

## ***Scoring the ballo fantastico: supernatural characters and their music in Italy's ballets during the Risorgimento***

Beginning in earnest in the 1840s and peaking in the 1850s and 1860s, ballets with the designation *fantastico* appeared in Italy's theaters. Called *ballo fantastico* or *azione fantastica* (often with other modifiers), some of these ballets were imported versions of the more well known French romantic ballets that have come to characterize this period in history. Yet many of these fantastic ballets were Italian choreographers' own brand of theater, or were so drastically adapted from imports as to barely resemble their ultramontane origins<sup>1</sup>. Typically this period of dance and music history is called romantic, but for the Italian peninsula 1815-1870 is more aptly described as the Risorgimento period, since this captures Italy's wider cultural participation in a revolution for independence, also hinting as to why French, German, or Austrian romanticism, including *fantastic* topics, was less on display in theaters. Yes, Italian ballets and operas did incorporate fantastic elements, as seen in the libretti and music, but they were only one strain of entertainment within a diverse repertoire.

Ballet in Italy from the so-called romantic period<sup>2</sup> has received less attention

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<sup>1</sup> See Ornella Di Tondo's account in Di Tondo, Ornella, *The Italian Silfide*, in Smith, Marian (ed.), *La Sylphide - 1832 and Beyond*, Alton, Hampshire, Dance Books, 2012, pp. 170-232. "Ultramontane" could be a derogatory term, rather than simply meaning "beyond the mountains (Alps)". See also Kathleen Kuzmick Hansell's accounting for the differing reception of foreign romantic ballets and ballerinas in Kuzmick Hansell, Kathleen, *Theatrical Ballet and Italian Opera*, in *Opera on Stage*, edited by Lorenzo Bianconi, Giorgio Pestelli, Kate Singleton, *The History of Italian Opera*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2002, pp. 279-281. On page 281, Hansell describes the Romantic ballet in Italy as having «a brief swell that was late in coming - not really being noticeable until about 1841 - [which] crested gently around 1845-6, and ebbed quickly away, leaving little trace of its passage». Debra Sowell urges that Italian ballet of period be considered as romantic on its own terms, rather than defined by French romantic ballet. She gives an excellent account of Italian romanticism in the ballets of Cortesi and Casati in Sowell, Debra H., *A Plurality of Romanticisms: Italian Ballet and the Repertory of Antonio Cortesi and Giovanni Casati*, in «Dance Research Journal», vol. 37, n. 1, 2005, pp. 37-55.

<sup>2</sup> The term "romantic" presents problems, especially in the narrative of Italian ballet, because its historical use does not always match well with current applications to ballet style periods. For example, Viganò's ballets were seen by contemporary observers as "romantic". This romanticism was of course different than the later term *romantico*, which appeared infrequently in mid-century Italian ballets as a signifier similar to *fantastico*. In fact, the same conflict between localized specific meanings and those more broadly understood exists with *fantastico*, which meant one thing in Italian regions, or to writers in specific fields, and something different elsewhere. I attempt in this article to adhere to the traits exhibited by primary sources (ballets) la-

than that in other regions, most obviously France. This is partly due to the lukewarm reception in Italy of the French brand of romanticism and the fantastical topics that were all the rage in Paris—the *ballets blancs* that have long dominated historical dance narratives<sup>3</sup>. But, it is also the fault of music historians who have been overwhelmingly concerned with Italy's operas during the nineteenth century. Notably, the trend toward the *fantastico* occurred later in Italian opera than ballet, with Verdi's *Macbeth* of 1847 one of the first native operas with a dominant fantastic element. Either way, Italian ballets, autonomous from the operas they appeared with, yet intertwined in the network of Italian theatrical production, represent a distinct brand of musical theater, their music and stories reflecting the desires of the public for a substantial danced-mimed entertainment at the theater<sup>4</sup>. Indeed, the arrival of the fantastic on the Italian musical-theatrical scene is partly due to the prominence of ballet, where the fantastic first appeared. The musical presentation of the fantastic on the Italian stage, of primary concern here, should be of great interest to those seeking to understand this vein of musical theatrical production.

Fantastic ballets by name were not in the majority and Italians generally resisted ballets such as *Giselle* and *La Sylphide* in unadulterated form. Instead, audiences preferred melodramatic plots centered in mythological or historical topics, with vivid action and abundant pantomime. Cortesi's (second) *La Sylphide* of 1841 ends in apotheosis with the character Love uniting the two lovers atop Mount Olympus (allegorical characters were commonplace in Italian ballets and often added to imported ballet plots)<sup>5</sup>. In fact, the terms

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beled as fantastic, and draw clear comparisons to other sources containing supernaturals or other uses of related terms (e.g. *fantastique*). See also, footnote 25. See: Sowell, *A Plurality of Romanticisms*, cit.. See also: Sowell, Debra Hickenlooper, *Romantic Topography and Modern Technology: Charting the Nineteenth-Century Repertory*, paper presented at the Topographies: Sites, Bodies, Technologies, 32nd Annual Conference of the Society for Dance History Scholars, Stanford and San Francisco, CA, Monday, June 22, 2009. For further reading on this matter as it stands in literary criticism, see: Ceserani, Remo, *The Boundaries of the Fantastic*, in *The Italian Gothic and Fantastic: Encounters and Rewritings of Narrative Tradition*, trans. by Jonathan Hensher, edited by Francesca Billiani and Gigliola Sulis, Madison (NJ), Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2007.

<sup>3</sup> As Manuela Jahrmärker and others have shown, Italian opera did not frequently adopt supernatural characters and themes until the mid-century and after. See: Jahrmärker, Manuela, *Themen, Motive Und Bilder Des Romantischen: Zum Italienischen Musiktheater Des 19. Jahrhunderts*, Forum Musiktheater, Münster, Lit, 2006. The rejection of fairy tale ballets has been noted by scholars including Jahrmärker and Hansell (see: *Theatrical Ballet and Italian Opera*, cit., p. 272).

<sup>4</sup> For an excellent discussion of the place of the ballet in Italian and French opera theater, see Sasportes, José, *Grand Opera and the Decline of Ballet in the Later Nineteenth Century: A Discursive Essay*, in «Dance Research», vol. 33, n. 2, 2015, pp. 258-268.

<sup>5</sup> Di Tondo, *The Italian Silfide*, pp. 183-184.

*fantastico* and *magico*, often used to indicate supernatural characters such as witches, sylphs, or fairies, were loosely applied to some ballets when they circulated the major theaters, sometimes appearing as a signifier and other times not. Furthermore, these terms were often combined with any number of other modifiers, such as *fantastico-allegorico* or *fantastico-comico* and so on, indicating much mixing of categories within works. At the same time, and throughout the nineteenth century in Italy, the term *allegorico* was in widespread use and allegory was a favored element in ballet productions (as in the adaptations of *La Sylphide*, mentioned above).

I propose that *allegorico* was sometimes a signifier for ballets with supernatural elements. Perhaps this was a way of including elements that were beyond the human realm but not altogether fantastic, combining an element common to Italian ballets with that which was foreign. Possibly this is why a ballet such as *Bianchi e Neri*, based on Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (a literary work not often designated as belonging to the realm of the fantastic) set in the exotic locale of America, would be deemed *fantastico* despite its lack of witches, fairies, demons, and other marvels. This ballet's allegorical characters and its foreign source (ultramontane but notably not German or French) were enough to deem this ballet *fantastico* in a way that was still in line with Italian audience tastes. Overtly fantastic ballets with witches and willis, based on *Faust* or *Giselle*-like tales, did sometimes find a path to success in their Italianate forms, such as the mid-century ballet *Gretchen*. And still, a haunted locale or allegorical tale could serve in the same capacity as the fantastic, as in *Il Noce di Benevento* from the time of Viganò. Four ballets that span eight decades of performance - *Il Noce di Benevento* (1812), *Fausto* (1849), *Bianchi e Neri* (1853), and *Gretchen* (1868) - will serve as examples in this study of Italian ballet supernaturals and their music.

Before proceeding to these case studies, we must further address the meaning and place of the fantastic in Italian musical theater, and more specifically the supernatural characters that took part. Setting aside specific and localized uses of terms, it was (and is) broadly accepted that *fantastico*, *fantastique*, or *fantasie* were signifiers of the supernatural in a wide array of literary, musical, and stage works, and that these works are exemplars of

romanticism<sup>6</sup>. As for music, fantastic topics allowed composers to write thoroughly illustrative music, even bending musical conventions for theatrical affect, only for that topical music to become commonplace and even stereotypical as time passed. Some audience members would only accept strange sounding music if it correlated with stage action that justified it. Sometimes modern ears fail to recognize the potency of such music. As for Italian literature and opera, investigations of the fantastic have, so far, been conducted in isolation from ballet<sup>7</sup>. Italian ballets were not unaffected by the literary and musical trends across the Alps and magical elements had long been a part of musical-theatrical and literary works in Italy. By the end of the eighteenth century, especially on the French and German stage, the supernatural had gained new prominence in the categorizing of theater works in which the magic dominated (think of Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte* of 1791, Vienna, as a prime example). For Italian ballets, while the use of magic categorization came later, the supernatural was present already in a few early nineteenth century ballets, as exemplified here by Viganò's *Il Noce di Benevento*. If we take an even broader definition of supernatural to include God-like creatures, then mythological and allegorical characters that had long populated Italian stages would qualify.

The later use of *fantastico* in particular may have been less of a generic limitation than an indication of foreign origin or even a marketing ploy, since the fantastic was all the rage elsewhere in Europe well before the mid-century<sup>8</sup>. Yet, the use of this subtitle in native Italian works *must* have indicated something beyond what was already present on Italian stages, whether supernatural, ultramontane, or extraordinary (the use of *fantastique* in France, on the other hand, indicated a rather specific category in Paris, as has been shown in Joellen Meglin's investigation of the *ballet fantastique*<sup>9</sup>). Kathleen

<sup>6</sup> See footnotes 2 and 26.

<sup>7</sup> See: Ceserani, *The Boundaries of the Fantastic*, cit., pp. 37-45. See also: Guarnieri Corazzol, Adriana, *Fantasmî, allucinazioni e seduttrici soprannaturali nell'opera Italiana del secondo ottocento*, in Vannoni Alliata, Michela, *Desiderio e trasgressione nella letteratura fantastica*, Venezia, Marsilio, 2002.

<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, before the term *fantastico* was in use, other terms sufficed. For example, Viganò's *Il Noce di Benevento* (1812) was *allegorico*; Cortesi's first *Silfide* productions of the 1830s were *mitologico*. Sowell sees *fantastico* as an indication to audiences of a kinship with the French *ballets blancs* but calls for more research, writing: «The adjective *fantastico* indicates the equivalent of what has become known as the *ballet blanc*: repertory featuring a magical element or supernatural creatures such as sylphs, wilis, nymphs, and ondines». Sowell, *A Plurality of Romanticisms*, cit., p. 47 and note 12.

<sup>9</sup> Meglin, Joellen A., *Behind the Veil of Translucence: An Intertextual Reading of the Ballet Fantastique in France, 1831-1841, Part One, Ancestors of the Sylphide in the Conte Fantastique*, in «Dance

Kuzmick Hansell, Manuela Jahrmärker, and Debra Sowell are among the few scholars to have considered the Italian *ballo fantastico* in any detail<sup>10</sup>. They agree that this term often indicated a special supernatural and foreign-sourced variety of stage work, and point out that it appeared earlier in ballet than in opera<sup>11</sup>. Its arrival in the late 1830s and throughout the 1840s can reasonably be linked to the import of foreign supernatural ballets. Yet Viganò's *Il Noce di Benevento* employed *allegorico* instead, presenting a native Italian witch legend. This will serve as a reminder that the topoi that later belonged to the fantastic—that is: demons, witches, and fairies—were already present earlier in the nineteenth century and the allegorical and mythological date back to the very beginnings of musical theater<sup>12</sup>.

