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Staging Grand Opéra – Historically Informed?¹

Historically-informed staging (“HIP staging”) is one of the most recent trends within the field of historically-informed performance practice (HIP/HIPP).² To promote seemingly “authentic” performances of early music and baroque opera, the website NewOlde.com in 2012 listed six productions of operas by Claudio Monteverdi, Domenico Scarlatti, Georg Philipp Telemann, Georg Friedrich Händel, Johann Adolf Hasse, and Johann Christian Bach staged at different locations in France, Germany, the Czech Republic and the United States. The criteria for inclusion in this directory, however, are rather vague: “Only historically-inspired stagings of early opera without modern dancers and acrobats will be listed.”³ Alongside professional festival performances, several of the operas scheduled were produced by singers and musicians still in training and studying at various music academies. Only one of the listed productions is actually located in a baroque theatre (Český Krumlov castle) with original “man-powered” stage craft.

Until now, such HIP staging has been confined almost exclusively to works from the baroque period, and, for a variety of artistic as well as economic reasons, it seems currently rather unlikely that the trend might spread to the main repertoire of 19th-century opera.⁴ Paradoxically, the task is not facilitated by the fact that historical information on the staging practices of the latter period is much more abundant and precise than that of the elder repertoire. On the contrary: The more we know about specific productions of 19th-century opera – and French Grand opéra in particular – the less plausible it becomes that we might aspire to the illusory ambition of reconstructing a theatre of the past.

In what follows I will first consider historically informed performance as one of several general trends of contemporary operatic staging, before dealing specifically with sources of the Parisian Grand opéra. Focussing finally on Meyerbeer’s *Le Prophète* (1849),

¹ This paper was presented at the Symposium “Opera as spectacle – Staging practices in French and Italian opera during the nineteenth century”, hosted by the University of Nottingham and held at the Institute of Musical Research, University of London in June 2012. I would like to thank the organizers of this symposium, Sarah Hibberd and David Rosen.

² Cf. Nicholas McGegan: *Movements by Candlelight*, in: *The Musical Times* 135 (1994), pp. 210–215; Sigrid T’Hooft: *The Art and Purpose of Baroque Gesture*, in: *Barocktheater heute. Wiederentdeckungen zwischen Wissenschaft und Bühne*, ed. by Nicola Gess, Tina Hartmann and Robert Sollich, Bielefeld 2008, pp. 23–27; Drew Minter: *Not Just a Song at Twilight*, in: *The Musical Times* 135 (1994), pp. 348–352.

³ www.newolde.com/performances.htm (accessed 13 June 2012).

⁴ Cf. Arnold Jacobshagen: *Rekonstruktion und Verwandlung. Zur Analyse und Interpretation zeitgenössischer Händel-Inszenierungen*, in: *Händel-Jahrbuch* 56 (2010), pp. 485–506.

I will discuss some of the challenges such historical documents pose for our understanding of the work as well as for modern opera producers.



Since the late 1970s, semiotic theories have been systematically applied to the analysis of theatre and drama.⁵ In order to set up a rough typology of contemporary (operatic) staging, scholars such as Patrice Pavis, Ulrich Müller, and Jürgen Schläder have distinguished three fundamentally different strategies:⁶

1) The reconstructive method: a “literalist” staging, following every detail of the musical and literary text.⁷

2) The staging of the subtext: a hermeneutic interpretation of the plot structure and the opera’s larger historical and interpretative context, revealing what is not expressly said in the operatic text.⁸

3) The transformative approach: the development of a new stage action, largely detached from the original text.⁹

It is not necessary to re-discuss the general problems of “reconstruction” here, especially with regard to postmodernist discourse. Unlike architecture (an obvious reference point for the reconstruction issue), theatre – being a live art form – is always contemporary, and is continuously dealing with the present. A cursory overview of recent Grand opéra productions – especially in Germany – shows that most of them operate with explicit conceptual transformations of the main plot, that go far beyond any visualization of the more or less implicit subtexts. A model for the description of such dramatic

- 5 Cf. Patrice Pavis: *Problèmes de sémiologie théâtrale*, Montréal 1976; Keir Elam: *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama*, London 1980; Erika Fischer-Lichte: *Semiotik des Theaters. Eine Einführung*, 3 Vols, Tübingen 1983.
- 6 Patrice Pavis: *Klassischer Text und szenische Praxis. Überlegungen zu einer Typologie zeitgenössischer Inszenierungsformen*, in: *Studien zur Ästhetik des Gegenwartstheaters*, ed. by Christian W. Thomssen, Heidelberg 1985, pp. 18–32.
- 7 Cf. Erika Fischer-Lichte: *Was ist eine “werkgetreue” Inszenierung? Überlegungen zum Prozess der Transformation eines Dramas in eine Aufführung*, in: *Das Drama und seine Inszenierung*, ed. by Erika Fischer-Lichte, Tübingen 1985, pp. 37–49; Christopher Balme: *Werktreue. Aufstieg und Niedergang eines fundamentalistischen Begriffs*, in: *Regietheater! Wie sich über Inszenierungen streiten lässt*, ed. by Ortrud Gutjahr, Würzburg 2008, pp. 43–50.
- 8 Ulrich Müller: *Problemfall Oper? Werktreue, Originalklang, Regietheater*, in: “Regietheater”. *Konzeption und Praxis am Beispiel der Bühnenwerke Mozarts. Salzburger Symposion 2005*, ed. by Jürgen Kühnel, Ulrich Müller, and Oswald Panagl, Anif/Salzburg 2007 (Wort und Musik. Salzburger akademische Beiträge, Bd. 65), pp. 35–53, especially pp. 40–44.
- 9 Jürgen Schläder: *Strategien der Opern-Bilder. Überlegungen zur Typologie der Klassikerinszenierungen im musikalischen Theater*, in: *Ästhetik der Inszenierung*, ed. by Josef Früchtl and Jörg Zimmermann, Frankfurt a. M. 2001, pp. 183–197, especially p. 188.

transformations can be derived from Gérard Genette's theory of hypertextuality, i. e. the relationship between two overlapping texts, a source text ("hypotext") and its transformation ("hypertext").¹⁰ The mainstream strategies of contemporary operatic staging include various "diegetic transpositions", which remove the action from a specific historical and geographical context to a different one, or displace the action into another epoch.¹¹ Furthermore, such diegetic transpositions normally necessitate various "pragmatic transformations", most typically the modernisation of props, costumes, hairstyles, et cetera, whereas the much more radical "semantic transformations" severely modify the whole plot structure.

In the current discussions about "director's opera" (*Regietheater*)¹² critics have often emphasized the paradox that lies in the contrast between the supposedly increasing freedom of staging and the claimed "historically informed" musical performance.¹³ But the opposition between modernization and reconstruction is not as simple as it might appear at first glance. In Peter Sellars' famous staging of Handel's *Giulio Cesare*, for example, the protagonist is transformed into the president of the United States and sung by a countertenor. Some critics might consider the diegetic transposition of the plot as a typical feature of director's opera, and the male high voice, on the other hand, as a hallmark of HIPP. But one could likewise argue that the representation of a Roman leader in contemporary costume and context was a general practice of opera seria, whereas the "false" falsetto voice would have been completely inappropriate to 18th-century Italian opera.¹⁴

What kind of historical information are we actually looking for if we think of historically informed staging?¹⁵ Generally speaking, three fundamentally different types of sources can be distinguished: (1) physical remains of historical theatre practice (buildings, historical stage craft, costumes, et cetera), (2) pictures/images (illustrations of decorations, costumes), and (3) texts (literary and musical texts).

