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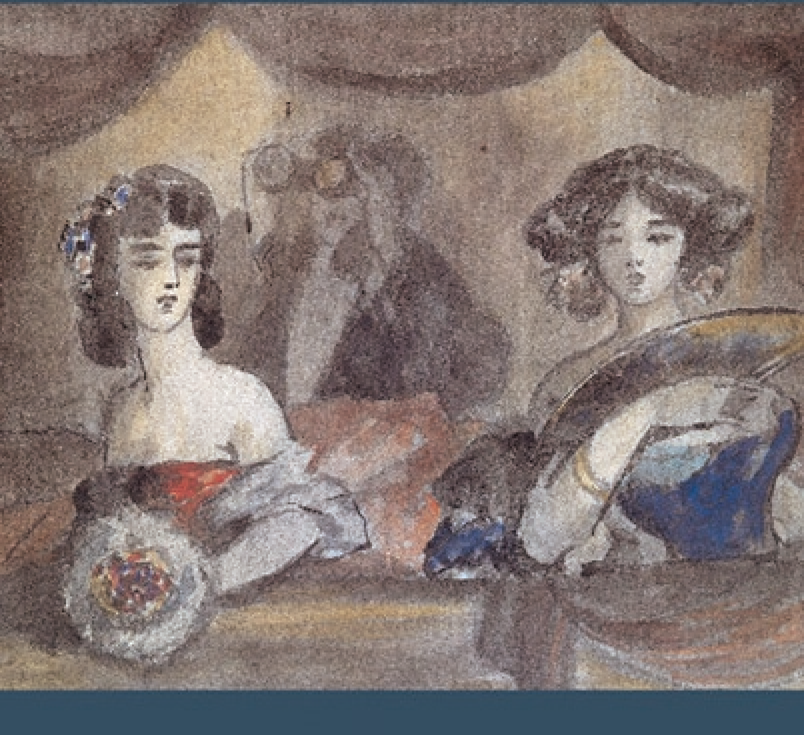
The Sounds of Paris in Verdi's *La traviata*

Emilio Sala



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THE SOUNDS OF PARIS IN VERDI'S *LA TRAVIATA*

How did Paris and its musical landscape influence Verdi's *La traviata*? In this book, Emilio Sala re-examines *La traviata* in the cultural context of the French capital in the mid nineteenth century. Verdi arrived in Paris in 1847 and stayed for almost two years: there, he began his relationship with Giuseppina Strepponi and assiduously attended performances at the popular theatres, whose plays made frequent use of incidental music to intensify emotion and render certain dramatic moments memorable to the audience. It was in one of these popular theatres that Verdi probably witnessed one of the first performances of Dumas *fils*'s *La Dame aux camélias*, which became hugely successful in 1852. Making use of primary source material, including unpublished musical works, journal articles and rare documents and images, Sala's close examination of the incidental music for *La Dame aux camélias* – and its musical context – offers an invaluable interpretation of *La traviata*'s modernity.

EMILIO SALA is Associate Professor of Musical Dramaturgy at the University of Milan. His research focuses on the musical dramaturgy of opera, melodrama and film music, and his publications include *L'opera senza canto: Il mélo romantico e l'invenzione della colonna sonora* (1995) and *Il valzer delle camelie: Echi di Parigi nella* Traviata (2008). He has published articles and reviews in *Cambridge Opera Journal*, *Musica e storia*, *Musica/Realtà*, *Musicalia*, *Opera Quarterly*, *Orages*, *Revue de musicologie, Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France, Il saggiatore musicale*, *Studi verdiani* and elsewhere.

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Translated by Delia Casadei

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Paris was a perpetual hurly-burly; the men and women in it were whirled away by a tempestuous waltz.

Balzac, Le Cousin Pons

Qu'est-ce que l'art? Prostitution.

Baudelaire, Fusées

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TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

The challenge of this book for the translator lies in the rendition of the author's virtuosic handling of primary sources in both French and Italian, particularly in Chapter 2. In order to avoid an excessively glossed translation, I have decided to relay primary sources in translation in the main text. The translations are my own, unless otherwise specified. A word of explanation is in order with regard to the play and novel versions of *La Dame aux camélias*, since both works are key reference sources throughout the book. The novel has been given an authoritative translation by David Coward for Oxford University Press, and this translation will be employed throughout the book. No such indisputably reliable translation exists for the play, which has been adapted into English with the famous title of *Camille* and exists in countless English versions, all of which, however, are stage adaptations rather than sources suited to any kind of scholarly purpose. Indeed, there is no English edition of the collected works of Dumas *fils*, nor any translation of Janin's preface to the second edition of the novel, which is also a key source in the book. With regard to the play and to Janin's preface, then, I will adopt my own translation of the texts as they appear in Alexandre Dumas *fils*, *La Dame aux camélias: Le roman, le drame, 'La traviata'*, ed. Hans-Jörg Neuschäfer and Gilbert Sigaux (Paris: Flammarion, 1981), pp. 481–94.

Prelude

THE MODERNITY OF VERDI

> In Paris there is no reality without imagination …[1]

We begin with an acute comment by Bruno Barilli. It is strange to think that the same author was also responsible for the perhaps over-celebrated 'mosquito nest' in which many Verdians have wished (and perhaps still wish) to trap the works of the 'heroic peasant' who was born to 'put critical musicology to flight'.[2] The opening sentences of Barilli's monograph ('The huge mosquito nest that is the Po valley between Parma and Mantua would one day cradle the genius of Giuseppe Verdi, and Parma would become the stronghold of Verdians')[3] are also echoed in Alberto Moravia's widely known essay on 'the "vulgarity" of Giuseppe Verdi': 'Whoever knows the Po valley around Parma will easily find in the monuments, the people and the landscape a Verdian aura. […] Verdi is thus our own folkloristic-plebeian Shakespeare, a peasant, and thus "vulgar".'[4] This view of Verdi's national identity could also be detected in Edoardo Sanguineti's recent writing about 'Verdi's Realism', which again uses the Barilli quotation as a way of approaching the question of the historical role of a 'corn-fed' theatre, Verdi's theatre, 'born to melodramatise the Italians'.[5] A theatre that, going back to Barilli, wholly 'identifies with its land of origin', Parma and its surroundings.[6] A theatre whose breath 'bears a healthy smell of onions'.[7] The fact that such a myth was created by Verdi himself does not make it any less misleading. I think that if we went through *La traviata* – 'the most Italian opera of all' – we would hardly find any mosquitoes or onions.[8] On the contrary, should we wish to analyse – as critical musicologists – its thematic framework and sonic imagery, we would find ourselves much closer to Paris than to Parma, and closer to modernity than to pre-bourgeois Arcadia or 'plebeian folklore'. To paraphrase Gabriele Scaramuzza, who usefully cites Karl Rosenkranz's *Ästhetik des Hässlichen* (1853), the so-called 'vulgarity' of Verdi should be re-read within the context of a project for the emancipation of the 'ugly' from its negative connotations, which took on European relevance in the years around *Rigoletto* and *La traviata*.[9] Should we really see Verdi as a 'peasant from Le Roncole' (as he loved to call himself)?[10] I prefer to see him, with Giovanni Morelli and Marzio Pieri, as the artistic equivalent of a bold nineteenth-century entrepreneur: a modern man in search of a modern musical stagecraft aimed at a modern audience.[11] According to the historian Marco Gervasoni, it was partly under the influence of Parisian circles that Verdi sought to establish his role as a 'bourgeois professional'.[12] After all, does Barilli himself not say (of Verdi's Parma) that 'this worn-out and illustrious city strongly resembled a district of old Paris'? It was thus fated that the author of 'Il paese del melodramma' should become – around the same time as Benjamin – the mythographer of Paris as 'Traumstadt' (to use Benjamin's own expression from *Passagenwerk*), a place where it is difficult to distinguish reality from imagination.[13] Barilli begins his essay on the French capital by associating Paris with consumption: what other city could have given birth to the lady of the camellias?[14] To clear the field of the cliché of Verdi the peasant (or *naïf*, or 'vulgar') is an essential starting point for my argument.[15]

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[1] Bruno Barilli, 'Parigi' (1938), in *Il paese del melodramma*, ed. Luisa Viola and Luisa Avellini (Turin: Einaudi, 1985), pp. 105–61: here p. 118. This particular collection of Barilli's essays, now out of print, contains, aside from the famous 'Il paese del melodramma' (1930), the lesser-known 'Parigi' (1938) and 'Verdi' (1946). Although a more recent edition of Barilli's essays has been made available by Adelphi in 2000, I will refer here to the Einaudi edition for two reasons: firstly, it offers a preface and footnotes of higher scholarly quality, and secondly, because the essay 'Parigi' is not included in the Adelphi edition.

[2] Bruno Barilli, 'Il paese del melodramma', in *Il paese del melodramma*, pp. 5–76: here p. 27.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 13.

[4] Alberto Moravia, 'La "volgarità" di Giuseppe Verdi' (1963), in *Opere 1948–1968*, ed. Enzo Siciliano (Milan: Bompiani, 1989), pp. 1345–51: here pp. 1349–50.

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[5] Edoardo Sanguineti, 'Il realismo di Verdi', in Fabrizio Della Seta, Roberta Montemorra Marvin and Marco Marica (eds.), *Verdi 2001: Proceedings of the International Conference, Parma, New York, New Haven, 24 January–1 February 2001*, 2 vols. (Florence: Olschki, 2003), vol. 1, pp. 3–21: here pp. 8 and 19.

[6] Barilli, 'Il paese del melodramma', in *Il paese del melodramma*, p. 15.

[7] *Ibid.*, p. 27.

[8] Barilli, 'Verdi', in *Il paese del melodramma*, pp. 79–101: here p. 95.

[9] Gabriele Scaramuzza, 'Il tema del "brutto" nell'universo culturale verdiano', in Della Seta, Marvin and Marica (eds.), *Verdi 2001*, vol. 1, pp. 229–40.

[10] 'Sono stato, sono e sarò sempre un paesano delle Roncole' ('I have been, am and always will be a peasant from Le Roncole'); letter of 25 May 1863, in Annibale Alberti (ed.), *Verdi intimo: Carteggio di Giuseppe Verdi con il conte Opprandino Arrivabene (1861–1886)*, preface by Alessandro Luzio (Milan: Mondadori, 1931), p. 26.

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[11] Giovanni Morelli, '"Le situazioni riescono quasi tutte d'un colore, mancan di varietà": Cinque glosse ad una lettera di Felice Varesi', in Biancamaria Brumana and Galliano Ciliberti (eds.), *Musica e immagine: Tra iconografia e mondo dell'opera. Studi in onore di Massimo Bogianckino* (Florence: Olschki, 1993), pp. 209–19: here p. 211, states that 'Verdi seems to enforce a preliminary tax on himself, a tax that is both a test and a challenge. This tax is a down payment, an insurance against the vagaries of the risk-taking necessary to the advancement of one's artistic career. In truly modern times, such a risk is necessary for any respectable enterprise. Such is the audacity cherished by the new talented entrepreneurs. They know how to invest daringly to beat the competition, to invent original opportunities for revenue, or to make a bet against time.' A similar point is made by Marzio Pieri, 'Impopolarità di Verdi', in *Mangiati dalla musica* (Trento: La Finestra, 2001), pp. 121–50: here pp. 123–4: 'Given his passionate support for the "unification", which would have greatly favoured business transactions […] Verdi should be understood not, as the old and inane rhetorical formula would have it, as a peasant, but rather as a great nineteenth-century entrepreneur.'

[12] Marco Gervasoni, 'Verdi politico: Il musicista come "bourgeois" e "citoyen"', *Gli argomenti umani: Sinistra e innovazione*, 12 (2000), 77–96: here p. 88. A few pages later (p. 90), the author remarks on the 'risk dynamic' present in 'Verdi as *entrepreneur of himself*. It was in Paris that Verdi and Ricordi came to agree on a new type of contract: 'From now on, i.e. starting with the contract for *Jérusalem* (signed in October 1847), Verdi will not ask for a one-off, lump-sum payment […] but he will instead share the profits generated through rentals and sales throughout the first ten years. […] Verdi and Ricordi moved from a relationship based on supply to one based on participation.' Stefano Baia Curioni, *Mercanti dell'opera: Storie di Casa Ricordi* (Milan: Il Saggiatore, 2011), p. 107.

[13] See Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), section

It is also the answer to a long-felt need. I remember my first conference, in 1985. We were talking about the organ prelude and choral prayer with organ accompaniment at the end of *Stiffelio*. It is an effect modelled on the *mélodrame* on which the libretto is based – a play that was also being performed at the theatre of the Porte Saint-Martin in 1849 while Verdi was in Paris: *Le Pasteur ou L'Évangile et le foyer* (to which I shall soon return). The effect of on-stage organs in opera goes back – in Paris – at least to *Robert le diable* (Meyerbeer, 1831).[16] Nevertheless, there were those who preferred to draw on the 'cradle of culture, of local production and consumption of music surrounding Verdi in the Parma area' and particularly on the 'ecclesiastical practices' that were 'crucial to Verdi's first training'.[17] After all, there have also been those who, when discussing the echt-Parisian bacchanal of Shrove Tuesday (the last act of *La traviata*), swore that it was nothing other than a carnival fair with village brass band such as a short-trousered Verdi would have heard in Busseto or Le Roncole.[18]

K ('Dream City and Dream House, Dreams of the Future, Anthropological Nihilism, Jung'), pp. 389–404.

[14] Barilli, 'Parigi', in *Il paese del melodramma*, p. 111, describes the city as follows: 'Paris, luminous surface cloaked in the foam and bloody slaver of consumptive women […]. Paris, damp fog, phthisis-drenched atmosphere'.

[15] See Isaiah Berlin, 'The Naïveté of Verdi', in *Atti del I congresso internazionale di studi verdiani: Venezia, 31 luglio–2 agosto 1966* (Parma: Istituto nazionale di studi verdiani, 1969), pp. 27–35, and Moravia, 'La "volgarità" di Giuseppe Verdi'.

[16] On this topic, see Michele Girardi, 'Un aspetto del realismo nella drammaturgia di "Stiffelio": La musica da fuori scena', in Giovanni Morelli (ed.), *Tornando a 'Stiffelio' : Popolarità, rifacimenti, messinscena, effettismo e altre 'cure' nella drammaturgia del Verdi romantico. Atti del convegno internazionale di studi (Venezia, 17–20 dicembre 1985)* (Florence: Olschki, 1987), pp. 223–41: here pp. 230–1.

[17] Claudio Gallico, 'Struttura e funzione dei pezzi sacri nell'opera e radici del linguaggio verdiano', in Morelli (ed.), *Tornando a 'Stiffelio'*, pp. 265–71; later published in Gallico, *Verdi e altri scritti* (Florence: Olschki, 2000), pp. 81–7: here pp. 85–6.

[18] See Chapter 3, n. 8.

The imagery of Verdi as a peasant (and the resulting interpretive framework) yields a distorted reality, a nationalistic fabrication. We should not forget the warning of Pierluigi Petrobelli, who as early as 1971 diagnosed how Verdi studies are in part still influenced 'by the manner in which the composer wanted his life and works to be considered' and warned that 'the image of Verdi "the peasant" […] constitutes a basic cliché that even today enjoys too much currency'.[19]

THE REAL AND THE IMAGINARY

To return to the lady of the camellias, it must be said that this Parisian and Verdian myth will prove to be an elusive object, an open thematic field to be discussed by using an archaeological approach; a system of representation (also a musical one), or 'expressive hyper-system'[20] whose latent meaning will be rendered by approximation. The task of deciphering will refer to ideas of trace and aura ('trace is the semblance of proximity, however far that which it has left behind may be. Aura is the semblance of distance, however close the object that causes it may be').[21] My goal will be the reconstruction of a horizon of meaning that transcends the boundaries of Verdi's *La traviata*, of its genesis and reception. This broadened textuality should not be confused, however, with a mere work of contextualisation or of source-tracing. The open and dynamic character of the hermeneutic object that I will reconstruct does not imply the dissolution of Verdi's text into the sources that create it or into the socio-cultural context of which it is an expression. However unstable and heterogeneous, the cluster of elements that constitutes the object of my attention still possesses a degree of autonomy and internal coherence. It should be understood as a sort of intertextual complex or indeed myth (if, with Lévi-Strauss, 'we define myth as consisting of all its versions') whose reconstruction-interpretation will have repercussions for the understanding of Verdi's opera.[22] The critical aim of this book could thus be summed up as follows: to approach *La traviata* via the system of representation (musical and non-musical) to which it belongs. This will call for the treatment of some factual evidence as though it were fiction, without ever renouncing, however, historical explanation. Alphonsine Plessis/Marie Duplessis is no more 'real' than Marguerite Gautier or Violetta Valery (the latter name spelled without the accent, as in Verdi and Piave). We must not – following Foucault – confuse the internal object of a system of representation or of a 'discursive formation' (to cite *The Archaeology of Knowledge*) with its external and pre-discursive referent. The latter acquires meaning only once it is woven into a discourse – once it is interpreted. Yet this recognition of the (relative) autonomy of the representations of a stock of images from its context (whether economic, social, or political) does not mean a detachment from history or an abolition of objective reality – quite the opposite. To take too seriously – as some deconstructionists do – Foucault's statement that discourses are 'practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak'[23] implies the risk of abandoning the very idea of historical truth (or of truth altogether). Neither the historical context nor the reality of experience is closed off from its mode of representation. The relation between empirical reality and representation is reciprocal, and it is irksomely multifaceted. The myth of the lady of the camellias does not start with Marguerite Gautier and Violetta Valery but with Alphonsine Plessis/Marie Duplessis (whose real life is already, in a way, mythical). Even the biographical data – not in themselves but their representation – can be relevant in forming our thematic (and sonic) field. I will thus start from a place – both real and imaginary – frequented by Alphonsine Plessis/Marie Duplessis, according to the testimony of Jules Janin, who reports having seen the future lady of the camellias 'in the abominable foyer of a boulevard theatre [but if it really was so abominable, what were he and Liszt doing there?], badly lit and filled to the brim with the noisy crowd who usually comes in to appraise the melodramas *à grand spectacle*'.[24]

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[19] Pierluigi Petrobelli, 'Remarks on Verdi's Composing Process', in *Music in the Theater: Essays on Verdi and Other Composers*, trans. Roger Parker (Princeton University Press, 1994), pp. 48–74: here p. 48.

[20] This expression is found in Fabrizio Della Seta, *Italia e Francia nell'Ottocento* (Turin: EDT, 1993), p. 11.

[21] Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, fragment M16a, 4, p. 447.

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[22] Claude Lévi-Strauss, 'The Structural Study of Myth', in *Structural Anthropology* (1958), trans. Claire Jacobson and Brooke Grundfest Schoepf, 2 vols. (New York and London: Basic Books, 1963), vol. 1, pp. 206–31: here p. 217.

[23] Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969), trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (London: Tavistock Publications, 1972), p. 54.

According to one of the most recent biographers (or should I say hagiographers) of Alphonsine Plessis, the meeting between the lady of the camellias and Liszt occurred at the Ambigu-Comique theatre.[25] In another monograph, however, it is assumed that the place was the Théâtre du Gymnase.[26] This is probably because of an erroneous reading of this slightly ambiguous statement by Janin: 'There were more workmen's shirts than dresses, more berets than feathered hats; […] People talked about all sorts of things, from dramatic art to fried potatoes; from the shows at the Gymnase to the Gymnase's *galette*.'[27] But we are in the *foyer* of a boulevard theatre, between two acts of a terrible *mélodrame* (soon afterwards, Janin writes of the encounter as a 'gallant entr'acte to such a terrible *mélodrame*'), and the Théâtre du Gymnase did not put on shows of this kind. References to the 'Gymnase's *galette*' are ubiquitous in texts of those years that describe the behaviour of *grisettes* and *lorettes* – particularly their proverbial gluttony: in the winter these young ladies craved roast chestnuts; in the summer they craved the *galette* that was sold in front of the Théâtre du Gymnase, on the Boulevard Bonne-Nouvelle;[28] their appetite for the *mélodrames à grand spectacle* of the Boulevard du Temple (also known as the Boulevard du Crime) lasted all year round.[29]

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[24] Jules Janin, 'Mademoiselle Marie Duplessis', preface to Alexandre Dumas *fils*, *La Dame aux camélias*, 2nd edn (Paris: A. Cadot, 1851); in Alexandre Dumas *fils*, *La Dame aux camélias: Le Roman, le drame, 'La traviata'*, ed. Hans-Jörg Neuschäfer and Gilbert Sigaux (Paris: Flammarion, 1981), p. 481–94.

[25] See Micheline Boudet, *La Fleur du mal: La véritable histoire de la dame aux camélias* (Paris: France Loisirs, 1993), pp. 194–8. Janka Wohl, in *François Liszt: Souvenirs d'une compatriote* (Paris: Paul Ollendorff, 1887), p. 170, recalls the episode as follows: 'In 1849, Liszt had come back to Paris on a business trip. He had to speak with Jules Janin, and went to visit him one evening. He was told that Janin was at the Ambigu, where a premiere was taking place. Liszt went there; while he was strolling in the foyer with Janin during the entr'acte, a very remarkable young woman passed him by and stared at him'. However, Wohl's late account is of dubious value: it may have been the case that the meeting between Liszt and Marie Duplessis took place at the Ambigu, but Duplessis had died two years before 1849.

[26] Christiane Issartel, *Les Dames aux camélias: De l'histoire à la légende* (Paris: Hachette, 1981), p. 14.

[27] Janin, 'Mademoiselle Marie Duplessis', p. 481.

To take the world of boulevard theatres and its undisputed ruler – *mélodrame* – as a starting point means to make room for a type of metropolitan popular culture that no longer has much to do with old-time folkloric peasantry, a popular culture that interested Verdi at least as much as it attracted Balzac, whom Moravia also deemed 'vulgar'[30] and whose work largely inspired the first stages of the archaeology of modernity.[31] Janin remains silent about the name of the theatre and the title of the *mélo*, but since the event must have taken place around 1845 and Alphonsine was (and for good reason!) a reader of the *Mystères de Paris*[32] we can reasonably imagine that the theatre was the Porte Saint-Martin, where a theatrical adaptation of Eugène Sue's *roman-feuilleton* (1842–3), with stage music by Auguste Pilati, had been showing since 13 February 1844.[33] I have explained elsewhere the importance and dramaturgical relevance of the kind of music that accompanied these shows, music that has since left very little trace: without their aura neither *mélodrame* nor the myth of the lady of the camellias can be understood.[34]

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[28] Louis Huart, *Physiologie de la grisette*, illustrated by Gavarni (Paris: Aubert, n.d. [c. 1842]; repr. Geneva: Slatkine, 1979), p. 37, observes that 'while eating this excessively hard dough, they [the *grisettes*] busied themselves with highly gastronomical disquisitions on the merits of the Gymnase *galette* versus the Porte Saint-Denis *galette*; a veritable course on comparative *galettes*'.

[29] The Boulevard du Temple was generally known by the nickname 'Boulevard du Crime' because of the countless crimes that were performed on the stages of its theatres; see Pierre Gascar, *Le Boulevard du Crime* (Paris: Hachette, 1980).

[30] See Moravia, 'La "volgarità" di Giuseppe Verdi', p. 1347.

[31] Balzac is at once a witness and an archaeologist. Jeannine Guichardet, *Balzac 'archéologue de Paris'* (1986, repr. Geneva: Slatkine, 1999), p. 17, encapsulates this well when she writes that Balzac makes us feel 'le présent en train de devenir passé', the present in the process of becoming the past. I have used the term 'modernity' in Baudelaire's sense, of course: 'la modernité, c'est le transitorie, le fugitif, le contingent' (Charles Baudelaire, *Le Peintre de la vie moderne* (1863), in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Claude Pichois, 2 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 1975–6), vol. II, pp. 683–724).

In Chapter 1 I will try to describe the sonic landscape of boulevard theatres at the time of Verdi's first journey to Paris. In Chapter 2 I will examine the system of representation (both musical and extra-musical) at work in the lady of the camellias, paying special attention to the role of waltz and polka. In the third and final chapter I will focus on the stage music written by Édouard Montaubry for Dumas *fils*'s play *La Dame aux camélias*, which opened at the Théâtre du Vaudeville on 2 February 1852 (while Verdi was in Paris). The preoccupation with the retrieval of the sonic dimension of the thematic field will not only help to avert the danger of excessive formalism, but will also enrich and inform my evaluation of new interpretative possibilities. From Benjamin to Karlheinz Stierle, every mythic account of Paris has put the issue of 'legibility' (*Lesbarkeit*) at the centre: 'Paris is a world and a book at once', as Stierle would have it.[35] Yet by the same token, and because of some of the issues exposed by the most recent work in sensory anthropology and sound studies, we are faced with the question of 'audibility' (*Hörbarkeit*, if you like), a question often relegated to a physical and perceptual realm.[36]

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[32] See Romain Vienne, *La Vérité sur la dame aux camélias (Marie Duplessis)* (Paris: Paul Ollendorff, 1888), p. 85. Eugène Sue, *Les Mystères de Paris* (1842–3), ed. Francis Lacassin and Armand Lanoux (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1989), p. 119, reminds us that Fleur-de-Marie, the famous *vierge souillée* of the *Mystères de Paris*, had according to Rodolphe (her liberator, who later turns out to be her father) 'la poitrine faible': in other words, she was a consumptive.

[33] Balzac himself turned the most famous character from his novels into a lead character for the boulevard theatre: *Vautrin*, performed at the Porte Saint-Martin in 1840.

[34] Emilio Sala, *L'opera senza canto: Il mélo romantico e l'invenzione della colonna sonora* (Venice: Marsilio, 1995).

[35] Karlheinz Stierle, *Der Mythos von Paris: Zeichen und Bewußtsein der Stadt* (Munich: Carl Hanserl Verlag, 1993), p. 14.

In this book I shall discuss not only what meets the eye, but also what meets the ear. The ear in question is archaeological, symptomatological. Are sounds not also *a product of culture*? Do they not *speak* to us of imagery, no matter how elusive their trace may be? Can one not *listen* to history? In a book dedicated to the historical significance of imagery, Peter Burke – who did so much to promote a visual approach to history – dwells for a long time on a popular-revolutionary wood-engraving telling the 'myth' of the storming of the Bastille. He altogether disregards the couplets that frame the whole scene and thus function as 'soundtrack'.[37] Does the obliteration of that musical source not imply the loss of part of the meaning of the image – the giving of a deaf interpretation? Is it not time to promote an approach to history that is also sonic? Bruce R. Smith poses the question of 'how to listen to history'.[38] The ensuing pages attempt to give a response – even if partial and provisional – to this question.

The question implies (as we will see more clearly by the end of the book) the meeting of history and ethnography. After all, both historical ethnography and anthropological history are fairly common today. I will attempt to reconstruct the Parisian

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[36] See for example David Howes (ed.), *The Variety of Sensory Experience* (Toronto University Press, 1991). On the 'histoire des sensibilités', see Alain Corbin, *Village Bells: Sound and Meaning in the Nineteenth-Century French Countryside* (1994), trans. Martin Thom (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).

[37] See Peter Burke, *Eyewitnessing: The Uses of Images as Historical Evidence* (London: Reaktion Books, 2001), p. 145. This 'Récit mémorable du siège de la Bastille' was published in Orléans by Letourmi about 1789. The six couplets, 'dédiés à la Nation par M. Déduit', are sung over the famous air by Jean-Joseph Vadé 'Dans les gardes françaises'.

[38] Bruce R. Smith, 'Tuning into London c. 1600', in Michael Bull and Les Beck (eds.), *The Auditory Culture Reader* (Oxford: Berg, 2003), pp. 127–35: here p. 129.

'soundscape' (the one of the Boulevard du Crime and of the *bals publiques*) that can be properly considered to be one of *La traviata*'s principal *tinte*, as Verdi would have put it. The term 'soundscape', with its strong anthropological and ethnomusicological connotations, has by now become part of the lexicon of historical musicology. We are now witnessing the flourishing of those studies that try to 'highlight the interaction between the repertories of oral tradition and so-called learned compositions',[39] studies in which the endeavour is not only the tracing of a history of listening, but listening to history. These studies attempt a translation in historical terms of ethnographies of sound *à la* Steven Feld, whose results 'should be transferable to older epochs thanks to musical analysis and to the study of treatises'.[40] (If in this book I have preferred to speak of 'sonic imagery', rather than 'sonic landscape', it is to avoid separating the latter from its representation.)[41] Viewed from this perspective, the challenge involves the reconstruction of an oral tradition and a sonic dimension starting from a few written traces. To quote Smith once again, 'Sound is at once the most forceful stimulus that human beings experience, and the most evanescent.'[42] If music does disperse easily, however, that is not because it is less laden with cultural meaning: music tells us more than we are accustomed to ask of it. Listen carefully: every thought sounds.

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[39] Frédéric Billiet, 'Pouvoir et culture sonore dans les rues d'Amiens au XVIe siècle', in Laure Gauthier and Mélanie Traversier (eds.), *Mélodies urbaines: La musique dans les villes d'Europe (XVIe–XIXe siècles)* (Paris: PUPS, 2008), pp. 25–44: here p. 26.

[40] *Ibid*. For the application of the concept of 'sonic landscape' to a historical domain, see also Pierre Gutton, *Bruits et sons dans notre histoire: Essai sur la reconstitution du paysage sonore* (Paris: PUF, 2000).

[41] Steven Feld, 'A Rainforest Acoustemology', in Bull and Beck (eds.), *The Auditory Culture Reader*, p. 226, writes that 'Soundscapes […] are not just physical exteriors, spatially surrounding or apart from human activity. […] Soundscapes are invested with significance by those whose bodies and lives resonate with them in social time and space.'

[42] Smith, 'Tuning into London c. 1600', p. 128.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Some twenty years ago, in a collection almost entirely made up of worn-out orchestral parts hailing from the mysterious music stands of boulevard theatres and preserved in the dusty attic of the Opéra Garnier (back then it was just called the Opéra, since the Opéra Bastille did not yet exist), I chanced upon something remarkable. It was a loose part, that of the oboe, that had clearly been used in 1852 at the Théâtre du Vaudeville for the incidental music to *La Dame aux camélias*. It was a trace, as precious as it was incomplete, of a score that immediately struck me as fascinating; upon finding it, I hoped to retrieve a few other instrumental parts more useful for its reconstruction (perhaps the *violon conducteur* or the bass part). This never happened, partly because the principal object of my research back then was the *mélodrame* of the years 1800–30, and also because the conditions of my work were soon to change for the worse. The preserver to whose kindness I owe the discovery of that fascinating collection, Nicole Wild, left the Bibliothèque de l'Opéra; the collection itself, catalogued only in part, was relocated elsewhere. After a series of peregrinations, it landed at the Département de la Musique of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, where it is now preserved;[43] however, only the catalogued materials are available to be examined: thus to this day only the oboe part of *La Dame aux camélias* exists. When will the rest of the materials be catalogued? When will they be made available to the public?

On the other hand, it was in relation to the one trace that is left (for now) of that music, the oboe part, that I then understood the meaning of Benjamin's use of the term 'aura' (which takes on here a strong sonic connotation): research consists not only of slow *approximation* but also (sometimes) of sudden *revelation*. Suddenly, the intervention and dramatic significance of the motif of reminiscence present in Montaubry's score – a motif that had initially caught my attention and was once praised by Dumas himself (as we shall see in Chapter 3) – were clear to me. I then decided to do without the extant parts and finally to write this essay, whose general plan indeed dates back some twenty years.

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[43] Girard, Pauline, 'Les Fonds de matériels de musique de scène du XIXe siècle à la Bibliothèque Nationale de France', *Revue d'histoire du théâtre*, 249 (2011), 7–30.

Although I have already published an early version of the first two chapters – one that is, incidentally, very different from the final version presented here – I have shaped my overall argument in the most unified way possible. I hope the reader will forgive my dwelling on a repertory of swiftly written, occasional music. The devotion of time to such a repertory will seem less gratuitous if one bears in mind that the work in question thrived more than other Verdian operas on the *Zeitlaute* of life passing by.

A friend and great connoisseur of nineteenth-century Paris's cultural undergrowth, whose expertise and kindness have considerably improved the following pages, passed away prematurely during my work on the manuscript: Loïc Chotard, to whose memory I dedicate my research here. Loïc was a great cultivator of the ephemeral – to the point of incarnating it. He is now buried, like Marie Duplessis, in the cemetery at Montmartre. In his last novel (*La Querelle des bouffons*), which remains unpublished, I found a passage that I quote below by way of final cadence to this Prelude.

> Heureusement il y a aussi les morts, nos chers morts, sans lequels nous ne pourrions rien connaître. Quoi que deviennent ceux qui disparaissent, et même s'ils ne vont nulle part, ils s'offrent à nous, pour qu'enfin nous les rencontrions.
>
> [Luckily there are also the dead, our dear dead, without whom we would not be able to know anything. Whatever happens to those who perish, even if they go nowhere, they come towards us, so that we may finally meet them.]

Perhaps what Chotard means is that truth (at least historical truth) is always posthumous, it always requires a continuous process of reconstruction, without which we would not be who we are: this is (perhaps) the way in which the dead 'give meaning' to the living who are desperately trying to give a meaning to death.

But before the curtain goes up, there are still two debts to settle. The first is with the daring circumstantial investigations led in the 1980s in Venice, my city of residence at the time, by Judge Carlo Mastelloni. I have had the privilege of discussing with Mastelloni several of the issues connected with my preliminary investigation, from the gathering of sources to the evaluation of evidence. To his friendship I owe, among other things, an important realisation – that of the analogy between criminal investigation and historical research. 'We historians', said Marc Bloch, 'are the examining magistrates of a large investigation of the past. Like our colleagues in the Court of Justice, we collect testimonies to help us reconstruct reality.'[44] Mastelloni once spoke to me about the interpretation of evidence as a 'reverse prophecy'.[45] I now realise that I have been using some of the elements of waltz (and polka) precisely as clues, and that I have, particularly in the first two chapters, followed investigative routes.

The second debt that I cannot leave unmentioned is to the latinist Cesare Questa, with whom I collaborated in the early 1990s on a project entitled 'Violetta and her Forebears', which we presented at a couple of academic institutions (in Padua and Turin) and which ended up not yielding a published result. Among the many things I learned on that occasion, and for which I am now especially grateful to Questa, there is one that is particularly important in the present context. It is a possible source of the name of the Verdian heroine. In the twelfth of the famous *Dialogues of the Courtesans* by Lucian of Samosata (second century AD) one of the *hetaerae* is indeed called Ἰόεσσα, which literally means 'violet': Violetta.

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[44] Marc Bloch, 'Critique historique et critique du témoignage' (1914), in *Histoire et historiens*, ed. Étienne Bloch (Paris: Colin, 1995), pp. 11–20: here p. 11. Carlo Ginzburg also reflected on the importance of the 'judiciary model' for historiographical studies. See for instance *The Judge and the Historian: Marginal Notes and a Late-Twentieth-Century Miscarriage of Justice* (1991), trans. Anthony Shugaar (London and New York: Verso, 1999).

[45] This observation bears further witness to the 'affinity' between the judge and historian: in those very years Carlo Ginzburg wrote, quoting Thomas Huxley, about 'retrospective forecast' in the historiographical field: Carlo Ginzburg, 'Clues: Roots of an Evidential Paradigm', in *Clues, Myths and the Historical Method*, trans. John and Anne C. Tedeschi (London: Hutchison Radius, 1990), pp. 96–125: here p. 117. On the topic of history as a reverse forecast or prophecy, let us also remember Paul Veyne's remark in *Did the Greeks Believe in their Myths? An Essay on the Constitutive Imagination* (1983), trans. Paula Wissing (University of Chicago Press, 1988), p. 103: 'Historians are merely prophets in reverse, and they flesh out and animate their *post eventum* predictions with imaginative flourishes. This is called "historical retrodiction" or "synthesis", and this imaginative faculty furnishes three-fourths of any page of history, with documents providing the rest.'

Finally, the English version of this book was greatly encouraged by David Charlton and Roger Parker: they have my gratitude and friendship. Naturally I have revised, corrected and expanded the book with respect to its Italian original: this was also made possible by the collaboration of Delia Casadei, who turned out to be more than a mere translator.[46] A final thanks to Victoria Cooper and Fleur Jones at Cambridge University Press and to Fiona Little, freelance copy-editor, for their support and patience.

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[46] Here I want to thank Davide Stefani for his help in reading and improving the final manuscript.

1 | Verdi and the Parisian boulevard theatre

On a cherché longtemps […] d'où peut venir ce mot 'boulevard'. Je suis maintenant, quant à moi, fixé sur son étymologie: il n'est qu'une variante du mot 'bouleversement'.[1]

VERDI IN PARIS

The importance of Parisian popular theatre for a historically informed understanding of Verdian dramaturgy has been largely overlooked, particularly as it emerged just before *Rigoletto*, *Il trovatore* and *La traviata*. However, it has been singled out by a number of scholars in recent decades. According to Giovanni Morelli, for instance, 'Verdi visited Paris several times to experience popular theatre, something outside canonic sources of romantic cultural thought (Milanese circles were enough to satisfy that need); so he sought to mingle with a crowd of metropolitan theatre consumers, in venues dedicated to local, mid-cultural levels of romanticism.'[2] Marcello Conati maintains that Verdi's long-standing association with Parisian boulevard theatres in the years 1847–9 can 'help explain the turning-point of the years 1849–59. A turning-point that was not as sudden as might appear from *Stiffelio* and *Rigoletto*, since it was already perceptible in *La battaglia di Legnano* and *Luisa Miller*.'[3] Concerning this last opera, Piero Weiss suggests that 'the idea of setting [Schiller's] *Kabale und Liebe* had first occurred to Verdi in the summer or autumn of 1847, soon after producing *I masnadieri* in London and settling in Paris. He probably saw it performed at the Théâtre Historique in an unusually faithful adaptation by Dumas *père*, which had opened while he was in London.'[4] I shall comment later on such views; now is the time to specify the purpose of this first chapter.

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[1] Édouard Fournier, *Chronique et légendes des rues de Paris* (Paris: E. Dentu, 1864), p. 16; also cited in Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), fragment E9, 1, p. 140.

[2] Giovanni Morelli, 'Introduzione', in Morelli (ed.), *Tornando a 'Stiffelio': Popolarità, rifacimenti, messinscena, effettismo e altre 'cure' nella drammaturgia del Verdi romantico. Atti del convegno internazionale di studi (Venezia, 17–20 dicembre 1985)* (Florence: Olschki, 1987), pp. v–xv: here p. xii.

[3] Marcello Conati, '"E quasi si direbbe prosa strumentata" (l'aria "a due" nello *Stiffelio*)', in Morelli (ed.), *Tornando a 'Stiffelio'*, pp. 243–63: here p. 253. See also the

My focus is to investigate more closely the Parisian boulevard theatre scene at the time of Verdi's first stay in the capital, which lasted, with brief interruptions, from summer 1847 to summer 1849. Rather than constructing a complete list of performances that Verdi could have attended, I shall examine a few works and locations that have obvious and significant resonances with Verdian dramaturgy. A general overview of Parisian theatrical performances in the years 1847–9 can be found in the third volume of Charles B. Wicks's annals, but this source lists only premieres. Verdi also had the chance to attend revivals of major *drames romantiques* at the Théâtre Historique such as Hugo's *Marie Tudor* and *Lucrèce Borgia* and Dumas's *Antony*, *Henry III et sa cour* and *La Tour de Nesle*.[5]

A further point concerns the genre of theatrical production commonly known as boulevard theatre. Its roots were in the tradition of popular *mélodrame à grand spectacle*, itself an important precursor of the *drame romantique* in the 1830s, as well as of theatrical types that

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same author's 'Verdi et la culture parisienne des années 1830', in Peter Bloom (ed.), *Music in Paris in the Eighteen-Thirties* (New York: Pendragon, 1987), pp. 209–25.

[4] Piero Weiss, 'Verdi and the Fusion of Genres', *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 35/1 (1982), 138–56. A similar approach is found in Conati, '"E quasi si direbbe"', p. 253, n. 7. Concerning *Kabale und Liebe* in the translation and adaptation of Dumas *père*, see n. 38 below.

[5] Charles B. Wicks, *The Parisian Stage (1800–1900)*, 5 vols. (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1959–79); vol. III, which covers the years 1831–50, was published in 1961. A catalogue raisonné of all the performances that took place at the Théâtre Historique can be found in Louis-Henri Lecomte, *Histoire des théâtres de Paris: Le Théâtre Historique* (Paris: H. Daragon, 1906; repr. Geneva: Slatkine, 1973).

Gautier called 'ocular'.[6] Although this type of theatre underwent several transformations during the first half of the nineteenth century, its spectacular effect was mostly 'audiovisual': indeed, one of its most constant and typical traits was its extensive use of music during performances. This last point is of fundamental importance to my purpose here, which is to define certain processes, or rather certain dramatic and musical 'effects', that may have left a trace on Verdi's burgeoning creativity.

During the first few days of Verdi's stay in Paris, between the end of July and the beginning of August 1847, two theatrical works enjoyed clamorous success on the boulevards: Félix Pyat's *Le Chiffonnier de Paris*, which had been playing for two and a half months (its premiere was on 11 May at the Porte Saint-Martin); and *Le Chevalier de Maison-Rouge* by Dumas *père* and Auguste Maquet, which triumphed at the Théâtre Historique from 3 August onwards. The orchestral accompaniment to *Le Chiffonnier* had been composed by Auguste Pilati, that of *Le Chevalier* by Alphonse Varney. Verdi mentioned both these successes in a *post scriptum* to a letter to Countess Clara Maffei dated 6 September 1847:

> I forgot to mention that last night saw the re-opening of the Opéra: the theatre has been refurbished, but I don't like it much – too oppressive; what I like are the new theatres of small towns in Italy, which are extremely simple and elegant.
>
> The Théâtre Historique is staging a Dumas play which has had great impact, and I too like it very much: it may have large flaws, but

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[6] Théophile Gautier wrote about 'spectacle oculaire' in *Histoire de l'art dramatique en France depuis vingt-cinq ans*, 6 vols. (Paris: Hetzel, 1858–9; repr. Geneva: Slatkine, 1968), vol. II, p. 174. On this topic, see also Hassan El Nouty, *Théâtre et pré-cinéma: Essai sur la problematique du spectacle au XIXe siècle* (Paris: Nizet, 1978), pp. 65ff. Gautier's term 'ocular' was drawn on and developed within the current visual studies. On features of 'oculacentric' modernity, see among others Martin Jay, 'Scopic Regimes of Modernity', in Hal Foster (ed.), *Vision and Visuality* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1988), pp. 3–23. Of course, the Boulevard du Crime was one of the prime venues where this type of ocular spectacle could be enjoyed. See the Prelude, n. 29.

> there is also great beauty, despite the opinion of all those who lashed out in Milan against *Lo stracciaiuolo di Parigi* [*Le Chiffonnier de Paris*], which has also had great impact over here. Nothing much on in the other theatres. Goodbye again,
>
> Cordially yours,
> G. Verdi 10 Rue St. Georges[7]

As this shows, Verdi had settled in the 'fashionable' district of the Chaussée d'Antin, near the Rue de la Victoire, where Giuseppina Strepponi had been living for a year;[8] barely a month into his stay, he was displaying good knowledge of the Parisian theatrical scene. It is also extremely significant that he should praise the boulevard theatres right after expressing his low opinion of the Opéra.[9] Further interest comes from the reference to the failure of *Lo stracciaiuolo di Parigi* in Milan. As we have seen, the premiere of this *mélodrame* had been at the Porte Saint-Martin on 11 May 1847; the play arrived in Milan about three months later (on 29 August at the Teatro Carcano).[10] This means that while he was in Paris, Verdi was following the goings-on of Milanese theatres via an informer (I have found no mention in the press of any 'lashing out' against *Lo stracciaiuolo*). In the winter of

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[7] Letter quoted in Claudio Sartori, 'La Strepponi e Verdi a Parigi nella morsa quarantottesca', *Nuova rivista musicale italiana*, 8/2 (1974), 239–53: here p. 249.

[8] The same district where Marie Duplessis had also lived (see Chapter 2, n. 14).

[9] Verdi's antipathy for the 'Grande Boutique' would become proverbial; and two months earlier, passing through Paris on his way to London, he had the opportunity to express his dislike to Maffei in an extremely trenchant manner: 'I've been to the Paris Opéra. I've never heard worse singers, or a more mediocre chorus. Even the orchestra (despite all our Lyons) is hardly anything more than mediocre' (letter to Clara Maffei, London, 9 June 1847, quoted in Sartori, 'La Strepponi e Verdi', p. 245).

[10] See *Gazzetta privilegiata di Milano*, Sunday, 29 August 1847, where it was mentioned that, at the Teatro Carcano, the (Gian Paolo) Calloud company was 'going to perform today' *Lo stracciaiuolo di Parigi*, with Gustavo Modena. The same play was also revived at the Teatro Re, by the (Vincenzo) De Rossi company, from 12 December 1847 onwards (see the listing in the *Gazzetta privilegiata di Milano* of that date).

1847–8, Pyat's *mélodrame*, entitled *Il cenciajuolo di Parigi*, was also published, again in Milan, in a translation by Luigi Tettoni.[11]

Before discussing the two plays in question, a few words will be useful on the mixed reception that musical journalists gave Verdi shortly after his arrival in Paris. He wrote to Clara Maffei the day after attending the dress rehearsal of Halévy's *La Juive*, which had opened the Opéra season that year. A review of this event in *Le Corsaire* on 7 September 1847 ended with a poisonous little remark that Verdi himself probably read (or had Strepponi read to him):

> Verdi's name has been inscribed in the foyer next to those of Pergolesi, Cimarosa, Paisiello, Mozart, Beethoven, Rossini, Meyerbeer and Weber, etc. The names of Mendelssohn and Spohr are conspicuous by their absence. Since it was our wish to pay this homage to Mr Verdi, in spite of a large number of both French and foreign composers with infinitely more talent, reputation and merit than he, we should have at least waited for a performance of his opera here, or for him to have learned a few words of French. The name of Verdi in the foyer of the Académie Royale de Musique is an enormous spelling mistake.

The opera the reviewer refers to, and on which Verdi was working feverishly, is obviously *Jérusalem* (a remake of *I Lombardi alla prima crociata*), which was performed on 26 November with some success (in spite of *Le Corsaire*). The fact is that Verdi's arrival in Paris was followed by a string of incandescent journalistic polemics. On one side there was *La France musicale*, a periodical owned by the Escudier brothers, who were Verdi's publishers and Strepponi's close friends. On the other were newspapers like *Le Corsaire* and *Le Coureur des spectacles*, which were prejudiced against and hostile to the Italian composer. On 1 August 1847 *La France musicale* issued a long panegyric to *I masnadieri*, which Verdi had just put on in London. Five days later, *Le Corsaire* responded with a crushing review of the same work, which opens thus: 'They write to us from London that nothing has been heard in living memory more boring, more frosty, more monotonous than this wretched *Masnadieri*.' The final sentence is even worse: 'Here they compare the seven obligatory performances of *Masnadieri* to the seven deadly sins.' Many articles greeting Verdi's arrival in Paris evince a similar tone.[12] Indeed, journalistic ill-will would last for some time. Even the undoubted success of *Jérusalem* (which stayed on the boards until February 1848) was not without tensions. Charles Maurice's *Le Coureur des spectacles* published several sarcastic ditties attacking Verdi. A particularly aggressive (and clumsy) example appeared in the 9 February 1848 issue, just as *Jérusalem* was being replaced with a few revivals of *Robert le diable*:

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[11] In *Florilegio drammatico ovvero scelto repertorio moderno di componimenti teatrali italiani e stranieri*, series 3, vol. IV (Milan: Borroni e Scotti, 1847), although a more accurate date of publication seems to be February 1848, as stated in the *Elenco delle opere stampate e pubblicate in Milano e nelle provincie lombarde nell'anno 1848* (Milan: Tipografia Bernardoni, 1848), p. 22 (no. 188). The *Florilegio drammatico* also published the first Italian translation (by the same translator) of the Dumas *fils* play *La signora delle camelie* (see Chapter 2, n. 6 below).

> La *Jérusalem* n'est ni charmante ni belle;
> Il ne lui vient d'aucun côté
> Le moindre spectateur qui s'en aille enchanté.
> Baisse, *Jérusalem*, baisse ta tête altière!
> Ne vois point le public, à ta chute obstiné:
> Ce roi des nations ne s'est pas prosterné,
> Et ta musique est en poussière.

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[12] The polemics continued during subsequent days. Léon Escudier, in *La France musicale* of 8 August 1847 asked *Le Corsaire*, in an article entitled 'Comment on écrit l'histoire', which sources could back up what it wrote. *Le Corsaire* answered the next day, repeating its accusations and adding that 'The editors of "La France musicale" are also Mr Verdi's publishers. It is thus natural that they should find Mr Verdi's scores admirable', a remark that certainly hits the target. But *La France musicale* still managed to land on its feet: in an article by Escudier entitled 'La vérité avant tout' of 15 August 1847 it argued that the success of *Masnadieri* was not at all 'piloted': 'Celui qui écrit ces lignes [this is Léon Escudier writing] a assisté aux trois premières représentations des *Masnadieri*; il peut donc parler *de visu*; et, comme sa loyauté n'as pas été mise en doute, il a plus d'autorité dans cette discussion que le rédacteur du "Corsaire", obligé de s'en rapporter à des correspondants plus ou moins exacts, qui, très probablement, n'ont pas même vu l'ouvrage en question'. To statements of this kind one could reply only if ready to accept a challenge to a duel.

Laisse l'Italien marcher à ta lumière.
Heureux qui pour Paris, d'une sainte ferveur,
Sentira son âme embrasée!
Meyerbeer, répands ta rosée,
Et que l'oreille ait en toi son sauveur!
[*Jérusalem* is neither charming nor beautiful;
search high and low for a spectator who goes home contented.
Bow your head, proud *Jérusalem*!
Regard not your public, intent on your downfall:
This king of nations [Paris] bends not his knee before you,
And your music crumbles into dust.
Let the Italian walk in your light!
Happy the one who feels his soul set aglow with holy fervour for Paris!
Meyerbeer, sprinkle your dew on us,
May our ears find salvation in you!]

