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## Ceremony, Celebration and Spectacle in *La Juive*

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Fromental Halévy's *La Juive*, famously one of the most spectacular and crowd-pleasing productions of Parisian grand opéra, was criticized for being more like circus than opera, dubbed an 'opéra-Franconi', after the owners of the Cirque-Olympique. Yet it proved particularly popular with audiences at the Opéra, increasingly familiar with, and appreciative of, the delights of supposedly less high-brow theatres.<sup>1</sup> Its ostentation and its success were of course linked, the reportedly huge cost of mounting the opera not unrelated to its ultimate financial triumph: like the other lavish productions that immediately preceded it, *La Juive* was indeed guilty of depending for its effect principally on vast, richly decorated sets, and a cast of hundreds in precious period costume. It is tempting to generalize, and conclude that the preferred object of contemplation for the 1830s audience—whose bourgeois values are invoked with tedious regularity—was essentially money: the Opéra had resources for ambitious staging far exceeding those of the boulevard theatres from which it borrowed the aesthetic, and *La Juive* was, above all, expensive even in comparison with other *mise en scène* landmarks such as *Guillaume Tell* and *Robert le diable*.<sup>2</sup> But along with presenting the

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<sup>1</sup> The phrase 'opéra-Franconi' was coined by Castil-Blaze, in his *Théâtres lyriques de Paris [ij]: L'Académie Impériale de Musique de 1645 à 1855* (Paris, 1885), 246; see also Marie-Antoinette Allevy, *La mise en scène en France dans la première moitié du dix-neuvième siècle* (Geneva, 1976; first published 1938). *La Juive*, with music by Fromental Halévy to a libretto by Eugène Scribe, was first performed at the Opéra on 23 February 1835.

<sup>2</sup> *Guillaume Tell* (Rossini) had its premiere in 1829 and *Robert le diable* (Meyerbeer) in 1831. From the point of view of generating excitement among its public, it was in the interest of the Opéra to put it about that each new production would be the most expensive opera ever made; nonetheless, *La Juive* probably merited that headline: John Drysdale has shown (in his Southampton University Ph.D. thesis, forthcoming) that, while most of the public accounting of that institution bore little relation to actual costs, expenditure on *La Juive* may have met or even outstripped the fabulous

opera-goer with comforting visions of wealth, grand opéra also sought to give a glimpse of the exotic, settings ranging from Spanish-ruled Naples in the seventeenth century (*La Muette de Portici*) to Madagascar in the fifteenth (*L'Africaine*).<sup>3</sup> The qualities of historical and geographical dislocation were naturally also part of the same phenomenon, the verisimilitude of sets, accessories and especially costumes seemingly an end in itself—actually a production value in the financial quite as much as the artistic sense. The much-vaunted authentic armour in *La Juive* broke all accounting records, but this essay begins with another feature of the *mise en scène* calculated to titillate: exotic yet familiar presences, colour at once local and foreign; Éléazar the jeweller and Rachel his daughter, the ‘Jewess’ of the title.

## 1

[Illustration]

Cornélie Falcon as Rachel, costume by Grevedon. Paul Lormier was in overall charge of costumes for the premiere; Rachel's is here reproduced from an illustration in the *Bibliothèque de l'Opéra* dated 1837.

Rachel is in many ways the counterpart of another of Scribe's female curiosities: Fenella, mute heroine of Auber's *La Muette de Portici*. Each has been seduced by a weak-willed nobleman married, or about to be married, to a princess; each is called upon by her pleading rival to save the former lover, and each meets a truly spectacular end (Rachel is condemned to be boiled alive, Fenella jumps into the mouth of the erupting Vesuvius). Fenella, played soundlessly by a ballet dancer, was the object of a certain kind of visual attentiveness as the audience

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estimates circulating in the press.

<sup>3</sup> Auber's *La Muette de Portici* (1828) tells the story of the abortive revolt in 1647 of fishermen and women against the Spanish viceroy ruling Naples. Meyerbeer's *L'Africaine* (1865) is a dramatisation of Vasco da Gama's expeditions to the Indian Ocean.

strained to understand her sign-language; Rachel, on the other hand, attracted a more contemplative gaze: an object of strange beauty, an oriental curio; what she signified was apparently written all over her face. While her supposedly authentic dress was the main reason for the character's credibility in terms of evocative *mise en scène*, it appeared, mysteriously, that Rachel's physical traits could easily be mapped onto those of the singer who created the role, Cornélie Falcon. As this recollection of the premiere from several years later shows, conscientiously-researched costume and likely-looking features proved an inspiring combination:

L'œil d'aigle étincelle de flamme liquide; la taille d'acier est souple dans sa force; le teint est brun et ardent; la longue chevelure noire flotte au vent. Mais ce n'est pas cette nuance mate et terne que les climats du Nord prêtent au teint et aux cheveux de leurs filles; c'est de l'ébène trempée dans le soleil.<sup>4</sup>

[The eagle eye glitters with liquid flame; the steel waist is supple but strong; the complexion is dark and ardent; the mass of long black hair streams out in the wind. But this is not that dull and lifeless hue with which Northern climes endow the complexion and hair of their daughters; this is ebony, drenched in sunshine.]

Evidence of Falcon's ethnic origins or religion is neither offered nor required: it is the testimony of the commentator's eye that counts, and the connotative licence in these descriptions is entirely characteristic of the free rein of the French writerly imagination when looking eastwards. The sexual undertone, heard in characteristic metaphors of bright or flashing light and heat, helps bring into relief two interdependent contexts necessary to understanding this apparent flight of fancy: the large coincidence of Jewish and theatrical communities, and the

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<sup>4</sup> Quoted from Philarète Chasles, *Les Beautés de l'Opéra* (Paris, 1845); all translations are my own. On the subject of casting by physical type, it may be significant that Julie-Aimée Dorus-Gras, who sang the part of the princess Eudoxie, had blonde hair and blue eyes.

marginal relation of both with the sexual mores of Parisian bourgeois society.<sup>5</sup>

For a witness to this connection, more or less contemporary with *La Juive*, we might look to Balzac, whose Coralie (Lucien's lover in *Illusions perdues*) could be a cipher for Cornélie, so nearly do their appearances—and concomitant imagery—merge, not only with each other, but also with that of Rachel:

Coralie offrait le type sublime de la figure juive, ce long visage ovale d'un ton d'ivoire blond, à bouche rouge comme une grenade, à menton fin comme le bord d'une coupe. Sous des paupières brûlées par une prunelle de jais, sous des cils recourbés, on devinait un regard languissant où scintillaient à propos les ardeurs du désert. Ces yeux obombrés d'un cercle olivâtre, étaient surmontés de sourcils arqués et fournis. Sur un front brun, couronné de deux bandeaux d'ébène où brillaient alors les lumières comme sur du vernis, siégeait une magnificence de pensée qui aurait pu faire croire à du génie. Mais, semblable à beaucoup d'actrices, Coralie sans esprit malgré son ironie de coulisses, sans instruction malgré son expérience de boudoir, n'avait que l'esprit des sens et la bonté des femmes amoureuses. Pouvait-on d'ailleurs s'occuper du moral, quand elle éblouissait le regard avec ses bras ronds et polis, ses doigts tournés en fuseau, ses épaules dorées, avec la gorge chantée par le Cantique des Cantiques, avec un col mobile et recourbé, avec des jambes d'une élégance adorable, et chaussées en soie rouge? Ces beautés d'une poésie vraiment orientale étaient encore mises en relief par le costume espagnol convenu dans nos théâtres.<sup>6</sup>

[Coralie had that sublime kind of Jewish look, with long oval face the colour of blond ivory, mouth as red as a pomegranate, chin delicate as the rim of a cup. Under eyelids singed by jet-black pupils, under curved eyelashes, you could imagine a languorous gaze in which, at certain moments, would flare up the heat of the desert. Those eyes shaded in with a ring of olive were

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<sup>5</sup> These connections are borne out in innumerable examples: for two important representations of the Parisian theatre and sex that engage, in very different ways, with Second-World-War anti-Semitism, see Marcel Carné's 1945 film *Les Enfants du paradis* and François Truffaut's *Le Dernier Métro* of 1980.

