Speaking and Sighing: Bellini's *canto declamato* and the Poetics of Restraint

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The critics were confused. "We do not really know whether it should be called sung declamation or declamatory singing," one reviewer for *L'eco*, an Italian journal devoted to the arts, wrote in 1829. "The goal of this method seems to be to reunite the force of declamation with the gentleness of singing . . . "[1] Vincenzo Bellini's two successes of the late 1820s—*Il pirata* in 1827 and *La straniera* in 1829—had attracted a great deal of attention in the Italian press, and what drew the most comment was his novel approach to melody. Stripping away ornament to tie melody closely to the rhythms of the spoken word seemed a radical move to audiences who had been taking pleasure in Rossini's florid and showy style for the last two decades. At its starkest, Bellini's *canto declamato*, as it came to be known, paired relentlessly syllabic text-setting with a preference for repeated notes. The new style appeared both in passages of free arioso and within the lyrical sections of numbers, as in these two excerpts from *La straniera* (examples 1a and 1b).[2]

Despite the mixed response from Bellini's contemporaries, modern scholars have tended to understand these melodic reforms in wholly positive terms. Trimming down musical utterance into something lean and spare, they have argued, shows an admirable concern with the needs of drama over and above those of mere vocal athleticism.[3] Nineteenth-century critics also tended to understand Bellini's *canto declamato* as a renunciation of excess. Detractors and supporters alike labeled the new style "filosofico," linking it to the burgeoning Romantic movement in the literary arts.[4] Even hard-to-please German critics praised Bellini's reforms, and his Italian supporters lauded *canto declamato* as a kind of moral antidote to Rossini; music more closely allied to and grounded in the text, they maintained, stimulated thought and spoke to the heart rather than speaking only to the senses.[5] Not everyone, however, was convinced of the merit of the new method. *L'eco*'s anonymous reviewer warned, in subtly gendered language, that declamatory "force" could overpower melodic "gentleness" and that "confusing declamation with singing" could result in "monotony, slowness, fragments . . . and a lack of motives that attract or remain in the ear."[6]

In the midst of this flurry of comment prompted by Bellini's experiments, however, opera critic Carlo Ritorni had a different axe to grind. One of Bellini's most vocal supporters, Ritorni was the author of a well-known

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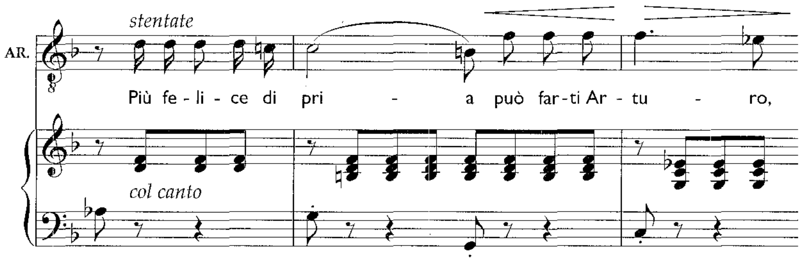
Example 1a: *La straniera*, Act I (Arturo's arioso).



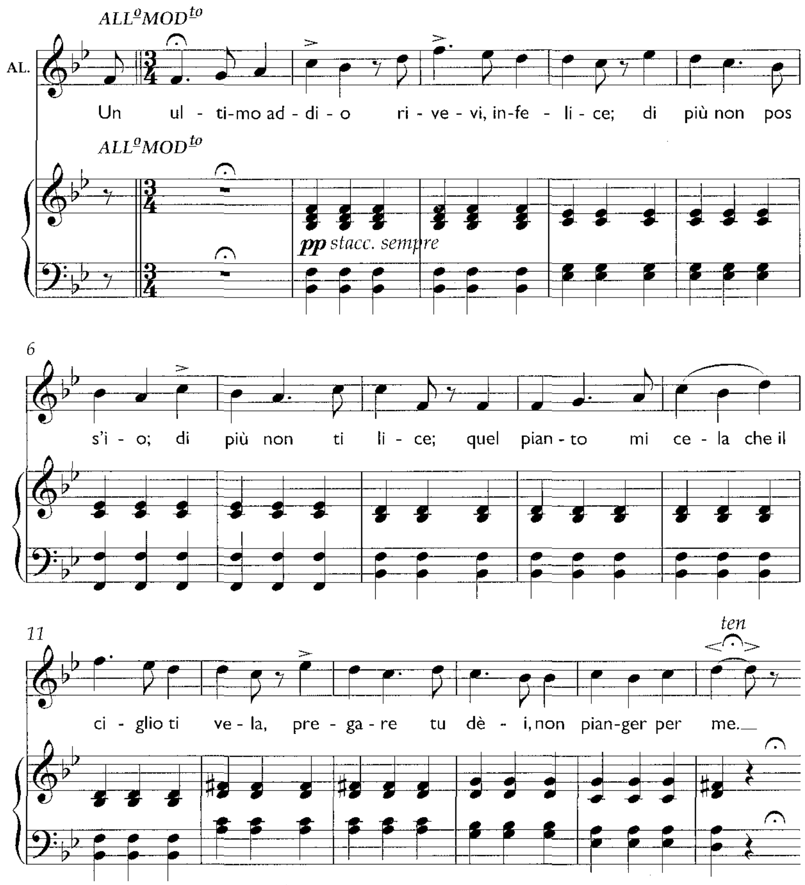
manifesto on libretto construction and operatic dramaturgy; it was not unusual to read his signed opinion pieces on musical matters in the pages of this very same journal.[7] But this time, Ritorni's screed in *L'eco* had nothing to do with opera. He was upset about a new trend in women's fashion: the return of the tightly-laced corset. Why, he wondered, were women rushing to adopt a look that was in his words, "ugly," "unnatural and dangerous"?[8] Ritorni's lengthy complaint begins with a clinical-sounding list of symptoms that he argues are attributable to corsets:

> In the head: headaches, vertigo, tendency to faint, aching eyes, pain and tinnitus of the ears, nosebleeds. In the chest: . . . dislocation of bones, . . . painful breathing, spitting of blood, consumption, alterations in circulation, heart palpitations . . . In the abdomen: loss of appetite, nausea, bleeding, bad digestion . . . hardening of the liver . . . Not to mention hypochondria, hysteria, and a quantity of maladies particular to women, which it would be superfluous to list here.[9]

It seems odd that an advocate of Bellini's new "filosofico" style, and one whose publications focus on matters of versification, declamation, and the history of musical drama, should expend so many words on such minute and messy details of female physiology. From a distance of nearly two centuries, Ritorni's gruesome list may seem no more than evidence of a prurient interest in women's underwear and a strange appendix to his public persona of cultural critic and man of letters.

But Ritorni's puzzling preoccupation with corsets was not merely extracurricular. The year 1829 saw intense journalistic debate about corsets and their effect on the female form, and the rhetoric of these debates, with their concerns about expression, flexibility, and naturalness, echoed accounts of Bellini's new melodic style. Listening to Bellini's shaping of vocal utterance with this larger context in mind helps us to perceive how the articulation of Romantic aesthetics overlaps with the articulation of gender. While corsets famously expanded and amplified the repertory of feminine

Example 1b: *La straniera*, Act I, Duet (Arturo-Alaïde).


ALL^o MOD^to
AL.
Un ul - ti-mo ad - di - o ri - ve - vi, in-fe - li - ce; di più non pos
ALL^o MOD^to
pp stacc. sempre
6
s'i - o; di più non ti li - ce; quel pian - to mi ce - la che il
11
ten
ci - glio ti ve - la, pre - ga - re tu dè - i, non pian-ger per me.__

distress, Bellini's *canto declamato* channeled emotion in a new way, helping to redefine operatic expressivity along gendered lines. By considering Bellini's famous stylistic change in relation to other "styles," I suggest that strategic moments of restraint created the conditions for the emotional overflow we now associate with Romantic expression.

To illuminate the connections between physical, emotional, and melodic restraint, I will revisit an opera normally left out of narratives of Bellini's progress to Romanticism: *La sonnambula* (1831), whose sentimental plot would have been at home in the eighteenth century. In it, Bellini largely abandoned his resolutely sparse melodies of the late 1820s to embrace a more florid Rossinian idiom. Rather than smoothing over the anomaly of *La sonnambula* into a coherent story of musical progress, I hope to show that Bellini's return to a sentimental plot and ornamented vocal style sheds reflective light on his earlier "speech-based" experiments in *La straniera.*

Despite their differences, these two works share a curious preoccupation with the idea of restraint—a preoccupation shared, as Ritorni's critique of corsets suggests, by the culture at large. In the course of my discussion, I shall range widely, touching on Rousseau's theory of language, anti-sentimental diatribes in the Italian press, and debates concerning the most "natural" shape of the female body. I will also explore in detail two small Bellinian musical tics—the ubiquitous appoggiatura and a motive made up of four repeated notes—in an attempt to complicate the simple dichotomy scholars have tended to draw between singing and speaking, body and "philosophy."

The Trouble with Tears

Bellini's decision to abandon an ornamented vocal style in the late 1820s could be understood as part of an ongoing debate about the appropriate expression of emotion. If at the height of sentimental opera's popularity viewers reportedly wept openly at Paisiello's *Nina* and jumped out of their seats in a frenzy of sympathy, the 1820s witnessed a fairly widespread reaction against such effusions, and emotional outbursts (or the idea of them) were met with a more cynical coolness in criticism and fiction. Perhaps because of the continued success in Italy of novels and plays on sentimental themes, antagonism to excessive emotion was still strong long after the "age of sensibility" had waned.[10] Journalistic writing from the period exhibits a marked suspicion concerning the efficacy or even the desirability of tears in bringing about empathetic identification with sufferers. While many theater-goers no doubt still wept at moving performances, writers in prominent women's magazines and artistic journals gave vent to a kind of annoyed exhaustion with the pervasive and conventional uses of tears in the most mundane of situations.[11] Anne Vincent-Buffault has drawn attention to similar anti-sentimental opinion in post-Revolutionary France; writers there increasingly advocated critical distance from theatrical performances and mocked the overly credulous spectator (usually portrayed as either lower class or female) who wept at the cheapest theatrical trick (1991:227). The Italian strain of this debate, however, centered not primarily on the intersection of class and gender, but on the very issue at the heart of sentimental values: the efficacy of mimesis, the ability of shed tears to occasion sympathetic response and thus stimulate the moral sentiments of the listener, reader, or spectator.

Two contemporary opinion pieces that appeared in *Il corriere delle dame* discuss the role of tears in moving spectators to virtuous feeling, and both call into question the relationship between "real" sentiments and those provoked by art. The first, a rather straightforward moralistic tale, draws a comparison between two men. Eugenio, the narrator's friend, is "without a doubt the best man I know . . . a loving husband, indulgent father, good subject, excellent worker, poor and generous" and "had not in his life shed one tear over any tragedy or drama." The seemingly cold and rational Eugenio greets tragic stories with the phrase "what does it matter?"—but in daily life, he is a Christ-like paragon of sympathy and goodness, willing to give away "the bread from his own mouth."[12] Signor Tale, on the other hand, although he sheds copious tears over all the sentimental novels he can get his hands on and "sighs away the whole evening at all the tragedies and sentimental dramas that now clutter up our degraded stage," "never has pity for anyone, has never given anyone even one *scudo*, and has never walked a step or said a word for anyone."[13] In this account, sentimental literature and plays actually provoke false sentiment, misleading and perhaps even corrupting spectators by educating them not to real-life virtue but to selfish absorption in their own responses to fictional characters. The author ends by arguing that there should be a new name for such behavior: "sensibileria." In tacking on a suffix with derogatory associations, the author effectively mocks and dismisses the behavior of so-called "sensitive" men.[14]

The value this moralistic tale places on stoicism in the face of sentimental fiction suggests that restraint is a prerequisite for "true" sentiment and efficacious pity. Although such criticisms were rarely leveled at opera, the debate about the merits of sensibility does extend to matters of performance—in particular, to declamation. In the early 1820s, there appeared in Italy a series of reminiscences by the famous French actor François-Joseph Talma that laid out his theories of acting and declamation.[15] Talma's theories, influenced by Diderot, called for the actor to coldly observe the workings of sensibility in others while maintaining distance from the emotional effects he could produce.[16] That such suspicion of tears was prevalent is made clear even in accounts that argue for the continuing importance of sensibility in cultivating noble feeling. In a second article from *Il corriere*, the writer Ugo Foscolo, author of a novel known as the "Italian Werther," defended the display of sensibility, taking as his theme the role of tears in moving spectators when reading aloud. Foscolo, writing under the pseudonym Didimo Chierico, poignantly describes reading to an audience who can do nothing but laugh at his overly emotive style of recitation:[17]

> Every time that I used to read aloud some tragedy or some moving passage of history, poetry, or fiction in the presence of others, my eyes became inundated with tears and my voice trembled. I was hoping to encourage the same effect in my listener; but instead of tears my commotion often excited laughter. I withdrew in shame, not for them, but for myself, and I suspected weakness on my part rather than theirs . . . I even doubted the strength of my own intelligence, so much so that I forced myself from then on to jealously guard every word and action.[18]

Ridicule thus prompts Foscolo to adopt a kind of painful self-censorship. But in the process of educating himself to restraint, he comes across other "like-minded" men who are not afraid to indulge in emotional display; this leads him to attempt reading aloud one more time. Again mocked for his ready tears and trembling voice, Foscolo angrily concludes that restraint is futile and deadening. When he tries to maintain his composure, he is unable to sympathize with the plight of others: "I realized that exquisite sentiments are ridiculed by the world as . . . weakness," he says, and concludes that many "conceal their sensibility . . . led astray solely by the example of . . . those lower than themselves."[19] The regained conviction in the value of his susceptibility to tears, however, is not shared by others, and Foscolo retreats into isolation and self-control.

What Foscolo describes is actually a failure of mimesis: in this case, openly shed tears lead not to empathetic response, but to misunderstanding. Although Foscolo presents his audience as unfeeling—indeed, as somehow inhuman—there is perhaps another perspective hidden in their laughter: the idea that bodily indulgence in emotion and declamation are somehow at odds. For this audience, unrestrained weeping infects the speaking voice, placing the emotions of the reader on display and working against sympathetic engagement. The notion that a trembling, sighing voice interferes with the clear presentation of words ties Foscolo's audience to earlier critiques of Rossini, which often portrayed the composer as supremely indifferent to his texts in favor of vocal (or orchestral) excess.[20] In other words, both excessive feeling and sheer vocal exuberance run the risk of engaging only the body, not the moral sense. Copious tears are depicted as self-indulgent, solipsistic, and possibly even, in the case of Signor Tale, amoral.

