The Medieval Leper Plagues Modern Paris: Sylvio Lazzari's *La Lépreuse*

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February 1912: The curtain of the Opéra-Comique rises to reveal medieval Brittany. Washerwomen gossip about lepers who walk among the healthy, in defiance of the law. The women hint to Maria that her son, Ervoanik, is in love with the beautiful Aliette, who, it is rumoured, is one of these freely roaming lepers. Ervoanik does love Aliette, and when he informs his parents of his decision to marry her, his father explodes in rage. Doesn't he know that she is the daughter of a leper? Ervoanik refuses to believe it. The hideous appearance of Aliette's mother, Old Tili, betrays her own leprosy as she attempts to lure young children with her singing to eat her infected breads. When Aliette and Ervoanik stop at Old Tili's cottage to rest before making a holy pilgrimage, Tili assumes that Aliette intends to infect him, just as she has infected so many others. When she realizes that Aliette truly loves Ervoanik and plans to live with him chastely, Tili lies, telling her that he already has a wife and children. Aliette confronts Ervoanik, and he claims it is true, as a joke. She immediately touches her lips to a cup of wine and offers it to him. He drinks. In the third act, Ervoanik, now a leper, awaits the procession of the dead, which leads him to his house of exile. Aliette joins him.

A critic for *L'Humanité* asserted: 'In the theatre, there are illnesses that are appealing and those that are not. Consumption is an appealing illness; leprosy is not.'[1] Critic Adolphe Boschot wrote: 'It is certain that with such a title: *La Lépreuse* [The Leper] – a piece doesn't pass unnoticed.'[2] It seems that it was precisely this conspicuous and unusual subject that made Opéra-Comique director Albert Carré uneasy when composer Sylvio Lazzari and librettist and playwright Henry Bataille came to him with their opera in 1901.[3] Carré refused to produce the work, even though he admired the music:

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[1] B.M., 'Les Premières', *L'Humanité* (9 Feb. 1912): 2. All translations are mine, unless otherwise stated.

[2] Adolphe Boschot, '*La Lépreuse* à l'Opéra-Comique', *Echo de Paris* (8 Feb. 1912): 4.

[3] Bataille adapted the libretto for the opera from his play of the same name – his first performed play, which premiered 6 May 1896 at the Comédie-Parisienne and was produced by the Société Théâtrale de l'Œuvre and directed by Lugné-Poë. André Antoine, *Le Théâtre,* vol. 1 (Paris: Les Editions de France, 1932): 340. Two years later, the well-respected critic Jules Lemaître attracted much attention to the play with his glowing article ('La Semaine dramatique') in the *Journal des Débats* (18 May 1896): 1–2. Almost every reviewer of the opera quoted Lemaître's article, often at great length. This column was reprinted in Lemaître's *Impressions de Théâtre*, vol. 10 (Paris: Boivin, 1927): 361–73.

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> I made clear to the two authors my unqualified reservations on the subject: imagine seeing, in the most important act of the drama, an old leper woman whose daughter, just as much a leper but without visible symptoms, willingly contaminates a healthy young man by offering him a deadly kiss that gives him the 'haut mal' ['terrible disease']. It was a situation that, at that time even at the Grand Guignol, one wouldn't have dared to put on the stage.[4]

It was ten years later that the opera finally went into production, after much high-profile controversy, including legal battles (which included a debate in the Chamber of Deputies regarding the suitability of the subject for a state-subsidized theatre), accusations, negotiations and substantial press coverage, all of which René Dumesnil described as 'an adventure that remained in all memories', writing, 'the story of *La Lépreuse*, for ten years, was the *Iliad* of theatrical news'.[5]

This initial refusal to produce *La Lépreuse* because of the wilful contamination of a 'healthy young man' by a woman who is 'a leper … without visible symptoms' suggests the possible nature of the anxiety the work evoked, for Carré's concern seemed to focus on the spread and identification of disease. Although the opera was set in the Middle Ages and dealt with a sickness that supposedly posed no threat to the modern world, Carré's response suggests that *La Lépreuse* touched a societal nerve.

In order to explore the nature of the opera's resonance in Parisian society, two intersecting paths of inquiry will be pursued in this essay: Parisian perceptions of Brittany and Parisian conceptions of and anxieties regarding disease. Through direct links between past and present, including visual, musical and ideological elements, *La Lépreuse* closes gaps between times and spaces, acting as a reflection of and a commentary on Parisian culture, providing a space for confronting social problems without ever explicitly identifying those problems, and addressing issues of cultural, social and national identity.

The Myth of Brittany: A Domestic Orient

Brittany in 1912 was perceived by Parisians as a savage place where ancient ways lived on. Breton peasants lived as their medieval ancestors did in their clothing, agricultural methods, songs and stories, believing in the same saints and spirits,

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[4] Albert Carré, *Souvenirs de Théâtre* (Paris: Plon, 1950): 349–50. The Grand Guignol was a theatre specializing in horror plays.

[5] René Dumesnil, 'L'Exemple de Sylvio Lazzari', *L'Information Musicale* 91 (20 Nov. 1942): 107. In addition to being mentioned by many reviewers of the opera, this 'adventure' is described in detail by Carré (*Souvenirs*, 350–52) and by Wolfgang Asholt in '*La Lépreuse* von H. Bataille/S. Lazzari (1896/1912)', in *Oper als Text: Romanistische Beiträge zur Libretto-Forschung*, ed. Albert Gier (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätverlag, 1986): 299–318. Asholt's explanation is based on *L'Affaire de La Lépreuse* (Paris: Librairie générale, 1910); *Journal officiel de la République française, Chambre des Députés* (1906): 747–50; and contemporary journals and newspapers. The main elements include a new libretto (eventually titled *L'Ensorcelé* [The Bewitched]) devoid of leprosy; Carré promising a production, stalling and eventually changing his mind; the debate in the Chamber of Deputies in 1906, which eventually resulted in Carré's agreement to produce the original libretto; Bataille and Lazarri accusing Carré of attempting to sabotage the opera; Carré's desire to pay off the pair; in 1908, Carré's discussion with the Société des Auteurs, which supported him; and finally, Carré's decision to mount the work and his lawyer's ability to make a final reconciliation.

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and participating in the same rituals. For many, Brittany provided a more 'pure' alternative to urban chaos and moral degeneration. For others, it served as a place in which a conventional, civilized lifestyle could be exchanged for a taste of the freedom of the uncivilized, the forbidden.[6]

Beginning in the nineteenth century, Brittany became the object of artistic, scholarly and spectacular pursuits. Folklore societies were formed, attempting to understand the peasant. Scholars, such as Théodore Hersar de la Villemarqué and F.M. Luzel, travelled there to collect its ancient songs and stories. By mid-century, the construction of railroad lines made the region easily accessible and it became a prime tourist attraction. Artists flocked there, especially to Pont-Aven, for its picturesque landscapes and pure subject matter.[7] Numerous paintings of Breton peasants and landscapes found a place in the well-attended annual Salon, and along with photographs, often made their way onto postcards (see Figs 1 and 2), which, in conjunction with the abundance of Breton-related prints, attested to Brittany's popularity.[8] These artworks contributed to, and thus came to represent, Parisian conceptions of Brittany and its inhabitants.

A popular subject for these artistic endeavours was the pardon. This ancient Breton tradition, a religious rite and festival consisting of a large procession to a holy place usually connected to a local saint or miracle, provided the possibility



Fig. 1 Théophile Deyrolle, *Haymaking near Pont-Aven*, postcard, c. 1901

[6] Naomi Schor has explored the conception of Brittany as a domestic Orient in 'Domestic Orientalism: On the Road with Gustave and Maxime', in *Corps/Décors: Femmes, Orgie, Parodie; Hommage à Lucienne Frappier-Mazur*, ed. Catherine Nesci (Amsterdam and Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 1999): 58. See also Theodore Zeldin, *France 1848–1945, Vol. I, Ambition, Love and Politics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973): 132–3, and Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchman: The Modernization of Rural France 1870–1914* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976): 5.

[7] See, for example, Julia Rowland Myers, '"Sympathy for Humanity": Robert Wylie and His Paintings of Breton Life', *American Art Journal* 28/2 (1997): 83–121, 86, and Judy Le Paul, *Gauguin and the Impressionists at Pont-Aven* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1990).

[8] For a discussion of Breton prints in the second half of the century, see Robert L. Herbert, *Peasants and 'Primitivism'* (South Hadley, MA: Mount Holyoke College Art Museum, 1995). Also see Myers, '"Sympathy for Humanity"', 83.

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Fig. 2 ***Little girl of Pont-Aven*****, postcard, c. 1895**

of healing, protection and atonement – what Eugen Weber calls 'access to the extraordinary'.[9] The expansion of the pardon tradition was part of the revival of religious practices cultivated in Brittany after 1875, in part as a response to republican anti-clericalism.[10] The pardon was a major tourist attraction, and many artists depicted this ancient ritual, often 'with a meticulous, almost photographic realism' (see Fig. 3).[11]

Fred Orton and Griselda Pollock have dispelled the myths of Brittany, asserting that its 'primitiveness' was in large part a construction of artists who needed a new space of representation for vanguard painting to compete with other

[9] Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen*, 351. Also see Gabriel P. Weisberg, 'Vestiges of the Past: The Brittany "Pardons" of Late Nineteenth-Century French Painters', *Arts Magazine* 55 (Nov. 1980): 134–8, 136.

[10] Deborah Silverman, *Van Gogh and Gauguin: The Search for Sacred Art* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2000): 92–3. Also see Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen*, 347, for an example of the institution of a new pardon.

[11] Silverman, *Van Gogh and Gauguin*, 92. In 1906, A. Le Braz described the appeal and charm of the festivities of the pardon, exclaiming, 'How innocent, how primitive!' A. Le Braz, *The Land of Pardons*, trans. Frances M. Gostling (New York: MacMillan, 1906): xix.