<sup>6</sup> Honoré de Balzac, *Illusions perdues* (Paris, 1974), 304-5; the novel was written and published, part by part, between 1835 and 1843, and is set in the early 1820s.

topped with arched, full eyebrows. On her dark forehead, crowned with two bands of ebony on which the lights glistened as if on varnish, there rested a magnificence of thought that could have made you think of genius. But, like many actresses, Coralie—without real wit despite her back-stage irony, without education despite her bedroom know-how—had only the intuition of the senses, and the goodness of women in love. In any case, would you really be able to think of morals while she was dazzling you with her smooth and rounded arms, her slender tapering fingers, her golden shoulders; with her cleavage sung of in the Song of Songs, with her graceful curved neck, with her adorably elegant, red silk-stockinged legs? These beauties of a quite oriental poetry were shown to yet better advantage by the Spanish costume customary in our theatres.]

Everything about Coralie expresses over-ripe sensuality, exotic promise—even danger: as Lucien admits much later in the novel, his liaison with her is his downfall in the eyes of Faubourg Saint-Germain society. Rachel, we may imagine, has exerted a similarly unwholesome power over poor prince Léopold, her unwisely tempted lover. Certainly she turns out to be no good for him, for although he is a Christian and related by marriage to the Emperor, Léopold has a close brush with the scaffold before managing to shake off his ill-starred relationship. That he disguised himself as a Jew, Samuel, to gain her and her father's confidence, and deceived his wife, the Princess Eudoxie, is conveniently swept under the carpet at the moment of judgement. Rachel is not so lucky.

The similarities might easily be pursued: Balzac's observations, always on the point of developing into ironic cultural synecdoches, rehearse almost exactly the descriptive mode used by critics of *La Juive*. By that token it might be argued that both texts participate in a tradition of describing women from the Middle East—typically comprising, in addition to smouldering eyes, reference to exotic spices, jewels, wine and fruit, and extending as far back as the Song of Solomon if not beyond—so generally accessible as to be banal. Literary concordances, however, are important here not just because opera criticism and novels share textual influences from older sources, but

also because the relationship those kinds of writing have with each other demonstrates how easily opera could be thought of in terms of familiar books. The interior practice, shared by every reader, of envisioning narrative scenes described in print is here turned inside out, the physical reality of the production and the associations it inspires rendered in prose. That those associations are literary is not surprising: the critics are ostensibly communicating their ideas to readers who, while they may have seen the production, cannot see it at the moment of reading; they require the stimulation of generally familiar images. Yet a connection between imaginative seeing, as when reading a novel, and seeing what is merely imaginary (or rather literary) would appear significant—for engaging with the act of reception, for telling the history of the genre, and, perhaps most important, for how the production was recorded inside the theatre for revival purposes. This mutual relationship of imaginative contexts and textual representation will be central, in various forms, to this essay.

To linger for a moment over the sources themselves: in portraying the Jewish characters, the principal background to *La Juive* is Walter Scott, whose historical novels were translated into French almost immediately after their publication in Scotland, and whose Gothic chic was all the rage in Paris in the 1820s and 1830s. It seems that *Ivanhoe*, presumably in the popular translation by Defauconpret, is what the critics first thought of when they saw Rachel and her father.<sup>7</sup> A rich, wife-less Jew (Isaac of York) and his alluring daughter (Rebecca, described in exactly the same way as Coralie and Rachel), an abortive love affair spanning the cultural divide, and a scene centred on the woman's imminent execution—the similarities of the structures, although worked out differently, are too salient to miss, so much so that

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<sup>7</sup> See Auguste-Jean-Baptiste Defauconpret, *Ivanhoé, ou Le Retour du croisé, par Walter Scott, roman traduit de l'anglais par le traducteur des Contes de mon hôte* (Paris, 1820). The other stereotype to turn up frequently in the critics' reading of *La Juive* is, predictably enough, Shylock.

one contemporary reviewer of the opera appeared to find the heroines interchangeable: ‘Mlle Falcon est une sublime Rebecca’.<sup>8</sup> Rebecca is the virtuous heroine, of course, winning the respect of every reader, and to a lesser extent, Rachel is too: in love with a Jewish painter she knows as Samuel, her only crime is to have trusted him too much. That does nothing, however, to inhibit lascivious contemplation of either heroine, whether by reader, audience or critic; equally, Rachel’s sympathetic behaviour did not protect her from bigotry. Atypical of the reviews for the opera, but revealing of the extent to which her person could figure in a system of much more general prejudices, is a commentary on Act II, scene iii from the *Gazette de France* of 27 February 1835:

Un rendez-vous pour la nuit est demandé et accepté par Mlle Rachel qui, toute juive qu’elle est, a reçu comme on voit une éducation extrêmement philosophique et libérale .... La princesse supplie la juive de sauver Léopold. Celle-ci résiste d’abord, mais elle cède en voyant la princesse à ses pieds. On ne change pas de sentiment et d’idées avec plus de facilité que cette fille-là ... une fille sans mœurs.<sup>9</sup>

[A night-time tryst is requested, and granted by Miss Rachel who, we may observe—Jewess that she is—has received a very philosophical and liberal education. The princess begs the Jewess to save Léopold. The latter resists at first, but she gives in when she sees the princess at her feet. A more facile inconstancy of feelings and principles than hers cannot be imagined ... a girl without morals.]

Rachel—‘Jewess that she is’—has been made a scapegoat, an abuse all too familiar to the twentieth-century reader: she and her liberal values are blamed for Léopold’s fall from grace in the opera and—here I

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<sup>8</sup> *L’Artiste* 9/1 (1835), 293 (unsigned); see also Karl Leich-Galland (ed.), *Fromental Halévy, ‘La Juive’: Dossier de presse parisienne (1835)* (Saarbrücken, 1987), 8. For Scott’s descriptions of Rebecca, see *Ivanhoe* (Oxford, 1996; first published 1820), 93-4, 251 and 299.

<sup>9</sup> Leich-Galland, 54-6.



extrapolate freely—for what the author and his ultra-Royalist set see as the moral decline of contemporary France.

That Jewishness is closely connected to the theatre, ‘louche’ or forbidden sex, and the fascinatingly exotic credentials of both, should be clear; also the dependence of *La Juive* and its reception on specific texts, such as *Ivanhoe*, and on less quantifiable sources, such as the familiar image of the seductive and promiscuous Eastern woman. Yet the opera was the first to address this point of racial conflict on the national stage, and subsequently acquired symbolic potential in its own right. Though the longevity of that potential perhaps tells us about the Opéra’s status as portal into a certain privileged area of cultural knowledge more than anything else, it is still revealing to note the symbolic uses of *La Juive* available more than half a century later; for example to Proust, in whose *A la recherche du temps perdu* the Act II cavatine ‘O Dieu de nos pères’ is heard early on, from the mouth of the anti-Semitic grandfather.<sup>10</sup> Associations of Jewishness with perceivedly transgressive sex (in this instance particularly homosexuality) remain.<sup>11</sup> There are many echoes of this throughout the novel, the most relevant in the person of St-Loup’s lover, a Jewish actress whom the narrator first meets in a brothel and whom he nicknames ‘Rachel quand du Seigneur’—a reference to Éléazar’s famous aria in Act IV of the opera.<sup>12</sup> That piece figured centrally in the opera’s role within French culture, mostly because it is the one instance of recognisably ‘Jewish’ music, but

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<sup>10</sup> Marcel Proust, *A la recherche du temps perdu* (Paris, 1987-1989; first published 1913-1927), 1:90. The complex genesis of this intertext has been explored by Julia Kristeva in *Le Temps sensible* (Paris, 1994), 52-64.

<sup>11</sup> The same text is quoted by the homosexual financier Nissim Bernard; see *A la recherche*, 3:239. Proust may be read to imply, moreover, that the association of Jewishness and a snatch of operatic music is actually tautological; that music, especially theatrical music, already has those Jewish connections. For a fuller discussion of the place of music in *A la recherche du temps perdu*, see Cormac Newark and Ingrid Wassenaar, ‘Proust and Music: The Anxiety of Competence’, *Cambridge Opera Journal* 9/2 (1997), 163-84.