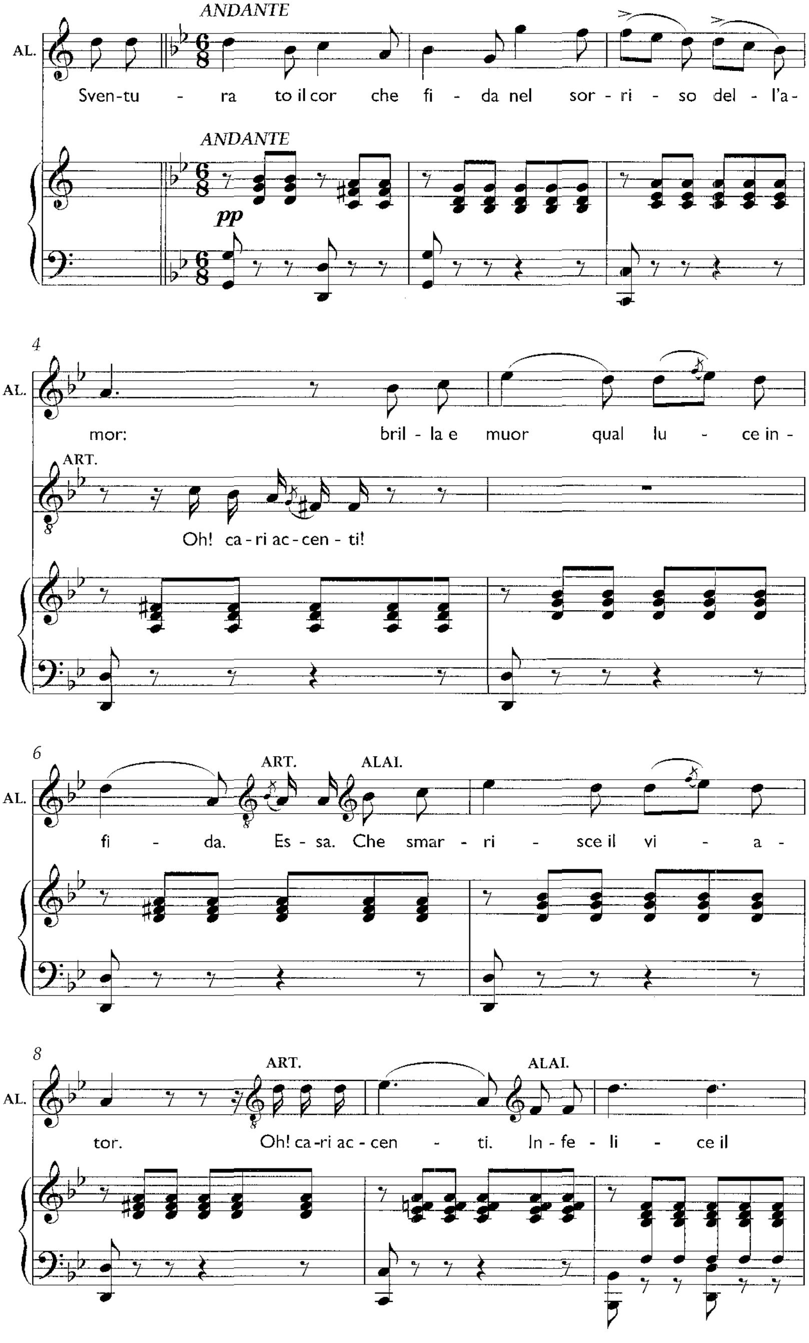
"Che cari accenti!" *La straniera* and the Appoggiatura

The stripped-down melodies of *La straniera* might appear at first glance to constitute another such critique of sentimental excess. But for audiences in 1829, Bellini's spare, unadorned style recalled that of composers such as Piccini and Paisiello, whose lyrical simplicity was praised by critics as natural and unaffected—the hallmarks of sentimental style. Given this heritage, it is logical that Bellini's much-praised "speech-like" style should be so saturated with the musical gesture famous for imitating sobs and sighs: the appoggiatura. This characteristic was more than audible to Bellini's listeners—Henry Chorley, writing in 1835, went so far as to complain that "there is nothing more fatiguing and mawkish, even in Spohr's incessant chromatics, than Bellini's abuse of appogiatura [sic]" (1926: 67). Considered the origin of all other musical ornaments, appoggiaturas were so commonplace that composers such as Mozart and Rossini often did not bother to notate them explicitly, especially in the case of what Will Crutchfield has described as "prosodic" appoggiaturas, which correspond to the stress pattern of words with feminine endings ("amore" or "calmatevi").[21] Bellini, however, tends to specify precisely where the singer should perform appoggiaturas, perhaps because at times his melodies on the page are bare of any other elaboration.

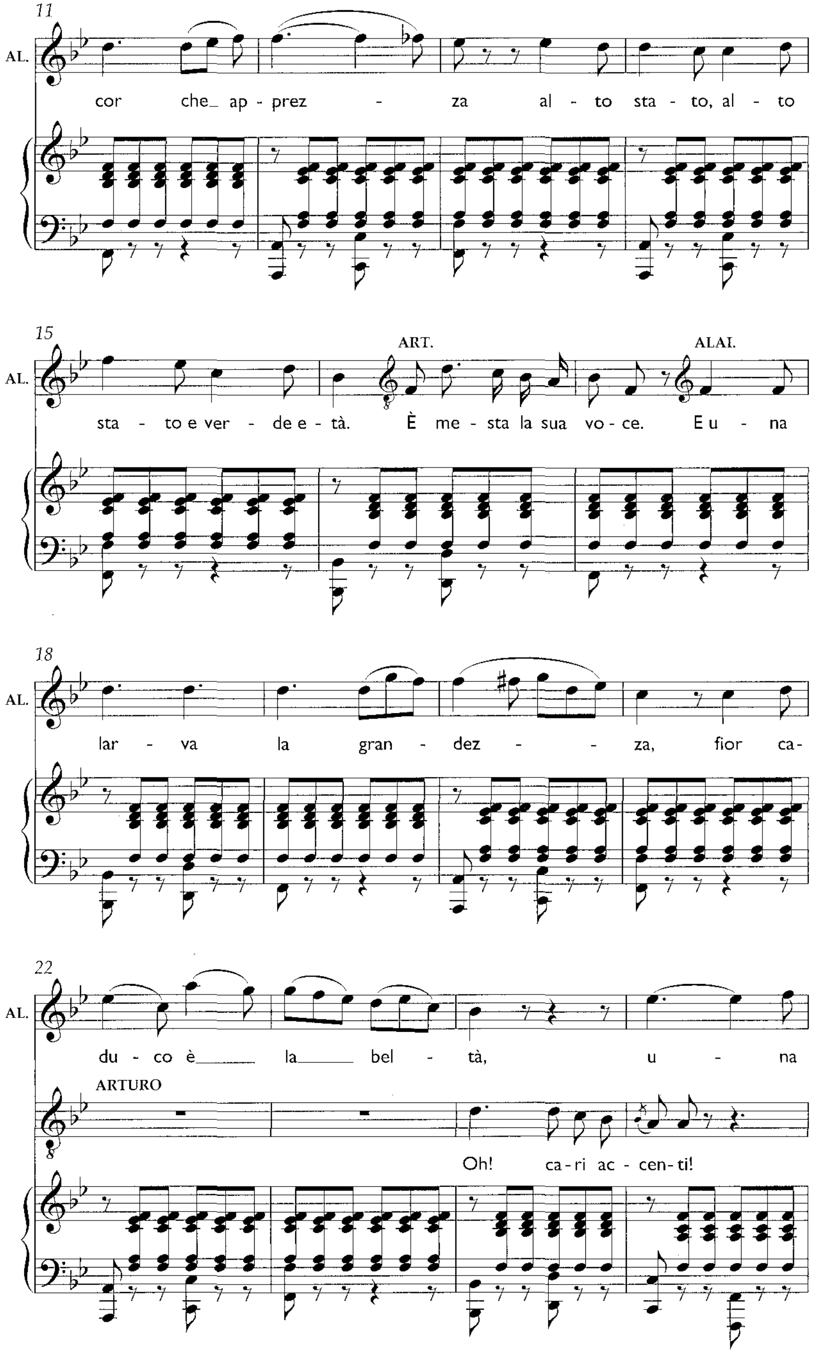
Scholars have thus tended to focus on the prevalence of the "prosodic" appoggiatura—called *l'accento* (the accent) by some contemporary theorists—in Bellinian *canto declamato* and its role in musically representing the rhythms of spoken language.[22] But it is worth remembering that in Italian, as in English, *accento* has more than one meaning: while it can signify stress or emphasis (and in poetic usage sometimes means "word"), *accento* can also indicate tone of voice. This latter meaning would have been particularly relevant in discussions of language, declamation, and music because it intersects with the definition Rousseau proposed in his *Essai sur l'origine des langues*.[23] Rousseau famously posited that music originated prior to rational discourse, arguing that the cry of passion lies at the root of all speech (1986:12). For Rousseau, "accent" is more than simply rhythmic stress: it is primarily the quality or intonation of the speaking voice. The rise and fall of tones (or pure vowel sounds) is the principal communicator of the passions; as men became more civilized and estranged from their earlier, natural selves, accent in language became less important and was replaced with articulation.[24] Orthographical accent marks in written script, Rousseau claimed, are definitive proof that true accent is dead, along with our ability to express emotion with the directness of natural man.

Italian theorists, following Rousseau, understood the appoggiatura as an imitation not only of the rhythms of contemporary speech, but also the original language of the passions—all those sighs and cries that came before words.[25] Certainly in Bellini's so-called philosophical operas, the appoggiatura is a slippery gesture, sliding effortlessly between declamatory emphasis and Rousseau's primal cry. The boundary between these two in *La straniera* is especially blurry, making it difficult to decide whether the saturation of melody with appoggiaturas points to body or discourse, whether we should hear such musical utterances as imitating speech or inarticulate cries. During Alaïde's melancholy opening romanza, for example, she is overheard by Arturo, who is so captivated by the sound of her voice that he is moved to exclamatory asides that illustrate Bellini's ability to exploit the appoggiatura's dual nature. At the end of Alaïde's first phrase, Arturo—in a happy conjunction of musical gesture and textual meaning—sings "Oh cari accenti!" in a brief phrase that terminates, not surprisingly, with an

Example 2: *La straniera*, Act I, Romanza (Alaïde). [Alaïde: Unfortunate is the heart that trusts/In the smile of love. / Arturo: (Oh! beloved tones!) / Alaïde: It flares and dies like the will o' the wisp / Arturo: (It is she) / Alaïde: ...which causes the traveler to lose his way. / Arturo: (Oh! beloved tones!) / Alaïde: Unhappy the heart that puts value/on lofty position and youth! / Arturo: (Her voice is sad.) / Alaïde: Greatness is an illusion/Beauty is a flower that fades /Arturo: (Oh! beloved tones!)]


ANDANTE
AL.
Sven-tu - ra to il cor che fi - da nel sor - ri - so del - l'a-
ANDANTE
pp
4
AL.
mor: bril - la e muor qual lu - ce in -
ART.
Oh! ca - ri ac - cen - ti!
6
AL.
ART.
ALAI.
fi - da. Es - sa. Che smar - ri - sce il vi - a -
8
AL.
ART.
ALAI.
tor. Oh! ca - ri ac - cen - ti. In - fe - li - ce il

Example 2 continued.

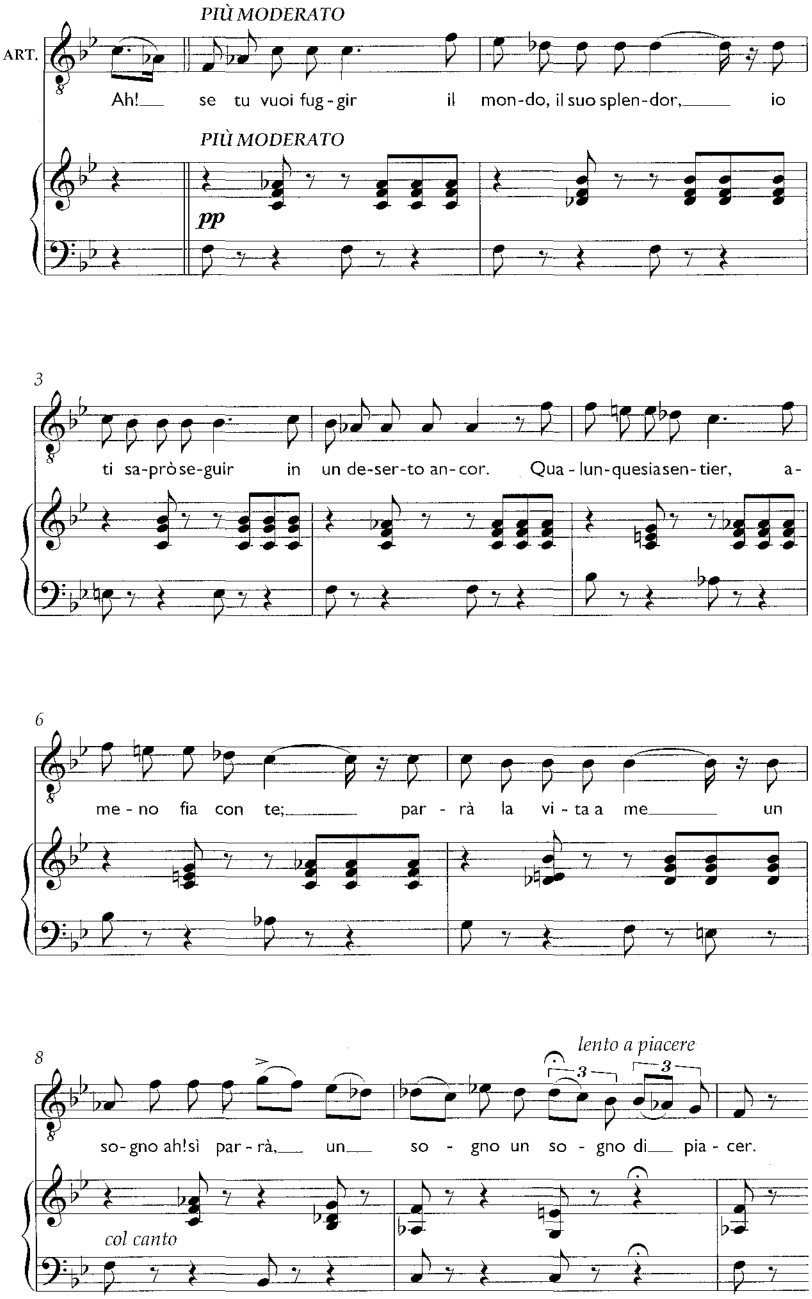

11
AL.
cor che_ ap - prez - za al - to sta - to, al - to
15
ART.
ALAI.
sta - to e ver - de e - tà. È me - sta la sua vo - ce. E u - na
18
lar - va la gran - dez - - za, fior ca-
22
du - co è___ la___ bel - tà, u - na
ARTURO
Oh! ca - ri ac - cen - ti!

appoggiatura. Initially, the short rhythms and the conventional placement of the musical *accento* on the stressed syllable ("ac*cen*ti") mark Arturo's asides as speech-like interventions, in contrast with Alaïde's simple legato melody. But as the romanza unfolds, Arturo's interruptions become more and more lyrical as he succumbs to Alaïde's song. The final result is much more than speech: Arturo's impassioned sighs in response to Alaïde's melody are less like the sober prosody of recitative than gusts of overwhelming delight at the sound of her voice. Even his text ("Oh, dear words/dear tones!") points to this double meaning—Arturo is transported both by what Alaide is saying and how she is saying it (example 2).

