CASTA DIVA
or
The Moon and Madness on the Operatic Stage

Offenbach's opéra fériee Le Voyage dans la lune *recently enjoyed a new recording issued by the Palazzetto Bru Zane, and the Opéra Comique planned a new production of it by Laurent Pelly which was streamed on television beginning on Oct. 29, 2021, due to the pandemic. The production is now scheduled for live performance in January and February, 2023. The Offenbach comedy is the impetus for this short study of the moon and its various phases in the operas of the long nineteenth century.*

The moon plays a significant role in numerous nineteenth-century operas as it does in the arts generally. Music brackets the nineteenth century with atmospheric references to the moon. Beethoven wrote his Piano Sonata No. 14 in 1801, but it was not called the "Moonlight Sonata" until 1832—at Romanticism's full flowering—when a German critic, Ludwig Rellstab, wrote that it reminded him of moonlight on Lake Lucern. Beethoven may not have conceived it as 'moonlight', but the name stuck as did the Romantic idea that music could be written which reminds us of moonlight, just as many composers had already used music to depict storms, seasons and all manner of natural phenomena. At the other end of the nineteenth century, in 1905, Debussy published his "Suites bergamasques" for piano, the third movement of which he named for Verlaine's famous poem "Clair de lune" ("Votre âme est un paysage choisi"). Originally Debussy had called the movement "Promenade sentimentale," but he changed the title to more closely reflect Verlaine's Symbolist impression of the dreamlike atmosphere of a moonscape (and perhaps as a marketing tool?).

Bel Canto Moonscape



Among bel canto opera composers—the purview of the Donizetti Society — it seems to me that the one who best channels moonlight, even as a religious experience, is Bellini. Bellini's Norma hails the moon as a goddess—a goddess who comes close to encapsulating Robert Graves' ideas of a matriarchal fertility goddess as delineated in his famous book *The White Goddess*[1]:

Casta Diva, che inargenti	*Chaste Goddess, who ensilvers*
queste sacre antiche piante,	*these sacred ancient plants,*
a noi volgi il bel sembiante	*turn your lovely face toward us*
senza nube e senza vel...	*cloudless and unveiled…*
Tempra, o Diva,	*Temper, O Goddess,*
tempra tu de' cori ardenti	*temper the proud zeal*
tempra ancora lo zelo audace,	*temper the zeal of ardent hearts,*
spargi in terra quella pace	*spread that peace on earth*
che regnar tu fai nel ciel…	*which you cause to reign in heaven.*

Graves posited three phases of the Moon Goddess—birth, love and death. He called her Druantia, and theorized her worship in pre-Judeo-Christian and pre-classical cultures (as Judeo-Christians and Classical cultures worship male gods), especially among the Celts and the Druids. The tragedy of *Norma* is that of a priestess of the Moon Goddess, a Druid, who experiences Graves' three phases as a woman: birth, love and death. She has loved Pollione and borne him two children who appear at crucial moments in the opera. In the cabaletta to her aria, she wishes she could return to that love—"Ah! bello a me ritorna"—but her trajectory is now towards death, which will come on the ritual pyre at the end of the opera.[2]

Norma's evocation of the moon is a moment of peace and calm, musically, as she calls on the Goddess to bring peace to the Druids, oppressed by the occupying Romans. In this case the moon is in contrast to the warlike male god Irminsul (in Celtic religion probably a name for the Saxon god Odin, whose physical manifestation is the Sacred Oak) whom the Druid warriors want to invoke to wage war with the Romans. The whole of the opening of

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[1] Robert Graves, *The White Goddess.* London: Faber & Faber, 1948.

[2] It might be noted that Norma cuts the sacred mistletoe, a symbol of fertility for the Druids, who were probably the first to decorate with it.

the opera is taken up with the rising of the moon and Norma's invocation of it. Romani, the librettist, uses the moonscape to create atmosphere, but it is Bellini's famous music which paints the scene with unworldly silver. Still, the moment of calm is surrounded by turbulence and conflict which Romani and Bellini show us in Pollione's nightmare aria "Meco all'altar di Venere" which precedes Norma's entrance and in the duet between Pollione and Adalgisa which follows it as well as in the Druids' call for war. Norma hides her own turbulence and conflict under her aria's prayerful call for peace.

