

Giacomo Meyerbeer
The Complete Libretti
in Eleven Volumes

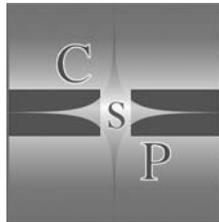
(in the Original and in English
Translations by Richard Arsenty with
Introductions by Robert Ignatius Letellier)

Volume 6

The Meyerbeer Libretti
Grand Opéra 2
Les Huguenots

Edited by

Richard Arsenty (translations)
and Robert Letellier (introductions)



Cambridge Scholars Publishing

The Meyerbeer Libretti: Grand Opéra 2 *Les Huguenots*,
Edited by Richard Arsenty (translations) and Robert Letellier (introductions)

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Giacomo Meyerbeer, Lithograph by François Delpech
after a drawing by Antoine Maurin (Paris, c. 1835)

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PREFACE

Giacomo Meyerbeer, one of the most important and influential opera composers of the nineteenth century, enjoyed a fame during his lifetime unrivalled by any of his contemporaries. His four French grand operas were in the standard repertory of every major opera house of the world between 1831 and 1914. But his stage works went into an eclipse after the First World War, and from then until the 1990s were performed only occasionally. Now a rediscovery and reevaluation of his lyric dramas is under way. More performances of his operas have taken place since 1993 than occurred during the previous twenty years. This presents a problem for anyone who wants to study the libretti of his operas. The texts of his early stage works are held by very few libraries in the world and are almost impossible to find, and the libretti of his more famous later operas, when come across, are invariably heavily cut and reflect the performance practices of a hundred years ago. This eleven-volume set, following on from the original five-volume edition of 2004, provides all the operatic texts set by Meyerbeer in one collection. Over half of the libretti have not appeared in print in any language for more than 150 years, and one of the early German works has never been printed before. All of the texts are offered in the most complete versions ever made available, many with supplementary material appearing in addenda.

Each libretto is translated into modern English by Richard Arseny; and each work is introduced by Robert Letellier. In this comprehensive edition of Meyerbeer's libretti, the original text and its translation are placed on facing pages for ease of use.

INTRODUCTION

Les Huguenots

WORLD PREMIÈRE

29 February 1836

Paris, Académie Royale de Musique [L'Opéra]

Marguerite de Valois	Julie Dorus-Gras
Valentine	Cornélie Falcon
Urbain	Louise Marie Flécheux
Raoul de Nangis	Adolphe Nourrit
Marcel	Nicolas-Prosper Levasseur
Le Comte de Saint-Bris	Jacques-Émile Serda
Le Comte de Nevers	Prosper Dérivis
Bois-Rosé	Pierre-François Wartel

The first mention of what would become Meyerbeer's most famous opera is in a letter to his wife Minna dated 10 October 1832:

"Scribe has finished the first act: it is *gracieuse* and ingenious, but what he always misses, and this time particularly so, *consens* of the chosen epoch, is completely lacking."¹

Meyerbeer had suddenly turned into a legend, and he was expected to show powers such as no single genius could combine. Given his modesty and earnestness, the pressure entailed much suffering for him. He was eager to merit the admiration lavished on him, and became increasingly painstaking, and even sceptical of his own power. For five years after the première of *Robert le Diable*, he appeared to be basking in the fame of this opera. In fact he was earnestly applying himself to a great drama of the French Wars of Religion that Scribe was writing for him, partly adapted from ideas in the novel by Prosper Mérimée, the *Chronique du règne de Charles IX* (1829), already the basis of Hérold's *opéra comique Le Pré aux clercs* (1832).

¹ MEYERBEER, Giacomo. *Briefwechsel und Tagebücher*. Vol. 2 (1825-1836). Ed. Heinz BECKER (1970).



The love duet in act 4 of *Les Huguenots*

His relationship with Scribe in this matter reveals important aspects of what was a highly important and effective operatic working partnership. Scribe suited Meyerbeer as no other librettist could. But this was not, as with Scribe's partnership with Auber, a marriage of true complementary minds from the same family. It was more in the nature of that between producer and consumer. Filled with poetic instincts himself, the composer needed a gifted technician who could give the ideas he came up with the power of situation in the language of the operatic stage. Scribe did not always grasp these ideas, or necessarily accept them: he might even have blunted their originality in his instinctively bourgeois perception. It was up to Meyerbeer, when he took over these ideas, to infuse them with his own particular energy. This was very much the case in the famous Ballet of the Nuns in *Robert* where Scribe had originally proposed a formal classical idea, and was prompted into the famous Gothic scenario by the ideas of the composer and designers.