As far as the place of fantastic works in Italian ballet as a whole, they were only a portion of a considerable output<sup>13</sup>. Remember that the practice in the first half of the century in the main theaters was a *gran ballo* (usually *storico*) between opera acts and a lighter *ballo di mezzo carattere* at the end of the evening. Since each ballet was a substantial entertainment of its own, this made for long theatrical evenings. After the mid-century there was a decline in ballet numbers (but with more repetitions of a single work) and ballets could be limited to one per evening. A perusal of theater chronologies gives one an accurate picture of the proportion of *balli fantastici* amongst the ballets and operas given each season at a theater. For example, according to Romani's chronology, there were 84 ballets given at La Scala during the decade lasting from 1840-1849. Of these, 16 were called *fantastico*<sup>14</sup>. Across the Italian peninsula, there were in fact hundreds of unique ballets with the designation *ballo fantastico* and *azione fantastica* from the 1840s through the 1880s (and others with supernaturals not labeled fantastic), but they were a minority genre. Somewhere between 35-45 “new” fantastic ballets were produced per decade

Chronicle», vol. 27, n. 1, 2004, pp. 67-129.

<sup>10</sup> See Sowell, *A Plurality of Romanticisms*, cit., and Hansell, *Theatrical Ballet and Italian Opera*, cit.. Jahrmärker investigates the supernatural more broadly, in both ballet and opera, and across the entire century, and also discusses painting, literature, and the Scapigliatura movement. See: Jahrmärker, *Themen, Motive Und Bilder Des Romantischen*, cit..

<sup>11</sup> Jahrmärker, *ivi*, pp. 33-34, 40-41, 46.

<sup>12</sup> Jahrmärker makes this point on several occasions. *Ivi*.

<sup>13</sup> For a still useful survey of the dominant stories in Italian ballet libretti for the period, see: Cohen, Selma Jeanne, *Virtue (Almost) Triumphant*, in «The Dancing Times», March 1964, pp. 297-301. See also: Sowell, Debra H., “*Virtue (Almost) Triumphant*”. *Revisited: Of Sylphs and Silfidi*, in «Dance Chronicle», vol. 18, n. 2, 1995, pp. 293-301.

<sup>14</sup> Romani, Luigi, *Teatro alla Scala: cronologia di tutti gli spettacoli rappresentati in questo teatro dal giorno del solenne suo aprimento sino ad oggi*, Milano, Coi tipi di Luigi di Giacomo Pirola, 1862, pp. 96-110.

between 1840-1880, at the major theaters, and these were spread among a great many choreographers (for example, in the 1850s my list included 30 different choreographers, and over 18 different cities and theaters). Statistics aside, there were surges and dips in popularity from theater to theater<sup>15</sup>. For example, a surge of fantastic ballets occurred in 1843-1844 with the imports of *La Sylphide* and *Giselle*. A second surge appeared between 1852-1853.

Even at the height of popularity of fantastic ballets, the critics were generally divided<sup>16</sup>. The evidence suggests tension with the uneven successes of these ballets, perhaps reflecting the uneasy compromises made by choreographers in fashioning foreign-sourced topics to Italian ballet norms. One of the most common themes in criticism of ballets in general was when a ballet was deemed to have had too much dancing and had failed to advance the action. This is especially relevant to the French romantic imports and thus important in assessing the *ballo fantastico*. It is an oversimplification to claim that *fantastico* indicates an Italian ballet genre in the strict sense, but the term was certainly used intentionally<sup>17</sup>. Since Italians sometimes treated supernatural and fantastic elements with suspicion, especially in German and French iterations, we might best view *fantastico* as signifying the influence of foreign elements, rather than just supernatural substance<sup>18</sup>. A benefit of studying the music for these ballets is to link fantastic scenic-topics to others more familiar to Italian

<sup>15</sup> The designation first appears in the 1830s, with Salvatore Taglioni's *Faust* for San Carlo in Naples (1838) as an early specimen of Italianate origin by a composer who we could consider an "early adopter" of the fantastic. In the 1840s we see a spike in fantastic ballets. For example, the years 1843-1844 saw the import and adaptation of *Giselle* and *La Sylphide*, with several other fantastic ballets alongside them, at theaters across Italy. Another surge in fantastic subjects seems to occur in 1852-1853. The *very* rough statistics I provide here are based on a database I created by searching for catalogued libretti with the designation *fantastico/a*, and eliminating as many repeats as possible to discern roughly how many unique ballets were created, where they were given, and by whom they were choreographed. My on-line search included the main collections in the United States at Harvard, the New York Public Library, and Brigham Young University, and Italian and European libraries and archives that are on-line (a wealth of libretti can be found at the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek). This account can not be considered exhaustive, but it is the first step in grasping the placement of fantastic in the repertoire.

<sup>16</sup> Only a sampling of criticism is provided here in the ballets discussed below. See also the criticism of ballets by Cortesi and Casati in Sowell, *A Plurality of Romanticisms*, cit.. Many other scholars cite uneven criticism of French imports. See Di Tondo, *The Italian Sylphide*, cit.

<sup>17</sup> There are at least two reasons strict categorization might not be at work. First, a ballet might not always be presented with the same subtitle (or even title) as it moved from theater to theater. Second, there were ballets with fantastic elements that were not labeled as such.

<sup>18</sup> It is clear that a deeper understanding of Italian ballet sub-genres is needed in music and dance scholarship. Hansell, Jahrmärker, and others have identified the great need (and difficulties) in studying the music for these ballets. Jahrmärker writes: «Vermutlich muß man gleiches auch für die musikalische Komponente annehmen, von der oft aber nichts erhalten scheint, in manchen Fällen nicht einmal der Autor bekannt ist» (Jahrmärker, *Themen, Motive Und Bilder Des Romantischen*, cit., p. 40).

audiences, such as the mythological or allegorical. My intention here is not a comprehensive genre study of the *fantastico*, but again, I do suggest that the terms *allegorico* and *fantastico* were entangled during this period. As for the music, it is apparent that topical music proliferated and was borrowed and traded between works and composers.

Out of the many fantastic ballets to choose from, I selected four with extant musical scores and libretti, from different decades, composers, and choreographers. All were successful in the theaters. I did not take it for granted that the music *would* signify the supernatural – yet, musically specific illustration of the magical, marvellous, sublime, terrible, and so on had long been practiced by composers. As shown by David Buch, the musical techniques used to depict these topics flowed from the stage into instrumental genres during the Enlightenment<sup>19</sup>. I have observed that the devices used in early nineteenth century ballet scores could even resemble earlier Baroque rhetorical devices. These observations hold true in Viganò's ballet scores, which drew from theatrical and instrumental works alike. The sinking motives as the Vestal Virgin slowly descends into her grave as she is buried alive in *La Vestale* (1818), the swirling figures that represent “Il Tartaro” (The Underworld) in *I Titani* (1819) and the thunderstorm in *Il Noce di Benevento* all come from a long tradition of theatrically illustrative music that continued through the nineteenth century, passed back and forth between the stage and instrumental music enjoyed in concert halls, salons, and domestically.

### **I: *Il Noce di Benevento* – Fantastic in the guise of an allegorical ballet with witches and demons**

Viganò's much-loved *Il Noce di Benevento* (premiered at La Scala in the spring of 1812, and given again the next spring) was ahead of its time in terms of the trend for the fantastic that occurred decades later. Yet, it presents an Italian fantastic tale at the beginning of a period regarded by many as “romantic”<sup>20</sup>. It is important because we can observe the transalpine influence of magic and magic plays, stemming from Viganò's time in Vienna<sup>21</sup>. However, this firmly

<sup>19</sup> Buch, David J., *Magic Flutes & Enchanted Forests: The Supernatural in Eighteenth-Century Musical Theater*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2008. This flow was not in one direction, as early nineteenth-century pastiche ballet scores in Italy sometimes included instrumental music to depict stage events. Viganò's pastiche scores from his time period in Milan are excellent examples of this practice.

<sup>20</sup> See footnote 2.

<sup>21</sup> This ballet was first given in Vienna. Its Italian premiere was at La Scala in 1812. *Il Noce di*

Italianate tale serves as a reminder that the fantastic was not entirely new on the Italian stage when it surged in the ballets during the middle decades of the century (just as Rossini's *Cenerentola* can serve as an early operatic fairy tale example, even if it avoids overt magic in favor of a more realistic telling). While *Il Noce di Benevento* did not have the designation *fantastico*, it gives us an indication of the early wandering of fantastic subject matter between foreign and Italian theaters, which perhaps paved the way for Italian ballet's earlier acceptance of fantastic than in opera. In this overtly supernatural ballet, which was commonly called *Ballo delle Streghe* [Witches' Ballet]<sup>22</sup>, two female witches visit an enchanted tree and meddle in the lives of a couple out hunting. The allegory is a fable on the triumph of reason over error. Performances stretched from 1812 (it was given in Vienna previously) to Giulio Viganò's (brother of Salvatore) revival in 1822, Serafini's 1840s restagings, and even a late production in 1864 by Viganò's nephew Edoardo. This is an example of how allegorical and supernatural sometimes link in the Italian ballet, as will be shown again in *Bianchi e negri*.

#### *Italian origins*

The legend itself is of Italian origins, adapted by Viganò and Giovanni Gherardini for a ballet in four parts. Even though the story was well-known to audiences, most scenarios for *Il Noce di Benevento* cite earlier Italian sources regarding witches' gatherings at the famous tree: *Del Congresso Notturmo delle Lammie* by Girolamo Tartarotti (1749) and Canto 4 of Lorenzo Lippi's *Il Malmantile racquistato* (1688)<sup>23</sup>. Despite their age, these sources provide some context for contemporary thinking. In *Del Congresso Notturmo*, Tartarotti links the practice of witchcraft with the cult of Diana, thus linking classical to the allegorical. Of course, whether witches or goddess cults, dancing is integral to

*Benevento* was drafted by Giovanni Gherardini, who also worked with Rossini. See: Sasportes, José, *Storia della danza italiana dalle origini ai giorni nostri*, Torino, EDT, 2011.

<sup>22</sup> «Giornaletto, Ragionato Teatrale N. LIX, Milano I. R. Teatro Alla Scala», *Giornale teatrale, ossia, Scelto teatro inedito*, vol. 30, 1822, pp. 453-456.

<sup>23</sup> See: Tartarotti, Girolamo, *Del congresso notturno delle lammie libri tre; s'aggiungono due dissertazioni epistolari sopra l'arte magica*, Rovereto, A spese di Giambatista Pasquali Libraro e Stampatore in Venezia, 1749. This title translates as *Nighttime gathering of the witches/nymphs...* and it was republished in 1799. See: Lippi, Lorenzo, *Il Malmantile racquistato*, Luigi Portirelli Soc. Tipogr. de "Classici Italiani", 1807. All scenarios examined for this ballet contained at least these footnotes, and some later *libretti* contained many more footnotes explaining the plot. See, for example, Franz Xaver Süssmayr and Salvatore Viganò, *Il Noce di Benevento ballo allegorico*, Torino, Onorato Derossi Stamp. e Lib. del R. Teatro, 1825; see also: Viganò, Salvatore and Viganò, Edoardo, *Il Noce di Benevento: ballo allegorico in quattro atti: da rappresentarsi nel teatro Vittorio Emanuele nel carnevale-quaresima 1864-65*, 1864.

the folklore. There is a necessity for the supernaturals in this ballet to dance - whether witches, fairies, sorceresses, or allegorical characters. *Il Malmantile*, a mock-heroic epic poem, likely accounts for the ballet's light character as a moral tale<sup>24</sup>. Finally, this ballet is significant because, while it might be an anomaly, it certainly represents an early example of a thoroughly Italian "fantastic" topic, and it was a celebrated work in its day<sup>25</sup>. Furthermore, it is a ballet by Viganò, who in his time was called romantic and carried back to Milan the influences from foreign stages, perhaps especially in this particular work<sup>26</sup>.

