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Giambattista Velluti in London (1825-1829): literary constructions of the last operatic castrato

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BOSTON UNIVERSITY
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

Dissertation

**GIAMBATTISTA VELLUTI IN LONDON (1825–1829):
LITERARY CONSTRUCTIONS OF THE LAST OPERATIC CASTRATO**

by

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Boston University Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, 2017

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ABSTRACT

This work is concerned primarily with the five seasons the castrato soprano, Giovanni Battista Velluti spent in London between 1825 and 1829. This time-place is unique in operatic history insofar as it sees the meeting of the new, exhaustively detailed, descriptive musical-critical journalism that emerged in the nineteenth century as it encountered the last operatic castrato in the last decade of his public performing career.

Beginning with a historiographical overview of writings about the castrati, spanning from the early eighteenth century to the present day, the introduction establishes the methodological and thematic placement of this dissertation. Chapter 1 details the events of the last fifteen years of Velluti's career. These almost exactly overlap the period of his presence in English periodicals and the focus of the next chapter, the late, English, literary Romantic. The Romantics were deeply interested in music and were the principal intellectual creators of the music critical style that arose in the 1820s. Their cognition will be explored to the extent it can found utilized in writing about the voice, the otherness of disability and horror and fear of the other intruding upon the personal space of the self.

Chapters 3 and 4 will proceed from literarily expressed cognitive understanding to the operatic voice of the 1820s: not only the castrato, but female singers, tenors and countertenors. While chapter 4 establishes the manner in which these voices functioned in their various, clearly audible registers, chapter 5 will then explore the meanings that each of these registers conveyed, especially regarding perceived gender and disability. These meanings are reinforced by excerpts of poetry and prose, fact and fiction, from England and the Continent.

Chapter 5 examines the two ornamental styles of Velluti, as they survive in published and manuscript sources from the 1810s and 1820s, comparing them to other singers of his time and reading them as literary texts. Velluti's highly literary rather than purely melodic ornamentation lends itself particularly to this cross-disciplinary approach. The work concludes with a short chapter concerning the end of Velluti's life and the last two castrati, one undoubted, one dubious, to appear on the English concert stage.

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List of Abbreviations

AMZ	Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung
D-DI	Dresden, Sächsische Landesbibliothek, Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek
D-Mbs	Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek
E-Mn	Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional de España
I-BC	Bologna, Museo internazionale e biblioteca della musica di Bologna
I-BEc	Belluno, Biblioteca civica di Belluno
I-PA	Parma, Regionale biblioteca palatina di Parma
NMM&LJ	New Monthly Magazine and Literary Journal
QMMR	Quarterly Musical Magazine and Review

Editorial Notes

When journals or other periodicals have been used that were published at the end of each year bound together in book form, the journal will be cited as a book with its page number and year given rather than the date the article or item appeared. If the date itself is important, however, it will be noted. As these journals very rarely changed publishing houses from year to year, the publishing information will generally be given only for the first appearance in each chapter.

As far as practicable, the original orthography in all citations and quotes has been retained including italics, archaic spellings and the rhetorical comma.

The Helmholtz system for note names will be used, to wit: CC, C, c, c', (middle C) c" and c''' (soprano high C). Vocal terminology will, as much as possible, be that of Velluti's own time, rather than that of modern vocal pedagogy.

Regarding editions of primary sources: whenever possible I have used printings proximal to the time of Velluti's London seasons.

Permission to use Illustrations

The 'Byronic' portrait of Velluti in the possession of the Herzog August Bibliothek in Wolfenbüttel, Germany has been used with permission.

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The originals for the role portrait of Karl Blumenfeld as Die falsche Catalani and the role portrait of Velluti as Armando d'Orville, printed in *The Parthenon*, are both in the possession of the author. All rights to the re-use of these images are reserved.

The caricature of Velluti and the Female Choristers is from the private collection of David Glass and is used with permission. All rights to the re-use of this image are reserved.

Introduction and a Brief Historiography of Castrato Scholarship.

Giovanni Battista [Giambattista] Velluti was born in Montolmo (between 1851 and 1931 Pàusula and since then Corridonia), a small town near Ancona in the Papal States on 27 January 1780.¹ The son of Xaverio and Lucia Stracciavelluti bore the longer last name and additional middle names Alexander Secundus only during his childhood. The next few sentences are the standard, accepted Velluti history. He was originally destined for military service, but was mistakenly castrated by a confused doctor.² His parents apparently decided to make the best of it, having him educated in music, at first in nearby Montolmo and from 1795 with Stanislao Mattei in Bologna. Possibly in an effort to shield him from the revolutionary fever sweeping Italy along with the Napoleonic invasion, he was sent to the Abate Calpi of Ravenna.³

¹ Paolo Peretti, "Il <<Musico>> e l'usignolo, omaggio a Velluti, ma non solo," *Studio Picena* 74 (2011): 293, fn. 11, 297-298. Almost all Italian sources give his birth as 1780, including the celebratory, 1980 bicentennial festschrift, authored by Ermanno Illuminati with essays by many others, including Rudolfo Celletti. This is the date carved on his tomb in Sambruson Dolo, overseen by his nephew and heir Luigi Velluti who, as both Peretti and the singer's great, great, great grand nephew Federico Velluti (in an email to me) observed, should be trusted to have known his uncle's true birthdate. Most Ultramontane sources give his birth year as 1781, but I believe that this date can almost certainly be discarded as an error. I gratefully thank Professor Peretti for sending me his extremely useful and informative article. See also, Ermanno Illuminati et al., Festschrift: *Il centenario della nascita del cantate Giovan [sic] Battista Velluti* (Corridonia: Il Città di Corridonia, 1980): 13-19. Unless otherwise noted, all translations in this work from German, French and Italian into English are my own.

² Cornelio Parolari, "Giambattista Velluti, ultimo dei sopranisti sulle liriche scene," *Rivista Musicale Italiana* 39 (1932): 263-298. Illuminati, 15. F. Velluti, who has graciously provided me with a familial viewpoint on G. B. Velluti, finds this account extremely unlikely, and notes that G. B. Velluti intensely disliked what F. Velluti calls "the Corridonia family." F. Velluti infers the worst from this, namely, that the castration was intentional and for the purposes of creating a *musico*.

³ Illuminati, 15. This is the standard story. However, Peretti's account corrects many of these errors. See next footnote.

Most modern sources claim Velluti's solo debut came in 1800 in the provincial Teatro Comunale di Forlì.⁴ In the Septuagesima season of 1799, however, Velluti sang along with the tenor Giovanni David in the first performance of Giuseppe Nicolini's oratorio *La Passione di Gesù Cristo* in Naples.⁵ Moreover, Paolo Peretti's research into the beginning of Velluti's performing life reveals that he sang as early as 1797 in Tolentino in Nicolò Zingarelli's oratorios *Figliuolo Prodigio* and *Giuseppe in Egitto*.⁶ The teenager was engaged from 1798 to 1800 at the cathedral of Jesi, appearing in the same town for the entire 1798 Carnival opera season *en travestie*.⁷ Velluti's career blossomed, and over the next twenty-five years he sang in almost every important Italian theater as well as travelling to Vienna and Munich.⁸ Until the 1820s Velluti's biography and reception were little different than those of the late eighteenth-century castrati whose lives and times have been extensively researched in castrato scholarship of the past ninety years. This would change, however, in the wake of meetings with Giacomo Meyerbeer in 1818 and Lord and Lady Burghersh in 1822. The ensuing chain of events led directly to his London

⁴ Illuminati, 15. Peretti has shown this to be false, and that these incorrect dates likely stem from a continual reiteration of the short entry on Velluti in François-Joseph Fétis, *Biographie Universelle des Musiciens et Bibliographie Général de la Musique* Vol. 8 (Paris: Didot Frères & Fils, 1866) 316.

⁵ Gaetano Barbieri and Giulio Ferrario, *I Teatri Giornale Drammatico Musicale e Coreografico* Vol. 3 (Milan: Gaspere Truffi, 1829): 355. Pietro Metastasio wrote this libretto.

⁶ Peretti, 306.

⁷ Ibid., 309-312, 324, fig. 6. Velluti is first on the season's playbill, listed as "prima buffa assoluta" for the farces *Lo spazzacamino principe* and *Le confusioni della soglianza ossia Li due gobbi* by Portogallo (Marcos António Portugal) and *La capricciosa corretta* by Giovanni Battista Martini.

⁸ Illuminati, 20-22.

sojourns of 1825–29 when he was the last castrato to appear at the King's Theater.

London in the middle of the 1820s had lost the three leading poets of the younger, second-generation literary Romantics: John Keats (d. 1821), Percy Bysshe Shelley (d. 1822) and George Gordon, Lord Byron (d. 1824). Nevertheless, the literary, journalistic world was populated as never before by essayists of literary excellence, foremost among them Leigh Hunt, friend, at times, of all three of the aforementioned poets and a leader of this literary coterie. The romantic ideals of this second generation are propounded in letters, diaries, journals, newspapers and books by Hunt, Mary Shelley, William Hazlitt, Charles and Mary Lamb as well as Thomas Moore, Thomas Medwin, William Ayrton, William Barnes and Richard Mackenzie Bacon. Their ideals were sorely tested by Velluti, the first castrato to have been heard in London in a quarter century.

Velluti's appearance caused an explosion of descriptive writing, grappling with a person who represented an aristocratic class of eighteenth-century decadence that most of these writers cordially despised, yet also someone whose artistry, musicality and humanity clamored for acknowledgement. These literati apparently felt keenly the responsibility to describe Velluti, his voice and his art. After the retirement of Girolamo Crescentini in 1812 and Filippo Sassaroli's retreat into the church in the early 1820s, Velluti was the last operatic castrato in Europe. Descriptions of his voice, his person, his singing and his

manner constitute the most exact, most complete recording of eye and earwitness accounts, both in prose and poetry, that exist for a castrato singer.

This brings me to my overarching theoretical framework. In the three-chapter arc that occupies the center of the dissertation, I first explore the English literary world of Velluti's late career, its methods and tropes, transition to the contemporaneous technical understanding of the singing voice and then combine the two in explicating the way the singing voice—not only Velluti's but other voice types as well—was received, understood and described by the surrounding literary culture. Using these reactions to Velluti I hope to uncover as much about literary Romantic cognition concerning Otherness, disability, music, gender, horror and the *frisson* of arousal or abjection inherent in the multifaceted singing voice, as I hope to uncover information about the castrato himself. When read as a multi-authored totality, this interlocking, often contradictory web of description approaches a kind of half-fictionalized musical London, with Velluti at its center. He looms at times like a specter in the fog while at other times he seems a harmless bachelor uncle. Despite his death four years earlier, John Keats's *Negative Capability*, which I believe to have been a shared value, especially among his close circle as it is evident in so much of this era's writing, is perhaps the guiding tenet of my methodology. "At once it struck me, what quality went to form a Man of Achievement, especially in literature, and which Shakespeare possessed so enormously—I mean Negative Capability, that is when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable

reaching after fact and reason."⁹ I will not then reach for a decisive synthesis of conflicting ideas if I believe the evidence does not support it. Velluti is paradoxical. His reception is paradoxical. I will explore these paradoxes, rather than attempt, necessarily, to resolve them.

There is no detailed account of Velluti's movements in the most momentous decade, the 1820s, of his career. For chapter one I will use a wide array of primary sources to create this timeline. Included are excerpts of pivotal reviews, essays, letters and poems praising, defending and mocking him. There are some surprises that this in-depth survey of primarily English publications has produced including appearances at the King's Theater in Rossini's *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* and *Semiramide*.¹⁰ The pseudonymous META, author in 1825 and 1826 of a series of rhapsodic poems to Velluti is introduced and a possible identity is proposed. Velluti's preoccupation with the aristocracy and the importance of his private singing career at their parties was crucial to his long-term success.

Chapter 2 maps the cognitive realities of the literary world of London as it intersected with Velluti. The chapter begins with the salons, both modest and grand, aristocratic and expensive. It telescopes outward to the literary portrayal

⁹ John Keats, "Letter to his Brothers, Sunday, December 21, 1817," *The Norton Anthology of English Literature: The Romantic Period*, Vol. D, ed. Stephen Greenblatt (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2006): 942. This philosophical stance will be situated more clearly within the context of this work in the central arch of chapters 2 through 4. As the literary nature of the texts cited is central to this work, I will be using as much as possible the orthography of the originals, including non-standard spelling, reproducing original footnotes where applicable and retaining a comma usage that may strike modern readers as exuberant.

¹⁰ Ferdinand Beidenfeld, *Die Komische Oper der Italiener, der Franzosen und der Deutschen: ein flüchtiger Blick in die Welt, wie sie war und ist* (Leipzig: Weigel, 1848): 221. In Dresden, Filippo Sassaroli also appeared in a Rossini opera outside of the generally known castrato repertoire: *Tancredi*. His efforts were unsuccessful, due largely to the inappropriately low tessitura of the part (he was a high soprano).

of London society as it relates to music and singing. The multifaceted realities of writers like Keats, De Quincey and Hunt are explored as their fictionalized London is explicated. The literary modus in the 1820s in both serious and comedic writing was to employ allusions – "replete literature," per Roland Barthes – to achieve multiple layers of meaning. The intertextuality of this writing, linking classical education, writings of the preceding century and the writings of their own peers, competes in the attempt to capture Velluti's likeness in prose. Sources range from Juvenal and Ovid to *Frankenstein* and *The Vampyre*. Literary tropes of nearness, of bodies damaged or unnatural, madness and delirium and above all, of pain, infect some of the Velluti commentary with a sense of Gothic horror barely contained.

The final section adds a sense of "mutability," a fascination general among the Romantics and described by Percy Bysshe Shelley in 1814.¹¹ The pun saw erudite books and essays dedicated to it and was utilized frequently to hint things about Velluti too libelous to be said directly. Juxtapositional methods created paronomastic commentary, written and visual, and convey multiplicative meanings that placed Velluti in insulting proximity to unlikely people, places and things.

Chapter 3 focuses directly on voice itself, defining "normal" vocalism before narrowing in on the voice of the castrato. Proceeding from Pier Francesco

¹¹ Percy Bysshe Shelley, "Mutability," *English Literature: The Romantic Period*, 744, ll 13-16 "It is the same!—For, be it joy or sorrow,/The path of its departure still is free: Man's yesterday may ne'er be like his morrow;/Nought may endure but Mutability."

Tosi's description of the two primary registers of the voice, chest voice and falsetto, I describe the two-register Italian concept of the voice as it existed at the beginning of the nineteenth century in both theoretical treatises and in their often contradictory counterpart, journalism of the 1820s with their simile-laden descriptions of contemporary voices. The chest and the falsetto voices at this point in history were usually unintegrated except in the short overlap where they met. The emerging three-register school heard in the voices of Velluti and some female singers will be explored using the same approach.

The middle of this chapter is devoted to reconstructing Velluti's voice in as detailed a manner as possible. Its registers, qualities and range are defined partially through surviving comparisons to other singers. His ornamentation as well as descriptions of his singing both in private and in public (the difference was considerable) are also examined. The other aural similes Vellutian criticism offers modern scholarship are bells, animal sounds, penny trumpets and the voices of boys, women, tenors, baritones and, I believe uniquely in the history of vocal criticism, a contemporaneous comparison between the sound of the castrato and that of the falsetto countertenor.

Chapter 4 combines the technical minutiae of voices from the previous chapter and some of the literary methods and tropes of chapter 2 to ascertain how voices were perceived both in fictional and "factual" writing. The world perceived and described by many romantic writers was not necessarily the world as it actually was, as Leigh Hunt freely admitted. "The mind hardly separates

truth from fiction...Fiction is Truth in another shape, and gives as close embraces."¹² Using excerpts from Fanny Burney and Tobias Smollett's works as a framing reference for the late eighteenth century, I first explore modern writers on the disjunct, interrupted or damaged voice. From the eighteenth century, the voice has been heard as having sexual *puissance* as an aspect of its aural projection, or penetration, into a space. Touching upon various writers who hint at this, I then compare Théophile Gauthier's highly sexualized 1849 poem "Contralto" about the gendered performance(s) of the two-registered voice to Thomas Medwin's 1834 *The Angler in Wales*. This features a man who, like Gauthier, is equally delighted, ravished through the agency of both the feminine falsetto and the masculine chest voice in a female singer. I explore the similarly ambiguous sexuality in Balzac's title character in *Sarrasine* and his reactions to the erotically intoxicating voice of the castrato *en travestie*, La Zambinella.

Moving from fictional characters to factual ones, I explore the critical reaction to Velluti's aging voice in the 1820s. With his three vocal registers he projected masculinity and femininity as well as a beguiling, pellucid neutrality in his middle register. When he sang loudly, however, clarity fled and the middle register cracked and failed. Here is the aspect of the erotic boy, only peripherally associated with Velluti himself but much more explicit in the figure of Zambinella. The boy as a middle *Gestalt*, neither fully male nor really female, is also seen in

¹² Leigh Hunt, *Lord Byron and some of his Contemporaries* (London: Henry Colburn, 1828): 474-475.

the youthful career of the falsettist and female impersonator Karl Blumenfeld. As he aged his travesty lost its charm, for the illusion of gender neutrality had fled.

Returning to modern writers, I establish the broken, damaged or decayed voice as a vector of contagion, primarily through the final recordings of Klaus Nomi in the early 1980s. Sickness and suffering in the voice leads to John Keats, trained in medicine, a tubercular and a writer of the voice as it communicates contagion. From Keats's poetry as a baseline, I explore the Romantic voice as it communicates disease, despair and decay, culminating in the voices of the spirits in Charles Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*. Both modern and nineteenth-century as well as factual and fictional lenses are applied to Velluti's discontinuous voice. His voice was aging and, due to a chronic cough, he often was unable to sing through his registers without cracking, going out of tune or squawking like a peacock. This leads to one of my central theses. When Velluti's sick and damaged voice traversed the middle ground between the male chest voice and the female head voice, it failed, his voice broke. The illusion of perfection, otherworldliness, and perpetual boyhood was destroyed. Hunt's "Velluti to his Revilers" starts with a "second baptism, bloody and profane." Knowledge of Velluti's childhood surgery preconditioned (mostly male) listeners to hear castration, but crucially I believe, only when the voice failed, sounding pained. As to hear the voice was to feel it, to hear castration was to feel castration.

Chapter 5 is mostly a departure from the literary and addresses Velluti's own thoughts as expressed in his ornamented arias, songs and cantatas. Velluti was a famously creative writer of ornamentation. I use three examples: from the mid 1810s his *Otto variazioni sul tema "Nel cor più non mi sento"*; from the mid 1820s, the opening recitativo and aria from Lord Burghersh's *L'amor timido*; and from the 1820s and from 1847 the ornamented versions of the *Romanza* from Francesco Morlacchi's *Tebaldo e Isolina*. I examine the primary aspects of his ornamentation and divide it into an early and a late period, a division to which he hints himself in an 1823 letter to Meyerbeer. I use his works from before and after this point to determine what was meant by his "double effect—little, but good."¹³ The last analyzed piece, *L'amor timido*, was re-published and dramatically transformed by the inclusion of Velluti's ornaments. These ornaments I class into three distinct *affects*, some of which impinge upon parallel literary as well as musical topoi of accreted meanings. With the end of this chapter I arrive at another of my principal arguments; namely, that while Velluti may have been seen as an artifact of a vanished age, his ornamentational art was a bold experiment in stacking meanings, both harmonic and textual.

The short final chapter first recounts Velluti's rapid vanishing from European consciousness once he left the stage in 1833. His withdrawal from public life is, with a few exceptions, only chronicled in Cornelio Parolari's 1932, anecdote-filled article about the singer. His trip to Paris and alleged advice to

¹³ Giacomo Meyerbeer, *Briefwechsel und Tagebücher* Vol. I, ed. Heinz Becker and Gudrun Becker (Berlin: Verlag Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1959): 545-546.

Manuel Garcia on the contents of the famous 1847 singing treatise are assessed. I measure the received history, especially of Velluti's final years, against the familial information that Federico Velluti, many times great-grand nephew of the singer and himself an historian, has kindly provided to me.

A Brief Historiography of Castrato Studies

The explosion of castrato studies in the past two decades follows a period that stretched from first-hand accounts of castrati's heyday in the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth centuries and the advent of scholarly writing on the subject in the 1920s. The period of modern scholarship proceeds from these primary sources and a significant degree of intertextual self-reflection. I provide here a brief, largely chronological overview of the castrato literature especially relevant to the English focus of the present work.

Eyewitness/Earwitness Histories

Charles Ancillon's 1718 *Eunuchism Display'd*, though it originally appeared in 1707 as *Traité des Eunuques*, is more pertinent to this dissertation's English focus in its London edition.¹⁴ The frontispiece contains John Dryden's translation of Juvenal's Satire 6, "There are, who in soft Eunuchs place their Bliss,/And shun the Scrubbing of a bearded Kiss," doubly entangling this now-

¹⁴ Charles Ancillon, *Eunuchism Display'd* (London: E. Curll, 1718).

English document with the Romantic poets, Leigh Hunt chief among them, who revered Dryden and his time. This taxonomical study of the various eunuchs, both classical and contemporary is representative of the prevailing view of the castrati as foolish, sinful, somehow subhuman creatures that dominates many eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century polemics.

Pier Francesco Tosi's 1723 *Opinioni de' cantori antichi e moderni* is by one of the few castrati to have published a book-length treatise.¹⁵ Tosi's *Opinioni* became the foundation of vocal pedagogies for over a century. Johann Ernst Galliard translated Tosi into English as *Observations on the Florid Song; or, Sentiments on the Ancient and Modern Singers* in 1743.¹⁶ Galliard's footnotes too are an important musico-historical addition from someone who knew Tosi in his London period.¹⁷ In 1757, Johann Friedrich Agricola translated Tosi's work into German.¹⁸ The *Anleitung zur Singkunst* is considerably expanded and represents not only a third version of Tosi's original work, but is in its own right a significant treatise about Italian singing.¹⁹

A minor work of 1730, a scurrilous pamphlet published privately, probably in London, is the anonymous *The Plain Reasons for the Growth of Sodomy In*

¹⁵ Pier Francesco Tosi, *Opinioni de' cantori antichi e moderni* (Bologna: Lelio dall Volpe, 1723).

¹⁶ Pier Francesco Tosi, *Observations on the Florid Song; or Sentiments on the Ancient and Modern Singers* 2nd ed., ed. and trans. Johann Ernst Galliard (London: J. Wilcox, 1743).

¹⁷ Lawrence Bennett, *The Italian Cantata in Vienna* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013): 85-92, 117-118. Bennett examines Tosi as both court singer and composer, as well as his time in London as a teacher and a performer.

¹⁸ Johann Friedrich Agricola, *Anleitung zu Singkunst* (Berlin: George Ludewig Winter, 1757).

¹⁹ Johann Friedrich Agricola, *Introduction to the Art of Singing by Johann Friedrich Agricola*, ed. and trans. Julianne Baird (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). Baird's work is an invaluable comparison of Tosi's original and Agricola's emendations.

England.²⁰ This polemical diatribe is directed at effeminacy in men and, to a lesser degree, masculinity, or wantonness, in women. These are both attributed to Italian influences, especially in the opera, enervating English men and accustoming them to the human traffic in women and boys that this work attributes to the Roman, opera-going public. While neither a major work of scholarship or literature and only peripherally about the castrati, this is nevertheless an example of a likely ever-present, countervailing current in English society whose echoes would color some of the more virulent, xenophobic and (in a veiled manner) "homophobic" Velluti criticism in the 1820s.²¹

1776 saw not only the American Declaration of Independence, but Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations* and two competing music histories by John Hawkins and Charles Burney.²² Hawkins and Burney wrote extensively about the castrato, with Burney's account more sympathetic to singers and less critical of the castrati than Hawkins. Tied to Burney is Stendhal's 1817 *Rome, Naples et Florence*, republished the following year in English. Stendhal gently mocks Burney's importance to English musical knowledge in the early nineteenth

²⁰ *The Plain Reasons for the Growth of Sodomy in England* (London: A. Dodd, ca. 1730).

²¹ I use "homophobic," an admittedly modern term, as it is the clearest expression of this phenomenon. It is not, however, the most accurate. More accurate would be, as the writer of the aforementioned pamphlet explicitly states, an abhorrence of the "effeminization" of men.

²² Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (London: W. Strahan and T. Cadell, 1776). Charles Burney, *A General History of Music, from the Earliest Ages to the Present Period* (London, 1776-1789). John Hawkins, *A General History of the Science and Practice of Music* (London: T. Payne and Son, 1776). Also of importance are Burney's two travelogues published in the early 1770s. Charles Burney, *Music, Men and Manners in France and Italy 1770* (London: Eulenburg Books, 1974). This is a reprint of the original 1771 London edition. In 1772, it was republished in German in Hamburg. Charles Burney, *The Present State of Music in Germany, the Netherlands, and United Provinces* (London: T. Becket and Co., 1773). Though it does not get introduced until chapter 3, castrato soprano Giovanni Battista Mancini's vocal treatise, *Practical Reflections on the Figurative Art of Singing* was also published in 1776.

century.²³ Having just heard the castrati of the Sistine Chapel, he mocks his English neighbor's stolid reaction to a confusing, overwhelming experience. "Unhappily, however, these neighbors of mine were English tourists—folk for whom *fashion* is a most implacable master: they replied to my puzzlement by quoting passages of Burney."²⁴

In 1823 Stendhal published the earliest detailed account of Velluti's singing in *La Vie de Rossini*.²⁵ His self-admittedly imaginative retelling of the 1813 premiere of Rossini's *Aureliano in Palmyra* with Velluti singing Arsace quickly became the definitive account, rightly or wrongly, of the singing of Velluti. Briefly, in the first rehearsal, Velluti sang the famed cavatina in the second act (which would later become Rosina's "Una voce poco fa" in *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*) with few ornaments. Rossini was charmed. In the second rehearsal, Velluti added many more ornaments and Rossini was delighted. In the third rehearsal Velluti ornamented to the point that, while quite beautiful, the music was no longer recognizable as Rossini's and the composer was filled with consternation. He thereafter vowed (in Stendhal's reimagining of events) to write all the ornaments out, so that singers without Velluti's taste, musical intelligence and judgment would not be beguiled into following the castrato where they could not go.²⁶ This

²³ Stendhal (Henri-Marie Beyle), *Rome, Naples et Florence en 1817* (Paris: Delaunay and Pelicier, 1817). "Count de Stendhal," *Rome, Naples and Florence in 1817: sketches of the present state of Society, Manners, Arts, Literature, etc., in these celebrated cities* (London: Colburn, 1818).

²⁴ Stendhal, *Rome, Naples and Florence*, ed. and trans. Richard Coe (New York: John Calder Ltd., 1959): 450.

²⁵ Stendhal, *The Life of Rossini*, ed. and trans. Richard Coe (London: John Calder, 1989).

²⁶ *Ibid.* 136-143.

story was reprinted, almost always with absolute credulity, for most of the nineteenth century and was almost always included in accounts of Velluti and his art.

In 1828 Richard Edgcumbe, Earl of Mount Edgcumbe published his *Musical Reminiscences chiefly respecting the Italian Opera in England from the year 1773 to the present time*.²⁷ Mt. Edgcumbe's observations on singing include many of the last 'golden age' of the castrato, including Luigi Marchesi, Girolamo Crescentini, Venanzio Rauzzini, Giuseppe Millico, Giovanni Rubinelli and above all his beloved Gasparo Pacchiarotti. His encounter with Velluti provides scholars with a contextual continuity between that singer's technical abilities and over fifty years of Italian singing.

Honoré de Balzac's novella *Sarrasine*, published in 1831, while fictional, elucidates a very real perspective on the castrato at the end of the literary Romantic.²⁸ Over the course of the nineteenth century this became the enduring picture of the castrato, combining the worst, most immoral aspects of the castrato found both in classical sources as well as those of the eighteenth century. Though out of chronological order, the companion work to *Sarrasine* is Roland Barthes's *S/Z*.²⁹ Barthes describes the nature of "replete literature," the interlocking meanings of classical, referential writing that is the norm for nineteenth-century writing, but his deconstructionist approach does not

²⁷ Richard Edgcumbe, Lord Mount Edgcumbe (Second Earl of Mount Edgcumbe), *Musical Reminiscences chiefly respecting the Italian Opera in England from the year 1773 to the present time* (1828) (London: George Clarke, 1828).

²⁸ Honoré de Balzac, *Sarrasine*, trans. David Carter (London: Hesperus Classics, 2007).

²⁹ Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974).

investigate it. Though his work is of undeniable importance, it cannot be used to explain the classically replete writing surrounding Velluti in the 1820s.

Heinrich Steinmann's 1863 *Denkwürdigkeiten der Churfürstlichen u. Königlichen Hofmusik zu Dresden, im 18. und 19. Jahrhundert* gives one of the few contemporaneous accounts of the castrati in the Dresden court.³⁰ Steinmann graphically describes the powerful soprano of Filippo Sassaroli in the late 1810s and early 1820s. Though a prominent singer, lauded by Carl Maria v. Weber and Stendhal and just a few years older than Velluti, Sassaroli, though a major figure in early Romantic sacred music, disappeared without a trace in 1828 and remains something of a lacuna in castrato studies.³¹

François-Joseph Fétis, composer, music theorist and historian almost certainly heard soprano Girolamo Crescentini sing in Paris between 1806-1812. He may also have heard Velluti. His *Biographie Universelle des Musiciens* was published originally between 1833 and 1844, and reprinted in 1866.³² The short biographies of Crescentini and Velluti, seemingly using Fétis's own recollections, are, concerning Velluti, prone to factual errors, but were one of the primary sources for early twentieth-century scholarship.³³

³⁰ Heinrich Steinmann, *Denkwürdigkeiten der Churfürstlichen u. Königlichen Hofmusik zu Dresden, im 18. und 19. Jahrhundert* (Leipzig: H. Matthes, 1863).

³¹ "Sassaroli, Filippo," Website: *Carl Maria von Weber Gesamtausgabe*, Accessed August 10, 2016 @ <http://www.weber-gesamtausgabe.de/en/A001649.html>.

³² François-Joseph Fétis, *Biographie Universelle des Musiciens et Bibliographie Général de la Musique* (Paris: Didot Frères & Fils, 1866).

³³ As Paolo Peretti shows throughout "Musico," many of the oft-repeated mistakes regarding details about Velluti's career appear to stem from Fétis's errors.

Storytellers into Musicologists and Re-understanding the Past

One auditor of the last castrato wrote the first modern musicological account on the subject: Franz Haböck, whose *Die Kastraten und ihre Gesangkunst* was published posthumously in 1927.³⁴ Upon Haböck's sudden death in 1921, his wife Martina Haböck finished the book from his notes. This monumental work remains the parent of the ensuing 90 years of modern castrato scholarship. Haböck was a medical doctor, musicologist and voice teacher and, beginning with medical physiology, proceeds through cultural history, analyzes the eunuchoid voice, and provides a singing history of the castrati, including with his friendship with Alessandro Moreschi, the last castrato of the Sistine Chapel.³⁵ Unfortunately, probably as a result of Martina Haböck's rush to complete this work, the biography of Velluti is taken almost verbatim, without attribution, from Fétis's *Biographie Universelle*, including the errors.³⁶

Cornelio Parolari's 1932 "Giambattista Velluti: ultimo dei sopranisti sulle liriche scene," was written by a family friend who had access to the many personal effects and letters still at the Palazzo Velluti, near Venice.³⁷ It is the first significant, modern treatment of Velluti, but is mostly concerned with anecdotes about the singer's life and deals very little with his voice or his manner of singing.

³⁴ Franz Haböck, *Die Kastraten und ihre Gesangkunst* (Berlin: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1927).

³⁵ See *Alessandro Moreschi—The Last Castrato* (Opal CD 9823, 1993). Originally recorded in Rome in 1902 and 1904 by W. Sinkler Darby.

³⁶ Haböck, *Die Kastraten*, 493. Fétis, *Biographie Universelle*, 2nd edition, Vol. 8, 316. This is far from the only instance of unacknowledged borrowing in Haböck & Haböck.

³⁷ Parolari, 263-298. At the time of Parolari's article, this archive was conscientiously curated by Federico Velluti's Bavarian grandmother, Emilia Velluti Stadlbaur.

Parolari's article is the likely source for most of the stories of Velluti the amorous adventurer, made popular by Angus Heriot, a novelist and apparently self-educated historian who published *The Castrati in Opera* in 1956.³⁸ A youthful book completed while the writer was still in his twenties, it is both well written and salacious. It is, however, almost entirely lacking in scholarly documentation and cannot be used as a reliable source without outside corroboration. Heriot's centrality in the twentieth-century historiography of the castrato is undeniable, however, and he is still occasionally cited by scholars, though generally with the same, acknowledged frustration about substantiating his stories.³⁹

Henry Pleasants wrote *The Great Singers* in 1966 and revised it in 1981.⁴⁰ A work of popular rather than serious tone, it nevertheless is unusual in that Pleasants treats the castrati as an integral part of the so-called 'bel canto' tradition. Rodolfo Celletti's *Storia del Belcanto* was published in 1983 and is perhaps the first detailed attempt to reconstruct the castrato technique.⁴¹ Celletti's theories, however, seem to derive from his own experience as a voice teacher, and though he proceeds from the well-established two-register concept explicated first by Tosi and then by Mancini, he then posits, as he does for the

³⁸ Angus Heriot, *The Castrati in Opera* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1956). Drewey Gunn, "Angus Heriot," *Gay Novels of Britain, Ireland and the Commonwealth, 1881-1981: A Readers Guide* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Co., Inc., 2014): 110-111.

³⁹ Martha Feldman, *The Castrato: Reflections on Natures and Kinds* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015): 294, fn 33. Feldman only cites him to express the same frustrations with his work, and does not consider him a reliable source.

⁴⁰ Henry Pleasants, *The Great Singers from Jenny Lind and Caruso to Callas and Pavarotti* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1981).

⁴¹ Rudolfo Celletti, *A History of Belcanto* trans. Frederick Fuller (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991). Rudolfo Celletti, *Storia del Belcanto* (Fiesole: Discanto Edizioni, 1983).

early nineteenth-century tenor, the *false tone*—an historically unsupported theory of the pre-Garcian tenorial high voice.

Patrick Barbier's 1989 *Histoires des Castrats* is a popular work that unlike Heriot's is the product of fairly serious musicological research.⁴² However, the parent of the popular castrato genre must be the Anne Rice's 1982 *Cry to Heaven*.⁴³ Along with Hubert Ortkemper's 1993 *Engel wider Willen: der Welt der Kastraten* or Christine Wunnicke's 2010 *Die Nachtigall des Zaren*, these works function more as gateways to the world of the castrati than as serious, original contributions to the scholarly corpus of the historical castrato.⁴⁴

There are many PhD dissertations about castrati. Of these, Hans Fritz's 1994 work is noteworthy.⁴⁵ *Kastratengesang: Hormonelle, Konstitutionelle und Pädagogische Aspekte* mirrors the form of Franz Haböck with the medical aspects far more graphically explored. Fritz includes a number of paintings, etchings and photographs of both the various procedures of castration as well as adult eunuchs. Also in 1994 Joke Dame's chapter "Unveiled Voices: Sexual Difference and the Castrato" appeared in *Queering the Pitch*.⁴⁶ Dame is

⁴² Patrick Barbier, *Histoires des Castrats* (Paris: Édition Grasset & Fasquelle, 1989).

⁴³ Anne Rice, *Cry to Heaven* (New York: Knopf, 1982). The 1994 French film *Farinelli*, directed by Gérard Corbiau, is not an historically serious attempt to recreate the art of the castrato.

⁴⁴ Hubert Ortkemper, *Engel wider Willen: Die Welt der Kastraten* (Berlin: Henschel Verlag, 1993). Christine Wunnicke, *Die Nachtigall des Zaren: Das Leben des Kastraten Filippo Balatri* (Munich: Claassen Verlag, 2010).

⁴⁵ Hans Fritz, *Kastratengesang: Hormonelle, Konstitutionelle und Pädagogische Aspekte* (Tutzing: Hans Schneider, 1994).

⁴⁶ Joke Dame, "Unveiled Voices: Sexual Difference and the Castrato," *Queering the Pitch*, ed. Phillip Brett (New York: Routledge, 1994): 139-153.

concerned with the sexual power of the castrato voice – not the body of the singer, but rather the phallic nature of the voice itself.

Todd Gilman's 1997 essay "The Italian (Castrato) in London" explores the London of the early eighteenth century partially through the eyes of pamphleteers like Ancillon or the author of "Plain Reasons."⁴⁷ Gilman's work situates the overlapping realities of the Italian and of the castrato within early eighteenth-century English polemics. Both are indicted in and are mutually accusatory of same-sex practices and "effeminacy." Gilman attempts to substantiate a generalized if not universal preference of castrati for men.

James Stark's 1999 *Bel canto: History of vocal pedagogy* attempts to quantify singing using a scientific method of analyzing the voice.⁴⁸ His attempts to understand the vocal revolution brought about by Manuel Garcia *fi*ls in the 1840s and 1850s bring a necessary clarity to the nature of the problem. His work is valuable in that it provides a sober, technical basis for the analysis of Garcia's aims and methods.

In 1997 Piotr Scholz published *Der Entmannte Eros*, re-released in 2001 as *Eunuchs and Castrati: a cultural history*.⁴⁹ Scholz is an orientalist and more concerned with showing the roles the eunuch has played in various cultures in

⁴⁷ Todd Gilman, "The Italian (Castrato) in London," *The Work of Opera: Genre, Nationhood, and Sexual Difference*, ed. Richard Dellamora and Daniel Fischlin (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997): 49-70.

⁴⁸ James Stark, *Bel canto: History of vocal pedagogy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999).

⁴⁹ Piotr Scholz, *Eunuchs and Castrati: a cultural history*, trans. John Broadwin and Shelley Frisch (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2001). Piotr Scholz, *Der entmannte Eros* (Dusseldorf: Artemis & Winkler, 1997).

world history. He starts with the quasi-divinity that was, in antiquity, associated with the eunuch; his discussion proceeds through ancient Greece and Rome, China, the early Christian church, the seraglio eunuchs of the Ottoman Empire, the strangely sexless, or emasculated medieval European heroes, only to end with the operatic castrati. His study is valuable when trying to understand the role of the eunuch played in the societies of the classical literature from which writers in the nineteenth centuries freely borrowed to create their own depictions and indictments of the castrato.

Departing from scholarly fascination about the sex lives of the castrati, Silke Leopold's 2000 chapter "'Not sex but Pitch' Kastraten als Liebhaber—einmal über den Gürtellinie betrachtet" addresses the castrato voice as an aural expression of gendered, erotic ambiguity.⁵⁰ In an overview of the history of the voice and its owners on the operatic stage, she sees the castrati as signifiers of the amorphous, two-sided nature of the male role in society: both as warrior and as utterer of "douceurs." She argues that, unlike on the preferred dramatic platforms of the bourgeoisie, the opera buffa and the straight theater, in the knowing, aristocratic, serious opera, the eroticized nature of political decisions, made at least as often in the bedroom as on the battlefield, was represented in the ambisexual voice of the castrato hero.

⁵⁰ Silke Leopold, "'Not sex but Pitch' Kastraten als Liebhaber—einmal über den Gürtellinie betrachtet," *Provokation und Tradition: Erfahrung mit der Alten Musik*, ed. Hans-Martin Linde and Regula Rapp (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 2000): 219-240.

James (J.Q.) Davies's "'Veluti in Speculum': the twilight of the castrato" is first in-depth, academically rigorous investigation into any aspect of Giovanni Battista Velluti, albeit focused on negative press reactions to the singer between 1825 and 1829.⁵¹ His view is that Velluti was an extension of the past wholly at odds with his 1820s London audiences.. Davies republished this article with a few, mostly cosmetic changes as the first chapter of his 2014 *Romantic Anatomies of Performance*.⁵²

Martha Feldman's 2007 *Opera and Sovereignty: Transforming Myths in Eighteenth-Century Italy* largely precedes her focus upon the castrato himself.⁵³ She nevertheless delves deeply into the concept of the castrato as a singing symbol of not just courtly intrigue, but of monarchical, stately puissance in the jumbled history of the eighteenth century. She extends her account to the end of the eighteenth century and the growing view of the castrato: not as the silly, effeminate nothing so common in literature throughout that century, but as a monstrous nothing – a threat to the rising concept of a simple, bifurcated, two-gender view of humanity. Nicholas Clapton's *Moreschi, The Last Castrato*, in its expanded, 2008 form, contains several theoretical essays by other authors concerning a possible physiological explanation of the castrato voice.⁵⁴

⁵¹ James Davies, "'Veluti in speculum': The twilight of the castrato," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 17 3 (November 2005): 271-301.

⁵² James Davies, *Romantic Anatomies of Performance* (London: University of California Press, Ltd., 2014): 13-40.

⁵³ Martha Feldman, *Opera and Sovereignty: Transforming Myths in Eighteenth-Century Italy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

⁵⁴ Nicholas Clapton, *Moreschi, The Last Castrato* (London: Haus Publishing, 2004).

Roger Freitas's 2009 biography of the seventeenth-century castrato singer, composer and diplomat Atto Melani, is notable for its findings about the nature of sexuality in the seventeenth century, especially with how the castrato was seen as fitting into a single-gender continuum that stretched from female to male, cold to hot.⁵⁵ Of considerable methodological interest for my work is Freitas's investigation of the castrato as a stand-in for the boy-as-Eros, Antinous, in contemporary literature, particularly poetry.

Gillen Wood's 2010 "Wordsworth castrato" does not address the Velluti phenomenon other than in passing, though Wood investigates Wordsworth's uneasy navigation of the new bi-gendered norms of the early romantic period through his little-known translations of poetry by Metastasio.⁵⁶ According to Wood, the Italian Metastasio is explicitly feminine. In the same year appeared John Griffiths's "The Music of the Castrato Lutenists at the Time of Caravaggio," investigating the castrati lute players using pictorial evidence of their music as a point of departure.⁵⁷

In 2011 three strikingly congruent, article-length works constituted significant musicological investigations into not just the castrati, but Velluti himself. All three use methodological approaches that I will to an extent adopt. Sieghart Döhring's "Giambattista Velluti und das Ende des Kastratengesangs in

⁵⁵ Roger Freitas, *Portrait of a Castrato: Politics, Patronage, and Music in the Life of the Atto Melani* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

⁵⁶ Gillen Wood, "Wordsworth castrato," *Romanticism and Music Culture in Britain, 1770-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010): 88-117.

⁵⁷ John Griffiths, "The Music of Castrato Lutenists at the Time of Caravaggio," in *La musica al tempo di Caravaggio*, ed. Stefania Macioce and Enrico De Pascale (Rome: Gangemi Editore, 2010): 87-103.

der Oper" and the chapter "The Revelatory Power of Giovanni Battista Velluti's Ornamentation as Composition" in Cindy Kim's doctoral dissertation concentrate on Velluti as he is revealed in the music he is believed to have sung.⁵⁸ Döhring's primary concern is fitting the castrato into musical scores. Kim takes a multiple-version look at the famous *scena ed aria* "Notte tremenda" and the *Romanza* and uses as her literary lens Stendhal's *Life of Rossini*. Paolo Peretti's "Il <<Musico>> e l'usignolo, omaggio a Velluti, ma non solo" is thus far the only musicologically rigorous investigation of Velluti's early career.⁵⁹

The trend of the past decade has been toward studies of individual singers. In 2011, Helen Berry published *The Castrato and his Wife*, an account of the marriage of the castrato Giusto Tenducci to Dorothea Maunsell, delving into the sexual capacity of the castrati.⁶⁰ Breaking this pattern somewhat and presaging Martha Feldman's more focused 2015 work, Corinna Herr's 2013 *Kastraten und Falsettisten in der Musikgeschichte* slightly disappoints, at least from the vantage point of the compendious treatment promised in the title. Rather, she delivers several focused case studies from the sixteenth through the early nineteenth centuries (briefly investigating Velluti) and seeks to attach this primarily castrato history to the performing history of the modern countertenor.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Sieghart Döhring, "Giambattista Velluti und das Ende des Kastratengesangs in der Oper" in *"Per ben vestir la virtuosa". Die Oper des 18. und frühen 19. Jahrhunderts in Spannungsfeld zwischen Komponisten und Sängern*, ed. Daniel Brandenburg and Thomas Seedorf (Schliengen: Edition Argus, 2011): 191-210. Cindy Kim, "Changing Meanings of Ornamentation in Nineteenth-Century Italian Opera" (PhD diss., Eastman School of Music, 2011): 61-111.

⁵⁹ Peretti, "Il <<Musico>>".

⁶⁰ Helen Berry, *The Castrato and his Wife* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

⁶¹ Corinna Herr, *Kastraten und Falsettisten in der Musikgeschichte* (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 2013).

Patricia Howard's 2014 *The Modern Castrato: Gaetano Guadagni and the Coming of a New Operatic Age* situates the career of Guadagni, first an alto, then a soprano, and finally an alto again, at the forefront of a new naturalism in opera.⁶² Though the migration of Guadagni's voice from fach to fach is addressed, it is seen through the eyes of a change in composed tessitura alone. One of the latest individual biographical studies is the 2014 doctoral dissertation of Anne Desler, "Il novello Orfeo' Farinelli: vocal profile, aesthetics, rhetoric."⁶³ While her principal thrust is uncovering the singer in literary texts either sung by him or written about him, the most pertinent foundational writing that applies to this work are her efforts to reconstruct Farinelli's voice using primarily literary sources.

Finally, and impinging upon the Romantic England of Velluti, Paul Rice contributed *Venanzio Rauzzini in Britain: Castrato, Composer and Cultural Leader* in 2015.⁶⁴ While this study begins with Rauzzini's early years in Italy, and his work with the teenaged Mozart, Rice studies Rauzzini's late, financially bedeviled life as a singing teacher and concert organizer in Bath. The xenophobic pressures he experienced from some elements of English society find their echo, in an amplified fashion, in the Velluti reaction a generation later.

⁶² Patricia Howard, *The Modern Castrato: Gaetano Guadagni and the Coming of a New Operatic Age* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

⁶³ Anne Desler, "Il novello Orfeo' Farinelli: vocal profile, aesthetics, rhetoric" (PhD Diss, University of Glasgow, 2014).

⁶⁴ Paul Rice, *Venanzio Rauzzini in Britain: Castrato, Composer, and Cultural Leader* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2015).

Martha Feldman's 2015 *The Castrato: Reflections on Natures and Kinds* represents a culmination of the last 90 years of castrato research.⁶⁵ Feldman's work bookends, with Haböck's, a century of inquiry. It is more interested in paradigmatic individuals than in anecdotes and thumbnail biographies. These are made to serve as signifiers for the genus. Feldman's work functions to construct a new castrato paradigm where the individual is a mirror held up to his particular time and place, reflecting as much or more of his surroundings than his autobiographical voice.

It is at this point that my own work is situated. Very few of Velluti's letters are available to scholars. The approximately fifty he wrote over a period of nearly a half-century to Giovanni Battista Perucchini were sold at auction in 1998 to an undisclosed buyer. Attempts to identify and contact them have been unsuccessful.⁶⁶ Velluti remains a bit of an enigma, only to be viewed through the astonishing array of written commentary about him, for him, against him and against his kind. A part of him also exists in the musical, vocal footprint he left behind in the few dozen sets of ornamentations, published and in manuscript. But it is his literary portrait, as captured by London's collective writerly genius in the 1820s—the apex of late Romantic aesthetic journalism—that is of the greatest value. It tells us, I believe, as much about itself as it does about the castrato it so vehemently observed.

⁶⁵ Cited *supra*, n. 39.

⁶⁶ Lot Description "Carte Perucchini," Website: *Christie's Auction House*, Accessed February 18, 2015 <http://www.christies.com/lotfinder/LotDetailsPrintable.aspx?intObjectID=1360003>.

Chapter One: Velluti's Late Career and London—A Timeline, 1817-1833

The phenomenal success of Giacomo Meyerbeer's *Il Crociato in Egitto* at Venice's Teatro La Fenice in 1824, with Velluti in the lead role of Armando d'Orville, was one of the primary motivating factors behind the singer's initial 1825 journey to London. Before this, his career and reception had differed little from that of the castrati of the late eighteenth century. Thus, the first quarter century of his career can be seen through the prism of the castrato scholarship outlined in chapter 1. His function as a living memory only emerged after he arrived in London in May 1825. Once there, he became the subject of an intense prosodic and poetic attention, both in public and in private. This scrutiny left him at the end of four years in the privileged position of being the castrato singer with the largest body of in-depth, primary source material concerning him. I begin with the arrival of Velluti to England in literary form in 1817, occurring just months before he first sang for Meyerbeer in Italy. This chapter seeks to create a definitive timeline for Velluti's London years and the period surrounding them. This period entwines the products of these two events: on the one hand, Velluti as a literary creation, on the other, the singer as a vocal, operatic, musical phenomenon. Together these two strands of cognition, musical and literary, defined the second half of Velluti's career and ultimately his legacy.

Necessarily entwined with Velluti's movements are those of some of his primary interlocutors in his London period, especially Mary Shelley and Leigh

Hunt. The literary Romantics, Hunt chief among them for the purposes of this work, were fascinated by, even obsessed with the vagaries of temporality. Events, past and present, were tied to physical objects, sounds and places, but could project meaning both forward and backward through time. Time, in the literary sense, tended always toward mutability, to borrow one of Percy Bysshe Shelley's favorite themes, and many events-of-thought cannot therefore be temporally ordered.¹ This work will not be strictly or, at times, even loosely bound to temporal order. As Velluti was a creature symbolically out of time in the eyes of many of his London critics, this largely non-analytical chapter is necessary to place him in time before the ensuing chapters remove him from it again.

1817

The first time the singer appeared in a British publication seems to have been in November 1817. *The Edinburgh Review* reviewed Stendhal's *Rome, Naples et Florence en 1817*, published simultaneously (in French) in London and Paris. Stendhal's book revels in gossip and recounts how the singing of one Mlle. Fabre, a favorite in Milan, "has improved notably since she took to living under the same roof as Velluti, the celebrated male soprano."² The reviewer condemns

¹ Percy Bysshe Shelley, "Mutability," *The Romantic Period, The Norton Anthology of English Literature, Volume D, The Romantic Period*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2006): 744. Mutability, like the "negative capability" of Keats, seems not so much a personal theory as the explication of more broadly held principles common to the small circle of the English literary Romantics.

² Stendhal (Marie-Henri Beyle), *Rome, Naples and Venice*, trans. Richard Coe (Great Britain: George Braziller, Inc., 1959): 16-17.

the gossip mongering while repeating it, and identifies "Veluti" as a eunuch, though only obliquely and in French.³ The reviewer adds, "even more strange to tell, she [Fabre] is also characterized as 'amoureuse de l'amour.'"⁴ This is, as far as I have been able to discover, almost the only explicit account in available primary sources, even here only implied, of Velluti's supposed liaisons with women. Cornelio Parolari's anecdotes seem to appear nowhere before his article.⁵ Velluti would not appear in England for another seven and half years, but in Stendhal's *Rome*, with its intimations of sexual immorality, the singer was introduced to the English consciousness.⁶

1818

Though *Crociato* was the apparent vehicle whose enormous success would bring Velluti to England, it was hardly the sole motivating factor. In 1818 Giacomo Meyerbeer was slowly making a name for himself as an operatic

³ *The Edinburgh Review* (Edinburgh: Archibald Constable and Company, 1817): 238-239. On opposite pages, the critic first quotes Stendhal's preface, in which Stendhal refers to an elderly superior as a eunuch (presumably a eunuch through loss of sexual function, due to age, rather than a eunuch made so through an operation.) "Les eunuques sont en colère permanente contre les libertins." (Eunuchs are permanently angry with the libertines.) On the facing page, when describing Velluti, the critic writes "one of the class formerly noticed as being, 'en colère permanente contre les libertins.'"

⁴ Ibid., "In love with love." According to the *Giornale di Venezia* (Venice: 1815), in at least 15 different articles for that year, Fabri, or Fabre, sang in almost every single Velluti operatic production—for that year. Velluti would repeat this pattern later, though to a less pronounced degree, with Emilia Bonini. He and Bonini also, on occasion, travelled together—I have never found any hint that there was a romantic relationship between them, however.

⁵ Cornelio Parolari, "Giambattista Velluti: Ultimo dei sopranisti sulle liriche scene," *Rivista Musicale Italiana* 39 (1932): 263-298. Angus Heriot, *The Castrati in Opera* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1956): 189-199. See chapter 6.

⁶ Stendhal, *Rome*, xxii. *Rome, Naples et Florence* was wildly popular and, translated into English, republished the following year.

composer in Italy.⁷ Though at the time he had no intention of composing for the singer, Meyerbeer's journal entry for 3 January 1818 describes a Sunday visit to Velluti in Parma, where he "received us with more than expected friendliness and amiability, although I had only spoken to him once (in Venice at Perucchini's) in my entire life."⁸ Velluti performed his variations on Paisiello's "Nel cor più non mi sento" ... "with which he occasionally uses to make an *Accademia* and at which Catalani sang hers in Venice. His are far more original and artistic, but would have little impact in a concert. The greatest difficulty comes principally in the intonation of diminished intervals, which appear too frequently."⁹ Velluti's *Otto variazioni sul tema "Nel cor più non mi sento"* (ca. 1815) are almost certainly the same variations Meyerbeer heard and will be one of the principal focuses of chapter 5.

⁷ Heinz Becker and Gudrun Becker, *Giacomo Meyerbeer: A Life In Letters*, trans. Mark Violette (London: Daedalus Books, 1989): 10.

⁸ Giacomo Meyerbeer, *Briefwechsel und Tagebücher* Vol. 1, ed. Heinz Becker and Gudrun Becker (Berlin: Verlag Walter de Gruyter & Co, 1959): 348-349.

⁹ Meyerbeer, *Briefwechsel*, Vol. 1, 348. "Er [Velluti] sang uns seine Variationen auf das Thema "Nel cor non più mi sento," [*sic*] welche er bei Gelegenheit der Akademie machte, wo die Catalani die ihrigen in Venedig sang. Die seinigen sind bei weitem origineller & kunstvoller, würden aber in einem Konzert wenig Effect machen. Die grosse Schwierigkeit besteht meistens in Intonationen verminderter Intervallen, welche gar zu häufig vorkommen." The text is slightly unclear, and perhaps Meyerbeer himself was fuzzy on the details. The implication that Catalani sang her variations for a rival, Velluti's *accademia* (a kind of masterclass in which both musicianship and vocal technique were taught) seems unlikely, though of course it is possible. Giuseppe Palomba, Libretto: *La Molinara; ossia, L'amor contrastato; dramma giocoso per musica, in due atti da rappresentarsi nel R.o Teatro alla Scala, la primavera dell'anno 1810* (Milan, ca. 1810). This aria was a concert favorite of the early nineteenth century. Not only Velluti and Angelica Catalani (1779-1849, perhaps Velluti's greatest rival) but also Beethoven and Paganini composed and published variations on this theme. For a more in-depth discussion of the operas of Paisiello, see Stefano Castelvetti, *Sentimental Opera: Questions in Genre in the Age of Bourgeois Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

1818-1819

Meyerbeer attributed Velluti's lack of success in Giuseppe Nicolini's *Balduino* to ill health and the indifferent quality of the opera itself. The singer's tendency to fall into debilitating illness in times of stress would become a constant theme during his later career. Though the list of Velluti's productions compiled by Ermanno Illuminati does not list *Balduino* in 1817 or 1818, he does indicate that Nicolini's *Carlo Magno* was staged with Velluti as Vitekindo in at least four different productions, including the Hoftheater am Isartor in Munich.¹⁰ In Munich, Velluti sang a divided season, in November and December 1818 singing Nicolini's *Trajano in Dacia*, *Carlo Magno* and Stefano Pavesi's *Celanira*, travelling to Verona for *Carnivale* 1819, and returning to Munich for a late spring run of the same three operas plus Simon Mayr's *Ginevra di Scozia*.¹¹

Carlo Magno, an opera that seems to have been Velluti's preferred vehicle in the late 1810s, occasioned a remarkable comment from a Munich correspondent, printed in the *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung* in April 1819. "The singer, with his tones of woe and joy, is the representation of pure humanity in its inner pain, the deep sorrow and struggle with fate in that indeed our

¹⁰ Ermanno Illuminati, "Opera Liriche Cantate dal Velluti," Festschrift: *Celebrazione II^o Centenario della Nascità del Cantante Giovan Battista Velluti* (Corridonia, 1980): 20-22.

¹¹ Robert Braunmüller, "Väterliche Rührung. Der Spielplan des Münchner Hof- und Nationaltheaters in der Zeit Max' I. Joseph.," Festschrift: *Münchner Theatergeschichtliches Symposium 2000* ed. Hans-Michael Körner (Munich: Herbert Utz Verlag, 2000): 106-108. Meyerbeer, *Briefwechsel*, Vol. 1, 373. *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung* (AMZ) (Leipzig, Winterthur: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1819): 315.

passions make us all like one another."¹² Here, unlike almost all English reactions, Velluti was seen as a kind of palimpsest upon which the human condition can be painted in the tones of his voice. This is enabled by his ability to enable *Mitleiden*, a sense of fellow-suffering, something about which Mary Shelley would write in 1826.¹³ Apparently untied to a gendered physicality he is able to embody universality. In 1820 Velluti was named *Kammersänger* to the Bavarian King, Maximilian I, though he does not appear to have ever returned.¹⁴

As Velluti travelled to Munich for his second season the Shelleys travelled to Rome with Claire Clairmont. That Lent all three heard private performances of the *Miserere* of Gregorio Allegri.¹⁵ In contradistinction to many English Romantics' ekphrastic writing, Clairmont, though a solid musician, refused to describe the performance. "In the evening go with the Signora Marianna

¹² AMZ, 317. "Der Sänger, mit seinen Klage- und Freudetöne, ist der Repräsentant des reinen Menschen in seinem innigen Schmerz, seiner tiefen Betrübniß und seinem Kampfe mit dem Schicksal, indem ja die Leidenschaften uns alle einander wieder gleich machen."

¹³ See chapter 4 on Mary Shelley, Velluti and Pasta, where Shelley sees universality in Velluti but not in Pasta, specifically because of the castrato's physical condition. Martha Feldman also uses the imagery of a palimpsest, but specifically regarding the "white" qualities of the castrato voice, with which description I tend partially to disagree. Martha Feldman, *The Castrato*, 81.

¹⁴ AMZ 1820, 250.

¹⁵ Mary Shelley, *The Journals of Mary Shelley* Vol. 1, ed. Paula Feldman and Diana Scott-Kilvert (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987): 254-255. Francois (Franz) Kandler "On the Actual State of Music in Rome," written between 1821 and 1826, reproduced in translation in the *Quarterly Musical Magazine and Review* (QMMR), ed. Richard Mackenzie Bacon (London: Hurst, Chance and Co., 1828): 23-24. The QMMR reports that Allegri's, Bai's and Giuseppe Baini's 1821 *Miserere* are all performed together, "the *Miserere* which he [Baini] composed for the Sixtine [sic] chapel, and which is executed conjointly with those of Allegri and Bai." but with their separate identities seemingly retained. The form of the present-day Allegri-Bai *Miserere* is perhaps called into question. It is possible that aspects of Baini's *Miserere* may have found their way into the modern version. Othmar Wessely, "Kandler, Fritz Sales," Website: *deutsche-biographie*, Accessed October 6, 2015 @ <http://www.deutsche-biographie.de/sfz39712.html>. The *Miserere* was itself a kind of touchstone of antiquity, a must-hear monument to the past that ranked alongside the Forum and the Colosseum for Anglo-Italians, and somewhat later for English Catholics, including Cardinal John Henry Newman.

[probably Mary Shelley] to a friend of hers where we hear sung the celebrated miserere [*sic*—Nothing was ever so beautiful. Words can never express it for (could) they could only do so by turning to Music (itself) themselves—nothing but itself can be its parallel."¹⁶ This is likely the first time that Mary Shelley heard the castrato voice, and the otherworldly *Miserere* perhaps created a foundation of understanding that later colored her encounters with Velluti.¹⁷

1820-1821

In 1820 and 1821 Leigh Hunt began to write his never completed *Musical Evenings*, a project intended to combine essays with sheet music, conceived together with Vincent Novello, for the promulgation of what both considered to be the best music for private musical evenings.¹⁸ Foreshadowing aspects of his 1825 "Velluti to his Revilers" (introduced later in this chapter and discussed further in chapters 2, 3 and 4), Hunt liberally quotes from Keat's *Lamia*, with its strange images of an imagined pastoral love in a kind of waking dream. Keats eventually turned away from Hunt and his musical evenings in disgust after

¹⁶ Claire Clairmont, *The Journals of Claire Clairmont*, ed. David Stocking and Marion Stocking (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1968): 104. The "(could)" is an addition by the editors.

¹⁷ There were still restrictions on the dissemination of the *Miserere* beyond the Sistine Chapel at this point, and it seems likely that in Rome especially, the home of most of the castrati still left in Europe as Kandler also details in the aforementioned article for the *QMMR*, the *Miserere* would likely have been performed by them. As I will make clear throughout, the private concert was a congenial home for Velluti and other late castrati.

¹⁸ Leigh Hunt, *Musical Evenings or Sections Vocal and Instrumental*, ed. and pref. David Cheney (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1964): 2.

hearing too many puns in an uncomfortable admixture with Mozart."¹⁹ Punning and other paronomasia will be discussed in greater depth in the next chapter. Keats was not entirely done with Hunt, convalescing at the latter's home in 1820 before travelling to Italy late that year, dying in Rome on 23 February 1821.²⁰

Velluti's whereabouts in 1821 are not entirely clear. Illuminati places him in Turin for the *Carnivale stagione* and in Venice for *Carnivale* 1822, singing in at least two if not all three of that *stagione*'s operas. As two were premieres, this would likely have necessitated his presence in Venice no later than late 1821.²¹ At the same time, he claims Velluti sang several roles at the Imperial Theater of the Czar at St. Petersburg from 1821 to 1822.²² The *Fondo Velluti* in Belluno, Italy, possesses the only known, contemporary account of Velluti in Russia. This is, however, in an edition of the *Gazetta di Genova* from 16 November 1816 that only mentions Velluti's "trip to Russia."²³ Wherever he was before then, by the end of 1821 Velluti was likely in Venice in preparation for, among other works, *Tebaldo and Isolina*, a new opera by the Dresden *Hofkapellmeister*, Francesco Morlacchi.

¹⁹ John Keats, "Letter to George and Georgiana Keats, Dec. 16, 1818," quoted in *Musical Evenings*, 8.

²⁰ Susan Wolfson, "Chronology," *The Cambridge Companion to Keats*, ed. Susan Wolfson (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001): xxxii-xxxiv.

²¹ John Ebers, *Seven Years of the King's Theater* (London: William Harrison Ainsworth, 1828): 264-265. Ebers describes the thirty days that Velluti had to mount a new production of *Crociato* in London in 1825 as being very short in comparison to the standard elsewhere, particularly to the nine months Rossini required for the same opera in the same year in Paris.

²² Illuminati, 20-22.

²³ Paolo da Col, *Catalogo del Fondi Musicali Antonio Miari e Giovanni Battista Velluti Della Biblioteca Civica de Belluno* (Venice: Edizioni Fondazione Levi, 2008): xxii-xxiv, fn 70.

1822

Tebaldo e Isolina premiered during the *Carnivale* of 1822 and by the end of that year had been repeated in Piacenza, Faenza, Vicenza, Senigallia, Cremona, Verona and in Florence at Il Teatro La Pergola.²⁴ The critic for the *Allegemine Musikalische Zeitung* in August 1822, citing 30 performances of *Tebaldo* in Venice alone, praised the singer. "The highest praise belongs emphatically to Herr Velluti, this sole soprano singer that Italy now has, and who alone remains the paragon, the [only] monument to the classical masters of singing left to us: those whom the history of those past times praised."²⁵

1822 also saw the entire Hunt family land, finally, in Pisa.²⁶ Though Shelley and Hunt met briefly at Pisa, Shelley drowned in a boating accident only a week afterward, on 8 July 1822.²⁷ In Shelley's pocket was Hunt's own copy of Keats's *Lamia*. "It was my copy. I had told him to keep it till he gave it to me again with his own hands. So I would not have it from any other. It was burnt with his remains."²⁸ Byron left for Greece soon afterwards, dying in 1824. Hunt and his family would not be able to find enough money to move back to England until September of 1825, spending much of their time near Florence. According to Hunt, in 1825 at least 200 English families called Florence their home and this

²⁴ Illuminati, 20-22. The Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana in Venice holds 20 printed libretti for various productions of *Tebaldo* from which I compiled this partial list.

²⁵ *AMZ* 1822, 546-547.

²⁶ Hunt, *Byron*, 480-500.

²⁷ Leigh Hunt, *The Autobiography of Leigh Hunt; with Reminiscences of Friends and Contemporaries* Vol. 3 (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1850): 14-15.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 15.

large circle provided an Anglophonic center not only for the Hunts, but a vital staging ground for Velluti himself.²⁹

In 1822 Velluti was in Florence singing *Tebaldo*, with the prominent Italian soprano Emilia Bonini cast as Isolina. At some point during the summer and autumn performances of *Tebaldo*, the pair must have caught the eye and ear of Lord Burghersh. A modestly talented amateur composer, he was married to Priscilla Wellesley-Pole, the favorite niece of the hero of Waterloo, Arthur Wellesley, first Duke of Wellington. Aubrey Garlington describes the pair – young, talented, wealthy, *powerful* dilettantes, he in music composition, she in painting and languages – and their dominion over English expatriate life in Florence.³⁰

Arthur Wellesley, Duke of Wellington was in Verona for the Congress of Verona in the late autumn of 1822 representing the British interests on numerous questions concerning the aftermath of the Napoleonic Wars. The Congress opened on October 20 and culminated in the premiere performance of Gioachino Rossini's cantata *Il Vero Omaggio* on 3 December 1822.³¹ Lady Burghersh wrote her husband on October 22 from Wellington's rented house, inviting her husband to join them in Verona to, among other things, "go to the opera."³² She must have returned to Florence, as on November 13 the *Gazzetta di Firenze* reported a

²⁹ Hunt, *Byron*, 490-502. Aubrey Garlington, *Society, Culture and Opera in Florence, 1814-1830: Dilettantes in an 'Earthly Paradise'* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004): 81.

³⁰ See Garlington, *Society, Culture and Opera in Florence*.

³¹ Phillip Gossett, Works, "Rossini, Gioachino," Website: *Grove Music Online*, ed. Deane Root. Accessed October 5, 2015.

³² Priscilla Fane, Lady Burghersh, *Correspondence of Lady Burghersh with the Duke of Wellington*, ed. Lady Rose (Fane) Weigall (London: John Murray, 1903): 28-29.

performance in the ambassador's own home of his *La Fedra*. The leading roles were sung by Velluti and Bonini.³³ It is almost inconceivable that Burghersh would have undertaken such an enormously expensive event, prominent and public for all its ostensibly private status, without her presence.³⁴

Gaetano Rossi, coming off his success with Morlacchi in *Tebaldo e Isolina* was engaged in detailed correspondence with Meyerbeer concerning the construction of a new libretto for La Fenice. Rossi reported on the events of the Congress in a letter dated November 28.³⁵ While mentioning the "many splendid concerts," presumably both public and private, anticipating Rossini's cantata he recounted the triumphs of Velluti singing "Notte Tremenda," the *scena* ending with the *Romanza* from *Tebaldo*.³⁶ Rossi singles out the "concerto di Vellinghon" where Velluti, Adelaide Tosi and Gaetano Crivelli all sang, as being "most brilliant and splendid."³⁷ "Vellinghon" is assuredly Wellington.

³³ Garlington, 81.

³⁴ Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger and Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999): 10-11, 14. Habermas's description of the private sphere of the aristocracy is applicable, particularly regarding the very public nature of the 'private' events of the nobility. Though Lord Burghersh's operas were, in Florence at any rate, performed for an exclusive, invitation-only audience, they were reviewed in newspapers and journals. Many of Velluti's press notices came from events which, though ostensibly private, transpired in such a way as to make them very public indeed.

³⁵ Meyerbeer, *Briefwechsel*, Vol. 1, 450-51. Rossi names the wrong day for Rossini's *Il Vero Omaggio*, Dec. 1 instead of the true first performance of Dec. 3.

³⁶ Contemporary English print usage almost always capitalizes and often italicizes *Romanza*, so for the purposes of clarity and simplicity I shall do the same within this work. The entire *scena* begins with the *recitativo accompagnato* "Notte tremenda." When just the aria is concerned, "Caro suono lusinghier," it is generally referred to as the *Romanza*, possibly because the first line of the aria is not the title, but rather "Morir! Ciel, qual contento (concento)."

³⁷ Meyerbeer, *Briefwechsel*, Vol. 1, 450-451. The editors of Meyerbeer's correspondence do not make the identification of Wellington. Stendhal, *Life of Rossini*, ed. and trans. Richard Coe (London: John Calder, 1985): 360. Velluti and Crivelli were at the apogees of their careers at this

On 2 December 1822, Byron's friend John Cam Hobhouse went to the dress rehearsal of *Omaggio*. He delayed his departure in order to hear the performance the next day. Though displeased with the cantata and the behavior of the crowned heads for whom it was performed, he reported that Velluti and Crivelli "performed wonders" and that Velluti, after the royals had left and applause was allowed to commence, took three curtain calls.³⁸ A humorous anecdote that may have its roots in musico-historical fact was made famous a few years later by John Ebers. "Every body applauded [Velluti] except an old Austrian officer, who thought nothing good out[side] of Germany. 'But is not this good?' they said to him. 'Yes, it is good—but I know a man at Vienna that would sing it as loud again!'"³⁹

1823

While Velluti spent much of 1823 singing in various productions of *Tebaldo*, we will turn our focus now to Gaetano Rossi and Meyerbeer. The construction and composition of *Crociato* as well as its enormous success may have been one of the primary motivating factors in bringing Velluti to London. Apparently, the rising reputation of Meyerbeer and the phenomenal success in

point, according to Stendhal, and everywhere they went carried with them the "score to *Isolina*" replacing any aria they disliked with one of Morlacchi's.

³⁸ John Cam Hobhouse, *Diaries, 1822*: 171-173. Website: *Petercochran*, Accessed October 6, 2015 @ <https://petercochran.files.wordpress.com/2009/12/30-18221.pdf>.

³⁹ Ebers, *Seven Years*, 264. This anecdote, though it savors of gossip, may have basis in truth, when one considers the careers in the 1820s of at least two accomplished falsettists in the German-speaking world; Karl Blumenfeld, in Vienna, was quite well known. See chapter 3 concerning the falsetto in the early nineteenth century and for a short biography of Blumenfeld.

1822 of Velluti in *Tebaldo* made the pairing an obvious choice.⁴⁰ Venice's La Fenice, the site of the premiere of *Tebaldo*, commissioned an opera from Meyerbeer for the 1824 *Carnivale* season.

The flurry of letters from Rossi to Meyerbeer began in earnest in late March, 1823. Rossi details correspondence with a multitude of singers, usually saying he has heard nothing from them.⁴¹ Meyerbeer's surviving letters to bass Nicolas Levasseur in the same time period hint at a singer/management relationship in which the singer held a great deal of power—often expressed by silence.⁴² Velluti was singing at La Pergola on 8 April 1823, and in communication with Rossi.⁴³ Nearly simultaneously, a grieving Mary Shelley in England sent Leigh Hunt a letter in Florence expressing her wish to be there, with him and his family.⁴⁴ It seems strange that a lover of opera like Hunt would not have taken the opportunity to hear Velluti, but perhaps the impoverished condition of the Hunts after Byron's departure left him unable to afford it.⁴⁵ Stendhal was also in Florence during this year, working on his 1824 *Life of*

⁴⁰ Don White, CD liner notes: *Meyerbeer: Il Crociato in Egitto* (London: Opera Rara, 1991): 16-17. Heinz Becker and Gudrun Becker, *Giacomo Meyerbeer: Ein Leben in Briefe* (Wilhelmshaven: Heinrichshofen's Verlag, 1983): 44. "Musico" was the standard term for a trouser role, a male role sung by a treble voice, regardless of gender, in the 1820s. Though the term was also still a euphemism for castrato, in Rossi's letters it is clear that he means it in the dramaturgical sense of the high-voiced 'trouser role.' For a lengthy discussion of this, see Naomi André, *Voicing Gender: Castrati, Travesti, and the Second Woman in Early-Nineteenth-Century Italian Opera* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: University of Indiana Press, 2006).

⁴¹ Meyerbeer, *Briefwechsel* Vol. 1, 460-467.

⁴² Becker & Becker, *Ein Leben*, 46-47.

⁴³ Meyerbeer, *Briefwechsel* Vol. 1, 470.

⁴⁴ Mary Shelley, *The Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley*, ed. Betty Bennett (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980): 379.

⁴⁵ *The Examiner* (London: John Hunt, 1825): 495-497. Hunt claimed in August of 1825 never to have seen Velluti or heard him sing.

Rossini in which he dedicates an entire chapter to Velluti's singing. His source is apparently as much concert singing as it is operatic.⁴⁶

As the summer turned into autumn, Rossi's letters became ever more detailed concerning the exact construction of the opera. On 2 September 1823 he wrote about Velluti's arias and concerns about the amount that he must sing.⁴⁷ A few days later he again wrote about Velluti's role, referencing his earlier work with the singer.⁴⁸ Rossi's continual reiteration of the places where Velluti *must* sing was apparently a sore spot between the librettist and the singer, as a letter from Velluti two days later attests.⁴⁹

Most beloved Giacomo ... Tell Rossi, for pity's sake, not to put me over and over in the scene; I love very much quality, but not quantity, otherwise he knows well what is good for my kind of singing: I much prefer, on the whole, the sentimental, for in this one can combine the Italian and Ultramontane tastes, and [the taste] of those who have a soul. Friend, for two years I have studied this difficult genre, and see that I have made a double effect; little but good.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Stendhal, *Life of Rossini*, xix, 262-265, 351. There is no evidence that Velluti ever sang the entire role of Romeo on stage.

⁴⁷ Meyerbeer, *Briefwechsel* Vol. 1, 540.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 544, *Illuminati*, 20-22.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 558-59. Rossi concerning the expected cavatina. As this is one of the very few surviving letters outside of the *Carte Perucchini* (see the preface to this work), it offers a rare glimpse into the social manner of Velluti, if not really a window into his soul. This insistence upon form, where Velluti must sing, is also remarked upon by Sieghart Döhring, "Das Ende des Kastratengesangs," >>Per be vestir la virtuosa<<. *Die Oper des 18. und frühen 19. Jahrhunderts im Spannungsfeld zwischen Komponisten und Sängern*, ed. Daniel Brandenburg and Thomas Seedorf (Schliengen: Edition Argus, 2011): 201.

⁵⁰ Meyerbeer, *Briefwechsel* Vol. 1, 545-546. "Dite a Rossi, che per carità, non mi faccia vedere tante e tante volte in scene; io amo assai la qualità, e non la quantità, per il resto lui ben sà e mi conosce cosa convenga al mio genere di canto; che io preferisco molto alla parte tutta sentimentale, percè così conviene al gusto italiano ed oltramontano, e per quelli che [h]anno un'anima. Amico, in due anni [h]o studiato molto, su questo difficile genere, e vedo che no ho ricavato un doppio effetto; poco ma buono."

I will explore what I believe to be Velluti's "doppio effetto" in chapter 5 in reference to Velluti's ornamentation of Lord Burghersh's Italian arias. As for requests to sing less, Velluti was now well over 40, an age by which earlier castrati like Farinelli, Rauzzini and others, had already retired from the stage. During concerts from 1825-1829 he often sang no more than two arias and a duet.⁵¹ A cautious singer managing an aging voice seems a likely reason for pleas for less music. His favorite opera of the 1810s, *Carlo Magno*, contains far more solo singing than does *Tebaldo*.⁵² On 29 November 1823 Rossi reports that Velluti was quite happy with the opera, calling it "heavenly music."⁵³ On 9 December Amalia Beer wrote to her son from Berlin, ending with a postscript entreating her son to greet all the Venetians and, leaving German for Italian, "sopra tutti mio caro carissimo Veluti [*sic*]."⁵⁴

1824

The 7 March 1824 premiere of *Il Crociato in Egitto* was an astounding success. This was the beginning of Meyerbeer's international fame and probably the pinnacle of Velluti's career.⁵⁵ If Velluti is mentioned at all in most music history or opera textbooks it is in connection with *Crociato* as the last major

⁵¹ *QMMR* 1825, 302-310. This account of the concert season in 1825, does not differ substantially on this point from other years and accounts in many, many other English journals.

⁵² Giuseppe Nicolini, MS *Carlo Magno* (ca. 1814) Parma, Regionale Biblioteca Palatina di Parma, I-PAc, ML. 198. I thank Gerd Ubbenhorst for providing me with digital copies of the original score, his transcription of which was used in the Frankfurter Mottetenchor/ Fliegende Volksbühne 2014 production of *Carlo Magno* in which I was privileged to sing Velluti's role of Vitekindo.

⁵³ Meyerbeer, *Briefwechsel* Vol. 1, 569-570.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 572-573, 578. "Above all (to) my dear dearest Velluti."

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 580.

operatic role written for a castrato. In the 13 March 1824 *Nuovo Osservatore Veneziano*, the critic praised Velluti as an "absolute master of his voice, he knows instinctively how to constrain it, to shade it, to let it spread or diminish with wondrous art, so that he always gives an affecting delicacy to his expression."⁵⁶ Amalia, writing her son in congratulations from Berlin on 23 March 1824 added that Velluti and Rossi had personally petitioned her to allow Meyerbeer to delay his return to Berlin, so as to ensure the success of the production of *Crociato* at *La Pergola*.⁵⁷ In early May *Crociato* opened in Florence, though of the original cast only Velluti reprised his role.⁵⁸ In this production, Meyerbeer composed a new cavatina "Caro mano" with a preceding recitative whose first words, "Popolo d'Egitto, ecco ritorno a voi," would become synonymous with Velluti's stage appearances in London.⁵⁹

Velluti's fame at its zenith, *Crociato*'s huge success, and his presence in Florence in close proximity to the Burghershes all probably led the British press to take serious notice of Velluti. Especially important was the beginning of what would be a fraught relationship with William Ayrton and *The Harmonicon*.⁶⁰ *The Harmonicon*'s Florence correspondent's report of the successful premier of *Crociato* hints at the generally anti-Italian tone of the journal.⁶¹ Meyerbeer reported Velluti's success "even over his enemies" that summer in *Crociato*, but

⁵⁶ White, *Crociato*, 27

⁵⁷ Meyerbeer, *Briefwechsel* Vol. 1, 580.

⁵⁸ White, *Crociato*, 30

⁵⁹ Meyerbeer, *Briefwechsel* Vol. 1. 43. White, *Crociato*, 30.

⁶⁰ William Ayrton, ed., *The Harmonicon for 1824* (London: Samuel Leigh, 1824): 126.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 160.

he was once again ill for Mayr's *Ginevra di Scozia* and sang badly.⁶² According to *The Harmonicon's* Florence correspondent in January 1825 he was "wretchedly out of tune."⁶³

Crociato ran well into autumn when architect and stage designer Karl Friedrich Schinkel heard Velluti on 29 October 1824. He didn't care for the opera, finding it trivial and "indigestible." "The famous castrato Velluti, a tall man, sang very beautifully, at least as far as such music can be sung; but one prefers to hear a woman."⁶⁴ Velluti had time for a repeat performance of Burghersh's *La Fedra* on November 20.⁶⁵ This was with "the principals of the opera," including Velluti.⁶⁶ Though Adelaide Tosi was the leading soprano in the summer, Bonini replaced her in the fall. The 13 December 1824 *Morning Chronicle* reported the sumptuous production of *La Fedra* with Bonini and Velluti.⁶⁷ They were both likely involved in the semi-private concerts that the Burghershes attended or hosted, cementing friendships between both singers and the ambassador and his wife. These friendships would prove vital for Velluti. I believe that the connections between Lord and Lady Burghersh, Wellington and the aristocracy were, as much or more so than the success of *Crociato*, that which encouraged him to

⁶² Becker & Becker, *Ein Leben*, 48-49.

⁶³ William Ayrton, ed., *The Harmonicon for 1825* (London: Samuel Leigh, 1825): 2-3.

⁶⁴ Karl Friedrich Schinkel, *Aus Schinkel's Nachlaß: Reisebücher, Briefe und Aphorismen* Vol. 2, ed. Alfred von Wolzogen (Berlin: Verlag der Königlichen Geheimen Ober und Hofbuchdruckerei R. Decker, 1862): 58. Oct 29, 1824: "Der berühmte Castrat Velluti, ein großer Mann, sang sehr schön, so weit sich dergleichen Musik singen läßt; aber Frau hört man doch lieber."

⁶⁵ *Illuminati*, 20-22.

⁶⁶ *Harmonicon 1825*, 17.

⁶⁷ *Morning Chronicle*, December 13, 1824.

come to London and then sustained him monetarily and socially when he immediately encountered spirited opposition.

1825: Winter and Spring

Velluti's movements in the winter of 1825 were likely centered around Florence and the Burghershes. The journal of Captain Daniel Roberts on 11 February 1825 in nearby Livorno (Leghorn) reports Velluti singing in a "Masquerade." Roberts was "never more delighted with music."⁶⁸ In the April edition of *The Harmonicon*, the Paris correspondent reported that Meyerbeer had arrived in Paris and upset all that Rossini, now the director of Paris's Italian Opera, had planned to do in the new production of *Crociato*.⁶⁹ In June, in a letter printed weeks after Velluti's arrival in London, probably the same correspondent reports that Velluti would be leaving Paris for London, as he was "so out of sympathy with the Rossinists" and "unwilling to coalesce with the Gran Maestro."⁷⁰ From the tenor of this report, it is likely that the correspondent had already read Stendhal's *La Vie de Rossini*.⁷¹ Stendhal's assertion that Velluti never sang Rossini's music if he could help it was credulously and continuously

⁶⁸ Donald Prell, *Biography of Captain Daniel Roberts* (Palm Springs: Strand Publishing, 2010): 74.

⁶⁹ *Harmonicon* 1825, 60. Mark Everist, *Music and Drama at the Paris Odéon 1824-1828* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002): 34.

⁷⁰ Stendhal, *Rossini*, 340-342, 349-350.

⁷¹ See Introduction.

repeated in the English press and did not sit well with London's Rossini-loving public.⁷²

The idea that Velluti had followed Meyerbeer to Paris in hopes of singing Armando in Rossini's production of *Crociato* has long been accepted. Stendhal's reported antipathy between Rossini and Velluti and the picture of the castrato pleading with the composer suits the narrative common to most accounts of the 1820s. This picture was of Velluti as a singer past his prime and unable to please Rossini and by extension modern operatic audiences with to his dated, outrageous, tasteless ornamentation and unquenchable singer's vanity. However, two small items that appeared in the London newspapers contradict this.⁷³

In the 11 April 1825 *Morning Post* there was a brief notice that Velluti had arrived in Paris on April 4, and was not planning to stay there more than a few days, already anticipating, it seems, an eventual London arrival.⁷⁴ On May 5 *The Public Ledger* reported that Velluti's stay in Paris was at an end and that he was determined to travel to London. The Paris correspondent for the *Ledger* wrote that Velluti had only consented to sing before the royal family, but that all of

⁷² Stendhal, *Rossini*, 365-366, 425. For some reason, Stendhal glides over *Il Vero Omaggio*, not even getting the year correct for the first performance.

⁷³ *Morning Post*, April 11, 1825. *Public Ledger and Daily Advertiser*, May 5, 1825.

⁷⁴ The letter published in the press was addressed to "Signore Crivelli," probably the tenor Gaetano Crivelli's son, Domenico Crivelli. The close working relationship and friendship between Velluti and Crivelli lends plausibility to not only the account, but to the likelihood that London was the long-term goal of Velluti. Domenico Crivelli sang in *Crociato* at the end of June, 1825, according to the *New Monthly Magazine and Literary Journal for 1826 (NMM&LJ)* (London: Henry Colburn, 1826): 58. The same article reveals that the younger Crivelli then travelled with the Gracias to New York. Ebers wrote that, at Velluti's suggestion, he hired the father for *Tebaldo*. Ebers, 270.

music-loving Paris had pressed him to stay. This reported exclusivity is probably not strictly true, given Velluti's eagerness to cultivate the wealthy and powerful and his predilection for giving private concerts.⁷⁵ Regardless, Velluti's intentions of travelling on, reported a day or two after his arrival in Paris, make it likely that his goal was always London. At approximately the same time Lord and Lady Burghersh also travelled to London for a 14-month visit.⁷⁶ According to the *London Magazine*, on the fourth or fifth of May 1825, Velluti arrived.⁷⁷

1825: May and June

On May 6, immediately after Velluti's arrival in London, the Duke of Devonshire rearranged a concert at his home, originally only for English music and musicians, to include the castrato. A writer in the *London Magazine* writes that Velluti had long been well-known in England due to "that charming writer [Stendhal]." Sir George Smart conducted the concert which included "Notte Tremenda."⁷⁸ John Ebers, manager of the King's Theater, reports that Velluti arrived in England without an engagement, but highly recommended by unnamed persons of "distinction."⁷⁹

⁷⁵ See chapter 2. I take the part about the French royal family with a grain of salt, unless they were present at every single party for which Velluti, if his London period is any guide, sang with great and lucrative frequency.

⁷⁶ Garlington, 82.

⁷⁷ *London Magazine* 1825, Vol. 2 (London: Hunt and Clark, 1825): 269.

⁷⁸ Ibid. This concert is all the more remarkable as not only were at least two boy treble soloists from the Chapel Royal on the program, but also London's most famous falsetto countertenor, William Knyvett. Unfortunately, no one at that point saw fit to directly compare the three voice types, though there are later comparisons that may stem from this concert.

⁷⁹ Ebers, 264.

Whispers about Lord and Lady Burghersh travelled with the castrato. According to a rumor current in London spread by a "recent visitor to Florence," Velluti, singing at a private party there at the home of an "official personage," sang so beautifully that "the lady of the house actually rose from her seat, and rushing across the room, kissed the singer's hand in token of the delight she experienced."⁸⁰ This lady is surely the ambassador's wife, Lady Burghersh. In a footnote the writer claims to have seen a letter "from a young nobleman at Florence" concerning the "private character and amiable disposition of this remarkable singer."⁸¹ Richard, Lord Mount Edgcumbe relates another letter "from a friend in Florence" full of praise for the character and morals of Velluti, hinting Lord Burghersh had exerted himself to insure Velluti's acceptance amongst the aristocratic, Tory circles of London society. This powerful group, while it did not control all the organs of the press, or indeed, even most of them, did enjoy considerable sway over the musical and theatrical world.⁸²

The *Times of London*, edited by Hunt's friend and old schoolmate Thomas Barnes, was Whiggish in politics and moralist in principles. In a cannonade directed at the Tory aristocracy on 19 May 1825, the *Times* wrote:

We certainly have no right to meddle with the tastes of the rich and powerful, so long as those tastes are confined to their private circles: neither is it any business of ours if the ladies in private revive the fashion

⁸⁰ *London Magazine* 1825, Vol. 2, 269.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Richard Edgcumbe, Lord Mount Edgcumbe, *Musical Reminiscences, Chiefly Respecting the Italian Opera in England from the Year 1773 to the Present Time (1828)* (London: George Clarke, 1828): 152. Mount Edgcumbe, himself an amateur composer, was another member of the Tory elite. Though now elderly and semi-retired, he had held several cabinet positions and other positions of authority, including at the King's Theater.

of a past age, and doat [*sic*] on Veluti [*sic*], as their grandmothers did on Farinelli, or any other ambiguous creature without a sex. But...in the name of public decency and public morals, [we must] protest against the design which we learn is entertained in a certain fashionable quarter, of insulting the public eye with the exhibition of this unhappy creature, whom we must not call a man, and whose very appearance must present the complex idea of parental avarice, deliberate cruelty, and unnatural taste.⁸³

In the British press this is the first specific characterization of Velluti as a signifier or placeholder for the excesses of the previous century. The *Times* introduced many of the themes that many of Velluti's critics would subsequently use to marginalize and dehumanize him. Though there seem to have been plans to mount an opera featuring Velluti, these were dropped in favor of Zingarelli's *Romeo e Giulietta* with the young Giuditta Pasta singing Romeo.⁸⁴

According to Ebers, Velluti had travelled to London with the complete music as well as costume and set designs for *Crociato* and *Tebaldo*, indicating some sort of willingness or desire to at least see these operas produced, with or without his own participation.⁸⁵ Mt. Edgcumbe asserts that Velluti was reluctant to sing in public, but this could have been a polite deceit commonly practiced by public artists not wanting to appear too eager for fame.⁸⁶ Velluti plunged into the *private* musical party world, the London 'season,' singing "almost nightly" according to *The London Magazine*, or "nightly" according to *The Harmonicon* at

⁸³ Thomas Barnes, ed., *The Times of London*, May 10, 1825.

⁸⁴ *London Magazine* 1825, Vol. 2, 270. The writer hints that *Crociato* was immediately planned, but dropped by mid-May due to strong opposition. There is no evidence that Velluti ever sang the role of Romeo, choosing instead to sing excerpts from it in concert, including during the 1825 London season. The role, written for castrato soprano Girolamo Crescentini, is for a comparatively high soprano voice with repeated b"s, and was probably out of Velluti's range.

⁸⁵ Ebers, *Seven Years*, 266.

⁸⁶ MountEdgcumbe, 171.

various private parties throughout May and June, culminating in a concert at "Carlton Palace," the more-or-less official residence of George IV, the king himself in attendance.⁸⁷ Contradicting Stendhal's assertions about Velluti's unwillingness to sing Rossini's music, the finale of the first half of that concert was the first-act finale from *Tancredi* with Velluti and most of the stars of the King's Theater with orchestra and chorus.⁸⁸

Before she left for Paris after the short run of Zingarelli's *Romeo* to take the role of Armando in Rossini's production of *Crociato*, Pasta joined Velluti in two concerts. They sang the duet "Mille Sospiri" from Rossini's *Aureliano in Palmyra*.⁸⁹ In a private concert on the sixteenth of June at the residence of Prince Leopold, most of the royal family, the Duke of Wellington and at least a dozen peers of the realm attended a concert where Velluti and seventeen-year-old Maria Garcia (later Malibran) sang.⁹⁰ Maria, her father too ill to continue her vocal instruction, had "at least 20 lessons" with Velluti, according to both Ebers and Richard Mackenzie Bacon. She also sang several concerts with Velluti in the spring and early summer of 1825.⁹¹ According to *The Quarterly Musical*

⁸⁷ *London Magazine* 1825, Vol 2, 474-475. *Harmonicon* 1825, 163-164.

⁸⁸ *Harmonicon* 1825, 164.

⁸⁹ Ibid. In what would in ensuing years become a common complaint, Velluti requested the instruments be tuned down a half step from English standard pitch, though this apparently only happened in concerts.

⁹⁰ *Morning Post*, June 18, 1825. Prince Leopold was married to one of the daughters of George IV and was later crowned the first King of the Belgians. A published cartoon, insulting to Velluti, Wellington and to the intelligence of the aristocracy in general, seems to depict one of these 1825 concerts. See chapter 4 for a reproduction and analysis of "An Italian Singer Cut Out for English Amusement, or, Signor Velluti Displaying his Great Parts."

⁹¹ Ebers, 266. "The State of Music in London," *QMMR* 1826, 131-183. Maria de las Mercedes Santa Cruz y Montalvo, Comtesse de Merlin, *Memoirs and Letters of Madame Malibran* Vol. 1 (Philadelphia: Carey and Hart, 1840): 65-66. An anecdote in this, Malibran's first biography,

Magazine and Review, a publication edited and mostly written by Richard Bacon, a sophisticated and insightful writer on singing, there were only two *public* concerts before *Crociato*.⁹²

At the end of May, Ebers and Ayrton, the latter the musical director of the King's Theater as well as the editor and primary contributor of *The Harmonicon*, were reluctant to engage Velluti or to undertake *Crociato*. *The London Magazine* reports that the Duke of Wellington stormed into Ebers's box in the middle of a performance and threatened to shut down the theater if Velluti were not immediately engaged and *Crociato* mounted.⁹³ Ebers acquiesced. In the same article the writer claims that one singer, Eliza Vestris, feared the taint of moral decay that Velluti brought, and refused to sing with him. Her role fell to Maria Garcia.

The time was short: thirty days. Velluti was apparently given sole responsibility for the production of *Crociato*. Both Ebers and Mt. Edgcumbe report that all credit for its success was due the singer.⁹⁴ Ebers hired him for ten performances of *Crociato* to run the rest of the season (ending in August) for

written by a worshipful fan a few years after her tragically early death following a riding accident, claims that Maria impudently imitated and expanded upon Velluti's ornaments (which she had never before heard) during a performance of one of the duets from *Romeo e Giulietta*, entralling the audience. Velluti was incensed (according to the biographer) and grabbed her, hissing an imprecative ("Briccona"—witch). Malibran behaved at times rather badly in this her first season as a professional singer, according to almost all newspaper accounts of the events surrounding the premier of *Il Crociato*, but good-will between them lasted (or was restored) until 1829 when Velluti left London, and well into the 1840s, if not until Velluti's death, with her brother, Manuel Garcia, Jr. This casts doubt, at least, upon the implied emotions of the story, if not upon the actual events. "Witch!" could, after all, have been said in admiration of her ability to duplicate immediately, in live performance, once-heard variations.

⁹² *QMMR* 1825, 302-310.

⁹³ *London Magazine* 1825, Vol. 2, 475.

⁹⁴ Ebers, 296. MountEdgcumbe, 152.

£600, and paid him an addition £700 for the premiere, which he was to sing as his personal "benefit" as recompense for his filling so many managerial roles.⁹⁵ Meyerbeer, having left Paris, for another *Crociato* in Padova, completely entrusted Velluti with the production.⁹⁶

It became clear that after a quarter-century's absence there would indeed be a castrato singing on the London stage. *The Times* and *The Parthenon* (and other journals that reprinted these articles) devoted considerable space in late June to detailed articles about the castrati (almost always "Male Sopranos" or "Musicos") including information on those few believed to still be singing in Rome.⁹⁷ The *Times* was almost always derogatory. Writing five years later, William Stafford recalled that "a considerable degree of popular prejudice was excited against [Velluti]; and he was annoyed by anonymous threatening letters, with every species of low attack, public and private."⁹⁸ The official announcement of the London debut of both Velluti and *Crociato* came in *The Harmonicon*.⁹⁹ Ayrton, like Hunt or Richard Mackenzie Bacon, wore several hats. He continued

⁹⁵ See fn. 118 for an explanation of the theatrical "benefit."

⁹⁶ Meyerbeer, *Briefwechsel*, Vol. 2, 573.

⁹⁷ *Times*, June 20, 1825. *The Parthenon: A Magazine of Art and Literature* (London: Black, Young and Young, 1826): 29. The *Parthenon* unfortunately only survived a single year, but has one of the most remarkable descriptions of Velluti and the premiere of *Crociato*. (See Appendix C for a reproduction of this essay.) The article in question concerning the castrati in Rome includes a transcription of the ornamentation then being sung at the Sistine Chapel in the *Miserere*. Instead of the sustained c" to which modern audiences are now accustomed, this note is apparently left quickly in a lilting, descending passage of alternating sixteenth notes and eighth notes, starting from d". The article's author considers this far too operatic, and indeed, it looks more like *Lucia di Lammermoor* than the Allegri to which twenty-first century audiences have become accustomed.

⁹⁸ William Stafford, *A History of Music* (Edinburgh: Constable & Co, 1830): 348.

⁹⁹ *Harmonicon* 1825, 118.

to write each monthly issue, apparently almost alone, all the while running an opera house.

30 June 1825 and the London Premiere of *Il Crociato in Egitto*

In an extraordinary effort to poison the well of popular sentiment, on the morning of the premiere *The Times* ran a vicious *ad hominem* attack on the debutant and upon his supporters.

