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# Looking for the revolution in Rossini's *Guillaume Tell*

BENJAMIN WALTON

## Telling tales

August in the Restoration, like Augusts before and since, was a time for those who could afford it to escape the hot, dirty streets of Paris to head for the country. With this in mind, Ludovic Vitet, music critic of *Le Globe*, broadcast an appeal in his *Bulletin musical* on 1 August 1829 (cloudy and unseasonably cool):

Have patience, you poor dilettanti who have rushed back from the countryside; and those of you who have put off your departure to be present at the first performance of this marvel, don't think that you have yet reached the end of your suffering.<sup>1</sup>

The Opéra had announced that the marvel in question, Rossini's *Guillaume Tell*, would receive its much-delayed première the following Monday, 3 August. Vitet nevertheless remained chary, observing that although everything seemed ready, obstacles could still arise. Laure Cinti-Damoreau, whose hoarseness had occasioned the most recent postponements, seemed better but could yet suffer a relapse; the head of the department of Fine Arts, the vicomte de la Rochefoucauld, had not yet returned from taking the waters with his wife, and Vitet worried that by the time he appeared all the singers would have forgotten their parts anyway. But the performance (rumored imminent since early the previous winter) took place as planned before a vast and expectant audience and lasted over four hours; the press, with a few predictable exceptions, hailed it ecstatically as a stunning success.<sup>2</sup> At the end of the week, on Friday, 7 August (still cloudy, considerably warmer), the king accepted the dedication of the full score and published an ordinance appointing Rossini a Chevalier of the Legion of Honour.<sup>3</sup> That evening, returning home from dinner, the composer found his three male leads (Adolphe Nourrit, Henri-Bernard Dabadie, and Nicolas Prosper Levasseur) standing under his window in the Boulevard Montmartre, waiting to serenade him. They were accompanied by members of the Opéra orchestra, its conductor François-Antoine Habeneck and a throng of interested onlookers.

<sup>1</sup> "Bulletin musical," *Le Globe*, 1 August 1829.

<sup>2</sup> Giuseppe Radiciotti lists all the promises of the work's near completion or performance from the summer of 1828 onwards: *Gioacchino Rossini: vita documentata, opere e influenza su l'arte*, 3 vols. (Tivoli, 1927–29), II, 108–9.

<sup>3</sup> *Le Moniteur universel*, 10 August 1829, 1401.

Another story from the same week: Victor Hugo, leader of the ever more self-consciously fraternal “Romantics” (by 1829 worthy of both the definite article and the capital R), received a letter on the day of Vitet’s *Bulletin* from one of the official theatrical censors, Charles Brifaut. It informed him that the Minister for the Interior and leader of the cabinet, the vicomte de Martignac, had decided not to allow the performance of Hugo’s new play, *Marion de Lorme*, which he had finished at the end of June, and which had been read in early July at an informal Romantic gathering of the kind that in retrospect sounds suspiciously star-studded (the guest list on this occasion included Balzac, Delacroix, Deschamps, Dumas, Mérimée, de Musset, Sainte-Beuve, and de Vigny, to name only the most canonical). On 2 August, the day before the *Tell* première, Hugo wrote back directly to the Minister, requesting an audience with the king himself, Charles X, to decide the matter. This was granted, and on the same day as Rossini received the Legion of Honour, Hugo presented himself at the palace of Saint-Cloud, south-west of Paris, dressed in finery borrowed from his brother and carrying under his arm a vellum-bound copy of the play’s controversial fourth act. The meeting was amicable but unsuccessful; the play remained unperformed. Charles offered Hugo a large increase in his annual royal pension by way of recompense; Hugo proudly – and publicly – declined the offer.

To begin again, one last time, in the same week: the final day of July 1829 saw the end of the parliamentary session. On the day Martignac received Hugo’s letter the king met with Prince Jules de Polignac, one of Charles’s old friends, and hated by the liberals as an ultra-royalist émigré, the son of Marie-Antoinette’s favorite and (worst of all?) an Anglophile – married to an Englishwoman and widely believed to be in league with Wellington (by this time the British prime minister).<sup>4</sup> Charles had already brought Polignac from England in January, just before the opening of parliament, with a view to replacing the more liberal Martignac, but with no result aside from a barrage of opposition press criticism. In the last week of July, Polignac returned to Paris, and the press engaged once more in ferocious speculation. Meanwhile, through the opening days of August, a careful reading of the king’s daily engagements as reported in government papers revealed the comings and goings of several prominent ultra-royalist politicians interspersed with other engagements, including frequent trips to hunt. As Hugo prepared for his trip to Saint-Cloud, the existing ministry resigned; new ministers were appointed. Adèle Hugo records that when Victor talked with the king, he sought assurance that Charles would not be influenced by Martignac’s opinion of the play. “Oh, if it’s M. de Martignac who worries you . . .” the king replied.<sup>5</sup> Two days later, *Le Moniteur* printed three royal decrees creating the last ministry

<sup>4</sup> *The Times*, 10 August 1829, gave short shrift to the idea of a connection with Wellington. On the character of Polignac, see Guillaume de Bertier de Sauvigny, *La Restauration* (Paris, 1955), 424–5.

<sup>5</sup> [Adèle Hugo], *Victor Hugo raconté par Adèle Hugo*, ed. Evelyne Blewer, Sheila Gaudon, Jean Gaudon, Gabrielle Malandain, Jean-Claude Nabet, Guy Rosa, Carine Trevisan, Anne Ubersfeld (Paris, 1985), 454.

of the Restoration.<sup>6</sup> The liberal press reacted with horror, and the satirical *Le Figaro* famously appeared on 8 August with its pages framed by a thick black border.<sup>7</sup>

Three stories disentangled from the infinitely complex reality of a week's events, any week's events, in the public sphere of Restoration Paris, with its interlocking, hierarchical systems of neighborhoods, classes, generations, cliques, pamphlets, journals, theatres, salons. What these particular narratives share, however (beyond temporal coincidence), is a reception history unavoidably colored by the 1830 Revolution, almost exactly a year away. All, in other words, become retrospectively revolutionary, foretastes of events to come. Yet the happenstance of shared chronology also points to a clear separation into the discrete spheres of music, theatre, and politics, a separation that leads to the question of whether all three events prefigured revolution to the same degree. Politically, the route seems clear: from the appointment of the Polignac ministry to the famous four ordinances that precipitated the revolution, via the ministry's incompetence in the intervening months. As for Hugo, he (typically) created his own post-1830 mythology around his meeting with the king. By August 1831, he was already linking the events of 1830 in the streets of Paris with the censorship of *Marion de Lorme*, announcing in the preface to the published version that "one day, July 1830 will be as much a literary as a political date."<sup>8</sup>

The revolutionary credentials of *Guillaume Tell* seem if anything still more straightforward, given its famous depiction of the people of Switzerland rising up against their oppressive overlords, coupled with a string of later revolutionary associations. Fromental Halévy, for example, writing in the 1860s recalled a rehearsal of *Tell* at the Opéra on the morning of 26 July 1830, the day of Charles's ordinances. During the oath-swearing trio of Act II, Halévy describes how "a shiver ran through the theatre" as the entire personnel, from the instrumentalists to the people working the scenery, all took up Tell's words, "independence or death" ("Ou l'indépendance ou la mort"), singing them with more passion and unity than any normal theatrical cast (not especially impressive, given that the line is sung to a single note). And with that the rehearsal came to a sudden end. Many of the men

<sup>6</sup> For the details of the change of ministry, see Achille Tenaille de Vaulabelle, *Histoire des deux restaurations*, 6th edn, 8 vols. (Paris, 1864), VIII, 46–53; Bertier de Sauvigny, *La Restauration*, 423–8; David H. Pinkney, *The French Revolution of 1830* (Princeton, 1972), 10–12; and François Furet, *Revolutionary France: 1770–1880*, trans. Antonia Nevill (Oxford, 1992), 321–2.

