

The Flying Dutchman

“Der Fliegende Holländer”

Music by Richard Wagner

**Libretto by Richard Wagner,
after Heinrich Heine’s
*Aus den Memoiren des Herren von
Schnabelewopski*, “The Memoirs of
Mr. Schnabelewopski” (1834)**

Premiere: Dresden, January 1843

**Adapted from the
Opera Journeys Lecture Series
by
Burton D. Fisher**

<i>Story Synopsis</i>	<i>Page 2</i>
<i>Principal Characters in the Opera</i>	<i>Page 3</i>
<i>Story Narrative with Music Highlights</i>	<i>Page 3</i>
<i>Wagner and The Flying Dutchman</i>	<i>Page 15</i>

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Story Synopsis

The legend about *The Flying Dutchman*, as told by Heine, and embellished by Wagner, relates the story of the Dutch sea captain, Vanderdecken, who impiously invoked the devil to assist him in rounding the stormy Cape of Good Hope: he was punished for his blasphemy, doomed to sail the seas eternally. However, once every 7 years, he was allowed to come ashore to seek salvation: if he found a woman who vowed eternal love and faith, “true unto death,” he would be released from his punishment.

The opera story begins simultaneously with the start of one of the Dutchman’s 7-year pardons. A storm has driven his ship to shelter: at the same time, a Norwegian ship, captained by Daland, also finds safe harbor.

Daland meets the Dutch captain who immediately expresses his desire to marry his daughter, Senta; Daland, impressed by the Dutchman’s wealth, easily agrees. Although Senta has never met the Dutchman, his portrait hangs on the wall of Daland’s house. She is well familiar with the legend of his curse, and vows to rescue him and become his saving woman; “true unto death.” Daland introduces the Dutchman to Senta: they immediately fall in love, and agree to wed.

Erik, a huntsman and suitor of Senta, berates her, condemning her desire to marry the Dutchman as an act of betrayal. The Dutchman overhears them argue, misunderstands Senta’s pleas to Erik, and believes that she has already become unfaithful to him.

He releases Senta from her vows and sails from the harbor. Senta pursues the Dutchman, mounts a cliff, and casts herself into the deadly seas; her sacrificial death, redeeming the Dutchman.

As *The Flying Dutchman* vanishes in the mist, the united lovers are seen ecstatically embraced and rising heavenward.

Principal Characters in the Story

Vanderdecken,	
captain of <i>The Flying Dutchman</i>	Baritone
Senta, daughter of Daland	Soprano
Daland, A Norwegian sea-captain	Bass
Steersman	Tenor
Mary, Senta's nurse	Mezzo-soprano
Erik, a huntsman	Tenor

Norwegian sailors, the Dutchman's crew, young women from the Norwegian village

TIME: 18th century
PLACE: Coast of Norway

Story Narrative with Music Highlights

Overture:

The overture to *The Flying Dutchman* begins with a portrayal of the fury of a raging and tempestuous storm at sea: amidst the tension, the brass resonate the thunderous theme associated with the Dutchman, a sailor condemned to travel the seas until he is redeemed by a woman's faithful love.

The Dutchman's Theme:



The second theme represents Senta's faithful, redeeming love for the Dutchman.

Senta's Theme: Redemption



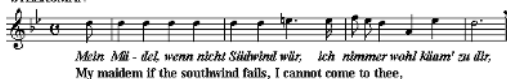
Act 1: The rocky coast of Norway

A Norwegian ship anchors in a cove where it has been driven by a storm: the storm subsides, but out at sea, it still rages. As the sailors unfurl the sails, their shouts of *Hojoho! Halojo!* echo from the cliffs. Daland, the Norwegian captain, goes ashore, climbs upon a rock and surveys the seacoast, concluding that the storm has led them into the bay of Sandwicke, forty miles from their home port.

The Norwegian sailors go below to rest. Alone on deck, the Steersman remains on watch, resting near the wheel, yawning, and fighting slumber. He arouses himself by singing a seaman's song: *Mit Gewitter und Sturm aus fernem Meer, Mein Mädal, bin dir nah'!*, "Through bad weather and storms from the distant seas, my maiden, I will be close," the song, expressing longing for a favorable southwind that will return him home to his love. After his song, he struggles with fatigue, and then falls asleep.

Steersman: *Mein Mädal, wenn nicht Südwind wär'*,

Moderato
STEERSMAN



The sky darkens, and the storm begins to rage again. Another ship enters the cove and anchors near the Norwegian ship: it is The Flying Dutchman, a ghostly ship with blood-red sails and black hull. The sound of its anchor crashing into the water awakens the Steersman: he is bewildered, looks around, sees nothing, and is satisfied that no harm has been done to the wheel; he sings a few verses of his song, and then falls off to sleep again.

