

The Exotic in Nineteenth-Century French Opera, Part 1: Locales and Peoples

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EXPLORING AN EXTENSIVE REPERTOIRE: WHICH WORKS?

When we hear references to “the exotic” in nineteenth-century French opera, we probably think of a small number of works, all largely or entirely serious and all from the second half of

the century: Meyerbeer’s *L’Africaine*, Bizet’s *Les Pêcheurs de perles*, Saint-Saëns’s *Samson et Dalila*, Delibes’s *Lakmé*, Massenet’s *Thaïs*, and—most widely known of them all today—Bizet’s *Carmen*. Such works explore and exploit, in imaginative ways, long-accepted and often-stereotypical images of peoples that Europeans (and, more generally, Westerners) thought of

The present article (in two parts) is based on principles that I developed and explored in two books: *Musical Exoticism: Images and Reflections* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009) and *Music and the Exotic from the Renaissance to Mozart* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015). It offers my first extensive and systematic attempt at exploring the works of a single relatively coherent “national” operatic tradition. I here apply principles and methods laid out in those two books (e.g., Table 3.1 in *Musical Exoticism*). A condensed version of the article forms the core of two chapters that I wrote (numbered 17.3 and 17.4) in *Histoire de l’opéra français*, ed. Hervé Lacombe, 3 vols. (Paris: Fayard, 2020–), II, 949–63. The chapters were skillfully translated by Dennis Collins. They are there entitled: “Les Territoires de l’exotisme” and “Les Formes de l’exotisme: intrigues, personnages, styles musicaux.” My original text appears here—revised and expanded—with permission of Fayard. My third chapter in

Lacombe’s book (17.5: “Exotisme et Colonialisme,” II, 963–68) largely derives from chapter 8 of my *Musical Exoticism* (especially pp. 175–202) and is therefore not incorporated into the present article. In 2021 Lacombe’s volume 2 was honored with two prizes: the Prix René Dumesnil (by the Académie des Beaux-Arts) and the Grand Prix France Musique-Claude Samuel (by the French radio system).

A number of scholars generously commented upon the text in draft or offered other helpful advice, including Jonathan Bellman, Jacek Blaszkiewicz, Peter Bloom, Gunther Braam, Carlo Caballero, Diana Hallman, Karen Henson, Nizam Kettaneh, the late Katherine Kolb, Hervé Lacombe, Hugh Macdonald, James Parakilas, Julian Rushton, Tommaso Sabbatini, Richard Sherr, Helena Kopchick Spencer, and Jürgen Thym.

as being Them: an Other, different from Us by essence.

Those operas, though, are a small sample and not necessarily representative. Exotic settings—and, more generally, exoticist attitudes about Other peoples—were manifest in hundreds of nineteenth-century French operatic works.¹ The works range from four- and five-act *grands opéras*—entirely sung, and relying on recitative or arioso interchanges to set up the next main musical number—to daffily comic works that require modest (though often extremely adept) performing forces and that feature extended spoken scenes between the numbers. A typical instance of the exotic in *grand opéra* is Eboli's flamenco-style "Veil Song" in Verdi's *Don Carlos* (1867), act II; the song recounts a secretive love tryst in the Alhambra palace in Granada and involves a Moorish (that is, Arab) king named Ahmet and a veiled woman. (This story-song also prefigures a crucial event later in the opera, involving Eboli herself.) A typical instance of exoticism in a light, comical work—with much spoken dialogue—is Offenbach's *Ba-Ta-Clan* (1855). This slippery one-acter is set in a disconcertingly unreal version of China

filled with conspirators who turn out to be not Chinese but French.

Many French operas were performed frequently at the time yet eventually fell out of the repertory. One or another, like *Ba-Ta-Clan*, may be revived occasionally, under special circumstances.² The present article seeks to redress the balance a bit by discussing not just the better-known "exotic" operas (including those mentioned above) but also such gratifying works as Bizet's *Djamileh*, Saint-Saëns's *La Princesse jaune*, Massenet's *Le Roi de Lahore*, and Chabrier's *L'Étoile*, plus meritorious instances by other skillful composers, including Luigi Cherubini, D. F. E. Auber, Adolphe Adam, Félicien David, Ambroise Thomas, and André Messager. Some of these works were widely loved in France and elsewhere but are now little known because their extensive use of spoken dialogue does not suit the needs of modern opera houses. (The latter tend to be too large for speech to carry well; also, they have become dependent on international assemblages of singers, many of whom would be ill at ease speaking quick, witty dialogue, whether in French or in the local language.)³ Examining these lesser-known works reveals merits that have gone relatively unheralded; as for the better-known works, approaching them, too, in this wide-angled way helps us to a richer appreciation of their strengths and their often-enlivening internal contradictions.

As we examine these French-language works, it is important to keep in mind that, in the Francophone operatic world, numerous Italian and German works were performed in French and that some of these likewise featured strongly exotic elements.⁴ For example, *Il trovatore* (*Le trouvère* in Francophone opera houses) involves a Gypsy woman (Azucena) and a chorus of Gypsy women and men (highly fictive versions of the ethnic group today called the Roma

¹The repertory of French operatic works that deal with some aspect of the exotic is vast and depends on how one defines "exotic." (See the first section, "Terminology," in the Appendix below.) Two previous attempts at an overview are Tom Cooper, "'Frenchmen in Disguise': French Musical Exoticism and Empire in the Nineteenth Century," in *Empire and Culture: The French Experience, 1830–1940*, ed. Martin Evans (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 113–27; and two books (not focused solely on France, and dealing mainly with orchestral music though also somewhat with opera) by Jonathan David Little: *The Influence of European Literary and Artistic Representations of the "Orient" on Western Orchestral Compositions, c. 1840–1920: From Oriental Inspiration to "Exotic" Orchestration* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2010) and *Literary Sources of Nineteenth-Century Musical Orientalism: The Hypnotic Spell of the Exotic on Music of the Romantic Period* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2011), esp. Appendix (pp. 221–58). A collection on the French fascination with the music of other lands and peoples during the nineteenth century (often in genres other than opera, such as published transcriptions of folk songs) is *Fascinantes Étrangetés: La Découverte de l'altérité musicale en Europe au XIX^e siècle: Actes du colloque de la Côte-Saint-André 24–27 août 2011*, ed. Luc Charles-Dominique, Yves Defrance, and Danièle Pistone (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2014). Most chapters deal with genres other than opera (e.g., published transcriptions of folk songs) and focus on European lands (e.g., Greece, Corsica, Spain). But some chapters treat more distant geographic regions (e.g., dancers from India that visited Paris).

²See the Appendix, sections 3 and 4. A recording of *Ba-Ta-Clan* was released in the United States on the 1967 LP entitled *Of Castles and Cathedrals: A Concert for Two Emperors at the Palace of Compiègne* (Musical Heritage Society MHS 794; conductor, Marcel Couraud). It contains a witty new narration linking the numbers.

³See, again, the Appendix, sections 3 and 4.

⁴On the complex question of terminology, e.g., "exotic" vs. "exoticist," see the Appendix, section 1.

or Romanies).⁵ Similarly, *Aïda* (to use its French spelling) features two ancient peoples—Egyptians and dark-skinned “Ethiopians” (the inhabitants of today’s Sudan)—each of which was understood as being very different from “Us” Europeans.⁶ Such operas will be discussed very briefly here, but they nonetheless form an important part of the context within which Paris-based composers wrote exotically charged operas specifically for one or another French theater: for example, Meyerbeer’s *L’Africaine* and Verdi’s *Don Carlos*. And this was true regardless of whether a composer was French born, like Berlioz and Massenet, or foreign born, like the two composers just named, Meyerbeer and Verdi.

We should also remember that French operas—including ones that are notably exotic—were performed in certain Francophone locales outside of France, e.g., Belgium, Switzerland, colonial Algiers, and New Orleans.⁷ Many of them were performed elsewhere in translation, e.g., in German (in German and Austrian theaters) or in Italian (in Italy but also in English-, Spanish-, and Portuguese-speaking lands). So French exotic operas can also tell us something about cultural values in places to which such works were successfully exported.

WHAT GUIDING PRINCIPLES?

French-language exotic operas conveyed ethno-cultural Otherness in a wide variety of ways.

Yet descriptions of such works, whether in newspaper and magazine reviews at the time or in recent scholarship and criticism, have often focused on a single question: To what degree does a given work use musical materials typical—or thought to be typical—of the people or ethnic group being shown on stage? That question is important and deserves to be explored even more than it has been in previous scholarly writings.⁸ The present article addresses it briefly, but as one aspect of a broader question: In what diverse ways did the music (whether exotic-sounding or not), the sung words, and—to the extent that we can know this—the staging and other performance-specific aspects of a given work (e.g., gesture, dance, costumes, makeup) reflect *conceptions* of lands and peoples that were widely deemed exotic in France and indeed elsewhere in the Western world?

By framing the matter broadly, we allow ourselves to pay attention to musical, verbal, and visual *features* that were considered markers of ethno-cultural Otherness and to *attitudes* (stereotypes, prejudices) that prompted the use of such features. These various features (markers) and the attitudes behind them are all recognized in what I call the “All the Music in Full Context” Paradigm of musical exoticism in contradistinction to the long-prevailing “Exotic Style Only” Paradigm.⁹ Some of these markers

⁵Ralph P. Locke, *Musical Exoticism: Images and Reflections* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 150–60.

⁶In two articles I explore the implications of exoticist conceptions in *Aïda*: “Beyond the Exotic: How ‘Eastern’ Is *Aïda*?” *Cambridge Opera Journal* 17:2 (2005): 105–39, reprinted in shortened and lightly revised form in *Art and Ideology in European Opera: Essays in Honour of Julian Rushton*, ed. Rachel Cowgill, David Cooper, and Clive Brown (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2010), 264–80; and “*Aïda* and Nine Readings of Empire,” *Nineteenth-Century Music Review* 3:1 (2006): 45–72, reprinted in shortened and lightly revised form in *Fashions and Legacies of Nineteenth-Century Italian Opera*, ed. Roberta Montemorra Marvin and Hilary Poriss (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 152–75.

⁷See, for example, Charlotte Bentley, “The Race for *Robert* and Other Rivalries: Negotiating the Local and (Inter) national in Nineteenth-Century New Orleans,” *Cambridge Opera Journal* 29 (2017): 94–112; and Jann Pasler, “L’Opéra dans l’empire colonial français,” in *Histoire de l’opéra français*, ed. Hervé Lacombe, 3 vols. (Paris: Fayard, 2020–) II, 802–11.

⁸A few recent studies that touch (in part) on this question include Michael V. Pisani, *Imagining Native America in Music* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), a book that includes a few French and French-influenced instances; Hervé Lacombe and Christine Rodriguez, *La Habanera de Carmen: Naissance d’un tube* (Paris: Fayard, 2014); Ralph P. Locke, “Spanish Local Color in Bizet’s *Carmen*: Unexplored Borrowings and Transformations,” in *Music, Theater, and Cultural Transfer: Paris, 1830–1914*, ed. Annegret Fauser and Mark Everist (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 316–60; and Richard E. Mueller, *Beauty and Innovation in la machine chinoise: Falla, Debussy, Ravel, Roussel* (Hillsdale, NY: Pendragon Press, 2018). See also n. 1.

⁹I define and discuss this broader paradigm (which embraces but also goes far beyond the narrower and more familiar “Exotic Style” Paradigm) in two books: *Musical Exoticism*, 1–12, 48–65, and (a “prequel”) *Music and the Exotic from the Renaissance to Mozart*, 17–27. I first articulated the narrow and broad Paradigms in Ralph P. Locke, “A Broader View of Musical Exoticism,” *Journal of Musicology* 24, no. 4 (2007): 477–521. See also the opening section of my “Cutthroats and Casbah Dancers, Muezzins and Timeless Sands: Musical Images of the Middle East,” this journal 22 (1998): 20–53; a somewhat shorter version (but with fuller

may have reflected, at least semi-accurately, musical or other cultural features of the national or ethnic group that was being represented on stage. Some reflected those features but in a highly simplified, exaggerated, or distorted way. And some were invented out of whole cloth. Yet all of them could serve to characterize a specific Other people through one or more features that were understood as “odd”—different from European norms—and that were thought to be appropriate to the character or behavior of the people in question according to some mixture of factual information, personal impressions, and often-noxious stereotypes. Most importantly, taking non-musical markers into consideration, along with the attitudes behind them, frees us to consider the exoticist effect of passages of music that were not themselves marked as exotic (hence the “All the Music” formulation). Some of the styles and procedures employed in these operas were not specifically associated with exotic realms; rather, they were utterly *usual* in operas of the day. Still, this meant that they were available, in the context of an exotic opera, to help convey plot and characterization and thereby to reinforce stereotypes about and prejudicial attitudes toward the land and people in question. This seemingly paradoxical situation—non-exotic music serving an exotic portrayal or “representation”—results in what is perhaps the single most untilled field for exploration of the several that the “All the Music in Full Context” Paradigm opens up. I will explore nine such instances of “non-exotic exotic portrayal” (to put it paradoxically) toward the end of Part 2 of this article.