<sup>7</sup> For the whole story of *Le Figaro's* 9 August issue, see the reminiscence by the paper's literary critic Louis Véron (who would take over the management of the Opéra after the July Revolution), *Mémoires d'un bourgeois de Paris*, 6 vols. (Paris, 1853), II, 381–2. See also Daniel Rader, *The Journalists and the July Revolution in France: The Role of the Political Press in the Overthrow of the Bourbon Restoration, 1827–30* (The Hague, 1973), 100–2. Véron reports that by the evening of 9 August, copies of the paper were already exchanging hands for ten francs (twice the normal monthly subscription price).

<sup>8</sup> Hugo, *Théâtre complet*, ed. J.-J. Thierry and Josette Méléze, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 2 vols. (Paris, 1963), I, 958.

at the theatre, Halévy recalled, ran straight out to the boulevards, hiding improvised weapons under their clothes as they went.<sup>9</sup>

Such a rousing account would seem to fuel the sweet but elusive dream of the modern cultural historian for evidence of opera and life merged, stage action inspiring direct rebellion in a giddy whirl of concentrated, kaleidoscopic Zeitgeist of the sort described by Patrick Barbier:

The theme of popular revolt passed from revolution by the Italians in [Auber's] *La Muette de Portici* to revolution by the Swiss in *Guillaume Tell*. . . . It is not surprising that the climate of latent riot fed on such works, and, inflamed by productions at the Opéra, Parisians waited only for the legendary last straw. It came with the July 1830 publication of the royal regulations suppressing freedom of the press and dissolving the newly elected Chamber. Insurrection followed.<sup>10</sup>

Yet in spite of Halévy's contention that "the passing of thirty years cannot wipe away the memory of this bizarre chorus," his anecdote sounds suspiciously similar to any number of other nineteenth-century operatic myths, ultimately revealing more about the period in which it was written than about the events it recounts.<sup>11</sup>

A theatrical footnote published a couple of years after Halévy's account can act as a counterweight to such revolutionary claims. It concerns a version of *Tell* by Michel Pichat, scheduled for the Théâtre Français in 1828 but postponed on his death, and finally performed at the Odéon on 22 July 1830: "but the Odéon, in the heat of summer, had few spectators, and . . . this translation of a worn-out subject counted for nothing next to the events [of the revolution] that were so near."<sup>12</sup> In relation to Rossini, this tale too has its modern counterpart in James Johnson's argument that the revolutionary charge of late Restoration opera has been greatly exaggerated. While admitting that "Grand Opera was . . . calculated to appeal to the public in explicitly political ways," Johnson suggests that the idea of revolution on stage inciting an audience stems from the misunderstanding of "assuming that the middle class audience of the late 1820s and 1830s were angry and cantankerous

<sup>9</sup> Jacques-Fromental-Elie Halévy, *Derniers Souvenirs et portraits* (Paris, 1863), 155–6; quoted in Anselm Gerhard, "Sortire dalle vie communi: Wie Rossini einem Akademiker den *Guillaume Tell* verdarb," in *Oper als Text: Romanistische Beiträge zur Libretto-Forschung*, ed. Albert Gier (Heidelberg, 1986), 185–219, here 197. For a similarly charged reminiscence (also from the Second Empire) by François-Joseph Méry concerning the performance of the oath at the aforementioned serenade under Rossini's window, see Herbert Weinstock, *Rossini: A Biography* (London, 1968), 167–8. In this context, it is perhaps no surprise that when Felice Orsini attempted to assassinate Napoléon III at the Opéra in 1858 he chose to do so at a performance of *Tell*.

<sup>10</sup> Patrick Barbier, *Opera in Paris, 1800–1850: A Lively History*, trans. Robert Luoma (Portland, OR, 1995), 77–8.

<sup>11</sup> On the similar myths surrounding the use of Verdi's music for revolutionary purposes, see Roger Parker, "'Va pensiero' and the Insidious Mastery of Song," in *Leonora's Last Act: Essays in Verdian Discourse* (Princeton, 1997), 20–41, and "'Arpa d'or dei fatidici vati': The Verdian Patriotic Chorus in the 1840s" (Parma, 1997).

<sup>12</sup> Théodore Muret, *L'Histoire par le théâtre*, 3 vols. (Paris, 1865), II, 291–2. In total, the work received just nine performances, ending on 8 September, and remained unpublished until 1870; *Oeuvres de Pichat*, ed. E.-J. Savigné (Vienne, 1870).

and on the verge themselves of rushing out into the streets to overturn the status quo."<sup>13</sup>

The remainder of this article will not (could not) seek to resolve the troubled relationship between opera and political action; on the contrary, it will seek to entangle it, to avoid a clear answer. And although it is no more than a truism to insist that historical events are always more nuanced and complicated than later narratives allow for, in the case of *Tell* hindsight concentration on the imminent revolution can distract from other connections, both more obvious and less. While my own contexts will be no less arbitrary (I might instead consider *Tell* in terms of the precise figures of the Opéra's budgetary constraints, or in relation to the construction of stage sets – there is ample information on each), I hope that by trying to escape, or just to explore more closely, the familiar accounts of *Tell*, it might be possible to appreciate the textures of cultural life at the end of the Restoration more distinctly, to fashion these textures into a different weave.

Such refashioning will involve not only reconsideration of the later reception of the work but also of contemporary accounts, with all their tempting collations of authentic detail. It is a characteristic of Restoration writing to co-opt every aspect of culture within an intense, insatiable desire for self-understanding. Every event, trend or discovery is analyzed, historicized, contextualized (as well as imitated and ridiculed) almost as it happens, generating narratives that tend to be as seductively and conveniently complete as later summaries. There was, for example, no need to wait even until 1831 to read of Hugo's meeting with Charles X. Within days of the encounter, an article appeared in the recently founded Romantic monthly the *Revue de Paris* speculating about the nature of the conversation while celebrating its importance. The report pointed out that this was not merely a private meeting but, above all, "a serious question of art and liberty that M. Victor Hugo came to plead before the king."<sup>14</sup> At one level, this amounts to no more than Romantic self-aggrandizement, given that the meeting supposed to have inspired so much intense interest had in fact gone unreported in all the official papers, despite their otherwise scrupulous accounts of the king's encounters.<sup>15</sup> But the piece also attempts to place the event in the wider sweep of history, casting it as the first direct meeting between the "new generation" and the head of the old. Such an account could seem like the last word, imperiously closing down the space for interpretation with both reportage and instant commentary. Yet, in an effort to begin to move

<sup>13</sup> James H. Johnson, *Listening in Paris: A Cultural History* (Berkeley, 1995), 254.

<sup>14</sup> [Charles de Sainte-Beuve], "De l'audience accordée par S. M. Charles X, à M. Victor Hugo," *Revue de Paris*, 5 (1829), 127–30, here 127; reprinted with original pagination by Slatkine (Geneva, 1972). The article is signed by the paper's editor, the ubiquitous Louis Véron, but was actually written by Sainte-Beuve, a close friend of Hugo. Many of the themes raised here were developed in more detail in Hugo's final treatment of the meeting in poetic form as one of the collection *Les Rayons et les ombres* (1839), in a poem entitled simply "Le sept août mil huit cent vingt-neuf."

<sup>15</sup> Sainte-Beuve's article begins by quoting the official form for royal meetings: "Le Roi a reçu hier, en audience particulière, M. Victor Hugo," words that in fact only appeared in *Le Figaro*, about as far from an official source as it would be possible to find. It is conceivable, however, that the very absence of Hugo from *Le Moniteur's* listings of the week's events was a symbolic omission.

away from later preoccupations with July 1830, it is worth listening past Hugo's articulations of generational struggle to the inescapable murmur that underscored such rhetoric, most rhetoric; not to the sounds of the revolution yet to come, but to the still-echoing events that the *trois glorieuses* would only feebly rehearse: the first French revolution.<sup>16</sup>

### Rebellion domesticated

In the summer of 1828 there was such an epidemic of *Tell* performances that *Le Globe* suggested numbering them in the manner of a royal dynasty, as a way of keeping track.<sup>17</sup> An assiduous theatre-goer in early July could have attended the French première of James Sheridan Knowles's *Tell*, performed at the Théâtre-Italien by the touring English troupe of Harriet Smithson fame (Smithson played Tell's wife Emma). Then, on the following night (with careful timing) the same spectator could catch Villeneuve and Dupeuty's version of the tale at the Vaudeville (third on the bill), nip along to the Boulevard du Temple for Pixérécourt's melodramatic account at the Gaité before returning to the center of town for a revival of the operatic version of *Tell* by Grétry and Sedaine.

