

Richard Wagner  
*Der fliegende Holländer*

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CAMBRIDGE  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

PUBLISHED BY THE PRESS SYNDICATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE  
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge, United Kingdom

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK [www.cup.cam.ac.uk](http://www.cup.cam.ac.uk)  
40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA [www.cup.org](http://www.cup.org)  
10 Stamford Road, Oakleigh, Melbourne 3166, Australia  
Ruiz de Alarcón 13, 28014 Madrid, Spain

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First published 2000

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

*Typeface* Times NR (MT) 10 on 12.25pt *System* QuarkXPress™ [SE]

*A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library*

*Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data*

Richard Wagner, *Der fliegende Holländer* / edited by Thomas Grey.  
p. cm. – (Cambridge opera handbooks)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0 521 58285 7 (hardback). – ISBN 0 521 58763 8 (paperback)

I. Wagner, Richard, 1813–1883. *Der Fliegende Holländer*. I. Title: *Der Fliegende Holländer*.

II. Grey, Thomas S. III. Series.

ML410.W132.R48 2000

782.1 – dc21 99-059951 CIP

ISBN 0 521 58285 7 (hardback)

ISBN 0 521 58763 8 (paperback)

## Contents

<i>List of illustrations</i>	page vi
<i>General preface</i>	ix
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	x
1 The return of the prodigal son: Wagner and <i>Der fliegende Holländer</i> THOMAS GREY	1
2 The sources and genesis of the text BARRY MILLINGTON	25
3 Text, action, and music THOMAS GREY	36
4 Romantic opera as “dramatic ballad”: <i>Der fliegende Holländer</i> and its generic contexts THOMAS GREY	65
5 Landfall on the stage: a brief production history PATRICK CARNEGIE	92
6 <i>Der fliegende Holländer</i> in performance DAVID BRECKBILL	129
7 Canonizing the Dutchman: Bayreuth, Wagnerism, and <i>Der fliegende Holländer</i> STEPHEN MC CLATCHIE	151
<i>Appendices</i>	
A Source texts (libretto)	166
B Autobiographical texts and correspondence	178
C Interpretation	190
<i>Notes</i>	201
<i>Select bibliography</i>	222
<i>Index</i>	226

## *Illustrations*

- 5.1 Playbill for the first performance Hoftheater, Dresden, 2 January 1843 (reproduced by permission of the Bildarchiv, Bayreuther Festspiele) page 94
- 5.2 Costumes of the Dutchman, Erik and Senta in the first performance, as depicted in the *Illustrierte Zeitung*, Leipzig, 7 October 1843 (reproduced by permission of the Bildarchiv, Bayreuther Festspiele) 96
- 5.3 Model made in 1865 of Heinrich Döll's setting for Act I (steiles Felsenufer) in King Ludwig II's royal command production, Munich, 1864 (reproduced by permission of the Bayerische Verwaltung der staatlichen Schlösser, Gärten und Seen, Schloss Nymphenburg; photo: G. Schmidt) 100
- 5.4 Anton van Rooy as the Dutchman and Emmy Destinn as Senta, Bayreuth, 1901–2. A posed studio image, characteristic of the period, signed by van Rooy (reproduced by permission of the Bildarchiv, Bayreuther Festspiele) 103
- 5.5 Act III at Bayreuth, 1914. Only two performances were given before the curtailment of the Festival by the outbreak of the First World War. The settings were developed by Siegfried Wagner, using a large cyclorama, from those made by Max Brückner for Bayreuth's first production of the opera, 1901 (reproduced by permission of the Bildarchiv, Bayreuther Festspiele) 104
- 5.6 The Dutchman's ship in Act III of Otto Klemperer's 1929 production at the Berlin Krolloper with designs of Bauhaus severity by Ewald Dülberg (photo: Stuttgart: Peter Dülberg) 105
- 5.7 The "Südwind" chorus at the end of Act I in Wieland

	Wagner's Bayreuth production, first seen in 1959 but pictured here in 1961 (reproduced by permission of the Bildarchiv, Bayreuther Festspiele; photo: Rudolf Betz)	110
5.8	Anja Silja as Senta in Act II of Wieland Wagner's production, Bayreuth, 1960 (reproduced by permission of the Bildarchiv, Bayreuther Festspiele; photo: Rudolf Betz)	112
5.9	Anna Prucnal as Senta (sung by Gerda Hannemann) and Fred Düren as the Dutchman (sung by Rainer Lüdeke) exploring the coastline during the Act II duet in Joachim Herz's 1964 film version of the opera (photo: DEFA-Wenzel)	115
5.10	The Dutchman's Act I monologue treated as a Black Mass in Ulrich Melchinger's Kassel production, 1976, with designs by Thomas Richter-Forgách (photo: Sepp Bähr)	119
5.11	The opera staged by Harry Kupfer as the dream of a psychotic Senta, Bayreuth, 1978, with designs by Peter Sykora (reproduced by permission of the Bildarchiv, Bayreuther Festspiele; photo: Siegfried Lauterwasser)	121
5.12	Franz Ferdinand Nentwig as the Dutchman in Act I of Herbert Wernicke's 1981 production at the Bayerische Staatsoper, Munich (photo: Anne Kirchbach)	123
5.13	Satanic mills for <i>Der fliegende Holländer</i> on the floating stage at Bregenz on Lake Constance, 1989. Designs by Stefanos Lazaridis, production by David Pountney (photo: Reinfried Böcher)	125

1 *The return of the prodigal son:  
Wagner and Der fliegende  
Holländer*

THOMAS GREY

*Lebensstürme (life's storms)*

The figure of the “Flying Dutchman” is a mythical creation [*Gedicht*] of the people: it gives emotionally compelling expression to a timeless feature of human nature. This feature, in its most general sense, is the longing for peace from the storms of life.

Wagner, *A Communication to my Friends* (GSD, vol. 4, 265)

The storm scene that opens Act I of *Der fliegende Holländer* rings with echoes of Wagner’s own life-experiences: his “famous sea-voyage” (as he had already styled it in a letter to Ferdinand Heine in 1843) from the Baltic coast of East Prussia through the North Sea, down to the English Channel, and finally up the Thames to London.<sup>1</sup> By the summer of 1839 rising debts and the termination of his post as Kapellmeister in Riga had made it expedient for Wagner to put into action his characteristically over-ambitious project to conquer Paris – and from there, the rest of Europe – with the five-act grand opera he had recently begun, *Rienzi*. (Both the opera and the career move he hoped to found on it were modeled after the spectacular success of Giacomo Meyerbeer during the past decade.) After escaping by the skin of their teeth from the Russian-controlled Baltic provinces and across the Prussian frontier, without passport, Wagner and his wife Minna – along with their mammoth Newfoundland dog, Robber – boarded a trading vessel “of the smallest sort” called the *Thetis*, bound for London.<sup>2</sup> A series of violent storms more than doubled the expected length of the voyage, in addition to occasioning a good deal of physical and mental distress; but these storms also afforded Wagner a variety of experiences that would ultimately contribute to the novel and authentic coloring of *Der fliegende Holländer*.