<sup>12</sup> Proust, *A la recherche*, 1:566-7, 2:88, and 2:456-61

perhaps also because it engages with some of the important ideas—of visual identity, and of the levels on which audiences participated emotionally in the work—that sustain the concept of Jewishness, both in opera and its reception.<sup>13</sup>

## 2

Rachel, quand du Seigneur la grâce tutélaire  
 A mes tremblantes mains confia ton berceau,  
 J'avais à ton bonheur voué ma vie entière,  
 Et c'est moi qui te livre au bourreau!  
 Mais j'entends une voix qui me crie:  
 Sauvez-moi de la mort qui m'attend!  
 Je suis jeune et je tiens à la vie,  
 O mon père, épargnez votre enfant!  
 Et d'un mot arrêtant la sentence,  
 Je puis te soustraire au trépas!  
 Ah! J'abjure à jamais ma vengeance,  
 Rachel, non, tu ne mourras pas!

[Rachel, when the guiding grace of the Lord  
 Placed your cradle into my trembling hands...  
 I had dedicated my whole life to your happiness...  
 And it is I who deliver you to the executioner!  
 But I hear a voice crying:  
 Save me from the death that awaits me!  
 I am young and I value life,  
 O father, spare your child!  
 And stopping the sentence with a word,  
 I can shield you from execution!  
 Ah! I renounce for ever my revenge,  
 Rachel, no, you will not die!]

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<sup>13</sup> Karl Leich-Galland, who has edited the full score of *La Juive* (Saarbrücken, 1985), believes that there are other instances of chromaticism that may stand for Éléazar's Jewishness, but certainly none is as clear as 'Rachel, quand du Seigneur'. See his essay, 'La Juive: Commentaire musical et littéraire', *L'Avant-Scène Opéra* 100 (1987), 38.

What seems at first glance simple paternal anguish over a daughter's cruel fate turns out to be more complicated: the reason Éléazar is so tortured over the fate of Rachel is that she is not, after all, his biological daughter and therefore not Jewish, an irony with implications bearing on what the audience may think about blood—its being thicker than water, its tendency, like truth, to 'out'. A further irony—to do with stereotypical images of Jewish women, the costumes they wear and also in this case their physiognomy, evoked by the character Rachel and the real person Cornélie Falcon—appears to have been lost on most critics: their extrapolating from her appearance Rachel's emotional and moral nature is thus doubly inappropriate.<sup>14</sup> Not only that; ethnicity, whose visual traits are the very substance of the contemporary printed reception, whose relation to faith is, in the final scenes of the opera, painfully at issue, but which cannot, in the end, be deduced from looking at the face, is heard quite clearly in the music. While the outer sections of 'Rachel, quand du Seigneur' proceed according to a tried and tested formula of 'exotic' augmented intervals and 'alien' melancholy, the central part of the aria, in which he speaks as if with the voice of his daughter, reverts to simple, unaffected diatonicism.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> To complete this set of ironies, the one scene in which Rachel's elsewhere conclusively Jewish face is differently—and tellingly—examined was cut from the second public performance of the opera onwards:

*La Juive*, Act III scene ii

EUDOXIE:	[EUDOXIE:
Quelle pâleur règne en ces traits	What a pallor reigns over these features
Et cependant... que d'attraits!	And yet... how attractive!
...	
RACHEL:	RACHEL:
Madame, parmi vos esclaves,	My lady, condescend to admit me
Daignez aujourd'hui m'admettre!	Today as one of your slaves!
...	
EUDOXIE:	EUDOXIE:
Mais si j'en crois ce front où la fierté respire	But if I am to believe your proud brow
Ce rang n'est pas le tien!	That is not your station!

<sup>15</sup> Although part of a long tradition—embracing various crazes for 'turquerie', 'chinoiserie', etc. preserved in innumerable salon pieces—such musical characterisations are, of course, all but arbitrary; their harmonic and expressive

[Music example]

Halévy, *La Juive*: No 22 (Air), bars 1-50.

Naturally, as Éléazar is the only person who knows Rachel's parentage, his representing her to the audience is crucial. Whether he is conscious of it or not, the stark musical difference they hear comes from him—through him they know the *truth* about Rachel—and his is the very inversion of the other male visions of her. In contrast to culturally Christian fantasies based on wrong assumptions about her ethnicity, Éléazar's aria is, among other things, a testimony to her non-Jewishness, proceeding from within a self-consciously 'Jewish' musical world. As will be shown in more detail later, this aria was taken to be a model of the expression of paternal love, Éléazar's one sympathetic aspect, yet heard a different way its object is Rachel's confused identity and the distance separating race and religion. The patriarch's musical representation of his supposed daughter contradicts that of many critics, who preferred to see in Rachel familiar visions of the erotic East, yet ultimately the co-existence of these images does not seem to trouble them. The blurred outlines of her character—containing both real and imaginary women, evidently Jewish and otherwise—may even have been a source of pleasure.

In nineteenth-century Paris generally, real and stage identity were sometimes distinguished only with difficulty, a confusion that in its most obvious manifestation had to do with the kind of coincidences illustrated above—of professional, racial and, according to some, moral communities. This confusion, rich in conceptual potential, has proved a happy one for scholars of French culture—in the words of F. W. J. Hemmings,

Among those who knew the theatre world only from the outside, it was axiomatic that no actress could convincingly fill the part of an adulterous wife

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tropes are apparently unconcerned with the verisimilitude otherwise so prized in grand opéra.

in a play without having some notion of what it was like to give way to passion. The argument was basically the same as inspired ignorant spectators during the early part of the century to insult an actor in the streets whom they recognized as having taken the part of the villain in this or that melodrama.<sup>16</sup>

Now patrons of the Opéra in the 1830s were not ‘ignorant spectators’—far from it—and critics still less so, but the identification of actor and role—character in both senses of the word—is unmistakable in much of what was written about *La Juive*. Race and ethnicity are claimed, like certain other categories—textual narrative (*Ivanhoe*), textual but non-narrative (the Song of Songs)—by the spectators’ enthusiasm for superimposing onto the world of the opera. Brought into relief by a twist in the plot, Rachel’s identity crisis is perhaps the most straightforward example of that unruly jostling of real and imaginary, but there were others: the audience’s idea of Éléazar too was unstable, or at least incongruous. Visually, his exaggerated facial hair and gestures of cantankerous old age coincided awkwardly with the sprightly form of Adolphe Nourrit, the thirty-three-year-old tenor playing him, who was then at the peak of his illustrious career at the Opéra. Musically, the non-‘Jewish’ central section of No 22—the audience’s clue to Rachel’s origins—gave Éléazar/Nourrit a peculiarly polyphonic singing voice. As problematic in its own way as that of Falcon with Rachel, the question of Nourrit’s identification with Éléazar also had an important bearing on the reception of the opera, especially his affecting performance of ‘Rachel, quand du Seigneur’.

The story goes something like this: the librettist Scribe had planned to end the fourth act with the customary chorus, but Nourrit proposed an opportunity to bring out the positive side of Éléazar’s character. Scribe and Halévy acquiesced, and it may be that Nourrit even had some influence in establishing the text of the aria. There is no

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<sup>16</sup> See F. W. J. Hemmings, *The Theatre Industry in Nineteenth-Century France* (Cambridge, 1993), 209.

doubt that Nourrit was one of the most sensitive operatic actors of the era, and that he valued dramatic credibility very highly: he certainly did everything to encourage that perception, admitting that he aspired to the stage presence of Talma, no less.<sup>17</sup> He had literary pretensions of his own, writing the libretto of *La Sylphide* for one of the most famous prima ballerinas of the day, Marie Taglioni.<sup>18</sup> While the stirring effect of the aria, above all in that particular position, was universally acknowledged, there is equally no doubt that panegyrics along the lines of this, from the *Courrier Français* (27 February 1835), were precisely what he had in mind.