The decision by the Opéra-Comique management to resurrect Grétry's work seems to have been made in direct competition with the Opéra, serving much the same purpose as Carafa's *Masaniello* (on the same plot and premièred two months before *La Muette de Portici*).<sup>18</sup> In the case of *Tell* the contest between the theatres was perhaps more pointed, however, since Grétry's work appeared in a revision by Henri-Montan Berton, stalwart defender of French music against the horrors of the Italian style.<sup>19</sup> It was nevertheless something of a strange choice, particularly for anyone who recalled the original performances in 1791 complete with concluding "scène patriotique," in which the distant sound of the *Marseillaise* heralds the arrival of "the French, the brave sans-culottes of the French nation" who then sing the anthem with their liberated Swiss brothers.

<sup>16</sup> The best account of the ways that the events of 1789 and afterwards resurfaced in the Restoration is by Stanley Mellon, *The Political Uses of History: A Study of Historians in the French Restoration* (Stanford, 1958). The generational self-consciousness revealed by Hugo did in fact become clearest in the events of the 1830 Revolution, which replayed key moments from the earlier events religiously, treating the old republican symbols, in the words of Simon Schama, "like holy relics": "It was in 1830 that the 'French Revolution' became a transferable entity. It was no longer a finite series of events, anchored to a particular historical mooring . . . Instead, the memory . . . constructed political reality." *Citizens: A Chronicle of the French Revolution* (New York, 1989), 7–8.

<sup>17</sup> *Le Globe*, unsigned review of Pixérécourt and Benjamin's *Guillaume Tell* at the Théâtre de la Gaité, 14 May 1828.

<sup>18</sup> See Andrea Baggioli, "Le fonti letterarie di *Guillaume Tell*," *Bollettino del centro rossiniano di studi*, 37 (1997), 5–50, here 19.

<sup>19</sup> François-Joseph Méry's 1854 anecdote on the serenade under Rossini's window (see n. 9) includes bit parts for both Berton and Ferdinando Paër – an Italian composer (and director of the Théâtre-Italien from 1812 to 1826) credited by both Stendhal and Fétis with delaying and mutilating Rossini's works in an effort to reduce their effect in Paris. The two were apparently sitting in the nearby Café des Variétés, and on seeing the crowds gather to congratulate their rival pronounced that "The art is lost!" (Weinstock, *Rossini*, 168).

Sedaine, the librettist, concludes his description of the scene in the preface to the published score by saying that “I am convinced that it will create a good effect.”<sup>20</sup> The censor who received the revised version in 1827 was not so sure, questioning why the Opéra-Comique was seeking to resuscitate such a detestable piece, and arguing that, in spite of the removal of political allusions and shocking language, the work nevertheless bore the scars of the period in which it was composed.<sup>21</sup> “One can feel the baleful influences [of Revolutionary ideas] reborn on all sides. Let us at least preserve the theatre. We should not put up with anything that awakens or recalls memories of that time.”<sup>22</sup>

I shall return to that last line later, to examine in more detail the impossibility of putting the revolution to sleep. Yet in spite of the censor’s fears, even this version, so blatant in its original appeal, was no longer straightforwardly revolutionary once subjected to Restoration revision. Indeed, precious little was left of Sedaine’s original play once it had been made palatable for the 1820s, and when it was finally performed a year later, the critic for the *Gazette de France* (probably none other than the censor of the original report) noted this approvingly, commenting that Sedaine and Grétry had provided the stones that Berton and Pélissier (the new librettist) had fashioned into a new building.<sup>23</sup> Large parts of the original music had been cut, and replaced by a selection of other bits from Grétry, well-known (a duet from *Aucassin et Nicolette* “familiar from a thousand melodramas” according to the reviewer in the *Gazette*) and obscure (another duet from *Céphale et Procris*, the opéra-ballet written to celebrate the wedding of the young Comte d’Artois in 1775, by 1828 better known as Charles X). What was left had been rescored. As to the plot, the revolutionary elements had been toned down: in particular, the women, who in the original spend much of their time on stage fighting or taunting the men into action, had been carefully domesticated, transformed into good, peaceful mothers and wives.

<sup>20</sup> André Ernest Modeste Grétry, *Guillaume Tell* (Leipzig, n.d.), xxiv.

<sup>21</sup> Paris, Archives Nationales (hereafter *Pan*) F/21/968, “Procès-verbaux des censeurs. Opéra-Comique 1808–86.” The report is dated 23 May 1827 and is unsigned, but marked with the symbol of A. Delaforest. His opinions tend to be the most extreme among the censors, and his ability to discover political meaning in the most benign plots frequently rivals that of the most committed musicologist.

<sup>22</sup> Delaforest’s tone here should be taken as representative of a right-wing hysteria that became ever more shrill as the liberals gained influence towards the end of the 1820s. As a single illustration, the *Gazette* review of Rossini’s *Tell* on 4 August 1829 appeared at the bottom of the first page, below a leader with the headline “De l’Esprit révolutionnaire.” In fairly short order, it accuses the liberals of wanting to bring about chaos and resurrect the Antichrist, and of there being no point in analyzing the causes of the French revolution, since the truth is ahistorical: “The conservative spirit represents all the acquired virtues, the revolutionary spirit represents all the natural vices; it is pride, jealousy, hatred of the law, the insatiable desire for power and domination.” In fairness to the writer, it should be noted that the similarity with the rhetoric of the more extreme Christian right in modern times goes some way to bolstering his claims for a cyclic historical model in which conservatives need to remain eternally vigilant.

<sup>23</sup> *Gazette de France*, 1 June 1828. The main theatre critic for the journal was the same A. Delaforest as found in the censorship office.

In place of the original plot, parts from Schiller's 1804 drama *Wilhelm Tell* had been inserted: Gesler the evil Austrian oppressor had been made more conspicuously dastardly in an effort to make revolution seem less unruly political action than a necessary human response to excessive cruelty. This served to bring the work into line with all the other versions at the time, rebalancing the plot so that revolution need not appear central. One of the curious aspects of *Tell* is its handful of strongly defined but not clearly connected dramatic moments, which the dramatist must stitch into a convincing whole.<sup>24</sup> The effect of reading all the different Parisian *Tells* in a short space of time must in some way replicate the experience of theatre-going in 1828; there are always differences, and they are often interesting generically (unexpected death by booby-trapped bridge in Pixérécourt, comic relief and no loss of life for the Variétés), yet the versions still seem to merge into an amalgam that can accommodate variation without much altering the overall impression.<sup>25</sup> This can be seen by outlining the central moments of the plot.

Switzerland around 1300, ruled over by the Habsburgs, whose representative Gesler and henchmen have been terrorizing and harassing the peaceful and liberty-loving Swiss. In the opening series of events, news arrives in Tell's village of an outrage by Gesler's soldiers that has incited a Swiss peasant to violence (in some versions the soldiers have tried to take the peasant's flocks, in others they have made advances on his daughter); the peasant now needs passage over the lake to escape retribution. The boatman refuses since a storm is rising, and so Tell makes the trip. Either in irrational reprisal for this act, or else for refusing to bow down to Gesler's hat placed on a pole in the main square of the nearby town of Altdorf, Melchtal, a local patriarch, is blinded or killed by Gesler's soldiers, an act that Melchtal's son then seeks to avenge. So ends the initial action; four more key scenes follow. The first is the swearing of loyalty between the three Swiss cantons of Uri, Unterwald, and Schwytz, historically several years separate from the rest of the story (though this is scarcely important given that even the existence of Tell as a historical figure is in itself doubtful). In Schiller (and Rossini) this becomes a moonlit oath scene. Next comes the central plot development in Altdorf. First, Tell and his son fail to bow to Gesler's hat, and are brought before the tyrant. They so enrage him that he orders the apple-shooting episode to break Tell's will. Tell successfully hits the apple on his son's head but inadvertently reveals a hidden second arrow meant for Gesler had he missed his first shot. He is arrested. The final part of the play (frequently something of an anti-climax after the famous apple scene) deals with the Swiss uprising, and Tell's escape on his way by boat to the fortress of Kussnacht. A storm again rises, and Gesler is forced to ask Tell for help. Tell steers the boat near enough

<sup>24</sup> For a description of how these events work symbolically, see Florence Cornu and Uli Windisch, "Quel Tell?" in *Guillaume Tell, L'Avant-scène Opéra*, 118 (1989), 102–5.

