2 *Meister* Richard's apprenticeship: the early operas (1833–1840)

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Richard Wagner's early approach to an operatic career was oblique, yet inexorable. As a boy he was raised in a *gesamtkünstlerisch* environment, so to speak – an educated bourgeois milieu that cultivated the arts both domestically and professionally. His stepfather, Ludwig Geyer, was a painter as well as an actor; among his sisters were an accomplished actress (the eldest, Rosalie) and a singer (Klara); his brother Albert was a tenor and sometime opera director; his uncle Adolf Wagner was something of a scholar and critic who had been on friendly terms with Ludwig Tieck and E.T.A. Hoffmann, though he looked less kindly on the performing arts; and the father he never knew and whose paternity remained a large question mark, Carl Friedrich Wagner, had been for his part an amateur actor and devoted theater-goer until his death in 1814. Music, in this environment, existed as the handmaiden to drama and poetry. The commingling of spoken theater and opera in the Wagner family circle was altogether characteristic of German theatrical culture in this period, similar to England and to some extent France in this respect; only the Italian repertory represented what the later Wagner might have called "absolute" opera.

According to his own later testimony, Wagner's early enthusiasms shuttled between Homer and Greek tragedy, the plays of Shakespeare, Goethe, and Schiller, the fantastic tales of Hoffmann, the music of Beethoven, and eventually the operas of Carl Maria von Weber. Indeed, the picture of his artistic development or *Bildung* as an enthusiastic dilettantism ignited by the spark of genius derives above all from Wagner's autobiographical accounts. The completion of a Shakespearean–Gothic farrago entitled *Leubald und Adelaïde*, replete with vengeful spirits and countless murders, spurred the dilatory schoolboy to learn the rudiments of theory and composition from a copy of J. B. Logier's primer on harmony and thorough-bass (accumulating in the process serious overdue fines on the copy borrowed from Friedrich Wieck's musical lending library in Leipzig), with the aim of concocting incidental music along the lines of Beethoven's for *Egmont*, as he claimed.[1] (The "spirit music" he had in mind would have been better served by Weber's *Freischütz* and *Euryanthe*, of which the former had been another youthful passion.) In the meantime the young man's Hoffmannesque musical mysticism fed itself on the Beethoven

symphonies, especially the Fifth, the Seventh, and the Ninth; a piano transcription of the complete Ninth Symphony from around 1829 (*WWV* 9) as well as a manuscript copy of the full score attest to this infatuation. But the capstone of Wagner's early aesthetic experiences that would point him definitively toward opera is a more contested biographical point: a performance by the singer-actress Wilhelmine Schröder-Devrient allegedly in the title role of Beethoven's *Fidelio* in Leipzig in 1829. In *My Life* Wagner puts great emphasis on his first impression of Schröder-Devrient's electrifying musical-theatrical persona, dating it to his sixteenth year. "When I look back across my entire life," he wrote, "I find no event to place beside this" (*ML* 37). The claim has been obscured by lack of evidence for the alleged "guest performance," and by the fact that in the earlier 1843 autobiographical sketch he mentions only a later Schröder-Devrient performance as Romeo in Bellini's *I Capuleti e i Montecchi*, in 1834, described with similar enthusiasm but with different results. In this version, the aspiring dramatic composer was thrown into doubts on the efficacy of the "intellectual" German approach to opera in comparison to the more earthy, sensual, and directly melodic idiom of the modern *bel canto* genre (*PW* I:9).

Whatever the (elusive) truth behind these two versions of the Schröder-Devrient "epiphany," the discrepancy remains telling, for Wagner's operatic coming-of-age coincided with a moment of great stylistic ferment in the history of nineteenth-century opera in the years around 1830. The 1820s had witnessed the hopeful blossoming of a new German "Romantic" genre, starting with Weber's *Freischütz* in 1821 and the through-composed, "grand Romantic opera" *Euryanthe* in 1823. In between these dates an 1822 revival of *Fidelio* had, in fact, catapulted the teenaged Wilhelmine Schröder (a year before her marriage to the actor Karl Devrient) to international celebrity and finally convinced audiences of the viability of Beethoven's opera. In the meantime, Louis Spohr's *Jessonda* (1823), Weber's *Oberon* (1826), and the early works of Heinrich Marschner (*Der Vampyr* [1828], *Der Templer und die Jüdin* [1829]) contributed to a newly successful profile of German opera after two fallow decades since Mozart's death. German opera in this decade was viewed in direct competition with the international successes of Rossini. Then, by 1830, the landscape was again changing radically: Bellini's operas from *Il pirata* (1827) to *I Capuleti* (1830), *La sonnambula*, and *Norma* (both 1831) reasserted the international dominance of Italian opera. A similar impact was exerted by Parisian opera, starting with D.-F.-E. Auber's path-breaking *grand opéra* of revolutionary spectacle, *La muette de Portici* (1828), followed by Rossini's *Guillaume Tell* (1829) and Meyerbeer's *Robert le diable* (1831). And simultaneously, a new breed of French *opéra comique* infused with the energies of Rossinian opera and French "boulevard" melodrama was making even greater inroads on

German stages, with works such as Auber's *Fra Diavolo* (1830) and Ferdinand Hérold's *Zampa* (1831). These Italian and French works, and many more like them, traveled quickly, so that when Richard Wagner set about fashioning himself as an operatic composer in the early 1830s he was faced with a truly dizzying array of possibilities.[2] Between the alleged 1829 Leipzig *Fidelio* of Schröder-Devrient and her 1834 *Capuleti* the young Wagner found himself at an operatic crossroads.

In between these dates he managed to complete some more serious musical studies, largely under the tutelage of the Leipzig Thomaskantor, Theodor Weinlig;[3] he also attained his first practical experience in the theater as *répétiteur* (rehearsal coach) and general musical assistant to his brother Albert, an operatic tenor and stage manager, with the small but enterprising town theater of Würzburg throughout most of 1833. By the following January (1834) Richard had completed his first operatic score, a "grand Romantic opera" entitled *Die Feen* (*The Fairies*) to a libretto of his own making, based on Carlo Gozzi's "dramatic fairy tale," *La donna serpente* (*The Serpent Woman*). Thus, when Schröder-Devrient's Romeo (among other experiences) pointed out to him the complex crossroads of operatic possibility later that year, we might say that his formal apprenticeship had been concluded, and he was poised to begin his *Wanderjahre* or journeyman years. These would take him far afield, both geographically and stylistically, until he returned to his home state of Saxony in 1842. The premiere of *Der fliegende Holländer* (*The Flying Dutchman*) in Dresden at the beginning of 1843 and his appointment as Royal Saxon Kapellmeister soon thereafter would mark his elevation to the rank of "master" (as his acolytes would fondly address him in later years) in his career as musical dramatist. The remainder of this chapter is concerned with the efforts of the "apprentice" and the "journeyman," and with the early routes taken by the eventual *Meister* of Bayreuth. After outlining the external stages of the early career path across the 1830s I will try to summarize what Wagner attempted and achieved in the first three completed operas (*Die Feen*, *Das Liebesverbot* [*The Ban on Love*], *Rienzi*), and to trace some stylistic, technical, and dramatic or imaginative "leitmotifs" (including the roots of that famous Wagnerian device itself) connecting the youthful oeuvre with the canonic works of the "master."

In the footsteps of Meyerbeer

If we date Wagner's accession to the status of mature master with the premiere of *Der fliegende Holländer* and the appointment as music director in Dresden, then his *Wanderjahre* coincide precisely with the decade of

his twenties, between 1833 and 1843. It was a decade rich in experiences, artistic as well as personal, but the basic stations of the emergent career can be enumerated simply enough. Upon completing *Die Feen* toward the end of his year in Würzburg, the young composer had high hopes of a premiere in Leipzig. After brief negotiations and despite the efforts of his sister Rosalie, the leading lady of spoken theater there at the time, it was ultimately declined. Before long Wagner moved on to a new post as music director for a theater troupe based in Magdeburg and to a new operatic project, a "grand Romantic comic opera" based on Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*, which he entitled *Das Liebesverbot*. The composition of this text reflected a broader musical-aesthetic project of absorbing the lyrical and lively rhythmical impulses of Bellinian *bel canto* and of Auber's recent successes in both *grand* and *comique* genres. The result was meant to be a characteristically German synthesis of these audience-tested ingredients of foreign opera with the conscientious symphonic workmanship of native traditions. Coinciding with this new stylistic experiment was Wagner's impetuous first marriage to the actress Minna Planer and an allegiance to the hedonistic, anti-metaphysical, liberal cultural politics of the current Young German movement. The Magdeburg stint concluded with the young Wagner's second attempt at a premiere, this time of *Das Liebesverbot*. Now, as music director, he was able to engineer this himself, blithely disregarding the vast discrepancy between means and ends. What we know of the result comes from his wry account of the effort in *My Life*, which he had previously excerpted to stand in for the libretto in the original editions of his collected writings (*GS* I:20–31; *PW* VII:5–18; and *ML* 83, 111–19). Despite the virtually unprecedented scope of these two early scores, Wagner was soon willing to put them aside for good and chalk up all this effort to a learning experience.[4] Apart from the compositional practice afforded him by these two projects, by no means negligible, he now clearly understood the necessity of attaining a professional arena commensurate with his artistic ambitions. The model he looked to was Giacomo Meyerbeer, especially in the wake of the phenomenal success in 1836 of his second Parisian grand opera, *Les Huguenots*.