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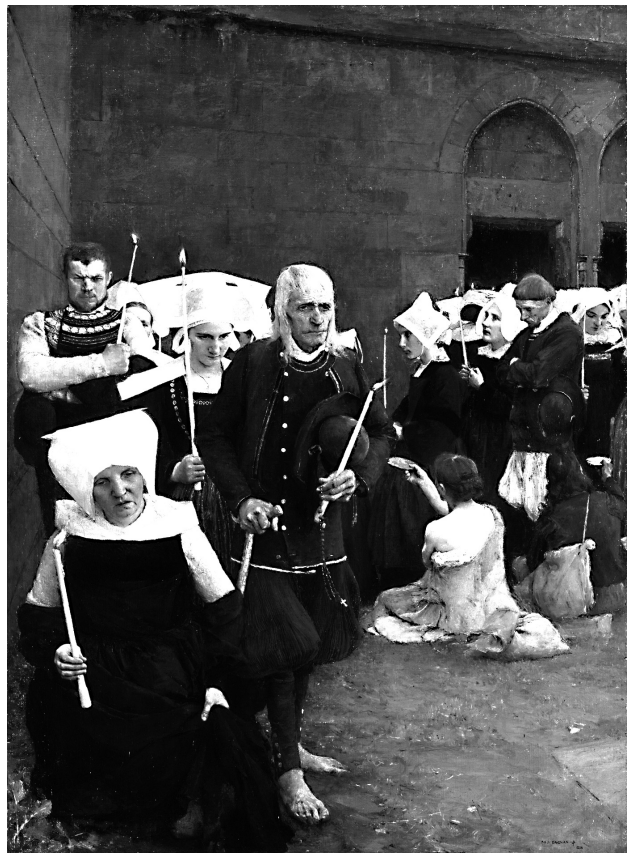


Fig. 3 Pascal-Adolphe-Jean Dagnan-Bouveret, *The Pardon in Brittany*, 1886
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of George F. Baker, 1931 (31.132.34)
Image © The Metropolitan Museum of Art

Parisian vanguard artists, which at the same time fulfilled the tourist's desire for an exotic culture to observe.[12] As scholars have shown, Brittany had been altered by civilization as early as the middle of the nineteenth century.[13] Even the fact that tourists could enter this 'timeless' realm made it less timeless, for the very practice of tourism was a modern one.[14] But the reality of Brittany at the turn of

[12] Fred Orton and Griselda Pollock, 'Les Données Bretonnantes: La Prairie de la Représentation', in *Modern Art and Modernism: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Francis Frascina and Charles Harrison (New York: Harper and Row, 1982): 285–304. Orton and Pollock assert that Seurat's *Grand Jatte* 'was so successful as a painting and as a gesture that it helped close that Parisian landscape of pleasure as a subject for vanguard painting'. 'There was no alternative for the vanguard to seeing Paris as Seurat revealed it both because of what he showed and because of the way the mode of representation redefined what was represented.' Ibid., 297.

[13] Orton and Pollock (ibid.) expose the myths of costume, language and economics. Also see Schor, 'Domestic Orientalism', 59; and Herbert, *Peasants and 'Primitivism'*.

[14] See Griselda Pollock, *Avant-Garde Gambits 1888–1893: Gender and the Color of Art History* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1992): 60.

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the twentieth century had no effective bearing on *La Lépreuse* and its meaning to the urban population of Paris, for it was the myth of Brittany, what Pollock calls 'a spectacle of difference',[15] which fed the imagination of artist, tourist and audience member alike.[16]

Jules Lemaître compared Bataille to 'an unknown singer of the most legendary Brittany from the most remote Middle Ages',[17] and in fact, the play and the opera owe a great deal to the folk songs of Brittany and the Parisian publications that contained and commented on them. The reference in the first act to the fear of catching leprosy through a keyhole comes from the tragic song 'L'Enfant du Lépreux', found in the Luzel collection.[18] The religious beliefs and practices found in the opera, such as Ervoanik and Aliette's pilgrimage to Folgoat and Aliette's religious devotion and faith in the power of the pardon to grant her wish to marry Ervoanik, are rooted in realities about which anyone in Paris could read in Villemarqué's popular collection *Barzaz-Breiz: Chants populaires de la Bretagne*.[19] Villemarqué's lengthy commentaries on the song texts and Breton peasant life served as factual documentation regarding the peasants themselves. His grim and detailed account of the fate of the leper informed *La Lépreuse* extensively – the exclusion, confinement and clothes that marked the leper as dead. In the third act, the processors sing the ancient responsory chant, *Libera me*, from the Requiem Mass, and the Seneschal reads the rules of containment outlined by Villemarqué.[20]

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[15] Ibid., 60.

[16] Gauguin, for example, in *Vision After the Sermon*, 'evacuates the modernity of Brittany by casting the scene into a pre- or non-modern field, of religiosity, superstition, visions'. Pollock notes how both Bernard and Gauguin 'exoticized' their female peasant subjects by medievalizing and orientalizing their faces. Ibid., 56–7. In a letter to Van Gogh (20 October 1889), Gauguin described the peasants as having a medieval quality about them, seemingly unaware of the actual year in which they lived. Orton and Pollock, 'Les Données Bretonnantes', 301.

[17] Lemaître, *Impressions de Théâtre*, 373. Also quoted in Edouard Sarradin, 'Théâtres', *Journal des débats* (9 Feb. 1912): 3.

[18] F.M. Luzel, *Gwerziou Breiz-Izel: Chants populaires de la Basse-Bretagne* (Paris: Lorient, 1868–74): 243–7. This tale is told in part from the point of view of a five-year-old child. Her father is a leper and her mother is hanged and burned for the murder of her baby. The child goes to see her father, and he warns her to back away from the door because she might catch leprosy through the hole in the lock. So she 'put her head to the window, and both their hearts broke'.

[19] So well known was this collection that Henri Marcel Fay, in his *Histoire de la lèpre en France: Lépreux et cagots du Sud-ouest* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1910) does not even provide any publication information when he quotes from it, and it is not included in his extensive bibliography. In the song 'Notre-Dame du Folgoat', a young girl, falsely accused and condemned to death, asks her father to make a pilgrimage to Folgoat for her. She is brought to Folgoat to be hanged, but she does not die and credits 'Notre-Dame Marie du Folgoat' for protecting her. Thèodore Hersar de la Villemarqué, *Barzaz-Breiz: Chants populaires de la Bretagne*, vol. 2, 4th ed. (Paris: A. Franck, 1846): 71–83. Villemarqué also describes the original miracle that took place in Folgoat in 1315.

[20] The end of Villemarqué's description reads as follows: 'Once at the threshold, the priest, in the presence of the people, again encouraged patience, consoled him anew, made him pledge never to go out without his black hood on his head and his red cross on his shoulder; not to enter churches, nor any houses, nor taverns to buy wine; not to go to the mill or the bakehouse, not to wash his hands nor his clothes in the springs nor in the current of the stream, not to appear at festivals, nor at pardons, nor other public assemblies; to touch produce in the markets only with the end of his rod and without

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In fact, in the preface to the published version of the play, Bataille explained that the story of *La Lépreuse* itself was drawn from a Breton song (Bataille himself heard this leper song in a Huelgoat forest in 1892[21]), whose 'gaps rendered it incomprehensible', thus allowing 'the substitution of the imagination of the author'. Yet he expressed his desire not to 'deform the Breton story', to conserve the form of the text and employ local expressions as properly as possible, referring to the undeniable authenticity of the work of Luzel and Le Braz, and Villemarqué.[22] Luzel published three different, incomplete versions of the song 'Iannik Coquart',[23] and Bataille's play closely follows these Breton songs.[24] In fact, he lifted entire sections and placed them, unaltered, into his play without acknowledging his sources.[25]

Given that the sets of *La Lépreuse* seem modelled after the popular depictions of contemporary Brittany (see Figs 4 and 5), the costumes worn in the production matched perceptions of contemporary Breton clothing (see Figs 6 and 7) and the story, the rituals, the Breton folk tunes – for Bataille was not the only one to borrow so literally from the Bretons – and much of the text itself could all be 'verified' in Villemarqué's volumes, an impression of recognizability was created, inviting an experience of the opera, immersed in Breton 'fact', as a document of truth. In addition, the fact that *La Lépreuse* takes place in the Middle Ages yet so closely corresponded to the Parisian perception of contemporary Breton life further reinforced the myth of Brittany as a timeless and mystical place.[26]

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speaking, to answer only downwind, not to wander at all in the evening in the sunken roads, not to touch children … not to offer them anything …; then he poured a shovel of earth on his feet, blessed it in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.' Ibid., 351–2.

[21] Henry L'Héritier, *La Vie et l'oeuvre d'Henry Bataille*, vol. 1 (Paris: Editions de l'Ame Gauloise, 1930): 69.

[22] Henry Bataille, preface to *'Ton Sang' précédé de 'La Lépreuse'* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1898): ix–x.

[23] Villemarqué only describes this song, as he was unable to verify its authenticity and therefore refused to print the text. In his description, the young leper, Marie, 'splits a finger, and with her blood … gives leprosy to fourteen people of the family who spurned her, and her young lover dies from it'. *Barzaz-Breiz*, 352–3. Luzel writes in his preface that the irregularities and incompleteness of many of the texts he is publishing are simply distinctive characteristics of this popular poetry: 'I provided what I found, what really exists among the people, real, popular poetry.' Luzel, *Gwerziou Breiz-Izel*, iii–iv. All three versions were recorded in 1863 in three different places. They may be found in ibid., 253–65.

[24] Bataille renamed the young leper and greatly expanded the role of Old Tili.

[25] Pierre Lalo reminds his readers that some young Breton musicians accused Bataille of plagiarism, and raises the notion of authenticity relative to Bataille's style: 'The fact is the more regrettable that these fragments of the popular poem are of a plain style, solid and strong, extremely different from the affectation and the manner that are in other works the habitual traits of the style of Mr Bataille; and thus Mr Bataille could seem to claim merits that were not at all his.' Lalo, 'La Musique', *Le Temps* (13 Feb. 1912): 3. The accusations of the Association of Breton Composers and Bataille's response were published in *Comoedia* on 8, 9 and 10 February.

[26] Lazzari even wrote the score in Brittany, which according to *Comoedia*, he called 'his dear country', and which inspired his music 'in delicious moments he spent in Pouldu, in a little house on the Breton coast where, rocked by the rhythm of the waves, he found his best inspirations'. Prudomme, 'Opéra-Comique', *Comoedia* (5 Feb. 1912): 2.

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Fig. 4 Decor for Acts I and III by Alexandre Bailly, in *Le Théâtre* (1 April 1912)[27]

La Lépreuse seemingly served as the perfect tourist opera, presenting the domestic Other, the 'spectacle of difference'. But what if the difference the tourist relies upon turns out to be not so very different? What if the audience is pulled into a world that is, in fact, their own?

For many artists, such as Van Gogh and Gauguin, Brittany represented the possibility of a return to the pure, the primordial, the essence of humanity. Albert Aurier praised Gauguin for initiating an art that travels deeper than realism, a 'simple, spontaneous, and primordial art', connecting with his primitive soul.[28] The Breton peasants served as a physical link to the truths of the ancients, and thereby to the truths of the present. Bataille's ideas regarding *La Lépreuse* and its connection to its companion play, *Ton Sang* (Your Blood), in which industrialization is tied to 'the malady of nerves' suffered by the main character, come very close to those expressed by Aurier:

> All came from the primordial soul, all that we are, all our little innumerable gestures are the repercussion of the extraordinary and beautiful action of the primordial soul. And that's why the smallest fragment of popular poetry stirs in us this powerful nostalgia. It seems that, once long ago, we knew ourselves and

[27] Louis Schneider, 'Théâtre National de l'Opéra-Comique: *La Lépreuse*', *Le Théâtre* (1 Apr. 1912): 4–8, 5.

[28] Albert Aurier, 'Le Symbolisme en peinture: Paul Gauguin', *Mercure de France* 2 (Mar. 1891): 155–64, in Henri Dorra, ed., *Symbolist Art Theories* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994): 192–203.

