


RESEARCH ARTICLE

## Verdi, Auber and the Aida-type

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### Abstract

This article presents a literary genealogy of the titular character in Verdi's *Aida*. While scholars have explored the opera's resonances with late nineteenth-century conceptions of Orientalism, Blackness and the imagined 'East', *Aida*'s etymology and character traits reflect a much broader archetype that extends back a century from its 1871 premiere. Her name is not Egyptian or Ethiopian but Greek, and her backstory was modelled on characters named 'Haidée' and 'Haydée' who appeared in works by Lord Byron and Alexandre Dumas  *fils*, as well as in a celebrated *opéra comique* by Daniel Auber. *Aida* was thus an assemblage of ready-made character archetypes and scenarios rather than an author's *sui generis* depiction of non-Western culture. An intertextual reading of *Aida* offers a broader perspective on alterity in the nineteenth century, which eschewed geographical specificity for archetypes, quotations and allusions. It also offers another way to confront claims of authenticity made by current-day defenders of brownface in Verdi's work.

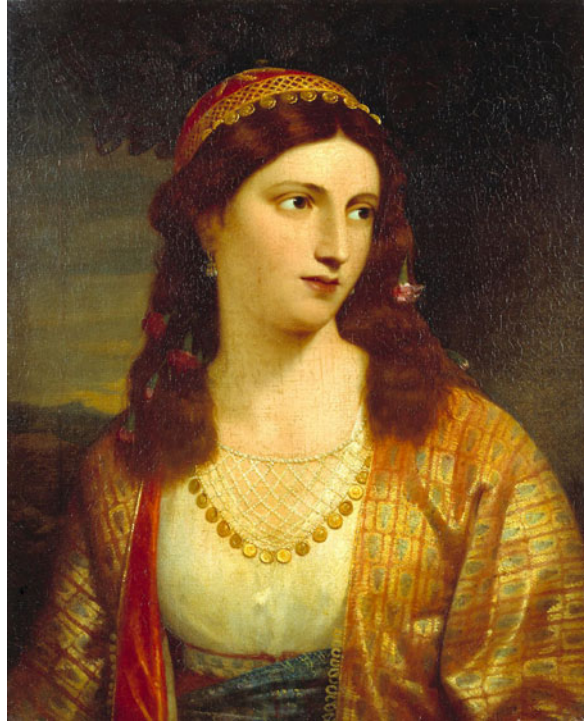
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Sir Charles Lock Eastlake's 'Haidée, a Greek Girl' (Figure 1), painted in Rome in 1827, depicts the beautiful island-dwelling maiden from Lord Byron's unfinished epic poem *Don Juan*. A curator at the Tate Museum interprets the portrait as personifying 'the philhellenic spirit of the times and a northerner's yearning for the warmth and freedom of the South or the exotic East. ... a striking image of a Byronic type'.<sup>1</sup> Following the idealised, allegorical and neoclassical 'Grand Manner' aesthetic promoted by Sir Joshua Reynolds and his followers in the late eighteenth century, Eastlake's Haidée looks chiselled in stone.<sup>2</sup> Her nose, chin and cheekbones are angular and defined like those of a classical sculpture. Evidence of her 'Hellenism' is thus left to the ornately patterned robe, headwear and golden necklace. The background portrays a dimly lit landscape that gives no indication of where the female figure is seated, nor why. The painting is placeless – except, of course, for the placemaking function of the title. To my eye, Eastlake's ornate, stony Haidée – more sculpted than human, more archetype than individual – bears a remarkably close resemblance to another famously placeless portrait: Leonardo da Vinci's 'Mona Lisa'.

Is Eastlake's 'Haidée, a Greek Girl' a copy, a generic historical trope aping neoclassical redheads painted by the Renaissance masters or by Eastlake's immediate

<sup>1</sup> 'Sir Charles Lock Eastlake, "Haidée, a Greek Girl", 1827, exhibited 1831', *Tate Museum* gallery label, 1992.

<sup>2</sup> The 'Grand Manner', as defined by Reynolds in 1778, advocated idealisation and generalisation over realistic depictions of nature: 'In conformity to custom, I call this part of the art history painting; it ought to be called poetical, as in reality it is.' Sir Joshua Reynolds, *Seven Discourses on Art* (Auckland, 2008), 66.



**Figure 1.** Charles Lock Eastlake, 'Haidée, a Greek Girl' (1827), Tate Museum. (colour online)

predecessors at the Royal Academy? To what extent is she treated, either as a real-life model or as a literary character, as an exotic fetish-object, for men by men? Eastlake's 'Haidée, a Greek Girl', though not remarkable, is a telling example of early nineteenth-century archetypal portrait painting, in which wealthy female patrons had their faces superimposed onto the bodies of peasants, dancers, musicians and other exotic characters.

Twenty years after Eastlake displayed his *Haidée*, critics lauded Daniel François Esprit Auber's new *opéra comique* titled *Haydée, ou le secret*, which was premiered on 28 December 1847 in Paris's Salle Favart. Set in sixteenth-century Dalmatia (Act I), Admiral Lorédan prepares to set sail against the Turkish fleet. He appears troubled, a condition not helped by the untimely request of his enemy, Malipieri, for the hand of Rafaela, Lorédan's ward. Having refused Malipieri, Lorédan hurriedly pens and pockets a letter before going to bed. Meanwhile, Haydée, a captured Cypriot slave, noting her master Lorédan's agitation, vows to discover his secret and help, for she is in love with him. While asleep, Lorédan inadvertently discloses this secret to Malipieri while re-enacting it in a dream. He reveals that he won the fortune of Donato, a Venetian senator, by cheating at dice (a plot point borrowed from Mérimée's 1830 story *La partie de tric-trac*). Donato later commits suicide and Lorédan, remorseful, has since adopted his niece Rafaela, and has searched for Donato's missing son, to whom he has written a letter. Malipieri steals the letter to use as a weapon against his enemy. The next day (Act II), Lorédan's fleet defeats the Turks. Despite Malipieri's objections, Lorédan awards a captured ship to Andrea, a young sailor. Rafaela tells Haydée that she loves Andrea, and Haydée tries to persuade Lorédan to let them marry, to which Lorédan agrees. In Venice (Act III), Haydée finds that Cyprus is now part of the Venetian Republic. Though she is again free, she chooses to remain Lorédan's slave. (Her opening aria is the first time we learn that Haydée is of

royal blood.) Lorédan, overcome with remorse, attempts to kill himself. Haydée intervenes, confesses her love for Lorédan, and proclaims that only death will separate her from him. When Malipieri threatens to reveal Lorédan's secret to the Senate, Haydée discloses her own 'secret' and offers herself in marriage to Malipieri in exchange for his silence. Lorédan denounces her offer, and Haydée threatens to kill herself with her dagger. In a subsequent duel, the sailor Andrea kills Malipieri. Lorédan, aware of Haydée's love, resolves to marry her.<sup>3</sup>

Auber's opera was a lasting success in the nineteenth century, receiving 499 performances between its premiere and 1894. The newspaper *Le charivari* raved that Auber's *Haydée* 'is certainly worthy of being placed in the top category of inspiration by this master of *opéra comique*'.<sup>4</sup> Auber's long-time collaborator Eugène Scribe supplied the libretto. Scribe's archetypal 'well-made plays' (*pièces bien faites*) had dominated Parisian playbills for years.<sup>5</sup> Edmond Viel complimented the story's tight construction and the librettist's 'inexhaustible fund of scenic surprises'.<sup>6</sup> Scribe's story, Giacomo Meyerbeer noted, was surprisingly serious for an *opéra comique*, but 'the dramatic dimension' of Auber's music and orchestration 'is most arresting, composed with aptness and skill'.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, there was a sense that the story and score, with its dramatic twists, turns and hints of local colour, swelled beyond the generic confines of *opéra comique*. *La France musicale*, noting its 'amphibious' generic characteristics, linked the work to the composer's earlier and much grander *La muette de Portici*.<sup>8</sup> Thus from the outset critics praised *Haydée* while also calling into question the work's blending of international and intertextual references, most notably Auber's deployment of the Italianate barcarolle rhythm and his use of a humming chorus inspired by the popular German singing style of *Brummlieder*.<sup>9</sup> This vocal technique, a style of singing *bocca chiusa*, would itself become a trope of statuesque musicality. Singers, stripped of the visual spectacle of the moving mouth, become sounding objects on stage. When considered amidst the web of visual and textual sources inspiring the *Haydée* libretto, it is clear that Scribe and Auber's heroine echoes that of Eastlake's painting: at once foreign and familiar, human and statuesque, novel and conventional.<sup>10</sup>

The spelling of her name may vary, but a closer examination reveals that the Haydée persona haunts nineteenth-century European art, music and literature. This article extends the genealogy of the Haidée/Haydée character in both chronological directions. To do so is to uncover the ease with which nineteenth-century writers transplanted archetypal exotic characters from setting to setting. A relatively late instance is Verdi's *Aida* who resembles Auber's *Haydée* (three syllables, with the *H* silent) in more than name. Therefore, rather than begin with *Aida*, this article positions Verdi's titular heroine amidst a web of literary sources that preceded the opera. It advances a straightforward assertion: that the creators of *Aida* were aware of, and borrowed from, Auber's *Haydée*, a work that in turn recalls multiple literary and visual texts.

<sup>3</sup> Adapted from Karin Pendle, 'Scribe, Auber, and the Count of Monte Cristo', *The Music Review* 34 (1973), 210–20.

<sup>4</sup> *Le charivari* (30 December 1847). The most common spelling of the opera's title is Haydée with a y instead of i (though some sources also feature a diaeresis over the y or i).

<sup>5</sup> See Douglas Cardwell, 'The Well-Made Play of Eugène Scribe', *The French Review* 56 (1983), 876–84.

<sup>6</sup> *Le ménestrel* (2 January 1848).

<sup>7</sup> Quoted in Robert Ignatius Letellier, *Daniel-François-Esprit Auber: The Man and His Music* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 2010), 403–4.

<sup>8</sup> *La France musicale* (2 January 1848).

<sup>9</sup> 'Haydée, ou le secret', in *Dictionnaire lyrique ou histoire des opéras*, ed. Pierre Larousse and Félix Clement (Paris, 1867–9), 338.

<sup>10</sup> Robert Ignatius Letellier, *Opéra-Comique: A Sourcebook* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 2010), 114.