"Casta Diva"'s moment of calm beauty is deceptive given underlying tension and what is to come, but through it all Norma proves to be a very strong woman, fully worthy of Graves' Moon Goddess, to whom she prays in the opening scene. She impresses the male Roman warrior Pollione so much that he is willing to die with her. Near the end, he confesses:

Ah! Troppo tardi t'ho conosciuta! *Ah! I have known who you are too late!*
Sublime donna, io t'ho perduta! *Sublime woman, when I have lost you!*

Norma's place in Druid society, her strength and her ability to dominate her father Oroveso, the Druid warriors, her Roman warrior-lover and finally herself make her a very unusual heroine in Romantic opera, and it ties her to the Moon Goddess, who rules over a matriarchal world.

Another symbolic aspect of the moon, related to its phases, is changeableness or inconstancy, and thus its association with madness (or crazy behavior). After all, the English words "lunacy" and "lunatic" are from "luna," Latin for "moon." Once again we can look to Bellini, who liked mad heroines as much as the next bel canto composer. *I puritani* boasts one such who drifts in and out of lunacy, and the moon figures in her moods, at least peripherally. The moon is in the offstage prayer we hear in the Introduction; it is hailed in the responses to the heroine's happy *polacca* "Son vergine vezzosa" when Enrichetta, Arturo and Giorgio respond to Elvira dressed in her white veil: "In her candor she is like the moon/ appearing amongst the clouds to console the night." And Elvira herself summons the moon to reflect her love in the cabaletta to the famous "Qui la voce": "Vien, diletto, è in ciel la luna." She imagines a moonlit night as an invitation to love. The moon in Pepoli's libretto is hailed as a symbol of the creator's goodness, then of purity and finally as an invitation to love. But it

shines over a heroine whom love drives to melancholy and madness (albeit temporary). We can hear the moonlight in the sad and beautiful melodic line of “Qui la voce” itself; if the moon is not mentioned in the text, it is in the music.

I have often wondered if Verlaine was thinking of Bellini when he wrote the poem which so inspired Debussy:

Ils n'ont pas l'air de croire à leur bonheur
Et leur chanson se mêle au clair de lune,

Au calme clair de lune triste et beau,
Qui fait rêver les oiseaux dans les arbres
Et sangloter d'extase les jets d’eau….

(They seem not to believe in their own happiness
And their song blends with the light of the moon,

With the sad and beautiful light of the moon,
Which sets the birds in the trees dreaming,
And makes the fountains sob with ecstasy…)

Donizetti’s *Lucia di Lammermoor* mixes moonlight and “jets d’eau” in its second scene, and Lucia is another heroine who gives way to madness. Donizetti and his librettist Cammarano admirably foreshadow Lucia’s final catastrophe in her entrance aria “Regnava nel silenzio.” Lucia’s fragile state of mind is revealed in her narrative of the appearance of a ghostly figure, a young woman drowned in the fountain: “…in the dead of a dark night, a pallid ray from a dark moon struck the fountain…when a low moan was heard….” In Lucia’s narrative, the moon is “tetra’ (dark) and that ray of moonlight heralds the appearance of the ghost in the story, and one could argue that the beautiful harp prelude to the scene is another musical evocation of moonlight. It certainly establishes the melancholy romantic atmosphere.