In recent decades, stage directors and designers involved in a new production of an opera have often introduced bold new elements that the librettist and composer never could have imagined. The aim of the production team, whether explicitly stated or not, is often to play down the prejudicial stereotypes invoked in the work. Or a team’s aim can be to *intensify* a stereotype in order to put it under critical scrutiny. Certain of these updated, re-located, or reimagined

productions have been hailed by audience members and critics, or derided, or both. The present article in no way attempts to deny or excuse the derogatory stereotypes in the works that it examines. Rather, it aims to uncover some of the *resonances* that such stereotypes had for a work’s creators and for its audiences (early on but also, in some cases, for decades or even a century or more thereafter).¹⁰

The bulk of the present article (Part 1 of two) consists of a survey of the main geo-cultural regions beyond France that were represented on stage in nineteenth-century French operas. Part 2 (to be published in a subsequent issue in this journal) will examine typical plots and characters and will conclude by discussing musical styles and procedures, ending with the aforementioned discussion of *non-exotic*-sounding musical means in exotic operas. Throughout Parts 1 and 2, attention will be given—however briefly—to the relationship between the French operatic world and imperialism, including France’s own massive nineteenth-century colonial ventures in the Caribbean, North and West Africa, and Southeast Asia. Also, I will frequently draw attention not just to largely serious works but also to notably imaginative works that are heavily comic in nature and use spoken dialogue. These are works that, as Hervé Lacombe notes, have until recent decades been almost systematically excluded from discussions of exoticism in opera.¹¹

VARIOUSLY EXOTIC PEOPLES AND PLACES

As in previous centuries in Italy and elsewhere, the opera industry in nineteenth-century France

notes) appeared in *The Exotic in Western Music*, ed. Jonathan Bellman (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1998), 104–36, 326–33.

¹⁰The scope of the present article, already quite wide, must set to the side such questions as how stage productions today handle or might profitably handle—re-enact, resist, replace, etc.—such stereotypes, and what aesthetic and ethical considerations such practical decisions entail. I briefly discuss performance choices (including interventionist stagings) in *Musical Exoticism*, 312–27, and in *Music and the Exotic*, 11–16 and 322–23. For an overview of traditions, and recent practices, in operatic staging, see David J. Levin, “Issues and Trends in Contemporary Opera Production,” in *The Grove Book of Operas*, 2nd edn., ed. Stanley Sadie, rev. Laura Macy (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), xi–xxiii.

¹¹Hervé Lacombe, “The Writing of Exoticism in the Libretti of the Opéra-Comique, 1825–1862,” trans. Peter Glidden, *Cambridge Opera Journal* 11:2 (1999): 135–58 (here 135).

often preferred stories that took place in a distant land or in the distant or legendary past. Or indeed both: Chabrier's *L'Étoile*, for example, presents the audience with a storybook Middle Eastern land redolent of the *Thousand and One Nights*. Distance in space and/or time helped make a plot believable, precisely because the specific events and details of daily life in those lands and eras were *not* well known to most operagoers. This somewhat ironic consideration became ever more important in the course of the nineteenth century, as the aesthetics of realism, with its heavy focus on the familiar and the here-and-now, gradually replaced Enlightenment- and Romantic-era norms.

Setting a French opera in a time and place far from current-day Paris (or Lyons, or Brussels) also helped deflect objections that government or religious officials might have raised about any social, political, or religious critique that they sniffed out in the libretto. For example, if the opera's creators wished to condemn the Catholic church's intolerance of other religions, they could make the message more acceptable by placing the plot two centuries earlier than the current day (as in Meyerbeer's *Les Huguenots*) or, indeed, four centuries earlier *and* in a foreign land (Germany, near the border of Switzerland, in Halévy's *La Juive*).

In the remainder of the present Part, I draw attention to a number of regions that were arguably viewed as exotic and that were actively represented—some more frequently than others—in nineteenth-century French operas. We start with certain European lands and peoples that in France were regarded as exotic to some degree. We then move to the Americas, Africa, and East Asia, and finally reach the exotic region (or we might say super-region) that was most extensively exploited: the vast “Middle East,” understood as extending from North Africa, Turkey, and the Arabian Peninsula to Persia, India, and Ceylon (today's Sri Lanka). The “Middle East” will thus be treated in a long section of its own, with various sub-sections.

Throughout the nineteenth century, France was recurrently involved in colonizing and gaining (or, in the Caribbean, regaining) control over extensive regions overseas. In 1802–03, Napoleon's troops reversed the Revolution's 1794 abolition of slavery on Guadeloupe, Martinique,

and other French-owned islands and came close to reconquering Saint-Domingue (today's Haïti), which had asserted its independence in 1791. France conquered Algiers in 1830 and, in the ensuing decades, expanded control over Algeria and neighboring Tunisia and Morocco. Cochinchina, a major section of what is now called Vietnam, came under French rule in 1862.¹²

Despite all these historical realities, I will mostly not be drawing direct connections to French imperialism and colonialism, in part because the theatrical works in question largely avoided doing so themselves.¹³ Nonetheless, the French efforts at colonizing distant lands clearly helped stoke an interest in distant and different cultures. This is particularly evident in the case of the Middle East: throughout the Napoleonic period, Egypt and greater Syria (including Palestine) were a major, recurring theater of obsession for the French military, and also for significant French Egyptologists such as Champollion. Several decades later, Algeria—a territory even closer to home—became a major permanent colony, complete with resort hotels and an opera house of its own. But we begin with lands that were within Europe itself or even bordered on France.¹⁴

¹²France (like Britain) often controlled its overseas territories by means of what scholars now call “informal imperialism,” e.g., through the establishment of treaty ports and by working with, rather than sidelining, local officials. Much of this was done in what the French took to be a progressive, modernizing spirit: they claimed, at least, that they were seeking to bring science and learning to a less-developed land and to guide its inhabitants into participating profitably in the worldwide economy. See Alice L. Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize: The Republican Idea of Empire in France and West Africa 1895–1930* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997); and David Todd, *A Velvet Empire: French Informal Imperialism in the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021).

¹³I discuss the impact of imperialism and colonialism on nineteenth-century opera (generally, including in *Lakmé*) in my *Musical Exoticism*, 175–213.

¹⁴I will not be discussing the possibility that regions *within* France were viewed through an exotic lens. This is of course quite plausible, even likely (e.g., Gounod's *Mireille* and Lalo's *Le Roi d'Ys*). But attitudes toward such regions were also colored by various stereotypes relating to social class, (lack of) education, and religiosity: e.g., the archetypally ignorant or deeply pious peasant from *les provinces*. Regarding *Mireille* and other operas set in the French provinces, see Katharine Ellis, “Mireille's Homecoming? Gounod, Mistral, and the Midi,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 65 (2012): 463–509; and her book *French Musical Life: Regional Perspectives from the July*

Relatively few French operas, at any point in the century, were set in Scandinavia, the Netherlands, or Eastern Europe.¹⁵ By contrast, Great Britain (especially England and Scotland) and German-speaking locales had a near-constant presence on the French operatic stage. Epic tales of ancient Scottish warriors were much in vogue early in the century, thanks to the wildly popular texts published in the 1760s by James Macpherson, who claimed that they were written by an ancient Scottish poet named Ossian: a kind of cold-climate Homer. Lesueur's *Ossian, ou Les Bardes* (1804) was given a particularly lavish staging at the Opéra that drew much attention, but the work did not remain long in the repertory.¹⁶ Méhul's one-act *Uthal* (Opéra-Comique, 1806), likewise based on the Ossian poems, emphasized, in highly effective music, the noble spirit that Macpherson's texts had attributed to the ancient Scottish bards and warriors. *Uthal* was even less successful at the box office than *Ossian*, but—as recent writings and a recording reveal—it weaves a special, imaginative mood of dignified, “northern” solemnity, reinforced by frequent use of the harp (associated, however inaccurately, with the singing of traditional epics) and by

Monarchy to the 1930s (New York: Oxford University Press, forthcoming), especially chapters 7 and 10. Stereotypes relating to social class (aristocratic pretentiousness and bullying, working-class slyness or dullness, etc.) are rampant in the French comic-opera repertory, as in Messenger's *Les P'tites Michu* (1897). See my review of Messenger, *Nineteenth-Century Music Review* 18, no. 2 (2021): 327–34 and 355 (a correction).

¹⁵There are some prominent exceptions, of course. Four that are set in the Netherlands or Scandinavia are Auber's *Gustave III* (Opéra, 1833), Offenbach's *Geneviève de Brabant* (Bouffes-Parisiens, 1859), Thomas's *Hamlet* (Opéra, 1868), and Reyer's *Sigurd* (Brussels, 1884; the action takes place partly in Iceland). A fifth, Saint-Saëns's *La Princesse jaune*, will be discussed below. The following are located in what are today Poland or Russia: Bizet's *Ivan IV* (composed in 1865 but then abandoned), Joncières's *Dimitri* (Théâtre national lyrique, 1876), and Chabrier's *Le Roi malgré lui* (Opéra-Comique, 1887). Acts II and III of Meyerbeer's *L'Étoile du Nord* (Opéra-Comique, 1854) are set in Russia; act I takes place in Vyborg, a long-Finnish town that Russia would conquer in World War II.

¹⁶See Annelies Andries, “Uniting the Arts to Stage the Nation: Le Sueur's *Ossian* (1804) in Napoleonic Paris,” *Cambridge Opera Journal* 31, nos. 2–3 (2020): 153–87.

Méhul's decision to have no violins in the orchestra.¹⁷

England and the German-speaking lands were often treated as quasi-neutral locales, where any kind of political or romantic plot could unfurl.¹⁸ Still, numerous comic operas portrayed English lords and ladies as superficial or irascible, e.g., *Lady Pamela and her husband*, Lord Cokbourg, in Auber's *Fra Diavolo* (Opéra-Comique, 1830).¹⁹ A German locale could add to the pleasure by invoking local customs that Parisians had read about. In Gounod's *Faust* (Théâtre-Lyrique, 1859; revised: Opéra, 1869), the end of act II—on the fairgrounds by the town gates—is a waltz scene involving the chorus. Waltzing, though very much part of Parisian social life by the 1850s, was well known as having originated in German-speaking lands.²⁰ The waltz music here offers a particularly “village-like” emphasis on the downbeat notes in the bass and, as a whole, forms an ironically cheerful backdrop against which Faust has his first encounter with—and is immediately rebuffed by—the modest peasant lass Marguerite (Goethe's Gretchen).

Saint-Saëns's comic opera *Le Timbre d'argent* (The Silver Bell; 1877, Théâtre-Lyrique [Nouveau]; rev., Brussels, 1914) is set mainly in eighteenth-century Vienna, and the painter who is its hero (or anti-hero) is named Conrad. The work has a touristic feel: various scenes occur in the painter's humble workshop-apartment and in Vienna's main opera house, including a scene played out on the theater's stage, viewed as if from the rear of the stage, looking toward where the Viennese audience is seen sitting! Other

¹⁷See the recording and book of essays, published in 2016 by the Centre de musique romantique française at the Palazzetto Bru Zane (Ediciones singulares, ES1026); also James Porter, *Beyond Fingal's Cave: Ossian in the Musical Imagination* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2019), 57–71. The orchestra is not reduced in size; rather, Méhul indicates that the violinists should play the viola parts (along with the violists). This gives the topmost melody lines much prominence and a deeper coloration than normal.

¹⁸The various French operas based on novels of Sir Walter Scott seem to be of this essentially place-neutral type, e.g., Boieldieu's *La Dame blanche* (Opéra-Comique, 1825) and Bizet's *La Jolie Fille de Perth* (Théâtre-Lyrique, 1867).
¹⁹Hugh Macdonald, “Les Anglais,” in his book *Beethoven's Century: Essays on Composers and Themes* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2008), 193–201 (194–95).

²⁰The German word “Walzer” means turning-dance.

scenes involve places and characters that feel more distinctly different from Here and Us: a Venetian palazzo, complete with a threateningly motoric gambling scene; a cozy German cottage, ivy-covered, by the Danube; an Italian ballad-singer who wanders in from nowhere to sing a Neapolitan song in music featuring a triangle and tambourine (he's actually the devil Spiridion in disguise); and a pair of Gypsies—he (Spiridion, again) with a set of bagpipes, she dancing with a tambourine. The relative normality of the Hapsburg Monarchy's capital city made these other contrasting locales and identities stand out in their difference.²¹ Something similar is true of Halévy's *La Juive*, a work set in Konstanz (in southeastern Germany) in 1414, the year in which the Catholic Church held an important council there that condemned to death the religious reformers Jan Hus and Jerome of Prague. By choosing an emblematic historical event in that city, the libretto established a basic equivalence between the onstage locale and Catholic France, thus putting the beleaguered (but also conniving and secretive) Jewish goldsmith Éléazar and his naïve adopted daughter Rachel in sharp relief. Rachel was given a costume that was pointedly designed in ultra-modest fashion in accordance with traditional Jewish custom: skirt and sleeves long, the hair entirely covered.²²

ITALY, SPAIN, AND PORTUGAL

Two particularly frequent European locales for French operas in the various genres—throughout the nineteenth century—were Italy and the Iberian Peninsula. Both were regions that many

French people could easily visit. Helpfully, their languages were related to French and thus could be easily “quoted” from time to time in the libretto, e.g., the nickname Fra Diavolo (literally Devilish Brother, for the Italian bandit-chief in Auber's opera), or *toréador* (in *Carmen* and other works set in Spain). This added a touch of “local color” without becoming incomprehensible, as might more easily happen if words had been inserted from, say, Polish or Chinese. Some of these little word-citations became so formulaic that a student of libretti can be tempted to start counting them: Hervé Lacombe reproduces no fewer than three instances of *opéra-comique* song lyrics that rhyme *boléro* with *fandango* (accenting their last syllable, the French way).²³

Italy, in obedience to a long literary tradition, was sometimes portrayed as a land of lawlessness, especially the Papal States and the southern portion of the peninsula.²⁴ For example, highwaymen holding up stage coaches is a major plot element in Auber's *Fra Diavolo*, a work that went on to become one of the most beloved comic operas in France and other lands. Berlioz invoked this tradition in the “Chanson de brigands” in *Lélio, ou Le Retour à la vie*, 1831–32, (rev. 1855), and in the last movement of *Harold en Italie*, 1834.