The Aida-type, as I call it, existed long before the team of Auguste Mariette, Temistocle Solera, Antonio Ghislanzoni, Camille Du Locle and Giuseppe Verdi ‘created’ her. My point of departure is that characters named ‘Aida’, ‘Haidée’, ‘Haïdee’, ‘Haydée’ and variations thereof are linked not only orthographically but by uncannily consistent commonalities. I summarise them here, and I elaborate on these traits over the course of the article: a backstory featuring non-Western European origins; enslavement to a benevolent Western male warrior-type and a romantic saviour complex towards that type; a fourth-wall revelation (via a soliloquy or aria) that she is in fact of royal or aristocratic blood in her respective land of origin; a proclivity to be secretive, keep secrets and be told secrets; a connection to embodied musicality (via diegetic music-making, overt references to her musicality, *bocca chiusa* singing or close association of the character with a musical instrument); and male characters’ fixation with the phonetics and musicality of her name.<sup>11</sup>

Also common to this character archetype is a preoccupation with death. Tombs, statues and pillars surround the Aida-type, which as I will argue suggest connections to the Pygmalion myth, another trope of nineteenth-century arts. Related to this fixation with tombs – a fixation that brings together Egyptian, Greek and Judeo-Christian conceptions of death – is the question of etymology. After all, the word ‘Aida’ is neither Egyptian nor Ethiopian nor Italian, but Greek: ‘Aida’, ‘Haydée’ and ‘Haidée’ all seem to derive from *Hades* (*Haidēs*, *Haidēs* or *Aidēs*), a word that refers to both the god of the underworld and the underworld itself.<sup>12</sup> Although Verdi’s is the only one to die, the Aida-type exhibits an openness to dying a martyr out of love for her enslaver. Tombs, columns and statues not only function as morbid motifs of the Aida-type but also reassert the archetype’s Greco-Roman roots.<sup>13</sup>

The sustained interest in this pan-European exotic heroine is also evident in other nineteenth-century musical works beyond Auber’s and Verdi’s operas.<sup>14</sup> The composer Felicita Casella (born Félicie Lacombe) premiered her Portuguese-language opera *Haydée* (libretto by Luiz Felipe Leite) in Porto in 1849 and, in revised form, at Lisbon’s Teatro Dona Maria (now the Teatro Nacional Dona Maria II) in 1853, where Casella performed the titular role. Later in the century, André Messager composed the Byronic cantata *Don Juan et Haydée*, a work that won him the attention of Auguste Vaucorbeil, the director of the Paris Opéra, who subsequently commissioned Messager’s ballet *Les deux pigeons* in

<sup>11</sup> A compelling case can be made that the Aida-type is also present in Leonard Bernstein’s *West Side Story*. As the sister of Bernardo, the head of the Sharks, Maria assumes a position of royalty relative to the gang culture of her surroundings. She, too, is in love with the enemy. Furthermore, the phonetics of name are remarkably similar to that of Aida, and her enemy-lover Tony rhapsodises on her name in the famous number in Act I. Tony’s ‘Maria’, therefore, performs the same sonic and dramaturgical function as Radamès’s aria ‘Celeste Aida’. Many thanks to Ralph P. Locke for noting this connection.

<sup>12</sup> ‘Hades’, in *New World Encyclopaedia Online*. [www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Hades#:~:text=scepter%20and%20cornucopia,-,Hades%2C%20abode%20of%20the%20dead,early%20Hebrew%20conception%20of%20Sheol](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Hades#:~:text=scepter%20and%20cornucopia,-,Hades%2C%20abode%20of%20the%20dead,early%20Hebrew%20conception%20of%20Sheol) (accessed 8 June 2022). Jon Solomon has made this Greek connection from another angle, arguing that Auguste Mariette had derived Aida’s name from that of a protagonist inscribed on the Rosetta Stone. See Jon Solomon, ‘Aida, Aetos, and the Rosetta Stone’, *Acta Musicologica* 85 (2013), 187–98.

<sup>13</sup> As Elizabeth French Boyd has noted in a classic study of Lord Byron’s *Don Juan*, the name ‘Haidée’ in Byron’s usage can also be translated as ‘caress’ or ‘caressed one’ in ancient Greek. Elizabeth French Boyd, *Byron’s Don Juan: A Critical Study* (London, 1958), 122.

<sup>14</sup> A related character to the Aida-type is Sélila, the eponymous heroine of Giacomo Meyerbeer’s *L’Africaine*, who shares many resemblances with the character archetype and whose provenance can also be traced back to Byronic literature. A review of Auber’s *Haydée* in an 1847 issue of *Le midi* places Byron, Auber and Meyerbeer in the same intertextual web. While discussing the origins of Scribe’s libretto, the critic admits that he first believed that *Haydée* was based on Byron’s 1813 poem ‘The Bride of Abydos’, which features a Turkish love interest named Zuleika. The deeper connections between Sélila and Aida and their respective ‘Africanness’ await further research and critique.

1884, a work that cemented his career.<sup>15</sup> Edmond de Polignac also composed a cantata named ‘Don Juan et Haydée’.<sup>16</sup> Another operatic instance of the Aida-type extends the intertextual web beyond French and Italian sources: the four-act Czech opera *Hedy* by Zdeněk Fibich was premiered in 1896. Featuring a score redolent of Wagnerism and *grand opéra* tropes, Fibich’s *Hedy* presents a version of the Byronic tale and noticeably adapts the spelling of the character’s name to fit Czech pronunciation. The work was, unfortunately (but perhaps appropriately), written off as a pastiche of old styles. As one critic presciently reminisced, ‘women in the theatre shouted during intermission: “I would give ten *Hedys* for one *Aida*”’.<sup>17</sup>

While this article makes a case for an unacknowledged connection between different operatic works, the broader aim is to emphasise the intersections of race, gender, geopolitics and genre in the construction of transmedial archetypes. I take ‘archetype’ to mean an abstraction constructed from repeated utterances, formulated in a scenario, template or character typology, then activated in a literary, visual or musical text.<sup>18</sup> Although one easily finds ‘exotic’ heroines, ‘slave girls’, ‘tragic mulattas’ and *femmes fatales* before and after the nineteenth century, I argue that this particular persona holds the key to understanding how Verdi’s late opera was constructed from ready-made character archetypes and generically exotic scenarios that have hitherto gone unrecognised.<sup>19</sup> By following the Aida-type through works by Byron, Dumas, Auber and Verdi – and in a brief coda, into cyberspace – this article connects Verdi’s heroine to a web of uncannily similar predecessors, revisits the arguments for and against the ‘authenticity’ of brownface, and explores how these debates around authenticity hold us back from understanding the more comprehensive, structural forms of alterity that informed the production and reception of the operatic archetypes.<sup>20</sup>

## The Aida empire

The substantial scholarship on Verdi’s opera has almost unanimously taken the imperialist ‘realism’ of her representation as the point of departure. This reading, which informs Edward Said’s famous study of the work, reveals how Verdi’s *Aida* reflects the imperialist

<sup>15</sup> John Wagstaff and Andrew Lamb, ‘Messenger, André’, *Oxford Music Online*.

<sup>16</sup> Sylvia Kahan, *In Search of New Scales: Prince Edmond de Polignac, Octatonic Explorer* (Rochester, 2009), 37.

<sup>17</sup> A. Piskáček, ‘Dva okamžiky’, *Dalibor* 24 (1910), 350. Quoted in translation from Jiří Kopecný, ‘Zdeněk Fibich’s opera *Hedy* as a “Czech Tristan” between Wagnerism and Verismo’, *Journal of Literature and Art Studies* 3 (2013), 619. Much gratitude to the late John Tyrrell, who first brought Fibich’s opera to my attention.

<sup>18</sup> Byron Almén has used Northrop Frye’s notion of archetypes to rid musical narrative of mimetic representation and reduce it to identifiable and reproducible models for analysis. See Byron Almén, ‘Narrative Archetypes: A Critique, Theory, and Method of Narrative Analysis’, *Journal of Music Theory* 47 (2003), 1–39. The classic study of feminine archetypes in opera libretti remains Catherine Clément, *Opera, or the Undoing of Women*, trans. Betsy Wing (Minneapolis, 1988). For a recent Jungian archetypal analysis of Berlioz’s *Les Troyens*, see Rhea Michelle Bumpass, ‘We Are Living in a Patriarchal World and I Am an Archetypal Girl: A Jungian Analysis of Hector Berlioz’s *Les Troyens*’ (Master’s thesis, University of Houston, 2020).

<sup>19</sup> This tension between claims of authenticity and abstract perceptions of alterity features prominently in the ‘tragic mulatta’, an archetypal nineteenth-century figure popular in the United States. This racial stock-type, found in stage works such as Dion Boucicault’s *The Octoroon* (1859) and literary works such as Victor Séjour’s short story ‘Le mulâtre’ (1837) and Harriet Beecher Stowe’s novel *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852), demonstrates that literary archetypes symbolised a discomfort with navigating social and geographic spaces along racial, societal and gendered lines. On the ‘tragic mulatta’ as a literary figure, see Kimberly Snyder Manganelli, *Transatlantic Spectacles of Race: The Tragic Mulatta and the Tragic Muse* (New Brunswick, 2012).

<sup>20</sup> As Naomi André argues, the discourses within the opera industry around the use of blackface seemed for years unaffected by the discourses around Orientalism and structural racism within operatic texts. See Naomi André, *Black Opera: History, Power, Engagement* (Urbana-Champaign, 2018), 7.



tendencies and ideologies of the European ‘West’ towards the non-European ‘East’.<sup>21</sup> The staying power of Said’s critique is precisely due to this transcendence of modern-day geopolitics in a more abstract space of ideology. His notion of a structural, not geographic, East/West binary is in itself an archetypal approach. Writing about Enlightenment modes of racial classification, Said identifies four motifs – archetypes, if you will – that informed subsequent notions of structural Orientalism: expansion, historical confrontation, sympathy and classification.<sup>22</sup> In their quest for universals, Enlightenment thinkers such as Kant and Montesquieu ascribed morality to racial physiology. Such designations gained power when in the nineteenth century these classifications became what Said terms ‘archetypal figures’, such as ‘primitive man, giants, and heroes’.<sup>23</sup> Thus the social construct of race in the nineteenth-century West was a game of archetypal family resemblances, including but not limited to racial phenotype, morality and the social relations between the colonisers and those colonised.<sup>24</sup> These abstracted relations informed not only geopolitics but also the ways in which fictional characters were sketched in opera. Yet despite Said’s own archetypal analysis of Orientalism, musicological studies of *Aida* predominantly take the literal Egypt/Ethiopia premise as the point of departure. As a result, the scholarship on Verdi’s *Aida* – or perhaps more accurately, Said’s *Aida* – has become an empire unto itself.

