Berlioz in Time

Bloom, Peter

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Chapter Ten

Imperialism and the Ending of *Les Troyens*

*Capitaine nous te suivons, nous sommes prêts! Allons! À la montagne!*

—Berlioz, *Lélio ou Le Retour à la vie*

It is a strange and curious phenomenon, I think, that Berlioz’s musical politics, generally speaking, have received far less attention than have those of his younger German contemporary, Richard Wagner. I have made no precise accounting, but there is little doubt that political interpretations of *Der Ring des Nibelungen* are as common to the Wagner literature as political interpretations of *Les Troyens*, in writings on Berlioz, are rare. In chapter 5, I mentioned that, in 2000, when the renowned Salzburg Festival was preparing to honor the two-hundredth anniversary of Berlioz’s birth with a star-spangled performance of *Les Troyens*, Richard Wagner’s great-grandson, Gottfried Wagner (son of Wolfgang, grandson of Siegfried), objected to a European-wide telecast of the opera because of its “imperialistic ideology” glorifying a “so-called providential ruler who would found a supposedly imperishable world order.”

Gottfried Wagner is a supersensitive political observer, for reasons that are obvious—he finds direct parallels in *Das Judentum in der Musik* and *Mein Kampf*; he feels certain (though the matter is hardly decided) that the music dramas of his celebrated forebear are intentionally charged with anti-Semitism; he condemns his famed family for failing fully to confront their Hitlerian past—but his point is well directed, it seems to me, calling attention as it does to the central ideological issue as it pertains both to Berlioz and to Virgil.

Even the literary critic Edward Said, not a musicologist but not unknowledgeable about music, argued that Berlioz “used *Les Troyens* as an artistic vehicle for paralleling in music the contemporary expansion of the French
imperialism and the ending of Les Troyens

“...empire in North Africa, which is where the second half of the work is set.” Said, familiar with only the final version of the opera, specifically retreats from labeling Berlioz an imperialist and Les Troyens as “crudely ideological,” but nevertheless believes that the opera “is incomprehensible as a great work of art without some account of the heady grandeur it shares both with Virgil as the poet of empire and with the imperial France in and for which it was written.”

The reasons for the plethora of political interpretations in the case of Wagner and the paucity of them in the case of Berlioz are linked to the trajectory of the careers of the artists and, more particularly, to the historical waters that flowed beneath the dam in the aftermath of their demise. Berlioz found no patron such as Ludwig II of Bavaria, founded no such festival as the Bayreuther Festspiele, and fascinated neither a “Führer” nor the foremost novelist of his time, Thomas Mann, whose writings wove Wagner into the literary and political history of the twentieth century. Berlioz would have been pleased to have as his patron the Emperor Napoléon III, even though his reign, in some ways progressive, was marked by the trappings of what has been called a police state: executions, deportations, and the severe repression of dissent. Indeed, the composer’s own vision of a musical utopia, set out in his novella, Euphonia, is not without troublingly despotic and sadistic components of the sort that persons associated with the similarly utopic village of Bayreuth would later endorse, among them the philosopher Houston Stewart Chamberlain: “The spiritual sword that we wield,” Hitler would famously write, “was forged in Bayreuth, first by the Master himself, then by Chamberlain.”

Unlike Wagner, the French composer did not himself actively dabble in politics. Nor was it necessary for the scholar who more than all others revived Berlioz in the twentieth century to write an essay of both admiration and admonition, as Thomas Mann did in Die Leiden und Grösse Richard Wagners—where Mann proclaimed that no spirit of brutal regression should claim Wagner for its own—because no one in France took Berlioz’s work as an anthem to a modern party of racial hatred and world domination. That, of course, is how Joseph Goebbels and the Nazis approached Wagner’s work, in 1933, and that is what Thomas Mann wished to contest. The scholar of whom I speak, Jacques Barzun, was not a German who went into exile in the United States, as did Mann, but a Frenchman who as a boy was sent to America to recover from psychological damage suffered during the First World War and to pursue the American university education that his father thought superior to the French. Barzun, whose work on Berlioz we shall consider in the final chapter of this book, made the acquaintance of Mann in the nineteen-forties, when the two men crossed paths in the intellectual crucible.
of New York City. Mann, the Wagnerian, had earlier tried to present himself as an apolitical artist, publishing a substantial monograph on The Reflections of a Non-Political Man, but he was soon drawn into the public sphere, first, as a defender of the fledgling Weimar Republic, later as an outspoken opponent of the Third Reich. Barzun, the Berliozian, not a novelist but a historian, was the more likely nonpolitical man in the sense that his essentially Gallic reasonableness led to admiration from both the right and the left. His relative disinterest in Berlioz’s political associations, something I felt firsthand during our four decades of regular correspondence, has carried over into the work of several generations of his followers.