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Fig. 5 Paul Gauguin, *A Farm in Brittany*, ca. 1894. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Bequest of Margaret Seligman Lewisohn, in memory of her husband, Sam A. Lewisohn, 1954 (54.143.2). Image © The Metropolitan Museum of Art

> that we wept for our lost innocence, – for our inner reality will generate anxiety for many of us for a long time to come.[29]

James Knapp has challenged the contention that artists who sought primitivism in Brittany at the turn of the twentieth century used it simply to escape modernity; instead, 'issues ranging from economic modernization to imperialism to class identity were inscribed in its texts'.[30] Similarly, *La Lépreuse* did not allow its audience to forget its own present.[31]

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[29] Bataille, preface to *'Ton Sang'*, viii. 'Tout est venu de l'âme primordiale, tout ce que nous sommes, tous nos petits gestes innombrables sont la répercussion du geste rare et beau de l'âme primitive. Et voilà pourquoi le moindre fragment de poésie populaire nous secoue de cette nostalgie puissante. Il semble que nous nous y reconnaissions lointainement et que nous y pleurions notre simplicité perdu, – car la réalité intérieure de nous-même fera longtemps encore le souci de beaucoup d'entre nous.' He explained that these two plays contain 'the same natural forces … facing each other'. Ibid., xiv.

[30] James F. Knapp, 'Primitivism and Empire: John Synge and Paul Gauguin', *Comparative Literature* 41/1 (Winter 1989): 53–68, 67. In his examination of prints, Herbert found that these depictions 'also revealed the conflicts of modern culture'. Herbert, *Peasants and 'Primitivism'*, 19.

[31] Asholt explains that critics of Bataille's play clearly regarded the work as symbolist, while Carré and the delegates in the Chamber responded to the opera libretto on a more realist/social level. This tension between symbolist and realist readings may also be

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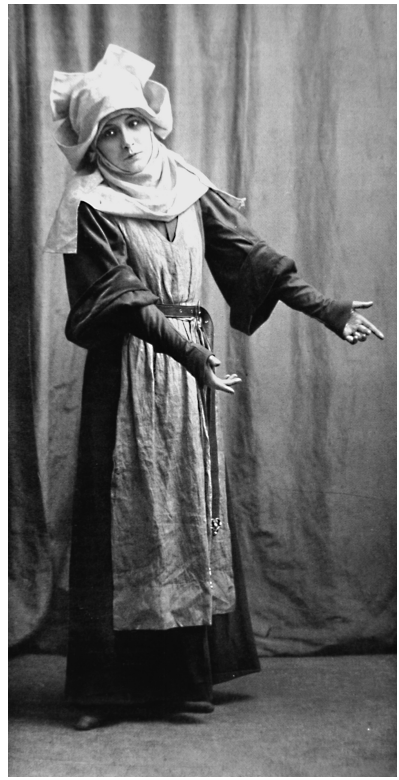


Fig. 6 Maria (Mme Brohly), in *Le Théâtre* (1 April 1912)[32]

Wagnerism and Frenchness

Boschot identified the shared interest of Bataille and Wagner in the primordial soul, in old eternal mysteries, in the essence of humanity.[33] And this Wagnerian connection extends to Lazzari's music as well. As Paul Landormy wrote: 'At a time when the works of Wagner were still violently debated, he [Lazzari] had the courage to declare himself Wagnerian.'[34]

found in reviews of the opera. Prudhomme addresses this tension between 'idealism' and 'realism' explicitly in a series of pieces in *Comoedia* (all titled 'Opéra-Comique', *Comoedia* (3 Mar. 1912: 2; 4 Mar. 1912: 2; 14 Mar. 1912: 3; and 16 Mar. 1912: 2)). He asserts that Bataille's work is '*idéaliste*' and criticizes elements of realism in the production, such as the blotches on Tili's face.

[32] Schneider, 'Théâtre National de l'Opéra-Comique: *La Lépreuse*': 7.

[33] Boschot, *Echo de Paris*.

[34] Paul Landormy, *La Musique française de Franck à Debussy* (Paris: Gallimard, 1943): 156. Lazzari (1857–1944) was born in Austria-occupied Bozen and became a naturalized French citizen in 1896. He studied law in Innsbruck and Vienna, and then attended the Paris Conservatoire, studying with Guiraud and Franck. His works include chamber music, songs, symphonic poems and operas. He served as President of the Wagnerian Association for many years. See ibid.; Arthur Pougin, 'Semaine théatrale', *Le Ménéstrel* (10 Feb. 1912): 43–4, 43; and articles by Emile Vuillermoz ('On doit une réparation à Sylvio

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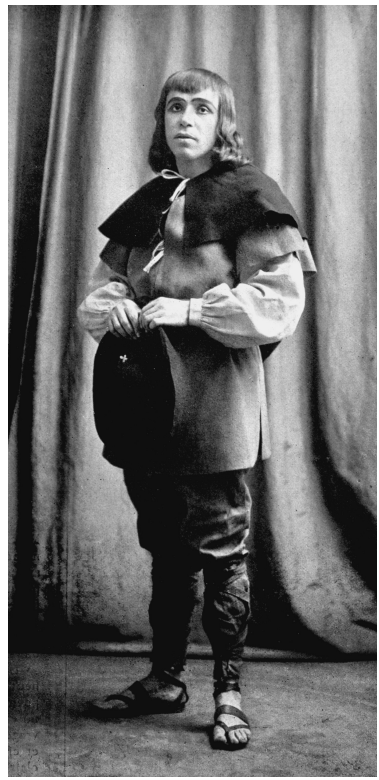


Fig. 7 Ervoanik (M Beyle), in *Le Théâtre* (1 April 1912)[35]

In fact, as Boschot acknowledged, the music that opens the opera is strongly reminiscent of the beginning of Wagner's *Das Rheingold*.A low octave pedal on E, to which a fifth is soon added, sounds under a single line that decorates E major arpeggio fragments. As these figures rise in pitch, density and motion increase in layers of arpeggiation and undulation, never leaving E major, creating an effect of growth and depth that is also static and pure. This music marks the awakening of a day, or the beginning of time itself; it is a pathway into a world of nature, myth and legend, where truths are told. This clearly recognizable Wagnerian parallel carries an ideological weight. And yet, when the curtain rises, the decors and costumes invoke not the depths of the Rhine, nor the mythological figures of the *Ring Cycle*, but rather that familiar Brittany.[36] This Nature music continues as solo winds play short arpeggio figures, reminiscent of the bird songs of *Siegfried*, over

Lazzari', *L'Information musicale* 91 (20 Nov. 1942): 105–6), Gustave Samazeuilh ('Sur une amitié de quarante ans', *L'Information musicale* 91 (20 Nov. 1942): 106), Adolphe Boschot ('Sur *La Lépreuse*', *L'Information musicale* 91 (20 Nov. 1942): 106) and René Dumesnil ('L'exemple de Sylvio Lazzari'; see n. 5 above).

35 Schneider, 'Théâtre National de l'Opéra-Comique: *La Lépreuse*': 8.

36 Boschot (*Echo de Paris*) identified the 'truthfulness' of the decors, 'which makes us feel the charm of Brittany'.

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major harmonies that circle statically around the tonic at whole-step intervals: ♭VII, ♭VI, II. The opening lines of recitative are immersed in this music.

As the washerwomen approach, a melody from the first piece found in Villemarqué's collection sounds (see Ex. 1).[37] Lazzari develops the first two bars of this counting song, repeating the material again and again, first in stark octaves and then harmonized.[38] The women converse over this music, which moves fluidly into the Nature music, and then they beat their linens to the counting rhythm over a dominant pedal in B minor as the motif rises in parallel thirds. This washing music alternates with another folk-like song in G major – a song the washerwomen actually sing: 'Tra la la la la dira la. In the little house at the foot of the land … is my sweet, my love, is my sweet, my desire.'[39]

Ex. 1 'Ar rannou', in Villemarqué, *Barzaz-Breiz*, vol. 2



The women contemplate the source of the linens they are washing: it could be anyone – a woman, a captain, a rector, the Seneschal, or even a leper! For the phrase 'clothes of a leper', the counting motif sounds in diminution over rising E♭-minor tremolos, as if caught in a whirlwind, propelling forward to a registral and harmonic lurch, as a C-minor melody sounds in the depths of the orchestra, followed by a sweeping chromatic melodic descent spanning four octaves that blurs through a diminished seventh sonority (see Ex. 2). This melody, played marcato below low tremolos, is truly the song of the leper, for it comes from Villemarqué's collection, from a lament entitled 'The Leper' (see Ex. 3).[40] It plods along heavily as the washerwomen discuss the frightening fact that not all lepers are on the mountain in the houses of containment, the *maisons neuves*. After Maria denies Ervoanik's involvement with lepers, the already mysterious leper melody, now sounded in canon, acquires a more sinister feel as the opening rising fifth becomes a tritone, harmonized with a series of diminished and half-diminished

[37] Villemarqué's collection consists primarily of the song texts. There is a small section at the end of the second volume that includes melodies for some of the songs, including this one.

[38] Musical examples taken from the piano-vocal score. Sylvio Lazzari, *La Lépreuse* (Paris: Eschig, 1909).

[39] Villemarqué reported that washerwomen often sang, and that their songs often corresponded to actual happenings in their villages. *Barzaz-Breiz*, 145–7. Washerwomen were a popular Breton artistic subject. See Myers, 'Robert Wylie and His Paintings of Breton Life', 102.

[40] Villemarqué, *Barzaz-Breiz*. The text is on pp. 354–9 and the melody on p. 46 of the appendix. This song is the lament of a young man in love with a girl who rejects him because of his leprosy. The text begins: 'Creator of heaven and earth! My heart is weighed down with pain; I spend my days and nights dreaming of my sweet beauty, my love.'

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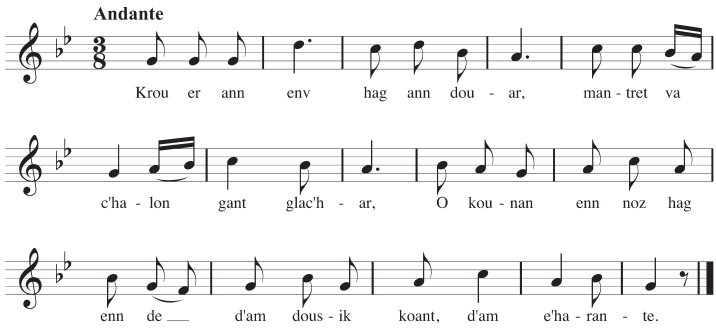
Ex. 2 Lazzari, *La Lépreuse*, Act I, scene 1



seventh chords. An inner figure from this theme is worked out in rising sequences with some intervallic expansion, driving to a diminished seventh chord, which engenders another statement of the opening motif of the theme. Maria puts a stop to this turbulence, silencing the women and calling in the Nature music,

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Ex. 3 'Ar c'hakouz', in Villemarqué, *Barzaz-Breiz*, vol. 2



and the women resume beating their laundry to the washing music, now in C minor, the key of the Leper theme.