Meyerbeer took new notions of psychology further than Scribe in his adaptation of the Waverley hero. And before the composer attempted to embody this psychology in music, he made exhaustive researches into the historical period to be presented. Integral to this process was an involvement and experimentation with unfamiliar musical sounds and devices. Hence a comparison of Scribe's original text, preserved in his *Oeuvres complètes*, with the final version of the text used by Meyerbeer, shows that most of the vivid details, gleaned from many documents related to the time in question, were the composer's own contribution to *Les Huguenots*. The manuscript of the libretto retained among Meyerbeer's papers is 117 pages with intercalated rough pages. These contain alterations and new versions of individual passages and whole scenes in Meyerbeer's own hand, and especially that of the second librettist, Émile Deschamps, he employed (with Scribe's open agreement) to versify these new ideas.²

Metastasio, who had been the most influential librettist of his time, had given all his attention to the form, the plasticity of the poem which was the frame or scaffolding of the composer's art. But with Scribe it was different. Here the situation dominates the form. The work sometimes appears to be minimal when it comes to style and color, but exceptional in apposite or stimulating situations, in providing material for contrasts, like a programme for the music. It is only to be understood what a stimulus to

²BECKER, Heinz. "Giacomo Meyerbeers Mitarbeit an den Libretti seiner Opern". In *Bericht über den internationalen musikwissenschaftlichen Kongress Bonn 1970*. Eds. C. DAHLHAUS, H.J. MARX, M. MARX-WEBER, G. MASSENKEIL. Cassel: Bärenreiter, 1973; pp. 155-62.

Meyerbeer's imagination such material could be. Scribe was an ideal collaborator for the composer's particular creative instincts.

The whole compositional process was interrupted in late 1833 by the illness of Minna Meyerbeer with a chest complaint following on her grief at her father's death. A visit to warmer southern climes was called for, and the composer paid the fine of 30,000 francs to Véron, the director of the Opéra, for violation of his contract. He took his wife over the Alps to Milan and Nice. During November of 1833 and in early 1834 he worked assiduously on the opera, and availed himself of the services of his old collaborator Gaetano Rossi in developing his new ideas for the *Huguenots* scenario. The figure of the old retainer Marcel was particularly his concern, and with Rossi, he re-conceived the dramatic nature of this character completely. In a letter to Scribe (2 July 1834) he wrote that the librettist's idea of the role had not agreed with the composer's musical conception of it, and that he (Meyerbeer) had "rewritten the whole of Marcel's part for my musical needs".³

On the composer's return to Paris at the end of September, his friend and confident the postal official Gouin put him in touch with the poet Émile Deschamps, who, on the basis of *Robert*, regarded Meyerbeer as a leading figure of French Romanticism. He met with Scribe and Deschamps on 1 November 1834, presumably to discuss his wishes for the libretto. Scribe, who was working on *La Juive* with Halévy, presumably gave the go-ahead, and the composer's diary for the month records 11 further meetings with Deschamps, during which the latter attended to the changes and the new versification required. These included Raoul's romance in act 1, Marcel's duet with Valentine in act 3, parts of the Blessing of the Daggers and the love duet in act 4, and the trio in act 5. Of particular importance were the new ideas for the great scenes in act 4, where Meyerbeer was influenced by the "guerra" chorus in Bellini's *Norma* and also responded to the tenor Adolphe Nourrit's ideas about additions to the famous love scene, changes that would result in the middle *andante amoroso* section, possibly the most famous music that Meyerbeer ever wrote. The final form of the libretto is thus by Scribe, with additions and alterations by Deschamps after ideas by Meyerbeer, Rossi and Nourrit.

By 5 May 1835 the composer could deliver the score to the solicitors for formalization of the contract; by 2 June rehearsals began. The première took place on 29 February 1836: after initial surprise at the difference from *Robert*, it fired the public imagination even more than its predecessor, was seen to exist on a different artistic level, and achieved over two hundred

³ Briefwechsel.

performances within two years.⁴ It became Meyerbeer's most popular opera, not only in France, but throughout the world during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. By 1936 it had been performed 1300 times at the Paris Opéra alone. The principal protagonists, Nourrit (Raoul), Falcon (Valentine), and Levasseur (Marcel) constituted an almost unprecedented trio of vocal prowess, and one that Meyerbeer himself thought would never be repeated. Indeed Falcon was soon to lose her voice, while Nourrit, filled with despair at the changing style of singing, would soon take his own life in Naples.

Scribe's story is indeed an enthralling one, and the opera is full of great moments. The backdrop of the action is the Wars of Religion in France during the second half of the sixteenth century, a period of historical trauma that found its horrific highpoint in the Massacre of St Bartholomew's Day on 24 August 1572 when some 30,000 Huguenots were murdered by Catholics in Paris, Orleans, and other French towns. Catherine de' Medici and the Guise family had persuaded Charles IX to consent to it. In the operatic scenario, Marguerite de Valois, the king's sister, is to be married to the Protestant leader, Henry of Navarre, as part of a grand plan for peace. She tries to affect further reconciliation among the warring Catholic and Protestant parties by arranging a politically expedient union between scions of the respective leading families. She has chosen for this purpose, the young Raoul de Nangis, a Protestant nobleman, and Valentine, daughter of the Comte de St Bris, a prominent Catholic. The work portrays religious fanaticism, too strong to be quelled even by royal intervention, and intensified by tragic personal misunderstanding. A complex dramatic nexus of religion, politics, honor, love and betrayal develops to a tragic highpoint that culminates in the massacre which is brutally depicted in the last act.

