RECONSTRUCTING CONVENTION: ENSEMBLE FORMS
IN THE OPERAS OF JULES MASSENET
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Dissertation Prepared for the Degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH TEXAS
December 2004

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Over the last quarter-century, scholars have taken a unified approach in discussing form in Italian and French opera of the nineteenth century. This approach centers around the four-part aria and duet form begun by Bellini, codified by Rossini, modified by Verdi, and dissolved by Puccini. A similar trajectory can be seen in French opera in the works of Meyerbeer, Gounod, and Massenet; however, only Meyerbeer and Gounod have received significant critical attention. This is in part due to Massenet’s reception as a “composer for the people,” a title ill fitting and ripe for reconsideration. This dissertation will examine duet forms in Massenet’s oeuvre and will focus on the gradual change in style manifest in his twenty-five operas. Massenet’s output can be divided into three distinct periods delineated by his approach to form. Representative works from each period will show how he inherited, interpreted, thwarted, and ultimately rewrote the standard formal conventions of his time and in doing so, created a dramaturgical approach to opera that unified the formerly separate number-based elements. Massenet’s longevity and popular appeal make him the quintessential French opera composer of the fin de siècle and the natural choice for examining reconstructed conventions.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My sincere thanks goes to the librarians at the University of North Texas Music Library for their unwavering support and assistance in a long-distance dissertation. Thanks also to the interlibrary loan office at Abilene Christian University’s Brown Library for finding materials when I thought it not possible. My colleagues at ACU have nurtured me and provided gentle guidance and occasional nudging; I am proud to be a part of their faculty. A special thanks to Dr. Murl Sickbert of the Hardin-Simmons University Smith Music Library for good conversation and wise questions. My committee, and especially Dr. Les Brothers, has provided a wealth of good advice from the mundane and technical to the profound and philosophical. Above all, my deepest thanks to my wife, Marcia, who has shared our marriage with my entire graduate career, and to our daughter, Eva, whose whole life has paralleled this project – thanks for being there when I needed it most.
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

By 1896, Jules Massenet (1842-1912) had established himself as the leading French opera composer for the generation after Charles Gounod. The successes of Manon (1884), Werther (1893) and Thaïs (1894) ensured his place in the history of opera. Indeed, his reputation today lies principally with this trio of works, though he composed a total of twenty-five operas for the stage, three ballets, four oratorios, and incidental music to fourteen plays. The lack of non-narrative instrumental music in Massenet’s oeuvre corresponds to a similar paucity in the works of Verdi and Wagner and has fostered a critical reception based solely on his operas, moreover often the early, most popular ones. However, a fuller interpretation of Massenet’s later works shows a distinctly different way of organizing their dramatic structure, specifically with regard to the formal conventions of four-part scene construction. Though recent scholarship has attempted to redress the critical myopia of an assessment based solely on his early works, there remains much to be done to present a more complete picture of Massenet, his later works, and their impact on popular expectations, subsequent critical reception, and artistic influence.¹

¹ The two standard biographies of Massenet are both about thirty years old and are both in English: James Harding, Massenet (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1970) and Demar Irvine, Massenet: A Chronicle of His Life and Times (Portland: Amadeus Press, 1994); Irvine’s biography was completed in the early 1970s but not published until 1994. Gérard Condé’s edition of Massenet’s biography Mes Souvenirs sets straight many of the questionable claims made but does not address the composer’s work or reception (Paris: Éditions Plume, 1992). Eric Goldstrom’s 1998 dissertation “Whore in Paradise: the Oratorios of Jules Massenet” (Stanford University) seeks to contextualize Massenet’s sacred works in the tradition of Berlioz and Franck but with the overt sexuality common to his own operas.
Orientations

While Italian and German opera of the mid- to late-nineteenth century has received excellent critical treatment over the last twenty-five years, indeed it has been the backbone of operatic investigation, there has been a conspicuous absence of similar studies regarding French opera.² French opera has fared better in the more focused study of production sources thanks to the work of H. Robert Cohen, though it remains eclipsed by similar studies of Wagner operas.³ While French grand opera has usually garnered more scholarly attention than fin-de-siècle opera, a quartet of books has recently been published that seeks to provide the social, musico-dramatic, and aesthetic contexts for the study of opera in the Third Republic.⁴

Hervé Lacombe uses Bizet’s Les Pêcheurs de perles (1863) as his locus classicus for the creation, production, and reception of opera after Gounod. His purpose in selecting Pêcheurs is to illustrate how tradition and innovation are combined in a single work so as to define “the most prominent characteristic of the French school,” namely that “the whole purpose of an opera was to gratify public taste at any price.” Lacombe


sees the balance between tradition and innovation as the “defining question for French opera.”

Using a single opera as his exemplar, he is able to show how the many artistic and bureaucratic agencies interact and interfere with the composition and presentation of an opera. While his study brings together ideas from cultural theory and reception history, it rarely engages the music itself nor how the music articulates the underlying narrative (there are no musical examples or graphs illustrating form).

A similar situation exists in André Michael Spies’s Opera, State and Society. Here, the author is not concerned with opera as a musical or dramatic genre but as an institution or political product. His approach takes the librettos of 138 operas first performed in Paris from 1875-1914 and use them to reflect how cultural and political tastes are imbedded within the drama. In doing so, Spies shows a “correspondence between the content of the librettos and the changing class relationships of the pre-war Third Republic.”

He sees a divergence in the works produced at the Opéra and the Opéra-Comique such that heroes in latter house “began to subordinate personal honor to the national interest.” This idea will be explored further in relation to Massenet’s Roma (1912), an opera with just a single mention in Spies’s account and then only as part of a list.

It is clear that Spies took Jane Fulcher’s 1987 book The Nation’s Image: French Grand Opera as Politics and Politicized Art as a methodological source of inspiration. Fulcher’s later book, French Cultural Politics and Music, expands on Spies’s

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5 Lacombe, Keys to French Opera, 14.
6 Spies, Opera, State and Society, 8.
7 Ibid.
commentary by including instrumental music as well as opera to show that “political ideology and musical values were no longer discrete: the two realms had fused.”9 Here, Fulcher is concerned with the broader exploitation of music and the musical establishment (opera companies, journalists, conservatoires, and the Parisian elite) for the service of the state. Again, a lack of discussion of the musical works themselves hampers an otherwise persuasive argument by leaving unanswered questions like ‘How does political ideology manifest itself in musical form?’10

The final study in this quartet of recent scholarship consistently engages the musical structure of the works discussed. Steven Huebner’s command of operatic conventions and construction is woven throughout French Opera at the Fin de Siècle. His primary interest lies with the critical reception and inherited style of the thirteen operas first performed or conceived in the decade following Wagner’s death. As this criteria and the subtitle (“Wagnerism, Nationalism, and Style”) indicate, Wagner is never far from the discussion. Indeed, Huebner is correct in focusing on what French composers sought from Wagner rather than explaining Wagner’s dominance in Paris after the 1891 première of Lohengrin. Though he devotes the first third of the book to Massenet, Huebner necessarily excludes the composer’s late operas.11 Further, the discussion of Massenet is often framed by negative opinions of the composer as seen by contemporaries or by comparing Wagner’s method to Massenet’s less-successful

9 Fulcher, French Cultural Politics, 169.
10 Though dealing with Italian opera, James Hepokoski has probed such a question in his article “Ottocento Opera as Cultural Drama: Generic Mixtures in Il trovatore,” in Chusid, Verdi’s Middle Period, 1849-1859, 147-196.
11 Chausson’s Le Roi Arthus first performed in November 1903 is the latest opera discussed.
attempts at emulation.\textsuperscript{12} Such an opinion can be redressed by an examination of Massenet’s late operas. Huebner does offer a penetrating discussion of formal dramatic, and musical elements common to Massenet’s style, leading one to reconsider the primacy of Wagner’s influence on the composer.

As these works show, recent scholarship on French opera has taken a socio-political interpretation as the primary stance with which to view the literature. While the merits of such an approach allow for conclusions that situate the work within its popular reception, there has been a corresponding lack of engagement with the structure of the works themselves. Further, while Italian opera has recently benefited from detailed examinations of structural issues,\textsuperscript{13} French opera has again been absent from any similar considerations. Indeed, the best examination of French formal paradigms has come from one scholar, Steven Huebner, who has examined both Meyerbeer and Gounod in light of inherited formal conventions and the adaptations each made.\textsuperscript{14} That Huebner’s \textit{terminus post quem} is 1881 (the date of Gounod’s last opera, \textit{Le Tribut de Zamora}) leaves the important question of conventional inheritance unanswered for the final two decades of the nineteenth century.

\textbf{Methodology}

These decades, roughly from \textit{Les Contes d’Hoffmann} to \textit{Pelléas et Mélisande}, saw an increased seamlessness in operatic construction that stemmed from two factors.

\textsuperscript{12} Evidence of the former is seen quotations like Huebner describing the reception of \textit{Hérodiade} as “Crass theological implication accompanied by crass music, a Vincent d’Indy might have remarked,” 42.
\textsuperscript{13} See below “Reconstructing Formal Conventions.”
First, the confluence of traditions from the two great Parisian houses, the Théâtre de l’Opéra (Palais Garnier) and the Théâtre de l’Opéra Comique, led to the abandonment of spoken dialogue and the more frequent use of tragic endings in *opéras comiques*, thus encouraging works that thwarted convention.\(^\text{15}\) Second, the increasing interest in all things Wagnerian frequently led to imitations of through-composed acts and leitmotivic connections.\(^\text{16}\) In both instances, the performance of new works juxtaposed against perennial favorites led to their immediate comparison and, further, to a reconsideration of the craft of operatic composition.

No account of these comparisons and reconsiderations for the last two decades of the nineteenth century would be complete without an examination of the works of Massenet. While new operas dotted the various Parisian stages during these decades, none issued more consistently from a single pen than those by Massenet. His status as the most popular operatic composer of his generation as well as his large output—twenty-five operas spanning twice as many years—makes him the ideal choice for examining the approaches to convention available at the turn of the century. Quite simply, no other composer had the staying power to match Massenet.\(^\text{17}\) While his early operas show a great deal of indebtedness to Gounod and Thomas, their large-scale organization is defined by distinctly self-contained numbers, even if the boundaries of those numbers are

\(^{15}\) Path-breaking operas first performed at the Opéra Comique in the last quarter of the nineteenth century include *Carmen* (1875), *Manon* (1884), *Esclarmonde* (1889), *Louise* (1900), *Pelléas et Mélisande* (1902), and Dukas’s *Ariane et Barbe-Bleue* (1907). See Mary Jeane Speare, “The Transformation of Opéra Comique: 1850-1880” (Ph.D. diss., Washington University, 1997).

\(^{16}\) Among the *wagnéristes* and their works were Ernest Reyer (*Sigurd*, 1884), Édourad Lalo (*La ROI d’Ys*, 1888), Emmanuel Chabrier (*Gwendoline*, 1886 and *Le ROI malgré lui*, 1887), Vincent d’Indy (*Fervaal*, 1897) Ernest Chausson (*Le ROI Arthus*, 1903), and Paul Dukas (*Ariane et Barbe-Bleue*, 1909).

\(^{17}\) Massenet was rivaled in quantity, but not popularity, by Camille Saint-Saëns, among whose operas, thirteen spanning 39 years, only *Samson et Dalila* remains in the canon.
blurred. Indeed, the techniques Massenet used to effect these blurred divisions reads like a laundry list of fin-de-siècle operatic style: “evaded final cadences, substantial beginnings on the dominant, local-level and medium-term thematic reprises and motivic reiterations, and subtle motivic manipulations.”  

Within these transformations, however, lies the skeleton of the number opera so long a part of the French stage. It is surprising, then, to find a lack of discussion regarding these conventions in the composer’s later operas. Certainly Massenet’s operas resist the unilateral classification offered by Alfred Lowenberg in the 1954 *Grove’s Dictionary of Music and Musicians* where he noted that “to have heard *Manon* is to have heard them all.”  

The need then is clear for an investigation of the conventional forms of arias and ensembles in the French repertoire after Gounod.

The endurance of the French solo *cavatine*, a tripartite form with a returning first section, is immediately identifiable when surveying the literature. Further, the conventional Verdian four-part aria form never took hold in French solo arias as it did in ensembles. Thus, composers sought out the ensemble with increasing frequency as a means of juxtaposing characters in potentially volatile and highly dramatic situations. For this reason, this dissertation will focus on ensembles (duets and trios) as the primary category of examination.

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18 Huebner, *French Opera*, 134.
20 Examples of the *cavatine* from all periods in Massenet’s operas are “O Sitâ bien aimée!” from *Le Roi de Lahore*, “Il est doux, il est bon” from *Hérodiade*, the “Mirror Aria” (“Dis-moi que je suis belle”) from *Thaïs*, and “Solitaire su ma terrase” from *Cléopâtre*.
Verdi’s *Aïda* provides an excellent example of how a character is defined not by solo aria but by her participation in various ensembles. Amneris must wait until Act IV to present solo music, though she has already engaged in two duets (one each with Radamès and Aïda) and a trio (with the above together). Further, her Act IV solo moves directly into a final duet with Radamès so that the traditional love triangle is always presented with two of its members. It is significant that the only character missing a large-scale romance or aria is the one who is most convincingly developed.

A similar interest in duets is evident in the work of Gounod, who chose the story of *Roméo et Juliette* for its prospect of writing intimate duets. Indeed, Huebner notes that the duets in *Roméo et Juliette* are “as close to greatness as Gounod comes as a composer.”21 This dissertation begins with a survey of the conventional ensemble forms used by Gounod and his contemporaries in the decade before Massenet’s *Le Roi de Lahore* (1877), his first operatic success. Duets from four operas, two each from the *opéra* and *opéra comique* traditions, will be examined to form a basis for comparison with the works of Massenet. The four operas represent the most popular works on the French stage: from the *opéra* tradition, “Va! je t’ai pardonné,” Act IV, *Roméo et Juliette* (1867) and “Hamlet, ma douleur est immense!” from Act III of Ambroise Thomas’s *Hamlet* (1868); from the *opéra comique* tradition, “Je vais danser,” Act II, *Carmen* (1875) and “Virginie! J’ai retrouvé ton coeur,” from Act II of Victor Massé’s *Paul et Virginie* (1876). Attention will be given to verse structure, correlation to the conventional Verdian four-part plan, variation of reprises, and overall tonal shape. These criteria will

then be brought to bear on duets and trios from Massenet’s works, specifically *Hérodiale* (1881), *Manon* (1884), *Werther* (1892), *Thaïs* (1894), *Chérubin* (1905), *Ariane* (1906), *Thérèse* (1907), *Roma* (1912), and *Cléopâtre* (1914).

This methodology allies itself with two important studies: Robert Moreen’s seminal dissertation “Integration of Text Forms and Musical Forms in Verdi’s Early Operas” (1975) and Gottfried Marschall’s thesis “Massenet et la fixation de la forme mélodique française” (1978).22 Both recognize the importance of verse form on the musical form and trace this structure through a series of exhaustive analyses. In doing so, Moreen is able to show how Verdi blurred the transition from *parlante* to aria. With his work centering on the motivic and phrasal levels, Moreen has laid the foundation for a study that is more concerned with period structures and large-scale formal designs. Marschall is chiefly concerned with Massenet’s setting of text and the effect it has on resultant melodic shapes. His conclusions illuminate Massenet’s often cellular-based melodic style, a style in sharp contrast to his Italian contemporary Giacomo Puccini. By focusing on duet and ensemble structures, we see that, not merely a “composer for the people,” Massenet sought out innovative and unusual formal solutions that heighten the dramatic tension and advance the operatic narrative.

The premières of Massenet’s operas up to 1902 generally took place in Paris.23 By contrast, most of the late operas received their first performance at the Opéra de

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23 *Hérodiale* was first performed at the Théâtre de la Monnaie in Brussels (1881) and came to Paris in 1884. *Werther* had its première in Vienna and came to Paris within a year.
Monte Carlo but were reprised in Paris within five years of their creation. This division of
venue is indicative of a larger break in Massenet’s oeuvre, one that plays out in his
approach to formal conventions and will be traced in this discussion of ensemble forms.
The stylistic/generic examination of Massenet’s works, thus far unrecognized in scholarly
literature, will show that Massenet’s late operas, far from being a mere continuation of
his earlier work, actually reflect a significant shift in the way he approached the drama.
This will lead to a reappraisal of Massenet as an innovator rather than only a continuator,
a view that challenges the assumptions of his critical reception over the last half century.
Such a position is evident in his dissolution of the Italian four-part scena structures in
favor of an organization around tableaux, ten- to twenty-minute set pieces that contain
ariosos, ensembles, or finales.

Also important in a discussion of formal elements is the increased awareness of
the final key as a goal for the entire opera. Certainly, the meaning of an opera in “a
certain key” has been questioned over the last twenty years, and with good reason. 24
Edward Cone reminds us that a composer need only write a prelude in the key of the final
bars to satisfy the condition of “tonal unity,” though he closes his discussion with the
trenchant observation that “if the designation of a single key as the tonality of an opera is
to have more than superficial relevance, it must refer somehow to the progress of the
entire opera.” 25 While Massenet never achieved the seamless, leitmotivically driven
unity that characterized operas after Pelléas, he increasingly relied on a hierarchy of keys

24 Edward T. Cone, “On the Road to Otello: Tonality and Structure in Simon Boccanegra,” Studi verdiani 1
25 Cone, 73.
to shift the tonal center of the entire drama to the final scene. This kind of long-range
tonal planning is not a feature of his earlier operas; rather, it is a reaction to the drama-
turgical conception of other composers, an evolution concomitant with contemporaries
such as Puccini and Leoncavallo.\textsuperscript{26}

Massenet and the Conservatoire

Like most of his contemporaries, Massenet launched his career with works for the
Paris Conservatoire. Moreover, his critical reception is tied to the Conservatoire since it
was here that he first met with academic and popular success. Massenet gained admission
in 1853 and began studying piano with Adolphe-François Laurent. Though he showed
impressive talent for a teenager—he took the \textit{premier accessit} in the piano trials of 1856–
Massenet’s interest began to shift toward composition. At this time, the Conservatoire
was under the general directorship of Daniel-François-Esprit Auber, whose own
\textit{Masaniello, ou La Muette de Portici} (1828) was enjoying enormous success throughout
France and would become the one of the foundations of French grand opéra, along with
Meyerbeer’s \textit{Robert le diable} (1831) and Rossini’s \textit{Guillaume Tell} (1828-29).\textsuperscript{27} Among
other teachers of composition at the Conservatoire were Michele Enrico Carafa,\textsuperscript{28}

\textsuperscript{26} See the discussion of \textit{Turandot} as a “number opera” in Ashbrook and Powers, \textit{Puccini’s “Turandot”}, 15-38, especially 15-16.
\textsuperscript{28} Carafa (1787-1872) was appointed to the Conservatoire in 1840. Among the sixteen operas premiered at the Opéra-Comique were many with strong female leads (\textit{Jeanne d’Arc [1821], Sangarido [1827], La Violette [1828], Jenny [1829], Le Grande Duchesse [1835], and Thérèse [1836]}), certainly an influence on the impressionable Massenet.
Jacques-Fromental Halévy,²⁹ and Adolphe Adam,³⁰ but it was to Ambroise Thomas that Massenet turned in 1861 to be his composition maître.³¹ Though Thomas is often described as “second only to Gounod” with respect to mid-century opera composers, his twenty operas were viewed as conservative, and ultimately only Mignon (1866) and Hamlet (1868) remain in the repertoire today. The appellation “second only” bears a somewhat negative connotation as well, since both of Thomas’s Goethean and Shakespearean subjects followed similar operas by Gounod, namely Faust (1859) and Roméo et Juliette (1867).³² Furthermore, it was only after Gounod’s declination that Thomas was offered the directorship of the Conservatoire following Auber’s death in 1871.

Thomas’s role as mentor to Massenet was one of genial guidance and support rather than profound artistic influence. He shuttled wealthy students to the young piano teacher and promoted his pupil’s La Grand’ Tante to the Opéra-Comique; it would be Massenet’s first staged work. However, the conservative nature of Thomas’s operas left little room for generic development. In both critical and popular assessment, the operas Massenet completed before 1896, the year of Thomas’s death, would far eclipse anything the latter had produced. For his part, Thomas respected the somewhat erratic talent of his

²⁹ Halévy (1799-1862) began teaching harmony and accompaniment at the Conservatoire (1827) and later counterpoint and fugue (1833). In 1840, he was appointed a professor of composition. On his only opera to gain a permanent place in the world repertoire, see Diana R. Hallman, “The French grand opera La Juive (1835): A Socio-Historical and Musico-Dramatic Study” (Ph.D. diss., City University of New York, 1995).
³⁰ The prolific Adam (1803-1856), whose fifty-three operas average to one a year throughout his lifetime, began teaching at the Conservatoire in 1849.
³¹ Thomas (1811-1896) won the Prix de Rome at the Conservatoire in 1832. He was appointed to the faculty of composition in 1856. On Thomas’s career and importance, see Elisabeth Rogeboz-Malfroy, Ambroise Thomas ou la tentation du lyrique (Paris: Cetre, 1994).
³² Stephen Heubner correctly points out that Thomas completed Hamlet as early as 1863; The Operas of Charles Gounod, 68. However, the combined popularity of Mignon and Hamlet cannot in any way match that of Faust, often touted as the most popular French opera of the nineteenth century.
young pupil noting “when the first excitement of youth is over, he’ll soon find his balance and achieve success.” The easy familiarity between teacher and student led Massenet to observe “envious looks” on the occasion of Thomas’s funeral from “those who already saw in me my master’s successor at the Conservatoire.”

Though offered the chance, Massenet declined the directorship, which subsequently went to organist and composer Théodore Dubois (1837-1924). Massenet did accept the position of professor of composition, a post he held from 1878 to 1896. Among his students were Alfred Bruneau, Gabriel Pierné, Charles Koechlin, Florent Schmitt, Gustave Charpentier, Henri Rabaud, Reynaldo Hahn, Ernest Chausson, and for a short time, Claude Debussy. The influence Massenet had over his students is evident in an anecdote attributed to Debussy. In 1884, when Debussy attempted and won the Prix de Rome, he consciously wrote his *L’Enfant prodigue* in “the manner of Massenet to impress the judges of the Institut, of whom the professional musicians constituted only a small minority.” By the mid-1880s, melodies à la Massenet had saturated the Parisian public and the Conservatoire, and most of his students did not stray far from the shadow of their maître. This picture of Massenet’s influence was vigorously disputed by Reynaldo Hahn, possibly in an attempt to validate his own originality:

Never, never did Massenet impose his own ideas, preferences or style on any of his pupils. On the contrary, he identified himself with each of them, and one of the most remarkable features of his teaching was the faculty of assimilation he

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35 Dubois resigned the directorship in 1905 whereupon Massenet was again offered the position. Again he declined, and the post went to Gabriel Fauré (1845-1924).
36 Quoted in Irving, 118.
37 Irving reports that before 1900, Massenet had five students that placed in or won the Prix de Rome, 204.
showed when correcting their work…. Massenet revised the piece of work just as the pupil would have done spontaneously had he had the necessary experience.\(^{38}\)

The genuine concern for his pupils is evident in the glowing memoirs they produced,\(^{39}\) and it is clear that Massenet’s youthful appointment—he was thirty-six years old—was viewed by the younger generation as a “dawn of a new era.”\(^{40}\) However concerned with and connected to the Conservatoire that Massenet may have been, his real interest lay in the theater. It is this tension between the academic and the public worlds that led the composer to resign his position following the death of Thomas. Any attachment he felt to the Conservatoire had expired with its director. Massenet explains at the beginning of chapter twenty-one of *Mes Souvenirs* that “I had only accepted and held the situation because it brought me in touch with my Director whom I loved so much,” but he closes the chapter with the statement, “Free at last and loosed from my chains forever.”\(^{41}\)

**Reconstructing Formal Conventions**

Massenet’s break from the Conservatoire represents a pivotal change in his career as an opera composer. Though he is best known for works written before 1896, there remain thirteen operas that form his post-Conservatoire oeuvre. Certainly these works have much in common with their predecessors, namely the preference for strong female leads, plots set in the Middle Ages or antiquity, and the general harmonic language used; however, several distinct changes manifest themselves in Massenet’s late operas – changes that signal an increasingly sophisticated approach to drama and form.

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\(^{38}\) Quoted in Harding, 64.
\(^{40}\) Irving, 105.
\(^{41}\) Massenet, 216.
To understand and appreciate the degree to which Massenet’s operas changed throughout his life, we must begin by considering how he treated the inherited formal conventions of Verdi and Gounod in both his opéras and opéras comiques. Chapter one will present the four duets mentioned above as a standard of comparison for the works of Massenet. Each will also show the ways in which composers adapted the traditional four-part form to further dramatic goals. The early works of Massenet adopt most of the conventional approaches to form as is evident in Hérodiade from 1881, the year of Gounod’s last opera. Three years later, Massenet witnessed the triumph of Manon, often regarded as his masterpiece. Chapter two will focus on these two operas as indicators of Massenet’s inherited practice. While Hérodiade never reached the popularity of Manon, it represents the culmination of mid-century trends in its use of formal and melodic conventions of the opéra tradition and is therefore a normative example of opéra after Gounod. Manon, on the contrary, represents a fusion of trends from outside the opéra comique tradition, including leading motives and scena forms, to create greater dramatic unity and formal integration.42

After establishing a basis for interpreting Massenet’s use of convention, chapters three and four will include examinations of his later works. These works in their synthesis and adaptation of large-scale formal units evidence a more sophisticated dramatic conception than has previously been identified. Key to this freedom is Massenet’s own generic designation of the later operas. Beginning with La Navarraise, an épisode lyrique completed in 1894, there are only two works entitled “opéra” (Ariane

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Massenet entirely abandoned the distinction “opéra-comique” preferring instead titles such as *pièce lyrique* (*Sapho*), *conte de fées* (*Cendrillon*), *conte lyrique* (*Grisélidis*), *miracle* (*Le Jongleur de Notre Dame*), *comédie chantée* (*Chérubin*), *drame musical* (*Thérèse*), *comédie héroïque* (*Don Quichotte*), *opéra tragique* (*Roma*), *haute farce musicale* (*Panurge*), and *opéra légendaire* (*Amadis*). This fluidity of nomenclature reflects a similar fluidity with the ways in which the public engaged these operas. Specifically, how would the composer meet expectations such as sung versus spoken text; melodic versus motivic construction; and tragic (read realist) versus comic elements. Chapter four will examine ways that *Werther* (1892) and *Thaïs* (1894) intersect and adopt that tradition, while chapter five will address formal disintegration in Massenet’s later operas, including *Le Jongleur de Notre Dame* (1902), *Chérubin* (1905), *Ariane* (1906), *Roma* (1912) and *Cléopâtre* (1914). Chapter six will provide a summation of formal practices in Massenet’s late operas and will situate these practices within the context of the dominant dramatic paradigm of the early twentieth century, namely the Wagnerian inheritance of leitmotivic structures. Avenues for further research within Massenet studies will also be suggested.

Though his late operas never received the critical or popular recognition afforded *Manon, Werther,* or *Thaïs*, their reception is clouded by the inescapable, if natural, comparison to works such as *Pêleles et Mélisande* or *Ariane et Barbe-Bleue*. Because the latter operas are singular examples in each composer’s oeuvre, such comparisons are not valid. By 1914, as the preference for an established canon supplanted the desire for new

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works, Massenet dominated the French operatic stage. At the same time, like Saint-Saëns, Puccini, and a host of other “post-Romantic” composers, Massenet was “crushed by the rhetoric of modernism”\textsuperscript{44} – confronted in his lifetime with a cultural and aesthetic shift so great that he moved from the avant- to the rear guard. Spanning this shift, however, Massenet, in subtle yet significant means, reinterpreted and reconstructed the long-standing conventions of French opera to create an unrivaled fin-de-siècle synthesis.

\textsuperscript{44} Huebner, \textit{French Opera}, 165.
CHAPTER II

INHERITED CONVENTIONS

FRENCH OPERA IN THE 1860s – 70s

The willingness and ease with which Jules Massenet internalized the operatic conventions of his immediate predecessors, Charles Gounod and Ambroise Thomas, is seen in his first Parisian triumph, Le Roi de Lahore (1877). Indeed, the composer and critic Ernest Reyer noted that with Le Roi Massenet had created a “happy synthesis” of the three schools of opera composition: French, Italian, and German.1 While the opera does include thematic reminiscence, it can only be considered Wagnerian in the loosest of definitions. By 1877, the general Parisian exposure to Wagner, and particularly Massenet’s, consisted of an occasional concert performance of an overture, usually Der fliegende Holländer, Tannhäuser, or Lohengrin.2 In 1861, Wagner himself conducted the above overtures along with excerpts from Tannhäuser and the Prelude to Tristan und Isolde. He was in Paris to conduct that country’s première of Tannhäuser, a debacle of great notoriety among the Parisian press and elite, though on Massenet it made a lasting impression.3

The synthesis that Reyer implies regarding Le Roi is echoed seventeen years later by Louis de Fourcaud, who in his review of Thaïs notes the influences of “Gounod

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1 Journal des Débats, 10 May 1877. Here and throughout, all translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.
3 For six months in 1861, Massenet served as a timpanist at the Théâtre-Italian, and it was there that he rehearsed and performed under Wagner the concerts leading to the performance of Tannhäuser at the Opéra on 13 May 1861.
throughout, Verdi in the final scene, even the Ride of the Valkyries in the interlude entitled ‘Alexandria’.”

Further, Adolphe Jullien, critic for the newspaper *Français*, remarked that “Massenet’s great fault is that he alternately attempts every style and perseveres in none.”

Thus, while Massenet is legitimately described as the successor of Gounod and Thomas, he is frequently depicted in the popular press as one who brings to bear elements of German and Italian convention. This synthesis is at the center of opera composition in France in the last decades of the nineteenth century. In order to understand Massenet’s treatment of formal conventions, it is important to see how these conventions manifested themselves in the works of his immediate predecessors.

Familiarity and precedence kept the number opera as the principal organizing form for early- and mid-nineteenth-century opera throughout Europe. Further, since the impetus for changing this convention came from Germany, specifically Wagner’s theories on music and drama and his works after *Tristan und Isolde* (1856-59), the momentum for its implementation, especially in France, was slow. The French operatic stage at the two main Parisian companies, the Théâtre National de l’Opéra and the Théâtre National de l’Opéra-Comique (more commonly known as the Opéra and the Opéra-Comique respectively), was dominated by number operas by the establishment of *grand opéra* composers: Daniel-François-Esprit Auber, Fromental Halévy, Giacomo Meyerbeer, Gounod, Gioachino Rossini, and Giuseppe Verdi.

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6 Rossini’s last four operas were given their first performance at the Opéra: *Le Siège de Corinthe* (1826); *Moïse et Pharaon* (1827, a revision of *Mosè in Egitto* [1818]); *Le Comte Ory* (1828); and *Guillaume Tell*
French Formal Conventions

Halévy, Meyerbeer, and Verdi each worked within a system of aria and ensemble forms that by 1850 was well established. The popularity of these composers certainly helped solidify the establishment and expected continuation of their procedures for future composers. While the four-part plan for solo arias was a consistent model throughout Italian opera (see below), it never gained an equivalent dominance in France. Instead, strophic arias were used with greater frequency, especially in _opéras comiques._

_Romances_ and _couplets_ were the most common types of strophic set pieces in the repertory, the former being sentimental and of a simple melody while the latter were faster and with shorter poetic lines. With its beginnings in the mid-eighteenth century _opéras comiques_, the _romance_ was frequently disconnected from the plot as a whole, instead functioning as a moment of lyrical reprise. However, the integration of stand-alone forms within the overall drama forced a greater connection between these strophic songs and their surrounding context. A good example of such integration is found in André Grétry’s 1784 _Richard Coeur-de-lion_ in which Blondel, the ever-faithful servant sings “Un fièvre brûlante” to identify himself to the captive king. Grétry himself noted that this was the “pivot around which turns the entire piece.”

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(1829). Verdi’s works for the Opéra included: _Jérusalem_ (1847, a revision of _I Lombardi_ [1843]); _Les Vêpres siciliennes_ (1855); _Le Trouvère_ (1857, a revision of _Il Trovatore_ [1853]), and _Don Carlos_ (1867).

<sup>7</sup> For a tabulation of self-contained strophic set pieces in the _opéras_ and _opéras comiques_ of Scribe, see appendices A and C of Karin Pendle, _Eugène Scribe and French Opera of the Nineteenth Century_ (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1979), 570-84 and 587-96.

<sup>8</sup> Steven Huebner, _The Operas of Charles Gounod_ (New York: Clarendon, 1992), 262-63.

unintentionally clarified the function of the *romance* as a genre when he wrote in his memoirs:

> since the romance needs by its very nature to be sung, nothing else should be except that piece, for then it would produce an even greater effect: I remember I was tempted not to let it be preceded by any other music in the second act, solely for that reason…. I gave up my first idea, never doubting besides that the spectators, through the power of illusion, would listen to the romance as if it were the only piece of music in the whole work. The same reflections prompted me to write in the old style, so it would stand out from the rest. Have I succeeded? One must think so, since I have been asked a hundred times whether I found that air in the fabliau that had supplied the story.\(^{10}\)

Both the centrality of the *romance* and the archaic style within which it was written were echoed by Massenet in *Le Jongleur de Notre Dame*, an opera written 118 years after *Richard*.

Beyond their appearance in individual arias, ensembles and choruses included strophic forms, often as echo device. In the duet “Un jour dans les flots de la Meuse” between Fidès and Berthe in Act I of Meyerbeer’s *Le Prophète*, Fidès echoes Berthe’s lines in the second of two strophes, and the two join together for the refrain. A similar echo effect, this time in a chorus, opens Act III of *L’Africaine*; Inès’s attendants sing of the speedy progress over the waves (“Le rapide et léger nare”). The siren-like effect of a line-for-line echo is as eerie as it is ethereal.

The self-contained strophic numbers mentioned above were not regularly included in a larger formal unit, for such inclusions, composers often turned to the

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cavatine, a tripartite number not to be confused with its Italian cognate.\textsuperscript{11} The slow, lyric cavatine was not appended by a faster, more virtuosic cabalette as was common in Italian forms. Instead, the cavatine signified an ABA’ form in which the middle section often contrasted the first in both tempo and orchestral figuration. Characteristic of Gounod’s use of the cavatine is Faust’s “Salut! demeure chaste et pure,” whose tonal framework of I – V – I is interrupted by a move to III at the end of the B section: A$_{b}$ – E$_{b}$ [C] – A$_{b}$.

Gounod subtly reharmonizes Faust’s $c_{1}$ from 1 in C major to 3 in A$_{b}$ major, thus forming a third-relationship over the entire aria.\textsuperscript{12} Composers were by no means bound by a tonic/dominant harmonic framework as the unclassified aria “Fille des rois” from Act II of L’Africaine indicates. Here, Meyerbeer begins in D, moves to G minor for the middle section (ending on A = V/D), then returns to D for the final section. Though he does not label it as such, “Fille de rois” unambiguously follows the formal, harmonic, and dramatic conventions of a cavatine. Indeed, all of these trends manifest themselves in opéras comiques after 1860, so that the antiquated and somewhat artificial distinction of recitatives in grand opéras versus spoken dialogue in opéras comiques gave way to innovative solutions such as overlapping numbers and melodrama (spoken text over an orchestral accompaniment). These solutions proved essential to the renewal of opéra comique. The spoken texture of these melodramas greatly influenced the trend toward a

\textsuperscript{11} By the 1820s, the Italian “cavatina” signified a principal singer’s opening aria. Modern writers have adopted it (and the French cavatine) to refer to the slow section of a multi-part aria or ensemble. It is in this latter context that the term will be used in this dissertation.

\textsuperscript{12} When octave register is specified, $c_{1}$ represents middle C. The octave above is $c_{2}$ and below, $c$. 22
*parlante* singing style that dominated works composed in the last two decades of the century.¹³

While Massenet composed his most important works during these decades, the rich tradition of Second Empire opera he inherited was itself the product of two concurrent musical trends.¹⁴ First, the waning appeal of *grand opéra*, marked by the *fin de genre*, Meyerbeer’s *L’Africaine* (1865), forced composers to rethink and rework conventions of through-composed dramas. Second, the juxtaposition of spoken and sung texts at the Opéra-Comique prompted a critical and popular reevaluation of France’s “second house.” Such a reevaluation led scholars at the turn of the century to proclaim the Théâtre de l’Opéra-Comique as France’s most important theater.¹⁵ Carl Dahlhaus has noted that through its facile mixing of styles from its own tradition as well as the more elevated *opéra*, the *opéra comique* “was a sign and expression of a current within musical theater that represented a further step toward the emancipation of the bourgeoisie.”¹⁶

This tension of common versus elevated styles is evident on many levels of operatic construction, from the inclusion (or exclusion) of “signal forms” to the overall dramaturgical construction, the musical conveyance of the story through these conventional or adapted forms. “Signal forms” are those musical structures more often employed in one type of work (an *opéra* or an *opéra comique*) than another. The

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¹⁴ Discussions of French history of the nineteenth century commonly make use of the following designations: the rule of Louis XVIII (1815-1824); Charles X (1824-1830); the July Monarchy (1830-1848); the Second Republic (1848-1852); the Second Empire (1852-1870); and the Third Republic (1870-1940).
quintessential example of a signal form is the *couplet*, a closed, strophic form common in *opéras comiques* from the eighteenth-century onward but whose appearance in Italian opera of the mid-century, particularly in the works of Verdi, signaled a cultural shift toward the intimate, psychological portrayal of characters. Through this rustic and naïve strophic form, characters were freed from the restrictions of a multi-part aria; their emotions became more immediate, more palpable, and more quickly conveyed to the audience. Since the *couplet* was by nature a closed form, its inclusion within operas regularly constructed with multi-part, open forms forced a reconciliation of the two normally separate worlds.

Labeling the Opéra comique as the most influential Parisian theater recognized the contribution it made to the repertoire during the last half of the century. From 1850-1875, it presented 45 premières, outpacing the combined totals of the Théâtre-Lyrique (25) and the Opéra (18). Of course, the preponderance of one-act operas at the Opéra-comique helps explain this imbalance, however, its reputation as a leader in new opera was firmly established. One factor contributing to this was the relative freedom with which a work could be presented. The Opéra limited new performances to winners of the *Prix-de-Rome*; no such restriction existed for the Opéra-Comique. Thus by its nature, the Opéra-Comique stood to push generic boundaries with the avant-garde works of younger artists. In quantifying the changes made to *opéras comiques*, Mary Jane Speare notes

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three factors that helped elevate the genre into a more serious venture: length (three acts versus one act), subject matter (a work based on Goethe versus a vaudeville), and scope (imitating grand opéra by including elaborate staging, through-composed scenes, a four or five act structure, double choruses or ballet scenes).¹⁹

Not immediately evident in an assessment such as this are the commonalities shared between opéras and opéras comiques. These include the liberal use of diegetic music through the function of drinking songs, narrative ballades, choruses of gypsies (or other “folk”), all of whose primary focus was to add local color.²⁰ Further, the construction of works by means of separate and individual numbers remained the backbone of all operas produced at mid-century. Massenet’s most influential mentor, Charles Gounod, stood at the center of the confluence of opéras and opéras comiques, both as an inheritor of tradition and as a practitioner of change.

Gounod’s career cannot be summarized here, though it is important to note his influence on Massenet after 1870. Perhaps most influential to the younger composer was his sense of melody. Gounod preferred syllabic settings with comparatively simple rhythms rather than the extreme displays of vocal techniques that characterized grand opéra of Meyerbeer and Auber. At the same time, Gounod raised the level of orchestral prominence by creating frequent solo lines in counterpoint with the voice. The mixture of syllabic settings and orchestral counterpoint lead to a parlante texture “in which the orchestra emits a slow lyrical melody and the vocal line alternates declamation in speech

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²⁰ Speare 116-117.
rhythms with snatches that double the instrumental strain."\(^{21}\) Massenet frequently used this technique and expanded it to include melodrama, thus skirting the arbitrary distinction between spoken-word *opéras comiques* and through composed *opéras*, a distinction that will be explored more fully in chapter three.

In terms of form, Gounod rarely deviated from the conventional number opera plan, though he frequently imbued multi-part arias and ensembles with variants, especially in the third section (analogous to the *tempo di mezzo*). One important precedent for duets was the inclusion of a second slow section so that one character sings the first and the other the second. This shows a willingness to bend formal constraints without wholly abandoning the overall shape. Finally, Gounod’s subtle use of thematic recapitulation must be recognized as a prototype for Massenet. Huebner cites the final duet in *Roméo et Juliette* as the best place to see this technique. Gounod creates musical coherence by using “recollections of significant material in the orchestra” to underscore *parlante* in the voices.\(^{22}\) While never approaching the leitmotive technique, this duet does show Gounod’s interest in connecting the musical substance with the most significant dramaturgical moments, a link that will be strengthened by Massenet.

**Italian Formal Conventions**

One of the central issues of opera research over the last two decades has been the formal conventions applied to Italian opera.\(^{23}\) The main thrust of this scholarship is to set


\(^{22}\) Huebner, *Opers of Charles Gounod*, 279.

forward an analytical paradigm that accounts for stylistic changes in arias, duets, and ensembles throughout the mid-nineteenth century. The model for the bulk of these discussions are Verdi’s middle-period operas, such as *Il Trovatore*, *Les Vêpres siciliennes* and *La Traviata*. Taking their collective cue from Abramo Basevi’s 1859 study, the authors set forth a four-part structure as *la solita forma* (the usual form) for duets, arias, and finales. Table 1 summarizes this structure.

Table 1. Normative scene types for mid-century operas.25

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Section Number</th>
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<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Solo Aria</td>
<td>Scena</td>
<td>Tempo d’attaco</td>
<td>Adagio (cavatina)</td>
<td>Tempo di mezzo</td>
<td>Cabaletta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Duet</td>
<td>Scena</td>
<td>- - - -</td>
<td>Adagio</td>
<td>Tempo di mezzo</td>
<td>Cabaletta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Finale</td>
<td>{chorus, air, scena, duet, ballet, etc.}</td>
<td>Tempo d’attaco</td>
<td>Pezzo concertato</td>
<td>Tempo di mezzo</td>
<td>Stretta</td>
</tr>
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This understanding of lyric operatic form has helped clarify the complex evolutionary process of composers after Bellini who strove to synthesize the inherited convention of separate numbers into larger, more seamless, wholes. That Verdi had no Hans von Wolzogen to catalog and categorize his musical gestures has spared Italian operas the often stymied, if exhaustive, motive-based analyses that plagued Wagnerian literature at the beginning of the twentieth century. Indeed, it is only after a century of

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25 Adapted from Powers, “‘La solita forma’,” 69.
historical distance that Verdi has achieved the scholarly analytical attention equivalent to his canonic status in the world’s opera houses.  

The unified approach to understanding lyric aria forms in Italian opera has done much to bolster the influence of Bellini, Rossini, and Verdi. However, such an approach has essentially neglected opera in the continental peripheries, that is eastern Europe, Great Britain, and France. With respect to France, operatic conventions are generally seen as emerging from the grand opéra traditions of Halévy, Auber, and Meyerbeer. Of course, both Meyerbeer and Halévy wrote Italian operas and approached formal conventions in much the same way as did Bellini and Donizetti. One final current of influence must be discussed, as its repercussions would change the face of French opera in the early twentieth-century: wagnerisme.

German Formal Conventions

The fiasco that surrounded Wagner’s presentation of Tannhäuser at the Opéra in 1861 was not soon forgotten by the press or public. While ostensibly centering around Wagner’s lack of consideration for French conventions (he refused to include the ballet mid-way through the opera at the behest of the Jockey Club; instead he arranged for it at the beginning), the deeper truth lay in the collapse, infinitesimal though it may have been,

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27 Halévy’s opera semi-seria Clari (1828) was given first at the Théâtre-Italian in Paris. Meyerbeer ventured further into Italian genres exemplified by Romilda e Constanza (melodramma semiseria, Padua, 1817), Semiramide riconosciuta (dramma per musica, Turin, 1819), Emma di Resburgo (melodramma eroico, Venice, 1819), and Il Crociato in Egitto (melodramma eroico, Venice, 1824). For Meyerbeer’s Italian operas, see Alessandro Mormile, “Meyerbeer 1816-1824: Il periodo italiano,” Musica e dossier, 6:52 (1991), 40-47.
of the dominance of the singer.²⁸ Quick to recognize that publicity is beneficial no matter what the slant, Wagner wrote to Hans von Bülow, “Thanks to the fury of the Jockeys, this much-hampered performance has acquired a real halo. Already groups are being specially formed in my honor, and that includes some of the common people.”²⁹ This split in French taste was framed by another controversial performance at the Opéra, this time of Lohengrin in 1891, this time with more than three performances, thirty-six by the end of the year. After this, the public quickly began to accept Wagner’s operas as it had his instrumental music for decades. While Parisian taste at the turn of the century accepted the Bayreuth master, to see Wagner west of the Alsace, one needed to travel outside the capital (see Table 2). Indeed, one would see a Wagner opera outside Paris three years

Table 2. Performances of Richard Wagner’s operas in France.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>First Performance</th>
<th>First French Performance*</th>
<th>First Paris Performance*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rienzi</td>
<td>Dresden, 1842</td>
<td>Paris, Théâtre-Lyrique, 1869</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Der fliegende Holländer</td>
<td>Dresden, 1843</td>
<td>Lille, 1893</td>
<td>Opéra-Comique, 1897</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tannhäuser</td>
<td>Dresden, 1845</td>
<td>Paris, Opéra, 1861</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lohengrin</td>
<td>Weimar, 1850</td>
<td>Nice, 1881</td>
<td>Théâtre Eden, 1887</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tristan und Isolde</td>
<td>Munich, 1865</td>
<td>Monte Carlo, 1893</td>
<td>Nouveau Théâtre, 1899</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Die Meistersinger</td>
<td>Munich, 1868</td>
<td>Lyons, 1896</td>
<td>Opéra, 1897</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Das Rheingold</td>
<td>Munich, 1869</td>
<td>Nice, 1902</td>
<td>Opéra, 1909</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Die Walküre</td>
<td>Munich, 1870</td>
<td>Paris, Opéra, 1893</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Siegfried</td>
<td>Bayreuth, 1876</td>
<td>Rouen, 1900</td>
<td>Opéra, 1902</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Götterdämmerung</td>
<td>Bayreuth, 1876</td>
<td>Paris, Château d’eau, 1902</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ring Cycle</td>
<td>Bayreuth, 1876</td>
<td>Monte Carlo, 1901</td>
<td>Opéra, 1911</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* All performances in French.
² Das Rheingold was heard in a complete concert performance conducted by Lamoureux in 1901.
²¹ Parsifal was given a private performance in Monte Carlo in February 1913.

earlier than if one stayed in the city. It is ironic that by the 1890s, Wagner was “by far the most frequently performed composer at the Opéra.”\(^{30}\) As with the tremendous success of Meyerbeer, French composers competed against a German interloper for supremacy at their own national house.

The difficulty with an assessment of Wagner’s importance on French opera lies with the uneasy and conflicting view he inspired in composers and the press. As Steven Huebner noted, “perceptions that his art encapsulated the essence of the German nation coexisted, often within the same person, with the enormous appeal of his music.”\(^{31}\) The staunchest positions against Wagner cried out for a defense of absolute music, a curtailment of formlessness, and a cessation of a musical system that “crushed spontaneity and natural genius.”\(^{32}\) The Franco inferiority complex regarding absolute music can be dismissed when one recognizes the paucity of influence and reception of French symphonic music in contrast with their Austro-German counterparts. Further, the complaint of formlessness was one heaped on French composers that bent the Rossinian-Verdian plan, regardless of their use of complex harmonies or unending melody. Thus it is the last plank of the anti-Wagnerian platform that holds the most critical weight. Hervé Lacombe notes that the French understanding of thematic repetition was “essentially associated with the pleasure of re-hearing a beautiful phrase.”\(^{33}\) In that respect, the continuous replay of a tune, for instance the Nadir-Zurga duet heard eight times throughout Bizet’s *Les Pêcheurs de perles*, disconnected itself with any dramatic context.

\(^{31}\) Ibid., 12.
\(^{32}\) Ibid., 11.
\(^{33}\) Lacombe, *Keys to French Opera*, 77.
The reception of a more Wagnerian approach to Leitmotifs was initially one of tenuity, though it quickly gave way to a wholesale embrace by composers such as Édouard Lalo, Emmanuel Chabrier, Vincent d’Indy, and Ernest Chausson.\textsuperscript{34} Certainly the works of Wagner played an important role in moving opera away from an artificially constructed number plan to a more seamless and unified structure. Gounod was quick to recognize this and to perceive the problems such formal unity would bring to a Parisian audience. Writing to librettist Jules Barbier, Gounod indicated that though Michel Carré (half of the Barbier/Carré team) did not think \textit{Tannhäuser} would be successful in Paris, “I think it is possible. It is a way of expressing things that in any event is much farther from the conventional than most of today’s works. I fear only that musical numbers do not play a large enough part; Wagner clearly cannot stand them.”\textsuperscript{35} Time, in the space of a quarter-century, proved Gounod correct.