Semantically, *Aida* seems hidebound by the geopolitical notion of ‘empire’. In general, scholars of *Aida* debate the degree to which Egypt or Ethiopia is accurately presented, misrepresented, or not represented at all. While these questions remain as pertinent as ever, such studies hover around one another, critique one another, and revisit the readings of earlier critiques of the opera.<sup>25</sup> This focus on representations of imperial space on the operatic stage can obscure the ways in which exotic heroines were abstracted and recycled. Readings of the work take seriously the extent to which the opera reflected the expansion of colonialism during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In other words, cultural critiques of *Aida* begin with the opera’s conception and then move forward chronologically to explore its reception and cultural resonance.<sup>26</sup> Christopher R. Gauthier and Jennifer McFarlane-Harris suggest that the work be read in the context of Egypt’s own imperial and racial self-fashioning at the turn of the century. They conclude by advocating for a ‘flexible reading of *Aida* that takes seriously not only

<sup>21</sup> Ralph P. Locke summarises these imperialist readings in terms broad enough to encompass a plethora of interpretations: ‘to establish and maintain an empire often entails a systematic Othering of a whole distant (or sometimes neighbouring) people, turning them into a category of not-Us, and thereby into objects to be dehumanised, possessed and used for Our own purposes, when not simply raped and mass-murdered on the spot’. Ralph P. Locke, ‘Beyond the Exotic: How “Eastern” is *Aida*?’ *Cambridge Opera Journal* 17 (2005), 106.

<sup>22</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York, 1979), 120.

<sup>23</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, 119.

<sup>24</sup> For a comprehensive overview of these relations, see Ian Haney Lopez, ‘The Social Construction of Race: Some Observations on Illusion, Fabrication, and Choice’, *Harvard Civil Rights-Civil Liberties Law Review* (1994), 28–34.

<sup>25</sup> Ralph P. Locke lists nine such readings, and by now there are more. See Ralph P. Locke, ‘*Aida* and Nine Readings of Empire’, *Nineteenth-Century Music Review* 3 (2006), 45–72. Elsewhere, Locke engages in a similar exercise in intertextual cross-reading of exotically styled operas including *Turandot*, *Madama Butterfly*, *Aida*, *L’Africaine* and *Les pêcheurs de perles*. Ralph P. Locke, *Musical Exoticism: Images and Reflections* (Cambridge, 2009), 200. Building on Locke’s own hermeneutics of exoticism, I argue that nineteenth-century literary conceptions never left the realm of archetypal fiction: they were often too abstracted as to be considered misreadings at all.

<sup>26</sup> Katherine Bergeron has taken to task scholars who ‘insist on seeing the Egyptian plot, and its potential political meanings, exclusively in terms of what Verdi himself might have intended’. Rather, Bergeron argues, we ought to begin any discussion of *Aida*’s imperial aesthetics with what she calls a ‘superficial’ reading of the spectacle: ‘a particular staging of Egypt’. Katherine Bergeron, ‘Verdi’s Egyptian Spectacle: On the Colonial Subject of *Aida*’, *Cambridge Opera Journal* 14/1–2 (2002), 150.

the position of the observer, but also the work that observers inevitably do in connecting the opera to their milieu'.<sup>27</sup> While Gauthier and McFarlane-Harris offer a localised, close reading of *Aida* as an index of Egyptian national identity, their chapter is a nuanced revision of 'Said's *Aida*' rather than an attempt to understand the intertextual contexts that led to the conception of the specific 'Aida' character in the first place. With such a focus on Verdi's intentions and the subsequent reactions of his critics, little attention has been paid to the non-Egyptian/Ethiopian contexts *before* *Aida*, leaving one to assume that this complex heroine was created *ex nihilo*.<sup>28</sup>

What interests me is less an author's decision-making in context, but rather how a casual reader or operagoer may have absorbed archetypal characters from different theatrical and literary texts, or what Henry Jenkins would call transmedial storytelling.<sup>29</sup> A fictional character, when read archetypally, can expose the layers of identity that were folded atop one another. Ostensibly, Auber's Haydée, a white Cypriot, and Verdi's *Aida*, a Black Ethiopian, share little in terms of racial phenotype. Yet their common circumstances ring similar: disenfranchisement brought on by female slave-trade practices, geopolitical tensions that make certain royal and familial duties impossible, and an ability to code-switch and keep secrets, learned by necessity. Distinct in context, genre and racial phenotype, these two soprano heroines nevertheless both existed in fictional archetypal situations that did not allow for their voices to be heard on their own terms.<sup>30</sup>

An archetypal approach by no means soft-pedals the politics of imperialism endemic to Verdi's opera, or, for that matter, to any of the aforementioned musical works. On the contrary, this shift in perspective away from work-centric exceptionalism to macro-level reading reveals the extent to which the nineteenth-century imagination reduced national origin and gender identity to a set of easily reproducible character traits. The *Aida*-type can be read as not having any nationality or ethnicity at all. Rather, an ambiguously named female slave/royal, chained to a vow of secrecy – for both romantic and geopolitical reasons – and driven by benevolence, engages in an archetypal master-slave dialectic with a male saviour-type who shares none of these characteristics.<sup>31</sup> Much as in *commedia dell'arte*, operatic titles and character names hold the keys to their typologies and origin stories. Such a computational approach to nineteenth-century character typology is less anachronistic than it may seem. This was, after all, the century of Scribe's

<sup>27</sup> Christopher R. Gauthier and Jennifer McFarlane-Harris, 'Nationalism, Racial Difference, and "Egyptian" Meaning in Verdi's *Aida*', in *Blackness in Opera*, ed. Karen M. Bryan, Eric Saylor and Naomi André (Baltimore, 2012), 70.

<sup>28</sup> An archetypal methodology is more concerned with synchronic typology and less with diachronic details of performance history, which I argue reflects the work-centric exceptionalism implicit in *Aida* scholarship. It also resists committing what Wimsatt and Beardsley – and later, Richard Taruskin – would dub the 'intentional' or 'poietic' fallacy. See W.K. Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley, 'The Intentional Fallacy', *The Sewanee Review* 54 (1946), 468–8; and Richard Taruskin, 'The Poietic Fallacy', *The Musical Times* 145 (2004), 7–34. Rather, surface or 'distant' reading bypasses the author-concept to piece together an 'implied reader' (to borrow from Wolfgang Iser), or how texts such as paintings, poems, libretti and scores repeated the same basic 'instructions' for how to represent female alterity. See Wolfgang Iser, *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett* (Baltimore, 1978).

<sup>29</sup> See Harry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York, 2016).

<sup>30</sup> André, *Black Opera*, 56.

<sup>31</sup> Roger Parker has mapped some of these characteristics onto Verdi's *Aida*. In particular, he notes *Aida*'s urge to spill the beans, a tendency marked sonically in her 'long sigh' and more explicitly in her self-interrupted 'I, too, am a [princess]' in the duet with Amneris. Parker, echoing Adorno, Said and other commentators argue that because Verdi's opera marked the composer's 'late style', its fissures, contradictions and insecurities are legible in the work's score. An intertextual approach obliterates any notion of 'lateness' in the work, as it interprets the *Aida*-type from the perspective of her readers, not her creators. See Roger Parker, 'The Genesis of *Aida*', in *Aida: English National Opera Guide*, ed. Nicholas John (London, 1980), 31–40.

*pièce bien faite* and Basevi's *la solita forma*, two 'default settings' of nineteenth-century French and Italian opera.<sup>32</sup>

It was also the century of Lord Byron, an author who understood the rhetorical power of allegory and abstraction. *Don Juan* (1819–24) is ostensibly set in the tumult of late eighteenth-century geopolitics, but it is a set of blueprints for stock characters and scenarios. Alexandre Dumas's *Le comte du Monte-Cristo* (1844) features a character named Haydée, and Byron's *Don Juan* is namechecked in a discussion of this character's origins. It is therefore worth dwelling on these two literary works in more or less chronological fashion, not only because they feature characters named Haidée and Haydée, respectively, but also because elements of the 'Byronic Hero' are omnipresent in the 'Aida-type'. The Aida character was not 'made-up', as some scholars claim, but rather 'assembled' through a conscious and unconscious accumulation of popular tropes and literary references to generic alterity.<sup>33</sup>

### Aida as Byronic heroine

Byron's unfinished *Don Juan* is part epic, part confessional. The protagonist Don Juan recounts his shipwreck, rejuvenation at the hands of Haidée and subsequent travels through the Mediterranean region – and he frequently interrupts these tales with digressions on alcohol, philosophy and criticism. Byron's poem can be read as an intertextual allegory, an autobiographical dream through which Byron – donning Juan's persona – has various amorous and near-death encounters. His characters are Byronic archetypes, copies of his own experiences, both real and imagined.<sup>34</sup>

Haidée appears in Cantos II through IV. Midway through Canto II, Juan's ship is destroyed in a storm. A series of gruesome events follows: only a few crew members survive, and out of desperation they eat Don Juan's dog aboard their emergency dinghy. Still near starvation, the crew draws straws to see who will be cannibalised. Juan's servant Pedrillo is chosen. Those who eat the body go mad and drown themselves. Juan, now alone, eventually washes up on an island in the Aegean Sea. Not having eaten the corpse, he is near death from hunger, and passes out. Upon awakening, he finds two young girls staring at him. One keeps her distance but the other approaches. The reader gathers snippets of information about this mysterious girl through Juan's gradual return to health: 'And slowly by his swimming eyes was seen / A lovely female face of seventeen.'<sup>35</sup> What Juan (and the reader) learns about Haidée is complicated by the fact that neither speaks the other's language. Their communication relies entirely on gesture, inflexion, superficial assumption and a few acquired phrases. Forty-eight consecutive lines are

<sup>32</sup> See Harold S. Powers, "La solita forma" and "The Uses of Convention", *Acta Musicologica* 59 (1987), 65–90; and Steven Huebner, 'Lyric Form in "Ottocento" Opera', *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 117 (1992), 123–47. On Auber and Scribe's reliance on *la solita forma*, see Herbert Schneider, 'Cavatine, Cantabile und Cabaletta in den Opéras-comiques von Scribe, Auber und einigen ihrer Zeitgenossen', in *Aria: Eine Festschrift für Wolfgang Ruf*, ed. Wolfgang Hirschmann (Hildesheim, 2011), 603–23.

<sup>33</sup> See André, *Black Opera*, 10.

