

A DISCUSSION OF LE MARIAGE DE FIGARO,
CARMEN, AND PELLEAS ET MELISANDE:
THE ORIGINAL WORK AND THE OPERA

by

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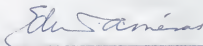
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

In the following pages, the works of three French writers have been discussed. The works are Le Mariage de Figaro, by Beaumarchais, Carmen, by Prosper Mérimée, and Pelléas et Mélisande, by Maurice Maeterlinck. These works represent classicism, romanticism, and impressionism, respectively. Each of these works has been used as the basis for an opera. The first was set to music by Mozart in 1797, the second by Georges Bizet in 1875, and the third by Claude Debussy in 1902. The ways in which the operas differ from the original story or play have been noted, as well as possible explanations for the variances. The characteristics of the works which distinguish their era are also noted. A discussion of the music has been included, as well as a brief discussion of the art of each particular age. It has been interesting to note the relationship of literature, music and art to each other.

CHAPTER II

LE MARIAGE DE FIGARO

Exposition of the Plots

The plot of the drama

As Act I begins, it is the wedding day of Figaro, valet of Count Almaviva, and Suzanne, maid of Countess Almaviva. Through a conversation of Marceline, castle housekeeper, and Doctor Bartholo, we learn that the Count has neglected his wife and has been philandering with the maids of his domain. The Count has his eye upon Suzanne. Marceline has matrimonial designs upon Figaro. Cherubino, chief page of the Count, is in the Count's bad graces. For one thing, Almaviva surprised him alone with Fanchette, lovely daughter of the gardener, Antonio. Fanchette was considered by the Count as his personal property. For another thing, Cherubino's adoration of the Countess Rosine has aroused Almaviva's jealousy. He has arranged to have poor Cherubino sent away to the army. Figaro advises him to make a great show of leaving, then return quietly to the castle to wait until Figaro can devise some way to change the Count's mind.

Act II takes place in the Countess' room. Figaro has a master plan which will restore the Countess' husband to her and pardon Cherubino at the same time. A note will be sent to the Count, asking him to meet an admirer in the garden. Of course, the

Count will go, and the lovely admirer will be none other than Cherubino, in disguise. Countess Rosine will confront him, and the Count will be forced to rescind his orders to Cherubino. The Count's contrition at having injured the Countess will make a faithful husband of him. Rosine is helping Cherubino into his costume when the Count knocks at the door, enraged at the note he has just received. Terrified, Cherubino hides himself in the dressing room. Rosine refuses to open the dressing room door for the Count, so he insists that Rosine go with him in search of a key. While they are gone, Suzanne changes places with Cherubino who exits via the window. The Count is much chagrined to find that he has evidently been mistaken in believing that the Countess would hide Cherubino in her dressing room. He humbly begs her pardon. Figaro enters and inquires why not get on with his wedding, which the Count has been trying to postpone. Tipsey Antonio enters and complains that they are now throwing men out of the windows, and the Count is on guard again. Antonio insists that the man looked like Cherubino, who is supposed to be miles away at this time. Antonio has recovered a paper which fell from the man's coat. It is the commission which the Count gave to Cherubino. Faced with all the condemning evidence which makes it appear that the Count had been right in the first place, Figaro is still able to render the Count's accusations ridiculous. Marceline enters and demands that Figaro marry her. Some time ago, Figaro borrowed money from her. The agreement was

that if he did not repay the money, Figaro would marry her. Marceline prefers that he marry her, and as he cannot repay the money, it looks as though Figaro must marry Marceline rather than Suzanne. Marceline intends to hold him to the bargain. The Count helps her all he can, for this will leave Suzanne free for his advances. Almaviva sends for the judge to settle the matter. In the meantime, the Countess decides to use Figaro's plan to meet Almaviva in the garden, but it will not be Cherubino. It will be the Countess herself. She and Suzanne decide not to tell Figaro of their intention.

In Act III, Figaro loses the court decision. He is ordered to marry Marceline. He says that he cannot do that as he cannot secure the permission of his parents, from whom he has been separated for fifteen years. He says that he has searched for them, but not even the identifying mark on his arm has been of assistance. Marceline describes the mark and identifies him as her long-missing son, Emmanuel. Bartholo is his father. The marriage of Figaro and Suzanne seems possible again, but Antonio refuses to permit his niece to marry a man whose parents never bothered to get married. Bartholo has refused to marry the mother of such a scoundrel.

Act IV begins happily, as Figaro's silver-tongued mother has persuaded Bartholo to marry her despite his poor opinion of Figaro. The marriage ceremony takes place. Figaro learns that "Suzanne" is to meet the Count in the garden. He is jealous and determines to spy upon them.

Act V is very complicated. Fanchette and Cherubino are to meet in one pavilion in the garden, Marceline hides herself to watch

the fun, and of course, Figaro is there. The Count meets "Suzanne", who is really Rosine, and realizes himself tricked. He humbly begs pardon, again, for his past actions, and everything ends happily.

Variations of the drama plot in the opera

Actually, very few liberties have been taken in the adaptation of the drama to the opera. A good deal of unnecessary action has been eliminated, but still, the opera is very long for an opera buffa, which generally consists of only two or three acts.¹ An opera buffa is one whose plot is drawn from situations concerning ordinary people, and not from historic or mythological sources, as is its opposite, opera seria. The reason for its length is probably two-fold. For one reason, a good deal of action had to be included, as the play is complicated. Without all the subterfuge, plots, sub-plots, etc., it would not be the same story at all. In addition, the individual rights of each singer had to be respected by the composer. Each principal singer jealously made certain that he or she had a role as important as the other singers. As a result, the composer of the eighteenth century often found himself writing additional arias even after rehearsals had begun. Mozart wrote this opera in six weeks, and had to hurry with the last part in order to be finished before production.

Fanchette's name has been changed to Barbarina in the opera. Act II of the drama ends with Basilio's frantic urging of Figaro not to marry Marceline until he can return to claim her. He has

desperately desired to marry her, but when he has the opportunity, and realizes that Figaro, whom he detests, will become his adopted son, he refuses. This has been eliminated from the opera, as has been the scene where Bartholo refuses to marry Marceline (again because of Figaro). In the opera, Bartholo manfully suggests marriage himself, offstage.

Act III of the opera eliminates the scene in the play where the Count gives orders to his servant, Peter, to hurry secretly to Seville and find out whether or not Cherubino is really there, as he is supposed to be. After Peter's departure, it is Suzanne, not Figaro, as in the play, who overhears the Count plotting to marry Figaro to Marceline. The humorous court scene of the play is also eliminated in the opera. Don Curzio, the lawyer, merely pronounces his edict that Figaro must pay or marry. The promissory note is voided when Marceline recognizes that Figaro is her son, because of the remembered strawberry mark on his arm. In the play, the identifying mark was a spatula which had been tatooed on the infant's arm.

Mozart telescoped Acts III and most of Act IV into one act, Act III, of the opera. In the play, Act IV ends quietly, with Figaro wondering about the faithfulness of woman. It was the custom of the eighteenth century composer of opera to end each act with a rousing finale which would bring the audience to its feet in wild applause.² The principal means of accomplishing this feat was either through an

ensemble or chorus singing about something stimulating. Perhaps in recognition of this tradition did Mozart make the alterations. Act III of the opera ends with the joyous celebration of the marriages which have taken place.

The Play as a Representative of the Eighteenth Century

Political aspects of Beaumarchais' play

Pierre-Augustin Caron, or Beaumarchais, wrote La Folle Journée, or Le Mariage de Figaro, in 1778. It was the second of a trilogy satirizing society as it was then. (The first of the series was Le Barbier de Seville, 1775, and the third was La Mère Coupable, 1792.) The play was considered so seditious by Louis XVI that he forbade it to be shown. Emperor Joseph II of Austria had followed suit and forbidden the play to be shown in Vienna. But a private performance in Paris produced such an enthusiastic response that Louis was forced to change his ruling.³ The first public performance took place in Paris on April 27, 1784.

