To my husband Ray, who supported me throughout this journey with no hesitation, always helping and motivating me to achieve one of my greatest ambitions.

To my daughter Elena, who has been patient when I was so busy.

To my mother Jacqueline, who has always been a source of inspiration in my life and whose assistance made my research possible.
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INTRODUCTION

The literary and musical phenomena produced by the vogue for exoticism in France developed throughout the colonial era, from the Second Empire to the Belle Époque. Novels and poems inspired by distant lands, along with voyagers' diaries and sketches of indigenous people and landscapes, increased in popularity; thus, too, did the taste for exotic musical instruments, melodies, and rhythms from the East Asian, Middle Eastern, African, and Pacific regions. The Parisian expositions universelles of 1878, 1889 and 1900 further stimulated the interest in artistic exoticism. This trend eventually influenced opera composers and librettists as well.

The subjects and music of exotic operas changed throughout the nineteenth century, at first focusing on the remoteness of the locale and its fantastic qualities, and later emphasizing its differences from the West. This changing approach reflected a certain French perception of the exotic. The more faraway lands and colonies became accessible, the more their customs contrasted with French cultural and artistic principles. During the last decade of the nineteenth century, five newly written exotic operas premiered at the Opéra and the Opéra-Comique: Bourgault-Ducoudray and Gallet's Thamara, Lefebvre and Lomon's Djeima, Massenet and Gallet's Thaïs, Lambert and Gallet/Alexandre's Le Spahi, and Hahn and Alexandre/Hartmann's L'Île du rêve. These five operas frame the evolution of the perception of the exotic in
France, even though the time span during which they were first produced is brief—only eight years, from 1891 to 1898. This short period represents the transition from old perceptions of the exotic (focusing on the dream) to the new ones (encompassing colonial reality).

This study assesses how the five operas constructed and elaborated the exotic dimension in their libretti, scores, and stage settings. Each opera acknowledged and embraced the codification of musical and literary exoticism of previous works and incorporated those codes, but each also cultivated the languages of exoticism in diverse fashion. By referring to scholarly publications on exoticism and semiological studies, this dissertation aims to approach the five operas through a deep reading of text and music and show their interrelationship with the stage setting, in order to establish how the plurimedial combination of these arts represented exoticism. 1

I focus on three main themes that typically characterized exotic literature and opera in the late nineteenth-century: love, religion, and landscape. Love had been the central theme to inspire adventures and tragedy in both literature and opera for centuries. In exotic operas and novels, however, the tales of love—mostly based on sexual attraction—involving strangers in strange lands. After

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various twists in the plot, these stories could end in only two ways. Love between two natives would succeed, but love between a native and a Westerner was doomed to fail. These operatic stories mirrored contemporary French law and Catholic dogma that forbade miscegenation (an interracial marriage or sexual relationship). The conservative ideology of the Catholic Church also influenced most of the public of the Opéra and Opéra-Comique, who expected composers and librettists to respect their values. The operatic spectacle, however, incorporated sensual female natives as dancers, princesses, and slaves. As in an erotic dream, such entertainment could offer a taste of what French society would condemn, allowing brief digressions from a prudish lifestyle. The best setting for these dreams was thought to be a far-away land where vast landscapes displayed magnificence but suggested danger and adventure, and sumptuous palaces evoked grandeur.

Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) initiated the discussion of how French and British colonial agendas affected exoticism in the arts.² His work originated from an analysis of Western imperialist propaganda and colonization, and developed the view of the Orient as a massive entity victimized by Western domination. In the last ten years, several scholarly essays have continued the

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debate about Orientalism, adding more specific considerations of gender and race to Said's idea of imperialistic agenda.³

Reina Lewis, for example, explored European women's participation in nineteenth-century imperialist discourses.⁴ Jane Haggis and Marisa Formes criticized historical writings that looked at colonizing and colonized women as villains, victims, or heroines of gender relations in the colonies, without engaging in accurate historical analyses.⁵ Graham Dawson studied the imaginative construction of imperial masculinity from historical, cultural, and psychological points of view. The identification with the imperial hero, Dawson suggested, provided a fulfillment of the wish for true masculinity.⁶ Robert Young focused on the two-faceted concept of hybridity (different races interbreeding) in British imperialistic culture; he interpreted hybridity as the production of impurity, and as a "latent expression of desire, and specifically sexual desire for the racial other(s)."⁷ John MacKenzie suggested that Orientalist European artists, far from trying to represent the Orient as inferior, were instead inspired by a nostalgia for the European past that they could find in

other cultures. Furthermore, Mackenzie proposed that Orientalists’ paintings, “in wishing to convey the East, describe more accurately, Europe . . . The gaze into the Orient had turned, as in a convex mirror, to reflect the Occident that produced it.”

Oriental studies began in the 1930s, when Pierre Jourda and Roland Lebel published early critical collections of French exotic literature. These two insightful works exemplify the perception of the exotic for the late period of French colonization and have constituted a major source for cultural studies over the past seventy years. Extensive research and critical studies of exotic literature have flourished in the last forty years, but studies focusing specifically on nineteenth-century French exotic literature have appeared only quite recently. Most recent scholars of this field have concentrated on particular regions and writers and have analyzed the Western portrayal of these countries (i.e., Elwood Hartman, Denys Lombard, Piya Pal-Lapinski, Vanessa Smith, and Lisa Lowe).10

Finally, in a collection of his essays on the exotic in French and other European literature, Chris Bongie has established a new approach to exoticism paralleling Mackenzie’s theories by defining exoticism as "... a discursive practice with the intent of recovering ‘elsewhere’ values ‘lost’ with the modernization of European society.”

Two decades before Bongie’s statements on exoticism, Roland Barthes also formulated a similar idea of the exotic in French literature, by looking at the structure of the text in reference to the conflict between the East and West and the West’s desire to be something else. With Pierre Loti’s work in mind, he wrote, “Whether Turkish or Maghrebi, the Orient is merely a square on the board, the emphatic term of an alternative: the occident or something else. As long as the opposition is unresolved, merely subjected to forces of temptation, meaning functions positively: the book is possible, it develops.”

My study departs from Barthes’ idea that formal elements in a narrative create oppositions, and also relies on Algirdas Julien Greimas’ theory on “deep structure.” Through the exploration of symbolic, semantic, and cultural codes in

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narrativity, Greimas sought a hidden and profound meaning of the text. In his conception of the deep structure of narrative, Greimas embraced the ideas of Vladimir Propp in an approach to exploration of the deep structure of folklore, of Claude Lévi-Strauss on the structure of myth, and of Etienne Souriau for his work on theater. Taking Barthes’ concept of narrative oppositions and Greimas’ theory of “deep structure” as a starting point for my study, I focus first on finding dramatic oppositions common in each of the five operas (West-East, male-female, hero-villain, etc.); then I suggest how these oppositions function in the “deep structures” of each work by exploring music and text and by examining how their absolute reliance on each other contribute to shape the dramatic oppositions. Through the reading of the deep structures, that is, the exploration of hidden meanings that transcend the structural aspect of text and score, historical and socio-political issues come to light to reflect the image of French society at the fin de siècle.

Like the studies of nineteenth-century exotic French literature, the exploration of semiotics in music also began during the 1970s. In 1977, for example, Frits Noske investigated the concept of symbolic, semantic, and cultural codes in music in his collection of essays analyzing various Mozart and

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Verdi operas. By looking at the recurrence of certain harmonic designs as well as rhythmic and melodic figures, and their connection to dramatic events in the operas, Noske explored the deep structure of the music. Kofi Agawu, in his semiotic analysis, examined how textural and generic “topics” interact with harmony and counterpoint. Jean-Jacques Nattiez took the exploration of narrative a step further by looking at musical codes and the perception of them in context. He wrote, “An object of any kind takes on meaning for an individual apprehending the object, as soon as that individual places the object in relation to areas of his lived experience—that is, in relation to a collection of other objects that belong to his or her experience of the world.” Furthering Noske’s earlier studies on semiology of music, I search for musical signs that in the context of each opera contribute to the making of exoticism and that, most of all, make cultural and social statements. Furthermore, I embrace Nattiez’ suggestion that objects take on meanings according to individuals’ experiences. In fact, I take into consideration the performative context of the operas in order to understand how musical and literary “topics” have affected the individuals who perceived them.

Carolyn Abbate applied Nattiez’ theories in her examinations of operas by Delibes, Mozart, Marschner, Meyerbeer, and Wagner, and instrumental works by Mahler and Dukas. Abbate explored who “speaks” in nineteenth-century music by embracing narratology, literary theory, and semiotics. “What I mean by ‘voice’,” she wrote, “is . . . a sense of certain isolated and rare gestures in music, whether vocal or nonvocal, that may be perceived as modes of subjects’ ‘enunciations’.” Although in her study Abbate approached the voices of operatic heroines, she did not involve feminist theory in her analysis. In contrast, Susan McClary has analyzed gender-coding practices from Monteverdi’s to Schoenberg’s music, emphasizing the connection between rhythm and rhythmic gesture of the body. Further pursuing gender analysis, Raymond Monelle has more recently connected the characteristic rhythm of galloping horses with the military, the hunt, and the masculine, through a series of music examples and narrative contexts. These studies have influenced my analysis of deep structures because they suggest that music can deliver extra-musical messages, and also that those messages can hint at gender issues; in fact, along with other social matters, gender issues constitute primary elements in the discussion of the exotic.

19 Ibid., ix.
Concerned with finding a comprehensive approach to musical semiotics, Eero Tarasti first analyzed existing musical-semiotic studies, and then provided the theory embraced in this dissertation. He divided past approaches of schools of semiology into two categories: the European, inspired by Ferdinand de Saussure and Greimas, and the American, based on the philosophy of Charles S. Peirce; finally, he suggested a critical synthesis that could clarify musical narrativity.

The first category, he explained, searches for deep structures that could enable the reader to understand a text or a part of it as a coherent whole. For example, any sign evoking an earlier sign by virtue of similarity or being in its proximity contributes to the meaning of the whole piece. To illustrate how his theories can apply to music, Tarasti gave the example of the “Fate” motive of Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony. Furthermore, he introduced Greimas’ concept of “isotopy” in music. According to Greimas, an isotopy is a sequence of expressions joined by a common semantic denominator. For example, a series of expressions or formal elements in a text might relate to the contrast between life and death, or a development from despair to consolation, or an end and a new beginning and so on. Recognizing that isotopies are “deep-level semantic fields that enable us to read a text or a part thereof as a coherent whole,” Tarasti...

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applied this concept in his theories of musical semiotics.\textsuperscript{24} Isotopy, he explained, makes possible a structural analysis by "simultaneously articulating differences and similarities, 'the continuities and discontinuities' of the elementary structure of signification."\textsuperscript{25}

The second musical-semiotic approach reviewed by Tarasti—the American approach—looked for structures directly on the textual surface. An iconic sign looks like what it represents (a picture of a house for example, represents a house). He gave as an example for iconic sign in music the horn signal at the beginning of Beethoven’s \textit{Les Adieux} Sonata, op. 81a. “It is an iconic sign in the sense that, although played on piano, it imitates the horn signal,” he wrote.\textsuperscript{26}

Tarasti embraced Peirce’s semiotics by examining apparent structures in music and elaborated Greimas’ notion of isotopy as a foundation for his analysis of structural levels. He also developed Propp’s and Greimas’ idea of “actantial model,” incorporated in this dissertation. According to Propp every narration includes particular protagonists, called “actors”; Greimas looked at the “functions” of the “actors” vis-à-vis the situation in the plot. Departing from Greimas’ “actantial model,” Tarasti examined how formal isotopies can generate

\textsuperscript{24} Tarasti, \textit{Signs of Music}, 12.
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., 13.
\textsuperscript{26} Ibid., 11. Besides the iconic model, Peirce included in the patterns of meaning in signs also the symbolic, where the image has another meaning culturally accepted (i.e., a flag), and the indexical, for which the image serves to represent a meaning (i.e., a number).
musical actors. For example, in his discussion of how tonality can be interpreted in a semiotic sense, he wrote:

The minimal condition for a story is that something becomes something else. Greimas describes this phenomenon with the formula $S \lor O$; i.e., the subject is "disjuncted" from an object, but regains that object in the course of narration, i.e., becomes conjuncted with it: $S \land O$. In this framework, the chordal movement from tonic toward dominant means "disjunction" from an "object", i.e., the tonic chord; and there also occurs a return, or "conjunction", with the object at the end. Greimas's "subject" and "object" are "actants," i.e., *dramatis personae*.\(^{27}\)

In analytical studies of opera Greimas' theory of actantial model easily applies. The medium in fact not only allows portraying roles and stories similarly to literary works, but also advances them through the music. Tarasti's application of Greimas' ideas on music opens a new path by offering a systematic interpretation of musical signs as active elements in a narrative. This dissertation views opera in general, and exotic opera in particular, as the ultimate medium to deliver cultural issues, sometimes through obvious and most times through hidden elements of the dramatic narrative.

The above studies of musical codes and music narratology, however, seem to be limited. They analyze the semiological features of works belonging only to the canons of classical music, or they explore musical semiotics from a strictly theoretical point of view. In addition, when including opera, most of them gloss over the close relationship between text and music, and frequently favor one over the other. For example, Noske saw music as the primary element

\(^{27}\) Tarasti, *Signs of Music*, 31-2.
in opera, while other scholars (i.e., Carolyn Abbate, Catherine Clément, Herbert Lindenberger, and André Michael Spies) focused on the importance of the libretto. While these studies have opened up the way for new readings of opera that go beyond pure structural analyses, they leave out of consideration the active and essential collaboration between music and text.

Studies of exotic operas have tended to favor either the music or the text, too. Following the trend of literary criticism and often influenced by semiological studies, in the last fifteen years a few music scholars have approached musical exoticism by looking at how particular orchestral and operatic scores have created a language of the exotic. For example, in the essays collected in *The Exotic in Music*, the approach to the subject tends to focus on exotic musical codes used to depict diverse regions at various times. Jean-Pierre Bartoli, Marie-Claire Beltrando-Patier, Myriam Ladjili, and Derek B. Scott concentrated on the construction of "generic" melodic, rhythmic, and instrumental devices that French composers used to create the *couleur locale*.

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In other instances, scholars have focused on particular works and their rendering of musical exoticism (for example, Peter Gradenwitz, Bartoli, Charles Dietrich, and Locke).31

Several publications investigated the construction of exoticism in plots and characters. Among prestigious studies of exotic libretti, the works of Locke, Hervé Lacombe, and James Parakilas stand out.32 Gille De Van surveyed several French exotic operas performed during the nineteenth century, and explored the function of exoticism in French librettos written between 1860 and 1920. In his article, he proposed a definition of exoticism that goes beyond the reproduction of faraway lands. De Van described exoticism as “an impetus toward the other which becomes a mirror of the self, the search for foreign land which changes into a reflection of one’s own country, the quest for the different that sends us back to the same.”33


The analyses in this dissertation use past research on musical codification of the exotic as a starting point and also embrace De Van's approach. I compare textual and dramatic exotic elements present in the codes of five operas under consideration to the codes established by Locke, Lacombe, Parakilas, and De Van. I also acknowledge most of the musical symbols representing the "generic" exotic suggested in the works of Gradenwitz, Bartoli, Dietrich, and Locke. However, my analysis concentrates even more on how fin-de-siècle librettos and music have systematically tackled social, political, and cultural issues (for example, gender, race, and imperialism), by shaping exoticism in textual, musical and stage settings as a "metaphor of desire."

Inspired by De Van, I look at musical and exotic codes as means to represent Otherness, but only as a symbolic reflection of the Self. Whenever dramatic situations, musical figures, and descriptive words tend to depict "difference" I interpret those signs not as representative of particular foreign lands, but as the reflection of fin de siècle France. Overall, I view exoticism as a series of signs waiting to be revealed in their true meaning: a fundamental dissatisfaction with oneself. And, in the particular cases analyzed in this study, I equate this dissatisfaction to the mal de siècle. Exotic characters and remote landscapes of fin-de-siècle operas provided an outlet for representing difference and diversity within French society (sexual emancipation, artistic innovation, and religious

34 Ibid.
exploration), without interfering with or offending conservative views. The remote locale, once dissociated from reality, allowed sinful, titillating, or controversial situations that realistic operas could not have approached.

While examining how five operas of the 1890s have constructed and elaborated themes of exoticism, I also look at each work as a result of the interweaving of different but complementary languages (musical, textual, and visual), at their signs and deep structures, and at how these collections of signs interact with each other. Through the semiological investigation of different facets in each opera, the exotic literary and musical elements come to light. This multi-faceted analysis does not separate words and musical sounds; instead, it presents continuous analogies between music and text and the ways that they interact with each other and with the stage set as well. Through a transdisciplinary approach in which musical values are not treated apart from the textual ones, the study of exoticism naturally reveals its cultural and political implications. The operatic representation of major issues in late nineteenth-century France (gender and sexuality, colonialism, national identity) emerge with transparent clarity when the reading of each work involves the interrelation between word and music—"the necessary vehicles of hermeneutics."35 I view operatic language as one language constructed through a sophisticated network of different artistic media. In particular, the components of my analysis are four

and involve: the examination of plot and characters, a comparative analysis between original text and libretto, the inspection of specific musical numbers and/or sections in relation to the libretto and plot, and the extra-heuristic inquiry into public and critical understanding and reception of the work.

The first component provides the material for a large-scale analysis that examines how events of the story and the large-scale musical construction represent the exotic. The second component establishes commonalities and divergences in the formulation of exotic codes in the literary and operatic versions. The third examines specific numbers and sections in detail, by addressing the realization of the exotic in the poetry and prose of the libretto through its imagery and symbolism. Musical analysis then provides an understanding of how each composer enhanced textual imagery and created symbolism through his music. The fourth aspect is a socio-cultural inquiry based on reception. Through reading of public and critical comments, it unveils contemporary perceptions of the exotic.

My study includes five chapters and is divided in two parts; the first part (two chapters) addresses general cultural, literary, and operatic issues; the second (three chapters) involves the analyses of the five operas. The first chapter begins with the investigation of how the concept of exoticism acquired its meaning during the years from the establishment of the Third Republic up to the end of the nineteenth century, at the height of French colonial expansion. Many
factors established the perception of Otherness during those years. A close look at how travels, colonial conquests, and religious expeditions fired the imagination of writers, scientists, and historians, illustrates the increasing and general French interest in the exotic. Furthermore, an overview of the *expositions universelles* (with particular attention to 1889) demonstrates the French taste for the foreign. The expositions furthered the image of Otherness created by writers and artists through exhibits and performances that contrasted French cultural traditions with their foreign and “odd” customs.

The introductory chapter also pays particular attention to how French exotic literature changed along the lines of France’s colonial growth. While, at the dawn of the expansion, distant lands had a dreamlike flavor in the French collective imagination (e.g., Baudelaire and Rimbaud), towards the end of the century, when colonies became more accessible, the imaginary exotic approached true-to-life situations (e.g., Loti). In the eyes of poets and writers, the Encounter between the West and the colonies resulted in an overt conflict that did not envisage reconciliation.

The second chapter explains how operatic exoticism evolved, following the trends in literary exoticism. First, it represented a splendid dream by staging remote lands resplendent with palm trees, flowers, gardens and mountains, oceans, and deserts where odalisques and princes inhabited lavish palaces. In parallel with its literary counterpart, during the last few years of the century,
opera approached the exotic as the rival. The Encounter between the two became a conflict. Western characters stood in contrast with the indigenous (i.e., the French soldier and the native girl, the Catholic priest and the seducing pagan woman); home (France) became an aspiration detached from the colony, and the colony represented only a temporary reality. With this development, the features of the music changed, too. At the dawn of operatic exoticism composers did not attempt to portray couleur locale at all. Then, beginning in the 1860s, some approached it by loosely reproducing features of Middle-Eastern countries. Eventually, musical codes expressing the exotic became generic blueprints, applicable in all circumstances. Finally, the overstatement or lack of these features suggested a preparation for change. The final break between the West and the exotic occurred during the last decade of the century. At the height of its colonial expansion, France started to view the colonies as real regions, still faraway, but mostly as real places; the separation between West and the Other became less obvious.

Comprising a separate part, the last three chapters concentrate on the analyses of the five operas. One of these chapters scrutinizes Thamara and Djelma; another examines Thaïs, and the last focuses on Le Spahi and L'Île du rêve. The first two operas (Thamara and Djelma) represent a certain attachment to earlier exotic themes. Their plots are set in remote countries and in the past

(Russian Georgia and India): the adventures involve a sultan and a raja and do not make any reference to Western domination. The music of the first includes elaboration of Greek melodies and ancient Greek modes, while the score of the second employs a generic form of exoticism. The third opera, Thaïs, represents instead exoticism in unique fashion. Set in a land free from French domination, Egypt, and in the distant past, it presents the exotic Other by contrasting Catholicism and Paganism. The music is sharply divided into exotic and Western, according to the characters, highlighting the conflict. Finally, the last two operas, Le Spahi and L’Île du rêve reflect the colonial experience and disillusionment with the exotic, although in different ways. They take place in contemporary times and in two existing French colonies, Senegal and Tahiti. Both of them impose the Western presence and expose racial and cultural conflict, as did Loti’s novels, the sources of the librettos. Employing few exotic features, the music in these last two operas, rather, draws attention to the absence of exoticism in the sections where it is most expected (for example in the voice of the heroine).

The five operas have in common several textual and musical features that were well understood by the French public of those days. They belong to the same operatic genre, the opéra lyrique that both the Opéra and the Opéra-Comique had endorsed by the last quarter of the century. They occur in non-European regions and view the exotic as distant. In addition, they all imply a
polarity between the West and the foreign even if the conflict is explored in a
different way in each opera. Finally, they also were reviewed in the same
publications. Case studies that examine the operas in both their unique and
shared contexts can define exoticism in musical and textual codes.

Even if aware of other contemporary literary and musical trends, the
librettists and composers did not attempt to make changes in their techniques.
They used clichés previously established by operas such as Carmen and Lakmé,
operas still performed and loved by the Parisian public of the 1890s. Four of the
five works did not attain success, and only one, Thaïs, has remained in the
French operatic repertoire to this time. Many factors can explain their failures.
Only Massenet was an experienced opera composer and, according to the critics,
the others’ lack of dramatic skills sometimes irritated the audience. Competing
with more “modern” French operas and with the innovative Wagnerian operas
contributed to the unsuccessful receptions as well. However, the public and
critics’ desire for fresher themes and fewer exotic clichés (Thamara and
Djelma), their appreciation for a well-constructed exotic locale (Thaïs), or their
request for a clearer and more traditional exoticism (Le Spahi and L’Île du rêve)
reveals a clear concern about the treatment of exoticism.

Although Orientalism in literature, music, and opera has been discussed
at length since the beginning of the 1990s, I find that a fresh interpretation of the
subject involving gender, imperialism, and race issues has great potential in
cultural studies. Said first saw the Orient as an image created by the imperialist West; then, in recent years scholars have pointed out that the Orient is not a collection of different regions but just a reflection of the West. In my study I appreciate exoticism per se as an inspiration for writers, musicians and painters; however, I take into consideration the most current vision of the exotic by asserting that when viewed in its cultural context, exoticism has reflected a certain French social exasperation and crisis of identity during the late-nineteenth century. Exoticism therefore has been a pretext for self-criticism and not only for condescending to the East. Starting from this idea, I contemplate exoticism as a dialectic phenomenon that marks the beginning of change.
On peut comparer les empires à un arbre dont les branches trop étendues ôtent tout le suc du tronc et ne servent qu'à faire de l'ombrage.

(Montesquieu, Lettres persanes)

PART I: THE MAKING THE EXOTIC

I. The Idea of the Exotic in France

A. Aesthetics of Exoticism

Exoticism is usually associated with Orientalism, a term that comprises categories of oriental tropes present in European literature and art of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.¹ Taken in their historical and political contexts, both terms have generally assumed negative connotations, for they have reflected the ideology of oppression. “Orientalism,” wrote Edward Said, “is the enormously systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage—and even produce—the orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period.”² In this “systematic discipline,” Said explained that the Orient is introduced as a separate, eccentric, backward, silent, passive, and sensual entity, and that its importance is evaluated solely in comparison to the

¹ In most literary and musicological studies, the word exoticism is used as an extension of Orientalism, in that it tackles the same ideological issues, but, while Orientalism limits its vision to North Africa and the far and middle-Eastern regions, the ideology of exoticism refers to “any setting that is alien and accordingly different from accepted local norms in its attitudes, customs and morals.” Ralph P. Locke: “Exoticism,” Grove Music Online ed. L. Macy (Accessed 13 October 2003), <http://www.grovemusic.com>
² Said, Orientalism, 3 (see Introduction, n.1).
West. Its location is not relevant either. What counts is that the opposition between Orient and Occident remains unresolved.³ In addition, Said believed that in Western ideology the representation of the Orient is fictitious and does not account for the socially harsh conditions of the non-Western and/or colonized countries.

