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Richard Wagner
Parsifal

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Emil Scaria as Gurnemanz in Wagner's production of *Parsifal*; Bayreuth, 1882

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CAMBRIDGE OPERA HANDBOOKS

General preface

This is a series of studies of individual operas, written for the serious opera-goer or record-collector as well as the student or scholar. Each volume has three main concerns. The first is historical: to describe the genesis of the work, its sources or its relation to literary prototypes, the collaboration between librettist and composer, and the first performance and subsequent stage history. This history is itself a record of changing attitudes towards the work, and an index of general changes of taste. The second is analytical and it is grounded in a very full synopsis which considers the opera as a structure of musical and dramatic effects. In most volumes there is also a musical analysis of a section of the score, showing how the music serves or makes the drama. The analysis, like the history, naturally raises questions of interpretation, and the third concern of each volume is to show how critical writing about an opera, like production and performance, can direct or distort appreciation of its structural elements. Some conflict of interpretation, is an inevitable part of this account; editors of the handbooks reflect this – by citing classic statements, by commissioning new essays, by taking up their own critical position. A final section gives a select bibliography, a discography and guides to other sources.

In working out plans for these volumes, the Cambridge University Press was responding to an initial stimulus from staff of the English National Opera. Particular thanks are due to Mr Edmund Tracey and Mr Nicholas John for help, advice and suggestions.

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to
Christopher Brett

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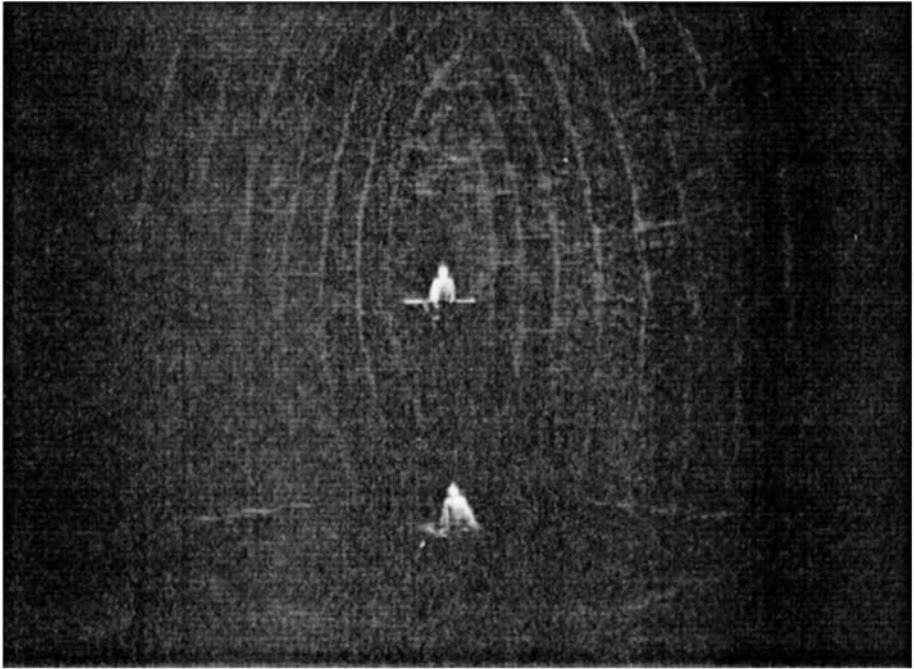
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Ich muss mit diesem letzten Werke volle Freiheit haben;
denn in Tell's Weise muss ich sagen: entrinnt auch dieses
kraftlos meinen Händen, hab' ich kein weiteres mehr zu
versenden.

With this last work I must have complete freedom; for like
Tell I have to say: if even this falls powerless from my
hands, I have no other to send after it.

Wagner to King Ludwig II, 25 August 1879

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