Of course, one year of assistant-conducting in Würzburg and a year and a half directing a threadbare company in Magdeburg, without any credible performance of an opera of his own, scarcely formed a sufficient basis for the great leap forward he had in mind. For several more years he toiled in the provinces, with a temporary engagement as conductor in Königsberg (1837) and a slightly longer one, further east on the Baltic coast in the German-speaking, Russian-controlled Latvian city of Riga (to the beginning of 1839). During most of his time in Riga Wagner was at work on the grand historical opera in five acts, *Rienzi*, which from the

outset he regarded as his ticket out of the provinces. "Paris or bust" was now his inner mantra. And, in fact, only a few months into his very first independent appointment, in Magdeburg, he had mapped out for himself a career path modeled on Meyerbeer's that would take him from Germany to Paris by way of Italy, in order to acquire some extra polish in his handling of the operatic voice. The notion of Italy as a training ground for the German opera composer, as in the days of Handel, Gluck, Hasse, and Mozart, was by now nearly obsolete, though Meyerbeer and Otto Nicolai had still followed it. Wagner was serious about learning something from Bellini, but when he wrote in October 1834 to Theodor Apel, his closest intimate since school days, with the proposal that he accompany Richard on this cosmopolitan musical journeyman's itinerary, he was perhaps only half in earnest. He clearly entertained some hopes that his well-off young friend might help subsidize the fantasy, fueled as it was in part by their common "Young German" enthusiasm for the aesthetic-sensual paradise depicted in Heinse's *Ardinghello*, yearned for by Goethe's Mignon, and more recently popularized for German youth in the travel writings of Heinrich Laube and others. The passionate insistence of his proposal to Apel is in any case wholly characteristic. (As he confided to Apel, Minna Planer had yielded to his sexual advances less from love or desire than from a sense of helplessness in the face of his importunity.) Recalling his travels with Apel through the Bohemian countryside the previous summer, when he drafted *Das Liebesverbot*, Wagner invokes the "divine licentiousness" that beckons beyond the Alps, at the same time merging his poetic fancies with what he sees as a practical route to success:

> Yes, my dearest Theodor, my plan is now firmly and irrevocably made. My Fairies [*Die Feen*] must be performed in 3 or 4 good theaters in order to lay the ground for my Ban on Love [*Das Liebesverbot*], which I am at present in the process of completing. I am bound to make a name for myself with this opera, and acquire both fame and fortune; and if I am lucky enough to achieve both of these, I shall go to Italy, taking them and you with me; this, I should add, will be in the spring of 1836. In Italy I shall write an Italian opera and, depending on how things turn out, maybe more than one; and then when we are tanned and strong, we shall turn to France. I'll write a French opera in Paris, and God only knows where I'll end up then! But at least I know *who* I shall be: no longer a German philistine. This career of mine must be yours as well. (*SL* 23–24, trans. emended; *SB* I:167–68)

In the event, *Das Liebesverbot* had to stand in for Italy and Italian opera (Wagner in fact transposes the setting of Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* to Sicily), and in a very real stylistic sense it served as a bridge from Italian and lighter French styles to the grand opera already envisioned as the goal of his *Wanderjahre*. Just before taking up the Kapellmeister post in Riga, Wagner

wrote directly to Meyerbeer, confirming his goals as they began to take on ever firmer outlines. (He was at the same time following up an earlier, abortive attempt to establish contact with the librettist Eugène Scribe, who he hoped would collaborate with him, as he had with Meyerbeer.) Wagner's letter of self-introduction to Meyerbeer is frank and, at the moment of its writing, undoubtedly sincere. He mentions the passion for Beethoven that first drew him to music as a vocation, but adds that, since the beginning of his fledgling career in opera, "my views on the present state of music, and above all dramatic music, have undergone a significant change, and it would be futile of me to deny that it was your works which suggested this new direction to me" (letter of 4 February 1837; *SL* 42). Nor is it empty flattery when he continues: "in you I behold the perfect embodiment of the task that confronts the German artist, a task you have solved by dint of having mastered the merits of the Italian and French Schools in order to give *universal* validity to the products of that genius. This, then, is what more or less set me upon my present course" (*SL* 42–43).[5]

With this "Parisian" grand opera, *Rienzi*, on his own (for now, German) text about halfway completed, Wagner finally launched himself and his wife Minna on an adventurous sea voyage from East Prussia to Paris in the summer of 1839. *Rienzi* was not fated to see the boards of the Paris opera until 1869, by which time it was a relic of a former life. The two and a half years Wagner spent in Paris were a period of frustration and hardship. To some extent he continued to absorb the lessons of French grand opera, a genre whose ambitious scale, effective dramaturgy, scenic plenitude, and rich stylistic palette he still admired. But for the most part, these lessons had been learned even before Wagner arrived in Paris; the net result of the Parisian sojourn was rather to reorient the composer toward his German Romantic roots, instrumental (Beethoven) as well as operatic (Weber, et al.). The composition of *Der fliegende Holländer* during the end of the Paris stay was the fruit of this reaction, and even *Rienzi* was to achieve its first performance, and establish its composer's fame at last, back in his childhood home of Dresden.[6]

Richard Wagner, the poet and the composer (*Die Feen*)

While Wagner was still an infant the Napoleonic armies waged battles outside Dresden (August 1813) and Leipzig (October 1813). The Battle of Leipzig, also called the Völkerschlacht or Battle of Nations, sealed Napoleon's defeat in central Europe. Only now did Austria and Saxony join in the Prussian resistance to Napoleon, and the Battle of Leipzig became a patriotic rallying point for the rest of the century. E.T.A. Hoffmann, who almost exactly

crossed paths with the Wagner family in moving from Dresden to Leipzig at the end of the year, recalled these recent conflicts in framing his famous dialogue between the German poet, Ferdinand, and his musician friend, Ludwig, on the nature of opera and its prospects in German culture of the time, "The Poet and the Composer." Since Richard Wagner developed a vivid awareness of Hoffmann during his early teens (Hoffmann had also befriended Richard's uncle Adolf, whom he addressed familiarly as "Alf"), one can't help but suppose that Hoffmann's dialogic essay on the aesthetics of Romantic opera made a significant impact on the young man, intent on proving himself both as a dramatist and as a musician.

At the center of Hoffmann's vignette is a proposal by Ludwig (the composer) about the suitability of Carlo Gozzi's "dramatic fairy tales" or fables (*fiabe teatrali*, 1760–65) as the basis for Romantic opera libretti, with their fanciful admixture of the comic, the serious, and the fantastic. The dialogue includes a lengthy précis of *The Raven* (*Il corvo*), of which uncle Adolf Wagner himself happens to have made a German translation (as *Der Rabe*). The young Richard Wagner's choice of another Gozzi "tale," *La donna serpente*, as the basis of his first completed opera, *Die Feen*, points almost ineluctably to Hoffmann's influence. Hoffmann's composer Ludwig resists the notion of devising his own libretto, even though he is full of opinions on what should go into one; he is too much the pure musician to be bothered with fussing over rhyme schemes, meter, and the like. Wagner, of course, overleaped such scruples. First, he rechristened the main characters of Gozzi's play, whose names reflect the *Arabian Nights* inspiration of this *fiaba* and others (Farruscad, Cherestanì, Canzade, Rezia, etc.), with Germanic and Ossianic names taken over from his early Gothic horror-play, *Die Hochzeit*, a text he had completed but then discarded upon its meeting with the strong disapproval of his sister Rosalie. The fairy princess becomes Ada, her mortal suitor is called Arindal, his strong and noble sister, Lora, and her beloved warrior, Morald. The *commedia* masks that formed an integral part of Gozzi's plays, in a conscious homage to Venetian traditions, are transformed into a pair of *Singspiel* comedians, Gernot and Drolla. A character of indeterminate status named Gunther mediates between them and the serious roles.

At the core of the story is the Ur-Romantic motif of the supernatural being in love with a human, already the subject of Hoffmann's own opera, *Undine*, after the influential story of the Baron de la Motte Fouqué.[7] (Wagner elaborated the motif again in *Lohengrin* and echoed it throughout his oeuvre in the pairings of the Dutchman and Senta, Venus and Tannhäuser, Brünnhilde and Siegfried, perhaps even Kundry and Parsifal.) Wagner also found in Gozzi the motif of the forbidden question: like Lohengrin, the fairy princess Cherestanì (Wagner's Ada) insists that her

mortal partner not ask after her name or her "kind." This stricture has already been broken before the opera begins, however, and two further series of trials of the mortal prince, Arindal, structure the second and third acts of both Gozzi's and Wagner's dramas. First he must promise not to curse her, despite the exhibition of apparently abominable acts of cruelty against his children and his kingdom. His failure of this test, in Act 2, turns Cherestanì into a loathsome serpent (in Gozzi), or into a lifeless statue (in Wagner). In the last set of trials, individual combat against supernatural foes, the prince is aided by the secret counsel of a beneficent wizard (Gozzi) or magical talismans provided by the same (Wagner). But Wagner exchanges Gozzi's Jungian archetype of the beloved female object become life-threatening monster (later alluded to in details of *Siegfried*, Acts 2 and 3) for the more traditional operatic motif of Orpheus. His Arindal reanimates the petrified Ada through song, to the accompaniment of a magic lyre or harp. Instead of winning her over to mortality, however, he joins her in the Romantic fairy realm, leaving his kingdom and all worldly concerns to his sister, Lora, and her husband. From the beginning, Wagner's hero is pre-occupied with love and the forms of its expression, as well as with guilt and redemption. Like many of Wagner's future heroes, he is not of this world.[8]

The elements of chivalric romance and magic spectacle in the Gozzi source look back to the knights and sorceresses of Tasso or Ariosto, but Wagner reimagines that world through the stylistic lens of works such as Weber's *Euryanthe* and *Oberon*, Louis Spohr's *Jessonda*, and Marschner's *Hans Heiling* (which shares the Romantic dilemma of a mixed fairy/mortal marriage, though it did not premiere until after he had already begun composing *Die Feen*). The spirit of Mozart's *Zauberflöte* stands somewhere in the background of it all, though only really audible in the comic duet scene for Gernot and Drolla in Act 2. And while *Die Feen* shares nothing of its "realistic" modern melodrama, the musico-dramatic energies of *Fidelio* are a still more important source of inspiration. The measure of the apprentice's achievement can best be read from the solo scenes (arias) of the protagonists, Ada and Arindal, anticipating the extended monologues often at the dramatic heart of the later music dramas, and from the ambitiously scaled ensemble finales.