Our opinion was, that the manly British public, and the pure British fair, would have been spared the disgust of such an appearance as that of VELLUTI upon any theater of this metropolis. His shameless patrons have dared to insult, not only the British nation, but even humanity itself, by thrusting forward this non-creature upon the stage. ... next to those to whom he owes his misfortune, no creatures under heaven more deserve execration, than those his patrons who now press him forward under his own name [referring to the performance being his "benefit," and not part of the regular schedule of the King's Theater] to excite public horror and disgust. ... In the most vicious era of Rome, before Christianity had spread its influence and whilst wealth yet abounded, VELLUTIS were in request and females paid them homage: are we returning to those times? The Satirist, we should have thought, had blasted the depraved taste with the breath of his indignation—

"Sunt quas eunuchi imbelles, ac mollia semper
"Oscula delectent, et desperatio barbae,
"Et quod abortivo non est opus: Illa voluptas
"Summa tamen— [The *Times*'s break]

But we can hardly follow the audacious poet, even under the obscurity of a learned language. ... *Juv.*, sat. vi., v. 363-385. [*sic*] ...

Whatever compassion can do to alleviate distress, or console for debasement, let the friends of patrons of VELLUTI perform in private. Let them amuse and solace themselves in private with his powers and skill, if

their taste be formed to take pleasure in such pastime: the British people are content to seek for entertainment within the confines of nature.¹⁰⁰

Juvenal would have been well-known to much of the *Times's* readership. Not only had many if not most (men) presumably had the classical education common among the English upper and increasingly middle classes, but the Reverend Martin Madan, a somewhat controversial member of the Godwin-Wollstonecraft circle had published a full, fairly explicit translation of the Satires in 1789.¹⁰¹ This was reprinted in 1807 and then again during Velluti's final year in London, 1829. John Dryden's translation of Juvenal possibly vied with Madan's, as Dryden had enjoyed a considerable revival in interest, especially due to the influence of Hunt.¹⁰² Dryden's "There are those, who in soft eunuchs place their bliss;/To shun the scrubbing of a bearded kiss;" was made famous for modern scholarship by its inclusion in the frontpiece of Charles Ancillon's 1718 *Eunuchism Display'd*.¹⁰³ Madan's translation is less poetic but more accurate. It was likely more readily available than Dryden's in 1820s London, at least in the libraries of the wealthy or well-educated.

There are some weak eunuchs, and their soft kisses

¹⁰⁰ *Times*, June 30, 1825. The rest of the Juvenal's Satire 6, unprinted in the *Times*, reads "— quod jam calida matura juvena/Inguina tranduntur medicis, jam pectine nigro./Ergo expectatos ac jussos crescere primum/Testiculus, postquam coeperunt esse bilibres,/Tonsoris damno tantum rapid Heliodorus./Conspicuus longe, conctisque notabilis intrat/Balnea, nec dubie custodem vitis et horti/Provocat, a domina factus spado: dormiat ille/Cum domina: sed tu jam durum, Posthume, jamque/Tondendum eunucho Bromium committere noli." Charles Stocker, *The Satires of Juvenal and Persius* (London: Longman, Orme and Co., 1839): 142-143.

¹⁰¹ *The Scots Magazine* (Edinburgh: Murray and Cochrane, 1789): 646.

¹⁰² Upali Amarasinghe, *Dryden and Pope in the Early Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962): 167-171.

¹⁰³ John Mitford, *The Works of John Dryden: In Verse and Prose, with a life* Vol. 1, (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1837): 359. Charles Ancillon, *Eunuchism Displayed* (London: E. Curll, 1718): frontpiece.

Will always delight, and the despair of a beard,
 Also that there is no need of an abortive. But that
 Pleasure is the chief, [*Times's* break] that adults, now in warm
 youth,/Are delivered to the surgeons, now bearing signs of puberty.
 Heliodorus, the surgeon, performs the operation
 When all is full grown, all but the beard,
 Which is the barber's loss only.
 Afar off conspicuous and observable by all, he enters
 The baths, nor does this eunuch, made so by his mistress,
 Doubtfully vie with the keeper of the vines and the gardens:
 Let him sleep with his mistress: but do you, Posthumus,
 Take care how you put your boy Bromius in his power.¹⁰⁴

Though the implications of the verses quoted in the *Times* will be dealt with over the next chapters, the unusually explicit nature of the quotation stands out from the standard practice of people like the *Times* editor Barnes, whose writing, along with that of Hunt and his wider circle, Jeffrey Cox terms "Cockney Classicism," an essay style with implicit footnotes.¹⁰⁵ Cockney Classicism was full of classical or mythological allusions, but usually only a word or phrase rarely

¹⁰⁴ Martin Madan, *A New and Literal Translation of Juvenal and Persius* (Oxford: N. Bliss, 1807): 327. If anything, Madan is too polite. Anthony Kline's modern translation is much more explicit. From the *Times's* break: "when loins already ripe with youth's hot blood and its dark rod, are dragged away to the surgeons. That's why the testicles are allowed to drop and develop first. And afterwards when they've achieved two pounds in weight, Heliodorus [the surgeon] has them off, the barber's loss but no one else's. It's a truer, more wretched debility the slave-dealer's boys are seared by, left shamed by the purse and chickpeas that remain, But the man made a eunuch by his mistress is noticed by all, From afar, as he enters the baths, and there's no doubt he can challenge Priapus, who's the guardian of vineyard and garden. He may sleep with his mistress, Postumus, but don't entrust your Bromius [slave, son, catamite—the meaning is multivalent and unclear], once he's no longer smooth and hairless, to that eunuch." Anthony Kline, "Juvenal's Satires." Website: poetry in translation. Accessed October 6, 2015 @ <http://www.poetryintranslation.com/klineasjuvenal.htm>. These "two pounds" would be incorporated in an 1826 caricature of Velluti in his court battle with the female opera choristers of the King's Theater, underlining the concious intertextuality of 1820s English criticism as well as the explicitly understood nature of the unquoted section of Juvenal's satire. See footnote 206 in this chapter.

¹⁰⁵ Jeffrey Cox, "Cockney Classicism: History with Footnotes," *Poetry and Politics in the Cockney School: Keats, Shelley, Hunt and their Circle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000): 146-186.

explicitly identified.¹⁰⁶ Barnes's *Times* left nothing to chance, and included not only the number of the satire, but line numbers for both the unquoted and the quoted sections. His readers could have had very little difficulty in finding the rest.¹⁰⁷

The day before the premiere two dress rehearsals went very poorly, the second not ending until 2:30 in the morning. Later that same morning there was a third. By the time the curtain dropped on the finale that evening the cast had sung much or all of the opera four times in the space of 36 hours.¹⁰⁸ Before the beginning of the performance someone took the trouble to have the entire *Times* article translated into Italian and delivered to Velluti.¹⁰⁹ After having read this and directly before the curtain rose, he was (understandably) shaken. An unnamed friend

descanted upon the generosity of an English audience, upon Velluti's claims and reputation, and the merits of "Il Crociato." He assured the soprano that nothing could be more foreign from the English character than to countenance such attacks as the "Times" had made upon him, and that they would, in all probability, operate the necessary fortitude. Velluti listened with the utmost calmness. When the harangue was concluded, he drew himself up to his utmost height, his fine dark eyes glanced fire, he placed his hand in his bosom, turned towards the speaker, and merely said with all the dignity he could so well assume, "SON VELLUTI." His

¹⁰⁶ See chapter 3.

¹⁰⁷ I find it unlikely that the *Times* is directly referring to the sentiments from the introduction to the English language version of *Eunuchism Display'd* as its justification for printing this satire in Latin, but the idea probably remained essentially unchanged over the intervening century." In Respect of the Ladies, such care is taken, that when any thing must be expressed freely, and in its natural Terms, it is always in Latin, a Language they are generally unaquainted with." Anon. "The Preface," *Eunuchism Display'd. Describing all the different Sorts of Eunuchs; etc.* (London: E. Curll, 1718): x-xi.

¹⁰⁸ *London Magazine* 1825, Vol. 2, 517. *QMMR* 1825, 272.

¹⁰⁹ *QMMR* 1825, 272.

friend skulked away, with a feeling between the sense of the sublime, and the ridiculous.¹¹⁰

Out in front, the King's Theater had been filled for over an hour before the curtain's rising, the audience excitedly talking about the singer.

One had heard him at the Rehearsal, and assured his neighbour that his voice was more like the scream of a peacock, or the yell of a savage, than a human sound. Another stoutly denied that there was anything like music in his whole composition, and a third insisted that his singing was the most disagreeable thing he had ever heard, and he never wished to hear it again.¹¹¹

Wellington did not fail Velluti. After hosting an extravagant dinner at Apsley House, he brought a large group with him to the theater. When the castrato stepped into the lights there reigned "the most profound silence...in one of the most crowded audiences I ever saw."¹¹² When he advanced to the lip of the stage, the silence was broken by applause and shouts of encouragement, intermingled with booing and hissing.¹¹³ He was visibly pale beneath his stage make-up and "trembled excessively."¹¹⁴ "The first note he uttered gave a shock of surprise, almost of disgust to inexperienced ears."¹¹⁵ The *Harmonicon* reported twenty or thirty people, booing and hissing, who were "speedily silenced" and that it was a "unanimous" success.¹¹⁶ Velluti was mocked by falsetto imitations of

¹¹⁰ "On the Progress of Music from the Commencement of the Present Century, No. V," *New Monthly Magazine & Literary Journal* (Boston: Allen and Ticknor, 1834): 20-26.

¹¹¹ *The Parthenon*, 80. The author wryly remarks that the third should have saved himself the trouble of coming.

¹¹² MountEdgcumbe, 153.

¹¹³ Ebers, 266.

¹¹⁴ *The Parthenon*, 80. *Evening Mail*, July 1, 1825.

¹¹⁵ MountEdgcumbe, 153.

¹¹⁶ *Harmonicon* 1825, 143.

his voice, also silenced, though not before the spontaneous falsettists stopped the attempted encore of a trio from the first act.¹¹⁷

Velluti had sold this performance, his "benefit," to John Ebers.¹¹⁸ In the 1820s and 30s, the benefit was a common theatrical practice both in England and on the continent. In England, this practice extended from the Restoration of Charles II in 1660 to the late nineteenth century. Usually benefits were for audience favorites who, for whatever reason, were not paid sufficiently by the theater itself. By this method, the popularity or value (to the box office) of the player or singer (or sometimes the manager: Ebers himself had a benefit in 1828) to the theater would be proved by an audience coming specifically for that person, at little additional cost to the theater itself.¹¹⁹ Often actors or singers were expected to sell tickets themselves.¹²⁰ Judging by various reactions, the *Times* the most vehement, it was unheard-of for a debutant to have a benefit.

Critical opinion was mixed. Though mostly very positive for the opera itself, the press was sharply divided over Velluti.

How do we describe his voice? It is the most unequal as well as the most unnatural, that we ever hear; and we desire not ... ever to hear it again. It has the shrillness of a woman's voice, but not the sweetness. At times it

¹¹⁷ *London Magazine* 1825, 517. *Evening Mail*, July 1, 1825.

¹¹⁸ In other words, Velluti had no financial risk for the benefit. Ebers made the calculation that the receipts would be in excess of the purchase price and that he would come out ahead on the deal.

¹¹⁹ "Theatrical Benefit Performances," *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Accessed September 4, 2015 @ <http://www.britannica.com/art/benefit-performance>. The contract articles of most singers seem to have provided the establishment of the theater (house, lights, orchestra, chorus, etc) free of charge to the singer for his or her benefits, should they be granted.

¹²⁰ For an amusing and probably reasonably accurate account of the benefit in provincial theater in the 1830s, first published in 1839, see Charles Dickens, "Of the Great Bespeak for Miss Snevillici," *Nicholas Nickleby* (New York: Penguin Books, 2002): 291-307.

burst upon us with all the discordance of a peacock's scream ... at other times his notes were sweet, and soft, and flexible.¹²¹

The *Times* on July 2 disapprovingly noted the presence of the lower middle classes, tradesmen, in great numbers in the audience, breaking the class-warfare narrative.¹²² The *Times*'s comments were repeated and integrated into a somewhat longer review printed later that day by the *Evening Mail*. Echoing the anti-aristocratic leanings of the *Times*, the *Evening Mail* sourly addressed the aristocracy who came out in great numbers to support Velluti.

Lords, and knights, and ladies fair, assembled to do homage to this representative of the epicene gender. Those high and no doubt honourable personages, many of whom have passed a considerable portion of their lives in Italy, far from their own sturdy, rough-toned peasantry, may delight in such forced fruits, such costly exotics; but, nurture them as they may, they never will suit the unsophisticated palate of that people who for years fought the battles of Europe, and came from the contest victorious.¹²³

Clarifying just what the danger was that Velluti posed to "the pure British fair" of *The Times*'s June 30 editorial, *The Dorset County Chronicle* wrote that "It is not to be borne with patience, that for the sake of such an exhibition, the mind of a young and virtuous female should be exposed to the consequences of the dangerous curiosity and vicious insinuation."¹²⁴ Writing from Paris on July 10, Meyerbeer was thrilled with descriptions of the debut. "The London *Crociato* was a total, brilliant success. During the first evening's performance [Velluti] had to

¹²¹ *Times*, July 1, 1825.

¹²² *Times*, July 2, 1825. Theodore Fenner, *Leigh Hunt and Opera Criticism* (Lawrenceville: The University Press of Kansas, 1972): 176. Fenner has noted the strange confidence that William Barnes seems to have had in the political and intellectual instincts of the working class, i.e., that they would match his. He was often disappointed by reality.

¹²³ *Evening Mail* July 1, 1825.

¹²⁴ *The Dorset County Chronicle*, July 7, 1825.

struggle against strong opposition. This opposition was not directed at his talent, but rather at his person. ... He gloriously won over all his critics and created a sensation."¹²⁵

On July 9, the string of *Crociato* performances, planned as the only opera for the rest of the season, was broken. Maria Caradori-Allen, singing Palmide and enjoying one of the first great successes of her career, fell ill. As there was no other Palmide available, *Crociato* was cancelled. In its place, Rossini's *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*, on hiatus since June, was performed. With Manuel Garcia (père) singing Count Almaviva and with Maria Garcia as Rosina, the cast now included Velluti in the music lesson scene. He and Maria sang "Mille Sospiri" from *Aureliano in Palmyra*. The duet was immediately encored, with Velluti singing completely different ornaments.¹²⁶ Though Wellington very publically attended the premiere, it was not until July 23 that his close friend Harriet Arbuthnot saw the castrato.

He is the most disgusting creature I ever saw, high shouldered, sunk in the chest, immensely tall with long arms and legs and looking more gaunt & unnatural than one can conceive. Then his voice is like a bagpipe. However, he has great taste and science, which I suppose compensates for all defects, but I do hope we shall have no more such importations from Italy, for it really makes one sick.¹²⁷

¹²⁵ Becker and Becker, *A Life in Letters*, 38-39.

¹²⁶ *Morning Post*, July 11, 1825. These ornaments are at least partially described by the critic, including one magnificently executed, descending chromatic scale. The ability of the musically sophisticated auditor to not only hear differences in musical performances, but to be able to remember them well enough to describe them afterward is remarkable, and one of the under-appreciated aspects of audience reception in a period when (apparent) ornamentational inventiveness and spontaneity was an important ingredient in a singer's success. See Feldman, *Opera and Sovereignty*, 44, on Gertrude Mara's seeming improvisational brilliance—she admitted late in life that she composed several sets of ornaments to be performed on successive nights in order to appear to be a brilliant improviser.

¹²⁷ Harriet Arbuthnot, *The Diary of Mrs. Arbuthnot* Vol. 1 (London: Macmillan & Co., 1950): 409.

Her struggle between admiration for Velluti's abilities and accomplishments and her disgust for his body and the thoughts and feelings that awoke are representative of the antagonistic dichotomy in English writing about Velluti for the next four years.¹²⁸

The spectacle of press outrage, the *Times* in particular, was wryly and humorously noted in the German papers. *Das Morgenblatt für gebildete Stände* (Stuttgart) wrote of Velluti's London debut that "*The Times* and a few other newspapers, before and after, created a Murder Spectacle out of it, and screamed as if through such a debut all the high-famed morality of Old England must come crashing to the ground. ... A half-dozen buffoons wanted to drive him off, but without success. His singing pleased."¹²⁹ Continental reaction was not uniformly *blasé*. The *Iris*, a reformist journal in Frankfurt am Main, was critical of the use of a castrato after the reforms of the past twenty-five years.¹³⁰

Leigh Hunt's "Velluti To His Revilers" and the Appearance of META

Word of the attacks had reached Leigh Hunt in Florence. Hunt was a rapid poet, excelling in extemporaneous composition, and was at all times a fast, near-

¹²⁸ See chapter 2.

¹²⁹ Meyerbeer, *Briefwechsel* Vol. 2, 573. "Die Times und einige andere Zeitungen machten vor- und nachher einen Mordspektakel darüber, und tobten, als wenn durch einen solchen Auftritt alle die hochgerühmte Sittlichkeit Alt-Englands zugrunde gehen müßte... Ein halbes Dutzend Maulaffen wollten ihn hinwegzischen, aber ohne Erfolg. Sein Gesang gefiel."

¹³⁰ "Auswärtige Nachrichten," *Iris: Unterhaltungsblatt für Freunde des Schönen und Rußlichen*, September 3, 1825.

indefatigable writer.¹³¹ On August 1 his brother John printed a notice for the appearance of a poem in defense of Velluti in the next issue.¹³² "Velluti to his Revilers" was printed on the front page of the August 8 issue of *The Examiner*. Though Hunt was not credited with its authorship, his effort had an immediate effect, muting for a time attacks upon Velluti and heralding a spate of Vellutian poetry from other poets. It was introduced by a moderately lengthy essay that, while written from a third person perspective, seems to be by Hunt himself: an "effusion of the feelings at a moment."¹³³

In the introduction there are a few snippets of biographical information said to have been gathered in Florence from friends and acquaintances of Velluti's. This defense is somewhat unusual, coming from an avowed liberal, an enemy of castration and of the aristocracy that promoted and sheltered its victims.

He cannot but agree with the writers in question [the harshest of Velluti's critics] that it would be better to have no more singers of this kind. [But he had] heard such interesting accounts at Florence of that unfortunate and accomplished person, of his amiable manners, his disinterestedness, his

¹³¹ Anthony Holden, "A new school of poetry," *Leigh Hunt: The Wit in the Dungeon: The Remarkable Life of Leigh Hunt—Poet, Revolutionary, and the Last of the Romantics* (New York: Little, Brown and Co., 2005): 91-120.

¹³² *The Examiner*, 494.

¹³³ "Velluti to his Revilers," *The Examiner*, 495. (August 8, 1825.) This image is taken from a book published in 1825. There are no applicable copyright issues. The poem is certainly Hunt's. This was also, probably, well-known at the time given the familial relationships within *The Examiner* itself, the identification within the preface of an author in Florence and above all, the unabashed celebrity of Hunt. The attribution to him is beyond any doubt. The Leigh Hunt Collection at Iowa State University possesses a ca.1850 manuscript of the poem, likely in the hand of Hunt's eighth child Julia, with a postscript from Hunt himself: "In fact, I think them the best (in rhyme) that I ever wrote—if I am old enough to be allowed to talk of my 'best.'" Patrick Olson, "New Leigh Hunt Manuscripts," Website: *The University of Iowa Libraries: Special Collections and University Archives*, Accessed April 15, 2015 @ <http://blog.lib.uiowa.edu/speccoll/2013/09/27/new-leigh-hunt-manuscripts/>.

pensive turn of mind and his possession nevertheless of that willingness to please and be pleased which gives so generous a character to melancholy, and renders it so superior to the ordinary weakness of misfortune, that he felt his sympathy very forcibly excited.¹³⁴

Illustration 1.1. Front Page of *The Examiner*: "Velluti To His Revilers"



There is an ambivalence here that strongly contrasts with the *Times's* certitude. In the poem, Hunt refuses to make final judgments condemning both the singer and his art, exemplifying John Keats's "negative capability." Keats, in a letter to his brothers during the time of his closest friendship with Hunt wrote: "At

¹³⁴ *The Examiner*, 495. Within the poem itself, Hunt repeatedly expresses the belief that Velluti, bereft of the love of family, a wife and children, should by all means be allowed to sing as a kind of (pale) recompense.

once it struck me, what quality went to form a Man of Achievement, especially in literature, and which Shakespeare possessed so enormously—I mean Negative Capability, that is when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason."¹³⁵ Coming from the period of their closest friendship, it is unlikely that Hunt would not have discussed the issue with Keats, and, after his death a great admirer, would not himself strive to some extent to master this ability, similar to E.T.A. Hoffmann's *Besonnenheit*.¹³⁶

VELLUTI TO HIS REVILERS

VELLUTI, the lorn heart, the sexless voice,
To those who can insult a fate without a choice.

You wrong your manhood, critics, and degrade
Your just disdain of an inhuman trade,
When, in your zeal for what man should be,
You wreak your shuddering epithets on me.
Scorn, as you will, the trade; you cannot err;
But why with curses load the sufferer?
Was I the cause of what I mourn? Did I
Unmake myself, and hug deformity?
Did I, a smiling and a trusting child
See the curst blow, to which I was beguil'd?
Call for the knife? and not resist in vain,
With shrieks convulsive and a fiery pain,
that second baptism, bloody and profane?¹³⁷

¹³⁵ John Keats, "Letter to his Brothers, Sunday, December 21, 1817," *The Norton Anthology of English Literature: The Romantic Period* Vol. D, ed. Stephen Greenblatt (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2006): 942.

¹³⁶ Detlef Kremer, ed., *E.T.A. Hoffmann: Leben-Werk-Wirkung* (Tübingen: Walter de Gruyter, 2010): 98-99.

¹³⁷ For the complete text of "Velluti to his Revilers," please see Appendix A.

Though the next chapters will address in greater detail various themes contained in the 378 lines of this poem so central to the literary portraiture of Velluti, a short dilation here is appropriate. The opening lines, ostensibly Velluti himself speaking, are arresting. They reveal Hunt, however, and not Velluti. This pseudo-biography of Velluti is Hunt's fanatastical projection. He does not step into Velluti's shoes, he steps into Velluti-shoes of his own devising. While a few autobiographical details concerning Velluti's two near-bankruptcies and his relationship with a faithful servant are apparently historical, most is fantasy. The opening lines bathe the body and voice of Velluti in blood and pain.¹³⁸ This perceptual entanglement, widely though not universally embraced by London audiences, would eventually prove to be too strong for Velluti to overcome. Hunt was often attacked for his "effeminate" poetry—Rodney Edgecombe describes the manner in which Hunt transgressed traditional gender boundaries in poetry—and he perhaps felt compelled to transgress or to embody for a moment the castrated body.¹³⁹

The season at the King's Theater ended with a final *Crociato* on Saturday, 13 August 1825. In a self-exculpatory editorial the *Times* published a kind of apology to Velluti. Possibly this was the editor William Barnes himself, stung by the public chastisement by his old friend Hunt. He cannot help, however, a final jab at Velluti's manliness in defence of his own with the beef-eating "*hearty*."

¹³⁸ When I asked Federico Velluti about the preface and poem, he did not know the work, but believed the autobiographical details about the servant and his (unspecified) actions to preserve his master's fortune to be essentially accurate, lending veracity to the rest.

¹³⁹ Rodney Edgecome, *Leigh Hunt and the Poetry of Fancy* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1994): 35.

As we have been accused of unbecoming harshness towards Velluti by our efforts—our *hearty* efforts, we admit—to prevent altogether his appearance before an English audience, we may be allowed, perhaps, to take this occasion of saying one word upon the subject ... we disavow in the most earnest and unqualified terms, having ever entertained so much as a thought of wounding his sensibility, or inflict on him one moment's pain. [*The Times* hopes that, despite his success] Velluti might have been the last, as he is the best and most accomplished of his unhappy order.¹⁴⁰

"Velluti to his Revilers" had an immediate, salutary effect on the treatment of the singer. It also seems to have opened a poetic floodgate. On 22 August 1825, a short work appeared, ascribed to "META" an otherwise unknown poet unpublished, with one exception, outside of a ten-month span in *The Examiner*.

To Signor Velluti: Composed Extempore in a Box at the Opera, On Saturday, August 13.

The voice of past sweetness has slept on mine ear,
Oh! no more 'twill awaken its lingering strain;
It has fled like a fond fairy vision, and here
There lives no soft Echo to tell it again.

When those tones which for us have just breathed their farewell,
Thou art waking for others, far, far o'er the sea,
Then how oft will regret on thy minstrelsy dwell,
And a sigh from this bosom be wafted to thee.

No! never, VELLUTI, oh! never fade
On remembrance that voice, though I hear it no more;
Like the bright smiling West, still in beauty array'd,
Though sun-set has faded, and daylight is o'er.

META¹⁴¹

The poetry is not remarkable for quality and its presence on the demanding pages of *The Examiner*—site of many of Keats's and Shelley's first

¹⁴⁰ *Times*, August 15, 1825. Emphasis original.

¹⁴¹ *The Examiner* 1825, 530. For the complete (known) poetry of META, please see Appendix A.

publications—is incongruous. META's poems would appear at irregular intervals in the pages of *The Examiner* over the course of the next year, usually lauding Velluti but also including a few translations of Italian poetry, a few poems concerning home life, sickness, and one praising Emilia Bonini. After the summer of 1826, with one exception, META disappears as abruptly as she or he appeared.¹⁴²

The New Music Director of The King's Theater

At some point by the end of August John Ebers decided to change the musical direction of the King's Theater, having incurred another financial loss despite Velluti's successes.¹⁴³ Ayrton was likely aware his position was in danger. His August review of Velluti was generally positive. He promised more in the next month's issue, but when it came, it was coolly dismissive.¹⁴⁴

It is true that Signor Velluti brought many to the house, particularly at first, when several were drawn out of mere curiosity; but his personal attraction soon abated, the opposition to him ceased, and the interest elicited in his favour died away. With all the merit he possesses, he is not a singer that can long keep hold of the public. Independently of moral considerations, his voice is not in its prime, and his intonation is defective. When we first heard him, many years ago, his middle tones were good; they are now imperfect, if not actually disagreeable, and he is no longer young.

Ebers wrote that very early in planning the 1826 season he had decided to hire Velluti as singer and director of music. He notes this caused some

¹⁴² Please see the section "META reappears" in this chapter for a tentative identification of META.

¹⁴³ Ebers, 273.

¹⁴⁴ *Harmonicon* 1825, 166. These articles were likely completed approximately 2 weeks before the beginning of each month. This puts Ayrton's dismissal, in all likelihood, in the middle of August.

contention between Velluti and harpist/composer (and noted scallywag) Nicholas Bochsa.¹⁴⁵ A talented teacher (at different times for the families of Napoleon and Wellington) and composer, Bochsa was appointed as the "director of the orchestra and choruses, and composer of the music for the ballet."¹⁴⁶ It is not clear, precisely, how this differed from Velluti's role as "Music Director" though it seems Velluti had casting and repertoire control while Bochsa conducted the orchestra and managed its affairs. For these two jobs, Velluti was to be paid £2,300. In 1826 London this was a very considerable sum, amounting to approximately £180,000 in 2013 currency.¹⁴⁷ There had been significant deflation since the end of the Napoleonic Wars, and this was approximately 30% more than the yearly income of Mr. Bennett, Elizabeth Bennett's father in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*.¹⁴⁸ Ayrton had lost a fortune to a foreign eunuch.

¹⁴⁵ Douglas Bomberger, "Bochsa, (Robert) Nicholas Charles," Website: *Grove Music Online*, ed. Deane Roote, Accessed September 6, 2015. <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com>. Bochsa, whom Fétis calls "as distinguished an artist as he was a miserable man" had decamped to London in 1817 to avoid prison for forgery. He was tried in Paris *in absentia* and sentenced to twelve years hard labor. He eventually left England, eloping with composer Henry Bishop's wife and emigrating, under a cloud, to Australia.

¹⁴⁶ Ebers, 280.

¹⁴⁷ Website: *Historical UK Inflation and Price Conversion*, Accessed September 6, 2015 @ <http://safalra.com/other/historical-uk-inflation-price-conversion/>. Data derived from Jim O'Donoghue et al., "Consumer Price Inflation Since 1750," *Economic Trends* 604 (2004): 38-46. This sum is, of course, not perfectly convertible as prices for various commodities have not retained the same relationship to one another and there was no income tax. I have used this, rather than the more common system derived by literary critic Edward Copeland, as it is more precise, and shows inflationary and deflationary changes, year-on-year, in addition to being far more user-friendly. Copeland's 100-to-1 ratio for converting monetary values in the novels of Jane Austen is an acceptable rule of thumb but is imprecise and does not take into account the wild fluctuations in inflation during the final years of the Napoleonic Wars.

¹⁴⁸ William Baker, *Critical Companion to Jane Austen: A Literary Reference to Her Life and Work* (New York: Infobase Publishing, 2008): 370. Baker considers the Bennett's income to place them economically, as indeed they are placed socially, well within the landed gentry, but not beyond the need for careful budgeting.

One of the changes Velluti convinced Ebers to make was the engagement of Emilia Bonini. On 29 December 1825, she made what appears to have been her London debut, in a private concert with Velluti.¹⁴⁹ Rehearsals for *Crociato* were already underway. That winter saw rumors of Velluti selling his Italian estate and moving permanently to London.¹⁵⁰ The season for which he must have had great hopes ended in disaster, disgrace and the collapse of his health.

1826: Winter and Spring

On 7 January 1826, the King's Theater's season opened with *Crociato*. Though according to Ebers it was technically better, changes in casting and a decline in Velluti's singing due at least partially to persistent ill-health made it far less successful than hoped. Bonini's appearance came about through the combined efforts of Velluti and Lord Burghersh, but her lack of beauty and perceived age hampered her success.¹⁵¹ Both Ebers and Mt. Edgcumbe found her too ugly.¹⁵² Mt. Edgcumbe found her acting cold, but Ebers considered it praiseworthy. "Her passion ... bore all the semblance of reality, and was truly affecting ... [But] on the score of personal attractions, Madame Bonini's claims

¹⁴⁹ *Morning Chronicle*, December 29, 1825.

¹⁵⁰ *Morning Post*, January 21, 1826.

¹⁵¹ *London Magazine* 1826, 316. For a performance of *Tebaldo*: "We cannot describe the effect of Velluti, with his tall figure bending over the little old lady [Bonini], and holding her up by the hand as if to lift her over the gamut."

¹⁵² Ebers, 280. MountEdgcumbe, 157. Alfred Edward Chalon, Watercolor: "Emilia Bonini." Website: *The Collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum*, Accessed September 7, 2015 @ <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O766584/drawing-of-la-bonnini-as-caricature-portrait-sketch-chalon-alfred-edward/>. This portrait, a caricature of her from the 1826 season by Alfred Chalon (1780-1860) exaggerates a sharp nose and bird beak-like mouth.

are exceedingly slight. Her figure is short, and not very graceful; and her features, though intelligent, are by no means remarkable for beauty."¹⁵³ Critic "X" of *The Examiner* calls her an "elderly lady ... the venerable remains of a very excellent singer; but her voice has begun to lose its firmness, and to quiver with the symptoms of age."¹⁵⁴ She was 27.

Her recommendation here is, having performed privately at Florence in an opera composed by a noble Lord [Burghersh], and being a *kind* of prima donna that will condescend to sing with a *musico*,—i.e. with a male soprano; for the really first-rate women will not appear on the stage with a person of such a description. ... She has neither youth, nor figure, nor beauty to offer as some compensation.¹⁵⁵

The assertion that first-rate women would not appear on stage with Velluti is false. Velluti sang, either on the concert stage or the operatic one, with every leading lady of the 1820s with the sole exception of Angelica Catalani, with whom he sang in Venice in the Teatro San Benedetto in 1814-1815.¹⁵⁶ Eliza Vestris, who alone had refused to sing with Velluti the previous year, though apparently charming in lighter, English-language productions, cannot be considered a first-rate singer of Italian opera. Even in London she rarely sang leading roles outside of English opera and her fees at the King's Theater place her decidedly in the second or even third rank.¹⁵⁷ Bonini's troubles seem to have inspired META to leave for a moment the near-ceaseless praise of Velluti that spanned the fall and

¹⁵³ *Times*, January 9, 1826.

¹⁵⁴ Critic X, *Examiner* 1826, 37. Critic X was a harsh, consistent critic of Velluti, Burghersh, and of most of the foreigners working as musicians in London.

¹⁵⁵ *Harmonicon* 1826, 42. Emphases original.

¹⁵⁶ John Edmund Cox, "Musical Recollections of the Last Half Century," *Tinsley's Magazine* (London: Tinsley Brothers, 1871): 631.

¹⁵⁷ Ebers, 392-395. As will be seen in the following chapter, by 1827 Vestris had swallowed her objections to appearing with Velluti, at least in private concerts.

winter to write a short, 12-line poem to Bonini's "voice, so sweet, so soft, so clear,/so beautiful in minstrelsy!" This is META's sole effort on behalf of another singer.¹⁵⁸

The season was not going well. Velluti was even criticized for his inability correctly to sing the *fourth* verse of "God Save the King."¹⁵⁹ Ayrton writes that Velluti was repeating the same ornamentation from the previous season. "He is a mannerist. This is as nothing compared to his intonation, which, though imperfect last year, is much more so this; from the commencement of the present season, he has sung so extremely out of tune, so flat, that many ears could not [bear to] hear it."¹⁶⁰ Burghersh continued to support Velluti and Bonini and on January 30 there seems to have been payback. At an "Oratorio" at the King's Theater in honor of the feast of the Martyrdom of King Charles I, the company performed well-received selections from Burghersh's *L'eroe di Lancastro* and *La Fedra* with Velluti and Bonini.¹⁶¹ The *Morning Post* reported that, once again, Velluti was ill, but that he persevered. The newspaper also noted the "dilettantish character" of the music. There is ambiguity in this statement in an age when "noble amateur"

¹⁵⁸ META, "Lines Addressed to Madame Bonini on Hearing Her Sing 'Naqui all'affanno al pianto,' &c.," *The Examiner* 1826, 91.

¹⁵⁹ *Bell's Weekly Messenger*, January 15, 1826. See Velluti's Italianized transliteration of the English text to Thomas Welsh's "Ah Can I think of Days gone by" at the end of this chapter for an estimation of the singer's linguistic abilities.

¹⁶⁰ *Harmonicon* 1826, 42.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 63. "Oratorios" were, in 1820s London, concerts of mixed sacred and secular music, usually held during Lent (the Martyrdom of King Charles, though during Epiphany, was considered a minor day of penitence). They were not presentations (necessarily) of single works with a unified, sacred dramaturgy like Handel's *Messiah*, though parts or all of *Messiah* were, for instance, frequently performed at them.

and "dilettante" were still, in some circles, compliments rather than insults.¹⁶² The concert was repeated and received another positive notice in the *Times*.¹⁶³

Tebaldo e Isolina, with which Velluti had wished to make his London debut, was nearing its premiere.¹⁶⁴ At the end of February, Ayrton wrote that "a new opera, by Morlacchi, was announced early in the last month, but had not appeared when our work went to press. We anticipate very little from it for Signor Velluti's part constitutes nearly the whole of it."¹⁶⁵ Roughly simultaneously, the most damaging poetic attack on Velluti was, like the best poetic defense of him, printed in *The Examiner* on February 19, 1826.¹⁶⁶ Unlike Hunt's or META's Velluti poetry, however, "VELLUTI" was reprinted early and often.¹⁶⁷

VELLUTI

Heard'st thou not the peacock shriek?
Heard'st thou not the cricket squeak?
Heard'st thou not the door-hinge creak?
No,—it was VELLUTI.

Heard'st thou the parrot's shrilly cry?
Heard'st thou the screech-owl hooting by?
Heard'st thou the sea-mew screaming nigh?
No,—it was VELLUTI.

Heard'st thou the angry mastiff growl?
Heard'st thou grimalkin's midnight howl
And croaking frog in waters foul?
No,—it was VELLUTI.

¹⁶² *Morning Post*, January 31, 1826. In his *Musical Reminiscences*, MountEdgcumbe calls himself and his friends old amateurs, and uses the term dilettante with no apparent pejorative sense attached to it.

¹⁶³ *Times*, February 9, 1826.

¹⁶⁴ Ebers, *Seven Years*, 266.

¹⁶⁵ *Harmonicon* 1826, 63.

¹⁶⁶ "VELLUTI," *Examiner* 1826, 124.

¹⁶⁷ Almost immediately, in fact, in the *Oxford University City Herald* on February 25, 1826.

Some there are who mock the song
And warblings of the feather'd throng,
But birds and beasts alike belong
To *thy* tones, lost VELLUTI.

For thou art all—first this, then that,
A husky rook—a squeaking rat,
Famed Punch—a frog—a love-sick cat;
These form *thy* voice, VELLUTI.

Critic X—a virulent Velluti foe who, in fairness, seems to have disliked much of what he or she saw and heard at the King's Theater—quotes the poem in the review of *Tebaldo* on 5 March 1826.¹⁶⁸ A month earlier, before "VELLUTI" appeared, X used similar imagery. "Poor VELLUTI remains in *status quo*;—still screeching like a peacock, howling like a midnight cat, or imitating the slender tones of a penny trumpet."¹⁶⁹ X may merely have provided fertile images, or may in fact be the poet. X is one of the comparatively few major critics whom Theodore Fenner's *Opera in London: Views of the Press, 1785-1830* is utterly unable to identify.¹⁷⁰ Paralleling "Velluti to his Revilers," a poem that had an ameliorating effect on the tenor of criticism, "VELLUTI" found the courage to voice sentiments that Hunt had made, however briefly, unvoiceable, and in such a clever, catchy way as to make renewed attacks upon the castrato and his person not only acceptable, but fashionable.

¹⁶⁸ *Examiner* 1826, 148.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 37.

¹⁷⁰ Theodore Fenner, *Opera in London: Views of the Press 1785-1830* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1994): 34-35. X also caused *The Examiner* more than one libel lawsuit, one to be detailed in upcoming chapters, but his or her identity was never revealed by the Hunt brothers. X may have also been more than one person, though Fenner considers the style to be distinct and consistent.

Tebaldo received a mixed review in the still-docile *Times*, which called Velluti "florid and charming," but the opera was for the rest of the press and the public a general and thorough failure.¹⁷¹ X eviscerated everything, castigating the castrato's "howling ... croakings and screechings."¹⁷² Velluti's health remained poor. At the end of the 1826 season the *QMMR* declared that Velluti "has laboured under continual ill-health ever since he has been in England, which must have detracted considerably from the exercise of his powers."¹⁷³

Ebers lamented the failure of an opera "full of out-of-the-way passages and unusual combinations. ... Its want of success made me regret the expense bestowed in bringing out this piece, which was not trifling," though he praised Velluti's solo scene "Notte tremenda" with the famed *Romanza*.¹⁷⁴ The *scena* was so popular that Velluti's version was published in London by three different firms, Ricordi, Grua (London), Birchall & Co. and Chapelle & Co.¹⁷⁵ The importance of this piece to Velluti's later career is hard to overemphasize. *Crociato* was the great operatic success of Velluti's first two London seasons, but the *Romanza* dominated the last decade or more of his private and public singing. *Tebaldo* was withdrawn after four performances, partly due to its failure,

¹⁷¹ *Times*, February 27, 1826. An anecdote for which the only source I have found is in Angus Herriot's *The Castrati in Opera*, 197, the virginal knight Tebaldo's line "il nostro casto amore" (Our chaste love) elicited the cry of "Well, how could it be otherwise?" from the audience.

Unfortunately, as there is no other source than Herriot, though the anecdote is believable I can only justify its appearance in a footnote. Printed libretti were available far in advance of performances and a far-seeing wag would have had ample opportunity to construct this bon mot.

¹⁷² Critic X, *The Examiner* 1826, 148.

¹⁷³ *QMMR* 1826, 136.

¹⁷⁴ Ebers, 293-294.

¹⁷⁵ "Morlacchi's Romance," *QMMR* 1826, 199-207.

and partly due to Velluti's continuing ill-health. It was replaced by *Il Barbiere di Seviglia* to the great relief of *The Times*, which, finding its teeth, bid a "doleful" Velluti farewell.¹⁷⁶ The final performance coincided with the publication of another of META's "Impromptus."

Impromptu composed in a box at the King's Theater
To Signor Velluti

OH! should some seraph of the sky,
While *thou* art singing, hover nigh,
No longer then thy minstrelsy
To *Earth* alone be given.

For as the sweet tones floated by,
Oft would that seraph hither hie,
To listen to its melody,
And waft each note to *Heav'n*.

META¹⁷⁷

The "thou," so much more intimate in English than "tu" is in Italian, and the apotheosis linking Velluti's song with that of the angels, equal, even superior to theirs, reveal a poet not only out of synch with the general sentiment of the London public (or at least the press) but someone possibly obsessed with the singer. Interestingly, the scansion and rhyme scheme echo those of "VELLUTI." This may have been intended as a direct response. No more of META's work appeared before July 9, the longest gap in the poet's short publishing career.¹⁷⁸

Modern accounts of Velluti have frequently focused on the scandalous affairs he is said to have had. Aside from the tittle-tattle about the soprano Fabri

¹⁷⁶ *Times*, March 13, 1826.

¹⁷⁷ META, "Impromptu," *The Examiner* 1826, 172.

¹⁷⁸ That is, excepting the 1828 appearance of a META poem in the *Spirit of the Age*, paired with a reprint of "VELLUTI." This appears to me, however, to be a reprint whose original appearance I've yet to locate.

in Stendhal's *Rome*, I find, before March 1826, no specific rumors of scandals involving Velluti in primary sources.¹⁷⁹ On 1 August 1825, the *Monthly Magazine or British Register* hints at sexual sins common to all castrati. Though it does not explicitly implicate Velluti, the preceding content is largely about him and his aristocratic sponsors. The parting warning must be seen as a swipe at that relationship, especially regarding the private parties at which he so often sang.

There are vices [appertaining to the castrati] which must remain unproved, lest the cheek of Innocence should be scorched by the very breath that diffuses the echo of the reproof. By the adepts in the science of sinning without shame, we shall be understood ... There are reasons enough ... why *the matrons and the maidens* of our isle should shrink from the imputation of countenancing, in public or in *private*, those speaking things whom humanity, even while she pities, must yet disown.¹⁸⁰

As the following implies worries about castration rather than carnal depredations I also exclude from the category of *specific* scandal the March 1826 remarks of X in *The Examiner* who opined that Velluti was going to teach "girls and **boys** [at the Royal Academy of Music] how singers in Italy were **made**."¹⁸¹ In

¹⁷⁹ This of course excludes the scandal of association and imputation of erotic entanglements between Velluti and the women of the aristocracy that *The Times* attempted to engineer with visions of doting grandmothers and Farinelli, or the shocking (and widely condemned) printing of Juvenal on the morning of Velluti's King's Theater debut.

¹⁸⁰ *The Monthly Magazine or British Register* Vol. 2 (London: Geo. B. Whittaker, 1825): 42. Emphases original. This review is signed with a triangle, probably the Greek letter delta perhaps indicating a self-personification as Change? Fenner offers no identity for this writer.

¹⁸¹ *The Examiner* 1826, 675. Bolds mine: boys are *made* into singers, not taught. Lord Burghersh had recently appointed Velluti as voice teacher for the Royal Academy of Music, of which he was the founder. The article includes a reprint from March that had attacked, primarily, Nicholas Bochsa, and which then drew a libel lawsuit from Bochsa. The Hunts refused to reveal the identity of Critic X whose accusations against Bochsa concerning his trail in absentia in Paris, though essentially true, were deemed libelous. The Hunts lost the judgment and, ostensibly in the interest of full disclosure but obviously as an unpunishable parting shot, reprinted the entire court proceedings in October, including the libelous original article. Why Velluti never initiated lawsuits against his more vicious accusers is not clear. Perhaps it was the staying hand of Lord Burghersh—apparently, a constant adviser to Velluti—who, as with *The Spirit of the Age* and that publication's attacks on Lady Burghersh's marital fidelity (see the next footnote) was wary of any

mid-April 1826 this all changed when Lady Burghersh was apparently obliquely accused of being in love with Velluti by Charles Westmacott in *The Spirit of the Age*. This was not really new. *The London Magazine* had in June 1825 repeated the story of a woman resembling Lady Burghersh rapturously kissing Velluti's hand. Though Burghersh was furious, no libel lawsuit seems to have resulted from it. Mrs. Arbuthnot recommended he horsewhip the editor.¹⁸²

In April, the dual problems of Velluti's recurring illnesses and the pressing need to provide operas for the stage were relieved, in one stroke, by Pasta's return to London and the King's Theater. She negotiated a contract with Ebers in which none of the planned operas included Velluti.¹⁸³ Though Mt. Edgcumbe writes that Velluti was afraid to appear with Pasta on the same stage, it has already been seen that they did sing in concert together.¹⁸⁴ Velluti shared a private concert in late March or early April with another invalid, Carl Maria von Weber, newly arrived in London for the premiere of *Oberon*. They performed in separate rooms, however, and apparently did not speak. Weber wearily

exposure to scandal in the press, even if he was in the right. See following footnote concerning horsewhipping.

¹⁸² Arbuthnot, *Journals* Vol. 2, 219-220. Mrs. Arbuthnot is the source for this story. Given the often very obscured identities in these printed rumors, I have had some difficulty in locating the original article. Horsewhipping had powerful class overtones, especially in an era when dueling was the standard method of settling disputes between equals (in the upper classes), and the image of the horsewhip conveys with it the understanding of one man atop a horse, and the other, his inferior, on foot. A nobleman like Burghersh would never stoop to duel with a journalist, hence Mrs. Arbuthnot's suggestion of horsewhipping. The act conveyed an extraordinary sense of disdain and condescension, the act of a man toward a beast, a noble toward a peasant. See the thrashing of Sir Mulberry Hawk by the eponymous hero in Dickens's *Nicholas Nickleby*. Sir Mulberry was particularly humiliated in his attempt to beat Nicholas, as the boy took the riding crop from him, and administered the degrading (and extremely painful) punishment.

¹⁸³ Ebers, 297-298. That is, none of the operas had roles that he sang. Additionally, as at this point in her career Pasta specialized in trouser roles—the *musico*—the likelihood of a joint appearance with Velluti would be, in the normal course of things, close to nil.

¹⁸⁴ MountEdgcumbe, 169.

describes a hot, noisy, crowded atmosphere where the performers had to contend against the cacophony of hundreds of chattering guests. In the end, he says, he thought of his £30—his fee for the evening—played his pieces and went home without eating dinner.¹⁸⁵

By May, Velluti had recovered somewhat and was still a powerful draw. A pickpocket caught at the King's Theater and brought up before a London magistrate said that he had chosen the night in question because "Velluti was singing, and the house was full."¹⁸⁶ On May 25 Velluti and Pasta shared an evening—a double bill of a sort. The first act of *Crociato* with Velluti as Armando was followed by the second act of Paisiello's *Nina* with Pasta in the title role. They did not, however, appear together. In the audience, Mary Shelley refused to speak English to help a lady fruitlessly searching the printed libretto of *Crociato* for the translation of the second act of *Nina*.¹⁸⁷ Two days later Sir Thomas Morgan wished to hear Pasta, but was forced to listen to Velluti as well.

[Letter to his wife] I did not tell you how Pasta charmed me in the *Romeo* the other night. She sang "Ombra adorata" *divinely*. They played, also, an

¹⁸⁵ Julius Benedict, *Carl Maria von Weber* (London: Sampson Low, Marston & Co., Ltd, 1894): 119. Mrs. Arbuthnot describes many of these private parties, where the dinner was held almost invariably at a very late hour, often past midnight. It is unsurprising that an ailing von Weber would choose to 'take the money and run.' If von Weber, a composer and pianist, received £30 (modern value over £2,500), it is a reasonable assumption Velluti as a true star would have gotten at least as much and likely far more. In the *NMM&LJ* 1833, 257, dinners at the "private concerts of the nobility," are represented as "rarely beginning before eleven o'clock at night, and end—no one knows when." The article goes on to describe Pasta as singing a morning concert, rehearsing, singing a full performance at the King's Theatre, and then singing in a late-night concert, all on the same day. A "Mrs. Salmon's" weekly schedule was "Monday night in London, Tuesday at Oxford, Wednesday in London, Thursday at Bath, Friday in London, and Saturday at Bristol." Even in the 1840s with the railroad this would have been a daunting timetable. In the 1830s, travel by horse-drawn coach would have taken most of a day between these cities.

¹⁸⁶ *Times*, May 3, 1826.

¹⁸⁷ M. Shelley, *Letters of Mary Shelley* Vol. 1, 519.

act of *Tebaldo ed Isolina*, in which Velluti sang "Notte tremenda," in a style of which I had no idea, still, however, he does not please me. ... I believe now I have done with operas.¹⁸⁸

Sir Thomas was a Whig; a medical doctor knighted in 1811, he was not born into the aristocracy.¹⁸⁹ His preference for Pasta and dislike for Velluti were thus par for the course. Not every liberal opposed Velluti, however.

Summer 1826: Anglo-Italicus and the Female Opera Choristers

In a letter to John Howard Payne dated June 11, Mary Shelley says she was "agreeably disappointed in Velluti. I had expected pain, but rec'd extreme pleasure, he is handsome and graceful & with the exception of a few peacock notes, his tones are sweet and clear, & his expression infinitely sweet."¹⁹⁰ On May 29 Shelley wrote a letter to *The Examiner*, published under the pseudonym "Anglo-Italicus," defending Velluti against those who condemned his entire art because of his obvious faults, his "bad soprano," writing that "VELLUTI has notes in his voice rare and perfect; his upper tones are sweet, clear and true... but his chief merit is... in his mode of linking note to note in a manner that chains the ear and touches the heart."¹⁹¹ Shelley continues that she will be going to Velluti's benefit on the eighteenth of June. This benefit was apparently Velluti's first repeat

¹⁸⁸ Sydney, Lady Morgan and William Dixon, *Lady Morgan's memoirs: autobiography, diaries and correspondence* Vol. 2 (London: Wm. H. Allen Co., 1863): 227-228. Emphases original. Sir Thomas was a sometime writer for the *New Monthly Magazine* but not on musical subjects. He is probably not a candidate for the more scurrilous anonymous attacks on Velluti.

¹⁸⁹ James McMullen Rigg, "Sir Thomas Morgan," *The Dictionary of National Biography* Vol. 39 (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1885-1900): 36.

¹⁹⁰ M. Shelley, *Letters of Mary Shelley* Vol. 1, 520.

¹⁹¹ M. Shelley, *Letters of Mary Shelley* Vol. 1, 517-518.

production of Rossini's *Aureliano in Palmyra*. The King's Theater had announced *Aureliano* for early June but delayed it several times.¹⁹² One reason may have been the funeral on 17 June 1826 of Weber, who had died at the home of Sir George Smart in the night of June 4/5. Much of the musical establishment of London was involved in his requiem mass.¹⁹³

When *Aureliano* finally debuted on 22 June Velluti was again ill. "He is labouring under a severe cough," wrote Shelley on 23 June in her second "Anglo Italicus" letter (unpublished) to *The Examiner*.¹⁹⁴ Velluti's cough so close to Weber's death from tuberculosis caused more than one journal to comment on their similarities. The *NMM&LJ* reported that many performances of *Aureliano* had been cancelled and opined that "the melancholy fate of poor Weber cannot but increase our sympathies in regard to Velluti; it would be distressing indeed, if, in one season England should prove the grave of two foreigners so illustrious in their respective departments of the art."¹⁹⁵

Shelley's letter of June 23 claims a great success for Velluti. In her cover letter to editor Charles Cowden Clarke, she speaks of Velluti as a friend. "He is a gentle graceful angelic being—too much the reverse of coarse natures to be relished by them—If he has not all the boasted energy of that vain creature man he has what is far better, a strength all his own, founded on the tenderness &

¹⁹² *Times*, June 9, 1826.

¹⁹³ Benedict, *Weber*, 131-132.

¹⁹⁴ M. Shelley, *Letters of Mary Shelley* Vol. 1, 523-524.

¹⁹⁵ *NMM&LJ* 1826, 325.

sympathy he irresistibly [*sic*] excites." ¹⁹⁶ Hinting at troubles Velluti was having with various groups at the King's Theater, she adds "Velluti himself is thoroughly & reasonably disgusted, & will not again engage himself at the theater."¹⁹⁷

Mt. Edgumbe was delighted with *Aureliano*, echoing Stendhal's delineation of Rossini's restrained first and "noisy" second styles.¹⁹⁸ Ayrton had "contempt" not only for the work itself, but for all who liked it.¹⁹⁹ Ebers thought it mediocre and added blandly that Velluti got embroiled in a court battle because of it without mention of his own, likely rather significant role in the affair.²⁰⁰ The exhaustion of preparing *Aureliano* for its premiere and the problems mentioned in Shelley's cover letter to Clarke were likely contributors to Velluti's disgust and annoyance with the King's Theater. This possibly contributed to the complete collapse in his health immediately following the premier of *Aureliano*.²⁰¹ A sign of the seriousness of his condition is the reappearance of META after a four-month absence with a short poem, dated July 1 and published in *The Examiner* on July 9, expressing thankfulness for Velluti's recovery. This was premature. He remained house-bound for some time longer, but the poem's publication indicates that his illness was a matter of public concern.²⁰²

¹⁹⁶ M. Shelley, *Letters of Mary Shelley* Vol. 1, 524. "Man" is underlined in the original.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 522.

¹⁹⁸ MountEdgumbe, 158.

¹⁹⁹ *Harmonicon* 1826, 154.

²⁰⁰ Ebers, 303-304.

²⁰¹ Ibid., 304.

²⁰² META, "Sonnet Dedicated To Signor Velluti On His Recovery From His Late Indisposition," *The Examiner* 1826, 444.

In early July, the female opera choristers successfully sued Velluti (too sick to appear in court) for the non-payment of a promised extra gratuity of one guinea each if they performed well for his 22 June benefit. On 30 June the female choristers had written Velluti reminding him of this promise, he having already paid the men. On 10 July, after losing in court, Velluti took his case public in an exchange of letters published in several newspapers, defending himself against what he clearly saw as an unjust verdict.²⁰³

The following summary comes from the proceedings as reported in the August edition of the *Harmonicon*, including all quotes.²⁰⁴ Velluti claimed that his benefit was originally scheduled for the first of June, when the choristers would still have been under contract with the house and would be paid by Ebers. He also wrote that as *Medea* (Simon Mayr) was in rehearsals at the same time, he was afraid that the *male* choristers would be overwhelmed by having to learn two operas simultaneously. He wrote the "Signori Coristi" a letter offering them one guinea each if they performed the music well.²⁰⁵

Velluti was represented by a solicitor and at least one friend (unnamed) in the courtroom, ready to attest to the veracity of the letter. Though the female choristers did not refute the authenticity of the letter to the Gentlemen Choristers that Velluti's solicitor produced in court, they claimed that this was not the one

²⁰³ *Morning Post* July 20, 1826.

²⁰⁴ *Harmonicon* 1826, 163-165.

²⁰⁵ A gold coin worth 21 shillings which was one shilling or twelve pence more than a pound. In modern currency, approximately 100 pounds, although this does not accurately represent its value. In gold these coins would be worth approximately 250 pounds, or put another way, would be the equivalent of a week and half's wages for the female choristers. The men earned two shillings more per week, per the *Harmonicon* 1826, 165.

they were read. Velluti had not spoken to the chorus himself as this was one of the many times in the spring when he was too sick to leave home. The chorus master Rubbi had made the decision to read the letter to the entire chorus.

Illustration 1.2. "Signor Velluti and the Female Choristers of the King's Theater"²⁰⁶



²⁰⁶ Dick Doublestone, Caricature: "Signor Velluti and the Female Choristers of the King's Theater" (London: John Duncombe, 1826). From the private collection of David Glass, used with his permission. The artist's name may well be a pseudonym. Underlining to what extent the interconnectivity of contemporary texts in the 1820s was conscious, the female choristers refer to Juvenal's Satire partially printed in *The Times* on June 30 of the previous year. The pounds demanded by the women (two want one pound and one wants two) are immediately followed by the final rejoinder of "we'll cut him." Though ostensibly referring to social shunning, refusing to speak to a previously acknowledged acquaintance, these are clear allusions to Juvenal. "That's why the testicles are allowed to drop and develop first. And afterwards when they've achieved two pounds in weight, Heliodorus has them off." See this chapter's fn. 104. The veiled same-sex accusations find voice in Velluti's attempt to ward them off, shielding his position and, conflated with his genitalia, in his "I no like you to meddle wite my Concern," all doomed to fail.

Mr. Monkhouse, Velluti's solicitor, when asked why the men should be paid by Velluti and not the women, claimed that "the Signor had a decided objection to the ladies, and never allowed them to appear in any place where he was concerned." Monkhouse added that their engagement was never intended by Velluti and was "contrary to his wish and express direction. "After enraged cries from the choristers of "Why he has beat time to me!" feelings in the courtroom, including the judge's, ran strongly against Velluti. It was declared "a trumpery defense" and the judge quickly decided against the singer. Language used in the *Harmonicon* approached the imputations (concerning "Bromius") in the *Times's* attack of the previous summer including an allusion to Velluti's "morbid antipathy to women."²⁰⁷ Although the details as laid out by Velluti never were contradicted in the press, the *Harmonicon*, the *Times* and like-minded journals (in verbatim reprints) mocked the proceedings, laughing at the spectacle of a castrato being taken to task, taken to court, and brought to heel by a group of women.

The justice of Velluti's case has not been considered in modern accounts like that of J.Q. Davies.²⁰⁸ It does not necessarily slip too far into advocacy to note some points in his favor. First, his letter was quite clearly addressed to the men, and if anyone should have paid for the mistaken reading to the entire chorus, it should have been the chorus-master, Mr. Rubbi. Second, while the

²⁰⁷ *Harmonicon* 1826, 163-164. The entire courtroom proceedings here are condensed from the *Harmonicon's* account which overlaps, though in a more complete fashion, the account published in the *Times*.

²⁰⁸ Davies, *Romantic Anatomies*, 29.

claim that Velluti disliked appearing with the female choristers is possibly true, this could well have been for musical reasons, not because of misogyny. In Nicolini's *Carlo Magno* and *Quinto Fabio*, containing two of Velluti's most performed roles, the chorus is omnipresent, but is made up only of Tenor I, Tenor II and Bass.²⁰⁹ In *Crociato*, at least during solo scenes for Velluti like the 1824 Florence version of the opening "Popolo d'Egitto; Caro mano" repeated in London, the accompanying chorus also appears (the clefs are somewhat haphazard and inspecific) to have the same three-part male scoring.²¹⁰ In the original 1822 version of *Tebaldo e Isolina*, though there is a mixed chorus, only the men accompany Velluti's solo singing.²¹¹ Composers and singers alike know that it is far more difficult to project a solo voice over a chorus that includes sopranos and altos than one consisting of lower voices alone.²¹²

The final factor supporting Velluti's position is that in *Aureliano in Palmira*, or at least in the ca. 1815 manuscript score at the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich, the male choristers have approximately four times as much music to

²⁰⁹ Giuseppe Nicolini, MS *Quinto Fabio* (before 1844) Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional de España, E-Mn, M-1472. . Hereafter, for every repeat citation of an MS, I will merely provide the siglum and call number.

²¹⁰ Giacomo Meyerbeer, "This dear hand: The Celebrated Cavatina CARA MANO as Sung by Sig^r. Velluti with the Chorus, Youthful Hero or Fortunate Vincitore in the Opera of IL CROCIATO IN EGITTO" (London: J. Willis & Co., ca. 1825).

²¹¹ Francesco Morlacchi, MS *Tebaldo e Isolina, melodramma eroico* (Venice: 1822) Bologna, Museo internazionale e biblioteca della musica di Bologna, I-Bc, UU.16/1-2.

²¹² When I sang Velluti's role of Vitekindo in *Carlo Magno*, I was initially worried about my two arias with full chorus. The nearly constant octave or more between their voices and mine, however, made projection very easy. I suspect that this acoustic phenomenon is essentially unchanged in the 200 years since the premier of this opera. Given the very common practice of TTB choruses accompanying solo arias in this period, I believe my experience to be analogous, if not necessarily identical, to that of solo singers of both genders in Italian opera of the 1810s and 1820s.

sing as the female choristers, who only appear in crowd scenes at the beginnings and ends of acts.²¹³ Assuming this version to be similar to the one presented in London, the work load for the male singers was considerably greater and Velluti was perfectly justified, if impolitic, to offer extra remuneration to the men. In a lengthy article titled "State of Music in London" written in August 1826 the writer defends Velluti specifically against the charges of any kind of dislike for or avoidance of women, calling it "a falsehood so palpable as to defeat itself."²¹⁴ Regarding the outraged cries from the female choristers that he had conducted them, or marked their parts; first, the statement tends to combine all rehearsals for all operas and second, this was part of Velluti's duties as music director. John Ebers wrote that Velluti had tirelessly worked with the choruses, his "exertions having been still unremitting in making the choruses and subordinate assistants perfect in their duties."²¹⁵

The trial destroyed much of what was left of goodwill toward Velluti among the general public, though his friends, including Mary Shelley, refused to repudiate him, either publicly or privately. Shelley, in a letter dated July 18, possibly having seen the *Times's* account of the trial, wrote "I [have] been to the Opera since I wrote to you—I think [I] have once,—& was disappointed for I

²¹³ Gioachino Rossini, *MS Aureliano in Palmyra* (ca. 1815) Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Historisches Aufführungsmaterial der Bayerischen Staatsoper, D-Mbs, PND 118602985.

²¹⁴ "State of Music in London," *QMMR* 1826, 131-184. This very lengthy essay is an invaluable overview, not so much of the King's Theater, but of the concert life of London in the year 1826. Though from a careful distance, Bacon's magazine details the triumphant London debut of mezzo-soprano Jane, Velluti's student (always "Miss Bacon"), in the various spring concerts. Bacon's daughters Louisa, Rose and Mary Anne also wrote for the *QMMR*, and some of the articles on Velluti, especially those about his voice, might come from one of the daughters.

²¹⁵ Ebers, 289.

expected to hear Velluti & did not—This person like all gentle & nice things is in ill health—and moreover exceedingly ill treated by Ebers—and I am afraid that he will not sing again."²¹⁶

Ayrton claimed that "The Velluti (as he delights to be called) is by no means a popular personage with any part of the establishment" and in Shelley's second Anglo-Italicus letter she mentioned an open rebellion against Velluti by the orchestra.²¹⁷ Ayrton's *Harmonicon*, Barnes's *Times* and other like-minded press organs laid the blame at the feet of Velluti while his defenders tried over the course of August to lessen or explain this away, defending him where they could. It was clear, however, that Velluti and his directorship were soon to be parted. He struggled through to the end of the season, his voice audibly diminished through his repeated illnesses. The season ended abruptly on 12 August—a week earlier than planned.²¹⁸ Apparently Velluti was as serious about not returning as Mary Shelley reported. On the evening of 20 August he was visited at his home by many of the most prominent members of the London aristocracy. They promised him, according to the recounted rumor in *The Harmonicon*, £3,000 worth of private performances if he consented to come back the next season.²¹⁹ The next day he and Bonini left together for Italy.²²⁰ One journal, echoing the many animalistic depictions of the singer, especially the peacock's scream, wrote "Velluti [has] fled howling, with £5,000 to steady his

²¹⁶ M. Shelley, *Letters of Mary Shelley* Vol. 2, 402-404.

²¹⁷ *Harmonicon* 1826, 163. M. Shelley, *Letters of Mary Shelley* Vol. 1, 524.

²¹⁸ *Harmonicon* 1826, 186.

²¹⁹ Ibid. Ayrton denies this rumor after reporting it.

²²⁰ *Morning Post*, August 21, 1826.

pinions."²²¹ On August 31 a letter printed in *The Morning Post* addressed the £3,000 rumor, but did not deny it. The letter, disingenously signed "Il Desinteressato," described tearful goodbyes at the farewell lesson at Velluti's *Accademia*, and claimed that the strong bond between the singer and his pupils and his desire to improve English singing made him wish to return.²²²

Velluti left without publicly stating his plans for the coming season. On October 31 Rossi wrote Meyerbeer that Velluti was sick, probably dying, and that the coming winter might well finish him. Despite his precarious health, Rossi added, Velluti was insistent upon returning to England.²²³ On November 27 *The Morning Post* reported that Velluti would arrive in December for the upcoming 1827 season—implied, but not stated is that he was a part of the King's Theater's planning. This was not to be. By year's end, Velluti's health took the dramatic turn for the worse that Rossi had feared.

1827: Rumors of Death

On 15 January 1827, probably picking up the story from a London newspaper, continental dispatches or, given the conflicting nature of the reports,

²²¹ *Bell's Life in London and Sporting Chronicle*, August 27, 1826. While this amount may seem high, especially as Velluti's contract for 1826 was only £2,300, it must be remembered that his benefit, the June 22 *Aureliano*, was not included in that sum. That evening likely brought him in excess of £500. Additionally, he sang constantly, when healthy, in private and public concerts throughout the season and it is likely that his fees were at least as much as Weber's £30—probably considerably more. He also earned a significant amount teaching private voice lessons. If anything, the £5,000 figure for 1826 is on the low side. Using *Pride and Prejudice* for comparison, Mr. Bingley, a splendid catch for Jane Bennett, had nearly a third less per annum in the late, inflationary years of the Napoleonic wars. This was enough to maintain a dignified house in the city and an estate in the country.

²²² *Morning Post*, August 31, 1826. The pseudonym seems ironic.

²²³ Meyerbeer, *Briefwechsel*, Vol. 2, 47-48.

simply rumors, *The Salisbury & Winchester Journal* printed the short notice: "It is reported yesterday that Velluti had died at Venice."²²⁴ Five days later, *The Exeter & Plymouth Gazette* contributed the laconic "Poor Velluti is said to have died lately at Naples."²²⁵ Though reports were untrue, the singer's illness had been severe. At one point, at least, his life had hung in the balance. Thomas Medwin, first cousin of Percy Shelley and peripheral member of the Pisan Circle, was now living in Florence. He wrote to Mary Shelley on 27 March 1827, possibly in response to an inquiry from her that does not survive concerning Velluti's health.

I don't know how it happened, but we saw little of Velluti during his stay here. My wife was ill, & did not go out—and his time was so much occupied at Lady Burghersh's & by Lord Burghersh that he couldn't spare any portion of it for others. ... When he left us he was quite recovered from an attack that had nearly proved fatal (at Venice), a mal di Petto...²²⁶

"Mal di petto" is defined in a 1799 *Grammar of the English Tongue for the Italians*, as "pleurisy." This is a blanket term that includes the modern one: an inflammation of the lining of the lungs that causes severe coughing and fever.²²⁷ Given the steady recurrence of Velluti's ill-health in newspapers and journals as well as in private writing from as far back as the early 1810s, it seems probable that this was a chronic condition for the singer, especially "when his health [is] extremely injured by fretting."²²⁸ His illnesses regularly came hard on the heels

²²⁴ *Salisbury & Winchester Journal*, January 15, 1827.

²²⁵ *Exeter & Plymouth Gazette*, January 20, 1827.

²²⁶ Ernest Lovell, *Captain Medwin: Friend of Byron and Shelley* (London: Macdonald, 1963): 215-216.

²²⁷ Edward Barker, *Grammar of the English Tongue for the Italians* (Venice: Joseph Rosa, 1799): 197, 279.

²²⁸ *Morning Post*, August 31, 1826. From a letter from an unidentified friend of Velluti defending him against the various charges of the summer, including those surrounding the court battle with

of, or concurrent with stressful situations. It is difficult to ascertain which of the singer's problems were age-related and which were just unfortunate biproducts of chronic ill-health. Prolonged coughing can cause inflammation of the vocal cords, especially at the edges, hoarseness, a reduced range, difficulty in negotiating the *passaggio* and pitch problems. Of course, age can cause these, too.

It may seem strange, after the enormous publicity that Velluti had experienced in the previous two seasons, that his supposed death did not receive more attention. The most likely cause is the Duke of York and Albany, George IV's younger brother and the heir to the throne, who had died on 5 January 1827. The newspapers were full of plans for his state funeral, held on January 20-21, as well as with memorials of his life.²²⁹ On 9 January 1827 a "continental traveller" wrote in a "letter," published in March 1827 in the *Oriental Herald*, that he had met Velluti walking in the public gardens in Venice but that was not able to approach the famous singer more closely. "He is quite *en particulaire*, and has, I believe, bid adieu to the stage. They say that he has enriched himself immensely in England, but that he does not enjoy his wealth. He has purchased a fine place on the Brenta ... and generally lives there in great seclusion."²³⁰

the female choristers. Ebers mentions his propensity toward obsessive worrying, regarding the premier of *Crociato* in June 1825 and "the uneasiness he had sustained in consequence of the attacks made upon him, and to which his susceptible temperament rendered him peculiarly open."

²²⁹ *London Gazette*, January 24, 1827.

²³⁰ "Letters from a Continental Traveller," *The Oriental Herald* (London: Cheese, Gordon, and Co., 1827): 435. Emphases original.

On 26 March 1827 *The Morning Chronicle* reported that Velluti had recovered and left Florence on March 12, and that he was expected in London by the end of that month. There was no planned engagement at the King's Theater. Ebers does not mention Velluti in connection with the 1827 season.²³¹ Without the constant reminder of the public singing at the King's Theater, Velluti's footprint in the press is faint. In 1827 he seems to have operated solely within his preferred, aristocratic demi-monde, the "fashionable world" of London.

By May 7, according to *The Times*, Velluti had opened his *Academia* again and both conducted and sung in private concerts.²³² According to *The Morning Post* on 15 June 1827, he and Pasta reprised their duet from the spring of 1825, "Mille sospiri" from *Aureliano*, contradicting

the idle gossip of the day, hinting that those great vocalists could not be induced to sing together, and that VELLUTI could not or would not sing any of ROSSINI's compositions; those mischievous assertions, promulgated, no doubt, from very unworthy motives, have been clearly negated by the fact of VELLUTI and PASTA having delighted Lady KEITH's brilliant circle by their incomparable execution of ROSSINI's duet.

The correspondent ends with the hope that "the exquisite performance of PASTA and VELLUTI will now no longer be confined to private parties."²³³

Velluti does not, despite the correspondent's wishes, appear to have sung in any public concerts that year. On June 13 Prince Hermann von Pückler-Muskau attended a private concert at Wellington's home. "Today was a concert at the tall Duke's in which the old Veluti [*sic*] crowed like a capon from which all

²³¹ Ebers, 301-355.

²³² *Times*, May 7, 1827.

²³³ *Morning Post*, June 15, 1827.

were overcome by delight because he once sang well. Here, however, he usurps his old fame."²³⁴ On June 30 he sang at a sumptuous picnic on the banks of the Thames. The "fête" was attended by royalty and hosted by five lords. Velluti sang barcarolles from a boat in the river.²³⁵ The next mention of him is a rumor, apparently unfounded, in the *Times* on September 24, that he was going to start his own opera company, in direct competition with the King's Theater.²³⁶ The humorous possibilities of his name and its application were exploited that year by a renamed bay gelding, now racing under the name Velluti.²³⁷

At the end of the year Velluti was once again in the newspapers for a minor lawsuit against a tailor to whom he had sold some used clothing. This time the dispute was decided in Velluti's favor. Unable to pay the damages, the tailor was in danger of prison, but Velluti stepped in to pay his costs.²³⁸ This adds believability to the statements made on Velluti's behalf during his battle with the female choristers: namely, that his principal concerns were honor and respect,

²³⁴ Hermann Pückler-Muskau, Fürst von Muskau, *Briefe eines Verstorbenen: Ein fragmentarisches Tagebuch aus Deutschland, Holland und England, geschrieben in den Jahren 1826, 1827 und 1828* Vol. 3 (Stuttgart: Hallberger'sche, vormals Frankh'sche Verlagshandlung, 1831): 60. "Heute war Concert beim großen herzog, in dem der alte Veluti [*sic*] wie ein Capaun krähte, worüber dennoch Alles in Entzücken gerieth, weil er einst gut sang, hier aber noch immer den alten Ruhm usurpirt [*sic*]."

²³⁵ Thomas Moore, *Memories, Journals and Correspondence of Thomas Moore* Vol. 5, ed. John Russell (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1854): 193.

²³⁶ *Times*, September 24, 1827.

²³⁷ *Chester Chronicle*, June 15, 1827.

²³⁸ *Times*, December 24, 1827. Although it would be tempting to connect this episode to Peter von Winter's last opera, *Der Sänger und der Schneider*, which is loosely based upon the story of a munificent, though retired Farinelli and his music-hungry tailor, the former was first performed in Munich in 1820, and though it enjoyed some vogue in German and Austrian opera houses, the account in *The Times* betrays no awareness of it. Nor does the *Times* indicate any kind of Christmas gesture on the part of Velluti. (The trial was on December 22.) After the magistrate decided against him, "Mr. West [the defendant] not being provided with silver, Signor Velluti paid the costs for him."

amour-propre, not money. However, the spectacle of the castrato once again in court, battling people with far less money and power than himself could not have helped his image as an arrogant abuser of the poor. Velluti seems to have spent much of 1827 teaching and singing within the aristocracy of London—the real center of his power, prestige and the foundation of his fame. If the rumors published at the end of the 1826 season of a promised minimum income were true, he likely earned in excess of £3,000 for this year—a year spent more or less in private, yet one whose earnings were enough to place him firmly on par with, if not actually in, the upper classes.²³⁹ It seems it was not the appearances at the King's Theater, for which he received the bulk of his press and public fame, that really mattered. The importance of the private party is possibly underestimated in operatic histories of the early nineteenth century. In 1820s London, the firmly held, private opinions of the aristocracy mattered as much or more than the weight of public opinion or the popular press.

1828: Return to the King's Theater

There is no real mention of Velluti until 7 March 1828 in the *Morning Post* with his announcement that he was reopening his *Academia*.²⁴⁰ On March 8 the

²³⁹ The rumors of the guaranteed £3,000 for a series of private concerts did not include his voice teaching. Velluti's students, especially the daughter of Richard Bacon, were progressing in their careers. "Miss Bacon" (probably Jane, though Louisa also sang very well) sang the *Romanza* several times in the 1826 and 1827 concert seasons, the *Harmonicon* in November 1827 saying that they far preferred to hear her singing it than her "master" (teacher) Velluti.

²⁴⁰ *Morning Post*, March 7, 1828. By which I mean no mention where he does not appear merely as a reference point, or a joke. There appear to be no press accounts of his presence in London or elsewhere for the beginning of 1828.

Times wrote that Velluti was in negotiations with the new manager of the King's Theater, Pierre- François Laporte, who had taken over the lease from a bankrupt John Ebers.²⁴¹ On March 17, Pasta's London debut in the role of Armando in *Crociato* was praised by the *Times* which added that Velluti "extravagant and pretentious," had failed in his negotiations with LaPorte, and would now definitely be leaving England for good.²⁴² The inference is that Pasta had supplanted Velluti, against his will. The score of *Crociato* in the Fondo Velluti in Belluno has the names of cast members and indications of performances for the 1824 Florence production as well as that in 1830 in Brescia: performances with Velluti. Additionally, Pasta's name is appended to the part of Armando. As she only sang this version in London in 1828, the implication is that this was (one of) Velluti's personal scores (He is apparently the only commonality among these three productions) and Pasta's performances in London were with his acquiescence if not necessarily his wholehearted approval.²⁴³

Indicating that there were not insurmountable hard feelings between the two, even if there was not necessarily friendship, on 26 April 1828 the *Times* printed the announcement of Pasta's and Velluti's concert series at the Argyll Rooms.²⁴⁴ The day before, the *Morning Post* felt obliged to write a short notice that "Signor VELLUTI (contrary to report) is in perfect health."²⁴⁵ This concert series attracted scant press attention. In fact, little Velluti did after 1826 drew

²⁴¹ *Times*, March 8, 1828.

²⁴² *Ibid.*, March 17, 1828.

²⁴³ Da Col, *Catalogo Fondo Velluti*, 419-420.

²⁴⁴ *Times*, April 26, 1828.

²⁴⁵ *Morning Post*, April 25, 1828.

either spirited opposition or effusive praise, as if the press, exhausted from the controversies of 1825-1826, had simply decided to ignore his singing as much as possible. On July 3, Velluti appeared as a guest with Pasta in what appears to be their only onstage appearance performing in the same opera: Rossini's *Semiramide* at the King's Theater.²⁴⁶ The performance, likely a drastically shortened, one-act version, was the piece to be performed for LaPorte's benefit, according to the July 3 *Morning Post*.²⁴⁷

Velluti was ill again and the *Times* reported that he sang without his "accustomed power." Three days later, however, an agreement between Velluti and LaPorte for a five-performance run of *Crociato* plus an additional performance for Velluti's benefit was announced in the *Times*.²⁴⁸ John Ebers's account of his ill-fated managership of the King's Theater was in the process of being published and his account of the private Velluti, a picture far more

²⁴⁶ *Morning Post*, July 3, 1828. This is an advertisement for the performance. Velluti sang Arsace and Pasta sang Semiramide. This is opposed to the performances in May 1826 when Velluti sang one act of one opera and in the second half of the evening's performance, Pasta sang one act of another opera. In 1826, unlike in 1828, they may have shared the evening, but they did not actually perform together in the same work.

²⁴⁷ *Morning Post*, July 3, 1828. Ebers, 307. Ebers writes that it was becoming common practice at the King's Theater in 1826 either to produce one act versions of operatic standards, or single acts of two or more operas during the same evening. The second variant was a favorite device of Bochsa's during his years as musical director, a position to which he succeeded after Velluti's dismissal, and LaPorte continued it, at least for a while. It is unclear whether every advertised performance of a first or second act of an opera coupled with a first or second act of another opera—this happened quite frequently in order to have top ticket sellers singing on the same evening—was in fact for one-act versions of full operas, as Ebers indicates, complete first or second acts, as was generally advertised in the newspapers, or a combination of the two. The conception of concert programs, whether operatic, symphonic, sacred or a mixture, seems to have settled into an invariable pattern of two 'acts,' or 'parts,' with an intermission. At the King's Theater, this was usually followed by a ballet, but in concerts the two-part program was essentially universal.

²⁴⁸ *Times*, July 7, 1828.

sympathetic than his public image in the hostile press, was frequently quoted in more supportive papers like the *Morning Post* and the *Morning Chronicle*.²⁴⁹

Ebers's benefit at the King's Theater was planned for 10 July 1828. Though he was no longer affiliated with the theater, there appears to have been goodwill there and widespread sympathy for his financial travails. The benefit consisted of one-act versions of *Semiramide* and *Il Barbiere*. The advertisement in *The Morning Post*, after naming the pieces and the principal performers including the German sensation Henrietta Sontag, then in her first London season, states that "In the course of the Evening, Signor VELLUTI has kindly consented to sing."²⁵⁰ At the final curtain, however, Ebers was forced to make an announcement "in a low voice," apologizing for Velluti's indisposition and non-appearance.²⁵¹ No explanation seems ever to have been given.

META Reappears: A Possible Identity

At about the time of Velluti's return to the high-profile, public gaze of the King's Theater's audience, *The Spirit of the Age*, the gossip journal accused in 1826 by Mrs. Arbuthnot of saying Lady Burghersh was in love with Velluti,

²⁴⁹ *Morning Chronicle*, July 5, 1828. This was the account of the artist, Thomas Lane, who had fallen from a balcony to his death on June 28, 1828 (alternately, fell through a skylight—the circumstances are murky). He was only 28. Lane is cited (though not named) by Ebers as having said that "without a single feature which one could select as beautiful, Velluti had the finest face he had ever seen." Ebers, 269. This is part of Ebers's description of the private, playful Velluti. *Literary Gazette*, January 19, 1828. Ebers lost over £40,000 during his management of the King's Theater. On July 5, 1828 the journal emended this to £45,000 in its review of the book.

²⁵⁰ *Morning Post*, July 10, 1828. Somewhat unusually, "a FAVOURITE BALLET," unnamed, was to go between the operas.

²⁵¹ *Morning Post*, July 11, 1828.

reprinted "VELLUTI" and immediately above it META's last known "Impromptu" to Velluti. This is very possibly a reprint, as it appears at such a far remove from the rest of META's publications.²⁵²

I've listen'd oft 'neath Italy's sky,
To the hallow'd voice of melody;
I've heard sweet music on the tide,
When all was hush'd and still beside—
When moonlight slept on the waters blue,
And the world's wild hum was sleeping too.
I've listen'd to the soft guitar
Wafted on Zephyr's wing from far;
I've listen'd to the dulcet flute,
To Pilgrim's harp, and Lady's lute,
But ne'er did aught so bless mine ear,
As that one voice now breathing—here.

META

Though I will devote much more time in the next chapter to literature, I will briefly present a possible identity for META. This chapter's detailed timeline is crucial to my tentative identification. This "impromptu" reveals strong ties to second-generation Romantic, Anglo-Italian images: voices breathing, the music

²⁵² Robert Cruikshank, ed., *The Spirit of the Age for 1828* (London: A. Durham, 1829): 221-222. Please see appendix A for the complete poem. I have been unable to discover the actual accusation from 1826 and depend upon Harriet Arbutnot's reportage. As this accusation would likely have only come obliquely, it may be that it is not instantly comprehensible to modern readers. One possible, but unlikely, culprit for this accusation, though only found reprinted in 1830, is examined in chapter 4. "The Eastern Winds," *The Polar Star, being a continuation of the Extractor* (London: H. Flower, 1830): 368. I give this a very different interpretation there. Only Velluti is here named, not Lord or Lady Burghersh, though Velluti's "scream" is combined with "Lord ----'s conjugal politeness." I believe this to refer to Lord Byron, not Lord Burghersh. Another figure whose bombast is lampooned in this article in *The Polar Star* is the loudly speechifying Lord Winchelsea, whose most prominent addresses were given during 1828 and 1829 in the run up to the Catholic Emancipation Act of 1829, tending further to exclude this from the META timeline.

of antiquity personified in the lute, and a fixation upon Italy as the home of music.²⁵³

Rumors of Lady Burghersh's infatuation with Velluti began almost the moment he arrived in London. The intense emotion in META's poetry is palpable: a near-erotic obsession with Velluti. Lord Burghersh used the poetry of Metastasio both for the opera *La Fedra* and, among other works, for the cantata "L'amor timido." This he dedicated to Velluti in a *circa* 1825 re-publication. Velluti included his own ornaments to one of its recitatives and both arias.²⁵⁴ Lady Burghersh was not only a talented amateur painter, but an adept linguist.²⁵⁵ META's poems include at least two translations of Italian poetry into English. The poetry (with the exception of the 1828 outlier, its publication appearing to mock the poet) appears regularly during the fourteen-month London stay of Lady Burghersh. For much of the summer of 1826 Lord Burghersh was away from England.²⁵⁶ One of the early poems, published in the fall of 1825, was a rapturous ode to home life at a time when Lady Burghersh would have been entering her 'confinement,' her social withdrawal as her pregnancy with the future

²⁵³ Gillan D'Arcy Wood, *Romanticism and music culture in Britain, 1770-1840: Virtue and Virtuosity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010). See especially Wood's analysis of Wordsworth's Metastasio/Castrato for the enduring attraction Metastasio held for the English Romantic poets. I thank Paula Feldman, the editor of the *Journals of Mary Shelley* to whom I showed the poetry of META. She has suggested that META was possibly (almost certainly, I now believe) an abbreviation of and an homage to Metastasio—a favorite poet of the Anglo-Italians as well as or the wider English Romantic.

²⁵⁴ See chapter 5 for an analysis of these publications.

²⁵⁵ George Boase, "Fane, Priscilla Anne," *Dictionary of National Biography, 1885-1900* Vol. 18 (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1885-1900): 179.

²⁵⁶ P. Fane, *Correspondence of Lady Burghersh*, 30-40.

earl, born that November, advanced.²⁵⁷ The only other singer praised by META was Bonini, who had sung in the Burghersh's home in Florence and whose London engagement was partly due to Lord Burghersh's influence.

Implied in the letters between herself and her uncle the Duke, as compiled (and rigorously culled) by her daughter Lady Rose Weigall, is a period of illness of some duration, certainly lasting well into the spring and summer of 1826, culminating in a severe attack (of an undisclosed "nervous" complaint) during June and early July of 1826.²⁵⁸ Two of META's poems concern sickness. The first, the poet's own, was published in January 1826. The second is more deeply felt thanks for Velluti's recovery, dated 1 July 1826. This comes, I believe not coincidentally, at the time of the beginning of Lady Burghersh's own recovery.²⁵⁹

The most convincing clue to META's identity, however, is the sudden cessation of META's Vellutian poetry more or less concurrently with Harriet Arbuthnot's report of the accusations from *The Spirit of the Age*.²⁶⁰ META only reappears that summer, presumably after the furor had died down, in the aforementioned thanks for Velluti's recovery. Though there is no mention anywhere of poetic pretensions on the part of Lady Burghersh at any point in her life, the 1820s was the period that saw the highest point of the Burghershes' dilettantism in terms of productivity. Her progression from painting and

²⁵⁷ Albert Pollard, "Fane, Francis William Henry, Twelfth Earl of Westmorland (1825-1891)," *Dictionary of National Biography* 1901 Supplement (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1901) 201. See also See Appendix for "Address to Home" September 12, 1825.

²⁵⁸ P. Fane, *Correspondence of Lady Burghersh*, 30-40.

²⁵⁹ Please see Appendix A: "Lines Written in Sickness" and "July 1st (on Velluti's recovering from an Indisposition)."

²⁶⁰ Arbuthnot, *Journals* Vol. 2, 219-220.

languages to poetry, especially in a hothouse atmosphere of opera, Metastasio, and her own private castrato, is easily imagined. Her fifth son, Julian Fane, published a book of poetry in 1852. The second poem after "The Prelude," an apparent homage to Wordsworth, is "Ad Matrem." Another, different "Ad Matrem" concludes the book.²⁶¹ These two poems seem, to my decidedly non-expert eyes, to bear a stylistic and thematic similarity to the poems of META (excluding references to Velluti). Though this may be entirely coincidental, the possibility exists that Julian Fane had seen or heard his mother's otherwise unpublished poetry. Admittedly, the evidence is mostly circumstantial, but the coincidences are many. I believe that META is probably Priscilla Wellesley-Pole Fane, Lady Burghersh. Given the ardent intimacy of some of the imagery, these poems must have been seen as scandalous, regardless of whether they were ever connected to Lady Burghersh, but far more so if they were.²⁶²

The season nearing its close, the *Times* recovered most of its vigor of the spring and summer of 1825 and criticized Velluti's "soulless" singing on 23 July 1828, explaining that opera had moved away from the "languor and *nonchalance* particularly suited to their [the castrati's] powers." In the same article, more dismissive than outraged, the critic writes:

It has become his misfortune to no longer be able to sing in tune. This failing was on his early appearance in this country only occasionally perceptible in him; latterly he has sung throughout the opera precisely a

²⁶¹ Julian Fane, *Poems* (London: William Pickering, 1852): 17-21, 108-110.

²⁶² This at any rate would at least partially explain Velluti's absolute non-appearance in the heavily edited correspondence Lady Rose Weigall published. It is inconceivable that he did not play a large part in the letters of 1822-1827.

quarter of a tone lower than the orchestra, although, for his sole accommodation, the instruments were tuned considerably lower than the diapason.²⁶³

Ignaz Moscheles, at the King's Theater on 19 July 1828, recorded in his diary that "Velluti's shrieks in the opera were absolutely unendurable; his false intonation drove me wild. I may be severe upon him, but the wounds he inflicted were hardly to be cured by the flute-like voice of Sontag."²⁶⁴

The renewed attacks come with Velluti's brief return to prominence, though possibly also partially to an actual, perceptible loss of ability. True to the initial promise of *The Times* on 10 May 1825, as long as he sang in private the press seems increasingly to have ignored him. One of the ever-present fears of Velluti's opponents was that his success might encourage the renewed production of castrati. This was explicitly expressed in the *Times's* apology to Velluti at the end of the 1825 season, expressing the hope that Velluti would be "the last, as he is the best of that unhappy order."²⁶⁵

The *Monthly Magazine or British Register* was by far the most explicit, on 1 August 1825 exhorting Velluti's patrons of "high rank and station" not to reward him, as this would provide "a temptation to depraved Italian parents to immolate

²⁶³ *Times*, July 23, 1828. Italics in original. The accusation of lowering the pitch was not new, and had been made against him in some of the first concerts he gave in May of 1825. In a long article about Velluti written at the end of 1825, the *QMMR* reported Velluti's complaint about the very high English pitch—a "half step" above what he was accustomed to on the continent. Regarding singing "precisely a quarter tone flat throughout," they are omnipresent in adversarial musical critical writing in London in the 1810s and 1820s and may perhaps be taken more figuratively than literally. However, with Velluti, this criticism is constant enough, even from friends and supporters, that one must accept it as at least partially true.

²⁶⁴ Charlotte Moscheles, *Life of Moscheles*, ed. and trans. Arthur Coleridge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014): 215. The sensation of Velluti's vocal failings actually causing illness or injury were not limited to Moscheles and constitute an important aspect of chapter 4.

²⁶⁵ *Times*, August 15, 1825.

their future offspring." The magazine feared that "British opulence" would cause a "renewal of a detestable practice, from which decency revolts, and at which humanity shudders." The writer attacked Wellington, "The Hero—as he is called—of Waterloo, is named among those who are most forward in the patronage we are reprobating." Saying that his embrace of the practice of castration would place his name alongside Napoleon's rather than allowing him to be remembered as Napoleon's vanquisher. The magazine then places Wellington in a class worse than Napoleon, reminding the reader that Napoleon imposed legal changes in Italy upon his invasion that included "the discouragement and abolition of that worse than infanticidal practice, by which children were qualified for the Velluti scream." Laying the sins of Velluti and castration upon the hated monarchies of the *Ancien Régime*, the journal wonders "Must this detestible practice, as well as the *blessings* of Austrian dominion, Bourbon dynasties and Spanish Inquisitions, be restored?—and restored, also, by Wellington influence, and by British gold?"²⁶⁶

It is tempting to see these as symptoms of panic, a part of an overreaction to a singer who was a rearguard, not a harbinger of the renewed production of singing eunuchs. The same article included the information that "[only] four, we are told, of that unfortunate choir of dishumanized squallers [*sic*], heretofore so numerous in Italy, at this time survive."²⁶⁷ These fears may not have been all that

²⁶⁶ *The Monthly Magazine or British Register for 1825* Vol. 2 (London: Geo. B. Whittaker, 1825): 39-42. Emphases original.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 42.

overblown. In 1828 the *QMMR* published a translation of Franz Kandler's recent work on the Roman composer Baini. Kandler discusses the dearth of young castrati voices in Rome in the mid 1820s.

All the chapels, not excepting that of the Pope, are beyond contradiction in their decline, and the cause is the want of treble and counter-tenor voices. This deficiency is the more painful, because it was the musici (or artificial soprani) who in all ages possessed the secret of the charms of harmony. ... Notwithstanding, there remains a feeble ray of hope that these choirs may be restored to perfection. The search after these persons is redoubled, and a school for them has been established in the institution *degli Orfanelli*, which includes many infants and young persons from different parts of Italy, whom disease or accident has qualified. The direction is committed to Sgatelli, the most celebrated of the Roman musici.²⁶⁸

This article goes some way toward explaining and making reasonable the persistent fear that embracing Velluti would cause a return of the manufactured monstrosities of the eighteenth century. Kandler names over a dozen castrati, sopranos and "contraltos", singing in Naples and Rome, including several considerably younger than Velluti himself.²⁶⁹

Velluti's departure, once the 1828 opera season ended, is not recorded.

He was apparently no longer interesting enough to warrant mention even in the

²⁶⁸ Franz Kandler, "On the Actual State of Music in Rome," *QMMR 1828-1829*, 19. Emphases original. 1829 was the last year that *QMMR* was published. This is the reason for two years being bound together. The voice types, "treble" and "counter-tenor" are, as this is the *QMMR*'s translation, English designations. While "treble" needs little qualification, I will search for the exact meaning or meanings of the term "counter(-)tenor" in the early nineteenth century in chapter 3.

²⁶⁹ This gives a hint of the underlying institutions and support mechanisms, mostly unexplored, that enabled the castrati choir in the Sistine Chapel to endure in an attenuated form into the early twentieth century. Nicholas Clapton, *Moreschi and the Voice of the Castrato* (London: Haus Publishing, 2008). Clapton does explore the late castrato choir of the Sistine Chapel, including the private musical parties in the late nineteenth century at which Alessandro Moreschi sang repertoire like "The Jewel Song" from Charles Gounod's *Romeo e Juliet*. The bridge between the disappearance of the castrato from the operatic stage, in the 1820s and early 1830s, and the rise of the last important church castrati, like Domenico Mustafa in the 1850s and 1860s, remains hazy.

"Fashionable Arrivals and Departures." His name and the Wellington's were not coupled in the press for this year, possibly for fear of the Iron Duke's greatly increased power. Velluti's presence and renewed, albeit brief, engagement at the King's Theater had doubtless been aided and abetted by his patron who, on 22 January 1828 had become Prime Minister. Even to the Duke, Velluti's fading voice must have been increasingly obvious, as in 1829 the two of them would hatch a plan to keep the castrato in London after his voice had finally left him.

1829: The Final London Season

On 23 January 1829 the *Evening Mail* reported that Velluti was wintering on his estate near Dolo in the Veneto, but that he planned to return to London in the spring to reopen his *Accademia*.²⁷⁰ News of Velluti's arrival from Italy was first published on 18 April 1829 in the *Windsor and Eton Express* which reported his being "in high health."²⁷¹ It seems unlikely that Velluti was willing to come back to London with little more than voice lessons to occupy him and, indeed, on 26 April 1829 a series of six concerts were announced with the castrato, Maria Garcia Malibran (newly returned from the United States, newly married and newly

²⁷⁰ *Evening Mail*, January 23, 1829. In 2017 the Palazzo Velluti is still standing but is closed to the public.

²⁷¹ *Cenni Storici Intorno Alle Lettere Invenzioni Arti Commercio e Spettacoli Teatrali 1829-1830* Vol. 2 (Bologna: Per Le Stampe Governative Sassi, 1830): 16. *Windsor and Eton Express*, April 18, 1829.

separated) and Sontag.²⁷² The concerts were to be held at the Argyll Rooms, several of them shared with a 20-year-old Felix Mendelssohn.²⁷³

On 1 May 1829 the *Times* reviewed one, praising Mendelssohn and lauding Velluti's "admirable style."²⁷⁴ On May 18, Mendelssohn wrote to his future brother-in-law, Eduard Devrient about the experience. "Just now that damned Veluti [*sic*] is going by my window; he is a despicable, pathetic fellow, whose singing so disgusted me that I dreamed about it in the night. He sang a duet with Sontag."²⁷⁵ According to Franz Grillparzer, though Mendelssohn "wished to hear the singing of Velluti, the last famous castrato, he was overwhelmed from the first note by such a disgusting feeling that he had to leave the theater half-dead."²⁷⁶

The concert season continued, both public and private, and at the June 4 concert, Velluti's and Sontag's duet "Questo cor" from Rossini's *Demetrio e Polibio* was a resounding success.²⁷⁷ At the next concert, only five days later,

²⁷² *Times*, April 26, 1829.

²⁷³ *Ibid.*, May 19, 1829.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, May 1, 1829.

