

Feminine Endings
Music, Gender, and Sexuality

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Chapter 4

Excess and Frame: The Musical Representation of Madwomen

From Monteverdi's experiments in the *stile rappresentativo* or Donizetti's tragic heroines to Schoenberg's *Erwartung* and beyond, composers have long been attracted to the dramatic subject of madwomen. Opera audiences obviously share their fascination: many operas of this genre maintain positions of honor within the standard repertory, and there are even specialized commercial recordings that contain nothing but Mad Scenes, all conveniently excerpted and packaged together so that the listener doesn't have to endure any of the boring stuff between the "good parts." Nor is the musical madwoman confined to operas with explicitly mad characters: Ethan Mordden's book on the phenomenon of the Diva bears the title *Demented*, because (he explains) "demented" is the highest accolade one can bestow on a prima donna's performance—or at least it was so for a particular time among opera buffs at the Met.¹ The excess that marks the utterances of a Lucia or a Salome as insane is thereby elevated to the status of an essential ingredient—a *sine qua non*—of interpretations by women opera stars, regardless of the specific role.

The mass popularity of madwoman representations, their frank appeals to sensationalism, and their somewhat tacky reception histories tend to make them sources of embarrassment to musicologists and theorists. Some of the pieces in question are dismissed as unworthy of serious critical attention, while others are acknowledged and studied as important masterworks, but with the issues of madness and gender shoved to the side as irrelevant to the music itself. The very aspects of these operas that make them favorites among opera lovers typically are overlooked, disparaged, or explained away: thus Salome's depravity can become an intricately designed configuration of pitch-class sets, and Lucia's lucidity may be recovered through lin-

ear and structural graphing. What appeared at first glance to be deviant is revealed to be normative, and all is well.²

But the links among madness, women, and music are neither irrelevant nor trivial—although to explain how and why these connections are significant will necessarily take us out of the realm of self-contained musical analysis and into such areas as history and literary criticism. For music is not the only cultural domain in which madwomen show up rather more prominently than one would expect, and their musical manifestations need to be examined at least in part against the broader contexts from which they emerge and in which they are received.

Fortunately, much of the information required for such a task is already available. The work of historians Michel Foucault and Klaus Doerner, for instance, has begun to lay bare the social history of madness in Europe: they have traced the ways in which insanity (which previously was regarded as a universal) has been defined differently by institutions at various times and places, how it has been treated, and so forth.³ Moreover, Elaine Showalter has demonstrated that during the nineteenth century, madness came to be regarded as a peculiarly female malady—usually as a manifestation of excess feminine sexuality.⁴ The socially perceived differences between male and female were, in other words, often mapped onto the differences between reason and unreason. Both official institutions (law and medicine) and also cultural enterprises such as literature were engaged in constructing and transmitting such formulations. And as the frequency of operatic madwomen indicates, music likewise participated in this process.

But music is not simply another medium. Its priorities and procedures differ significantly from those of literature, and thus we cannot apply directly to music the insights gleaned by Showalter or Foucault. It is reductive, for example, to regard characters such as Lucia as mere victims, in part because of the technical virtuosity required of the singer performing such a role. If the prima donna in such operas can be interpreted as a monstrous display, she also bears the glory of the composition: her moments of excess are its very *raison d'être*.

In this essay, I will examine several famous portrayals of madwomen in music from both cultural and musical points of view. I hope to demonstrate how madwomen such as Monteverdi's nymph, Donizetti's Lucia, and Strauss's Salome are offered up as spectacles within the musical discourse itself: how their dementia is delineated musically through repetitive, ornamental, or chromatic excess, and how normative procedures representing reason are erected around them to serve as protective frames preventing "contagion."

But I also want to consider what may at first appear to be a strange coincidence: namely, that the excessive ornamentation and chromaticism that mark the madwoman's deviance have long been privileged components in Western music—the components that appear most successfully to escape formal and diatonic conventions. When these same strategies appear in instrumental music, they are regarded as indications not of psychopathology but of genius. This essay concentrates on particular musical representations of madwomen. But it also employs the insights gained from those specific examples to illuminate a fundamental contradiction within the social framing of Western music since 1600—namely, its compulsion for theoretical control and yet its craving for strategies that violate and exceed that control: a contradiction that is at times projected onto and dramatically enacted by musical madwomen, but that is by no means restricted to that genre.

Before proceeding to the music itself, however, I want to reconstruct something of the historical contexts within which these pieces took shape, paying particular attention to dominant cultural beliefs concerning madness, women, and spectacle. For it was not only musical style that changed between Monteverdi and Strauss: many social assumptions concerning gender and madness likewise underwent radical transformations during this period, and these extramusical assumptions strongly influenced the various characterizations as well. Indeed, these outside assumptions created the very conditions that made feasible the emergence and popularity of musical madwomen.

1

Michel Foucault's *Madness and Civilization* presents itself as the first "archaeology" of attitudes toward insanity in early modern Europe. In this influential study, Foucault argues that before the seventeenth century, individuals who were regarded as mentally deficient or deviant were usually permitted to wander about freely unless they proved to be dangerous. The seventeenth century saw the emergence and development of many of the institutions and social habits we now take for granted, among them the confinement of the insane. For the first time in European history, the mad were gathered up and incarcerated in precisely the same way as lepers had been in an earlier time. In Foucault's words, in the classical society of the seventeenth century,

reason reigned in the pure state, in a triumph arranged for it in advance over a frenzied unreason. Madness was thus torn from that imaginary freedom which still allowed it to flourish on the Renaissance horizon. Not so long ago, it had floundered about in broad daylight. But in less than a half-century, it had been

sequestered and, in the fortress of confinement, bound to Reason, to the rules of morality and to their monotonous nights.⁵

The rationale for this move was in part beneficent: to protect these poor, unfortunate beings from the outside world. But it also was motivated by the modern state's obsession with surveillance, its need to define and control behavior: "The house of confinement in the classical age constitutes the densest symbol of that 'police' which conceived of itself as the civil equivalent of religion for the edification of a perfect city" (63).

Yet even though the mad were sequestered during and after the seventeenth century, it was not quite a matter of "out of mind, out of sight." Quite the contrary: the public display of mad persons became and remained an extremely popular entertainment well into the nineteenth century. As Foucault states:

Here is madness elevated to spectacle above the silence of the asylums, and becoming a public scandal for the general delight. Unreason was hidden in the silence of the houses of confinement, but madness continued to be present on the stage of the world—with more commotion than ever. (67)

The indulgence of our civilized ancestors in such freak-show exploitation of the helpless may seem almost incomprehensible today. However, as Klaus Doerner explains in *Madmen and the Bourgeoisie*:

These spectacles had more in common [with displays of animals] than merely the bars of cages and the skilful baiting of the keepers. They were displays of a wild and untamable nature, of "bestiality," of absolute and destructive freedom, of social danger which could be demonstrated far more dramatically behind the bars of reason, just as that same act showed the public reason as the necessity of the control over nature, as a limitation of freedom, and as a guarantee of authority. . . . The arrangement that presented the insane as wild and dangerous beasts was an appeal to the public to accept the moral yardstick of the absolute state as its own measure of reason.⁶

In other words, the agencies of the newly consolidating modern state found it useful to exhibit those whom it defined as deviant, largely as a means of persuading the public to embrace restrictive legal and behavioral codes—codes ostensibly designed to protect individuals from their own potentially fatal excesses.