Liszt observed of Scribe. "If one continually reproaches the poet for striving after dramatic effects, it would be unjust not to acknowledge how thrilling these can often be."⁵ The characters are also well-drawn, and the combination of Scribe and Meyerbeer's concern for a psychological realism works most effectively. Meyerbeer was very successful in his characterizations of individuals: the dreamy idealist Raoul, the passionate and self-sacrificing Valentine, the fanatical and implacable St Bris, the rough stolid Marcel, the elegant and capricious queen, the somewhat flamboyant but always honorable Nevers. Speaking of this gift, Ernest

⁴ PROD'HOMME, Jacques-Gabriel. "Die *Hugenotten*-Première". *Die Musik* 3:9 (1903-04): 187-200.

⁵ LISZT, Franz. "Über Meyerbeers *Hugenotten*" [1837]. In *Gesammelte Schriften* 10 vols. Ed. L. Ramann. Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1881; II: 64-66.

Newman observed that, "In each of his operas Meyerbeer gave his audiences the delighted feeling that they were being brought into touch with real life, and that the characters they saw on the boards were men and women such as they might meet any day themselves...."⁶

The composer's genius for enhancing effects through the music is especially evident in the construction of the crowd scenes: the Catholic gentlemen of Nevers's party, the Catholic ladies of the queen's court, the subtle gallantry and hidden treachery of the Court, the massed groups of Catholic and Protestant townspeople, soldiers, courtiers and partisans. All bring alive on the stage the harsh realities of religious bigotry, the frightening unpredictability of people swayed by murderous ideology.

The great challenge for Meyerbeer had been in producing another work after *Robert le Diable* that could reasonably hold its own in the public affection. The use of the supernatural, the polarized concepts of good and evil, had worked overwhelmingly. Now the same interest had to be sustained using another register of images altogether, the hard cold world of human intrigue and religious intolerance.

In *Les Huguenots* we see both composer and poet in a new sphere of action. Meyerbeer's response to the text led to the enrichment of tonal art with the power of expressing a totally new item. Gluck and Spontini had already depicted in dramatic music the contrast between the religious rites of barbarians and the services of civilized nations: Gluck in *Iphigénie en Tauride* (1779) illustrates the ceremonies of the Scythians and the Greeks, and Spontini in *Fernand Cortez* (1809) the difference in religious rites between the Mexicans and the Spaniards. No one before though had attempted to portray the persecution of one half of a nation by the other professing a different creed. Meyerbeer and Scribe were the first to paint religious fanaticism, that terrible madness in human nature which respects neither relationship, ties of nationality, nor the common values of fundamental faith. Others had treated the subject of the St Bartholomew's Massacre in plays and novels, but it was up to Scribe to treat it with all the heat, passion and color of melodrama and tragedy. His plastic handling of the form, his innovative restructuring of the scene, is preeminently evident in act 4 where the prolonged ensemble of the Blessing of the Daggers is a constantly shifting vortex of intrigue, conspiracy, prayer and fanaticism. Here the human personalities and personal commitments and destinies are subjected to every kind of trial and betrayal in the onward rush of communal intent.

It is interesting to see how Scribe has transformed a literary source for

⁶ NEWMAN, Ernest. "*Les Huguenots*". In *More Stories of Famous Operas*. Philadelphia: Blakeston, 1946.

his own dramatic purposes. The duet in act 4 is based on an idea borrowed from Mérimés's *Chronique de Charles IX*. Here the young Huguenot nobleman Bernard de Mergy is with his mistress, Diane, the countess of Turgis, a good Catholic, at the beginning of the massacre. Scribe gives this situation greater dramatic character by supposing that Raoul, hidden in Valentine's apartment shortly after her marriage to Nevers, has just heard her father confirming the details of the plot to eliminate the Protestants. He seeks to warn his brethren, but Valentine reveals her love for him. It is a moment of rapture when Raoul forgets the whole world, his duty, and even the imminent massacre. Only the tocsin breaks in to wake him to reality, so he rushes to join his friends as they are being massacred. The extended duet, occupying half an act, in its variety and changing moods, colors and structural plasticity, is an effort that represents dramatic and formal innovation of the highest order. The words at the heart of the duet were inspired by Nourrit and penned by Deschamps:

*Tu l'as dit: oui tu m'aimes!
 Dans ma nuit quelle étoile a brillé?
 Je renais, c'est l'air pur des cieux mêmes!
 La, toujours, oubliant, oublié!
 Tu l'as dit: oui, tu m'aimes.*

Scribe also borrowed from Merimée of the tragic motif of inadvertently killing a member of one's own family. In the novel Bernard escapes the carnage in Paris disguised as a monk, and during the siege of La Rochelle strikes down one of the besiegers, only to discover that he has killed his Catholic brother Georges. In the libretto *St Bris*, directing the massacre, finds he has murdered his own daughter, unaware that she has become a Protestant.