Late in his life, Gounod disavowed any Wagnerian influence, a fact manifestly clear in the formal structures of all his operas. Even his last work, the \textit{grand opera Le Tribut de Zamora} (1881), was controlled by number divisions. Such rigidity in form attests to the constant appeal, at least in France, of the self-contained number as the base formal unit of operatic construction. By 1902, however, new works on the stages of the Opéra-Comique or the Opéra bore little resemblance to their ancestors by Gounod or

\textsuperscript{34} Major studies of this phenomenon are Huebner’s \textit{French Opera at the Fin de Siècle}, Anya Catherine Suschitzky, “The Nation on Stage: Wagner and French Opera at the End of the Nineteenth Century,” (Ph.D. diss., University of California at Berkeley, 1999), and Manuela Schwartz, “Wagner-Rezeption und französische Oper des Fin de siècle: Untersuchungen zu Vincent d’Indy’s \textit{Fervaal}” (Diss., Technische Universität Berlin, 1995).

\textsuperscript{35} Letter from Gounod to Barbier dated 21 August 1860. Quoted in Lacombe, \textit{Keys to French Opera}, 116.
Thomas. The influence of Wagner had left its mark both in matters of motivic use and
 dramaturgical construct.

Formal conventions on stage at the Opéra

That the Italianate four-part structure for ensembles was a much more consistently
employed feature of French opéras may be attributed in part to the overwhelming success
of Rossini, Meyerbeer, and Verdi, each of whom was a successful Italian opera composer
before writing for the French stage. Evidence of this is quickly ascertained by consistency
with which duets and trios followed the traditional four-part plan. Steven Huebner has
shown that the majority of Meyerbeer’s duets follow the Italian prototype: one (of six) in
Robert le Diable (1831); all three in Les Huguenots (1836); two (of three) in Le Prophète
(1849); and all four in L’Africaine (1865).  

The multi-part plan as articulated by Meyerbeer could take on two different forms based on the repetition (or differentiation)
of text in the final portion (the cabaletta), he termed these “Italian cut” and “French cut.”
In 1832 after receiving the prose draft of Les Huguenots, Meyerbeer delineated the
difference between the two versions:

As there will be many duets in the work I would like some to be cut in the Italian
manner, that is where the words and rhythms of the middle-ensemble [the
cavatina in Italian terminology] and the final one [the cabaletta] are different
(like in the second act duet from Robert le Diable “avec bonté soyez ma peine”) and others in the French manner, where the words of the middle-ensemble are
repeated at the end (like the duet from La Muette “Amour sacré de la patrie”).  

36 See Table 1, Steven Huebner, “Italianate Duets in Meyerbeer’s Grand Operas,” Journal of Musicological
37 “Remarques générales” BN MSS n.a.f. 22502, fo. 65, quoted in Steven Huebner, “Italianate Duets,” 208-209.
Meyerbeer’s reluctance to cite his own work as an example of a “French cut” duet attests to the popularity of Auber’s La Muette de Portici (1828), commonly heralded as the first grand opéra.

An examination of Auber’s duet reveals a structure firmly rooted in the four-bar phrase accompanied by a disproportionately large amount of singing in thirds. Further, Auber makes no attempt to include a “middle-ensemble” in a slower tempo as the initial Allegro non troppo marking is kept throughout the duet. The overall formal plan exhibits a high degree of symmetry as is shown in Table 2. The two bar-form sections (ABB close) are differentiated by a repeat of the first strophe (to different music) and transition in the first section. With no attempt at tempo, textural, or timbral distinction, this duet represents the classic coupe français. The immediate weakness of such a form is apparent in the dramatic stagnation it implies. With no change in the second part of the duet, the characters are obliged to repeat their emotions rather than
develop or react against them. It is not surprising, then, to see that this form was quickly abandoned in favor of the much more dramatically charged *coupe italienne*, a form that will now be traced through its use by the four best-known composers of the Second Empire.


The “Garden Duet” from Act IV of *Roméo et Juliette* is one of four duets shared by the title characters. Though the finales to the first and third acts contain ensemble singing, the only other duet not between Roméo and Juliette is a brief scene between Juliette and Frère Laurent (Act IV “Mon père! tout m’accable!”). Indeed, it was the potential frequency of duets that led Gounod to take up the Shakespeare play.\(^{38}\) Five years before the première an anonymous Belgian critic quipped “When will you give us that *Roméo et Juliette* that seems made for you and that only you can give to the French stage?”\(^{39}\) Coming off the failures of three operas in succession (*Philémon et Baucis* [1860], *La Colombe* [1860], and *La Reine de Saba* [1862]), Gounod sought a libretto that showcased his strengths: the sensuous and highly emotional representation of characters doomed by fate.

This unmatched sensuousness is the strength of the “Garden Duet,” which from its beginning is wrought with tension. The duet proper is framed by one of the opera’s principal love themes, music last heard at the conclusion of the overture-prologue (see

\(^{38}\) Though one early biography of Gounod remarked that all of “Jules Barbier’s cleverness could not make the plot other than a love duet, or rather a succession of love duets.” Marie Anne de Bovet, *Charles Gounod: His Life and Works* (London: Low, Martson, Searle and Rivington, 1891), 164.

Example 1). The timbral expansion that Gounod orchestrates – a cello quartet before the duet and full strings after – sonically represents the withdrawal of Roméo from his beloved. The voluptuous sound of close position cello writing is spread out, in effect forced to separate, in the full string orchestration. Further, Gounod reestablishes D major, the key in which the duet opens, with the orchestral postlude; the fast, final section of the duet is solidly in F major.


Though four versions of the opera exist, Gounod did little to change the structure of this duet. The same is true for the Act I “Madrigal” duet and the Act II duet “Ô nuit divine!” Such stability between versions attests to the confidence with which Gounod, the various opera directors, and the public viewed these duets, the centrality of which is evident when one examines character development throughout the opera. Roméo and Juliette are each given a single instance of solo singing: Roméo sings the *cavatine*

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40 An optional cut of 53 measures beginning with “Ô volupté devivre!” (mm. 59-112) is permitted in the final version. The four versions correspond to the venues presenting the opera: Version A (1867) at the Théâtre-Lyrique; Versions B (1873) and C (1873) at the Opéra comique; and Version D (1888) at the Opéra. See Joël-Marie Fauquet, “Quatre versions de *Roméo et Juliette*,” *L’Avant-Scène Opéra* 41 (1982), 66-69. Huebner proposes that the variants between Version A and B may have been introduced as early as opening night of the première, Huebner, *The Operas of Charles Gounod*, 173, n. 15.
“L’amour, oui, son ardeur a troublé” in the second act while Juliette has a *scène et air*

“Dieu! quel frisson!” in Act IV, though it is suppressed in all versions except the original.

The two protagonists are thus defined in relation to each other rather than through self expression, a mechanism that further unites the two lovers.

Poetically, the entire Act IV duet is comprised of *alexandrines* (12-syllable verse), save one couplet before the final-ensemble. This consistency, even outside the tonally closed “middle” and “final” ensembles, gives the duet a lyric quality that greatly contributes to its overall sensuousness. Table 4 is a diagram of the major components of the duet. As the first number comprising Act IV, the orchestral prelude functions both as an introduction to the duet itself and as an evocation of the night the two lovers spent together. The regular, four-bar structure of the opening is typical of Gounod’s conservative melodic construction as evident in the similar orchestral interludes of the “Soldier’s Chorus” (“Gloire immortelle”) and first tableau of the “Walpurgis Night” from *Faust*. This four-bar hierarchy is carried over into the andante section “Nuit d’hyménée” in which even the link between the *récit* and middle-ensemble is a four-bar, triplet pulsating dominant pedal.

The surface structure of the middle-ensemble is a typical ABA’ form, though the repetition of A section text within the B section disturbs the overall balance. The final line of the A section “Ô volupté devivre! Ô charmes tout puissants!” returns to launch a restatement of the B section text, effectively doubling the length of the B section. To see how such text repetition effects the overall structure, the similarities between the A and B

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Verse</th>
<th>Lines</th>
<th>Incipits</th>
<th>Measures</th>
<th>Tonalities</th>
<th>Tempo</th>
<th>Meter</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intro</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Va! je t’ai pardonné (Ju)</td>
<td>1-25</td>
<td>D → V/A</td>
<td>Andantino</td>
<td>c</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Récit</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Ah! redis-li (Ro)</td>
<td>25-36</td>
<td>V/A</td>
<td>Andantino</td>
<td>c</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Je t’aime, ô Roméo (Ju)</td>
<td>36-41</td>
<td>A → V/A</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Nuit d’hyménéée (Ro/Ju)</td>
<td>42-46</td>
<td>A</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ensm.</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Nuit d’hyménéée (Ro/Ju)</td>
<td>46-49</td>
<td>A → D</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Sous les baisers (Ro/Ju)</td>
<td>50-57</td>
<td>D</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Nuit d’hui (Ro/Ju)</td>
<td>58-61</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>Andante</td>
<td>½</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Nuit d’hui (Ro/Ju)</td>
<td>62-76</td>
<td>f → B → E7</td>
<td>Andante</td>
<td>½</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>O volupté de vivre (Ju+Ro)</td>
<td>77-88</td>
<td>A → A7 → D7 G7 v7i/ E7 A</td>
<td>Andante</td>
<td>½</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1.5+ext</td>
<td>A toi! toujours (Ro/Ju)</td>
<td>89-92</td>
<td>A7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Nuit d’hui (Ro/Ju)</td>
<td>93-100</td>
<td>D</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>O volupté de vivre (Ju+Ro)</td>
<td>101-110</td>
<td>B → A7 → D7 G7 A7 D7 G7 C7 vii/ E7 A</td>
<td>Andante</td>
<td>½</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Reste! Reste! (Ju, Ro)</td>
<td>111-114</td>
<td>(vii/D) D</td>
<td>Andante molto appassionato</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Roméo! qu’as tu donc (Ju, Ro)</td>
<td>115-124</td>
<td>v7i/C → VB,</td>
<td>Allegro</td>
<td>c</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Non! ce n’est pas le jour (Ju)</td>
<td>125-137</td>
<td>B7 → A7 → f7</td>
<td>Andante</td>
<td>½</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>C’est l’alouette (Ro)</td>
<td>138-153</td>
<td>f7 → g7 a7 → G7</td>
<td>Andante</td>
<td>½</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Non! ce n’est pas le jour (Ju)</td>
<td>153-161</td>
<td>V/B → B</td>
<td>Andante</td>
<td>½</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Ah! tu dis vrai (Ju)</td>
<td>162-170</td>
<td>v7i/D → V/D</td>
<td>Allegro</td>
<td>c</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Roméo! qu’as tu donc (Ju, Ro)</td>
<td>171-176</td>
<td>V/D → IV/D</td>
<td>Andante molto appassionato</td>
<td>c</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Ah! tu dis vrai (Ju)</td>
<td>177-183</td>
<td>a7 → c → G</td>
<td>Allegro</td>
<td>c</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Non! ce n’est pas le jour (Ro, Ju)</td>
<td>184-190</td>
<td>G7 C7 → (vii/D → D</td>
<td>Moderato</td>
<td>½</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>Pars! ma vie (Ju, Ro)</td>
<td>196-221</td>
<td>G → C → F</td>
<td>Allegro agitato</td>
<td>c</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Il faut partir, hélas! (Ju)</td>
<td>222-232</td>
<td>F</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>Il faut partir, hélas (Ro/Ju)</td>
<td>233-242</td>
<td>F</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Ah! que le sort (Ro/Ju)</td>
<td>243-250</td>
<td>V/F</td>
<td>Allegretto agitato</td>
<td>c</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Il faut partir, hélas (Ro/Ju)</td>
<td>251-264</td>
<td>F → “vii”/C</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Adieu! ma Juliet (Ro, Ju)</td>
<td>264-287</td>
<td>“vii” C7 F</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Adieu, mon âme! (Ju)</td>
<td>288-299</td>
<td>F → D</td>
<td>Andante</td>
<td>c</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Adieu, mon âme! (Ju, Ro)</td>
<td>299-304</td>
<td>D</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ju = Juliette       Ro = Roméo
Ro/Ju = characters sing together
Ro+Ju = Juliette imitates Roméo’s musical phrase
Ro, Ju = characters sing at different times

Sections must be understood. Both can be described as a a′x, wherein x represents the harmonic drive toward the following section and in each case, the a phrase is a four-bar phrase (a + a′) (see Table 5). The repetition of “Ô volupté de vivre” creates another a a′x in the B section, but while it was x in the A section, now it is a. The commencement of the B section is underscored by a shift in harmony (from D to f♯) and texture (from...
unison to imitation at the bar) as well as a rhetorical shift from the generalities of a “night of love” to the specifics of “your loving gaze” and “your voice.”


```
Nuit d’hyménée! O douce nuit d’amour!   a
La destinée m’enchaîne à toi sans retour.   a’
Ô volupté de vivre, ô charmes tout puissants!  x
Ton doux regard m’enivre, ta voix ravit mes sens!  a
Sous tes baisers de flamme le ciel rayonne en moi.  a’
Je t’ai donné mon âme; à toi, toujours à toi.  x

A

Ô volupté de vivre, ô charmes tout puissants!  a
Ton doux regard m’enivre, ta voix ravit mes sens!  a’
Sous tes baisers de flamme le ciel rayonne en moi.  x
Je t’ai donné mon âme; à toi, toujours à toi.  x

B

Nuit d’hyménée! O douce nuit d’amour!   a
La destinée m’enchaîne à toi sans retour.   a’
Sous tes baisers de flamme le ciel rayonne en moi.  x
Je t’ai donné mon âme; à toi, toujours à toi.  x

A’
```

The reuse of B section text in the final A section (represented by the dotted line in Table 5) provides a kind of symmetry to the atypical borrowing throughout this middle-ensemble. Indeed the “Sous tes baisers” and following line acts as a refrain-like structure closing each section of the duet. Though it reinforces the sentiment of “toujours à toi,” no other duet in Gounod’s oeuvre shows such consistent use of recycled text.

An important precedent does exist, however, for the alteration of the final A’ section as evident in the Act I duet “Vincenette a votre âge” from Gounod’s 1864 *Mireille*. Unlike the common duet strategy of setting parallel strophes to the same melody sung first by one character then another, here Gounod sets the strophes to markedly different music. When the A section returns at the end of the middle-ensemble Mireille
recycles her text and music. Vincent, on the contrary, does his best to reuse his original A section melody but is forced to realign it to form good counterpoint.\textsuperscript{41} In fitting a new melody to the Vincent’s A section text, Gounod is keeping up with a common trend in duet construction. That he gives both Roméo and Juliette lines together is somewhat unusual, though not unprecedented.\textsuperscript{42} Delivery \textit{a due} in the slow section can be found in Act II of Halévy’s \textit{La Reine de Chypre} (1841, “Arbitre de ma vie”) and in Act II of Félicien David’s \textit{La Perle du Brésil} (1851, “Enfin, on nous laisse”). The latter is a more closely related precedent to the \textit{Roméo} example as it shares the singing in sixths at the beginning of the A section followed by imitative singing in the B section.

The unusual qualities of this duet are magnified in the \textit{tempo di mezzo} interlude between the two set pieces. The continuation of \textit{alexandrine} lines blurs the distinction between the set piece and the freer \textit{récit} that follows. Indeed, the tempo indication of \textit{Andante} and the meter change to $\frac{3}{4}$ set up the lyricism that marks the lover’s ornithological debate. While Roméo hears the lark (\textit{l’alouette}) heralding the day, Juliette insists that it is the nightingale (\textit{le rossignol}) permitting him to stay, though the characters will switch their positions after a third iteration. Gounod’s birdsong, a repeated flute f\textsuperscript{3} to the rhythm $\begin{array}{c}
\text{crotchet} \\
\text{minim} \\
\text{minim} \\
\text{quaver} \\
\end{array}$ does little to specify the species but does forecast the F major final-ensemble. To reach F, Gounod ascends an upward step sequence from B\textsuperscript{#} to B to C repeating the IV – I\textsuperscript{b} – V\textsuperscript{7} – I cadential pattern each time. C is then reinterpreted as the dominant of F leading to the final section of the duet.

\textsuperscript{41} A precedent from outside Gounod’s works can be found in Meyerbeer’s \textit{Le Prophète}, Act IV “Pour garder à ton fils” in which a shift in modality (minor to major) accompanies the shift in melodic reprise. \textsuperscript{42} Huebner notes that after \textit{Sapho} (1851) the only Gounod duet with ensemble singing in the initial slow section is this one from \textit{Roméo; The Operas of Gounod}, 275.
The final-ensemble restores the four-bar hierarchy of the middle-ensemble; this time with less rigid adherence. The opening phrase is Juliette’s alone, with Roméo entering ten bars later, a sixth below. Their parallel motion transforms momentarily into contrary motion before ending in a climactic unison passage. While unison writing was not unknown to opera audiences (Sélika and Vasco’s Act IV duet from *L’Africaine* is a famous example), it was most often used to forge the strongest possible connection between the two characters. In *Roméo et Juliette*, only this and the final duet employ unison singing. The latter, occurring only seconds after Roméo drinks the poison and Juliette awakes from her sleep (“Viens! fuyons au bout du monde”), is one of the most extended examples of such use in the French repertoire. To lessen the finality of the Act IV duet, Gounod interrupts the final F major cadence with a B-diminished seventh, thereby extending the lovers’ embrace a few measures longer. While such cadential deception is commonplace, it allows for the return of D major, the key in which the duet began, by softening the presence of F major (the key of the final-ensemble). Gounod’s concern for long-range tonal planning is one that Massenet would take up to great effect.

Ambroise Thomas – *Hamlet* (1868) – Act IV, No. 16: “Hamlet, ma douleur est immense.”

Though it had its first performance less than a year after *Roméo et Juliette*, Ambroise Thomas’s *Hamlet* was completed long before Gounod had begun his Shakespearean adaptation.43 While Gounod’s *Faust* was the most frequently performed

43 The genesis of *Hamlet* has often been confused with its première, a fate that frequently befalls French nineteenth-century operas. Elisabeth Rogeboz-Malfroy reports that it was composed in 1867; see her *Ambroise Thomas ou la tentation du lyrique* (Besançon: Cêtre, 1994), 46. For a more convincing account of the creation, see Huebner, *The Operas of Gounod*, 68.
opera of its time (500 performances within 18 years of its 1859 première at the Opéra; 1000 seventeen years later, in 1905), Hamlet received its 100th performance in 1874 (six years after its première); its 250th followed in 1889 – a sound reception for an opera that was not frequently performed in the twentieth century. The respect for Hamlet can also be seen in its immediate inclusion in the Opéra repertoire after the 1873 fire destroyed the old theater; Hamlet was the youngest opera to be staged during the first season of the Palais Garnier. Early critical opinion, especially in the British press, lamented the loss of several characters: Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are completely omitted and Polonius’s role is relegated to that of a mere spectator. Writing in 1881, Sutherland Edwards regarded “the piffling fourth act,” which is comprised of the ballet and mad scene, as “the sole justification for the work,” while the first three acts were “in a great measure irrelevant.”

Central to its popularity, however, were the adaptations made by the librettists Jules Barbier and Michel Carré. Acknowledging audience tastes and expectations, they added a coronation scene for Queen Gertrude. This event takes place before the opening scene of the play, but is frequently referenced by Hamlet and so forms an extension of the on-stage drama. Owing to Shakespeare’s popularity in France through a number of highly successful translations, the public (critical and popular alike) took quick notice of this emendation. Writing for Le Moniteur universel, the influential critic Théophile Gautier noted, “This portrayal on stage of an earlier event, which Hamlet often recalls with such

44 Faust has never lapsed from the repertoire since its première. Lacombe, 235, n. 34.
45 Irvine, Massenet, 83.
bitter sadness, has the advantage of being clear and of providing the musical opportunity for songs, choruses, and marches of dazzling color, serving as a good contrast with the dark heart of the action.” 47 At the same time, Jules Ruelle’s review for *Le Guide Musical* cautioned the audience to “look for long cavatinas, duets, trios, etc., cut in the usual pattern; you will not find them. In each scene you will admire fine phrases, but the author does not make them the subject of long developments.” 48 The idea of thematic fragments as the basis for operatic construction is one heavily indebted to Wagner’s influence, though Ruelle is exaggerating such a claim.

Thomas’s score is frequently cited for its innovative orchestration. The effective combination of English horn and alto saxophone (its first appearance in opera) underscores the ominous appearance of the ghost and reflects a concern for timbral precision unmatched since Berlioz. 49 In contrast, the delicacy with which he scores the choir of comedians (single winds and pizzicato strings) shows a willingness to accommodate a multiplicity of styles for the sake of the drama.

In his use of formal structures, Thomas shows a great deal more flexibility than his contemporaries, especially Gounod. While he opens the opera with an elaborate choral introduction, a convention to which Gounod rarely acquiesced, Thomas freely interjects solo and duet structures to highlight character development. An example early

47 16 March 1868, quoted in Lacombe, 107. While Barbier and Carré were frequent contributors to the best-known operas of their time, their reputation as “literary scavengers” has followed them ever since. Heather Hadlock remarks that they “reduced *Wilhelm Meister’s* enigmatic Mignon to a sentimental heroine” in their attempt to “[boil] down literary masterpieces to provide opportunities for sensational situations, catchy melodies, and colorful sets.” *Mad Loves* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 17.
49 Rogeboz-Malfroy, 233-34.
in the opera are the back-to-back cavatines in duet and solo form, respectively. The
“Récitatif et Duo” (No. 2) for Ophélie and Hamlet is followed by the “Récit et Cavatine”
(No. 3) for Laërte. While the use of this form is wholly traditional, both follow the
expected ABA’ pattern with a tonal alienation and return, their immediate juxtaposition
serves to slow the pace of the drama after the boisterous opening scene.

The centerpiece of the opera is the duet (no. 16) between Hamlet and the Queen.
Based on the “Closet Scene,” this duet is one of the most faithful adaptations of the
original text: Hamlet confronts the Queen and accuses her of murdering her husband.
Conspicuously absent from the duet is Polonius, whose relegation as an observer would
have been perfect for this scene, since that was his capacity in the original. While the
duet is governed by clearly defined tonal boundaries (as is the opera as a whole), it is not
aligned with the conventional multi-movement plan seen in *Roméo et Juliette*. Rather,
Thomas approaches each of four principal moods with distinct tonal centers. The
dramatic structure of the duet can be outlined as follows: (1) the Queen accuses Hamlet
of offending the King; (2) Hamlet accuses the Queen of killing her husband; (3) the
Queen begs for mercy; (4) the Ghost appears and spares the Queen. While much of the
writing is *parlante*, the two most melodically generated sections (nos. 2 and 3 above)
lend themselves to descriptions using the terms middle- and final-ensemble, however
loose those terms must be applied. Thus, Thomas succeeds in filling the audience’s
expectation for a multi-section ensemble (most often in four parts) with one of equal

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50 In the original, Hamlet detects Polonius hiding and stabs him through a curtain. While Polonius does
appear in the last number of the opera, his role there is merely one voice among many condemning
Hamlet’s behavior; in short, Polonius was dead long before the conclusion, and his death could have been
included in the duet without much difficulty.
weight if not equivalent structure. Table 6 illustrates the form of this duet overlaid with the four topical sections.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Verse</th>
<th>Lines</th>
<th>Incipits</th>
<th>Measures</th>
<th>Tonalities</th>
<th>Tempo</th>
<th>Meter</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prelude</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1-10</td>
<td>d</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>“Hamlet, ma douleur” (Qu)</td>
<td>11-33</td>
<td>d→B♭</td>
<td>Acc. con moto</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Recit)</td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>“Qui de nous offensa” (Ha,Qu)</td>
<td>34-46</td>
<td>B♭→c</td>
<td>(Allegro moderato)†</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>“Je le sais!” (Ha)</td>
<td>46-62</td>
<td>“/c→A</td>
<td>(Récit)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>“Veux-tu m’assassiner” (Qu, Ha)</td>
<td>62-79</td>
<td>A→♭</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>+ext</td>
<td>“Ah! que votre âme” (Ha)</td>
<td>80-93</td>
<td>f♭</td>
<td>Allegro</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>“Je frissonne! hélas!” (Qu)</td>
<td>93-113</td>
<td>f♭→G</td>
<td>(un peu retenu)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>“Vos mains ont versé” (Ha, Qu)</td>
<td>113-127</td>
<td>(B)→f♭</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>“Tenez! levez les yeux” (Ha)</td>
<td>128-131</td>
<td>to B♭</td>
<td>Récit</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>“Ici la grâce et la beauté” (Ha)</td>
<td>131-145</td>
<td>B♭</td>
<td>Adagio</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>“Là, tous les crimes de la terre” (Ha)</td>
<td>146-152</td>
<td>V/b</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>“Voilà le coeur choisi” (Ha)</td>
<td>152-155</td>
<td>b→ x</td>
<td>Animez un peu</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3)</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>“Que vous avez donné” (Ha, Qu)</td>
<td>155-160</td>
<td>to V/♭g</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>“Pardonne, hélas!” (Qu)</td>
<td>161-194</td>
<td>B♭</td>
<td>Moderato</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4)</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>frag.</td>
<td>“Cet assassin, ce misérable” (Ha)</td>
<td>194-211</td>
<td>C♭→♭</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>“Mon fils!” (Ghost)</td>
<td>211-223</td>
<td>d→♭/♭f♭</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>“Ombre terrible et chère” (Ha)</td>
<td>224-230</td>
<td>f♭</td>
<td>Adagio</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>“Ah! détourne les yeux” (Ha, Qu)</td>
<td>231-242</td>
<td>B♭→♭</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>“An nom du ciel, Hamlet” (Qu,Ha)</td>
<td>243-257</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>And♭ plus animé</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>“O nuit terrible!” (Qu)</td>
<td>258-262</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Allegro moderato</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postlude</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>orchestral</td>
<td>262-272</td>
<td>D</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Qu = Queen    Ha = Hamlet

* Verse length in the recitatives is variable, though there are more lines with eight syllables than any other length.
† Parenthetical tempos are changes that occur after the incipit.

Immediately noticeable is the harmonic and poetic flexibility with which recitative sections are constructed as opposed to the lyrical sections. Also, the shift from eight- to six-syllable lines at the conclusion serves to quicken the dramatic pace after the introduction of the Ghost. It is as though the mere appearance of Hamlet’s father has physically altered the way in which the young prince interacts with his mother. On the
musical surface, this corresponds to a return to D major, thus binding the duet in that key.\(^\text{51}\)

The conservative approach Thomas favors for melody is evident in the tonal stability exhibited by these sections. In contrast, the recitatives immediately preceding these solos or ensembles are rich with chromaticism and timbral subtleties. As witness to this in the duet, it may be noted that section 2 ("Ah! que votre âme") is solidly in F\(^\text{\#}\) minor even though it temporarily visits the key of its Neapolitan. Further, the opening section is symmetrically arranged around D minor, with the principal deviations being a major-third down (B\(^\text{\#}\)) and up (f\(^\text{\#}\)).\(^\text{52}\) This symmetrical arrangement is echoed in the orchestral postlude, in which B\(^\text{\#}\) is frequently included in an otherwise diatonic D major, and the penultimate chord, rather than being a dominant, is an F\(^\text{\#}\) major-minor seventh (see Example 2). The inclusion of these non-diatonic elements at the end sets up those keys as turning points in the duet proper.

Since sections 2 and 3 comprise the two accusations (the Queen of Hamlet’s ill manners and Hamlet of his mother’s regicide), they are naturally linked by a common disposition. What is more, Thomas uses this commonality to underscore a structural relationship analogous to the middle- and final-ensemble of duet form. The conclusion to section 3 – beginning with the queen’s line “Pardonne, hélas!” – bears a close resemblance to the expected \textit{cabaletta} shape: it is tonally and metrically stable (B\(^\text{\#}\), major

\(^{51}\) Thomas’s concern for global key structure is evident by the fact that Hamlet is bounded by E major, and that Acts II and IV also close in this key. Significantly, E major is usually arrived at through its leading tone (often written as E\(^\text{\#}\)) as in the Introduction and No. 1 (the coronation), No. 5 (the first appearance of the Ghost), No. 12 (the Pantomime), No. 18 (the “Mad scene”), and No. 24 (the finale).

\(^{52}\) The move to A major while important, is brief and not convincing as a point of repose.

in 4/4, it has regular, rhyming octosyllabic lines, and it is in a fast tempo (Moderato \( \frac{\dot{4}}{} = 66 \)). More compelling is the arrangement of text into two equal parts with broken symmetry between the two halves (see Table 7).

Table 7. Final-ensemble structure of *Hamlet*, Act III, No. 16.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pardonne, hélas! ta voix m'accable!</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Veux-tu que je meure désespérant!</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hamlet, ne sois pas implacable!</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>Ta mère à tes pieds se traîne en pleurant!</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veux-tu que je meure en désespérant!</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>Ta mère à tes pieds se traîne en pleurant!</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hamlet, ne sois pas implacable!</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>Pardonne, hélas! ta voix m'accable!</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ta voix m'accable!</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>Mon fils, mon fils, tu vois ta mère</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A tes pieds, hélas! hélas! se traîner en pleurant!</td>
<td>D</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
While these factors make it a good candidate for a conventional final-ensemble, two unusual harmonic shifts obscure its musical position as such. First, the B$_b$ tonality is not prepared by its dominant; indeed, Thomas includes a full four measures of D$^7$ leading up to an expected G minor cadence to begin the final-ensemble. While taking a similar freedom in alienating the second key area of a late-nineteenth-century sonata form, using this procedure in operatic forms is much less common.\footnote{The term for an unexpected key area is the “alienated secondary theme zone.” This term has gained popularity as a paradigm for explaining sonata process failures in the late-nineteenth century. For a complete summary of this feature as it relates to other functions of sonata form, see Warren Darcy, “Bruckner’s Sonata Deformations,” in \textit{Bruckner Studies}, ed. Timothy L. Jackson and Paul Hawkshaw (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 271-274.} Of course, the minor mode would certainly be congruous with the Queen’s plea for mercy. She exclaims “ta voix m’accable” (“your voice overwhelms me”), and in fact it was Hamlet’s voice that eight measures previously introduced the preparation to G minor.

This kind of rhetorical subtlety is magnified in the second unusual feature: the establishment and subsequent negation of B$_b$ major in Hamlet’s ode to his father. The changes in texture (solo trumpet after several measures of unaccompanied recitative), meter (from $\frac{\epsilon}{4}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$), and tempo (Adagio $\ddot{x} = 40$) that accompany Hamlet’s ode are the most striking of the entire duet and audibly signal the arrival of a new section. Thomas writes “attendri” for Hamlet’s cantabile line and it is easy to expect this to be the \textit{cavatine}-like middle-ensemble of the duet, though it is Hamlet alone who sings this music. While the strategy of solo singing in the middle-ensemble of a duet is not common, it is not unprecedented. Examples in Gounod’s work include the Act II duet between Pierre l’ermite and Rodolphe in \textit{La Nonne sanglante}, the Act IV duet between Mireille and
Vincenette in Mireille, and the Balkis/Adoniram duet in Act III of Le Reine de Saba.\textsuperscript{54} In Hamlet, Thomas approaches the Act II duet between the King and Queen with the Queen taking the entire slow-section strophe to herself. This kind of dominance over her male counterpart highlights the queen’s strength and is replayed in her solo singing during the cabalette of the Act III duet.

Returning to Hamlet’s ode, the equality of having one character sing the cavatine and the other sing the cabalette would have destroyed the drama at this moment in the opera. The duet is not about equality, it is about Hamlet proving his masculinity in an otherwise female-dominated opera.\textsuperscript{55} While in the play he kills Polonius to confirm his ability to act, in the opera he is denied such action. Thomas underscores Hamlet’s need for action and dominance through a formal convention – one that is divorced from his mother’s B\textsubscript{b} major tonality and that will have her tremble at his power. This is exactly what happens in the F\textsubscript{b} minor Allegro section immediately preceding Hamlet’s ode. Hamlet has just asked the queen if she would “kill a king and marry his brother!” This leaves the Queen speechless and permits Hamlet to begin his attack. The even distribution of octosyllabic lines into three quatrains (Hamlet, the Queen, both) is an order that is frequently used in middle-ensembles, though it is important to note that Hamlet acts as an interruption to the Queen’s primary melody in the last quatrain. A tonal shift to G major, the Neapolitan of F\textsubscript{b} minor, marks the second quatrain. While not asserting melodic dominance, Hamlet does control, as he will again later, the tonal

\textsuperscript{54} Huebner, The Operas of Charles Gounod, 274. While these are closer in time with Thomas, Huebner notes that the Valentine/Raoul duet “O ciel! où courez-vous?” from Act IV of Les Huguenots can be considered a prototype for solo singing in the slow section.

\textsuperscript{55} Reliving a fate that befell Lucia di Lammermoor, several sopranos (including Nellie Melba) actually ended Hamlet with Ophélie’s mad scene, thus ensuring the supremacy of the female lead.
direction of the music. This tonal control is most evident in the upward chromatic
sequence in which Hamlet exclaims “Vos mains ont versé le poison” (“Your hands
administered the poison”). Just before this, the Queen’s melody was harmonized to an
alternating pair of chords (I\(^6\)-vii\(^07\)) in G major. Hamlet’s line moves the harmony up a
major third so that the B\(^7\) will become the subdominant in F\(^\natural\) minor. The concluding
measures of this section are taken over by an exclamatory melisma followed by a tutti V\(^7\)
– I resolution. The resolution, however, is tinged by the addition of the \#6 scale degree, a
reminder that the duet as a whole is governed by D.

What Thomas succeeds in accomplishing in this duet is a multi-section structure
that eschews the tempo and texture expectations of a middle- and final-ensemble
structure without wholly abandoning them. Taking his cue from the dramatic impact of
the interaction between characters, Thomas creates a new dramatic paradigm, one that
will have repercussions for the young Massenet.

Formal conventions on stage at the Opéra comique

While Gounod and Thomas represent the culmination for opéra in the Second
Empire, both also produced successful opéras comiques. Faust was originally conceived
as such before it was given recitatives and permanently ensconced in the repertory of the
Opéra, and Thomas’s Mignon (1866) was unsurpassed as a multi-act opéra comique,
reaching 1,000 performances in less than 30 years. In comparison with works on the
Opéra stage, opéras comiques would sustain much growth in the years of the Third
Republic (1870-1940). It is as though the grand opéras of Auber, Halévy, and
Meyerbeer, having waned in popularity, still exerted authoritative control over the genre.
No new works premièred at the Opéra in its new hall (the Palais Garnier was opened in January 1875) came close to the critical and popular successes of those performed in the Salle Le Peletier.\textsuperscript{56} At the end of the Second Empire, when Massenet was at his most impressionable, a curious mixing of experiments with convention marked the new repertoire at the both the Théâtre-Lyrique and the Salle Favart. The ever increasing exoticism in the form of plots, settings, and local color was balanced by a more conservative approach to form. Mary Jane Speare describes the overall plan for an act in an \textit{opéra comique} as follows: (1) Tripartite choral scene [chorus→solo piece→choral reprise] – parlé – (2) Solo number or small ensemble – parlé – (3) Solo number and/or small ensemble leading to finale [without break] (4) Finale [Tripartite choral scene→ solo→small ensemble].\textsuperscript{57} She notes that the elevation of the \textit{opéra comique} genre in works such as \textit{Carmen} center around the expansion of musical sections with a concomitant reduction in parlé.\textsuperscript{58} This is certainly true, however, it does not explain the strategies used by composers to manipulate conventional approaches for specific dramatic effects. While adducing specific works to illuminate general trends can be tenuous, the increased frequency of certain plot types (e.g. stories of \textit{femmes fatales}) generates a network of references that recur throughout operas of this period. Two selections from \textit{opéras comiques} will help illustrate these approaches.

\textsuperscript{56} Among the works first performed at the Opéra after 1875 were Massenet’s \textit{Le Roi de Lahore} (1877), \textit{Le Cid} (1885), and Thaïs (1894 [the most successful Third Republic première at the Opéra]), Gounod’s \textit{Tribut de Zamora} (1881), Thomas’s \textit{Françoise de Rimini} (1882), Février’s \textit{Monna Vanna} (1909), and Massenet’s \textit{Bacchus} (1909 [an utter failure]). The Opéra did claim Saint-Saëns’s \textit{Samson et Dalila} but waited until 13 years after its première in Weimar (1877) and its first Paris production at the Théâtre Eden in 1890.

\textsuperscript{57} Speare, “Transformation,” 115.

\textsuperscript{58} Ibid. It is important to recall that \textit{Carmen} was original conceived with spoken dialogue (first performance on 3 March 1875 at the Opéra comique; the recitatives, written by Ernest Guiraud, were included for the 23 October 1875 performance in Vienna.

Like its parallel in *Hamlet*, the duet between Carmen and Don José in Act II establishes the dynamic that will shape their relationship for the remainder of the opera. Having quizzically proclaimed her love for José in Act I, Carmen escapes the authorities after a fight at the cigarette factory. Her escape was blamed on José, who accepts a brief jail sentence as punishment. Upon release, he finds Carmen at the tavern where she has just met with her band of smugglers. Carmen refuses to go on a smuggling expedition claiming that she is in love with a soldier; no sooner has she said this than José’s voice is heard. Significantly, this brief canzonetta is the only solo music Don José sings in the entire opera.\(^{59}\) Its position offstage and unaccompanied underscore his weakness and marginal status compared to Carmen. This imbalance is amplified in the ensuing duet.

While Bizet wrote in 1869 that he “wanted to change the [opéra comique],”\(^{60}\) Susan McClary accurately notes, that though the opera as a whole is governed by self-contained numbers, especially in its original version without recitatives, this duet “necessarily refuses division into the tidy numbers that usually ordered opéra comique and even (up until this point) this particular work.”\(^{61}\) The Act I duet between José and Micaëla is a good example of a closed ABAB form in which the second half reverses the order of vocal entries while keeping the music the same. This is telling because it shows their relationship to be one of an externally imposed structure, a fact amplified by the

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\(^{59}\) The famous “Flower Song” within the ensuing duet is of course a solo, but it is part of a larger scene complex and does not stand as well on its own as comparative passages for Carmen (her “Habanera” or “Seguidilla” for example).


third woman in José’s life, his unseen mother. Moreover, the conservative nature of this duet weakens Bizet’s desire to introduce change into the genre. Huebner goes so far as to say “there was certainly no worse way of doing that [introducing change] than writing a duet with multiple parallel strophes in succession” but proves that the “unconventional symmetry” inherent in the duet negates an easy assessment. Even the Seguidilla, the other duet that precedes this one, is marked by a regular structure that veils a much more ambiguous reading. Carmen’s lusty song is in tripartite form followed by an interruption by José as he pleads to hear her say she loves him. The alternate readings of the Seguidilla range from Carmen “promising” to love him if only he will let her escape, to Don José forcing this promise in capitulation for her release. A moderated view is offered by Ralph Locke, who sees Carmen’s response as tacit – admittedly, she answers “Oui” but this precipitates a final strophe of the Seguidilla, this time in full voice while José maintains a single pitch (b) asking “do you promise?” “you’ll keep your word?” Again Carmen has the last word (literally and metaphorically), but equally important, she does so through formal convention, a point not noted by Locke. Carmen must sing another stanza to take away any sense of José’s tonal authority. Though he maintains the b as he confirms her statement, Carmen forces it down a half-step to become the root of

62 It was his mother’s letter that Micaëla delivered to José at the beginning of this duet. Moreover, it is Micaëla whom José’s mother would have him marry, “Même de loin, ma mère me défend” he says (“Even far away, my mother protects me”).
65 McClary, Bizet, 89.
an A♯ leading tone triad that moves her music back to B minor. This then becomes the lead into her full-voice presentation of the Seguidilla theme.

Carmen’s formal and tonal dominance over Don José is echoed in the Act II duet as can be seen in the following table. Susan McClary’s willingness to deny this duet its conventional multi-part structure weakens its ability to function within the confines of the drama on stage and the expectation of the audience.\(^{67}\) As is evident from the table, the duet is structured on a four-part plan with two important exceptions: Carmen’s wordless dance at the beginning and the absence of singing in thirds or sixths at the end. Of course,

\[\text{Table 8. Carmen, Act II, No. 17. “Je vais danser en votre honneur.”}\]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Verse</th>
<th>Lines</th>
<th>Incipits</th>
<th>Measures</th>
<th>Tonalities</th>
<th>Tempo</th>
<th>Meter</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Récit</td>
<td>8 or 6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>“Je vais danser” (Ca)</td>
<td>1-12</td>
<td>V/C→V/B♭</td>
<td>Allegretto</td>
<td>e</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“La la la” (Ca)</td>
<td>13-38</td>
<td>B♭</td>
<td>Allegretto</td>
<td>e</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Récit</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>“Attend un peu, Carmen” (Jo,Ca)</td>
<td>38-52</td>
<td>V/B♭</td>
<td>Poco ritenuto</td>
<td>e</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>“Tu ne m’as pas compris” (Jo)</td>
<td>61-70</td>
<td>B♭→V/G</td>
<td>Allegretto molto moderato</td>
<td>3/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>“C’est mal à toi, Carmen” (Jo)</td>
<td>100-116</td>
<td>IV/V♭→B♭</td>
<td>Tempo I</td>
<td>3/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>“La ra la la… Mon Dieu” (Ca)</td>
<td>117-133</td>
<td>B→G</td>
<td>Poco più mosso</td>
<td>3/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(→8)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>“Ainsi tu ne crois pas” (Jo,Ca)</td>
<td>133-151</td>
<td>G→d</td>
<td>Allegretto moderato</td>
<td>3/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>151-158</td>
<td>d→V/D</td>
<td>Andante</td>
<td>3/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid-Ens</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>20.5</td>
<td>“La fleur que tu m’avais jetée” (Jo)</td>
<td>159-208</td>
<td>D♭</td>
<td>Andantino</td>
<td>e</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td>“Non! tu ne m’aimes pas” (Ca)</td>
<td>208-227</td>
<td>G→V/C</td>
<td>Allegretto moderato</td>
<td>3/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fin-Ens</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>“Là-bas là-bas, dans la montagne” (Ca)</td>
<td>227-252</td>
<td>V/C→C</td>
<td>Allegretto moderato</td>
<td>3/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>“Tu n’y dépendrais de personne” (Ca)</td>
<td>253-277</td>
<td>e→V/C</td>
<td>3/4</td>
<td>3/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>“Là-bas là-bas, dans la montagne” (Ca)</td>
<td>277-299</td>
<td>V/C→C</td>
<td>poco ritenuto</td>
<td>3/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>“Hélas! hélas! pitié! Carmen” (Jo,Ca)</td>
<td>299-322</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>Allegro</td>
<td>e</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>*</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>“No, je ne veux pas t’écouter!” (Jo, Ca)</td>
<td>332-351</td>
<td>vii/G→G→c</td>
<td>3/4</td>
<td>3/4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ca=Carmen  Jo=Don José
* Verse length in the final recitative is highly variable, ranging from 3 to 7 syllables per line.

\(^{67}\) McClary, Carmen, 95.
given the dramatic moment – Don José pulling himself from his duties to Carmen while Carmen pulls away – does not lend itself to the traditional approach a due. This is borne out in the key scheme Bizet employs for each of the lyric sections. Don José is tonally confined to D♯ major, and a similar reliance on diatonic melody describes his character throughout the opera. As if to weaken his position further, Bizet denies José a perfect-authentic cadence at the end of his cavatine. Instead, the leading-tone–tonic motion is harmonized, as has often been noted, with every possible harmony except the dominant: c to d♯, harmonized by A-C-E→C-E-G→F-A-C (in D♯ major: VI→V/III→III). The most blatantly chromatic moment in Don José’s song serves only to undermine his dramatic and musical authority. In contrast, Carmen’s liberal use of chromaticism distances her from the naïve José as is evident in her move to G major after José’s extended D♯ passage. The farthest musical distance possible, the tritone is “softened” to become a half-step progression when Carmen turns the G into the dominant of C, the key of her “Là-bas, là-bas, dans la montagne.” The N-V-I (D♯-G-C) progression is hardly anything new or unexpected, though expanding it to function as key centers is evidence of the Bizet’s technique of using form to telegraph dramatic intent: Carmen waits patiently during the D♯ cavatine, seizes control through her monotone G and reshapes it into the dominant of C, the goal for her cabalette.

Equally powerful is the freedom with which Bizet interpreted the standard formal conventions of the duet. As Carl Dahlhaus has indicated, it is a most difficult task for an

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68 The diatonic/chromatic duality that defines Don José and Carmen has been noted by numerous scholars. See McClary, Carmen, 44-51 and James Parakilas, “The Soldier and the Exotic: Operatic Variations on a Theme of a Racial Encounter,” Opera Quarterly 10 (1993-94): 34-35.
69 Huebner, “Carmen as Corrida,” 20.
opera composer to write a duet for characters who “cannot talk to each other.” To deny ensemble singing in a duet forces one of two dramatic solutions: split the slow and fast sections between the two characters so that each sings a part of both, or have one character sing the cavatine while the other takes the cabalette. Bizet chose the much stronger latter choice to great effect. Again, this solution was one that did not wholly abandon precedence, as was noted above (see note 21), though the complete absence of ensemble singing, save for a few labored phrases by Don José, was unusual for its time. Likewise, the expansion of duet space by a concluding recitative section was an increasingly common event, and one that was shared with equal frequency by opéras and opéras comiques. Both the Gounod and Thomas duets discussed above are particularly good examples of this practice. Finally, Carmen controls the form of this duet from beginning to end. Her opening chanson sans parole and its lack of tonal closure leads into José’s tonally stable “Flower Song,” which in turn gives way to her cabalette and its harmonic move to C major.

Just as Thomas blurred the placement of middle- and final-ensembles, Bizet also employs a non-traditional arrangement. The duet in Carmen is end-weighted, that is, both cavatine and cabalette are placed at the conclusion of the duet with only a minimal intrusion of recitative between the two. This privileging of melody reflects an increased emphasis on motivating the plot through song rather than speech, a trend that was ever increasing at the Opéra-Comique of the 1870s and 80s. In that sense, Bizet is just another

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step in the seemingly inevitable direction of motivically constructed, through-composed music dramas. The mediocre reception of Carmen in its first run attests to the audience’s unwillingness to accept some of its disorienting formal procedures. Writing in 1905 for the 1000th performance, librettist Ludovic Halévy recalled a letter he wrote to a friend who was absent for the first performance. Quoting his own letter, Halévy noted that “as Bizet deviated more and more from the traditional form of opéra-comique, the public was surprised, put out, baffled…. The only applause [in the third act] was for Micaëla’s air, one cut in the ancient, classical style.”  

Halévy’s remarks help refine our understanding of Carmen’s early reception, one in which most critics attributed its failure to the lack of a ballet, the overly sensuous nature of Carmen, or the opera’s tragic ending. While Carmen has long been recognized as significant for its penetrating use of colour locale and the sexual strength of its title role, the freedom with which Bizet approached form, especially as the opera progressed, is an equally important factor, and one that contemporary composers quickly recognized.


In 1864, Massé, then the most recognized composer of opéras comiques with the tremendous success of the one-act Les noces de Jeannette (1853), entertained the idea of setting Mérimée’s Carmen. This idea was never brought to fruition. Instead, Massé carried on the tradition of composers such as François-Adrien Boieldieu, Auber and Ferdinand Hérold, preferring the dramatic simplicity of fewer acts over the more complex

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72 Le Théâtre (January 1905), 8.
three- and four-act structure.\textsuperscript{74} The super saturation of \textit{Les noces de Jeannette} (1000 performances by 1895) can be attributed to its brevity and its frequent placement as an introduction to another opera, a common custom with one-act works at the Opéra-Comique and the Théâtre-Lyrique. Nevertheless, its tunefulness and grace lead the editors of the \textit{Dictionnaire des Opéras} to declare that it was “the most distinguished, the most poetic, the most inspired piece to be given at the Théâtre-Lyrique in many years.”\textsuperscript{75} The première actually took place at the Opéra National Lyrique (housed at the Théâtre de la Gaîté), the short-lived company organized by Albert Vizentini after the Théâtre-Lyrique burned down in 1871. Its title reflects the confluence of two historical companies: the Opéra National and the Théâtre-Lyrique. In its eighteen months of existence, Vizentini mounted twelve premières and nineteen reprises, including \textit{Le bourgeois gentilhomme} by Lully, and \textit{Monsieur de Pourceaugnac} and \textit{Le malade imaginaire} by Marc-Antoine Charpentier. These reprises reflected a trend toward reclaiming the heritage of the \textit{ancien régime} following France’s defeat in the Franco-Prussian war. This trend will have repercussions for Massenet’s later works.