Nor did the public require much coercion to get them to attend such ex-

hibits: the desire to observe those who had lost all inhibition appealed to the same tastes as executions, bear baiting, or strip shows. The voyeurism that guaranteed the popularity of madhouse displays also inspired innumerable artworks—novels, paintings, and especially operas—that were concerned with representing the spectacle of madness. And in these artistic genres, as in the asylums, we find the double gesture of confinement and exhibition, of frame and display, of moral lesson and titillation.

Foucault and Doerner deal with insanity largely without paying particular attention to gender. But in *The Female Malady*, Elaine Showalter has demonstrated the extent to which attitudes toward madness in modern Europe have been informed by attitudes toward sexual difference.⁷ Two of her arguments are crucial for the purposes of this essay. First, she demonstrates that the growing “science” of psychiatry came to differentiate radically between explanations for unreason in men (which ranged from grief or guilt to congenital defectiveness) and the cause (singular) of madness in women, namely, female sexual excess. Over the course of the nineteenth century, psychiatrists obsessed over mechanisms of feminine dementia to the extent that madness came to be perceived *tout court* as feminine—even when it occurred in men.⁸ Moreover, they came to perceive all women—even apparently “normal” ones—as always highly susceptible to mental breakdown, precisely because of their sexuality. The surveillance and control that had always characterized the psychiatric profession became focused on the “problem” of Woman, and so it has remained with substantial help from Darwin and Freud.⁹

Second, Showalter reveals that when madness is dealt with in bourgeois artworks (whether in literature, art, or music), it is almost always represented as female.¹⁰ These two features of modern culture—psychiatry and public art—inform each other: the more science tells us that it is women who go mad from an excess of sexuality, the more artists reflect that understanding; but the more art gives us vivid representations of sexually frenzied madwomen, the more society as a whole (including its scientists) takes for granted the bond between madness and femininity. In other words, explanatory models in science and representational artifacts in the arts are often interdependent in processes of social formation.

Cultural anthropologists and historians have demonstrated that there is no essential or ideologically neutral condition that is “the mad.” Rather, because each society values certain types of behavior, each defines deviance according to very different criteria. Notions of madness consequently vary across time and space, and especially with respect to gender, and these differences inform representations of dementia in art. Yet representations are never mere transcriptions of reality or ideology. Artistic conventions them-

selves change across time and space, and the available artistic codes of a given moment likewise inform what gets represented. Thus part of my concern here is with the ways madwomen are “framed” in the sense of constructed: what characteristics mark their musical utterances as feminine and as mad?

There is a second sense in which I am interested in “framing.” As one surveys the genre of madwomen in art, a very interesting formal tick emerges. In two of the most famous paintings celebrating psychiatry—*Pinel Freeing the Insane* and *Charcot Lecturing on Hysteria at the Salpêtrière*—the madwoman is being exhibited not merely as one who suffers some disorder, but also as a sexually titillating display.¹¹ She is a beautiful woman whose chief sign of abnormality is her indecency: her bared breasts of which she herself seems to be incognizant, but of which her painter and the viewer of the painting are most certainly aware. Moreover, within the confines of the represented scene itself are male displayers of the madwoman. As scientists they are in control. They represent the normal, the bars of reason that protect the spectator from the monster. They are, as Doerner points out, necessarily present within the discourse itself.¹² The frame of masculine rationality is constantly visible to guard against the male-constructed (or framed) image of the madwoman. It is apparently only within the security of that double frame that feminine madness can be presented for public delectation.

One of the conventions governing representations of madwomen in most media is that they are silent.¹³ They are seen but are rarely given the power of language, are almost never given the opportunity to speak their own experiences. But music, of course, is radically different in this regard. If musical representations of madwomen likewise are often pruriently conceived and doubly framed, they must—because of the special capabilities and demands of the medium—actually give voice to symptoms of insanity. Since the seventeenth century, dramatic music has offered the extraordinary illusion of knowledge beyond the lyrics, beyond social convention. When Orfeo or Otello sings, for instance, we grasp not only the meanings of his texts (which we could actually do better through spoken theater), but also another dimension in addition to the words, which is understood to be the character’s subjective feelings. The music delivers a sense of depth and grants the spectator license to eavesdrop upon the character’s interiority.¹⁴

But the apparent power of music to make us as listeners privy to the inner thoughts of characters becomes problematic when that character is a madwoman, for the risk arises that what we hear may so influence us—so move the passions—that we will be seduced into unreason ourselves. Since Plato, music has been regarded as a very tricky medium that can corrupt, effeminize, bedazzle, and delude. Most listeners do not know how to ac-

count for the effects music has on them, and thus they often understand those effects as manifestations of their own subjectivities, as their own inner truths. Thus a composer constructing a madwoman is compelled to ensure that the listener experiences and *yet does not identify with* the discourse of madness. It becomes crucial, therefore, that the musical voice of reason be ever audibly present as a reminder, so that the ravings of the madwoman will remain securely marked as radically “Other,” so that the contagion will not spread.

The three portraits I will examine—Monteverdi’s nymph, Donizetti’s Lucia, and Strauss’s Salome—date respectively from 1638, 1835, and 1905, and thus their stylistic premises are extremely different. To the extent that style defines what counts as rational, what as irrational, these three characterizations are indelibly marked by the musical tensions of their day. As exceptions that prove the rules, they tell us a great deal about the styles from which they are constructed. Madwomen strain the semiotic codes from which they emerge, thereby throwing into high relief the assumptions concerning musical normality and reason from which they must—by definition—deviate. And by threatening formal propriety, they cause frames of closure or containment (which usually operate more or less unnoticed) to be enacted most dramatically.

2

They cannot represent themselves, they must be represented.

Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*

In study after study, Foucault’s work posits the seventeenth century as the era when most modern institutions and discourses emerged, including those organizing power, knowledge, insanity, and sexuality. The most significant of the new discursive practices in music—the *stile rappresentativo*—was dedicated to inventing musical constructions of affect, but also class, gender, and madness. Monteverdi alone created several different versions of musical madness,¹⁵ the most famous of which is the *Lamento della Ninfa*, a chamber piece that appears in his eighth book of madrigals.¹⁶

The core of this three-part composite is the prolonged soliloquy sung by the nymph, and it is for this segment that the piece is justly famous. The particular brand of madness generating the lament is that of obsession: the nymph is fixated on memories of a lover who has abandoned her—who has awakened her sexually and has left her with no outlet for that excess, no recourse but madness. Her responses and reminiscences range widely with

The image displays two systems of musical notation. The first system features a vocal line (soprano) with the lyrics: "fa che ri - tor - ni il mio a - mor co - m'ei pur fu o o tu m'an -". Below the vocal line are two staves for the basso continuo. A vertical double-headed arrow is positioned between the vocal line and the basso continuo staves, indicating a specific musical relationship or tension. The second system features a vocal line with the lyrics: "- ci - di ch'i - o non mi tor - men - ti più". Similar to the first system, it includes two staves for the basso continuo and a vertical double-headed arrow between the vocal line and the basso continuo staves.

Example 1a: "Lamento della Ninfa," refusal of cadence

respect to affect (self-pity, anger, grief, envy, erotic longing, hopelessness, etc.), and yet she is unable to escape that solitary fixation.¹⁷

This obsessive quality is created musically through an unvarying cycle of four bass notes that seem to progress rationally through the A-minor tetra-chord, only to double back inevitably to starting position. Against this backdrop, the nymph's vocal lines sometimes acquiesce, sometimes struggle—though always in vain. It is a mark of Monteverdi's powers of imagination that we never hear the ostinato bass the same way twice: it is constantly being reinflected by the nymph's dramatic moments of resistance (her dissonant refusals of cadences implied in the bass, the futile attempts at cadencing on g; see Ex. 1a and b) or of sudden collapse (Ex. 1c). Monteverdi presents us here with a stark experience of madness and also of uninhibited female desire as both were construed within seventeenth-century style and ideology, and it counts as one of his most powerful portraits.