It has therefore happened that when we seek the meaning of Der Ring des Nibelungen, Wagner’s most ambitious undertaking, we consider, among other things, the original ending of the drama—in which Brünnhilde delivers Siegfried to Wotan, in Walhalla, in order that Wotan, now free from guilt, reestablish his rule; and we wonder, for example, if it ought to be associated with the pamphlet Wagner published in the Dresdener Anzeiger on June 14, 1848, on the relationship between contemporary republican efforts and the monarchy, “Wie verhalten sich republikanische Bestrebungen dem Königtum gegenüber,” in which it is suggested that aristocratic privilege should be abolished, that a king should rule, but only as the first among republicans. In his brilliant monograph on Wagner’s Music Dramas, Carl Dahlhaus comments on no fewer than six different versions of Brünnhilde’s final lines and on the political implications of each, from republican satisfaction to the advantages of anarchy, from Schopenhauerian resignation to the optimism of rebirth. On the last point, as a small example, Wagner himself, in 1872, associated the musical motif that we hear high in the sky, at the end of the symphonic peroration of Götterdämmerung, with the birth of his own daughter, Isolde, six years earlier, in 1865. (The motif is first heard at “O hehrstes Wunder,” in Die Walküre, when Sieglinde becomes aware that motherhood, for her, is imminent.)

Should we not lavish similar attention upon the ending of Berlioz’s epic opera, which was significantly revised for reasons that were variously artistic, practical, philosophical, and, yes, political? The ending of act 5, when Berlioz completed work in April 1858, did not encompass the thirty-five bars of what is now number 52 as we have it in Hugh Macdonald’s great score for the New Berlioz Edition, and as we have it in almost all recorded performances. It rather encompassed the two hundred fifty-one bars found in the appendix to the NBE, based on the autograph of the score preserved in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France. (It should be noted that some collettes or paste-overs in the autograph have been lifted since Macdonald completed his
work, and the vocal score prepared by Berlioz between April 1858 and June 1859, of which only a fragment was known to Macdonald, has now been recovered. These documents need renewed study, but do not fundamentally alter the picture we already have.) The NBE score is also based on the autograph copy of the libretto, preserved in the Bibliothèque de l’Opéra, which Berlioz presumably wrote out before or during the composition of the opera, between 1856 and 1858. The latter is inscribed with the date of August 12, 1859, on which day Berlioz gave it to the celebrated mezzo-soprano Rosine Stoltz, with a flowery but potentially wounding dedication: “À la Cassandre inspirée, à la noble Didon, à l’aiglonne du chant dramatique, à Rosine Stoltz, je donne ce manuscrit autographe pour qu’elle le garde toute sa vie avec le souvenir de mon affection profonde”—“to that inspired Cassandra, that noble Dido, that commanding eagle of dramatic singing, to Rosine Stoltz, I give this autograph manuscript in order that she keep it for the rest of her life along with a remembrance of my profound affection.”

By the late eighteen-fifties, Rosine Stolz no longer possessed the powerful mezzo-soprano voice of her youth, to which Berlioz refers with the word aiglonne, which he used to compliment her in his feuilleton of October 5, 1854. Although she would have liked to take one of the roles, she would sing neither Cassandre nor Didon. Berlioz surely wished her to understand that, in an earlier time, she would have been the ideal interpreter of his two Virgilian heroines. Believing herself still in the fullness of her career, however, she was unmoved by his flattery. As Berlioz explained to his son on January 26, 1864: “Madame Stolz has written to me. She is here and is still totally furious. So many people out in the world are simply out of their minds!”

In fact, as reported in the press, for the role of Cassandre, Berlioz had chosen a young and little-known mezzo-soprano, Irma Morio, whose brief career unfolded primarily in the provincial theaters of Bordeaux, Marseille, and Rouen.

Needless to say, when he was compelled to abandon the first two acts of his grand opera, on June 4, 1863, he was compelled as well to abandon both Cassandre and Mademoiselle Morio, who had in fact been engaged for the role.

Let me take a moment to describe the ending of Les Troyens that we have in the first version of the score—the ending that Berlioz sketched in January 1858, shortly before writing to Hans von Bülow, on the 20th, that he had just added “an ending to the drama, an ending considerably more grandiose and conclusive than the one [he has] had in mind until now. The audience will now see how Aeneas has completed his mission […]. There is in all of this a great deal of musical pomp and circumstance, which I do not now have time to explain to you in detail.” After Dido has stabbed herself and fallen
on her bed, a rainbow appears to stretch over the funeral pyre and to touch her nearly lifeless body. Berlioz notes, with Newtonian precision, that we see “un rayon solaire décomposé présentant les sept couleurs primitives”—“a decomposed ray of sunlight presenting the seven primary colors.” The Grand Prêtre takes notice of Iris, goddess of the multicolored rainbow, who has appeared above the dying Queen, and who leads the assembly in a chant-like responsorial prayer of deliverance on a solemn C-major chord. (Berlioz here follows the end of book 4, where Iris appears—her role in the *Aeneid*, Berlioz seems to realize, is crucial—in order to free Dido from the agony of death.) Two pizzicato strokes, V to I in E minor, mark the precise moment of the Queen's demise. (In the revised version, Dido, with her dying breath, both imagines the fall of Carthage and, rather precipitously, the rise of Rome.) The Carthaginian flag is placed upon the pyre such that it waves above Dido’s inanimate frame. The Carthaginians, in a furious D-major chorus (music that no one has ever heard in performance), swear their eternal hatred of the race of Aeneas, “Haine éternelle à la race d'Énée,” the very text that Berlioz later fitted to the strains of the Trojan March—a maneuver that is ingenious but incongruous. You would presumably not sing “God Save the South,” the text of the would-be anthem of the Confederacy, to the music of “The Star-Spangled Banner,” even if the slave-owning Francis Scott Key’s poem makes troubling reference to “the hireling and slave.” The Trojan March does not execrate the Trojans, it exalts them! The D-major chorus to which I refer is marked “coupé” in the autograph, but it is not crossed out. This is a sign, I believe, that Berlioz was reserving the right to use it at a later date: when he wished to make a permanent cancellation, he obliterated the notes or the words.