10 Cf. Gérard Genette: *Palimpsestes. La littérature au second degré*, Paris 1982.

11 Jürgen Kühnel: *Regietheater. Konzeption und Praxis am Beispiel Mozarts. Versuch einer Typologie*, in: "Regietheater". *Konzeption und Praxis am Beispiel der Bühnenwerke Mozarts*, pp. 13–30.

12 Cf. Roberto Alonge: *Il teatro dei registi. Scriptori di enigmi e poeti della scena*, Rome/Bari 2006; *Regietheater! Wie sich über Inszenierungen streiten lässt*, ed. by Ortrud Gutjahr, Würzburg 2008.

13 The "limits of authenticity" have been judiciously discussed by Richard Taruskin: *Text & Act. Essays on Music and Performance*, Oxford/New York 1995.

14 In fact, Handel never employed such a voice-type in his operas and even in his oratorios, he generally avoided countertenor soloists. Cf. Arnold Jacobshagen: *Händels Countertenöre und die historische Aufführungspraxis*, in: *Archiv für Musikwissenschaft* 68/3 (2011), pp. 104–120.

15 Where Grand opéra is concerned, historical information has to be replaced by historical imagination, as Sarah Hibberd has argued in her book: *French Grand Opera and the Historical Imagination*, Cambridge 2009.

The theatre building that housed all Parisian Grand opéra premieres of the period under discussion, the Salle de la rue Le Peletier, does not exist anymore since it was destroyed by fire in 1873 (figure 1). It is difficult to find a theatre of equivalent dimensions today that still has 19th-century stage technology. Nonetheless, Alexandre Dratwicky, scientific director of the Centre de musique romantique française in Venice, and Agnès Terrier, dramaturge at the Paris Opéra-Comique, recently announced the intention of creating “historically informed” productions according to the original stage manuals of the 19th century.¹⁶ The Théâtre Impérial de Compiègne is another venue focused on historical informed staging of French opera. Constructed in 1867, the theatre was never finished until its opening in 1991, and thus presents an “authentic” mid-nineteenth-century ambience. Devoted to 19th-century French repertoire, the Théâtre Français de la Musique in Compiègne is internationally renowned for its excellent acoustics.

The decors of Grand opéra productions from the period 1828–1849 are relatively well documented.¹⁷ However, even if it were theoretically possible to reconstruct the original designs of many of these operas, we still would have to acknowledge the enormous challenge of reproducing adequate copies today of these very high quality 19th-century Parisian stage paintings (figure 2). Furthermore the lighting conditions of the 1830s and ‘40s – with gas lights which were the new technology of the epoch – would be quite difficult to imitate, and even more difficult to accept (as would the fact that the audience was completely illuminated by the central chandelier during the performance).

Besides stage painting, design and lighting, Parisian staging manuals have been considered indispensable sources for the reconstruction of nineteenth-century French

- 16 This announcement was made during the conference “Le grand opéra. Un genre et un modèle”, Opéra-Comique, Paris, 3–4 April 2012, on the occasion of the premiere of *La Muette de Portici*, with a modern staging by Emma Dante.
- 17 Nicole Wild: *La recherche de la précision historique chez les décorateurs de l’Opéra de Paris au XIX^e siècle*, in: *International Musicological Society. Report of the Twelfth Congress Berkeley 1977*, ed. by Daniel Heartz and Bonnie Wade, Kassel/Basel/London 1981, pp. 453–463; Wild: *Décors et costumes du XIX^e siècle*, 2 Vols, Paris 1987/1993; Wild: *La mise en scène à l’Opéra-Comique sous la Restauration*, in: *Die Opéra comique und ihr Einfluß auf das europäische Musiktheater im 19. Jahrhundert*, ed. by Herbert Schneider and Nicole Wild, Hildesheim 1997, pp. 183–210; Cecil Thomas Ault: *Design, Operation and Organization of Stage Machinery at the Paris Opéra, 1770–1873*, Diss. Univ. of Michigan, Ann Arbor 1983; *Les Gravures Musicales dans l’Illustration, 1843–1899*, ed. by H. Robert Cohen, 3 Vols, Québec 1983; Jürgen Maehder: *Historienmalerei und Grand opéra. Zur Raumvorstellung in den Bildern Géricaults und Delacroix’ und auf der Bühne der Académie Royale de Musique*, in: *Meyerbeer und das europäische Musiktheater*, ed. by Sieghart Döhring and Arnold Jacobshagen, Laaber 1998, pp. 258–287; Karin Pendle/Stephen Wilkins: *Paradise Found. The Salle le Peletier and French Grand Opera*, in: *Opera in Context. Essays on Historical Staging from the Late Renaissance to the Time of Puccini*, ed. by Mark A. Radice, Portland 1998, pp. 171–207.



FIGURE 1 Paris Opéra, Salle Le Peletier (1867). Lithograph by Collen Imerton of a performance of *Giselle* (Wikimedia Commons)



FIGURE 2 Daniel-François-Esprit Auber: *Gustave III*, stage painting by Cambon (Paris, 1833)

opera.¹⁸ The collection of livrets de mise en scène at the Bibliothèque de l'Association de la Régie théâtrale in Paris presents a very comprehensive overview of this kind of material, which H. Robert Cohen described as “enregistrements permanents de la mise en scène en vue de sa reconstitution exacte lors de la reprise de l'œuvre.”¹⁹ Cohen concluded that opera direction of the time was characterized by the continuous conservation of the original staging from the Paris premières: “Staging in Paris and the French provinces throughout the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth was an art of preservation rather than creation. Régisseurs strove to conserve, to the extent possible, the original mise en scène of an opera's première as transcribed in the production book. Staging, in a word, was not intended to be altered.”²⁰ However, Cohen's hypothesis is difficult to verify. He failed to recognize that many of the allegedly “original” production books do not actually correspond to the Parisian premières. Concerning the repertoire of Grand opéra between 1828 and 1849 – from the premiere of Auber's *La Muette de Portici* to Meyerbeer's *Le Prophète* – only a few productions are documented by comprehensive original publications (see Table 1). Louis-Jacques Solomé's mise-en-scène for *La Muette de Portici* (1828) is by far the most detailed printed director's script that we have from this period, and remains an absolute exception as none of the other printed production books of Grand opéra from 1828 to 1849 was signed by the régisseur.²¹ Furthermore we should not misinterpret Solomé's intentions. Clearly his main concern was to help foreign theatre directors, and not to restrict them, as the following indication suggests:

- 18 H. Robert Cohen/Marie-Odile Gigou: *Cent ans de mise en scène lyrique en France (environ 1830–1930). Catalogue descriptif des livrets de mise en scène, des libretti annotés et des partitions annotées dans la Bibliothèque de l'Association de la régie théâtrale* (Paris), New York 1986. See also H. Robert Cohen: *The Original Staging Manuals for Twelve Parisian Operatic Premières*, Stuyvesant, NY, 1991; id.: *The Original Staging Manuals for Ten Parisian Operatic Premières*, Stuyvesant, NY, 1998; Arnold Jacobshagen: *Staging at the Opéra-Comique in Nineteenth-Century Paris. Auber's Fra Diavolo and the livrets de mise en scène*, in: *Cambridge Opera Journal* 13/3 (2001), pp. 239–260; id.: *Analyzing Mise-en-Scène. Halévy's La Juive at the Salle Le Peletier*, in: *Music, Theater, and Cultural Transfer. Paris, 1830–1914*, ed. by Annegret Fauser and Mark Everist, Chicago/London 2009, pp. 176–194; Marie-Odile Gigou: *Conserver le spectaculaire, ou de l'utilité de la conservation des mises en scène*, in: *Le Spectaculaire dans les arts de la scène du romantisme à la Belle Époque*, ed. by Isabelle Moindrot, Olivier Goetz and Sylvie Humbert-Mougin, Paris 2006, pp. 47–52; Olivier Bara: *Les livrets de mise en scène, commis-voyageurs de l'opéra-comique en province*, in: *Un siècle de spectacles à Rouen (1776–1876)*, ed. by Florence Naugrette and Patrick Taïeb, 2009 (Publications numériques du CÉRÉDI, Actes de colloques, Vol. 1), <http://ceredi.labos.univ-rouen.fr/public/?les-livrets-de-mise-en-scene.html> (accessed 22 November 2016).
- 19 H. Robert Cohen: *La Conservation de la tradition scénique sur la scène lyrique en France au XIX^e siècle. Les livrets de mise en scène et la bibliothèque de l'Association de la régie théâtrale*, in: *Revue de Musicologie* 64/2 (1978), pp. 253–267, here p. 254.
- 20 Cohen: *The Original Staging Manuals for Twelve Parisian Operatic Premières*, p. XXIII.
- 21 Reprint in Cohen: *The Original Staging Manuals for Twelve Parisian Operatic Premières*, pp. 13–72.

TABLE 1 Grand opéras in 4 or 5 acts, premiered between 1829 and 1849, with their published livrets de mise-en-scène

Work	Composer	Year	Performances in the first two years		Author	Pages
La Muette de Portici	Auber	1828	91	1829	Solomé	60 p.
Guillaume Tell	Rossini	1829	52	c 1831	[Duverger] *	[4 p.]
Robert le diable	Meyerbeer	1831	61	c 1832	[Duverger]	[4 p.]
Gustave III	Auber	1833	61	1833	Duverger	4 p.
Ali Baba	Cherubini	1833	11	—	—	—
La Juive	Halévy	1835	58	c 1835	Duverger	4 p.
Les Huguenots	Meyerbeer	1836	75	c 1836	[Duverger]	[4 p.]
La Esmeralda	Bertin	1836	11	—	—	—
Stradella	Niedermeyer	1837	11	—	—	—
Guido et Ginevra	Halévy	1838	37	1838	Duverger	7 p.
Les Martyrs	Donizetti	1840	18	1840	Palianti	16 p.
La Favorite	Donizetti	1840	32	1841	Palianti	16 p.
La Reine de Chypre	Halévy	1841	50	1842	Palianti	16 p.
Charles VI	Halévy	1843	37	—	—	—
Dom Sébastien	Donizetti	1843	30	1844	Palianti	16 p.
Marie Stuart	Niedermeyer	1844	23	—	—	—
L'Étoile de Séville	Balfe	1846	15	—	—	—
Lucie de Lammermoor	Donizetti	1846	57	—	—	—
Jérusalem	Verdi	1847	27	—	—	—
Jeanne la folle	Clapisson	1848	8	—	—	—
Le Prophète	Meyerbeer	1849	86	1849	Palianti	32 p.

* Publications in square brackets subsist only in manuscript copies at the Bibliothèque de l'Association de la régie théâtrale.

“Messieurs les Directeurs qui ont fait jouer Masaniello de Feydeau [à l’Opéra-Comique], doivent avoir une partie des choses nécessaires à l’exécution de la Muette, soit en décors, habits, accessoires, etc., puisque c’est le même sujet. Du reste, la Neige, Madame de Sévigné, le Chevalier de Canole, Cendrillon, le petit Chaperon Rouge, Joconde, et autres pièces du répertoire, peuvent fournir les matériaux nécessaires pour toute la partie de cet opéra. On voit par tous ces moyens que l’on peut monter facilement la Muette de Portici; cependant les Directeurs qui entendront leurs intérêts feront bien, je le crois, de porter tous leurs soins sur le dernier coup de théâtre, qui est d’un effet neuf pour la province, et qui, bien exécuté, peut contribuer à leur faire faire d’abondantes recettes. M. Duverger pourra leur envoyer les moyens d’exécution.”²²

Solomé was also responsible for the staging of Rossini’s *Guillaume Tell* in 1829, but he didn’t publish a staging book for this production.²³ The Duverger livret copied by Palianti

22 Ibid., p. 71 f.
23 Edizione critica delle opere di Gioachino Rossini, 1/39: *Guillaume Tell*, ed. by M. Elizabeth C. Bartlet, 1–1v (Partitura), v (Commento critico), vi (Testi), Pesaro 1992; *Guillaume Tell* di Gioachino Rossini. fonti iconografiche, ed. by M. Elizabeth C. Bartlet, Pesaro 1996.

FIGURE 3 Gioachino Rossini: *Guillaume Tell*, copy of a livret de mise-en-scène by Duverger (Cohen: *The Original Staging Manuals for Twelve Parisian Operatic Premières*, p. 211)



and reproduced by Cohen is certainly not an authentic document of the premiere, since Palianti had originally written opera “en trois actes” only later replacing “trois” by “quatre” (figure 3). Indeed, *Guillaume Tell* was played in a three-act version after 1831, while the four-act version was only restored much later, in 1856. Presumably, Duverger’s livret dates from the early thirties, and Palianti modified it in the late 1850s.²⁴ Beginning with this Duverger publication and continuing throughout the next two decades, we only have succinct commercial protocols written by theatrical agents who were not directly involved in the production process of the Paris Opéra.

When Meyerbeer’s *Robert le diable* was premiered in 1831, Solomé had already been fired by Louis Véron, for the remarkable reason that the new director considered the services of the most famous Parisian director superfluous and too expensive. As John Drysdale pointed out in his dissertation on the finances of the Académie Royale de Musique, the directeur-entrepreneur Véron cut down expenses whenever he could, also for the staging.²⁵ Furthermore, we should not forget that the production of *Robert le diable* was renowned not only for its extraordinary scenic splendour, but also for a series of calamities and accidents. In her doctoral thesis on the production of *Robert le diable*, Rebecca Susan Wilberg published a copy of a livret from a production in Brussels in the late 19th century.²⁶ The comparison of this source with the manuscript copy by Palianti

²⁴ Cohen: *The Original Staging Manuals for Twelve Parisian Operatic Premières*, pp. 211–229.

²⁵ John Drysdale: *Louis Véron and the Finances of the Académie Royale de Musique*, Frankfurt a. M. 2003 (Perspektiven der Opernforschung, Vol. 9), p. 78.

²⁶ Rebecca Susan Wilberg: *The Mise en Scène at the Paris Opéra, Salle Le Peletier (1821–1873) and the Staging of the First French Grand Opéra: Meyerbeer’s Robert le Diable*, Diss. Brigham Young University, Ann Arbor 1990.

of Duverger's indications shows significant differences.²⁷ The protocol transcribed by Wilberg is much more detailed than that of Duverger, but it is certainly not a reliable documentation of the Parisian premiere. Neither of the two sources mention the role of Alberti, which was only removed in 1832 (or in part replaced by an anonymous "Robert de Chapelin"). In the original version, Alberti already appears in the first scene, an incidence that one would expect to find mentioned in any "original" *mise en scène*.

For Auber's *Gustave III* (1833) – to continue chronologically – Cohen published another manuscript copy of a Duverger publication. As usual, Duverger only needed two double-sided folio sheets to transcribe the production of *Gustave III*, while the large handwriting of the manuscript in Cohen's edition fills 44 pages. Nevertheless, this copy is not identical to the printed document, for it contains significant references to future conventions. Here the description of the decoration is integrated into the main text and not placed as a separate list at the end, as was still common for Solomé and Duverger. Unlike Duverger, the manuscript doesn't propose any reductions of the ballet numbers. The main differences, however, concern the costumes, which seems to indicate that the copy was made with regard to a specific performance.