It is, in this context, hardly surprising that Verdi should show such intolerance towards the Opéra and official musical venues: better for him to turn to the cheers or boos of unofficial boulevard theatres such as the Porte Saint-Martin. It is true that in his letter to Clara Maffei, dated 6 September 1847, Verdi did complain about the chaotic, promiscuous atmosphere reigning in the boulevards ('one finds there friends, enemies, priests, friars, soldiers, spies, loan-sharks'). But this slightly paranoid list, in support of his antipathy, hides that ambivalent feeling towards metropolitan depersonalisation – the disease of the 'man in the crowd' – which we recognise as similar to the exciting unease that runs through Poe's and Baudelaire's work of those years. Indeed, Verdi follows the above statement with the following: 'There is one thing only that I like about Paris, and it is that amid all this clatter I feel as though I'm in a desert': this is the 'popoloso deserto' that Violetta will refer to in *La traviata*.

LE CHIFFONNIER DE PARIS

Verdi must have found *Le Chiffonnier de Paris* all the more fascinating since it provided distraction from the vitriolic polemics enmeshing him in August 1847. It is one of the key works of the new, socially engaged *mélodrames* functioning as *décor misérabiliste*, and in a sense paving the way to the barricades of February 1848. It was after attending Pyat's previous success (*Les deux serruriers*, 1841) that Eugène Sue became a socialist and began writing *Les Mystères de Paris*. The dingy attic at the opening of *Les deux serruriers* is very similar to that of the factory worker Morel, one of the most famous features of Sue's *roman-feuilleton*. The melodramatic influences in the latter are evident when we recall that the frightening tableau of this poverty-stricken attic in which Morel's family lives is viewed from the walk-in cupboard of Pipelet (the caretaker), as if it were the stage of the Porte Saint-Martin: 'Since the wall has many cracks, when I'm in the walk-in cupboard, I see them and hear them as though I were in there with them. That's not to say that I spy on them, good heavens! But sometimes I go and watch them, the way one goes to a really depressing *mélodrame*.'[13] As the caretaker says to Rodolphe, inviting him to come up and watch the show himself: 'It's sad, but it's strange' ('C'est triste, mais c'est curieux'); he adds that, after spying and eavesdropping in this way, his own humble janitor's lodgings seem like a royal palace – thus highlighting the compensatory effect of melodramatic voyeurism, a true catharsis for the poor. The connection of voyeurism to *mélodrame* is underlined by Proust in a famous scene from *Du côté de chez Swann*: the forbidden exchange between Mlle Vinteuil and her friend in a country house in Montjouvain, which is witnessed by the unseen narrator. It is worth recalling Proust's commentary:

> It is behind the footlights of a popular theatre rather than in the lamplight of an actual country house that one expects to see a girl encouraging her friend to spit on the portrait of a father who lived only for her; and almost nothing else but sadism provides a basis in real life for the aesthetics of melodrama.[14]

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[13] Sue, *Les Mystères de Paris* (1842–3), ed. Lacassin and Lanoux (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1989), p. 237.

[14] Marcel Proust, *In Search of Lost Time* (1913–27), trans. Lydia Davis *et al.*, ed. Christopher Prendergast, 6 vols. (London: Allen Lane, 2002), vol. 1: *The Way by*

Another important aspect of Pyat's *mélodrame* is that its contemporary setting makes it a kind of *Zeitstück*. The stage directions at the beginning read 'the action takes place in the present' ('la scène se passe de nos jours') – the possibility of putting the contemporary world on stage was one denied to serious opera in the mid nineteenth century, and yet one that Verdi took very seriously indeed (as is shown in both *Stiffelio* and *La traviata*). With its prologue, five acts and twelve tableaux, *Le Chiffonnier* also partakes of a new tendency in the melodrama: that of multiple changes of scenery, a typically 'ocular' trait that Jules Janin stigmatised as 'the total ruin of dramatic art'.[15] I use the term *mélodrame* here, but the plays in question actually opt for the title *drame*. The change occurred in the 1820s, when *mélodrame* in the style of Pixérécourt underwent a crisis, frequently did away with the happy ending and re-baptised itself as *drame* several years before Victor Hugo re-launched this term and re-defined its meaning.[16]

Roughly between 1820 and 1830 the *mélodrame* or *drame* became the liveliest and most progressive theatrical genre, as well as a source of (often concealed) inspiration for romantic playwrights such as Hugo and Dumas.[17] After the crisis of *drame romantique* at the end of the 1830s, authors such as Pyat, Joseph Bouchardy and Adolphe Dennery returned to old, reassuring, happy endings; but restoration of the final triumph of virtue coincided with the marginalisation of *mélodrame* as popular art: a sub-product, an example of

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Swann's, trans. Lydia Davis, p. 167. See also Giovanni Macchia, *L'angelo della notte: Saggio su Proust* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1990), pp. 224–5.

[15] Jules Janin, *Histoire de la littérature dramatique*, 6 vols. (Paris: Michel Lévy, 1855–8; repr. Geneva: Slatkine, 1970), vol. 1 (1855), p. 145.

[16] For further literature about this periodization, see Emilio Sala, *L'opera senza canto: Il mélo romantico e l'invenzione della colonna sonora* (Venice: Marsilio, 1995), pp. 163ff.

[17] On this topic, see Emilio Sala, 'Drame, mélodrame, et musique: La Partition d'Alexandre Piccini pour la *Marie Tudor* de Victor Hugo', in Olivier Bara (ed.), *Orages: Littérature et culture 1760–1830*, no. 4: *Boulevard du Crime: Les Temps des spectacles oculaires* (March 2005), pp. 190–209.

'para-literature'.[18] At the time of Verdi's first stay in Paris, there was still talk of the difficulty of distinguishing between *drame* and *mélodrame*. The composer might, for example, have read in *Le Corsaire* of 1–2 September 1847 an article by Paul Lagarde entitled 'Physiologie du mélodrame' (we shall discuss the fashion for *physiologies* in 1840s Paris in Chapter 2), which ended with this significant reflection: 'in my opinion, these two words, *drame* and *mélodrame*, should not designate two different genres, but simply two levels of achievement: the higher and the lower'.

In this context it should be remembered that musical accompaniment (although less prominent than in the original *mélodrame*) continued to be indispensable in boulevard entertainments. *Le Chiffonnier de Paris*, whose original orchestral material by Pilati survives, consists of no fewer than fifty musical numbers plus a long overture.[19] Of course, the proliferation and often swift succession of tableaux tends to limit musical interludes to the function of intermezzos: since an orchestral passage was always expected during a change of scenery, eleven of the fifty numbers turn out to be entr'actes. Yet without accompaniment the on-stage dynamic of *Le Chiffonnier*, in common with all boulevard theatre, would be almost incomprehensible. For instance, the orchestral interludes create a sort of internal memory: poles of attraction, links that are more or less perceptible but make connections between moments very far apart in the scenic action. The first theme of the overture, for example, is reprised in the entr'acte (no. 46) preceding the last tableau of Act 5. Similarly, the overture's second theme is reprised in the entr'acte (no. 5) leading to Act 1 and is heard again several times in nos. 6–9 and 13 (all in Act 1). In short, music – with its ability to remain in the mind – 'fixes' the focal points of on-stage development and functions as the nervous system of the performance. Since it had been made to be heard rather than listened to, it can be thought an integral part of the performance's 'soundtrack', and thus as almost completely lacking in aesthetic autonomy.[20]

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[18] See Jean Follain, 'Le mélodrame', in Noël Arnaud, Francis Lacassin and Jean Tortel (eds.), *Entretiens sur la paralittérature* (Paris: Plon, 1970), pp. 33–53.

[19] The orchestral materials are preserved in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France (hereinafter BNF), Département de la Musique, Mat. Th (312), and include the following complete parts: *violon conducteur*, first violin (two copies), second violin (two copies), viola, cello, double bass (three copies), flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoons, cornet, trombones (three copies), timpani.

We find the following amusing 'lamentation' written in pencil at the end of no. 28 (the last scene of Act 2) in the manuscript *violon conducteur* part of *Le Chiffonnier*. After some sketches showing the head of an inspired, tousled-haired 'Louis van Beethoven', we read the following: 'Infortunés chefs d'orchestre qui conduirez cet ouvrage, puissiez-vous supporter cette épreuve avec le courage stoïque qui ne m'a pas quitté' ('To the unfortunate conductors who will conduct this work: may you endure this trial with the stoic courage that never left me'). This is signed 'Adolphe' (that is, Adolphe Vaillard, then deputy director of the Porte Saint-Martin orchestra). The lamentation is headed 'Note pour la province', revealing the addressee of the message: the orchestral materials were rented out to provincial theatres staging revivals of Parisian successes.

After a long overture ending in E minor, the curtain rises on a nocturnal scene representing the Quai d'Austerlitz, complete with flickering street light on one side and a 'winter moon, veiled from time to time', on the other.[21] No. 1 ensues immediately 'de suite après l'ouverture' (i.e. without any intervening spoken dialogue in between) and comprises thirteen bars of Allegro moderato in C minor, clearly depicting the desperation of a rag-and-bone man who is planning to throw himself into the Seine. A few moments later, we hear a backstage voice singing 'Vive le vin | Vive ce jus divin! | Je veux jusqu'à la fin | Qu'il égaye ma vie' ('Long live wine | Long live this juice divine! | I want it forever | To brighten up my

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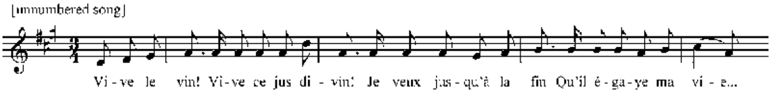
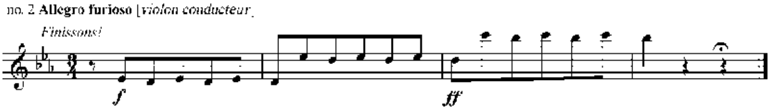
[20] As we can read in the article 'De la musique de mélodrame', published on the front page of *Le Ménestrel*, 19 January 1834, 'music for melodramas became known in France more than thirty years ago, and it has since been heard every day, but hardly ever listened to'.

[21] Félix Pyat, *Le Chiffonnier de Paris* (Paris: Michel Lévy, 1847), p. 2.


[unnumbered song]
Vi-ve le vin! Vi-ve ce jus di-vin! Je veux jus-qu'à la fin Qu'il é-ga-ye ma vi-e...

Example 1.1 'Vive le vin' in *La Muse comique*, incipit of the first stanza



Example 1.2 Pilati, *Le Chiffonnier de Paris*, no. 2 (prologue)

life'): this is the protagonist, Jean, also a rag-and-bone man (played by the legendary Frédérick Lemaître), who comes on stage drunk. His song does not feature in the orchestral material, since it was to be sung 'realistically', without accompaniment: an *effet de réel* further increased by the fact that it was a pre-existing song, probably well known to the public and thus migrating from the street to the stage. The first stanza (the only one sung by Jean) featured in a collection of 'chansonnettes' from the second half of the nineteenth century entitled *La Muse comique* (see Example 1.1).[22]

Garousse, the desperate rag-and-bone-man who will later take on the role of villain, hastens his preparations: 'Allons! … finissons!' These words are reproduced in the orchestral parts and indicate the moment at which the music enters. No. 2, four bars of Allegro furioso marked *forte* to *fortissimo* fixes the moment at which Garousse, who has climbed onto the parapet, is about to jump into the water (see Example 1.2).[23]

Of course Jean saves Garousse, and, taking a piece of newspaper from his rag-and-bone bag, proceeds to read him a long, uplifting tirade against suicide. After this, he exits singing the same song as

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[22] 'Vive le vin: Chanson bachique', in *La Muse comique: Recueil de chansonnettes* (Paris: Alfred Ikelmer [c. 1870], pl. no. A.I. 2808), vol. iv, no. 15.

[23] The first two bars of this rapid, ascending figure, played by the entire orchestra (including trombones), were subsequently omitted (as is shown by the instrumental parts): a true sonic flash of lightning!

before. Garousse is left alone, and after reading over the last lines of the article decides to turn – such are the miracles of social pedagogy – from an aspiring suicide into a murderer: 'Yes, unhappiness … no longer just for me, but unhappiness for others, too!'[24] At this moment an Allegro moderato (no. 3) starts up during which, as we see from the *violon conducteur* part, 'on parle' ('they speak') – which means that dialogue occurs over the orchestral accompaniment. A character enters, walking hastily. Garousse turns round. He suspects that the man has money. He fetches the hooked stick with which he has been picking up rags and exclaims: 'All right, you asked for it … Money! Money!' These last repeated words are also quoted in the *violon conducteur* part, and coincide with two bars of string tremolo (bars 10–11 of no. 3). This is clearly an indication to synchronise this passage with the moment at which Garousse prepares to hit the unfortunate man with his stick. No. 3 goes on for a further eight bars: the first four are marked *forte* (the scuffle), and the rest are *pianissimo* with tremolos over which 'on parle' (here referring to the groans of the victim). Jean comes back on stage 'hobbling' and tries to stop Garousse, who pushes him to the ground: 'And now I've something to live on, so I will live!' At this, an Allegro vivace (*forte*) picks up to punctuate the exit of the murderer, making up the last musical segment (four bars) of no. 3. The dying man barely has time to hand his document wallet to Jean, who reads out the victim's name: Jacques Didier. 'It's my fault, it's my fault! … Damned wine! … I'll never drink again! … Oh! no, no, never touch it again! … I swear it here, over the corpse of this poor man!' The music starts up again with a seventeen-bar Andantino, the last eight bars acting as a repeated refrain. This number, in F minor (no. 4), closes the prologue; Jean exits on the right. 'At the same moment a patrol comes out from the left, notices Jacques Didier, and goes towards him. Curtain.'[25]

This brief retelling of the prologue of *Le Chiffonnier de Paris* gives some idea of the importance and status enjoyed by music within

[24] Pyat, *Le Chiffonnier*, p. 5.

[25] *Ibid.*, p. 6.

mélodrame. The pursuit of effect, so typical of boulevard theatre, is unthinkable without the involvement of the orchestra. Sometimes whole sections, acted quietly and in semi-darkness, often coinciding with moments of suspense, were absorbed into the music, which is even superimposed over the dialogue ('on parle', as in no. 3). These rather long sections were known as the 'scènes mystérieuses'.[26] At other times the musical excerpts are very short, as for instance no. 2, acting like an electrical discharge during the performance. But what is really important is the cultural and psycho-social (as well as dramaturgical) relevance of this musical material, in which we find the 'soundtrack' or 'songbook' of an entire epoch. Life itself was, as it were, part of these pieces of music: the excerpts belong more to the physiological or existential sphere than to the realm of aesthetics. *Mutatis mutandis*, one is reminded of Sartre's evocation of silent cinema and its heroes, animated by music that was 'the sound of their inner life. Persecuted innocence did more than speak or show its pain, it pervaded me through that melody which emanated from it.'[27]

The next scene's somewhat Verdian flavour also encourages commentary. It occurs in a space subdivided into several places independent of one another and yet all visible to the audience, following a typical tendency of *mélodrame* to be discussed below. When the curtain rises, there is a landing with a small, humble but tidy white room on one side, belonging to Marie Didier (the grown-up daughter of the murdered man), and on the other a dingy attic belonging to Jean the rag-and-bone man, who is now quite old. But what is most important is the contrast created – with the aid of music – between the despair of Marie, who is overcome by tiredness and hunger (her job as a seamstress barely earns her enough to live on), and the rejoicing crowd which we hear off-stage: the act indeed takes place on Shrove Tuesday. Indoors, a despairing woman, lonely and abandoned; outdoors, the masked crowds of Paris, crazed by the carnival; again *La traviata* is just around the corner.

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[26] Arthur Pougin, *Dictionnaire historique et pittoresque du théâtre* (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1885), p. 512, s.v. 'Mélodrame'.

[27] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Les Mots* (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), p. 101.

LE CHEVALIER DE MAISON-ROUGE

As we can read in an old monograph on the Théâtre Historique, *Le Chevalier de Maison-Rouge*, a play much praised by Verdi, 'found the same success that it enjoyed as a book, helped further by changes to the ending, which spared the lives of the attractive lovers: one hundred and thirty-four performances came of it'.[28]

Whereas in the days of romantic drama Dumas submitted plays with a tragic ending for performance at the Porte Saint-Martin, such as *Antony* (1831) or *La Tour de Nesle* (1832), now in 1847 he opted for an ending that, if not happy, was at least a little more optimistic. The villain Rocher, prototype of the fanatic Jacobin, is murdered in the end, and the sacrifice of Lorin (the *chevalier de l'innocence*) saves the lives of the two lovers. Defined by Dumas as an 'episode from the time of the Girondins', the play consists of twelve tableaux. Its incidental music, composed by Alphonse Varney, is more substantial than that of *Le Chiffonnier*: according to the surviving orchestral materials, it consists of no fewer than seventy musical numbers, plus an opening prelude and a 'Chœur des Girondins' (Girondins' chorus) which, as we shall see, coincides with the most important passage of the play.[29] There is no space here to give even a rough description of the 'soundtrack' of this very complicated drama, but

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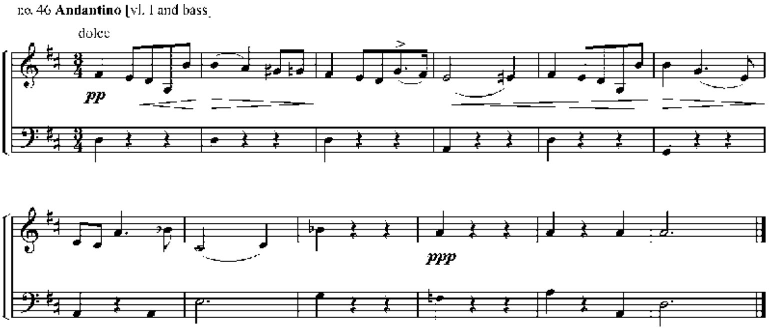
[28] Lecomte, *Histoire des théâtres de Paris*, p. 33.

[29] The incomplete set of orchestral parts (all wind parts are missing except for the flute) are preserved at the BNF, Département de la Musique, Mat. Th (279). They appear to be the orchestral parts used for some revivals of the *pièce* that took place twenty years after the premiere. Indeed, the flute part is labelled 'Porte Saint-Martin' and dated 10 November 1869, while the first violin part is dated Lille, February 1870. The music, however, is most likely to be the original score by Alphonse Varney.



Example 1.3 Varney, *Le Chevalier de Maison-Rouge*, no. 46 (Act 2)

it will be useful to single out another typical effect of melodramatic rhetoric: the instrumental solo which, by suspending the on-stage flow of time, allows us to go 'inside' the characters, living the scene from their point of view. This is what Luca Zoppelli, writing about opera, has called the 'spotlight effect': a particular timbre acts as a narrative device that 'concentrates the spectators' attention on one character – whether silent or vocally active – by separating him out from the others and bringing him to the foreground, highlighting his inner subjectivity'.[30] For example, when Maurice learns that the Chevalier de Maison-Rouge (whom he wrongly believed to be Geneviève's lover) is in fact in love with the queen, a violin solo emphasises his agitation. Maurice sees that the portrait the Chevalier is trying to hide is of the queen. Geneviève says: 'Do you remember that question that you jokingly asked me at the Temple, Maurice? "Is it the queen whom Morand [i.e. the Chevalier's assumed name] loves?"'; Maurice exclaims: 'Oh! Mon Dieu!'[31] Precisely at this moment no. 46 begins: theatrical time stands still and the 'spotlight effect' begins to work (see Example 1.3). Moments of lyrical expression such as this, however musically elementary, bear witness to the ease with which *mélodrame* could turn into musical drama.

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[30] Luca Zoppelli, *L'opera come racconto: Modi narrativi nel teatro musicale dell'Ottocento* (Venice: Marsilio, 1994), pp. 99–100.

[31] Alexandre Dumas *père* and Auguste Maquet, *Le Chevalier de Maison-Rouge* (Paris: Michel Lévy, 1847), p. 95.

The 'Chœur des Girondins' contributed in no small measure to the play's immense success. According to Théodore Muret, this number 'had something fateful about it; it was a sign, a premonition, together with the other symptoms one felt were in the air'.[32] The public in 1847 immediately understood this: 'If their premonitions about a revolution had come true, the Girondins' hymn would have been its adopted anthem, its new *Marseillaise*.'[33] After all, as Muret himself recalled, the refrain of the 'Chœur des Girondins' recalls another famous tune: the 'battle hymn' ('chant de guerre') 'Roland à Roncevaux' by Rouget de Lisle – who was indeed the composer of the *Marseillaise*.[34] It is probably no coincidence that they are linked together in Flaubert's *L'Éducation sentimentale*.[35] Whatever the case, the 'Chœur des Girondins' is first heard during the opening tableau of Act 5, which takes place in the revolutionary court of justice. It is then recalled as a closing gesture in the last tableau, set in the mortuary of the Conciergerie. This last scene was also reproduced on the title page of a quadrille composed by Varney himself on themes from his incidental music for *Le Chevalier de Maison-Rouge*. The title page, reproduced in Figure 1.1, was published by Mme Cendrier in 1847 (and reprinted in 1852). But the 'Chœur des Girondins' was also published independently, also by Mme Cendrier in 1847; Figure 1.2 shows the entire piece.

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[32] Théodore Muret, *L'Histoire par le théâtre, 1789–1851*, 3 vols. (Paris: Aymot, 1865), vol. III, p. 279.

[33] *Ibid.*

[34] See *ibid.*, vol I, pp. 295–6 and Constant Pierre (ed.), *Musique des fêtes et cérémonies de la révolution française* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1889), pp. 461–2.

[35] Gustave Flaubert, *L'Éducation sentimentale* (1869), in *Œuvres*, ed. Albert Thibaudet and Réné Dumesnil, 2 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 1951–2), vol. II, pp. 31–457: here p. 314.

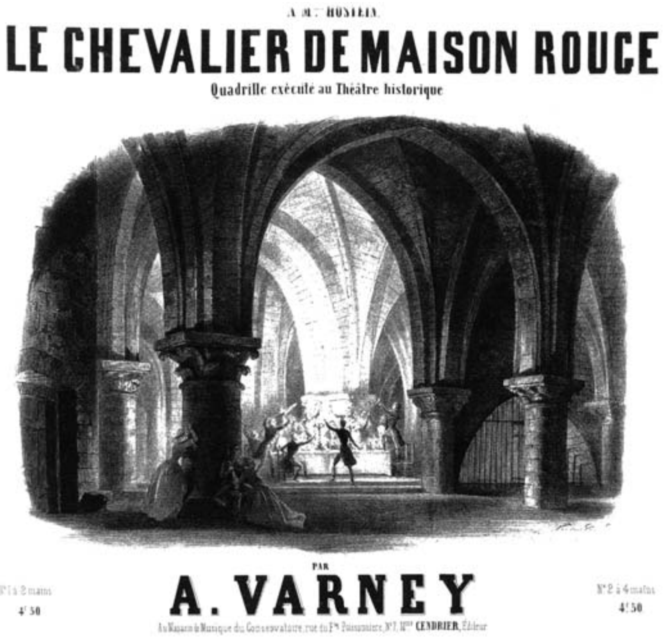
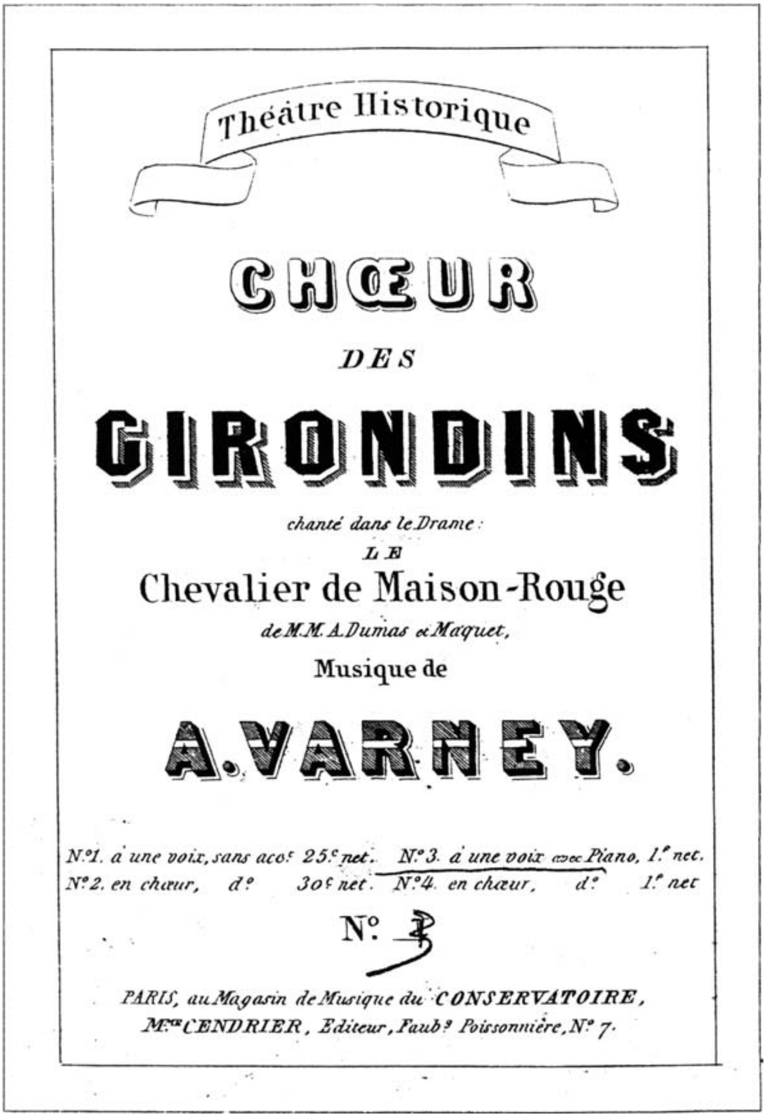

A M.r HOSTEIN.
LE CHEVALIER DE MAISON ROUGE
Quadrille exécuté au Théâtre historique
PAR
A. VARNEY
N° 1 à 2 mains
4f 50
N° 2 à 4 mains
4f 50
Au Magasin de Musique du Conservatoire, rue du Fg Poissonnière, N° 7, Mme CENDRIER, Éditeur

Figure 1.1 Alphonse Varney, *Le Chevalier de Maison-Rouge: Quadrille* (Paris: Mme Cendrier, [1847], pl. no. Mme C. 509), title page

The popularity of this chorus went far beyond the theatre, so much so that – once it migrated from the stage to the street – it aped the destiny allotted to it in the drama, often resounding on the barricades of 1848. We find remarkable testimony to its success in a short article from *Le Corsaire* of 22 March 1848, a piece that reminds us of the importance of the auditory approach to history, mentioned in the Prelude:

> The other day, a group of youths were walking arm in arm along Rue de Rivoli, singing:

Mourir pour la patrie,	To die for the fatherland
C’est le sort le plus beau,	That is the best of fates,
Le plus digne d’envie!	The most enviable!



Théâtre Historique

CHŒUR
DES
GIRONDINS
chanté dans le Drame :
LE
Chevalier de Maison-Rouge
de M.M. A. Dumas et Maquet,
Musique de
A. VARNEY.

N.° 1. à une voix, sans acc.t 25.c net. N.° 3. à une voix avec Piano, 1.f net.
N.° 2. en chœur, d.° 30.c net. N.° 4. en chœur, d.° 1.f net

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PARIS, au Magasin de Musique du CONSERVATOIRE,
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Figure 1.2 Alphonse Varney, *Chœur des Girondins chanté dans le drame ‘Le Chevalier de Maison-Rouge’* (Paris: Mme Cendrier, [1847], pl. no. Mme C. 510bis)

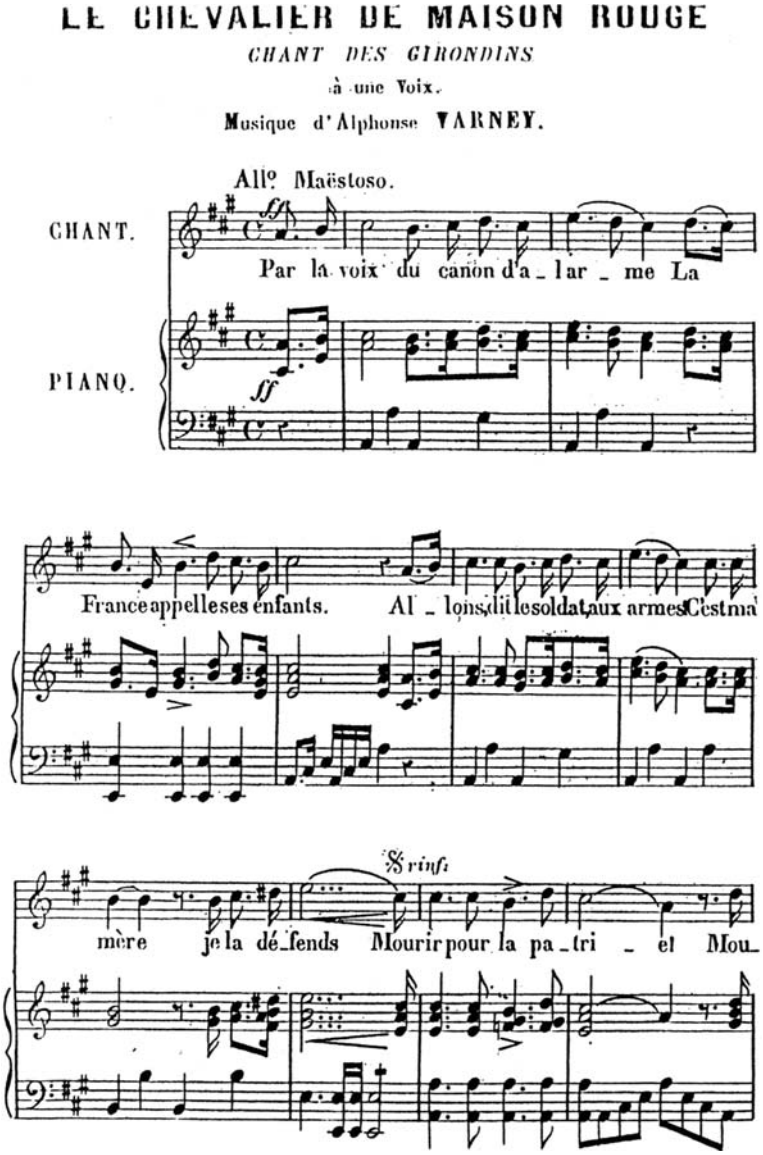

LE CHEVALIER DE MAISON ROUGE
CHANT DES GIRONDINS
à une Voix.
Musique d'Alphonse VARNEY.
All° Maëstoso.
CHANT.
PIANO.
ff
Par la voix du canon d'a_lar_me La
France appelle ses enfants. Al_lons, dit le soldat, aux armes C'est ma
mère je la dé_fends Mourir pour la pa_tri_e! Mou_
rinf.

Figure 1.2 *(cont.)*

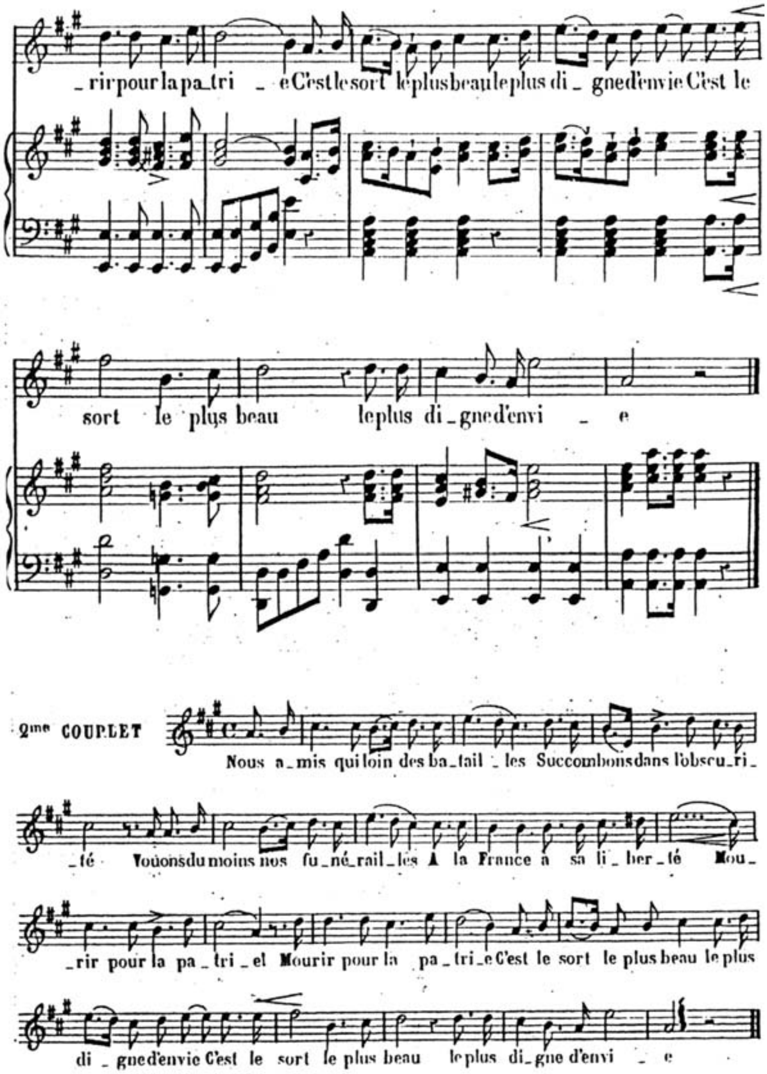

_rir pour la pa_tri _ e C'est le sort le plus beau le plus di _ gne d'envie C'est le
sort le plus beau le plus di_gne d'envi _ e
2me COUPLET
Nous a_mis qui loin des ba_tail _ les Succombons dans l'obscu_ri_
_té Vouons du moins nos fu_né_rail_les A la France à sa li_ber_té Mou_
_rir pour la pa _ tri _ e! Mourir pour la pa _ tri_e C'est le sort le plus beau le plus
di _ gne d'envie C'est le sort le plus beau le plus di_gne d'envi _ e

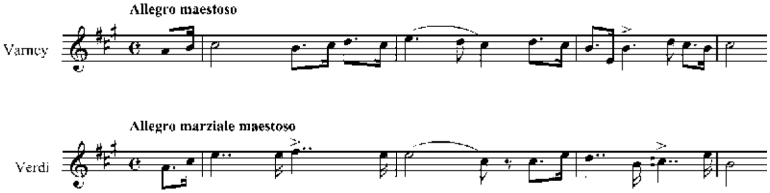
Figure 1.2 *(cont.)*

An old priest was walking by them at that moment, and they took off their hats and shouted: 'Long live the priest!' The good priest stopped and told them 'It is you who should live, my friends, and it is me who should die, since I am very old:

> | | |
> |---|---|
> | Vivez pour la patrie, | Live for the fatherland, |
> | C'est le sort le plus beau, | That is the best of fates, |
> | Le plus digne d'envie! | The most enviable! |
>
> Live for the fatherland then, love it, serve it as you should love and serve God. The Fatherland and God! Let these two words be forever inscribed in your heart.'

On 22 March 1848 the Austrian garrison was driven out of Venice, and Field-Marshal Radetzky was driven out of Milan. The next day Carlo Alberto declared war on Austria. With a copy of *Le Corsaire* in his pocket, Verdi hurried back to Milan, where he arrived on 5 April. Mazzini would reach the city forty-eight hours later. Despite all this, after spending two months in Italy Verdi returned to Paris, just in time to witness the ruthless repression of the factory workers' revolt in June. He continued to write music uninterruptedly. The political climate of those years would animate every moment of *La battaglia di Legnano*, which he wrote in Paris while the Austrians were returning to Milan: 'Viva Italia! Sacro un patto | Tutti stringe i figli suoi: | Esso alfin di tanti ha fatto | Un sol popolo di eroi!' ('Viva Italia! A sacred pact binds all her sons: | Out of many it finally created | One single people of heroes!') This chorus opens the opera, which was first performed at Rome's Teatro Argentina on 27 January 1849 in a city without a pope and in which a new constituent assembly had just been elected. The fact that the last act of *La battaglia di Legnano* is entitled 'Morire per la patria!' ('To die for the fatherland!'), like the most famous line of the 'Chœur des Girondins', may be a coincidence, but it is still significant. It is especially relevant that the melody of the Verdi chorus, heard several times during the opera, is introduced at the beginning of the overture (Allegro marziale maestoso) in the same key (A major) as that of the 'Chœur des Girondins' (Allegro maestoso); and the two songs follow very similar rhythmic-melodic contours – although of course this similarity is largely due to the dictates of the genre (see Example 1.4).

The extent to which his Parisian experiences of those years influenced Verdi's output and plans is also made clear by the list of



Example 1.4 The 'Chœur des Girondins' from Varney's *Le Chevalier de Maison-Rouge* compared with 'Viva Italia' from Verdi's *La battaglia di Legnano*

'Argomenti d'opere' (subjects for operas) that the composer wrote on the back of the last page of the second volume of his *Copialettere*, which comes from the first months of 1849 (when Verdi was still in Paris).[36] It includes some of the titles he was able to attend at the Théâtre Historique; particularly interesting is, thirteen titles down, *Maria Giovanna*, or *Marie-Jeanne ou La Femme du peuple* by Adolphe Dennery, featuring the famous Marie Dorval and revived with great success on 12 April 1848 (the premiere had been at the Porte Saint-Martin on 11 November 1845). Tenth in the list is *L'Attala*, or *Atala*, a story by Chateaubriand that was adapted for the stage by Dumas *fils* (also for the Théâtre Historique) and performed with a much-praised score by Alphonse Varney on 10 August 1848.[37]

I have already mentioned how important to the genesis of *Luisa Miller* was the Dumas *père*'s translation and adaptation of Schiller's *Kabale und Liebe*, again for the Théâtre Historique: *Intrigue et amour* was first performed on 11 June 1847, while Verdi was in London, but it stayed on stage until early August, which means that the composer could have seen it just after he arrived in Paris. The incidental music to the play (which was undoubtedly in the style of the music we have just examined) does not seem to have survived, but some of the orchestral entries are mentioned in stage directions. One occurs in the famous last scene of Act 2 (which coincides with the *finale primo* of *Luisa Miller*):

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[36] The facsimile of the list of 'Argomenti d'opere' was published in *I copialettere di Giuseppe Verdi*, ed. Gaetano Cesari and Alessandro Luzio (Milan: Stucchi Ceretti, 1913; repr. Bologna: Forni, 1968), fig. xi, between pp. 422 and 423. Concerning the problems of dating this document, see Marcello Conati, *Rigoletto: Un'analisi drammatico-musicale* (Venice: Marsilio, 1992), p. 9, n. 23.

[37] Lecomte, *Histoire des théâtres de Paris*, p. 52, observes that 'this poem, sung or recited by ladies in white robes and gentlemen in black garments, owes its success to the charming music of the conductor, Varney'.

> THE PRESIDENT: The father in a reformatory!
> The mother in the stocks with the daughter!
> LOUISE: Ah! … (*She falls unconscious*)
> FERDINAND: Mother, take care of your daughter! (*He walks towards the President with the greatest calm*) Father, if there is any love in you, not for me, but for yourself, father, let there be no violence! … There is a corner of my heart where the name of father has never sounded … do not push me as far as that! (*Music*)[38]

Other famous titles (known to Verdi mostly as books) were also made into acclaimed stage productions that the composer was able to attend. *Amleto*, for example, second in the list of 'Argomenti d'opere', was performed (as *Hamlet*) with great success at the same Théâtre Historique on 15 December 1847.

MONTE-CRISTO

It is not possible to develop all the starting points mentioned above, but it is worth focusing on some titles whose musical accompaniment has survived. First among these is *Monte-Cristo*, which triumphed on 3 and 4 February 1848, again at the Théâtre Historique. Dumas, assisted once again by Maquet, adapted his famous novel for the stage by dividing it into two evenings: the first comprised five acts and eleven tableaux, the second five acts and six tableaux. The following annotation occurs in the double bass part of the orchestral materials:

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[38] Alexandre Dumas *père*, *Intrigue et amour* (Paris: Michel Lévy, 1847) p. 43. Naturally, in the corresponding passage from the 'bourgeois tragedy' by Schiller there is no instruction regarding musical accompaniment. With reference to Dumas's adaptation and its relation to *Luisa Miller*, see also Emanuele Senici, *Landscape and Gender in Italian Opera: The Alpine Virgin from Bellini to Puccini* (Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 162ff.

> Première représentation | de la première partie | de la première journée | de la première moitiée [*sic*] | de Monte Christoooo | le 2 février 1848 | Grrrrrrrrrandisssime | succès (Brrravo).[39]
>
> [First performance | of the first part | of the first day | of the first half | of Monte Cristoooo | 2 February 1848 | Enoooooormous | success (Brrravo).]

The orchestral accompaniment (by Varney in collaboration with Robert-Auguste Stoepel and Sylvain Mangeant) provides fifty-five musical numbers for the first half and thirty-eight for the second. We find practically all the melodramatic effects mentioned above. Example 1.5 reproduces a short clarinet solo which coincides with a flash during the 'duet' of the two lovers:

> MÉRCEDÈS: In truth, I cannot believe our happiness! …
> EDMOND: Nor can I, Mércedès … I feel like I'm dreaming … Oh! your forehead … my heart … you … the whole of you! … I must know that I am not dreaming! … [40]

This is where the Andantino in F major (no. 14) begins, during which the two characters freeze their gestures in a short, silent tableau.

In the same manner there is an instance of a typically melodramatic (but also operatic) *topos* in the reading of a letter with musical background. This is during no. 18, in which the villainous Fernand reads the famous anonymous letter that will denounce Edmond Dantès as a Bonapartist. The feelings of emptiness and disillusion connected with the scene are expressed by the figures of the double basses and cellos, which strikingly anticipate those used by Verdi to

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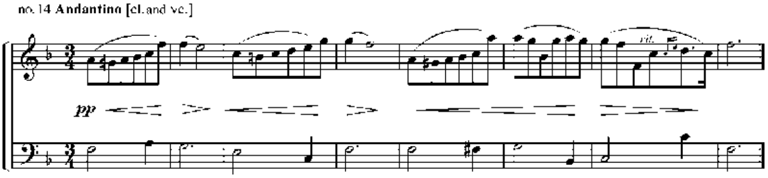
[39] Set of orchestral parts (more or less complete, but full of cuts, corrections, insertions and patching-up), BNF, Département de la Musique, Mat. Th (257). In fact the premiere took place on the day after: 2 February must have been the day of the (evidently open) dress rehearsal.

[40] Alexandre Dumas *père* and Auguste Maquet, *Monte-Cristo* (Paris: Tresse, 1848), p. 13.



Example 1.5 Varney, Stoepel and Mangeant, *Monte-Cristo*, first evening, no. 14 (Act 1)

accompany the hero's despair in Act 3 of *Otello* ('Dio! Mi potevi scagliar tutti i mali'). Example 1.6 shows the Lento in C minor, which is reproduced here together with the text of the letter.[41]

Yet we should also recall the visual (audiovisual) effect, which is essential to boulevard theatre. In this context, the penultimate tableau of the play, which almost seems a combination of the two final scenes of *Rigoletto* and *Aida*, is surely significant. Figure 1.3 shows an image of this scene, signed 'H. V.' (Henri Valentin), reproduced from a contemporary periodical.[42] The space is divided both horizontally and vertically, and is filled with the actions of the characters. Even the inside of the large wall separating the two cells has been dug into by the prisoners, and it is precisely in that visible hollow between the two cells and the upper platform that we find Edmond and Faria when the curtain rises: 'Two cells, separated by a thick wall that the two prisoners have broken open. – When the curtain rises, both are inside the wall. A sentry patrols above, along a raised area.'[43] The new importance given to the *mise en scène*, the new conception of a scenic space 'à grand spectacle', has always been understood as the

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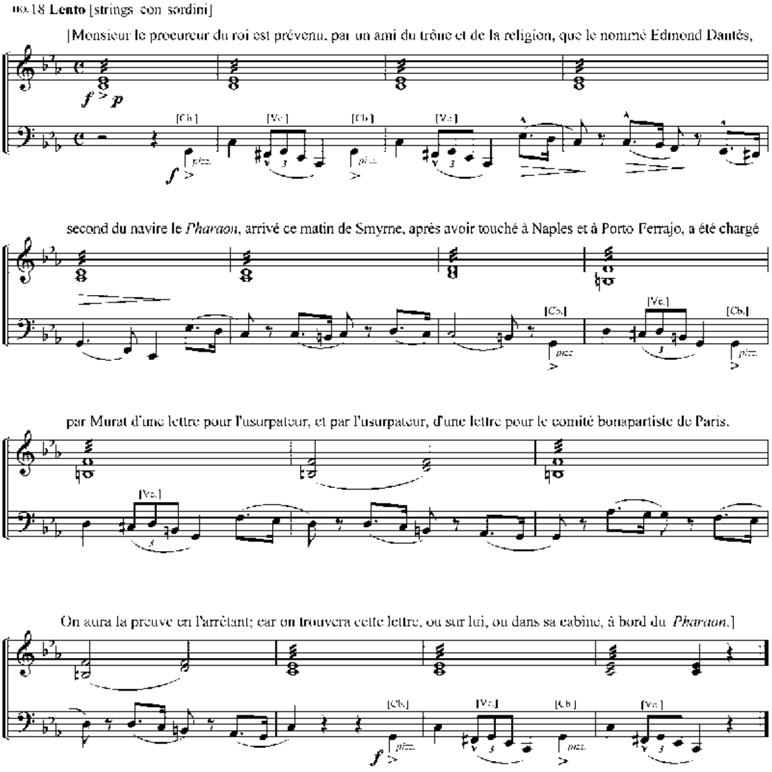
[41] *Ibid.*, p. 17.

[42] *L'Illustration*, 12 February 1848, p. 373. I am correcting the caption that appears at the foot of the vignette: the tableau in question is not the last but the last but one. Besides, (Philibert) Rouvière did not act in the role of Faria as planned: since, out of neglect, his name did not feature on the *affiche*, he refused to act, and was replaced at the last minute by someone called Bonnet (see Lecomte, *Histoire des théâtres de Paris*, pp. 43–4).

[43] Dumas and Maquet, *Monte-Cristo*, p. 43.


no. 18 **Lento** [strings con sordini]
[Monsieur le procureur du roi est prévenu, par un ami du trône et de la religion, que le nommé Edmond Dantès,
second du navire le *Pharaon*, arrivé ce matin de Smyrne, après avoir touché à Naples et à Porto Ferrajo, a été chargé
par Murat d'une lettre pour l'usurpateur, et par l'usurpateur, d'une lettre pour le comité bonapartiste de Paris.
On aura la preuve en l'arrêtant; car on trouvera cette lettre, ou sur lui, ou dans sa cabine, à bord du *Pharaon*.]
[Cb.]
[Vc.]
pizz.
f
p
3

Example 1.6 Varney, Stoepel and Mangeant, *Monte-Cristo*, first evening, no. 18 (Act 2)

main contribution of *mélodrame* to the birth of romantic theatre.[44] In the *mélodrame* 'à grand spectacle', scenic space is not simply *décor*, a mere staged background to the action, but rather tends to be integrated into the dramatic discourse, to be acted through by the characters. It is, in short, a dramatic or diegetic space rather than merely a scenic one. The almost complete overlapping of scenic and dramatic space creates what Hassan El Nouty has called an 'integral

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[44] See first of all Marie-Antoinette Allévy, *La Mise en scène en France dans la première moitié du dix-neuvième siècle* (Paris: E. Droz, 1938; repr. Geneva: Slatkine, 1976).
]

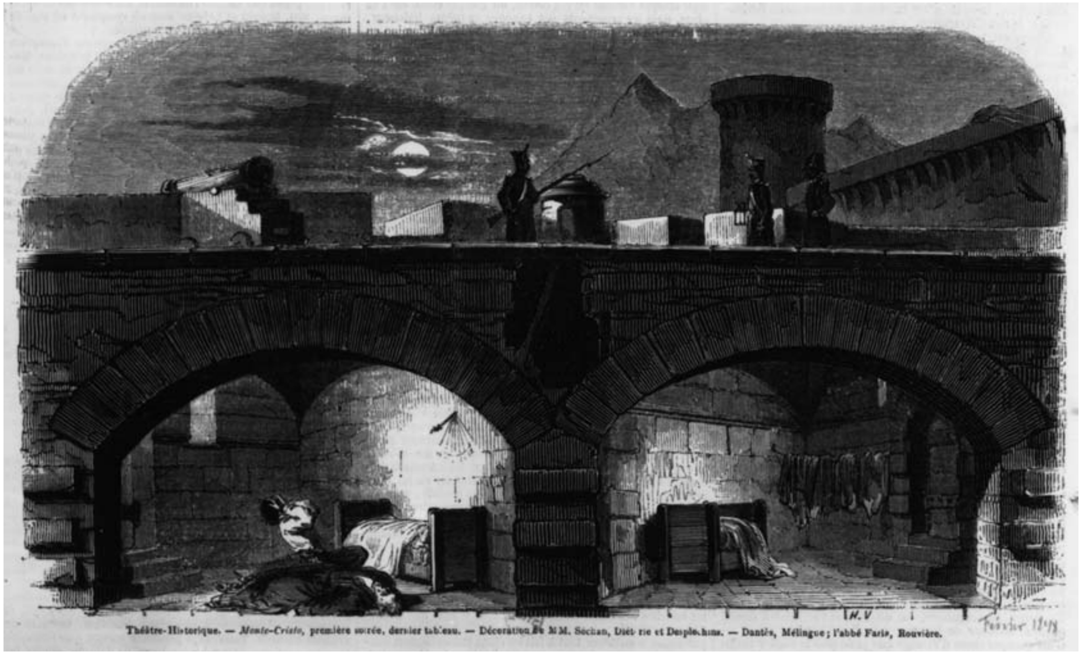
H.V
Février 1848
Théâtre-Historique. — Monte-Cristo, première soirée, dernier tableau. — Décoration de MM. Séchan, Diéterle et Desplechins. — Dantès, Mélingue; l'abbé Faria, Rouvière.