At the center of this nexus of real-life impressions resonating through the opening scene of *Der fliegende Holländer* (and the overture, by extension) is, in fact, a literal echo effect. In the one passage

from his autobiography, *Mein Leben (My Life)*, in which Wagner specifically connects the impressions of his sea-voyage with the eventual composition of the opera, he describes how a short rhythmic cry emitted by the crew of the *Thetis*, preparing to moor the ship, echoed across the fjord along the southern coast of Norway where they had been driven for shelter during the last days of July 1839:

A feeling of indescribable well-being came over me as the granite walls of the cliff echoed the chantings of the crew as they cast anchor and furled the sails. The sharp rhythm [*kurze Rhythmus*] of their call stuck with me as an omen of good fortune and soon resolved itself into the theme of the Sailors' Chorus in my *Fliegende Holländer*, the idea for which I had already carried within me at the time and which now, under the impressions I had just gained, took on its characteristic musical-poetic coloring.<sup>3</sup>

The three-note descending idea Wagner alludes to here as the motivic basis of the Sailors' Chorus in Act III, "Steuermann! Laß die Wacht!" also figures in the re-creation of the very scene described in *My Life* at the opening of Act I: as they secure their boat in the shelter of a Norwegian fjord, in an attempt to escape the tumult of the storm raging about them, the crew of Daland's ship cries "Hallojo!" to a more emphatic, "sharper" version of that same rhythm, which is echoed in the orchestra alternately by valved horns, *fortissimo*, and natural horns, *forte* (see Chapter 3, Ex. 4a).<sup>4</sup>

In the scenario Wagner originally drafted, as well as in the original libretto, the setting of the action had been some unidentified point on the coast of Scotland, evidently following the example of several recent treatments of the Flying Dutchman legend, such as Heinrich Heine's (see Chapter 2). Prior to the eventual première of the opera in the first days of January 1843, however, Wagner transposed the action to the Norwegian coast, altering the names of the principal characters accordingly. It has been suggested that Wagner decided to distance his dramatization of the story from Heine's and from *Le Vaisseau fantôme* of Pierre-Louis Dietsch, recently mounted by the Paris Opéra and nominally based on Wagner's own scenario. Whatever the other reasons behind this last-minute transposition of setting, though, there can be little doubt that the change confirmed the close association between the composer's own experiences and his conception of the opera. Thus when the Norwegian captain Daland identifies the neighborhood of his ship's haven as "Sandwike," the name of the fishing-village where the *Thetis* had sought respite from the North Sea storms during Wagner's summer voyage of 1839, it is a

kind of personal signature inscribed by the composer into the text of his work. The change of fictional setting was not so much an afterthought, then, as a decision to authenticate an aspect of the work that was truly Wagner's own intellectual (or imaginative) property (however widely familiar the underlying elements of the story may have been): the maritime local color that he had absorbed first hand in the course of his tempestuous North Sea crossing with its Norwegian coastal interlude.

Wagner would always be fond of identifying himself with the characters and situations of his dramas. In one way or another he could always fancy himself as the heroes of his works. In a few other cases, too, biographical anecdotes served as the foundation for particular scenes or episodes, such as the midnight brawl in Act II of *Die Meistersinger*, whose prototype Wagner claims to have participated in during a visit with his sister Klara and her husband in Nuremberg in 1835 (*ML*, 105–07). But, apart perhaps from the notorious case of *Tristan und Isolde* and the Mathilde Wesendonck affair, the strongest parallel between Wagner's life and his art is to be found in *Der fliegende Holländer*. And while the echoes of his own seafaring experiences are especially vivid and precise, an even more extensive parallel exists between the mythic-dramatic figure of the Dutchman and Wagner's inner, "artistic" biography, as he himself construed it in later life.

No one has ever questioned Wagner's assessment of *Der fliegende Holländer* as a crucial turning point in his career as composer and dramatist. "I am unable to cite in the life of any other artist," Wagner wrote in the introduction to the first volume of his collected writings, "such a striking transformation accomplished in so short a time" as occurred with him between the composition of *Rienzi* and *Holländer*, "the first of which was scarcely finished when the second one, too, was nearly complete" (*GSD*, vol. 1, 3). Despite the numerous traditional or even regressive details one could cite, Wagner's overall achievement in *Holländer* represents the first of two distinct quantum leaps in his artistic development, the second constituted by the much more protracted upheaval between the composition of *Lohengrin* and *Das Rheingold*, between 1848 and 1853. (The compact and revolutionary character of *Rheingold* makes it a counterpart of sorts to *Holländer* within Wagner's career.) Both of these phases of intellectual and psychological upheaval coincided with periods of exile. After his participation in the socialist uprisings in Dresden in May 1849



Wagner became an actual political exile from Germany, and the factors of political agitation and geographical exile were certainly catalysts to the inner, creative “revolution” that gave birth to the *Ring* project. The period spent in Paris between 1839 and 1842 was, on the other hand, a self-imposed exile. Yet its effect on Wagner’s psyche was equally drastic.

Living the life of a struggling artist in 1840s Paris – that of Henri Murger’s original Bohemians – may have had its colorful aspects, in retrospect; but it was scarcely the *vie de Bohème* that drew Wagner to the French capital. His failure to become a second Meyerbeer, indeed, his near-failure to make any kind of living at all during these years, is surely the root of many salient traits of his future character: his demonization of Meyerbeer himself, along with all Jews (and Frenchmen); his deep-seated sense of social and artistic persecution; his peculiarly egocentric brand of aesthetic nationalism; and his genuine socialistic convictions, even if colored (like his nationalism) by a self-centered aesthetic utopianism. Against all odds Wagner had staked everything on a brilliant popular success in Paris, and by 1841 it was becoming evident that he had lost this wager. By then it was clear that his grand-historical Meyerbeerian blockbuster, *Rienzi*, would not so much as receive an audition by the personnel of the Académie royale de musique, the official operatic institution of Paris (commonly known as the Opéra). His hopes of having a translation of his previous operatic effort, *Das Liebesverbot*, produced by the Théâtre de la Renaissance foundered with the bankruptcy of that institution. (This was the first of several pieces of bad luck which Wagner’s suspicious imagination transmuted into evidence of Meyerbeer’s insidious double-dealing with him; but even if plans for the production had moved ahead, it is more than likely that the French would have dismissed this overwrought *opéra comique* as an impossible freak.) Finally, Wagner’s hopes of receiving a commission for a short opera in one or three acts on the subject of the Flying Dutchman and his “phantom ship” – perhaps with a notion of capitalizing on the successful Parisian revival of Weber’s *Freischütz* in 1840 and recent French interest in spectral themes of the Gothic and “fantastic” – dissolved early in his negotiations with the new opera director, Léon Pillet (see Chapter 2). By the time *Rienzi* was accepted for production back home, in Dresden, and Wagner had managed to sell off the French rights to his “Dutchman” scenario (as *Le Vaisseau fantôme*) to the direction of the Paris Opéra, he was ready to turn his

back on Paris entirely. Now he would direct all his energies toward re-establishing a career in Germany, on a more secure and respectable footing than when he had left in 1839. It was in this frame of mind that he set about the composition of the “Dutchman” material (as *Der fliegende Holländer*) in the early summer of 1841, about nine months before he and Minna finally returned to Germany.