After *La Juive* – for which Paliante published a staging manual more than thirty years after the Parisian premiere²⁸ – Meyerbeer's *Les Huguenots* offers the last prominent example. Paliante's handwritten copy of the Duverger protocol contains numerous intrinsic changes, some of which also concern the staging. It should be borne in mind that foreign productions of works like *Gustave III*, *La Juive*, and *Les Huguenots* could hardly ever be presented according to the "original production", not least of all for reasons of censorship. In German-speaking countries, for example, the most important foreign market for French opera productions, *Gustave III* was first played under the title *Die Ball-Nacht*, and set in the 16th century with a certain "Duke Olaf" in the title role.²⁹ 19th-century diegetic transpositions of *Les Huguenots* in Germany include *Die Anglikaner und Puritaner* (Munich 1838) and *Die Ghibellinen in Pisa* (Wien 1839). In Italy, *Les Huguenots* was transformed into *Renato di Croenwald* as late as 1864, in order not to offend the censorship in Rome. It can be assumed that such modified versions were quite typical for the European transmission of Grand opéra in this era. Under these conditions, the slavish adherence to a Paris production document appears a rather unlikely option: the original *mise en scène* was simply inadequate for the contemporary purposes. Therefore, the idea of an "authentic" and immutable staging has to be seen in relative terms: as a

27 Cohen: *The Original Staging Manuals for Twelve Parisian Operatic Premières*, pp. 183–210.

28 Cf. Jacobshagen: *Analyzing mise-en-scène*.

29 Cf. Arne Langer: *Der Regisseur und die Aufzeichnungspraxis in der Opernregie im 19. Jahrhundert*, Frankfurt a. M. 1997 (*Perspektiven der Opernforschung*, Vol. 4), p. 316.

retrospective projection of modern concepts, but certainly not as a part of nineteenth-century operatic reality.

Around the middle of the century, when Meyerbeer's *Le Prophète* was premiered in 1849, the situation changed to some extent.³⁰ In this period, Louis Plianti, the author of about two hundred staging manuals, dominated the market of printed stage direction books. Plianti, born in 1810 in Spain, came to France with his family when he was still a child. Later he started acting and singing as a second bass in the provincial theaters of Nantes, Marseille, and Dijon, before he was hired at the Opéra-Comique in 1836. He stayed there as an actor, singer, and "sous-régisseur" for almost forty years. In 1838 he began his publications of *livrets de mise en scène* of Opéra-Comique productions. His first Grand opéra livret was published in 1840 for Donizetti's *Les Martyrs*. During the next decade, only five subsequent productions from the Paris Opéra entered the Plianti collection: *La Favorite* and *Dom Sébastien* by Donizetti, *La Reine de Chypre* by Halévy, the two-act "fantastic opera" *L'Âme en peine* de Flotow, and the *livret de mise-en-scène* to Giacomo Meyerbeer's *Le Prophète* (1849), which is by far the most comprehensive and detailed Grand opéra featured within the Plianti series. The reasons for the extraordinary status of this production book are diverse, and related to the complexity of the work as well as to several very specific technical devices and theatrical inventions, such as the use of roller skates for the actors of the so-called "ice skater's ballet" and the famous electric light effect of the "prophet's sun". Historically far more significant, however, is the fact that the composer himself was the driving force behind the normative prescription of every staging detail. Arguably Meyerbeer's *Le Prophète* offers the first well-documented evidence that an opera composer claimed complete control over all aspects of the musical as well as the scenic realization of his work, not only for the premiere but also for future productions and performances elsewhere: a predecessor of Wagnerian "total authorship".³¹

Unlike his earlier Grand opéra examples, Plianti's stage descriptions for *Le Prophète* do not simply repeat the information already mentioned in the paratexts of the libretto. The *livret* for *Le Prophète* is among the first to include detailed ground plans of the stage, allowing an accurate organisation of the décors according to the Parisian model. A comparison between Eugène Scribe's libretto and the Plianti *livret* helps clarify the additional interest of the production book.

30 The final part of this essay is based on my article "Oper als szenischer Text. Louis Pliantis Inszenierungsanweisungen zu Meyerbeers *Le Prophète*", in: Giacomo Meyerbeer, *Le Prophète*. Edition, Konzeption, Rezeption, ed. by Matthias Brzoska, Andreas Jacob, and Nicole K. Strohmman, Hildesheim/Zürich/New York 2009, pp. 181–212.

31 Cf. Cormac Newark: *Staging Grand Opéra. History and the Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Paris*, Ph. D. Oxford University 1999, p. 11.



FIGURE 4 Meyerbeer: Le Prophète, livret de mise-en-scène by Paliani (Cohen, p.151)

Whereas Scribe merely describes how,

“Le théâtre représente les campagnes de la Hollande aux environs de Dordrecht. Au fond on aperçoit la Meuse, à droite, un château fort avec pont-levis et tourelles, à gauche, fermes et moulins dépendant du château. Du même côté, sur le premier plan, des sacs de blé, des tables rustiques, des bancs, etc.”³²

Paliani’s description provides exact implementation and comprehensive technical information about the scenery:

“1. Rideau de fond tombant sur le quatrième plan. Ce rideau représente une suite de moulins à vent sur les bords de la Meuse. – Celui qui, au premier plan, occupe presque toute la hauteur du rideau, se

32 Cited after the Version musicale “Brandus-Troupenas” in: Eugène Scribe/Giacomo Meyerbeer: Le Prophète. Livret – étude, sources, documents, ed. by Fabien Guilloux, München 2007, p. 99.

trouve vers le côté jardin, presque en face des marches B. – 2. Terrain praticable élevé à deux mètres environ au dessus du niveau du théâtre. – De la coulisse (côté jardin) on monte sur ce terrain par un escalier A, non vu du public. – A la droite 3, se trouve l'entrée principale, avec pont-levis, du château-fort d'Oberthal. – Les murs 4, occupent une partie du côté cour. – Les tourelles 5 servent à la perspective du rideau de fond. – Du terrain 2, on descend sur le théâtre par un escalier de pierre B. – 6. Quelques herbes marécageuses poussent au pied du terrain 2. – A l'endroit où, dans le tableau ci-dessus est un O, se trouve un arbre au tronc très-haut, mais peu large; le haut du feuillage de cet arbre se joint presque à celui d'un arbre côté jardin. (Sujet de la frise tombant à cet aplomb.) – Aux ailes cour et jardin, châssis représentant un des côtés des fermes dépendant du château. – 7. Draperie. – C. Entrée et sortie côté jardin. – D. Entrée et sortie côté cour. – Eclairez magnifiquement cette décoration, qui doit offrir un aspect riant. – Des tables rustiques, des bancs et des sièges [sic] de bois sont placés aux endroits indiqués dans le tableau.”³³

In addition to the precise arrangement of the individual decoration elements, Paliani also gives details of the third dimension (“presque toute la hauteur du rideau” – “Terrain praticable élevé à deux mètres environ au dessus du niveau du théâtre”). With regard to the scenery transformations, and especially the “changements à vue” – the accurate determination of the dimensions and proportions of the stage is particularly important. Especially the transformation of the fourth act is logistically difficult, including the coronation scene in the cathedral of Münster, preceded by a first scene showing the public square of the city. Eugène Scribe's libretto doesn't specify that these two very different and very complex decorations must be prepared simultaneously on the same stage (separated only by a curtain):