Figure 1.3 'Théâtre-Historique. – *Monte-Cristo*, première soirée, dernier tableau. – Décoration de MM. Séchan, Diéterle et Desplechins. – Dantès, Mélingue; l'abbé Faria, Rouvière' (*L'Illustration*, 12 February 1848)

spatial realism', in which the presence of simultaneous actions goes well beyond the conventional use of visual counterpoint.[45] The intervention of music again contributes to the effect. No. 48 (Example 1.7) is subdivided into two contrasting sections: the A minor Maestoso, pervaded by a sense of threat (during its eleven bars, the trombones play in the bass register and a *pppp* timpani roll sounds throughout), seems to refer to the world outside (and above) craved by the two prisoners: a fear of death mixed with hope for life. By the fourth bar, just after the curtain rises, it is not clear exactly which of the text lines coincides with the 'on parle': it may refer to Edmond, who says he can hear 'the soldier walking to and fro above my head' ('passer et repasser le soldat au dessus de ma tête'), a stage noise which perhaps overlapped with both words and music. On the other hand, the D minor Andante which ensues, with its slightly claustrophobic repeated motifs, seems to refer to the world inside (and below) inhabited by the two imprisoned men and their ceaseless digging.[46]

As we can see, therefore, the new *mise en scène* was primarily a new *mise en musique* and *mise en espace*. In the next scene, the final one, we witness the sinister progress of a sack containing a human body, a theatrical sack, like the one in *Rigoletto*, which prison warders throw into the water thinking it contains the corpse of Faria, while we know that it hides the body of Edmond, who has taken the place of the dead man and thus effects his escape.

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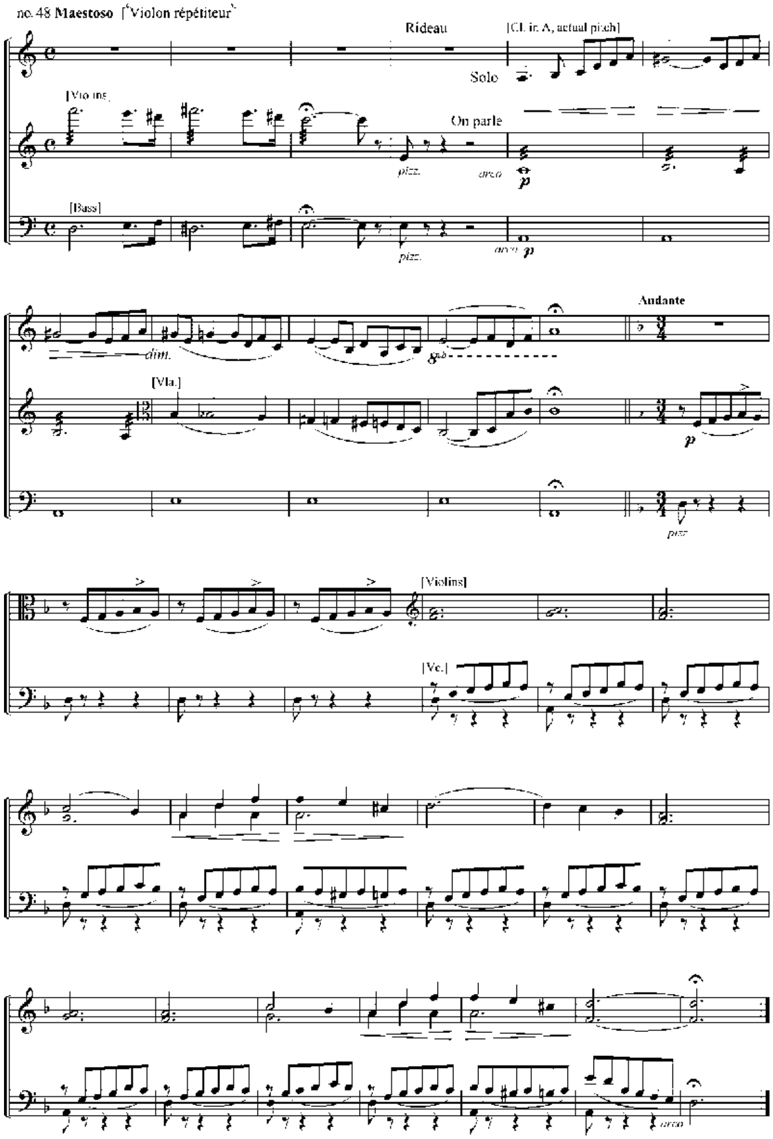
[45] El Nouty, *Théâtre et pré-cinéma*, p. 85. The need for a 'polyphonic' *actio scenica* 'composée de deux scènes symultanées' was already felt by Denis Diderot, from whom I have borrowed this quotation (see *Le Père de famille: Comédie en 5 actes* (Amsterdam: n.pub. [Paris: Michel Lambert], 1758), Act 2 scene 1). It would be taken to an extreme by *opéra-comique* of the end of the eighteenth century, and by nineteenth-century *mélodrame*, two genres teeming with 'simultaneous scenes'. It would be superfluous to stress the prevailingly musical nature of this type of dramaturgy.

[46] At the end of the scene, at the moment of Faria's death, the Andante starts up again, as we can read in the *violon conducteur* part: 'jusqu'à l'entrée du gouverneur et de l'inspecteur'.


no. 48 Maestoso [Violon répétiteur]
Rideau
[Cl. in A, actual pitch]
Solo
[Violins]
On parle
pizz.
arco
p
[Bass]
pizz.
arco p
dim.
8va
[Vla.]
Andante
p
pizz
[Violins]
[Vc.]
arco

Example 1.7 Varney, Stoepel and Mangeant, *Monte-Cristo*, first evening, no. 48 (Act 5)

ROBERT MACAIRE

Also a *succès fou* at the Porte Saint-Martin in March 1848 was *Robert Macaire*, in the famous interpretation of Frédérick Lemaître, who turned the most notorious criminal fugitive of the century into a mythical character whose fame – as witnessed in Daumier's drawings – soon spread beyond the stage. Going back to *Le Comte de Monte-Cristo* (this time in its literary format), it is significant that Robert Macaire's name should be evoked to describe a gesture made by the cunning, evil Danglars – 'a gesture that will be understood only by those who have seen Robert Macaire interpreted by Frédérick' ('geste que comprenderont ceux-là seulement qui ont vu représenter Robert Macaire, par Frédérick').[47] The genesis of *Robert Macaire* (fictionalised by Marcel Carné in his film *Les Enfants du paradis*) started twenty-five years earlier in the actor's mocking interpretation of yet another villain in yet another *mélodrame*, *L'Auberge des adrets* by Benjamin Antier, Armand Lacoste and Alexandre Chapponier, performed at the Ambigu-Comique in 1823 with music (now lost) by Adrien Quaisain. After several problems with the censors, *Robert Macaire* became the title of the play which Lemaître re-wrote, taking himself as a model (again with the help of Antier and Lacoste, as well as Armand-Joseph Overnay), and which was performed at the Folies Dramatiques in 1834 and at the Porte Saint-Martin in 1835 (the name of the composer of its stage music is not mentioned). It is important to stress here that Robert Macaire personified, well before Gubetta or Saltabadil, the 'grotesque' type, whose laughter is associated not so much with the side of virtue (as was the case with the simpletons of traditional *mélodrame*) as with the side of evil.[48] It is in *Robert Macaire*'s laughter, rather than in any ritual references to Shakespearean tradition, that one finds the most direct influence of the Hugolian 'grotesque'.

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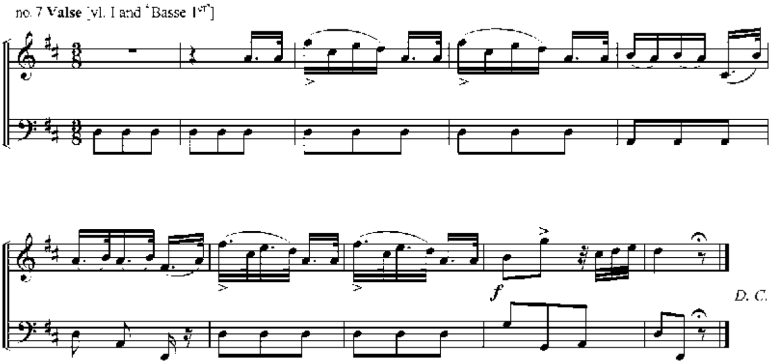
[47] See chapter 104 ('La Signature de Danglars') of the novel, which was first published as a book in 1846: Alexandre Dumas *père*, *Le Comte de Monte-Cristo*, ed. Gilbert Sigaux (Paris: Gallimard, 1981), p. 1252.

[48] On this topic, see Sala, *L'opera senza canto*, pp. 210ff.



Example 1.8 *Robert Macaire*, no. 7 (Act 1)

The incidental music (composer unknown) survives from the 1848 revival at the Porte Saint-Martin, in the usual form of incomplete individual parts.[49] The play, which consists of a prologue, four acts and six tableaux, includes, overture aside, no fewer than sixty-four musical numbers. The prologue starts with a sleepwalking scene as the blind-drunk Macaire, candle in hand, staggers down the stairs of the Auberge des Adrets. Later on (scene 4), still sleepwalking, he dances a waltz (no. 7) whose motif has been heard and developed at quite some length in the second movement of the overture (see Example 1.8): 'What's that sound? – A wedding! Well! A wedding! I'm coming … I'll dance too (*he waltzes, stumbling constantly, and mimes a ball-scene*).'[50]

This D major waltz in 3/8, whose character seems inoffensive today, must have made a strong impact when mimed by Frédérick, since a reviewer for *Le Figaro* (20 June 1834) wrote about a 'walse [*sic*] infernale'. The effect was doubtless increased by a double parodic reference. As well as the somnambulism of Lady Macbeth, such a stage mime recalls Goethe's Mephistopheles, whom Frédérick memorably interpreted in 1828. In that same year, *Faust* was performed at the Porte Saint-Martin, in a version adapted for the French stage by Antony Béraud, Jean-Toussaint Merle and Charles Nodier with stage music by Alexandre Piccini. At one moment (Act 1 scene 9) the stage direction reads: 'Mephistopheles and Martha dance to a waltz, or rather, act out a pantomime scene in which Mephistopheles uses all the power of his diabolical charm to subdue Martha to his will.'[51]

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[49] The remaining parts – first violin, second violin, bass (three copies), first double bass, second double bass, second bassoon, trumpet, trombone, bass drum and cymbals – are preserved in the BNF, Département de la Musique, Mat. Th (343).

[50] Frédérick Lemaître, Benjamin Antier and Saint-Amand [Jean-Amand Lacoste], *Robert Macaire: Pièce en 4 actes* (Paris: J. N. Barba, 1835), pp. 275–302: here p. 276.

This scene (not present in Goethe), destined to become famous, was invented by Frédérick, who in a sense parodied himself in the sleepwalking scene of *Robert Macaire*.[52] The waltz in Example 1.8 might thus coincide with the one composed by Piccini for the *Faust* of 1828, the prototype of a string of 'infernal waltzes' that stretch from the invisible chorus of *Robert le diable* ('Noirs démons, fantômes'), via the prologue of Verdi's *Giovanna d'Arco* ('Tu sei bella'), all the way to venues that may seem quite surprising, such as the 'Coro dei Monatti' in the penultimate scene of Errico Petrella's *I promessi sposi* (1869). The devilish 'Mephistophelian' connotation is part of the waltz's semantic web for the entire century – although it is sometimes disguised. For instance, an infernal waltz peeps out between the lines of the Siciliana, again from *Robert le diable*, played by Countess Marina 'with demonic fire' in the great seduction scene of the last chapter of Antonio Fogazzaro's *Malombra* (1881). Even in the 6/8 of Meyerbeer's Siciliana in Act 1 finale, we can sometimes pick up the hint of a waltz as Robert sings the following – significant – words: 'Ah! Le vrai plaisir sur la terre | n'est il pas le plaisir?' ('Ah! True satisfaction on earth | is it not pleasure itself?'), a case similar to the waltz latent in the 6/8 of the gambling scene in *La traviata*. But given the erotic-demonic context of Fogazzaro's episode, there is no doubt that the piece played by Marina Malombra is a thoroughly waltz-like Siciliana.

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[51] Ginette Picat-Guinoiseau, *Une Œuvre méconnue de Charles Nodier. 'Faust' imité de Gœthe* (Paris: Didier, 1977), p. 151.

[52] Frédérick Lemaître, *Souvenirs* (Paris: Ollendorf, 1880), p. 101.

And although the business of identifying the *ethos* of different musical metres is dangerous, it is worth mentioning that all the waltzes with demonic connotations so far mentioned belong to the diegetic sphere (that is, they all take part in the scenic action as stage music) and are notated in 3/8 rather than 3/4.

LE PASTEUR OU L'ÉVANGILE ET LE FOYER

The last piece I want to examine was not as successful. Its relevance to Verdian dramaturgy is, though, self-evident, since it is the source of *Stiffelio* – the most problematic and experimental opera before *Rigoletto*, *Il trovatore* and *La traviata*. *Le Pasteur ou L'Évangile et le foyer*, by Émile Souvestre and Eugène Bourgeois, was first performed on 10 February 1849 at the Porte Saint-Martin. Verdi had just returned to Paris after the triumph of *La battaglia di Legnano* in Rome. We do not know whether he attended the play (which remained on the boards for a month). It would appear that he did not, since on 28 April 1850 he wrote to Piave: 'I don't know *Stifelius*, send me an outline.'[53] Yet the possibility that Verdi did attend a performance of or heard of Souvestre's play in Paris, and had only a fleeting memory of it, cannot be entirely ruled out. After all, Piave referred to the play by the Italian title *Stiffelius*, while the original French title (perhaps the only one known to Verdi) was completely different. As early as 8 May, fewer than ten days later, Verdi had received it, read it (or perhaps simply recognised it) and pronounced it 'good and interesting'.[54] Either way, the melodramatic influences in *Stiffelio* are, as I have demonstrated elsewhere, very obvious.[55] This has been both confirmed and clarified by the retrieval and examination of the incidental

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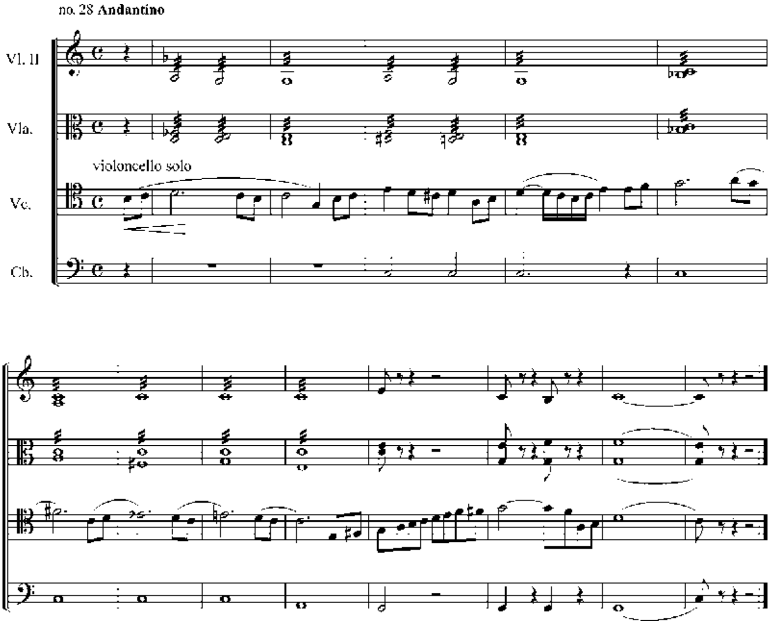
[53] Franco Abbiati, *Giuseppe Verdi*, 4 vols. (Milan: Ricordi, 1959), vol. II, p. 59.

[54] *Ibid.*, p. 62.

[55] See Emilio Sala, 'Tra *mélodrame* e drama Borghese: Dal "Pasteur" di Souvestre-Bourgeois allo "Stiffelio" di Verdi-Piave', in Morelli (ed.), *Tornando a 'Stiffelio'*, pp. 97–106. On *Stiffelio*'s sources, see also Hellmut Ludwig, 'La fonte letteraria del libretto', in *Stiffelio*, Quaderni dell'Istituto nazionale di studi verdiani (Parma: Istituto nazionale di studi verdiani, 1968), pp. 9–18.



Example 1.9 *Le Pasteur ou L'Évangile et le foyer*, no. 28 (Act 3)

music used in the Paris performance of *Le Pasteur*.[56] In the published text of the play there is no mention of the composer, but the resident musicians of the Porte Saint-Martin in those years were usually Auguste Pilati and Alphonse Vaillard. *Le Pasteur* consisted of fifty-five musical numbers, plus an overture (which is missing in the score and parts) and a 'Chœur des Ashasvériens' (belonging to the religious sect headed by Stiffelius), which we hear in Acts 1, 4 and 5 (functioning as a *dénouement*, as with the 'Chœur des Girondins' in *Le Chevalier de Maison-Rouge*). The incidental music uses almost all the *topoi* of melodramatic rhetoric, but is particularly generous in its use of instrumental solos as a way of 'branding' characters. Example 1.9 shows the Andantino (no. 28) that follows the exit of Stankar at the end of the third scene of Act 3 (just before the *tête-à-tête* between Lina and Stiffelius). The melodic line of the cello (the sonic 'double' of the *père noble*) is constantly threatened by a restless accompaniment of tremolando second violins and violas, but increasingly asserts its presence as we get to the final cadence: even when faced with a situation that risks collapse, Stankar never loses heart.

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[56] The complete set of orchestral parts and, exceptionally, the full score are preserved in the BNF, Département de la Musique, Mat. Th (326).

The next scene includes the 'duet' between Lina and her husband: a *fortissimo* tutti (No. 29) breaks in abruptly after Stiffelius notices that his wife is no longer wearing his mother's ring. A *pianissimo* with solo strings ensues, laying a sonic carpet over which 'on parle' (Lina and Stiffelius continue their dialogue over the music for a few more moments). Then the music ends. Enter Stankar, as in Verdi's opera, who has come to announce that the faithful reclaim Stiffelius. Before going out, the husband-pastor addresses Lina with a threatening tone: 'But I'm coming straight back!' ('Mais je reviendrai tout à l'heure!').[57] No. 30, which starts up immediately, refers to Lina's anguish as she is left alone on stage. As we can see from Example 1.10, her state of mind is expressed through a lamenting oboe again accompanied by tremolando strings and a timpani roll: in melodramatic rhetoric, together with the tam-tam stroke, the sonic signpost of danger and death.

Yet the scene most influenced by music, as well as being the one most faithfully reproduced by Verdi in *Stiffelio*, is the last – the final *coup de théâtre* in which Stiffelius forgives (by divine will?) his adulterous wife from the pulpit. This takes place (in both Souvestre and Verdi) inside a Gothic church; at the back is a large upper seat, accessible from staircases on the right and on the left. The curtain rises, as we read in a stage direction on the score, on the third or fourth bar of the entr'acte (no. 53), which consists of a solo prelude from an organ in the wings. The organ plays (or improvises on) the ritornello of the 'Chœur des Ashasvériens' (which features in the score as an independent piece, added on without a number), while

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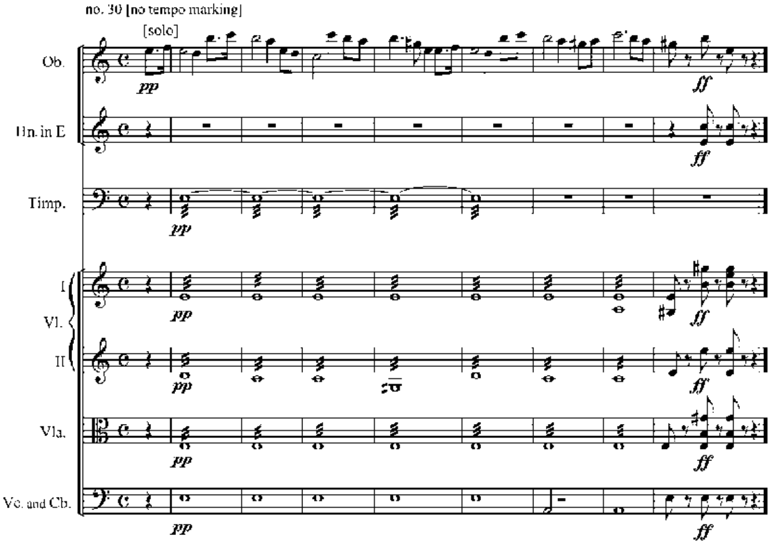
[57] Émile Souvestre and Eugène Bourgeois, *Le Pasteur ou L'Évangile et le foyer* (Paris: Michel Lévy, 1849), p. 54 (Act 3 scene 5).

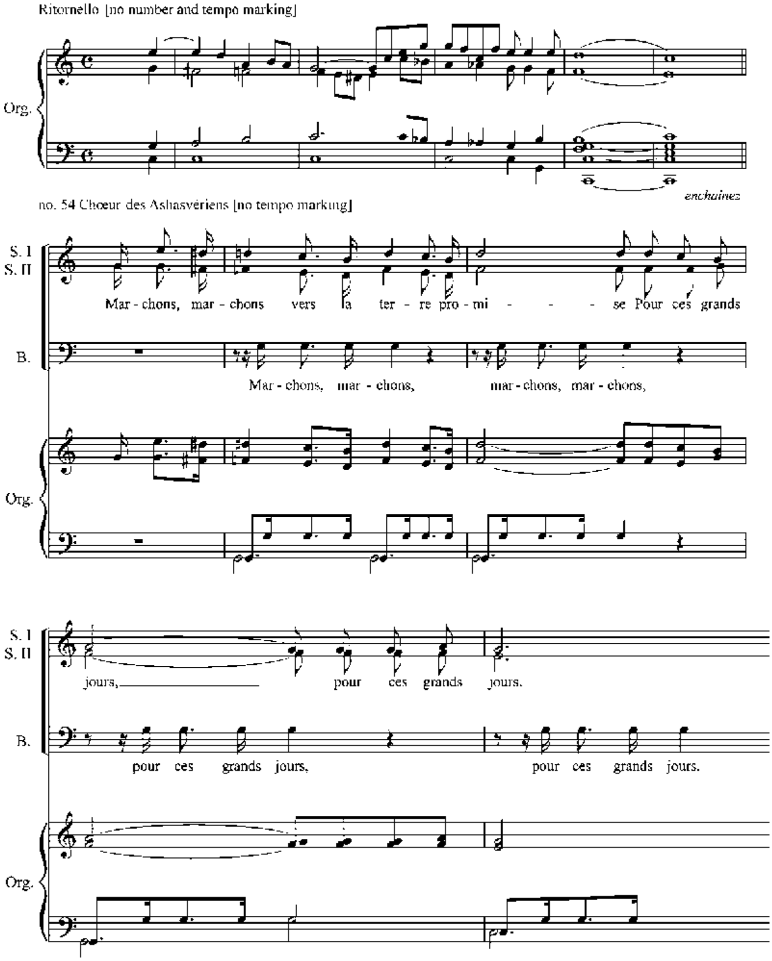


Example 1.10 *Le Pasteur ou L'Évangile et le foyer*, no. 30 (Act 3)

the faithful await the beginning of the service. Once the entr'acte is finished, Stiffelius appears, accompanied by Jorg (the pastor's spiritual father or super-ego, who also features in Verdi's opera). After a brief exchange, the music starts up, as we can read at no. 54 in the score, in the form of 'le chœur sur le théâtre accompagné par l'orgue' ('the on-stage chorus accompanied by the organ'), whose *incipit* is reproduced in Example 1.11 together with the instrumental ritornello.[58]

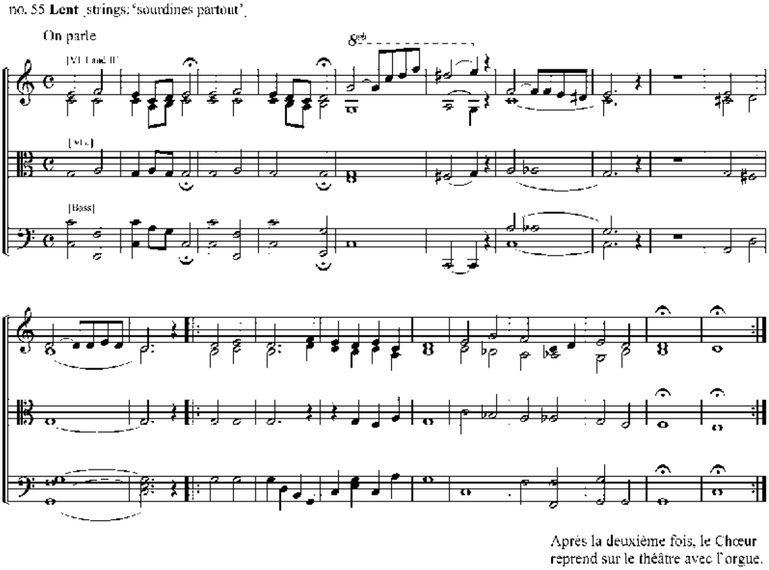
Once the chorus is over, Jorg urges Stiffelius, who is startled and hesitant on seeing Lina, to begin the sermon. At the very moment when the pastor, from his pulpit, begins the gospel, no. 55 starts up

[58] It is in fact difficult to determine the exact moment of the chorus's entry, because the score bears an instruction for it to come in after the words 'qui lui reste désormais', which do not appear in the corresponding scene of the play (evidently this is a difference between the script employed for performance and the original play). Besides, the edition of *Le Pasteur* does not include the text of the Ashasverians' chorus, whose first stanza I have transcribed from the score: 'Marchons vers la terre promise | Pour ces grands jours. | Dieu nous donne un nouveau Moïse, | Marchons toujours.'


Ritornello [no number and tempo marking]
Org.
enchaînez
no. 54 Chœur des Ashasvériens [no tempo marking]
S. I
S. II
Mar - chons, mar - chons vers la ter - re pro - mi - - - se Pour ces grands
B.
Mar - chons, mar - chons, mar - chons, mar - chons,
Org.
S. I
S. II
jours, pour ces grands jours.
B.
pour ces grands jours, pour ces grands jours.
Org.

Example 1.11 *Le Pasteur ou L'Évangile et le foyer*, ritornello and no. 54 (Act 5)

('Lent'; 'on parle'), a sort of instrumental chorale for muted solo strings that lays down a sonic carpet for the final part of the scene – the part in which Stiffelius forgives Lina, almost despite himself, while reading the passage about the adulteress forgiven by Jesus. The significance of this piece resides in its function as an anticlimax after the rapid increase of dramatic tension: the slow, regular


no. 55 Lent [strings: 'sourdines partout']
On parle
[Vl I and II]
8va
[Vla]
[Bass]
Après la deuxième fois, le Chœur reprend sur le théâtre avec l'orgue.

Example 1.12 *Le Pasteur ou L'Évangile et le foyer*, no. 55 (Act 5)

orchestral accompaniment proceeds, apparently oblivious of the events taking place on stage (Stiffelius's stuttering and unease, his trance-like state, the excitement and even exaltation of Lina, who finally climbs the staircase up to the seat, etc.), but it is precisely this alienating asynchrony that paradoxically heightens the suspense of the situation (Example 1.12). The scene culminates in a tableau during which everyone kneels and the Ashasverians' chorus sounds one last time as the curtain falls.[59]

As mentioned earlier, Verdi reproduced the general outline of this scene with striking fidelity, chaining the music to the dramatic flow, renouncing all lyrical expansion and creating the same effect of alienation: a more fitting example of melodramatic influence on his musical theatre could not be found. This influence is also noted by Kathleen Hansell, who stresses how *Stiffelio* was, significantly, the

[59] As we can read in the *violon conducteur* part, at the end of no. 55, 'Après la deuxième fois [no. 55 is repeated], le Chœur reprend sur le théâtre avec l'orgue.'

first opera composed by Verdi on his return from Paris: by bringing in sketch studies for the critical edition she edited, and by focusing specifically on this scene, Hansell emphasises 'the formative influence on it of Verdi's long Parisian sojourn'.[60] And this same finale had already impressed Julian Budden through its 'deliberate avoidance of thematic interest'.[61] The almost anti-operatic domination of the mimetic-gestural sphere is not released even after the act of forgiveness. Both in the *mélodrame* and in the opera, Lina stays frozen in her silence: yet 'how much more extreme all this is in the operatic version!', writes Roger Parker, who completes his commentary of the scene as follows: 'Here is a character who has defined herself through vocal expressiveness, now dispossessed of her principal means of articulation. The opera ends, and the lady [...] does *not* sing.'[62]

What Verdi borrows from *mélodrame* is (obviously) not related to the musical numbers *per se*, but rather to their *effects* – the potency of expression, and way in which they remain in the mind because they are tied to the specific dynamic between music and stage. Small wonder that Fabrizio Della Seta has emphasised Verdi's desire to translate the techniques of spoken drama into operatic terms:[63] above all, I would add, the melodramatic combination of spoken drama with musical accompaniment. As Marcello Conati writes of the Rigoletto–Sparafucile duet, 'the musical fabric is all in the orchestra, the voices limit themselves to a pure dialogue made up of basic questions and answers, without ever coming together: the effect of a *mélodrame*'; he continues in a footnote, 'it is not impossible that Verdi's frequenting of Parisian theatres specifically inspired the extremely original form of this passage'.[64] I would put it more boldly, and say that it is impossible not to recognise the model of the *scène mystérieuse*. Here as well as elsewhere Verdi translated into operatic terms a scenic and musical *topos* of Parisian *mélodrame*.

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[60] Kathleen Kuzmick Hansell, 'Compositional Technique in "Stiffelio": Reading the Autograph Sources', in Martin Chusid (ed.), *Verdi's Middle Period (1849–1859): Source Studies, Analysis, and Performance Practice* (University of Chicago Press, 1997), pp. 45–97: here p. 97.

[61] Julian Budden, *The Operas of Verdi*, 3 vols. (London: Cassell, 1973), vol. 1, p. 472.

[62] Roger Parker, *Leonora's Last Act: Essays in Verdian Discourse* (Princeton University Press, 1997), p. 162 (chapter 7, entitled 'Lina kneels; Gilda sings').

[63] Della Seta, *Italia e Francia*, p. 229.

Twenty years ago I wrote a study of the relationship between an unknown *mélodrame* by Pixérécourt, entitled *La Muette de la forêt* (with incidental music by Alexandre Piccini), and *La Muette de Portici*, the famous *grand opéra* by Auber, suggesting a comparison between the pantomimes of Agathe and Fenella, the two silent roles that take centre-stage in the respective dramas.[65] I can now add a further instance. If we take the orchestral motif of the Rigoletto–Sparafucile duet, we can see that it is closely related – if we exclude the accompaniment, discussed below – to the motifs in Piccini and with Auber generally (see Example 1.13): the same dotted rhythms, the same opening gesture of a rising fourth (marked here by a square

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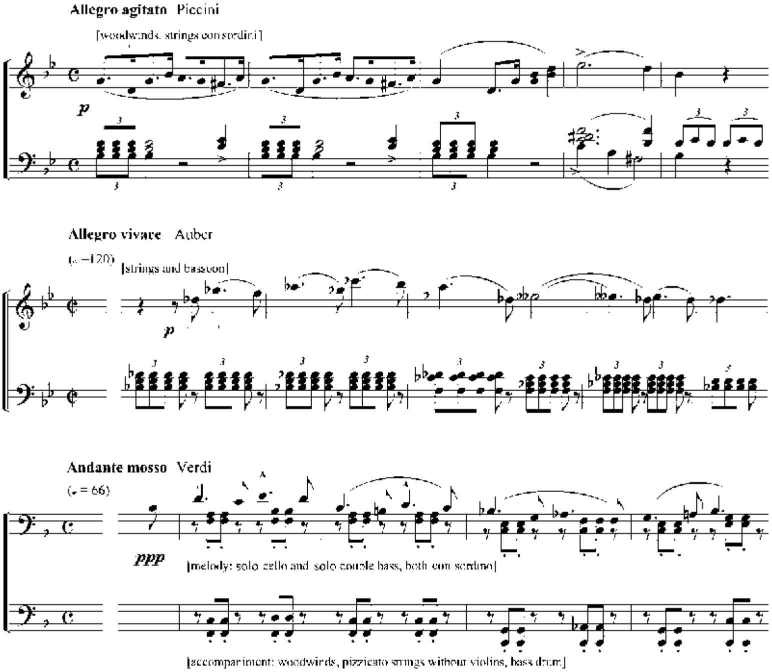
[64] Conati, *Rigoletto*, p. 232. Gilles de Van talks about the links between Parisian *mélodrame* and Verdian *melodramma* in a similar way in his important book *Verdi: Un théâtre en musique* (Paris: Fayard, 1992), trans. Gilda Roberts as *Verdi's Theater: Creating Drama through Music* (Chicago University Press, 1998). However, de Van neglects what I consider to be the pessimistic metamorphosis of *mélo*, and thus proposes a reductive equation of *mélo* with happy ending. See *ibid.*, p. 92: 'Nonetheless, the resemblances between opera and melodrama are analogies of means rather than ends. Boulevard melodrama, at least up to the 1820s, was an edifying, pedagogical theatre (some claim it formed the basis of the morality of the Revolution), one that proclaimed the solidarity of the new bourgeois values and showed how they had triumphed over all obstacles. Hence a naïve, faintly perverse moralism that preferred to affirm the triumph of virtue by showing the horrors of vice.' This is obviously true only until 1818–20, that is, only as long as *mélo* had its foundation in the ritual happy ending, which referred to the rigid system of values that was characteristic of the first stages of its history.

[65] Emilio Sala, '"Que ses gestes parlants ont de grâce et de charmes": Motivi *mélo* nella "Muette de Portici"', in Lorenzo Bianconi, F. Alberto Gallo, Angelo Pompilio and Donatella Restani (eds.), *Atti del XIV congresso della Società Internazionale di Musicologia: Trasmissione e recezione delle forme di cultura musicale, Bologna, Ferrara, Parma, 27 agosto–1° settembre 1987*, 3 vols. (Turin: EDT, 1990), vol. 1, pp. 504–20.


Allegro agitato Piccini
[woodwinds, strings con sordini]
p
Allegro vivace Auber
(♩ = 120)
[strings and bassoon]
p
Andante mosso Verdi
(♩ = 66)
ppp
[melody: solo cello and solo double bass, both con sordino]
[accompaniment: woodwinds, pizzicato strings without violins, bass drum]

Example 1.13 A comparison of Piccini's *La Muette de la forêt* (*mélodrame* in one act), no. 26, Auber's *La Muette de Portici*, no. 4 'Scène et chœur' (Act 1), and Verdi's *Rigoletto*, no. 3 'Duetto Rigoletto, Sparafucile' (Act 1)

bracket) and a similar melodic contour. Naturally the change in accompaniment and the augmentation of note-values turn the 'agitated' mood into something 'mysterious' – an atmosphere that pervades the entire dialogue of basic questions and answers; a fragmented, reticent and allusive dialogue 'without singing' and, to use Conati's phrase again, 'with an effect of *mélodrame*'.

One hardly needs to repeat that these associations do not in any sense imply direct influence (from *mélodrame* to *grand opéra* to Verdian *melodramma*): they aim most of all at reconstructing a connective fabric, a common musical substratum which is to be located – as mentioned earlier – between a social scene and textual context, between reality and representation, within that 'melodramatic imagination' to which Peter Brooks dedicated his now classic book.[66] In other words, the purpose of this first chapter and of the musical examples gathered here is to present a 'soundtrack', or a 'sonosphere', albeit fragmented and still largely buried, of the melodramatic imagination.[67] My hope is to show, by way of improved contextualisation and new evidence, some of the ways in which Verdi's theatre came under the sway of *mélodrame*: 'Verdi is a Dennery, a Guilbert de Pixérécourt', said Gautier to the Goncourt brothers.[68] Or – to quote Gilles de Van – 'the aesthetic of melodrama constitutes the basic framework of Verdi's dramatic world'.[69]

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[66] Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James and the Mode of Excess* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976). The book was reissued by the same publisher in 1995, with a new and interesting preface by Brooks.

[67] By 'sonosphere' I mean a sonic subset of what Jurij Lotman called 'semiosphere' in 1984. See Lotman, *Universe of the Mind: A Semiotic Theory of Culture* (New York: Tauris, 2001), part 2.

[68] Édmond and Jules de Goncourt, *Journal: Mémoires de la vie littéraire (1851–1896)*, ed. Robert Ricatte, 4 vols. (Paris: Fasquelle-Flammarion, 1956), vol. 1, p. 1031 (3 March 1862).

[69] De Van, *Verdi's Theater*, p. 144.

2 | Images and sounds in waltz (and polka) time

Valse. S'indigner contre.[1]
Polkez vite le temps presse.[2]

THE LADY OF THE CAMELLIAS

It is hard to believe that on his return to Paris in February 1852, Verdi did not find occasion to see *La Dame aux camélias* at the Théâtre du Vaudeville. Unfortunately, evidence is lacking either way. The possibility becomes nevertheless all the more concrete when we consider that the *pièce mêlée de chant* by Alexandre Dumas *fils* enjoyed, starting on 2 February, no fewer than one hundred consecutive performances. Verdi, who returned to Busseto on 18 March 1852, would have had about one and a half months to attend a performance.[3] I am therefore inclined to give serious consideration to the account of the Escudier brothers, who report that Verdi did indeed attend a performance of the play at the Vaudeville.[4] Besides, Dumas's play followed him to

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[1] Gustave Flaubert, 'Le Dictionnaire des idées reçues', in *Œuvres*, ed. Albert Thibaudet and Réné Dumesnil, 2 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 1951–2), vol. II, pp. 999–1023: here p. 1023.

[2] Nick Polkmall [pseudonym of Paul-Émile Daurand Forgues], *Les Polkeuses: Poème étique sur les célébrités de la polka* (Paris: Paul Masgana, 1844), p. 68.

[3] In *Le Ménestrel* of Sunday, 30 May 1852, Jules Lovy opened his review of the hundredth performance of *La Dame aux camélias* thus: 'The day before yesterday there were great celebrations at the Vaudeville! She finally reached her hundredth performance, this *Dame aux camélias* of ours […] this holy sinner, made so interesting by her tears, by her misfortunes.'

[4] The account given in the review of the Parisian premiere of *La traviata* (Théâtre Italien, 6 December 1856) in *La France musicale* of 14 December 1856 reads thus: 'He [Verdi] saw a performance of *La Dame aux camélias*; he was gripped by the subject; he felt the strings of his lyre quiver as he saw the heroine of the play struggle through joy, shame and repentance. Upon his return to Bussetto [*sic*], he sketched out the scenario of *La traviata* and within twenty-four days both the libretto and the music were ready to go on stage.'

Italy: in May 1852 it was performed in French, by the 'Dramatique compagnie française conduite de M. [Adolphe-Charles?] Dupuis', at the Teatro Re in Milan.[5] The Italian version of the play was published in Milan in the same year (in the same collection and with the same translator as Pyat's *Le Chiffonnier de Paris*).[6] In February–March 1853, while *La traviata* was in rehearsal at La Fenice in Venice, *La signora delle camelie* was performed with great success at the Teatro Apollo in the same city.[7] The review of Verdi's opera published in the *Gazzetta ufficiale di Venezia* on the day after the premiere begins – significantly – as follows:

> Because of the great fuss made by the Paris newspapers about it, and the countless performances it enjoyed at the Apollo, we believe that our readers will not only be familiar with the subject of the opera, but will know the play word by word. The subject is none other than *La Dame aux camélias* by Dumas *fils*, adapted a little clumsily – as is customary with

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[5] The details of this performance are found in the *Gazzetta ufficiale di Milano* of 13 May 1852 (no. 134). In the *Appendice alla Gazzetta ufficiale di Milano* of Sunday, 16 May 1852 (no. 137), under the heading 'Critica teatrale', there is a review penned by Pietro Boniotti, who writes that 'the fifth performance of Mad. Berger in the play *La Dame aux camélias* was a veritable triumph for the said actress […]; she plays the part of Margherita with such a power of suggestion and dramatic ability that she could be said to embody the true character created by Dumas's fervid imagination'.

[6] Alexandre Dumas *fils*, *La signora delle camelie: Dramma in cinque atti*, trans. Luigi Enrico Tettoni, in Florilegio drammatico ovvero scelto repertorio moderno di componimenti teatrali italiani e stranieri, series 3, vol. III (Milan: Borroni e Scotti, 1852). It must be noted that this version appears not to have been taken into consideration by Verdi and Piave during the drafting of the libretto for *La traviata*.

[7] In the playbill section entitled 'Spettacoli' of the *Gazzetta uffiziale di Venezia* of late February and early March 1853, *La signora delle camelie* at the Teatro Apollo is often listed with *La traviata*, whose imminent first performance at the Gran Teatro La Fenice is repeatedly announced. On the dissemination of *La signora delle camelie* in the various Italian regions, see also Simona Brunetti, 'La "Signora delle camelie" sulla scena italiana: Sistema dei ruoli e drammaturgia d'attore a fondamento di una straordinaria fortuna', in Umberto Artioli (ed.), *Il teatro dei ruoli* (Padua: Esedra, 2000), pp. 125–66.

> operatic plots – and transported back to the time of the great Louis in order to create an excuse for a little more grandeur and lustre in the stage decorations.[8]

We can see that the subject of the lady of the camellias, an instance of the well-known theme-myth of the *courtisane amoureuse*, enjoyed relative autonomy from the texts that came to incarnate it over time.[9] It is not by coincidence that, in the famous brief chapter of Roland Barthes's *Mythologies* (1957) devoted to *La Dame aux camélias*, the name of Dumas *fils* never features once. According to a recent commentator, the myth of the lady of the camellias is 'probably the most popular feminine myth of the bourgeois era'.[10] Let us not forget that before Marguerite Gautier there had been Alphonsine Plessis, whose professional name was Marie Duplessis. While trying to find out from Guglielmo Brenna (the secretary of La Fenice) the subject of Verdi's forthcoming opera, Felice Varesi (the future Germont *père*) recognised it immediately despite the change of title and historical context; he then wrote the following lines to Brenna (on 10 November 1852): 'From what you tell me on the subject of *Amore e morte*, the plot cannot have been taken from anywhere else. This is a novel by

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[8] *Gazzetta uffiziale di Venezia*, Monday, 7 March 1853.

[9] On the 'myth' of the lady of the camellias, see also Tadeusz Kowzan, 'Le Mythe de la "Dame aux camélias": Du mélodrame au mélodramatisme', *Revue des sciences humaines*, 162 (1976), 219–30; Nicholas John (ed.), *Violetta and her Sisters: The Lady of the Camellias. Responses to the Myth* (London: Faber and Faber, 1994); and Didier Van Moere, 'La Traviata', in Pierre Brunel (ed.), *Dictionnaire des mythes féminins* (Paris: Éditions du Rocher, 2002), pp. 1858–64. The expression 'courtisane amoureuse' can be traced back to at least the homonymous tale by La Fontaine, which inspired a famous drawing by Boucher (in which the courtesan takes off the shoes of her lover) whose wide resonance across the eighteenth century would not be difficult to document. In 1830 we find the same phrase in the title of an opera by Auber, *Le Dieu et la bayadère ou La Courtisane amoureuse*.

[10] Hans-Jörg Neuschäfer, 'De "La Dame aux camélias" à "La traviata": L'évolution d'une image bourgeoise de la femme', introduction to Alexandre Dumas *fils*, *La Dame aux camélias: Le roman, le drame, 'La traviata'*, ed. Neuschäfer and Gilbert Sigaux (Paris: Flammarion, 1981), pp. 19–42: here p. 19.

Dumas *fils* entitled *La Dame aux camélias*, whose main character is a prostitute, that is a *Lionne* [= high-class, stylish] whore of our century who died in Paris not long ago.'[11] In Italy, as well as in Paris, the historical event had not been erased by its own literary formulation.

It is within this very context that one can speak of a short-circuit between 'reality' and 'myth'. The mistake made by Romain Vienne, a friend of Marie Duplessis who wrote the first *true* account – and thus the most mythological one – of the lady of the camellias, is revelatory.[12] On the one hand, Vienne distances himself from Dumas ('I know not a word of the play by Alexandre Dumas [...] and as far as the novel is concerned, I have read it for the first time only two months ago'), and on the other hand he has the lady of the camellias die on 20 February 1847, the same day as Marguerite Gautier's death in Dumas's novel.[13] Here is the 'false memory', the short-circuit! In fact, Marie Duplessis died on 3 February of the same year. Vienne's postposition of the date is also over-determined: 20 February represents a generic date for the last days of the carnival season. In 1847, Shrove Tuesday fell on 16 February; in 1852 on 24 February. Before continuing, it is therefore important to clarify some essential historical data. As is seen to this day on the prominent epitaph of her grave in the Montmartre cemetery, the famous courtesan Alphonsine Plessis was born on 15 January 1824 and died of consumption on 3 February 1847. In 1847 Giuseppina Strepponi lived near Alphonsine in the wealthy, fashionable neighbourhood of the Chaussée d'Antin; Verdi settled down in the same neighbourhood a few months later.[14]

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[11] The remark following this statement is particularly interesting: 'However, I don't know whether *an event of our times* transposed back more than a century can produce the same impression' (emphasis mine). This letter can be found in the original Italian in Marcello Conati, *La bottega della musica: Verdi e la Fenice* (Milan: Il Saggiatore, 1983), p. 303.

[12] Romain Vienne, *La Vérité sur la dame aux camélias (Marie Duplessis)* (Paris: Paul Ollendorff, 1888).

[13] *Ibid.*, p. 313.

[14] Alphonsine had lived on Rue d'Antin before moving to the Boulevard de la Madeleine (where she died); Giuseppina lived on the Rue de la Victoire and Verdi (from the summer of 1847) on Rue Saint-Georges.

On 24–7 February 1847 a famous auction took place at the apartment of Paris's most famous courtesan (at 11 Boulevard de la Madeleine and not 9 Rue d'Antin, as in the novel).[15] An 'exposition publique', which allowed the ladies of Paris's high society to peer into the *sancta sanctorum* of the *débauche*, took place on the day before the auction, Tuesday 23 February 1847. On 6 March 1847, the 'Courrier de Paris' column of *L'Illustration* featured a review of this memorable event and more specifically a rich description of the very objects 'that awoke the curiosity, if not the greed, of the holiest and chastest of women'.[16] Gautier recalled the event in his review of the play by Dumas (*La Presse*, 10 February 1852), and emphasised the presence – *chez* the courtesan – of many 'honest women, ecstatic to be able, for once, to enter this unholy place, this paradise of forbidden pleasures'.[17] Zola also described, in *Nana*, 'the sort of obsessive fascination that the most respectable women feel towards ladies of easy virtue'.[18] One cannot help but be reminded of Schopenhauer, who in 1851 spoke of the courtesan as 'the inevitable counterpart [*Gegenrechnung*] of the European lady with her pretension and arrogance'.[19] The first edition of *La Dame aux camélias*, the novel by Dumas *fils*, was published by A. Cadot of Paris in the summer of 1848, while Verdi was in the city. In the novel, Marguerite Gautier (the literary equivalent of Alphonsine Plessis) dies of consumption on 20 February (1847). In 1849, Dumas *fils* turned the novel into a play that should have been performed at the Théâtre Historique (a theatre frequented by Verdi, and one that had a remarkable impact on him, as we saw in Chapter 1), where Dumas *père* was director at the time. However, the theatre was going through a crisis and it soon closed down for good (on 16 October 1850). In 1851 the second edition of the novel was published by Cadot, enhanced by an important preface by Jules Janin entitled 'Mademoiselle Marie Duplessis', which revealed the true identity of the lady of the camellias for the benefit of those who did not know it yet.[20] Meanwhile Dumas's play was vetoed by the censors and obtained an *imprimatur* only after the 1851 coup d'état. It was eventually performed at the Théâtre du Vaudeville on 2 February 1852 (while Verdi was again in Paris). In the play, Marguerite Gautier dies of consumption on 1 January, which in the nineteenth century was a day devoted to familial love and the exchange of presents.[21] Naturally, in the mythographical perspective privileged here, historical data have the same value as fictional data (which does not mean that one should renounce philological accuracy and confuse, for instance, 3 February with 20 February). It should be clear by now that the circumstantial and archaeological reconstruction I propose in this book will take as its objects the representations, both musical and non-musical, of the myth of the lady of the camellias – a sounding myth.

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[15] In fact, Marie Duplessis had lived at 22 Rue d'Antin. According to Micheline Boudet, *La Fleur du mal: La véritable histoire de la dame aux camélias* (Paris: France Loisirs, 1993), p. 132, the brief affair between Dumas and Marie Duplessis had taken place while the latter still lived on Rue d'Antin: 'It was in her Rue d'Antin home that Dumas would sleep with her; […] it was from this apartment, as he held in his memory, that he would draw his inspiration, even though in reality Marie died in the Boulevard de la Madeleine.'

[16] *L'Illustration*, 6 March 1847, p. 3.

[17] Théophile Gautier, *Histoire de l'art dramatique en France depuis vingt-cinq ans*, 6 vols. (Paris: Hetzel, 1858–9; repr. Geneva: Slatkine, 1968), vol. VI, pp. 300–8: here p. 302. In the volume, the essay is erroneously dated 25 February.

[18] Émile Zola, *Nana* (1880), trans. Douglas Parmée (Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 166.

[19] Arthur Schopenhauer, 'On Women', in *Parerga and Paralipomena: Short Philosophical Essays* (1851), trans. E. F. J. Payne, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), vol. II, pp. 615–26: here p. 623.

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[20] It was in other words a preface in a sensational, publicising tone, which catered to a vaguely 'voyeuristic' public and aimed to turn Dumas's novel into a text to be deciphered; this same type of reading is also encouraged by Dumas himself when he assigns to the young protagonist (Armand Duval) his own initials, or when he lingers over details both enigmatic and scabrous such as the change of the camellias. See Alexandre Dumas *fils*, *La Dame aux camélias* (novel), trans. David Coward (Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 9: 'For twenty-five days in every month the camellias were white, and for five they were red. No one ever knew the reason for this variation in colour which I mention but cannot explain.'

[21] For all this information, see also Jacques Robichez, 'La Dame aux camélias', *Revue des sciences humaines*, 104 (1961), 477–87.

