PART ONE

The resourcing of grand opera

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2 The 'machine' and the state

HERVÉ LACOMBE

'A machine so complicated as the [Paris] Opéra is like a maze: only people with long and profound acquaintance with the house can find their way through it.' So wrote J.-T. Merle in *De l'Opéra* in 1827. The truth is that no artistic enterprise before the creation of cinema could match grand opera in complexity; no mode of artistic production was comparable with what this theatre offered in uniting all the material and human factors that make up an operatic production, and to create the conditions necessary for its performance. It is no denial of the importance of creativity to assert that grand opera was the product of technology, albeit in a very wide sense of the term.

Grand opera[1] developed and became a significant factor in European culture thanks to the power of this technology. For a more comprehensive understanding of this particular variety of opera, it is therefore necessary to describe the 'machine' in all its economic and political ramifications (that is to say, its ramifications in Parisian life and its relations with the French state) and also its cultural and moral ramifications (especially with censorship). In the nineteenth century, opera became the vehicle for both aesthetic and moral values indissolubly linked with the environment from which they sprang. Grand opera was born and grew up within a particular historical, institutional and legislative situation. While concentrating on the period of the blossoming of the genre, which corresponds with the reign of Louis-Philippe (between the Revolutions of 1830 and 1848), our analysis of the conditions of its production and creation will endeavour to bring out relationships with earlier and later periods. The same 'machine' allowed grand opera to endure throughout the nineteenth century; some works simply took their place within the traditions of the genre (despite adaptations to new tastes, which will be discussed later, in Chapter 15), but the repertory was shaped by certain key works, shown in Table 2.1, and their creators.

Institutional mechanisms

[21] The Paris Opéra was an institution inasmuch as it partook of social structures established by law and custom. Its nature was defined within a legislative

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Table 2.1 *The central repertory of French grand opera*[a]

Opera title	Sample total number of Parisian performances	Date of relevant statistic
La Muette de Portici (1828)	489	1882
Robert le Diable (1831)	751	1893
La Juive (1835)	500	1886
Les Huguenots (1836)	1,000	1903
Le Prophète (1849)	573	1912
L'Africaine (1865)	400	1888

[a] Statistics for the period 1890–1910 are found on p. 301.

framework; it can be fully understood only in the general context of theatre legislation. It had to fulfil two cultural functions: serving the public interest at home, and promoting a certain image of France in Europe.[2] This was the justification of the large subsidies that it received and the controls under which it operated. In the course of the nineteenth century its role was ever-changing: sometimes it functioned as if it were a museum charged with preserving the nation's musical heritage, and sometimes it was the nursery of the modern world's loftiest creations. It was when it sought to play the latter role that it created grand opera. The institutional framework was restrictive in that it determined the conditions in which opera was created and performed, yet it could also be dynamic, for it provided special artistic conditions and functioned as a place where various powers and creative drives could interact.[3]

The legal foundations of the Opéra were laid down by Napoleon. By the decree of 8 June 1806 all theatrical activity was placed under state control, and the Opéra, the Comédie-Française and the Opéra-Comique were each allotted their specific repertory. On 25 April 1807 the Minister of the Interior promulgated regulations for the theatres, establishing a hierarchy in Paris. The Opéra, the Comédie-Française (to which the Odéon was linked), the Opéra-Comique and the Théâtre de l'Impératrice (later Théâtre Italien) were designated 'grand theatres'. The other authorised theatres became 'secondary theatres', and by a decree of 29 July 1807 they were restricted to four in number, though many others were to open in Paris in the course of time.[4] The 1807 regulations also defined the type and genre of entertainment permitted at each of the various institutions, only the Opéra being allowed to mount productions wholly in music, and ballets 'in the noble and gracious style'. Later on, these general limitations were to be specified more exactly – and sometimes modified even during his period of control – in each director's *cahier des charges*. This schedule detailed his managerial obligations, in return for which the state granted him subsidies and his licence (or '*privilège*') to operate at his own financial risk and for his own

profit, if he succeeded in making any. The first holder of this type of schedule was Louis-Désiré Véron (1798–1867), a young ex-doctor who had gone into business, first with a patent medicine and then by founding the *Revue de Paris* in 1829.

It is worth quoting more explicitly from these documents (see p. 455, n. 37). In 1831, clause 8 of Véron's schedule laid down that 'no dramatic genres other than those hitherto designated for this house may be performed at the Opéra. First, *grand opéra* and *petit opéra*, with or without ballet; secondly, ballet-pantomime.' Véron was supposed to put on the following new works in each year of his directorship: one *grand opéra* (in either three or five acts); one ballet of similar dimensions; two *petits opéras* in either one or two acts; and two ballets, of similar dimensions. The wording of Duponchel's schedule, dated 15 August 1835, specified 'First, *grand opéra*, with orchestrally accompanied recitative, in one, two, three, four or five acts, with or without ballet; secondly, ballet-pantomime in one, two, three, four or five acts' (clause 21). Only at the end of the century was the Opéra, under Eugène Bertrand's directorship in 1891, theoretically allowed to stage musical performances of every sort: 'all types of opera and ballet may be performed on stage at the Opéra'. Following the line of thought that had regulated French opera since the seventeenth century, both a particular genre and its institution were, then, linked and circumscribed by decree and regulation. In its drafting of directors' schedules the government was furthermore guided by financial concerns – the desire to maintain and improve the building and its equipment, which were the property of the state – and artistic and political concerns: the desire to sustain the reputation of France's premier theatre.

On 6 January 1864 a decree of Napoleon III announced that the theatre industry henceforth was free: 'any individual may build and run a theatre, provided due declaration is made to the Ministry of our Fine-Arts Household and the Paris Prefecture of Police'. It declared that 'those theatres which appear more particularly worthy of encouragement may be granted subsidies, either by the state or the local authorities'. Clause 4 of this decree also jettisoned the former legislative notion linking specific theatres with particular types of theatrical entertainment: 'dramatic works of any genre, including plays which have fallen into the public domain, may be performed in any theatre'. Censorship was, however, re-established, and control of the subsidies indispensable for the production of major works meant that only the Opéra was able to mount grand operas regularly. Léon Carvalho (1825–97) had tried to bring grand opera to the Théâtre-Lyrique in 1863 with shortened performances of Acts III to V of Berlioz's *Les Troyens* (under the title *Les Troyens à Carthage*, complete with a specially designed

prologue), and also offered works of intermediate type, with new modes of expression (e.g., Gounod's *Faust* with spoken dialogue in 1859). His efforts did not, however, meet with success.