La distribution des rôles dans *La Juive* présente une grande anomalie. C'est Nourrit qui joue le rôle du juif Éléazar; c'est Nourrit, dont la voix suave, argentine, amoureuse, est chargée d'exhaler l'amour de l'or et la haine des chrétiens; dont la belle figure est condamnée à se grimer en masque de vieillard flétri par la colère, jauni par l'usure! La métamorphose est complète, et hormis quelques instants où la douceur d'une voix juvénile donne aux traits de la physionomie un démenti trop absolu, personne ne reconnaîtrait Robert ou Gustave sous la triste casaque d'Éléazar.<sup>19</sup>

[The casting of *La Juive* presents us with a significant anomaly: the role of Éléazar the Jew is played by Nourrit, whose smooth, silvery, amorous voice is burdened with expressing a love of gold and a hatred of Christians. His good looks are condemned to be made up into the mask of a withered, angry old man, jaundiced by usury! The metamorphosis is total, and apart from a few moments in which the sweet tone of a voice still young gives the lie too starkly to the features, no one would recognize Robert or Gustave underneath the miserable garments of Éléazar.]

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<sup>17</sup> For an early appreciation of François-Joseph Talma, whose name was a by-word for affective stage performance throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, see Pierre-François Tissot, *Souvenirs historiques sur la vie et la mort de F. Talma* (Paris, 1826).

<sup>18</sup> *La Sylphide* had its first performance, at the Opéra, on 12 March 1832.

<sup>19</sup> Leich-Galland, *Dossier de presse*, 30. 'Robert' and 'Gustave' refer to two of Nourrit's most famous roles, in Meyerbeer's *Robert le diable* (1831) and Auber's *Gustave III, ou Le Bal masqué* (1833).

The coincidence of performer and character is in this quotation once again brought into play, but Nourrit actively encouraged the identification: the disjunction between Éléazar and Nourrit, and especially how the audience was nevertheless constrained to identify them with each other, was one of the most admired elements of the opera. As one critic put it:

Ceux qui n'ont pas entendu Nourrit dans son air admirable du quatrième acte, ne savent pas comment gémit la douleur paternelle.<sup>20</sup>

[Those who have not heard Nourrit in his wonderful fourth act aria do not know the groans of a father's pain.]

More realistically, however, Nourrit was playing out yet another irony of identification: he was preparing for the day when his voice would no longer be young, re-inventing his own career in an effort to forestall a chronic failure of confidence that would quickly prove fatal. Only two years after the triumph of *La Juive*, he left the Opéra for Italy in the face of competition from Gilbert Duprez, and by 1839 he was dead—by his own hand, despairing of his fading voice. Nowadays his reputation rests principally on having been a believable actor, of having had a creative role in the works that he performed; in the case of Éléazar's great aria, of seeing beyond the unforgiving appearance of the old man and drawing out something more noble. The discrepancies and disjunctions he managed to keep alive in the critical reception of that something had the happy—if temporary—result of focusing attention on his voice, mysteriously issuing from an old Jew, uncorrupted by avarice and intolerance.

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<sup>20</sup> *L'Artiste* 9/1 (1835), 293 (unsigned); see Leich-Galland, *Dossier de presse*, 8.

Nourrit may indeed have had something approaching paternal feelings for his stage daughter, Falcon: he had been her teacher at the Conservatoire in 1831, and took the credit for having 'discovered' her.

Establishing some kind of characterly essence for Éléazar and Rachel, already problematic because of the slippage between what they look like and what, at varying degrees of audience consciousness, they ethnically are, is further complicated by how they sound. As if to emphasize this, immediately after Éléazar's aria, the same augmented second that helped make him sound so characteristically 'Jewish' is heard from the mouths of his Christian persecutors:

[Music example]

[To the stake with the Jews! Let them perish!]

Halévy, *La Juive*: No 22, bars 93-6.

Although an obvious point of departure for musical extrapolations on the subject, the interval represents a part of Éléazar's identity as provisional as any other: his qualities are in the eye and ear of the beholder. The passage quoted exposes this instability by showing that Éléazar's 'inner' melodies are not confined to his body: the mob can take them from him. In its insulting imitation of Éléazar, the interval is in inverted commas, as it were, emphasizing the word 'Juifs' in each case. The parody has interesting implications (of which more later) for what might be the role of exaggeration in the 'Jewish' music—the chorus's, and also Éléazar's, elsewhere much more like that of the other characters—but the point here is that it represents a further instance of the singing of another's music with the effect, if not necessarily the intention, of saying something about who they are. Especially given the abusive context, it might be taken as emblematic of the politics of reading *La Juive*.

### 3

Augmented intervals are clichés from which the opera's audience could easily have maintained ironic distance, but there are more insidious distinctions in play. Perhaps the strongest example of the place of cultural difference in *La Juive*—and how it was consumed by



spectators—comes earlier in the opera, at the beginning of Act II, where Éléazar and his circle celebrate the Seder meal:

[Music example]

[O God of our fathers, come down among us! O God, hide our secrets from enemy eyes!]

Part of his prayer is that the ceremony remain hidden from outsiders' eyes, a concern emphasized in the cavatine immediately following:

Si trahison ou perfidie  
Osait se glisser parmi nous,  
Sur le parjure ou sur l'impie,  
Grand Dieu, que tombe ton courroux!<sup>21</sup>

[If treachery or faithlessness  
Dared to insinuate itself among us,  
Almighty God, let your wrath descend  
On lies and blasphemy.]

The irony here is ostensibly directed at Léopold, present at the celebration under his pseudonym Samuel. The audience, on the other hand, are also outsiders: they too observe secretly, but, unlike Léopold, who is shortly to be unmasked, remain hidden from celebrant and devotees. As if Éléazar's explicit desire not to be seen were insufficient, the contrast with the religious service of the preceding act could not be sharper: owing to censorship laws that forbade the depiction of formal Catholic worship, the Te Deum with which the opera opens is invisible, inside the cathedral.<sup>22</sup> As a public festivity on an essentially worldly

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<sup>21</sup> Halévy, *La Juive*, Act II, scene i.

<sup>22</sup> Discussed briefly in Ruth Jordan, *Fromental Halévy: His Life and Music* (London, 1994), 52. A similar scene based around a church ceremony the audience cannot see occurs in the first act of *La Muette de Portici*, when Alphonse and Elvire are married. There the narrative is sustained by the reactions of the crowd, supposed to be able to see inside, and the proclamatory reports of Selva, captain of the guard.

occasion—Léopold's military victory over the Hussites—it is to a certain extent all about pomp and display, but its ceremonial integrity is preserved while that of the Passover feast is flagrantly compromised. The subtext is that the eyes of the work, so to speak, are directed outwards from a Christian environment into a Jewish one; the spectator is forced to make that inquisitive tourist's gaze his or her own.

The invitation to look at strangeness, the proposed pleasure in experiencing—as if they were there!—what is alien, implicated the audience in a kind of voyeurism that occasionally had the power to affect their hearing: the music to which the prayer is set came in for widely differing commentary, most of it responding to the precept of verisimilitude enshrined in the grand opéra aesthetic. One critic thought that, in general, the opera owed a great deal to oratorio, while another, though unconvinced of the necessary 'Hebrew flavour', found the prayer properly religious in character. A third complained of the incongruity of praising the Jewish deity to the strains of what he took to be plainsong!<sup>23</sup> Its cantor/congregation responsory form obviously helped to reinforce the prayer's pretensions to authenticity; yet comparing it with the earlier *Te Deum*, surely its most striking quality is the lack of accompaniment: not only do the Christians have the benefit of the full theatre orchestra to bolster their celebrations, there is even an organ.<sup>24</sup> The feeling of intrusion into privacy, and the frisson of difference, are heightened. The relative freedom or restriction of visual access, and the power relations implied, suggest that the gaze of the spectator is uncomfortably proprietorial.