Scribe's additional use of Ludovic Vitet's (1802-73) *Scènes historiques*, and the influence of the Huguenot ideal of martyrdom as embodied in the writing of Agrippa d'Aubigny (1551-1630), were powerful imaginative stimuli. (D'Aubigny's great ideological poem *Les Tragiques* [1616] is the fighting epic of French Protestantism: *Les Feux* describes the sufferings of the Protestant martyrs; *Les Fers* gives an account of the wars of religion, with a tremendous evocation of the St Bartholomew's Day massacre).⁷ These are vital elements in Scribe's poetic consideration of commitment, humanity, faith, and death, and are preeminently embodied in act 5 when

⁷ AUBIGNÉ, Theodor Agrippa d'. *Der Hugenott von altem Schrott und Korn: Denkwürdigkeiten Theodor Agrippa d'Aubignés*. Leipzig, 1854.
 —. *Histoire universelle*. Ed. A. de RUBLE. Vol. 3. Paris, 1889.

Valentine and Raoul are married amidst darkness and desolation in the cemetery of a church where the Huguenot women and children are seeking refuge, and about to be murdered before their very eyes.

Meyerbeer's response rises to Scribe's dramatic vision here in his use of Luther's hymn "Ein' feste Burg" as the theme of spiritual idealism. While the hymn is used often by other composers in symphonies and sacred works, it remains a prosaic and formal reminiscence. Meyerbeer turns it into a fully developed *Leitmotif*, and succeeds in transforming it into something deeply poetical and even mystical. In the overture it is presented in many different guises, to represent the spirit of religion in all its forms: solemn, loving, tender, inflamed, militant, deformed, rendered grotesque in militancy. In Marcel's singing of it in act 1 it is a beautiful expression of faith, full of power and exquisite aspiration. In the second finale it provides a *cantus firmus*, expressing Huguenot resolution and strength in face of deception and danger. In act 3 it is a stirring call to arms in the midst of ambush and betrayal. In act 5 it becomes the hushed and remote prayer in the moment of imminent death, and finally the triumphant cry of martyrdom accepted.

Meyerbeer succeeded decisively in this work in fusing the different traditions of the three great operatic lands of Europe. His style is strikingly defined by Italianate melody, a French sense of rhythm, and a Germanic richness of harmony. The vivid color of the score is characterized by these stylistic and formal influences: romance mingles with scenes of celebration and conflict shaped by massive choruses; a consistently appealing melos is illumined by a brilliant, inventive sense of instrumental tincture.

Meyerbeer's teutonic origins and training give the work a classical beauty of expression in the intellectual polyphony of the orchestra and ensembles, the greater harmonic richness of the score, the vigorous and various structures of the second and third finales, and in the monumental formal control of the conspiracy scene and extended love duet; in the detailed and sustained use of recurring motif.

The particularly Romantic elements of the stirring story are distilled in the attention to color and atmosphere on the part of both librettist and composer. Starting with the precedent of *Der Freischütz*, Meyerbeer had increasingly concerned himself with the color of times and places. This was by developing the picturesque elements where convivial choruses, courtly processions and gypsy dances serve as both frame and diversion for the depiction of great social history and intense personal passion.

In *Les Huguenots* the fabulous color of time and place plays a central role. The five acts of the opera present contrasts in large blocks: the first

two acts are solar, joyful and idyllic, the other three nocturnal, serious and eventually tragic. The happy salon of the Comte de Nevers, the delightful gardens of Chenonceaux and the rituals of courtly formality are contrasted with the busy chaos of medieval Paris, with crisscrossing narrow streets, chapels and bawdy taverns, swarming with strolling citizens, students and pugnacious customers, feasting, playing, dancing, provoking religious controversy. There are altercations between the Catholics, disturbed in their religious services, and the mocking Huguenots who intone a bellicose rataplan. This is in turn interrupted by the unexpected arrival of the gypsies, alien pagans detached from the religious controversies, whose fortune telling and dances distract the contenders. The atmosphere is reminiscent of Villon's "Ballade des Pendus" of Hugo's Court of Miracles from *Notre Dame de Paris*. Light gives way to darkness, with flickering torches picking out sinister details, as appalling plots and sublime self-offering unfold. The gathering darkness, the solitary cry of the archer announcing the curfew, the brief hushed answers from the chorus, the first mysterious signs of intrigue among St Bris and his followers, secretly overheard, the orchestral measures accompanying the entry of Valentine, fill the air with murmurs, and the tremble of anxiety.