Grand opera, or the product of a crisis

Grand opera emerged in the wake of a crisis that was both aesthetic and institutional. On the one hand the Opéra at the end of the 1820s was in the throes of an aesthetic dispute following the impact of Rossinian vocal styles and operatic forms on the French repertory; on the other it was riven by politico-administrative disputes linked to the instability of its management, various abuses, rising fees for singers and poor financial management. Matters were being made worse by the lack of any great personality capable of renewing the repertory. Under the Restoration (1815–30) the Opéra's expenditure fluctuated between 1,264,251 francs (in 1822) and 1,782,663 francs (in 1829). There was uncertainty about the best means of facilitating decision-making within the institution. Ought responsibility to be concentrated in one man's hands or be shared? Should the Opéra be run directly by the state or should management be entrusted to an individual? Vicomte Sosthène de La Rochefoucauld, director of the Department of Fine Arts from 28 August 1824, was himself criticised. The conflict between those favouring and those opposed to the way the Opéra was being run was reflected in pamphlets published anonymously in Paris in 1828–29.[5]

As early as the start of the nineteenth century the Académie Impériale (later Royale) de Musique, as the Opéra was properly known, had appeared antiquated and unattractive by comparison with the smaller secondary theatres that had, under intelligent management, successfully responded to new tastes and the aspirations of a wider public. On 11 January 1816, in a letter to Comte de Vaublanc (briefly Minister of the Interior), Comte de Pradel, director of the Royal Household from 1815 to 1820, remarked on the poor voices and inadequate delivery of the sung text now encountered at the Opéra.[6] He went on to make a revealing comparison that touched on moral, aesthetic, political and financial issues:

> For a long time the people who really care about the arts and morality have been appalled by the almost frightening state of prosperity that the secondary theatres in Paris have come to enjoy. The Comédie-Française and the Académie Royale are often empty while the Variétés and the Ambigu-Comique are crowded out. The losses suffered by the major houses are growing even larger on account of the almost excessive number of these secondary theatres, not to mention the smallest Parisian theatres. To me it seems appropriate to impose at least a heavier tax on the secondary theatres, thus making them contribute to the support of an

> institution whose mission is to bring back to the truly national theatres decent themes that offer so much of value to the progress of the arts and good writing.

The problem was plainly one of competition, and it was made all the more acute because of the relationship between the government and the two major institutions whose failings were felt to tarnish its image. In addition, the authorities did not wish to be associated with something that appeared old-fashioned. The notion of competition may be noted even in a censorship document dated 13 March 1827 about the French version of Rossini's *Mosè in Egitto*:

> New sections have been added, as well as some of the miracles worked by Moses during his sojourn in Egypt and at the moment of his flight. The crossing of the Red Sea comes from an old melodrama played at the Théâtre de la Gaîté. We shall see whether the Académie Royale de Musique will again fail in this new struggle against the Boulevard theatres.
>
> (It did fail: see Chapter 14, p. 268).

This makes it easier to understand the ambiguous relationship between grand opera in its early days and the theatrical styles of the Boulevard theatres. The project of giving the Opéra a new style of stage-setting led to the formation in 1827 of a Staging Committee, the *Comité de mise-en-scène*, to co-ordinate the various production departments. The role of Ciceri, the great scene-painter whose work is shown in Chapter 4, was crucial. Solomé, who had won a reputation at the Théâtre Français, was stage manager from September 1827 to June 1831, and Duponchel was in charge of props and sets from January 1829 to June 1831. This team gradually brought together the technical means needed to carry out new ambitions.[7]

Against the need to attract the public by drawing on fashionable themes, and accepting the inheritance of the tremendous advances in dramaturgy and stage representation being pioneered by the secondary theatres, had to be balanced the need to preserve a certain grandeur in the themes dealt with at the Opéra. Grand opera managed to bring the liberal middle classes and the 'spirit of the age' within its walls, thanks in large measure to the dramatic skills of Eugène Scribe (1791–1861). In *La Muette de Portici*, he borrowed the role of Fenella from the mimodrama (described in Chapter 9), thus linking movement and mime closely with plot; he took from Daguerre's dioramas the idea of accurate stage-setting (see Chapter 4); from melodramas came the eruption of Vesuvius, and from vaudevilles came the liveliness of the ensemble scenes. Grand opera was to be inscribed in society as experienced by the bourgeoisie, not, as *tragédie lyrique* had previously been, outwith reality in a world of heroes and marvels that accorded better with aristocratic dreams.

An inspection report by the Department of Fine Arts in 1829 is testimony to official satisfaction at the aesthetic renewal brought about by Rossini and by the Staging Committee:

> the sustained success of Rossini's works, of our male and female singers who have been trained on good [i.e. Italian] principles, the ever-increasing size of audiences, are clear proof that the musical revolution determined upon by Monsieur de La Rochefoucauld and carried out by maestro Rossini, with the assistance of Monsieur Lubbert [see Table 2.2], was timely and urgent ... The splendour of the spectacle is wedded to the delights of the music. The historical and architectural accuracy of both scenery and costumes truly conveys us to where the action takes place.

Not long after, with *Robert le Diable*, there was a more or less conscious desire to absorb the great intellectual developments of the age (see Chapter 11), in this instance a certain type of Romanticism that combined, against a medieval background, the struggle between good and evil, the melodramatic themes of paternity, religious sentiment and so on.

Administration and personnel[8]

Throughout the Restoration the administrative organisation of the Opéra comprised three layers: the minister for the Royal Household; a ministerial official charged with oversight of the Opéra; and the Opéra's management. Political events hastened changes at the Opéra. After the 1830 July Revolution and the accession of Louis-Philippe (the 'bourgeois king') administrative arrangements for the Opéra were altered. By an Order of 26 August 1830 the Minister of the Interior appointed a 'commission to examine the present state of the theatres in Paris, with regard to both legislation and literary and financial administration'. The government's financial concerns were shown when on 30 January 1831 the Minister of the Interior set up a new commission to look into the receipts and expenses of the Académie Royale de Musique. A Royal Ordinance of 25 January 1831 made it plain that the institution was no longer linked with the Royal Household but fell, like the other so-called royal theatres, within the sphere of the Secretary of State for the Interior (see Table 2.2). The tax on the secondary theatres (decree of 13 August 1811) from which the Opéra benefited – it received, for example, 188,000 francs from the theatre tax in 1828, over and above a subsidy of 850,000 francs – was discontinued by Royal Ordinance on 24 August 1831.

The new form of management by a private contracting-director – the 'financially interested arrangement' – was a form of public service franchise.