Italy's extensive coastline and many port cities (notably Naples) created a major theme for stage works. One example is Léo Delibes's one-act *La Jeune Fille du golfe* (The Girl of the Gulf [of Naples]), a work apparently intended for performance at home or in the voice studio by young women or children. It was published, with piano accompaniment and with all the necessary spoken dialogue, in the May 1859 issue of *Le Magasin des demoiselles*.²⁵ The characters have quintessentially Italian names (Pietro, Giannetta) or Frenchified equivalents (Zerline). They chat about the pleasures and dangers of being on a fishing boat, engage in a bit of

²¹Further on *Le Timbre d'argent*, see Hugh Macdonald, *Saint-Saëns and the Stage: Operas, Plays, Pageants, a Ballet and a Film* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 20–49. Another Saint-Saëns opera set in a broadly “Germanic” land (the Netherlands) and containing exotic insertions is *La Princesse jaune* (see discussion under “East Asia” p. 106).

²²See the costume design for Rachel at <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b70016824/f1.item.r=halevy%20la%20juive%20costumes.zoom>. Further on *La Juive*, see Diana R. Hallman, trans. Hervé Lacombe, “La Présence des Juifs dans l'opéra français,” in Lacombe, *Histoire*, II, 969–76, esp. 971–73, and Hallman, *Opera, Liberalism, and Antisemitism in Nineteenth-Century France: The Politics of Halévy's La Juive* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

²³Lacombe, “Writing,” 151–54.

²⁴Stendhal writes, at the outset of one novella: “Le mélodrame nous a montré si souvent les brigands italiens du seizième siècle, et tant de gens en ont parlé sans les connaître, que nous en avons maintenant les idées les plus fausses. . . .” (*L'Abbesse de Castro: Chroniques italiennes*, 1832).

²⁵“Magasin” here conveyed the double meaning of “Ladies' Magazine” and “Ladies' Shop”; many pages in each issue were devoted to fashions in clothing.

romance, and make numerous references to dancing the tarantella.²⁶ The opening number is a barcarolle-like chorus for the sailors (scored for sopranos and altos), and there are only four more numbers before the work ends with a chorus of rejoicing.²⁷ This modest, utilitarian work may serve as a reminder of the many diverse social contexts in which exotic settings and musical “local color” were enjoyed and practiced in France.

Of course, an exotic locale, however attractive inherently, could not ensure that a work would receive frequent performance and thereby attain commercial success. In the final scene of act I of *Benvenuto Cellini* (Opéra, 1838; rev. Weimar, 1852), Berlioz and his librettists characterize a public festival in sixteenth-century Rome as immensely energetic. Some of the passages for chorus in this uproarious act-finale make use of unusually complex rhythms to suggest the rumor-mongering of hordes of people milling around in the Piazza Colonna. The intent, surely, was to suggest that Italians were more overtly emotional and more entertainingly argumentative than people living north of the Alps. The opera soon failed, mostly because of its problematical libretto, whose comic and occasionally vulgar elements made it a poor fit for the Opéra, but also because of its music’s unpredictability, a trait that makes the work so fascinating today (and, even now, tricky to perform).

In Verdi’s *Les Vêpres siciliennes* (Opéra, 1855)—set in Palermo in 1282—Procida (the baritone role) embodies, to some extent, a widely disseminated stereotype about men in southern Italy, namely that they are stubborn and pugnacious. This Sicilian doctor devoted to overthrowing the Spanish overlords is, by turns, baleful and irascible. A roughly parallel figure in

Meyerbeer’s *Huguenots*, the hard-bitten French Protestant soldier Marcel, is deeply suspicious of the nation’s Catholic rulers, yet, with his amusing sarcasm, he seems at times to have wandered in from an *opéra-comique*. There is nothing humorous about the Spain-hating Procida.

As for Spain itself, its image in the opera house is generally that of a land of guitars; of proud, headstrong, or possessive males; of flashing-eyed, dark-haired women; of “Gypsies” (*bohémiens* and *bohémiennes*) engaged in smuggling, dancing, fortune-telling, and sexual lasciviousness; and of captivating dance rhythms, elaborate guitar-strumming, and certain unusual scales—notably one, sometimes nowadays called “Andalusian,” that may sound like the harmonic minor except that it cadences on the dominant rather than returning to the tonic.²⁸

These images have been reinforced for nearly a century and a half by one rich and omnipresent cultural artifact: Bizet’s *Carmen*. Yet many elements familiar to us today from Bizet’s masterpiece can be found in comic operas from several decades earlier. For example, Friedrich von Flotow’s *L’esclave du Camoëns* (Opéra-Comique, 1843) gives the Renaissance-era Portuguese court poet Camoëns (1524–80) a female Gypsy slave, Griselda, who dances in the streets, much as Carmen would do twenty-two years later.²⁹ Actually, Bizet’s opera managed to avoid the single most overused operatic signifier of Spain: the under-the-window serenade with

²⁶Further, see Pauline Girard, *Leo Delibes: Itinéraire d'un musicien des Bouffes-Parisiens à l'Institut* (Paris: Vrin, 2018), 106–07. A short opera intended for performance in the home was often called an “opéra de salon.” Mark Everist has identified eighty-eight *opéras de salon* for the years 1850–70; the documentation can be located in the “Music in the Second Empire Theatre” database, on the “France: Musiques, Cultures: 1789–1918” site: <http://www.fmc.ac.uk/mitset/index.html#/>.

²⁷The barcarolle is more narrowly identified with Venice and its boat-filled canals. See sub-section on “styles and rhythmic patterns” in Part 2.

²⁸Peter Manuel, “From Scarlatti to ‘Guantanamo’: Dual Tonicity in Spanish and Latin American Musics,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 55 (2002): 311–36. Compare Peter Van der Merwe, *Roots of the Classical: The Popular Origins of Western Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 46, 63–64, 102–03, 144–54, and 159–64. Van der Merwe speaks of this harmonic-minor scale cadencing on the dominant note and chord not as evincing “dual tonicity” but as “Phrygian” (and typical of areas around the Mediterranean, from the Iberian Peninsula to southern Italy to the Balkans to the Turkish and Arab worlds). Celsa Alonso calls the same phenomenon the “Andalusian cadence” in her editions and writings, e.g., *Cien años de canción lírica española*, ed. Celsa Alonso, vol. 1, *Música hispana, Serie C, Antologías 8* (Madrid: Instituto Complutense de Ciencias Musicales, 2001).

²⁹Other French operas in which Gypsies sing and dance publicly (that is, for an onstage audience) include Offenbach’s *La Périhole* (Théâtre des variétés, 1868; rev. 1874) and Saint-Saëns’s *Le Timbre d’argent*.

guitar, which had in recent decades become extremely predictable.³⁰

Flotow's *Griselda*, we should note, dances in the streets not for her own delight (as *Carmen* will do) but in order to raise funds to help her impoverished owner, Camoëns, who, having been exiled from Lisbon, is dying of hunger.³¹ History tells us that he was indeed sent into exile in the provinces, if only for a few months. That this French opera puts the banished genius at the center of an opera surely echoed the longstanding French stereotype—based in part on certain historical realities—of the Iberian lands as suffering under authoritarian, repressive rulers.

Another such stereotype insistently emphasized the determination of Catholic religious leaders in Spain to persecute Jews and Muslims or to suppress uprisings against Spanish control in the Netherlands and elsewhere. As a result, repressive or politically controlling inquisitors from the Vatican appear in no fewer than four prominent French operas set in Spain: Gomis's *Le Diable à Seville* (Opéra-Comique, 1831—the composer was himself a Spaniard), Halévy's *Le Guitarrero* (Opéra-Comique, 1841), Auber's *La Part du diable* (Opéra-Comique, 1843), and Verdi's *Don Carlos*.³² Indeed, Verdi's Grand Inquisitor is one of the most menacing characters ever to tread the operatic stage.

Life for women under Spanish Catholicism is shown as being rather grim. In Auber's widely performed *Le Domino noir* (Opéra-Comique, 1837), Angèle nearly gets locked up for the rest of her life in a convent. Still, this threatening turn of events gave the composer occasion for a very attractive church-like hymn for the nuns and novices. The same plot twist, with an even more ethereal women's chorus, would occur in

act II of Verdi's *Il trovatore* (Rome, 1853; revised for Paris: *Le trouvère*, 1857). The delicate sweetness of the music in each case presumably enabled the work to pass as not being anti-Catholic, but the tension and threat inherent in the dramatic situation clearly echoed centuries-old stereotypes of Spain as a land marked by religious extremism and by harsher restrictions on its women than was the case "here" (namely in France or Italy).³³

Men in "Spanish" operas are likewise at risk: namely, of being tempted into dueling or of getting imprisoned or assassinated. All three of these things occur in Massenet's first full-length opera, *Don César de Bazan* (Opéra-Comique, 1872), including, yes, an offstage killing just before this otherwise largely comic opera ends. Spanish-controlled Peru is little better, as the male protagonist Piquillo in Offenbach's *La Périchole* discovers when he is unjustly imprisoned by the unscrupulous, lecherous, and sadistic viceroy Don André de Ribeira.

The categories of "Spanish women and men" did not include *gitanas* and *gitanos* ("Gypsies"). Rather, Spain's Roma or Romanies were understood as comprising an internally exotic people within a land that was already considered half-exotic by the residents of France and other European lands. Victor Hugo said it plainly: "Spain, too, is the Orient, Spain is halfway African."³⁴ The portrayal of *Carmen* and the other "Gypsy" characters in Bizet's *Carmen* is vivid and specific (yet varied, as in the playful act II Quintet) and has helped that work become and remain the single most frequently

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³⁰Lacombe, "Writing," 152–54.

³¹Hervé Lacombe, "L'Espagne à l'Opéra-Comique avant *Carmen*: Du *Guitarrero* de Halévy (1841) à *Don César de Bazan* de Massenet (1872)," in *Échanges musicaux franco-espagnols XVIIe–XIXe siècles*, ed. François Lesure (Paris: Klincksieck, 2000), 161–93.

³²Hervé Lacombe, "Sur le *Guitarrero* de Scribe et Halévy: Réflexions sur la dramaturgie lyrique française," in *Actes du colloque Halévy (16–18 nov. 2000)*, ed. Francis Claudon, Gilles de Van, and Karl Leich-Galland (Heilbronn: Musik-Edition Lucie Galland, 2003), 72–87; also Lacombe, "Writing," 145.

³³Offenbach's delightful *Maître Péronilla* (Bouffes-Parisiens, 1878) involves a woman in Spain who, because of some trickery, signs two wedding contracts (one civil, the other in church) with different husbands. The civil one is with a man twice her age whom she abhors; the religious one is with her true love. The matter is resolved in a court scene: she marries her true love, and her maiden aunt (one of the tricksters) marries the old man. See my review of the first complete recording: *American Record Guide*, July/August 2020, pp. 99–100; lightly revised and uploaded to *The Arts Fuse*: <https://artsfuse.org/212974/opera-album-review-offenbach-in-a-spanish-mood-in-a-top-notch-first-recording/>.

³⁴"L'Espagne c'est encore l'Orient; l'Espagne est à demi africaine" (from Hugo's preface to his 1828 poetry collection *Les Orientales*).

performed, reworked, and parodied French opera in France and around the world.³⁵

Il trovatore, too, has its own sharply profiled exotic characters, namely Azucena and the chorus of *zingari* and *zingarelle* ("Gypsy" men and women). It is thus worth mentioning that, for the work's 1857 production at the Paris Opéra—in French translation, as *Le trouvère*—Verdi composed an imaginative ballet replete with exotic overtones. Certain of the ballet numbers re-used "Gypsy" materials from the opening of act II (the scene with the Anvil Chorus and Azucena's "Stride la vampa"). In one extended section of the ballet, a dancer portraying a Gypsy woman, with the obligatory fortune-telling cards, approaches a series of Spanish soldiers and, as European literary tradition decreed, tells their fortunes, one by one (though of course wordlessly).³⁶

Parallel to the aforementioned stereotype of the oppressive Vatican official, and almost symbolic of it at a more personal level, was that of the haughty or abusive male head of a Spanish family or household, given to overweening control of his social inferiors, vacuous pride in his ancestry, and a hypocritical mixture of jealousy and philandering.³⁷ Commentators such as Stendhal entertained French readers with accounts of Spanish men behaving with imperious disregard for the rights or feelings of others.³⁸

³⁵On the roots of *Carmen* in accepted lore about Spain and its "Gypsies," and on its history in performance (and publication), see Locke, *Musical Exoticism*, 160–74, and four recent books: Hugh Macdonald, *Bizet* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 208–33, 238; Michael Christoforidis and Elizabeth Kertesz, *Carmen and the Staging of Spain: Recasting Bizet's Opera in the Belle Époque* (London: Oxford University Press, 2018); *Carmen Abroad: Bizet's Opera on the Global Stage*, ed. Richard Langham Smith and Clair Rowden (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020); and Richard Langham Smith, *Bizet's Carmen Uncovered* (Woodbridge, Surrey, UK: Boydell Press, 2021).

³⁶Julian Budden, *The Operas of Verdi*, vol. 2 (London: Oxford University Press, 1978), 107–11. Verdi's revisions for Paris included expanding the very end of the opera by thirty measures (which recall material from earlier acts). For more detail on the *Trovère* ballet and its Gypsies, see Knud Arne Jürgensen, *The Verdi Ballets* (Parma: Istituto nazionale di studi verdiani, 1995), 57–77.

³⁷Lacombe, "Writing," 143–45.