Silently, the spectral crew of The Flying Dutchman unfurls its black sails. Afterwards, Vanderdecken, the Dutch captain of the ship, a man with pallid face and dark beard, goes ashore, commenting that seven years have passed, and he has reached land again: *Die Frist ist um, und abermals verstrichen*, “The time is up, and to Eternity’s tomb I am consigned.”

The Dutchman explains his despair and desolation: he is condemned to sail the seas, permitted to land once every seven years; his curse removed if he is redeemed by the love of a faithful woman. He pleads earnestly for deliverance from his accursed doom, but he fears that his hopes for salvation are in vain, and death would be a welcome, merciful pardon: *Wie oft in Meeres tiefsten Schlund*, “How often I have sought death and eternal sleep in the ocean’s depths.” He remains forlorn, and meditates silently.

Dutchman: Wie oft in Meeres tiefsten Schlund..

Allegro molto
DUTCHMAN



Daland observes the strange ship and awakens the Steersman, reproaching him for sleeping while on duty. He calls out to the ship, but there is no response, only the echoes from his *Werda?*, “Ahoy.” Daland notices the ship’s captain ashore and approaches him.

Vanderdecken introduces himself simply as ‘a Dutchman’, and then immediately proceeds to provide Daland with an account of his endless voyaging: *Durch Sturm und bösen Wind verschlagen*, “Storm and raging winds wind have kept me from shore.”

Dutchman: Durch Sturm und bösen Wind verschlagen,

Moderato
DUTCHMAN



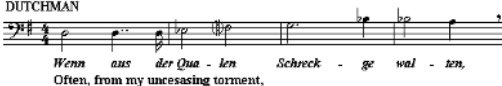
The Dutchman explains that he has neither wife nor family, and then overwhelms Daland by offering him treasures from his cargo in exchange for a night's hospitality. Suddenly, he inquires and learns that Daland has a daughter, offering Daland booty if he could have his daughter's hand in marriage.

Daland, unable to believe the Dutchman's generous offer, becomes delighted: greed, as well as the stranger's interest in his daughter prompt his agreement: *Wie? Hört' ich recht? Meine Tochter sein Weib?*, "My child shall be his, why should I delay?"

Daland assures the stranger that his daughter will be a faithful wife. Impatiently, the Dutchman asks to see her at once, envisioning that she will bring peace to his tormented soul.

Dutchman: Wenn aus der Qualen Schreckge walten,

Allegro agitato
DUTCHMAN



The storm subsides, and the wind changes to a south-wind. Both ships weigh anchor, and sail toward Daland's house.

Act 2: A large room in Daland's house

Mary, Senta's nurse and housekeeper, together with maidens, are busy at their spinning wheels; their spinning, a symbolic act to please

their lovers who are away at sea, and provide favorable winds for their return.

Senta sits in a chair, absorbed in dreamy contemplation as she gazes fixedly at a portrait of a pale man with dark beard, and wearing Spanish attire, the portrait possessing an uncanny resemblance to Vanderdecken, the captain of *The Flying Dutchman*.

The Spinning Song chorus, *Summ' und brumm'*, "Hum and buzz," contains repetitive melodies and accompanying rhythms that evoke the humdrum turning of the wheels.

Spinning Chorus



Senta, absorbed in the portrait, sighs, wondering why she has such insight and compassion into this wretched man's fate? Mary reproaches Senta for her idleness, but the other women excuse her, commenting that she need not spin because her lover is not a sailor; he is a hot-tempered hunts-man who provides game.

Senta responds angrily to the women's foolish jesting; they respond to her chiding by singing loudly and rapidly turn their spinning wheels to create a deafening noise. To stop them, Senta asks Mary to sing the *Ballad* about *The Flying Dutchman*, but Mary refuses. Senta decides to sing the *Ballad* herself. In anticipation, the maidens group around Senta's chair while Mary continues spinning.

Senta begins the *Ballad: Johohoe! Johohohoe!* She describes the Dutchman's ghostly ship with its blood-red sails and black masts, its blasphemous captain condemned to roam the seas until he finds a woman faithful

and true: compassionately, she prays that he will find that woman and be rescued from his torment.

Senta: *Trafft ihr das Schiff im Meere an?, “Have you seen the ship that rides the storm, blood-red sails and black mast?”*

Allegro non troppo
SENTA



As Senta describes that the Dutchman comes ashore every 7 years to seek a faithful wife, she becomes possessed and rises from her chair. Suddenly, she becomes consumed by a sudden inspiration and bursts into ecstasy: she decides that she will become the Dutchman's faithful love, the instrument of salvation that will rescue this man from his unhappy fate. Senta addresses her vision to the portrait: *Ich sei's die dich durch ihre Treu' er löse!*, "I will be the woman who by her love will save you!"

Theme of Redemption



Senta's outcry prompts Mary and the women to shock and horror; they believe that Senta has turned to madness.

Erik, a huntsman in love with Senta, suddenly enters to announce that he has seen the sails from Daland's ship. The news that the men are returning prompts all the women to leave and prepare to welcome their men-folk.