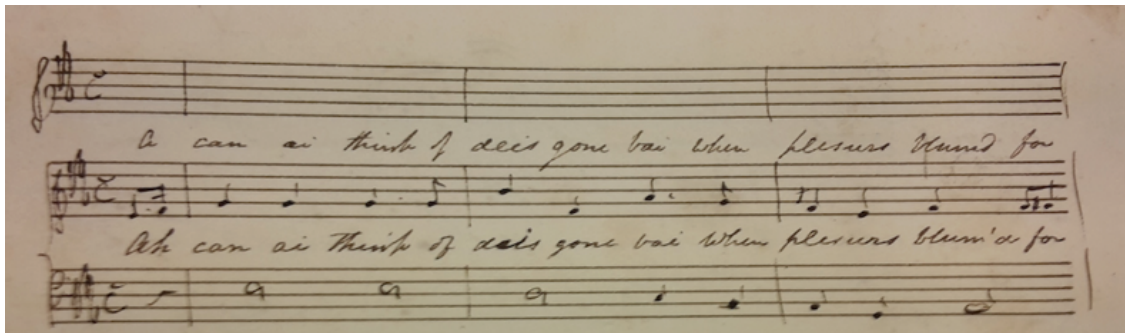
²⁷⁵ Eduard Devrient, *Meine Erinnerungen an Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy* (Leipzig: J.J. Weber, 1872): 80. Davies identifies this as the Argyll Rooms concert of May 15 and the duet as one from Mayr's *Ginevra di Scozia*. James (J.Q.) Davies, "'Veluti in speculum': The twilight of the castrato," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 17 3 (2005): 271. Davies mistranslates or uses a mistranslation of this passage, replacing "by my window" ("Eben geht der verfluchte Veluti [*sic*] vor meinem Fenster vorbei; er ist ein erbärmlicher, jämmerlicher Kerl, dessen Gesang mich so anekelte, daß ich in der Nacht davon träumte.") with "under my window." Emphasis mine. Though this seems a very minor point, Davies's thesis is of the castrato beneath the window casement lurking just beneath the conscious threshold of thought in 1829 Europe. I believe his position to be more threatening, like that of most literary Gothic monsters: in believable, touchable proximity—"other," yet terrifyingly on the same level.

²⁷⁶ Franz Grillparzer, *Grillparzer's Gespräche und Charakteristiken seiner Persönlichkeit durch die Zeitgenossen* (Vienna, August Sauer, 1917) quoted in Franz Haböck, *Die Kastraten und Ihre Gesangkunst* (Leipzig: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1927): 500.

²⁷⁷ *Literary Gazette* (London: James Moyes, 1829): 380. The irony of those lines, sung by a relic of a bygone era to an audience whose aristocratic surety had also been severely shaken over the

Velluti sang for the first time a song written for him by the manager of the Argyll Rooms concerts, Thomas Welsh, "Ah can I think of days gone by." This was advertised as the first time he had ever sung in English.

**Musical Example 2.1. Thomas Welsh's "Ah can I think of days gone by,"
mm 1-3²⁷⁸**



What seems to be Velluti's own phonetic transliteration of English "A can ai think of deis gone bai" supports his public protestations of being unable to communicate well in English. He repeated this song in at least one more concert at the Argyll Rooms, where it was received with "great eclat."²⁷⁹ These concerts were almost completely ignored by the serious critical press, though the *Evening Standard*, the *Morning Post* as well as a society writer for the *Times* all wrote "chit-chat" articles (Ayrton's term) in which Velluti appeared. These seem all to have been aimed at fashionable readers or those interested in the goings-on the aristocracy and are not serious, critical accounts. The concerts were still well-

ensuing decades speaks to, perhaps, part of the enduring attraction Velluti held for this, his most devoted public, long after his voice seems to have left him.

²⁷⁸ Thomas Welsh and Giovanni Battista Velluti, MS "Ah! can I think of days gone by" (London: ca. 1828) Belluno, Biblioteca Civica di Belluno, I-BEc, FV.ms.41. Image used by permission of the Fondo Velluti. Velluti also sang "God Save the King" after performances at the King's Theater with the entire company.

²⁷⁹ *Evening Standard* June 16, 1829.

attended by Velluti's core audience. In the 1895 autobiography of the Victorian journalist George Sala, he described the Argyll Rooms in 1829.

The famous male soprano singer, Velluti, gave a grand concert which I have reason to know was crowded by nearly all the nobility and gentry of the period. My mother has often told me about the Regent Street Argyll Rooms. She was Velluti's favourite pupil, and presided at the pianoforte at his Academy for teaching Italian singing. Whether the Academy itself was held at the Argyll I am not certain.²⁸⁰

The *Accademia* was not normally held at the Argyll Rooms; advertisements give street addresses other than Regent Street.

The aristocracy still supported Velluti, despite his almost complete collapse in popularity with the broader public. This probably emboldened the singer and the Prime Minister to announce on 11 July 1829 the formation of a new opera company at the Argyll Rooms. Welsh was to be the manager and Velluti the "music leader in the serious [opera]. ... All the best music of an opera is to be compressed into a single act." The Duke of Wellington was the principle subscriber and supporter.²⁸¹ The writer in the *Gazette* sniffed that the "whole thing seems rather exclusive," and with a limit of 500 seats available only by subscription, it seems the theater was meant to be an upper class province.

²⁸⁰ George Augustus Sala, *London Up to Date: Travels in Regent Street*, 230-231. Website: *Victorianlondon*, Accessed September 13, 2015 @ <http://www.victorianlondon.org/publications/uptodate-19.htm>. Sala's mother, who sang under the name Madame Sala, had her Covent Garden debut in late 1827, as the Contessa Almaviva in *Le Nozze di Figaro*. "She sang in a pure style, which she has learned of that excellent teacher, Velluti." *NMM&LJ* 1828, 17.

²⁸¹ *Literary Gazette*, 460. "Music leader" is a nebulous term in 1820s English musical writing, but the context implies that he was not *necessarily* to be the conductor, or certainly the concertmaster (both positions were at times referred to as "leader"), but rather a general musical director: analogous to the post he held at the King's Theater in 1825/26. He need not have sung or conducted. Ayrton did neither at the King's Theater.

A planned concert for Velluti in Brighton at the end of July was cancelled, according to the *Brighton Gazette*, in favor of an engagement at the Dublin Theater.²⁸² This story was believed, in any event, in Ireland, where the *Tipperary Free Press* reported on 25 July 1829 that Velluti was about to be engaged at the Dublin Theater.²⁸³ This seems not to have happened, for reasons I have been unable to discover, and the lack of any mention of him in English newspapers and journals after this point indicates that he had probably, as was his wont, left England at some point in early August. On 5 January 1830, the Argyll Rooms burned to the ground.²⁸⁴ Velluti never returned.

1830-33: the Last Years on the Stage

On 3 March 1830 Rossi wrote to Meyerbeer that he has seen the singer in *Crociato* in Trieste, and that there was a "fanatismo" (an enormous success) for Velluti, adding that the singer had "truly recovered."²⁸⁵ By February 13, Velluti had sung *Crociato* in Brescia, interpolating "Notte Tremenda" from *Tebaldo*.²⁸⁶ In Lugo in the autumn of 1830 Velluti sang a production of *Tebaldo* where his

²⁸² *Brighton Gazette*, July 23, 1829. Madame Sala was a favorite singer in concerts at Brighton for many years. It is conceivable that she was the instigator of this plan to take Velluti out of London for this first time in his five seasons in England. Sidney Lee, "Sala, George Augustus Henry," *Dictionary of National Biography 1885-1900*

Vol. 50 (London: Smith, Elder and Co. 1885-1900): 175-178.

²⁸³ *Tipperary Free Press*, July 25, 1829.

²⁸⁴ *The Annual Register for 1830* (London: Baldwin and Cradock, 1831): 21.

²⁸⁵ Meyerbeer, *Briefwechsel*, Vol. 2, 100.

²⁸⁶ *Cronaca polemica drammatica musicale, I Teatri 4* (1830): 77-79. Da Col, *Catalogo Fondo Velluti*, 430.

"genius" and "tireless zeal" were praised.²⁸⁷ A concert in Lugo on September 18 was also a huge success, but this revival in Velluti's fortune was short-lived.

In Venice, on December 31, La Fenice produced Nicolini's *Il Conte di Lenosse*. The Venetian correspondent to the *Harmonicon* reported that the voice had become "sharp and grating as it gets old" like "all singers of his class," and that the theater had been forced to replace him.²⁸⁸ The *Brighton Gazette* pitied the "now enfeebled Velluti."²⁸⁹ The *Sussex Advertiser* wrote that Velluti "is treading the downhill path both of life and reputation. ... But were we to admit the superior taste, and other high qualities ascribed to Velluti, even then we should say that gold may be bought at too dear a price."²⁹⁰ Stendhal heard him, in private and apparently for the last time on 25 January 1831 in Venice.

I came to hear Velluti; this was at a salon off St. Mark's Plaza, at midday, under a beautiful sun. Never has Velluti sung better. He has the look of a young man of thirty-six or thirty eight years, who has suffered; he is fifty-two [*sic*]. Never was he better. The divine Perucchini accompanied him. There were twenty-four women, but not a single hat in good taste.²⁹¹

Velluti sang one more production of *Aureliano* in Brescia late in Carnival 1831.²⁹² In March 1832 came a rumor of Velluti's taking over the management of

²⁸⁷ *I Teatri* 4, 579.

²⁸⁸ *Harmonicon* 1831, 75.

²⁸⁹ *Brighton Gazette*, May 26, 1831.

²⁹⁰ *Sussex Advertiser*, June 13, 1831. This is a reprint of the June 1831 review in the *Harmonicon*.

²⁹¹ Stendhal, *Le Livre du Divan Stendhal* (Paris: Le Divan, 1933). Letter 59: Venice, January 25, 1831. "J'ai entendu Velluti, c'était dans un salon de la place Saint-Marc, au midi par un beau soleil. Jamais Velluti n'a mieux chanté. Il a l'air d'un jeune homme de trente-six à trente-huit ans, qui a souffert, et il en a cinquante-deux; jamais il n'a été mieux. Le divin Perucchini l'accompagnait. Il y avait vingt-quatre femmes, mais pas un chapeau de bon goût."

²⁹² *Illuminati*, 20-22.

the theater in Trieste, but nothing seems to have come of this.²⁹³ In 1833 the singer attempted one more production of *Crociato* at Florence's La Pergola. According to the *Morning Post* his voice was "weak and ineffective. He performed only four nights, it is not thought that he will appear again as a public singer."²⁹⁴ On 10 July 1833 the Viennese newspaper *Der Wanderer* sadly remembered the 1824 premiere of *Crociato*. "The times change and we change with them. The Velluti from then is not the Velluti from now. The art has stayed, the voice has gone."²⁹⁵ Though Velluti performed in private for many more years the Florence *Crociato* was his last operatic performance and the last known performance of any castrato on an operatic stage.

²⁹³ *Times*, March 29, 1832.

²⁹⁴ *Morning Post*, July 30, 1833.

²⁹⁵ *Der Wanderer*, July 10, 1833. "Tempora mutantur, et nos mutamur in illis. Der Velluti von damals ist nicht der Velluti von jetzt. Die Kunst ist geblieben, die Stimme gegangen."

Chapter Two: Truth Embracing Fiction and the Literature of Velluti

Before Velluti met Meyerbeer and, somewhat later, Lord and Lady Burghersh, his career had followed a path similar to those of his castrato forbearers. He sang roles written for him or rewritten for him, often largely by him, to a generally enthusiastic reception. Beginning in 1797 in Jesi and, apart from trips in 1811 and 1812 to Vienna and in 1818 and 1819 to Munich, his focus remained the rich, musically important opera theaters of Italy. There is little evidence that this pre-1820s Velluti was received or perceived much differently than Marchesi, Pacchiarotti or even Farinelli, Caffarelli or Siface. But 1825 London, so long without a castrato, was a dramatically different experience. The combination of the wildly successful *Crociato* and the intimate musical and social friendship with Lord and Lady Burghersh that brought him to London also brought him into contact with a literary journalism far more modern, Romantic, involved, intertwined and questing, not only into philosophy and politics, but into the arts, music and the voice itself, than anything that had up to that point confronted him.

Velluti's own literary voice, as embodied in his still mostly inaccessible letters, does not play a large role in this work. Rather I am concerned with the writers of the late, literary, English Romantic, generally seen as ending in the years following Victoria's accession to the throne in 1837, and how they viewed the castrato: their language, puns, poetry, humor and horror. Their writing is heavily allusional, peppered with references to classical sources, to Renaissance

and Restoration writers and, to a somewhat lesser extent, the writers of the previous century. They also heavily cited each other. Their literary-social circles were, from a purely numerical perspective, relatively small. An astonishing number of important writers of this period were close friends, in and out of each other's parlors, sharing ideas, poetry, jokes, conviviality and music.

There are a great many texts that at least impinge upon the Velluti-castrato phenomenon in the 1820s and early 1830s, though the most famous one, *Sarrasine*, is not English at all. In it, however, Honoré de Balzac uses much of the imagery of the English Romantic, and his musico-literary world is to no small degree intertwined with that of his English peers. The Parisian musical salons he describes were closely linked to London's and in 1825 Velluti sang in both with perhaps less than a week's separation. Not only were these two worlds linked by an intertextuality of identical music and singers, but the ideas and the texts about them are similarly congruent. Ironically, in Roland Barthes's *S/Z*, though he declines to explore the cross-referential "replete literature" of which *Sarrasine* is irreducibly a part, he provides a clear, concise description of the warp and weft of the writing that sought in the 1820s to encapsulate *Il Velluti*.

Referring to the use of classical texts in *Sarrasine* and similar texts of the period, Barthes writes "we can say that any classic (readerly) text is implicitly an art of Replete Literature: literature that is replete: like a cupboard where meanings are shelved, stacked, safeguarded (in this text nothing is ever lost: meaning recuperates everything)." He goes on to discard it, however, for his

purposes. "This Replete Literature, readerly literature, can no longer be written: symbolic plenitude (culminating in romantic art) is the last avatar of our culture."¹ Barthes uses *S/Z* to achieve very different aims concerning the underlying structure of narrative which I, however, have no intention of replicating. Departing from Barthes's elegant description of what he will not investigate, I intend to show at least the iceberg's tip of a replete literature that, in a sense (borrowing again from Barthes), entabulates its efforts with a myriad of cross-referenced texts. "The classic text, therefore, is actually tabular (and not linear), but its tabularity is vectorized, it follows a logico-temporal order. It is [a] multivalent but incompletely reversible system."² Writing concerning Velluti sometimes reaches far into the past, referencing the barbarities and cruelties of ancient Rome or the sylvan idylls of mythic Greece to, as Barthes hints, conjure up multi-temporal, multivalent allusional co-meanings that, alongside those aspects of the text that merely reported the present, attempts to place the singer into several realities—and timeframes—at once.

Salon Society of London

Velluti's faithful META, in one of his—perhaps more likely, her— earliest published efforts after the initial poem praising Velluti in August 1825, paraphrases Sir Henry Bishop's hit of 1823, "Home, Sweet Home"—a theatrical

¹ Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993) 200-201.

² Barthes, *S/Z*, 30-31. Honoré de Balzac, *Sarrasine*, ed. and trans. David Carter (London: Hesperus Press Ltd, 2007): xiii. Carter acknowledges the startling insights of Barthes, but in the end is unconvinced. "It [*S/Z*] might be compared to interpreting all the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle individually without attempting to relate them to the total picture of which they are a part."

song that by dint of fantastic sheet music sales (over £2,100 in the first year) had also become a fixture of the private musical evening.³

OH! Home, sweet home! in whose endearing name
Is centered ev'ry inborn happiness, —
Receptacle of each fond, tender tie,
That binds us to existence, —lov'd resort
Of ev'ry social joy and pure delight;⁴

If I am correct in identifying META as Lady Burghersh, then the poet was entering her "confinement," the period of pregnancy when women of the upper classes withdrew from the gaze of the public. But home, the salon, the "lov'd resort/of ev'ry social joy and pure delight," was a greatly expandable concept. From the attendance of only family, as is probable in the case of the expectant Lady Burghersh, the salon could be extended to a few choice friends.

Considerably lower on the social scale, Leigh Hunt and Vincent Novello cultivated an intense, close-knit circle of poetic, literary and, above all, musically enthusiastic friends in the half-decade following the fall of Napoleon in 1815 and Lord Byron's departure for Italy. Mary Cowden Clarke (Novello's daughter) described the select circle at her father's house in Oxford Street.

Keats, with his picturesque head, leaning against the instrument [a "fine-toned" chamber organ], one foot raised on his knee and smoothed beneath his hands: Leigh Hunt, with his jet-black hair and expressive mouth; Shelley, with his poet's eyes and brown curls, [Charles] Lamb with his spare figure and earnest face; all seen by the glow and warmth and

³ Nicholas Temperley and Bruce Carr, "Bishop, Sir Henry R.," Website: *Grove Music Online*, ed. Deane Root, Accessed April 16, 2015. <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com>. Regarding META's identity, I will, for the sake of textual simplicity, assume my cautious identification of Priscilla Fane, Lady Burghersh is correct. I fully acknowledge that the feminine pronoun I use is subject at any future moment to revision, but have enough faith in my hypothesis to keep it in reference to META.

⁴ META, "Address to Home," *The Examiner for 1825* (London: John Hunt, 1825): 579.

brightness of candlelight, when the young musician and his friends assembled in that unostentatious informal fashion which gave zest to professional social intercourse at the then period.⁵

Though the circle of genius above described seems a bit too fortuitous, Maria Schoina's detailing of the great care with which Percy Shelley later built his Pisan circle supports, indirectly, Mary Cowden Clarke's assembly.⁶ The salon may have *seemed* "unostentatious" and "informal" but its construction seems to have been carefully plotted out and its constituent parts—the talents, intellects and personalities that filled it—chosen with great care. Though this may seem overly calculating, this was the inner sanctum of the family, which was protected with a fervidity approaching the sacral. Hunt, describing the ideal, musical salon in his unfinished *Musical Evenings*, wrote, "there are few things finer in the world, even than sitting and saying nothing in the company of those we love; at twilight for instance, before candles come in; when faces are all bent toward the fire, or turned to the open window of a calm summer evening: The mere consciousness of their presence is like an embrace around our thoughts."⁷

Those in the close circle that centered upon Leigh Hunt, most of whom could claim some degree of professional literary achievement, were bound by a common though loosely defined "liberalism"—a general though not comprehensive rejection of the aristocratic Tories—and in many cases by

⁵ Charles Clarke and Mary Cowden Clarke, *Recollections of Writers* (London: Sampson, Low, Marston, Searle, and Rivington, 1878): 13.

⁶ Maria Schoina, *Romantic 'Anglo-Italian': configurations of identity in Byron, the Shelleys, and the Pisan Circle* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009): 145.

⁷ Leigh Hunt, *Musical Evenings or Selections Vocal and Instrumental* ed. David Cheney (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1964): 17-18. This is the first publication of the unfinished *Musical Evenings*, which had remained until 1964 in Hunt's or his wife's handwriting.

common backgrounds. Hunt and Charles Lamb had both been students of the Christ's Hospital School, one of the first London schools in which boys of the middle class could receive the classical education of a "gentleman." Their time there followed the somewhat older Samuel Taylor Coleridge's.⁸ Jennifer Hall-Witt describes this social-literary circle as also including Thomas Barnes and Thomas Alsager, both of *The Times of London*, as well as William Ayrton and William Hazlitt. All were at least partially bound together by their opposition to aristocratic, Tory politics.⁹

Prudence Hannay's work on the slightly later salon of Lady Blessington describes another carefully curated gathering of young authors like Dickens and Thackeray, with political exotics like Louis Napoleon, the exiled grand-nephew of Bonapart, future president and later emperor of France.¹⁰ This salon, more noble and possibly less intimate, was also *presumably* less cautiously assembled. The salon in literature was no different. As in *Sarrasine's* parties, all of which have a significant admixture of the *demi-monde*, in John Polidori's 1819 novella *The Vampyre* the sensationally strange Lord Ruthven (a vamp[i]re, probably a veiled portrait of Lord Byron) is a highly desirable attendee: "his peculiarities caused him to be invited to every house."¹¹

⁸ David Cheney, "Leigh Hunt," Website: *The Poetry Foundation*. Accessed April 2, 2016 @ <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/bio/leigh-hunt>.

⁹ Jennifer Hall-Witt, *Fashionable Acts: Opera and Elite Culture in London, 1780-1880* (Durham: University of New Hampshire Press, 2007): 48-49.

¹⁰ Prudence Hannay, "Lady Blessington," *Affairs of the Mind: The Salon in Europe from the 18th to the 20th Centuries* ed. Peter Quennell (Washington: New Republic Books, 1980): 23-32.

¹¹ John Polidori, *The Vampyre; A Tale* (London: Sherwood, Neely, and Jones, 1819 via ProjectGutenberg: EBook #6087, 2009): 7.

Though Lady Blessington offers, in her person, a kind of meeting point of equality between the new aristocracy of letters and the old one of birth, her position as patroness probably somewhat weakens this. A better example, lying between the earlier Hunt-Novello musical circle (1816-1820) and the later salons of Lady Blessington, exactly contemporaneous to and on close personal terms with Velluti, is Richard Mackenzie Bacon.¹² Though a journalist, a political liberal and solidly middle class, he held conservative, Italianate views on music and singing that seem to have lent his social movements an unusual fluidity. He moved between the journalistic-literati, the singers of the King's Theater as well as the English theaters, and into the rarified musical salons—the *fêtes* of the cream of London society.¹³

The intense self-promotion of the Hunt-Novello circle, facilitated by the explosion of literary and artistic journals in London in the 1820s, enabled the activities of people who often had little money and only moderate influence to become almost as important, in terms of readership and the dissemination of their ideas, as did those of the aristocracy whose parties were usually reported by the Tory press. Jürgen Habermas describes an aspect of this phenomenon as a "mutual penetration of the public and private sphere."¹⁴ In the case of the ideas

¹² David Cheney, "Leigh Hunt," *Poetry Foundation*.

¹³ Leanne Langley, "Bacon, Richard Mackenzie," *Grove Music Online*, ed. Deane Root Accessed March 25, 2016 @ <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com>. John Warrack, "Bacon," Website: *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Accessed March 25, 2016 @ <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/1006>.

¹⁴ Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger and Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999): 50.

of the middle-class literati, their prolific writing enabled them to eventually overshadow the more complacent aristocrats. There was an aspect of social climbing—an unseemly grasping—in the perception of the more established social-literary classes. John Keats was mocked for his lack of Greek and Latin, his modest upbringing and comparatively limited (classical) education by critics who used these facts as bludgeons in denouncing his poetry.¹⁵ The entire group of young writers around Leigh Hunt were derisively termed the "Cockney School" by conservative critics who gleefully mocked the young writers' self-conscious display of their hard-won Greek and Latin.¹⁶

Music was central to the London salon of the early nineteenth century, though the individual participation of *male* members of genteel society had been forced to climb out of the disrepute into which this had fallen in the late eighteenth century. In his 1824 *Elements of Vocal Science*, Bacon spent much of his introduction refuting Lord Chesterfield's famous admonition to his son that while in Venice he should "neither [be] piping nor fiddling yourself. It puts a gentleman in a very frivolous contemptible light; brings him into a great deal of bad company; and takes up a great deal of time... Few things would mortify me more, than to see you bearing a part in a concert, with a fiddle under your chin,

¹⁵ Duncan Wu, "Keats and the 'Cockney School,'" *The Cambridge Companion to Keats*, ed. Susan Wolfson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001): 37.

¹⁶ Anthony Holden, *The Wit in the Dungeon: The Remarkable Life of Leigh Hunt, Poet, Revolutionary and the Last of the Romantics* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2005): 121-127.

or a pipe [a flute] in your mouth."¹⁷ Bacon, perhaps revealing an intentional double entendres in the quoted section, turned the tables on Chesterfield, calling him a "courtly pandar [*sic*] to vice and effeminacy." Bacon vehemently argued for the intellectual and spiritual benefits to be obtained by people of unequal musical talents working together to make music. "It elevates our devotion, chastens our affections, exalts our feelings, and [is] a greatly varied exercise [to increase] mental capacity."¹⁸ Bacon considered the *active* participation in music-making, in a private circle of friends, to be an indispensable attainment, and an activity for both men and women. Hunt concurred, though he was tolerant of those without musical ability. As originally planned, his *Musical Evenings* was meant to have been accompanied by sheet music of a modest level of difficulty so that most amateurs could take part in its execution. He wrote that his intention was to provide explanations of vocal music in foreign languages, so that the import was always clear, and to "enable everyone present at a musical party to contribute to what is going forward, those who cannot play or sing, taking upon them the task of reading the prose."¹⁹ Bacon, like Hunt, emphasized the effect of improving the individual's value to circle of friends as a primary motivator for participating in the private musical evening, but also added that guarding against vanity was

¹⁷ Philip Stanhope, Lord Chesterfield, "Letter CLXXX, London, April 19 (Old Style) 1749," *The Works of Lord Chesterfield including His Letters to His Son, &c.* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1838): 250.

¹⁸ Richard Bacon, *Elements of Vocal Science*, ed. Edward Foreman (Champaign: Pro Musica Press, 1966): 5-6.

¹⁹ Leigh Hunt, *Musical Evenings*, 15-16.

paramount.²⁰ In Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, Mary Bennett and Caroline Bingley both markedly fail to conquer their pride, their quickness to show off: Mary is earnest, tedious and pedantic and Miss Bingley is condescending and fatuous. Elizabeth Bennett's less proficient, more modest and infinitely more charming playing receives greater praise.²¹

Austen, herself a competent amateur singer and pianist, wrote her heroine Anne Elliot in the late novel *Persuasion* as a musical analogue of the author herself, if not necessarily an autobiographical portrait in full.²² At a family party early in the novel, Anne, a spinster disappointed in love, takes refuge behind the pianoforte, literally and figuratively, while her one-time suitor Captain Wentworth flirts with her much younger relations Louisa and Henrietta Musgrove. Though they play poorly, their performances are praised while Anne, far more proficient, is relegated to the instrument only when it is time to dance. She is valued only for her functionality. For Austen, pure ability is not necessarily an indicator of social success, though Anne's thorough-going competence in all things—mirroring her musical abilities—quickly wins back Wentworth's esteem, if not immediately his love.²³ The pianoforte, much more so than the voice, becomes a shield for young women, or not so young women in the genteel hurly-burly of the salon.

²⁰ Hunt, *Musical Evenings*, 16. Bacon, *Elements*, 1-2.

²¹ Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, ed. Patricia Spacks (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010): 86-87, 140.

²² Gillen D'Arcy Wood, "Austen's Accomplishment: Music and the Modern Heroine," *A Companion to Jane Austen*, ed. Claudia L. Johnson and Clara Tuite (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009): 367.

²³ Jane Austen, *Persuasion*, ed. Patricia Spacks (New York: W. W. Norton & Co, 2013): 42-53.

Charles Lamb was a skeptic about music, especially singing, but *apparently* allowed himself occasionally to be swept up with it in private. In his "A Chapter on Ears," Lamb recounts an evening at Novello's. Novello is a "good Catholic ... [who] by the aid of a capital organ, himself the most finished of players, converts his drawing-room into a chapel, his week days into Sunday, and these latter into minor heavens." Lamb confesses rapture after a little of this music, but of being overwhelmed by "protracted hours, fresh waves" when, "in triumphant progress, dolphin-stead, ride those Arions, *Hadyn* and *Mozart*, with their attendant Tritons, *Bach*, *Beethoven*, and a countless tribe ... I stagger under the weight of harmony."

He humorously describes a threatened, musically induced conversion to Catholicism. The little audience are all seduced into Novello's private faith by his capture of a kind of mythic world in the recreation of its music. Lamb is only rescued from the specter of a dreamlike, Romish apotheosis by the "coming of the friendly supper tray...and a draught of true Lutheran beer."²⁴ As David Cheney notes, however, this was a public essay about a private evening. In reality, or at least in the reality that his *truly* private, humorous writing creates, Lamb remained far cooler to music's charms. His poem, "Free Thoughts on some Eminent Composers," written in Novello's personal album, excoriates them all,

²⁴ Elia (Charles Lamb), "A Chapter on Ears," *The London Magazine for 1821* Vol. 1 (London: Baldwin, Cradock, and Joy, 1821): 265-266.

"Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven and Bach "or *Batch*—which is it?" with cheerfully pugnacious dismissal.²⁵

Though my emphasis until now has been on the instrumental side of the musical salon, singing was at least as important if not considerably more so. Leigh Hunt was an accomplished amateur singer and accompanied himself on the piano as he sang both baritone and falsetto soprano ("a tender treble") through many Mozart operas for an intimate circle that included Keats and Percy Shelley.²⁶ As Hall-Witt has noted, a modern scholarly imputation of a lack of intellectual seriousness that pervades commentary on voices and singing comes often from those whose primary interest is instrumental music. This is belied by the *quality* of observation and the depth of knowledge of contemporary vocal technique prevalent in aristocratic (and middle-class) circles.²⁷ The most influential commentator on vocal technique, both in theory, in his *Elements of Vocal Science*, and in his (mostly anonymous) voluminous critical commentary on London singing in the 1820s, was Bacon.²⁸ His free movement between the social circles of people like Hunt and those of the nobility allowed him to publish critically upon the private musics of both. His belief that one heard the technique of the voice best in private, intimate settings underlies and supports much of his

²⁵ David Cheney, "Preface," Leigh Hunt, *Musical Evenings*, 7-9. The poet's sister, Mary Lamb's humorous, poetic rejoinder to her brother will be addressed in detail in chapter 4.

²⁶ Holden, *Wit in the Dungeon*, 112. Holden is quoting Hunt's son, Thornton.

²⁷ Hall-Witt, 44-45. Hall-Witt's interest is the upper-classes and her remark pertains mainly to them.

²⁸ Langley, "Bacon," *Grove Music Online*.

commentary on singers in public.²⁹ In large, theatrical or concert acoustics, vocal-technical specificities and flaws are often partially or even entirely inaudible.

Bacon, though he grew up in a modest, provincial, publishing family, whose early musical life was presumably confined to middle-class circles, Bacon advised his amateur, private singers to sing as often as they could for "persons of quality," placing greater value upon the greater worldliness and experience of the upper classes.³⁰ A bridge between the middle and upper classes is enabled through Bacon's musical opinions which, though representative of the upper classes were, by and large, eagerly adopted by the more "respectable" of their social inferiors. Though neither in London nor *of* London, *Sarrasine* is, through the high degree of affinity between the upper-class musical parties of both cities, easily transferable. The structure of the novella moves backward from its 1830 present-day at the large, musical salon of the wealthy de Lanty family to the intimate *tête-a-tête* between the narrator and the unnamed marchioness and, finally, into the internal, wild, artists' parties in a long-ago, decadent Rome.³¹ Underscoring Hall-Witt's point about its centrality, the music, when present, is all vocal—from Jomelli in the inner story to Rossini in the outer—and the narrative itself is a simulacrum of the body of the castrato La Zambinella, aging backward and forward as Balzac moves between temporal realities.

²⁹ Bacon, *Elements*, 48-50.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 52.

³¹ Balzac, *Sarrasine*, 19-20, 30-35.

A satirization of the aspiring attempts by the middle classes to ape the splendid parties of the aristocracy is found in Charles Dickens's *The Pickwick Papers*, at the opulent garden party of the ridiculous Mrs. Leo Hunter (dressed as the goddess Minerva) self-presenting as both artist and patroness of the arts. Set between 1827 and 1829, Dickens's first novel shares temporal, thematic and stylistic affinity with Vellutian criticism.³² The real-life "Bohemian" Brothers, a minor sensation in the late 1820s with their howling soprano falsettist—called the "Bohemian Velluti"—also make a veiled appearance. "The four something-ean singers ... ranged themselves in front of a small apple-tree, to look picturesque, and commenced singing their national songs, which appeared by no means difficult of execution, inasmuch as the grand secret seemed to be, that three of the something-ean singers should grunt, while the fourth howled."³³ In this way, doubly cloaked, Velluti makes his only appearance in the works of Dickens. The parties of the Hunt-Novello circle were intimate but, through the literary efforts of the participants themselves, became well-known in substance and form to English readership. There is in these writings a constant, self-conscious sense of performing intimacy for a larger audience. The parties of the aristocracy were

³² Though at the time of Velluti's London sojourns Dickens was just a teenaged boy, his sister was a charity voice student at the Royal Academy and circumstantial evidence would strongly indicate that she was at least an occasional auditor of Velluti's *Academia*, if not a regular participant. It is very unlikely that Dickens was unaware of the castrato.

³³ Charles Dickens, *The Pickwick Papers*, ed. Robert Patten (Aylesbury, Bucks: Penguin Books, 1982): 283-285. Please see chapter 3 for more about the vocal quartet, The Bohemian Brothers and their Velluti-like soprano falsettist (called the "Bohemian Velluti" in many press accounts), and his similarity, even (vocal) interchangeability, with the castrato. Also possibly satirized by Dickens as a guest at this party is Hermann, Fürst von Pückler-Muskau whose dismissal of Velluti's "usurping his old fame" by singing poorly at the Duke of Wellington's house in 1827 has already been quoted in chapter 1. Dickens's "Count Smortork" (small talk) has just finished research for a book he is writing about England, having visited it for three weeks.

news and were both memorialized and satirized in the popular press: daily and monthly newspapers and journals both pro- and anti-aristocracy. Mrs. Leo Hunter's party, created for satirization by Dickens, threads the line between the serious intellectual aspirations of the one, and the fashionable opulence of the other.

On 30 June 1827 Thomas Moore, a close friend of Lord Byron and another figure who, thanks to his writerly and artistic connections enjoyed a great deal of social fluidity, attended a sumptuous private "fête" hosted by "five lords" at Boyle Farm on the river Thames in Thames Ditton. Beginning at five, when "the *élite* of the gay world was assembled, the women all looking their best, and scarce an ugly face among them," the dinner was held on the lawn, with fifty seated at the "royal table in the observatory." "After dinner there were gondolas on the river, with Caradori, De Begnis, Velluti, &c. singing barcarolles, and rowing off occasionally so as to let their voices die away and again return."³⁴ This operatic stagecraft shows an attention to detail and to effect that puts the Hunt-Novello parties to shame, though it also tends by contrast to highlight the cutting-edge, intellectual nature of the smaller functions, and the opulent reaffirmation of conservative, aristocratic power structures of the larger gatherings.³⁵ Indeed, the nobility were often mocked by members of the Cockney School for intellectual

³⁴ Thomas Moore, *Memories, Journals and Correspondence of Thomas Moore* Vol. 5, ed. John Russell (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1854): 193. Emphasis original. The "&c." probably refers to other members of the Italian opera company, as they were succeeded later in Moore's account by "Madame Vestris, Fanny Ayton, &c., who rowed about in the same manner and sung 'Oh come to me when daylights sets,' &c. &c." The bifurcation between English and foreign singers, English and Italian repertoire, seems clear and intentional.

³⁵ See Martha Feldman, *Opera and Sovereignty*.

pretensions to which they had no right as mere pseudo- "cognoscenti."³⁶ As noted in the previous chapter, the year 1827 has long been believed to have been a year that Velluti spent in Italy as he sang no public performances in London, but here he was, busy with his private season.

These aristocratic parties were, for the musicians, well-paid ventures. Carl Maria von Weber suffered through the noise and press of 700 guests at one, never seeing or hearing Velluti, who had also been engaged to perform.³⁷ Just as the *fête* at Boyle's Farm had a royal presence. Velluti often sang for titled, even royal personages. The *London Morning Post* on 18 June 1825 printed a guest list for such an event, the "second Grand Party" of HRH Prince Leopold (the future Leopold I of Belgium), that included members of the Royal Family, the Duke of Wellington, duchesses, marchionesses, earls, countesses and several dozen lesser nobles and notables, including the Lord Mayor and his wife. The party began at ten, but the guests were so numerous that they did not finish sitting down to *begin* dinner until after one in the morning. Velluti sang along with most of the Italian opera company including Caradori and both Manuel Garcia (père) and Maria Garcia. At these parties, Velluti, as the reigning star, had a say over all music matters, including regularly having the orchestra and/or piano tuned down a half-step.³⁸

³⁶ *The Harmonicon for 1825* (London: Samuel Leigh, 1825): 118.

³⁷ Julius Benedict, *Weber* (New York: Scribner's, 1913): 119.

³⁸ *Harmonicon 1825*, 164.

Judging by Arbuthnot's and Moore's description of such events, they were not entirely the relentless crush that Weber describes.³⁹ The crowd scenes were interspersed with intimate moments and private conversations. Moore described another, more intimate gathering at the Countess St. Antonio's on 1 June 1828, to which he went expressly to meet Henriette Sontag. Sontag and Velluti were both present, and Moore remembered a quiet interlude. "Sontag trying over things she had never seen before, and making little excursions with her voice as she sat alone on the sofa, very interesting."⁴⁰ Despite literary evidence from Polidori to Hannay demonstrating the willingness of English upper-class hosts to invite spectacular if morally or politically suspect guests to make their salons more interesting or successful, there is ample evidence to suggest that the *personal* reputations of artists *were* scrutinized before welcoming them into private homes. John Ebers's account of Velluti as a private person in his 1828 *Seven Years of the King's Theater* betrays a need to vouch for the private morality of a public performer.

It is agreeable to be able to say that, high as Velluti now stood with the public, his professional excellence fell short of the goodness of his private character. As a man of kind and benevolent disposition, and equally gentlemanly feeling and deportment, he is known to many who duly appreciate and respect him.

His private habits are of the most simple and inoffensive kind. In society he never fails to interest, and the apparent melancholy of his disposition is exchanged for a lively and almost playful exuberance of good humour—a

³⁹ Harriet Arbuthnot, *The Journal of Mrs. Arbuthnot, 1820-1832* Vol. 1 (London: MacMillan & Co., 1950): 404-409. Arbuthnot describes several of these parties in a period covering June and July immediately before first hearing Velluti in late July 1825.

⁴⁰ Moore, *Memoirs*, Vol. 5, 294.

feature of character not unusual with persons of much sensibility. Velluti is sparing in the pleasures of the table; a cup of coffee and a little dry toast form his breakfast, and his other meals are in proportion. His chief amusement is in billiard playing, or whist, which, though no gamester, he is very fond of.⁴¹

This concern for morals in a private setting, the private moments of Moore and Sontag, frequent accounts of Velluti's morals and character, all indicate that no matter how splendid, no matter how magnificent, no matter how much physical *space* existed between the artists and their hosts, these parties of the wealthy were still at "Home," as META apostrophizes the concept. They were intimate to a degree that their very public face belies. Insofar as this felt intimacy is shared—if not intellectual content or ease of conversation and exchanges of ideas—they are little different from the small musical evenings described by Hunt.⁴²

The intimacy of home seems to have extended into the theater, in the opera house's private boxes, as Hall-Witt details.⁴³ The boundaries of home, in the anonymous account of Velluti's London debut that appeared in the *Parthenon*, extended even to the anonymous space before the orchestra pit.⁴⁴ The writer describes a salon-like, conversational, confessional intimacy in the openness of the orchestra seats, each audience member relating hopes, fears,

⁴¹ John Ebers, *Seven Years of the King's Theater* (London: William Harrison Ainsworth, 1828): 271-272.

⁴² This is close social connection between actor/actress and audience is satirized in Charles Dickens "Miss Snevellici's Bespeake," *Nicholas Nickleby* (New York: Penguin Books, 1999) in which the author follows Nicholas and a rather dubious young lady, Miss Snevellici, into the private homes of several of her more devoted fans, selling tickets for her upcoming "Bespeak," or benefit.

⁴³ Hall-Witt, 74, 97.

⁴⁴ See Appendix B for the complete article from *The Parthenon* about 30 June 1825.

rumors and expectations concerning the looming appearance of the castrato.⁴⁵

The obsessive chatterers of the theater, as the writer says, use their printed libretti to "calculat[e] to a nicety the exact period at which their curiosity was to be gratified by the entrance of Velluti." This must have mimicked to a certain extent the incessant chatter in the hot, stuffy, overcrowded aristocratic salons awaiting the private performances of the controversial Italian. In August 1826, hinting at weariness with an unvarying topic of conversation, Mrs. Arbuthnot fled north, finding respite in Durham Cathedral and in the "chaunting" of the evening service. "There is nothing so sublime, nothing that elevates the soul from the contemplation of nature to adoration of nature's God like the sounds of the human voice as they swell thro' the arched aisles of a Cathedral. Such music in such a scene has 10,000 times more effect upon me than all the singing of all the Vellutis in the world."⁴⁶

The similar biographies—middle-class backgrounds, institutions like Christ's Hospital School—shared by many of the Hunt circle was a bond that may have had much to do with the group's cohesion, both aesthetically and politically. Shelley and Byron, members of the aristocracy, did not share this bond. Strains partially brought about by the social distance between Byron and Hunt, especially after Shelley's death, ended their friendship well before Byron departed for Greece. In the golden years of the Hunt-Novello musical evenings between 1816 and 1820 Hunt was the dominant figure. He had been made a free-press hero to

⁴⁵ *The Parthenon* (London: Black, Young, and Young, 1826): 79.

⁴⁶ Arbuthnot, *Journal* Vol. 2, 41.

young, politically liberal poets and writers in 1811 when, after calling the Prince Regent (later George IV) a "Fat Adonis," he was sentenced to two years in prison.⁴⁷ His dominance increased after Byron left England for good in 1816, and though Keats chafed under his somewhat overbearing patronage, it was only with Hunt's disastrous journey to Italy that he lost his preeminence over the younger Romantics.

Hunt's concern that all members of the musical evenings take part, whether in the musical elements themselves, or in the poetic, is reflected in the non-musical aspects of his friendship, especially, with the young John Keats. Having met in 1816, the friendship formed between the two was immediate and deep and Keats, as a frequent overnight guest, wrote a great deal of poetry in the Hunt house, often in Hunt's company.⁴⁸ The literary productions of this period, especially the shorter poems, were created in a social atmosphere of (generally) friendly competition, often including sonnet-writing competitions of a half-hour's duration.⁴⁹ Poetry writing was a social pastime. Within these narrow parameters, according to Holden, Hunt could and often did best Keats, though far his inferior in raw talent.⁵⁰ Whether or not one shares either Holden's view or Duncan Wu's,

⁴⁷ Holden, *The Wit in the Dungeon*, 62-90.

⁴⁸ Duncan Wu, "Keats and the 'Cockney School,'" *Cambridge Companion to Keats*, 41.

⁴⁹ Wu, 45. Cheney, "Leigh Hunt," Poetry Foundation. Shelley also participated in some of these competitions though he never seems to have been as annoyed by their results as Keats; a fact that may have had much to do with his social advantage vis-à-vis Hunt: his noble birth. An innate sense of superiority possibly enabled him to brush off Hunt in his more obnoxious moments.

⁵⁰ Wu deprecates the quality of Keats's poetry at this time of Hunt's greatest influence. Hunt did, at times, break Keats's confidence, insofar as he occasionally published both poets's efforts side-by-side in *The Examiner*. In his 1828 *Lord Byron and some of his Contemporaries*, Hunt does this again, though the fondness with which he writes about Keats, akin to a grieving older brother, perhaps pardons his self-congratulatory preening at having beaten a better poet.

that Keats's poetry of this period is inferior to his other work, there was clearly a web of ideas and language that was common not only between these two poets, but among the entire generation of writers who, a half-decade later, would all (at least, those still living) be writing to some degree about Velluti.

As a theater and music critic, Leigh Hunt was careful at least to attempt to maintain critical independence from his friends. He refused, for instance, to accept free tickets to performances at the Drury Lane Theater in 1815, when Byron was on its board of governors.⁵¹ Writing much later, he recalled with derision the practice of deciding what a play's critical response would be at dinners attended by a handful of writers/playwrights and actors, often well before the actual performance.⁵² Michael Eberle-Sinatra remarks on the strong connection Hunt consistently and ironically saw between a critic's memories of an evening of good food and good company, and the resulting, favorable review.⁵³ William Ayrton's caustic remark in 1826 that a favorable review of Velluti in Rossini's *Aureliano in Palmyra* was written in "one of the drawing-rooms of the theater" indicates that a lack of critical distance was, if not uncommon, also not above censure.⁵⁴ A constant sociability and the near ubiquity of conversations concerning the events—esthetic, musical, political, literary—of the day among a fairly small group of writers probably did much to insure that certain threads of thought would appear in article after article, in a wide variety of newspapers and

⁵¹ Holden, 91.

⁵² Leigh Hunt, *Lord Byron and Some of His Contemporaries* (London: Henry Colburn, 1828): 401.

⁵³ Michael Eberle-Sinatra, *Leigh Hunt and the London Literary Scene: A Reception History of His Major Works, 1805-1828* (London: Routledge, 2013).

⁵⁴ William Ayrton, ed., *The Harmonicon for 1826* (London: Samuel Leigh, 1826): 154.

journals. This would have the effect of creating the (possibly false) impression of a general view when, in reality, the opinion in question may have been held by only a handful of people.

Romanticizing London: Dreamscapes of Reality

In Dickens's original preface to *Bleak House*, he admits to having "purposely dwelt upon the romantic side of familiar things."⁵⁵ Brian Robinson describes the fictionalization of the various classes in London in Dickens's novels as being expressly contrived for purposes of furthering social justice.⁵⁶ Dickens is known for having created the literary character of London, or rather London as a literary character, as opposed to writing strictly factual descriptions of its myriad facets. I argue that the concept of a writerly text, replete literature, per Barthes, was not merely an aspect of literature, but was a mode of cognition for the English Romantics. This view holds that the world itself, and the real people, places and things in it, could and often did function as allusions, cognitive portals, to other times, places, concepts or people, linked to the observer's "real" world by a shared point of reality. Real versus imagined becomes, in a world whose entirety is multivalent rather than linear, a possibly useless distinction.

In 1822, when Hunt's ship passed Gibraltar and entered the Mediterranean, it skirted the coast of North Africa. In a manner similar to Hunt's

⁵⁵ Charles Dickens, *Bleak House* (London: Bradbury & Evans, 1853): x.

⁵⁶ Brian Robinson, "Charles Dickens and London: The visible and the opaque," *Geo Journal* 38 1 (Jan. 1996): 59-74.

friend Thomas Carlyle's seeing the English past embedded in the language, Hunt, though looking at his modern world—the coast of what is now Morocco—saw not only reality, but simultaneously experienced the entire Mediterranean, both in history and in myth. First with Africa: "The first sight of Africa is an achievement. ... They [voyagers] look at it and repeat the word [Africa], till the whole burning and savage territory, with its black inhabitants and its lions, seems put into their possession."⁵⁷ Hunt's nineteenth-century racial views aside, the word "Africa" itself is a portal to topoi of meaning—an almost magical talisman. He was later transported by the same alchemy, this time via the water underneath the ship, not only to every geographical point within the sea's most extreme bounds but, through those points that share a portion of the mythology learned in his boyhood's classical education, into the mythological past.

But what a crowd of thoughts face one on entering the Mediterranean! Grand as the sensation is, in passing through the classical and romantic memories of the sea off the western coast of the Peninsula, it is little compared with this. Countless generations of the human race, from three quarters of the world, with all the religions, and the mythologies, and the genius, and the wonderful deeds, good and bad, that have occupied almost the whole attention of mankind. ... The water at your feet is the same water that bathes the shores of Europe, of Africa, and of Asia, —of Italy and Greece, and the Holy Land, and the lands of chivalry and romance, and pastoral Sicily, and the Pyramids, and old Crete, and the Arabian city of Al Cairo, glittering in the magic luster of the Thousand and One Nights. This soft air in your face, comes from the grove of 'Daphne by Orontes';⁵⁸ these lucid waters, that part from before you like oil, are the same from which Venus arose pressing them out of her hair. In that quarter Vulcan fell—'Dropt from the zenith like a falling star.'⁵⁹—and there

⁵⁷ Hunt, *Byron and Contemporaries*, 474.

⁵⁸ A part of the ancient Greco-Roman city of Antioch, near today's Antakya, Turkey.

⁵⁹ John Milton, *Paradise Lost, Book 1* (New York: S. King, 1831): 32, line 745. Milton calls him Mulciber, rather than Vulcan, in line 740.

is Circe's Island, and Calypso's, and the promontory of Plato, and Ulysses wandering, and Cymon and Miltiades fighting, and Regulus crossing the sea to Carthage, and

'Damasco and Morocco, and Trebison;
And whom Biserta sent from Afric shore,
When Charlemagne with all his peerage fell
By Fontarabia.'⁶⁰

The mind hardly separates truth from fiction in thinking of all these things, nor does it wish to do so. *Fiction is Truth in another shape, and gives as close embraces.*⁶¹

Hunt's Mediterranean is a readerly multiplicity that, unlike Barthes's description of a classical text, emphatically *does not* move forward in a linear fashion. Hunt was aware of the inconsistencies, truth and fiction, and embraced both without destroying the integrity of either, and absolutely without attempting to create a synthesis of them. Possibly a reference to Keats's "Beauty is truth, truth beauty," Hunt affirmed for himself the fantastical, the imagined, the remembrance of things that never happened as coequal in importance and veracity to the empirically true.⁶² This interconnectivity of fact, myth, classical learning and imagination would be vital to the construction of the most beautiful—if most fanciful—portrait of Velluti: Hunt's "Velluti to his Revilers."

⁶⁰ Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Book 1, 29, ll. 584-587. Hunt has slightly altered Milton's original text, which reads (with my emphases): "Damasco, or Morocco, or Trebison/Or whom Biserta sent from Afric shore." This is perhaps unintentional, but perhaps Hunt is, in his embrace of a readerly Mediterranean, including all those battlefields simultaneously, whereas Milton offers them successively.

⁶¹ Hunt, *Byron and Contemporaries*, 474-475. Emphases mine.

⁶² John Keats, "Ode to a Grecian Urn," *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, Volume D, *The Romantic Era*, eds Jack Stillinger and Deidre Lynch (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2006): 905, line 49.

Hunt, remembering the early, exuberant days of his friendship with Keats, wrote how they were caught up in worlds of imagining rather than of fact. "I was in the habit, though a public man, of living in a world of abstractions of my own, and I regarded him as a nature still more abstracted. ...Our whole talk was made up of idealisms. In the streets we were in the thick of the old woods."⁶³ Lord Byron had very little patience with these exotic worlds of thought, especially when encompassed within a finite point. He criticized Keats's line "Oh for a beaker full of the warm South" to Hunt.⁶⁴ Hunt recalled that "it was not the word beaker that puzzled him. ... But the sort of poetry in which he excelled, was not accustomed to these poetical concentrations."⁶⁵ Byron heartily disdained Keats's *and* Hunt's fanciful worlds, writing "I do not know what world [Hunt] has lived in—but I have lived in three or four—and none of them like his Keats and Kangaroo terra incognita—."⁶⁶ William Keach attaches this comment to a classist rejection of Hunt's and Keats's middle-class, London suburban surroundings (as Byron himself indicated in the following sentence), but it seems as likely that the comment is general and literary, just as it is specific and geographical. Byron disliked the beaker's self-contained, tiny, hand-held world that contains the totality of the warm South, a promised land for Keats of health and life, a "poetic concentration." Keats and the fantastical kangaroo, hopping about in almost impossibly far-off Australia, is an expression of extreme exoticism forcibly

⁶³ Hunt, *Byron and Contemporaries*, 257.

⁶⁴ John Keats, "Ode to a Nightingale," *Norton Anthology of English Literature*, 903, line 15.

⁶⁵ Hunt, *Byron and Contemporaries*, 266.

⁶⁶ George Gordon, Lord Byron, Letter to John Murray, October 10, 1822, cited by William Keach, "Byron reads Keats," *The Cambridge Companion to Keats*, 203.

dwindled to a discrete, ridiculous entity. Byron repackaged and renamed Keats's beaker with a comedic sneer. Undeterred, years later Hunt's "A Fancy Concert" recreated a concert of stars, entirely in his own head. He is, in the poem's preamble, too sick to attend a real concert, and mixes impossibly different periods and artists for his imagined listening. "Of all the composers accounted divinest,/And with their own hands, did they play me their finest."⁶⁷ Starting with Marcello and Purcell, Hunt described a concert that appears to be a fair representative of concert life in London between 1800 and 1830, though with all the composers themselves as performers, regardless of their historical period. All are dead, except for Giuditta Pasta. Hunt explains in a footnote, "Pasta, who is not dead, is here killed for occasion, being the singer of the greatest genius it has ever been my good fortune to hear."⁶⁸ Despite his quick mirth, there is a sense of melancholy that hangs over this poem. The performers are dead and Hunt is old—self-consciously old. Velluti is not mentioned.

Hunt's creation, the fact/fiction world in "Velluti to his Revilers," appears, in the 1820s at least, to have been a source of regret or embarrassment for him. He never published (unless pseudonymously) a review of Velluti's singing though he was in London for most of Velluti's time there. He seems to have blocked the poem itself from further dissemination.⁶⁹ Only one manuscript copy exists, in the

⁶⁷ Leigh Hunt, "The Fancy Concert," *Ainsworth's Magazine: A Miscellany of Romance, General Literature, & Art* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1845): 93-94.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 94.

⁶⁹ Leigh Hunt, *The Poetical Works of Leigh Hunt*, ed. Humphrey Milford (London: Oxford University Press, 1923): xii, 752. This is my own copy of Hunt's collected poetical works. It does not include the poem, nor does Milford's short biography mention it. Milford claims for this work

handwriting of his daughter Julia, to which he appended the remark "I think them the best (in rhyme) that I ever wrote—if I am old enough to be allowed to talk of my 'best.'"⁷⁰ This copy was possibly occasioned by a letter from John Hunter to Hunt dated 16 October 1856 requesting copies of several out-of-print poems and concluding, "I dare not hope to see Velluti, though I think it ought not to be left in 'cold obstruction.'"⁷¹

Hunt's conceptualization of readerly realities is central to this work as his poem lies athwart much of the critical writing about Velluti. Somewhat younger and much more prominent as a pure philosopher, Thomas Carlyle was a sometime neighbor and close friend of Hunt's and seems to have at least partially shared this mode of cognition. From the lecture series entitled "On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History," Part One, "The Hero as Divinity" was delivered in London on 5 May 1840. Carlyle discussed the old Nordic *Aegir*, a

an almost-completeness that merely avoids "the all but wholly worthless *Juvenalia*." The supposedly complete chronological bibliography of Hunt's poetry does not include "Velluti to His Revilers" for the year 1825. It is possible that, a century after its composition, Hunt's "cold obstruction" (see next page) did in fact succeed in nearly obliterating his authorship from the poem. Milford, who claims to have reprinted all Hunt's notable anonymous poetry from *The Examiner* either did not consider this poem notable (which I find difficult to imagine) or did not realize it was Hunt's.

⁷⁰ Patrick Olsen, "New Leigh Hunt Manuscripts," Website: *University of Iowa Libraries: Special Collections and University Archives*, September 27, 2013, Accessed April 14, 2016 @ <http://blog.lib.uiowa.edu/speccoll/2013/09/27/new-leigh-hunt-manuscripts/>. The Hunt Letter collection at the University of Iowa does, however, contain a spate of letters from Hunt to Julia in the summer of 1857, partially concerning her copying some of her father's poems. This "Velluti" copy may well then be an answer to John Hunter's request of the previous autumn. It may have been that Hunt, now in his early seventies, was past caring about the social ramifications of a poem in which he altered reality to defend what many considered the indefensible and was moved have it copied by a justifiable pride in his poetic accomplishment. Considering the brief time he likely had to complete it, "Velluti" probably belongs to the same speed-poetry category, though in a much longer form, in which he managed to best Keats.

⁷¹ "Leight Hunt Letters," *University of Iowa Libraries*. Accessed April 14, 2016 @ <http://digital.lib.uiowa.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/leighhunt/id/6065/rec/3>.

god of sea-tempests whose living descendant he found in the local dialect of Nottingham. The local people call a dangerous, flooded state of the River Trent the "Eager." "They cry out, 'Have a care, there is the *Eager* coming!' Curious that word surviving, like the peak of a submerged world!"⁷² Carlyle's vision of the English language is a landscape strewn with barrows, visible reminders of the buried past, to a certain extent accessible by a transition/translation similar to that of Hunt's "Africa." Carlyle's vision of English history and of the English language as a web of interconnectivity, an intertextuality that spanned the centuries was strongly opposed by his near-contemporary, Thomas Macaulay.

In his unfinished *History of England*, begun in 1840 and published between 1848 and 1861, Macaulay utterly rejected the historicism he found in the barrows of Carlyle's English and Sir Walter Scott's romanticization of the British past. He was a modernist and a triumphalist, rejecting any imagined similarity, for instance, to a "gentleman" of his own age, and one in 1685. "We should be much mistaken if we pictured to ourselves the squires of the seventeenth century as men bearing a loose resemblance to their descendants, the country members and chairmen of quarter session with whom we are familiar." He excoriated the Restoration gentleman who, though bearing the same name was, in comparison to the Victorian gentleman, dirty, vulgar and ignorant. "His language and pronunciation were such as we should now expect to hear only from the most

⁷² Thomas Carlyle, "On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History: The Hero as Divinity," *Victorian Literature 1830-1900*, ed. Dorothy Mermin and Herbert Tucker (Fort Worth: Harcourt College Publishers, 2002): 181.

ignorant clowns. His oaths, coarse jests, and scurrilous terms of abuse, were uttered with the broadest accent of his province."⁷³ Macaulay and others rejected the works Scott and, by extension, Hunt's romanticization of Velluti and his imagined glades as signifiers of an at least partially sanitized past. Byron doubted and mocked their imagined topoi twenty years earlier. Rising factuality, a prosaic "anti-Romantic" philosophy seems to embody what Terry Eagleton sees as "a crassly philistine Utilitarianism ... rapidly becoming the dominant ideology of the industrial middle class, fetishizing fact, reducing human relations to market exchanges and dismissing art as unprofitable ornamentation."⁷⁴ Eagleton describes a Gradgrindian vulgarity of which even Macauley is only occasionally guilty, but the general characterization is, I think, not entirely inapt.

Thomas De Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium Eater* was first published in *The London Magazine* in the fall of 1821. The following year, the first version (De Quincey revised it in 1856) was published as a book. His opium-addled/opium enhanced dreamscapes, both waking and sleeping, seized the public imagination. He describes a "sympathy" that exists between waking and

⁷³ Thomas Macauley, "State of England in 1685," *History of England*, reproduced in *Victorian Literature* 199, 201-202. Macauley was not the first to denigrate the superimposition of 1820s manners and mores upon characters out of British history. In January 1826, proximal to very critical writing about Velluti's upcoming directorship of the opera, a review of the first publication of the Diary of Samuel Pepys appeared in "Manners of the Court of Charles II," *The London Magazine* 1826 Vol. 1 (London: Hunt and Clark, 1826): 105-118. The anonymous reviewer decries the sanitization of characters like Pepys, whose personal peccadillos were problematic to a romanticized view of history and absolutely antithetical to the rising moralism of the still-incipient Victorians.

⁷⁴ Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Oxford, Blackwell Publishing, 1996): 19.

dreaming states, though his transitions are achieved through chemical means.⁷⁵ Through opium's agency, dreamlike fantasy realms, like Hunt's or Keats's, overlay reality. His descriptions of a fantastic London bear a strong resemblance to Hunt's "thick of the old woods" whilst walking busy streets. Though for De Quincey it is usually the drug facilitating the transition between hard reality and the dream, music could also serve the function. Having discovered himself talentless at the pianoforte, he was "disenchanted" from hoping he could ever attain proficiency. "Too soon I became aware that to the deep voluptuous enjoyment of music, absolute *passiveness* in the hearer is indispensable."⁷⁶ For De Quincey, the slightest physical or intellectual effort destroyed the enjoyment of music. He described a supine, breathing-in of music that strikingly reproduces the enervated addict reclining on his opium couch. But, like the more vigorous Hunt via classical allusion, he is transported to other worlds via music, particularly by the singing of Giuseppina Grassini, a contralto at the King's Theater in the first decade of the nineteenth century.⁷⁷ De Quincey's musical reveries are not derived from the content of the music, but are rather recapitulations of his own thoughts and experiences.

It is sufficient to say, that a chorus, &c., of elaborate harmony displayed before me, as in a piece of arras-work, the whole of my past life—not as if recalled by an act of memory, but as if present and incarnated in the music, no longer painful to dwell upon, but the details of its incidents

⁷⁵ Thomas De Quincey, *The Collected Works: Confessions of an English Opium Eater*, Vol. 1 (Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black: 1862): 258-261.

⁷⁶ De Quincey, 59.

⁷⁷ This was always via opium, it must be emphasized; music alone, it seems, was not attempted. See chapter 3 on the singing of Grassini.

removed, or blended in some hazy abstraction, and its passions exalted, spiritualised, and sublimed.⁷⁸

Hunt's abstractions take him into a learned, acquired past, but De Quincey's opium-aided abstractions take him into his own life, or into exalted versions of it: a life, judging by a body of work as studded with classical allusions as Hunt's, that is just as readerly and just as replete with the knowledge of other topoi of thought.

Constructs of Velluti, Topoi of Music, Anglo-Italy and the Classical Past

The Anglo-Italians—a group of English expatriates, among them, most prominently for this work, the Burghershes, Byron, the Shelleys, Hunt, Medwin and possibly Keats in aspiration, certainly in death—were a significant subset of the second generation of English Romantics. Their discomfort with England despite their literary works increasingly becoming so much a part of the landscape of English literature was accompanied by a love of (almost) all things Italian. In her *Romantic "Anglo-Italians,"* Maria Schoina seeks to re-configure Anglo-Italy not so much as a geographical space as an "Italian-ness ... removed from geographical-cultural reality."⁷⁹ Though she seems to acknowledge a placeness within the sense of a "bi-cultural identity,"⁸⁰ she situates her bi-cultural construct very much within the confines of language, literature and the figurative arts. She deals little with Italian music and opera. In the chapter entitled "Anglo-

⁷⁸ De Quincey, 207.

⁷⁹ Schoina, *Anglo-Italians*, preface.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 13.

Italicus," Schoina reads Mary Shelley's sense of Anglo-Italian identity as coming from within her oikophobic distaste for her less-travelled fellow English.

Specifically, this is demonstrated by Shelley's behavior at the double bill of Velluti and Pasta in *Crociato* and *Nina*.⁸¹ This episode, in Shelley's own words but more so in Schoina's portrayal of it, furnishes posterity with an unattractive picture of Shelley. In it, Schoina sees her as reifying opera as a kind of artifact, a symbol of Anglo-Italian intellectual superiority.⁸² But Shelley's diary and letters reveal a much more detailed, well-educated understanding of not only the language, but of music, characterization/acting, and of voices, tending to undercut Schoina's view of Anglo-Italian-ness as primarily, or even solely, a self-assumed identity, and of opera as a mere commodity. I theorize that the opera, with its singers, sets, fantastical plots (in the 1820s) in tandem with Italian art, literature and above all the sinuous euphony of the spoken and sung language, constituted a kind of hyper-real, visible and audible romantic Anglo-Italy, all called into being with the rising of the curtain.⁸³ De Quincey, after his Grassini-induced reveries at the King's Theater, wrote of continuing the Italian bath during intermission. "And over and above the music of the stage and the orchestra, I had all around me, in

⁸¹ Mary Shelley, "Letter to John Howard Payne, June 11, 1826," *The Letters of Mary Shelley* Vol. 1, ed. Betty Bennett (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980): 519-520. Schoina does not identify either the precise performance or the performers.

⁸² Schoina, *Anglo Italians*, 73-74.

⁸³ Schoina, *Anglo Italians*, 17. Schoina does see "Pisa" as a place as well as a word, becoming a topos of and shorthand for Liberal, expatriate politics. The fact that the short-lived *The Liberal* was written almost entirely in Pisa makes this particular identification fairly straightforward. William Maginn calls it "the Pisan periodical, *The Liberal*, edited by Lord Byron and Leigh Hunt," packaging the entire concept rather neatly. William Maginn, "The Fraserian Papers," *The Miscellaneous Writings of Dr. Maginn* Vol. 5 (New York: Redfield, 1857): 47.

the intervals of the performance, the music of the Italian language talked by Italian women—for the gallery was usually crowded with Italians."⁸⁴ Hunt, writing in *Byron* about the long coach ride through northern Italy on the journey back to England, sees Italy, or possibly Italy as it describes itself in Italian, as a kind of sheet-music landscape. "But a list of places in Italy is always like a succession of musical chords. Parma, Piacenza, Voghera, Tortona, Felizana,—sounds like these make a road-book a music-book."⁸⁵

In "Velluti to his Revilers," Hunt, in the real Italy, creates a sylvan dreamscape within the framing, London reality of the poem. In this topos, another conceit of the poem that seems entirely a product of Hunt's imagination, Velluti longs for a lost love and an unborn son, sitting in a woods, part *Attis*, part *Lamia*. A "Nymph more than spirit, and of mortal birth;/Something of shapely warmth, 'twixt heav'n and earth."⁸⁶ Though the woman in Velluti's dreamscape draws quite close to the castrato, nearness breaks the dream, destroys the woods.

For love so high, so graceful, and so good,
And in the depths of our commingling eyes
We see, upcoming, the dark ecstasies,—
Sudden the landscape fades; my wits forlorn
Deal her, instead of love, some dreadful scorn;
And her poor lover, torn with self-rebuke,
Dies of the pardoning sweetness of her look.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ De Quincey, 207-208.

⁸⁵ Hunt, *Byron and Contemporaries*, 507.

⁸⁶ Keats's *Lamia* was a volume loaned by Hunt to Shelley. It was the only means by which he could identify Shelley's badly decomposed body and thus seems to have held an fascination for him, at least as long as he stayed in Italy.

⁸⁷ Hunt, "Velluti to his Revilers," *The Examiner* 1825 (London: John Hunt, 1825): 497. There is also something Orphic in these lines: Orpheus finally looking at the pleading Euridice, ensuring she can never leave the realm of the dead.

The dream of an unattainable, feminine beloved could be, in some sense, Hunt's attempt to shield Velluti from accusations of sexual "unnaturalness." Nevertheless, it is not so much the *content* of these dreams-within-dreams that concerns me as it is the nature of these concentric constructs, each one fading into and out of its neighbors; they provide a map in verse to Hunt's cognitive world. The sensation of Velluti's singing actually pulling his listeners away from the mundane geography of the concert room or theater comes from Stendhal, via Bacon. In an article about the singer published in the *Quarterly Musical Magazine and Review* in the summer of 1825, the writer reprints extensive sections of Stendhal's 1824 *Vie de Rossini*, anticipating the sensation of an ordinary listener, in an ordinary city (Paris or London: the writer implies the two are interchangeable) experiencing the exotic places called into being by Velluti's singing, specifically in "Notte Tremenda." "This style may appear too effeminate, and may not at first please; but every amateur of Paris will agree with me, that this manner of singing is to him an unknown region—a strange land, of which the music he hears [has heard up to this point] has given him no idea."⁸⁸

META, in the outlier poem published in 1828, finds the landscape of Anglo-Italy transported to London through/in the singing of Velluti.

Impromptu on Velluti

I've listen'd oft 'neath Italy's sky,
To the hallow'd voice of melody;

⁸⁸ "Signor Velluti," *The Quarterly Magazine and Musical Review for 1825* (London: Baldwin, Cradock and Son, 1825), 274, citing Stendhal's 1824 *La Vie de Rossini*. Stendhal means by "amateur," like "dilettante," a gifted, or at least accomplished, non-professional musician.

I've heard sweet music on the tide,
When all was hush'd and still beside—
...
But ne'er did aught so bless mine ear,
As that one voice now breathing—here.⁸⁹

META's poetry about Velluti has a palpable, nearly physical longing for Anglo-Italy. So constructed, it is, like the eroticism of the language itself, a place for and of physical pleasure. If Velluti's song is a strange land, the King's Theater, suffused in language and music thoroughly un-English, was itself a foreign country, a "little world" in the words of Mary Shelley.⁹⁰ De Quincey's love of the Saturday night performance at the King's Theater contended on that same night with his other great passion, about which he "shall be rather obscure."⁹¹ He is. Having taken opium, he went into the midst of London's poor—the implication is to find easy, anonymous sex, though he certainly never said that explicitly. The Italian language served as placeholder, a linguistic home for acts of sexual intimacy. This conceit is not limited to De Quincey. In 1812, during their tempestuous affair, Lady Caroline Lamb wrote Byron a letter notable for its bloody eroticism. "I asked you not to send blood but Yet do—because if it means love I like to have it. I cut the hair too close & bled much more than you need—do not you the same & pray put not scissors points near where *quei capelli* grow—

⁸⁹ *The Spirit of the Age* for 1828, 221.

⁹⁰ M. Shelley, "Second Anglo-Italicus Letter to *The Examiner*," *The Letters of Mary Wollestonecraft Shelley* Vol. 1, ed. Betty Bennett (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980): 524. This letter was not published in *The Examiner*.

⁹¹ De Quincey, *Confessions*, 208.

sooner take it from the arm or wrist—pray be careful..."⁹² Perhaps it goes without saying, but the letter contained Lady Caroline's blood, and hair that could only be named in Italian—her pubic hair.

The Anglo-Italian *demi-monde*'s view of "normal" English society, though all of it that appeared in print was shorn of Mary Shelley's dislike for the way it used the English language itself—"The voices of the people are new & grating—the Vulgar English they speak particularly displeasing"—was well known and occasionally held up to ridicule.⁹³ Though ostensibly these writings are about aristocrats like the Fanes or Wellington, the veiled attacks upon the smaller group of arguably more famous, liberal expatriates is faintly discernable. On 1 July 1825, in its review of Velluti's King's Theater debut, the *Evening Mail* mocked the many Italians in the audience for their insisting upon keeping their Italian manners (applauding throughout the performance whenever Velluti sang, well or poorly), but reserved its greatest, patriotic scorn for the Anglo-Italians.

Those high and no doubt honourable personages, many of whom have passed a considerable portion of their lives in Italy, far from their own sturdy, rough-toned peasantry, may delight in such forced fruits, such costly exotics; but, nurturing them as they may, they will never sate [sic] the unsophisticated palate of that people who for years fought the battles of Europe, and came from the contest victorious.⁹⁴

⁹² Marilee Hanson, "Lady Caroline Lamb Facts & Information – Lord Byron's Lovers," Website: *Englishhistory*, Accessed April 14, 2016 @ http://englishhistory.net/byron/lady-caroline-lamb/, February 1, 2015. Emphases mine.

⁹³ Mary Shelley, "Letter to Leigh Hunt: September 9/11, 1823," *Letters of Mary Shelley* Vol. 1, 377-381. Shelley had just arrived in England and was writing to Hunt in Italy.

⁹⁴ *Evening Mail*, July 1, 1825.

Incursions of the Classical World: the Singer as Statue and in Ruins

Replete literature as it has functioned for much of its (European) history has relied heavily upon classical sources. The rediscovery of or reawakened interest in the ancient world, although a fundamental part of European thought since at least the fifteenth century, was arguably accelerated by the spectacular, slowly unfolding find of the ruins of Pompeii and Herculaneum over the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Statues, buildings, ruins of every description became referential peri-textual points. Intertextuality spreads to non-textual objects which could then be made to speak eloquently. Sculpting an artist into a work of art, particularly one who was visibly or audibly long past his or her best days was a process that came more slowly to fruition, though it is not clear that the classical past is distinguished from the Renaissance or even later, neo-classical copies. Creating neo-classical copies of singers, particularly castrati, just as Hunt's Velluti to his Revilers is a neo-classical copy, is in evidence as early as 1770. This was the year Charles Burney heard the great castrato soprano Caffarelli (Gaetano Majorano) in Naples. The singer was over sixty, and his voice had clearly faded. Yet, much to Burney's surprise, he consented to sing at a private party.

Many notes in [Caffarelli's] voice are now thin, but there are still traits in his performance sufficient to convince one of his having been an amazing fine singer. ... Expression and grace with great neatness in all he attempts are his characteristics—both Barbella [an instrumentalist] and he are

Bolisarius[e]s, rather in ruin than otherwise, but what remains of them is but the more precious for it.⁹⁵

By the time Théophile Gautier's 1849 poem "Contralto" was written, the idea of the singer as not just an artist impersonating figures out of classical literature and classical art, but as a piece of classical art him/herself (literally sexually bifurcated, in this instance) had become explicit. "One sees in the Museum of Antiquities,/On a bed of sculpted marble,/An enigmatic statue/Of a disquieting beauty."⁹⁶

A year later, Pauline Garcia Viardot, younger sister of Manuel and Maria Garcia, attended one of Giuditta Pasta's final concerts with a friend, who ridiculed it. Pasta was over fifty and struggled with her old repertoire. Her voice's

state of utter ruin on the night in question passes description. ... Dismal as was the spectacle—broken, hoarse, and destroyed as was the voice—the great style of the singer spoke to the great singer. ...[after she rallied late in the concert] the old irresistible charm broke out; nay, even in the final song. ... 'You are right!' was Madame Viardot's quick and heartfelt response (her eyes full of tears) to a friend beside her. 'You are right! It is

⁹⁵ Charles Burney, *Music, Men and Manners in France and Italy 1770* (London: Eulenburg Books, 1980): 196-197. Though to say a voice or person was in ruins was a common enough criticism in the eighteenth century, the description of the castrato as Belisarius needs clarification. Belisarius, a general of the Emperor Justinian, the early Byzantine re-conqueror of much of the Western Roman Empire, was a popular subject in eighteenth-century fiction, especially in his guise (probably apocryphal, but until the twentieth century generally believed) as a blinded, fallen hero, punished by Justinian for pride and made to beg outside of the city gates of Constantinople. Hence: more precious for being in ruins.

⁹⁶ Théophile Gautier, "Contralto," Website: *PoésieFrancais* Accessed January 20, 2016 @ http://poesie.webnet.fr/lesgrandsclassiques/poemes/theophile_gautier/contralto.html. "On voit dans le Musée antique,/Sur un lit de marbre sculpté,/Une statue énigmatique/D'une inquiétante beauté." Camille Paglia, *Sexual Personae* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991): 413. Paglia suggests that both readers and viewers of the sexually, vocally polymorphic statue of the contralto need to use Keats's negative capability. She means for the statue's gender, but I believe negative capability to be a more general concept of Romantic thought, and believe it applies as strongly to the male-female voice of the contralto, as it does to the body of the statue. See chapters 3 and 4 for the registers of the voice and the gendered identities they variously imply. Gautier seems to be writing about the classical sculpture "Hermaphrodite Endormie" at the Musée du Louvre.

like the 'Cenacolo' [The Last Supper] of Da Vinci at Milan—a wreck of a picture, but the picture is the greatest picture in the world!"⁹⁷

Theresa Kelley describes John Keats's experiments in ekphrasis, giving life to ceramic or sculpted figures in *On Seeing the Elgin Marbles* and *Ode on a Grecian Urn*, or blurring the line between life and death, flesh and stone in *The Eve of St. Agnes*.⁹⁸ Keats's young lovers' substance flits from that of statues to living memories, or ghosts, and back to statues. The decade that followed ended with *Sarrasine*. In the 1830 home of the DeLantys hangs a painting of the singer as Apollo, itself copied from a sculpture of Zambinella executed in the novella's inner story. Sculpted from a model believed by the sculptor to be a woman, it is in actuality a castrato, himself/itself formerly a boy who would otherwise have grown to be a man not unlike the Apollo he impersonates. Balzac abstracts Zambinella as far as possible from his original self, yet at the point of ultimate remove, places the old man next to his many-times-removed portrait, executed at the height of his youth, beauty and deception.⁹⁹ At the climax of *Sarrasine*, undeceived, the furious sculptor tries to destroy his statue but his hammer stroke misses. In failing to destroy the statue, he is defeated by the living castrato whose cries of terror summon the assassins.¹⁰⁰

The castrato of the nineteenth century, as seen with a cognition shaped by classical literature, was perhaps inevitably seen as a three or four-dimensional

⁹⁷ Henry Chorley, *Henry Fothergill Chorley: Autobiography, Memoir and Letters* Vol. 2, ed. Henry Hewlett (London: Richard Bentley and Son, 1873): 208-209.

⁹⁸ Teresa Kelley, "Keats and 'Ekphrasis'," *The Cambridge Companion to Keats*, 174-179.

⁹⁹ Balzac, *Sarrasine*, 16.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 43.

(or five, if sound is a dimension), replete allusion to history: the body as readerly text. The text of statues, of marble ruins, was a natural progression. The *Times's* review of 1 July 1825 removes Velluti from the world of the living, from the world of flesh and bones. "Velluti's face is distinguished by a melancholy placidity. It speaks of a heart that knows no joys. It is a painted sepulchre; the external of a mind, it would seem, where sorrow is predominant."¹⁰¹ Though the immediate literary source being plundered is Catallus's *Attis*, the physical representation is of cold, lifeless, funerary sculpture, covered with false color in hope of simulating life. Like the figures in *St. Agnes*, Velluti moves back and forth between sculpted, solid reality and the insubstantiality of the spirit world. "On seeing the thin, tall form tread the stage in armour, we felt a sensation which we cannot describe. It seemed as if we saw a spirit glide before us."¹⁰² *The Parthenon* tries to have it both ways, situating him both in life and in death. "There was something in his whole appearance, his every look, and every motion, which gave him, to my imagination at least, a preternatural effect. He looked like a being of another world. ... His cheeks, even through the rouge, were plainly of a death-like hue."¹⁰³ John Ebers, perhaps in an attempt to naturalize, demystify Velluti, writes about his appearance in a less fantastical though still romanticized vein. "He is tall and of a slender make, his countenance pale and suffused with a melancholy

¹⁰¹ *Times*, July 1, 1825.

¹⁰² *New Monthly Magazine and Literary Journal* [NMM&LJ] (London: Henry Colburn, London. 1828): 154-155.

¹⁰³ *Parthenon*, 80.

expression, which gives way, when the singer is excited, to one of vivid animation."¹⁰⁴

Even Ebers, though his is one of the more human portrayals of the singer, abstracts him into a work of art in his final passage, describing Velluti in the moonlight scene, "Notte Tremenda" in *Tebaldo e Isolina*. Praising the skill of the painter and the luminescence of the set, Ebers grants Velluti magical powers of enchantment.

While this scene is displayed, which seems to *paint* the silence of night even to the eye, the full orchestral accompaniment is hushed—the flute and the harp alone are heard to prelude the mournful air that breaks from the lips of the melancholy warrior. ... The stillness of the scene was communicated to the house; and not a word was spoken, not a breath heard.¹⁰⁵

Though it is full of sound—Velluti's singing, the harp and flute accompaniment—Ebers describes not a sung scene but a painted one, a tableau of stillness.¹⁰⁶

Mary Shelley, ironically while defending Velluti's humanity and his ability to speak to all humanity because of rather than despite his traduced physical state, sees his partially ruined voice in terms of beautifully executed but slightly ludicrous statuary. "To refer continually to VELLUTI's bad soprano, and his liability to be out of tune, is to imitate a person of my acquaintance, who, in going through the superb galleries of sculpture at the Vatican, was chiefly struck by the

¹⁰⁴ John Ebers, *Seven Years*, 268.

¹⁰⁵ Ebers, 293-294. Emphasis original.

¹⁰⁶ See chapter 5 for a reproduction and analysis of the various surviving versions of the *Romanza*, the aria at the end of the scena introduced, as Ebers says, by solo harp and flute.

ugly faces and stiff ringlets of the busts of various Roman ladies."¹⁰⁷ Shelley goes on, exactly like an art historian might point out the beauties of a well-executed statue of an ugly woman, to describe the many good points that remained in Velluti's singing. Her view of him, though partaking of the antique, is firmly embedded in her living, present day. Shelley seems also to see Velluti as a physical artifact of Anglo-Italy, folding neatly into Leigh Hunt's description of the Italian landscape as one where the ancient manages somehow to appear modern and new.¹⁰⁸

These statues, singers, tied both to the past and the present, were as a consequence of their divergent-yet-whole natures always new-old. When audibly in ruins they become, like an ancient urn, like a blinded hero or a Leonardo fresco, all the more precious. Almost poetical creations, they flickered back and forth between states of spirit, flesh and stone—mute works of art that, however and for modern sensibilities perhaps perversely, exerted themselves through the medium of sound.

Velluti Explicated: Indexation through Literary Allusion

On the morning of the London premiere of *Il Crociato in Egitto*, *The Times* ran their *ad hominem*, Juvenalian attack on the debutant. According to rumor, someone allegedly took the trouble of translating the *Times* article and having

¹⁰⁷ M. Shelly, "First Anglo-Italicus letter to *The Examiner*, May 29, 1826," *Letters of Mary Shelley* Vol. 1, 517. This first letter was published in *The Examiner*.

¹⁰⁸ Leigh Hunt, *Autobiography*, Vol. 3, 26-27.

it placed in Velluti's hands shortly before the opening curtain.¹⁰⁹ It is unlikely, given well established fame in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries of the Satire quoted in the *Times* that Velluti hadn't long known it. Perhaps at some point in the past he had even seen it used against him as a representative of his class, if not personally. The direct nature of this attack was out of the ordinary, however, attacking both Velluti and his aristocratic backers in highly personal ways, and the established nature of the messenger, *The Times*, probably played, if the rumor is true, no small part in Velluti's agitation.

The Roman meme, the eunuch as over-endowed sexual machine predating upon women and boys, perhaps was meant as a contrast to the *Times*'s previous historical-literary portrait of the singer. In May Velluti was Farinelli, his admirers their own doting grandmothers. This was written in an almost eighteenth-century vein: ironic, detached and humorous.¹¹⁰ Though for the Farinelli attack there is no clear literary source (unless it is Ancillon), but rather a collective, socio-historical memory, there exist clear, eighteenth-century antecedents for this view of the castrato. Tobias Smollet's *Humphrey Clinker* and Fanny Burney's *Cecilia* and *Evelina* all hint at the castrato's essential inutility.¹¹¹ One of the more important and certainly more explicit texts explicating the difference between a castrato of the eighteenth century and the eunuch-for-

¹⁰⁹ *London Magazine* 1825, 517.

¹¹⁰ *Times*, May 10, 1825. "We certainly have no right to meddle with the tastes of the rich and powerful, so long as those tastes are confined to their private circles: neither is it any business of ours if the ladies in private revive the fashion of a past age, and doat [*sic*] on Velluti, as their grandmothers did on Farinelli, or any other ambiguous creature without a sex."

¹¹¹ See chapters 3 and 4.

pleasure of Juvenal's Rome is the play *The Remarkable Trial of the Queen of Quavers*. First published around 1771 and probably based upon the 1766 elopement, marriage and ensuing annulment of the castrato Gaetano Tenducci and Dorothea Maunsell, the play parodied a fictionalized castrato named Signor Rascallini.¹¹² Mocking the witness's silly passion for Rascallini's "Great parts and fine understanding," the lawyer explains:

I know very well, that the ancient cunning Roman ladies used to make much of this cattle; but you must consider, that they had the precaution of having them castrated after they had attained the age of five and twenty, when their manhood was in its full growth, as you may be informed by the nice commentators of [J]uvenal. –With our Castrati the thing is quite different. If you take Signor Rascallini to a serious task, you will be sure of finding him a blunted sword, an old woman in masquerade, a pistol without balls, a pen without ink, a dog that cannot wag his tail, a pin which cannot prick, a chimney without fire, where no dinner can be cooked, a warming pan with a broken handle, and a house that cannot stand long, because it is built without stones.¹¹³

After initially using popularly held beliefs from the previous century—the castrato Rascallini as a "a pin that cannot prick" being little different from Velluti playing Farinelli to besotted society ladies—seven weeks after his initial attack on Velluti, on 30 June 1825 the *Times*, or probably more specifically William Barnes himself, apparently decided mild derision would not suffice. In this, he seems to have mendaciously betrayed his own knowledge. While it is possible he did not know the *Queen of Quavers* it is far less likely that he was unfamiliar with the real-life trial of Tenducci or the many, laughingly dismissive accounts of castrato

¹¹² Helen Berry, *The Castrato and His Wife* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). See the Introduction.

¹¹³ *The Remarkable Trial of the Queen of Quavers* (London: J. Bew, ca. 1771): 7-8, 33-35.

virility prevalent in late eighteenth-century novels.

Hunt's "Velluti to His Revilers" is for completely different reasons just as dependent upon Roman sources as the *Times*'s Juvenalian address to the "manly British public, and the pure British fair." Hunt derives much of his imagery and some of the internal structure from Catullus's Attis, a self-emasculating boy who at first lives ecstatically in music and dance then grows to regret bitterly his rash act. Hunt seizes upon the chance to place a modern, factual topic into a close fictional embrace with one of his favorite authors. Henry Stead sees the ties of "Velluti to his Revilers" to "Attis" as Hunt's mythologizing the people of London, a kind of valorism.¹¹⁴ As the classical Attis has no audience but his own regrets and a vengeful goddess, it seems more likely that while *Velluti* is being mythologized, the "modern," "enlightened" and "liberal" critic is merely called to be what he claims he is (modern, enlightened and liberal). *The Examiner* made the Attis framework explicit with a footnote, likely by Hunt himself, appended to the lines "To the sea-shore he came, and look'd across,/Mourning his native land and miserable loss.—* ... *See the poem of Atys, above-mentioned. Gibbon says, 'it is enough to fill a man with pity, a eunuch with despair.'—In what sex are we to place those who feel neither like the one nor the other?"¹¹⁵ Hunt's meaning is unclear. Did he refer to Velluti, who, despite contemporaneous slurs to the

¹¹⁴ Henry Stead, *A Cockney Catullus: The Reception of Catullus in Romantic Britain, 1795-1821* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2016): 63, 265-268. Stead unaccountably calls "Velluti to his Revilers" a response to Velluti's "conservative" critics. Thomas Barnes and *The Times* in general were leading voices of the opposition Whigs, and cannot reasonably be termed conservative in any meaningful sense within English politics of the 1820s.

¹¹⁵ Hunt, "Velluti to his Revilers," *The Examiner for 1825* (London: John Hunt, 1825): 490.

contrary, was never believably implicated in any instance of same-sex desire? Or is this a more general plea, arising from self-conscious liberality, for a gentler treatment of those who, in the gender bifurcation of the early nineteenth century, apparently fit into neither one nor the other? I have no answer, but see both as possible and both, considering the period, as remarkably open-minded.

Unlike Barnes's simplisitic attacks, Hunt did not remain within a single source.¹¹⁶ He reached again, not for the classical canon or for the knowing satires of the previous century, but for Milton's *Paradise Lost* by way of Mary Shelley's title page for the 1818 edition of *Frankenstein*.

[Hunt] Was I the cause of what I mourn? Did I
Unmake myself, and hug deformity?
Did I, a smiling and a trusting child,
See the curst blow, to which I was beguiled?

[Shelley/Milton] Did I request thee, maker, from my clay
To mould me man, Did I solicit thee
from darkness to promote me?¹¹⁷

This bears a strong a resemblance to Hunt's "Velluti," and for the nearly identical purpose of humanizing a monster whose creation was against his will that only an overabundance of scholarly caution would deny its applicability.

¹¹⁶ For the complete text of "Velluti to his Revilers," please see Appendix A.

¹¹⁷ Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Book X, 228, ll. 743-745. Karen Karbeiner, "Introduction," Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein, or, The Modern Prometheus* (New York: Barnes and Nobles Classics, 2003): xv. *Frankenstein* was a moderately successful novel but was very successful in stage adaptations, some running concurrently, or nearly so, with Velluti's appearance. Though the fact of Hunt's residence in Florence during this period might seem to hint her novel held a less prominent place in his imagination, Karbeiner adds that Shelley kept Hunt apprised of these theatrical adaptations, citing a letter from her to him, praising the actor playing the monster. Mary Shelley, *Letters* Vol. 1, 378. I am not alone in ascribing a strong familial resemblance between Frankenstein's monster and Hunt's Velluti. Gillan D'Arcy Wood, *Romanticism and Music Culture in Britain, 1770-1840: Virtue and Virtuosity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010): 257. Concerning "Velluti to his Revilers," Wood writes "the aging castrato takes the shape of Mary Shelley's sympathetic monster, a 'solitary' lovelorn man-child left 'wand'ring in aching' space."

Hunt's next lines, the blood-filled— "Did I ... Call for the knife? and not resist in vain,/With shrieks convulsive and a fiery pain,/That second baptism, bloody and profane?" —may have a concrete literary source as well.¹¹⁸ These lines seem to savor strongly of John Polidori's *The Vampyre*. This was a veiled portrait of Byron using the germ of Byron's own idea, according to Mair Rigby. *The Vampyre* enjoyed wildly successful stage adaptations both in London and on the continent and its imagery was absolutely current.¹¹⁹ Blood figures prominently in *The Vampyre* from the first page to the last. At the story's close, the innocent yet eminently corruptible young Aubrey, dying from sorrow at his inability to stop his sister's marriage to Lord Ruthven, bursts a blood vessel.

Aubrey's weakness increased; the effusion of blood produced symptoms of the near approach of death. He desired his sister's guardians might be called, and when the midnight hour had struck, he related composedly what the reader has perused [first his implicit seduction by the vampire, then his sister's explicit seduction]—he died immediately after.

The guardians hastened to protect Miss Aubrey; but when they arrived, it was too late. Lord Ruthven had disappeared, and Aubrey's sister had glutted the thirst of a VAMPYRE!¹²⁰

A "second baptism, bloody and profane" is not only the description of a castration and the beginning of a second life, in blood and against nature, but is also entirely convertible to a description of the initiation, through blood, death and rebirth, into a second life of vampirism. Indeed, there is reason to suspect that Velluti, and perhaps castrati in general, were viewed as vampires. Not only does

¹¹⁸ Hunt, "Velluti," lines 13-15.

¹¹⁹ Mair Rigby, "'Prey to some cureless disquiet': Polidori's Queer Vampyre at the Margins of Romanticism," *Queer Romanticism* 36-37 (Nov. 2004-February 2005). Accessed December 6, 2013 @ <https://www.erudit.org/revue/ron/2005/v/n36-37/011135ar.html>.

¹²⁰ John Polidori, *The Vampyre*, 18.

the language describing Velluti often appear to mirror that of Polidori's description of the vampire, in at least one instance the connection is explicit. In an article in the 1 August 1825 edition of the *Monthly Magazine and British Register* entitled "Opera Exhibition," the spectacle of the castrato was memorably eviscerated, as are his protectors, promoters and, in a not uncommon aside, his parents. Urging Velluti's fans to withdraw their support from him, and through him support for the practice of castration, the writer exhorted "those persons of high rank and station" to "think again before they persevere in rendering the prospect of British remuneration a temptation to depraved Italian parents to immolate their future offspring to the vampire taste of a perverted sensuality."¹²¹ The vampire's creations—other vampires—are its children. A second birth, a bloody second baptism ties Hunt and Velluti, through the act of his parents, to Lord Ruthven. If so, then it is perhaps reasonable to see in Aubrey's corrupted youth and his bloody death/destruction by the machinations of Lord Ruthven a Bromius to Polidori's vampiric version of Juvenal's eunuch.¹²²

Aspects of Gothic Horror in the Velluti Portrayal

Perhaps as a natural outgrowth of the general popularity of the Gothic

¹²¹ "Topic of the Month:—Opera Exhibition," *Monthly Magazine and British Register* (London: Geo. B. Whittaker, 1825): 42. Two pages preceding this, in an example of juxtapositional commentary-by-inference, a lengthy article appears concerning a "Living Skeleton," an unnaturally thin Frenchman named Seurat being exhibited as a freak in London. See the final section of this chapter. The sense of Velluti being an exhibition for the decadent tastes of the upper classes, without agency of his own, was one that, while popular initially, faded when his forceful personality became more generally known.

¹²² Polidori, 8.

horror genre, Velluti's physical and audible presence in the King's Theater as well as on the streets of London was reported in language and imagery sharing strong affinities with purely fictional writing. In her *Powers of Horror*, Julia Kristeva posits a fear of nearness to the self, or of supplanting the self with the external "abjected" horror. "It is as if the skin, a fragile container, no longer guaranteed the integrity of one's 'own and clean self' but, scraped or transparent, invisible or taugth, gave way before the abjection of its contents."¹²³ The feared/despised Other becomes the self as the thin protection of the self's outer layer, both literally and metaphorically the skin, fails to maintain that plausible deniability of the body's separation from the unclean without, which is itself a material, visible reminder of the unclean that lurks within. Dino Felluga writes that "Kristeva associates the abject with the eruption of the Real into our lives. In particular, she associates such a response with our rejection of death's insistent materiality."¹²⁴ I see this specifically in the aforementioned Velluti-penumbra works. It presents in three more or less distinct ways: nearness, a treacherous similitude to life and beauty, and youth in age/death in life.

Nearness is perhaps the most powerful aspect of horror in the Velluti portraiture and contemporary writing in general, and is that which ties the literature of the 1820s most closely to modern theories. Both his voice and his person became in a sense the abjected as they impinged upon *some* of his

¹²³ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, trans. Leon Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982): 54-55.

¹²⁴ Dino Felluga, "Modules on Kristeva: On the Abject," *Introductory Guide to Critical Theory*, Website: *Purdue University*, Accessed April 19, 2016 @ <<http://www.purdue.edu/guidetotheory/psychoanalysis/kristevaabject.html>>.

contemporaries' sense of the self, their aural and physical personal spaces, causing reactions that verged on the horrified. In Heinrich Marschner's *Der Vampyr*—the 1828 operatic version of Polidori's novella—early in the second act, though ostensibly protected by a crowd of people, the young Emmy is fascinated by Lord Ruthven. Her mother warns her of his eyes, of the power of a close gaze whose fascination she will not be able to escape.¹²⁵

Sieh' Mutter, dort dem bleichen Mann

[Emmy] Look mother, there the pale man,
With a soulless gaze,
[Mother] Child, don't look at the pale man,
Otherwise you will soon be done for,
Back quickly away from him!
Already some maidens, young and beautiful
Have looked too deeply into his eyes,
And then were forced, with bitter anguish
With their blood to pay,
So quietly and secretly I say to you,
The pale man is a Vampire!
Protect us God on the earth
To ever become like him.¹²⁶

Her mother's warnings, whispered in the crowd, cannot protect Emmy. She is unable to stay away, unable to resist the vampire's charms. A few scenes later

¹²⁵ Marschner may seem far afield, but as will be seen in chapter 5, he was likely Morlacchi's amanuensis for the 1825 Dresden version of *Tebaldo e Isolina* and prepared the piano-vocal edition of the opera. He must have known about Velluti, and almost certainly knew Filippo Sassaroli fairly well. In any case, his use of an 1819 English novella as the subject matter for his first successful opera lassoes him, for my purposes, into the primarily English orbit of the Velluti-penumbral works.

¹²⁶ Wilhelm Wohlbrück, *Der Vampyr: Romantische Oper in 2 Akten: Musik von Heinrich Marschner* (Munich: Georg Franz, ca. 1830): 31. "Sieh Mutter, dort den bleichen Mann/Mit seelenlosen Blick; —/Kind, sieh den bleichen Mann nicht an,/Sonst ist es bald um Dich gethan,/Weich' schnell von ihm zurück; /Schon manches Mägdlein, jung und schön,/Thät ihm zu tief in's Auge sehn,/Muszt' es mit bittern Qualen/Und seinem Blut bezahlen;/Denn still und heimlich sag' ich's Dir,/Der bleiche Mann ist ein Vampyr!/Bewahr' uns Gott, auf Erden/Ihm jemals gleich zu werden."

her dead body is found in the woods, Lord Ruthven standing over it.

Closeness as a function or facilitator of horror is also evident in Polidori's original. Aubrey, though long in Ruthven's company, is increasingly uncomfortable sharing close spaces with him.¹²⁷ Awakening from a long illness following the death of his beloved he is "horrified and startled at the sight of him whose image he had now combined with that of a Vampyre."¹²⁸ Aubrey, after his escape from Ruthven whom he believes dead, has brought his sister to a "drawing-room."¹²⁹

The crowd was excessive—a drawing-room had not been held for a long time, and all who were anxious to bask in the smile of royalty, hastened thither. Aubrey was there with his sister. While he was standing in a corner by himself, heedless of all around him, engaged in the remembrance that the first time he had seen Lord Ruthven was in that very place—he felt himself suddenly seized by the arm ... He had hardly courage to turn, fearful of seeing a spectre that would blast him, when he perceived, at a little distance, the same figure which had attracted notice on this spot ... Lord Ruthven again before him ... the dead rise again!¹³⁰

The vampire's closeness, the closeness of the room, and the manner in which memories, multiple temporalities, or multiple personalities/beings could be tied to a shared placeness, all combine to create the horror of a too-close Other, threatening to break through the skin of separation between the self and the abjected. The finite, shared place acts as a portal, not only allowing the remembered past to become the present, but for good things to become evil, or dead things to come alive.