<sup>25</sup> For a thematic survey of some of the different treatments of the story, see Gilles de Van, "Les Sources littéraires de *Guillaume Tell* de Rossini," *Chroniques italiennes*, 29 (1992), 7–24, and Baggioli, "Le fonti letterarie" (which also includes a detailed summary of Pichat's play). Some of the different versions are also considered in the chapter by Alfred Berchtold, "Le cheminement d'un héros (Tell au XIXe et au XXe siècle)" in the collection *Quel Tell* (Lausanne, 1973), 181–201.

the shore to jump free. Meanwhile, Altdorf is taken by the Swiss, and Tell shoots Gesler with a well-aimed arrow.

Within this framework, any differences tend to arise from theatrical practicality: for instance, the number of characters or their attendant relationships. In Pixérécourt's account, Melchtal *fil*s is betrothed to Gertrude (whom Gesler also wishes to seduce), the sister of one of the oath swearers; for Sedaine and Grétry the same Melchtal will marry Tell's daughter. For Rossini, however, borrowing an idea from Schiller, the love of young Melchtal, Arnold, becomes the opera's principal subplot, since he is in love not with a good Swiss girl but with Mathilde, a Habsburg noblewoman whom he felicitously saved from an avalanche, but who can now only offer him love in conflict with his patriotic duty. Yet, while such a clash has an honorable operatic pedigree, and although most of the solo and duet music in the opera derives from these two characters and their circumstances, their relationship remains largely irrelevant, and again (as in Grétry/Berton) the structural balance of the work is tipped towards the elements familiar from other versions. Indeed, as the opera goes on, Rossini himself seems to show less and less interest in his pair of lovers, not even bothering to resolve their plight very satisfactorily at the end.<sup>26</sup> With love sidelined, Rossini could focus his attention elsewhere.

### On the Alpine trail

Where Berton and Pelissier shied away from revolutionary associations by taking refuge in domesticity, and Pixérécourt in theatrical effects, Jouy, Rossini, *et al.* took from Schiller the apparently failsafe recourse to scenic detail. But if revolution concealed behind picturesque landscape or silenced by local color might appeal to the censor, it still presented its own problems. On the one hand, given the terms of contemporary aesthetic debate, Rossini would have been well aware that successful depiction of color was the surest way to be accepted as a successful romantic composer, laying to rest for good the suspicion that he was incapable of rising to the dramatic depiction of his operatic environments.<sup>27</sup> And Switzerland offered a more ready stock of colorful possibilities than had the Greece of *Le Siège de Corinthe*, or the Holy Land of *Moïse*, Rossini's only previous attempts at serious French opera. On the other hand, the stock of Swiss imagery created the difficulty of how to better what was familiar from elsewhere. Musical romanticism had shed the challenging criteria of modernity and musical emancipation with which it had been invested in

<sup>26</sup> On the way the relationship was increasingly written out as the work was revised before its first performance, see Anselm Gerhard, *The Urbanization of Opera: Music Theater in Paris in the Nineteenth Century*, trans. Mary Whittall (Chicago, 1998), 108–11.

<sup>27</sup> The *Histoire du romantisme*, published in the summer of 1829 by F.-R. de Toreinx, a pseudonym for Eugène Ronteix (Paris, 1829; reprinted by Slatkine, Geneva, 1973), described Rossini as a “true romantic author” purely in terms of his ability to reproduce “les couleurs locales et historiques” (405).

the mid-1820s by Stendhal and Vitet, but *couleur locale* by itself seemed to offer little room for innovation.<sup>28</sup>

This was not simply a musical problem, however, since it had its roots in the much larger phenomenon of the beginnings of mass tourism. Put bluntly, by the late 1820s Switzerland had become a little boring. One of *Le Globe's* theatre critics said as much in reviewing a vaudeville at the Théâtre des Variétés in the summer of 1827: Artist or man of the world, who hasn't taken a trip to Switzerland? It's a pleasure that has been fashionable for a long time. It would be in bad taste not to have admired at least once the wild beauties of antique Helvetia.<sup>29</sup>

Even those who had never been pretended they had, he continued, because they had read the right literary works. A small selection from the index of one of the books mentioned, first published in 1803, bears witness to the fixed state of Swiss sublimity:

*Alpine eagle.* Its strength, its grandeur.

*Alps.* Character of the men who live there.

*Alpine chamois.* Their strength and their agility.

*Alpine hunters . . .* Their bravery, their intrepidity. Their passion for hunting chamois.

*Switzerland.* Industriousness of its inhabitants; their good customs, source of their happiness . . . two virtues that characterize them.

*Swiss mountaineers.* An adventure that demonstrates their simplicity and their innocence.

*Mountains . . .* Majesty of their shapes; their arid rocks and their beautiful greenery.<sup>30</sup>

Such a ready-made range of impressions was ever easier for the visitor to seek out, with the publication from the early nineteenth century of detailed guide books which combined extended dissertations on the purity of the Swiss and the immense beauty of the scenery with good practical advice. The model was Johann Gottfried Ebel, whose *Manuel du voyageur en Suisse* (translated into French in 1810) explored the analogy between nature and man as fully realized in the Swiss mountain dwellers, while still finding room for reminders to pack an umbrella and advice on what to eat and how much to tip the stable boys.<sup>31</sup>

Yet while the codification of Switzerland allowed the traveler to go in confident search of Swiss grandeur, the mass marketing of a supposedly solitary communion could make the reality of the country disappointing for the visitor longing for that experiential profundity promised by books. Wordsworth's irritation on learning from a passing peasant that he had accidentally missed the summit of the Simplon Pass, recorded in Book 6 of *The Prelude*, can stand as representative for generations of disappointed voyagers thwarted in search of those impressions they had expected

<sup>28</sup> See Benjamin Walton, "The Professional Dilettante: Ludovic Vitet and *Le Globe*," in *Reading Critics Reading: Opera and Ballet Criticism in France from the Revolution to 1848*, ed. Roger Parker and Mary Ann Smart (Oxford, 2001), 69–85.

<sup>29</sup> *Le Globe*, 30 June 1827.

<sup>30</sup> Etienne-François de Lantier, *Les Voyageurs en Suisse*, 3 vols. (Paris, 1817), III, 369–409.