Arindal's entrance aria ("Wo find ich dich, wo wird mir Trost") lamenting the sudden disappearance of Ada (when he posed the "forbidden question") seems to take its cue from the scene and aria of Lysiart, the jealous and conscience-tormented villain of Weber's *Euryanthe*, which opens the second act.[9] Both are agitated, multisection soliloquies in C minor, enfolding a restful, wistful interlude before they press on to a furious and nihilistic conclusion. Wagner would later mine Lysiart's aria again in the Flying Dutchman's opening monologue, another tormented

C-minor *scena*; all three scenes involve a similar dying-out effect at the end. Still more freely constructed than Lysiart's "Vengeance" aria is Arindal's "mad scene" (the scene and aria, "Halloh! Halloh! Lasst alle Hunde los!") in Act 3 of *Die Feen*. In the introductory F-minor *scena* he relives the first discovery of his fairy wife, Ada, whom he hunted in the shape of a deer. In his fevered recreation of the scene, he imagines that he kills her before learning who/what she is. Again there is an internal cantabile episode, here a vision of immortal transfiguration (in E major, the key associated with the fairy realm throughout the opera). When this vision fades, the number dissolves into arioso fragments in F minor, as Arindal sinks back unconscious. The largest solo number is Ada's in Act 2. Like those of Arindal, the scene begins as an agitated monologue, and moves, in this case, to an extended allegro in D major expressing a heroic resolve in gestures reminiscent of "Ich folg' dem innern Triebe," the final phase of Leonore's great scene and aria in *Fidelio*. In this case, Ada projects the heroic resolve onto Arindal, who will in fact disappoint her in this regard.

Arindal's failure to withstand the tests imposed on him by Ada is the subject of the opera's most ambitious musico-dramatic conception, the finale to Act 2, which follows directly on her big scene and aria. Italian opera since Rossini could furnish models for considerably extended finales, but the dramatic material of Wagner's second act finale is too manifold and discursive to be contained in the orderly progression of those models. The energetic stretta in which the finale issues ("Ertönet, Jubelklänge, zum Himmelhoch empor") celebrates a military victory that also serves to highlight Arindal's personal failure and despair. This music draws on the martial idiom of Spontini's finales and forms an audible bridge between those and the finales of *Rienzi* or Act 1 of *Lohengrin*. The victory is the outcome of an offstage battle that initiates this Act 2 finale. (That Arindal's foes and their motives for attack are left utterly vague is partly the fault of the fairy-tale source; Gozzi simply calls them "Moors," forgetful of the Arabian character of his own hero's milieu.) In between, Arindal is reunited with his children from Ada, only to see them cast into a fiery furnace, then to see his armies hopelessly routed – both illusions created by Ada to test his will power. Believing all is lost, Arindal curses Ada, thereby losing her and discovering (to his further distress) the illusory nature of those catastrophes. Only now does Ada reveal her supernatural origin – not in response to the "forbidden question," which we never hear posed, in fact. We can hardly be surprised if the net effect is somewhat diffuse. Nonetheless, the sequence of Ada's *gran scena* and this finale leaves no doubt of the young composer's natural feeling for musical drama and his ambition to work on an unprecedented scale.

"Ja, glühend wie des Südens Hauch" (*Das Liebesverbot*)

Almost as soon as he had completed *Die Feen*, Wagner began to feel dissatisfied with it or, rather, with what he was beginning to regard as the awkward, pedantic, provincial elements of German opera of the day. The rejection of his score by the Leipzig theater administration and, at about the same time, the experience of Schröder-Devrient as Romeo in Bellini's *Capuleti* conspired to send him in a new direction, one furthermore in harmony with the new climate of Young German rebellion against bourgeois values and academic learning.[10] Central to the Young German creed was the denunciation of perceived hypocrisy in modern German society, politics, and culture. The intellectual postures of idealist metaphysics were to be exposed as such, and the physical realities of life and art celebrated instead. It was in this spirit that Wagner adapted Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* to the libretto of his next opera, *Das Liebesverbot*.

In Shakespeare's famously grim "comedy," the puritanical Angelo has been deputized to serve in place of the Duke of Vienna, who charges Angelo with improving the morals of the city while he, in fact, stays behind to observe in the disguise of a friar. When a generally upstanding young nobleman, Claudio, is caught in the snares of Angelo's draconian new laws suppressing fornication, Claudio's sister Isabella, destined for the convent, is conscripted to plead on his behalf. Angelo's own dormant or suppressed desires are enflamed by Isabella's beauty and chastity; he agrees to suspend her brother's death sentence if she will yield her own person in return. The fiancée whom Angelo had once callously rejected, Mariana, is substituted for Isabella (the "bed trick" popularized by the tales of Boccaccio). After Angelo compounds his guilt by attempting to proceed with Claudio's execution, Isabella denounces him to the Duke, who has witnessed the whole affair while incognito.

Wagner preserves most of the plot and main characters (except the Duke, who is now truly absent); yet he transposes the whole to a distinctly brighter key and register. Shakespeare's play represents sexual desire as troublesome, at best, and potentially degrading, if not inherently sinful. It shares a contemporary assumption, as Katharine E. Maus notes, that morality and sexual conduct "could and should be legislated."[11] Wagner, on the other hand, uses Angelo's sexual repression and hypocrisy to preach free love and to denounce the legislation of morality altogether. He moves the setting to Palermo, probably influenced in part by the picturesque Sicilian and Neapolitan settings of such contemporary favorites as *Robert le diable*, *Zampa*, and *La muette de Portici*. Angelo, however, is turned into a German regent, "Friedrich" (presumably of Hohenstaufen extraction), pointing up the thematic contrast between hypocritical "German" prudishness and Mediterranean naturalness or spontaneity. This contrast relates likewise

to the lesson at hand in matters of operatic style. To drive home the point, Wagner has Isabella betrothed in the end not to the virtuous Duke, but to the libertine Lucio (here, Luzio, who is not quite the unregenerate rogue of *Measure for Measure*).[12] Wagner makes further use of his Italian setting to recast the conflict more broadly as one between a "carnivalesque" popular spirit and the agents of authority and oppression: in Palermo, Friedrich's "ban on love" is allied to an edict suppressing the rites of carnival.[13]

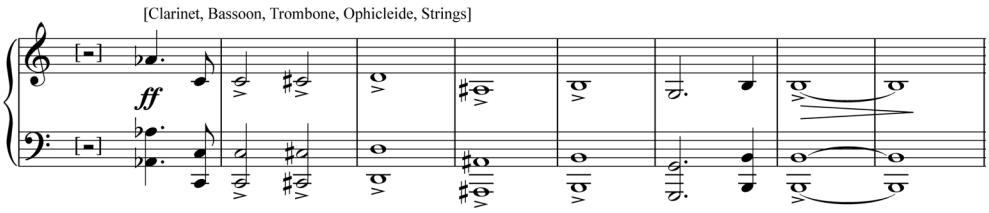
Wagner, for his part, had suddenly come to feel himself oppressed or hemmed in by the false authority of German music. He did not question its authority in the instrumental realm, where Beethoven would always reign supreme. But he began to question whether its values were sufficiently well suited to the exigencies of drama and of operatic singing. Schröder-Devrient's performance of Romeo in Bellini's opera (no doubt an atypical and in some sense very "German" interpretation) led him to question, as he afterwards recalled, "the choice of means that could lead to a great success" in the theater:

> While I was far from overestimating Bellini's own achievement, it none the less struck me that the stuff from which his music was made was better calculated to create a warm, living impression than was the fussy, overconscientious approach with which we Germans thought to achieve a dramatic truth that was in reality merely the strained appearance of such "truth." The lazy, characterless quality of our modern Italians, no less than the light frivolity of the new French school, seemed to challenge us serious, conscientious Germans to appropriate the better, more effective aspects of our rivals' music in order to outstrip them decisively in the production of true works of art. ("Autobiographical Sketch," *GS* I:9–10)

Thus, *Das Liebesverbot* is not an attempt to write an Italian opera according to the "Meyerbeerian" plan Wagner had proposed to Apel, nor to write an *opéra comique* of the sort that had become a staple of the German stage in the works of Boieldieu, Hérold, and Auber. Rather, it seeks to combine Bellinian lyricism, the taught rhythmic energy of post-Rossinian choruses, the supple, discreetly accompanied *parlando* dialogue of Auber's comedies, and the whole stylistic palette of Auber's historical drama *La muette de Portici*, while infusing all of these with Wagner's abiding sense of "solid German workmanship."

The overture is already emblematic in this regard. It begins with deliberate frivolity, quoting Luzio's carnival song from the Act 2 finale; but almost immediately this music becomes involved in acts of dramatic signification in the German manner, when the motive of Friedrich's Ban on Love (Example 2.1) tries to stop the carnival song in its tracks. Luzio's song theme mocks and taunts the motive of authority, until both are swept away by the theme of Friedrich's illicit passion (Wagner's version of a