The duet with Marcel, at the center of the opera, with Valentine's affecting *Larghetto* intersected by the troubled throbbing of Marcel's concern, creates a melancholic lament unfolding in an atmosphere full of ambush and menace. The fusion of characters and setting and plot is superbly achieved, with melodic cues, the disposition of voices, orchestral timbres, and the variety of rhythms combine to create an inspired dramaturgy. The darkness is etched by torches and the air filled with chivalrous pride and ominous warnings in the septet of protagonists, a comment on the rituals of duelling on the Pré-aux-Clercs, as the River Seine flows silent and sinisterly at the feet of the contestants. The irruption of the ambushade, the swelling of the Huguenot chorale as the alarm is given over the tumult of the confrontation, the rushing of soldiers and students, the shrill insulting disputes between the Catholic and Protestant women, the pacifying entry of the Queen and her retinue, and finally the arrival of the illuminated wedding barque with the joyful guests, the celebration riding over the murderous mutterings and menacings of the populace, provide a vivid scenario governed by chiaroscuro, decrescendo and crescendo.

The monumental act 4 which follows depends not so much on local color, as on huge musical structures and variety, the tumultuous Catholic plot and blessing of the daggers, where a tale of conspiracy rises to the structured solemnity of the great historical fact. The play of contrasts

reaches its climax in the celebrated love duet, where, confiding their love to each other, borne on the wings of endless melody, they forget the tragedy which is about to overtake the Huguenots, and are roused only by the eerie ringing of bells in the dead of night, inciting the Catholics to the slaughter.

The pattern of surface contrasts reflects the deep structural theme of ideological contrast, the incurable variance between religious fanaticism on the one hand, and the human aspiration to freedom of worship and prayer, indeed to liberty of the spirit, on the other. The motif was already present in *Il Crociato in Egitto*.

Scribe's 5-act construction is put to superb dramaturgical use. The first act is all sunshine and laughter, in the depiction of the *matinée* at the chateau of the Comte de Nevers. The cast is all male until the arrival of the Page (*en travestie*). Underneath all the fun and games, the serious purposes are all revealed: the religio-political crisis, the role and identities of all the characters, the world of passion and intrigue.

In act 2 the mood is still idyllic (initially, anyway), the atmosphere still irradiated, and this time full of the feminine badinage of the court of Marguerite de Valois. Once again the apparently frivolous action is the means of carrying the action forward, as the daylight and course of events begin to wane with the revelation of the Queen's sentimental political plans, and the entry of all the parties to her strategies. The collapse of trust and the brutal advent of confrontation suddenly plunge one into actual terror of the religious conflict.

In act 3 the initial idyll is even further truncated. The afternoon urban happiness of the Parisian crowds is soon wrenched apart by partisan conflict, and with the fall of night, the horrible truth of betrayal and planned murder come to the fore. At the heart of this act, and the whole action of the opera, is the decision of a brave young woman to defy religious affiliation and family loyalty in the interest of truth, justice and love. Valentine's approach in the night to Marcel as he keeps watch is an exploration of the deepest issues of human commitment and liberty of the spirit as pride and ideology are vanquished, and hearts transformed. When the crisis arrives in the foiled assassination of Raoul, the extent of unfolding tragedy is couched in irony.

Act 4, the conspiracy, the planning and advent of ideological hatred, takes place in secretive interiors in the darkness of the eve of St Bartholomew. The denouement is reached with this hatred in action, in the context of the ironic foiling of true love, as the fatal bell breaks into the lovers' reverie and the massacre becomes reality.

In act 5 the darkness thickens even more as the whole of society is seen to be unraveling in hatred, murder and chaos. The only light is spiritual

illumination which chooses self-sacrifice and love, even to death itself, above hatred and vengeance. Resolution comes in true enlightenment of mind and heart.

Ah voyez!

Le ciel s'oeuvre et rayonne!

Gloire a Dieu! Le divin clairon sonne!

George Sand, indeed, called this opera “an evangel of love”.⁸

The plot has followed an inexorable course, intensified in terms of broadness, light, time, speed and compression, as leisured life, freedom of mind and action, are funneled into a vortex of constriction: action becomes narrower, darker, faster and inescapable in the realization of a fatal course of tragic events. The broad bright vistas of the opening acts pass through the dark and twisting streets of Paris and the secret chambers of conspiracy, to end up in the gutters of city. Eventually the only authentic action left is the freedom to die for the truth.

In *Les Huguenots* Meyerbeer showed himself the master of narrative pacing and symbolic color. He emerges as the historical novelist of dramatic music, using sophisticated orchestral and choral mixtures and powerful characterization to unfold both relaxed and vibrant narration. The apprehension of historical detail, the bold confrontation of themes of profound importance to human self-determination and liberty, established him as a great composer of serious opera. As David Charlton has observed, the engagement of poet and composer transcended historical limitations, and between them, by avoiding sentimentality as regards the main characters, they “created a masterpiece of Romantic tragedy.”