This opening scene, which consists almost entirely (all but the Nature music) of Breton folk or folk-like music, is neatly sectionalized, with clear textures, into a pattern of alternation between the recitative over the counting song motif and the washing song. Thus, when the Leper theme emerges, its disruptive power is magnified; it invades and intrudes. And the 'simplicity' of these Breton people is marked as potentially deceptive, haunted by dark secrets.

Lazzari's use of an actual Breton folk melody from a song about a leper might seem to grant psychological truth and power to the theme. Both its first appearance, as if rising up from Hell itself, and its tritone alteration reflect the menacing side of leprosy. But the song from which the melody comes, like many of the Breton songs dealing with leprosy, emphasizes the loneliness and sadness of the leper, and seems intended to evoke pity. Lazzari seems to remove the melody from its human context, allowing it a life of its own, the power of the disease itself.

Lazzari's combination of Wagnerian elements with Breton folk music invoked a wide range of responses in the press, many clearly informed by nationalist agendas. At a time when forging a worthy, exclusively French musical identity was first and foremost on the minds of many musicians and critics,[41] critics had to contend with the Wagnerian aspects of the score and still claim the work as utterly French.[42] The differing opinions regarding the degree and depth of Wagnerian influence on the opera attest to the different conceptions of Wagnerism.[43] Even Bataille himself took pains to separate Lazzari's music from Wagner's, clarifying that Lazzari's leitmotivs were not 'unbearably developed' and that nothing in

[41] See Steven Huebner, *French Opera at the Fin de Siècle* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); Jane Fulcher, *French Cultural Politics & Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); and Anya Suschitzky, '*Ariane et Barbe-Bleue*: Dukas, the Light and the Well', *Cambridge Opera Journal* 9/2 (Jul. 1997): 133–61.

[42] Prudhomme asserts that *La Lépreuse* 'has the very rare value of being fundamentally French' because of its links to French literature of the Middle Ages. He compares the opera to Gounod's *Mireille*, which he calls more Greek than French. Prudhomme, *Comoedia* (16 Feb. 1912).

[43] Huebner writes: 'Even within the limited confines of the fin-de-siècle repertory, ideas about what constituted pastiche were not grounded in absolutes, but shaped by contextual factors such as the aesthetic, political designs, age, and training of the critic and/or composer.' *French Opera*, 243.

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the score was 'stifled by science'.[44] For many, it was the Breton songs that 'saved' the work from Wagnerian domination. Boschot praised the fusion of popular melodies with 'Wagnerian working out'.[45] Marnold asserted that the heavy, Wagnerian score was transformed, vivified and clarified in the theatre itself through the charm of the Breton airs.[46]

Certainly *La Lépreuse* is not the only French opera of the time to deal with peasants or Brittany, or to combine Wagnerian aspects with folk source material or French subject matter. Steven Huebner has explored the variety of ways that French operatic creators and critics responded to Wagner at the *fin de siècle* and there are many connections to *La Lépreuse*.[47] But it is the ways in which *La Lépreuse* differs (or was perceived to differ) from these other operas that affected its meaning for and connection to contemporary Parisian society.

A productive comparison may be made with Lalo's *Le Roi d'Ys* (1888), which is based on a Breton legend, with a medieval setting, and also includes Breton songs (as well as the incorporation of chant and religious ritual). Yet *Le Roi d'Ys* deals with royalty, not peasants; thus the costumes serve to emphasize this legendary quality (not what could be contemporary Brittany).[48] And the emphasis on sacrifice and redemption is nowhere to be found in *La Lépreuse*. The borrowed folk tunes are performed as set pieces, always sung, with simple textures, straightforward harmonies and orchestral doubling of the vocal lines, providing local colour.[49] Lazzari's Breton borrowings transcend this function; this music permeates the score, defining the world and the very essence of the characters. As Prudhomme stated: 'It seems that it is one of the forms of the language of the characters.'[50]

Prudhomme compared *La Lépreuse* to *Le Roi d'Ys*, asserting that 'they are different Brittanys', that this is not the Brittany painted for the annual Salon, because for Lazzari, Brittany is 'simply and uniquely the country where there are still lepers'.[51] Prudhomme's reading highlights a tension that is grounded in the very 'Frenchness' of the opera. Lazzari's use of leitmotivs, many of which originate from or imitate Breton folk songs, brings this tension to the fore, playing a crucial role in communicating the core issues of the opera. Though many critics praised Lazzari's leitmotivs for possessing more clarity than Wagner's,[52]

[44] René Bizet, 'Une Mélodie inédite d'Henry Bataille: L'auteur du poème de "La Lépreuse" nous parle de la musique de M. Sylvio Lazzari', *Comeodia* (5 Feb. 1912): 2.

[45] Boschot, *Echo de Paris*.

[46] Jean Marnold, 'Musique', *Le Mercure de France* (1 Mar. 1912): 176–9, 178.

[47] The partnership of Bruneau and Zola, for example, resulted in attempts to create 'a new kind of *drame lyrique*', to bring truth and idea together with realistic modern settings and characters to create a more 'human' music drama. Like *La Lépreuse*, their *La Rêve* includes a long religious ritual, the depiction of which relies heavily on borrowed chant. *Mireille*, set in nineteenth-century rural Provence, involves a long pilgrimage and the use of Provençal folk music. Huebner, *French Opera*, 399, 406. A few of the critics of the opera also identified these parallels.

[48] For images of the original costumes, see *L'Avant-scène opéra* 65 (Jul. 1984): cover, 8, 17, 76.

[49] According to Huebner, the stark textures, concision and brevity of motifs indicate an attempt on the part of Lalo to separate his work from that of Wagner. *French Opera*, 242–51.

[50] Prudhomme, 'Opéra-Comique', *Comoedia* (25 Feb. 1912): 4.

[51] Prudhomme, 'Opéra-Comique', *Comoedia* (28 Feb. 1912): 2.

[52] And in fact, for Lalo, the music of *La Lépreuse* contained 'nothing Wagnerian beyond the principal of thematic development', which, in Lalo's opinion, was applied with 'simplicity and in a way more melodic and vocal than Wagner would do'. Lalo, *Le Temps*.

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his treatment of those leitmotivs creates ambiguity and ambivalence, raising questions, forcing the audience to look to the music for answers, and presenting disturbing possibilities in reply. So while critics could praise the work for its Frenchness, for its use of pure Breton music, that very Frenchness is laid bare in all its harsh ambiguity, in dashed hopes and unfulfilled desires, selfishness and disease.

Retrospective Pathology: Art as Science

Professor Gilbert Ballet, in his preface to Dr Henri Marcel Fay's 1910 *Histoire de la lèpre en France*, attests to the recent predilection for medical readings of art, which he calls 'studies in retrospective pathology' – 'the careful examination of works of art, made from the medical point of view'.[53] This scientific analysis of art was in large part the work of Dr Jean-Martin Charcot, who coined the term 'retrospective diagnosis'. In 1889, he published *Les Difformes et les malades dans l'art*, and beginning in 1888, he annually produced *Nouvelle iconographie de la Salpêtrière*, which contained images and diagnoses of present patients as well as of artistic images of the past. Charcot's ability to identify nervous diseases through visual signs, to correlate 'external signs and symptoms to an internal state of deformation and degeneration', was unprecedented and extremely influential.[54] He brought new power to the visual and demonstrated art's significance to science, to truth.

In 1905, well-known writer J.K. Huysmans also took part in the retrospective diagnostic trend, publishing an essay on the works of Matthias Grünewald, in which he discusses a panel of the Isenheim altarpiece (see Fig. 8), which includes a figure that Huysmans calls a 'monster':

> And is this creature a larva or a man? Whatever it may be, one things is certain: no painter has ever gone so far in the representation of putrefaction, nor does any medical textbook contain a more frightening illustration of skin disease. This bloated body, moulded in greasy white soap mottled with blue, and mamillated with boils and carbuncles, is the hosanna of gangrene, the song of triumph of decay![55]

In a footnote, Huysmans cites two prominent Parisian doctors who analysed the malady of the figure, Dr Charles Richet calling it leprosy and Charcot identifying it as syphilis. The inability of medical experts to definitively identify this disease and the fact that the same physical signs were interpreted as leprosy *and* syphilis, in conjunction with Huysmans's vivid and frightening description, offer a physical and psychological point of connection between leprosy and syphilis, and suggest a possible explanation for Carré's reluctance to stage *La Lépreuse*. Leprosy might not have been considered a threat to modern-day Parisians, but syphilis certainly was. So when Lalo wrote, 'For many people, the most serious of its faults is the very nature of the subject, which is considered painful and

[53] Preface to Fay, *Histoire de la lèpre*, v.

[54] Deborah L. Silverman, *Art Nouveau in Fin-de-siècle France: Politics, Psychology, and Style* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989): 94.

[55] J.K. Huysmans, *Trois primitifs* (Paris: Librairie Léon Vanier, 1905): 35–6. Translation by Robert Baldick taken from *Grünewald, with an essay by J-K Huysmans* (Oxford: Phaidon, 1976): 9. See also William B. Ober, MD, 'Can the Leper Change his Spots? The Iconography of Leprosy. Part II', *The American Journal of Dermatopathology* 5/2 (Apr. 1983): 173–86, 182.

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Fig. 8 Matthias Grünewald, *The Temptation of St. Anthony* (detail), Isenheim Altarpiece, 1512–16. © Musée d'Unterlinden, Colmar

repugnant',[56] and Prudhomme declared, 'We live during those hours in an atmosphere that makes us sick',[57] perhaps it was not leprosy alone that caused such intense reactions. The opera's resonance with modern Parisian life is made clear by the horrified reactions in the Chamber of Deputies to what was clearly viewed as scandalous material, completely inappropriate for the social function served by the opera house. Jumel asserted: 'It seems to me absolutely impossible, in effect, to put a piece like this on the stage of the Opéra-Comique, this meeting place, each one of us knows it, of all the young women, this last salon where people interact and where marriages are made.'[58] Jumel also linked the opera and its disease to sex when he explained that Aliette spreads her disease 'in the more certain way', his statement meeting with exclamations from the other deputies.[59] And Lemaître extends that link to prostitution when he observes that Tili treats Ervoanik more like a 'client' of her daughter than a son-in-law.[60]

A cartoon published in *Le Figaro* just after the premiere of *La Lépreuse* (see Fig. 9) displays Old Tili, whose face and hands bear the ancient artistic sign that could, in fact, represent leprosy *or* syphilis, and Ervoanik holding the bowl that contaminates him with her disease. This cartoon called upon its viewers to

[56] Lalo, *Le Temps*.
[57] Prudhomme, L'interprétation, *Comoedia* (6 Feb. 1912): 2.
[58] Jumel, who represented Carré, closed his speech to the Chamber with this point. *Journal officiel de la République française, Chambre des Députés*, 750. Quoted in Asholt, '*La Lépreuse*', 310.
[59] Ibid.
[60] Lemaître, *Impressions de Théâtre*, 366.