So effective is this ostinato-lament that we often forget its frame. Indeed, it may be an indication of how very successful the frame is, that it manages

Example 1b: "Lamento," Attempted cadence on G

Example 1c: "Lamento," nymph collapses and trio imposes continuity

to escape our memories of the piece. For the chamber piece is not composed solely of this lament, but of three distinctive sections of which this is but the middle unit. The piece is not even in A minor, but rather C major, with the lament positioned as an extravagantly prolonged envelope on the region of the tentative sixth degree. And while the nymph is the principal attraction of the piece—it is her energy, her subjectivity we are invited to witness and experience vicariously—she does not control the proceedings. She is carefully mediated by a trio of men who introduce her and remain ever present until the nymph's conclusion, following which they offer a short coda that brings the composite to secure closure.

In their introduction, the trio sings complacently, twice reaching easy cadences on C, thus establishing their rationality and credibility. As they begin describing the pathetic nymph, they empathize with her various states, painting in music her sorrow, her rupturing sighs, and her trampling of

flowers (a sure sign of her derangement is that she thus disregards these standard emblems of femininity). Finally, with the line “thus lamenting she went forth,” they turn the piece over to the main event—the representation of the nymph proper. Foucault states in the earlier quotation that madness was allowed “to flourish on the Renaissance horizon,” “to flounder about in broad daylight.” And the premise of the libretto of this piece is that the three men have observed the nymph doing just that—flourishing and floundering in her madness on the Renaissance landscape. Yet as they “represent” her to us, they enact the confining frame that turns her into a seventeenth-century exhibit.

Throughout the nymph’s lament, the three men make their presence audible as they continually mark her utterance as their own recollections: they punctuate her first line with “she said,” thus undercutting the potential immediacy of the spectacle; they complete syntactical units in the music when the nymph falters, ensuring rational continuity despite her (Ex. 1c); and they insert their own sympathetic responses (“*miserella*”) to her ordeal, thus insisting upon their humane intentions even while they display her publicly (Ex. 2a). At the end, they return us to secure, normative reality with another couple of complacent cadences on C major (Ex. 2b).¹⁸

This elaborate framing device is crucial to the organization of the composition. The intrusive trio of men is extraneous to the dramatic immediacy of the lament—indeed, it even works to the deliberate detriment of verisimilitude. Yet they serve a vital function: they protect and reassure us throughout the featured simulation of insanity. For the madwoman is one of the most terrifying archetypes in Western culture, and she is fascinating precisely because she is terrifying. We the spectators are curious to know about her (in order to accumulate possible human experiences, in order to control), but we do not want to be endangered by a creature who is beyond reason and who may inflict unmotivated injury or spread her disease. The density of auditory reminders of this masculine presence is directly related to the anxiety potentially generated by the confrontation with this frightening and unpredictable force.

Moreover, the three men establish and maintain a masculine subject position throughout. Just as the psychiatrists in the paintings mentioned earlier situate their disheveled hysterics as objects of the male gaze, so the trio situates the nymph’s outburst as a display designed by men, chiefly for the consumption of other men.¹⁹ The mediating filter of masculinity creates something like the grilles that used to be put over the windows of asylums at the time when gentlefolk liked to witness the spectacle of insanity for entertainment. These grilles permitted voyeuristic access and yet ensured security. Thus the double framing effect: the nymph is a male construct (com-

The image displays a musical score for a vocal piece. It is divided into two systems. The first system contains three measures of music. The vocal line (soprano) has the lyrics: "Ne mai si dol - ci ba - ci mai mai mai mai". Below the vocal line are three staves for instruments, each starting with the word "può". The second system also contains three measures. The vocal line has the lyrics: "da quel - la boc - ca havrai ne più so -". Below the vocal line are three staves for instruments, with the second staff starting with "mi - se - rel - la". The first measure of the second system has a *pp* (pianissimo) dynamic marking. Arrows point from the first and second measures of the first system down to the first and second measures of the second system, respectively.

Example 2a: "Lamento," Trio attempts to reassure and to impose closure

posed by Monteverdi and the poet Rinuccini), and the piece's frame is dramatically enacted so as to provide maximal evidence of her containment. She will not bite or even trample flowers. It is safe to observe her distress—her rage against her faithless lover—with “aesthetic” pleasure.

3

The transformation of Walter Scott's Lucy Ashton into Lucia di Lammermoor provides an especially interesting example of the particular demands and potentials of music in the service of representation.²⁰ In the novel, Lucy plays but a very minor role—as bait in an ill-fated class struggle between a boorish, ascendant bourgeoisie and an impoverished but noble remnant of the aristocracy. Lucy and her family are precariously balanced between their upwardly mobile aspirations and the quagmire of uncultivated peasantry from which (by implication) they have only recently emerged. Large parts of the novel revel in the Scottish dialect of servants and crones, in opposition to the standard English of Ravenswood and the Ashtons. Lucy rarely

Si tra sde_gno_sì pian - ti sparge - a le vo - - _ci al

Si tra sde_gno_sì pian - ti sparge - a le vo - - _ci al

Si tra sde_gno_sì pian - ti sparge - a le vo - - _ci al

ciel co_sì ne' co_ri a_man - ti mesce amor fiam - - _ma e gel.

ciel co_sì ne' co_ri a_man - ti mesce amor fiam - - _ma e gel.

ciel co_sì ne' co_ri a_man - ti mesce amor fiam - - _ma e gel.

Example 2b: "Lamento," Conclusion

speaks in the novel—she is regularly characterized as quiet, even as “feeble minded.” And after her mind snaps, she delivers but a single (though highly significant) line: “So, you have ta’en up your bonny bridegroom?” she croaks as the veneer of bourgeois gentility drops from her, exposing mercilessly her underclass origins. The rest is silence.

By contrast, Lucia and her inner self are the entire point of Donizetti’s opera. Scott’s Tory politics are eradicated, replaced by a love story reminiscent of *Romeo and Juliet* and a type of mental breakdown more indebted to

Ophelia's than to Lucy Ashton's. Far from losing her ability to manipulate her well-bred musical discourse, Lucia's madness is manifested in her move into increasingly extravagant virtuosity. In her celebrated Mad Scene, Lucia (like Monteverdi's nymph) displays her deranged mind without inhibition as she variously relives erotically charged moments with Edgardo, imagines that they are exchanging vows in marriage, and anticipates her own death, burial, and afterlife in heaven. She has lost touch with outer reality and lives now in a world made up entirely of the shards of her fears, hopes, and dreams.

Yet it is not the text that makes hers the quintessential Mad Scene, but the way in which her music is continually far in excess of the meanings of the lyrics and the rigid formal strictures of *bel canto* style. Indeed, from her very first scene in the opera, in which she sings of her encounter with the specter and of her love for Edgardo, Lucia is only tenuously connected to reality: her music is always given to excess and needs only the shock of her wedding night to unleash its full monstrosity. The other characters in the opera happily conform to the periodic phrases, the diatonicism, the melodic lyricism of this rather restricted sociomusical world. But Lucia always has far too much energy for these narrow confines. Her excess breaks forth at all the weak moments or seams in the form—in roulades between eight-bar phrases, in cadenzas between verses. And when the form of the piece refuses to accommodate her, she spills out in the only direction available: upward into coloratura delirium. Her exuberant singing leaves the mundane world of social convention behind as she performs high-wire, nonverbal acrobatics that challenge the very limits of human ability. And in the Mad Scene, she finally abandons formal convention altogether to enact a collaged fantasia. When she returns to formal continuity for her final "Spargi d'amaro pianto," it is a sign that she has successfully moved into another realm of consciousness, and the discrepancy between her morbid text and her ecstatic dance music betrays how far beyond the bounds of normal reason she has fled.