³⁸Stendhal [Henri Beyle], *Mémoires d'un touriste*, 2 vols. (Paris: M. Lévy, 1854), II, 293, discussed further in Ralph P. Locke, "Doing the Impossible: On the Musically Exotic," *Journal of Musicological Research* 27, no. 4 (2008): 334–58 (338–47, 357). Two Spanish noblemen respond "proudly"

As Tim Carter has observed with regard to Count Almaviva in *Le nozze di Figaro* and to the title character in *Don Giovanni*, Spain—viewed from elsewhere on the Continent—was "European enough to present realistic characters but also sufficiently exotic to allow [those characters to engage in] somewhat licentious behavior" on stage.³⁹

Indeed, a man's inappropriate sexual desire is at the core not just of Mozart's *Le nozze di Figaro* but also of Rossini's *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, based on a play—likewise by the French playwright Beaumarchais—that presented earlier events involving some of the same Spanish characters. (Both Mozart's *Figaro* and Rossini's *Barber*, though composed in Italian, were often performed in translation in Francophone cities.) The same ignoble trait crops up also in French operas that are set in Spain and that were written in French.

One witty instance is Adam's *Le Toréador*, ou *L'Accord parfait* (Opéra-Comique, 1849), which concerns a French-born flutist, Tracolin, who is living in Barcelona and seeking to develop a relationship with Coraline, the Spanish-born wife of a retired bullfighter, Don Belflor. Tracolin easily tempts Belflor into trying to seduce Caritéa, a woman who lives just a few houses away from Belflor and Coraline. Tracolin's plan is to make Don Belflor's imminent misbehavior known to Coraline, and then to denounce her bullfighter-husband as faithless so that the flutist himself can win Coraline's heart. Belflor takes the bait but eventually realizes that he has been a fool. The opera ends with a neat solution: Coraline and the men happily form a *ménage à trois*, in which the flutist will, so he claims, "stay as hostage" in the house (*rester en otage*) in order to ensure that the husband not visit other women. This plot resolution was risqué by the moral standards of the day. Presumably, having the opera set in a Spanish city, rather than a French one, made the implications of sexual promiscuity easier for respectable audience members to swallow, especially since this particular easy-going threesome involved a woman and two men rather than a man with multiple women. The latter was of

(according to the stage directions) in Massenet's *Le Cid*. (See one instance in n. 89.)

³⁹Tim Carter, *Understanding Italian Opera* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 119.

course the typical arrangement in many operas of the period involving a Middle Eastern harem.

THE WESTERN HEMISPHERE AND, AT TIMES,
SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

The Western Hemisphere and sub-Saharan Africa can perhaps best be discussed together. Not only had the two regions been explored and colonized by Europe over the course of several centuries, but they had long been cruelly—and profitably—linked by the trans-Atlantic slave trade. They thus lent themselves to similar stories of conquest and intercultural conflict, bondage, and exploitation. Spontini's *Fernand Cortez, ou La Conquête du Mexique* (Opéra, 1809; rev. 1817), for example, deals with the Spanish conquest of Mexico. Decades later, Meyerbeer's *L'Africaine* (Opéra, 1865; first drafted in the 1840s–50s) would tell a somewhat similar story about the Portuguese explorer Vasco da Gama and his trips around the southern tip of Africa.

Criticism of the depredations of conquest and domination tends to be less overt in such works than in a prominent Enlightenment-era opera, Rameau's *Les Indes galantes* (1735–36; especially the *entrée* entitled “Les Incas du Pérou”).⁴⁰ These early- to mid-nineteenth-century “Age of Discovery” operas, to use James Parakilas's phrase, tend not to be strongly racist in outlook. They therefore allow at least the possibility that the “native” heroine could move toward happiness by adopting the religion of the European man who has conquered her and her people.⁴¹ Later in the century, as racial categories harden in the writings of Renan, Gobineau, and others, a romantic union between individuals from different ethno-racial populations is nearly always presented as doomed.⁴²

⁴⁰See Locke, *Musical Exoticism*, 100–05, and *Music and the Exotic*, 235–38.

⁴¹See James Parakilas, “The Soldier and the Exotic: Operatic Variations on a Theme of Racial Encounter,” part 1, *Opera Quarterly* 10, no. 2 (1993): 33–56.

⁴²Two renowned instances: Bizet's *Carmen* and Delibes's *Lakmé*; for such operas, Parakilas has created the category of “the Soldier and the Exotic” (to be discussed in Part 2 of this article). Influential racist books of the period include Ernest Renan's preface to his *L'Avenir de la science: Pensées de 1848* (Paris: Calmann Lévy, 1890); and Joseph-Arthur, comte de Gobineau's *Essay sur l'inégalité des races*

The extensive Canadian territories owned by France did not get much attention on the French operatic stage, perhaps because they were considered too similar to “home” to be fascinating.⁴³ By contrast, the similarly vast regions lying along the Mississippi and known to the French as “Louisiane” contained significant French-owned plantations worked by enslaved persons of African ancestry, as did numerous important Caribbean islands, e.g., Guadeloupe, Martinique, and Saint-Domingue/Haïti.⁴⁴ These locations—and other Caribbean islands—were evidently quite attractive for operatic portrayal. As parallel evidence of this in instrumental genres, we might point to the success, in France and elsewhere, of New Orleans-born Louis-Moreau Gottschalk's 1850s piano pieces inspired by Creole and Afro-American music: e.g., *Le Banjo*; *Ojos criollos: Danse cubaine*; and *Souvenir de Porto Rico: Marche des gîbaros*.

Two intriguing comic operas take place in the Caribbean region. *Le Planteur* (Opéra-Comique, 1839) is set in Louisiana, some miles from New Orleans. The music is by Hippolyte Monpou. Characters include—besides various “mulatto” women and enslaved Blacks—an English colonist named Jakson; an American named Arthur Barclay; Jenny Makensie, a cousin of Barclay's; and a mulatto man, Caton, who is Jenny's factotum. The opera presents the colonists as having a natural human warmth and simplicity rarely encountered in the big European cities.⁴⁵ The work thus applies to a modern intercultural

humaines (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1853–55). See, for example, Shmuel Almog, “The Racial Motif in Renan's Attitude to Jews and Judaism,” in *Antisemitism through the Ages*, ed. Shmuel Almog (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1988), 255–78.

⁴³Interestingly, Rossini's early *farsa* entitled *La cambiale di matrimonio* had a Canadian trader—perhaps a fur-trapper—in the man-of-reason baritone role (Slook).

⁴⁴France sold its holdings on the North American mainland to the United States in 1803 (the Louisiana Purchase, or, in French, *Vente de la Louisiane*).

⁴⁵Several of the names are simplified or misspelled (Jakson, Barclay, Makensie), perhaps in part to clarify the pronunciation. I consulted the Library of Congress's copy of the libretto, available at <https://www.loc.gov/item/2010659171/>. For a detailed appreciation of *Le Planteur* and its unusually frank treatment of chattel slavery, see Helena Kopchick Spencer, “Louisiana Imagined: Gender, Race and Slavery in *Le Planteur* (1839),” in *America in the French Imaginary, 1789–1914: Music, Revolution and Race*, ed. Diana Hallman and César Leal (Woodbridge, Suffolk, England: Boydell, forthcoming).

setting an age-old trope from the literary pastoral, which projected kindness and other humane values onto (idealized) shepherds and peasants.

Clapissou's *Le Code noir* (Opéra-Comique, 1842) derives from an influential novel by Fanny Reybaud. The opera's main character, Donatien, was born in Martinique but educated in France. Upon returning to the island, he is denounced as a mulatto and therefore legally a slave. The opera greatly toned down the political positions expressed in the novel. Nonetheless, it maintained the highly dramatic scene in which Donatien is put up for sale at a slave auction.⁴⁶ The work's librettist, Eugène Scribe, clearly relished the opportunity to weigh in on an important current issue. Two years later, he would sign a petition for abolishing slavery in French-owned territories.⁴⁷ This policy would indeed be put into place in 1848 during the early months of the Second Republic.

Brazil was the center of attention in two successful comic works with spoken dialogue by, respectively, Félicien David and Jacques Offenbach. In David's *La Perle du Brésil* (Opéra-National, 1851, rev. 1858), whose characters are mostly Portuguese, the title character is a native Brazilian woman, Zora.⁴⁸ Her big aria, "Charmant oiseau," with its captivating part for solo flute, became one of the most cherished French numbers for coloratura soprano and remained so long after the opera ceased to be revived on stage. This aria is still performed and recorded today (e.g., by Sumi Jo).⁴⁹ The flute here represents a supposed Brazilian bird, the *mysoli*. (No such species exists, except, by now, in the imaginations of fans of coloratura arias.)

The presence of a bird facilitated the inclusion of such a florid aria, which otherwise might have seemed inconsistent with Zora's modest origins.⁵⁰ It also had the advantage—as did the flute and soprano's echo-like exchanges of musicalized "twittering"—of linking this particular exotic female character with the beauties of nature. This linkage occurs, but without the pseudo-birdsong, in other nineteenth-century operas; examples include the Flower Duet in Delibes's *Lakmé* and the nighttime-by-the-Nile scene in *Aida*.⁵¹

A wealthy Brazilian man is a prominent character in Offenbach's *La Vie parisienne* (Parisian Life; Théâtre du Palais-Royal, 1866; rev. Théâtre des Variétés, 1873), one of the few Offenbach stage works that are performed frequently today. This "Brésilien" is wealthy but uncouth, having come to Paris to spend money and indulge his voracious tastes. He is not even given the dignity of a name. In the original production, he was a man of apparently mixed race, with dark curly hair, and, in act V, he appeared outfitted in full Brazilian carnival regalia, including a sombrero with hanging pompons to match the ones dangling from his trouser-legs.⁵² As Jacek Blaszkiewicz argues, this nameless foreign sybarite may also have been a kind of lightning rod for French anxieties about the provincialism of France itself, as increasing numbers of wealthy people came from other lands to visit Paris and to treat themselves, as one says, royally. Indeed, Brazil was hardly a backwater by this point: long owned and controlled by Portugal until it established its independence in 1825, Brazil had, within

⁴⁶There is likewise a dramatic slave-auction scene in Monpou's *Le Planteur*.

⁴⁷Eugène Scribe, *Le Code noir: Opéra-comique, suivi de documents inédits*, ed. Olivier Bara and Roger Little (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2018). Also Olivier Bara, "Figures d'esclaves à l'opéra: Du 'Code noir' à 'l'Africaine' d'Eugène Scribe (1842–1865), les contradictions de l'imaginaire libéral," in *Littérature et Esclavage, XVIII^e-XIX^e siècles*, ed. Sarga Moussa (Paris: Desjonquères, 2010), 110–23, <https://hal.archives-ouvertes.fr/hal-00909738>.

⁴⁸On an important comic opera that was set in Dutch Guyana, Halévy's *Jaguarita l'Indienne* (Théâtre-Lyrique, 1855), see n. 88.

⁴⁹See the recording on her aria-album *Carnival!* (Decca 440679, released 1994; English Chamber Orchestra, cond. Richard Bonyngne) or her 1995 concert performance: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ElfDq2IGspQ>.

⁵⁰Other opéras-comiques that similarly use birdsong as an occasion for florid vocalizing include A. E. M. Grétry's *Zémire et Azor* (Comédie-italienne, 1771) and Victor Massé's *Les Noces de Jeannette* (Opéra-Comique, 1853).

⁵¹On the association of exotic women characters with natural surroundings (versus government, war, etc.), see Locke, *Musical Exoticism*, 184–92. Regarding women characters, generally, and gardens, see Helena Kopchick Spencer, *The jardin des femmes as Scenic Convention in French Opera and Ballet* (Ph.D. diss., University of Oregon, 2014), and her "Le Divertissement dansé," in Lacombe, *Histoire*, 316–24.

⁵²Jacek Blaszkiewicz, "Writing the City: The Cosmopolitan Realism of Offenbach's *La Vie Parisienne*," *Current Musicology* 103 (2018): 67–96, costume design: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Draner_-_La_Vie_Parisienne,_le_br%C3%A9silien.jpeg. A photo also exists of the singer (known as Brasseur) in that very costume.

many people's memory, been for a decade or so the center of the small but potent Portuguese empire; the Portuguese royal family and administration had relocated there in 1808 as a result of Napoleon's invasion of the Iberian Peninsula.

It seems significant that the land from which this carefree hedonist in *La Vie parisienne* comes is one that had been a colony of some nation other than France. In selecting Brazil, the librettists avoided the risk of commenting directly on France's policies toward its own colonies in the Caribbean, North Africa, Southeast Asia, and the Pacific. Or indeed in Guyane (French Guiana), which had been a French colony since 1643 and which—as some audience members surely knew well—borders on Brazil, the land of Offenbach's boisterous sombrero-wearer and David's Zora and her colorful, mellifluous *mysoli* bird.⁵³

So much for representing Americans, whether they had some African ancestry or not.⁵⁴ As for fully sub-Saharan African characters, one might expect that they would be numerous, especially after the French conquest of lands in western Africa such as Sénégal. Yet there were few sub-Saharanans (*noirs, nègres*) on the operatic stage in France—or indeed elsewhere in Europe—during the nineteenth century.⁵⁵ Performers with darkened skin, brown tights, and so on were used more readily in ballets—often as a group from some “Elsewhere,” such as Nubia—and as supernumeraries, e.g., servants at a court. The most prominent character with dark hair and darkish skin to hold the stage in any opera performed frequently in France, aside from the title role in Verdi's *Aida/Aïda*, was Sélika, the African

queen in Meyerbeer's *L'Africaine*. The imperious Sélika attracts the attentions of both the Portuguese explorer Vasco da Gama and her own countryman Nélusko. In act III, the latter leads an insurrection of his fellow slaves against their Portuguese captors. Sélika thus bears a strong resemblance to other exotic *femmes fatales* of the era.