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Fig. 9 *Le Figaro* **(8 Feb. 1912)**

attempt to diagnose its figures, and in fact, allowed an experience of the opera house as a space carved out for medical readings. The opera itself offered more art for analysis and diagnosis. Fay used ancient songs and legends as medical documents, alongside his other data, to provide medical evidence for the symptoms of leprosy and treatment of lepers.[61] With *La Lépreuse*, the audience could do the same, examining the characters and their songs, words, appearance and behaviour, and attempting to discern the signs of their disease or perversion, their guilt or innocence.

The Disease that Cannot Be Named

Yet discussions of the opera in the press did not explicitly mention syphilis. Although syphilis and syphilophobia raged throughout Paris, at all levels of society, the disease was considered too distasteful, horrifying and degrading to discuss in 'proper' circles; no one even wanted to say the word or see it in print. Syphilis was everywhere, and yet nowhere. The scandal associated with syphilis was so powerful that many failed to seek treatment, learn about the disease, or even tell anyone about their symptoms.[62] Barbara Leavy explains: 'This demand

[61] For example, Fay uses the Villemarqué collection as evidence in his discussion of leprosy, quoting a Breton folk song that describes a symptom of leprosy. Fay, *Histoire de la lèpre*, 28–9.

[62] As Jill Harsin describes: 'It was not considered appropriate for respectable women to know about the disease, or to speak of it if they knew.' Physicians supported the right of the syphilitic man 'to control the knowledge that the woman in the case would receive'

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for concealment by respectable people as well as the hypocrisy that governed their sexual lives made them especially insidious spreaders of the disease.'[63] Eugène Brieux's play, *Les Avariés* (Damaged Goods), which dealt very explicitly with syphilis among the bourgeoisie, was banned before its first performance in 1901.[64] André Antoine, who was going to produce the play, wrote: 'People were dumbfounded that Brieux dared to write a play on syphilis.'[65] The doctor in *Les Avariés* asserts that 'syphilis must cease to be treated like a mysterious evil the very name of which cannot be pronounced'.[66] But until that time came, syphilis had to be addressed through more covert means. Even if no critics mentioned syphilis in their reviews, that does not mean the opera did not resonate on this level with its audiences. In fact, numerous works written at the turn of the twentieth century dealt with syphilis or resonated with conceptions of syphilis without ever using the word.[67] The numerous parallels between the obsessive perceptions and constructions of leprosy and syphilis, and between the attempts to contain and control these societal threats, facilitate a reading of this opera as a striking allegory of *fin-de-siècle* Paris and its attempts to grapple with the problematic issues related to the perceived moral and physical epidemic.

Syphilis: 'This Leprosy of our Time'

Historically, leprosy and syphilis have long been intertwined. Medieval medicine considered both to be venereal diseases. By the end of the fifteenth century, artistic tropes employed in representations of leprosy were transferred to representations of the syphilitic (see Figs 10 and 11). During the sixteenth

for the sake of family stability, and an 1892 law requiring physicians to report dangerous illnesses to the Ministry of the Interior excluded syphilis and tuberculosis, 'illnesses that, if known, would harm the employment or marriage prospects of the victim'. Harsin, 'Syphilis, Wives, and Physicians: Medical Ethics and the Family in Late Nineteenth-Century France', *French Historical Studies* 16/1 (spring 1989): 72–95, 73, 85, 80–81.

[63] Barbara Fass Leavy, *To Blight with Plague: Studies in a Literary Theme* (New York: New York University Press, 1992): 157–8.

[64] Eugène Brieux, *Théâtre Complet de Brieux*, vol. 6 (Paris: Stock, 1923). After this play was banned, Brieux held a private reading for doctors, playwrights and critics. A petition seeking to stop censorship resulted and was highly publicized. By 1905, the Chamber of Deputies voted to remove the salaries of the censors from the budget. F.W.J. Hemmings, *Theatre and State in France, 1760–1905* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994): 224. Also see Antoine, *Mes Souvenirs sur le Théâtre Antoine et sur l'Odéon* (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1928): 187.

[65] Antoine, *Mes Souvenirs*, 184. Antoine described the reaction of the public to the first performances in 1905: 'The performances of *Les Avariés* continue before solemn houses which understand perfectly the immense import of the play, but my head ticket-collector informed me that almost every evening one or two spectators felt sick and were forced to leave the theater.' Ibid., 253.

[66] Brieux, *Théâtre Complet*, 93.

[67] Elaine Showalter has discussed a few of these works, including *Nana*, *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, *Ghosts* and *Jude the Obscure*. 'Syphilis, Sexuality, and the Fiction of the Fin de Siècle', in *Sex, Politics, and Science in the Nineteenth-Century Novel*, ed. Ruth Bernard Yeazell (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986): 88–115. Linda Hutcheon and Michael Hutcheon build a strong case for a turn-of-the-twentieth-century reading of Wagner's *Parsifal* as a tale of syphilis. 'Syphilis, Sin and the Social Order: Richard Wagner's *Parsifal*', *Cambridge Opera Journal* 7/3 (1995): 261–75.

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Fig. 10 Pathology: Leprosy, Barthélémy l'Anglais, *Le Livre des Propriétés des choses*, 1480. Bibliothèque nationale de France[68]

century, many writers believed the diseases to be identical.[69] Saul Nathaniel Brody contends that views of leprosy in the Middle Ages remained intact throughout history, and Peter Lewis Allen connects those societal attitudes to other diseases linked to sin, including syphilis: 'The fear of lepers, and the memories of what they suffered, have haunted the West for centuries, and provided an easy – if unfortunate – model to follow when other diseases came along.'[70]

Leprosy was hardly a remote concept in *fin-de-siècle* Paris,[71] and the connection between leprosy and syphilis was made explicit by many medical experts. Alfred Fournier, a syphilis specialist, cites medical predecessor, Michel Lévy,

[68] Bibliothèque nationale de France, ms. fr. 9140, fol. 151v.

[69] Saul Nathaniel Brody, *The Disease of the Soul: Leprosy in Medieval Literature* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1974): 56–7.

[70] Peter Lewis Allen, *The Wages of Sin: Sex and Disease, Past and Present* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000): 39.

[71] Guy de Chauliac's *La Grande Chirurgie* (1363), ed. E. Nicaise (Paris: Germer Baillière, 1890), includes a description of leprosy. Dr Fay's previously mentioned *Histoire de la lèpre* of 1910 incorporates a multitude of primary sources, past and present, providing a highly documented, detailed and technical discussion of the complex nature of society's understanding of leprosy and treatment of lepers since the Middle Ages. Other *fin-de-siècle* publications include Ulysse Robert's *Les Signes d'infamie au Moyen Age: Juifs, sarrasins, hérétiques, lépreux, cagots et filles publiques* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1891) and Léon Le Grand's *Statuts d'hotels-Dieu et de léproseries; recueil de texts du XIIe au XIVe siècle* (Paris: Alphonse Picard, 1901). Démétrius-Alexandre Zambaco's *La Lèpre à travers les siècles et les contrées* (Paris: Masson, 1914) includes a lengthy discussion of the existence of leprosy in the present day.

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Fig. 11 Doctors treating syphilis, woodcut, title page, Bartholomaeus Steber, *A Malafranczos morbo Gallorum praeservatio ac cura*, Vienna, 1497–98. National Library of Medicine

who calls syphilis 'this leprosy of our time'.[72] In fact, these doctors used leprosy's reputation to instil what they considered a necessary fear of syphilis, invoking an entire set of powerful images and associations in the mind of the reader with only a few words. In effect, syphilis carried the psychological weight of leprosy on its shoulders.[73]

The syphilis crisis thoroughly infused the popular imagination from every possible vantage point, creating a fear perpetually fed by the constant flow of information bombarding the public in the form of literature, art, and discourses

[72] Dr Alfred Fournier, quoting Michel Lévy, in *The Prophylaxis of Syphilis*, trans. C.F. Marshall (London: Rebman, 1906): 3. *Prophylaxie de la syphilis* was first published in 1903. Lévy was the author of *Traité d'hygiene publique et privée* (Paris: J.B. Baillière, 1844), which went through many editions.

[73] See Sander Gilman, *Disease and Representation: Images of Illness from Madness to AIDS* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988). In fact, in the chapter 'Seeing the AIDS Patient', Gilman documents the parallels between images of syphilis and images of AIDS, thus tracing a path from leprosy to syphilis to AIDS paved with perceptions of sexual promiscuity. Ibid., 247. Allen makes two more stops along this path, including medieval lovesickness and nineteenth-century responses to masturbation. He writes: 'In its fights about how to respond to AIDS, American society was reenacting a drama that had been written centuries before.' Allen, *Wages of Sin*, xv. See Hutcheon and Hutcheon, ' Syphilis, Sin and the Social Order', 265–6, for a succinct description of syphilis as we understand it today. Also see Brody, *Disease of the Soul*, 28–31. Leprosy symptoms are also discussed in great detail in Fay, *Histoire de la lèpre*. Also see Luke Demaitre, *Leprosy in Premodern Medicine: A Malady of the Whole Body* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007).

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on prostitution and venereal disease.[74] Alain Corbin discusses the psychological effects of these discourses – the shame, despair, cruelty and 'hygienic terror' interweaving syphilis, sexuality and immorality.[75]

In 1887, the Academy of Medicine instituted a Commission to investigate the prevention of syphilis. This Commission included Dr Fournier, who outlined its findings in his book *The Prophylaxis of Syphilis*. Fournier also founded the Society of Moral and Sanitary Prophylaxis, devoted to educating the general public about syphilis.[76] The Commission described the dire 'social consequences' of the disease as follows:

> Diverse infirmities may result from numerous lesions, and end in incapacity for work, and misery; public expense for the maintenance of hospitals …; permanent incapacity in the army of a considerable number of men on active service; … introduction of syphilis in the family circle, with separation, divorce, and all the social calamities derived from them; … sterile marriage, or, what is still worse, corruption and degeneration of the race; finally, polymortality of the young, causing depopulation.[77]

In *The Prophylaxis of Syphilis*, Fournier methodically works through every part of the body, explaining how that part can be infected. The mouth is a 'veritable laboratory for syphilis' and 'the saliva acts as the vehicle of transmission of the virus'. Kissing, however, is not the only means of contamination. In fact, 'every object charged with syphilitic contagion which comes in contact with the mouth may contaminate it'.[78] The most common objects are feeding utensils, especially spoons, glasses and bottles, but even bed-linens and clothing can act as mediate contagions.[79]

Thus, if one makes any connection between leprosy and syphilis, when the washerwomen of *La Lépreuse* ponder the possibility that the clothes they are washing could be those of a leper, Dr Fournier can confirm that their fears are well founded in scientific fact. And Old Tili's contamination of the breads she offers to her very young victims is in fact, according to Fournier, a viable method of

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[74] See Zeldin, *France 1848–1945, Vol. II, Intellect, Taste and Anxiety* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977): 867. Harsin identifies 1890–1910 as the period during which 'the increasingly fervid rhetoric against syphilis … reached its greatest intensity in France'. Harsin, 'Syphilis, Wives, and Physicians', 74.