Cultural historians have recently criticized Said's analysis of Orientalism. They have considered his interpretation too restricted to the conflict between the West as the dominator/colonizer and the Orient as its victim, pointing out that "Said's denunciation of the whole in Western civilization is . . . extreme and uncompromising."⁴ In addition, they note that the issue of imperialism needs to be related to Western nationalist, social, and gender matters.⁵ My analysis recognizes this multi-faceted method and approaches the dichotomy of East-West as a concept coming from a European nineteenth-century world. Yet, this study adds another facet to the recent historical-cultural approach. Besides acknowledging French political and social opinions, it emphasizes nineteenth-century France's longing for social

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³ Barthes clarifies the idea of "unresolved" conflict between East and West in: New Critical Essays, 116 (see Introduction, n.12).
⁵ Among the most recent studies criticizing Said's approach to Orientalism as an exclusively imperialistic phenomenon: Lewis' Gendering Orientalism (see Introduction, n. 4); Robert Young's Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race (see Introduction, n. 7); John Mackenzie's Orientalism: History, Theory, and the Arts (see Introduction, n. 8); and Paul A. Bové ed., Edward Said and the Work of the Critic: Speaking Truth to Power (see Introduction, n. 3).
change, too. This *mal de siècle* manifested a certain desire for transgression and for the “alternative,” and channeled these desires into the *exotic*, especially, into the *remote exotic*. In this context, the *exotic* reflected the West and did not portray foreign lands in a realistic way. By embracing the idea of “otherness,” everything socially inappropriate and forbidden in real life became plausible in fiction without causing any manifest political or moral harm. In order to invent an “other” in which to vest unseen images and feelings, the West, and in particular France, expanded its literary and artistic languages beyond traditional convention, and elaborated a unique language.

Furthermore, my interpretation of “otherness” as the embodiment of Western desire, also finds supporting evidence in other literary trends of the nineteenth century besides *exoticism*. For example, similar “alternative” themes are found in the adventure novel, symbolist poetry, and in the naturalist novel. All these genres, too, are reflected in the conception of exotic operas of the late 1800s.

This dissertation will a) take account of the concept of the *remote exotic* as a sign of the Western desire for transgression or alternative, different,

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6 The only time I have encountered the term “alternative” was in Chris Bongie’s *Exotic Memories: Literature, Colonialism, and the Fin de Siècle* (see Introduction, n. 11). Bongie uses it to describe the “unknown” worlds. It describes the desire for change, characteristic of both Romantic and *fin de siècle* artistic trends.

7 Originally written in 1955, Victor Segalen’s *Essay on Exoticism* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2002) also criticized the imperialist conceptions of difference, but exalted the existence of differences between cultures and peoples, and viewed exotic literature as the mere reflection of the writers’ selves.
and daring ways of life, and b) recognize the political and social significance of the concept in light of its colonial context. The aesthetics of French nineteenth-century exoticism expanded in different stages, all connected to cultural and social attitudes of the time. In opera, for example, during the first fifty years of the nineteenth century, exoticism took shape in comic subjects in which the "other" came from far-away and often unspecified lands, and was always an odd caricature. From mid-century on, French literature associated the exotic with existing—though very remote—countries that represented mysterious entities. Finally, at the end of the century, the exotic became part of colonial life, embodying the rigid dichotomy between the West and the "other." To better understand the ideology beyond the manifestations of remote exoticism in nineteenth-century French literature and opera—the main concern of this dissertation—an historical survey of the politics and rationale for French colonial expansion and of its repercussions for the arts seems necessary. In fact, French colonization not only had strong political impact on the arts, but it also shaped a unique aesthetic. Furthermore, a deeper knowledge of the political and cultural relationships as well as of the conflicts between France and the regions depicted in the operas under discussion here will

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8 French and British colonialism have marked this period; however, this study will conveniently focus only on the French politics of expansion.
10 For exoticism in French literature, see pp. 37-51 of this chapter, and for exoticism in French exotic operas see Chapter 2.

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enhance the appreciation of the works, premiered in the 1890s, during the apex of French colonial expansionism.

B. French Exoticism: A Cultural Promotion of the Colonies

1. Historical Survey of French Colonies

The French politics of methodical expansion developed after the 1870s, during the Second French Colonial Empire. Before 1870, the French had invaded territories abroad, but without conceiving a global colonial and commercial plan, and often considering those territories as exchangeable goods. For example, in the eighteenth century the French India Company, assisted by missionaries, explorers, and merchants, helped France to acquire several West Indian Islands and parts of India; however, in 1763, at the end of the French and Indian War, the French lost India and Canada to the British. The loss of India affected the French view of the Orient, which at that very time vanished as a symbol of the imaginary and the exotic. A significant attempt at colonization, however, waited until 1830, when the French Colonial military ventured into Algeria; but only eighteen years later, in 1848, Algeria became the first French colony.

In its attempt to stimulate a sense of political self-confidence, the Third Republic made a systematic effort to create a French colonial empire and

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11 The loss of India to the British and the French idealization of the Orient are important in the analysis of Djelma and Thamara in Chapter 2.
persuade the nation that its power had no boundaries. In addition, the prospect of a boost in the country’s economy through the exploitation of foreign raw materials and labor appealed not only to the government, but also to merchants, financiers, and manufacturers.\(^{12}\) In fact, at the beginning of the 1870s, France desperately needed new economic goals and incentives for the populace’s morale since the nation was facing serious foreign and domestic problems: it had just lost the war against the Prussians (1870) and, at the same time, was facing an imbalance between monarchist pressure and republican forces.

At the beginning of the Third Republic, the French also saw a threat in British expansion, and so they resolved to compete, engaging like their rivals in entrepreneurial imperialistic endeavors. Despite the lack of coherent imperial policies and the suffering caused by serious economic depressions, both countries went in search of new markets, while continuing to support the financial interests of chartered companies already established abroad. Both countries took advantage of new technological developments (i.e., transportation, communication, and weaponry) that were results of the industrial revolution. In addition, both tried to invest their capital in new areas. Until the end of the 1880s, the main objective of French and British

\(^{12}\) The French empire abroad before the 1870s was formed by agencies supported by the state, church, and armed forces, but not by the business community. See: *Colonies, territoires, sociétés: l’enjeu français*, eds: Alain Saussol and Joseph Zitomersky (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1996).
expansionism was therefore mostly economic exploitation and not immediate and direct political oppression. This fact is important for the study of French exoticism in literature and opera. It is generally reflected in characters and plots, where Western protagonists are rarely depicted as political rulers or authoritarian figures; even the Western soldier, so common in French literature and opera of the late-nineteenth century, is never portrayed as a military leader or authority.\textsuperscript{13} Throughout the Third Republic, in addition to political and economic motivations, colonial expansion also carried ideological goals. The British focused on the idea of bringing civilization to undeveloped countries; and the concept of “the white man’s burden” was ingrained in British culture from the beginning of the Empire.

For the French, \textit{la mission civilisatrice} and \textit{rayonnement}—lighting the way for others—denoted a similar purpose, but specifically referred to a French mission, rather than the “white man’s burden.” The French task of “civilizing” had two main goals: the propagation of French culture and the dissemination of Catholic faith in outlying areas of France and in overseas countries. These two fundamental concepts—the propagation of French culture and religion—permeated French aesthetics in the latter part of the century. As a result, the idea of the righteousness of Catholic morality versus the “blasphemy” of other religions and beliefs, together with the belief in French

\textsuperscript{13} See the discussion below of French exotic literature and the following chapters of this dissertation on French exotic operas.
cultural supremacy over other cultures, became recurring literary topics and indispensable tools for the construction of the exotic. References to religious and cultural supremacy pervaded late nineteenth century French opera, too, dominating both music and drama, as the following discussion of French exotic literature will demonstrate.

France applied its foreign economic plan and its policy of *rayonnement* in different ways according to the locations and the cultures of the controlled countries. In some countries, the French preferred to rule indirectly by keeping local authorities in power; in others, they imposed direct rule through the use of force. Where the occupied countries already had structured societies, as, for example, in Morocco, Tunisia, Indochina, and Tahiti, the French implemented the strategy of association by allowing the native culture to continue to exist. In other regions, like West Africa and Algeria, that had less structured societies (and were therefore “less civilized,” according to the ideology behind *la mission civilisatrice*), France pursued a policy of assimilation, imposing French culture and laws on the natives.\(^{14}\) The two colonial approaches are reflected in the literary and operatic works in which the relationship between

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\(^{14}\) For a clear explanation of the history of the two concepts, see Raymond Betts, *Assimilation and Association in French Colonial Theory 1890-1914* (New York: Columbia University Social Science Studies Series No. 604, 1961).
Europeans and natives varies according to the location where the story takes place.\textsuperscript{15}

By 1893, the French colonial Empire entered the era of its largest expansion, while economic profits from the systematic exploitation of the colonies, and the alleged accomplishments of the \textit{mission civilisatrice} gratified the nation. In the East, France controlled the colonies of Indochina; in Africa, French Equatorial Africa, French West Africa, French Somaliland, Madagascar, and Comoros; and in the Pacific, the protectorates of the Society Islands and the Marquesas. Finally, in 1894, the \textit{Ministère des Colonies} was created to organize and coordinate the military branches that were assigned to take over specific countries. With the \textit{Ministère des Colonies} and its systematic military policy and strategy of economic regulation within the colonies, France reached the highest point of a colonial expansion that had begun in the 1870s.

To demonstrate and celebrate its colonial accomplishments, the city of Paris, in 1878, 1889, and 1900, offered to its residents and visitors the opportunity to view unique cultural aspects of the colonies in the \textit{expositions universelles}. On these occasions, Paris organized the display of artifacts, costumes, architecture, art, and even of natives, and planned performances of music of numerous regions of the world, while also publicizing its industrial progress and glorifying its own culture.

\textsuperscript{15} For a personal account of a colonialist's life in Africa, see Maurice Delafosse, \textit{Les États d'âme d'un colonial.} (Paris: Comité de l'Afrique française, 1909).
2. Les Expositions Universelles

The *expositions* of the Third Republic aimed to prove French control over its own economy and to confirm its power abroad, while also conveying the ideal of the *mission civilisatrice* at home.\(^\text{16}\) The events also aimed to educate the public about the existence of other forms of culture and to instruct them about the current scientific advancements of the West, all in the name of peace and progress. The *expositions*, therefore, reflected the Republic’s efforts to convince the French and foreign visitors of France’s role as promoter of peace, progress, science, and education and to confirm its authority and strength in matters of domestic and foreign policy.

Different emphases were chosen for each of the *expositions*, and the representation of the colonies became increasingly more important.\(^\text{17}\) In 1878, technology and economy were the focus of French accomplishments.\(^\text{18}\) In this

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\(^\text{18}\) The theme of the 1878 Parisian exposition was *Agriculture, Beaux-arts, Industrie*. It was organized by the state, only eight years after Prussia’s victory in the Franco-Prussian war, to re-establish French vitality and political image in Europe. Hosting an event of such proportions and building an industrial palace at the Champ de Mars and the imposing building of the Trocadero symbolized France’s return to the control of its cultural and economic power. France occupied half of the space dedicated to the exhibition, showing the greatest technological inventions of the time including a machine that trapped solar energy, stronger train rails, an electric lamp, the telephone, and the phonograph; see: *Nouvelle Histoire de France*, Julien Cain ed., vol. 30. (Paris: Jullies Tallandier, 1969), 38. The colonies and other
exposition the participation of the colonies served as a visual confirmation of French economic accomplishment abroad. The exposition of 1889 is most relevant to this study since it occurred just before the decade of the 1890s, in which the operas here analyzed had their premieres. This exposition dedicated greater physical space to the actual representation of the colonies and gave them a more active role. Finally, in 1900, the first Parisian exposition of the twentieth century displayed all countries in larger areas and with a more picturesque flavor.19

The 1889 exposition, the second during the Third Republic, was organized by the French Government and the City of Paris, and its official theme was simply *Exposition Universelle de Paris 1889*.20 Besides displaying newer technologies and architectural progress, it offered a broader vision of the colonies, too, confirming French hegemony while acknowledging strong and independent cultural characteristics of the other regions. The numerous colonies occupied 6,000 m² out of the 32,000 m² allotted to the whole regions of the world were represented in part, but without significant cultural impact. They functioned, rather, as the source of raw materials.

19 *Le Bilan d’un siècle* was the theme of the 1900 exposition, and it was organized by the *Ministère du Commerce et de l’Industrie, des Postes et des Télégraphes*. The participating colonies were Algeria, French Congo, Ivory Coast, Dahomey, Guadeloupe, French Guinea, Guyana, French India, Indochina, Madagascar, Martinique, Mayotte and the Comores, New Caledonia, the French establishments in Oceania, Reunion, Saint-Pierre and Miquelon, Senegal, French coast of Somalia, Sudan, and Tunisia. In this exposition the attention shifted towards social economy and entertainment rather than keeping the focus on technology and science. For example, the French colonies were asked to present small living tableaux describing customary aspects of their lives.

20 The collaboration of city and national governments signified stronger financial opportunities and a chance for the city to demonstrate its resources.
exhibition, and their pavilions were mostly centrally located around the *Palais central des colonies*. These countries comprised Algeria, Tunisia, Senegal, Gabon, Nossi-Be, Réunion, Saint-Pierre and Miquelon, Annam-Tonkin, Cambodia, Cochinchina, Guadeloupe, Martinique, Mayotte and Comores, New Caledonia, and Tahiti. In addition to the current colonies, territories previously belonging to the French also attended the event, but were located outside the circle of French colonies. India, for example, was represented within the space devoted to Great Britain and its colonies. Furthermore, the 1889 exposition commemorated the centenary of the French Revolution, giving a further reason to celebrate Republican pride, and at the same time emphasizing nationalism through the re-evaluation of the heroic past. The premises of nationalism, expansionism, and cultural superiority appealed to all French audiences, and placated anti-republican sentiments, still strong at the time.

The French government demonstrated its political and cultural authority through the polarization of the two main entities of the 1889 exposition: France on one side and the colonies on the other, almost contrasting national identity and intellectual sophistication on one side with political disorganization and cultural simplicity on the other. This polarization was obvious in the organization of the musical performances that constituted a considerable part of the 1889 exhibition. During the days of the *exposition universelle*, five concerts by major Parisian orchestras were held in the *Salle*
des fêtes of the Palace du Trocadéro; in the Palais de l'Industrie 1,200 musicians performed for the Grand festival de musiques militaires françaises; and numerous and continuous musical performances and dances of overseas cultures were presented daily in their assigned pavilions throughout the exhibition. The musical program of the exhibition clearly reflected the political agenda of the Third Republic: military music represented the strength of current nationalistic feelings, and orchestral concerts featured repertory that belonged to the canon of current French repertoire and represented the quintessence of French style and taste. In contrast, the music from the colonies was perceived as melodically simple and unsophisticated; mostly deprived of harmony, it was understood as inferior to French culture and therefore in need of being enriched by French influence.

The press of the time made clear references to the inferiority of several cultures displayed at the 1889 exhibition, describing the lack of masculinity in

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22 All five concerts introduced compositions of the nineteenth century, with the exception of Cherubini’s Ouverture de Médée (1797). See Fauser, ibid., 187-88.  
23 For a discussion of the perception of overseas music at the 1889 exhibition see: Fauser, “World Fair-World Music: Musical Politics in 1889 Paris.” The contrast between refined national musical canon and the proud military styles on one hand, and the colonies’ lack of sophistication on the other, is also clearly reflected in the operas discussed in this study. In fact, the dichotomy between French and the “other” became a characteristic and essential feature in late nineteenth-century operas, in which military anthems and fin-de-siècle music oppose the allegedly simple melodies and repetitive rhythms of native cultures, hence symbolizing French supremacy.
Indo-Chinese dancers or the vulgarity of Arab belly dancers? Even Julien Tiersot, a researcher in the field of comparative anthropology (a fairly new academic discipline at the time), while acknowledging the cultural value of all ethnic customs, also commented on the inferiority of black Africans by describing them as "lazy" and "indolent." Some of the most striking comments from the press, however, concerned the "vulgarity," the gender ambiguity, and the "barbarism" of some dances and music compared to the "refined exoticism" described in French novels and represented in contemporary exotic operas. For example, an article in La Vie Parisienne stated, "Those who dream to a certain extent, who have fabricated themselves an ideal Orient through the conventional lenses of artists, are really disappointed." Tiersot remarked upon the lack of musical interest in Tahitian dances, because the accompaniment was simple and only rhythmic—as opposed to exciting and harmonic. Other comments referred to the lack of exotic interest as well. Mentioning the Cambodian and the Tahitian pavilions, a journalist wrote that they "contained . . . little to interest European visitors" and, commenting on the French as a colonizing power, he stated, " . . . as a matter of fact, the colonizing influence of France rarely extends beyond the

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24 Articles from the magazines La Vie parisienne and Le Rappel and descriptions from Revue de l'Exposition Universelle de 1889, are quoted in length by Fauser, ibid.
27 Tiersot, Musiques pittoresques. Promenades musicales à l'Exposition de 1889, 111.
range of her cannon. The French are a homesick nation”; in addition, the writer continued, “If they leave their country for foreign parts, it is always with the idea of gaining money to be spent on a little villa in some part of la Belle France.”

Whether irritated or polemic, the brief comments of the press make two main points about basic attitudes of the French public towards colonies and exoticism. First, the exotic must not be realistic—whereas the colonies are real—and it should instead be fabricated and accommodated to reality in order to be pleasant. Second, the colonies are in opposition to home, they represent “the other,” and they are instrumental in the creation of wealth (economic, cultural, political, etc.) of France, the homeland. These two attitudes, as the next chapters will make evident, were reflected in the operas of the fin de siècle. Although the literary works and operas of the 1890s acknowledged the reality of the colonies by contrasting the wealth of the West (France) to the poverty of the colonies, they continued to refer to sensuality and mysteriousness in their settings and peoples. French operatic exoticism of this period, however, originated from literary works of artists and explorers who had actually traveled abroad. Filtering imperialistic and colonial reality

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through their “conventional lenses,” they contributed to the formation of beliefs regarding exoticism.

3. French Expeditions

On the sixth of January 1874 the Commission de voyages et missions scientifiques et littéraires was established within the Ministère de l'Instruction publique. The committee that evaluated all applications, reported Raoul Blaise de Saint-Arroman, established the number of French explorations by assessing the importance of the projects, according to their “choice, order, use, regulations, balance, and to their practical results.” The committee also believed that “... the most current interest, the most direct profit, and the most urgent necessity for France and its rivals is to persistently follow step-by-step the scientific movement.” The Commission’s preferences for specific scientific missions and literary voyages stemmed from the need to organize and direct expeditions towards potential or past colonies. The main goal of the expeditions was to fulfill the educational ideals of the mission civilisatrice, first at home, by systematically examining and comparing lands and cultures

30 Ibid., “[Cette commission] pense... que l’actualité la plus saisissante, l’intêret le plus prochain, la nécessité la plus urgente, pour notre pays comme pour ses rivaux, est de suivre pas à pas, sans relâche, le mouvement scientifique.”
through artifacts and notes, and secondly abroad, by founding religious and academic institutions.\textsuperscript{31}

Among the expeditions sponsored by the \textit{Commission}, Saint-Arroman pointed out those to the Congo, where Brazza, Ballay and Marche cleared the paths that later became roads; to America, where new rivers and ancient towns were discovered by Crevaux, Pinart and Charnay; to Egypt, where Mariette and Maspero founded the French school later called \textit{Institut français d'archéologie orientale}; and within Europe, where the geographic research excursions ventured to Scandinavia. He continued his review of French scientific accomplishments from the beginning of the Third Republic through the 1880s by also mentioning French journeys to Africa: scientific missions in Tunisia; evangelical missions in central Africa; explorations in the Kalahari desert and the Sahara desert; journeys across the Sahara to Sudan; botanical and linguistic research in Guyana; the archeological mission in Persia; and finally, sea-life research in the Mediterranean waters.\textsuperscript{32}

Although directly linking scientific explorations and religious missions with plots and music of the operas under discussion would be pure speculation, the numerous reports of such travels in journals and books of the 1800s demonstrate how widely available the idea of the exotic was in both popular

\textsuperscript{31} In the rush of colonial expansionism, in 1880, the Parliament approved the \textit{Commission}'s 500,000 franc budget, the highest budget ever provided. See Saint-Arroman, ibid., 17.

\textsuperscript{32} For more information and photographs of French colonies see also: Pierre Legendre, \textit{Notre Épopée coloniale} (Paris: Charles Tallandier, 1900).
and academic cultures. Since a large quantity of voyagers’ annotations were available in both scholarly and popular publications, the reports reached intellectuals as well as common readers, and inspired artists, writers, and musicians, as well.\textsuperscript{33} Therefore, for a better understanding of how scientific explorations and missionary travels paralleled the works analyzed in this dissertation, it is important to mention a few details about the travels that explored the areas in which the selected operas take place: Persia, Egypt, India, Senegal, and Tahiti.

According to Saint-Arroman, from 1886 to 1889 the archeologist Jacques de Morgan settled in the Caucasus to carry out geological, archeological, and historical research. In 1886, the scientist brought back to Paris “une inscription sur pierre en vieux caractères géorgiens.” (An inscription on stone in old Georgian characters).\textsuperscript{34} The inscription came from

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{33} Among the most-read magazines that published travelers’ accounts were the \textit{Annales des voyages, de la géographie et de l'histoire} (1807-1819), \textit{Nouvelles annales des voyages} (1819-1865); \textit{Revue coloniale} (1843-1858) that later became \textit{Revue algérienne et coloniale} (1859-1860); \textit{Revue maritime et coloniale} (1861-1898); \textit{L'Explorateur. Journal géographique et commercial} (1875-1876) that later became \textit{L'Exploration. Journal des conquêtes sur tous les points du globe} (1876-1884); \textit{Gazette géographique} (1885-1887); \textit{Revue française de l'étranger et des colonies} (1890-1914). On the academic side the following publications appeared: \textit{Bulletin de la Société de géographie de Paris} (1822-1899); \textit{Les Annales de géographie} (1891); \textit{Bulletins de la Société d'anthropologie de Paris}. On the popular side the following publications were the most sold: \textit{Journal des voyages et des aventures de Terre et de Mer} (1877-1929); \textit{Tour du monde} (1860-1914). The \textit{Bulletin du Comité de l’Afrique française} (1891-1908) and \textit{Quinzaine coloniale} (1897-1914) were published by the \textit{Union coloniale française} and had a colonial agenda. Among the religious publications, there was \textit{Missions catholiques} (1868). For information about French periodicals dealing with colonial issues see: Roland Lebel, \textit{Histoire de la littérature coloniale en France}, 206-210 (see Introduction, n. 9).
\textsuperscript{34} Saint-Arroman, “Les Missions françaises,”163-64. Jacques de Morgan also wrote \textit{Histoire du peuple arméen}, (Marseille: Académie de Marseille, 1881), as a result of his research. In this study, I have translated all the French quotations.
\end{footnotesize}
the monastery of Achtala, in the Caucasus and, according to Morgan himself, dated to the period of the Georgian Queen Tamara (1184-1212).\textsuperscript{35} The stone that weighed one hundred kilos was brought to the Louvre, in Paris, where many linguists attempted to decipher the inscription.\textsuperscript{36} Although a direct link between this discovery and the making of the opera \textit{Thamara} is a matter of speculation, it is safe to assume that the discovery and its placement in the Louvre were well publicized; this fact might have stimulated the public’s imagination and helped to circulate information about the area and its history.

Egypt, too, attracted Morgan, who was appointed General Director of the Egyptian Museums and Excavations in 1892, after French Egyptologist Grébaut and many other French and English scholars of the time. It was a great success for the French to have their citizens at the post in spite of English control of the region. At the time that Grébaut discovered the ancient Egyptian site of Luxor, where Ammon’s priests were buried, the English press accused the scholar of being the cause of all the regrettable things that happened to the Egyptian monuments, including the uncontrollable thefts by visitors, “\textit{anglais pour la plupart}” (the majority of which, English), and requested that Grébaut be replaced by an Englishman.\textsuperscript{37} The competition between the British and the French was indeed not only scientific, but also political. After sharing Egypt’s

\textsuperscript{35} Thamara was the name of the heroine from Baku as well as the title of the first exotic opera of the 1890s, by Louis Albert Bourgault- Ducoudray and Louis Gallet (1891). The plot and analysis of this opera will be discussed in chapter 2 below.