In this ballet, fantasy abounds as allegorical characters mix with witches and demons. The cast list includes a good witch and a bad witch, Youth, Humility, Old Age, Caprices in the form of little devils dressed in women's clothing, Volubility, Pride and Vanity. One of the sidekicks is Narcissus. The first

<sup>24</sup> The legends about this famous walnut tree apparently date back to the thirteenth century. The libretti state at the outset that this folklore is well known and cites a few Italian sources about witchcraft (see note 22). In *Del congresso notturne delle lammie*, Tartarotti attempts to dispel beliefs in the supernatural, tracing them to the cult of Diana. "Lammie" refers to pagan nymphs, or fairies that resemble witches. One of the best sources that I found for nineteenth century use of the word "lammie" was from Leopardi's *Zibaldone*, written in the early nineteenth century, though not published until later. See pp. 979-981 of the translation: Giacomo Leopardi, *Zibaldone* [in English], trans. by Michael Caesar, Franco D'Intino, and Kathleen Baldwin, New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2013. In the libretto from Edoardo Viganò's Torino staging in 1864, many more footnotes are added. For example, here is a footnote about the good and bad witches: «Sotto le sembianze di queste due streghe si rappresenta quella disposizione al bene o al male, che dirige tutte le azioni umane; cioè a dire queste due streghe sono l'immagine materiale de' due Genii, l'uno buono e l'altro cattivo, che, secondo l'opinione degli antichi, accompagnano l'uomo dalla culla infino alla tomba *Martinazza* è qui presa pe[[l] Genio benefico, e *Canidia* pel Genio malefico» [Under the guise of these two witches is that disposition to good or evil, that directs all human actions, that is to say these two witches are the material image of two Genii, the one good and the other bad which, in the opinion of the ancients, accompany man from cradle to grave. Here Martinazza is the good sorceress and Canidia is the evil sorceress]. See also: Salvatore Viganò and Edoardo Viganò, *Il Noce di Benevento*, p. 6. Here the witches are qualified as the good and bad side of human nature (in other words as further allegories, rather than truly supernatural).

<sup>25</sup> Praise was not universal, however. Ritorni had suggestions for improvement (see: Ritorni, Carlo, *Commentarii della vita e delle opere coredrammatiche di Salvatore Viganò e della coregrafia e de' corepei*, Milano, Guglielmini e Redaelli, 1838, pp. 54-64. See also the 1826 review of the *La Scala revival* *Il Noce di Benevento* [in English], in *The Parthenon: a magazine of art and literature*, Black, Young and Young, n. 15, December 1825, pp. 363-365. The author calls the ballet an «absurd allegory» but has high praise for the music.

<sup>26</sup> Interestingly, Viennese magic plays had an Italian influence of their own through Carlo Gozzi (1720-1806). Jahrmärker writes that Gozzi's fables had faded in Italy by the end of the eighteenth century, but were quite popular in Vienna, where they were incorporated into the repertoire of Viennese magic plays: «Trotz des großen Erfolgs der *Fiabe* konnten sie sich nicht lange halten; und am Ende des Jahrhunderts war Gozzi in Italien vergessen. Ganz anders jenseits der Alpen. Dort ließen sich seine Märchenspiele in das Repertoire des Wiener Zauberspiels eingliedern, etwa in Ferdinand Raimunds *Der Verschwender* oder *Der Alpenkönig und der Menschenfeind*». Jahrmärker, *Themen, Motive Und Bilder Des Romantischen*, cit., p. 42. The Milanese during Viganò's time were exposed to German literary trends, especially through «Il Conciatore», and Schiller and Shakespeare were adapted in ways seen by contemporaries as "romantic". See also footnote 2.

paragraph of the scenario admits to the silliness of superstition itself, attributing it to «silly women», and stating: «About this vain and superstitious belief, this story is imagined»<sup>27</sup>.

### *Synopsis*

The spectacle opens with a horde of witches and demons, accompanied by violent storms (storms and witches together are a common trope). The young huntress Dorilla comes to rest under the walnut tree (the magical tree of the legend), and while she is sleeping, two witches hover over her, and compete, both jealously aspiring to possess her. Canidia (the bad witch) wins the fight with a giant stag, while Martinazza (the good witch) converts a bush into a great lantern (of Reason)<sup>28</sup>. Canidia awakens the beautiful Dorilla, but blocks her from shooting the enchanted deer, instead kidnapping her with the help of a *Farfarello* (a little devil)<sup>29</sup>, into its bosom. Roberto (Dorilla's husband), who is looking for her with his «imbecile» sidekicks<sup>30</sup>, is likewise captured by the good Martinazza and brought into the lantern of Reason. In the second Act, Dorilla, inside of the deer, is courted by Youth, Virility, and Old Age embodied as three lovers. Roberto can see her and, angry, wants to attack, but is stopped by the Fairy. Dorilla meanwhile is charmed - Old Age calls upon the Caprices who present her with riches and clothing, on which she happily spends his money before dispensing with him and moving on to the other two. Roberto, when he can again see Dorilla «in the throws of vice» becomes so angry that he throws himself at her. She, astonished and realizing her error, asks Old Age for protection (he is thrilled). He threatens Roberto and his companions who reach for their swords but are immobile because of the witch Canidia. They are not allowed to see any more (and neither is the audience), as the theatre returns to the forest of Benevento. In the third act, Martinazza bends the three Caprices to her will, and uses them to try to aid Roberto in killing the deer

<sup>27</sup> See the libretti cited in footnote 23.

<sup>28</sup> «Ad un cenno di Martinazza si converte un cespuglio in una grande lanterna (simbolo del lume della Ragione); ed ai comandi di Canidia apparisce dal canto apposto uno smisurato cervo (col quale è figurato l'Errore): nasce allora una fiera baruffa tra la due maliarde, ma Canidia ne rimane vittoriosa; e Martinazza tra l'onta e lo sdegno si fugge dentro alla sua lanterna, aspettando tempo e luogo di soggiogare l'avversaria». Franz Xaver Süssmayr and Salvatore Viganò, *Il Noce di Benevento Ballo Allegorico*, Torino, Presso Onorato Derossi Stamp. e Lib. del R. Teatre, 1825, pp. 55-56. Synopsis and all quotes derive from this libretto.

<sup>29</sup> The term *farfarello*, indicating a devil or elf-like creature appears in Dante's *Inferno* and, almost contemporary to Viganò, Giacomo Leopardi's moral tales *Operette morali* written after 1824.

<sup>30</sup> Foolish sidekicks are common in many types of theater.

(with a drum, a cabbage, and a spear). This fails, and Martinazza tries again by sending a shepherd with a horn, a butcher with a rope, and a carpenter with a saw to cut the horns. Canidia responds with the deer spewing fire, forcing only Roberto to enter the lantern alone. The two fools who had accompanied him are seduced through vanity into the belly of the deer. Roberto is provided with a pumpkin, branch of chestnut, and ax, to once again try to defeat the deer. But Dorilla, realizing the threat and taking the advice of Canidia, disguises herself as a milkmaid, seducing Roberto to drink the «milk of oblivion». He is however, able to enter and lead Dorilla back to the laws and duties of reason. He then defeats the deer, whose demon disappears in the air. Through the superhuman powers of Martinazza, the forest is transformed to a «delizioso» garden of Reason, where Canidia is captured in a cage along with the «imbecile» companions. Dorilla throws herself into the arms of Roberto. The fourth Act consists of sacred and celebratory dances.

#### *Context and music*

This ballet is dominated by supernatural characters and their music, even while the fable demonstrates a celebration of reason<sup>31</sup>. Unlike Rossini's roughly contemporary *Cenerentola* (Rome, 1817), which was also based on a fairytale, this work's witches and fairies are not turned into realistic characters (the role of the Fairy Godmother in *Cenerentola* is turned into a more realistic philosopher). Furthermore, the witches have their own specialized music, mostly by Franz Xaver Süssmayr<sup>32</sup>. Some of this music far outlasted the ballet, with one selection becoming the main theme upon which Paganini set his famous orchestral variations titled *Le Streghe Opus 8*, of 1813 [*The Witches*, also known as *The Witches' Dance*]. The theme was then used in the ballet *La Sylphide* (Taglioni, Schneitzhoeffler, Paris, 1832) to signify Madge the witch. Thus, as David Buch observed for the previous decades, we have an example of theatrical music migrating to the instrumental musical world (and then, of course, back to the theater in a fantastic French ballet!).

<sup>31</sup> I have set aside the obvious symbolism and, to modern sensibilities, the gendered representations in this tale ("silly" female superstition, male Reason, female vice and vanity, wild nature tamed into a garden of reason, and so on) in order to focus on musical rendering of the witches.

<sup>32</sup> Franz Xaver Süssmayr, famous for his completion of Mozart's *Requiem*, was an Austrian composer who worked with Viganò during his time in Vienna. Apparently he supplied the music for the danced portions of *Il Noce di Benevento*, while Viganò himself may have written some of the mime music.

The ballet opens with a *Congiura delle Streghe e Diavoli* [*Conspiracy of the witches and devils*] (see Example 1 below<sup>33</sup>). It is marked *Grave*, with many dotted rhythms and frequent shifting between *forte* and *piano*, all which lend it a mysterious but comic quality. To modern sensibilities this music may seem tame, but consider this review, likely of the 1822 revival in Milan, which describes this scene with musical detail:

A uniform succession of notes performed on the oboes, violins, and violincellos, comically represents the harsh accents of the witches, whose hobbling motions are marked by the second violin and bass. Next comes the dance of the witches, one of the most admired pieces in the whole ballet... A storm suddenly arises, and the witches take flight.<sup>34</sup>

The quick flourishes that slide into the opening and closing chords suggest a storm, and indeed these flourishes swirl in the third number «Temporali» (very much resembling Baroque storm music, Jean-Philippe Rameau comes to mind). Following the opening *congiura* is a *Contraddanza delle streghe* [*Witches' contradance*], shown in Example 2 below. It is initially a cheerful affair in duple meter, E-flat major, retaining the key of the opening. To modern ears again this might not seem overly demonic, but this theme would go on to become the musical material for Paganini's variations and was borrowed by Schneitzhoeffter for *La Sylphide's* witch, Madge. Its witchy appeal certainly resonated with audiences outside of Milan as this seemingly cheerful bit of music, at least in the first section, ended up having a long life associated with witches<sup>35</sup>.

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<sup>33</sup> Examples 1-3 were transcribed from: Franz Xaver Süssmayr, Salvatore Viganò, and Giulio Viganò, *Il noce di Benevento: ballo allegorico*, Biblioteca di musica, anno 3, classe 2, Milano, Ricordi, 1822 (John Milton and Ruth Neils Ward Collection, Harvard Theatre Collection).

<sup>34</sup> «Parthenon», cit., p. 363.