THE WALTZ

We know from Jules Janin and Romain Vienne that Marie Duplessis was a famous dancer, especially when it came to waltzes. Janin recalls a grandiose high-society event in 1846[22] at which the lady of the camellias, already very ill, stunned everyone by 'waltzing the waltz *à deux temps*, which is seduction itself'. Vienne draws attention to the palliative function of the 'exhilarating and voluptuous waltz': Marie danced both 'for her own pleasure' and 'in order to use up all her energy', which is the equivalent to Violetta's 'con tal farmaco i mali sopir'.[23] Also in 1846, a feuilleton entitled 'Satan au bal de l'Opéra', published in several instalments on *L'Argus des théâtres*, featured Marie Duplessis at length. The Bal de l'Opéra was another one of the sacred venues of the Parisian carnival, teeming with the 'living ruins of a civilisation that is too advanced': the *lorettes*. Among these, a particularly striking presence was a figure clad in a 'violet domino', whose fascination was of an incorporeal sort: 'an impalpable waistline, feet that would fit in one's hand, sparkly eyes and a mouth free and unrestrained'.[24] This very figure will turn out to be the heroine of the ball, even though, seen amid the clamor of Philippe Musard's music, her image projects a melancholic aura. After all, 'Marie Duplessis is blessed with an excellent nature, and most importantly with a sensitive heart'.[25] It is perhaps not by coincidence that in the novel Marguerite makes her entrance as Gaston sits down to play a waltz in the apartment of Prudence Duvernoy (Marguerite's neighbour, a former *fille* and a less than disinterested friend).

> – Oh, poor Marguerite! – said Gaston, sitting down at the piano and playing a waltz – I had no idea. Still, I have noticed that she hasn't seemed as jolly for some time now.

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[22] The ball for the inauguration of the company of the Chemin de Fer du Nord, which took place at Brussels station on the night of 15–16 June 1846.

[23] Vienne, *La Vérité sur la dame aux camélias*, p. 221.

[24] Alfred Leroy and Raymond Deslandes, 'Satan au bal de l'Opéra', *L'Argus des théâtres*, 17 December 1846.

[25] *L'Argus des théâtres*, 24 December 1846.

> – Hush! – said Prudence, pricking up her ears.
> Gaston stopped.
> – She is calling me, I think.[26]

While the three of them (Prudence, Gaston and Armand) go to Marguerite, the scene of the interrupted waltz is repeated: 'A few chords from a piano reached our ears. Prudence rang the bell. The piano stopped.'[27] Marie Duplessis was also an amateur pianist (see the eighth quatrain of the *élégie* entitled M.D. [= Marie Duplessis] in Dumas *fils*'s *Péchés de jeunesse*). This episode turns out to be a second instance of 'interrupted waltz' when we find out, in a moment of retrospective recognition, the music that the lady of the camellias was strumming.

> – I say, Gaston, do play the *Invitation to the Waltz*.
> – Why?
> – Firstly because I should like it, and secondly because I can never manage to play it when I'm by myself.
> – What do you find difficult with it?
> – The third part, the passage with the sharps.
> Gaston got to his feet, sat down at the piano and began to play Weber's splendid melody, the music of which lay open on the stand.[28]

Marguerite follows Gaston carefully, waiting for the difficult passage: '*Re, mi, re, do, re, fa, mi, re* ... that's the part I can't get. Again.'[29] And after Gaston repeats it, she tries to play it herself, 'but still her stubborn fingers tripped over one or other of the notes which we have just mentioned'.[30] After a fit of anger, complete with throwing the score across the room and the inevitable coughing fit, Marguerite – resigned – sits at the piano again and begins 'quietly crooning a squalid song – without making any mistakes in the accompaniment'.[31]

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[26] *La Dame aux camélias* (novel), p. 54.

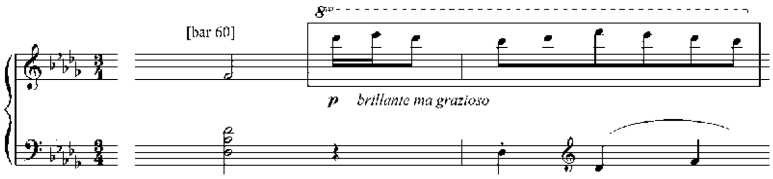
[27] *Ibid.*, p. 56.

[28] *Ibid.*, p. 61.

[29] *Ibid.*

[30] *Ibid.*

[31] *Ibid.*, p. 62. The relevance of this episode, clearly thematised by Dumas, is confirmed by its reappearance later on, during an argument between Armand and Marguerite (p. 146): 'she got up, opened her piano and once more began playing *The Invitation to the Waltz* as far as the famous passage in the major key



Example 2.1 Weber, *Aufforderung zum Tanz*, bars 60–1

This last detail is one of several that encourage us to interpret Marguerite's compulsive inability to play those bars as a sort of *lapsus*. Incidentally, it is not difficult to find the *punctum dolens* of the lady of the camellias in Weber's *Aufforderung zum Tanz*.[32] The 'third section' can be placed by counting from the beginning of the dance proper; the notes mentioned by Marguerite are the ones marked with a box in bars 60–1 (Example 2.1).

It is, however, unclear why she should get tangled up at precisely that point. The passage in question does not mark a significant increase of technical difficulty from the preceding music; if anything, the music becomes more demanding with the descending scales of the two bars following the incriminated passage. Besides, why does Marguerite talk about a 'passage with the sharps' when the key is D flat major? (Later on – see n. 31 – there will be an equally unsubstantiated mention of a 'passage in the major key'.) I think the answer lies with the 'upward leap' featured in a passage that, not coincidentally, reaches the highest note of the entire composition

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which always got the better of her. Was this done out of habit, or was it to remind me of the day we first met? All I know is that with this tune, the memories came flooding back.'

[32] I find it very significant, with regard to the cultural role played in Paris by the *Aufforderung zum Tanz* (known in French as *L'Invitation à la valse*), that in *Le Spleen de Paris* (1869), Baudelaire should have suggested a connection between his 'Invitation au voyage' and Weber's composition: 'Un musicien a écrit *l'Invitation à la valse*; quel est celui qui composera l'*Invitation au voyage*, qu'on puisse offrir à la femme aimée, à la sœur d'élection?' Charles Baudelaire, 'L'Invitation au voyage', *Le Spleen de Paris*, 18 (1857), in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Claude Pichois, 2 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 1975–6), vol. II, pp. 275–363: here p. 302.

(f‴). This interpretation also explains the confusion between sharps and flats, since sharps do indeed push 'upwards': it is as if Marguerite perceived this passage as too 'elevated' for her … Better, then, to go back to libertine songs …

Still, the connection with waltzing that characterised – as we saw – Alphonsine Plessis extends to Marguerite Gautier (in both the novel and the play, as we shall see)[33] and Violetta Valery ('perhaps in no other opera as much as in *La traviata* does Verdi exploit the rhythms and melodies of dance, particularly those of the waltz').[34] This connection is of course over-determined by the fact that the waltz, a 'close couple' dance long deemed 'obscene', was understood throughout the nineteenth century to have 'the remarkable ability to stir up erotic thoughts, thoughts of seduction, of arousal and fulfilment of sexual desire'.[35] To quote Flaubert once more: 'Valse. S'indigner contre.' Rémi Hess also dwells upon the sensual component on the waltz;[36] however, the richness of cultural connotations borne by the waltz through the nineteenth century can only be matched by its enormous capability for metamorphosis and, conversely, an immediate recognisability whatever its incarnation. In Chapter 1 we saw touched upon the 'infernal' connotations of the waltz – an element that may by now even seem obvious. The ambiguities and ambivalences of the waltz are well portrayed by Musset in *La Confession d'un enfant du siècle* (1836), where he writes of the 'tourbillon de la valse' and how the man who lets himself be transported by it with a 'beautiful woman [...], palpitating in spite of herself' gradually loses control 'in such a way that it cannot be positively asserted whether she is being protected or seduced'.[37] From Goethe's *Werther* onwards (see the famous letter of 16 June), the waltz is associated with romantic love and memory (as with Lamartine's *Jocelyn*: 'la valse aux bonds rêveurs tourne encore dans ma tête')[38] and also with the feeling of life passing by, a sort of existential dispersion that Thomas Mann would later encapsulate as 'des Lebens süßer, trivialer Dreitakt': the sweet and trivial triple time of life.[39] Sensual love/social life, romantic love/escapism, memory/existential dispersion: these are three semantic areas of the waltz that will also feature prominently in *La traviata*. The institutionalisation of the waltz, on the other hand, was unequivocal and started very early. In 1819, with the *Aufforderung zum Tanz* we just discussed, the waltz was 'promoted for the first time to the rank of a work of art'.[40] When Johann Strauss performed in Paris in 1837, his phenomenal success was of an entirely 'official' sort; and as Rémi Hess rightly remarked, 'this institutionalisation of the waltz will continue, thanks to Vienna and the Strauss family, throughout the nineteenth century'.[41]

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[33] I will analyse Édouard Montaubry's stage music (in which waltz and polka play a relevant role) for the *pièce mêlée de chant* by Dumas *fils* in Chapter 3.

[34] Elvidio Surian, 'Turn and Turn About: Waltz-walzer-valse, le tre carte di credito erotico dell'opera lirica', *Eidos*, 9 (1991), 30–45: here p. 38. Gabriele Baldini, *The Story of Giuseppe Verdi: 'Oberto' to 'Un ballo in maschera'* (1970), trans. Roger Parker (Cambridge University Press, 1980), p. 200, observes that 'the man in the street […] habitually declares that the opera is "all waltz time"; even unconsciously, the ear perceives as an unmistakable characteristic this frequent, obsessive recurrence of a well-defined, classified rhythmic measure'.

[35] Surian, 'Turn and Turn About', p. 31.

[36] Rémi Hess, *La Valse: Révolution du couple en Europe* (Paris: A. M. Métailié, 1989), p. 105. Shortly after discussing the erotic aura of the waltz, Hess moves on to note its 'dimension "égalitaire"' (p. 108).

THE POLKA

In this context, it is significant that the subversive side of the waltz should transfer, a few years later, to another dance for couples, one that Hess considers 'a simplification of [the waltz]': the polka.[42] It is also highly significant for us that polka came into vogue in Paris at a specific time – in the winter of 1843–4. This was the time when Alphonsine Plessis became Marie Duplessis, the sparkling attraction of Rue d'Antin. In the same winter, Madame Doche danced the polka at the Vaudeville, the very same theatre where she would soon give the first performance of the stage adaptation of *La Dame aux camélias*.[43] Della Seta identifies 'the metre of a polka' in the *introduzione* of *La traviata* (up to the brindisi, where the rhythm of the waltz picks up).[44] Della Seta's insight is correct in spite of the fact that Verdi notated this polka in 4/4 rather than in 2/4 (as it should be notated); perhaps the composer conceived of it as music but not (yet) as a codified genre; perhaps he wanted to create a more cogent connection with the Allegro brillante of the party at Flora's house (which is also in 4/4),[45] or perhaps again he was deliberately going for a distorting effect. The effect is indeed that of a polka 'gone mad', with the accompaniment playing at twice the speed of the melody. If we wanted to bring the whole thing (melody and accompaniment) to the Parisian standard of those years, we would have to write the piece as in Example 2.2.

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[37] Alfred de Musset, *Confession of a Child of the Century* (1836), trans. Henri de Bornier (New York: Howard Fertig, 1977), p. 104.

[38] This passage by Lamartine is quoted by Hess in *La Valse*, p. 156; Hess glosses it admirably when he writes that the waltz 'enters the dreams of Lamartine's Jocelyn, who – at a time when he is faced with sorrow – remembers his happy childhood during the years that preceded the Revolution'.

[39] Thomas Mann, *Tonio Kröger* (1903), in *Die Erzählungen*, 2 vols. (Frankfurt: Fischer 1975), vol. 1, pp. 205–56: here p. 254; in *Death in Venice and Other Tales*, trans. Joachim Negroschel (New York: Viking Press, 1998), pp. 161–228: here p. 226.

[40] Hess, *La Valse*, p. 134. [41] *Ibid.*, p. 162. [42] *Ibid.*, p. 182.

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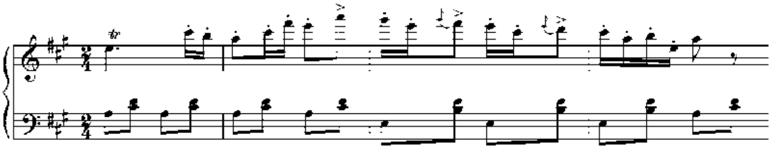
[43] See Auguste Vitu and Paul Farnèse, *Physiologie de la polka d'après Cellarius* (Paris: Chez l'éditeur, 1844); in Alain Montandon (ed.), *Paris au bal: Treize physiologies sur la danse* (Paris: H. Champion, 2000), pp. 235–95: here p. 251. Henri Cellarius, a fashionable dancing master, started the trend of polka-dancing in Paris and wrote *La Danse des salons* (Paris: Hetzel, 1847); 2nd edn, illustrated by Gavarni (1849); and now republished, ed. Rémi Hess (Grenoble: J. Millon, 1994).

[44] Fabrizio Della Seta, 'Il tempo della festa: Su due scene della "Traviata" e su altri luoghi verdiani', *Studi verdiani*, 2 (1983), 108–46: here p. 112. According to Knud Arne Jürgensen, the *introduzione* of *La traviata* has the character and tempo of a *galop*. See Jürgensen, *The Verdi Ballets* (Parma: Istituto nazionale di studi Verdiani, 1995), p. 359.

[45] It is remarkable that while the Act 1 polka is introduced by an extremely emphatic ascending phrase stated twice (of the same type as that which opens the polka of Example 2.4), the Allegro brillante of the party scene at Flora's house starts up suddenly, *in medias res*, and has the effect of a 'return to reality': the dream of love has ended, and the party – which has been going on all the while – continues. This is an effect similar to that of the waltz during the duettino in the *introduzione*, which I shall discuss in Chapter 3.



Example 2.2 The opening theme of Verdi's *La traviata*, Act 1, *introduzione*, arranged as a polka

But that is not enough. It is necessary to emphasise the extraordinary force of characterisation contained in such a very recent dance. Despite backdating the on-stage events to 'around the year 1700', *La traviata* overtly displays – through its music and its *Zeitlaute* – the actuality and contemporaneity of the story it tells. It is important to remember that the polka reached Venice soon after Paris: on 28 March 1848 (four years before *La traviata*) a ballet by Arthur Saint-Léon entitled *L'anti-polkista ed i polkamani* (The Anti-Polkist and the Polkamaniacs)[46] was performed at La Fenice; the ballet music, now unfortunately lost, was perhaps put together by Saint-Léon himself using the most popular polkas of the time. Needless to say, in *L'anti-polkista* 'the events take place in a borough of Paris and its neighbourhood. Year: 1840.'[47] The polka hater is an ageing misoneist (Severo) who considers the new dance to be obscene: naturally, he contrasts it with the good old minuet, the musical emblem of tradition. The polka supporters are young lovers looking for novelty and freedom: the most typical instance of a 'polkist' is Francesco, 'a light-hearted student with a bit of a temper, but good at heart' (in other words, a bohemian).[48] This makes it all the more paradoxical that the Allegro brillantissimo e molto vivace opening Act I of *La traviata* could have left 'the taste of mould' in the mouth of Gabriele Baldini (and others with him).[49] By what strange law of retaliation can a piece so full of Parisian licentiousness end up sounding outdated and dull? To recognise it as a polka (more or less distorted) from the time of Marie Duplessis is nonetheless essential in order to interpret it correctly. In these scenes, Verdi attempted to translate into music 'something I may be allowed to call modernity, since no other word lends itself better to expressing the idea in question. For him, it was a matter […] of conjuring up the eternal from the transitory.'[50]

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[46] The date of the premiere and the name of the choreographer (absent from the libretto) are found in a book that includes a chronology of Saint-Léon's dances, *Letters from a Ballet Master: The Correspondence of Arthur Saint-Léon*, ed. Ivor Guest (London: Dance Books, 1981), p. 144.

[47] *L'anti-polkista ed i polkamani* (Venice: Tipografia Ricci, 1848), p. 2. In Paris also, several plays were soon named after the polka. Take for instance the three one-act vaudevilles from the year 1844 alone: *La Polka*, by Paul Vermond and Frédéric Bérat (Palais-Royal, 14 March); *Les trois polka*, by Dumanoir [pseudonym of Philippe-François Pinel], [Pierre-Frédéric-Adolphe] Carmouche and [Paul] Siraudin (Variétés, 24 March); and *La Polka en province*, by Alexis Decomberousse and Jules Cordier (Vaudeville, 6 April).

Baudelaire is talking about Constantin Guys, who was 'a painter of modern life' just as Gavarni (whom we will meet shortly) would be its illustrator. Shifting from the visual to the sonic, it seems appropriate – and not too forced a comparison – to consider *La traviata* as a 'modern' opera in the Baudelairian sense:

> Modernity is the transitory, the elusive, the contingent, the one half of Art whose matching half is the eternal and the immutable. […] This transitory, elusive element, whose metamorphoses are so swift, you have no right to despise or shrug off. By suppressing it, you will inevitably fall into the emptiness of a beauty that is both abstract and indefinable, like that of the one woman before original sin.[51]

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[48] *L'anti-polkista ed i polkamani*, p. 2.

[49] 'L'"allegro brillantissimo e molto vivace" con cui s'inizia l'atto ha un sapore di muffa' ('The "allegro brillantissimo e molto vivace" that opens the act has a taste of mould about it'): Gabriele Baldini, *Abitare la battaglia: La storia di Giuseppe Verdi* (Milan: Garzanti, 1970), p. 213. Please note that Roger Parker's translation of this passage is slightly different: 'The hackneyed impression suggested by the "allegro brillantissimo e molto vivace" which begins the act very skillfully introduces the situation': Baldini, *The Story of Giuseppe Verdi*, p. 191.

[50] Charles Baudelaire, *Le Peintre de la vie moderne* (1863), in *Œuvres complètes*, vol. II, pp. 683–724: here p. 694.

[51] *Ibid.*, p. 695.

I do not know to what extent this element of contingency – which pervades many scenes of *La traviata* – can be renounced without serious interpretive consequences. Admittedly, the meaning of polka has by now evaporated and changed (Baudelaire indeed speaks of ephemerality and metamorphoses); yet that 'taste of mould' is the exact opposite of the 'modernity' that the Verdian polka meant to express. As Baudelaire would have it, 'the pleasure we get from the representation of the present is due not only to the beauty that may enshrine it, but also to its essential quality of being present'.[52] A critical awareness of the original meaning (rather than a revival of it, which would be impossible) seems to me an essential requirement even for an updated, modern rendition – one produced by a contemporary director, maybe – of a scene such as this one. Only by retrieving the contingent aspect of a self-consuming actuality can we meet eternity half-way and redeem the uniform flow of banality for a moment. What we need to be able to recognise in Verdi's polka is, to paraphrase Baudelaire once again, the seal that time has impressed upon our own sensations.

On this topic, it is amusing and useful to quote a polka which seems constructed expressly to support my argument: *Camélia: Polka sur 'La traviata' de Verdi* op. 49 by Pierre-Claude Perny, published by Ricordi in the *Album per il carnevale 1854*.[53] The fact that during carnival 1854 people in Milan (and not only Milan) danced to *La traviata* in polka time, even before Verdi's opera had fully arrived in the city is very significant.[54] Even more significant for my argument is the polka-camellia fusion, which anticipates another, to which I will shortly devote a small entr'acte: the waltz-camellia. When *La traviata* reached Paris (at the Théâtre Italien) in 1856, Léon Escudier

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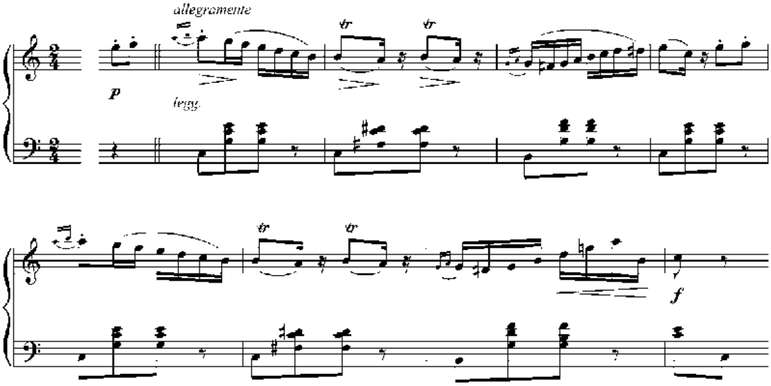
[52] *Ibid.*, p. 684.

[53] The piece by Perny in the *Album* for piano (pl. no. 26024) was advertised in the *Gazzetta musicale di Milano* of 11 December 1853.

[54] *La traviata* arrived in Milan by the end of 1856: it opened on 10 September at the Teatro Canobbiana and on 26 December at the Teatro Carcano; the premiere at La Scala was not until 29 December 1859.



Example 2.3 Perny's 'Sempre libera' arranged as a polka

republished Perny's op. 49 (pl. no. L.E. 1544/2), and it is from this last edition that I take Example 2.3.

As we can see, Perny's piece is nothing other than a conversion into a polka of 'Sempre libera' – which was originally a waltz! Indeed, notwithstanding its 6/8 notation, Violetta's famous cabaletta implies the metre of a waltz. Not by coincidence do we find the same piece notated in 3/8 in the sketches – something that is also true of the first versions of 'Addio, del passato' and the gambling scene.[55] The latter has been clearly shown by Fabrizio Della Seta to be derived from the Act 1 waltz: a typical instance of how 'Verdi deliberately used a well-defined motif to create a musical connection between two scenes that are also parallel from a dramatic point of view'.[56] In Chapter 3 we will listen to a waltz-like polka, while here we have a polka-like waltz. The associative circuit clearly works both ways. As a second example of Parisian polka in the 1840s I would like to now cite (see Example 2.4) the first few phrases of a composition published under the name of a musician who is also mentioned in Act 1 of Dumas's play (I will return

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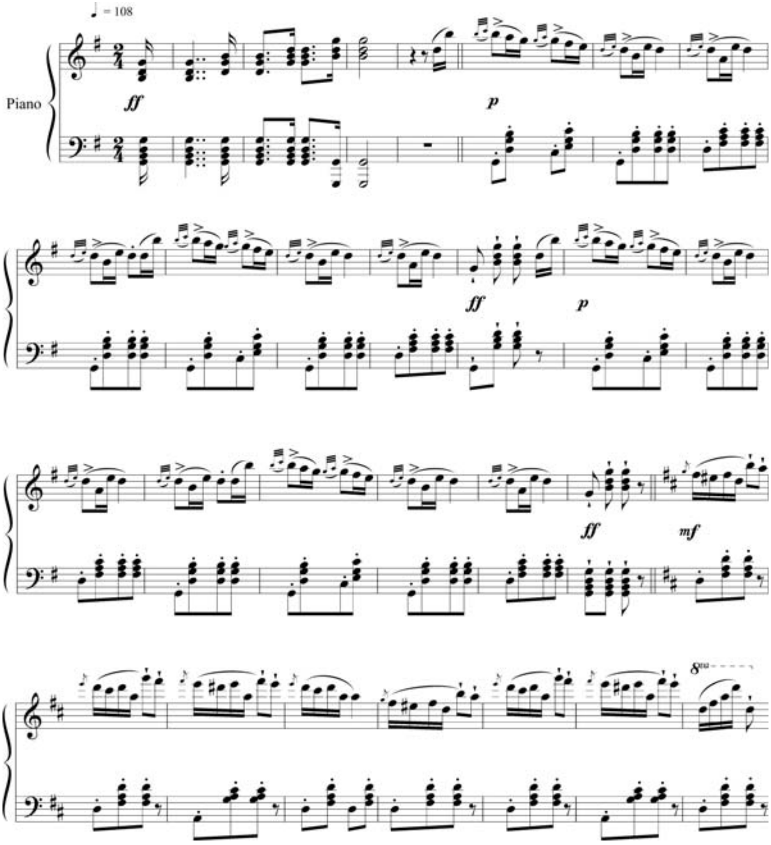
[55] Giuseppe Verdi, *La traviata: Schizzi e abbozzi autografi/Autograph Sketches and Drafts*, ed. Fabrizio Della Seta (Parma: Istituto nazionale di studi verdiani and Comitato nazionale per le celebrazioni verdiane 2001, 2000), pp. 109, 169 and 184.

[56] Della Seta, 'Il tempo della festa', p. 135.



Example 2.4 Rosellen, *La Taglioni: Polka*

to this in Chapter 3), a musician who, among other things, wrote a *Fantaisie* for piano on the themes from *La traviata*: Henri Rosellen.[57]

Another polka worthy of attention is found in *La contessa d'Egmont*, a ballet by Giuseppe Rota set to music by Paolo Giorza (Milan, La

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[57] *La Taglioni: Polka arrangée par H. Rosellen* (Paris: A. Meissonnier et Heugel, [1844], pl. no. H. 352). See also, by the same composer, *La Traviata, opéra de Verdi: Fantaisie pour le piano*, op. 154 (Paris: L. Escudier, n.d. [1856], pl. no. L.E. 1590; Milan: Ricordi, n.d., pl. no. 29076). Among the interesting features of this fantasia, it is worth remarking that the brindisi in 3/8 is clearly marked as a 'Tempo di valza' (p. 8).

Scala, 1861). *La contessa d'Egmont* is similar to *La traviata* in that its overtly contemporary features create a stark contrast with the curiously *ancien régime* backdrop. The action takes place 'in Paris in the first half of the eighteenth century'.[58] The intrinsic contradiction is made obvious in Act 3 – a folk festival at the Porcherons – where the entire action takes place (like the first party in *La traviata*) in waltz time and polka time. Such contemporary musical references clash with the music of the last scene, in which the accompaniment to the sumptuous dance taking place in the Countess's plush ballroom will instead be a minuet. Besides, the Porcherons was an area associated with *grisettes* and *lorettes*, which is why, in the libretto published for the revival of the ballet during carnival 1863–4, the polka of the Porcherons bears the title *Les Lorettes*.[59] Although the *guinguettes* of the Porcherons were already famous back in the eighteenth century, Émile de la Bédollière reminds us that by the mid nineteenth century, the Café des Porcherons was a famous meeting-point for *lorettes*.[60] Example 2.5 shows the first part of the polka *Les Lorettes* as it was published by Lucca in 1864.[61]

'A VAGUELY "SPANISH" CHARACTER'

Another characteristic element of Paris's sonic landscape in those years was without doubt the vogue for 'Spanish' dances. Inverted commas are in order here because it was actually an Austrian performer who launched the great success of these dances in Paris:

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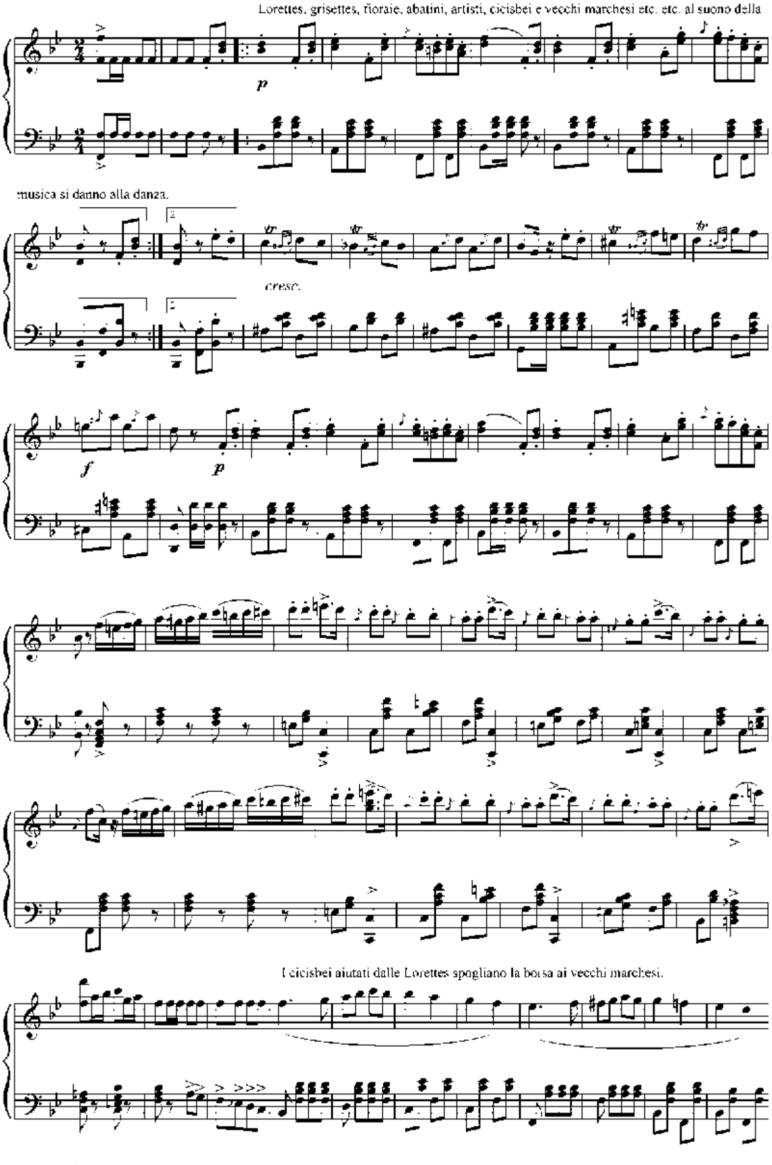
[58] Giuseppe Rota, *La contessa d'Egmont: Ballo in cinque atti* (Milan: Regio stabilimento nazionale di Paolo Ripamonti Carpano, 1861), p. [3].

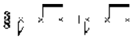
[59] Giuseppe Rota, *La contessa d'Egmont: Ballo storico-romantico in cinque parti e sei quadri* (Milan: Giacomo Pirola, 1864), p. 6.

[60] Émile de La Bédollière, *Le Nouveau Paris: Histoire de ses 20 arrondissements* (Paris: Gustave Barba, 1860), pp. 138–9 (chapter 8, 'Les Porcherons') and pp. 140–1 (chapter 10, 'Les Lorettes').

[61] Paolo Giorza, *La contessa d'Egmont*, reduction for solo piano (Milan: F. Lucca, n.d. [1864], pl. no. 12576), pp. 39–43.


Lorettes, grisettes, fioraie, abatini, artisti, cicisbei e vecchi marchesi etc. etc. al suono della musica si danno alla danza.
p
cresc.
f
p
I cicisbei aiutati dalle Lorettes spogliano la borsa ai vecchi marchesi.

Example 2.5 Giorza, *Les Lorettes: Polka*

Fanny Elssler.[62] Elssler danced her epoch-making *cachucha* as part of the ballet *Le Diable boiteux*, which was set in Spain and performed at the Opéra in 1836.[63] The dance was indeed a milestone of Parisian popular culture at the time: in 1842 a *Physiologie de l'Opéra, du carnaval, du cancan et de la cachucha* was published which emphasised the lascivious quality of this latest choreographic novelty. Page 79 – where we also find a vignette by Henri Emy showing 'Fanny Essler' [*sic*], castanets in hand, dancing the *cachucha* – tells us that, while the cancan and the *cracovienne* make us dream of pleasure and the boudoir, 'la *cachucha* fait desirer l'alcove'.[64] In the late 1840s the 'Spanish' piece *par excellence* was the *jaleo de Jerez:* once again we need inverted commas, since it was launched in Madrid by a French dancer, Marie Guy-Stephan. Dumas *père* wrote about it in his *De Paris à Cadiz: Impressions de voyage* (letter from Madrid, 14 October 1846). In Paris the dance was performed by actual Spaniards: Petra Camara at the Théâtre du Gymnase in May 1851 and Pepita Oliva in July 1852 (in the same theatre, the Vaudeville, and the same year as *La Dame aux camélias*).[65] Both the *cachucha* and the *jaleo de Jerez* belong to the famous *escuela bolera*, and both dances are in a rather fast triple time, almost always notated as 3/8 and performed one-in-a-bar, accompanied by an 'oom-pah-pah' similar to that of a waltz  . The *jaleo de Jerez* arranged by Henry Verley even bears the performance direction 'Tempo di Valse'.[66] In the

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[62] Admittedly, Elssler was ushered in by a troupe of actual Spanish dancers, who were present at the Opéra in the carnival of 1834. However, these performers never accrued the type of cultural prestige enjoyed by Elssler.

[63] The ballet was by Jean Coralli and Burat du Gurgy, with music by Casimir Gide; the premiere was on 1 June 1836. According to Ivor Guest, the *cachucha* of *Le Diable boiteux* 'fit date comme la première danse qui eût jamais été bissée à l'Opéra': Guest, *Le Ballet de l'Opéra de Paris* (Paris: Flammarion, 2001), p. 96.

[64] *Physiologie de l'Opéra, du carnaval, du cancan et de la cachucha par un vilain masque*, illustrated by Henri Emy (Paris: Raymond Bocquet, 1842), p. 79; in Montandon (ed.), *Paris au bal*, pp. 443–9: here p. 466 (but without the illustration).

[65] See Hervé Lacombe, 'L'Espagne à Paris au milieu du XIXe siècle (1847–1857)', *Revue de musicologie*, 88/2 (2002), 389–431.

[66] Paris: Cartereau, [1858], pl. no. C.P. 4.

opéra-comique that perhaps most contributed to establishing the Spanish vogue in Paris, Scribe and Auber's *Le Domino noir* (1837), the three pieces chiefly representative of the Spanish style (one in each act) are all in 3/8 and all have the aforementioned accompaniment. The first, played by a small backstage orchestra during a masked ball, is described by the characters on stage as a 'joli boléro'. The second is the famous *Ronde aragonaise* sung by the 'belle Inès' (who is really Angèle in disguise): as it emerges from several – sometimes iconographic – accounts, Laure Cinti-Damoreau sang it while providing her own accompaniment on castanets (which do not, however, feature in the score). The third ('Flamme vengeresse') is indeed a *jaleo*, sung by Angèle as the second part of the aria 'Ah! Quelle nuit!'

This context gives the chorus of 'mattadori' at the Flora's party greater dramatic relevance than is usually allocated to it. The matador chorus is, significantly, made up of Gastone and his friends *dressed up* as toreros ('Testé giunti a godere del chiasso | Che a Parigi si fa pel bue grasso'), and resembles a pseudo-Spanish masquerade typical of Paris in the 1840s. Also significant are the emphatic *fortissimo* repeated notes which punctuate the chorus's entrance, and are reminiscent of the introduction of Verley's *jaleo de Jerez* (which is itself made up of two sections, the first in a minor key and the second in the parallel major). Nor is it a mere coincidence that the name of Piquillo, the character featured in the lyrics of the matador chorus song, was also used as the title of an *opéra-comique* of those years.[67] Could this not be, then, less an imitation of Spain than a parody of what James Parakilas dubs 'the Parisian put-on of the Spanish'?[68] After all, Spanish colour also defines various passages of *La traviata*. It is odd, for instance, to hear the offstage castanets in the *baccanale*.

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[67] *Piquillo*, by Alexandre Dumas *père* and Gérard de Nerval with music by Hippolyte Monpou (1837).

[68] James Parakilas, 'How Spain Got a Soul', in Jonathan Bellman (ed.), *The Exotic in Western Music* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1998), pp. 137–93: here p. 153.

It is as if the 'matadores' had finally reached the noisy cortege for which they had come to Paris: one can picture them mingling perfectly with the other masks – the 'sauvages' with feathered headdresses escorting the 'fatted ox' (see Figure 3.1 below), the 'modern' Pierrots *à la* Debureau and the Robert Macaires *à la* Frédérick Lemaître … As Heine wrote, Parisians rummaged through the past and the exotic 'merely with the intention of picking out an interesting costume for the carnival'.[69] Recently a short article by Edgecombe has emphatically stressed the influence of *Le Domino noir* on *La traviata*.[70] The strictly causal-derivative perspective adopted by Edgecombe weakens his thesis considerably, but his is nonetheless a useful contribution: even though I find it difficult to interpret the toast scene of *La traviata* as a bolero stemming from Auber's *Ronde aragonaise* (contemporaries immediately recognised it as a waltz – see n. 57), the 'Spanish' motif pointed out by Edgecombe is worthy of consideration. I am referring to the 'percussive' figuration that enters to counterbalance the upward sweep of the opening phrase, which is redolent of the idiomatic qualities of castanets, of the 'castanet rattle that would usually accompany a bolero'.[71] In the toast scene this is found in the two small groups of semiquavers preceded by an acciaccatura that are placed on the second and third beats of the bar ('che la bellezza infiora'); these small groups recur several times and are nearly identical to those found in the *cachucha* quoted earlier. In this context it is worth mentioning a remark by Della Seta to which I will return in Chapter 3. While transcribing and commenting on a sketch by Verdi which would one day be used for 'Addio, del passato' (an Allegro which I have mentioned earlier; see n. 55), Della Seta refers to 'a vaguely "Spanish" character' of the melody; this quality is further intensified by a rhythmic figuration that is a near carbon copy of the opening of Auber's *Ronde aragonaise*.[72]

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[69] Heinrich Heine, 'The Romantic School' (1836), in *The Romantic School and Other Essays*, ed. Jost Hermand and Robert C. Holub (New York: Continuum, 1985), pp. 1–128: here p. 124.

[70] Rodney Stenning Edgecombe, 'The Influence of Auber's "Le Domino noir" on "La traviata"', *The Opera Quarterly*, 20/2 (2004), 166–70.

[71] *Ibid.*, p. 167.

THE *LORETTE*

To sum up, both the 'polkamania' of Saint-Léon *et alii* and *La traviata*'s references to a Spanish style come straight from Paris and both are very '1840s'. They arrived together with the vogue of literary (or para-literary) *physiologies* and the surge in popularity of a new social phenomenon – the *lorettes* (another neologism of the 1840s).[73] It almost goes without saying that along with the *Physiologie de la polka* (see n. 43), a *Physiologie de la lorette* was published in those years (1841).[74] Polka and prostitution were associated by default: a booklet entirely devoted to this association was published in 1845; it concludes with a song entitled 'La Polka', whose second stanza features this eloquent line 'Les dieux s'en vont vont; mais la Polka nous reste' ('The gods are leaving, leaving; but we still have the polka').[75] In the preceding year, *L'Illustration* had published a vignette by Cham showing a *lorette* obsessed by polkas even in her sleep (see Figure 2.1). The kingdom of the *lorette* would last for at least a decade, and as late as 1853 the Goncourt brothers wrote a monograph that bore all the distinguishing traits of a *physiologie*, despite being simply called *La Lorette*.[76] As François Ponsard wrote in his review of a performance of

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[72] Giuseppe Verdi, *La traviata: Schizzi e abbozzi autografi. Commento critico/ Autograph Sketches and Drafts*, ed. Fabrizio Della Seta (Parma: Istituto nazionale di studi verdiani and Comitato nazionale per le celebrazioni verdiane 2001, 2002), p. 157, and Verdi, *La traviata: Schizzi e abbozzi autografi/Autograph Sketches and Drafts* (edn), pp. 184–5.

[73] Nathalie Preiss, *Les Physiologies en France au XIXe siècle: Étude historique, littéraire et stylistique* (Mont-de-Marsan: Éditions interuniversitaires, 1999).

[74] Maurice Alhoy, *Physiologie de la lorette* (Paris: Aubert, 1841), illustrated by Gavarni. In a way, this book is a sort of *physiologie* of *La traviata*.

[75] Théodore Staines, *Les Oiseaux de nuit et les polkeuses des scènes publiques* (Paris: J. Bréauté, 1845), p. 83.

[76] Édmond and Jules de Goncourt, *La Lorette* (1853), ed. Alain Barbier Sainte Marie (Tusson [Charente]: Du Lérot, 2002).

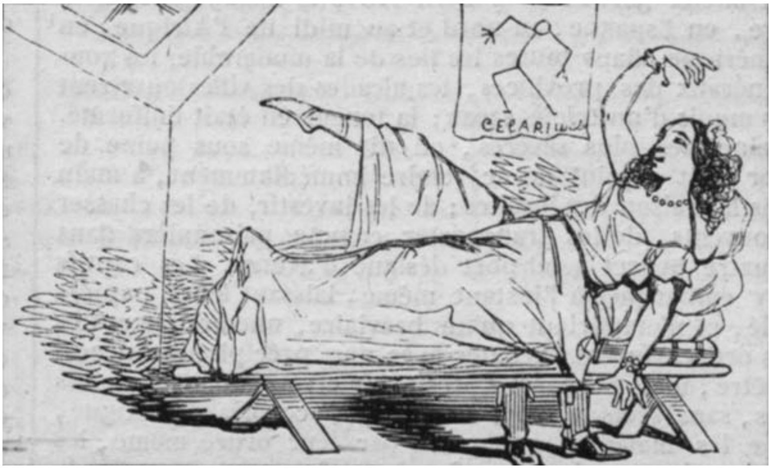

Figure 2.1 'Quartier Notre-Dame-de-Lorette. – Le cauchemar d'une polkeuse' (*L'Illustration*, 1 June 1844)

La Dame aux camélias at the Vaudeville, 'Dumas put the *lorettes* on stage; this term is used by all, and I adopt it here without giving a definition that is already known by everyone.'[77]

A similar remark, albeit in a more complacent tone, is found in Louis Huart's review: 'Mademoiselle Marguerite is nothing but a *lorette*, but she loves Armand with such passion that we forgive her *loretterie*.'[78] Even Basevi could not help but use the term *lorette*, despite being scandalised by *La traviata*, an opera in which 'everything oozes lasciviousness and voluptuousness'.[79] The term *lorette*, derived from the neighbourhood surrounding the church of Notre-Dame de Lorette, near the stylish area of the Chaussée d'Antin and the boulevards, describes 'an amorous lady with a rather luxurious lifestyle. The word became fashionable thanks to Nestor Roqueplan around 1840.'[80] More accurately, the word came into circulation in January 1841, with the publication of the second volume of Roqueplan's *Nouvelles à la main*. Some ten pages of Roqueplan's *Nouvelles* are devoted to 'Les Lorettes',[81] and in the ninth volume of the same collection (October 1841), Roqueplan boasts of how, with his neologism, he has rendered 'un grand service à la langue et à la pudeur françaises'.[82] Meanwhile, Gavarni had started work on what turned out to be an epoch-making series of seventy-nine lithographs entitled 'Les Lorettes'. The series was published in *Le Charivari* between 30 June 1841 and 30 December 1843. Among the most typical traits captured on paper by Gavarni were the *lorette*'s talkativeness and the occasional sharpness of her tongue, especially when addressing her lover-patron. The thirty-eighth lithograph of the series (*Le Charivari*, 14 January 1843) shows an attractive young woman, magnificently stretched out on the sofa, an open book (*Les Mystères de Paris*? *Manon Lescaut*?) laid out on the floor. A bald, ageing gentleman has approached her from behind and has gallantly taken her hand in his, saying 'Toujours jolie!', to which the *lorette* replies, with glib cynicism, 'C'est mon état.' Yet she speaks the truth: beauty, physical attractiveness, was the social status of the *lorette*. Marie Duplessis was also renowned for her bold answers: according to Roqueplan, 'she lied easily and used to say that "lying whitens one's teeth"'.[83] The same goes, naturally, for Marguerite Gautier and Violetta Valery, at least as far as Act 1 is concerned. Thus polkas and *lorettes* entered the Parisian scene in the same years, between 1841 and 1844: the years of

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[77] *Le Constitutionnel*, 9 February 1852.

[78] *Le Charivari*, 4 February 1852.

[79] Abramo Basevi, *Studio sulle opere di Giuseppe Verdi* (1859), ed. Ugo Piovano (Milan: Rugginenti, 2001), p. 291.

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[80] Hector France, *Dictionnaire de la langue verte: Archaïsmes, néologismes, locutions étrangères, patois* (Paris: Libraire du Progrès, 1907; repr. Étoile-sur-Rhône: N. Gauvin, 1990), p. 203, s.v. 'Lorette'. Remarkably, in the same dictionary, the *argot* meaning of the term 'Polka' is given as 'Photographie de groups obscènes' (p. 330).

[81] Nestor Roqueplan, *Nouvelles à la main* (Paris: Lacombe, [1840–4]), vol. II (20 January 1841), pp. 70–80.

[82] *Ibid.*, vol. IX (20 October 1841), p. 74.

[83] Nestor Roqueplan, *Parisine* (Paris: J. Hetzel, 1869), p. 67 (pp. 61–9 include a small section devoted to Marie Duplessis).

Marie Duplessis, the years of 'the giddy fools who dance the polka with the *lorettes* at the Jardin Mabille', to use Balzac's expression.[84] At the Bal Mabille the polka was made popular by two famous *lorettes*: Céleste Mogador (1824–1909) and Élise Sergent (1825–47). The first ended up getting married, amid general scandal, to Count Lionel de Chabrillan in 1853.[85] The way she was portrayed in 1844 (see Figure 2.2) allows us to introduce the problem of the 'ideal type' of the *lorette*, which I will shortly discuss in some detail. It was precisely in the summer of 1844 that Élisabeth-Céleste Vénard became 'Mogador' (the name is a reference to the Moroccan city of Mogador, today Essaouira, which was bombarded by the French in the summer of that year).

The second, nicknamed 'La Reine Pomaré' (in those months there was much talk of Aimata Pomare IV, an unlikely twenty-year-old queen of Tahiti, overthrown in 1843), died of consumption only two months after Alphonsine Plessis and was buried, like Alphonsine, in the cemetery of Montmartre.[86] It is therefore hardly surprising that Charles Monselet commemorated Élise Sergent by describing her as 'une des dames aux camélias d'avant la Révolution de février'![87] In the inevitable *Physiologie du Bal Mabille* (1844) we find a portrait of the *lorette poitrinaire* which bears an uncanny resemblance to all the ladies of the camellias:

> She is as pretty as Love, she has two great blue eyes that make you dream of the angels and a crimson red, pure mouth, a virginal countenance and

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[84] Honoré de Balzac, *Le Cousin Pons* (1847), in *La Comédie humaine*, 12 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 1976–81), vol. VII, pp. 453–765: here pp. 546–7. The Mabille, one of the most disreputable *bals publiques* of the 1840s, is mentioned also in the first scene of Puccini's *La bohème* (the bohemians catch Mr Benoît there 'in peccato d'amore' ('committing the sin of love')).

[85] On Céleste Mogador, see François Gasnault, *Guinguettes et lorettes: Bals publiques à Paris au XIXe siècle* (Paris: Aubier, 1986), pp. 237–40.

[86] On Élise Sergent, see Jean Ziegler, *Gautier, Baudelaire: Un carré de dames. Pomaré, Marix, Bébé, Sisina* (Paris: Nizet, 1977), pp. 9–34.

[87] Charles Monselet, *La Lorgnette littéraire: Dictionnaire des grands et des petits auteurs de mon temps* (Paris: Poulet-Malassis et de Broise, 1857), p. 31.

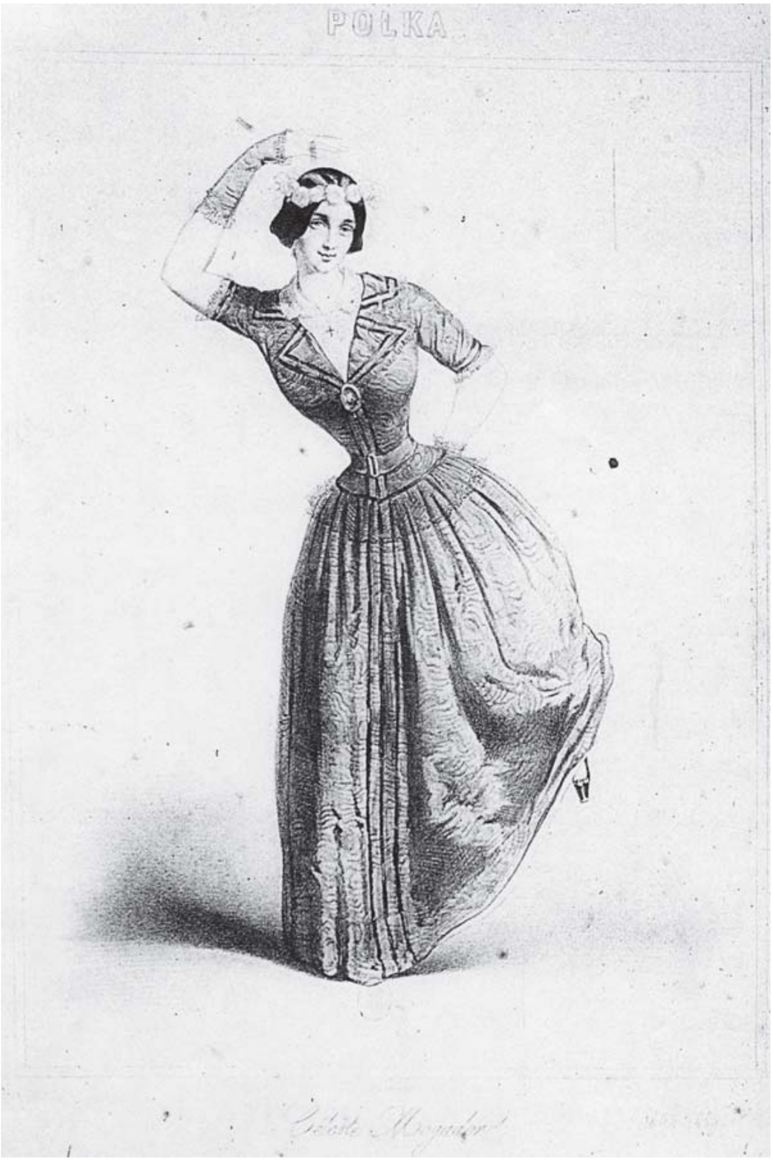
POLKA
Céleste Mogador

Figure 2.2 *Céleste Mogador*, anonymous lithograph (1844), printed by Lemercier, from François Gasnault, *Guinguettes et lorettes*: *Bals publics à Paris au XIXe siècle* (Paris: Aubier, 1986), plate 14

> a veiled gaze; […] She does not love, she is venal and calculating; she is sold and exchanged just like a precious painting, a jewel, a thing; yet she does not believe herself to be a dishonoured woman, and pities the *grisette* who sells herself for a meal … She lives. She loathes herself and tries to avoid herself; she attends parties, *bals publiques*, theatres and orgies; she has found herself a man who has given her laces, cashmere dresses and banknotes. […] She suffers from poor health; her ravaged chest has often given her serious worries. 'Another year like this', the doctor told her, 'and all will be lost. Above all, no lovers: this is necessary.' She smiles a ghastly smile; she never leaves the Duke and throws herself ever more excitedly and joyously into the whirlwind which will eventually destroy her … *She dies because one has to live*.[88]

THE CAMELLIA

Camellias could be considered a true *topos* within the stock of images (and sounds) that I am reconstructing here. We have already encountered a polka-camellia, and will soon come across a waltz-camellia. Even though Dumas *fils* credited himself with inventing the nickname 'la dame aux camélias' for the heroine of his novel ('Le surnom que j'ai donné à Marguerite est de pure invention') there are many good reasons why that nickname was met with such immediate and profound acceptance.[89] As Christiane Issartel writes, 'the camellia was back then what the orchid is nowadays: an essentially fashionable, expensive flower, a symbol of elegance and luxury'.[90]

Like the orchid, the camellia has no scent. There is an artificial, fake element to it, and this is also the case with the love of or for the courtesan. Camellias, waltzes, consumption: we find these three elements in the first chapter of the second part of Flaubert's *L'Éducation sentimentale*, at the party hosted by Rosanette, a typical *lorette* of the 1840s. The three images appear in sequence, as though each leads to the next. Camellias decorate the trousers of a famous dancer of the *bals publiques*; the waltz follows almost automatically, and its dizzying circular motion communicates a sense of inebriation to the mind of Frédéric Moreau (who is not dancing); the consumptive courtesan comes in immediately afterwards: during a coughing fit, she brings a napkin to her mouth and then throws it on the table. In Balzac's *Les Illusions perdues*, Lucien de Rubempré entitles one of his sonnets 'Les Camélias'; in the poem, this modern flower is described as a 'rose sans ambroisie' which is a 'monstre de la culture'.[91] It is thus not so absurd that, in an Italian poem dated 1865 ('Una camelia' by Adele Curti), the flipside of this flower is its association with another somewhat fictional love – that of or for a virgin. 'Profumi, evver, non mandano | Tue foglie, o vago fiore: | Che val? Mi sembri un tacito | Voto di casto amore' ('It's true: no scent flows out | from your leaves, fair flower: | what's the use? You seem like an unspoken | vow of chaste love').[92] The artificiality by excess of the courtesan (who yields but does not love) turns into the artificiality by defect of the virgin (who loves but does not yield).[93]

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[88] Auguste Vitu and Jules Frey, *Physiologie du Bal Mabille* (Paris: Carrier, 1844), quoted in Montandon (ed.), *Paris au bal*, p. 201.