### **There’s no place like home**

It was thus in the course of his two-and-half-year Parisian “exile” that Wagner first consciously began to construct his identity as a German artist. A variety of factors were involved in this process, which was more than mere *ressentiment* occasioned by his failure to attain a brilliant Parisian success. The performances of Beethoven’s symphonies by the “Société des Concerts” of the Paris Conservatoire under François Habeneck, which had achieved a kind of cult status among the musical cognoscenti by the time of Wagner’s visit, reawakened his appreciation of Beethoven and the Viennese Classical tradition. In particular, Habeneck’s rendition of the Ninth Symphony galvanized his musical imagination: “the scales fell from my eyes,” Wagner recalled many years later in his essay “On Conducting.”<sup>5</sup> Beethoven’s still-enigmatic masterpiece had fascinated him as a youth (he had made his own piano arrangement of the symphony around 1830), but he had never as yet encountered a performance that made sense of it. Performances of Berlioz’s *Roméo et Juliette*, *Symphonie fantastique*, *Harold en Italie*, and *Symphonie funèbre et triomphale* during his first year in Paris also made a deep, if partly disturbing effect on Wagner. This remarkable body of new music aroused the ambitious young composer to look beyond the horizons of *Rienzi* and grand opera. The initial result of this inspiration was the decidedly Romantic project of a *Faust* symphony, which, however, soon took the more pragmatic form of a concert overture (*Eine Faust-Ouverture*, WWV 59).

Thus as time wore on, an ever-increasing disaffection with the world of commercial music-making in the French metropolis set in, along with a bitter resentment over his own inability to make headway as a musician beyond the hack-work of piano arrangements of music by Donizetti, Halévy, and Auber, as well as assorted potpourris for strings, flute quartet, and the latest rage, the *cornet à pistons*. (The fact that this “degrading” work was carried out for Maurice Schlesinger,

son of a German-Jewish publisher in Berlin, was probably another contributing factor in the early development of Wagner's anti-Semitic psychology.) In the essays and reviews Wagner provided for the younger Schlesinger's *Revue et gazette musicale*, and in the notices on Parisian musical life he provided to the Dresden *Abend-Zeitung*, Schumann's *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, and several other German papers, Wagner gave vent to a splenetic view of musical circumstances in the French capital and, by contrast, an idealized view of German music and its institutions. This new strain of musical patriotism was less an expression of nostalgia for what he had left behind than of the utopian desires that he would continue to cultivate throughout his career. In the 1840 essay "On German Music" (originally published as "De la musique Allemande"), Wagner "could not help, at that [particular] time, holding forth with enthusiastic exaggeration on the intimate and deep nature" of German musical culture, as he remarks in *My Life* (*ML*, 186). The short story, "An End in Paris" (originally "Un musicien étranger à Paris," 1841), transmutes the composer's own tribulations into a still more tragic tale of young idealism and genius victimized, brutalized, and ultimately extinguished by modern urban capitalism and the emergent "culture industry." This bit of thinly disguised social criticism followed the story "A Pilgrimage to Beethoven" (originally less reverentially titled "Une visite à Beethoven"), which fantasizes a sympathetic encounter between a similar idealistic young musical protagonist and the aging Beethoven. Where the Beethoven-fantasy had been well received, Maurice Schlesinger was rather taken aback by the gloomy and acerbic tone of the second novella (although it elicited sympathetic remarks from Heine, Berlioz, and a "poor clerk" in Schlesinger's office, according to Wagner). With this piece, as he later observed, he exacted vengeance for all the shame he had endured.<sup>6</sup>

These details of biographical and psychological context explain, to some extent, what might have seemed at the time to be an odd miscalculation on Wagner's part in deciding to compose *Der fliegende Holländer*, an apparent return to the outdated, provincial *Schauerromantik* of the Weber-Marschner-Spohr variety at a time when new genres were ruling the European operatic stage: historical grand opera in Paris, Romantic-historical *melodramma* in Italy, and the lighter *Spieloper* with spoken dialogue in Germany (Lortzing, Flotow *et al.*). As Wagner actually composed it, of course, the *Holländer* was anything but a throwback. Even a number of early

critics (cf. Chapter 4) noted how the popular German “dark Romanticism” of an earlier generation had been infused with elements of grand-operatic orchestration (even traces of Berlioz), as well as Meyerbeer’s sense of stage spectacle. (The stage machinery and decorations of the Paris Opéra were another influential revelation for Wagner during this period.) And in retrospect, at least, one can already detect a distinctively Wagnerian leaning towards “psychological” drama and increased musical continuity. But if *Holländer* did benefit from the composer’s experiences in Paris – whether or not he cared to admit it – it remained above all a gesture of musical and cultural solidarity with the “homeland” toward which he was now turning his sights. Just as he had composed *Rienzi* with his eye fixed on the conquest of Paris, so the *Holländer* was composed as an offering of sorts by the prodigal son preparing to return home and recommence his operatic career on a newly reformed track. (We should not forget, of course, that it was really *Rienzi*, his bid for a brilliant, worldly success abroad, that paved his way back to Germany and to a respectable Kapellmeistership in Dresden.)

The autobiographical construction of *Der fliegende Holländer* as an embodiment of Wagner’s own yearning for the maternal bosom of “German music” and as the redemptive agent (in spirit, if not in fact) of his own artistic repatriation following the misadventures of his Parisian campaign was variously elaborated up to the early years at Tribschen, when the initial portions of *My Life* were dictated to Cosima. Wagner’s identification with the Dutchman as a symbol of the alienated, exiled artist seeking redemption from the consequences of an impetuous and foolhardy transgression (the Dutchman’s oath to round the Cape of Good Hope at all costs, Wagner’s ill-advised bid for a brilliant career à la Meyerbeer) was evidently as vital a motive in the composition of the opera as his experience of weathering the North Sea storms along the coast of Norway.<sup>7</sup>

During his last months in Paris and the first ones back in Germany (where Wagner returned in April 1842) he became increasingly contrite about his misguided attempts to establish himself in Paris, while expressing enthusiasm at the prospect of a new beginning back home. He had already given fictional expression to the dangers Paris posed for naive idealists like himself in the story “An End in Paris,” mentioned above. And he repeated the warning in several of the essay-reports he submitted to German publications, such as the one headed “Parisian Fatalities for Germans” printed in August Lewald’s cultural

review, *Europa* (1841).<sup>8</sup> An open letter to Robert Schumann from the early weeks of 1842 containing the first signs of Wagner's antipathy toward Meyerbeer (slightly toned down in the text printed in the 22 February issue of the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*) offers Wagner's experiences as an object-lesson for his countrymen: "How happy we should be if we could break *completely* free from Paris! It has had its Grande Epoque, which, admittedly, had a good and salutary effect upon us. But that is now a thing of the past, and we must renounce our faith in Paris!"<sup>9</sup> (The letter ends with an apology for having gotten rather carried away.) Writing about a month after his return to Germany to Ernst Benedikt Kietz, a young art student and former companion of his Parisian *misère*, Wagner reflects on his mixed feelings about having abandoned the French metropolis and makes a pointed attempt to convince himself – as well as Kietz – that he has taken the proper course:

Paris for people like *us* is no more than a resplendent grave in which all our youthful energies ebb away, untapped. The devil take it! – This is something I would scarcely have admitted a week ago: the first impression you feel on returning from Paris to any of our larger cities is dreadful; it is almost impossible to say why this should be so . . . – Here – I feel – is my *homeland*, this is where I belong, & my only desire is to have my friends here with me, since all that has made them dear to me is similarly a part of this homeland. What do you have there? Hunger & – inducements, yes, but let it be in Germany that you accomplish all that you feel induced to do. Whenever I find myself growing too much enamored of Paris, all I need do is pick up the latest issue of the *Gazette musicale*: my love for the place vanishes in an instant – the devil take it!  
(letter of 12 May 1842, *SL*, 92).