What made the play appear so dangerous to these absolute monarchs? Beaumarchais was an agitator for the Enlightenment, which lasted from the middle of the seventeenth century until the end of the eighteenth. The way for Beaumarchais and his plays had been paved by the ideas of Montesquieu, Voltaire, Diderot and Rousseau. Man was beginning to think and to recognize that perhaps

he had a value of his own. Old values and judgments were being questioned. Reason was the new god to be worshipped. Privileges of the aristocracy which were once unquestioned were now not only questioned but disputed. The ideas put forth by Beaumarchais were certainly not new, for by 1784, the enlightened aristocracy and the new high bourgeoisie were convinced that a man's talents were a much more reasonable basis for assessing his worth than was the mere accident of his birth, that injustices and incompetencies existed and should be righted.⁴ However, it was the first time that these new views had appeared on the stage.⁵ Beaumarchais was so successful in his tongue-in-cheek denunciation of the bumbling aristocracy that Flaubert labeled his play as one of the causes of the French Revolution.⁶

Beaumarchais has set his play in Spain, deliberately, for here was to be found the last stronghold of the ancien régime at its worst.⁷ Count Almagiva's castle, in feudal Spain, creates a world of its own, where the Count is the undisputed authority. His subjects belong to him and are his to deal with as he chooses.

The Count's amorous escapades have a serious undertone, for in pre-Enlightenment times, the servants of a ruling lord were his property. By this means, a woman lucky enough to belong to the aristocracy seldom had her honor placed in jeopardy. The worth of an individual is coming into recognition at this time, an aspect which will be carried further by Romanticism. Beaumarchais' characters seem to be on an equal footing with their ruler. For the

first time, a servant is a hero.⁸ His code of honor contrasts sharply with the Count's caddishness. Figaro is standing upon the same governing code which the Count should be supporting. The political battle fought between the aristocracy and the servants places the sympathies with the servants, as far as the audience is concerned. Figaro outwits the Count at every turn, making him seem stupid somehow, even when the Count is in the right. The various professional representatives--doctors, lawyers, rulers, diplomats--are all subject to scorn by the clever dialogue of Figaro, and by the way in which the characters damn themselves by their own stupidity. The higher ranks' absurdities were emphasized, and the cleverness of the common people contrasted so that the differences could not help but be noticed. It is no wonder that the play was viewed in alarm and banned by the mighty rulers of Europe.

Eighteenth century concepts of the purpose of literature

The purpose of literature in the eighteenth century was to reveal the true nature of human beings.⁹ By seeking the universal, that is, what is general and therefore representative in man, reason can form a man's moral character.¹⁰ Beaumarchais has selected types for his characters--the despicable ruler, the stupid lawyer, the ignorant diplomat, etc.--and these are placed counter to the servant class. These characters are not caricatures nor stereotypes, but they are very real human beings. By creating real people from types, Beaumarchais reveals his genius as an author.

The writing is clear and lucid, for the three distinguishing characteristics of classicism are order, sincerity and taste.¹¹ Beaumarchais' play fulfills all of these requirements.

The classic unities of time, place and action are strictly observed. The time span of the play is well within the twenty-four hour limit, and the action takes place within the castle of the Count with relatively few stage settings necessary, considering the length of the play.

Beaumarchais, as one of the spokesmen for the Enlightenment, argues convincingly the need for social reform. In adopting as his characters standard existing types, he has shown them to be what they are--too often stupid, unfeeling, unworthy to be in control. Clever, scheming Figaro is an able representative for the model of emancipated modern man of 1789. As has been stated earlier, none of Beaumarchais' ideas originate with him. A good deal of the play is traditional and purely comic. The name Figaro probably was a corruption of the word *picaro*, which meant a rogue who traveled about, living by his wits among lower type characters.¹² The tone of the play is optimistic, humorous, promising a better day for all when Reason shall have freed man from injustices.

The Opera

Background

Mozart's greatest desire was to write opera. Yet the choice of a libretto was vital to him. He could not compose around just any subject. It had to appeal to him. He had been attracted to Le Mariage de Figaro for over four years, and had read over one hundred libretti before selecting this particular one.¹³ The next step was to find a librettist who could adapt the play to his satisfaction. Lorenzo da Ponte was a very happy choice.

Mozart was court musician to Joseph II of Austria, and had to secure his permission before the opera could be performed. The first performance took place in Vienna, 1797.

Le Mariage de Figaro enjoyed a brief spurt of success, which soon dwindled. The French enjoy ballet to such an extent that, at the time that the opera appeared, it was not possible for them to fully enjoy an opera which did not include some dance.¹⁴ (This opera does include a little dance, during the wedding festivities.) The French seemed to prefer undiluted Beaumarchais. It was fairly difficult for an opera, written in Italian by an Austrian in collaboration with an Italian, to be completely appreciated by a French audience, especially when the dance element was minimized. However, after a very favorable reappraisal of Mozart around the beginning of the twentieth century, Le Mariage de Figaro is now one of the standard world favorites.

Adaptation of the
play to the opera

All of the characters have been softened a little by Mozart. The Count does not appear to be so lecherous in the opera as he appears in the play.

The opera is written in the opera buffa style, which is distinguished from its opposite, opera seria, in its choice of plots. While opera seria selects subjects from antiquity which will serve to uplift and ennoble the soul, opera buffa selects its characters from real life.

It is interesting to ponder why Mozart's attraction to this particular play was so strong. He was not especially interested in social reform. The play represented no outstanding musical themes. It must have been due to the spirit of the play. Paul Henry Lang theorizes that the attraction must have resulted from Beaumarchais' desire to eliminate social conventions and to render all persons equal. This peculiar freeing of the characters must have struck a responsive chord in Mozart, enabling him to respond with music which became as free as the characters, music which, because of its lightness, seemed to be as free from rules of composition as Beaumarchais would have people freed from tyranny. Classical music was bound by fairly strict rules. Certain forms had been established which were to be observed by composers. Certain chord progressions were permitted, others were not. Yet Mozart's music ripples as gaily and unrestrainedly as that of any emancipated revolutionary.

The music

The overture to Le Mariage de Figaro sets the mood for the lighthearted action to follow. The orchestra moves along busily, zestfully. Only merriment is to be considered, for da Ponte removed all of the political implications, leaving just the funny parts. The overture is a perfect example of classical composition which follows the traditional sonata form. This means that the first theme, which is written in the key of D major, is introduced and repeated. A transitional passage follows which leads to the second theme, in the key of A major, five notes away from the original key, considered to be a perfect modulation in classical times. The second theme is followed by another transitional passage which leads back to the first theme, again in D major, and the coda which reinforces the tonality of D. Tonality was very important to the classical composers, as this was one of their means of achieving unity and clarity. They used chromatic passages, but it was always for the purpose of getting from one key to the next.

The real action of the opera is carried on during the recitatives, rapid, almost spoken dialogue supported by sustained chords in the bass and cembalo. There are forty-seven recitatives in this opera, as compared with six duets, eight ensembles and fourteen solos. As far as I am concerned, this is the only criticism of Figaro. Beautiful melodies abound in the musical sections of the opera. It is such a rude awakening to have the music stop while the non-tuneful, melodically uninteresting speaking portions seem to

go on and on. However, this was the style, and Mozart was a product of his time. His style of composition, with the gay, bubbling scale passages suited the carefree timbre of his time.

Since the bulk of the action occurs during the recitatives, with detached sustained chordal accompaniment, the music cannot help the singer interpret his part, as does the music in Carmen. All emotions must be rendered by the voice alone. The arias which follow the recitatives serve as a commentary upon the action which has just taken place. The musical background to all musical sections is pure music, with no attempt to describe the event or emotion. Mozart intended that the voice be the supreme consideration, and that the orchestra be subordinate to it. Indeed, program music was not to come into wide usage until the nineteenth century. So the music of Figaro is music for the sake of music, with beauty the major objective.