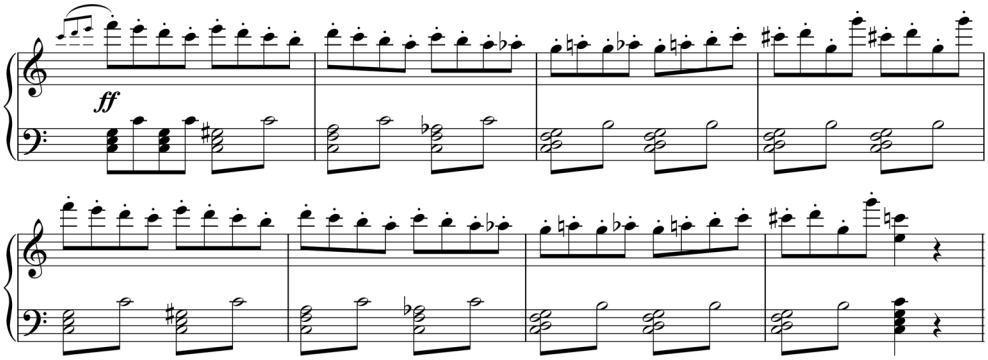
Ex. 2.1



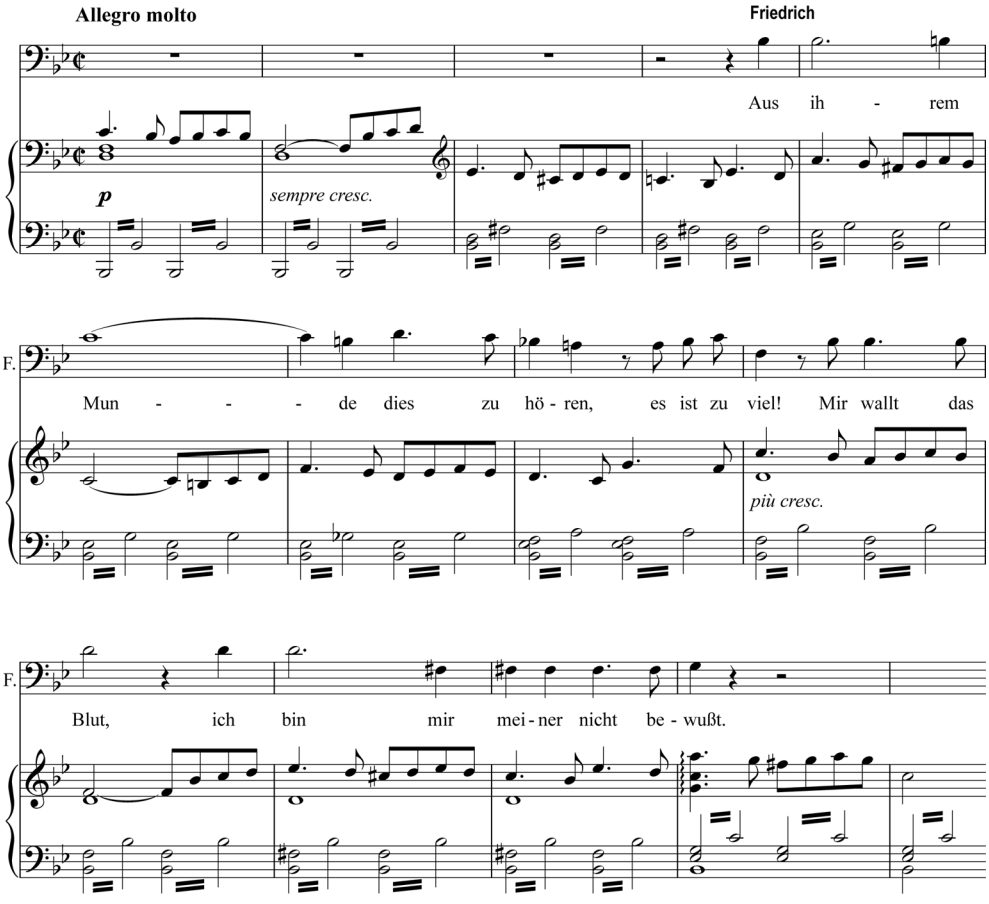
Rossini crescendo). The loose structure tends toward the potpourri of the *opéra comique* overture, but again Wagner cannot resist episodes of Germanic harmonic development, precipitated by the "signifying" motive of Friedrich's Ban. Luzio's song and Friedrich's "passionate" crescendo have in common a harmonic formula that permeates the score, probably under the influence of Hérold's *Zampa*, which was very much in Wagner's ears in this period: the formula is a simple progression from I to IV by way of a chromatic passing tone (♯5, or ♭6 descending, creating either a passing augmented triad or minor subdominant), usually grounded by a tonic pedal. (See Examples 2.2a, 2.2b, and 2.2c, including a version from the Act 1 finale of *Zampa* used in the overture to that work; Hérold's overture includes a similar "signifying" interruption of a rollicking theme, intimating the vengeance wrought by the statue of the betrayed Alice upon the libertine pirate Zampa.) This harmonic formula is not used as a conscious "motive," like that of Friedrich's Ban – Wagner seems rather to have reacted instinctively to its diastolic quality, a broad swelling or intake and outtake of breath, which musical-expressive gesture he manages to relate to the whole spectrum of passions represented in his comedy.

In solo and duet scenes Wagner applies the current Italian structures in flexible, dramatically canny ways.[14] The duet encompassing Isabella's interview with her imprisoned brother Claudio at the opening of Act 2 (no. 7) moves quickly toward a cabaletta-like section with solo and duo strophes ("Ha welch ein Tod für Lieb' und Ehre") expressing Claudio's proud resolve to lay down his life for Isabella's honor. The tone and form of the cabaletta suggest the matter is settled, when Claudio interrupts his sister with his doubts. He concludes the scene with an energetic attempt to restore the C-major heroics of the cabaletta, recalling its use of that same harmonic formula described above ("O Schwester sieh', O sieh' auf meine Reue!"), though he is unable to repair the breach. Wagner creates a special urgency by ending the scene, as he would later do sometimes in *Rienzi*, with a condensed stretta in place of a whole two-strophe cabaletta. Friedrich's scene and aria (no. 10) intensify through words and music Angelo's speeches in both scene 2 and scene 4 of Act 2 of *Measure for*

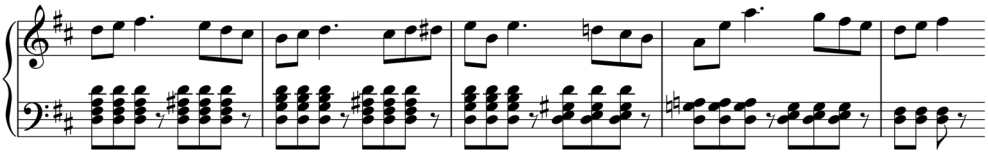
Ex. 2.2a



Ex. 2.2b



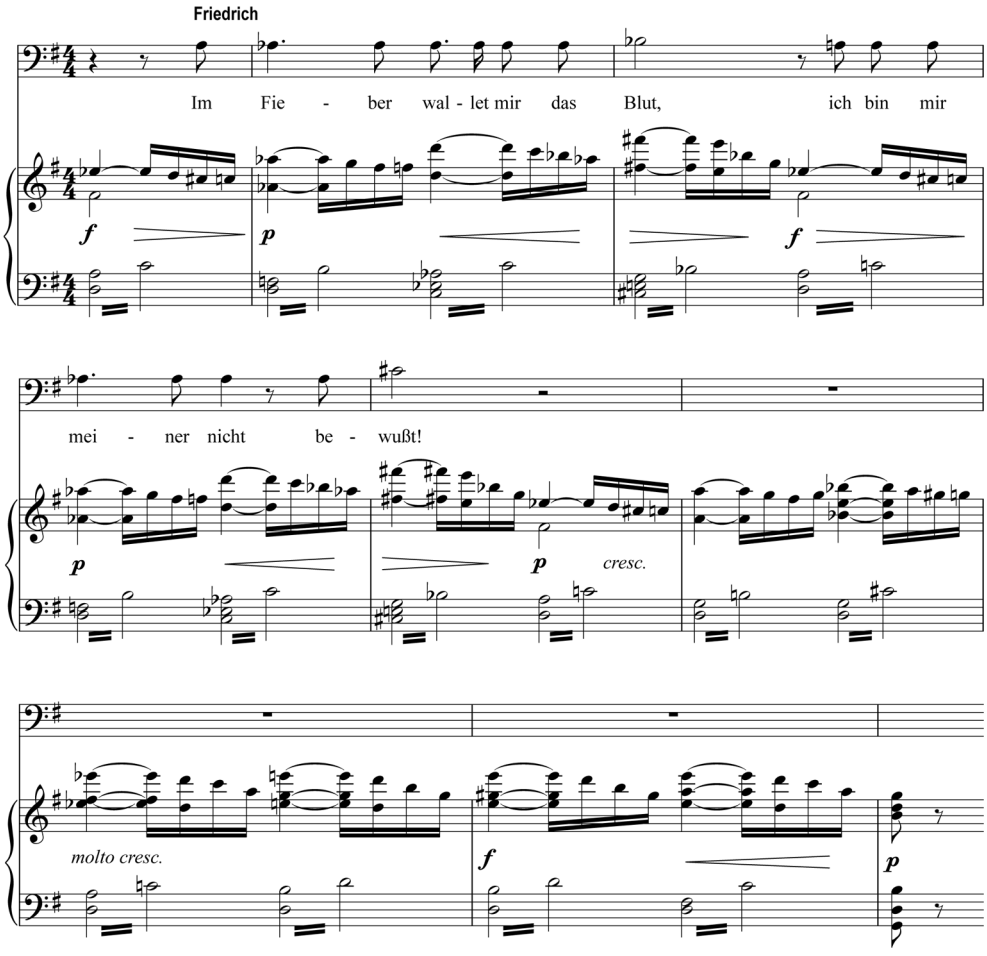
Ex. 2.2c



Measure reflecting on his unexpected passion. The scene is punctuated with references to the Ban on Love motive, now projecting Friedrich's own tormented conscience. The text of his cantabile, "Ja, glühend wie des Südens Hauch brennt mir die Flamme in der Brust" ("Yes, like the warm breath of the southern breeze, this flame burns in my breast") might be taken as a motto of Wagner's own discovery of the expressive value of the "Southern" idioms he had once contemned, even if this chromatically swelling, rather densely textured music is one of the score's less Italianate moments. A rapturous cabaletta ("O Wonne, himmlisches Entzücken") is precipitated in the classic manner by the delivery of a message: Isabella's feigned consent to his proposal. Tripping "carnival" music taunts his conscience in between the strophes of the cabaletta, and the second strophe is dramatically interrupted by thoughts of Claudio's fate (and relevant musical reminiscences). In a new Wagnerian gesture, Friedrich, quite unlike Shakespeare's Angelo, resolves not only to carry out Claudio's sentence but also to end his own life once he has indulged his forbidden passion. Thoughts of physical desire and annihilation mingle in a delirious frenzy: "Wie trag' ich Qualen und Entzücken, es harret Tod und Wollust mein" ("How can I bear these torments and delights; death and pleasure await me").[15] Leading into this final phase of the aria is a development of a short chromatic figure that anticipates, appropriately enough, moments of *Tristan und Isolde* (Example 2.3).