[75] Alain Corbin, *Women For Hire: Prostitution and Sexuality in France after 1850*, trans. Alan Sheridan (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990): 251, 275. Fournier discussed lifestyle with the same scientifically rigorous rhetoric that he used for medical treatment and physical symptoms. Excess is the sin which invites syphilis in: 'An organ which is stimulated or overworked in a syphilitic is an organ which is menaced by syphilis, for stimulation tends to direct the disease to this organ. For example, venereal excess and neglect render vulvar syphilides severe in common prostitutes.' 'The overworked and the debauched' attract syphilis of the nervous system, and even too much thinking can open up one's brain to infection. Alfred Fournier, *The Treatment of Syphilis*, trans. C.F. Marshall (London: Rebman, 1906): 44–5, 263. *Traitement de la syphilis* was first published in 1893.

[76] Harsin, 'Syphilis, Wives, and Physicians', 73.

[77] Fournier, *The Prophylaxis of Syphilis*, 3.

[78] Ibid., 88–9. For leprosy parallels, see Fay, *Histoire de la lèpre*, 23–4.

[79] Fournier is even suspicious of the telephone, writing: 'So far as I know, no authentic case of contamination by the use of the public *telephone* has yet been recorded, but some day or other we must expect to meet with contagion of this kind.' *The Prophylaxis of Syphilis*, 101.

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spreading disease. Aliette needs only to touch her contaminated lips to a glass and pass that cup to Ervoanik to infect him.

Dr Fournier knew a great deal about syphilis, but he did not know enough. He admitted that there was no certain cure and no sure means of ascertaining the exact origin of a venereal infection, stating: 'It is quite certain that we are insufficiently protected against syphilis.'[80] His writings augmented fears already in place, and *La Lépreuse* played upon these fears. In fact, the opera may well have served as a musical and visual demonstration of Fournier's warning of the limitless dangers of syphilis. It invokes the protective stereotypes associated with syphilis, but it also undermines those stereotypes, thus demonstrating the chaotic nature of a disease that can contaminate anyone at any time.

Old Tili emerges directly from the iconography of the leper and the syphilitic. *Le Figaro* noted the 'unbelievable realism' of Marie Delna's portrayal with her 'horribly ravaged face',[81] and Jean Marnold referred to 'the realistic hideousness of her makeup'.[82] Tili's hatred and mad, destructive behaviour are read as logical extensions of her appearance. But Aliette does not display the physical signs of leprosy; Marguerite Carré's portrait as Aliette in *Le Théâtre* leans more toward the angelic than the leprous (see Fig. 12). While critics gushed over Aliette's beauty, they also responded vehemently to the lack of consistency with regard to the treatment of lepers in the opera,[83] their discomfort a link to the inconsistencies related to syphilis. As Sander Gilman states, when the dangerous cannot be identified or proven to be different from ourselves, 'then we no longer know where lies the line that divides our normal, reliable world, a world that minimizes our fears, from the world in which lurks the fearful, the terrifying, the aggressive'.[84] The character of Aliette embodies the worst fears realized, slashing the boundaries between health and sickness, morality and corruption, innocence and guilt.

The Music of Lepers: A Musical Mystery of Identity

These ambiguities weave a mysterious web around Aliette. The power of this opera revolves in large part around her elusive identity, and it is in Lazzari's music that the audience must listen for clues, for evidence. Aliette's first appearance is preceded by an argument between Ervoanik and his parents over her potential identity as a leper. There is a knock on the door, notated in the rhythm of the opening motif of the Leper theme, and answered by that same

[80] Ibid., 32. He voices the same concerns in *The Treatment of Syphilis*, 14, 269.

[81] Le Monsieur de l'Orchestre, '*La Lépreuse* à l'Opéra-Comique', *Le Figaro* (8 Feb. 1912): 5–6.

[82] Marnold, *Mercure de France*, 179.

[83] Bellaigue complained that he could not understand why Ervoanik, who has only just acquired leprosy, should 'be the object, and so soon, of such severity, while two known and recognized lepers, Aliette and her mother, can indulge with impunity in their fatal propaganda'. Camille Bellaigue, 'Revue musicale', *Revue des deux mondes* (15 Apr. 1912): 923–9, 925. Lalo (*Le Temps*) agreed: 'Hardly is Ervoanik suspected of having leprosy, then he is locked up in the *maison blanche*. But Old Tili, the one covered with ulcers and sores, … lives in freedom in her cottage; and the innocent [*blanche*] Aliette, whose beauty has not at all suffered the damage of the sickness, but who, through her kisses, leads a large number of young men to the tomb, wanders freely across the country.'

[84] Gilman, *Disease and Representation*, 13.

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Fig. 12 Aliette (Mme Marguerite Carré), in *Le Théâtre* (1 April 1912)[85]

rhythm in the form of the Leper motif itself in C minor, finishing on an ominous F♯ fully diminished seventh chord.[86] 'Who knocks there?' sings Matelinn, Ervoanik's father. A long silence is notated in the score. This moment of suspense opens a space for contemplation: Does this leper music belong to Aliette? An answer comes from a voice behind the door, singing, 'It's little Aliette who asks for entry', a simple countermelody over a minor, modal, folk-like tune played by the orchestra (see Ex. 4). Boschot described the effect of the stark interweaving of these two voices: 'Aliette sings and, under her voice, murmurs a tender song of the Breton earth. How would she not have taken the heart of the very young Ervoanik? … And how … could he believe that Aliette is not as pure as she is beautiful?'[87] The orchestra then harmonizes that folk-like melody, highlighting the 'archaic' nature of the music with the minor dominant and adding a lushness with delicate appoggiaturas. Maria opens the door, and Aliette enters singing over an A-major version of what will soon clearly emerge as a Love/Marriage leitmotiv (see Ex. 5). Her joy and her confidence are exhibited by this theme, and even in the face of Matelinn's hostility, she declares that she will marry the one who loves her. She appears hardly the leprous killer that Matelinn described.

The subsequent interaction between Aliette and Matelinn is a contest of musics, with Ervoanik acting as intermediary. Ervoanik sings with Aliette's folk

[85] Schneider, 'Théâtre National de l'Opéra-Comique: *La Lépreuse*', facing 6.

[86] From this point forward, I will refer to the Leper theme when the theme is heard in its entirety, and to the Leper motif when only the opening of the theme is employed.

[87] Boschot, *Echo de Paris*. Boschot is right; Ervoanik tells Aliette: 'You would not have lied with those eyes nor with those lips.'

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Ex. 4 Lazzari, *La Lépreuse*, Act I, scene 3



song in B minor, which then transforms into a B-major declaration of the Love theme. Matelinn responds with a series of chromatically ascending tritones, accusing Aliette of being the daughter of a leper, culminating in an E-minor statement of the opening motif of the Leper theme and ending on an F♯ dominant seventh chord. Aliette's song then undergoes a transformation: over F♯-octave tremolos, her song begins to sound in F♯ minor, clashing with the F♯-major chord surrounding it, the line fragmented and sequenced. This accusation has unnerved her. Matelinn unleashes more insults, and she breaks down, her final response – 'my heart breaks with pain and fear' – accompanied by layered, major

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Ex. 5 Lazzari, *La Lépreuse*, Act I, scene 4



versions of the leper motif, which Lazzari fragments and sequences, altering its pitch content and building to a tragic statement of the Love theme in A minor. As she staggers, sinks to the ground and begins to sob, a full statement of her folk song in two-part canon sounds in A minor, and Ervoanik admonishes his father over a four-part canon of this melody in F♯ minor, the orchestra attesting to Ervoanik's faith in Aliette's purity.

Only possibilities have been presented in this scene; modal ambiguity muddies any clarity these leitmotivs may have acquired up to this point. Which of these musics corresponds to her real identity? In the subsequent scene, Ervoanik tries to comfort Aliette, converting her music into the Love theme as consistently as she pushes that music away, reciting severely on a single pitch the 'truths' regarding leprosy, such as the fact that sometimes it is enough to drink from the same cup as a leper to die. They move back and forth between Ervoanik's confidence, faithfulness and love, and Aliette's despair and pessimism, their musics connected only through half-step shifts and common-tone links, until, finally, Aliette gives herself over to the Love theme, singing, 'Let me recover righteousness, since you love me!' and Ervoanik effusively professes his undying love – 'We will live on the same land and die in the same bed' – his line bathed in a working out of the end of the Love theme. But the final cadence of the B-major Love theme is dramatically undermined by a deceptive movement to a French augmented sixth chord, which ominously signals Aliette's return to her dark recitation mode, warning Ervoanik to remember his words over repeated, pounding, octave triplets. Aliette's oscillation between these modes continues, and when she states her desire to cry, her folk song sounds; the thirds of her

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theme continue upwards chromatically and cadence in the relative major as Ervoanik sings a more modern-sounding corrective hymn, sweetening and cheering the melodic gestures of her melancholy modal song (see Ex. 6): 'Aliette, my delicate little sister, come with me to the garden, to collect a bouquet of herbs, marjoram and thyme.' Aliette copies the basic shape of his melody, but in D minor first, before moving to F major. She sings his 'normalized' music, but her words suggest that music is ironic, futile: 'I am no longer the girl of bouquets, and the one I will collect will come from three kinds of plants: grief, melancholy, and torment.' On the last syllable, the opening gesture of the tritone (and then major) version of the Leper theme punctuates her statement in quick, accented

Ex. 6 Lazzari, *La Lépreuse*, Act I, scene 5

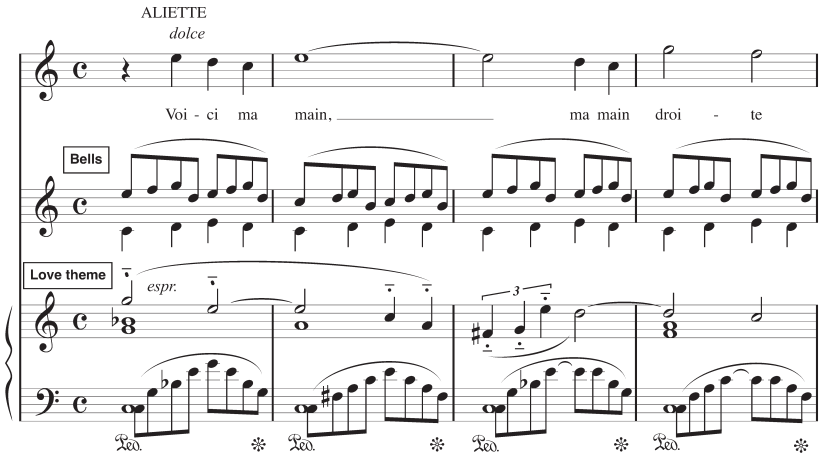


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triplets. But Ervoanik takes her in his arms and the Love theme resounds in the orchestra in F major.