[89] Alexandre Dumas *fils*, introductory remarks dated December 1867, in the definitive edition of *La Dame aux camélias* (Paris: Michel Lévy, 1868); in *La Dame aux camélias*, ed. Neuschäfer and Sigaux, pp. 497–535: here p. 498.

[90] 'Le camélia était à cette époque ce que l'orchidée est à la notre: une fleur essentiellement à la mode, chère, symbole de l'élégance et du luxe': Christiane Issartel, *Les Dames aux camélias: De l'histoire à la légende* (Paris: Hachette, 1981), p. 12.

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[91] Honoré de Balzac, *Les Illusions perdues* (1843), in *La Comédie humaine*, vol. v, pp. 123–732: here p. 340.

[92] Adele Curti, 'Una camelia', in *Poesie di illustri italiani contemporanei*, ed. Ferdinando Bosio, 2 vols. (Milan: Tipografia di Maurizio Guigoni, 1865), vol. i, p. 121; repr. ed. Luana Salvarani with an essay by Marzio Pieri (Trento: La Finestra, 2002).

[93] From being an emblem of virginity, the camellia can become, in the decadent movement, a symbol of frigidity. Nina de Villard – whose non-conformist salon was frequented by Charles Cros, Verlaine, Villiers de l'Isle-Adam and many other bohemians of the Sedan years – wrote a poem titled 'Le Camélia', published in *Les Feuillets parisiens* (Paris: H. Messager, 1885), p. [37] (the volume has no page numbers). In de Villard's poem the flower is associated with the lack of sexual desire: 'Nul visage ne s'est penché | Vers mon pétale clair qui

When Marguerite asks for Varville's bouquet to be taken from her in Act 1 of the play (scene 5), she seems to make an explicit link between the absence of scent and the impossibility of love: 'Les parfums me rendent malade' ('Scents make me ill'), she says to explain her rejection of any flower other than the camellia.[94] To quote a significant simile in a famous poem by Gautier ('Camélia et pâquerette', in *Émaux et camées*), camellias are planted and grown under glass, and 'Comme des belles courtisanes | elles se vendent à prix d'or' ('like beautiful courtesans | they are sold for their weight in gold'). Besides, Gautier himself reminds us that the nickname 'Dame aux camélias' 'came to be associated with her [Marie Duplessis] because of the fact that her delicate nerves would not allow her to bear the scent of any flower'.[95] In Balzac's *Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes*, the white camellias decorating Esther's black locks during her last meeting with Lucien de Rubempré take on a clear sacrificial connotation. On the other hand, in Balzac's *La Cousine Bette* the red camellia adorning the black hair of the good-hearted *lorette* Josépha is extremely erotic. The scene takes place in 1843: Josépha is wearing a sumptuous *collier* whose pearls are 'barely discernible on her skin of white camellia'.[96] A *lorette* with skin of white camellia who wears a red camellia in her hair: it does not get more 'lady of the camellias' than this! But there is more: the quote placed by Illica and Giacosa as an epigraph to the first scene of *La bohème* mentions Mimi's 'sickly beauty' and that her fair complexion has 'the pale glow of a camellia' ('aux blancheurs de camélia'): yet another association between a less than morally irreprehensible *poitrinaire* – a *grisette* – and a white camellia. This passage is of course taken from the famous novel by

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semble être sans vie. | Parfum! En vain, je t'ai cherché. | Être tentation, soit … Fleur inassouvie, | Je voudrais être plus: péché.'

[94] One is also reminded of Mimi (whose kinship with the lady of the camellias will be discussed shortly), who in the first scene of Puccini's *La bohème* says that the flowers she embroiders 'ahimè, non hanno odore' ('alas, have no scent').

[95] Gautier, *Histoire de l'art dramatique*, vol. vi, p. 304 (review of 10 February 1852).

[96] Balzac, *La Cousine Bette* (1846), in *La Comédie humaine*, vol. vii, pp. 4–451: here p. 407.

Henry Murger (chapter 14). Even though almost half a century separates *La traviata* (1853) from Puccini's *La bohème* (1896), one must not forget that the literary sources for both operas date from the same period and followed similar paths. The *Scènes de la vie de bohème* came out in irregular instalments in *Le Corsaire* between 1845 and 1849; then came the play that Murger, with the help of Théodore Barrière, based on the novel, which was entitled *La Vie de bohème*, a *pièce mêlée de chants* (Variétés, 22 November 1849); the instalments of the novel were finally compiled into a single volume in 1851. The numerous inter-textual correspondences that connect Murger to Dumas *fils* (and a few other surrounding figures) are thus unsurprising. Observed closely, these correspondences turn out to be genuine networks of motifs or strings of associations; they point towards thematic fields that are as open and metamorphic as they are recognisable and coherent – and essential to an historical understanding of the system of representation (including musical representation) of the lady of the camellias.

Let us here interrupt this series of detours on other ladies of the camellias by way of a waltz that has been metaphorically resonating between the lines for quite some time now. This waltz (see Example 2.6 below), written by Alfred Musard *fils*, featured in a collection devoted to the ultra-modern public greenhouse that was the Jardin d'Hiver, and was predictably entitled *Le Camélia* (1843). Marie Duplessis and her female friends used to dance to this piece as though it were a waltz *à deux temps*.[97] The Jardin d'Hiver cultivated and sold the finest camellias in Paris, but it was also a very fashionable venue and served as the setting for a vaudeville performed at the Théâtre du Gymnase on 30 April 1846.[98] It was converted into a *bal public* at the end of 1847. *Le Charivari* of 20 February 1848 features an amusing caricature by Cham showing a 'Polka au Jardin d'Hiver' in which an overexcited *polkeuse*

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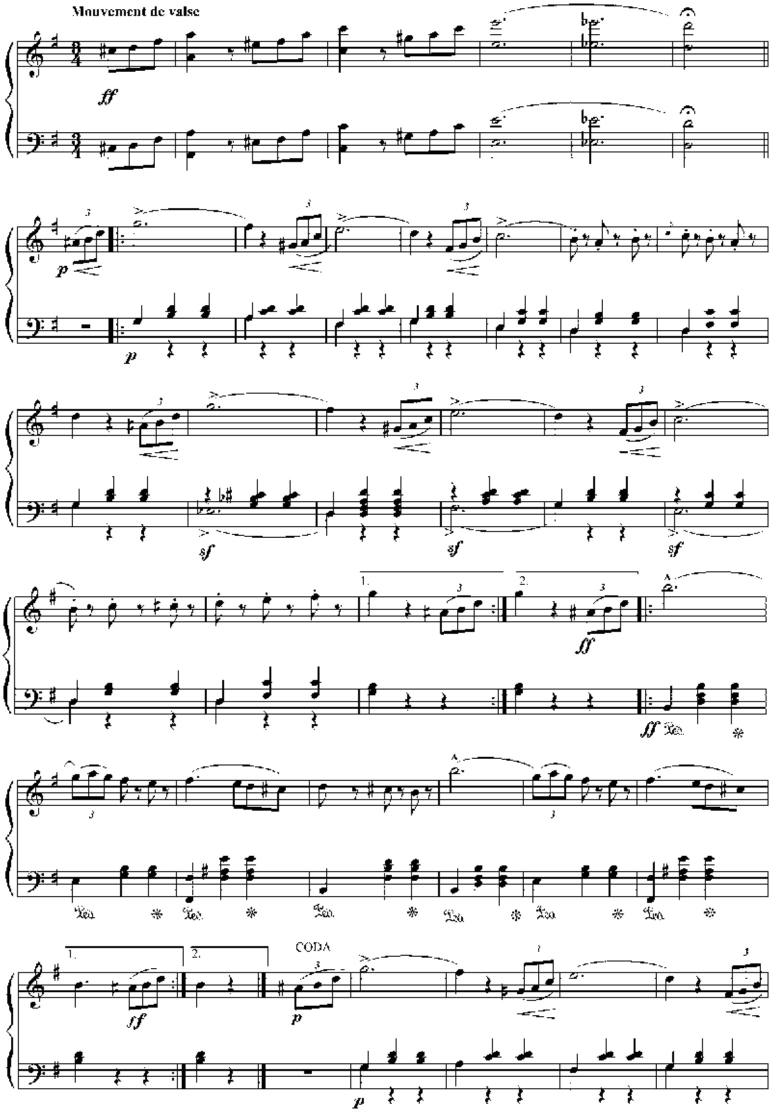
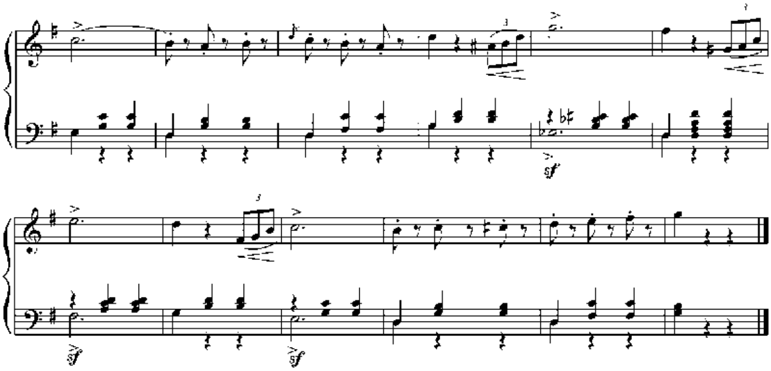
[97] Alfred Musard, *Le Camélia*, in *Jardin d'hiver: Suite de valses* (Paris: J. Meissonnier, n. d. [1843], pl. no. J.M. 2568). Besides the piano part (reproduced in Example 2.6), this edition includes parts for flute, violin, *piston* [*cornet à pistons*] and bass.

[98] Mélesville [pseudonym of Anne-Honoré-Joseph Duveyrier], Pierre-Frédéric-Adolphe Carmouche and Frédéric de Courcy, *Le Jardin d'hiver: Folie-vaudeville en un acte* (Paris: Michel Lévy, 1846).


Mouvement de valse
ff
p
sf
1.
2.
CODA

Example 2.6 Musard *fils*, *Le Camélia*



Example 2.6 (*cont.*)

falls into a fountain. As we read in the *Physiologie de la polka*, 'the people who are able *to properly hear and feel the waltz in two beats*, [...] are those who show more aptitude for dancing the polka'.[99]

Marie Duplessis, as we already know, was the very incarnation of the waltz *à deux temps* (and thus an equally gifted *polkeuse*, at least potentially). According to the dance teacher Cellarius, it would be best to call it a waltz 'in two steps':

> I have elsewhere regretted how common usage has given this waltz the name of 'waltz in two beats' [*à deux temps*], rather than 'waltz in two steps' [*à deux pas*]. The term 'two steps' would have spared us a lot of confusion, by indicating that [the waltz] is to be executed in two steps over the three beats of the music: the first step is on the first beat; one lets the second beat pass, and performs the second step on the third beat. In this way, one can always be sure of following the metre.[100]

Cellarius also adds that he who dances the waltz in two steps should be careful not to hop but to glide, 'en évitant les soubresauts et les saccades' ('while avoiding any jumps and jerks'). This is perfectly clear. Yet it was not just the dancers who 'felt' the waltz in two steps.

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[99] Vitu and Farnèse, *Physiologie de la polka*, quoted in Montandon (ed.), *Paris au bal*, p. 248: 'Les personnes qui sentent bien la valse à deux temps, [...] sont celles qui montrent le plus d'aptitude à danser la polka.'

[100] Cellarius, *La Danse des salons*, pp. 75–6.

The musicians would perform the three beats of the traditional waltz differently if they thought of them as being danced in two steps. Cellarius again emphasises how 'the waltz in two steps has the same metre as the one in three steps, *with the only difference that the orchestra is required to quicken the pace a little and take special care with the accents'*.[101] Cellarius also indicated the metronome marking for the waltz *à deux temps* in a footnote: 𝅗𝅥. = 88. Interestingly, this marking does not match the one that he himself indicated for the waltz in three beats, or three steps: 𝅗𝅥. = 66.[102] The waltz *à deux temps* has its own particular *allure*, or gait, which is difficult to discern on paper, but is nonetheless distinctive. It is the very *allure* with which it was danced in Parisian *bals publiques* of the mid 1840s, such as the Bal Mabille or the Jardin d'Hiver; and this same *allure* was meant to define the waltz of Act 1 of *La traviata*, whose metronome marking is 𝅗𝅥. = 80.[103]

Let us now go into the Jardin d'Hiver to hear, finally, *Le Camélia* (Example 2.6). In an advertising brochure of 1848, this venue, part greenhouse and part *bal publique,* is described as an enchanted place: 'Nothing can convey the effect of the thousands of candles reflected by the spouting water and the garden's walls, entirely covered in mirrors fitted with trellises and woven with climbing flowers. At night, these are the gardens of Armida; all the seductions and all the enchantments are gathered there.'[104] In another booklet, very similar to the *Physiologies*, the Jardin d'Hiver is associated with the garden of the Bal Mabille, which hosted many more *fêtes de nuit*.[105] Both these artificial and ultra-modern gardens of Armide are of course teeming with *lorettes* who dance the polka and *la valse à deux temps*.

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[101] *Ibid*., pp. 74–5 (emphasis mine).

[102] See *ibid*., p. 67. Cellarius's musical collaborator and pianist, to whom we owe these metronome markings, was Maxime Alkan, who published several dances for solo piano as *Répertoire des cours Cellarius*.

[103] This metronome marking features in the first piano-vocal score published by Ricordi (1855) and was accepted and reproduced in the critical edition by Fabrizio Della Seta (Chicago University Press and Milan: Ricordi, 1997), p. 48.

[104] Félix Drouïn, *Le Jardin d'hiver* (Paris: Mme Lacombe, 1848), p. 4.

[105] See Victor Rozier, *Les Bals publiques* (Paris: Gustave Havard, 1855), p. 35 and *passim*. On the relation between the Bal Mabille and the Jardin d'Hiver, see

INTERFERENCES AND CONDENSATIONS

Camellia, waltz and polka, castanets and *cachuchas*, *lorettes*, consumption … it is impossible to thematise these elements without at least crossing paths with Walter Benjamin's *Arcades Project*. I have already talked about open thematic fields and their transitory nature – staple items of Benjamin's Parisian writing of the 1930s. My attempts at archaeological reconstruction, however, owe many an insight to Benjamin's 'physiognomic studies',[106] which I am here trying to integrate with Eggebrecht's concept of 'auditive physiognomy' (although my purpose is admittedly very different from Eggebrecht's).[107] Somewhere in the labyrinthine and unfinished *Arcades Project*, Benjamin quotes a passage by Lurine that is of particular interest:

> 'In the thirteenth *arrondissement* there are women who expire as they begin to make love; they whisper to love a last sweet nothing'. Louis Lurine, *Le Treizième arrondissement de Paris*, 1850, pp. 219–220. A nice expression for the Lady of Camellias, who appeared two years later.[108]

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also, *Guinguettes et lorettes: Bals publics à Paris au XIXe siècle* (Paris: Aubier, 1986), pp. 206–7.

[106] Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), fragment Q°, 10, p. 866.

[107] Hans Heinrich Eggebrecht, *Musikalisches Denken: Aufsätze zur Theorie und Ästhetik der Musik* (Wilhelmshaven: Heinrichshofen, 1977), pp. 103–4. Eggebrecht draws this expression from a novel by Wilhelm Heinse, *Hildegard von Hohenthal* (1795–6), and from a famous essay by Theodor W. Adorno, *Mahler: Eine musikalische Physiognomik* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1960). The question of 'auditive physiognomy' has been recently taken up and discussed in depth in Werner Keil and Charis Goer (eds.), *'Seelenaccente' – 'Ohrenphysiognomik': Zur Musikanschauung E. T. A. Hoffmanns, Heinses und Wackenroders* (Hildesheim: G. Olms, 2000).

[108] Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, fragment O7A, 4, p. 503. The publisher of Lurine's book is F. Lamiche.

The final sentence here refers to the theatrical form of the lady of the camellias, Dumas *fils*'s play of 1852: the character in the novel had appeared two years earlier, and the flesh-and-bone incarnation of the lady of the camellias had died a year before that. This clarification does not take anything away from the relevance and poignancy of the Lurine quotation, because within our system (or hyper-system) of representation it is difficult to say what came first and what came after. As we know, it is often life that imitates art.[109] Baudelaire explains this very well when he illustrates the social types of the *grisette* and the *lorette*: 'Paul de Kock created the *grisette*, and Gavarni the *lorette*; and some of these young ladies have perfected the art of assimilating themselves to them, just like the young people of the Latin Quarter were influenced by its "students", and as many people strive to look like fashion plates.'[110] The question is of critical importance. We shall come back to it shortly as we leaf through a few fashionable engravings. The social success enjoyed by Marie Duplessis around 1845 (her 'mythic' dimension) depended entirely on her ability to incarnate the 'ideal type' – or, better, the 'cognitive type' – of the *lorette*. The novel (and the play) by Murger, just like *La Dame aux camélias*, partly references real people and events, and therefore spawned a rich exegetic literature in turn.[111] Yet even though Mimi and Musette remind us of some memorable female companions of Murger, their resemblance to literary characters – Musset's characters, for instance – is even more striking. Murger himself describes

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[109] 'La natura imita l'arte': Bruno Barilli, 'Il paese del melodramma', in *Il paese del melodramma*, ed. Luisa Viola and Luisa Avellini (Turin: Einaudi, 1985), pp. 5–76: here p. 53.

[110] Charles Baudelaire, *Quelques caricaturistes français* (1857), in *Œuvres complètes*, vol. II, pp. 544–74: here p. 560. For the reference to Paul de Kock, see Kock, 'Les Grisettes', in *Nouveau tableau de Paris au XIXe siècle*, 7 vols. (Paris: Librairie de Mme Charles-Béchet, 1834–5), vol. I, pp. 169–79. See also Alain Néry, 'Grisette' and 'Lorette', in Brunel (ed.), *Dictionnaire des mythes féminins*, respectively pp. 867–71 and 1173–7.

[111] On this question, see Jürgen Maehder, 'Immagini di Parigi: La trasformazione del romanzo "Scènes de la vie de bohème" di Henry Murger nelle opere di Puccini e Leoncavallo', *Nuova rivista musicale italiana*, 3/4 (1990), 403–55.

Musette as 'la sœur de Bernerette et de Mimi Pinson' in chapter 6 of his novel.[112] (Musset's two short stories *Frédéric et Bernerette* and *Mimi Pinson: Profil de grisette* date from 1838 and 1845 respectively.) Elsewhere (chapter 19), Murger suggests a parallel which is also mentioned in *La Dame aux camélias*: Musette is indeed 'a bright and witty girl, with a few drops of Manon's blood in her veins'.[113]

Once again, there is no 'mirroring' relationship between historical reality and the myths of the collective imaginary (here too, Benjamin should be our model): this much has been established. Instead, the two are linked by a complex dialectic operating by contrast, and the school of thought that conceived of such a thing as 'aesthetic reflection' has fortunately fallen into disuse by now. As is almost always the case, Mimi and Musette are 'condensations' (in the psychoanalytic sense) of real people and literary characters. In keeping with the psychoanalytic metaphor, one could say that historical reality stands to its aesthetic reformulations as the day residue stands to oneiric language. Illica and Giacosa themselves admit to having 'condensed' Mimi and Francine (on the latter, see chapter 18 of Murger's novel): 'Who can help fusing Mimi's and Francine's features into the delicate silhouette of one woman?'[114] Such a condensation was already present in the *pièce mêlée de chants* entitled *La Vie de bohème*, mentioned earlier. The play contains a good few musical insertions (arranged and composed by Julien Nargeot) and many a polka; it also features inter-textual references to *Manon Lescaut*, Musset and others and intersects neatly with the play by Dumas *fils*. Rodolphe, a young orphaned artist, has a rich uncle who would like him to pull himself together and marry a wealthy widow. Thus in the middle of the play, Uncle Durandin confronts Mimi in a manner very similar to the way in which Duval/Germont *père* would later confront Marguerite/Violetta.[115]

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[112] Henry Murger, *Scènes de la vie de bohème* (1845–9), ed. Loïc Chotard and Graham Robb (Paris: Gallimard, 1988), p. 121.

[113] *Ibid.*, p. 312. In *La Dame aux camélias*, Marguerite is said to be 'a sinner like Manon': Dumas *fils*, *La Dame aux camélias* (novel), p. 15. On the relationship between Manon and Marguerite, see Éliane Lecarme-Tabone, 'Manon, Marguerite, Sapho et les autres', *Romantisme*, 22/76 (1992), 23–41.

[114] This passage is found as the opening epigraph (in a footnote) both in the libretto and in the Ricordi score.

> MIMI: Leave Rodolphe? […] What you are saying is absurd, I feel as though I am having a bad dream …
> DURANDIN: Let's avoid the mad scene.
> MIMI: My God! Why do you treat me like this? What did I ever do to you? (*She coughs*.)
> DURANDIN: Honestly, what the devil! You should understand that this is no position for Rodolphe; he can't stay with you for the rest of his life!
> MIMI: The rest of my life won't be such a long time. (*She coughs again*.)[116]

This scene between victim and tormentor is also found in Balzac's *Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes*, in the first meeting between Vautrin and Esther: 'Listen, my child. Your fatal reputation has plunged Lucien's family into despair; they fear, not unreasonably, that you will drag him into dissipation, into a world of folly …' 'You are right …' answers Esther, unknowingly quoting Violetta.[117] But let us return to the literary influences on the character of Musette and to the two aforementioned short stories by Musset. *Frédéric et Bernerette* has very strong links with *La Dame aux camélias*. It now seems hardly surprising that Bernerette, too, should receive a visit from her lover's father, and that she should sacrifice herself in the same way as Marguerite and Violetta:

> But your father came back to me: that is what you never knew. What would you have had me say to him? I promised I would forget you; I went back to my admirer. […] I am not killing myself, my friend, I am drawing to a close; I am committing no great murder here. My health is

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[115] On this comparison, see also Daniele Martino, *Catastrofi sentimentali: Puccini e la sindrome pucciniana* (Turin: EDT, 1993), p. 35.

[116] Théodore Barrière and Henry Murger, *La Vie de bohème: Pièce en cinq actes mêlée de chants* (Paris: Michel Lévy, 1849), Act 3 scene 9, pp. 65–6.

[117] Balzac, *Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes* (1846), in *La Comédie humaine*, vol. VI, pp. 393–933: here p. 457.

> pitiful, lost forever. […] Had your father wanted it, we would never have separated; but you had no money: that was the trouble.[118]

After all, Dumas himself mentions Musset's short story in his attempt at a genealogy of his own novel: 'Hugo a fait *Marion de Lorme*, Musset a fait *Bernerette*, Alexandre Dumas a fait *Fernande*', and so on.[119] The last of these, the least known of the three, always leaves a 'scent of violet' behind and sings well enough to make Malibran jealous. Like a good enamoured courtesan, she defends the values of the bourgeois family, to which she sacrifices herself. Like Violetta, she sells her jewels and gives the proceeds to charity. Then she withdraws from the world: 'Je suis désormais morte au monde' (anthropologically speaking, a 'weak' death).[120] The career of another *courtisane amoureuse*, whose biography had been published a year before, had come to a similar end:[121] are these not different versions of the same story?

To return to *Mimi Pinson*, it is clear that the story is meant as a portrait of the *grisette*, and Musset says so himself; however, her friend Musette is an incarnation of the *lorette*. The *grisette* is the young proletarian of the Latin Quarter who makes love to the *étudiant* or the artsy *bohémien*.[122] Rodolphe and Mimi have the typical meeting between a *bohémien* and a *grisette*: an easy, transitory love, consummated but not mercenary. When venality comes into play the *grisette* metamorphoses into a *lorette*: we move from the Rive Gauche to the Rive Droite, from the penniless bohemians to the wealthy viscounts and *viscontini*. In the *Scènes de la vie de bohème*, Musette starts her career as a *grisette* of the Latin Quarter and goes on to become 'une des lionnes de l'aristocratie du plaisir' (in other words a *lorette*) of the Rive Droite.[123] The song of Musset's *Mimi Pinson* (*pinson* = finch) is a waltz – the archetype, in a way, of what would later become Musetta's waltz. It was set to music as a waltz by Frédéric Bérat; his piece is found in the first edition of *Mimi Pinson*, which was in the famous anthology *Le Diable à Paris*.[124] In Act 1 of *La bohème* (1897), Leoncavallo puts Musset's song to use by following the French text to the letter ('Mimi Pinson est une blonde' becomes 'Mimì Pinson la biondinetta') and having Musette sing it. However, he does not set it as waltz but rather as a polka: yet another proof of the contiguity of the two dances. The associative link from the *grisette* or *lorette* (light-hearted girl or *fille de joie*) to the flower (not only the camellia) and thence to the song or popular refrain (especially if in waltz time) reaches far beyond the structural and chronological boundaries of our system. Going back to the camellia–orchid link mentioned earlier, one cannot help but be reminded of Odette – a true *dame aux orchidées* – and her love (not shared by Swann) for 'La Valse des roses', whose refrain should have accompanied her funeral. The same relationship between song and courtesan appears in the second episode of the film *Le Plaisir* by Max Ophüls (1951), which is based on Maupassant's *La*

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[118] Alfred de Musset, *Frédéric et Bernerette* (1838), in *Œuvres complètes en prose*, ed. Maurice Allem and Paul Courant (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), pp. 454–98: here p. 496.

[119] Dumas *fils*, *La Dame aux camélias* (novel), p. 66.

[120] Alexandre Dumas *père*, *Fernande* (Paris: Dumont, 1844), p. 299.

[121] See Maximilien Perrin, *Mémoires d'une lorette*, 4 vols. (Paris: Charles Le Clère, 1843).

[122] Regarding the issue of bohemians as a social class (a paradoxical, transitory one), I find Gramsci's point of view, which is cited often, too reductive; Gramsci sees in the bohemian lifestyle 'the most typical form of petit-bourgeoisie': Antonio Gramsci, letter to Tatiana Schucht, 20 October 1930, in *Lettere dal carcere*, ed. Sergio Caprioglio and Elsa Fubini (Turin: Einaudi, 1965), p. 374. About the same time, Benjamin expressed a similar opinion when he wrote of 'the camouflage of bourgeois elements in the *bohème*' (*The Arcades Project*, p. 902). For an excellent discussion of the internal contradictions of the category of 'bohème', see instead Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art: Genesis and*

Structure of the Literary Field, trans. Susan Emanuel (Stanford University Press, 1996), pp. 92–112.

[123] Murger, *Scènes de la vie de bohème*, p. 120.

[124] Frédéric Bérat, 'Mademoiselle Mimi Pinson' (piano-vocal score), in *Le Diable à Paris*, 2 vols. (Paris: Hetzel, 1845–6), vol. 1, pp. 339–42. In this collection, Bérat's song (Allegretto in 3/4) is not accompanied by a waltz rhythm; however, the piano accompaniment of the first separate edition of the piece (Paris: J. Meissonnier et fils, 1846) definitely has a clear waltz rhythm.

Maison Tellier. In the film, much more so than in the short story, a prostitute named after a flower – Rosa – is continuously associated with the popular song 'Ma grand'mère' by Béranger, which is in a waltz-like 6/8. At the end of the episode this refrain is sung by the chorus of Madame Tellier's *filles* as they pick wild flowers to take to the city, a scene of false cheerfulness, full of nostalgia.[125]

One last remark on the passage from *grisette* to *lorette*:[126] it must not be understood as too clean a transition, yet once it has occurred it is difficult to reverse.[127] Musette does sometimes return to Marcel (travelling across Paris from the Chaussée d'Antin to the Latin Quarter), but with increasing difficulty. The next stage is that of the *fille entretenue*, of the Second Empire *cocotte*. Baudelaire also writes about this: 'The *lorette*, as we said earlier, is not a kept woman, that [Second] Empire thing, condemned to live in a funereal twosome with the metallic corpse off whom she lives, a general or a banker. The *lorette* is a free person.'[128] Even though the lady of the camellias never renounced her 'freedom', let us not forget that her last *entreteneur*, Count Stackelberg, was a possessive octogenarian.[129] Marguerite Gautier is often half-way between the *lorette* and Baudelaire's idea of the *fille entretenue*. It is clear by now that the *lorette* as a collective representation – true emblem of the age of polka – can take on changing and contradictory features while still bearing a recognisable watermark. More often than not a brunette – rather than a blonde – like Esther, Josépha and Marie Duplessis, the hypersensitive *lorette* hides her good-heartedness behind a cynical, reckless gaiety, which she uses as a kind of palliative or autotherapy. She is fragile and ephemeral, an ethereal and almost disembodied figure against which Zola will pit his 'grande cocotte', an opulent curvy blonde who is amoral and almost bestial: Nana.

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[125] The lyrics of the refrain of the song 'Ma grand'mère' are as follows: 'Combien je regrette | mon bras si dodu, | ma jambe bien faite, | et le temps perdu.'

[126] The two types are contrasted not only in *La bohème* (Mimì = *grisette*, Musetta = *lorette*), but also in the *pièce* by Dumas: Nichette = *grisette* (this character does not feature in the novel), Marguerite = *lorette*.

[127] Louis Huart, *Physiologie de la grisette* (Paris: Aubert, n.d. [c. 1842]; repr. Geneva: Slatkine, 1979), p. 42, points out that such a transformation is, fortunately, far from obligatory and happens relatively late in the life of the *grisette*: 'Certainly more than one *grisette* transforms into a *lorette*, but at least this does not happen before the age of twenty-two or twenty-three.'

[128] Baudelaire, *Quelques caricaturistes français*, p. 560.

[129] This detail was exploited by Dumas in order to sketch out the figure of Marguerite's unlikely old benefactor; this elderly gentleman finds in Marguerite a close physical resemblance to his own deceased young daughter – herself a victim of consumption – and decides to comfort himself by supporting Marguerite without asking anything of her but irreprehensible conduct. The meaning of this episode is ambiguously caught between a sickly sweetness and an element of supreme perversion; in the play, it is the occasion for a less than innocent comment from Nanine (Act 1 scene 3): 'Pauvre Homme! C'est son seul bonheur. Il est son père, ou à peu près.'

Let us now return to the *lorettes* drawn by Gavarni and to the many *filles* who, according to Baudelaire, were trying to imitate them. The same topic is discussed by Clément Caraguel in *Le charivari* of 8 February 1852. Caraguel reports that the hugely successful Dumas play showing at the Vaudeville 'has made romantic feelings popular with the *lorettes*; any self-respecting *polkeuse* will swear that she is the model for Marguerite's character'.[130] The identification or 'transference' escalates to the point that the demand for *amants de cœur* enjoys a drastic increase. Caraguel continues: 'This is an excellent opportunity for those Desgrieux hanging around behind the scenes who aspire to be loved for themselves.' Jokes aside, we are once again faced with the question of life imitating art and the influence that the imaginary tales of the newspapers and theatres had (and still have!) on the public – particularly the young female component. Straying for a moment from the predominantly sonic component of our journey of analogies and associations, let us briefly look at one of these *gravures de mode*: it is a lithograph that appeared (as no. 37 of the series 'Les Lorettes') in *Le charivari* of 11 January 1843 and is here reproduced in Figure 2.3. As we can read at the foot of the page, we are witnessing a 'représentation à bénifice', in which the 'entrées de faveur' are indeed

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[130] Gavarni was also the illustrator for a new edition of the novel by Dumas *fils* (Paris: G. Havard, 1858), but approached the task with little inspiration or commitment, judging by the results. It is likely that by 1858 the topic that had so enthralled him in the years 1841–3 would have struck him as rather overrated.

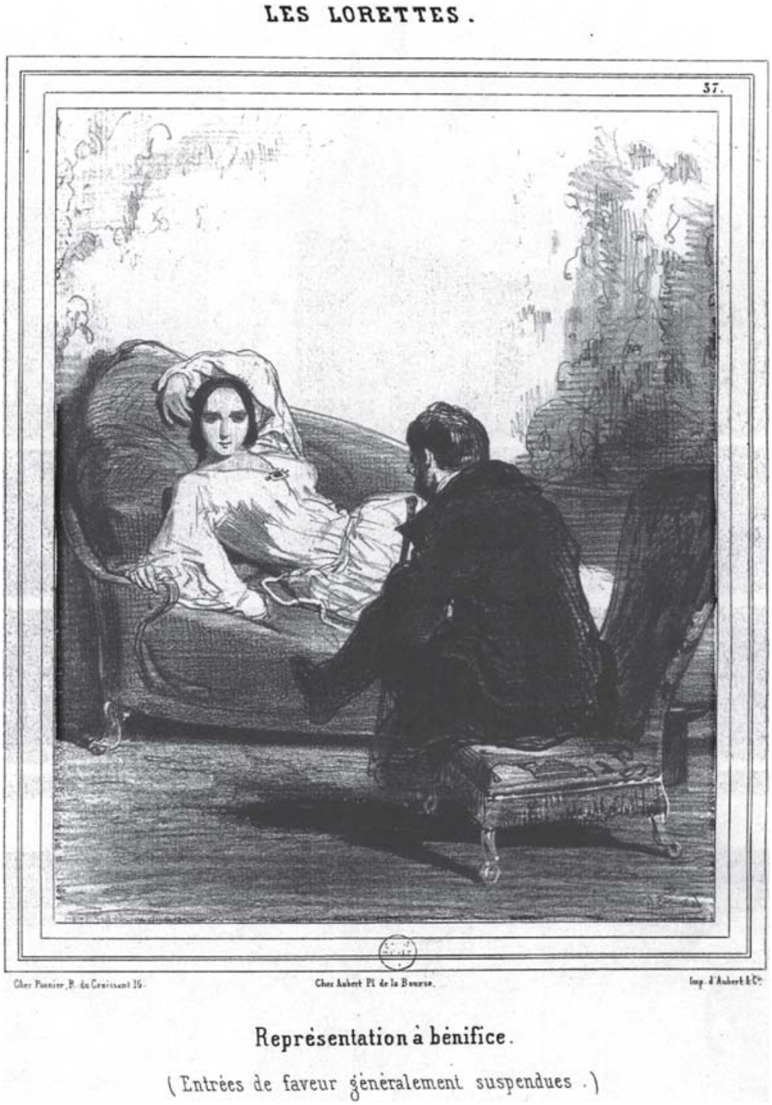
LES LORETTES.
37.
Chez Pannier, R. du Croissant 16.
Chez Aubert Pl. de la Bourse.
Imp. d'Aubert & Cie.
Représentation à bénifice.
(Entrées de faveur généralement suspendues.)

Figure 2.3 'Les lorettes: Représentation à bénifice (entrées de faveur généralement suspendues)' (*Le Charivari*, 11 January 1843)

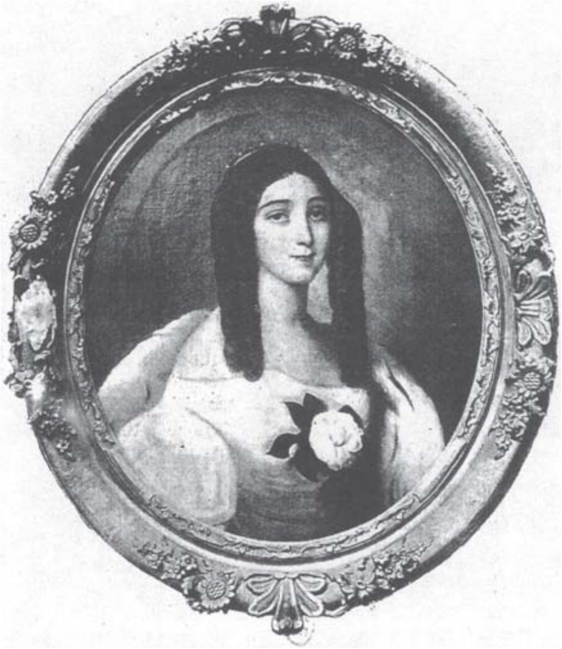

Figure 2.4 Édouard Vienot, Portrait of *Marie Duplessis*, BNF, Estampes, Ne 63 (Coll. Laruelle), t. 118, p. 27 (today part of a private collection)

'généralement suspendues'. The paying audience is represented by a gentleman with his back to us: the patron. The beneficiary-artist, who is also the show itself, is lying on the sofa: she is the *lorette*. The image of the *lorette* drawn by Gavarni matches the description of Maguerite Gautier found in the first chapter of Dumas's novel: the same perfectly oval face 'd'une grâce indéscriptible', the same black eyes and hair, the same nose that is 'fin, droit, spirituel' and so on. It is useful to compare this image with the famous portrait of Marie Duplessis painted by Édouard Vienot, here reproduced in Figure 2.4. Is it Gavarni's *lorette* who resembles the lady of the camellias or vice versa?

This Baudelairian way of locating the lady of the camellias in the inter-space between 'reality as representation' and 'representation as reality' is also thematised by Dumas *fils*. Indeed, many of the episodes

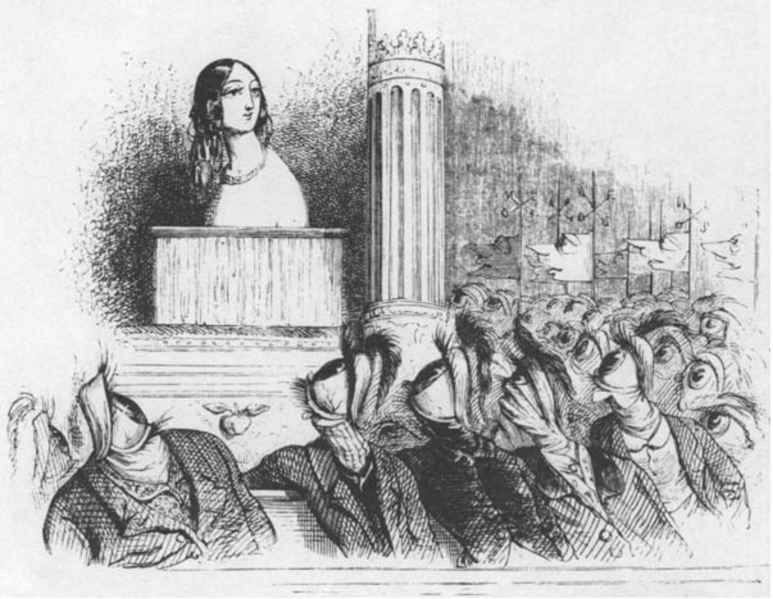

Figure 2.5 'Venus Herself', in Grandville, *Un autre monde* (Paris: H. Fournier 1844; repr. Paris: Les libraires associés, 1963), p. 102

in the novel take place in Parisian theatres, and yet the true protagonist (as in Gavarni's 'benefit performance') is always her – the lady of the camellias. It is no coincidence that her favourite seat is in the marginal land of the proscenium box, between the fictional world of the stage and the real world of the audience. It is in this amphibious place that the first meeting between Armand Duval and Marguerite Gautier takes place. And it is she, rather than the play being performed, who is secretly being watched through *lorgnettes* – and not just by the male population (ah, how many honest bourgeois ladies would like to be in her place!). This show within the show is depicted by Grandville in a way that is both fantastic and realistic. In the book entitled *Un autre monde* (1844), he represents 'Venus Herself' peeping up from her box while the whole theatre audience transforms into a mass of blatantly phallic, yearning eyeballs. This famous image, which is reproduced in Figure 2.5, has been excellently

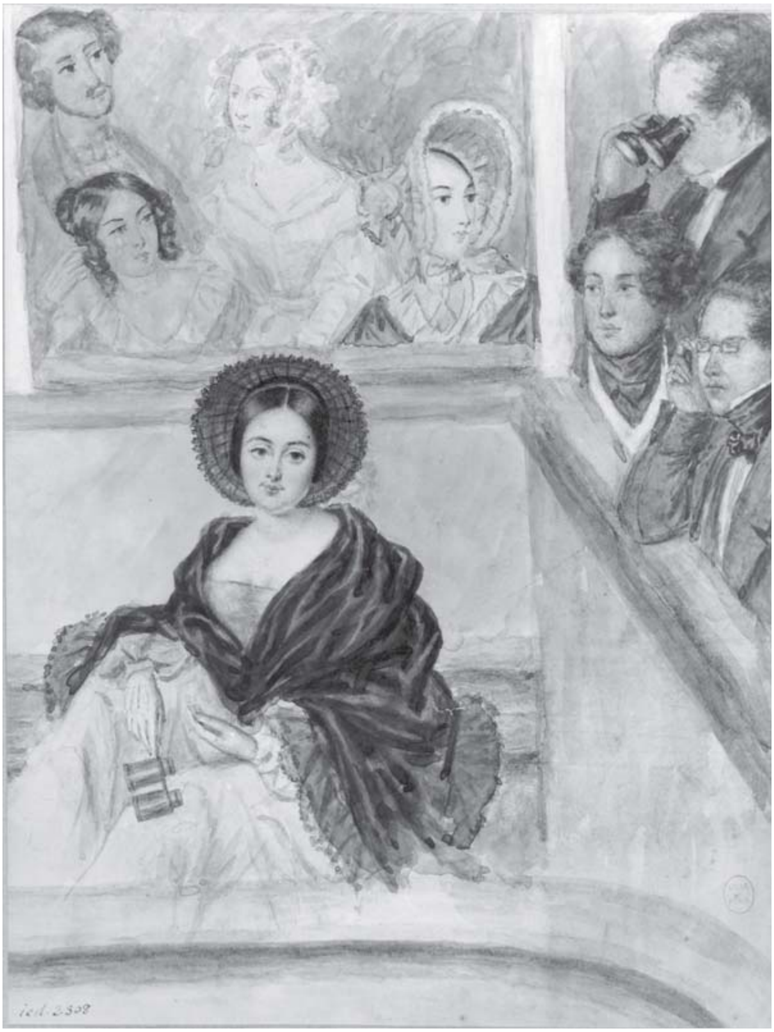

Figure 2.6 Camille Roqueplan, *Marie Duplessis*, Paris, Musée Carnevalet

analysed by Anselm Gerhard.[131] I should add that the model for this Parisian Venus of 1844 could very well be, once again, the lady of the camellias. But one could just as easily maintain that both the lady of the camellias and Grandville's Venus, with their perfectly oval faces, their black hair and big dark eyes, their dainty crimson-red mouths and their 'virginal expressions', imitate the ideal *lorette* of those years.

One last image will serve to illustrate my point even better. Figure 2.6 shows us an unknown Parisian theatre. An attractive brunette has a group of spectators on either side of her (one group of men and one of women). We do not know what play is showing, but the male audience seems to be much more interested in her, the pretty brunette, while the female audience is *making a point* of feigning indifference towards both her and the show.[132] This time, however, the resemblance is not simply our own projection, for what I have just described is an actual portrait of Marie Duplessis, unpretentiously sketched in watercolour by Camille Roqueplan (Nestor's brother) around 1845 and preserved in the Musée Carnavalet in Paris. Thinking back to the four ladies of the camellias – both fictional and real – reproduced in Figures 2.3–6, I am tempted to conclude this second chapter by quoting Balzac again: for us too, 'la scène est dans les loges'.[133]

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[131] Anselm Gerhard, *The Urbanization of Opera: Music Theater in Paris in the Nineteenth Century* (1992), trans. Mary Whittall (Chicago University Press, 1998), p. 233 and *passim*. The illustration by Grandville (pseudonym of Jean-Ignace-Isidore Gérard), can be found in Grandville, *Un autre monde* (Paris: H. Fournier, 1844; repr. Paris: Les libraires associés, 1963), p. 102.

[132] In the ladies' box one can also see a young man with a languishing gaze; by the way, he is observing the gentlemen's box. I think he could be considered to be a member of the 'third sex', as Balzac would have put it (see *Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes*, p. 840).

[133] This is the title of one of the chapters in the second part of the first edition of *Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes* (see *ibid*., p. 1395).

3 | Motifs of reminiscence and musical dramaturgy

… comme un souvenir constant de la vie folle qui s'exhalait.[1]

THE 'FATTED OX'

The centrality of the Parisian context in *La traviata* also emerges in the fatted ox bacchanal mentioned earlier, whose sonic representation is unusually rich in detail.[2] The event was indeed a very typical aspect of Parisian carnivals in those years,[3] and the subject of many plays.[4] The description below, for example, seems a perfect translation into words of the musical effect created by the boisterous refrain of Verdi's bacchanal: 'Men, women and children jostle each other around, hurl themselves violently, carelessly, at the risk of suffocating or breaking some bones. As soon as the ox appears, he is greeted by enormous cheers. The "ah"s and the "oh"s, the "there he is, there he is!", all the admiring clichés ring out together.'[5] Ever since it had been re-established and meticulously regulated in 1805, the cortege of the fatted ox had always been preceded by a band of musicians consisting of 'un tambour-major; deux fifres; dix-huit musiciens' ('one drum major; two fifes; eighteen musicians').[6] In order to give an idea of its dimension and logistics, I include here an illustration taken from a periodical of the time, which depicts the fatted ox cortege of 1852 (see Figure 3.1).[7]

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[1] Alexandre Dumas *fils*, preface to *La Dame aux camélias: Pièce mêlée de chant*, 2nd edn (Paris: D. Giraud and J. Dagneau, 1852), pp. 5–8 (dated 3 February 1852): here p. 8.

[2] Usually the instrumentation of the on-stage band (like the one of the waltz in the *introduzione*) was not specified; it is therefore significant that Verdi gave detailed instructions regarding the ensemble accompanying the chorus of the 'fatted ox', which includes, aside from the castanets mentioned in Chapter 3, two piccolos, or rather two *fifres*.

[3] Alain Faure, *Paris carême-prenant: Du carnival à Paris au XIXe siècle (1800–1914)* (Paris: Hachette, 1978).

[4] See, among others, Paul de Kock, *Le Bœuf gras*, vaudeville in two acts, premiered at the Palais-Royal, 3 February 1845 (Paris: Tresse, 1845).

[5] Benjamin Gastineau, *Le Carnival* (Paris: Havard, 1855), p. 72, quoted in Faure, *Paris carême-prenant*, pp. 131–2.

Only the distorted notion of a 'peasant Verdi' or of 'Verdi's vulgarity' (see Prelude) could lead a scholar to state that the bacchanal 'cannot be the carnival of Paris, but is instead a country carnival fair with village brass band', and it is likely that Verdi would have heard something of this kind in Busseto or Le Roncole.[8] A proof by contradiction (should it be necessary) of the thoroughly Parisian quality of the fatted ox cortege is an article published in the *Gazzetta musicale di Milano* of 28 December 1859, aptly entitled 'Il baccanale del Bue Grasso a Milano' ('The Fatted Ox Bacchanal in Milan'); the article gives a vivid description of the festivity as it is celebrated in the French capital and concludes with the wish that 'by the next carnival, the revels of the fatted ox will end up being celebrated in Milan also'. Judging by the way he interpolates them into Act 3 of *La traviata*, Verdi must have been less than thrilled with these celebrations. According to Berlioz, the fatted ox festivities were one of those spectacles 'that turn the *would-be civilised man* into the vilest and most atrocious of evil creatures'.[9]

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[6] From an article in the *Gazette de France* of 4 Ventôse [22 February] 1805, quoted by Alphonse Aulard, *Paris sous le Premier Empire: Recueil de documents pour l'histoire de l'esprit public à Paris*, 3 vols. (Paris: Librairie Noblet, 1912–23; repr. New York: AMS Press, 1974), vol. 1, p. 621.

[7] The image was published in the *Illustrated London News*, 28 February 1852, p. 177. A detailed description of the cortege and its path through Paris can be read on the next page. The *Illustrated London News* was a periodical to which Constantin Guys also contributed, and Baudelaire mentions it in his essay *Le Peintre de la vie moderne*.