Das Liebesverbot betrays something of an identity complex – one that reflects that of Wagner himself as a novice opera composer in the 1830s. Despite the Italianisms in the numbers just described, the work is in essence a German *opéra comique* – unrelated, that is, to a *Singspiel* tradition – with scarcely concealed aspirations to grand opera. The few bits of spoken dialogue that remain are entirely out of proportion to the rest, almost like accidental relics of some earlier plan. Certainly the comic portions of the score model themselves on Auber's lighter comic style, though lightness is a quality Wagner attains only with much effort, if at all.[16] The final sequence of numbers in Act 1 is representative of the whole stylistic spectrum of the score, as well as the composer's ambitions in the direction of a new kind of through-composed drama. The Act 1 finale (no. 6) follows a loose concatenation headed "Aria, Duet, Trio and Ensemble" (no. 5) without a break, and together they probably include as many notes as constitute some entire operas in Wagner's early repertory. The first part, involving the comic characters Brighella, Pontio Pilato, and Dorella (the former two roughly equivalent to Shakespeare's Elbow and Pompey), shows Wagner trying to master the kind of fleet, motivically accompanied conversation and bouncy dance song he knew from works like Auber's *Fra Diavolo*, *Le Maçon*, or *Lestocq*, while the finale emulates the massed choral

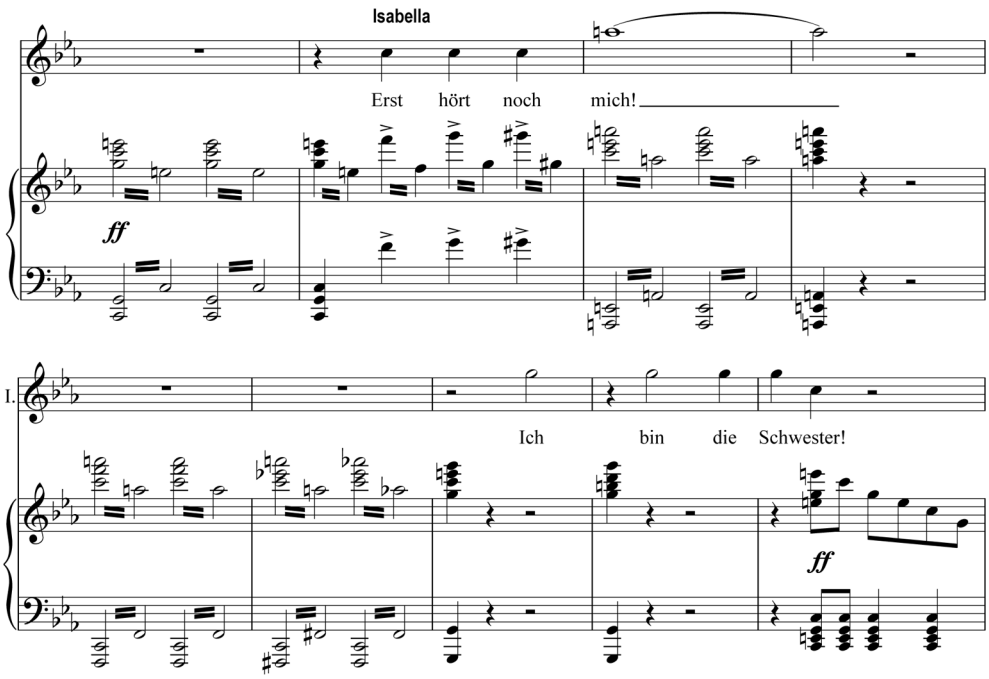
Ex. 2.3



scenes of *La muette de Portici*. The element of popular insurrection informing the finales of both Acts 1 and 2 is clearly derived from that model, and has nothing to do with Shakespeare's play.

Isabella's role in the Act 1 finale probably owes more than a little to the impact of Wilhelmine Schröder-Devrient. Her dramatic intervention on behalf of her brother Claudio, fighting her way through an unruly crowd to confront Friedrich, paraphrases Leonore's climactic utterance in *Fidelio*, confronting the tyrannous Pizarro: "Töt erst sein Weib!" ("Erst hört noch mich! Ich bin die Schwester," Example 2.4). In a tripartite aria, embedded in the first finale, Wagner's Isabella begins by pleading the quality of mercy but ends with a veritable paean to erotic love, offering a much franker provocation of Friedrich's desire that anything uttered by Shakespeare's more circumspect heroine. (This modification of the role

Ex. 2.4



again suggests the musical and dramatic ardor for which Schröder-Devrient was so celebrated, and perhaps something of her personal reputation as a passionate, liberated woman which clearly fascinated the young Wagner as well.) He reframes the central confrontation of Isabella and Angelo/Friedrich in grand-operatic terms, within the public arena of massed chorus and ensemble. Her initial plea and his indecent proposal take place aside, but then Isabella invites back the crowd in an attempt to denounce Friedrich. In foiling this ("Who will believe thee, Isabel? My unsoiled name . . . will so your accusation overweigh that you shall stifle in your own report . . . My false o'erweighs your true," as Angelo argues) Friedrich precipitates a broad *adagio concertato* movement, converting to an energetic ensemble and choral stretta of truly delirious proportions when Isabella conceives the plan of substituting the betrayed Mariana for herself as a means of conferring justice upon all.[17]

A diploma in grand opera (*Rienzi*)

However much Wagner revised the tone of *Measure for Measure* toward a spirit of carnivalesque hedonism and rebellion in *Das Liebesverbot*, he still

responded to the essential gravity of Shakespeare's play. The frenzied excess of the Act 1 finale is not that of Rossinian buffa; Wagner's compositional eye is already trained on grand opera. By the time he completed *Rienzi* in 1840, and certainly by the time of its premiere in 1842, his artistic preoccupations had moved on, or back, to the question of a specifically German opera, and how to reform and expand the "Romantic" genre he had begun with in *Die Feen*. But in the meantime, during the later 1830s, Wagner was intent on mastering the prestigious genre of the moment: French grand opera. The truly enthusiastic reception of *Rienzi* in Dresden in the final months of 1842 was the breakthrough for which Wagner had been waiting so long and working so hard. This success, sealed by the appointment as Royal Saxon Kapellmeister several months later, was a diploma of sorts recognizing the achievements of the aspiring composer, librettist, and conductor: the *Meisterbrief* or master's certificate that formalized the completion of a strenuous "course" in contemporary operatic genres. (Ironically, the work he himself regarded as true evidence of an original mastery – *Der fliegende Holländer* – received scant initial acclaim and was largely ignored by the public for some decades.)

Rienzi was the second of two projects in the field of grand opera, both derived from recent historical novels. In the summer of 1836 Wagner devised a scenario based on Heinrich König's novel *Die hohe Braut*, concerning love across class lines: Bianca, the "noble bride" of the title, loves a commoner, Giuseppe, who becomes swept up in conspiracy and revolt. Set in Italian-ruled Savoy of the 1790s and capitalizing on the picturesque background of the Alpes Maritimes and the French Riviera, the *Hohe Braut* project continued the emulation of *La muette de Portici* begun in *Das Liebesverbot*; Wagner confidently sent his scenario off to Eugène Scribe in Paris, thinking thus to lay the groundwork for the great Parisian campaign he was beginning to plot in his mind. A year later (summer 1837) Wagner had abandoned this first "Parisian" project and moved on to Bulwer-Lytton's novel of medieval Rome, *Rienzi, Last of the Tribunes*. Bulwer-Lytton's previous success, *The Last Days of Pompeii*, had proven the author's affinity with grand-operatic drama and spectacle, but the moral and political conflicts between the idealistic *Volkstribun* Rienzi, the corrupt nobility, and the plebeian leaders spoke more to Wagner's dramatic instincts.[18]

With *Rienzi* Wagner finally put aside the model of Auber's *La muette* and turned to others better suited to the gravitas of his Roman subject: Spontini's proto-grand operas (*La vestale*, *Fernand Cortez*, *Olympie*) and *La Juive* of Scribe and Halévy (1835). In May 1836 Wagner heard Spontini conduct *Fernand Cortez* in Berlin. The music and above all the performance provided a critical impetus. The "exceptionally precise, fiery and

superbly organized way the whole work was brought off" was a revelation, he recalls; it gave him a whole new picture of the potential "dignity of major theatrical undertakings, which in all their [constituent] parts could be elevated by alert rhythmic control into a singular and incomparable form of art" (*ML* 124). Appropriate to its themes of inspired leadership and the renewal of ancient Roman pomp and civic virtue, *Rienzi* was conceived in the spirit of a directorial "total artwork" after the example of Spontini.[19]

The drama of Rienzi's struggles with feuding noble clans and with the Vatican's claims to secular power in fourteenth-century Rome (only loosely modeled on the historical figure of Cola di Rienzo), the frequent appeals to the "glory that was Rome," and a post-revolutionary bourgeois skepticism toward the power of the "mob" as well as the old clergy allowed Wagner to draw on the musical-dramatic ambience of both *La vestale* and *La Juive*.[20] The portrait of a fickle crowd – alternately enthusiastic, cowed, and unruly – still benefits from the example of *La muette*, supplemented possibly by impressions of Meyerbeer's *Les Huguenots* (1836).[21] The role of Rienzi, closely identified with the principal tenor of the Dresden royal opera, Josef Tichatschek, is regarded as the starting point of the Wagnerian Heldentenor as vocal *Fach*, however much the melodic idiom differs from roles like Siegfried or Tristan. To avoid a competing heroic tenor role, Wagner casts the young patrician Adriano as a mezzo-soprano trouser role. We might detect shades of the heroic castrato in this casting, but the composer was inspired rather by the Romeo and Fidelio of Schröder-Devrient (she also created the role of Adriano). The soprano role of Rienzi's sister, Irene, remains more in the background. As the portrait of a heroically devoted sister, however, she provides an interesting link between the earlier figures of Lora (Arindal's warrior-sister in *Die Feen*) and Isabella in *Das Liebesverbot* and the future Volsung twin, Sieglinde, in *Die Walküre* – a motif that has been related to Wagner's deep youthful devotion to his actress sister, Rosalie.[22] At the drama's climax Irene sacrifices Adriano's love in order to stand by her brother when – betrayed by the nobles, the church, and the people alike – he faces immolation in the burning Capitol.

The vocal achievements of the Dresden cast, a splendid *mise-en-scène* including as much (or more) ballet and general panoply than anything to be seen in Paris, a score synthesizing the most effective ingredients of modern operatic styles, and an expertly constructed (if sprawling) dramatic libretto all contributed to Wagner's first signal success. That was in October 1842, when he had already completed the score of *Der fliegende Holländer*. That next, more "radical" work would have to ride rather feebly on the coattails of *Rienzi*'s fame. Eventually, the more

durable success of the "Dresden" operas, *Tannhäuser* and *Lohengrin*, and of the subsequent music dramas, would consign *Rienzi* to the margins of the repertoire.