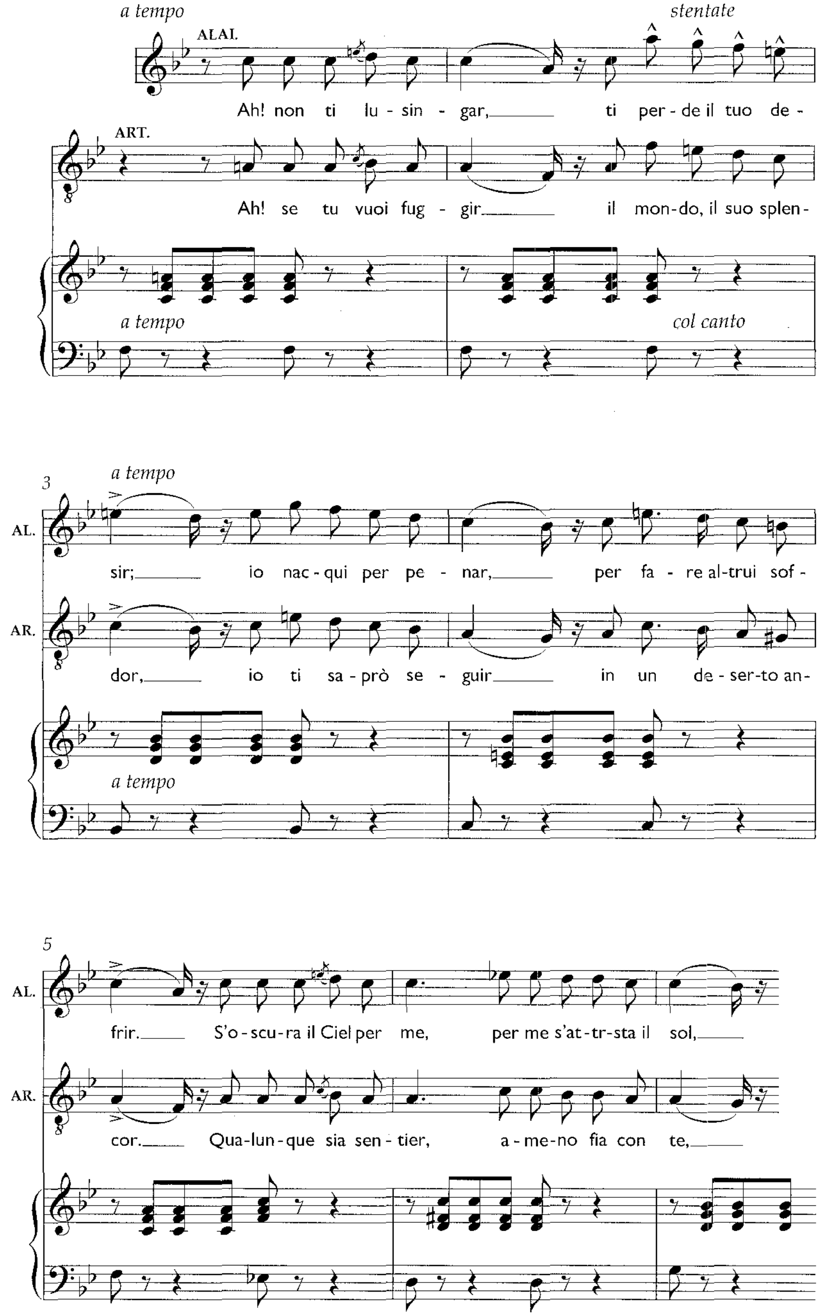
At times, Bellini's *canto declamato* even shows a certain disregard for the text. Although his contemporaries were struck by the composer's conscientious shifts of musical mood to correspond to changes in the words, his melodies just as often demonstrate an unswerving commitment to formal conventions. In the slow movement of the duet between Arturo and Alaïde, Bellini firmly abides by the custom of parallel opening statements for the two principals, despite the contrasting sentiments of each of their statements (example 3a). Arturo's words are passionate and persuasive while Alaïde's are melancholy and quelling; however, they both sing the same opening F-minor melody, a rather weary-sounding pattern of an appoggiatura followed by four reiterated notes. And when the two sing *a due* in the next section, Bellini not surprisingly gives them lush, major-mode music to signal their vocal and erotic union, in spite of the fact that the words themselves have not changed (example 3b). In this duet at least, Bellini's *canto declamato* is manifest not in a scrupulous attention to the semantic meaning of the text, but to the varied rhythms of the *settenario tronco* meter. Stresses normally come on the second, fourth, and sixth syllables in this verse form, but here Bellini alters the placement of musical stress to dramatic effect. In the F-minor section (example 3a), the appoggiatura is heard insistently on the second syllable of each poetic line, while in the major-mode section (example 3b), each phrase is end-weighted. The sigh now occurs on the last syllable of each line, which is stretched to accommodate two notes. The poetic meter is recast, this time in search of a different "accent."

Arturo's declamatory asides that sigh more than they speak, Alaïde's ecstatic major-mode cries when the text speaks of renunciation—I draw attention to these moments not just to show that Bellini's reputation as supremely attentive to poetry does not prevent him from ignoring his text at crucial moments. More importantly, such "lapses" remind us that *canto declamato* is more than a heightened attention to text. Rather, *canto declamato* is often a meaningful gesture—or topos—in itself, a musical representation of embodied, passionate utterance. The saturation of Bellini's melodic style with appoggiaturas is proof not simply of the composer's attention to the

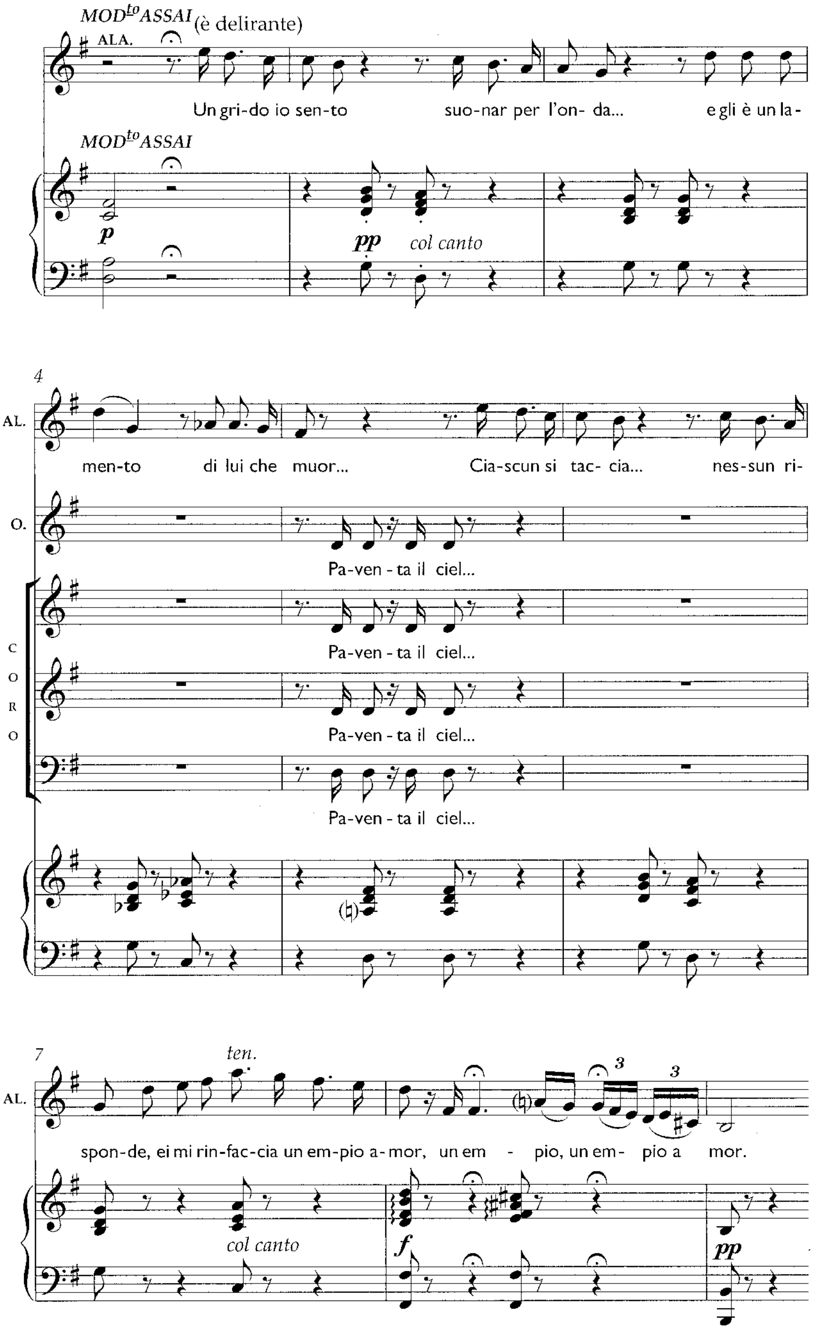
Example 3a: *La straniera,* Act I, Duet (Arturo-Alaïde)—slow movement. [Arturo: If you wish to flee/The world and its splendor/I shall follow you/Even into a desert./Whatever the nature of the path/It would be pleasant with you;/Life will seem to me/A dream of pleasure.]


PIÙ MODERATO
ART.
Ah! se tu vuoi fug-gir il mon-do, il suo splen-dor, io
PIÙ MODERATO
pp
3
ti sa-prò se-guir in un de-ser-to an-cor. Qua-lun-que sia sen-tier, a-
6
me-no fia con te; par-rà la vi-ta a me un
8
lento a piacere
so-gno ah! sì par-rà, un so-gno un so-gno di pia-cer.
col canto

Example 3b: *La straniera*, Act I, Duet—Arturo and Alaïde together. [Alaïde: Ah! do not deceive yourself!/Your wish will be your undoing./I was born to suffer/And to make others suffer with me/The heavens grow dark because of me/The sun grows sad . . . Arturo: If you wish to flee/The world and its splendor/I shall follow you/Even into a desert./Whatever the nature of the path/It would be pleasant with you . . .]


a tempo
stentate
ALAI.
Ah! non ti lu - sin - gar, ti per - de il tuo de -
ART.
Ah! se tu vuoi fug - gir il mon-do, il suo splen -
a tempo
col canto
3
a tempo
AL.
sir; io nac - qui per pe - nar, per fa - re al-trui sof -
AR.
dor, io ti sa - prò se - guir in un de - ser-to an-
a tempo
5
AL.
frir. S'o - scu - ra il Ciel per me, per me s'at - tr - sta il sol,
AR.
cor. Qua-lun-que sia sen - tier, a - me-no fia con te,

Example 4: *La straniera*, Act I, Alaïde's mad scene.


MODto ASSAI (è delirante)
ALA.
Un gri-do io sen-to suo-nar per l'on- da... e gli è un la-
MODto ASSAI
p
pp col canto
4
AL.
men-to di lui che muor... Cia-scun si tac- cia... nes-sun ri-
O.
Pa-ven - ta il ciel...
C O R O
Pa-ven - ta il ciel...
Pa-ven - ta il ciel...
Pa-ven - ta il ciel...
7
ten.
AL.
spon-de, ei mi rin-fac-cia un em-pio a-mor, un em - pio, un em- pio a mor.
col canto
f
pp
3
3

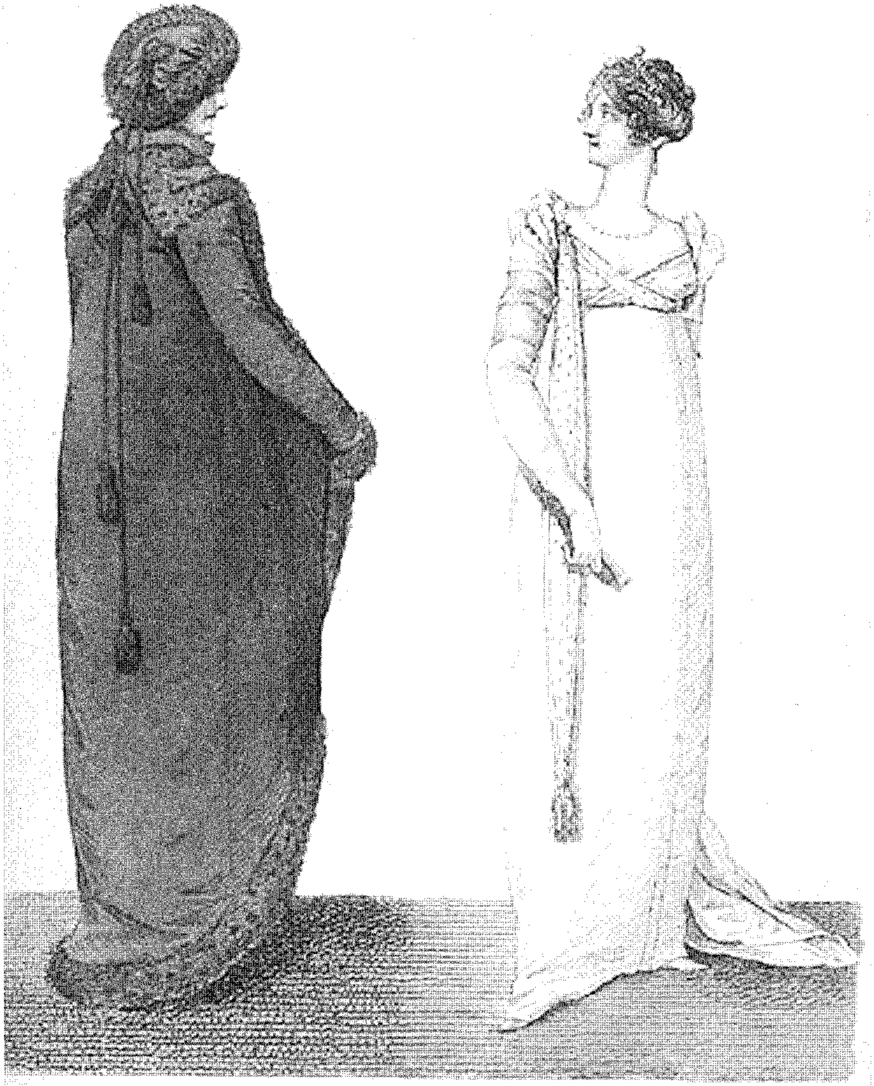
meanings of the words, but also of his interest in the musicality of the act of speaking. His adoption of *canto declamato*, then, is not a repudiation of sentimental excess, but a recuperation of Rousseauvian notions of impassioned and natural utterance, achieved in a way that might placate critics of "meaningless" or "excessive" tears.