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Table 2.2 *Overseeing authorities and directors of the Opéra from 1827 to 1870*

Overseeing authority	Director or administrator (date of start of duties)
State Enterprise (1827–31)	
Royal Household (1815–30) then Minister of the Interior (decree of 25 January 1831)	Emile Lubbert (July 1827)
Enterprise franchised to a contracting-director (*directeur-entrepreneur*) (1831–54)	
Minister of the Interior, then Minister for Commerce and Public Works (17 March 1831–4 April 1834), then Minister of the Interior (4 April 1834 to 1848)	Louis Véron (1 March 1831)
	Henri Duponchel (1 September 1835)
From 12 May 1839 the premises placed under the Ministry of Public Works	Duponchel and Édouard Monnais (1 December 1839)
	Léon Pillet, Duponchel and Monnais (1 June 1840)
	Pillet (1 June 1842)
	Pillet, Duponchel, Nestor Roqueplan (August 1847)
	Duponchel and Roqueplan (30 November 1847)
	Roqueplan (21 November 1849)
Minister of State (decree of 14 February 1853)	
State Enterprise (1854–66)	
Imperial Household (decree of 28 June 1854) July 1854–April 1866	Roqueplan (1 July 1854)
	François-Louis Crosnier (11 November 1854)
The decree of 16 December 1860 places the Opéra once more under the Minister of State, without, however, removing it from the Civil List with respect to financial responsibility for running costs	Alphonse Royer (1 July 1856)
	Emile Perrin (20 December 1862)
Enterprise franchised to a contracting-director (1866–70)	
	Emile Perrin (1 May 1866)

La Rochefoucauld had been thinking of this system as early as 1827. In exchange for a subsidy, the director undertook to observe a schedule (the *cahier des charges*) that had been negotiated with the ministry exercising general oversight, and the Opéra became a commercial enterprise under a director who was appointed by the minister and who then managed the institution for his personal profit. The aim was to avoid the budgetary and administrative difficulties that had arisen from arrangements in place under the Restoration while at the same time ensuring that the Opéra lost nothing of its splendour. Directors acted in the name of the government and on its behalf. The foundations of this new system for running the Opéra were laid between July 1830 and February 1831, and apart from two intervals, from 1854 to 1866 and from 1870 to 1871, the system was to endure until 1939.

The 1830 Revolution provided the state with the opportunity of casting off the enormous burden of running the Opéra. Furthermore, the image that

the incoming régime sought to create would have accorded ill with an Opéra subsidised by the civil list and under royal protection. The July Monarchy was conforming to the prevailing mood of liberalism in setting up this financially interested arrangement. Political régimes in France continued to determine the way the Opéra was run, as was to become clear with developments under the Second Empire. Imperial authoritarianism was reflected in direct management between 1854 and 1866, and liberalism in the Second Empire by franchising the Opéra to private enterprise between 1866 and 1870, while a period of control by the performers themselves in 1870–71 corresponded with the spirit of the Commune.

Dr Véron – who as director of the *Revue de Paris* had in 1829 met various writers (Scribe included) and composers – was appointed as the first contracting-director of the Opéra; with the help of the banker Alexandre Aguado (1784–1842) he was able to put up a substantial financial guarantee. His schedule, dated 28 February 1831, stipulated in its first clause that 'The management of the Académie Royale de Musique, otherwise known as the Opéra, shall be entrusted to a contracting-director who shall run it for a period of six years at his own risk, peril and expenses subject to the following obligations, clauses and conditions'. Véron was living proof that the bourgeois influence had penetrated even the world of opera houses.[9] In the six volumes of his *Mémoires d'un bourgeois de Paris* he related in detail the story of his life, and his account of the considerations that led him to choose the directorship is revealing, even if a little improved in the telling. 'The July Revolution was the triumph of the bourgeoisie, a victorious bourgeoisie that wanted to lord it and be entertained; the Opéra will become its Versailles, and it will throng there to replace the aristocrats and princes lately driven into exile.' He went on: 'this plan to make the Opéra both brilliant and popular appeared to me to have great prospects after the July Revolution.' Véron's policies paid off, and are reflected in a letter of 28 October 1833 to the Minister of Commerce from the divisional head in the Ministry of Fine Arts, reminding him that there were two principles behind seat pricing at the Opéra: on the one hand the aim was to maintain the character of the house as one 'intended for the better class of society', but on the other it was to make it accessible to 'the middle classes'.[10]

The financial problem for the Paris Opéra lay in the virtual impossibility of balancing the demands for luxury against the constraints of a budget that tended to limit and control production costs which were being inflated by the birth of a 'star system'. Throughout its long life the Opéra had been a vast drain on finance. The demand for a balanced budget came up against the demands for art and theatrical spectacle. Véron, first of the financially interested directors, was the only one ever to make a profit. (On 30 June 1854 the contracting-director Nestor Roqueplan (1805–70) went bankrupt, with

a shortfall of 900,000 francs; the decision was taken to liquidate the Opéra's debts, and the house was brought under the responsibility of the Minister of the Imperial Household: see Table 2.2.) Véron's subsidy came in tangible form (lease of the auditorium and its equipment) and in money. During his first year he received an exceptional subsidy of 810,000 francs, but this was reduced subsequently, being set between 1836 and 1852 at 620,000 francs *per annum*. Voting this subsidy often provoked lively parliamentary debate. Apart from all disbursements for maintenance, staff salaries and production expenses, the director was obliged to subtract from receipts the Poor Tax (which was not discontinued until 1938), and he also had to pay royalties to authors and composers.

In the financial management of the Opéra heed had to be paid to every smallest detail, for the scale of the productions ratcheted up expenses. In *L'Envers du théâtre* (Paris, 1873) J. Moynet cites the example of character make-up for the choruses and extras in *L'Africaine*: the cost was 128 francs 75 centimes for each performance, that is, 12,875 francs for a hundred. Production expenses were sometimes very high. Those for *La Juive* amounted to 134,004 francs: 6,179 francs for copying music, 69,769 francs for costumes and props, and 58,056 francs for scenery. For *Les Huguenots*, total expenditure came to 109,076 francs: 8,000 francs for copying music, 35,202 francs for costumes and props, and 65,874 francs for scenery. Table 2.3 shows how singers' salaries went up between 1831 and 1836, and to these must be added the *feux*, a sort of appearance bonus for each performance. Reputation and length of service at the Opéra were factors that came into the equation, with drastic effect. The chorus went up from fifty-nine singers (costing 70,150 francs) in 1831 to eighty-two (costing 82,750 francs) in 1836. The principal dancers, on between 10,000 and 1,000 francs, were paid less than the leading singers, twenty-eight dancers receiving a total 186,200 francs in salary in 1836. The consequences of the general underpayment for the female *corps de ballet* were dire (see the end of Chapter 6). In the same year, 1836, 106,200 francs were paid to the eighty-one instrumentalists. Individual salaries varied between 2,000 and 800 francs, with four exceptions. The famous flautist Tulou received 3,000 francs and the oboist Brod 2,300 francs, in comparison with just 600 francs to Duret junior (cymbals) or 300 francs to Dauverné junior (triangle). François-Antoine Habeneck, the violinist-director of the orchestra, received 8,000 francs a year between 1831 and 1836.