This is not the way the Mad Scene is always interpreted. For instance, the entry on Donizetti in *The New Grove* states: "Some of the Mad Scene remains on a purely decorative level. . . . The brilliant cabaletta "Spargi d'amaro pianto" shows a curious indifference to the mood of Cammarano's text. . . . Lucia lacks the excuse of morbid euphoria for her roulades."²¹ To be sure, Donizetti's music and his librettist's text do not match with regard to affect: the situation and the lyrics suggest that morose music might be more suitable. However, whatever one thinks of Donizetti as a musical formalist, he did have an uncanny sense of theater, and it is unlikely that he would have capped this, his most celebrated scene, with a mistake. And if

one reads Lucia's behavior as a manifestation of the sexual excess the nineteenth century ascribed to madwomen, then these "decorative" and "euphoric" details make strong dramatic sense.

During the first fifteen bars of "Spargi," the harmonic vocabulary is remarkably diatonic, conventional, predictable. In the abstract, one might even be tempted to call it "rational," if the singer were not clothed in a blood-splattered gown, and if we had not just witnessed the extravagant discontinuities and ornamentation of the earlier sections of the Mad Scene. Thus her apparent musical lucidity at this point in the action, paired with the seemingly carefree style of her waltz meter, is all the more chilling. She seems to be submitting to the sociomusical frame she has resisted throughout the opera. But the nonfit between the morbid lyrics and musical setting (with its flirtatious grace notes and skips) signals that something is wrong. In measure 32 there is a sudden pivot from the key of the dominant, B^b major, to the key of its lowered submediant, G^b major. And it is at the moment of this flat-six excursion that the kind of madness Donizetti seems to have in mind bursts forth in all its splendor (Ex. 3).

Admittedly, such chromatic modulations were relatively common in music of this time. Yet their frequency does not lessen their significance, but rather serves as an index of how effective such rhetorical devices were—and still are. The flat-six modulation creates a sudden, dramatic shift into what is perceived as an alien region: a realm of fantasy, illusion, nostalgia, unreason, or the sublime, depending on semiotic context.²²

In measure 30, Lucia ascends unexpectedly to a chromatically altered g^b. This pitch challenges the boundaries temporarily, but then Lucia demurs to the lower a-natural and submits to the expected diatonic cadence in B^b major. In retrospect, it seems that the g^b was but a local inflection merely interjecting a brief shadow of sensitivity, weariness, yearning. However, without warning she pushes her cadential b^b up to c^b as the bass descends to A^b—a pitch that immediately undermines the sovereignty of B^b major and that disorients us for the moment. Two measures later we will understand that the A^b chord was ii in a forceful ii—V—I progression in G^b major. We are probably relieved at discovering in retrospect the logic of this pivot, but perhaps at the same time a bit disconcerted at having been so easily seduced into Lucia's perverse logic.

G^b major holds firm for seven measures, following which Lucia returns to her original E^b major for the remainder of the aria. Her process back to tonic is noteworthy in at least two respects. First, she ascends by step as she did before, though this time she ends on a brilliant g-natural harmonized by E^b—she succeeds in breaking through the clouds "foreshadowed" by the earlier g^b. And second, she uses a trilled b^b as a whimsical springboard

Spar - gi dà - ma - ro pian - to il mio ter - re - stre
 Cast on my grave a flow - er, But let there be no

ve - - - lo, men - tre las - sù nel
 weep - - - ing, When 'neath the turf I'm

cie - lo io pre - ghe - rò, pre - ghe - rò per te; Al giun - ger
 sleep - ing, Let not an eye, not an eye grow dim, For 'mid the

tu - o sol - tan - - to fia bel - lo!l ciel per
 fields of a - - zure, I go to wait for

me! ah sì, ah sì, ah sì, per me,
 him, ah yes, ah yes, ah yes, ah yes,

rall. e portandola voce
string. tr
a tempo
string. e cresc.
f a tempo

Example 3: Lucia di Lammermoor, Mad Scene: "Spargi d'amaro pianto"

p
 fia - bel - lo il ciel, il ciel - per me, ah
 'Mid fields of a - zure I wait for him, ah

string tr *tr* *tr* *tr*
 sì, ah sì, ah sì, per me,
 yes, ah yes, ah yes, I wait,

string: e cresc. *p*

mp

per me, per
 I wait, I

pp
 me, wait per
 wait for

from which to launch each pitch of the ascent. If listeners are occasionally disoriented by her logic, Lucia is absolutely confident of her steps and can even take time out to tease her lines sensually, willfully. Once again she folds into a conventional cadence, only to reemerge and leap beyond the now-expected *g*-natural to a high *b^b*, at which point she bursts into euphoric spirals of erotic transport. The excess here overflows its bounds completely as she anticipates her reunion with Edgardo in heaven and, formally speaking, her cadence.

In the repeat of the cabaletta—in which lavish ornamentation (now standardized by performance tradition) is added—the flat-six pivot is even more erotically charged. For instead of backing off from the sensitized *g^b* in measure 30, she pushes up through it chromatically to the high *b^b*. If the original rendition was demure and submissive, this one is defiant and exhibitionistic, almost brazen. And from that high, vulnerable pitch, she moves on without a breath to the pivotal *c^b*, which is now almost unbearably exposed. The *rallentando* indicated in the score can make this moment both delicious and excruciating, especially if the singer clings to that high pitch before she plunges down the octave and pushes (*stringendo*) toward the return of tonic and ever more dazzling roulades.

Of course, much depends on the performance: the scene can be (and frequently is) sung as a formal *vocalise* or as the lament of a pathetic distracted virgin. But it is also possible to use details of this sort to create an extraordinary portrait of a woman who, in her madness, has transgressed all conventions of propriety and whose exuberance is both awesome and frightening.²³ If the performance of conventionalized ornaments is potentially this effective, imagine the impact if a performer were to invent new roulades—if she were allowed to rage at will without our being able to predict her every move in advance! We have lost a great deal in terms of dramatic impact in our substitution of traditional solutions for improvisation in *bel canto*, though we have also thereby secured certainty (Ex. 4).

As extravagant as it may be, there are important ways in which Lucia's music is carefully framed within the opera. In the middle of this, the most ecstatic and uninhibited demonstration of feminine *jouissance* they are ever likely to hear, the chorus of wedding guests breaks in with the refrain: "It is no longer possible to refrain from weeping." They attempt in vain to lead her into a more suitable affective key, C minor, for what they perceive as a tragic event. Indeed, the wedding guests respond to and accompany Lucia very much as the trio of men did Monteverdi's nymph. There is even a lead-in, in which her former tutor, Raimondo, sets the scene, and the emphatic quality of the cadential harmonies bracing and interpolating the scene is

Pag. 246, batt. 7^a e seguenti
LUCIA

ve - - lo, men - tre las -

Batt. 9^a
LUCIA

mentre - - las -

Batt. 14^a e seguenti
LUCIA

-rò per te. Al giunger

Opp.

Batt. 14^a
LUCIA

-rò per te. Ah! Al giunger

Opp.

Pag. 247, batt. 6^a e seguenti
LUCIA

si, ah!