¹²⁷ Polidori, 9.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 13.

¹²⁹ This is a party without a meal but with a royal personage in attendance.

¹³⁰ Polidori, 14-15.

Polidori's foreword briefly describes the ghost story evening in the summer of 1816 at Lord Byron's villa on Lake Geneva. Byron's reading of Coleridge's "Christabel" had at some point caused Percy Shelley to flee the room.¹³¹ Though Polidori merely wrote that Shelley saw a vision of a female neighbor, the situating of the event within Coleridge's demonic bosom hints at Shelley's fear of being drawn erotically close to a woman he found abhorrent.¹³² Shelley, the poetic Christabel, Emmy, Aubrey: they are all drawn to the vile yet irresistible other. Sarrasine, when in ignorance of La Zambinella's true nature, seeks nearness to her/him with the unquenchable ardor of the young lover.

Sarassine devoured with his eyes the statue of Pygmalion that had come down from its pedestal for him. When Zambinella sang, there was a furore ... He did not applaud, he said nothing, but experienced a mad impulse, a kind of frenzy, which only disturbs us at that age when desire has something terrible and diabolical about it. Sarassine wanted to dash onto the stage and take hold of this woman.¹³³

As long as Zambinella is not only young and beautiful, but also (apparently) female, Sarrasine seeks closeness with violent vigor. Much later in Zambinella's life the tiny, mysterious old man the castrato has become repels and chills party guests with his nearness. "'Since a moment ago, I feel cold,' a lady seated near the door said to another next to her. The unknown man [Zambinella] who was

¹³¹ Polidori, 4. Polidori does not say at what point in the reading Shelley left, merely that he gave as his excuse the sudden, horrible vision of a woman who lived nearby. My inference is that it came during one of the parts of "Christabel" that feature the nearness described in the next footnote.

¹³² Corinna Wagner, ed., *Gothic Evolutions: Poetry, Tales, Context, Theory* (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2014): 34. "Beneath the lamp the lady bow'd/And slowly rolled her eyes around;/Then drawing in her breath aloud,/Like on that shudder'd, she unbound/The cincture from beneath her breast:/Her silken robe, and inner vest,/Dropped to her feet, and full in view,/Behold! her bosom and half her side—/A sight to dream of, not to tell!/And she is to sleep by Christabel."

¹³³ Balzac, *Sarrasine*, 24.

standing near this woman, moved away. 'How strange! Now I'm warm,' said this woman after the stranger's departure."¹³⁴ A physical beauty that made nearness a thing desired above all else causes chilled horror when what was beautiful, its true nature revealed, draws close.

Victor Frankenstein, Mary Shelley's anti-hero, works tirelessly in his charnel-house/laboratory to construct his new man, whom he designs to be beautiful. In his frenzied disappointment when his creation, a monster, comes to life, he flees his laboratory, collapsing into a deep sleep on his bed. Dreaming of his beloved Elizabeth he is horrified as, while he kisses her, she becomes his dead mother, her shroud crawling with "grave-worms." He starts awake and "by the dim and yellow light of the moon, as it forced its way through the window shutters, I beheld the wretch—the miserable monster whom I had created. He held up the curtain of the bed; and his eyes, if eyes they may be called, were fixed upon me."¹³⁵ His beloved becomes the corpse of his mother, then becomes his horrible, living-dead progeny; all are held within the lover's close embrace.

The bed, a place of repose, is also, as the place of ultimate vulnerability, the seat of horror. It is for Aubrey as it is for Frankenstein; both are helpless in the presence of their foe. This is, when viewed as a near corollary to De Quincey's supine enjoyment of music, his supine enjoyment and, at times, horrific suffering in his opium dreams, a literary framework for understanding the horror that could be felt through music delivered by, or containing elements of abjection.

¹³⁴ Polidori, 7-8.

¹³⁵ M. Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 55-56.

Here can be read a despicable otherness that, taking advantage of a defenseless *déshabillé* of the mind and body, looms over it.

Illustration 2.1. 1827 Copy of Fuseli's "The Nightmare"¹³⁶



Henry Fuseli's 1782 painting *The Nightmare* seized the imagination of the then-incipient Romanticism. It held the public imagination well into the 1820s and was copied, satirized and adapted many times. The brooding demon, the pun-ish Night-Mare, the helpless sleeper, ravished and exploited: Fuseli painted the Romantic fear and love of abandoned, vulnerable sensuality (and a dark sense of humor concerning it).

Near the end of the novel, Victor Frankenstein has married Elizabeth. He leaves her alone on their bridal bed. Having gone outside the inn to watch, again, for the monster, he hears two screams. Rushing back to their room he finds her, murdered by his creation. "She was there, lifeless and inanimate, thrown across

¹³⁶ William Raddon (after Henry Fuseli), Engraving: "The Nightmare" (London: Raddon, 1827). Victoria and Albert Museum, Prints & Drawings Study Room, level C, case TECHS, Museum number: E. 1194-1886. This image used with permission of the V&A, © Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

the bed, her head hanging down, and her pale and distorted features half covered by her hair. Everywhere I turn I see the same figure—her bloodless arms and relaxed form flung by the murderer on its bridal bier."¹³⁷ The sexual intimacy of the hunted and the hunter—in *Frankenstein* and the monster these roles are constantly exchanged—is contained in the lifeless body of Elizabeth, ravished by them both.

In November 1826 in the *Dublin and London Magazine* an anonymous writer, after disclaiming all knowledge of music and revealing a "great contempt for fiddlers," admits that his greatest hatred is reserved for singers, that "whole race of *warblers*." "I have always preferred Astley's to the Opera House, and would go five miles round sooner than encounter Velluti, even in the street." He barely tolerates the Jewish John Braham because he once sang "Scots wha hae."¹³⁸ The aversion to proximity with singers extends to only two named examples: a castrated Italian and a Jew. The Jew is only spared because he sang a Scottish nationalist song. An almost perfect obverse to Mary Shelley's Anglo-Italianism, the xenophobe abhors closeness with what/whom the oikophobe finds delightful. A crush of bodies at the opera, an overheated Anglo-Italy already adverted to by De Quincey, was the norm when Velluti sang.¹³⁹

¹³⁷ M. Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 193.

¹³⁸ *The Dublin and London Magazine* (London: James Robbins and Co., 1826): 481-482. Astley's Amphitheater was a venue for popular entertainment. I suspect that the author of this is William Maginn.

¹³⁹ *Times*, May 3, 1826. The *Times* reported that a pickpocket had been caught at the King's Theater. He is quoted as having chosen that night because "The house was very crowded, as Velluti was singing." The press of bodies constantly bumping into one another made the violation of the pickpocket harder to notice, though not impossible, of course, as he got caught.

Bodies pressed together, uncomfortable nearness, the voice of the castrato recalling a criminal violation, the undesirable, dangerous elements of the other, threatening to become the self, to become real, are indelibly intermingled.

Felix Mendelssohn despised not only being close to the castrato ("Just now that damn fellow Velluti is passing by my window") but also was supposedly made physically ill by the sound of Velluti's singing.¹⁴⁰ James Fennimore Cooper likened the imperious knock of a nobleman at his door—sweeping sonically, uninvited and unwanted into his private space—to "the touch of Velluti."¹⁴¹ Cooper likely means by this the manner in which Velluti sang—the insistent puissance of his voice. Velluti's voice had, by most accounts, a physical presence that, though his voice was probably not very large (or at least, he rarely sang in full voice), was not only heard, but felt by his audience. The *NMM&LJ*, reviewing the London premier of *Crociato*, compared the sweet, soft texture of Maria Caradori's voice with that of the castrato. "Her clear tones most successfully stood the contest with Velluti's penetrating soprano."¹⁴² Velluti's voice, when tired or forced, cracked and squawked; the consequences of this heard and felt nearness were dramatic. In some cases the audience reaction (like that of the young Felix Mendelssohn) exceeded mere distaste, entering the realm of pain and revulsion. This reaction is for this work the final nearness and one that, while it suffuses the body of English Velluti criticism, is a primary focus

¹⁴⁰ See Franz Grillparzer and Eduard Devrient, ch. 1.

¹⁴¹ James Fennimore Cooper, *Gleanings in Europe: England* (Albany: State University of Albany Press, 1982): 46-47.

¹⁴² *NMM&LJ* 1825 Vol. 3 (London: Henry Colburn, 1825): 345.

of chapter 4.

Kristeva sees the horror of the corpse as residing within the similitude that it has to humanity, but with the awful absence of a soul. "A body without a soul, a non-body, disquieting matter, it is to be excluded from God's *territory* as it is from his *speech*. Without always being impure, the corpse is 'accursed of God' (*Deuteronomy* 21:23)."¹⁴³ This modern stance differs little from the Romantic. In Dickens's *Barnaby Rudge*, the mentally weak Barnaby is handsome, but of disturbing mien. "The absence of a soul is far more terrible in a living man than in a dead one; and in this unfortunate being its noblest powers were wanting."¹⁴⁴ Beauty without a soul, without an intelligence—for Dickens there seems to have been a close connection between the two—was horrible, if not in Barnaby's case actually threatening.

Polidori's vampire is handsome, but something is missing. His "dead grey eye" is unable to communicate warmth or humanity. "In spite of the deadly hue of his face, which never gained a warmer tint, either from the blush of modesty, or from the strong emotion of passion, though its form and outline were beautiful, many of the female hunters after notoriety" sought his attention.¹⁴⁵ Emmy in *Der Vampyr* falls for the operatic Ruthven despite his "soulless gaze," and the prosodic Ruthven is equally successful.

Frankenstein's monster upon first awakening horrifies his creator with his

¹⁴³ Kristeva, *Horror*, 109.

¹⁴⁴ Charles Dickens, *Barnaby Rudge*, ed. John Bowen (London: Penguin Books, 2003): 35.

¹⁴⁵ Polidori, 7.

failure. Though disgusted by his work, constructing his creature from stolen body parts, Frankenstein has persevered in the expectation of a final beauty.¹⁴⁶ But the immorality, inhumanity and soullessness, the sheer filthiness of the endeavor dooms the result.

I saw the dull yellow eye of the creature open; it breathed hard and a convulsive motion agitated its limbs.

How can I describe my emotions at this catastrophe, or how delineate the wretch whom with such infinite pains and care I had endeavoured to form? His limbs were in proportion, and I had selected his features as beautiful. Beautiful!—Great God! His yellow skin scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath; his hair was of a lustrous black, and flowing; his teeth of a pearly whiteness; but these luxuriances only formed a more horrid contrast with his watery eyes, that seemed almost of the same colour as the dun white sockets in which they were set, his shrivelled complexion and straight black lips.¹⁴⁷

Castration was, like the work in Frankenstein's laboratory, a dirty, despicable act that for many devalued the hard-won beauty of the castrato's song. This beauty mirrored and was mirrored by the physical beauty of the singer himself. In the climactic final confrontation between Sarrasine and the unveiled Zambinella, the incensed sculptor dehumanizes the castrato.

"I ought to have you killed!" shouted Sarrasine, drawing his sword with a violent movement. "But," he continued with cold contempt, "by delving into your being with a dagger would I find a feeling there to extinguish, any revenge to satisfy? You are nothing. If you were a man or a woman I would kill you. ... I shall constantly think of that imaginary woman, when I see a real woman. ... You monster, who can give life to nothing, you have emptied the world of all its women."¹⁴⁸

All of Zambinella's beauty, vocal and physical, is imaginary, feigned and, as it

¹⁴⁶ M. Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 52-53.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 55.

¹⁴⁸ Balzac, *Sarrasine*, 42-43.

has supplanted natural feminine beauty, damnable and damned.

Beautiful singing coming from a beautiful woman was made thereby more beautiful, as John Keats writes about hearing a singer before seeing her. "Do you not remember forming to yourself the singer's face more beautiful [than] it was possible and yet with the elevation of the Moment you did not think so."¹⁴⁹ An ugly woman, singing beautifully, could transform herself, taking aural beauty and making it corporeal. Mary Shelley hoped that a plain woman with an artist's soul, a beautiful voice and the love of a fervent admirer could indeed be transformed, however momentarily, into a beauty.¹⁵⁰ Velluti was famously handsome, praised for his comely, expressive face by Mt. Edgcumbe and John Ebers.¹⁵¹ Ebers writes that "from what has been said, it may be concluded that Velluti's countenance is an interesting one; it is, indeed, so much so, that a late artist [Thomas Lane] said, 'that, without a single feature which one should select as beautiful, Velluti had the finest face he had ever seen.'"¹⁵²

The *Parthenon* calls Velluti's features "rather finely formed, particularly his eyes and mouth, and his skin, which is of the most delicate texture, is perfectly free from the slightest indication of a beard of any sort." The enervated sadness

¹⁴⁹ John Keats, "Letter to Benjamin Bailey," *Romantic Era*, 940-941.

¹⁵⁰ M. Shelly, "Mary Shelley's Review," *The Journals of Claire Clairmont*, ed. Marion Stocking and David Stocking (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968): 456.

¹⁵¹ Richard Edgcumbe, Lord Mount Edgcumbe, *Musical Reminiscences, Chiefly Respecting the Italian Opera in England from the Year 1773 to the Present Time (1828)* (London: George Clark, 1828): 156. John Ebers, *Seven Years of the King's Theater*, (London: William Harrison Ainsworth, 1828): 269. Lane is identified in the (London) *Morning Chronicle*, July 15, 1828, in a review of Ebers's book.

¹⁵² The grammatical oddness in Ebers's sentence is original. In the middle of quoting Lane, he switches back to his narrator's voice.

the writer sees in Velluti, however, seems to impute the soulless emptiness of Zambinella, though it engenders pity rather than scorn. "A settled melancholy seems stamped upon his countenance—an expression of hopelessness—a dreary look of despair. He seems an outcast from his fellow beings—or rather, like one moving through the world without a fellow—joyless, solitary and forlorn."¹⁵³ Despite the seemingly hollow shell, devoid like Barnaby or Zambinella of that spark of humanity, the writer hears a human spirit that, Attis-like, finds its expression through music, "seeking relief from its anguish." "His soul seems to mingle in the sound he utters—his very existence to hang quivering upon the thread of his modulation."¹⁵⁴

It seems that perceptions of physical beauty, in Velluti's case, depended to no small degree upon perceptions of his singing. While his admirers thought him handsome, the *Times* was repulsed. Here his beauty, like Ruthven's, is empty and cold. "His eyes are good—his features feminine—but they have not, even in the most impassioned scenes, that lovely and glowing intelligence which we generally see beaming on the female countenance, although beauty be absent."¹⁵⁵ Ebers, on the other hand, thought him almost overly impassioned when the scene required it. "His countenance [is] pale and suffused with a melancholy expression, which gives way, when the singer is excited, to one of vivid animation. Fraught by nature with excessive sensibility, his features speak

¹⁵³ *The Parthenon*, 80.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 80.

¹⁵⁵ *Times*, July 1, 1825. *Evening Mail*, July 1, 1825.

every subtle shade of emotion by which the performer is supposed to be, and in Velluti's performances really is actuated."¹⁵⁶ The *London Magazine* concurred. "The moment he addresses himself to his task of delight, (for to him singing is obviously extacy [*sic*]), his countenance assumes the passion he is about to express; his face is Italian in its contour and in its features. His eyes are fine and dark, with an expression of passionate languor."¹⁵⁷ Hunt, perhaps recalling performances of Velluti's described to him, imagined the castrato on-stage, mid-*furore*.

How, when admir'd on the resounding stage,
My pulses high, my song in all its rage,
When the proud notes, demanding a rich death,
Ran down my voice, and lavished glorious breath,
How often when they thought, ears, arms and sight,
Drew to my heart one deluge of delight,
Was the most lofty triumph of the air
But its own mockery and a high despair!¹⁵⁸

Just as Velluti was a marvel to some, he was as emphatically a monster to others, depending largely it seems upon the aesthetic, political or possibly spiritual predisposition of his audience. Critic X of *The Examiner*, a tireless critic of Velluti's performances, grew more vituperative as the 1826 season wore on. For X it was impossible to find beauty in Velluti's aging voice—full of cracks, too-flat and "howling"—or in his aging face. The castrato was a creature, "an embroidered skeleton with a death's head, aping the hero and lover!"¹⁵⁹ Velluti,

¹⁵⁶ Ebers, *Seven Years*, 268.

¹⁵⁷ "The Music of the Month," *London Magazine*, 474.

¹⁵⁸ Hunt, "Velluti to his Revilers," II 237-244.

¹⁵⁹ Critic X, *The Examiner* 1826, 148.

thin, tall and narrow-shouldered like so many castrati before him, carried these bodily markers like guilty stigmata. If the writer disliked him on a visceral level, was disgusted with his mangled body, then Velluti's rounded shoulders bore an essential part in the description. In the same review, describing what Ebers and the *Parthenon's* critic saw as a soul caught up entirely in music and emotion, X saw a disgusting ghoul for whom sin has created an unbearably ugly body. His gestures summon up an ugly, meaningless, soulless art. "When he draws up his round shoulders, grins with his thin face, and stretches out his bony arms, we know precisely the division of notes he is going to execute."¹⁶⁰ Mrs. Arbuthnot's disgust the previous summer is almost identical; she dehumanizes the voice as she is revolted by the body. "He is the most disgusting creature I ever saw, high shouldered, sunk in the chest, immensely tall with long arms and legs and looking more gaunt & unnatural than one can conceive. Then his voice is like a bagpipe. ... It really makes one sick."¹⁶¹

Critic X's depiction of Velluti's slender, weak body overdressed in the splendid costume of a heroic knight mimics, as J.Q. Davies has noted, descriptions of the emaciated Frenchman Seurat. Seurat's exhibition as "The Living Skeleton" in 1825 and 1826 had caused many to make the connection between the two terribly thin, freakish foreigners.¹⁶² Seurat was, like a vampire, a spectacle of living death. The castrato was "cut off" from his humanity and

¹⁶⁰ Critic X, *The Examiner* 1826, 148.

¹⁶¹ Arbuthnot, *The Journal of Mrs. Arbuthnot*, Vol. 1, 408-409.

¹⁶² James Davies, *Romantic Anatomies of Performance* (London: University of California Press, 2014): 38-39.

embodied both a living death and a weird, perpetual and unnatural youth.¹⁶³

Balzac wrote *Zambinella* in a multiplicative manner—living, painted and sculpted, young, old and immortal. The castrato is present in *Sarrasine* as a beautiful girl, as a statue, the model for another beautiful girl, Pygmalion (the original Pygmalion is the creation of a sculptor who then falls in love with her), as a painting made from the statue (this time again in the guise of man, as Apollo), as a terrified young castrato and finally as an old man both "alive and dead" in the outer, framing story.¹⁶⁴ The old man carries traces of many of the former iterations of himself; dressed in a preposterous wig of yellowing curls he is a fop of the 1750's.¹⁶⁵ His voice, revealed in his dry cough, retains a childish resonance.¹⁶⁶ His odor, replacing his lost singing voice as the means by which he fills the room, when touching his near neighbors, evokes death. It has "the smell of the graveyard."¹⁶⁷

Velluti, in the interlocking texts concerning his debut, negotiates many of the same conflicting realities with a kind of serpentine indecision, a temporal, perceptual back-and-forth that makes searching for consensus on anything a near impossibility. In the *QMMR* he was at least eight years younger than his actual age of 45.¹⁶⁸ The *London Magazine* amazingly believed him to be twenty-

¹⁶³ Davies, *Romantic Anatomies*, 39.

¹⁶⁴ Balzac, *Sarrasine*, 11.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 14.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 15.

¹⁶⁸ *QMMR* 1825, 269.

four though it conceded he looked approximately three years older.¹⁶⁹ Roger Freitas has argued that the castrato of the late seventeenth century held the indeterminate position of the peri-adolescent boy, sexually and physically potent but not fully mature.¹⁷⁰ Velluti, after the June 30 Juvenal attack, seems never again to have been considered as having physical or, by extension, sexual force (though still portrayed as a louche, suspicious character) *in potentia* or otherwise.

Hunt's "Velluti" is locked in childhood, his persona stretching back to his Greek and Roman roots. Only his mind and heart ever grow old. Velluti may even, for Hunt, have represented a version of Anglo-Italy, not only musically but also physically, just as in his autobiography Hunt wrote of buildings in Italy that still seemed quite new though "they have been standing hundreds of years. This is owing to the dryness of the Italian atmosphere. Antiquity refuses to look ancient in Italy. It insists upon retaining its youthfulness of aspect. The consequence at first is a mixed feeling of admiration and disappointment."¹⁷¹ The arid, infertile castrato, like the obdurately un-weathered Italian houses of stone and mortar, retains his seeming youth, but somehow this cannot be entirely pleasing. Like Frankenstein's monster, the thing created cannot escape, cannot grow beyond the state fixed by the essentially depraved nature of his creation, and the inhuman intentions of those his creator(s).

But mostly, blighted in the stirring bud,

¹⁶⁹ *London Magazine* 1825, 269.

¹⁷⁰ Roger Freitas, *Portrait of a Castrato: Politics, Patronage, and Music in the Life of Atto Melani* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014): 108-110.

¹⁷¹ Hunt, *The Autobiography of Leigh Hunt* Vol. 3 (London: Smith, Elder & Co, 1850): 27.

The wheel undone that whirls the strenuous blood,
Shorn of his strength for sweetness or for strife,
The quavering eunuch is a child for life;
In all a child, as in his beardless chin;
In all but the warm heart, that grows within.¹⁷²

Hunt, like other Anglo-Italians, saw Velluti as an adult intellect and soul trapped inside the body of a perpetual child. Velluti's intellect *was* his missing gender. "My sex is human still, and of the mind."¹⁷³ But Velluti's body is too weak for sex and too weak to fight. He achieves adulthood in his mind and heart but is nevertheless fit only for "quavering": a twinned existence of shivering fear and running *fiorature*.

Others saw Velluti in a childlike light, or at least, saw the accession to manhood as being opposed to his state. Samuel Wesley wrote to Vincent Novello about his teenage son Samuel Sebastian Wesley, a major figure in mid-nineteenth-century Anglican music and, at the time of the letter, a much in-demand boy treble. "Sam will be with us on Sunday, but alas! His Voice betrays Symptoms of Anti-Vellutism, & moreover he begins to shew Signs that Razor must before very long form one Article of his Toilette."¹⁷⁴ Wesley's rue is comic. He is a proud father who, though clothing in wistful regret the loss of the ephemeral voice of childhood, nevertheless celebrates the boy's visible and increasingly audible accession to the badges of manhood, things to which Velluti, "Shorn of his strength for sweetness or for strife," never would. To retain the

¹⁷² Hunt, "Velluti to his Revilers," II 341-346.

¹⁷³ Ibid., I 108.

¹⁷⁴ Samuel Wesley, *The Letters of Samuel Wesley: Professional and Social Correspondence, 1797-1837*, ed. Philip Olleson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001): 387.

voice was cold comfort. Thomas Medwin in 1827 wrote to Mary Shelley of the castrato's amazingly youthful appearance. "Would you believe that Boy, as he lives, he is 54—I had this from good authority."¹⁷⁵ Medwin's "good authority" wasn't; Velluti was 47. Stendhal, though knowing the singer's age, still found in the early 1830s that he looked remarkably young. "He has the air of a man in his late thirties," albeit one "who has suffered."¹⁷⁶

Illustration 2.2. "Romantic" Portrait of Velluti¹⁷⁷



Highlighting the probable disconnect between Velluti's own sense of self, for which there is very little accessible primary evidence, and the literary portrait

¹⁷⁵ Ernest Lovell, *Captain Medwin: Friend of Byron and Shelley* (London: Macdonald, 1963): 215-216.

¹⁷⁶ Stendhal, *Le Livre du Divan Stendhal* (Paris: Le Divan, 1933). Letter 59. Venice, January 25, 1831.

¹⁷⁷ Lithograph (undated): "Giov. Batt. Velluti." Herzog August Bibliothek, Wolfenbüttel, Germany. Used with Permission of the HAB.

that is the focus of this work, it is possible that Velluti saw himself in a thoroughly Romantic, even heroic vein. The little-known, undated portrait of the singer shown above was likely taken during the London period, judging by his apparent age of middle 30s, and shows him striking a thoroughly Byronic, Romantic pose.

Critic X was among the comparatively few whose writing prefigured Balzac's death-in-life in the factual, as opposed to the fictional castrato. The elderly Zambinella is not so much a portrait of Velluti as he is a nightmarish projection—the ignoble twin of Hunt's noble, sorrowing Attis. The sense that Velluti was a kind of death-in-life is seldom found, though I have quoted examples of this. When discernible, it is accompanied by a probably closely related impression. The writer in the *Parthenon* saw his entrance as "preternatural" and the sound of his voice in the opening recitative as "preter-human." "He looked like a being of another world."¹⁷⁸ His first notes "fell upon the ear with a death-like peal," and his face had a "death-like hue."¹⁷⁹ He is not merely a half-dead old man, he is beyond the normal scope of human existence. Earlier in the same issue another writer for *The Parthenon* recommends that if Velluti is to be used at all, he should be cast in roles suited to his theatrical effect. It is further suggested he play a demon in Weber's *Der Freischütz*.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁸ *Parthenon*, 80.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 75.

Puns and Paired Realities: A Sympathy between Waking and Dreaming

John Keats distanced himself from Hunt after a few years of intense friendship. Part of this was owing to Hunt's overweening personality, but part seems to have been also due to his continual diversion from the serious to the silly. In the winter of 1818 Keats was disgusted with one of the Hunt-Novello musical evenings at which there was "a complete set-to of Mozart and punning—I was so completely tired of it." Rodney Edgecombe sees Keats's disgust stemming from the "sylleptic alignment of Mozart and punning [that] points to the disordered values of the circle that gives them parity."¹⁸¹ The pun is generally seen, in this case also by Edgecombe, as the virtuosic use of language or rhetoric for, essentially, its own humorous ends, making it perhaps inherently trivial or at least self-centered. In the case of Keats, this view sees an irreverence *for* Mozart merely by Hunt's placing his music in the company of shallow, intellectual tricks. Though this may, in this instance, be true, it seems probable that the pun, or more broadly paronomasia, is merely the outer, rhetorical symptom of twinned realities, truth and fiction, that held Hunt's creative attention as well as that of many of his contemporaries. This would indeed be infuriating, as the shallow puns (Keats does not record *what* Hunt said, exactly) would just not be an inappropriate juxtaposition *with* Mozart, but would be a direct assault

¹⁸¹ Rodney Edgecombe, *Leigh Hunt and Poetry of Fancy* (London: Associated University Presses, 1994): 198. Edgecombe (not to be confused with Mount Edgcumbe!) quotes Keats on this same page. I find his analysis problematic as to this precise point, however, as two individuals more qualified to understand the music of Mozart and appreciate it than Novello and Hunt would have been almost impossible to find in London. Certainly, their musical understanding was far in excess of anything Keats could have managed. This does not exclude the possibility that a young, terribly serious Keats would *think* himself far better qualified to appreciate Mozart.

upon the seriousness of Mozart.

In the 1820s, however, the pun was also a respectable device of wit and learning. In 1826 Charles Westmacott, under his pseudonym Bernard Blackmantle, wrote *The Punster's Pocketbook, or The Art of Punning Enlarged*.¹⁸² In the preface Westmacott asks "What are Puns, and Jests, and Quirks?/But Literary *Fireworks*."¹⁸³ Though largely devoted to giving examples of puns that from a distance of nearly two hundred years seem frivolous and often very feeble, the book does include rather serious defenses of the practice.¹⁸⁴ Refuting Joseph Addison (1672-1719) who had "erroneously defin[ed] a pun to be merely 'a conceit arising from the use of two words that agree in sound, but differ in the sense,'" Westmacott self-referentially demonstrated the intellectual skill required in making a pun that works in more than one language.¹⁸⁵ He termed this more elevated genre the "macaroni pun. It necessarily implies not only superior wit, but a considerable fund of learning."¹⁸⁶ Velluti's multifaceted personae, ancient and young, male and not-male, foreign and domestic, were all fertile fields in which many a macaroni pun was sown. The *Monthly Magazine and British Register* called him a "two-fold curiosity," "Signor *non signor*

¹⁸² Bernard Blackmantle (Charles Westmacott), *The Punster's Pocketbook, or The Art of Punning Enlarged* (London: Sherwood, Gilbert, and Piper, 1826).

¹⁸³ Westmacott, *Punster*, 1.

¹⁸⁴ It's entirely possible that these are far deeper and cleverer than they seem, and that my knowledge of the times about which they amuse themselves is simply too shallow and incomplete to understand them.

¹⁸⁵ Westmacott, *Punster*, 5-6.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 10.

Velluti."¹⁸⁷ Simultaneously a better, multifaceted, macaroni, Velluti-pun was crafted by Charles Lamb in a 3 July 1825 letter to Coleridge.

Have you heard *the Creature* at the Opera House—Signor Nonvir
sed veluti Vir?

Like Orpheus, he is said to draw storks &c. *after* him. A picked raisin for a
sweet banquet of sounds; but I affect not these exotics. Nos durum
genus, as mellifluous Ovid hath it.¹⁸⁸

The pun, playing on a misspelling of Velluti's name as a form of *velut*, "as" or
"just as," translates roughly to, "Have you heard *The Creature* at the Opera
House—Mr. Not-manly, yet [seen] as a sort-of man?"¹⁸⁹ Lamb, who does not at
this point seem to have heard the singer, places him within a comic, late
eighteenth-century framework. His ironic twist on the Orphic legend, "drawing
storks &c. *after* him" makes Velluti not only farcical, but mocks the mythic
fascination of nature for Orpheus's song with a traditional metaphor for fecundity,
the stork, as metonym for that natural world. The exotic, dried-up raisin, sweet
but desiccated, is rejected by the Englishman Lamb: hearty and hardy (*Nos
durum genus*—our hard race; "hard" is more of a double entendre and needs no
further explanation). Lamb, though he here has piled at least two additional plays
on words or concepts, condemned this practice in the same letter. "A Pun is a

¹⁸⁷ "Opera-House Exhibitions," *New Monthly Magazine* 1825, 40.

¹⁸⁸ Charles Lamb, "Letter 685: Charles Lamb to S. T. Coleridge 'The Theory of the Pun,'" *Works of Charles and Mary Lamb. VI-VII. Letters: 1825* Website: *LordByron.org*, Accessed February 2, 2016 @ <http://www.lordbyron.org/monograph.php?doc=ChLamb.1905&select=L1825>.

¹⁸⁹ I thank Jeremy Yudkin for his indispensable help in translating this pun. Intentional misspelling seems to have been a common method to facilitate the transfer between perceptual realities. In Harriet Arbuthnot's April 1826 journal entry, cited in chapter 1, where she reported the accusations about Lady Burghersh and Velluti, she spells his name *Viluti*. In earlier entries she spelled his name correctly. Considering her well-established distaste for the singer it seems quite possible that she has replaced "Vell" with "Vil" for "Vile."

sole object for reflection ... it is entire, it fills the mind: it is perfect as a Sonnet, better."¹⁹⁰ While these additional *bon mots* may not strictly be puns, but rather a collection of metaphors and double meanings, the broader class of paronomasia is discoverable in Lamb's writing. A related class of wit and the idea of two meanings, one often obscene, residing within one discrete entity is central to Velluti portraiture as has been seen in "Velluti and the Female Choristers" in chapter 1 and will be seen in two further caricatures in chapters 3 and 4.

The pun was seen as an artifact of serious thought by more than just Lamb and Westmacott. Ewan Jones, in *Coleridge and the Philosophy of Poetic Form*, details the essential seriousness of the pun for Coleridge, especially dwelling upon the Biblical origin of those that interested the poet.¹⁹¹ Jones, revealing what is apparently a general opinion in the serious, scholarly interest in the pun, sees it as a purely textual phenomenon.¹⁹² The concept of the pun, or rather an enlarged paronomasia extending out from the original word-play, seems to embrace a multitude of images, sounds, objects and persons whose momentary interchangeability both entranced and infuriated the Romantic mind. As Hunt writes, in mixing places with their historical or mythological simulacra, fact and fiction embrace and the mind can no longer tell the difference between them. De Quincey, admittedly with only a casual relationship with reality, noted

¹⁹⁰ Lamb, "The theory of the pun." Charles Lamb, "Popular Fallacies IX: That the Worst Puns Are the Best," *London Magazine* 1826, 29. Lamb condemns the double pun as a "superfoetation," a double pregnancy in two different phases of development. "When a man has said a good thing, it is seldom politic to follow it up."

¹⁹¹ Ewan Jones, *Coleridge and the Philosophy of Poetic Form* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014): 108.

¹⁹² Jones, *Coleridge*, 110.

"the increasing sympathy between waking and dreaming states."¹⁹³

The pun, or the as-yet unnamed, super-textual version of it, can be seen as the simultaneous juxtaposition, within one finite space, of two apparently mutually exclusive realities. Westmacott reprinted Thomas Sheridan's 1719 "The Original of Punning."

Once on a time in merry mood,
Jove made a pun of flesh and blood:
A double, two-faced, living creature,
Androgynos, of two-fold nature,
For back to back with single skin
He bound the male and female in;
So much alike, so near the same,
They stuck as closely as their name.¹⁹⁴

Here the pun extends beyond language itself. It incorporates a cognitive understanding of a coextensive simultaneity of dissimilar things where, though they are mutually opposed, neither one can erase the other. An aspect of this physical double existence that will be explored in the following two chapters resides within the voice itself. Remembering Paglia's recommendation of the assumption of, as much as possible, negative capability, here is another strophe of Gauthier's "Contralto." "How you delight me, O strange timbre!/Your double(ness), man and woman all at once,/Contralto, bizarre mixture,/Hermaphrodite of the voice!"¹⁹⁵ The double-sexed androgen as template is entirely applicable to both the person and the voice of Velluti, and completes

¹⁹³ De Quincey, 258.

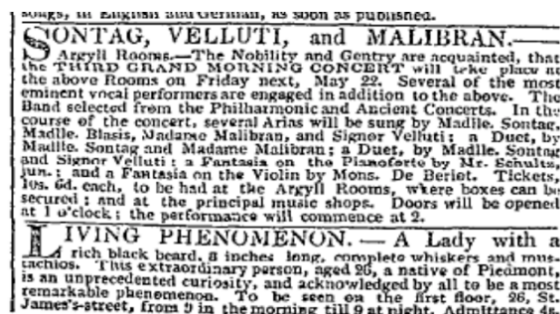
¹⁹⁴ Westmacott, *Punster*, 21

¹⁹⁵ Gauthier, "Contralto," II 57-60. "Que tu me plais, ô timbre étrange!/Son double, homme e femme à la fois,/Contralto, bizarre mélange,/Hermaphrodite de la voix!"

his bifurcated stance. Not only is he old and young, past and present, beautiful and hideous, alive and dead, he is male and female as well, both in body and sound. Though this may cause a kind of cognitive *agita* for the modern mind, his ambivalent existence seems to have been understood, if fought over vociferously, by the literary journalists attempting to make him comprehensible.

The more serious aspects of Velluti's multiple portraiture have already been shown: his similarity to the created monsters of Shelley and Polidori. He embodies both the classical past as an avatar of Juvenal's Eunuch or Ovid's Attis as well as in the Gothic present with his other, Zambinella-like attributes: youth, age, life and death. Some of the more humorous paronomasia made at his expense were as much locational juxtapositions of seemingly dissimilar things as they were plays on words. In 1829, Velluti's final series of London concerts were advertised in the *Times*, and a waggish editor on several of these occasions placed the advertisement for the current spectacle on display in London, a bearded lady, immediately above or below Velluti's.

Illustration 2.3. *The Times of London: Velluti and the Bearded Lady*¹⁹⁶



This kind of juxtapositional wit had already been used in 1825 with Seurat,

¹⁹⁶ *Times*, May 19, 1829.

"the Living Skeleton," stories about whom and advertisements for whom often were placed immediately after those concerning Velluti. The "Lady with a rich black beard" is advertised as being a foreigner, an Italian from the Piedmont. Whether she was or not is entirely a matter of conjecture. The so-called "Bohemian Brothers," detailed in the next chapter, were likely neither Bohemian nor brothers. During his time in London, a racehorse, a gelding, raced under the name of Velluti and the 8 August 1829 edition of the *Berkshire Chronicle* contained the humorous story of Velluti the Donkey. "A little dappled donkey ... christened Velluti after the celebrated singer." The author explained that the donkey is so named because a flirtatious mare he also owned "with all her frolics could never discompose the gravity of Velluti."¹⁹⁷ The donkey (possibly a neuter mule from the context), like Velluti, was "shorn of his strength for sweetness or for strife" and viewed the antics of the frolicsome mare with utter disinterest.

This juxtapositional commentary could be quite subtle. *The Examiner* printed a short excerpt of Johann Spurzheim's theories on the *pathognomy* of the voice on the page following Hunt's "Velluti." This theory held that the voice was a gesture of the body, revelatory of both the body and the mind."¹⁹⁸ Entitled "THE VOICE," the excerpt explains that "the voice also bears a relation to the prevailing powers, if a man be very secretive and sly, his voice will be soft and sweet; but if very combative, firm or courageous, his voice will be of a stronger

¹⁹⁷ Charles MacFarlane, *Reminiscences of a Literary Life* (London: John Murray, 1917): 261-262.

¹⁹⁸ Johann Gaspar Spurzheim, *The Physiognomical System of Drs. Gall and Spurzheim: Founded on an Anatomical and Physiological Examination of the Nervous System in General and of the Brain in Particular* (London: Cradock and Joy, 1815): 400-409

tone."¹⁹⁹ The beauty in Velluti's voice when it was soft, as opposed to the difficulties he had controlling it when he attempted to sing loudly or forcefully, was an almost universal observation in the summer of 1825, and this seemingly innocuous snippet is anything but. At the risk of overstatement, I would assert that for the London, literary journalist of the 1820s, placement, juxtaposition, misspellings or any syllepsis of ostensibly different or incongruous qualities, people, places or concepts was almost *never* innocuous. Rather, their visual, spatial proximity to their real target was intentional and the leap the mind makes was precisely that desired. Fiction embraces Truth to create an additional truth.

David Gamut and Velluti: A Psalm-Singing, American Castrato?

James Fennimore Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans* was published almost simultaneously in London and New York in early 1826. The novel was greeted harshly by much of the London press, *The London Magazine* calling it "clearly the worst of Mr. Cooper's performances" and mocking the "[i]mprobabilities of its action and characterizations."²⁰⁰ It was conceived in 1824 during a sight-seeing tour of the Hudson River Valley that Cooper made in the company of several young English noblemen. Presumably its birth came about during and possibly informed by conversations largely concerning the lives and

¹⁹⁹ *The Examiner* 1825, 498.

²⁰⁰ Daniel Peck, *New Essays on the Last of the Mohicans* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992): 6.

experiences of the young, wealthy, privileged men accompanying him.²⁰¹ One character in *Mohicans* stands out and begs further analysis. David Gamut, both of whose names mark him as living for and through music, is a psalmodist, a caricature of the peripatetic singing masters of the American colonies: Ichabod Crane meets William Billings. He is tall, thin, weak, effeminate and always somewhat ridiculous. Cooper describes his "ungainly limbs, offensive to the eye," and mounts him, not on a stallion but, underscoring the singer's effeminacy, on a mare.²⁰²

At a moment of desperation during a pitched battle with Native American warriors his small group of non-combatants, except for himself all women, is surrounded by superior forces. The physically weak but asymmetrically brave Gamut draws upon the power of music. Steeling himself to the task, his

chest heaved, and every feature swelled, and seemed to speak with the power of the feelings by which he was governed. ... Then raising his voice to its highest tones, he poured out a strain so powerful as to be heard, even amid the din of that bloody field. More than one savage rushed towards them...but when they found this strange and unmoved figure, riveted to his post, they paused to listen. Astonishment soon changed to admiration, and they passed on to other, and less courageous victims, openly expressing their satisfaction at the firmness with which the white warrior sung his death song. Encouraged and deluded by his success,

²⁰¹ Peck, 5. Nick Loras, *James Fennimore Cooper: A Life* (Alesford, Hants, Chronos Books, 2016): 92-120. I see the genesis of *Mohican* as coming about in a conversational, peripatetic, rough-and-ready salon very similar to the one Thomas Medwin creates in *The Angler in Wales* (London: Richard Bentley, 1834) about which more in chapter 4.

²⁰² James Fennimore Cooper, *The Last of the Mohicans: A Narrative of 1757* (London: Henry Colburn and Richard Bentley, 1831): 65. I use this revised edition because by that point Cooper must have seen and heard Velluti, probably in Florence. Comparison to the (London: John Miller, 1826) British first edition shows no alteration from the original text in the passages I have chosen. Cooper, doubtless aware of Maginn's (see footnote 210) persiflage, did not weaken the intertextual associations between David Gamut and the castrato. The "New Introduction" is only concerned with more background information on the Native American tribes of the upstate New York region traversed in the novel.

David exerted all his powers to extend what he believed so holy an influence.²⁰³

Gamut exhibits a kind of divine madness, adjunct to divinity itself, that Piotr Scholz describes in the eunuchs of antiquity.²⁰⁴ The high voice, castrato-like body, his silliness, his preternatural calm and self-possessed belief that the power of his own voice could, alone, rescue him, suggests that Cooper had at least read about the singing castrati in Europe, in Smollett or, more likely, in one of the Burneys. Though his life, including a stint in the U.S. Navy, had not been in any sense provincial, his path would not cross Velluti's until after *Mohicans* was published. He therefore could neither have seen or heard him, but there is no reason to believe that he could not have read or heard of him. This becomes less tenuous when coupled with the fact that he was in the company of a group of young English noblemen during the book's conception.²⁰⁵ Many of these aristocrats had probably spent some time abroad in countries other than the young United States, namely, the Duchy of Florence with its large, generally aristocratic English expatriate community that since 1822 had had Velluti in its midst.²⁰⁶ Additionally, while Velluti was not well-known in the English-speaking world in 1824 outside of Florence, neither was he, thanks to Stendhal and continental journals and newspapers, in any way unknown.

David Gamut *seems* very much like a castrato. He bears not only a strong

²⁰³ Cooper, *Last of the Mohicans*, 197.

²⁰⁴ Scholz, Piotr, *Eunuchs and Castrati: A Cultural History*, trans. John Broadwin and Shelley Frisch (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2001).

²⁰⁵ Nick Loras, *James Fennimore Cooper: A Life* (Alesford, Hants, Chronos Books, 2016) 92-120.

²⁰⁶ See chapter 1. See also Aubrey Garlington, *Society, Culture and Opera in Florence, 1814-1830: Dilettantes in an 'Earthly Paradise'* (Aldershot, Ashgate, 2005).

physical resemblance to Velluti but also to the literary portrayal of the silly, awkward and foppish castrato of the late eighteenth century.

The person of this individual [Gamut] was to the last degree ungainly, without being in any particular manner deformed. He had all the bones and joints of other men, without any of their proportions. ... The same contrariety in his members, seemed to exist throughout the whole man. His head was large; his shoulders narrow; his arms long and dangling; while his hands were small, if not delicate: his legs and thighs were thin, nearly to emaciation, but of extraordinary length; and his knees would have been considered tremendous, had they not been outdone by the broader foundations on which this false superstructure of blended human orders was so profanely reared.²⁰⁷

In later editions of *Mohicans*, after Cooper had seen and heard Velluti (probably in Florence or Venice between 1829 and 1830), he did not alter the Gamut portrait.²⁰⁸ Gamut appears to be, like the positional, pairing paronomasia of much of the indirect Velluti portraiture, a pun intentionally made, but with plausible deniability. What is almost certain is that when *Mohicans* appeared in England in 1826, Gamut was *read* as a pompous, rather ridiculous, American Velluti.

William Maginn's *Whitehall: Or the Reign of George IV*, published a year after *Mohicans*, mocks the entire historical romance genre, most prominently represented by Sir Walter Scott's *Waverly* romances, purporting to portray

²⁰⁷ Cooper, *Last of the Mohicans*, 7-8. This description, introducing the reader to Gamut, continues "the ill-assorted and injudicious attire of the individual only served to render his awkwardness more conspicuous. A sky-blue coat, with short and broad skirts and low cape, exposed a long thin neck, and longer and thinner legs, to the worst animadversions of the evil disposed. His nether garment was of yellow nankeen, closely fitted to the shape, and tied at his bunches of knees by large knots of white riband, a good deal sullied by use."

²⁰⁸ See James Fennimore Cooper, *Gleanings in Europe: England* (Albany: State University of Albany Press, 1982): 46-47, likening a nobleman's knock on his door to the "touch of Velluti." This work was originally published in 1838.

accurately events that happened in the distant past.²⁰⁹ Maginn poses as the editor of a newly discovered document "printed" in "Teyoninhakawarenopolis, capital of the great empire of Yankeedoodoolia, in the year 2227, exactly four hundred years from the present date."²¹⁰

The loosely constructed *Whitehall* lampoons by name most of the prominent figures of the day, up to and including the King himself. Maginn elaborates his scorn for the historical inaccuracies of the historical romance by ridiculously mangling the real persons and places in his book, creating a strange world where the names are correct but bear little or no resemblance to reality. In a scene before a great battle between the "warlike Ravagees" and the tomahawk-bearing Americans, the "minstrel Veluti" exhorts the Ravagees "with manly voice."²¹¹

Beggi, beggi, bettra trade is
Ti, ti, ti, ti, tal, la! la
Thana fighti Frenchy Cadiz,
High go, scampery, sneaky ba!
Napoli, Espana, runi, runi
Raci, chaci, tal, tal, la!
In Britani beggi money,
Gulli, goosy, ha! ha! ha!

Brave Heroes! moved by these strains, you moved gallantly to the combat,

²⁰⁹ David Latané, *William Maginn and the British Press: A Critical Biography* (London: Routledge, 2013): 109.

²¹⁰ William Maginn, *Whitehall: or the Reign of George IV* (London: W. Marsh, 1827): preface. Maginn despised Cooper, calling him the preposterously "American" name Epaminondas Grubb in his 1838 "Epaminondas Grubb, or Fe(n)nimore Cooper, versus The Memory of Sir Walter Scott," *The Miscellaneous Writings of the Late Dr. Maginn*, Vol. 5, 294-307. Additionally, Maginn might well be mocking Mary Shelley's *The Last Man* (London: Henry Colburn, 1826). This is a post-apocalyptic novel set at the end of the twenty-first century. Shelley also claimed, in the narrator's guise, to have found a mysterious manuscript that she then incorporated into her novel.

²¹¹ "Ravagee" could be a pun on refugee and ravish, ravage. It implies violence, music, foreignness and a rapine, predatory nature.

the beams of the moon, brilliantly illuminating the naked beauties of your uncovered limbs.²¹²

It seems unnecessary to unpack completely the xenophobia of "Veluti's" song, his "Ravagees" or the "savage" Americans: a commonality in that faction in English critical writing at all times vehemently opposed to foreigners and foreign things. The book rises to a overwrought climax in which the Americans unloose first a hail of tomahawks then a fusillade from a "thousand muskets" upon "Veluti's" men, the Ravagees. "A bullet passed through the body of Veluti; he died, exclaiming with his stentorian voice, '*Popolo d'Egitto*, I die like a man,' yielded [*sic*] up his soul."²¹³ The scenes in which the satirical Velluti appears seem to be an unmistakable persiflage of David Gamut and his strutting, mad singing. This, I believe, places the fictional/factual Gamut/Velluti, relative to the history of Cooper's novel's *reception* if not definitively to the history of its *conception*, in the odd position of being the first American castrato.²¹⁴

Conclusion

This chapter, disparate in that it seeks to quantify the many different manners with which literary commentators both in published accounts and in

²¹² Maginn, *Whitehall*, 192-193.

²¹³ Ibid., 209. Maginn is quoting Velluti in Armando's opening recitativo from *Il Crociato in Egitto*. This opening line, as the crusader returns after a long absence, is an ironic, self-referential prologue: the castrato commenting his brief return and on the history of the castrato on the London stage.

²¹⁴ Mathew Knip, "Cooper's Heroic David Gamut," Festschrift: *James Fennimore Cooper: His Country and His Art*, ed. Hugh MacDougall and Steven Harthorn (Oneonta, Papers from the 2007 Cooper Seminar no. 16, 2007): 44-47. Knip situates Gamut not as a castrato, but rather as a queer, Davidic presence in *Mohicans*. Consistent with the way I see Gamut, Knip defends his heroism, but does not seem to have made any kind of connection to Velluti or the castrati.

private letters and journals, aimed to elucidate the phenomenon of the construction, if not necessarily the actual person, of Velluti. This effort, though seen in individual, seemingly independent sources, I see as a largely communal process proceeding in no small degree from the private salons of the literary classes. The salon itself crossed class and political boundaries, and some, like Bacon and Moore, were able to cross those boundaries as well. The home was a concept that could be extended from the smallest, most intimate familial circle to grand parties with hundreds of guests, and was even transportable into otherwise public arenas like the theater. The ideas of one salon, especially those self-publicizing ones like the Hunt-Novello musical circle, could then either through print or word-of-mouth permeate salons of utterly different social and political makeups. The idea, far more so than the person espousing it, enjoyed (and probably still enjoys) an essential fungibility that allowed its promulgation over otherwise significant social and economic boundaries.

Among the fund of ideas shared across political and class boundaries were, at least among the men and (few) of the women, the classical and eighteenth-century source material about the eunuch, or castrato. The concept of a readerly text, as explicated by Barthes and others in the late twentieth century, is not so much a description of text as it is a description of cognition for the well-educated English Romantic. As such, moments, specific contractions of meaning, functioned as allusions to funds of knowledge, classical, more recent or current, that were generally if not universally understood. Velluti's overarching

literary portrait is the product of many writers from several different political, social and aesthetic viewpoints. It has, despite its internal contradictions, a source-based cohesion that rests upon several identifiable authors and/or books: Ovid, Juvenal, Tobias Smollett, Charles and Frances Burney, Mary Shelley, John Polidori and many others.

Just as Velluti occupied, like his fictional double La Zambinella, both the past and the present, he was able also to occupy both flesh and stone. Keats's ekphrastic portrayals of statues and urns are not terribly different from descriptions of singers, especially aging ones, who become paintings or sculptures in which former glories contend with present decay. The literary portrait of Velluti takes on, as it tends often to traverse the border between the factual and the fantastical, Gothic literary traits current in writing of the 1810s and 1820s. These traits included several aspects, "abjections" in the terminology of Julie Kristeva, that are consistently present in descriptions of the singer. Nearness, death-in-life, the appearance of horrible, eternal youth: the real threatens to break the barriers between the self and the other. When the other is an aging, castrated man singing a cracked yet penetrating soprano, that reality, when it breaks through, visits horrors upon the listening body.

Finally, criticism is neither always horrified nor is it always defined by seriousness. The pun, non-sylleptical juxtapositions and the double meaning are used: hermaphroditic fillips of the mind that depend upon a seeming similitude, a shared point or concentration, to drastically subvert meaning. Expanded into a

broader paronomasia , this shared point, a poetic contraction, can be achieved simply by juxtaposing the two elements whose meanings should be intermingled, or with the intellectual complexity of the macaroni pun, functioning in different languages to achieve multivalent meaning.

The presence of a ridiculous figure whose description bears a strong resemblance to eighteenth-century descriptions of the castrato gives birth to a fictional character who is explicitly an admixture of both that ridiculous, fictional character and of a factual person made fictional. David Gamut *is* Velluti, if not in Cooper's original, then certainly in Maginn's persiflage. The juncture, the contraction of meaning is an allusion to a new topos of meaning without destroying the old. It attains far more specific import in the following chapter concerning vocal technique, vocal registers and the meanings these held for the late, literary Romantic listener.

Chapter Three: The Multi-Registered Voice

The following chapter forms the middle of the central arc of this dissertation. It describes the singing voices of women and of the last few castrati singing in the 1810s and 1820s, as well as those of tenors, countertenors and falsettists (the last two terms are not synonymous) using primary sources from music criticism, pedagogical treatises and a few private letters and journals. As much of the discussion goes deep into a singerly concept of the voice, a few explanatory remarks here will hopefully aid understanding for non-singers throughout this chapter and the next and prevent some misperceptions.

Modern vocal pedagogy and modern popular as well as non-singing musicological understanding has given many names to many divisions within the singing voice as it is understood in western "classical" music. However, the critical and pedagogical understanding of the voice in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was comparatively simple. With very few exceptions, it was of a two-register voice for *all* voice types, female, male and eunuchoid—adult, child and adolescent. These two divisions were most often demoninated "chest (voice)" and "falsetto" in English writing of the period—again, for *all* voices. The chest voice is also variously known as *voce di petto*, *voce naturale*, natural voice, *Bruststimme* and *voix du poitrine*, with modern pedagogy adding modal register, strong register, speaking register and many more. The falsetto is (as this becomes highly controversial among vocal pedgagogues, something I wish to

avoid here, these terms are merely broadly synonymous) also known as *voce finta*, *voce bianca*, *voce di testa*, *voix de la tête*, *falsette*, *Kopfstimme*, *Fistelstimme*, head voice and feigned voice, with modern additions of M2, weak register, light register, isolated head voice and others.

I wish to emphasize that though some of the primary sources I will cite tend to speak of the registers in a more euphemistic manner, the two primary registers used in western "classical" singing are in fact physiological phenomena, well-established in vocological studies. Particularly Ingo Titze, working in the Voice Acoustics and Biomechanics Laboratory at the University of Iowa, has laid out a long, scientific and methodologically consistent case for the existence of these two primary registers (in addition to acknowledging many sub-registers within them) in both male and female singers. He has not, of course, investigated the castrato voice in a laboratory setting.¹ Titze's work proceeds from the establishment by Anat Keidar et al of the ability of listeners to hear and correctly identify the physiological registrational changes in heard singing.² For the purposes of this dissertation I will use the two terms, chest and falsetto, most in use in England in Velluti's time there, with the occasional addition of the mixed, or "mixt" voice, also a term current in the 1820s. It bears mentioning that unless the writer quoted is clearly speaking euphemistically or coloristically, I take these terms to be a description of the actual, physiological register of the voice.

¹ Ingo Titze, "A Framework for the Study of Vocal Registers," *Journal of Voice* 2 3 (1988): 183-194.

² Anat Keidar, Richard Hurtig and Ingo Titze, "The Perceptual Nature of Vocal Register Change," *Journal of Voice* 1 3 (1987): 223-233.

Though the voices of singers from different genres will be discussed and compared to one another, I view this as appropriate. Critical writing from this era never seems to differentiate, on a vocal-technical basis, between voices in different genres or styles of singing—be it the small ensemble or glee, oratorio, concert, Italian opera, comic opera, ballad opera or farce. The only technical (as opposed to stylistic) differentiation made among singers is that of private or public. The private singer was not necessarily amateur but the public singer was essentially always professional. As singers moved freely between the concert stage, public and private, and their accustomed genres, they often shared the stage with singers from vastly different ones. If in fact technical differences in addition to stylistic ones existed, one would expect to find some sort of vocal-technical distinction in the way the voices produced were then described and compared to each other. I have found none and must conclude that, unlike today, vocal technique (again, not style) was *more or less* consistent across genres, always with the exception of greater or lesser proficiency. Public and private singing *were* technically different, however, though the technical difference seems to be one primarily related to volume. The smaller the room, the more delicately all singers, regardless of genre, were expected to sing. The obverse was also true and many great private singers failed in public settings—too quiet for the space.

Introduction to the Registered Voice in the Eighteenth Century

The ghost of the castrato soprano Pier Francesco Tosi, author of 1723's *Opinioni de' cantori antichi e moderni*, hangs over both theoretical and pedagogical writing on singing far into the nineteenth century. Johann Ernst Galliard, a German composer and oboist who had been working in England since late in the reign of Queen Anne, produced a translation of Tosi in 1742/3. Galliard's footnotes are extremely valuable, if occasionally confusing. None is so much so as his translator's note preceding the preface stating that Tosi, when speaking of the ancients, was generally speaking of singers 30 to 40 years ago, and the moderns as the "late and present" singers.³ Though Galliard appears to indicate a period stretching from around 1700 to 1743, this may have been an attempt to keep his translation current for commercial reasons. Many (though not all) of the singers that Tosi names as paragons—Siface, Pistocchi and others—were at their peak 30 to 40 years before the *original*, and over a half-century before Galliard's translation. In other words, Tosi's seemingly modern prescriptions for good singing in 1743 were in fact those of his own youth (he was born in 1653) and heyday, in the 1670s and 1680s.

This always/already historicism in Tosi—his golden era of singing lying permanently in the past but upon whose ideals he uncompromisingly expounds—

³ Pier Francesco Tosi, *Observations on the Florid Song, or, Sentiments on the Ancient and Modern Singers*, trans. and ed. Johann Ernst Galliard (London: J. Wilcox, 1743). Joshua Rifkin, "Bach's Chorus: Some Red Herrings," *Journal of Musicological Research* 14 (1995): 223-34. Rifkin notes that "30-40 years ago" was a common metaphor, not to be taken too literally. In the case of Tosi, I believe the cited singers' dates point to at least some degree of literalism.

is important for the purposes of this chapter and the following one primarily (for my purposes) because of the following four principles.

§ 18. Let the Master attend with great Care to the Voice of the Scholar, which, whether it be *di Petto*, or *di Testa*, should always come forth neat and clear, without passing thro' the Nose, or being choaked in the Throat; which are two the most horrible Defects in a Singer, and past all Remedy if once grown into a Habit.⁴

§19. The Little Experience of some that teach to *Sol-fa*, obliges the Scholar to hold out the *Semibreves* with Force on the highest Notes; the Consequence of which is, that the Glands of Throat become daily more and more inflamed, and if the Scholar loses not his Health, he loses the treble Voice.

§ 20. Many Masters put their Scholars to sing the *Contr'Alto*, not knowing how to help them to the *Falsetto*, or to avoid the Trouble of finding it.

§ 21. A diligent Master, knowing that a *Soprano*, without the *Falsetto*, is constrained to sing within the narrow Compass of a few Notes ought not only to endeavour to help him to it, but also to leave no means untried, so to unite the feigned and the natural Voice, that they may not be distinguished; for if they do not perfectly unite, the Voice will be of diverse* Registers, and must consequently lose its Beauty. The Extent of the full natural Voice terminates generally upon the fourth Space, which is C; or on the fifth Line, which is D: [c" or d"] and there the feigned Voice becomes of Use, as well in going to the high Notes, as returning to the natural Voice; the Difficulty consists in uniting them. ... Among the Women, one hears sometimes a *Soprano* entirely *di Petto*, but among the Male Sex it would be a great Rarity, should they preserve it after having past the age of Puberty.⁵

⁴ Though Tosi never actually wrote "castrato," it is fairly clear from the beginning that he writes for the young male soprano, though he says it is for the boy. This may have merely been an attempt to broaden his book's appeal, however, as he intends for his singers to have a future. A young castrato, rather than a boy soprano, must have, of necessity, been whom he primarily meant. Almost all instructions are for "sopranos," a common euphemism for castrato, and he occasionally explicitly adjusts his advice for the benefit of female singers.

⁵ In this paragraph it is clear by context that with the first instance of "Soprano" Tosi is speaking of the student. Though almost certainly a castrato, the fact that Tosi calls the scholar a "him" is not, in and of itself, dispositive. The male third person singular was used as a default in writings of this period in both English and Italian. However, the second instance of "Soprano" is defined within a gendered context. In this case, it is the voice range itself and the various permutations experienced by both female and male possessors of it. By the end of the paragraph he has included both adult male (almost surely castrated) sopranos as well as female sopranos as possessors of that vocal range. Johann Frederick Agricola's translation of Tosi added that the castrated boy just as surely went through puberty as did his uncastrated peers. Johann Agricola,

[Galliard's footnotes]

§ 18. *Voce di Petto*, is a full Voice, which comes from the Breast by Strength, and is the most sonorous and expressive. *Voce di Testa* comes more from the Throat, than from the Breast, and is capable of more Volubility. *Falsetto* is a feigned Voice, which is entirely formed in the Throat, has more Volubility than any, but of no Substance.

§21. **Register*; a Term taken from the different Stops of an Organ.⁶

It is difficult to overemphasize the centrality of these four paragraphs and two footnotes, as well as, unfortunately, the confusion arising from Galliard's second footnote where he inexplicably divides the falsetto into two voices. Even after the goal of the *apparent* single register was abandoned at some point in the mid-eighteenth century, the single most important goal in vocal pedagogy was until the middle of the nineteenth century the union of the chest voice and the falsetto so that the exact point of their union was impossible to hear. Tosi's was a late seventeenth-century concept of the voice in an ideal form somewhat contrary to nature. It was *apparently* composed of a unified, single register that, while it retained the qualities of both chest and falsetto, betrayed neither's existence unambiguously. The idea of creating a single register appears to have been discarded in favor of cultivating two audible registers—and, increasingly in high voices, both female and castrate, three registers. The overriding pedagogical goal becomes more modest: simply disguising the point where the registers met.

Introduction to the Art of Singing ed. and trans., Julianne Baird (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

⁶ Tosi/Galliard, *Observations*, 22-24. It is important to note that for Tosi/Galliard, the ultimate goal is an *apparently* single-register voice, bottom to top. This would change in the following century to two (or three) clearly identifiable registers whose meeting points were as nearly perfectly disguised as possible.

Even Tosi, despite his uncompromising insistence upon the cultivation of a (seeming) single register, admits that this perfect union was extremely rare.⁷ Embedded within this admission is a discoverable reality of his singing world; many if not most singers in 1723 probably had audible registers and merely disguised, with varying degrees of success, their point of meeting. In 1777 Giovanni Battista Mancini, another castrato soprano, explicitly acknowledged the different sounds of the registers in first class singers at the time of Tosi's original publication, praising Francesca Cuzzoni (active circa 1715-1745) for "loose runs in a redoubled style, soaring with a portamento from a chest tone to a high head tone."⁸ The exact point of transition from one to the other may have been imperceptible, but the specific qualities of the two different registers were clearly heard beyond their artfully concealed meeting place.

Another important aspect of Tosi's depiction of the castrato voice in particular is that a castrato without falsetto, thus limited to his chest voice, was almost always confined to singing contralto.⁹ Tosi's definition, never to my knowledge contradicted by later writers, of a castrato chest-falsetto meeting point at c" or d" fits almost seamlessly with the upper limit of the composed ranges for contralto castrati from the first quarter of the eighteenth century. This implies that most avoided the falsetto register almost entirely.¹⁰

⁷ Agricola, 82-83.

⁸ Giovanni Battista Mancini, *Practical Reflections on the Art of Figurative Singing*, trans. Pietro Buzzi (Boston: The Gorham Press, 1912): 39.

⁹ Tosi/Galliard, 26. The context of this observation of Tosi's makes it clear that he means castrati.

¹⁰ Martha Feldman, *The Castrato: Reflections on Natures and Kinds* (Oakland, The University of California Press, 2015): 91, 94.

Tosi blamed overuse of the chest voice and a failure to practice the falsetto correctly as the primary causes for the irretrievable loss of the latter. For Tosi, without the integration of the chest voice and the falsetto, the soprano voice can only vanishingly seldom exist. He states that either through age, lack of practice or overpractice (or dissipation and wild living), sopranos were liable to lose the use of the falsetto. They would then be forced either to sing contralto or persist in calling themselves sopranos through vanity, while incapable of singing above c".¹¹ The biographies of the castrati Pistocchi, Carestini, Guadagni, Rauzzini and to a lesser degree Velluti himself all tend to bear out Tosi's predictions concerning the result, if not necessarily the causes, of the degradation of two-registered facility. From out of Tosi's writing peeps the implication that all (or almost all) castrati, at least *in potentia*, were sopranos. If "Soprano" in Tosi's §21 is understood to be, in its first instance, the young castrato student of singing, and in its second instance descriptive, variously, of first a female voice range and then a male, then it becomes clear that while a woman might occasionally achieve a soprano voice without using the falsetto, a male (castrato) almost never could.¹² Many of these castrati, Tosi explains, chose to sing "Contr'alto," ignoring their falsetto, or were forced into the lower voice through the loss or degradation of the falsetto.

¹¹ Baird, *Agricola*, 82-83.

¹² Modern vocal pedagogy is energetically split on whether women generally use their falsetto, or even if they have a one. As will become clear over the course of this chapter, however, English opinion in the 1820s was very definite that women singers, especially sopranos, used a "falsetto" register, and I follow their usage here.

Galliard's definition of the difference between the terms head voice and falsetto, which Tosi seems to have used interchangeably, was at least partially adopted by Johann Agricola in his 1757 translation of Tosi.¹³ He, almost uniquely until Manuel Garcia in the 1840s, uses "falsetto" as the term for an intermediate, third register between the head and chest. This construct—the falsetto as different from the head voice—may perhaps have been a German idea, as it is generally not present in Italian writing on the subject. In 1777 Mancini claimed a strong pedagogical and intellectual inheritance from the Tosian school. Though he admitted no departures from Tosi, his writing reveals some. His pedagogical focus, or that part concerning the two registers, is a slight retreat from Tosi's uncompromising one. Mancini aimed toward their unity to the point that both registers *appeared* to be emanating from the chest.¹⁴ For Mancini, the connection between the chest voice and the body itself is powerful. He conflates the chest with healthy lungs, implying that the *voce naturale*, which appeared to emanate from the lungs, the chest and the heart, was synonymous with the body, with rude good health, sensuality, worldliness, strength, power etc. "It will convince anyone who will take the trouble of attentively observing, that the chest voice is not in everybody equally strong. The reason is, that as one has more or less

¹³ Beverly Jerold, "Quantz and Agricola: A Literary Collaboration," *Acta Musicologica* 88 (2016): 127-142. Jerold lays out the case for Agricola having been the necessary ghost writer of both Johann Quantz's books, *Versuche einer Anweisung die Flöte traversiere zu spielen* and his autobiography. Considering Agricola's own heavy reliance upon Tosi, the *Opinioni* take an even more prominent place in eighteenth-century pedagogy, not only in Italy and England, but in Germany as well.

¹⁴ Mancini, 20, 44. This figurative, coloristic imagery will be addressed in an attempt at a modern explication later in this chapter.

strong organs of the chest, so he will have more or less strength in the chest register."¹⁵

Mancini's remedy for the break, the meeting of the registers, is study and the "help of art" [artifice] to disguise their point of union.¹⁶ Neither Tosi nor Mancini provide many specific methods for achieving this paramount goal, a fact that irritates modern scholar-pedagogues like James Stark.¹⁷ Tosi merely says to leave "no method untried" in the attempt. This depended upon demonstration and imitation rather than upon scientific research yielding physiological answers: detailed solutions with practical applicability. Mancini writes, "As for myself I always acted with my pupils like a dancing master. ... 'Boy, look ...raise your head ... don't lean on the chest ... no ... not in the back either ... there, that's right. Straight and natural.'"¹⁸

There are observational indications, however, that strong registral differences were becoming normal even in the very best singers. In 1781, an article praising the voice of the famed castrato Luigi Marchesi described him as having "three diverse voices: a piercing soprano, the middle one a most robust contralto and the most virile and affecting one [that] of a tenor."¹⁹ This is the

¹⁵ Mancini, 59.

¹⁶ Ibid., 39.

¹⁷ James Stark, *Bel Canto: A History of Vocal Pedagogy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999): 61-62. Modern vocal pedagogy, much of which descends from the historical inflection point of the lowered laryngeal position of Manuel Garcia's *voix sombre*, has little patience with the vague, philosophical stance of the eighteenth-century demonstrative paradigm.

¹⁸ Mancini, 93.

¹⁹ *Lode caratteristiche del celebre cantore Signor Luigi Marchesi* (Siena, 1781): 4. "Tre voci diverse: l'acutissima di soprano, quella di mezzo di contralto robustissima, e la più virile e toccante di tenore." I am deeply indebted to Marco Beghelli for sharing with me his research

earliest specific description that I know of the three-registered soprano or mezzo soprano voice, a concept that was to become commonplace in English vocal pedagogical and critical writing (concerning Italianate singing) of the 1820s.

Carestini and Caffariello were praised for their low, chest registers.

Farinelli's aria "Navigante che non spera" in Leonardo Vinci's *Il Medeo* lies entirely within a high tenor range[e^b-b^b'] and the first aria for Velluti in Giuseppe Nicolini's 1811 *Quinto Fabio* lies also, initially, in a somewhat higher, contralto range [a to c", touching a d" though it rises in the final measures to a g"]. The subsequent role is in Velluti's normal, low soprano/high mezzo-soprano tessitura.²⁰ These excursions into a much lower register than that for which these singers were famous is indicative not necessarily of a suddenly lower voice, but of a choice to use the chest register more or less exclusively for a short period of time. In the case of Rauzzini, this may not have been a matter of choice. Tenor Michael Kelly, a student of Rauzzini's, wrote in his *Reminiscences* that, later in life, Rauzzini entirely lost the use of his falsetto register and sang only contralto.²¹ On the other hand, in a private gathering before 1789, Pacchiarotti, whose technique seems to have been very good, perhaps impeccable, sang an entire

surrounding and supporting his thesis of the manly castrato voice. This description is quoted in his as-yet unpublished paper on the subject.

²⁰ Franz Haböck, *Die Gesangskunst der Kastraten, Band 1, Die Kunst des Cavaliere Carlo Broschi Farinelli. B: Farinellis Berühmte Arien* (Vienna: Universal-Edition, 1923): 10-15. Giuseppe Nicolini, MS *Quinto Fabio* (ca. 1811) E-Mn, M-1472.

²¹ Michael Kelly, *Reminiscences*, ed. Roger Fisk (London: Oxford University Press, 1975): 233.

aria with a tenor voice for Charles Burney while at the same time singing soprano roles in public.²²

For Rauzzini the loss of the falsetto, as Tosi warned, required him to sing only in chest voice, hence, contralto.²³ This may have been the fault of poor technique, age, health, or a combination of factors. Mount Edgcumbe notes that Gluck's first Orfeo, Gaetano Guadagni, began his career as an contralto, enjoyed a lengthy intermediate period as a soprano, and later in life lost his falsetto voice, settling once again into an contralto range.²⁴ Burney describes the limited *good* range of the last important contralto castrato, Giovanni Rubinelli, who flourished in the 1780s. He was another former soprano.

A true and full contralto from C [c'], in the middle of the scale, to the octave above [c'']. He sometimes, however, goes down to G [g], and up to F [f'], but neither the extra low notes nor the high are very full. All above C [c''] is falset [*sic*], and so much more feeble and of a different register than the rest, that I was uneasy when he transcended the compass of his natural and real voice.²⁵

Tosi implies that contraltos were exceedingly common, or rather, that good sopranos were rare, not because of the voices themselves, but rather

²² Charles Burney, *A General History of Music: From the Earliest Ages to the Present Period* Vol. 4 (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2010): 512.

²³ Though my original intention was, whenever possible, to use the modern term "alto," for the sake of simplicity and describing a vocal range, the word itself was only rarely used in English. "Countertenor" (in various spellings) and "contr'alto" or "contralto," are the terms that are almost universally used. Contralto is almost universally used for low castrati, and I will retain that usage. I shall only retain "alto" when it is in the original English or, very occasionally, in translations from the German ("alt").

²⁴ Richard Edgcumbe, Lord Mount Edgcumbe, *Musical Reminiscences, Chiefly Respecting the Italian Opera in England: from the year 1773 to the present time* (London: George Clark, 1828): 35.

²⁵ Philip Highfill, et al., "Giovanni Battista Rubinelli," *A Biographical Dictionary of Actors, Actresses, Musicians, Dancers, Managers & Other Stage Personnel in London, 1660-1800* Vol. 13 (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1991): 129.

because so many castrati could not or would not learn to use their falsetto registers.²⁶ Martha Feldman hypothesizes, in the case of the middle-aged Alessandro Moreschi, the last castrato and the only one known to have made sound recordings, that a calcification on aging castrato vocal cords made the falsetto register more difficult to use.²⁷

It was not just the castrati whose vocal registers were not, in actuality, perfectly integrated. Mount Edgcumbe praised Brigida Banti, a late eighteenth-century soprano, for a voice that, despite containing three audible registers, appeared to emanate solely from the chest.²⁸ While this is somewhat confusing, when one comes upon Mount Edgcumbe's postscript concerning the voice of Henrietta Sontag in 1828, one is closer to discovering what he meant by chest voice (*voce di petto*). His definition is more coloristic than physiological.

Mademoiselle Sontag ... possesses a voice of great extent, brilliant clearness, and correct intonation. The upper notes are particularly good and pleasing, but the lower part of her voice is less sweet, and when forced beyond it's [*sic*] natural strength, may be called rather shrill. It is not, in short, a true *voce di petto*, and has not the round, full, mellow tone peculiar almost to the Italians.²⁹

Taken together with his remarks on Banti, Mount Edgcumbe seems to call a *voce di petto* a voice whose *perceived* coloristic, physical center is the chest voice, or whose power appears to come from it, rather than a voice like Sontag's, the power of which appeared to have been centered in her falsetto. He does not say

²⁶ Tosi/Galliard, *Observations*, 22-24.

²⁷ Feldman, 86-89. In some of the choral tracks from the same Sistine Chapel recordings, the chest voices of elderly castrati can be heard singing the alto line.

²⁸ Mount Edgcumbe, 84.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 187.

that Sontag does not use a chest voice, rather he says that her chest voice lacks depth and roundness, and that her entire range, both the physiological chest and falsetto register, do not *appear* to come from the chest.³⁰ Mount Edgcumbe praised Giuseppina Grassini for her contralto singing, though he described a voice not entirely dissimilar from the castrati who had lost their high soprano voice entirely. Hers is recorded as having a limited range, something that seems have been a common description of contralto singers of both genders, again implying that this voice was one that eschewed use of the falsetto register almost entirely. She was once a high soprano, then a low contralto. Finally, in a later season when she unwisely attempted to re-conquer her falsetto register, she lost her chest voice, singing with a "hoarse soprano."³¹

Early Nineteenth-Century Pedagogies and the Juncture in the Voice

Reinforcing the idea that both contraltos and *countertenors* had little falsetto, Joseph Corfe's 1799 *A Treatise on Singing*, published in English but by an Italian musician, says that of the four voice types, "Soprano, Countertenor or Contr'alto, Tenor and Bass,"

The Bass is the most dignified, but ought not to be so boisterous as it is generally practised. It has always been a matter, not to be accounted for by Professors of Music, why the deepest Bass Voices should, in general, sing in a Falsetto, and with greater taste than in their natural voices, and that the Contr'alto should have the least Falsetto of either of the other

³⁰ Titze, 191-193, discusses the ability of highly trained singers to fool their listeners with their ability to smooth the head voice between registers, mixing aspects of falsetto and chest voice to the point that one can sound, in fact, as if it were the other.

³¹ Mount Edgcumbe, 90-93, 133-134.

voices. The fact is however certain, for if a Treble part is wanted in a Quartetto, and there is no Soprano Voice, the Bass is generally called to sing it.³²

From Corfe's descriptions one can assume that a number of theories were current, if not necessarily universally held, at the beginning of the nineteenth century. First: "countertenor" and "contralto" were roughly synonymous and neither used the falsetto register. Second: "falsetto" was then essentially what "falsetto" is now, at least in men's voices. Corfe reveals this with the remark that the best falsettos were in bass voices, and that that voice was capable of singing soprano. In other words, the male falsetto of the early nineteenth century, at least in English pedagogical and musico-critical writing, was simply a falsetto, separate from the chest voice and clearly recognizable in what most modern writers on the voice describe as the male falsetto.³³ A third, not less controversial revelation given conservative resistance to falsettists today, is that male falsettists in England did, with a degree of regularity great enough for it to be unremarkable, if not necessarily best common practice, sing soprano in the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century—at least in ensembles.

Published in London eleven years later, Domenico Corri's *The Singer's Preceptor, or, Corri's Treatise on Vocal Music* is a work by one of the Nicola

³² Joseph Corfe, *A Treatise on Singing* (London: 1799): 9. "[E]ither of the other voices" probably means among the other three: soprano, contr'alto/countertenor or tenor. This accords with Tosi's warning that a castrato without a falsetto would be consigned to singing contr'alto.

³³ Rudolfo Celletti, *The History of Bel Canto*, trans. Frederick Fuller (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991): 166-167. Celletti's theoretical *falsetone*—a "reinforced" falsetto, begins, according to him, at an a' or even b', a second or third higher than the point most writers of the early nineteenth century state that a tenor switches from chest voice to falsetto. There seems to be little or no historical justification for this term. Celletti's *Bel Canto* claims none.

Porpora's students.³⁴ Though much of the treatise merely repackages the now-canonical Tosi, Corri generally used current singers; the tenor John Braham (active ca. 1795-1845) is a frequent example. Corri is self-consciously modern, making the seeming immutability of the rules of singing all the more important. If, as many pro-Velluti commentators claimed, his style was of the old school, then descriptions of his singing, his voice, and his technique could be considered reasonably analogous to late eighteenth-century Italian singing.³⁵ "The artificial formation of his tone is masterly. His *portamento* is exact; no taint of nose, mouth, or throat is discoverable in its production."³⁶ Even Velluti's dramatic register changes, to be detailed in the next section of this chapter, might not be terribly far removed, if perhaps less skillful, from the chest-to-falsetto *portamento* of Francesca Cuzzoni, probably in the 1720s, described by Mancini in the 1770s.

Corri also addresses, indirectly, the nature of the tenor's high voice, implying that it is generally a lighter production, a falsetto. He is firmly opposed to tenor songs being sung an octave higher by female sopranos, saying a range that, in a tenor's voice is high but easy, sounds forced and shrill when sung by a soprano.³⁷ Implying tenors of his time generally sang their high notes in a falsetto

³⁴ James Sanderson, "Life," Website: *The Porpora Project*, Accessed June 15, 2016 @ http://www.porporaproject.com/nicola_porpora.php?ref=porporaproject. Porpora was one of the great teachers of castrati of the eighteenth century. Included among his students were the castrati Caffarelli, Farinelli, Porporino as well as Franz Josef Haydn and Pietro Metastasio.

³⁵ *London Magazine* 1825, 270. The writer states that Velluti's singing is of the "great Roman school." When coupled with the castrati, "Roman" either as compliment or epithet apparently always refers to the Sistine Chapel, the first and last home of the "operatic" castrato, or, the so-called "bel canto" castrato—the castrato singer in the modern, western tradition.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 474. This seems a clear reference to Tosi/Galliard.

³⁷ Domenico Corri, *The Singer's Preceptor—or-Corri's Treatise on Vocal Music* (London: Chappell and Co., 1810): 67. A g' is at most only a step above the tenor's chest-falsetto transition and is

rather than a heavier chest voice, he criticizes them for leaping from g to g', and sounding thereby all too often as if they had two radically different voices with different weights, calling it literally a "duet" between tenor and soprano. He urges tenors to unite their chest and falsetto voices, almost perfectly (and likely self-consciously) mimicking Mancini and Tosi and their instructions to the castrati.

Richard Bacon was an amateur baritone and author of *Elements of Vocal Science*. Though published in book form in 1824, it is actually a series of essays written for the *QMMR* between 1818 and 1823. Bacon was an acute auditor of and sharp commentator on the voice and was especially interested in the registers and the exact point at which they meet: the "juncture." His emphasis, and the emphasis of his *QMMR* (edited by him and mostly written, anonymously or pseudonymously, by himself and his three daughters) on "the juncture" and their attempts to precisely define this in many singers' voices is a recurring theme in 1820s vocal criticism. In *Elements* he urges tenors to balance their registers at the "juncture."³⁸ While this critical stance abhors tenors (as well as female singers) whose junctures are obvious, it remains obsessed with discontinuous voices, and through this obsession seems to reveal contradictory desires. Either it evinces a wish to be disappointed as aesthetic listeners when singers fail at the

thus more likely to be soft and maleable than is a g", sitting as it does as much as an octave above a female soprano's chest-falsetto transition.

³⁸ Richard Mackenzie Bacon, *Elements of Vocal Science, being a philosophical inquiry into some of the principles of singing*, ed. Edward Foreman (Champaign, Pro Musica Press, 1966: 1824) 96. On page 89, he defines the tenor, and included in this description is the understanding of two voices, chest and falsetto. He never considers it likely, in any of his writing that I have discovered, that a tenor could possibly succeed (elegantly) in the upper voice without using falsetto.

juncture—grimly satisfying for the theorist—or it wishes to be theoretically disappointed as the listener's acuity is deceived, pleasing the aesthetic senses.

I believe this obsession to be another manifestation of the idea of overlapping realities meeting at a mutually held linguistic or cognitive point, the extended, non-humorous paronomasia I posit in chapter 2. The juncture, in other words, is like Hunt's "poetic concentration," his term for Keats's "beaker full of the warm South."³⁹ Though this will only fully unfold over the course of the next chapter, its eventual importance is the reason for this chapter and justifies underlining here. The juncture is a discrete entity whose discovery, though here feared and avoided, opens worlds of meaning. In this case, topoi of production/sound, a simultaneity of body and soul, sickness and health or male and female are revealed in the mysterious meeting of chest voice and falsetto.

In 1825 the *QMMR* published excerpts from Domenico Crivelli's *L'arte di canto, or Art of Singing*. This was republished in 1841 with the wording regarding the falsetto and chest voices considerably revised or even abandoned, weakening the two-register concept of, at least, tenor singing.⁴⁰ In 1825, however, Crivelli still adheres to the older, two-register concept of the voice.

It is also necessary to be cautious not to force the voice from the chest beyond its natural limits, as there is nothing which more impedes the drawing out the voice and uniting its tones with sweetness than this over exertion, and hence the best method is that of taking in the falsetto those notes which cannot be produced from the chest, and of studying the

³⁹ See chapter 2. Lord Byron criticized Keats's line "Oh for a beaker full of the warm South" to Hunt. Hunt recalled that "it was not the word beaker that puzzled him. ... But the sort of poetry in which he excelled, was not accustomed to these poetical concentrations." Leigh Hunt, *Lord Byron and some of his Contemporaries* (London: Henry Colburn, 1828): 266.

⁴⁰ Domenico Crivelli, *L'arte di canto* (Boston, Oliver Ditson & Co., 1841): 4-5, 9.

manner of uniting the two registers (viz. voce di petto and falsetto) in such a manner as to render their junction or point of union imperceptible.⁴¹

Female Singers in the 1810s and 1820s: Audible Bodies

Though descriptions of female bodies as they were expressed through their singing voices are rare in the eighteenth century, English critical writing of the 1810s and 1820s becomes ever more aware of them, to varying degrees of censure or praise. Leigh Hunt was disturbed by singing with the registers too obviously separated, in males and females, and praised singers who could hide the juncture. More importantly, he sedulously maintained negative capability, not allowing the unsatisfying or disturbing aspects of a singer's technique or artistry to overwhelm or erase the satisfying ones. Concerning Ann Tree's singing with Catherine Stephens, he wrote "It is seldom that two such singers come together; and seldomer that their voices so well unite, or that the under tones of the female who sings second, are deep enough without being masculine. Miss Tree's however are so. If they have any fault it is perhaps that they are occasionally too luscious, and contrasted with her upper." Comparing Tree's voice to another, apparently somewhat higher female voice the following year, Hunt writes "Miss [Lucy Anne] Greene's voice...is of excellent quality, round without fatness, powerful without being harsh, clear, flowing, and equable throughout. [Though] It may not be able to go so low as Miss Tree's, it falls into the lower tones without

⁴¹ *Quarterly Musical Magazine and Review for 1825* (London: Baldwin, Cradock and Joy, 1825): 219. The "viz" in parentheses may well be editorial.

such a marked difference of body between those and the upper."⁴² The "difference of body" seems a clear reference to the change from falsetto to chest voice; for Hunt it's simply too obvious in Tree's singing.

Hunt is glad that the audible, singing body of Miss Tree is not overly masculine, but he is disturbed by its overt sensuality. "Luscious" should possibly not be seen as unqualified praise. The character of Becky Sharp, William Thackeray's unscrupulous adventuress in *Vanity Fair* (1848), is revealed through the quality of her voice in private singing. Rich and throaty, hers is the voice of too-proficient, too-knowing young woman: no lady. Singing at a musical evening shortly before a forced departure from the home of her offended protectors (she has set her designs far too obviously on the eldest son), Sharp, an orphan, masterfully delivers a song about a dying orphan boy, dwelling on the final words "When I'm gone." "It was the sentiment of the before-mentioned words, 'When I'm gone,' over again. As she came to the last words, Miss Sharp's 'deep-toned voice faltered.' Everybody felt the allusion to her departure, and to her hapless orphan state."⁴³ Philip Horne quotes this in his essay "Poetic Allusion in the Victorian Novel" to illustrate the allusional aspects of replete literature. In this case, the reference is to another song, sung from the perspective of a bride and popular ten years prior to the publication of *Vanity Fair*. In it, the groom's "deep-toned voice faltered." Horne sees this as Thackeray underlining Miss Sharp's

⁴² Leigh Hunt, *The Examiner*, December 26, 1819 and September 24, 1820, cited by Theodore Fenner, *Leigh Hunt and Opera Criticism* (Lawrence: The University of Kansas Press, 1972): 93-94.

⁴³ William Makepeace Thackeray, *Vanity Fair* (New York: Harper and Brother's Household Edition, 1876): 20-22.

disingenuousness, calculatingly mapping onto herself the generic plight of the orphan. I would add that Thackeray, through allusion to the groom (not the bride), is mapping her true character onto a male body.⁴⁴ Read with the understanding of a "classical" voice with a multi-registered nature, the too-luscious, "deep" tones can symbolize the erotic worldliness of a talented adventuress seeking to snare a wealthy husband with her deep, sensual, knowing and, above all, masculinely assertive chest voice. When so heard, Sharp's artifice of faltering tones paint another layer of super-textual meaning, different from but not incompatible with Horne's. Though Hunt swallows his minor qualm about Miss Tree and praises her highly—after all, her low notes are not *too* masculine—Thackeray is not so forgiving toward Miss Sharp. Hers clearly are.

In 1825 the *QMMR* took Domenico Crivelli to task not for his dissection of the tenor voice and the emphasis upon the juncture, but for his old-fashioned assignment of two registers to the female voice. "He has not noticed the method now adopted upon high authorities, of forming the voice (particularly the female voice) with three registers."⁴⁵ Though considering this third register to be more a learned artifice than a natural state, the *QMMR* praises Pasta and Maria Garcia (Malibran) for having it.

Their low tones are produced like those of a base [*sic*], and are sweetened and softened by constant exercise. They unite with the mixed voice, at about E or F upon the first line of the treble staff, [e' or f'] and then the mixed voice again is to be united with the falsette at D or E (an

⁴⁴ Philip Horne, "Poetic Allusion in the Victorian Novel," *The Oxford Handbook of the Victorian Novel*, ed. Lisa Rodensky, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013): 612.

⁴⁵ *QMMR* 1825, 218.

octave higher.) [d" or e"] ... the use of the very low notes is obtained with far greater force, and the mixed voice can often be employed with more various change of passionate expression than in the ordinary manner of forming the middle tones, as if they were really and absolutely the voce di petto, or breast voice.⁴⁶

The implication is that female singers had sung until some point in the recent past as Tosi indicates castrato singers did, using pure or nearly pure chest voice until c" or d" before (hopefully imperceptibly, though in practice probably not) switching to a falsetto register of similar purity.

The new, mixed register was not always of a uniform quality and production. Stendhal, here quoted in the *The New Monthly Magazine and Literary Journal*, praised Pasta for her ability to substitute one manner of production for another, a voice for a voice, upon the same note.

In the twinkling of an eye, she heightens or alters the colouring of a phrase of melody, by introducing her falsette, even in the middle of the scale, or by using alternately notes of the falsette and of the chest voice.⁴⁷ She employs this expedient with the same facility of blending in the middle as in the highest notes of the chest voice.

The *NMM&LJ* then appends this explanatory footnote.

When the voice is trained to three registers, many notes of the middle portion are formed by the commixture of the head and chest voice, in a manner so artful, that the singer can at pleasure swell the tone to the full power of the natural, or attenuate it to the softest sounds of the falsette—or thus use either quality. ... It is achieved by strengthening (through exercise) the lowest notes of the falsette; and, on the contrary, by weakening the highest of the natural voice. the singer becomes able to take the same three or four notes in either, and also in both mixed. This is what the French term *la voix mixte*.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ *QMMR* 1825, 218-219.

⁴⁷ It seems very clear that Stendhal is not being metaphorical or coloristic in his language, but is using this terminology in a straightforward, specific and physiological manner.

⁴⁸ "On the Progress of Music From the Commencement of the Present Century," *NMM&LJ* 1833, 417. Quoting Stendhal's *Life of Rossini*.

This mixed voice was not then an entirely different vocal register.⁴⁹ It was generally a range of registral overlap, where both chest voice and falsetto were sufficiently compromised to enable the singer to switch easily from one to the other over the range of approximately a fourth. As this register is predicated upon weakening the register that was considered the stronger, and strengthening the weaker, the resultant mixed register was possibly, despite the assurance to the contrary, not only weaker than the upper chest voice that it replaced, but more likely to fail in adverse conditions. This was the case with Velluti.

A modern misperception concerning the changing registers in the multifaceted middle voice, *la voix mixte*, is that it was, if audible, *necessarily* a sign of poor technique.⁵⁰ This was not the case, as even to non-musicians like Stendhal these shifts between registers upon the same or neighboring notes were as audible as they were delightful. Some great singers never truly united their voice: "such equalization was impossible to Pasta."⁵¹ Maria Malibran was chastized in 1832 for her "excessively precipitous" leaps from the high voice into the low.⁵² The *QMMR* praises Jane Bacon (a bit nepotistically) for possessing a voice from f to b^b—a stretch of two and half octaves without any discernible

⁴⁹ Titze, 193, somewhat reluctantly calls this intermediate register, in common with most modern pedagogy, the "head voice." However, he believes it not to be an independent register but "likely some mixture of chest and falsetto." It will become clear from the descriptions quoted, however, that in the 1820s the middle register was not only a mixture but also a range of overlap where one register could be switched for the other to adapt to the passions of the moment.

⁵⁰ Naomi Andre, *Voicing Gender*, 33-34, 44, quotes Celletti on the necessity of an homogenized *voix mixte*, and is emphatic that the lack of one indicated a faulty technique. This is possibly a misapprehension on her part of Celletti's meaning.

⁵¹ *NMM&LJ* 1833, 417.

⁵² *Giornale del Regno delle due Sicilie* 187 (August 17, 1823): 781. Thanks again to Marco Beghelli for bringing this quote about Malibran to my attention.

registration shifts. This is at least partially attributed to her intensive study with Velluti.⁵³ The degree, however, to which singers like Pasta or Malibran could be disqualified from greatness due to an ostensibly poor technique seems very limited. A very minor singer, like Jane Bacon, who had mastered the middle voice was, regardless of her achievement, still a minor singer. Pasta's and Malibran's greatness lay partially in the exploration and exploitation of their technical "faults," their inability perfectly to equalize their registers. Technique is, in the pedagogical sense of the word, the modern equivalent of "art," "artifice" or, partially, "science." It is an exertion of the intellect to master nature or to deceive it. Pasta and Malibran might be said not to have deceived nature, but to have seduced it.

Surviving descriptions indicate that until the 1810s, female singers, especially contraltos, used, instead of the mixed voice, the chest voice up to about c". This is especially clear in descriptions of voices like Grassini's, or the German contralto Marianne Schönberger's. She sang tenor roles in Weimar and was praised by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and Carl Maria von Weber. The former wrote,

⁵³ *QMMR* 1826, 172-173. The *QMMR* quotes several other journals' reviews of the 1826 concert season for the London debut season of Bacon's daughter Jane. These all give a two-octave, A-a" range. As the family was surely better informed about the range Jane felt she had mastered, the limits for it are probably more accurate. This may seem a minor point, but it becomes more relevant later when the voice and range of Velluti is discussed. Probably the apparent, reported performing range of any singer was not as great as the range with which they were in actuality more or less comfortable. As with Jane Bacon—and this is a phenomenon I have experienced myself in reading others' estimates of my range—the upper limit is likely to be more accurately described than the lower one. The nature of operatic singing, especially for higher voices, is to approach more closely and more frequently the upper limit of possible tones, than the usually less explored and less exploited lower range.

In the higher regions, in the tones f, g, a, and so on [f', g', a'] of the tenor, the voice of Madame Schönberger unfolds into its own beautiful region. And since tenors seldom reach and master these tones with a true lightness without the help of the head voice, the falsetto, and so on, it's naturally here with Madame Schönberger that one experiences a great *frisson* [*Reiz*] and magic, and it is here that the deception of the listener is at its greatest.⁵⁴

What was so captivating in Schönberger's voice was not its extent, especially the lower notes; their quality was rather pedestrian though their power was impressive. The part of her voice that was most charming was when she sang in the range of a light, high tenor, but remained in her chest voice—something a tenor, forced to switch to a falsetto or mixed voice, could not duplicate.

Goethe valued the chest register in Schönberger's voice largely for its clarity. Pasta's chest voice was famously "veiled" (*voce velato*), though the *QMMR* believed her to have slowly improved it.⁵⁵ Veiling was the sound or state of a voice that "is not clear, but sound[s] as if it passed through some interposed medium." This is not a husky voice, where the folds are occluded by swelling or mucus. It is a condition of the vocal folds themselves, due to "overwork or disease."⁵⁶ The above-quoted article on the veiled voice from *Grove's Dictionary*

⁵⁴ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, "Tag- und Jahreshefte," *Johann Wolfgang Goethe. Sämtliche Werke, Briefe, Tagebücher und Gespräche* Vol. I/17, ed. Irmtraut Schmid (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, Insel, 1994): 248. Carl Maria von Weber, *Writings On Music*, ed. John Warrack (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982) 124–125. For these sources on Madam Schönberger I am, again, indebted to Marco Beghelli. "Doch in den höheren Regionen, in den Tönen f, g, a, u. s. w. des Tenors, entfaltet sich die Stimme der Mad. Schönberger in ihrer eigenen schönen Sphäre, und da diese Töne selten von Tenoristen mit vollkommener Leichtigkeit, ohne die Hilfsmittel der Kopfstimme, des Falsets u.s.w. erreicht und beherrscht werden, so ist natürlich hier bei Mad. Schönberger ein großer Reiz und Zauber zu finden, und die Täuschung für den Zuhörer am größten."

⁵⁵ *QMMR* 1825, 219.

⁵⁶ "Veiled Voice (*voce velato*)," *Grove's Dictionary Music and Musicians* Vol. 5, ed. J. A. Fuller-Maitland (New York: MacMillan, 1910): 235.

in 1910 cites Pasta, her veiling famous enough to be remembered sixty years after her retirement. Veiling could mask the more direct qualities of a voice, possibly making it, when tamed, an aid in extremely subtle, private singing. "When nearly sixty [Pasta] had still preserved a wonderful power of *mezza voce* when singing in private."⁵⁷ Rosamunda Pisaroni, another contralto who lost her soprano notes, in her case due to smallpox, had a chest voice that was far less veiled, clearer and more direct than Pasta's. It was preferred by some, and her at times quite masculine chest tones were the most famous aspect of her voice.⁵⁸ There is an aspect of feminine fragility inherent in the veiled voice discoverable in the writing of the 1820s and 30s. Pasta's veiling not only inhibited projection, it projected physical and emotional vulnerability.⁵⁹ Some considered her voice to be too "weak," including Thomas Medwin (who preferred Pisaroni). He wrote to Mary Shelley from Florence in 1827 that "Pasta has left or is about to leave Naples, where she has given better satisfaction [than in Florence]. Il Carlo was too enormous for her weak organ—When she first saw it she burst into tears & soon relinquished the attempt to be heard in it, singing afterwards at one of the minor Theaters."⁶⁰ Medwin's comment about Pasta's "organ" recalls Mancini and the connection of the power of the chest voice to the health and vigor of the body at large.