<sup>34</sup> Linguist Claudio Bracco claimed that Byron's Haidée was based on a real-life person. A Circassian child slave was bought in Constantinople and taken to France by a French diplomat around the end of the seventeenth century. She was eventually freed and became famous in French salons under the name Mlle Aïssé. Thus, despite her ethnic roots in the Caucasus, Mlle Aïssé was 'transplanted' both geographically and etymologically, being given a name inspired by Greek antiquity. In 1811, Lord Byron published an apocryphal 'Translation of a Romaic Song', whose first stanza announces a new spelling of the Greek/Romaic/Circassian girl's name – a possible tribute to the real-life Mlle Aïssé: 'I enter thy garden of roses, / Beloved and fair Haidée, / Each morning where Flora reposes, / For surely I see her in thee'. Claudio Bracco, 'Haidée: Vicende di un antropomino letterario', *Italianistica: rivista di letteratura italiana* 42 (2013), 47–61.

<sup>35</sup> Lord Byron, *Don Juan: in Sixteen Cantos* (Halifax, 1837).



devoted to Haidée's appearance alone. It is likely that Haidée's painters consulted the following colourful description:

Her brow was overhung with coins of gold,  
That sparkled o'er the auburn of her hair—  
Her clustering hair, whose longer locks were roll'd  
In braids behind; and though her stature were  
Even of the highest for a female mould,  
They nearly reach'd her heel; and in her air  
There was a something which bespoke command,  
As one who was a lady in the land.

Byron's description is not devoid of exotic female stereotypes; we hear of her long, braided auburn hair and her stoic, statuesque visage. She is so charming as to be fake. Byron continues with an aside on neoclassical painting: he favours a more human, imperfect approach to portraiture:

For she was one  
Fit for the model of a statuary  
(A race of mere impostors, when all's done—  
I've seen much finer women, ripe and real,  
Than all the nonsense of their stone ideal).

Stoniness haunts the Aida-type. In his parenthetical aside, Byron speaks to nineteenth-century sensibilities when he notes that statues are a 'race' in themselves. In turning Haidée to stone, Byron conforms to what would become a century-long practice of reifying women's identities through the evocation of stone. At the same time, Byron's 'race of impostors', that is, statues, outlives their masters and serves new ones.<sup>36</sup> Each reincarnation of the Aida-type, then, has the unenviable – one might even call it Promethean – task of loving and redeeming her master, all the while performing a new, yet perpetually exotic, identity. The Byronic Haidée – based, as we have seen, on a real, Turkish slave – is truly a 'stone ideal', as all that is needed to activate her is an arbitrary change of nationality and a gentle respelling of her name.

Upon rescuing the beached Don Juan, Haidée and her servant Zoë hide him in a cave, lest Haidée's despotic father sell the white man into slavery. Haidée is fascinated by Juan, and he by her. In 1837, Alexandre-Marie Colin illustrated this scene in his 'Byron as Don Juan and Haidée' (Figure 2). Colin was receptive to Byron's vivid poetry: he included Don Juan's 'clean shirt and very spacious Turkish breeches' (garb that Haidée supplied), oysters (the 'amatory food' for Don Juan's nourishment) and, notably, Haidée's bare foot, following the contours of Byron's text 'Her small snow feet had slippers, but no stocking.' The bare foot is a recurring sexual motif that seems to suggest Haidée's cavalier attitude towards clothing; like the veil, the bare foot is what Bram Dijkstra would have called an 'icon of misogyny' – the addition of a sexually suggestive feature to a generic female character marked as non-Western.<sup>37</sup> Traditional signifiers of Haidée's 'ethnicity' are

<sup>36</sup> On the implications of whiteness as the dominant and 'default' race in Byron's poem, see Mark Canuel, 'Race, Writing, and *Don Juan*', *Studies in Romanticism* 54 (2015), 303–28.

<sup>37</sup> Examining *fin-de-siècle* painterly representations of female archetypes, Dijkstra argues that the popularity of the *femme fatale* and the *femme fragile* reflected the increasing visibility and power of women in European and American social and cultural life. Dijkstra identifies 'codes' that signify various forms of subversion of the female gender. This iconography, Dijkstra observes, reaches beyond painterly technique to a scientific philosophy in the Hegelian tradition: 'the self "lives" only when perched like a vulture upon the supine, lacerated, absolutely



**Figure 2.** Alexandre-Marie Colin, 'Byron as Don Juan, with Haidée' (1837), Bridgeman Images. (colour online)

distinguishable only through her garments; she retains her distinctive golden jewellery that simultaneously establishes her class (as reported by Byron and painted by Eastlake, see [Figure 1](#)). Her skin tone is the same as Juan's, illuminated from a strong light source that seems to originate from within the cave. Henry Pickersgill's eerie illustration of Haidée for an 1837 printing of Byron's *Don Juan* ([Figure 3](#)) finds Haidée surrounded by the stone of what seems to be a room in a tower. Haidée looks longingly at the moon through a window, and yet she is the only lit object in the image. These images suggest that Haidée was far more than fodder for the sexual appetite for slave girls, nor was she merely a decorative piece of *couleur locale*. Rather, the Byronic Haidée is presented as a complex set of visual signifiers of royalty, enslavement and benevolence. A walking backstory, her origins, dignified behaviours and physical attributes would find their way into the pages of one of the most popular novels of the nineteenth century.

### **Aida, Pygmalion and Monte-Cristo**

If *Don Juan* produced a Byronic heroine in Haidée – caregiver, statuesque beauty, martyr – Haydée of *Le comte de Monte-Cristo* embodies a more powerful and active heroism. Dumas's Haydée is a polyglot and refined courtesan who helps the Count of Monte Cristo (born Edmond Dantès) inflict revenge upon Fernand Mondego – now Count de Morcerf, the man who was responsible for both Dantès's imprisonment and the death of Haydée's father.

Unlike her older cousin in *Don Juan*, Haydée in *Le comte de Monte-Cristo* plays an active role in the development of the entire novel. Briefly: she is the daughter of the Ottoman Ali Pasha of Tepelen, eventually bought by the Count of Monte Cristo from the Sultan Mahmoud. She is considered at once 'Greek', 'Eastern' and the daughter of an Albanian-Turk, causing several characters throughout the novel to comment on her

submissive body of the other'. See Bram Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in fin-de-siècle Culture* (Oxford, 1986), 252–3.



Printed by H.W. Pickersgill, R.A.

Engraved by Henry Balls.

## HAIDÉE.

**Figure 3.** Henry William Pickersgill, frontispiece for Lord Byron, *Don Juan: in Sixteen Cantos* (Halifax, 1837).

'Hellenic' elocution but also on her 'Eastern' mannerisms. Even though she was purchased as a slave, Monte Cristo treats her with the reverence of a free courtesan. With Dumas we have a stronger emphasis on the character's diegetic musicality, one of the 'family resemblances' of the Aida-type. Haydée attends local operas with the Count, and she entertains herself by playing an instrument that the other characters find unusual and striking.

As they did in Byron's *Don Juan*, male characters in *Le comte de Monte-Cristo* report on Haydée's physical features at various points in the novel. Two chapters – both titled 'Haydée' – are especially descriptive of the archetype. Haydée's jewels and her sculpture-like feet capture the attention of Monte Cristo. She wears a dress that displays feet 'so exquisitely formed and so delicately fair, that they might well have been taken for Parian marble, had not the eye been undeceived by their constantly shifting in and out of the fairy-like slippers in which they were encased'.<sup>38</sup> By relating her feet to art objects and raw materials, her fictional observers create an intertextual link to another popular Greek trope of the era: the Pygmalion myth. Ellen Lockhart has explored the trope of the

<sup>38</sup> Alexandre Dumas, *The Count of Monte-Cristo* (London, 1846), 582.

sentient statue in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. These literary Pygmalions, Lockhart explains, not only communicated in pantomime but also used ventriloquism. In this way, musicians, choreographers, scientists and philosophers conjured up statues in a range of discourses concerning ethnicity, enlightenment and consciousness.<sup>39</sup> We see these Pygmalionesque tendencies in Byron and Dumas, as well as in the painters who set their words in colour. Yet we also see them in Verdi's opera. As Aida descends to the tomb in Act III, she greets her 'fatal stone', as Lydia Goehr puts it, with a hymn of death: 'O terra addio, addio, valle di pianti'.<sup>40</sup> In fact, contemporary critics noted that Aida seemed destined for a stony death from the beginning of the opera, anticipating what Gabriela Cruz has called Aida's inherent 'subterranean morbidity'.<sup>41</sup> The critic Ernest Reyer, for instance, commented that Verdi had placed the 'statue in the orchestra but left the pedestal on stage'.<sup>42</sup> In other words, Aida's accompanying music foreshadows the character's final tomb scene. This foreshadowing is particularly evident in Aida's 'Ritorna vincitor' (discussed later), which features quotes from the ominous chromatic melody in the opera's prelude. Yet to read 'death' into this character, to assume that 'lateness' in Verdi has brought upon a preoccupation with the end, is again to assume a rhetoric of realism – not to mention a Judeo-Christian perspective on the afterlife. As a Pygmalionesque figure, the Aida-type is laid to rest, only to be revitalised in a different setting and a different medium. Her death is a return to her stony origins, a cyclic completion of her trajectory as a statuesque archetype.

### 'Celeste Haydée'

Just as the Pygmalionesque statues in Lockhart's book dance and sing their way into sentience, so does the Aida-type acquire agency through diegetic musicality. Even her appellation is musical: characters dwell on the exoticism of her name and explore its phonetic features at various points in *Le comte de Monte-Cristo*. We find these musical references in chapter 77, the second of the two chapters titled 'Haydée'.<sup>43</sup> Morcerf, who is a guest in Monte Cristo's home (and does not recognise Monte Cristo as his nemesis) interrupts a conversation with his son Albert to listen against the wall, 'through which sounds seemed to issue resembling those of a guitar'. Once Morcerf explains that the music is coming from Haydée's instrument – identified in the text as a *guzla* – Albert is struck not only by the sounds of this esoteric instrument but by the servant's very name: 'Haydée! What an adorable name! Are there, then, really women who bear the name of Haydée anywhere but in Byron's poems?' Morcerf proceeds to answer this bizarre intertextual question: 'Certainly, there are. Haydée is a very uncommon name in France, but it is common enough in Albania and Epirus; it is as if you said, for example, Chastity, Modesty, Innocence,—it is a kind of baptismal name, as you Parisians call it.' Perhaps there is something in the name, after all. Dumas assumes that Haydée's exotic name would register as exotic not only for the novel's characters but also for readers of the book: an exoticism that functions both diegetically and non-diegetically. The character Albert, in his shock, briefly becomes a post-structuralist; he can only make sense of her name by deferring to another text. The

<sup>39</sup> See Ellen Lockhart, *Animation, Plasticity, and Music in Italy, 1770–1830* (Berkeley, 2017).