Like the critiques of sentimentality in *L'eco* or *Il corriere delle dame*, which seem concerned with forging a new, more stoic masculinity, Bellini's recuperation also participated in redefining notions of gender and expression. It is well known that Bellini's new approach to melody was instrumental in the emergence of a new type of tenor hero, one who would eventually be characterized more by his vocal power than by the refined eloquence of his ornaments. But Bellinian *canto declamato*, combined as it often was with melodramatic plots, also helped shape a new mode of feminine utterance, one marked by emotional constraint rather than unguarded outpouring. The melodramatic preoccupation with prohibitions on female speech—what Peter Brooks (1995) has called its "text of muteness"—made the female body, with its blushes and pallor, frozen poses and emphatic gestures, the expressive vehicle *par excellence*.[26] *La straniera's* Alaïde is kin to these women rendered mute by emotion.[27] She cannot speak of either her past (she is actually the queen of France in hiding) or her love for the tenor Arturo. By reining in lyrical melody, Bellini represents this difficulty in speaking as an inability to sing: Alaïde's melodic discourse becomes the most speech-like precisely at those moments when she seems the most inarticulate. At the end of Act I, witness to the deaths by drowning of both her brother and her lover in the span of one short number, Alaïde, like so many operatic heroines, loses her reason. But instead of responding with flourishes, roulades, and excessive coloratura, her pathetic fragmented utterances communicate a sense of containment and frozen shock (example 4). Alaïde only manages to choke out brief, halting phrases, and never launches into full-blown delirium.

Restrained Figures

In the Europe of the early nineteenth century there was, of course, a more literal way women were "restrained": in the contraptions of linen, lace, and whalebone known as corsets. At the same time Bellini was lauded for trimming down melodic excess, a new fashion was emerging—or, in fact, reemerging. As recently as thirty years earlier, the aesthetic of naturalness had expressed itself in a taste for the "pastoral nightgown," a high-waisted dress that resembled classical drapery. Such dresses transformed the female figure into a kind of willowy column topped by two globe-like breasts. By the 1820s, however, the tide had turned. The hourglass figure (and hence the markedly slim waist) once more rose to prominence, and corsets again

Figure 1: Evening dress from *La Belle Assemblée* (London), 1807 (University of Washington Libraries, Special Collections, COS006).



became a necessary article of female dress: figures 1, 2, and 3 show the transformation from column to hourglass. This transformation, however, did not happen without a struggle. Critics of corsets were vehement in their disapproval; the year of *La straniera's* premiere, 1829, saw multiple denunciations of the new trend. Carlo Ritorni was not alone—many of these tirades focused on the danger tight-lacing represented to women's health,

Figure 2: Fashion plate from *Il Corriere delle Dame*, 1819.

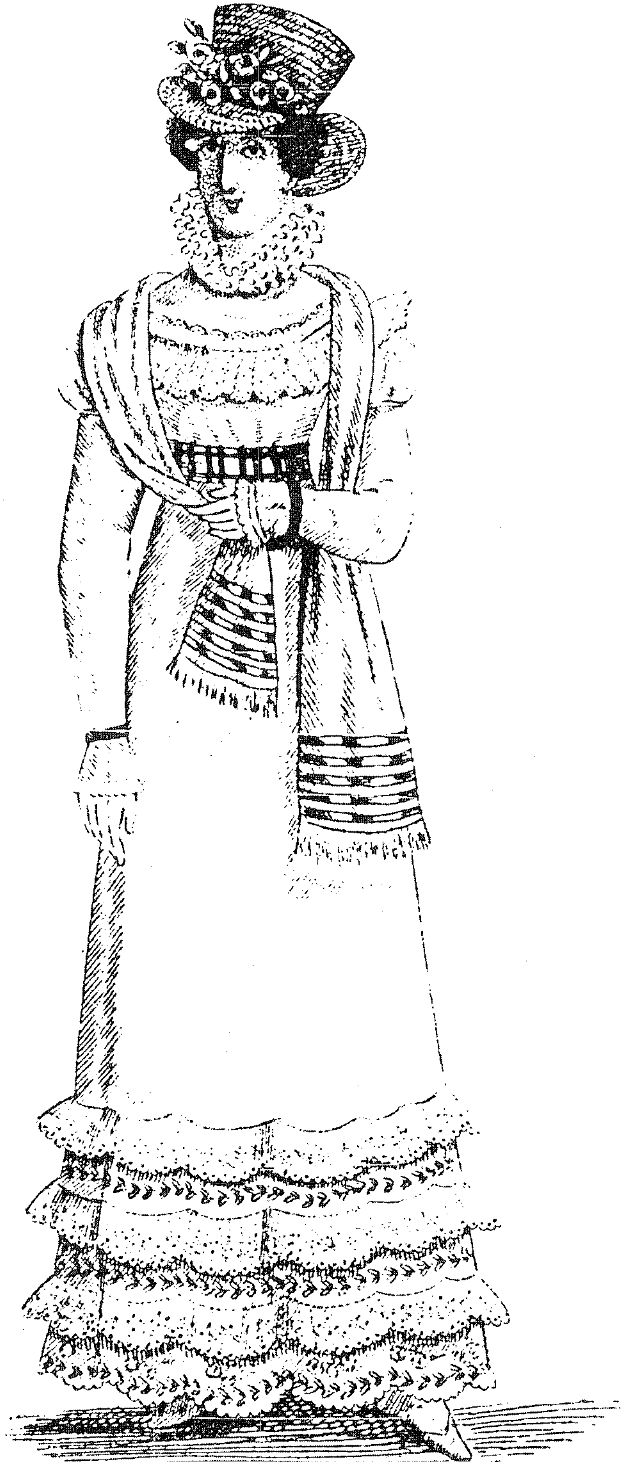
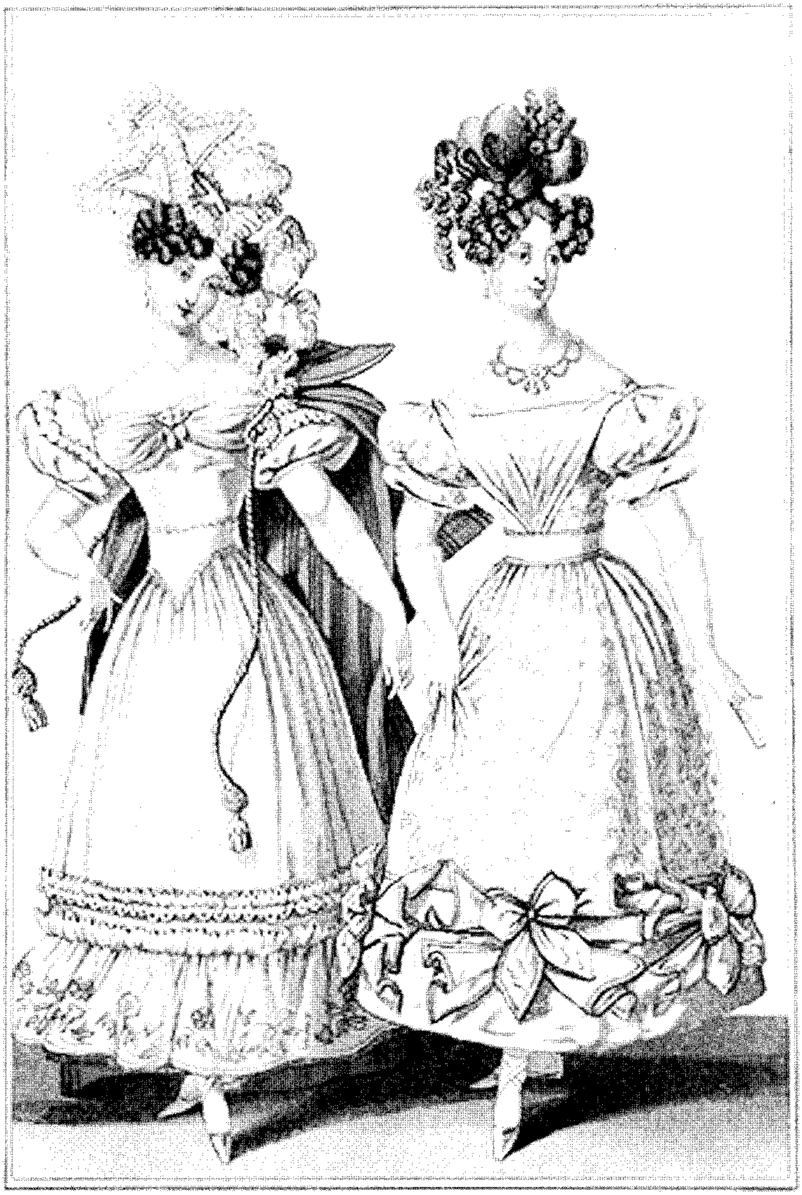


Figure 3: Evening dresses from *La Belle Assemblée* (London), 1828 (University of Washington Libraries, Special Collections, COS412).



describing in detail the havoc corsets wreaked on the internal organs and citing purported medical evidence and doctors' testimonials to bolster their claims.[28] What is striking, and indicative of a shift in thinking about the female body, is that such dangers to feminine health should be represented in such a relentlessly physical or clinical way, with comparatively little mention of moral or social implications.

But other critiques went beyond the somatic to engage with the aesthetic. Only a few months after the premiere of *La straniera*, an article attacking both the specific practice of tight-lacing and corsets in general appeared in the journal *Teatri arti e letteratura*. The story, entitled "Pazzia punita" (Folly punished), begins with the sensationalist tale of a young English girl whose suffocatingly tight corset resulted in her premature death:

> In Bristol, a sweet girl of twenty years was the most recent victim of too-tight corset lacing. After having suffered a long while from coughing, from violent heart palpitations and from other indispositions, she died suddenly. The dissection of the cadaver revealed that her early death, and all the ills she suffered, were the consequence of lacing herself too tightly.[29]

After a brief homage to the medical argument, the author takes up arms against corsetry—and contemporary fashion in general—on aesthetic grounds: the cinched waist unduly limits feminine gesture, deportment, and expression. To this critic's mind, the corseted figure is, in fact, a kind of laughable, unnatural deformation:

> It is rumored that a great number of girls and also married women in the world, simply for the desire to have a *good waist*, squeeze themselves to the point of bursting; and no exhortations, facts, discomfort or pain can dissuade them from such torture. If by means of this barbaric practice, women did indeed succeed in appearing to have *nicer figures*, men could perhaps boast of the fact that there were women who deliberately kill themselves to attract their attention; but since women only transform themselves into deformed trunks, men can do nothing but groan about it and deride them for having little sense. In fact who wouldn't laugh at seeing certain figures who walk upright and stiff with a measured step like marionettes, and who can neither raise nor extend the arms, neither turn around nor bend over, no matter how much they would like to invite you with a gesture or a nod to stop and admire them? Who wouldn't laugh on seeing, rising from a vast base, a triangular rib cage, a ramrod made of who knows what, that goes on to end in two squared shoulders, upon which is mounted a head so immobile that it seems like a wig stand, decorated, what is more, like a face from the cemetery? The women who have the weakness to "refine" themselves in this way should know the beautiful figures with which nature may have adorned them are developed and displayed better than with any of these arts, and it is utter madness to torture themselves and kill themselves only to be, far from admired, pitied and derided (emphasis in original).[30]

The tropes of naturalness, flexibility, and the critique of artifice in this account uncannily mirror the preoccupations of writers dealing with the problem of expression in a post-sentimental era. But here holding back, reining in, is something to be avoided—at least for women. The article vividly condemns the techniques of feminine restraint, evincing disgust for stiff, unyielding women, unable to bend or gesture but draped with finery. In their inability to make fluid gestures, corseted women are perceived as abstract, geometric figures, lifeless puppets, wig stands, or even death-like masks. Such abhorrence for rigid artificiality implicitly upholds the flexible "natural" as a valued opposite. This image of modern women contrasts strikingly with the ideal sentimental heroine, whose supposedly artless manners, deportment, and speech were highly prized. The author implies that it is the renunciation of vitality that is the true crime; even the words chosen here have resonances in the natural world. Corsets impinge upon the "beautiful figures with which nature . . . adorned" women. Those who wear corsets deform their "fusti," a word that, like the English equivalent "trunk", has both anatomical and horticultural associations and can refer to the stem or stalk of a plant as well as to the human torso. Such images—which portray the natural stem of the female form constricted and stiffened by artificial means—suggest that for this author, women properly belong in the garden, to bend and sway like the flowers they tend.[31]

The Virginal Waistline

It has always been rather embarrassing to musicologists that after his two Romantic experiments Bellini should have produced not another hard-hitting work with sparse vocal lines and stormy plots, but instead *La sonnambula*, a story of a simple serving maid whose virtue is questioned and then re-established when it is revealed she is a sleepwalker.[32] To make matters worse, Bellini largely discarded speech-like singing to embrace a more ornamental melodic style for this nostalgic pastoral idyll. Eager to refute the potential charge that Bellini was backtracking, musicologists have rushed to bundle *La sonnambula* under the umbrella of Romantic experiment, arguing, for example, that although Bellini did indulge in florid writing, it always serves a dramatic purpose. Further, the phenomenon of sleepwalking, as an expression of unconscious or repressed psychological desires, is often taken a sign of Bellini's essentially Romantic sensibility.[33]

In the face of the critique of corsets, it is tempting to suggest that Amina's sleepwalking is not so much evidence of romanticism as is it a reflection of the desire to see a young woman in a flowing classically-styled nightdress—a kind of reactionary recuperation of the flower-like image of woman so popular in the era of sentimental opera. And indeed, in contrast to the extravagance seen in fashion plates of the time, the costumes for *La sonnambula* were quite simple, giving up ruffles, enormous sleeves, and wide skirts. But Amina's costumes nonetheless bear traces of the contemporary fashion. The one thing they do not forfeit is the defined waist—a waist that suggests an ideal attained only by rigorous corseting. Compare portraits of Irene Tomeoni as Nina (figure 4) and Maria Malibran as Amina (figure 5): Nina's flowing high-waisted gown certainly differs from Amina's tightly cinched waist, with its obvious bodice lacing.[34] The portrait of Malibran, from the London performance of 1833, is not unusual; nearly every subsequent Amina, from Jenny Lind to Maria Callas, exhibits a defined waist.