Massé’s opera was based on the novella \textit{Paul et Virginie} by Bernardin de Saint-Pierre written in 1788. Within a decade of its publication, two operas were produced, one by Rodolphe Kreutzer and Edmond de Favières (Opéra-Comique, Théâtre Favart – 15 January 1791) and the other by Jean François Le Sueur to a libretto by Alphonse du Congé Dubreuil (Opéra-Comique, Théâtre Feydeau – 13 January 1794). Both achieved

\textsuperscript{74} That Massé was elected to the Académie des Beaux-Arts in 1872 to replace Auber is as ironic as it is appropriate.

notoriety in their time, though neither was given in Paris during the nineteenth century.

Both works altered Saint-Pierre’s tragic ending in accordance with contemporary views of opéra comique.⁷⁶ Not bound by this restriction, the librettists Barbier and Carré endeavored to craft a story more closely tied to the original:

(Act I) After being disowned by her family, Madame de Latour, widowed mother of Virginie, seeks refuge with Marguerite, mother of Paul, on an island off the coast of Africa. The two women discuss the future of their children, who were raised as brother and sister, when Mme. Latour proposes that Virginie marry Paul. This delights Marguerite as she had feared her son’s lowly birth would be an obstacle to his success. After the title characters proclaim their love in a duet (“Nous sommes à l’abri”), Meala, a runaway slave, enters to seek asylum from her master, M. de Sainte-Croix. The couple accompanies her to the plantation to seek his forgiveness. Charmed and aroused by Virginie, Sainte-Croix forgives Meala but asks them to stay and rest. As slaves dance and sing, Meala warns Paul of Virginie’s position and the couple departs. (Act II) Upon returning home, Mme. de Latour receives a letter summoning Virginie to Paris to receive her rich aunt’s fortune. Unwilling to leave her lover, Virginie refuses, but is persuaded by an advance of jewels and her mother’s insistence. Virginie informs Paul and, thinking that her love for him has grown cold, he laments his ignoble birth. Seeing her effect on Paul, Virginie recants and the two sing of their inseparable love. The governor of the island arrives and produces an official mandate for Virginie to leave for Paris. She faints and is borne away to the waiting ship. (Act III) Paul, consumed with grief, sees a vision of Virginie in the Parisian salons. Sainte-Croix, whose lust has lead him to France, feigns manners and asks for her hand. When she refuses, the haute société rebuffs her and warns her to leave Paris for her home. Knowing that she will return, Paul anticipates her arrival only to witness the sinking of her ship in a violent hurricane. The opera ends with Paul clutching Virginie’s lifeless body while the islanders kneel to chant that the two will be reunited in heaven.

The first duet sung by the title characters, “Nous sommes à l’abri,” is in a standard four-part form. The cavatine, like the Gounod duet examined above, is sung entirely a due, and is infused with references to “mon frère” and “ma soeur” sung in close

imitation. Certainly a reference to the love shared by Paul and Virginie, the unison writing is allotted to the cabalette. Paul then Virginie sing separate rhymed strophes, then join for a final repetition of Paul’s music with Virginie taking a new contrapuntal line. The omission of any interstitial music strengthens the resolve of the characters, if it weakens their portrayal as multifaceted characters.

As crafted by Barbier and Carré, the story centers around the grand duo in Act II, in which both characters undergo a psychological and emotional reversal. Massé emphasizes this centrality by making it the longest and most complex duet of the opera. Its form is given in Table 9.


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Verse</th>
<th>Lines</th>
<th>Incipits</th>
<th>Measures</th>
<th>Tonalities</th>
<th>Tempo</th>
<th>Meter</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Récit</td>
<td>6→8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>“Virginie! J’ai retrouvé ton coeur” (Pa,Vi)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>V/A→A/V/E</td>
<td>Moderato</td>
<td>e</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>“Je comprends” (Pa)</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>E→V/E</td>
<td>Andante sonstenuito</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>“Mais, sans parler de moi” (Pa,Vi)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>E→V/A</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>“Ah! puisque tu nous fuis” (Pa)</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>a→A</td>
<td>Allegretto appassionato</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ens.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>“Hélas! que ne veux tu me suivre” (Vi)</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>a→V/A</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>“J’apaisera ta crainte” (Pa)</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>V/A→(F)→V/A</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>“Ah! laisse-moi te suivre” (Pa/Vi)</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>A</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Récit</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>“Ma mère ordonne!” (Vi,Pa)</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>f→iii/c</td>
<td>Même mouv’</td>
<td>e</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>“Ah! c’en est trop” (Vi)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>c→V/e</td>
<td>Moderato</td>
<td>e</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td>“Quoi! que dis-tu?” (Pa,Vi)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>c→V/A</td>
<td>Allegretto</td>
<td>e</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>orchestral interlude</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>V/A</td>
<td>All’ maestoso</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>“Par le ciel qui m’entendre” (Vi)</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Più lento</td>
<td>(e)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ens.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>“Ah! maintenant que le tonnerre” (Pa)</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>V→V/A</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>“Par le ciel qui m’entendre” (Vi/Pa)</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>A</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Récit</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>“Le voir, l’entendre encore” (Pa)</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Andantino</td>
<td>(e)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pa=Paul  Vi=Virginie
* Verse length at the end of the central and final recitative is highly variable.
Massé’s approach to form is the most conservative of the four composers surveyed, evident in the clearly defined tonal and poetic structures of the middle- and final-ensemble. His use of a single governing tonality to unify a duet, while still occasionally employed, was by now a mark of a bygone practice. Even Gounod’s tonal boundary of D major in “Va! je t’ai pardonné” from Roméo et Juliette only achieves this balance after the conclusion of the cabalette, thus undermining the large-scale tonal stability with a more subtle and small-scale approach to harmonic organization. Massé’s lack of harmonic daring – the two most distant keys explored are the lowered mediant and subdominant – is reminiscent of the one- and two-act opéras comiques which established him as a major composer. In Les Noces de Jeannette for instance, the bounding key of E major is never far from the related keys of individual numbers (see Table 10). The seemingly distant keys of A♭ and E♭ for the latter numbers are more accurately read as enharmonic keys in E major. A similar tightly controlled key scheme is evident his Galathée, though Massé introduces the key of the Neapolitan and its dominant as a structurally significant tonality. In both Les Noces de Jeannette and Galathée, Massé uses very little chromaticism so that the self-contained numbers are never far removed from their key. This kind of pervading diatonicism is mitigated in Paul 

Table 10. Key relationships of individual numbers in Massé’s Les Noces de Jeannette.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overture</th>
<th>Air No.1</th>
<th>Chanson No.2</th>
<th>Duo No.3</th>
<th>Couplets No.4</th>
<th>Air de Meubles No.5</th>
<th>Rossignol No.6</th>
<th>Duo No.7</th>
<th>Final No.8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>E♭/A</td>
<td>E♭</td>
<td>G – D</td>
<td>C(F)C</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>G – C</td>
<td>A♭ (=G♭)</td>
<td>E♭ (=D♯)</td>
<td>G – E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I iv/IV</td>
<td>vii</td>
<td>Ⅲ-Ⅴ/Ⅲ</td>
<td>Ⅵ</td>
<td>Ⅴ/Ⅲ</td>
<td>Ⅲ-Ⅵ</td>
<td>Ⅲ</td>
<td>vii</td>
<td>Ⅲ-I</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
et Virginie by exploration of unusual harmonic turns to portray storms, violent passions, and the journey through a tropical forest. Such expanded tonality along with the heightened drama of the story lead Arthur Pougin to note that the opera was:

a true lyric drama whose resonance was quite large, thanks to the name of its author and one of the principal characters, M. Capoul; moreover, in my opinion, it is extremely far removed from the pretty little scores that Massé had written before, which is appropriate for its fine talent, delicacy and gracefulness.  

A similar view is taken by Victor Wilder in his review for Le Ménestrel:

It is precisely because we were struck and touched by efforts of Massé to elevate his style and to expand his palette, that we believed him able to do this. A work of this value necessarily calls for analysis and deserves better than 'praises with exceptions'.

The exceptions taken by critics centered around Massé’s uninspired instrumentation. The frequent use of low strings and brass to portray the dense forest and tumultuous storm lead to comparisons with Bizet and Massenet. Writing with the historical distance of forty years, Julien Tiersot noted that Paul et Virginie marked an “interesting development” in the history of the opéra comique, but that it was not to the composers of Massé’s generation to lead that genre “to the limits it would reach.”

Conclusions on Form

While many scholars have noted the gradual change of conventional structure, these four examples show a consistent pattern of disintegration of that structure. Most noticeable is the expansion of the four parts to include a closing section of recitative. This

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78 Le Ménestrel, 23 November 1876.
denies the audience a chance to “intrude” at the high-point of the duet (the close of the cabalette) thus closing one of the most gaping wounds in the quest for dramatic realism, the interruption of the narrative with applause. Instead, the drama is propelled beyond the duet space proper, into a realm of reflection, confrontation, or departure.

It is important to note that while the five-part trend is becoming more common, it is by no means the only solution to the awkward problem of how to create a more realistic duet. Indeed, the standard structure, wherein both voices close the duet singing together in the cabalette, remained a popular choice for another quarter century.

Examples illustrating this from among the operas just surveyed include: from Roméo et Juliette the “Madrigal” (Act I, No. 4); from Hamlet the duet “Vains regrets! tendresse éphémère!” (Act I, No. 2), “L’âme de votre fils” (Act II, No. 8),\(^{80}\) and the trio “Le voilà! Je veux lire enfin dans sa pensée!” (Act III, No. 15); from Carmen the duet “Parle-moi de ma mère!” (Act I, No. 7) and “Je suis Escamillo” (Act III, No. 23),\(^\text{81}\) from Paul et Virginie “J’aime à reparler de leurs premiers ans” (Act I, No.1 ), “Nous sommes à l’abri” (Act I, No. 3), and the quartet “Maître! toi! pauvre créature!” (Act II, No. 10). Except for the two indicated, there is an obvious “applause point” built into the music. Certainly composers did not deny an expectation of the cavatine-cabalette structure to deliver lyric melodies and vocal pyrotechnics while simultaneously bringing together (or forcing apart) two characters; however, with the increased desire for more seamless acts, the duet

\(^{80}\) Though this duet ends with both voices together at the end of the final-ensemble, it proceeds without a break to the next scene.

\(^{81}\) As with the above note, this duet ends with both voices concluding the cabalette together, though during the orchestral postlude, Escamillo’s knife breaks and Don José is about to strike him when Carmen enters, thus leaving no room for applause.
became an easy choice for jettisoning convention in favor of increased dramatic continuity.

Other departures in the conventional duet form include the appearance of a slow lyric section, usually set to lines of even length, in places other than the expected *cavatine*. Frequently, lyric sections precede the *cavatine*, as they do in Bizet’s *Don Procopio* (“Ah! voyez si je suis bonne” Act II, No. 8) or his *Les Pêcheurs de Perles* (“Léïla!, Dieu puissant” Act II, No. 9). Occasionally they occupy the middle space between ensembles, though this kind of use, either with a chorus or with one of the soloists, has been long associated with such sections. One final use of lyric sections is to interrupt the *cabalette*, as is seen in Auber’s *Le Premier Jour de Bonheur* (“O mon Hélène, o bien suprême” (Act II, No. 13). This last example, while not as frequently used in operas before Massenet, has the potential for an important development of conventional form, that of nesting one section within the space of another. This technique was one that Massenet would explore in his operas before 1890, the works to which we shall now turn.
CHAPTER III
INTERPRETED CONVENTIONS
MASSENET’S OPERAS BEFORE 1890

Though Massenet entered the Paris Conservatoire as a pianist in 1853, it was not long before he began to supplement his private instruction income by taking a job playing triangle in the Gymnase orchestra in the Boulevarde de Bonne-Nouvelle. More important for his future direction as a composer was his “promotion” as a timpanist to the Théâtre Lyrique, where he worked from 1857 until he won the Prix de Rome in 1863. Here he would have had a chance to perform the premières of three Gounod operas, *Le Médecin malgré lui* (15 January 1858), *Faust* (19 March 1859), *Philémon et Baucis* (18 February 1860), and Reyer’s *La statue* (11 April 1861), to mention only the best known composers. Other significant productions of those years include Weber, *Euryanthe* and *Abu Hassan*; Mozart, *Les noces de Figaro* and *L’Enlèvement au sérail*; Gluck, *Orphée*; Beethoven, *Fidelio*; Jules Beer, *La fille d’Égypte*; and Bizet, *Les Pêcheurs de Perles.*

Though he missed the chance to perform Verdi’s *Rigoletto* (on 24 December 1863 he would have been en route to Rome), his brief stint as a substitute at the Théâtre Italien in 1861 positioned him to rehearse Wagner’s music in advance of the French-language première of *Tannhäuser* at the Opéra. The orchestra was deeply divided over the appropriateness of Wagner’s music to Parisian audiences, though Massenet sided with the pro-Wagnerites.

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Generally reticent about naming influences, Massenet’s *Mes Souvenirs* mentions Gounod and Thomas as mentors but not specifically models.³ It is clear that Massenet learned much from his experience in the opera orchestra pit. His sense of dramaturgy was colored by the works of Gounod and Bizet, especially in the intimate portrayal of lead characters set in relief to a bustling background (Carmen vs. Manon, for instance). Massenet was also quick to develop a sense of the Leitmotif, which, while never dominating his work, did become a consistent element in the operas from *Le Roi de Lahore* (1877) to *Don Quichotte* (1910).

What Massenet inherited from Gounod and Thomas, among other contemporaries, was an approach to opera that was bounded by multi-movement aria and ensemble forms. How Massenet interpreted these conventions set him apart from Second Empire composers and reveals a powerful shift in the ways operas were conceived and received. Throughout his early career, Massenet skillfully blended elements that the audience expected with forms less familiar yet dramatically plausible. The work that best shows his interpretation of inherited conventions is *Hérodiade*, first performed in 1881.

*Hérodiade*

In the summer of 1877, Massenet visited Turin, Italy, for a performance of *Le Roi de Lahore*, given as *Il re di Lahore*, at the Teatro Regio. It was there that he met publisher and impresario Guilio Ricordi, who proposed the idea of a commission for a new work to be premièred on an Italian stage. Within six months, Ricordi had a scenario drafted by Angelo Zanardini, the translator of *Le Roi de Lahore*, and sent it to Massenet.

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in Paris. Zanardini’s work formed the outline of a narrative based on the third of the *Trois Contes* by Gustave Flaubert.\(^4\) Massenet’s preference for working with French texts, however, resulted in the composer commissioning Paul Milliet, working with Henri Grémont (the nom de plume of publisher Georges Hartmann) to create a French translation. The composition of *Hérodiade* began in March 1879 and was finished with the piano-vocal draft by the end of that year. Following several months of interrupted work, Massenet began the orchestration in the fall of 1880 and completed it in the summer of 1881.

During the orchestration process, Ricordi wrote Hartmann to indicate that his calendar had changed and that Massenet’s opera would not be premièred at La Scala as intended. Writing back, Massenet was “much saddened, for [you] seemed to show a complete disinterest in *Hérodiade*.”\(^5\) The decision to abandon the commission led Massenet to seek alternative venues, including the Opéra and Opéra-Comique, though both houses rejected him because of the opera’s incoherent plot. Massenet related a fanciful story of a chance meeting with Édouard Calabrési, director of the Théâtre de la Monnaie in Brussels, who begged the composer for a chance to stage *Hérodiade*.\(^6\) In reality, it is much more likely that Hartmann, one of the librettists for the work and also the publisher of the first edition, was in negotiations with Calabrési to produce the work.\(^7\)

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The result was a lavish staging at the Monnaie on 19 December 1881 that drew Parisian socialites in expressly arranged trains to witness the spectacle.

The seemingly direct triumph of *Hérodiade* in no way compares with its circuitous composition. In what would be Massenet’s first real triumph, the composer took great pains to craft his opera to suit the dramatic needs of the story. The genesis and compositional history of *Hérodiade* have not yet been satisfactorily explained, but such an investigation is beyond the scope of this study. Because Massenet’s revisions were performed during his lifetime and because the four act version has been the most frequently performed in the twentieth century, it will serve as the basis for this analysis.

*Hérodiade* is the first of Massenet’s operas to break away from the standard arrangement of acts into numbers. Though conventional forms are still present, they are not articulated as such. The result is a much more visibly unified score, a plan that Massenet maintained for his twenty-one remaining operas. If *Le Roi de Lahore* represented Massenet’s entrance into the world of grand opéra, *Hérodiade* pointed him in the direction his career would maintain thereafter. It is an excellent work with which to begin examining Massenet’s interpretation of conventional form.

By far the most common form used throughout *Hérodiade* is the slow, tri-partite *cavatine*. This describes the two most famous arias in the work: Salomé’s “Il est doux, il est bon” (Act I, Scene 1) and Hérode’s “Vision fugitive” (Act II, Scene 5), as well as

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8 *Hérodiade* exists in at least three separate and distinct versions, in three, four, and five acts. The première in Brussels was in 3 acts and 5 tableaux, while the revised version, possibly performed as early as 23 February 1882 in Milan, was certainly in place by the 1 February 1884 production at the Théâtre Italien in Paris. The manuscript for this revised version is in the Bibliothèque-Musée de l’Opéra de Paris (Rés. A 736 a, I-IV). A working copy antedating the Brussels première indicates 5 acts and 7 tableaux and is held at Yale University (FRKF Deposit 544, Range Vault 3 Section B, Frederick R. Koch Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library).
Hérodiade’s “Ne me refuse pas!” (Act I, Scene 3), Phanuel’s “Astres étincelants que l’infini promène” (Act III, Scene 8), and Salomé’s “Charme des jours passés” (Act III, Scene 9). All but the last two are set off from the ensuing music by a rest with fermata, allowing the audience a moment to applaud. While these interruptions represent a break in the dramatic continuity, Massenet employs several methods to minimize them. As he developed his compositional style, the methods to avoid interruption became increasingly sophisticated.

Duet Structures in *Hérodiade*

Phanuel’s aria “Astres étincelants” was not part of the original three act version but was added for bass Edouard de Reszke after he created the role. It concludes with a moment of stasis when the character stares out into the heavens. The stage directions read: “il reste absorbé dans la contemplation de la nuit étoilée” (“he remains absorbed in the contemplation of the starry night”). At the moment of his cadence, the full orchestra sounds a brilliant C major chord then drops out with only the upper strings remaining. The void is thus filled with the shimmering sound of the violin’s high register, though this alone is not sufficient to halt an enthusiastic response to Phanuel’s aria.

More subtle is Massenet’s manipulation of the three-part form. The sections are clearly articulated with tenuto cadences in the voice before the beginning of the next section. The three sections are of nearly equal length (A=15 measures, B=23, A´=19), permitting the audience a reasonable assumption as to when the aria will conclude. But Massenet blurs the conclusion to the A´ section by effecting a momentary return to music that opened the B section.
The textures of the two sections could not be more distinct: the A section opens with sustained chords in the upper woodwinds while the B section is permeated by the strings on a four octave unison C played to a continuously pulsating rhythm (\(\overline{\text{C}}\)). Thus, when Massenet returns to B music at the end of the A’ section, he has removed the sense of balance inherent in three-part form. This is further obscured by his refrain-like use of the final words in the A section: “Quel est ce Jean? est-ce un homme? est-ce un Dieu?” (“Who is this John? Is he a man? Is he God?”). Each interrogative is punctuated by silence and, in keeping with the symmetrical expectations of the cavatine, they appear at the end of the A’ section with the same orchestration that was used the A part. Their appearance at the end of the B section, however, is unexpected and serves not only to articulate the return to A’ but also to insinuate the question of Jean’s being (mortal or divine) more deeply into Phanuel’s mind.

The character of Phanuel, the Chaldean astrologer, while essential to the opera, is only marginal in Gustave Flaubert’s original, in which he is described only as an “Essene.” In contrast with the Flaubert story, Massenet’s Phanuel knows the secret of Salomé’s lineage: she is the daughter of Hérodiade, a fact that is only exposed in the concluding tableaux, though Salomé had posed the question to Phanuel in Act I. At the opening of Act III, Phanuel questions the nature of Jean, thus reflecting and foiling Salomé’s earlier questions.\(^9\) Hérodiade enters immediately following Phanuel’s aria and sets up one of the most striking and formally disjunct moments in the opera. Indeed,

\(^9\) Flaubert raised the question of Jean’s dual identity through a rhetorical aside. The unnamed narrator muses, “If Jokanaan [Jean] were really Elias, he would be able to avoid it [death]; and if her were not, killing him was a matter of no importance.” Gustave Flaubert, “Herodias,” in Three Tales, trans. Robert Baldick (London: Penguin Books, 1961), 122.
Hérodiade’s presence turns what was a simple self-contained cavatine into the middle ensemble of a four-part duet, albeit one whose cabaletta will undergo significant formal stress. Forcing Phanuel to acquiesce, she demands to know who has stolen Hérode’s affections. Phanuel describes the motion of the stars that inscribe her fate and adds that only her lost child could end this suffering. Indignantly, Hérodiade demands a name and Phanuel reveals it – Salomé.

This confluence of identities, Salomé as innocent child and libidinous rival, has an important effect on the musical structure of this dramatic moment. As we just noticed, Hérodiade alters the function of Phanuel’s cavatine by extending the space after its conclusion to include récit that will lead to a cabaletta. When Phanuel reveals to Hérodiade that Salomé is her daughter, he does so in a kind of cabaletta, thus providing a conventional resolution to his earlier cavatine. The difficulty lies in the breakdown of this cabaletta half way through its structure, a breakdown that reflects Salomé’s musical control over this scene even though she is not physically present.

Table 1 provides an outline of this duet. Immediately evident is that the final ensemble has the surface appearance of a standard cabaletta. The tempo is faster than the middle ensemble, Allegro maestoso compared to the former Andante, and it is bounded by E minor, a chromatic third away from the tonally stable C major of the cavatine. Moreover, it ends with both Hérodiade and Phanuel singing together, though it is this ensemble singing that presents the greatest problem to such a “conventional” interpretation. Hérodiade was absent during the cavatine portion of this scene, making the
possibility of a duet structure tenuous at best. While the possibility of solo singing in the
\textit{cavatine} of a duet is one explored by many composers, it is done with both characters on
stage. In the operas of Gounod, Thomas, and Bizet, there are no closed-form duets in
which one of the characters is physically absent from the first half of the scene, though
this unique possibility is one that will be explored by Massenet in later operas as a
substantial change to the conventional form.

More troubling for the designation of \textit{cabalette} is the tonal move to E\textsubscript{b} major
(functioning as the leading tone to the general key of E minor) with its concomitant shift
to a slow tempo. By inserting this slow, lyric section within the context of the \textit{cabalette},
Massenet deforms the overall structure and takes away from the potency of the larger
multi-part form. This practice exemplifies one of the three common ways to reconstruct
convention discussed in chapter one. The move to the slower section is cleverly disguised
by a two-fold shift employing both a common motive and a common-tone modulation.
First, Massenet restates the motive that opened this *cabalette* (see Example 1a) to open its second phrase (“L’horizon devient,” Example 1b). The drastic reduction in tempo, from Allegro maestoso ($\text{\textit{=}} 104$) to Large (no metronome mark given) is mitigated by double dotting the motive itself, though there can be no doubt of the tempo change. Second, the ascending tremolo arpeggio, originally in the violins, is reworked as a pedal point in the low strings.

The common-tone modulation is equally striking (see Example 2). Here, the fluctuating harmony of the dozen preceding bars is finally stabilized in C major. The unaccompanied vocal ascent through $c^1\text{-}e^1\text{-}g^1$ leaves no doubt as to the proper resolution of the $g^1$. It is avoided, however, through a reharmonization of the old dominant as the new mediant. This occurs at a tempo change to Andante that serves as the opening of
Example 1b. *Hérodiade*, Act III, Scene 8, mm. 148-151.

Example 2. *Hérodiade*, Act III, Scene 8, mm. 162-163.
the next major section. As if to solidify this move and to ally it with the reworked motive, Massenet used the same unaccompanied arpeggio to precede the tempo shift to Large (see Example 3). The symmetry involved in this passage is indicative of Massenet’s concern for formal clarity in an otherwise fluid medium.


This fluidity is taken a step further when a fully-formed lyric section emerges out of the Andante tempo change. For the first time, Hérodiade and Phanuel sing together: she of finding her child’s identity, he of her need to remember the past. Hérodiade is unable to ingratiate herself to Phanuel, even though she seeks information that only he can provide. She dominates the melody by initiating the music (she precedes the orchestra with her anacrusis), providing the material that Phanuel imitates, effecting a return to previously heard music, and placing the cadences where she would have them. This last trait is most evident at the final cadence: Hérodiade transcends her $b^2_7$ of the $E_b$ major cadence to a $c^3_7$ while the orchestra and Phanuel drop out entirely. Her $C_b$ will be
reinterpreted as B♭ and will effect the transition back to E minor, the key that opened
Phanuel’s cabalette over 80 measures ago.

This scene with its constituent cavatine and cabalette shows Phanuel as doubly
alienated. First, Massenet alters the mechanism of the cavatine with a false return to B-
section material, thereby denying him a full force recapitulation and the strength to
support an interruption of the drama with the audience’s applause. Second, his solo
cabalette, the expected companion, is effectively destroyed by the entrance of Hérodiade
and her constant interruption of his musical statements. These interruptions are so
damaging that his return to E minor at the close of the scene provides only minimal
closure, though it was the key that began his cabalette. Thus, Phanuel is shown to operate
outside the two primary triangles of influence in the opera (Hérode-Hérodiade-Salomé
and Hérodiade-Salomé-Jean), and as such he remains aloof yet influential.

The only other self-contained cavatine that ends with a continuous link to ensuing
music is Salomé’s “Charme de jours passés” (Act III, Scene 9). This aria, like “Il est
doux, il est bon” from Act I, is very straightforward, though, as we have seen, Salomé
can exert musical control without physically being present on the stage. The three
constituent sections are presented without any ambiguity or formal blurring, though
Massenet does introduce a musico-dramatic strategy that will be extremely important for
his works after Werther (1893). The A section is presented with the melody in the clarinet
while the voice maintains a consistent pitch (usually b, the dominant to E major) with
motion to other notes only at the ends of the phrase. The B section introduces a much
more active accompaniment and frees the voice to begin exploring a more goal-oriented
melodic shape that will lead to the return of A. In the recapitulation, the voice takes over the melody but is doubled by clarinet and violins in the octaves at and above her pitch, an orchestrational technique exploited with great success by Puccini. The A’ section is abbreviated, only the first phrase is repeated, and then moves directly into the coda. A chromatic upward-step sequence leads to a high c\(^2\) that serves as \(\hat{5}\) of the Neapolitan in E major. From this point on, however, E major is replaced by the parallel minor as Salomé laments “S’il doit mourir, près de lui, laissez-moi mourir!” (“If he must die, let me die next to him!”).

Salomé’s *cavatine* is linked without a break to her duet with Hérode. Like Hérodiade’s attempted duet with Phanuel, this one also fails in its attempt to reach a rousing conclusion in the *cabalette*. Hérode dominates the initial scena material as he reveals that the Roman occupation is complete, “la Judée appartient à Tibère!” (“Judea belongs to Tiberius!”). Though Salomé is present on stage, he does not see her. Thus she overhears his idea that sparing Jean will incite the Jews to revolt. Significantly, Hérode does not yet realize that the object of his affections, Salomé, is herself in love with Jean – a fact that will ultimately unravel the duet.

The three governing keys of this duet are D major, A\(^\#\) major, and C major. The tritone relationship at the beginning, the largest musical distance possible, signifies Hérode’s separation between Jean and Salomé. His monologue concludes with a full-stop cadence in D and is followed by a tempo change (from Allegro un poco agitato to Andante) and harmonic shift toward G (read as the leading-tone to A\(^\#\)). The *cavatine*, in which he confesses his love to Salomé, is solidly in A\(^\#\) but is unusual in its meter shift at
the midpoint. Table 2 diagrams the form of this *cavatine*. Massenet maintains a four-bar phrase structure to set each line of *alexandrines*. Overall, the two halves are symmetrically organized around a repeating musical phrase, “a” and “x” respectively. Ironically referencing Jean’s captivity, Hérode compares his desire for Salomé to a prisoner who desires only the sun. The rhetorical move is accompanied by one of rhythmic subdivision: simple triple becomes compound triple. Massenet exploits this by more frequently altering the four-bar phrase structure that defined the first half. The whole second half of this *cavatine* is an exact repeat of Hérode’s arioso in Act I, the first solo music he sings in the opera. Considerable textual

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Rhyme</th>
<th>Measures</th>
<th>Tonality</th>
<th>Meter</th>
<th>Musical Phrase</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>orchestral introduction</td>
<td></td>
<td>45-49</td>
<td>A₄</td>
<td>¾</td>
<td>intro</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demande au prisonnier qui revoit la lumière,</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>50-53</td>
<td>A₄→g⁰</td>
<td>a</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Au coeur désespéré qui renaît à l'amour,</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>54-57</td>
<td>b₄→D₄</td>
<td>b</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demande-leur, enfant, ce qu'ils veulent sur terre?</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>58-61</td>
<td>ct⁰→E₃</td>
<td>c</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ils oublient tout, la nuit, le froid et la misère:</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>62-65</td>
<td>E₃→g⁰</td>
<td>a</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ils ne désirent rien, car ils ont le soleil!</td>
<td>c</td>
<td>66-69</td>
<td>c→C</td>
<td>d</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ils ont la joie, ils ont un horizon vermeil!</td>
<td>c</td>
<td>70-72</td>
<td>F→C</td>
<td>e</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Et pour moi c'est ainsi: j'ai tout ce que j'espère!</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>73-77</td>
<td>g⁰→E₃</td>
<td>a</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salomé! Salomé! Laisse-moi contempler ta beauté douce et fière!</td>
<td></td>
<td>79-81</td>
<td>A₄→A₅</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salomé! Salomé! Quelle ivresse ineffable illumine mes cieux!</td>
<td>d</td>
<td>82-85</td>
<td>A₅→A₅</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mon rayon de soleil c'est l'éclat de tes yeux.</td>
<td>d</td>
<td>86-88</td>
<td>D₃→y⁷/D₃</td>
<td>y</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toi seule est le trésor que je cherche sur terre!</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>89-90</td>
<td>F⁷→E₃</td>
<td>z</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salomé! Salomé! laisse-moi t'aimer!</td>
<td>e</td>
<td>91-98</td>
<td>A₅</td>
<td>x’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ask the prisoner who sees light again, the desperate heart reborn to love. Ask them, child, what they want on earth? They forget everything, the night, the cold and misery: They want nothing, because they have the sun, they have joy, they have a rosy future. And for me it is the same: I have all that I’ve hoped for! Let me contemplate your soft and proud beauty! What ineffable intoxication illuminates my heaven! My sunbeam is the splendor of your eyes. You alone are the treasure I seek on earth. Salomé! Let me love you!

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differences mark the two versions and the last phrase is not repeated in Act I; however, the connection between the two moments is unmistakable. This wholesale musical recapitulation reveals Hérode’s impotence as a leader, both politically and musically. Having just proclaimed himself “chef de tribu chez les Galiléens” (“chief of a tribe among Galileans”), he now quotes an entire musical period rather than fashioning an original one. His inability to produce new music will undermine his attempts to create a cabaletta.

The relative clarity that defines the cavatine disintegrates in the ensuing tempo di mezzo and cabaletta. The former is brief, only 22 bars, and effects the modulation to C major, the last of the three governing key areas. As if to foreshadow the impending failure of this duet, the first time both Salomé and Hérode sing together they form a tritone (G#/C), part of the vii/V that will lead to C major. The cabaletta begins with octosyllabic lines set to four-bar phrases but breaks off without any ensemble singing when Salomé interrupts to tell of her love for “un autre.” At this point syllabic regularity is abandoned and the harmonies are much more chromatically inflected, though C major still functions as the underlying key. The intrusion of voices from the sanctuary singing “Schemâh Israël” crushes all hopes of Hérode winning Salomé, and Massenet underscores this with a brilliant recollection of Hérode’s “Vision fugitive” (Example 4a). While a solo cello plays that melody, Hérode sings “Ne me repousse pas!” (“Do not repel me!”), recalling Hérodiade’s famous aria “Ne me refuse pas” from Act I (Example 4b).

10 Having just missed Salomé, Hérode sings “Reviens, je te veux! C’est ma voix qui t’implore!” (“Return, I want you! My voice implores you!”) Significantly, none of the Act I arioso is present in the Yale manuscript, which gives credence to its provenance as pre-performance copy rather than a revision after the Brussels première.

![Example 4a. Hérodiade, Act III, Scene 10, mm. 167-170.]


![Example 4b. Hérodiade, Act I, Scene 3, mm. 90-92.]

The chromatic ascent in the cello line (m. 167 in Example 4a) is the link to Hérodiade, and Hérode’s inability to incorporate it in his own sung music again illustrates his utter incompetence as a leader. His pathetic entreaty, marked “suppliant,” follows a premature climax on “Salomé,” the highest note in this section. Upon Salomé’s refusal, he swears to punish her fatal love while she cries that life does not matter if eternity is protected. Their
seven bars of ensemble singing do little to recapture the essence of the lost *cabalette*,
though they do provide a conventional end to this otherwise unconventional duet. Salomé
may sing with Hérode, but it is Jean that controls their singing. Indeed, his dramatic
weight causes all the ensembles from which he is absent to disintegrate (Hérodiade/
Phanuel and Salomé/Hérode). In both instances, either Jean or his “lover” Salomé is the
subject of the failed duet process.

There are two love duets between Jean and Salomé in *Hérodiade*: the first in Act
I, Scene 4, and the second in Act IV, Scene 13. Both abide by the conventions of four-
part division with modifications that were regularly in place at the time. The sections of
the duet in Act I (see Table 3) are clearly defined by cadential harmonies, changes in

Table 3. *Hérodiade*, Act 1, Scene 4. “Calmez donc vos fureurs.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Verse</th>
<th>Lines</th>
<th>Incipits</th>
<th>Measures</th>
<th>Tonalities</th>
<th>Tempo</th>
<th>Meter</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>récit.</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>“Calmez donc vos fureurs” Je</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>d</td>
<td>Andante</td>
<td>12/8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>“Jean! je te revois!” Sa</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>a&quot;→V/E</td>
<td>All’ vivo</td>
<td>12/8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid-Ens.</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>“Ce que je veux…” Sa</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>E→V/E</td>
<td>Andante cantabile</td>
<td>12/8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12/8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>“Je t’appartiens!” Sa</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>V/E→G</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12 *</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>“Que me veut ta splendeur” Je</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>G→E</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12/8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>“Que ferait ta jeunesse” Je</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>E</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>récit.</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>“Pour moi tout autre” Sa, Je</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>C→V/C</td>
<td>Allegro</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>“Non! Jamais!” Je, Sa</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>A→C→E→A</td>
<td>a Tempo→Animando</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12/8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>“Amie-moi donc alors” Je</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>E→V/E</td>
<td>Andante→Plus animé→en animant peu à peu</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fin-Ens.</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>“N’entends-tu pas” Je</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>E→V/E</td>
<td>All’ appassionato</td>
<td>e</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8/12</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>“Ah! je t’écoute!” Sa+Je</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>All’ meno mosso</td>
<td>12/8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Je=Jean      Sa=Salomé
* This phrase is a retransition to the A’ section.

tempo, and metrical changes. While the standard arrangement is immediately visible, so
too is Massenet’s use of a slow solo section, in this case lyric – as one might expect – to
prepare the final ensemble. This section (“Amie-moi donc alors”) is a continuous, three-
fold crescendo in volume, pitch, and tempo acceleration. Throughout this section, Massenet employs Jean’s chromatically ascending motive (Example 5), often aligning it with textual fragments from his lines. The gradual accelerando (from Andante to Allegro appassionato) helps to situate the motive in its proper tempo so that by the end of the lyric section, Massenet arrives at a tempo suitable for the cabalette. At this moment, Jean’s words align exactly and completely with his motive as he states “N’entends-tu pas les saints cantiques” (“Can you not hear the sacred hymns?”), thus launching the cabalette proper. The ensemble singing necessary to conclude a love duet comes fifteen measures later and is marked by a slight decrease in tempo and a recapitulation of the cavatine accompaniment.

Effectively framing the duet, Massenet comes the closest he ever would to the “French cut” duet structure as defined by Meyerbeer. More than just reusing melodic material from before, the effect here strengthens Jean’s position of platonic love as opposed to Salomé’s desire for a more carnal relationship. Massenet does this aligning their musical phrases but keeping their text distinct. Salomé sings “Je t’aime! je t’adore!

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11 The motive itself is first heard in the “Introduction” to the opera (mm. 59-61) and is associated with Jean when Salomé mentions “le prophète” in her scena before “Il est doux, il est bon” (Act I, Scene 1, mm. 263-265).
je t’appartiens!” (“I love you! I adore you! I am yours!”) while Jean sings “Regarde cette aurore! Ô vérité!” (“Look at this dawn! O truth!). Further, and on a larger level, the recapitulatory gesture restores the dramatic balance of the duet to both characters rather than keeping it with Jean, whose dominance had gone unchallenged since the close of the *cavatine*. By avoiding ensemble singing at the close of the *cavatine*, Massenet imbued Jean with dramatic and vocal authority. It is this authority that tacitly speaks during the duets from which he is absent, allowing references to him to shape cadence points, recapitulatory gestures, and governing tonalities.

One less obvious manifestation of Jean’s authorial power is Hérodiade’s Act I, Scene III aria in which she demands his head. The scene begins with a section of recitative that leads into her *cavatine* “Ne me refuse pas!” In a inversion and diminution of the melodic line (see Example 6), Massenet connects the recitative to the aria proper in one of the most seamless transitions in the opera. It is fitting for the title character to have such finely tuned control over melodic shapes. In terms of formal shapes, however, Hérodiade has seemingly little control. The end of her F major *cavatine* moves directly into the ensuing recitative without tonal closure (her f⁴ is part of an F⁷ chord that leads to B⁵ major). Further, though she addresses the tetrarch, he does not participate in the *cavatine*, thus raising the question as to the function of this scene: is it a solo or an ensemble? The answer comes when Jean returns to hear that Hérodiade will strike him down, to which he replies, “Frappe donc!” (“Strike me down!”). From this, the trio commences and clearly functions as *cabalette* to the earlier *cavatine*. Hérodiade has lost
her authority as Jean seizes control of the overall musical form, an important harbinger of his ability to control musical form throughout the opera.


The second (and final) duet between Salomé and Jean distributes musical and dramatic material more equitably than the first. Though the scene opens with Jean’s arioso “Adieu donc, vains objets,” with Jean biding farewell to mortal life in expectation of *la vie éternelle*, the duet begins with the entrance of Salomé accompanied by a shift of tempo and tonality. The overall structure of this duet (see Table 4) is strikingly similar to
the Act I duet shared by Salomé and Jean, though Salomé’s lyric interruption of the
tempo di mezzo is much more self-contained than the parallel section sung by Jean in the
Act I duet. It is fitting for Salomé to take the lead at this moment since we have seen and

Table 4. Hérodiade, Act 4, Scene 13. “Salomé! Jean! C’est toi!”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Verse</th>
<th>Lines</th>
<th>Incipits</th>
<th>Measures</th>
<th>Tonalities</th>
<th>Tempo</th>
<th>Meter</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>intro</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>orchestral</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>G\rightarrow F</td>
<td>Allegro animato</td>
<td>\frac{5}{4}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>récit.</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>“Salomé! Jean! C’ est toi?” Je, Sa</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>G\rightarrow G</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>“Mais… qu’ as-tu donc?” Je, Sa</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>E\rightarrow V/G</td>
<td>Un peu moins vite</td>
<td>\frac{1}{2}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid-Ens.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>“Qu’ est-ce que respires” Je, Sa</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>G\rightarrow G</td>
<td>Andante</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>“Ces mots ne sont pas” Je, Sa</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>G</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>“Ah! j’ai peur de l’ entendre” Sa, Je</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>G\rightarrow C</td>
<td>a Tempo poco a poco animato appassionato</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>“Ah! de bonheur je frissonne” Sa+Je</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>V/G\rightarrow G</td>
<td>Più mosso \rightarrow Molto appassionato</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chorus</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>“Mort au Prophète!” (three times)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>b\rightarrow d#</td>
<td>All’ moderato</td>
<td>\frac{3}{4}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>récit.</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>“C’est le supplice” Sa, Je</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>C\rightarrow d#\rightarrow V/C</td>
<td>All’ agitato \rightarrow Un peu retenu</td>
<td>\frac{3}{4}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>récit.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>“Ami, la mort n’est pas cruelle” Sa</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>Andantino</td>
<td>\frac{3}{4}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>“Je saurai donc mourir” Sa</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>C\rightarrow c#</td>
<td>a Tempo</td>
<td>\frac{3}{4}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fin-Ens.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>“Non! Dieu n’ accepte pas” Je, Sa</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>c#\rightarrow D\rightarrow V/g</td>
<td>All’ agitato \rightarrow Un peu retenu</td>
<td>\frac{5}{4}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>“Quand nos jours s’ éteindront” Je</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>g</td>
<td>All’ moderato</td>
<td>\frac{3}{4}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>“Quand nos jours s’ éteindront” Sa,Je</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>g\rightarrow V/g</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>“Il est beau de mourir” Sa+Je</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>G\rightarrow E#</td>
<td>Poco più mosso \rightarrow En animant</td>
<td>\frac{3}{4}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Récit</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>“Jean! ton heure est venue!” GrPr</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>b#\rightarrow D\rightarrow V/E</td>
<td>Allegro</td>
<td>\frac{7}{8}</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>post.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>orchestral</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>All’ moderato</td>
<td>\frac{5}{4}</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Je=Jean  Sa=Salomé  GrPr=Le Grand Prêtre

heard of her love for Jean throughout the opera. Now, with him reciprocating that love,
she finally has a chance to sing of her happiness. Of course, the eminent death of her
beloved and the circumstances of their meeting – they are in a hollowed-out crypt
beneath the temple of Jerusalem – negates any sort of exultant singing that would lead to
a cabalette. Instead, Salomé sings a sort of Liebestod, remarking that “la mort n’est pas
cruelle qui nous prend tous les deux et va nous réunir!” (“death is not cruel since it takes
us both and will reunite us both!”). Even though Wagner’s music was ringing in the ears
of tout Paris, the idea of a Liebestod in French grand opéra seems completely out of
place. Even in his most Wagnerian opera, *Esclarmonde*, from 1889, Massenet avoided this conventional German duet. When Jean cries out “j’attends la mort!” (“I wait for death!”), he does so at the very last moment of the duet, the lead into the orchestral postlude. Thus, all hopes for ensemble singing of transported love and unity in death are squashed by Jean’s forced removal to the executioner’s block. Indeed, looking at the structure of the *cabalette*, we see a foreshadowing of this false *Liebestod*. Though both characters sing the same text, they do not begin together. Rather, Jean begins to sing three lines of *alexandrines* before Salomé enters to duplicate these lines. Unable to contain himself, Jean duplicates her melody, down an octave, at the end of each line: “comme une chaste flamme” (“like a pure flame”), “rayonnant de clarté” (“shining with light”), and “immortalité!” (“[we shall find] immortality”). These three cadences, each one successively higher and with increasing rubato, lead to the fully formed unison of the last section. Here though, the couple sings of a love that will guide them in finding the mysteries of immortality, not in the heavenly consummation of what Isolde termed her “höchste Lust” (“supreme bliss”).

The tenuous transition of Jean from “prophète tonitruant” (thundering prophet) to “ténor amoureux” (a tenor in love)\(^\text{12}\) is evident throughout *Hérodiade* in the way Massenet shapes his music and dramatic interactions with other characters. At first, Jean is seen as an imposing figure whose “voix éclatante” (“ringing voice”) towers over Hérode and Hérodiade when he names her as “Jèzabel.” Even in his more intimate

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contact with Salomé, he takes control of the *cavatine* and does not relinquish it until Salomé responds to a direct question he asks. Still, the two sing different words, undermining any hopes of a transformative union between the pair. In the second duet, Jean takes the initiative in beginning both the *cavatine* and *cabalette* portions of the duet, but it is Salomé who usurps his melodic material and shapes the ensemble singing. This happens in both sections but is much more dramatic in the *cabalette*, for Jean keeps interrupting her melodic lines with octave duplication, forcing her to give way to singing *a due*. Huebner correctly identifies this action as a feminized Jean who, like Salomé, is “unable to separate spiritual love and physical desire.”\(^{13}\) This move toward feminization is underscored in the large-scale recapitulation of the Act I duet *cavatine* to serve as the orchestral postlude of this scene. Jean, the “sublime martyr” in Salomé’s words, is being led to his death, but the music transports us to a much more base moment as Salomé exclaims “qu’au son de ta voix tout mon être est suspendu!” (“that my whole being hangs upon the sound of your voice”). The lumbering triplet melody, marked Andante cantabile (see Example 7), was described by Reyer as “du rythme amoureux par excellence”\(^{14}\) and by Huebner, speaking for a conservative such as Vincent d’Indy, as “crass theological implication accompanied by crass music.”\(^{15}\)

More than just musical recollection for the sake of recalling earlier bliss (which of course it cannot, since Jean and Salomé were not together at its first appearance), the use of this music calls into question the true narratival authority between Jean and Salomé.

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\(^{13}\) Steven Huebner, *French Opera at the Fin de Siècle* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 42.


\(^{15}\) Huebner, *French Opera*, 42.
As we have seen, Jean (or references to him) controls the formal integrity of Salomé’s other duets. In this recapitulatory moment, however, the feminized Jean is wholly under her control. Massenet makes this clear through a series of references to music heard before in seemingly disparate contexts. Salomé’s initial motive, the one that accompanies her first appearance in Act I, Scene 1 and reappears in Act I, Scene 4 (the duet), is used as the opening of the *Danse Babylonienne*, in which young slave girls administer aphrodisiacs to Hérode. Eric Goldstrom notes this connection between Salomé’s motive and the Babylonian dance and astutely observes that, after Jean chastens her, the motive is no longer used to represent Salomé.¹⁶

While this is true, there is another connection with the Babylonian dance that resurfaces at a dramatically and structurally significant point: the *cabalette* to the Act IV duet. Massenet scores the entrées of the young Babylonian girl to the sound of G major harp arpeggios. The very same texture, though now in G minor, is used to accompany

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Jean and Salomé’s *cbalette*. Thus the moment of purest spiritual exultation between the two lovers is infiltrated by this most secular and erotic reference. In doing this, Massenet heightens the tension between filial and erotic love shared by the respective characters. It is as though Salomé’s carnal desire, though suppressed through the middle two acts of the opera, was never completely extinguished. Further, its resurgence in the space after the *cbalette* illustrates Massenet’s flexible approach to formal convention. Such an approach is not new, however, and a fifth part does not usually entail a change of attitude between the characters as it does here. Nevertheless, the subtle manipulation here marks Massenet’s resolve not to let seemingly standard forms dictate the long-term dramatic plan. Such manipulations would be more frequently used in his next opera, *Manon*.

*Manon*

If *Hérodienne* represented Massenet’s fully conventional interpretation of Meyerbeerian French *grand opéra*, then *Manon* demonstrates his last attempt to write an opera bound by the practices of the Opéra Comique. Premièred there on 19 January 1884, *Manon* remains his most successful and most studied work.\(^{17}\) Its epochal status, second only to *Faust* in its sheer number of performances, can be attributed in part to its clear modeling on Verdi’s successful *La Traviata*. This was quickly recognized by the press, as evident in Léon Kerst’s review for *Le Ménestrel*, where the review for *Manon*’s première

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is juxtaposed with one for Verdi’s chef-d’oeuvre.\textsuperscript{18} Surface similarities between the two include a French locale (Paris/Amiens in the early eighteenth century), a title character who manipulates her lover into living above his means, an effort by that lover to win a fortune at the gaming table, a father who interposes himself between the two lovers, onstage instrumentalists, moments of melodrama, and of course the untimely death of the title character, who manages to reprise a melody from happier times before expiring (Manon recalls “Ne c’est plus mas main” and Violetta sings “Di quell’ amor”). Tantalizing as these similarities may be, several formal aspects, as we will see, do more to connect the two best-known works of their respective masters.