⁵⁷ "Singing," *Grove's Dictionary Music and Musicians* Vol. 4, ed. J. A. Fuller-Maitland, 507.

⁵⁸ *London Literary Gazette and Journal of Belles Lettres, Arts, Sciences, &c., for 1829* (London: James Moyes, 1829): 133.

⁵⁹ See chapter 4 on Leigh Hunt, Lord Byron and the veiled voice of the latter.

⁶⁰ Earnest Lovell, *Captain Medwin: Friend of Byron and Shelley* (London: Macdonald & Co, 1963): 216. "Il Carlo" refers to Teatro San Carlo, the premier opera house in Naples.

Velluti's Voice: An Attempt at Reconstruction

Sieghart Döhring makes the assertion that "competent descriptions of Velluti's voice and art of singing are rare and that is how it might have come to pass that a false picture of a hyper-virtuoso has become canonical."⁶¹ The first half of this statement seems to be clearly mistaken, in view of the almost bewildering number of first-hand accounts of Velluti's singing including a variety of viewpoints from friend and foe alike. The many digital humanities projects increase the amount of available material from the 1820s seemingly daily, but even without them, Velluti's has long been *recognizable*, if not actually recognized, as the most thoroughly analyzed, minutely described castrato voice in history. The second half of Döhring's statement is manifestly true, however, and accords with contemporary assessments.

Velluti has been represented as the most florid of singers: it was not so when he was in England. That he changed the passages of a song is true; but he changed them rather for the sake of varying the traits and heightening the expression, than with a view to multiplying notes or showing his facility, which was by no means superior.⁶²

Velluti's reputation as a hyper-virtuosic singer lies largely in the persistent popularity of Stendhal's 1817 account of the 1813 premiere of *Aureliano in Palmyra*. It also lies in the somewhat anachronistic, possibly blinkered readings of critical writing about his ornamentation, especially from Ayrton in *The*

⁶¹ Sieghart Döhring, "Giambattista Velluti und das Ende des Kastratengesangs in der Oper," >>Per ben vestir la virtuosa<<. *Die Oper des 18. und frühen 19. Jahrhunderts im Spannungsfeld zwischen Komponisten und Sängern*, eds. Daniel Brandenburg and Thomas Seedorf (Schliengen: Edition Argus, 2011): 192.

⁶² NMM&LJ 1834, 21.

Harmonicon. Velluti's ornaments, and the intellectual, coloristic, and literary virtuosity that they display, will be the focus of chapter 5. This section of the present chapter is devoted to the voice itself. It seeks to reconstruct its dimensions and character from the many contemporary descriptions of his singing.

Descriptions of Velluti's voice are normally interwoven with those of his style of singing, his personal appearance and occasionally his personality. Here the focus is on descriptions of its range, force, quality and the apparent technique used. In 1825 *The London Gazette* described his voice as it was heard in private concerts before the premiere of *Crociato* on June 30.

The compass of the voice appears to be from G, in the treble to B, in alt [b to g"], and in addition to the peculiarity of tone incident to a falsetto, it has three distinct registers.⁶³ The same remark has been applied to Madame Pasta's voice, and, indeed, it belongs to the manner of forming the tone, which is understood to be according to the principles of the great Roman [castrato] school. The lower notes come distinctly from the chest in the manner as nearly as can be described of producing a bass voice—the middle notes constitute *la voix mixte*, or that kind which blends the chest and head voice according to the cast of sentiment, or the volume necessary to be employed. The higher are those of the head voice, or *voce di testa*, as the Italians call it. Strange to say, these registers are more easily apprehensible in Velluti's execution than consists either with the gratification of the ear, or with that finish which such an artist would be imagined to have striven to accomplish.⁶⁴

⁶³ *Recte* "alto" rather than *in altissimo*. There is unfortunately no standard apparent for this period's musical writing for descriptions of ranges: top to bottom, bottom to top, etc. Additionally the precise octave is usually given through contextual denomination (in the alto, in the treble, above the bass etc) that changes from writer to writer. Here, reversing the pitches would produce a voice that went from g' to b" and would both make no sense and not accord with Velluti's sung repertoire for this period, all of which lies in what would today be considered a mezzo-soprano range. This section will conclude with my estimation of Velluti's range and the approximate extent each of his three registers covered.

⁶⁴ "The Music of the Month," *The London Magazine* 1825, 269-270.

Velluti's voice is situated within the three-register modern school of Pasta and Garcia/Malibran, though "the peculiarity of tone incident to a falsetto" seems to imply a male-sounding falsetto. The two arias Velluti sang, "La Notte si [xe] bella" by his friend Giovanni Battista Perucchini and the *Romanza* from *Tebaldo*, do not much exceed the described range.⁶⁵ The outer limits here should, however, probably not be read as describing anything other than that of the repertoire performed. The following example, taken from Velluti's version of the *Romanza* preserved by Manuel Garcia in 1847, shows the voice plunging to a low e^b, if only in an *ossia*, as an alternative to a more conventional variant.⁶⁶ This extensive range was not achieved, as Mary Shelley delighted observed, without a marked registral change. On Velluti's singing the aria "Soave immagine" in Rossini's *Aureliano in Palmyra*, Shelley wrote that "the compass of his voice was [to] be particularly to be remarked in it, and the immediate transitions from his clear upper notes to the mellow sweetness of his lower ones was effected with the greatest flexibility and command of his voice."⁶⁷ On the following page, in notated form, is a dramatically extended chest voice into an almost baritonal range, including the instructions for "rinf^o." [rinforzando], a marking evidently used to denote the points where Velluti left his middle register to enter either the

⁶⁵ See chapter 5 for comparisons of the 1822, post-1822, 1825 and post-1825 versions of the *Romanza*. The post-1822 version published by Velluti in ca. 1825 contains one low f [f] in an *ossia*. Otherwise, the range is a to a" with both extremes only very briefly touched.

⁶⁶ Though there is no proof that Velluti definitely sang, without alteration, any of the ornaments he published, the *QMMR*'s 1826 article comparing his published ornaments to his sung ones indicates that they were very similar, if not absolutely identical. See chapter 5 for more discussion of this article.

⁶⁷ M. Shelley, "Second letter of "Anglo-Italicus" to *The Examiner*," (unpublished) *The Letters of Mary Shelley* Vol 1, ed. Betty Bennett (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980) 523.

false alto or the full chest voice, helping illuminate the above remark in the *London Gazette* that Velluti's "lower notes come distinctly from the chest in the manner as nearly as can be described of producing a bass voice."

Musical Example 3.1 Excerpt from Velluti's (Garcia) *Romanza*, mm 42-48⁶⁸

The *QMMR*, after having heard Velluti both in private and in the theater, later in the summer of 1825 reported that,

The voice is formed upon the principle of three registers reaching from A upon the first line of the base to A above the treble staff [a–a’].* It is the upper part of the compass that is so beautiful. Upon a protracted note, he will hold this last sound (like the harmonics upon a violin) and ring it with the alternate swell and fall of a distant bell, in the most perfect possible manner.

* [*QMMR*'s footnote] Signor Velluti finds the pitch here so much above that abroad, that in private concerts where he has sung, he has requested that the piano forte be let down about half a tone.⁶⁹

This description of the range, after having heard Velluti both in public and in private, extends it by a tone in each direction to complete the second octave. It

⁶⁸ Giovanni Battista Velluti and Francesco Morlacchi, Fragment of the *Romanza*: "Caro suono lusinghier," *Tebaldo e Isolina*, printed in the second, bilingual edition: Manuel Garcia, *Die Kunst des Gesangs* Vol. 2 (Mainz: Schott & Söhne, circa 1850): 133-135. See chapter 5 for a full reproduction of this final version of Velluti/Morlacchi's *Romanza*.

⁶⁹ *QMMR* 1825, 271-272.

is conceivable that Velluti rarely sang the lowest notes in his range in that first summer, though the remark about the low notes coming like a "bass voice" seems to contradict this. Additionally, Velluti's obvious ease in his chest voice led at least one critic to claim that he "appears to use his low voice with even more ease than the high."⁷⁰ This may have always been the case, as in 1810 the *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung* said almost the same thing about a performance of Nicolini's *Il Trajano in Dacia* at the Kärnthnertheater in Vienna. "Herr Velluti has more of an alto voice than a soprano voice. His upper range is forced and somewhat raw, the lower all the fuller and more beautiful."⁷¹ The upper end of his voice may have been too piercing for him comfortably to use it in private singing—almost none of his (reported) private repertoire required him to sing above an a^b" and complaints that he sang his concerts a half tone lower than normal were common. Two arias written for Velluti in *Carlo Magno*, and at least one *by* Velluti, "Come potrei mai vivere," published in London in the 1820s but apparently inserted in Simon Mayr's *Ginevra di Scozia* in a Viennese production in 1811, feature b^b".⁷² This note seems to have disappeared from the music Velluti sang and from descriptions of his singing after about 1822.

A range of f-a" is represented in the 1822-1824 version of Velluti's ornamentation of the entire *scena* "Notte Tremenda," in the which the *Romanza*

⁷⁰ QMMR 1825, 278.

⁷¹ AMZ 1810, 605. "Hr. Velluti hat mehr eine Alt- als Sopran-Stimme. Seine Höhe ist gezwungen und etwas rauh, desto voller und schöner seine Tiefe." The critic added that on the second night Velluti was considered to have been much improved.

⁷² Giuseppe Nicolini, MS *Carlo Magno* (ca. 1814) I-PAc, ML. 198. Giovanni Battista Velluti, Aria: "Come Potrei," inserted into Simon Mayr, *Ginevra di Scozia* (London: Antonio Grua, ca. 1825). Held at the Harvard Houghton Library.

itself is in its original key of g-minor, rather than f-minor as published by Garcia (excerpted above) in 1847/50.⁷³ This is only marginally different from the g-g" range of the opening *scena e cavatina* in the manuscript of Nicolini's ca. 1811 *Quinto Fabio*.⁷⁴ By taking the higher extremes of *Carlo Magno* and *Ginevra di Scozia* into account, and constructing a portrait that evolves over time, we see a voice very slowly losing the top while expanding the bottom. This image of a voice gracefully sliding downward contains no details of the interiority of the voice. In other words, a note still sung is not necessarily a note still sung *well*. A range may be wide but have gaping holes opening up in the middle or increasingly harshly sung extremities.⁷⁵

Both the *QMMR* and *London Magazine* note the difference between Velluti's singing in private and in public, especially with regard to his middle register and his intonation. Mount Edgcumbe, who apparently (and significantly)

⁷³ Giovanni Battista Velluti and Francesco Morlacchi, "Notte Tremenda, Recitative, CARO SUONO LUSINGHIER_ROMANZA as Sung by the Celebrated Signor Velluti at Venice and Florence in the Opera of Tebaldo ed [sic] Isolina," *Tebaldo e Isolina* (London: Chappell C°, 1825). The f comes in a different place than the e^b in the *scena* and is not an ossia.

⁷⁴ Giuseppe Nicolini, MS *Quinto Fabio* (ca. 1811) E-Mn, M-1472.

⁷⁵ Will Crutchfield, "G. B. Velluti e lo sviluppo della melodia romantica," Festschrift: *Bollettino Del Centro Rossiniano di Studi, Anno LIII* (Pesaro: Fondazione Rossini, 2013): 9-84. Crutchfield cites the version of Rossini's *Aureliano in Palmyra* in Belluno to support his thesis that Velluti was, essentially, the composer of the final form of Rosina's aria, "Una voce poco fa" from "Io sono dolcile" to the end in Act I of *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*, (essentially a later version of the second act cavatina in *Aureliano*) including the penultimate b". The Belluno *Aureliano*, however, is a composite, and the b" (in a different form, but the same note) Crutchfield believes Velluti to have sung appears only in a section in a different hand on different paper clearly marked as the ornamentation of Carolina Bassi. The score gives no reason, therefore, to believe that Velluti *ever* sang this note. This casts doubt on Crutchfield's thesis that Rossini essentially copied Velluti's version of the cavatina when he composed *Il Barbiere*. Regarding the b": a close examination of Morlacchi's original 1822 manuscript of *Tebaldo* reveals that the first act was revised and large stretches of music completely abandoned by Morlacchi. Most importantly, in Velluti's role, every single phrase with b" has an optional phrase that is at least a third lower. It is reasonable to assume that, in the very unlikely event that Velluti *ever* sang b", he no longer did by 1822. Francesco Morlacchi, MS *Tebaldo e Isolina, melodramma eroica* (Venice: 1822) I-Bc, UU.16/1-2.

only heard him sing at the King's Theater though he received him privately as a guest, writes about Velluti's voice:

This singer is no longer young, and his voice is in decay. It seems to have had considerable compass, but has failed (which is extraordinary) in its middle tones, many of which are harsh and grating to the ear. Some of his upper notes are still exquisitely sweet, and he dwells on, swells, and diminishes them with delightful effect. His lower notes too are full and mellow, and he displays considerable art in descending from the one to the other by passages ingeniously contrived to avoid those which he knows to be defective.⁷⁶

This was the voice in the theater, where it was necessary to produce a great deal of sound to cut through the chorus, orchestra and the susurrations of the public.

Ayrton, in the August 1825 *Harmonicon*, calls Velluti a "mezzo-soprano," a term Ayrton thought unusual enough to italicize. This may simply have been an acknowledgment of the near universal (English) usage of "soprano" or "male soprano" (along with *musico*) rather than "castrato" by 1825, and an attempt to more precisely describe the actual range of the voice. "Signor Velluti's voice has a compass of full two octaves from the G above the treble clef, to the G above the bass [g-g"]. ... It is powerful, and in its softer tones is sweet; but when strained is harsh and painful. His style of singing is of the best school."⁷⁷ *The London Magazine*, July 1825, describes Velluti's singing in private:

We have had the good fortune to hear Velluti in five songs, and almost as many styles. ... The middle tones of his voice are more delicately beautiful than those of any other we ever remember to have heard. The upper notes are rather thin, but scarcely less sweet. ... His conceptions are

⁷⁶ Mount Edgcumbe, *Reminiscences*, 155. My suspicion is that Velluti, like Grassini, was attempting to maintain his soprano voice rather than gracefully accepting an alto range like earlier castrati had, Rauzzini, Guadagni or Carestini most prominently among them. While the falsetto register was still usable, the connection between it and the chest voice was more liable to fail.

⁷⁷ *The Harmonicon for 1825* (London: Samuel Lee, 1825): 143.

grand; but his voice in passages of command, lacking the volume of the tenor, is not so effective as in the pathetic parts, where it is perfectly irresistible.⁷⁸

The *QMMR* that summer passed almost exactly the same judgment, making it possible that the same author wrote both articles, or at least was at the same concert.

Very general complaints are made that Signor Velluti is in the habit of singing too flat. This is not without a foundation in truth—but in the five songs we have heard him sing in private ... we could distinguish no greater failing in respect to tune than we hear in all singers. Upon the boards of the King's Theatre similar failures were a little oftener perceptible, but the defect is exceedingly common ... to all singers when they force their voices. The tone of Velluti suffers with his tune by vehemence of manner in impassioned passages.⁷⁹

The private voice of Velluti revealed few of the glaring faults of his public singing, or revealed them only faintly, explaining perhaps Mount Edgumbe's comment about the failed middle. When it functioned properly Velluti's voice was brilliantly clear. The foreign correspondent to the *London Public Ledger and Daily Advertiser* gushed about his Tebaldo in Venice on 3 December 1822 that "his voice is the most chrystalline [*sic*] we ever heard."⁸⁰ The *QMMR* wrote that

we have never heard tone at once so pure and delicate, so sweet and brilliant, as parts of the scale of Signor Velluti. It affects the ear as chrystal [*sic*] or as diamonds the eye. There is a ringing in some of the notes that conveys more clearly to our understanding the meaning of the Italian term *bel metallo di voce* than any dissertation or any practical demonstration ever submitted to us before. ... We would also be understood to describe it as heard in the chamber, for force reduces its perfection.⁸¹

⁷⁸ "The Music of the Month," *The London Magazine* 1825, 474.

⁷⁹ "Signor Velluti," *QMMR* 1825, 272.

⁸⁰ *London Public Ledger and Daily Advertiser*, December 3, 1822.

⁸¹ "Signor Velluti," *QMMR* 1825, 271.

The gemlike brilliance of the castrato voice forcibly struck not only Velluti's English auditors, but also Adolf (A. B.) Marx when he heard castrato soprano Filippo Sassaroli in a Berlin concert in March 1824. Groping for a way to describe the various voices he heard in Sassaroli's singing, Marx compared the upper range first to that of a boy, then, when loudly sung to a "high male falsetto," then to musical instruments: an overblown flute, a horn and finally a hard-struck glass bell.⁸²

Velluti's upper register, specifically, was also described as having "the mellifluous sweetness of a fine female soprano."⁸³ John Edmund Cox was probably talking about the falsetto, beginning at Tosi's predicted c", when he remembered "the upper part of the compass, from C to G [c"-g"] when I heard him, [as] being most clear and resonant."⁸⁴ Its brilliant, narrow qualities did not, however, please all who heard them. Mrs. Arbuthnot, in her diary entry of 24 July 1825, wrote that "his voice is like a bagpipe."⁸⁵ The image of a reedy, nasal voice navigating its registers as a bagpiper manages his bellows, drone and chanter, is colorful, but also useful, implying as it does a narrow, at times constrained, nasal vocal production while simultaneously evoking a wild, exotic sound. Critic X on 15 January 1826 in *The Examiner* seems to have been caricaturing the high voice of Velluti when he wrote that the castrato was "screeching like a peacock,

⁸² Adolph Marx, ed., *Berliner Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung* (Berlin: Schlesingerschen Buch und Musikhandlung, 1824): 111-114. March 17, 1824.

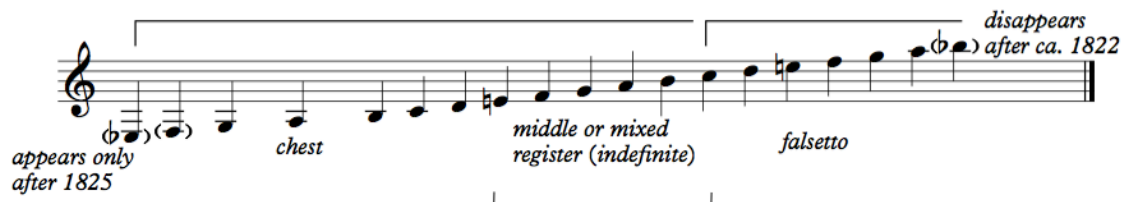
⁸³ *The Parthenon: A Magazine of Art and Literature* (London: Black, Young, and Young, 1826): 75-79.

⁸⁴ John Edmund Cox (uncredited), "Musical Recollections of the last Half Century," (excerpt printed in) *Tinsley's Magazine* (London: Tinsley Brothers, 1871): 633.

⁸⁵ Harriet Arbuthnot, *The Diary of Mrs. Arbuthnot* Vol. 1 (London: Macmillan & Co., 1950): 409.

howling like a midnight cat, or imitating the slender tones of a penny trumpet."⁸⁶ Even a friendly writer like the critic for the *NMM&LJ* in 1833 wrote that there was "an offensive contraction of the tone in certain parts of his scale, which, without any intention to bring the individual into ridicule, can only be likened to the shrilly scream of a peacock."⁸⁷ Mary Shelley, though enamored of Velluti's singing in the summer of 1826, nevertheless admitted that his voice had "one or two peacock notes."⁸⁸ The peacock's cry is a description so universal, from *The Times* review of 1 July 1825, the morning after *Crociato*, to retrospective, laudatory writing in 1834, that it must be seen as objective truth, descriptive of, if not a constant vocal quality, then certainly of an intermittent one.

Musical Example 3.2. Velluti's Vocal Range as Derived from an Aggregation of Written Descriptions and Musical Scores⁸⁹



⁸⁶ *The Examiner* 1825, 37.

⁸⁷ *NMM&LJ* 1834, 21.

⁸⁸ Mary Shelly, "Letter to J. H. Payne, June 11, 1826," *The Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley*, ed. Betty Bennett (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1980): 519. "I was agreeably disappointed in Velluti. I had expected pain, but rec'd extreme pleasure, he is handsome graceful & with the exception of one or two peacock notes, his tones are sweet & clear, & his expression infinitely sweet."

⁸⁹ It is important to note that the exact location of the lower end of the middle or mixed register is unclear. To the best of my knowledge there are no precise descriptions of where Velluti's chest register met his middle. I assign it a range of about a fifth, as this is in keeping with the *QMMR*'s descriptions of female middle registers, said by the same journal to be analagous to Velluti's.

Velluti's voice was, under duress, unpredictable. "His voice is like a sharp, harsh and ill-governed instrument, which alarms the ears with a constant expectation of its cracking."⁹⁰ The many different vocal effects of his disparate registers were a clear impetus for the poem "Velluti: Heard'st thou not the peacock's shriek?" The high tones are caricatured as "a squeaking rat," a "cricket squeak," or a "door-hinge creak" the low range is an "angry mastiff growl" or a "croaking frog." The combination is an unlikely hodgepodge of barnyard and falsetto-shrieking hand-puppet: frighteningly animalistic, inhuman and ludicrous. "A husky rook, a squeaking rat,/Famed Punch—a frog—a love-sick cat;/these form *thy* voice, VELLUTI."⁹¹

It was the middle, neither high nor low, where Velluti's registral navigation most often failed him. "The first tones he uttered fell upon the ear with a death-like peal. His opening recitative, 'Popolo d'Egitto, ecco a voi ritorno' seemed like the announcement of a return from the tomb. ... The recitative, however, as it usually falls in the most defective part of his voice, is least adapted to display his powers."⁹²

⁹⁰ *The London Magazine* 1826, 316.

⁹¹ *The Examiner* 1826, 124. For the full text of this poem, please see Appendix A.

⁹² *Parthenon*, 75.

Musical Example 3.3. "Popolo d'Egitto": Velluti's Opening Recitativo from Meyerbeer's *Il Crociato in Egitto*, mm 4- 12⁹³

The musical score is presented in three systems. Each system consists of a vocal line (treble clef) and a piano accompaniment (grand staff). The key signature is one sharp (F#), and the time signature is 4/4. The lyrics are written below the vocal line.

System 1 (Measures 4-6):
Vocal: Po - po-lo d'E-git-to ec-co ri-tor-no a voi
Piano: Accompaniment with a forte (f) dynamic marking.

System 2 (Measures 7-9):
Vocal: So-no quà vin-ci -
Piano: Accompaniment.

System 3 (Measures 10-12):
Vocal: tri - ci quel-le schie -re o Si-gnor che a me fi - das -te tut-to de pro di
Piano: Accompaniment with a piano (p) dynamic marking.

The opening recitativo lies almost entirely just under c", across the middle register as described by the *QMMR*, the *London Gazette*, Ayrton, Mount Edgcumbe and others. *The New Monthly Magazine* writes that the voice was

⁹³ Giacomo Meyerbeer, "Recitativo & Air CARO MANO DELL AMORE Sung with unbounded applause by SIGNOR VELLUTI in Meyerbeer's celebrated Opera IL CROCIATO IN EGITTO, arranged for forte piano by C. M. Sola" (London: G Longman, circa 1830s). All modern musical editions are my own.

harsh, out of tune and "in the lower tones ... there is a sourness of vibration."⁹⁴ Velluti's harsh, forced middle register was probably, when fatigued as he certainly was for the London premiere of *Crociato*, a region whose overlap contained more notes sung high in his chest voice than low in his falsetto, or in the lighter, more ductile mixed production so praised in his private singing.⁹⁵ It struck the ears and sensibilities of the King's Theater's audience and seems to have branded this entrance onto the collective memory. "People of Egypt, I return to you," crackingly and quaveringly sung was, in some circles at least, heard as the castrato's metonymic, ridiculous address to the London public: a preposterous ghost from an embarrassing, silly era.

⁹⁴ *New Monthly Magazine* 1825, 344-345. This article assigns Velluti a range of "barely two octaves," a-a", implying mild shock that a soprano voice could be so limited. Certainly, next to Garcia-Malibran, Pasta or Catalani—the voices to which his was most often contrasted—it lacks at least a third or fourth, as those singers apparently all sang at least to d". The lower range is less obvious and likely Velluti could sing as low or lower than any of them.

⁹⁵ Keidar et al., 231, have noted the tendency of the upper chest voice to sound "pressed" or "belted," immediately before the switch to falsetto.

Illustration 3.1. "SOME—THING!! peeping at NO—THING."⁹⁶



One of the published caricatures of Velluti memorializes this precise moment. "SOME—THING!!! peeping at NO—THING" depicts, according to the Victoria and Albert Museum in whose collection this cartoon resides, the voluptuous Harriett Mellon Coutts, after 1827 the Countess of St. Albans. She was a pulchritudinous actress who married an elderly banker, inheriting his wealth at his death a few years later. She was, at the time of Velluti's London

⁹⁶ Caricature: "Some-thing!!! peeping at No-thing" Website: *Victoria and Albert Museum*, Accessed October 29, 2015 @ <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O1137407/h-beard-print-collection-print-doublestone-dick/>. This image used with permission of the V&A, © Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

debut, a wealthy and influential socialite.⁹⁷ Her imputed lack of morals is clear in the "Some—Thing!!" designation—a thing, dehumanized and degraded by her behavior. Out of her mouth come the words "Really I can see nothing to admire about the Creature. He will never prove a loadstone of Attraction, for he is not perfect in his parts!!"

The disjunct voice, imperfect in its parts (the quadruple *entendre* on "parts" as it also refers to education, a man of parts, and Velluti's musical role, his part) and lying across a forced and malfunctioning middle register that is neither male nor female, parallels Velluti's missing testicles and maimed body. The humor is heavy-handed: a wanton, earthy and sinful woman would notice the missing testes, "a loadstone of Attraction," and speculate upon the impossibility of Velluti's ever satisfying a woman with sexual appetites.

Velluti is singing in the recitative here, sitting in a region of his voice bereft of the reassuring solidity either of his feminine and/or otherworldly falsetto or his masculine chest voice. Its cracking presence betrays a "No-Thing," nothing, possessing no physical or even spiritual existence. He is strangely chaste—not a scandalous "THING" like the scheming actress, but no thing, kept perpetually, ridiculously, preposterously pure by his dysfunction. Even the ever-present peacock is alluded to, in the posturing of a singer overdressed, with comically false mustachios: a painted cartoon of masculinity completely at odds with the "shrilly scream" of the voice itself.

⁹⁷ "Countess of St. Albans," Website: *Thepeerage*, accessed October 29, 2015 @ <http://www.thepeerage.com/p1169.htm#i11687>.

Though perceptions of Velluti's body are part of the primary focus of the next chapter, it is important to note here, in proximity to descriptions of his chest voice, that Velluti was consistently, even by friends, seen as lacking any kind of physical agency. Bacon in 1825 wrote that Velluti sometimes failed because his voice was simply too weak to support his aims. "The failure is in the organ, in the nature of the voice, or from the fact that his conception transcends the power of vocal expression." Though the lower notes of Velluti's voice had a masculine sound, they lacked a masculine vigor. "Signor Velluti's lower tones are finely cultivated, and would vie with his upper, did they not want the power which by contrast with tenors and bases, is always strongly anticipated by the hearer."⁹⁸

Velluti's tendency to sing flat seems to have been exacerbated by the necessity of being heard in the theater. *The Pantheon* was, after a fashion, more tolerant of this failing in 1825, saying that all male sopranos were "more or less susceptible" to it.⁹⁹ This seems at odds with most writing of the eighteenth century praising castrato singers, and certainly writing on one of the nineteenth century's other two important castrato singers as well (I exclude the elderly Luigi Marchesi's last few years on the stage). Girolamo Crescentini never seems to have been accused of this failure. Filippo Sassaroli, on the other hand, was frequently excoriated in German press accounts, from the middle of the 1810s, for singing more than a half-tone flat. Adolf Marx, in his 1824 review of Sassaroli's Berlin concert, notes that on higher tones, the longer they were held

⁹⁸ "Signor Velluti," *QMMR* 1825, 273.

⁹⁹ *Pantheon*, 29.

the more likely they were to sink in pitch, sometimes by more than a whole step.¹⁰⁰ Even the great Gaspare Pacchiarotti, the "divine Pacchiarotti" of Mount Edgumbe, the singer with whose memory Velluti was most often unfavorably contrasted, suffered from this failing. Catherine, Countess Solari, an Englishwoman married to a Venetian nobleman and diplomat, published her memoirs *Venice Under the Yoke of France and Austria* in 1824. Though she praises Pacchiarotti as an educated gentleman compared to the illiterate "animal" Marchesi, she admits that he almost invariably sang flat.¹⁰¹ This, she somewhat mysteriously says, was neither from a failure in technique or musicianship, but rather was due to "a metaphysical sensibility" to the text and music.¹⁰²

The comparative failure of Velluti in the King's Theater was counterbalanced by his success in private concerts. This phenomenon was common in the early nineteenth century, and indeed, much, much earlier. In 1685 John Evelyn sourly noted a very powerful female singer, a Mrs. Packer, whose voice was too much for the room, but would do "rarely well" in large church with the nuns.¹⁰³ Mount Edgumbe remembered that long after the great Rossinian mezzo-soprano Isabella Colbran's public voice had failed, she was still

¹⁰⁰ Marx, *Berliner AMZ 1824*, 111-114, may have been exaggerating slightly for effect.

¹⁰¹ While "animal" could be seen as an aspect of the dehumanization of the castrato, this is not the case, at least in Countess Solari's writing. For her this was an epithet for those lacking manners, class, education or some combination thereof. She calls most of her husband's male (intact, rather vigorously masculine) political opponents, especially the French ones, "animals."

¹⁰² Catherine, Countess Solari, *Venice Under the Yoke of France and Austria* Vol. 1 (London: G. and W. B. Whittaker, 1824): 141-143.

¹⁰³ John Evelyn, "January 28, 1685," *Diary of Evelyn* Vol. 2 (New York: M. Walter Dunne, 1901): 134. Coming from a strict Protestant and seeming to reek of Hamlet's dismissive "Get thee to a nunnery" this is a left-handed compliment at best, containing not only artistic censure, but a faint whiff of distaste for the hysterical female, out of control and dominating the room (and men listening to her) with her powerful body.

successful in private concerts, and that while the voice of Maria Caradori, the 1825 Palmide in *Crociato*, was too soft for his taste to be truly successful on stage, she was "perfect in a room."¹⁰⁴ Like Tosi, an intellectually gifted singer whose career was almost entirely conducted in private, courtly circles, Velluti's greatest moments, later in his career, were mostly "in a room."¹⁰⁵ The private voice was nuanced, mutable and multifaceted. Here is Stendhal on the private performance of Morlacchi's *scena* "Notte Tremenda" in Florence in 1823.

His *chef d'oeuvre* was the Romance in "Tebaldo ed Isolina," beginning "Notte Tremenda," and here it was that, by contrasts of tone and time, by bursts and suppressions of voice, by the most beautiful swells and attenuations, by transmutations of the passages, he displayed all his feeling, delicacy, and imagination, leaving the hearer unable to pronounce which of the three had the mastery.¹⁰⁶

The Emergence of the Tenor from the Castrato School of Singing

The revolution in singing that occurred in the second half of the nineteenth century, whereby the *comparatively* high, moveable laryngeal position that had been noted, explicitly, as early as Agricola in 1757 and Jean-Baptiste Berard in 1755, changed to an ever-increasing acceptance, eventually across all voice types, of a generally lowered or tilted laryngeal position. This occurred most prominently and spectacularly in the tenor voice.¹⁰⁷ Much has been written about

¹⁰⁴ Mount Edgcumbe, 144, 154.

¹⁰⁵ Stark, 4. This is a phenomenon Stark seems not to have taken into account when he dismisses Tosi's rather high-profile, courtly career as a minor one or Velluti as a "less-gifted" singer than his predecessors

¹⁰⁶ *NMM&LJ* 1834, 21.

¹⁰⁷ Stark, 40-41. Stark mentions Berard but not Agricola, though the latter clearly describes the rise and fall of the larynx. Agricola (Baird), *Anleitung*, 70-71.

the *ut de poitrine*, the chest voice high C (c'') of the French tenor Gilbert Duprez, famously heard in Paris in 1837 in the role of Arnold in Rossini's *Giullume Tell*.¹⁰⁸ In a spate of papers delivered in Paris in the early 1840s, Manuel Garcia contended with others for recognition as the first to note and describe this new phenomenon of the lowered laryngeal position, often called the *voix sombre* (dark voice) as opposed to the *voix claire* (clear or bright voice) of the high(er) laryngeal position.¹⁰⁹ The lowered larynx enabled the tenor to bring the weight, resonance and, to a degree, the production of the chest voice as far as c'' as opposed to earlier tenors who had generally switched to their falsetto around an f' or g'.

Velluti's short, flattering biography that appeared in the summer of 1825 in the *QMMR* was followed immediately by a letter to the editor "English and Italian Tone" signed by "R."¹¹⁰ It is deeply ambivalent in tone, striving for evenhandedness while trying to mediate between a deep-seated preference for an older style of vocal production—approvingly quoting from Bacon's *Elements of Vocal Science*, "which neither partakes too strongly of the lips, the mouth, the throat or the head"—and a fair appraisal of the new, "lower production" becoming common among English singers.¹¹¹ Though the language is figurative as opposed to the methodical, scientific terminology that Garcia would begin to use

¹⁰⁸ Stark, 41. John Potter, *Tenor*, 44-46.

¹⁰⁹ Manuel Garcia, *Gesang*, Vol. 1, 9.

¹¹⁰ *QMMR* 1825, 277-281. R could possibly be either Richard or Rose Bacon.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.* 277.

fifteen years later, this *seems* to describe a dichotomy of lowered laryngeal singing vs. the higher larynx.

Though preferring the less audible body in the "art" of the old school, R admits, "It appears to me that science [technique or artifice] and nature are at variance upon this point. The throat confers fullness, richness, body—the head, clearness and brilliancy."¹¹² The author continues "The fullest, richest and sweetest voice I know, is that of Miss Love—but it is certainly polluted by the throat and the mouth. No Italian would allow this tone to approach even to purity—yet it is very pleasing, not to say more pleasing than that of any other contralto singer." Continuing with a Miss Wilkinson, another, more extreme case than Miss Love, "The moment Miss Wilkinson breathes a note, a practised ear revolts—and Italian would clap his hand upon his throat, and exclaim 'gola!' [Throat!] It is nevertheless extremely doubtful whether this does not confer the chief excellence of her tone."¹¹³

Moving to tenors, R notes that Braham's voice is "in point of strength and quality, like that of Catalani, though nothing is more difficult than to apprehend distinctly the real properties of his true tone—so much does it vary from the standard in execution." Braham appears to have been a tenor who was able to change his laryngeal position, even schools of technique, at will, depending upon

¹¹² *QMMR* 1825, 277.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 278. I have been unable to identify either of these singers. Though both were active and often mentioned in musical journals in the mid-1820s, in keeping with the practice of the time, unmarried female singers' first names are almost never given—indeed, male singers' first names were also rarely published. "Miss Wilkinson" might come from the London theatrical family Wilkinson, at least half a dozen of whom sang under the name "Miss Wilkinson" starting in the late eighteenth century.

his technical or interpretive needs. Comparing him to tenor Lewis Sapio, R notes that with less power

Mr. Sapio has obtained fine quality (when he does not overstrain his voice), by a high Italian formation.¹¹⁴ The moment he forces it his intonation fails. This is not his defect alone—it is common to all voices—but the reason I mention it here is, because I think that voices formed high are liable to fail with less strain upon them than those which come more from the throat.¹¹⁵

A "high Italian formation" liable to go flat with any kind of excess strain is evocative of descriptions of Velluti's singing. It implies that the pre-Duprez tenor's technique was close to that of the castrato, a point Potter also makes, though largely through historical context rather than the specifics of technique.¹¹⁶

Reminiscent of the stern warnings to tenors earlier in this chapter, Lewis Sapio's too-audibly two-registered tenor voice was one whose artificial construction was particularly vulnerable to criticism. "Mr. SAPIO is a singer by acquirement rather than by nature; his voice is neither extensive nor strong, nor is its tone naturally good. ... [His] falsetto is not particularly pleasing to us; but this may arise from our admiring no feigned voice that does not blend with the natural one."¹¹⁷ R refuses to make a final judgment and chooses rather to point out the advantages and disadvantages of the "high" and "low" formations. Though an aesthetic

¹¹⁴ "Mr. Sapio," *The Georgian Era: Memoirs of the Most Eminent Person, who have Flourished in Great Britain, from the Accession of George the First to the Demise of George the Fourth* Vol. 4 (London: Vizetelly, Branston and Co., 1834): 540.

¹¹⁵ *QMMR* 1825, 280. Parentheses original.

¹¹⁶ John Potter, "The tenor-castrato connection, 1760-1860" *Early Music* 35 1 (Feb 2007): 97-110. In other words, Potter builds the historical case of castrato-to-tenor pedagogy also using the tenors I am using as examples, primarily Braham, Incledon and Rubini, but does not take the additional step of assuming a similar technique for bridging the chest to falsetto juncture.

¹¹⁷ Catherine Elizabeth Oxberry, ed., "Memoir of Mr. Sapio," *Oxberry's Dramatic Biography And Histrionic Anecdotes* Vol. 1 (London: G. Virtue, 1825): 256-257.

preference for the high, "artificial," brilliantly heady sound is clear, R's realization that this new, lowered-laryngeal, darker, throatier vocal production has distinct advantages prevents any definitive conclusions. The article appeared twelve years before Duprez thrilled Paris with his ringing high Cs. If even so staunch an advocate of the old school could struggle to defend it in the face of what appears to be the new, it is small wonder that in a relatively short period of time the traditional tenor would disappear from the stage.

Recall Domenico Crivelli and his insistence in 1825 upon "uniting the two registers (viz. voce di petto and falsetto) in such a manner as to render their junction or point of union imperceptible."¹¹⁸ This two-registered concept would disappear in Crivelli's 1841 edition of his treatise. The tenor-falsettist (John Potter prefers the term "tenor contraltino") was at times extravagantly represented on the English stage.¹¹⁹ In 1791, Josef Haydn complained about Charles Incledon's excessive use of falsetto, leading his less-talented colleague to attempt to imitate him. "The first tenor overdoes his falsetto—trilling on a high C [c"] and then going up to the G [g"]. The second tenor wants to imitate, but can't attach the falsetto to the natural voice."¹²⁰ Leigh Hunt, writing a quarter of a century later, was censorious of Incledon, using him as the *sine qua non* of a bad chest-to-falsetto in comparing him to William Pearman.

¹¹⁸ *QMMR* 1825, 218.

¹¹⁹ Potter, "Tenor-Castrato," 97-110.

¹²⁰ H. Robbins Landon, ed., *Joseph Haydn: Gesammelte Briefe und Aufzeichnungen* (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1965): 509. Landon identifies Incledon as the first tenor. Haydn may have been exaggerating somewhat, but the note itself was certainly thought possible. The g" is given as the theoretical limit for the tenor's "second voice" by Alexis de Garaudé, *Méthode complète de chant* (Paris: 1854): 9.

[Pearman's] falsetto will remind the public of Incledon's, which it surpasses in reach and sweetness. He plays upon it like a flute. His transition to it however from the natural voice is not happy. It is not indeed so violent as Incledon's, who in his leap from one to the other slammed the larynx in his throat, like a Harlequin jumping through a window shutter; but it is poor and unskillful; neither does he seem to care upon what sort of words or expression he does it, so as the note is such as he can jump up to.¹²¹

Regarding this "jumping": Incledon had an enormous break between his chest voice and his falsetto. Though he was "splendidly gifted by nature" with a voice "not only powerful, rich and *ductile* as gold, but his falsette was more exquisitely toned than that of any singer we ever heard," he was considered an awkward, abrupt singer and a vulgar, graceless man. This appears to have been mirrored in his falsetto-chest transition.¹²² "In this way ... he used to jump to his falsette by octaves, for the tone (it was that of a rich flute) was so widely different from his natural voice, there could be no junction."¹²³ Michael Kelly claimed to be the first tenor to sing a chest voice high A (a') but had, according to Dr. Samuel Arnold, organist and composer at the Chapel Royal, a voice "naturally bad...like the tearing of brown paper."¹²⁴ The high, tenorial chest voice was not to everyone's taste. Possibly Kelly, active in the late eighteenth century, had experimented with the lowered larynx with only mixed success.

For English critics, John Braham was *the* tenor of the first half of the nineteenth century. Not only was his voice powerful and flexible, but his chest-to-

¹²¹ Leigh Hunt, *The Examiner*, July 13, 1817, cited by Fenner, *Opera Criticism*, 95.

¹²² These observations about his personal character come from the *NMM&LJ* 1833, 254. By "transition" the author means merely change. The word is used often to describe abrupt and jarring changes and in this period does not have, unmodified, the connotation of smoothness.

¹²³ *NMM&LJ* 1833, 254.

¹²⁴ Book review: "Reminiscences of Michael Kelly," *QMMR* 1825, 475.

false transition was so good as to be imperceptible—at least as to where, exactly, the juncture lay. "If he ran through his whole compass by semitones, it was impossible to point out at what precise interval he took, or relinquished, the false, though the peculiar quality of that voice, when he rose high, was sufficiently perceptible."¹²⁵ Though Braham had no *perceptible* transition, it is clear that even he sang with two distinct registers, with a range of "20 notes...A to e-flat [A-e^b]," and that an *eventually* recognizable false was utilized even by this the greatest of the early Romantic English tenors.¹²⁶ His style of singing was neither *sui generis* nor was it the last of its type. The *NMM&LJ* notes that decades after he mastered his technique of chest and false singing, all tenors were using it. "The singers of Italy, of the present day [1833], do commonly what he introduced about thirty years ago."¹²⁷

There is ample evidence that Italian tenors also utilized a clearly identifiable false for their upper notes. The *NMM&LJ* in the above paragraph states specifically that Braham's method of chest voice and well-joined false (and the concomitant wide range it afforded) were common in Italy. In 1831, Giovanni David (or Davide) appeared at the King's Theater in Rossini's *Ricciardo e Zoriade*. Contradicting earlier accounts of David in Italian sources describing a

¹²⁵ *NMM&LJ* 1833, 254.

¹²⁶ John Potter makes the same point, to wit, that while the quality of vocal production in the transition in Braham's voice was, for a space of possibly several half-steps, such that it was impossible to hear whether he was using chest voice or false, above and below this range false and chest registers were clearly, audibly evident. Potter, "Tenor-Castrato," 103.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

narrower range without a falsetto extension, the forty-year-old singer, possibly to compensate for a failing upper chest voice, was utilizing an extensive falsetto.¹²⁸

We should not suppose the voice ever to have possessed great volume, and it is evidently much weakened by age. ... Its compass is extensive upwards, going into a very high falsetto, which is used with a perfect mastery in executing passages, combining it with the *voce di petto*, and is peculiarly sweet and effective in tone. In its use the singer not unfrequently reminds us of the manner of Velluti.¹²⁹

It is possible that the critic is referring not to the voice itself, but rather some other aspect of Velluti's singing—his delivery or nuance—but it seems a stretch to take this text at anything other than face value. David's aging-tenor falsetto sounded like Velluti's aging-castrato falsetto, if not necessarily in sound quality then certainly in the manner of transitioning between it and his chest voice, or in its deployment for effect. In 1834, the tenor Giovanni Battista Rubini, then forty, was at the King's Theater in Rossini's *Le Siège de Corinthe* (sung in Italian) opposite a younger rival, Nicola Ivanoff, then twenty-four. The praise for the younger tenor's voice seems at first glance strange and at odds with the idea of a tenor as a masculine, heroic voice. "The more we hear Ivanoff, the more we are struck at the extraordinary quality of his voice: it may be termed a *male-female* voice."¹³⁰ Though this seems gender-ambivalent, and is reminiscent of the castrato, the critic continues "Very different, for instance, to Velluti's—it has none of his

¹²⁸ Potter, "Tenor-Castrato," 104. John Rosselli, "Grand Opera," *Cambridge Companion to Singing*, ed. John Potter (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000): 98. However, given the clear and specific contradiction in the *Morning Post*, it may be that David, his high chest voice failing, was forced to return to his falsetto register to keep singing in the upper range and, like many singers, had strikingly different voices at different stages of his career.

¹²⁹ *Morning Post*, February 14, 1831.

¹³⁰ See the following chapter and A. B. Marx on the virago or "*Mann-Weib*" qualities in Sassaroli's voice. Emphasis in the original.

breaks, falsetto, or false intonation." Perhaps Ivanoff's registers disappeared so well into each other that the normally clear, somewhat gendered demarcations between masculine chest voice and feminine head voice were not in evidence, a *chiaroscuro* of a sort. Male-female, not male or female.

Critical rejection of Rubini's older, castrato-influenced vocal school of strongly demarcated chest and falsetto registers comes in an 1844 critique of Lorenzo Salvi (1810-1879). He is presented as another adherent of the new, chest voice-dominated, apparently single-registered tenor school of Duprez, though considerably less stentorian. The construction is odd, but the writer seems to be saying that Rubini is guilty of the "soprano screamings" of the Velluti school.

Compared with Rubini's, its range is limited, but the tone is music itself. ... Whoever expects to find Salvi a tenor of the Rubini school, will be disappointed. ... he attempts none of the falsetto whisperings and tremulous shoutings which made the wonder, as they constituted part of the charm, of Rubini's singing. ... And then the voice!—*sweet to the very verge of effeminacy, but not in the least degree effeminate*; for Salvi is a tenor, rightly so called, *who entirely rejects and repudiates the soprano screamings of the Velluti school*.¹³¹

The common assumption that tenors were replacing the castrato as an heroic ideal (with the intermediate presence of the female *musico*) is perhaps not as straightforward as it has been presented. The *chest voices* of the castrati have been shown to have been perceived as essentially masculine, tenorial or even baritonal in quality. The above evidence concerning the extensive falsetto extensions of the operatic tenor between approximately 1790 and 1840 shows

¹³¹ *Oxford University and City Herald* June 22, 1844. Emphases mine.

that the falsetto register of the castrato, here represented by Velluti, was sometimes experienced/heard as analogous in quality, or possibly merely in the tonal topos where it was situated, to the high, tenorial falsetto of Rubini et al. Looking back on Braham's long career, *The Atheneum* on 11 February 1843 specifically blamed the disappearance of the castrato in the early decades of the century for the sudden and dramatic increase of tenorial range through the utilization of the falsetto. (The writer does seem to absolve Braham of this vocal transgression—a historically conflicted position.)

In the days when he [Braham] was taught [in the 1780s and 90s], the *male soprano* was not extinct, while the feminine *contralto* was struggling up into an importance of which recent composers have deprived it: consequently there was no temptation for a tenor to stretch the voice upward to those extravagant heights of *falsetto* which the Rubinis of the more modern school have made so fashionable.¹³²

It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to determine whether the tenor was in fact tempted into a newly abandoned, dramatically rich tonal territory or whether the pedagogical historical fact of the last castrati teaching the new, Romantic tenors merely meant that much of the vocal technique was transferred. Braham and Incledon were, after all, students of Venanzio Rauzzini and Corri studied with (non-castrato) Porpora.¹³³ The overriding concern of pedagogues from Corfe and Corri to Bacon and Crivelli was, in the tenor voice, to bridge the gap between falsetto and chest voice. This seems little different, though separated by about a tritone [tenors at f[#] and castrati at c"], from Tosi's and

¹³² *The Atheneum*, February 11, 1843. Emphases original.

¹³³ Potter, "Tenor-Castrato," 32-34, notes this, but does not, at least as I understand him, make this connection.

Mancini's insistence upon bridging the gap between the falsetto and chest voice of the castrato. A castrato had a masculine sounding chest voice of more than an octave, extending upward to approximately c", possibly through a mixed middle register, after which he transitioned to a falsetto extending as high as d"". The tenor-falsettist began in a near-baritonal chest voice as low as A, sang in that production to f' or g', then transitioned to a falsetto extending, in extreme cases, to g".

It is likely that almost all of the castrato's operatic functions, not just that of the heroic figure, were filled not only by the female *musici* like Giuditta Pasta, or Maria Garcia Malibran, but simultaneously by the upwardly mobile tenor-falsettists like Rubini, Nourrit and David. The tenor-falsettist, along with the female *musico*, was not solely a near-heroic figure, a mid-point in the progression from castrato to female to heroic male, but was also, in certain areas of his range, a vocal analogue, tonally (approximating not quite the pitch level, but either the quality of the sound or the effect) reminiscent of the castrato.¹³⁴

¹³⁴ Henry Pleasants recognizes this relationship, with regard to Rubini, in *The Great Tenor Tragedy: The Last Days of Adolphe Nourrit As Told (Mostly) By Himself*, ed. Henry Pleasants, trans. Henry and Richard Pleasants (Portland, OR: Amadeus Press, 1995): 150. John Potter in "The Tenor-Castrato Connection," 97-110, also recognizes a pedagogical connection between the castrato and the tenor, but not an aural one. He does, interestingly, consider this high tenorial falsetto to have sounded much like the modern operatic countertenor. I am not entirely in agreement with this analogy, as the "operatic" countertenor of today also uses, to a significant degree, the lowered laryngeal position. Regarding "musico": this was, in the early nineteenth century, increasingly a role designation, taking the place of the "primo uomo" in the late eighteenth century. Dramaturgically speaking it is a predecessor of the trouser role, breeches part, *Hosenrolle* etc. Its meaning was slowly shorn of its coextensiveness with "castrato," just as "soprano" began to attach more to a vocal range than to a castrato singer. For a thorough discussion of this see Naomi André, *Voicing Gender*, 51-88.

Gilbert Duprez put an end (or a beginning to the end) to the inheritance of the castrati in male singing and to the high, falsetto tenor school with his 1837 *ut de poitrine*. Duprez claimed to have "found" the *ut de poitrine* in Italy in the early 1830s.¹³⁵ His rival Adolphe Nourrit was one of the last great exponents of the tenor-falsettist school. After Duprez's electrifying Parisian triumph, Nourrit decided that the old way of singing would no longer suffice. He went to Italy in hopes of finding his own *ut de poitrine*. Though R, writing in London in 1825, as well as Domenico Crivelli in the same year and place, present the Italian tenorial school as one of chest voice and falsetto, at a point not too far in the future if not simultaneously, this was being abandoned in Italy itself, despite Rubini's and David's still-dominant positions in the tenor stratosphere.

In 1838 Nourrit, in Venice, agreed to sing at a party hosted by Perucchini. Velluti promised not only to be present, but to sing. Nourrit wrote his wife that "Velluti is to be one of us, and to [be able to] hear ten measures of the last of the ... great singers of Italy, I would sing on my head."¹³⁶ At the party, far larger than Perucchini had promised, Nourrit sang Schubert. Velluti "made me the gallantry [compliment] to say that today the French sing better than his compatriots." Nourrit adds that "I took from the compliment what there was to take: although, in truth, I think it must be very painful for Velluti to hear the Italian style of today,

¹³⁵ Pleasants, *Tenor Tragedy*, 158-159.

¹³⁶ Louis Marie Quicherat, *Adolphe Nourrit: sa vie, son talent, son caractere, sa correspondance* Vol. 3 (Paris: Librairie de L: Hachette et C^{ie}, 1867): 109-110. "Velluti doit être de nôtres, et pour entendre dix mesures de dernier des ... grands chanteurs d'Italie, je chanterais sur la tête."

which is so far, so far from his method."¹³⁷ Nourrit, according to his letter, had a great success at this party and was pressed on all sides to stay in Italy. "Each one had his say, and Velluti said more than any."¹³⁸

Velluti had disappointed Nourrit that evening in another matter, however, as he complained of a cold and refused to sing. At Perruchini's house a day or two later, Velluti

sat himself at the piano, and let me hear a little Venetian *bacarole* that he ornamented with style, in a manner for which you could get an idea if you think of Pizzaroni [Pisaroni], Pasta and whatever was good about Madame Tacchinardi. He is certainly the master [teacher] of all the great female singers of this era; it is the tree that has produced all those beautiful fruits. I was ravished, and it was not a banal compliment that I made him when I said that I had just had a great lesson that I hoped never to forget. In my enthusiasm, I was about to tell him *that he was the last of the Romans*, but I stopped myself in time: the poor man might have taken it the wrong way.¹³⁹

From the letter's larger context of a vanishing style of singing, it is clear that Nourrit means that Velluti, a noble representative of a lost civilization, was the last of the Romans, but that he realized the obvious double meaning—the last of

¹³⁷ Quicherat, 112. "et m'a valu de grands compliments de la part de Velluti, qui m'a fait la galanterie de me dire qu'aujourd'hui les Français chantent mieux que ses compatriotes. J'ai pris de ce compliment ce qu'il fallait en prendre: quoique, en vérité, je pense qu'il doit être bien pénible à Velluti d'entendre la manière italienne d'aujourd'hui, qui est si loin, si loin de sa méthode."

¹³⁸ Quicherat, 112. "Encore nouvelles sollicitations pour m'engager à rester en Italie; chacun disait son mot, et Velluti en disait plus que tous."

¹³⁹ Quicherat, 112-113. "Velluti se plaignait d'un rhume, et n'a pas voulu chanter; mais hier matin, chez M. Peruchini, il s'est mis au piano, et m'a fait entendre une petite *bacarole* vénitienne qu'il a variée avec un goût, avec une méthode dont tu peux te faire une idée en te rappelant la Pizzaroni et al Pasta et ce qu'a de bon Mme Tacchinardi. C'est bien le maître de toutes les grandes chanteuses de l'époque; c'est l'arbre qui a produit tous ces beaux fruits. J'ai été ravi, et ce n'est pas un compliment banal que je lui ai adressé quand je lui ai dit que je venais de prendre une grande leçon, que j'espérais ne plus oublier. Dans mon enthousiasme, j'allais lui dire *qu'il était le dernier des Romains*, mais je me suis arrêté à temps: le pauvre homme aurait pu prendre la chose de travers." Emphases original.

the castrati, creatures of Rome, the Catholic Church and the Sistine Chapel—and stopped himself before committing the *faux pas*.

Nourrit, Rubini and other tenors of the two-register school were the rearguard of a way of singing whose ties to the castrati were direct and palpable. Nourrit's interview with Velluti is not notable for any melancholia on the part of the castrato, aside from his deprecation of Italian singing. Velluti is cheery and voluble, full of advice and encouragement. It is the worried Nourrit who, having left behind a lifetime of learning and achievement in an attempt to follow Duprez, is charmed at this brief seduction back into the ravishing world of the old Italian school and regrets its disappearance.

He left Velluti behind and apparently never mentions him again, continuing south in pursuit of the chest-voice high C. His voice rapidly deteriorated over the following year, and ironically enough it was at a benefit concert for Manuel Garcia (*fils*) at San Carlo in Naples on 7 March 1839 that he sang his final performance. Though he rallied for the final aria, most of the concert had been poorly sung and indifferently received. He was convinced that he'd permanently lost his audience and his voice. Garcia recalled the last concert and its aftermath: "The last aria—he sang it with supreme energy and eloquence, and the audience gave unanimous testimony to the pleasure it had received. But Adolphe [Nourrit] appeared just as mortified as before, and while his friends departed satisfied, he alone saw in this concert the sentence of death."¹⁴⁰ The morning after the concert

¹⁴⁰ Pleasants, "Letter from Manuel Garcia," *Tenor Tragedy*, 118.

he was in despair. "Is it not true...that I am losing my voice? No, I cannot fulfill the task that I undertook." He claimed that the warm welcome Italy (by extension, though unmentioned, Velluti and all the others at Perucchini's party) had given him "was from pity, a matter of generosity from nation to nation."¹⁴¹ The following morning, the 37-year-old Nourrit threw himself out of the top floor of his home, dying in the courtyard below.

Velluti, Falsettists, Countertenors and the Comparison of Voices

One of the aspects of criticism in English periodicals concerning and surrounding Velluti is the existence of direct comparisons of his singing, not only to the tenor-falsettists who dominated the stage at both the Italian and English operas, but also to falsettists as well as countertenors singing with varying technical means, chest *and* falsetto in England in the 1820s.¹⁴² The late-career appearances of Velluti and Sassaroli *outside* their normal geographical range of activity—for Velluti, London, and for Sassaroli, Berlin—compelled musical writers to attempt to describe with as much exactitude as possible a voice that their readers likely had never heard and probably never *would* hear. Just as Nourrit praised, or nearly praised, Velluti for being the last of the Romans, these writers often show a keen awareness of their historically privileged positions as auditors of a sound that they frequently hoped would soon disappear forever.

¹⁴¹ Pleasants, "Letter from Manuel Garcia," *Tenor Tragedy*, 122.

¹⁴² See chapter 2 for the comparison of Velluti to (possibly) Karl Blumenfeld at the premiere of *Il vero omaggio* in Verona in December 1822.

Descriptions of music in words—an ekphrasis of a less common type—are probably viewed with greater skepticism than the common and well-known ekphrastic examples from the late, literary Romantics. These describe works of art, as in Keat's *Ode on a Grecian Urn* or, from a slightly later period, John Ruskin's review/recreation of Turner's painting *The Slave Ship*. The value writers of this musical, vocal ekphrasis *themselves* placed upon their writing, despite the struggles they confess to having but whose difficulties they appear to have considered to have at least partially conquered, encourages us, two centuries later, to read their efforts with as much seriousness as that with which they wrote them.

Stendhal in 1824 agonized over his limited ability to describe voices and manners of singing. He does not say that he utterly fails, merely that he does not succeed as well as those who write about things like geometry or even painting.

Who knows, therefore? Perhaps in our own day some genius will master the secret art of describing with sublime accuracy the rare and individual gifts of Mademoiselle Mars or of Madame Pasta; and so, a hundred years hence, these miraculous virtues will continue to live on in the memory of man, as intact and as sharply personal as ever.

An exact and individual record of the voices of our great *prime donne* (should such a thing become possible) would not only profit their own celebrity, but would open the road directly to vast and unlooked-for progress in the art of singing as a whole. ... This process of transmission is already fully-developed in respect to a Euclid or a Lagrange; for a Raphael, a Canova, a Morghen, it is no more than partially available; yet may we hope, one day to see it fully established even for the art of a Davide, a Velluti or a Madame Fodor?¹⁴³ Perhaps the first step in the right

¹⁴³ Euclid: an ancient Greek mathematician, Lagrange: an eighteenth-century Italian mathematician, Raphael: an Italian Renaissance painter, Canova: a late eighteenth-century

direction may lie in the development of a new style of writing *about* singing—a style which is *simple* and free of turgid rhetoric.¹⁴⁴

Although I have already quoted many descriptions with respect to the sounds of Velluti's registers, comparing him to everything from squeaking rats to fine, female sopranos, there are also direct comparisons of his sound to that of male falsettists. The 7 July 1825 *Dorset County Chronicle* struggles to provide an aural picture, or more precisely, to reference known analogues. "The voice of Signor Velluti is not easy satisfactorily to describe. It is not a boy's voice, nor a woman's voice; it is not a *soprano*, nor a counter-tenor, nor a treble. What approaches nearest to it in tone is a high *false* voice of a man, without much richness, but with compass, power, and flexibility."¹⁴⁵ This echoes what A.B. Marx wrote about Sassaroli the year before in Berlin, that certain, loudly sung notes in the Dresden castrato's voice sounded like a male falsetto. These two primary sources sharply contradict Potter and Laura DeMarco, both of whom try to draw a sharp, absolute distinction between the sound of the male falsetto and the sound of the castrato.¹⁴⁶ This rhetorical line in the sand is one of the more persistent and, to an extent, flawed stances in modern musicological writing about the nature of the castrato soprano voice.

Italian sculptor, Morghen: a late eighteenth-century/early nineteenth-century engraver, and Fodor: a nineteenth-century mezzo-soprano.

¹⁴⁴ Stendhal, *The Life of Rossini*, ed. and trans. Richard Coe (London: John Calder, 1985) 330-331. There is, admittedly, a warning for the modern writer to heed in his description of musical writing as "turgid rhetoric." Emphases original.

¹⁴⁵ *Dorset County Chronicle* July 7, 1825. Orthography and emphases original.

¹⁴⁶ Potter, "Tenor-Castrato." Laura DeMarco, "The Fact of the Castrato and the Myth of the Countertenor," *Musical Quarterly* 86 (2002): 174-185.

In 1827/8 a vocal quartet calling itself The Bohemian Brothers sang a series of concerts in London briefly satirized in Charles Dickens's *Pickwick Papers*.¹⁴⁷ The *Dorset County Chronicle* reported that two of the "brothers," the tenor and countertenor singing the inner voices, were unremarkable. The "*basso cantate*" was generally well received, but the singer whose voice aroused the most comment was he whom the papers called "The Bohemian Velluti."¹⁴⁸ He was a "Soprano and man of authority among the party. His treble is perfect and so acute, that he might be taken for a near relative of Signor Velluti. But his shrill falsetto is far from being pleasing: in the streets, to which his voice probably more habituated, his efforts might, in all likelihood, have a better effect."¹⁴⁹ After a period of study with Nicholas Bochsa (the son of a Bohemian oboist), the "brothers" appeared at a much publicized, apparently semi-staged concert at the Argyle Rooms in November 1828. The concert appears to have had something of the aspect of a music-hall variety show, as between each number the Brothers retired into a set built to approximate a Bohemian cottage in a glade. After praising the soprano falsettist's instrumental flexibility, the critic writes that he "sings as high as Velluti, and his tones are fuller and sweeter than that admired singer's."¹⁵⁰ The critic prefers the *quality* of the falsettist's high notes to Velluti's, but does not, crucially, say that the two voices are different in any *quantitative* sense. The falsettist had a sweeter voice as well as a more powerful one. A

¹⁴⁷ See chapter 2, 123-124.

¹⁴⁸ There is no evidence that this singer ever called himself "The Bohemian Velluti."

¹⁴⁹ *NMM&LJ* 1828, 64-65.

¹⁵⁰ *Morning Post* November 17, 1828.

better version, in other words, of the same thing. Though he was singing the top line in a quartet, there seems to be no acknowledgement of a singing technique that is fundamentally different from a soloist's, be it in opera, oratorio or concert singing. The Argyll Rooms were, as was seen in chapter 1, one of Velluti's favorite concert venues. As noted at the beginning of this chapter, vocal production seems, in the abstract, to have been fairly uniform across all genres, excepting possibly the cathedral choir.

Another critic saw the falsettist as a sham in a harsh review frequently quoted that winter in other periodicals. Calling the ostensibly Bohemian falsettist "Signor Soprano," the critic ignores his purported nationality and transports him to Italy, linguistically transforming him into a castrato.

To ... astonish the natives, there is a soprano, with a sham voice which is altogether a falsette, at the other extremity [from the bass], who is a still greater pig; his squeak, in vile imitation of Velluti, is unparalleled. The whole four make a noise together; as for being in concert, there is no such thing;—sometimes the middle two sing in unison; but the grand effort is, when Signor Soprano utters chuck, chuck, chuck, as if he were calling to fowls around him, and then he squeals, and bass throws in a growl, enough to make the audience exclaim, "Well, we never did hear anything like this before!"¹⁵¹

Aside from this rather doubtful stage-Bohemian (almost all articles about the cast doubt on their nationality), I have been unable to discover other soprano falsettists singing in England at this time aside from the occasional music-hall comedian executing a falsetto imitation of Velluti for a single song. But there

¹⁵¹ *The London Gazette and Journal of the Belles Lettres of 1828* (London: James Moyes, 1828): 763.

were at least two falsettists, one with considerable soprano capabilities, singing in musical comedies or *Posse* (farces) on German and Austrian stages.

Angelica Catalani's enormous fame had inspired a *Posse* by Ignaz Schuster in Vienna in 1819. Various titles *Die falsche Katalani*, *Die falsche Prima Donna* or *Die falsche Diva in Krähwinkel*, or simply *Die Krähwinkliade*, the piece was presented contemporaneously with Velluti's late career in most of the major theaters in German-speaking Europe. An impudent young student, appropriately named "Lustig," disguises himself as Catalani in order to fool the music-loving but rather vulgar and pathetic *Bürgermeister* to allow the marriage of his daughter to a man of whom he disapproves. In a performance in Dresden, the title role was taken by an otherwise unknown actor-singer named Keller.

One of the great attractions of the day is, the admirable performance of M.[onsieur] Keller in the part of *Die Falsche Katalani*, in which his extraordinary falsette is called so effectively into play, in the imitation of this distinguished singer. The manner in which he imitates the various styles of Italian singing, and in particularly the laborious fidelity with which he gives the well-known variations of Rode, as executed by this singer, is altogether marvelous.¹⁵²

A manuscript score of *Die falsche Prima Donna*, from the same period and probably the version sung by Keller, is held at the Sächsische Landesbibliothek–Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Dresden. There are no variations from Rode, but the famed *Paradestück* for Catalani and Velluti of the 1810s, Paisiello's "Nel

¹⁵² *Harmonicon* 1825, 211. The reviewer is referring to the variations for violin by Pierre Rode, published originally in 1794.

cor più non mi sento" from the opera *La Molinara*, is parodied in Act II, no. 9.¹⁵³

Given the alternating dialogue, musical number structure of the work and the comparative dearth of music here assigned to "Katalani," it is likely that many arias and musical scenes were interpolated and not included in this score.¹⁵⁴

Keller seems to have just been a local performer, however, as the far more prominent Catalani impersonator was the soprano falsettist Karl Blumenfeld (d.1860). After the Viennese premiere in 1819, Blumenfeld sang the role in Bremen, Leipzig, Rostock, Weimar, Frankfurt, Munich and many other cities.¹⁵⁵ It may have been Blumenfeld whom the elderly Austrian officer, unnamed by John Ebers who reports the story, was referring to when he said about Velluti's performance in Rossini's *Il vero omaggio* in Verona in 1822, "Yes, it is good—but I know a man at Vienna that would sing it as loud again [twice as loudly]!"¹⁵⁶

In 1825 Blumenfeld was mentioned on equal terms with Rubini in a review praising the former's performance in "*Die Falsche Prima Donna*, in which M. Blumenfeld gave the part of the pseudo-Catalani with very great effect; his soprano falsetto is of the most extraordinary kind, and enables him to imitate this great singer in a manner that is altogether astonishing."¹⁵⁷ Rubini garners fainter

¹⁵³ Ignaz Schuster, MS *Die Falsche Prima Donna* (Dresden: ca. 1825) Dresden, Sächsische Landesbibliothek – Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Dresden, D-DI, 4389/F/1.

¹⁵⁴ Indicating two different falsettists may have sung this, perhaps including the more famous Blumenfeld, pencil instructions on the first page of the variations on "Nel cor più non mi sento" call for transposing the entire number a major third higher, from a low-mezzo soprano E-flat major to the undeniably soprano range of G major. See chapter 5 for a partial transcription of this aria.

¹⁵⁵ L. Schneider, *Deutsche Bühnen-Almanach* (Berlin: Verlag von Ed. Bloch, 1861): 40. The short notice of Blumenfeld's death from typhus in 1860 gives his age as 74, putting his birthyear around 1786, though other sources give his birthyear as 1800.

¹⁵⁶ Ebers, *Seven Years*, 264. See chapter 1.

¹⁵⁷ *Harmonicon* 1825, 57.

praise in the next sentence for "appear[ing] to great advantage" in Rossini's *La Donna del Lago*.¹⁵⁸ In Leipzig in 1827, Blumenfeld sang to a delighted provincial audience that had just hosted Sontag. After praising Sontag's "Donna Anna" in *Don Giovanni*, the critic continued "We had also a visit from M Blumenfeld, so celebrated for his musical powers and falsetto voice; he delighted overflowing houses in *Die falsche Catalani*, and *Die Wiener in Berlin*, both pieces of considerable humour, and not deficient in musical excellence."¹⁵⁹

Illustration 3.2. Karl Blumenfeld as "Die falsche Catalani"¹⁶⁰



What seems clear from these English music correspondents, surely conversant with English vocal registral designations, is that this male falsetto,

¹⁵⁸ *Harmonicon* 1825, 57.

¹⁵⁹ *Harmonicon* 1827, 141-142.

¹⁶⁰ Carl Pfeiffer, Detail from copperplate etching: "Karl Blumenfeld als *Die falsche Prima Donna in Krähwinkel*" (Vienna: Carl Pfeiffer nach B. von Schrötter, ca. 1819). Original in the author's possession.

capable of convincingly, even astonishingly mimicking virtuosic femininity, must not have significantly differed in their perception from the identically named falsetto of the tenors Incledon, Rubini, Braham, Pearman, David et al. Blumenfeld regularly appeared on the same stages as Rubini singing Catalani's arias—both repertoire and context are comparable, if not perfectly so.

More importantly, Blumenfeld's soprano falsetto was at least once compared to the sound of a generic castrato—though neither emerged from the experienced unscathed. "[Blumenfeld's] raspy though cultivated and well-practiced falsetto singing [*Fistuliren*] reminds one of a ruined castrato who loves wine."¹⁶¹ This comparison came from a Munich correspondent on 22 March 1824, just five years after Velluti sang there to great acclaim. Some critics in England found Velluti's sound comparable to falsettists and to the high falsetto of the tenor, and Marx heard something similar in Sassaroli's voice. Nevertheless, the comparison to "countertenors," literally, is rare, concurrent with Velluti's time in London. Fortunately for history and unfortunately for him, William Knyvett, a falsettist and the most famous English "countertenor" of the early nineteenth century, had to endure a direct, explicit comparison to the castrato.

To judge of his [Velluti's] voice, the hearer should be free from prejudice—for if the falsette in all cases is at variance as it were with our expectations, even when partially employed and for a few notes, the prejudice or principle, to it which it may, will operate more strongly when we listen to a song wholly in that species of voice. And let not this be thought peculiar to hearing Velluti. The sense of feebleness always has

¹⁶¹ *Der Gesellschaftler, oder, Blätter für Geist und Herz: ein Volksblatt* (Berlin: Maurerschen Buchhandlung, 1824): 236. "[S]ein heiseres, aber dabei doch kunstfertiges und geübtes *Fistuliren* mahnt an einen verdorbenen Castraten, der den Wein liebt."

possessed us when we have heard a counter-tenor song from Mr. William Knyvett or any other falsette singer. But we have never heard tone at once so pure and delicate, so sweet and brilliant, as parts of the scale of Signor Velluti.¹⁶²

Here the *QMMR* implicates both the castrato and the "falsette singer" as engendering a sense of feebleness in the listener. Proceeding further using the registration descriptions of the previous sections, the falsetto of Velluti (hearing "a song wholly in that species of voice") is as a species of vocal sound not fundamentally different from, just better—sweeter, purer, more delicate and more brilliant—than, the sound of falsettist William Knyvett singing about a third or fourth lower. A falsetto is a falsetto is a falsetto, at least in the voice of a man or man-analogue. Note that the article is not saying that the falsettist countertenor is less powerful, merely less good in a variety of ways. The two falsetto sopranos already mentioned were both considered to be considerably louder than Velluti, Blumenfeld by implication (in 1822) and the "Bohemian Velluti" explicitly (in 1828). Bacon wrote in 1823—before he had ever heard Velluti—regarding the male falsetto in various voice types that "of the artificial falsette [the castrato] I do not speak. It is now, happily for humanity, unknown in England; nor, I do hope and believe, will my countrymen ever again endure such a degradation [*sic*] of their species."¹⁶³ The judgment of critics in *The Morning Post* and *The Dorset County Chronicle* concerning the Bohemian Brothers' falsetto soprano was that

¹⁶² *QMMR* 1825, 271.

¹⁶³ Bacon, *Elements of Vocal Science*, 89.

this falsettist was an imitation Velluti—good or bad, but in both cases the likeness was unmistakable.

In 1871, John Edmund Cox, an elderly music *aficionado*, recalled Velluti's voice:

The quality of his tone was that of the male countertenor, and was somewhat unequal in portion—particularly in the middle—of his register, which extended from A on the upper line of the bass clef to A [a-a"] above the treble staff—just two octaves; the upper part of the compass, from C to G [c"-g"], when I heard him, being the most clear and resonant. ... His lower tones, which resembled those of the female contralto, were well cultivated, and would have been equal to his upper notes, had they not wanted the power which, by contrast with tenors and basses, is always strongly anticipated in by the hearer.¹⁶⁴

As is immediately apparent, Cox leaned heavily upon earlier accounts of Velluti: Ebers, Mount Edgcumbe and the *QMMR*. He did, however, claim to have heard Velluti himself, and the remarks about the voice sounding like a "male countertenor" and the lower tones resembling those "of the female contralto" appear to be his alone. That the chest register of Velluti's is heard as similar to a woman's chest register is somewhat surprising but that should not be understood as sounding like a modern contralto. If any hearable exemplar were left, I expect it would be something like the unabashed chest voice in contralto Dame Clara Butt's 1917 recording of "Ombra mai fu" from Handel's *Serse*, or even better, her 1927 recording of the spiritual "Deep River."¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁴ John Edmund Cox (uncredited), "Musical Recollections of the last Half Century," (excerpt printed in) *Tinsley's Magazine*, February-July 1871, 633. The book was published the following year. John Edmund Cox, *Musical Recollections of the last Half Century* (London: Tinsley Brothers, 1872).

¹⁶⁵ Dame Clara Butt, "Ombra mai fu," Website: *Youtube*, Accessed December 7, 2015 @ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XX4fEC_zwck. "Deep River." Website: *Youtube*, Accessed

The "male countertenor" sound in Velluti's voice is more problematic and points to two possibilities. The first, dismissive and simplistic, is that though Cox had a concept of countertenor sound as a falsetto voice, his concept was at variance with and uninformed by the standards of his time. Given the solidity of his other observations and significant research evidenced, this seems unlikely. The second explanation, the feasibility of which the following section will attempt to demonstrate, is that the *concept* of the countertenor voice was, by 1871, of an essentially falsetto production. Cox applies the term "male countertenor" to the entire voice, though as he says the low notes sound like a contralto, the implication is that the high notes are what sound the most like a "male countertenor."

Just What Was a Countertenor in 1820s London?

I proceed here from an acceptance of the arguments of Andrew Parrott, Olive Baldwin, Thelma Wilson, Timothy Morris and many others, who all concur that the countertenor in seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was preferably, though not exclusively, a chest-voice production singing in what today would be considered a low alto/high tenor range.¹⁶⁶ It is quite possible that the late

December 7, 2015 @ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-IWgWGkKBY>. I thank Robert Hill for pointing me to Dame Clara's "Ombra mai fu."

¹⁶⁶ Olive Baldwin and Thelma Wilson, "Purcell's Stage Singers," *Performing the Music of Henry Purcell* ed. Michael Burden (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1995): 109. Timothy Morris, "Voice Ranges, Voice Types, and Pitch in Purcell's Concerted Works," *Performing Purcell*, 140. Andrew Parrott, "Performing Purcell," *The Purcell Companion* ed. Michael Burden (London: Faber & Faber, 1995): 385-444. All of the above cited authors make the same assumption, namely, that the Alfred Deller school of exclusively falsetto modern countertenors was still the standard for all

eighteenth/early nineteenth-century singer Charles Knyvett (William and Charles Knyvett's father) was an example of a tenor-falsettist who at least occasionally sang "countertenor."¹⁶⁷ In 1834, recalling the *Messiah* commemoration concert for Handel's (supposed) 150th birthday, Mount Edgcumbe, now seventy, preferred the 1784 Westminster Abbey Handel Centennial of his youth to the 1834 celebration.

There being no good counter-tenor, the song "He was despised," which is generally given to that voice, was assigned to a female contralto, a Miss Masson, who sung [*sic*] it correctly, but without feeling. As it is within the compass of a tenor, Harrison, Knyvett, and others having sung it, Braham might have taken it, and would have given it all its deeply pathetic expression, which is totally lost.¹⁶⁸

countertenors. This was already changing by 1995, with younger singers like Derek Lee Ragin or Brian Asawa both using their chest voices and, especially Ragin, having achieved notable prominence. John Potter also makes the point in "The Tenor-Castrato Connection" that the tenor voice often held up as the ideal, historically informed choice for the countertenor is in truth a modern, chest voice production utilizing the *voix sombre* of the lower larynx and is not, thus, a truly historically informed choice. If that voice still exists at all, it most probably is in the ranks of the untrained, naive voices of pop singers, some choral singers and high male chest voices in other, non-classical genres. A beguiling possibility is the "high lonesome" sound of the first tenor in Kentucky Bluegrass—a point also made to me by Anthony Heilbut, though he used the parallel example of the gospel quartet's first tenor.

¹⁶⁷ "Alto," as a choral or glee part designation, does not seem to have been frequently used in English writing this period. Far more common was either countertenor or contr'alto.

¹⁶⁸ Richard Edgcumbe, Lord Mount Edgcumbe, *Musical Reminiscences of an Old Amateur* 4th Edition (London: John Andrews, 1834): 281-282. Simon Ravens, *The Supernatural Voice* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2014): 168-169, misreads this as a reference to William Knyvett, possibly as he cites from John Potter's *Tenor*, 41, and not from the original source. Two pages earlier Mount Edgcumbe reports "Mrs. W. Knyvett" as having sung "the recitative 'There were shepherds.'" Standard usage for the early nineteenth century, when some or all of the Knyvett men, Charles, Charles Jr. and William, as well as William's wife were being written about would have been "Knyvett" for Charles Knyvett, senior, and Wm. or W. Knyvett and C. or Chas. Knyvett for the two sons (and Mrs. W. Knyvett for William's wife). To be fair, Potter does not identify any of the Knyvetts in his quote—he is not concerned with them. This misidentification does, however, tend to take away most of the force of Ravens's assertion, stemming as it does almost entirely from this single, misunderstood citation that he calls "most revealing," that tenors and countertenors could still be considered largely interchangeable in 1834 and both used primarily the chest voice. Mount Edgcumbe was an elderly man, pining for the golden age of singing of his youth, for Pacchiarotti especially, and his opinions were rarely harmonious with those current in the 1820s and 1830s. In any case, he explicitly *does not* consider the voices interchangeable, but rather sees the violent passion of the song too powerful for a *female* singer, no matter how "correct," to fully realize. (Regardless of the fact that Mrs. Cibber was the first

Mount Edgcumbe dwells largely in the past in his account of the 1834 *Messiah*, adding that "on one of the former occasions it was executed to perfection by [contralto castrato] Rubinelli."¹⁶⁹ In other words, he expresses a preference for a tenor-falsettist but remembers an contralto castrato as the ideal. Either voice would use a great deal of chest voice in this aria whose highest note is a very brief c", the castrato possibly exclusively.

In 1820 an article titled "Preliminary Remarks on Counter-Tenor Singing" appeared in the *QMMR*. It outlines four possible practitioners of this voice before launching into a "memoir" of the early nineteenth century's most prominent "countertenor," William Knyvett (1779-1856).¹⁷⁰ Speaking always and literally of "countertenors" of various types, the writer says:

From the introduction of the Italian opera into this country till nearly the close of the last century, this part of a musical performance was

singer of this aria.) As no "good counter-tenor" (Mount Edgcumbe's judgment, not necessarily the opinion of the commemoration concert's organizers) was available, it was better that the aria be sung by a tenor, even one using some falsetto—namely Braham who, when he used the falsetto, became a "counter-tenor *pro tempore*" in the *QMMR* 1820, 470. Ironically, Peter Giles, *The Countertenor* (London: Frederick Muller Ltd, 1982): 48-50, makes exactly the same error, Knyvett senior vs. Wm. Knyvett, conflating the two, in making precisely the opposite point, namely, that the countertenor was at that point, and well back into the seventeenth century, an all-falsetto production.

¹⁶⁹ Mount Edgcumbe, *Reminiscences* 1834, 282.

¹⁷⁰ Raven, 163, believes these "Preliminary Remarks" and the memoir of Knyvett to be mostly the work of Knyvett himself, and indeed, their (very) slight preferencing of the falsetto countertenor might be seen as supporting his contention. He does not cite a source for this, however, and I have been utterly unable to discover anything that suggests that these two articles (which Raven rather confusingly, though understandably from his perspective, conflates) were written by anyone other than a member of the *QMMR* staff. The writing style is assured, professional, and very like that periodical's. The *QMMR*'s stance on the issue is *also* to tend to admit that, though the preferred countertenor, theoretically, is a high chest voice, the practical reality in the 1820s was that most countertenors were falsettists, and had been for a considerable period of time—a period of time outside of living memory. Bacon, in his *Elements of Vocal Science*, 89, originally published as "Letter 6," *QMMR*, 1822, 266, largely repeats this description of the countertenor as "usually the voce di testa, or falsette," already quoted, tending to reinforce my belief that these two articles, as well as their footnotes, are Bacon's and/or his daughters', and not of Knyvett, who was a publisher of his own music, but apparently not of any writings on music.

sustained, as circumstances directed, by three different species of voice, though of the same general pitch—by Castrati, by females with low soprano voices, and by men using the falsette. The natural counter-tenor might also be enumerated, for we have heard those who could ascend to B [b'] in the natural voice, but the examples have of late become so rare as rather to afford exceptions, than to fall in the with the rule. The compass of the countertenor is from A to C and D [a–c"/d"], or even to E [e"], an octave and a fifth, but it is rarely so extensive except in females.¹⁷¹

Referring possibly to the lowering of the castrato voice with age, and the often-concomitant expansion of the chest voice at the expense of the falsetto, the *QMMR* includes Pacchiarotti (or Pacchiarotti's private performances as a tenor, reported by Burney), whose final London performances were when the singer was in his fifties, and Roselli, the last London castrato before Velluti, among the castrato countertenors. The writer then adds Gaudagni, late in his career. "His voice had sunk to a contralto. He was a man of infinite taste, with a delicious and fine volume of voice."¹⁷² For women, the writer offers Grassini as representative of the "low soprano," the "finest example in our time" of the countertenor in its female variant.¹⁷³

The *QMMR*, though it does not prefer it, also does not shortchange the primarily falsetto version of the "countertenor" voice.

The voice at present most in repute and most employed is the falsette, which is sweet and brilliant in its tones, but rarely powerful, and occasionally apt to go out of tune. The few natural counter-tenors we have heard have generally been coarse, and produced, as it appeared, by

¹⁷¹ "Preliminary Remarks on Counter-Tenor Singing," *QMMR* 1820, 468.

¹⁷² *QMMR* 1820, 469.

¹⁷³ Richard Bacon, *Elements of Vocal Science*, ed. Edward Foreman (Champaign, Pro Musica Press, 1966: 1824): 86. Bacon divides the soprano into three voices, the "high treble, the mezzo or middle, and the low or contralto."

strong effort, impure and *throaty*, the expedient to which singers who wish to increase their volume have but too often recourse.¹⁷⁴

The writer compares the 1820s falsetto countertenors unfavorably to those (presumably chest-voice singers) described by "the historians of music" whose "grand effects...we never experienced," and resists granting them, however dominant they might now be, the status of ideal countertenor.¹⁷⁵ The writer *does* grant Braham countertenor status of a sort, saying a normal tenor "would be gruelled by "'Sing all ye Muses,' one of the finest of [Purcell's] compositions, though never sung, unless like Mr. BRAHAM he could assist his natural voice by his falsette, and convert himself in truth into a counter-tenor *pro tempore*."¹⁷⁶

In his *Elements of Singing*, Bacon voiced tacit approval of the two-register countertenor in perhaps the first-ever explicit description of this voice, saying that, for the falsetto countertenor, the juncture between chest voice and falsetto is at approximately c'.¹⁷⁷ One of the peculiarities of Bacon and his contemporaries' view of the countertenor is that while the ideal consistently expressed was of a very high chest voice, beyond the abilities of most tenors, those men described as actually singing countertenor were either falsetto

¹⁷⁴ *QMMR 1820*, 469-470. Emphasis original. This supports the theory (among others, offered by Ravens) that the throaty (or imperfectly executed) lowered larynx production was first used by "cathedral" countertenors attempting to sing only in chest voice. This passage is largely a restatement of Bacon's *Elements of Vocal Science*, 89. "The counter-tenor is the highest male adult voice, and is usually the voce di testa, or falsette. A good falsette will extend to E in alt [e"], the range below being uncertain. Sometimes the lowest soprano, termed the contralto, takes the counter-tenor parts."

¹⁷⁵ "Counter-Tenor," *QMMR 1820*, 470.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Bacon, *Elements*, 70.

countertenors or, occasionally, tenors with prominent falsetto extensions.¹⁷⁸

Practice and theory seem to have remained at variance throughout the 1820s and 1830s.

William Knyvett, after 1802 composer to the Chapel Royal, was a popular concert soloist and gleeman (singers of partsongs for three or four voices) with a "natural voice...as we have understood, a base [*sic*], but distinguished of no superiority."¹⁷⁹ The writer sees Knyvett's voice as an artificial construct, a voice created rather than born, recalling the earlier analysis of Lewis Sapio's falsetto-tenor. "Mr. W. K. therefore [as his bass voice was not very good] preferred to avail himself of the falsette which usually accompanies the bass, and by indefatigable industry and sound science, he may be said almost to have created his counter-tenor."¹⁸⁰ This mirrors, for the normal male voice, the implications of Tosi's writing; the difference between an contralto and a soprano castrato was often a matter of will, of choice and training, rather than of fate dictated by nature. The *QMMR* believed the countertenor as it existed in Purcell's time to have been extinct in the 1820s, and rationalizes its disappearance by valorizing the present. "The greater delicacy which the polished taste of our own age requires" made those voices "coarse in proportion as they were powerful" fall out of favor. A pre-

¹⁷⁸ The difference is significant as, according to the differing junctures as described in the 1820s, the falsettist would switch at a c' and the tenor-falsettist at an f' or g', a perfect fifth in the middle of the range sounding, in all likelihood, very different from one practitioner to the next. An ideal countertenor, if he ever existed, would never audibly leave his chest voice.

¹⁷⁹ "Mr. William Knyvett," *QMMR* 1820, 472.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

echo of MacCauley's English gentleman in 1685: the Restoration countertenor was uncouth, his revival in the 1820s impossible.¹⁸¹

Though the writer in the *QMMR* dismisses the brutish, all-chest-voice countertenor imagined in English history, she or he also deprecates Knyvett's power. "The tone is pure, sweet, and brilliant, but in point of volume it is so limited, that one never hears Mr. K. in a song without lamenting its want of power."¹⁸² The writer reported that the aria "Jehovah crowned" from Handel's *Esther* suffered from Knyvett's lack of volume.¹⁸³ This was a common complaint about the singer, echoed ten years later in the *NMM&LJ* of 1835. Calling him and a Mr. Hawkins the "present representatives of the old English school of singing—the upholders of what they are pleased to term 'the pure style,'" the critic adds that "Knyvett has a pleasing taste, but his voice has no power, being almost inaudible even in a concert-room; and it is of that bad quality, the falsetto counter-tenor. Mr. Hawkins, by the bye, is another of this class: he spoilt a good tenor to acquire an artificial alto."¹⁸⁴

It is tempting to state that, in the 1820s, the falsetto countertenor, though not accepted as equal to his chest-registered colleague, was the standard countertenor singing in England, at least as a soloist and in public ensembles

¹⁸¹ See chapter 2, 137-138 concerning Thomas MacCauley's 1840 *History of England from 1685* and that writer's vehement rejection of any attempt to romanticize the past, specifically his depiction of the "gentleman" of 1685 as an uncouth, unletted and unwashed brute.

¹⁸² "Knyvett," *QMMR* 1820, 473.

¹⁸³ Despite his magazine's disappointment with Knyvett's renditions of them, in *Elements*, 124, Bacon actually lists nine Handel arias as being appropriate for the "contralto or countertenor," including "Jehovah crowned" as well as "Oh thou that tellest good tidings to Zion," "Though shalt bring them in" and "He was despised" from Handel's *Messiah*.

¹⁸⁴ *NMM&LJ* 1835, 442.

(gleemen), and that he had been since some point in the eighteenth century. There are hints that, while the falsettists dominated, there were still primarily chest-voice countertenors, lurking in cathedral choirs or possibly amongst the gleemen. If they were there, however, either they were so undistinguished that almost no record of their existence has survived, or they kept to the cathedrals, shielding themselves from critical notice. In keeping with Keats I prefer not to eliminate these competing realities. The constant deprecation of the falsetto countertenor in favor of the chest-voice countertenors, though specific examples of the latter are nowhere in evidence, describes a practical reality and a theoretical reality in somewhat rancorous coexistence.

Conclusion

In the mid 1820s, among both German and English writers, Velluti's and Sassaroli's voices, presumably their falsetto registers, were considered to be at least partially analogous to the normal male falsetto. The falsettist-soprano of the Bohemian Brothers was compared both favorably and very unfavorably to Velluti, though always as a recognizable, if perhaps vile analogue to the castrato. The soprano falsettist/female impersonator Karl Blumenfeld achieved fame as a highly accomplished singer capable of imitating convincingly, and with great *éclat*, the most virtuosic singer of the day, Angelica Catalani. The falsetto was omnipresent in both male and female voices as well as contentious. Accepted as par for the course in women and the castrati, it was source of praise and mirth in

Blumenfeld, was only reluctantly accepted in countertenor singing and, during the mid-century, became increasingly unacceptable in and was banished from the legitimate operatic tenor.

By 1871 and by one writer, Velluti's was considered in retrospect to be analogous to a "countertenor." For Cox, the countertenor seems to have become by 1871 both in theory and in practice a falsetto voice, especially as he singles out Velluti's chest voice for its *female* contralto-like qualities. Writers in the 1820s held the opposite position, though the *QMMR* and Bacon go farthest in mainstreaming the falsetto countertenor as the most prominent type, if not the ideal. In the 1820s, the ideal countertenor was still a chest-voice singer, though the overwhelming majority of countertenors apparently no longer used this vocal production.

The technical developments in the female soprano and mezzo-soprano roughly paralleled the last of the castrati. By the early nineteenth century both moved from a two-registered voice that merely covered and hid the meeting of the chest and the falsetto to a three-registered voice whose middle consisted of a span of between fourth and a sixth where the singer could substitute chest and falsetto at will. These registers could and, as the next chapter will show, did project gendered personae, altering between male and female as the (usually female) singer altered between chest voice and falsetto.

This three-registered voice was apparently a fragile one that, when the singer was tired or ill, could and did go disastrously flat. It was by the 1820s, and

perhaps considerably earlier, slowly being replaced by a throaty production, likely an early analogue of lowered laryngeal singing, or *voix sombre* (a technique that in modern singers tends to hide or minimize audible register changes). While not capable of as much delicacy or (perhaps) as wide a range, the *voix sombre* compensated for those defects with a far greater power, richness and robustness in the face of age, illness or fatigue.

The tenor-falsettists (or tenor contraltini) as represented by Incledon, Braham and were closely linked by pedagogy and philosophy as well as the manner in which they navigated between the chest and the falsetto to the castrato soprano (later contralto) Rauzzini. By the time Nourrit sang for Velluti in 1838 he was attempting to catch up to tenor singing in Italy and France and the castrato, though Nourrit clearly admired him and his singing, would have represented a step backward in his ultimately doomed search for the *ut de poitrine*. The extreme tenor-falsettist as represented by an aging Giovanni Battista Rubini was implicated, *ex post facto*, in the "soprano screamings" of Velluti. The next chapter leaves the tenors behind, just as they renounced their multi-registered techniques. It will concentrate upon Velluti, some of his female peers and upon a few fictional singers as these multi-registered voices were heard and experienced in literature and music criticism.

Chapter Four: The Voice as the Communicator and Conveyer of the Body

The operatic voice in the first part of the nineteenth century, particularly that of sopranos both female and castrato, was theoretically conceived and in practice heard as comprised of two or three distinct registers. This voice also had a palpable, physical presence, as an extension of the body which was then physically experienced by its auditors: heard *and* felt. This chapter intends to demonstrate two of the more salient, non-musical messages commonly attributed to multi-registered voices, both in the 1820s and, when and where applicable, today.

The first aspect is one of gender. Viewing this paradigm through three works of fiction from the 1830s and 1840s, Honoré de Balzac's novella *Sarrasine*, Thomas Medwin's novel-travelogue *The Angler in Wales* and Théophile Gautier's poem "Contralto," I will explore the voice as it communicated gender, especially when that gender was eroticized. As long as the voice was healthy, the audible differences in quality heard above and below the point of juncture were often interpreted in an explicitly gendered context. However, when the voice was unhealthy, showing its age, its cracks as it were, the voice became an audible communicator of the physical condition of the singer as this was known, remembered or *imagined* by the auditor. This is the second aspect—the perceived communicability of pain and sickness through the voice, both in singing and speaking.

Strict causality, temporality, seems to have had little to do with the second phenomenon, as heard hints of a perhaps transient debility became symbols of greater malady, especially, though not exclusively, when the singer was a castrato. In extreme cases, the greater malady's effects on the singer could then be *felt* by the auditors themselves. This is the second and by far lengthier section of this chapter. Starting first within modern scholarship, I explore the damaged voice and achievement of vicarious catharsis in the singing of Maria Callas and Klaus Nomi. I then move to the late, literary Romantic, using the poetry of the tubercular John Keats and the voices of contagion he created, first as they are hearable, primarily in the works of Charles Dickens, above all in *A Christmas Carol*. Finally comes the voice of contagion as it is found in the criticism and commentary surrounding Velluti's London sojourns, where his indifferent health and advancing age, and the concomitant flaws they exposed, served as a kind of allusion written upon the body of his singing.

In the late eighteenth century, the point at which most modern scholarship has tended to leave the castrato, his voice as well as those of his male and female peers tended to be described as either good or bad. If good, descriptions of it could range from acceptable, through delightful, to transcendent, and if bad it was generally pitiful, ridiculous or even execrable. What this voice generally did not do, at least in written accounts of it, was communicate the physical state, the bodily autobiography of the singer. The Countess Solari remembered Gasparo Pacchiarotti's marvelous artistry of the 1790s, though his constantly flat singing

came about through "an excess of metaphysical sensibility."¹ Fanny Burney portrayed Pacchierotti both in positive and negative lights through the mechanism of her characters' impressions in *Cecilia* (1782). The title character, naive but intelligent and empathetic, was deeply moved.²

His voice, always either sweet or impassioned, delivered those words in a tone of softness, pathos, and sensibility, that struck her with a sensation not more new than delightful. ... [Cecilia] found herself by nothing so deeply impressed, as by the plaintive and beautiful simplicity with which Pacchierotti uttered the affecting repetition of *sono innocente!* his voice, always either sweet or impassioned, delivered those words in a tone of softness, pathos, and sensibility, that struck her with a sensation not more new than delightful.

In *Evelina* (1778) Burney puts criticism of Pacchiarotti's near-contemporary Giuseppe Millico into the mouth of a fool.

[Mr. Branghton] I think he might as well let alone singing till he's in better cue: it's out of all nature for a man to piping when he's in distress. For my part, I never sing but when I'm merry. ... there isn't one ounce of sense in the whole Opera, nothing but one continued squeaking and squalling from beginning to end."³

Burney was an accurate, feared transcriber of overheard fashionable conversations. Her prodigious, exact memory allowed her to record in her journals the elegant chit-chat of London society, making it a reasonable to

¹ "A Lady of Rank" (Catherine Hyde Solari), *Venice under the Yoke of France and Austria* Vol. 2 (London: G & W.B. Whittaker, 1824): 141-143.

² Frances (Fanny) Burney, *Cecilia*, 1782 edition (The Floating Press, 2011): 89. Emphases original.

³ Frances (Fanny) Burney, *Evelina, or, The History of a Young Lady's Entrance into the World*, 1778 Edition (The Floating Press, 2011): 138.

assume that her characters' opinions often reflected, in an exaggerated fashion, those of the fashionable set, the *tout le monde* of London.⁴

Tobias Smollett's *The Expedition of Humphrey Clinker* (1771) casts doubt upon the very humanity of the castrato, seeing the outward, male form as a fiction belied by a denatured voice that partook more of the divine than of the corporeal. "There I heard the famous [Giusto] Tenducci, a thing from Italy—it looks for all the world like a man, though they say it is not. The voice, to be sure, is neither man's nor woman's; but it is more melodious than either; and it warbled so divinely, that, while I listened, I really thought myself in paradise."⁵ The castrato was not necessarily identifiable by any external physical traits other than his singing. Singing, divine warbling, is the one externality that marks him as irrevocably apart from the rest of humanity.⁶

These novels fictionalize real people, Pacchiarotti, Tenducci and Millico, in the course of defining, not real people, but their paragon, a metonym for the genus. This is achieved through literary, allusional mechanisms reminiscent of Velluti's treatment in the London press in 1825, though quite dissimilar in the details. The eighteenth-century castrato remains a caricature, two-dimensional.