The curtain now falls to indicate the “passage of time,” this being one of the principal themes of the *Aeneid* itself. The stage direction reads: “Une toile d’avant-scène s’abaisse, représentant le Temps suivi du cortège des heures, dont douze sont vêtues de tuniques blanches et roses et douze de tuniques noires étoilés d’or.” (“A downstage curtain falls representing Time followed by the procession of the Hours, twelve outfitted in pink and white tunics, twelve, in black tunics spangled with golden stars.”) Berlioz’s phrase, with the capital *T* of “Temps,” suggests the presence of an image—perhaps the traditional allegorical figure of a shrunken old man—but this is not certain. Nor is it clear if his mention of the Hours—Greco-Roman divinities (Horae) personifying the seasons or, more literally, the twenty-four hours of the day—refers to a procession illustrated on the curtain or enacted on the stage. It is not impossible that the composer was relying upon the elaborate
descriptions of the garb of the hours as specified in John Murray’s 1833 commentary on Pope’s *Homer* and Dryden’s *Aeneid*. Or that he had in mind a painting such as Poussin’s *Danse de la musique du Temps*, whose purchase by Lord Hertford, in 1845, was noted at the time in all the Parisian papers, and whose subject has been viewed as “a reflection on the passage of time”; or even Guido Reni’s Roman masterpiece, *L’Aurora*, whose virtues would be later extolled by Berlioz’s good friend, the art critic Francis Wey.

The new section, marked Épilogue, begins with a mysteriously modulating orchestral murmur, forty-two bars that do indeed suggest the passage of time and, conceivably, a pantomime of some solemnity. The curtain then rises anew to reveal the Capitol in Rome with, to one side, Clio, the muse of History, and, next to her, “une Renommée,” a winged allegorical representation of a transmitter of extraordinary events based, we may presume, on Virgil’s “Fama,” a god or goddess of “rumor” who, in the *Aeneid*, brings to Dido, in a dream, the news of Aeneas’ imminent departure. We hear again the Trojan March, “handed down by tradition and now become the triumphal hymn of the Romans.” We see parading in front of the Capitol an armed warrior leading a Roman legion, and we hear Clio singing in Latin the praises of Scipio Africanus, the Roman General who defeated Hannibal of Carthage in 202 BC; we see a second warrior leading a second Roman legion, as Clio sings “glory to Julius Caesar” (these four bars are carefully crossed out in the manuscript but, again, remain fully legible); and we see “an Emperor,” as Berlioz puts it, “surrounded by poets and artists,” while Clio sings “glory to the Emperor Augustus and to the Divine Virgil.” As this ultimate, extended version of the march comes to an end, Clio intones, and two distant voices echo, the words “Fuit Troya, Stat Roma”—“What was once Troy is now Rome!” Beneath the final bars of the score, the composer sets down a line from the *Aeneid*: “Quidquid erit, superanda omnis fortuna ferendo est”—the advice given to Aeneas by old counselor Nautes, a favorite pupil of Pallas, who appears only in book 5 of Virgil’s epic poem—which Berlioz translates as “Quoi qu’il arrive, on doit vaincre le sort en supportant ses coups,” and which we may wish loosely to render as “we must endure whatever befalls us.”

Hugh Macdonald has concluded that this is “an uncompromisingly idealistic plan, whose aim was lofty enough: to transmute the ultimate purpose of the *Aeneid* into operatic form.” But what is the ultimate purpose of the *Aeneid*? Gottfried Wagner had an answer to that question, as we have seen, as did Edward Said; and Mitchell Cohen, in *The Politics of Opera*, has proposed something similar: “Hector Berlioz returned to Virgil, Dido, and Aeneas; *Les
Troyens (1856–1858) announces the imperatives of founding or reconstructing a national home (or, perhaps, a renewed empire).”21 “I simply must have the right to set down on the title page of the score,” Berlioz exclaimed to his brother-in-law on November 2, 1859, “the words that Clio sings in the Epilogue: ‘Stat Roma!’ ”22