The posthumous fame of *Rienzi* is linked in some part to the name of Adolf Hitler. According to a much-cited account by Hitler's youthful associate, August Kubizek, the future Führer experienced something akin to an epiphany on hearing and seeing this work in the early years of the twentieth century: "In that hour it all began."[23] As recorded by Kubizek, the remark leaves much open to interpretation ("it," for example). But even setting aside the nationalistic totem Wagner and his oeuvre had become in the years before World War I, it is not difficult to see how Hitler might have been mesmerized by Rienzi's theatrical embodiment of a charismatic *Führerprinzip*. He leaves the stage after his opening scenes with the messianic words: "The hour approaches, my high calling summons me . . . Soon you will see me again; my mission approaches its completion."[24] Then, toward the beginning of the Act 1 finale, he makes a grand re-entry from the church of the Lateran, "in full armor but with his head bared." Preparing this entry is an a cappella hymn to the "reawakening" of Rome's freedom and glory after a millennium of shame and oppression. The people, and the orchestra, greet him ecstatically, acclaiming him their new king. Rienzi demurs, and accepts instead the ancient republican title of "people's tribune." In every step of Rienzi's career – from this acclamation as leader and savior of the *Volk*, through military struggle, violent suppression of mutinous factions, betrayal, and the final immolation at the hands of a world that has failed to follow his vision – Hitler would doubtless have found sustenance for his fantasies. Whether this sustenance was primarily aesthetic, psychological, or political is another question; what it says about his understanding of Wagner's larger achievement is another question, too.

"Grand opera," Wagner frankly confessed in his 1851 *Communication to My Friends*, "stood before me, with all its scenic-musical display, its effect-laden and massively scaled musical passions." His intent, he adds, was "not simply to imitate it, but to outdo all previous examples through a reckless outlay of means" (*GS* IV:258). As we have seen, a similar impulse informed his operas from the very beginning.[25] With *Rienzi*, however, Wagner was at least able to purge himself of the impulse. Now he had absorbed, synthesized, and "outdone" all the available models and could turn his efforts toward becoming the figure we think of today as Wagner. It is crucial to remember, however, that the Wagnerian "music drama" was not an experiment conducted in the isolation of some kind of Faustian aesthetic laboratory. Without Wagner's immersion in the generic and stylistic achievements of his immediate predecessors throughout his

first creative decade, the music drama as we know it would never have succeeded, or even materialized.

Like its models, *Rienzi* is dominated by ensemble numbers, and above all by its extended choral-ensemble finales. Each of the five acts has a substantial finale encompassing some mixture of ceremony, lyric expression, and action – the later finales (Acts 4 and 5) being more compact and the central ones (Acts 2 and 3) the most expansive, after the dramaturgical precepts of Eugène Scribe and his collaborators. The score includes three trio scenes (the later two, in Acts 2 and 4, involving considerable choral participation), two duet scenes (Adriano and Irene in Act 1, Rienzi and Irene in Act 5), and only two very concentrated solo scenes: the aria of the conscience-wracked Adriano in Act 3 and Rienzi's famous prayer beginning Act 5. Adriano's aria is a concise adaptation of the Bellinian model: a rueful cantabile reverie ("In seiner Blüte bleicht mein Leben") is framed by anxious responses to the noises of the plebeian–patrician conflict offstage, and the number concludes with the mere vestige of a cabaletta ("Du Gnadengott ... Mit Kraft und Segen waffne mich!"), reproducing the gesture and function but not the structure of the type. To put this further in proportion: Adriano's aria and Rienzi's prayer account for all of fifteen pages within the nearly six hundred of the Breitkopf and Härtel vocal score. (Such proportions are obviously very far removed from the *opera seria* of a century earlier.) The other end of the spectrum is represented by the Act 2 finale, with its massive pantomime and ballet.[26] At the height of his brief civic glory, Rienzi stages for his new subjects the story of Tarquin's rape of Lucretia, the vanquishing of tyranny led by Brutus, and a series of games and dances illustrating the spiritual communion between the old Rome and the new. The patricians' assassination attempt on the tribune, their sentencing, and Rienzi's ill-advised clemency comprise the various phases of ensemble and chorus that conclude the act. Here and elsewhere, the heavily scored, march-based choral sequences are cast in an updated Spontinian idiom.

It is likely that when Wagner composed the first two acts of *Rienzi*, while still in Germany, he knew no more of Meyerbeer than *Robert le diable*. By the time he completed the later acts in Paris (1840) he had certainly become acquainted with *Les Huguenots*. His admiration of Meyerbeer's "gigantic, almost oppressive expansion of forms" (in a contemporary unpublished essay on *Les Huguenots*) is undoubtedly sincere. It reflects just the kind of thing he was striving for in *Rienzi*, as does his praise for the famous "consecration of the daggers" ensemble in Act 4:

> Just consider how the composer has succeeded in maintaining a continuous intensification of excitement [*fortwährende Steigerung*] throughout this

> tremendously extended number, never lapsing for a moment, but arriving, after a furiously impassioned outburst, at the highest fever pitch, the very ideal of fanatical expression! (*SSD* XII:29–30)

The Trio and Chorus (no. 11) in Wagner's own Act 4 (a nocturnal conspiracy between Adriano and the disaffected Roman magistrates, Cecco and Baroncelli) were surely composed with Meyerbeer's ensemble in mind. Some of his greatest achievements – the recognition scene of Siegmund and Sieglinde in Act 1 of *Die Walküre*, the love scene at the center of *Tristan und Isolde*, or the concluding scene of Act 2 in *Götterdämmerung* – represent the natural evolution of this same ideal. The genealogy is most obvious in the *Götterdämmerung* example, a conspiratorial trio for Hagen, Gunther, and Brünnhilde that makes no attempt to disguise its roots in grand opera, while its motivic and harmonic language integrate it securely in the musico-dramatic world of the *Ring*.

Some leitmotifs

The overture to *Rienzi* begins with a sustained solo trumpet tone, portentously swelling and twice repeated. We learn the significance of this sound at the end of the third scene, when it intrudes on the just finished love duet of Irene and Adriano. "What sound is that?" she asks, unnerved ("Was für ein Klang?"). "How dreadful," he replies ("Wie schauerlich!"); "That was the war-call of the Colonnas." *Rienzi* is full of such effects: the alarums and tocsins that were a fixture in the sonic landscape of grand opera, along with hunting calls, chanting monks, and other kinds of playing and singing that mediated between the stage and the implied spaces behind or beyond. At the same time, the frisson felt by Irene and Adriano at this dreadful, disembodied tone recalls the experiences of Wagner as a hypersensitive or hyperacute Romantic child responding to "uncanny" musical impressions, such as the tuning of the orchestra in the Grosser Garten in Dresden ("the fifths on the violin struck me as a greeting from another world") or the tones of an unseen violin emanating from a palace in the Ostraallee and strangely mingling with the ornamental garlands of flowers and mute instruments adorning the exterior (*ML* 29–30).[27] From the beginning, that is, he was alert to the power of musical tones to produce strong "intimations," as well as to awaken memories. This, of course, was a power that he would harness in the "leitmotif," the technique so closely identified with the later music dramas.

In concluding this overview of the early operas, let us consider a few ways in which they prefigure this technique of musical "anticipation and

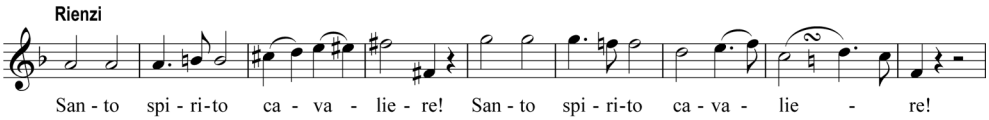
recollection," as well as some other striking anticipations here of mythic or psychological motifs that would be recalled and transformed in the mature oeuvre.

Scholarly-critical consensus views the full-fledged Wagnerian leitmotif technique as a product of the *Ring* cycle. It was in anticipation of the *Ring*, indeed, that the composer theorized the concept in part 3 of *Opera and Drama* (1851).[28] A broader practice of thematic-melodic "reminiscence" or quotation in opera, however, extends back to the late eighteenth century. By the 1830s and 1840s the idea of treating selected melodic ideas as a special class of dramatic "signifier" was not rare; nor, on the other hand, was it especially common. No one before Wagner, certainly, thought to develop it into a dual compositional and semiotic "system." Just as certainly, Wagner was giving serious thought to the possibilities of such "signifying" musical motives in his earliest works.

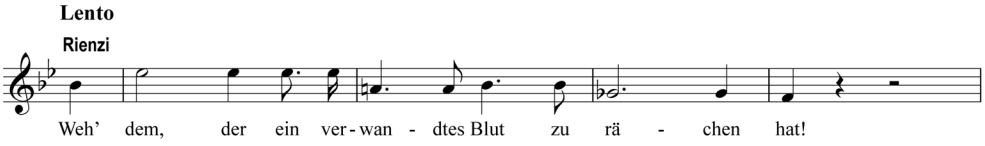
Rienzi, the last of the three early operas, actually makes the least use of such recurring musical themes, apart from a broad family of signals, fanfares, and martial themes that characterizes the score. If we do not count the citation of themes from the opera within the overture (Rienzi's Prayer and several choral march themes), there are only two recurring motives in the score. Most evident is Rienzi's call to arms, "Santo spirito, cavaliere!" (Example 2.5). More of a motto or a "device," in the heraldic sense, than a motive susceptible to development, it is designed as a simple call-and-response formula. (In the overture and the Act 3 battle sequence it is, however, subject to some mimetic distortions and struggles.) The other theme belongs to the category of the "stage curse" that plays a large role in the genesis of the operatic leitmotif. This is the oath Rienzi previously swore to himself to avenge the slaughter of a younger brother, an innocent bystander to the patricians' reckless feuding: "Woe to him who has shed a kinsman's blood!" (Example 2.6). In character and significance this idea forms a natural obverse of the "Santo spirito" motto; in outlining a portentous half-cadence in the minor mode, it sets a model for a number of later leitmotifs. On the whole, though, the extroverted historical drama of *Rienzi* did not seem to Wagner the appropriate place for experimenting with subtleties of motivic reminiscence.

More is attempted in the way of motivic recall in the very first opera, *Die Feen*, due partly to its ancestry in Weber's operas, no doubt. Despite the turn away from those models in *Das Liebesverbot*, the second opera makes a great deal of at least one particular motive. The "title" theme (so to speak) – signifying the suppression of carnival and carnal love and, more generally, the hypocrisy of the law and its oppression of individual freedoms (see Example 2.1) – is recalled and developed on a number of occasions throughout the score.