The brilliant success of *Rienzi* in Dresden later the next year heartened Wagner in his resolve to rebuild his career at home. Subsequently, he tried his best to read encouraging signs into the fitful progress of *Der fliegende Holländer* following its Dresden première in January 1843. But after only a handful of performances in Dresden, Berlin, Kassel, and Riga by the end of 1844 the opera sank all too quickly into the very oblivion its protagonist so fervently invokes. And in fact, *Holländer* never did achieve more than a marginal existence in the repertoire, at home or abroad, during the composer's lifetime. Within a few years Wagner himself lost interest in the opera, though he did revive it for a few performances in Zurich in 1852 (as the most practical of his mature works up to that time) and advised on the "model" production mounted under King Ludwig's patronage in Munich in 1864 (cf. Chapter 5, pp. 99–101).<sup>10</sup>

This increasing distance from the opera is not surprising, considering the nature of Wagner's development as a composer over the next two decades. But just as understandably, he continued to regard *Holländer* as the crucial step in his path toward genuine "musical drama" and continued to elaborate, from time to time, the parallel between his own situation in the years around 1840 and the mythic import of the Dutchman figure. Already the brief account of the opera's genesis that concludes the "Autobiographical Sketch" of 1843 juxtaposes that with the sentimental scene of Wagner's return to Germany, the implicit setting for the next, more glorious chapter in this life-in-progress: "For the first time I saw the Rhine – with hot tears in my eyes, I, poor artist, swore eternal fidelity to my German fatherland."<sup>11</sup> ("Eternal fidelity," *ewige Treue*: written around the time of the *Holländer* première in Dresden, these closing words of the "Autobiographical Sketch" must have contained for Wagner some echo of Senta's redemptive oath.)

The most extensive ruminations on the significance of the Dutchman figure and his legend occur in another autobiographical context, *Eine Mitteilung an meine Freunde* (*A Communication to my Friends*). This reflexive analysis of his artistic career up to 1851 and the first phase of the *Ring* project was written as a preface to the publication of the librettos of *Der fliegende Holländer*, *Tannhäuser*, and *Lohengrin*. An implicit premise of the undertaking is the status of these three operas, beginning with *Holländer*, as the foundation of Wagner's career as an original and distinctively German artist. Wagner's account of *Holländer* here has often been taken to task in recent times for its fairly transparent attempt to interpret the opera as an incipient "music drama," in terms of the later theories of *Opera and Drama* (in particular, to represent the score as organically unified by a network of motives in the manner of the *Ring* or other later music dramas). Equally tendentious is the construction of the drama, and even the music, as symbolic representations of the composer's own spiritual homesickness for "true German art" following an extended period of artistic waywardness coupled with empirical, geographical wandering and "exile." Whatever one makes of the retrospective reading of the opera as "music drama" (on this, see also Chapters 4 and 7), the parallels to Wagner's own life and career are less easy to refute. Allowing for an inevitable element of idealization and hyperbole, we probably must accept them, along with most aspects of his aesthetic self-analysis, as fundamentally valid.

The *Communication* is concerned primarily with “inner,” artistic biography rather than external facts, dates, and events. Wagner’s self-identification with the Dutchman there focuses on the theme of spiritual, psychological alienation as the lot of the Romantic artist, which condition becomes more poignant still for the artist who – like Wagner – has sacrificed his deeper artistic convictions along with his native roots in the vain pursuit of fame and fortune. In true Romantic fashion, Wagner yearns for a homeland he has never actually known, a utopian artistic “space” that is more a state of mind than any real place. (Of course, Wagner was writing here from the perspective of his second exile, following on his participation in the insurrection of 1849, and his faith in both the political and artistic conditions in Germany was at a low point.) He cites the “ardent, yearning patriotism” newly awoken in him at the time he composed *Holländer*, after receiving word that *Rienzi* would be produced in Dresden, news that strengthened his resolve to return to Germany. But he immediately qualifies this as a cultural, distinctly non-political patriotism – a rekindled faith in the potential of “German art” and, implicitly, in his own destined role within it:

It was the feeling of utter homelessness in Paris that awoke in me a longing for my German homeland. Yet this longing was not directed toward some old familiar thing that was to be regained; rather, its object was something new, as yet unknown, which I intuitively desired, but of which I only knew one thing for sure: that I would certainly never find it here in Paris. It was the longing of my Flying Dutchman for a woman . . . the redeeming woman whose features I beheld as yet only indistinctly, but which hovered before me only as the feminine element in general. And now this element expressed itself to me in terms of the *homeland* [*Heimat*], that is to say, the sensation of being embraced by some intimately familiar community [*Allgemeinen*], although a community I did not truly know, but only longed for, as the realization of the idea of a “homeland.” Previously it had been the notion of something thoroughly foreign that, in the confining circumstances of my earlier existence [i.e., in Magdeburg and Riga] had beckoned to me with the promise of salvation, and which had driven me towards Paris in order to find it. (GSD, vol. 4, 268)

For Wagner, writing ten years after the *Holländer*, this dreamt-of “homeland” was not the Germany of the 1830s or 1840s, but an undiscovered country: the Germany (or Europe) of the “future” as this had been imagined and theorized in the post-revolutionary writings he had recently completed.

The nexus of parallels between *Heimat*, woman, and an ideal artistic community maps onto the roles of Senta and the Dutchman

within the *Holländer* interpreted as a *Künstlerdrama*, a dramatic representation of the artist's condition in symbolic terms.<sup>12</sup> This interpretation naturally reflects Wagner's conception of himself with respect to society at large, but also patterns in his personal life. As an individual, he was – from this time onward – forever in search of a woman who would demonstrate absolute, unconditional faith in him, ready to sacrifice everything for the sake of his mission and his person (Jessie Laussot, Mathilde Wesendonck, Cosima von Bülow). His ideal of the public audience for his work mirrored this personal dynamic: the public had only to surrender itself wholly and unconditionally to his vision and his works, and all would be mutually “redeemed” (the public spiritually and socially, and he, not least of all, fiscally). The selfless, self-sacrificing, unconditionally yielding woman was thus also a figure for the ideal audience, the public “of the future.” Wagner's own “male” persona adopts a role partly conjugal and partly paternal with respect to this (implicitly) female construction of the public. Such a gendered allegorical embodiment of the relation between artist and public also helps to make some sense of Wagner's otherwise rather inscrutable identification, in this same context, of the object of Dutchman's desire as “the woman of the future” (*GSD*, vol. 4, 266).