The ultimate purpose of the Virgilian epic remains a matter of considerable dispute. The scholarly literature on the subject is, to mix a metaphor, Wagnerian. Most specialists agree that Virgil’s epic celebrates the achievements, and offers mythical and divine justification of the authority, of Augustus—the first Roman Emperor, the adoptive son of Julius Caesar, the worthy descendent of Aeneas, the founder of the Roman people. Some, associated with what has been called the Harvard School, finding aspects of Aeneas’ behavior to be “disturbing,” offer pessimistic readings of the poem and its hero: “a perjurer and a worshipper of false gods, a seducer and a traitor, a warrior who repeatedly gives in to an anger that is incompatible with true courage.”23 These experts, however, may be fairly accused of applying current norms to ancient civilizations.24 Berlioz, too, in the Mémoires, apostrophizes Aeneas as perfidious and hypocritical;25 he seems to feel from the Aeneid the sad similarity, indeed the near equality, of the victors and the vanquished, as Sainte-Beuve would put it in his Étude sur Virgile.26

The reference to Sainte-Beuve occurs in a thoughtful reading of Les Troyens by William Fitzgerald, who deals wisely with the relationship between the opera and Virgil’s epic, but who rather offhandedly sets aside the original, bloated finale, which I have described, as so much “imperial phantasmagoria, inspired by passages in books 6 and 8 of the Aeneid.”27 But it is precisely that unquestioning “imperial phantasmagoria” that interests me, because, whatever the reasons for its eventual excision, the phantasmagoria “compatible with a triumphalist reading” of the poem, in Fitzgerald’s words, is basic to Berlioz’s original design. The subsequent draconian shortening of the finale eliminates much of the fanfare, including the once much-desired “Stat Roma,” and in the process eliminates a fully satisfying plagal cadence at the end, replacing it with ten ultimately tiresome bars of unrelieved B-flat major.

It seems to me logical, not only to study the original ending, in its expansive entirety, but also to see it as cast in the mold of the ancient tragédies en musique of Lully, whose prologues were encomia to Louis XIV: “In no other artistic form was Louis’ image of grandeur and power more effectively projected to the court and to the public than in the music-dramas whose subjects were selected personally by him and whose texts were imaginative encomiums of his exploits. Thus the fine arts, their support, protection, and
control, were the business of the state.” Robert Isherwood’s may be a one-dimensional view of what is in fact a multifaceted musical and dramatic reality, as Olivia Bloechl has demonstrated in her recent study, but it cannot be denied that the use of the principal theater of the capital as an instrument of the prestige of the régime has been an aspect of the Académie Royale (Impériale, Nationale) de Musique since its very foundation. Berlioz was no fan of Lully, but he did idolize Gluck, who renewed the tradition of the tragédie en musique when he came to Paris, in 1773, only one year after the arrival there of his former singing pupil, Marie Antoinette. From the seventeenth through the twentieth century and beyond, the prestige of the Opéra in Paris has always echoed the power of the administration. That this is still the case is well recounted in Le Syndrome de L’Opéra, where it is pointed out, among other things, that the choice of black for the color of the seats in the modern Opéra de la Bastille was made by none other than President François Mitterrand. More recently, the choice of Alexander Neef as director of the Opéra, in July 2019, was made, to no one’s surprise, by President Emmanuel Macron.

Now, to show that Berlioz was a lifelong admirer of royalism and authoritarianism is not difficult, as we have demonstrated in earlier chapters. His public and private writings are rich with statements and allusions that directly and indirectly express esteem for Napoléon I, for Louis-Philippe, for his son the Duc d’Orléans, for the various German and Russian Kings and potentates he encountered during his European travels, and of course for Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte, who became Président de la République for what was intended to be a singular four-year mandate and for what became a term of Emperor for life. Those writings—which, as David Cairns has observed in an essay that wisely reminds us of what we know and what we do not know of Berlioz’s thinking—are equally marked by statements that excoriate the republican and representative forms of government that in France manifested themselves during Berlioz’s maturity. What he says in the 1848 Préface to the Mémoires—“As I write, republicanism is steamrollering its way across the European continent. The art of music, which for a long time has been everywhere gasping for life, is at this hour quite dead. It is about to be buried, or rather thrown upon the dung-heap”—is only the most talked-about of a number of such comments, like those found in letters of 1849, where Berlioz speaks of “this time of liberty, fraternity and equality, and obscenity and improbity and stupidity, [when] people are only interested in what fills the stomach;” and where he says, of the protestors in the streets: “We are in a forest full of bandits, who threaten us, and yet we reason with them rather than shooting them like the wolves they are.”
We are not surprised, therefore, to hear him say, on December 9, 1851, one week after Louis-Napoléon’s coup d’état, and five days after the arrest of twenty-five thousand citizens and the shooting of some four hundred demonstrators, that “this coup d’état is a stroke of genius, an utter masterpiece.” Such a reaction was precisely opposite to that of Richard Wagner, for whom the coup d’état represented a continuing sign of the rotting corpse of European civilization and a setback to his hopes for revolutionary change. For Berlioz, who was by no means alone, the rot was republican. In what is a purely fortuitous coincidence, an apparently left-leaning critic of the 1851 salon, François Sabatier-Ungher, viewing Courbet’s new, magisterial portrait of the French composer, noted in March of that year that “the falcon has become an eagle.” Berlioz, acutely aware of the symbolic value of the eagle in the Roman and Napoleonic Empires, would surely have appreciated the remark.