For Hans von Bülow, *Les Huguenots* remained “one of the greatest moments of my life”.

Meyerbeer's most perfect and popular opera was performed 1120 times at the Paris Opéra between 29 February 1836 and 22 November 1936. Only Gounod's *Faust* was given there more often (2336 times by 1959). It soon spread all over the world and became Meyerbeer's most performed work: 459 times in Hamburg (-1959), 385 times in Berlin (-1932), 249 times in Covent Garden (-1927), 247 times in Vienna (-1911), 118 times in Linz, 75 times in Parma (-1927), 66 times in New York (-1915). See *BT* (II, 680-1) for a listing of reviews. also the section under *Les Huguenots* in M.-H. Coudroy, *La critique parisienne des "grands opéras" de Meyerbeer* for reprints.

⁸ —. *Lettres d'un Voyageur*. Trans. Sacha RABINOVITCH and Patricia THOMSON. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1987. Letter Eleven, pp. 275-91.

The Librettists

Augustin-Eugène Scribe (b. Paris, 14 Dec. 1791; d. Paris, 20 Feb. 1861). He began his theatrical career as a writer of comedies, but by appreciation of the theatrical condition in Paris and of the sensibility of his audience, he gave *opéra comique* a new strength (*Le Maçon*, 1825), and animated the genre of French *grand opéra* (*La Muette de Portici*, 1828). His keen sense of historical awareness was inherited from Jouy's work for Spontini, and he fully utilized the opportunities for staging on an elaborate scale at the Paris Opéra. His plots draw on historical sources, but are reworked rather than adapted. He often dealt with the clash of religious, national and political issues, and the lives of famous and ordinary people caught up in crisis. He captured an epic sense of the movement of peoples, and gave the chorus a more dramatically functional role. He also used collaborators to write verse for his strong stage situations. The effectiveness of his texts resulted in great success for him and his composers. His brilliant sense of the stage is confirmed by the number of composers who turned to him: Adam (9), Auber (38), Audran (1), Balfe (1), Bellini (1, *La Sonnambula*), Boieldieu (4, incl. *La Dame blanche*), Boisselot (1), Cherubini (1), Cilea (1, *Adriana Lecouvreur*), Clapisson (6), Donizetti (5, incl. *L'elisir d'amore* and *La Favorite*), Fétis (1), Gatzambide (1), Gomis (1), Gounod (1, *La Nonne sanglante*), Grisar (1), Guénée (1), Halévy (6, incl. *La Juive*), Hérold (2), Kastner (1), Kovarovic (1), Lavrangas (1), Macfarren (1), Marliani (1), Massé (1), Meyerbeer (6), Moniusko (1), Montfort (2), Offenbach (2), Reber (1), Rossi (1), Rossini (2 incl. *Le Comte Ory*), Setaccioli (1), Södermann (1), Suppé (1), Verdi (2, *Les Vêpres siciliennes*, *Un ballo in maschera*), Zandonai (1), and Zimmermann (1) (120 libretti alone or in collaboration).

Émile Deschamps (Deschamps de Saint-Armand) (b. Bourges, 20 February 1791; d. Versailles, 22 April 1871), a minor poet of the Romantic Movement. His brother Antony (1800-1869) was also a minor poet, a translator of Dante (1829), but he was of a more feverishly romantic disposition, and his mental health failed in 1834. Émile was one of the founders of *La Muse française* (1823), a good friend to younger authors, notably Vigny and Hugo. His writings, mainly translations and imitations, stimulated interest in German, Spanish, and English literature, and included *Études françaises et étrangères* (1828), poems prefaced by an essay on Romantic doctrines, and also translations of plays like *Romeo and Juliet* (1839), *Macbeth* (1844), and libretti.

LES HUGUENOTS
OPÉRA EN CINQ ACTES

Paroles de
Eugène Scribe

Musique de
Giacomo Meyerbeer

THE HUGUENOTS
OPERA IN FIVE ACTS

Libretto by
Eugène Scribe

[with additions and alterations by Emile Deschamps,
after ideas by Giacomo Meyerbeer, Gaetano Rossi
and Adolphe Nourrit]

Music by
Giacomo Meyerbeer

Table des Personnages (Dramatis Personae):