<sup>31</sup> See Claude Reichler and Roland Ruffieux, *Le Voyage en Suisse* (Paris, 1998), 637–54. Reichler and Ruffieux suggest that Schiller was very influenced by Ebel's earlier work *Schilderung der Gebirgsvolker der Schweiz*, 2 vols. (1798 and 1802).

from home.<sup>32</sup> And it is easy to multiply the examples of the gap between the imaginary Switzerland and its prosaic reality from the French perspective. Etienne de Jouy, creator of the *Tell* libretto with its potent idealization of rustic innocence, recorded his hatred of the petty avariciousness of the Swiss when he was forced to live there in the 1790s.<sup>33</sup> Victor Hugo, touring the country in the summer of 1825 with Charles Nodier with a view to writing a book of travel impressions, managed only the shortest fragment of picturesque description, but page upon page of incredibly detailed account books on the cost of lodgings and meals.<sup>34</sup>

The effect of this accumulation of detail points to the fact that by 1829 the Swiss nation had little geographical reality in the French consciousness as a country on France's eastern side, but was instead defined through desire for a life of simplicity and beauty lost forever to the modern French. Above all, and most poignantly in the confused loyalties of the Restoration, the Swiss had a clear and uncomplicated sense of nationality, of what it meant to be Swiss. "The Swiss alone seem to understand patriotism and the efficacy of *fêtes* to arouse and nourish it," wrote *Le Globe* wistfully in 1826, and two years later, just before the spate of Parisian *Tells*, carried a report on an outdoor Swiss performance of a version of the work at Kussnacht, with real mountains for scenery and an audience that literally followed the action as it happened. When *Tell* was put on the boat to the dungeons, the audience accompanied him to the lakeshore, and when Gesler was killed at the end "the entire audience spontaneously became actors, and the dramatic fiction was suddenly transformed into a reality full of gaiety, but nevertheless imposing."<sup>35</sup> For *Le Globe*, this was romanticism "raised to a higher power," with Classical dramatic rules replaced by "the truthfulness of facts, the patriotism of ancestors, the glory of the nation and enthusiasm for liberty; here are the only guiding deities of these uncouth minds, and their complete poetics."

Next to such patriotism and naive authenticity, effortlessly bridging the gap between audience and stage, any French Swiss simulacrum risked failing to capture the ideal. The possibility of theatrical success was caught in the same bind as the eager tourist – between the need to dwell on the same old Swiss symbols yet make them transcend their status as cliché. In an effort to move beyond stock imagery, Pierre-Luc-Charles Cicéri, the Opéra's chief designer, took a trip to Switzerland in 1828, sketching possible scenes for use back in Paris.<sup>36</sup> From the reviews of the

<sup>32</sup> "Loth to believe what we so grieved to hear, / For still we had hopes that pointed to the clouds, / We questioned him again, and yet again; / But ever word that from the peasant's lips / Came in reply, translated by our feelings, / Ended in this, – that we had crossed the Alps" (*The Prelude*, Book 6, lines 586–91).

<sup>33</sup> Jouy later recalled that he had never encountered a people "more selfish, dry and inhospitable" than the Swiss. See Paul Comeau, "Etienne Jouy: His Life and his Paris Essays," Ph.D. diss. (Princeton University, 1968), 35.

<sup>34</sup> The book fragment was eventually published in the same August 1829 *Revue de Paris* as the account of Hugo's meeting with the king (289–96); Hugo's account books are found as an appendix to his *Oeuvres complètes: Edition chronologique*, ed. Jean Massin (Paris, 1967), II, 1539–47.

<sup>35</sup> *Le Globe*, 22 March 1828.

<sup>36</sup> For reproductions of Cicéri's drawings, see M. Elizabeth C. Bartlet with Mauro Bucarelli, "*Guillaume Tell*": *fonti iconografiche* (Pesaro, 1996), 74–84.

work, however, it is clear that he failed to create a Switzerland that the audience felt belonged uniquely to them:

His mountains, notably those of Act II, have neither enough verisimilitude, nor enough distinction of place; all the outlines overlap, no air, no perspective, no nature. It is no more Switzerland than are the heights of Belleville or Ménilmontant [suburbs of Paris]. The geological appearance has no character, with soft and vague shapes where there should be vigorous forms, striking peaks, sudden and forceful crevices, proud and wild situations. I appeal to the travellers who have roamed through Switzerland: in the presence of M. Cicéri's views, do they see a historic place reproduced before their eyes in conjunction with the magic of their memories? This rustic, masculine, imposing nature, these picturesque areas of solitude, whose appearance, at once sharp and gentle, awakes all the power of the imagination, where are they? . . . Can it be here, in these nooks and crannies, that the genius of liberty rose up?<sup>37</sup>

Fortunately, this reviewer concluded, Rossini had not committed the same errors. He had been sensitive to the echoing murmur of the mountains, that communicating of sounds destined to intoxicate sympathetic souls. But in truth, the musical means for the evocation of Swiss-ness were equally hackneyed, and Rossini's options equally predetermined. *Couleur locale* predominantly meant a single thing, the *ranz des vaches*, played by shepherds to call the flocks home at the end of the day. By the Restoration this was just one more source of potential touristic disappointment. Ludovic Vitet, traveling through Switzerland and Italy (another predominantly imaginary country) the year before Hugo in search of folk music, was delighted to find four young girls who would sing him a Swiss song, but was disturbed by the ugliness of the harmony. Worse still, when he finally heard the famous *ranz*, perhaps the most potent European musical symbol aside from the *Marseillaise*, he found it shockingly nasty.<sup>38</sup>

The fame of the *ranz* came primarily from Rousseau, who had famously notated it in his *Dictionnaire de musique* (still regularly reprinted in the 1820s), where it appears beneath a "Chinese air" and "Song of the Canadian natives" in a plate devoted entirely to exotic folk music. More famously still, Rousseau had borrowed his definition of its characteristics from an early eighteenth-century treatise on nostalgia – a condition only then recently invented to describe homesickness, "the Swiss illness."<sup>39</sup> Rousseau declared that in the *ranz* "the music does not act exactly like Music, but as a sign to aid memory."<sup>40</sup> But the sign was not always helpful, since it made those soldiers who heard it when away from Switzerland "dissolve in tears, desert or die, by exciting in them such an ardent desire to see their country once more."<sup>41</sup> A later account (apparently read by Rossini) expanded on the effect of the

<sup>37</sup> G. Imbert de Laphalèque [L.-Fr. Lhéritier], "De la musique en France – De Rossini – De Guillaume Tell," *Revue de Paris*, 5 (August 1829), 109–26, 179–94, 253–72, here 264–5.

<sup>38</sup> *Le Globe*, 31 May 1825.

<sup>39</sup> Quoted in Guy Métraux, *Le Ranz des vaches: du chant des bergers à l'hymne patriotique* (Lausanne, 1984), 55.

<sup>40</sup> The passage is quoted in Métraux, *Le Ranz*, 60.

<sup>41</sup> Rousseau's description appears in the article "Musique" in the *Dictionnaire de musique*, ed. Jean-Jacques Eigeldinger et al., in *Écrits sur la musique, la langue et le théâtre*, Vol. 5 of the *Oeuvres complètes*, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 5 vols. (Paris, 1995), V, 924. Rousseau also includes a separate entry for the *ranz* (1006).

tune, situating it clearly as the center around which all other Swiss imagery could circulate:

This song reminds the Swiss of their childhood games, the sweet affections of their youth, their old habits, their rustic lifestyle, the attractions of their mountains, of their valleys, of their cataracts, of their glaciers, and finally and most particularly of the spirit of liberty or independence which reigned in their families, and which determined all their happiness and all their glory.<sup>42</sup>

From such a description, it can be seen that the *ranz*, like other Swiss symbols, took two forms, real and ideal; in the first place was Rousseau's tune, without which no "Swiss" work could exist, and which Grétry used to open his *Tell*.<sup>43</sup> But it also had a life of its own as a part of the Swiss experience, as vital, despite Vitet's disappointment, as the visit to the Pont du Diable or sunrise over the Alps. And in line with Vitet's account, part of the experience of hearing the tune in its native surroundings was the underlying fear that if the effect was not as great as might have been hoped, the fault lay with the spectator, not the music. By the 1820s the mystical power that tended to render the melody indescribable except in the vaguest terms was bolstered by solid musicological investigation, which argued both for an enormous number of *ranzs*, with Rousseau's as only one sanitized version among many, and for a defining *ranz* characteristic less of melodic shape than of performance: "the pastoral melody knows no other measure than its caprice, its taste, its enthusiasm, and the time that it wants to take in order to enjoy its own emphases."<sup>44</sup>

This was the description that Rossini needed to solve the problem of how to go beyond Grétry's local color, as well as that of Schiller who, although writing a spoken play, had used every opportunity for musical accompaniment. Edmond Vander Straeten, writing in the 1870s, produced an entire monograph on "Popular melody in Rossini's opera *Guillaume Tell*."<sup>45</sup> In it he provided musical illustrations complete with asterisks highlighting certain notes in an attempt to prove that no melody in the opera escapes from its popular roots. The examples are not always convincing; but even if Vander Straeten's approach is over-literal he nevertheless pinpoints Rossini's approach, which is to let the melodies take so much time enjoying their emphases, and to saturate the work with local color to such a degree that there is room for little else.