No doubt on some level the opera reflects fifteenth-century reality, long before Jewish emancipation. The domination of the Jews by the

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<sup>23</sup> Leich-Galland, *Dossier de presse*, 47 (*Le Figaro*, 3 March 1835, unsigned), 135 (*Le National*, 7 March 1835, Louis Desnoyers) and 166 (*La Tribune Politique et Littéraire*, 26 February 1835, 'C. F.').

<sup>24</sup> Berlioz, in his review of the opera, dismissed this feature, noting simply that all large-scale works since *Robert le diable*—the first major work to include an organ—had to have one or risk appearing second-best. Leich-Galland, *Dossier de presse*, 151.

imposing physical presence of the cathedral, which looms over Éléazar's house in the first act and over the scaffold in the last—though it is admittedly unlikely a Jewish family would have been living next door to a cathedral—is an eminently suitable emblem of their general persecution. It follows that the fact of the censorship laws allowing representation of the Seder meal but denying any glimpse of the mass is merely a coincidence of real and narrative political superiority. But just as Éléazar's agency in the separate voices of 'Rachel, quand du Seigneur' (his own, his daughter's, Nourrit's) is open to interrogation, so is Scribe's and Halévy's in representing to the audience Rachel and Éléazar—all the more so because Halévy, who approved the text of the libretto at every stage, was himself Jewish. Hugh Macdonald, on the other hand, has confidently stated that Halévy did not identify with the Jews of *La Juive*, and that he treated the Jewish aspects of the plot merely as 'local colour'.<sup>25</sup> While this seems disingenuous, defining a Jewish composer only, or even principally, in terms of his Jewishness would be precisely the kind of racial essentialism *La Juive* calls into question at every turn: its audience, as the preceding examples show, never saw difference as clear-cut, never as a matter of being simply one thing or the other.

Nevertheless, Hélène Pierrakos has suggested that *La Juive* was a potentially controversial attempt to address the question of anti-Semitism; only the then-conventional trivialisation of opera diffused its power.<sup>26</sup> In terms of critical reception, the Jewishness of Éléazar and especially Rachel is certainly a category unlike any other relevant to grand opéra. Constantly at issue in Europe over hundreds of years—as the plot of *La Juive* itself recalls—anti-Semitism was on the increase in nineteenth-century Paris.<sup>27</sup> This is not to say that Jewish men and

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<sup>25</sup> See his entry under *Juive* in Stanley Sadie (ed.), *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera* (London, 1992).

<sup>26</sup> Hélène Pierrakos, 'Chrétienté, judaïté et la musique', *L'Avant-Scène Opéra* 100 (1987), 21-2.

<sup>27</sup> The Dreyfus Affair would be the most spectacular evidence of this, but for the

women were excluded from some notionally Christian body called Parisian society—far from it: religious emancipation had come as comparatively early as 1791, and in the years immediately after the July Revolution, the prevailing regime was liberal. Neither, it may be imagined, were abusive stereotypes such as those applied to Rachel and Éléazar in the reception of *La Juive* unavailable—or maybe even unamusing—to Jews themselves. The self-defining gestures of a Parisian Jew at that time, indeed, might have been more likely to find expression in representations of what he or she wasn't: the exaggerations that proceed from Éléazar in particular may be identifiable with real Jews (possibly, but not necessarily, Halévy himself) only by inversion, across the safe distance established by familiar Jewish jokes. When Éléazar rubs his hands with glee in Act II, for instance, over the thirty thousand ducats he will receive for the chain he is selling to Eudoxie, he steps out of character into caricature:

Pour moi plaisir extrême et quel heureux avenir,  
Ces bons écus d'or que j'aime chez moi vont revenir!<sup>28</sup>

[The pleasure is mine: the future is bright,  
the fine gold pieces I love are coming back home!]

Given the example of Rachel, who inspired reverie but sometimes also contempt in her beholders, such unexpected behaviour may signal the presence of another opinion of Éléazar—the composer's own, in a moment of irony?—more dismissive than he elsewhere deserves. As Sander Gilman has suggested, racial slurs may be safely projected onto

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intellectual background see, among others, Edward W. Said, *Orientalism: Western Representations of the Orient* (Harmondsworth, 1995; first published 1979). As Pierrakos goes on to say (23), 'In the 1930s *La Juive* was revived at the Paris Opéra, and all sorts of praise for the munificent sets and costumes—to which the subject matter doubtless lends itself—turn up once again. Not a word about its essence, and yet, the 30s in Europe...'

<sup>28</sup> *La Juive*, No 9 (Trio).

sub-categories, maybe even purely operative ones, and grotesque stereotypes would have been more common on the stage than ordinary, liberal Jews.<sup>29</sup>

Experiencing the restlessness of representation—how it shifts between ironic distance and voyeurism, how it manipulates—commits the audience to dislocations, acts of adjustment more theoretically complex than mere stereotyping and local colour can explain. Increasingly it is apparent that the cultural difference advertised in the title of the opera, while underpinning many of those dislocations, cannot entirely explain them. Watching *La Juive*, it emerges, could be against a background of contexts, the spectator's own idea of Jewishness only one among many, yet because race figured not just conceptually but also visually in his or her mind, for most the distinction between themselves and the Jewish characters was subsumed into the very act of looking. Thus where they placed themselves mentally vis-à-vis the exotics—how they abused and admired Rachel and Éléazar, alternating between visual aspect and stock cultural existence—could be flattering, allowing them to mix reality and reverie as they pleased. Conversely, their physical position was also brought into play, a function of having the upper hand by virtue of remaining morally unexamined themselves. Anti-Semitism is the fact of real history that makes us consider the politics of looking; at least it is the most obvious one. As will become clear, there were others, some buried deep in the genre's past.

## 4

Opera, it was frequently implied, used to be so much more sophisticated, particularly the librettos. The plot of *La Juive* was

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<sup>29</sup> See his essay, 'Strauss and the Pervert', in Arthur Groos and Roger Parker (eds), *Reading Opera* (Princeton, 1988), 306-27, especially 325, and, for a fuller treatment of the subject, *Jewish Self-Hatred: Anti-Semitism and the Hidden Language of the Jews* (Baltimore, 1986).

typically summarized in a dismissive, dry style appropriate to contempt for a degenerate art-form, and admonitions like the following sounded plaintive rather than sternly corrective: ‘l’Académie Royale de Musique doit avant tout justifier son nom: elle ne doit pas vouloir rivaliser avec Franconi’.<sup>30</sup> Franconi’s style of entertainment had, on the contrary, played a role at the Opéra for several years. But even as they kept their distance, and despite mock-horror at the excess, none of the critics challenged the basic right of spectacle to be part of an opera. *La Juive* might have been the most lavish production at the Opéra to date, but it was nonetheless part of a long tradition of historical dramas that relied on exotic costumes—and sheer numbers—to impress. A few days before the above quotation appeared, another critic had put it succinctly in precisely opposite terms: in *La Juive* ‘l’Opéra n’a jamais été plus complètement et plus magnifiquement l’Opéra’.<sup>31</sup>

Hassan El Nouty, in an essay on spectacle in the nineteenth century, proposes that spectacular historical productions were in general anti-establishment, radical in nature. They descended from a theatrical tradition that grew up outside the monopoly of the approved houses, and, in flouting the system of theatrical privilege—under which certain institutions had rights over certain kinds of production—challenged the very notion of privilege, the social machine of the Ancien Régime.<sup>32</sup> These were the ‘faits historiques’, or Deeds from History, performed at the Théâtre de la Foire with the object of whipping up popular patriotism by representing, in pantomime, the most emotive episodes in French military history.<sup>33</sup> The people claimed the entertainment they desired, and when the privileges granted to the

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<sup>30</sup> *Journal de Paris et des Départements* (28 February 1835, ‘Z. Z.’). Leich-Galland, *Dossier de presse*, 88.

<sup>31</sup> *Journal des Débats* (25 February 1835, ‘J. J.’). Leich-Galland, *Dossier de presse*, 108.

<sup>32</sup> See Hassan El Nouty, *Théâtre et pré-cinéma: Essai sur la problématique du spectacle au 19e siècle* (Paris, 1978), 14.