\textsuperscript{36} Saint-Arroman, “Les Missions françaises,” 163-64.

\textsuperscript{37} Ibid.
resources with the British from 1878, and facing strong tensions during 1882, France was ousted by England in 1883, after the British invaded the country and established it as a protectorate. However, even after being defeated by the British, France continued to explore Egyptian lands, not only through scientific expeditions, but also through imaginative literary and operatic descriptions of the region's legendary past.38

French direct involvement with India had been short, too, and the competition with British expansionism steadily grew throughout the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries. French Catholic missions in India started early in the seventeenth century, and in 1664 the French East India Company was formed. The company gave financial support to the Catholic missionaries, who were agents of the company.39 However, the strong competition of British traders and missionaries, together with the tension created by the Anglo-French conflict of the Seven Years War and the superiority of the English navy, contributed to the French failure in India. Nevertheless, once again, France kept India alive in its fictional literary and

38 Massenet and Gallet's *Thaïs* (1894) takes place in Egyptian Alexandria. Even if not explicitly written in the libretto or score, the story takes place around the third or fourth century, when Christianity spread through Egypt and Christian monasticism began in the Egyptian desert.

musical works, celebrating it especially for its mystical qualities, with no
reference to the contemporary situation.\footnote{Lefebvre and Lomon's \textit{Djelma} (1894) takes place in India in the eighteenth century.}

In Africa, French expeditions were numerous and well reported. In
particular, the voyages through the Sahara desert seemed to be of particular
interest for French explorers. Foureau explored several regions of the desert,
and \"son influence active a préparé à la France des succès pacifiques et
féconds\" (his active influence prepared a peaceful and prosperous success for
France).\footnote{Saint-Arroman, \"Les Mission françaises,\" 89.} In 1876-7, he went for the first time to the far south of the Algerian
region with Louis Say, crossing the desert southbound in 1892. He wrote long
reports on natural science, cultural aspects, geographical observations, and
even reported local legends.\footnote{See also Gaspard-Théodore Mollien, \textit{Voyage dans l'intérieur de l'Afrique: aux sources du
Sénégal et de la Gambie, fait en 1818}. 2\textsuperscript{nd} edition. (Paris: A. Bertrand, 1822).} The great accounts, however, come from the
memoirs of officers and missionaries.\footnote{See Ernest Bolis, \textit{Mémoires d'un sous-officier: mes campagnes en Afrique et en Asie de 1889
à 1899}. (Chalon-sur-Saône: Courrier de Saône-et-Loire, 1905). Mother Anne-Marie Javouhey, foundress of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Cluny opened the first French schools in 1820, and
Cerf, 1994).} The Abbé Boilat wrote, \"Comme les préjugés de couleur sont inconnus au Sénégal, [les habitants] vivent en bons
concitoyens avec les Européens\" (Since prejudices of color are not known in
Senegal, the natives live as good fellow-citizens with the Europeans). And he
continued:
La majeure partie des négociants français, beaucoup de marchands et d'autres Européens sont mariés légitimement avec les filles des habitants... Les unions libres ou temporaires, qui se faisaient autrefois sous le nom de mariages à la mode du pays, et dont plusieurs voyageurs ont parlé, sont tombés... dans le mépris et le déshonneur.  

(The majority of French businessmen, many merchants, and other Europeans are legally married with natives' daughters... The free or temporary unions that were once considered marriages, according to the country’s customs and about which many travelers have talked, have fallen... into contempt and disgrace).

These and other relevant comments about the people of Senegal and the French colonists inspired musical and literary works that romanticized life in the colonies and survival in their arid landscapes.  

Oceania, and in particular Tahiti, attracted French travelers and missionaries during the first fifty years of the nineteenth century. In 1836, French Catholic missionaries failed to settle in Tahiti because they were chased by English missionaries and colonists; however, in 1839 French commander Laplace intervened, and established rules for all Catholics’ activities. By then, there were already a few European residents in Tahiti, and marriages between Tahitian women and foreign men were regulated by the Tahitian legislators and controlled by the Church, according to the writings of Dupetit-Thouars, the

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45 *Le Spahi* by Lambert and Gallet/ Alexandre (1897) takes place in Saint-Louis, in Senegal, at the end of the nineteenth century.
46 Louis-Antoine de Bougainville, however, had already explored the area in 1768. See Michel Claude Touchard, *Les Voyages de Bougainville* (Papeete: Les Éditions du Pacifique, 1974).
captain of the ship Reine Blanche. The French established their protectorate in 1842 by drawing in more of their military forces and attracting interest from France itself. The French naval officer Edmond de Bovis, who traveled to Tahiti for the first time in 1837, and who participated in the conflicts between English and French there (1843-1846), wrote a booklet on Tahitian society that appeared for the first time in La Revue Coloniale in 1855. In his report, he described the laws that governed marriage, land ownership, and inter-racial marriage, and illustrated how political and religious organizations functioned at the time. The meticulous descriptions of the Tahitian people and their customs inspired and encouraged artists and writers to travel in the Pacific later in the century; in turn, their art stimulated the imaginations of musicians and librettists. Although the popularity of these reports from foreign countries reached a large group of readers, what really constructed the exotic vision of those countries were their literary and romantic portrayals by French writers and poets who traveled abroad.

50 Reynaldo Hahn and André Alexandre/Georges Hartman’s L’Île du rêve (1898) takes place in Tahiti, at the end of the nineteenth century.
C. Exoticism in Nineteenth-Century French Literature

Throughout the nineteenth century, the style of French "exotic" literature developed according to writers' perceptions of the foreign countries, their knowledge about those countries, and their possible life experience in distant countries. First, in the times preceding the Second Colonial Empire, before the systematic colonial expansion took place and while exposure to overseas regions was minimal, writers of the exotic envisioned the faraway lands and people as legendary and unreachable worlds. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, when France asserted its presence abroad and many travelers had had opportunities to visit the settlements, the exotic settings of novels became more realistic, palpable, and dramatic. Regions under control of other European powers also inspired French writers and poets during colonial times; however, the novels portrayed those lands as distant, mythical, and often esoteric, and most often unaffected by Westerners. In both pre-colonial and colonial times, however, plots and settings in French exotic literature had always distanced the West from the rest of the world, making that contrast the main subject of exoticism, and always rendering the foreign lands mysterious and adventurous.

Exoticism progressed hand in hand with an appreciation for adventure until the 1870s, when they converged and took shape as a genre in popular literature. By the 1880s the genre was well established, and specialized
publishers—i.e., Hetzel and Tallandier—printed novels in the collections *Bibliothèque des grandes aventures* and *Le Livre national: romans d’aventures et d’explorations*, and the periodical *Le journal des voyages*. The stories featured young and scornful heroes. Other popular novels of the 1880s and 1890s carried a clear didactic agenda. They included Jules Verne’s *Les Voyages extraordinaires: Kéraban-le-têtu*, Louis Boussenard’s *Le tour du monde d’un gamin de Paris*, and Paul d’Ivoi’s *Voyages excentriques*.\(^{51}\) The purpose of these popular novels was indeed to introduce other cultures and lands around the world, but always with a propensity to describe the exotic as inferior to French civilization. In addition, specific regions inspired a few writers of the popular adventurous-exotic genre; for example, Louis Noir wrote about Africa; and Gabriel de La Landelle and Édouard Corbière, about South America; Alfred Assolant set his novels in Asia; and Gustave Armand and Gabriel Ferry, in North America.\(^{52}\)

Besides the novelists of the popular-exotic genre, others in intellectual and literary circles also approached the idea of the exotic from mid century on; however, they narrated their personal experiences in countries abroad rather than fantasizing about those locations, shaping their prose in a more reflective


and intimate tone, and directing their works to a more specialized audience.\textsuperscript{53} Later in the century, the roman colonial emerged from this intellectual exotic trend. This was a literary genre directly concerned with life in the colonized regions, in which the protagonist—frequently the author himself—witnesses or directly participates in the conflict between the West and the “other.” Poetry and images (paintings and drawings) often accompanied the prose, to render the imagery even more suggestive.

The literary genre of popular-exotic adventure, as well as the more sophisticated roman colonial had a great impact on French opera, as the next chapters of the dissertation will illustrate. Although a great quantity of French exotic literature was produced during the last half of the nineteenth century, this study will confine itself to the works that significantly influenced the creation of French exotic operas of the 1890s, and, in particular, to the literary sources of three librettos: Anatole France’s Thaïs, and Pierre Loti’s Le Roman d’un Spahi and his Le Mariage de Loti. In other operas, even if librettists did not choose a literary work as their source, they always fashioned the libretto following the stylistic and dramatic model of exotic literature. The question of how “difference” molded these literary works will be of particular interest for

the understanding of the discussed operas. On the one hand, when the exotic
did not represent any specific place, the "other" consisted of a vague dream,
intangible, and often mystical. When, on the other hand, exotic imagery
depicted a more realistic setting, and recreated existent or possible situations in
specific places—mostly French and British colonies—difference collided
directly with the West. The influence of both tendencies—the intangible exotic
and the realistic exotic—will be discussed in the following two sections.
Recurrent themes that describe the exotic will be the topic of the third section
of this chapter. These aspects of literature had a tremendous effect on French
operas of the nineteenth century and a strong impact on the exotic operas
performed in the 1890s.

1. The Intangible Exotic: Bovarysm, Escapism, and Mysticism

Victor Segalen thought of exoticism as the spirit of diversity, the
aesthetic ideal, "the feeling which Diversity stirs in me . . . and the practice of
this very feeling; its pursuit, its play, its greatest freedom . . ." Post-colonial
cultural studies took a step further from Segalen's poetic account of exoticism
and viewed literary exoticism as a reflection of the writer's ideology and
experience. Taking matters even further, and recognizing both Segalen's and

57. The collection of Segalen's notes was first published in 1955 with the same title, but
Segalen wrote them between 1904 and 1918.
post-colonial views, this dissertation explores writers' desire and need to
admire diversity as their own longing for change and their own pursuit of new
experiences, which was typical of mid-century and fin-de-siècle intellectuals
and artists.

The idea of viewing difference as an alternative to one's unhappy or
frustrated life was well incorporated in the concept of Bovarysm, introduced in
1892 by Jules de Gaultier.55 Explaining Gaultier's term, Georges Palante
wrote, "dans le sens empirique... le mot bovarysme désigne un fait de
psychologie courante que tout homme a pu observer sur lui-même et dont
Flaubert a montré l'évolution et décrit les effets dans l'âme de ses principaux
personnages. Ce fait est le pouvoir qu'a l'homme de se concevoir autre qu'il
n'est" (In the empirical sense... the word bovarysme denotes a current
psychological fact that everybody can observe in him/herself; Flaubert has
shown its evolution and described its effects in the souls of his main
characters’).56 To specify the nature of the concept, he added, "Ce qui
caractérise le bovarysme, c'est l'inconscience de l'hypnose, c'est la sincérité
du rêve que l'on vit éveillé. Dans le véritable bovarysme, aucun calcul égoïste
n'entre en jeu" (What characterizes bovarysme is the unconscious state of
hypnosis, the sincerity of the daydream. In true bovarysme there is no selfish

55 The term refers to Flaubert's Madame Bovary (1857) in Jules de Gaultier, Le Bovarysme
(Paris: Cerf, 1892).
scheming involved).\textsuperscript{57} In fact, the characters of Flaubert's \textit{Madame Bovary}, and in particular the protagonist, all dream of an ideal life, an alternative to the misery of provincial life. Even if not set in an exotic context, \textit{Madame Bovary} made direct references to the Orient; the protagonist dreams of all the Oriental clichés: harems, veiled dances, princesses and princes, and most often associates “the Orient and the freedom of licentious sex.”\textsuperscript{58} The uniqueness of the exotic dream in \textit{Madame Bovary} lay in the fact that it appears in daydreams in which the Orient represents an ideal, but the setting of the novel is a real place, provincial France.\textsuperscript{59}

Flaubert took Orientalism much further in \textit{Salammbô} (1862), set in a remote place, Carthage, and in remote times, 241 B.C.; this idealized setting immediately inspired operas.\textsuperscript{60} The desire to escape the reality of both Parisian and provincial France, paired with the dream of the Orient as the contrast to that reality, also inspired the creativity of poets. Charles Baudelaire and Arthur Rimbaud often referred to specific geographical places, even if not explicitly

\textsuperscript{57} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{58} Said, \textit{Orientalism}, 190.
\textsuperscript{59} Flaubert however had already traveled in Egypt and reported his impressions in his letters. See \textit{Flaubert in Egypt: A Sensibility on Tour}, ed. and trans. Francis Steegmuller (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1973).
\textsuperscript{60} \textit{Salammbô} provided the source for a projected grand opera by Modest Petrovich Mussorgsky to his own libretto by the same title (1863-1866). In addition, Ernest Reyer and Camille du Locle also wrote an operatic version of Flaubert’s \textit{Salammbô} with the same title (1890). Hector Berlioz’s \textit{Les Troyens} (1856-8), from Virgil’s \textit{Aeneid}, also takes place in the antiquity in Carthage and Troy.
aiming to represent exotic places or people. Baudelaire created a surrealistic reality by means of exotic images—fabrics, metals, perfumes, and flowers—that epitomize the beauty and freedom that, he believed, transcended the confinement of nineteenth-century Paris. Rimbaud also used exotic imagery as an escape from reality. "Les voyages imaginaires de Rimbaud font partie de ce dérèglement des sens que toute la littérature romantique cherchait avant lui."
(Rimbaud’s imaginary journeys are part of that deregulation of the senses that all Romantic literature was looking for before he did). Through the Rimbaudian dérèglement des sens, that is, the release of all inhibited sensuality, the writer completely denies his reality, in an active pursuit of new, different, and alternative experiences, where freedom is represented by exotic landscapes. The search for a frisson nouveau, the escapism characteristic of most writings of the nineteenth century and many operas, had a particularly exotic twist. As Michael G. Lerner explained, “The exotic is... the means of escape for the rebel and the refuge for the voyeur.” To the public, the language of the exotic suggested emancipation from mundane real life and proposed a safe place away from triviality.

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61 See Charles Baudelaire’s *Petits Poèmes en prose* (1857) and *L’Invitation au voyage* (1855), and Paul Verlaine’s *Le Bateau ivre* (1883).
Emancipation from the ordinary also promised release from ethical values and opened up the possibility of new spiritual experiences. The foreign settings in French literary exoticism permitted the exploration of esoteric religions and philosophies distant from the predictability of a Sunday sermon, and many exotic and colonial novels provided settings for spiritual journeys. In these, the fulfillment of mystical desires and a dream world converge; and when representative of a desire rather than a real place, exoticism often signified mysticism, which is a form of escape, too. Both the mystic and the exoticist, Mario Praz explained, “transfer the fulfillment of their desires to an ideal, a dream world.” The first “culminates in a world that does not exist,” and the second “succeeds to such an extent in making itself concrete in time or space (or both) that it gives the artist the illusion of an actual former existence in the atmosphere he loves.” Here the exotic locale represents a transcendent paradise, where all is possible, all is beautiful, and all is natural. Several writers and composers employed exotic imagery as the representation of spirituality. The subject of religion and exoticism will therefore be discussed in this chapter as a recurrent theme in French literature, and in chapter 2 of this dissertation, as a frequent subject in French exotic operas.

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65 Ibid., 211.
2. The Existing Exotic: the "Roman Colonial"

The exotic world imagined by poets and artists became less and less remote at the end of the nineteenth century. French colonies reproduced the cultural and social structures of the motherland, while modernity was taking over local traditions. "No part of the world [was] . . . exempt from this fin de siècle insight into the dissolution of the 'unknown' alternative worlds and the repetitive appearance in their place of 'our' world," wrote Bongie. Consequently, writers of the exotic found it more difficult to keep alive the exotic ideas and language exploited in the past, when exotic meant "unknown."

The traditional early-century literary exoticism that modeled the unreachable "other" faded, leaving room for the roman colonial in which the reality of the life in the colonies—the "new" exotic locales—constituted the main subject. Before the growth of colonial expansion of the late 1800s, exotic novelists and poets viewed and wrote about indigenous life in a foreign land as a reality unconnected to theirs. In the roman colonial, however, the writers' experiences in the colonies paralleled those of their characters: the European man coming from the European metropolis lives in the colony and formulates his

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66 For a semi-fictional report of colonial life see: Delafosse, "Les états d'âme d'un colonial."
67 Bongie, Exotic memories: Literature, Colonialism, and the Fin de Siècle, 19.
68 In this dissertation literature of roman colonial refers only to French colonial literature written by French authors born in France and not in the colonies; however, the genre later expands to the literature written by authors native to French colonies.
impressions and descriptions of the environment. The authors’ direct experience with the natives and the land sounded believable to many. Lebel wrote, “Les écrivains coloniaux proprement dits . . . édifient leurs romans sur des documents solides et étendent la portée de leur œuvre en l’ouvrant à des considérations non seulement psychologiques mais ethniques et sociales.” (True colonial writers . . . build their novels on solid documents and extend the importance of their work by opening it not only to psychological considerations, but also to ethnic and social ones.) Lebel believed that the colonial writer “ne fait pas que décrire des paysages ou des états de sa propre sensibilité, il observe autour de lui, il s’impègne de la réalité et s’efforce de pénétrer en elle par une sorte d’intuition sympathique.” (does not only describe landscapes or his own states of sensibility; he looks around himself, he commits to reality, and he makes the effort to penetrate it through a sort of sympathetic intuition). Even if the accuracy of their descriptions is often arguable, colonial writers tried to take a closer look at the realities of the colonized peoples. On the other hand, as Lebel maintained, “Le voyageur n’est qu’un passant qui ne peut pas connaître un pays pour l’avoir simplement visité.” (The traveler is just a passerby who cannot know a country just because

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71 Ibid., 84.
he has simply visited it).72 “Littérature touristique,” Lebel wrote in 1936, “s’apparente à un genre aujourd’hui périmé: l’exotisme selon la vieille formule, impressionnisme superficiel qui ne tient compte que du décor, du costume . . .” (Tourist literature relates to a genre that today is obsolete, that is, the exoticism according to the old formula, the superficial impressionism that takes account of the decorations and the costumes only . . .).73

Despite Lebel’s attempts to describe colonial narrative as a documented source of the colonial world, most of the romans coloniaux still reflected the mentality of the European writer in the process of looking at the “other” through his own cultural biases, paradoxically maintaining the myth of the exotic. The roman colonial in fact continued to perpetuate a prejudiced image of the natives—wherever they were from—based on the “scientific” assumptions of racial differences of the time. Sometimes colonial writers were interested in pseudo-scientific descriptions of the natives and places. For example, in Paul Vigné d’Octon’s Chair Noire (1889) and Pierre Loti’s Le Spahi (1881) a realistic treatment of war, misery, and corruption in the colony shaped the narrative, eventually substituting for exotic mysticism and reverie a sort of exotic naturalism.74 Other times writers were distraught by the loss of

72 Ibid.
73 Ibid., 79.
74 “Exoticism” and “Naturalism” describe two different literary trends. “Naturalism” comprised explicit, detailed, and often crude descriptions of lower class urban life, whereas “Exoticism” consisted of the interpretation of life in foreign lands. The two trends converged
identity of the “noble savage,” in the Diderot and Rousseau tradition, e.g., Pierre Loti’s *Le Mariage de Loti* (1880), Jules Boissière’s *Fumeurs d’opium* (1896), and Guy de Maupassant’s short story “Allouma” in the collection *Au Soleil* (1889).

Whether pseudo-scientific or nostalgic, and cleared at once from elusive exotic images, the interpretation of the colonial reality from an insider’s point of view had become the concern of colonial writers. “In their rejection of the exotic novel many colonial novelists echoed the terms in which, half a century before, the Realists had rejected Romanticism.”75 In the *roman colonial*, the quest for the ideal alternative world became futile, as reality had replaced the ideal object of the search: there was no more search at the core of the narrative. Bongie explained that the *fin-de-siècle* colonial writers necessarily “register[ed] the exotic as a space of absence, a dream already given to the past.”76 Instead, the writer of the *roman colonial* replaced the absent exoticism with “un espace qui lui est propre, ou qui lui est dû” (A space that he owns or that is due to him).77 In sum, the *roman colonial* envisioned the colony as the West within the exotic, while the ideal exotic of earlier times, before the *roman colonial*, had disappeared but was longed for.

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in a few novels. For example, *Le Roman d’un Spahi* (1881) and *Chair Noire* (1889), described cruelty and war in the colonies and the “lowness” of their inhabitants.


If the literary colony idealized the lost “alternative” life in imagery that suggested nostalgic feelings, Pierre Loti’s *Le Mariage de Loti* epitomized the *roman colonial.* In an almost autobiographical fashion, the author told about the Tahitians’ world. He identified with their customs, and, fearing Western contamination, he perpetuated the myth of the noble savage. In this colonized setting, the author described the protagonist of the novel as an outsider who has become part of the locale: he lives in the tableau, but temporarily; he is not a tourist, but he is not a native; he thinks like a European, but he is often dressed in native clothes. He is a visitor who has chosen to sojourn in an exotic land, carrying with himself all the cultural values of his own country without ever embracing the local culture. In the same way, during his time in South Algeria, Guy de Maupassant wrote about the Algerians, “... *je pensai à ce peuple vaincu au milieu duquel nous campons, ou plutôt qui campe au milieu de nous, dont nous commençons à parler la langue, que nous voyons vivre chaque jour sous la toile transparente de ses tentes, à qui nous imposons nos lois, nos règlements et nos coutumes, et dont nous ignorons tout, mais tout, entendez-vous.*” (I thought of those defeated people among whom we camp, or better, who camp around us and whose language we are beginning to speak; whom we see living under the transparent canvas of their tents; and on whom

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*Loti’s *Le Mariage de Loti* (1880) was the literary source for Hahn’s and Alexandre/Hartmann’s *L’Ile du rêve.*

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we impose our laws, our rules and customs, and of whom we know nothing, nothing, you understand.)

In an illuminating brief passage about Loti’s novel, Barthes defined the sojourn as “A fragile form [that] serves as a transition or passage between an ethical intoxication (the love of an art of living) and a national engagement (or, as we would say, politics): this is the sojourn.” Barthes explained, “Loti knows, transposed into modern terms, the three graduated moments of all alienation: the journey, the sojourn, and naturalization . . . Of these three moments, the most contradictory is the sojourn (the residence): here the subject no longer has the tourist’s ethical irresponsibility (who is simply a national on tour), but does not have the citizen’s responsibility (civilian, political, military).” Loti’s status as “resident” showed in all of his novels. Results of long sojourns in various regions of the world, the novels develop the author’s notes and diaries. The author himself was always represented by one of the characters of his novels. In the case of Le Mariage de Loti, the protagonist, whose name is also Loti, is a resident in the way Barthes defined it. He is “a tourist who repeats his desire to remain,” and who is simply “an amateur of tableaux, of photographs,” and can satisfy any desire without fear because of

80 Barthes, New Critical Essays, 117.
81 Ibid. Barthes referred to Loti’s novel Aziyadé, but his comment can well apply to all novels by Pierre Loti.
his “knowledge of sites, manners, and language” of the place. The protagonist is a French navy officer living on the island, who is familiar with local culture and personalities. He lives on the island, and loves the tableaux to which he belongs; however, he is always free to leave and go back to his country, which in fact, he eventually does.

While the historical setting of *Le Mariage de Loti* is not exactly colonial—Tahiti had been a protectorate since 1847 and was not yet considered part of the “Établissement français in Oceania—Loti’s *Le Roman d’un Spahi* (1881) takes place in a colony. The semi-autobiographical novel finds its background in Senegal, a French colony subdued by violent military action during those years. In the novel, the quasi-realistic portrait of the colony, its constant turmoil, and the harsh representation of the Sudanese and their land had a characteristic naturalistic trait that theatrical performances had reinforced, too. On the other hand, in the theatrical versions the

82 Ibid., 118.
83 Loti’s *Le Roman d’un Spahi* (1881) was the literary source for Lambert’s and Gallet/Alexandre’s *Le Spahi*. French literary works about the region had already been published before Loti’s novel, and the harsh stories about the war in the region had been the subject of later colonial literature, too. Louis Faidherbe, who was the governor of the colony of Senegal (1852-65) wrote *Le Sénégal* in the 1860s, but his book was published in 1889; Eugene Mage wrote *Voyage dans le Soudan occidental* (1868). For more information on colonial literature on Senegal see: Lebel, *Histoire de la littérature coloniale en France*, 130; and the collection of colonial literature, *Sénégal: les Livres anciens et modernes de Soumbala* (Accessed 5 October 2004), <http://www.soumbala.com/catalogues/seng/chap10.htm#49>.
84 Adolphe Belot, *La Vénus noire*, a five-act play in twelve parts, performed for the first time at the Théâtre du Châtelet, on 7 September 1879; E. Gugenheim and G. Lefaure, *Cinq Mois au Soudan*, a vast military pantomime in four parts, performed the first time in the Arènes du Bois de Boulogne, on 13 July 1891; Dennery, *La Conquête du Dahomey*, a military and history play, performed for the first time at the Théâtre du Châtelet; F. Oswald, E. Gugenheim and
representation of cruelty mirrored the representations often promoted by the press: the Sudanese were savages who knew nothing of the civilized world and were very cruel.  