[8] Alfredo Bonaccorsi, 'Danze e melodie di danza nell'opera di Verdi', *La rassegna musicale*, 21/3 (1951), 246–51: here p. 249.

[9] Hector Berlioz, *Mémoires* (1865; Paris: Flammarion, 1991), chapter 36, p. 199, n. 8. Berlioz was responding to a letter that Léon Halévy (the brother of the composer) had sent to the *Journal des débats* of 7 March 1825 to request the suppression of the 'ignoble fête'.

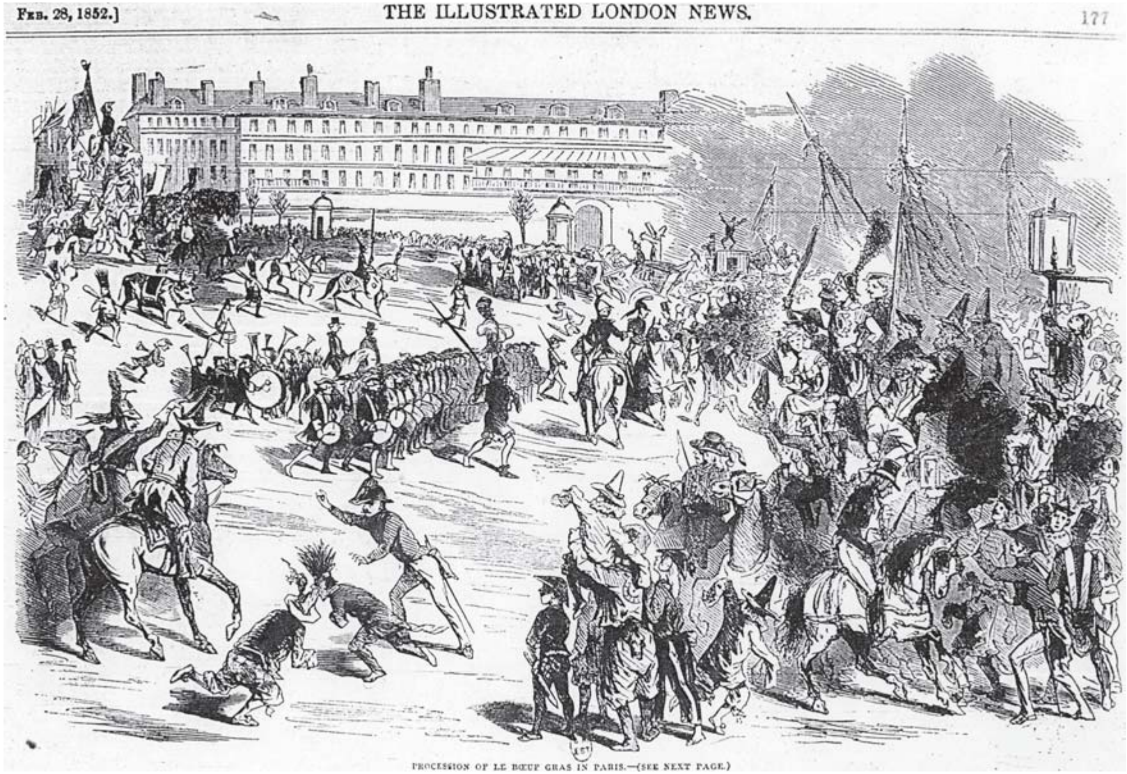
FEB. 28, 1852.]
THE ILLUSTRATED LONDON NEWS.
177
PROCESSION OF LE BŒUF GRAS IN PARIS.—(SEE NEXT PAGE.)

Figure 3.1 ‘Procession of le bœuf gras in Paris’ (*Illustrated London News*, 28 February 1852)

At the 1852 carnival, Parisians (and perhaps Verdi among them) were rather surprised to see the fatted ox float decked with advertising posters:[10] despite its ancient lineage, by the beginning of the Second Empire the fatted ox cortege seemed to bear the mark of modernity rather than that of tradition. The Parisian Camille Bellaigue was thus right to draw attention, in 1911, to the 'recherche de l'actualité' in Verdi's opera, and he accordingly spoke up

> against the stagings *à la* Louis XIII or Louis XV of the very contemporary *La traviata*. Here [in the bacchanal] is the route to our times, to a Paris that is almost as we left it yesterday. Steeped in mud, under the February or March snow, is the very carnival we knew as children, and nothing is more sinister than hearing it rush by, coarse and undignified, from behind the sad, closed shutters of the mortuary chamber.[11]

This Verdi is a far cry from 'the peasant from Le Roncole' and certainly a far cry from a *naïf* (perhaps Marzio Pieri had it right when he wrote that 'Verdi is genuinely *naïf* only in his last operas').[12] Cultural updating – always by way of Paris, 'the capital of the nineteenth century', as Benjamin saw it – is one of the main fuels of Verdi's ebullient imagination. I do not know whether the revelry of the fatted ox ever caught on in Milan, but it is significant that the festivity made an appearance at La Scala in a ballet by Giovanni Casati (with music by Paolo Giorza and Costantino Dall'Argine) entitled *Madamigella d'Heilly* and premiered in the autumn of 1865. The ballet's seventh and final scene does indeed take place 'in Paris on the day of the fatted ox celebrations'. For this last scene, Paolo Giorza composed a *Polka del bue grasso*, which was also published by Ricordi and from which I include bars 23–8 (Example 3.1).[13]

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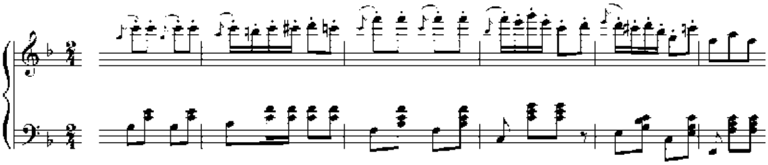
[10] See the amusing vignette in *Le Charivari*, 23 February 1852.

[11] Camille Bellaigue, *Verdi: Biographie critique* (Paris: Henri Laurens, n.d. [1911]), pp. 53 and 54–5.

[12] Marzio Pieri, 'Impopolarità di Verdi: Una commedia all'italiana', in *Mangiati dalla musica* (Trento: La Finestra, 2001), pp. 121–50: here p. 136.

[13] The libretto for *Madamigella d'Heilly*, 'azione coreografica in sette quadri', was published in Milan by Pirola, n.d. [1865]. For the music, see Paolo Giorza, *Polka del bue grasso*, in *Madamigella d'Heilly*, piano score (Milan: Ricordi, n.d.,



Example 3.1 Giorza, *Polka del bue grasso*, bars 23–8

Another significant element of the collective imagery of those years was the association of the fatted ox with the golden calf. As Méphistophélès would sing in Gounod's *Faust*, 'Le veau d'or est vainqueur des dieux', the golden calf triumphs over the gods. One instance is a song by the title of 'Le Bœuf gras et le budget de 1847', which was indeed printed for the carnival of 1847 (the time of Marie Duplessis's death). Each refrain is a variation on the obsessive equation of fatted ox and 'budget', in which 'budget' takes on the significance of 'capital', in the Marxian sense. The link between fatted ox and budget first appears in the opening stanza (where the fatted ox itself is addressing the Parisian population):

> De carnaval épargnez ma couronne;
> Je suis bien gros, moins gros que le budget.
> [Spare my carnival-time crown;
> I am very big, not as big as the budget.]

In the fifth stanza, we find the following variation:

> De carnaval épargnez ma couronne;
> Laissez-moi vivre et prenez le budget.[14]
> [Spare my carnival-time crown;
> Let me live and you can have the budget.]

---

pl. no. 39406). The plot of the ballet, a mixture of elements from *Le Roi s'amuse* and *Le nozze di Figaro*, is meant to take place in Paris c. 1530, but it is clear from the presence of a hyper-contemporary dance like the polka that the historical setting is a rather weak one. This is a similar case to *La contessa d'Egmont*, the ballet with music by Giorza mentioned in Chapter 3.

[14] *Le Bœuf gras et le budget de 1847* (Paris: Lacour, 1847).

The February Revolution of 1848 was clearly just around the corner, and it was closely related to carnival. In January all of Paris was dancing, yet 'un mois plus tard, l'émeute éclate et la fête s'interrompt' ('a month later, the riot broke out and the party stopped').[15] The figure of the *lorette* thus takes on a political significance as well. As early as 1845, Musset's Mimi Pinson, a *grisette* with 'a republican heart', had taken part in the three days of the July Revolution (as emphasised in the last stanza of the song quoted in Chapter 2, n. 124). Yet as Richard Sennet rightly remarks, the ideal of a revolutionary community (of the kind depicted in Delacroix's *La Liberté guidant le peuple*) was no longer believable in 1848. Unlike the *grisette*, the *lorette* was from its inception already a sign of the kind of 'destructive communal fantasizing' that would become widespread in Paris after 1848.[16] In Paul Lafargue's *Religion du capital* (1887) we witness the ironic glorification of the courtesan as a sort of explosive high priestess of the God of Capital. After all, the analogy between the bohemian (who 'sells out' his artistic vocation by writing journalism) and the courtesan is typical of the 1840s. As Bourdieu states, the anti-bourgeois spirit and the enfranchisement from the ties that limited the free sale of his own labour force explain 'the tendency of the modern artist to identify his lot in society with that of the prostitute'.[17] Benjamin comes to mind again: 'Love for the prostitute is the apotheosis of empathy with the commodity.'[18] Thus the 'trionfo del bue grasso' (the carnival for which 'tutta Parigi impazza'), just like the polka curtain-raiser, brings us back to the sound of the contemporary world, whose echo (fading and blasphemously indifferent) resounds as Violetta dies: life's carnival continues – the show must go on. That sound, like many other sounds from the milieu surrounding the opera's characters, has now lost part of its evocative power. The same goes for the cortege of the fatted ox, which started to disappear from the streets of Paris as early as 1870 (it returned for a few years – as a revival – at the end of the century, from 1896 until the First World War). It is in the resulting void of such loss and disappearance that I place much of my discourse. 'How are we to understand', asks Alain Corbin, 'a world we have lost, or rather, a world we have just lost? How are we to study phenomena that, even though close to us in time, bear witness to a paradoxical distance?'[19] The type of investigation I am carrying out here involves a *post factum* reconstruction of a thematic and sonic field that is partially submerged: that of the lady of the camellias. My work entails documentation but also the re-reading and re-appropriation of the materials collected, among which it is not always easy to tell fact from interpretation, original meaning from reconstructed meaning. Indeed, the selection and collection of some evidence into a more or less homogeneous corpus is already an act of interpretation. To ask, as I did in Chapter 2, whether Marguerite's repeated muddling of the same bar of *L'Invitation à la valse* is interpretable as a symptom or *lapsus* means to subject a passage of altogether secondary importance in the novel to something like an intensive treatment. That passage has however taken on fundamental relevance to my discourse, as it allowed me to better understand the deep connection – often hinted at by various sources and textual information – between Marguerite/Violetta and the waltz. Therefore, even though we have just stumbled across the oft-quoted fragment 481 from Nietzsche's *The Will to Power* ('there are no facts, only interpretations'), I do not wish to devalue empirical research or (worse still) deprive things of their immanent historical meaning. Yet I concede that the latter must be constantly reconstructed and renegotiated. Perhaps I can tailor Nietzsche's remark to the spirit of this study by juxtaposing the epigraph by Barilli that opens this book's Prelude: there are no facts without interpretations. This book takes distance from the neo-positivistic claim to facts without interpretations, but also from an excessively abstract critique – a postmodern stance, if you will – that philosophises on interpretations without facts.

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[15] François Gasnault, *Guinguettes et lorettes: Bals publiques à Paris au XIXe siècle* (Paris: Aubier, 1986), p. 215.

[16] Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man* (Cambridge University Press, 1977), p. 235.

[17] Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*, trans. Susan Emanuel (Stanford University Press, 1996), p. 358, n. 13.

[18] Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), fragment O11a, 4, p. 511.

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[19] Alain Corbin, *Village Bells: Sound and Meaning in the Nineteenth-Century French Countryside*, trans. Martin Thom (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), p. xviii (preface).

LA DAME AUX CAMÉLIAS AT THE VAUDEVILLE

Let us then proceed to a closer inspection of the play, or rather the *pièce mêlée de chant*, that went on stage on 2 February 1852 at the Théâtre du Vaudeville. That year saw the publication of two editions of the play, the second one being identical to the first but 'augmentée d'une préface'. In this preface, dated 3 February 1852 (the day after the premiere but most importantly the same month and date of Marie Duplessis's death in 1847), Dumas praised, aside from the actors, the conductor of the Vaudeville, Édouard Montaubry, who had composed the stage music for *La Dame aux camélias*, a *pièc*e that was indeed *mêlée de chant*: 'Mr Montaubry, the conductor, livened up the scene of the toast with a *ronde* that was vigorous, original, brash, and then with a skilfulness ripe with feeling he had this joyous motif come back in the third act, at the moment of Marguerite's death, like a persistent memory of a mad life drawing its last breath.'[20] This is a very important passage which invests Montaubry's music with a dramaturgical role: this should concern us also because the use of reminiscence recalls, if indirectly, Verdi's opera. But first it is worth listing the three musical sources available to us, through which we can gain a rough idea of Montaubry's score:

(1) A manuscript oboe part that was definitely used in 1852 at the Théâtre du Vaudeville. The front page is reproduced in Figure 3.2 (unfortunately it is currently the only part from the original orchestral materials to have been identified);[21]

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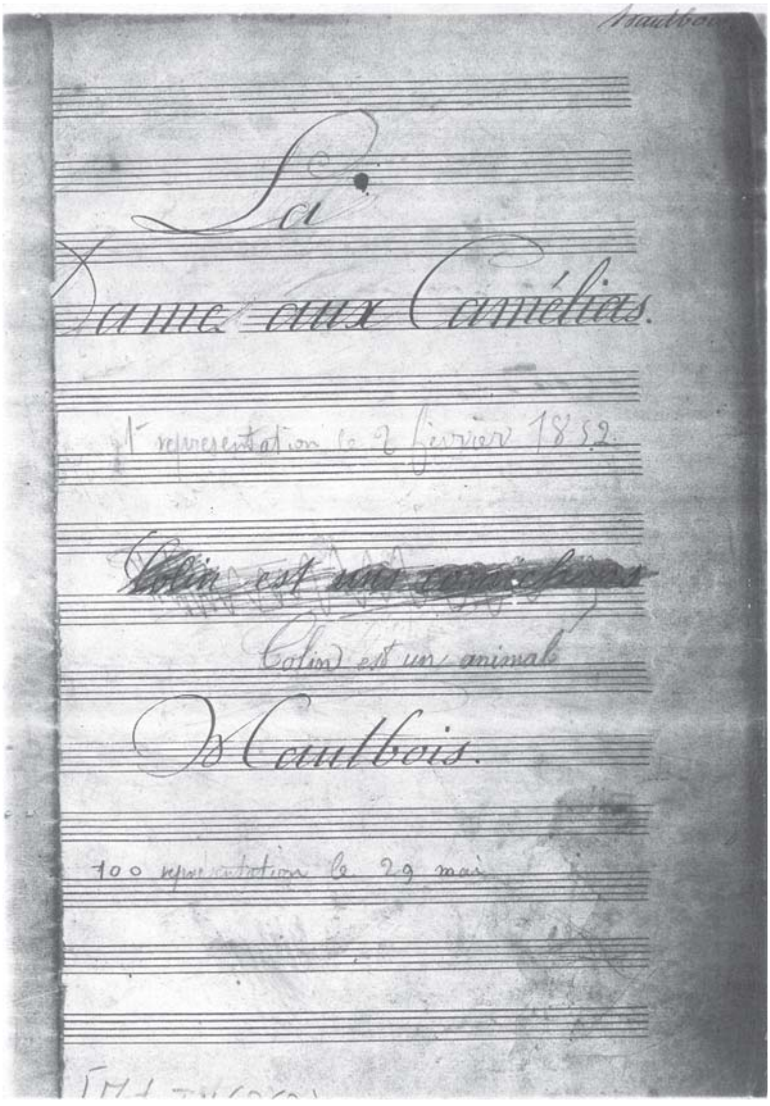
[20] Dumas *fils*, preface to *La Dame aux camélias*, 2nd edn, p. 8.

[21] This nine-page part is preserved in Paris at the Département de la Musique of the BNF, Mt. Th (362), and is part of a collection of stage music – formerly at the Bibliothèque de l'Opéra, where I studied it while writing *L'opera senza canto* – that has not been completely catalogued, as I said in the Prelude. A noteworthy detail is the exchange of compliments ('Colin est un cornichons [sic]', 'Colin est un animal') added in pen and pencil by the two oboists, who shared the same music stand and spent a long time without playing …



Hautboi

La

Dame aux Camélias.

1re representation le 2 février 1852.

[redacted]

Colin est un animal

Hautbois.

100 representation le 29 mai

Figure 3.2 Édouard Montaubry, *La Dame aux camélias*, Théâtre du Vaudeville, 2 February 1852, front page of the oboe part

(2) The printed edition of the *ronde* 'chantée par Mr. Réné Luguet [who played Gaston] at the Th. du Vaudeville' (Paris: Alphonse Leduc, n.d. [1852]). The front page is reproduced in Figure 3.3;[22]

(3) The printed edition of a *Fantaisie de salon pour piano et violon concertant* entitled *La Dame aux camélias* and composed by Ernest Depas and Alphonse Leduc, based on the stage music by Montaubry (Paris: A. Leduc, n.d. [1853]).[23]

With the aid of these three documents we can identify and in some cases extensively analyse all the moments in the play when the music makes some type of intervention in the stage play.

ACT 1

Let us begin with the first act. Although there is no overture in the oboe part, an opening instrumental piece (possibly even *ad libitum*) was the norm in boulevard theatres of the time. The first numbered piece is indeed the *ronde*, which was also published separately in the edition whose first page is shown in Figure 3.3. Before dwelling on this piece further, it is important to stress that not all incidental music was performed by the orchestra and thus not all of it is registered in the oboe part that guides our enquiry. Marguerite's boudoir (where Act 1 takes place) features a piano which is played repeatedly, first by Varville (Marguerite's aspiring lover-client) and then by Gaston (Armand's friend). In scene 5 Varville starts playing a *Rêverie* by Henri

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[22] The *ronde*, corresponding (as we will soon see) to the brindisi of *La traviata*, was sung in the Dumas *pièce* by Gaston, who in the rushed and somewhat imprecise lithography of Fig. 3.3 is still recognisable as the man standing on the left side of the picture; proceeding from left to right, we then find Prudence, Armand, Marguerite, Saint-Gaudens and Olympe.

[23] To my knowledge, however, Depas and Leduc used only the Act 1 *ronde* from Montaubry's music.

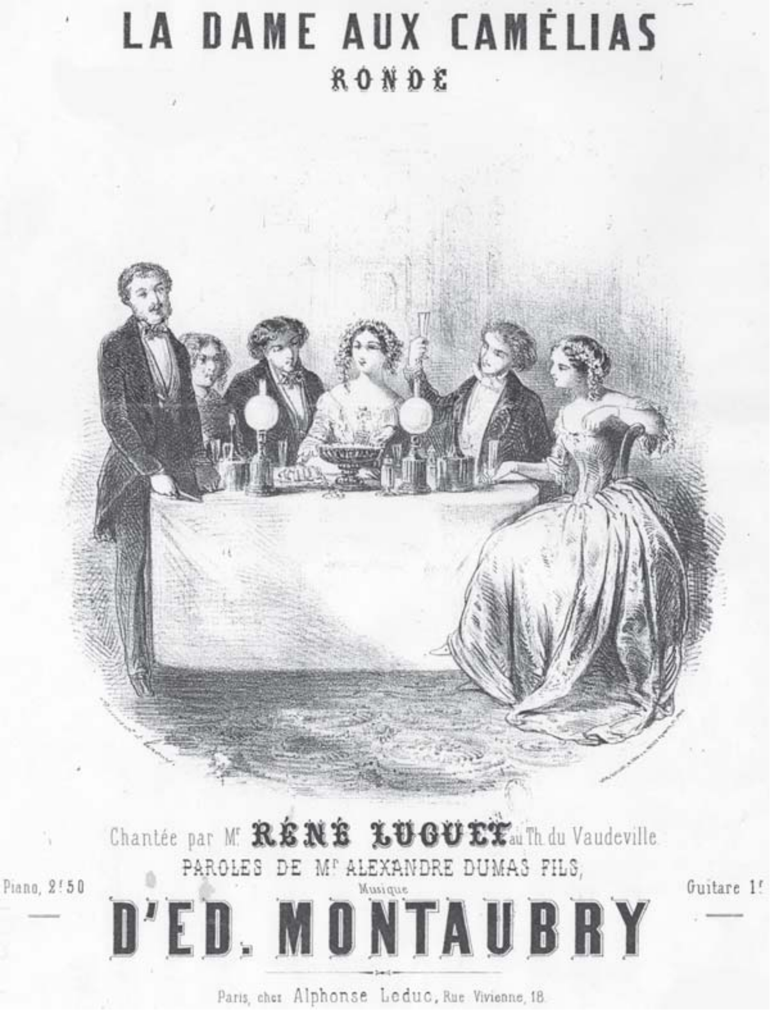
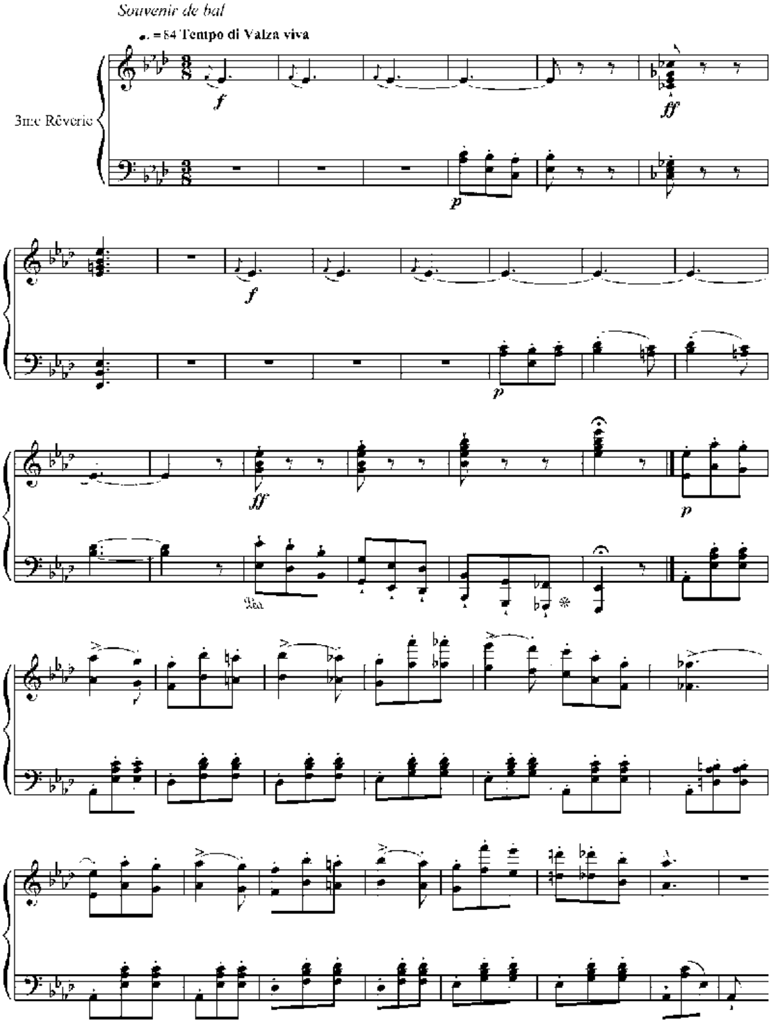

LA DAME AUX CAMÉLIAS
RONDE
Chantée par Mr RENÉ LUGUET au Th. du Vaudeville
PAROLES DE Mr ALEXANDRE DUMAS FILS,
Musique
D'ED. MONTAUBRY
Piano, 2f 50
Guitare 1f
Paris, chez Alphonse Leduc, Rue Vivienne, 18

Figure 3.3 Édouard Montaubry, *La Dame aux camélias: Ronde* (Paris: Alphonse Leduc [1852]), front page

Rosellen, one of the most typical products of the drawing-room romanticism that constituted the musical undergrowth of the 1840s. In Chapter 2 and Example 2.4, I examined a polka by the same composer and quoted excerpts from his *Fantaisie* on a few of the themes from *La traviata*. Now it is the turn of


Souvenir de bal
♩. = 84 Tempo di Valza viva
3me Rêverie
f
ff
p
f
p
ff
p
Ped.

Example 3.2 Rosellen, *Souvenir de bal: Rêverie*

an unspecified *Rêverie* which, hazarding a guess, we could identify as the one partially reproduced in Example 3.2.[24]

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[24] Henri Rosellen, *Trois rêveries*, op. 31 (Paris: H. Lemoine, pl. no. 2447 [c. 1840]); Example 3.2 is taken from the 4th edn, pl. no. 3904 [c. 1868], p. 10 (the third *rêverie*, whose beginning I have transcribed in the example, occupies pp. 10–18).

Varville, who is Marguerite's whipping boy, is ordered to sit down at the piano ('Allez mettez-vous au piano: le piano, c'est votre seule qualité'). 'What should I play?' he asks. 'Whatever you like,' answers Marguerite. While the introduction (corresponding to the first twenty bars of Example 3.2) flows on, Marguerite approaches Nanine to ask whether everything is ready for the *souper*. Then, as the waltz proper begins, Marguerite – who detests Varville – comes closer to him. As we already know, she is drawn to music (and to waltzes in particular): 'What are you playing?' 'A *Rêverie* by Rosellen.' 'C'est très joli …'[25] But the spell is soon broken and reality takes over again as Varville uses the romantic flair of the music as tapestry for this charming little speech (which he whispers in the ear of the lady of the camellias): 'Listen, Marguerite, I have an income of forty thousand francs', and so on. It is hard to imagine a crueler thing to say. For a moment Marguerite has fallen into the trap: that sound was never an echo of her inner self (a self that she cannot afford to have), but the enticing mask of the very reality that annihilates her. It is the finely decorated envelope in which men like Varville put their money. *Souvenir de bal*: this is the title of the Rosellen *Rêverie* which I conjecture to be the one featuring in this rather harrowing scene. The hypothesis is of course unverifiable (for now), but it allows us to quote a waltz in 3/8 employed as stage music (see Chapter 1) with a metronome marking very similar to the one of the *valses à deux temps* whose importance to this sonic landscape I have previously shown.

As I stated earlier, the first numbered piece included in the oboe part is the *ronde* sung by Gaston as a toast during the *souper*. Gaston Rieux, friend of Armand Duval and *bon vivant*, is wealthy enough not to have to work for a living (nightlife is his main occupation), but he cannot afford to become the official patron of a lady of the camellias: during the party he has to make do with the older Prudence Duvernoy, a former *fille* become milliner. Gaston seems to be satisfied with his lady friend, at least judging from what he says to Armand as they leave Marguerite's house together ('On ne croirat pas, elle est encore très bien, cette grosse Duvernoy!'). In the play it is he who sings the following tipsy toast, whose hedonism takes on ostentatiously blasphemous overtones:

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[25] Alexandre Dumas *fils*, *La Dame aux camélias: Le roman, le drame, 'La traviata'*, ed. Hans-Jörg Neuschäfer and Gilbert Sigaux (Paris: Flammarion, 1981); the scene I have paraphrased is found on pp. 270–1.

Il est un ciel que Mahomet	There is a heaven that Mohammed
Offre par ses apôtres.	Offers through his apostles.
Mais les plaisirs qu'il nous promet	But the pleasure he promises us
Ne valent pas les nôtres.	Is not a patch on our own.
[Chœur: C'est vrai, c'est vrai, c'est vrai.]	[Chorus: That's right, that's right, that's right.]
Ne croyons à rien	Let's only believe in
Qu'à ce qu'on tient bien	What we can lay our hands on
Et pour moi je préfère	And for me I prefer
À ce ciel douteux	To that uncertain heaven
L'éclair de deux yeux	The sparkle of two eyes
Reflétés dans mon verre.	Reflected in my glass.
[Chœur: Ne croyons à rien ...][26]	[Chorus: Let's only believe in ...]

A stanza in a similar vein follows. It is important to quote the opening two lines at least: 'Dieu fit l'amour et le vin bon, car il aimat la terre' ('God created love and good wine, because he loved the earth'). As we can see in Figure 3.4, where the piece is shown as it appears in the oboe part, the toast was sung in B major, a rather unusual – and therefore noteworthy – key for the incidental music of boulevard theatres.[27]

So unusual was this key that in the printed edition whose front page is shown in Figure 3.3, the piece is transposed into C major for the benefit of the amateurs to whom such editions were addressed. Except for the key change, however, the printed version matches the manuscript version perfectly, and this becomes evident if we

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[26] *Ibid.*, p. 284. It goes without saying that the heaven promised by these unlikely apostles of Mohammed is more Christian than Muslim.

[27] The line 'puisqu'il le faut' that precedes the Allegro moderato obviously marks the exact beginning of Gaston's song, which starts after he speaks the following lines: 'J'aime mieux chanter, puisqu'il le faut.'

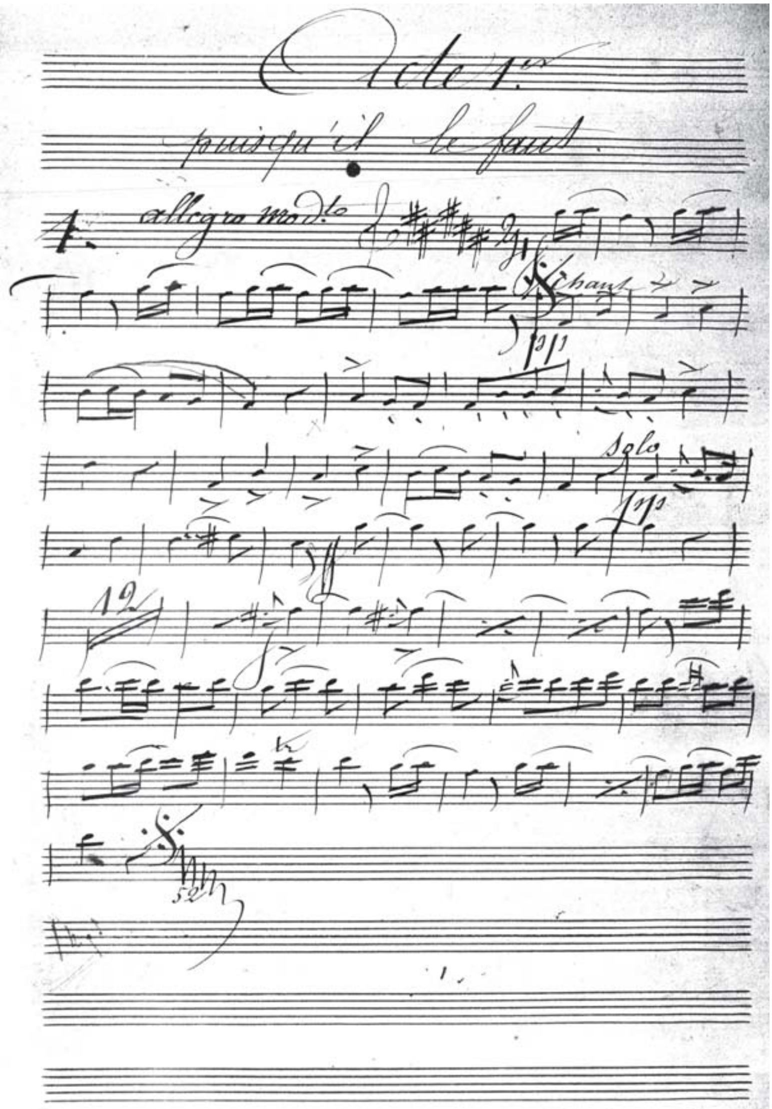
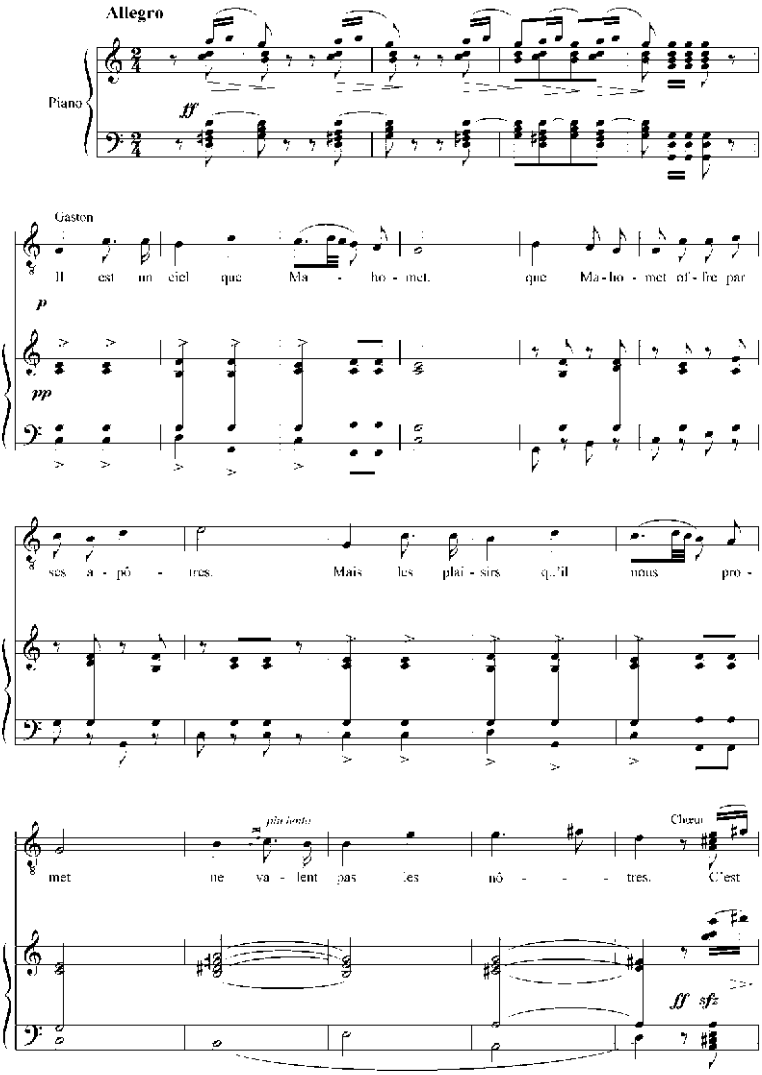

Acte 1er
puisqu'il le faut
1
allegro mod.to
Chant
pp
Solo
pp
12
52

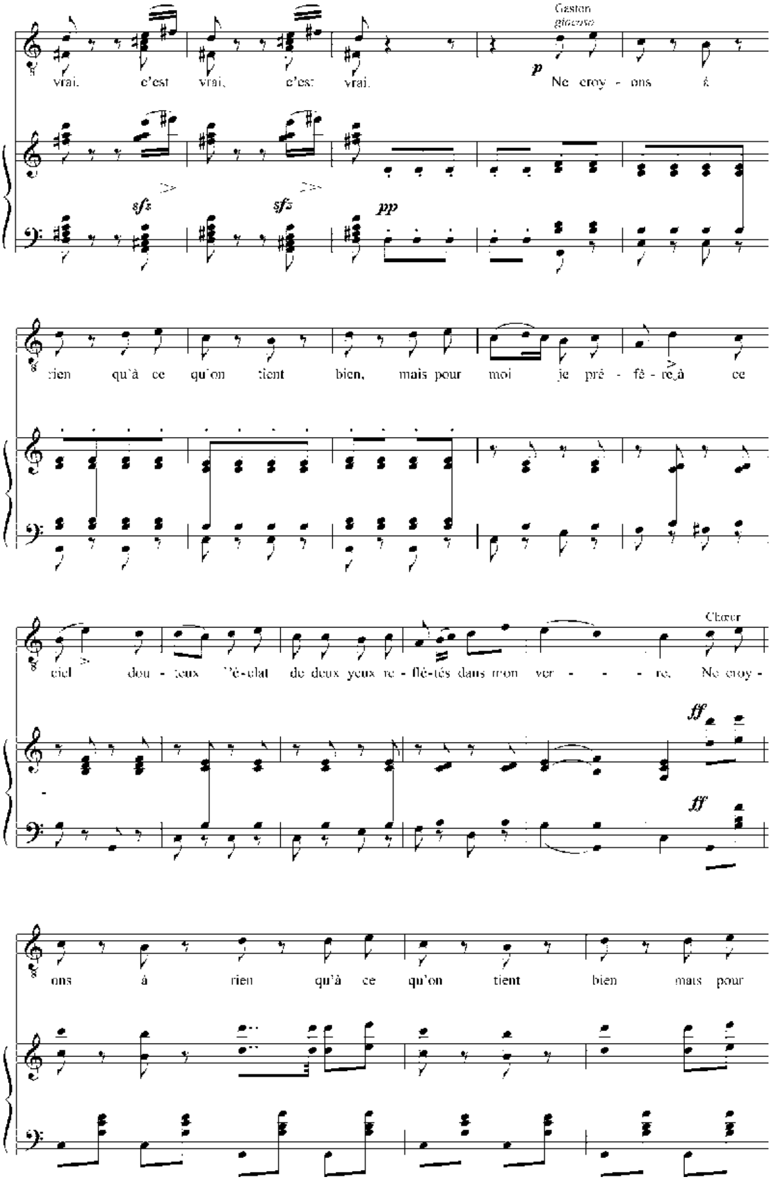
Figure 3.4 Édouard Montaubry, *La Dame aux camélias*, Théâtre du Vaudeville, 2 February 1852, first numbered piece (the toast) in the oboe part


Allegro
Piano
ff
Gaston
Il est un ciel que Ma - ho - met. que Ma-ho - met of - fre par
p
pp
ses a - pô - tres. Mais les plai - sirs qu'il nous pro -
met ne va - lent pas les nô - - - tres. C'est
più lento
Chœur
ff sfz

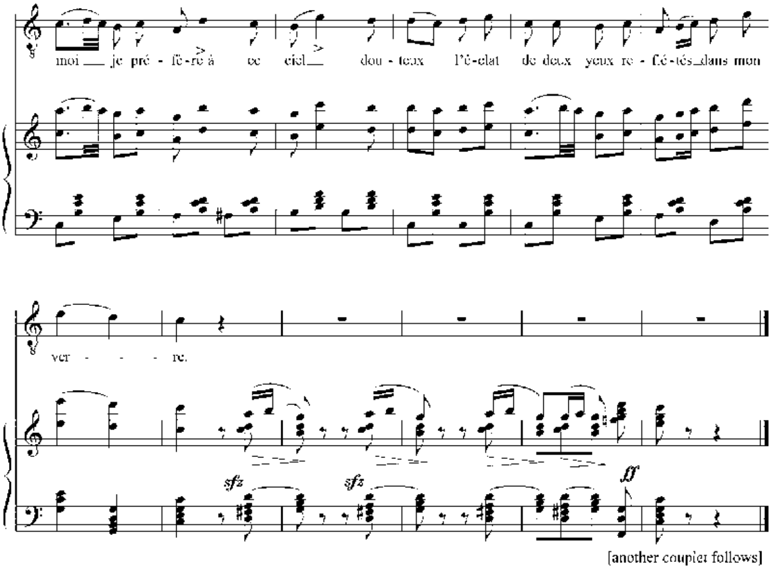
Example 3.3 Montaubry, *La Dame aux camélias: Ronde*

compare Figure 3.4 with Example 3.3, a transcription of the *ronde* as it was published in the edition.

As early as the opening four bars of the introduction, which will be picked up later by the chorus ('C'est vrai, c'est vrai, c'est vrai'), this


Gaston
giocoso
p
vrai, c'est vrai, c'est vrai.
Ne croy - ons à
sfz sfz pp
rien qu'à ce qu'on tient bien, mais pour moi je pré - fè - re,à ce
ciel dou - teux l'é-clat de deux yeux re - flé-tés dans mon ver - - - - re.
Chœur
Ne croy -
ff ff
ons à rien qu'à ce qu'on tient bien mais pour

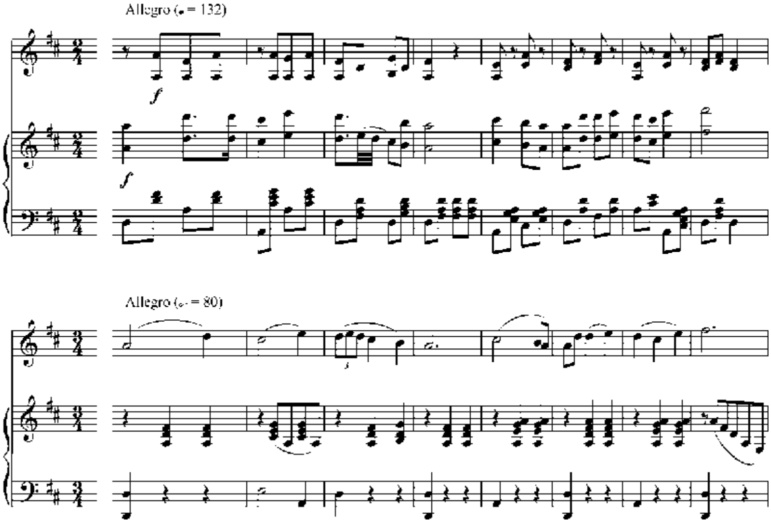
Example 3.3 *(cont.)*


moi __ je pré - fè - re à ce ciel __ dou - teux l'é-clat de deux yeux re - flé - tés_dans mon
ver - - - re.
sfz
sfz
ff

[another couplet follows]

Example 3.3 *(cont.)*

toast song takes on the rhythmic drive of a polka. This feature is further consolidated by the refrain ('Ne croyons à rien'), which is repeated later by the chorus of Marguerite's guests and then followed by another statement of the instrumental introduction. I have discussed the relationship of waltz to polka in Chapter 2, so it will not come as a surprise to find that the famous toast song from *La traviata* is in a waltzing 3/8. Even though Verdi does not make any explicit reference to waltz in the autograph score, the rhythmic character of the toast song – with a likely 'Spanish' tint here and there – is very obvious and is immediately recognisable to the audience. In the piano fantasy on themes from *La traviata* by Rosellen (see Chapter 2, n. 57), the toast song is clearly labelled as a 'Tempo di valza' complete with the metronome marking ♩. = 76. Of course, it is now sung by Alfredo, whose infatuation is genuinely passionate. But the unbridled hedonism, purged of its blasphemous overtones, is still very much a feature. As Violetta herself says, in her stanza, 'Tutto è follia nel mondo | Ciò che non è piacer.'



Example 3.4 Depas and Leduc, *La Dame aux camélias: Fantaisie de salon pour piano et violon*: Montaubry's *ronde*, in polka-like and waltz-like versions

Another appearance of Montaubry's *ronde* worthy of examination is the *Fantaisie de salon* for violin and piano I mentioned earlier, which bears the title *La Dame aux camélias* and was composed by Ernest Depas and Alphonse Leduc. Its episodic structure is typical of *pot-pourris*: Introduction – Episode 1 – Transition – Episode 2 – Transition – Episode 3 – Transition – Episode 4 – Coda. Episode 2 is indeed our *ronde*, now transposed to D major and very polka-like from the very beginning. In Episode 4 we find (with some surprise) Montaubry's *ronde* once again, but in a new, clearly waltz-like version. In order to make this metamorphosis more easily perceptible, Example 3.4 shows the first eight bars of the *ronde* as they appear in the second episode of the fantasia and the corresponding segment from the waltz-like version in Episode 4.[28] It is worth noting that the metronome marking for the latter is identical to that of the waltz played by the band in the *introduzione* of Act 1 of *La traviata*: 𝅗𝅥. = 80.[29]

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[28] Ernest Depas and Alphonse Leduc, *La Dame aux camélias: Fantaisie de salon pour piano et violon* (Paris: A. Leduc, n.d. [1853], pl. no. A.L. 3), respectively pp. 4 and 8.

After the toast, the party continues with gossip and risqué jokes. Armand alone keeps silent. Gaston, now heavily intoxicated, bashes out a couple of popular songs at the piano. Then come the dances. Marguerite asks Gaston to play some more. 'I only know one polka.' 'Then let's have a polka!'[30] The table is moved to make room for the dancers. 'Hurry up,' says Gaston, 'here comes the passage where I get tangled up' (a moment of reminiscence and of a renewed association of polka and waltz: in the novel it was Marguerite who got tangled up when playing Weber's *Invitation à la valse*). It comes as no surprise then that the Goncourt brothers, when reviewing the play, should remember the polka of this scene as a waltz: 'They get up, leave the table, and *dance the waltz*: Marguerite hurries to the arm of a gentleman. She is overcome by a choking fit.'[31] It is helpful to remember once again that while Marie Duplessis was a notorious *valseuse*, Madame Doche, the first actor to play Marguerite, was an equally famous *polkeuse*. In Dumas's text there is no mention of either the composer or the title of the polka, but is easy to imagine the scene with Gaston playing the polka 'arranged' by Rosellen that we saw in Example 2.4. Let us now go back to the play. Couples are formed: Marguerite with Saint-Gaudens and Olympe with Armand. However, after a few dance steps, Marguerite feels unwell. 'What's wrong?' 'Nothing, I am choking a bit.' Armand, leaving Olympe, hurries over: 'Are you in pain, Madame?' 'Oh! It's nothing. Let us continue.' Gaston picks up the polka again and 'plays with all his strength; Marguerite tries again and again she comes to a halt'.[32] The dance is suspended. Marguerite needs to have a glass of water. It is one of her haemoptysis fits. ‘But it’s really nothing,’ she assures him. ‘Go next door and smoke a cigar. I will join you in a moment.’

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[29] On this metronome marking, see Chapter 2, n. 103. In Chapter 2 I also gave the example of a waltz turned into a polka (see Example 2.3); in Example 3.4 I give an example of the inverse process, a polka turned into a waltz.

[30] Dumas *fils*, *La Dame aux camélias*, ed. Neuschäfer and Sigaux, p. 288.

[31] Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, review in *L'Éclair*, 7 February 1852 (emphasis mine).

[32] Dumas *fils*, *La Dame aux camélias*, ed. Neuschäfer and Sigaux, p. 289.

The homologous scene in *La traviata* is so famous that it hardly needs to be paraphrased. The fact that the off-stage band is playing a waltz rather than a polka will by now seem something of a system variant. Even though the word ‘waltz’ does not appear in Verdi’s autograph score, it was added for the first Ricordi edition (1855) and featured in newspaper reviews from the beginning. In the *Gazzetta musicale di Milano* of 4 January 1857 there is an article on a performance of *La traviata* at the Teatro Carcano. The writer of the article noted the orchestra’s ruinous tendency to speed up the tempi: ‘Generally, the orchestra plays with a very good sense of ensemble. However, many movements especially the *tempi di mezzo*, seemed strangely rushed. Because of this, the performance of the waltz by the off-stage band in the first act was unbearable.’[33] Let us remember once again that the waltz’s ‘Parisian’ metronome marking, also absent from the autograph score but present in the published edition, is 𝅗𝅥. = 80, a tempo much more suited to a *valse à deux temps* than to a traditional waltz. Verdi’s prodigious receptivity to and ability for dramaturgical re-elaboration are apparent in this scene. On the one hand the composer faithfully reproduces the typical morphology and syntax of the Parisian waltzes of the time; on the other he treats these commonplace, low-quality materials with extreme originality. The insertion of the duettino into the waltz sequence brings an extraordinary effect of focalisation: just like Alfredo and Violetta, the audience cease to hear the band playing next door. The rhythm of the waltz does continue throughout the Andantino, but it is completely transfigured: real time is re-absorbed into psychological time. At the end of the duettino the waltz of reality takes over once again from the waltz of the dream of love. As Julian Budden observes, ‘The banda intrudes again the second of its melodies, an episodic theme which serves to remind us that it has been playing all the time and that the cantabile has been, in television terms, a

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[33] On the earliest performances of *La traviata* in Milan, see Chapter 2, n. 54.

cutaway shot. The intensity of the preceding scene has made it vanish from our consciousness.'[34] Thus the band was playing all along while we were distracted. How does Verdi achieve this effect? Part of it is having the band start up again on an episodic theme (that in C minor). Most importantly, however, Verdi's waltz does not feature a *repetition* of this particular theme. Yet the waltz form followed by Verdi indeed involves a succession of themes that are to be repeated: even the opening segment is to be played twice. The same goes for 'episodic themes', those in C minor and in D flat major. When the band starts up again, it plays the theme once only. This is an anomaly, for the principal theme that follows (that in E flat major) is played with the customary repeats – four times (2 + 2) in a row. In other words, it is only we who hear the episodic theme once: the orchestra has never stopped playing.

Before going back to Dumas's play and to its stage music, I would like to dwell upon the theme of the young consumptive who feels unwell during a ball. It emerges in some theatrical and operatic adaptations of Lamartine's *Graziella*, whose first edition appeared in instalments in *La Presse* as part of *Les Confidences* (starting on 2 January 1849). It was re-published as a single volume to great acclaim in 1852 (these are precisely the years of our investigation). For a further analysis of some of the recurring elements that feature in two seemingly very different stories such as those of Graziella and the lady of the camellias, I can only point to an earlier essay of mine.[35] Here I would like to emphasise the importance of this network of associations and cross-pollinations that stretches over the thematic fields we are working with.