⁴ See Frances (Fanny) Burney, *The Court Journals and Letters of Frances Burney, Volume II: 1787*, ed. Stewart Cooke (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001).

⁵ Tobias Smollett, *The Expedition of Humphrey Clinker* (Edinburgh: Stirling & Slade, 1820): 99. Though the first edition was in 1771, whenever possible I have used printings proximate to Velluti's own time in London, partially to emphasize the ready availability of texts about castrati to the London reading public.

⁶ Roger Freitas, *Portrait of a Castrato: Politics, Patronage, and Music in the Life of Atto Melani* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014): 197. Atto Melani, when an old man and long past his singing days, was able to rewrite and hide his personal history so well that some of his contemporary biographers did not realize that he was a eunuch, implying that even a castrato's speaking voice could be low enough to disguise his physical nature, and that his physical appearance did not necessarily conform to the obvious traits of the eunuchoid male.

He is (generally) depicted without any sense of interiority, conflict between good and evil, the beautiful and the terrible, the whole and the incomplete, or, most importantly perhaps, the sick and the well.

The voice as a whole entity, devoid of a bodily narrative inevitably appertaining to it in its hearers' perceptions, is not unexplored in modern scholarship. Carolyn Abbate's *Unsung Voices* hears the coloratura soprano, specifically in the "Bell Song" from Leo Delibes's *Lakme*, as "pure voice," though she cannot escape the non-textual, perhaps non-vocal meaning it conveys. "Pure voice commands instant attention ... the sonority is disturbing, perhaps because such vocalizing so pointedly focuses our sense of the singing voice as one that can compel *without* benefit of words."⁷ Roland Barthes, after his treatment of Honoré de Balzac's *Sarrasine*, wrote "The Grain of the Voice." In it, he rejects the intellectual, corporeally distant voice of Dietrich Fischer-Diskau in favor of the intensely physical singing of an unnamed Russian bass, writing that, in the latter voice, the body is "speaking in its mother language."⁸ Henry Wadsworth Longfellow wrote *Hyperion* in 1836, just three years after Velluti's final public bow and two years before he sang for Adolphe Nourrit. Laurie Stras quotes from it in the title and foreword of her essay on the voice "The Organ of the Soul." "Oh, how wonderful is the human voice! It is indeed the organ of the soul! The intellect of man sits enthroned visibly upon his forehead and in his eye, and the heart of

⁷ Carolyn Abbate, *Unsung Voices* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991): 4-5.

⁸ Roland Barthes, "The Grain of the Voice," *Image Music Text*, ed. and trans. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana Press, 1977): 295.

man is written upon his countenance. But the soul reveals itself in the voice only."⁹ Stras expands upon the narrow, spiritual confines of Longfellow's "voice," speaking for the early twenty-first century, and does not address the nineteenth-century conflation of soul and body.¹⁰ I believe, however, that the modern idea of the voice as constructed by Stras does not in its effect on its listeners drastically depart from the idea of the voice at the end of the literary Romantic in the 1820s and 1830s. Additionally, Fanny Burney's Mr. Branghton's dismissal of the castrato's "piping ... squeaking and squalling" when "in distress" betrays an incipient, physical Romanticism irritated by the disconnect between a seemingly non-corporeal voice and the very real sufferings that voice was meant to be portraying: not just a shallow rake's insensate foolishness.

Of the two physicalized aspects of the voice in the 1820s I shall explore, gender and health, the multi-gendered evocative power of the multi-registered voice seems to have had much less durability into our own era, possibly because aside from mostly non-classical singers, this voice no longer sounds in modern ears. It is not possible, of course, to exclude the sexualized response to the voice in modern terms, but voices of today rarely cross gender boundaries *and successfully cross back*. The powerful, masculine chest voices of Marlene Dietrich, Ethel Mermen or Judy Garland, or more recently of Whitney Houston or Lady Gaga do indeed have a powerful effect, arguably as much or more on men

⁹ Laurie Stras, "The Organ of the Soul: Voice, Damage, and Affect," *Sounding Off: Theorizing Disability in Music*, eds. Neil Lerner and Joseph Straus (New York: Routledge, 2006): 173.

¹⁰ This is not a criticism. Her essay is not concerned with the castrati or the Romantic era.

than on women. It is difficult to find high, falsetto male singers whose *erotic* impact equals that of the above-named women. The appeal of Michael Jackson, Chris Colfer in the TV show *Glee*, Justin Bieber's peri-adolescent bleat or that of the myriad countertenors seems more epicene, ethereal, juvenile. They do not ravish the body as they ravish the senses.¹¹ While both of these voice types may *arouse* sexual desire, neither seems to be able to embody both genders. This may simply be an artifact of modernity. Historically, it seems, the physicality of the castrato soprano's masculine chest and feminine falsetto registers as well as, occasionally, those of his female peers, could indeed ravish his audience in alternating guises.

Raguenet's 1702 *A Comparison between the French and Italian Music and Operas* was written before Charles Ancillon's *Eunuchism Display'd*. Raguenet is speaking almost certainly about the castrato, however, when he writes about the *messa di voce*, the long crescendo and decrescendo on a single note that Tosi held in such esteem, and that defined the art of the castrato from the late seventeenth century all the way to the London performances of Velluti.

The more hardy *Italian* changes the Tone and the Mode without any Awe or Hesitation, he makes double or treble Cadences of seven or eight bars together, upon Tones we shou'd think incapable of the least Division. He'll make a *Swelling** of so prodigious a Length, that they who are unacquainted with it can't chuse but be offended at first to see him so

¹¹ Anthony Heilbut, "The Male Soprano," *The Fan Who Knew Too Much* (New York: Knopf, 2012): 253, argues on a somewhat different track than do I, and delights in the male soprano. He, however, likens the excitement, almost militaristically, to the conquest of one's own gender via the voice of the opposite. "Both sexes are enthralled to hear their natural pitches claimed by a foreign power." This may well be erotic, a delight expressed from the position of the ravished, the passive partner.

adventurous; but before he has done, they'll think they can't sufficiently admire him.¹²

Raguenet clearly intends a double meaning, whereby the least masculine, insofar as physical capacity for sexual penetration goes, the castrati, are the most successfully, outrageously penetrative with their voices, their "*Swellings* of so prodigious a Length." The voice, specifically the castrato voice, could penetrate in a physically palpable way, offending (emasculating?) but also delighting its audience, its physically passive receptacle.

Wayne Koestenbaum's *The Queen's Throat* postulates the gay man's physical internalization of the powerful, female soprano's voice, and the sexual, almost onanistic position the penetrative treble voice takes in the gratified, supinely listening body. "'I love Callas's voice' is another way of saying 'Callas's voice loves me.'" ¹³ This is essentially a restatement of the rejoinder to Charles Lamb's poem about music, "Free Thoughts on Some Eminent Composer," that his sister Mary wrote in 1830 in Vincent Novello's personal album." There, he excoriates both the long and the recently dead, from John Blow and Henry Purcell to Ludwig van Beethoven and Carl Maria von Weber. His sister appended a short riposte to Lamb's curmudgeonly poesy.

The reason why my brother's so severe,
Vincentio is—my brother has no ear:

¹² Enrico Fubini, *Music and Culture in Eighteenth-Century Europe* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994): 69. Emphases original. The asterisk is also original and indicates a footnote (probably by the early eighteenth-century English translator of this text) explaining that by swelling Raguenet means the *messa di voce*.

¹³ Wayne Koestenbaum, *The Queen's Throat* (London: Penguin Books, 1993): 33.

And Caradori¹⁴ her mellifluous throat
 Might stretch in vain to make him learn a note.
 Of common tunes he knows not anything,
 Nor "Rule, Britannia" from "God save the King."
 He rail at Handel! He the gamut quiz!¹⁵
 I'd lay my life he knows not what it is.
 His spite at music is a pretty whim—
 He loves not it, because it loves not him.¹⁶

To love music, to love voices was then, as Koestenbaum avers it is now, an intensely physical process, though that love is not necessarily reciprocated. Charles Lamb is immune to the erotic charms of Maria Caradori's "mellifluous throat" no matter how she arches and stretches it to gain his attention. He is numb, frigid. Koestenbaum sees the modern gay man as anything but, writing (of hearing Rosa Ponselle) that "moments of being pierced, being surrounded by sound, being called, are worth collecting," and feels the heard voice as foreign and phallic, occupying the same place in the listening throat as the active partner in fellatio.¹⁷ Maria Caradori's sweet, light voice, as described by Mount Edgumbe in chapter 3, could not hope to attain this phallic position. Mary Lamb inverts it, creating a feminine vocal space surrounded by whose charms, nevertheless, her brother's musical member remains limp and unresponsive. Arguably an oral eroticism tinged with bitterness, the relationship of the ravished to an emotionally conflicted ravisher is found in "Velluti to his Revilers."

¹⁴ Maria Caradori-Allen was "Palmide" to Velluti's "Armando" in the 1825, London *Il Crociato* performances.

¹⁵ To quiz: to mock or tease.

¹⁶ "Letters," *Works of Charles and Mary Lamb* Vol. 4, 854-857. Website: *LordByron*, Accessed March 15, 2016 @ <http://www.lordbyron.org/monograph.php?doc=ChLamb.1905&select=L1830#!MaCarad1865VII.856a>. Bold mine. Italics Original.

¹⁷ Koestenbaum, 15-16, 155-156.

How, when admir'd on the resounding stage,
My pulses high, my song in all its rage,
When the proud notes, demanding a rich death,
Ran down my voice, and lavish'd glorious breath,
How often when they thought, ears, arms and sight,
Drew to my heart one deluge of delight,
Was the most lofty triumph of the air
But its own mockery and a high despair!¹⁸

Koestenbaum is far from the only modern writer—just like Hunt or Mary Lamb in the 1820s and 1830s—to see the voice as erotic, phallic, thrusting and importunate. Elizabeth Wood's "Sapphonics" hears female voices with lesbian ears. "A particular voice that thrills and excites me. ... I speak of this voice metaphorically: as vessel of self-expression and identity, channel for a fluid stream that 'speaks' for desire in living human form, a lure that arouses listening desires." Though the voice is not explicitly male—in fact Woods seems to exclude this possibility—it functions phallically.¹⁹ In the eighteenth century, Casanova was aroused by seeing his current conquest listening rapturously to music, being taken, in a very sexual sense, by the music. "If you knew what joy I feel when I see you ravished, as if in ecstasy, when you hear some beautiful piece of music."²⁰ Mary Lamb laughs at her brother's insensibility, while Casanova, decades earlier, in an analogous voyeuristic position, thrills to watch his paramour ravished by another. These are all examples of either opposite-sex

¹⁸ Leigh Hunt, "Velluti to his Revilers," II 237-244. See Appendix A for full text.

¹⁹ Elizabeth Wood, "Sapphonics," *Queering the Pitch*, Eds. Phillip Brett et al. (New York: Routledge, 1994) 28-29, 35.

²⁰ Martha Feldman, *Opera and Sovereignty: Transforming Myths in Eighteenth-Century Italy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007): 358. Feldman sees this as a dangerous, thrilling, eroticization of public space, a near exposure of a forbidden liaison.

attraction, or of a same-sex supplanting of one gender for another, in the aesthetic transmutation of the powerful voice to a phallus shorn of gender.

In the 1820s, 30s and 40s the female voice, especially the clearly registered ones documented in the previous chapter, could seemingly project both the phallic and the vaginal. Rudolfo Celletti theorizes a female substitution, or rather, a pseudo-eunuchoid substitution of the mezzo-soprano or contralto for the castrato in the 1810s when, fairly suddenly, Velluti was left essentially alone as their only operatic representative.²¹ In support of this theory Celletti cites the last two lines of Théophile Gautier's 1849 poem "Contralto," written about Marietta Alboni, one of Rossini's contraltos.

How you please me, o strange timbre!
Your double, man and woman at once,
Contralto, bizarre mixture,
Hermaphrodite of the voice!

Here is Romeo, here is Juliet,
Singing with a single throat.²²

²¹ There were, as yet scantily documented, castrati singing in the remains of the Portuguese Royal Court in Brazil, whence they fled in 1807/8 during the advance of Napoleon. The last of these ceased performing around 1830. Celletti, 158. Crescentini left the stage in 1812, and Marchesi in 1806/7. Filippo Sassaroli, Vincenzo Buccolini and several lesser known castrati sang on the Dresden stage (and for at least another decade in the Dresden churches) until some point in the early 1820s. Heinrich Steinmann, *Denkwürdigkeiten der Churfürstlichen u. Königlichen Hofmusik zu Dresden, im 18. Und 19. Jahrhundert* (Leipzig, H. Mattes, 1863).

²² Théophile Gautier, "Contralto," Website: *Les Grandes Classiques*, Accessed January 20, 2016 @ http://poesie.webnet.fr/lesgrandsclassiques/poemes/theophile_gautier/contralto.html
Que tu me plais, ô timbre étrange !/Son double, homme et femme à la fois,/Contralto, bizarre mélange,/Hermaphrodite de la voix !/C'est Roméo, c'est Juliette,/Chantant avec un seul gosier. Celletti's portrayal of the early nineteenth-century voice is somewhat disingenuously sheltered from scrutiny by his neglect of the four lines that precede "C'est Roméo, c'est Juliette." It is clear that both sexes exist in this voice and, though melded, they are both audible.

Wood believes men both now to be and then to have been cut off, "estranged" by the Sapphonic voice, the term she applies to this same, poly-gendered, multi-registered voice. "Aphrodite to men and Cupid to women" is what Gauthier heard coming from Alboni's falsetto and chest voices.²³ Wood recounts the production of Gluck's *Orfeo* in Paris, 1859, as sung by the younger sister of Malibran, Pauline Viardot, another singer of the multi-registered voice, masculine and feminine, and the same-sex desire she awoke in confused young girls.²⁴ Gauthier was clearly delighted by the same phenomenon in Alboni—a conflict, a confusion that he found delicious. The sexual component only becomes truly explicit in the final stanza of "Contralto," and *seems* to attach more to the ability of the contralto to feign the young man, in her voice, than in the physicality of whom she feigns: "And whose voice, in its caress,/Awakens within the sleeping heart,/intermingled with the sighs of the mistress/an accent more masculine than a [male] friend!"²⁵ But to what or whom is Gauthier more attracted? The difference is important; one is an attraction for a clever, changeable, headstrong woman, and the other is suspect, whiffing of desire for the nineteenth-century heirs of Antinous.²⁶ The poet manages an equilibrium that allows for fascination at the point of mutation, the juncture of meaning that the *QMMR* does in the 1820s, though unlike Bacon's magazine, Gauthier also

²³ Wood, 35.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 29-31.

²⁵ "Et dont la voix, dans sa caresse,/Réveillant le coeur endormi,/Mêle aux soupirs de la maîtresse/L'accent plus mâle de l'ami!"

²⁶ Antinous was the adolescent lover of the Roman emperor Hadrian. His name was a euphemism for the catamite in nineteenth century literature: for instance, in Balzac's *Sarrasine*.

manages a hint of depravity clothed in respectability. He knows that the body of the contralto is, at last, female.²⁷ Twenty years after Bacon, in Gauthier's opening stanzas the contralto is apotheosized as an antique, a marble statue neither male nor female, "Sex douteux, grâce certaine" (doubtful gender, certain grace). The poet sees the singer's double-gendered voice as a modern totem of antiquity, hearkening back to the ancient Greeks and Romans and their doubtful, changeable sexuality. This ability to see antiquity within modernity is little removed from the writing of the Cockney Classicists.

Sexualized Listening in Literature: Thomas Medwin and Honoré de Balzac

Gauthier's desire for, or at least fascination, with the poly-gendered contralto contradicts Wood's assertion of male estrangement from the powerful female voice—in whatever register—at least as far as her theory appertains to the first half of the nineteenth century. In Thomas Medwin's little-known *The Angler in Wales* (1834), the fascination for the Romeo-and-Juliet vocal registers by an ostensibly heterosexual male is palpably sexualized. Charters (also called "Endymion") thrills to the voice of the powerful female, unnamed in the narrative,

²⁷ As previously noted, I am not the first to ascribe the necessity of Keats's "negative capacity" to the reading of Gauthier's "Contralto." Camille Paglia, though primarily concerned with the gender of the statue, and not the gender of the voice that it personifies, also makes this connection. Camille Paglia, *Sexual Personae* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990): 413. Paglia's understanding of the voice is a post-Garcian one, that of a single-registered voice occupying a middle ground between male and female. She does not (here) evince understanding of the chest and falsetto, polysexual hermaphroditic qualities of a the multi-registered voice.

but denominated metaphorically "Diana."²⁸ He responds alternately to the submissive feminine and the assertive masculine registers of her voice.²⁹ When this girl of nineteen first appears, her voice precedes her body and announces it. "I was welcomed by a sweetly-modulated voice, soft, and clear as a silver bell." She is tall, athletic, resembling "Cynthia as she appeared to Actaeon." Already "Endymion"—so named by his companions for his eternally soft, eternally languishing nature—has been portrayed as a man whose masculinity is seen as comically tenuous and susceptible.³⁰

In describing her as "Cynthia," another name for Diana, or Artemis as she appeared before Actaeon, Medwin has Charters recast himself, not as Endymion (or not solely as Endymion), the suitor of Diana, but as Actaeon, torn by the fangs of his own hounds. For the hunter, the hound is a weapon. Its teeth are a projection of the weapons: the destructive phallic externalization of Actaeon himself. This vocal-sexual jujitsu, the female subverting and claiming the phallus for herself and *wielding it*, seems to have been an important aspect of sexualized hearing of the multi-registered voice.

²⁸ When Endymion and Diana are used, they are invariably surrounded by quotation marks, making it clear that these are pseudonyms.

²⁹ Thomas Medwin, *The Angler* Vol. 2 (London: Richard Bentley, 1834): 271. "I saw before me a second Diana Vernon, a beau-ideal likeness of that charming creation of the Scotch novelist." Diana Vernon, in Sir Walter Scott's *Rob Roy* (1817) is an aristocratic young huntress, a 'tomboy' who steadfastly refuses the proffers of love of the young protagonist, Frank Osbaldistone. Diana Vernon is the goddess of the hunt: Diana. This identification is simply too clear to be doubted, given the replete literature of the Romantics and the school of Cockney Classicism delineated in chapter 3. Medwin, for his part, makes the connection multiple times.

³⁰ See Roger Freitas, *Portrait of a Castrato*, 109-112 on effeminacy and heterosexuality.

"Diana" brags to "Endymion" that she has so coopted the progenitive rights of men that she breeds race-horses, she commands the men of the estate concerning the horses and, Amazon-like, hunts on "a mare that has carried me over stone walls that few of my father's hunt dared to face till I showed them the way." She caresses not a pug or other ladies' lap-dog, but a hunting terrier.³¹

"Endymion" sees a piano, and doubts that the boasted talents of "Diana" could possibly "be consistent with the finer arts and accomplishments that embellish women."³²

"She seemed to read my thought, and, ringing for lights, which were brought by the same attendant, moved towards the instrument. It was a grand piano of Broadwood's, and on the desk lay the opera 'Semiramide.' I was familiar with the music of that chef-d'oeuvre of Rossini, for I had been at Florence in 1826, and during six weeks drank deep of the inspiration of the soul-piercing Pesaroni [*sic*].

The book was open at a cavatina which had stilled, night after night, the noisy 'palchi' of the Pergola. She sat down before it, and I listened as if my whole frame, like that of a fish, was one ear. At the first notes she struck, I could perceive that she was a finished '*pianiste*.' I never heard but one woman who had so *firm* a touch; her prelude was brilliant. She began to sing: the enchantment increased; her voice was a magnificent 'contralto.' ... There was no difficulty that did not vanish before the marvellous flexibility of her organ. Her deep notes now penetrated the bottom of my heart, and now she played with her voice like a humming bird* fluttering over the tops of flowers; and when she had ceased, I was so charmed to silence that I had no breath to utter a single 'bravo.'"

[Medwin's footnote] *Charter's description of Miss ----'s singing reminds me of the song of the nightingale ... for she runs up and down the gamut, fluttering and playing with her voice in treble, tenor or base, at will.³³

³¹ Medwin, 272.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid., 272-274. Italics are Medwin's.

In the search for the eroticized, multigendered voice of the 1820s and 1830s, this lengthy quotation is among the most clear, powerful and extraordinarily revealing. Though Medwin put all this in the mouth of Charters he seems to have been confessing an aspect of himself.³⁴ Many of Charters's memories are factual aspects of Medwin's own biography. He was in Florence in 1826/27, complaining to Mary Shelley of Velluti's preoccupation with the demands of Lord and Lady Burghersh. In the same letter, Medwin related tittle-tattle about the inadequacy of Giuditta Pasta's "organ."³⁵ Hers was too weak, or small, for Naples's Teatro San Carlo. "Organ" functions as a sexually suggestive signifier in the confessions of the fictional Charters, delighted with the power of "Diana's." Curiously, when writing about Velluti Medwin merely describes his singing, his wonderful "intonations" and not the voice itself. His physical description, if that is what it is, is somewhat ironic—"that Boy"—by which Medwin places the castrato seemingly beyond the pale of eroticization.³⁶

Charters first evokes the brilliant, penetrating voice (especially the chest register) of Pisaroni, and its butch ghost hangs over the scene.³⁷ "Diana" plays

³⁴ Though *Angler* is primarily non-musical, it does wander, in a somewhat dialectical manner, across a plenitude of philosophical, political, social and artistic subjects, giving it the same feel as Robert Schumann's contemporaneous Florestan, Eusebius and Meister Raro music criticism. This reinforces my suspicion that all the characters of *The Angler in Wales* are, in fact, aspects of Medwin's own personality. He uses their various aspects to chatter, at times brilliantly, at time prolixly, with himself, about himself, to himself.

³⁵ Ernest Lovell, *Captain Medwin, Friend of Byron and Shelley* (London: MacDonald, 1962): 216.

³⁶ Lovell, *Medwin*, 215.

³⁷ "Drinking deep" in the lengthy quotation concerning Pisaroni echoes, almost certainly coincidentally, the fellatio position the female voice occupies in the mouth of the gay male in Koestenbaum's work. Although I think Charter's description is sexual, I seriously doubt that there was any conscious thought in Medwin's head of drinking in what Wood, like Koestenbaum, sees as the seminal flow of the received voice. On Pisaroni's voice. "This girl possesses the vocal

the piano with a firm, implicitly masculine, dominating hand, driving the underlying musical pulse as she drives her horses. Then his ravishment by the low voice, the chest register, of "Diana" proceeds apace—he is supine, breathless, delighted, "penetrated to the bottom of [his] heart." His submissive stance is only briefly alleviated by her "hummingbird fluttering over the tops of the flowers" that unmistakably refers to the lighter falsetto register. At the end of the cavatina he is limp, breathless and post-orgasmic. A more polite euphemism for that state than "charmed to silence" would be difficult to construct.

At the end of this first, unmistakably sexual encounter, he recovers sufficiently to take her place at the piano, playing a duet for "Odoardo and Oloiska."³⁸ He is, by his own admission, brilliant. Their union is physical, trembling, perfect.

Never was I in better voice, for I never felt so deeply. At first, in deed, it trembled, and I fancied, though it might be imagination, that her's [*sic*] trembled too: but at the close they were in perfect accord, and seemed like a soul within a soul, 'a difference without discord,' —'notes formed for each other, yet dissimilar;' such was the entire harmony in which they blended. ... Never till then had I really known what the magic of music was.³⁹

The "'difference without discord,' —notes formed for each other, yet dissimilar'" is a metaphor for heterosexual coitus and reinforces the contention that the idea of singing together as a kind of erotic play is not merely one that

cords of a soprano, of a tenor and of a bass, all at once." Caterina Lattanzi, Review: Giuseppe Nicolini's *Carlo Magno*, "Corriere delle dame" 10 7 (February 13, 1813): 49–52. "questa ragazza possiede le corde del soprano, del tenore, e del basso ad un tempo." Again, thanks to Marco Beghelli for this quote.

³⁸ Possibly a reference to *Odoardo e Cristina* by Stefano Pavesi.

³⁹ Medwin, 275.

modern musicology projects back into time. This is not, just as Gauthier's poem is not, a heterosexual male estrangement from a powerful, dominating female voice. It is difficult to overlook the obvious ecstasy that Charters as Actaeon/Endymion experiences through his vocal penetration by "Diana." The huntress takes charge of the hunted and rides him to ground, piercing him deep, rending him with his own weapon before allowing the gentle duet as reward and to allow him, however imperfectly, to regain a portion of his manhood (if indeed he ever does). As he is leaving, he describes himself in her thrall. "I was like a bird under the fascination of a hawk—spell-bound, and had not courage to tear myself away from the spot."⁴⁰ Charters's fellow anglers are embarrassed by him, by his too-ready susceptibility and slightly ambiguous sexual stance. "Endymion" readily admits his weakness in a lack of social self-defense that (surely intentionally, given Medwin's overtly readerly text) reminds the reader of another *Endymion*—Keats's—and his eponymous hero's embarrassed reaction to the beautiful sleeping Adonis. Christopher Ricks can forgive Keats's Endymion, but Charters is a grown man and should be out of his hobbledehoyhood—that awkward, boney, adolescent phase of involuntary blushing (and involuntary erections).⁴¹ He embarrasses others by his unguarded arousal, forcing prurient observation upon the other men of his party.

⁴⁰ Medwin, 276.

⁴¹ Christopher Ricks, *Keats and Embarrassment* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974): 11-15. Ricks, to be fair, does not introduce any erections into this passage, but his involuntary "blushing" seems to be a euphemism for it, especially as he relates it particularly to teenagers.

The deep voices of dominating women in literature, like Becky Sharpe in Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*, have their greatest effect on weak men. Men like Charters/Endymion and like Joseph Sedley are fascinated by the powerful, mannish voice of Dianas: assertive and domineering. Published just three years earlier than Medwin's *The Angler*, Balzac's *Sarrasine* is an anti-hero with, to say the least, conflicted masculinity. *Sarrasine* is almost entirely about sex, singing and the mutability of gender, as opposed to *The Angler's* brief excursion.

In *Sarrasine's* party of 1831, the de Lanty's young daughter Marianina, whose "singing made the imperfect talents of the Malibrans, the Sontags and the Fodors of this world pale," sings a cavatina from Rossini's *Tancredi*.⁴² For Balzac the voice of the castrato, unlike that of Marianina, has a peculiar incisiveness even in the frailty of old age and querulous, cadaverous infirmity. Velluti was a private singer in Paris only for a brief period. Balzac may have heard of him, second-hand, rather than actually having heard him sing. There is no record of either occurring, however. It is possible that he read or heard of the English accounts of Velluti's singing. A decade earlier, Lord Byron sent Hunt a number of letters detailing the goings on in Paris for publication in the *Examiner*. Byron revealed that information between Paris and London societies travelled in both directions, asking Hunt to change some details. "I have only to beg you will prevent your copyist, or printer, from mixing up any of the *English* names, or *private* matter contained therein, which might lead to a discovery of the writer;

⁴² Honoré de Balzac, *Sarrasine*, ed. and trans. David Carter (London: Hesperus Press Ltd., 2007): 5, 10.

and, as the *Examiner* is sure to travel back to Paris, might get him into a scrape."⁴³ Regardless of his first- or second-hand knowledge of the voice of Velluti, Balzac's understanding of the voice in *Sarrasine* is limited to overall effect and does not show the differentiated, multi-registral awareness of Medwin.

Sarrasine, the dangerously talented, overprotected and naive young sculptor, suffers from the same fragile, too-sensuous sexuality/traduced masculinity as *Charters/Endymion* does. Even as a boy in a Jesuit school, he betrays a flexible, gendered ambiguity.⁴⁴

When some conflict arose between him and a friend, the struggle would rarely finish without blood being spilt. If he was the weaker, he would bite. By turns active or passive, without any special aptitude or very much intelligence, his odd character made him feared by his teachers as much as by his friends. ... While awaiting his turn in the confessional one Good Friday, [he] sculpted a large piece of wood in the image of Christ. The impious detail engraved on this statute was too extreme for the artist not to bring some punishment on himself. Had he not had the audacity to place this rather cynical figure high up on the tabernacle!⁴⁵

Balzac's choice of Good Friday is, given *Sarrasine*'s conflicted, violent nature, full of meaning. It requires the carved Christ figure to be naked and hanging on the cross, pierced with three spikes; this is no *Christus Rex*, robed in gold. Though there is conceivably ambiguity concerning what this "impious detail" is, it is

⁴³ Leigh Hunt, *The Autobiography of Leigh Hunt* Vol. 3 (London: Smith, Elder & Co, 1850): 321. Emphases original. Letter of Lord Byron to Leigh Hunt, June 1, 1815. This date is somewhat astonishing, when one realizes that Byron was in Paris as Napoleon was marching north to Belgium and Waterloo to attempt to crush the British. Hunt and Byron played dangerous games with the politically powerful.

⁴⁴ Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993): 91. Barthes notes the feminine, biting, in the quoted passage, rather than using, as he puts it, "the phallic fist."

⁴⁵ Balzac, 21.

unlikely anything other than the naked Christ's penis, sacrilegiously realistic, extreme either in size or condition.⁴⁶

Medwin's penetrating voice is much like Wood's, both intensely pleasurable ("the soul-piercing Pisaroni" and "penetrat[ing] the bottom of my heart"). Penetration is also achieved by the voice of La Zambinella, the elderly castrato in *Sarrasine*'s framing story, and the young, beautiful castrato *en travestie* of the internal story. It is at first disturbing, then overwhelming, and at the denouement disgusting, debilitating and fatal. Her/his voice is the extension of the phallus, but not a mature, healthy one, but rather a phallus of an 'othered' body and a mind empowered by, or at least transcending, its body's hindrances.

The young Sarrasine, now a talented though unfinished sculptor, first hears La Zambinella at an operatic performance in Rome. The opera is an unnamed one of Jomelli's and Zambinella sings the female lead. At first Sarrasine admires the singer's intense physical beauty. "The mouth was expressive, the eyes full of love, and the complexion of a dazzling whiteness."⁴⁷ Suddenly Sarrasine is overcome with a frenzied passion for the singer.

An almost diabolical power enabled him to feel the soft breath of that voice, to breathe in the fragrant powder with which her hair was impregnated, to see the surfaces of that face, to count the blue veins in it that added subtle detail to its satin skin. Finally that agile voice, fresh and with a silvery tone, as supple as a threatened, given form by the slightest

⁴⁶ Barthes, *S/Z*, 96. Barthes strangely ignores this passage's phallic irreverence, retreating into a dry assignment of semantic motivations/motivators. The reason for this and the reason Barthes's *S/Z* sometimes fails to uncover meaning lies perhaps in his insistence that "the object of semantics should be the synthesis of meanings, not the analysis of words." The self-limitation of aims, however, makes Barthes's analysis, like his struggle to capture the grain of the voice, frustratingly incomplete.

⁴⁷ Balzac, 25.

breath of air, which winds and unwinds it , develops and disperses it, that voice stuck his soul so sharply that more than once he let out involuntary cries, torn from him by those spasms of pleasure that are too rarely provided by the human passions.

Soon he was compelled to leave the theater. His trembling legs were almost refusing to support him. He was shattered, weak like a tense man who has given himself up to some dreadful fit of anger. He had had so much pleasure, or perhaps he had suffered so much, that his life had drained away like water from a vase that has been hit and knocked over.⁴⁸

The parallels of Charter/Endymion's intensely sexual listening, and Sarrasine's are strong. Their close temporal proximity make the similarity between the two passages all the more striking. It reveals, if not a common reaction to male listening in the early 1830s, then at least a non unique one. Balzac does not appear to hear chest voice and falsetto (or possibly he is merely writing about the upper register of the voice). But the generalized sexual puissance of the castrato's voice is not only unmistakable, it is intermingled with a transmission of debility. The pleasure is intense, but it is like pain. It saps strength, burning fever-like through the listener.

Ecstasy bordering upon the painful was experienced by some hearing Velluti's voice, from a variety of critics. From *The Parthenon*, describing Velluti's 30 June 1825 London debut:

There is something so awfully preter-human in the sound—too harsh to be pleasing, yet too strangely overpowering to leave room for disgust, and withal so mixed up with tender expression, and intense feeling, as to give rise to an indescribable mixture of emotions between pleasure and pain, terror and admiration;—a sort of thrilling sensation of almost awful interest,

⁴⁸ Balzac, 26.

which, if it were to continue for any length of time without interruption must lead to the very borders of delirium.⁴⁹

John Ebers's account of Velluti's February 1826 final solo *scena* from Morlacchi's *Tebaldo e Isolina* echoes this sentiment.

If ever the attention of an audience was enchained, enthralled, bound, as it were, by a spell, it was when Velluti sang the *Notte Tremenda*. The stillness of the scene was communicated to the house; and not a word was spoken, not a breath heard: —was this wonderful? when not to the eye and ear only, but to the heart and the soul, every thing conveyed but one impression; that of pathos, so deep so touching, so true, that it wanted but one added shade to become too deep for enjoyment.⁵⁰

To speculate that de Balzac must have read either *The Parthenon* or Ebers is to assume too much. Intense reactions to Velluti's singing seem frequently to have run along these lines. These two accounts thus need not be the actual sources of the description in *Sarrasine* to be accurate representations of the feelings of listeners to a castrato's song, reports of which must have been known to Balzac.

One of the signal differences between the real, middle-aged Velluti, and the fictional, young and ravishingly beautiful Zambinella is that, aside from the very early appearance in 1797 as the *prima buffa assoluta* in Jesi, Velluti apparently never again sang female roles. There is also no evidence of him engaging in same-sex *amours*. The passion of Velluti's 1820s listeners was always informed by and infused with knowledge of the true nature of the singer. Their disgust, if it arose, was equally well informed. *Sarrasine*'s passion is tragically innocent, or naive, and though Balzac acknowledges the peculiar,

⁴⁹ *The Parthenon* (London: Black, Young, and Young, 1826): 80.

⁵⁰ John Ebers, *Seven Years of the King's Theater* (London: William Harrison Ainsworth, 1828): 293-294. Emphases original.

masculine power of the castrato, both in voice and in body, he nevertheless deceives Sarrasine, letting him fall desperately in love with another man.

The phallus, as Joke Dame notes, is removed from the body of the castrato, and placed in his voice. Dame describes this phallic voice as essentially unbound by physical gender. "Having the phallus, or being the phallus, not having the phallus, or not being the phallus, are all positions that can be taken by both men and women."⁵¹ The phallus, in its vocal guise, has many ghosts in *Sarrasine*. It is self-reproducing, especially in symbolic violence. When, at a party, Sarrasine manages a moment alone with the still-disguised Zambinella, he carries him/her bodily into the next room. Armed with a dagger, Zambinella resists him. "'If you come near,' she said, 'I will be forced to plunge this weapon into your heart. Leave me. You would despise me. I have conceived too much respect for your character to give myself thus. I don't want to dishonour the feelings that you hold towards me.'"⁵²

This tends to underscore the generally shared contention of Dame, Koestenbaum and Barthes that the vocal phallus is non-gendered. The owner of the phallic voice, Zambinella transforms the agency she/he has enjoyed with it into a solid object, a dagger, to pierce once again Sarrasine's heart—though this time to defend and to kill rather than to seduce. La Zambinella is ambivalent throughout, as much concerning what she/he calls "this fatal beauty" that engenders so much trouble as with the phallic power, expressed through the

⁵¹ Dame, "Unveiled Voices," *Queering the Pitch*, 141, 145.

⁵² Balzac, 34.

voice, that the singer so emphatically possesses.⁵³ On an outing in the countryside, Zambinella is frightened, or pretends to be, by the ur-phallus: a serpent.

'A snake!' she said, pointing out a grass snake, which was slithering along a ditch. 'I'm afraid of those horrible creatures.' Sarrasine squashed the head of the grass snake by stamping on it with his foot. 'How can you be so courageous?' continued Zambinella, looking with obvious terror at the dead reptile.⁵⁴

Zambinella's terror is at first glance disingenuous, a ploy to distract Sarrasine. It is, however, doubly, even triply real. The singer is terrified of his own, diminutive, probably inutile member, or at least terrified of its being revealed.⁵⁵ If it is discovered in Sarrasine's passionate embraces, he will be killed. There is also the fear of the sculptor's unforgiving, vital, adult phallus whose hormonal imperative it is to dominate or destroy all its natural rivals, figuratively crushing them, but also to conquer Zambinella's ambiguous body. Finally there is the phallic voice and its power—the combination of which make the singer too attractive, too desirable: constantly in danger of discovery and destruction.

Zambinella can wield the phallus, clearly, not only in the aural, vocal form, but also can conjure up a physical *Doppelgänger* like the little grass snake, or the dagger. In the final scene of the inner story the singer reveals himself. The

⁵³ I am at a loss to find a *consistently* correct pronoun to describe the gender of La Zambinella. The constant reversal—he/she, she/he—is intentional. As the change, the sexual chiaroscuro is meant, I cannot use the modern pronouns of intermediacy, "zie/zir." That would oblivate the central theme of the entire novella and therefore be self-defeating.

⁵⁴ Balzac, 37-38.

⁵⁵ See Freitas, *Portrait of a Castrato*, 104-116 on castrati, erectile function and sexual activity.

sculptor struggles for possession of the psychological phallus. For Balzac, just as for Medwin's Charters, there can only be one phallus in any amorous relationship, though perhaps possession of it is traded back and forth. "'I ought to have you killed!' shouted Sarrasine, drawing his sword with a violent movement. 'But,' he continued with cold contempt, 'by delving into your being with a dagger would I find any feeling there to extinguish, any revenge to satisfy?'"⁵⁶ He would wield his sword, but at the last moment suffers the humiliation—conveniently dismissed as "cold contempt"—of a man not able, in the end, to thrust home. Fatal flaccidity. He further betrays his ambiguous sexuality, passivity secreted within noisy activity, by the odd question "Have you any sisters who resemble you? No. Well then, die! But no, you shall live."⁵⁷ This substitution of a beloved male friend by his sister, an erotically acceptable simulacrum, is a common device in literature with close, ostensibly platonic male friendships in the early and mid-nineteenth century. Ian Biddle postulates a feminine third (here the missing sister) who mediates the intensely close homosocial bonds, defanging them and sanitizing them of unacceptable *eros*.⁵⁸

In other, less charged relationships, the bond is more subtle, and the policing feminine third more distant or abstracted. Charles Dickens's hero in his semi-autobiographical *David Copperfield* is protected and apparently loved, when a small charming boy, by the much older boy Steerforth, who names him "Daisy"

⁵⁶ Balzac, 42.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 43.

⁵⁸ Ian Biddle, "Policing Masculinity: Schumann, Berlioz and the Gendering of the Music-Critical Idiom," *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 124 2 (1999): 196-220.

and asks him if he has a sister. David is an only child, so Steerforth is frustrated. Steerforth eventually meets, seduces, penetrates and ruins "L'il Em'ly," a childhood friend who is also the closest thing David has to a sister, bringing to physical completion the emotional bond the older youth has with the younger. Steerforth's sexuality is, in the end, far less of an admixture than Sarrasine's, though his behavior is as venal. He is always the master of the phallus.⁵⁹

The sculptor cannot ruin (or wed) a sister of the castrato, as Steerforth does L'il Em'ly, and so attempts to destroy with a hammer the statue of the castrato over which he had been slaving. It is a sister of a sort, as the statue is a decisively female Zambinella, its sham pulchritude sculpted after a naked form that exists only in Sarrasine's fevered imagination. His hammer blow misses but he does not see this. He turns, at last his courage sufficient, to kill the singer.

He thought he had destroyed this monument to his folly, [the statue of Zambinella] and so he took up his sword again and brandished it, to kill the singer. Zambinella emitted piercing cries. At that moment three men entered, and suddenly the sculptor fell down, pierced by three stiletto blows. "On behalf of Cardinal Cicognara," [Zambinella's protector and lover] said one of them. "It is a kind deed, worthy of a Christian," replied the Frenchman as he breathed his last.⁶⁰

Zambinella's agency, his phallic voice, is so powerful that merely screaming *in extremis* evokes three real blades that then come to his aid, each one stabbing home.⁶¹ This is the voice as a communicator of power, of puissance in its most

⁵⁹ Charles Dickens, *David Copperfield* (Reading: Penguin Books, 1994): 82.

⁶⁰ Balzac, 42-43.

⁶¹ The three wounds, *stigmata* evoking the Holy Trinity, are protruding peaks of the undercurrent of harsh criticism of the Catholic Church, especially coming as they do at the behest of the Cardinal Cicognara. They parallel Sarrasine's early, prurient carving of the crucified Jesus, transfigured like the sculptor with three (four) wounds. The Church's guilt in the centuries-long

visceral form. A voice that, when penetrating in the guise of a woman, is so devastatingly pleasurable, becomes in the uncovered reality of a physically traduced, ridiculous, perpetual boy, the vector for immense psychological pain, humiliation and death. Fantastically, it has the power of summoning up steel versions of itself, piercing Sarrasine like the fangs of Actaeon's hounds.

Searching for Meaning in the Voices of 'Wrong' Bodies

By the dawn of the industrial revolution, the humanity of the castrato was denied, as Martha Feldman has demonstrated.⁶² The castrato, though he had generally left the "eroticized middle ground" of the the potent adolescent that Roger Freitas demonstrates, had not entered into adult sexuality; he was dehumanized entirely.⁶³ He was a manufactured monster. But this is in the final decade of the eighteenth century, not in 1825 London, when castrati had disappeared from the operatic stage and (nearly) from living memory and had to be literarily reconstructed.

In 1825 the castrato was necessarily reinserted into the English debate, now informed by what Feldman terms the emerging "dimorphic view of gender" where not only persons, but the singing voice was viewed, with some exceptions, within this now either-or paradigm. When in 1844 Henry Chorley heard Paolo Pergetti, long believed to have been the last castrato to appear in England, he

production of the castrati was explicit in many English sources of the eighteenth century, though it tended to be conflated with the nebulous "Italian" or specific "Roman" in Velluti's own time.

⁶² Feldman, *Opera as Sovereignty*, 367-370. The citation of della Lena is also Feldman's.

⁶³ Freitas, *Portrait of a Castrato*, 108-110, 116-129.

wrote that the voice was a "union of masculine solidity and steadiness, with feminine acuteness of tone."⁶⁴ In 1824 Adolf Marx wrote a lengthy review of Filippo Sassaroli's Berlin concert. He compared the voice to various musical instruments as well as, at times, a boy, a man singing falsetto and, provocatively, a "*Mann-Weib*," a virago.⁶⁵ This female type has long been a literary figure comprising both comedy and dark menace. She is well represented by Pip's older sister, "Mrs. Joe," in Dickens's *Great Expectations*, a powerful, dominating woman who beats her orphaned brother and her equally cowed, though physically powerful, blacksmith husband, Joe.⁶⁶

Velluti's voice also partook of the sense of gender bifurcation. *The Parthenon's* 1825 opinion was that "Velluti's voice is very unequal in quality. Its middle tones are harsh and discordant—but in its upper tones it very nearly resembles the mellifluous sweetness of a fine female soprano."⁶⁷ This complements the *QMMR's* near exactly contemporaneous "Signor Velluti's lower tones are finely cultivated, and would vie with his upper, did they not want the power which, by contrast with tenors and bases, is so strongly anticipated."⁶⁸

⁶⁴ Henry Fothergill Chorley, "Ancient Concerts," *The Athenaeum. Journal of English and Foreign Literature, Science and the Fine Arts for 1844* (London: James Holmes, 1844): 435-436. Thanks to Marco Beghelli for this quote. Regarding the last castrato in England see chapter 6.

⁶⁵ Adolf Marx, ed., *Die Berliner Allgemeine Zeitung* (Berlin: Schlesingerschen Buch und Musikhandlung, 1824): 111-112.

⁶⁶ Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations* (London: Penguin Books, 1994): 12-17. The description of Mrs. Joe is spread throughout the second chapter and does not admit of easy quotation.

⁶⁷ *The Parthenon*, 77-78.

⁶⁸ "Signor Velluti," *Quarterly Musical Magazine and Review 1825* (London: Baldwin & Cradock, 1826): 270-271.

Velluti could communicate, apparently at will, maleness with the chest voice. Its baritonal, even bass-like tones expressed a masculine solidity probably not unlike Pergetti's or Sassaroli's. His head voice, likewise, communicated femininity, and was, for some listeners, the dominant register. His middle voice was more problematic, and even when it was fascinating, perhaps contained a confusing variability, a tendency to rapidly, willfully change from male to female, as Velluti the artist saw fit. When something as basic as gender is subject to the demands of art, however, an irresolvable dissonance can arise, at least for those who insist upon one or the other.

Illustration 4.1. Velluti as Armando d'Orville in *Il Crociato*⁶⁹



⁶⁹ *The Parthenon*, 79. The original of this image is in the possession of the author.

This portrait in the *The Parthenon* is quite flattering. Yet it is also confusingly, perhaps even laughably mixed, a man-woman clothed in the garb of a warrior, wearing a silly false mustache with a white ribbon (this detail was often mocked) securing his helmet to his head.⁷⁰ Velluti's masculine tones in the chest or feminine ones in the falsetto issued from a body that was neither. Balzac's solution for this *Mann-Weib* bifurcated identity was, in *Sarrasine*'s inner story, a kind of masculinity via the voice itself, that is, if vocal agency can be conflated absolutely with phallic power. In the outer story, when the castrato is an undying husk whose voice has fled, he is repeated, partitioned into his young relatives Marianina and Filippo. This division has been partially noted by Feldman and André, who see the unrevealed La Zambinella in the inner story, the beautiful young diva, repeated by the girl in the outer.⁷¹ The brother's function has not been investigated. His beauty, the male image of his sister's, is mirrored in the portrait of Zambinella as Adonis, copied from the female statue Sarrasine executed in his time of deception. As Balzac seems to have been either uninterested in or simply lacking in-depth knowledge of the voice, the youth cannot then represent the castrato's chest voice. Balzac betrays no knowledge of it. What he does the represent is Eros, the erotic youth.

Filippo, Marianina's brother, had, like his sister, the marvelous beauty of the countess. To express it all in one word, this young man was the living image of Antinous, with a [more slender] figure. But how well those thin

⁷⁰ *The Examiner* 1825, 417. "A most injudicious bow of white satin ribbon on the tip of his chin."

⁷¹ Martha Feldman, *The Castrato* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015): 258-259. Naomi André, *Voicing Gender: Castrati, Travesti, and the Second Woman in Early-Nineteenth-Century Italian Opera* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006): 21-25.

and delicate proportions combine with youthfulness, when there was also an olive complexion, vigorous eyebrows and the fire of velvet eyes that give promise of male passions and noble ideas for the future.⁷²

Filippo is an Antinous, a lover of men and not of women, though propriety requires that Balzac cloud this by this by forecasting a future of thoroughly respectable male-female desire. He is also probably an occluded reference to Lord Byron's charmingly erotic, teenaged Don Juan, first when still at home with his family, and then in his first conquest, immediately after he leaves them.

Young Juan now was sixteen years of age,
Tall, handsome, slender, but well knit: he seem'd
Active, though not so sprightly, as a page;
And everybody but his mother deem'd
Him almost man.

Later, hiding from a jealous husband, Juan cowers amongst the bedsheets.

He had been hid— I don't pretend to say
How, nor can I indeed describe the where—
Young, slender, and pack'd easily, he lay...⁷³

Byron himself appears in the following paragraph when Balzac summing up the DeLantys, writes that "This mysterious family had all the appeal of a poem by Lord Byron."⁷⁴

John Lauritsen writes that "The male narrator of *DJ* is clearly in love with Juan — who is in love with himself. ... Byron delights in dressing up Juan, just as

⁷² Balzac, 6.

⁷³ George Gordon, Lord Byron, *Don Juan, Canto I* in *The Norton Anthology Of English Literature, Volume D, The Romantic Era*, Eds. Stephen Greenblatt and Deidre Lynch (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006): 676, stanza 54, ll 425-429 and 689, stanza 166, ll 1321-1323. . I have changed the "skinnier" of David Carter's translation to the "slender[er]" of Byron's *Don Juan*, Canto I, to underline this oblique reference. Carter's word describes a hobbledehoy, a gangly, awkward youth comprised mostly of arms and legs, and Byron's describes an object of desire.

⁷⁴ Balzac, 6. *Don Juan* was, by the end of the 1820s, by far the most popular of Byron's longer works, especially in translation.

in real life he enjoyed dressing up his boys—he called them 'pages'."⁷⁵ Byron was by reputation, reinforced by Balzac's carefully placed innuendo, the notorious despoiler of youth as well as of women. Filippo hints at Zambinella the whore, the young "page," perpetually on the cusp of manhood. His casting in the explicit text as a future lover of women and fine husband appears merely to be a sop to bourgeois sensibilities. Balzac's placement of his luminous youth—also mute, he's an early Tadzio—as the representative of the body but not of the voice of Zambinella so close to the poetry of Lord Byron is no accident, and betrays by whom Filippo is desired. It completes the circle of damnation that encloses the DeLantys. Their fortune was founded upon the sins of a castrato and their children are apparently doomed to repeat them.

Lord Byron's taste in music was shallow, according to Hunt in his sometimes vituperative *Lord Byron; and some of his Contemporaries*. Byron preferred Pope to Handel and, sounding remarkably like Fanny Burney's Mr. Branghton, adored the cheerful music of Rossini. "Lord Byron knew nothing of the Fine Arts and did not affect to care for them. ... Rossini was his real favorite. He liked his dash and animal spirits. All the best music, he said, was lively—an opinion, in which few lovers of it will agree with him."⁷⁶ About his work habits during the composition of *Don Juan*, Hunt writes that

⁷⁵ John Lauritsen, Book review: "Byron's Boyfriends" of Peter Cochran, *Byron and Women [and men]*, *Gay & Lesbian Review* (Jan-Feb 2011), Accessed January 28, 2016 @ <http://paganpressbooks.com/jpl/COCHRAN.HTM>.

⁷⁶ Leigh Hunt, *Lord Byron and some of his Contemporaries* (London: Henry Colburn, 1828): 74.

Lord Byron, who used to sit up at night writing *Don Juan* (which he did under influence of gin and water), rose late in the morning. He breakfasted; read, lounged about, singing an air, generally out of Rossini, and in a swaggering style, though in a voice at once small and veiled; then took a bath, and was dressed; and coming down-stairs, was heard, still singing, in the courtyard.⁷⁷

Hunt tweaked Byron's objections to music, especially serious music, on the grounds that it promoted effeminacy: a characteristic which, again according to Hunt, Byron saw and reviled in other men, but not in himself. Byron's tirades against effeminacy were delivered whilst "sitting in health and wealth, with rings on his fingers, and baby-work to his shirt; and he just issued, like a sultan, out of his bath."⁷⁸ Hunt highlighted repeatedly the irony of Byron's blind self-regard; his swaggering machismo and self-consciously disregard for deep-seated feelings expressible through music. This was all hilariously at odds with his small, weak, occluded voice that revealed his deep-seated effeminacy. Byron's real personality was "veiled," the voice of his body and his soul hidden, even false: "the mother tongue of the body" unhearable.⁷⁹

Hunt's portrait is vicious on the surface, but even more so in the veiled secondary texts whose underlying meanings often move in directions independent of those explicit meanings to which they are anchored. They describe a man whose private character is outrageously at odds with his public one. Hunt's most serious accusations, of Byron's sexual improprieties, come obliquely. Referring to John Cam Hobhouse's exculpatory remarks about Byron's

⁷⁷ Hunt, *Byron*, 38.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 74.

⁷⁹ Barthes, *Grain of the Voice*, 295.

attractiveness to, and flirtations with women, Hunt smirks "Does our speculative friend think that the *Rochesters* and *Buckinghams* always failed in their gallantry?" By naming two of the most notorious seventeenth-century lovers, of adolescent boys in the case of Rochester and of older men in the case of Buckingham, Hunt placed Byron in their company.⁸⁰

Hunt was not Byron's only contemporary to see in him a sexualized but weakly gendered ambiguity, a lassitude incapable of masculine action. Betrayed by his veiled little voice, Byron's braggadocio was completely at odds with his ineffectual body.

Never was a particle of enthusiasm in the body or soul of Lord Byron. He was a mere artist. He could describe high actions, we allow; but he possessed not within himself the energies which produce them. Any gifted son of the brush or the chisel, who paints heroes on canvass or carves them in stone, is as likely to be a hero as he that makes them with words. If Lord Byron is hereafter noticed in Grecian story, it will be as the chief of no achievement, and the statesman of no measure. In camp and council his genius was a—Velluti.⁸¹

The similarity between the veiled voice and the fourth voice is intriguing. Nathan described the latter as a "species of ventriloquism, a soft and distant sound produced apparently in the chest, and chiefly in the back of the throat and

⁸⁰ Hunt, *Byron*, 106-107. Emphases original. By combining "Rochester" and the indeterminate, veiled voice in Byron, Hunt conflates two seemingly distinct issues, gender identity, sexual identity and how it is revealed in the singing voice with their "linkboy" juncture. John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester wrote: "There's a sweet, soft page of mine/Does the trick worth forty wenches. ...Nor shall our love-fits, Chloris, be forgot,/When each the well-looking linkboy strove t'enjoy,/And the best kiss was the deciding lot/Whether the boy fucked you, or I the boy." from Rictor Norton, "The Gay Subculture in Early Eighteenth-Century London," Website: *Homosexuality in Eighteenth-Century England*, Accessed January 28, 2016 @ <http://www.rictornorton.co.uk/eighteen/molly2.htm>

⁸¹ William Maginn, "Moore's Life of Byron," *Fraser's Magazine For Town and Country* (March, 1830): 133. Emphasis original.

head."⁸² It is peculiarly bodiless. It might relate to the chest voice, it might appertain to the body, but it does not appear to do so. Nathan calls it "the voice of a child," placing it at a remove from a chest voice indicating adulthood. Both the veiled voice of Byron and the fourth voice of Nathan deny/obscure their physical source. One achieves this through shamming—ventriloquism—while the other flatly contradicts, or interdicts, the body with the voice. Elizabeth Wood rightly connects this to the fourth voice of castrato soprano Domenico Mustafá and his student Emma Calvé.⁸³ For Joke Dame the veiled voice is also a form of deception—a description which takes it far from the late nineteenth-century, clinical description of an occluded vocal apparatus.⁸⁴ A physical impairment, dramatically altering, even sapping to the point of inutility the natural power of the unimpaired vocal cords is naturally a form of deception, but it is also debility, presumably unwanted and unintended. Hunt's description of Byron is more nuanced than I have represented it. He described a weak, ineffectual (though brilliant) man struggling mightily to reveal his better nature while suppressing his worse, though his spiritual frailty doomed his efforts.

⁸² Isaac Nathan, *Musurgia Vocalis* (London: Fentum, 1836): 117-118.

⁸³ Wood, 31. Wood then conflates this fourth voice with the falsetto of a modern countertenor, absolutely incorrectly, in my opinion, as this kind of suppression will make the male falsetto (as opposed to the castrato, if Mustafá's voice is accurately described by Calvé) simply cease to function—it is incompatible with the "clear, light, high sound" that Wood believes to be derived from it, and directly contradicts Nathan's own statement that it comes from the chest, and not from the head.

⁸⁴ Joke Dame, 137. See also chapter 4: "Veiled Voice" and "Singing," *Grove's Dictionary Music and Musicians* (London, MacMillan, 1910): 235, 507.

"Falsetto comes profoundly perverse: a freakish sideshow: the place where voice goes wrong."⁸⁵ Wayne Koestenbaum writes this shamefacedly, uncomfortable with that part of his voice that causes effeminacy to become audible and he fears the characteristics that belong to it, assumed to be his by his listener. He conflates this wrongly with Nathan Isaac's fourth voice. Nathan is clearly not describing a falsetto, and in any case, in the 1820s and 1830s, though "falsetto" generally seems to have communicated at least the imputation of femininity if not actually dangerous effeminacy, it was accepted as part of the vocal palate: male, female and eunuchoid. After the tenor revolution of the 1830s and 1840s, however, this register fell out of the *acceptable* male arsenal, and in the late nineteenth century, the famed voice teacher Mathilde Marchesi recalled a boy, disguised as a girl, who took lessons from her. As long as his voice remained unchanged, she did not notice the deception. But, as he entered his teens, she noticed that his voice became "very queer, extraordinarily queer." Koestenbaum, who cites this incident, writes "the moment when it grows impossible to judge the gender of a singing voice is the moment she [Marchesi] names 'queer.'"⁸⁶ Marchesi's queerness comes not from a voice emanating from a body that professes what it is, but from a voice and body that veils its true nature. The castrato Velluti, the falsettist countertenor William Knyvett: these two singers *may* through their singing have communicated femininity, but they are not at all queer in Marchesi's sense of the word. They are not pretending to be

⁸⁵ Koestenbaum, 164.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 98.

anything other than what they are (leaving aside Velluti's operatic portrayals: I speak here merely of the singer as a singer).

Karl Blumenfeld looked "monstrously like [Catalani]. His falsetto, which sounded like the purest soprano, was praised as a phenomenon; Sontag taught him all her bravura arias and Bäurle adapted his famous *Die falsche Primadonna* [sic] to him. In all of Germany and Austria he was celebrated and cheered."⁸⁷ Though in a rather low key, possibly originally sung by the otherwise forgotten Monsieur Keller, there are also penciled instructions for the transposition of the entire aria up a third, which would accord more with descriptions of Blumenfeld's soprano voice.

Musical Example 4.1. "Nel cor più non mi sento" in *Die falsche Catalani*, mm 48-52⁸⁸

48

tu. mi piz - zi - chi. mi stuz-zi-chi, mi pun - gi - chi. mi mas-ti chi,

⁸⁷ Friedrich Ernst, *Lindau's Reisebibliothek* 1 (Erfurt: ca. 1880): 15. "In den Zwanziger Jahren machte Karl Blumenfeld (der Neffe des Gottlieb, für die Mozart seine Pamina geschrieben hatte) als falsche Catalani ungeheures Aussehen. Seine Fiselstimme, welche dem reinsten Sopran gleichkam, wurde als Phänomen gepriesen; die Sontag studierte ihm alle ihre Brovouarien ein, und Bäurle richtete seine bekannte "Falsche Primadonna" für ihn ein. —In ganz Oesterreich und Deutschland wurde er gefeiert und beklatscht." A version of the variations on Paisiello's "Nel cor più non mi sento," from *Die falsche Primadonna*, held at the Sächsische Landes- und Universitäts Bibliothek in Dresden, is reproduced and analyzed in chapter 5.

⁸⁸ Ignaz Schuster, MS *Die Falsche Prima Donna im Krähwinkel* (Dresden: ca. 1825): D-DI, 4389/F/1.

In the second verse of the aria, the variations on the phrase "Mi pizzichi, mi stuzzichi, mi pungichi, mi mastichi" (You prick me, you poke me, you pinch/pierce me, you bite/chew me) all descend from what was probably a low falsetto/mixed voice into an undeniably male, unabashed chest voice.⁸⁹ The first half of each phrase, with the octave leaps from c' to c" and b^b to b^b' possibly approached a yodel, depending upon where the falsettist chose to enter/leave his chest voice. With each violent, invasive vocal gesture, Blumenfeld, in the role of the student "Lustig" (Funny, Cheerful or Jolly), who is in turn playing a patently false "Catalani," pulls the veil aside, hilariously showing the audience the maleness that lurks beneath his bonnet and pearls.

In 1885, long after Blumenfeld's death, a thumbnail biography in *Über Land und Meer* saw his legacy as mixed, even tragic, despite the laughter he elicited in his hey-day.

In this time [the 1820s] Herr Blumenfeld created a kind of special *furore*.⁹⁰ He had a phenomenal falsetto, a so-called head-voice, which sounded like the most beautiful soprano and which he drilled [trained] in the most difficult coloraturas. He travelled half the world as the "False Catalani" in Bäuerle's *Krähwinkliade*,⁹¹ and aroused everywhere indescribable enthusiasm. His entire twirling modus [tournüre] was gracefully feminine, he copied Catalani in all her nuances, in her coqueties, in her toilet [her make-up and hair], in every movement.

⁸⁹ While there are many modern countertenors who might sing these notes in an extended, low falsetto production, that would ruin the joke. It is highly unlikely that the original singer did anything other than sing these low notes in a raw, vulgar chest voice.

⁹⁰ A term from Italian operatic performances of the early nineteenth century, denoting an immense, sensational theatrical impression or reception.

⁹¹ Bäuerle was the playwright/librettist. "Krähwinkliade" is a made-up word meaning an extravaganza concerning the town of Krähwinkel—literally Crow-Corner. "Krahwink[e]" was the name of the nonspecific, prototypical provincial town, and was used in several, early nineteenth-century Viennese theatrical works, *Die falsche Catalani* being one of the earliest. Its nearest American equivalent would probably be something along the lines of Gopher Gulch.

...

As the "Falsche Catalani" Blumenfeld achieved a fame that was almost world-wide. As he began to be too old to play female roles, he was, however, unable to lay down the effeminate and so was forgotten. He sank from stage to stage. In his elderly days he received, after long suffering, a new engagement in Agram.⁹² But he had not the money to travel there. His one-time colleague, the great Ludwig Löwe in Vienna,⁹³ lent him clothes and money for the winter's journey. Absolutely overjoyed, the old man travelled to his destination, and there, even before he could appear onstage, met his death.⁹⁴

Though written in a tone of sadness, there is also the sense of a fate deserved: the beautiful boy who would not grow up. "He could not lay down the effeminate and so was forgotten." Playing the girl, the coquette, could be forgiven when the man doing it was so close to boyhood, but when age stripped him of his youthful bloom it also stripped him of the right to hide his real self. Like Mathilde Marchesi's queer-sounding, aging boy, Blumenfeld's disguise grew ever more uncomfortable, distasteful and weird to his audiences. It embarrassed them. The falsetto fails, unveiling the true voice of an aging body that can no longer be listened to with pleasure; it becomes difficult to endure. Possibly the vocally revealed age then reminds men of their own vanished youth—the slender limbs,

⁹² Zagreb, Croatia as it was known when it was part of the Austrian Empire.

⁹³ A Viennese actor famous for his Shakespeare roles.

⁹⁴ *Über Land und Meer: allgemeine illustrierte Zeitung* (Stuttgart: Deutsch-Verlag Australt, 1885): 318. Emphases original. "Um jene Zeit machte auch Herr Blumenfeld als Spezialität Furore. er hatte nämlich eine phänomenale Fiselstimme, sogenannte Kopfstimme, welche dem schönsten Sopran glich und die er für die gewagtesten Koloraturen gedrillt hatte. Er bereiste als "Falsche Catalani" in Bäuerle's Krähwinkliade die halbe Welt und erregte überall unbeschreiblichen Enthusiasmus. Seine ganze Tournüre war weiblich anmuthig, er kopierte die Catani in ihren Nüancen, in ihren Rinaudiereen, in ihren Toiletten, in jeder Bewegung. ... Als "Falsche Catalani" errang Blumenfeld fast Weltruf. Als er zu alt wurde, um noch Frauenrollen zu spielen, konnte er doch das Fraunhafte nicht ablegen und war vergessen. Er sank von Bühne zu Bühne. In seinen alten Tagen erhielt er nach langem Elend noch ein Engagement in Agram. Aber es fehlte ihm an Geld zu Hinreise. Sein einstiger Kollege, der grosse Ludwig Löwe in Wein, versah ihn mit Kleidern und Geld für die Winterreise. Ganz selig fuhr der alte Mann an seinen Bestimmungsort, um dort, ehe er zum Auftreten kam, zu sterben."

rosy cheeks and boundless, heedless vitality. Death stalks the singer as he sinks from stage to stage inexorably to his end. It is one thing to be young and beautiful, and to move gracefully in an intermediate ground between the sexes, alluring to both, like Zambinella, or even like Filippo, but another thing entirely to be old and attempt the same thing.

Communicating Disability: The Voice as a Vector of Contagion

"A broken voice has brought the self's private woe, the body's history and flaw, into the Olympian art of singing. A broken voice *exposes*, and what it exposes is a sadness (not gaiety) which may be the listener's."⁹⁵ Thus Koestenbaum, self-professed opera queen, describes his reaction to the voice of a failing diva. The voice is, in the modern operatic cognitive lexicon and arguably in the nineteenth century's as well, superhuman. In the present day, it reveals its history only when the modern 'bel canto' technique of perfectly regulated registrational integration, single vibrato, single sound, is interrupted by debility, psychic or physical. For the modern 'fan' (by which I do not intend to be pejorative, though perhaps subconsciously I am being so), any break that reveals the body destroys the Olympian illusion. This may conjure pity, but just as likely will be met with disgust or dismissal. Rarely is it rewarded by increased adulation, tempered or infused by slightly patronizing compassion, or worse, 'understanding.' But even the term "Olympian" is deceptive. It means godlike of course, but even the most

⁹⁵ Koestenbaum, 127.

cursory examination of the Hellenic pantheon shows gods and goddesses not as perfected beings, but supremely powerful, supremely flawed beings whose superhuman abilities serve to magnify their superhuman frailties. In the process, girls and boys are ravished or turned into beasts, hunters are ripped apart by their own hounds, swans, eagles and golden showers seduce, and cities and civilizations vanish beneath the petulant, powerful waves of immortal pique. This description, now intermingled with faults, might indeed apply backward in time to the 1820s, when vocal disruption was, if not actually embraced, understood and accepted (or rejected, even reviled) as an audible index to the singer's soul and body projected into the listening space.

Laurie Stras writes, "The disrupted voice conveys meaning even before it conveys language; in Western cultures we hear disruption as pathology, in both the current and obsolete meanings of the word: it is indicative of passions, suffering, disease, malfunction, abnormality."⁹⁶ Moving from the general to the specific, she uses the example of Maria Callas, whose voice in her later career arguably reveals the traumas of her personal life. Remarking upon the propensity of avid fans to find the late, damaged voice to be the most moving, Stras finds grounds for preferring disruption.

In that assessment is revealed a more powerful consequence of hearing damage in a voice—it connects the listener inescapably with the body of the performer, and the emotion in the performance is communicated as a testimony of personal experience rather than as an expression or invocation of the idea of emotion. The singer is no longer just a conduit for the composer's musical intentions and the poet's literary ones, but a

⁹⁶ Stras, 172.

person whose own flesh speaks its history wordlessly through the voice itself.⁹⁷

Stras's concept of the voice is modern, and does not attempt to address nineteenth-century history. A now-historical singer like Maria Callas is heard not through the ears of Callas's own, live audiences, but the ears of those listening to her recordings, half a century later.

When this idea of a self-revelatory biography written into the grain of the voice (with a nod to Barthes, to whom Stras also acknowledges a debt) is applied, as Stras does, to a shared catharsis between listener and singer, especially through the heard trauma in the latter's instrument, Callas's voice in the AIDS-themed movie *Philadelphia* demands attention.⁹⁸ Tom Hanks's character Andrew Beckett, dying of AIDS, attempts to share his love of opera with his lawyer, played by Denzel Washington. "Opera" is a foreign, Other, intrinsically gay medium in this film's *Weltanschauung*, and one that its director Jonathan Demme decides to personify with the voice of Callas. Specifically, the recording is her 1954 rendition of Umberto Giordano's "La mamma morta" from *Andrea Chénier*.⁹⁹ Though her voice was possibly never better than in this early recording, in the climactic moments one can nevertheless hear, or at least *imagines* one can hear, the seeds of vocal decline. It inevitably leads the informed listener, the one who knows of her early loss of ability, her early, lonely

⁹⁷ Stras, 176.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Joseph McClellan, "Callas Still Soars With 'Philadelphia': Opera: Two arias in the movie that were recorded 40 years ago have led to a surge in sales of the late diva's work," *The Washington Post*, March 2, 1994.

death, to vicariously experience a triumph over death, however brief and doomed that triumph may be. The exact moment of symbolic decay is, appropriately enough, when Callis sings the iconic high C (c'''). She initially lands it comfortably, but then presses the tone and attenuates it until the voice grows brittle and is abruptly, harshly closed. Though the movie and its characters do not seem to acknowledge this moment of doom, audible even at the diva's triumphant zenith, doom is, for a listener *listening* for it, heard in the voice and seen upon Hanks's ravaged face. The catharsis does not heal, at least in any physical sense, but through a shared suffering with an almost religious assurance of an eternal victory, a kind of spiritual healing is achieved.

A transcendence of bodily woes, in the case of Beckett's mortal illness, is more achievable when the voice is barely compromised, the faults perhaps inaudible to all but professional singers. Koestenbaum, though his opera queen glories even in the damaged voice of Callas, is far more uncomfortable with male falsetto. For him disruption is revealed when the juncture is traversed too audibly; for men, to dwell in the 'other' register is to flirt with danger.

Falsetto is among the greatest of singing shames. Using falsetto, you perform an act deemed unnatural. ... The break between registers ... is the place within one voice where the split between male and female occurs. The failure to disguise this gendered break [the head and chest] is fatal to the art of 'natural' voice production.¹⁰⁰

Strangely, though his work is deeply informed by the AIDS epidemic, especially the terrible phase before protease inhibitors (ca. 1981-1995), when

¹⁰⁰ Koestenbaum, 164-167.

death was the almost-certain end, Koestenbaum does not address perhaps the most prominent exponent of the falsetto voice as it spoke from and through AIDS in those early, dark days: Klaus Nomi.¹⁰¹ Koestenbaum's concern and passion is the female soprano, through whose tragedies and triumphs he vicariously lives. Stating that the diva is, like gay people, "associated with disease and with injuries that prevent adequate voice production," he almost implies a self-loathing in his acceptance of gay people as carriers of disease and death.¹⁰² It is her woe after all, not his, this "broken voice [that] has brought the self's private woe," and one is left with a sense of displacement and of a mildly disingenuous self-abnegation.

Klaus Nomi, pop countertenor and a sort of neo-baroque icon of the early 1980s, performed the 'Cold Song' ("What power art thou?" originally composed for a bass) from Henry Purcell's *King Arthur* in Munich, Germany, in late 1982. This event came about 8 months before his death from AIDS and two years after making a studio recording of the same aria.¹⁰³ In a comparison of the two versions, hearing stark changes in Nomi's voice and singing is (or should be) unavoidable.¹⁰⁴ In the live recording, the chest-to-falsetto passaggio, always impudently audible in Nomi's singing, is labored. "What pow'r art Thou who from

¹⁰¹ "HIV Surveillance — United States, 1981—2008," Website: *Centers for Disease Control*, Accessed February 8, 2016 @ <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/mm6021a2.htm>.

¹⁰² Koestenbaum, 102.

¹⁰³ Mathias Rascher, Website: *Openculture*, "Klaus Nomi; the brilliant performance of a dying man." Accessed February 8, 2015 @ http://www.openculture.com/2011/08/klaus_nomi_the_brilliant_performance_of_a_dying_man.html.

¹⁰⁴ Klaus Nomi and Henry Purcell, Video: "Cold Song," Live concert, Munich 1982, Website: *Youtube*, Accessed May 22, 2014 @ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3hGpjsgguqw>. Klaus Nomi and Henry Purcell, Video: "Cold Song," Studio recording, ca.1980, Website: *Youtube*, Accessed May 22, 2014 @ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t7WehY5vTI4>.

below hath made me rise unwillingly and slow," rises by half-steps from c' to g', revealing a falsetto and chest juncture that has splintered and frayed. The highest chest tones are brittle and the gap is audible. The singer is unable cleanly to close his vocal cords just above it, releasing excessive amounts of air in the first notes of falsetto. This is discoverable to the non-singer in the sudden diminution of brilliance and power in the voice. In the climactic, repeated e^b his enervation is palpable. Nomi no longer has the strength or control to attack each note in tune and release it cleanly. Compared to the earlier recording where this line is easily sung, this is a clear loss of vocal ability. It cannot be denied that the breathlessness with which the text "I can scarcely move or draw my breath" is sung, sadly autobiographical, makes this performance of the aria more effective in the dramatic sense than the earlier, healthier, better-sung version.¹⁰⁵ But thirty or more years into the future, the foreknowledge of Nomi's death is now ineradicable from the live version. This false prescience arguably plays a far greater role in creating the power heard in this performance than any artistic qualities intrinsic to the performance itself.

In the final "Cold Song," the shared catharsis between the listener and the suffering singer is unlike that in *Philadelphia*. Callas's suffering is to most inaudible. It is only a foreshadowing of the failure of the voice, not the actual sound of failure. The catharsis Beckett experiences through her doomed, brilliant singing is transcendent. The trauma of Nomi's sickened voice is to most listeners

¹⁰⁵ Klaus Nomi, "Cold Song," *KLAUS NOMI: ENCORE!*, Solo Album (RCA, 1983).

audible, making the moment of transcendence questionable, frail, and verging upon willful self-deception. Paul Attinello, a long-term HIV survivor, casts doubt upon the transcendent victory one critic hears in the audibly sick voice of baritone William Parker on World AIDS Day, December 1, 1992. "Parker's voice, frayed from the ravages of AIDS, faltered: but the notes held pure."¹⁰⁶ Attinello, though with kindness, doubts this, hearing instead a weak, disjunct, impure and sickly voice. The wish for catharsis and victory in modern listeners is powerful and it can override objective listening. This self-deceptive desire for victory is present in the mostly amateur writing concerning Nomi's final "Cold Song." In a very personal essay, Vanzell Kirk makes objectively unsupportable claims about the initial rising passage where Nomi's struggle seamlessly to navigate the juncture is so audible.

The first three lines of the Cold Song feature a slowly ascending scale, consisting mainly of half steps. ... In order to sing this ascending scale properly, any countertenor would be forced to switch from "chest" to "head" voice, which would generally result in an audible "break." Incredibly, Klaus Nomi is able to sing the scale, seemingly in full chest voice, with no audible break, and no change in timbre and quality. In no subsequent recording of the Cold Song is any singer able to sing this scale with the same precision and control, and without an audible voice break.¹⁰⁷

Kirk's eager advocacy for Nomi deafens him to flaws in the voice. In the live recording, the singer utilizes his chest voice up to an f ("ri-i-ise"), using the first syllable of "unwillingly" to switch to a closed (almost an "ee"), clearly falsetto

¹⁰⁶ Paul Attinello, "Fever/Fragile/Fatigue: Music, AIDS, Present, and...", *Sounding Off: Theorizing Disability in Music*, eds. Neil Lerner and Joseph Straus (New York: Routledge, 2006): 16.

¹⁰⁷ Vanzell Kirch, Website: *KlausNomi: Cold Genius*, Accessed February 9, 2016 @ http://klausnomicoldgenius.blogspot.de/2011/12/klaus-nomi-cold-genius-by-vanzell_03.html.

production on the f[#] ("wil-ling-ly"). This f[#] juncture essentially coincides with that of the 1820s tenor, described by Bacon and others in chapter 4. In Nomi's RCA solo album *Encore*, released in 1983 but recorded before the singer fell seriously ill, the juncture is very well concealed. Nomi *appears* to use falsetto production on e' ("ma-a-ade me") switching back to chest voice on f' ("ri-i-ise") before switching to falsetto, as he does in the live performance, for the rest of the line.¹⁰⁸ This does not discount the validity of Kirk's perception of transcendence. He is an enthusiast with self-admittedly little background in classical music and his is a legitimate emotional response to Nomi's laboured performance. It is a tribute to the singer's bravery and artistry in transforming a difficult situation into an arguably triumphant one.

Kirk speaks to the modern desire for *Mitleiden* and healing: victory or transcendence through shared suffering. With the exception of Mary Shelley, this modern concept, unlike other aspects of hearing the voice, does not seem to have been shared by Velluti's London auditors in the 1820s. Only rarely were more 'normal' artists, notably Pasta in her final concerts (though more with pity than empathy), heard or seen through a modern, cathartic paradigm. The voice itself, however, abstracted from pure song and real-life singers, does play a central role in literary catharses and *Mitleid*.

¹⁰⁸ A bit of inside baseball: the low, male falsetto voice is usually far easier to focus/resonate using closed vowels, like "ee" or "oo," than using open vowels, especially if the vocal cords have been weakened or swollen by illness, coughing, etc, causing them to close imperfectly.

John Keats, Charles Dickens and the Voice

John Keats was an intimate of the Leigh Hunt-Victor Novello musical evenings. He tired of them and their constant punning and for a time shunned Hunt's company altogether. I believe, however, that this did not occur before he was influenced by Hunt's physical understanding of the voice, folding the older poet's perceptions neatly into his own cognitive pharmacopoeia.¹⁰⁹ Keats did not, in fact, utterly abandon Hunt. The two maintained a friendship that lasted, intermittently, until the younger poet's death in 1821.¹¹⁰ Hunt's influence on Keats was, at the beginning, quite substantial, as Anthony Holden relates, and Keats, younger and more talented, eventually was to have an equal or greater influence upon the older poet. Hunt himself admitted late in life that while Shelley was closer to his heart, he was very fond of Keats. "I could never love him as deeply as I did Shelley. But my affection was only second to the one which I entertained for that heart of hearts."¹¹¹

Keats was trained in medicine. His poetry grew out of a man sick, aware of how he was sick, and aware of the voice and how it related to the body.

Though he may seem an odd source for understanding the literary construction

¹⁰⁹ Hyder Edward Rollings, ed., "December, [17] 1818, 'To the George Keatses,' No. 37," *The Letters of John Keats* Vol. 2, "1819-1821: 1814-1821" (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012): 9. "The night we [Hunt and Keats] went to Novello's there was complete set-to of Mozart and punning. I was so completely tired of it that if I were to follow my own inclinations I should never meet any one of that set again, not even Hunt who is certainly a pleasant fellow in the main when you are with him—but in reality he is vain, egotistical, and disgusting in matters of taste and morals. ... Through him I am indifferent to Mozart."

¹¹⁰ Anthony Holden, *The Wit in the Dungeon: A Life of Leigh Hunt* (London: Little, Brown, 2005): 100-120.

¹¹¹ Leigh Hunt, *Autobiography* Vol. 2, 206.

of the voice, it is in his late poetry that the voice refers audibly to the body that produces it. Not only sorrows and joys, but also physical decay or strength are communicated by the singing body to the listening body. The voice becomes a transmitter of physicality, a voice of contagion, probably tying directly to the shadow of the tuberculosis that killed his mother and brother and would kill him within two years of his last works. In 1818's *The Fall of Hyperion*, the idea of the voice as contagion intermingles with the self and the poetic voice. The moans and groans of the gods transmit their bodily *and* spiritual anguish not only explicitly, in words, but implicitly, almost infectiously, in the quality of the voices themselves, just as Keats transmits his anguish, breathing "pestilence" to his reader.

He is self-referential, calling the poet "A humanist, a physician to all men."¹¹² Introducing Apollo, he castigates the god for the bad poets working in his name. The poet is a healer: "Though I breathe death—with them it will be life."¹¹³ Hermione de Almeida writes that Keats's Apollo is penetrative in nature; he heals, but in a sharp, piercing manner. "Apollo's power of pestilence is invariably represented as a purging or cauterizing influence, a swift penetration beneath the skin and entrance into the body, an intent to possess or know first and then force out and dispel from within."¹¹⁴ Through Apollo, Keats makes poetry and song one. Song is also necessarily penetrative, simultaneously balm

¹¹² John Keats, "The Fall of Hyperion," *The Norton Anthology of English Literature, Volume D, The Romantic Period* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006): 932, l 190.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, ll 205, 209.

¹¹⁴ Hermione de Almeida, *Keats and Romantic Medicine* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1991): 19.

and spear. Keats (as poet) to Apollo, god of poetry, calls upon him for healing. "Where is thy misty pestilence to creep/into the dwellings[?]"¹¹⁵ Bad poetry is bad song; it creeps in and enervates, infecting with banality and falsity. The link is imputed only and not explicit. Coming as it does, however, on the heels of time spent with Hunt and evenings full of poetry and song, I believe Keats's work to reveal a tight connection between Hunt's criticism of the voice and knowledge of its intense physicality, and Keats's own portrayal of the voice as a physical entity, capable of spreading health or illness. Song and speech exist in companionable proximity so close that untangling one from the other is almost impossible. Much later in *Hyperion*, Saturn describes his sorrows to Pan, revealing the symbiosis, the mutual inextricability of physical and emotional sorrow. Enervation and disease are heard and felt, not only in words, but in the quality of the voice itself.

With sad low tones, while thus he spake, and sent
Strange musings to the solitary Pan.

...

Moan brethren, moan; for I have no strength left,
Weak as the reed—weak—feeble as my voice—
O, O, the pain, the pain of feebleness.
Moan, moan; for still I thaw—or give me help¹¹⁶

The medical knowledge that infused Keats's understanding of the body and its voice and breath was in the late 1810s an at-times mystical array of swirling theories which, nevertheless, tended to have certain shared tenets. Effluvia were one tenet of this medical understanding: "'noxious powers' of

¹¹⁵ Keats, *Hyperion*, ll 205-206.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, ll 427-430.

morbid poisons that produce fever are derived from 'human effluvia, generated commonly in ... the putrid atmosphere of marshes' and in the 'damp unventillated cells of imprisonment.'¹¹⁷ The air itself was, through its unhealthy properties—smells, mostly, and not to confused with bacteria or other modern discoveries—a primary cause of disease and contagion.

The singer's breathing, the air as activator of the body, was synonymous with singing, and the voice generally. When the elderly castrato glides among the party guest in *Sarrasine's* outer story his very presence causes the air to chill. "'Since a moment ago, I felt cold,' a lady seated near the door said to another next to her. The unknown [the elderly Zambinella], who was standing near this woman, moved away."¹¹⁸ His breath stank of death and decay. "'He has the smell of the cemetery about him,' exclaimed the horrified young woman."¹¹⁹ In *Persuasion*, Jane Austen squeezes Anne Elliot onto a sofa in suffocating proximity with the "large, fat sighings" of the obese, ridiculous Mrs. Musgrove. Austen had difficulty forgiving bad breath. In a letter to her sister Cassandra she writes that she could only receive visitors "as civilly as their bad breath would allow me."¹²⁰ Peter Leithart calls Austen malicious for these observations, though he sees them in keeping with the strict candor of her staunch Anglicanism. Certainly this is a valid interpretation, but given medical understanding concurrent with hers and Keats's writing, and Austen's last, sickly years, these

¹¹⁷ Almeida, *Keats and Medicine*, 199.

¹¹⁸ Balzac, *Sarrasine*, 7.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 15.

¹²⁰ Peter Leithart, Review: *Austen's Anglicanism*, Website: *First Things*, Accessed March 4, 2016 @ <http://www.firstthings.com/blogs/leithart/2013/01/austens-anglicanism>.

passages can also be read as a just indignation at being exposed to the effluvia of contagion. This was a contagion of physical illness, but also of something arguably worse.

As de Almeida writes, "Pestilential winds and miasmatic vapors ... [for Keats] wreak havoc upon the constitution of those predisposed to their infecting influence: the excessively enervated man of power, the obsessively indolent poet or man of genius."¹²¹ This feared susceptibility probably lies at the heart of *The Times's* Juvenal citation on 30 June 1825. Sensitive, vulnerable youths—Bromiuses—would be infected by the unmanly languor of the pestilential, miasmatic voice of the castrato. This was like the decadence that infected and killed Keats: excessive sensibility. It is against these fears, specifically regarding young men and music making, that Bacon argued in his *Elements of Vocal Science*.¹²² While Keats was not famous and would not be for at least another twenty or thirty years, he and his poetry, his ideas, his weaknesses and sensibilities *were* well known within the writing intelligentsia responsible for the commentary on Velluti.¹²³ Arthur Henry Hallam noted as early as 1831 that Keats was a poet of sensation, not of reflection, and this view ripened over the next two decades so that in 1850 Keats's poetry could have "an excess of green and vegetable imagery ... we seem either to breath the air of a hothouse, heavy with

¹²¹ Almeida, 201.

¹²² Richard Bacon, *Elements of Vocal Science*, ed. Edward Foreman (Champaign, Pro Musica Press, 1966): 5-6.

¹²³ Jeffrey Cox, "John Keats, Coterie Poet," *Poetry and Politics in the Cockney School: Keats, Shelley, Hunt and Their Circle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998): 82-122.

the moist odours of great-leaved exotics, or to live full-stretched out at noon in some shady nook in a wood, rank underneath with the pipy hemlock."¹²⁴ This seems to negate at least partially the modern idea of an early Romantic conception of the castrato as a kind of consumptive, unless it is in the very late stages. The portrait of the pre-consumptive is of a dangerously over-stimulated, enthusiastic young poet predestined for illness and early death.

The voice as a physical extension or expresser of the body and the soul, though not specifically mentioned in Almeida's study of Keats's medical influences, was addressed at some length by Johann Spurzheim in his medical theories.¹²⁵ In 1815 his medical lectures were published in English. In his section on *pathognomy* (the study of the soul and/or the emotions as they are evidenced in the body) Spurzheim connects the qualities of the voice (loudness, softness, gentleness or harshness) with the thoughts and emotions of the brain as they impacted the general condition of the body. The first principal of pathognomy, according to Spurzheim, is that "as soon as any faculty of the mind is active, all the bodily parts which contribute to the performance of the respective function enter into action." For Spurzheim, the voice is one of the primary outward physical characteristics of the functions of the body, into the hierarchy of which

¹²⁴ David Masson, "The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth," *North British Review* 13 (August 1850): 494-495. Cited by Almeida, 7.

¹²⁵ Johann Gaspar Spurzheim, *The Physiognomical System of Drs. Gall and Spurzheim: Founded on an Anatomical and Physiological Examination of the Nervous System in General and of the Brain in Particular* (London: Cradock and Joy, 1815): 400-409. Almeida does frequently quote Spurzheim and believes his works well-known to Keats. My assumption that his theories concerning the voice were also known by the poet seems to be a fairly safe one.

he places it on a level coequal to movements of the larger muscle groups/body parts. The voice is treated as a physical attribute, an audible gesture of the body.

The breath of the young, gloriously beautiful and gloriously singing Zambinella pierces Sarrasine, filling him with "that agile voice, fresh and with a silvery tone, as supple as a thread, given form by the slightest breath of air, which winds and unwinds it."¹²⁶ META's poem "To Signor Velluti" uses the breathing/singing imagery constantly. Its vision of the castrato voice appears at first to be of a purely musical entity, sound alone, though breath is physical and betrays the body, in this instance, perhaps betrays an obsession with the singer. The miraculous fact of the castrato in London, "here," brings Velluti's breath into shocking intimacy. Unlike the harp, guitar and lute, the voice moves of its own volition. It need not rely upon the fickle god of wind. "But ne'er did aught so bless mine ear,/As that one voice now breathing—here."¹²⁷ META's concept of the breath of the voice as a positive effluvia, one that in intermingling with the afflicted brings healing, is a kind of obverse of Keats's pestilence.

When those tones which for us have just breathed their farewell,
Thou art waking for others, far, far o'er the sea,
Then how oft will regret on thy minstrelsy dwell,
And a sigh from this bosom be wafted to thee.¹²⁸

¹²⁶ Balzac, 26.

¹²⁷ *Spirit of the Age Newspaper for 1828* (London: A. Durham, 1829): 221.

¹²⁸ META, "To Signor Velluti. Composed Extempore in a Box at the Opera, on Saturday, August 13," *The Examiner* 1825, 530. META here seems to be under the impression that Velluti would return to Italy. He was, however, in the final stages of negotiating with John Ebers for the musical direction for the King's Theater the following season. If META actually was Lady Burghersh, she may well have known about the negotiations, but either didn't want to reveal that knowledge, or wished to put public, poetic pressure upon Ebers to keep "the Velluti" in London. The repeated alexandrines seem to have been a conscious reference to antiquity, or the archaic.

META describes a linkage, erotically physicalized, of breath to breath, and implicitly, bosom to bosom, body to body. The sigh that longs after the departed singer is fancifully sent across the sea. It describes a body that arches itself toward a lover, unreachable but close enough to tantalize. META's idea, though expressed in poetry less grand than Keats's explication of the same concept, finds solid theoretical underpinning in the theories of Anton Mesmer, first made popular in the 1770s. He posited an invisible *fluide universale* he believed to permeate the physical universe, and to be able to transmit healing from the well to the sick.¹²⁹ Balzac also appears to subscribe to an aspect of this concept of commonality, an invisible substance or force that is either felt (the cold) or smelled (the graveyard), and to its ability to transmit sickness. In Dickens's *Nicholas Nickleby* the despairing, unnatural filicide Ralph Nickleby, shortly before his suicide, expresses his desire that his own evils infect others as his corpse decays and the stench of corruption spreads. "Throw me on a dunghill, and let me rot there to infect the air!"¹³⁰ This is an almost perfect mirror of META's healthful effluvia, as Ralph's rotting corpse mingles its stink with that of the pile of excrement, thereafter to disease the air itself. Conversely, Dickens's voice of laughter in *A Christmas Carol* could spread health. "It is a fair, even-handed, noble adjustment of things, that while there is infection in disease and sorrow,

¹²⁹ De Almeida, 71-72.

¹³⁰ Charles Dickens, *Nicholas Nickleby* (New York: Penguin Books, 1999): 754.

there is nothing in the world so irresistibly contagious as laughter and good-humour."¹³¹

A final aspect of Keats's medical knowledge already hinted at was the belief in the possibility of communication of physical pain through strong feelings, "vehement sensations,' including sympathy."¹³² Almeida appears somewhat contradictory here, as she approvingly quotes Elaine Scarry's *The Body in Pain* regarding the "essential 'unsharability' of pain, of the difficulties in articulating one's own pain or imagine another's pain, of the resistance of language inherent in pain." Though this would, at first blush, appear to negate my thesis, Scarry and Almeida are speaking of *written* language. I am speaking of the non-verbal language of the voice itself: the biography of the body of the singer that it conveys to the listening body of its auditor.

De Almeida sees in *Hyperion* not only a temporal proximity to Tom Keats's death from consumption (presumably tuberculosis), but also believes this poem to "mark the point at which Keats reached this deeper understanding of present pain."¹³³ In lines like "I have no strength left,/Weak as the reed—weak—feeble as my voice" it is not hard to imagine Keats remembering the cough-and-fever-ravaged voice of his brother. Thou fearing contamination, he is restrained from flight by love and duty. Hunt believed this sick bed attendance hastened Keats's death, and implies that Keats knew it. "He had a constitutional tendency to

¹³¹ Charles Dickens, *A Christmas Carol in Prose, being a Ghost Story of Christmas* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1845): 106.

¹³² Almeida, 56-57, quoting James Gregory, *Conspectus Mecidiane Theoretica*.

¹³³ Almeida, 57.

consumption; a close attendance on the deathbed of a beloved brother, when he ought to have been nursing himself in bed, gave it a blow which he felt for months."¹³⁴

Not merely the infectious, ravaged voices of Keats's poetry, however, disclose the inner nature of the speaker/singer. A closer examination of literary descriptions of "voice" reveals a kind of literary natural philosophy that assumes the voice functions as a kind of a Aeolian harp, an image of the soul and body in tune with nature beloved of Romantic poets, and "sings" the song of its body and soul. In Dickens's *Oliver Twist* the rough voice of Bill Sykes, a murderer-to-be, is accompanied by an implied harmony played by the soul, equally rough. "'Come here, you born devil! Come here! D'ye hear?' The dog no doubt heard; because Mr. Sikes spoke in the very harshest key of a very harsh voice."¹³⁵ As effective as a blow, the pathognomic gesture of the voice communicates Sikes's constantly furious inner tonality.

In that most musical of novellas, In *A Christmas Carol in Prose, being A Ghost Story of Christmas*, the structure itself, "staves" rather than chapters, reinforces the idea of an underlying musical order playing an accompaniment to reality. In *A Christmas Carol* Dickens lets one character's bonhomie shine greasily out through his voice. "Old Fezziwig laid down his pen, and looked up at the clock, which pointed to the hour of seven. He rubbed his hands; adjusted his capacious waistcoat; laughed all over himself, from his shoes to his organ of

¹³⁴ Hunt, *Autobiography*, Vol. 2, 209.

¹³⁵ Dickens, *Oliver Twist* (Philadelphia: Lea and Blanchard, 1839): 63.

benevolence; and called out in a comfortable, oily, rich, fat, jovial voice."¹³⁶

Health and spiritual harmony combined in the body and expressed through the voice of Fezziwig find their opposite number in the same scene from Scrooge's Christmas Past as Fezziwig's hired musician tunes a physicalized violin. "In came a fiddler with a music-book, and went up to the lofty desk, and made an orchestra of it, and tuned like fifty stomach-aches."¹³⁷

It is the voices of the ghosts, all echoes of Scrooge's own tortured soul, whose terrible import most profoundly move the old man. Marley's ghost, the first visitor in a supernatural night of redemption, uses his spectral chains as both percussion and pedal tone to his lament. "The Ghost, on hearing this [a satirical remark of Scrooge] set up another cry, and clanked its chain so hideously in the dead silence of the night, that the Ward would have been justified in indicting it for a nuisance."¹³⁸ Marley's moans and accompanying chains are visible/audible to Scrooge, as his own have not yet become. At the end of his old partner's visit, however, the veil is lifted enough for the living man to see, more to hear and be filled with the cries of regret that come from the other spirits of the dead: those who lived their lives in the pursuit of lucre.

When they were within two paces of each other, Marley's Ghost held up its hand, warning him to come no nearer. Scrooge stopped. Not so much in obedience, as in surprise and fear: for on the raising of the hand, he became sensible of confused noises in the air; incoherent sounds of lamentation and regret; wailings inexpressibly sorrowful and self-accusatory. The spectre, after listening for a moment, joined in the

¹³⁶ Dickens, *A Christmas Carol*, 57.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 59.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 29. The Ward refers to the local municipal authorities.

mournful dirge; and floated out upon the bleak, dark night. Scrooge followed to the window: desperate in his curiosity.

He looked out.

The air was filled with phantoms, wandering hither and thither in restless haste, and moaning as they went. Every one of them wore chains like Marley's Ghost.¹³⁹

The ghosts of dead men have terrible voices, accompanied by the terrible (implied) music of their chains, all the more so as they are the audible companions to Scrooge's future doom. The voices of the ghosts of Christmases Past, Present and Future are more terrible though, in the archaic sense of the word, inspiring terror, as they speak to Scrooge, respectively, in the voices of what *he* once was, what he was failing to be, and what he would likely become. Their tones speak nobody's biography but his. Simultaneously with the sorrow that he hears in the voices of the dead, he hears hope (health?) in the voices of his own past and potential present. The ghost of Christmas past speaks with the voice of the distant, boyish, hopeful Scrooge. "The voice was soft and gentle. Singularly low, as if instead of being close beside him, it were at a distance."¹⁴⁰ The ghost of Christmas present has a voice that joyously echoes Scrooge's only living relative, his nephew Fred. It is the voice of a Scrooge that could have been, and still could/should be. "Its dark brown curls were long and free; free as its

¹³⁹ Dickens, *A Christmas Carol*, 36.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 44.

genial face, its sparkling eye, its open hand, its cheery voice, its unconstrained demeanour, and its joyful air."¹⁴¹

If the beautiful or cheery voices of the first and second ghosts fill Scrooge with regret, the most terrible visitor is the ghost of Christmas yet-to-come. This apparition is mute, representing a future where Scrooge has ceased to have a living voice and is now moaning with the dead, unheard by and unfelt by the living. Its silence is more disturbing to Scrooge than all that has come before.

"Ghost of the Future!" he exclaimed, "I fear you more than any Spectre I have seen. But, as I know your purpose is to do me good, and as I hope to live to be another man from what I was, I am prepared to bear you company, and do it with a thankful heart. Will you not speak to me?"