Even had the costume designers in fact wanted to revisit the earlier fashions of sentimental opera, doing away with the cinched waist—even for Amina's nightdress—might have sent the wrong message. By the late 1820s, the corseted waist (except to its detractors, a vocal minority) signified not artificial restraint, but "natural" virginal slimness. Corsets were by no means universally understood as contraptions that deformed and immobilized the "stem" of the female figure. In fact, concern over the dangers to women's health posed by the fashion for slim waists led to the first major corset reforms of the century and the concurrent notion that corsets should conform to a woman's "natural" shape. More flexible corsets became common: so-called "elastic" corsets using coiled metal wires and springs as well as corsets made with "vulcanized India rubber" became available.[35] Not only were corsets discussed in familiar terms of rigorous bodily discipline, as a way of reining in recalcitrant flesh, but also in terms that reflect the growing assumption that corsets should move with the body, and above all, increase the comfort of the wearer. Restraint itself began to be configured as "natural." One English corset-maker even invented what she called a "hygienic corset" and cited medical testimony to support her claim that her product acted like a "new layer of muscles, rather than an extraneous article of dress."[36] Of course, the "natural" shape all these corsets gently attempted to embrace (or enhance) was just as ideological as any artifice: the ideal body sought was one with a virginally slim waist. Corset manufacturers and advertisers throughout Europe continually stressed the power of the slim waist to convey a woman's unchanging youthfulness and beauty; their products were designed to hold back the creeping tide of flesh that maternity and age bring to women. The later popularity of maternity corsets suggests that enforced svelteness was a means of preserving the illusion of youthful virginity for as long as possible (Summers 2001:37–62). Amina's firmly belted midsection, even (and especially) in her nightgown, is an important visual signal of her innocence, clearly communicating the fact that she is not a "loose" woman.

Figure 4: Irene Tomeoni as Nina, c. 1794.

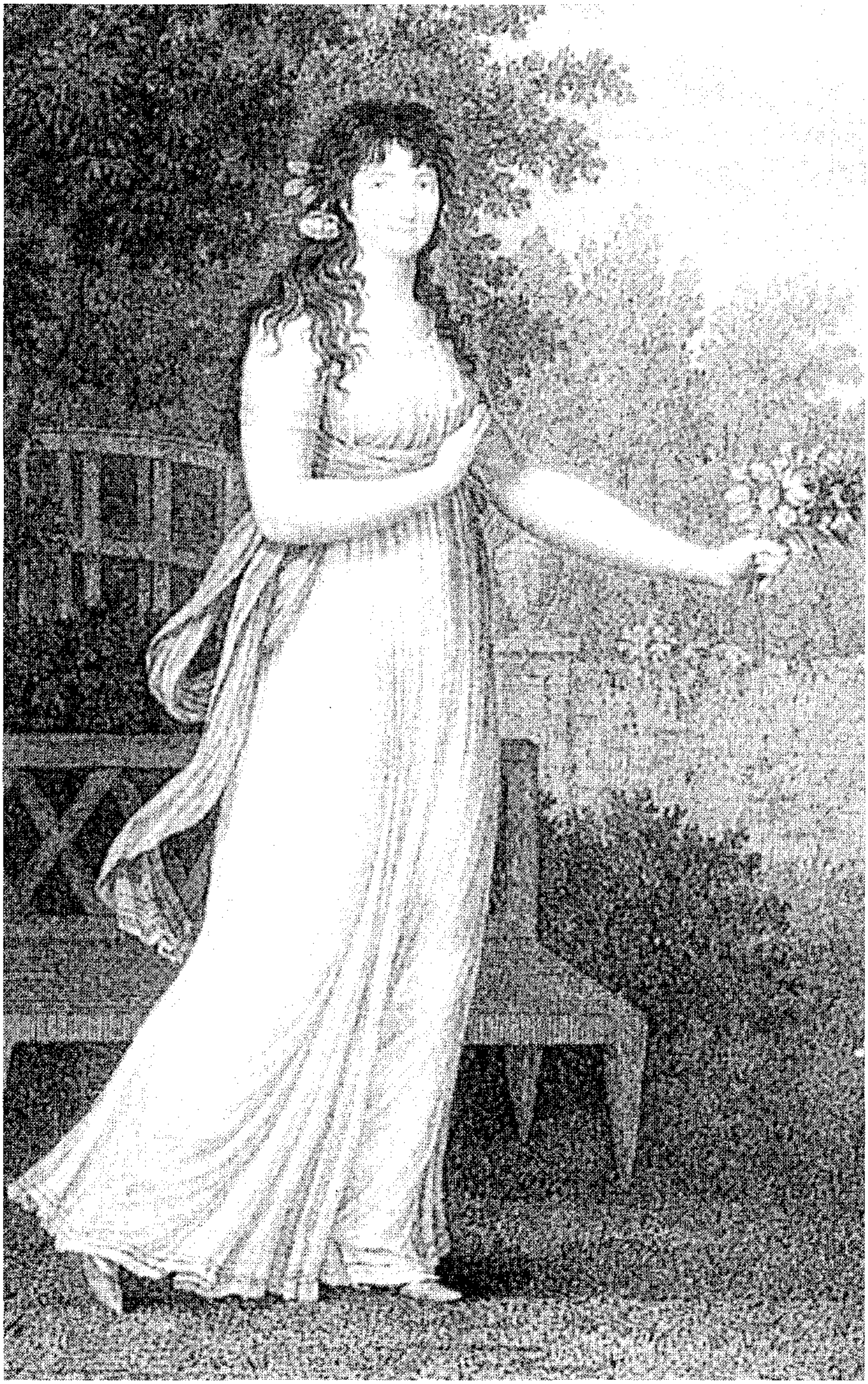
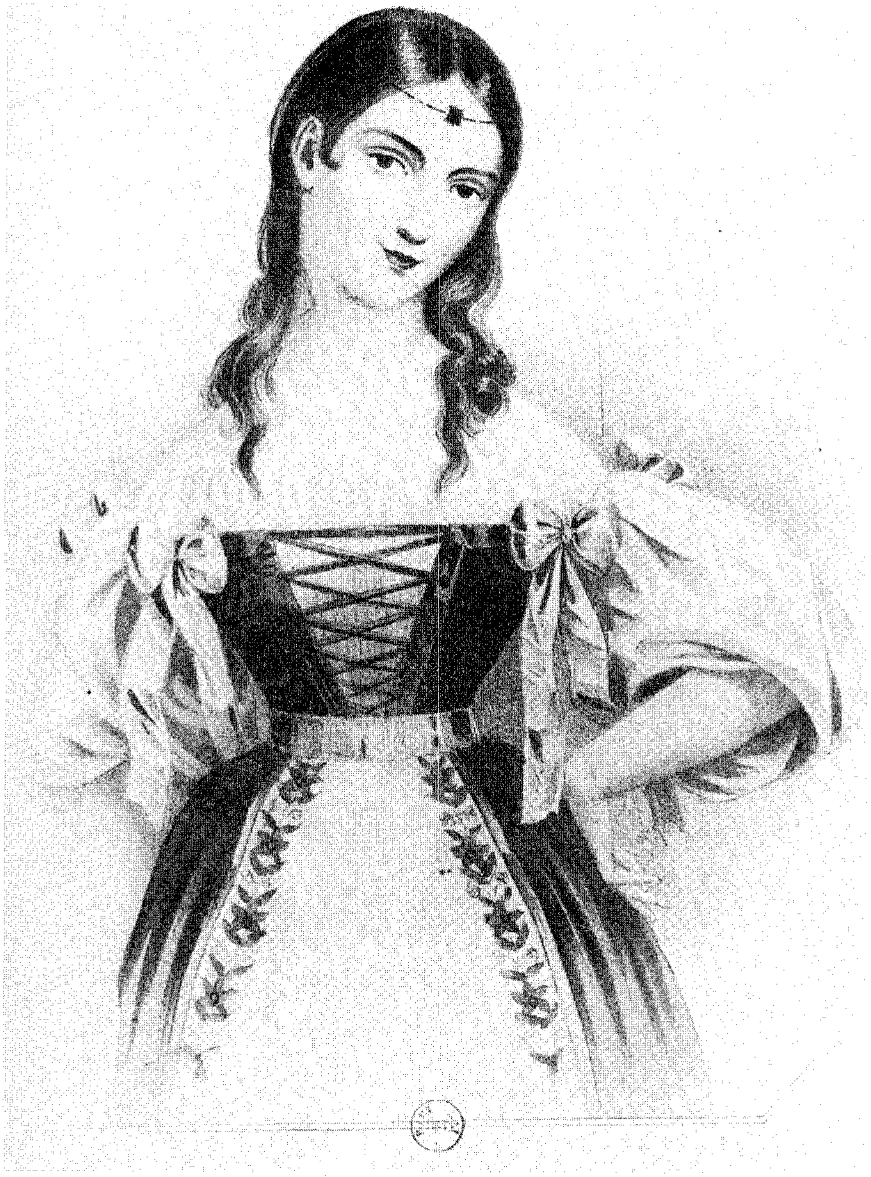


Figure 5: Maria Malibran as Amina, 1833.

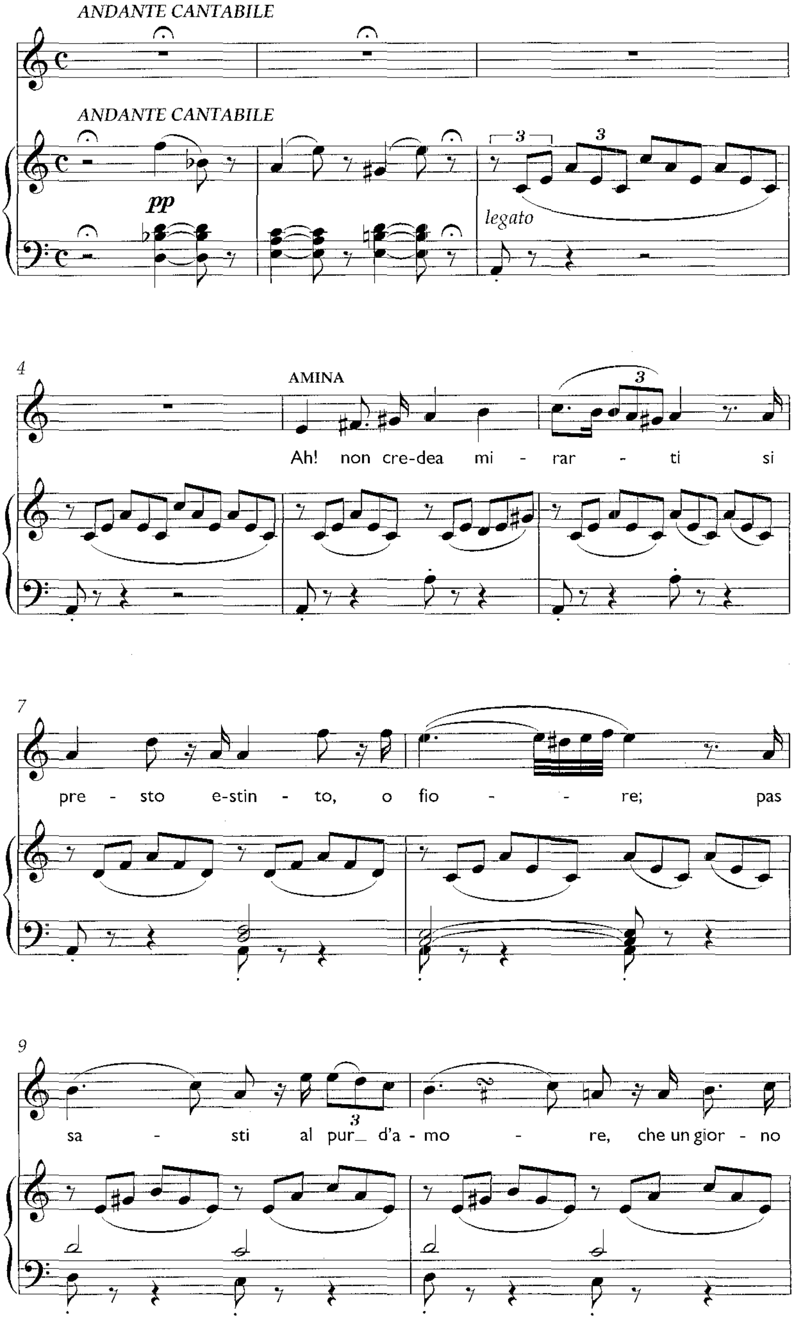


Bellini's music for Amina shows a similar kind of virginal restraint; despite his much-talked about "rapprochement" with the Rossinian style, and despite the gentle lyrical facility of her musical discourse, occasional moments of constriction stand out. No scene displays this better than Amina's famous sleepwalking aria from the last act, "Ah! non credea mirarti" (example 5). Amina has been rejected by her lover, who believes her unfaithful, and in her distress, she wanders, still sleeping, out of her room, only to be witnessed by the entire village. Perhaps the most analyzed Bellini aria, Amina's dreamy lament is one of the "long, long, long" melodies Verdi so admired. Its idiosyncratic structure (the first stanza is an odd eleven measures in length and does not repeat any large-scale melodic ideas), an effective portrayal of a wandering somnambulist, has also presented an attractive puzzle to formalists.[37] The slow, trance-like opening proceeds as if in a dream: small two-measure phrase breaths build until measure 11 where the voice rests on a high E for longer than expected—two whole beats. This drawn-out appoggiatura has the effect of suspending time, making it seem as if Amina is wandering through the landscape of her aria the same way she wanders the stage. This extended sigh, however, is not the mimetic weeping of a lamenting heroine. Rather, it seems an effort to halt the progress of the aria for a moment, to delay the inevitable. No coincidence, then, that the text of the first stanza is about transience: "I never thought to see you faded so soon, oh flower; you died as did our love, which lasted only a day."