In 1852 Berlioz hoped, but in vain, to have his newly composed Te Deum performed at an imperial coronation and at an imperial marriage. Indeed, Frank Heidlberger has interpreted the Te Deum itself as inspired by Berlioz’s nostalgia for Napoléon I and, in the aftermath of the death of his own father, as a representation symbolic of the very idea of authority. Furthermore, in the new Napoleonic era, Berlioz would soon prepare a detailed program for the organization of a renewed and grandiose Imperial Chapel. And he would send to the Emperor a copy of his new book, Les Soirées de l’orchestre, whose crowning tale, the novella Euphonia, which I mentioned earlier, has been convincingly interpreted by Katherine Kolb as Berlioz’s sermon of “early allegiance” to the emergent Second Empire.

In the spring of 1853, Berlioz busily prepared Benvenuto Cellini for performance in London: there were rumors of the possibility of a conspiracy to spoil the première—presumably not politically inspired—but Berlioz felt reassured by the knowledge that among those in attendance would be a number of royals, including Queen Victoria, Prince Albert, the King and Queen of Hanover, and Grand Duke Carl Alexander of Weimar. Alas, the presence of so many dignitaries failed to quell the cabal that took place, and the cabal probably quashed whatever thought Berlioz might have had, given his tenuous position in France, of seeking temporary refuge in the kingdom across the channel.

Later in 1853—I mention this because I have mentioned the end of The Ring—Berlioz joined Liszt and Wagner in Paris at the home of the governess of Liszt’s children, the formidable Madame Patersi de Fossombronni, just as Wagner was reading to the three teenagers the libretto of what was still at that time Siegfried’s Tod. (The title of Götterdämmerung was not fixed until
1856.) Berlioz, “who behaved with admirable forbearance in the face of this misfortune,” Wagner noted with irony in Mein Leben,40 would have understood nothing at all! But surely, in subsequent conversation, the German composer-librettist would have attempted some kind of explanation to the non-German-speaking Frenchman.

In 1854, Berlioz composed a Cantate Impériale, as he announced to Liszt on July 2 of that year,41 which he hoped to have performed on August 15, the birthday of the first Napoléon, whom Berlioz had of course always admired from afar. That title—identical to contemporary works by Édouard Deldevez and Adolphe Adam, and similar to others by Jérôme Develey, Alfred Chaubet, and Aimé Cornier,42 may have replaced Berlioz’s original title of Le Dix Décembre, the date of Louis-Napoléon’s election to the presidency, December 10, 1848, although which title came first is not clear. In early 1856, Berlioz published the cantata with a dedication to Napoléon III, and in late August of that year, he was pleased to receive acknowledgement of the dedication in the form of a gold medal with the engraved portrait of the sovereign and the words “L’Empereur Napoléon III à M. Hector Berlioz.”43 The year 1856 is the one in which, after five previous attempts, Berlioz was finally elected to the Académie des Beaux-Arts of the Institut de France—an honor that he much appreciated in part, although he would never say so explicitly, because it refurbished his rank in the cultural establishment, and led to occasional intercourse with the Emperor. On January 16, 1858, for example, two days after Felice Orsini’s failed attempt to assassinate the Emperor on the steps of the Opéra, Berlioz, shaken by the event, went to the Palais des Tuileries to inscribe his name on the list of those expressing their sympathy, and joined three colleagues to draft for the Académie des Beaux-Arts an official letter of confidence and concern.44 The year 1856 is of course the year in which Berlioz began work on Les Troyens, telling his uncle that he had “superstitiously begun to set down the poem on the glorious date of the fifth of May”—that being the date of the death, as Berlioz presumed everyone knew, of Napoléon I.45 (One of the first things Berlioz did with his new title was to write “Membre de l’Institut” beneath his name on the title page of the in-progress autograph of Les Troyens.) Berlioz was well aware that Napoléon III was not musically inclined: “[The Emperor] abominates music like ten Turks,” he wrote in 1856; “You won’t believe it, this harmonophobia,” he joked in 1857.46 And yet we know from copious correspondence that, throughout the gestation of Les Troyens, he was hoping to receive imperial support for a performance of the work at the Académie Impériale de Musique.
Under the weight of so much correspondence, and so much imperial approbation, it seems to me inconceivable that, while composing the grandiose finale that we have described above, for the opera house that was christened *impériale* after 1852, Berlioz did not have in the back of his mind an encomium to the Emperor Napoléon III, who would himself, like his illustrious uncle, associate the glory of his empire with the glory of ancient Rome. In Berlioz’s *L’Impériale*, the obsequious text goes so far as to sing the praises of the Napoleonic “race”—the “race auguste de nos Césars.” Like Berlioz, the poet Achille-Louis Lafon was well aware of the Emperor’s “cézarisme,” something explicitly demonstrated in his two-volume *Histoire de Jules César* (1865), about which Berlioz would remark, before he had seen it: “The public is extremely interested in this book. I’ll bet that it is really fine. He has been working on it for at least a dozen years.”

Émile Zola, who penned a long review, and who read as obviously self-serving the French Emperor’s glorious portrait of the Roman Emperor, admitted that its documentation was thorough and useful in and of itself.