In the 1848–49 season the great tenor Gilbert Duprez, who was required to give six performances a month, earned 3,000 francs a *month*, with a bonus of 500 francs for each extra appearance. Pauline Viardot, the first Fidès in *Le Prophète*, had a special clause drawn up as follows: 'price and salary will be settled amicably by the arbitration of M. Meyerbeer' (for the background

Table 2.3 *Increases in singers' salaries, 31 May 1831 to 1 June 1836*

Singer (status) Voice type	Salary for 31 May 1830	Salary for 1 June 1836
	Gentlemen	
Nourrit (leads) 1st tenor	10,000	25,000
Lafont (leads) 1st tenor	2,000	20,000
Dupont (stand-in) 2nd tenor	10,000	8,000
Wartel (understudy) 2nd tenor	X	6,000
Raguenet (understudy) 2nd tenor	X	6,000
Ferdinand Prévos (stand-in) 1st baritone	7,200	7,200
Massol (stand-in) 1st baritone	7,200	7,200
Bernadet (understudy) 2nd baritone	X	3,000
Levasseur (leads) 1st bass	10,000	25,000
Dérivis (stand-in) 1st bass	X	15,000
Prévost (stand-in) 2nd bass	8,000	4,500
Serda (stand-in) 2nd bass	X	8,000
Martin (understudy) 3rd bass	X	1,200
Trévaux (understudy) 3rd tenor	2,400	3,300
	Ladies	
Dorus-Gras (leads) 1st first soprano	X	25,000
Falcon (leads) 1st first soprano	X	25,000
Jawureck (leads) 2nd first soprano	9,000	10,000
Flécheux (stand-in) 2nd first soprano	X	4,000
Nau (understudy)	X	3,000
Gosselin-Mori (leads) 1st contralto	7,200	7,200
Laurent-Grandidier (understudy) 2nd contralto	7,200	7,200
Cayot (understudy) 3rd first soprano	X	1,500

Source: Archives nationales, AJ[13] 181. Figures do not include *feux* (appearance bonuses for each performance).

to this, see Chapter 7). In 1850 the tenor Gustave Roger cost the Opéra 50,000 francs, and Pauline Viardot 54,000. In 1870 the principal singers alone received total fees of 500,000 francs.

In the 1830s receipts of 8,000 francs for a performance were reckoned excellent. This sum included both tickets sold 'at the door' and season tickets, the latter amounting, between 1835 and 1869, to more than 25 per cent of the

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total take.[11] The first supplement to Véron's schedule (30 May 1831), as also to that of Duponchel in 1835, laid down that the director was not entitled to raise the price of seats without authorisation. Up until 1833 the price of amphitheatre and gallery seats was 8 francs, if purchased in advance, and 6 francs on the night. The *Relevé Général de la Salle* or daily seating summary, which was printed in the 1860s and used for each performance, shows how the auditorium was parcelled out into seats at various prices (see Figs. 3 and 4). The director was also obliged to make arrangements for those with free entry or entitled to special rates, for example, on occasion, the claque, a part of the institution that will be discussed presently. The July Monarchy government broke with the precedent that had tended to turn the Opéra into a society drawing room. Edmond Cavé (1794–1852), who was secretary of the Opéra Commission, wrote on this subject in his report of 20 May 1831; his conclusion was that 'since the Opéra auditorium has space for only 1,900 people, if all those who are allowed free entry exercised their privilege on the same evening, the house would certainly be full'. This explains why free entry came to be restricted.

Véron divided up the staff of the Opéra into three groups: (a) stage staff (musicians and dancers, wardrobe, scenery, machinery and props); (b) house staff (safety, lighting, claque, ticket checkers and usherettes etc.); (c) administration. The *cahier des charges* specified the minimum composition of the orchestra, chorus and *corps de ballet*, the sizes of which were to match the institution's pretensions. Véron was required to have at least sixty-six chorus singers, seventy-nine instrumentalists and a conductor. Between 1831 and 1848 the actual number of principal dancers fluctuated between twenty-four and thirty; the *corps de ballet* between seventy-five and 113; and the size of the orchestra between eighty-one and eighty-seven (see Table 2.4), to which must be added such possible reinforcements and also on-stage musicians required for any particular work; the choruses were made up of between fifty-eight and eighty-three singers. Conservatoire pupils studying singing added extra weight to the chorus on occasion, for example in *Robert le Diable*. With such forces, which included a number of leading performers who were both outstanding and prepared to innovate, grand opera emerged to profit from the co-operation between an outstanding dramatic craftsman (Scribe), remarkable scene-painters, and composers such as Auber, Halévy and Meyerbeer.

The in-house staff also included the singers' official physicians, the many suppliers of necessities as well as such staff as firemen and *gendarmes* to guarantee safety; the total number of the latter (Table 2.5) is testimony to the particular importance of the Opéra. At 'extraordinary' performances, such as the first three of any new work, further *gendarmes* were drafted in (e.g., thirty-one at the Opéra, thirteen at the Théâtre Français and at the Feydeau, twelve at the Vaudeville, twenty-two at the Théâtre Italien).

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THÉATRE IMPÉRIAL
DE
L'OPÉRA

RELEVÉ GÉNÉRAL DE LA SALLE

Représentation du 186

	STALLES D'AMPHITHÉATRE.	STALLES D'ORCHESTRE.	PLACES DE PARTERRE.	PLACES DE BAIGNOIRES.	PLACES de 1res LOGES		PLACES de 2es LOGES		PLACES de 3es LOGES		PLACES des 4es et 5es LOGES et Amphithéâtre.	TOTAL.	OBSERVATIONS.
					de face et d'Avant-Scène.	de côté.	de face et d'Avant-Scène.	de côté	de face.	de côté.			
Nombre de Places.....	133	220	311	86	94	108	118	120	90	156	350	1786	
Location à l'année.....													
— au jour.....													
— supplémentaire.....													
Billets vendus au bureau.....													
Billets donnés numérotés.....													
Billets donnés sans numéro.....													
Billets des auteurs.....													
Entrées personnelles.....													
Service du parterre.....													
CONCESSIONS ET SERVICE.													
Loge du Ministre d'État.....				4								4	
— du Préfet.....							6					6	
— du Commissaire de police.....								6				6	
— du Conservatoire.....											6	6	
Stalle de l'officier de paix.....		1										1	
— de l'officier de sapeurs.....		1										1	
— du médecin de service.....	1											1	
Totaux.....													
Suppléments à ajouter.....													
— à retrancher.....													
Totaux définitifs.....													