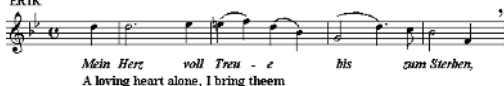
Erik restrains Senta from leaving, and immediately pours out his love for her, pleading with her that she accept his humble lot and

marry him before her father decides to find her a wealthier husband: *Mein Herz voll Treue bis zum Sterben*, “A loving heart alone, I bring thee.”

Erik: *Mein Herz voll Treue bis zum Sterben.*

Allegro passionato

ERIK



Senta shuns Erik, heedless to his ardent pleas for her love.

Erik relates his dream to Senta, a vision that her father brought a stranger home, a man resembling the seaman in the portrait, who asked for her hand in marriage; she agreed, and then fled with him on his ghostly ship. As Senta listens, she becomes excited and overcome by her imagination: she erupts into ecstatic rapture, exclaiming that she is determined to share the Dutchman’s fate. Erik, in horror and despair, rushes away.

Erik’s Dream Narration: *Auf hohem Felsen lag’ich träumend.*

Sostenuto

ERIK



Alone, Senta remains absorbed in silent thought, her eyes fixed on the portrait: softly, but with profound emotion, she recalls the “redemption” refrain from her *Ballad*: *Ach! Möchtest du, bleicher Seemann, sie finden! Betet zum Himmel, dass bald ein Weib Treue ihm*, “Ah! You mighty, pallid seaman, find her! Pray to Heaven that soon your wish will be granted!”

Senta's last words are unfinished: she is interrupted as the door suddenly opens, and Daland and the Dutchman stand before her at the threshold. Senta turns her gaze from the portrait to the Dutchman: she utters a loud cry of astonishment, then turns mute and spellbound, her eyes staring fixedly on the Dutchman.

The Dutchman moves toward Senta, likewise, his eyes firmly fixed upon her. Daland stands at the door, bewildered that his daughter has not greeted him, and then he approaches Senta, reproaching her for not welcoming him with a kiss and an embrace. Senta seizes her father's hand, draws him nearer to her, welcomes him, and immediately inquires who the stranger is.

Daland introduces the Dutchman in a breezy and lighthearted manner: *Mögst du, mein Kind*, "Will you my child, kindly welcome a stranger!" He explains that he has learned that this man has wandered from afar amid danger in foreign lands and has earned treasures, however, he was banished from his homeland, and would richly pay for a home. He asks Senta if it would displease her if he should stay with them?

Daland asks Senta if she would consent to marry the stranger, tempting his daughter by displaying jewels, but she is impervious and disregards him, her eyes remaining transfixed on the Dutchman: likewise, the Dutchman is absorbed in contemplation of Senta.

Daland, perplexed by their mysterious silence, decides to leave them alone; as he departs, he seeks the Dutchman's confirmation that his daughter is indeed as fair and charming as he had promised.

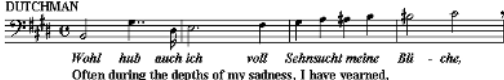
Senta and the Dutchman remain motionless, absorbed in mutual contemplation of each other.

The Dutchman proclaims that his dreams

have transformed into reality, telling Senta that she is the woman whom he has yearned for, the angel who can bring peace to his tormented soul.

Dutchman: Wohl hub auch ich voll Sehnsucht meine Blicke,

Allegro moderato
DUTCHMAN



Senta and the Dutchman become absorbed in their inner thoughts: Senta wonders whether she is dreaming; the Dutchman wonders if it is indeed true that his dream of salvation has become a reality.

Senta confirms to him that through her love, he will be saved and redeemed from his curse: she will be his love angel who will bring him joy. Senta pledges eternal faith and fidelity to the Dutchman: until death; both explode into rapture and exultation at their new-found love.

Senta: Was ist's das mächtig in mir lebet,

Allegro molto
SENTA



Daland re-enters to ask whether the feast of homecoming can be combined with a betrothal. Senta reaffirms her vows to the Dutchman: all three join together and express their rapturous joy.

Act 3: The bay near Daland's home

It is a clear night. In the background, partly visible and moored near each other, are the ships of Vanderdecken and Daland; high cliffs above the sea rise some distance away.

The Norwegian ship is illuminated, the sailors indulging in merriment on its deck; the Dutch ship, in sharp contrast, possesses an unnatural darkness and deathly stillness.

Young girls, bearing food and drink, emerge from their houses, and the Norwegian sailors excitedly invite them to join them.

***Chorus of Norwegian sailors: Steuerman!
Lass die Wacht!***

Animato, ma non troppo allegro
NORWEGIAN SAILORS



The girls are confounded by the Dutch ship: it is dark, unlit, and appears to have no crew. The Norwegian sailors jest, suggesting that they have no need for refreshments since their crew is asleep; or perhaps they are all dead. The sailors call out to *The Flying Dutchman's* crew, inviting them to join in the merriment. There is no response, only an eerie silence, prompting the girls to tremble in fear and retreat from the ship.