- Marguerite de Valois, reine de Navarre (Marguerite de Valois, Queen of Navarre)
 Valentine, fille du comte de Saint-Bris (Valentine, daughter of Count de Saint-Bris)
 Urbain, page de la reine (Urbain, the Queen's page)
 Raoul de Nangis, gentilhomme protestant (Raoul de Nangis, a Protestant gentleman)
 Marcel, soldat huguenot, serviteur de Raoul (Marcel, a Huguenot soldier, Raoul's servant)
 Le Comte de Nevers, gentilhomme catholique (Count de Nevers, a Catholic gentleman)
 Le Comte de Saint-Bris, gentilhomme catholique (Count de Saint-Bris, a Catholic gentleman)
 Bois-Rosé, soldat huguenot (Bois-Rosé, a Huguenot soldier)
 Maurevert, gentilhomme catholique (Maurevert, a Catholic gentleman)
 Tavannes, gentilhomme catholique (Tavannes, a Catholic gentleman)
 Cossé, gentilhomme catholique (Cossé, a Catholic gentleman)
 Thoré, gentilhomme catholique (Thoré, a Catholic gentleman)
 De Retz, gentilhomme catholique (De Retz, a Catholic gentleman)
 Méru, gentilhomme catholique (Méru, a Catholic gentleman)
 Deux Dames d'Honneur (Two Maids-of-Honor)

L'action se passe au mois d'août 1572. Les deux premiers actes en Touraine; les trois derniers actes à Paris.

The action takes place in August 1572. The first two acts in Touraine; the last three acts in Paris.

WORLD PREMIÈRE

29 February 1836

Paris, Académie Royale de Musique [L'Opéra]

Marguerite de Valois Julie Dorus-Gras
 Valentine Cornélie Falcon
 Urbain Louise Marie Flécheux

Raoul de Nangis Adolphe Nourrit
 Marcel Nicolas-Prosper Levasseur
 Le Comte de Saint-Bris Jacques-Émile Serda
 Le Comte de Nevers Prosper Dérivis
 Bois-Rosé Pierre-François Wartel

SOURCES CONSULTED FOR TRANSLATION

Les Huguenots; opéra en cinq actes. Eugène Scribe et Emile Deschamps (paroles), Giacomo Meyerbeer (musique). Paris: Maurice Schlesinger, 1836.

[First edition of the published score. The composer’s manuscript score is held by the Biblioteka Jagiellonska in Cracow.]

Les Huguenots; opéra en cinq actes. Eugène Scribe et Emile Deschamps (paroles), Giacomo Meyerbeer (musique). Paris: Brandus & Cie, 1851.

Les Huguenots; opéra en cinq actes. Eugène Scribe et Emile Deschamps (paroles), Giacomo Meyerbeer (musique). Paris: Deiss, 1883.

[Two later editions of the opera, both claiming to be “definitive and complete” and “corresponding to the full orchestral score used by the Paris Opéra.” Both editions of the score contain all of the “standard” music of the opera, plus, in appendices, the second act “Rondeau of the Page,” Valentine’s fourth act romance “Parmi les pleurs,” and the second verse of Raoul’s fifth act aria “À la lueur de leurs torches funèbres,” which are missing from many other editions of the opera.]

Les Huguenots; opéra en cinq actes. Eugène Scribe et Emile Deschamps (paroles), Giacomo Meyerbeer (musique). Paris: Maurice Schlesinger, 1836.

[First edition of the published libretto.]

TABLE OF MUSICAL NUMBERS**ACTE I**

1. Ouverture et Introduction
- 1a. Ouverture
- 1b. Choeur Des beaux jours de la jeunesse
- 1c. Morceau d'Ensemble De ces lieux enchanteurs châtelain respectable
- 1d. Entrée de Raoul Sous ce beau ciel de la Touraine
- 1e. L'Orgie Bonheur de la table
- 2a. Scène Versez de nouveaux vins, versez avec largesse!
- 2b. Romance Plus blanche que la blanche hermine
- 3a. Récitatif Quelle étrange figure ici vois-je apparaître?
- 3b. Choral Seigneur rempart et seul soutien
- 4a. Scène Eh! mais, plus je le vois, et plus il me rappelle
- 4b. Chanson Huguenote Piff, paff, piff, paff
- Récitatif Au maître de ces lieux, au Comte de Nevers
5. Morceau d'Ensemble L'aventure est singulière
- Récitatif Il faut rompre l'hymen qui pour moi
6. Final
- 6a. Choeur Honneur au conquérant
- 6b. Cavatine du Page Une dame, noble et sage
- 6c. Suite du Final Trop de mérite aussi quelquefois importune
- 6d. Ensemble Vous savez si je suis un ami
- 6e. Stretta Les plaisirs, les honneurs, la puissance

ACTE II

- 7a. Entr'acte
- 7b. Air Ô beau pays de la Touraine
- 7c. Cabaletta À ce mot seul s'anime et renaît la nature
- Récitatif Que notre reine est belle

8. Choeur de Baigneuses (*dansé*) Jeunes beautés, sous ce feuillage
 Récitatif Encore! et quelle audace, Urbain!
9. Rondeau du Page Non, non, non, vous n'avez jamais, je gage
10. Scène du Bandeau Le voici, du silence
 Récitatif Pareille loyauté vaut son prix, chevalier
- 11a. Duo, 1re partie Beauté divine, enchanteresse
- 11b. Duo, 2me partie Ah! si j'étais coquette
12. Récitatif et Entrée de la Cour Madame! – Allons, toujours le page!
 Récitatif Mon frère, Charles Neuf, qui connaît votre zèle
13. Final
- 13a. Le Serment Par l'honneur, par le nom que portaient
- 13b. Scène Et maintenant je dois offrir à votre vue
- 13c. Stretta Ô transport! ô demence!