<sup>33</sup> El Nouty, 46.

established theatres were abolished by the revolutionary Convention in 1791, the genre flourished. Paradoxically, when Napoleon, to whom every symbolic vestige of the Revolution was anathema, re-introduced the monopoly system in 1807, he took pains to maintain the *faits historiques* and similar kinds of spectacle. He reserved the *Cirque-Olympique* for *mimodrame*, or dialogue alternated with pantomimes composed of military processions and so on—that is to say, exactly the material of the underground productions of the *Théâtre de la Foire*. Moreover, when the Emperor reopened the *Théâtre de la Porte Saint-Martin* in 1809, it was to provide ‘*tableaux historiques*’ and shows ‘*propres à entretenir dans le peuple la flamme guerrière*’.<sup>34</sup>

It seems to be agreed by historians that political life in Paris under the Empire was more or less a function of foreign policy.<sup>35</sup> In this light, the *mimodrame* can be understood as a by-product of Napoleon’s expansionist philosophy, for the exhibition of military strength was his way of representing the nation to itself. Parades and processions were part of everyday life, and, as news of the army’s progress reached the capital, so was some kind of mental participation in the military success and failure of France. The nature of spectacle, or at any rate the audience’s apprehension of it, was changing, a situation El Nouty captures in an anonymous *bon mot* from a society journal:

Il y a quelques années le peuple de Paris assistait aux batailles comme au spectacle; maintenant il va au spectacle comme à la mêlée.<sup>36</sup>

[A few years ago the people of Paris watched the fighting as if it had been a show; now they go to shows as if to a riot.]

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<sup>34</sup> El Nouty, 47.

<sup>35</sup> See, for example, Louis Bergeron (trans. R. R. Palmer), *France Under Napoleon* (Princeton, 1981; first published 1972).

<sup>36</sup> El Nouty, 46.

Insofar as the enjoyment of spectacle went hand in hand with nationalistic representations of history, then, the theatrical rhetoric of *La Juive* might have developed from a populist practice current during the advent of the Revolution, but a practice taken over—institutionally ratified—by the Empire. The historical spectacular, born as a proto-revolutionary patriotic entertainment, nourished by the revolutionary regime and then pressed into service by the Empire, might well, in *La Juive*, be seen as the perfect imperial advertisement. The contexts are images of imperial power (the church asserting its superiority over its enemies) and acquisition (the enjoyment of the exotic qualities of those enemies). One critic of the opera, nostalgic for the Empire, put the connection in the following terms:

L'Opéra est le pays du miracle. Au milieu des avortements actuels, il est deux noms qui gardent à notre pays son prestige auprès des étrangers; l'Opéra et Napoléon. Qui de nous, enfant avide, tout frais sorti des contes d'Orient, n'a entendu dire en sa province qu'il était à Paris un théâtre qui tenait bazar ouvert de ces merveilles.<sup>37</sup>

[The Opéra is the land of miracles. In the midst of present failures, two names keep our country's prestige up in the eyes of foreigners: the Opéra and Napoleon. Who among us, as an eager child, fresh from tales of the Orient, did not hear tell, back home, that in Paris there was a theatre running an open bazaar full of those very marvels?]

This quotation is an Orientalist reading of the nature of operatic spectacle in Edward Said's sense. The representation of the exotic is in some ways its colonisation—one thinks immediately of Napoleon's Egyptian expedition: the spectacular procession that ends Act I of *La Juive* involving the soldiers of a subjugating power, come to destroy its foreign enemies (the Hussites in the historical source; in the opera, also the Jews). The theatre of the historical spectacular might have served

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<sup>37</sup> *Le Corsaire* (25 February 1835, unsigned). Leich-Galland, *Dossier de presse*, 20.



very well as an expression of imperialistic aspirations, in its claim over the exotic as much as in the magnificence of its parades.

Napoleon I was long gone, however, and under the Revolution things had been much more complicated than this neat theatrical lineage implies: if the Empire had allowed entertainment and the normal ostentation of imperial government to mix, during the Convention spectacle had become nothing less than a part of executive political ceremony. The fact that Robespierre himself took part in the Fête de l'Être Suprême of 1794—an idealized representation of post-revolutionary social virtue celebrated on the Champ de Mars—is indicative of an extraordinary coincidence of the symbolic and the real in the practice of the regime. Everything around him was allegorical or representative of some revolutionary concept, but he represented only himself. He formed part of a *tableau vivant* that could have been spectacular theatre in its own right, but was at the same time a narrative with both definite historical content and state ceremony.

Plan de la Fête à l'Être Suprême  
qui doit être célébrée le 20 prairial, proposé par David  
et décrété par la Convention Nationale.

La Convention Nationale, précédée d'une musique éclatante, se montre au peuple. Le Président paraît à la tribune élevée au centre de l'amphithéâtre; il fait sentir les motifs qui ont déterminé cette fête solennelle; il invite le peuple à honorer l'auteur de la nature. Il dit. Le peuple fait retentir les airs de ses cris d'allégresse. Tel se fait entendre le bruit des vagues d'une mer agitée, que les vents sonores du midi soulèvent et prolongent en échos dans les vallons et les forêts lointaines. Au bas de l'amphithéâtre s'élève un monument où sont réunis tous les ennemis de la félicité publique; le monstre désolant de l'Athéisme y domine; il est soutenu par l'ambition, l'égoïsme, la discorde et la fausse simplicité, qui, à travers les haillons de la misère, laisse entrevoir les ornements dont se parent les esclaves de la royauté. Sur le front de ces figures, on lit ces mots:  
Seul espoir de l'étranger.

Il va lui être ravi. Le Président s'approche, tenant entre ses mains un flambeau; le groupe s'embrase, il rentre dans le néant avec la même rapidité que les conspirateurs qu'a frappés le glaive de la Loi.<sup>38</sup>

[Plans for the Feast of the Supreme Being to be celebrated on the 20th of Prairial, presented by David and decreed by the National Convention. The members of the National Convention, ushered in by strident music, present themselves to the people. The President appears on the raised stand in the centre of the amphitheatre; he reminds the people of the reason for this solemn festival; he invites them to honour the maker of nature. He speaks. The people fill the air with their cries of jubilation. The sound of waves on stormy seas is the same, when carried off by the sonorous winds of the south and prolonged in echoes in faraway valleys and forests. At the bottom of the amphitheatre there rises up a monument on which all the enemies of public harmony are represented. The frightening spectre of Atheism dominates, supported by ambition, selfishness, discord and disingenuousness, upon which, underneath the rags of misery, can be glimpsed the decorations with which royalist slaves adorn themselves. On the brow of these figures can be read the words: 'The only hope of the enemy' ...which will soon be snatched from him. The President approaches, holding in his hands a torch; the group goes up in flames and is reduced to nothing as quickly as were the conspirators, struck down by the sword of the Law.]

The mode of this document is fascinatingly theatrical—like a very long, very declamatory stage direction. The event it proposes—at the time of writing the celebration hadn't yet taken place—raises intriguing questions about narrative in ceremonial contexts at this time. Its inclusive quality, with its obvious nationalistic rationale, and its invitation to experience the projected events imaginatively almost lift it

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<sup>38</sup> Quoted in El Nouty, 38-40. The role of Jacques-Louis David in the Revolution has been the object of numerous studies; see for example Philippe Bordes, *Le Serment du jeu de paume de Jacques-Louis David: Le Peintre, son milieu et son temps* (Paris, 1983), David Lloyd Dowd, *Pageant-Master of the Republic: Jacques-Louis David and the French Revolution* (Lincoln, 1948) and Warren Roberts, *Jacques-Louis David, Revolutionary Artist: Art, Politics and the French Revolution* (Chapel Hill, 1989).

out of the physical realm entirely. Robespierre's presence is the piece of the real that keeps it there.