“Le théâtre représente une place publique de la ville de Munster. À droite, la porte de l'hôtel de ville de Munster; plusieurs marches y conduisent. Plusieurs rues aboutissent à la place publique. Au lever du rideau, plusieurs bourgeois, portant des sacs d'argent ou des vases précieux, montent les marches de l'hôtel de ville; d'autres descendent les mains vides. Plusieurs arrivent par les différentes rues, s'avancent au bord du théâtre et forment des groupes. Il regardent autour d'eux avec inquiétude et se parlent à voix basse.”³⁴

As Paliani explains, these buildings and streets only occupy the front part of the stage: “Une place publique de la ville de Munster. – Selon la profondeur des théâtres Rideau tombant à l'aplomb du troisième, quatrième ou cinquième plan, juste au pied des marches de la décoration qui se trouve derrière.”³⁵ The decoration behind the “rideau tombant à l'aplomb du troisième, quatrième ou cinquième plan” is for the second scene:

“Le théâtre change et représente la cathédrale de Munster. Une partie du cortège est censée déjà entrée; l'autre moitié continue à défiler. Au fond de l'église, des trabans de la garde du Prophète forment la

33 Cohen: *The Original Staging Manuals for Twelve Parisian Operatic Premières*, p. 152.

34 Cited after the Version musicale „Brandus-Troupenas“ in: Scribe/Meyerbeer: *Le Prophète*, p. 201.

35 Cohen: *The Original Staging Manuals for Twelve Parisian Operatic Premières*, p. 166.

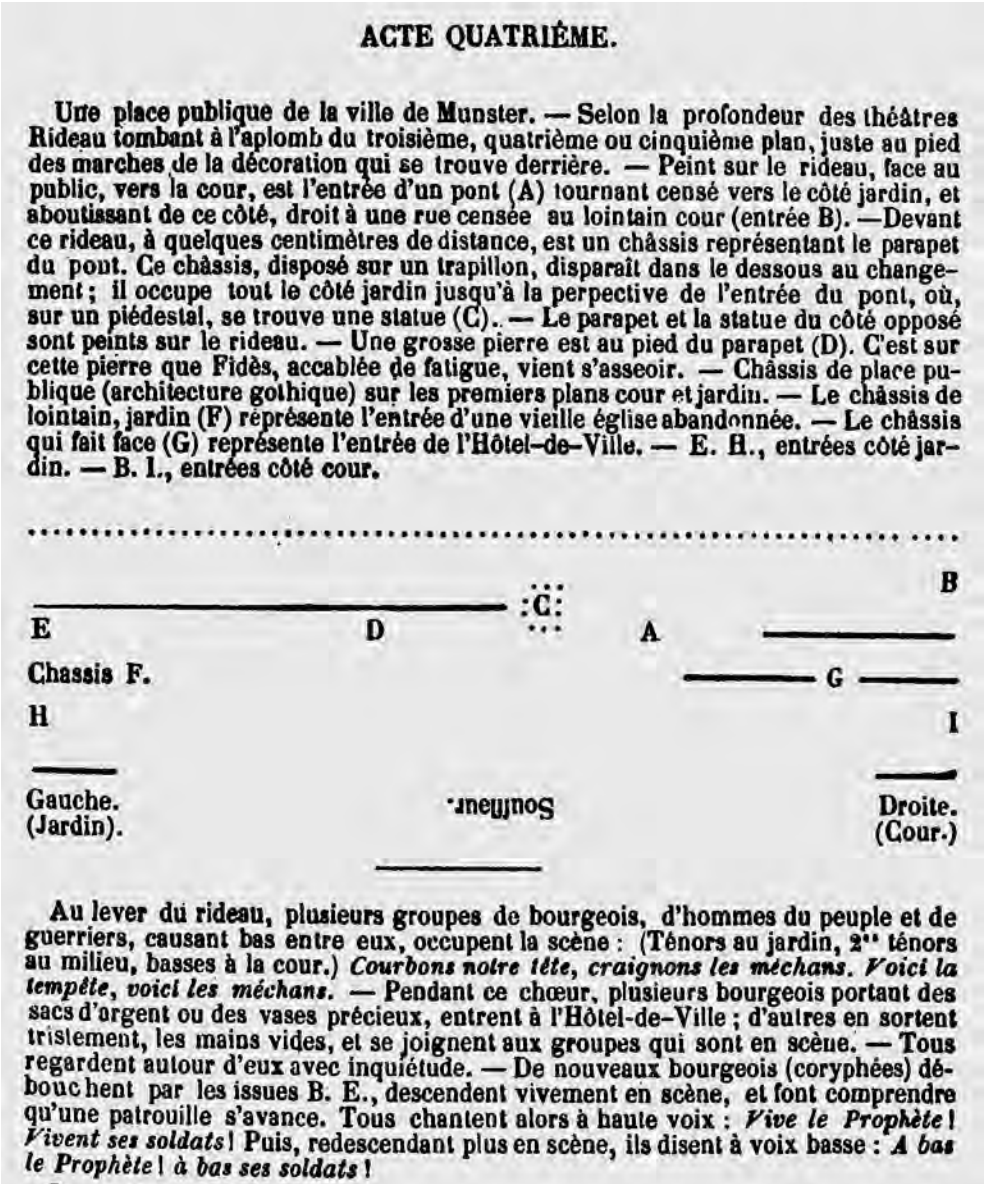


FIGURE 5 Meyerbeer: *Le Prophète*, livret de mise-en-scène by Paliani (Cohen, p.166)

haie. Marche des grands électeurs portant, l'un la couronne, l'autre le sceptre, l'autre la main de justice, celui-ci le sceau de l'État et d'autres les ornements impériaux. Jean paraît après eux, sous un baldaquin qui est porté par des halbardiers, la tête nue, habillé en blanc. Il traverse la nef principale et se rend dans le chœur au maître-autel qui est dans le fond à droite et qu'on ne voit pas. Le peuple, qui est sur le devant du théâtre, veut se précipiter sur ses pas. Il est repoussée par les trabans dans les chapelles latérales.”³⁶

36 Cited after the Version musicale „Brandus-Troupenas“ in: Scribe/Meyerbeer: *Le Prophète*, p. 225.

MARCHE DU SACRE.

Placez la musique militaire sur le théâtre, en vue du public, sur le sol de la nef, à l'endroit indiqué par des 0000 dans le tableau ci-dessus. — La marche se rendant au chœur et au maître-autel, traverse processionnellement au haut des marches, la nef principale 4, de jardin à cour, dans l'ordre suivant :