<sup>35</sup> Paganini's variations were reduced for piano and for violin solo, which may have been the primary form in which they were transmitted. In later iterations, the theme of this dance was often presented in a minor key, as in some of Paganini's variations. Though this number appears only once in *Il Noce di Benevento* (as far as can be discerned from the published piano score) and is in major, the theme appears in minor during certain parts of Taglioni's and Schneitzhoeffter's *La Sylphide* of 1832, where it is still easily recognized, but is transformed into a recurring theme for Madge the witch. Paganini's *Witches Dance* is still published and used today as a teaching piece in the violin repertoire (and is specifically part of the Suzuki violin method).

### Example 1: *Il Noce di Benevento* (Viganò, Süssmayr), *Congiura delle Streghe e Diavoli*.

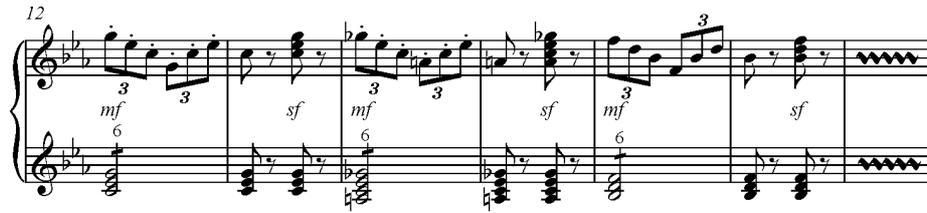
SCENA 12 Congiura della Streghe e Diavoli.

N° 1.

Grave

### Example 2: *Il Noce di Benevento* (Viganò, Süssmayr), *Contraddanza delle streghe*.

Allegretto



Note the rhythmic character of the Allegretto with dotted rhythms mixed with triplets (perhaps briefly suggesting a tarantella?). The *sforzandi* on the second beat in the second part, which hover on diminished and minor harmonies, provide a dissonant contrast to the cheerful opening, suggesting the more sinister nature of these supernatural characters. It is noteworthy that this is one of the first events of the ballet, signifying that it is expected that witches will dance when they gather. Witches' Sabbaths and gatherings are well-documented on the European stage during the nineteenth century, and reaching back into history, with a rich iconography that often depicts women, sometimes scantily clad, together with demons, gathering at night in wild places<sup>36</sup> (see the scene depicted in Figure 1). We will see that this scenic-topic repeats in later ballets (and operas).

Later in the ballet, an *Agitato* (number six of the piano score) is a danced contest between the two witches in a quick 3/4 time and F-minor, praised in 1822 by the same author cited above as «very original»<sup>37</sup>. The character of this is urgent and punctuated by *sforzando* markings. See Example 3, below.

**Example 3: *Il Noce di Benevento* (Viganò, Süßmayr), n. 6, *Agitato*, *Contesa delle due streghe* [Argument of two witches].**

<sup>36</sup> Famous contemporaneous examples of Witches Sabbaths abound, from Goethe's *Faust* (Part I, 1808) and its many spawn. Witches gather in Berlioz's *Sinfonie Fantastique* (1830) or the ballet *La Sylphide* (1832). Shakespeare's *Macbeth* was 200 years old and still a favorite on the European stage, with its Italian operatic stage debut in Verdi's *Macbeth* of 1847. In the 1830s, the polygraph Defendente Sacchi wrote about witches in *Le Streghe. Dono del Folletto alle Signore presentato da D. Sacchi*, Milano, Manini, 1830?. In the opening is a vivid description of a nighttime witches' Sabbath. This reads much like a description in a libretto, but there is nude obscene dancing, as described in the description preceding Figure 1 below.

<sup>37</sup> «Parthenon», cit., p. 363.

5

10

16

21

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37

This music must have accompanied the action where the two witches fight over the sleeping Dorilla. The waltz feel, if we can call it that, is disrupted by the accents and *sforzandi*, again on beat two of each measure. The rhythmic consistency of the opening phrases leads to more agitated figures. While Example 3 ends in suspense on a half cadence and pause (m. 39), this is only

midway through the number<sup>38</sup>. The music continues on in similar fashion, with internal repeats, before culminating in Canidia's victory. This music is rhythmically consistent and relatively normal in its initial phrasing (see how measures 1-4, 5-8, and 9-12 behave as equal phrases, melodically, harmonically and rhythmically similar). For the most part, this music is regular enough to be a dance (relative to the irregular features of typical action and mime music), yet it accompanies the action. In imagining this scene then, the witches' fighting is dance-like, regulated by the music, and the section long enough to have been a major event, not passed over but relished for many measures. Even if the music contains markers of supernatural (minor key, off-beat accents, a build in tension), the danced feel normalizes the scene, and marks dancing again as something that witches do (thus, dancing is natural to supernatural beings). This notion is further supported by the use of the *contraddanza* earlier (Example 2) for the same characters. Was that dance perhaps carried out using the figures and formations of social country dance, still popular in Italy during the nineteenth century and familiar to those in the audience? Finally, the composition of witch music is not overly dark, underlining the light character of this ballet, especially in opposition to the more epic and serious music in the tragic coreodrammas of Viganò. These examples do well to demonstrate the musical-scenic topics of witches and storms from the first three decades of the century, for a native Italian fantastic ballet by one of the century's most influential choreographers, with music by a well-known Austro-German composer (Viganò's ballets for La Scala usually mixed Italian composers with borrowed works from across the Alps and new specially composed music). The ballet was given in the decades after Viganò's death in 1821. Ricordi published the music discussed here in a piano reduction with Giulio's 1822 staging at La Scala. Even later restagings of *Il Noce di Benevento* occurred in the 1840s and 1860s.

As an aid to visualizing this ballet, and to bridge the gap between the imagery of witches on the Italian peninsula between the early and mid-decades of the nineteenth century, when the ballet *Fausto* was presented on stage, consider the illustration and description from Defendente Sacchi's *Le Streghe. Dono del Folletto alle Signore presentato da D. Sacchi* published in Milan around 1830

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<sup>38</sup> A common trait of Italian ballet scores of this period is for each number to link to the next. Closed forms are avoided but pauses also abound, especially within the mime music.

as a literary compendium of the supernatural. The illustration (see Figure 1) matches well with iconography of witches' Sabbaths that appeared on Italian stages and beyond. Sacchi wrote about witches much like descriptions found in libretti, except here there is nude, obscene dancing:

In un lato bolle una pentola immane sopra un fuoco ardente; in un altro le streghe si gittano ignude, menano danze oscene, portando in mano una candela accesa, e a certe cadenze sospendono il ballo e vanno a baciare maestro Leonardo. In un angolo più appartato si confondono amori nefandi di streghe, di folletti, di maghi, nè si conosce parentela o rispetto conjugale.<sup>39</sup>

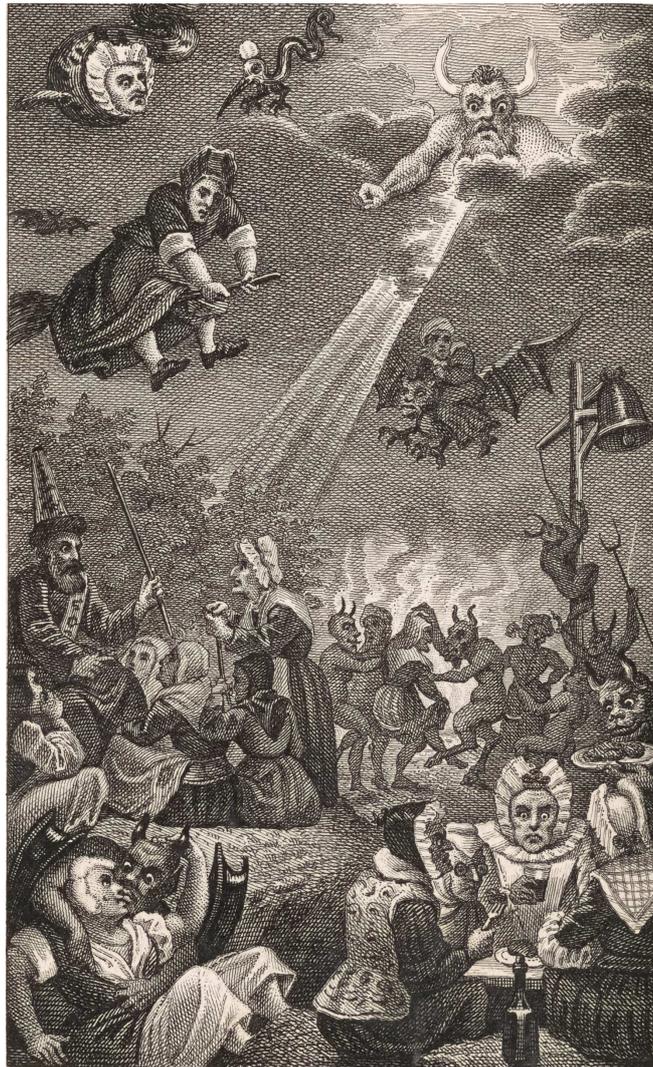


Figure 1: Illustration from Defendente Sacchi's *Le Streghe* (1830?) showing a witches' Sabbath.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Sacchi, *Le Streghe*, p. 15 [On one side bubbles a huge pot on a burning fire; on the other the witches throw themselves into it naked, leading obscene dances, carrying in their hands a burning candle, and on certain cadences they suspend the dance and go to kiss master Leonardo. In a secluded corner the nefarious loves of witches, goblins, and magicians mingle, knowing neither kinship or conjugal relation].

<sup>40</sup> *Le Streghe, dono del Folletto alle signore presentato da Defendente Sacchi*, [1831], Frontispiece. Engraving. General Research Division, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations. Used with permission.

## II. *Fausto*: archetype of supernatural drama in its Italian ballet versions

No discussion of supernatural in the theater would be complete without Faust. This legend was attempted many times as a ballet in Italy, by different choreographers, and each time with different music. Salvatore Taglioni presented his *Faust* ballet (*azione fantastica*, with music by Robert Gallenberg and others) in Naples in 1838, with a tragic ending for *Faust*, little success with the public, and problems with censors. Jules Perrot fashioned the topic for La Scala in 1848 as the fantastic element was in full swing amidst revolutionary turbulence, but again with little success (*Faust, gran ballo fantastico* with music by Giacomo Panizza and others, Margherita was danced by Fanny Elssler, Mefistofele by Perrot). Antonio Cortesi's *Fausto* of 1849 was the most successful (premiered at the Teatro della Pergola, Florence, with music by Luigi Maria Viviani). It was remounted in the following decades<sup>41</sup>. Both Perrot's and Cortesi's ballets resulted in piano reductions, but Cortesi's *Fausto* reduction was of the entire ballet, rather than «pezzi scelti» or chosen pieces<sup>42</sup>. There were several other Faustian ballets by other names<sup>43</sup>. Indeed, the mixed fates of these attempts illustrate the Italian ambivalence toward even the most popular fantastic tale of the nineteenth century<sup>44</sup>.

By the late 1840s Cortesi was experienced at adapting French fantastic ballets for the Italian stage, having presented successful versions of *La Sylphide* and *Giselle* that decade<sup>45</sup>; he had also created many grand historic-dramatic

<sup>41</sup> Later productions, for example, took place at the Teatro Regio, Torino, Carnevale 1851-1852 (alongside another shorter ballet and at least two different operas, Margherita was danced by Carolina Rosati) and the Teatro Pagliano, Carnevale 1861-1862, as well as other theaters. The piano reduction of Viviani's score, completed by Ermanno Picchi, was published by Ferdinando Lorenzi, Florence, in 1852. Francesco Ramaccini mounted a Faust ballet in 1850, likely Cortesi's version. Some of Panizza's music for Perrot's *Faust*, which was more successful outside of Italy, was published in 1848 as piano reductions of selected pieces (many of which involve the supernatural characters) and again in 1883. Some of this music was also adapted for pedagogical uses (see, for example, Oesten, Theodore, *Faust, Ballet Von Panizza. Joyful Strains, 12 Bagatelles on Favorite Melodies, Free from Octave Passages & Carefully Fingered & Arranged For [sic] the Use of Teachers by Theodore Oesten*, Boston, Oliver Ditson, 1855).