A dark bluish flame flares up like a beacon on the Dutch ship, causing its crew, hitherto invisible, to become aroused: they talk about their captain, now on land, who is seeking a faithful maiden. The sea begins to rise around the Dutch ship, and frightful winds whistle: the ship is tossed about by the raging waves, but elsewhere, the air and winds remain calm.

The Norwegian sailors become bewildered by the appearance of the *The Flying Dutchman's* crew: they believe they are ghosts; in their horror and terror, they make the sign of the cross. The Dutch crew observes their motions and bursts into shrill laughter. Suddenly, the air and sea calm, and in the eerie darkness, a deathly stillness overcomes their ship.

Senta emerges from her house, trembling and in agitation: Erik follows her, likewise irritated and disquieted. Erik, possessed by his sorrow, demands to know why she has betrayed him and decided to marry the Dutchman: he implores her, reminding her that she had vowed eternal love to him.

Erik: Willst jenes Tag's di nicht dich mehr entsinnen,

Andante
ERIK



Willst je - nes Tag's du nicht dich mehr ent - sin - nen,
Have you forgotten the day when you vowed to me,

Senta denies him, explaining that she is compelled to the Dutchman by a higher power: she disavows Erik, urging him to forget her. The Dutchman, unnoticed, has been listening to their argument. He hears Erik's last words in which he questions Senta, reminding her that she promised to be true to him: *Versich' rung, die Versich' rung deiner treu'?*, "Did you not promise to be true?"

Misunderstanding their conversation, the Dutchman explodes into uncontrollable agitation, crying out, *Verloren! Ach! Verloren! Ewig verlor'nes Heil!*, "Lost! All is forever lost." Erik steps back in astonishment as the Dutchman approaches Senta and shouts to her: *Senta, leb'wohl!*, "Senta, farewell!"

Senta turns towards the departing Dutchman, who, in anguish and disappointment, calls out in despair: *In See für ew'ge Zeiten!*, "To Sea! For eternity!" He reproaches Senta for betraying her promise: she pleads with him to remain, but he is heedless.

The Dutchman signals with his pipe, calling his crew to weigh anchor and set sail immediately: a farewell forever to land, and hope. With great agitation, he condemns Senta

as unfaithful, her promise to him a mockery: Senta assures him that her promises will be kept, and she will be true to him. Erik looks on, exacerbad, and believing that Senta has become possessed by the Devil.

The Dutchman vindicates Senta, assuring her that she will be free from eternal damnation because she did not make her vows before God; nevertheless, she has shattered his hopes for eternal peace, and he is doomed to the seas for eternity. Senta protests to the Dutchman, again assuring him that she has been true, a love vowed unto death that will remove his curse.

The Dutchman rushes to board his ship: his sailors hoist their crimson sails, and put to sea where a storm begins to rage. Erik believes that Senta has turned to madness: in panic, he calls for help; Daland, Mary, and the maiden rush from the house, the Norwegian sailors from their vessels. All attempt to restrain Senta from pursuing the Dutchman.

Senta struggles and frees herself. She ascends a cliff overhanging the sea, looks toward the departing Dutch ship, and bursts into an ecstatic outcry, proclaiming her unbounded fidelity to the departing Dutchman: *Preis' deinen Engel und sein Gebot! Hier steh' ich, treu dir bis zum Tod!*, “Your angel has been commanded. I am faithful to you even unto death.” Afterwards, Senta casts herself into the sea.

Suddenly, the sea rises and then sinks back into a whirlpool: The Flying Dutchman is wrecked and sinks into the ocean.

In the glow of the sunset, the transfigured images of Senta and the Dutchman, eternally embraced, rise heavenward from the sea.

Wagner.....nd The Flying Dutchman

During Wagner's first creative period, 1839-1850, his opera style was fundamentally subservient to existing operatic traditions: he faithfully composed in the German Romantic style of Carl Maria von Weber (*Die Freischütz*), Giacomo Meyerbeer's grandiose French style (*Le Prophète*, *L'Africaine*, *Robert le Diable*, *Les Huguenots*), and the Italian bel canto style. The operatic architecture within those traditions was primarily concerned with effects, atmosphere, characterization, actions, and climaxes, all presented with formal arias and ensemble numbers, choruses, scenes of pageantry, and in *Tannhäuser*, even a ballet.

Wagner's operas from this early period were: *Die Feen*, "The Fairies," based on Carlo Gozzi's *La Donna Serpente*, "The Serpent Woman," an opera that was never performed during the composer's lifetime but premiered in 1888, five years after his death; *Das Liebesverbot*, "The Ban on Love," (1836), a fiasco based on Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*; *Rienzi*, *Der Letzte Der Tribunen*, "Rienzi, Last of the Tribunes" (1842), a resounding success that was based on a Bulwer-Lytton novel; *Der Fliegende Holländer*, "The Flying Dutchman" (1843); *Tannhäuser* (1845); and *Lohengrin* (1850).