Loti had always opposed the naturalist literary trend, but his approach to cruelty and violence is reminiscent of the naturalist literature’s approach to Parisian urban life. The Mercure de France described Loti as a “naturaliste inconscient”; naturaliste because of the author’s careful descriptions of people and landscapes, but inconscient since Loti never explicitly adopted the naturalist viewpoint. In fact, he dismissed Naturalisme in his acceptance speech at the Académie française. He accused realism and naturalism of being excesses and focusing only on people in big cities. He blamed them for cynically portraying morbid phenomena characteristic of Paris only. He also criticized the Naturalists for false depiction of the lower class (paysans, laboureurs).

G. Lefaure, Au Dahomey, five-act play, performed for the first time at the Théâtre de la Porte Saint-Martin, on 10 December 1892; Béhanzin ou la prise de Kana by Garnier and Mihiel, a pantomime performed at the Bataclan in February 1893; Patara au Dahomey by Boucart and Marietti, a pantomime performed at the Théâtre des Nouveautés in December 1895; La Guerre au Dahomey by Marot, Péricaud and Noellet, a play performed in Amiens in December 1892; Les Aventures de trois Marseillais au Dahomey by Maunier, Normand and Graffan performed in Marseilles in July 1893.

For Parisian theater, the portrayal of Africans in the late nineteenth century, and the influence of the press, see: Sylvie Chalaye, “Du Dangereux Indigène au cannibale sympathique: les images du théâtre à l’époque coloniale,” Africultures 3 (December 1997).


Two political and literary journalists who called themselves Marius-Ary Leblond argued that the Naturalists lacked “a genuine interest in other races.” The two writers accused them, and Vigny d’Octon in particular, of “intellectual arrogance in dismissing those irrational aspects of behavior [that are] important to an understanding of primitive peoples.” However, they also criticized Loti for doing “de la féerie exotique,” (an exotic extravaganza) while the roman colonial should be intended to reveal “l’intimité des races et des âmes de colons ou indigènes” (the intimacy of the races and of the souls of the colonists or the natives). They also felt that the genre should not only be “une machine à décors et une matière à aventures” (a vehicle for scenery and a topic for adventures). The roman colonial for them should explore social and psychological issues that were only found in the “romans métropolitains des Balzac, des Zola ou des Bourget” (Balzac, Zola, or Bourget’s metropolitan novels).

Loti approached naturalism when, in Le Roman d’un Spahi, he attempted to describe the life of a soldier in a colony. Jean, the main character of the novel, is a “resident” of the colony, as in Barthes’ definition. The reality of the protagonist does not have the idyllic connotation that the fictional Loti

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88 Ridley, Images of Imperial Rule, 84.
89 Ibid.
91 Ibid.
92 Ibid.
had in *Le Mariage de Loti*. Instead, Jean’s struggles with the conflict between his nationalistic loyalty to his country and love for his French family on one side, and the turbulent, violent, but sensual Africa, on the other. In *Le Roman d’un Spahi*, “L’opposition est connotée moralement: en France, tout ce qui est honnête, naïf et bon; au Sénégal le plaisir, même la beauté, ne peuvent être qu’impur et malsains” (The opposition is morally suggested: in France all that is honest, naive, and good; in Senegal, pleasure and even beauty can only be impure and unhealthy), wrote Denise Brahimi. In fact, while the protagonist longs for his motherland, he also becomes intoxicated with the sensuality of the place and people. He describes his surroundings with familiarity, as a resident, and yet he despises them.

In sum, idyllic or hostile, the environment described in colonial novels always appeared as a temporary home where cultures clashed without ever resolving their conflict, and as a “real” sensual place where the ideal exotic did not exist any more. In this literary colonial framework, however, exotic tropes continued to spring up, carrying on the tradition set earlier in the century, even if they stemmed from a “realistic” far-away setting that was always opposed to urban life. These themes, analyzed in the following discussion, not only characterized the conventional language of the exotic throughout the

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nineteenth century, but also constituted the distinctive foundations of operatic exoticism.


Exotic literature changed its focus during the nineteenth century: the mysterious, unreachable, and nonexistent lands and peoples of the stories from early in the century turned into colonized, accessible and real lands and peoples in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. At first, the main motivating forces for the development of the exotic plot involved adventure in love and battle, and the voyage of a non-Western hero to exotic and mysterious lands inhabited by fascinating people. In other words, exotic literature rearranged and transposed into an exotic setting the fundamental mythological theme of the hero’s journey.⁹⁵ In this epic-exotic context, the hero’s initiation “centers around the encounter with a world that, in its barbarism, is radically different from his own; where there [is] no exotic realm, there could be no heroic voyage as such.” ⁹⁶ However, in this exotic realm, “otherness” was not directly in conflict with the Western world. Similar to mythological stories, the

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⁹⁵ See: François-René Chateaubriand’s *Atala*, (1801) and Victor Hugo’s *La Légende des Siècles* (1859, 1877, 1883).

⁹⁶ Bongie, *Exotic Memories*, 51. In this passage, Bongie refers to Jules Verne’s *Michel Strogoff* (1876).
epic-exotic world did not include modern France in the narrative, and it is not until the late eighteenth century that the European hero was featured in exotic literature, specifically in the roman colonial.

By introducing the figure of the Western hero, colonial literature shifted its focus from the representation of "otherness" to a large and unequivocal general theme: the opposition between East and West. The development of this theme occurred through three broad narrative premises that included objects placed in clear opposition to each other: the love between a native and a European, the exotic landscape and the faraway homeland, and finally, paganism and Christianity. In unfolding these themes, the roman colonial often re-used the images and literary clichés that had represented and defined the exotic since the early century, but elaborated them in a new fashion. In order to clarify how the language of the exotic changed in the last decade of the century, it is first necessary to investigate the three general dramatic characteristics of the novels: love, religion, and landscape.

a. Love, Sexuality, and Miscegenation

A great deal of literary criticism in the last two decades has focused on the topic of love, sex, and literary exoticism, and recently these topics have appeared in musicological studies on exotic operas.\(^\text{97}\) Both literary and music

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\(^{97}\) Dawson, *Soldiers Heroes: British Adventure, Empire, and the Imagining of Masculinities* (see Introduction, n.6); Lewis, *Gendering Orientalism* (see Introduction, n. 4); Pal-Lapinski, *Defiant Odalisques: Exoticism, Resistance and the Female Body in Nineteenth-Century Fiction*
criticism found that in most cases the concept of “otherness” in exotic literature was personified by the female native figure. In early exotic literature, she normally interacts with a non-Western male who comes from a different village or region, and is therefore considered foreign. He is often a leader at home who wants to conquer the land where she lives. Classic tragedy exemplifies this relationship. For example, in the Histories of Erodes, as Bongie pointed out, “the exotic subject transgress[es] the limits of his own society and pass[es] over into a world where sovereign action remains possible.”98 In colonial literature, however, the heroine’s exotic image, that is, the “other” or the colony according to Said, is secured by contrast with the European male character, who, in his place, represents the “self” or the imperialist spirit, as Said argued.

Indeed, the idea of long-term love in exotic, and in particular in colonial literature, involved issues of imperialistic agenda. The roman colonial reflected colonial ideology in that it incorporated the rayonnement mentality and its practical intention of civilizing the colonies and introducing French moral ideals. Bringing civilization meant the opposite of recognizing and


98 Bongie, Exotic Memories, 179-80.
adapting to native traditions and, more specifically, avoiding the union between races. In addition, miscegenation, “the interbreeding of people classified as belonging to different races,” not only epitomized corruption, but was considered to be one of the main causes of the diseases spreading in the colonies, too. While depicting life in the colony and the relationship between a Westerner and a native, the roman colonial also emphasized the impossibility of a lasting relationship between two people of cultures perceived as opposite. Their love could not be legalized in marriage and, as Denise Brahimi stated when writing about Loti’s novels, “l’amour est de plus en plus incertain et condamné” (love is more and more uncertain and condemned).

Obviously, in this context of illegal relationship, procreation was also ill-fated. Rarely did children of mixed racial background have any role in the narrative of this genre, and when one does, as happens in Loti’s Le Roman d’un Spahi, he dies. For all colonial writers, and in particular for Loti, “La tentation de l’exotisme comme rencontre d’un Européen avec d’autres civilisations est condamnée . . . parce qu’il [Loti] l’estime déjà condamnée par l’histoire” (The exotic temptation as the encounter between a European and other civilizations is condemned . . . because he believes it has already been

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condemned by history). In fact, the history of doomed interracial encounters began in 1802, when Napoleon forbade interracial marriage, a law that survived throughout the Third Republic, when France experienced the highest point of its colonial achievement. However, even if in France religious and political authorities considered the union of mixed races immoral, their disapproval did not impede its occurrence.

The exotic woman, in representing the ultimate desire for lasciviousness and pleasure, could not belong to the goodness and decorum of the traditional nineteenth-century French family. By discarding “domestic femininity”—the fictional world in which the main preoccupation is “the search for fulfillment through heterosexual love—and instead contemplating only “masculine romance”—in which adventure is the main concern, a lasting love seems to be impossible. Colonial novels based the drama precisely on this antagonism: authority and morality that implied righteousness—the West, versus exotic sexual temptation that suggested freedom but depravity (i.e., the Other).

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101 Ibid., 297.
103 The occurrence of interracial relationships in French colonies will be further discussed in the analyses of Le Mariage de Loti and L’Île du rêve, and of Le Roman d’un Spahi and Le Spahi.
104 Dawson, Soldier Heroes, 63-64. I use “domestic” as a two-fold term: from one’s country and belonging to one’s family.
105 Ridley suggests that French colonial fiction exploited the subject of inter-racial sexual encounters with “a sexual openness almost unheard of in Germany or England,” Images of Imperial Rule, 80.
Besides the Saidian argument of “other” versus imperialistic “self,” however, other inter-related cultural interpretations emerge from exotic literature, in particular, gender-related and class-related issues. The image of the beautiful, sensual, and passive woman, fantasized in male cultures for centuries, appears here in the shape of an exotic female. She can be a princess, a queen, a slave, a little girl, a priestess, or a prostitute. Whatever her social background might be, her seducing image does not change. What predominates in her character is her dramatic function as submissive feminine entity, the opposite sex, and not as belonging or functioning in any particular social stratum. On the one hand, her image projects and perpetuates the reality of both European and other societies; on the other hand, with her multiple possible guises (princess, slave, prostitute, etc.), she lends herself to many elaborate descriptions. In these, ornaments and decor constitute great interest. Exotic imagery and clichés are attached to her, and the novel can use her image as an adornment. In opposition to her figure stands the European soldier whose appearance never changes. The stereotyped white, young male in military uniform established his authority from the dawn of the colonial novel. If his appearance sometimes changes—in Loti’s novels, the hero often wears local garments—his behavior remains predictable. His mission, as the tragic hero’s mission, is to complete his adventure in the foreign land, seduce a native, and go back to his homeland. Exuding domination, he is the ultimate
characterization of power, not only representing racial domination, but also embodying military and masculine power that, in order to be recognizable, can never change its appearance.

His dramatic opposite, the submissive heroine, is foreign and unfamiliar. Through this process of distancing, the danger of offending the public with the representation of a lustful Western woman in a European setting was discarded. As a result, while holding the underlying principle of racial integrity, the novel embraced the accidental digression from it, using deviation as a dramatic tool. The soldier could seduce the native girl—it was happening in the French colonies anyway—but could not commit to her—an outcome quite convenient for the resolution of a sexual fantasy described by male authors. Some authors justified the refusal of commitment by asserting that native women failed to satisfy the Westerner’s idea of long-term relationships. In 1892, Vigné d’Octon wrote: “The black woman has neither the same qualities, nor the feelings nor the same experiences as a woman of the Caucasian race. Between her and the white man there is no possibility that love—in any psychological sense—might exist.” The “passivity” and “dirtiness” of native women, and French political and religious authorities’ disapproval of miscegenation, provided the intrinsic foundations and physical

106 About the exclusion of women’s opinions on the subject of miscegenation see: White, Promoting the Colonial Idea: Propaganda and Visions of Empire in France, 134-138.
107 Paul Vigné d’Octon, Fauves amours (1892), quoted in Ridley, Images of Imperial Rule, 84. Vigné d’Octon, however, condemned the behavior of French colonialists in Africa, denouncing their violent acts on the local population.
and moral justifications for colonial novels' characteristic approach to sex and love.\textsuperscript{108} The dramatic formula implied that the Western resident can temporarily experience the exotic girl's tempting sexuality as long as he overcomes corruption. He does this by abandoning her, by obtaining liberation through her death, or, as in \textit{Le Roman du Spahi}, by becoming a martyr.

b. Religious and Mystical Issues

Overcoming temptation constituted a basic but imperative belief promoted by the Roman Catholic Church and by the \textit{mission civilisatrice}, that is, the dissemination of Catholic faith in overseas countries. If the Church recognized the human tendency for temptation (physical and mostly erotic), exotic novels of the end of the century and the \textit{roman colonial} promoted such experience, often relying on detailed titillating descriptions that accompanied temptation.\textsuperscript{109} The biblical theme of temptation and its realization through exotic imagery had already taken shape in 1874 in Gustave Flaubert's \textit{Tentation de Saint Antoine}, a subject that also inspired artists of the time.\textsuperscript{110} In

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\begin{itemize}
  \item The passivity of African women continued to be a subject in literature of the early 1900s (i.e. Louis Sonolet in \textit{Le Parfum de la dame noire} (1910).
  \item The exotic literary genre was not the only one to exploit religion as a dramatic tool. In French Decadent literature the theme is contrasted with sadism, sacrilege, and depravity; see: Praz, \textit{The Romantic Agony}, 320-28.
  \item See for example: Gustave Moreau's \textit{Salomé} and \textit{L'Apparition}, both shown at the \textit{Exposition} of 1876.
\end{itemize}
addition, victory over temptation often entailed sacrifice, as in the story of Salome, a favorite subject in exotic literature and opera.\footnote{Literary examples are: Mallarmé’s *Hérodiade* (1869, but known to the public only in 1898, according to Praz, *The Romantic Agony*, 316); Flaubert’s *Hérodias (Trois Contes)* (1877); and Oscar Wilde’s drama *Salomé* (1893). In opera some examples are: Jules Massenet and Paul Millet/Henri Grémont’s *Hérodiade* (1881), and Richard Strauss’ *Salomé* (1905). However, in this dissertation, this last opera is considered as a “psychological” opera rather than an exotic opera (see Chapter 2). For an insightful study on Catholicism in Massenet’s work, see: Rowden, *Massenet, Marianne and Mary: Republican Morality and Catholic Tradition at the Opera.*} Taking the argument further, Anatole France transposed the temptation allegory to a non-biblical context in *Thaïs* (1889), and described the heroine’s formidable mystical journey from Paganism to Christian faith.\footnote{Anatole France’s *Thaïs* was the source for Massenet’s opera bearing the same title. Although France did disapprove of exotic literature, exotic themes and tropes occur in his works. For mystical themes in literature see also: France’s *Balthazar* (1889), a bizarre version of the story of one of the Magi, and *L’Étui de nacre* (1892), the story of a hermit and a faun. See also André Gide, *Le voyage d’Urien* (1893).} In the desert, the protagonist changes from an Alexandrian sinner, follower of the cult of Venus, to a devoted Christian. As a rule, in exotic and colonial novels, the narrative of how moral principles can defeat evil always paralleled the success of the West and the defeat of the “other,” whether it was a Jewish princess or a Pagan believer, a priestess or a prostitute.

Besides France’s vision of Paganism, other French authors interpreted exotic mysticism as the ultimate religious expression. Oriental Paganism, however, was not always explicitly placed in opposition to Christianity, Christian people or land. For example, Baudelaire explained that intense religious mysticism is the link between Paganism—the most exotic faith—and
Christianity, and that the two faiths, by being opposites, confirm each other. Other writers and poets used “Oriental” religions to represent separate spiritual worlds. Alphonse de Lamartine, for example, described the Orient as “la terre des cultes, des prodiges” (the land of cults and prodigy), where all believers can become prophets. Referring to India, a common exotic locale in French literature, Judith Gautier affirmed that the country was a paradise on earth that holds a degree of spirituality unknown in Europe. Moreover, both “profound” spirituality and alluring sensuality of “other” religions mirrored a certain desire for freedom from conventions and acknowledged transgression, a desire impossible to satisfy at home.

c. Familiar Home and Formidable Landscapes

Home had always represented the realm of the “same,” where change rarely happens, but also the safe place where rules are clear and men can find refuge from the unknown. In terms of dramatic conventions, as previously mentioned in the discussion of the mythological theme of the hero’s journey, the protagonist must leave home to find adventure in a different world in order

to come back victorious. The location and concept of “home,” however, developed quite dramatically in nineteenth-century French literature. Home was originally the place where the dream of the exotic originated (for example in Baudelaire, Rimbaud, etc., as previously mentioned), but a place where the exotic was always absent (Bovarysme). In colonial literature, however, home assumed two dimensions: the far-away homeland—the “Same and Safe” place—and the colony itself where the protagonist lives, interacts with natives, and has adjusted to local ways of life. In this colonial reality, he transfers his Western moral values and habits, but he always has to face his foreignness. To create the distance between the familiar and the foreign, the authors of exotic and colonial literature reconstructed geographical landscapes either described by earlier explorers or observed during personal travel experiences. The novelists’ descriptions favored landscapes that looked extreme to the eyes of the French readers, and underlined, sometimes exaggerating, the challenge of nature of those removed locales. Always opposed to metropolitan settings and frozen in time, these scenarios played a fundamental dramatic role in the representation of the “other.” In fact, not only did they represent the “other” viewed from the imperialist “self,” as asserted by Said, but they carried archetypal meanings, too, often representing subconscious states and challenges. Archetypal images such as desert and water were constant factors; symbolic images including particular flowers, fruits and trees, and nocturnal
scenes, mountains, and storms opposed to sun-drenched flat landscapes constituted some of the basic dramatic backdrops that suggested unconscious states, the significance of which I will discuss further in this study.

The emblematic representation of landscape had already constituted a primary element in literary Symbolism even before exotic literature. The tropes, although belonging to an oneiric world rather than an exotic setting, show some similarities. With the lines “... à travers un désert stérile de Douleurs,” and “... l’eau perfide des glaciers” (Through a sterile desert of Pain ... the perfidious water of the glaciers), Stéphane Mallarmé described the poets’ challenging journey towards the accomplishment of their artistic and philosophic mission.116 The parable of the hero in a struggle with nature and in search for success in exotic lands was identical with this, except that, from a poet, the Mallarméan protagonist became a colonial resident. In sum, from poetry to literature and from symbolism to exoticism, the path of the hero did not change much.

Nevertheless, the use of the scenery in exotic and colonial novels, as well as in exotic operas, was of a great dramatic importance. In being critical to the success of the hero and challenging him directly, nature virtually acquired the role of a character, becoming, particularly in opera, a significant

116 Stéphane Mallarmé, L’Azur (1864), published in Le Parnasse in 1866, and Le Pitre châté (1864-1867). The poet as a hero compelled to accomplish his creative mission and the landscape imagery representing the encountered challenges were also favorite themes of Baudelaire’s.
component of the drama.\textsuperscript{117} Its dramatic function, however, did not consist of just threatening the hero with danger. In some novels the landscape appealed to the reader for its natural prosperity, especially when the stories took place in tropical regions. In “Harmonies d’Annam,” the nature around the village of Camtinh is described as “les arbres, et les eaux, et le sol sont fraternels…

 Cette nature sans secousses abrite des habitants sans désirs; et la délicieuse médiocrité de tous les aspects recèle le contentement absolu des hommes” (The trees, the water, and the soil are friendly… This nature without surprises shelters inhabitants without desires; and the delicious mediocrity of all its aspects conceals the absolute contentment of men).\textsuperscript{118} During his stay in Tahiti, Gauguin wrote, “Franchi le seuil et la ville, c’est à la nature qu’on doit s’adresser pour vivre, et elle est riche, elle est généreuse, elle ne refuse rien à qui lui va demander sa part des trésors dont elle a d’inépuisables réserves dans les arbres, dans la montagne, dans la mer.” (Having once passed over the threshold and through the town, it is to nature that we need to address ourselves in order to live; it is rich, generous, it does not refuse anything to whomever asks a part of its treasures stored in its inexhaustible reserves of trees, mountains, and sea).\textsuperscript{119} The tropics became the equivalent to enticing sensuousness, suggesting a comfortable but idle life-style, a dangerously

\textsuperscript{117} As the following analyses of exotic operas will illustrate, landscape has its own musical “voice,” as if it were a character itself.
\textsuperscript{118} A. de Pouvourville, \textit{Le Maître des Sentences} (1898), quoted in Leblond, \textit{Anthologie Coloniale}, 250.
\textsuperscript{119} Paul Gauguin and Charles Morice, \textit{Noa-Noa} (1891-1893), quoted in Leblond, ibid., 298.
volatile existence for the Westerner. In all of its aspects, from brutal to attractive, the role of the exotic landscape was to offer to the hero a chance for victory: he must either endure or resist the seduction.

The brutality or seductiveness of the natural elements created the symbolic backdrop for the soldier’s potential ruin. The challenging landscape was diverse: it went from the tropical heat of Viet-Nam: “Saigon, reine du Marécage . . . moustiques . . . paludisme . . . dysenteries . . . bilieuxes. Gaie perspective . . . On constate aussi brusquement que l’on est surtout loin de la France” (Saigon, Queen of the Marécage . . . mosquitoes . . . malaria . . . dysentery . . . bile. Happy prospect . . . We notice just as abruptly that most of all, we are far from France); and it reached the desert of Africa: “Jamais une mousse, jamais un frais brin d’herbe sur ce sol, desséché par tous les souffles brûlants du Sahara.” (Never moss and never a fresh blade of grass on this soil, dried by all the burning breezes of the Sahara). 120 The African desert was the defiant spirit that hindered the soldier’s love and mission, a logical backdrop from the time the French army extended their colonies in Africa. For example, Algeria and Senegal, the regions colonial writers favored the most, underwent the French colonial politics of assimilation. The natives, often associated with geographical and environmental hostility, appeared to be brutal, and their behavior, feral, whereas European soldiers suggested heroism and patriotism.

Some examples of how the African landscape was treated at the end of the
nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth will illustrate the
dramatic role exotic nature played in French literature.

Through an almost graphic approach to violence, Paul Vigné d'Octon
wrote in *La Gloire du sabre* (1900):

_C'est l'Afrique, mangeuse d'hommes, amollisseuse d'âmes, dévoratrice
d'Énergies, mère de la Fièvre et de la Mort. C'est la Goule mystérieuse
qui, depuis des siècles, suce le sang des Européens, les vide jusqu'aux
moelles ou les rend fous._121

(It is Africa, man-eater, soul-softener, energy-devourer, mother of
Fever and Death. It is the mysterious Ghoul that has sucked the blood
of the Europeans for centuries and has emptied them to their marrow or
has made them crazy).

In Vigné d'Octon's realist approach, Hugh Ridley found that landscape
and violence are one in the representation of men's curse; and in this cursed
land, often called in Biblical terms 'the land of Cham,' "... it is to the country
itself that are ascribed the crimes and lifestyle of the invaders."122 By blaming
the land and its people for colonial violence, many novels embraced and
justified their racist opinions as natural reactions.

Besides violence, the African desert also signified extreme
solitude:

_On dirait que notre globe, épanoui dans sa béatitude, enivré de
tant de lumière, excédé par tant de chaleur, s'est immobilisé
dans l'espace comme, par un calme plat, sur la mer immense,_

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122 Ibid., 71.
un vaisseau s'arrête, voiles tombant. L’œil interroge: rien ne bouge. L’oreille écoute: aucun bruit, pas un souffle, si ce n’est le frémissement imperceptible de l’air au-dessus du sol embrasé. La vie semble avoir disparu, absorbée par la lumière.123

(It seems like our globe, blooming in its beatitude, intoxicated from so much light, and exhausted by such heat, is immobilized in this space like a vessel becalmed, its sails slack, on the immense sea. The ear listens: no noise, not a breath, only the imperceptible tremor of the air over the blazing ground. Life seems to have disappeared as absorbed by the light).