<sup>42</sup> Fortunately, the autograph full score for this ballet is also available, and digitized via Internet Culturale ([www.internetculturale.it](http://www.internetculturale.it)). Viviani, Luigi Maria, *Fausto (Fausto/Ballo Fantastico in Cinque Grandi Quadri del Coreografo/Antonio Cortesi/Con Musica di/Luigi M. Viviani/Pergola L'Autunno del 1849)*, Autografo. In *Manoscritti musicali di pregio*. Firenze, Biblioteca del Conservatorio di musica Luigi Cherubini, 1849.

<sup>43</sup> Other Faustian ballets included: *Elda o sia Il patto degli Spiriti* (1843) by Armand Vestris and *Kardinuto* by Antonio Monticini (1845).

<sup>44</sup> Those interested in a contemporary literary account of all things supernatural might consult Sacchi, *Le Streghe*. See also footnote 37. There is, of course, a section on *Faust (Il dottor Faust and Margherita di Milano)*, pp. 21-26).

<sup>45</sup> For an excellent discussion of *La Sylphide's* Italian versions and reception, and especially of

ballets, in line with mainstream Italian tastes stemming back to Viganò's coreodrammas. Furthermore, his *Fausto* was mounted on heels of Verdi's *Macbeth* (also premiered at Florence's Pergola) in 1847 with its prominent witches, which were unusual in Italian opera. Verdi was well aware that the choice of a fantastic topic would be new<sup>46</sup>. Of course, as Jahrmärker points out, the *balli fantastici* of the 1830s and 40s were precursors to the fantastic in Verdi's *Macbeth*. It cannot be dismissed as merely a side note that the musical and visual tumult of the opening witches' gathering was already somewhat familiar in the Italian ballet stage by the time of *Macbeth*'s premier (along with the rich history of foreign operas and ballets containing this kind of scenic-topic)<sup>47</sup>.

#### *Faust adapted*

Just as Cortesi had done with Nourrit's libretto for *La Sylphide*, he streamlined Perrot's 1848 libretto. Even though these two *libretti* are obviously related (and both end in the usual Italian ballet apotheosis—Faust and Margherita are united at the end of Cortesi's *Fausto*), there were some major changes in the ballet that went beyond cutting characters and extraneous material from the plot. A comparison of the two Faust *libretti* shows that Cortesi adhered to the typical outlines of an Italian ballet libretto, centering the drama on the love story with a virtuous, happy ending. Perrot's synopsis is more of a novella, rich in detailed description and dialogue and numbering over twenty pages, while Cortesi's was half that length. Of higher literary quality than the typical Italian synopsis, Perrot's version is somewhat more true to Goethe's poem. Cortesi's is a true synopsis, though still containing many elements that betray its foreign inspiration, such as more dialogue.

What stands out the most between the two is the clarity of the denouement

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Cortesi's adaptation, see Di Tondo, *The Italian Silfide*, cit. For further examples of Cortesi's Italian ballets and a discussion of their Romantic elements, see Sowell, *A Plurality of Romanticisms*, cit.

<sup>46</sup> Verdi decided on a fantastic topic on the heels of the success of foreign-sourced operas such as Meyerbeer's *Robert le Diable* and Weber's *Der Freischütz* in the earlier 1840s, through the same impresario Alessandro Lanari, who first contracted with Verdi to create an opera of the fantastic genre. See: Verdi, Giuseppe, *Macbeth, The Works of Giuseppe Verdi*, edited by Philip Gossett and David Lawton, Series I, Vol. 10, Chicago, Milano, University of Chicago Press; Ricordi, 1983, pp. xi-xii.

<sup>47</sup> See Jahrmärker, *Themen, Motive Und Bilder Des Romantischen*, cit., pp. 112-119 and also footnote n. 130. Verdi employs sylphs and ondines in the danced portions, unlike Shakespeare. Verdi's critics, citing Meyerbeer's *Robert Le Diable* and Weber's *Der Freischütz*, ignored the closer-to-home fantastic Italian ballets that shared the stage with Italian opera during the 1840s (Jahrmärker, *Themen, Motive Und Bilder Des Romantischen*, cit., p. 114).

in Cortesi's *Fausto*. The differences between Perrot and Cortesi are significant: in Perrot's, a flame burns Faust's pact with Mefistofele, while in Cortesi's the actions of Margherita triumph over the devil. In fact, this is depicted quite clearly in the cover of the piano reduction for this ballet (Figure 2 below). We see a wild mountainous landscape in which Margherita wards off Mefistofele, holding a cross in front of her, as she stands between Faust and the demon, grasping Faust's hand. Clearly, she is in charge of her own (and apparently Faust's) salvation. She has the moral high ground. Furthermore, in Cortesi's adaptation of the plot, she is not pregnant and has not murdered her mother, brother, and baby. She is only temporarily found guilty of killing her father—it was actually Mefistofele. Most surprising, but typical of Italian ballet, is the happy ending achieved as Margherita's virtue and piety move Faust to pray with her. Ultimately they are saved and Mefistofele is cast into hell. She is reunited with her father and then agrees to marry Faust despite his age. The ending is hardly tragic.



Figure 2: Cover of *Fausto in piano reduction (Cortesi/Viviani)*<sup>48</sup>.

<sup>48</sup> *Fausto: ballo fantastico del coreografo A. Cortesi. Rappresentato nell' S. e R. Teatro della pergola. Con musica composta dal Mo. L. M. Viviani. La riduzione per piano del Mo. E. Picchi, ca. 1850-59. Cover. Music Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations. Used with permission.*

*Faust music*

In *Fausto*'s score by Luigi Maria Viviani, several numbers involve witches and infernal spirits. It can be no coincidence that the opening *Preludio* (shown in Example 4) bears great similarity to Verdi's *Preludio to Macbeth* (1847), which also opens with witches gathering in the woods. The full manuscript score for *Fausto* confirms that the musical gestures and orchestration are quite similar, with brass under the stage blasting G-minor fanfares, countered by the orchestra with high piercing gestures in the winds and strings<sup>49</sup>. This is clearly music fit for hell, witches, demons and the like. It is hard not to think that this music is a purposeful quotation of Verdi, a technique that was celebrated in pastiche ballet scores earlier in the century<sup>50</sup>. The music for the witches in Verdi's *Macbeth* is likewise purposefully distinct. Tame-sounding to Verdi's later critics, contemporary audiences found it just right and favored the witches' choruses<sup>51</sup>. This witch music, though relatively new in topic for Italian opera, comes from the same family as ballet witch music already present on the Italian stage. It is no wonder that Viviani copied Verdi, creating an intertext and continuing the cross-fertilization between opera and ballet that stretches back to the pastiche scores of Viganò's ballets.

The sinister Verdian prelude music for *Fausto* sets the scene and is followed by the *Introduzione* where the witches and infernal spirits celebrate a Sabbath with dances (see Example 4, again)<sup>52</sup>. Foreboding tremolos, chromatic passages, syncopated dissonances and swirling motives portray these supernatural characters, similar to the music found in *Il Noce di Benevento* much earlier (but more in minor keys and more dissonant). In number five of *Fausto*, titled *Ridda Infernale [Infernal turmoil]*, where the witches make a potion for Fausto to drink and become rejuvenated, similar swirling motives are heard.

<sup>49</sup> See Giuseppe Verdi, *Macbeth*, full score, the section beginning at measure 11 for comparison: Verdi, *Macbeth*, edited by Gossett and Lawton, pp. 1-2. See: Viviani, *Fausto, Autografo*, Preludio.

<sup>50</sup> Verdi instructed his librettist, Francesco Maria Piave, to set the witches' choruses in a manner «triviali, ma stravaganti ed originali» as cited in Albright, Daniel, *The Witches and the Witch: Verdi's Macbeth*, in «Cambridge Opera Journal», vol. 17, n. 3, 2005, pp. 232-233, fn. 9. Albright concludes that this approach was the nineteenth century version of “camp”.

<sup>51</sup> Albright, *ivi*, p. 223. See also: Rosen, David and Porter, Andrew, *Verdi's Macbeth: A Sourcebook* [in English]. American Institute for Verdi Studies. 1 ed., New York, W.W. Norton, 1984.

<sup>52</sup> Luigi Maria Viviani, Antonio Cortesi, Ermanno Picchi, *Fausto: ballo fantastico* [piano score], Firenze, Ferdinando Lorenzi, 1852 (Harvard Theatre Collection, John Milton and Ruth Neils Ward Collection); alternatively at the New York Public Library (Gift of Lillian Moore): Viviani, Luigi Maria, *Fausto; ballo fantastico del coreografo A. Cortesi. Rappresentato nell S. e R. Teatro della Pergola. Con musica composta dal Mo. L. M. Viviani. La riduzione per piano del Mo. E. Picchi* [piano score], Firenze, F. Lorenzi [185?].

When he drinks it in the next number (n. 6), the music depicts the potion traveling down his throat with quickly descending passages in the melodic line (all shown in Example 4).

**Example 4: *Fausto* (Cortesi, Viviani, 1852), examples from *Preludio* n. 1, *Introduzione*, n. 5 *Ridda Infernale* (opening), and n. 6 (m. 1-8).**

Largo

PRELUDIO.

3 *sf* *3<sup>me</sup>* *Ped. ff*

5 *sf* *3<sup>me</sup>*

6 *Ped. ff* *sf* *3<sup>me</sup>*

8 *Ped. ff* *3<sup>me</sup>*

9 *sf* *3<sup>me</sup>*

10  
Ped. ff

11  
Ped. ff  
Ped. diminuendo

13

15

18  
Ped. perdendosi ppp

**INTRODUZIONE.** Le Streghe e gli Spiriti Infernali festeggiano il sabato con danze analoghe.

N.º 1.  
Allegro vivo

Ped. f  
ff

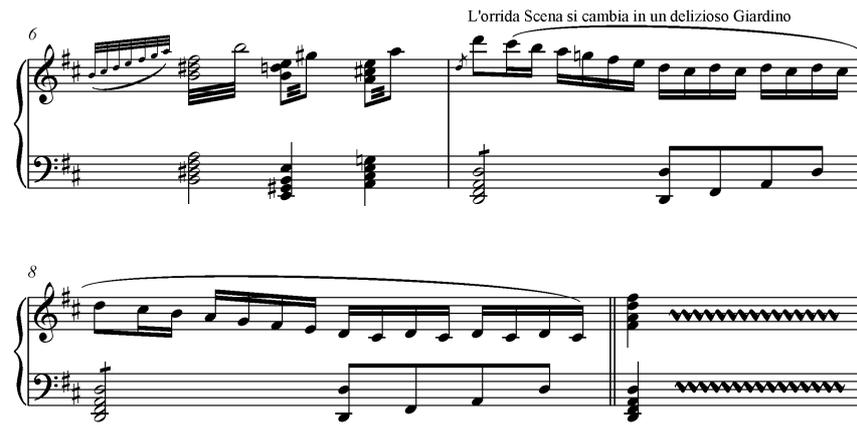
Ped. ff

Durante la quale alcune Streghe fabbricano il liquore che deve fare ringiovanire Fausto.

N.° 5  
ALL.° SPIRITOSO ASSAI

Fausto beve il liquore

N.° 6.  
ALL.° SPIRITOSO.