In the initial one-act theatrical adaptation of *Graziella* by Jules Barbier and Michel Carré (Théâtre du Gymnase, 20 October 1849), we witness Graziella's malaise during a tarantella (scene 4). The girl stops and brings a hand to her heart; she then falters and the dance is interrupted. Even though consumption is never explicitly mentioned in either the play or the novel (in both cases the chest pain could have been caused by romantic passion), the young woman from Procida who inspired the character of Graziella did die of consumption at the age of twenty-two.[36] It is well known that at the time of Lamartine and Verdi a close connection was usually drawn between chest-ache and heartache. This is highlighted well by Linda and Michael Hutcheon: 'That the disease should be associated with love and even called *tuberculosis amatoria* is therefore not surprising: the age of first love becomes also the age of death.'[37] Indeed, we should not forget that consumption was a young person's disease and that death by consumption often occurred at the age of first love. Nor should we forget that Verdi shows deep familiarity with the system of representation of consumption, as is apparent in those scenes of *La traviata* analysed by Arthur Groos.[38] In short, around the mid nineteenth century, 'consumption was', to quote Raffaello Barbiera, 'a fashionable disease'.[39] Barbiera gives the example of the romantic actress Clementina Cazzola, 'the consumption specialist' and famous interpreter of Marguerite Gautier, who died of consumption – yet another short-circuit between fiction and reality – in her early thirties. To return to Dumas's play, the *tête-à-tête* between Marguerite and Armand takes place while the rest of the party is frolicking in the next room. Suddenly, Prudence comes in ('Ah, ça! Que diable faites-vous là?'); in *Traviata* she is replaced by Gastone ('Ebben? Che diavol fate?'). Then Marguerite gives the fateful camellia to Armand, who leaves the scene happy. In the end everybody comes back in dancing and singing: the curtain falls on this tableau of confusion and debauchery. According to the oboe part, this last scene is accompanied by music throughout – more precisely by the finale, no. 3, an Allegro in A major. Since the *ronde* was labelled as no. 1, it is evident that no. 2 (in which the oboe does not play) is missing. Indeed, in the part, the following comment has been added in pencil before no. 3: '2 tacet[,] enchaînez'. The last word indicates that there is no real break between nos. 2 and 3. It is therefore possible to identify the position of this elusive no. 2 with some degree of exactness: it coincides with Armand's exit and with the moment when Marguerite, left alone, recites (probably over music) her ambivalent *confiteor*: 'Pourquoi pas? … À quoi bon? … Ma vie va et s'use de l'un à l'autre de ces deux mots.' At this point the rest of the party bursts back into the room in a state of confused excitement (a scene that corresponds to Verdi's *stretta* in the *introduzione*, 'Si ridesta in ciel l'aurora'). Here also begins the finale, no. 3, which includes a stanza sung by Gaston ('C'est une heureuse journée!') in apparent symmetrical relation to the toast song of the *ronde*. This scene constitutes the high-point of the debauchery: the half-undressed guests were expecting to catch Armand and Marguerite in a similar state ('Vivent M. e M.me Duval!'). The latter immediately throws herself into the bedlam, in that 'gaieté plus triste que le chagrin' that Armand has spoken about. This confusion is very well expressed in the stage direction that closes Act 1 of the play in the manuscript prompt-book preserved in the Tommaso Salvini collection of the Museo Biblioteca dell'Attore in Genoa. The prompt-book was used in the famous performance of *La signora delle camelie* at the Teatro dei Fiorentini in Naples, in 1865, with a Clementina Cazzola already marked by consumption:

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[34] Julian Budden, *The Operas of Verdi*, 3 vols. (London: Cassell, 1973), vol. II, p. 133. A little trio framed by a dance-music number played from backstage (the 'joli boléro' mentioned above) is also found in Act I of Auber's *Domino noir* (1837).

[35] Emilio Sala, 'La fortuna di "Graziella" nel melodramma italiano', in Georges Vallet (ed.), *Lamartine, Napoli e l'Italia* (Naples: Guida, 1992), pp. 565–83.

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[36] See Jean-Michel Gardair, 'Préface' to Alphonse de Lamartine, *Graziella* (1852), ed. Gardair (Paris: Gallimard, 1979), pp. 7–26: here pp. 12–13.

[37] Linda and Michael Hutcheon, *Opera: Desire, Disease, Death* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), p. 36.

[38] Arthur Groos, '"TB sheets": Love and Disease in *La traviata*', *Cambridge Opera Journal*, 7/3 (1995), 233–60.

[39] Raffaello Barbiera, *Vite ardenti nel teatro (1700–1900) da archivi e memorie* (Milan: Treves, 1931), p. 273. On the consumption 'fashion', see also Arnaldo Cherubini, *Una malattia fra romanticismo e decadenza* (Siena: Nuovo Aminta, 1975).

> Sound of music from off-stage. The men come on stage dressed as women, screaming and shouting; the women come dressed as men. Everyone is smoking and all call, laughing: *Margherita! Margherita! Si balla! Si balla!!!* [Margherita! Margherita! We are dancing! We are dancing!!!] Everyone starts dancing. Some fall back into their seats, drunk; others follow the dance by singing along – everything is disorder.

Thus ends Act 1 of the play – a collective tableau that almost evokes the crisis of 'indifferentiation' (men dressed as women and women dressed as men) which René Girard points to as the typical premise of the 'scapegoat' mechanism.[40] A search immediately begins for a sacrificial victim capable of restoring order, and the lady of the camellias bears every sign of being the designated victim. It is with this close-up of the chosen victim that Verdi chooses to end his first act. He hives off, amplifies and postpones Marguerite's swift *confiteor*, which in the play functions as a brief aside between Armand's exit and the messy entrance of the rest of the party. The result is Violetta's *scena ed aria* that closes the first act. 'To close the act with a monologue that way is daring, new and beautiful', wrote Alberto Mazzuccato the *Gazzetta musicale di Milano* of 19 October 1856.[41] The conclusion of Act 1 was daring and new (and beautiful) not only within the context of the operatic conventions of the time but also in relation to Dumas's literary model (novel and play) from which Verdi departed. Adaptations of a literary source to a *melodramma* normally involved shortenings; Verdi's alteration is particularly unusual because it is an addition, an extra scene entirely devoted to Violetta's inner life. This scene was already present in the 'synoptic sketch' of Act 1 attempted by the composer even before Piave started writing the libretto (Violetta is still called Margherita and Alfredo is simply labelled as the tenor), which was recently published by Fabrizio Della Seta.[42] It is truly exciting to find out that Verdi planned from the very beginning to have

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[40] René Girard, *The Scapegoat* (1982), trans. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989).

[41] This is an excerpt from the second part of Alberto Mazzuccato's five-instalment review of the Milanese premiere of *La traviata* (at the Teatro alla Canobbiana: see Chapter 2, n. 54), published in the *Gazzetta musicale di Milano*, 28 September, 19 October, 30 November, 14 and 28 December 1856.

[42] Verdi, *La traviata: Schizzi e abbozzi autografi/Autograph Sketches and Drafts*, ed. Fabrizio Della Seta (Parma: Istituto nazionale di studi verdiani and Comitato nazionale per le celebrazioni verdiane 2001, 2000), pp. 105–9.

'a voice repeating words of love from the duettino' intrude on 'the end of [Violetta's] cabaletta', 'Sempre libera degg'io'.[43]

It is important to note that the sketch calls for 'a voice' and not for Alfredo 'under the balcony', which was to be the eventual stage direction in the autograph score.[44] The latter seems to be a sort of 'secondary elaboration' or 'rationalisation' (in the psychoanalytic sense), attempting to justify a vocal presence that would otherwise prove quite problematic. Indeed, it would be extremely misleading to interpret that voice in a merely referential way (as a serenade by Alfredo from 'under the balcony'): the voice comes from Violetta's own heart or unconscious at the moment when she is trying to negate it and banish it from herself.[45] It is a perfect example of the 'return of the repressed' expressed through music.

THE REST OF THE PLAY

Let us now return to our *pièce mêlée de chant*. Once the curtain is drawn on the tableau of misrule and disorder, the orchestra does not stay quiet for long: between the acts there is an instrumental piece. In the oboe part we indeed find it as an unnumbered entr'acte, qualified – a precious and yet unsurprising detail – as a *valse*. Thus between the first and second acts, the orchestra of the Théâtre du Vaudeville played a *valse* in G minor (the first eight bars) and G major (the remainder), whose oboe part is transcribed in Example 3.5.

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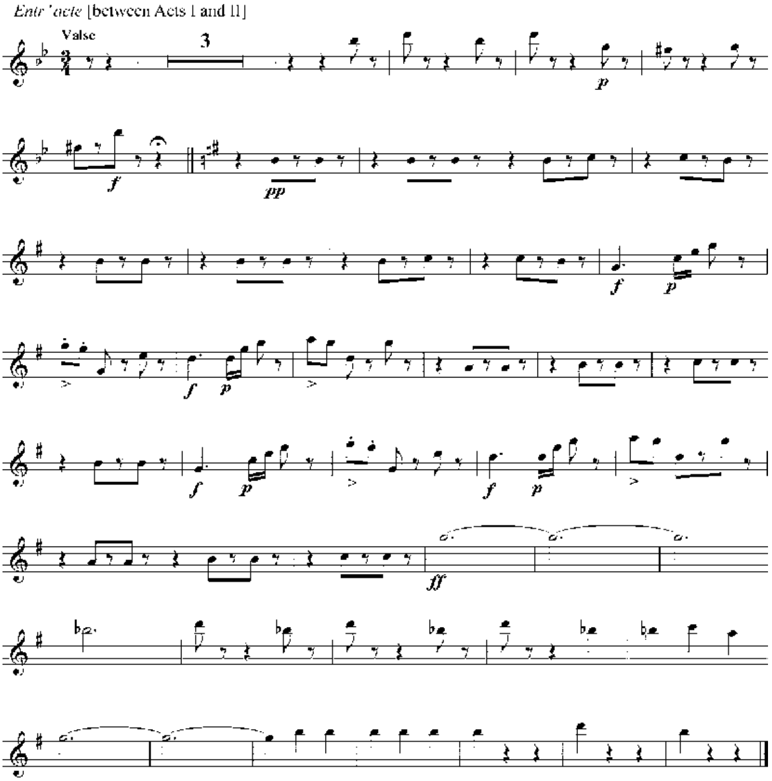
[43] *Ibid*., p. 109.

[44] Verdi, *La traviata*, critical edn by Fabrizio Della Seta (University of Chicago Press and Milan: Ricordi, 1997), p. 96. The same indication is present in the manuscript *livret de mise en scène* written for the French version of the opera, *Violetta* (Théâtre-Lyrique, 27 October 1864) and preserved in the ART collection in Paris. In this staging manual, the voice of Rodolphe (see below, n. 67) comes from backstage: 'Lorsque Rodolphe chante dans la coulisse à droite, Violetta s'approche de la fenêtre […] s'appuie sur le canapé et écoute' (*Violetta*, manuscript staging manual, Paris, Bibliothèque historique de la ville de Paris, ART collection, T 3 (I), p. 5).

[45] 'È strano … è strano … *in core* | Scolpiti ho quegli accenti' (emphasis mine).



Example 3.5 Montaubry, *La Dame aux camélias*, entr'acte between Acts 1 and 2, oboe part

What sort of interpretation should be ascribed to this waltz? I have shown elsewhere how in the long tradition of stage music for *mélodrame* the instrumental interludes were closely linked to the action of the play.[46] What, then, is the dramatic significance of this waltz? If we go back to the association between the lady of the camellias and waltzes, whose depths I have already explored, we are bound to ascribe to the *Entr'acte-valse* a similar function to

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[46] Emilio Sala, *L'opera senza canto: Il mélo romantico e l'invenzione della colonna sonora* (Venice: Marsilio, 1995).

Violetta's monologue. When the curtain closes and the last scene of Act 1 disappears, Marguerite's 'Pourquoi pas? … À quoi bon? …' is still hovering in the air. Marguerite's ambivalence chimes well with the juxtaposition of G minor and G major and the significant return of G minor in bars 35–8 (see Example 3.5). As far as Act 2 of the play (which Verdi skipped altogether) is concerned, it featured only one piece of incidental music at the end (no. 4 in C major), meant to seal Armand and Marguerite's reconciliation. As we can see in the oboe part, it is followed by a vaguely labelled 'Entr'acte (No. 1)'. Should we take this to mean that the *Entr'acte-valse* was picked up again by the orchestra between the second and third acts? Or does the label refer to an instrumental version of the first musical item (the toast in Act 1)? Either way, what seems truly relevant here is that the first two instrumental interludes do not so much introduce the forthcoming act (as was usually the case in the incidental music of boulevard theatres) as stand side by side with the stage action. This does not mean that they stand outside the drama: rather, the orchestra expresses a sort of musical subtext that recalls the sounds of the party, the outer life of Marguerite (waltzes, toasts …). In one of the rare moments in which she is left alone on stage, in Act 2, Marguerite defines herself as a 'créature du hasard'.[47] Perhaps the first two interludes refer to this existential dimension of apparent randomness: the 'vie folle' that continues. We should not forget the words of Murger's unforgettable Musette: 'mon existence folle est comme une chanson'.[48]

We have now reached Act 3, the one taking place in the country house a few miles away from Paris (Bougival in the novel, Auteuil in the play), an alternative to the 'crazy life' of Paris soon to be shown up as fragile and illusory. According to the oboe part, the orchestra played twice during this act, but the only musical traces left are from the second passage. In the first one, as the part indeed shows, the oboe is *tacet* (no. 5) and it is therefore impossible to

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[47] Dumas *fils*, *La Dame aux camélias*, ed. Neuschäfer and Sigaux, p. 316 (scene 5).

[48] Henry Murger, *Scènes de la vie de bohème* (1845–9), ed. Loïc Chotard and Graham Robb (Paris: Gallimard, 1988), p. 327.

identify the segment of action accompanied by the music. No. 6, the finale, closes the act and features the oboe, and is thus fairly easy to piece together. After the last goodbye (immortalised by Verdi with the famous 'Amami, Alfredo') and Marguerite's hurried exit, Armand is alone on stage and struck by a vague feeling of disquiet (scene 7). He picks up a book left on the table by Marguerite. It is the famous copy of *Manon Lescaut* that the narrator purchased at an auction at the beginning of the novel. Armand opens it at a random page: 'Je te jure, mon cher chevalier …': it is Manon's second goodbye letter to Des Grieux, the prelude to a separation that will lead her to accept the protection of the old Monsieur de G. M. (Des Grieux has run out of money). Armand's disquiet turns into anxiety ('Why did I let Marguerite leave? She was hiding something. She was crying. Could she betray me?'). A messenger comes in with a letter by Marguerite for Armand (scene 8). Left alone again, Armand opens the letter (scene 9). The usual cue in the oboe part features the first words of his reaction, after which the music is to begin. Thus Armand says (with the letter in his hand): 'Je tremble. Allons, que je suis enfant!' ('I tremble. Dear God, what a child I am!') Here the orchestra comes in (without the oboe) for no. 6, Agitato. The stage direction of the play reads: 'Meanwhile, M. Duval has come in and is standing behind his son. Armand reads on: "By the time you will receive this letter, Armand …"'. A *cri de douleur* interrupts the music: Armand turns around and finds himself in his father's arms: 'Ah, father, father!' Here the oboe part echoes Duval's last line – 'Pauvre fille, comme elle doit souffrir' ('Poor girl, how she must suffer') – which is followed by fourteen bars of tutti, a Con fuoco in G minor which must refer to Armand's fury. It is remarkable that the last sentence spoken by Duval *père* to himself was later cut by the author and is therefore not included in the final version of the play. It does, however, feature in the 1852 edition mentioned above.[49] The finale is transcribed in its entirety in Example 3.6.

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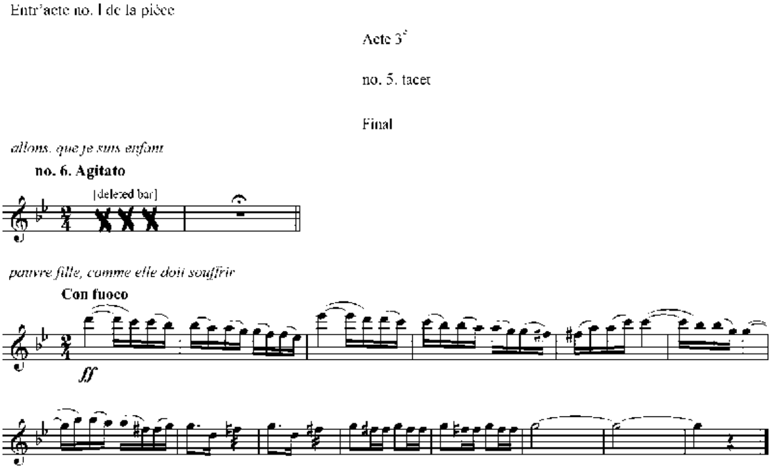
[49] 'Duval, *à part*: "Pauvre fille, comme elle doit souffrir!"': Dumas *fils*, *La Dame aux camélias* (Paris: D. Giraud and J. Dagneau, 1852), p. 76.


Entr'acte no. I de la pièce
Acte 3e
no. 5. tacet
Final
allons, que je suis enfant
no. 6. Agitato
[deleted bar]
pauvre fille, comme elle doit souffrir
Con fuoco
ff

Example 3.6 Montaubry, *La Dame aux camélias*, Act 3, finale, oboe part

The third entr'acte, which precedes Act 4, is an Allegro in C minor whose character is difficult to infer from the lone oboe part that guides my analysis. It may have anticipated the mood of the party *chez* Olympe on which the curtain is raised; after all, Dumas's stage direction reads: 'An elegant lounge at Olympe's house – sound of the orchestra; dance; movement; lights' ('Un salon élégant chez Olympe. – Bruit d'orchestre; danse; mouvement; lumières'). The act culminates with Armand's famous *coup de théâtre*, when he challenges and humiliates Marguerite in front of everybody. The latter refuses to follow him: 'An abyss separates us … go away, forget me, it's necessary, I made a pledge.' 'To whom?' replies Armand. 'To someone who had every right to ask me for such a pledge.' Armand's jealousy and anger reach their climax: 'To Monsieur de Varville. Am I right?' 'Yes.' Then Armand grabs Marguerite by the arm: 'To Monsieur de Varville, whom you love; tell me that you love him and I'll leave.' 'Well then, yes, I love Monsieur de Varville.' Here begins the finale, no. 7, with an Agitato that probably accompanied the entrance of all the guests (during which the oboe did not play). Armand has indeed pushed Marguerite to the floor and has called for Olympe's guest to join him. Then, in front of the whole crowd, he humiliates her. To use the words of *La traviata*, 'Questa donna conoscete? Che facesse non sapete?' ('Do you know who this woman is? Don't you know what she did?') and so on. After this follows the *coup de scène*: 'Il jette des billets de banque et de l'or à Marguerite.'[50] It is the money that Armand has just won gambling. 'Or testimon vi chiamo, che qui pagata io l'ho' ('I now call you as my witnesses that here I have paid her'). Marguerite lets out a cry of pain. Varville challenges Armand to a duel 'en lui jetant ses gants au visage' ('by striking his face with his gloves') and says, 'Décidément, monsieur, vous êtes un lâche' ('Sir, you are most definitely a coward'). The orchestra immediately starts up again with a Vivace in A minor, *fortissimo*, which accompanies the tableau on which the curtain emphatically closes.There is no doubt that this is a dramatic-musical sequence in pure *mélo* style.

Of the last entr'acte, the one introducing Act 5, which takes place in Marguerite's bed-chamber, we know nothing except that the oboe did not play in it. At the corresponding place in the oboe part we find 'Entr'acte, tacet'. The same is true of nos. 8–10, which are also *tacet*. The oboe part does not even show the line in the play after which the music was to start. No. 11, made up of multiple sections and entitled, like all the music at the end of an act, 'Final', starts as soon Marguerite knows for certain that she is going to die: 'Je ne peux pas!' she exclaims, after trying in vain to walk and collapsing on the couch (the same moment at which the last section of the finale starts up in *La traviata*). Thus we know only that, in Act 5, before that 'I can't!' so full of despair, there would have been three musical episodes. One may have been for the doctor's entrance at the end of scene 2, or for the reading of the letter at the beginning of scene 6. Another one could have been for the moment in which Marguerite drags herself to the window to contemplate the domestic happiness of others ('Quelle joie dans les familles! Oh! Le bel enfant, […] je voudrais embrasser cet enfant').

---

[50] *Ibid.*, p. 94.

Indeed, as I said earlier, the play has the lady of the camellias die on 1 January, while everybody is exchanging good wishes and presents, while in Verdi's opera Paris is crazed by the carnival. Another musical number may have accompanied Armand's entrance. Either way, the lack of information on nos. 8–10 is partly made up for by the finale (no. 11), about which we at least know the exact moment of the music's entrance into the drama. Marguerite understands that even Armand's arrival will not be able to save her, and yet beyond that threshold of awareness and self-recognition, beyond that deadline, there lies for her a space of peaceful well-being. Susan Sontag reminds us that in the nineteenth century, death by consumption was considered a sweet death: 'TB is a disease of time; it speeds up life, highlights it, spiritualizes it.'[51] From what we can gather from the oboe part, whose last folio is reproduced in Figure 3.5, the entire last scene, including Marguerite's death, is punctuated by music.[52]

After the exclamation 'Je ne peux pas!' a twenty-six-bar Lento in B minor (the same key as the last *fortissimo* Allegro) begins, followed by an Andante of sixteen bars. The empty bar with fermata that ensues must surely have coincided with an emphatic phrase pronounced by Marguerite. In view of the 2/4 in five sharps that follows (highlighted by a dotted line in Figure 3.5), I think I am right to identify that phrase with the 'Ah! C'est étrange!' pronounced by Marguerite during the last moments of her agony, a classic case of *spes phthisica* ('hope of the consumptive').[53] In the nineteenth-century system of representing tuberculosis, this expression described the

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[51] Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor* (New York: Farrar, 1978), p. 14.

[52] Marguerite's exclamation is clearly thematised in *La traviata*: Violetta indeed says 'È strano' at three key moments: she sings it initially to set in motion the process of self-recognition (the announcement of love) at the beginning of the 'scene ed aria' of Act 1; she sings it again, almost as a premonition, just before the entry of Germont *père* (the announcement of the sacrifice), and she sings it for the last time during her last few moments of life (the announcement of death).

[53] See, among others, Hutcheon, *Opera: Desire, Disease, Death*, p. 44 and Groos, '"TB Sheets"', p. 238, n. 36.

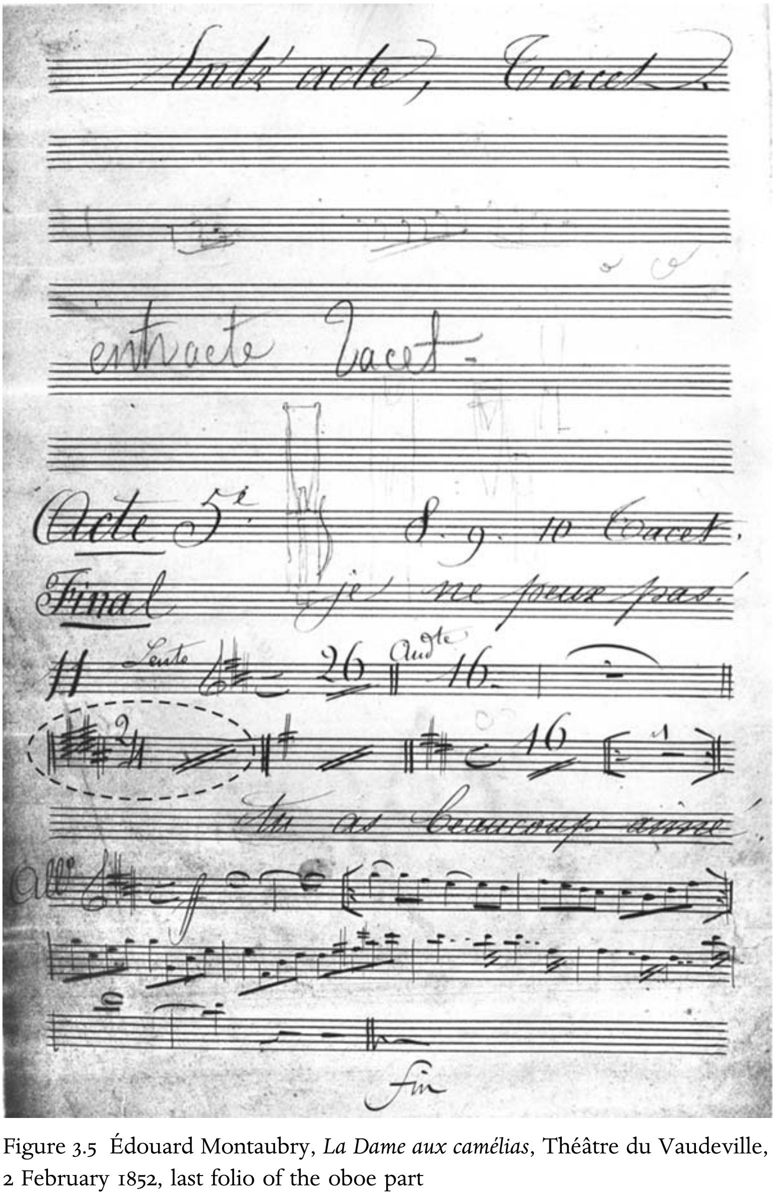
Ente'acte, Tacet
entracte Tacet
Acte 5e
8. 9. 10 Tacet
Final
je ne peux pas!
Lento
26
Andte
16
16
Tu as beaucoup aimé
Allo
Fin

Figure 3.5 Édouard Montaubry, *La Dame aux camélias*, Théâtre du Vaudeville, 2 February 1852, last folio of the oboe part

feeling of well-being that the sick person was supposed to experience in the moment of passing. What needs to be emphasised here, however, is the musical process so often associated with the 'hope of the consumptive', namely the motif of reminiscence. Indeed, it is at this exact moment that the *ronde* in B major from Act 1 makes a return – 'ce motif gai, comme un souvenir constant de la vie folle qui s'exhalait'. The oboe part does not tell us anything about the tempo (in Act 1 it was Allegro moderato; see Figure 3.4), the dynamics (naturally, one would imagine a *pianissimo*) or the duration of this repetition of the *ronde*. The 2/4 metre and the five sharps are, however, certain, just as it is obvious that the oboe did not play in this section. The absence of the oboe is a precious detail: since the oboe was playing in the *ronde* of Act 1, it is clear that the repetition of this same music at the moment of Marguerite's death was to take place in a rarefied, almost transfigured sonic atmosphere. Indeed, during the entire finale (no. 11), the oboe plays only *after* Marguerite's death, in the B minor Allegro (played *fortissimo*) that accompanies the concluding tableau and curtain-fall.

OTHER MUSICAL DEATHS

The structural similarity between this finale and that of *La traviata* – with the reminiscence motif in the major and the fast orchestral conclusion in the minor – must therefore be analysed while bearing in mind that both versions belong to the same system of representation. The following examples should make my argument more apparent. Let us begin with the final scene of *Manon Lescaut*, performed at the Théâtre du Gymnase a year before *La Dame aux camélias*: we are in the Louisiana desert, not too far from New Orleans. Manon, exhausted like Marguerite, gives up hope. She says: 'To die like this! To die loved! This must be heaven's forgiveness! Oh! I promise that I am not afraid … Come here, come to say goodbye.' Des Grieux, who is trying to keep her awake, replies: 'No, no! Never say goodbye … I want to save you; I want to take you away …' But there is no response: Manon is still and pale. Here 'the orchestra lets us hear the first few bars of Manon's favourite song, played in a gentle and slow fashion':

> MANON, *d'une voix qui s'éteint*: 'Tout est fauché … la place est nette …'
> DES GRIEUX: Oh! ce souvenir …
> MANON: 'Nouez votre dernier bouquet.'
> DES GRIEUX: Tais-toi, tais-toi.
>
> MANON: 'Car la … petite pâquerette …
> Est morte … avec le serpolet.'
>
> *Sa tête retombe, Des Grieux la regarde, pousse un cri déchirant et entoure des ses bras Manon expirée.*[54]
> [MANON, *with a feeble, fading voice*: 'All is mown … the field is empty …'
> DES GRIEUX: Oh! This memory …
> MANON: 'Tie up your last bunch.'
> DES GRIEUX: Be quiet, be quiet.
>
> MANON: 'Because the … little daisy …
> Died along with the wild thyme.'
>
> *Her head falls back, Des Grieux looks at her, lets out a heart-rending cry and wraps his arms around the dead Manon.*]

This finale explains the subtitle of the play, which is *Drame mêlé de chant*. Manon's 'chanson favorite' here takes on an obvious dramatic relevance. Manon's death is a sort of 'musical death', in a fading *pianissimo*. Even though the moment of passing is mimetically marked by the falling-back of the head, it is as though for Manon the passing from life to death has happened without the crossing of a specific dividing line. The repetition of her song 'in a sweet and slow fashion' is all the more effective because the melody – composed for the occasion by Loïsa Puget – has cropped up repeatedly throughout the whole play. It is heard as early as Act 1 as Manon's *alter ego*, as it were: she initially hums only few notes of it and then sings the whole thing (scene 4). She also says that it is a song that she learned in her home town (behind her sophistication and love of luxury, Manon is indeed a country girl). Still in Act 1 (scene 8), the same song seals the love between Des Grieux and Manon: the two lovers sing it passionately together. In Act 3 scene 3, in the rich boudoir of the commander, the song intervenes as a means of seduction: listening to it, Des Grieux gives in and forgives Manon for her betrayal. The way it is first played by the orchestra alone and then sung by Manon is truly remarkable:

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[54] Théodore Barrière and Marc Fournier, *Manon Lescaut: Drame en cinq actes mêlé de chant* (Paris: Michel Lévy, 1851), p. 58.

> DES GRIEUX: It is all over between us!
> *He walks away a few steps. Manon unties her hair, which falls on her shoulders.*
> *Des Grieux, right behind her, devours her with his gaze.*
>
> MANON: 'All is mown, put away your sickles
> Gleaners, go home now.
> You boys and you girls
> Shall come back at the end of the year.'*
>
> **[Note:] The orchestra plays the music of these four lines without Manon singing them. Des Grieux comes closer …*
>
> MANON, *singing sadly:* 'All is mown, the field is empty,
> Tie up your last bunch,
> *Sighing …*
> Because the little daisy
> Died along with the wild thyme.'
>
> DES GRIEUX, *falling at Manon's knees and putting his arms around her*: Oh! Manon![55]

It is clear that the purely instrumental melody of the first four verses has an incantatory power – it is the sonic incarnation of the magnetic flux that emanates from Manon. It is also clear that the final return of this melody displays a close kinship with the reminiscence motif of *La Dame aux camélias*.

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[55] *Ibid.*, p. 28.

After all it is no mere coincidence that within the span of a few years three closely related plays were billed under the same genre label – *drame* or *pièce mêlé(e) de chant* – and performed in Paris boulevard theatres. They were *La Vie de bohème* (Variétés, 22 November 1849), *Manon Lescaut* (Gymnase, 12 March 1851) and *La Dame aux camélias* (Vaudeville, 2 February 1852). Although I have already touched upon some of the similarities between the plays, the close chronological relationship of these performances calls for a deeper enquiry into relationship between these three theatrical subjects.

Each of these three plays portrays the death of a female protagonist 'sur un mode doux et lent', cradled by a music that acts as a psychoanalytic regression, richly laden with references to the past. Mimi in *La Vie de bohème* also has a favourite song ('Reveillez-vous, mamie Jeannette') and dies in an anticlimactic fashion, without any of the bystanders taking immediate notice (the first to realise is Musette). The stage direction informs us that, while Mimi is drawing her last breath, we hear music being played by the orchestra. Uncle Durandin (whose degree of similarity to Germont *père* I have explained in Chapter 2) regrets his behaviour – or pretends to do so – when he sees that Mimi is about to die:

> Miss Mimi, it was a test; it's over now.
> (*He takes Rodolphe's and Mimi's hands.*)
> I entrust him to you! (*Mimi gives a long sigh and does not respond. The orchestra plays music.*)
> You love him and he loves you, you are good and he is going to be rich; be happy … Come, rise to your feet and embrace me.
> (*A moment of silence; Musette, who is leaning over Mimi, lifts herself up all of a sudden, lets out a cry and falls on her knees. Everybody gathers around Mimi; Durandin, after a movement, lets go of Mimi's hand, which falls lifeless.*)[56]

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[56] Théodore Barrière and Henry Murger, *La Vie de bohème: Pièce en cinq actes mêlée de chants* (Paris: Michel Lévy, 1849), p. 115 (Act 5, last scene).

Let us take a close look at the surviving materials from the stage music prepared by Julien Nargeot for this play.[57] One recurring feature seems especially remarkable. I am once again referring to a recurring motif, a main theme that crops up repeatedly throughout the play and could be regarded as the anthem of the bohemians.[58] After being prefigured in the overture, it is picked up in song by a group of people who are about to become Rodolphe's friends. Example 3.7 shows the choral refrain and the first couplet (sung by Schaunard) as they appear in the *violon conducteur* part. Two couplets follow, sung by Marcel and by Musette respectively.[59] A third occurrence of this melody is found at the end of Act 3, after Rodolphe's escape to Paris in the company of the noisy bohemians. Uncle Durandin enters the scene, and at once we hear the noise of a hastily departing coach; Durandin understands at once: 'Qu'est-ce que c'est ça? … (*Il court au fond et regarde par-dessus la balaustrade.*) Ah! Mon Dieu! Il m'a joué!'[60] ('What's that? … (*He runs to the back and looks*

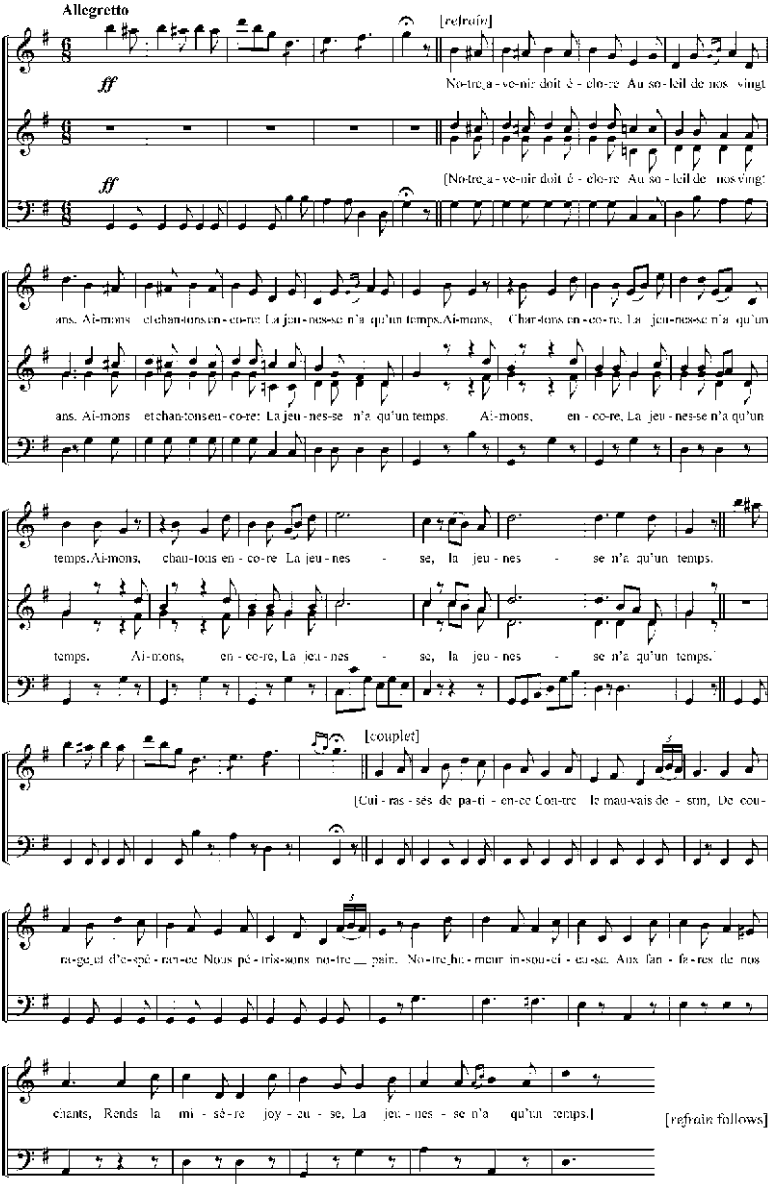
---

[57] Only the individual orchestral parts are extant (*conducteur*, flute, clarinet, first violin (2 copies), second violin, viola, cello, double bass (2 copies), at the Département de la Musique of the BNF, Vma ms. 719 ('Anonymes'). I thank my friend Thomas Betzwieser, who let me know about these materials; an approximate reconstruction of the original *mise en musique* is possible, albeit with great effort. The difficulty is due to the fact that the materials come (as the BNF catalogue label informs us) from the Théâtre de l'Odéon, 'où l'œuvre fut reprise le 30 décembre 1865'. On that occasion the work was drastically reduced in scale: from thirty-four numbered pieces, the music was pared down to just twenty-one. Still it is worth emphasising that the Odéon performances used the same materials as those at the the Variétés. The proof of this is found in the heading of piece no. 12 in the first violin part (copy no.1), which is dated and signed by two musicians sharing a music stand at the Variétés run: 'Paris[,] ce 6 juillet 1850[,] [Adolphe] Lebrun et [Eugène] Bernard'. The examples I will draw from these materials naturally refer to the first version of the stage music (at the Variétés), so far as I have been able to reconstruct it.

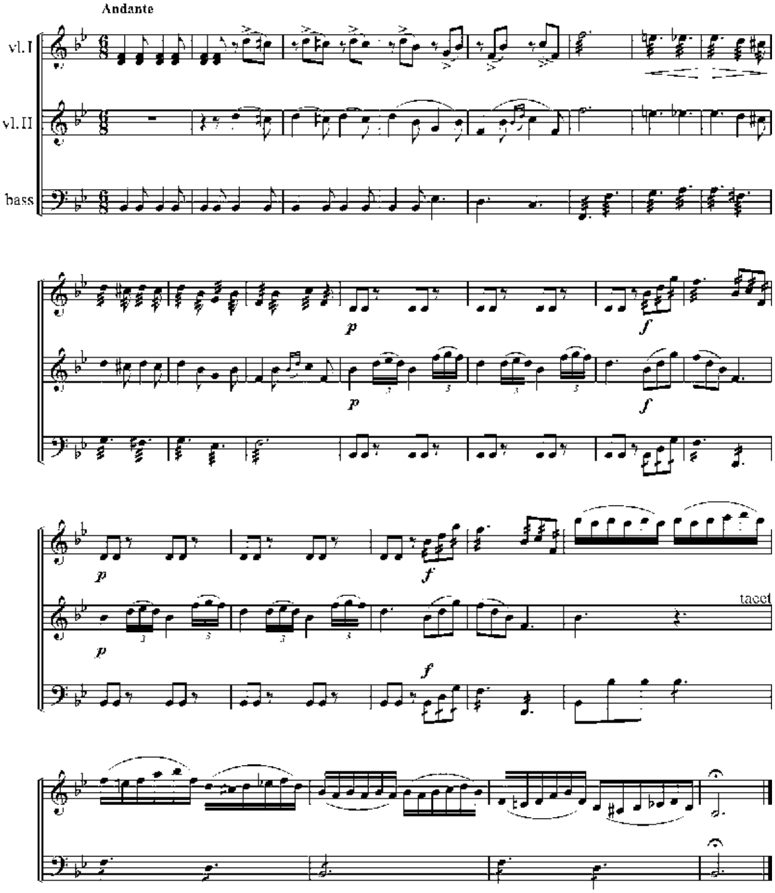
[58] Another characteristic trait of the stage music for *La Vie de bohème* is the insertion of a 'Mouvement de valse' as an entr'acte between Acts 3 and 4 (a waltz that is later repeated to accompany stage action): *La Dame aux camélias* also featured an 'Entr'acte valse' between Acts 1 and 2.

[59] For the text, see Barrière and Murger, *La Vie de bohème*, pp. 20–1 (Act 1 scene 10).

[60] *Ibid.*, p. 22.

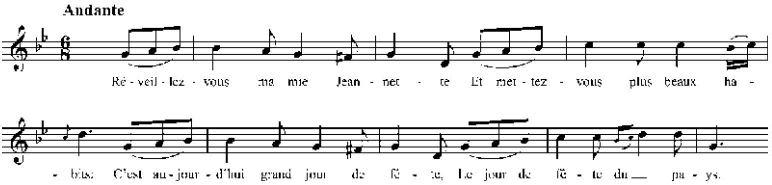

Allegretto
ff
[refrain]
No-tre_a-ve-nir doit é-clo-re Au so-leil de nos vingt
ff
[No-tre_a-ve-nir doit é-clo-re Au so-leil de nos vingt
ans. Ai-mons et chan-tons en-co-re: La jeu-nes-se n'a qu'un temps. Ai-mons, Chan-tons en-co-re. La jeu-nes-se n'a qu'un
ans. Ai-mons et chan-tons en-co-re: La jeu-nes-se n'a qu'un temps. Ai-mons, en-co-re, La jeu-nes-se n'a qu'un
temps. Ai-mons, chan-tons en-co-re La jeu-nes - se, la jeu-nes - se n'a qu'un temps.
temps. Ai-mons, en-co-re, La jeu-nes - se, la jeu-nes - se n'a qu'un temps.]
[couplet]
[Cui-ras-sés de pa-ti-en-ce Con-tre le mau-vais de-stin, De cou-
3
ra-ge_et d'e-spé-ran-ce Nous pé-tris-sons no-tre __ pain. No-tre_hu-meur in-sou-ci-eu-se, Aux fan-fa-res de nos
3
chants, Rends la mi-sè-re joy-eu-se, La jeu-nes-se n'a qu'un temps.]
[refrain follows]

Example 3.7 Nargeot, *La Vie de bohème*, anthem of the bohemians



Example 3.8 Nargeot, *La Vie de bohème*, anthem of the bohemians as a prelude to the last act

over the balustrade.) Ah! My God! He tricked me!'). At this moment, the refrain of the bohemians picks up again, faster and mocking: the curtain goes down. An extremely interesting instance of the recurrence of the theme is its appearance in a 'negative' version as a prelude to the last act, the one in which Mimi dies. As shown in Example 3.8, where this version of the theme is reproduced in its entirety, the original material is transposed to a flat key and slowed


Andante
Ré - veil - lez - vous ma mie Jean - net - te Et met - tez - vous plus beaux ha -
- bits: C'est au - jour - d'hui grand jour de fê - te, Le jour de fê - te du — pa - ys.

Example 3.9 Nargeot, *La Vie de bohème*, Act 2, Mimi's 'chanson favorite'

down (from Allegretto to Andante), and further variations are introduced through the shifting of accents, chromatic inflections, tremolos and a long coda: all devices that have a destabilising effect.

We have now reached the final scene, from which our explorations of Murger's play originally began. Before examining its *mise en musique*, it is worth reminding ourselves that Mimi had a 'chanson favorite', repeated many times throughout the course of the play and in many ways the opposite of the anthem of the bohemians: the latter is as lively as the former is mournful. Example 3.9 shows it as it appears, in G minor, in Act 2 scene 12:

Once the possibility of having Mimi die a musical death complete with reminiscence motif was set up, Nargeot could choose between two options: the use of a sad theme – Mimi's song – and the intervention of a cheerful theme – the bohemians' anthem. Surprisingly, and predating Montaubry's analogous choice for *La Dame aux camélias* in 1852, Nargeot takes the second option. After Durandin's words 'Allons, levez-vous et embrassez-moi' begins an Andante in 2/2 time which I have not transcribed, whose descending motion acts as a mimetic accompaniment to Mimi's passing-away. This is followed by the contrasting theme of the bohemians, played in the same key as in Act 1 (G major) but slowed down and rarefied (played tremolando and *pianissimo*) (see Example 3.10): another 'memory of a mad life drawing its last breath'. Rodolphe barely has the time to utter his famous last words ('O ma jeunesse! C'est toi qu'on enterre!')[61] before the orchestra brings the play to a close with a swift, six-bar *fortissimo* cadential coda.

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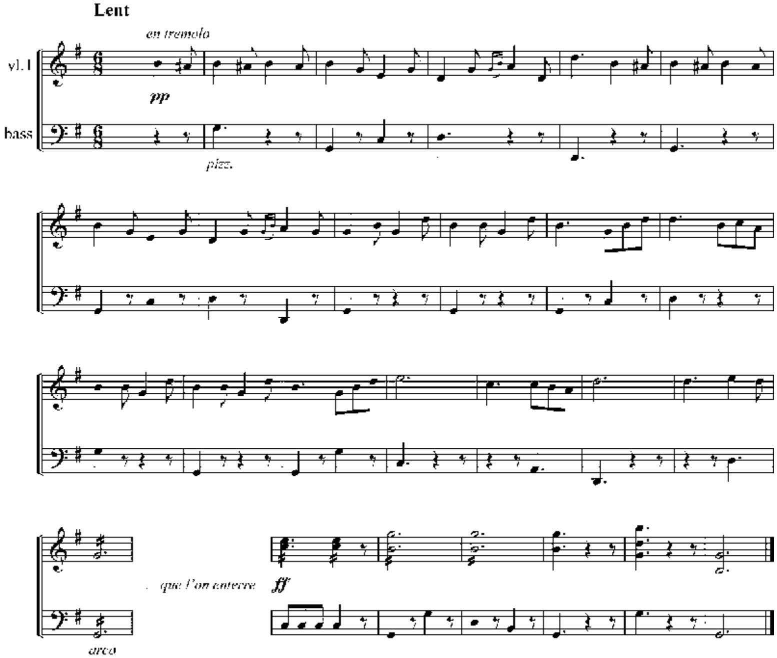
[61] *Ibid.*, p. 116.



Example 3.10 Nargeot, *La Vie de bohème*, Mimi's musical death

The same sort of dramatic liquidation is found in another theatrical text that enjoyed great success and was performed at the Vaudeville a year after *La Dame aux camélias* was featured there: *Les Filles de marbre*. The expression 'fille de marbre' soon came to be used to describe a type of ruthless and destructive courtesan, the obvious reverse of the lady of the camellias; its genre description, *drame en cinq actes mêlé de chant*, again recalls the plays that I have mentioned above.[62] Walter Benjamin rightly observed that 'the comedy *Les Filles de marbre* was an answer to Dumas's *La Dame aux camélia*s the year before'. [63] Thus, the one dying this time had to be the young artist full of hope, Raphaël, unable to resist the destructive charm of a courtesan, Marco, despite the pure and earnest love of the young orphan Marie who, like Mimi, has a favourite song. The last scene takes place in Raphaël's *atelier*; the young man, who has finally escaped from *la fille de marbre*, dies in the arms of the *honnête fille*.

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[62] The premiere was on 17 May 1853.

[63] Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, fragment O10a, 7, p. 510.

> RAPHAËL, *raising himself and immediately falling back*: I want to embrace my mother … No … she sleeps … she is dreaming that I am happy; Marie, you will take her my kisses (*he embraces her*) […]
>
> MARIE, *in despair*: Raphaël, my brother! …
>
> RAPHAËL, *smiling and repeating Marie's song in a feeble voice*:
>
> 'The sky is all full of hope,
> The earth is full of songs …'
>
> (*His head falls back*)
>
> MARIE, *with a stifled cry*: Ah! Dead!
>
> (*She falls on her knees in front of Raphaël. The orchestra very quietly plays the melody of Marie's song.*)[64]

Once again, as Beaumarchais had it, *tout finit par des chansons*. Besides, Raphaël sends a kiss to his mother via Marie, just as Don Jose's mother sends a kiss to her son via Micaëla (*l'honnête fille* always stays under the aegis of the mother). The ghost of Carmen crops up every now and then in our system of representation (although the gift of the flower that draws the Andalusian gypsy closer to the lady of the camellias belongs to very different rituals in the two stories). Mérimée's novella is in fact dated 1840. I spoke about the Spanish fashion of the 1840s in Chapter 2. During a rowdy *soirée* among bohemians, Musset's Mimi Pinson (1845), one of the archetypal *grisettes*, breaks a plate and uses the pieces as makeshift 'castanets' to provide an accompaniment to her own singing. This situation was almost certainly modelled on the corresponding scene from Mérimée's *Carmen*, which later featured in the first version of the Act 2 duet of Bizet's opera.[65] The obvious association made here is between the *bohème* in a traditional, ethnic sense and the new Parisian *bohème*. Our subjects and their thematic areas are teeming with recurring elements – sometimes even small details – that call to each other, cross-pollinate each other and generate new stories, new situations and new characters. It is worth repeating once more that our system of representation is indeed an 'open' one.

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[64] Théodore Barrière and Lambert Thiboust, *Les Filles de marbre* (Paris: Michel Lévy, 1853), p. 76.

CROSS-POLLINATIONS, ACTUALISATIONS, BACKDATING

Let us go back to the thematic perimeter sketched earlier – that of *La Vie de bohème*, *Manon Lescaut* and *La Dame aux camélias*. The constant elements and correspondences inside this perimeter are numerous. Act 1 of *La Vie de bohème* (1849) ends with a prank and a coach ride towards Paris, towards freedom: it clearly recalls the escape from Amiens that opened almost every theatre adaptation of *Manon Lescaut* (including the one of 1851). As for the influence of *La Vie de bohème* on the mid-century *Manon Lescaut*, one only needs to look at the interesting *opéra-comique* by Scribe and Auber (1856). In this first operatic version of Prévost's novel, the two authors seem to superimpose the contemporary world onto the eighteenth-century scenery. Thus Act 1 opens in a mansard in the Latin Quarter (without the preceding flight from Amiens), and Manon becomes a typical *grisette* with a love for – surprise, surprise – pink bonnets. It is hardly surprising, then, that the affair between Des Grieux and Manon ends up bearing a close resemblance to the model for literary romances in those years: the love between the bohemian and the *grisette*, which I explored in Chapter 2. The scene that closes Act 1 unsurprisingly interpolates the *Manon* narrative with the Murgerian trope of the bohemians who, after loudly enjoying a lavish meal in a fashionable venue on the Boulevard du Temple (Chez Bancelin), have no money to pay for it. It is extremely significant that the same actualisation of the historical context also takes place in the music: the chorus of the diners is sung to a cancan melody already heard in the overture that is typical of the nineteenth century and would be impossible in the eighteenth. This example, along with many others that could be added, is one instance of a broader principle that has often been given little consideration in thematological studies. Thematic domains correspond to genuine gravitational fields drawing external elements to themselves. This is true in the specific case of the three themes of Manon, Bohème and the lady of the camellias: in the years concerning us, the reciprocal force of attraction between these subjects is so strong that they end up looking like three subsets of a single system. In order for this to happen, Manon has to undergo a profound transformation, which is apparent both in the 1851 play and in the 1856 *opéra-comique*: she asks for forgiveness and dies extolling the value of the family. The all-too-famous dedication hand-written by Armand on Marguerite's copy of *Manon Lescaut* has already been mentioned. Yet we must not confuse the vitalistic innocence of Prévost's Manon with Marguerite/Violetta's feelings of guilt. The role of the victim, typical of the courtesan redeemed by love and a prime bourgeois trait, has no place in a novel that derives from the eighteenth century's type of immorality and libertinism. One only needs to think of the different reactions of Manon and Marguerite/Violetta during their countryside sojourns. At Auteuil/Bougival, the lady of the camellias hopes to erase her 'moi d'autrefois'; at Chaillot, after the flight from Saint-Sulpice, Manon is bored to death.