The emptiness of the desert was always contrasted to the French home:

“Sans ce maudit soleil qui enveloppait toutes choses de reflets aveuglants accusant la terre d’Afrique, on se fut cru dans un coin ombreux de Normandie ou de Bretagne” (without this cursed sun that has enveloped everything with its blinding reflection on African land, one might think of being on a shady corner of Normandie or Bretagne); or to the colonial city within: “les solitudes défilent, avec une monotonie triste, les dunes mouvantes, les horizons indéfinis; et la chaleur augmente d’intensité chaque jour. . . Et puis enfin apparaît au-dessus des sables une vieille cité blanche, plantée de rares palmiers jaunes: c’est Saint-Louis du Sénégal, la capitale de la Sénégalie.” (Solitude parades with sad monotony, while the dunes move and the horizons are infinite; and the heat augments its intensity every day . . . and then over the

123 Gustave-Achille Guillaumet, Tableaux algériens (1888), quoted in Leblond, Anthologie coloniale, 78.
sand appears an old white city lined with rare yellow palm trees: it is Saint-
Louis of Senegal, the capital of Senegambia.\textsuperscript{124}

Representing nothingness, the desert was also the ideal terrain for
mystical experience.\textsuperscript{125} In France's \textit{Thaïs}, the desert represented the conversion
that brings the heroine to renunciation of all she had. In her solitude, her
longing for salvation is accompanied by a strong desire for mercy, and the
lifeless desert is the vehicle for virtue and courage.\textsuperscript{126} Furthermore, the desert's
immensity paralleled human sin, too: "Frère Paphnute . . . mes iniquités sont
innombrables comme les sables du désert" (Brother Paphnutius . . . my
iniquities are countless as the sand of the desert), Brother Palemon tells holy
hermit Brother Paphnutius.\textsuperscript{127}

The mystical silence of the desert found its counterpart in the calm of
tropical nights where the bamboo and the moon evoke vague memories:

\textit{Le silence! J'apprenais à connaître le silence d'une nuit tahitienne. Je
n'entendais que des battements de mon cœur, dans le silence. Mais
les rayons de lune, à travers les bambous également distants entre eux
de ma case, veniaient jouer sur mon lit. Et ces clartés régulières me
suggéraient l'idée d'un instrument de musique, le pipeau des anciens,
que les Maoris connaissent et qu'ils nomment vivo.}\textsuperscript{128} La lune et les
bambous le dessinaient, exagéré: tel, c'est un instrument silencieux,

\textsuperscript{124} Pierre Loti, \textit{Le Roman d'un Spahi}, 310 and 1.
\textsuperscript{125} In the operas discussed in the next chapters, paradoxically the sounds of the orchestra
sometimes render the literary idea of silence.
\textsuperscript{126} For the meaning of desert and conversion see: Benedicta Ward, \textit{Harlots of the Desert: A
\textsuperscript{128} In Hahn's \textit{L'île du rêve} the vivo had a significant part, the analysis of which is discussed in
the chapter about the opera.
toujou durant. La nuit, dans la mémoire et grâce à la lune, il redit
au songeur les airs aimés. Je m'endormis à cette musique. 129

(The silence! I learned to know the silence of a Tahitian night. I could
hear only the beating of my heart in the silence; but, through the
bamboo, the moon’s rays—as far apart from one another from my
cabin—came to play on my bed. These orderly lights suggested the
idea of a musical instrument, the reed of the ancients that the Maori
knew and called vivo. The moon and the bamboo drew it, exaggerating;
it was the quiet instrument lasting all day. At night, in one’s memory
and thanks to the moon, it repeats the beloved airs to the dreamer. I fell
asleep with this music).

The bamboo as the mysterious source of breath and its soothing image
stirred the imagination of travelers to Asia, too. In descriptions of the Indo-
Chinese landscape it blends with the numerous colors of nature, often carrying
symbolic meanings: “Entre les frêles touffes vertes et dorées des jeunes
bambous, ondulent les myrtes et les églantiers qu’un souffle fait vibrer; les
‘fleurs de la passion de Bouddha’ saluent de leurs rouges panaches l’ardent
épanouissement des grenades.” (Within the frail, green and yellow clumps of
the young bamboo, the myrtles and the wild-rose bushes are waving, and a gust
makes them vibrate; with their red panache, “Buddha’s flowers of passion”
greet the ardent blooming of the pomegranates). 130 Symbolic descriptions of
plants and fruits—grenade is both a fruit and a weapon—applied to trees also.
Asian tree forests, like the desert did, represented the voyager’s challenge:

. . . [la caravane] n’est plus qu’une trainée verte sous les parasols
étagés d’arbres gigantesques, étayés de leurs racines comme de

129 Gauguin, Noa-Noa, quoted in Leblond, Anthologie coloniale, 299.
130 Jules Boissière, Oiseaux en fleurs (1890) quoted in Leblond, ibid.,15.
murailles de soutènement; à travers le réseau des lianes, innombrables comme les fibres de la pluie; entre les végétations rigides, métalliques, aux lances hérisées, aux lames tranchantes, aux dents pointues, aux griffes déchirantes... Le silence grinçait, craquait, crépitait, vibrait, à la stridulation frénétique de la saison sèche.\textsuperscript{131}

(The caravan is just a green trail under the multi-leveled parasols of the gigantic trees, supported by their roots as if they were retaining walls; through the network of the lianas, as countless as the rain’s fibers; among the rigid vegetation, metallic, with erected spears, with sharp blades, pointed teeth, with ripping claws... The silence creaked, cracked, crackled, and vibrated to the frenetic stridulating of the dry season).

If the imagery, in all its attractive and horrible shapes, referred to far-away places, the perception of the exotic could survive solely in relationship to home. The language described the imagery in terms that always referred to the “attractive” or “horrible” at home. The world of the exotic complemented the idea of home, sometimes explicitly, other times indirectly. If there is “aucun bruit” (no noise) and “la vie semble avoir disparu” (life seems to have disappeared) in the desert it is because the landscape differs from home, where life and activity prevail; the “memory in the night” recalls beloved airs, the music of home; the vegetation is “metallic” as is the mechanized modern French world. In sum, the challenge and the endurance that consumed the hero in exotic lands are defined in terms distinctively French; while the eye of the

\textsuperscript{131} Jean Ajalbert, S\textit{ao van Di} (published in 1920), quoted in Leblond, ibid., 249. In Paris, Ajalbert was considered one of the most brilliant realist writers. Tired of the “superficial” life of the European cities, he left Paris to travel in Indochina (see Leblond’s biographical note on the author, ibid.).
writer saw the exotic, his pen remained distinctively European. The following investigation of French exotic operas of the late nineteenth century analyzes how librettists’ pens further adapted to the idea of the exotic by following literary conventions, and how the composers’ pens wrote music that highlighted the complementary functions of “self” and “other” in the themes of love, religion, and landscape.
II. The Making of Exoticism in French Opera

The language of exoticism, as all languages, developed through artistic, cultural, and social changes. It originated, revised, and exhausted its meanings, and its decline formed new discourses. Literary exoticism stemmed from narrations of adventurous travel, and then adopted symbolic connotations, mimicked reality, and finally declined to typical fin-de-siècle melancholic nostalgia. French exotic literature flourished before exotic opera, around the 1850s, and the latter assimilated many traits of its literary counterpart. As in literary works, exotic archetypes in opera expressed “very different nuances according to the period or genre.” Similar to its literary counterpart, the language of exotic operas may be viewed either as the expression of an imperialist, misogynist, or racist culture, or simply as the tool that creates new art. And, at an even deeper level, here the West expresses discontent about itself, just as in much French nineteenth-century literature.

Operatic exoticism differed, however, from its fictional counterpart. Operatic adaptations required adjustments of the text and modification of plots to satisfy both audience and censorship; it also depended on the managerial and financial predicaments of the theaters. Besides these pragmatic factors, one has

84 Lacombe, “The Writing of Exoticism in the Libretti of the Opéra-Comique, 1825-1862,” 135. Lacombe refers to the following operatic genres: opéra comique, opéra lyrique, and grand opera. This dissertation refers to broad literary genres as adventure novel, symbolic poetry, and colonial literature.
also to realize that since opera relies on three main components—libretto, music, and staging—its language results from the interrelation of those separate communication systems. In exotic operas, the scenery portrayed the imaginary and distant spaces; the libretto assimilated the language of exotic literature; the music used and re-created non-Western musical systems. Nevertheless, these elements relied heavily on each other to create the meaning of the exotic and each constantly made reference to the other.

Even if belonging to different linguistic systems, libretto, music, and setting are part of the same “syntactic” frame (operatic exoticism). The concept of a syntactic frame resembles Greimas’ notion of semantic isotopy.85 Greimas has proposed that in an isotopic system, a “text” presents a series of general terms, the lexemes; these are minimal units of language that embody a distinct cultural concept in the lexicon of a language and belong to a particular syntactic category (for example, went, gone, goes, are all forms of the lexeme go). At a semantic level, lexemes become classemes; these are different words that assume the same meaning according to the context in which they are articulated.86 Similarly, I view the structure of the operatic “text” as a large isotopic system. The operatic “text,” however, includes exotic lexemes from

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86 Greimas, Structural Semantics, 57-58.
different communication systems—that is, visual, textual, and musical—that often tend to represent the same classes.

In order to approach the semantic interrelationship among scenery, text, and music in the “syntactic” frame of each opera discussed in this dissertation, it seems helpful to take a closer look at the exotic aspect of each component (stage set, text, and music) and its own exotic codes.87

A. Displaying the Exotic: Sets and Costumes

The spatial aspect of exotic operas suggests the conflict between East and West with clarity. The stage itself becomes the “other” in the eyes of the public, especially in exotic operas where no Western presence directly influences the story (i.e., Djelma, Thamara, Thaïs). Still, the confrontation between the spectator and the exotic is unmistakable: the backdrop, usually a desert, a jungle, or an Eastern-looking royal palace or temple, stood out against the French theater auditoriums. The costumes of the poor natives were worlds apart from those of the Parisian bourgeois audience. Finally, all exotic objects on stage, from palm trees to small talismans, intrigued the public for their “oddness.” Conversely, when the story includes Western characters, the West imposes its powerful presence in war scenes (Le Spahi) and in all situations that

feature European soldiers in uniforms, such as celebrations or gatherings among soldiers (Lakmé, Le Spahi, and L’Île du Rêve). However, when the stories occur in ancient times, Christian characters personify the West (Thaïs and Thamara).

On stage, therefore, men in military or religious uniforms typically represent the West, while the characters in native costumes and exotic scenery embody Otherness. At the opening of the first acts, the “remote exotic” operas establish a distant locale. The natural setting, the first element determining the location, creates large and sparsely inhabited spaces contrasting busy nineteenth-century metropolitan Paris. Desert (Thaïs, Le Spahi and Djelma), ocean (L’Île du Rêve), jungle (Thamara), and mountains (L’Île du Rêve, Thamara) symbolize the dream-like realm of the unknown. Scorching sun and starry nights also address the idea of distant power. When depicting early civilizations, large monuments emphasize the greatness of a kingdom, similarly to the scenery of many classic tragedies and earlier grand operas.

Often objects carry symbolic meanings, too. For example, as in other operatic genres, in exotic operas jewels and stones represent material wealth, luxury, and seduction as well. In exotic operas, however, native heroines yearn to show off their jewelry to please and seduce Western men in the attempt to draw them into marriage and to secure their own status. In Le Spahi, for example, the slave Fatoua steals jewels from her French lover to look attractive
and to reveal herself as a prospective bride. Conversely, in *Thaïs*, exotic slaves urge the Christian monk Athanaël, the embodiment of the West, to wear rings and bracelets before meeting Thaïs. To encounter her, the protagonist has to accept her terms, that is, to yield to luxury and seduction. Amulets, on the other hand, belong only to natives, who use them as love potions or tokens. In *Le Spahi*, Fatou gives a magic talisman to the French soldier in order to seduce him. In *Djelma*, the heroine gives an amulet to her husband as reminder of their love and to bring him good luck in the jungle.

Specific symbolism in scenery and stage props depends on the context chosen by composer and librettist; but in the more specific representation of the exotic, set and costume designers controlled the stage. At the *Opéra* and the *Opéra-Comique*, only a small number of artists mastered the art of depicting remote landscapes. Among the most prestigious set designers, Marcel Jambon excelled at creating exotic settings. He designed *Djelma*, the 1894 version of *Thaïs*, and *Le Spahi*. All critics praised his accurate reproductions of foreign regions, the result of his numerous travels and research abroad. Gondy de Seinprez of the *Revue Illustrée* wrote, “Autrefois, les décorateurs lisait mais ne voyageaient pas; maintenant, ils font le tour du monde: Jambon et Bailly ont visité l’Inde, la Chine, l’Égypte, la Turquie, la Grèce, l’Espagne, l’Italie.” (In

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the past, the set designers used to read but did not travel; now, they go around the world: Jambon and Bailly have visited India, China, Egypt, Turkey, Greece, Spain, and Italy). In addition, the author commented on Jambon’s ability to reinforce the plot and the text through the stage imagery. “Ce qui caractérise les décors de Jambon et Bailly, c’est la recherche du détail s’harmonisant dans l’ensemble de la composition, c’est l’exactitude du document s’alliant avec la vérité du texte, c’est, en un mot, la vision directe du pays et de l’époque.” (Jambon’s and Bailly’s stage sets are characterized by a research into the detail that harmonizes with the ensemble of the composition; by the exactness of the document that joins forces with the truth of the text; and overall, by a direct vision of the country and period). At the end of the century, when travels abroad were more common and the public could see photographs and drawings of foreign lands, Jambon decided to focus on simplicity and faithful reproductions, avoiding artificial effects. Before the fin de siècle, artists staging the exotic in the two main opera theaters concentrated instead on contrast, choosing to captivate the public “avec l’effet provocant, par la violence ou par l’opposition d’une des parties” (with provocative effect, through violence or by the opposition of one of the parts). Through simple but massive backdrops,

90 Ibid., 467, n. 1.
91 Ibid.
Jambon and his followers communicated a strong impression of the remote landscape that music and text reinforced. The meaning of the opera "se trouve plus encore intimement lié au décor dont la musique vient agrandir l'effet et multiplier la sensation" (is even more intimately linked to the stage design; its effect is expanded from and its sensation is multiplied by the music). If the stage setting suggested the meaning of opera and the music amplified it, the libretto exemplified it with intriguing plots populated by "odd" and fascinating characters, and communicated it through a series of specific literary codes.

B. Telling and Speaking the Exotic: The Libretto

Librettos establish an exotic realm by choosing particular plot types and classemes. The plot, enacted by the characters and organized around their predicaments, forms an explicit aspect of the system. The words, through which the librettist chose to give voice to the characters, shape the exotic, too, sometimes openly, other times symbolically.

As in literary exoticism, operatic West and East confront each other mostly in matters of love and sex, often conflated for the sake of dramatic simplicity; in religious conflicts, where faith is associated with passionate temptation; and in depictions of distant landscapes that conceal potential love stories. Although love, religion, and the fascination for other lands permeated

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92 Ibid., 465.
French opera long before the nineteenth century, the frequency of travels and French colonial achievements brought a new meaning to their integration in the plot. While the core of romantic drama had earlier focused on class differences, now, masked in exotic costumes, love acquires an additional political and ideological meaning that extends the concept of class disparity with racial issues. In exotic opera, success or failure of love depended upon the race of the protagonists: when involving a native and a foreign invader, it is bound to fail; when the lovers belong to the same race, love succeeds. Paganism and Christianity too, also conflicted with each other. In a fictitious pagan land a Christian would try to challenge immorality and sometimes suffer death; in the same land, all Pagans would get along with each other, and only common villains would be punished. Finally, the exotic stage treated something that could not be found in the spectators’ side of the theater: mystery, escape, and transgression.

The stories of exotic loves, as Parakilas suggests, consist of daring relationships between a native and a European. In what the author calls the “Turkish captivity operas,” the heroine is European, while the man, a native. The plot typically revolves around an Englishwoman who falls in love with a

94 Ibid., 35. Here Parakilas refers to Wenzel Müller and Karl Friedrich Hensler’s *Das Sonnenfest der Braminen* (1790), Gioachino Rossini and Angelo Anelli’s *L’Italiana in Algeri* (1813), and Giacomo Meyerbeer and Gaetano Rossi’s *Il Crociato in Egitto* (1824).
native, who at first pretends to be a European but then turns out to be a native. Their relationship is justified because of the misunderstanding. In other operas, the prevailing theme comes from encounters of the Age of Discovery. In these, the heroine is a queen in captivity, and the hero, a European explorer of the fifteenth or sixteenth century. Their love lasts, but only in the explorer’s terms, that is, consistent with his duty of establishing a relationship with the exotic world. “Colonial Opera” is the last category defined in Parakilas’ article. In this genre operas feature the love between a European soldier and an exotic native woman. Their relationship varies according to each opera and the decade it was created. In the exotic operas produced before the 1890s, the exotic native girl appears as a rebellious woman who defends her people (i.e., Carmen, Lakmé); in the early 1890s the heroine seduces her enemy in order to accomplish a patriotic mission (i.e., Thamara); and at the end of the century she does not lead any native resistance, in fact, she does not even see her counterpart as a direct enemy (i.e., Djelma, Thaïs, Fatou, Mahénu).

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95 Ibid., 37. Parakilas refers to Gaspare Spontini and Étienne de Jouy /Joseph Alphonse d’Esmenard’s Cortez (1809), Louis Spohr and Eduard Gehe’s Jessonda (1823), Giacomo Meyerbeer and Eugene Scribe’s L’Africaine (1865), and Félicien David and Gabriel/ S. Saint-Etienne’s La Perle du Brésil (1851).

96 Ibid.

97 Parakilas, “The Soldier and the Exotic: Operatic Variations on a Theme of Racial Encounter, Part II.” The author here includes Georges Bizet and Henri Meilhac/Ludovic Halévy’s Carmen, Léo Delibes and Edmond Gondinet/Philippe Gille’s Lakmé, Augusta Holmès’ La Montagne Noire, Ignacy Jan Paderewski and Alfred Nossig’s Manru, Giacomo Puccini and Giuseppe Giacosa/Luigi Illica’s Madama Butterfly. The author also analyzes a few American operas.

98 Thamara’s predicament is reminiscent of Dalila of Saint-Saëns’ Samson et Dalila. In the last decade of the nineteenth century Samson et Dalila was produced at the Opéra more than eighty times.
If love could affect a European soldier and a native woman, it could also involve two exotic characters as in, for example, *Thamara* and *Djelma*. The former still suggests incompatibility between the “self” and the “other,” even if indirectly. Thamara’s village is occupied by the enemies whose leader will eventually be her lover. They belong to different worlds—she is mostly identified with the Western world and he, with the Orient; therefore, their relationship, as in other colonial operas, cannot last. In the latter opera, Djelma loves her husband, the ruler of an Indian village, and their love overcomes all obstacles. Since they both belong to and reign over the same land, their relationship ought to last.

Together with the colonial issue of miscegenation and the French belief in their own superiority went the desire to identify with diversity, a search for a *frisson nouveau* that would allow the public to see a world different from their own. Whereas in the real colonies love could not overcome racial difference, in a literary and operatic context the interracial relationship could temporarily succeed and satisfy the *fin-de-siécle*’s latent longing for diversity. In novels the relationship sometimes produces offspring, but in exotic operas no children of interracial unions belong to the plot. For example, in the literary source of *Le Spahi*, Loti’s *Le Roman d’un Spahi*, the mixed couple has a child, but in the opera, he is absent. If there is a bi-racial child, as Cora in *Le Spahi*, she is not the
child of the main characters, she is marginal, and more significantly, she does not have a voice. 99

Until the very end of the century most operatic heroines paid a harsh price for being different: Carmen, Lakmé, Thaïs, and Thamara all die on stage. Djelma, Fatou, and Mahénu, however, manage to outlive their hardships. Djelma must live because she is the king’s wife and with him, she has to carry on his legacy. Her death would have implied the end of the kingdom, which, in the story, is populated by decent people. The last exotic heroines of the century, Fatou and Mahénu, do not die either. They survive their despair, left behind by their European soldiers-lovers, and face a future in a deteriorating land, corrupted by European civilization.

The Western hero’s destiny, however, is different. He rarely dies, and when he does, it is after an act of extreme courage and patriotism. The exception is in Thamara, in which both exotic hero (a Persian invader from a neighboring land) and exotic heroine (whose town, Baku, is invaded) die. She murders him in an attempt to save her people, and kills herself afterwards because she wants to join her beloved enemy in death. For the first time in exotic operas, the male protagonist dies on stage by the hand of a woman, a justifiable act however, for he represents the exotic villain. In Le Spahi, the soldier dies by the hands of local

99 The role of Cora is mimed. In Puccini’s Madama Butterfly (1904), the boy, whose name is Dolore (Sorrow) is also the child of an interracial relationship, but in the opera he never speaks or sings.
enemies, in the arms of his African lover. 100 Here East and West (in this case more specifically, Africa and France) confront each other directly. Finally, if the operatic events turned to different endings toward the end of the nineteenth century, the content remained the same: difference is still attractive but impossible to reach.

Paganism and Christianity, likewise, reflect the conflict between East and West. Paganism and Eastern religions, however, never come across as central themes of the drama. Rituals, on the other hand, constitute an important part of the action and entertainment. They sometimes represent or provoke sexual excitement with songs and dances (Le Spahi, Lakmé), usually employ a large number of actors and singers (Lakmé, Dijelma, Thamara), and support all exoticism in music. These pagan practices stand in opposition to the introspective character of Christianity. Meditation (Thaïs) and prayer (L'Île du rêve, Le Spahi) involved no physical movement, no action, and provided the occasion for the most lyrical, tonal, conventional—in sum, non-exotic—musical moments. These moments further detach the Self-Other poles. The ultimate voice of the West, the Roman Catholic Church, gravely resounds over alien backdrops typically associated with native excitement and simplicity. In this theatrical context, the contrast reinforces the extremes.

100 In Augusta Holmès' La Montagne noire (1895), a “near exotic” opera, the male protagonist dies, too. For an in-depth study of La Montagne noire, see: Henson, “Of Men, Women and Others: Exotic Operas in late-Nineteenth Century France.”
Religious extremes merge only through the act of conversion. In many typical exotic operas of the last two decades of the nineteenth century, conversion seems temporarily to solve the polar conflict between East and West, man and woman, Self and Other. In almost all operas of the period, after encountering the West the native embraces European culture and religion.101 Only in Lakmé does the French hero Gérald convert to Hinduism. His conversion, however, does not originate in mystical enlightenment or love; he is trying to escape the hatred of Lakmé’s people. Thaïs, however, finds peace and absolution in Christianity; Mahéné, the heroine of L'Île du rêve, has already converted prior to meeting with the soldier; Fatou, the native girl of Le Spahi, wants to become a Christian to please the Frenchman. In all cases, and especially in the operas of the last decade of the nineteenth century, a lasting relationship between the two extremes, Christianity-paganism, man-woman, East-West, or self-other, is doomed to fail and always ends tragically.