Ex. 2.5



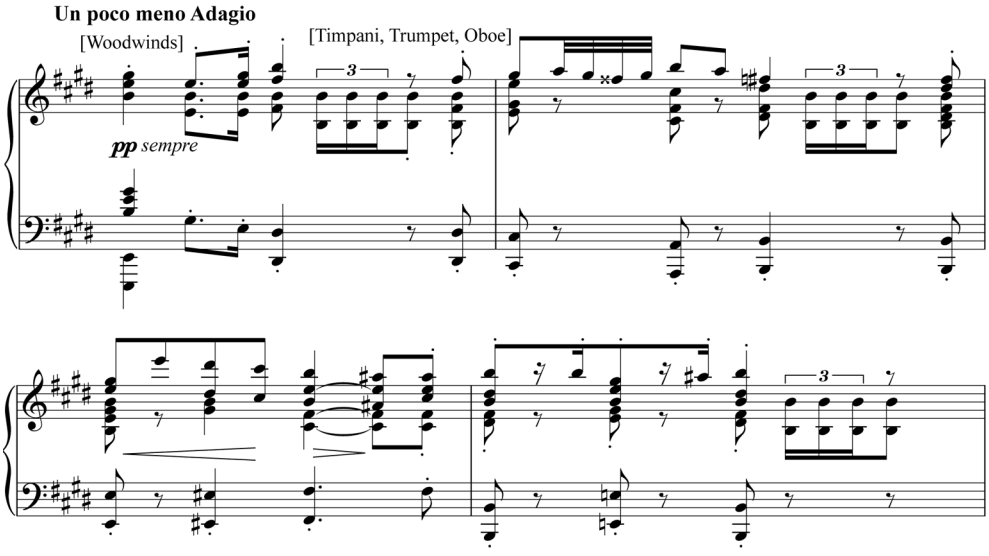
Ex. 2.6



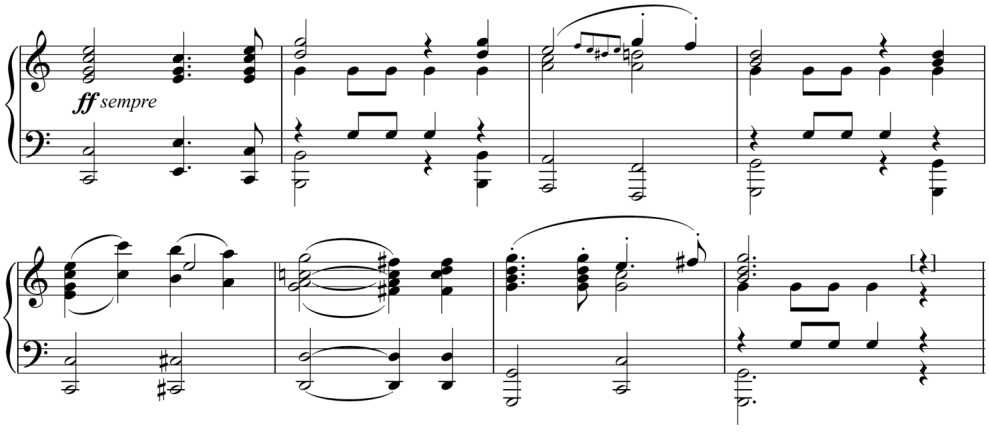
In *Die Feen*, the treatment of the "fairy march" figure in terms of scoring, key, and dynamics looks forward in appropriate ways to the motivic emblem of the title character in *Lohengrin*. The slow introduction to the overture introduces the "authentic" version, in E major, whose nobility is also something diminutive, delicate, and far away (Example 2.7a). When Ada ponders in her Act 2 aria the option of abandoning her doomed mortal love and returning whence she came, the miniature march is recalled in similar scoring and dynamics, freely developed and ending back in E ("Ich könnte Allem mich entziehn . . . in ew'ger Schöne unsterblich, unverwelklich blühn!"). However, when she is acclaimed queen of her realm in the finale to Act 1 and her higher nature is first revealed to the human characters, the march-theme grows in volume and moves to C major (Example 2.7b shows the orchestral reiteration as she is carried away in a triumphal cart). When in the final scene Ada returns to life from stone, a tentative recollection of the delicate E-major version prefaces the speech of her father, as *deus ex machina*, inviting Arindal to immortality. The final chorus welcomes Arindal to the fairy kingdom with a vigorously accompanied allegro transformation, still in the native "fairy" key of E. (Did Wagner perhaps know Mendelssohn's overture to *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at this time?)

Ballad or *Romanze* melodies were among the earliest candidates for operatic reminiscence, since they tended to be easily recognizable, and also because their original narrative burden or dramatic context was often relevant to later situations. Gernot's *Romanze* about the "evil witch Dilnovaz" in Act 1 of *Die Feen* provides Arindal with an object lesson against courting supernatural species. With its shivering string tremolos and thumping timpani punctuating the verses, it is really a semi-comic number, even if Gernot means it in earnest (Example 2.8a). But at the climax of the Act 2 finale, when Arindal's understanding of Ada's identity

Ex. 2.7a

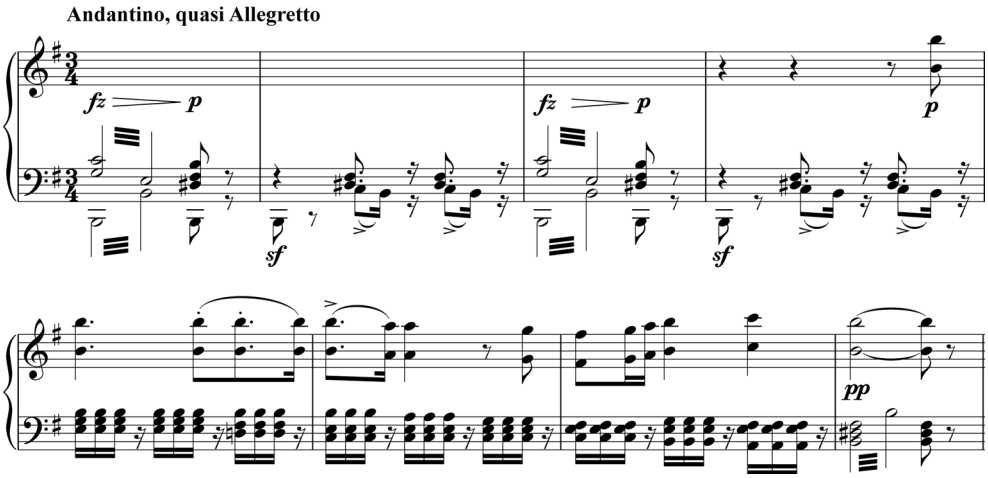


Ex. 2.7b

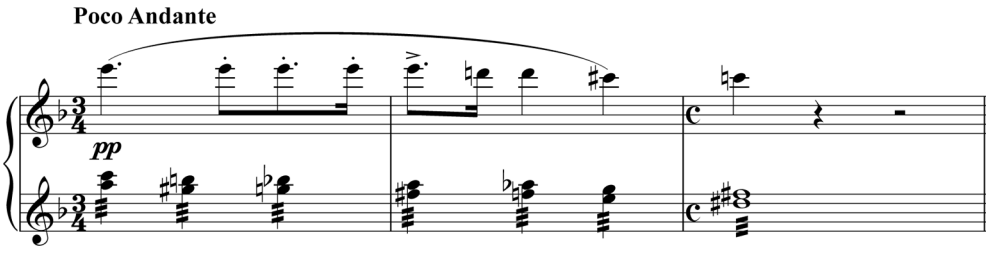


is being put to the utmost test, the theme of the *Romanze* is thrice recalled and twice transformed with utterly serious dramatic import – first *pianissimo* and then *fortissimo*, each time over a descending chromatic tetrachord (Example 2.8b, 2.8c). A less felicitous set of recollections and anticipations involve the orchestral theme from the concluding phase of Ada's big aria in Act 2, also serving as the closing theme of the overture's sonata-form (Example 2.9). Wagner would recall this flatfooted and foursquare brand of melody – even the same descending scalar contour with chromatic passing tones – to express similar states of elation in *Der fliegende Holländer* (e.g., the

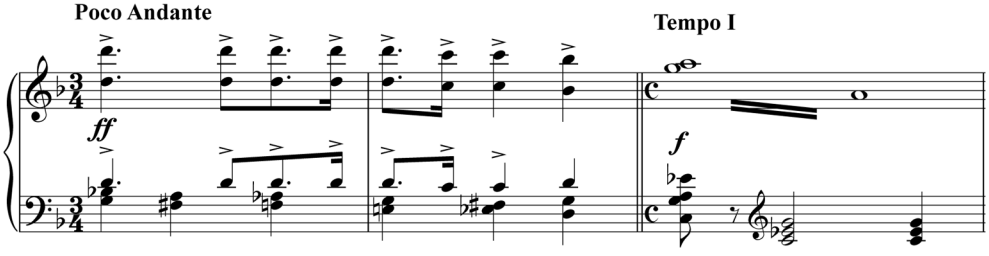
Ex. 2.8a



Ex. 2.8b



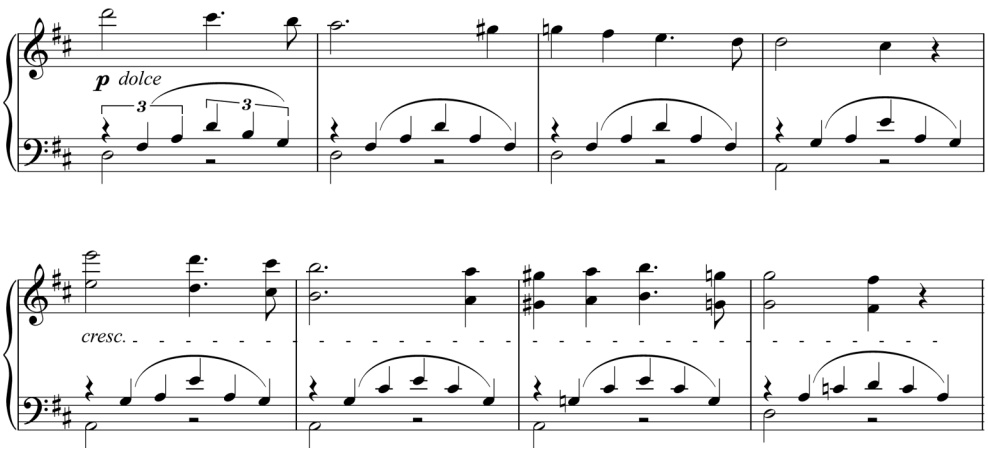
Ex. 2.8c



Senta–Dutchman duet) and *Tannhäuser*. Apparently it was only with some effort he was able to forget it.