It gave him no reply.¹⁴²

The ghost of Christmas yet-to-come never speaks. Perhaps it cannot, if all the spirits are merely echoes of Scrooge in his various phases of existence. In the final battle with the desperate man, the ghost "dwindles to a bed post," a mundane anchor reconnecting the dreaming man to a non-supernatural, waking reality. Scrooge awakens, broken and contrite, yet joyous.

"I will lie in the Past, the Present, and the Future!" Scrooge repeated, as he scrambled out of bed. "The Spirits of all Three shall strive within me. Oh Jacob Marley! Heaven, and the Christmas Time be praised for this! I say it on my knees, old Jacob; on my knees!"

He was so fluttered and so glowing with his good intentions, that his broken voice would scarcely answer to his call. He had been sobbing violently in his conflict with the Spirit, and his face was wet with tears.¹⁴³

¹⁴¹ Dickens, *A Christmas Carol*, 78.

¹⁴² Ibid., 123.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 151-152.

The old man's voice is broken through the cathartic struggle with himself, mortality and oblivion. Its shattered sound betrays the spent body, the teary, clogged throat struggles to express the exuberance of redemption. The denouement in Stave 5, "The End of it," is as rapid as it is famous, recreated in dozens of film and television versions from Alastair Sim to Scrooge McDuck. Shrieks and moans are exchanged for laughter. "Some people laughed to see the alteration in him, but he let them laugh, and little heeded them. ... His own heart laughed: and that was quite enough for him."¹⁴⁴ Scrooge achieves the rubicund wholeness of Fezziwig, his nephew or of the ghost of Christmas present: a wholeness that is reflected both audibly and to his ears alone, in laughter.

Like the voices of the dead, the voices of living but death-like castrati had physical dimensions. Perhaps—probably—this was aided by a resonance peculiar to them. A few years after Velluti's death, Sassaroli's powerful *messe di voce* were described by Heinrich Steinmann, minutely and memorably.

These were the subject of universal admiration. He began the tone in the quietest, almost inaudible pianissimo. It was as if a quiet silver bell was ringing, whose tone, however, grew unceasingly, swelled ever more by imperceptible degrees, as the churchgoers listened with halted breath, their eyes fearfully directed toward the choir. This magical tone grew and grew to an astonishing volume, finally filling the entire church. Everyone's breath was suspended, the supplicants, even the priests turned their heads to the orchestra. Now began the shrinking of this colossal sound, which sounded exactly like a powerful trumpet, and in equally imperceptible degrees grew softer, shrank, exactly as it had previously grown until it, once again in an almost inaudible whisper, disappeared. This fantasy/fantasia, through this single, fully fifty-seconds-held tone so

¹⁴⁴ Dickens, *A Christmas Carol*, 165.

beguiled everyone that bets were laid that a fifteen-minute duration had actually occurred. The imagination was so deceived by this single tone lasting a full fifty seconds that some bet it had lasted a quarter of an hour.]¹⁴⁵

The castrato can please his listeners, emotionally, physically, even erotically, with the power and penetration of his voice. Sarrasine's orgasmic reaction to Zambinella's voice when he first hears it recalls other listening memories of the castrati. This phenomenon was not peculiar to the voice of the castrato. Medwin's *Charters/Endymion* thrums to the low, chesty singing of his "Diana." Medwin's reaction to the flesh-and-blood Pasta was far less eroticized than to the fictionalized Pisaroni or to the wholly fictional "Diana." His dismissal of the power of Pasta's "organ" was not repeated by Stendhal. About the depths of her chest voice, Stendhal wrote "Many notes of this last category are not only extremely fine in themselves, but have the ability to produce a kind of resonant and magnetic vibration, which, through some still unexplained combination of physical phenomena, exercises an instantaneous and hypnotic effect upon the soul of the spectator."¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁵ Steinmann, *Denkwürdigkeiten*, 55. "Diese waren Gegenstand allgemeiner Bewunderung. Er setzte den Ton im leisesten, kaum hörbaren Pianissimo ein, es war, als ob ein leises Silberglockchen erklänge, dessen Ton aber unaufhörlich wachte, in unmerklichen Graden immer und immer mehr schwölle, während die Kirchgänger mit stockendem Athem, die Augen ängstlich nach dem Chore gerichtet, zuhörten. Der Zauberton wuchs und wuchs zu einer erstaunlichen Stärke, er füllte zuletzt die ganze Kirche aus, Aller Athem stockte, die Beter, selbst die Ministranten wandten die Köpfe nach dem Orchester; jetzt begann das Abschwollen des colassalen Klanges, der ganz einem starken Trompetentone glich und nun in ebenso unmerklichen Graden sich milderte, abnahm, in welchen er vorher gewachsen, bis er wieder im kaum hörbarem Flüstern verdustete. Die Phantasie wurde durch diesen einzigen, volle fünfzig Sekunden andauernden Ton so getäuscht, dass Wetten auf eine Viertelstunde Dauer desselben eingegangen wurden."

¹⁴⁶ Stendhal (Henri Marie Beyle), *Life of Rossini*, ed. and trans. Richard Coe (London: John Calder, 1985): 374.

This was not the first time Stendhal ascribed almost magical physical dimensions to the voice of a diva. Hearing Catalani, a few years before Pasta's debut, he wrote "[S]ignora Catalani has had no rival within living memory. La Banti, La Correa, Mrs. Billington, Marchesi, Crivelli—not one of them can hold a candle to her. Even in the most brilliant of coloratura arias she creates the effect of *singing in a grotto*; every note has a *silvery reverberation*."¹⁴⁷ For Stendhal, Pasta's superiority lay in an unaffected, spiritual connection with the music that was utterly absent in Catalani. "What marvels, then, were it our fortune to witness, had nature but seen fit to bestow upon her [Catalani] the gift of a *soul*!"¹⁴⁸ Though both voices projected an innately physical force, only Pasta's, infused with spirituality, had hypnotic, magnetic power over the listener.

Velluti's voice also apparently possessed a strange, demanding physical presence. James Fennimore Cooper described the invariably loud, imperious banging that announced an English nobleman at his front door: "I know a Lord by his knock, as one would know Velluti by his touch."¹⁴⁹ This passage was sharply criticized in an 1837 review of Cooper's *Gleanings in Europe* in the *London Quarterly Review*. After quoting the above passage, the critic continued, "that is—not at all. Velluti, Mr. Cooper should know, was a *singer*, and never *touched* anything but his salary, and metaphorically our feelings."¹⁵⁰ Velluti's singing,

¹⁴⁷ Stendhal, *Rome, Naples and Venice*, ed. and trans. Richard Coe (London: George Braziller, Inc., 1959): 25. Emphases in original.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ James Fennimore Cooper, *Gleanings in Europe: England* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1982): 47.

¹⁵⁰ "Cooper's England," *The London Quarterly Review July and October 1837* (New York: William Lever, 1837): 199. Emphases original.

though never described as having the sheer power, the loudness, of Pasta's or Catalani's, was heard by some—the critic in the *Quarterly Review* is an ill-tempered exception, representative of the ever-present Vellutian opposition that denied his corporeality—as having physical force as well as comparable spiritual or emotional investment to Pasta's. The reactions of those hearing his intense emotionalism did not, however, always mirror those hearing Pasta. At times his listeners departed from hers at a sharp angle, overwhelmed, even nauseated by his intensity. Regarding the "Notte Tremenda" from *Tebaldo*, John Ebers described a sense of feeling emotions almost too great to be endured.¹⁵¹ The anonymous correspondent for *The Parthenon* was similarly moved, describing Velluti's first night in *Crociato* in a manner foreshadowing Marley's Ghost.¹⁵²

If Velluti's admirers admitted to sensations too powerful to permit enjoyment, detractors like Mendelssohn or Grillparzer were filled with disgust.¹⁵³ Sarassine's orgasmic reaction to Zambinella lies close to Ebers's or to *The Parthenon* writer's descriptions of Velluti. The two English writers are suffused

¹⁵¹ Ebers, *Seven Years*, 293-294. "Was this wonderful? when not to the eye and ear only, but to the heart and the soul, every thing conveyed but one impression; that of pathos, so deep so touching, so true, that it wanted but one added shade to become too deep for enjoyment."

¹⁵² *The Parthenon*, 80. "The first tones he uttered fell upon the ear with a death-like peal. His opening recitative, 'Popolo d'Egitto, ecco a voi ritorno,' seemed like the announcement of a return from the tomb. There was something so awfully preter-human in the sound—too harsh to be entirely pleasing, yet too strangely overpowering to leave room for disgust, and withal so mixed up with tender expression, and intense feeling, as to give rise to an indescribable mixture of emotions between pleasure and pain, terror and admiration;—a sort of thrilling sensation of almost awful interest, which, if it were to continue for any length of time without interruption must lead to the very borders of delirium." For the complete text of this article, see Appendix B. This article from *The Parthenon* has already been quoted in chapter 2 for different purposes.

¹⁵³ Franz Grillparzer, *Grillparzers Gespräche und Charakteristiken seiner Persönlichkeit durch die Zeitgenossen* (Vienna: August Sauer, 1917). Cited by Franz Haböck, *Die Gesangkunst der Kastraten*, 500.

with uneasy, metacognitive feelings *about* a surfeit of feeling, perhaps with an unexpressed shame that a quasi erotic frisson could occur. Disgusted or overwhelmed reactions were as much a tribute to Velluti's committed, passionate singing as condemnations of his mangled body. They give way to much more localized, specific reactions when his health, and his voice, began to fail.¹⁵⁴ *Bel canto* (if that nearly meaningless term can be here utilized) in Velluti's conception meant anything *but* a constant stream of pure vowels and perfect, round tones. This probably aided the sensory overload—the tipping over into disgust—that afflicted so many of his hearers. "The tone of Velluti suffers with his tune by vehemence of manner in impassioned passages, but it is to be recollected that he often purposely transmutes the colouring of his tone, so to speak, in order to heighten the passion."¹⁵⁵

Velluti and the Shared Trauma of Imagined Remembrance

Dwelling on the threadbare connections between his registers, the harshness when he forced the voice, on 1 July 1830 the *Times* called his voice "unnatural and unequal, shrill, and like the peacock's scream."¹⁵⁶ The next day

¹⁵⁴ James Davies, "'Veluti in speculum': The twilight of the castrato," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 17 3 (2005): 289. Davies reads this particular aspect of the reaction to Velluti as a kind of general pain, attaining to Velluti's body, and as being essentially without narrative. The body itself exists in a non-temporal permanence of pain, irrespective of how well or poorly the singer's voice was behaving. As I will demonstrate, I believe this sickness, this imagined pain to be both temporally specific to performances where the singer was ill, and even more specifically tied to cracks and breaks between his chest and falsetto registers as the point of juncture audibly failed.

¹⁵⁵ *QMMR* 1825, 272.

¹⁵⁶ *The Times of London*, July 1, 1825. "How do we describe his voice? It is the most unequal as well as the most unnatural that we ever hear; and we desire not ... ever to hear it again. It has the

the *Times* added that one heard in the voice a quality that, when "mingled with the reflection on his situation, really set the teeth on edge, and people were heard to suck up the breath as if in pain."¹⁵⁷ Mount Edgcumbe, in the theater on 30 June 1825, described the "shock of surprise, almost disgust."¹⁵⁸ John Ebers recalled the voice's "preternatural harshness which jarred even more strongly on the imagination than on the ear."¹⁵⁹

Echoing, though probably not consciously, Keats's *Hyperion*, William Ayrton envisioned the listener made ill by Velluti's voice, only to be healed by the balm of a female soprano. "Sig. Velluti's *scena*, and indeed the whole of his singing this evening, was so distressing to our ears, that they hardly recovered the shocks they received, till Miss Paton's beautiful intonation, in a charming aria by Weber, restored them to a healthy state."¹⁶⁰ The *Atlas's* correspondent, hearing him in June 1826, when his health was at its most fragile, claimed to have been made ill by Velluti's voice, professing a constant nausea that never abated.¹⁶¹ On 7 March 1826 Ignaz Moscheles believed the ailing Weber to have been physically exhausted, not only by the despised Morlacchi's *Tebaldo*, but also seemingly by listening to Velluti singing it "horribly wrongly."¹⁶²

shrillness of a woman's voice, but not the sweetness. At times it burst upon us with all the discordance of a peacock's scream..."

¹⁵⁷ *Times*, July 2, 1825.

¹⁵⁸ Richard Edgcumbe, Lord Mount Edgcumbe, *Musical Reminiscences, Chiefly Respecting the Italian Opera in England: from the year 1773 to the present time (1828)* (London: George Clark, New Bond Street, 1828): 15.

¹⁵⁹ John Ebers, *Seven Years*, 268.

¹⁶⁰ *The Harmonicon* 1826 (London: Samuel Leigh, 1826): 106.

¹⁶¹ *The Atlas*, June 18, 1826.

¹⁶² Ignaz Moscheles, "Ignaz Moscheles aus Leipzig an Max Maria von Weber in Dresden, Leipzig, Sonntag, 15. September 1861," Website: *Carl Maria von Weber-Gesamtausgabe*, Accessed

Though Leigh Hunt's *Velluti to his Revilers* purports to defend the singer, and in fact *did* defend him, after a fashion, Hunt began in blood.

Did I, a smiling and a trusting child,
See the curst blow, to which I was beguil'd?
Call for the knife? and not resist in vain,
With shrieks convulsive and a fiery pain,
that second baptism, bloody and profane?¹⁶³

Hunt had neither met Velluti nor had he ever heard him sing. In the name of liberality, he commodified the singer. Writing prosopopaeically, Hunt utilized the opportunity to display his own classical education. He wrote *Revilers* in ignorance of Velluti—at least ignorant of first hand information—and recreated the myth of the perpetual boy, shorn of vivacity and living only through music. But the opening lines constitute a preamble of pain. This is the most memorable part of *Revilers*, and with it Hunt only added fuel to the flames. He ensanguines the castrato's song with "That second baptism, bloody and profane," and this poem seems to displace the real singer with the writer's imagined one. Every subsequent note the real Velluti sang was for literary London stained with guilty blood and pain, though certainly his reception already tended in that direction. When the illusion of the boy, perpetuated in a perfectly functioning castrato voice whose edges and boundaries are smoothed over, covered up and inaudible,

February 8, 2017 @ <http://www.weber-gesamtausgabe.de/de/A001353/Korrespondenz/A045798.html>. "Die W. nur so bekannte Oper "Tebaldo ed Isolina" von Morlacchi, in welcher Velutti [*sic*] fürchterlich falsch sang, ermüdete ihn bald." "Falsch" in this sense means, in all likelihood, badly out of tune rather than actual wrong notes.

¹⁶³ *The Examiner*, August 8, 1825.

meets the cracking, imperfect voice of the aging castrato, visions of blood and pain inevitably fill these totemic cracks and seize the imagination.¹⁶⁴

The mixing of temporalities was a speciality of Hunt's. When an ailing Hunt, his ailing wife and their large brood of children were offered the financial wherewithal by Percy Shelley to travel to sunny Italy in the autumn of 1821, they leapt at the chance. After an abortive journey along the wintry, storm-tossed English coast, they found a second ship and embarked in May 1822. In Hunt's 1828 account of this journey, the specter of Shelley's untimely drowning just days after the Hunts' arrival glowers over the narrative. Events at sea, from seeing small boats, to experiencing storms, to a letter from Shelley himself, received after their first Italian landing at Genoa saying that "wind and waves would never again part them," all self-consciously foreshadow his death.¹⁶⁵ In Hunt's reminiscences, the sea and death, the sea and hope are mirrored in Italy as a land of death, and of hope, and of the death of hope. What came first, what followed what—all is lost in the eddies and whirlpools of memory. Hunt's 1828-self, remembering the death of Shelley, fills the voyage of his hopeful 1822-self with the desolation of his mourning 1822-self. The intentional destruction of timelines then—in this case bringing Velluti's castration forward by over thirty years into an always/already event—is a device of literary cognition that does not

¹⁶⁴ See Roger Freitas, *Atto Melani*, for the perpetual boyhood of the castrato.

¹⁶⁵ Leigh Hunt, *Lord Byron and some of his Contemporaries* (London: Henry Colburn, 1828): 433, 485, 488-491.

pertain necessarily to the castrato himself, but rather to Hunt's thinking and writing, and by extension, presumably, much of the late literary Romantic's.

Shelley's death moved backward in time and Velluti's castration moved forward. Though Byron's death preceeded Velluti's London period, the gap between them could also be collapsed. Though direct accusations of same-sex desire or behavior regarding Velluti are apparently non-existent, there is at least one instance where Velluti's harshest, most pained notes were seen—ostensibly humorously—in that light.¹⁶⁶ The only explicit linkage I know of Velluti and Byron is the already cited depiction of Byron's utter inefficacy in Greece: politically and militarily "a Velluti."¹⁶⁷ Another implied connection between the two comes from the same year, in *The Polar Star*. It is embedded in a series of punning juxtapositions, most of whose aggregate meanings are incomprehensible to this modern reader. In one, if the reader imagined combining "Velluti's screams with Lord ----'s conjugal politeness," hilarity would then ensue.¹⁶⁸ This seems extremely obscure. An early rumor circulating in London concerning the separation proceedings between Lord and Lady Byron (Annabella Gordon) in 1816, promulgated by the now-spurned Lady Caroline Lamb, was that he had

¹⁶⁶ Ayrton hints at this in his account of Velluti's court battle with the women of the opera chorus in 1826, accusing Velluti of having a "morbid antipathy to women." Also related to that lawsuit, see the caricature with Velluti comically warding women off, protecting "his concern." See chapter 1.

¹⁶⁷ Review: "Moore's Life of Byron," *Fraser's Magazine*, 133.

¹⁶⁸ "The Eastern Winds," *The Polar Star, being a continuation of the Extractor* (London: H. Flower, 1830): 368. As I have already discussed in chapter 1, regarding the identity of META, possibly Lady Burghersh, this could be a reprint of the article that Mrs. Arbuthnot interpreted as accusing Lady Burghersh of being in love with Velluti, but it is difficult to interpret it in that light. Though many of the allusions in this article are not clear to me, those that are point to the period of political unrest surrounding the Catholic Emancipation Act in 1828 and 1829, thus out of the timeframe of Lady Burghersh and Velluti.

forced his half-sister Augusta to have intercourse with him and also that he had admitted, even bragged, of sodomizing schoolfellows. He was even supposed to have similarly forced himself upon his wife (whence "conjugal politeness").¹⁶⁹

According to Marilee Hanson, "Caroline alleged that Byron told her of a 'criminal intercourse' between him and Augusta, even 'boasting at the ease of his conquest.' And there were other 'unnatural crimes' —young boys he had corrupted—'He mentioned 3 schoolfellows whom he had thus perverted.'"¹⁷⁰

Such an accusation could never be made in print, even with the polite fiction of a single letter, i.e., "Lord B---'s," and certainly not by naming him outright. London society had certainly discussed this in private and surely remembered it in 1830, even in such indirect terms, when this juxtaposition appeared in print. If my inference is correct, remembering the Romantics' cavalier attitude concerning the preservation of time lines, the forced, pained singing of Velluti—especially those sounds which most approached a scream—was not only the child's scream at the moment of his castration, but was also the schoolboy's scream, or Lady Byron's, as they were penetrated by Lord Byron.

Stras has written approvingly of the notion that trauma is heard in the voice, when that trauma is generalized and shorn of a narrative.¹⁷¹ The audibility of Velluti's trauma seems to have waxed and waned with his health. Possibly

¹⁶⁹ Fiona MacCarthy, *Byron: Life and Legend* (London: Faber & Faber Ltd, 2002). MacCarthy details Byron's sexual escapades and, especially regarding the accusations of anal sex and Lady Byron, how widely known these rumors were.

¹⁷⁰ Marilee Hanson, "Lady Caroline Lamb Facts & Information – Lord Byron's Lovers," Website: *englishhistory.net*, Accessed January 28, 2016 @ <http://englishhistory.net/byron/lady-caroline-lamb/>.

¹⁷¹ Stras, 182.

never disappearing, even on the most perfect of evenings, when he sang well his castration receded for many if not all of his listeners to a distant, unfortunate event. However, when the voice crackled, temporality was compromised and narrative intruded. The pain of long ago surgery was revealed, relived in every bobbled, cracked or squawked note.

Castration, or rather the creation of eunuchs solely for the purpose of singing, was such a prominent concern, obsession even, in the forefront of early English criticism of Velluti that this obsession seems to have created a slightly overwrought, always/already castration-in-progress. It emanated from his voice and afflicted his audience anew, with every performance. The anonymous nature of critical journalism in the 1820s makes identification difficult, but the following writers are *likely* all male, given the male domination of journalism at this time. In the *NMM&LJ* in February 1826:

Waving even the painful consideration of the visitation of Nature to which we owe the peculiarity of voice in male-Soprani, supposing even voices of this kind were to procured among our sex without the outrage to which they owe their existence, their introduction in the vocal drama would still be unnatural and destructive of all illusion.¹⁷²

Mount Edgcumbe's description of Velluti's debut in June 1825:

Many declared that to the last his tones gave them more pain than pleasure.¹⁷³

The London Magazine in March 1826:

His voice is like a sharp, harsh, and ill-governed instrument, which alarms the ears with a constant expectation of its cracking. It is as painful to our

¹⁷² *NMM&LJ* 1826 (London: Henry Colburn, 1827): 57, 105.

¹⁷³ Mount Edgcumbe, *Reminiscences*, 156.

sense of hearing to listen to Velluti's singing as it is to our sense of sight to see a man standing insecurely on a dizzy height; and our experience encourages the uneasy apprehension we describe, for the Signore frequently loses the command of his voice, and bitterly does it then grate on our musical nerves, like the scraping of a grinder on the edge of a saw.¹⁷⁴

Men consistently expressed pain or unease and even his most ardent admirers had serious reservations about parts of his voice. There are few women whose written commentary on Velluti has survived. They formed a large part of his fan base and his studio, indicating that at the very least that they were not wholly averse to him. Even Harriet Arbuthnot, while she found the *spectacle* of the singer disgusting, reported no pain from hearing him sing. Mary Shelley went "expecting pain, but receiv'd only pleasure."¹⁷⁵ For her the position of Velluti, abstracted from the generality of men, seems to have bequeathed him with a kind of universality that Giuditta Pasta could not hope to rival. From the first "Anglo-Italicus" letter: "Madame PASTA, in her supreme excellence, surmounts this difficulty [acting in a foreign country], but the next step to perfection wants the "touch of nature" that "makes the whole world kin."¹⁷⁶ Shelley is quoting Shakespeare's *Troilus And Cressida*, Act III, sc. iii, and seems to express the opinion that Velluti, unlike Pasta, is able to function universally, communicating to all audiences, making the "whole world kin," because he lacks the specific reality

¹⁷⁴ *London Magazine* 1826, 316.

¹⁷⁵ Mary Shelly, "Letter to J. H. Payne, June 11, 1826," *The Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley*, ed. Betty Bennett (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1980): 519. "I was agreeably disappointed in Velluti. I had expected pain, but rec'd extreme pleasure, he is handsome graceful & with the exception of one or two peacock notes, his tones are sweet & clear, & his expression infinitely sweet."

¹⁷⁶ M. Shelley, "First Letter to the Editor of the *Examiner*, signed, 'Anglo-Italicus,'" *Letters*, Vol. 1, 518. Published.

of gender, or possibly, because of his great trauma. Denatured, he can speak to all whereas an uninjured, natural state would tie him down to a specific, in some ways mute form—weighed down by the inescapable and mundane earthiness of his testes. Injured, he elicits pity and solicitous attention. In the cover letter to her second (unpublished) letter to *The Examiner*, she writes that "if he has not all the boasted energy of that vain creature man he has what is far better, a strength all his own, founded on the tenderness & sympathy he irresistibly [*sic*] excites."¹⁷⁷ His great ur-hurt draws his audience to him, making them all the more amenable to being emotionally captured by his singing. Mary Shelley is, I think, providing a late Romantic corollary to the modern idea of shared catharsis, though perhaps appropriately for the first science fiction writer, she is ahead of her time, and her opinion that Velluti had the ability to "make the whole world kin" seems not to have been generally held. The empathetic pain unwillingly felt by many in the male portion of his audiences was hooted away in falsetto mockery, or laughed away in jokes about his sexuality, his gender, his humanity, and the humanity of those who sponsored him. Perhaps the falsetto cries that met his singing on 30 June 1825 can be seen as a frantic grab for the weapon he was wielding, his "preter-human," piercing voice, turning it against him in desperate mockery.

A caricature in the collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum is full of puns and double entendres, visual and verbal. It reveals the obsession so many *men* seem to have had about the contents of Velluti's trousers. The original has

¹⁷⁷ M. Shelley, "Second Letter to the Editor of the *Examiner*, signed, 'Anglo-Italicus,' *Letters*, 522. Unpublished.

light pencil markings dating it to 1825, and above that, to 1826, though the themes portrayed tie it more directly to the pre-*Crociato* period of spring 1825, when the Velluti literary portraiture as detailed in chapter 2 owed more to classical and eighteenth-century sources than to actual, observed behavior.

Illustration 4.2. "An Italian singer, cut out for English amusement, or, Signor Veluti [*sic*] Displaying his Great parts."¹⁷⁸



The foppish Velluti sings for the fatuous nobility. The pun "cut out" for English amusement is obvious. Velluti displaying his "great parts" refers to his

¹⁷⁸ John Lewis Marks, "An Italian Singer, cut out for English amusement, or, Signor Velluti displaying his great Parts," Victoria and Albert Museum, H Beard Print Collection. Museum Number s. 2568-2009. This image used with permission of the V&A, © Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

vaunted education and/or his presumably either mutilated or absent genitalia.¹⁷⁹

J. Q. Davies has already identified the tall, hawk-nosed man in military costume saying "Do you not think he's a well-made man?" as the Duke of Wellington.¹⁸⁰

Wellington's well-known admiration for Velluti's singing was not infrequently extended by waggish commentators to Velluti's questionable body, hinting at a conflicted sexuality in the Iron Duke. This was never more than hinted, of course, as Wellington was perhaps the most powerful man in England. In a satirical book published in 1827, an unknown writer, reporting on the Italian Opera with Velluti and the young Maria Garcia, noted that "the 'great captain of the age' [Wellington] took a lively interest in quiverings of Velluti."¹⁸¹

I would like to offer as tentative identities Harriet Arbuthnot for the skeptical lady on his right, Lord Burghersh for the other uniformed officer, and for the bosomy, silly, malaproping lady to his right ("La! How delicious it he strains, it's enough to melt the heart of a stone!"), Lady Burghersh, foolishly and publicly enamored of the singer. The young woman seated in the far left, foreground, looks very much like Maria Garcia (Malibran), with whom Velluti did share many concerts in the spring and early summer of 1825.

¹⁷⁹ "Great parts" might refer to operatic roles, although this particular interpretation, not really being insulting, seems less applicable to the parsing of Velluti puns.

¹⁸⁰ J. Q. Davies, *Romantic Anatomies of Performance* (London: University of California Press, Ltd., 2014): 26.

¹⁸¹ *Lion Hunting: Or, A Summer's Ramble Through Parts of Flanders, Germany and Switzerland in 1825, with some Remarks on Men, Manners, and Things at Home and Abroad* (Edinburgh: Adam Black, 1826): 16-17. An obvious pun on "quaverings," or eighth-note-ing, as well as Velluti's voice, either his runs, or his vibrato, this nevertheless has distinct sexual overtones if one changes, per Westmacott's *Punster's Pocketbook* addressed in chapter 2, the "a" to an "i." The Quiverings of Velluti: illicit sexual pleasure lies only a vowel away from *fioratura*.

Illustration 4.3. Detail from "An Italian singer...displaying his Great parts."



Of course, the ladies—I use the term advisedly given the obviously aristocratic social class of Velluti's audience here—are shown here by caricaturist John Marks to be most interested in Velluti's "parts," and most skeptical of them. One lady in the back of the audience at the far right even trains a spyglass upon them. Closer inspection of his pants and his parts reveals no discernible contents in his gaudy trousers. No bulge, and perhaps the reverse—the hint of a *mons veneris* is revealed in the creases and reiterated by the lacy fly. His trousers themselves are another mute pun. A design that at first appears to be repeated vaginas could also be interpreted as the theatrically overstated, imagined twin wounds of castration itself. The actual scars of castration would naturally be far smaller and, depending upon the exact procedure, quite different, but this is not about scientific accuracy.¹⁸² These are triggers for masculine

¹⁸² Gerold Gruber, "Der Niedergang des Kastratentums. Eine Untersuchung zur bürgerlichen Kritik an der höfischen Musikkultur im 18. Jahrhundert, aufgezeigt am Beispiel der Kritik am Kastratentum - mit einem Versuch einer objektiven Klassifikation der Kastatenstimme" (D. Phil Diss, University of Vienna, 1982). Gruber's work contains a great deal of surgical information, including pictures, mostly from late nineteenth-century studies of the Skoptsy castration cult in Russia. It is not for the faint of heart.

hysteria, and their ambiguity—scar or vagina—functions, I would argue, as visual paronomasia : both female and destroyed male states are present in the shamelessly flourished emblems of the singing eunuch.

Small wonder men cringed when Velluti lost control, cracking or squawking. The peacock's scream was the scream of the castrated boy, and for much of his audience, every failure of the voice inflicted his long-ago castration upon them. This is a near corollary to the castration fear, most famously advanced by Barthes in *S/Z*, and mostly accepted by later writers concerning the at-times almost panicked reaction to Velluti's singing. Davies writes eloquently, but not accurately, that "his [Velluti's] was a figure of tremendous repressed pain; his outward form muffled a screaming silence."¹⁸³ Velluti's *silence*, very unlike that of *The Ghost of Christmas Future*, was never the source of proximal pain, or even of unease—as long as his figure was silent, genial mockery was sufficient to ward off disquiet. The general reaction, as shown by the many first-hand accounts of Velluti's singing when he was healthy, was of either admiration or unease, mostly related to the philosophical predisposition of the listener. The specific fear of castration is more accurately the imagined, vicarious *experience* of castration. This seems to have happened when the voice of the castrato failed: breaking in the middle register or at the imperfectly hidden juncture, harshly forced at the top, going badly flat or being unpleasantly narrowed.¹⁸⁴ Velluti

¹⁸³ Davies, *Romantic Anatomies*, 27.

¹⁸⁴ Davies mentions this in an aside, but displays little interest in the pivots of perceptual reality, that the cracks between registers, and in the middle register, itself an in-between thing, represent.

forced the dangerous middle voice, so successful in a small room, to be audible in the large theater, and it broke. His male auditors, conditioned by years of education in the classics—replete, readerly literature—heard in the cracks the operation that had created generations of literarily constructed eunuchs, from Juvenal to Leigh Hunt, and winced in empathetic pain. Trauma here must have narrative. That narrative is derived from the shared classical education that informed the entire Cockney School and bound the middle and upper classes in common understanding. Humorous paronomasia —punning, double and triple meanings, meaning-laden juxtapositions—was used to fight this pain, this outrageous trespass into the seat of male strength.¹⁸⁵ The felt intrusion into the listening male body of the female voice (or of a voice believed to be female) and by extension her body, especially the chest voice, may have thrilled not only psychologically, but sexually. The felt penetration of the listening male body by a male-yet-not-male, failing, injured voice and its injured body was an attack, an outrage and an unforgiveable injury.¹⁸⁶

These are vital to destruction of the illusion of unanimity, of the single voice, the single, un-traumatized body and are, in this case, the gateway, or totem, to a remembered, imagined reality.¹⁸⁵ See David Freidman, *A Mind of its Own: A Cultural History of the Penis* (London: Penguin, 2003) for the centrality of the penis and testicles to the male sense of the self throughout western European history.

¹⁸⁶ Sourya Acharya and Samarth Shukla, "Mirror Neurons: Enigma of the Metaphysical Modular Brain," *Journal of Natural Science, Biology and Medicine*, (2012: Jul-Dec, 3(2)) 118-124. Mirror neurons, recently demonstrated to have a real, physical existence in humans as well as animals, might explain the felt pain in male, but not female auditors of Velluti's voice when it functioned poorly. The possibility that this phenomenon, observable in 1820s musical criticism has real physiological causes, is, like many modern theories applied to the past but relying upon observation, unprovable. However, recent discoveries in the field of neuroscience concerning the likely existence and historical prevalence of mirror neurons as a fundamental tool of evolutionary forces makes this male hysteria seem, when viewed in this light, far more of a reasonable response than it would, at first blush, appear to have been. As Acharya and Shukla put it, these

Conclusion

The preceeding chapter has sought to build upon the previous two, combining the technical understanding of the registered voice of the first half of the nineteenth century with the methods of the replete literature of that same period. This combination I believe sheds new light first upon the gendered, eroticized voice in literary fiction, especially the bifurcated attraction that the voices of "Diana" had for Charters/"Endymion" in Medwin's *The Angler in Wales*. That bifurcation was then played out in the body of the contralto in Gauthiér's poem of the same name, and then in the many replications of the castrato La Zambinella as he/she moved backwards and forwards through time. Even shorn of the voice of intoxicatingly beautiful youth, she/he found reincarnation in statues and paintings, both as a man and as a woman, but most importantly in Marianna and Filippo, the doomed children of the de Lantys.

Modern scholarship, especially that of Laurie Stras and Wayne Koestenbaum, has sought to tie the body of the singer to its own past, its autobiography, but also to the body of the listener. In illness or decay, the modern urge is toward transcendence, most notably for my purposes in the singing of Maria Callas and Klaus Nomi. But in Velluti's own time that

are "[t]he neurons that shaped our civilization." I do not think that Sigmund Freud's (much later) theories of castration anxiety, sometimes ascribed to this discomfort men experienced in hearing castrated voices, is, at least in the case of Velluti, really applicable. There is no father figure, there is no mother figure and these men did not record any actual *fear* of castration, merely an somewhat overwrought, apparently imagined *experience* of the pain of castration forced upon them by the flaws in the voice. It is momentary and does not engender a long-term anxiety that is at all discoverable in the writings about Velluti's singing.

transcendence was felt by few. By first understanding Spurzheim's *pathognomy*, and then Keats's own tubercular obsession in his voices of contagion, the miasmic effect of the voice, its ability to externalize and physicalize the inner longings of the soul as well as its healing properties, it is possible to explore Dickens's concept of the voice, most prominently in *A Christmas Carol*.

Finally we come to what is the central thesis of this dissertation and the culmination of the three-chapter, central arc. When Velluti's damaged voice traversed the middle ground between the masculine chest voice and the feminine falsetto, it failed, his voice broke. The illusion of perfection, otherworldliness, perpetual boyhood, etc, was destroyed. Hunt's "Velluti to his Revilers" starts with a "second baptism, bloody and profane." Velluti's vocal failures functioned as literary allusions written in sound upon the body and voice of the castrato. Though knowledge of his childhood surgery and an intense classical education preconditioned (mostly male) listeners to hear castration, this crucially, I believe, only came to the fore when the voice failed, especially between the registers, sounding pained. As to hear the voice was to feel it, to hear castration was to feel castration. Velluti could only have been rejected as his voice failed, as acceptance would have meant listening further, and listening further brought pain.

Chapter Five: Velluti and the Art of Ornamental Singing: Paisiello, Morlacchi and John Fane, Lord Burghersh

The following chapter takes as its point of departure the state of ornamentation as it stood (and outlined in the next section using Richard Bacon's description of it) in the first few decades of the nineteenth century. It will then view the innovations in ornamentation that Velluti introduced, first through critical reactions to his ornaments as well as descriptions of their affect—their "adaptation to the passions"—and then through an analysis of excerpts from three of his most representative works.

The first is the circa 1815 *Otto variazioni sul tema "Nel cor più non mi sento"* found, to the best of my knowledge, only in Velluti's own manuscript score in the Fondo Velluti in Belluno, Italy.¹ Variations—the Theme and Variations constitutes, strictly speaking, a separate genre—for my purposes will be considered as a species of ornamentation, at least as far as the singer's art is concerned. I do not believe the compositional intent behind a singer's variations to a theme changes significantly whether it is a single da capo, or eight different variants of the same theme. Certainly with Velluti the same methods appear largely to be shared between his variations and his more localized ornamentation. The second piece is from *Tebaldo e Isolina*, the famous

¹ I say "manuscript score." The score itself seems to be a copy of Velluti's composing score, done in a professional hand, while Velluti's emendations, in pencil, are in his own. Certainly the score was in his own music collection and, absent another one surfacing, can be presumed to be the one he used.

Romanza (the aria at the end of the *scena* "Notte Tremenda"), which is known in four versions: the 1822 manuscript original held at the Biblioteca della Musica di Bologna; the circa 1822-1824 version published in London in late 1825 by at least three different firms; the 1825 revision for the Dresden Hoftheater production published by Francesco Morlacchi with assistance of Heinrich Marschner; and the final, post-1825, Velluti version published by Manuel Garcia in 1847. The last piece to be investigated is the opening recitativo and aria from Lord Burghersh's *L'amor timido*, published complete in ca. 1823 and then piecemeal ca. 1825/6 with Velluti's ornamentation. Through this temporal ordering of some of Velluti's most important works, I will attempt to assign concrete meaning to Velluti's "doppio effetto," about which he wrote Meyerbeer in 1824, outlining what I see as the first and second periods of Velluti's ornamental art.

There has been little investigation into the purely vocal aspects of ornamentation in this period, though Frederick Neumann's 1986 work on Mozart peripherally addresses the dramatic increase in ornamental freedom enjoyed by singers at the end of the eighteenth century.² This freedom can be found first in the rhythmically rigorous body of the composed aria in the form of primarily diatonic alterations and second, in cadential expansions at the ends of sections of the aria, using melodic fragments in temporally expanded and chromatically more adventuresome excursions. The latter include sometimes

² Frederick Neumann, *Ornamentation and Improvisation in Mozart* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986).

exotic non-diatonic tones on the way, however, to establish firmly the tonic. The best examples of diatonic alteration can be found in the lengthy *sofleggi* of two late eighteenth/early nineteenth-century castrato-composers. Girolamo Crescentini's were published variously between approximately 1800 and 1824 and Giuseppe Aprile's 36 soprano *sofleggi* in 1791 and then almost continuously until the early twentieth century.³

Richard Bacon's *Elements of Vocal Science* is an expression of his understanding of the vocal art and science as practiced in London *before* his first encounter with the ornamental art of Velluti or of Velluti's imitator (though not, as was frequently claimed in the London press, his student) Giuditta Pasta.⁴ Bacon outlines three acceptable points at which ornaments might or must be applied. These consist of the first two (his examples one and three), already adumbrated above, and a third (his second example): an emerging half-cadential pause—mid-stream, so to speak—within rather than at the end of each section of the aria. This last would eventually supplant the final cadence as the place for the greatest singerly expansion upon the original musical text, especially for Velluti. For Bacon, the ornament partook of both an almost geographical understanding of the sung text, whose nature is (nearly—there is always memory) linear and temporal, and to a lesser degree of an expansion upon the written text, a non-linear entity whose temporality (if any) is suspended.

³ Girolamo Crescentini, *Recueil d'exercices pour la vocalization* (Mainz: Gebrüder Schott, after 1800). Giuseppe Aprile, *Exercices Pour la Vocalisation à l'Usage du Conservatoire de Naples* (Leipzig: Breitkop & Härtel, ca. 1826).

⁴ Richard Mackenzie Bacon, *Elements of Vocal Science Being A Philosophical Enquiry Into Some Of The Principals Of Singing*, ed. Edward Foreman (Pro Musica Press: Champaign, 1966).

Ornaments may be applied in three ways. –1st. When a simple passage is changed into one more complicated by the addition of notes in conjunction with those of the composer, or the introduction of an entirely new combination, which occupies the place and time of the original.* 2^{dly}. [O]n pauses, either merely for embellishment or to connect one part of a song with another—and 3^{dly}. [A]s at cadences, or those additions at the close of an air, which it is customary for singers to append. It is chiefly to those of the first kind that modern art has made such copious additions.

* Airs, with variations, as sung by Catalani, and since her time by other singers of agility, show the use of this species of grace carried to its extreme.⁵

Bacon viewed the ornament as merely serving to underline the already-present musical affect. It was not communicative of any passion specifically due to the peculiarity in its construction. For him, the vocal tone and manner employed in the execution of the ornament were everything, insofar as communicating the passion is concerned.⁶

Velluti, Pasta and the London Critical Assessment of the New Style

Velluti's in-depth introduction into the world of English letters came in the form of Stendhal's second-hand account of an extravagant ornamentationer in the 1824 translation of Stendhal's *La Vie de Rossini*.⁷ While Stendhal did record his first-hand memories of Velluti's singing, the Rossini story is from second-hand, unnamed sources. When Velluti's ornamentation was heard in London it

⁵ Bacon, *Elements*, 103.

⁶ Bacon, *Elements*, 101. Cindy Kim, "Changing Meanings of Ornamentation in Nineteenth-Century Italian Opera," (PhD Diss, Eastman School of Music, 2011). Kim has undertaken one of the most sweeping investigations of this change, chiefly represented by Velluti and Pasta, and her work will be addressed, as it applies directly to Velluti, later in this chapter.

⁷ Stendhal, *La Vie de Rossini: The Life of Rossini*, ed. and trans. Richard Coe (London: John Calder, 1985): 136-143.

was immediately perceived as and for some time after remembered as something rather different from the empty show of which Stendhal perhaps inadvertently accused him. The *Sussex Advertiser* in an concert review on 27 August 1844, long after Velluti had retired from the stage, mentioned him as the primary exponent of the *contrasting* school to the "*canto spianato* ... the more grandly expressive style of singing." In contradistinction to singing using broad, powerful strokes was Velluti who, the critic continues, "was the introducer of *ornament* applied to purposes of expression."⁸ According to Manuel Garcia, Velluti's and Pasta's school, or rather the class of aria in which they excelled, was the *canto di maniera*, one that depended upon sudden, textually driven changes, fine nuances rather than power or vocal agility.⁹ The "mannered song" is an unfortunate translation without some of the quality of the original, but that was later used against Velluti by some of his foes in the London press.¹⁰

The initial reaction to Velluti's ornaments, heard at first in private concerts, was overwhelmingly positive. The *London Magazine*, concerning his performances in private settings, wrote that his ornaments

are original, singular and pleasing, and charm at once by their novelty and science. He is not a man for ordinary judges to appreciate duly; for a long and close attention to the art is indispensable to the exact perception of

⁸ *Sussex Advertiser* August 27, 1844.

⁹ Manuel Garcia, *Die Kunst des Gesangs* Vol. 1 (Mainz: Gebrüder Schott, circa 1850): 99-100. This is a dual-language text, with the original French and a fairly exact (with some errors) German translation printed side-by-side on each page. It is my preferred text for Garcia, as some of the unclear passages in French are made more comprehensible by the accompanying, contemporary German translation.

¹⁰ William Ayrton, ed. *The Harmonicon 1826* (London: Samuel Leigh, 1827): 42. "Of his taste we have in a former number spoken; we do not find that it possesses the charm of variety; he is a mannerist."

what he does that is different from others, and *how* he does these things. ... Upon the whole we cannot hesitate to pronounce his singing to be so far superior in point of polish and sensibility that we know of no one who can be compared with him.¹¹

An article in the *QMMR* from the summer of 1825 evidences a partial *volte-face* from editor Bacon's opinions regarding the inherent or constructed as opposed to delivered passion of the vocal ornament. This article agrees with Stendhal's final, effusive assessment of Velluti's capabilities, that "the choice and execution of Velluti's ornaments are more appropriate and masterly than can be conceived from hearing any other singer. ... The ornaments of Signor Velluti appeared to us more novel than any to which we have been accustomed."¹² Nevertheless the *QMMR* attributes the greater part of the effectiveness of Velluti's ornaments to his delivery, placing their relationship to the emotions they portrayed still largely, though not entirely, in accordance with Bacon's *Vocal Science* views.

A year later the *QMMR* praised both Velluti and Pasta for elevating the standards of singing in London. Regarding Velluti, it wrote

Ornament is with him very much subservient to expression, and the very fact that his ornaments are so original and so *recherchée* as sometimes to be quaint, proves, that he is too nice in his choice to be satisfied with ordinary graces, and therefore must be to a limited extent sparing in the use of them, for no man's invention is sufficiently boundless to allow of a fastidiously nice choice, and a profuse employment of what he so cautiously selects or prepares.¹³

¹¹ *London Magazine* 1825 Vol. 2 (London: Hunt and Clark, 1825): 474.

¹² *Quarterly Musical Magazine and Review* 1825 (London: Baldwin, Cradock, and Joy, 1825): 276.

¹³ *Quarterly Magazine and Musical Review* 1826 (London: Baldwin, Cradock, and Joy, 1826): 181. "Recherchée" in this sense means essentially what the French original does—somewhat exotic, learned and/or studious. "Quaint" has more the sense of the outlandish, odd, old-

The apparent contradiction of archaisms being original is not really so in an era whose vogue was to romanticize the past—a seemingly inexhaustible fund of creativity. Indeed, "quaint" might merely mean outlandish or odd, though *recherchée* seems to indicate a touch of the historical or outdated. Velluti was seen in his ornaments as he was in his literarily constructed body and soul—his perceived *Gesamtgestaltung*—as a figure who existed both in the present and the past. In the case of his ornamentation he was possibly a harbinger of the future as well as reminiscent of the past. From the same year in the *QMMR* came the opinion that Velluti's "style is more perfectly that of the greatest schools than any singer we have heard since Crescentini or Pacchierotti. It is certainly more devoted to passionate expression. His ornaments are remarkable rather for their curious and original structure, and for adaptation to the passion, than for their abundance."¹⁴ If this is all Bacon's struggle to come to terms with an idea he found impossible as recently as 1823, he cannot yet find a way to clearly express what he means by "adaptation to the passion."

By 1833/34, in a multi-part article "On the Progress of Music from the Commencement of the Present Century," the ability to write about this new style had progressed considerably in some comments about Pasta by an author with an avowed admiration for the now-defunct *QMMR*.

fashioned, archaic or peculiar than of the modern "charming." "Nice" naturally carries its older meaning of exact or precise.

¹⁴ *QMMR* 1826, 14.

She has arrested the rapidity of the progression towards the substitution of notes—mere notes—for the sensible and expressive employment of sounds. Her use of ornament is *comparatively* restrained; but her graces are, for the most part, the best adaptations of such passages to the illustration of the passion. If she introduces a volata, it has all the analogies which the philosophy of the mind, as well as of the art, has determined are the vocal *media* of emotions, and which are common to the representation and the thing represented.¹⁵

Though this writer attributed much of the communication of the literary passion to the quality and manner of the singing rather than to the construction of the ornament, he or she clearly implied that the manner of composition was perhaps equally capable of constructing the evocation of specific passions. Regarding a private performance of Giovanni Battista Perucchini's "La Notte xe [che] Bella," apparently the same author remembered "At the close, [Velluti] introduced a passage to depict the undulation of the sea, more ingenious than the writer of this article ever remembers to have heard from any other singer."¹⁶ A topography of *affect* is revealed in the structure of the notes.

Like Pasta's, Velluti's ornaments were often praised for their relatively infrequent occurrence and precise execution. "His style of singing is of the best school; expression is its characteristic; *roulades*, and such vulgar finery, such 'Brummagem ware,' he appears to despise, and though he decorates much, yet

¹⁵ "On the Progress of Music from the Commencement of the Present Century" part 4, *The New Monthly Magazine and Literary Journal* Vol. 2 (July-December, 1833) (Boston: Allen and Ticknor, 1833): 418.

¹⁶ "On the Progress of Music" part 5, *NMM&LJ* Vol. 3 (Boston: Allen and Ticknor, 1834): 21. I believe that this multi-part history, published in 1833 and 34, is all by the same person. The style is in a consistent and first-person narrative throughout.

his ornaments are new, and in fine taste."¹⁷ The *NMM&LJ* in 1825 praised both Pasta and Velluti, placing the castrato in the position of the originator of this style.

What a style of singing! how simple, how pure, how impassioned! We at once recognized the model upon which Pasta formed her style. Here is no interlarding of meretricious ornament to cloak imperfections, no feverish feats of *bravura*, no connecting one sound to another by whooping hectic slides, no mouthfuls of indistinct division, quick passages, and misplaced graces. Every thing Signor Velluti utters is chaste, tranquil, and distinctly articulated. ... Signor Velluti, in our opinion, must have been, and is still, one of the first artists that has appeared on any vocal stage, far superior to any male soprano we have heard, Marchese [*sic*] not excepted.¹⁸

Giuditta Pasta was one of the greatest female singers of the age and the creator of roles in Bellini's *La Sonnambula* and *Norma* as well as Donizetti's *Anna Bolena*.¹⁹ Her style was highly influential in the formation of the "bel canto" of Donizetti and Verdi. In the mid 1820s and into the early 1830s she was explicitly seen as a disciple of Velluti's—whether she herself ever acknowledged this or not. Regarding Velluti's reception in England: "All who could appreciate him understood the points we have described, and all his merit; they saw also how much other singers (even Pasta herself) had borrowed from him. Instead of increasing the rage for florid singing, his influence aided that of Pasta in exalting

¹⁷ *Harmonicon* 1825, 143-144. (Page 144 is incorrectly numbered 126 in the bound edition for the year 1825.) "Brummagem ware" is a pejorative reference to the most cheaply produced products in Birmingham before and during England's industrial revolution, especially the bright, cheap objects used in trading with Native American peoples.

¹⁸ *NMM&LJ* 1825, 344-345. Emphases original. This article concentrates on Velluti. References to Pasta are limited to relating her to him.

¹⁹ See Susan Rutherford, "'La cantante delle passioni': Giuditta Pasta and the Idea of Operatic Performance," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 19 2 (July 2007): 107-138. Naomi André, *Voicing Gender: Castrati, Travesti, and the Second Woman in Early-Nineteenth-Century Italian Opera* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006). Kim, 238-292.

the great style which subsists upon expression."²⁰ Even Mary Shelley, who, however much she may have liked Velluti, adored Pasta, calling her "My Divinity," felt that Pasta owed much of her style to Velluti. Shelley included acting within her idea of singing—indeed, the voice acts as much as the body—and concentrated upon the former, though implying both.²¹

In addition to a precise ("nice"), unhurried style of delivery of the ornaments of altered/additional tones, rhythms, etc, one of Velluti's signature ornaments was a kind of repeated *messa di voce* in the upper part of his range, most frequently upon the f". Probably represented (though very rarely) in printed music as "<><><," this ornament was fondly remembered by Cox nearly fifty years later. "The upper part of the compass, from C to G, when I heard him, [was the] most clear and resonant. Upon a lengthened note he would hold for a considerable time without taking breath, ringing it, so to speak, with increasing and diminished power, so as to resemble the tone of a bell."²² This passage betrays Cox's unacknowledged debt to the *QMMR*, which in 1825 wrote [specifically about this effect in Velluti's upper, purely falsetto register: c" to g"] "Upon a protracted note he will hold this last sound (like the harmonics upon the violin) and ring it with the alternate swell and fall of a distant bell, in the most

²⁰ *NMM&LJ* 1834, 21. The author of this series of articles in the *NMM&LJ* in 1833-34 appended a footnote to this observation about Pasta. "A series of concerts were given by Velluti and Pasta in conjunction. He beat her decidedly by his polish and delicacy."

²¹ Mary Shelley, *The Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley* Vol. 1, ed. Betty Bennett (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980): 518-520.

²² Cox, *Musical Recollections*, 633. The bell tolling imagery was, as far as I have been able to discover, applied only to a few singers, Velluti in particular.

perfect possible manner."²³ Garcia reproduced this ornament only rarely in the second volume of his treatise, once as a theoretical possibility and then in each of the final two arias. The first is attributed to Crescentini and the second is in the final ornamented version of the Morlacchi-Velluti *Romanza*.²⁴ This ornament was perhaps specifically associated with the peculiar puissance of the castrato soprano, but Garcia never asserted this and the effect that Heinrich Steinmann described regarding Sassaroli's *messa di voce*, quoted in chapter 4, is quite different—this is a single crescendo and decrescendo and its effect, in point of volume, seems far more powerful than anything of which Velluti was capable.

Velluti's voice, as has been documented at length in chapters 3 and 4, was in decline by the time he reached London. Even friendly ears heard the holes that were developing in it. Mount Edgumbe perceived in some of his peculiarly shaped ornamentation an effort to avoid problem areas in his voice.²⁵ The *QMMR* was a great admirer of Velluti, but was positive that this assessment was correct.

Perhaps his ornaments were too much for himself and too little for general application, since it cannot be concealed that his ingenuity was tasked to cover his own declining means by those substitutes. The truth of this observation may be confirmed by the fact that, that no singer ever did, or ever could, give to his passages his particular expression; yet it was impossible, so singular was their construction, not to perceive from whence they were borrowed.²⁶

²³ "Signor Velluti," *QMMR* 1825, 272.

²⁴ Garcia, Vol. 2, 99, 129, 130, 133-135.

²⁵ Richard Edgumbe, Earl of Mount Edgumbe, *Musical Reminiscences, Chiefly Respecting the Italian Opera in England: from the year 1773 to the present time (1828)* (London: George Clark, New Bond Street, 1828): 155.

²⁶ *NMM&LJ* 1834, 22.

As none of Velluti's *published* ornaments definitively reveal (to my understanding, at any rate) an avoidance of technical problem areas, this is perhaps an indication that his publications are not solely what is here referred to, but his *performed* graces as well. This is supposition, however, and hardly definitive as no amount of writing in text or notation can ever completely describe the workings of a voice. What may appear to be an ornament of equal or greater difficulty than the original vocal line might in fact be considerably less difficult for a specific singer.

One frequent criticism of Velluti's singing in general, as well as his behavior on-stage, I believe sheds light on the execution of his harmonically more complex ornamentation. He was apparently not at all averse to dropping out of character in operatic performances in order to conduct ensembles both on-stage and in the pit, as well as the chorus. "He listens, he watches, he helps the choruses—(help they need indeed!)—he times the military band; in short, he is alive to all that's doing."²⁷ Not content to conduct others in their music, when he was singing he also clearly indicated (presumably with gestures) his preferred tempi. "With regard to time, he does not strictly confine himself to that marked by the composer; and he shews great earnestness in communicating to the orchestra the particular time in which he wishes his accompaniments to be performed."²⁸ Critic X of *The Examiner* was particularly scathing regarding Velluti's willful disregard of tempi, asking in March 1826 "what taste indeed can

²⁷ *NMM&LJ* 1825, 345.

²⁸ *The Parthenon* (London: Black, Young, and Young, 1826): 78.

be expected from a man who sings so miserably out of tune, that it is difficult for the band to accompany him,—who defies all time,—hurrying or relaxing without ever regarding the effect intended, and dwelling upon a set of tedious flourishes with a sameness perfectly wearisome?"²⁹

His attention to harmony, as opposed to simple melodic alteration, received both censure and praise. The *Dorset County Chronicle* on 7 July 1825 wrote that "His runs, cadences, and ornaments are particularly beautiful and appropriate, and his management, generally of passages of harmony, skillful and judicious."³⁰ Ayrton in September 1825 wrote that in the final performances of *Crociato* "we witnessed some symptoms....of an erroneous judgment and a neglect of the harmony in the variations he introduced."³¹ Despite Ayrton's censure, it may have been that Velluti broke time specifically to make harmonic complexities easier for his audience to apprehend.

"Nel cor più non mi sento"

Velluti's variations on Paisiello's simple aria are hardly unique. His contribution to the vogue for variations was midstream, nearly two decades after the youthful Beethoven's piano variations on this tune, and ten years before Paganini added his for solo violin.³² Angelica Catalani's were published several

²⁹ *The Examiner* (London: John Hunt, 1826): 148.

³⁰ *Dorset County Chronicle*, July 7, 1825.

³¹ William Ayrton, ed., *The Harmonicon 1825* (London: Samuel Leigh, 1825): 166.

³² Gordana Lazarevich, "La molinara," Website: *Grove Music Online*, ed. Deane Root, Accessed June 29, 2016 @ <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com>.

times, unaltered, from approximately 1807.³³ Paisiello's little aria, oft-repeated in the 1788 opera *La molinara o L'amor contrasto*, was not the only comparatively simple melody to be subject to extravagant variations, or even the only variations Catalani regularly performed.³⁴ And regularly perform them she did, a fact that irritated Stendhal in his 1817 musical travelogue *Rome, Naples and Florence*. After congratulating the discernment of the Milanese public for not attending her concert (the house was half-empty), he eviscerated not her voice (this he considered, literally, peerless), but her taste.

What marvels, then, were it our fortune to witness, had nature but seen fit to bestow upon her the gift of a *soul*! But, alas! in the event, she sang every single aria on the programme *in exactly the same style*. In anticipation, the aria

Frenar vorrei le lacrime...,

so gentle and so persuasive, was to have been the climax of the evening.³⁵ Yet she sang it with the same profusion of tinkling and cascading *fiorature* as she had employed in the variations and on the theme

Nel cor più non mi sento...,

In actual fact, signora Catalani's total *repertoire* comprises no more than a dozen items; with so slender an equipment does she tour the capital cities of Europe!³⁶

³³ See fn. 40 for two Catalani versions of "Nel cor più non mi sento."

³⁴ Hillary Poriss, *Changing the Score: Arias, Prima Donnas, and the Authority of Performance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009). Poriss, though she only gives "Nel cor" a passing mention, devotes a great deal of time to Catalani's (and others') performance of the vocal version of violinist Pierre Rode's variations in G major.

³⁵ Marcos Portugal, "Frenar vorrei le lagrime etc./Aria nell'Opera La Semiramide/ coll'accompagnamento del Pianoforte/composta per al Signora Catalani da S. Portogallo," *La Morte di Semiramide* (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, ca. 1818). These ornaments, presumably Catalani's own, do in fact bear the striking resemblance that Stendhal describes between the versions of this aria and her variations on "Nel cor più non mi sento" that he heard in Milan in 1816. See footnote 40.

³⁶ Stendhal (Henri Marie Beyle), *Rome, Naples and Florence*, ed. and trans. Richard Coe (London: John Calder, 1959): 25-26. Emphases and indentations original.

Catalani was the reigning diva of the period between approximately 1810 and the rise to prominence of Pasta in the early 1820s. So great was her fame that Karl Blumenfeld was able to achieve his own significant measure of fame by hilariously imitating her. Meyerbeer preferred Velluti's variations to Catalani's, considering them "far more original and artistic."³⁷ A mid-1820s score of *Die Falsche Prima Donna in Krähwinkel* (alternately known as *Die Falsche Catalani* or *Die Falsche Diva*) possibly sung by Blumenfeld contains a single variation for the voice (partially excerpted in chapter 3).³⁸ A vertical comparison of the first variation (Catalani's published versions only contain two) illustrates not only Catalani's technique, but her apparent lack of a sense of humor compared to the versions by the castrato and the female impersonator. The third variation is the first of Velluti's unpublished eight variations.³⁹

³⁷ Giacomo Meyerbeer, *Briefwechsel und Tagebücher* Vol. 1, ed. Heinz Becker and Gudrun Becker (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co, 1959) 348-349.

³⁸ As noted in chapter 3, a Monsieur Keller also sang the false Catalani in Dresden, and the original, lower version of "Nel cor" may have been his. However, the Dresden score also has pencilled instructions to transpose the aria to G major, a soprano key, putting the aria in Blumenfeld's reported soprano range.

³⁹ NB: I have in all cases attempted to preserve the original barring and slurring.

Musical Example 5.1. Three Versions of "Nel cor più non mi sento"

Dresden *Catalani*
First Variation
(original in E-flat)

Angelica *Catalani*
First Variation
(original key)

G. B. Velluti
First Variation
(original in E)

Theme

Ti sen - to si ti sen-to bell'_

Nel cor più non mi sen-to bril-

cor più non mi sen - to bril-

Nel cor più non mi sen-to bril-

4

fior di gio - ven - tu ca - gion del mio torm -

lar la gio - ven - tù ca - gion del mio tor -

lar la gio - ven - tù Ca - gion del mi - o tor -

lar la gio - ven - tu ca - gion del mio tor -

7

men - to a - ni - ma - mi - a sei tu. mi

men - to a - ni ma mia sei tu mi

sf men - to *sf* l'a - ni - ma mi - a sei tu mi

men - to a - mor sei col - pa tu. Mi

10

piz - zi - chi mi stuz-zi-chi, mi pun - gi - chi mi

piz - zi - chi mi stuz-zi-chi mi pun - gi - chi mi

piz - zi - chi mi stuz - zi-chi, mi pun - gi - chi e mi

piz - zi - chi, mi stuz-zi-chi, mi pun - gi chi, mi

16

tà, pie-tà pie - tà. a - mor - re'e un cer - to.

tà pie tà pie - tà a - mor e'un cer - to.

sf tà pie - tà pie - tà L'a- mor è un cer - to.

tà, pie - tà, pie - tà, a mo - re'e un cer - to

19

che che de - li - rar mi fa.

che, che de - li - rar mi fa.

sf che che de - li - rar mi fa.

che che de - li - rar mi fa.

⁴⁰ These three versions are taken from four sources. Ignaz Schuster, MS *Die falsche Prima Donna im Krähwinkel* (Dresden: ca. 1825): D-DI, 4389/F/1. It is transposed up a major third, both in accordance with penciled instructions at the top of the first page of the aria, and to ease comparison with Catalani's version. Catalani's version is taken from a published score held in the Harvard Theater Collection. Giovanni Paisiello and Angelica Catalani, "Nel cor più non mi sento/The much admired Air of Paisiello's/As sung in the Opera of IL FANATICO PER LA MUSICA/by Mad.^e Catalani with her own Variations/Arranged by G. G. Ferrari" (London: M. Kelly's Opera Saloon, ca. 1807) and "AIR/Nel cor più non mi sento brillar etc: del'Opera La Molinara/pour Le Forte-Piano/Musique de M^r Paisiello/Chanté par Madame Catalani à Londres." (Hamburg: Böhme [overwritten "B. Schott in Mainz"], ca. 1810) held at the Badische Landesbibliothek in Karlsruhe, Germany. Catalani's two versions are essentially identical. Giovanni Paisiello and Giovanni Battista Velluti, MS *Otto variazioni sul tema/"Nel cor più non mi sento"/a voce sola con accomp* (paper degraded) *forte piano/composta da/Giambattista Velluti* (ca. 1815) I-BEc, FV. ms. 1. Velluti's variations are originally in E major, a minor third lower than here represented.

The Dresden variations often closely track Catalani's, though rather less virtuosically: usually merely sixteenth notes as opposed to the female soprano's running ("tinkling" per Stendhal) thirty-second notes. This version, like Velluti's, is transposed here to match Catalani's G-major. Unlike in Velluti's variations, however, in *Die falsche Prima Donna* there are instructions added to the score to make the transposition to G-major. Even in the same key, however, the false Catalani does not attempt the a" of the real one, nor does he sing g" nearly as frequently. The most striking difference is at mm 9-13, the central, memorable "mi pizzichi, mi stuzzichi, mi pungichi, mi mastichi," ([Love] pricks me, prods me, pinches/pokes me, bites/chews me). Where Catalani chose light melodic alteration, the female impersonator dips deep into his chest voice, not only pulling aside the veil of impersonation, but dramatically illustrating through this repeated, abrupt registral change, a comically outrageous penetration of the female by the male. Of course in this case it's onanistic self-violation. In fairness, Catalani should not be judged harshly for gliding over the comic possibilities of an erotically charged text in an age when the perception of "virtue" in a female performer was hard-won and easily lost.

Catalani's ornaments do bear out both Stendhal's explicit and Meyerbeer's implicit judgment of them—aside from her lack mimetic illustration of "mi pizzichi, etc."—for Stendhal of being artistically undistinguished and, for Meyerbeer, less interesting than Velluti's. They are, aside from a rhythmically unexpected delay of the final syllable in m 6 that illustrates perhaps the delay of release inherent in

"tormento" and its echoes in mm 16, 19 and 20, straightforward if virtuosic melodic alteration or extension. Even with "tormento," however, each shift of textual underlay allows Catalani to begin a descending run with an unvoiced consonant and the related, tiny pause. This shift might merely have been in the service of artifice, not of art.

Velluti's first variation is perhaps his most conventional. Despite this nod (feint?) to convention, he immediately exceeds both real and fake Catalanis, altering the melodic with chromaticisms in m 2 and alters the duple rhythmic scheme of this variation for the half-cadential triplet in m 3.⁴¹ His sforzandos come almost always on leaps to higher notes, or to the highest notes in runs throughout the eight variations, as do his crescendos, hinting, like Catalani's changing text underlay, at an artistic choice with vocal/technical origins. The castrato's "mi pizzichi, etc." is, like the female impersonator's, mimetic comedy, a vocal reproduction of the textual onomatopoeia. Unlike the Catalanis, however, Velluti sets each of these actions—poking (pricking), prodding (pushing), pinching and biting (chewing) —with a somewhat different vocal affect. The first and third words may seem identical, and would be if it were not for Velluti's slur over the staccato arpeggiation of the first word. This is not an unusual interpretation marking—a slur over staccati—among his surviving ornamentation (especially to Lord Burghersh's music) and seems to indicate a different effect

⁴¹ The alteration of a four-note sixteenth-note cadential pattern into a duple and triple grouping of five total notes was a favorite device of Girolamo Crescentini's in his early nineteenth century *Recueil d'Exercices*—his *solfeggi*.

than simple *staccati*. Pricking/poking and pinching are not the same action. The pinching could be—and Velluti seems to indicate that it is—a sharper, more invasive action than a mere prick. Prodding/pushing and biting/chewing are almost identically set, and perhaps *are* identical if Velluti merely neglected to add the final slur. These two latter actions, though in some ways equally violent and invasive, are effected or could be effected with more physical force behind them—also of a longer duration. Especially if the second of each slurred duple is not then tied (as Velluti indicates) to the following note, this paints an insistent, repeated action with some degree of physical follow-through.

In a manner only superficially reminiscent of *Die falsche Prima Donna/Catalani* the text is changed, though here it is Velluti's (comparatively minor) alteration of the first verse, rather than the false Catalani's introduction of the second verse—a text that neither Catalani nor Velluti used. Though Velluti never seems to have been as cavalier with the *texts* of others as he was with the music of others, he did reserve for himself the right to change it in small ways.

Velluti's eight variations are an intellectual *tour-de-force*. Though by the 1820s theme and variations were becoming *passé*, the *QMMR* enjoyed hearing him sing at least some, if not all of these in 1825, in private. "We had the gratification of hearing him sing variations of his own upon the hacknied theme, *Nel cor p[ù] non mi sento*, and they seemed to our ears alike quaint, pleasing, and original. They were certainly more expressive than belong to such things generally, and less instrumentative." Underlining these variations' unsuitability to

the theater or large, public concerts, the *QMMR* adds "the principal beauty is the exquisite finish with which these ornaments are performed. It is here that the delicacy of his voice and the polish of his art demonstrate themselves irresistibly. No one who has not heard Velluti in the chamber can justly say he has heard the superlative of polished execution."⁴² The simple accompaniment changes with each variation to suit the changing *affect*, an additional aspect of these variations that sets them apart from Catalani's. Velluti likely wrote them for his own pianistic abilities, as he seems to have generally, if not always, sung these variations to his own accompaniment. Certainly he did so in two public concerts in 1828.⁴³

Though space prohibits the reproduction of the thirty-plus manuscript pages or a complete transcription of Velluti's *Otto variazioni*, I have excerpted below my transcription of the four measures, vocal line only, that I have already analyzed, this time in the original key(s) and for all eight variations as well as Velluti's version (itself a variant) of the original theme. An additional aspect of these variations that sets them apart from Catalani's: as already indicated, Velluti pairs each variation with a different piano accompaniment adjusted to fit the *affect* of variant. The *Otto variazioni* represent, probably, the peak development of Velluti's first manner: a style of ornamentation that stays within the rhythmic confines of the measure, that is chromatic, and that relies upon melodic

⁴² *QMMR* 1825, 275-276.

⁴³ *Morning Post*, April 19, 1828 and May 2, 1828. Cited by Robin Bier, "The Ideal Orpheus: An Analysis of Virtuoso Self-Accompanied Singing as a Historical Vocal Performance Practice" (PhD Diss, University of York, 2013): 411-412. Program listing: "Aria 'Nel cor più non mi sento', with Variations, Sig. Velluti, accompanied by himself on the Pianoforte (Paisiello)."

alterations or enhancements, though with occasional onomatopoetic excursions like the "mi pizzichi" measures. Chromaticism is often intense, as in Variations 2 and 8. Each variation, with the possible exception of the first, introduces a particular rhythmic or melodic affect and applies it throughout.

Musical Example 5.2. Excerpt from Velluti's *Otto variazioni sul tema "Nel cor più non mi sento"*

Tema
mi piz - zi - chi mi stuz - zi-chi mi pun - gi - chi e mi mas - ti-chi che

Variazone I
mi piz - zi - chi mi stuz - zi-chi mi pun - gi - chi e mi ma - sti-chi che

Variazone II
mi piz - zi-chi (ah) mi stuz-zi - chi mi pun - gi - chi e mi mas-ti - chi che

Variazone III
mi piz - - zi - chi mi stuz - zi-chi mi pun - gi - chi e mi ma - sti-chi che

Variazone IV
mi piz - zi - chi, mi stuz-zi - chi mi pun - gi - chi e mi ma-sti chi che

Variazone V
NB: This Variation is in e-minor.
mi piz-zi - chi mi stuz - zi - chi mi pun-gi - chi mi ma-sti-chi che

Variazone VI
mi piz - - zi - chi mi stuz-zi - chi mi pun - gi - chi e mi ma-sti - chi che

Variazone VII
mi piz - - zi - chi mi stuz - zi-chi mi pun - gi - chi e mi ma - sti-chi che

Variazone VIII
mi piz - - zi - chi mi stuz - zi - chi mi pun - gi - chi e mi ma - sti-chi che

Velluti's most dramatic alterations come in the fifth variation, the "*minore*" that is standard in this genre. This rises to an almost tragic (more likely tragicomic) quality. This variation is probably not coincidentally the one with the most marginalia: at times extravagant, additional cadenzas (in pencil and in Velluti's

hand) in what I have come to see as Velluti's second manner. He hints at this in his 1823 letter to Meyerbeer: "this difficult new genre."⁴⁴ Some of the second manner's characteristics include lengthy and complicated cadenzas at non-cadential points—disjunct and asymmetrical—that absolutely disregard the original rhythmic confines of the measure. This second manner would reach its apparent peak late in Velluti's career with the Garcia version of Morlacchi's *Romanza*. The second manner's sketched-in presence indicates he sang this variation often, perhaps into the late 1820s or even 1830s. In e-minor, the comedy of poking, pinching and biting is eliminated, the note values exactly halved, and the text is given a bare, syllabic treatment.

Meyerbeer's greatest reservation about the effectiveness of these variations was the "intonation" of the "diminished intervals, which come far too often."⁴⁵ It is possible, though Velluti did at times sing horribly out of tune, especially when ill, that Meyerbeer did not necessarily mean Velluti's tuning, but was referring to an audience's difficulty in aurally comprehending a too-difficult musical language⁴⁶ The final page of these variations, reproduced below, shows

⁴⁴ Giacomo Meyerbeer, *Briefwechsel und Tagebücher* Vol. I, ed. Heinz Becker and Gudrun Becker (Berlin: Verlag Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1959): 545-546. "In due anni [h]o studiato molto, su questo difficile genere, e vedo che no ho ricavato un doppio effetto; poco ma buono." My emphasis.

⁴⁵ Meyerbeer, *Briefwechsel* Vol. I, 348. "Er [Velluti] sang uns seine Variationen auf das Thema 'Nel cor non più mi sento,' [sic] welche er bei Gelegenheit der Akademie machte, wo die Catalani die ihrigen in Venedig sang. Die seinigen sind bei weitem origineller & kunstvoller, würden aber in einem Konzert wenig Effect machen. Die grosse Schwierigkeiten besteht meistens in Intonationen verminderter Intervallen, welche gar zu häufig vorkommen."

⁴⁶ Velluti was quite ill when he first sang these for Meyerbeer. Additionally, In German musical criticism of the 1820s and 1830s, "Intonation" is normally used (when praising singers) in combination with the word "pure" (rein) or even "bell-like purity" (glockenrein), indicating that, for most Germans, if not necessarily for Meyerbeer, this word really was about tuning.

a chromatic language whose rapid fire alterations, while not too difficult to understand when heard slowly, are almost impossible to grasp when sung at any kind of speed.

Musical Example 5.3. Excerpt from Velluti's *Otto variazioni sul tema "Nel cor più non mi sento"*

191 *sf* mor è un cer - to *sf*

192 che che

193 de - - li - rar - mi fa.

Morlacchi's *Romanza*, Velluti's *Romanza* and Morlacchi's Velluti-*Romanza*

In Morlacchi's 1822 composing score of *Tebaldo e Isolina* the entire *scena* including the *Romanza* was inserted at some later point, written in a different hand upon paper apparently the same age but of a different size and different consistency.⁴⁷ The ensuing several pages of music containing hints of the melody of the two-strophe aria that replaced them are crossed out.

In late 1825, Velluti published his ornaments to the entire *scena* "as sung" in productions in Verona and Florence between 1822 and 1824.⁴⁸ Far more valuable for my purposes than yet another Velluti ornamented version of one of his famous numbers is a detailed review published at the beginning of 1826 of both the entire *scena* and of Velluti's alterations to it, including some comparisons to actual performance. "Morlacchi's Romance" in the *QMMR* is the only example I know of a serious, critical and specific assessment of Velluti's published ornamentation. It was written, according to the author, using Morlacchi's original score as a comparison to both Velluti's newly published ornaments and his *performed* ornaments during the 1825 London season.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Francesco Morlacchi, MS *Tebaldo e Isolina, melodramma eroico* (Venice: 1822) I-Bc, UU.16/1-2. The inserted paper is rougher and less yellowed, though it does not appear to be significantly newer. It is, in any case, a much simpler version whose composition unquestionably pre-dates Morlacchi's revised 1825 version.

⁴⁸ Francesco Morlacchi and Giovanni Battista Velluti, "Notte Tremenda/Recit. e Caro suono lusinghier/Romanza/as sung by the celebrated Signor Velluti/at Verona and Florence/in his Opera of Tebaldo e Isolina/composed by Signor Morlacchi" (London: Chappell and Co, 1825). This is held in many libraries. The original of the copy I have used is in the Irish National Library. Cindy Kim uses the Birchall and Co. publication, probably from the same year. I also have in my possession a copy of a virtually identical edition by Grua, Ricordi and Co. of London, presumably also from 1825/26.

⁴⁹ *QMMR* 1826, 199-207.

Francesco Morlacchi dramatically revised the score to *Tebaldo* in preparation for a spring 1825 production, entrusting the piano-vocal score to Heinrich Marschner.⁵⁰ Though Ayrton reported that the composer had offered Velluti the revised score for the 1826 London production, the singer turned the offer down, probably for a variety of reasons.⁵¹ A close examination of Morlacchi's original 1822 score shows that the first act was heavily revised and large stretches of music in both the first and second acts completely abandoned by Morlacchi in his 1825 piano-vocal edition. The role of Tebaldo in the 1822 manuscript score begins with a *scena* in which the singer is given an unrelenting succession of b"s. In a similar hand, however, every single phrase with b" is given an optional phrase at least a third lower (with the very brief exception of a single sixteenth note). After this first *scena* for Tebaldo, the rest of the role lies in a clearly lower tessitura. This dramatic change and the preceeding emendations indicate that Morlacchi began composition before hearing or hearing *from* Velluti who apparently then refused to sing a note—b"—that is nowhere else in evidence in any of the music that he is known to have sung. The original tessitura for Tebaldo *is* strikingly similar to music Carl Maria von Weber composed for Filippo Sassaroli in the two Dresden festival masses of 1818 and 1819. It is possible that Morlacchi used the castrato voice he knew (Sassaroli's) as a

⁵⁰ Francesco Morlacchi, *Tebaldo e Isolina*, Facsimile: 1825 piano-vocal edition by Heinrich Marschner, ed. Phillip Gossett (New York: Garland Publishing, 1989).

⁵¹ *Harmonicon* 1826, 86.

template for the one he didn't (Velluti's).⁵² Although Sieghart Döhring notes that the later, Dresden version of *Tebaldo* was clearly written for a singer with a higher voice, he does not mention the alterations in the original 1822 score itself.⁵³ The b" that frequently appears the Dresden version is, with one possible, sixteenth-note exception, always rewritten or overwritten in the 1822 score.

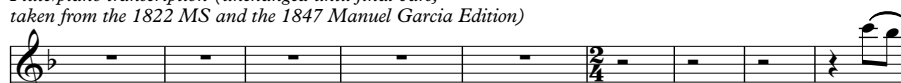
The *scena* "Notte Tremenda" and the *Romanza*, coming as they do late in the second act and, presumably, late in the opera's composition, lie in Velluti's normal, low soprano/mezzo soprano range. In the 1825 Dresden version, while throughout the opera Morlacchi largely reinstates the original, higher tessitura, his changes to the *scena* itself offer solid evidence that Velluti's ornaments as documented in the published 1822-1824 version were considered improvements upon the original by the composer himself. These versions are arranged geologically, that is to say, the oldest layer is at the bottom and the youngest at the top.

⁵² Carl Maria von Weber, *Missa Sancta Nr. 1 Es-Dur (WeV A.2) Mit Offertorium "Gloria Et Honore" (WeV A.3) ; Missa Sancta Nr. 2 G-Dur (WeV A.5) Mit Offertorium "in Die Solemnitatis" (WeV A.4)*, eds. Dagmar Kreher et al. (Mainz: Schott, 1989).

⁵³ Sieghart Döhring, "Das Ende des Kastratengesangs," >>Per be vestir la virtuosa<<. *Die Oper des 18. und frühen 19. Jahrhunderts im Spannungsfeld zwischen Komponisten und Sängern*, eds. Daniel Brandenburg and Thomas Seedorf (Schliengen: Edition Argus, 2011): 201.

Musical Example 5.4. Comparison of 1822, 1822-1824 and 1825 Versions of Morlacchi's and Velluti's *Romanza*.

Flute/piano transcription (unchanged until final bars, taken from the 1822 MS and the 1847 Manuel Garcia Edition)



Published, 1825 Dresden, Morlacchi/Marschner piano-vocal edition



Published, 1825 London, Velluti's Version "As Sung in Florence and Verona" 1822-24



1822 Venice, Francesco Morlacchi Original MS



NB: A. All barring has been kept as in the various originals both when this goes against modern and presumably, contemporary usage. I begin to believe that barring of successive notes was an indication of articulation and gestural grouping, rather than simply an aid to easy reading. B. Velluti's grace notes are almost never slashed, and his ornaments are often notated in longer note values (for example: eights vs. sixteenths) rather than the shorter values preferred by composers and in instrumental passages. C. Punctuation and capitalization are kept as in the original, published versions (the MS is at times very rushed, sloppy and inconsistent.) D. Clusters of vowels are almost never exactly matched to notes in vocal prints or manuscripts of this period, and I believe that the exact placement of them was left to the singer's discretion. I have done the best approximation I could of their positions relative to the sung notes.

10

lo co no sco... lo sen- to nel mio co - re

lo co - no - sco lo sen-to nel mio co - re

lo co-no-sco lo sen-to nel mio co - re V.S.

14

è la ma-no d'I-so - li - na è il

è la ma-no d'I-so - li - na è il

è la ma-no d'I-so - li - na Il___

18

suon il suon_ d'a - mo - re

suon è il suon_ d'a - mo - re

suon il suon_ d'a - mo - re

23

tal quel - la pri - ma vol - ta ch'io l'in - te - si e che di lei m'ac-

ah! si la pri - ma vol - ta ch'io l'in - te - si e che di lei m'ac-

tal quel-la pri - ma vol - ta ch'io l'in - te - si e che di lei m'ac-

25

ce - si, e - ra'un in-can - to ma'al-lor e-ra fe

ce - si, e - ra'un in can to. ma all'or e-ra fe

ce - si, e - ra l'in- can - to ma'al-lor e-ra fe

29

li - ce or tri - sta'e so - la for-se'a me,

li - ce Or tristo e so - lo forse a me,

li - ce or tri - sta'e so - la for - se'a me,

33

for - se'a me pen-sa e il

for - se'a me pen-sa e il

for se'a me pen - sa e il V.S.
originally notated twice as fast

4

36

suo do - lor con - so - la ca ro

suo do - lor con - so - la ca ro

suo do - lor con - so - la ca ro

40

suo - no lu - sin ghier dol ce'o - gnor mi scen - di'al cor

suo - no lu - sin ghier dol ce'o - gnor mi scen - di al cor

suon-(o) lu - sin ghier dol ce'o - gnor ^{sic} mi scen-de al cor

45

dol ce'o- gnor mi scen - di'al cor tu ri chia mi al mio pen -

dol ce'o- gnor mi scen - di'al cor tu ri chia mi al mio pen

dol ce'o- gnor mi scen - de'al cor tu richia - mi al mio pen - ^{sic}

49

sier i pia - cer d'un ca - sto'a - mor quel bel di che ci ra - pi di sua

sier i pia cer d'un ca - sto'a - mor quel bel di che ci ra - pi di sua

sier i pia - cer d'un ca-sto'a mor quel bel di che ci ra - pi di sua

54

pu-ra vo - lu - tà do - ve'an - dò, do - ve'an - dò, do - ve'an

pu-ra vo - lon - tà do - ve'an - dò, do - ve'an - dò, do - ve'an

pu-ra vo - lon - tà do - ve an - dò do-ve'an - dò do-ve'an

58

dò mio ben quel di! ah! mai più ah! mai più, ah! mai

dò, do-ve'an-dò mio ben, quel di, ah mai più, ah mai più, ah mai

dò mio ben quel di ah mai più ah mai più, ah mai V.S.

62

più ri - tor - ne - rà, mai più mai più ah! mai più ri - tor - ne -
più ri - tor - ne - rà, mai più, mai più, ah mai più ri - tor - ne -
più ri - tor - ne - rà, mai più mai più ah mai più ri - tor - ne -

67 *From this point the versions for the flute vary too widely to use in this comparison.*

Rallentando *Affrettando con forza*

rà ah mai più, ah mai più ri - tor - ne -

Adagio *Con Forza*

rà ah mai più, no mai più, ri - tor - ne -

70 rà ah mai più ri - tor - ne - rà.

-rà ah! mai più ah mai più ri - tor - ne - rà.

-rà.

As is immediately clear in the above example, the version Morlacchi published in 1825—there is no reason to suppose this *did not* postdate Velluti's ornaments as sung in Italy between 1822 and 1824—substantially adopts Velluti's ornamentation. Morlacchi's 1822 composing score is at times hurriedly sketched in and places like m 11 are just suggestions that don't precisely fit the time signature. I have slightly adapted these to fit the measure while keeping as much as possible of the original sense. The other two versions are printed and while not always fitting the measures themselves are quite clear and presumably exact.

In comparing the 1822-24 version and the 1825 Morlacchi/ Marschner versions, Kim makes the remark that "Velluti's work is indistinguishable from Morlacchi's. Who then can claim the status of author in published scores that bear the name of the singer?"⁵⁴ She does not mention the 1822 original manuscript and does not include it in her bibliography. Once that original version is added, however, and the Italian rather than London provenance of the Velluti ornaments in the 1822-24 version taken into account, it becomes clear, as often as not, that Velluti is the originator and Morlacchi the adopter. The likelihood of Velluti's having been able to adapt his score to Morlacchi's by the spring of 1825, when both versions were likely being prepared for publication and Velluti's was being sung in private parties all over London while Morlacchi's was probably already in rehearsal for the Dresden premier, is extremely small.

⁵⁴ Kim, "Ornamentation," 85.

The secondary motive is first sung in mm 17-19. It is first played in its entirety by the solo flute in mm 15-17.⁵⁵ Morlacchi gives the primary theme "Caro suono lusinghier" to the voice only once, in m 39, though the flute plays it several times, the first instance being in mm 9-11. The harp is understood as being played by Isolina, out of sight. This is referred to in the opening measures of the aria itself, "Lo conosco/lo sento nel mio core/e la mano d'Isolina," as Tebaldo reacts to hearing its introductory phrase.⁵⁶ The flute, on the other hand, seems to represent a supercognitive ossia, a *Doppelgänger* pre-echoing, re-echoing Tebaldo's own thoughts. While the harp on the surface is the sound to which Tebaldo refers, "the sound of love," the constant dialogue between voice and flute in the original and, in Velluti's variations, clouds the issue. Is the sound of love Isolina's playing (on the harp), or is it the responsorial, self-contained, self-exploration of the narcissistic duo of flute and castrato?

The secondary motive is repeated far more often than the primary motive. As Davies believes the flute to be the voice of Isolina, he sees this as Morlacchi's demonstration of the lack of agency inherent in the castrato.⁵⁷ Perhaps underlying a lack of agency, at least in Morlacchi's conception, there is no real melody, only gestural fragments. The *QMMR* wrote about the preceding recitative that "upon paper it looks nothing, or if any thing, a scrambling up and

⁵⁵ For the complete and final Manuel Garcia-published version with flute and harp, see the next section of this chapter.

⁵⁶ "I know it/I feel it in my heart/it is the hand of Isolina" The German translation in Morlacchi/Marschner is even clearer: "Sie erken' ich/Sie hallen in mir wieder/Es ist Isolins Harfe."

⁵⁷ Davies, *Romantic Anatomies*, 36-37. Davies is ignoring the text here in his assignment of the flute to Isolina. She is both clearly and explicitly represented by the harp.

down jumble of notes; nor is it, till it be thoroughly studied and apprehended," and extends, a bit unfairly, the critique to the aria itself. "In truth there is little that can be called melody."⁵⁸ Morlacchi gives this secondary motive to Tebaldo the singer (as opposed to Tebaldo the flute) five times (mm 17-19, 35-37, 45-45, 61-63 and 65-67), never altering it in the 1822 original. Velluti's 1822-1824 version alters every single iteration, including the second half of the first instance in mm 17-19, a process Kim describes as "the singer's creative variation mimic[ing] the process of recalling a memory."⁵⁹ I believe this is to be a dialogue of self-exploration rather than the memory reconstruction of Kim or the agency-less reactivity of Davies.

The *QMMR*'s critic wrote that Morlacchi did not entirely approve of the singer's version: perhaps his creation of a "strange land" (Stendhal) within its confines. "We have heard from authority upon which we are accustomed to rely, that the composer's interpretation of his own music does not exactly coincide with that given it by Signor Velluti."⁶⁰ In 1825, Morlacchi kept the theme, unaltered, only twice: once on the first iteration in mm 17-19 and once in mm 61-63. For the other three reiterations of this theme, the composer adopted Velluti's adaptations in their entirety. His exact repetition of it, something Velluti never follows, tends to diminish, though it does not destroy, the intimate, insular conversation between Tebaldo and his flute. This is a nearly indisputable example of a composer not

⁵⁸ "Morlacchi's Romance," *QMMR* 1826, 202-201.

⁵⁹ Kim, "Ornamentation," 71.

⁶⁰ "Morlacchi's Romance," *QMMR* 1826, 199.

only allowing a singer great latitude to change the melody substantially—and perhaps through this changing the dramaturgy itself—but in fact largely adopting the singer's changes, note-for-note, in the final, "official" version. In the *QMMR*, and in apparent innocence of the exact form of Morlacchi's 1825 revisions, the opinion was that "had he [Morlacchi] so clearly imagined the passages, he probably would have written them, and secured to himself the praise that belongs to them."⁶¹

Other examples of Morlacchi copying Velluti, aside from the most prominent variations upon the secondary motive, are the near-exact repetitions of short cadenzas in mm 25 and 67. The descending chromatic scale in m 25 seems to have been a favorite device of Velluti's. He seems to have introduced something quite like it, though probably of greater extent, in the *encore* of the lesson scene in Rossini's *Barbiere di Siviglia* on 9 July 1825, with Maria Garcia as Rosina.⁶² During the encore "VELLUTI exceeded any thing which we had previously heard from him. He descended the chromatic scale in one of his ornaments with a perfect distinctness and precision rarely to be equalled."⁶³ Morlacchi also adopted Velluti's extension of Tebaldo's singing beyond its original bounds, in mm 68-70, even Velluti's interpretive markings of "Adagio" and "Con forza" were incorporated with only minor changes. The final, emphatic, sung coda that Morlacchi added in 1825, mm 70-72, building upon the

⁶¹ "Morlacchi's Romance," *QMMR* 1826, 199.

⁶² Velluti and Maria Garcia (Malibran) sang the duet "Mille Sospiri" from Rossini's *Aureliano in Palmyra*.

⁶³ *Morning Post* July 11, 1825.

passionate additions he heard from the singer, underlines the wisdom of Velluti.

The singer, unlike the composer, knew when to stop.

Kim is of the opinion that the 1822-24 version of the aria published in 1825 is not really highly ornamented.⁶⁴ Believing this to be a "relatively simple version of the *Romanza*" marketed to amateur singers, she derives her judgment of simplicity from a comparison that is only true when the 1822 original is excluded and the only comparison is the 1847 Garcia version.⁶⁵ Bacon, the only source who had not only heard Velluti sing this, but had seen both the original and Velluti's published variants and *wrote about it*, finds it highly ornamented: similar to but not exactly like the sung version of 1825.⁶⁶

Velluti's final version of the *Romanza*, from 1847, seems to contain many of the secrets, the "manner, which is all in all," that Bacon says is lacking in the 1825 version.⁶⁷ This was published by Manuel Garcia (fils) long after the castrato's retirement. Though many of the arias in the second volume of Garcia's book have interpretive instructions, those in this aria are more extensive and detailed, indicating that the castrato had some hand in them. Garcia merely introduces the aria as an example of an extinct school, given to him by Velluti. He adds that only Velluti now knows the secrets of this school.⁶⁸ When judged against this, all three of the previous versions seem simplistic. Compared only to

⁶⁴ Kim, "Ornamentation," 97-98.

⁶⁵ See next section.

⁶⁶ "Morlacchi's Romance," *QMMR* 1826, 202, 207. Stendhal writes that Velluti prepared 3 different sets of ornaments from which he chose the one most appropriate to the feelings of the moment, preserving the sense of spontaneity. Stendhal, *Life of Rossini*, 355, fn. 2.

⁶⁷ *QMMR* 1826, 207.

⁶⁸ Manuel Garcia, *Die Kunst des Gesangs* (Mainz: Gebrüder Schott, ca. 1850): 133.

the original version, the considerable and constantly evolving changes that Velluti makes justify the *QMMR*'s final assessment of the singer's liberties, and his mild condemnation of Morlacchi for writing such a simple aria. The original not only invited such treatment, it was the better for it.

Manuel Garcia's *Traité complete de l'art du chant* was published first in 1847 in Paris and then in ca. 1850 in Mainz.⁶⁹ Garcia's print of Velluti's last version of this aria is in many respects the most remarkable documentation of the art of the castrato that survives. The specification of colors, effects, subtleties of consonant placement within *portamenti*, detailed descriptions not only of the specifics of *rubato* but even, occasionally, of vocal technique itself comprise, when read/heard with a mind's ear that employs the numerous, specific descriptions of the various colors, qualities and registers of Velluti's voice, the closest thing to a recording (in prose and notation) that can be said to exist for a great castrato.⁷⁰ The final version of the *Romanza* is far more detailed than any other Velluti-ornamented aria, published or in manuscript, and hints at a singer who no longer sings. No longer needing to keep his exact manner of singing and ornamentation a proprietary secret and apparently anxious to secure his legacy, Velluti gave Manuel Garcia all his secrets capable of being transmitted via print.

Davies's description of this scena as one of "memory, melancholy and delusion ... gesturing to an imagined event preparatory or external to the operatic

⁶⁹ Garcia, 133.

⁷⁰ The Vatican recordings of the mediocre Alessandro Moreschi, whose instrument, in pieces, tells us much about the bones of the castrato voice, otherwise illuminates only by the vivid contrast his limitations provide to the phenomenally varied manner(isms) of Velluti in his waning years.

plot," needs but one change, from "event" to "place," to move the aria, or at least Velluti's version of it, into one of Keats's or Hunt's imagined, "Kangaroo terra firmas."⁷¹ Indeed, the Garcia version, far more so than the 1822-1824 version, is evocative of, or at least makes comprehensible, Stendhal's sense that Velluti's *Romanza* was capable of transporting the listener to a strange land, or even of being itself a landscape of heretofore unknown or perhaps unknowable dimensions. Davies's analysis is the earliest in modern scholarship and remains, in some ways, the most complete. However, his ill-concealed disdain for the singer as revealed in his music undermines his impartiality.⁷²

Paolo da Col believes the lower key of the *Romanza* (F Major to E^b Major) that is repeated in one manuscript copy of the aria in the Fondo Velluti to be a transposition made to accommodate the slowly sinking voice of an aging castrato.⁷³ However, the manuscript copies are of the 1822 original version and the few penciled ornaments (in what appears to be Velluti's hand) look like

⁷¹ James Davies, "'Velluti in speculum': The twilight of the castrato," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 17 3 (2005): 295.

⁷² Ibid. Davies considers the style stilted and archaic and deplores the harmonic clashes as "Bizarreries." These are a hallmark of Velluti's second manner. He uneasily backs away from the *scena* in its Vellutian splendor with the statement: "The stench of antiquity ... hangs over his manner [and] is on the contrary disengaging. There are places in history, this being one, that are perhaps best left alone. This music is not ours." Here Davies makes the false equivalency of Velluti's *manner* of singing, rather than the voice itself, as *necessarily and uniquely* proceeding from and appertaining only to the castration of Italian boys. Ironically, Davies here proclaims a moral-aesthetic affinity with some of the worst bigotry of Velluti's 1825 London critics. Kim's chapter, though entirely based upon the earlier, article version of the book's chapter, is understandably if a bit zealously pro-Velluti. She is even less forgiving than I am.

⁷³ Paolo Da Col, *Catologo dei Fondi Musicali Antonio Miari e Giovanni Battista Velluti della Biblioteca Civica di Belluno* (Venice: Edizioni Fondazione Levi, 2008): xxii-xxiii. Da Col refers to this manuscript copy (see fn. 72) and the theory of age-necessitated transposition, citing "Silvanus Urban," *The Gentleman's Magazine and Historical Chronicle for January to June 1826*, 79, for the "disagreeable harshness" in Velluti's upper range.

simplified or preliminary versions of the same ornamented secondary motive found in the 1822-24 published versions.⁷⁴ The fact that these two Belluno versions are both mostly unornamented hints that they precede both published revisions, or were (unlikely, as they were part of Velluti's personal library) made in innocence of them. This was also in the period *before* Velluti's high notes were consistently and audibly heard as being in a state of decay. I believe this version in the lower key of E^b Major to be in Velluti's preferred concert key.

Private concerts seem rarely to have employed full orchestras, and the caricature of Velluti at a private concert seen in chapter 4 shows him being accompanied by a flute and a small spinet. Possibly this is a visual, if highly satirical, representation of one of 1825's private performances of the *Romanza* (the spinet would have played the harp part). The already documented necessity of singing with reduced volume when in private could explain the use of a lower key with a commensurately more relaxed *tessitura* (even if, as Kim notes, the range is almost as extensive—*tessitura* is far more important in these instances than the extremes of ambitus).⁷⁵ A more softly sung version of this aria is much more practicable when it is a tone lower. As Ayrton and others noted, Velluti often had the instruments tuned down a half step in his private, London

⁷⁴ Francesco Morlacchi, MS "Romanza di Tebaldo ed Isolina," (ca. 1820s), Belluno, Biblioteca Civica di Belluno, I-BEc, FV.ms.13. This is one of two copies of the *Romanza* in Belluno: one with orchestra, this one with just harp and flute.