All of this music is typical of Italian ballet's witches, devils, and hell as scenic-topics at the mid-century, with driving rhythms, minor keys, offbeat *sforzandi*, dynamic extremes, swirling gestures, chromatic passages, and a liberal use of dissonant harmonies for affect. Number 6 also shows the illustrative nature of music for pantomime, which constituted the majority of action in the Italian ballo - a trait not emphasized here due to the selection of witches' dances for discussion thus far.

#### *Faust choreography*

Lacking choreographic records, there is some evidence that the spectacles of dances that involved witches and other infernal creatures were quite elaborate and reflected the swirling music with swirling patterns on stage. For example, the danced portions of Arrigo Boito's opera-ballo *Mefistofele* (La Scala, 1868, rev. Bologna, Teatro Comunale, 1875), according to Ornella Di Tondo, includes one such dance involving supernumeraries, choirs, nine little witches, twenty-four female witches, twenty-seven wizards, and twelve elves (there was also a band on stage). According the «disposizione scenica» (published staging manual) by Ricordi in 1877, these groups «follow various configurations (aligning, moving, and stopping in concentric or divergent lines, diagonals, whirling or arching circles and spirals) very actively taking advantage of the stage space vertically and horizontally...»<sup>53</sup>.

Boito was known to have admired the ballets of the choreographer Giuseppe Rota (a prominent Italian choreographer like Cortesi). Though the

<sup>53</sup> Di Tondo, Ornella, *Italian Opera Staging Manuals (Disposizioni sceniche) and Ballet. An Example: Arrigo Boito's Mefistofele*, in *Die Beziehung von Musik und Choreographie im Ballett Buch*, edited by Michael Malkiewicz and Jörg Rothkamm, Berlin, Vorwerk 8, 2007, p. 161.

choreographer of the danced portions of *Mefistofele* is unknown, it is likely that these parts were similar to large *corpo di ballo* scenes in Italian ballets. Later in *Mefistofele*, the witches again perform a dance during a chorus that is «animatissimo, con salti e gruppi pittoreschi» (highly animated, with leaps and picturesque groups)<sup>54</sup>. The formation of many tableaux, similar to what Marian Smith describes in the French ballet<sup>55</sup>, clearly indicates that this was also a choreographic approach used in Italy, at least for the opera-ballo, and likely for the Italian ballet beyond the era of Viganò (in whose ballets the picturesque tableaux are famous). The instructions for *Mefistofele* specifically indicate that the choreography should follow the intensity of the music:

Keep in mind that the beginning of the movements are not casual, but instead *support and correspond to the musical effects realized by the composer*. The choreographer does not need to study the steps as much as he needs to realize big movements and lines, and picturesque groups; they are witches and demons that make a group of devils and so they must stay in character; this also applies to the choir.<sup>56</sup>

Why was Cortesi's ballet successful? It was adapted to the audience expectations of the time. Cortesi's *Fausto* is an innocuous Faust. While Mefistofele may meddle, and the human characters may have some flaws, they do not willingly commit horrible acts. This is especially true of Margherita. In this way Italian audiences could, just like Faust, have it both ways - that is to say, they could have their Faust drama, replete with witch dances and colorful music and scenic display, but also have the love story in which virtue triumphs and the social order is maintained<sup>57</sup>.

#### **IV. *Bianchi e negri*: historic-allegoric-fantastic ballet based on Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.**

Giuseppe Rota's ballet *Bianchi e negri*, with music by Paolo Giorza, premiered at La Scala on November 10, 1853<sup>58</sup>. Over the following two decades, it was performed at the main Italian theatres, including the Apollo in Rome, La

<sup>54</sup> *Ivi*, p. 162.

<sup>55</sup> Smith, Marian Elizabeth, *Ballet and Opera in the Age of Giselle*, Princeton Studies in Opera, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 2000.

<sup>56</sup> Quoted and translated by Ornella Di Tondo from Boito's *Mefistofele*, 163, from the *Disposizione scenica per l'opera Mefistofele di Arrigo Boito compilata e regolata secondo le istruzioni dell'autore da Giulio Ricordi*, Milano, Ricordi, n. 45401, 1877.

<sup>57</sup> This was a lasting archetype for ballet scenarios. See Selma Jeanne Cohen's libretti analysis in: Cohen, *Virtue (Almost) Triumphant*, cit.

<sup>58</sup> *Bianchi e negri* was but one title. Others include: *Giorgio il negro*, *La Capanna dello Zio Tom*, and variations of these. Additional musical numbers were provided by Marco Aurelio Marliani, Cesare Dominicetti, and Signor Olivieri.

Fenice in Venice and San Carlo in Naples. Based on Stowe's critique of American slavery in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, a piece of historical fiction, this ballet appeared directly on the heels of her novel's European successes and before the American Civil War. It was aligned with the final stages of the Italian Risorgimento, its themes of social justice tapping into the revolutionary fervor<sup>59</sup>.

#### *Uncle Tom's Cabin as a ballet*

The complexity of Stowe's narrative was difficult to match in any theatrical version, yet the story is fitting for stage drama and theatrical versions of Uncle Tom proliferated in America and Europe. The Italian ballet versions retain the novel's strong anti-slavery and pro-Christian themes, but the story is compressed into a structure of two or three parts of several scenes. There are a smaller number of characters. The resulting libretto adhered more to Italian ballet norms than Stowe's novel. While there were variations to the libretto as it was staged at different theaters, the overall story remained relatively the same<sup>60</sup>. As was common, allegorical scenes form the opening and closing of the ballet. At the opening, the character of Nature creates two races, black and white, which are supposed to live in harmony. The white enslaves the black but Nature restores brotherly love. After this allegory, the action proceeds in a series of scenes containing the mime and dance. The slaves are persecuted, and the protagonist (usually called Giorgio) vows to free all slaves. The slaves

<sup>59</sup> I explore Risorgimento themes in this ballet in: *Risorgimento Themes in Italian Ballets of the Nineteenth Century*, paper presented at the symposium *Italy and the Dance: Dance in Italy, Italian Dance in Europe 1400-1900, for Barbara Sparti (1932-2013)*, 25-29 May 2016, Burg Rothenfels am Main, Germany. It is published in the proceedings: *Risorgimento Themes in Italian Ballets of the Nineteenth Century*, in *Tanz in Italien: Italienischer Tanz in Europa 1300-1900, Für Barbara Sparti (1932-2013)* 4. Symposium für Historischen Tanz, Burg Rothenfels am Main, 25-29 Mai 2016, Tagungsband, edited by Uwe Schlottermüller, Howard Weiner and Maria Richter ("fa-gisis" Musik- und Tanzedition: Freiburg, 2016), pp. 43-56. In one instance the ballet was banned after Rota and Giorza inserted the Marseillaise at a performance in Milan, inciting the crowd to riot, according to the music critic, journalist and patriot, Leone Forti (Fortis) writing under the pseudonym "Doctor Veritas" in the January 1, 1877 issue of «Illustrazione Italiana». See: Doctor Veritas [Leon Fortis], *Conversazione*, in «L'Illustrazione italiana», n. 2, 1877, pp. 22-23. For more discussion of the ballet's role in the Risorgimento, and more broadly, Italy's evolving views of America, see: Körner, Axel, *Uncle Tom on the Ballet Stage: Italy's Barbarous America, 1850-1900*, in «Journal of Modern History», vol. 83, n. 4, 2011 and also: Körner, Axel, *Masked Faces. Verdi, Uncle Tom and the Unification of Italy*, in «Journal of Modern Italian Studies», vol. 18, n. 2, 2013, pp. 176-189.

<sup>60</sup> I have analyzed libretti from many different productions and found two versions or version-families of libretti. In one of these, Christian themes are subdued, with the *Codex of Truth* replacing the bible. These secularized versions may have been an attempt to avoid censorship. See: Matilda Ann Butkas Ertz, PhD Dissertation: *Nineteenth-century Italian Ballet Music Before National Unification: Sources, Style and Context*, University of Oregon, 2010, pp. 427-433.

gather to study a banned book but are persecuted by an evil master. Taking a notable turn toward melodrama, the plot at this point includes the slave master's unwanted advances on the «beautiful slave», who is already married to Giorgio and has children<sup>61</sup>. They plan their escape, flee, and are discovered and betrayed in a grand market scene that included character dances. Giorgio is recaptured and put into a warehouse full of sleeping slaves. He has a vision that includes the allegorical character played by the star ballerina, sometimes as «Religion» or «Music, Poetry and Dance», other times called «Il Genio dell'Umanità sotto le spoglie di Enrichetta»<sup>62</sup>. The protagonist then breaks the bonds of slavery itself, freeing all slaves. This *lieto fine* features allegorical characters joining the cast in a final danced celebration. Stowe's complexities are boiled down into singular, stock characters. This allows the story to assume the narrative forms common to the Italian stage. Love and virtue are challenged, but all ends with happy resolution. The necessary ingredients for a typical Italian ballet are present<sup>63</sup>.

#### *Genre confusion*

The ballet was usually labeled *allegorico* or *storico*. In a few cases, however, it also took on the label *fantastico*<sup>64</sup>. It seems hardly to fit into the picture painted thus far of the fantastic ballet in Italy. Yet, Italians largely preferred ballets with non-fantastic plots. Remember, *La Sylphide* was sometimes billed *mitologico* rather than *fantastico* (including Cortesi's *La Silfide* of 1837, or the even earlier

<sup>61</sup> According to several libretti and the musical score: Giorgio's wife Dellay, also a slave, makes her entrance, fleeing the advances of Legrey, the plantation owner. Legrey attempts to isolate Dellay «from [her] family, so that [he can] more easily bend her to his will». When alone with the «pretty slave», he renews his «impassioned declarations of love» accompanied by threats, which she refuses with dignified repulsion, guided by the principles of honesty and love for her husband. This intrigue is not present in Stowe's novel, but it does further establish the need for escape, which is analogous to the opening chapters of Stowe's book. Injustice and intrigue are accentuated by adding Legrey's sexual advances on Dellay and his fracturing of the slave family. In addition to the musical score, see also libretti from productions in 1858, 1858, 1862, 1863, 1871 and 1875.

<sup>62</sup> Most commonly called simply «Enrichetta», the character is explained as both Enrichetta and the «Genius of Humanity» in the Torino libretto from 1857-1858. See: Rota, Giuseppe, *Bianchi e Negri: Azione Mimico-Storica-Allegorica in Tre Parti e Sei Scene: Da Rappresentarsi al Teatro Regio Nel Carneval-Quaresima 1857-58*, 1857.

<sup>63</sup> See Selma Jeanne Cohen's study on plot archetypes in Italian ballet libretti from 1766-1865. Cohen found Italian ballet plots to be quite homogenous with specific sub-genres/archetypes. This plot archetype is that of the triumph of virtue over adversity. Cohen, *Virtue (Almost) Triumphant*, cit., p. 299.

<sup>64</sup> The libretti with this designation are: *Giorgio il negro: ballo allegorico fantastico* (Teatro Apollo, Rome, 1858-1859); *Giorgio il negro: ballo allegorico fantastico* (Trieste, 1858); *I bianchi e i negri: ballo allegorico fantastico* (Teatro Bellini, Palermo, 1871); *Bianchi e negri: ballo allegorico-fantastico* (Teatro Regio, Torino, 1875).