### Angels to the rescue

Reading backwards in the *Communication*, however, a more concrete application of the redemptive female to the circumstances of Wagner's own “inner” biography materializes – one that draws on the metaphorical constructions of music as “woman” in *Opera and Drama* and music's role as the redemptive (metaphorically female) agent within the aesthetic union of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*.<sup>13</sup> It is music, Wagner says a few pages earlier, that came to his spiritual rescue in the dark days of penury and degradation in Paris – specifically music in its “pure” and “German” guise (instrumental music, Beethoven), as might be aptly embodied in the pure and Nordic person of Senta. The frustrating and depressing circumstances of his life in Paris and his disaffection with the modern culture industry, he reflects, might easily have led to the continued dissipation of his creative energies in ineffectual gestures of literary and critical protest. But having discharged his accumulated ironic, bitter, and sardonic impulses in the assorted journalistic efforts of this period,



Wagner asserts, he was rescued from the career of a mere hack critic and arranger by the revitalization of his authentic creative impulses, and specifically, the impulse to composition.<sup>14</sup>

“I have more recently expressed myself at sufficient length on the nature of music,” Wagner writes, alluding to the major series of “reform” treatises written immediately prior to the *Communication*. “Here I only want to call to mind how it [music] acted as my good angel, who preserved me as an artist, or indeed, only truly rendered me an artist in the first place now, at a time when my feelings were roused to an increasingly strong sense of indignation toward our entire artistic conditions” (*GSD*, vol. 4, 263). The widespread revolutionary sentiments of the age, he maintains (already with a eye toward his own post-revolutionary political rehabilitation), were in him transmuted into revolutionary *artistic* impulses, nurtured by a new musical consciousness and – to infer from the broader context – by the maternal bosom of the German art (music) he now consciously re-embraced:

Just now I identified [music] as my good angel. This angel was not sent down to me from heaven, though; rather, it came to me through the toil of human genius over the centuries. It did not simply touch my brow with an imperceptible, shining hand; rather it nourished itself in the dark, warm-blooded interior of my vehemently longing heart, strengthening a generative power [*gebärende Kraft*] directed to the daylight world without.

(*GSD*, vol. 4, 264)

The gender identity of this musical angel of salvation becomes somewhat complicated. Following the norms of German grammar, Wagner speaks of this angel in the masculine (*der Engel*), and he is clearly being figured here as an emissary of the pantheon of (male) German composers of the modern era, from Bach and Handel through Gluck, Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven. But precisely at this point in the text Wagner takes a new metaphorical tack, identifying music with the abstract notion of “love” (*die Liebe*), figurally and grammatically feminine.<sup>15</sup> Where Wagner’s “capacity for love” (thus also, for music) had been injured and repulsed by the cold, soulless “formalism” he had encountered in Parisian culture, this same experience kindled his “need for love” (for music) all the more (*GS* vol. 4, 264). Wagner figures his relationship to music in terms of desire, psychological as well as sexual (echoing the explicitly sexual, biological metaphors of music and drama developed in *Opera and Drama*). But there is also an element of Romantic, even courtly chivalric love

in this figurative relationship. At the time of *Der fliegende Holländer* Wagner is suddenly activated by a desire to rescue the honor of true (German) music, threatened by the loveless forces of modern capitalism and urban culture, even while his own aesthetic salvation, in turn, is effected through the agency of the “good angel” of German Music.

All of this is finds a reflection in the role of Senta (that dreamy, ingenuous, yet fanatically resolute Nordic maiden) with respect to the Dutchman. He several times apostrophizes her as his “angel” – or potential angel – before addressing her directly as such. “Wird sie mein Engel sein?” (“Will she be my angel?”), he asks himself, aside, at the moment of closing his bargain with Daland toward the end of the first act. “Can I still indulge the wild hope,” he ponders in the last part of his duet with Daland, “that an angel will take pity on me?” (“Darf ich in jenem Wahn noch schmachten, daß sich ein Engel mir erweicht?”). In the duet with Senta in Act II he wonders, yet again (still to himself), “will [my salvation] come to me through an angel such as this?” (“würd’ es durch solchen Engel mir zutheil?”). Finally, as their duet nears its climax, he exclaims:

Du bist ein Engel, – eines Engels Liebe  
Verworfne selbst zu trösten weiß . . . !  
Ach, wenn Erlösung mir zu hoffen bliebe, –  
Allewiger, durch diese sei’s!

[You are an angel, – an angel’s love  
can console even a lost one [such as I] . . . !  
Ah, if salvation remains within my reach, –  
Almighty one, let it be through her!]

But there is, in fact, another angel inhabiting the text of *Der fliegende Holländer*, if not the visible stage drama. In Wagner’s version of the legend it was an “angel of God” who instructed the Dutchman as to the one possible means of salvation open to him, a woman who will plight him eternal troth and remain good to her word.<sup>16</sup> (In Heine, appropriately, it is the Devil who fixes these terms – “not believing in woman’s constancy, fool that he is.”) Hence the various references within the internal narratives of the drama (the Dutchman’s monologue, Senta’s Ballad) to *Gottes Engel* and the promise that this angel would someday point the Dutchman to the chosen woman who will be true to him. The gender of this particular “angel of God” remains indeterminate (though again, grammatically male). Yet, as the passages of text just cited suggest, and as the end of the opera confirms, Senta herself assumes the role of redeeming angel

over the course of the drama. In her final lines prior to her redemptive *salto mortale* into the sea, Senta proclaims that she now fulfills the angel's promise:

Preis deinen Engel und sein Gebot!  
Hier steh' ich – treu dir bis zum Tod!

[Praise your angel and his decree!  
Here I stand – true until the end!]

By fulfilling the terms of the angel's promise to the Dutchman, Senta herself is beatified. Wagner made the point in his stage directions: "Senta and the Dutchman rise from the sea in transfigured guise." This "phantasmagoria" of disembodied, sanctified forms floating heavenwards is scarcely something we expect to see realized in modern productions (though it forces certain questions that confront us throughout Wagner's oeuvre: what *are* we to make of all the talk about redemption, finally, and how *is* redemption to be staged?).