Sélika's geographical origin is somewhat confused and her ethnic/“racial” identity a bit vague. At first, Meyerbeer and his librettist Scribe placed the opera on the African continent itself (at the source of the Niger River, with the locals referring at times to Islam and their progenitor, Ishmael); then they revised it to take place in India (renaming it *Vasco da Gama*). The version that was finally performed, supervised by other hands, a year after Meyerbeer's death, split the difference by restoring the work's original title; by locating Sélika and her realm, not on the African mainland, but rather on an unnamed island off its coast (in the Indian Ocean); and by giving the island Hindu religious customs, hardly typical of Africa. Perhaps the revising team had in mind Madagascar or Mauritius.⁵⁶

L'Africaine went on to have a substantial career on the world's operatic stages, often in Italian translation. Particularly beloved was, and

⁵³Indeed, in 1809 the French lost Guyane to the Portuguese; they regained it in 1814. Guyane remains today a French *département*: the only mainland American territory that is still a fully integrated part of a European nation.

⁵⁴“Indians”—that is, Native Americans—were rarely represented in French operas of this era.

⁵⁵Among the few exceptions, there is a Black slave in Ambroise Thomas's *Le Roman d'Elvire* (Opéra-Comique, 1860): Lacombe, “Writing,” 140. On the complex relationship between the operatic world and Blackness (whether Caribbean or sub-Saharan), see *Blackness in Opera*, ed. Naomi André, Karen M. Bryan, and Eric Saylor (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2012), and Naomi André, *Black Opera: History, Power, Engagement* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2018).

⁵⁶The population of Mauritius was in the mid-nineteenth century largely Hindu (and still is today), though it was apparently uninhabited in the days of Vasco da Gama. A contemporary illustration of the first-night cast of *L'Africaine* shows Sélika with dark, wild hair and her male counterpart, Nélusko with particularly dark skin. It is reproduced in Locke, “Territoires,” 951. Even if the skin makeup was not carried out so consistently in the theater, the published descriptions and the illustrations in magazines and on the title pages of scores could help reinforce a character's “racial” identity. Regarding the complex compositional history of *L'Africaine*, see John H. Roberts, “Meyerbeer: *Le Prophète* and *L'Africaine*,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Grand Opera*, ed. David Charlton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 222–32; Tommaso Sabbatini, “Genealogia di Sélika,” in *La Fenice prima dell'opera* (program book of the Teatro La Fenice, Venice), 2013–2014, no. 1 (November 2013): 27–44, available online at <https://www.teatrolafenice.it/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/africane.pdf>; and two articles by Gabriela Cruz: “Laughing at History: The Third Act of Meyerbeer's *L'Africaine*,” *Cambridge Opera Journal* 11, no. 1 (1999): 31–76, and “Meyerbeer's Music of the Future,” *Opera Quarterly* 25, nos. 3–4 (2009): 169–202.

still is, Vasco da Gama's "Pays merveilleux . . . Ô paradis!" ("O paradiso!")—an aria of wonderment at the riches and majestic beauty of a land that all Europe, through da Gama, is here espying for the first time.⁵⁷ The concluding lines, coordinating with a long-held high B♭, state plainly the imperialist ideology of possession and plunder:

Ô trésors charmants,
Ô merveilles, salut!
Monde nouveau, tu m'appartiens,
Sois donc à moi, ô beau pays!

(Oh, enchanting treasures,
Hail, oh, wonders!
New world, you belong to me,
Therefore *be* mine, oh, beautiful land!)

EAST ASIA (AND, AS A KIND OF ANNEX:
POLYNESIA)

East Asia, like sub-Saharan Africa, may have been thought difficult to portray effectively on stage. Saint-Saëns reports that when he proposed writing an opera set in Japan to Camille du Locle, director of the Opéra-Comique, "the very idea of putting Japan itself on the stage scared him; he asked us to tone things down."⁵⁸ The result was *La Princesse jaune* (The Yellow Princess; Opéra-Comique, 1872), a one-act work set entirely in the Netherlands. The work's title, which sounds racist to present-day ears, was, in context, ironic. The character never appears in the opera; indeed she exists only in the main male character's drug-addled imagination.⁵⁹

East Asia found a warmer welcome—not toned down but cranked up—in a more extreme

form of comic opera: operetta, often known in France as *opéra-bouffe*. There, realism was not the point; or, put differently, reality often wore extravagant, even ludicrous foreign disguise. Two works by Offenbach, *Ba-Ta-Clan* ("chinoiserie musicale"; Bouffes-Parisiens, 1855) and *L'Île de Tulipatan* (Bouffes-Parisiens, 1868), demonstrate a tendency to use East and Southeast Asian lands as settings in which commentary on life in Europe could be amusingly expressed. Readers in English-speaking lands have a sense of how this can work from Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Mikado*, a work that outfitted an imaginary Japan with various English types—light-hearted schoolgirls and ineffectual governmental ministers—barely disguised.

Ba-Ta-Clan—whose name, minus the hyphens, would seven years later be applied to a pagoda-shaped theater (a *café-concert*) in Paris's eleventh arrondissement—takes place in China.⁶⁰ The characters are given ludicrous names, such as Fé-ni-han, i.e., *fainéant* ("do-nothing" or "useless person"). At first, they sing only bizarre nonsense syllables, as if mocking the presumed incomprehensibility of all things Chinese. But they eventually admit to one another that they are French. (Presumably they are wearing such things as pigtail wigs and "slanted" eye makeup.) One man, for example, is son of a Parisian laundress, from rue Mouffetard on the Left Bank. The characters make musical jokes about currently fashionable French and Italian operas and soon all but one of them head back home.

L'Île de Tulipatan pokes fun at pompous governmental rulers: in this case, the island's Roi Cacatois XXII, who sports another joking name referring at once to the cockatoo (the word for which can be spelled exactly this way in French, or else as *cacatoës* or *cacatoès*) plus "caca." The ruler is thus at once King Cockatoo XXII and King Shit-on-You XXII. The show twits oppressive norms of male and female behavior—for example: all boys and no girls want to be soldiers who love guns and war—such as could easily be found in the France of Offenbach's day and can

⁵⁷One can enjoy it in splendidly healthy recordings from the past century and more, e.g., by Caruso, Domingo, and Alagna.

⁵⁸"Le Japon tout pur, mis à la scène, lui faisait peur, il nous demanda de le mitiger," *Camille Saint-Saëns: Écrits sur la musique et les musiciens 1870–1921*, ed. Marie-Gabrielle Soret (Paris: Vrin, 2012), 751. For parallel (but also distinctive) complications and sensitivities with regard to portrayals of Japan in American music (including opera, the Broadway musical, and film), see W. Anthony Sheppard, *Extreme Exoticism: Japan in the American Musical Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019).

⁵⁹The work's similarly quirky use of exotic styles (East Asian but also Middle Eastern) is discussed in Part 2 of the present article.

⁶⁰In recent years, the Bataclan hall has often been used for rock and other pop-music concerts. This is the hall at which armed terrorists (apparently affiliated with ISIS) killed dozens of concertgoers on 13 November 2015.

no doubt be found today more or less anywhere. A revealing hint: there is, on maps, no island called Tulipatan. The location—presumably somewhere in the vast Middle East, since tulips were originally associated with Persia, or even, because it is an island, Indonesia or the Pacific—is nowhere and everywhere.⁶¹

André Messager's *Madame Chrysanthème* (Théâtre de la Renaissance, 1893) is set in contemporaneous Japan. The work had a limited success and eventually vanished from the repertory, except for one lusciously sad nature aria for the title character ("Le jour, sous le soleil béni"). Its many other fascinations include a colonial male figure who is not Iberian (as in *Fernand Cortez* or *L'Africaine*) or English (as in *Lakmé*) but French, bearing the generic name Pierre. *Madame Chrysanthème*, almost more than any other work mentioned in the present article, deserves an extended study, and not only because it draws creatively on the Pierre Loti novel of the same name, a sneering account of Japanese life that would some years later become an indirect source for Puccini's *Madama Butterfly*.⁶²

Auber's tuneful opéra-comique *Le Cheval de bronze* (Opéra-Comique, 1835) is notable for its pointed critique of the privileged classes, which are represented by the mandarin Tsing-Sing—governor of the local region—and by Prince Yang, the ruler of the vast province of

Shantung (today: Shandong). Tsing-Sing's four wives treat him so mercilessly that, as a local farmer explains, he has become betrothed to a fifth woman "in order to have someone he can boss around" ("pour commander à quelqu'un"). The farmer also explains that Tsing-Sing is, in his official functions, greedy and punitive, showing up once a year "to grab our money or to beat us with sticks" ("pour toucher notre argent ou nous donner des coups de bâton"). As for the all-powerful Prince Yang, he is oblivious to the needs of his subjects. The carefree refrain of his entrance-song says it all:

Ne blâmer rien,
Trouver tout bien,
C'est le système
Que j'aime.⁶³

(Never criticize,
accept everything as it is.
That's the kind of system
I like.)

Audience members at the many theaters in France and other lands where *Le Cheval de bronze* was performed could, no doubt, easily imagine rulers and bureaucrats nearer to home who resembled the lazy, greedy officials in this imagined version of a rigidly hierarchical, comically cruel China.

Just at the end of the century, a compact work by the precocious Reynaldo Hahn (he wrote most of it at eighteen; it reached performance five years later) appeared and pushed the portrayal of East Asia into new, dreamier realms: indeed, its title is *L'Île du rêve* (The Isle of Dreams, subtitled *idylle polynésienne*; Opéra-Comique, 1898). Hahn's opera is based on a novel by the aforementioned Pierre Loti (pseudonym of Louis Marie-Julien Viaud), *Le Mariage de Loti* (1880), which had already left an impact on Delibes's *Lakmé*. *L'Île du rêve*, in three short acts that might better be called "scenes," tells of a Breton sailor who stops on the island of Tahiti, where he is given a new name, Loti, and is welcomed by a native woman, Mahénu (Rarahu in the novel), with whom he falls in love, as she does with him. Georges (Loti) then returns

⁶¹Three other cases of savages in Offenbach's works occur in *Oyayaye, ou La Reine des îles* (an *anthropophagie musicale* [i.e., "a musical case of humans eating humans"]; Folies nouvelles, 1855), *Vent du soir, ou L'Horrible Festin* (Bouffes-Parisiens, 1857), which likewise involves cannibalism; and *Robinson Crusoé* (Opéra-Comique, 1867). They are set, respectively, on a Pacific island, on an "isle de l'Océanie," and off the coast of Venezuela.

⁶²I am currently completing a study of how exoticism functions in a small number of quite varied French comic operas and operettas, including one set in Spain-controlled Peru (Offenbach's *La Périhole*), two in East Asia (Auber's *Le Cheval de bronze*, Messager's *Madame Chrysanthème*), one on the Indian subcontinent and in what is today Uzbekistan (Félicien David's *Lalla-Roukh*), two in the Arab world (Ambroise Thomas's *Le Caïd*—Opéra-Comique, 1849; Bizet's *Djamileh*—Opéra-Comique, 1872), one in a Turkish embassy (complete with a Greek harem woman being held captive) in modern-day Paris (Auber's *Le Maçon*—Opéra-Comique, 1825), and one (Chabrier's *L'Étoile*) in a pointedly vague "Orient" that barely conceals its barbed portrayal of social and political life in the Paris of the 1870s. On the special problems of "representing" an exotic Other land and people in the comic genres, see the astute remarks in Lacombe, "Writing," 157–58.

⁶³Act 1, scene 5.

to France, leaving the young woman (whom he calls *enfant*—child) disconsolate. We also learn along the way of a previous visit by George's brother to the same village, and we meet the woman that *he* abandoned, Téria, who has gone mad from grief.

Told this way, the work sounds like a compact (one-hour-long) re-do of *Madame Chrysanthème* and anticipation of *Madama Butterfly*. (An extended episode involving a ridiculous old Chinese man anticipates the Prince Yamadori scene in *Butterfly*.) But Hahn purposefully blunted the dramatic potential of the plot, avoiding sharply defined characters and making the music continuous rather than full of contrast. With its redoubling of the plot, *L'Île du rêve* is closer to myth than to tragedy.⁶⁴

In this respect, and with its prevailing slow pace and highly nuanced orchestration, it is often analogous to Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande*, which (though composed in 1893–98) would not have its first performance until 1902.⁶⁵ If Asia and the Pacific islands had once been a region of imaginary escape for somewhat bored Western city-dwellers, and highly precise in its detail (as it would remain in *Madama Butterfly*), in Hahn's highly Symbolist-tinted work such lands were themselves escaping from the demands of realistic portrayal and generating instead a kind of trance-inducing mist.⁶⁶

THE EXTENDED MIDDLE EAST (FROM MOROCCO TO INDIA)

The exotic region that was most frequently selected by composers and librettists of French

opera—and the one that produced more works that remain in the international repertory today—is what we might call “the extended Middle East.” This (super-)region was widely understood as stretching from Morocco eastward to India and Ceylon, thus including what, in modern terms, are called North Africa, Southwest Asia (today's Turkey, Lebanon, Syria, and Israel/Palestine, plus the entire Arabian Peninsula and Iran), and the vast Indian subcontinent. Few distinctions were made between locations as distant and different from each other as, say, Algiers and Isfahan. All were often subsumed under the simple term *l'Orient*.⁶⁷

In the imagination of artists and public alike, the extended Middle East (again: Morocco to Ceylon) tended to be marked by a set of recurring images and characteristics including caravans; Islamic religion or, in ancient times or in India and Ceylon, polytheism; highly authoritarian and often arbitrarily harsh rulers (an overlap with what we saw in regard to China); the harem, understood largely as a group of indolent women, each seeking to become *la favorite* of the all-powerful pasha or sultan; and much feuding between tribes and other power-hungry groups and individuals. This was especially true when a work evoked either the Middle East of recent centuries or the tales of the *Thousand and One Nights*. (Works set in the biblical world or the ancient Middle East—e.g., pharaonic Egypt—form a distinct category, as we will see.)⁶⁸

⁶⁴See some illustrations, plus numerous perceptive comments from Hahn and contemporary observers, in the small book accompanying the world-premiere recording, conducted by Hervé Niquet, in the “French Opera” series produced by the Centre de musique romantique française (Bru Zane BZ1043, 1 CD). My review of that recording+book is at *The Arts Fuse*: <https://artsfuse.org/226075/opera-cd-review-two-splendid-world-premiere-recordings-rediscover-an-exotic-master-of-song-reynaldo-hahn/>. Further illustrations and contemporary reviews are available online at <https://reynaldo-hahn.net/Html/operasIDR.htm>.