In a more specific area, as a member of the staff at the *Journal des débats* and a colleague of among others the political writer Xavier Raymond, an ardent Catholic with his own concerns for the welfare of the home of the papacy, Berlioz would surely have been aware of Napoléon’s project to expel Austria from Italy and to free the Italian peninsula, especially since a part of that plan was the arranged marriage of Prince Napoléon (the second son of Jérôme Bonaparte, the first Napoléon’s youngest brother, and a close adviser to Napoléon III), whom Berlioz knew personally, and Princess Marie-Clotilde, the daughter of King Victor Emmanuel. Indeed, in his later review of the first performance of *Les Troyens*, Auguste de Gasperini seems to associate Aeneas’s anguished Roman destiny with Napoléon’s desire for the liberation of Italy: “We have heard all of them, all of those mysterious voices that tear us away from terrestrial enjoyments in order to remind us that Italy is before us.” Another reviewer, ridiculing Berlioz’s decision to have Dido expire upon her vision of “Rome immortelle,” asked sardonically why the composer had not included a final scene picturing the Battle of Solferino, with Victor Emmanuel riding to victory on the plains of Rome to the strains of the *Marche troyenne*, with Garibaldi to his right and Cialdini to his left.

When Berlioz for the second time used the word *aiglonne* to describe Rosine Stoltz, in 1859, as we have seen, he may have been letting us in on this thinking: “L’aiglon,” the young eagle, was the name that Victor Hugo had applied to the first Napoléon’s son, Napoléon II, who lived for only the short period of 1811 to 1832. At the boy’s birth, Napoléon I gave his son,
the heir apparent to the French Empire, the title of His Majesty, the King of Rome. That Berlioz chose to compliment Stoltz with an “aiglonne” of Napoleonic resonance is one more sign—ironic, perhaps Freudian—of the association of his opera with the symbol and the fate of the First and Second Empires. As I have said, both Emperors made much use of eagles for signs and symbols. Be this as it may, to read an opera celebrating a new Roman civilization destined to dominate the universe as flattering to an Emperor who wished to stand as a champion of Order in the eternal city of Rome, in the various parts of the expanding empire, and primus inter pares in the French capital, is, at the end of the day, to take a relatively small interpretative step. As Annegret Fauser has it in a recent study of Les Troyens: “That Berlioz connected his opera to current politics is played out repeatedly in his plot.”

We must now ask, after mentioning some of the adjustments he made to the score and to the libretto: Why—in late 1859 and early 1860, presuming that this is fact when it took place—did Berlioz delete that original 200-bar ending, the ending, that is, which seems purposefully to overwhelm the tragedy of Dido’s death with its inflated glorification of empire and its near-incarnation of a new national pride? The first answer that suggests itself is that he was counseled to do so by his friend and mentor, Pauline Viardot, singer, pianist, composer, musicienne extraordinaire. In Baden-Baden, during the summer of 1859, according to Viardot (who in this case is our primary source, although the composer’s letters to her at this time are, even for him, exceptionally loving and flirtatious), Berlioz, ill and unhappy, had fallen in love with her. This is credible, considering not only the tenor of his letters but also his allusions elsewhere to his overcharged emotional state: “Not a day goes by, not an hour,” he wrote to Adolphe Samuel, on January 29, 1860, “when I am not ready to risk my life, to make a most dramatic decision. I repeat, I live in my thoughts, in immense emotions, far from reality… I can’t tell you anything more.”

Berlioz was so much on edge that he was unable to appreciate Camille Saint-Saëns’s silly but hilarious sendup of the composer’s frequent use of “ma sœur” in the dialogues of Dido and her sister in acts 4 and 5. Smack in the middle of a rehearsal, Saint-Saëns, the répétiteur, blurted out “Dis-donc ma sœur”? In English, “Dis-donc” is “hey!” or “say!” The all-purpose expression rhymes precisely with “Didon”—which is why Saint-Saëns’s remark is funny! (Having to explain it, of course, renders it leaden.) Equally amusing (with historical distance) is Berlioz’s reaction:
“What a way to make music! To break into the middle of a phrase to laugh at such an inanity! That is what is going on, that is what upsets me, that is what gets on my nerves, that is what exasperates me! And that is also how one rehearses in the opera house. Or rather that is how one does not rehearse, I would suggest, when one wishes to work on our opera. I am no longer able to stomach such infantile behavior.”

Beyond his love of Viardot, Berlioz had great respect for the great singer’s musical judgment—she “liked and admired what [he] liked in music, in literature, in all matters of the intellect,” he had told his sister in January 1859—and as he began with pleasure to arrange Gluck’s *Orphée* for her contralto voice, in September of that year, she began, to his profound satisfaction, to look closely at the score of *Les Troyens*. For the next seven months, through March 1860, Pauline Viardot acted as Berlioz’s musical adviser, one might even say collaborator, as he continued to rework the score of his monumental five-act opera. In the first two acts, apparently delighted by the role of Cassandra, which Berlioz had at one time hoped she would assume, Viardot nonetheless found certain passages “shockingly bizarre and out of place.” On October 11, 1859, Berlioz sent to Viardot the entire piano-vocal score of *Les Troyens*, with a copy of the libretto, promising soon to bring her the orchestral score of act 4 in order that she prepare a piano reduction of one number. On October 24, with Berlioz’s young friend Théodore Ritter at the piano, Viardot sang Dido’s farewell from the end of act 5: “I had never heard it,” wrote Berlioz, “and I was quite overwhelmed.” On October 30, she apparently returned the manuscripts to the composer, with her comments marked in the margins. Slightly misquoting Victor Hugo, he told her that, coming from her, they were like flags returning from battle, “plus beaux quand ils sont mutilés”—“all the more beautiful for being mutilated.” (Hugo’s word, in the seventeenth of the *Odes et Ballades*, was not “mutilés,” but “déchirés”—“torn.”)