Paris. — Typ. Morris et Comp. — N° 68

Vu par l'Inspecteur du Contrôle et de la Salle, *Dressé et certifié par le Chef du Contrôle,*

Figure 3 Daily seating summary designed for use at Paris Opéra performances in the 1860s. It shows categories of subscribers (those by the year and those coming on fixed days); box-office sales; numbered/unnumbered free seats; seats for 'authors' (presumably including composers); those having a personal right of entry, and so on, totalling 1,786 places.

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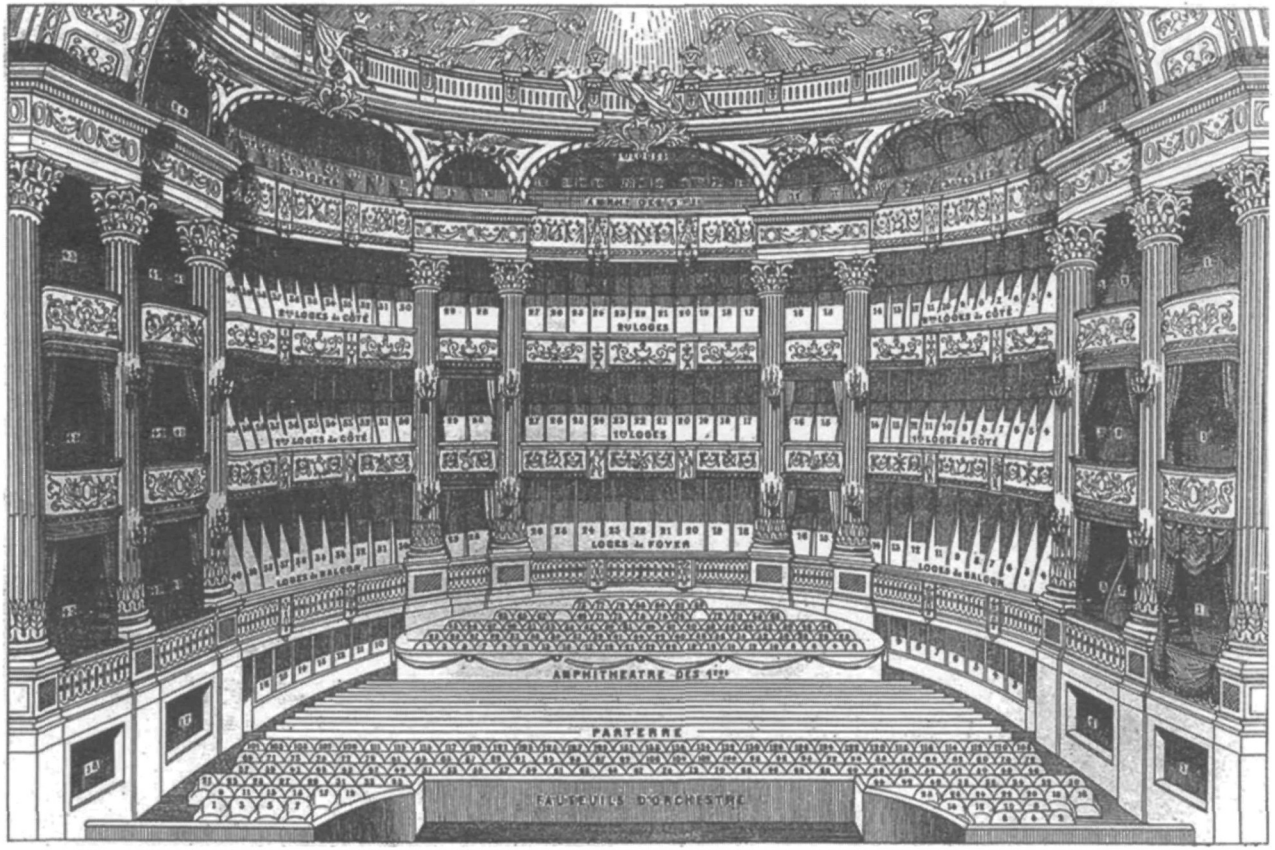

Figure 4 Perspective seating-plan of the Paris Opéra, Salle Le Peletier (1821–73). The seating areas can be correlated with the categories of seats (and numbers of places) seen along the top horizontal axis of the plan in Fig. 3.

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Table 2.4 *Numbers of orchestral players at the Paris Opéra*

Instrument	1825 (Source: Opéra, PG 698)	1836 (Source: Archives nationales AJ[13] 181)
I[st] violins	12	12
2[nd] violins	12	12
Violas	8	8
Cellos	10	10
Basses	8	8
Flutes	3	3
Oboes	3	3
Clarinets	3	3
Bassoons	4	4
Horns	4	4
Trumpets	2	4
Trombones	3	4
Timpani	1	1
Harps	1	2
Bass drum	0	1
Cymbals	0	1
Triangle	0	1

Table 2.5 *Safety staff in Parisian theatres in 1829*

Theatre	Number of safety staff
Théâtre de l'Opéra	24
Théâtre Français	9
Théâtre Italien	17
Théâtre Feydeau	9
Théâtre de l'Odéon	7
Théâtre de Madame, later Gymnase-Dramatique	7
Théâtre du Vaudeville	7
Théâtre des Variétés	7
Théâtre des Nouveautés	7
Théâtre de la Porte Saint-Martin	8
Théâtre de la Gaîté	7
Théâtre de l'Ambigu	7
Théâtre du Cirque Olympique	7

Source: Archives nationales AJ[13] 187

Other controls

The government had at its disposal many control mechanisms. Early in 1831 a Commission was appointed to oversee the Opéra and the Conservatoire; it was made up of political figures, among them the Duc de Choiseul. Since Véron did not take over until 1 June 1831, this Commission ran the Opéra until that date. Afterwards it had the more limited role of advising the minister. It checked that obligations under the director's schedule were being fulfilled, writing a report on each new work, as well as an annual appraisal. The essential elements of the genre were to be spectacle, luxury and striking

effects. Of *Gustave III*, the Commission wrote on 26 March 1833 that 'this opera conforms entirely to the type of work that should be performed in the Académie Royale de Musique. The ballets are sumptuous, and the scenery is lavish, creating an admirable impression. The management must be congratulated on the quality of the production . . .; nothing has been stinted that can achieve visual impact and win over the audience.' Relations between Véron and the Commission often became strained, however. According to Véron, the minister was even jealous of his success.

Louis Gentil (1782–1857) was appointed as controller of the theatre's equipment with effect from 28 September 1831. He was to remain in post until 1848, serving at the same time as a source of information about the Opéra for the head of division in the Ministry of Fine Arts.[12] On 20 August 1835 the Minister of the Interior had appointed a royal commissioner whose duty was checking on the fulfilment of the director's schedule. When Véron's reign gave way to that of Henri Duponchel (see Table 2.2) a Royal Ordinance of 31 August 1835 created a new Special Commission for the Royal theatres under the Duc de Choiseul, to replace the earlier body.