The libretto, written by Henri Meilhac and Philippe Gille, is based on the Abbé Prévost’s novel \textit{L’histoire du chevalier des Grieux et de Manon Lescaut} (1731). Well-known in the nineteenth century as a novel of intrigue, it was originally an appendix to the six-volume fictional autobiography, \textit{Mémoires et aventures d’un Homme de Qualité}. The autobiography never achieved the popularity of the appendix, and it is on this short story of Manon that Prévost’s reputation is founded. Manon’s tale is framed as a story within a story. Though Des Grieux tells the story of his love for Manon, the novella opens with the narrator observing Manon on the road to Le Herve awaiting her deportation to Louisiana. Even in this pitiful state, Manon has the capacity to fix a gaze as the narrator relates, “she was in abject misery and her clothes were filthy, but all that had so little effect on her beauty that I felt nothing but pity and respect for her.”\textsuperscript{19} The centrality of Manon prompted publishers to capitalize on her name to sell copies. As

\textsuperscript{18} \textit{Le Ménestrel}, 26 January 1884.
early as 1746, only fifteen years after its initial printing, a separate volume was issued as
*Histoire de Manon.*

For his part, Massenet refined the title even further. According to a remarkable if not verifiable account in *Mes Souvenirs*, the composer met with Henri Meilhac to discuss the progress on the opera *Phoebé*. Meilhac assured Massenet that the libretto was finished but that “we will never speak of it again.” Incensed, Massenet turned to the author’s bookshelf and cried “Manon!” Meilhac replied, “*Manon Lescaut,* it’s *Manon Lescaut* that you want?” Massenet answered, “No! *Manon,* merely *Manon; Manon,* it’s *Manon!*” This instinctive shortening allies his opera with a host of other nineteenth-century masterpieces: *Mignon* (1868), *Carmen* (1875), *Lakmé* (1883), and even *La Traviata*, which was given in French as *Violetta* at the Théâtre Lyrique in 1864. Further, with *Hérodiade* and *Manon,* Massenet begins his prominent titular use of a single female character’s name: *Esclarmonde, Thaïs, Sapho, Cendrillon, Grisélidis, Chérubin, Ariane, Thérèse, Cléopâtre.* The gradual progression from vindictive *femme fatale* to penitent sinner is one that marks his oeuvre in general and that will have important implications with respect to form, especially in the title character’s function in ensembles.

The overall shape of *Manon* differs remarkably from that of *Hérodiade,* premièred just three years earlier. In May 1882, he began work on *Manon* and finished the piano score on 19 October 1882; the orchestration followed between March and July 1883. This speed of composition, while typical of Massenet’s working habits, also befits

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20 In the nineteenth century, the title was shortened to *Manon Lescaut,* though Prévost himself had nothing to do with the truncation.
22 Between *Hérodiade* and *Manon,* Massenet completed his seventh orchestral suite, the *Scènes alsaciennes,* and saw its first performance on 19 March 1882 at the Concerts du Châtelet.
the natural and effervescent quality of the score. While wholly planned for the Opéra-Comique, Massenet took care to bend the audience’s expectation to suit his dramatic needs. This can be seen in the two distinct ways he integrated music into narratival exposition.

The position of Manon as the “twilight of the opéra-comique” is one that has been recently fostered by scholars, who describe it as a “pastiche, or imitation, opéra-comique,”23 or “unlike any opéra comique written before”24 (owing to its use of continuous music), or with “the designation ‘opéra comique’ [as] misleading.”25 Such comments situate Manon in what Jean-Christophe Branger articulates as a “movement that exceeds the framework of opéra-comique.”26 Branger gives other generically similar works that flesh-out his “movement,” including Delibes’s Lakmé (1883) and Kassya (1892), Saint-Saëns’s Proserpine (1887) and Phryné (1893), Charpentier’s Louise (1900), and Massenet’s own Esclarmonde (1889) and Sapho (1897).

To be sure, Manon is groundbreaking in its use of certain elements. It was the first work presented at the Opéra-Comique to employ continuous music, though the entrenched convention of spoken dialogue was grafted over this music in the form of melodrama.27 And its use of motives, while not unprecedented, clearly represents the a

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24 Huebner, French Opera, 63.
26 Branger, Manon, 426.
27 Huebner, French Opera, 3. See also Jean-Christophe Branger “Le Mélodrame musical dans Manon de Jules Massenet,” in Le Théâtre lyrique en France au XIXe siècle (Metz: Serpenoise, 1995), 239-77. This discussion is expanded in his “Manon” de Jules Massenet, ou, le crépuscule de l’opéra-comique, 385-420.
mainstay of post-Wagnerian French opera in general. Still, there are elements that pull Manon back, like the courtesan who cannot abandon frivolity, to a more conventional approach to operatic construction. The opera is stocked with elements common to opéras comiques: many short and vocally dominated numbers, carefully articulated applause points, an active chorus, a church scene, a gambling scene, a street scene, to name the most visible. All of these are arranged and situated according to traditional number schemes, though their boundaries are blurred as never before. This tension, between the use of linear- (scene complexes) and non-linear-elements (motives of recollection), is the essence of a problem that defined French opera at the turn of the twentieth century, and the gradual supplanting of the former with the latter is evidence of the dilemma composers sought in presenting a less artificial, more natural (read veristic) telling of their stories.

Manon is a number opera whose scenic divisions are concealed in a variety of methods. Huebner counts two practices central to this concealment: (1) the use of recurring motives; and (2) developing these motives through symphonically initiated procedures like augmentation, diminution, chromatic inflection, or melodic expansion. While this represents a significant and important step in the evolution of opéras comiques, the scaffolding of the Verdian four-part plan is still visible. Two examples will illustrate how Massenet appropriated these techniques to undermine the audience’s ability to pinpoint scenic divisions.

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28 Huebner notes that “many previous examples of opéra comique with reiterated motifs and themes exist, their number and extent of application in Manon also depart from past practice in this genre.” French Opera, 63.
29 Huebner, French Opera, 65-66.
In a scene that almost exactly parallels *La Traviata*, Act IV takes place at the gambling tables in the Hôtel de Transylvanie. It can be divided into two large sections. The first is comprised of several independent three-part forms for various minor characters and the trio Guillot’s companions, Poussette, Javotte, and Rosette, all sopranos. The second part begins at the entrance of Des Grieux and Manon and is distinguished by on-stage laughter and orchestral silence followed by a change of key, meter, and tempo. The remainder of the act comprises a conventional finale structure as outlined in Table 5. Several unusual features stand out in Massenet’s handling of this scene. First is the continual interruption of internal sections in the overall scene. The *pezzo concertato*, analogous to the *cavatine* or middle ensemble, is Des Grieux’s gushing ode to Manon. The lines are borrowed from Alfred de Musset’s poem *Namouna*, the source for Gallet’s libretto to Bizet’s *Djamileh*, and reflect the duality of his relationship with his temptress/lover: “que je t’aime et te hais!...Ah! folle que tus es! Comme je t’aime!” (“how I love and hate you… Ah! you are quite mad, but I love you!”). Equally important in terms of formal blurring is Massenet’s triple use the opening phrase (see Example 8) to mirror the famous line “coeur trois fois féminin” (“heart three times feminine”). Its prominent augmented-second recalls similarly shaped and erotically conceived motives in *Carmen* and is unmistakable in every manifestation.\(^{30}\) The second repetition of the theme comes as the typical recapitulation in a tripartite form, but the third stands wholly outside of conventional practices. Surfacing for two bars in the *tempo*

Table 5. *Manon*, Act IV, finale.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Verse</th>
<th>No. of length lines</th>
<th>Incipits</th>
<th>Measures*</th>
<th>Tonalities</th>
<th>Tempo Meter</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>tempo d’attaco</td>
<td></td>
<td>1-9</td>
<td>“C’est la belle Manon” (trio/DG)</td>
<td>V/B→B,→B,</td>
<td>Allegretto brillante</td>
<td>♩</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>9-24</td>
<td>&quot; <em>Faîtes vos jeux, Messieurs!</em> &quot; **</td>
<td>B</td>
<td></td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>25-38</td>
<td></td>
<td>V/f→G</td>
<td></td>
<td>Allegro moderato</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pezzo concertato</td>
<td>12/4</td>
<td></td>
<td>“Manon, sphinx étonnant” (DG)</td>
<td>39-55</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Andante</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;Notre opulence est en volée” (Ma, DG)</td>
<td>56-73</td>
<td>B,→g→B,→B,</td>
<td>Allegro</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;Vous avez tort” (Les, DG)</td>
<td>74-82</td>
<td>V/V→V in B,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;La fortune n’est intratable” (Les)</td>
<td>83-91</td>
<td>B,→D,→B,→B,</td>
<td>trêsh peu retenu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;Tu veux bien” (Ma, DG, Les)</td>
<td>92-102</td>
<td>g→ct/D/B,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>récit</td>
<td>8/4</td>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;C’est la belle Manon” (trio/DG)</td>
<td>119-131</td>
<td>D Lyidan→f</td>
<td>Allegretto moderato</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;Nous parions toujours” (Gamblers)</td>
<td>132-148</td>
<td>f→x</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&quot; <em>Faîtes vos jeux, Messieurs!</em> &quot; (Gamb, Ma)</td>
<td>148-168</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>Allegro brillante</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;Chanter, aimer…” (Ma)</td>
<td>168-198</td>
<td>C</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;Chanter, aimer…” (Ma+trio)</td>
<td>198-215</td>
<td>C</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;La jeunesse passe” (Ma)</td>
<td>215-242</td>
<td>g→V/C</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;Chanter, aimer…” (Ma+trio)</td>
<td>242-265</td>
<td>C</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;A nous les amours” (Ma+trio)</td>
<td>265-285</td>
<td>C</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>air de bravoure</td>
<td>8/3</td>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;Au jeu! Au jeu!” (Gamblers, Ma)</td>
<td>286-324</td>
<td>c→V/B,→o/D</td>
<td>Allegro</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6/8</td>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;Manon! je t’aime!” (DG)</td>
<td>325-328</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Andante</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8/3</td>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;J’arrête la partie!” (Guil/DG)</td>
<td>329-337</td>
<td>E-pedal (V/a)</td>
<td>Allegro deciso</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;Quelle furie!” (Guil/DG)</td>
<td>337-344</td>
<td>C-pedal (V/G)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;Messieurs! voyons!” (tutti)</td>
<td>344-388</td>
<td>c→N→V→c→B,</td>
<td>(door knock)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tempo di mezzo</td>
<td>8/2</td>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;Au jeu! Au jeu!” (Gamblers, Ma)</td>
<td>388-421</td>
<td>B,→VI/B,→a</td>
<td>Andante maestoso→All. vivo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;Manon! je t’aime!” (DG)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;J’arrête la partie!” (Guil/DG)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;Quelle furie!” (Guil/DG)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;Messieurs! voyons!” (tutti)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>strepta</td>
<td>8/4</td>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;Oui, je viens t’arracher” (Comte)</td>
<td>421-430</td>
<td>a→D</td>
<td>Andante cantabile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8/4</td>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;Oui, je viens t’arracher” (tutti)</td>
<td>430-440</td>
<td>V/D→D</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>récit</td>
<td>8/4</td>
<td></td>
<td>&quot;Qu’on l’emmène!” (tutti)</td>
<td>440-455</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Tempo I→Allegro→a Tempo</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

DG = Des Grieux    Ma=Manon        Les=Lescaut        Guil=Guillot
* Measure numbers begin at rehearsal 293.
** Italicized text indicates passages of melodrama.
† Des Grieux quotes his musical phrase “Manon, sphinx étonnant” from the pezzo concertato.

**di mezzo**, Des Grieux is unable to contain himself after winning successive hands at the card table and blurts out the theme while proclaiming, “Manon! Je t’aime! je t’aime!”

With this orphaned statement of his earlier theme, Des Grieux himself confirms Manon’s triple femininity: courtesan-penitent-lover. He also calls into question the nature of the *tempo di mezzo* as the dramatically dynamic, internal portion of an ensemble. Indeed, this moment epitomizes the shift marking European opera of this period: the displacement of cantabile melody with *parlante* vocal writing.

Moreover, Massenet does not confine himself to motivic recollection from within a scene complex. The opening moments of the *tempo di mezzo* recall music from earlier in Act IV, thus providing continuity for the act as a whole. Specifically, the violin figure that introduces the *tempo di mezzo* (Example 9a) is the same in key, register, tempo, and articulation as the music that preceded Manon and Des Grieux’s entrance. Further, this leads into a similarly symmetrical quotation of the clarinet and bassoon motive (Example 9b) that opened the Act. Reversing the order of quotations allies the finale with the opening scene not with exact repetition, which would seem artificial and non-dramatic.
but rather with thematic saturation, where Des Grieux and Manon interact in a musico-
dramatic space that is defined by and defines these motives. Des Grieux’s purpose for
being at the gaming tables is specific and intentional. For him to be present without those
motives present would have been less than dramatically convincing.

The *tempo di mezzo* is further interrupted by Manon’s *air de bravoure*, “Chanter,
aimer, sont douces choses.” This ebullient C major air and trio extols the carefree life of
(literally) wine, women, and song. It is cast as an arch-form (A-A´-B-A´-Coda) and uses
regular octosyllabic lines, in contrast with the generally flexible line lengths of the *tempo
di mezzo*. It is tempting to pair this moment with Des Grieux’s “Manon! sphinx étonnant”
as a kind of *cabalette*. Their tonal relation, D# major to C major, would suggest an
elliptical cadence: Neapolitan to tonic, omitting the dominant. Furthermore, the two are
related rhetorically. Des Grieux indicates that “pour le plaisir et l’or quelle ardeur inouïe”
(“you only long for pleasure and gold”) and Manon replies “Ce bruit de l’or, ce rire et ces
éclats joyeux!...Pour Manon encore / De l’or, de l’or…” (“This glitter of gold, this
laughter, these joyous cries!... More for Manon / Gold, gold…”). The inclusion of the
three sopranos, Guillot’s companions, might seem to strengthen a comparison with the
trio that forms the second part of Des Grieux’s *cavatine*, though the constituent members
there were all principal characters, while here, Manon is the only principal. Rhetorical and tonal relationships aside, “Chanter, aimer” cannot be viewed as an accompanying cabalette because it functions outside the operatic boundaries of sung text. It is diegetic singing, heard by the characters on stage as a drinking song. And true to most other chansons de boissons, it is tripartite, lightly orchestrated, and ends with a lengthy tonic prolongation while the singers make their way to the cadence. In short, it is simply an interruption of the tempo di mezzo, and a wholly conventional one at that. What is not conventional is the multivalent nature of this “mere drinking song.” To borrow a term from discussions of sonata form, Massenet introduces a kind of “false cabalette” – in the right key (possibly) but with the wrong dramatic function.

“Chanter, aimer” also functions as the first of three specific intersections with Verdi’s La Traviata. As noted earlier, Manon shares with Traviata several large-scale, dramatic similarities, and one of the most visible is this gambling scene. Manon’s drinking song resembles the Matador’s chorus in Traviata as both are in $\frac{3}{4}$ and seek to convey a sense of escapist, non-reality in an otherwise dramatically intense moment. Much more equivalent is the function of the father in both scenes. Germont enters to reprove his son into taking pity on Violetta while le Comte enters to rescue his son from dishonor.\(^{31}\) This kind of “strong musico-dramatic rhyme,” as Huebner calls it, is amplified by the final moments of the respective acts.

In Manon, the gambling scene comprises the whole of Act IV, while in Traviata it is confined to the second scene, though both scenes are of equivalent length,

\(^{31}\) Huebner, French Opera, 62.
approximately half an hour. All of Verdi’s scene is marked as “finale,” but only the second half of Massenet’s scene can be identified as such.  

32 Massenet does not clearly identify “finale” in his scores after Hérodiade, but it is clear from dramatic (if not wholly musical) means that the finale begins when Manon and Des Grieux enter. Gerard Condé proposes a similar reading, see his “Commentaire Musical,” in L’Avant-Scène Opéra, 123 (1989), 93.


34 Verdi uses the same formal abbreviation in Act II of Macbeth (1847) and Act II of Il Trovatore (1853). Though in Trovatore he does include a short choral refrain, marked Allegro, to end the act, it can in no way be considered a stretta to the extended concertato that preceded it.

Indeed, Verdi does not reach the pezzo concertato until the final moments of the scene, leaving it formally “incomplete,” though, as Roger Parker has indicated, the “charge of the movement,” with each character expressing his or her own contrasting mood, is sufficient enough for the act to “end there, without the conventional concluding stretta.”

Significantly, Verdi has Germont initiate the pezzo concertato. Similarly, Massenet uses le Comte to begin his final section, the slow “Oui, je viens t’arracher,” here marked Andante cantabile. The two moments are musically very similar sharing large-scale instrumental doubling of vocal lines, unison or octave doubling within the vocal lines, and sextuple beat division. They differ in their endings with Massenet including a brief but significant digression before the final cadence, revealing that Manon will go “Où l’on emmène ses pareilles!” (“where all her kind go”). Verdi ends with a tutti exclamation to Violetta that “all here share your grief.”

Verdi’s abbreviated form, omitting the tempo di mezzo and stretta, has a calculated effect on the remainder of his opera. One of the most significant problems to
overcome in operatic verisimilitude is the so called “black hole” of the intermission. Composers had many choices of how to breach the gap, and the simplest was to construct the acts as continuous in both time and space, thus negating the void that separated them. Verdi does not do this between Acts II and III of Traviata. The two acts are separated by a change in both time – it is several weeks later in Act III – and space – we are now in Violetta’s bedroom instead of Flora’s town house. The “incompleteness” of the Act II finale, however, serves to bridge the two acts as a kind of meta form. We long for the stretta that will conclude the finale, and wait expectantly for its arrival later in the opera. By squelching the forward dramatic motion at the end of the second act, Verdi in fact propels the drama past the intervening abyss into the final act. The irony of Alfredo’s ignorance – he does not know that Violetta had sacrificed herself for the good of his family – is known to the audience and, as Violetta reads a letter from Germont at the beginning of Act III, we know that Alfredo knows too.

This pattern of ending an act with irony that will be resolved at the beginning of the next is duplicated by Massenet between Acts IV and V of Manon. Instead of ending the former with an abbreviated plan, however, Massenet engages all four sections of a conventional finale but transforms the last into another concertato, thus turning the convention in on itself. The effect is not so much of dramatic cessation as it is of confusion: is this the beginning of another four part plan layered onto the existing plan, or

35 Lacombe, Keys to French Opera, 121.
36 Other French operas that make use of an omitted stretta include the Act II finale of L’Africaine (1865) and the Act I finale of Les Pêcheurs de perles (1863). Massenet’s deformation of conventional form was previously used by Gounod to conclude Act II of La Reine de Saba (1862). The third act of Bizet’s La Jolie fille de Perth (1867) concludes with a stretta, but is appended with a slow section, thus turning what was a clear, self-contained act into (by way of a mistakenly recognized talisman) one whose resolution will happen later in the opera.
is this a formal, rhetorical echo of the dramatic confusion on stage? Rodney Milnes calls this moment into question, noting that *Manon* is:

less satisfying [at] the moments when convention takes over. The sinister atmosphere of the gambling den, laced with the hysterical hedonism of ‘Ce bruit de l’or,’ gives way to the stock concerted finale, complete with the Count des Grieux, who has no business to be there save to underline a calculated echo of *La Traviata.*

The presence of le Comte does more than rhyme with his counterpart in *Traviata.* In the thick polyphony that comprises the brief *stretta,* Des Grieux puts aside his love for Manon and begs his father to save his honor (“Ne peux-tu sauver mon honneur?”). Germont is present to reveal to his son the high quality of Violetta’s character, while le Comte chastens his son for easily changing his mind. Already, Des Grieux has waffled between his intended duty to the church and his love for Manon. Now he is willing to abandon her to exculpate his name. Manon is openly capricious; Des Grieux, on the contrary, is unable to control his will. In short, theirs is a dramaturgical rhyme much closer to Carmen and Don José than to Violetta and Alfredo.

Manon shares with Carmen the ability to shape dramatic form and this is most explicit in the Act III, Scene 2, the meeting at St. Sulpice. Table 6 illustrates Massenet’s use of a nested structure to create dramatic tension in this scene. The flexibility of tempos is immediately apparent in this scene, and foreshadows the increasingly fluid tempos that characterize his later operas. Also apparent is a large-scale tonal plan that moves from the opening G major to E♭ major, then through a series of modulatory passages to A♭ and finally to B♭ major. This tonal plan is significant, as its goal is used to depict Manon

37 Milnes, “Manon,” 190.
throughout the opera. Conspicuously absent is a large section of F major that prepares the final B♭ music, though Massenet does touch on the dominant in localized instances.


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>No. of lines</th>
<th>Incipits</th>
<th>Measures</th>
<th>Tonalities</th>
<th>Tempo</th>
<th>Meter</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0. scena</td>
<td>1-15</td>
<td>organ/orchestra (Les Dévoutes)</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>Andante</td>
<td>e</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. tempo d’attaco</td>
<td>15-70</td>
<td>“Quelle éloquence” (Les Dévoutes)</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>Allegro animé</td>
<td>¾</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 / 6</td>
<td>71-84</td>
<td>“Oui, je n’ai trouvé dans la vie” (DG/Co)</td>
<td>V/C</td>
<td>Andantino espressivo</td>
<td>⁵⁄₈ → e</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 / 6</td>
<td>92-122</td>
<td>“Espose quelque brave fille” (Co)</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>Andante</td>
<td>¼</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 / 6</td>
<td>122-139</td>
<td>“Rien ne peut m’empêcher” (DG/Co)</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>Andantino tranquillo [melodrama]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. cavatine</td>
<td>157-178</td>
<td>“Je suis seul!” (DG)</td>
<td>E[subscript 3]</td>
<td>a tempo [Andante con moto]</td>
<td>[e]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0. scena</td>
<td>210-229</td>
<td>“Monsieur… je veux parler” (Ma/Portier)</td>
<td>g → c</td>
<td>Allegretto agitato → Stesso tempo</td>
<td>⁵⁄₈</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0. scena</td>
<td>235-246</td>
<td>“Magnifict anima mea” (Choeur)</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>Andante religioso</td>
<td>e</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0. scena</td>
<td>247-266</td>
<td>“Pardonnez moi” (Ma)</td>
<td>G → E → V/G</td>
<td>Stesso tempo → Tempo I</td>
<td>⁷⁄₈ → e</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 / 12</td>
<td>277-306</td>
<td>“Oui!… je fus cruelle” (Ma, DG)</td>
<td>A[subscript 3]</td>
<td>a tempo (agitato)</td>
<td>[e]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. cavatine</td>
<td>335-343</td>
<td>“Ah! rends moi ton amour” (Ma, DG)</td>
<td>V/F → V/B[subscript 3]</td>
<td>Andantino agitato</td>
<td>⁹⁄₈</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[coda]</td>
<td>352-358</td>
<td>“N’est ce plus ma main” (Ma)</td>
<td>B[subscript 3]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>orchestra</td>
<td>385-391</td>
<td>“N’est ce plus ma main” (Ma+DG)</td>
<td>B[subscript 3]</td>
<td>Andante espressivo</td>
<td>⁵⁄₈</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

This scene is problematic in its layering effect. Branger reads the scene as an intact, four-part duet beginning with a *tempo d’attacco* at “Toi! Vous!” followed by the

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38 Areas of B♭ major include: Manon’s entrance (“Je suis encor tout étourdie” [Act I, Scene 3]); the coda to Manon and Des Grieux’s first duet (“Combien ce doit être amusant” [Act I, Scene 8]); the duet between Manon and Bretigny (“Venir ici sous un déguisement!” [Act II, Scene 2]); Manon’s entrance into the crowd scene (“Voici les élégantes” [Act III, Scene 4]); Manon’s aria “N’est ce plus ma main” [Act III, Scene 7]; Manon and Des Grieux’s entrance to the Hôtel de Transylvanie [Act IV, Scene 3]; Lescaut’s air “La fortune n’est intratable” addressed to Des Grieux but representing Manon [Act IV, Scene 3]; the fateful knock at the door interrupting the gambling scene [Act IV, Scene 4], Manon and Des Grieux’s duet (“O Manon!” [Act V, Scene 5]; and the final moments of the opera which include the reprise of “N’est ce plus ma main” (from “Partons! Non…” [Act V, 5]).
“Ne c’est plus ma main” is in three parts: A (15 bars) B (8 bars) A’ (6 bars). The nature of its melodic line is much more aligned with a *cavatine*, especially in its

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transparent orchestration. With a general dynamic of pianissimo, low strings and harp have pizzicato while upper strings sustain chords. The loudest moment of the A section comes at its conclusion: a single forte pizzicato note in the strings. This is greatly contrasted in the B section, in which the motive of Des Grieux’s anguish appears (it was first associated with his music “Ah! fuyez douce image”) played by the full orchestra. The return of A music permits the addition of winds to thicken the timbre, but its most significant change is duplication of the melodic lines by the cellos. By taking both Manon’s and Des Grieux’s lines, the effect replicates the sound of ensemble singing without the two characters actually coming together. Indeed, the only moment of ensemble singing is a single “Je t’aime!” sung as the final measure of the duet. This weakens Branger’s claim of cavatine qua caballette since the ensemble conclusion is brief and forced.

This ending has an important dramatic and structural rhyme with the Act I duet “Nous vivrons à Paris.” After a conventional caballette that ends with them both singing “partons,” a coda-like section is appended shifts the tonality from C major, the key of the caballette, to B♭ major, signifying Manon. At the transition to B♭, Manon initiates a cadence, pulling Des Grieux with her (see Example 11). While the Act I duet obeys the conventional four-part plan, Huebner notes that it is “one of the last times Massenet would use this sequence;”⁴⁰ the final cadence lies beyond the caballette in what we have

⁴⁰ Huebner, French Opera, 68.
seen as a commonly used departure from normative form. This departure from convention is replayed in the Act III duet, now serving as the crux of the drama.

If “Ne c’est plus ma main” is not a caballette, how does it function in the scene? The answer lies in the inherent symmetry that characterizes the music at the beginning and end of the scene. Table 6 illustrated the dramatic shift away from Des Grieux and to Manon. This move sets up a narratival tension centered around the following question: which character will survive this confrontation intact to carry the drama forward? Only Manon. Des Grieux’s quick abandonment of the church underscores his weakness and the power Manon holds over him. Taken at a larger level, Manon wields this power to alter the shape of the scene by cutting off the tempo di mezzo that follows Des Grieux’s cavatine and replacing it with her own tempo d’attaco. The inherent flexibility of the tempo d’attaco and tempo di mezzo sections make such a transition seamless. Manon’s assumption of formal control is made more authoritative with the recapitulation of music used in the early part of the scene, a strategy seen in the opening

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41 My reading of “Ne c’est plus ma main” as a solo rather than a duet also differs from Branger, though there are many examples of solos qua duets and vice versa. See Harold Powers, “‘La solita forma’ and ‘The Uses of Convention’,” Acta Musicologica 59 (1987): 70-72.
of the Act IV finale. As the clock strikes six, Manon enters to the sounds of Des Grieux’s “Ah! Fuyez loin de moi!” (“Depart, dream of love”) still audible. Massenet sets up an aural parallel with organ prelude by having the church choir sing the Magnificat off-stage. Moments later, and in an obvious connection that is subtly changed, Massenet reuses the boisterous string music that accompanied the dévotes to herald the arrival of Manon. The former was music of sheer admiration and was solidly in G major, the governing key of the opening. Now, however, things are different, and Massenet highlights this by keeping the same melodic shape but harmonizing it in C minor. This gives way to the “Magnificat” and a return to G major, thus solidifying the return tonally, motivically, and timbrally, to the beginning of the scene.

From this point the symmetrical organization abounds. Both tempi d’attaco are interrupted by sections of lyric verse, the first sung by le Comte, the second as a duet between Manon and Des Grieux without ensemble singing. Both are tonally separated from the surrounding music (in C major and A♯ major, respectively) and are tonally stable within their tripartite forms. Finally, both le Comte and Manon are seeking to change Des Grieux’s mind. Le Comte hopes his son would marry someone worthy of the family name, while Manon aspires to rekindle his love for her. In both cases, the participants fail to persuade Des Grieux, though Massenet hints at Manon’s eventual success by using b♯1 as an upper-neighbor figure at the peak of Des Grieux’s musical phrase (see Example 12).42

42 The same b♯1 is also the high point of Des Grieux’s “Ah! fuyez” and is similarly orchestrated.
Example 12. *Manon*, Act IV, Scene 2, mm. 294-299.

Next in the line of symmetries is the structure of the two *cavatines* themselves. As expected, they are in three-part form and are tonally stable. The central section of “Ah fuyez” is much longer and includes the Portier announcing the beginning of a worship service followed by Des Grieux’s chant-like response “L’ombre qui passe encor dans le fond de mon coeur” (“Shadows still linger in the depths of my heart”). As a counterpoint to this, Massenet has the off-stage organ return with music reminiscent of the opening, a natural connection given the liturgical connection just made. In a similar move, the central section of the duet evokes music from “Ah! fuyez” thus strengthening the generic connection between the two *cavatines*. As Des Grieux’s struggle is made audible, we hear the juxtaposition of “Ah! fuyez” with “Ne c’est plus ma main” as he asks for divine strength to overcome this temptation. Significantly, the pitches of the “Ah! fuyez” quotation are altered – what was 3 1 2 is now 1 5 6 – but the rhythm remains the same.

The effect illustrates Manon’s power to sway Des Grieux; he is unable to articulate even his most powerful musical statement in front her.

As a final symmetrical gesture, Massenet uses a similar orchestrational device to unite the two *cavatines*. The A’ section of “Ah! fuyez” replays Des Grieux’s melody exactly as before, this time with a continuous sixteenth-note violin figure, tremolo strings, and harp chords to accompany the voice. In its original appearance, the
accompaniment was confined to sustained string chords with an occasional woodwind punctuation. The return of A material in the duet is equally thrilling. Absent from the first A section but present now are harp arpeggios, tremolo strings, and, as noted earlier, a sweeping cello melody that duplicates both voice lines.

Massenet’s Interpretations

_Hérodiade_ and _Manon_ represent Massenet’s last attempt to fill the full expectations of a generic convention of an opera house where his work was to première. His twentieth-century reputation is built on these early works as they represent the pinnacle of Second Empire techniques. All of these techniques – discrete and self-contained numbers, multi-part arias and ensembles, spoken dialogue (in the _opéra comique_ tradition), and motivic connection over scenes and acts – read like a ledger of _fin-de-siècle_ practice. Deviation from this plan was of course inevitable, but the consistent use of conventional structures, especially in the function of duets, helped maintain a link with past works that would ensure audience approval.
By 1894, Massenet’s status as the leading opera composer of his generation had been securely established with the international successes of *Manon* and *Werther*. Both are known for their combination of melodic charm and the overtly sensitive portrayal of characters whose destiny is shaped by a sense of inevitable tragedy. The early operas of Massenet show a great deal of indebtedness to those of Gounod and Thomas, and *Manon* and *Werther* are no exceptions. While *Werther* opens with the ubiquitous small festive chorus that includes the secondary characters, Massenet had already begun to bend the conventions of the *opéra comique* by offering orchestral rather than vocal representations of the main characters in the airs that follow. Both *Manon* and *Werther* owe their large-scale organization to distinctly self-contained numbers, even if the boundaries of those numbers are blurred. Indeed, every opera in this middle period of Massenet’s life makes use of closed formal structures at specific local instances.\(^1\) Thus Massenet never strays too far from the scaffolding of the number opera so long a part of the French stage. The first opera to reveal a significant change in dramaturgical approach was *Thaïs*. Massenet began composition in April 1892 and finished the orchestration in July 1893; the opera was first performed on 16 March 1894 at the Opéra.

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\(^1\) See “Ah!... Mariez donc son coeur” from Act I of *La Navarraise* (1894); Jean’s “Ah! qu’il est loin” from the Act I of *Sapho* (1897); “Rest au foyer, petit grillon” from Act I and “Viens nous quitterons cette ville” from Act III of *Cendrillon* (1899); “Loin de sa femme qu’on est bien!” from Act II of *Grisélidis* (1901); or the modified strophic *Légende de la Sauge* from Act II of *Le Jongleur de Notre Dame* (1902).
Massenet’s approach to *Thaïs* is one that is predicated on a change from the symmetrical structures of both verse and phrase that defined the music of his mentors, to the continuous melody of Wagner-influenced operas, with their asymmetrical musical phrases. Indeed, Gallet’s libretto forced Massenet into constant asymmetrical structures so that the language itself determined the melodic structure.\(^2\) Since so many scholars have tackled the issue of the prose libretto, only a brief explanation will be considered here.

Along with the well-known instrumental *méditation*, *Thaïs* is famously remembered for its use of a prose libretto. Rather than strict prose, though, Massenet’s librettist, Louis Gallet, supplied him with a kind of blank verse, the so-called *poésie mélique*. Two days before the opera’s première, Gallet provided an introduction to his libretto in an article for *Le Ménestrel*. In it, Gallet defined *poésie mélique* as a hybrid of poetry and prose. The term itself stems from a definition given by Belgian musicologist and director of the Academy of Brussels, François Auguste Gevaert:

*poésie mélique* borrows certain rigors from poetic art; it prohibits the caesura, it seeks the sonority and the harmony of the words; it observes the rhythm of line-length; it endeavors to contain the idea within metrical limits; it is freed only from the absolute obligation of the rhyme.\(^3\)

Noting Massenet’s concern for the libretto, Gallet continues:

According to his penchants and his independent disposition, Massenet would wish for his score to *Thaïs* – a poem in free literary form, very simple, very malleable, allowing for this or that concession, without the obliged monstrosities, without deterioration of the text – a perfect accord between the poem and the music.\(^4\)

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\(^2\) Steven Huebner, *French Opera at the Fin de Siècle* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 143.
\(^4\) Ibid.
Steven Huebner notes that by the early 1890s, the “issue of the prose libretti had been simmering in French operatic culture for quite some time.”

5 Gounod’s interest led him to consider setting Molière’s *George Dandin*, a project begun in 1874 but that remained unfinished, though it did spark the composer to write an descriptive preface in which he detailed the interests and difficulties of such an endeavor. 6 Gallet, in his introduction, summarized the approach composers had taken to setting librettos over the past twenty years (that is, from the mid 1870s- to 1894):

Indeed, very few composers have had enough literary sense or delicacy to keep the absolute respect of the poetic text; it is to their process of composition – very arbitrary, very intolerant, and finally very egoistic, and with their minds made up not to marry the pure literary form but instead to reshape and deform it without concern for rules to conform to the contours of their music – to which we owe the bad verse and monstrous adaptations that have been so ridiculed.

7 To reinforce his argument, Gallet cites a specific instance of Massenet altering a verse in his oratorio *Ève* (1874), text by Gallet. Massenet omitted the final word of a pair of strophes, effectively obliterating the rhyme set up by Gallet. As the librettist notes, “the stanza breaks down, but the image remains.”

8 For his own part, Massenet offered these thoughts on the prose libretto before he began work on *Thaïs*:

It seems to me that the adoption of prose for the opera libretto (how will librettists adjust to this evolution?) is a kind of corollary to the transformation music is

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5 Huebner, 135.
6 Huebner offers an hypothesis for Gounod’s abandonment of *George Dandin*: following his estrangement from his wife in 1874, Gounod moved to London and began an adaptation of Molière’s *George Dandin*. His amanuensis Georgina Weldon took possession of the score upon Gounod’s hasty return to France. Upon reconciliation with his wife, Gounod abandoned the dark comedy that dealt with a philandering wife and her confused and misguided husband. Paper delivered at the National Meeting of the American Musicological Society, 14 November 2003, Houston, Texas.
7 Gallet, ibid.
8 Ibid.
undergoing at present; the lyrical declamation that is used more and more frequently will accommodate itself well to this, I believe.\(^9\)

Massenet is articulating the shift away from the forced rhymes and strict syllabification of Scribe and Meyerbeer’s era to the fluidity of movement evident in works by Bruneau (Le Rêve [1891] and Messidor [1897]) and Charpentier (Louise [1900]), all written to prose libretti. Missing from Massenet’s statement, and equally absent from Gallet’s preface, is the dilemma faced by every French composer: the frequent, weak syllabic stress of the language. The artificial stress placed on final vowels (especially the voicing of the e muet) had been a long and frequent consolation made in the name of metrical verse.\(^10\) In a country where discourse on language had been played out in the public press, it is easy to see that “the temptation to abandon verse for prose was thus greater for French composers than elsewhere.”\(^11\) Though composers in France may have been the most vocal about adapting the libretto, they lagged behind similar trends in Germany and Italy. Indeed, traits most associated with these two countries mark the two main thrusts of French prose libretti: emancipation from conventional verse structures and greater stage realism.\(^12\)

*Thaïs* cannot be considered *vérisme*; that designation more closely fits *La Navarraise* (1894), *Sapho* (1897), and *Thérèse* (1907); however, it is indicative of the flexibility offered by *poésie mélique* as opposed to the verse librettos Massenet had pre-

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9 Interview with Léon Baron, *Le Figaro*, 8 July 1891.
12 Wagner is of course the most frequently mentioned composer in regard to the former; see Philippe Lacoue-Labarth, *Musica ficta (Figures of Wagner)*, trans. Felicia McCarren (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 42-46. Two years before *Thaïs*, Italy, the cradle of Verismo, had produced the two most important representatives of the genre (Pietro Mascagni’s *Cavalleria rusticana* [Rome, 1890] and Ruggero Leoncavallo’s *Pagliacci* [Milan, 1892]); Matteo Sansone, “Verismo: From Literature to Opera,” (Ph.D. diss., University of Edinburgh, 1987).
viously set. Huebner cites the famous mirror aria, “Dis-moi que je suis belle” as a locus classicus of the élan Massenet gives to some of his melodies” (see Example 1). Indeed, the compacting of an entire twelve-syllable Alexandrine into the first measure followed by the expansion of subsequent 10- and 12-syllable lines into two and three measures, respectively, is indicative of the inherent “freeness” and “malleability” Massenet requested of his librettist. This use of poésie mélitude represents an important change in

Example 1. Thaïs, Act II, Tableau 1, mm. 41-43.

Massenet’s approach to operatic construction, for after Thaïs, almost half of his remaining operas use similarly constructed libretti. La Navarraise (1894), Thérèse (1907), Cléopâtre (1914) all use genuine prose libretti, while Amadis (1922 [written in 1895]), Sapho (1897), and Roma (1912) use poésie mélitude. Cendrillon (1899), Grisélidis (1901), Le Jongleur de Notre Dame (1902), Chérubin (1905), Bacchus (1909), Don Quichotte (1910), and Panurge (1913), all characteristically lighter in tone than the above mentioned operas, use traditionally versed libretti.

Aside from loosing the tyranny of verse, Gallet’s poésie mélitude libretto afforded Massenet an opportunity to shift the dramaturgical focus of his opera away from the voice

13 Huebner, 146.
and onto the orchestra. The freer development of motives across a large span of musical and dramatic space is one characteristic central to *Thaïs* and is indicative of his later operas in general. Equally important for the change in Massenet’s dramaturgy is the way he ties formal structures to symphonic proportions. Here, “symphonic” is used in a metaphorical yet denotative sense to connect Massenet’s narratival exposition and thematic recapitulation with similar large-scale devices used by symphonic composers of the late 1880s and 90s (e.g. Bruckner, Saint-Saëns, Franck, Mahler, and Richard Strauss). ¹⁴ These practices are evident in the two duets shared between the title character and her “lover” and in the tonal hierarchy set up by a unified central key. *Thaïs* is the first opera to utilize such long-range structures and is singularly important as a harbinger for later practices.

**Large-Scale Structures in *Thaïs***

Immediately noticeable when listening to *Thaïs* is the absence of any large-scale duet between the two principal characters. Indicative of critical response to this lacuna is Camille Bellaigue’s review for the influential *La Revue des deux mondes*: “In the long scene, or which should be long, longest even of all, between Thais and [Athanaël], when he implores the courtesan to listen to and follow him, one hardly finds an accent, a gesture, [or] a cry.” ¹⁵ Massenet does not receive all the blame for the lack of interaction: “In *Thaïs*, there are only two dramatic situations. One is in the third tableau (when Athanaël tries to convert Thais), the other is at the end (when he takes her to the convent). Oh well, M.Gallet

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missed the first and did not treat the second.”\textsuperscript{16} Instead of an envoiced duet, Massenet unfolds, in a symphonically derived model, an orchestral passage meant to symbolize the relationship shared by Thaïs and Athanaël. In so doing, he uses the orchestra without voice to define the most significant narratival turning point of the opera. This interlude possesses enough dramatic weight to return and alter formal designs later in the opera. The symphonic moment in question is the famous méditation wherein the title character sheds her life as a courtesan to enter the life of the convent.

The super-saturation of the méditation in the twentieth century stems from its sinuous melodic line underscored by clear, mostly diatonic harmonies. The relative ease with which the méditation separated itself from the opera is evident in the number of early recordings made – no fewer than a dozen in the two decades after the première. The famous “Mirror” aria (“Dis-moi que je suis belle”) and Athanaël’s lyric aria “Voilà donc la terrible cite!” both garnered early recordings, but even combined they do not total those of the méditation. Like the Intermezzo from Cavalleria Rusticana or Delius’s “Walk to the Paradise Garden” from A Village Romeo and Juliet, the extra-operatic associations given to the méditation obscure its function within the opera itself.

Already in Esclarmonde (1889), Massenet sought to invest dramatic significance to an orchestral passage when he portrayed the union of Esclarmonde and Roland through then interlude between the first and second tableaux of Act II. Here, the sensuous nature of the music included undulating chords alternating in crescendos and decrescendos to build to a passionate climax. Camille Bellaigue wrote:

\textsuperscript{16} Emile Pessard writing for L’Événement, 17 March 1894; Rowden, 25-26.
Never before, I believe, had such a close and detailed musical description of the physical manifestation of human affection been made (you see I am trying to express myself decently); everything is taken into account and graduated… the whole culminates with a general burst that is terribly significant and as La Fontaine’s pigeon says… ‘you would think you were there yourself.’  

For Thaïs, the méditation is the pivot around which the entire opera revolves. Athanaël says as much when he indicates, “my work is now accomplished.” Because the méditation is invested with so much dramatic significance, one almost immediately begins to question its effectiveness. Certainly Bellaigue does:

How did Massenet translate this abandonment, this chief vicissitude of the work, this crisis of the heart, where the old Thaïs dies and the new Thaïs is born? With a frail violin solo. "Méditation" he calls it. Oh no! At most it’s a daydream, and so light! The phrase is more elegant, more turned over and circumvented than even Chopin…. What a weak representation! A nocturne for such a night!  

How, in the space of seventy measures, can Thaïs abandon a life of luxury and excess to take on one poverty and denial? Furthermore, how will this seminal moment play a part in defining her relationship with Athanaël in the remainder of the opera. The way Massenet develops and employs the méditation theme throughout the opera will answer these questions.

Figure 1 shows an overview of major keys and appearances of the méditation theme throughout the opera. The theme, marked with a cross, forms a diagonal axis linking the opening of Act I, the mid-point of Act II, and the conclusion of Act III. While its first appearance is veiled in comparison to later ones, it is no less significant since it represents a “voiced,” that is texted, connection to an otherwise abstract melodic phrase.

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17 Review of Esclarmonde, Revue des deux mondes, 1 June 1889. Quoted in Huebner, French Opera, 84.
18 Revue des deux mondes, 1 April 1894; Rowden, 175.
The *méditation* theme is born out of Athanaël’s opening aria, in which a four note cadential embellishment is expanded to become the quintuplet that ends the *méditation*’s first phrase (Example 2). This expansion, especially when coupled with the rubato most violinists take when ending the phrase, heightens the tension of the octave drop and phrase end, a gesture also modeled on Athanaël’s aria. While this vocal connection will

Figure 1. *Thaïs*. Tonal overview and *méditation* appearances.

![Figure 1](image)

be come crucial to an understanding of how *Thaïs* ends, the very act of its use and thematic development deserves comment as well.

In his earlier works, Massenet did not develop motives in as consistent or symphonically conceived fashion as did Wagner. It was not until *Manon* that he offered “a clear invitation to listen for motivic connections of a rudimentary developing-variation

These connections were further strengthened in *Esclarmonde* (1889), often regarded as Massenet’s most motivically derived opera. Writing a year after the première, composer-critic Charles Malherbe, in the manner of Wagner’s Wolzogen, counted the appearances of the “Magic” motive to reach 111 uses. More than mere accounting, Malherbe’s statistics serve to quantify Massenet’s opera as representative of the French *avant-garde*, in line with Wagnerian techniques and, with *Esclarmonde*’s plot based on medieval legend, subject matter. While Massenet would revisit medieval settings (notably in *Grisélidis* and *Le Jongleur de Notre Dame*), he would not again invest an opera with such a thorough and continuous treatment of motives. Instead, Massenet employed more fully developed themes (reminiscence motives) as aural landmarks that recur throughout the opera.

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19 Huebner, 66.
Returning to *Esclarmonde*, the extreme paucity of motives – Huebner suggests only six function throughout the opera\(^{22}\) – weakens the connection with Wagner. So too does Massenet’s reliance on, or reluctance to abandon, the four-square shape of his melodic lines. Two examples will illustrate this. The first (Example 3) is from the the prologue to *Esclarmonde* in which the emperor Phorcas renounces the throne to pursue his magic. This is the first hearing of the “Magic” motive (marked with a bracket), and its limited sequential treatment combined with its hollow underscoring of the pair of four-bar phrases makes a reading as Wagnerian difficult at best.\(^{23}\) The second example illustrates the other motive associated with magic. It first appears at the end of act I when Esclarmonde uses it as an incantation to summon Roland to her island (Example 4). Texted from the beginning, the “Incantation” motive is heard much less frequently than the “Magic” motive. It is first seen in the initial presentation of the “Magic” motive (see mm. 36-38 of Example 3), but subsequent repetitions involve wholesale repetitions of this opening presentation.\(^{24}\)

The “Incantation” motive lends itself to a rounding of the double-dotted rhythm, and Massenet does so in Act III with Esclarmonde’s “Regarde les ces yeux” (Example 5). The derivation of “Regarde” from “Esprits de l’air” is highlighted by a textless repetition of the latter moments before (see Example 6). The effect is wholly instrumental as Esclarmonde’s voice is stripped of all syntactical power save the name of her lover.

Situated somewhere between the gawkish elegance of Lakmé’s “Bell Song” and Kundry’s

\(^{22}\) Ibid.
\(^{23}\) Compare this treatment with the gesturally similar “Giants” leitmotif first heard in *Das Rheingold* and transformed in *Siegfried* to become the “Dragon” motif.
\(^{24}\) See Phorcas’s Act IV statement (mm. 350-352) “Esprits de l’air…En ma présence amenez Esclarmonde!” where the entire initial presentation is transposed a tritone.

penetrating summons of Parsifal, Esclarmonde seduces Roland by the wordless rhetoric of her voice.\textsuperscript{25}

In \textit{Thaïs}, Massenet heightens this textless power by concealing the vocal origins of the \textit{méditation} only to reveal them at the opera’s climax. As we have seen, the \textit{méditation} is formed out of Athanaël’s first aria, specifically, in the \textit{cavatine} portion of an otherwise standard four-part form. Though closed forms exist as other arias throughout \textit{Thaïs}, this scene is the only complete example of the traditional four-part form. As such, it offers an excellent example of Massenet’s transformation of the time-honored plan.

The opening \textit{cavatine} (“Hélas!... enfant encore”) is extremely short: thirty-two measures and just under two minutes in length. It is symmetrical in each section, though the coda is twice as long as the main phrases (see Table 1). The deceptive simplicity of this

Table 1. *Thaïs*. Act I, “Hélas!.. enfant encore.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section / Length</th>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A / 6</td>
<td>Hélas!.. enfant encore, avant qu’à mon coeur la grâce ait parlé,</td>
<td>Alas, when still a child before grace had yet spoken to my heart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B / 7</td>
<td>je l’ai connu… je l’ai connue!</td>
<td>I had known her!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Un jour, je l’avoue à ma honte devant son seuil mandit</td>
<td>One day, I say it to my shame before her accursed doorstep,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>je me suis arrêté,</td>
<td>I had stopped,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A’ / 7</td>
<td>Mais Dieu m’a préservé de cette courtisane, et j’ai trouvé le calme</td>
<td>but God had preserved me from this courtesan and I found calm in this desert,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>en ce désert… maudissant le péché que j’aurais pu commettre!</td>
<td>cursing the sin that I might have committed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>coda / 13</td>
<td>Ah! mon âme est troublée!</td>
<td>Ah my soul is troubled...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>La honte de Thaïs et le mal qu’elle fait me causent une peine...</td>
<td>the shame of Thaïs and the harm she has done cause me bitter pain...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>et je voudrais gagner cette âme à Dieu!</td>
<td>and I would win this soul to God!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Oui, je voudrais gagner cette âme à Dieu!</td>
<td>Yes, I would win this soul to God</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

form acts as a microcosm for one the most important features of the whole opera – an end-weighted telos. Here, the rhetorical, narratival, and musical strength is to be found in the coda, just as the opera as a whole reaches its telos in the final moments. In terms of the narrative, the first three sections represent the most chronologically distant moment in the opera and are delivered in the *passé composé*. We learn the reason of Athanaël’s attraction to Thaïs and in the coda, we learn of his mission to convert her. The shift to future tense (je voudrais) returns the listener both to the present and to the key of D major, the key of the *cavatine* and one that had been usurped since the beginning of the coda. Before that, Massenet had avoided tonic closure by eliding the A and B sections with a progression from V to ii. Indeed, there is no tonic cadence except the final one, and even there Massenet softens the V-I motion by extending the final tonic through a D
major/ D mixolydian scale in contrary motion. The effect then, is an impression of tonal stability without its realization, a musical analogy to the dramatic tension of the opera.