The musical Count is nothing like the blackhearted villain which the play shows him to be. He has one solo which is as light and gay as any of the other singer's. In his ensembles, he is as full of fun as anyone else. Figaro turns the joke on him so often that he cannot be a figure to be feared.

For the most part, the entire opera has been composed in major keys. Of course, there are brief modulations to minor modes, which add variety, but the tone is definitely major. It is almost impossible to impart gaiety through a minor mode. Even the two arias in which Countess Rosina sings of her despair because of the

Count's infidelity are written in major keys. Had Mozart wished to communicate a more tragic atmosphere, surely he would not have used major keys so abundantly. As it is, Rosina, though saddened, is not completely disheartened by her husband's indifference to her, so neither am I. In those days of arranged marriages, love was not a necessity for marriage, and it was expected that husbands would seek love elsewhere, having served their family by making a marriage which would further name and fortune.

The only aria in which a minor key predominates is one sung by Barbarina at the beginning of the fourth act. The Count had given her a needle to give to Susanna, and she has dropped it and is searching for it. The brief aria is very lovely. The minor key imparts no tragic overtones. Instead, the result is a melodically pleasing little plaint, sung by a charming girl who has the aggravating task of searching for a tiny needle which might be anywhere on a large floor.

It was a common practice in the eighteenth century to end each act with a finale, involving an ensemble, a group of singers lustily singing their heads off, accompanied by a busy orchestra. Figaro follows this custom, except for the end of the first act. Figaro sings an aria, gaily bidding farewell to Cherubino, who is being shipped off to the army. After Figaro sings, the orchestra ends the act with a lighthearted, military episode.

Act II has the longest finale of all. It begins on page 164 with the Count standing outside the door of the closet,

commanding "Cherubino" to come out, and ends on page 247. At first, only the Count and the Countess are on stage. Then Susanna comes out of the closet, and a trio is formed. As the plot thickens, characters are added, one by one. First Figaro enters, then Antonio, Marcellina, Basilio and Bartolo. The vocal groupings range from duets to trios to quartets, male to female voices, mixtures, which give variety. Antonio exits, and the finale ends in a septet and short orchestral coda which emphasizes the tonality of E^b major.

The third act ends with the chorus praising the Count, after the weddings have taken place, followed by the usual orchestral passage.

The finale of the fourth act is also about half the total length of the act. As is to be expected, all eleven of the singers are present at the end. All eleven voices are not independent, however, as doublings limit the number of different vocal lines to an easily manageable and understandable quartet. The eighteenth century preferred clarity above all. Polyphony had given way to homophonic writing. Polyphony is beautiful, but it is not too clear. It is impossible to really follow more than two independent parts simultaneously. Polyphony was a mass of many melodies, all going on at the same time. So for the sake of clarity, writing based on triads, a chord built on thirds, was favored. This type of composition usually resulted in three different notes which harmonized, with one of the tones being doubled by a fourth voice. One voice would carry the melody and would dominate, while the other

three voices provided the harmony. The quartet was the largest grouping used by Mozart in this opera, and it was not used as frequently as the smaller groupings.

The instrumentation of Mozart's opera was standard for the day. The strings provided the nucleus of the orchestra and were abetted by the flutes, oboes, clarinets, bassoons, trumpets, trombones and tympany. There were many fewer wind instruments than there were strings. Most orchestral music of the eighteenth century had the same sound, because that sound produced by that group was about the only possibility. Some of the instruments which we use today had not yet been perfected or invented.

Eighteenth century art

The art and the music of the eighteenth century have a good deal in common. Many of the features which were mentioned in Le Mariage de Figaro may also be applied to the art.

The music which we have discussed abounds in scale passages, grace notes, every measure filled with activity. The art is also full of detail. François Boucher's Madame de Pompadour is a good example. She is shown reclining on a couch. Her dress is alive with carefully executed detail--ribbons, bows, lace, ruffles, flowers. Ribbons are about her throat and in her hair. Not too much has been done to show the effects of light on the draperies of her gown. Light was not a fascination until the impressionists discovered the magic in it. The clear blue color of the lady's gown is much the same all over. Her face and skin are almost

uniformly the same pretty but rather unrealistic shade. You can tell by looking at the human figures of this era that the artists understood the bone structure, yet the differences in color of the skin stretched over the bones, certain areas catching the light, others being in shadow, did not interest classical artists. The painting is pretty and graceful, and it probably looks like her, but it is not realistic. Grace, beauty and design were the important things of this time, though.

Boucher's The Birth of Venus is a pleasing arrangement of figures and clear, soft color. Venus dominates the tableau. The two cupids and the fish are arranged so that they balance the scene. No attempt is made to portray realistically the background of sky and water. The comments made upon skin and anatomy also apply to this painting.

Mythology was a favorite subject during the eighteenth century. Not many paintings of religious topics are found. People were becoming important in themselves. There were not as many landscapes as there were portraits of people. When out-of-doors scenes were shown, as in The Music Party, by Jean Watteau, much more detail is shown in the clothing and objects than in the trees, grass and sky. Again, the eye is attracted by the soft, clear color of the costumes. The background is drab and monotonous. The skin colors of the figures stand out against the dark columns.

It can be said that eighteenth century art was a result of the growing influence of women. The salon, governed by women, was the focal center of cultivated life. Gone were the days when men had to impress women with brute strength. Women were much more concerned with esprit. The art is designed for a genteel people, with an eye for beauty for the sake of beauty, design, clear color, delicacy, graceful arrangement of subjects. Paintings were valued as decorative items. Important aspects of a classical painting were symmetrical arrangement and the use of clear, soft, pastel colors, similar in a way to the soft, delicate, charming qualities of Mozart's music.

CHAPTER III

CARMEN

Exposition of the Plots

Exposition of the story

Part I of the story begins with the narrator and his guide, Antonio, who are travelling in Spain. They meet a stranger, who immediately trains his gun upon them. The narrator shows no fear and offers a cigar to the stranger, who relaxes and accepts it. In spite of Antonio's warnings, they all travel together to the place where they intend to spend the night. The narrator believes that his travelling companion is José-Maria, a famous bandit.

After all is quiet for the night, Antonio informs his master that the mysterious stranger is none other than Don José Navarro, the most notorious of all bandits. Antonio is going to send for the soldiers, for he covets the reward which is to be gained from turning this gunman in to the police. The narrator has come to like the bandit, and he awakens him in time for him to make his escape.

Part II takes place in Cordova. After several days spent in a Dominican library doing research, the narrator wanders about the town. He meets Carmen, a gypsy, who takes him to her home to tell his fortune. While she is engrossed in reading his palm, the door

is thrown open violently and Don José storms in, berating Carmen. José escorts the narrator to the door and shows him his way home, and the narrator understands that under no circumstances is he to try to see Carmen again. Not until later does our story teller notice that his gold watch is missing. He spends the next few months wandering about Andalusia. On his way back to Madrid, he passes through Cordova again. The Dominican brothers are happy to see him, for his gold watch had been found and they had feared that he had been killed in order to secure its possession. The brothers tell him that the man who stole the watch is safely behind bars, awaiting execution for several murders. The narrator goes to visit him, and Don José relates to him the story which comprises Part III.

José was born in the Basque country. After a fight with another boy, he was forced to leave his country. He joined the army and was stationed in Seville as a guard at the tobacco factory. It was great sport for the soldiers to gather and watch the women on their way to and from work. As Don José could see no comparison between those women and the ones from his home, he ignored them. Carmen was a flirt and she enjoyed tremendously the admiring eyes and comments of the men. She was nettled by José's complete indifference and she accosted him. As she was leaving, she threw a flower at him, which he picked up and kept in his coat.

A short time later, Don José was ordered to take two men and investigate a fight in the factory. As Carmen was to blame, José

had to escort her to prison. On the way, she surprised him by her ability to speak Basque, and she persuaded him to help her escape. José was consigned to the prison for his tender heart. While he was there, he received a loaf of bread which contained a file and some money. He deduced that they were from Carmen, but he decided to serve out his sentence, rather than escape.