The music of the bells dominates the rest of the scene in heterophonic layers. Aliette and Ervoanik make the sign of the cross, clasp hands and move to join the procession. Amid the layered ringing of the bells, the Love theme sounds in augmentation (see Ex. 7). The final interval of the triplet figure in the Love theme is compressed and absorbed into the bell texture. In the end, both Ervoanik and Aliette are swept up by the ritual, and the merging of the bell music and the Love theme reveals their faith in the power of God, faith and religious ritual to solve their problems, to overcome fear, despair and even the Leper theme itself.

Ex. 7 Lazzari, *La Lépreuse*, Act I, scene 5



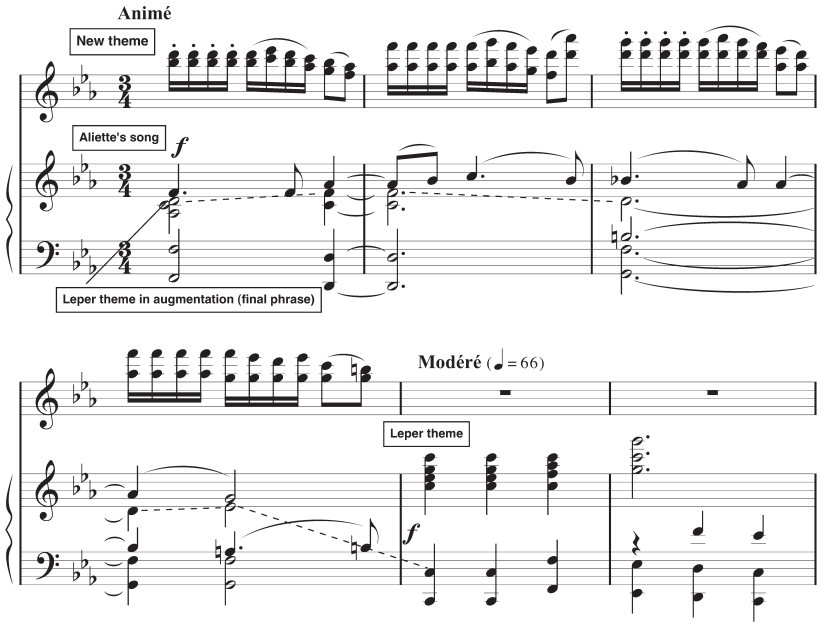
The introduction to Act II reveals musical relationships that provide disturbing insights in response to the issues raised in the first act, especially the question of Aliette's identity. The act begins with the Leper motif in C minor, immediately answered by its tritone counterpart, quickly and chaotically imitated through multiple octaves. Then a slow, fortissimo, marcato statement of the entire Leper theme in a middle voice of a chorale texture is interrupted, first by a statement of a new theme in G minor, and then by the opening of Aliette's song in G minor. As the Leper theme resumes once again, the new theme now layers itself above it, and then Aliette's music does the same. Finally, above the very end of the Leper theme in augmentation, the new theme and Aliette's music sound simultaneously (see Ex. 8).

Lazzari gradually leads his listeners down a musical path of frightening implications, as musics come together to create a composite identity. The ability of Aliette's song, which previously seemed so starkly opposed to the Leper theme and certainly seemed to attest to her innocence, to sound in sonorous counterpoint with the Leper theme suggests that Aliette could, in fact, be that leper, even as she sings her 'innocent' music.[88]

[88] The fact that Aliette's song cannot be found in the folk collection suggests that it may have been developed from the Leper theme.

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Ex. 8 Lazzari, *La Lépreuse*, Act II, Introduction



After a complete statement of the leper theme resounds in C minor in full, pounding chords, reiterations of its opening motif are interrupted by Ervoanik's corrective major hymn, which eventually sounds in its entirety in E major, certainly representing the hope at the end of the first act. But the relative minor soon takes over with a more intense, condensed combination of the same three musics of before and the introduction ends with the same tritone Leper motifs and diminished seventh chords of the opening, as if in harsh response to Ervoanik's optimism. The Leper theme is the glue that holds this introduction together. It frames, contains and controls; it embraces, enfolds and infiltrates the other musics, revealing horrifying possibilities.

The new theme soon allies itself with Old Tili, becoming the accompaniment for her song and dance of madness.[89] The turn figure of this theme repeats incessantly and obsessively under Old Tili in this act. She sings a chromatic version, and later the figure outlines augmented harmonies, the orchestral swirlings representing the chaotic workings of her mind. But this turn figure may also be found in Aliette's song, Ervoanik's hymn and the Leper theme itself. The fluidity and flexibility of this figure (and the Leper theme) defy all barriers. The connections between so many of these musics attest to the inability to clearly differentiate between innocence, disease and immorality, between sanity and insanity.

[89] The texts reads: 'Good evening, good evening, good evening! We will sing, we will whistle, we will skip! And dance then, François the Seneschal, let's dance hard to crack our backs! That the devil gives you a good year, three little lepers in bed with your wife! One becomes King, one becomes Pope, the last breaks your back! Ha! Ha! Beat me, strike me! Your time will come.'

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When Old Tili first appears, she sings an inversion of the opening notes of the Leper theme, which sound under her, but then joins her voice to the melody, claiming the theme as her own, singing: 'Don't be afraid little ones … come closer!' The thin texture and delicate thirds that creep disjointedly under the Leper theme create an eerie effect, as if she were casting a spell. When this does not have the desired effect on the children, she tries another song, 'Ar C'Horred' (The Dwarves), also from the Villemarqué collection.[90] By giving Tili the words of the magic dwarves, Bataille marks her as a supernatural creature. Louis Schneider extends this connection, declaring: 'Old Tili is not a witch, but something not very far from it. She is a leper – The Leper.'[91] This leper later speaks Christ's words, which Schneider called 'satanically parodic', when Ervoanik takes the cup of wine that has been infected by Aliette: 'Drink, this is my blood.'

In Act I, Aliette's folk song seemed to testify to her innocence, but her mother sings folk songs too – songs of madness, deceit and hatred, songs that call all men to their demise,[92] thus granting new meaning to the 'pure', unadulterated music of the primitive people of Brittany. Here the Breton song is but a mask, hiding the most vicious intentions. And Tili's deliberate use of these songs for her own hateful ends might make the audience think twice about Aliette's intentions. The folk song itself becomes an unstable, yet powerful, axis point, generating an uneasy ambiguity.

Classifying, Confining and Controlling: The Leper and the Prostitute Share a Home

In *Les Avariés*, Georges's father-in-law assumes that Georges has contracted syphilis from a prostitute, and it is the trespassing of the prostitute's infected blood into his space, into his home, that he finds the most degrading for his daughter and his family.[93] Fournier advocated registration and strict medical supervision as the only possible means of defence against this primary source of contagion, the prostitute.[94] Societal attempts to classify, contain and control the prostitute paralleled those steps taken to control leprosy. Lepers were required by law to report themselves to governmental authorities, just as prostitutes were required by law to register with the police. In both cases, most did not.

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[90] Villemarqué, *Barzaz-Breiz*, vol. 1, 57–65.

[91] Schneider, 'Théatre National de l'Opéra-Comique: *La Lépreuse*', 6.

[92] 'With a morsel of bread you gave them leprosy. Happy again you, who can give death in a glass! If it isn't you, Senechal, it will come to others. The first who passes will drink from my bowl, I swear it here. Come forward, young men, come forward! There is room here to eat and sleep … Come forward! Eh! Let us dance, François the Seneschal! Pages, scholars and peasants, come all to the entertainment!'

[93] Brieux, *Théâtre Complet*, 80–81. Depictions of syphilitic women in literature and theatre played a large role in the spread of fear of syphilis and of the women who carried its destructive and contaminating power within them. See, for example, Barbey D'Aurevilly, 'A Woman's Revenge', in *Les Diaboliques*, trans. Ernest Boyd (London: Dedalus, 1986) and Huysmans, *Against Nature* [*A Rebours*], trans. Margaret Mauldon (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998 [1884]).

[94] Fournier, *The Prophylaxis of Syphilis*, 178. He argues: 'Society has the right to defend itself against the diseased prostitute who distributes syphilis to all comers'. Ibid., 163.

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Registration required a physical exam by an expert, and if disease was found, then containment was in order.[95]

Saint-Lazare, originally a space of confinement for lepers, became a place where the insane were locked away and, in the nineteenth century, a prison. In 1834, funds were approved for an infirmary in the prison specifically for syphilitic prostitutes.[96] It is the physical space of Saint-Lazare that connected leprosy, madness, crime and syphilis, and its very name certainly kept the association between leprosy and syphilis alive in Parisian minds.[97] Here every patient wore the same uniform to be easily identifiable as diseased.[98] Corbin details the problems of this system, including 'none-too-competent doctors only too inclined to regard their patients as offenders', poor hygienic conditions, the inability to provide a definitive cure and the fact that 'the severity of the treatment led the venereal patients to try to conceal their disease in order to escape what was in fact a form of detention'.[99] Regulationism's failure to control the behaviour of prostitutes and, by extension, the disease they spread, in conjunction with a lack of real effort by the government to participate in the fight against syphilis,[100] only augmented societal fears regarding the threat of the prostitute.[101]

Lepers who participated in the regulation system, whether willingly or not, were rendered legally dead through the religious death rite performed upon them, and, as such, had no legal rights.[102] Prostitutes who participated in the system, willingly or not, suffered a similar fate. Andrew Aisenberg explains: 'Medical understandings of syphilis defined prostitutes as a social danger that effectively served to define them outside of the category of "individual" and thereby exclude them from the enjoyment of civil, political and social rights.'[103]

The notion of the rights of an individual resonates deeply and ambiguously with *La Lépreuse*. Because of her leprosy, Aliette is denied the right to fall in love, to marry, to be accepted by society, and Ervoanik is denied the right

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[95] Registered prostitutes not found to be diseased were expected to work in the government-approved *maisons de tolérance*, which, in effect, served as simply another form of attempted containment.

[96] Corbin, *Women For Hire*, 94.

[97] Foucault has explained how, long after the lepers disappeared, the lazar houses persisted, along with 'the values and images attached to the figure of the leper': 'Often, in these same places, the formulas of exclusion would be repeated, strangely similar two or three centuries later.' Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Vintage, 1965): 6–7.

[98] These uniforms are shown in Picasso's depictions of Saint-Lazare inmates. He visited Saint-Lazare in 1901. Michael Leja argues that his interest is a direct reflection of the debate over syphilis and the governmental control over prostitution, and that he portrays the women in his paintings from this period as victims rather than monsters. '"Le Vieux Marcheur" and "Les Deux Risques": Picasso, Prostitution, Venereal Disease, and Maternity, 1899–1907', *Art History* 8/1 (Mar. 1985): 66–81.

[99] Corbin, *Women For Hire*, 94–5, 100.

[100] Parliament discussed syphilis in 1907, but did nothing about it. Real efforts to control it took place after the First World War. Zeldin, *France, Vol. I*, 304–5.

[101] See Brody, *Disease of the Soul*, 96, and Fay, *Histoire de la lèpre*, for ambiguities and inconsistencies regarding the laws applying to lepers and the enforcement of those laws.

[102] Brody, *Disease of the Soul*, 81.