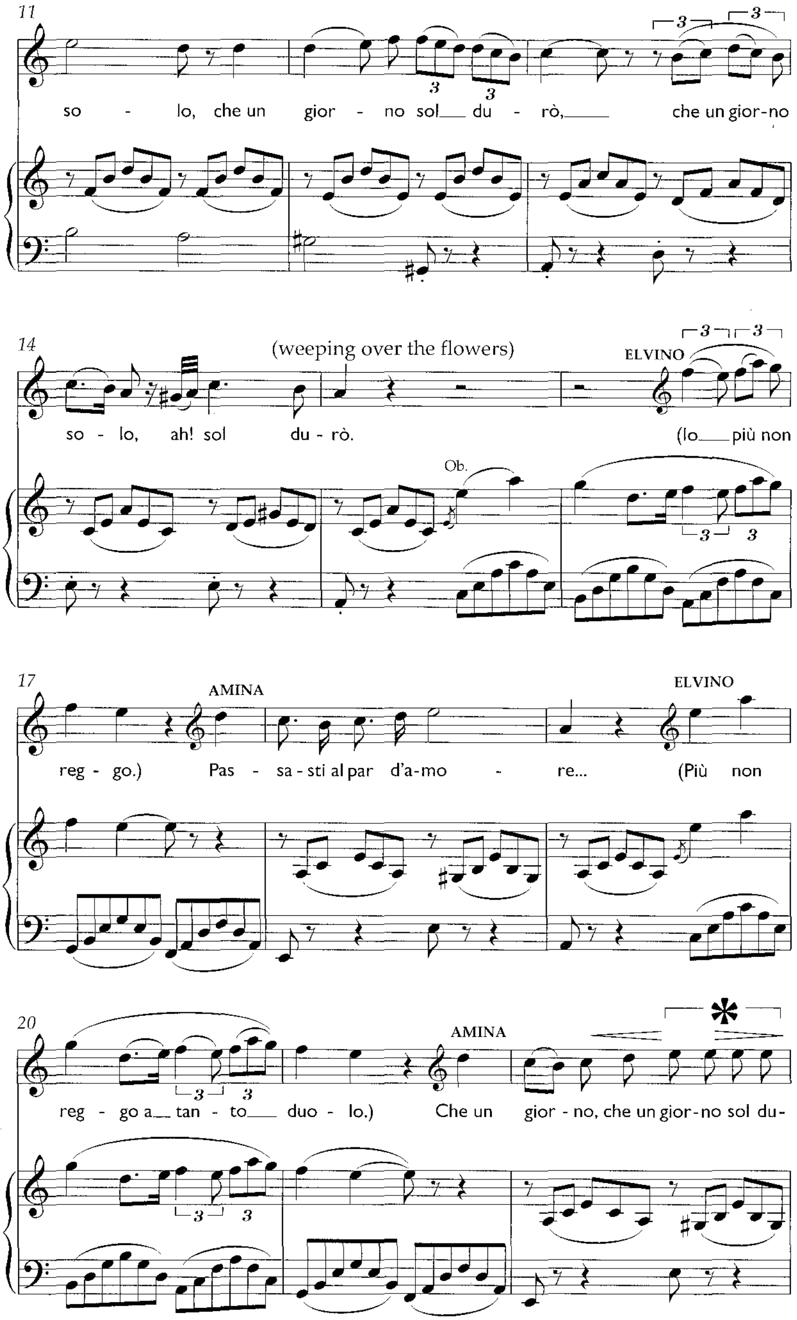
After these words at the end of the first stanza, Elvino interjects, framing Amina's performance of despair with an outburst of pity (m. 16). In so doing, he resembles all those onstage courtiers and repentant lovers that witness in horror the madness and distress of the prima donna. "Who can look upon such a sight and not weep!" they usually cry, to percussive half-cadences, while the lover lambastes himself for his cruelty. Elvino, however, takes a slightly different approach. True, he does guiltily declare "I can no longer stand so much grief!", but his expansive outburst seems suspended between A minor and its relative major, C. Supported by a steadily descending bass line, Elvino does not commit to any one tonal center, though the open-ended nature of his statement, ending as it does on an E-minor harmony (minor V in the tonic), sounds a bit like a peace-offering, a gentle encouragement to Amina to turn away from her minor-key lamentations. Amina does not take Elvino's cue and closes off his open-ended phrases with resigned cadential figures in the minor tonic (mm. 17–19). Elvino tries once more, and once more Amina terminates the phrase in A minor, this time changing her dismissal into four forcefully reiterated eighth notes whose rhythm grates against the triplet accompaniment (mm. 21–23).[38]

This declamatory gesture of renunciation is significant. An interruption like Elvino's might typically lead to that convention of sentimental opera, a decorated second stanza with even more sobbing ornaments and elaborate musical markers of distress. But instead Amina retreats into a kind of controlled, calm acceptance for the second stanza (m. 25), which is in the relative major (making good on Elvino's hints). It is a bittersweet C major, though: the pastoral pedal tone lends it an almost Schubertian flavor of nostalgic distance. The text of the stanza is centered around an image of impotence—the failure of Amina's tears to restore her happiness.

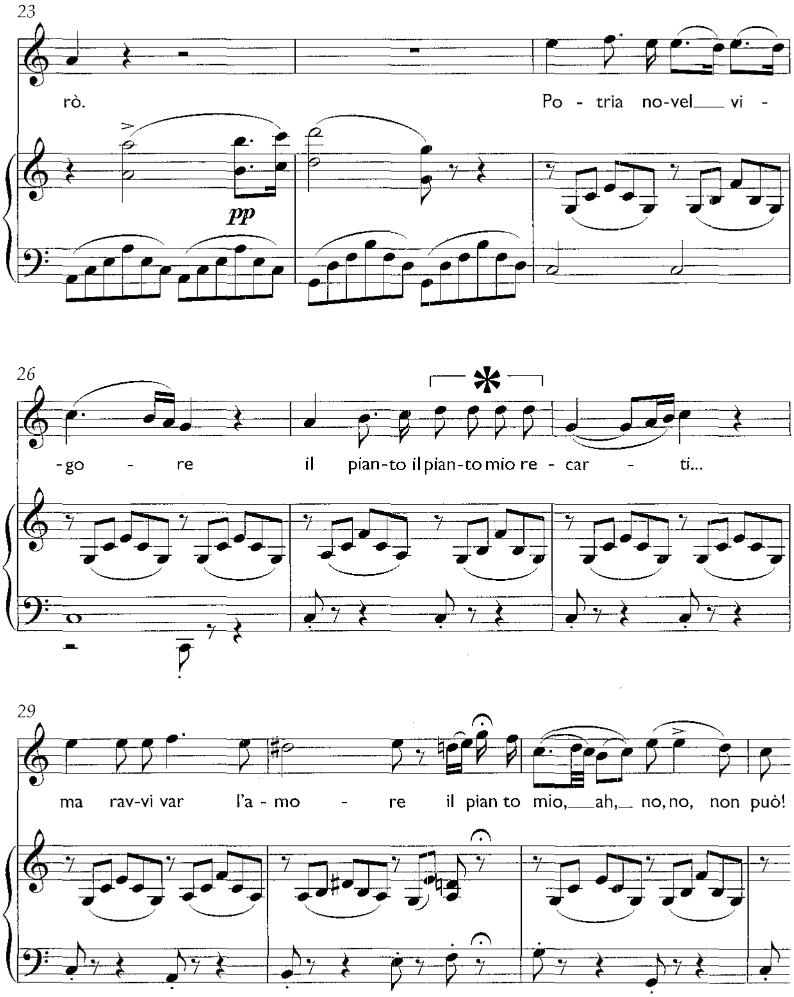
Example 5: *La sonnambula*, Act II, Aria (Amina). [Amina: I never thought to see you/ faded so soon, oh flower;/you died as did [our] love/which lasted only a day. Elvino: I cannot bear . . . Amina: You died as did love . . . Elvino: . . . I cannot bear so much grief. Amina: . . . which lasted only a day./Perhaps my tears/will restore you to life/But my tears / cannot revive love.]


ANDANTE CANTABILE
ANDANTE CANTABILE
pp
legato
4
AMINA
Ah! non cre-dea mi - rar - ti si
7
pre - sto e-stin - to, o fio - - re; pas
9
sa - sti al pur_ d'a - mo - re, che un gior - no

Example 5 continued.

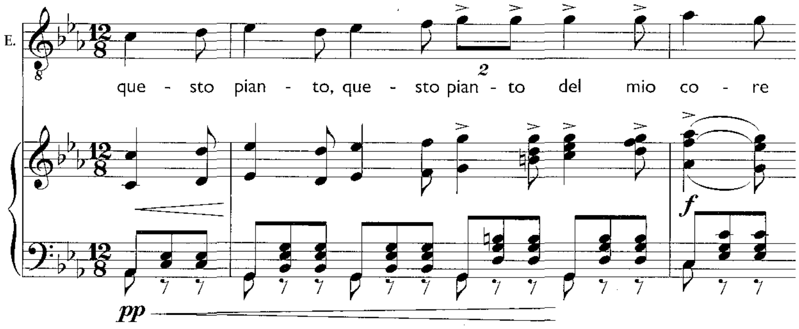

11
so - lo, che un gior - no sol__ du - rò,__ che un gior-no
14
(weeping over the flowers)
ELVINO
so - lo, ah! sol du - rò. (lo__ più non
Ob.
17
AMINA
ELVINO
reg - go.) Pas - sa - sti al par d'a-mo - re... (Più non
20
AMINA
*
reg - go a__ tan - to__ duo - lo.) Che un gior - no, che un gior-no sol du-

Example 5 continued.


23
rò.
Po - tria no-vel vi -
pp
26
-go - re
il pian-to il pian-to mio re - car - ti...
29
ma rav-vi var l'a - mo - re il pian to mio, ah, no, no, non può!

To the dead flower clasped to her breast, Amina sings, "Perhaps my tears will restore you to life, but my tears cannot revive love." Precisely at the moment when these tears are mentioned, the declamatory fragment with which Amina closed off Elvino's open phrase—those insistently repeated eighth notes—sounds again (m. 27). This figure, too, is set against the grain of the flowing accompaniment, lending it a speech-like quality, but here it has been transformed from cadential gesture to small-scale "melodic" climax. Amina renounces conventional mimetic weeping at precisely the moment she mentions her impotent tears. These four repeated notes call for a kind of emotional expression entirely different from the weeping, sighing appoggiatura—instead they suggest choked sobs forcing their way through a normally controlled speaking voice.

Example 6: *La sonnambula*, Act I, Quintet (Elvino's tears).



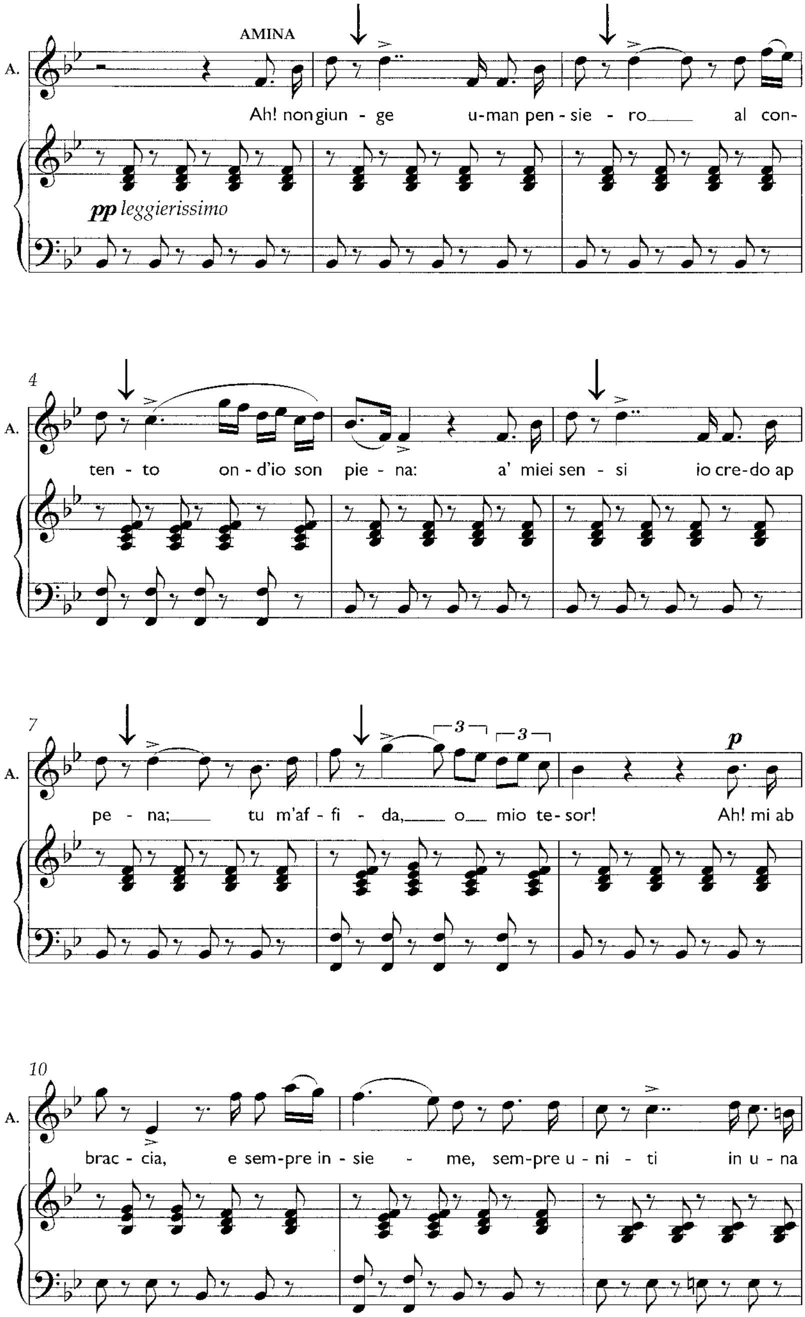
What are we to make of this brief moment when Amina's lyrical facility becomes stifled and constricted? Such declamatory repeated notes in Bellini's earlier works are almost invariably paired with an appoggiatura. But here Amina simply sinks down to a consonant note—hers is speech without the passion. And while *canto declamato* in *La straniera* and *Il pirata* is set almost exclusively in time with its accompaniment, Amina's utterance floats free of the beat, as if refusing to engage in the task of song-making. In the context of Bellini's supposed "return" to sentimental opera, a genre whose expressive ideals were shaped by Rousseau's theories of language, this four-note figure stands out as a peculiarly constrained kind of expression. There is no conventional weeping cry here: inflection, melody, *accento* are conspicuously absent. If tears cannot help, then perhaps melody must be silent too.

Although Amina's four notes look fairly nondescript and innocuous on the page, I would argue that they call for a very particular effect from the performer—neither speech nor song, but perhaps dry, hiccupping sobs instead. This seems to be the case in the first act quintet, when Elvino, faced with the spectacle of Amina asleep in the Count's room, speaks of his tears as evidence of his betrayed love (example 6). Although it serves as a launching pad to a soaring, sighing appoggiatura, Elvino's "pianto" is treated much like Amina's later ineffectual "pianti" and the word is clearly distinguished as a sort of special effect: not only are his two eighth notes also at odds with the triplet accompaniment, they are made even more emphatic by accent marks. It is difficult to know just what Giuditta Pasta, the first Amina, might have done when faced with her four evenly spaced notes (example 5, m. 27); contemporary reviews praised her acting and singing lavishly but are generally short on specific details. Pasta's performance as Paisiello's Nina, the gentle innocent driven mad for love, was apparently a model for Bellini's Amina (Rosselli 1996:81) and critics were quick to assert that the success of the sleepwalking scene owed as much to Pasta's remarkable talents as it did to Bellini's music (Bellini 1943:268–72). Susan Rutherford has shown that Pasta was well-known for her electrifying stage presence, particularly her strikingly "realistic" and yet disciplined approach to gesture, which seems to have been characterized by intense, measured movements timed to correspond directly with the music (2007:112–17). Furthermore, Rutherford suggests that Bellini exploited many of the singer's characteristic vocal effects; in the composer's markings in the autograph score for *Norma*—another role created expressly for Pasta—directions such as "con voce soffocata (with a suffocated voice)" and "con voce repressa (with a suppressed voice)" create the impression of a singing actress not afraid to stifle her voice for dramatic purposes (2007:128–32). We also have evidence that later singers approached Amina's four repeated notes with particular care. Jenny Lind's published ornaments for "Ah! non credea mirarti" single them out for special emphasis, adding an accent mark to each of them (Caswell 1989:13). And Will Crutchfield's transcription of Adelina Patti's 1906 recording of the aria captures how Patti slows and slightly softens their relentless pulse, taking an audible breath between "mio" and "recarti" (1989:454). In investing this moment with such weight, Patti makes it sound as if Amina is struggling to jerk out the repeated notes and the effort is dragging her down.