Moon Dances

I'm being followed by a moonshadow,
Moonshadow, moonshadow
Leaping and hopping on a moonshadow,
Moonshadow, moonshadow.
—Cat Stevens



Ombre lègere

Moonlight-infused heroines who flirt with madness were not exclusive to the operatic stage in the nineteenth century. They also danced, and Meyerbeer's *Dinorah* gives us a heroine who both sings and dances. Dinorah dances to her own shadow cast by a ray of forest moonlight in the 1859 *opéra comique*'s most famous number. Like Elvira and Lucia, she is a heroine driven mad by love (in this case by the desertion of her lover Hoël, whose lust for forbidden treasure has caused him to abandon her). Dinorah's nuttiness is seen in her affection for her companion, a pet goat (a stage director's nightmare for any opera house wishing to produce the work), but her looniness is perhaps best encapsulated in the famous "Ombre légère." The moon shadow is Dinorah's friend and she is sad when it temporarily disappears because the moon passes behind a cloud, but in Barbier and Carré's libretto the bright lunar appearance is both atmospheric and what Coleridge would have called an 'objective correlative' to her madness as she moves in and out of different moods, in and out of—lunacy. Besides, who knew that moon shadows could waltz?

The moon also figures in Romantic ballet, for example in Adolphe Adam's archetypal *Giselle*. The two acts of the ballet have been analyzed as representing 'the natural world' (peasants and nobility, the flower theme, the huntsmen) in Act I and 'the supernatural world' (the Wilis) in Act II; the fulcrum of these worlds is the mad scene which ends Act I and prepares for Act II. Giselle, having fallen in love with Albrecht, whom she thinks is a peasant, discovers that he is really a nobleman engaged to the noblewoman Bathilde, and she goes mad, dying at the conclusion of her mad scene. Adam's debt to *Lucia di Lammermoor*'s mad scene is obvious. (*Lucia* dates from 1835; its French incarnation is from 1839, and *Giselle* debuted in 1841.) In Act I, which deals mostly with Giselle's happiness, the realism of peasant life is matched by a sun-filled village setting. In Act II, the supernatural atmosphere of the wilis in the woods is symbolized by the moonlit setting. Giselle's madness is the portal to that spirit world of death, and Adam uses snippets of happy musical themes from earlier in the ballet just as Donizetti had done in Lucia's mad scene. In the original ballet scenario, Albrecht, the faithless lover, is danced to death by the Wilis in his own terpsichorean mad scene. Madness, the moon, love and death are all linked in the ethereal second act.

Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake* (1875-76) is similar to *Giselle* with its opening scenes set in 'reality' contrasted to the forest scenes which deal with the supernatural. Act I is the celebration of Prince Siegfried's birthday in which his mother, the Queen, tells him that he must marry. At the act's end, he sees a flock of swans fly over and decides to go hunting. Act II is bathed in moonlight, in a forest by the ruins of a chapel (compare *Giselle* and even *Lucia di Lammermoor*). As the Prince starts to shoot at one of the swans, she turns into a beautiful young woman, Odette. Under a curse, she is doomed to be a swan by day and takes her true form as a woman by the light of the moon. Siegfried and Odette fall in love, but Rothbart, the evil author of the curse, tricks Siegfried into proposing to his own daughter Odile (the Black Swan) at a ball in Act III. The fourth act is back at the lake at night. Odette, distraught at Siegfried's betrayal, decides to die and throws herself into the lake. Siegfried, who has learned of his error, follows her. Once again, it is a work where moonlight is related to and sets the atmosphere for the spirit world, and it is a story of magic, love, broken vows and ultimately, tragedy, when Siegfried's broken vow, however much the result of a trick, drives Odette to suicide.

The lunar themes we have been discussing continue into the twentieth century, and it would be remiss not to mention two prominent examples from the first decade when Romanticism was still a strong influence.