Opp.

Batt. 20^a
LUCIA

per

Opp.

Batt. 20^a
LUCIA

Ah!

Opp.

Pag. 252, batt. 3^a e seguenti
LUCIA

REGINA PACINI

Example 4: Traditional ornaments for “Spargi d’amaro pianto” [from Luigi Ricci, *Variazioni—Cadenze—Tradizioni Per Canto*]

likewise there to remind us of social reality—the base from which Lucia has broken free into her world of unfettered imagination. Yet the conclusion of the Mad Scene itself suggests that Lucia (unlike the nymph) has triumphed, for despite the chorus's desperate attempts to maneuver once again toward a C-minor cadence, it is Lucia's E^b major and her jubilant high e^b that prevail. To be sure, another whole scene follows this one, and it serves in part to insulate the Mad Scene. But that final scene, in which Edgardo commits suicide, can also be understood as evidence of Lucia's contagion. The frame itself has become contaminated, has gone mad.

I usually avoid using biographical information to substantiate points—and, indeed, I think that the argument that Lucia's disorder is a sexual one can be supported well enough on the basis of social context, changes from the literary model, and (most important) the details of the musical score. However, I cannot resist bringing to bear what seems to be extremely important evidence that the composer himself associated madness with sexual excess. When Donizetti was mad and dying of syphilis in a Parisian asylum, one of the principal symptoms of his degenerating state (to the great consternation of his friends and keepers) was uncontrollable sexual frenzy. Special care was taken to ensure that he—a celebrity—would not be subjected in this condition to the gaze of curiosity seekers, who were still frequenting madhouses for entertainment.²⁴ To be sure, if Donizetti had died in excellent mental health at age ninety, I would still argue that this composition works on the basis of the madness/sexuality nexus. That his demise was so like that of some of his heroines, however, is uncanny. He apparently knew whereof he composed.

Yet I would not want to read Lucia solely as an instance of feminine dementia, despite the obvious links between her plight and notions linking madness and sexual excess. For in her revolt against patriarchal oppression and musical conformity, she is also a romantic hero whose energy defies stifling social convention. This would help to account for why the class issues of Scott's novel have been so thoroughly transformed in the opera. Lucia's resistance to social oppression can be celebrated not only as a woman's refusal of an arranged marriage, but also as a refusal of any sort of imposed social contract. Her tragic end potentially enflames the resentment of injustices of all kinds, yet the fact that her dilemma seems domestic rather than overtly political meant that it could (and did) pass through the censors. To have enacted a similar rebellion with a male figure at this time would have been risky. And, because she is mad, Lucia cannot, of course, be held responsible for deliberate resistance. Thus she can be victim and heroine simultaneously—in short, a martyr.²⁵

Elaine Showalter has argued that

to watch these operas in performance is to realize that even the murderous madwomen do not escape male domination; they escape one specific, intolerable exercise of women's wrongs by assuming an idealized, poetic form of pure femininity as the male culture had construed it: absolutely irrational, absolutely emotional, and, once the single act is accomplished, absolutely passive.²⁶

Yet Flaubert had Emma Bovary respond to a performance of *Lucia* by exclaiming, "Oh why had not she, like this woman, resisted?"²⁷ The gender politics of this opera are so heavily mediated by musical factors and subtexts of Romantic rebellion that it is finally very difficult (as well as undesirable) to arrive at a definitive reading. But however one chooses to read it, *Lucia di Lammermoor* is far too interesting and complex to dismiss as either a mere crowd pleaser or an unambiguous instance of misogyny. Whatever it means, that high e^b that triumphs at the end of the Mad Scene does not spell passivity or simple bravura.

4

The nineteenth century saw great turmoil in the area of sexual politics. Women increasingly demanded the right to education or admission into professions, were less and less willing to accept passively the prescribed role of "angel in the house" as their inevitable fate.²⁸ Historians such as Peter Gay have traced how female ambition and resistance were understood as pathological by threatened male culture, which retaliated by producing in art a large number of monstrous, vampirish women preying on poor helpless males.²⁹ By far the most sensational and celebrated of these castrating, bloodsucking harpies is Salome—Oscar Wilde's creation who proliferated like a hydra in paintings, art nouveau illustrations, and, of course, Strauss's opera.

Sander Gilman has written brilliantly on the various layers of homophilia/homophobia, anti-Semitism, and misogyny present in this opera.³⁰ Thus I will focus only on the musical delineation of Salome's transgressions and her eventual recontainment. Salome's madness is explicitly linked to excessive female sexuality. One review of the premiere called it "a medical theme in Biblical clothing," which Gilman glosses as probably meaning "gynecological."³¹ Salome's insatiable sexual hunger finally demands not only the mutilation of John the Baptist, but also an autoerotic

scene in which she manages to attain climax with the aid of his dismembered head.

Musically, Salome's pathology is signaled by her slippery chromatic deviations from normative diatonicism. In this she is a sister to figures such as Isolde and Carmen, who likewise play maddeningly in the cracks of tonal social convention.³² Of course Isolde is not presented as a dominatrix in quite the way the others are. Still, she does befuddle and seduce poor Tristan by means of her chromatic excess, and she too (like Lucia and Salome) achieves transcendence in the absence of the phallus. Isolde gets the last word in this most unconventional opera: *Tristan und Isolde* has a feminine ending of sorts. Yet she does not survive the frame, for after her climax she expires through a spectacular effusion of irrational bliss.³³

However, not all offending women in opera die off by themselves, and the framing device that controls the proceedings must sometimes be imposed forcibly for purposes of closure. The increasingly paranoid and masochistic cultural agendas of the late nineteenth century tend to give full rein to the perceived horror of female sexual power, flirting with the possibility that it cannot be stopped except by exerting closure violently from without. Many pieces are constructed to simulate lion-taming acts in which the lion mauls the trainer. The fun of seeing the show is knowing in advance that the lion is dangerous, though presumably under control. To witness the beast break through the first line of defense adds the thrill of actual risk—and also the necessity of martial recontainment. Carmen and Lulu are killed like vampires with stakes through the heart. The triumphant, C#-major conclusion of Salome's "Liebestod" is greeted by Herod's command that his guards crush her to death beneath their C-minor shields. The perverse, overripe sexuality of her transport is interrupted by the arbitrary bludgeoning that brings the piece to an abrupt halt. The monstrosity of Salome's sexual and chromatic transgressions is such that extreme violence seems justified—even demanded—for the sake of social and tonal order.

However, that final gesture indicates that the frame itself has lost its hegemonic authority, that the treacherous chromaticism to which European composers and audiences had increasingly become addicted could no longer be rationally contained. Indeed, from the very first line of the opera, we are made aware that Salome's sexual presence has already contaminated the entire court. The tonal fabric festers with chromatic slippage—the half-step between major and minor mediant flickers as an erotic fetish; occasionally a line coalesces into a moment of diatonic desire, only to sink back into the flood of diffused perversity. Jokanaan tries bravely to assert untainted C-major stability in several of his pronouncements, but even his music is driven to frenzy by his environment.