[103] Andrew Aisenberg, 'Syphilis and Prostitution: A Regulatory Couplet in Nineteenth-Century France', in *Sex, Sin and Suffering: Venereal Disease and European Society since 1870*, ed. Roger Davidson and Lesley A. Hall (London: Routledge, 2001): 15–28, 16.

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to health.[104] We see in Aliette the battle between this basic human desire for love and community, and the inability to fulfil that desire without spreading disease and without deception. When Fay addresses the leper's reputation for deceit, he explains that this characteristic is not inherent to leprosy, but secondary to it, 'the expression of a mental state connected to the social condition imposed on them'.[105]

Fin-de-siècle social conditions necessitated that the middle-class wife become 'a sacrifice to respectability', denied knowledge of the disease or even choosing to accept the role of deluded wife.[106] Harsin notes the powerlessness of women in these situations, and the virtual absence of women's voices in medical texts. *La Lépreuse* provides a woman's voice, and Aliette's monologue in Act II engages with this complex social situation. Aliette does not merely accept her lot; she voices her fears and desires, the truth of her leprosy, and her battle to keep her emotions and desires in check. Her music expresses the inherent tensions that accompany her struggle, the complexity of her emotions and the depth and power of her fantasy.

In her mother's house, Aliette sings her love to sleep with a folk-like lullaby in 6/8 in G♯ minor, over a syncopated undulation between G♯ and D♯ in the bass. The final three notes of this lullaby are sequenced and imitated, rising with Aliette's despair, sounding in weighty augmentation in the brass as she gives voice to that despair, her line driving to every downbeat (see Ex. 9).[107] This three-note motif has become a sign of her suffering, and it repeats in chains, rocking desperately through the orchestra. As she prays to Mary for strength and time, this motif sounds in a descending circle-of-fifths sequence with a long series of accented dissonances on the downbeat of every measure, creating a sense of doom and inevitability. The suffering motif continues to dominate as she announces that she can and does bring death; it blares in the brass, accompanied by a low, winding line of semiquavers, which soon develops into menacing augmented sonorities.[108]

Aliette's folk song returns in A minor, and she sings its melody, admitting that she knows she will never kiss Ervoanik, but asserting that she will find solace merely sleeping near him. But the Suffering motif sounds in the second half of every bar, infiltrating even this music that earlier seemed to speak to her pure nature, weighing on her hope, attesting to the despair that lies underneath her words and marking those words as delusion. Yet the harmony consistently moves to the relative major, as if pushed by Aliette's strength of will, leading even to the Love theme, representing her fantasy of marital bliss. These oscillations reflect her conflicting emotions, but the Love theme soon dominates, its triplet figure cycling through compressed intervals as she sings of telling him the truth, which 'will not seem so terrible'. It sounds a final time as she asserts: 'I will be his mother at 20. I will kiss him from afar, in the air, all around.'

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[104] In *Les Avariés*, the doctor consistently asserts the individual's right not to be infected with syphilis unknowingly. Brieux, *Théâtre Complet*, 27, 52.

[105] Fay, *Histoire de la lèpre*, 36.

[106] Harsin, 'Syphilis, Wives, and Physicians', 95.

[107] There is no recording of the entire opera, but this scene was recorded in 1933, conducted by Piero Coppola, with Madeleine Sibille as Aliette (Gramo DB 4853). It is available through Malibran-Music on *Paris L'Opéra-Comique*, vol. II, CDRG136, and on *Madeleine Sibille*, MR672.

[108] These characteristics recall Tili's sorcery music.

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Ex. 9 Lazzari, *La Lépreuse*, Act II, scene 4



In this musical context, with this confession of her leprosy, the presence of the Love music tragically reveals her fantasies as illusion and her love as an impossibility. It seems no longer simply to represent her love, but also her naivety. Even her folksong now marks her as naive. And when she sings the refrain of

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the washerwomen's song – 'and time will pass forever' – it seems to signify her feeble attempt to comfort herself, to lose herself in the fantasy.

But her fantasy is brought to an end by the reality of the tritone Leper theme, which can no longer be contained, as she confesses that she fears herself, her lips, her hands, singing one tritone after another, finally *singing* the opening notes of the Leper theme in B minor, admitting that with a drop of blood from her finger: 'I would kill 100; I would kill 1,000.' [109] Her confession reverberates on the dominant in quick Leper motif triplets. The Suffering motif now dominates again as she feels herself lose control over her body and her desire.

> Je sens mon coeur qui s'en va de moi.
> Les baisers sortent, les baisers crient.
> Le premier baiser veut sortir.
> Je le sens là, au bout de ma bouche,
> Au bout de la sienne,
> Je ne puis plus le retenir, là![110]

Here the Suffering motif becomes the kiss that she cannot control, rising chromatically ever higher in diminution with dotted, rhythmic drive, until that kiss leaves her, hanging in the air on an F♯ repeated in triplets in four octaves for two measures, like Aliette's earlier recitation warning to Ervoanik. Her outburst culminates in a high shriek above an augmented triad, from which cascades a series of augmented sonorities under the suffering motif arriving on a half-diminished seventh chord, over which she chants her prayer to Mary at lightening speed and makes the sign of the cross. But the damage is done; she has revealed herself as a leper, complete with the excessive sexual drive lepers were believed to possess. And a bit later, when Tili tells Aliette, 'You are not my daughter, you are my sickness', it seems that Aliette, in fact, cannot be both.

Leprosy and Religion: *The Tidings Brought to Mary*

Paul Claudel's play of 1911, *The Tidings Brought to Mary*, staged by Lugné-Poë the same year as the premiere of the operatic *La Lépreuse*, was also set in the Middle Ages and also dealt with leprosy.[111] Violaine, a young peasant, is raped by Pierre, whose love for her is unrequited. Much later, he tells her that he has contracted leprosy. Violaine forgives and kisses him, curing his leprosy and taking it upon herself. She lives alone in exile, giving up her fiancé to her jealous and hateful sister, Mara, and later brings her sister's dead baby back to life to the voices of angels. Even after Mara pushes her into a sand pit, leaving her for dead, her faith is firm.

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[109] The text of one of the original songs reads: 'With a drop of blood from my little finger, I would give leprosy to a hundred, as to one!' Luzel, *Gwerziou Breiz-Izel*, 263. This text and music return in the third act; Aliette sings these words from afar, three times, causing Ervoanik to cry out for her.

[110] 'I feel my heart leave me, the kisses leave, the kisses cry out, the first kiss wants to escape … I feel it, at the edge of my mouth, at the edge of his, I can't restrain it any longer, ah!'.

[111] The first performance took place on 12 December 1912. Vincent Cronin, *Paris on the Eve: 1900–1914* (London: Collins, 1989): 120.

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The atmosphere of this play is one of religious mystery, a direct reflection of Claudel's conversion to Catholicism in 1886.[112] Here leprosy is a sign of the grace of God, Violaine's kissing of the leper 'the supreme act of charity'.[113] Violaine sacrifices herself for others, for her country, for God. Foucault explains how the social exclusion of the leper did not imply a separation from God, but rather necessitated God serving as the leper's only saving grace.[114] According to the Bible, God will comfort the leper and, for a while, leprosy was seen as 'a sacred malady', though eventually, 'the notion of leprosy as a sinner's disease prevailed'.[115] With *The Tidings Brought to Mary*, Claudel brings the leper back into God's good graces.

While Violaine's piety is clearly an ideal for Claudel, the same cannot be said of Bataille's view of religion in *La Lépreuse*. Aliette does not choose leprosy, and her prayers are never answered. There are no miracles in Bataille's Brittany, just as there were no miracles related to syphilis in Paris. Violaine accepts her fate, her exile, piously.[116] She follows the rules of society and she does not lie; her saintliness is exemplified in her words and her actions. Aliette is no Violaine – she cannot bring herself to make these sacrifices; in fact, she proves more selfish than selfless and, perhaps, more human. In fact, Lazzari's music grants Aliette a depth of character that highlights her humanity, inviting the audience to empathize, disallowing stark categorization.

And in the end, when the Aliette and Ervoanik partake in the designated ritual and enter into exile, this religious closure seems ineffective. Even Aliette's final return, a change made specifically for the opera,[117] uniting the lovers and placing Aliette safely in confinement, does not remove the disease she gave to Ervoanik, nor relieve her own suffering. Textual and musical parallels between the end of Act I, as Aliette and Ervoanik begin their pilgrimage of hope and faith, and the end of Act III, as they begin their pilgrimage into societal death, reveal the fruitlessness of that hope and faith. Aliette's ritualistic singing of the 'facts' regarding leprosy is paralleled by the Senechal, when he reads the laws to Ervoanik in the final ritual. And the music of the bells returns, signifying religion itself and linking these religious rituals. The dramatic and musical arc moves from religion to chaos to religion, from hope and faith to disaster and despair, to a societally enforced religious acceptance. Their final words echo those at the end of Act I: Ervoanik asks, 'Tell me, you're not afraid?' And Aliette only voices Ervoanik's name. There has been no progress, only a spiralling back as Aliette and Ervoanik are absorbed into the societal system.

The coexistence of these two stories represents the dialectic surrounding religion and sexuality at the beginning of the twentieth century. The presence

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[112] The characters pray at length in Latin, and Lugné-Poë replaced speaking with intoning. Ibid., 119.

[113] Wallace Fowlie, introduction to Paul Claudel, *Two Dramas*, trans. Wallace Fowlie (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1960): 154.

[114] 'Hieratic witnesses of evil, they accomplish their salvation in and by their very exclusion: in a strange reversibility that is the opposite of good works and prayer, they are saved by the hand that is not stretched out. ... Abandonment is his salvation; his exclusion offers him another form of communion.' Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*, 7.

[115] Brody, *Disease of the Soul*, 103–4.

[116] She states her plan to 'fulfill the law. Show myself to the priest. Then find … the place reserved for people like me. The lepers' colony of Géyn.' Claudel, *Two Dramas*, 233.

[117] In the play, Ervoanik and Aliette never meet in the last act, and he goes into exile alone.

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of leprosy in these early twentieth-century artworks perhaps engages with a desire to reclaim religious jurisdiction over the body, over sexuality. Both works emphasize the mystical beliefs of the medieval peasant, but, while Claudel longs for the religiosity of the past, Bataille and Lazzari expose the inevitable ineffectiveness of religion, revealing how human nature remains the same with or without it.

When Schneider called Old Tili 'The Leper', he identified her as an archetype, but the meaning and function of this archetype are hauntingly ambiguous. If syphilis could not be named, leprosy could certainly stand in. But *La Lépreuse* moves beyond syphilis, encompassing multiple fears, threats and paradoxes related to the Other. This opera made connections and broke them; it simultaneously reinforced and undermined stereotypes, dissolving the constructed boundaries between self and Other. Thus *La Lépreuse* provided no escape, no answers, but rather held a mirror to its audience and asked them to look upon themselves in all their human ambiguity, providing a space for compassion, identification and self-reflection. And that mirror still stands, that space extends; this opera has questions for us as well.

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