After his release, he was placed as a guard before a colonel's home. One evening, Carmen came to entertain some guests. She recognized Don José and told him to meet her at Lillas Pastia's shop. They spent the day in each other's company, and when the evening drums sounded to call all soldiers back to their quarters, Carmen taunted him so that he did not go, but stayed with her. In the morning, she advised him to forget her and she ran away. By this time, José was hopelessly in love with her.

He had not seen her for several days until one evening when he was on guard at the wall. Carmen approached him and asked him to let some smugglers in. Against his better judgment, he consented, provided that she agree to meet him later.

The next time he saw her, Carmen was in the company of a lieutenant of his regiment. In blind jealousy, José killed the man. Now he could not return to his life as a soldier. Carmen reminded that she warned him that she would prove to be dangerous to him, but he did not care. He joined her life, as a bandit, for he reasoned that in that way, he could keep her love. The

bandits accepted him, as he had killed his man, which seemed to be a requirement for entering bandit life. For some time, José believed that Carmen was true to him. It was quite a blow to him to learn that she had been married for some time to Garcia, a bandit leader. José could not rest until he had killed this man. He begged Carmen to give up the life they led and to go away with him, to begin fresh, honestly. She refused.

José learned that Carmen had become interested in Lucas, a famous picador. He took her to a solitary inn and begged her to come away with him, to permit him to save her. She refused, knowing that he would probably kill her. "I have always known that you would kill me," she told him. "The first day I met you, I had just met a priest at my door, and tonight, a rabbit ran between the horse's hoofs. I have always known that it would be me first, then you."

José sought a priest, asked him to say a mass for a soul about to die, then returned to Carmen. She was studying the shape of some lead which she had melted and dropped into water. The configuration of the lead told her what was about to happen. José led her to a deserted spot in the woods, begged her again to let him save her. She admitted that she did not love him any more, nor Lucas, and she flung away the ring he had given her. He stabbed her and buried her in the woods. Then he returned to Cordova and surrendered himself to the authorities. He blamed the gypsies for having reared Carmen as they did.

Variations of the story
in the opera

Only a portion of the original story was used in the opera. The opera opens at the entrance to the tobacco factory. Micaela, the girl from Don José's home town, arrives, bearing messages from his mother. Micaela tells him that his mother thinks of him, pardons him (for what, we do not know. The opera gives no reason for his having left his home.), and urges him to marry Micaela when he returns home. He promises to do so. Some girls from the factory rush in and announce that there has been a fight between Carmen and another woman. Don José must arrest Carmen and take her to prison. On the way, he permits her to escape. They have arranged to meet later at Lillas Pastia's. José is imprisoned for two months.

Act II opens at Pastia's. Carmen and two friends, Mercedes and Frasquita, are there. Escamillo, the famous toreador, takes a fancy to Carmen. El Dancairo and Remendado, smugglers, try to persuade the girls to come with them to help them with a scheme. Carmen refuses, as she will not leave José. Zuniga, captain of the guard, comes to see Carmen. Zuniga sees José and orders him to be gone. José refuses and draws his sword. El Dancairo and Remendado intervene and put Zuniga in safe keeping until the gypsies can make their escape. José knows that he cannot return to his life as a soldier. Carmen has been telling him that if he loves her, he will come to the mountains with them, where they

are free, where life is beautiful. As much as Don José hates the thought of becoming a deserter from the army, he must.

Act III takes place in the gypsy camp. José still thinks of his mother and regrets that he is causing her so much pain. Carmen tells him to leave, that this life is not worth anything, but he cannot leave her. Mercedes and Frasquita are telling their own fortunes with cards. Carmen checks on her own fortune, and finds death--first hers, then his. Nothing can be done to alter the course of fate.

Escamillo enters, and asks for Carmen. He tells José that he is her new lover. José tells him that he must fight for her. Carmen grabs his arm before he can kill Escamillo. The smugglers put an end to the fight. Micaela enters, informs José that his mother is dying, and that she wishes to pardon him before she dies. José goes with her, hating to leave Carmen, threatening her, as she has evidenced a strong interest in Escamillo.

The final act takes place at the walls of the arena. Carmen and Escamillo enter and sing of their love for each other. Escamillo leaves to fight the bull. José tries to persuade Carmen to go away with him. She refuses, throws away his ring. He kills her. As the crowd comes out of the arena, José asks them to arrest him.

Variations of the story in the opera

Several liberties have been taken in the adaptation of the story to the opera. Only a small portion of the story has been

used. This is natural because the music takes up so much time that the plot must be restricted to a smaller time element. Several new characters have been added, some names have been changed. Mercedes and Frasquita, Carmen's gypsy friends, have been added to the opera. Other female principal parts are usually included in an opera, to add vocal contrast to the female lead. Micaela, the girl Don José left behind, is new to the opera. Lucas, the picador, has been changed to Escamillo, the toreador. Escamillo is a condensation of all of Carmen's amours. Garcia is eliminated.

Micaela is necessary to the plot. She serves as Don José's conscience. She is always representing what he should do, she helps dramatize the terrible attraction Carmen holds for José. Micaela is the realistic symbol of Don José's inner self. He knows that the right thing to do would be to return home to his mother and to marry this self-sacrificing, noble girl. But he cannot. Micaela also serves as the contrast to Carmen. Through her goodness, she emphasizes Carmen's baseness, wildness. Through Micaela, the audience is made aware of these inner turmoils. Ancient Greek theater would have made use of the chorus, whose object was to comment upon the action and the actors. Modern opera has eliminated the chorus except in rare cases when a return to ancient tradition is desired. Since opera cannot make use of narrative commentary, as is so simple to do in writing a story, other methods must be devised.

Don José is a much different character in the opera than in

the story. He is much stronger, more cruel in the story. He kills a lieutenant, which earns him the respect of the gypsies. In the opera, he threatens Carmen, but most attempts toward more positive action are thwarted. He is more to be pitied than anything else in the opera, for he knows that he is doing wrong, he keeps sorrowing that he is causing so much grief to his mother, yet he cannot help himself. The first instance where he shows any strength is in his willingness to do battle with Escamillo when he comes to get Carmen. But he is prevented even from this act. In the story, José kills three men, directly as a result of their admiration for Carmen. He has lost the strength and the brutality which the story gives him.

The librettists, Meilhac and Halévy, toned down the character of Carmen quite a bit, but she still was enough to "scandalize Paris in the seventies."¹⁵ She still manages, through her songs and actions, to taunt any new-comers, warn them to beware of her, fully aware of her power over men. In the opera, she keeps telling José to leave her. In the story, she runs away from him, but keeps returning to him. She is much more evil in the story than in the opera.

The Story

Romantic aspects

Prosper Mérimée, the author of Carmen, which was written in 1845, has been classified by Morris Bishop as a romantic realist.¹⁶

The story of Carmen has many qualities of the romantic school. The romantics savored settings which were exotic or medieval. The locale of Spain, complete with bull fights and gypsies, is quite a different atmosphere from that of France.

The characters themselves are colorful, romantic. Gypsies, soldiers and bandits do not appear in just any story. The gypsy desires to be free above anything else. This is typically romantic, for the romantic is freeing himself at this time from the confines of classicism and its rules. One of the ways Carmen tries to tempt José to come and live with them is to describe in glowing terms how beautiful it is to live under the sky. Nature, however, is extolled much more in the opera than in the story, for when Don José verbally pictures himself and Carmen, riding through the mountains together, she ridicules him. "There is nothing like bivouacing under a tent." The characters do not want themselves to be dominated by anything or anybody. They turn away from the city, except when they carry on their business, and live close to nature. Carmen keeps telling José not to push her too far in his desire to keep her away from other men, that she will not permit it. Carmen prefers death to submitting to someone or something which she does not choose.