<sup>42</sup> George Tarenne, *Recherches sur les Ranz des vaches, ou sur les chansons pastorales des bergers de la Suisse, avec musique* (Paris, 1813). Radiciotti claims that this was a "book Rossini definitely consulted" (II, 159), but provides no evidence.

<sup>43</sup> The melody would in addition have been well known to generations of early nineteenth-century piano students, appearing in Louis Adam's *Méthode de piano du Conservatoire* (1805). Métraux also prints the title page of a version of the melody from "around 1820" with music by Meyerbeer and words by Scribe (124).

<sup>44</sup> Tarenne, *Recherches*, 7.

<sup>45</sup> Edmond Vander Straeten, *La Mélodie populaire dans l'opéra "Guillaume Tell" de Rossini* (Paris, 1879). For a more recent view of Rossini's use of Swiss themes, see Anselm Gerhard, "'Schweizer Töne' als Mittel der motivischen Integration: Gioachino Rossini's *Guillaume Tell*," in *Schweizer Töne: Die Schweiz im Spiegel der Musik*, ed. Gerhard and Annette Landau (Zurich, 2000), 99–106.

### Colorful apathy

Rossini's saturation method in *Tell* can perhaps best be demonstrated through his liberal use of the chorus, which, as Anselm Gerhard has argued, created "a completely new kind of relationship between protagonists and crowds, soloists and chorus."<sup>46</sup> But while Gerhard correctly suggests that the Swiss people no longer merely represent a picturesque background, he concludes that they therefore must act as a political force, and in support of this he draws attention to the participation of the male chorus in the oath swearing that ends Act II. I would suggest that the chorus's role in this scene is still entirely dictated by the three principal characters, has been prefaced by their own oath ("independence or death"), and that the chorus still require Walter and Tell to shore up their resolve ("with the threat of war, in spite of ourselves we are frozen by fear"). More importantly, here and elsewhere, the role of the chorus is less as political force than as picturesque *foreground*, dominating the action through inaction in a way that for much of the first half of the work pushes all questions of politics to one side. Undoubtedly this holds less true as the work goes on; the apple scene and consequent chaining up of Tell are enough to inspire the Schwitzers to call for Gesler's downfall in Act III ("Anathème à Gesler"), but only on Tell's prompting, and after severe incitement. By Act IV the Swiss confederates are shown preparing for rebellion when Tell has been captured, forcing them to act themselves. But in the opening two acts, as well as in parts of the others, dramatic developments seem reluctantly incorporated, an annoying interruption of pastoral bliss. The four nearly successive choruses of the first act, for example, which, as Gerhard says, offer a way to spotlight dramatically the preoccupations of Tell and Arnold, show the Swiss people entirely blind to threats to their livelihood. While Tell worries about the future of his country, the villagers enjoy simple happiness, and prepare to celebrate the three weddings to be blessed by old Melchtal. If this could seem to function as dramatic irony, other details work against such an interpretation, most notably the use of off-stage horns.<sup>47</sup>

After the initial chorus, the fisherman sings a solo song (mysteriously accompanied by harp), supported by Tell, his son Jemmy and wife Hedwige, all commenting on the fisherman's words. At its end, horns are heard off stage, playing an extended version of Rousseau's *ranz* (Ex. 1). This leads to the second chorus, whose E minor tonality struck Berlioz as inappropriately agitated, but which has some precedent in the curious F sharp minor barcarolle of Grétry's *Tell*.<sup>48</sup> Melchtal *père* arrives to bless the weddings and greets the assembled villagers to the

<sup>46</sup> Gerhard, *Urbanization of Opera*, 89.

<sup>47</sup> On Rossini's use of horns in the opera, see also Ulrich Weisstein, "Rossini's *Guillaume Tell*, eine musikalische Schweizerreise," in *Oper als Text*, ed. Gier, 147–84, here 171–2.

<sup>48</sup> See Hector Berlioz, "Rossini's *William Tell*," in Leo Treitler, ed., *Strunk's Source Readings in Music History*, Vol. 6, *The Nineteenth Century*, ed. Ruth Solie (New York, 1998), 83–99.

Berlioz writes of this chorus: "The key is E minor and the melody is so full of alarm and agitation which at the first performance, not hearing the words, as usually happens in large theatres, I expected the news of some catastrophe – at the very least, the assassination of Father Melchtal" (1129).

accompaniment of the opening of the *ranz* scored for full orchestra. Between this and the third choral interlude comes another off-stage horn *ranz*, on the second half of the tune (see Ex. 2), in a  $\frac{6}{8}$  meter retained by the rejoicing that follows. All depart except Arnold, whose thoughts turn to Mathilde as he hears the distant sounds of Gesler's hunt. Knowing Mathilde will be present at the hunt, Arnold has confused feelings but tries nevertheless to label these sounds as signifying evil ("Mais quel bruit? Des tyrans qu'a vomis l'Allemagne"). However, the melody here, played by off-stage horns, sounds like merely another extension of the *ranz*, complete with  $\frac{6}{8}$  meter and the characteristic acciaccaturas with which the previous chorus has just ended, and which are taken up for yet another chorus that follows the first set piece for the soloists, the duet between Arnold and Tell (Ex. 3 and 4). The hunt is heard once more before the wedding ballet, again sounding nothing if not Swiss, its rhythm then borrowed for the C minor/major chorus "Gloire, honneur au fils de Tell!" (Ex. 5). When Gesler's men finally arrive there is no connection with the hunting party, and lest the dramatic end of the act may have distracted from the colorful details, Act II opens with a Hunters' chorus, prefaced by the same horn melody, finally stripped of all reference to Gesler. Although bloodthirsty in comparison with the following religious simplicity of the Swiss peasants' chorus, the hunters' melody is nevertheless tied unequivocally to the familiar Swiss motifs: "What wild sounds mix with the sound of the horns! The cry of the dying chamois combines with the noise of the waterfall" (Ex. 6). The Swiss soundtrack, in other words, appears to have successfully drowned out musically any dramatic antagonism that might have justified revolutionary uprising.

### ***Tell* and the French revolutions**

With Rossini's immersion in the sound of Switzerland before us, the revolution seems to have disappeared from view, effectively neutralizing the censor's fear in 1827 of revolutionary reminiscence. To quote the report's most telling sentence again: "we should not put up with anything that awakens or recalls the memories of that time." Rossini's drive against the dramatic elements of plot in favor of stasis might seem to act unequivocally in support of that position, evoking a fantasy land of peasants and chamois that seems Romantic in terms far removed from the political engagements of the "generation of 1820."<sup>49</sup> But having reached this anti-revolutionary extreme, I wish to question it with two readings that reinterpret the use of Swiss local color in *Tell*; readings that furthermore can stand as a balance to the three stories with which I began: like them, the readings are separate and even partially incompatible, but share the same ultimate revolutionary obsession. The first is geographical, the second temporal.

In many ways the development of the chorus in Rossini's opera has a parallel in the character of Tell in Schiller's play. Initially very unwilling to get involved with political events, insisting that such matters are not for him, Schiller's protagonist is gradually drawn into action less through debate (of which there is much in the play)

<sup>49</sup> See Alan Spitzer, *The French Generation of 1820* (Princeton, 1987).