Senta's angelic transfiguration was evidently a serious point for the composer, at any rate, since it seems to have been the principal impulse behind his subsequent revisions to the ending (mainly those of 1860; see below and Chapter 3). The ten measures appended to the closing scene in 1860 – from the revised conclusion of the overture – sound the "redemption" theme from the refrain of Senta's Ballad in paired flutes and oboes to the celestial accompaniment of strumming harps, a sonic counterpart to the "brilliant gloriole" that is meant to surround the ascending images of Senta and the Dutchman at the final curtain. The "psalmodic" contour of  $\hat{1}-\hat{2}-\hat{4}-\hat{3}$  (familiar from the Finale to Mozart's "Jupiter" Symphony) is harmonized as a minor plagal cadence to terminate the angelic transformation of Senta's theme, while reinforcing the gesture of angelic beatification. At key moments in the original score, as well, the music indicates Senta's provisionally angelic status: the hushed, a cappella refrain the women's chorus supplies to the third strophe of her Ballad (while she is momentarily sunk in a visionary trance), and the pulsating high woodwind chords that illuminate the musical texture of the Senta-Dutchman duet with a new "celestial" radiance strongly contrasting with the preceding, storm-tossed developmental material (Senta: "Wohl kenn' ich Weibes heil'ge Pflichten"). Senta's words – "Well I know a woman's sacred duty" – allude to the "eternal fidelity" set as the condition of the Dutchman's salvation. But they also remind us of the extent to which Senta's character is conceived as an

apotheosis of the domestic “angel” of Biedermeier and Victorian social ideals, the virtuous helpmate whose entire being is dedicated to making the household a safe and tranquil haven for her husband when he returns home exhausted by “life’s storms.” (Wagner later construed his relation to Cosima in terms of the Dutchman and Senta: after singing the Act II Dutchman–Senta duet, apparently, with a certain Frau von Steinitz during a musical soirée at Tribtschen, he remarked to Cosima how affected he was “to be singing this particular scene, in which he sees our whole situation, in front of my father” – *CWD*, 26 July 1873.)

If the music of *Holländer* assists in constructing Senta’s redemptive angelic persona, what about its role as Wagner’s own “good angel,” leading the prodigal composer away from the false temptations of Paris and back toward his artistic homeland? In terms of outward pecuniary and domestic circumstances, as mentioned earlier, the composer was rescued by *Rienzi*, not by *Der fliegende Holländer*. There can be little question, though, that Wagner did really in some sense “discover himself” in the composition of *Holländer*. Modern scholarship has long been driven (and with good reason) by an impulse to deconstruct the personal mythography constructed by Wagner in the course of his lifetime. But the core of these personal myths often remains compelling and insightful, like those of his dramas. His sense for myth, after all, rivaled his sense for music.

After a decade of *Lehr-* and *Wanderjahre* (his artistic apprenticeship and journeyman years in Germany) Wagner underwent a rapid and remarkable sea-change – so to speak – toward the end of his stay in Paris. This creative sea-change seems indeed to have been triggered by a reaction against the conditions he faced in Paris and the false hopes that brought him there, as well as by a renewed orientation to German traditions, both operatic and instrumental. On the surface, *Der fliegende Holländer* still reflects much more of Weber and Marschner than of Beethoven, although the score does betray early signs of the supple motivic consciousness, as we might call it, that links Wagner’s more mature works with Beethoven on a very broad level. At the same time, it should be admitted (as Wagner himself was loath to do) that much of what marks an advance over his German operatic forebears in the *Holländer* can be traced to the impact of Meyerbeer and Berlioz, and the spirit of French Romanticism as embodied by Victor Hugo, with its sense of theatrical panache, its grandly melodramatic gestures, and its new feeling for historical and

local color.<sup>17</sup> On the whole, though, it is fair to regard *Der fliegende Holländer* as a new beginning for Wagner, drawing on a newly rediscovered enthusiasm for his German Romantic roots.

The fact that he so neatly closed the circuit of his early wanderings by returning to Dresden, where he had spent much of his youth, was to some extent a matter of chance, or at least of pragmatic concerns. Of the major operatic centers in Germany, this was the one to which Wagner had the most personal connections. *Holländer* was to have been created in Berlin, in fact, where it was first accepted, partly at Meyerbeer's recommendation. Only a series of administrative delays (which Wagner would soon blame on Meyerbeer) accounted for the eventual première in Dresden, at the beginning of 1843. And while the welcoming embrace extended by his native city to this "prodigal son" following his misadventures in the wide world was of course encouraging, it was also to some extent illusory. It was not so long before the terms and duties of his Kapellmeistership came to seem nearly as onerous as the privations of Paris. The conditions of German opera – both the repertoire and the institution – were disappointing. *Der fliegende Holländer*, which Wagner had proudly designated as his "offering to the German muse" in the first flush of his new-found cultural patriotism,<sup>18</sup> met with only a tepid success in Dresden, and the following year in Berlin. Attempts to get the work staged in Leipzig and Munich came to naught; the direction of those theatres, as mentioned above, viewed the piece as "unsuited to the German public" and to conditions of the German stage (cf. note 11).

Wagner's account (in the *Communication to my Friends*) of the "spiritual homecoming" represented by *Der fliegende Holländer* is suffused with nostalgic recollections of the homesickness he experienced during the latter part of his Paris sojourn. But at the time of the *Communication* (1851), Wagner had also come to realize that he was still far from finding the understanding that he had hoped for in Germany. The unconditional, unquestioning love that he required from his public in order to achieve artistic (or maybe just psychic) "redemption" was still a long way off. (The *Communication* is in large part a plea for that unconditional love.) Wagner was just then embarking on a whole new period of exile and wandering, as it turned out. And contrary to his original expectations, *Holländer* had failed to find a home on the German stage. Wagner did revive the opera for a few performances in Zurich, in 1852, and it was given a considerable

boost by Liszt's production in Weimar the next year (and by the lengthy, appreciative essay he published in 1854). But it was not until after Wagner's death that the work really found a stable niche in the operatic repertoire and came to be generally appreciated as the first decisive step in his path toward the "music drama of the future."

### Conception and composition: a brief chronicle

By way of epilogue to this account of *Holländer's* role in the composer's personal and artistic biography, let us briefly review some basic facts pertaining to the original conception of the work and the various stages of its composition and subsequent revision.

When Wagner undertook his "famous sea-voyage" through the Baltic and North Sea in the summer of 1839 he was already familiar with Heinrich Heine's satirical version of the Flying Dutchman story, as he confessed to his Dresden friend and colleague Ferdinand Heine (see Appendix C, pp. 190–91). He could well have known several other versions of the legend from German popular literature of recent decades, such as von Zedlitz's "Das Geisterschiff" of 1832 or the "Geschichte vom Gespensterschiff" by the short-lived Wilhelm Hauff (1802–27).<sup>19</sup> Thus, whether or not he was actually regaled with stories of the Dutchman by the sailors aboard the *Thetis* (as the early "Autobiographical Sketch" would have it), there is no reason to doubt that he did have occasion to reflect on this legend in the course of his sometimes stormy and harrowing sea-voyage, and that – as he also maintains in the 1842 "Sketch" – the legend acquired for him "a distinctive coloring as only the experience of such an adventure at sea could provide" (*GSD*, vol. 1, 13–14). Upon arrival in Paris in the fall of 1839, the first order of business was to complete *Rienzi* while also beginning to lay the groundwork for its triumphant Parisian première – at least, as the still idealistic young composer imagined it. But knowing as we do Wagner's habit of storing up and working out in his mind promising dramatic themes, often over great lengths of time, there is every reason to believe that he did continue to meditate on the operatic possibilities of the Dutchman legend throughout his first months in the French capital.