Destiny plays an important part among the romantics. Carmen reads the cards which tell her what her fate is to be. She does not fight it, for she knows it is useless. Carmen and José are not the classic, universal characters. They are individualistic,

emotional. They become involved in a destructive relationship which they have no power to oppose. Don José really does not have to be a tragic hero. He does not really have to turn his back on an honest life. But his passions rule him so completely that he thinks that he has no choice.

Carmen's warnings to him that his love for her will destroy him, the gypsy flair for fortune telling, the lead she drops into the water to learn what is going to happen by interpreting the shape it takes, the signs of the priest and the rabbit all contribute to the mystery which is dear to the heart of romanticism. It is somewhat reminiscent of medieval time, an era popular to the romantics because of supernatural ideas mixed with Christianity.¹⁷ The people of the Middle Ages still lived under the cloud of superstition, witchcraft, spells, remnants of pagan religion became mixed with the teachings of the Catholic Church. Carmen and her powers of fortune telling, her calm acceptance of her fate, set her apart from ordinary people who do not know what lies ahead for them and who cling tenaciously to life.

The classic unities of time, place and action are broken in Carmen. The story covers a time span of several years, and action takes place in various parts of Spain.

Voltaire realized the narrowness of French tragedy and had attempted to enlarge its scope. In Mahomet, he violated the rule "de ne pas ensanglanter la scène" and staged the murder of Zopire

in full view of the audience.¹⁸ Formerly, murders had been conducted off-stage. So Carmen's demise on the stage is nothing new, but it is terribly romantic.

Realistic aspects

Carmen also contains realistic qualities. Mérimée has a great gift for story telling. While he is able to convey the deep emotional experience of the characters, he never permits himself to become involved to the point of passing a moral sentence upon them. One cannot tell from reading whether he considers them guilty, unjustly accused, bad or good. He relates factually, with an economy of words, what has happened.

The novels of Sir Walter Scott were popular in France during the time of Mérimée. Perhaps from Scott did Mérimée realize the value of picturesque descriptions as a means of stimulating the imagination of the reader, enabling him to project himself into the action of the story.

The Opera

Background

Carmen was written by Georges Bizet in 1875. It was his most important work.¹⁹ It is the most popular and vital French opera of the latter part of the nineteenth century. Yet it was almost a failure. It was not appreciated at the time of its premiere.

Carmen is catalogued as an opera-comique. Originally the term meant an opera which contained some spoken dialogue, regardless of the plot. But by the time of its appearance, the terms opera and opera comique represented the places where the operas were produced. Standard, established operatic repertory took place at the Paris Opera. The Opéra-Comique was famous for staging new, experimental works. In fact, practically every new work after 1870 in Paris was produced at this place.²⁰

Bizet had insisted upon a very un-opera-comique conclusion, that of an unhappy ending. Because of this, one director of that famous company resigned.²¹

The music of Carmen

The overture of Carmen accomplishes what every overture should. It sets the mood for the listener, and anticipates various events which will happen later on. With his rhythms and festival melodies, Bizet transports his audience to Spain. One finds one's self surrounded by the crowds and excitement of Seville. Then the toreador theme is heard. It is the perfect theme for a toreador--brash, flashy, confident. The theme always accompanies the entrances and exits of Escamillo, except during the third act, when he appears at the gypsy camp searching for Carmen. The gaiety ends abruptly as the "fate theme" is heard for the first time. The listener now knows that the opera is not going to be merely a gala

celebration all the way through. The five-note passage of the "fate theme", rhythmically altered, is the same one which introduces Carmen later on. It is apparent that fate and Carmen are related. The overture ends on a fever-pitch of emotion, after having developed the new theme.

The music of Carmen is invaluable in translating the action and emotions of the characters. The development of the story is intensified by the care Bizet has taken to create music which so closely corresponds to the action. In some instances, the music even forecasts that something is about to happen. It is also used to indicate settings. The French horns introduce the scene in which the robbers are waiting at the mountain pass. French horns are associated with outdoor or mountainous locales.

Bizet has made good use of the chorus. It is used to set the scene and tell what is going on. It is necessary to the musical development of many of the scenes. Because of the varied vocal range and color of the chorus, the composer can repeat certain phrases which would become monotonous if he had only a solo voice to rely upon. The chorus can also give a more dramatic atmosphere than can one voice alone. The chorus, which accompanies Escamillo, also adds realism. Toreadors are national heroes to the Spanish, and it is a privilege to be a member of the entourage, singing praises to the great Escamillo and bolstering his ego.

The music is exceptional in portraying the characters and groups. The martial rhythms make the Dragoons easily recognizable, as does the savage music which illustrates the gypsies. For example, the scene at the beginning of Act II in which the gypsies are dancing for the amusement of the officers would be a total loss if it were not for the complete abandonment of the music to the frenzy inspired by the dance. In Act III, Frasquita and Mercedes are telling their own fortunes with the cards. Even without seeing the action on the stage, one can visualize the two attractive harpies, crouched over the deck of cards, shuffling and dealing, gleefully reading their carefree futures. One even gaily sees herself widowed--but an heiress! Their music contrasts strongly with that of Carmen, as she sees what fate has in store for herself--death. It takes a great deal of compositional ability to treat a rollicking melody and a somber one simultaneously.

The vocal part of Micaela is strongly opposed to the music written for Carmen. The score instructs Micaela to sing with simplicity, and her arias are quite ethereal in quality. One can easily tell that Micaela is honest and lovely, and that Don José is indeed a miserable wretch because he must do without her. In general, Micaela's music is characterized by step-wise motion, calmness, great beauty. She even sings an aria asking God to protect her and to give her courage in her search for José. Carmen's songs contain many wide leaps, glissandos which connect two widely separated notes, wildness. She is an earthy, sensual

creature and she sings to evoke a response in any man who momentarily interests her. Don José's despair is obvious in the music written for him. Nowhere is his pain so acute as when he makes his final plea to Carmen. His vocal part is doubled by the strings, whose low sonority gives a particularly despondent effect. As the chorus is commenting on Escamillo's progress in the bull ring, the orchestra is playing a melancholy variation of the toreador theme. The five-note theme constantly reappears. The crowd comes on stage at the end of the toreador song, and the music climaxes in the five-note motive, after which Don José is left to finish the act alone.

The end is very realistic. The crowd sees that Carmen is dead. Don José admits his guilt simply and quietly. Here, Bizet has departed from grand opera tradition, for this would be a wonderful place for the chorus to make a large addition. Mercifully, the chorus refrains from making any comment upon the murder. Bizet is adhering to the naturalistic quality of Mérimée, who has never judged his characters. Bizet completes his opera as concisely as Mérimée did his original story.

The three operas discussed in this paper vary widely regarding recitatives. Mozart included many, Bizet used few, and Debussy made the full swing back to a style of composition approaching total recitative. There are only thirteen recitatives in Carmen. Bizet handles them in a variety of ways, which helps to eliminate the monotony encountered in Mozart. Some times, the

voice is completely solo. At other times, a very thinly orchestrated sustained chord supports the singer. Frequently, brief instrumental interludes are interspersed between vocal phrases.

The instrumentation in Carmen is rich and full. In addition to the instruments used by Mozart, Bizet has added French horns, piccolo, harp and different types of percussion. With the instrumentation of Mozart's day, all music tended to sound alike, but addition of new instruments permits new sounds. Debussy's instrumentation includes all of the above, plus the English horn, tuba and an extra harp. It is no wonder that music can increase in complexity with the coming of new sound possibilities, which, because of their novelty, demand new styles of composition.

Classical music is rather limited in the number of emotional effects it can achieve. At the risk of over-simplification, it can be said that the music of this era is either extremely gay or very sweet. Had the classicist considered the matter, he would have probably considered it in bad taste to allow his inner feelings to be made public. The romanticist went to the other extreme. He was subjective, introspective. He was important, different from others. He suffered and raptured as no one ever had or ever would. The increased possibilities of representing emotions by musical means was due to the new instrumentation developments. Instruments capable of lower or more mournful pitches could better depict the depths of despair of the suffering hero. The shrill piccolo, which often doubles with the flute, although an octave higher,

is not often noticed by the listener, but the brilliant, penetrating result makes a substantial change in sound. The orchestra is now capable of producing a greater range of moods. The extremes of joy and sorrow of the romantic can be rendered musically.