<sup>40</sup> Lydia Goehr, 'Aida and the Empire of Emotions (Theodor W. Adorno, Edward Said, and Alexander Kluge)', *Current Musicology* 87 (2009), 148. Goehr sees the Schillerian and redemptive Christian connotations in Aida's death, but it is also impossible to ignore the Pygmalionesque references to stone in the opera, and its role in deciding who lives and who dies.

<sup>41</sup> Gabriela Cruz, *Grand Illusion: Phantasmagoria in Nineteenth-Century Opera* (New York, 2020), 172.

<sup>42</sup> Quoted in Cruz, *Grand Illusion*, 172.

<sup>43</sup> See Dumas, *The Count of Monte-Cristo*, 889–910.

plot is thus interrupted to ruminate on the strange musicality of the name, as if Dumas had built the reader's own wandering thoughts into the narrative.

Like Albert in *Le comte de Monte-Cristo*, Radamès briefly pauses to ruminate on a slave's name. The three syllables of Aida's name form the melody of one of the most famous, and notoriously difficult, arias in the tenor repertory: 'Celeste Aida':

Celeste Aida, forma divina,  
Mistico serto di luce e fior,  
Del mio pensiero tu sei regina,  
Tu di mia vita sei lo splendor.  
Il tuo bel cielo vorrei ridarti,  
Le dolci brezze del patrio suol  
Un regal serto sul crin posarti,  
Ergerti un trono vicino al sol.

(Heavenly Aida, divine form, mystic garland of light and flowers, you are the queen of my thoughts, you are the radiance of my life. I would like to give you back your lovely sky, the gentle breezes of your native land, set a royal crown on your locks, raise you a throne near the sun.)<sup>44</sup>

Few arias in the standard repertoire dwell on a character's name so prominently. 'Celeste Aida' forms part of Radamès's first soliloquy, following an expository recitative in which he identifies himself as an ambitious warrior. We learn of Aida being displaced from her homeland, but backstory is not the primary purpose of this *romanza*. Rather, it is an ode to her name. The first two words, connected through vowel elision, send the tenor voice soaring up an octave through his *passaggio* in a notably archaic example of operatic text painting (Example 1).

As a slow-motion rhapsody that announces Aida's name and little else, 'Celeste Aida' brings the main plot to a halt, rupturing whatever Egyptian local colour had been established in the opening moments of the opera. Indeed, as Fabrizio Della Seta notes, Verdi and Ghislanzoni added the aria to Auguste Mariette's original scenario.<sup>45</sup> Given the amount of exchange between Verdi and Giulio Ricordi regarding the aria's punishing B flat, 'Celeste Aida' was not so much conceived for the fictional Radamès as for the very real tenors attempting the role.<sup>46</sup> Scholars have also commented on the abstract placelessness of the aria. For Julian Budden, this famous passage is nothing if not generic: Radamès's aria is a 'typical instance of Verdian three-limbed melody fashioned into a French ternary design'.<sup>47</sup> Steven Huebner remarks on the conspicuous banality of the trumpet fanfare that announces the aria, an interrupting signal 'so stiff and conventional' that it is difficult not to hear 'an undertone of irony or insincerity'.<sup>48</sup> This fanfare, and the *romanza* that follows, thus brings further attention to the sound of Aida's name. Verdi traces the three vowels up an octave in the key of B flat major, into a punishing tenor tessitura. Both male characters – Albert and Radamès – stop to focus on the phonetics

<sup>44</sup> William Weaver, *Seven Verdi Librettos* (New York, 1975), 277.

<sup>45</sup> Fabrizio Della Seta, 'New Currents in the Libretto', in *The Cambridge Companion to Verdi*, ed. Scott L. Balthazar (Cambridge, 2004), 81.

<sup>46</sup> See, for instance, Verdi to Giulio Ricordi, 26 January 1875, *Verdi's Aida: The History of an Opera in Letters and Documents*, ed. Hans Busch (Minneapolis, 2000), 377.

<sup>47</sup> Julian Budden, *Verdi* (Oxford, 2008), 284.

<sup>48</sup> Steven Huebner, "'O patria mia': Patriotism, Dream, Death", *Cambridge Opera Journal* 14 (2002), 163. Elsewhere Huebner remarks on the traditional template of 'Celeste Aida', which effectively follows a recitativo-cavatina format. See Steven Huebner, *Les opéras de Verdi: éléments d'un langage musico-dramatique* (Montréal, 2017), 106.



The image shows a musical score for Verdi's *Aida*, Act I scene I. It consists of a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The tempo is marked *Andantino con espress.* and the key signature has one flat. The vocal line begins with the lyrics "Ce. le. ste A. i. da,". The piano accompaniment includes dynamic markings such as *ff*, *pp*, and *p*.

Example 1. Verdi, *Aida*, 'Celeste Aida', Act I scene I.

of their respective Aida-type's name. In the novel, Dumas lists the name's various meanings and makes a non-sequitur reference to Byron; in the opera, Verdi uses 'Celeste Aida' to represent Aida's name musically. The trumpet fanfare that begins 'Celeste Aida' can thus be read not only as a signifier of Radamès's military background, but also as an announcement of a plot interruption. Pausing the story to enter Radamès's thoughts, we hear Aida's name ringing in his head. These transmedial interruptions, digressions and announcements amplify the Aida-type's capacity to be adapted from one artistic medium, ethnicity and plot to another.

### Distant musicality

A key trait of the Aida-type is performative musicality. As we have seen, her name is the source of sonic fascination by the male characters who subjugate her. Yet unlike Byron's statuesque heroine, Dumas's Haydée is a literal musician. Her instrument – the *guzla* – is as exotic-sounding to the characters as her name. The *guzla*, or *gusla*, was a traditional one-stringed bowed instrument popular in Eastern European folk music-making in the nineteenth century.<sup>49</sup> The presence of the *guzla* in the story in turn refers to another French literary source: Prosper Mérimée's collection of faux-Greek poems titled *La guzla, ou choix de poésies illyriques, recueillies dans la Dalmatie, la Bosnie, la Croatie et l'Herzégovine* (The Guzla, or a Selection of Illyric Poems Collected in Dalmatia, Bosnia, Croatia and Herzegovina). They were published in 1827, the peak of French philhellenism and the year of Eastlake's 'Haidée, a Greek Girl'. The specific details of how she makes or initiates music change from text to text, but these authors crafted the Aida-type to be as connected to exotic and overt performance as to saving her master/lover.

Haydée is already playing the *guzla* when the aforementioned scene (in chapter 77) begins. Throughout the novel, she seems instructed to play it when guests are nearby. An exchange in chapter 53 suggests that she plays the instrument often: Morcerf notes to Albert that 'the poor exile [Haydée] frequently beguiles a weary hour in playing

<sup>49</sup> See Joan DeJean, 'Fictive Performances: Oriental Music in Alexandre Dumas' *The Count of Monte Cristo*', *Asian Music* 11 (1979), 99–105.



**Figure 4.** Jean-Baptiste Camille Corot, 'Haydée, Young Woman in Greek Dress' (1872), Musée du Louvre. (colour online)

over to me the airs of her native land'.<sup>50</sup> Like the sound of Haydée's name, the timbre of the *guzla* is mysterious, charming and nostalgic; it performs the dual function of signifying Haydée's presence and indicating her foreignness.

Jean-Baptiste Camille Corot's 'Haydée, Young Woman in Greek Dress', completed in 1872, shows a solitary girl with her instrument (Figure 4). Her dark eyes seem lost in thought, gazing into the bottom left corner of the canvas. Although she grips her instrument with two hands, she pays no attention to it. There is an intense perspectival duality, between the rock on which she sits and the ship in the background. The rock's edge in the upper left seems to carve out a separate canvas onto which the ship scene is painted. The rock is darkened by shadow, yet the light source, illuminating her gold garb, highlights most of her body. In short, Haydée looks disoriented, but her body also looks like it has been cut and pasted onto a rocky seascape. Corot's 'Haydée' bears a much closer resemblance to Eastlake's than to Colin's painting, in that the ominous background contrasts with the glowing presence of the sitting subject. Corot, unlike Eastlake, painted the whole body, and so Haydée's famed bare foot protrudes suggestively from beneath her

<sup>50</sup> Dumas, *The Count of Monte-Cristo*, 640.

dress, evoking the implied sexuality that both Byron and Dumas detailed in the works discussed earlier.<sup>51</sup> Her musicality, represented via the instrument as well as the performative sexuality expected of exotic female musicians, is thus a key signifier of the Aida-type's alterity.

The Aida-type represents distance, both geographic and temporal. Her exoticism is synonymous with the equally exotic musical instruments with which she is associated. Gabriela Cruz has written about instrumental diegetic musicality in the conception of Verdi's *Aida*, focusing not on the *guzla* but on the flute.<sup>52</sup> Occasionally found in sarcophagal remains, the flute has not only served as an access point into excavating the sensory experiences of everyday ancient Egyptians but also functioned as an evocative sonic symbol of ancient rites of passage for composers such as Mozart, Gluck and Berlioz. Yet as Cruz explains, composers preferred their imagined versions of the ancient world to those found in archaeological remains. Travelling to Florence to see an excavated Egyptian flute that François-Joseph Fétis had publicised in detail, Verdi left disappointed. Perhaps he had hoped to find an oracular instrument, but instead he bitterly described a 'pipe with four holes like those our shepherds have'.<sup>53</sup> Verdi's Egyptomanic expectations were dulled by the unimpressive realities of the ancient civilisation's everyday objects. We can relate to Verdi's disappointment. Film and video game franchises such as *The Mummy* and *Assassin's Creed* romanticise Egyptian artefacts, but excavation and research can never match that bloated box-office standard; recently, scientists painstakingly engineered a 3D-printed voice box based on the cadaver of the 3,000-year-old Egyptian priest Nesyamun, only to generate an anticlimactic (yet hilariously adorable) chirp.<sup>54</sup> While Cruz dwells on the first part of Verdi's description – the 'pipe with four holes' – what interests me is the comparison with present-day rural flutes. Here, Verdi seems to equate an ancient Egyptian artefact with a contemporary Italian one. Although, as Cruz explains, Verdi would explore the flute's potential to signify Aida in his score – becoming something like her prosthetic voice – the casual conflation of now/then, East/West informed the ways that Aida was assembled from earlier artefacts, tropes and sounds, most of which had nothing to do with Egypt or Ethiopia at all. As we will see, the Aida-type's statuesque features, her musicality (both diegetic and nondiegetic), her rhapsodic name and her ability to musically encode secrets coalesced in a much earlier operatic character who, though not Ethiopian, nevertheless resembles Verdi's heroine in ways that can no longer be overlooked.