Athanaël’s cavatine is followed by the expected tempo di mezzo, though it is interrupted by a long, orchestrally dominated passage. This is indicative of the prominence Massenet invests in the orchestra to shape musical form and narratival movement. Table 2 gives an outline of this tableau and its component forms. That Massenet would present a classical set piece as the first music heard in *Thaïs*

Table 2. *Thaïs*. Act I, Tableau 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Incipits</th>
<th>Measures</th>
<th>Tonalities</th>
<th>Tempo</th>
<th>Marking</th>
<th>Metre</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intro</td>
<td>[orchestral]</td>
<td>1-35</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>Andante très calme</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0. Scena</td>
<td>“Voici le pain,” (Cénobite)</td>
<td>35-45</td>
<td>a→V/A</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Chaque matin” (Palémon)</td>
<td>45-57</td>
<td>A</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Que les noirs” (Cénobites)</td>
<td>57-77</td>
<td>a→V/B,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Tempo</td>
<td>“Le voici!” (Cénobites)</td>
<td>78-90</td>
<td>vii/d</td>
<td>Andante lento</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d’attaco</td>
<td>“Non.. mon couer est plein” (At)</td>
<td>91-106</td>
<td>vii/d (in D)</td>
<td>1° Tempo Andante</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Cavatine</td>
<td>“Hélas!... enfant encore” (At)</td>
<td>106-112</td>
<td>D→A</td>
<td>a Tempo</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“je l’ai connue”</td>
<td>112-118</td>
<td>e→A^7</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Mais Dieu”</td>
<td>118-125</td>
<td>D→Fr^8 (in D)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Ah! mon âme”</td>
<td>125-137</td>
<td>Fr^8→A→D</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Tempo</td>
<td>“Ne nous mêlons” (Palémon)</td>
<td>137-151</td>
<td>D→d→e</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>di mezzo</td>
<td>“Prions” (Cénobites)</td>
<td>152-164</td>
<td>a→C→e→V/d</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Ô Seigneur” (At)</td>
<td>165-173</td>
<td>vii/d→D</td>
<td>un peu plus lent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vision</td>
<td>[orchestral]</td>
<td>173-186</td>
<td>D→A pedal (V/D)</td>
<td>Lento cantible</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Honte! Horreur!” (At)</td>
<td>226-235</td>
<td>b^8 (V/C)</td>
<td>Stesso tempo</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Cabalette</td>
<td>[orchestral link]</td>
<td>236-239</td>
<td>x→V/C</td>
<td>All’ moderato</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Toi qui mis la pitié” (At)</td>
<td>240-244</td>
<td>C</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“J’ai compris l’enseignement”</td>
<td>245-248</td>
<td>F→G</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Car je veux délivrer”</td>
<td>249-253</td>
<td>c→G</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Dans l’azur”</td>
<td>253-257</td>
<td>C→G</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“N’est-elle pas le souffle”</td>
<td>258-262</td>
<td>G→B</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Ah! plus elle est coupable”</td>
<td>262-274</td>
<td>C→G→C</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Scena</td>
<td>“Frères! levez-vous tout!” (At)</td>
<td>274-300</td>
<td>A→sequence→V/F</td>
<td>sempre All”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Mon fils” (Palémon)</td>
<td>301-331</td>
<td>F→V/F</td>
<td>sempre stesso tempo-sans retenir</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Espirit de lumière” (At + Cénobites)*</td>
<td>332-363</td>
<td>F→V/F</td>
<td>Beaucoup plus modéré</td>
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</table>

At = Athanaël
* The final portion of the last scena is sung a cappella and in the metrically unstressed manner of chant.
testifies to the strength of that tradition and his belief that it still carried dramaturgical possibilities. This is mitigated, however, by its singular status, a fact that would lead Massenet to seek even larger structural forms to knit together his opera.  

The prominence of the orchestra is evident in the symmetrical arrangement of this tableau. The whole structure is bounded by and focused around “non-operatic” music, that is orchestral or a cappella music. Table 3 shows the arrangements of these elements around the central orchestral vision. Just as the orchestral méditation stands for Thaïs’s conversion, the vision functions in a similar capacity, galvanizing Athanaël in his mission. Metaphorically, the vision represents a divine moment of ecstasy; specifically, however, it represents an image of Thaïs in Alexandria. The “invisible orchestra” (Massenet’s own term) accompanies the dancer:

half clothed, but with a veiled face, miming the lovers of Aphrodite. In the theatre sound acclamations of enthusiasm. The effect is of great distance. The name of Thaïs, howled by the mob, can be distinguished. The vision disappears; suddenly Day begins.  

Athanaël responds to this vision with renewed fervor, forming the cabalette to his earlier cavatine. Massenet is clearly imbuing orchestral music with a much more significant role


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>orchestral introduction</th>
<th>scena</th>
<th>cavatine</th>
<th>tempo</th>
<th>vision</th>
<th>tempo</th>
<th>cabalette</th>
<th>scena</th>
<th>a cappella</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>d’mezzo</td>
<td>(orch.)</td>
<td>d’mezzo</td>
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26 While vestiges of the four-part plan are evident in Don Quichotte, this is the last fully formed scene complex in any of Massenet’s operas.

in motivating the drama. While this is a trait easily identifiable in Wagner, Massenet’s use is still bound by the familiar structures of Second Empire composers. His commitment to such a procedure, while novel, is not total.

A striking example of Massenet’s orchestral conception of *Thaïs* can be seen in the change from the 1894 première version to the 1898 definitive version. The original version was considerably longer and made use of two orchestral interludes: a “Symphonie des amours d’Aphrodite” and the ballet “La Tentation” (Temptation) in addition to the *méditation*, shared by both versions. Arranged as interludes, they broke up each of the tableaux to serve as a moment of reflection or scenic ambiance. Table 4 compares the arrangement of the first and final versions of the opera. Immediately noticeable is the prominence of orchestral music in the first version at moments of narratival shift – physical changes of space or metaphorical changes of attitude. Also, the action is more clearly divided into two large movements as opposed to the tripartite arrangement in the latter version (see Table 5).

Table 4. *Thaïs*. 1894 version compared with 1898 version.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1894 Version</th>
<th>1898 Version</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I</td>
<td>I, 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La Thébaïde (1)</td>
<td>II, 1</td>
<td>II, 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alexandrie</td>
<td>Interlude</td>
<td>Interlude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interlude: Symphonie des amours d’Aphrodite</td>
<td>xxx</td>
<td>II, 1 + Ballet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chambre de Thaïs</td>
<td>II, 3</td>
<td>III, 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interlude: Méditation</td>
<td>Interlude</td>
<td>Interlude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place publique</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oasis</td>
<td>xxx</td>
<td>III, 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La Thébiade (2)</td>
<td>II, 1</td>
<td>III, 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interlude: La course d’Athanaël dans l’orage</td>
<td>xxx</td>
<td>III, 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ballet La Tentation</td>
<td>II, 2</td>
<td>II, 2 + Ballet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vision</td>
<td>III, 2</td>
<td>III, 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La Mort de Thaïs</td>
<td>III, 3</td>
<td>III, 3</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Orchestral music in italic type. Vocal music in Roman type. Complete acts are bounded in boxes. xxx=not present in that version.
This earlier version highlights the symmetry of orchestral moments as is evident by the placement of the *méditation* at the exact center of the work and its framing by two large-scale orchestral movements. Massenet maintains the centrality of the *méditation* in the final version of the opera. Further, the removal of the ballet *La Tentation* and its ensuing interlude (*La course d’Athanaël dans l’orage*) centers the *vision* and creates a noticeable symmetry with the initial *vision* in Act I, thereby framing the whole opera within Athanaël’s ecstatic dreams.

Table 5. Bipartite arrangement of the first version of *Thaïs.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prologue: La Thébaïde</th>
<th>First Part</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Alexandrie</td>
<td>2. Chambre de Thaïs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Interlude: Symphonie des amours d’Aphrodite</em></td>
<td><em>Entr’acte: Méditation</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Place publique</td>
<td>1. La Thébaïde. Ballet de la Tentation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Second Part</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. La Thébaïde. Ballet de la Tentation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Interlude: La course d’Athanaël dans l’orage</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. La Mort de Thaïs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The intrusion of the orchestra had never been greater in Massenet’s operas. Indeed, “the old principle, according to which an instrumental melodic style was applied to the voice is here replaced by its inverse: the application of a vocal style to instruments.”

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constant tension in Massenet’s late operas as he, like Puccini, never relinquished the power of soaring voices.

Tonal Centrality before *Thaïs*

If the prevalence of orchestral music is one of the chief motivating forces of the overall narrative, the reliance on a central tonality to provide the harmonic scaffolding for that narrative is even more significant. Recent scholarship has emphasized “the profound consequences that tonal symbolism may have for the basic organization of an opera, suggesting that text-generated quotations of tonalities determine the emergence of certain keys at certain dramatic foci.”

 caution is essential when viewing the macroscopic progression of an opera as a large-scale Neapolitan-Tonic progression without accounting for the specific ways in which key usage intersects the turning points of the narrative.

In one of the earliest discussions of operatic tonality, Edward Cone offered this important question: “Can it be taken for granted… that tonal unity is desirable because unity is desirable?” Certainly this question is one that Joseph Kerman hints at when he noted that “Verdi was less interested in tonal absolutes (or absolutes of any other kind) than in what could impress his naïve listener.”

 This sounds very much like criticism leveled at Massenet throughout the twentieth century. Later, Kerman articulates the artistic problem faced by late nineteenth-century opera composers: balancing progress with expectation, “like all great composers, no doubt, he [Verdi] was always at least a little ahead of his listeners – always leading them by the ear, as it were, into new and

strange artistic territories.”33 To be sure, this problem has always faced composers, though never more so than these early, formative years of the operatic canon.

Massenet’s immediate predecessors used tonal centrality with varying degrees of consistency. *Faust*, for instance, ends in C major following a thrice-repeated statement of “Anges purs, anges radieux;” (G→A→B→C), and C is used at moments where the drama intersects religious elements: the song of the Golden Calf in Act II; the “Flower Song” in Act III; Méphistophélès’s departure in Act III, No. 9; the church scene in Act IV; and the first tableaux of the Walpurigsnacht in Act V. The last instance tonally bounds the final act in c/C. It would be difficult, however, to assign the same kind of significance to the tonal movement of each act, since Gounod organizes individual numbers, rather than whole scenes or acts, around a single tonic. A good example of this is No. 16 from Act III, the “Trio du duel” between Faust, Valentin, and Méphistophélès. The tripartite arch structure is organized around a chromatic mediant relationship: E♭ - C♭ - E♭. The larger context of this number is Méphistophélès’s serenade (No. 15) in G minor and the death of Valentin (No. 17), moving from v/D to D major. Certainly the progression: iv-N-v-I (g – E♭ – a-D) is not unusual in tonal harmony, notwithstanding the minor dominant. However, Gounod ends the duel with a recitative that effectively links it with the death of Valentin but that diminishes the strength of the harmonic progression with a move to C minor. Thus, one of the most compelling of all harmonic motions, the tritone resolution of N-V-i, is replaced in favor of a third progression (E♭-c – a-d).

33 Ibid.
A much more compelling example of a tonally unified opera is Ambroise Thomas’s *Hamlet* (1868). Massenet had enrolled in Thomas’s composition class seven years earlier, and Thomas had arranged the performance of Massenet’s first opera *La Grand’ Tante* in 1867. No doubt *Hamlet* was a topic of discussion when Massenet first met Gounod at the home of Thomas in 1866.\(^{34}\)

Thomas’s setting, while necessarily truncated, manages to capture the essence of Shakespeare’s drama. Indeed, everything that Hamlet sings, excepting the Act II drinking song, is original to Shakespeare. Thomas mirrors this intense dramatic organization by providing the opera with a governing tonality of E, as confirmed by the entire final scene and the likewise grandiose opening coronation.\(^{35}\) Further, E major closes Acts II and IV; the other acts (I and III) both close in D major, the lowered seventh. E major also frames the most famous portion of the opera, Ophelia’s mad scene in Act IV.\(^{36}\) As is evident from Figure 2, the home key, with only one exception, is always approached by its dominant or its leading tone (usually spelled enharmonically as E\(_b\)).\(^{37}\) The harmonic stability usually associated with choral scenes, coupled with their use in the opening coronation, the close of Act II, and the close of Act V (all in E major), reinforces the sound of the home key in a powerful, almost visceral, manner.

\(^{35}\) The final scene is also preceded by a funeral scene and march in B major; a somewhat rare instance of the dominant as a large-scale tonal area that leads directly into its goal tonic.
\(^{36}\) Though the opera is better known today as a vehicle for baritones in the title role, in the nineteenth century it was viewed as a coloratura showcase in the vein of *Lucia di Lammermoor*.
\(^{37}\) The exception is the conclusion of Act II, in which E is arrived at through a series of ascending thirds.
Throughout his own compositional career, Massenet shows an ever-increasing preference for large-scale tonal organization. *Don César de Bazan* (1872) shows very little confirmation of its final E major key. Neither of the previous two acts ends in E nor is there any significant use of the dominant or leading-tone key areas at dramatic focal points. Cut much more in the model of a Meyerbeer *grand opera*, *Don César* is comprised of individual numbers whose tonal boundaries are clearly defined by full-stop cadences at their ends. Even *Hérodiade*, whose number skeleton is subsumed into larger scenes but which is still audible as a collection of closed musical forms, shows only a limited reliance on a governing tonic. The D minor conclusion to Act IV is a mere twenty-nine measures following a lengthy scene in E minor/major that includes a tripartite aria by Salomé and a chorus asking Hérode to show pity on Jean. The shift to D minor accompanies the appearance of the executioner and acclimations of terror and outrage. Seen in the larger scope of the opera, however, D minor is arrived at through a series of stepwise descents that conclude the previous three acts: Act I – E; Act II – E♭; Act III – D; Act IV – d. *Hérodiade* does represent an important step in defining how
Massenet characterizes the lead roles in their relationship to an operatic tonic. Indeed, Salomé and Jean are clearly defined in their relationship to the D minor. Jean’s first appearance includes the thundering, prophetic “Frappe donc!” (“Strike me down!”) along with other inflammatory exclamations – all sung in D minor. Salomé begins singing in E♭, later E, until the moment when her true identity as Hérodiade’s daughter is revealed in the final moments of the opera. Thus, the somewhat abrupt shift from e/E to d in these last minutes of the opera can be seen as analogous to Salomé’s own self realization. Her suicide negates the possibility of her singing in D (Jean’s key) and therefore nullifies the relationship she so desperately sought to have with the prophet.

The two operas that immediately precede Thaïs, Le Mage (1891) and Werther (1892), each show a more consistent and heightened dramaturgical approach to the operatic tonic. Like Hérodiade, Le Mage has an abrupt change of key moments before the final curtain falls. Here, the move from E♭ to C major is an aural corollary to the triumph of constancy over jealousy. The general Zarâstra has defeated the Tournaians but falls in love with their queen, Anahita. Varedha, daughter of the high-priest, loves Zarâstra and vows to have him as her own regardless of the cost. In the final moments of the opera and in the smoldering ruins of the temple, Varedha witnesses Zarâstra and Anahita together and summons a great fire to threaten their safety. The lovers duet is initiated by a move to E♭ when Zarâstra first sees Anahita (who he thought was dead), and it is cut in a traditional four-part plan. When Varedha interrupts their reunion, she does so in the tempo di mezzo and in E♭, all the while screaming incantations to whip up the flames. To countermand this tonal and physical intrusion, Zarâstra, whose new abilities as Magus
and priest afford him great magical powers, pushes the music up to C major through a stepwise ascent (see Example 7). Zarâstra overcomes the flames and departs with his love, leaving the jilted Varedha behind to die.

Also witness to the large-scale tonal plan in Le Mage is the key structure of each act. The first, third, and fifth act end in C major, while Acts II and IV end in A minor and D major, respectively. Indeed, the keys that form the goals of the closed numbers are almost always closely related to C major. Conspicuously absent, as it was in Hérodiade and Don Cesar, is a large-scale move to G major, the dominant. Instead, Massenet structures whole tableaux, or even acts, around a single, goal oriented progression. The first section of Act III illustrates such a move: B♭/♭→B→B♯→E♯. The upper-neighbor motion to B major is subsumed in an otherwise V-I progression in E♯ major, the goal key of this section and the key of the ensuing cavatine (“Heureux celui”) and caballette (“O ciel d’Ahoura”). Though in later works Massenet will not use a single key for such a long-term movement as a caballette and cavatine combined, the sense of a musical arrival at a goal key will nevertheless be an important indicator of dramatic arrival. This is the case with his next opera, Werther.

The earliest indication of Massenet’s interest in the Goethe story came in the summer of 1885 when the composer, along with his publisher Georges Hartmann and librettist Paul Milliet agreed to expand the “improvised scenario” Hartmann had sketched. The actual composition took place over the span of almost two years from

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38 The exceptions are moves to VI or to the leading-tone in B major (often spelled as B♭ major).
mid-1885 to 14 March 1887 and corresponds to a four-year hiatus from operatic premières. Werther was first performed at the Vienna Opera in February 1892; a year later, it was given at the Opéra-Comique. It has remained ensconced in the repertory ever since.

In Werther, Massenet carefully outlines a key structure that tracks G major from the opening moments of the opera to its conclusion. The four acts end in F major – D major – B minor – G major (respectively) and the opera begins solidly in D major, the goal dominant. Like Le Mage, Massenet sets up a specific short-term goal for individual sections within an act. While some of these goal-oriented movements correspond to the standard closed aria and ensemble forms, Massenet adds a new technique of tonal importance to this opera: key association with specific characters. An example of each of these practices will illustrate this important step in Massenet’s dramaturgy before Thaïs.

Act III opens with two complete multi-part arias for Charlotte. The first is the famous “letter scene” in which Charlotte reads Werther’s letters. In this scene, the move from A minor in the cavatine (“Je vous écris”) to C major in the cabalette (“Des cris joyeux”) is interrupted an eleven-measure tempo di mezzo. Following the cabalette, however, is an extended passage in F minor while Charlotte reads Werther’s most pathetic letter. This passage keeps the same tempo as the cabalette, Massenet even marks Même mouvt., but its character is much more indicative of a scena. Indeed, it functions as a concluding récit section to this scene. While it exemplifies Massenet’s conservative

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40 The four years that separate Le Cid (30 November 1885) and Esclarmonde (14 May 1889) represent a somewhat longer break than similar interludes in Massenet’s early career. However, they more than double the time between operas after Esclarmonde, which average one and a half years between premières.
approach to operatic form, the “letter scene” is end-weighted and thus serves to launch the second scene. Here, Charlotte’s sister Sophie enters to find Charlotte deeply distressed. After prying to find the cause, Charlotte confesses in only the vaguest of terms, “Les larmes qu’on ne pleure pas” (“The tears we hold back”). This forms the cavatine of the second scene complex. After a tempo di mezzo where Sophie begs her sister to come away to meet their father, Charlotte finally acquiesces and sings the caballette, “Seigneur Dieu! Seigneur!” Her resolution to avoid Werther is weakening and the caballette is a plea for strength and resolve. Figure 3 shows how Massenet sets up the two scenes to reach the final caballette through ascending stepwise motion. In doing so, he aligns the musical and dramatic ends of these two scenes.

In true operatic fashion, Werther enters as Charlotte finishes her plea for strength. Massenet highlights this ironic tension throughout the next scene, the last of Act III. Werther manages to sing his cavatine, the famous “Pourquoi me réveiller,” despite Charlotte’s attempts to restrict their conversation to nostalgia. However, he cannot push

Figure 3. Werther, Act III, Scenes 1 and 2. Key structure and tonal goal.

41 The tempo d’attaco of this scene moves from F major to A major when Sophie tries to cheer up Charlotte with the ariette “Ah! le rire est bénı.”
42 She states: “Voyez! la maison est restée telle que vous l’aviez quittée!” (“Look! the house has remained just as you had left it!”)
the ensemble forward to a much desired “happy caballette.” Instead, Massenet brings the couple together – it is the only ensemble singing they have in the entire opera – in a repetition of Werther’s cavatine. Werther’s failure to complete the traditional form reads as his failure to obtain Charlotte. Massenet has skillfully thwarted the conventional plan in favor of a much stronger dramaturgical impact. Significant in terms of the overall key, the act ends in B minor, the only key avoided in the upward-step sequence of the first half of the act.

The way Massenet fixes keys with individual characters is, as of its writing, unique to Werther but will become an important practice in later operas. The title character shows the most thorough appropriation of this technique. Throughout the opera, Werther sings in A#, and though he may try, he does not resolve this Neapolitan-tonic relationship until his last dying request. When the opera opens, Werther is content to sing in G major, but upon seeing Charlotte, he moves to A# and remains there throughout the rest of the work.

Werther opens with a D minor/major prelude and opening scene. In the background, Children sing “Noël! Jésus vient de naître.” The whole atmosphere establishes the innocence of Charlotte’s home. Werther is a guest in this house and so accommodates himself by singing in D major. This music serves as récit to the ensuing cavatine, “O nature, pleine de grâce,” sung in G major. In a crystalline tri-partite structure, Werther reaches his final g\textsuperscript{1} through a stepwise ascent from d\textsuperscript{1} only to have his tonic reharmonized as the third of an E\# dominant seventh chord. More than just a deceptive cadence (V to \#VI), Massenet is hinting at Werther’s defining key of A\# (E\# as
the dominant of $A_\#$), though it is only after Charlotte appears that Werther will find solace in this tonality.

Charlotte’s entrance comes shortly after Werther’s opening *cavatine* and is accompanied by a move to F major. The balance of this scene is dominated by the music for the ball, a jocular tune in $\frac{3}{4}$ and marked *Assez animé, avec entrain* (Rather fast, with energy). It is in this context that Werther erupts with his first melody in $A_\#$, “O spectacle idéal d’amour” sung as he watches Charlotte embrace her younger siblings. Massenet sets up this passage to be a multi-section slow aria but cuts it short by modulating to C major and by reintroducing the music for the ball. Once again, Werther is unable find tonal, and in this instance formal, resolution, though he has managed to find the key that will define himself for the rest of the opera.

Werther leaves with Charlotte after this brief ariette only to reappear with her at the close of Act I. In the interim, Albert, Charlotte’s intended husband, arrives and sings of his longing to be with his future bride, then departs to find her. Werther and Charlotte return during a symphonic interlude evoking the *clair de lune*. This F major pastorale sets up Charlotte’s first major aria “Vous avez dit vrai!” in E major. Responding to Werther’s somewhat caustic question regarding her lack of interest (“Faut-il que j’en appelle à ceux que vous nommez vos enfants?” [“Must I appeal to those you call your children?”]) Charlotte tries to deflect Werther’s interest by offering him an image of herself as *chère maman* (dear mamma) rather than his lover. Werther does not accept this, and, in a tour de force of modulations that harmonize a chromatic ascending scale, he forces E major up to $A_\#$ major where he passionately declares “Le céleste sourire! Oh! Charlotte! Je vous
aime et je vous admire!” (“What a celestial smile! O, Charlotte! I love you and admire you!”). In the first of only two resolutions to an A₉ tonic anywhere in the opera, Werther has spoken his heart and set himself in tonal opposition to the G major foundation of the opera.

Werther’s next excursion in A₉ comes at the beginning of Act II. Having just witnessed Charlotte and Albert enter a church together, Werther exclaims “Un autre est son époux!” (“Another is her husband!”) then flirts with the dominant of A₉ before moving solidly there for his romance “J’ai rais sur ma poitrine pressé” (“I should have clasped [her] to my breast.”) Though he manages to reach a₉ for the final cadence, the undulating pattern of I-VI-I over his long last note defies any real sense of conclusion and instead moves the music away from A₉. Albert enters and tries to consol Werther by expressing sympathy for his situation. This is done in D₉ major, the subdominant to the A₉ major heard moments before. A₉ major continues when Werther declares, “celui qui sait lire au fond de ma pensée / n’y doint trouver jamais que la seule amitié!” (“he who can read my inmost thoughts / must never find anything there but friendship”). Thus, the two arias that define Albert are harmonically related to music sung first by Werther. Albert’s Act I aria “Quelle prière” is in A₉ major and serves as an extension of Werther’s paean to Charlotte “O spectacle idéal d’amour” both in key and in sentiment.

Later in Act II, Werther sings a brief passage in A₉ at the moment he realizes he cannot leave Charlotte alone, “Partir! Non! je ne veux que me rapprocher d’elle!” (“Go away! No! I only want to come closer to her”). Though the context of this passage is

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43 Albert’s Act I aria “Quelle prière” is in A₉ major and serves as an extension of Werther’s paean to Charlotte “O spectacle idéal d’amour” both in key and in sentiment.
and the harmony is modulatory throughout, Massenet deliberately notates the nine measures in \( A_b \) major further equating that key with the main character.

Werther’s appearance in Act III follows the “letter scene” discussed earlier. Massenet shows the disintegration of Werther’s emotional stability by approaching his goal key from above and below. His entrance coincides with a move to \( B_b \) and the duet he sings with Charlotte is in \( F_b \) (read \( G_b \)) minor. This tonal removal, although proximally close to \( A_b \), a whole step in either direction, is harmonically distant in order that the sound of Werther’s singing is far removed from the envoiced familiarity of \( A_b \). Such tonal removal is carried to its extreme in Act IV, where Charlotte finds Werther lying in a pool of blood. His first words “Qui parle?” form the fifth of a \( D \) major triad, a full tritone away from his home \( A_b \). His tonal and physical removal from the Charlotte and her world is now complete.

Or rather, it has come full circle, as Werther makes his final request to Charlotte in \( G \) minor, thus reconciling himself to the opera’s key, if not modality. He asks to be buried “au fond du cimetière” (“in the heart of the cemetery”) and failing that, on the roadside nearby. In a gracefully subtle yet aurally horrific gesture, Massenet gives Charlotte an \( a_b^2 \) for her exclamation after Werther dies. The orchestra sounds a German augmented-sixth \( (A_b-C_b-F_b^\#) \) in \( C \) that moves as expected to a \( G^7 \) chord. The \( G \) dominant harmony loses its \( F \)-natural to become the final key of the opera.

Huebner suggests that “the last harmony of the opera is open-ended” and that coupled with the setting (Christmas Eve), it represents “Werther’s own potential for
regeneration in the hereafter [as] reflected in the symbol of Christ’s birth.” 44 If tonal reconciliation in the form of Werther’s earlier G minor statements reflects the possibility of regeneration, Massenet extends this technique in *Thaïs*, for there, both tonal and melodic reconciliation (analogous to symphonic recapitulation) are present in the final moments of the opera. In effect, Massenet’s most popular triptych of operas, *Manon*, *Werther*, and *Thaïs* all share, to a greater or lesser extent, the common thread of tonal and/or melodic return at the final moments of the opera.

Tonal Centrality in *Thaïs*

*Thaïs* represents Massenet’s most thorough effort to unify an opera with an underlying tonic. As Figure 4 illustrates, the whole opera is organized around a relationship to D major. Characters, places, and narratival turning points all function in specific and consistent ways relative to D major. At the same time, the paucity of conventional forms shows Massenet’s willingness to abandon the audience’s expectation in favor of a larger, more symphonic conception of opera.

The tonal centrality of D major emerges in Athanaël’s opening aria. *Thaïs* opens with an a pedal point on A, later confirmed as A minor with the entrance of the cellos on the “Thébaïde” motif, whose open fifths represent the Egyptian desert. With its chorus of monks and the pleading voice of their leader, Palémon, this scene corresponds, in the broadest of comparisons, to the opening crowd scene of grand opéras four decades earlier. Athanaël’s entrance sixty-four measures later is marked by a shift to D minor, making the opening choral scene a dominant prolongation to the operatic tonic. The

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44 Huebner, *French Opera*, 127.
dense chromaticism that marks Athanaël’s entrance (marked Andante lento) is in sharp contrast to the diatonicism of both the opening tableaux and his subsequent aria, “Hélas! enfant encore.”

Figure 4. Keys, aria and ensemble forms, and méditation appearances in Thaïs.

Act I

Scene 1

Athenaël’s entrance Vision

At: Hélas, enfant encore Aria: ABA’
cavatine
cabaletta

Scene 2

At: Voilà, donc la terrible cité! Aria: ABA’

Cro / Myr duet Quartet: Ne t’offense

That’s entrance

Act II

Scene 1

Th: Dit-moi “Mirroir” Aria: ABA’

Scene 2

Méditation

Ballet

Aria: A B A’

At: L’amour est une vertu Ariette: AA’

Cro / Myr: Celle qui vient est plus belle

Act III

Scene 1

Th: O messager de Dieu

Scene 2

At: En vain j’ai flagellé

At: Alors, pourquoi le

Scene

Th / At: Te souviens-il
Duet: ABA’
cabaletta

The first half of Act I scene 2 is a large-scale dominant preparation and prolongation in D. Athanaël’s great three-part aria “Voilà donc la terrible cité!” is in E major, the dominant of the dominant. Its conclusion is marked by a move to the more seductive E Phrygian and the entrance of the two slave girls, Crobyle and Myrtaile.

Athanaël’s reason for returning to Alexandria is to seek out and convert Thaïs; to do this,
he meets with Nicias, a friend from his youth and now a successful businessman and slave owner. The four characters join in a quartet where Athanaël is ridiculed for his backwards lifestyle. This is one of the few instances of ensemble singing in the entire opera. It opens with a clearly articulated eighth-note ostinato pattern on E and A. A major assumes its place as the central key and the quartet closes with an unaccompanied cadential figure for all four voices.

The entrance of Thaïs follows and, though her character is introduced with a D pedal, it is obscured by frequent harmonic reinterpretation and chromaticism. Her first aria, “Qui te fait si sèvere” is in A-flat, enharmonically G-sharp, the leading tone to the dominant in the home key of D. The leading tone resolves as expected shortly after Thaïs’s aria concludes, but Massenet effects a move to C major to conclude the scene and act. This provides tonal symmetry with the end of first scene and sets up a flatted relationship with D that will be paralleled at the end of Act II. The first two acts end on the lowered seventh and second (respectively) in the key of D.

While the centrality of D is not immediately evident at the beginning of Act II, it does emerges after a series of dominant preparations and prolongations. The act opens with Thaïs’s famous “Mirror Aria” in B-flat (the Neapolitan to the dominant). One other advantage of B-flat is that it allows for an impressive cadential close, in which Thaïs transcends the tonic to end on the third of B-flat major; as yet the highest note in the piece, and the pitch that will return as the apotheosis of the opera as a whole.45

45 Massenet uses the same “over-third” device in Hérodiade for Salome’s “Il est doux, il est bon.” Here, the tonal excess symbolizes Salome’s willingness to abandon the rules of Hérode’s court in order to win Jean for herself.
Following the “Mirror” aria, the dominant leading tone is again enharmonically respelled as A-flat to form the key of Athanaël’s “Qui m’inspirera,” and again it resolves as expected – to A. Here, though, Massenet uses the return of the A section of the aria to underscore the move from A-flat to A major. This kind of tonal ascent within a closed form is common in French opera and can be found throughout the work of Gounod and Thomas.

A major is reinterpreted as the dominant of D and serves as an introduction to the famous méditation. Though the méditation has significance far beyond its place as a D major focal point, this will be discussed later as it relates to the final moments of the opera. It is significant that this move to D major provides the center-point of a diagonal axis that links tonality and motivic presence with the opening of the first act, the midpoint of the second act, and the conclusion of the third act. The remainder of the second act is devoted to the ballet and to the exposure of Thaïs’s decision to abandon her secular lifestyle. Significantly, Massenet avoids any use of D major in this section – there is no D major dance in the ballet, and the act ends with a move from C major/minor to E₉ (the Neapolitan). The result is an aural association of D major with elements of the sacred: Athanaël’s mission, Thaïs’s conversion (the méditation), and ultimately, her apotheosis. The omission of D major in all of Act II, Scene 2, the most secular moment of the drama, confirms Massenet’s view of the function of his operatic tonic.

The final act reads as a study in third and half-step relations to D major. Absent is the use of the dominant as a structurally important point, though the opening of Scene 2 is briefly in A minor before moving to F major. After an extended opening in F minor,
meant to depict the desert road to Thaïs’s convent home, Massenet highlights the Neapolitan and relative minor keys as tonally and dramatically significant. Thaïs sings in Eₙ, accompanied by tremolo strings, as the two characters reach an oasis. The halo effect mirrors her own sentiments, “mon esprit, dégagé de la terre planne déjà dans cette immensité!” (“my spirit, disengaged from Earth, floats already in this immensity”) and foreshadows her final assumption. More importantly, Thaïs’s move to Eₙ pulls Athanaël with her, and they sing together for the first time in the opera. Clearly baptismal in nature (“Baigne d’eau mes mains” [“Bathe your hands in water”] says Athanaël), the duet is the long awaited moment wherein the two characters unite in purpose.

Significantly, Massenet avoids a perfect authentic cadence between the two characters, thus symbolizing their inability to truly unite. Neither sings tonic on the final note (Thaïs has a g² while Athanaël has a Bₙ), and the arrival at the cadence is equally unexpected. Setting up what appears to be a plagal cadence (vii/IV – IV – I), Massenet replaces the subdominant with a German augmented sixth (C♯-E♯-G♯-A♯) and elides it with the final tonic (E♯-G-B♯) omitting the dominant altogether. The two reach their final note through contrary motion thus imbuing the voice leading with dramatic significance. Thaïs transcends the tonic while singing “Ma vie est à toi!” while Athanaël descends to the dominant selfishly saying “Ta vie est à moi!” Though the characters inhabit the same tonal space for this cadence, the crossing of their trajectories is short, as Thaïs now enters the convent. Massenet restores D major to accompany this separation, thus imbuing the

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46 Massenet uses the same string tremolo qua halo to conclude *Le Jongleur de Notre Dame* when Jean is transfigured before the eyes of his monastic brothers.
key with a tension made more urgent by its juxtaposition with E♭ major heard just moments before.

The closure provided by this moment is heightened by the confluence of several different elements: a return to D major, thematic recall of the méditation motive, and Athanaël’s plaintive “Je ne la verrai plus!... (“I will never see her again!”). Added together, they effectively halt the action, leaving the audience to wonder if the characters will ever unite. They do, in a manner of speaking, but such a plot reversal is not rare in opera. Act III of Verdi’s Ernani concludes with a magnanimous gesture when the title character is freed from captivity only to have Silvia call for his death in Act IV. On a much more intimate scale, in La traviata, Violetta’s sudden freedom from pain is accompanied by a move to D♭ major, the opera’s final key, effectively uniting plot movement with tonal space.

Massenet did not originally provide this moment of connection, the “Oasis scene,” for the first performance of the opera. Instead, Act III opened at the Thébaïde monastery, thus providing exact symmetry with Act I. The revised version was frequently derided in the press as an example how Massenet capitulates to the operatic public’s demands. The duet was seen as gratuitous and dramatically unnecessary. In reality, this scene, and the duet in particular, shows Massenet’s willingness to bend conventions to an almost unrecognizable point, since this duet forms the first part of a “conventional” plan that spans, both tonally and dramatically, the whole of Act III. To see this feature, the duet is best viewed in the musico-dramatic context of the entire act.
The second tableau opens with Athanaël at home with his Cénobite brothers. The A minor passage effectively recalls the opening of the opera, and the aural symmetry suggests dramatic symmetry too: Athanaël, at first articulating his conversional mission, now confesses his love for Thaïs: “Je ne vois que Thaïs” (“I only see Thaïs”). This arioso, while not part of a larger aria complex, mirrors the cavatine “Hélas! Enfant encore” complete with its initial ascending fifth and a move to the parallel major. This recall, if more gestural than motivic or formal, sets up a series of recapitulations throughout the second and third tableaux of Act III. Table 6 illustrates these musico-dramatic recapitulations. The result of this steady reuse of music goes much deeper than the thematic reminiscences used in Werther, Manon, or Hérodiade. Indeed, Thaïs’s recapitulation is symphonic in proportion, and in this way, Massenet is setting up a kind of symphonic conception of the drama – not in terms of sonata form, rather in the manner of end-weighted, teleological fulfillment that follows thematic revisitation. Massenet

Table 6. Musical recapitulations in the last act of Thaïs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Act III Recalls</th>
<th>Deuxième Tableau</th>
<th>Troisième Tableau</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>La Thébaïde</td>
<td>At. arioso: “En vain”</td>
<td>At. arioso: “Alors”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Act I – Tbl. 1</td>
<td>Th: arioso “Qui te fait”</td>
<td>Vision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>La Thébaïde</td>
<td>Act I – Tbl. 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>At. cavatine</td>
<td>Th: arioso “Qui te fait”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Hélas!”</td>
<td>Act I – Tbl. 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keys original/Act III</td>
<td>a / a</td>
<td>At. cabalette “Toi qui mis”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keys original/Act III</td>
<td>D / f/F</td>
<td>e / d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keys original/Act III</td>
<td>A₇ / A₇</td>
<td>D / D</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To be sure, the Act III arioso, “En vain j’ai flagellé,” contains the motion to parallel major within its closed formal boundary while the corresponding move in Act I precedes the opening of the cavatine. The elements are shared, just not in the same order.
does this through a consistent and deliberate use of pre-existing material – both musical and scenic/dramatic – to the exclusion of including anything musically or scenically new in the final two tableaux. While not so restrictive as *Thaïs* in its paucity of new music, Wagner’s *Parsifal* makes use of a similar recapitulatory gesture between its first and third acts.48 This connection with Wagner, when extended, opens up a series of questions and suggested interpretations in what has heretofore been considered a non-Wagnerian opera.

Writing on the “Symphonic Myth” in *Götterdämmerung*, Carolyn Abbate cautions against evoking “Wagner’s authority for a modern view of the symphonic – based on formal designs, large-scale tonal coherence, and the like,” fearing that such a view is “at best naïve, at worst dishonest.”49 This concern is borne out in a reading of Act II, Scene 5, the “Conspiracy Scene” in which we find an assortment of smaller-scale sections interposed with refrains. Wagner slows and at times halts the narrative by repeating lines of text and, in that rarest of *Ring* moments, by ensemble singing. The result is a scene that is much more operatic in conception that symphonic. Carl Dahlhaus confirms the reading of this scene when he noted that “a music drama in which the characters are mere vessels for passions and the dialogue takes the form of tableaux, in which concurring or contrasting emotions are decked out with the appropriate musical colouring, is nothing other than an opera.”50

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48 Massenet saw *Parsifal* in August 1886 and it made an indelible impression on him. A companion on that trip to Bayreuth, Téodore de Wyzewa recalled that “He [Massenet] quivered feverishly, became short-breathed, and his large, sombre eyes twinkled in the dark. And when the opera was over, I heard him say to someone in the corridors of the theatre, ‘Ah! I am anxious to return to Paris to burn my *Werther!*.” Le *Figaro*, 16 January 1893; quoted in Huebner, *French Opera*, 88.


What Abbate finds operatic about this scene is exceptional, indeed inversely proportional, when compared to the balance of the *Götterdämmerung* and the *Ring* in general. As the exception that proves the rule then, how can this scene inform a reading of *Thaïs*? The final scene of Massenet’s opera is symphonic only in the context of the operatic essence of Acts I and II and the opening of III. Here, musical forms long associated with Second Empire and early Third Republic operas are evident at the surface, and their function in the opera is, as one might expect, more directed toward character development than narratival advancement. What happens in the final scene of Act III fuses all of these set pieces into their final, apotheosized form.

This interpretation can rest on unsteady ground when one compares it to similar transfigurative endings. The example that would have resonated most profoundly with Massenet and his audience is the ending of Gounod’s *Faust*. Here, Marguerite sings “Anges purs, anges radieux,” asking for divine protection against Méphistophélès. This leads to the final visual scene of the opera, a chorus of angels singing “Christ est ressuscite!” as Marguerite ascends to heaven and Faust falls to his knees in prayer. Although only thirty measures long, Gounod marks this final chorus *Apothéose*, embuing it with a mystical quality that was frequently revisited by later composers. The idea of an apotheosis helps mitigate the otherwise *deus ex machina* sense given this scene: Marguerite’s prayer for deliverance results in her transfiguration as an act of self-preservation.\(^{51}\)

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\(^{51}\) Nineteenth-century critics were quick to point out that “the transcendental significance apparently demanded by one of the literary sources (Goethe’s play) has been considered as sacrificed to bathetic sentimentality.” Seven Huebner, “Faust,” *New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, 4 vols., ed. Stanley Sadie (London: Macmillan, 1994), 2: 135.
Thaïs does not suffer from the same kind of self-preserving dénouement. While critics of the first version occasionally made comparisons to Faust, they were generally associated with the ballet La Tentation. By removing the temptations from Athanaël, Massenet removes the external influences that would have colored his decision to love Thaïs. In effect, Massenet weakens Athanaël’s moral fortitude in order to strengthen Thaïs’s. This transfer of morality is accompanied by a shared musical gesture in the form of the envoiced méditation. By tracing the final workings of the méditation, we see how Massenet acts to fuse music and narrative on a much larger dramatic scale.

The Méditation qua Apotheosis

The méditation first appears in full form in the middle of Act II. Thaïs has just refuted Athanaël saying, “Non! je reste Thaïs! la courtisane! Je ne crois plus à rien et je ne veux plus rien: Ni lui, ni toi, ni ton Dieu!” (“No! I remain Thaïs the courtesan—I believe in nothing more and I want nothing more. — Not him [Nicias], not you, nor your God!”). The méditation itself is performed with a closed curtain while the scene is changed from the interior to the exterior of Thaïs’s house. Marked “Andante religioso,” it is in three parts of roughly equal length. Massenet juxtaposes diatonicism in the A sections with chromaticism in the middle, so that the listener visualizes Thaïs reflecting on Athanaël’s argument, wrestling with it, and (finally) succumbing to his message. It is the final A section then, that represents Thaïs’s real conversion experience. The occasion is marked by a most unusual addition to the palette of orchestral timbers – a humming

52 Adolphe Julien’s review for Le Journal des Debats typifies this assessment. He writes, “At once the Seven Spirits of Temptation attack him, charm his poor heart and dance an infernal round where the appearance of the beautiful enchantress will be offered him: the effect for Athanaël is of Robert and the nuns, or Doctor Faust in the Walpurgis night.” 17 March 1894; Rowden, 80.
chorus, muted behind the curtain. Though this is rarely heard when the *méditation* is extracted as an operatic interlude, it is occasionally omitted from fully staged productions as well. Such an omission lessens the dramatic impact and the connection which the *méditation* has with the rest of the opera.

The nascent *méditation* theme was first heard in Athanaël’s opening aria (see above, Example 2); that is to say, fully texted. Here, at the moment of her conversion, it is as though words cannot describe the experience. Thaïs overcomes this moment of inarticulateness in the final appearance of the *méditation* theme. With a melody that frequently aligns with the *méditation*, she recounts her journey to the convent, the splendor of heaven’s open doors, and ultimately, the tender hand of the *doux consolateur*. But Thaïs does not sing this alone. This moment is actually a duet, albeit one of the most unconventional imaginable.

Prior to their baptismal duet heard earlier in Act III, the only ensemble singing that takes place is diegetic song; that is, music heard by the characters on stage. This changes in Act III as Thaïs and Athanaël finally sing to, not for, each other. Figure 5 reflects how the *méditation* theme tracks throughout the final act as an omnipresent force pulling the two characters together.

Figure 5. *Thaïs* Act III. Tonal overview.

![Tonal overview](image)

Note: *méditation* appearances are marked with a cross.
Massenet aligns the dramatic trajectories of Athanaël and Thaïs with the recapitulatory gesture of the *méditation* theme in a series of texted presentations. The first of these “voice-overs” belongs to Athanaël (see Example 8). Here, Athanaël realizes that Thaïs’s departure will permanently separate the two. Notice that Athanaël’s line first matches the pitches of the *méditation* theme not on a syntactically or semantically important word (“branches” at the end of the first line) but rather at the elision of the second and third musical phrases, with the rising F-natural to F-sharp; a pivotal note for this key’s identification. Concordance happens again two bars later, this time on important words: “and the days, and the years, will pass… never to appear to me again.” The harmonic shift at the final forte sends the theme into an E half-diminished-seventh chord and brings the entire first scene to a close.

This appearance of the music from the *méditation* follows the baptismal duet, “Baigne d’eau mes mains” and thus forms a kind of release from the finality of that closed form. Indeed, it could function as an “interruption” or *tempo di mezzo* should there be a fully-formed, tonally closed *cavatine* to follow. Massenet provides this second closed form in the guise of the second voice-over to the *méditation* theme, the final duet shared by the main characters.

Example 9 illustrates this duet, which is initiated by Thaïs. The alignment of Thaïs’s vocal line with that of the original *méditation* theme is much more consistent than Athanaël’s version - as is evident from her first phrase. This reinforces Thaïs’s connection with the melody, though Athanaël too shares more melodic correspondence.

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53 This moment concludes scene 1 of Act III and corresponds to the second † in Figure 5.
than he did in his own voice-over. This final version plays out the entire three-part
*méditation* theme with contrafacta congruence at every musically significant phrase. This
is indeed the moment the audience has been waiting for: consummation of the love of the
two main characters. Of course, Thaïs cannot reciprocate Athanaël’s love, as hers is
directed toward heaven, but the tonal, recapitulatory, and formal space shared by these
two characters is weighty enough to mitigate their now divergent trajectories. In short,
Massenet, the consummate dramatist, does not disappoint.

54 The *méditation* begins where it ended in Example 2.
55 In this way and to great effect, Massenet has softened the “antagonistic” duet so frequently a part of
Verdi’s later operas.
Reinterpreting the A’ section, we hear the apotheosis of Thaïs and the opera as a whole. The soaring d³ is a testament to the stability of D major throughout the opera and its reverberation in the ears of the listeners. Indeed, the only time this note is transcended...
is in the spectral laughter heard at the end of Athanaël’s dream earlier in Act III.\(^{56}\) This move beyond the top D is made all the more powerful when its unreality is taken into account. Thaïs appears to Athanaël in his dream – she taunts him by singing the seductive “Qui te fait si sévère” (“Why are you so strict?”). As Athanaël responds “Satan!,” Thaïs breaks out into maniacal laughter. The effect of the excess is striking. Athanaël must publically denounce Thaïs’s former lifestyle, but he cannot escape her charm. Even his subconscious mind, in the function of this dream, is not able to separate his moral obligation from his carnal desire. Only when Thaïs moves beyond the confines of D does the dream end and the vision of her death appear.

The final duet, and specifically the A’ section, reestablishes the tonal authority of D, vividly manifest in Thaïs’s upper register. One final reading of this ensemble, only the second time the main characters have sung together, will reveal how it functions in a conventional, or in this case, wholly unconventional, formal plan. If the baptismal duet with its lilting ensemble singing in thirds and sixths represents the epitome of the \textit{cavatine} form, then can this final duet, whose topos is wholly subsumed in the \textit{méditation}, really be considered some kind of deformed \textit{cabalette}? The answer lies in how (and from where) Massenet appropriated the melody for the final section of the duet.

Since so much of the final duet is a reworking of \textit{méditation} theme, it is easy to view it a mere thematic recapitulation meant to reorient the listener to Thaïs’s conversion experience now writ large as her assumption. However, the music from the \textit{méditation} breaks off at the final A’ revealing a new theme that begins at Thaïs’s words “Deux

\(^{56}\) Though Massenet marks “Rires stridents” (“shrill laughter”), he specifically notates pitches beginning e\(_3\) and moving chromatically up to e\(_5\).
séraphins” (see above, Example 9). The origin of this phrase is tied to Athanaël’s *cabalette* from Act I, “Toi qui mis la pitié” (Example 10). By borrowing from Athanaël’s earlier *cabalette*, the only fully formed four-part aria in the entire opera, Massenet solidifies the function of the final duet as a *cabalette*, the *cavatine* to which is heard in first scene of this act. The dramatic reverberation is even stronger than the musical one, for it is in Athanaël’s Act I *cabalette* that we understand the nature of his mission, indeed, the setup for all narratival events to follow, and it is in the *cabalette* of the final duet that we fully realize the result of his action. With its alignment of tonal, recapitulatory, and conventional formal space, the final moment of *Thaïs* assumes a much deeper significance than similar transfigurative moments in Gounod or Meyerbeer, though on the surface the gestures may appear the same.