The art of the
nineteenth
century

The art of the nineteenth century is a far cry from that of the eighteenth. The trend is toward more realism in portraying the subject. Souvenir de Marissel by Corot is a good example of nineteenth century art. Nature was important to the romantics. In this painting, we see a lovely scene, a wood by a body of water. The grass and trees are not done in great detail, but a variety of color is used which gives the idea of detail, especially when the picture is viewed from a distance. The reflections of the sky and trees in the water are faithfully produced. The painting emanates a feeling of great calm. The figures in the painting go about their tasks serenely. Evidently those who live close to nature are at peace with themselves.

The Haunt of the Deer by Courbet is another nature setting. There are deer and a brook in this woodland setting. The placing of the figures has been done with a photographer's eye to pleasing arrangement. The brushwork is as carefully done in this painting as in the preceding one. Color is never laid on in thick blotches the way the modernists do, nor are the colors as vivid. The colors

in both of these pictures are similar. Browns and muted greens predominate. There are no bright colors, no sharp contrasts. Nature, to these two painters, is not at war with man or beast.

Delacroix, on the other hand, sees man at war with nature, in conflict with himself and the elements. He is a pure romantic in this sense. Man is at the mercy of the natural forces and he will never win. His majesty comes from being a tragic figure.

Arab on Horseback Attacked by a Lion is a very compact scene, painted in somber colors. The two animals and the man writhe in perfect symmetry. Man is always near death whether or not he realizes it. The horse is white, the man's robe is red, and the rest of the painting is in darkness. The eye is captured first by the horse's white head, then travels upward to the man who is symbolically above the animals.

Design is still important to the romantics. The painting by Corot is beautifully balanced on either side by tall, straight trees. The eye follows a road which leads from the water, which occupies the foreground, and ends at a castle in the background. The lines are not as definitely horizontal or vertical as they are in the impressionistic paintings. The water's edge is at a diagonal angle, more realistic than straight across. The arrangements of the other two paintings are as carefully done. The colors are much darker than those preferred by classicists, but design is still important. Nature, holding more importance to the romantic, is emphasized much more than by the classicists.

The relationship of romantic music and romantic art

It seems that there is a great relationship between the art, literature and the music of any particular era. In the romantic period, certain forms of expression are held in common by the composer and the artist.

Architecture is of vital importance to both the romantic composer and artist. The composer still uses many of the forms of the classical age, which give cohesiveness to his music. Tonality is still important. There is much more chromaticism in romantic music than in classical music, but the key center is always well-established at the beginning and end of each section. Classical paintings have balance, order. There is always a focal point.

Most of the art and music of the romantic era is dark and depicts turmoil. The artist is preoccupied with nature. Nature is either an adversary or a healing balm, depending on the viewpoint of the artist. Many paintings show the conflict of nature and man. The painting by Delacroix, which I have cited, is a good example. But to Corot, man finds peace in nature. At any rate, the color tones of the later Corot are muted, and one shade seems to predominate.

Much of the romantic music is also somber, yet restless. The operas and other forms of program music usually have love as the theme. The other music can be interpreted by the listener who relates an unhappiness of his own to the agony described by the composer.

Love is never serene to the romantic. It is an over-powering emotion, generally unhappy. The orchestra is exploited to the fullest to portray the darkest distress of the hero, his surges of happiness which seem always to end in greater despair. The over-all emotional effect of romantic music is somber, which corresponds to the color in the paintings of this age.

To the romantic, there are forces which are more powerful than man. He cannot control them, but they control him. The artist sees these forces in nature, the musician and poet see them in love. Some artists say that man can find peace by submitting to nature, which will soothe his troubled spirit, while others see nature as man's supreme enemy, a force with which to wrestle. In either case, man must deal with it in his own way, as an individual.

Man has no control over love. The musician sees him constantly harassed by the dictates of love, made even more poignant by his brief flights into ecstasy. Love makes him a prisoner, and usually the affair ends unhappily. The orchestra echoes his turmoil by gloomy tone color, crashing chords, long, heart-rending melodies.

CHAPTER IV
PÉLLÉAS ET MÉLISANDE

Exposition of the Plots

The plot of the drama

Act I of the drama takes place at the gate of the castle. The servants have come to wash the steps of the seldom-used gate, apparently in anticipation of some great celebration. Scene II shifts to a forest, where Mélisande is found crying beside a pool. She is discovered there by Golaud, grandson of Arkel, king of Allemonde. Golaud is on his way to marry Princess Ursula, who lives in another country. Arkel believes that their marriage will put an end to the wars between the two lands. Scene III takes place in the castle. Geneviève, mother of Golaud and Pélleas, is reading Arkel a letter from Golaud, in which Golaud asks permission to return home and bring his bride of six months, Mélisande. He fears the anger of Arkel, though, since he has ruined his grandfather's hopes of a peace by not marrying Ursula. Arkel remarks that Golaud knows his own fate better than anyone else, so he harbors no anger.

Act II begins by a fountain. Mélisande accidentally drops the ring given her by Golaud into the pool. They cannot get it back, as the water is too deep. Scene II is in Golaud's room.

He has had an accident at the same time that Mélisande dropped the ring. Golaud is upset that the ring is missing. Mélisande lies to him and tells him that it fell from her finger while she was gathering seashells at the grotto. Although it is growing dark, Golaud insists that she go get it. Mélisande and Pélleas go to the grotto, so that Mélisande will be able to describe it to Golaud, should he question her.

In Act III, Mélisande combs her hair by her window. Pélleas walks by and her hair falls over him, engulfing him completely. Golaud finds them there, and tells them not to behave as children. He is becoming jealous. Pélleas is much younger than he, nearer Mélisande's age. Later, Golaud and Pélleas explore the cavern beneath the castle. A great pool of stagnant water is pointed out by Golaud, who struggles against a desire to push Pélleas into it. In another scene, Golaud asks Yniold, his son by a previous marriage, if something is going on between Mélisande and Pélleas. The child gives no satisfactory answers. Golaud holds the child up to the window so that the boy can peer in and spy on the two young people in the room. Golaud is disappointed that he can see nothing.

In Act IV, Pélleas asks Mélisande to meet him, as he is at last able to go away, something he has been promising to do throughout the play. In Scene II, Arkel and Mélisande are together when Golaud enters and demands his sword. He says that he cannot stand the touch of his wife, that her eyes are not innocent. Next,

Yniold sees some sheep going by. He notes that the shepherd is having difficulty getting them to go the way he wants them to go. The child is told only that they are not going to the stable. In Scene IV, Pélleas and Mélisande meet by the fountain in the woods. They say goodbye, and confess their love for each other. Golaud has been spying. He kills Pélleas and pursues Mélisande.

In Act V, the servant women describe what has happened. Mélisande has had a baby girl and is dying, but not from the slight wound given her by the now contrite Golaud. In Scene II, Golaud, tortured by not knowing whether or not he had anything to be jealous of, asks Mélisande if she was guilty of any wrong doing. She denies it. He does not believe her. The servants enter quietly, for they know that death is near. Arkel does not blame Golaud for her death. He attributes it to a being who was born without reason, and who must die for the same reason.