Thus as satisfying as the final purging of Salome's chromaticism might be on some levels, Herod's (and Strauss's) appeal to social convention for narrative and tonal closure can be seen as an act of extraordinary hypocrisy: after Salome's lurid excesses have been exploited throughout the piece, the bid suddenly to frame her as diseased and radically Other is a bit disingenuous. This imposition of closure also represents stylistic cowardice at a time when resistance against convention was most highly prized among artists. Thus resorting to such violent solutions—to last-minute repudiations of erotic indulgence—signals weakness and desperation. Yet not to impose closure—however “inorganic”—was apparently to risk everything. The chromatic excess of the madwoman became even more intense with Elektra, and she finally escaped her would-be captors altogether in Schoenberg's *Erwartung*, where the secure frame of tonality has been murdered, where atonality reigns in supreme, unchallenged lunacy.³⁴

5

At this moment, a very interesting subtext of music since Monteverdi becomes explicit. If we review the portraits of famous madwomen in music, we find that the signs of their madness are usually among the favorite techniques of the avant-garde: strategies that for each style hover at the extremes, strategies that most successfully exceed the verbal component of dramatic music and that transgress conventions of “normal” procedure.³⁵ These same techniques are used without comment in our most complex, most intellectually virtuosic instrumental music. An ostinato underpins the heroic struggles of Bach's chaconne for solo violin, which enacts the same kinds of resistances, strains, and obsessive returns as Monteverdi's pathetic nymph. The excessive ornamentation, formal discontinuity, and virtuosic display that represent Lucia's deluded mind characterize the extravagant cadenzas of concertos. Here the increasingly crazed harpsichord solo of Bach's Brandenburg No. 5, or the acrobatics of Liszt come especially to mind.³⁶ And in the nineteenth-century symphony, Salome's chromatic daring is what distinguishes truly serious composition of the vanguard from mere cliché-ridden hack work.

In other words, the very qualities regarded as evidence of superior imagination—even of genius—in each period of music are, when enacted on stage, often projected onto madwomen. In explaining the musical appeal of the subject of madness, Donal Henahan states:

Even as late as Mozart's time the forms of music were so rigid that the only way the average composer could wriggle out of the

restraints even momentarily was to seize upon certain genre pieces such as the storm. A storm is not expected to follow strict logic, so the composer could break away for a moment and upset the furniture. The Mad Scene offered similar freedom, both formally and expressively.³⁷

In opera, the madwoman is given the music of greatest stylistic privilege, the music that seems to do what is most quintessentially *musical*, as opposed to verbal or conventional. She is a pretext for compositional misbehavior.

This says something very interesting and important about music as it is “framed” in Western culture. Roland Barthes has written that

the body passes into music without any relay but the signifier. This passage—this transgression—makes music a madness. . . . In relation to the writer, the composer is always mad (and the writer can never be so, for he is condemned to meaning).³⁸

In contrast to this position, I have always maintained in my work that music is a socially organized enterprise—is likewise “condemned to meaning.” Its structures, narratives, semiotic codes, and so on are developed, negotiated, resisted, transmitted, or transformed within a completely social arena. There are social strictures at any given moment that attempt to impose propriety over this scary stuff, whether through Renaissance rules of voice-leading, Rameau’s codification of diatonic tonality, or narrative principles of sonata procedure. Yet ever since Glarean praised Josquin for disregarding the rules, artists have been socially encouraged to violate the regulations that would reduce music to mere words and dead forms. This vital dialectic between what Jacques Attali calls order and noise has given rise to all of the music we care about, and it is always socially grounded.³⁹

But to the very great extent that Western culture is logocentric, music itself always gives the impression of being in excess, of being mad—and thus Barthes’s statement. Moreover, musicians themselves have often tried to have it both ways: to indulge extravagantly in whatever is regarded as lying beyond the pale (as the heavy metal band Iron Maiden puts it, to “play with madness”), but asserting all the while that everything they do is actually ordered, rational, under control. And during the nineteenth century, this paradoxical blend of madness with order, of “feminine” excess with structural rigor came to be known and celebrated as “genius.”

Christine Battersby’s *Gender and Genius* painstakingly traces the evolution of the concept of “genius” and its attendant ideologies from its beginnings in antiquity (when the word was associated chiefly with male procreativity) to the present (when whatever it is, is supposed to be “scientifically” measurable through IQ tests). As she demonstrates, the word came to be

applied in the Romantic era to artists, who were thought to be different from other men precisely because they incorporated “feminine” imagination with “masculine” reason, madness with craft.⁴⁰ Battersby warns that this appropriation by males of “the feminine” did not have the result of exalting actual women or granting them a role in cultural production. In the words of Otto Weininger:

The man of genius possesses, like everything else, the complete female in himself; but woman herself is only a part of the Universe, and the part never can be the whole; femaleness can never include genius.⁴¹

Yet although women were explicitly excluded from the category of “genius,” images of feminine receptivity, organic generation, and childbirth nonetheless abound in nineteenth-century accounts of the creative process. Likewise, characterizations of Romantic artists as holy madmen were commonplace.

Associations of femininity and/or mental imbalance with creative genius occur in writings about music as well. Heinrich Schenker’s theories concerning genius, for instance, are thoroughly informed by the formulations of Schopenhauer and others, and he often describes creativity in terms of divine insemination, of feminine passivity and gestation on the part of the artist rather than conscious intention.⁴² And Jeffrey Kallberg, in his study of the nineteenth-century critical association of femininity with the genre of the nocturne, located the following extraordinary statement: “The poetic side of men of genius is feminine, and in Chopin the feminine note was over emphasized—at times it was almost hysterical—particularly in these nocturnes.”⁴³

As this last quotation betrays, the contradictions inherent in the social framing of the composer-genius as androgynous mad(wo)man became ever more stressful over the course of the nineteenth century. The battle between what were understood as the mad feminine side and the rational masculine component was played out stylistically in massive assaults on “normative” procedures, until very little remained to attack. What I am describing is a network of uncomfortably slippery metaphors; but, slippery or not, these are the metaphors that both nourished the transgressions of the *fin de siècle* avant-garde and also helped to precipitate its unparalleled moment of crisis. For the dilemma confronting musical syntax in the early years of this century was not just an intellectual or formal problem: it was inextricably tangled up with anxieties over sexual identity and gendered distinctions between reason and madness.

We have seen how arbitrary the final frame of *Salome* seems, given the unrelenting resistance to tonality enacted for the full duration of the opera. The fantasy played out in *Erwartung* (1909) is that the contagion of chromaticism is ultimately fatal, that the monstrosity that had gradually been unleashed within musical syntax can no longer be arrested. The rationality of tonal closure that had always come like Dudley Doright to the rescue is revealed as arbitrary, as unmotivated, as imposed from without.

Based on a dramatic monologue by Marie Pappenheim, *Erwartung* presents the ravings of a deranged woman as she searches anxiously for her lover. She eventually discovers his body, which she only gradually realizes is dead. She speaks lovingly to him at first, but then lashes out at him for his infidelities. It seems that she herself is probably his murderer and that we are witnessing her return to the scene of the crime, the memory of which she has repressed at the expense of her sanity.

In his musical setting of *Erwartung*, Schoenberg dispenses with tonal reference or goal orientation altogether, as the woman's paranoid utterances range from catatonic paralysis to chaotic flailing. The first sense of framing I have been tracing—the semiotic construction of the madwoman through discontinuity and extreme chromaticism—is still intact in *Erwartung*; but the protective frame—the masculine presence that had always guaranteed the security of rationality within the music itself—is absent, ostensibly murdered by our madwoman. If the nineteenth century had been enacting a musical game of “chicken” in which ever greater risks were run before pulling back to safety, Schoenberg here careens right over the edge. The bloody tide of insubordinate women so dreaded by European males early in this century here appears to overwhelm the social order completely.⁴⁴

6

Women in the real world who were diagnosed as mad at the end of the nineteenth century were turned over to a new group of professionals called analysts, whose business it was to detect the logic hidden behind aberrant behaviors. The extreme transgressions of early twentieth-century music similarly called forth a new breed of music professional, also known as analysts.⁴⁵ There had, of course, been instances of music criticism before this time: musicians such as Glarean or Schumann had written essays explaining what was of value, what was effective, what was unusual in pieces of music. But the new analysts were interested not so much in celebrating the idiosyncracies of individual pieces as in demonstrating that moments of apparent madness are, in fact, ultrarational. Indeed, analysts tend to flock precisely to those passages that most flaunt their excessiveness.