### The Aida-type's secrets

The Aida-type seems perpetually sworn to secrecy. In Auber's opera, this facet of the archetype is on full display in Act I scene 4, in which the villain Malipieri demands to learn more about his rival, Lorédan. Here, it is revealed that Haydée may be more than a mere slave (one of the 'secrets' of *Haydée, ou le secret*). In the preceding scene, the secondary character Domenico discloses that Haydée escaped a massacre in her native Cyprus, was enslaved by Malipieri and was subsequently bought by the more benevolent

<sup>51</sup> Corot's *Haydée* was widely disseminated via anonymous copies, creating from the start a problem of authenticity, dating and titling for art historians. Henri Marceau notes that it was painted from Corot's favourite model, Emma Dobigny – yet another instance of *Haydée* functioning as an allegorical stand-in for a real person. See Henri Marceau, 'Photographic Aids and Their Uses in Problems of Authenticity in the Field of Paintings', *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 97 (1953), 706.

<sup>52</sup> Cruz, *Grand Illusion*. For an earlier version, see Gabriela Cruz, 'Aida's Flutes', *Cambridge Opera Journal* 14 (2002), 177–200.

<sup>53</sup> Quoted in Cruz, *Grand Illusion*, 176.

<sup>54</sup> 'Mummy returns: Voice of 3,000-year-old Egyptian priest brought to life', *BBC News* (24 January 2019).

Lorédan. This backstory, as Karin Pendle has noted, coincides with Dumas's nearly concurrent novel, in which the benevolent Monte Cristo brings Haydée into a better life, albeit still one of slavery. Furthermore, both Dumas's and Scribe's Haydées wear the distinctly exotic jewellery worthy enough for men of high social standing to comment on. Thus, Malipieri's deduction about his former slave's royal roots is an accurate one: 'And so, from the diamonds that you wore and which my soldiers had taken from you, I have always thought, despite your obstinate silence, that you were connected with some rich and powerful family of Cyprus, that would someday pay for your ransom four or fivefold!'<sup>55</sup>

While making this observation (and sharing expository information with the viewer), Malipieri is trying to wrest from Haydée the opera's main secret: Lorédan's cheating at dice, which led to a friend's bankruptcy and suicide. Malipieri interrogates her about what Lorédan says to her in their evening talks. But Haydée sings. She 'sings', in the sense that she lies to him, waxing poetic about how patriotic and loyal her master is to his country. In a lilting aria full of subtext, she teases Malipieri that Lorédan whispered to her to 'be silent'. She is, of course, doing just that: resisting Malipieri's questioning, she 'sings' while not disclosing anything to him. Her response to Malipieri takes the form of a diegetic song in two couplets. Even in the context of *opéra comique*, in which actual speaking is juxtaposed with singing couplets, her concluding remarks to Malipieri seem cut and pasted, offering little contextual detail about what is happening in the story. The strange dislocation of this music is underscored by its diegetic nature. It is one of several points at which Haydée interrupts the plot to sing or to play an instrument: 'C'est la ville aux joyeux ébats, / Chantez-y? Mais n'y parlez pas!' (It is the city of joyous frolics, sing there? But do not speak!). At this point, Haydée's melody is now ornamented and faster, reminding the listener that her song is framed as a musical break from the story. Featuring melismatic vocalisation and repetition, her song conforms to broader tropes of diegetic songs-within-operas by exotic female characters, such as Sélika's Act II cradle song ('Sur mes genoux, fils du soleil') in Meyerbeer's *L'Africaine* and Lakmé's Act II 'bell song' ('Où va la jeune Hindoue') in Delibes's *Lakmé*.

Auber's Haydée 'sings' on several other occasions during the opera, including once with an instrument in hand. Later in Act I, Domenico notices that Lorédan is troubled, having just completed a letter that will decide Rafaela's future. Domenico attempts to appease Lorédan first by handing him a Turkish pipe, then by beseeching Haydée to 'sing him some of those airs which do him so much good!'. According to the libretto, Domenico then hands Haydée a mandolin. She is joined by Rafaela, and the two women sing a barcarolle – but in this context it is a berceuse, as the intention is to lull Lorédan to sleep. Haydée not only sings but also does so on command and with skill.<sup>56</sup>

The scene that most anticipates the plight of Verdi's *Aida* must be the opening of Act III. Back in Venice, Haydée, Lorédan and his entourage have returned from a successful naval battle in Act II. According to the staging instructions in the libretto, marble columns frame the proscenium, and the background shows the sea and Venice's main buildings. Haydée enters the Venetian palace alone. The columns serve not only as pillars but

<sup>55</sup> 'Et puis, à ces diamants que tu portais et dont mes soldats s'étaient déjà empruntés, j'ai toujours eu l'idée, malgré ton silence obstiné, que tu appartenais à quoique riche et puissante famille de Chypre, qui paierait un jour pour ta rançon quatre ou cinq fois cette somme!' *Haydée, ou le secret: Opéra-comique en trois actes* (Paris, 1848). All subsequent French translations from the libretto are mine.

<sup>56</sup> Auber often deployed the barcarolle as a signifier of *italianità* and even wrote an *opéra comique* titled *Barcarolle* with Eugène Scribe in 1845. This heavy reliance on barcarolle rhythms was noted by critic Henri Blanchard, for whom Auber's barcarolles functioned as a 'musical homeopathy'. See *Revue et gazette musicale de Paris* (2 January 1848). On the barcarolle as a French musical *topos* signifying Italy, see Herbert Schneider, 'Die Barkarole und Venedig', in *L'opéra tra Venezia e Parigi* (Florence, 1988), 11–56.

*Moderato*

Pour pu nir pa. reille of. fen. se tant d'aff. ronts tant de souff. ran. ce,

**Example 2.** Auber, *Haydée, ou le secret*, 'Pour punir pareille offense', Act III scene 1.

also as monumental reminders: of the Doge's power, of Venice's legendary serenity – and of Haydée's burdens, secrets and grief over her conquered family. As we learn in her opening recitative, these columns also signify death:

Je suis dans son palais! à Venise ... chez lui!  
 Aux yeux de ces vainqueurs, que le sort fit nos maîtres,  
 Cachons, plus que jamais, le nom de mes ancêtres,  
 Ce nom si glorieux que les fers ont flétri!

(I am in his palace! In Venice ... in his home! From the eyes of these victors, those who were our [my family's] masters, I must hide, more than ever, my ancestral name, that glorious name that the sword had vanquished!)

It was the Venetian army, after all, that had captured her from her native Cyprus, killed her family, pillaged her material wealth and deprived her of her royal power. At the same time, the palace is 'his house': she is, in a way, in the home of the man she loves. For the first time in the opera, Haydée confronts the master–slave dialectic. Although she has learned that she has been granted her freedom, she cannot leave Lorédan. She loves him, and although the extent to which he loves her is unclear – he never sings a 'Celeste Aida' – he requires her to nurture him as he agonises over his fate. Haydée's aria, 'Pour punir pareille offense', is her most serious moment in the opera, and the one for which the soprano will receive the most applause. The binary-form aria features two extended couplets, each of which can be subdivided into four distinct musical topoi: a cantabile, a waltz, a transitional stretta and melismatic vocalisation. These topoi not only constitute a compendium of Franco-Italian lyric conventions, but also conveniently map the archetypal sensibilities of the character.<sup>57</sup> Of note is the aria's dual key: beginning in F and ending in A flat, this third relation provides a dramatic pivot for Haydée's shifting thought processes. As she begins to sing, the F major melody of her opening cantabile seems to contradict her dreams of vengeance and retribution for the wrongs inflicted on her family (Example 2): 'Pour punir pareille offense, / Tant d'affronts, tant de souffrance, / Dès longtemps à la vengeance / J'aurais dû, dans ma fureur, / Livrer mon cœur' ('To punish such an offence, so many affronts, so much suffering, I have longed for vengeance I should have, in my fury, surrendered my heart').

<sup>57</sup> The Aida-type seems tailor-made for the *opéra comique* genre. Writing of *Carmen*, perhaps the most famous serious *opéra comique*, Susan McClary suggests that the Micaëla character's 'modesty, charm, and stalwartness in the face of evil mark her as the stock *opéra-comique* heroine'. Susan McClary, *Georges Bizet: Carmen* (Cambridge, 1992), 46.



The image shows a musical score for the vocal part of 'un vain. queur' from Auber's opera *Haydée, ou le secret*. The score is in 3/4 time and marked 'Allegretto'. The vocal line begins with a melodic phrase: 'un vain. queur'. The melody is in F major and features a cadence on the dominant chord C. This is followed by a waltz in A flat major. The piano accompaniment consists of a waltz-like rhythm with chords in the right hand and a simple bass line in the left hand.

**Example 3.** Auber, *Haydée, ou le secret*, 'Pour punir pareille offense', Act III scene I.

There is conspicuously little 'fury' to her F major melody, and the contrast between melody and text makes this proclamation of vengeance hard to take seriously. Following a cadence on the dominant chord C is another pivot: the C is repeated in the orchestra and transforms into a waltz in A flat major. Having apparently forgotten about the gravity of her circumstances, Haydée turns on her heel to sing a coquettish tune about her secret crush whose name she dares not speak: 'Ce nom, mon seul bonheur, / C'est celui du vainqueur' ('His name, my only happiness, is that of my conqueror'). A cadence initiates the third musical topos, a tense sequence of stepwise, ascending motives, during which Haydée synthesises her defensiveness over Lorédan's political reputation with her personal bond to him. In the coda that follows the second couplet, Haydée launches into a waltzing vocalise. Haydée the lovelorn queen becomes, once again, Haydée the exotic soprano (Example 3). Her wordless vocalising is consistent with her persona in Act I: lilting, carefree, eager to entertain, she resigns herself to Lorédan's fate, despite being free of enslavement.<sup>58</sup> Though never dipping into exotic *couleur locale*, these four musical topoi illustrate Haydée in a way similar to that of Eastlake, Corot and other painters: as ornate, reverential, musical and statuesque.