**Andantino** (*Ici l'on entend le ranz des vaches*) (*Cors sur le théâtre*)

**Allegretto.**

**All.º, vivace** ♩. = 152

Ex. 1: Rossini, *Guillaume Tell*, Act I, Introduction.

than through the spectacle of injustice played out before him. He acts not as a revolutionary, but as a compassionate human being. Likewise, the chorus in the opera seems not to notice the operatic Tell's fears and concerns, but lives naively, turning to God for help when needed, until clear abuses persuade it that the natural

All<sup>o</sup>. vivace ♩ = 88

Ex. 2: Act I, Introduction.

order needs to be restored. In Schiller, and possibly in Rossini too, this progression carries with it a clear anti-revolutionary streak, but what is more significant for Rossini's work is the nature of Tell's character given such a role for the chorus. Musically, Tell has precious little to do. The closest he gets to an aria is the extended declamatory passage "Sois immobile," sung as he prepares his son in the apple scene. For the rest of the time he joins in ensembles as required, but even when in a soloist's role, such as in his Act I duet with Arnold, he is usually confined to a secondary plane. Yet Tell acts as the motivating force behind the entire plot. Looking at him standing apart from the happy peasants at the opening, lost in thought, it seems as though the way to interpret Tell might be found in a comment in *Le Globe* about Knowles's version of the play. Tell has a similarly active part in inciting rebellion in the English piece, and the reviewer pointed out the difference between Schiller's conception and Knowles's, claiming that in the latter Tell is a liberal from the 1820s, "a sentimental poet appealing to the rocks and mountains."<sup>50</sup>

Here may lie the key to Rossini's character: he is a man who has wandered into this fantasy of Swiss life from abroad, and who, with all the force of nostalgia (in the original sense of the word) for a place that has never really existed, tries to warn the other inhabitants of that world about what they stand to lose. In these terms, even Tell's music works rather in the manner of liberal propaganda, helping out other characters from below as needed while resisting the limelight except for short, strong statements of purpose. Moreover, such a reading can be developed in light of Rossini's prolonged study of French text-setting in preparation for the composition of this, his single original non-Italian opera. Shorn of all hints of Italianate lyricism, Tell's reliance on recitative marks him nationally as well as temperamentally; he is French, not Swiss, belonging firmly to the tradition of the *tragédie lyrique*. As such, the end of the opera is utopian in its celestial repetitions of the characteristic *ranz* turn, as Gerhard suggests, but only insofar as the whole enterprise has been utopian.<sup>51</sup> In other words, the piece does bear comparison with the 1830 Revolution, but only because, like that event, it offers a chance to travel

<sup>50</sup> *Le Globe*, 9 July 1828.

<sup>51</sup> Gerhard, *Urbanization of Opera*, 112–14.

Allegro ♩ = 112

pas. Mais quel bruit,

(Cors sur le théâtre)

*p* *f* *f*

mais quel bruit, Des ty-rans qu'a vo-mi l'Al-le-ma-gne

le cor son-ne sur la mon-ta-gne!

*f* *p* *f* *p*

The musical score is written in 8/8 time with a key signature of two flats (B-flat and E-flat). It consists of six systems of music. The first system shows the vocal line with the lyrics 'pas. Mais quel bruit,' and the piano accompaniment starting with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The second system continues the vocal line with 'mais quel bruit, Des ty-rans qu'a vo-mi l'Al-le-ma-gne' and the piano accompaniment with dynamic markings *f*, *p*, and *f*. The third system has the vocal line 'le cor son-ne sur la mon-ta-gne!' and piano accompaniment with *p*, *f*, and *p* dynamics. The fourth system continues the piano accompaniment with *f* and *p* dynamics. The fifth system shows the piano accompaniment with a *f* dynamic. The sixth system concludes the piano accompaniment.

Ex. 3: Act I, Introduction.

Ex. 3: *cont.*

**Allegro**  
(4 cors en SOL sur le théâtre)

Ex. 4: Act I, Récitatif et Duo (Arnold-Guillaume).

back to 1789 (here the idealized 1789 available only in Switzerland), and to remake the events of that time successfully in a way that leads to the eternal happiness promised so frequently by the original revolutionaries.

Perhaps given this idealization, the description here should be less of utopia than of *Tell* (the work as much as the character) as an embodiment of the “Swiss illness” of nostalgia. During the Restoration and afterwards, graduating students from the Faculty of Medicine at the Sorbonne each published a brief thesis on a medical concern of their choice. Alongside dissertations on breastfeeding and rabies, rhinoplasty and epilepsy, one student per year produced an assessment of the symptoms and treatment of the nostalgic which together offer some intriguing conclusions. Reading the work of V.-M. Besse in 1828, for example, reveals that although the disease apparently disregards age, sex, class or nationality, it is found most frequently in young (liberal?) men who have moved from the country to the city and can be exacerbated by sudden changes of circumstance.<sup>52</sup> Other accounts go further, suggestively proposing that the effects of nostalgia include an inability to

<sup>52</sup> V.-M. Besse, *De la Nostalgie* (Paris, 1828). Other theses from successive years include those by P. Moreaud (1829) and H.-J.-M. Hyacinthe Musset (1830). For a magnificent history of the concept, see Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York, 2002). In relation to *Guillaume Tell*, see Gerhard, *Urbanization of Opera*, 114.

The musical score is for a choir of Swiss (Choeur de Suisses) and piano accompaniment. It is in 8/8 time. The first system shows the choir entering with the lyrics "En-fants de la na-tu-re la" in a strong dynamic (*sf*). The piano accompaniment is marked *ff*. The second system continues the choir's part with the lyrics "sim-ple ha-bit de bu-re". The piano accompaniment continues with a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes.

Ex. 5: Act I, Choeur dansé.

distinguish between real events and imaginary, and also between past and present time. Between past and future too, it is tempting to add, and a better description of the 1820 generation would be hard to imagine; boys who had left their provincial homes behind for a life in ever-changing Paris; honorary Swiss who saw in their imaginary homeland the liberty that they hoped for in an idealized world separate from the brutal realities of urban life.

My second reading remains closely tied to this nostalgic condition manifested as a quest for revolutionary homecoming. The Restoration belief in constant progress was always at war with an irresistibly strong pull backwards. At one level, a constant aesthetic demand for variety, for the new, is most easily read as a symptom of pathological boredom (or perhaps nostalgic ennui) in a leisured society, flitting from one fad to the next. But the depiction (in the *Revue de Paris*) of a war between Rossini and French music as “vitality” pitted against “convention” (another figuring of the Romantic/Classic, new/old, left/right debate) can also be seen in terms of different conceptions of historical time. Reinhart Koselleck has explored

All<sup>o</sup>, vivace ♩ = 120

(31 measures omitted)

Chœur de chasseurs

Quelle sauvage harmonie au  
 son des cors semarie

Ex. 6: Act II, Chœur.

the new currency of the concepts of acceleration and retardation in the eighteenth century as ways to comprehend temporality. According to his model, “acceleration, initially perceived in terms of an apocalyptic expectation of temporal abbreviation heralding the Last Judgment, transformed itself – . . . from the mid-eighteenth century – into a concept of hope.”<sup>53</sup> Such a positive figuring of accelerated time, an enjoyment of constant flux that created an “anticipation of a future both desired and to be quickened,” became concrete in the years following 1789.

It is illuminating to look for these same temporal categories behind the constant craving for novelty and the search for cultural self-understanding in Restoration Paris. But their application is far from simple, since the two categories can become confusingly intermingled, and can stray from their political affiliations, depending on the situation. At its most straightforward, the boredom of Restoration life for the young, familiar from Vigny’s *Servitude et grandeur militaires* (where the contrast is to Napoleonic glory) or Stendhal’s *Armance*, is clearly contrasted with the desire for something new, be it diverting conversation (as in the memoirs of Etienne-Jean Delécluze), exciting German symphonies and English theatre (for Hector Berlioz faced with Beethoven or Harriet Smithson) or the building of barricades and popular uprising (Dumas *père* taking to the streets in 1830 armed with pistols). But the search for escape from the retarded time of daily life could take other forms. One of these was History, the discovery of worlds full of as much action as could be desired, colored with the appealing hues of otherness. Moreover, the turn to History, in books, paintings, music (Fétis’s first historical concerts took place in 1828) and on stage brought with it the didactic intent familiar from the writings of Vitet, a quest for understanding of the mysterious process of historical development that would lead to the reclaiming of accelerated time.