1° Vingt Soldats, deux par deux, précédés d'un Chef. — 2° Douze Enfants de chœur. — 3° Quatre Moines en robes violettes, toques carrées, surplis de guipure, pèlerines à capuchon, etc. — 4° Douze autres Enfants de chœur portant des encensoirs. Ils se rangent en vue du public, de chaque côté des marches 2, qui conduisent au maître-autel. — 5° Un Héraut d'armes portant la bannière du Prophète. — 6° Huit Pages. — 7° Douze grands Electeurs portant sur des coussins de velours, l'un la couronne, l'autre le sceptre, l'autre la main de justice, celui-ci le sceau de l'Etat, et d'autres les ornemens impériaux. — Les Enfants de chœur encensent. — La marche continue. — 8° Magnifique dais, porté par deux Hérauts d'armes, et sous lequel se trouve le Prophète la tête nue, et habillé en blanc. Près de lui, en dehors du dais, marche Jonas, Mathisen et Zacharie. — Le cortège s'arrête un instant pendant que les Enfants de chœur encensent. Ces derniers suivent la marche. — 9° Trois grands Dignitaires suivis de leurs Pages. — 10° Douze Magistrats aux grands manteaux de d'ap d'or doublés d'hermine. — 11° Trois autres grands Dignitaires de l'armée, suivis de leurs Pages. — 12° Un Héraut d'armes portant une bannière. — 13° Trois autres Dignitaires de l'armée suivis de leurs Pages. — 14° Douze clairons. Les instrumens sont ornés de tablis armoiries. — 15° Des Soldats finissent la marche. — Pendant cette marche, des Hallebardiers et des Trabans du Prophète ont gardé le haut, le bas des marches 2, et les quatre coins de la nef, qui précède les marches et la balustrade d'or 2, qui donne entrée dans le chœur, dépendant du maître-autel. — Vers la fin de la marche, Fidès est entrée sur la scène par un des seconds plans de gauche, et se mêle au Peuple. — Pendant le roulement de tambour qui s'exécute au haut des marches, à la place qu'occupaient les Musiciens, les Soldats et les Hallebardiers qui sont du haut, mettent un genou en terre. Ceux qui sont en scène, en font autant sur les marches. Le Peuple, divisé en plusieurs groupes, garnit au fond toute la largeur du théâtre et les marches. — Pour la perspective, placez des Enfants agenouillés tout à fait au fond, côté cour. Tous les personnages vus du public en ce moment, sont agenouillés, tournent le dos au public, et portent leurs regards vers le maître-autel. — Fidès seule, presque face au public, est agenouillée sur l'avant-scène de gauche.

Le *Domine salvum fac regem* se chante dans la coulisse côté cour censé au maître-autel. — Les orgues se font entendre. — Les personnages vus du public, restent agenouillés comme il est dit ci-dessus. — Fidès seule relève la tête et s'écrie : *Que Dieu sauve le roi Prophète, disent-ils ?.. Grand Dieu exaucez ma prière, et qu'errant, misérable et proscrit, il soit maudit.* S'animant par degrés, elle dit avec exaltation : *Oh ! ma fille, ô Judith nouvelle, etc.*, puis elle se lève sur les derniers mots : *Le Seigneur conduira ton bras.*

FIGURE 6 Meyerbeer: Le Prophète, description of the "marche du sacre" in Palianti's livret de mise-en-scène (Cohen, p. 169)

The fact that the scenery transforms from the first to the second tableau of the fourth act with a "changement à vue" implies that the decoration of the first tableau consists of painted canvases which are removed within seconds during the raising of the rear curtain, as indicated by Palianti. The only exception is a bridge railing that disappears into a trap in the floor at the moment of transformation providing more space for the crowds on stage in the coronation scene.

Indeed Palianti lists more than one hundred figures, either individually or as members of small groups that appear in succession in the cortège, followed by an unspecified

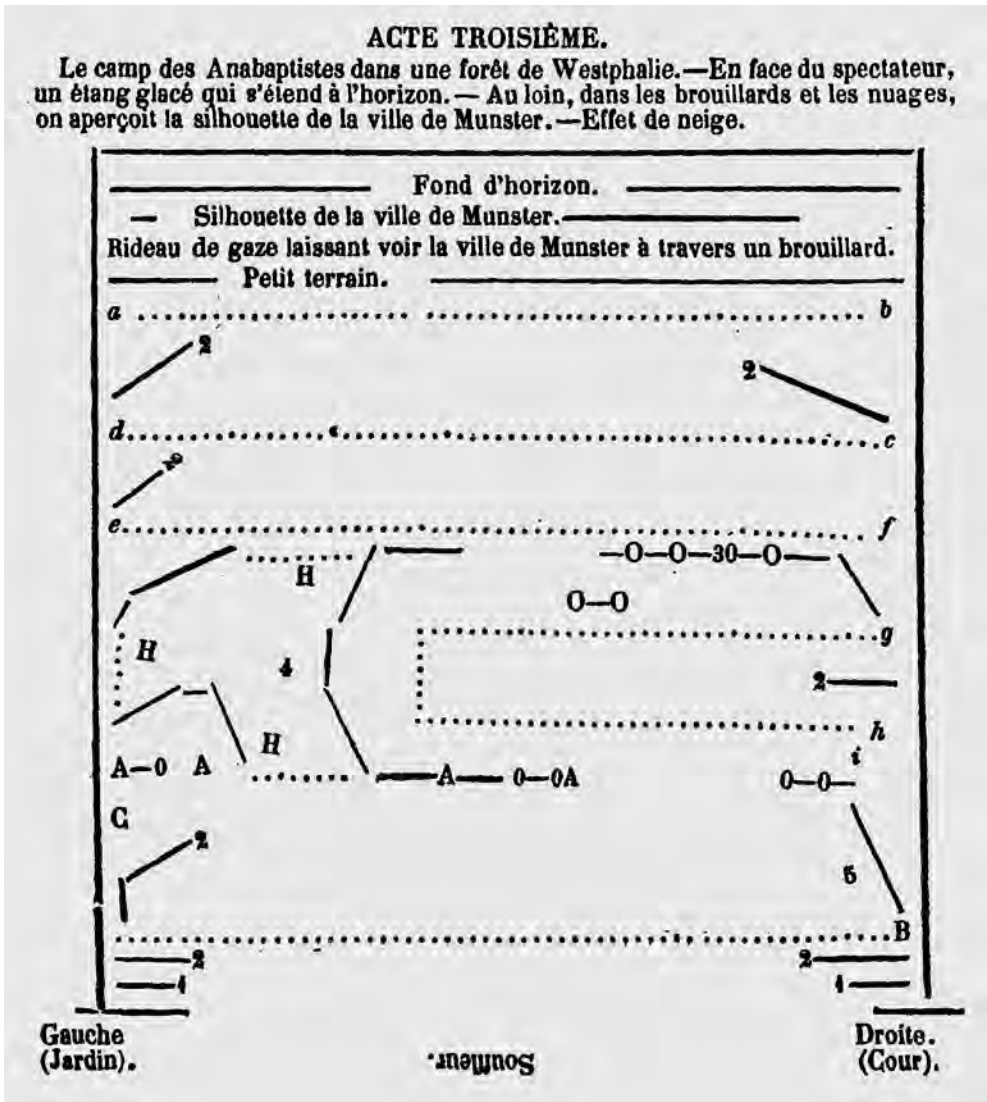


FIGURE 7 Meyerbeer: *Le Prophète*, livret de mise-en-scène de Paliani (Cohen, p. 159)

number of soldiers. The enormous procession of this coronation scene constitutes a tradition of Grand opéra, following previous examples such as the arrival of the emperor in Halévy's *La Juive*.³⁷ The stage must thus be arranged to accommodate a mass of people consisting of the cortège of extras and soloists (including Jean and the three Anabaptists) as well as the chorus already on stage in the moment of transformation.

37 On the cortège of *La Juive*, see Cormac Newark: Ceremony, Celebration, and Spectacle in *La Juive*, in: *Reading Critics Reading. Opera and Ballet Criticism in France from the Revolution to 1848*, ed. by Roger Parker and Mary Ann Smart, Oxford 2001, pp. 155–187. On processions in Grand opéra see also the contribution by Marian Smith in the present volume, pp. 43–50.