Heinrich Schenker, one of our fathers of analysis, was concerned with finding a method for objectively distinguishing manifestations of *responsible* excess from pieces that were genuinely deviant, for early modernism had demonstrated to him that some forms of chromaticism were in fact deadly. His graphs are at their most obsessive when dealing with a moment in a beloved piece that seems to defy rational explanation, and he succeeds when he can reduce the offending passage back to diatonic normality or (in the case of his redemptive graphs of Chopin's nocturnes) to structural virility.⁴⁶ He delivers the Good Housekeeping seal to those pieces that were just joshing, that deep down inside were rigorously ordered, and the Surgeon General's warning for those such as Wagner or Mahler that are truly bad for your health.

Arnold Schoenberg's route to analysis was considerably more ambivalent, for he was not only a theorist: he also aspired to play the role of the transgressor par excellence. Much of his ambivalence is readily apparent in his 1911 treatise, *Theory of Harmony*, in which he repeatedly asserts his desire to escape the strictures of tonality. What Schenker continued to hold as sacrosanct—rational tonal procedure, dissonance regulation, and laws of necessary closure—Schoenberg perceived as oppressive conventions, rather than immutable or natural. Yet throughout his treatise, Schoenberg also reveals how terrifying it was to identify himself with those forces that had traditionally served to destabilize tonal certainty—dissonance, chromaticism, excess—but which were inevitably quashed in accordance with narrative propriety. In effect, he affiliates himself with what had always been defined as the “feminine” side of all the binary oppositions governing tonal procedures and narratives.

Repeatedly in *Theory of Harmony* Schoenberg lays bare the inherited binarisms he detests. But he is careful in his highly troped language to avoid the obvious and conventional mapping of these musical pairs onto gender. He chooses rather to define the oppositions in accordance with images of resistance against oppressive political authority. And from that vantage point, Schoenberg seems safe, for he is aligning himself with the properly masculine business of revolution:

Of course the idea of closing with the same tone one began with has something decidedly right about it and also gives a certain impression of being natural. Since indeed all the simple relationships derive from the simplest natural aspects of the tone (from its first overtones), the fundamental tone then has a certain sovereignty over the structures emanating from it just because the most important components of these structures are, so to speak, its satraps, its advocates, since they derive from its

splendor: Napoleon, who installs his relatives and friends on the European thrones. I think that would indeed be enough to explain why one is justified in obeying the will of the fundamental tone: gratefulness to the progenitor and dependence on him. He is Alpha and Omega. That is morally right, so long as no other moral code obtains. Yet, another can indeed prevail! If, for example, the supreme lord becomes weak and his subjects strong, a situation that arises only too often in harmony. Just as it is hardly inevitable that a conqueror will endure as dictator, so it is no more inevitable that tonality must take its direction from the fundamental tone, even if it is derived from that tone. Quite the contrary. The struggle between two such fundamentals for sovereignty has something indeed very attractive about it, as numerous examples of modern harmony show. And even if here the struggle does end with the victory of the one fundamental, that victory is still not inevitable. . . . The ceremonious way in which the close of a composition used to be tied up, bolted, nailed down, and sealed would be too ponderous for the present-day sense of form to use it. This precondition, that everything emanates from the [fundamental] tone, can just as well be suspended, since one is constantly reminded of it anyway by every tone. And whenever we let our imagination roam, we certainly do not keep ourselves strictly within boundaries, even though our bodies do have them.

Many examples give evidence that nothing is lost from the impression of completeness if the tonality is merely hinted at, yes, even if it is erased. And—without saying that the ultra-modern music is really atonal: for it may be perhaps that we simply do not yet know how to explain the tonality, or something corresponding to tonality, in modern music—the analogy with infinity could hardly be made more vivid than through a fluctuating, so to speak, unending harmony, through a harmony that does not always carry with it certificate of domicile and passport carefully indicating country of origin and destination.⁴⁷

Here we have a thorough remapping of the conventional tonal narrative, which is now interpreted as arbitrary and authoritarian. Those moments he wishes to preserve, the “vagrants” who travel without passports, are precisely those large-scale dissonances—“feminine” keys, themes, and chromaticism—that motivate the narrative of tonality and sonata. It is the frame itself that had always seemed to guarantee security (“tied up, bolted, nailed down, and sealed”) that is now unmasked as the enemy—as the musical incarnation of what Althusser would call an Ideological State Apparatus.

Schoenberg does not always write of those transgressive moments in strictly revolutionary tropes. A kind of sexual license—the right to indulge in excess, to play out forbidden desires—likewise is at stake:

Thus it can also be imagined how the chance occurrence of a dissonant passing tone, once established by the notation, after its excitement had been experienced, called forth the desire for less accidental, less arbitrary repetition; how the desire to experience this excitement more often led to taking possession of the methods that brought it about. But, should the excitement of the forbidden lead to uninhibited indulgence, that essentially despicable compromise between morality and immoderate desire had to be drawn, that compromise which here consists in a looser conception of the prohibition as well as of that which is prohibited. Dissonance was accepted, but the door through which it was admitted was bolted whenever excess threatened. . . . Preparation and resolution are thus a pair of protective wrappers in which the dissonance is carefully packed so that it neither suffers nor inflicts damage. (48)

Despite his careful presentation of his agenda in political terms, these other tropes often break through to reveal other realms of experience fueling his battle. More important, these tropes are not limited to his theoretical writing—they also informed and helped to legitimate his experimental compositions. Schoenberg had argued that the only genre within which he could bring about his longed-for “suspended tonality” was opera, for symphonic forms depend on the restrictive conventions for purposes of coherence (370). In order to escape tonality’s narrative stranglehold and still make sense, he needed another organizing metaphor—one made explicit by the libretto and dramatic action.

And, not surprisingly, his metaphorical surrogate in *Erwartung*—the piece in which he committed his supreme violation, his break with tonality—was once again the figure of the madwoman. The political revolutionary of *Theory of Harmony*, who boldly demands sexual license, is nowhere to be seen. Schoenberg’s celebrated “emancipation of the dissonance” is self-consciously presented as the liberation of the female lunatic, of the feminine moment of desire and dread that had driven most nineteenth-century narratives. If he managed in his theoretical writings to construct transgression as a heroic deed, his artistic enactment of that transgression in *Erwartung* betrays his inability to dismiss or transcend traditional binarisms and their gendered associations. The repressed returns with a vengeance. For the principal affect of the composition bears little resemblance to the joy of a hero who has just succeeded in overthrowing a dictator; on

the contrary, it conveys a mixture of guilt, confusion, and alarm. Stripped of the possibility of resolution or the intervention of hegemonic control, desire in its rawest, most murderous form runs rampant through the piece. Schoenberg's fantasy of emancipation is realized on the stage as a paranoid nightmare.