If the plot establishes the premises of Otherness, specific words reinforce the exotic by making multiple references to exotic literature known to the intended audience. Names of characters, flowers, precious stones, colors, among others, make the little fragments that build the exotic mosaic. Short phrases shape exotic clichés, too; for example, a few words describing the dangers of the

101 Parakilas noted that the heroine’s assimilation to European culture was also characteristic of the operas falling under his “Age of Discovery” category. See Parakilas, “The Soldier and the Exotic: Operatic Variations on a Theme of Racial Encounter, Part I”: 37.
exotic land—"seuil maudit" (cursed land), (Thaïs, Act 1, First Tableau), "ce pays qui meurt de volupté" (this country dying of voluptuousness), (L'Île du Rêve, Act 3, First Scene)—appear often enough to become a convention. When describing death away from home, the red of blood is contrasted with the white of the sand (Thaïs, Le Spahi, Djelma). In addition, words also reinforce the exoticism of nature and objects by referring to them. Saying the name of objects helps to accentuate their symbolism of "otherness." For example, descriptions and references to the large spaces of the scenery recur in all these operas: "Les grands cieux calmes," (The vast and calm skies) (Thamara, Tableau 4, Scene 1); "Le désert est profond et la tombe muette!" (The desert is deep, and the tomb is mute) (Djelma, Act 1, Scene 6), "Ce ciel divin dont l'azur enivre!" (This divine sky whose blueness makes you dizzy!) (Djelma, Act 2, Scene 1); "J'ai trouvé le calme en ce désert" (I found calmness in this desert) (Thaïs, Act 1, Tableau 1); "Je vois au réveil les sables, le désert, l'implacable soleil" (When awakening I see the sand, the desert, the implacable sun) (Le Spahi, Act 2, Scene 1); "Un étrange désir tombe du firmament" (A strange desire falls from the firmament) (L'Île du rêve, Act 1, Scene 5). The vast physical space and the verbal expression of its qualities construct and reinforce the concept of Otherness: imperturbable, detached, but deeply moving. In this exotic landscape isotopy, the visual lexemes and the textual lexemes sung by the characters, collaborate to establish contextual features, the classemes.
C. Echoing the Exotic: the Music

Music reinforced exotic imagery, too, during the first half of the century, but in a fragmentary way; later it became a very structured language. Its development took almost seventy years to take root, grow and decline. Its path in exotic opera followed three phases: experimental stage (1844-1862); codification of the language (1862-1890); and the gradual abandonment of the language and the assimilation of other styles, i.e., Naturalism, and Wagnerism (1891-1898). After the end of the century, codes previously associated with exoticism were sometimes used to express meanings no longer related to the exotic (same codes, different connotations). This dissertation reviews the second stage but focuses largely on the third. In those years specific exotic codes and archetypes were well established in the world of opera, particularly at the Opéra and Opéra-Comique, which staged similar repertoires. The five “remote exotic” operas that premiered in those eight years, *Thamara*, *Thaïs*, *Djelma*, *Le Spahi*, and *L’Île du rêve*, exemplify how operatic exoticism developed from imaginary to realistic, and how musical language accommodated that change. However, before focusing on those specific operas, it is important to define all three phases, relating them to selected operas and vocal works.

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102 The performances of Félicien David’s *Le Désert* (1844), David’s *Lalla-Roukh* (1862), and Richard Wagner’s *Lohengrin* (1891) mark the beginning of these periods.

103 For example, Claude Debussy’s *Pelleas et Mélisande* (1902) made use of modality, a characteristic trait of musical exoticism, to express dreams and symbols. Despite its exotic setting, Richard Strauss’ *Salomé* (1905) focused on the psychology of the characters rather than their exoticism.
1. Musical Exploration of the “Odd” World Beyond France

There had been a taste and curiosity for far-away lands in French music, opera, and ballet since the seventeenth century. Jean-Baptiste Lully and Molière’s comedy-ballet Le Bourgeois gentilhomme (1670) and André Campra’s L’Europe galante (1697) introduced Turkish nobility without particular reference to any Turkish music; in the eighteenth century Jean-Philippe Rameau’s Les Indes Galantes (1735) portrayed the “noble savage” without references to particular musical idioms. In these works, overseas countries functioned as evidence of French cultural authority and, sometimes, as a display of the oddity of others. In the early exploration of the exotic, costumes and scenes created the visual locale, but the music barely depicted foreignness. Then, in the early nineteenth century some exotic elements surfaced in the music, at a time when the text identified the foreign as a comic element. After this exploratory phase, musical exoticism developed as a specific genre. Not until the 1830s and 1840s did the Middle East generate great interest. Orientalism became popular among writers as well as musicians. While travelers and explorers wrote of their adventures and described their trips, music scholars, composers, and recreational musicians traveled to learn about non-Western music. Even

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104 Miriam K. Whaples maintains that exotic dances were staged in France by the end of the 1500s. See: Miriam K. Whaples, “Early Exoticism Revisited” in Bellman, The Exotic in Western Music, 3-25.
105 See: Lacombe, “The Writing of Exoticism in the Libretti of the Opéra-Comique, 1825-1862.”
composers indulged in adventurous travels to the "Orient," bringing back ideas and opinions about the music of other cultures. They studied musical elements foreign to them, but narrowed the notions to specific melodic, rhythmic, and sometimes, instrumental characteristics. In this stage of musical exoticism, "il ne s'agit plus... d'un exotisme, dirons nous, grossièrement caricatural" (It is no longer a question of... we would say, a roughly caricatured exoticism). Composers in fact started to research "séductions sonores nouvelles" (new sonorous seductions) exploring possibilities for a new musical language.

Felicien David, Ernest Reyer, and Francisco Salvador-Daniel, pioneered the French exotic genre in orchestral and vocal works, defining the basis for a codified musical exoticism. David traveled in North Africa and in the Middle East in search of new experiences. During his travels in Turkey, Egypt and Palestine in 1833, for example, he collected several melodies that, once back to France, he arranged for piano and published; however, his symphonic ode *Le Désert* (1844) is today considered one of the most prominent Orientalist works of that time since “the author had experienced the Orient at first hand.” *Le Désert*, in fact, constitutes the first landmark in musical exoticism because of its exploitation of authentic Middle-Eastern musical material (i.e., melodies and

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107 Ladjili, "La Musique arabe chez les compositeurs français du XIXe siècle saisis d’exotisme (1844-1914)" : 5.
rhythms). In addition, in this work David adapted non-Western music to the Western tonal system, establishing a new genre of compositional technique. His elaboration of original melodies "implique . . . une déformation pour l'adaptation à notre échelle de hauteurs et de surcroît l'opération, considérée alors comme indispensable, qui consiste à harmoniser ces mélodies." (involves . . . a distortion to conform to our tempered scale and moreover to the procedure of harmonizing those melodies, a practice considered indispensable at that time).\textsuperscript{110}

Ernest Reyer, who lived in Algiers for nine years, did not adapt specific Arabic melodies or rhythms. Instead, he adopted larger systems—for example, native melodies—and arranged them to make them accessible to the French audience. He wrote the Oriental symphony Le Sélam (1850), with orchestra, chorus and soloists, inspired by Le Désert and Gérard de Nerval's Voyage en Orient (1851).\textsuperscript{111} His approach to Orientalism in music represents the first tentative step towards a musical codification for its modal quality—which will be described later in this chapter—that prepared the ground for subsequent Orientalist operas. Salvador-Daniel, in the Album de chansons arabes, mauresques et kabyles (1868), approached Eastern music by applying a

\textsuperscript{110} Bartoli, “L'Orientalisme dans la musique française du XIX\textsuperscript{e} siècle”: 142.
\textsuperscript{111} Ibid., 146.
systematic classification of North-African Arabic modes. Finally, in 1876, Bourgault-Ducoudray collected *Trente Mélodies populaires de Grèce et d’Orient*, analyzed them, and later lectured on the subject at the 1878 *Exposition Universelle*.

2. Operatic Codification of the Exotic

It is not until David’s opera *Lalla-Roukh* (1862) that a sophisticated exotic musical system was introduced to the opera audience, at the *Opéra-Comique*. Adolphe Jullien considered it a masterpiece that germinated in the originality of *Le Désert*, for its dreamy melodies, and in particular, for its suggestive orchestration, while Hector Berlioz saw in *Lalla-Roukh* David’s talent and expressive ability to depict the exotic atmosphere of Kashmir. Shortly after the production of *Lalla-Roukh*, the first performance of Berlioz’s *Les Troyens* (Théâtre Lyrique, 1863) affirmed the characteristic exotic modal quality of his predecessors and contemporary fellow composers in a *grand opéra* setting. The same year, Georges Bizet’s *Les Pêcheurs de perles* introduced exoticism at the Théâtre-Lyrique. Camille Saint-Saëns’ *La Princesse jaune* and Bizet’s *Djamileh* (1872) were exotic operas in the Opéra-Comique tradition—

113 His lectures were published in *Conferences sur la modalité dans la musique grecque* (Paris: Imprimérie Nationale, 1879).
spoken dialogue alternating with sung melodies, and a happy ending, joined with “Oriental” melodies (pentatonic in the case of La Princesse jaune, chromatic in the case of Djamileh) and exotic dances. In these two one-act works the exotic language, emancipated from its fragmentary role, expressed “un véritable sujet plutôt qu’un prétexte” (a real subject rather than a pretext).\(^\text{115}\) Bizet, who never went to Spain, advanced the exotic genre in Carmen (1875): not only did he borrow and adapt melodies and rhythms from Spanish folk songs, but he also made Otherness the principal focus of the plot.\(^\text{116}\) Lastly, Saint-Saëns, who lived in Algeria, wrote Samson et Dalila (1877) suggesting a “re-creation pseudo-authentique” (a pseudo original re-creation) of original material that was elaborated in a generic fashion examined later in this section of the chapter.\(^\text{117}\)

Finally, the “exotic” music performed at the expositions universelles of 1878 and 1889, and the access to extra-European music recordings, inspired French composers to reinforce and amplify the codes of musical exoticism. Exotic opera as a genre per se was finally established by the 1880s. If David pioneered the genre and Bizet established it, Léo Delibes, Jules Massenet, Bourgault-Ducoudray, Lefebvre, and others, secured a distinct place for exotic


\(^{116}\) Nevertheless, the music representing the exotic abounds in the first two acts of Bizet’s opera, but largely disappears in the last two acts.

\(^{117}\) Bartoli, “L’Orientalisme dans la musique française du XIX\textsuperscript{e} siècle”: 151. See also: Locke, “Constructing the Oriental ‘Other’: Saint-Saëns’s Samson et Dalila.”: 261-302.
opera, by re-affirming and strengthening the already well established exotic musical codes and literary conventions. In this period, Locke suggests, “Orientalist composers relied on previous Orientalist compositions, more than on what was known of the music of the region.”

The number of exotic operas premiered in Paris between 1862, when the first exotic opera was staged, and the end of the century, when the genre started to fade, is considerable. This brief diagram maps the repertory.

Table 2-1 Exotic operas premiered in Paris (1862-1898)\textsuperscript{119}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Opera</th>
<th>Composer</th>
<th>Theater</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1862</td>
<td>Lalla-Roukh</td>
<td>David O.c.</td>
<td>O.C.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1863</td>
<td>Les Troyens</td>
<td>Berlioz</td>
<td>O.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Les Pêcheurs de perles</td>
<td>Bizet</td>
<td>T.L.</td>
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<td>1865</td>
<td>L'Africaine</td>
<td>Meyerbeer</td>
<td>O.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1872</td>
<td>La Princesse jaune</td>
<td>Saint-Saëns</td>
<td>O.C.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Djamileh</td>
<td>Bizet</td>
<td>O.C.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1875</td>
<td>Carmen</td>
<td>Bizet</td>
<td>O.C.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>L'Amour africain</td>
<td>Paladilhe</td>
<td>O.C.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1877</td>
<td>Le Roi de Lahore</td>
<td>Massenet</td>
<td>O.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1880</td>
<td>Aïda (1871)</td>
<td>Verdi</td>
<td>O.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1883</td>
<td>Lakmé</td>
<td>Delibes</td>
<td>O.C.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1884</td>
<td>Hérodiate (1881)</td>
<td>Massenet</td>
<td>T.I.</td>
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<td>1891</td>
<td>Thamarra</td>
<td>Bourgault-Ducoudray</td>
<td>O.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1892</td>
<td>Samson et Dalila (1877)</td>
<td>Saint-Saëns</td>
<td>O.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1893</td>
<td>Kassya\textsuperscript{120}</td>
<td>Delibes</td>
<td>O.C.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1894</td>
<td>Thaïs</td>
<td>Massenet</td>
<td>O.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Djelma</td>
<td>Léfebvre</td>
<td>O.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1897</td>
<td>Le Spahi</td>
<td>Lambert</td>
<td>O.C.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1898</td>
<td>L'Ile du Rêve</td>
<td>Hahn</td>
<td>O.C.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The last two new operas, L'Ile du Rêve and Le Spahi, belong to what this study considers the third stage in the path of French exotic operas. Musical and textual language of the exotic became redundant and lost their original impact.

Before discussing the last two phases of exotic language in opera, an in-depth analysis of musical and literary codes seems necessary.

\textsuperscript{119} Charles Parsons, \textit{The Mellen Opera Reference Index. Opera Premieres A Geographical Index}. Vol. 7 (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1989). The above diagram concentrates on performances of operas of "remote exotic" settings, which represent the Middle East, North and West Africa, Asia, and the Pacific region. It does not include the "near exotic," in which European countries are depicted, except for Carmen, which takes place in Spain, and Kassya, set in Austria, because of the Middle-Eastern inflections in the music.

\textsuperscript{120} Kassya is not covered in this study since it is a "near exotic" opera.
Signs of Musical Exoticism

In the operas listed above, the musical signs that helped to create the language of exoticism were always linked to each other and to the drama. They consisted of the specific use of: intervals, modes, and scales; rhythmic figures; instruments and orchestral textures; and vocal ranges and coloratura. However, it is of paramount importance to recognize that the musical language of the exotic never permeated the entirety of the operas. The codes appear in certain contexts that both composers and librettists considered dramatically and artistically appropriate, and that could most effectively depict Otherness. Their absence in specific parts of an opera, as the following analyses will indicate, did not always express the lack of exotic; on the contrary, the lack of exotic tropes in situations that actually take place in unmistakably exotic settings, often had strong dramatic impact on the perception of Otherness.

Among the most frequent musical constituents suggesting exoticism, composers exploited melody for three practical reasons. First, in opera generally and specifically in nineteenth-century French opera, melody expresses the characters' predicaments, sentiments, and personalities; second, because melodies could imitate monophonic or heterophonic songs widely found in
extra-European music; and third, because melody is a formal element of non-Western music that European composers could relate to with ease.  

A close look at intervals and scales used in exotic operas from 1862 to the end of the century indicates that augmented seconds were the most obvious signs indicating difference. In *Samson et Dalila*, *Djamileh*, *Les Pêcheurs de perles*, *Carmen*, *Thaïs*, *Thamara*, *Djelma*, and in *Le Spahi*, these intervals permeate vocal and orchestral melodies. But is the augmented second a true representative of the locales that inspired Saint-Saëns, Bizet, Massenet, Bourgault-Ducoudray, Lefebvre, and Lambert? Miriam Ladjili answers, “... *dans de nombreux écrits sur l’orientalisme dans la musique occidentale, on évoque souvent la ‘fameuse seconde augmentée’ en l’accusant de donner un caractère faussement arabe à des œuvres d’origines et de structures occidentales*” (Many writings about Orientalism in Western music often evoke the “famous augmented second” and blame it for giving a counterfeit Arabic character to works that are Western in structure and origin). “*Cette mise en cause,*” she adds, “*n’est, a notre avis, pas justifiée, car il s’agit réellement d’un...*

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121 The performative context and the significance of particular structural makeup in Middle-Eastern or Indian melodies did not concern French Opera composers at all, since they did not want to reproduce or imitate any historical or authentic circumstance.

122 As Locke and Scott point out, this intervalllic feature, particularly striking in *Samson et Dalila*’s “Dance of the Priestesses,” reflected the Arabic *hijāz* mode, where augmented seconds are located between the second and the third, and the sixth and seventh degrees of the scale. See Locke, “Constructing the oriental ‘Other’: Saint-Saëns’ *Samson et Dalila*”: 267; and Scott, “Orientalism and Musical Style”: 313.

intervalle très couramment employé dans la musique arabe, et il est donc légitime d’en faire usage pour évoquer cette musique là.” (We think that this claim is not justified because the interval in question is very frequently employed in Arabic music and therefore it is legitimate to use it to evoke that music).\(^{124}\) Adding that even if this particular musical feature cannot be detached from its context, Ladjili states that the majority of French composers tried to insert it in an appropriate musical context. Yet, the main issue of the misuse of the augmented second is a different one: why was it also employed in operas that had no Arab connections (i.e., *Les Pêcheurs de perles*, that was originally set in Mexico but was later changed to Ceylon, and *Djelma*, set in India)? The answer, suggested by Bartoli, acknowledges that although this interval does not belong to “traditional” Western music, it is the easiest to reproduce in Western music without altering the tempered system; inserted in a Western melody, the augmented second sounds colorful, and above all, different.\(^{125}\) In addition, this interval, forbidden in the strict and conventional counterpoint of the time, represented a digression from French conventionality and could easily represent a generic “Otherness.”

Unconventional positions of common intervals (half and whole tones) in a modal system also inspired composers to write a musical “alternative” to the

\(^{124}\) Ibid.

\(^{125}\) Ibid.
conventional major and minor modes. Church modes, with their timeless and mysterious implications due to their lack of a strong tonal drive, constituted an optimal musical tool that suggested remoteness and at the same time provided alternatives to a predictable tonal system. French melodies favored the first, the seventh, and the ninth modes (the Dorian, the Mixolydian, and the Ionian) and several operas employed the Aeolian and the Phrygian modes. For example, the Bell Song in *Lakmé* includes the Aeolian mode, the Ballad of *Djamileh* displays a descending Aeolian scale with a raised fourth degree, and, as Locke pointed out, Nadir’s aria “Je crois entendre encore” in *Les Pêcheurs de perles* consists of a melody in E Phrygian. Several parts of *Thaïs*, *Thamara*, and *Djelma* also suggest modality, the use of which will be explored in the next chapter. In addition to modality, in the mid-century, “le mélange majeur-mineur. . . [prend] l’allure d’un langage fortement typé.” (The mixture of major and minor takes on a strongly differentiated language). Whenever harmonized, however, modal features tended to lose their exotic impact. The tonal accompaniment of unusual melodic systems often hid the intelligibility of the exotic, occasionally producing a dissonant effect. Sometimes this effect

125 Bartoli, “L’Orientalisme dans la musique française du XIXe siècle”: 158. This idea starts form the premise that the majority of scale systems and intervals outside the French classical tradition include intervals smaller than the half tone.


127 Locke, “Cutthroats and Casbah Dancers”: 120.

enhanced the drama and strengthened the representation of the West through the perception that traditional harmony controlled unconventional melodies. Composers, however, did not always intend a specific effect by contrasting traditional harmony and modal melodies; sometimes their choices depended also on style, period, and individual compositional skills. In addition, from 1885 to the end of the century, the vogue of Wagnerism affected composers of exotic operas. While some sought harmonic complexity (i.e., Reyer, Lefebvre, Lambert, Bourgault-Ducoudray, and Massenet), others avoided it (i.e., Delibes, Hahn). Wagner's music also exerted a strong impact on French opera during the 1880s by developing innovative orchestration and promoting a new relationship between text and music.

If generic modality constituted the basis of exotic language in the great majority of exotic operas, the recurrence of certain “simple” rhythmic configurations—as they were perceived by European composers and audiences—reinforced exotic imagery with similar insistence. Such rhythmic “simplicity” of Arabic and Indian music incorporated in some exotic operas (i.e., Lakmé, Thaïs, and Djelma), was not typical at all of genuine Arabic or Indian music, and, most likely, in the last part of the nineteenth century critics and audience were aware of the inconsistency. The composers chose “simple” rhythmic patterns as ostinatos for pragmatic and dramatic reasons. The complexity of true Arabic and Indian rhythms did not belong to and could hardly
be reproduced within the musical framework of nineteenth-century Europe where melody and harmony dominated. Simple and repetitive patterns could easily be incorporated in a dance number, a traditional requirement in French opera that exotic operas used to represent non-Western customs, and they often punctuated natives' choruses. Finally, rhythmic complexity could distract in the context of an opera, since the medium itself begs for clear and immediate understanding of drama and therefore of music. In general, basic rhythmic figures were suited to depiction of “primitive” cultures and distant wilderness.

On a deeper level, however, in the context of a fast tempo, they also reflected elemental human behavior and basic passions, such as aggressiveness, sensuality, laziness, seductiveness, and exaltation, and punctuated dances of seduction or war scenes. When in a slow tempo, they represented mystery and were often linked to nature. The desert, for example, a typical backdrop of many exotic operas of the time and the vast, incomprehensible symbol of adversity, was often characterized with long notes (e.g., in David’s *Le Désert*) and slow tempos (e.g., in Thaïs’ “Meditation” scene). In the third act of Verdi’s *Aida*, the image of the still water of the Nile in a quiet and starry night is depicted through “the staccato tonic pedal, spread over four octaves...”130

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129 Both Arabic and Indian music, for example, make a large use of polyrhythm.
Syncopation, too, characterized the exotic. For example, in Lakmé’s aria “Légende de la fille du Paria,” placed right after the “Bell Song,” the figure eighth-quarter-eighth in a 2/4 meter insistently punctuates her exotic melody.\(^\text{131}\)

In the “Danse de l’almée” in Bizet’s Djamileh, the expression of sensuality consists of the melodic “Orientalism” accompanying the seductive movements of the heroine’s dance, but it is also expressed in the repetition of a strong syncopated rhythm in 4/4: \(\text{♩♩♩♩♩♩♩♩♩♩}.

Nevertheless, as Lacombe has suggested, “excepté les danses, les recherches rythmiques sont plutôt rares.” (Except for the dances, rhythmic exploration is quite rare).\(^\text{132}\) Occasionally, however, composers underlined the exotic with more complex rhythmic figures. In Bizet’s Les Pêcheurs de perles, for example, Nadir’s aria (Act 2) presents the alternation of the 9/8 and 12/8 meters, “vraisemblablement inspirée... du numéro 8 de l’opéra comique Jaguarita l’Indienne (1855) d’Halévy” (most likely inspired... by Number 8 of the comic opera Jaguarita l’Indienne [1855] by Halévy), in which the heroine evokes the nocturnal, silent but forceful walk of the tribe in the forest.\(^\text{133}\)

In his discussion of Carmen’s “Habanera,” Parakilas explored the exotic function of another rhythmic complexity: the juxtapositions of meters. “Most

\(^{131}\) For a lengthier discussion on the use of syncopation in this excerpt see: Scott, “Orientalism and Musical Style”: 310.

\(^{132}\) Lacombe, Les Voies de l’opéra français au XIXe siècle, 205.

\(^{133}\) Ibid.
seductive of all is the effect of the triplet eighths in the melody against the
dotted rhythm of the bass,” eventually dissolving into a “rhythmic consistency to
overwhelm the spectator with the power of Carmen’s movements.”134 Lambert
used a similar technique in Le Spahi, in which a meter in two is juxtaposed on a
meter in four.

Besides melodic and rhythmic devices, instruments and orchestral
textures, too, determined the construction of the exotic language. Western
instruments substituted for authentic instruments, and original instruments rarely
appeared in the score. For example, “Music intended for sitars and surnais is
channeled . . . through violins and oboes.”135 In addition, “Quand la harpe est
isolée (par exemple dans la Chanson de Nadir) [in Les Pêcheurs de perles],
c’est pour donner l’illusion de la guzla.” (When the harp is isolated—for
example in the Song of Nadir—it is to give illusion of the guzla).136 However, in
other instances, according to its association with other instruments and
depending on the music it played, the harp represented instead a “symbol of
sanctity in French opera of that time,” according to Hugh Macdonald.137 In
contrast, double reeds in general were the instruments preferred to typify a
characteristic exotic scene as, for example, in the sensual and emotional “Bell

Opera”: 116 (see Introduction, n. 30).
Song” of Lakmé in Delibes’ opera, or in seductive dances, as in David’s *Lalla-Roukh*. Certain percussion also played a major role in representing exoticism: the *tambour de basque* (called *bendir* in Arabic countries), and the cymbals, also a fundamental instrument in Arabic music. These instruments were almost always present in the orchestration of exotic operas from *Le Roi de Lahore* to *Le Spahi*, regardless of the locale they represented. Castanets were mostly used in Spanish-inspired operas (e.g., *Carmen*), but also for other locales, as in the *Bacchanale* of Saint-Saëns’ *Samson et Dalila*.

If such instruments were used to signify the exotic, they also gave the composers the opportunity to exploit the possibilities of the orchestra—through its size and texture—to create new sounds, especially, as Lacombe has pointed out, during the last quarter of the century. The musical search for new timbres in fact, reflected a desire for change, not only by evoking remote locales, but also by including the language of the exotic in a changing but still markedly Western musical structure.

Finally, the voice, its range, and its expressiveness, characterized operatic exoticism most significantly. Ornamental motives, coloratura and wordless vocalizes—generally sung by the exotic heroine—implied strangeness, mysteriousness, seductiveness, and sometimes vulnerability.139

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139 Locke introduced the idea of “vulnerability” referring to Lakmé’s modal, unaccompanied coloratura vocalizes in “Reflections on Orientalism in Opera and Musical Theater”: 54 (see
Dalila, Lakmé, Djelma, the slaves in Thaïs, the native girls in L’Île du rêve, among others, all use what Locke has defined as “looping melodic figures” to seduce, or to represent love. In particular, the voice of the soprano—or, in some cases of the mezzo (Aida, Dalila, Carmen)—and her melismatic flourishes suggested exoticism. In his discussion of Lakmé’s Bell Song, Scott writes, “It begins with a wordless vocalization, a device that became common in the representations of the “emotional” Easterner, the lack of verbal content pointing to a contrast with the ‘rational’ Westerner.” However, while modal, vocalized melodies helped to create the sexual and feminine exotic, female vocalization, in general and in a tonal context, already had the connotation of feminine strangeness and perversity (for example, the Queen of the Night’s voice in Mozart’s Magic Flute and later, in many mad-scenes of the first half of the nineteenth century). In actual fact, the ornamental motives imitating Arabic and Indian melismas exploited the bel canto technique, a style still fashionable in France, judging from the Parisian operatic repertoire of the whole nineteenth century.