After five years during which it was officially lifted, general censorship was re-established in France in 1835 by the law of 9 September, under the same conditions as during the Restoration. Discontinued again in March 1848, it was again reinstituted in July 1850 and maintained until 1906, apart from a short period in 1870. As well as the censors, there was an inspector of theatres whose duty was to keep an eye on productions, and the Commissioner of Police had to check that new works had been passed by the censor. Between 1835 and 1848, no fewer than 8,330 dramatic texts, intended for every sort of theatre, were submitted to the censors;[13] not one of the works that were banned belonged to the Opéra's repertory. With rare exceptions, censorship of the Opéra centred on religious issues. Bringing the clergy or religious customs and ceremonies on stage would attract the censor's attention and sometimes be forbidden if resemblances with contemporary practices were too close. Though the distancing implied by opera meant, in the view of the censors, less moral or political impact than in ordinary plays, any overlap of a plot with contemporary affairs was, however, noted. The report of 9 May 1826 authorising the performance of Rossini's *Le Siège de Corinthe* dwelt on parallels with the war currently being waged in Greece, which, according to one censor, should ensure that the work would be received 'with great enthusiasm'.

Though the Opéra was subject to strict control, grand opera cannot be reduced simply to propaganda: the librettists and composers were not the spokesmen of the state. It is the reception of a work of art that determines its ideological impact, as is shown by a comparison between Carafa's opéra comique *Masaniello* of 1827 and *La Muette de Portici*.[14] Where Scribe was

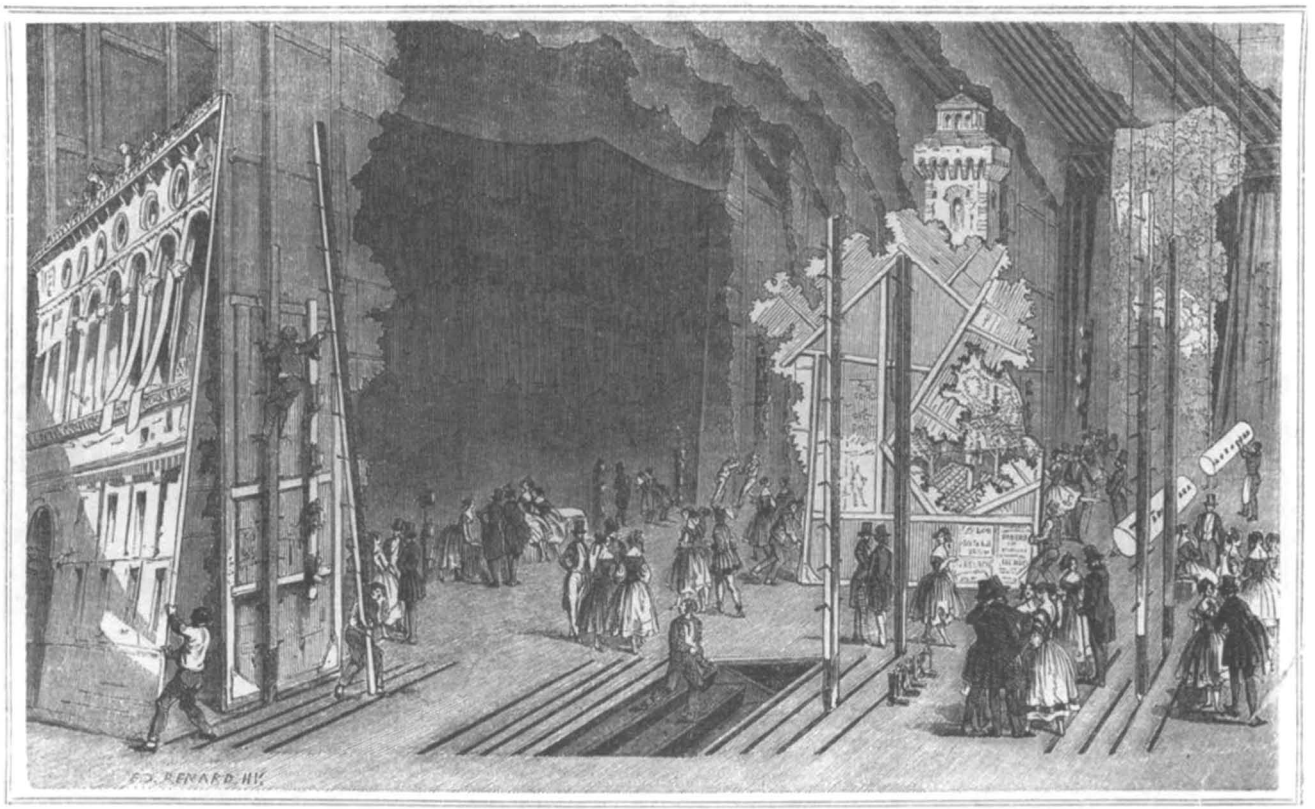

Figure 5 General view from the wings during an interval at the Paris Opéra drawn and engraved *c.*1844 by Edouard Renard and Henri Valentin. Vertical supports (*mâts*, or 'masts') stand ready to take the tall painted flats of scenery (*fermes*) already being manoeuvred into position. Vast under-stage spaces and machinery also allowed flats to be wheeled sideways. On the far right, a technician arranges gas lights contained within two suspended battens. Top-hatted male subscribers exercise their privilege to chat with female performers.

clever with *La Muette de Portici* was in leaving many ambiguities and taking attention away from the revolutionary hero Masaniello to concentrate rather upon Fenella and the love story. The censors expressed general satisfaction, asking only for the removal of a few lines such as 'Le peuple est maître' ('The people are sovereign').

A social mechanism

Unlike arts such as painting or literature, drama requires bringing together, in a single place, the constituents of a work that does not really exist save in production by the mediation of sound and visual images, and its performance before the public. This temporal and spatial simultaneity – the 'here and now' of theatrical production and its reception by an audience – partially explains why this art form is, to an exceptional degree, dependent on society. The direction of an opera house involves first the production team and everything that is required for the performance, secondly advertising, and thirdly arrangements for the receiving of the public. The opera house brings these three functions together in three spaces: the stage, the bill-board and the auditorium. Advertising, which used to involve posting bills on the outside walls of the auditorium, was almost totally taken over during the nineteenth century by the press, and publicity became a business. Crowd responses, which were always regarded by the authorities with apprehension, could become worrying when posters were misleading, not displayed widely enough or else were over-explicit. For instance, at the time of the long-awaited first performances of *Le Prophète* in 1849, the Prefect of Police forbade posters announcing that since all the boxes and stalls had already been taken up, no tickets would be on sale to the general public.