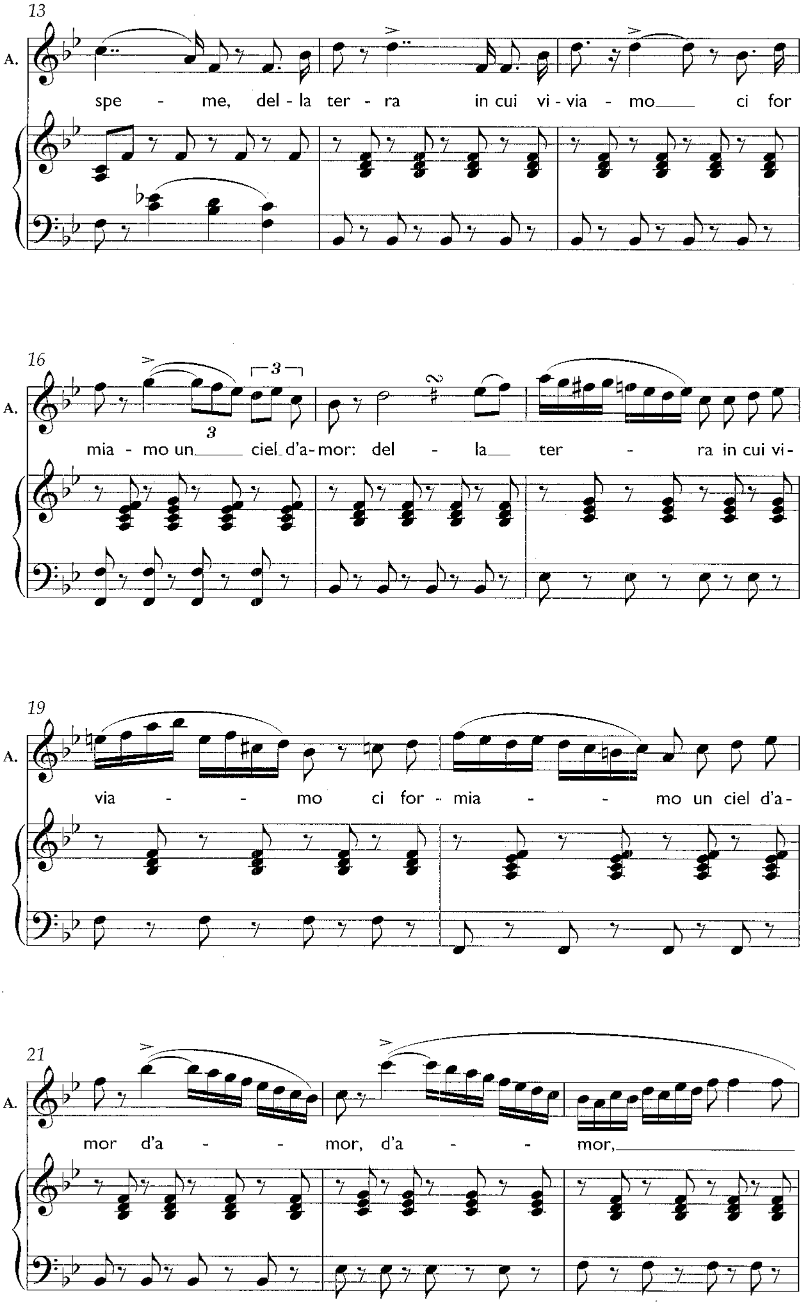
The Corset and Romantic "Ex-pression"

My emphasis on the constrictive nature of Bellinian restraint is not the whole story, however. Amina ends the opera with a showy cabaletta celebrating the restoration of her reputation and her impending marriage to Elvino (example 7). As is typical, the cabaletta is much more elaborate than the slow movement, as if Amina is finally able to indulge in the agile singing she has long avoided. But a closer look at Amina's melody makes it clear that this apparent release from constraint is not in itself unproblematic. The opening phrases of the cabaletta each begin with a characteristic gesture: a leap up to a jerky, breathless, repeated D. Here Bellini abandons his normally clear text-setting, lodging an eighth-note rest between those repeated notes to break apart words: "giun-ge," "pensie-ro." In addition, Emanuele Senici has pointed to Bellini's decision to ignore the conventional vowel elision known as the *sinalefe* in this passage, arguing that it projects a "kind of effortful breathlessness, as if Amina lacked the necessary energy to sing even four or five syllables without an intake of breath."[39] The effect is indeed striking, and it is not too fanciful to hear it as replicating the shallow, labored breathing of the tightly corseted body.[40]

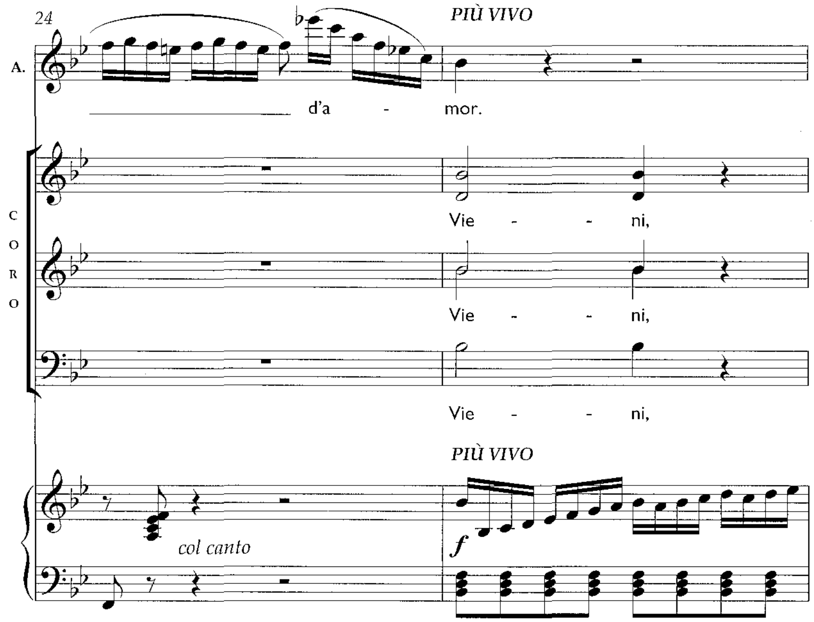
Example 7: *La sonnambula*, Act II, Amina's final cabaletta.


AMINA
A.
Ah! non giun - ge u-man pen - sie - ro al con-
pp leggierissimo
4
ten - to on - d'io son pie - na: a' miei sen - si io cre - do ap
7
pe - na; tu m'af - fi - da, o mio te - sor! Ah! mi ab
3
p
10
brac - cia, e sem-pre in - sie - me, sem-pre u - ni - ti in u - na

Example 7 continued.


13
A.
spe - me, del - la ter - ra in cui vi - via - mo ci for
16
A.
3
3
mia - mo un ciel d'a - mor: del - la ter - ra in cui vi -
19
A.
via - - mo ci for - mia - - mo un ciel d'a -
21
A.
mor d'a - - mor, d'a - - mor,

Example 7 continued.



It seems, then, that strategic moments of restraint in *La sonnambula* actually imply a heightened emotional intensity; the threat of spillage is only sharpened by the creation of expressive "dams"—in this case, those small gasping rests. In a similar manner, if the corset is an attempt to contain or control the female body, it simultaneously places it in the limelight. Indeed, historians of the corset have argued that while the devices were certainly understood as a form of physical discipline, corsets also allowed—even made necessary—indulgence in symptoms of bodily distress that marked the female figure as delicate, susceptible, and sexually desirable. Not only did corsets provide opportunity and justification for fainting spells, dizziness, and palpitations in an age where physiological ailments were taking precedence over attacks of "sentiment," they also helped make feminine indisposition more widespread and seem more "natural."[41] It was Ritorni, after all, who said it best: corsets cause fainting, headaches, consumption, and a host of other maladies "typical to women." Femininity—and even feminine desirability—came to be defined through the performance of symptoms made possible by the tightly laced corset. Even while rigorously restraining the body, corsets made the body itself, in its ailments and symptoms, all the more legible.

This paradox of bodily restraint and bodily indulgence has implications for our understanding of Bellinian *canto declamato* and operatic Romanticism. If the corset squeezes the female waist into a constricted form, it also forces the most "feminine" attributes to spill over its edges, just as sparse, declamatory singing at moments of heightened emotion hints at the possibility of eventual outpouring, highlighting the very physical excess it would seem to renounce. Listening to moments of musical restraint with the corset in mind can help us to understand even *La straniera's* famously sparse vocal writing in a new way: as filled with tension, as passion inhibited but never absent. In other words, *canto declamato* is not a renunciation—or even successful control—of bodily excess, but a new poetics of restraint which, like the corset, places the body even more emphatically before our ears. I want to end by suggesting that the figure of the corseted woman can serve as a living symbol for a different kind of Romantic expression. Operatic Romanticism is often described in terms of extravagant gestures and emotional overflow, the dissolution of boundaries between recitative and aria, and the creation of strongly teleological dramatic trajectories. What deserves attention, however, is the way that strategic moments of restraint allow for even greater emotional spillage; how carefully placed obstacles hold back expressive energy, allowing it to build up and burst forth in more powerful guises. Rather than being written in to melodies from the start, tears now forced their way through closed throats and stiffened bodies, literally "ex-pressed"—pressed out—through restraint. A broader understanding of the forms and meanings of restraint in Bellini's operas not only casts new light on the social grounding of his aesthetic, it also reveals just how much Italian Romanticism owed to the bodies of women it sought to define.

Notes

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1. "Egli ha preso un metodo, che non ben sappiamo se debba dirsi declamazione cantata, o canto declamato. Lo scopo di questo metodo sembra essere di riunire la forza della declamazione alla gentilezza del canto ..." From a review of *La straniera* in the February 20, 1829 issue of *L'eco*, cited in Bellini 1943:196.

2. The first definitive discussion of Bellini's new approach to melody in *La straniera* was Lippmann (1971).

3. Such perspectives owe much to A. B. Marx's distinction between Rossini's sensuous surface pleasures and Beethoven's deep spirituality. Carl Dahlhaus, while attempting to dismantle the value judgment implicit in this dialectic, ends up maintaining its terms. While he argues that coloratura in Rossini's style is no "mere adjunct or paraphrase" of an underlying melody ("the external trappings of Rossini's music prove to be its essence, an essence that lies on

the surface rather than being concealed beneath it"), his discussion of Bellini's melodic style begins with the assertion that it "was the quintessence of what the nineteenth century, with astounding unanimity, understood by melody in the strong sense of the term" (1989:59–60, 117). Philip Gossett has taken Dahlhaus to task for the implicit bias in his approach to Italian opera, and especially Rossini (1989:54–56). Friedrich Lippmann understands Bellinian *canto declamato* as a forward-looking break with operatic convention, and maintains that the label "filosofico" was used to indicate a totally new, almost psychological, treatment of human emotion (Adamo and Lipmann 1981:456–57, 473). More recent work on Bellini has questioned such approaches. Simon Maguire (1989) insists that in labeling Bellini "filosofico," Italian critics saw the composer as a "throwback" to earlier values of simplicity and balance, and Mary Ann Smart (2000) has argued for a re-examination of Bellini's relationship to melodic convention, using Bellini's habit of self-borrowing to question the assertion that he consistently strove for greater synchrony between text and music.

4. Using the term "philosophical" to describe "serious" music was common throughout France and Italy in the 1820s; the term could be used to praise or condemn. Henri Berton's 1825 pamphlet *De la musique mécanique et de la musique philosophique* castigated the music of Rossini as mechanical and warned of the dangers it posed to "philosophical" music. The Italian term "filosofico" was largely used to describe Bellini's habit of matching the music to the words. One review of *La straniera*, for example, mentioned "that philosophy, constant in Bellini, of following with his music poetic phrases and dramatic situations (*quella filosofia, costante in Bellini nel seguir sempre con la sua musica le frasi poetiche e le situazioni*)," and speculated that the enthusiasm audiences showed for the technique was perhaps due more to the way such sudden musical shifts allowed Henriette Méric-Lalande to demonstrate her consummate skill as a singer and actress (*L'eco*, February 16, 1829; cited in Bellini 1943:193).

5. Rossini had been consistently criticized for inattention to his texts; Simon Maguire points out that such complaints were common. In 1824, *La rivista teatrale* declared that " . . . in choruses and ensembles, the words are of no importance to Rossini." Those who looked favorably on Bellini's "filosofia" spoke of it as somehow resisting the lure of spectacle or of music's sensual pleasures. The journal *L'indifferente* insisted that Bellini "is not seduced by the charms of some musical motif that he has invented . . . if he sees that the words change, he will then abandon it, and seek out another one that suits the new sentiment. Such is his philosophical approach, that often his phrases remain incomplete, but is this a defect? It is for those people who have become used to *cabalettas* more like country dances, yawning when they can't hear them, and mechanically clapping at momentary effects; they are quite content just to gratify their ears without any sensation ever being felt by the heart" (quoted in Maguire 1989:78–79 and 108–9; I have altered his translation). For German reception of Bellini, see Kümmel (1973).

6. "...il suo pericolo potrebbe essere quello di confondere declamazione e canto, e produrre monotonia, lentezza, spezzatura, e titubanza nella cantilena, e mancanza di motivi che allettino, e rimango nell'orecchio" (Bellini 1943:196).

7. Ritorni published widely on the arts, but he is perhaps best known for his study on contemporary opera, the *Ammaestramenti alla composizione d'ogni poema e d'ogni opera appartenente alla musica* (Milan, 1841), which assessed current operatic trends with an awareness of certain scenic conventions. See Fabbri (1996) and Balthazar (1989).