During Wagner's second period, 1850-1882, he composed the *Ring* operas, *Tristan und Isolde*, *Die Meistersinger*, and *Parsifal*. In those later works, he fully incorporated his revolutionary theories about opera: Wagner created a new form of lyric theater; "music drama."

In 1839, at the age of 26, Wagner was an opera conductor at a small, provincial opera

company in Riga, Latvia, then, under Russian domination. In a very short time, he was summarily dismissed: his rambunctious conducting style provoked disfavor, and his heavy debts became scandalous; to avoid creditors and debtors' prison, Wagner fled, en route to Paris, the center of the European opera world.

Wagner arrived in Paris with the lofty ambition to become its brightest star, imagining fame and wealth: he appeared with letters of introduction to the "king" of opera, Giacomo Meyerbeer, and his yet uncompleted opera, *Rienzi*.

During Wagner's three years in Paris, from 1839 to 1842, he experienced agonizing hardships, living in penury and misery, and surviving mostly by editing, writing, and performing musical "slave work" by transcribing operas for Jacques Halévy. The leading lights of French opera were Meyerbeer and Halévy, but Wagner was unsuccessful in securing their help and influence in having *Rienzi* produced at the Paris Opéra. He became lonely and alienated, frustrated by his failures, bitter, suspicious, and despondent. Ultimately, with his dreams shattered, his Paris years became a hopeless adventure, the non-French speaking Wagner considering himself an outsider.

Nevertheless, during his Parisian years, he completed both *Rienzi* and *The Flying Dutchman*, an incredible accomplishment since both operas possess extremely diverse stories and musical styles. *Rienzi* was a melodrama composed in the Italian *bel canto* style: it portrays the tribulations of its protagonist in conflict with power politics: *Dutchman* was composed in a unified, musically integrated style; it recounts the legend of a sailor doomed to travel the seas until he is redeemed by a faithful woman's love.

In 1842, the omnipotent Meyerbeer, changed the young composer's fortunes, and used his influence to persuade the Dresden opera to produce *Rienzi*. *Rienzi* became an outstanding success, actually, the most successful opera during Wagner's lifetime; although frequently revived in the contemporary repertory, it is far overshadowed by Wagner's later works,

Nevertheless, *Rienzi* catapulted Wagner to operatic stardom, prompting the Royal Saxon Court Theater in Dresden to appoint him *kappelmeister*: the year was 1843, and Wagner was 29 years old. That same year, *The Flying Dutchman* was mounted at Dresden to a rather mediocre reception, followed by *Tannhäuser* (1845), and *Lohengrin*, introduced by Franz Liszt at Weimar in 1850.

Mein Leben, "My Life," was Wagner's autobiography, a self-serving chronology and interpretation of his life and works that he began in the 1860s after he had achieved world-wide fame and recognition. Much of its recollections require a judicious separation of fiction from fact, particularly since after Wagner's death, his "woman of the future," Cosima, supervised the editing of the work.

In *Mein Leben*, Wagner vividly describes his inspiration for composing *The Flying Dutchman*. Wagner fled Riga in the summer of 1839, accompanied by his wife, Minna, then in the first stages of pregnancy. They boarded the small schooner, *Thetis*, that crossed the North sea from Pillau on the Baltic coast of East Prussia, to London, and then to Paris: they decided to sail to Paris via London and chance what became a perilous three week sea voyage because it was the cheapest way to reach his destination.

The North Sea, seldom gentle, was in one of its wildest moods: the *Thetis* was nearly wrecked three times by a violent storm, and in one instance, was compelled to seek safety in a Norwegian harbor. According to Wagner's autobiography, those experiences inspired the *Dutchman* opera: he recalled the sailors calls echoing from the granite walls of the Norwegian harbor of Sandviken, an inspiration for Daland's echoing call to the Dutchman in Act I, *Werda?*, and, the Norwegian Sailors' Chorus, *Steuermann! Lass die Wacht!*, which he commented was "like an omen of good cheer that shaped itself presently into the theme of the seamen's song in my *Flying Dutchman*." But above all, his experiences inspired the portrayal of a ferocious and merciless sea that dominate the entire *Dutchman* score: Wagner depicts an unceasingly restless ocean with raging storms; impressions from his terrifying voyage which he musically transformed into his opera.

Wagner, a prolific reader of German Romantic literature, was well familiar with Heinrich Heine's haunting story of *The Flying Dutchman: Aus den Memoiren des Herren von Schnabelewopski*, "The Memoirs of Herr Von Schnabelewopski." (from *Der Salon*, 1834–40), a retelling of the nautical legend about the doomed seaman.