As a rebel seeking to justify his unparalleled violations of established order, Schoenberg had debated in *Theory of Harmony* whether or not to invent a new system to account for apparent improprieties, to convert them to logic. At one point he wrote: "If the laws issuing from tonality, the laws of the autocrat, were rescinded, its erstwhile domain would not thereby necessarily sink into chaos but would automatically, following its own dictates, make for itself laws consistent with its nature" (152). His thought in 1911 was so opposed to systems per se that he was reluctant to posit a new one. However, when he revised this passage in the 1922 edition, he added the following phrases: "that anarchy would not ensue, but rather a new form of order. I may add, however, that this new order will soon begin to resemble the old, until it becomes completely equivalent to the old; for order is as much God's will as change, which persistently leads back to order" (152).

To have enacted his fantasy of uninhibited transgressions of *Erwartung* seems to have been unnerving, and consequently Schoenberg soon diverted his energies from anarchy to the analytic search for hidden order. No less an authority than God seemed to demand that he abide by some kind of regulation, yet he could not turn back to what he had himself revealed as the lie of tonality. After this period of anarchy, Schoenberg wrote little music until he emerged with a systematic theory that permitted him to have it both ways: his technique of serialism succeeds in underwriting what sound like dissonant ravings with supreme rational control.⁴⁸ Or, as he put it in "Composition with Twelve Tones":

The desire for a conscious control of the new means and forms will arise in every artist's mind. . . . He must find, if not laws or rules, at least ways to justify the dissonant character of these harmonies and their successions. After many unsuccessful attempts during a period of approximately twelve years, I laid the foundations for a new procedure in musical construction which seemed fitted to replace those structural differentiations provided formerly by tonal harmonies. I called this procedure *Method of Composing with Twelve Tones Which are Related Only with One Another*.⁴⁹

From this moment on, the rational frame guaranteeing social order comes to permeate the dissonant discourse of the madwoman, and the chromati-

cism of feminine sexual excess no longer poses a threat: henceforth it is appropriated—even generated—by the highest achievement of intellectual discipline. One can now experience that frenzy, that illicit desire, without either the panic that attends chaos or the traditional demand for narrative closure, because the composer and analyst can prove that every pitch is always already contained. In contrast to the tortured prose of *Theory of Harmony*, Schoenberg's explanations of serial theory are serene and orderly, as are his many accounts that demonstrate his essential continuity with (rather than violation against) tradition. And most analysts of serial music no longer acknowledge or even recognize the transgressive impulse that first gave rise to "atonal" and then twelve-tone practices.

But the period between Schenker's tonality and Schoenberg's serial music remains a repertory of great theoretical anxiety, for this is the music (composed in deliberate opposition to the old system and without the security of a new one) that might genuinely be crazy.⁵⁰ As music theorists, we are so compelled to find evidence of order in all these traumatic pieces that we sometimes resort to the corrective surgery of pitch-class amoebas—to drawing loops around groups of pitches in order to demonstrate that they are actually arranged rationally.⁵¹ Atonal compositions—like patients throughout most of psychiatric history—are usually silent during the process of analysis, for it is only apparently in the absence of those coils of seductive or demented sound that order can be detected and objectively charted.⁵²

That analysis is an indispensable ingredient in our study of music is beyond question. Yet we need to supplement bare formal analysis with information concerning the historical conditions that give rise both to particular repertories and also to the metatheoretical discourses that serve to frame and explain away the "problematic" aspects of music. If—as is clearly the case—a fascination with madness and transgressive behavior motivates much of the music we care about, then surely we need to take that into account before we jump in with our graphs. Otherwise, what precisely are we doing? Whose rationality are we attempting to establish, and why?

7

It is important to keep in mind that the analytical devices for taming the monstrous in music are brought to bear not on actual madwomen—or even on the products of madwomen. They are marshaled to ward off the boogeymen constructed by the same people who also construct the frames and then stand in horror of their own inventions, rather like Dr. Frankenstein and his creature. For the nymph, Lucia, Salome, and the antiheroine of *Erwartung*

are first and foremost male fantasies of transgression dressed up as women. Real women—mad or otherwise—do not enter into this picture at all. We sit on the sidelines and watch as mainstream culture concocts such figures, then envies, desires, fears, and finally demolishes and/or analyzes them. This process might be a rather amusing spectacle in its own right, if such travesties were not taken so often to reveal how women really are. In French the word *folle* means both madwoman and drag queen. And so far, we have only been dealing with the latter. Thus I want to conclude by considering a very different sort of example.

In the course of the nineteenth century, female novelists seized the power of self-representation that had traditionally been denied them. And as Gilbert and Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic* demonstrates, many of them reappropriated for their own uses the image of the madwoman for expressly political purposes.⁵³ For a variety of reasons, there have been few women in music in comparable positions until very recently. There are no nineteenth-century musical equivalents of Gilbert and Gubar's madwomen, for whom both the semiotic constructions and the narrative frames were designed by feminists.

But there is at present a woman composer who produces extraordinary simulations of feminine rage. Diamanda Galas emerged within the post-modern performance art scene of the seventies, and like other performance artists she enacts her pieces upon her own body.⁵⁴ This is politically very different from the tradition of male composers projecting their own fantasies of transgression as well as their own fears onto women characters and performers. Galas is not interested in the narrative of raising the specter of the monstrous, flirting with madness, and then reimposing control—the narrative in which the double discourse of violation and protection are at stake. Rather, she enacts the rage of the madwoman for purposes of protesting genuine atrocities: the treatment of victims of the Greek junta, attitudes toward victims of AIDS.⁵⁵ Her simulations are not peep shows.

This does not mean that she enacts some essence of femininity or of insanity. On the contrary, she identifies herself as a virtuoso of extended vocal techniques and as a composer. Galas has even published accounts of her compositional processes in *Perspectives of New Music*.⁵⁶ Her pieces are constructed from the ululation of traditional Mediterranean keening, and from the kinds of whispers, shrieks, and moans one somehow recognizes as potentially human but that have always been represented for our genteel aesthetic consumption through Lucia's coloratura or Salome's chromaticism.

For instance, in "Free among the Dead," her setting of Psalm 88 from the AIDS trilogy, the parameters most responsible for the power of her music are those most resistant to traditional forms of analysis: ear-splitting vol-

ume, a broad spectrum of bizarre timbres, the semiotics of extreme anguish, and a structure that builds intensity through sheer repetition—unlike the carefully modulated, ever-changing responses to the ostinato by Monteverdi's nymph. Or when she sings "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot" entirely in the range above the staff, she applies to the familiar spiritual the signs of crazed virtuosity usually associated with figures such as the Queen of the Night or Lucia. She thereby converts it into a searing protest song, even as she also comments on the conventional link between the coloratura range and madness. If one were to transcribe such pieces onto paper, the scores might look fairly controllable, for the sources of her musical power—including the fact of its sheer noise—would thereby be silenced. (The pitch relationships of "Sweet Chariot," for instance, would remain identical to those of the standard tune.) But paper is not her medium, and producing esoteric structural correspondences is not her aim.

What Galas does is undeniably risky, given the tendency for women in Western culture always to be understood as excessive, sexually threatening, mad. She can be read as simply reaffirming the worst stereotypes available. But she can also be read as extremely courageous as she confronts these stereotypes head-on, appropriates them, and rechannels their violent energies in other directions. Her images enter into public circulation, challenging the premises of the prestigious male-constructed madwomen preserved within the musical canon and giving voice to what has always been represented as radically "Other."⁵⁷

Diamanda Galas's music reveals how very constructed the classic madwomen of music have been—how sanitized, how made to conform to various male cultural fantasies, and finally how framable. As she seizes the signs of dementia in order to give voice to political outrage, she defies and dispenses with the conventional framing devices that have aestheticized previous portrayals of women and madness. She thereby heralds a new moment in the history of musical representation.