⁶⁵Another resemblance: both composers took exquisite care to render the sung text in a natural, not stentorian manner.

⁶⁶See n. 64. On the interaction between symbolism and exoticism around 1900, see my *Musical Exoticism*, 214–21.

⁶⁷For an overview of musical representations of the “extended Middle East” (including the biblical world, ancient Egypt, and the Arab and Turkish lands), see my “Cutthroats.” I discuss two “Middle Eastern” operas in detail in the following three articles: “Beyond the Exotic”; “*Aida* and Nine Readings of Empire”; and “Constructing the Oriental ‘Other’: Saint-Saëns's *Samson et Dalila*,” *Cambridge Opera Journal* 3:2 (1991): 261–302. The “Nine Readings” article is reprinted in shortened and lightly revised form in *Fashions and Legacies*, ed. Marvin and Poriss (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 152–75. The *Samson et Dalila* article appeared in shortened and lightly revised form, with a new introductory section, in *The Work of Opera: Genre, Nationhood, and Sexual Difference*, ed. Richard Dellamora and Daniel Fischlin (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 161–84. *Samson et Dalila* and three French operas set in India or Ceylon (*Les Pêcheurs de perles*, *Lakmé* and *Le roi de Lahore*) are also discussed in my *Musical Exoticism*, 175–202.

⁶⁸A further terminological oddity: archaeologists still call the world of the bible and the pharaohs “the ancient Near East,” even though the same territory is, in the present-

In the case of a work set on the Indian subcontinent, the religion alluded to was sometimes Hinduism, telegraphed to the audience by reference to “our gods” in the plural (“nos dieux”), a phrase otherwise mainly encountered in works set in ancient Greece or Rome. But we should remember that much of the Indian subcontinent was under Muslim (Mughal) control in the sixteenth to mid-nineteenth centuries. As a result, the religion of its rulers was monotheistic (as of course was true of Islam everywhere), and the region had many cultural customs in common with those of the Arab and Ottoman-Turkish lands (such as the harem or, more generally, a man’s taking multiple wives). This made it easier than one might think today to subsume India into a single category with the lands of the Arabs, Turks, and Persians.

Some of the real or supposed ethnic and religious characteristics or stereotypes just mentioned were inherited from eighteenth-century “Turkish” operas set in the region, e.g., by Gluck, Grétry, Mozart, and Salieri. Salieri’s astonishingly blunt *Tarare* (Opéra, 1787) features a vicious, selfish king who was explicitly intended as a symbol of despotism within Europe or, more particularly, France.⁶⁹

BIBLICAL AND OTHER OPERAS SET IN THE ANCIENT MIDDLE EAST

Biblical operas were few in nineteenth-century France because they risked drawing attacks from the clergy. Yet some managed to be staged, even to be hailed and oft-performed. And, of course,

nearly all were, by definition, located in ancient Palestine or Egypt. Such operas, in the early nineteenth century, did not yet show, much less feature, the ethno-regional traits mentioned above (e.g., an emphasis on polygamy), presumably because the primary concern was to keep the tone morally uplifting. Méhul’s *Joseph* (Opéra-Comique, 1807) disregards the Egyptians in the story almost entirely. Instead, it focuses on the remorse of Joseph’s brothers for selling him into slavery and then reporting him dead to their father Jacob. Rossini’s *Moïse* (Opéra, 1827) likewise centers primarily on Hebrew characters; the whole last act is about the crossing of the Red Sea, and the Israelites’ gratitude to God.⁷⁰ Of course, the opera contains a prominent role for the oppressive pharaoh and his family, but his wife is a secret convert to the Israelite religion, and his son is in love with a Hebrew maiden. This greatly reduced the opportunities for characterizing the religio-cultural Other.⁷¹ In Auber’s *L’Enfant prodigue* (The Prodigal Son; Opéra, 1850), several characters were Egyptians; they wore costumes carefully modeled after visual depictions found on ancient bas-reliefs.⁷² As for the Israelite characters in many of these works (e.g., those Israelites of the Exodus story, or Saint-Saëns’s *Samson et Dalila*), they were probably understood less as early versions of nineteenth-century Jews than as proto-Christians. This was consistent with the centuries-old Christian hermeneutical tradition of using figures in the Hebrew Bible as prototypes, or sometimes antitypes, of Jesus and other New Testament characters, and of interpreting the suffering,

day English-speaking world, considered part of the Middle East. American political scientists often lump Turkey, Israel, Iran, and the majority-Arab countries together as MENA (“the Middle East and North Africa”). By contrast, the phrase “Near East” (“Proche-Orient,” “Naher Osten,” etc.) is still used by many writers on the European Continent for what Americans and many Britons call the Middle East.

⁶⁹Thomas Betzwieser, *Exotismus und “Türkenoper” in der französischen Musik des Ancien Régime* (Laaber: Laaber, 1993), 332–58; John A. Rice, *Antonio Salieri and Viennese Opera* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 383–420; and Locke, *Music and the Exotic*, 287–322 (*Tarare*: 304–07). See my review of the new recording (conducted by Christophe Rousset), *American Record Guide*, September/October 2019, 137–38, and in the online arts magazine *The Arts Fuse*: <https://artsfuse.org/191785/opera-review-antonio-salieris-tarare-a-startling-opera-of-social-commentary/>.

⁷⁰Its fullest title, though rarely used then or now, is *Moïse et Pharaon; ou, le Passage de la Mer rouge*. Rossini based the work freely on his own *Mosè in Egitto*, 1818, rev. 1819.

⁷¹Anselm Gerhard, *The Urbanization of Opera: Music Theater in Paris in the Nineteenth Century*, trans. Mary Whittall (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 68–83; Benjamin Walton, *Rossini in Restoration Paris* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 154–209.

⁷²Nicole Wild, *Décors et Costumes du XIXe siècle* (Paris: Bibliothèque nationale, 1993), 328; Karen Henson, “Exotisme et Nationalités: *Aida* à l’Opéra de Paris,” trans. Dennis Collins, in *L’opéra en France et en Italie (1791–1925): Une Scène privilégiée d’échanges littéraires et musicaux* (Paris: Société française de musicologie, 2000), 263–97 (279 and plate 20).

faithful Israelite people as the model of the ideal Christian community.⁷³

INCREASING CONTACT WITH, AND KNOWLEDGE ABOUT, THE MIDDLE EAST

The increasing concern for a degree of historical accuracy in the visual depiction of the Middle East, mentioned above in regard to Auber's *L'Enfant prodigue*, was nourished by the illustrations and verbal accounts in the *Description de l'Égypte*, a multi-volume report by a team of dozens of French scholars, some of whom had spent substantial time in Egypt in the years 1798–1801 beginning with Napoleon's military conquest of Alexandria. The *Description* reached publication in the years 1809–29 and included volumes devoted to music-making, musical instruments, and dance in both ancient and current-day Egypt. The numerous illustrated plates in the *Description* soon influenced French architecture, furniture design, and the like: as Hervé Lacombe notes, "Empire" style featured "lotus capitals, sphinxes, obelisks, and pyramids."⁷⁴ Prominent literary figures also began traveling to "the East" (e.g., Egypt or Algeria), among them Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, Chateaubriand, Lamartine, Nerval, and Flaubert, together with such important painters as Decamps, Vernet, Delacroix, and Chassériau.⁷⁵

A more concretely musico-depictive impulse came from *Le Désert*, a concert work of 1844 for tenor, male chorus, orchestra and narrator that was set in the Arab world. It was composed by Félicien David, a native of Provence who had studied for a few years at the Paris Conservatoire. *Le Désert* was first heard at the distinguished Salle du Conservatoire and it instantly became the talk of the town. More performances followed within the coming weeks and months, including some conducted by Berlioz or by David himself. The work was eventually performed and published in numerous lands, often in translation.

⁷³See Locke, "Constructing the Oriental 'Other,'" 271, 274.

⁷⁴Hervé Lacombe, *The Keys to French Opera in the Nineteenth Century*, trans. Edward Schneider (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 180.

⁷⁵Lacombe, *Keys*, 179–86.

Le Désert was the first notable European work by a composer who had direct knowledge of life in the Middle East (or any other non-European region). Thirteen years earlier (1831), David had dropped out of the Conservatoire to join the Saint-Simonians, an early (or "utopian") socialist movement. Soon after, in 1833, he was one of several dozen Saint-Simonians who spent two years in Turkey, Palestine, and Egypt and who traveled to "the Orient" to promote their doctrines of the dignity of labor and the equality of the sexes.⁷⁶ *Le Désert* incorporates several melodies that David had heard in his travels and, more generally, focuses on daily life in the region: the lumbering progress of a caravan across the arid wastes, a sandstorm, women dancing at evening, an equestrian contest, and a muezzin giving out, in Arabic, the call to worship ("God is great, come to prayer").⁷⁷ Exoticism at one point becomes a form of social critique, namely in a male chorus extolling the freedom of life in the desert and denouncing "[you] pale inhabitants of the city" (members of the audience!) who are locked away in your immobile "tombs of stone" (i.e., solid houses, rather than conveniently portable tents).

It was no doubt in response to the impact of *Le Désert* and of the increasing French colonization of North Africa that, later in the century, operas featuring ancient Hebrews and early

⁷⁶They also had a plan for cutting a canal through the Isthmus of Suez, which they believed would facilitate international trade and thus advance the cause of world peace. The plan was of course adopted decades later, under the auspices of several governments and major banks.

⁷⁷For fuller accounts of *Le Désert*, see Hagan, *Félicien David*, 67–86; Richard Taruskin, *Oxford History of Western Music*, 6 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) 3:386–92; my *Music, Musicians, and the Saint-Simonians* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 208–12; Robert Laudon, *The Dramatic Symphony: Issues and Explorations from Berlioz to Liszt* (Hillsdale, NY: Pendragon, 2012), 81–98, 101, 112, 132 (possible influence on act I prelude to Wagner's *Lohengrin*), and 133–34; my "Cutthroats," 30–32; and my chapter "The French Symphony: David, Gounod, and Bizet to Saint-Saëns, Franck, and Their Followers," in *The Nineteenth-Century Symphony*, ed. D. Kern Holoman (New York: Schirmer Books, 1997), 163–94. In the "French Symphony" chapter, I erroneously stated that the spoken narration is unrhymed. On the two recordings of the work, see my review of the more recent one (conducted by Laurence Equilbey) on Naïve CD 5405: *American Record Guide* 78:4 (2015): 96–97; updated (with various Internet links) at http://www.operatoday.com/content/2015/11/a_prize-winning.php.

Christians would openly revel in Middle Eastern “local color.” This was often manifested in costume and set designs (as before) but, thanks in large part to *Le Désert*, also now in musical style. For example, troupes of ballerinas in such operas tended to be clad in skimpy or gauzy fabrics and to dance to exquisitely sensual music tinged with modal degrees (e.g., the lowered sixth and seventh), as when the priestesses of Dagon dance and wave their floral garlands enticingly at the Hebrew warriors in act I of Saint-Saëns’s *Samson et Dalila*.⁷⁸

Or such an opera could evoke, in quasi-ethnographic fashion, the Middle East of the current day, a familiar instance even today being a strongly Arab-sounding passage—complete with repeatedly emphasized augmented seconds in the melody—in the act III Bacchanale from the same opera. Saint-Saëns later explained that he had received this melody from a French military man who had been prominent in the conquest of Algeria.⁷⁹ More generally, this opera dramatizes the tension between the ancient Hebrews, who, as mentioned, “stood in” for modern-day Christians, and the pagan Philistines, who to some extent may have represented the Ottoman Turks and Arabs: that is, the current-day inhabitants of the Holy Lands.

IMAGINING THE MIDDLE EAST OF EARLY CHRISTIANITY

Three notable works involve the Middle East as it was imagined to have existed two millennia earlier (what historians and archaeologists call the “ancient Near East”).⁸⁰ The exotic locale

can here carry multiple meanings. As often with operatic works evoking the distant past (e.g., Baroque operas set in ancient Greece or Rome), the work could either incarnate or criticize the European social values of the composer’s and librettist’s own day. But it can also—as is less often the case with ancient Greece or Rome—reflect widely shared European attitudes toward the people who, in the composer’s day, inhabited the locale in question. Massenet’s *Hérodiade* (Brussels, 1881), set in first-century Roman-occupied Judea, puts John the Baptist and Salomé on stage. The latter is here (unlike in Richard Strauss’s German-language *Salome*; Dresden, 1905) a modest young Jewish woman devoted to the Baptist, as she reveals in her famous aria “Il est doux, il est bon.” The rapacious pagan world—back then but also possibly “now”—is vividly represented by Hérode (Herod Antipas, son of Herod the Great). This Jewish-born ruler of a Roman client-state, and thus a kind of local emperor, is a pitifully weak human being, consumed by unprovoked lust for the virtuous young Salomé in ways that presumably were felt as less threatening when the depraved male character was a denizen of the Middle East.⁸¹

Some two decades earlier, Félicien David’s *Herculanum* (Opéra, 1859) presented a similar situation, but with the genders reversed. This opera—once popular, and recently revived to much acclaim—takes place in and around Herculaneum in 79 A.D., the year when the nearby Mt. Vesuvius famously erupted and destroyed both Herculaneum and Pompeii.⁸²

Châtelet, 1911), using a luxuriantly exoticized spoken and sung text (in French) by Gabriele d’Annunzio. See my “Unacknowledged Exoticism in Debussy: The Incidental Music for *Le Martyre de saint Sébastien* (1911),” *Musical Quarterly* 90 (2007): 371–415.