Heine, 1797-1856, was one of the foremost German Romantic lyric poets and writers during the early decades of the 19th century. Wagner was not only inspired to *The Flying Dutchman* from Heine's works, but his later *Tannhäuser* owes much of its provenance to Heine's poem, *Der Tannhäuser* (1836): Heine's lively evocations of the young Siegfried in *Deutschland ist noch ein kleines Kind* (1840), certainly influenced aspects of the *Ring*.

Heine filled the shoes of two different

writers. On the one hand, he was a brilliant love poet whose works were set to music by such famous composers as Franz Schubert and Robert Schumann. On the other hand, he was a gifted satirist and political writer whose fierce attacks on repression and prejudices made him a highly controversial figure. Heine was a German who made Paris his permanent home. While he witnessed the establishment of limited democracy in France, he became increasingly critical of political and social situations in Germany. Eventually, his popularity enraged and angered the German government: the controversy he sparked prompted them to ban all of his works, and they made it clear that he was no longer welcome to return to his homeland.

Heine was a quintessential lyric poet, the writer of brief poems that were not narrative, but expressed personal thoughts and feelings. Lyric poetry evolved during Medieval times, originally intended to be sung to a musical accompaniment. But in its 19th century Romantic era transformation, the poems tended to be melodic through their inherent rhythmic, song-like patterns: musical accompaniment was completely abandoned, and their word-play was intended to evoke powerful and energetic sensibilities.

Throughout his life, Heine considered himself an outsider. He was brought up as a Jew in a nation plagued by anti-Semitism, and as a result, developed an inescapable sense of alienation, isolation, and loneliness. Heine considered himself, “a Jew among Germans, a German among Frenchman, a Helene among Jews, a rebel among the bourgeois, and a conservative among revolutionaries.”

His *Aus den Memoiren des Herren Schnabelewopski*, the story that became Wagner’s underlying basis for *The Flying Dutchman*, is virtually autobiographical: the

alienated, isolated, and lonely Dutchman, was Heine himself; similarly, the alienated and lonely Richard Wagner, who was suffering agonizing frustration and defeat during his Paris years, wholeheartedly identified with the tormented hero of the story.

As always, Wagner's muse, consciously and unconsciously, was inspired by his personal identification with his protagonists: all the characters in all of Wagner operas represent the composer himself. At the time of *Dutchman*, Wagner was exceedingly unhappy, bankrupt, unemployed, and a failed composer: the melancholy Dutchman symbolized his own wretched condition, a man persecuted, uprooted, and unfulfilled. The Dutchman was seeking redemption: likewise, Richard Wagner was seeking redemption.

In the spring of 1841, Wagner moved to Medufon, a small village a short distance from Paris, and in 7 weeks, wrote the original prose scenario for *The Flying Dutchman*. He submitted the first sketch of the libretto to Léon Pillet, director of the Paris Opéra. In financial straits, Wagner regretfully sold Pillet the libretto for 500 francs, but reserved the German rights. The commission to compose the opera was granted to Pierre-Louis Dietsch, not Wagner: the opera was entitled, *Le Vaisseau Fantôme*, "The Phantom Ship," its librettists, Paul Foucher and Bénédic-Henry Révoil, basing their story not only on Wagner's scenario, but also on Captain Marryat's novel, *The Phantom Ship*, Sir Walter Scott's *The Pirate*, and elements of the legend written by Heinrich Heine, James Fenimore Cooper, and Wilhelm Hauff. Nevertheless, Wagner continued to compose his *Dutchman* to his own libretto.

The Flying Dutchman was produced in Dresden after the phenomenal success of *Rienzi*. Dietsch's *Le Vaisseau Fantôme* was premiering at the Opéra in Paris almost simultaneously in November 1842: it was a signal failure. As Wagner began rehearsals for *Dutchman*, the Paris premiere of Dietsch's opera was undoubtedly one reason for his 11th-hour changes in the score. Wagner emphatically distanced himself from Dietsch's work in order to avoid a collision: he changed the story's venue from Heine's Scottish coast to the Norwegian coast, and replaced the characters Donald and George with Daland and Erik respectively.

Wagner himself conducted the première which featured the renowned soprano, Wilhelmine Schröder-Devrient, as the heroine, Senta. *The Flying Dutchman* aroused antipathy from its premiere audience who concluded that although the opera possessed a somber beauty, it was too psychological, and too introspective: it was canceled after its 4th performance and revived twenty-two years later, an interim period in which Wagner had achieved world-wide acclaim. Although a presumed failure, the renowned composer and violinist, Ludwig Spohr, was almost alone in his recognition of the excellence of the work, proclaiming Wagner the most gifted of contemporary composers for the stage.

Wagner originally conceived *The Flying Dutchman* in a single act, claiming that a one-act opera enabled him to better focus on the dramatic essentials rather than on "tiresome operatic accessories." In his negotiations to have *Dutchman* produced at the Paris Opéra, they had rejected his proposal for a one-act opera, and he proceeded to develop the scenario in three distinct acts, the form in which it was given in Dresden at its premiere, and subsequently published. Nevertheless, Cosima

Wagner introduced it in its one-act version at Bayreuth in 1901, and since that time, it is often presented as a one-act opera.