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[65] In the final version, Carmen does not accompany herself with broken plates but with actual castanets: see the critical edition of Bizet's *Carmen* by Fritz Oeser (Kassel: Alkor-Edition, 1964), p. 208.

To go back to Auber and his 'updated' *Manon Lescaut*, one could say that we are dealing with a story from the eighteenth century that has been 'nineteenth-centurised' (by way of the plot and the music); on the other hand, *La traviata* presents a nineteenth-century story that has been 'eighteenth-centurised' (by way of the *mise en scène*). Indeed, it is quite surprising to note how during the entire nineteenth century Verdi's opera was staged with seventeenth- and eighteenth-century costumes; according to the original libretto, the action takes place 'around the year 1700'. Even in Paris, where it was revived at the Théâtre Italien in December 1856, *La traviata* was staged with the same type of costume. Taxile Delord's commentary on this production in *Le Charivari* of 8 December illustrates this point well:

> The author transported the coughing and consumption of the *Dame aux Camélias* into the seventeenth century. The heroine is a sort of consumptive Marion Delorme or Ninon de Lenclos. The public was therefore a little surprised to see Miss Piccolomini lend to her role the gestures and looks of Mogador or Pomaré. In the seventeenth century the Bal Mabille and the Closerie des Lilas had not yet been invented, one did not dance the cancan, and courtesans were not yet *lorettes*. There is a chronology even for the camellia. One may do away with it in London [where *La traviata* was performed at Her Majesty's Theatre from 24 May 1856, also with Piccolomini], but one must respect it in the country where camellias bloom, namely Paris.

In Victorian London the subject of Dumas *fils*'s play was considered inherently immoral; indeed, Marietta Piccolomini's performance of *La traviata* gave rise to bitter criticism and heated debates, a reaction that would have been deemed – along with Violetta's seventeenth-century costume – unreasonably conservative in liberal, free-thinking Paris.[66] In Paris, 'das Land wo die Kamelien blühen', the opera was revived and the action transported to the age of Louis XV: this French version by Édouard Duprez, re-baptised the play as *Violetta* and opened at the Théâtre-Lyrique in 1864.[67] This innovation did not go unnoticed: as the Escudier brothers wrote in *L'Art musical* of 3 November 1864, this new context 'a le double avantage, et d'offrir de beaux costumes et de ne pas être en anachronisme avec le drame. *La Dame aux camélias* devient une *Manon Lescaut*' ('has the twin advantages of featuring beautiful costumes while also not being anachronistic with respect to the play. *La Dame aux camélias* becomes a *Manon Lescaut*'). Once again the association with Manon Lescaut explains why *ancien régime* stagings stayed with *La traviata* for the entire duration of the nineteenth century. Even in Mario Mariani's 'popular novel' *La traviata*, published in 1891, the traditional historical background is maintained: 'Violetta Valery, one of the most elegant kept women to brighten the lives of Parisian pleasure-seekers with her beauty in 1700'.[68] After all, we must not forget that the association between Second Empire and *ancien régime* was very widespread in the mid nineteeth century: the fashion for crinolines, for instance, was interpreted by many as a modern (and tasteless) comeback of the seventeenth-century pannier. Absurd as it may sound to us today, crinolines could give out a strong erotic connotation. A lithograph featured in *Le Charivari* of 1 September 1856 – a vignette in a series entitled 'La Crinolonomanie' – shows a man hidden under a huge crinoline. In any case, the first staging of *La traviata* to break out of the chronological inconsistency and feature nineteenth-century costumes was – as far as I know – Albert Carré's for the Opéra-Comique in 1903, created in celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of Verdi's masterwork.[69] As Carré himself wrote, the staging aimed to recreate a setting 'appropriate to the time in which *La Dame aux camélias* was written'.[70] Indeed, also according to Carré, the age of the lady of the camellias was by then 'assez eloignée dans le temps pour avoir conquis son style': far away enough in time to have acquired a style of its own …

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[66] On the reception of *La traviata* in London see Susan Rutherford, '"La traviata" or the "Willing Grisette"', in Fabrizio Della Seta, Roberta Montemorra Marvin and Marco Marica (eds.), *Verdi 2001: Proceedings of the International Conference, Parma, New York, New Haven, 24 January–1 February 2001*, 2 vols. (Florence: Olschki, 2003), vol. II, pp. 585–600, and Heather Wiebe, 'Spectacles of Sin and Suffering: "La traviata" in Victorian London', *Repercussions*, 9/2 (2001), 33–67.

[67] It is significant that in this version 'Alfredo' becomes 'Rodolphe', thus recalling the name of Mimi's lover in Murger's *La Vie de bohème*.

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[68] Mario Mariani, *La traviata: Romanzo popolare* (Milan: Natale Tommasi, 1891), p. 7. The same setting is found in a *racconto popolare* of the same kind: 'In una sera dell'agosto 1700, Violetta Valery aveva invitato a pranzo parecchie sue amiche e alcuni amici' ('on an August evening in 1700, Violetta Valery had invited several female friends and a few male friends to lunch'): Sergio Arcioli, *La traviata: Racconto popolare* (Milan: Angelo Bietti, 1897), p. 9.

[69] According to Budden, the earliest Violetta in a crinoline was Gemma Bellincioni (who began singing Traviata in 1884): see Budden, *The Operas of Verdi*, vol. II, p. 165.

[70] Albert Carré, *Souvenirs de théâtre* (Paris: Plon, 1950; repr. Paris: Éditions d'aujourd'hui, 1976), p. 293.

SYSTEM VARIANTS

I would now like to go back to the reminiscence motif that closes Dumas's play and Verdi's opera. Because such motifs were a constant feature among the literary productions examined above, I must enquire after their different dramaturgical meanings – the variants of the constant. In his influential essay 'Verdi's Use of Recurring Themes', Joseph Kerman considered the reminiscence motifs in *Rigoletto* (the curse) and *La traviata* ('Di quell'amor') to be turning points: 'these recurring themes do more than recall or identify: they provide, in a single musical gesture, a compelling particular focus for the dramatic action'.[71] In other words, the 'recurring themes' take on a generative and narrative function (as we shall soon see) and become symbolic of the entire drama. They are thus beyond the distinction, formulated by Kerman, between 'recalling themes', those of a predominantly mnemonic-syntactic nature, and 'identifying themes', those of a predominantly semantic-referential nature. Yet this distinction, apparent on an abstract level, is much less clear in a concrete analytic context. If an identifying theme, which in principle 'does not serve to recall a previous dramaturgical situation but simply to identify',[72] takes on a special dramaturgical weight, it is obvious that its impact derives not only from scenic momentum but from the increasing charge of the potential for recognition (*agnitio*) typical of recollection themes. So it is, for instance, for the identifying choruses of the Girondins and the Ashasverians that I discussed in Chapter 1, whose effect is found again in the *Battaglia di Legnano* ('Viva Italia!') and *Stiffelio* ('Non punirmi, Signor'). On the topic of the process of dramatisation and symbolic strengthening of identifying choruses, one must also cite the example of 'Ein' feste Burg' in *Les Huguenots* (1836), which certainly became an unavoidable point of reference even for plays with music. Thus, beyond the functions of identification and recall, there are other characteristics that a good musical dramaturgy of reminiscence motifs cannot overlook. First of all, one must ascertain whether, in Bianconi's words, 'such "reminiscences" spring from *dramatis personae* [more or less] aware of their own memory, or from the tragic irony of that "hidden narrator" – the composer – who knows far more than each of his characters'.[73] Put differently, there are focused and unfocused reminiscences, ascribable to the point of view of a character or to the presence of an all-knowing narrator.[74] Secondly, one must establish whether the music forms part of the action or intervenes from outside it – to put it in film-making terms, whether it belongs to the diegetic or extra-diegetic sphere.[75] Of course, such a distinction must not be taken to constitute a clean and rigid binary. Some theorists of audiovision – like Michel Chion and Sergio Miceli – have recently insisted, albeit in different ways, on this point. Chion has emphasised the importance of another distinction, between sound that is visualised and sound that is 'acousmatic', or whose source is not visualised.[76] Acousmatic sound is potentially ambiguous, since it is often the case that, faced with music whose source we do not know, we falter: is it diegetic or extra-diegetic? Miceli introduced, beyond the 'internal level' (diegetic sphere) and the 'external level' (extra-diegetic sphere), a 'mediated level', which is related to 'sonic subjectivisation'.[77]

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[71] Joseph Kerman, 'Verdi's Use of Recurring Themes', in Harold S. Powers (ed.), *Studies in Music History: Essays for Oliver Strunk* (Princeton University Press, 1968), pp. 495–510: here p. 502.

[72] *Ibid.*, p. 499.

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[73] Lorenzo Bianconi, 'Introduzione', in Bianconi (ed.), *La drammaturgia musicale* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1986), pp. 7–49: here p. 38. The addition in square brackets is my own and is necessary since, as Kerman rightly remarks, motifs of reminiscence are often used to delineate characters who are delirious or whose consciousness is somehow distorted.

[74] On the issue of focused reminiscence, see Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* (1972), trans. Jane E. Lewin (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983).

[75] On the opposition between diegetic and non-diegetic music see, among others, Claudia Gorbman, *Unheard Melodies: Narrative Film Music* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), pp. 3–4 and *passim*.

[76] Michel Chion, *L'Audio-vision: Son et image au cinéma* (Paris: Nathan, 1990); trans. and ed. Claudia Gorbman as *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, foreword by Walter Murch (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), pp. 71–85.

[77] Sergio Miceli, *Musica e cinema nella cultura del Novecento* (Milan: Sansoni, 2000), especially pp. 350–63. Besides, Genette himself makes a distinction between

This last category appears to be relevant to my argument. The reminiscence motifs of both *La Dame aux camélias* and *La traviata* function as 'sonic subjectivisation' that leads us to the interiority of Marguerite / Violetta. The need to go beyond the opposition of diegetic and extra-diegetic is also made obvious by the stage music we have examined thus far. Take for instance the 'chansons favorites' of Manon and Marie (the good girl in *Les Filles de marbre*) in their instrumental versions, with no singing and a clear effect of focalisation. The notion of diegetic music – at the internal level and from a visualised source – should not be understood in too rigid a way. There is a difference between the polka played by Gaston in Act 1 of *La Dame aux camélias* on an on-stage piano – the polka during which Marguerite feels unwell – on the one hand, and the *ronde* sung as a drinking song by Gaston later ('Il est un ciel'), whose orchestral accompaniment, not justifiable in purely 'realistic' terms, is nonetheless unequivocally diegetic. In the first case one could speak of stage music as a subset of a broader category of diegetic music. This leads us back to the first definition of diegesis, introduced by Étienne Souriau in 1951. For Souriau, the diegetic is 'Everything that is thought to happen according to the fiction presented by the film; everything that this fiction would imply if we supposed it to be true.'[78] This is a much broader definition, one also embraced by Genette, who in *Palimpsestes* (1982) makes a distinction, more clearly than he had ever done in his *Discours du récit* (see n. 74), between *story* and *diegesis*, which is defined as 'the universe wherein [the] story occurs').[79] The plot is therefore included in the

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three (not two) narrative levels, adding the 'meta-diegetic' level ('the story within the story') to the diegetic and non-diegetic levels: see Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, pp. 228ff. Through Genette's work, the meta-diegetic level has become part of the lexicon of audio-vision theorists, thanks especially to Gorbman, *Unheard Melodies*, pp. 22–3.

[78] Étienne Souriau, 'La Structure de l'univers filmique et le vocabulaire de la filmologie', *Revue internationale de filmologie*, 7–8 (1951), 231–40: here p. 240.

[79] Gérard Genette, *Palimpsestes: La littérature au second dégré* (Paris: Seuil, 1982), trans. Channa Newman and Claude Doubinsky as *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), p. 295.

diegesis (*'l'histoire* is in the diegesis'). Thus in Act I of *La traviata*, the polka with which the story begins is clearly diegetic even though it is not performed as stage music, because it is justified by the action: it is part of the universe in which the stage action unfolds.

If we consider the constant of the 'death with reminiscence motif' within the inter-textual set provided here, we find ourselves confronted with a 'field of possibilities'. Although it is mostly relatable to the interiority of a character (the mediated or meta-diegetic level), the motif can also intervene as a stage song (as in the *Manon* of the Théâtre du Gymnase), to be sung 'sur un mode doux et lent'. The effect is always that of a sequence prolonged in varying degrees by anticlimax and suspension, followed by a swift and peremptory orchestral recapitulation. In *La Dame aux camélias* the recurring motif first appears as a toast song on stage at the internal level. When it reappears at the end, it seems to resurface instead from Marguerite's conscience or subconscious – as an involuntary echo of 'la vie folle qui s'exhale'. If Violetta's last thought is about love, Marguerite's is for the futile world that, despite everything, is still a part of her. It is the same sort of difference that is found in the 'death with reminiscence motif' of the two most famous Manons – those of Massenet and Puccini. The last thought of Massenet's Manon is one of resignation (the thematic reference recalls the song 'Voyons, Manon, plus de chimères'); the last thought of Puccini's Manon goes to the world of 'trine morbide', soft lace curtains. These are two possibilities within the system: one of them more empathic and consolatory, the other ironic and full of despair.

The sonic translation of 'la vie folle qui s'exhale' coincides, in *La traviata*, with 'Addio del passato', which Hepokoski rightly interprets as a French strophic song at the tempo of a slowed-down waltz (despite its being in 6/8) – a death-dance, a desolate echo of the frivolous and light-hearted world of Act I.[80] 'Even at the point of death Violetta remains Violetta. Her life within the opera has been that of surface exhilaration, the swirling of skirts in the turning waltz.'[81] The sketches for *La traviata*, recently published by Fabrizio Della Seta, lend great significance to Hepokoski's statement. 'Addio del passato' is found there as a stage song (without words) with a futile and mundane flavour, notated in an Allegro in 3/8. As I stated in Chapter 2, Della Seta also drew attention to the fact that – and this is a crucial observation for us – 'its rhythm, like that of many melodies in *La traviata*, is that of a Valzer, but the passage in bars 31–4 has a vaguely "Spanish" character' (and is reminiscent of the 'Flamme vengeresse' of Auber's *Domino noir*, mentioned above).[82] Thinking back to Edgecombe's article and to the 'Spanish' traces in the 3/8 toast song of *La traviata*'s first act, I am compelled to agree with Hepokoski: 'Addio del passato' is a slowed-down and distorted echo, but most importantly it is an internalised (and thus focalised) echo of the atmosphere of Parisian parties from which Marguerite and Violetta are inseparable. Up to now, the French overtones of *La traviata* have mostly been explored with respect to the presence of strophic forms in the opera. Basevi remarked on this long ago when he wrote that in *La traviata* 'Verdi entered into a third *style* which in several places comes close to the French genre of *opéra-comique*. [...] [Here] one finds a few arias of the kind that are repeated in the manner of *couplets*'.[83] The presence of strophic forms is certainly important and has been thoroughly analysed by Hepokoski. I hope, however, that my work here has shown how the question of French influence brings far richer implications than have been previously ackowledged.

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[80] James A. Hepokoski, 'Genre and Content in Mid-Century Verdi: "Addio del passato" (*La traviata*, Act III)', *Cambridge Opera Journal*, 13 (1989), 249–76: here p. 262.

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[81] *Ibid.*

[82] See Verdi, *La traviata: Schizzi e abbozzi autografi. Commento critico/Autograph Sketches and Drafts*, ed. Fabrizio Della Seta (Parma: Istituto nazionale di studi verdiani and Comitato nazionale per le celebrazioni verdiane 2001, 2002), p. 157 (for the comment) and Verdi, *La traviata: Schizzi e abbozzi autografi/Autograph Sketches and Drafts* (edn), pp. 184–5 (for the transcription).

[83] Abramo Basevi, *Studio sulle opere di Giuseppe Verdi* (1859), ed. Ugo Piovano (Milan: Rugginenti, 2001), p. 290.

Within this framework, Verdi's choice to seal the death of Violetta with a return of the love-related motif (instead of the motif related to worldly life) appears less moralistic and far from merely sentimental. Either way, it is interesting that Piero Rattalino, in his novel-essay devoted to *La traviata*, expressed a certain unease, via his character Luigi Rubio, about the last reminiscence motif of the opera and its function as the introduction of 'an ending at the service of the moral'.[84] According to Professor Rubio, 'the ailing Violetta should hear "Sempre libera", not "Di quell'amor"'.[85] The curious thing is that this 'feminist' finale is somewhat foreshadowed by the sequence of polkas on themes from *La traviata* by Perny, which was mentioned in Chapter 2. In it, a principal theme modelled on 'Sempre libera' and rendered 'polka-like' in the way I have shown (see Example 2.3 above) is contrasted with an opposing theme modelled on 'Un dì, quando le veneri', also made polka-like in this way (see Example 3.11).

The two themes follow one another closely (a third theme intervenes later), creating an arm-wrestling effect that concludes with the victory of 'Sempre libera' – the victory of Violetta on Germont *père*. A happy ending that may seem rather unlikely to us today, but was made possible in a choreographic context, as is shown by the ballet *Rita Gauthier* by Filippo Termanini (1856), which indeed ended with the wedding of Alfredo and Rita (Margherita). The ending clearly recalls that of another successful ballet, Giovanni Casati's *Manon Lescaut* (1846), which also concluded with the wedding of Des Grieux and Manon: a further proof of the close relationship between the two subjects.[86]

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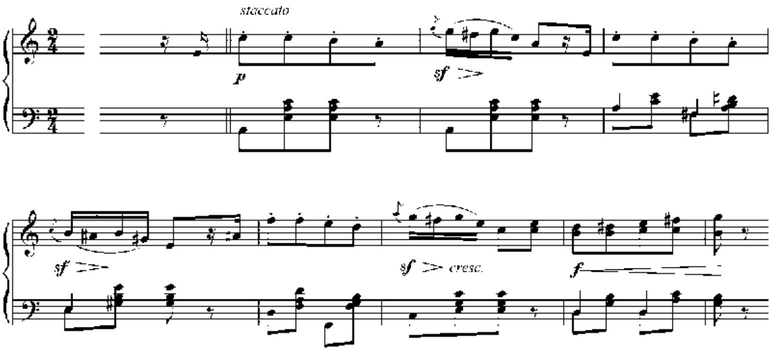
[84] Piero Rattalino, *Memoriale di 'Pura siccome': La storia di Violetta la traviata raccontata dalla sorella nubile di Alfredo* (Varese: Zecchini, 2000), p. 116.

[85] *Ibid.*, p. 135.

[86] Another opera of that period to feature a double finale is Michael William Balfe's *The Maid of Artois*, written for Malibran; Balfe's opera (1836) is the earliest operatic adaptation of the story of *Manon Lescaut*, and was initially meant to conclude with a happy ending in which Isoline (as the character of Manon was here re-baptised) is saved at the last minute; this ending was later cut and replaced by the death of the protagonist. On this question and on Isoline's final waltz in 3/8, see William Tyldesley, *Michael William Balfe: His Life and his English Operas* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), pp. 61–9.



Example 3.11 Perny's 'Un dì, quando le veneri' arranged as a polka

Another system variant worth dwelling on is the musical death, previously mentioned, of the lady of the camellias. At the moment of passing, both Marguerite and Violetta hear music: reminiscences of the sort which 'function as the evocation of a preceding scene on behalf of the character, unfold through her perspective and are filtered by her memory'.[87] The lady of the camellias extinguishes herself to the sound of this memory-music, and we *listen* to the sound of her extinction. There is, however, a remarkable difference between what happens in Dumas's play and what happens in Verdi's opera. In the former, Marguerite dies without any of the on-stage characters noticing; Gaston thinks she has fallen asleep, and only later does Armand realise what has happened, crying, 'Marguerite! Marguerite! Marguerite!' In the latter, the reminiscence motif turns instead into a progression that culminates, via a crescendo, into a *fortissimo* B♭″ (on a dominant ninth chord) on which Violetta collapses and dies a dramatic death by falling on the couch under everyone's dismayed gaze.[88] According to Arthur Groos, the solution adopted by Dumas 'appears to be the source for the death of

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[87] Luca Zoppelli, *L'opera come racconto: Modi narrativi nel teatro musicale dell'Ottocento* (Venice: Marsilio, 1994), p. 115.

[88] The voice sings the ninth of the dominant ninth chord; the same thing occurs, more or less identically, in the last 'addio' of 'Amami, Alfredo'.

Puccini's Mimì'.[89] However, as we have seen, the same situation had featured, in some ways, as early as the 1849 *Vie de bohème*. Whether the other characters on stage take notice early or late, whether the memory-music is sung or instrumental, diegetic, extra-diegetic or on a mediated level, all these variants have to be considered within the same constant, which is omnipresent in our system: the 'sweet death with reminiscence motif'. This is how almost all the ladies of the camellias I have examined pass away, including Leoncavallo's Mimì.

VIOLETTA'S BODY AND HER 'MUSICAL GESTURES'

In Debussy's opera *Pelléas et Mélisande*, although Mélisande no longer belongs to the same system of representation, and indeed constitutes a near antithesis of it, she too can be understood to be a case of 'sweet death'. Debussy himself spoke to this when he wrote to Henri Lerolle that his heroine leaves this world 'discreetly', unnoticed by any of the characters on stage.[90] It is therefore not a coincidence that Debussy made an association, albeit a negative one, between the death of Mélisande and that of Marguerite ('In France, every time a woman dies on stage, it has to be like *La Dame aux camélias*'),[91] thus betraying an unconscious connection between Mélisande and her anti-model. Could Pelléas's mysterious lover be a disembodied, symbolist niece of the melodramatic lady of the camellias, rather than her mere negation? We are touching upon a topic that stands at the core of Mary Ann Smart's interesting book on the relationship between music and gesture in nineteenth-century opera. In her work, Smart highlights a shift during the course of the century between two dramatic conceptions: on the one hand, the binding of music and gesture together through expressive synchrony and an emphatic use of 'miming music' (a practice largely derived from the French

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[89] Groos, '"TB Sheets"', p. 239, n. 26.

[90] Claude Debussy, *Correspondance (1872–1918)*, ed. François Lesure and Denis Herlin (Paris: Gallimard, 2005), p. 268 (letter of 17 August 1895).

[91] *Ibid.*

mélodrame); on the other hand, an approach in which 'the operatic body became more idea or aura than physical sequence of gestures'.[92] This latter conception, which would become the dominant one after Wagner, tends to consider any form of 'miming music' and close synchronisation between music and on-stage action a musical tautology, and thus an aesthetic mistake. However, the fact remains that melodramatic mimetism was far from extinct in Wagner and maybe even Debussy. Indeed, there is no opposite principle to synchronisation: a-synchronization is a musical effect that nonetheless implies a missing synchronisation between word (or the gesture, situation or environment) and music. For example, while setting Verlaine's famous 'Clair de lune' to music (op. 46 no. 2) Gabriel Fauré, a great opposer (like Debussy) of the tautology of mimetic emphasis, still allowed musical discourse to slip into the major mode in exact correspondence with the words 'tout en chantant sur le mode mineur'. However, his anti-mimetic option is at least in part refuted or compensated for by the fact that the piece's tempo and time signature are those of a *galant* minuet, a genre perfectly in keeping with the general content of the text and used as the subtitle of the *mélodie*. The typical twentieth-century aesthetic choice in favour of a-synchrony and 'counterpoint' cannot erase the principle according to which, if music has any meaning, it is as a product of the relationship entertained with a text (to be understood in broad terms, not just as a verbal text). After all, any musical dramaturgy is founded on this very principle. Another example: everyone is familiar with the orchestral void that 'accompanies' the avowals by the two lovers in Act 4 of Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande*. Debussy justified it as follows (in his famous letter to Ernest Chausson of 2 October 1893): 'I made use, in a thoroughly spontaneous way, of a means that seems to me to be quite rare, namely silence (do not laugh!).'[93] We could speak here of an anti-melodramatic option, a rejection of the convention according to which intense emotion must be accompanied by a *fortissimo* dynamic. 'Silence' here brings Debussy's 'discretion' to its extreme consequences. 'Discretion' does not mean indifference: the silence, while seemingly detached from the situation, is still an expressive means: there exist, in short, different levels of synchronisation.

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[92] Mary Ann Smart, *Mimomania. Music and Gesture in Nineteenth-Century Opera* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2004), p. 5.

[93] Debussy, *Correspondance*, p. 160.

Going back to the (possible) parallel between Violetta and Mélisande, Smart's remarks on the scarce 'bodily resonance' of Verdi's character are especially interesting. Violetta's body finds musical representation only in relation to her disease; it almost never figures as the sexual object that it undoubtedly is. In contrast to what takes place in Dumas *fils*'s play (where Marguerite dances the polka in front of our very eyes), in *La traviata* we never see 'Violetta waltzing (not even in the opening party scene or the Act II finale); the desperate waltz "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'.[94] To support her intuition, Smart cites the 'straightforwardly representational entrance music' that accompanies Germont, the curt, four-bar dotted-rhythm motif that precedes the menacing address 'Madamigella Valery?' Smart underlines the great mimetic force of this 'musical caption' and adds that 'significantly, Violetta herself is never presented in such a forthright way'.[95] Music immediately tells us (or rather shows us) that Germont's presence is a physical, authoritarian one. Violetta's body seems far less musically characterised: '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.'[96] But Violetta makes three entrances in Act 2. The first one, in the country house, occurs after the cabaletta ('Oh mio rimorso!') and Alfredo's exit and is accompanied by a harmonic oscillation of accented but fluctuating sevenths that create a sense of increasing disquiet. (The same accompaniment formula will be repeated after the fateful 'È strano!' and is clearly contrasted with the dotted motif that will mark Germont's authoritarian entrance a few moments later.)[97] The second one, at Flora's house at the beginning of the gambling scene, is indeed not musically characterised: Violetta comes in arm-in-arm with the baron 'facendo finta di niente', feigning indifference. The third entrance, however, occurs after everyone has gone to dinner, and Violetta's entrance on stage is punctuated by an agitated, hyper-mimetic music that, after a spasmodic series of semiquavers, culminates in a very emphatic diminished seventh chord ('Invitato a qui seguirmi'). Violetta's body is here shot through with a plurality of signs (sickness, wordliness, sex, love, etc.), some of them hyperbolic (see the pantomimic rushed exit after the heart-rending 'Amami, Alfredo') and all of them contributing to make her into a 'melodramatic body'.[98] The fact that in the opera the lady of the camellias does not dance either the waltz or the polka is certainly relevant, but is far from being a token of pre-Debussian disembodiment, and should not be interpreted as such. If in the opera Violetta does not dance the waltz, it is for two reasons, one practical, one dramaturgical. On the one hand, we have the practical avoidance of adding choreographic challenges to a role that was already vocally demanding; on the other, the dramaturgical decision to bind the body of the *lorette* to the dazzling social life of which it is a function. As I have stressed in Chapter 2, the entirety of the first party at Violetta's house unfolds to the sound of polkas and waltzes. I might now add that this sonic background originates and emanates from Violetta's very body, which has become one with the space that surrounds her: it is as though the music, which is the agent of this osmosis, became in turn somatised.

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[94] Smart, *Mimomania*, p. 7.

[95] *Ibid.*, pp. 6–7.

[96] *Ibid.*, p. 7.

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[97] See n. 52 above.

[98] Peter Brooks, 'Il corpo melodrammatico', in Bruno Gallo (ed.), *Forme del melodrammatico: Parole e musica (1700–1800). Contributi per la storia di un genere* (Milan: Guerini e associati, 1988), pp. 177–95.

Coda

The good God is in the detail.[1]
The Devil is in the detail.[2]
Music succeeds admirably in saying two things at once: this is a quality of this art that is resented by critics and scarcely exploited by composers.[3]

'OOM, OOM-PAH-PAH-OOM'

I have almost reached the conclusion of this study, and yet, as Count Almaviva would say, 'Il meglio mi scordavo' ('I forgot the best'). Here is a genetic variant, taken from the sketches of *La traviata* edited by Fabrizio Della Seta that I have been referencing throughout the book. In the earliest sketch of the *preludio*, the melody anticipated as a main theme was not 'Amami, Alfredo' but 'Di quell'amor', accompanied by a tremolo.[4] As Della Seta points out, the later change is probably due to Verdi's desire to hold back the presentation of a melody

> which would be widely exploited later on, and on the other hand to make the most of one that is no less memorable, but which would be heard for only a few bars. Both themes express the passionate love that lies at the centre of the plot; but while 'Di quell'amor ch'è palpito' is associated with Alfredo, directly or by way of reminiscence, 'Amami, Alfredo' belongs exclusively to Violetta; therefore the definitive *preludio* is more explicitly a portrait of the heroine in her three aspects, here presented in

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[1] Favourite motto of Aby Warburg.

[2] German saying; see *Deutsches Universalwörterbuch* (Mannheim: Duden, 1996), pp. 1528–9: here p. 1528, s.v. 'Teufel'.

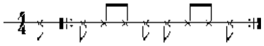
[3] Verdi, letter to Antonio Ghislanzoni, Wednesday, 9 November 1870, in *I copialettere di Giuseppe Verdi*, ed. Gaetano Cesari and Alessandro Luzio (Milan: Stucchi Ceretti, 1913; repr. Bologna: Forni, 1968), pp. 667–8.

[4] Verdi, *La traviata: Schizzi e abbozzi autografi/Autograph Sketches and Drafts*, ed. Fabrizio Della Seta (Parma: Istituto nazionale di studi verdiani and Comitato nazionale per le celebrazioni verdiane 2001, 2002), pp. 110–11.

> the reverse of the order to that in which they appear in the opera: the martyr, the passionate lover and the courtesan.[5]

This last observation recalls an interesting insight by Roger Parker, who emphasises how *Traviata*'s *preludio* consists of

> A curious narrative experiment: it paints a three-stage portrait of the heroine, but in reverse chronological order. First comes a musical rendering of her final decline in Act 3, with high, chromatic strings dissolving into 'sobbing' appoggiaturas; then a direct statement of love, the melody that will in Act 2 become 'Amami, Alfredo'; and finally this same melody repeated on the lower strings, surrounded by the delicate ornamentations associated with Violetta in Act 1.[6]

Weaving Parker's and Della Seta's statements together, one could also add that the replacement of 'Di quell'amor' by 'Amami, Alfredo' became necessary not only in order to keep the focus on Violetta's character by excluding a melody that referred primarily to Alfredo, but also to achieve the effect of the reverse movement that characterises the *preludio* as a whole. Important as this interpretive framework is, the lack of differentiation between the second and third sections of the portrait constitutes a problem that can hardly be overlooked. The 'love declaration' that corresponds to the second section of the *preludio* is very far from the dejected, passionate character of its vocal and verbal incarnation in Act 2. If in the third section the love theme seems to be contradicted 'from above' by the frivolous embellishments that recall the Violetta of Act 1, in the first section it is similarly wrong-footed 'from below' by an accompaniment figuration of a light-hearted character . This rhythmic pattern seems to combine aspects of both the waltz and the polka (for instance the many polkas – including the one shown in

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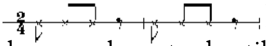
[5] Verdi, *La traviata: Schizzi e abbozzi autografi. Commento critico/Autograph Sketches and Drafts*, ed. Fabrizio Della Seta (Parma: Istituto nazionale di studi verdiani and Comitato nazionale per le celebrazioni verdiane 2001, 2002), p. 107.

[6] Roger Parker, '*La traviata*', in Stanley Sadie (ed.), *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, 4 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1992), vol. IV, pp. 799–802: here p. 800.

Example 3.1 – accompanied by this rhythm: ). In the novel-essay by Rattalino mentioned above, a character hostile to Verdi's opera makes fun of the *preludio* to Act 1, with the '*oom-pah-pah-oom, oom-pah-pah-oom* that accompanies the saccharine theme of "Amami, Alfredo" and the *tra-la la, tra-la la, tra-la la* of the violins when the theme goes to the cellos'.[7] Indeed, it seems obvious that both the 'oom-pah-pah-oom, oom-pah-pah-oom' and the 'tra-la la, tra-la la, tra-la la' mask the love theme with a layer of wordly, dance-driven make-up. The theme and its unlikely accompaniment serve to create an oxymoronic expressive backbone closely linked with Violetta's 'doubleness': besides being a sick woman (in the first section of the *preludio*), the lady of the camellias is a woman with a sensitive soul, potentially capable of true love, and at the same time a *lorette* who whirls 'di gioia in gioia' (second and third sections). If all of this is true, the *preludio* of *La traviata* should be interpreted more as a preparatory piece of music than some kind of cinematic flashback.[8]

To return once again to the 'oom-pah-pah-oom, oom-pah-pah-oom', it should be noted that this accompaniment figuration had already made a brief appearance in a crucial section of *Rigoletto*, which I mentioned in Chapter 1 (see Example 1.13): the duet, or rather the *tête-à-tête* between a buffoon and a murderer, between Rigoletto and Sparafucile. The mysterious and 'grotesque' French character of this passage – to which I will not return here – is further explained by a few observations on the accompanimental figurations. A disquieting legato melody, dangerously oscillating between F major and F minor, is contradicted by an incongruously light-hearted, almost comical figuration of a light, repeated-note staccato.[9] The result is once again a double utterance, a case of music 'saying two things at once': on the one hand we have the tension carried by the dotted-note, legato melody (corresponding to the 'oom, oom'); on the other, the frivolity of the dance-like repeated-note accompaniment that follows it (the 'pah-pah'). The meaning of this dramatic-musical construction is apparent: the night-time meeting of the two cloaked figures takes place in a mysterious, threatening psychological climate, yet this atomosphere is also cynical and full of mockery: Sparafucile insinuates and Rigoletto is diffident. It is, in one word, grotesque (in the manner of Robert Macaire and Victor Hugo). Naturally, not all occurrences of this rhythmic model share the same dramaturgical charge, and the connotation of lightness, derived from the accompaniment figuration of waltz, polka and similar dances, is sometimes lost. The 'oom-pah-pah-oom, oom-pah-pah-oom' then becomes a sparkly, bouncier version of a standard accompanimental foil adaptable to any melody.[10] This seems to be the case with the *introduzione* of *Il trovatore*, where this figuration serves to underline the chorus's request to Ferrando: 'Dalle gravi | palpébre il sonno a discacciar, la vera | storia ci narra di Garzía' ('In order to banish sleep from our heavy eyelids tell us the true story of Garzía'). The presence of this rhythmic formula in *Il trovatore* already speaks eloquently to its persistent presence in the Verdian sound-world of those years, and a trace of the frivolous dancing character can perhaps be glimpsed in the fact that it is used as a sonic stimulant by the guard-house, in order to banish sleep 'dalle gravi palpébre'.

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[7] Piero Rattalino, *Memoriale di 'Pura siccome': La storia di Violetta la traviata raccontata dalla sorella nubile di Alfredo* (Varese: Zecchini, 2000), p. 118.

[8] Paolo Gallarati appears to have come to a conclusion very similar to my own on the matter, albeit via different pathways and arguments. See his article 'Il preludio della *Traviata*', in Francesco Cotticelli, Roberto Puggioni and Laura Sannia Nowé (eds.), *Sentir e meditar: Omaggio a Elena Sala di Felice* (Rome: Aracne, 2005), pp. 285–93. As for the *preludio* as an introductory flashback, one must also consider the influential role played by Franco Zeffirelli's film *La traviata* (1983). It should be noted, however, that this idea was already present in Zeffirelli's work on *Traviata* as a theatre director, starting with his first staging of *La traviata* in Dallas in 1958, with Maria Callas.

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[9] From a phraseological point of view, this is a perfect miniature AA′BA″ lyric form: four bars in F major with hints of F minor (A), four bars in F major (A′), four bars in F minor (B), four bars in F major with hints of F minor (A″).

[10] In that case, one should ascribe a fundamental semantic neutrality to such a standard base. In other words, the accompaniment figuration *oom, oom-pah-pah* can be used with or without a semantic connotation. On the 'contextual meaning' (and thus a meaning that is never 'absolute') of this as well as many other musical emblems, see Marco Beghelli, *La retorica del rituale nel melodramma ottocentesco* (Parma: Istituto nazionale di studi verdiani, 2003), pp. 87–8.

One further observation on the initial issue of the genetic variant of the love theme in *La traviata*: by replacing 'Di quell'amor' with 'Amami, Alfredo', Verdi has introduced a new internal reference without affecting the 'main theme' role of the motif that will become symbolic of the whole opera. Besides the many occurrences of the love theme[11] and the filigree of Paris-inflected rhythms woven across the *pezzi chiusi*, there are many motifs that, although they recur only once, are no less important: the 'mal sottile' instrumental solo that opens the opera and returns at the beginning of Act 3;[12] indeed, the 'Amami, Alfredo' motif, which is anticipated in the *preludio* and explodes in the famous climactic scene; and the waltz of Act 1 that returns, deformed and yet recognisable, in the gambling scene at Flora's house.[13] To these examples I would like to add a further one that has not – to my knowledge – been taken into consideration by Verdi scholarship, despite its crucial function in defining and relating two important stages of Violetta's 'way of the cross'. I am referring to a passage from the duet between Violetta and Germont. The tormentor says to his victim: 'È grave il sacrifizio,

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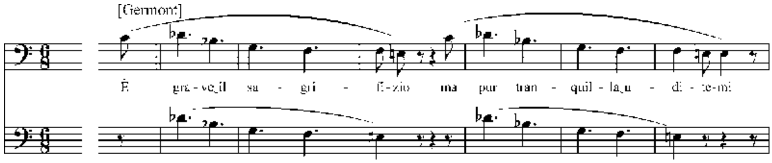
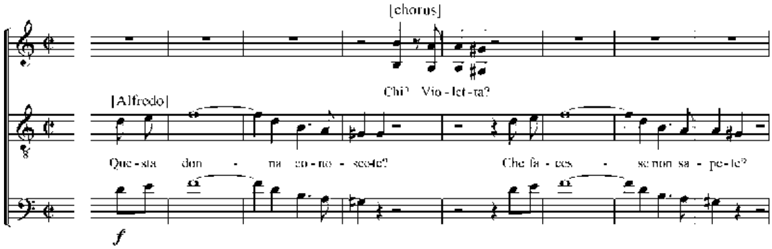
[11] To the five explicit occurrences – (1) in the duettino in the *introduzione*, (2) in the cantabile, (3) in the cabaletta of Violetta's 'scena ed aria', (4) at the reading of the letter and (5) during the 'hope of the consumptive' (*spes phthisica*) – a sixth one should be added, whose occurrence is implied and hidden. The opening of 'Di quell'amor', albeit with a minor-mode accompaniment, makes a brief appearance – with a terrible effect of disillusionment – in 'Così alla misera', in the duet with Germont in Act 2; I thank Giorgio Pestelli for this precious insight.

[12] Arrigo Boito in a famous letter to Bellaigue of 20 December 1910, reproduced in Alessandro Luzio (ed.), *Carteggi verdiani*, 4 vols. (Rome: Reale Accademia d'Italia/Accademia nazionale dei Lincei, 1935–47), vol. IV (1947), p. 255: 'I applaud the use of the word *sottile* [subtle, slight] when applied to the prelude of the last act of *Traviata*. […] We speak of someone who dies of consumption as someone who dies of *mal sottile* [subtle disease]. That prelude speaks to this in sounds'.

[13] See Fabrizio Della Seta, 'Il tempo della festa: Su due scene della "Traviata" e su altri luoghi verdiani', *Studi verdiani*, 2 (1983), 108–46: here pp. 135–6.


[Germont]
È gra - ve_il sa - gri - fi - zio ma pur tran - quil - la_u - di - te-mi

Example 4.1 Verdi, *La traviata*, Act 2, 'È grave il sagrifizio'


[chorus]
Chi? Vio - let - ta?
[Alfredo]
Que - sta don - na co - no - sce - te?
Che fa - ces - se non sa - pe - te?
f

Example 4.2 Verdi, *La traviata*, Act 2, 'Questa donna conoscete'

| ma pur tranquilla uditemi' ('It is a great sacrifice, but please hear me out calmly'); the music (Example 4.1) sculpts his words by repeating a descending motif that outlines the 'melodramatic' chord *par excellence* – the diminished seventh chord.

The very same motif comes out of Alfredo's mouth in the scene that leads up to the supreme insult: 'Questa donna conoscete [...] che facesse non sapete?' The fact that Alfredo's words sound so grimly similar to his father's is of course highly significant (like father, like son), especially as the descending motif is, again, stated twice and culminates in a dissonant appoggiatura (A against G♯) that closely resembles the point of arrival of Germont *père*'s cruel and hypocritical warning, F against E (see Example 4.2).

MUSICOLOGY AND ETHNOMUSICOLOGY

The dramaturgic and analytic relevance of these references across wide spans of operatic time is greater than the attention we normally devote to them. Indeed, music scholarship is still influenced by the morphologic-structural approach that relegates these fortuitous correspondences to the subjective sphere and the superficial level of musical discourse, far from its form and deep structural foundation. But in terms of the production of meaning (and therefore in terms of musical dramaturgy), small particulars – whether divine or diabolical (see the opening epigraphs to this Coda) – are often worth far more than macro-structures. Every reference made across a structural divide can be seen as a way of creating a thematic, or rather semantic, level for the flux of music. Even though there are only two instances of such a reference throughout the opera, these echoes prove fundamental at the oral-performative level (that associated with listening rather than with the analysis of a written text) by connecting distant parts of the text and by offering opportunities for recognition (*agnitio*) and interpretation. I wish to acknowledge, at least in this Coda, the indebtedness of this line of research to ethnomusicology, which is understood here as a methodology rather than an object of study: let us not forget, to use the words of Roberto Leydi, that 'even written traditions have their own oral traditions'.[14] It may be added that if we accept Alan P. Merriam's famous definition of ethnomusicology ('the study of music in culture'), then this book, resulting as it does from 'field-work', is also a study of historical ethnomusicology.[15] I thus do not share the scepticism of Joseph Kerman, according to whom 'musicologists need to maintain a sharply sceptical attitude […] to the message they are receiving about the virtues of trying to adopt ethnomusicological methods to their own work'.[16] The relationship between musicology and ethnomusicology is neither straightforward nor to be taken for granted (it is neither in this book), but the music historian invested in a cultural perspective should at least be open to cultivating it. After all, the goals of oral (or aural) history and ethnomusicology are not so different. By attempting to reconstruct the sonic context of *La traviata*, have I not responded to Steven Feld's exhortation 'to imagine auditory culture(s) as historical formations of distinct sensibilities'?[17] Is this kind of research not founded on an implicit agreement with John Blacking's statement that 'Western music must also be treated as strange and exotic'?[18]

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[14] Roberto Leydi, *L'altra musica: Etnomusicologia. Come abbiamo incontrato e creduto di conoscere le musiche della tradizioni popolari ed etniche* (Milan: Ricordi and Lucca: LIM, 2008), p. 187.

[15] Alan P. Merriam, *The Anthropology of Music* (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 1964), p. 6.

[16] Joseph Kerman, *Musicology* (London: Fontana, 1985), p. 175.

To go back to the issue of internal references, the *ronde* by Montaubry that I examined in Chapter 3 occurs only twice throughout Dumas's *pièce mêlée de chant*.[19] As I have tried to show, the practice of internal musical repetitions was very widespread among the various genres of musical theatre found in the Parisian boulevards of the 1840s and 1850s. A greater familiarity with this practice can, therefore, help us to understand how Verdi's musical dramaturgy fell under the spell of the *mélodrame* (Gilles de Van) and tried to translate into operatic terms some of the techniques of modern spoken drama (Fabrizio Della Seta).[20] This effort had already been made by Donizetti, for instance in *Linda di Chamounix* (1842), whose subject had been taken from a *mélodrame-vaudeville* (that is, a *mélo mêlé de chants*) of 1841, *La Grâce ou La nouvelle Fanchon* by Adolphe Dennery and Gustave Lemoine. This play contained, like the *Manon Lescaut* of 1851, a 'chanson favorite' composed by Loïsa Puget, which played a dramaturgically active role and evidently impressed

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[17] S. Feld, 'A Rainforest Acoustemology', in Michael Bull and Les Beck (eds.), *The Auditory Culture Reader* (Oxford: Berg, 2003), pp. 223–39: here p. 223.

[18] John Blacking, 'The Ethnography of Musical Performance' (summaries of the papers presented), in Daniel Heartz and Bonnie Wade (eds.), *International Musicological Society: Report of the Twelfth Congress, Berkeley 1977* (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1981), pp. 383–5: here p. 384.

[19] It may even be the case that the *ronde* (see Chapter 3) used to be performed in an instrumental version as an entr'acte between Acts 2 and 3.

[20] See Gilles de Van, *Verdi's Theater: Creating Drama through Music* (1992), trans. Gilda Roberts (Chicago University Press, 1998), and Fabrizio Della Seta, *Italia e Francia nell'Ottocento* (Turin: EDT, 1993).

Donizetti when he went to see *La Grâce de Dieu* in Paris.[21] The subject of the play belies another theme-myth (which I have discussed elsewhere) that had already fastened itself upon the collective imaginary by the early nineteenth century.[22] *La Grâce de Dieu* is indeed a re-elaboration of – among others – Jean-Nicholas Bouilly and Joseph Pain's *comédie-vaudeville* entitled *Fanchon la vielleuse*, premiered in 1803 with only partly original music by Joseph-Denis Doche. The events in the scabrous life of the young Savoyard *vielleuse*, whose virtue is corrupted or at least forcefully pursued in the crowded desert of the metropolis, are in a way a premise to those of the lady of the camellias. When the curtain opens on the elegant Parisian sitting-room where Act 2 of *Linda* takes place, one cannot help but think that the young Savoyard, dishonoured, has now become a *fille entretenue*. It is truly remarkable that the source of the myth of Fanchon, the pretty Savoyard girl who plays the hurdy-gurdy, was a real person – one Françoise Chemin, who lived in Paris in the second half of the eighteenth century and whose conduct was actually far less irreprehensible than the popular theatrical tradition would have us believe.[23] In one of the operatic versions of *Fanchon la vielleuse*, namely *Cecchina sonatrice di ghironda* (1810) by Gaetano Rossi (with music by Pietro Generali), the pretty Savoyard girl receives an unexpected visit from the Duke of Rosmond, who is worried about the latest developments of his nephew's regrettable liaison with the attractive *vielleuse* (who is unaware of the young man's true identity). As I have written in my conference paper 'La "vielleuse" e il savoiardo: Tradizione e drammaturgia' (see n. 21), the Duke of Rosmond comes on stage like a sort of *ante-litteram* Germont *père*:[24]

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[21] On this question, see Emilio Sala, 'La "Vielleuse" e il savoiardo: Tradizione e drammaturgia', in *Donizetti, Parigi e Vienna: Atti del convegno internazionale (Rome, 19–20 March 1998)* (Rome: Accademia dei Lincei, 2000), pp. 47–77.

[22] Besides the article cited in n. 21 above, see also Emilio Sala, 'Romantisme populaire et musique: Autour d'une chanson savoyarde', in André Guyaux and Sophie Marchal (eds.), *La Vie romantique: Hommage à Loïc Chotard* (Paris: Presses de l'Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 2003), pp. 437–54.

[23] See Victor Fournel, *Les Cris de Paris: Types et physionomies d'autrefois* (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1887; repr. Paris: Les Éditions de Paris, 2003), pp. 204–8.

> DUKE (*with pride*): And a hurdy-gurdy player dares to aspire to public esteem in this way!
>
> CECCHINA (*with dignified force*): The Duke has forgotten that he is in my house![25]

'Quai modi!' the Duke must surely have muttered, like Germont, before continuing with the unpleasant *tête-à-tête* …

Yet I do not wish to lead towards another thematic reference here. The previous chapter, on the relationships between *La Dame aux camélias*, *La Vie de bohème* and *Manon Lescaut*, will suffice to that purpose. Instead, the suggestion of a new theme allows me to reiterate, in conclusion, a principle that I have never abandoned throughout my research and which concerns the relational and contextual, rather than immanent, nature of signification. Here one could draw upon Jonathan Culler's Derridian formula ('Meaning is context-bound, but context is boundless').[26] However, this principle by no means implies, at least for me, a distance from the text (which can be broadened in various degrees, as we have seen in the Prelude), or from its intrinsic values, its specificity and its openness to analysis. I confess to a certain disappointment, or even irritation, with those cultural studies on music in which the subject matter is only that which surrounds the text. Yet a purely formal analysis of works treated as monads outside any relational network leaves me rather indifferent. The way I have searched within (and not just around) *La traviata* for the 'system' of relations on which its historical meaning largely depends has led me instead to follow a double movement of 'contextualization of the text' and 'textualization of the context'. One must also not forget the importance of examining, wherever possible, the oral-performative dimension, the only one that allows the move from the text to the musical event proper. Meanwhile history unfolds, life unfolds, research unfolds, music unfolds, and ‘des Lebens süβer, trivialer Dreitakt’ continues (even though our times are very different from Thomas Mann’s),[27] regardless of the fact that this book – at least – is over.

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[24] See Sala, 'La "Vielleuse" e il savoiardo', p. 75, n. 51.

[25] Gaetano Rossi, *Cecchina suonatrice di ghironda* (Venice: Rizzi, 1810), p. 18 (scene 9 of a one-act play).

[26] Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1982), p. 123.

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[27] See Thomas Mann, *Tonio Kröger* (1903), in *Die Erzählungen*, 2 vols. (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1975), vol. 1, pp. 205–56: here p. 254; in *Death in Venice and Other Tales*, trans. Joachim Negroschel (New York: Viking Press, 1998), pp. 161–228.

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