*La Silfide: ballo magico-mitologico* by Luigi Henry 1828). In a sense, *Bianchi e negri*'s historic and allegoric tale of the triumph of virtue fits well into the mainstream of Italian ballet for the period. What, then, made this ballet fantastic? As in the earlier nineteenth century where ballets containing supernaturals might be labeled *allegorico* or *mitologico*, this ballet is the reverse—what is truly a (contemporary) historic topic about social justice, bookended by the requisite allegorical scenes, was labeled *fantastico* only in some cases. Lacking willis, sylphs, witches and demons, this ballet's fantasy came from the allegorical characters such as «Nature» and the «maga benefica» or good fairy: variously named the «genio di umanità» or «Enrichetta» (see Figure 3 below). Perhaps derived from the Stowe's first name Harriet, which was given in Italian editions of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as Enrichetta, or based on Stowe's *Evangeline*, this character appears in many of the Italian ballet adaptations. She is one key to understanding how this ballet could be *fantastico*. The famous ballerinas Caterina Beretta and the American Augusta Maywood danced the role, which is pictured in the costume design shown in Figure 3.



Figure 3: *Enrichetta*, from *Bianchi e negri*, costume design by Del Buono for the 1862 production at Teatro San Carlo, Naples<sup>65</sup>.

<sup>65</sup> Filippo Del Buono, *Enrichetta*, from *I Bianchi e I Neri/Ballo del Corea[!].O/Gins. Rota/1862*, 1 cartella, figurini: acquerello e tempera, cartoncino e carta (watercolor and tempera, cardboard and paper), 1862. Digitized by [www.internetculturale.it](http://www.internetculturale.it). Used with permission. To be clear, this production was not labeled *fantastico*, but a study of the libretti shows that of the two versions of “libretto families”, the Naples production fits the second version and belongs to the family of productions that was more often categorized as *fantastico*. The role was danced by Giovani-

The second key to this ballet's fantastic features is in the allegorical scenes that form the opening and closing of the ballet, a common trait for Italian ballets of the time. The libretto for Palermo, 1871, provides the clue, describing the opening allegory as a *Scena unica, quadro allegorico fantastico*<sup>66</sup>. This opening allegorical scene, appearing in most productions, features the character of Nature who creates two races, black and white, that are supposed to live in harmony. The white enslaves the black but Nature restores brotherly love. The costume design is depicted in Figure 4 below. It makes sense then to explore the music for the scenes in this ballet that were seen as fantastic.



Figure 4: *The allegorical character of Nature in Bianchi e negri, costume design by Del Buono for the 1862 production at Teatro San Carlo, Naples*<sup>67</sup>.

The opening allegorical tableau *Il Caos, Preludio e Introduzione*, sets a serious tone with a gloomy contrapuntal elaboration in C minor. Following a suspenseful preparation on diminished tremolos, an *Allegro* breaks forth in swirling figures and chromatic lines that simulate the “dividing elements”.

Snippets of melody poke out from this texture as the conflict between white

na(?) Adamoli. Caterina(?) Beretta also danced in this production (questions marks indicate that the first names are not given in this synopsis — I have made reasonable guesses). Costumes for Beretta's *pas de trois* with Adamoli and a male dancer were similarly white, and more elegantly decorated.

<sup>66</sup> Paolo Giorza and Giuseppe Rota. *I Bianchi e i Negri: Ballo allegorico fantastico in due parti e sei scene: da rappresentarsi nel R. Teatro Bellini l'anno teatrale 1870–71, 1871.*

<sup>67</sup> Filippo Del Buono, *La Natura*, from *I Bianchi e i Neri/Ballo del Corea*[!].O/Gius. Rota/1862, 1 cartella, figurini: acquerello e tempera, cartoncino e carta (watercolor and tempera, cardboard and paper), 1862. Digitized by [www.internetculturale.it](http://www.internetculturale.it). Used with permission.

and black figures begins<sup>68</sup> (see Example 5 below). The music is setting the scene and preparing the audience for the central conflict of the ballet, but this scene is not based in reality. While not necessarily linked to witches, storms, or hell, this music fits that scenic-topic especially when compared to similar musical settings of hell-like Tartaro or other nebulous places inhabited by spirits or mythological characters.<sup>69</sup> It was described in such terms at the time:

For the scene of chaos, the stage was full, [it] took all the wings from the stage, filled the immense space with a curtain — with layers of different colors— in the back [of the stage], a dim, vague light, which was used to make palpable the vast and nebulous shadows of the scene. — The effect was immense.<sup>70</sup>

**Example 5: *Il Caos, Preludio e Introduzione* from *Bianchi e negri***

**IL CAOS**  
**PRELUDIO E INTRODUZIONE**

NEL BALLO  
BIANCHI E NEGRI

MUSICA DI  
P. GIORZA

**ATTO I°.**

N° 1.

**Andante**

<sup>68</sup> This allegory is varied in its presentation between the two version families of libretti (an examination and close comparison of the many libretti for this ballet yielded two groups or families). One account states: «Rising from Earth are two small children one white and the other black. In contest over a fruit the white child knocks down the black one [and] subjects him to his servitude; after such an allegory the darkness returns and the ballet begins».

<sup>69</sup> Ertz, *Nineteenth-century ballet music*, cit., pp. 265-305.

<sup>70</sup> Fortis, *Conversazione*, pp 22-23. The entire passage, given here, recounts the ballet's participation in Risorgimento fervor in the 1850s: «Tolse al palcoscenico tutte le quinte - riempì quell'immenso spazio di velo - a strati di tinte diverse - in fondo una luce vaga, incerta che serviva a rendere palpabili quelle tenebre immense, e nebulose della scena. - L'effetto fu immenso. Ma quel ballo aveva un altro effetto... Ad un certo punto gli schiavi neri si strappavano i collari e li sollevavano in atto di minaccia verso i loro aguzzini - in quel momento si sentiva fremere nell'orchestra quattro battute della Marsigliese. - Era Rota che le aveva volute. L'azione combinata con la musica produsse l'effetto di un fulmine. Il pubblico scattò in piedi - fa una insurrezione di applausi. - Eravamo ai crepuscoli forieri del '59. - Il successo fu tale che la polizia proibì il ballo per qualche tempo» [For the scene of chaos, the stage was full, [It] took all the wings from the stage, filled the immense space with a curtain - with layers of different colors - in the back [of the stage], a dim, vague light, which was used to make palpable the vast and nebulous shadows of the scene. - The effect was immense. But that ballet had another effect... At a certain point the black slaves tore off their shackles and raised them in an act of threat against their tormentors - in that moment one heard quivering in the orchestra four bars of La Marseillaise. - It was Rota who had wanted these. The action combined with the music produced the effect of lightning. The audience jumped to their feet - there was an insurrection of applause. - We were in the twilight before '59. - The success was such that the police forbade the ballet for some time].

6

10 *cres*

13 <sup>8</sup>

15 **Allegro**

17

19

21

23 *p*

27 <sup>8<sup>va</sup></sup>  
*p*  
Gli Elementi si dividono

Detailed description: This page of a musical score contains measures 6 through 27. It is written for piano and includes a vocal line starting at measure 27. The key signature has two flats (B-flat and E-flat). Measure 6 begins with a treble clef and a bass clef. The music features various textures, including chords and moving lines. Measure 10 has a *cres* (crescendo) marking. Measure 13 has a first ending bracket. Measure 15 is marked **Allegro**. Measures 17 and 19 show rapid sixteenth-note passages in the right hand. Measure 23 has a *p* (piano) marking. Measure 27 begins with a vocal line marked <sup>8<sup>va</sup></sup> and the text 'Gli Elementi si dividono'. The score concludes with a double bar line.

The next location of the fantastic is in the ultimate scene of the ballet, which features a mime-dance number for the star ballerina (the section is called *Danzante allegorica*). The main protagonist, a slave, has been captured and is back under the ownership of his master. He is kept in a large warehouse full of sleeping slaves. He wants to liberate himself and all of his companions from misfortune. He falls asleep and has a vision. Thus, dancing is justified through his fantasizing an allegory of Music, Poetry and Art (or Religion, depending on the libretto). The vision music is labeled as both a mimed scene and a danced allegory. The otherworldly nature is immediately apparent in the arpeggiated

flourishes that strongly suggest harp. Here is where our prima ballerina, dancing an allegorical role, enters. As described in the music and some libretti, «Giorgio... stands at the feet of the symbolic figure of *Religion* who points to a book in which it is written that all men are equal». A rolling accompaniment with an ornate melody in F major accompanies what must have been either an elaborate solo or *pas de deux*. This could be sylph music, as the trills recall the fluttering of wings (or feet), and the lofting melodic gestures suggest an ethereal being. The opening to this music is in Example 6.

**Example 6: *Bianchi e negri*, n. 11, Larghetto, *Scena mimica danzante-allegorica* (m. 1-17).**

N°. 11.  
Larghetto

3

6 *tr* Giorgio sogna di trovarsi libero fra i suoi cari, mentre sta ai piedi della Simbolica figura *La Religioso* che gli addita un libro nel quale sta scritto esser tutti gli uomini uguali. *tr*

8 *Sua*

10 *tr*

Many scenarios mention music as part of the vision, as a «moving melody softens his heart», and «Music, Poetry and Dance inspire him to the knowledge of beauty, and unite in harmony to refine him; in this solemn moment of rapture the sleeping companions awaken and all together raise up prayers of thanksgiving to Heaven...». Some *libretti* actually include a song with lyrics.<sup>71</sup> Thus, the allegory conveniently provides justification for both dance and music, as they inspire the breaking of his bondage. Apotheosis is achieved, and the vision provides an excuse for a non-human character, performed by the prima ballerina, to enter the stage and dance.

It is likely that this is the scene as performed by Amalia Ferraris that so impressed one writer who exclaimed that through the good and graceful Amalia as the «Genio di Humanità» the charm of the dance was able to regenerate the two races: «...the eye is enraptured to follow the rapid leaps, the strong steps, the voluptuous movements of the head, the sweet pose of her person, the academic poses and the lively and elegant embroidery of the feet of this sylph...»<sup>72</sup>. Here, in the critic's description of an allegorical character, we

<sup>71</sup> There is no indication of song and lyrics in the musical score.

<sup>72</sup> See: «Teatri Arti e letteratura», anno 34, vol. 65, 1856-1857, Tip. Government della Volpe al

find concrete evidence of the link between fantastic and allegorical, through the role and execution of the prima ballerina and the structural placement within the drama. Though the best dancers were often described as sylphs, it is this portion *Bianchi e Negri* that further opened the door to the designation of fantastic. Giorza's sylph-like music takes part in this linkage.

#### **IV. *Romantico-fantastico* German-French influence and the Italian willis in *Gretchen***

If the term *fantastico* were not an adequate signifier of French or German supernatural import, then adding *romantico* would surely serve to identify its genre. In *Gretchen: ballo romantico fantastico* by Luigi Danesi with music by Enrico Bernardi and various composers (1868 and after) we have a(nother) successful Italian parallel to *Giselle*, but with its German origins emphasized<sup>73</sup> (this was one of several *Giselle*-like ballets that were mounted in Italy<sup>74</sup>). In fact this ballet can serve as evidence of the fantastic taking hold. If fantastic subjects had not succeeded on some level with Italian audiences, why bother appropriating *Giselle*, again, at all? With performances and restagings in each decade from the 1860s through the 1880s,<sup>75</sup> this ballet successfully combined fantastic elements and pure dance on the one hand, and the Italian preferences for melodrama and pantomime, on the other.

*Gretchen* is at once an obvious intertext to its famous sibling *ballet blanc*, in a German setting. In this ballet the deceived lover, an orphan girl named Gretchen, has died apparently of heartbreak. Her deceiver, the prince Arnold does not know. When the court jester relays this at the wedding of Arnold to Hildegard, he flees into the woods and kills himself in despair (note the lack of apotheosis, which is in contrast with Casati's *Giselle*-like *Lo Spirito Danzante* of 1851<sup>76</sup>). A number of character dances and solos, *pas de deux*, and group dances

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Sassi, 1856, pp. 95-96.