After its premiere, Wagner made many revisions to the score; alterations in the orchestration, and a remodeling of the coda of the overture. Like the Paris version of *Tannhäuser*, many of his revisions reflect his preoccupation and advancements that he had effected in *Tristan und Isolde*.

The Flying Dutchman possesses the early foundations of Wagner's innovations to operatic structure and architecture.

Firstly, it employs a mythical or legendary subject, elements reflecting basic humanity which appealed strongly to Wagner: "The legend, in whatever nation or age it may be placed, has the advantage that it comprehends only the purely human portion of this age or nation, and presents this portion in a form peculiar to it, thoroughly concentrated and, therefore, easily intelligible.... This legendary character gives a great advantage to the poetic arrangement of the subject, for the reason already mentioned, that, while the simple process of the action – easily comprehensible as far as its outward relations are concerned – renders unnecessary any painstaking efforts for the purpose of explanation of the course of the story, the greatest possible portion of the power can be devoted to the portrayal of the inner motives of the action – those inmost motives of the soul, which, indeed, the action points out to us as necessary, through the fact that we ourselves feel in our hearts a sympathy with them."

Second, Wagner was determined to provide a faithful musical embodiment of the spirit of each scene, instead of a mere sequence of effective tunes, what he termed the "intelligible

presentation of the subject.” In *Rienzi*, Wagner succeeded by using a combination of existing operatic methods and traditions; musical styles with arias and set-pieces: numbers. For the *Dutchman* story, he found those techniques impracticable: if he used them he would be unable to embody the full emotions of the text.

Wagner, the musical dramatist, could no longer express his musico-dramatic subjects intelligently in a conglomeration of operatic pieces: he was accused of iconoclasm by eliminating in *The Flying Dutchman*, what was considered the “soul” of opera: arias. He defended his break with operatic traditions: “The plastic unity and simplicity of the mythical subjects allowed for the concentration of the action on certain important and decisive points, and thus enabled me to rest on fewer scenes, with a perseverance sufficient to expound the motive to its ultimate dramatic consequences. The nature of the subject, therefore, could not induce me, in sketching my scenes, to consider in advance their adaptability to any particular musical form, the kind of musical treatment being in each case necessitated by these scenes themselves. It could, therefore, not enter my mind to engraft on this, my musical form, growing, as it did, out of the nature of the scenes, the traditional forms of operatic music, which could not but have marred and interrupted its organic development. I therefore never thought of contemplating on principle, and as a deliberate reformer, the destruction of the aria, duet, and other operatic forms; but the dropping of those forms followed consistently from the nature of my subjects.”

Third, Wagner stressed the importance of using representative themes or “typical phrases”: leitmotifs. Wagner had reached the conclusion that in opera, the music must become the handmaid of poetry; therefore, the

musical formulae must be sacrificed. He believed that once the best musical investiture of a particular emotion had been discovered, he had to associate each and every reappearance of that emotion with the same musical expression. The results, leitmotifs, or “typical phrases,” were designed to represent a particular person, mood, or thought within the overall dramatic scope of the work. In *Dutchman*, Wagner’s use of leitmotifs was in its infancy: in *Tristan und Isolde* and the *Ring*, they were completely developed.

In effect, Wagner found that the old operatic structures were incompatible with the systematic use of leitmotifs, consequently, beginning with *Dutchman*, he abandoned set-pieces, trios, or quartets.

In Senta’s *Ballad*, Wagner found the seeds of his future musical leitmotif system: the *Ballad* comprises two themes that represent the fundamental essence of the drama; first, the Dutchman’s motive, the accursed wanderer yearning for inner peace; and second, Senta’s redemption motive, the sacrificial love of the eternal woman. These two themes develop and mold the *Ballad*: when one of them is recalled, likewise its thematic expression.

Wagner fashioned these revolutionary transformations on the organic union of poetry, painting, music, and action. Beginning with *Dutchman*, these elements would become so fully integrated, that no one aspect could be regarded as more important than the other: opera became a total art form in which the whole became equal to the sum of its parts.

Romantic period artists felt alienated from the rest of society, an isolation caused by society’s inability to completely understand or appreciate their acute sensibilities and insatiable spirits. Some artists deliberately sought to separate themselves from society

in order to engage in quiet contemplation and poetic composition; others totally rejected society's dominant attitudes and values.

Heine expressed the artist's inner sensibilities: "The artist is the child in the popular fable, every one of whose tears was a pearl. Ah! The world, that cruel stepmother, beats the poor child the harder to make him shed more pearls."