The decision to pursue the Flying Dutchman project was probably influenced by a mixture of practical and aesthetic factors. Even before having completed *Rienzi* Wagner was forced to realize that the prospects of a production at the Paris Opéra were negligible, at best.

The influential conductor François Habeneck had given Wagner to understand, in the meantime, that he would have better luck with a small-scale opera in one or two acts that could sooner help meet the requisites of the Opéra's seasonal programming needs (a mixture of new grand opera, shorter works, older repertoire operas, and ballets).<sup>20</sup> The Flying Dutchman material, Wagner realized, was naturally suited to the proportions of a one-act "curtain-raiser." At the same time, the cold water cast on his original hopes for a Parisian *Rienzi* had the effect of warming him towards the thought of a return to an "authentically German" style and genre, as suggested earlier in this chapter.

The delusion of providing an immediately practical work, as would later attend the births of *Tristan* and *Die Meistersinger*, was perhaps less exaggerated in the case of *Der fliegende Holländer* (or *Le Hollandais volant*, as it was first sketched). But, while Wagner held on to hopes of a Parisian production of this new project for almost a year, these hopes would also have to be relinquished, even before serious work on the score had begun in the spring and summer of 1841. Wagner seems to have made the first steps toward realizing the *Holländer* project within six or seven months of his arrival in Paris. On 6 May 1840 he sent a sketch of his plan to the celebrated playwright and librettist Eugène Scribe in the hope of getting Scribe to produce a French text for it. (This was presumably the same as the still extant French prose draft reproduced, in translation, in Appendix A, pp. 169–73.) Would Scribe still be willing to consider versifying "un petit opéra en un acte" on the basis of the enclosed sketch, Wagner inquires, as he had intimated earlier? (*SB*, vol. 1, 390). Whatever polite promises he may or may not have extended, Scribe seems, unsurprisingly, to have ignored this request when it was formally proposed. By 26 July 1840 Wagner is writing to Meyerbeer again encouraging him to put in a good word "for me and my 'winged Dutchman' (1 act)" with the new director of the Opéra, Léon Pillet, who is on his way to meet with Meyerbeer at Bad Ems. Wagner adds that he now has "several numbers" ready for audition.<sup>21</sup> Evidently these pre-composed "audition numbers" for the project consisted of Senta's Ballad, the dance-chorus of Norwegian sailors that opens Act III, and some simplified, autonomous version of the "spectral chorus" (*Spukgesang*) later in Act III. In *My Life* Wagner mentions these as having been written before the rest of the score for this purpose, with texts translated into French by Emile Deschamps.<sup>22</sup>

Despite his best efforts to pull strings with the power elite of the Parisian operatic world, no audition of Wagner's *Holländer* excerpts was forthcoming. The project remained on hold through the spring of 1841, until he finally gave into pressure from Pillet to relinquish his prose sketch to the Opéra management for their own uses.<sup>23</sup> In May Wagner went ahead and drafted a complete libretto on the basis of his sketch for a "Dutchman" libretto, now evidently staking his hopes on a production of the work back home in Germany. (The libretto was completed by 28 May.) Sometime over the next month it was settled that Wagner would receive 500 francs for the rights to his scenario. This was probably an unnecessary act of generosity on the part of the Opéra administration, since the general subject was well known, and the opera eventually composed by Pierre-Louis Dietsch to a libretto by Révoil and Foucher owes less to Wagner's sketch than to other existing versions of the story (see Chapter 2).

At any rate, these 500 francs along with the news that *Rienzi* was accepted for production in Dresden (both bits of good luck arrived in the first week of July) greatly heartened the composer after his long tribulations in Paris. He settled himself and Minna comfortably out in the country, at Meudon, to devote the summer to the composition of his new opera, now as *Der fliegende Holländer*. According to *My Life*, a complete draft of the opera (minus the overture) was finished within seven weeks, between the second week of July and 22 August 1841. An interesting detail in this account is Wagner's uncertainty as to whether he had already composed the Helmsman's song (from Act I) along with the other "advance" numbers mentioned above: the implication is that he had imagined the music (or *some* music) distinctly enough when writing out the text that he could later be unsure whether or not he had actually "composed" it. The orchestration of the opera was carried out through the fall of 1841, and this, along with the composition of the overture (which, in fact, Wagner did claim to have "carried around complete in his head" for some time), was completed by early or middle November.

Having placed *Rienzi* with the Dresden theatre, Wagner was now working on a Berlin première for *Der fliegende Holländer*. Partly thanks to Meyerbeer's recommendation, *Holländer* was indeed accepted early in 1842 for production at the royal theatre in Berlin. (For a time, Wagner even expected that Meyerbeer himself would rehearse and conduct the première.) But Count Redern, who had accepted the work, turned out to be a lame-duck Intendant and, as



luck would have it, his replacement (Theodor von Küstner) was less enthusiastic. Küstner, in fact, had just turned down the work in his previous capacity as director of the Munich court opera. While negotiations with Berlin came to a standstill, Wagner had in the meantime moved back to Germany and enjoyed a tremendous success with *Rienzi* in Dresden, where the theatre administration declared itself eager to take on the composer's latest opera. And so at the beginning of January 1843 (a little more than two months after *Rienzi*, and just a month before Wagner came to be appointed Royal Saxon Kapellmeister) *Der fliegende Holländer* reached the boards of the Dresden court opera.

Wagner was understandably eager to see his newest and most original work produced. His letters from the time (see Appendix B, pp. 185–90) reflect his excitement over the event, which seems to have led him to exaggerate a good deal the warmth of the public's response. Recalling the première in *My Life*, on the other hand, he takes a much more sober view of it. He was genuinely inspired by Schröder-Devrient's performance of Senta. (While coaching her in the role he had become particularly intimate with the singer, for whom he had entertained a strong natural sympathy since first meeting and working with her in 1835.) But the rest of the cast, the stage sets, and very likely the orchestral playing were either merely adequate or worse, and the evidence suggests that the composer enjoyed at best a *succès d'estime* as the "composer of *Rienzi*" and a newly discovered, promising local talent more than for the merits of the new work itself. After only four performances the opera was put aside, and was never revived in Dresden during Wagner's tenure as Kapellmeister, nor for many years afterwards (not until 1865).

Almost exactly one year later the long-delayed Berlin production came to fruition. This took place in Karl Friedrich Schinkel's Schauspielhaus, as the old opera house on Unter den Linden had recently been burned out. Wagner was unexpectedly pleased with the staging and design, under the circumstances, and later cited it in his 1852 production notes (see Appendix C) as a "model" production. Yet, like the first production, it lasted only four performances. The first two were given on 7 and 8 January, conducted by Wagner, who was not at all pleased with the musical state of things when he arrived to take over the last dress rehearsal. The plan had been to invite Schröder-Devrient to reprise the role of Senta. For some reason, however, she did not participate in the performances conducted by

Wagner, but only in the second two (23 and 25 February), after he had returned to Dresden.