On November 17, 1859, Berlioz sent the finale to Viardot: “Here, dear critic, is the fifth act, corrected.” And at same time he told her: “You have made me demolish a lot of things. I sincerely regret that, quite often, you are exactly right. I would perhaps regret it even more if you were wrong! Because I prefer it when we are in agreement.” On December 29, in a rare moment of relief from the constant pain he suffered from Crohn’s disease, Berlioz told his sister: “I have revised a bad bit of my score, I think I have succeeded in making it better. This evening I’m dining with some excellent friends. I’m feeling confident and happy about everything.” (Here I must pause to explain my translation of the previous sentence, a loose English version
of Berlioz’s clever, revealing, and culture-bound play on words, “L’Empereur n’est pas mon parrain.” Berlioz starts with the expression “le roi n’est pas mon cousin”—which means that at this moment I am happier than even the King has the right to be, that I am so proud, and so happy, that even the King would at this time be my unworthy cousin. He then substitutes the word *empereur* for *roi*, as befits his imperial times, and, for the word *cousin*, he adroitly substitutes the rhyming word *parrain*—godfather. He is thus happier than even the Emperor has the right to be; the Emperor, his godfather, could not possibly be happier than he.

We cannot be sure whether the words *corrigé* and *refait* in these letters to Viardot and others, to say nothing of *déchiré* or *mutilé*, refer to the removal of the final two hundred bars and their replacement by a new, condensed finale. However, in Berlioz’s letter to Viardot of January 25, 1860, we find this: “Yesterday I worked hard on my score. It became necessary to take an axe to the finale, where you had made only tentative suggestions, and to set it afire. I think it goes really well now. How can I possibly thank you for calling my attention to so many grave imperfections.”

It may be that my translation is excessively free (Berlioz writes “il a fallu porter le feu et la cognée dans le final où vous n’aviez fait que de timides remarques,” and he speaks of “tant de défauts graves”), but his forceful language does indeed suggest more than polite pruning. Was Viardot troubled by the long-windedness of the original finale, with its implied veneration of the Napoleonic dynasty? Her reaction to the 1848 Revolution, like that of her friend George Sand, was opposite to that of Berlioz; later, in 1863, “stifled by the political repression of Napoléon III,” she and her husband Louis Viardot went into exile in Baden-Baden, returning to France only after the fall of the Emperor.

It could be, of course, that by “défauts graves” Berlioz refers primarily to matters of harmonic progression and structural detail, or perhaps to matters of text-setting and prosody of the sort that he himself was concerned about in Viardot’s performance of Gluck’s *Orphée*, when he told her how to avoid—in the line “Ah, je te suis, tendre objet de ma foi” from the recitative in act 1 that follows the aria “J’ai perdu mon Eurydice”—“a ghastly verse of eleven feet and an abominable *hiatus*” (an unpleasant juxtaposition of unlike vowels). Four days later, on January 29, 1860, in a letter to his friend Adolphe Samuel, Berlioz again quotes the line from Virgil that he wrote at the end of the original finale: “Quidquid erit,” etc. Was the original finale still intact? Or was the main work now essentially finished. (The composer set down the line again on the proofs of the piano-vocal score that he gave to Georges Kastner in February 1862.)
Berlioz continued to polish the score of *Les Troyens* through March 1860, telling his uncle Félix Marmion, on April 4, that “my opera is finished—retouched, revised, twice corrected.” The printing of the vocal score began in September 1860: Berlioz would be correcting the proofs from November of that year through February 1861. During this period, the composer’s correspondence becomes sparse, and, in particular, the flood of letters to Pauline Viardot dries up: there is an eleven-month gap between the last of a series, set down on July 13, 1860, and a new letter, of June 1861. It is possible that this *refroidissement* resulted from the fact that, in March 1860, for political reasons of his own, Napoléon III ordered that a production of *Tannhäuser* be scheduled at the Opéra, and the fact that Pauline Viardot was becoming friendly with its composer: Viardot was the first person he had met, wrote Wagner, “who, quite spontaneously, surprised [him] by her truly magnificent understanding of the position [he] was in.”