The third act of *Le Prophète* presents many challenges and inventions in terms of staging. A further transformation on the open stage is described in the production book: The panorama picture representing the camp of the Anabaptists near the frozen lake, which opens Act III, disappears after the first scene and is immediately transformed into the interior of Zachariah's tent. After the fourth scene, the initial setting is again restored. The first panoramic tableau ends with the famous skaters' ballet: "A l'exception des danseurs, le personnel en scène devient graduellement moins nombreux. – Tableau très-animé. – Vers la fin du galop, il ne passe presque plus personne sur le lac glacé."³⁸

Furthermore, Paliani's stage directions for the skater's ballet are of interest concerning their precise consideration of perspective.³⁹ The skaters were ranked in lines parallel to the ramp according to their size: "Pour la perspective, faites traverser des enfans de a à b. Des jeunes gens d'une moyenne taille de c à d, et de e à f, puis en dernier lieu de grandes personnes de g à h, qui entrent en scène par la droite i. The invention of the roller blades themselves was a technical feat worthy of mention: "Les patins à roulettes sont de l'invention de M. Legrand, 8, rue des Jardins, à Chaillot."⁴⁰ The challenge consisted in developing skates that would be silent enough even when used simultaneously by many figures in a large-scale scene; otherwise the illusion of the frozen lake would have been completely destroyed by rumbling. Even more sensational was the technical invention of the so-called "prophet's sun" at the end of the same act, which has already been discussed in detail in literature on the topic. Once again, Paliani quotes the complete manufacturer's address: "A l'Opéra, le lever du soleil s'exécute au moyen de l'appareil électrique de M. Lormier, 13, rue du Delta projetée, à Paris."⁴¹

So what exactly was the part of the composer in the process of this staging? Some examples concerning the very precise information on the coordination of stage action and music are of interest in this respect. A first example can be found right at the beginning of the first scene:

"Au lever du rideau, quelques Meuniers, couchés à la face, près des châssis de gauche, se reposent ou dorment sur des sacs de farine. – Un Pâtre, assis, sur le haut des marches B, se lève et donne l'éveil en jouant de la cornemuse. Un autre Pâtre (censé dans les coulisses) lui répond de loin. – Le Pâtre renouvelle ce jeu à plusieurs reprises sur le haut du terrain 2. – Immédiatement après les échos, dès l'attaque de la ritournelle en sol majeur, des Paysannes entrent par la droite D."⁴²

³⁸ Cohen: *The Original Staging Manuals for Twelve Parisian Operatic Premières*, p. 162.

³⁹ Cf. Arnold Jacobshagen: *Chœur dansé und Chœur en action. Zur szenischen Realisierung bewegter Chöre in der französischen Oper*, in: *Bewegung im Blick. Beiträge zu einer theaterwissenschaftlichen Bewegungsforschung*, ed. by Claudia Jeschke and Hans-Peter Bayerdörfer, Berlin 2000 (*Documenta choreologica*), pp. 291–306.

⁴⁰ Cohen: *The Original Staging Manuals for Twelve Parisian Operatic Premières*, p. 161.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 165.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 152.

Similarly, in the pastoral scene of the second act, the challenging coordination between music and stage action could not be achieved without this written record:

“Pendant les quelques mesures qui précèdent [sic] la pastorale, Zacharie remonte la scène pour s’assurer si personne ne vient, puis il redescend occuper le numéro 2.
Mathiesen. – Zacharie. – Jean. – Jonas.
A l’ensemble allegro 2/4 qui suit le second couplet de la pastorale, les trois anabaptistes remontent le théâtre en disant à Jean: Ah! viens, suis nos pas, etc., etc. – Ce dernier fuit, au contraire, vers l’avant-scène de gauche. – Les quatre dernières mesures de l’ensemble Et bientôt tu règneras, se chantent presque sur le seuil de la porte du fond 2. – Immédiatement après la dernière note chantée, les trois anabaptistes s’éloignent dans la campagne vers le côté Cour.”⁴³

Such detailed descriptions of how certain actions were supposed to be performed at specific beat numbers in the music, show how the form of livret de mise-en-scène was gradually becoming inadequate as a means of recording stage action. Accordingly, the transition to “interleaved” piano vocal scores (i.e. with empty pages for scenic entries) coincides with the gradual disappearance of livrets de mise-en-scène in the late 19th century. The relationship between stage action and music was becoming increasingly precise and complex.

I will finally come back to the above-mentioned claim that Meyerbeer was presumably among the first operatic composers who tried to achieve greater control over the scenic realization of his work: not only in Paris, but also in all subsequent productions elsewhere. With *Le Prophète* we can see a marked difference to earlier examples of Grand opéra in the fact that later productions were also subjected to relatively important changes. This is not surprising, given the fact that opera staging at this time was a decidedly work-sharing affair. The main responsibility was still with the librettist, in this case Eugène Scribe, who met with Meyerbeer on several occasions to discuss the mise-en-scène. The following personalities were involved in the 1849 staging of the Parisian premiere of *Le Prophète*:

Eugène Scribe	Text
Giacomo Meyerbeer	Music
Edmond Duponchel	Directeur
Nestor Roqueplan	Directeur
Auguste Mabilie	Choreography
Paolo Taglioni	Choreography
Charles Cambon	Decoration
Édouard Despléchin	Decoration
Charles Séchan	Decoration

43 Ibid., p. 157.

Meyerbeer's correspondence during the 1830s and 1840s clearly shows that his own understanding of staging changed decisively. Already at the time of *Robert le diable* and *Les Huguenots* he worked with the theater agent Duverger, who published the first summary stage directions of these works, but there is no evidence that they ever discussed staging matters.⁴⁴ This changed radically at the time of *Le Prophète*. Meyerbeer corresponded intensively with Louis Paliani shortly after the premiere of *Le Prophète* on 16 April 1849. Four weeks later, on 15 May, Meyerbeer noted in his diary: "Brandus wegen Palliantin [sic]".⁴⁵ Possibly it was the composer himself who took the initiative to meet with Paliani, asking his publisher Brandus for help. Three months later Paliani reappears in the diary: "Brandus. Pallianti beeilen und auch Notizen über das Sonnenlicht und Schlittschue [sic] geben."⁴⁶ So it seems that Meyerbeer urged the theatre agent to give the full technical information for the manufacture of roller skates and the electric light of the so-called "prophet's sun". More than once Meyerbeer had to urge Paliani to speed up the editing and publication of his *livret de mise-en-scène*. On 21 August, he wrote to Brandus on this subject from Bad Gastein:

"Es wäre wegen der Provinztheater, und auch wegen der deutschen Theater sehr wünschenswerth wenn Paliani die Publikation der mise en Scène beschleunigte. Ebenfall's wäre es gut wenn er am Schluß der mise en Scène einige Indicationen gäbe über die Art und Weise wie das Sonnenlicht im 3^{ten} Akt hervorgebracht wird, und den Namen und die Adresse des Mannes beifügte bei welchem man die dazu nöthige Vorrichtung kaufen kann. (Von Duponchel kann er den Namen und die Adresse des Erfinders erfahren). Deßgleichen sollte er eine Indication geben wie die Schlittschuhe gemacht sind. Ich bin über diese beiden Gegenstände in wenigstens 6 Theatern befragt worden."⁴⁷

On 11 October 1849, almost half a year after the premiere of *Le Prophète*, Meyerbeer corrected Paliani's instructions and formulated his own opinions about them: "Ich übergab Paliani seine Mise en scène nebst meinen Bemerkungen, u. wir diskutierten sie."⁴⁸ Two days later, Meyerbeer met Paliani again, and on 25 October, he made a note in his pocket calendar to remind Brandus of a "gift for Paliani", which may suggest that Meyerbeer was either very satisfied with Paliani's work, or that he wanted to inspire the

44 As we know from Meyerbeer's letters and diaries, the composer met with Duverger several times during the production period of *Robert le Diable* and *Les Huguenots*. Cf. Giacomo Meyerbeer. *Briefwechsel und Tagebücher*, Vol. 2: 1825–1836, ed. by Heinz Becker, Berlin 1970, pp. 174f., 275.