8. Ritorni complained of "la predilezione per una moda brutta, non naturale e perniciosa"; the complaint from *L'eco* was reprinted in his *Annali del Teatro della Città di Reggio* (Bologna, 1829:174). I thank Susan Rutherford for allowing me to verify my handwritten transcription

of the passage from *L'eco* against her photocopy of the reprinted article in the *Annali*. See also her discussion of corsetry and singing technique in Rutherford (2006:70-71).

9. "Nella testa. Mali di testa, vertigini, tendenza agli svenimenti, male d'occhi, dolore e tintinnio delle orecchie, ed emorragie del naso. Nel torace. Oltre al dislocamento delle ossa, l'allacciarsi strettamente produce il respiro affannoso, lo sputo del sangue, la consunzione, l'alterazione nella circolazione, la palpitazione di cuore e l'idropisia di petto. Nell'addome. Inappetenza, nausea, sbocco di sangue, cattiva digestione, flatulenza, diarrea, dolori colici, induramenta di fegato, idropisia e allentatura. Ne segue pure ipocondria, isterismo ed una quantità di malattie particolari alle donne, malattie che qui è superfluo il numerare" (Ritorni 1829:179–80).

10. Stefano Castelvecchi (2000) has argued that even in its heyday, the cult of sensibility was subject to an equally strong critical or parodistic commentary, a phenomenon he has labeled the "anti-sentimental."

11. A typical example is a parody skewering a widow who cried more tears for her dead cat than for her husband published in *Il corriere delle dame* on March 20, 1819 (100).

12. "Eugenio è, non v'ha dubbia, il miglior uomo che io mi conosco. Figlio sommesso, marito amoroso, padre indulgente, buon suddito, buon cittadino, ottimo impiegato; povero e generoso, disposto sempre a levarsi di bocca il pane per darlo ad altri...quest'uomo . . . non sì e mai intenerito alla lettura di nessun romanza...simile quasi a quel geometra, che stando a sentire una tragedia, domandava: Qu'est ce que cela prouve? Egli domanda: Che cosa importa? (*Il corriere delle dame* 1820:264)."

13. "Il Signor Tale, all'incontro . . . sparge di lagrime tutti i romanzi sentimentali che gli vengono alle mani, e singhiozza le sere intere a tutte le tragedie, a tutti i drammi sentimentali che pur troppo ingombrano le degradate nostre scene. E pure questo, Signore Tale non ha mai avuto pietà di nessuno, a nessuno, ha mai dato uno scudo, per nessuno ha mai fatto un passo nè detto una parola (1820:264)."

14. "Ora, amabili leggitrici, ponete al confronto il mio buon Eugenio col Signor Tale, e sappiatemi poi dire che cosa è la sensibilità morale, o piuttosto chiediamo ai cruscanti il permesso di dare alle lagrime e ai singhiozzi del Signor Tale il nome di *sensibileria* (1820:264)." The rhetorical weight bestowed upon the term "sensibileria" (the italics are in the original) here makes it clear that the author does not consider the term neutrally descriptive. Historically the suffix *–eria* (etymologically related to the French *–erie* and the English –ery) has been used to signal contempt—as with the English words "monkery" or "popery."

15. Published in *I teatri* in April 1828. This interest in declamation was explicitly linked to singing in the extended polemic published a month later concerning artificial versus natural declamation and its relation to the singer's practice of improvising ornaments (*I teatri*, May 3, 1828:64–67).

16. For more on Diderot's influence on Talma, see Roach (1985:169–73).

17. The suicidal hero of Foscolo's *Le ultime lettere di Jacopo Ortis* (first version written in 1798, with subsequent revisions), with his intense passions and unrequited love, strongly resembles Goethe's Werther, while the novel's epistolary form echoed the novels of Samuel Richardson and Rousseau's *La Nouvelle Heloïse*. The pseudonym Didimo Chierico seems to have had special significance as the representation of the sentimental side of his character, as it was under this name that Foscolo published his translation of Sterne's *Sentimental Journey* in 1818. For more on Foscolo's status as sentimental icon and early Romantic, see Brand and Pertile (1999:412–17).

18. "Ogni volta che io andai leggendo ad alta voce qualche tragedia, od alcun passo commovente di storia, poesia, o di romanzo, in presenza d'altri, i miei occhi s'innondavano di pianto, e la voce tremava. Sperava di scorgere lo stesso effetto ne' miei uditori; ma in vece di lagrime, colla mia commozione eccitai sovente il riso. Mi ritirai vergognando, non di loro, ma di me stesso, ed ebbi sospetto più della mia che dell'altrui debolezza . . . In allora dubitai persino del vigore del mio proprio intelletto, tanto che prescrissi a me stesso dappoi una gelosa precauzione in ogni parola ed azione (*Il corriere delle dame* 1819:92–93)."

19. ". . . conchiusi adunque che i sentimenti squisiti sono messi in ridicolo dal mondo come... debolezza, e che da ciò nasce lo sconcerto delle menti delicate, le quali per apparir sagge, celano la loro sensibilità, ed affettano un carattere superiore all'umana natura, deluse dal solo esempio di coloro che appunto sono al di sotto della medesima (1819:93)."

20. This is a recurring theme in Rossini criticism; see Note 5 and Steffan (1992). See also my "Rossini's Noisy Bodies," forthcoming in the Cambridge Opera Journal.

21. Crutchfield distinguishes prosodic appoggiaturas from those that are "purely musical," sung on a single syllable. See Crutchfield (1989) for a definitive discussion of notation and performance practice issues surrounding the appoggiatura. Domenico Corri, in a treatise from 1810, referred to the appoggiatura as the "origin of all other embellishments" (Maguire 1989:175).

22. Marcello Perino called the appoggiatura the musical "accent" in his *Osservazioni sul canto* from 1810 (Maguire 1989:175). Maguire's work on Bellini is concerned with discussing the composer's style in terms of poetic aesthetics; hence his focus on the prosodic appoggiatura. In contrast, Mary Ann Smart (2004:69–100) has considered Bellini's sighs as a potent way to represent bodies moving through (or beyond) the space of the stage and Marco Beghelli (2001) has explored the denotative and connotative functions of the lamenting appoggiatura.

23. The sections on music in Rousseau's *Essai sur l'origine des langues où il est parlé de la mélodie et de l'imitation musicale* were written in 1749 for the *Encylopédie*; additional material was written in 1755.

24. "To the degree that needs multiply," Rousseau writes, "that affairs become complicated, that light is shed, language changes its character. It becomes more regular and less passionate. It substitutes ideas for feelings. It no longer speaks to the heart but to reason. Similarly accent diminishes, articulation increases" (1986:16).

25. For Rousseau's influence on Antonio Eximeno, Francesco Algarotti, Stefano Arteaga, and Pietro Lichtenthal, see Maguire (1989:21, 39–40, 48, 120). A portion of Madame de Staël's reflections on Rousseau was reprinted in *Il corriere delle dame* in the late 1820s. Italian editions of Rousseau's works were widely circulated and numerous critical studies appeared in the 1810s and 1820s (Felice 1987:61–63). For more on Rousseau's Italian reception, see Ghibaudi (1961:282–311).

26. Following Brooks's cue, I am speaking here of general plot tropes common in spoken dramas with prominent musical accompaniment (called melodrama in England or *mélodrame* in France), tropes which then spread to other media and genres. Italian opera was certainly influenced by these different forms of melodrama (see Sala 1995a and 1995b) but it is important to remember that the Italian term *melodramma* was used more generally to refer to "musical drama"—that is, opera—whether or not the work had what we would today call "melodramatic" elements.

27. The best known of these silent women is the heroine of Daniel-François-Esprit Auber's *La Muette de Portici* (*The Mute Girl of Portici*), which opened in Paris a year before *La strani-*

era's première in Milan. For contrasting discussions of the implications of the operatic link between femininity and silence, see Smart (2004:32–68) and Clark (2003). This curiosity concerning mute women extended to the popular press: *Il corriere delle dame* reprinted an item from *La Gazetta di Sanità* about a "very sensitive (assai sensibile)" woman who, believing her husband to be dead, mourned for two years. When the husband returned, she was so overwhelmed that she became mute—although she was still able to talk in her sleep (*Il corriere delle dame* 1817:45).

28. These ailments ranged from so-called "corset liver," a condition in which the liver was said to be cut in half by the tightness of the waist-cincher (a phenomenon known to be physically impossible today) to "congestion of the blood" and constriction of the lungs and digestive organs (Steele 2001:67–86).

29. "In Bristol, un'amabile fanciulla di venti anni, fu di recente vittima dell'allacciar troppo stretto il busto. Dopo aver essa lungamente sofferto di tosse, di violenta palpitazion di cuore e di altri incomodi, morì all'improvviso. Fatta la sezione del cadavere, si ebbe la prova evidente che la immatura sua morte, e tutti i mali da essa sofferti, erano la conseguenza del suo troppo stretto allacciarsi" (*Teatri arti e letteratura* 1829:13).

30. "Corre voce esservi del mondo gran numero di fanciulle ed anche di donne maritate, che per la smania di fare il *bel vitino*, si stringono a segno di schiattare; e che non vagliono nè esortanzioni, nè fatti, nè gl'incomodi ed i dolori che ne provano esse medesime per distorle questa tortura. Se da questo barbaro uso ne risultasse loro veramente di comparire più *ben fatte*, gli uomini potrebbero forse gloriarsi che vi siano delle donne le quali studiamente si ammazzino per attirare la loro attenzione; ma siccome egli non fa che transformarle in tanti fusti informi, gli uomini non possono che lagnarsene e deriderle del poco cervello. In fatti, e chi non ride nel vedere quelle certe figure che se ne vanno ritte e dure a passo misurato come marionette, e non possono né alzare, né stendere le braccia, né girarsi, né curvarsi, per quanta voglia pur abbiano d'invitarvi con un gesto od un inchino a soffermarvi per ammirarle? Chi non ride al vedere spuntare da una vasta base, resa triangolare dalle stecche, un fusellino di non sai che cosa, che va a terminare in due spalloni quadrati, a cui sormonta una testa talmente immobile, che sembra una testiera da parrucca, decorata per lo più da un viso da cimitero?—Le donne che hanno la debolezza di raffazzonarsi in tal guisa, dovrebbero sapere che le belle forme onde la natura può averle ornate, si sviluppano e si mostrano da per sè meglio che con qualunque arte, e che è una vera pazzia quella di torturarsi ed ammazzarsi per essere, invece che ammirate, compassionate e derise" (*Teatri arti e letteratura* 1829:13–14).

31. The immobility of the female figure so derided by this author may have been just as common in the age of Empire waist gowns. Anne Hollander has pointed out that neoclassical torso, shaped like a "long-cylinder," was "clearly imposed and enforced by corseting as insistent as that in any previous period but with a shift of emphasis" from the slim waistline to slim hips and thighs. Such corseting is perhaps responsible for the "bolster-like" stiffness of female figures that Hollander finds in portraiture of the time (Hollander 1993:117–22). The flexibility of the female figure implicitly valued in this article was most likely an illusion, created more by a long expanse of clinging, flowing drapery than by a flexible trunk per se.

32. For a clear account of *La sonnambula*'s place within Bellini scholarship, see Smart (2002:278–84).

33. John Rosselli suggests that although Bellini abandoned work on *Ernani*, a more "romantic" subject, for *La sonnambula*, "sleepwalking nonetheless tapped the romantic interest in the unconscious and the strange. In *La sonnambula* it hints at a shadow side to the outwardly calm village life . . . " (1996:83). Guido Paduano's effort (1992:69–83) to understand the pastoral setting of *La sonnambula* not as simple nostalgia, but as a realm with spiritual

significance could also be read as a recuperative effort to invest the opera with a weight and seriousness missing from previous accounts. It does seem possible, however, that Bellini was drawn toward the sentimental subject of *La sonnambula* after seeing Giuditta Pasta give a much-acclaimed performance as Nina in 1829. It is known that *I puritani*, for example, was influenced by Paisiello's *Nina*. See Petrobelli (1977:351–64).

34. For more on the costumes for *La sonnambula*, in particular their relation to notions of landscape and history, see chapter 2 of Senici (2005).

35. An article on the new elastic corsets ("corsets elyantònes") appeared in the *Teatri arti e letteratura* on June 30, 1829 praising their ability to prevent "sincopi" (blackouts), "vapori" (vapors), "svenimenti" (fainting fits), "languori" (weakness), "attacchi di nervi" (nervous attacks), and "spasimi" (pains) caused by normal corsets. Two years later, a brief announcement in the journal touted new "corraze feminili" (feminine breastplates) which were described as a more healthful alternative to corsets (*Teatri arti e letteratura* 1831:165). For further discussion of corset reforms, see Steele (2001:43–44).

36. The corset-maker was Madame Roxey A. Caplin, who touted her 1848 invention as a kind of "muscular envelope." Her subsequent book, *Health and Beauty; or corsets and clothing constructed in accordance with the physiological laws of the human body* (1856) quotes the approving testimony of a French doctor (Steele 2001:41–42).

37. See Carl Dahlhaus's analysis (1989:117–20), which focuses on the balance between the aria's "simplicity in detail and grandness in the overall design." In 1935, Domenico de Paoli described this aria as achieving an "astonishing cohesion, despite the abolitions of repetitions and recapitulations," and ascribed its success to its organic nature: "each note appears to arise from the preceding one like a fruit from a flower, always new, always unforeseen, always logical . . . " (quoted in Weinstock 1971:340).

38. Obsessively repeated notes are perhaps the most noticeable characteristic of Bellinian *canto declamato.* In discussing Bellini's self-borrowings in the baritone cabaletta "Meco tu vieni" from *La straniera,* Mary Ann Smart (2000: 43) notices a preference for "motivic monotony" in Bellini's reworking of earlier material, particularly in his decision to return to the "reiterations of middle C that had dominated the first eight measures of the piece" at a point where the earlier version of the melody moved to a more "expansive" phrase.

39. Senici points to both the inserted rests and the failure to elide the vowel endings of "giunge" and "contento" with the beginning of the next word as contributing to this labored effect (2005:72).

40. This effect is amplified by the fact that this cabaletta, as is true of many celebratory moments in opera, suggests a kind of dance, another type of physical exertion that would make a corset-wearer easily winded. The corset's effect on breathing is well documented. In 1868 the medical journal *The Lancet* claimed that "tight-lacing seriously limits, indeed almost annihilates, the respiratory movements of the diaphragm." Many nineteenth-century medical studies explored the link between corsets and shortness of breath. More recently, in 1998, Colleen Gau conducted experiments in which participants wore nineteenth-century corsets laced three inches tighter than their waist measurements; she demonstrated that the movement of the diaphragm is limited even by wearing only a moderately tight corset. Corset-wearers thus must rely upon accessory respiratory muscles to compensate for the restricted diaphragm, which results in "shallow, upper-diaphragmatic (or costal) breathing" (Steele 2001:69–70).

41. For more on the widespread dissemination of corset horror stories and the notion of femininity they perpetuated, see Kunzle (2004:80–97).

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