In sum, particular features in the melody, rhythm, orchestration, and voices constituted the foundations of musical exoticism, a language reinforced

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Introduction, n. 31). See also the first chapter of: Carolyn Abbate, Unsung Voices: Opera and Musical Narrative in the Nineteenth Century, 3-29 (see Introduction, n. 17).

140 Locke, “Reflections on Orientalism in Opera and Musical Theater”: 54.

by their interaction and supported by the dramatic context in which they were expressed. The appearance of these codes in the 1830s, their increasing consistency in mid-century, and their substantial relevance in the last third of the nineteenth century, show how the exotic language of French opera had been successful with the public and was still thriving at the end of the century.

3. The Gradual Loss of the Exotic: Colonial Operas

At the very end of the century, as France strengthened its position as a world power and expanded its territories and colonies on all continents, the image of the exotic in opera and its musical representation became a hackneyed vehicle of drama. First of all, the imagery of remote and ideal locales seemed obsolete at a time when the exotic became the tangible reality of multiple colonies. Second, the continuous presence of exotic operas in the repertoires of the Opéra and Opéra-Comique in the last decades of the century exhausted the impact of the codes. A diagram shows the frequency at which exotic operas were performed at the Opéra-Comique and the Opéra between 1890 and 1898.  

Table 2-2 Exotic operas at the *Opéra-Comique* and *Opéra* (1890-1898)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Seasons</th>
<th>Operas</th>
<th>Performances during seasons</th>
<th>Composers</th>
<th>Theaters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1890-1</td>
<td><em>L'Africaine</em></td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Meyerbeer</td>
<td>O.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1891-2</td>
<td><em>Lakmé</em>, <em>Carmen</em>, <em>Lalla Roukh</em>, <em>Thamara</em></td>
<td><em>L'Africaine</em> 8</td>
<td>Delibes, Bizet, David, Bourgault-Ducoudray</td>
<td>O.C., O.C., O.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1894-5</td>
<td><em>Djelma</em>, <em>Samson et Dalila</em>, <em>Thaïs</em>, <em>Lalla Roukh</em>, <em>Lakmé</em>, <em>Carmen</em></td>
<td>8, 16, 30</td>
<td>Lefebvre</td>
<td>O.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1895-6</td>
<td><em>Thaïs</em>, <em>Samson et Dalila</em>, <em>Lalla Roukh</em>, <em>Lakmé</em>, <em>Carmen</em></td>
<td>7, 9, 3, 10, 39</td>
<td>Massenet</td>
<td>O.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1896-7</td>
<td><em>Le Spahi</em>, <em>Thaïs</em>, <em>Samson et Dalila</em></td>
<td>9, 3, 6</td>
<td>Lambert</td>
<td>O.C.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1897-8</td>
<td><em>Lalla Roukh</em>, <em>Carmen</em>, <em>Lakmé</em>, <em>L'Ile du Rêve</em>, <em>Thaïs</em></td>
<td>1, 26, 21, 9, 6 (new version)</td>
<td>Hahn</td>
<td>O.C.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*L'Africaine*, *Samson et Dalila*, *Lalla Roukh*, *Carmen*, and *Lakmé* had already been in the theaters’ repertoires for years, and had secured and
reinforced the language of the exotic. Their quality was not disputed. They represented the operatic canon of exoticism. Besides Thaïs (a revision of the 1895 version), the only new operas set in exotic locales in those years were L’Île du Rêve and Le Spahi. In contrast to the “canonic” operas, these last two operas were performed only nine times, and each failed to attract a significant audience and suffered from negative reviews. One of the main reasons the two operas failed was that they only partially employed traditional exotic codes, incorporating instead elements of other musical and literary genres. 143

The critics blamed Le Spahi for relying too much on strong realistic components in the drama, music, and text, despite the exotic setting. The score often refers to nationalism, imperialism, and the exaltation of the French army, as well as descriptions of a French soldier’s harsh life in Africa, through persistent military music. Allusions to life at home pervade the score through lyricism and a strong tonal drive, while musical components of the exotic fade. Critics found fault with the lack of exoticism in Le Spahi. “Une œuvre soignée qui devait, sous un soleil de feu, et dans cette brûlante atmosphère, atteindre à 45 degrés, et qui reste au-dessous de 0.” (A meticulous work that, under a blazing sun and in this burning atmosphere, was supposed to reach 45 degrees

143 The musical and textual analyses of Le Spahi and L’Île du Rêve in Chapter 5 of this dissertation clarify these transformations of styles.
[but] remains below zero), wrote the critic A. Goullet.\footnote{A. Goullet, "La Musique de Paris" (no title of publication provided) \textit{Le Spahi} in \textit{Dossier de l'opéra}, F-Po.} Alfred Bruneau specified that Lambert was not able to paint the town and the burning land “\textit{avec des couleurs assez spéciales, assez violentes},” (with colors that are peculiar and violent enough).\footnote{Alfred Bruneau, “Les Théâtres” \textit{Le Figaro} (19 October 1897) \textit{Le Spahi} in \textit{Dossier de l'opéra}, F-Po.} Comparing the original source \textit{Le Roman d'un Spahi} to the opera, Henri Bauer wrote that the opera missed “\textit{le charme ineffable et la sensibilité du style, l'ardente sensualité et la mollesse des corps, l'insouciance et le caprice effréné, l'éclat brûlant du soleil, les nuances colorées du sable . . .}” (the ineffable charm and the sensibility of style, the ardent sensuality and softness of the bodies, the freedom from worry and the wildly whimsical, the burning brightness of the sun, the colored nuances of the sand).\footnote{Henri Bauer, “Les Premières Représentations,” \textit{Écho de Paris} (20 October, 1897) \textit{Le Spahi} in \textit{Dossier de l'opéra}, F-Po.} The opera, in sum, instead of underlining the \textit{couleur locale} as the primary component in the musico-literary style, had a propensity for \textit{naturalisme}. Philippe Blay defines \textit{Le Spahi} as an opera “\textit{exotico-naturaliste}.” He explains, “\textit{L'œuvre, en effet, se présente comme une synthèse entre le style colonial de la 'Lakmé' de Delibes et le réalisme patriotique de 'L'Attaque du moulin' de Bruneau, dont Gallet était d'ailleurs le librettiste}.” (The work, in fact, is presented as a synthesis between
the colonial style of Delibes’ *Lakmé* and the patriotic realism of Bruneau’s *L’Attaque du moulin*, the librettist of which, not incidentally, was Gallet).  

The critics also complained about *L’Ile du Rêve*’s lack of exotic impact. For example, Pierre de Breville wrote, “... ceux qui croyaient la Polynésie un pays de tropicale chaleur emporteront de cette soirée cette impression étonnante que c’est tout simplement un pays tiède.” (... those who believed that Polynesia is a country of tropical heat, they will take away this evening the startling impression that it is just a lukewarm country). Leon Kerst accused Hahn’s music of lacking substantial form and expression, and reported the audience’s bland reaction to the subject: “... cette Polynésie ‘sans couleur, sans saveur’” (... this Polynesia ‘without color, without flavor’). The journalist of *La Libérté* (1898) also commented that *L’Ile du rêve* lacked “couleur exotique,” and that the popular Tahitian song performed by the chorus at the end of the third act, “... ne suffit pas à me donner la sensation d’un pays que je ne connais pas.” (... is not enough to give me the impression of a country that I do not know). Moreover, according to the critic of the New York

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148 In *L’Île du rêve* the profits of the nine performances averaged 2,726.27 francs, a low income in comparison to the 6,217.72 francs that the Théâtre de l’Opéra averaged from nine performances of *Carmen*. See: Philippe Blay, “Le Théâtre lyrique de Pierre Loti,” 109, n. 51.


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newspaper *Dramatic Mirror* (1898), the public’s expectation for the exotic component seemed frustrated: “The impression made by the performance upon the audience was not very favorable, the general opinion being that the work was of too light and colorless a character.”152 In sum, Hahn did not thoroughly embrace the language of the exotic, typical in previous operas. He diluted exotic imagery by confining the exotic musical codes to only a few scenes. In the search for “un équivalent sonore à la prose poétique de Pierre Loti” (a sonorous equivalent to the poetic prose of Pierre Loti), Hahn turned to the “merveilleux méditatif et mélanconique, celui des voyageurs fin-de-siècle pour lesquels l’espace exotique est celui du désenchantement” (meditative and melancholy contemplation of spectacle, that of the fin-de-siècle travelers for which ‘the exotic space is the space of disillusion’).153 The introspective moods of music and libretto triumphed over seductive exoticism, blanching the imagery. The opera, in fact, leaned towards symbolism, already popular in literature and instrumental music. Even if he never explicitly confirmed it, Hahn seemed to anticipate the dream-like atmosphere of Claude Debussy’s symbolist opera *Pelléas et Mélisande* (1902). About his opera, Debussy wrote, “In it there is an evocative language whose sensitivity could be extended into music and into the

152 *Dramatic Mirror* (1898), *L’île du rêve* in *Dossier de l’opéra*, F-Po.
orchestral backcloth.\textsuperscript{154} Although never explicitly referring to Debussy\textquotesingle s style, Hahn\textquotesingle s evocative musical and textual language, as Chapter 4 of this dissertation demonstrates, permeated \textit{L\textquoteright Is du r\^e}.\textsuperscript{155}

Both \textit{Le Spahi} and \textit{L\textquoteright Is du r\^e} conveyed exotic codes through their subjects, sets, and musical and textual languages, even if only in a milder manner. They represent the third and last stage of the evolution of exotic opera in France and marked the end of an operatic genre. Nonetheless, exotic themes kept re-appearing in the twentieth century through thousands of performances of the operas that epitomize the exotic canon (\textit{Carmen, Thaïs, Lakmè}) not only in the country that spawned them but all around the world.


\textsuperscript{155} It is interesting to notice that Étienne Mallarmé, one of the most significant voices of literary \textit{Symbolisme}, died in 1898, the same year in which \textit{L\textquoteright Is du r\^e} premiered.
PART II: READING FIVE EXOTIC OPERAS OF THE 1890s

The second part of this dissertation focuses on how five operas composed and produced in the 1890s mirror contemporary views of exoticism. They all represent extra-European remote locales and people, but the depictions of Otherness differ in each work. Furthermore, the evolution of exotic language in these works parallels that of French literature from 1880 to the end of the century, but the developments in these operas took only eight years. The first three new productions of the 1890s—Thamara, Djelma, and Thaïs—stage their exotic locales without any explicit reference to the West. In the last two, Le Spahi and L'Île du rêve, the concept of the exotic appears more realistic, since they take place in French colonies and feature Western characters. Besides representing diverse regions, the first three operas also differ from the last two in that they represent the past, instead of contemporary times. In addition, the first operas never use real native language, while the last two occasionally do. The change of locale from remote to tangible reflects a fascination for the colonies, mirroring contemporary literary trends. Thamara and Djelma stem from relatively unknown literary sources, whereas Thaïs, Le Spahi and L'Île du rêve derive from popular novels. Thaïs' literary source does not specifically belong to the genre of colonial novel, but it implies some characteristics of it, while the novels on which Le Spahi and L'Île du rêve are based depict life in French colonies.
In this section of the dissertation, three chapters (Thamara and Djelma, Thaïs, and Le Spahi and L'Île du rêve) study the semantic layout of each opera. These analyses focus on the interrelationships among scenery, text, and music in each opera’s “syntactic” frame, with particular attention to the themes of love, religion, and landscape. A close look at particular textual and musical codes also explains how each opera approaches exoticism, colonialism, and literature. The analytical method proceeds as follows. First, an examination of the libretto, its literary source, its cultural implication, and its semantic significance vis-à-vis the exotic codes, clarifies the social and dramatic contexts in which the opera functions. In this section the presence of particular themes (i.e. love, religion, and land) and the use of terms and objects of particular importance for the representation of the exotic (for example, “sand,” “sun,” “blood,” “mimosa,” etc.) illustrate the constant conflict between the West and the Other. Second, a musical analysis of selected numbers and scenes, and their function in the development of dramatic and musical exoticism clarify how composers viewed Otherness. The musical analyses focus on melodic, rhythmic, and harmonic features, as well as form, texture, and orchestration to establish the presence (or sometimes the absence) of musical codes that suggest Otherness. In addition, the combination of text and music and their coordination or lack thereof in depicting the West and the Exotic as well constitutes an important part of the musical analysis. Finally, these chapters make continuing references to stage setting and
costumes and to their relevance in the portrayal of the exotic, to examine how visual aspects of the exotic might reinforce or replace music and text.

The first chapter of the second section (chapter 3 of the dissertation) takes a close look at Thamara and Djelma and at the construction of “elusive” exoticism.\(^1\) The following chapter shows how Thaïs refers to a more modern view of Otherness, in which Self (the West) and Other (the East) become separate entities. Finally, the last chapter of this section examines two operas of the existing exotic, Le Spahi and L’Île du rêve, and explains how they rely on the roman colonial to build a more realistic vision of Otherness.

**III. The Intangible Exotic: Thamara and Djelma.**

Thamara and Djelma embrace the same view of exoticism but in different terms. They develop in Eastern regions not under French dominion and considered remote and exotic at the time (Russian Asia and India), take place in the past, and feature no European characters.\(^2\) Librettists Louis Gallet and Georges Lomon created original plots for these operas; Gallet adapted one of his

\(^1\) Although Thaïs premiered before Djelma, the latter opera belongs to a more conservative interpretation of exoticism, barely affected by the roman colonial. Therefore, it is appropriate to cover Djelma first.

\(^2\) Both composers also won the Prix de Rome for previous works and were chosen to compose operas for the Opéra. Bourgault-Ducoudray won the prize in 1862 with the cantata Louise de Mézières and Lefebvre in 1870 with Jugement de Dieu. According to the conditions of the Cahiers de charges of the Opéra, an opera by a recipient of the prize ought to be performed once every two years. See: Frédérique Patureau, *Le Palais Garnier dans la société parisienne: 1875-1914* (Paris: Mardaga, 1991), 212.
own novels, and Lomon made no explicit reference to any literary work. They shaped similar exotic imagery (i.e., oriental palaces, flowers, desert, sun) and made use of similar dramatic tools to explore exoticism (i.e., dreams, prayers, and dances). The music displays few exotic elements in common, for each composer approached musical Orientalism in his own way. In *Thamara*, Bourgault-Ducoudray found inspiration in and elaborated upon original material from Greek music, while in *Djelma*, Lefebvre made minimal and always generic references to exoticism. Furthermore, the distancing effect created by the stage sets is similar in the two operas as well. They both rely on stage settings that depict unusual landscapes, and their costumes represent the idealized exotic, according to the stage directions of librettos and scores and to the descriptions of reviewers.\(^3\)

The most striking difference between the two operas, however, is their approach to Otherness. In *Thamara* the Georgian heroine represents a familiar character with which the French public shares religious and patriotic sentiments. Her male opponent, in contrast, embodies all the traditional characteristics of the exotic: paganism, mysteriousness, and sharply “different” physical features. In *Djelma*, on the other hand, the Indian heroine appears equal to her male counterpart. They both belong to a world completely removed from European

\(^3\) Articles and reviews on the reception of *Thamara* are collected at the Bibliothèque de l’Opéra, Paris, (F-Po) in *Thamara, Dossier de l’œuvre*; the press concerning *Djelma* is collected in *Djelma, Dossier de l’œuvre* (F-Po). Records of costumes and stage sets created for the *Thamara*
religious and cultural values; therefore, they are perceived as Others. The two contrasting approaches to Otherness will be the focus of the following analyses of the two operas.

A. Thamara

1. The Libretto

Louis Gallet, the librettist of Thamara, was one of the most accomplished French librettists of the last quarter of the nineteenth century. He adapted his own short novel Thamara, Légende persane (1881) to libretto form for Thamara in four tableaux. Because it was published in one of the most prestigious periodicals widely known among French intellectuals, we can assume that his short story had been read and appreciated by at least some reviewers and members of the audience. Gallet was also an expert in the

and Djelma productions cannot be located at the Bibliothèque de l'Opéra. A portrait of Rose Caron in Djelma's costume, however, heads the vocal score of the opera.

4 Thamara was performed in two different series of productions at the Opéra. The first series (five performances) premiered on December 28, 1891. The revival took place in 1907.

5 This dissertation always refers to the first and only edition of the libretto: Louis Gallet, Thamara (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1892).


7 Gallet was the opera critic of La Nouvelle Revue at the time of the publication of “Thamara. Légende persane.” In the same year (1881) famous writers whose works served as the basis of exotic operas, such as Pierre Loti and Anatole France, also published their writings in La Nouvelle Revue.
dramatizations of novels for opera. Victorin Joncières complimented Gallet on the skill of his adaptation of the novel. He wrote, "Il lui a été facile de le découper en quatre tableaux, très courts, très clairs, et offrant de belles situations dramatiques au compositeur" (It was easy for him to divide it in four brief and clear tableaux that offered to the composer some beautiful dramatic situations).

The action takes place in the Georgian (now Azerbaijani) village of Baku, called "Bakou la Sainte" in both libretto and novel, near the Caspian Sea in Russian Asia, a strategic crossroads between East and West. The libretto does not specify the time period in which the story occurs, but historical references suggest that the setting might be between the twelfth and the thirteenth century. The army of the Persian Sultan Nour-Eddin has destroyed the Tartar village, Baku "the Holy." The last hope of defeating the invaders rests with the beautiful and religious virgin Thamara. The old priest and the greatest warrior of the village choose her as their savior to seduce and kill the enemy. She agrees, but falls in love with Nour-Eddin, after he charms her when they meet. After a night of passionate love, Thamara, hesitating, kills the Sultan with a knife. She goes back to her village where the people celebrate her. At the end, however, she kills

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8 For a complete list of Gallet's librettos, see Lacombe, "Autour de Louis Gallet," 84-87. Gallet wrote the librettos for six exotic operas: Massenet's *La Coupe du roi de Thulé* (with E. Blau) (1866), Bizet's *Djamileh* (1872), Saint-Saëns's *La Princesse jaune* (1872), Massenet's *Le Roi de Lahore* (1877), Massenet's *Thaïs* (1894), and Lambert's *Le Spahi* (with A. Alexandre) (1897).

9 Joncières, "Feuilleton de La Liberté."
herself with the same knife she had used to kill Nour-Eddin, because she cannot
live without him.

The heroine of Gallet's story appears as a strong character, a true brave
woman who sacrifices her virtue for her people, but ends up being a victim of
her passion. She resembles Tamar, the Queen of Georgia, and the subject of
many historical articles and books published before Gallet wrote his novel
Thamara, Légende persane. Eugène d'Auriac, the president of La Revue de la
société des études historiques, also wrote a lengthy account of her life at the time
of the premiere of Thamara, published by his periodical to commemorate his
death, in 1892. Queen Tamar (1184-1212) fascinated nineteenth-century
historians and writers for her beauty and bravery. In the latter part of the twelfth
century this Christian Georgian queen fought powerful Persian armies and
defeated Muslim invaders throughout her entire life. “Thamar était de ces
femmes qui ont le privilège d'inspirer de grandes passions, privilège qui
n'appartient qu'aux femmes fortes pouvant donner tout ce qu'elles peuvent”

10 Histoire de la Géorgie, depuis l'antiquité jusqu'au XIXe siècle, trans. into French from
Georgian by Marie-Félicité Brosset (St. Petersbourg: L'Académie Impériale des Sciences, 1856).
Frédéric Dubois de Montpéreux. Voyage autour du Caucase, chez les Tcherkesses et les
Adèle Hommaire de Hell, Les Steppes de la mer Caspienne, voyage dans la Russie méridional
1847). Frederic Bodensladt, Les Peuples du Caucase et leur guerre d'indépendance contre la
Russie (Paris: Dentu, 1859). Ernest Chantre, Recherches paléoethnologiques dans la Russie
méridionale et spécialement au Caucase et en Crimée (Lyon: H. Georg, 1881).
11 Eugène d'Auriac, “Thamar, Reine de Géorgie, 1184-1212,” Revue de la Société des études
historiques 58 (1892): 66-77. A study by Alexandre Manvelichvili, Histoire de Géorgie (Paris:
Nouvelles de la Toison d’or, 1951) confirms the accuracy of d’Auriac’s account.
(Thamar was one of those women who have the privilege of inspiring great passions, a privilege that belongs only to strong women who give all that they can). In his novel and libretto, Gallet used names similar to those of the real historical figures surrounding the Queen. Chirwan, the Russian prince who fell in love with Tamar, Gallet names Khirvan, the warrior eager to defend Baku. Noukr-Eddin, the Muslim sultan who feigned to seek peace but instead declared war on the Queen, becomes the Persian villain Nour-Eddin in the libretto.

The events around the true Georgian heroine often bear a resemblance to those of the story of Jeanne d’Arc, and the mythology created around these beautiful, strong, and patriotic Christian women provided an excellent background for Gallet’s plot. The libretto makes the heroine the most beautiful virgin of Baku, and not a queen or a saint, even if she possesses all the characteristics of both. In addition, according to Gallet’s interpretation, Thamara’s virtuous character contrasts with her male counterpart in several ways: she is white, Catholic, a patriot, and a virgin, while her enemy Nour-Eddin is dark-skinned, pagan, and a tyrant with many wives. Nevertheless, their physical beauty attracts each to the other. This fascination between totally opposite characters, along with their conflict, creates the interest of the drama. Gallet, however, following the rules of exotic literature, denies a long-lasting union between the two, clearly symbolizing the failure of the Encounter. The

12 Ibid., 71.
following diagram exemplifies Thamara’s structure to facilitate a detailed discussion on the opposites’ contrast, bond, and destruction, with particular attention to Thamara’s embodiment of Western values and Nour-Eddin’s personification of Otherness.

Table 3-1 Thamara’s dramatic layout and exoticism in the set

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tableaux</th>
<th>Where</th>
<th>Dramatic Elements</th>
<th>Set and Props</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

The dramatic premise of Thamara would have proven an inherently titillating idea for the Parisian audience because the title character prostitutes herself for her country and her people. Thamara accepts her charge, but does not make her own decisions until the end. Instead, the main Priest and Khirvan, the strongest warrior of the village, exert that power to send her into the enemy’s arms. In fact, the Priest introduces Thamara’s drama even before she has her first
chance to sing. In Scene 2 of Tableau 1, the Priest announces to the crowd of the village that the Persian invaders will leave and their leader Nour-Eddin will die. The crowd asks, “Qui frappera l'infâme? Qui nous délivrera?” (Who will strike the villain? Who will free us?); showing Thamara, the Priest answers, “Une femme” (A woman). Recognizing Thamara, the women of the village describe her as “l'orgueil de Bakou” (the pride of Baku) and “sa vierge la plus belle” (its most beautiful virgin). After she accepts her mission, the crowd comments, “Dieu l'inspire et l'éclaire” (God inspires and illuminates her).

Then, it is Khirvan who prompts her to seduce the Sultan:

... Va vengeresse!
Fais de ta voix une caresse,
Fais un charme de tes beaux yeux.
Soit comme un fruit délicieux
Donnant la mort après l'ivresse!...

(... Go, agent of vengeance!
Of your voice make a caress
Of your eyes make a charm.
Become a delicious fruit
That gives death after exhilaration!...)

The Sultan predicts her actions before meeting with her as well. He reveals to his harem that he has seen the most beautiful woman in his sleep. In his aria he sings of how she kissed him and how the kiss took his life. Later in

13 Louis Gallet, Thamara, 6.
14 Ibid.
15 Ibid., 7.
16 Ibid.
the opera, fulfilling his dream, she kills the Sultan after having sexual intercourse with him. Thamara’s predicament was hardly original in contemporary French opera. Similar to the story of Judith in the *Book of Judith*, and comparable to other favorite biblical stories represented in French operas, Thamara embraces sex and death for a noble purpose. Thamara even spells out the conflict in her last words to the invisible image of Nour-Eddin, right after she stabs herself with same knife she used to kill him:

_Viens! À jamais nous lie
La puissance du sort.
_Viens où la haine oublié
Nous aimer dans la mort!*_18_

(Come! Forever we are linked
By the power of destiny.
Come where hate forgets,
To love each other in death!)