Although she never vocalises on a neutral vowel as Haydée does, Verdi's *Aida* discloses her diplomatic tendencies, social awareness and romantic co-dependency in her Act I aria 'Ritorna vincitor'. Like Haydée, *Aida* stands alone surrounded by columns. Yet unlike Haydée, *Aida* is not automatically redeemed by the *opéra comique* convention of a happy ending. As Lydia Goehr and others have observed, *Aida* seems aware of her inevitable death and bears this burden from the beginning of the opera.<sup>59</sup> *Aida*'s through-composed music is ostensibly richer in sonic content, but in terms of context, 'Ritorna vincitor' is the analogue to 'Pour punir pareille offense'. She feels torn between obligations to her family, her country and her lover/enslaver, Radamès:

Ritorna vincitor!  
 E dal mio labbro  
 Uscì l'empia parola!  
 Vincitor del padre mio...  
 Di lui che impugna l'armi per me...  
 Per ridonarmi una patria, una reggia  
 E il nome illustre che qui/ Celar m'è forza!

<sup>58</sup> Melismatic song has long been a preoccupation of opera scholars exploring gender performativity on the nineteenth-century stage. See Mary Ann Smart, 'The Silencing of Lucia', *Cambridge Opera Journal* 4 (1992), 119–41.

<sup>59</sup> See Goehr, 'Aida and the Empire of Emotions'.

*Allegro agitato*

E dietro il car-ro, un Re... mio pa-dre... di ca-tena av-vin-tol...

**Example 4.** Verdi, *Aida*, 'Ritorna vincitor', Act I scene I.

*ppp dolce dim. morendo*

**Example 5.** Verdi, *Aida*, 'Ritorna vincitor', Act I scene I.

(Return victorious! And from my lips came the wicked word! Victorious over my father ... He who takes up arms for me ... To give me again a homeland, a palace and the illustrious name that here I am forced to conceal.)<sup>60</sup>

Aida's music, though not bound to conventional musical topoi, nonetheless shifts in character when Aida slides from thoughts of vengeance to love for her oppressor. This aria, like Haydée's, does not begin and end in the same key. When mentioning her enslaved father, Aida's recitative is accompanied by aggressive, chromatic passagework in the strings, whose pulsing diminished chords push the soprano higher in register (Example 4). Yet by the end of the aria, Aida resides in a lower tessitura in the key of A flat major – coincidentally, the same key that concludes Haydée's aria – and the aggressive violins give way to placid cello that conclude the number. Aida's music is like *la solita forma* in reverse, starting strong and ending soft. Verdi even writes 'cantabile' as the expressive marking for Aida's final, lyrical passage to the afterlife (Example 5).

This morbid foreshadowing is not prophesy. Read intertextually, Aida has been here before. Haydée's own frenetic aria, balancing duty, secrecy, romantic attachment and the spectre of death, created the template for a soprano slave-royal caught between a rock and a hard place. Surrounded by marble, both characters contemplate the tomb. Yet while one's life is spared by operatic convention, the other slowly expires in a long, final-act number, as so many operatic heroines do.

### The Aida-type and the brownface question

This article has argued that the Aida character constructed by Mariette, du Locle, Solera, Ghislanzoni and Verdi was not their invention, but rather an archetype derived from

<sup>60</sup> Weaver, *Seven Verdi Librettos*, 283.

sources earlier in the nineteenth century, notably the *opéra comique* *Haydée, ou le secret*. With roots in Greek mythology, the Haydée character created by Scribe and Auber was, in turn, a compilation of mythological, exotic and historical tropes. Although no documentary evidence directly attributes the conception of Verdi's *Aida* to Auber's *Haydée*, the two characters share an uncanny set of family resemblances which, when read intertextually, reveal that *Aida*'s 'African' setting was perhaps more inspired by generic, timeless notions of alterity than has previously been thought.

The *Aida*-type does not feign authenticity. It is an intertextual infrastructure built around common tropes: enslavement, anachronism represented by references to Greco-Roman statues, sexually motivated saviour complexes, embodied musicality and forced secret-keeping. These tropes in turn domesticate and naturalise otherness, making it possible to present it matter-of-factly as exotic art.<sup>61</sup> An example of this disregard for authenticity of representation exists in plain view in an 1870 letter from Auguste Mariette to Camille du Locle: 'Don't take fright at the title. *Aida* is an Egyptian name. By rights, it should be *Aita*. But the name would be too harsh, and the singers would inevitably soften it into *Aida*. Anyway, I don't set much store by that name more than any other.'<sup>62</sup> It is precisely this cavalier approach to dramaturgical detail that underscored the structural racism pervasive in nineteenth-century operatic conventions. The exoticism of these operas rested not only on what they evoked (i.e., *couleur locale*) but also on the protagonist's broader social circumstances, how she navigates them and how her (male) interlocutors navigate her. One scholar who – perhaps unintentionally – explored *Aida*'s alterity by deliberating trying to look past it is Julien Budden, who commented that the *Aida* plot 'is an old-fashioned and generic one and a surprising choice for Verdi'.<sup>63</sup> The word 'generic' here has more meaning than Budden had perhaps intended. Budden was an apologist for the work's aesthetic autonomy, citing 'a complete absence of racist ... overtones' in the work.<sup>64</sup> In his usage, 'generic' was a marker of innocence: by this logic, only *serious, realistic* works can be *seriously racist*. Yet by reframing *Aida* as 'generic', we are better equipped to understand the network of tropes, templates, archetypes and stereotypes available to opera's producers and legible to opera's viewers. Karen Henson has interpreted *Aida* along such lines, showing how the opera's most iconic scenes could easily be cut and pasted into earlier works depicting what Said would call the 'East', such as Meyerbeer's *L'Africaine* and Massenet's *Le roi de Lahore* and *Hérodiade*.<sup>65</sup> Yet an even more abstracted approach that looks beyond the concept of the nation-state, like the one I have proposed, links Verdi's heroine to an even richer tapestry of texts that extends beyond *grand opéra*. This approach skims the surface of numerous works without needing to dig into the personal inclinations of their authors. Historicist readings have a lot to offer in terms of unpacking the politics of representation, but they also reify the fictionalised 'Africanness' of the opera in the process. The fact is that *Aida* remains in the European operatic canon, and canons – like other hegemonic structures – presume colour-blindness and universality while re-enforcing structures of normativity. It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that the question of brownface in traditional (non-'Regietheater') productions of *Aida*, and subsequent defences of so-called 'authentic' staging by white

<sup>61</sup> My thanks to one of the anonymous reviewers for this observation.

<sup>62</sup> Julian Budden, *The Operas of Verdi: From Don Carlos to Falstaff* (New York, 1978), 164.

<sup>63</sup> Budden, *The Operas of Verdi*, 166.

<sup>64</sup> Quoted in Locke, 'Aida and Nine Readings of Empire', 56.

<sup>65</sup> Karen Henson, 'Of Men, Women and Others: Exotic Opera in the Late Nineteenth-Century' (DPhil diss., University of Oxford, 1999), 147. Steven Huebner has also resisted the literal Egypt/Ethiopia binary, arguing instead that *Aida*'s national allegiances are tied to the individualised political whims of Radamès. Huebner, "'O patria mia'", 175.

performers, critics, directors and administrators, remains controversial in stalwart American institutions such as the Metropolitan Opera.<sup>66</sup>

In June 2019, the American classical musical periodical *VAN* magazine reported on an Instagram post by the superstar soprano Anna Netrebko.<sup>67</sup> Gazing up at her phone while catching her reflection in the mirror, Netrebko appears in full operatic costume, wearing a gold tiara, red cloak, ornate jewellery and brownface makeup covering her face, neck and exposed shoulder. In response to the deluge of both critical and defensive comments, Netrebko replied, 'Black Face and Black Body for Ethiopien [sic] princess, for Verdi[']s] greatest opera! YES!' This Instagram post – and the onslaught of discourse that has reenergised the controversy around *Aida*'s brownface for the better part of the #BlackLivesMatter era – raises significant questions about how *Aida*'s supposed 'Africanness' has been weaponised by brownface's defenders.<sup>68</sup> Olivia Giovetti's *VAN* article quotes musicologists Imani Mosley and Naomi André, who both remind the reader of the real stakes of these allegedly fictional representations. As Mosley argues, the question is not just whether black/brownfaced characters appear as villains in their respective fictional worlds: 'it's an issue that has real repercussions and real ramifications, even if it's nice-looking and not perpetuating of derogatory black stereotypes'.<sup>69</sup>

Just as the notion of 'race' is a social construct in which phenotypes, social relations and material conditions are in a perpetual process of negotiation, so too are operatic archetypes reflective of racial, gendered and socioeconomic conditions. According to the cast notes in Giulio Ricordi's production book for La Scala, the actors playing *Aida* and *Amonasro* should be darkened with makeup; they should have 'olive, dark reddish skin' onstage.<sup>70</sup> Yet there is slim evidence that singers in the nineteenth century consistently coloured their faces. This was perhaps due to the conditions of visibility and shadow in gaslit theatres, or perhaps to black/brownface being reserved for villainous, comic or peripheral characters as opposed to titular heroes and heroines.<sup>71</sup> In an 1865 illustration of the protagonists in Meyerbeer's *L'Africaine*, the eponymous *Sélika* (soprano Marie Saxe in costume) looks nearly identical to her white Portuguese rival *Inès* (soprano Marie Battu), while *Sélika*'s brother *Nélusko* (baritone Jean-Baptiste Faure) is visibly darkened (Figure 5). In short, racial alterity in the nineteenth century was represented by a more generic array of tropes, allegories and signifiers than it is in modern-day 'authentic' productions.<sup>72</sup> Yet despite the lack of evidence that nineteenth-century opera heroes and heroines consistently performed in brownface, major opera institutions and performers continue to utilise anachronistic and skin-deep visual stereotypes in the name of faithfulness to what the creators intended.<sup>73</sup>

<sup>66</sup> The question of the representation of archetypal alterity in 'Regietheater' productions of *Aida* is well beyond the scope of this article, which has focused on the texts leading up to *Aida*'s premiere. See Samuel Weber, 'Taking Place: Toward a Theater of Dislocation', in *Opera Through Other Eyes*, ed. David J. Levin (Stanford, 1994), 107–26; and Clemens Risi, 'Shedding Light on the Audience: Hans Neuenfels and Peter Konwitschny Stage Verdi (and Verdians)', *Cambridge Opera Journal* 14 (2002), 201–10.