⁸¹On the portrayal of Jerusalem and the court of Herod in *Hérodiade* (including descriptive details borrowed from Flaubert’s 1877 novella *Hérodias*), see Tommaso Sabbatini, “Jerusalem, Machaerus, Carthage: Massenet’s *Hérodiade* and Flaubert’s Orient,” in *Massenet and the Mediterranean World*, ed. Simone Ciolfi (Bologna: Ut Orpheus Edizioni, 2015), 85–100.

⁸²The world-premiere recording and an accompanying small book appeared in the “Opéra français” series produced by the Centre de musique romantique française (Éditiones singulares ES1020). See my review in *American Record Guide* 79:1 (2016): 92–95; updated, lightly expanded, and posted (with Internet links) at: http://www.operatoday.com/content/2016/03/felicien_david_.php.

⁷⁸On the standard musical markers of the extended Middle East, see Frits Noske, *French Song from Berlioz to Duparc: The Origin and Development of the Mélodie*, rev. Rita Benton and Frits Noske, trans. Rita Benton (New York: Dover, 1970), 312–14; and Jean-Pierre Bartoli, “L’Orientalisme dans la musique française du XIX^e siècle: La Ponctuation, la seconde augmentée et l’apparition de la modalité dans les procédures exotiques,” *Revue belge de musicologie* 51 (1997): 137–70.

⁷⁹Further, see Part 2 of this article.

⁸⁰Two other important “early saint” operas derive, however freely, from Pierre Corneille’s tragedy *Polyeucte* (1642): Donizetti’s *Les Martyrs* (Opéra, 1840; based on his *Poliuto*, first performed posthumously: 1848) and Gounod’s *Polyeucte* (Opéra, 1878). Yet another important instance, by Debussy, comes from after my end-date of 1900 and is not an opera: *Le Martyre de saint Sébastien* (Théâtre du

Here the representative of Roman power is female—Queen Olympia—and she is drawn to a recent and not very committed convert to Christianity, the Greek prince Hélios. Exoticism functions in multiple ways in this fascinating work. The queen is herself from “the East” (apparently Mesopotamia). This helps make her a plausible sexual predator, like Dalila in the opera that Saint-Saëns began writing around the same time but did not reach performance until 1877. The ascetic (indeed, celibate) early Christians—the steadfast Lilia, plus the pious chorus whose prayer scene opens act II—are shown as living austerely in a deserted locale far from the palaces of Herculeaneum. Their determination amid the hardships of life in this forbidding region cause them to resemble the devout Muslims who trudge by caravan in David’s *Le Désert* and, in Bizet’s *Carmen*, the Gypsy bandits who negotiate the treacherous mountainside in the opening of act III. These followers of the new sect have no use for the pompous palaces and self-indulgent lifestyle of the glittering city of Herculeaneum—excesses that their spiritual leader, Magnus, denounces and that will lead to the city’s destruction in the opera’s final moments.

Massenet’s *Thaïs* (Opéra, 1894, rev. 1898) uses music and dancing to identify fourth-century Egyptians with the nineteenth-century inhabitants of the Middle East. For example, at the end of act I, Thaïs engages in a sexually inviting pantomime.⁸³ And, in act II, an onstage performer known only as “La charmeuse” offers a come-hither entertainment uniting supple bodily movements and a curvaceous wordless vocal line—all of this redolent of North African entertainments familiar to French people who had traveled to North Africa or had attended the Paris world’s fairs of 1878 or 1889.⁸⁴

In addition, one must at least mention a work that would require extensive discussion for its multiple exotic locales. Halévy’s *Le Juif errant* (The Wandering Jew; Opéra, 1852) deals primarily with a Christian world of the distant past.

The title figure is a mythical character, Ashvérus (first mentioned in thirteenth-century writings), who supposedly taunted Christ as the latter was led to his crucifixion, and thereafter was doomed to wander the world like a latter-day Cain or the title character in Wagner’s recent *Der fliegende Holländer* (Dresden, 1843). The five-act work, staged and costumed in an extraordinarily luxurious manner, contains scenes that are set in the twelfth century CE and move their way progressively eastward and southward: from Antwerp in the western part of the Holy Roman Empire to Bulgaria at the foot of Mt. Hemos, to a broad public square in Thessaloniki, to Constantinople (today’s Istanbul) during the era of the Crusade (ca. 1190), and to the Valley of Jehoshaphat. In that final location, the Last Judgment is enacted, complete with the Exterminating Angel sounding the famous trumpet call. The souls of the damned are set apart from those of the blessed, and all are sent to their respective rewards, after which the Wandering Jew, who has been asleep on the sand, awakes, realizes he has been dreaming, and marches wearily onward. Halévy’s opera was a great success at first, providing ripe material for piano arrangements and the like. But, unlike his *La Juive*, it fell quickly into operatic oblivion. *Le Juif errant* surely deserves at least a decent world-premiere recording, or maybe a semi-staged concert version allowing the audience to provide the extraordinary, and often highly exoticized, visuals in their imagination.⁸⁵

THE THOUSAND AND ONE NIGHTS AND A FANTASTICAL MIDDLE EAST

The Arab world itself, long little known to Europeans, was quickly thrust into public awareness when Antoine Galland published *Les Mille et Une Nuits* (1704–17), a free adaptation of the famous “Arabian Nights” tales that had circulated in the Arab world for centuries in manuscripts of varying length and reliability. (Galland even added some stories that had been

⁸³A powerful moment, to be discussed in Part 2 of this article.

⁸⁴See Annegret Fauser, *Musical Encounters at the 1889 Paris World’s Fair* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2005).

⁸⁵Further, see Hallman, “Présence,” 973–74. A bit earlier (1847), Liszt had composed an extended song entitled *Le Juif errant* (S. 300/LW N40).

told to him by Hannā Diāb, a well-traveled Maronite Christian man from Aleppo, for which Galland's publication provides the earliest known versions. These Arabian Nights tales were quickly translated into numerous other languages, and they also spawned new tales written in a similar manner, e.g., *Les Mille et Un Jours* (1710–12). The fascination with the characters and plot devices in these stories spilled over into a number of eighteenth-century comic or semi-comic operas (e.g., by Gluck and Grétry). The trend continued into the nineteenth century, producing such notable instances as Boieldieu's *Le Calife de Bagdad* (Opéra-Comique, 1800), Isouard's *Aladin, ou La Lampe merveilleuse* ("féerie-musicale"; Opéra, 1822; completed by A. M. Benincori); Cherubini's *Ali-Baba, ou Les Quarante Voleurs* (Opéra, 1833), Chabrier's *L'Étoile* (Bouffes-Parisiens, 1877), and Reyer's *La Statue* (Théâtre-Lyrique, 1861).

Boieldieu's *Le Calife* contains a harem scene in which local and foreign women vie to become the caliph's favorite. Here the servant Késie sings (and perhaps dances) a bolero with guitar-like pizzicato accompaniment from the strings in the orchestra as well as a village-like (drone-laden) German Ländler and a minor-mode Scottish lament, all in order to support her claim that she can match the charms of women from other countries.⁸⁶

Somewhat similar in fairy-tale feeling is Félicien David's tuneful and engagingly scored *Lalla-Roukh* (Opéra-Comique, 1862), based on a book by the Irish poet Thomas Moore about a beautiful Mughal princess from Kashmir who must travel to Samarkand (in what is now Uzbekistan) to marry, against her will, the king of that land. Numerous musical numbers in *Lalla-Roukh* praise the beautiful surroundings that the anxious heroine and her retinue encounter as they move along their otherwise grim route. Early in act I the chorus (Lalla-Roukh's servants) is given a gentle, folklike song to the words "C'est ici le pays des roses, / . . . Sous cette

ombre on peut s'abriter" ("This is the land of roses. . . . Beneath this shade we can take shelter"). The charming number is stated twice—first by the men, later by everyone who has gathered on stage—and creates a sense of "the East" as a fantastical wonderland, more lovely than anything one could find in a Western town or city.

THE MIDDLE EAST IN MORE RECENT HISTORICAL ERAS

A small number of "extended Middle East" operas are set only a few centuries earlier than the composer's and audience's present day. Two of these deal with political tensions *within* a population understood as Eastern and Other. Catel's *Les Bayadères* (Opéra, 1810) relates the losing struggle that Dēmalī, a rajah of Benares (i.e., Varanasi, again in northern India), wages against Maratha insurgents.⁸⁷ The Mughal Empire, which the Maratha confederacy would in fact defeat in 1674, was Islamic in religion. But the opera makes no reference to Islam. Indeed, Dēmalī and his court are clearly Hindu, since the officials include a Chief Brahmin and we hear numerous references to Vishnu, Durga, and other "dieux." The opera was apparently meant to praise Napoleon and therefore treats the rajah as a completely admirable figure whose strategic errors arise only from his having been misled by some of his advisors. The heroic Laméa, a chaste temple dancer, disarms the Marathas by performing before them with her fellow *danseuses* and getting them drunk. This episode echoes the patriotic and divinely ordained murders committed by two biblical women: Jael and Judith.⁸⁸ The resemblance must have

⁸⁷See the recording and book of essays, published in 2014 by the Centre de musique romantique française at the Palazzetto Bru Zane (Ediciones singulares, ES1016). My review appeared in *American Record Guide* 81:6 (2018): 74–75. Dēmalī does not seem to be identifiable with any one Indian monarch.

⁸⁸The title character in Halévy's aforementioned *Jaguarita l'Indienne* (see n. 48), likewise subdues her fellow tribesmen with drink. She thereby stops them from attacking the Dutch settlers. A comparable plot-constellation occurs in a work set on the shores of the Caspian Sea, Louis Bourgault-Ducoudray's *Thamara*, except that the heroine falls in love with the enemy leader (Opéra, 1891).

⁸⁶See Miriam K. Whaples, "Early Exoticism Revisited," in Bellman, *Exotic*, 3–25, 307–13; James Parakilas, "How Spain Got a Soul," in Bellman, *Exotic*, 137–93, 333–42 (here 143); and Locke, "Cutthroats," 25.

helped audiences identify with Laméa, despite her religion, foreign name and costume, and, perhaps, her makeup and hair.

After the women have disabled the enemy, Laméa frees Démaly from imprisonment, but he, suffering from battle wounds, is now close to death. Laméa, following Brahmin custom, prepares to commit *satī* (to join him on the funeral pyre when he dies), thus proving her devotion to him. Démaly asks her to marry him, and, miraculously, he returns to health. The work, full of fresh and interesting melodic ideas, harmonies, and orchestrational choices, was so successful—and so impressive and unique in staging—that it was brought back as the opera with which the new home of the Paris Opéra (Salle Lepeletier) was inaugurated in 1821.

Somewhat similar, in that it relied on historical accounts (however distorted), was Cherubini's *Les Abencérages, ou L'Étendard de Grenade* (Opéra, 1813). The work expands upon an anecdotal account of a struggle between two groups of Arabs in late-fifteenth-century Spain, the Abencerrages and the Zegrís, and the attempt, successful in the opera at least, of the former to make peace with the Christians who were attempting to complete their reconquest of the Iberian Peninsula.⁸⁹ Massenet's *Le Cid* (1885), based freely on Pierre Corneille's renowned play (1636), likewise deals with a historical event: the battle between the Spanish warrior Rodrigo, who would come to be known as Le Cid, and the Moorish (i.e., Arab) forces under Boabdil. The second tableau (in act I) begins with a scene of rejoicing among the Spaniards after a momentary victory over the Moors, and tableau 6 (in act III) includes an orchestral "Moorish rhapsody" to help characterize the Moorish soldiers (and apparently their wives and, perhaps, children) that the soldiers from Navarra and Castile have brought back from the recent combat. The stage direction projects a certain enjoyment of the captives' misery: "A gauche sont accroupis des prisonniers, des prisonnières et des musiciens maures. Désordre très pittoresque" (At left we see, squatting, Moorish prisoners—male and female—and

musicians; all arranged in a highly picturesque disorder).⁹⁰

During the rest of the century, serious operas would rarely allow the possibility that a group of Muslims could be peace-loving and conciliatory. The trend was, instead, a return to a portrayal of Muslims as implacably hostile to Europeans, a stereotype that had been memorably incarnated in Osmín, the overseer of the estate of the (largely humane) pasha in Mozart's *Abduction from the Seraglio*, 1782. In this regard, distant memories of the Ottomans' control of southeastern Europe, culminating in the sieges of Vienna in 1529 and 1683, may have been reinforced by recent warfare between French and native fighters in North Africa: for example, the resistance movement in Kabylia (ca. 1847–54) led by Bou Baghia and a female warrior, Lalla Fadhma N'Soumer.

This more negative portrayal already shows up in Rossini's *Le Siège de Corinthe* (Opéra, 1826; freely based on his Italian opera *Maometto II*, 1820). *Le Siège de Corinthe* includes the most topical attempt in any Rossini opera to harness the day's headlines for theatrical effect. As so often in the history of opera, it does this indirectly, in order to skirt censorship from church and government and condemnations from critics and influential theatergoers. The plot is set in the 1450s and involves an important historical event: the lengthy attack on the Greek city of Corinth by the Ottoman Turks under Sultan Mehmet II. But this was, for Parisian theatergoers, a transparent allegory of the Ottomans' current struggle to put down the protracted Greek War of Independence (1821–29)—a conflict limned at the time on canvas by Delacroix (*The Massacres at Scio*, 1824; *Greece Expiring on the Ruins of Missolonghi*, 1826) and in verse by Victor Hugo ("L'Enfant," in *Les Orientales*, 1829).⁹¹

⁹⁰In act II (tableau 3), Boabdil's envoy arrives on horseback and challenges the Spanish troops to new combat. The king dismisses him "proudly," and the envoy departs "with a last gesture of defiance." The best-known portion of *Le Cid* is the danced *divertissement* in act III (tableau 4), in which each region of Spain is represented by music supposedly typical of it (e.g., the spirited "Navarraise").