Rusalka's "Song to the Moon" in Dvorak's 1901 opera is justly one of the most famous musical invocations of the shimmering moon. The folk-like melody and the unusual orchestration unite Rusalka's longing for mortal love with an otherworldly quality:

> *Silvery moon in the velvet sky*
> *Your light shines far in the heavens….*
> *Oh, once stay awhile, stay with me*
> *Tell me oh, where is my lover?*

Rusalka is a fairy tale opera based in folk tales in the tradition of Romantic music and literature linked to folk culture; it too is a story of magic, love, vows taken and broken, and tragedy, like *Swan Lake*. In the 'moon' aria which comes early in the opera, Rusalka calls on the Moon to stay with her, to speak to the Prince with whom she has fallen in love, but the moon is inconstant and changing; it does not "stay awhile" and cannot symbolize the kind of fulfillment and fidelity which Rusalka longs for. She will indeed find her Prince, but he will desert her for the Foreign Princess and the Prince and Rusalka will both die as she, now become a wili (as in *Giselle*) laments their love and his inconstancy.

Perhaps the most famous (and infamous) use of the moon in twentieth century opera as symbol and setting for a sultry and off-key atmosphere is in Strauss' *Salome.* In the single act the Moon appears a dozen times in the dialogue and the stage directions, from the opening direction ("Der Mond schist sehr hell") to the penultimate stage direction ("The moon breaks through, illuminating Salome"). The Page declares that the moon "looks strangely eerie, like a woman risen from the grave." For Salome, it is like a "silvery blossom, cool and chaste; like a virgin ever undefiled." She imagines "unearthly moonlight" flickering in Jokanaan's eyes. As her madness grows, she imagines parts of Jokanaan's body in relation to the moon: he is "chaste like the moon"; his flesh is whiter than "the breast of the moon upon the ocean"; his hair is black like "nights in winter when the moon hides its face." Herod, lusting after Salome imagines an erotic moon: "It has the face of a wild madwoman who looks for lovers everywhere; like a drunken woman tumbling through the clouds." These

decadent but Romantic evocations are shattered by Herodias, who has had enough of these moons with anthropomorphic qualities: “Nein,der Mond is wie der Mond, das ist alles” (“No, the Moon is like the Moon, that’s it”). Jokanaan’s prophetic voice from the Cistern foresees a blood red moon just before Salome’s dance, and in the end, Herod, finally repulsed by Salome’s erotically kissing Jokanaan’s severed head, orders the moon to hide along with the stars: “Verbergt den Mond, verbergt die Sterne!” It as if Oscar Wilde, Hugo von Hoffmansthal and Strauss are all declaring, ‘enough with Romanticism! The moon is just the moon!’

In *Salome* the moon suggests the longing inherent in each character’s dreams, be they eerie, erotic, virginal, chaste, or bloody. In the twisted logic of Wilde’s play and Strauss’ opera, however, it also fulfills all three of Graves’ lunar stages at the same time: birth-love-death, and it is certainly linked to lunacy. *Salome,* however shocking it may have been in the early twentieth century, is neither new in form nor symbolism: it is one long mad scene, and the heroine is a severely twisted sister of Norma. Like Lucia, Elvira, Dinorah, Rusalka, the ballet heroines Odile and Giselle and Norma herself, she longs for what she cannot have—the love of the man with whom she is obsessed. Of course the polite edges are rubbed off and Salome exhibits her naked eroticism and criminal obsession, but she is as mad as any of her forbears in opera, and Strauss expresses her madness in rich, melodic but twisted music. Like Dinorah, she dances in the moonlight. Like Elvira or Lucia, she sings a long solo mad scene: “Ah! Du wolltest mich nicht deinen Mund küssen lassen, Jochanaan!” Like most of the women in these stories, she dies in the end. *Salome* is probably not the last, but she may be the most overt entry in this long tradition of heroines whose lunacy is symbolized by the Moon.