Improving facilities for the public had become a matter of importance. The Opéra always mounted public performances three or four days a week (see Table 6.1, p. 94). Véron made a start by refurbishing the boxes in order, as he put it, 'to suit better the means and economical habits . . . of the new bourgeois court that was going to replace the one formerly gathered around Charles X'. While improving interior decoration and lighting, he sought to provide 'luxury and pleasure at reasonable prices'. The auditorium of the Le Peletier opera house – home of the Académie de Musique from 1821 to 1873, when it was accidentally burnt down on the night of 28–29 October – possessed an exceptional acoustic and was, according to contemporaries, 'a Stradivarius of a building'.[15] (Fig. 5.) Véron turned it into a sort of club for season-ticket holders, who alone were allowed entry backstage and into the ballerinas' green room. When in 1840 the Prefect of Police expressed the desire to ban such backstage visits, Duponchel, the current director,

was furious: a measure like that could jeopardise the success of his next production. The tradition of including ballet in grand opera was in part aesthetic (grand opera was a union of all the arts), in part institutional (see Chapter 6) and in part social, for the ballerinas found rich admirers among the season-ticket holders.

In the age of grand opera social considerations often counted as much as aesthetic ones. People went to the Opéra for the artistic spectacle, but equally for the spectacle of themselves as reflected in the mirrors installed in the public spaces and found gratification in both gazing at others and being gazed at in the auditorium, which remained lit during performances right up until the early twentieth century, when André Messager (1853–1929) ended the practice, though not without many protests. This social narcissism was sometimes carried to such an excess as to allow the two spectacles to mingle together, as when members of the public – in costume – took to the stage during the Act V ball scene of Scribe and Auber's *Gustave III*.[16]

Up until the early twentieth century the Claque, otherwise ironically known as the 'Applause Department' or the 'Success Guarantee Service', served as a link between the stage and the public. Some members of the claque who were required to pay for their seats (which were, however, reserved for them), could choose which performances to attend and had more freedom over what response they cared to show. Enquiries were made into the operation of the claque, and attempts were made to ban it, but to no avail. If some thought it despicable, others judged it essential because it could direct attention to the best passages and draw the best out of the performers. The famed leader of the claque, Auguste Levasseur – universally known as Auguste – was active from the early 1820s until his death in 1844. He would decide with the Opéra management what was needed for any particular performance. He took his remuneration in tickets which he then sold on, and also received tickets and cash from performers. In Roqueplan's time as director, the appointment of the leader of the claque or 'chef du service du parterre' ('Head of Pit Services') was a ministerial decision, and David Cerf was the first one appointed in this way. Meyerbeer's devoted friend Louis Gouin, for his part, ran a parallel claque, paid for with tickets handed over by the composer. He gave Meyerbeer a full account of his tactics. For instance, when Véron was putting on *Gustave III*, Gouin tried to puff *Robert le Diable* so that patrons should not neglect it for Auber's rival opera.

Such practices were but one aspect of a huge effort to ensure commercial success; others include granting privileges to the season-ticket holders and maintaining good relations with the press. Véron was one of the first to divine the importance of the fourth estate and make use of advertising. He likewise appreciated, in the spirit of modern communications, that getting himself, as director, talked about would have the positive effect of bringing

the Opéra before the public eye. All publicity was good publicity, and the traditional Opéra balls also played their part in keeping up the fascination that all society felt for the Opéra, the source of pleasures artistic and otherwise, the place where the best people met and socialised. The institution's extraordinary hold over minds and attitudes at the time can only be explained by the combination of French centralisation with metropolitanisation, which sucked the nation's energies towards the capital and inflated the tendency for fashion and taste to be dictated by Parisians. The Opéra supported, besides, a luxury industry occupying a significant place in the economy (see Fig. 6). Ladies' fashions and coiffure, the jewellery trade, restaurants and cafés all owed something to opera in general, which also attracted many foreigners to Paris. Finally, vocal melodies and dance tunes first heard in various productions, not to mention innumerable arrangements, 'reminiscences', fantasies and medleys, became an important factor in music publishing, salons and the programming of concerts, as is evident from the advertisement illustrated in Fig. 2 (p. 16). A wide range of 'merchandise' reflected the productions and stars of the Opéra, like those of other nineteenth-century theatres.[17]

Deeply rooted in a basically capitalist society yet profiting from major state support, grand opera occupied an ambiguous position where several superimposed functions intersected. These were political and ideological, aesthetic and industrial. The Opéra was a machine for creating pleasures, dreams and symbols, just as much as for producing a marketable commodity.

Making symbolic impressions

The success and the image of grand opera cannot be reduced to a single political, administrative or artistic policy; they derived too from the fact that significant works emerged for a particular public at a certain moment in the history of taste and sensibility when the themes treated were in accord (in ways that were not always foreseen) with contemporary events. Grand opera staged, in various historical disguises, the birth of its own age, i.e. the Revolution, the terrible struggles that accompanied it, the fight for liberty against oppressors and for people's right to self-determination. This art lent dramatic form to society's deepest feelings, which had been given fresh urgency by the major events of the 1830 and 1848 Revolutions. It showed history in action and reflected the most frightful panorama of modern times, by representing all the horrors of fanaticism, endless disorder, massacres and war. Perhaps, by implication, it showed too the necessity of a form of order that is assured by the state. Grand opera may even have provided an