This kind of meta-structure in which a four-part ensemble form is realized over the span of several scenes is new in the work of Massenet and reveals his importance as the mediator between the conventional employment of forms inherited from Gounod and Thomas and those who would abandon these forms, namely Debussy and Dukas. The
way Massenet approaches this problem in his later operas shows a continuation of the flexibility engendered in *Thais* and will be explored in more detail in the next chapter.
CHAPTER V

REWRITING CONVENTIONS

MASSENET’S OPERAS AFTER 1902

On 12 February 1896, Massenet’s teacher, friend, mentor, and colleague Ambrose Thomas died in his apartment at the Conservatoire. The venerable composer had just returned from a gala celebration at the Opéra where his overture to Françoise de Rimini was performed to a warm reception. Thomas’s influence on Parisian musical life was immense – he was given a chair in the Académie des Beaux Arts in 1851 following the death of Gaspare Spontini, and he succeeded Daniel Auber as director of the Conservatoire in 1871. Massenet delivered one of the eulogies at Thomas’s funeral, noting that “It is said that a king of France in the presence of powerful lord of his court could not help but exclaim: “How tall he is!” So he who rests here before us seemed tall to us; one whose height is only measured after his death.”¹ Massenet knew that Thomas was regarded as the old guard, and, as Elizabeth Forbes has indicated, after taking the directorship Thomas “no longer had time for composition, no pressing financial need to write operas, nor, one may presume, any artistic stimulus to continue doing so.”²

Massenet, however, was a man of the theater, and his desire to devote his full energies to opera would soon dictate a significant change in his responsibilities at the Conservatoire. Upon Thomas’s request, Massenet accepted a position on the composition

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faculty at the Conservatoire in 1878, so it was naturally assumed that the student would take his master’s place as director when necessary. Massenet recalled in Mes Souvenirs, “it was very painful to me on that occasion [Thomas’s funeral] to see the envious looks of those who already saw in me my master’s successor at the Conservatoire.”³ Massenet was indeed offered the directorship, but declined “as I did not want to interrupt my life at the theater, which took my whole time.”⁴ More important for his development as a composer, Massenet also resigned his post at the Conservatoire, saying only “Free at last and loosed from my chains forever.”⁵

_Sapho_

The first work to emerge from Massenet’s freedom was _Sapho_, which premièred at the Opéra-Comique on 27 November 1897. Henri Cain, Massenet’s librettist for _La Navarraise_ (1894) and for _Cendrillon_ (1899), _Chérubin_ (1905), _Don Quichotte_ (1910), and _Roma_ (1912), approached the composer in the winter of 1895 with the idea of setting Alphonse Daudet’s story about a pair of lovers whose relationship is continually broken and renewed. Massenet worked quickly on _Sapho_, writing, “I felt twenty years younger. I wrote _Sapho_ with an enthusiasm I had rarely felt up to that time.”⁶ By 7 October 1896, he had completed the opera.

Though _Sapho_ met with much success early on, it dwindled in popularity throughout the twentieth century so that now it is only a footnote in the composer’s output. This is due in part to the crafting of the lead to fit the voice of Emma Calvé.

³ Massenet, _My Recollections_, 215.
⁴ Ibid., 216.
⁵ Ibid.
⁶ Ibid., 217.
Impressed with her triumph in *La Navarraise*, Massenet took advantage of Calvé’s extraordinary ability to sing convincingly as both a soprano and alto. The tessitura of Sapho frequently moves through widely spaced arpeggios from above to below the staff (though never as boldly as the climax of *Thaïs*). Writing in the same year as the premiere of *Sapho*, Eugène de Solenière remarked that “of all the interpreters of Massenet, Calvé is the one who best adapts to his temperament, and who most deeply realizes in all accounts his originality and passion.”

One other factor for *Sapho*’s contemporary neglect is its subject matter. With the successes of *Cavalleria rusticana* (1890), *La Bohème* (1896), and *Andrea Chénier* (1896), Massenet saw the influence of verismo operas encroaching from the Italian peninsula. Like his experimentation with Wagnerian opera, Massenet’s foray into verismo was equally brief. Nothing but the chorus *Noël* and the volume of *Vingt Mélodies* separate Massenet’s two verismo operas: *La Navarraise* and *Sapho*, both of which featured Calvé in the lead role.

In *Sapho*, the worldly and sophisticated Sapho (Fanny Legrand) falls in love with the provincial and naïve Jean. By concealing her sordid past, Sapho persuades Jean to love her, and the two settle down to start a family. A year later, Jean is visited by Sapho’s Parisian friends who inform the young husband of his wife’s former lifestyle. Repulsed, Jean leaves Sapho. She tries to win Jean back by playing the distressed beauty, but to no avail. Finally, Jean realizes that her love is genuine and seeks her out at their little home.

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7 “It is easy to see how Calvé made so much out of the part of Fanny [Sapho], which is designed for big effects and strong climaxes.” James Harding, *Massenet* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1970), 127.
8 Solenière, 140.
Sapho, however, has determined that no one will ever fully love her, and while she feigns happiness at Jean’s return, she quietly abandons him forever while he sleeps.

The constant flux of Jean and Sapho’s relationship is analogous to Des Grieux and Manon thirteen years earlier, and this connection has not been lost on Massenet’s critics. Camille Bellaigue wrote, “Sapho must be a modern Manon,”9 James Harding echoed that “in some respects Sapho is Manon brought up to date,”10 and Brigitte Olivier connected the two by means of a “collage” (a French colloquialism for “common-law marriage”).11 Each supports his or her claim with specific examples tied to the surface narrative (i.e. Jean and Des Grieux are both viewed as innocents, Sapho and Manon both abandon their lifestyle for the chance to be with their lover). While such readings illustrate consistency between the two operas, they do not account for analogous musical structures that might be shared.

*Sapho* employs a half dozen ABA forms in solo or ensemble moments. Grafted on top of these self-contained structures is a motive that appears throughout the opera at moments of maximal dramatic tension. In this respect, it is like *Thaïs’s méditation* theme, but in *Sapho*, the motive is fully-formed from the beginning and undergoes thematic transformation throughout the opera. The transformation softens the original agogic accents to become an anacrusis to a V-I cadence (see below, Examples 1a-1g).

After the initial presentation that opens the opera, the music changes to an on stage band accompanying the sounds of a party for the sculptor Caoudal. The motive

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9 *La Revue des Deux Mondes*, 1 January 1898.
10 Harding, 127.
functions as the main thematic material for a seventeen measure prelude firmly rooted in D minor. The abrupt connection with the G major party music serves a dual purpose. While the two are linked in terms of tonality (v-I), they are of vastly different characters so that the prelude (marked Large-très expressif and in \( \frac{3}{4} \)) stands in relief to the boisterous sounds accompanying the curtain (marked Très animé-avec beaucoup d’entrain and in \( \frac{3}{4} \)). The motive returns only once in Act I, at the moment that Sapho takes notice of Jean. It is the identical melody, but is now harmonized with a diminished seventh chord to add tension (Example 1b).

The first melodic and rhythmic alteration of the motive comes in the middle of Act II as Jean bids farewell to his parents and childhood friend, Irene. Moments before, Jean and Irene sing a tender duet in a modified ABA form. Jean’s parents then join the couple to form a quartet, and it is this texture, along with orchestral doubling, that sets this presentation of the motive apart from all the others. The motive is present at the

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12 Massenet specifies that the party music should rage in the background, performed by “un orchestre de faux Tziganes.”

13 See the discussion of this duet below.

climax of their final phrase where it forms Irene’s melodic material (Example 1c). What is striking about this kind of motivic transformation is that the dense vocal texture tends to obscure the presence of the motive itself. The descending tritone leap from the original form is now gone – replaced by a descending scalar passage that keeps continuous eighth-notes moving to a dotted figure (mm. 370-371). Also, the addition of contrary motion in the lower strings further blurs both the original unison presentation and the contrapuntally sparse diminished-seventh harmonization. Yet despite all these melodic adjustments, the original rhythm remains in tact.

The total effect seems to diminish the recognition of this moment as motivic transformation, yet this is a pivotal moment in the drama. By separating himself from his parents and his past, Jean strengthens his relationship with Sapho, who will enter moments later. That Irene would sound the motive at this moment strengthens her
position as Sapho’s putative rival, and though this is never explicitly mentioned in the opera, it is undoubtedly in Jean’s mind.

The motive, then, is not simply a representation of Fanny Legrand, indeed she does not articulate it anywhere in the opera. Like Thaïs who also lacks a specific motive, Sapho’s influence permeates the drama at every level so that the motive is best understood as a representation of this influence. It is fatalistic to be sure, especially in its original guise, but Sapho defies that convention by having all characters remain alive at
the end. Sapho exits knowing that what she does is for the good of Jean, and after time, Jean would realize the love Irene has for him.

The next appearance of the motive in Act II (Example 1d) shares several features with the vocal quartet version earlier in the act. In order to soften the dissonance and the gravity of the original motive, Massenet continues to omit the tritone leap, replacing it now with a major third. He keeps rhythmic continuity by maintaining an agogic accent followed by even eighth notes that lead to a dotted figure (in this new version, the dot is replaced by a sixteenth rest). This new version of the motive follows a twenty-two measure unaccompanied diegetic song. Fanny, in order to win Jean’s heart along with his body, sings an *air provençal* that Jean has been humming since the beginning of the act.14 Immediately after, Jean blurts out that he loves her. Fanny’s desire to have Jean completely is now fully realized.

Example 1d. *Sapho*, Act II, mm. 568-569.

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14 Massenet ascribes the text of this folksong to Frédéric Mistral. See the first edition score of *Sapho* (Paris: Heugel [plate 18,648], 1897), 49.
Fanny used the folksong to convince Jean that she respects his ties to his native Provence, and Massenet used it to frame the whole second act. Though not labeled as such, the act naturally falls into two scenes, both of which employ the “O Magali” folksong at their beginnings. By juxtaposing “Sapho’s influence” motive with the second iteration of the folksong, Massenet illustrates the total control she wields over Jean. Yet Sapho is equivocal in her desire and says as much just a dozen measures later, “He loves me, and yet we must say goodbye.”

A full year separates Acts II and III and Fanny’s ambiguity has turned to steadfastness. After a short discussion on the day’s plans, Jean triumphantly, and without provocation, exclaims that Fanny has complete control over him (Example 1e). The appearance of “Sapho’s influence” here is analogous to the harmonized example of the original presentation (see above Example 1b). Indeed, the same B diminished triad is present, though now it is harmonized as part of a dominant seventh G-B-D-F. Massenet

Example 1e. Sapho, Act III, mm. 66-69.
uses this aural rhyme to contrast Fanny’s initial gaze, in which she viewed Jean as a conquest, with her present stance of Jean as a companion. The musical similarities could not be more obvious, and Fanny’s motivation could not be more different.

The dissonant first presentation returns in a slower and more lyrical version in the next transformation of “Sapho’s influence” (Example 1f). Here, Jean has just learned that Fanny Legrand is one and the same as “Sapho,” the infamous artist’s model and courtesan. This transformation keeps the same pitches and rhythms of the initial version, but the reorchestration excludes winds and brass. As if to cancel the intervening scalar versions, the return of the original theme here and moments later at Fanny’s arrival on stage graphically return the listener to the beginning of the story, thus imbuing the motive with a duality (dissonant/consonant) befitting the two lives of Fanny/Sapho.
The final version of the motive is heard in the last act after Fanny confesses to Jean that she loves him alone (Example 1g). Putting aside her past, Jean sings with her “Je t’adore!” two measures before this example. This transformation is similar to the

Example 1g. Sapho, Act V, mm. 209-211.

one most frequently used in Acts II and III, when the relationship between the two characters was at its most blissful. The addition of harp arpeggios and the fourth-beat chromatic harmony adds an element of pathos to this version that supercedes all previous transformations. Like Manon’s “N’est ce plus ma main” or Dalila’s “Mon coeur s'ouvre à ta voix,” Massenet here uses the third iteration of a melody to pull hard on his listener’s heartstrings. With the Manon and Samson examples, however, the emotional pull is generated by the soprano voice; in Sapho, it is done by the orchestra alone.

Massenet had explored large-scale thematic unity in Thaïs, but the relative stasis of the méditation did not foster the kind of malleability seen in Sapho. There are other motives in Sapho to be sure, but there presence is usually localized, and none have the potential for dramatic resonance of “Sapho’s influence.” Even the motivically thick
Esclarmonde and Werther do not match transformational approach to motives in Sapho. Clearly Massenet is thinking of the drama as a larger, more unified whole.

This is evident in the approach he takes in the duets Jean shares with other characters. The largest of these is in Act II with Irene (see Table 1 for a formal outline).

While Massenet makes no attempt at a multi-part form, he has not altogether abandoned a four-square approach to melodic shape within self-contained sections. The result is a kind of modular duet whose melodic shape and style is governed by the text a character is singing. Massenet’s hallmark of a dominant-inflected melody is evident throughout Jean’s brief introduction; indeed, Jean avoids the D₃ tonic altogether. Instead, Irene’s opening \( cE₂ \) provides a reharmonized tonic to close Jean’s melody. Massenet is weakening Jean’s tonal authority and placing him in a subservient position to his female companions. Of course, this will be to Fanny’s advantage in the final moments of the opera, when her resolve to leave will decide his fate.

Table 1. Sapho, Act II, Jean and Irene duet, “Cher parents!”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Incipit</th>
<th>Measures</th>
<th>Antecedent/Consequent</th>
<th>Tonalities</th>
<th>Tempo</th>
<th>Meter</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>orchestral introduction</td>
<td></td>
<td>140-148</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>a tempo [Assez animé]</td>
<td>c</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vocal introduction – “Cher parents!” (Je)</td>
<td>148-159</td>
<td>2+2</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Modéré-gai</td>
<td>g</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a “C’était bien gentil” (Ir)</td>
<td>160-185</td>
<td>2+2</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Modéré-gai</td>
<td>g</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b “Et vous rappelez-vous” (Ir, Je)</td>
<td>186-210</td>
<td>4+4</td>
<td>D dorian</td>
<td>Modéré</td>
<td>g</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b’ “Puis…nous nous sauvions” (Ir→Ir+Je)</td>
<td>210-228 *</td>
<td>4+4</td>
<td>D dorian</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a’ “Vous souvient-il aussi” (Ir)</td>
<td>229-241</td>
<td>4+4</td>
<td>F</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c “Et, quand venait la nuit” (Ir→Ir+Je)</td>
<td>241-263 *</td>
<td>2+2</td>
<td>a→C→F</td>
<td>Tempo I’ [Modéré-gai]</td>
<td>g</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d “Puis, sur le seuil” (Je, Ir)</td>
<td>264-277</td>
<td>4+4</td>
<td>F→E→d→c/C</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c’ “Et vous l’étiez” (Ir, Je)</td>
<td>277-292</td>
<td>2+2</td>
<td>C→c²→V/A</td>
<td>a Tempo [Modéré-gai]</td>
<td>g</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a” “Comme autrefois” (Je+Ir)</td>
<td>293-304</td>
<td>2+2→cadence</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Modéré-plus lent qu’au début</td>
<td>g</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Je=Jean    Ir=Irene  
* = cadential figure “que nous tremblions” sung by both
The \( a \) sections of the duet are in marked contrast to the introduction. A staccato melody of tonic chord sixteenth-note arpeggios is accompanied by an ostinato figure (\( 1\)-\( 5\)-\( 5\)-\( 5\)) also in sixteenth notes. The dance-like character is somewhere between a \textit{tambourine} and a Turkish march, and it is exactly this kind of peasant feeling that Massenet was trying to evoke; Irene sings “it was sweet when we used to go together in the woods.” This music serves as a refrain in the remainder of the duet, though it is truncated in both of its subsequent appearances.

Taking her cue from the mention of childhood activities, Irene moves to the \( b \) section and recalls their game of enacting the flight into Egypt; Jean would play Joseph and Irene, Mary. Massenet obliges with a D-dorian melody (played by the oboe) accompanied by open-fifth drones in the low strings. After Jean declares that he remembers their game with fondness, Irene repeats the entire \( b \) section music remembering how they would run to escape Herod’s army (“que nous tremblions!”). Jean joins her in this memory and this cadence.

The whole \( b \) section is comprised of four-bar antecedent and consequent phrase pairs, and a similar structure was used in the \( a \) section. The four-square effect gives an innocence to their music, situating it, like the memories themselves, firmly in the past. Irene returns to \( a \) section music as she describes their leisurely journeys home, but when she recalls how the night would close around them, Massenet breaks off the tonally stable A major music and replaces it with a series of modulatory phrases. The \( c \) section maintains staccato sixteenth-notes in the upper strings but replaces the ostinato figure with a sinuous cello melody that duplicates the voice. The descending step modulations
add to the threatening quality of Irene’s memory, and the return of the “que nous tremblions” cadence provides a tonal rhyme with the end of the earlier b sections. The return of this cadence also signals the end of memory as Jean takes the recollection of kissing her goodbye and transports it to the present (d section). In doing so, he abandons the four-bar phrase structure in favor of two- and three-bar fragments knit together by a continuously moving violin line. The move from past to present is highlighted by the abandonment of those things musically associated with innocence: even phrase structures, stable key centers, and ostinato accompaniments. The remainder of the duet is comprised of previously heard music (specifically c’ and a’’), and the text, while nostalgic, remains grounded in the present as Jean kisses Irene on the forehead “comme autrefois” (“as long ago”).

The complexity of this duet is masked in the seemingly straightforward sections that narrate past events. Yet the overall structure defies a simple cavatine designation. While the return of a section material frames the entire duet, it is not an ABA form since a material also appears in the middle, between the b’ and c sections. Massenet uses specific references in the text to shape the musical form for a given section. This privileging of the text gives rise to a kind of local-level complexity that Massenet will continue to explore in his later works.

Sapho displays the same kind of the long-range tonal goals that mark Thaïs, though the actual occurrence of the tonic within the opera is not as frequent. The ends of each of the five acts form a lower step-sequence that become increasingly chromatic as the opera progresses: g – C – c – b – b♭/B♭. The final chord moves from minor to major as
the curtain closes, helping to negate the otherwise sentimental purity of Fanny’s B♭ major farewell, replete with its violin obbligato. Jean’s music is related to the third, fifth, second, and seventh of B♭, but never achieves correspondence with the tonic. Jean’s only excursion to a key not diatonic to B♭ is his E minor “J’ai tout brisé là-bas” in Act V. A full tritone away from the operatic tonic, Jean exclaims to Fanny, “I have destroyed my home to come to you!”

Fanny’s music is more consistently related to B♭ major than Jean’s. She enters in D major, to the acclamations of her friends, and her first air “Adorateurs, courtisans” is in that key. Her entrance in Act II is marked by a move away from C major, in which Jean was singing, to F major (“De jolis meubles”). A brief digression into B major (enharmonically the Neapolitan) leads Fanny to B♭, as she sings the unaccompanied folksong “O Magali.” The two lovers sing together in C major at the end of Act II and in F major at the beginning of Act III. Fanny’s vitriolic tirade against her friends (“Cet enfant dont l’amour”), when they tell Jean of her past, is in C minor and is one of only two substantial moves to a minor key in the entire opera. Fanny reconciles herself to B♭ major for the remainder of the opera, singing with Jean in D major in Act IV, in A minor/major to open Act V (“Demain, je partirai”), and finally in B♭ for the last music heard, her tripartite aria “Adieu, m’ami.”

_Sapho_ illustrates the continued refinement of techniques begun in _Thaïs_. In its overall structure governed by a single tonic, its abandonment of multi-sectional arias or

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15 Jean’s opening air (“Ah qu’il est loin mon pays”) is in D♭ as is his opening to the Act II duet with Irene, though the both move later to A. His duet with Fanny in Act III (“Voilà pourquoi”) is in F, and their Act IV duet (“Pendant un an”) is framed in D. Jean sings in C with his mother (“Et mon coeur” [Act IV]).
ensembles, and its thread-like use of a primary motive, *Sapho* does not represent a break from earlier compositional practices. Even in its contemporary setting, *Sapho* is linked to the earlier *La Navarraise*, and while both operas are touted as Massenet’s attempt at *verismo*, *La Navarraise*, with its two brutal acts compressed into approximately 80 minutes, is truer to intensity and speed with which Mascagni and Leoncavallo unfold their works.\(^{16}\) *Sapho*, while similarly stripped of superfluous plot details, progresses more slowly, allowing characters thoughtfully to react to their situation. Arthur Pougin describes pace and emotional extremes in one of the first surveys of Massenet’s life and works after the composer’s death:

> Perhaps one could have believed that a subject of this kind was only partly appropriate for his nature, yet *Sapho* offers us warmly colored music - sometimes full of liveliness and spirit, as with the third act, where everything is sunny; sometimes pathetic to the point of breaking, as with the fifth act, where the emotional intensity is carried through the roof.\(^{17}\)

The very story of *Sapho* calls into question Massenet’s reason for setting it. Noting its timeless quality, critic Émile Vuillermoz suggested that it was chosen because, “in the apartment of today’s students, or in a modest suburban house, the great voice of love sounds as splendidly as in the palaces of legendary queens. Never had what one could call the lyric immodesty of Massenet, affirmed itself more magnificently.”\(^{18}\) The story at its essence is one of renunciation – Fanny leaves Jean knowing that it is for his

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own good. While some have criticized this ending as one of “oppressive monotony,”¹⁹ it is better understood as a departure from Massenet’s previous operas, in which the endings were set up early in the drama and followed through like a causal chain of events.

Sita’s suicide at the end of *Le Roi de Lahore* is motivated by her selfish desire to end a forced marriage, and it is the height of irony that in doing so, she frees the spirit of her beloved Alim, with whom she will spend eternity. Likewise, Salomé takes her life when she finds out that Hérodiade is her mother; had she know this before, she could have prevented the execution of Jean. *Le Cid* ends with a *lieto fine* as Chimène puts aside her father’s vengeance in order to marry his murderer (and her lover), Rodrigue. Manon does nothing but expire in Des Grieux’s hands, and Werther’s suicide is an instinctive reaction to Charlotte’s final rebuff. Even *Thaïs*’s climactic telos is a kind of role-reversal set in motion by Athanaël’s initial desire to convert the courtesan.

Massenet’s earlier operas had been carefully chosen for their piquant characters, and this is of course a great part of their charm and élan. However, the character-driven plot in *Sapho* reveals a much more intimate conception of drama than Massenet had previously explored – one that would maintain its appeal in his later operas. The next three operas Massenet saw produced each ended with a fairy-tale-like miracle. With *Cendrillon* (1899), the story of Cinderella, this was expected from the beginning, but with *Grisélidis* (1901) and *Le Jongleur de Notre Dame* (1902), the endings represent a sudden shift from the tragic to the epiphanic.

Le Jongleur de Notre Dame

Le Jongleur marks a significant turning point in Massenet’s career. For the first time since Werther, Massenet could not find an opera house in Paris that would stage his newest work. This is due, in part, to the cool reception of a string of works (Sapho, Cendrillon, the substantially revised Thaïs, and Grisélidis) on the stage of the Opéra-Comique. When Raoul Gunsbourg offered to stage Le Jongleur at the Opéra de Monte Carlo, Massenet hesitated only slightly. The result was an immediate success for the composer, and a professional relationship with Monte Carlo that would last for the rest of Massenet’s life.

By 1902, Gunsbourg had been at the Opéra de Monte Carlo for nine years. The company itself was only fourteen years older, having been a project of François Blanc, president of the Société des Bains, proprietors of the casino. Monaco’s reputation as an elite playground grew throughout the nineteenth century, when both infrastructural and cultural improvements were made in order to attract larger numbers of longer-staying customers. To satisfy the need for an opera house, Blanc’s wife suggested Charles Garnier, architecture of the Paris Opéra. The opening season in 1879 drew many celebrated names including Victor Capoul (lyric tenor and future director of the Opéra), Marie Miolan-Carvalho (the first Marguerite, Mireille, and Juliet), Sarah Bernhardt (the

20 Massenet writes, “the following autumn [1900], the winter, and finally the spring of the succeeding year passed without any one coming to me from anywhere with an offer to produce the work.” My Recollections, 235.
great actress; engaged as a reader), and Célestine Galli-Marié (the first Carmen and Mignon).21

The success of the Opéra de Monte Carlo was predicated on the presence of a steady supply of internationally famous singers. Gunsbourg continued this trend but augmented it with a vision for creating new works that surpassed most Parisian stages of its time.22 The amalgam of stellar talent with new works was a successful formula for most of Gunsbourg’s long tenure, and to initiate this trend, Gunsbourg persuaded Prince Albert to fund a new work of the most established opera composer of his day.23 That Massenet had difficulty finding a home for Jongleur did not seem to bother Gunsbourg, who was anxious to add a much-beloved composer to his growing list of well-known singers.24

The story of Le Jongleur centers around Jean, an itinerate juggler, who regularly performs in the marketplace outside the Cluny monastery in hopes of gaining scraps and alms. Having heard all his songs before, the crowd insists on something new and Jean obliges with the “Alleluia du vin.” This is Jean’s opening aria and the way his character is introduced to the audience. As Jean finishes this song, the Prior emerges chastising the juggler for his profane display. Jean repents and, seeing the material benefits of the monastery (shelter and hot food), makes known his wish to join. Act II begins on

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21 Interestingly, Capoul also created Le comte Guy de Kerdrel in Massenet’s La Grand’Tante and Galli-Marié was the first Lazarille in his Don César de Bazan.
22 Before Gunsbourg, there were only two premières in Monte Carlo, and one of those opened the inaugural season. The most complete account of the history of the Opéra de Monte Carlo is T.J. Walsh, Monte Carlo Opera: 1879-1909 (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1975); Ibid., Monte Carlo Opera: 1910-1951 (Kilkenny: Boethius, 1986). See also Martine Mari, L’Opéra de Monte-Carlo, 1879-1990 (Paris: Champion, 1991).
24 Interestingly, Gunsbourg’s predecessors staged only Manon and Werther before Le Jongleur. After 1902, the company averaged a world or Monaco première of Massenet’s works once a year for the next decade.
Ascension Day with the monks practicing the chant *Ave coeleste lilium*. Jean watches off to the side, and when asked why he does not sing, he admits that he cannot understand Latin. One by one, the monks offer their help – the painter, the sculptor, the composer, the cook – each touting their craft as the most godly. The prior chastens their pride and Boniface, the cook, stays to council Jean. As the centerpiece of the opera, he relates the legend of the Sage (the flower that opened its petals to hide the infant Christ during the Herod’s Slaughter of the Innocents). Moved, Jean understands that everyone has a purpose and a talent for pleasing God. In the final act, he steals inside the chapel to perform for the newly-finished statue of the Virgin. He tries singing a war-song, then a love-song but finally reverts to dancing – which he does to the point of exhaustion as the scandalized monks observe. Realizing the sincerity of his act, the statue comes to life, blesses and transfigures Jean. The opera ends with Jean’s own Assumption to the alleluias of heavenly angels and showers of lilies.

The initial critical response, while generally favorable, invariably sought out the unusual elements of the story: it lacked love, lovers, sexual exhibition, or even women, “so pure that would could perform it in front of virgins; so pathetic that one cried.”\(^{25}\)

Typical of these kind of reviews was Henri Moreno writing for *Le Ménestrel*:

> Since it was said that Massenet was above all the poet of love (*chantre amoureux*) for woman in so very many ways, one would finally see if he could also make monks sing – only monks, but not too rigidly under their sackcloth.\(^{26}\)

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\(^{25}\) *La Délivrance*, 12 May 1904. Quoted in Olivier, 208. Quotations from 1904 represent reviews of the Paris première, 10 May 1904 at the Opéra-Comique.

\(^{26}\) *Le Ménestrel*, 23 February 1902.
But critics also sought out those elements that lent themselves to quick comparisons with other well-known operas. Jean Chantavoine connected the singing lesson in Act II with similar treatments in *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*, *La Fille du régiment*, and Charles Lecocq’s *Le Petit Duc*.\(^{27}\) Paul Flat equated the pastoral nature of the interludes with Berlioz’s *L’Enfance du Christ*.\(^{28}\) Indeed, *Le Jongleur* is replete with audience-pleasing elements: a drinking song, a singing lesson, a center-piece ballad, the use of a liturgical Feast day, and a miraculous, visionary ending.

The use of such conventions seemingly lends credence to Massenet’s assessment as currying favor from his audience. However, each of these conventions is fully integrated into the medieval religious *couleur locale*: the drinking song begins with Latin phrases; the singing lesson rehearses a Gregorian chant for the Feast of the Ascension; the center-piece ballad relates a myth about Christ’s birth; and the final tableau is a representation of heaven on earth. Viewed separately, these elements had been seen in operas throughout the nineteenth century and their collection here is not meant to be an exhaustive catalogue of plastic references to the middle ages. Rather, their effect in *Le Jongleur* is to effuse through the opera an intimacy with the religious setting so that the real message of the opera – redemption – is seen in greater relief. Before examining Massenet’s structural and musical approach to redemption, it is important to see how the surface medieval elements contribute to presentation of the whole drama.

Massenet wrote *Le Jongleur* at his home in Égreville, sixty miles southeast of Paris; it was the first opera to be completed there. The medieval story perfectly suited his

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\(^{27}\) *L’Intransigeant*, 12 May 1904.

\(^{28}\) *La Revue Bleue*, 21 May 1904.
new environs and Massenet noted that “the character of my home, a relic of the same Middle Ages... [was] exactly suited to give me the desired atmosphere for my work.”

To create a medieval sound, Massenet orchestrated the work with a chamber-like quality throughout. Louis Schneider described the music for *Le Jongleur* as comprised of “half-tones” and being “deliciously veiled, like light shining discretely, filtered through stained glass.” Massenet’s concern for timbral veracity is most evident when he portrays Jean dancing. Though a modern viola could substitute, Massenet calls for the vielle, a medieval fiddle often used for self accompaniment, to represent the itinerate juggler. In this kind of antique instrumentation, Massenet is not far removed from Meyerbeer, who used a viola d’amour to accompany Raoul’s *romance* “Plus blanche que la blance hermine” in *Les Huguenots*.

While Massenet’s timbral specificity was more idiomatic to a viola, it nevertheless reflects an increased scholarly interest in past musical experiences, an interest brought about through the burgeoning discipline of musicology. In France this was due in no small part to the chant scholarship of the Solesmes monks, and Massenet would have had a number of chances to access their new work. Indeed, the opening phrase to each of the three stanzas of Jean’s “Alleluia du vin” is a chant-like incipit closely related to the standard melody of the Credo. The remainder of the *chanson à

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29 *My Recollections*, 233.
31 Certainly Massenet would have been familiar with Berlioz’s *Grand traité d’instrumentation et d’orchestration moderns* published in 1843. In discussing the viola d’amour Berlioz wrote that “any violinist might learn to play upon it by a few weeks’s practice.” *A Treatise on Modern Instrumentation and Orchestration*, ed. Joseph Bennett, trans. Mary Cowden Clark, (London: Novello, 1882), 30.
32 See the *Liber Usualis with Introduction and Rubrics in English*, ed. Benedictines of Solesmes (Tournai: Desclée, 1938, 64.
boire is Massenet’s own, though it was modeled on the chansons farcies popularized by medieval troubadours.\(^{33}\)

For the climactic scene when Jean presents himself in front of a statue of the Virgin, Massenet assembled a collection of dances and melodies culminating in the pastoral “Robin et Marion” (Example 2a). In a remark that testifies to the status medieval scholarship had attained in the early twentieth century, one reviewer even suggested that it “may quite possibly be a genuine quotation from Adam de la Halle.”\(^{34}\) Indeed, Massenet would have the opportunity to consult the trouvère’s work in the guise of Edmond de Coussemaker’s pioneering Oeuvres complètes de trouvère Adam de la Halle published in 1872.\(^{35}\) A list of the contents of Massenet’s library is regrettably incomplete, and there is no mention of his consultation with the Coussemaker or any other edition in his correspondence or contemporary literature; however, his melody for Jean’s pastoral is remarkably similar to one given by Coussemaker and leaves the question of Massenet’s inspiration tantalizingly open (Example 2b).

Example 2a. Le Jongleur de Notre Dame, Act III, mm. 303-311.

\(^{33}\) Harding, 153.
\(^{34}\) Times (London), 16 June 1906.
\(^{35}\) Originally published under the auspices of the Société des Sciences, des Lettres, et des Arts de Lille, it was reprinted in 1966 by Gregg Press Limited.
The most frequently heard medieval music in the opera is the *Ave coeleste lilium* which opens the second act. The stage direction for this moment calls for the following scenery:

At the Abbey, in the study room. Tables, desks, stalls. A statue of the Virgin, newly finished, in a mystic attitude of indulgence and love, which a monk is at work coloring. Grouped around the Musician Monk, other monks finish rehearsing, under his direction, a hymn to the Virgin which he has composed for the occasion; it is Assumption morning.

Though the melody is Massenet’s, the text for the chant is taken from the thirteenth-century theologian Saint Bonaventure, specifically from his Lauds to the Blessed Virgin.

The complete text reveals a consistent theme throughout the late middle ages: the mystical transformation of the Virgin Mary into an otherworldly mediator of humanity:

\begin{quote}
Ave coeleste lilium, Ave rosa speciosa
Ave mater humilium, Superis imperiosa,
Deitatis triclinium; hac in valle lacrymarum
Da robur, fer auxilium, O excrusatrix culparum
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
Hail, heavenly lily, Hail most graceful rose.
Hail mother of the lowly, Reigning on high.
Couch of deity; give us strength in this valley of tears,
\end{quote}
Though it is not possible to pinpoint the modern source Massenet’s librettist Maurice Léna consulted for this text, he would have had a variety from which to choose, including the ten volume set of Bonaventure’s complete works published between 1882-1902 by the Collegium S. Bonaventurae in Rome.\(^{38}\)

The score to *Le Jongleur* is full of these “near misses” – melodic or timbral attempts to recreate medieval music without actually quoting it. Adolphe Jullien said that the music was “not religious, but mystical.”\(^{39}\) Underneath this mysticism is a simple story of twin redemptions, Jean’s personal transfiguration and the redemption of the monastic community. Massenet uses a carefully planned tonal scheme to represent Jean’s move from secular outsider to sacred redeemer through the progress of the opera.

Nothing in *Le Jongleur* follows the multi-part plan for arias or ensembles, yet the appearance of strophic and arched forms lends a feeling of familiarity to the entire work. Massenet sets this up in the opening scene, in which a chorus of merchants and peasants hock their wares. This scene is reminiscent of Donizetti’s or Rossini’s opening crowd scenes and serves both to herald the arrival of title character and to establish a “secular” tone that will be contrasted by the “sacred” music heard later. The crowd does indeed announce Jean, and his first aria, while not completely unconventional, points to Massenet’s readiness to rewrite convention to suit his dramatic needs. In this case, the need was for a medieval ballade, so Massenet chose a three-part strophic form, the


\(^{38}\) Léna was a professor of philosophy at the University of Lyon. Another important study that coincided with Massenet’s work on *Le Jongleur* was Léopold de Chérancé, *S. Bonaventure* (Paris: C. Poussielgue, 1899).

\(^{39}\) *Journal des Debats*, 27 May 1904.
“Alleluia du vin.” Solidly set in A major, the music of the three strophes differ mainly in the ways they accommodate new text. The first two strophes are sung by Jean, accompanied by “himself” on the viola. The result separates this aria from the rest of the opera and from normative operatic expectations in general.

While Massenet’s first goal was to create an appropriate sound for a medieval song, he also succeeds in separating Jean from the rest of his operatic community. This is the first in a series of important separations Jean will undergo throughout the opera; separations that make his role as redeemer more poignant. Before settling on the “Alleluia du vin,” Jean offers to sing several other well-known stories (Roland, Berthe the big-footed, Renaud of Montauban, Charlemagne, Pépin) all refused because of their stale familiarity. Instead, the crowd insists on the “Credo de l’Ivrogne” (“Drunkard’s Credo”) so that from the beginning, Jean’s personal will is subsumed to the will of others.

Jean finishes his ode only to be interrupted by the Prior of the Cluny abbey. The crowd runs away, leaving Jean to face his accuser alone. This is the first in a series of two moves that alienates Jean. Once beloved by his fellow peasants, Jean is just a pagan troublemaker in the eyes of the Prior. After he is confronted and chastised by the Prior, Jean begs for forgiveness and for inclusion into the monastery. Jean’s motivation is base hunger, but the Prior sees beyond this immediate need and suggests that Jean’s faith will “flower again like a pale rose in winter.” The Prior grants him admission and in doing so seals Jean’s fate as a double outsider: rejected by his peasant friends and the only pagan in a sacred community. Jean articulates this later alienation in one of the most tender moments of the opera. When asked why he does not join the other monks in rehearsing
the chant, Jean replies that he does not understand Latin, only “profane songs written in plain French.”

Thus, communication links both of Jean’s states of alienation. His song marked the entrance of the Prior and the rejection by his peers, and his inability to understand Latin highlights his distinction from the Cluniac brothers. Massenet underscores both of these through unusual orchestral sonorities: “self-accompaniment” with the viola and a cappella four-part harmony, respectively. With this meticulous use of unusual sonorities, Massenet transcends the mere couleur locale, making them essential features of the musical narrative. Unlike an opera such as Aïda, whose story of jealousy and duplicity could be transplanted to a number of settings or time periods, Le Jongleur is firmly rooted in a medieval presence on both surface and deep levels.40

What is striking about Le Jongleur is the way in which Massenet fits the medieval aural surface into the tonal structure of the entire opera. The three acts end in F major, C major, and B♭ major, thus creating a sense of expectation at the final tonic goal. To heighten this expectation, Massenet uses B♭ major throughout to portray the sacred. Table 2 gives an outline of the opera with principal key areas and arias. The tonal / sacral connection is hinted at with the arrival of the Prior in Act I and is made aurally manifest at the moment he recognizes Jean’s potential. Playing off the harmonic similarities of the relative and parallel majors of G minor, Massenet equates the Prior’s initial chastisement (G minor) with his realization of Jean’s inner faith (B♭ major) which leads to a statement of Jean’s raison d’être, his ode to freedom, “Liberté, m’ami” (G major). The whole

scene functions as a three part form bounded by g/G, so that the move to Bb is nothing more than a tonal and discursive digression. This digression is, of course, much more significant and Massenet underscores this with the very effective first presentation of the opera’s central motive.

Called the “aspiration mystique” by the analytical discussion of *Le Jongleur*,41 the motive (Example 3) is first heard when Jean responds to the Prior’s question, “Ton nom?” (“Your name?”). That it does not undergo thematic transformation attests to Massenet’s desire for it to “reverberate” the moment of its initial presentation. Of the three other presentations, marked with a dagger in Table 2, only one alters the original

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The remaining presentations keep the same orchestration, rhythm, and harmony (dominant emphasis in B♭ major).

The B♭ tonal stasis that marks the motive, along with its presence toward the beginning, middle, and end of the opera, align it with the méditation from Thaïs. Though the two share a similar schema in terms of presentations, their functions are vastly different. The méditation actually shapes the formal structure and dramatic intensity of the entire opera; the same cannot be said of the two-bar motive in Jongleur. Indeed, Massenet’s later operas become more cellular in their motivic construction and implementation, disavowing a larger thematic presence in favor of smaller, more malleable, or, in the case of Le Jongleur, static and reverberant constructs.

Tonal plans govern the unlabeled scenes of each act and add to the sense of harmonic direction of the entire opera. Two central moves are present in Act I; they are delineated by Jean’s centerpiece aria, the “Alleluia du vin.” The D major prelude leads to

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42 This is the presentation associated with the Poet Monk, the third dagger in Table 2. The motive is truncated (the first three beats are missing); the orchestration is different (violins replace cellos), and it is transposed up a whole step. To begin the third act, Massenet presents the motive in E♭, but it is otherwise unchanged.
a G major crowd scene, that (after a move back to its dominant for Jean’s entrance) moves to an extended C major section in which the crowd helps establish Jean’s character. The effect is a descending fifth progression (D-G-C) that gravitates towards the person of Jean, the still nameless title character, “le Jongleur.” While the first half of Act I is dominated by instrumental and choral music, the commencement of Jean’s drinking song reorients the balance of the act toward the more usual operatic medium of the solo voice. Each of the three arias in the second half is linked by a descending step progression from A (“Alleluia du vin”) to G (“Liberté”) to F (“Pour la Vierge”). The result here, in the truest function of the *Urlinie*, is a feeling of real arrival at F major.

The second act is a prolongation of C major, the key in which it begins, returns to in the middle, and ends. What is more, Massenet uses the music from the singing lesson, the *Ave coeleste lilium*, to divide the act into two scenes, both of which are bounded by C major. The seemingly unrelated keys of A♭, B♭, and G♭ (and the quick move to G major), in which the bickering monks argue, now stand in direct contrast to the placidity of the surrounding music. The presence of the “aspiration mystique” motive in the B♭ major painter monk’s music creates a tension between the opera’s home key, the second hearing of the motive, and the immediate context of the surrounding C major music. Why would Massenet have introduced the motive in this “dissonant” context? The answer is not merely to equate the sound of B♭ with the listener, though that must have been a factor in its appearance. The stage directions at this appearance connect the hearing of the motive with the painter’s gesturing to his unfinished work painting a statue of the Virgin. Significantly, he is the only one of the quartet of monks that directly references Mary.
His words depict the brush animating the statue (“fluttering, subduing, it reddens the lips”): the Virgin is brought to life by the painter. The motive has taken a quantum leap from its original association with Jean to a new connection with the Virgin. In doing so, Massenet has subtly linked the two characters in a bond that will become apparent in the final moments of the opera; the present verbal animation will give way to the miraculous incarnation.

Massenet’s use of the altered form of the motive a mere twenty-nine measures later serves to realign the music with the broader context of C major. It is repeated up a whole step (from the V/B♭ to the V/C). The G dominant chord concludes the poet monk’s music in G major, and the combination of both diatonic and dominant harmonies lessens the strength of G serving as the dominant of C. With the immediate arrival at G major for the musician monk’s paean, Massenet has further dissipated any aural association G might have had as the dominant of C.

In one of the only ensemble moments in the opera, the four monks sing together—each suggesting that his art is the greatest. Massenet accompanies this with quick moves through the circle of fifths followed by liberal use of diminished sevenths. To reassert the tonal and dramatic authority of C major, he takes Léna’s quotation of Virgil “Agitans discordia fratres” (the feud that turns brother against brother) and with a musical pun on “discordia,” has the Prior chant the line on middle C. There follows the C major pastorale that opened the Act.

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43 From the *Georgics*, Book 2, line 496.
The remainder of Act II is symmetrically organized around C. The legend of the Sage is Boniface’s extended aria in E♯ major. At the end of his aria, Boniface explains that sage is also important for cooking, and that while he attends his heart he is pleasing the Virgin. The move in the dialogue from past to present is accompanied by a return to C major. Moments later, Jean realizes that he too has a talent for pleasing the Holy Mother – his juggling. This moment of realization occurs at a brief move to A major, made more powerful by its lack of singing; Jean speaks his lines for the twenty-four measures in A. Massenet links these two moments of humble recognition by flanking C major with key areas a minor third above and below. It is fitting to remember that seventy-one days after the première of *Le Jongleur*, one of the most studied and important operas of the twentieth century had its first performance: Debussy’s *Pelléas et Mélisande*. Tonal symbolism and symmetrical structures are a constituent part of that opera. Though he would never embrace the extended tonal vocabulary of his Symbolist contemporaries, it is clear that Massenet was thinking about ways tonality might be used to represent the otherwise intangible shift of a change of mind.

The realization of the opera’s B♯ goal is apparent throughout the last act. Each self-contained section is diatonically related to B♯, often by motion that implies direct resolution (vii, ii, or V). Further, the “aspiration mystique” bounds the entire act, aurally marking Jean’s realization and transfiguration. The final scene, containing the miraculous

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appearance of the Virgin, is a direct move from C to F to B, (ii-V-I), thus providing a direct tonal parallel with the opera’s conclusion.

The final act also makes manifest Jean’s status as the redeemer of the Cluniac brothers. Like Parsifal, Jean is a stranger to the monastic community, and like Parsifal, he is separated from them by an act of miscommunication. Significantly, Jean is not the only one to suffer from misunderstanding. The elaborate scene in which each monk vies for Jean’s attention represents the dysfunctional monastery’s inability to communicate. Massenet prolongs both communicative failures to the last possible moment. As Jean takes his last breath, he whispers, “At last, I can understand Latin.” At the same time the monks, who had secretly observed Jean’s dance with horror and disgust, proclaim in unison “Christe exaudi nos / Sancta Maria, ora pro nobis” (Christ, graciously hear us / Holy Mary, hear our prayer). Their unison cry is for understanding, and it is Jean’s transfiguration that delivers the monks from their division.

That Massenet was thinking of a large-scale tonal progress as a symbolic representation of Jean’s own journey from outsider to redeemer is evident in the alignment of that plan with dramatic turning points. Massenet successfully subsumed the structures of musico-dramatic construction (arias, ensembles, and choruses) into a hierarchical system governed by the expectation of musical resolution. Indeed, in Le Jongleur, he has strictly limited these aria-type constructions so that the only ensemble in the opera represents the most “dissonant” moment (in terms of harmony and civility) in

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45 Jean’s inability to understand Latin is a parallel to Parsifal’s inability to ask the question “Whom does the Grail serve?” In Wagner’s Parsifal, this crucial question is omitted in favor of a pantomime: Parsifal shrugs his shoulders after Gurnemanz asks him “Do you know what you just saw?” The question of whom the Grail serves is contained in the sources Wagner consulted as he created the story.
the work. This kind of subjugation of formal designs to the unfolding tonal plan of the opera will be apparent throughout his later works.

Le Jongleur de Notre Dame was Massenet’s most successful opera premièred in Monte Carlo. Indeed, the performances of all of the operas after Le Jongleur do not combine to total the number of performances it received before the second World War. Like most of Massenet’s later operas, however, it has fallen out of the European and American repertoires and now remains a relic for its composer. Part of its decline is wrapped up in the strange circumstances surrounding its American première (27 November 1908, Manhattan Opera). The Scottish soprano Mary Garden, the first Mélisande and for whom Massenet would later write Chérubin, had appropriated the role for herself after hearing it in Paris. The result, of course, destroyed Massenet’s sonic conception of the opera with its low tessitura, and though he may have resisted at first, he quickly succumbed to her demands. “In the face of the artist’s triumph,” he wrote, “I bow and applaud.”

Chérubin

While Mary Garden first appeared as le Jongleur on 27 November 1908, she had created title role in Chérubin three and a half years earlier; it was Massenet’s second opera at Monte Carlo, and the one for which he intended Mary Garden to perform en travesti. If Le Jongleur represents his post-Parisian apex, Chérubin was one of the least successful in this period. Ostensibly picking up Cherubino’s exploits where Mozart left off, Chérubin presents the cunning page as a young man recently made an officer in the

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46 Massenet, My Recollections, 238.
army. Replete with mistaken identities and multiple love triangles, the plot that comprises
this *comédie chantée* is indeed Mozartean. Further, its delicate orchestration of a
collection of easily identifiable, self-contained numbers, plus the connection with
Cherubino led the composer-critic Alfred Bruneau to remark: “it seems that the young
Mozart and the young Massenet were fraternal collaborators.”47 In a subtle quotation at
the conclusion of the opera, Massenet recalls the opening bars of the romanza “Deh vieni
alla finestra” from *Don Giovanni*. The quotation is heard just as Chérubin pledges his
love to Nina, the trusting ward who has loved Chérubin all along and despite his love for
another. The ramifications of this juxtaposition (*Figaro contra Giovanni*: an innocent
youth becomes a philandering man) are powerful, but Massenet leaves the issue
unanswered.

Most of the critical response, whether favorable or not, centered around the
character of the music as it reflected Chérubin’s carefree life. “Never was music better
adapted to its subject. Never has a score better agreed with the tastes of the public in so
easily distracting the cares of the world” wrote Bruneau.48 Adolphe Jullien, picking up
on this distractive nature noted that:

> On leaving the theater when this froth of sound has subsided, one feels a trifle
> embarrassed at having allowed one’s self to be so carried away; and if one wishes
to probe to the core this dazzling, shimmering music, it is easy to see that there is
in it little substance and novelty. But when the curtain goes up again we promptly
come under its spell once more, and again we feel the lively attractiveness of this
fresh and sparkling music. A great magician, in truth, is the composer of
*Chérubin*.49

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47 *Le Matin*, 24 May 1905.
48 Ibid.
49 Quoted in Finck, 209.
The surface of *Chérubin* is marked by a host of tripartite forms and the largest collection of ensembles in Massenet’s later works; such an arrangement fits with the expectations of a comic opera. There are four duets in the opera, each of which is shared by Chérubin and a lover or his mentor, le Philosophe. None of the duets include extended passages of ensemble singing and none feature singing in thirds or sixths; rather, each concludes with a unison passage *a due* that either interjects new material (as with the duet “Ah! mon Dieu!” from Act II and “Aimer, sentir, souffrir” from Act III) or recapitulates the A section of a tripartite form (“Philosophe, dis-moi” from Act I and “Qu’importe demain” from Act II).