<sup>73</sup> Jahrmärker has also noted the intertextuality of *Giselle* and *Gretchen*, providing a synopsis of Danesi's ballet, and further noting the dominance of mime, the emphasis of German origins, the influence of Shakespeare, and the ballet's general success. Jahrmärker, *Themen, Motive Und Bilder Des Romantischen*, cit., pp. 79-82.

<sup>74</sup> Sowell shows how Casati's *Lo Spirito Danzante* of 1851 is also an Italian *Giselle*. Sowell, *A Plurality of Romanticisms*, cit., pp. 49-50. *Gretchen* is very similar to the ballet *Ilda* (1868, and after) also by Danesi with music Bernardi. Both contain a Willi *ballabile* in a «Selva Nera».

<sup>75</sup> This ballet traveled to Lisbon in 1869 and was also given post unification, in the 1870s and by Coppini after Danesi in the 1880s; it was sometimes called "storico-fantastico". Some performances were: Teatro Ciniselli, Milan, 1868; La Fenice Venice, 1872; Vittorio Emanuele di Torino, 1875; San Carlo, Naples, 1876-1877, and La Scala, Milan 1885.

<sup>76</sup> Sowell, *A Plurality of Romanticisms*, cit., pp. 49-50.

occur throughout and the Willi's nighttime gathering, which is an extended *ballabile* occurring in the second half. Danesi noted at the end of his preface that he had taken the German mythology and ancient Nordic poetry, and made it his own, lightening the fantastic elements—in order to «advance the action»<sup>77</sup>. Again, we see the striving of the choreographer to balance competing elements, that of the action and mime versus that of the pure dance and fantasy.

A reviewer as late as 1885 wrote a glowing report of the ballet at La Scala, especially praising the dancing that reminded him of Rota, the setting, and lighting effects (even though the writer was somewhat surprised by the ballet's success). Calling it a «fantastic melodrama transported into choreography», the writer praised the music as «spontaneous, with excellent melodies» and an «exuberance of fantasy» (it avoids polyphony), while noting that the gifted composer, Bernardi, had written music of fifty-two ballets and «is not yet old». This critic dares anyone to disagree: «Se vi par poco, negatemi quanto dissi»<sup>78</sup>.

The «danza fantastica delle Willi, la selva nera» [fantastic dance of the Willi, the black forest], especially noted in the above review, occurs in Act VI. As one might expect, an ethereal and tremulous *Andante sostenuto* with a soaring violin solo depicts these supernatural beings in their spooky setting. The flourishes in the solo line are marked «a piacere» and frequently consist of improvisatory, odd-numbered note groupings juxtaposed over a steady accompaniment in the pianist's left hand. A middle *Agitato* section seems to indicate a new action involving the willis, followed by several more changes in meter, tempo, and texture, which include a waltzed section and a galop-like closing. Thus, this *ballabile* contains several distinct sections, some of which likely contained action, mixed in with the ballroom dance types more associated with the long tableau of Romantic ballet second-acts. Since this is the first ballet I have discussed with such an arrangement, I have included Table 1 to show the sections and their features. Then, in Example 7 below I provide the beginning of each musical section<sup>79</sup>.

<sup>77</sup> See for example, the Milanese libretto of 1868: «La mesta leggenda fu dalla mitologia alemana illeggiadrita di tutto quel fantastico, di cui tanto si piacque l'antica poesia nordica, ed il coreografo ne fece suo prò, nella persuasione che ne avrebbe avvantaggiato l'azione» (p. 8).

<sup>78</sup> See: *Il Teatro illustrato e la musica popolare: Ritratti di maestri ed artisti celebri, vedute e bozzetti di scene, disegni di teatri monumentali, costumi teatrali, ornamentazioni, ecc., ecc. anno 1-12* (n. 1-144), gen. 1881-dic. 1892, vol. 5, March 1885, p. 39.

<sup>79</sup> Bernardi, Enrico, *Gretchen; ballo romantico fantastico del coreografo Luigi Danesi. Musica dei maestri Bernardi e Scaramelli. Riduzione per pianoforte di Ettore Contrucci*, Firenze, Bratti Sciabilli, [1855?]

Tempo	Meter	Musical Texture	Key	Measures
<i>Andante sostenuto</i>	4/4	tremolos, soaring violin, free flourishes, many fermatas	D major	1-23
<i>Agitato</i>	4/4	varied – possibly action/mime	A minor	24-46
<i>Mosso</i>	2/4	accented unison or homophonic lines, march-like, possible action	~ F minor	47-76
<i>Andante</i>	6/8	arpeggiated accompaniment, soaring melody, likely danced	B major	77-90
<i>Moderato, con grazia</i>	3/4	waltz- or mazurka-like accompaniment and regular phrases, many internal changes of texture and some repeats, likely danced	G major - modulates	91-106 107-114 115-130 131-144 145-160, 161
<i>Allegretto sostenuto</i>	4/4	galop-like accompaniment, perky melody, likely danced	A major	162-182

Table 1: Danza fantastica delle Willi - la selva nera from Gretchen.

**Example 7: Gretchen: ballo romantico fantastico (Danesi, various composers, 1855), Act VI, Danza fantastica delle Willi... la selva nera, by Enrico Bernardi (beginnings of each new section).**

ATTO VI "Danza fantastica delle Willi...La selva nera"

Solo del Violino

*Andante sostenuto*

4

7

10

12

*a piacere*

*10*

*11*

*11*

(NYPL). Note the questionable publication year of 1855 recorded for this source, since the ballet premiered in 1868. Additional pieces were added to the 1885 performance at La Scala, and published in piano reduction by Ricordi that same year.

## Agitato

**Agitato**

Measures 1-10 of the Agitato section. The music is in 2/4 time and one sharp (F#). It begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The bass clef part consists of dense, rhythmic chords, while the treble clef part features a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes and frequent rests.

## Mosso, with «Banda sotto il palco» [Band under the stage], and Andante

**Mosso** Banda sotto il palco

Measures 11-29 of the Mosso section. The music is in 2/4 time and three flats (Bb, Eb, Ab). It begins with a forte (*f*) dynamic. The bass clef part consists of rhythmic chords, while the treble clef part features a melodic line with eighth and sixteenth notes and frequent rests. The section concludes with a fortissimo (*fff*) dynamic.

**Andante**

Measures 30-33 of the Andante section. The music is in 6/8 time and three sharps (F#, C#, G#). It begins with a tenuto (*ten.*) dynamic. The bass clef part consists of slow, melodic lines, while the treble clef part features long, sweeping phrases.

### Moderato and Allegretto sostenuto

**Moderato**  
*con grazia*

*pp*

**Allegretto sostenuto**

*ff* *p*

8<sup>va</sup>

This music, especially the opening *Andante sostenuto* and the later *Andante*, is obviously ethereal and the link is clear between it and Giorza's music for the *Genio di Humanità* in *Bianchi e negri*. Note the sweeping arpeggiated flourishes, rolling accompaniment, and soaring melodies. This group of dances in *Gretchen* likely contained some action within the scene, but also showed the trend felt at the mid-century and thereafter where the *ballabile* gained greater importance and could constitute a long string of dances, usually placed in the latter half of the spectacle, and often ending with a galop. This practice, along with the advertising of the danced portions in the scenarios, indicated the importance

of academic dancing in attracting the audience. Yet, the reviews still show mixed feelings toward too much dancing and too weak of a plot (and vice versa as the decades passed). This also perhaps reflects the limiting and transitioning of ballet production that was occurring at the same time in Italian theaters (there was greater need to advertise the dances), yet too many repetitions of the same ballet were tiresome. In 1873, a reviewer in the «Gazzetta musicale di Milano» wrote that the audiences were beginning to show signs of discontent with the «vain reproductions of the ballet *Gretchen*... Only two ballets in a long season is [too] few»<sup>80</sup>. Even though the *ballabile*, *pas de deux*, etc. were highlighted, pantomime and engaging action scenes were still important features of ballet, as even the libretti for *Gretchen* make clear.

These four ballets demonstrate that the *fantastico* had many guises in Italian ballets, and that the inclusion of fantastic elements met with success when adapted to mainstream practices in Italian ballet: love stories where virtue triumphs and the social order is restored. The appearances of supernatural characters in Italian ballets varies also in scope, from stories where the fantastic dominates to those in which allegorical characters make a few “fantastic” appearances. Indeed, the prevalence of allegory in Italian ballet provided another avenue for the fantastic to be adapted. The most common thread is that these ballets take their sources in part from foreign materials (with the exception, to some extent, of *Il Noce di Benevento*) and contain supernatural characters. The fact that witches, demons, fairies, allegories, and sylphs must dance makes their inclusion convenient for theatrical danced drama. Each ballet revels in the dancing and miming of its supernaturals, whether it is a witches’ Sabbath, the meddling of Mefistofele, the intervention of a good sorceress to free the slaves (and humanity), or the graceful dances of Willis. These sections are seen as highlights, making their music more notable also (much like arias are more remembered than recitatives in opera). In particular the fantastic music was most widely discussed in reviews and was enjoyed outside of the ballet by those who acquired the piano reductions. Furthermore, many other generic witch and sylph dances proliferated in the instrumental

<sup>80</sup> «La Gazzetta Musicale di Milano», vol. 28, Milano, Ricordi, p. 105, signed “D.E.P.”. In Italian: «Il pubblico comincia a dar segno di malcontento per le soverchie riproduzioni del ballo *Gretchen* come per l’addietro il fece coll’altro ballo la *Fata Nix* - Due soli balli in una stagione lunga son pochi e finiscono coll’annoiare anche i più furenti amateurs delle silfidi da quadriglia».

music market of the nineteenth century. Yet, the fantastic in Italian ballet is tempered by the desire for a strong narrative executed with plentiful mime, virtuous characters, and apotheosis. The prevalence of pantomime in Italian ballet meant that human and supernatural characters alike must dance and mime, and the plots had to be more than a thinly veiled excuse for long stretches of dancing. Since the dances for the top ballerinas, ballerinos, and mimes were justified by the inclusion of fantastic and allegoric characters, these practices included the use of highly illustrative music, a practice predating Viganò and stretching into the post-Risorgimento period. Finally, witch, devil, sylph, and willi music first made inroads to the nineteenth-century Italian stage through ballet, predating these characters' arrivals in native Italian opera at the mid-century.

This research shows that the fantastic, as a part of hundreds of Italian ballets, was a significant part of Italian musical-theatrical context, even if it was a minority genre category. Thus any wider consideration of the fantastic on the Italian stage must take into account ballet and should including ballet music in addition to Italian and foreign opera. Instead of comparing Verdi's witches in *Macbeth* only to the fantastic in foreign operas, and equating Italian ballet's fairies (and genies: «maga benefica», «il genio di umanità») to the French sylphs, I propose we look at the entire evening of theatrical entertainment anew and consider the Italian landscape more inclusively. We must consider cross-genre relationships between Italian opera and ballet, the adaptation and recycling of topics and music, and also investigate cultural priorities that shaped both repertoires on Italian stages. This can only help us move away from the paradigm that elevates the canonic French romantic ballet and Italian opera amidst diverse national and regional practices on European stages for the nineteenth century. Italians participated in Romanticism on their own terms. Romantic traits such as the fantastic were mixed with many other themes on Italian stages. Instead of seeing this as a lack of embrace of Romanticism we might do well to simply include Italy's theatrical and cultural history more fully in the broad international narrative of nineteenth-century ballet and opera, as part of a plurality of intersecting approaches to romantic era theater.