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Old Devil Moon



We have followed a thread, mostly in the nineteenth century, of the way that the moon figures in serious operas and some ballets as symbol, objective correlative, atmosphere-creator and in relation to characters who suffer tragic madness. There is, however, another operatic moon which is linked to lunacy in a comic sense, where the moon is the setting for absurdist drama and Aristophanic comedy. This tradition links the Moon with madness, but in the sense of craziness or the world turned upside down. Lunatic behavior can be funny, and like the serious approach (should we call it the "dark side"?), it is related to the phases of the moon —its 'changeableness'. The moon-lunacy-changeableness connection finds many associations in pop culture with the absurd behavior of people in love, animals and even evil creatures (e.g. look at the 1987 film *Moonstruck;* or Harry Warren's song for Dean Martin where the "moon hits your eye like a big pizza pie"; or the strange affinity that vampires and werewolves seem to have for a full moon). There is a reason that Warner Brothers' long running cartoon series immortalizing the crazy antics of Bugs Bunny, Daffy Duck, Porky Pig, Elmer Fudd et al. was called "Looney Tunes" by the studio.

Absurdist comedy is as old as the ancient Greek Old Comedy of Aristophanes, who set his satires in the clouds or in the underworld and gave us characters dressed as frogs, wasps and birds. Which brings us to Offenbach's 1875 *opéra féerie* in four acts *Le voyage dans la lune,* which has just enjoyed its first complete release on CD thanks to the Palazzetto Bru Zane, complete with a scholarly apparatus in its "book" format. This ambitious comic work includes twenty-three different tableaux which involved scene changes done innovatively in full view of the audience to musical accompaniment. Many of the scenes involved remarkable stage spectacle including an erupting volcano, a moon shot and landing, a glacier and a snowstorm. There were two full ballets for the delectation of men in the audience who could ogle the ballerinas in their tights.

The immediate inspiration for Act 1 of Offenbach's work was Jules Verne's wildly popular novel *De la Terre à la Lune,* which had been published ten years earlier, in 1865, while the opera's ending was modeled on Verne's *Voyage au centre de la Terre* (1864). Verne's novel on moon travel imagines a group of men in the Baltimore Gun Club in post-Civil War America constructing a huge cannon which shoots three daring lunar astronauts (two Americans and a French poet) from a giant excavation built for the purpose near Tampa, Florida. Verne does not tell us, however, if the space

travelers ever reach the moon, much less what they find there if they do.[3] In the *Voyage to the Center of the Earth* the adventurers rappel into the earth's core through an extinct Icelandic volcano and are spewed out of the interior at the end by the active volcano on Stromboli.

In Offenbach's libretto (by Albert Vanloo, Eugène Leterrier and Arnold Mortier) three French travelers, King V'lan (King Wham), Prince Caprice and the scientist Microscope, arrange a moon shot and land there at the beginning of Act II. In the central acts of the work, they find a world which is both like and unlike the one left behind on Earth—and a world which offers a fine stage for Offenbachian satire on earthly ways and the lunacy introduced into the world by love and desire.

On Offenbach's moon there is a lunar King (Cosmos), who has a wife (Popotte) and a daughter (Fantasia). There are courtiers, scientists and an advisor (Cactus), so lunar structure is quite similar to nineteenth century French monarchical structure, but with twists. The big difference is that love and sexual desire are unknown on the moon, so when Prince Caprice falls in love with the Selenite Princess Fantasia, she doesn't know what to make of it and finds Caprice's mooning over her absurd. That is, until she eats an apple (they don't exist on the Moon, but the Earthlings have brought along a supply), and in a parody of the creation story in Genesis, she discovers love and desire. Gradually, other Selenites taste of the Edenesque apple and fall in love, not necessarily with the right person. King Cosmos falls in love with his own wife, but she falls for Microscope. Although apples have long since lost their erotic potency on Earth, they exert exciting new power on the Moon, as evidenced by the charming "Duo des pommes" in Act 2, predicated on Fantasia's awakening desire after biting the apple, and the choral "Ronde des pommiers" which opens Act 4. As boys in the apple trees drop apples into the laps of girls on the ground, the text is rife with naughty French double-entendres: "… Dépouillons chaque pommier!…Ces fruits si bons, ces fruits charmants/ Qu'enfin nous pouvons connaître, Mordons-y tous à pleine dents, Et que l'amour règne en maître" ("Let's strip each apple tree!…These tasty fruits, these charming fruits That at last we have come to know, let's take big bites of them, and let love reign supreme"). The satire provides a plot thread upon which the librettists hang one crazy non-sequitur tableau after another, most offering the opportunity for stunning stage spectacle.