ACTE III

14. Entr'acte et Choeur C'est le jour de dimanche
- 15a. Couplets Militaires (*des soldats Huguenots*) Prenant son sabre
 de bataille
- 15b. Litanies Vierge Marie, soyez bénie!
- 15c. Morceau d'Ensemble Le seigneur de Saint-Bris?
16. Ronde Bohémienne Venez!... – Vous qui voulez savoir d'avance
17. Danse Bohémienne
 Récitatif Pour remplir un voeu solennel
18. Le Couvre Feu Rentrez, habitants de Paris
- 19a. Scène Ô terreur! Je tressaille au seul bruit
- 19b. Duo, 1e partie Dans la nuit où seul je veille
- 19c. Duo, 2me partie Ah! l'ingrat d'une offense mortelle
- 19d. Scène Tu m'as comprise... adieu!
- 19e. Duo, 3me partie Ah! Tu ne peux éprouver ni comprendre
 Récitatif Un danger le menace, et j'ignore lequel...
20. Septuor du Duel En mon bon droit j'ai confiance

- Scène Arrêtez! Entendez-vous ces pas?
 21. Choeur de la Dispute Nous voilà!... Félons, arrière!
 Scène Arrêtez! Respectez la reine de Navarre!
 22. Final
 22a. Scène Ma fille! – Ah! grand Dieu! – Quelle audace!
 22b. Arioso de Nevers Noble dame, venez près d'un époux
 22c. Choeur de la Noce Au banquet où le ciel leur apprête
 22d. Choeur des Combattants Non, plus de paix ni trêve

ACTEIV

- 23a. Entr'acte
 23b. Récitatif Je suis seule chez moi
 23c. Air Parmi les pleurs mon rêve se ranime
 23d. Scène Juste ciel! est-ce lui dont l'aspect terrible
 24a. Conjuración, 1re partie Des troubles renaissants... Pour
 cette cause sainte
 24b. Conjuración, 2me partie Et vous qui répondez au Dieu
 qui nous appelle
 24c. Bénédiction des Poignards, 1re partie Gloire, gloire au
 grand Dieu vengeur!
 24d. Bénédiction des Poignards, 2me partie Dieu le veut!
 Dieu l'ordonne!
 25a. Duo, 1re partie Ô ciel! où courez-vous?
 25b. Duo, 2e partie Le danger presse et le temps vole
 25c. Duo, 3me partie Tu l'as dit: oui, tu m'aimes!
 25d. Duo, 4me partie Plus d'amour! plus d'ivresse!

ACTEV

26. Entr'acte et Ballet
 27. Air À la lueur de leurs torches funèbres

- 28a. Scène C'est toi, mon vieux Marcel
28b. Interrogatoire Savez-vous qu'en joignant vos mains
28c. Choeur des Meurtriers Abjurez, huguenots, le ciel l'ordonne!
28d. Le Vision Ah! voyez! Le ciel s'ouvre et rayonne!
29. Scène Finale (*Choeur des Meurtriers*) Par le fer et par l'incendie

OUVERTURE**ACTE PREMIER**

Le théâtre représente une salle du château du comte de Nevers. Au fond, de grandes croisées ouvertes laissent voir des jardins et une pelouse, sur laquelle plusieurs seigneurs jouent au ballon; à droite, une porte qui donne dans les appartements intérieurs; à gauche, une croisée fermée par un rideau et qui est censée donner sur un oratoire; sur le devant du théâtre, d'autres seigneurs jouent aux dés, au bilboquet, etc. Nevers, Tavannes, Cossé, de Retz, Thoré, Méru et d'autres seigneurs catholiques les regardent et parlent entre eux.

NEVERS

Des beaux jours de la jeunesse,
 Dans la plus riante ivresse,
 Hâtons-nous, le temps nous presse,
 Hâtons-nous, hâtons-nous de jouir,
 Oui, hâtons-nous, hâtons-nous de jouir!

LES SEIGNEURS

Hâtons-nous, hâtons-nous de jouir!

NEVERS, SEIGNEURS, CHOEUR

Des beaux jours de la jeunesse, etc.

LES SEIGNEURS

Aux jeux, à la folie
 Consacrons notre vie,
 Et qu'ici tout s'oublie
 Excepté le plaisir!

CHOEUR et SEIGNEURS

Aux jeux, à la folie
 Consacrons notre vie,
 Et qu'ici tout s'oublie...
 Tout, oublions tout...