The most complex of the duets is the first, between Chérubin and le Philosophe. Chérubin complains that his heart grows weak when he sees a dress nearby and that his skin grows pale when he sees a shawl. He wonders what could be wrong, and le Philosophe explains that his sickness is simply love. The duet is in two large parts, with Chérubin singing first followed by le Philosophe. Further, each character’s music is a simple ternary form, creating internal symmetry to the overall shape. The two sections are separated by an eleven-measure interlude in which le Philosophe, in a lyrical parlante, explains that this malady only affects twenty-year-olds.

At the return of le Philosophe’s A section, Chérubin joins with him to sing that he will embrace his condition and love “all the women at once!” Though the two unite to sing the final cadence, a total of three notes together, most of their *a due* singing is characterized by Chérubin’s rapid pronouncements over le Philosophe’s lyrical A section.
melody. The patience and wisdom of le Philosophe in the guise of a well-crafted melody is a foil to Chérubin’s impatience and frenetic energy.

Even with the surface familiarity of this kind of duet and the many other comic opera conventions Massenet followed (abundant crowd scenes; frequent small-scale dance numbers; occasional melodrama), he did not abandon a large-scale tonal plan for the opera. After an overture that establishes the opera’s themes, *Chérubin* begins in C major, the key in which it will end. A major represents youthful blitheness, specifically Chérubin but also the Manolas and officers in the army. Chérubin’s two love interests, Nina and the Ensoleillad, respectively inhabit subdominant and dominant keys in relation to C major. Nina enters and sings in D major (“Vous dites: c’est un polisson!” [“You say that he’s a rascal”]) and, after seeing Chérubin flirt with other women, in D♯ major (“Ah! Chérubin, c’est mal” [“Ah! Chérubin, it’s wrong”]). Nina is absent from the second act of the opera, but her reappearance in Act III is signaled by a move to F major, when she announces that she has always loved Chérubin (“J’ai dû vous paraître” [“I must have appeared to you as a child”]). The Ensoleillad is Chérubin’s unrequited love – a dancer in the king’s ballet. Her music fluctuates between E major (“Plus de soucis” [“No more cares”]) and E♯ major (“Qui parle dans la nuit confuse?” [“Who speaks in the shadowy night?”]) before settling on the dominant of C (her duet with Chérubin, “Qu’importe deman” [“What does tomorrow matter”]).

In a reversal of their normative key areas, both of Chérubin’s lovers sing a single parting aria in the “wrong” key. In an effort to deflect the Count’s wrath after he

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50 Chérubin’s first appearance is in A major as is the Act II drinking song and its reprise when the officers leave. The overture is also bounded by A major.
intercepted one of Chérubin’s letters (which the Count thought was addressed to his wife), Nina interjects that the letter was for her, and to prove it she recites it verbatim (“Lorsque vous n’auriez rien à faire” [“When you have nothing to do”]). The letter was intended for the Ensoleillad, but Nina’s nobility as well as her selfish desire for Chérubin’s affections triumphs, and the situation is diffused. After a tonally ambiguous setup that centers around B major, Nina sings in a pure and simple G major, the only time she sings in this key. Once she exposes herself as Chérubin’s putative lover, Nina exits and does not return until the third act. The Ensoleillad ventures away from the dominant to A major for her final aria, the aubade “Vive amour qui rêve” (“Long live love that dreams”). Replete with onstage guitar, flute, and mandolin, the Ensoleillad hails “love that dies in one night.” Like Nina, she leaves after singing in an otherwise tonally unexpected key.

The presences of these key substitutions strengthens the view that Massenet was interested in assigning specific tonalities to individual characters, and that these keys would remain in consistent use throughout the opera. While Adolphe Jullien’s embarrassment at being pulled into the surface sound world of Chérubin might be warranted, the vitriolic tone of Jean Marnold does not adequately describe Massenet’s deft craftsmanship: “The palate has never tasted a more insipid drink than this carbonated lemonade sweetened with sticky caraway seeds.” Even in a decidedly less serious and ultimately less popular opera, Massenet remains committed to a tonally all-encompassing dramaturgical concept.

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51 Mercure de France, 15 June 1905.
Of the eight operas after *Chérubin*, only *Don Quichotte* (1910) has enjoyed a consistent (albeit sporadic) representation in European and American opera houses. Massenet’s next opera, *Ariane*, was premièred on Halloween in 1906 at the Opéra; 61 performances and two years later, it was retired and was revived only once since then. While the score garnered the usual praise from a handful of critics, particularly for the five orchestral preludes and Ariane’s lament in Act III, the convoluted text by Catulle Mendès of the already complex myth left many feeling it pretentious. The nearly eponymous première one year later of Dukas’s *Ariane et Barbe-Bleue*, with its highly symbolic and ever ambiguous text by Maurice Maeterlinck, is much more indicative of early-twentieth-century French tastes than Massenet’s decidedly antique opera. Indeed, of the operas that premièred in the ten years surrounding *Ariane*, most are either *vérisme*, following the trend set forth by Charpentier’s *Louise* or symbolist, following Debussy and Dukas. Of those that treated ancient stories, only *Quo vadis?* (1909) by Jean Nouguès met with popular success. Déodat de Séverac’s *Héliogabale* (1910), which fuses third-century Christian mysticism with the story of the illegitimate (and oriental) Roman emperor Heliogabalus, was quickly abandoned because of its cumbersome plot and frequent reliance on special musical effects. Given this antipathy towards antique

53 Though Raymond de Rigné called it “superb,” he qualified it with “and sometimes quite odd.” Rigné, 3:13.
54 The score calls for, among others, Gregorian chant, Roman courtesan’s melodies, music in Hindu and Phrygian modes, and *cobla*, a collection of Basque folk instruments.
subjects, Massenet’s choice of a pair of ancient stories (Roma and Cléopâtre) for his last operas did not bode well for a vigorous reception.

As might be expected, Ariane is characterized by a number of self-contained tripartite forms. Indeed, Massenet includes so many that the score has the feel of a Baroque opera, a style that befits its mythological subject. Raymond de Rigné recognized this kind of neoclassic structure when he noted that “there are indeed airs in Ariane, but they emerge out of the drama like pediments with rich sculptures.”

The first act is indicative of the work as a whole. It opens with a chorus of Sirens and Greek sailors cast in a large three-part shape that moves from A major to C major and back to A. Pirithoüs enters and sings of his friend Thésée’s attempt to penetrate the Labyrinth. His music is a lyric parlante style, but this gives way to a brief, fully-formed three-part aria “Délices de mon coeur violent” (“The delights of my passionate heart”) in C major. Massenet moves to the parallel minor for Pirithoüs’s next aria, “Avec toi, j’ai traqué la Laye,” (“With you, I hunted the boar”) which is arrived at without pause. The two arias resemble a cavatine/cabalette pair but are more akin to the pairing of disparate emotions in a Baroque aria. They are respectively marked “Plus large (Andante largamente)” and “Ample et vigoureuse (Sans lenteur) (Allegro deciso non troppo).” Indeed, all of the tempo markings in Ariane have Italian translations, the only Massenet opera to employ this dual convention. It seems clear that Massenet was aligning himself to a foreign practice, in this case Italian Baroque opera. This idea is borne out in

55 Rigné, 3:14.
56 Massenet’s first operas, Le Grand’Tante and Don César de Bazan used Italian tempo markings almost exclusively. With Le Roi de Lahore, he began to mix common Italian markings with more exacting French expressions. This practice remained consistent throughout his career, though the last three operas (Roma, Panurge, and Cléopâtre) abandon Italian tempo markings altogether.
his handling of the second of Pirithoüs’s two arias. True to the *da capo* expectation, Massenet recalls the end of “Délices” in a four-measure coda to “Avec toi.” The sirens reprise their opening chorus to frame this first scene.

The longer second scene opens with Ariane confiding to her sister Phèdre that she loves Thésée, to whom she had given the secret of the Labyrinth. Again, a lyric *parlante* recitative precedes her aria, though compared with Pirithoüs, the orchestra is much less active. Ariane’s slow, G minor aria “Chère Cypris” is a modified tripartite form (AABA), and the orchestra alone takes the final A section. A paean to her beloved Cypress, the alternation of $\frac{4}{4}$ and $\frac{6}{8}$ meters characterize this aria whose tonal stability and limited chromaticism again recall the Baroque. Thoroughly Romantic, however, is the reappearance of the entire A section in a duet with Phèdre. This happens some 126 measures later, and the intervening music is comprised of two small arias, one each for Ariane and Phèdre.

In the latter aria, Phèdre’s emotions overshadow her angular music, which Massenet marks “vigoureuse fierté” (“with spirited pride”). She is jealous of Ariane’s and Thésée’s love and angry with the ease with which her sister divulged the labyrinth’s secrets. Ariane’s interruption transforms D minor into the dominant of G minor, which effects the return of her lyric “Chère Cypris” while Phèdre continues her tirade that Cypress “will be cursed.” Here, Massenet abandons any semblance of Baroque style and instead employs the thick textures and lyric/angular juxtapositions characteristic of Verdi (see below, Example 4).
The remainder of Act I is dominated by another choral scene, this time for the *sept vierges* and *sept ephèbes*, who describe Thésée’s battle with the Minotaur.\(^{57}\) Highly programmatic and unified by a motive that variously outlines a tritone, perfect fifth, or augmented fifth arpeggio, the “combat scene” ends with the ensemble singing “Libres!” in a brilliant E major tripartite chorus. Thésée enters and sings of his love for Ariane

Example 4. *Ariane*, Act I, mm. 515-520.

\(^{57}\) Both of the choruses are comprised of sopranos I and II; the latter, representing young Greek men, were performed *en travesti.*
"Ariane, ô bouche fleurie" ["Ariane, oh blossoming lips"] . He invites her to return with him to Athens, and the act ends with vierges, ephèbes, and Greek soldiers all praying for safe passage for the couple.

The remainder of Ariane continues this kind of clear-cut, quasi-Baroque practice. While the arias are much more well defined than in most of his operas from this time,
there is an audible tension between Massenet’s usual practice and the alterations he made for *Ariane*. Massenet did employ his customary tonal hierarchy to the opera, which begins and ends in A major. Indeed, the only other duet, Phèdre’s and Thésée’s love duet from Act III, Scene 5 (“C’est vrai! Phèdre!” [“It’s true! Phèdre!”]), is in A major and thus links the opening, middle, and end of the opera with an audible tonal thread. Though the last eight measures are sung in lyrical unison melody, the balance (a total of eighteen measures in this short duet) is a series of emotional outbursts and exclamations of the characters’ names. It is the orchestra that carries the principal melodic material.

The tonal control in *Ariane* is unusually symmetrical. A testament to Massenet’s appropriation of small-scale Baroque balance on a much larger, tonal scale, the five acts can be diagramed as shown in Table 3. Along with the stable tonal frame of A major,

Table 2. Act and key structure for *Ariane*.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Act</th>
<th>Key</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>A – a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>F – F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>b, – F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>b – b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>c – A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

the entire second and fourth acts are bounded by the same key. The F major of Act II represents the passionate love between Thésée and Ariane as they sail through the storm to Naxos, while the B minor of Act IV reflects Ariane’s descent to Hades in order to restore her sister to life.

Though it is tempting to view the return of A major as a kind of victorious apotheosis, in reality, it underscores the dramatic frame of the Sirens’s songs. In the first
act, the Sirens signaled to Thésée the temptations and danger inherent in approaching the shores of Crete; in the final act, they beckon the heartbroken Ariane to join them since Thésée gave way to the temptation of Phèdre. The Sirens repeat their original text “Vers les rives blanches de brume, Plane et glisse notre essor…” ("Toward the white banks of fog, our designs and dances take flight") and then add “Viens avec nous, nous sommes celles qui gardent ce qui s’en va!” (“Come with us, we keep that which goes away”). The implication is, of course, Thésée and Phèdre, who have just abandoned Ariane by sailing away to Greece. The A major duet shared by Thésée and Phèdre in Act III now finds its proper resolution in the overall tonality: more than just a brief, surface-level ode, it symbolizes the inherent temptations of love, reorienting Ariane’s character from proactive – as she was in wooing Thésée in Acts I and II – to reactive – all that she does in the remainder of the opera is a result of seeing her sister in the arms of her lover. Though the paucity of duets in Ariane and the late works in general might lead to a conclusion that Massenet had abandoned the venerable genre as a dramaturgical agent, it is clear that he still recognizes its potential for narratival change. In Ariane, the duet serves both as the turning-point of the opera and as the tonal mid-point in a unifying, central axis.

Thérèse

In describing his collaboration with Massenet, Mendès wrote that he had found “a marvelous Lully, a perfect Rameau, and a complete Gluck.” Massenet’s use of eighteenth-century elements in Ariane helped align that work with the tragédie lyrique

58 Quoted in Finck, 214.
tradition of the Opéra as “the Nation’s history” if not its “image.” In his next work, Thérèse, he would capture the actual sound of the eighteenth century. Thérèse uses eighteenth-century elements, specifically a military march evoking the Revolution, an off-stage harpsichord, and the menuet d’amour, to establish a complex series of references to time. As Ariane strove for balance in tonal and melodic shapes, Thérèse achieves its symmetry, and ultimately its dramatic urgency, through a shifting of temporal dimensions. Massenet underscores these through specific changes in the vocal and orchestral fabric and, as we might expect, through a planned system of tonal relationships between the characters.

While a sense of temporal urgency frequently visits nineteenth-century opera plots, it does not usually do so as explicitly as in Thérèse. The two acts are given specific months and years to situate themselves in the larger context of the French Revolution: Act I takes place in October 1792; Act II in June 1793. Between these two dates lie notorious and well-known events of the Revolution, most significantly, the trial (December 1792) and execution (21 January 1793) of Louis XVI and the arrest (2 June 1793) of thirty-one Girondist deputies and the simultaneous assumption of power by Maximilien Robespierre. The arrest is directly referenced in the opera; Robespierre’s coup is implied. Critics, like Fernand Platy writing for the Journal de Monaco, generally agreed that Massenet “presented the characters with historical veracity, in spite of their being works of fiction.”

59 Journal de Monaco, 12 February 1907.
The typical involvement of a love triangle is present here, with the title character torn between her husband (André) and former lover (Armand). Even the voice types reverberate a concern with temporal hierarchy. Armand is a tenor, and throughout the century, his voice type has maintained its place as the *prima voce* in Italian and French opera. Only with works from the late nineteenth century did the baritone, André’s voice type, begin to encroach into the space of the lead role.\(^{60}\) Thus, beyond the words and actions that each character expresses as a means of moving the story forward, the actual voices of Armand and André *themselves* testify to the conflict of past (Armand) versus present (André).

Jules Claretie’s libretto clearly articulates the men’s positions regarding this conflict between past and present. As a Girondist, André wishes that his wife would forget the past and “have faith in the future.” For his part and after seeing Thérèse, the Royalist Armand wishes to “relive again the sweet memory of an hour from the past.” Thérèse herself moves uncomfortably between temporal extremes, pulled by whomever she is near. At the crucial moment of her duet with Armand, the two exchange imperatives “Oubliez…Souviens-toi!” (“Forget…Remember!”) and Armand summons the memory of their first dance.

\(^{60}\) The changing role of the baritone is evident in the relative scarcity with which it appears in *grand operas* (Nélusko in *L’Africaine* [1865], Bertram (a bass) in *Robert le diable* [1831], Guillaume Tell [1829]) as compared with a growing presence in Verdi’s works (Nabucco [1841], Don Carlo in *Ernani* [1844], Macbeth [1847], Rigoletto [1851], Germont in *La Traviata* [1853], Simon Boccanegra [1857], Renato in *Un ballo in maschera* [1859], Iago [1887], and Falstaff [1893]). French roles in the Second Empire and early Third Republic reflect this increased interest and include Méphistophélès in *Faust* [1859], Hamlet [1868], Don César de Bazan [1872], Athanaël in *Thaïs* [1894], Don Quichotte [1910], Panurge [1913], the Father in *Louise* (a lyric bass) [1900], and Pelléas (in an opera otherwise devoid of tenors) [1902]. See Ryan Edwards, *The Verdi Baritone: Studies in the Development of Dramatic Character* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994).
The ubiquitous and cursory mention of the menuet d’amour by critics belies its importance in the opera. A large three-part form, it is comprised of three smaller, binary movements. The ABA form makes use of a chromatic mediant progression for the central section (c-A♯-c) in which Thérèse interrupts Armand to offer details of their encounter. While the two characters sing in alternation at this moment, in the A’ section, they sing together – if only for the final two-bar cadential close. Massenet calls for an off-stage harpsichord along with pizzicato strings and harp. The timbral displacement away from the orchestra, along with archaic sound of the quintessential Baroque instrument solidifies the atemporality of this moment. This is the past made present that Armand hopes so fervently to live in, and that Thérèse cannot find herself to embrace.

Massenet foreshadows the importance of the menuet at Armand’s arrival earlier in Act I. Following Thérèse’s soliloquy, Armand enters accompanied by a timbral, metrical, and temporal shift. The effect is a kind of valse triste (see Example 5) and effectively associates the triple-meter sound with Armand’s nostalgically inclined

Example 5. Thérèse, Act I, mm. 432-437.
character. This same music appeared in the overture as a contrast to the “Animé, violent” opening, what Camille Bellaigue called “the thundering Ça ira?”⁶¹ As the menuet d’amour and the valse triste indicate, Massenet is consistently employing a slow ¾ meter to represent the past. As expected, these nostalgic past-times are associated with Armand, so that in Act II, when the valorous André resigns himself to duty and to the fact that his wife loves another man, Massenet again summons the dolorous dance, this time marked Assez lent-expressif, to fulfill our expectation while heightening the pathos of the moment.

The seemingly abrupt change to A♭ minor at the end of the opera – it is only present for last dozen measures – is similar to the end of Hérodiade from a quarter-century earlier.⁶² As with Hérodiade, Thérèse’s ending holds a deeper significance, though unlike the earlier opera, Massenet is now much more consistent and purposeful with his key relationships. Figure 2 outlines the principal arias and keys of Thérèse.

The centrality of A♭ becomes apparent when the presence of its dominant is taken into account. E♭ appears toward the beginning of Act I and at the end of Act II, and both times it is associated with the tension Thérèse feels between her husband and her lover. In her Act I aria, she admits that André’s duty to France is important, but it comes at the cost of her loneliness. André departs to march with his comrades, leaving Thérèse alone with her thoughts of Armand. The move to the remote D major for “Et mon coeur”

⁶¹ Revue des Deux Mondes, 1 July 1911. “Ça ira” was one of the most famous popular songs of the Revolution. See Constant Pierre, ed. Musique des Fêtes et Cérémonies de la Révolution Française (Paris: Imprimeire Nationale, 1899), xx-xxi; transcription on 477-78.
⁶² See the discussion in Chapter 3, pp. 68-70.
Figure 2. Key relationships and dramatic structure in Thérèse.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characters / Incipit / Context</th>
<th>Act, Scene</th>
<th>Key</th>
<th>Key</th>
<th>Act, Scene</th>
<th>Characters / Incipit / Context</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Armand</strong></td>
<td>I,4</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>I,4</td>
<td><strong>André</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Th: “Et mon coeur”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>[Th: “Et mon coeur”]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>My heart still cherishes Armand</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ar: Valse triste – “Je veux vous”</td>
<td>I,5</td>
<td>g</td>
<td></td>
<td>E,3</td>
<td>Th: “Leur devoir”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>I want to remember again</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Thérèse decries André’s sense of duty</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Menuet d’amour</td>
<td>I,6</td>
<td>-c-A_b-c</td>
<td></td>
<td>F,3</td>
<td>Th/An: “Mon bonheur”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Ah, such a tender sweet minuet</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Only Th. and France make André happy</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ar: “Loin de toi”</td>
<td>I,4</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>I,1</td>
<td>An: “Et! bien, c’est ma fierté”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Separation from Thérèse is death</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>An offers to give save passage to Armand</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Th: “Va-t’en!”</td>
<td>I,6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>F,3</td>
<td>Th/An: “Bien tôt, viendra l’heure”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Life awaits Armand if he will flee</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Th/An wonder if they should flee to safety</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ar: “Vivons tous deux!”</td>
<td>I,6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>F,3</td>
<td>Th/An: “Je vous aimais”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>We will live together</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>André pledges his love to Thérèse but will leave her for his country</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Th: “Mon coeur étouffé”</td>
<td>I,6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>F,3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>My heart is suffocating</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Th/Ar: “Là bas!”</td>
<td>I,6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>F,3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>We will flee to an unknown land</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Th: “Jour de Juni”</td>
<td>I,1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>F,3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Th: “Soir de Juni”</td>
<td>I,6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>F,3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Armand’s farewell</td>
<td>II,6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>F,3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Thérèse</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Ar = Armand        Th=Thérèse        An=André  
Solid lines show harmonic connection in successive moments.  
Dotted lines show harmonic connection over more distant moments.

strengthens the separation from E\_b and its association with André. Massenet reverses this harmonic direction for the Act II when he moves from Thérèse’s D major “Mon coeur étouffé” to the E\_b major duet “Là bas!” This duet follows a series of abrupt modulations that lead to successively more passionate statements by the two lovers. At the arrival of “Là bas,” Armand has convinced Thérèse to run away with him, and Thérèse’s inability to resist her former lover is vividly characterized in the upward-step that leads from D to E\_b. The connection with and reversal of the Act I modulation imbues this moment with a sense of urgency that is beyond mere Steigerung. Thérèse alone effects these
modulations, and though she does not resist the temptation of Armand, she controls the
tonal and melodic space of their final duet. Hers is the first phrase of “Là bas” and it is
accompanied by a shift in timbre and, more significantly, meter – $\frac{3}{4}$, as one might expect
given its association with Armand.

Two other features are evident in Massenet’s careful alignment of form, harmony,
and drama in *Thérèse*. The first is a kind of gestural recapitulation of Armand and
Thérèse’s *menuet d’amour* in the guise of Thérèse’s “Jour de Juni” and its echo “Soir de
Juni.” Though the simple triple meter of the *menuet* is now transformed to compound
triple for the “Jour de Juni,” the initial tonality, C minor, is the same for both. Thérèse’s
anxiety is evident as she notes that “down there, the men with their cries of hate make my
heart shudder.” She is referring to the crowd gathering beneath her window and the
barker heralding the names of the latest conspirators. The echo, “Soir de Juni,” highlights
Thérèse’s increasing angst as she changes the original words “Les hirondelles passent
jetant leus cris de joi au ciel clair, au ciel bleu” (“The swallows fly by, singing their songs
of joy to the clear, blue sky”) to become “Les hirondelles passent mêlant leur cris de joie
à nos cris de terreur!” (“The swallows fly by mingling their songs of joy with our cries of
terror!”). The tonality is also changed – C minor is now C♯ minor, but again, this is more
than large-scale *Steigerung*. C♯ minor gives way to its relative major, thus forming an
important tonal rhyme with the end of Act I.

This harmonic concurrence with Act I is the final witness to Massenet’s long-
range tonal planning in *Thérèse*. Thérèse convinces her lover that he must leave and that
she will join him momentarily. She does this by transforming the feverish C♯ minor “Soir
de Juni” into the passionate E major outbursts of Armand begging her to join him. Thérèse accomplishes this move in one word, “Partez!” and Armand obeys only after she promises him the she will come too. Though the c/E harmonic shift is not as violent as the semitone movement that followed and preceded E♭ in Acts I and II (respectively), the E major key is meant to resonate with the end of Act I, when André agreed to hide Armand from the revolutionaries. In neither instance does Massenet provide lyric music; instead, he assembles a collection of fragments over a relatively stable harmonic framework. In both cases, the effect is striking: the lyric melody associated with Armand’s love of the past is abruptly cast aside by the turbulent, anti-lyrical music connected with the present.

The symmetrical organization of Thérèse is striking. Though the final key of a♭ is almost completely absent from the opera as a whole, it exerts an enormous influence on the harmonic shape taken through the course of the drama. Most notably, the half-steps that surround the dominant (a♭: D→E♭←F♭) are pivotal keys for the dramatic trajectory. With D major, Thérèse initially abandons her duty to André for the temptation of a former love. F♭, enharmonically spelled as E, serves as a key of dual separation. In Act I, André forsakes his wife out of duty to his country and to his friend, Armand. While in Act II, Armand leaves Thérèse in order to save himself.

The actual move to a♭ is accomplished not by Thérèse’s voice, though she is the only character on stage at the time. Instead, Massenet effects the modulation through an ascending chromatic sequence in the bass so that the pedal E rises to A♭. Above this, Thérèse sings that it is “duty for whose sake I live / duty for whose sake I die.” Her vocal
line outlines diminished seventh chords that form the texture of this transition, and at the moment she sees André arrested in the street, she abandons melody altogether crying out in unspecified pitches, “I could have fled with Armand, but I choose to rejoin you!” The orchestra continues its upward-step sequence until Thérèse screams out “Vive le Roi” thus ensuring her capture and reunion with her husband. The orchestra, having reached a G diminished seventh, resolves to $\#1$, and stays there with minimal chromatic decoration for the last dozen measures of the opera.

Thérèse is Massenet’s most tightly constructed opera. Though he makes use of several tripartite forms and frequently references eighteenth-century sounds, the music does not stray from a frenetic sense of anticipation. Recognizing this constant forward momentum, Bellaigue remarked that “never does a form degenerate into a vacuous formula of thought and feeling.” Further, the plot itself is devoid of extraneous elements, a point recognized by Henry Gauthier-Villars when he noted that the authors “scorned the picturesque representation of the Revolution, keeping only the tragic atmosphere of the hour.” One final assessment of the opera stresses the intimacy of the story, a featured shared with La Navarraise but magnified in Thérèse, whose principal action (André’s arrest that triggers Thérèse’s sense of duty) occurs offstage. Writing at the Monte Carlo première, Platy noted that:

from the beginning to the end of the work, the three principal characters are lovers of nature. In the midst of the shocks of life, they return, purer in heart, to the happiness of a pastoral loneliness. Rousseau weighs on them as he weighed on all

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63 *Revue des Deux Mondes*, 1 July 1911.
64 *Mercure de France*, 1 March 1907.
65 In *La Navarraise*, the murder of Zuccaraga by Anita also occurs offstage, but it precipitates Anita’s insanity which is enacted both vocally and musically thereby making visible (and audible) what was invisible to the audience.
of the most savage heroes of the French Revolution – who, in their bloodiest hours, dreamed of the Eclogues and the Bucolics.\textsuperscript{66}

While Platy is right to emphasize the dichotomy of city versus country – a problem that each character wrestles with in the opera – such a reading emphasizes the temporal duality of past versus present, since the willingness or reluctance to abandon Paris is tied to a sense of duty for country and family.

If Thérèse’s pastoral nature is relegated to the background, it is very much at the fore of Massenet’s most frequently performed late opera, \textit{Don Quichotte}. Long a vehicle for lyric baritones, thanks in part to its creator Feodor Chaliapin, the music mixes Massenet’s long-spun melody with frequent quotations of Spanish-like folksongs. Annegret Fauser sees \textit{Don Quichotte} as Massenet’s most successful attempt to marry \textit{colour locale} with the dramatic exigencies: “In no other opera is the network of quotations, allusions, and direct musical language so artfully woven as in \textit{Don Quichotte}.”\textsuperscript{67} Fauser is right to indicate the importance of quotations. One reviewer of the \textit{Indépendance Belge} noted that the score was full of “a monstrous assemblage of entirely disparate elements,”\textsuperscript{68} and Henry Finck noted that “there is a little of everything in \textit{Don Quichotte}.”\textsuperscript{69}

Far from a patchwork, however, \textit{Don Quichotte} displays many of the long-range elements seen in \textit{Thérèse}, \textit{Ariane}, and \textit{Chérubin}, namely the association of specific tonalities with individual characters, the frequent use of closed tripartite forms, and the

\textsuperscript{66} \textit{Journal de Monaco}, 12 February 1907.
\textsuperscript{68} Quoted in Finck, 223.
\textsuperscript{69} Finck, 223-224.
hierarchical arrangement of keys to a end-weighted conclusion. Fauser even suggests that entire acts can be seen as a “closed musical form,” a point to which we will return in the conclusion. That *Don Quichotte* has garnered more attention in recent scholarly writing than Massenet’s other later operas makes it unnecessary to go into detail here. It is emblematic of an approach to dramaturgy that characterized Massenet’s operas after *Thaïs*.

*Roma*

Though *Amadis* was the last Massenet opera to be premièred, it was written during 1889-90 when the composer was working on *Esclarmonde* and *Le Mage*; Massenet made revisions in 1910 while recovering from being in the hospital. The two final works in Massenet’s oeuvre were devoted to antique subjects: *Roma* (begun in 1902, written in 1909-10 and premièred in 1912) and *Cléopâtre* (written in 1911-12 and premièred posthumously in 1914). Though neither work enjoyed critical or popular success during their initial runs, the former was revived and recorded at the Festival of Martina Franca in 1999 and the later at the 1990 Massenet Festival in St. Etienne.

Though *Roma* had a long genesis (1902-1910), the actual composition took place in a remarkably short time. Rigné reports that Massenet “composed it in a flash, with an irresistibly enthusiastic spirit.” Most of the limited discussions of *Roma* acknowledge

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70 Fauser, ibid.
73 Ibid., 252; Rigné, 3: 72.
74 Rigné, ibid.
Massenet’s debt to Alexandre Parodi, on whose *Rome vaincue* the opera was based,\(^{75}\) however, there has been no discussion of the stylistic traits in an opera that marked the full course of Massenet’s late compositional period. The sketches for *Roma* that Massenet wrote while “enraptured by the sublime tragedy”\(^{76}\) have not been identified, and indeed it would be difficult to see a marked change in his compositional style over the ensuing eight years between the first draft and the opera’s completion.

*Roma* is in five acts, befitting its designation as an *opéra tragique*. This structure, matched only by *Ariane* and *Don Quichotte* among Massenet’s later operas, highlights one of the unique features of this opera – the lack of subordinate characters. Massenet structures the drama so that each act features one or two characters prominently: Lentulus in Act I; Junia in Act II; Vestapor in Act III (with a love duet between Fausta and Lentulus at the end); Fabius in Act IV; and Fausta in Act V. This results in an inherent weakness of character development since the only characters to appear in multiple acts are the two lovers. The “minor characters,” while given a greater presence along with a tripartite aria in specific acts, appear to be more episodic than inherent to the plot. For instance, Junia, functioning like a much underdeveloped Micaëla, serves as a foil to Fausta. Her aria is formally complex but melodically pure, and once it is finished, she does not again sing by herself in the opera. Nevertheless, the role was first performed by Julia Guiraudon, the first Cendrillon and the first French Mimi. Likewise, Vestapor, who like Brangâne warns the lovers of their impending discovery, only appears in the third


\(^{76}\) Massenet, 252.
act; the role was premièred by Jean Noté, a thirty-year veteran of the Opéra and extremely prolific recording artist. Critics, however, were quick to point out Vestapor’s ephemeral nature, noting that “the role was only there for an artificial adventure.”

That Massenet would diffuse the drama over a number of characters instead of concentrating it on a pair – as he would with Cléopâtre – illustrates a shift in emphasis away from individuals and onto the state. Roma is the only Massenet opera whose title is not a character name, either proper or common. Even the Verdi operas, with their colorful titular characters, had place- or action-titles that occurred with more frequency (Jérusalem, Les Vêpres siciliennes, Un ballo in maschera, La forza del destino). Roma represents an important shift away from Massenet’s usual dramaturgical concerns, though as one might expect, he does not altogether abandon those practices that have defined his later works.

Like Thérèse and Hérodiade, Massenet avoids the final key (A major) during the entire opera, emphasizing instead the minor dominant, or the tritone dominant substitution (E♭). The effect – as with Thérèse and Hérodiade – is one of disorientation upon reaching the final key area, which in Roma is an extended choral scene praising Scipio Africanus in his victory over Hannibal. Thus, the seemingly abrupt dramatic shift parallels the sudden tonal shift, and both instances reflect and amplify the idea of instantaneous poetic justice.

While reviews frequently outlined the plot, few critics commented on this unusual appendage, something of a lieto fine, to an otherwise fully tragic opera. The well-known

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77 Le Temps, 19 February 1912.
operatic version of this story from a century earlier, Spontini’s *La Vestale*, ends with a hackneyed example of *deus ex machina*: a thunderbolt reignites the Vestal’s flame, and everyone takes it as a sign of divine protection; the virgin is spared and instead unites with her lover to the sounds of celebratory choruses and dancing. Though *La Vestale*’s popularity waned considerably after mid-century, its presence and memory was strong enough for critics to mention the connection in their review.

*Roma* excited frequent comparisons with Gluck, whose architectonic style had an echo in Massenet’s restrained lyricism. Adolphe Boschot, writing for *L’Echo de Paris*, observed that “it was written in a sober and firm style, to some extent purified, stripped, [and] reduced to its essence. Under the voice, there is sometimes only one instrument which doubles it here and there,” and Louis Schneider described the “nobility and simplicity” of the score. Jean Chantavoine, writing for the *La Revue hebdomadaire*, carried the comparison earlier than Gluck, suggesting that *Roma* was a “civic oratorio” in manner of Handel: “the ‘Vesta theme’ which recurs throughout the score, clearly took its shape from the broad, calm and dignified phrases that one often finds in the *andante* of Handel.”

Despite recurring musical connections with past masters, the general assessment of *Roma* was harsh. The London *Times* critic suggested that “it was an instance of pseudo-classicism – resuscitated and desiccated Gluck. M. Massenet has over-reached his

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78 Parodi’s mentions Scipio advancing, but the final moment of the play shows Postumia clamoring at the door to the tomb yelling “Ouvre, ma fille!”
80 *L’Echo de Paris*, 25 April 1912.
81 *Le Théâtre*, 15 March 1912.
powers in attempting a theme too austere for his passionate and sentimental genius.”

Henri Gauthier-Villars implied that Massenet went too far in his attempt to recreate antique purity:

In *Roma*, Massenet banished the seductions that ensured the fortune of his other scores... it was condemned to a melodic dryness, which – by a touching heroism and a poverty of writing – Massenet believed would reach the great Gluckian sobriety. But it is not enough to multiply the recitatives, to accompany a duet with only a willfully withered melody, to extinguish any lyric flame, to imitate (with touching fidelity) an austere motet of Victoria, to renounce orchestral emphasis, to put a crêpe in the place of a violoncello solo – all to become a perfect Roman citizen.

While he is right to question the effect of Massenet’s renunciation of lyricism, an indictment levied against most French operas after *Pelléas*, Gauthier-Villars overlooks the way the remaining austere musical elements contribute to the drama.

*Roma*’s plot centers around expiation, and Fausta’s punishment for forsaking her vestal duties is to be buried alive. For her part, Fausta – when given the chance to escape with her lover – chooses to uphold her duty to the state; she lets herself be captured so that her atonement might restore Rome’s glory. Her capture is a negative action in an opera full of similar occurrences: Lentulus relates the story of Paul-Émile’s sacrifice on the front lines; Junia sings of a dream she had in which Pan tried to seduce her; Fausta and Lentulus embrace and sing of a future that will never come to pass; Scipio’s victory over Hannibal is only referenced by offstage voices and trumpets, though it is meant to symbolize the restoration of Roman power – the only positive action in the story. Even when Postumia stabs her granddaughter, it is only to expedite the inevitable fate of

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83 *Times* (London), 27 April 1912.  
84 *Mercure de France*, 16 May 1912.
asphyxiation. Poetic justice comes more quickly through the knife than through the sealed coffin.

Postumia’s blindness is a graphic representation of these kind of negative actions. Twice she learns of events through tactile investigation, the most dramatic being her touch of Fausta’s veil, the symbol of guilt and impending indictment. In a very powerful way, Massenet symbolizes Postumia’s blindness and the inherent inactions of the plot with the almost complete absence of the home key anywhere in the opera. The only appearance of A major before the final chorus is Fausta’s entrance in Act III, and even there Massenet avoids root position confirmation of A major, substituting I♭ chords instead. The effect telegraphs the function of A major in the opera: an aural symbol of triumph. In Act V, it is the triumph of Rome; in Act III, the (seeming) triumph of love (see Figure 3).

As with most triumphant events, the victory is not reached without difficulty, and Massenet portrays this through a violent tritone juxtaposition to and from A major. He links the two keys in two separate occasions, the more dramatic of which is the move from E♯ minor to A major at the end of Act V, when Postumia’s lament gives way to Scipio’s advance – it is the moment of poetic justice. Massenet moves briefly through F♯ minor before reaching A major, so the effect of the modulation is not immediately apparent to the listener. To mitigate this move to the relative minor, Massenet avoids resolving the E♯ minor dominant used to underscore Postumia’s final words “ouvre, c’est ton aïeule!” (“open, it is you grandmother”). According to the stage directions, Postumia
descends into the open tomb, and at the moment of her disappearance, cries of joy are heard in the distance. If Postumia’s blindness is aurally represented by the lack of

Figure 3. Key areas and aria forms in Roma.
A major throughout the opera, its return is only possible when she is physically absent from the stage.

The other tritone connection shares several elements that help prepare the final dramatic shift: a similar dramatic space – the conclusion of Act III – as well as a brief move to another key before reaching the final goal, through the qualities of the two keys are reversed (E♭ major to A minor). Unlike the non-resolution of Postumia’s lament, E♭ major is fully confirmed as the key of the only trio in the opera. Lentulus and Fausta have agreed to flee and Vestapor is hastening their exit. The trio ends with the lovers and Vestapor singing E♭, and though the orchestra does not diatonically support their arrival, the authority of E♭ major is not in question.

Vestapor’s reason for helping the lovers is purely selfish. As a Gaul, he stands to gain much from Rome’s military impotence. Indeed, once the lovers depart, he cries out “La Vestale est sauvête, Ma tâche est achevée!” (“The Vestal is saved, my work is accomplished!”). As if to heighten the duplicity of the moment, Vestapor sings this unaccompanied, and the next sonority heard is the E♭-A tritone with an added G. At this moment the Pontifex Maximus enters to seize Fausta while his guards dispose of Vestapor. Though the arrival at A minor is brief (only seven measures are clearly in the key), the effect is striking. Fausta’s hesitation moments before the final duet/trio has now cost her her life. The safety of E♭ major gives way to the inevitability of A minor, the key whose parallel major, at the moment of Fausta’s entrance earlier in Act III, had symbolized the triumph of an individual’s love over the duties of country and religion.
The A/E₃ tritone, whether immediately juxtaposed or separated by multiple closed forms, is never far away. Even the penultimate chord of the act resonates the tension of the two keys: A-C-D♯ leads to A-C-E.

Along with conclusions defined by the E♯/A tritone, Acts III and V share an internal recapitulation of their opening key. Act III opens with an orchestral prelude meant to depict the sacred forest where Lentulus and Fausta once met. As he describes his love for Fausta, Lentulus takes the orchestral music and grafts his own words to it. In the last act, Massenet reuses the opening chorus “O Vesta” immediately after Fausta is stabbed. The recapitulation is brief, only four measures, and sets up Postumia’s E♯ minor lament that follows.

Though *Roma* displays many of the large-scale dramaturgical concerns characteristic of Massenet’s later operas, it cannot be viewed as a success in part because of its lack of development for the principal characters. *Roma* is also Massenet’s only opera to abandon the traditional recapitulatory structure of the duet. Though two duets are present (Lentulus and Faust in Act III; Fabius and Fausta in Act IV), the first one expands to include another voice in the recapitulation of its A section. Deforming one of the staple operatic forms in this manner strengthens the centrality of the state in relation to the individual, since tonal confirmation of the couple’s unity is invaded by an added voice. Massenet uses an alternate procedure to transform the Act IV duet. Its brevity (only twenty measures, half of which are *a due*) precludes any kind of large-scale recapitulation. Instead, the duet portion functions as the *Abgesang* of a bar form whose

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85 This technique recalls the voice-overs in *Thaïs*, and it is interesting to see Massenet revisit this device at a similar dramaturgical moment, and indeed in the same key!
Stollen are of unequal length (Fausta sings five measures; Fabius only three). Taken collectively, these kind of formal aberrations weaken the sympathy given to a character since the expectation of formal closure is somehow altered. In his final opera, Massenet sought to balance the dramaturgical structure by mixing hallmarks of his later operas with elements indicative of his pre-1900 works. The result was an opera that is summative in its essence, if not in its audience’s approval.

Cléopâtre

The table of contents of Cléopâtre reveals a structure similar to all of Massenet’s operas after 1902. Instead of formally designated arias, there are only textual incipits with the name of the character singing. While the division of Act II into a first and second tableau is more explicit than in previous operas, Massenet had never fully abandoned this procedure, though it might not specifically be designated as such in the contents. Even the occasional “Prélude” or “Musique dans la Taverne” that begins an act or tableau is consistent with his designation of orchestral music from earlier operas. Indeed, the ballet, which has been a feature of about half the operas after Le Jongleur, is included in Cléopâtre, though instead of identifying it as a “ballet,” the contents list the separate geographic groups in the Fête Asiatique.

Critics frequently mentioned these apparent stylistic holdovers. Adolphe Boschot writing for L’Echo de Paris suggested that the composer “does not have, as with Falstaff by Verdi, the desire to renew his style at the end of his career. Instead, you will find the usual habits of Massenet: brevity, a sureness of means, and a light and fast writing.”

86 L’Echo de Paris, 30 October 1919.
Jean Chantavoine caustically remarked that Massenet “was satisfied with emphasizing the images that naturally unfolded from Cléopâtre, the stock formulas that no longer needed his imagination but that he was able to find flowing from his pen. It is nothing more than the skeleton of his art.”\textsuperscript{87} In spite of this general disparagement of Massenet’s conservative style, some critics saw his last work as the terminus of his other masterpieces: “In Cléopâtre, the author of Manon, Werther, and Thaïs (not to mention others) wholly and fully lives again. The new score is the younger, smiling sister of its three glorious siblings.”\textsuperscript{88}

Unlike the wide distribution of characters in Roma, where ancillary actors received equal amounts of music as the main characters, Cléopâtre is much more concentrated in the scope of its narrative. The two principal characters, Marc-Antoine and Cléopâtre, dominate each of the acts. Further, each of the principals is connected to a secondary character: Octavie is Marc-Antoine’s wife and Spakos is the would-be suitor for Cléopâtre. Though various choruses are used throughout, the opera has a very intimate mood, and Massenet highlights this with an almost chamber-like orchestration of the arias and ensembles.

Like its immediate predecessors, Cléopâtre uses a small number of motives – a good case can be made for only three – that recur at dramatically significant moments. Unlike its predecessors, though, Massenet is much more explicit in his use of conventional formal devices, so that their appearance defines the opera’s surface in an aurally distinct way. In this way, Cléopâtre resembles Turandot as a kind of disguised

\textsuperscript{88} Henri Quittard, Le Figaro, 24 February 1914.
“number opera,” though Massenet never approached the kind of constancy that Puccini displayed toward the “grand tradition.”

Any claim of conventional formal practices at work in *Cléopâtre* must be made cautiously, since like *Roma*, the presence of tripartite arias and ensembles is scarce (see Figure 4). Neither Marc-Antoine’s nor Cléopâtre’s first entrance coincides with an ABA form. Instead, Massenet provides brief, through-composed airs that confirm the on-stage perception of each character: Marc-Antoine sings a militaristic “Je reçois votre hommage” (“I accept your hommage”) complete with double-dotted rhythms and a widely disjunct melody, while Cléopâtre offers the seductive “Je suis venue quittant mes palais enchantés” (“I have left my enchanted palaces”) with its static accompaniment and freely-rhythmic melodic line. This music is very similar to Thaïs’s entrance (“C’est Thaïs, l’idole fragile”) and is the first of several formal and dramaturgical reverberations of that opera.

The absence of smaller-scale tripartite arias is balanced by two act-opening choral scenes that employ an ABA structure. The opening of Act I grows out of the orchestral prelude and is a tribute to Rome’s glory sung by the Roman Chiefs, Envoys, and Tributaries. Marc-Antoine’s entrance forms the B section of the overall form, which ends with an abbreviated statement of the A material. Similarly, Act II opens with a choral wedding processional that bounds the love duet between Marc-Antoine and his

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Figure 4. Key areas and aria forms in *Cléopâtre*.

**Act I**

solo, a point to which we will return in the context of Cléopâtre’s character. Only the last act is missing a large-scale three-part form for chorus or orchestra, though this is mitigated by the love duet between Marc-Antoine and Cléopâtre which is comprised of two ABA sections.

In place of the tripartite aria, Massenet substitutes bar forms (the Act III duet/trio), binary forms (“Sur ma terrasse” and “On m’a trompé!” both in Act IV), and a pair of modified strophic forms (“Je croyais” in Act II and “Quiconque effleurerà” in Act III). The cumulative effect of all these closed yet unconventional forms is a sense of modular composition, a sense that is highlighted by Massenet in the way he approaches these closed forms. In Cléopâtre, the division between a recitative and an aria/ensemble is more clearly articulated than in any of Massenet’s operas after 1900. Each act contains long stretches of dialogue punctuated by orchestral chords, a hallmark of mid-nineteenth-century French and Italian recitative structure (see Example 6), and as one would expect from the recapitulation of a sixty-year old tradition, the recitatives lead directly to arias and ensembles.

Massenet’s approach to the form of the ensembles themselves is equally retrospective. Cléopâtre contains four duets dispersed throughout Acts II, III, and IV. Each involves Marc-Antoine and another woman, Octavie or Cléopâtre, and the third duet evolves into a trio with both. The absence of a duet in Act I sets up a tension between Marc-Antoine and Cléopâtre: there is infatuation on Marc-Antoine’s part, but he cannot abandon his duty to Rome nor to his betrothed. This tension is furthered in the

first duet of the opera. The Act II duet ("Toi qui franchis" between Marc-Antoine and Octavie) is one of the most formally aberrant structures in any of Massenet’s operas. Though the two manage to come together in thirds at the end, the duet lacks the kind of formal repetition that would permit the early passion of an individual to be consummated by the couple. Instead, Massenet achieves formal balance by alternating the two
characters in roughly equal phrases. This creates a through-composed structure comprised of melodic rhymes (aa’ bb’ cc’) and effectively veils the unusual macro form. By omitting a large-scale, recapitulatory duet between the newly married couple, Massenet underscores Marc-Antoine’s duplicity and opens his character up to seek a relationship with which he can find emotional, physical, and formal closure.

Marc-Antoine acts on this impulse immediately after the orchestral postlude that follows his duet with Octavie. In a remarkable return to a formal design he had not used in almost two decades, Massenet includes all of the constituent elements of a scena ed aria to create the second half of the First Tableau in Act II. The scene opens with a long dialogue between Marc-Antoine and the soldiers Sévérus and Ennius, who have just returned from fighting in Egypt. When Marc-Antoine inquires as to the queen’s happiness, Ennius replies that “when one lover passes the courtesan’s arms… another replaces him.” This sends Marc-Antoine into a jealous rage and precipitates the tempo d’attaco, “A-t-il dit vrai?” (“Has he spoken the truth?”). There is even a lyric interruption of the recitative texture in the manner of Manon and Werther: “Cléopâtre! J’ai peur des souvenirs qui s’éveillent en moi” (“Cléopâtre! I fear the memories that have awakened in me”). To excite his passion even further, Marc-Antoine reads one of Cléopâtre’s letters, “Solitaire sur ma terrasse” (“Alone on my terrace”). A closed ABA form, this functions as a model cavatine. It is slow (Assez lent; soutenu; bien chanté), lyric, and ends with a passionate yet restrained outburst, “Non! tu ne mentais pas quand tu traçais ces lignes!” (“You did not lie when you wrote those lines!”), which forces the action forward. The tempo di mezzo follows, and Octavie enters to find her husband deeply distressed. The
terse interchange between the characters is scored with sequential motivic fragments which build a climax before Octavie’s unaccompanied cry “Pitié… J’ai peur de deviner!” (“Have pity… I am afraid to guess!”). This launches the caballette in which Marc-Antoine confesses that he cannot resist his past. The move from F major to D minor intensifies the move away from Octavie, who tries to woo him back with her own D major music, “Je savais tes tourments… ah! laisse moi t’aimer comme une soeur…” (“I knew your torments… let me love you like a sister”).