⁹¹Walton, Rossini, 108–53; Warren Roberts, *Rossini and Post-Napoleonic Europe* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2015), 184–85; Larry Wolff, *Ottoman Power and Operatic*

⁸⁹Another opera involving the Abencerrages is Théodore Dubois's *Aben-Hamet* (Théâtre du Châtelet, 1884).

In the course of the nineteenth century, a largely negative portrayal of Muslims became so standard that Massenet's *Le Roi de Lahore* (Opéra, 1877) could casually characterize as violent and "black" a battalion of soldiers that comes from an unnamed Muslim land. This idiosyncratic opera combines the "recent centuries" type with elements of the legendary: act III takes place in Hindu heaven.⁹² As for the evil Muslim marauders, they are treated casually, not even appearing on stage; they end up dispersing into the desert when challenged by the forces of good. The latter (King Alim and his court and army) are explicitly Hindu, but, in context, may have symbolized present-day Europe or even France in particular.⁹³

LAKMÉ AND BRITISH (OR IS IT FRENCH?) IMPERIALISM

Among (mostly) serious French operas, only one—Delibes's *Lakmé*—was set in what audiences would call "today" in some part of the Muslim or Hindu world and nonetheless managed to become a standard part of the international repertory. As in David's comic opera *La Perle du Brésil*, the colonial power is a country other than France; the opera is set in British-controlled India. Still, the work does contain some overt critique of the obtuseness of colonial officers who find themselves in the midst of a foreign society and of women from the home country who visit or even join the officers there. The scenes satirizing the English characters—part of a long French tradition of twitting the English as insufferably "prosaic"—are largely carried out in spoken dialogue.⁹⁴ As a result,

these scenes are not familiar to many opera lovers, even though they may know well a few excerpts (the act I soprano-mezzo duet: "Viens, Mallika . . . Sous le dôme épais"; the act I tenor aria: "Fantaisie aux divins mensonges"; and the act II soprano "Bell Song").

Indian society is presented in a highly bifurcated manner: female gentleness, male viciousness. Women characters are associated with colorful flowers, exquisite jewelry, and diegetic singing.⁹⁵ The songs they perform are often gentle or slightly sad ("Viens, Mallika" and the introduction and narrative portions of the "Bell Song"). The male leaders and their followers are resentful and prone to violence.⁹⁶ The Hindu priest Nilakantha sets out to assassinate the English officer Gérald, who has stepped into the priest's secluded compound and fallen in love with his daughter. Gérald ends up merely wounded. In the final act, while Lakmé is nursing him back to health, the local men rise up in arms against the English overlords and their military enforcers.

If any similar uprising ever happened in a French opera set in, say, present-day Algeria, that work either never reached the stage or failed with audiences and critics and soon vanished. Nobody, clearly, wanted to have their noses rubbed in the realities of French imperialism while it was in the phase of its greatest expansion. If anything, Delibes ensures that we think, in the final act, not of the French in North Africa, but of a directly comparable moment in a French exotic opera, *Carmen*, set in yet another country, Spain. Gérald hears the tuneful fifes of the British military band marching to put down the Hindu rebellion, and Lakmé realizes at that moment that he will never be truly hers.

Emotions on the European Stage from the Siege of Vienna to the Age of Napoleon (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016), 305–60.

⁹²Further on the "Heaven" act in *Le Roi de Lahore*, see Part 2.

⁹³Locke, *Musical Exoticism*, 178–80, 183, 196. The Arab conquerors of the Iberian Peninsula are portrayed as cruel—in their policies and also individually—in Gounod's *Le Tribut de Zamora* (Opéra, 1881); see my review of its first complete recording: *American Record Guide* 82:1 (2019): 100–02. Lightly revised and uploaded to *TheArtsFuse*: <http://artsfuse.org/190776/opera-album-review-a-grand-opera-from-late-in-gounods-career-gets-its-first-recording-ever/>.

⁹⁴"The parallel [i.e., contrast] with the prosaic civilization of England transplanted smack onto Indian soil brings out marvelously well the poetry of unchanging customs [in

India] that seem to be impervious to man and time"—from part 3 of the anonymous multipart "Lettres sur l'Inde," *L'Illustration*, 19 May 1849, p. 183, as quoted in Lacombe, *Keys*, 180.

⁹⁵See Gurminder Kaur Bhogal's "Lakmé's Echoing Jewels," in *The Arts of the Prima Donna in the Long Nineteenth Century*, ed. Rachel Cowgill and Hilary Poriss (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 186–205.

⁹⁶One character forms a special case: Hadji, the male servant of Lakmé's father Nilakantha, is totally devoted to Lakmé. The role is generally given to a thin- and often nasal-voiced character tenor, the type known in the French operatic world as a Trial, after Antoine Trial (1737–95).

The musicodramatic situation is directly comparable to the one in *Carmen*, act II, where Carmen sings and dances (and plays the castanets, or, according to the original libretto, clicks pieces of a broken plate together) for Don José, but he is suddenly distracted by the bugles of his regiment and announces to *his* exotic *femme fatale* that he must get back to the barracks. The biggest difference is perhaps that Lakmé is at once *fatale* and *fragile*.

The interrelationships among French exotic operas will become even clearer when we look in more detail in Part 2 at the typical plots, character types (including fatal women and vulnerable men), and musical devices that were used again and again, yet often with fresh twists.

APPENDIX FOUR GUIDES TO TERMINOLOGY AND REPERTORY

1. Terminology. Some would prefer to call the works studied here “exoticist” rather than “exotic” so as to make clear that they reflect widely held assumptions that were prejudicial, distorted, and culturally self-serving. The main point of such objections is that, for example, the character Carmen in Bizet’s opera is not a Rom (Romany) woman but a nineteenth-century cultural construction of a “Spanish Gypsy” woman; and that the style of her “Chanson bohème” (“Gypsy Song”) in act II is likewise an agreed-upon Parisian *version* of the music of Spain or, more specifically, of the Roma (*gitanos*) there, rather than the actual thing. Calling the portrayal *exoticist*, rather than merely *exotic*, would, according to this line of thought, have the advantage of emphasizing that an underlying cultural ideology (an -ism) is being expressed in the work. I understand this position and in large part agree with it. Still, I prefer to use “exotic opera” and analogous phrases (e.g., “exotic styles”), mainly because they have attained wide currency and have built up a range of relevant associations with specific repertory works.⁹⁷

⁹⁷See Locke, *Music and the Exotic*, 17–26, 31–33 (and nn. 44–45, p. 337), and 324–26 (“Afterword: A Helpfully

I should perhaps also make clear that my use of the phrase “exotic opera” is not meant to imply that such a work was or is somehow exotic within (i.e., foreign to) its French cultural context. Quite the contrary, an opera rich in implications about exotic lands and peoples can offer eloquent testimony to attitudes prevailing in France (and elsewhere) at the time and for generations to come.

As for the terms “Orientalism” and “the Orient,” I largely avoid them throughout this article for many reasons, or else use them within (understood) quotation marks. For English speakers today, “Orient” has a special disadvantage: it often refers to East and Southeast Asia, as if they comprised a vast undifferentiated region. Furthermore, “Oriental” as an adjective or, worse, as a noun (“an Oriental”) has accumulated many negative and highly stereotypical connotations.⁹⁸

2. The special problems of light opera (*comique* and *bouffe*). Most of the operas discussed by scholars in relation to exoticism are relatively serious. Comic opera in France (as elsewhere) has often focused on mundane daily life, e.g., tensions in a bourgeois household or between aristocrats and commoners. A nineteenth-century *opéra-comique* (such as by Auber) or, even more so, an *opéra-bouffe* (such as by Offenbach) could evoke current events and trends in French society in a manner that was either direct and pointed or indirect but quite transparent. Indeed, the light-hearted moments in *Carmen* and *Lakmé* (two of the six operas mentioned at the outset of this article) derive from those works’ being partly rooted in traditions of French comic opera. (Some textbooks create a distinct category for such mixed-tone works: *opéra-lyrique*.) Writers on French operas have tended to neglect the lighter genres. As a result, I have made a point of taking such works into consideration, including particularly

Troubling Term”); also Locke, “On Exoticism, Western Art Music, and the Words We Use,” *Archiv für Musikwissenschaft* 69:4 (2012): 318–28.

⁹⁸Further, see the section of the present article on the “extended Middle East.” Some people from East and Southeast Asia whom I know continue to use “Oriental” to refer, in a neutral manner, to their native region and culture, perhaps reflecting its longstanding use in British-based educational systems and newspapers (e.g., in Hong Kong and Singapore).

accomplished ones by Chabrier and Messager, in both parts of this article.⁹⁹

3. Reviving certain operas today. Some operas exist on the margins of the repertory but are performed from time to time. For example, Cherubini's French opera *Ali-Baba, ou Les Quarante Voleurs* was performed at La Scala in 1963 (though in Italian) and, fortunately, was recorded. The singers included Teresa Stich-Randall, Alfredo Kraus, and Vladimiro Ganzarolli.¹⁰⁰ In September 2018, the work returned to La Scala, with an international group of young professional singers under the stage direction of Liliana Cavani.¹⁰¹

Many works mentioned here, whether well known or forgotten, can be heard, in excerpts or in full, through YouTube, Naxos Music Library, Spotify, and other online services. The listener should be wary, though: a given recording may eliminate most or all spoken dialogue (a crucial component in many examples of *opéra-comique*, *opéra-lyrique*, and *opéra-bouffe*), or it may reassign a role to a different voice type. For example, the trouser role of the handsome young peddler Lazuli in Chabrier's *L'Étoile*, written for a mezzo-soprano *en travesti*, is sometimes now—without historical justification—sung by a tenor.¹⁰²

4. Specific theaters, and spoken vs. sung dialogue. Because the question of spoken dialogue vs. recitative is so basic to French opera in the nineteenth century, I include, at the first significant mention of an opera, the name of the theater at which it was first performed, as well as the year of its premiere there. Works mentioned here as having been first performed at

the Opéra-Comique or the Bouffes-Parisiens all used spoken dialogue.

I should perhaps also warn that in some cases knowing the name of the theater is not enough. For example, at the Théâtre-Lyrique, certain works used spoken dialogue and others did not. Bizet's *Les Pêcheurs de perles* is entirely sung, even the passages that are most like free, plot-advancing discussions between two characters before a formal number begins. The original libretto used brief spoken exchanges at some crucial junctures, but Bizet reworked them as recitatives.



Abstract.

Nineteenth-century French opera is renowned for its obsession with “the exotic”—that is, with lands and peoples either located far away from “us” Western Europeans or understood as being very different from us. One example: hyper-passionate Spaniards and “Gypsies” in Bizet's *Carmen*. Most discussions of the role that the exotic plays in nineteenth-century French opera focus on a few standard-repertory works (mainly serious in nature), rather than looking at a wider range of significant works performed at the time in various theaters, including the Opéra, the Opéra-Comique, and Offenbach's Bouffes-Parisiens.

The present article attempts to survey the repertory broadly. Part 1 examines various “different” (or Other) lands and peoples frequently represented on stage in French operas. Part 2 discusses typical plots and character types found in these operas (sometimes regardless of the particular exotic land that was chosen) and concludes by exploring the musical means that were often employed to impel the drama and to convey the specific qualities of the people or ethnic group being represented. These musical means could include special or unusual traits: either all-purpose style markers of the exotic generally or more specific style markers associated with identifiable peoples or regions. But the musical means could also include any of the rich fund of devices that opera composers *normally* used when creating drama and defining character: melodic, harmonic, structural, and so on. This last point is often neglected or misunderstood in discussions of “the exotic in music,” which tend instead to focus primarily on elements that indisputably “point to” (as if semiotically) the specific land or people that the work is seeking to evoke or represent.

In both Parts 1 and 2, instances are chosen from works that were often quite successfully performed at the time in French-speaking regions and that, even if little known today, can at least be consulted through recordings or videos. The works come from the standard

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⁹⁹Still, the question of how “the exotic” and French colonialism are reflected specifically in the comic operatic genres deserves separate treatment, more extended than what is possible here.

¹⁰⁰The 1963 recording, conducted by Nino Sanzogno, is on Nuova Era 2361/62 (2 CDs.)

¹⁰¹See Renato Verga's informative review at Bachtrack.com: <https://bachtrack.com/review-cherubini-ali-baba-academy-scala-milan-september-2018>.

¹⁰²The unauthorized tenor option was adopted in D.-J. Inghelbrecht's radio-broadcast recording from 1957. The cast members use a savvily rewritten version of the spoken dialogue and deliver it with variety and verve. The conducting and singing are likewise witty and elegant. A 2016 Covent Garden production was reworked in more extreme fashion: two added characters, speaking in English, engage in annoying banter about the plot.

recognized operatic genres: five-act *grands opéras*, three-act *opéras-comiques*, and short works in *bouffe* style. The composers involved include (among others) Adam, Auber, Berlioz, Bizet, Chabrier, Cherubini, Clapisson, Félicien David, Delibes, Flotow, Gomis, Gounod, Halévy, Messenger, Meyerbeer, Hippolyte Monpou, Offenbach, Ernest Reyer, Saint-Saëns, Ambroise Thomas, and Verdi (*Les vêpres siciliennes*, *Don Carlos*).

Examining certain lesser-known works reveals merits that have gone relatively unheralded. As for the better-known works, approaching them in this wide-angled way grants us a richer appreciation of their strengths and their often-enlivening internal contradictions.

Keywords: exoticism, imperialism, Orientalism, local color, opera, France (nineteenth century), colonialism, libretto, staging, sets, costumes

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