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[3] A sequel has them orbiting the moon.

That is the free-form structure of the entertainment called the *opèra fèriee* (*fairyland opera*)*,* a loose-fitting form where plot and character yield to magic, fantasy, spectacle and satire. In contemporary terms, the Harry Potter series offers a fairly sanitized version of the *féerie,* where absurdity and magic reign. The book accompanying the Bru Zane release makes that point and also that Georges Méliès' 1902 film of *The Voyage to the Moon*—the first science fiction film in history—owes more to Offenbach's *opera féerie* than to Jules Verne. It is also easy to see how Offenbach's own *chef d'oeuvre—Les contes d' Hoffmann*—grows out of the *fériee* tradition, with its parody of science (a robotic Olympia) and its elements of magic strung out on the slender plot thread of Hoffmann's drunken reveries.

There is a distinguished history of the Moon and its relation to inconstancy and change in literature. In Dante's *Commedia* the First Sphere of Paradise is that of the Moon and it is the home of souls who are saved but who were inconstant to their vows; the earth is sub-lunar and thus subject to change while the Spheres of Paradise above that realm are permanent and unchanging. A world turned upside down full of inconstancy and absurdity is what we find in Offenbach's moon-realm, and in the *féerie* in general. One of Offenbach's most successful essays in the genre was the 1872 *Le Roi Carotte* (with a libretto by no less than Victorien Sardou, the author whose plays *La Tosca, Fedora* and *Madame Sans-Gens* would provide librettos to Puccini and Giordano). Surely this work, which posits an underground realm ruled by a Carrot King with a retinue of Beets, Turnips, Radishes and Horseradish is absurdist drama and the ancestor of cartoons (and commercials!) with anthropomorphic plants and animals, as well as the distant descendent of Aristophanes' comedies.

The literary *locus classicus* of a voyage to the moon associated with madness and absurdity is probably a section of Ariosto's influential *Orlando furioso.* There, the indispensable Christian warrior Orlando has lost his wits—gone stark-raving mad (*furioso*) in fact—when his beloved Angelica has fallen for the wounded Medoro, who is neither a hero nor a Christian. Her unceremonious dumping of the greatest of Charlemagne's paladins has sent his reason flying and left him naked and raving, unable to join the battle. He is the extreme of a man who has lost his wits due to love. When it becomes obvious that Charlemagne's warriors cannot win without him, the English knight Astolfo sets out to find Orlando's lost wits.

Astolfo, who has suffered from his own love-madness and has been changed to a myrtle tree by the enchantress Alcina, is a semi-comic figure. He travels to Ethiopia on a borrowed ride—the flying horse, the Hippogryph—where he meets and helps Senapo (whose character is based on the legendary Prester John), the ruler who directs him to the Terrestrial Paradise at the top of the Mountain of Purgatory. There he meets St. John the Apostle, who tells him that he must travel to the Moon to find Orlando's lost wits. John accompanies him on the Hippogryph.

Readers of the *Divine Comedy* will recognize a parody of Dante in these cantos. Opera-goers will recognize many of the figures from serious operas by Handel and Vivaldi as Ariosto's Renaissance epic was prime source material for baroque composers. On the Moon Astolfo finds a world which is both similar to his own and not: a world of mountains and valleys, houses and castles, but in a particular valley, St. John points out the heaps of "trash" which represent things lost on Earth, and this valley provides a canvas for Ariosto's satire, a valley where the absurd and ridiculous products of earthly life are heaped up—burst crickets, for instance, represent poems written in praise of rulers, vacuous art of no more worth than dead crickets. Here they find Orlando's "wits" in a large flask and Astolfo scoops them up to return them to Earth—and to Orlando, who with his reason restored, will allow Charlemagne's knights to win their war against the Moslem army. In other words, Ariosto's sixteenth century epic provides the lunar setting for satiric comments on love, lost reason and the vanities and follies of life on Earth.