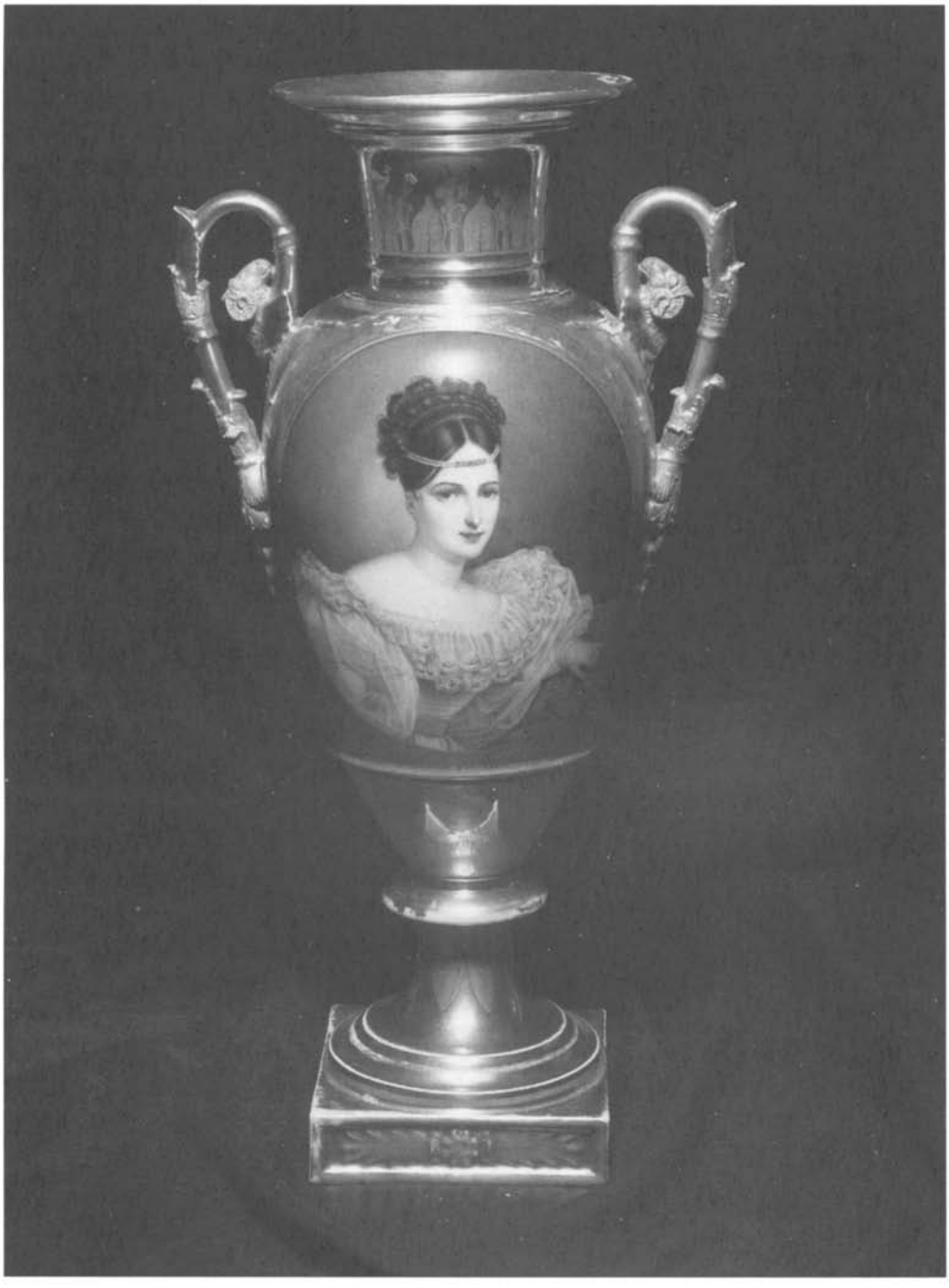

Figure 6 One of a pair of luxurious porcelain vases made in Paris by the Darte brothers around 1834, at the height of grand opera's first phase. They incorporate copies of well-known lithographs. One bears the image of Maria Malibran, who specialised in Italian opera; the other – above – after Vigneron's portrait, bears the image of Laure Cinti-Damoreau (see Chapter 7), leading singer in *Guillaume Tell*, *La Muette de Portici*, *Robert le Diable*, etc.

imaginary space between sovereign and nation, thus producing a cathartic release of psychological tension or else creating a link between government power and the audience's political awareness. Typically, its heroes are tossed hither and thither by events, even if, like Masaniello in *La Muette de Portici* and Jean in *Le Prophète*, they believe for a moment that they can control them. Grand opera showed a society that thinks in class terms, where the people become an active force and, thanks to the chorus, finds its own form of representation. Taking up an idea from Ernest Renan's 1882 lecture *Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?* we might say that this art form corresponded to the desire to 'accomplish great things together'. It gave special life to the idea of the nation. Memories of shared ordeals, an awareness of history and the representation of the past made grand opera the expression of a collective identity, subsuming the genre within the orbit and ideology of nationalism. Furthermore Scribe was clever enough to write librettos that satisfied bourgeois sensibilities while deriving inspiration from various other dramatic forms that had been well received. Thus, thanks to its aesthetic strength and its occasional fortuitous contemporary relevance, this art form helped provide the bourgeoisie with a 'common emotional bond', a 'shared dream', as André Malraux terms it in *La Tentation de l'Occident*. Society at large responded to the music, images and emotions produced and given full expression by this great machine. Often a reflection of literature, grand opera is itself reflected in literature, as a 'social marker' and also as a point of visual reference and as a pattern for emotions and sometimes for thought.

A virtual obsession with period and regional accuracy in scenery and costumes, the desire for realism, the variety and contrast in scenes and also in the musical means employed, all combined to give the impression of mastery over what was real and what might be real, effectively like an industrial process capable of producing wealth, and a comparable display of social power. French opera was testimony to the march of progress and to the idea that knowledge could grow exponentially. On the Opéra stage bourgeois society 'ennobled' its property through the symbolic metamorphosis of its riches. Luxury became an institutionalised aesthetic category: clause 4 of Véron's schedule laid down that 'the contractor shall maintain the Opéra in the state of splendour and luxury befitting this national theatre'. Eclecticism was affirmed as an aesthetic principle. To paraphrase Pierre Larousse's *Grand Dictionnaire universel du XIX^e siècle*: 'Slowly, and to meet modern needs better, opera is becoming an enormous machine, an historical epic, a kind of drama incorporating all genres – sacred music, ballet music, concert pieces, *romances* and barcaroles'.[18] Great efforts were made to bring on stage the totality of the world, both people and nature. This mirrors the new power of the bourgeoisie, which was linked to its economic capabilities rather than to social rank or the influence of the aristocracy. The Opéra operated as a device

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for harnessing the riches and energy of the time, revealing in a number of exceptional works, as has been shown by Anselm Gerhard, changes related to developments in the modern metropolis.[19]

The Académie de Musique was also a sort of enchanted domain, in which France took pride because it offered the possibility of transcending foreign art. In 1872, Charles-Ernest Beulé defended the Opéra and its subsidy in a National Assembly speech that was greeted with applause (*Journal officiel*, 20 March 1872). Its hyperbole is revealing. Looking back over the history of the house he remarked:

> In the course of the nineteenth century, since the true and full development of French opera, the Opéra has produced a miracle, the sight of which has made Italy and Germany turn pale. France has taken their geniuses [Rossini and Meyerbeer] and made them Frenchmen . . . Our Opéra has made them greater than they were before.

The fortuitous coming together of all these factors and forces – human, institutional, administrative, economic, political, social and historical – in the productive 'machine' that was the Académie de Musique, allowed grand opera to emerge and endowed it with a symbolic importance (or as Pierre Bourdieu has it, '*un capital symbolique*'[20]) that was unique in its day, both in France and elsewhere.

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