*Guillaume Tell* in part fulfilled this desire very well, offering a plot that progressed from the absolute stasis of rustic bliss through a series of increasingly dramatic events culminating in the famous apple scene, popular uprising, and victory. As with *Le Siège de Corinthe*, in which humanitarian concerns for the fate of the Greeks against the Turks were swept aside by the narrative drive towards the mass suicide that ends the work, the reign of peace ushered in at the end of *Tell* seems in this model less important than the thrill of the revolution itself. As to whether this makes *Tell* a revolutionary work or not, the piece could offer one way to experience a dramatic drive towards a catastrophic increase of action, while Habeneck’s performances of Beethoven’s symphonies could be seen as another, and going out onto the streets to man the barricades a third. Both Rossini and Beethoven could thereby satisfy the same temporal needs for heroic narratives played out in aesthetic form, or, put another way, they are each quite as likely to have appealed to the young revolutionary; a fact that remains surprising to our images of the two composers today.

By shifting the consideration of lived experience in this way away from some rather vague assessment of audience “mood” or the likelihood of direct causal

<sup>53</sup> Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, trans. Keith Tribe (Cambridge, MA, 1985), 36–7.

action between art and life, I do not wish to suggest that Rossini's *Tell* is especially exceptional. What seems striking about the work, however, is its articulation of the co-existent yet diametrically opposed models of temporality that underpin the period: between utopian stasis and revolt, acceleration and retardation, dynamism and stagnation. Put more precisely, in its musical unfolding *Tell* embodies the complex attitude of the Restoration towards the unsuccessfully repressed first revolution, by illuminating the retrogressive (nostalgic) aspect within every desire for cataclysmic progress; moving forward, but towards a past revolution that by the 1820s was both historical and imaginary, action-packed and static. And indeed, seen through the prism of the 1790s, the stasis of the initial choruses cannot so easily be dismissed, since such inertia has its own history beyond the simple post-Rousseauian idealization of pastoral life. In terms of temporal structuring, the opening of the opera before any action takes place, cycling through different sources of happiness (family, marriage, scenery, weather, etc.) evokes nothing so much as the revolutionary festival, with its stage-managed enactment of the eternal revolutionary present.<sup>54</sup> Furthermore, the peasants' apparent refusal to acknowledge the danger *Tell* perceives acts as the kind of denial regularly practiced throughout the revolution, in which the festivals became more peace-loving as the events which they tried to conceal became more bloody. In consequence, the beginning and end of Rossini's opera, while still utopian (and here I slip from the temporal to the spatial), could be seen to represent not a progression but a kind of curtain, drawn aside to reveal the revolution always just behind, and successfully but hurriedly drawn back at the end to distract from pressing doubts about the final outcome of the events, in spite of Gesler's death.

And the audience? As is clear from the range of interpretations offered by contemporary reviews, the audience at the première could take what they wished from this outcome, turning back to their other preoccupations and thinking, according to temperament, that revolution had triumphed, that revolution had at no point occurred (the position of the *Gazette* critic the following day), or, perhaps more likely, that they would be lucky to get home before midnight, and that it looked like it might be about to rain.

### Epilogue: On weather forecasting

I began by emphasizing the separation of simultaneous events; I have reached a point where that separation appears at once impossible and inescapable, the experience of a complex work fragmented through the unknowable reactions of each original audience member. The lost response of contemporary audiences is one of the familiar voids in any reception history, but in the case of *Guillaume Tell*, alongside all the newspaper reviews, there does exist a single, precious description of the August première remarkable in bringing together vividly two of the three

<sup>54</sup> For an elaboration of the idea of the revolutionary present, see Mona Ozouf, *Festivals and the French Revolution*, trans. Alan Sheridan (Cambridge, MA, 1988), 158–96. Interestingly, Ozouf also proposes that one of the models for the revolutionary festivals came from an idealized view of Switzerland already communicated by Rousseau in the 1760s.

stories with which I began. When Marie d'Agoult published her memoirs in 1877, she recalled watching the first performance of *Tell* seated in a box next to Madame du Cayla, former mistress and political confidante to the late Louis XVIII, who had ruled from 1815 to 1824.<sup>55</sup> During an *entr'acte*, as Marie sought to discuss the merits of Rossini's music, the countess interrupted her with the "calamitous" news of the prince de Polignac's arrival in Paris. Shortly afterwards she got up to leave, and bending down to the young Marie grasped her hand forcefully, whispering ominously "Madame d'Agoult, *I'm scared*," while looking at her "in a way that made me scared as well." Although until then d'Agoult's only impression of Polignac had been of a pleasant and kindly man, the obvious discomfiture of the countess made a deep impression on her, and in later years the memory of Madame du Cayla's distress, "her cheeks blanched beneath her make-up, her agitated breast that made her jewelry glint, her feverish grip, her shining eyes" all became "intimately linked in my head with the chords of *Guillaume Tell* and with the first premonitions of the revolution that would explode a year later."

It is a resonant tale, but in contradiction to my revolutionary readings of *Tell*, the work here might seem to retreat once more to the position of being revolutionary only by association, the whole piece no more than picturesque backdrop to the real life of political intrigue carried on in the boxes and corridors of the Salle Le Peletier. News of Polignac's arrival is far too important to allow for concentration on a mere opera, Madame du Cayla's anxiety disturbs other members of the box, and she leaves before the end. In the absence of any other individual accounts of the première, the received meanings of the work itself therefore remain as indistinct as before, submerged beneath the waters of unknowable contingency. Yet in returning to the crowds at the *Tell* première as we left them, debouching onto the steps of the opera house after the performance, looking up at the sky in search of clues about the changeable August weather, we should not forget the end of the opera that they have been watching only a few minutes before. The opera, too, ends with the people gazing upwards at a change in the weather, as the storm clears and the sun breaks through. It does not take any great knowledge of the opera, in fact, to realize the overwhelming part that the weather plays in the unfolding plot of the entire work from the first line ("Quel jour serein le ciel présage") to the last ("Liberté, redescends des cieux").<sup>56</sup>

I draw attention to this imagined connection between the audience at the première and the fictitious Swiss population on stage not to insist on its importance. Indeed, at first, it seems to re-emphasize the lack of integration between stage and life, between the operatic sphere with its blindingly evident symbolic alternation between stormy oppression and the sunshine of liberty, and the incommensurable reality of an overcast August night. But by setting the sunny scene at the end of the opera against its documented meteorological counterpart, the opposition between the two spheres of opera and Paris, symbol and reality, becomes in its turn

<sup>55</sup> Daniel Stern [Marie d'Agoult], *Mes Souvenirs, 1806–1833* (Paris, 1877), 317–18.

<sup>56</sup> On the importance of the weather in *Guillaume Tell*, see Cormac Newark, "Staging Grand Opéra: History and the Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Paris," D.Phil. diss. (University of Oxford, 1999), 87–94.

confused. As in d'Agoult's narrative, the intermingling of symbolism and reality cannot easily be disentangled. And regardless of the specific connection between revolution on stage and revolution in the streets, what her story (symbolically) shows so well is that there was no reality for *Guillaume Tell* aside from the political situation, or aside from Rossini's position in France, or indeed aside from the weather outside the opera house. All spill into each other, influencing the narratives that are constructed both at the time and since. Opera in the 1820s, and Rossini's *Guillaume Tell* in particular, is thereby profoundly political; political not in a directly causal way, or a way that can be conclusively revealed by the discovery of the correct documents or contemporary accounts, but political in line with Stendhal's contention that "it is no longer possible . . . to study the practices of a nation without falling into politics."<sup>57</sup> Another Restoration idea to end, then, that once again points towards the importance of historical detail. Through attention to these details we can avoid the Restoration's own greatest trap of imagining only the history that it wanted to find, while clinging to its greatest gift: history as creative act, history that can serve as a means for self-discovery.

<sup>57</sup> Stendhal, *Rome, Naples et Florence en 1817* (Paris, 1968), 139.