Offenbach's opera was not the first one to play with the Moon and its relationship to madness, absurdity, vanity and love, nor was it the last. In 1750 the great playwright Carlo Goldoni wrote a libretto for Baldassarre Galuppi entitled *Il mondo della luna,* which premiered in Venice that year. Seven composers set the text over the next half century including Paisiello (twice) and Haydn. Haydn's version is the best known today.[4] No one actually travels to the moon in Goldoni's libretto, but the astrologer Ecclitico and his confederates trick the credulous Buonafede into thinking he has made a trip there in Act II, but the moonscape is really Ecclitico's garden with characters disguised as the Emperor and Empress of the Moon, which turns out to be a place much like Earth. The foolishness and absurdity of life on the Moon is reflected in the *commedia dell'arte*

[4] I myself have seen the Haydn opera more than once, including inside the Hayden Planetarium in New York, complete with projections of the moon.

influenced plot which concerns, typically, outwitting a foolish old man and getting the young lovers (Ecclitico and Ernesto) together with the daughters of old Buonafede, Clarice and Flaminia. The final scene in Act III is on a starlit night with a full moon; Buonafede forgives the young peoples' deceit and the latter sing of their love. Now the Moon becomes the lovers' ally and its traditional symbolism representing love and harmony is there in all its fullness (as opposed to the comic tradition which associates the moon with absurdity and lunacy).

Leoš Janáček took up the satiric view of the Moon in the twentieth century with his opera *The Excursions of Mr. Brouček to the Moon and to the 15th Century* (Prague, 1920). Brouček (Mr. Beetle) makes two trips in the opera —one to the Moon and in a second part he time-travels back to the 15th century. Once again the Moon is a setting for satire and absurdity (lunacy) which gives Janáček and his librettists (there were several) the opportunity to satirize avant-garde arts in comparison to down-to-earth reality. There is a lunar maiden (Etheria) who falls for Broućêk and a lunar Temple of the Arts. There is even Pegasus, the flying horse, in a reference to Astolfo's journey to the moon.

As for Offenbach's satirical journey, it is filled with delightful music, some of it just dissonant enough to match the absurdity (as in the tableau of the Charlatans). The overture, one of Offenbach's best, summarizes the two divergent attitudes to the Moon that we have found in this short essay. After an opening fanfare, the overture is based on two themes. The first is a suave, andante melody, given to the horn. Offenbach himself borrowed it from a previous ballet of his, but we are most familiar with it because long after the composer's death it was used for a new aria for the character Dappertutto, inserted by the composer André Bloch into the Giulietta act of *Les contes d' Hoffmann*—the seductive baritone aria "Scintille, diamant." We might see that smooth horn melody as representing the moon's melancholy, seductive side, its invitation to love, its atmosphere of 'moonlight becomes you', or in the translated words of the Offenbach/Bloch aria "Shimmer, diamond." The second theme is an allegro vivace *galop* which is taken from the music for the finale of the Snowflake ballet which ends Act 3 of the opera. With this music we are truly in cloud-cuckoo land, a frenzied theme of absurd nuttiness. The Moon Prince Quipasseparla has bought Fantasia on auction at the Market of Women, but towards the end of Act 3 he gives her up and she can be with Prince Caprice. At that moment it starts to snow. "What an amazing

country," says King V'lan. "Just a moment ago we were in the tropics and now we are in Norway!" A big ensemble finale begins as everyone shivers, highlighted by singing on a syllable: "Brrr." With completely absurd logic, the act ends with the Snowflake Ballet ("Ballet des flacons de niege"). The ballet features dancing snowflakes, a dancer emerging from a melting snowman and dancers emerging from snow banks. The ballet ends with a heavy snowfall to the music of the galop we heard in the overture. It is all scenically spectacular, no doubt, but it has nothing to do with anything. In other words, pure lunacy!