As soon as Wagner had decided to divide the opera into three acts, rather than risk his original plan of playing it without a break, he seems to have worried about the lack of a strong “curtain” for the first act. The musical-dramaturgical effect of the first- and second-act conclusions, in the customary three-act division, are indeed rather perfunctory – by Wagner’s own standards, as well as those of contemporary grand opera. Thus his letters from Berlin express considerable relief and elation at the growing responsiveness of the audience in the course of the second act: “their interest grew,” as he describes it to Minna, “tension turned into excitement, heightened involvement – finally to enthusiasm, and even before the curtain had fallen on the second act I was celebrating a triumph such as few, I am sure, have ever been granted” (8 January 1844, *SB*, vol. 2, 352; see also Appendix B, p. 190).

Nonetheless, the intense desire for public approbation of his newest opera, as expressed in Wagner’s correspondence, was destined to meet with frustration. In between the Dresden and Berlin performances *Holländer* had been also produced at Riga (where local interest in the work of the former music-director was no doubt sparked by reports on the success of *Rienzi*), and in Kassel (where the composer and Kapellmeister Louis Spohr looked with a sympathetic eye on what others seem to have regarded as an untimely bid to revive the creaky, provincial genre of German Romantic *Schaueroper*). Plans for a Leipzig production in 1846 never materialized. After resettling in Zurich following his exile from Germany Wagner was persuaded to oversee a revival of his now nearly forgotten opera in the spring of 1852 (with performances on 25, 28, 30 April and 2 May), its modest dimensions being better suited to local forces than *Tannhäuser* or *Lohengrin*. Liszt produced the opera in Weimar the following year (February 1853), and a few other theatres picked it up over the next decade (Breslau and Schwerin in 1853, Prague in 1856, and Vienna in 1860). Yet *Holländer* was destined to remain a poor relation to Wagner’s other “Romantic operas” of the Dresden years throughout his life and into the twentieth century, when its dramatic economy and its significance in Wagner’s oeuvre came to be better appreciated.

Although Wagner himself had little contact with *Holländer* in performance after its relatively inauspicious première, he did have

occasion to implement some second and third thoughts about the score. He evidently still entertained hopes of making a mark with the opera when the plans for a Leipzig production were floated in 1846. A year earlier, the Dresden publisher C. F. Meser had overseen the production of thirty lithograph copies of the full score.<sup>24</sup> On the basis of his interim experience with *Tannhäuser*, Wagner now wanted to rework the orchestration throughout, principally by reducing the role of the brass and thinning out the strings in places. (Berlioz had criticized an over-reliance on string-tremolo accompaniments after hearing the first performances in Dresden, and Wagner himself came to regard the tendency to reinforce melody and harmonic accompaniment alike with penetrating brass instruments as a bad habit acquired from modern French and Italian opera, with its striving for “effect.”) He touched up a copy of the printed score accordingly, and sent it to Leipzig. Several years later, when he directed the Zurich revival (April 1852) and corresponded with Liszt about the Weimar production of 1853, Wagner attempted to recuperate his 1846 revisions, further refining the instrumentation of the overture’s coda (and the analogous passage at the close of the opera), as well as adding an extra measure of unison tremolo (on A, m. 328) to highlight the entrance of the triumphantly transformed Senta/redemption theme.<sup>25</sup>

The most significant alterations were undertaken at the beginning of 1860 in conjunction with the concert programs Wagner organized to introduce himself to the Paris public prior to the ill-fated French première of *Tannhäuser* (which he had hoped would be a triumphant conquest of the site of his earlier struggles). Now it was the experience of *Tristan* that guided the tone of the revisions, just as it did – on a larger scale – the revisions to the *Tannhäuser* score at this time. “Only now that I have written Isolde’s final transfiguration,” the composer remarked in a well-known passage from his correspondence with Mathilde Wesendonck, “have I been able to find the right ending for the Flying Dutchman Overture, as well as – the horrors of the Venusberg” (letter of 10 April 1860, *SL*, 489).

The relevance of Isolde’s “transfiguration” is immediately clear in the case of the *Holländer* finale, for this likewise involves the self-sacrificial death and mystical assumption of the opera’s heroine, as anticipated at the conclusion of the overture. (Wagner made a point to see that the end of the opera and the overture corresponded at each stage of his revisions.) Musically, there are two points of contact. In place of the somewhat limited attempt at harmonic-developmental

intensification in the overture's original coda (measures 346–69) Wagner inserted a much bolder series of chromatic sequences, based on the coda to Senta's Ballad, pressing from V<sup>7</sup> of E-flat through E major (measures 355–57) to V of F and beyond. These sequences are now set to the “ethereal” orchestration of harps and woodwinds, backed by a more energetic figuration in the strings. (This much recalls, if on a modest scale, the central intensifications of Isolde's great final scene.) Then, following a triumphant D-major statement of the Dutchman motive with an elaborate new swirling string accompaniment (measures 377–88), woodwinds and harp arpeggios return with the Senta/redemption theme, rounded off with a drawn-out minor/major plagal cadence (measure 389 to the end) that similarly recalls the cathartic, “transfigured” conclusion of *Tristan und Isolde*. The scoring, the cadential harmony, and the melodic rise to a sustained third degree in the upper voice are all comparable features of both endings.

As with his next opera, *Tannhäuser*, Wagner continued to think in later life about establishing a definitive musical text for *Der fliegende Holländer*. In particular, he contemplated a wholesale recomposition of Senta's Ballad (though this could not have included the Ballad's refrain-theme without seriously upsetting the conception of the overture and the other passages in the opera that quote or transform the theme). The idea of revising the Ballad may have originated at the time of the Munich revival of the opera in 1864, under the patronage of Ludwig II of Bavaria. A brief sketch of the opening phrase of the Ballad, with the text slightly altered and the melody completely recast (modulating from A-flat/C minor to A minor, though still in  $\frac{6}{8}$ ) exists with the date “9 September,” most likely 1864. From the primitive state of the sketch it is difficult to gauge the potential effectiveness of the new idea.<sup>26</sup> There is no evidence that this sketch was ever further elaborated, and on 17 October 1878 Cosima noted that he was still “thinking of revising Senta's Ballad, the beginning of which he finds quite like a folk-song, but not characteristic of *Der fliegende Holländer*.” Intriguingly, Wagner mentioned to Cosima several years later a “new version he made of the Ballad in *Der Fl. Holländer*, which he has unfortunately lost” (*CWD*, 20 January 1880). Whether he really had made such a new version or whether he was referring to the brief sketch is not possible to say for sure, though it seems unlikely that a fully composed new version would have gone astray. Other comments from between these years (1865–80) suggest that Wagner

contemplated a more radical reworking of the whole score, to bring it closer into the orbit of his mature ideal of the “musical drama.”<sup>27</sup> Beyond linking the three acts into one, as Cosima did with the so-called “Bayreuth” version in 1901, it is difficult to see how the fundamental dramaturgical and musical structure or the motivic-thematic content of the work could easily be thus overhauled. But Wagner’s plans, at least, confirm his own sense of the work’s importance in his oeuvre, as the vessel that returned him to his native soil, in aesthetic terms, securely oriented on his route toward “the future.”