In Paris, Wagner's personal emotions, his sense of alienation and loneliness, were synonymous with those of the Dutchman: the Dutchman was a weary mariner, yearning for land and love; Wagner was a weary artist, homesick and longing for his fatherland. Wagner's psyche at the time, his churning anguish and intense sufferings, were those of his operatic hero. In the end, both were in desperate need of redemption.

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe endowed the German Romanticist ideal of the eternal female, the *ewige weibliche*, *la femme eterne*: the woman who "leadeth us ever upward and on." German Romanticists proceeded to ennoble the "woman of the future," the "holy" woman, who, through her sacrifice and unbounded love, redeemed man. The embodiment of that exalted woman became *The Flying Dutchman's* heroine, Senta. For Wagner, that ideal would reappear in his later works: Elizabeth in *Tannhäuser*, Brünnhilde in the *Ring* operas, and Isolde in *Tristan und Isolde*.

The Flying Dutchman represents the beginning of Wagner's evolutionary continuum: its drama possesses a singular mood, and it expresses suffering by an alienated outsider, its hero redeemed by a faithful woman.

Senta's *Ballad* represents the "thematic seed," or conceptual nucleus, of the entire work: the *Ballad* integrates the key identifying themes of the Dutchman himself with Senta's redemption; it is in the *Ballad* that it is revealed

that the Dutchman was accursed for his blasphemy. Nevertheless, Senta's *Ballad*, in structure, is typical of the early 19th-century operatic tradition of narrative songs, and Wagner was well familiar with one of its German Romantic role-models; Marschner's *Der Vampyr* in which Emmy's song possesses many similarities to the three turbulent stanzas of Senta's *Ballad*.

In Senta's final refrain, she is overcome by a sudden inspiration, exploding into ecstasy as she expresses her determination to be the instrument for the Dutchman's salvation. Wagner surpassed Heine, creatively elevating Senta's character to nobility: her fidelity and love are the engines that drive the dramatic action; Senta is the embodiment of the "woman-soul" so treasured by the German Romantics.

Wagner musically differentiates the opera's other characters. In the Dutchman's opening Monologue, *Die Frist ist um*, the harmonies project his "interior," self-absorbed world, while the harmonies in the music of Daland, Erik, and the Norwegian sailors, represent the "exterior" world. Wagner ingeniously created the Dutchman's character as other-worldly, a character that is far from conventional.

In Erik's *Dream Narration*, Wagner provides a precursor to his more mature works; those narrations that are so prominent in *Tannhäuser*, *Lohengrin*, and his later music dramas. Erik recounts his dream about Senta's father bringing home a stranger who resembles the seafarer in the painting: Senta, engrossed in an hypnotic trance, brings life to the fantasy through her rapture.

The drama possesses extreme musical and visual contrasts: a chiaroscuro. The Norwegians have a robust naturalness, strongly contrasted by the supernatural ghostliness of everything related to the Dutchman and his ship, its silence and phantomlike sailing and docking.

In the 3rd act, the musical contrast is more delineated: Wagner becomes a choreographer as sailors break out in song and dance, their dancing accented by a heavy foot-stomping downbeat. In contrast, the girls interplay with the Dutch sailors, provides a stifling deadly mood. .

In the final scene, the Norwegian sailors taunt the eerie crew of *The Flying Dutchman*: “Have you no letter, no message to leave, we can bring our great-grandfathers here to receive?” Wagner was adopting Heine’s mention of an English ship bound for Amsterdam that was hailed on the seas by a Dutch vessel: its crew gave a sack of mail to the Englishmen asking that its contents be delivered to the proper parties in Amsterdam. Upon reaching their destination, the English crew was chilled to find that many of the addressees had been dead for over 100 years.

Wagner claimed that with the *Dutchman*, he began his career as a true poet. Musically, the opera certainly marks a great step forward from the Meyerbeerian, *bel canto* style of *Rienzi*: it represents an assured development of his musical and dramatic ideas. It is in *Dutchman* that Wagner first uses an appreciable number of leitmotifs which the orchestra treats symphonically and with an ingenious virtuoso. The opera’s singleness of conception and mood, and its almost total dissolution of set-pieces, anticipates a synthesis of text and music; the seeds and ideological beginnings of Wagner’s “music of the future,” his music dramas.

The Flying Dutchman maintains a special interest for all Wagnerians: it exhibits the first fruits of Wagner’s revolutionary theories, factors that contributed to a complete

transformation of modern operatic architecture, form, and style. Although the opera fails to reach the complete individuality and overwhelming power of Wagner's later works, many aficionados of early Wagner wish that he had composed at least one more opera in the old, romantic tradition of *The Flying Dutchman*.

Lohengrin, composed between 1846 and 1848, was Wagner's last opera before he reinvented himself and introduced his idealized conception of music dramas: the *Gesamtkunstwerk*. Wagner would cut the cord that had tied him to the past: he would abandon old paths completely and strike-out in new directions with his new esthetics; Wagner would no longer compose operas; he would create music dramas.