<sup>67</sup> Olivia Giovetti, 'Color Blind: Anna Netrebko and Blackface', *VAN* (13 June 2019).

<sup>68</sup> See, for instance, Norman Lebrecht, 'US Soprano Refuses Verona Blackface', *Slipped Disc* (25 July 2019).

<sup>69</sup> Giovetti, 'Color Blind'.

<sup>70</sup> Gauthier and McFarlane-Harris, 'Nationalism, Racial Difference, and "Egyptian" Meaning in Verdi's *Aida*', 63.

<sup>71</sup> Locke, *Musical Exoticism*, 151.

<sup>72</sup> Ralph P. Locke has called for an exploration of exoticism beyond the score and libretto, in costumes, vocal timbre and stage blocking. As Locke writes, 'what we see on stage in this opera ... can be taken at once literally and metaphorically, so that the various Others—people who are Others to us, whether they be the Egyptian imperialists or the Ethiopian victims/rebels—turn out to be Us after all, and become so all the more readily by virtue of the intensity and specificity of their portrayed Otherness'. Locke, 'Beyond the Exotic', 107.

<sup>73</sup> Ann Midgette, 'Talking Race and "Blackface" in Opera: The Long Version', *Washington Post* (16 October 2015).



**Figure 5.** Principal singers in costume for the premiere of Meyerbeer's *L'Africaine*. *Le monde illustré* (6 May 1865). (colour online)

The *Aida*-type unsettles these pervasive and often superficial binaries of self/other, real/fictional and East/West. It exposes a network of placeless and lifeless tropes, created for and by the nineteenth-century reader and spectator. It shows that these various family resemblances involved both a cavalier attitude towards ethnic origins and an enactment of a sexualised female slave fantasy. I close with what can be considered an updated version of the *Aida*-type: a recent example of how archetypes of alterity dating from the nineteenth century persist in virtual spaces.

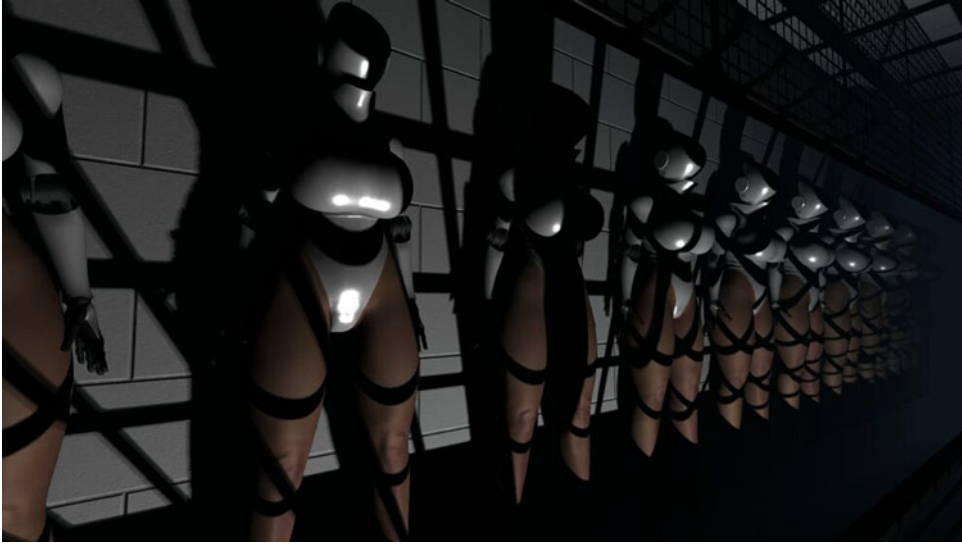
### **coda\_aida.exe**

In 2016, independent video game developer Haydee Interactive released *Haydee* (no accent), a third-person shooter, on the PC platform. Available for sale via the online market Steam, *Haydee* features a half-human half-robot who navigates an abstract warehouse environment, collects inventory, solves in-game puzzles and battles robots.<sup>74</sup> There is no context or backstory. A fan site discloses that cyborg Haydee's name indeed derives from *Le comte de Monte-Cristo*, and that it is a Greek word for 'well behaved'.<sup>75</sup> Yet this information has no bearing whatsoever on the game. No cut-scenes or dialogue introduce the

<sup>74</sup> The only context for the character comes from a blurb on the online video game portal Steam: 'You will control Haydee – half-human, half-robot character in search of her way out of strange artificial complex full of traps, pain and depression. No casual stuff awaits you. There is no "X to win". Your gun, your instincts and your logic are your only friends. Don't drop your guard, conserve ammo and collect items on this long journey. Be vigilant, be sharp, be ready. Be good. Be Haydee.' <https://store.steampowered.com/app/530890/Haydee> (accessed 8 June 2022).

<sup>75</sup> 'Haydee Wikia', <https://haydee.fandom.com/wiki/Haydee> (accessed 8 June 2022).





**Figure 6.** A row of deactivated Haydees. Screen capture by Jacek Blaszkiewicz, 21 September 2021. (colour online)

player to the character or the scenario. There is no soundtrack to set the atmosphere. Any information about the character is gleaned from her appearance, and the degree to which the developers were preoccupied with hypersexualising the character is evident. Sporting heels, Haydee moves with an exaggerated swagger. Her world is a warehouse, but because the game is a third-person shooter, it doubles as a tomb.<sup>76</sup> Voiceless and faceless, she cannot speak but does not need to, as there is no dialogue in the game. She instead gains agency through her sophisticated abilities to navigate tight spaces and destroy enemies. At the beginning of the game, we learn that this modified human female is a copy; in a revealing screenshot (Figure 6), she emerges from a row of deactivated Haydees, all with identical proportions, brown complexion and metallic helmet. Haydee is a cyborg, an abstraction, an archetype of a hypersexualised robot-warrior of unknown origin who reboots as soon as she dies. Given *Haydee's* independent, low-budget release, it is assumed that seasoned gamers would likely recognise the tropes, scenarios and goals of similar video games – much like seasoned operagoers who are intimately familiar with convention and tradition and who know what is expected of them as spectators. The cyborg Haydee's existence is predicated on a balance of abstraction and expectation.<sup>77</sup>

<sup>76</sup> In a third-person shooter (TPS), the player has full view of the onscreen avatar. After the player is 'killed', the camera typically dwells on the avatar's corpse before the game resets.

<sup>77</sup> There is a growing body of scholarship on the relations between cybertheory and opera staging and performance. I can only imagine that this body of scholarship will burgeon in response to the global COVID-19 pandemic, during which the present article was drafted. See, for instance, Bonnie Gordon, 'The Castrato Meets the Cyborg', *Opera Quarterly* 27 (2011), 94–122; Marco Antonio Chávez-Aguayo, 'Live Opera Performance in Second Life: Challenging Producers, Performers, and the Audience', in *The Oxford Handbook of Music and Virtuality*, ed. Sheila Whiteley and Shara Rambarran (New York, 2016), 210–32; and Christopher Morris, 'Casting Metal: Opera Studies after Humanism', *Opera Quarterly* 35 (2019), 77–95. On how staging opera in outer space can potentially reinforce the same conservative binaries of traditional productions, see Micaela Baranello, 'Space Opera: Alienation, Voice, and Colonialism in Sci-Fi Regietheater', paper presented at the American Musicological Society Annual Meeting, 2020.

My intention in this brief coda is to address why operatic archetypes continue to be reproduced in different iterations, as human and – evidently – as cyborg. Donna Haraway defines a cyborg as a ‘hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction’, and underlines that ‘Social reality is lived social relations, our most important political construction, a world-changing fiction.’<sup>78</sup> Haraway’s work has endeavoured not only to disrupt the binaries between human/animal and human/machine but also to critique the Western literary tradition of male domination over the non-male. The debates about *Aida*’s intersectional crises – debates legible in academic and journalistic writing, the opera industry and social media – often assume that the racial, geopolitical and gendered circumstances of this fictional character were invented by her authors. The cyborg version of Haydee offers yet another example that gendered exotic archetypes are necessarily generic, ambiguous and rebootable. Of course, scholars in visual and media studies have long interrogated racialised and gendered stereotypes in video games. Leman Giresunlu has argued that the use of godly female imagery in video game franchises such as *Resident Evil*, especially imagery linking female bodies with machines, builds on a long-standing practice in lore, mythology and literature featuring names with feminine qualities.<sup>79</sup> Despite the burgeoning scholarship on the subject of ‘ludomusicology’, more work remains to be done on the translation of operatic archetypes into the virtual worlds of games: not merely the presence of operatic sound per se, but also the influences of operatic production on game design.<sup>80</sup>

Deprived of a concrete origin story, hypersexualised, and unafraid of death, the cyborg Haydee can thus be read as a reboot of her nineteenth-century stock character predecessors. As Haraway writes, ‘cyborgs are not reverent; they do not remember the cosmos. They are wary of holism, but needy for connection.’<sup>81</sup> Granted, Cyborg Haydee is not forced to love or to die. Yet on the other hand, she is literally controlled by a user’s keyboard and mouse inputs – and the game being fiendishly difficult, Haydee ‘dies’ often. She has multiple lives and multiple versions, and she does not carry scars, secrets or memories. The screenshot of her standing among her replicas is a potent metaphor for the archetype first imagined by Byron and expanded on through the nineteenth century. Auber’s Haydée and Verdi’s *Aida*, therefore, were not *created* as much as *activated*. I close with Haraway, whose framework offers a hermeneutic way out of the dualisms that tie the *Aida*-type to ethnicity, empire, gender, performativity and death. Like archetypes, cyborgs are treated like ‘illegitimate offspring’, more beholden to their current masters than to a single provenance: ‘but illegitimate offspring are often exceedingly unfaithful to their origins. Their fathers, after all, are inessential.’<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Donna Haraway, ‘A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century’, in *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York, 1991), 149.

<sup>79</sup> See Leman Giresunlu, ‘Cyborg Goddesses: The Mainframe Revisited’, in *Cyberculture and New Media*, ed. Francisco J. Ricardo (Leiden, 2009), 157–87.

<sup>80</sup> On representations of opera in video games, see Tim Summers, ‘Opera Scenes in Video Games: Hitmen, Divas and Wagner’s Werewolves’, *Cambridge Opera Journal* 29 (2017), 253–86; and William Gibbons, *Unlimited Replays: Video Games and Classical Music* (New York, 2018), esp. 19–35.

<sup>81</sup> Haraway, ‘A Cyborg Manifesto’, 151.

<sup>82</sup> Haraway, ‘A Cyborg Manifesto’, 151.

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