This final duet qua caballetta is thick with the kind of melodic and dramatic conflict found in Verdi’s antagonistic duets. Octavie introduces her soaring lyric melody while Marc-Antoine bullets rapid-fire statements on a single note. Though the two sing together for two measures, Marc-Antoine refuses to join Octavie’s melody, and the duet ends without any semblance of tonal resolution. Marc-Antoine has abandoned his wife in three operatic means: form, harmony, and dramaturgy.

In the remainder of Act II and the opening of Act III, Massenet articulates the nature of Cléopâtre’s relationship with Marc-Antoine without having the two sing together. Instead, Cléopâtre dominates the stage in a series of arias that reveal her depraved personality. In defining the “otherness” of Egypt, Massenet invokes the whole-tone scale; a procedure reminiscent of the E Phrygian used to depict Alexandria in Thaïs. Indeed, Cléopâtre’s description of a slave dance (“Sa danse est langoureuse”) is Massenet at his most Debussian (see Example 7).\(^9\)

\(^9\) In one of the only revisions to the orchestral draft of Cléopâtre, Massenet reorchestrated this passage to create a duet between oboe and solo cello over a chordal string accompaniment, a timbre that recalls the flute/cello duet in Debussy’s Prélude à l’après-midi d’un faune. FKFR 912. Frederick R. Koch Collection. Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University
Example 7. Cléopâtre, Act II, Tableau 2, mm. 95-99.

Effleurera”) is framed by the ballet that opens Act III. Here, she offers a kiss to anyone who would drink from a poisoned goblet. The interrupted ballet again recalls Thaïs, when Crobyle and Myrtale sing the “Cantique de la Beauté” while the mysterious Charmeuse dances and sings a vocalise, all within the context of a seven piece ballet.

When Marc-Antoine and Cléopâtre finally manage to sing together, it is only after Octavie has entered demanding him to make a choice. He chooses Cléopâtre and the two briefly sing together, one echoing the other (“Va combatre pour moi” [“Go fight for me”]). When Octavie enters, the brilliant and energetic G major gives way to its parallel minor, and the two lovers continue their jaunty duet underneath Octavie’s descending chromatic line. The addition of a voice to the existing duet structure, plus the corresponding shift from major to minor, gives this ensemble a sense of asymmetry, a
sense confirmed by its AAB structure. That its final cadence is prepared by subdominant harmony and tonally evaded (G$_b$ major rather than the expected G minor) only adds to the instability of the ensemble.

The climactic love duet of Act IV comes after Marc-Antoine’s appearance to a surprised and delighted Cléopâtre. While Spakos had convinced Cléopâtre that her beloved was dead, he also sent word to Marc-Antoine that Cléopâtre’s funeral pyre was burning in the palace. Not wanting to live without her, Marc-Antoine inflicts a mortal wound on himself and begins his journey back to queen’s chambers. He finds her alive and recounts his actions in the quasi-strophic “On m’a trompé” (“They betrayed me!”). Though he tries to move his C minor music into the parallel major at “consolé dans tes bras” (“consoled in your arms”), the severity of his actions bar such a modulation. The final cadence is deceptively resolved into the lower submediant, forming the key of the first of two tripartite duets shared by the lovers. Cléopâtre asks Marc-Antoine to forgive her for causing his misery and death, to which he replies that “I regret nothing.” Marc-Antoine alone dominates the first two formal sections. Though Cléopâtre only enters at the reprise, she is able to push the music away from A$_b$ major to its dominant, the key of their final love duet “Regarde l’horizon!” At last, the lovers sing together – always in unison, and frequently doubled one or two octaves higher by divisi violins, a technique resembling Puccini’s orchestration.

The E$_b$ major tonality of this scene rhymes with the Act II duet “Toi qui franchis” between Marc-Antoine and Octavie, and indeed, all of the ensembles in Cléopâtre are closely related to E$_b$: D major for the duet when Marc-Antoine leaves Octavie (Act II)
and G major/minor when he ultimately chooses Cléopâtre (Act III). As important as this complex of keys is, it is subordinated to the final E minor key in two important ways.

First, every appearance of E♭ is associated with some kind of misunderstanding. After the chorus of Greek slaves sing, Marc-Antoine asks Spakos if one of them was Cléopâtre. Later in Act I, Marc-Antoine is summoned back to Rome, and having suffered Cléopâtre’s attempt to seduce him, he agrees to leave, though very reluctantly. The Act II duet between husband and wife is, retrospectively, a study in misunderstanding. Though he attempts to define the mysterious transformation that occurs between two people at their marriage, Marc-Antoine also hints at doubts in his own mind when he questions his bride: “Toi qui franchis, voilée, le seuil de ma demeure, Vierge, qui donc es-tu?” (“You, veiled Virgin, who cross the threshold of my chamber, who are you?”). Finally, the love duet in Act IV is tinged with the impending death of Marc-Antoine, so that their very words “c’est le plus beau des soirs!” (“it is the most beautiful of evenings!”) completes that late-nineteenth-century operatic equation: night equals death equals love.

The move in Act IV from the final love duet to Cléopâtre’s “Une douce torpeur” vividly illustrates the second way E♭ is subjugated to E. Since her first mention in Marc-Antoine’s ”Courtisan!,” Cléopâtre has been associated with the key of E. The opening of the second tableau in Act II clearly connects the mystical-oriental atmosphere (articulated by the whole-tone scale) with Cléopâtre’s home key, and this is strengthened by a move to its dominant and subdominant as stable keys thereafter. Cléopâtre’s opening aria in Act III is preceded by an E minor dance so that its relatively clear F major seems unusually distant and provocative – the perfect impression for her proposal to exchange her kiss for
a drink of poison. The final act is bounded by E minor, and the dramatic tension that
tracks through the act is underscored by a series of ascending chromatic keys: D♯
(Cléopâtre awaits Marc-Antoine); D (Marc-Antoine’s arrival is heralded); E♯ (love duet);
E (Cléopâtre’s death). In no other opera has Massenet articulated the arrival at the home
key in such an audibly determinate fashion. What was Steigerung in a series of phrases in
a Gounod aria has become a progression of intense harmonic plateaus in an act by
Massenet.

*Cléopâtre* will never achieve the popularity of Massenet’s middle-period
masterworks. It is, however, among the best of his late works. Louis Schneider made this
point in his review for *Le Théâtre* and called attention to the opera’s connection with
Massenet’s acknowledged masterpieces:

One guesses that the late master, having found in this subject all that was suitable
to his sensibilities, especially his amorous temperament, wrote these four acts
enthusiastically, where we find the voluptuous tenderness of *Thaïs* and the sunny
orientalism of *Hérodiade* giving way to the melancholy and fatal atmosphere of
*Werther*.

Writing for the production at the *Festival Massenet* in 1990, Gerard Condé suggests that
“*Cléopâtre* represents Massenet’s late style. The music is marked by a simplicity that
does not rule out invention, by an unerring sense of the important and by a purity of
concept and execution that upholds the tradition of the Classical tragédie lyrique.”

Indeed, the clarity of Massenet’s dramaturgy, specifically intimate orchestrations and
unencumbered plots, is evident throughout his late style. Massenet articulated the

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91 *Le Théâtre*, April 1914.
92 Gerard Condé, trans. Clive Williams, liner notes for Jules Massenet’s *Cléopâtre*, performed by Kathryn
Harries, Didier Henry, et. al., the Nouvel Orchestre de Saint-Etienne, conducted by Patrick Fournillier
(Koch Schwann LC 1083, 1992), 35.
beginning of this style when he left his teaching position at the Conservatoire. At the same time, his relationship with post-Wagnerian techniques underwent a similar shift, and he took only those elements deemed integral to dramatic composition. No longer bound by the expectations of leitmotivic construction, Massenet felt free to construct opera articulated less by audible surface connections and more by an intentional deep-structure of tonal cohesion.
CHAPTER VI
CONCLUSION
MASSENET’S LEGACY

The critical assessment of Massenet’s operas has often centered on their stylistic stasis after Thaïs. Most of Massenet’s eulogists agreed that he was quick to break from the traditions of his teachers only to maintain a newly-found style, a mixture of lyric declamation and supple melody, throughout his later works. Occasionally, contemporary critics attested to the diversity of his works, as did Octave Séré who suggested that these “do not match each other any more than they all share the same happy fortune.”¹ Séré is right; none of the works after 1900 came close to matching the critical or popular success of the masterpieces from the 1880s and early 90s.

These early reactions to Massenet’s style have remained constant throughout the twentieth century, as evidenced by comments in the general encyclopedias of music: “[his style] changed very little in character after 1894”² or, in reference to his last four operas, that “he could now barely escape the echoes of earlier works in everything he did,”³ or “at the end of his career, Massenet’s handling of the tempo and structure of the music drama had changed very little in relation to his works from the 1880s.”⁴ It is true that Massenet’s treatment of the expected operatic conventions – a limited motivic

¹ Octave Séré, Musiciens français d’Aujourd’hui (Paris: Mercure de France, 1911), 283.
framework, closed, tripartite aria and ensemble forms, and an intimacy of character-
ization – coalesced in *Manon, Werther,* and *Thaïs* in a much more synthetic fashion than
they did in *Don César de Bazan, Le Roi de Lahore,* or even *Hérodiade.* It is also true that
Massenet never fully abandoned those procedures in his later operas. To dismiss the
works after *Thaïs* as merely derivative or continuations, however, is to overlook a
significant component of Massenet’s dramaturgical development: the careful situation of
closed, ensemble forms into a large-scale tonal framework.

Massenet’s last opera, *Cléopâtre,* shares with *Thaïs* several noticeable
components: a strong female lead whose lifestyle draws other characters to her; the
characterization of Egypt as a Oriental paradise replete with dancing slaves and
sumptuous feasts; the emotional and philosophical reversal of a main character; and the
first presentation of their title characters in a free and lyrical moment of stasis following a
climactic, anticipatory, crowd scene. Though the kind of tonal hierarchy in place in *Thaïs*
was relatively new for Massenet (its use in *Werther* was more experimental than overtly
intentional), by the time he wrote *Cléopâtre,* he had used the procedure in more than ten
operas. The last act of *Cléopâtre* shows the facility and care with which Massenet
outlined a large dramatic unit. Indeed, the act is much more “active” in the sense of tonal
and narratival build-up than the last act of *Thaïs,* in which the omnipresent D major forms
a kind of tonal and dramatic stasis. Of course, these two strategies, static versus dynamic,
parallel the dramatic resolution experienced by the two main characters: Thaïs and
Athanaël are separated by death; Cléopâtre takes her life to unite with her dead lover.
Though Cléopâtre represents a unique example, Massenet had been building to such integration between drama and tonality over several operas. The use of D major as the apotheosis in Thaïs, the association of individual characters with specific keys in Chérubin, Sapho, and Thérèse, and the complex network of key relationships that develop in Thérèse and Cléopâtre illustrate an increasingly thorough approach to musical dramaturgy. Indeed, such evidence argues against the reception, articulated both explicitly and implicitly in much of the recent criticism, that Massenet was developmentally stagnant in his later years. To be sure, his works after 1900 completely contradict Hugh Macdonald’s statement that, “Massenet does not attempt any long-term tonal design but concentrates on what the ear can appreciate: the tonal shape of single scenes.”

While Macdonald is correct to suggest that Massenet had his listener’s ears in mind as he created his operas, it is equally true that he wanted to pull his audience away from the conventions of Second Empire opera into a more continuously-conceived musical texture. Massenet was caught in the tenuous shift from Verdian-influenced practice to wagnerisme that marked operas in the Third Republic. Act-length and work-length structures, more than leitmotivic interplay, were Wagner’s most lasting impressions on the French composer. If Massenet was giving people what they wanted to hear, he was doing it on his own terms.

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Part of Massenet’s dramaturgical strategy was to highlight the conventional forms his audience expected in a meaningful and structurally significant way. He did this by subsuming the arias and ensembles to a large-scale tonal plan, thus forming stable key-areas that acted as a nodal points in the dramatic and musical narrative. The recapitulatory structure of these tripartite forms aided in the tonal stability they generated, which is why Massenet was reluctant to abandon that venerable form. This is especially true in the ensembles, wherein the characters would join voices, thereby strengthening the timbral density. When Massenet avoids melodic and tonal resolution in an ensemble – as he does in the Act I trio from *Hérodiade*, “Jézabel,” the duet “Grisélidis, écoute-moi” from Act II, Scene 7 of *Grisélidis*, or the duet/trio “Va combattre pour moi” from *Cléopâtre*, Act III – it is to signal a critical tension in the narrative. While this is more the exception than the rule in Massenet’s compositional grammar, it also demonstrates the care with which he viewed the closed-form ensemble.

The particularly character-driven nature of Massenet’s operas make duets a natural vehicle with which to explore the sometimes subtle, sometimes blatant psychological and emotional exigencies of a particular character. Though he is often chided for his “excessively feminine” characters, in truth, Massenet’s prima donnas are frequently portrayed as tonally stronger than their masculine counterparts. This is evident in duets like “Voici le divin moment” from Act II of *Esclarmonde*, “Cher parents!” from Act II of *Sapho*, and the brief “On l’appelle Manon” from Act II of *Manon* where the women all reach tonal resolution through motion ending on tonic, while the men are
relegated to third or fifth of the chord. Of course, it is Thaïs who exemplifies the strongest female character in this respect. In their final duet together (“Te souvient-il du lumineux voyage” from Act III) Thaïs not only reaches tonic while Athanaël lingers on the third, her cadential drive, covering the two and a quarter octaves from d to b, confirms her own apotheosis and the conclusion of the opera.

The transition from number-based structures to the more fluid designs that mark works like Debussy’s Pelléas and Fauré’s Pénélope was the most difficult compositional challenge Massenet faced during his forty-five year operatic career. While this study has shown how Massenet struggled with this issue, a more complete picture of French opera at the fin de siècle would trace how other composers approached it.

Though he never achieved the continued popular or critical success of his rival, Camille Saint-Saëns surpassed Massenet in one important aspect: after Faust, his Samson et Dalila (1877) became the most frequently performed work at the Opéra. Saint-Saëns’s other operas, a dozen in all, have been relegated to obscurity, with the occasional exception of Henry VIII (1883). Though totaling only half of Massenet’s output, Saint-Saëns was the next most prolific composer of his time to achieve national and international attention. As expected, his early operas are squarely in the mold of Gounod, indeed Huebner suggests that Saint-Saëns, more than Massenet, deserves to be cast as the fils of Gounod. By the end of his career, however, Saint-Saëns’s style had moved away from ternary designs that privileged four-square melodies to consistent lyrical

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6 One notable exception to this practice is the Act IV duet in Don Quichotte, “Oui… je souffre votre tristesse” in which Dulcinea cadences on the third of A major while Don Quichotte ascends from ti to do.
7 Steven Huebner, French Opera at the Fin de Siècle (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 225.
declamation in the vein of Debussy’s *Pelléas*. Character- and plot-based leitmotivs are more commonly found in Saint-Saëns’s works than in Massenet’s, though they are never as present as they are in d’Indy’s *Fervaal* or Charpentier’s *Gwendoline*. In short, Saint-Saëns dealt with the same problems that affected every composer of French opera: the synthesis of Wagnerian techniques within the framework of Second Empire grand opera. Examining Saint-Saëns’s “failure” to capture the critical and popular imagination with respect to the structural dramaturgy of his operas would reveal another important aspect of the public’s changing interpretation and acceptance of mid-century formal conventions.

That these conventions persisted into the twentieth century in works by Massenet and Saint-Saëns, among others, attests to their continued, if diminished, effectiveness. An analysis of the operas that purposefully engaged tripartite or multi-part forms would help trace the end of that genre as a means of organizing operatic narratives, an end that post-dates both Massenet and Saint-Saëns. Henry Février (1875-1957), for instance, sets the center-piece love duet of *Le Roi Aveugle* (Paris, Opéra-Comique, 1906) in a large-scale tripartite form that gradually increases in tempo over the course of the duet.\(^8\) Unity is achieved through a recurring motive that is first heard in the orchestra but that, through an alignment of textual fragments, becomes texted by the end of the duet and serves to underscore its climax with the words “Sa riches se épanouit les lys de ton âme!” (Its riches flow from the lily of your heart!).

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\(^8\) This is the duet for Hilda and le Roi, “O mon Père!” from Act I, Scene 3.
Over the last quarter-century, Massenet’s reception has changed to reveal a composer more concerned with the musico-dramatic aspects of his operas than with what the public wanted to hear. In this respect, his reception ironically parallels Saint-Saëns’s eulogy, which described Massenet as having “many imitators, [though] he imitated no one.”9 An increased representation in commercially available recordings and the foundation of the Festival St. Etienne, devoted to the biennial presentation of his works, has undoubtedly helped this situation. As much of the early scholarship on Massenet was focused on individual characters, both as the quintessence of stereotypes (especially the feminine) and also the performers for whom Massenet wrote, so now are the works themselves eliciting scholarly attention.

Massenet’s late operas represent the end of a tradition of French opera that covers the entire nineteenth century and includes André Grétry, Hector Berlioz, Giacomo Meyerbeer, Charles Gounod, and Georges Bizet, to name only the peaks of the chain of composers. Of these, only Meyerbeer had the repeated successes that matched his Italian counterparts (Gioachino Rossini, Gaetano Donizetti, Vincenzo Bellini, and Giuseppe Verdi). Of course, the marginalization of French composers did not stop with the operatic domination of Italian composers at the beginning of the century; Wagner’s influence commanded the late-nineteenth century in a similar fashion. Massenet, then, stands with Puccini at the end of a long line of inheritance, and like Puccini, Massenet left “no Crown Prince.”10

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Unlike Puccini, however, Massenet did not leave a final work that represented the culmination and perfection of his craft. Massenet’s “Turandot” must be viewed as fragmented throughout his last six operas (Thérèse to Cléopâtre), so that it is the continuous refinement of practice, rather than a bold anthology of technique, that gives these works their significance. Massenet’s late operas deserve, and are beginning to receive, more attention and performance, but they must be viewed in relation to the fin de la tradition, of which Massenet was only an inheritor.

Writing about the construction of Werther, Carl Dahlhaus observed that, “the crucial point is that, contrary to a popular misconception, Massenet, a professor at the Conservatoire, was not simply an ‘opera monger’ but took musical forms to be ‘sedimented contents’ (to use Adorno’s term) and put them to dramaturgical use.”11 As we have seen, Massenet locates these forms in a variety of large-scale schemas. His reluctance to completely abandon convention while simultaneously challenging his audience’s sense of security resulted in works of dramaturgical genius, and it was the extremely successful balancing of conventional elements within a carefully constructed dramatic composition that made Massenet one of the most unconventional composers of fin-de-siècle opera.

APPENDIX:

PLOT SUMMARIES
This appendix contains the operas discussed throughout this work. They are presented in alphabetical order.

**Ariane, opéra.** Jules Massenet, libretto by Catulle Mendès.

**Act I.** On the island of Crete at Minos’s labyrinth. Ariane has given the secret of the labyrinth to Thésée, which he uses to defeat the Minotaur. A chorus of Sirens and Greeks narrates these events, and Ariane confesses her love of Thésée to her sister Phèdre. After he exits the maze, Phèdre sees the hero and also falls in love. Ariane is ecstatic when Thésée asks her to return to Greece. Phèdre asks to accompany them under the pretense of being near her sister.

**Act II.** As the ship sails to Greece, Thésée and Ariane are absorbed in their love. A storm overtakes the ship, and Phèdre secretly hopes it will overcome them all. When they reach shore, it is on the island of Naxos.

**Act III.** Thésée’s friend Pirithoüs rebukes the hero for taking too long to leave the idyllic Naxos. As he departs, Ariane mistakes this for rejection and asks her sister to talk to Thésée. Phèdre agrees and after a emotional exchange, she and Thésée are in each others arms. Ariane surprises the two and faints; once restored, she laments her fate. Pirithoüs soon brings word of Phèdre’s fate: in anger, she stoned the statue of Adonis which toppled and killed her. As Phèdre’s body is brought in, Thésée flees crying her name. Ariane calls upon Cypris, who gives her the three Graces as a guide to the underworld. Ariane descends to restore Phèdre to life.

**Act IV.** In Tartarus, Perséphone dreams of the upperworld. The three Graces appear and dance a ballet that charms the Furies. Though happy to receive Ariane, Perséphone refuses to release Phèdre. Ariane counters this opposition with a basket of roses. Reluctantly, Phèdre is led back to life.

**Act V.** On the Naxos shore, Thésée now laments the fate of both sisters. Just as plans are made to descend to rescue them, Ariane and Phèdre emerge from below. Though Ariane pushes Phèdre to rejoin Thésée, Phèdre prefers that Ariane be reunited with him, but as Ariane turns away, Thésée embraces Phèdre. Ariane walks out into the sea as the Sirens sing of her fate.
Carmen, opéra comique. Georges Bizet, libretto by Henri Melihac and Ludovic Halévy.

Act I. As corporal Moralès and his soldiers wait for the cigarette factory girls to come out on break, the peasant girl Micaëla searches for Don José. She is told that he is a corporal in another division that is en route. A change of guard signals the arrival of Don José and coincides with the factory worker’s break. Among the many women that emerge, Carmen stands out as their leader. She dances the habanera and playfully throws a rose to Don José. The crowd returns to work at the factory, and Micaëla brings a letter from Don José’s mother which suggests he marries Micaëla. The tender moment is interrupted by a scream, and we learn that Carmen has attacked one of her co-workers. Don José is sent to arrest Carmen, which he does. The two are eventually left alone, and Carmen persuades Don José to release her and offers to meet him at a tavern later. Unable to withstand her spell, Don José agrees. As Carmen slips away, Don José is arrested for the dereliction of duties.

Act II. Carmen and her girlfriends entertain the officers at Lillas Pastia’s tavern. As she flirts with Don José’s former captain, Carmen learns that José will be released tonight – two months after he let her escape. Escamillo, the famous toreador, enters amid a flurry of enthusiasm and sings his famous couplets. Though she briefly flirts with him, Carmen decides to wait for Don José. The tavern closes, and two smugglers ask Carmen and her friends to help them with their nefarious activities. Soon Don José approaches, and Carmen hides the smugglers. After a brief reunion, a trumpet fanfare calls Don José to duty. Carmen is upset and suggests that if Don José really loved her, he would help the smugglers. When his captain enters to seduce Carmen, Don José tries to attack him. Carmen summons the hidden smugglers who disarm the officer and escort him away. Don José now has no other choice but to join Carmen and the smugglers.

Act III. At a hideout with the smugglers, Carmen has grown weary of Don José, and the two are arguing. José is summoned to guard duty and Carmen turns to her girlfriends for diversion. They tell each other’s fortunes, but frivolity turns to sobriety as Carmen turns over the death card. She resigns herself to this fate, and the girls depart to distract the border guards. As Don José keeps watch, he fires a shot at an intruder – it is Escamillo who has come in search of Carmen. The two men scuffle, but Carmen intervenes and the toreador invites everyone to his next bullfight. Micaëla enters, having come to find Don José and bring him the news of his dying mother. She begs him to return, and he agrees, though he vows to return to Carmen.

Act IV. At the bullring in Seville, Carmen walks to the stadium on Escamillo’s arm. Before he enters to fight the bull, the two sing a duet in which she declares her love. Don José arrives, disheveled and pathetic, pleading for Carmen to forget her past and come away with him. At first, she calmly dismisses him, but her contempt grows, and she flings the ring he given her back into his face. Enraged, Don José stabs Carmen to death, while the crowd inside the stadium cheers the triumphant bullfighter.

**Act I.** Now seventeen and an officer in the army, Chérubin has outgrown his image as the timorous page from Mozart’s opera. Jealous of his reputation, the Count, the Duke, and the Baron object to Chérubin’s poem for the Countess, suggesting that it is inappropriate. Nina, the Count’s page, is in love with Chérubin, and to save his reputation, she recites the poem saying that it was intended for her all along. Chérubin’s teacher, le Philosophe, is happy to know of Nina’s feelings but cannot make Chérubin return them. Instead, Chérubin exclaims that he is in love with the beautiful Spanish dancer l’Ensoleillad.

**Act II.** The Count, the Duke, and the Baron all arrive at a hotel with their wives. Meanwhile, the officers celebrate Chérubin’s promotion to lieutenant, and Chérubin uses this chance to demonstrate his bravado. A duel breaks out, but le Philosophe quiets the instigators. When l’Ensoleillad begins to notice Chérubin, le Philosophe cannot dissuade the young man from a dangerous pursuit. Later that night, Chérubin approaches l’Ensoleillad’s window, where he sings a ballade to her. She melts, much to Chérubin’s delight, but the Count, the Duke, and the Baron mistakenly think the song is for their respective wives. The act ends in bedlam.

**Act III.** Captured and about to face three simultaneous duels, Chérubin makes his will. Le Philosophe gives advice on swordsmanship, but there is no need, since Chérubin acknowledges that his song was for l’Ensoleillad. As she prepares to resume her tour, Chérubin confesses his love; he is rebuffed but is consoled by le Philosophe. The long-suffering Nina has made plans to enter a convent, but when Chérubin recognizes her affections, the opera ends with the couple in each other’s arms.


**Act I.** As a member of the imperial triumvirate, Marc-Antoine arrives in Egypt to observe its assimilation into the Roman Empire. He receives the acclamations of the people and prepares to meet their queen, whose legendary beauty has been described by Spakos. Cléopâtre arrives on a sumptuously decorated galley. Her seductive charm almost makes him forget his duties to the Senate and to Octavius, to whose sister, Marc-Antoine is engaged.

**Act II.** *Tableau 1.* At the wedding of Marc-Antoine and Octavie, a Roman chorus sings in praise of felicity. The newlyweds briefly sing together, but when a soldier enters to inform Marc-Antoine of the Egyptian progress, his mind returns to Cléopâtre. He dismisses Octavie and runs to board a ship bound for the Nile. Octavie resigns her fate and vows to remain faithful.
Tableau 2, a tavern in Alexandria. Cléopâtre, in disguise, watches the seductive dance of Adamos. Her visible interest makes Spakos jealous, and in a fit of rage, he kills Adamos. The crowd turns on Spakos, but Cléopâtre reveals her true identity. As Spakos flees, Cléopâtre is informed of Marc-Antoine’s return.

Act III. Cléopâtre is watching dancers at a party in her gardens. She interrupts the festivities to offer a kiss to anyone who will drink a cup of poison. Marc-Antoine suggests that her beauty alone is enough to make anyone do horrendous deeds. Though Octavius has declared war on Egypt, Marc-Antoine is reluctant to leave Cléopâtre’s side, fearing that Spakos might take his place as her lover. Octavie enters trying to restore Marc-Antoine’s Roman valor, but she only increases his distrust. Now he boldly offers himself to Cléopâtre, and the two sing together of their certain victory.

Act IV. Desperate and alone, Cléopâtre prepares to take her life. The messengers she sent to summon Marc-Antoine’s return were intercepted by Spakos, who has told them to inform the general that Cléopâtre is dead. Dismayed, Marc-Antoine falls on his sword and has himself carried to the palace to die next to his queen. He finds her there alive, but it is too late. Marc-Antoine dies in Cléopâtre’s arms and, after lamenting her fate, she clinches the asp to her breast as the Roman army approaches.

Hamlet, opéra. Ambroise Thomas, libretto by Michel Carré and Jules Barbier.

Act I. At the coronation of Claudius and Gertrude, the joyous crowd acclaims their new king and queen. Meanwhile, Hamlet bemoans the fact that a mere two months has past since his father’s death, yet his mother, Gertrude, has married her husband’s brother, Claudius. Ophélie, distraught and melancholy, scolds Hamlet for insulting the king; Hamlet then renounces his love for her. Laerte, Ophélie’s brother, prepares to leave Denmark and entrusts his sister to Hamlet’s care. As Hamlet bids farewell to Laerte, he stands on the ramparts of Elsinore castle where he sees the ghost of his dead father who reveals that he was murdered by Claudius. Hamlet swears revenge.

Act II. Ophélie is now so distraught over Hamlet’s rebuttal, that she asks permission to enter a convent. Gertrude denies her request, though she too is worried about her son’s irrational behavior. In vain, Claudius tries to calm his wife; but she suggests that Hamlet has discovered their guilt. Hamlet tries to flesh out Claudius’s guilt by having a troupe of actors perform the story of King Gonzago’s murder. Hamlet narrates the mimed story, and at the moment of assassination, Claudius stops the play, exposing his guilt. Engorged on his victory, Hamlet madly accuses the king of murder.

Act III. After Hamlet intones his famous soliloquy, he hides, meaning to kill Claudius who has come to pray. He is unable to follow through, however, and Claudius calls on Polonius for counsel. Hamlet now realizes that Polonius, Ophélie’s father, was an
accomplice to murder. Later, when the queen brings Ophélie to Hamlet with the intent that they marry, Hamlet angrily spurns them both. In a long duet, the queen chastises Hamlet for his boorishness, but he accuses her of duplicity and murder. The ghost reappears, unseen by the queen, and Hamlet calmly bids his mother good night.

**Act IV.** Driven to the brink of death, Ophélie wanders out to a lake. There, she meets a group of peasants and tells them her story. As she casts flowers all around her, she declares that she is married to Hamlet and sings a song to the *wili* who lives in the lake. She drowns herself.

**Act V.** At a graveyard, Hamlet watches workers singing of the brevity of earthly pleasures, except drinking. He has left Elsinore to avoid death, and though he knows of Ophélie’s madness, he does not know that she has died. Laerte enters and blames Hamlet for Ophélie’s death. The two begin to duel but are interrupted by Ophélie’s funeral cortege. Though he wants to take his own life, the ghost appears to Hamlet, who summons the courage to kill Claudius instead. The people proclaim Hamlet the new king.

**Hérodiade, opéra.** Jules Massenet, libretto by Paul Millet and Henri Grémont.

**Act I.** In a courtyard outside Hérodé’s palace in Jerusalem, a dispute between merchants is broken up by Phanuel, a Chaldean astronomer. He meets Salome, who has come to the city in search of her mother (whom Phanuel knows is Hérodiade, but does not tell her). Instead, she has fallen in love the prophet, Jean [John the Baptist]. Phanuel and Salome leave, and Hérodé, the tetrarch, enters; he is in love with Salome. Soon after, the tetrarch’s wife, Hérodiade, enters; she demands that Jean be punished for insulting her. Since Jean commands great popular appeal and respect, Hérodé tries to discourage his wife, but when Jean enters and again insults her, Hérodé and Hérodiade flee. Salome enters and offers herself to Jean, but he refuses, seeking a more divine love.

**Act II.** Phanuel counsels Hérodé to forget Salome. When Hérodé suggests a plan to kill all the prophets in preparation for a revolution, Phanuel warns against it, suggesting that if dead, they would become martyrs. The scene changes to the palace exterior, where Hérodé is rallying the people against the Romans. When Vitellus, the Roman proconsul arrives, he placates the people by allowing Jean to return to his duties at the Temple. Jean enters, followed by Salome, and the shouts of acclamation make Vitellus jealous. He has the prophet arrested.

**Act III. Scene 1.** Hérodiade has come to Phanuel’s house, while the astronomer is trying to grasp Jean’s significance. She is here to seek revenge against the rival to her husband’s affections. Phanuel suggests that only her daughter can help Hérodiade, and when he reveals that this is Salome, Hérodiade does not believe him. Scene 2. In the
temple, Salome proclaims her love for Jean and her wish to be united in death. Since Hérode has decided to release Jean to curry favor with the Jews, he expects that Salome will come to love him. Instead, Salome rejects him, and Hérode threatens to kill both her and Jean. As the people gather for worship, the crowd looks to Vitellus to condemn Jean. Vitellus refuses, giving the responsibility back to Hérode. Hérode questions the prophet and plans to grant him clemency when Salome again declares her love for Jean. Enraged, Hérode rebukes them both, and they are seized by the guards.

**Act IV.** Alone in his cell, Jean prays, saying that he is not afraid to die, though he is plagued with thoughts of Salome. When she enters, they declare their mutual love, but Jean tells Salome to save herself. She, however, will not leave his side, and when the guards enter to take Jean to the executioner, they drag Salome to Hérode’s palace. Salome pleads for Jean’s life. Just as Hérode is about to give in to her demands, the executioner arrives with a bloody sword. Hysterical, Salome grabs a dagger and tries to kill Hérodiade. When the queen reveals herself as Salome’s mother, Salome turns the dagger on herself.

**Le Jongleur de Notre Dame, miracle.** Jules Massenet, libretto by Maurice Lena.

**Act I.** In front of the Abbey Cluny in the fourteenth century, peasants gather to sell their wares. Jean, a jongleur, arrives and offers to sing songs in exchange for food. The crowd cries out for the *Alleluia du vin* and Jean obliges. The Prior overhears this blasphemous song and urges the juggler to mend his ways. As Boniface the cook arrives, his donkey laden with provisions, Jean succumbs to the Prior’s message and asks to enter the monastery. He brings only his clothes and juggler’s bag.

**Act II.** The monks rehearse a motet for the Virgin, though Jean’s inability to understand Latin excludes him from singing. A dispute ensues between the painter, poet, sculptor, and musician monk; they are arguing over who has the noblest art. The Prior chastizes their selfishness and separates the group. Boniface enters and reminds Jean that the Virgin appreciates a gift from the heart over all else.

**Act III.** Determined to offer the Virgin what he can do the best, Jean enters the chapel with his juggler’s bag. He performs and sings love songs and war songs but eventually dances himself to exhaustion. The monks observe and are outraged, but the statue comes to life and blesses Jean, who falls dead.

Act I. Amiens, 1721. In a courtyard, Guillot and three young “actresses” impatiently wait on their dinner, while a crowd arrives, awaiting the coach. Among them is a young officer, Lescaut, who has come to greet his cousin, Manon, and escort her to a convent. When she arrives, she tells him of the excitement of her first independent trip. As he looks for her luggage, Guillot begins flirting; she laughs at his advances, and when Lescaut returns, he warns his young cousin about talking to strangers. Manon begins to weigh her bland future against the glamour represented by Guillot. When the Chevalier Des Grieux arrives, he instantly falls in love with Manon. Grasping the opportunity to escape the convent, Manon suggests that they run away in Guillot’s coach. They do, just as Guillot arrives to hurl insults.

Act II. In a Parisian apartment where Manon and Des Grieux have been living together for three months, Des Grieux reads a letter to his father asking permission to marry Manon. Suddenly, Lescaut and Brétigny arrive. Following a show of bravado, Brétigny quietly informs Manon that Des Grieux will be kidnapped this evening to be reunited with his family. Brétigny offers Manon a life of luxury if she does not tell her lover. When all the men leave, Manon bids a poignant farewell to her comfortable life over the last months. Des Grieux returns from posting his letter and does not realize Manon’s anguished state; instead he sings of the idyllic life on which they are about to embark. This is short lived, however, as officers violently storm the apartment and carry off Des Grieux.

Act III. Scene 1. On the promenade of the Cours-la-Reine, a crowd enjoys the pleasures of easy company and a carefree life: the “actresses” of Act I flirt with young clerks, and Lescaut sings of the charms of Rosalinde. Manon makes a grand entrance and sings a glorious gavotte praising the life of luxury. Afterward, the Comte Des Grieux takes Manon aside to inform her that the Chevalier has irrevocably suffered because of her and that he has taken religious orders as a result. The arrival of the Opéra ballet momentarily distracts Manon, but following their performance, she rushes off to Saint-Sulpice. Scene 2. At the parlor of Saint-Sulpice, the Comte Des Grieux tries to persuade his son against taking holy orders. Des Grieux, however, cannot shake Manon’s memory, and when she arrives, he completely succumbs to her charms.

Act IV. Manon and Des Grieux arrive at the gaming tables of the Hôtel de Transylvanie. They find a crowd enrapt with their games, and Manon persuades Des Grieux to make a wager, suggesting that luck is on their side. Des Grieux plays so well against Lescaut, that he is accused of cheating. The police are summoned and Manon and Des Grieux are arrested. Coming to the aid of his son, the Comte enters and promises that he will have the Chevalier released; however, he cannot do the same for Manon.

Act V. On the road to Le Harve, Lescaut and Des Grieux watch the prisoners who are awaiting deportation. Des Grieux bribes the guard to gain a moment alone with Manon.
She begs his forgiveness for being unfaithful, and, heroically recalling their blissful past, dies in his arms.

**Paul et Virginie, opéra.** Victor Massé, libretto by Jules Barbier and Michel Carré.

**Act I.** After being disowned by her family, Madame de Latour (widowed mother of Virginie) seeks refuge with Marguerite (mother of Paul) on an island off the coast of Africa. The two women discuss the future of their children, who were raised as brother and sister, when Mme. Latour proposes that Virginie marry Paul. This delights Marguerite as she had feared her son’s lowly birth would be an obstacle to his success. After the title characters proclaim their love in a duet, Meala, a runaway slave, enters to seek asylum from her master, M. de Sainte-Croix. The couple accompanies her to the plantation to seek his forgiveness. Charmed and aroused by Virginie, Sainte-Croix forgives Meala but asks them to stay and rest. As slaves dance and sing, Meala warns Paul of Virginie’s position and the couple departs.

**Act II.** Upon returning home, Mme. de Latour receives a letter that Virginie is to come to Paris to receive her rich aunt’s fortune. Unwilling to leave her lover, Virginie refuses, but is persuaded by an advance of jewels and her mother’s insistence. Virginie informs Paul and, thinking that her love for him has grown cold, he laments his ignoble birth. Seeing her effect on Paul, Virginie recants and the two sing of their inseparable love. The governor of the island arrives and produces an official mandate for Virginie to leave for Paris. She faints and is borne away to the waiting ship.

**Act III.** Paul, consumed with grief, sees a vision of Virginie in the Parisian salons. Sainte-Croix, whose lust has led him to France, feigns manners and asks for her hand. When she refuses, the haute société rebuffs her and warns her to leave Paris for her home. Knowing that she will return, Paul anticipates her arrival only to witness the sinking of her ship in a violent hurricane. The opera ends with Paul clutching Virginie’s lifeless body while the islanders kneel to chant that the two will be reunited in heaven.

**Roma, opéra tragique.** Jules Massenet, libretto by Henri Cain after Alexandre Parodi.

**Act I.** Lentulus (a Roman tribune) arrives at the Senate after being defeated by Hannibal. He tells the story of the brave Paul-Émile, who gave his life for his country. The citizens are worried because the sacred flame of the Vestals has expired – a portentous sign that one of the virgins has been unfaithful, and an assurance that Rome will continue its disgrace. An inquiry is begun.
**Act II.** Slaves and vestals are questioned. Junia, Lentulus’s sister, accuses herself of infidelity, but her innocence is proven – it was only a dream. Hoping to catch the culprit, the Pontifex Maximus announces that Lentulus has been killed. Fausta betrays her guilt by fainting.

**Act III.** In the sacred forest, Vestapor, a Gallic slave, helps Lentulus and Fausta prepare their escape. The lovers sing of their desire to live together, but Fausta is torn by the duty to her office. After they finally agree to flee, the Pontifex Maximus enters and seizes the lovers.

**Act IV.** Fausta is brought before the Senate where her uncle, the powerful Fabius, reads her fate: she is to be buried alive. Wearing the black veil of guilt, she makes preparations. Her blind grandmother, Postumia, enters, not knowing the severity of Fausta’s crime. When reaching to kiss Fausta, Postumia feels the veil and realizes that death awaits her granddaughter.

**Act V.** The open grave lies ready to receive Fausta. Postumia enters concealing Fabius’s dagger and offers it to the doomed vestal. But Fausta’s hands are bound, so Postumia herself must stab her granddaughter. The crime is expiated, and Rome’s glory is restored. The crowds welcome the conquering Scipio Africanus.

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**Sapho, pièce lyrique.** Jules Massenet, libretto by Henri Cain and Arthur Bernède.

**Act I.** In the Parisian apartment of the sculptor Caoudal, sounds of a party are heard in the background. Jean Gauvin, an unsophisticated provincial, enters, feeling out of place at such an urbane occasion. He meets Fanny Legrand, known as “Sapho” (the model who posed nude for a well-known sculpture) to her friends. She draws Jean into a conversation but keeps her identity a secret. When supper is announced, Fanny persuades Jean to leave with her.

**Act II.** Having provided an apartment for Jean to use as he studies for a diplomatic exam, Jean’s parents take leave of him. Before they go, Jean shares a tender moment with Irène, his orphaned cousin whom the family has now adopted. Fanny enters, after remaining out of sight while his parents said farewell. Though the thought of using Jean for her personal enjoyment bothers Fanny somewhat, she cannot resist his innocent charm and the two are pulled passionately together as the act ends.

**Act III.** Jean and Fanny celebrate their one-year anniversary at a quaint restaurant with their friends. When the conversation turns to Fanny’s past, her secret is revealed. Upset, Jean ends their relationship and storms away. Enraged at the thought of losing her only true love, Fanny insults her former friends.
Act IV. Jean has returned home to Avignon where his mother suspects a cruel woman is to blame for his sudden appearance. She and Irène try to console him, but Fanny arrives pleading for his affection. Jean’s parents dismiss Fanny, who leaves rejected.

Act V. Fanny returns to the cottage she shared with Jean. Though she knows that she must leave him for his own good, her heart is broken with anguish. Jean appears, having broken the ties to his family and declares his love to Fanny. Now Fanny must decide. As Jean rests, Fanny knows that he will never be able to accept her past. She departs, quietly leaving him asleep.


Prologue. The rivalry of the Veronese houses of the Montagues and Capulets is depicted by a tempestuous orchestral introduction. This leads to a speech-like prologue that summarizes the story of the star-crossed lovers.

Act I. At a masked ball hosted by the Capulets, Tybalt, Juliette’s cousin, eagerly awaits her entrance. When Juliette is presented, she sings of her joy. After this, she departs, and Roméo and his friends appear, planning to start a fight. Roméo tells about a recent dream that warned him of this night, but Mercutio dismisses this by singing the “Queen Mab” scherzo. As Roméo’s eyes meet Juliette, she is dancing. He approaches and asks for her hand and the two realize their destinies are intertwined; they sing their first duet. When Tybalt approaches, Roméo dons his mask, but Tybalt recognizes him, and he tells Juliette that she is in love with a Montague. The party guests return and the Montagues retreat. Capulet restrains Tybalt from following, saying that the party must continue.

Act II. Roméo has left his friends and gone to the Capulet garden. There he compares Juliette to the morning sun. He reveals himself to her, and the two sing of their love. They are interrupted as the Capulet servants enter looking for a Montague. After they depart, Roméo reappears and promises to marry Juliette who eagerly agrees. Again, they are interrupted, but now it is Juliette’s nurse who is summoning her inside.

Act III. Scene 1. At Frère Laurent’s cell, the monk is singing of nature’s wonders when Roméo enters. Juliette, followed by her nurse, soon enters, and the lovers ask Laurent to marry them. Convinced of their love, he does so. Scene 2. Outside the Capulet house, Stéphano, Roméo’s page, is taunting the Capulets with a chanson about a turtledove held captive in a house full of vultures. When he is challenged to a duel, Mercutio comes to his aid and Tybalt engages him in combat. Roméo enters trying to pacify Tybalt, but Mercutio vies for Montague honor and is wounded in the process. Angered, Roméo deals a mortal blow to Tybalt just as the Duke of Verona enters. Both parties explain their side, and the Duke banishes Roméo from the city. As he leaves, the Montagues and Capulets renew their vows of hatred.
Act IV. Scene 1. Roméo takes leave of Juliette as the sun begins to rise. As they sing of their love on their wedding night, Juliette realizes that he must depart. Moments after Roméo leaves, Capulet, the nurse, and Frère Laurent enter to inform Juliette that Tybalt’s dying wish is for her to marry Paris, and that their wedding has already been arranged. Distraught, Juliette tells Laurent that she would rather die than marry Paris. The clever monk suggests a ruse to help Juliette escape with Roméo. He administers a potion that will simulate death. Scene 2. As Juliette processes down her wedding aisle, she is greeted by adoring guests. As her father presents her, she collapses. much to everyone’s horror. Capulet pronounces his daughter dead.

Act V. In the underground Capulet crypt, Laurent learns that Roméo has not received the message describing Juliette’s real condition. He leaves to find another messenger to dispatch. Roméo appears soon thereafter, and finding Juliette, he swallows a fatal dose of poison. Juliette awakens and the two sing of their love. When Roméo begins to weaken, Juliette stabs herself with a dagger and the two sing one final duet, asking for mercy.


Act I. Scene 1. In the Egyptian desert, a group of monks await the return of Athanaël. When he arrives, he sings of the debaucheries of Alexandria and of how thankful he is that such a life is behind him. The monks retire, and Athanaël rests – during which time he sees a vision of the infamous courtesan Thaïs. His mission is now clear: convert Thaïs to a life of Christ. Scene 2. Athanaël arrives in Alexandria, where he seeks out his childhood friend, Nicias. Athanaël views Alexandria with both fondness and disdain. Nicias informs Athanaël that Thaïs will be present at banquet in her honor that very night. He summons a pair of slave girls who provide Athanaël with appropriate dress. Thaïs enters and reminds Nicias that she is his for only one more night. When Nicias informs Thaïs of Athanaël’s purpose, she laughs and dares him to come to her own house.

Act II. Scene 1. In her room, Thaïs gazes into a mirror and notices that her beauty is ephemeral. Athanaël enters, and though he feels the trap of her beauty, he stands resolute in converting her. When the courtesan invokes the goddess of love, Athanaël sheds his opulent clothes to reveal a monk’s robes. After a series of false promises, Thaïs begins to weaken, and when she hears Nicias’s voice, she understands the severity of her decision and rebuffs Athanaël. He promises to wait under her balcony through the night, and during the closed curtain scene change, we hear the famous méditation as Thaïs wrestles with her decision. Scene 2. Outside her room, Thaïs approaches Athanaël and commits herself to his care. He informs her that she is to live in an abbey outside the city but first must destroy all traces of her former lifestyle, including the statue of Eros that she persists on keeping. A crowd arrives and among them is Nicias, fresh from celebrating a gambling victory that evening. During the ensuing ballet, two dancers invoke the
allegory of beauty. Athanaël arrives, and the crowd mocks him, but their tone soon
changes when Thaïs appears in a frock while flames engulf her house. The crowd
demands to have Thaïs the courtesan, but Nicias appeases them by dispensing gold coins.

Act III. Scene 1. En route to the abbey, Thaïs and Athanaël stop at a desert oasis.
Seeing her bloodied feet, he halts and tends to her. Through the difficult journey, Thaïs
has become transfigured by a mixture of outer suffering and inner joy, and she blesses the
monk for what he has done for her. The nuns approach and prepare to take Thaïs in their
care. Athanaël is shaken, however, as he realizes that he will never see Thaïs again.
Scene 2. Athanaël has returned to his monastery, where he has refused food and drink.
He confesses that in spite of his success, he is troubled by the temptation of his flesh.
While he sleeps, images of the dancing Thaïs haunt him but then give way to the
appearance of Thaïs on her deathbed. He awakens and resolves to join her. Scene 3.
Athenaël arrives at the abbey to find Thaïs pale and dying. While the nuns expect him to
give Thaïs a final blessing, he has instead come to persuade Thaïs to love him. She
cannot hear him, though, and is in a state of mystical ecstasy as they sing their final duet.
She dies in his arms and, heartbroken, he collapses next to her.

Thérèse, drame musical. Jules Massenet, libretto by Jules Claretie

Act I. October 1792. The Girondist André Thorel has bought the abandoned château of
the royalist Armand de Clerval, who fled the country in fear of his life. The two grew up
there together (André as an employee; Armand as the heir), and André hopes one day to
return Armand’s property to its rightful owner. As André prepares to leave to fulfill his
duties as a Deputy, his wife Thérèse enters. Though full of respect for her husband’s
sense of duty, she cannot put away the memory of her first love, Armand, who enters to
find her standing alone. The two recall the happier times of their youth, and Armand
declares that he still loves her. Thérèse rejects his claims on the principle of fidelity.
André enters and embraces his old friend, to whom he promises shelter and protection
from the Girondist mobs.

Act II. June 1793. The Thorel’s home in Paris, where Armand has been living with
André and his wife. André has wielded his political power to secure safe-passage for his
friend. However, the jealous Armand refuses to leave Thérèse’s side. Instead, he begs
her to run away with him and, after little resistance, she agrees. Word comes of the
capture of Girondists conspirators including André. Armand leaves only after Thérèse
promises to join him later. From the window, Thérèse sees André in chains and, to be
with him, cries out “Vive le roi!” The mob enters and drags her off to the guillotine.
The following Massenet operas are the subjects of complete volumes of *L’Avant-Scène Opéra*: *Werther* (no. 61), *Don Quichotte* (no. 93), *Thaïs* (no. 109), *Manon* (no. 123), *Esclarmonde* and *Grisélidis* (no. 148), *Panurge* and *Le Cid* (no. 161), *Le Roi de Lahore* and *Hérodiade* (no. 187), *Sapho* and *La Navarraise* (no. 217).


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