Variations of the drama
to the opera

Claude Debussy changes the libretto very little. He eliminated Scene I from Act I, Scene IV from Act II, Scene I from Act III, and Scene I from Act IV, all of which contributed nothing to the action. The word setting enables the text to move with almost natural speaking voices. According to Debussy, the words are the most important thing in any opera, and the music must be subordinate.²² The extremely narrow range of the vocal line is

typical of French music. An examination of French folk songs show that, in general, the melodic range is rather restricted.²³ This tenet has been marked in French opera since its beginning--the French insistence upon clarity of words, that opera is fundamentally drama to which music has been added. To show how far they would go to favor words over music, opera-comique, with its spoken dialogue, was extremely popular in France.²⁴

The Drama

Symbolism

Maurice Maeterlinck belonged to the symbolist movement, a group of writers who reacted against realism and naturalism. Maeterlinck believed that symbols were to be found even in the simplest, common, every day actions rather than in abstractions which tend to impose upon reality.²⁵ He believed that the very staging of a drama became a symbol, for it was all too obvious to him that the actor whom he saw on stage was not really a Hamlet or a Macbeth, but another man with his own interests, habits and passions who was trying hard to convince his audience that he was someone he was not.²⁶ It was his opinion that the ancient Greeks were aware of this, for they wore masks in order to weaken the presence of man and to strengthen the symbol image. In spite of the reliance upon symbolism, though, the dialogue is entirely natural.

Maeterlinck represents the growing thought during the later part of the nineteenth century that uncertainties replace certainties. Life is mysterious, unexplainable.

Symbolism lends itself nicely to Maeterlinck's attempts to keep the drama surface-smooth while dramatic tensions seethe underneath. He uses the imageries of dark forests, seldom penetrated by light, bottomless wells, ships appearing and disappearing, the very foundation of the castle in which the characters live is based on insecurity and must be supported. There is also the fact that Mélisande's large innocent eyes never close except in sleep, and the darkness which falls upon Yniold as he tries to find out where the sheep are going. Mélisande's long hair which falls upon Pélleas from the tower represents a love which completely engulfs them, unites them, a love which will not let them escape.

Blindness recurs several times in this drama. Arkel is nearly blind, yet he is able to see more clearly than anyone else. The well at which the lovers meet is called Blind Man's Well, yet it is here that their eyes are opened to their love. Golaud makes several references to blindness. Once he likens his horse that shied and threw him, to a blind man. He said that he felt himself to be a blind man looking for treasure at the bottom of the sea, a blind man running from a burning house. At the end of the play, he mourns that he is going to die like a blind man, never knowing whether or not Mélisande has told him the truth.

Characterization

All of the characters are complicated, and most of them are not realistic. If they were, they would be out of place in the fairy tale kingdom of All-the-World.

Maeterlinck's main idea in the drama is that underneath everything, there is a fate from which people cannot escape.²⁷ It is slowly and relentlessly engulfing humanity which is helpless against it. Arkel has lived long and has learned well that it is useless to struggle against destiny. He is the spokesman for acceptance of whatever happens.

Mélisande is a thoroughly weak person, as is Pélleas. But in this drama, she is the heroine, because she understands, as does Arkel, that what will happen will happen. She does not speak about it, but lets herself be manipulated as fate would have it. The submission of both Pélleas and Mélisande to their fate removes them from any censor on their behavior. In permitting themselves to be pushed in the direction fate would have it, they are removed from any judgment by morality. They cannot be bad, for they are submitting to the order of fate. They are passive, so they cannot be guilty, for they exhibit no wills for which the good and bad forces must struggle. They must be innocent, for they allow themselves to be led, and they question not what is happening to them, nor do they mourn about what fate has done to them. Looking at innocence from this standpoint, Mélisande was completely honest

at the end of the play when she stated that she had been guilty of no wrong. No matter what she and Pélleas might have done, they would be innocent. Yet at times she lies to Golaud. Perhaps because she recognizes in him one who does not accept fate. He cannot understand her.

Golaud is the only completely human character in the drama. He is the only one who acts. He hunts, fights, tries to do something about the famine, shores up the castle foundations, tries to save his marriage, tries to understand and rationalize his wife, which is impossible, as she is irrational. Because of this, his humanity, he is the villain of the drama.²⁸ Because of his humanity, he is the one who is hurt the most, frustrated, really pitiable. His emotions of jealousy, rage, hurt pride, vindictiveness are understandable. He loses more than anyone else at the end.

The Opera

Impressionism

While symbolism is the reaction of writers against naturalism and realism, impressionism is its musical counterpart. The impressionist depicts only a fleeting glance, not the entire image. His object is to give only enough to stimulate the imagination of the listener. Debussy was the leader of the impressionist school in France.

The dialogue of the drama, while natural, consists for the most part of short phrases, which lend a breathless, mysterious, somewhat unreal quality. This dialogue lends itself well to the talents of Debussy, whose specialty is brief snatches of melody which rise up suddenly, then disappear into the subdued, undulating orchestra. Neither Maeterlinck nor Debussy was interested in portraying graphically what they saw. Both offered only a brief glance, a suggestion. The audience can participate to the fullest in this type of art, for they must meet the artist halfway in order to share the meaning of this experience.

Adaptation of the drama
to the opera

Debussy first read Pelléas and Mélisande in 1892, the same year in which it was written. The following year, he attended a performance. At first, he considered setting some of the scenes to music, then he decided to make an opera of it. He labored on it for ten years, but it was the central work of his life.²⁹

It is the most French of all French operas, except possibly for Manon. This is probably because of the wording of the drama, which was so remarkably fitted to Debussy's style. He had to make few changes in the libretto. Debussy illustrates the phrases with musical impressions. The French have always preferred the under-statement, the refined, the suggested, to the bombastic, vividly portrayed, detailed account. Debussy's music is restrained, usually thinly orchestrated when accompanying the voice, never competing

with the voice for the listener's attention. Music joins the scenes, so that a harmonious, whole effect is achieved. The voices never sing in unison, but sound one at a time, as a true drama would be handled. Pelléas and Mélisande is truly a lyric drama, a play which is sung.

Maeterlinck gave Debussy carte blanche regarding the adaptation of the drama, but ten years later, he changed his mind and published a burning letter in Figaro, saying that he no longer recognized the drama as being his own, and that he sincerely hoped the opera would fail, utterly and miserably.³⁰ He said that the reason for his anger was due to some cuts which Debussy had made. Since the cuts which Debussy made were almost non-existent, this reasoning is highly unlikely. It is suspected that the major reason for his anger was because Debussy selected Mary Garden to sing the role of Mélisande rather than Maeterlinck's wife. The opera did not fail, but was an immediate success.

The Music

There is no overture to Pelléas et Mélisande. A short orchestral interlude sets the scene. Without having to see the stage action, the music makes us feel a somberness, a darkness. Debussy has accomplished his musical illustrations of place and emotional atmosphere by use of short snatches of melody, suggesting rather than outlining completely the scene. Bizet and

Debussy have both managed to project the listener into any particular setting. Both remained faithful to the text. Yet how differently they accomplished their means. Bizet renders his settings and characters in completeness, leaving nothing to the imagination. He uses any means at his disposal to give as full a description as possible--rhythm, melody, particular combinations of instruments, recurring themes. Debussy conveys scenes and emotions which are as illustrative as Bizet's. However, instead of giving the entire picture, he briefly outlines, suggests, hints. The listener must meet him halfway. It is more work to listen to Debussy's opera than to Bizet's. One can listen to Carmen and know what is occurring at any time without consulting a score. However, with Pelléas et Mélisande, one must follow the score at all times unless the singers enunciate clearly. The only singable theme in the whole opera occurs when Mélisande is combing her hair. The melody she sings is either borrowed from an old folk tune or was composed by Debussy to sound like an old melody. Aside from this one instance, one can come away from the opera, even after having heard it several times, without being able to recall one tune. This, of course, is due to Debussy's style of composition. But it is also rather frustrating to hear two measures of an indescribable beauty, which disappears as suddenly as it came.

The vocal parts in Pelléas et Mélisande differ from the other two operas which have been discussed. Whereas Mozart and Bizet

composed arias which were tuneful, designed to suit any voice and to enchant the listener, Debussy was looking for another means of vocal expression. He found his solution in a type of quasi-speaking style. One cannot say that the characters really sing nor that they really speak. Their parts are notated, yet the range in each phrase is so limited that the listener accustomed to bel canto style of singing is in for a shock. Debussy makes extensive use of the triplet figure in the vocal passages. This rhythm is said to approximate the natural speaking voice more closely than any other rhythm.