45 Giacomo Meyerbeer. *Briefwechsel und Tagebücher*, Vol. 4: 1846–1849, ed. by Heinz Becker and Gudrun Becker, Berlin 1985, p. 490.

46 "Brandus. Hurry Paliani and also give notes on the sunlight and ice skates." Giacomo Meyerbeer. *Briefwechsel und Tagebücher*, Vol. 5: 1849–1852, ed. by Sabine Henze-Döhring, with collaboration by Hans Moeller, Berlin/New York 1999, p. 41.

47 *Ibid.*, p. 59.

48 "I gave Paliani his mise en scene, with my comments, and we discussed it." *Ibid.*, p. 93.

theater agent to further efforts in the publication of the stage-directions. In November 1849, Paliani's *mise-en-scène* was finally published in the "Supplement" to the *Revue et Gazette des Théâtres*. Paliani's role in all this should not be exaggerated. He personally had nothing whatsoever to do with the actual realization of the scenic work, and his written record was absolutely subordinate to the production process determined by Meyerbeer and the team of opera professionals. However the documents quoted above confirm that the staging manual of *Le Prophète* reflects an extraordinary ambition of Meyerbeer to control every detail of the production of his opera.

For the production of *L'Étoile du Nord* (16 February 1854), the collaboration between Meyerbeer and Paliani displays a similar pattern. The first recorded meeting between the two was about six weeks after the premiere on 27 March. Another meeting followed on 1 April: "Paliani lieset mir die *Mise en scène* de *L'Etoile du Nord* vor, welche er für die Bühnen drucken läßt."⁴⁹ Meyerbeer supervised the distribution of these production books himself, as his diary entry from 8 May 1854 illustrates: "Brief von August Lewald aus Stuttgart: verlangt *L'Etoile* zur Aufführung in Stuttgart. An Lewald die *Mise en scène* von Paliani und das Libretto der *Etoile du Nord* geschickt."⁵⁰ Only eleven days later, Lewald gave a detailed report of the preparations for the Stuttgart production to the general manager Ferdinand Freiherr von Gall, also mentioning Paliani's name:

"Kosten wird die Ausstattung nicht viel, besetzen können wir sie auch. Wir besetzen ja Alles und es ist caprice zu sagen, die Marketenderinnen sind nicht zu besetzen, wenn gleich zugestanden werden muß, daß sie es hier sehr schön machen und daß es nicht möglich ist, wenn man Herrn Palliantis *Mise en scène* noch so gut studirt hat, es andern Sängerinnen klar zu machen, wie das gegeben werden muß, wenn man es nicht mehrmals hier gesehen und zwar mit Regisseur Augen gesehen hat."⁵¹

In a letter dated 16 October 1854, Meyerbeer informed the director of the Opéra de Lyon, Georges Hainl, about many details of the new work:

"La tente est également d'une très grande importance scénique; ~~est~~ sa construction et sa disposition offrent de très grandes difficultés. J'engage donc le théâtre du Grand Opéra de Lyon à se procurer le modèle en petit que M. Paliani a fait faire de cette tente et dont on [sic] fait usage tous les théâtres d'Allemagne qui ont donné ou se proposent de donner cet ouvrage."⁵²

And Meyerbeer issued a similar information on 8 November 1854 to Julius Cornet, the director of the Vienna Opera:

49 Giacomo Meyerbeer. *Briefwechsel und Tagebücher*, Vol. 6: 1853–1855, ed. by Sabine Henze-Döhring, with collaboration by Panja Mücke, Berlin/New York 2002, p. 285 (diary, 1. April 1854). See also pocket calender note, April 1854, beginning, no date, *ibid.*, p. 282.

50 *Ibid.*, p. 305.

51 *Ibid.*, p. 780.

52 *Ibid.*, p. 406.

“Obgleich noch nicht hergestellt, benutze ich den Moment wo ich wenigstens im Stande bin eine Antwort zu dictiren, um Ihnen mitzutheilen daß ich, ihrem Wunsche gemäß, H Pallianti in Paris in Ihrem Namen ersucht habe, Ihnen das kleine Modell des Zeltes zu schicken, und wird dasselbe hoffentlich schon in Ihren Händen sein.”⁵³

In conclusion, it appears that Meyerbeer, in accordance with the production system of his time, devoted detailed attention to the presentation of his works. As an observer of *fin de siècle* noted, looking back on the Grand opéra era:

“J’ai donc été témoin et, depuis plus de trente ans, témoin presque quotidien de ce travail si intéressant et si curieux de la mise en œuvre d’une pièce de théâtre. [...] Mais, que ces hommes se soient appelés Scribe, Meyerbeer, Auber, Alexandre Dumas, Halévy, George Sand; qu’ils s’appellent Victor Hugo, Verdi, [...] Ambroise Thomas, [...] Ludovic Halévy, je les ai tous vus, animés du même souci, donner à la mise en scène de leurs ouvrages une importance capitale, la considérer comme indispensable à l’expression complète de leur pensée.”⁵⁴

Meyerbeer’s quest for an all-embracing control of the theatrical process of his works was a developing model that influenced both Wagner and Verdi, and the premiere of *Le Prophète* marked a new stage within this development. Nevertheless, it would be misleading to imply that Meyerbeer’s intention was to set the staging in the same fixed manner for all eternity. Just as the scenic possibilities of the time were still far from being perfect, so were the methods of documentation. In staging practice, new discourse systems such as the technique of the interleaved piano vocal score were introduced to solve the problem of accurate coordination of music and stage action in a more convincing manner.⁵⁵

As Roger Parker has pointed out, authentic staging will always be a chimera.⁵⁶ Even if we were able to reconstruct the “original staging” in the most sophisticated manner, we would never be looking at a stage that 19th-century Parisian audiences would have seen. Theater is, and always has been, in constant development, influenced by the modes and fashions spanning almost two centuries “full of experiences and transformations of the stage environment that provide other references and associations that cannot be forgotten or eliminated from our memory.”⁵⁷

53 Ibid., p. 413.

54 Émile Perrin: *Etude sur la mise en scène. Lettre à M. Francisque Sarcey*, Paris 1883, p. 28 f.

55 Cf. Friedrich A. Kittler: *Aufschreibesysteme 1800 · 1900*, München 1985, engl. edition: *Discourse Networks 1800/1900*, with a foreword by David E. Wellbery, Stanford 1990.

56 Cf. Roger Parker: *Reading the Livrets, or the Chimera of “Authentic” Staging*, in: *La realizzazione scenica dello spettacolo verdiano. Atti del Congresso internazionale di studi*, Parma, 28–30 settembre 1994, ed. by Pierluigi Petrobelli and Fabrizio Della Seta, Parma 1996, pp. 345–366.

57 “Denn auch im Bereich der Bühnenästhetik und des Aufführungsstils haben sich im Laufe der Jahrzehnte oder Jahrhunderte die Kenntnisse und Erwartungen verändert, und auch hier ist es für uns letztlich unmöglich, das seitdem Geschehene völlig zu vergessen und zu verdrängen.” Müller: *Problemfall Oper?*, p. 39.

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Herausgegeben von Roman Brotbeck, Laura Moeckli,

Anette Schaffer und Stephanie Schroedter unter

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HOCHSCHULE DER KÜNSTE BERN

Herausgegeben von Martin Skamletz
und Thomas Gartmann

Band 9



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