El Nouty makes a distinction between plays that set out to impress with a galvanising, political intent, and ones that do so only according to an aesthetic of the marvellous, with their extravagant staging. But this distinction is insecure, as the Fête de l'Être Suprême shows: politics and outrageous staging are inextricably linked. Revolutionary public events such as this performed several roles: ceremonial, in that they re-affirmed the collective consciousness of the sovereign people; celebratory, in that they were public festivals that commemorated historical political acts; and spectacular, in that they were representational theatre on the most impressive possible stage. This multiplicity had been formally acknowledged in August 1793, when the Fête de l'Unité et de l'Indivisibilité de la République generated such enthusiasm that the day's events were recast in unambiguous dramatic form: a theatrical 'sans-culottide', or people's holiday, in five acts commissioned by the Comité de Salut Publique and given at the Opéra, the Opéra-Comique and the Théâtre Molière the following year. The real and the theatrical had become indistinguishable.

Yet to argue that political resonance is therefore necessarily present in descendants of the once-radical historical spectacular (such as grand opéra) would address only one aspect of their effect. Taking account of the on-stage coincidence of allegorical and real—in the person of Robespierre in the above example—brings into question the status not only of the spectacle, but also, more immediately, of the people watching it. Consciousness of the current regime, and of its relation to preceding political environments, is certainly everywhere in the reception of *La Juive*, as some of the excerpts collected here have shown. Journalists, perhaps prompted by still-fresh memories of censorship under the Empire and Restoration—the July Revolution began over the destruction of printing presses—were constantly producing political readings of what they saw. This consciousness, however, is only one context among many, and their appetite for

partisan commentary must surely have had more to do with the vigorous exercise of free speech than with any real or seriously suspected content in the opera.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the *Fête de l'Être Suprême*, after all, is the document that brought it into being, both imaginatively and physically, which not only projects what David had in mind but also, in one way, records it. It is the most direct access to that historical moment that has come down to us; as such, it is historical evidence, though we can only know it as a challenging mixture of prescription and description. Stage directions, even for strictly theatrical spectacle, have something of the same quality, of holding within them the distance between projection and observation, and the production of *La Juive* too contained sufficient space for subjective distance—not only through bringing relative cultural positions into relief, as was the case in Act II, scene i, but also in the ways it was itself represented: by the account of its stage action contained in the 'livret de mise en scène', or staging manual.

## 5

The practice of recording the *mise en scène* of an opera, so that it could be re-created in provincial productions, grew up in the decade preceding *La Juive*; that the booklets were subsequently edited and printed is a measure of the special status enjoyed by the visual aspect of grand opéra. A principal function of these documents was to present the enthusiastically large amount of information pertaining to historical and geographical verisimilitude: either in the body of the text (as with *La Juive*) or in large lists included as appendices, and sometimes in both, the booklets described props and especially costumes in lavish detail.<sup>39</sup> Typically they describe the sets and the movement of characters on stage, and prescribe the blocking for the numerous

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<sup>39</sup> The staging manual for *La Muette de Portici*, which has a list of costumes at the end, insists on 'Neapolitan cloth' for the fishermen and women—literal local colour.

tableaux, but—perhaps surprisingly—they may already include a layer of interpretation. In the case of the livret de mise en scène for *La Juive*, the text we have was not that worked out in rehearsals for the premiere, but one edited after the opera had been seen in public: it can be dated from some time *after* the final dress rehearsal, owing to the absence of what were originally planned as the first two scenes of Act III, cut before the official first night.<sup>40</sup>

The livret, then, compromises its prescriptive position. Its ability to stay out of the narrative—to deny itself commentary—is always suspect: at times, the language is the same. In Act I, Éléazar’s house is described as that of ‘l’hérétique’, a phrase taken straight from the libretto, and, while the livret begins by calling Rachel and Éléazar by name, it goes on to shorten that to ‘les Juifs’ and finally refers to them dismissively as ‘les maudits’—‘the accursed’. In entering into the spirit of things, as it were, by bowing to the linguistic peer pressure of racists on stage, the livret opposes its ostensible function—a neutral report of stage action—with an undeniably inclusive narrative feel. In other words, by sometimes implying a subjective position, the livret can blur the line separating the real visual aspect of the opera and its narrative world. To take one simple illustration, it moves from representing physical structures as if in real space to translating them into narrative structures:

Acte Cinquième.

Vaste tente préparée pour recevoir les membres du Concile. —Cette tente est soutenue par des colonnes gothiques A, dont les chapiteaux sont dorés. —De cette hauteur on domine la grande place et une partie de la ville de Constance. —La cathédrale (fermes sur les derniers plans) fait face au

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<sup>40</sup> Critics at the preview complained that the opera was far too long. The staging manual of *La Juive* was published in the large collection of such documents built up by Louis Palianti: see ‘La Juive / Opéra en cinq actes / De M. E. Scribe / Musique de F. Halévy / Représenté pour la première fois à Paris, sur le Théâtre de l’Opéra, le 23 février 1835’, reproduced in facsimile in H. Robert Cohen (ed.), *The Original Staging Manuals for Twelve Parisian Operatic Premieres* (Stuyvesant, N. Y., 1991), 137-50.

public. —On descend, face au public, par une pente douce, sur la place, au milieu de laquelle on voit une énorme cuve d'airain placée sur un fourneau construit en briques.

Un brasier ardent brille dans le fourneau.<sup>41</sup>

[Act Five. / A vast tent ready to receive the members of the council. This tent is held up by gothic columns (A) with gilded capitals. The scene overlooks, from this vantage-point, the main square and a part of the town of Constance. The cathedral (shown on flats at the very back of the theatre) faces the audience. Characters come down a gentle rake towards the audience into the square, in the middle of which an enormous bronze vat can be seen, placed on top of a brick range. / A raging furnace is blazing in the range.]

The horrifying fact that the fire underneath the vat is already lit is meaningfully isolated, given a paragraph all on its own, in an authorial gambit not out of place in a novel. The static spectacle is lent an interpretative sequence; it becomes the story that this paragraph is telling us. That we are obliged to re-create mentally things described in the order of their description is not normally interesting—reading or retelling, after all, must order even simultaneous events over time—but here there is a narrative desire behind that ordering, in the disposition of those things. The stage scenery is given a teleological impulse—a narrative of description asserts itself alongside the narrative of events. One effect of this, in the same way as the opera's physical disposition tends to make the audience share its intrusive gaze into the Jewish house in Act II, scene i, is to reconstruct the novelistic first person, the eye that sees what the provincial producer (destinatee of the booklet) is narratively made to see; the 'I' that speaks about it to him, but which perversely retards the gathering progress of his vision, revealing the set to him only in a suspenseful narrative order.

Later in the century, when composers are more involved in the textual establishment of staging, it becomes easier to regard the livret

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<sup>41</sup> Cohen, 148.

as a form of notation for the work—Verdi in particular has been cited as adopting the French practice in order to exert greater authorial control—but at the time of *La Juive*, it is still in many ways comparable to the descriptions of critics who saw the production.<sup>42</sup> Its author is, like them, susceptible to reverie, to drifting off on imaginary displacements. One such is betrayed by the following grammatical slip:

Les enfants et quelques hommes du peuple disparaissent par la droite G devant ces soldats. —Apercevant Léopold, Albert court à lui; le reconnaissant il l'arrête et s'incline avec respect. —Léopold lui fait signe de se taire. —  
Descendez en scène.<sup>43</sup>

[The children and some of the men from the crowd disappear stage right (G) in the face of these soldiers. Catching sight of Léopold, Albert runs towards him; recognising him, he stops him and bows with respect. Léopold motions to him to say nothing. Come down stage.]

The switch between two modes of speech suggests an abstract location of the narrative first-person. That this location is not fixed is evident—‘descendez’ in the example quoted here could be translated as ‘go’ or ‘come’, depending on where in the theatrical space the person who gives the order is situated—but, either way, the livret’s author seems for a moment at least to place the *reader* on stage, ordering the singers about. It is another mistake: he forgets to use the third person, ignoring the barrier between characters and audience, and communicates directly with Léopold and Albert. Put another way, it is the failure to hold two imperatives—prescription for provincial re-creation, and due record of Paris magnificence—in proper balance. But it is also evidence of a dislocation, a feeling of participating in the action that goes beyond identification in the basic sense of sympathy.