The orchestra very effectively mirrors the text. When a scene takes place in a wood, for example, the music gives this impression by use of basses, cellos, bassoons or bass clarinets in a low register, giving an appropriate gloomy effect. Debussy also uses lush, rich chords which give warm, happy, passionate or exciting effects. In Act I, where Geneviève, Pelléas and Mélisande are together before entering the castle, they discuss the sea and the passing ships. The power of the sea is suggested by the orchestra. It surges, undulates, radiating an underlying power. Brief use is made of a chorus as a ship puts to sea near them. I believe that the use of the chorus is not intended as a realistic touch of the crew as they sing while they hoist the sails. It seems to me that the voices are used as instruments, for sound effect. The words they sing are not important. The effect is ghostly, other-worldly. Little Yniold's childish happiness at being tickled by

Golaud's beard is shared by the orchestra. The relief of Pélleas upon emerging from the dank cavern under the castle surges out in the music. You can actually feel the warmth of the sunshine and breathe the fresh air. Golaud's jealous anger upon finding Pélleas entangled in Mélisande's hair, as well as the terror which the two lovers experience when they discover that Golaud has been spying upon them when they meet to bid each other farewell, are intensified by the instrumentation. The music mounts in agitation and violence as Golaud kills Pélleas and pursues Mélisande. These are only a few of the examples which I could cite in which the orchestra accomplishes so much.

As I listened to the recording, I tried to analyze how the fragments of music fit together to produce a five-act opera. It seems that the cohesiveness comes from the text and not from the music. Le Mariage de Figaro seems to be rather a haphazard arrangement of arias and ensembles connected by recitatives. However, I believe that the real unity comes from the harmonic architecture of the music, the classic sonata form which is unity itself. Debussy, pioneering in a new type of composition, could not use these old forms. So he relies on the text, writing the music to follow it so closely that unity is achieved, even though only impressions of each mood are given. Also, there is no musical break between the scenes. Each one flows into the other. The music stops only at the end of each act.

The impressionistic style of composition requires many changes of meter. On page 120 and 121 of the score, for example, the meter changes from $\frac{4}{4}$ to $\frac{6}{8}$ to $\frac{12}{8}$ to $\frac{4}{4}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ to $\frac{4}{4}$ again. This is in Act II, Scene II, in which Golaud notices that Mélisande's ring is missing. Golaud is quite upset over its loss, saying he would rather have lost anything else than the ring. Mélisande is quite upset also, as she is not telling him the truth. Irregular rhythms heighten the tension.

This opera is unusual in that there are no ensembles at all. Aside from the brief use of the chorus, there is only one other place where more than one voice sounds at the same time. This occurs at the end of Act IV, where Pélleas and Mélisande kiss each other for the last time, and sing four notes in unison, a symbol perhaps that their love, unrequited though it may be, has united them.

Impressionism in Art

The major preoccupation of the impressionist painters is light. The creation of its illusion fascinates them. The striking thing about almost any impressionistic painting is the shimmering quality. Even pictures of objects in darkness are imbued with luminosity. Monet's London: The Houses of Parliament, with the Sun Shining through Fog, is alive with color. The two focal points of the sun which is reflected in the water are brilliant. Many different colors, placed close together in small patches, have been

used. The eye picks up the different colors and the effect is of vibrating intensity, especially when viewed from a distance. The building in the background is rather dark. Its darkness is emphasized, because large areas of the same color bordering on another shade which covers a large area produce a greater contrast. To be a good impressionistic painter, it is necessary to understand light thoroughly, the properties of color and how the eye functions. The critics of the impressionists do not realize how exacting their means of expression is.

Georges Seurat was interested in line as well as in related colors. La Grande Jatte, at first glance, resembles a child's stencil design because the figures and the landscape are so simply done. Then you see the dazzling brilliance of the light, which permeates even to the welcome shade of the foreground. No child could do this. Closer observation shows that the colors are put on the canvas in painstaking little dots. This technique is called pointillism, and demands great technique and knowledge of light and color on the part of the artist. It is the eye which translates these dots into meaningful shapes. The faces are generally left blank, but some have hints of features. The line of the trees leads the eye upward. This is balanced by the line of the shade which cuts horizontally across the picture. The reclining figure of the man, the smaller shady areas, the umbrellas and the lake neatly offset the many vertical figures. One color is used, then another is placed beside it. The colors do not blend into

each other. There is hardly any shading of colors at all to indicate folds or contour. This picture is more precise in composition than any of the other impressionistic paintings.

Landscapes are popular among the impressionists. Monet, preoccupied with light, would often paint the same scene time after time, with a different result because of the changing of the illumination. Fields in Spring also includes another of his favorite subjects—a lady with a parasol. In this picture, the eye is carried along the horizon, then upward by three tall trees in the left half of the picture. The colors of the field move horizontally across. Smaller trees in the background relieve the monotony. The sky has a peculiar greenish tinge. The sky does not appear to be bright with sunlight, yet the field and the blossoms are shimmering in brilliance. Each color in this picture is used in a smaller area, and gives way frequently to another color. You can feel the warmth radiating from the field.

Similarities of impressionistic art and music

There are similarities in impressionistic art and music. Tone color is perhaps the biggest preoccupation of both artist and composer. Both have had to develop new methods to convey their idea of color.

They are both concerned with impressions rather than a complete picture. The artist is interested in painting the effect produced on him by seeing sunlight shining through fog, for example, rather

than the actual event. The musician gives the listener a short phrase, rather than a completely developed melody, because he is after effect.

Much of the art is shimmery, sometimes vague. The viewer must concentrate to capture the mood. The music of this period is also vague, because the musician wants it that way. Old ties of key center are deliberately broken. Key center and rhythm, the old forms of stability, keep changing. The listener must learn to listen in a new way, as the person viewing an impressionistic painting must learn that the picture is not the important thing, but how it makes him feel. Impressions are fleeting. They come rapidly and disappear just as rapidly. This is more obvious in the music than in the art, because, of necessity, the painting must have a narrower scope.

FOOTNOTES

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13. Paul Henry Lang, Music in Western Civilization (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1941), p. 643.
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23. Donald Jay Grout, A Short History of Opera (New York: Columbia University Press, 1951), p. 426.
24. Ibid.
25. Haskell M. Block, Mallarmé and the Symbolist Drama (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1963), p. 110.
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27. Joseph Kerman, Opera as Drama (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1956), p. 176.
28. Ibid.
29. Claude Debussy, Pelléas and Mélisande, preface of the score.
30. Louis Biancolli and Robert Bagar, The Victor Book of Operas (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1949), p. 388.

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A DISCUSSION OF LE MARIAGE DE FIGARO,
CARMEN, AND PELLEAS ET MELISANDE:
THE ORIGINAL WORK AND THE OPERA

by

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The works of three French authors have been selected as the basis for this paper. They are Le Mariage de Figaro, by Beaumarchais, Carmen, by Prosper Merimee, and Pelléas et Mélisande, by Maurice Maeterlinck. Each of these works was adapted into an opera. Le Mariage de Figaro was set to music by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Carmen, by Georges Bizet, and Pelléas et Mélisande, by Claude Debussy. The major objective of the paper was to note the similarities and the dissimilarities between the original and the libretto.

Each of these works represents a certain era. Le Mariage de Figaro represents the age of classicism, both the original play and the opera. Carmen, the story and the opera, represents the age of romanticism, and the play Pelléas et Mélisande represents symbolism. The opera represents the musical counterpart of symbolism, impressionism. The ways in which each of these literary works and musical works represent the particular age has been pointed out.

A brief description of paintings which were contemporary with the play or story and the opera has also been included. General conclusions have been drawn between the literature, music and art of each period. It has been interesting to note the relationship between the three means of expression.

A brief discussion of the background of each work has also been included. Reasons have been suggested as to why the particular work appealed to the composer, the qualities which lent themselves so well to the musical capabilities of the composer.