Das Liebesverbot contains one very audible anticipation of the later, familiar Wagner: a pre-echo of the theme of "absolution" from Tannhäuser's Rome narration (related in turn to the "Dresden Amen" used in *Parsifal*). Here the theme frames the duet of Isabella and Mariana

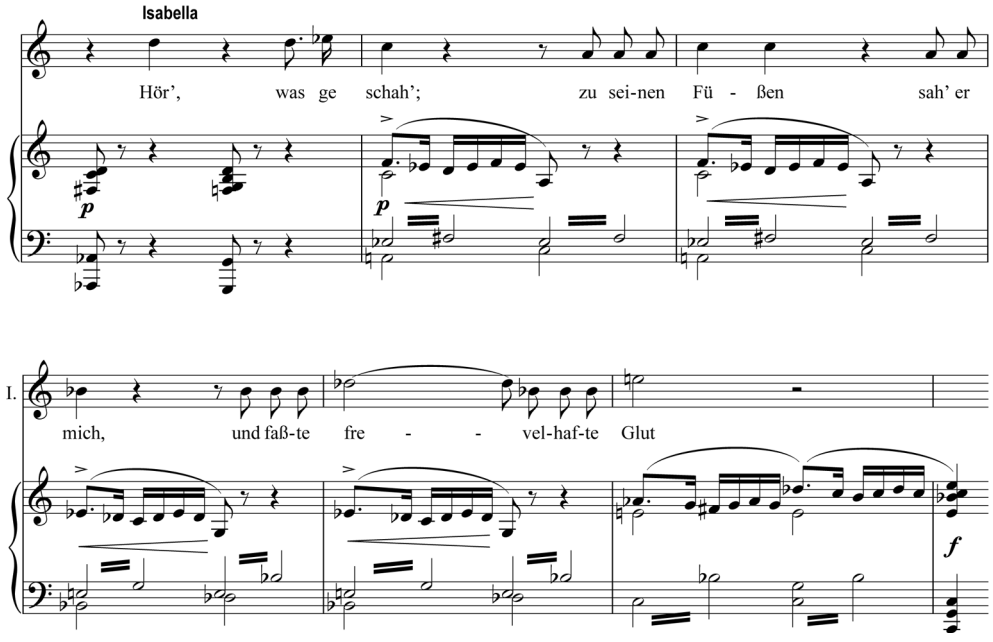
Ex. 2.9



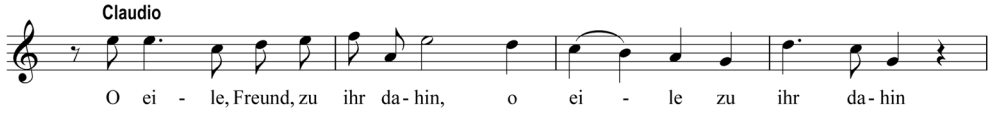
in praise of the cloistered life. In the duet with her brother Claudio in Act 2 Isabella quotes the swelling phrases of Friedrich's lust. She does so in a tone of barely suppressed outrage that dislocates it from its original harmonic formula (see Example 2.2b) so that it briefly reels keyless before reaching a half-cadence in C (Example 2.10): "Hear what occurred: at his feet he saw me, and was seized by a criminal passion; at the cost of my dishonor he promised your life and pardon!" The orchestral introduction to the duet ends with a poignant recollection of a phrase, prominent in the opening scene, to which Claudio expressed hope that Isabella might intervene to save him (Example 2.11a). Now oboe and horn recall this "hopeful" theme quietly, over a descending chromatic tenor line and tonic pedal (Example 2.11b). In both cases, the altered recollection makes an expressive point beyond the mere act of citation: the musical image of Friedrich's lust is distorted by Isabella's indignation; the contours of Claudio's earlier hope are inflected with wistful resignation. The latter example, an expressively inflected instrumental memory of an original vocal utterance, precisely fits the "theory" of leitmotif articulated later in *Opera and Drama*.

Still, these remain isolated instances within a score primarily concerned with other, more immediate forms of musical expression. Only the figure of Friedrich's Ban on Love (Example 2.1) is deployed with a frequency and variety that anticipates later practices. Its portentous statements in the overture and the introductory ensemble leave no question as to the motive's significance. Moreover, it resembles later, "true" leitmotifs in being a malleable, memorable fragment rather than a periodically structured tune or phrase. It recurs often enough throughout the score

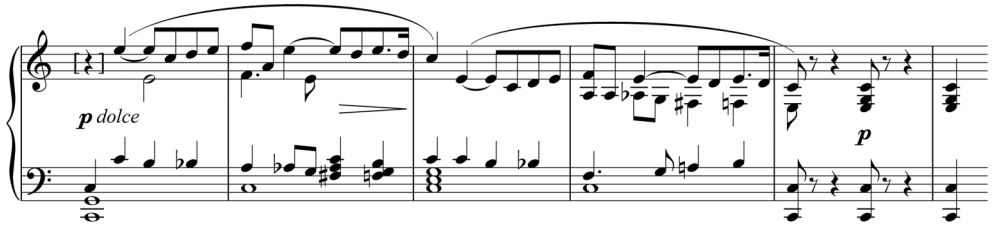
Ex. 2.10



Ex. 2.11a

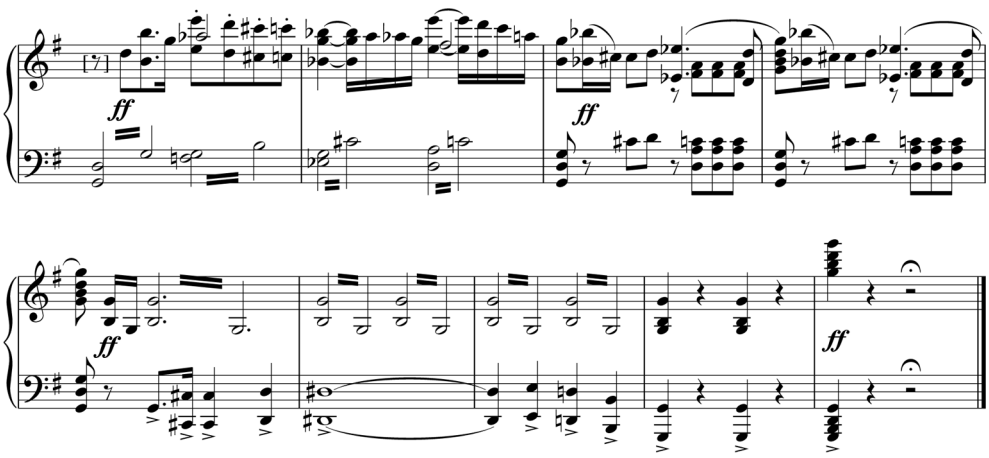


Ex. 2.11b



that the listener is never in danger of forgetting it, and these recurrences are felt to be significant. Above all, as demonstrated in Friedrich's scene and aria (no. 10), the motive insinuates itself into the musical discourse to variable psychological effect. At the beginning of the scene it runs through Friedrich's mind as an uneasy *idée fixe* ("What has become of the system you set so well in place? . . . The vengeful force of [love] makes you neglect

Ex. 2.12



duty and honor"). A deliberate, unaltered statement accompanies his resolution to sign Claudio's death warrant after all, and to subject himself to the same decree. After Friedrich gives full vent to his tormented passion in the cabaletta, an allegro transformation of the motive (Example 2.12), is sutured on to the "Tristanesque" gestures of that passion (see Example 2.3). The almost grotesque quality of these final measures conveys something of Friedrich's conflicted state, beyond anything articulated in the text.

Although *Der fliegende Holländer* would be Wagner's principal portal into the domain of myth, and hence music drama, we have seen that some psychological, dramatic, or indeed "mythic" tropes of the later works are clearly prefigured in the early ones. These are most striking in *Die Feen*, whose fairy-tale wonders bridge the elements of magic and the marvelous in baroque opera or Mozart's *Zauberflöte* and Weber's *Oberon* with works like *Lohengrin* and *Parsifal*. Ada's proscription against asking after "her name and kind" and her desire to leave behind an enchanted homeland for the sake of human love return as central themes in *Lohengrin*. The thematic linking of the power of song to the power of love in Arindal's reanimation of the petrified Ada prefigures elements of both *Tannhäuser* and *Die Meistersinger*; and Ada herself is transformed from a Venus figure, as her mortal detractors painted her, into a figure of purity and redemption, like Elisabeth.

In Gozzi and Shakespeare Wagner had found noble, devoted sisters for the heroes of *Die Feen* and *Das Liebesverbot*. For *Rienzi* he invented one (Irene) to replace the original hero's wife. In the final act, Rienzi apostrophizes Rome as a "noble bride" whose love seems to have failed him in the end, while Irene renounces Adriano and assumes herself the abandoned

mantle of "Rome," Rienzi's bride ("In our faithful union, in this chaste breast Rome still lives"). The progression of these sibling relationships leads in the direction of the mythically glorified incest of Siegmund and Sieglinde. (Shakespeare's Isabella, as Wagner would have known, warns Claudio that yielding up her virginity to save his life would be "a kind of incest"; but, not yet a Wagnerian heroine herself, she disapproves.)[29]

Both Claudio and Friedrich, on different sides of the moral fence, struggle like Tannhäuser with the conflicting claims of body and soul, the profane and the sacred. And while Wagner revises *Measure for Measure* as a celebration of carnivalesque release, *Die Feen* and *Rienzi* both end with a foretaste of classic Wagnerian redemption, the heroes transcending this life for a glorious "beyond." For Arindal it is the immortality of a fairy kingdom, perhaps something akin to the "distant spirit realm" described by Hoffmann's composer – a dream-like place of "flowery paths" and Romantic marvels where speech becomes music.[30] Rienzi's immortality is that conferred by posterity, though better realized through an operatic immolation than in the sordid facts of history. (Cola di Rienzo was murdered by an angry mob and dismembered; his remains – at least in Schiller's account – were handed over to the Jews, who "burned them over a slow fire in revenge on one who had denounced them and their trades.")[31] Between Arindal and Rienzi Wagner outlines a spectrum of redemptive options comprehending the apotheosis of virtually all his subsequent heroes and heroines.