On New Year’s Day, 1861, Berlioz went to the Palais des Tuileries to see the Emperor and to advocate for *Les Troyens*. “Such strange things are happening in our world of art at the present moment,” he wrote the next day. “At the Opéra there is nothing but rehearsal for Wagner’s *Tannhäuser*, and at the Opéra-Comique there is a new work in three acts [Barkouf] by Offenbach (yet another German!), who has Monsieur de Morny as his sponsor.” In a letter to his son, dated February 14, 1861, Berlioz expressed increasing exasperation at Wagner’s apparent success: “Public opinion is becoming more and more indignant at seeing me shut out of the Opéra while the Austrian ambassador’s protection has readily let in Wagner.” Meanwhile, because of his doubts about a production at the Opéra, Berlioz had been meditating a possible performance at what would be a newly constructed and larger Théâtre-Lyrique. On January 16, 1860, he signed a contract with the director, Léon Carvalho, and made every effort with his friends in positions of authority—Baron Haussmann, Prince Napoléon, Prince Poniatowski—to speed the construction of Carvalho’s new theater in the place du Châtelet.

And yet as late as January 1863, Berlioz was still hoping for performance at the Opéra: to proceed with the Théâtre-Lyrique, he wrote, “does not seem to me politically wise [‘pas d’une bonne politique’], while the fate of *Les Troyens* is still in the balance at the Opéra.” The suspense was finally ended on February 15, 1863, when Berlioz broke definitively with the Opéra and signed a new contract with the Théâtre-Lyrique. Two months later, in April, when Berlioz was in Weimar, Grand Duke Carl Alexander attempted indirectly to convince Napoléon III to order a performance of *Les Troyens*: “Poor Grand Duke,” wrote Berlioz, “he simply cannot believe it possible that
It is surely the case that Berlioz, like Alexis de Tocqueville, was an advocate more of _liberté_ than of _égalité_. But even the “liberté” he admired was not for all. As the father of modern conducting, Berlioz was a firm believer in musical _order:_ conducting is an “obvious expression of power,” Elias Canetti suggests in _Masse und Macht_; and the conductor is “the ruler of the world.” At one point, Berlioz’s friend, the horn player Eugène Vivier, no doubt following the expression applied to the composer-conductor in the newspapers, went so far as to address Berlioz as “Général.” Indeed, Berlioz’s treatise on _L’Art du chef d’orchestre_ is nothing if not a tract on absolute authority. It is no doubt his penchant for absolutism that, more than all the rest, attracted him to Napoléon III. Does that somehow take away from the grandeur of his own music? Does Igor Stravinsky’s admiration for Mussolini (“I don’t believe that anyone venerates Mussolini more than I do. To me he is the one man who counts nowadays in the whole world. […] He is the savior of Italy and—let us hope—of Europe”) take away from the grandeur of his? This is not the place to enter into the larger debate (of which the centerpiece is always Wagner’s antisemitism). But it is relevant to note that, absolutist though he was, Napoléon III practiced what the historians—I rely here primarily on the work of Jean-Claude Yon—have called “democratic Caesarism,” in which the voice of “the people” was, theoretically, the ultimate authority. In the midst of completing his “imperial” opera, Berlioz, too, made a gesture we may read as on behalf of the “people,” as he gave his personal collection of scores and parts to the Société des Concerts du Conservatoire, the one more or less “democratic” institution then extant on the French musical landscape.
Like the Olympic games of 1936 in Berlin, which were precisely what Joseph Goebbels called them, “a victory for the German cause,” and like those that took place in Beijing in 2008, which were as much an exercise in Chinese propaganda as they were a demonstration of “the Olympic spirit,” so, too, were the grand operatic ventures of the nineteenth century inextricably linked to the political circumstances of their creation and performance. To tell the story of the opera without them is to tell only half the story. Berlioz’s gods—Gluck and Beethoven, Shakespeare and Goethe, the early Victor Hugo with his contemptuousness of others that our composer particularly admired—“the fathers of his musical destiny,” always played a larger-than-life role in his creative enterprise, an enterprise marked by sympathy for authoritarian rule and antipathy to republicanism. “When the populace starts meddling in public debate,” the composer would presumably have agreed with Voltaire, “all is lost.”

Now, history tells us that authoritarians have feared the power of music and have concomitantly attempted to use it for propaganda: Hitler (who during the war sent the troops to the Bayreuth Wagner Festival for moral fortification) and Stalin (who posed as chief music critic for the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) are only the most obvious modern cases in point. Others include Mussolini, Salazar, Franco, and Khomeini. In an article for the New York Times, Richard Taruskin criticized John Adams’s Death of Klinghoffer for what he took to be its ideological bias: “Art is not blameless. Art can inflict harm. The Taliban know that. It’s about time we learned.” In devising Les Troyens, Berlioz linked his mature musical talents to his cherished Latin epic; he also linked his faith in Virgil to his loyalty to the Emperor Napoléon III. To those of us who believe that Berlioz’s opera is not harmful, and deserved a destiny less dark, it is regrettable that Napoléon III was indifferent to the promise of great music and unresponsive to Berlioz and Les Troyens: had he examined the original ending, he might have wished (I say, indulging my own wishful thinking) to make propagandistic use of Berlioz’s grand opera. He might have wished to associate himself with a remark, uttered on the occasion of the première, by a republican, Auguste de Gasperini, who nonetheless regretted the commercialization of contemporary music and the absence of the dignity art once enjoyed in absolutist days of yore: Berlioz’s opera “does honor to the country. We owe an immense debt of gratitude to the man who, despite predictions of disaster, took control of his own destiny—and completed the work.