⁷⁵ Mount Edgumbe, *Reminiscences*, 160. See his criticism of Pasta in private concerts. "In a small room her voice was too loud and sometimes harsh, her manner too forcible and vehement: but in the theater all blemishes disappeared." Kim, 97.

performances.⁷⁶ High notes that were perhaps not too harsh-sounding when loudly, freely sung in a large theater were probably both harsh and too loud in a much smaller room with its far less forgiving acoustic. Far easier to obviate them altogether with a lowered key than to struggle to accomplish them with less force than was possible. Garcia's version of the *Romanza* shows the highest sustained note is f".⁷⁷ The g" and a single a^b are only touched before the singer descends back into more friendly territory. One aria, actually composed by Velluti in its entirety in ca. 1811, was inserted into Simon Mayr's *Ginevra di Scozia*. Though rising to a b^b", the highest sustained note is still generally f". Every rising run that goes higher than f" is marked with a crescendo or an accent, followed by a decrescendo or *morendo* when the peak is past.⁷⁸ This, written by Velluti for his own voice when it was at its peak, indicates that his very highest notes were rarely if ever sung at much less than full power.

With the preceding caveats in mind, one hears Garcia's E^b Major version of the *Romanza* not with the full-throated, occasionally cracking or strained, late 1820s theater voice, but rather with the light, subtle singing of the private Velluti. All notes below approximately an f' are in a full tenorial, even baritonal in the case of the e^b, chest voice.⁷⁹ Between approximately f' and c", the mentally

⁷⁶ *QMMR* 1825, 272. *Harmonicon* 1825, 164.

⁷⁷ Mount Edgcumbe, *Reminiscences*, 155. Velluti "lovingly dwelt" upon some high notes.

⁷⁸ Giovanni Battista Velluti, "Come potrei mai vivere/Cavatina/Composta dal Sig.r Gio Bat.a Velluti./Esequita dal Acclamismo in Vienna/Nell'Opera La/Ginevra di Scozia" (London: Grua, Ricordi and Co., circa 1825/26). Held at the Harvard Houghton Library.

⁷⁹ I have never been able to discover an account of the exact point at which Velluti left chest voice and entered the middle register, merely that the middle register existed and in all likelihood ended at a c". The female middle registers described in chapter 3 in the *NMM&LJ* of 1833 and 1834

reconstructed Velluti uses the middle register, sometimes neither falsetto nor chest voice clearly audible, sometimes audibly exchanging the one for the other as vehemence or color suggests. Finally, above the c" he uses his falsetto: clear, soft (when he wishes) and flexible (sounding alternately like a bell, like a woman, like a high male falsetto—perhaps not quite like any of the them, but something in between them). He especially dwells upon the high f", as Cox fondly recalled, ringing his voice like a distant bell, tolling a multi-part *messa di voce*: the good Velluti. It is all too easy to imagine the bad Velluti's peacock shriek, doorhinge creak and all the barnyard cacophony of a voice in distress. As noted in chapter 3, Stendhal heard this particular aria, in a geographical sense, as a "strange land."⁸⁰ It is tempting to see here Anglo-Italians conjuring up their Italy within Velluti's discontinuous, jagged promontories of sound.

cover about a fifth or a sixth and their three-registered voices were considered by the same author to be analogous, in this manner, to Velluti's.

⁸⁰ "Signor Velluti," *QMMR* 1825, 274, quoting Stendhal's 1824 *La Vie de Rossini*.

81

9779

396

expiration légère.
 leichtes Ausathmen.
Timbre ouvert.
 bedeckte Klangfarbe.
note et syllabe légères.
 Note und Sylbe leicht.
appoggiature rapide.
 ohne port de voix.
 raschlag-schnell oh.
 Tragen der Stimme.
notes lisses égales et légères.
 gleichmäßig gleiche und leichte
 bedeckte Töne.
accompagnement inspiré.
 Begleitung mit Schwingung
 des Instrumentes.
inspiration.
 Einathmen.
pharynx resserré.
 Schlund zusammengezogen.
l'entassement de la note le fait.
 Das Nachschlagen auf das
 letzte Sylbenbedeckte.
 Diese Sylbe leicht.

voix mélancolique.
 Melancholische Stimme.
éclat:
 glänzend. *p*
étendez la voix sur toutes les notes.
 die Stimme auf allen Noten ausbreitet.
And.^{te} mosso.
 e il su - o do lo *rall.* con - so - la ca - ro suo no lu - sin

physionomie riante.
 lachende Physionomie.
clan de lame.
 Schwingung der Seele.
timbre clair.
 helle Klangfarbe.
pharynx resserré.
 Schlund zusammengezogen.
éclat:
 glänzend. *p*

le motif modifié.
 veränderter Motif.
le motif modifié.
 veränderter Motif.
Sous imitant l'écho.
 Echo nachahmende Töne.
smorzando.
rinforzando.
 ghier dolce o guor mi scen - deal cor
 dol - ce o - gnor mi scen - de al cor
 de al cor tu ri
 de al cor tu ri

cresc. f
écho.
 Echo.
pharynx resserré.
 Schlund zusammengezogen.
dolce.
 chial mi o pen - sier i pia cer d'un cas - to a - mor quel bel di che ci ra -
 cer dun cas - to a - mor

p f p f

9779.

[illegible]

Velluti, Lord Burghersh and the Emergence of the Second Manner

Lord Burghersh and Lady Burghersh were both talented dilettantes, he in music and she in painting, linguistics and, I believe, in poetry. When they first met Velluti is unrecorded, but it was no later than summer of 1822, when the singer reprised *Tebaldo e Isolina* in Florence. Composition of Lord Burghersh's opera, *La Fedra*, on a libretto of Metastasio's was likely already well underway, if not largely complete, and Burghersh convinced Velluti to sing the male lead.

La Fedra premiered in early November 1822 at the ambassador's home. In 1823, at a time when Velluti was back in Florence and probably seeing the Burghershes frequently, Gaetano Rossi and Giacomo Meyerbeer were deep in the planning for *Il Crociato in Egitto*. Velluti's single known surviving letter to Meyerbeer from this period was sent in September 1823. "I much prefer, on the whole, the sentimental, for thus one suits Italian and Ultramontane tastes, and those of all who have a soul. My friend, for two years I have much studied this difficult genre, and see that I got a twofold result [literally "double effect"]: modest, but good."⁸² This twofold result to which Velluti alludes remains elusive, though sentimental music, rather than raucous and lively, would allow him more leeway in layering the composer's wishes with his own.

⁸² Meyerbeer, *Briefwechsel*, Vol. I, 545-546. "Dite a Rossi, che per carità, non mi faccia vedere tante e tante volte in scene; io amo assai la qualità, e non la quantità, per il resto lui ben sà e mi conosce cosa convenga al mio genere di canto; che io preferisco molto alla parte tutta sentimentale, perchè così conviene al gusto italiano ed oltramontano, e per quelli che [h]anno un'anima. Amico, in due anni [h]o studiato molto, su questo difficile genere, e vedo che no ho ricavato un doppio effetto; poco ma buono."

The time indicated in the letter, I think not at all coincidentally, places the gestation of this "difficult" new genre almost exactly parallel to his apparently intense friendship with the Burghershes. Further revealing the close relationship between Burghersh and Velluti, around 1825 the latter published several of the former's arias with ornaments above the vocal line with Grua & Ricordi of London, having already published numbers from *La Fedra* in Florence.⁸³ Two of those arias, one with a fully ornamented *recitativo accompagnato*, are from Burghersh's setting of Metastasio's popular cantata XVI, *L'amor timido*. Burghersh had published this at some point before 1823 according to a general review of his compositions in the *QMMR* that, however, manages to avoid ever passing judgment upon them with the exception of praising Burghersh's recitatives in an almost surprised tone.⁸⁴

This ornamentation, consistent in style throughout Burghersh's publications, possibly demonstrates what Velluti meant by a "double effect." Bacon praised Meyerbeer for composing arias in *Crociato* to be "beautiful in a high degree. They join Italian melody with German harmony." Additionally, Meyerbeer's music is written "to give the singer great latitude: a power of which Velluti knows how to avail himself to the utmost."⁸⁵ Though the idea of an intense

⁸³ Garlington, Appendices I and II.

⁸⁴ *QMMR* 1823, 209-213. John Fane, Lord Burghersh, "L'amor Timido/CANTATA OF METASTAZIO [*sic*]/The Music Composed by LORD BURGHERSH" (London: Walker Senior, ca. 1822/23). Held in the British Museum. This cantata setting is the apparent original with no emendations by Velluti. The entire text of Metastasio's text takes the form of Recit, Aria, Recit, Aria. Pietro Metastasio, *Opere sacre, poesie varie, e traduzioni*, Volume 5 of *Opera Scelte di Pietro Metastasio* (Milan: Società Tipografica dei Classici Italiani, 1820) 287-288.

⁸⁵ "The Music of the Month," *The London Magazine* 1825, 475.

harmonic language (the Germanic or Ultramontane) being compatible with an Italianate singerly melodicism is contradictory, Velluti had already been shown, even in his earlier, simpler first manner to have been chromatically ambitious and melodically willful to a degree well beyond the virtuosity of his contemporaries.

Burghersh's music is straightforward and almost purely Italianate.

According to the *QMMR* "it is quite clear, judging from the unity of design and of taste [Burghersh's] printed compositions exhibit, that his musical faith has been settled in [Italy]."⁸⁶ As has been seen in the short excerpts from the circa 1815 *Otto variazioni*, Velluti had already been experimenting with an ornamentation among whose goals was harmonic intensification through added chromaticism, though it exists there in a fleeting form. Velluti "changed the passages of a song; but he changed them rather for the sake of varying the traits and heightening the expression, than with a view to multiplying notes or showing his facility [his flexibility], which was by no means superior."⁸⁷

Unfortunately the Burghersh-Velluti publications appear never to have been reviewed. Perhaps this was out of fear of Burghersh's power, or perhaps because their publication occurred either before Velluti was in London (this seems unlikely) or later during his sojourns, when his star no longer shone so brightly and little notice of his concerts or publications was paid in the critical press. These ornaments are in some ways as extensive as those in the Garcia version of the *Romanza*, but with the added complexity of a truly great poet,

⁸⁶ *QMMR* 1826, 209-214.

⁸⁷ *NMM&LJ* 1834, 21.

Metastasio, rather than the more workaday Rossi. Here, Velluti's emendations are not merely musical or mimetic, but seem to cross the line into diagesis.

Using only the first recitative and aria from "L'amor timido" I find examples of Velluti's second manner, though not as extreme as in the *Garcia Romanza*, with ornaments falling into approximately three classes.⁸⁸ The first class, shown below, is one of simple melodic alteration or extension. It is diatonic and conventional, and though Velluti does layer triple upon duple, this is no advancement upon standard vocal practice. The uppermost line contains Velluti's ornamentation; below it is Lord Burghersh's original.

Musical Example 5.6. Velluti's Ornaments to John Fane, Lord Burghersh's "L'amor timido," Class 1, mm 56-57

56

so che ti vuol - i

so che ti vuol - i

pp

In the second class, Velluti alters the vocal line not to enhance the melody, but mimetically to illustrate the word. This is also, while not entirely conventional, something that he had been doing since at least the *Otto varazioni*.

⁸⁸ John Fane, Lord Burghersh and Giovanni Battista Velluti, "L'Amor timido./CANTATA, BY METASTASIO./The Music Composed by Lord Burghersh,/and Presented by him to/SIGNOR VELLUTI,/with whose Embellishments it is published/for the instruction of those/Amateurs desirous of acquiring his style of Singing" (London: Grua, Ricordi & Co., ca. 1825/1826).

"Palpitar"—palpitate—is set so blandly by Burghersh that it not only expects alteration, it invites it. Velluti creates, at its first appearance, a gasping, leaping line that evokes the excited young lover's racing heart.

Musical Example 5.7.1. Velluti's Ornaments to "L'amor timido," Class 2, mm 52-53

Musical Example 5.7.2. Velluti's Ornaments to "L'amor timido," Class 2, mm 95-96

In the repeat of the text “T'intendo sì, mio cor; con tanto palpitar” (I hear you, indeed, my heart, with great palpitation) the heart's palpitations are dramatically represented by a quick, shivering, grace-note laden run, dramatically extending the simple cadence with a downward sweeping octave. While highly

imaginative, this is not conceptually an advance upon "mi pizzichi" in the variations of 1815.

Musical Example 5.8.1. Velluti's Ornaments to "L'amor timido," Class 3, mm 87-88

87

sof - - fri t'in - ten - do t'in -

sof - - fri t'in - ten - do t'in -

A Tempo

ff *pp*

In the third class of ornament Velluti, rather than illustrating words mimetically, opted for a combination of melodic and chromatic intensification in an effort to demonstrate the meaning of "soffri," or suffer. Eschewing the diatonicism offered by the tones of V^7 chord in the piano, Velluti added a $g^\sharp$ and $b^\sharp$ on a torturous, albeit brief, demonstration of suffering. This seems to be passion that inheres not the manner with which this ornament is sung, but rather to the contour of the notes themselves. This cannot be mimesis, as the word "suffer," by itself, has no real onomatopoetic connotations independent of the sounds a sufferer might make. This is diagesis—a kind of additional layer of narrative imposed upon Burghersh's musical structure that serves to emphasize, not it, but Metastasio's poetic intent.

We find in the final two examples, both taken from the opening recitative, some of the most remarkable instances of Velluti's multiple layers of musical *and* literary meanings. Here he utilizes sharply dissonant chromatic appoggiaturas, brief, florid interpolations into what is otherwise a relatively restrained recitative to create fleeting pictorial flourishes of heightened meaning.

Musical Example 5.8.2. Velluti's Ornaments to "L'amor timido," Class 3, mm 27-29

27

scin - til - lar quel - la

cau-to in un leg-giar-do ci-glio scin - til - lar quel-la fa-ce ond' or m'ac

In singing "scintillare," Velluti manages to create a scintillation, a sparkling like the path of a rising skyrocket as the shimmering vocal line rises out of the dense instability of the chord below it and then falls rapidly back down to earth, onto Burghersh's tonal field, within a few notes. As this rising figure briefly, brilliantly opens a vista onto another world, it is not hard (for me) to imagine that, upon hearing it, Lord Burghersh and other listeners "look'd at each other with a

wild surmise," at the strange lands opened up by this new, expressionistic style of ornamentation.⁸⁹

Musical Example 5.8.3. Velluti's Ornaments to "L'amor timido," Class 3, mm 33-35

The final cadenza, on the repeated "Cor mio" rises again, climactically to the a". The heart, with the highest note of the entire cantata, makes its complaint heard.⁹⁰ The aria "T'intendo sì, mio cor"—I hear you, indeed, my heart—that immediately follows makes the literal heart's cry of Velluti's stentorian cadenza all the more dramatic.⁹¹ This cantata would almost certainly have been sung, not in

⁸⁹ John Keats, "On first looking into Chapman's Homer," In *The Norton Anthology of English Literature, Volume D, The Romantic Period*, eds. Jack Stillinger and Diedre Lynch (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006): 880, ll 9-14. "Then felt I like some watcher of the skies/When a new planet swims into his ken;/ Or like stout Cortez, when with eagle eyes/ He stared at the Pacific—and all his men/ Look'd at each other with a wild surmise—/ Silent, upon a peak in Darien."

⁹⁰ Aubrey Garlington, *Society, Culture and Opera in Florence, 1814-1830: Dilettantes in an 'Earthly Paradise'* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004): 141, seems to be in error when he believes the text in this measure to be non-repeated, as the thirty-second notes of Velluti's cadenza not only allows the entire addition to fit into the final beat of the antepenultimate bar of recitativo, but the rhetorical/vocal flourish demands it. This a" is the highest note (and almost the only instance of it) that I know of in the music for private or concert performance that Velluti published during the London period.

⁹¹ I thank Valentina Anzani of the University of Bologna for her invaluable help in marrying this passage with Velluti's ornaments to the somewhat Byzantine meaning of Metastasio's poetry. It

a theater, but in a room. Velluti, for a moment, allows his (perhaps) audibly strained highest note, normally only used in a large opera theater where its harshness is ameliorated by the acoustic, to make its presence known. The normally sweet, subtle chamber singing of the castrato's private style is disrupted by the passionate cry of a heart that would be heard.

Velluti's most extreme poetic/chromatic ornaments are remarkable not for the use of an extraordinarily advanced musical language, but for the fact that it is the ornamenting singer imposing this sharply chromatic language upon a pleasant but frankly rather bland pre-existing structure—*with* the composer's permission—and with enriching it without question. Velluti exercised, not an agency-less, bodiless, sexless caprice, but real agency via his fecund intellect. In Hunt's imagination, Velluti speaks directly to his male critics.

I'm not the veriest stain
On manhood; nor are they the perfect men.
External men, and statues cold and void,
They share their honours with the inferior kind:
My sex is human still, and of the mind.⁹²

Ironically—more likely only apparently ironically—the one freedom Burghersh absolutely composed, an explicit invitation for the singer to expound, was the fermata. More often than not Velluti chooses to leave these unaltered, whether upon accented syllables (usually the case) or unaccented (only rarely). In fact, when the original *L'amor timido* is compared to the later version that

was her translational imagery for "scintillare" of the sparks of the skyrocket in flight before it actually explodes that I have incorporated here.

⁹² Leigh Hunt, "Velluti to his Revilers," ll 102-108.

Velluti ornamented, there are far more of these invitations than Fane originally composed, almost as if Velluti had requested them.⁹³ If so, it is far more likely that either he displayed his *messa di voce* or in some manner "lovingly dwelt" upon them, than that he deliberately ignored them.⁹⁴

Conclusion

The state of vocal ornamentation in Italian opera and song was one of increasing, almost heedless virtuosity at the beginning of the nineteenth century. More than almost any other singer, Angelica Catalani was the primary exponent of a display of technical prowess to the neglect of the poetic and musical texts. When Velluti began performing his eight variations on Paisiello's "Nel cor più non mi sento" at some point in the mid 1810s, Catalani's variations on the same aria had already achieved both a measure of fame, and of infamy. Though the only direct comparison of the two is Meyerbeer's, he expressed a clear preference for Velluti's.

When compared side by side, even using just the first and most conventional of Velluti's variations, the difference in depth and artistic, intellectual effort is clear. Velluti had already abandoned by his mid 30s the long practice of

⁹³ John Fane, "L'amor timido" (London: William Senr, ca. 1820). Velluti and Fane, presumably together, shortened the first recitative and completely eliminated the second. The second aria "Placido zef(f)iretto" (Gentle Zephyr) is transposed down a major third from G-major to E^b-major. They were published separately in Velluti's ornamented version. John Fane, Lord Burghersh and Giovanni Battista Velluti, "Placido Zeffiretto,/ARIETTA/Composed by/Lord Burghersh,/with the Vocal Embellishments of/SIG.R VELLUTI." (London: Grua, Ricordi & Co., ca. 1825/26). Held at the Harvard Houghton Library.

⁹⁴ Mount Edgcumbe, 156.

diatonic alteration and cadential expansion for an intensely chromatic style with occasional poetically dependent, onomatopoetic expansions of textual meaning. Though the harshly enforced gender roles—the need for a woman on the stage to guard her reputation for virtue—may make this comparison an unfair one to Catalani, both Velluti and the female impersonator showed earthy humor and creativity when the text hinted at it. More salient than the presence of humor, however, is that singers were beginning to ornament not to musically intensify the vocal line, but rather to intensify with vocal gestures—passions composed into the new melodic contours—the meaning of the literary text.

In the coming decade Velluti would dramatically expand his ability to ornament the text, adapting his music "to the passions." He would be copied in this by Giuditta Pasta and, probably, by most of the important sopranos and mezzo-sopranos of the 1830s, if we take Adolphe Nourrit at his word. The implications of this lie unfortunately outside the scope of this work. Velluti's intellectual innovation, decoupling the voice from the diatonic melodies of Italian opera, and the ready adoption of this innovation by the female singers of Bellini's, Donizetti's and Verdi's operatic heroines may have been an important ingredient in the latter nineteenth century's development of the intensely expressive, textually driven and melodically fragmented *opera verismo*.

Though the castrato was castigated for ignoring the musical text—the notes laid down by the composer—in the evolution of Morlacchi's *Tebaldo e Isolina*, at least as far as the *Romanza* is concerned, it is the composer who

knew a good thing when he heard it. He copied the singer, adopting those changes he recognized as being substantially better than his original composition. The final version of this aria as published by Manuel Garcia constitutes the closest thing that exists to a recording of a performance by one of the great castrati. It can only function so, however, if it is slowly and carefully read and heard with a mind's ear conversant in the many descriptions of the voice of Velluti, his ornaments, effects, affects and manner, measure by measure, as that mental listener attempts to incorporate every minute instruction into the recreation of this performance.

Inherent meaning in ornamentation apart from its singerly execution, passion composed into the very shape of it, was something Bacon thought impossible as late as 1823. Bacon's opinion seems to have been uncontroversial, but was, at least for some critics, revolutionized by the appearance of the castrato. Velluti was remembered for decades after he was last heard in London as the creator of a new, passionate, literary manner of decorating the vocal line. This was an exertion of intellect, an act of will, that Velluti imposed even upon the music of one of his most powerful protectors. Lord Burghersh may well have had a keener sense of his limitations as a composer than history records. Velluti's emendations to and republications of Burghersh's music indicate this. The peer's continued protection of the singer hint that, even if he was not pleased, he was also not inclined to suppress the now-joint compositions or to withdraw his

sponsorship in the face of personal scandal and innuendo surrounding the singer and his wife.

Burghersh's music was, as Velluti urged Meyerbeer to compose for him in 1823, simple and sentimental. The singer's double effect, appealing both to German and Italian audiences, was probably one where melodic and harmonic or vocal and literary displays were easier to achieve. Overlaying the composer's structure in such a complex manner was only achievable when it was comparatively banal. Only in the final version of the *Romanza* do Velluti's ornaments exceed what he accomplishes in Burghersh's "L'amor timido." They truly begin to take on the aspect of, as Stendhal puts it, a strange land. The magical, transportative qualities of Velluti's songs, consisting of palpable topoi evocative of Italy, Keats's "warm beaker(s) of the South," are effected by his quick, concentrated, at times startling departures from the composer's vision to create vistas of his own mind. These ornaments were too original to be copied by other singers without betraying by whom and for whom they were created.

It is difficult to know whether Velluti was a revolutionary whose ideas were incorporated by later composers or if his was a stream of thought that, though original, was starved of sustenance, dried up and vanished. I tend toward the former, though as the next chapter will show, Velluti's immediate posterity very quickly forgot him. If he was indeed the father of these innovations, his paternity was wiped from memory.

Chapter Six: The Final Years, Epilogue and Conclusions

Velluti's final years after the poorly received 1833 performances of *Crociato* in Florence were in no way confined to the quasi internal exile believed to have been the case by many observers amongst his contemporaries.¹ As demonstrated in private letters from Stendhal and Adolphe Nourrit, he was still performing in private in and around Venice as he approached the age of sixty: until at least 1838, if not considerably longer.² Though now living on his estate on the Brenta in Sambruson, about 20 kilometers outside of Venice, he still travelled regularly, including a last meeting with Giacomo Meyerbeer in Venice in February 1856.³ On 25 April 1856 Meyerbeer wrote to Velluti at his villa, apologizing for being unable to visit as planned. He promised, however, to send Velluti "a lithograph of my poor, excellent mother who loved and admired you greatly."⁴

¹ Mauro Manfrin, "L'amarezza delle cose belle: Villa Velluti tra storia, arte e memoria," *Luoghi e itinerari della riviera Brenta e del Miranese* Vol. 4, ed. Antonio Draghi (Castelfranco, Panda Edizioni, 2014): 92-100.

² Louis Marie Quicherat, *Adolphe Nourrit: sa vie, son talent, son caractere, sa correspondance* Vol. 3 (Paris: Librairie de L: Hachette et C^{ie}, 1867): 109-110. Stendhal, "Letter 59: Venice, January 25, 1831," *Le Livre du Divan Stendhal* (Paris: Le Divan, 1933).

³ Giacomo Meyerbeer, *Briefwechsel und Tagebucher* Vol. 7, ed. Sabine Henze-Döhring (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2004): 18.

⁴ *Ibid.*, Vol 7, 50. "Adieu donc cher & illustre Ami: des que je serais arrivé à Berlin je Vous expedierais une litographie de ma pauvre excellente mère qui Vous amait & vous admirait tant." The only letter I know from Velluti to Meyerbeer is in Italian (cited in chap. 2). This indicates that, at the very least, Velluti was comfortable reading French, if not perhaps speaking or writing it.

His chief music-related activity seems to have been teaching. He had been a prominent teacher of singing in London in the 1820s, especially at the Royal Academy of Music under the aegis of Lord Burghersh.⁵

It is ... not generally known that Signor VELLUTI gave his instruction and time (and that too at a moment when his health was extremely injured by fretting) to the Royal Academy of Music, gratis; He sung [*sic*] at their concerts, and took the most lively interest in his young pupils. ... His attachment to his pupils and their regard from him (though a strict master) was so great, that there was scarcely a dry eye in the room on his giving his farewell lesson on Thursday week.⁶

This altruism, though it was probably true that Velluti got no payment from Burghersh specifically for his teaching at the RAM, is also probably not all it appears to be. Velluti, according to all testimony both by friends and enemies, was an excellent teacher of singing. He was also an expensive one, if what is implied in the satire "Parental Soliloquies" that appeared in 1827 in the *NMM&LJ* is at all true: a Marquis bemoaning the £150 a year his daughter, a student of Velluti's, was costing him.⁷ The money from teaching voice was no doubt important to building Velluti's fortune, and lessons given to the daughters of the aristocracy increased his public stature and secured his social position. Teaching remained an interest of his long after he retired from the stage.

In November 1839 the *AMZ* reported that "Die Goldberg" (probably Fanny Goldberg, active circa 1836-1846) was studying with Velluti, a tutelage "highly

⁵ I don't use the modern term "voice teacher," as most evidence indicates that Velluti was as much concerned with training a thinking artist capable of understanding and interpreting fairly complex musical and rhetorical models as he was with the technicalities of vocal production.

⁶ "Letter to the editor, signed 'Il Desinteressato,'" *Morning Post*, August 31, 1826. The writer is clearly a friend of Velluti's and is anything but disinterested. Tellingly, "Il Desinteressato" did not debunk the £3,000 rumor, and in fact seems to defend its proffer as just.

⁷ *The New Monthly Magazine and Literary Journal* (London: Henry Colburn, 1827): 442-443.

prized."⁸ In 1905 Giovanni Battista Lamperti remembered Velluti as a "celebrated singing-master." In the early twentieth century his fame as a teacher of singing was his legacy.⁹ The most striking example of his teaching method comes from Parolari's account of Velluti in Paris in circa 1845. During this visit he spent time socializing with Manuel Garcia, Gioachino Rossini and Hector Berlioz.¹⁰ Gabrielle Fantoni in his 1873 *Storia universale del canto*, written over several years and aided by at least one live interview with Velluti, late in life, claimed that Velluti influenced Manuel Garcia and implied that his teachings found their way into the latter's landmark *Traité complète de chant*.¹¹

Though Fantoni does not ascribe this information directly to his meeting with Velluti, there seems to be justification for believing that the singer told him something of it. Parolari's is a much more comprehensive account of Velluti's influence, one worthy of being reproduced at length, as it appears nowhere else. It concerns Velluti's evening at the Garcia home in Paris in 1845.

The great singer was received in the parlor where the son of Garcia, Gustavo, was at the piano, accompanying himself in some unknown vocalise.

⁸ *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung* (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1839): 936.

⁹ Giovanni Battista Lamperti, *The Technics of Bel Canto*, trans. Theodore Baker (New York: Schirmer, 1905): fn 9.

¹⁰ Cornelio Parolari, "Giambattista Velluti, ultimo dei sopranisiti sulle liriche scene," *Rivisti musicale italiana* 39 (1932): 298. Federico Velluti considers Parolari's account to be essentially accurate and to have been backed by a then-well-preserved archive under the curatorship of his grandmother, Bavarian-born Emilia Velluti Stadlbaur (to whom Parolari dedicates his article). She was the wife of Giocchino Velluti, grand-nephew and once-removed heir of the singer. Parolari's maternal grandfather was a friend of the family, according to F. Velluti. Thus, Parolari's remarkable access to a private archive otherwise unavailable to scholars is made unremarkable, and considerably more trustworthy, though at some point his stories need external verification.

¹¹ Gabrielle Fantoni, *Storia Universale del Canto* Vols. 1 & 2 (Milan: Natale Battezzati, 1873): Vol. 1, 51; Vol. 2, 6-7, 95-96.

Left alone with the young man, who had respectfully gotten up to greet him, "Il Velluti" urged him to continue. ... The other thus resumed his task, one designed to educate the *portamento di voce*. Shortly afterwards it seemed to the singer that the child breathed by moving the ribs rather than the diaphragm. ...

[Velluti addressed the boy] "The school of breathing is the school of singing and no one can succeed in it without being master of this: how to stay afloat. [It] is not enough to have trained the muscles of the arms and legs, but [additionally to] know how existential it is to keep breathing Just breathe so that the air enters the nasal passages and move the diaphragm rather than the ribs and clavicles. When you will be able to make a spontaneous habit of this mechanism, you will be able to call yourself the master of your breath. [This is essential] to effect the bel canto. And what will be the consequences of such mastery? The behavior of your voice will be perfect, the placement of the voice perfect, flawless intonation and also spontaneous agility. ... But," he added, pausing, "I did not come here to give lessons, but to see your father. I was told that he was at home! "

[At Velluti's request, Gustavo went to find his father] But what a wonder for him and for "Il Velluti," to see that self-same Emmanuel Garcia on the threshold of the door, erect and motionless as, with a pencil, he took notes in a notebook he carried. And no less than the marvel of one was the confusion of the other. ...

"Thank you, friend," exclaimed Garcia, going towards him friendly and smiling, holding out his right hand, "you have already written [a] chapter more important, more beautiful, more worthy of the art of singing [than] my method that I am about to publish. How can I repay you for snatching your copyright [stealing your words/ your ideas]; this evening you'll be having dinner with us!"

The method appeared shortly after and managed to open up to the author ... the [teaching position] at the Royal Academy of Music in London.

And you can still read [in] the archive of the noble and great family of the knight Gioacchino Velluti, great grand-nephew of the great singer, a letter from the wife of Garcia, Eugenia, in which she, a few years later, confessed that her husband as he taught kept before his eyes as a mirror of perfection the image of Giambattista Velluti; [one] who had not neglected the [ancient] teachings, so that the example for his perfection of vocal technique would flow: abundant and effective.¹²

¹² Parolari, 287-288. See Appendix C for the complete original Italian of this passage.

Despite the mellifluous language of an antiquated style, what Parolari (and through him the Velluti family archives) claims is unmistakable. Velluti was more than just the furnisher of his final, ornamented version of the *Romanza* from *Tebaldo e Isolina*. He was a material contributor to the School of Garcia, itself a foundational work for operatic pedagogy of the past century and a half. Most modern vocal pedagogues would quibble with Velluti's assessment of diaphragmatic breathing as all-important; this is simplistic. However, the emphasis that Velluti places on it runs counter to what is currently believed about pre-Garcian and particularly castrato vocal technique by at least some prominent pedagogues.¹³ If the assertions of Bacon and others about the manner with which Velluti sang are correct, namely, that it descended directly from the eighteenth-century school of castrato singing, then low breathing and, presumably, a version of abdominal support mechanisms are a much older technique than is often supposed.

Velluti spent his last years, not in seclusion, but rather travelling, teaching and, according to Parolari, farming. The central thesis of J.Q. Davies's "Velluti in Speculum," although partially resting upon a mistranslation of Mendelssohn,

¹³ Lamperti, 5. Lamperti, quoting Louis Mandl's 1876 *Hygiène de la voix*, claims his method descends directly from Pacchierotti and Velluti, and repeats much the same thing about the tenor Giovanni Battista Rubini and the quintessential castrato teacher, Nicola Porpora. "Singing voices—were preserved much better and longer by the old Italian method, as taught by Rubini, Porpora, etc., than by our modern methods, which teach (or at least permit) clavicular breathing. And those teachers who favor diaphragmatic breathing can likewise show the best results." Cornelius Reid, "Voice Science: an Evaluation," *Australian Voice* 11 (2005). Reid, using peripherally throughout his article the writings of the castrati, Mancini and Tosi in particular, to support his claims, dismisses the importance of breath and support as a concept central to that school's vocal technique. Parolari's anecdote contradicts this, especially if one takes at their word the multitudinous writers of the 1820s and 1830s who classed Velluti as belonging to the traditional castrato school (whether or not they felt he matched its highest standards).

appears nevertheless to have been becoming ever more true.¹⁴ The modern European musical world was, in many quarters, doing as much as it could not only not to hear the castrati (some sang in Rome until the early twentieth century) but to forget that they existed, as far as this was practicable.¹⁵ Operatic adaptations of the story of Farinelli began with Peter von Winter's 1820 singspiel *Der Sänger und Der Schneider* followed by, among others, John Barnett's 1839 *Farinelli* and at the end of the century Hermann Zumpe's 1886 operetta *Farinelli*.¹⁶ The singer was almost always cast not with a mezzo soprano, contralto or soprano, but a tenor, though "trouser roles" were still, as in the case of Strauss's Prinz Orlofsky, Gounod's Siebel or Verdi's Stefano, fairly commonplace. These nineteenth-century Farinellis are always 'the lover' and always 'get the girl' in the end. By the beginning of the twentieth century some accounts of Velluti were identifying him as a tenor, though in 1846 Velluti's true

¹⁴ Parolari, 298. Velluti's final years as a farmer have been seized upon by writers beguiled by the poetic image of the castrato, infertile, spending his final years cultivating the soil: in a way propagating himself. Parolari's final paragraph consists of an epigram of Velluti's own devising, addressing a dinner guest and memorializing this tidy, Arcadian conceit. "Se de' fiori di mia voce tu facesti profitto all'arte, giusto è che del verde, in cui trovasti oggi dì, faccia profitto il stomaco!" "If from the flowers of my voice you believe art to have profited, it is right that the vegetables which you have had today have profited [your] stomach!" Emphases original.

¹⁵ James Davies, *Romantic Anatomies of Performance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014). James Davies, "Veluti in Speculum," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 17 3 (Nov 2005): 271-301. This "Veluti" in the title is not a misspelling, but rather references a Latin tag that was current before Velluti's arrival in London and was the motto of the Covent Garden theater.

¹⁶ Peter von Winter, MS *Der Sänger und der Schneider: Oper in 1 Act* (ca. 1820) Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Historisches Aufführungsmaterial der Bayerischen Staatsoper, D-Mbs, St. th. 137-11. *The Athenaeum* (London: James Homes, 1839): 140, describes the successful debut of Barnett's *Farinelli* in February, 1839, despite the severe cold of Michael Balfer, the tenor singing the title role. Herman Zumpe, *Farinelli: Operette in 3 Akten* (Hamburg: Max Leichssenring, ca. 1887).

identity was still the source of clumsy humor.¹⁷ From a short satire about two men sitting during the intermission of an opera, one well-informed, the other almost entirely ignorant:

"Will you tell me, Sir, if the music be Rossini's or Lablache's?"
"Lablache is a singer and not a composer."
"Oh! then I suppose the music is Rossini's?"
"No, Sir, it is not—it is Bellini's."
"Ah"—he is a promising composer, is he not?"¹⁸
[I could but answer with a suppressed laugh.]¹⁹
"And the tenor—is that Velluti?"
"Really, Sir, you must have come from the city of the dead, that tenor is the celebrated Mario."²⁰
"Oh" but Velluti was a tenor?"
"No, Sir, he was not."
"What was he, then?"
"I really can't explain, Sir."²¹

Velluti's fame was still enough that his name, like Farinelli's, lived on (despite having been killed here for the purpose of satire, as Hunt killed Pasta for poesy), but his singing body was an object now too shameful to name. Farinelli's too: his voice and body were exchanged for the more potent ones of tenors, obliterating the castrato's essence (or lack thereof). All of these pieces were written or composed not only while castrati were still singing in the relatively

¹⁷ *La Moda elegante ilustrada: periódico de las familias* (Madrid: 1888): 174. Recounting the supposed duet-duel between Velluti and the young Maria Garcia (later Malibran) first told by the Countess Merlin (See chapter 1). Velluti is identified as a tenor. This occurs again with this same anecdote in *The Musical Courier: A Weekly Journal Devoted to Music and the Music Trades* (1908): 6, and in the 1887 edition of George T. Ferris's *Great Musical Composers: German, French and Italian* ed. "Mrs. William" Sharp (London: Walter Scott, 1887): 179. Stendhal's account of the contretemps between Velluti and Rossini at the premier of Aureliano is retold, changing Velluti to a tenor.

¹⁸ Vincenzo Bellini died in 1835.

¹⁹ Narrator speaking, square brackets in the original.

²⁰ The tenor Giovanni Matteo de Candia. He was known simply as "Mario."

²¹ *Dorset County Chronicle* May 21, 1846. The condescending tone of the story-teller is reminiscent of Mary Shelley retreating into her feigned foreignness at the King's Theater, refusing to help a seatmate with her libretto. See chapter 2 on the Anglo-Italians.

secluded Sistine Chapel, but also, if only very fitfully and at times rather doubtfully, on concert stages across Europe.

Two Castrati(?) in London: Paolo Pergetti and Vincenzo Benedetto

Paolo Pergetti's London concerts in 1844 are generally believed to have been the last time that a singing castrato appeared in England.²² His appearance was not greeted with the universal outrage implied by Davies, who, only quoting the *Musical World* from 9 May 1844, writes that the castrato had sunk "below language," and below humanity.²³ "Sbgrmld—vxgspl—zy—tdpmbg—qz" spluttered that critic. Henry Chorley, his opinions quoted in chapter 4 concerning this same concert, was of a more equanimous, mixed opinion. The *Evening Standard* did not judge the performance at all, only writing that "Signor Pergetti is a male soprano—a class of singers, after the experiences in Velluti, not likely to be tolerated again in this country."²⁴ The haste to see every performance of a castrato as the last, already in evidence in 1825 and 1826 in negative commentary about Velluti, reveals further a prevailing discomfort with these representatives of the past, and an eagerness to forget them. Pergetti did not, however, vanish as desired, though he seems to have sung very infrequently after this concert.

²² Henry Chorley, "Ancient Concerts," *The Athenaeum. Journal of English and Foreign Literature, Science and the Fine Arts*, May 11, 1844. Heriot, 20.

²³ James Davies, *Romantic Anatomies*, 19, citing *Musical World* 19 19 (May 9, 1844): 158-159.

²⁴ *Evening Standard*, May 7, 1844.

In 1846 Pergetti returned to London after a stay in Germany, according to the *Morning Post*, and set up an academy at his home at Cavendish Square.²⁵ He appears to have profitably spent at least the next 15 years in London, as in 1860 the *Brighton Gazette*, reprinting several reviews of his treatise on singing, furnished addresses for his homes both in Brighton and London.²⁶ The *Athenaeum's* review from 5 September 1857, though it did not identify Pergetti as a castrato, revealed that his "entire treatise is arranged principally with a view to Italian Singing. That the style in Rome, Milan, and Naples was the true and grand vocal style, we know."²⁷ Though the subject of the castrati is never openly broached, it is clear from context and the naming of famous centers of castrato singing that, in 1857, Pergetti's method was of the old, castrato school. Even the *Musical World*, in 1844 so incensed by Pergetti's appearance, in 1857, naming Pacchierotti and Velluti as "the great singers of that period," praised Pergetti for "preserv[ing] many of the traditions of this school."²⁸ The inheritance of the castrati, at least from the viewpoint of the middle and end of the nineteenth century was, if anything, technique and style. According to Rossini, late in life,

Most of the singers of the newer times owe their talent more to their natural gifts than their training; thus Rubini, thus Pasta and many others. The true art of the bel canto ended with the castrati; one must acknowledge that, even if one cannot wish for their return. These people had to exist for their art, and thus they spent the most exhausting rigor and

²⁵ *Morning Post*, January 24, 1846.

²⁶ *Brighton Gazette*, October 11, 1860.

²⁷ *The Athenaeum*, September 5, 1857, quoted in the *Brighton Gazette*, October 11, 1860.

²⁸ *Musical World*, June 20, 1856, quoted in the *Brighton Gazette*, October 11, 1860.

tireless care on their training. They were always proficient musicians and, even when their own voices failed, [were] at least effective teachers.²⁹

Like Velluti, Pergetti seems to have spent his remaining years teaching. Unlike Velluti, however, he left behind not only many compositions, but also his treatise on singing, published in the 1840s.³⁰ Though Pergetti was living in Brighton until at least 1867, he seems to have ceased singing in the mid 1840s, in public at least, and the last mentions of him in English newspapers concern his activities as a composer.³¹

Pergetti has long been believed to have been the last of the castrati to appear in England. However, hints of another are first found in the *Liverpool Mercury* on 26 August 1886. "Signor Vincenzo Benedetto, a young singer who is said to be gifted with an exceptionally beautiful contralto voice, is about to make his *debut* in Berlin."³² Six months later, on 8 January 1887 in the *Blackburn Standard*, Benedetto was moving closer. "It is announced that a young Italian, named Benedetto Vincenzo, possessing a mezzo-soprano voice, has come to Paris to seek his fortune on the stage."³³ Though it would be some time before

²⁹ Ferdinand Hiller, "Plaudereien mit Rossini," *Aus dem Tonleben unserer Zeit* Vol. 2 (Leipzig: F.G. Leuckart, 1871): 26. "Die meisten Sänger der neueren Zeit haben ihr Talent mehr ihrem glücklichen Naturell als ihrer Ausbildung zu danken, so Rubini, so die Pasta and viele andere. Die eigentliche Kunst des bel Canto hat mit den Castraten aufgehört; man muß das zugestehen, wenn man sie auch nicht zurückwünschen kann. Diesen Leuten mußte ihre Kunst alles sein, und so wandten sie denn auch den angestrengtesten Fleiß und die unermüdlichste Sorgfalt auf ihre Ausbildung. Sie wurden immer tüchtige Musiker und, wenn es mit Ihrer Stimme fehlschlug, wenigstens treffliche Lehrer." *Fehlschlug* is a rather ambiguous word, as it can mean in this case either failing after a period of success, or failing to develop into a useful solo instrument.

³⁰ Paolo Pergetti, *Canto Serio by Paolo Pergetti, A treatise on singing, forming a complete school of the art* (London: ca. 1845).

³¹ *Brighton Gazette*, May 2, 1867.

³² *Liverpool Mercury*, August 26, 1886.

³³ *Blackburn Standard*, January 8, 1887.

this male mezzo-soprano made his way to England, on 11 March 1889 he made his London debut at St. James's Hall Picadilly with the Moore and Burgess Minstrel show. He sang "Ernani involami" from the first act of Giuseppe Verdi's *Ernani* and Charles Gounod's song "Quand tu chantes."³⁴

The *Daily News* described his voice as "extraordinary enough. If he were a female, Signor Benedetto would probably be considered a mezzo-soprano, a voice which, it need hardly be said frequently has an extensive compass."³⁵ There is a hint of skepticism as to whether he was, in fact, a castrato.³⁶ He was compared frequently to Velluti and Pergetti, though not considered in their class. He confused the *Daily News* correspondent when, on the afternoon (in a matinee performance?) before his evening debut "this gentleman of middle stature, clean-shaven chin, and clear cut features appeared as we are informed in women's attire instead of in male evening dress." His voice: "though of wide compass and very flexible, it is not wholly agreeable in quality, altogether apart from its owner's very faulty intonation."³⁷

In the evening performance, eschewing what may or may not have been the *travestie* of the afternoon, Benedetto appeared in normal, men's evening dress. "As a contrast to the other members of the company, Signor Benedetto

³⁴ *Daily News*, March 12, 1889. Also printed in the *Glasgow Herald*, March 12, 1889.

³⁵ *Daily News*, March 12, 1889.

³⁶ *The Graphic*, March 16, 1889. This writer was skeptical that Benedetto was a castrato at all. "Whether Signor Vincenzo Benedetto, who made his *début* at the smaller (Moore and Burgess) St. James's Hall on Monday, is a veritable male soprano, we need not now stop to inquire." And, indeed, *The Graphic*, having raised the question, does not deign to answer it. The writer either implies doubt or feigns fastidiousness. If this delicacy had been real, of course, the issue would never have been broached.

³⁷ *Glasgow Herald*, March 12, 1889.

appears in what is technically known as 'a white face;' that is to say, he is not a sable melodist."³⁸ While the rest of the white, presumably European men in the minstrel company wore blackface, the maybe-castrato eschewed the false (?) female clothing of the afternoon for the traditional, male, European dress of the evening.³⁹ Newspaper advertisements for the show with "Vincenzo Benedetto, the Wondrous Male Soprano" as the headliner ceased appearing after early May 1889. The voice, described as strange and not entirely pleasant, agile, wide-ranging and often out of tune, could easily have been a castrato. However, this just as easily could have been reported listening conditioned by reading *about* the late castrati—Velluti at their forefront—most of whose voices were at least occasionally described in this manner.

Whether or not this strange episode describes a true castrato is not possible to say. He (or she, or a falsettist, either one donning the apparel of castration as a marketing gimmick) was a strange, exotic character, hiding among the "sable melodists" of a black-faced minstrel show, singing a few arias and then disappearing from history as quickly as he appeared. The newspaper articles that report Benedetto acknowledge the existence of castrato sopranos still singing at that time in Rome, but the elements of panic present in articles about Velluti in 1825, or spluttering disgust over Pergetti in 1844, are absent. Bemused dismissal prevails. It was clear in 1889 that the age of the castrato was

³⁸ *Morning Post*, March 13, 1889.

³⁹ Complicating the question is whether Benedetto was seen onstage in the afternoon show in drag, or in drag on the street. The context indicates a preview to the evening's official debut, but is not entirely clear.

over, regardless of any leftovers. Undermining the idea that the body of the eunuch, *unvoiced*, was a source of pain, *The Graphic* on 16 March 1889 writes that "Male sopranos are now, happily, out of fashion; and only two, Vellutti [*sic*] and Pergetti, *have come prominently before the London public* since the year 1800."⁴⁰ In the period before modern medicine, eunuchs from accidents, sickness or birth defects must have been (comparatively) commonplace, and seen as (very) unfortunate.⁴¹ Pergetti's reviews as a teacher and composer after he ceased to sing in public almost never mention his physical condition. It seems that when the injury was made audible, when castration was voiced by the castrato and possibly only when that vocalization failed, sounding strained and painful—*only then* was the castrato a source of pain. It seems not to have occurred when the castrated man was silent, though even when he sang well, he could still elicit outrage. By 1889 he was, as a singer, so nearly extinct as to be a forlorn curiosity: no longer a threat. The critic for *The Era* opined that "Male sopranos are becoming as rare as herons in the fens or as the great bustard on

⁴⁰ *The Graphic* March 16, 1889. My emphasis. I believe that this critic is talking about what is a very reasonable possibility; namely, there were a number of eunuchs in England, but that they were not castrati, i.e., they did not *perform* their injury through the public utilization of a soprano or contralto singing voice.

⁴¹ Many modern, medically oriented studies of the castrati, from Haböck to Fritz have addressed the horrific ubiquity of castration, either as a result of a medical procedure or from accidents. Just because this was a common, polite deception in the official biographies of many an eighteenth century castrato does not mean that it did not actually happen. See Franz Kandler, chapter 1, and the search for castrati, "made so by accident or disease," in 1820s Italy. Francois (Franz) Kandler "On the Actual State of Music in Rome," written between 1821 and 1826, reproduced in translation in the *Quarterly Musical Magazine and Review* (QMMR) London: Hurst, Chance and Co., 1828): 23-24

the Wiltshire downs."⁴² Romanticized and sanitized, the disappearing castrato was a rare and curious bird—beautiful, perhaps, but neither necessary nor useful.

The Death of Velluti

In the early morning hours of 22 January 1861 Giovanni Battista Velluti died at his villa on the Brenta just a few days short of his eighty-first birthday, according to the parish register in Sambruson.⁴³ On the memorial stone plaque, set in the parish church in Sambruson by his nephew Luigi, his sole heir, his birth is given as 27 January 1780. The date agrees with the birth registry in Corridonia cited at the beginning of chapter, and there seems little reason to doubt it, even though almost all non-Italian sources give this as 1781. On the stone, framed by a carving of a stylized lyre, upon which is perched a nightingale, is carved

To
Gio Batta Velluti
who was born in Pàusola on 27 January 1780,
With the magic of sweetest song
enjoyed
on the melodramatic stages
applause and laurels
in Italy, Germany, England,
gained the favor of princes and peoples,
retired
into the sanctuary of this countryside
where he, pious and liberally beneficent,
ended this life in peace

⁴² "London Music Halls," *The Era*, March 16, 1889. This evocative first sentence, from another review of Benedetto, was reprinted in several newspapers over the course of the next week. The context, including the Sistine Chapel, makes it clear that castrati and not falsettists are meant.

⁴³ Manfrin, 99, citing to the parish register in Sambruson

on 22 January 1861
his nephew Luigi
with greatest sadness.⁴⁴

One of the published memorials for Velluti, signed by "a friend," extolls the singer as "the new Orpheus."⁴⁵

Only one who is master of the art can properly judge his musical merit. Certainly it was great, if Rossini could call Velluti emperor of the sweetest song and Meyerbeer could call him a prodigy and miracle of melody. The famous Emanolito [Manuel] Garcia, brother of Malibran, to me, the writer of these lines, did extol that inexhaustible mine of select, purest finery to clothe musically any conceit." ... the new Orpheus, marveled at in Italy, Germany, England.

Short obituaries in newspapers all over Europe recorded his death, usually mentioning his performances of *Aureliano in Palmyra* and *Il Crociato in Egitto*, but also, strangely, as this information is not to be found in earlier sources, claiming he was "in his earlier years, ... one of the principal ornaments of the Sistine chapel at Rome."⁴⁶ On 5 February 1861 Meyerbeer wrote a short note in

⁴⁴ Manfrin, 100. "A GIO BATTÀ VELLUTI/CHE NATO A PAUSOLA LI 27 GENNAJO 1780/COLLA MAGIÀ DI DOLCISIMO CANTO/RISCOSSE/SULLE SCENE MELODRAMMATICHE/APPLAUSI E CORONE/DA ITALIA GERMANIA INGHILTERRA/É/POSTERGATI FAVORI DE' PRINCIPI E POPOLI/RITIRVASI/IN QUESTO ASILO CAMPESTRE/DOVE PIO LIBERLAE BENFICO/CHIUSE IN PACE LA VITA/NEL 22 GENNAJO 1861/IL NIPOTE LUIGI/DOLENTISSIMO."

⁴⁵ Ibid. "Solo chi é maestro nell'arte, potrà adeguatamente giudicare del suo merito musicale, che certu fu grande, se Rossini no dubitò di chiamare il Velluti imperadore del dolcissimo canto, e Mayerbeer, un prodigio miracolo della melodia, ed il celebre Emanolito Garcia, fratello della Malibran, a me che scrivo queste righe decantava miniera inesauribile di modi eletti e purissimi per vestire musicalmente qualsiasi concetto. ... novello Orféo, meravigliate Italia, Germania, Inghilterra." I suspect this to be from Giovanni Battista Perucchini, but cannot prove it. The bust of Velluti, given by Velluti's sole heir, Luigi Velluti, to the city of Corridonia in 1874 quotes Rossini as having called Velluti the "emperor of the highest song." ("Imperatore dell'altissimo canto.") Ermanno Illuminati et al., *Festschrift: Il Centenario della nascita del Cantante Giovan Battista Velluti* (Città di Corridonia, 1980): 19.

⁴⁶ "Death of Velluti," *The Musical World*, March 2, 1861. Essentially the same obituary appears in many newspapers and journals, in English, Spanish and French. This may be a misremembering of his early cathedral position in Jesi in the late 1790s.

his diary. "The singer Velutti [*sic*], for whom I composed the Crociato, has died on this day [*sic*], at the age of 79 [*sic*]."⁴⁷ According to Federico Velluti, several small, presumably very valuable items, gifts from wealthy fans of the singer from his over three decades of performing, were stolen by Velluti's long-time faithful servant—probably the same one mentioned in the introduction to "Velluti to his Revilers"—when Luigi Velluti dismissed him immediately following his uncle's death.

Conclusions about Giovanni Battista Velluti, the Last Operatic Castrato

I have attempted to disentangle the second half of Velluti's career, by far the more momentous half despite his declining voice and fading abilities, from the occasionally misleading impression left by writers from his own lifetime and well into the twentieth century. Martha Feldman postulates two kinds of castrati emerging in popular perception at the end of the eighteenth century. There is the "good" castrato exemplified by Gasparo Pacchiarotti; he is the "Orphic" castrato. Contrarily there is the "bad" castrato, most prominently represented by Pacchiarotti's near-exact contemporary, the soullessly acrobatic Luigi Marchesi.⁴⁸ Sieghardt Döhring has worked to dispel Velluti's reputation—mostly owing to Stendhal—of an extravagant, highly virtuosic and somewhat tasteless ornamenteer. Cindy Kim's work on Velluti's 1825 ornamentation of "Notte

⁴⁷ Giacomo Meyerbeer, *Tagesbücher und Briefwechsel* Vol. 8, 179.

⁴⁸ Martha Feldman, *The Castrato: reflections on natures and kinds* (Oakland: The University of California Press, 2015): 188-189.

Tremenda" and the *Romanza* from *Tebaldo e Isolina* also pushes the needle in the direction of the Orphic castrato and away from the soulless, denatured, bizarre creature whom J. Q. Davies has depicted.

I hope with this work to have shown that Velluti was, or at least almost certainly intended to be, one of the "good" castrati. He was called the new Orpheus in his memorials. His literary technique for ornamentation, outlined in chapter 5, shows an intense preoccupation with the possibilities of multiple, concurrent meanings of sung text and a search for a method to transcend mere mimesis: diatonic extension that used harmonic as well as melodic means. This is most unusual, if not absolutely unique, for a singer, wielder of a non-harmonic instrument. In this he seems to have been very much a man of his own time: the late, literary Romantic. His harmonic ornamentation of text, according to contemporary critics emulated by the leading prima donnas of his time, possibly helped push the boundaries of operatic writing in the late Italian Romantic. If so, this newly extended technique of vocal writing would soon be taken over by composers, not singers. Velluti created with his ornaments a kind of replete literature similar to that of the literary Romantic, here worked out in musical form. They function as brief, poetic concentrations, opening windows onto fleeting topoi of additional meaning.

One of the principal themes of this work has been the irony of Velluti's English reception. He probably viewed himself as a musical innovator, and his surviving ornamentations support that view. Yet he was seen in London by a

literary, critical community steeped in historical allusions, copiously citing both these and each other, as a stalking horse for the past. He carried both the sins and the glories of the ancients and of the *Ancien Régime* on his narrow shoulders. When those more truly "liberal" of his critics successfully maintained John Keats's "negative capability," Velluti became a Janus figure. He was not only a compelling, disgusting, at times painful, at times terrifying spectre of the past, but simultaneously a fascinating, progressive artist and a kind, gentle and generous if foolishly proud person who severely tested their liberality, their acceptance of the Other in their midst.

Another central aspect of this work has been transitions, not only the process and the results, but the precise point at which change occurs. To the English, Velluti's person, consciously or not, exemplified Percy Bysshe Shelley's concept of Mutability, as he switched and back forth in the perception of his audiences, between the past, present and future, the mortal and the supernatural, the living and the dead, the sublime and the ridiculous. He was a pun, a living, singing, at times sylleptical paronomasia, a gatepost upon which alternating realities swung. His most noticeable features, from his stooped shoulders to the cracks between his registers, functioned as literary allusions to episodes out of classical or eighteenth-century histories, written into his voice and onto his body. As I have shown, however, this allusional listening was in no way peculiar to the castrato. Singing voices, as they navigated the registral changes between the chest, the middle and the falsetto, also navigated between

musical lands—gendered soundscapes that delighted a too-susceptible Charters in Medway's *The Angler or Wales* or a decadent Gauthier in his "Contralto."

The voice had puissance for the literary Romantic. It communicated health, sickness, the soul of the singing body to the soul of the listening body. The physical qualities of the voices of ghosts—not just their words—delighted, saddened and terrified Scrooge. The air was vector of contagion, not only for Keats or for Dickens, but for Spurzheim and for medical science of the time. The breath, upon which the speaking and the singing voice rides, communicated the condition of the body of the singer. Beautifully, supplely spun out, it thrilled Sarrasine and, for the love of a sham woman, drove him to the point of madness. When it failed, it disgusted and pained Velluti's (male) audience, as his long-ago mutilation—always lurking in their collective subconscious—was forcibly brought back to their attention; they felt its phantom pain in their own bodies.

Finally the singer's name, Giovanni Battista (John the Baptist) Velluti, served for Leigh Hunt as a crucial pivot-point between realities. The name was certainly common enough during Velluti's lifetime—this dissertation alone includes many identically named singers and musicians: Martini, Mancini, Lamperti, Perucchini, Rubini and Rubinelli to name but a few. But to Hunt, the son of an Anglican priest, the baptism hovering behind the singer's name had special meaning. Baptism is the moment in Christian life unquestionably more important than any other, when the worldly, secular person becomes a child of Christ. In the Anglican liturgy the child is "marked as Christ's own forever." By

contrast, Hunt's "second baptism, bloody and profane" was when that "smiling child," the young Giambattista, was literally cut off from the church and, by extension—certainly from an early nineteenth-century English perspective—from mankind. Though the eternal boy was in some sense always present, as was the ghost of the man he never became, whenever Velluti sang poorly he performed his mutilation, drenching his song, the air that carried it and at least part of his audience in the bloody horror of a shared pain they imagined they remembered.

**Appendix A: Selected English Poetry, 1825-1828, Concerning Velluti, Bonini
and Pasta, Including the Complete (Known) Poetry of META in Order of
Publication.**

Velluti To His Revilers

(Leigh Hunt)

(*The Examiner*, August 8, 1825. I have not reproduced the footnotes Hunt appends to certain lines.)

VELLUTI, the lorn heart, the sexless voice,
To those who can insult a fate without a choice.

You wrong your manhood, critics, and degrade Your just disdain of an inhuman trade, When, in your zeal for what man should be, You wreak your shuddering epithets on me. Scorn, as you will, the trade; you cannot err; But why with curses load the sufferer? Was I the cause of what I mourn? Did I Unmake myself, and hug deformity? Did I, a smiling and a trusting child, See the curst blow, to which I was beguil'd? Call for the knife? and not resist in vain, With shrieks convulsive and a fiery pain, that second baptism, bloody and profane? Ah fate! what was I then? A rosy boy, Trusting in all things, radiant at a toy. What am I now? A shadow with lorn eyes; A toy myself, to hear and to despise.	5 10 15
I own I felt a reverential fear Of English thoughts, when I was venturing here. In Italy, my friends know well, it took Strong hold upon me, nor in France forsook: But most I felt it, when I cross'd the sea, That awful sphere of English mastery. The skies were misty; and the there hung in air Behemoth shapes, and phantoms with huge hair; Antediluvian things, as though they stood Once more alive, and guarded the old flood. Wonder not at these thoughts in me: I've read Old bards; and mine has been a suffering head. As I look'd round upon the awful shows,	20 25 30

While the rains bicker'd , and mad winds arose,	
And the sea dealt us its disdainful blows,	
I felt my soul look grave, and said—Are these	35
The gods and playmates of the British seas?	
And have I, venturing with my little store,	
A song to please the lords of such a shore?	
I know not:—but I whisper'd—Manly thought	
Stands by me still, and serves me as it ought.	40
I can behold these waves, with awe, 'tis true,	
But yet with something of th'exulting too.	
Not mean have I been held, not void of soul;	
No hollow friend, nor servile o'er the bowl.	
Free songs have I bestow'd, best quitted then;	45
Free pleasures have exchang'd with nobler men;	
And in my song, when manly verses come,	
The thought, no stranger, finds my heart at home.	
I scorn not praise, I own; what can I scorn,	
That makes this heart a little less forlorn?	50
I dare the public eye: my very shame	
Would fly for refuge in the arms of fame.	
But witness, all my friends, how cheap I hold	
What makes the powerless powerful, even gold.	
I waste it not: but 'tis not in my thought:	55
Twice has my purse to its last weight been brought	
And were it not for a brave servant (nay,	
Call him my friend) were pennyless this day.	
Not pow'r I see, but prouder sympathy:	
A song and a sweet smile are all to me.	60
If I came hither not for fame alone,	
Let honest natures judge me by their own.	
Liberal and rich may still be found in one:	
In English ground the glorious mixtures run.	
England, my patrons told me, is a place	65
Where honest men soon know each other's face;	
Where to be just, is all; and a wrong blow	
Must light on none, and least on the laid low	
There, said my friends with exultation, there	
The men are manly, as the fair are fair:	70
There you will find true knowledge; there a mind	
Made to partake all good with all mankind.	
If England warn you from the public view,	
'Twill be to shame your lot, not injure you.	
Go then, Velluti, no ungenerous name,	75
And get what happiness you can, with fame.	

I came. I stood not in the public eye:
 I needed urging, e'en for company:
 I said, I will not, in a land so kind,
 Risk a wrong wonder in the public mind; 80
 I will not hurt one humbler innocence;
 I'll stay where I am known, and bar offense.
 I did so. Manly were the men indeed,
 And fair the fair, that bade my song proceed:
 And yet the storm burst in upon me there, 85
 And with amazement bow'd me, and despair.

What have I done? Could not these men have shown
 Kindly my fault, and let my soul alone?
 Perhaps 'twas wrong to venture my disgrace,
 However spared, in any crowded place. 90
 Fame may be food unlawful for my sect,
 An odious cast whom no one may protect;
 Doom'd to withdraw their being from remark;
 And shut, were tears the deluge, from the ark.
 Perhaps 'twas wrong; but why not warn me off 95
 With kindly signs, at least without a scoff?
 Why not have said,—Velluti, you will find
 Too great a pity for a generous mind;
 Hearts moved too much to hear that hapless tone,
 And doubting, e'en by praise, to please your own. 100
 With tears I would have thank'd them: yes with tears
 Used to my eyes, and not unworthy theirs.
 But they mistake. I'm not the veriest stain
 On manhood; nor are they the perfect men.
 External men, and statues cold and void, 105
 Never had eye like theirs a look that was enjoyed.
 They share their honours with the inferior kind:
 My sex is human still, and of the mind.
 Go, sorrier trampers of a sorry frame;
 Boast of your prowess to the lovely dame; 110
 Say (for you can say) how, with your high frown
 And manly parts, you put the warbler down;
 And want the noblest in a woman's eye,
 The best, and manliest, generosity.
 woman, by thy nature kind and good; 115
 With bosom for the bird, howe'er pursued;
 Whom I must love, unduly as I may;
 Whom I must thank, whate'er the world may say;
 lost (not all, for thou hast tears) to me,

Let them not, pitying sweetness, unsex *thee!* 120
 Women are never ignorant as men,
 For more or less they surely taste of pain:
 Of pain they taste, and bashful secrecy,
 And thus they learn to pity one like me.
 My censurers say, they play a shameful part: 125
 I say, they're right, and they rejoice my heart.
 If in their pity some ideas intrude
 That force a thought of joy, 'tis fair and good:
 No tear of mine shall wish the comfort less;
 Love put the knowledge there, and grief shall bless. 130

A dim desire, a sweetness hard to bear,
 Hangs ever on me, like a charmed air.
 'Tis beauteous; 'tis a woe. My languid eyes
 Look dimly through, and mourn their destinies.
 Yet what is on the other side, I know 135
 But faintly: only a sweet voice, and low;
 A woman's form; a beating heart like mine;
 The rest runs off in tears, and even they're divine.
 Oh God of heav'n what is this thought, and this,
 Made up of weak and strong, of anguish and of bliss? 140
 Tears can shine sweetly, looking on a smile;
 Not so, when what we look on mourns the while.
 How often have I wept the dreadful wrong,
 Told by the poet in as pale a song,
 Which the poor bigot did himself, who spoke 145
 Such piteous passion when his reason woke!—
 To the sea-shore he came, and look'd across,
 Mourning his native land and miserable loss.—
 Oh worse that wits that never must return,
 To act with madness, and with reason mourn! 150
 I see him, hear him; I myself am he,
 Cut off from thy sweet shores. Humanity!
 A great gulf rolls between. Winds, with a start,
 Rise like my rage, and fall like my poor heart;
 Despair is in the pause, and says "We never part." 155
 'Twas ask'd me once (that day was a black day)
 To take this scene, and sing it in a play!
 Great God! I think I hear the music swell,
 The moaning bass, the treble's gibbering yell;
 Cymbals and drums a shatter'd roar prolong, 160
 Like drunken woe defying its own song:
 I join my woman's cry; it turns my brain;

The wilder'd people rise, and chase me with disdain!
 let me still some little seeming know,
 Some fancied pride:—my life is but a show. 165
 Something should pay me for what fate has done;
 Some little lustre for my darken'd sun;
 Some gift unenvied (none can envy me)
 Wherewith to solace my heart's poverty.
 And something surely 'tis, on some great stage, 170
 When overtures have read their fiery page,
 While taste and wit quicken the sparkling rounds,
 And beauty sits expecting beauteous sounds,
 Something it is, to issue on that scene,
 With clapping hands receiv'd, and shouts between, 175
 And lose myself, and live in the charm'd ear
 Around me, in some generous character.
 Something it surely is, to give and take
 That pleasure and that pride: to keep awake
 Beauty's bright eye; to fill it with sweet fears, 180
 Tears glad as smiles, and smiles as soft as tears;
 To make the Graces vocal, to rejoice
 Through the round raptures of an easy voice,
 Uttering such meaning, far beyond the verse,
 As was the speech in Eden, and occurs 185
 Now only in the depth of poet's books,
 Or failing language when it flies to looks.
 Then win I up my way, like lark to heaven,
 With happy shudders, quivering, quick, and even,
 Catching at every strain a nicer height 190
 of cordial subtilty and rare delight.
 While yearning eyes, and words cut short, below,
 Witness delicious wonder, as I go:
 Till, with the passion pierc'd as with a dart,
 I feel the headlong impulse at my heart, 195
 And struck at once, down sliding, more than dove,
 Drop in the bosom of the general love.
 music, solace made for the bereav'd;
 Giver of gentle answers to the griev'd;
 To labour, rest; to tiresome wealth, employ; 200
 Companion whom the loneliest may enjoy,
 Ev'n if with nothing left him to rejoice
 His sorrow with but his own sorrowing voice,
 Whate'er is graceful in calamity,
 And wise above disdain, finds balm in thee; 205
 And all whose wretchedness would fain divide

Their aching thought with some sweet thought beside.
 The dark'ning King sat on his throne, and felt
 At thy caress his fiery eyeballs metl.
 With thee the Bard in his blind orbs withdrew; 210
 The winds of Paradise his organs blew,
 And rais'd him to the angelic choirs, to hear
 Heav'n's homage trav'ling to the eternal ear.
 He too, in nature kindred as in wrong,
 The master of the earthly heavn's of song, 215
 While in the public gaze he sat, and let
 The poet's wail for Samson's rayless head,
 Felt thy soft touch on his benighted eyes,
 And wept with his deploring harmonies.
 Benignant art! and must I blush to join 220
 One genius more from thy own land and mine?
 blow to redden priestly dust with shame!
 From the curst rack with injur'd hands he came;
 Had left their sacred vision in the skies.
 From the pale villany he came, and found 225
 His generous lute, and tried a feeble sound:
 A shake of his grey head confess'd the unholy wound.

I blush again, thinking of men like these,
 To name with their's my very miseries:
 And yet I know not: few and stout were their's; 230
 Their name a blessing. mine a mockery wears;
 Nay, and there's dignity in desperate cares.
 Alas! 'tis slavery to excuse thee so:
 Arise, my heart, and claim no second place in woe!

I talk of triumphs in the theatre: 235
 The rottenest part of all the core is there.
 How, when admir'd on the resounding stage,
 My pulses high, my song in all its rage,
 When the proud notes, demanding a rich death,
 Ran down my voice, and lavish'd glorious breath, 240
 How often when they thought, ears, arms and sight,
 Drew to my heart one deluge of delight,
 Was the most lofty triumph of the air
 But its own mockery and a high despair!
 No soul, thought I, in all this ampe round, 245
 Weighs me for more than what I am, a sound:
 No soul regards me, loves me, is my own,
 Will look me in the face, when these are gone;

And say, and fold me to her dancing breast,
 "Dearest, 'tis late, and all our birds at rest." 250
 And yet (would I continue) here, e'en here,
 Some one may sit, that might have held me dear;
 Here may she sit, fair, gentle, wise, apart,
 A pleasurable eye, a pilgrim's heart;
 One that perhaps may know no fitting lot 255
 Of wedded sweetness, because I must not:—
 Oh! how I turn'd , as if to wipe that tear,
 And sung, and sacrificed my soul to her!

Alone! alone! no cheek of love for me,
 No wish to be wherever I may be 260
 (For that is love):—no helpmate; no defence
 From this one, mortal, undivided sense
 Of my own self, wand'ring in aching space;
 No youth, no manhood, no reviving race;
 No little braving playmate, who belies 265
 The ruffling give in his proud father's eyes;
 No gentler voice—a smaller one—her own—
 No—nothing. 'Tis a dream that I have known
 Come often at mid-day.—I walked, and was alone.

Not on the stage, not amidst heaps of eyes— 270
 Half kind—half scornful, my true comfort lies;
 But where 'tis humblest of humilities.
 Lo! in the church the poms of this world meet
 To lay their service at the sufferer's feet:
 Prostrate they bend: all love the meek distress: 275
 The draperied poms adore that nakedness:
 Thither the odour breathes, the tear aspires,
 And seraph tapers waste with yearning fires.
 Then stirs the organ, and with gusty roar
 Sweeps like a storm from some ethereal shore; 280
 And through the sphery volume and stern noise
 Takes its meek way the imploring human voice.
 One, that the ear with strange compassion haunts?
 'Tis mine. Mine also is that voice of tears,
 When the dark casket of the grave appears, 285
 A diamond in it. See—she came—she's gone—
 The only bride for me, and I am still alone.
 death too hard! Yet O still harder death,
 Borne by the virgin with no dying breath,
 When in their veils the living ghosts come round, 290

And gather one soul more, and void her place is found.
Once at that sacrifice I sat apart,
And seem'd in weltering tears to weep away my heart.

Go forth, my thoughts. Breath me a little ease,
Ye blowing airs; and take me, noble trees, 295
To your old arms, out of the crowd, and let
My lonely soul taste of a pleasure yet.

Alas! my heart goes with me. I am not
What I would fain become, a point, a mote,
A thought or intuition, a blind air 300
Gathering some faint sensation here and there;
Much less the calm superiority

Of some angelic, intellectual eye,
Looking on all, and loving all, but still
Out of the pale of passion and weak will. 305

I sit sometimes within the woods, and feign
A spirit comes to soothe me in my pain;
Nymph more than spirit, and of mortal birth;
Something of shapely warmth, 'twixt heav'n and earth.
I clasp her hand at meeting, and embrace; 310

The day before us dances in her face;
And we sit down, and read, and play on lutes
Past thinking of, and feed on rosy fruits,
And wander by untrodden paths, and lend—

Oh, such a life! No young Elysian mead 315
Ever held sweeter; no poetic nest,
Took disappointment to a balmier breast.

Yet when our bliss is greatest, when the sense
Of one another's hearts is most intense,
When each grows wild to vent its gratitude 320
For love so high, so graceful, and so good,

And in the depths of our commingling eyes
We see, upcoming, the dark extasies,—
Sudden the landscape faces, my wits forlorn
Deal her, instead of love, some dreadful scorn; 325

And her poor lover, torn with self-rebuke,
Dies of the pardoning sweetness of her look.

Oh curst be (not my parents, for they knew
Surely no better, yet they lov'd me too!)
But curst be their effeminate souls, who first 330
Found out the way to make their betters curst.
What tasks they put them to, what impious cares,

How Tantalus's fate was heav'n to theirs,
 Better be told by any pen but mine:—
 My headlong soul would burst along the line. 335
 Once and away the slave has sprung, and ride
 His scorners' necks, as dire Eutropius did;
 Once and away has won a glorious name,
 Like Narses, by outstripping manly fame,
 And saving Rome her very self from shame: 340
 But mostly, blighted in the stirring bud,
 The wheel undone that whirls the strenuous blood,
 Shorn of his strength for sweetness or for strife,
 The quavering eunuch is a child for life:
 In all a child, as in his beardless chin; 345
 In all but the warm heart, that grows within.
 Darkling it grows, and wonders, and in vain
 Calls for the cup that should have eased its pain,
 And so with tears and infant gentleness,
 Gathers meek patience for its great distress. 350
 Nature will find some comfort, first or last:
 The wither'd warbler weeps not for the past;
 But young in age, as he in youth was old,
 Dies like a singing child, and quits his gentle hold.

Peace with the critics. What must be, must be: 355
 One common gift is mine, mortality;
 And 'twixt my grave and this, pardon, ye sounds
 Of peace and love, and in your wonted rounds
 Take me again, and be to me whate'er
 Love would have been, and peace, and honourable care. 360
 I lean my cheek against ye, though ye be
 But air; for 'tis supporting air to me,
 My world, my wings, my rest, my shore at even,
 From which I launch my thoughts, and dream, and glide to heaven
 Oh! though denied my birthright, and shut up 365
 In my own heart and with this thirsting cup;
 Though bound for life, and the sweet drink denied,
 Which glad and loud makes every heart beside;
 Yet as the bird who, in his prison born,
 Never knew tree, or drank the dewy morn, 370
 Still feels a native sweetness at his tongue,
 And tow'rs his woodland shakes a glittering song;
 So the sweet share of nature left in me
 Yearns for the rest, but yearns with harmony;
 And through the bars and sorrows of his fate 375

Hails his free nest, and his intended mate.
Love's poorest voice shall loving still be found,
Though far it stray and weeps,—a solitary sound.

To Signor Velluti.
Composed extempore in a box at the opera, on Saturday, August 13.

(*The Examiner*, August 22, 1825)

THE voice of past sweetness has slept on mine ear,
Oh! no more 'twill awaken its lingering strain;
It has fled like a fond fairy vision, and here
There lives no soft Echo to tell it again.

When those tones which for us have just breathed their farewell, 5
Thou art waking for others, far, far o'er the sea,
Then how oft will regret on thy minstrelsy dwell,
And a sigh from this bosom be wafted to thee.

No! never, VELLUTI, oh! never fade
On remembrance that voice, though I hear it no more; 10
Like the bright smiling West, still in beauty array'd,
Though sun-set has faded, and daylight is o'er.

META

VELLUTI

Written in reply to the poem in the Examiner of August 7.
[Referring to Leigh Hunt's "Velluti to his Revilers"]

(*The Examiner*, August 22, 1825)

AH! cease, Velluti, nor thus vainly try
To wake the world's cold narrow sympathy:
Hope not in Pity's silken wreath to bind
The heart ungenerous and the tongue unkind.
And though 'tis inhumanity indeed 5
That can resist when the defenceless pleade,
Or moving eloquence like *thine* unheeded;
And tho' thy slighted wrongs demand redress,
As claims thy fate our gentlest tenderness—
Yet ah! while hearts are strangers to the name 10

Of mercy, what has wretchedness to claim?
 Still, midst the taunts of our unfeeling world,
 Midst each unmanly shaft around thee hurl'd,
 And th'scorn that from th'unkindly spirit springs—
 Reflect (tho' small perchance the balm it brings)— 15
 Reflect, that 'tis *unworthy* hearts alone
 Mock the unhappy—the defenceless scorn;
 And deem, while compassion you appeal,
That heart beneath regret, which cannot feel.
 He in whose haughty and repulsive eye 20
 Ne'er beam'd the hallow'd tear of sympathy—
 He who with calm indiff'rence could behold
 The drop in thine, and yet with cold
 Mute apath and narrow selfishness
 The voice of soft humanity suppress, 25
 And from thy path of sadness harshy tear
 The little boon that *might* shed comfort there—
 Oh! heed him not: so poor, so base a prize
 Is 'neath invoking, nay, beneath despise.
 And say not, 'mongst the rude and heartless throngs 30
 That thus unblushing trample on thy wrongs,—
 Midst looks of scorn and lofty arrogance,
 There beams no eye of gentler, milder glance;—
 Say not, for thee there flows no pitying tear,
 No soul to love thee, and no voice to cheer:— 35
 One heart there is,—*one* heart at least, would bring
 To Friendship's shrine its sacred offering.
 Yes! here, VELLUTI, here thou'lt ever find
 Nor tongue ungen'rous nor reproach unkind;
 Here beats at least one sympathizing breast, 40
 Where thou mayst lay the weary head to rest,
 And tell thy sorrows; and when the rue
 Rough bitter blast of "man's ingratitude"
 Comes sweeping by;—when on the pensive mind
 Rise friends far hence, and days long left behind;— 45
 When all around looks desolate and lorn,
 And nothing meets thee save the cold world's scorn;—
 When from thy breast awakes the mournful sigh,
 And the sad tear comes trembling to thine eye,—
 Ah! then to th'heart of gentle Friendship come, 50
 And be that heart thy refuge and thy home.

M—
 (META?)

Sonnet to Madame Pasta, on her departure for Italy

(*The Examiner*, September 3, 1825)

Wend o'er the waters to thine own bright land,
SAPPHO of song! Again, upon the shore
Where footprints are immortal, for of yore
Tro'd by Italia's all immortal band,
To drink the inspiration of the scene! 5
But come, Enchantress! when the fields are green,
Full fraught with high-souled thought and thrilling sounds,
To shew us, in this island's distant bounds,
What glorious creatures women oft have been!
Come, *Judith*, terrible as Colchis' Queen, 10
Or steal the tears from even man's strained eye,
As love-lorn *Nina*. Years may not efface
The print of rapture, stamped with ma[t]chless grace
Upon my breast by thee;—some pleasures never die!

T.

Stanzas From an Italian MS. Poem in the Possession of Lady B—.
(Lady Burghersh?)

(*The Examiner*, September 10, 1825)

THAT lay, that lay, how many a thought
Is woven with its dulcet strain,—
How many a scene in memory wrought
Comes pressing on the heart again!

I heard those tones in happier days, 5
When Hope was bright, and Life was new,
When childhood shed her fairy rays,
And all the world seem'd fair and true—

I heard those tones in riper years,
When Life and Hope stole fairer on 10
I hear them now in age,—in tears
When youth is fled and friends are gone.

META

Address To Home

(*The Examiner*, September 12, 1825)

OH! Home, sweet home! in whose endearing name
Is centered ev'ry inborn happiness,—
Receptacle of each fond, tender tie,
That bins us to existence,—lov'd resort
Of ev'ry social joy and pure delight; 5
Oh! hail, and with thee thy attendant train
Of fireside comforts and domestic peace.
More welcome still, when the declining year
Compresses daylight in its narrow span,—
When the rough North sends forth its jarring blast, 10
And chilly Winter rules the shortened day;
how then I love thee at that social hour
When misty twilight fades, and th'lengthen'd night
Shuts in; when th'blinds are lower'd, the shutters closed,
And th'murky aspect of the cloud-clad sky 15
Excluded; when the blazing hearth sends forth
Its cheerful flame and renovating warmth,
While pendant o'er it many a joyous eye
Reflects its brightness—Evening then how sweet,
Her calm enjoyments how supremely dear! 20
'Tis then we calmly listen to the blast
That hurrying sweeps in murmurs thro' the air,
And hark with secret rapture to the storm
That howls without;—'tis then we know thy worth,
To thy protecting shelter fondly cling, 25
And gladly own and feel how dear thou art,
How great thy comforts. Oh! enchanting home,
What other pleasures then can equal thine?
What other scenes then compensate for thee,
And all the fond attractions thou afford'st? 30
Thou art the spell to which the traveller
In distant realms directs his ev'ry thought;
Thou art the leading star of hope, to which
His anxious fancy strays, while fond remembrance,
To his sad heart depicting other days, 35
Pourtrays thee, all-enchanting as thou art,
With all the charms thou bring'st. Oh! Home, sweet home!
To thee I turn with all a patriot's love,

To thee shall ever turn. Whate'er my fate,
 Whate'er decreed of novelty to see, 40
 Here will my best affections linger still,
 Here every hope concentrate, and my heart
 Incline thro' life but to one magnet,—HOME.

META

THE MOURNER
 From the Italian of "In questo tempo," &c.

(*The Examiner*, September 25, 1825)

Night closes in;—yon dim red star
 Departing twilight comes to tell;
 And whisp'ring breezes waft from far
 The music of the vesper-bell.

Oh! not one lingering sound beside 5
 Breaks on the soft and stilly air
 The moon is slumbering on the tide,
 And all is calm,—and all is fair.

All, all, save in the mourner's breast, 10
 Where sorrowing mem'ry will not sleep:
 Without!—the world is gone to rest;
 Within!—the heart remains to weep.

META

LINES DEDICATED TO SIGNOR VELLUTI

(*The Examiner*, November 7, 1825)

YES! I have heard the voice of melody,
 And music's dearest tones have linger'd by;
 Yet never, never in my sunniest hours,
 In pleasure's festive halls and radiant bowers,
 While sweetest harmony was breathing near, 5
 Came wafted sounds so beautiful, so dear,
 As when *thy* voice first slept upon mine ear,
 In grandeur swelling like the torrent stream,
 Then still and peaceful as an infant's dream,
 Or th'hallow'd calmness that comes stealing on 10

When winds are dying and when storms are gone.
 I've listen'd to the strains of other days,
 Have felt their sweetness,—yet, like meteor rays
 On th'passing wave that dances on the shore,
 They live and then are thought upon no more. 15
 But oh! *thy* tones when they have floated by
 Still vibrate on the chords of memory;
 Still on the raptured fancy fondly stray,
 As smiles the west when daylight dies away.
 The song by others breath'd may charm in part, 20
 'Tis thine alone to linger round the heart;
 And while we listen to each dulcet sound
 That floats like fairy minstrelsy around,
 Oh! let the heart each bitter thought disclaim,
 Let charity forbear unkindly blame, 25
 And curb resentment where compassion's due,
 An act of mercy and of justice too.

META

ACROSTIC

(*The Examiner*, November 27, 1825)

Varied and beautiful as are the dyes
 Embosom'd in the West when daylight dies,
 Lingers thy voice upon the raptur'd ear—
 Low murm'ring, now, like night-winds passing by
 Upon the sea;—and now, like "torrents near," 5
 That grandly swell in lofty majesty,—
 It breaths around, so sweet, so soft, so clear.

META

Lines Written in Sickness

(*The Examiner*, January 15, 1826)

I would not wish,—when I am dead
 And shrouded in the church-yard gloom—
 I would not wish to lay mine head
 In marble vault or sculptur'd tomb:—

 No!—bear me to some lowly spot 5
 Where waves the alder-tree above me;
 Where I may sleep, and be forgot

By all,—save those I wish to love me.

Then if perchance fond Friendship e'er
Directs her footsteps to my grave, 10
And sheds one hallow'd tear-drop there,
Oh! that *one tear* is all I crave.

META

Lines Addressed to Madame Bonini on Hearing Her Sing
"Naqui all'affanno al pianto," &c.

(*The Examiner*, January 29, 1826)

THAT voice, so sweet, so soft, so clear,
So beautiful in minstrelsy!
Oh! should some spirit, hov'ring near,
Its dulcet tones perchance to hear,
Or should its music, floating by, 5
Reach Echo's ear,—how oft would then
That spirit leave its native star,
To wander hither back again,
And oft fond Echo, from afar,
Enamour'd of the fairy strain, 10
From woods, and wilds, and waters come,
To linger round so *sweet a Home*.

META

SIGNOR VELUTI [*sic*] (anonymous)

(*The Examiner*, January 29, 1826)

I'd rather hear Signor Veluti,
Than gaze upon the rarest beauty:
I'd rather wear old clothes though they were sooty,
Rather than never hear Veluti:
The miser, tho' a purblind newt, he 5
Would part with gold to hear Veluti:
The bandit would forsake his booty
At the first tone from sweet Veluti:
Why does the client leave his suit? he
Is open mouth'd to hear VELUTI: 10
The nun neglects her choral duty,
She cannot vie with lost VELUTI:
I saw the man in parachute, he

Was vastly strange—but, O VELUTI!
 Of crowded theatres the fruit he
 Must disregard, who hears VELUTI.
 But lo! vile instruments, be mute—he
 At length appears, Divine VELUTI!

15

VELLUTI (anonymous)

(*The Examiner*, February 19, 1826)

Heard'st thou not the peacock shriek?
 Heard'st thou not the cricket squeak?
 Heard'st thou not the door-hinge creak?
 No,—it was VELLUTI.

Heard'st thou the parrot's shrilly cry?
 Heard'st thou the screech-owl hooting by?
 Heard'st thou the sea-mew screaming nigh?
 No,—it was VELLUTI.

5

Heard'st thou the angry mastiff growl?
 Heard'st thou grimalkin's midnight howl
 And croaking frog in waters foul?
 No,—it was VELLUTI.

10

Some there are who mock the song
 And warblings of the feather'd throng,
 But birds and beasts alike belong
 To *thy* tones, lost VELLUTI.

15

For thou art all—first this, then that,
 A husky rook—a squeaking rat,
 Famed Punch—a frog—a love-sick cat;
 These form *thy* voice, VELLUTI.

20

Lines translated from an Italian MS. Poem in the possession of Lady P-L.
 (Lady Priscilla Wellesley-Pole Fane?)

(*The Examiner*, February 26, 1826)

Bards have sung of the jocund light
 That laughs in the western skies,

Of silver spray so fair, so white,
 On the dancing wave that lies;
 There's glittering dew on the mountain's height, 5
 When morning mists arise;
 There's a radiant smile for the brow of night,
 Where the yellow moonray hies,
 And fair are the lines whose tints unite
 In the Rainbow's fairy dyes; 10
 Yet there's nought so fair, so best, so bright,
 As the glance of Ladies' eyes.

META

Impromptu.
 Composed in a box at the King's Theatre To Signor Velluti.

(*The Examiner*, March 12, 1826)

OH! should some seraph of the sky,
 While *thou* art singing, hover nigh,
 No longer then thy minstrelsy
 To *Earth* alone were given.

For as the sweet tones floated by, 5
 Oft would that seraph hither hie,
 To listen to its melody,
 And waft each note to *Heav'n*.

META

SONNET DEDICATED TO SIGNOR VELLUTI ON HIS RECOVERY FROM
 HIS LATE INDISPOSITION July 1st (on Velluti's recovering from an
 Indisposition)

(*The Examiner*, July 9, 1826)

AGAIN, again, that voice, like dulcet flute,
 Is come to bless us with its melody,—
 Again EUTERPE wakens back to joy,—
 (She e'er must droop when THY sweet tones are mute;)—

For thou art Music's soul,—and when thy notes 5

Are lost to us, we seek and wish in vain
For ought beside to breathe so dear a strain,
'Midst ev'ry other voice that round us floats.

Ah! none can waft upon the ear, like thine,
Those witching tones that ravish and inthral,— 10
Taste, pathos, power, science, sweetness, all,
All, in thy voice of excellence combines.

The art of Song by *many* may be known—
To touch the heart is *thine*,—and thine *alone*.
META

Impromptu on Velluti¹

(*Spirit of the Age for 1828*)

I've listen'd oft 'neath Italy's sky,
To the hallow'd voice of melody;
I've heard sweet music on the tide,
When all was hush'd and still beside—
When moonlight slept on the waters blue, 5
And the world's wild hum was sleeping too.
I've listen'd to the soft guitar,
Wafted on Zephyr's wing from afar;
I've listen'd to the dulcet flute,
To Pilgrim's harp, and Lady's lute, 10
But ne'er did aught so bless mine ear,
As that one voice now breathing—here.
META

¹ As I have indicated, I believe this either to be a reprint or a printing of an earlier, unpublished submission, as it lies so far outside of the period of META's apparent activity.

Appendix B: First-hand Account of 30 June 1825 from *The Parthenon*.¹

offensive interpolation upon the audience, especially as the liberty she has taken has already been received with marked disapprobation.

The following sketch made from Velluti in the character of Armando, after he assumes the dress of a Knight of Rhodes, represents one of the most favourable views of his countenance :—



To what has already been said on the subject of Velluti, we venture to add an article written immediately after seeing him on the night of his debut. It was impossible to make room for it in our last; but we insert it now, as, though some of the expressions may perhaps be considered exaggerated, it records the first impressions of a person who has a very lively feeling for the beauties of music :—

“ I attended the other evening to witness the first appearance of Velluti, at the Italian Opera of London. I went with feelings of a mixed nature, but I think that the expectation

¹ The originals of these images are in the possession of the author.

of something at least extraordinary, and a sort of half anticipation of something not quite pleasing, were the uppermost sensations in my mind. To say that those around me seemed, like myself, curious even to anxiety on the subject of the approaching entertainment, is to express but half the interest which I am sure we shared on the occasion. For nearly an hour before the drawing of the curtain, every seat in the pit was occupied, and every third person was to be seen running over the leaves of the Opera book, and calculating to a nicety the exact period at which their curiosity was to be gratified by the entrance of Velluti. Others were busy gathering information from passing friends. One had heard him at the Rehearsal, and assured his neighbour that his voice was more like the scream of a peacock, or the yell of a savage, than a human sound. Another stoutly denied that there was any thing like music in his whole composition, and a third insisted that his singing was the most disagreeable thing he had ever heard, and he never wished to hear it again. I thought the last of these might as well have saved himself the pain of attending, and endeavoured to divest myself as much as possible of the prejudice which these and similar observations were calculated to excite. At length the well-known signal of the leader announced the overture which was listened to with the profoundest attention, and in the midst of it, as if in obedience to the anxiety of the audience, the curtain rose. After two or three short scenes, which, in spite of the exquisite singing of Caradori, and an attempt at splendid decoration, quite unusual on the stage of the Italian Opera, seemed as many ages, the object of interest at length presented himself to the audience, amidst overwhelming shouts of applause. His first appearance in a boat at the farther end of the stage was uncommonly striking. His tall figure and picturesque attitude distinguished him from those around him, and there was something in his whole appearance, his every look, and every motion, which gave him, to my imagination at least, a preternatural effect. He looked like a being of another world. As he advanced, the applause continued, and a few hisses were heard. His agitation was extreme, he was seen to tremble, and his cheeks, even through the rouge, were plainly of a death-like hue. A nearer inspection of him only increased the feeling which the first impression had excited. His features are rather finely formed, particularly his eyes and mouth, and his skin, which is of the most delicate texture, is perfectly free from the slightest indication of beard of any sort. A settled melancholy seems stamped upon his countenance—an expression of hopelessness—a dreary look of despair. He seems an outcast from his fellow beings—or rather, like one moving through the world without a fellow—joyless, solitary, and forlorn. But if such was the impression produced upon me by his appearance alone, how shall I attempt to describe the effect of his singing. The first tones he uttered fell upon the ear with a death-like peal. His opening recitative, "*Popolo d'Egitto, ecco a voi ritorno,*" seemed like the announcement of a return from the tomb. There was something so awfully preter-human in the sound—too harsh to be entirely pleasing, yet too strangely overpowering to leave room for disgust, and withal so mixed up with tender expression, and intense feeling, as to give rise to an indescribable mixture of emotions between pleasure and pain, terror and admiration;—a sort of thrilling sensation of almost awful interest, which, if it were to continue for any length of time without interruption must lead to the very borders of delirium. The recitative, however, as it usually falls on the most defective part of his voice, is least adapted to display his powers. It is only in the execution of airs that his extraordinary qualities can be truly appreciated. His soul seems to mingle in the sound he utters—his very existence to hang quivering upon the thread of his modulation. His cadences are not mere effusions of elegant combinations—they are spells which work the feelings up to a pitch of frantic delight—the overflowings of a soul seeking relief from its anguish, and venting itself in an agony of enjoyment."



Appendix C: Excerpt from Cornelio Parolari's Account of Velluti and Manuel Garcia. Original Italian.

This passage includes sections not translated in the excerpt found in chapter 6.

Ciò nondimeno il grande cantante fu ricevuto nel salotto, ove il figlio del Garcia, Gustavo, era al pianoforte, accompagnandosi non so qual vocalizzo.

Rimasto solo col giovinetto, poichè questo, rispettoso, s'era alzato a salutarlo, il Velluti lo esortò a continuare come egli non ci fosse, affermando che il più bel modo di onorare chi di qualche merito si crede fornito è il far tesoro di quel tempo, di cui egli, se veramente ha merito, non può aver mai fatto spreco. L'altro allora ripigliò l'intrapreso studio composto con l'intento di educare nel *portamento* della voce. Poco appresso parve al cantante che il fanciullo respirasse spostando le costole anzi che il diaframma. Onde lo interruppe:

<<Dai retta, piccino mio>>, cominciò, <<che diresti tu di iun carrettiere, il quale intraprendesse il viaggio senza mettere in assetto le ruote, di un falegname che imprendesse il lavoro senza aguzzare i ferruzzi del mestiere, di un organista che pretendesse sonare con arte, avendo i mantiei difettosi, scrudsciti, soffianti da ogni lato, come gatti frugati? Diresti che son genti, che si studiano di anfanare a secco. E ben a ragione. Ma no potresti dire altrimenti di chi crede cantare con garbo senza aver prima imparato a respirare. La scuola del respiro è la scuola del canto e niuno può emergere in questo senza essere padrone di quello, come per rimanere a galla non basta aver educati i muscoli delle braccia e delle gambe, ma saper eziandio convenientemente trattenere la respirazione. E come si fa a conseguire scop sì importante? È più difficile il bere un uovo! Basta respirare sì che l'aria entri per le vie nasali e spostare il diaframma anzi che le costole e le clavicole. Quando di questo meccanismo tu sarai riuscito a fare una spontanea consuetudine, tu potrai dirti padrone del tuo respiro agli effetti del bel canto. E quali saranno le conseguenze di siffatta padronanza? Il portamento della tua voce sarà perfetto, perfetta sarà la *messa di voce*, senza pecche l'intonazione e del pari verrà spontanea l'agilità. Sì, sì, anche l'agilità, perchè, come potrebbe un ballerino muovere agile quel piede, il quale fosse ravato da pesanti scarpe, che lo redessero dolente. Ond'è che insomma il tuo canto riuscirà in tal modo perfetto...Ma>>, soggiunse, interrompendosi, <<io non sono venuto qui per dar lezioni, ma per vedere il tuo babbo. Eppure mi fu detto che è in casa!>>.

Il giovanetto si mosse tosto per accertare ove fosse il genitore e sollecitarlo e a tal fine schiuse un uscio per andarsene di là. Ma qual meraviglia per lui e pel Velluti, scorgendo lo stesso Emanuele Garcia sulla

soglia di quell'uscio, ritto ed immobile, mentre con una matita stava prendendo appunti sopra un libruccio, che recava. E non inferiore alla meraviglia degli uni fu la confusione dell'altro. Per buona sorte sì questo che quello erano avvezzi ai contrattamenti del palcoscenico, sì che elegantemente seppero trarsi d'impiccio:

<<Ti ringrazio, amico>>, esclamò il Garcia, andadogli incontro cordiale e sorridente tendendogli la destra, <<tu hai già scritto il capitolo più importante, più bello, più degno dell'*Arte del Canto*, il mio *Metodo*, che sto per pubblicare. E per compensarti come posso per la manomissione de' tuoi diritti d'autore, questa sera rimarrai a cena con noi!>>.

Il *Metodo* apparve poco dopo e riuscì in modo tale da schiudere all'Autore, come si è detto, la via dell'insegnamento nella Reale Accademia di Musica di Londra.

È si potrebbe tuttora leggere nell'archivio della nobile ed ottima famiglia del cavalier Gioacchino Velluti, pronipote del grande cantante, una lettera della moglie del Garcia, Eugenia, con cui costei, pochi anni appresso ebbe a confessare che il marito, mentre insegnava, teneva come uno specchio di perfezione dinanzi gli occhi della fantasia l'immagine di Giambattista Velluti per non trascurare gli insegnamenti, che dall'esempio suo per la perfezione della tecnica vocal scaturivano copiosi ed efficaci.

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