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<sup>42</sup> See Roger Parker, *Leonora’s Last Act: Essays in Verdian Discourse* (Princeton, 1997), 126-30.

<sup>43</sup> Cohen, 138.

The pleasure that comes from looking can be thought of in different ways: chief among them, and crucial to an understanding of how *La Juive* was received, is the contemplation that arises out of the arresting quality of strangeness, a product of power relations buried deep in cultural history. The opera exhibits the working of those power relations very plainly, as earlier examples showed. Yet equally important is to appreciate how what may appear to be a subjective distance, often instituted by the aesthetics of the exotic, may be suspended, or even dissolved by that same invitation to look and marvel. Documents bearing witness to the production of the opera, as represented here by the livret, are paradoxically more powerful evidence of the occasional removal of that distance, that perceptual attraction, than the records left by grudgingly impressed critics. Studies of grand opéra stressing spectacle—its commodity value, its power as a political tool—have in general failed to render these troubling fluctuations in audience engagement.<sup>44</sup> A final example shows neatly the influence on reception of the spectators' subjective (in the strict sense) relationship with what they saw, but also how unstable that relationship was, and the implications of this instability for apprehending the opera. If the audience experienced the piece primarily as an object of marvel, nowhere was there more marvelling in *La Juive* than at its most striking visual moment, the Act I imperial procession.

Cortège défilant pendant le chant.

1° Les sonneurs de trompe de l'empereur, précédés de trois gardes à cheval richement armés et équipés. - 2° Un porte-bannière. - 3° Vingt arbalétriers. - 4° Un porte-bannière. - 5° Deux cardinaux, suivis de deux clercs. - 6° Deux autres cardinaux suivis de deux clercs. - 7° Un porte-bannière accompagné d'évêques et des maîtres de différents métiers. - 8° Un porte-bannière

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<sup>44</sup> See, for example, William L. Crosten, *French Grand Opera: An Art and a Business* (New York, 1972; first published 1948) and Jane F. Fulcher, *The Nation's Image: French Grand Opera as Politics and Politicized Art* (Cambridge, 1987).



accompagné de deux autres évêques et de quelques supérieurs de confréries.  
- 9<sup>e</sup> Trois échevins.<sup>45</sup>

[Procession, which files past during the singing. 1. The emperor's buglers, preceded by three lavishly-armed and fitted-out guards on horseback. 2. A standard-bearer. 3. Twenty crossbowmen. 4. A standard-bearer. 5. Two cardinals followed by two clerics. 6. Two more cardinals followed by two clerics. 7. A standard-bearer accompanied by bishops and various guildsmen. 8. A standard-bearer accompanied by two more bishops and by several abbots. 9. Three aldermen.]

The complete list is actually much longer (10. on its own is 120 soldiers, and the emperor doesn't come on until 20.) but it was reproduced at least in part in many contemporary journalistic reviews. This in itself exposes a close relation of production to consumption: often the only detail distinguishing the two versions of the procession is the presence or absence of the articulating numbers. In either case, the richness of the spectacle is conveyed in large part by the unmediated quality of the cataloguing: not only does the list re-create the march, but in its apparent inability to supply any commentary or interpretative information, it makes the reader aware of the stupefying influence of such excess. One of the main effects of the procession was to render the spectator lost for words: the effect was one of unparalleled magnificence, and the realistic costumes and live horses proved utterly convincing—the verisimilitude so sought after by the administration had been achieved.

In a slightly different way, however, the spectacle went further; beyond its historical plausibility into a kind of immediacy that was almost uncomfortable. The witticisms of the critics, drawn in, we may suppose, in spite of themselves, reflect this: there were so many soldiers, noted one, that 'si l'on n'y prend garde, l'opéra deviendra une puissance capable de jeter ses armées dans la balance de l'Europe'.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Cohen, 141.

<sup>46</sup> *Le Courrier Français* (27 February 1835, 'Ed. M.'). Leich-Galland, *Dossier de presse*,

Absorbing as well as convincing, the procession was thus able not only to express the celebration it narratively represents, but also communicate something to the audience of their position in watching it: the above remark seems born of the mixture of state or military ceremony and its simulacrum in the theatrical genes of the opera. Indeed, this may be where the act of seeing at the Opéra (as distinct from merely what is seen) most obviously reclaims its origins in the spectacles of the boulevard theatres, and by extension, in *their* historical relation to the spectacular entertainments of the Revolution and Empire. Yet the family resemblance runs deeper, to a more theoretical idea of the meaning of spectacle: in the Act I procession of *La Juive*, abstract space became real, because what they saw really *was* a procession with an avowed spectacular purpose. Historical panoply became contemporary circus, not just in the sense intended by Castil-Blaze and others when they invoked the name Franconi: the spectacular was, in that period if not always, the *raison d'être* of the Opéra, but here the sustaining narrative was under threat—of becoming confused with real life.

Clearly, the plot of Act I could have functioned very well without the procession, but its pomp was an accepted part of the genre. What makes it particularly revealing of the place of such extravagant spectacles in the Parisian mentality is its physical plausibility in the theatre: a ceremonial body of people in unusual dress filing past a large group of spectators, in which on-stage crowd and audience coincide. In the process, the role of the audience vacillated between that of observers and accessories, self-consciously hushed spectators and participating crowd, a double identity which reflects those other, more obvious coincidences—that the aesthetic of magnificence was shared by the Opéra with the boulevard theatres, that the audiences of the latter (although often composed of the same people) were ruled by different standards of conduct, had—just maybe conscious of those institutions'

radical past—a different idea of themselves qua spectators. One of the opera’s reviewers picked up on the strange sensation of the split experience, theatrical and quasi-ceremonial:

Nous-mêmes, nous, le public, qui sommes bien peuple aussi, nous n’avions plus d’attention que pour ce magnifique cortège. On se demandait si c’était bien un théâtre que cette vaste scène où s’avançaient tant de soldats couverts d’armures éblouissantes, tant de cavaliers.<sup>47</sup>

[Ourselves, the audience—we who are surely also the crowd—no longer had eyes for anything but this magnificent cortege. We couldn’t help wondering if this vast scene, with so many soldiers in shining armour and so much cavalry streaming past, really was in a theatre.]

Without even picking up too much of the revolutionary resonance in his use of ‘peuple’, it is evident that this writer, by identifying it—and the crowd on stage—with the audience, and thus collapsing the distinction between the narrative space of the opera and the physical space of the theatre, is creating a context for the opera with a different, older idea of audience engagement.

The pressure that the tradition of French historical theatre exerted on *La Juive*, with its inviting space for post-revolutionary revisionism, was, then, in part due to an unresolved crisis of function or genre that survives in the principal documents of the opera’s reception. While the political content of that generic inheritance, in friction with more recent events, invites dissection, the ideologically charged story of *La Juive* helps to uncover a deeper restlessness: livret de mise en scène and journalistic criticism alike seem constantly unsettled, working simultaneously to approach and to distance themselves from the object of visual desire. This object may be the quality of the exotic, as in the case of Éléazar’s and Rachel’s repeatedly-established Jewishness, or it may be sheer plenitude, as in the procession, but in either case there is

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<sup>47</sup> *Le Temps* (26 February 1835, ‘L.-V.’). Leich-Galland, *Dossier de presse*, 158.

confusion—in historical terms, of reconstructing a subjectifying popular mode of ceremony, in which the people played themselves, as a piece of spectacular entertainment for their visual consumption. And after all, where but in historical drama should these mental residues—ways of seeing and emotional engagement—surface? To paraphrase Laura Mulvey, in a well-known essay on ways of seeing classic Hollywood cinema, there is, in spectators' relationship with a work, a continual back-and-forth between remembering and forgetting themselves, between the pleasure of contemplation and that of identification and (proxy) participation.<sup>48</sup> The same was true of grand opéra: the consumption of spectacle is never uniform throughout the theatre, nor consistent from one moment to the next. Nonetheless, its vicissitudes are of cardinal importance to our understanding of what went on at the Opéra, cynosure of a whole culture.

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<sup>48</sup> See Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' in *Visual and Other Pleasures* (London, 1989), 18.