Death alone can resolve the interracial conflict that has parted the protagonists. In Thamara’s words, they can be united only where they cannot be seen. In fact, to a certain extent, *Thamara* conforms to classic tragedy in which

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17 Dalila seduces Samson and betrays him, but at the end he kills her and himself (Saint-Saëns and Ferdinand Lemaire, *Samson et Dalila*, 1877). Salammbô, daughter of a Carthaginian leader seduces the rebellious Mathô, falls in love with him, kills herself, and at the end he too kills himself with the same sword (Reyer and Du Locle, *Salammbô*, 1890). Although desire for power motivates the seductress Salomé to kill her prey, John the Baptist, she is punished and killed afterwards (Richard Strauss’ *Salomé*, 1905). Charles Lefebvre wrote *Judith*, a “Biblical Drama” that was performed in 1875 at the Conservatoire, and in 1879 at the Concerts Pasdeloup.


19 In *Thamara* death is the final solution, differently from the epic opera *Le Roi de Lahore* (Gallet and Massenet, 1877) in which the lovers reunite in the afterworld.
conflict ends with death. Furthermore, the uncompromising polarity of images in the text reinforces the conflict. The following examples clarify this concept.

The staging directions also emphasize his "blackness" in contrast to Thamara’s "whiteness": she appears “blanche dans sa robe blanche” (white in her white dress), and Nour-Eddin describes her appearance in his dream as “une femme au visage pâle” (a woman with a pale visage) in his romance:20

Belle d’une beauté fatale
Une femme venait vers moi
Une femme au visage pale
Et mon cœur frisonnait d'émoi

Ouvrant les bras la charmeresse,
Marchait ainsi lente et sans bruit
Ses yeux doux comme une caresse
Étaient profond comme la nuit

Et sur cette pâleur mortelle
Éclatait, ô charme puissant,
Sa lèvre cruelle
Rouge comme une fleur de sang.

Et sous cette lèvre de flame
Je sentais ma lèvre brûler
Et dans un lent baiser
Mon âme s'exale.

La vision s'efface
Troublant une vague menace
Des souvenirs pleins de douceur.21

---

20 Ibid., 21 and 11.
21 Ibid., 11.
(Lovely, with a fateful loveliness
A woman came toward me,
A woman with a pale visage
And my heart trembled from emotion

Opening her arms, the charmer
Then walked slowly and without noise,
Her sweet eyes as a caress
Were profound as the night

And on this mortal paleness,
O powerful charm,
Her cruel lips burst,
Red as a flower of blood.

And under these burning lips
I felt my lips burning
And in a slow kiss,
My soul dissipating.

The vision faded,
A vague threat overshadowing
Memories full of delight.)

In her first appearance in front of her enemy, in Tableau 2, Scene 4, she
indeed appears white to the Parisian public: “Elle est dévoilée, dans la blancheur
laitueuse de la lumière. Ses mains se serrent sur sa poitrine nue . . .” (She is
unveiled, in the milky whiteness of the light. She holds her hands over her naked
breasts . . .).22 Half naked, she unveils her face not only to show her white
complexion, but also to titillate the male audience, a requirement for many
operatic exotic females, such as Thaïs and Salomé. Although specifying stage

22 Ibid., 16. Staging directions. In the novel, Gallet adds “sidérale” (sidereal) after “lumière”
light, set, and Thamara’s physical appearance, the librettist also betrays a certain literary complacency by using the cliché “blancheur laiteuse.” Furthermore, her pale image associated with red blood in Nour-Eddin’s dream “Et sur cette pâleur mortelle éclatait, ô charme puissant, sa lèvre cruelle rouge comme une fleur de sang” (And on this mortal paleness, O powerful charm, her cruel lips burst, red as a flower of blood) comes back in Tableau 4, where Thamara appears in “vêtements blancs souillés, tachés de sang” (white garments soiled, stained with blood), after she has killed her lover. Blood red associated with pure white represents a cliché widely used in other operas of the period to symbolize loss of virginity or innocence and the beginning of sin.

Nour-Eddin’s darkness instead represents antagonism. In Tableau 1, Scene 2, a group of women describe Nour-Eddin before he even appears on stage, “... le sultan au repoussant visage, immonde et noir... l’être brutal et sauvage...” (The sultan with a repellent face, filthy and black... the brutal and savage being...). Khirvan later adds, “... Noir destructeur de villes!” (Black destroyer of cities!) But Nour-Eddin also appears “white” to the women who love him. For his harem he has “pâles mains” (pale hands), and to Thamara’s eyes, after she has loved him, “son front charmant est pâle” (his charming...}

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23 For example, the same terms had been used in La Tueuse d’écho by Catulle Mendès (1883), and Madame Parisse by Guy de Maupassant (1886).
25 Gallet, Thamara, 7.
26 Ibid., 9.
forehead is pale). Finally, the Priest, too, is dressed in white when he first appears. In Tableau 1, Scene 2, he is immediately associated with purity and justice not only for his holy appearance, but also for his actions: he convinces the crowd to revolt against the army of the tyrant Nour-Eddin.

Besides her attractive pale appearance, imagery suggesting holiness also surrounds Thamara from the beginning of the opera. Before she can say a word, in Tableau 1, Scene 2, the Priest introduces her:

\[
\begin{align*}
Elle a \text{ prié près des autels dans l’ombre} , \\
\text{Pleurez nos morts apparus dans son cœur;} \\
Elle a \text{ prié durant des jours sans nombre!} & \ldots
\end{align*}
\]

(She has prayed by the altars in the shadow, Cried over our dead who appeared in her heart; She has prayed throughout so many days! \ldots)

And to the Priest she finally says, “\textit{Du ciel j’accomplirai les vœux! Je suis prête et j’attends; je suis forte et j’espère!} \ldots” (I will accomplish the Heavens’ wishes! I am ready and I wait. I am strong and I have hope! \ldots). In the same scene, when the women of the village ask her if she will be able to accomplish her mission and dare to look at the enemy, she answers, “\textit{J’oserai, Pour ta gloire, ô Patrie!”} (I will dare for your glory, o Homeland!). In sum, the
heroine’s predicament in *Thamara* supplies titillating erotic scenes, but also promotes religious faith and patriotic feelings.

The sets also contribute to the fabrication of exoticism by means of visual contrast. The first tableau shows Thamara’s hometown (Home, Self). Then the curtain falls, followed by an orchestral prelude. The second and third tableaux, instead, show Nour-Eddin’s palace (Foreign, Other). In between these two tableaux the curtain falls to hide the two protagonists’ night of love. Finally, the fourth tableau takes us back to Thamara’s village. In between the last two tableaux the curtain remains raised and only darkness divides them, symbolizing the Sultan’s death and the end of love. In addition, the set of each tableau represents the contrasting positions of a good but hopeless Self, and the villainous but exciting Other.

Thamara’s journey starts in the village of Baku. The enemies have destroyed the village depicted under an “implacable sun,” representing the villagers’ hardship. In the novel, Gallet describes the sun more extensively: “L’astre-dieu reste impassible témoin de leur [the villagers’] désastre; il dore de ses rayons les ruines embrasées; il met de la pourpre dans les fumées qui, peu à peu, montent de la ville, s’étendent et flottent au-dessus d’elle, comme une vapeur de sang” (The star-god remains an impassive witness of their [the villagers’] disaster; with its rays it gilds the blazing ruins; it drops crimson on the smoke that, little by little, rises from the town, expands and floats over it as
streaming blood).\(^{32}\) In addition, the staging directions of Tableau 1, Scene 1, describe a Parsi temple.\(^{33}\) Parsi, an ancient religion based on the belief that the opposition of good and evil and the victory of good represent the essence of the world, reflects much of the entire opera’s meaning, and the temple becomes the bearer of Truth.\(^{34}\) In this context, the heroine represents goodness, which conflicts with the enemy and evil Other, the Muslim Sultan. Through its magnificence, the setting of Nour-Eddin’s palace in the second and third tableaux contrasts with the village of Baku in the outer tableaux. The harem, the dances, and the music complement the Persian carpets, flowers, and the luxurious bed to create true couleur locale. In the only scene of Tableau 3, where the love scene and murder occur, it is night, and the only light comes from the lamp which illuminates the dagger; this dark setting in an exotic palace represents the ultimate Catholic sins of sexual luxury and murder concentrated. The last tableau shows the home village, now festive in day’s brightness, where houses are decorated with flowers and palm fronds, symbols of peace. Here, Thamara’s suicide happens suddenly. She stabs herself after having sex with the enemy, and after murdering her enemy, that is, after she had sinned and accomplished her mission. The exotic scenes seem to be a memory of the past.

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\(^{34}\) Alexandre Dumas travelled into the Caucasus and in Baku, witnessed a Parsi (Zoroastrian) religious ceremony illuminated by natural petroleum, and he published his impressions just a few years before *Thamara* was performed. See Dumas, *Impressions de voyage: le Caucase*, vol. 2 (Paris: Calmann-Levy, 1880), 25-30.
and the return to the first tableau’s setting suggests also a return to Thamara’s reality, her hometown.

Gallet’s language reinforces his stage directions, as it did his description of his characters. For example, at the beginning of Tableau 2, the women of the harem sing to their husband who they are, where they are, and what they are doing, employing a typical exotic language.

\[
O \text{ maître de toutes choses,}  \\
Loin du soleil dévorant,  \\
Pour te charmer sont écloses  \\
Les jeunes fleurs de l’Iran,  \\
\]

\[
Et tes esclaves heureuses  \\
Versent sur tes pâles mains  \\
Le parfum des tubéreuses  \\
Des roses et des jasmins.\textsuperscript{35}  \\
\]

(O master of all things,  
Far away from the devouring sun,  
The young flowers of Iran  
Have blossomed to charm you,  

And your happy slaves  
Pour on your pale hands  
The perfume of tuberoses,  
Of roses and jasmines).

“Devouring sun” symbolizes a far-away hardship that does not threaten the Sultan. Flowers, perfume, and attractive slave women offer instead the image of pleasure and luxury, that is, the Sultan’s present situation. By portraying Nour-Eddin in his environment, the women’s words enhance his dramatic

\textsuperscript{35} Gallet, \textit{Thamara}, 10.
persona, but also add exotic flavor by using well-known literary clichés. In his novel, Gallet establishes these clichés very clearly. There he describes the scene of Thamara and Nour-Eddin's encounter, after women, slaves and musicians have left: “Sous la coupole transparente du ciel, tandis que tournent lentement les constellations, que la fraîcheur de minuit fait frissonner légèrement les étendards et que le parfum subtil des roses effeuillées par les femmes flotte dans l'air, Thamara et Nour-Eddin demeurent seuls” (Under the sky's transparent dome, while the constellations slowly revolve, the midnight coolness makes the banners lightly shiver, while the subtle perfume of the roses' petals pulled off by the women is floating on the air, Thamara and Nour-Eddin remain alone).36

Overall, plot and words in Gallet's novel and libretto implement a literary trend based on strong Oriental tropes that only indirectly contrast with the West since the West has no part in the story. However, filtered through his text, the expert librettist reproduced Western values and opposed them to exotic symbols. Within a highly removed context he was able to re-create the conflict between Self and Other, already “established” in much literature and opera of his time.

2. The Music

Bourgault-Ducoudray's score of *Thamara* establishes an even stronger contrast between Western and non-Western identities. The composer promotes this distinction not only by following the dramatic plan and giving suitable exotic music to the Other, but also by purposely avoiding exotic color when faith and victory prevail, in order to construct the image of Self. His music suggests that he had a clear idea of how and where he ought to re-create the exotic locale and when it was necessary not to represent it. Where he wants to promote Otherness he uses original Greek folk music (i.e., Tableau 2), which he considered Oriental enough to represent ancient Persia. He reinforces the drama by portraying difference in an accessible yet unfamiliar way, by using simple but intriguing irregular rhythms and Greek melodies. He also makes reference to previous operas set in faraway lands, by imitating some structural features. For example, as in Giacomo Meyerbeer's and Eugène Scribe's *L'Africaine* (Opéra, 1865), *Thamara* starts with an animated first tableau—it

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37 This dissertation always refers to the first and only edition of the piano-vocal score, Louis Albert Bourgault-Ducoudray, *Thamara* (Paris: Léon Grus, 1892), and to the manuscript of the original orchestral score *Thamara*, A. 657, 3 vols. (F-Po). The composer's children gave this manuscript to the Bibliothèque de l'Opéra in May 1922. There are no other copies of the orchestral score.

38 After winning the Prix de Rome in 1862, Bourgault-Ducoudray developed a particular interest for folk and ancient Greek music. From 1878 to 1909 he was professor of aesthetics and music history at the Conservatoire. In 1878 he lectured at the *Exposition Universelle* on Greek music. He published three works on the subject: *Études sur la musique ecclesiastique grecque* (Paris: Hachette, 1877); *Souvenir d'une mission musicale* (Paris: Hachette, 1878); and the reports of his lecture at the 1878 Exposition, *Conférence sur la modalité dans la musique grecque* (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1879). In addition, Bourgault-Ducoudray collected several Greek melodies in the original language, harmonized them and published them in 1876.
was an act in the case of Meyerbeer’s opera—that alternates vocal music with melodic fragments played by the orchestra. Between the second and the third tableaux of *Thamara* the curtain falls to conceal the sex scene, a dramatic technique previously employed by Jules Massenet and librettists Alfred Blau and Louis de Gramont in *Esclarmonde* (Opéra-Comique, 1889).

Bourgault-Ducoudray concentrates all musical exoticisms in the four scenes of Tableau 2, where all characters promote Otherness. Its dramatic plan develops from its most exotic when the Persian harem and slaves celebrate the Sultan, to lyrical and traditional before the curtain falls to conceal a night of love. Opposed to the musical Orientalism of this tableau, other parts of the opera feature religious and martial music. The sporadic absence of exotic codes in an opera that displays an entirely exotic background carries a particular significance, especially for a composer who dedicated much of his research and work to “Oriental” music. The scenes that do not incorporate exoticism tend to represent the Self, an entity that always reflects the West, even if not physically present. In those scenes it is mostly the music relating to Thamara that does not communicate in exotic terms. Therefore, her musical representation, along with her image (white) and her predicament that promotes religious and patriotic values, suggest that she embodies the West.

The following analysis concentrates on the East-West dichotomy in music, with particular attention to the musical representation of Thamara and the
exotic musical context in which she operates. Since this dissertation aims to identify how each opera depicts the exotic, the analysis also focuses on selected scenes in which the presence and the absence of musical Orientalisms contribute to designing the image of Otherness. Overall, exoticism appears easy to identify, for its blatant characteristics in melody, rhythm, and timbre are always associated with visual and textual references to the mysterious, sensual, and brutal. By identifying the instances in which these exotic codes appear, and the situations in which musical “Westernization” of the locale occurs, the discussion clarifies the composer’s vision of Otherness, consistent with Gallet’s plan. Tableau 2 contains the most obvious reproduction and re-creation of musical exotic codes. In contrast, the music of Tableaux 1, 3, and 4 sounds more typically Western. The following table maps the general plan of the opera and points out the main musical events in relation to exoticism.
Table 3-2 *Thamara*’s dramatic events and exoticism in the music

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tableaux</th>
<th>Main Stage Events in Relation to the Exotic</th>
<th>Musical Events in Relation to the Exotic</th>
<th>Pages in P/N Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Priests praying in the temple.</td>
<td>Priests’ chorale humming passage.</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>War in the village.</td>
<td>Trumpets and cannons sound.</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Priest declares that God has sent help. (Thamara) to the crowd.</td>
<td>Two harps accompaniment.</td>
<td>39-40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Thamara declares she will kill the enemy.</td>
<td>“<em>Allegro Marziale ben Moderato.</em>”</td>
<td>56-57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Accompaniment in 3/4 with distinct beat.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Women dancing.</td>
<td>Prelude “<em>Largo Amoroso.</em>”</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Curtain rises. Dance.</td>
<td>On stage accompaniment of Persian drums <em>dayereh</em> and <em>tombak.</em></td>
<td>76-78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Harem women sing to the Sultan.</td>
<td>Orientalism (Greek melodies and rhythms).</td>
<td>79-82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Augmented seconds and tritones. Highy embellished melody.</td>
<td>Accompaniment includes tambourine.</td>
<td>82-85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nour-Eddin’s dream/admonition.</td>
<td></td>
<td>86-90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Harem women response to Nour-Eddin’s dream.</td>
<td>Aria (romance).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Soldiers and Nour-Eddin.</td>
<td>Andantino in 5/4 with harmonica accompaniment.</td>
<td>90-92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Love duet.</td>
<td>Solo cello, violin, and flute.</td>
<td>104-114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sporadic augmented seconds.</td>
<td>141-146</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3-2 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tableaux</th>
<th>Main Stage Events in Relation to the Exotic</th>
<th>Musical Events in Relation to the Exotic</th>
<th>Pages in P/N Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Thamara hears the voices and kills Nour-Eddin.</td>
<td>Prelude. Some reminiscences of love duet. Some reminiscences of first tableau.</td>
<td>147-154 154-174</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As the curtain rises on the first tableau, Thamara and her village immediately draw in the audience’s compassion. They have been victimized, but they believe in their God’s help. Their devotion characterizes them as strong and honest in the eyes of the fin-de-siècle public. And to reinforce the public’s support for the village, Bourgault-Ducoudray and Gallet place in the first Tableau a priest and a warrior, symbols of devotion and courage. The music underlines these symbols with an “invisible” humming chorus of priests in Cb followed by trumpet and cannon blasts:
The passage evokes a solemn and firm mood representing Christian faith, but ends on a dissonant tritone on the upper voices, suggesting conflict, and anticipating the violent blasts of the cannons. The implicit references
suggest that the chorus characterizes the people of the village as victims of their opposite, a non-Christian identity, that symbolizes Otherness. 39

Following the chorus, in a song accompanied by the harps, the Priest declares that God has sent Thamara to save the village. Identified by Macdonald as a “symbol of sanctity in French opera of that time,” the use of the harp here suggests righteousness. 40 Nevertheless, just as religion stresses ethical values, warfare emphasizes patriotic heroism. In the first Tableau, cannon blasts and trumpet sounds animate patriotism, but they hint at French nationalism rather than the Georgian militia. The trumpets’ motifs and timbre in fact, hardly suggest early Caucasian instruments; besides, cannons were weapons of the West, never used by the ancient Persians or Georgians.

Furthermore, the martial character of the music during Thamara’s acceptance of her task, “Allegro Marziale,” reveals her courage to fight for her country in a scene comparable to the one in the first Act of Pyotr Il’yich Tchaikovsky’s The Maid of Orléans (St. Petersburg, 1881). 41 Thamara, similarly to Joan in The Maid of Orléans, also falls in love with her enemy before attempting to kill him. The comparison with the French myth of the warrior

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39 Besides using exotic codes to depict Otherness, Bourgault-Ducoudray’s music also explored modality as a new compositional technique. The composer expressed his philosophy in the 1878 Exposition Universelle lecture in which he affirmed that all modes, old or new, European or exotic, can serve an expressive purpose and that all composers should make use of them.


41 Other operas about Joan of Arc preceding Thamara are Giuseppe Verdi’s Giovanna d’Arco (La Scala, 1845) and Auguste Mermet’s Jeanne d’Arc (Opéra, 1876).
maiden becomes even more obvious in Tableau 3 of *Thamara*, when Bourgault-Ducoudray’s heroine hears voices that urge her to kill her country’s enemy, just as Joan of Arc heard God’s voice saying that it was her divine mission to free France from the English. Although not an explicit political statement, this passage obviously hints to French nationalist agenda, and surely inspired patriotic feelings among the conservative public of the Opéra.

In the opera the invisible chorus of voices sings the melody and lines “*Je le frapperai de ses propres armes...*” (I will kill him with his own weapons), echoing the melody Thamara sang in the first Tableau (Ex. 3.2 a), but a third higher (Ex. 3.2 b):
Example 3.2 *Thamara*, Tableau 1, *Thamara*: “Je le frapperai. . .”

a) All’ marziale ben mod’.

b) Ma non troppo.

The second tableau, praised by many reviewers, showcases the greatest amount of exoticism in its music, but also features a romance by Nour-Eddin, “Belle d’une beauté fatale.” This lyrical section contrasts with the stage set and the preceding and succeeding music, and has two functions, one pragmatic and

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42 Victorin Joncières, “Revue musicale,” *Feuilleton de La Liberté* (4 January 1892); Arthur Pougin, “Opéra. Première Representation de *Thamara,*” *Le Ménestrel* (3 January 1892). In addition, in *La Liberté* the reviewer of the 1907 production of the opera wrote that Nour-Eddin was an astonishing and complete character thanks to the music only (26 May 1907). The only recording available of this aria is by Augustarello Affre who played the role of Nour-Eddin in this 1907 production. See: *Souvenirs of Rare French Opera*, International Collector’s Club CD 802, no year is specified. This recording is taken from Brown Odeon 60308, 1907-8. There are no other recordings available of any other part of the opera.
the other dramatic. First, it provides the baritone a vehicle to demonstrate his
talent and expressiveness; secondly, the romance functions as a dramatic tool
that also reflects reverse exoticism, that is, Nour-Eddin’s interpretation of
Thamara as the quintessence of the exotic. Before taking a closer look at the
romance, it is important to locate it in the larger context of the tableau.

Dances of the slaves and music at the beginning of the second tableau
immediately establish the couleur locale. Public and critics enjoyed the scene;
Arthur Pougin wrote that this scene holds “incursions curieuses et piquantes
dans les modalités du chant grégorien” (curious and piquant interventions in
Gregorian chant modes), nicely incorporated within the broad tonal and
rhythmic character of the opera. At the beginning of the scene, women in front
of the closed curtain play the dayereh and the tombak, two Persian percussion
instruments, while female dancers perform to a melody in F major but with a
modal quality:

43 The term “reverse exoticism” has been used in some recent studies. Locke mentions it
regarding the perception of American popular music in some non-Western countries. Locke,
“Exoticism and Orientalism in Music: Problems for the Worldly Critic,” in Edward Said and the
45 Bourgault-Ducoudray illustrated this mode and all the Greek modes in the introduction to
Conférence sur la modalité dans la musique grecque.
When the curtain rises, a dance behind it has already started.\textsuperscript{46}

This section repeats a brief phrase starting on E major, always ending on the chord of C\# minor, in a non-functional progression, alternating major and relative minor chords, thereby destabilizing the sense of tonality. In addition,

\textsuperscript{46} Berlioz, too, in Act 4 of \textit{Les Troyens} (1863) composed a ballet for the Nubian slaves, that bears similar modal qualities.
melodic accents and frequent syncopations also give a vivacious character and an "ethnic" flavor to the number.

Following the dance, the women of the harem sing for their Sultan an elaborate melody filled with augmented seconds. The women describe their actions and their surroundings (flowers, perfumes, etc.), in music that also reinforces the *couleur locale* of the set.

Example 3-5 *Thamara*, Tableau 2, "O maître..."

Bourgault-Ducoudray inserts Nour-Eddin’s aria in this exotic context.

However, instead of keeping to the Oriental mood created by his people, the Sultan sings a *romance* ("Belle d’une beauté fatale"). The *romance*, a song with simple vocal line and accompaniment, consists of two or more stanzas of
rhymed poetry on a love subject, usually strophic.\textsuperscript{47} In French opera of the time, composers would sometimes employ romances by focusing on the narrative. “Several librettists . . . developed the technique of constructing the poem’s narrative as a gloss on the story of the opera. This sort of romance could figure in the plot as an explicit onstage song, often sung as an illustrative admonition at some important juncture.”\textsuperscript{48} In the romance Nour-Eddin describes his dream of a beautiful white woman—who shortly after appears as Thamara—and expresses his desire for her.\textsuperscript{49} The song describes the sensual features of a white woman, and his dream, he tells his harem, ends with a feeling of menace and loss of his senses. Thus his dream depicts a desire for the unknown, its attractiveness, and danger. Here Thamara embodies Otherness; but, contrary to the pattern in most French exotic operas in which the object of desire is a non-Western woman, Nour-Eddin fantasizes about a woman with Western features. His desire for the Other reverses the paradigm of exoticism: a Persian Sultan in an exotic locale dreams of a white woman whom he calls “fatale.”

Dreams and visions were common devices in French opera of the time, especially in exotic operas. Most of the time oneiric representation or the narration of a dream on stage reflected a sexual desire or a premonition involving love and death, as in Nour-Eddin’s dream. \textit{Djelma, Thaïs,} and \textit{Le

\textsuperscript{47} Antoine Reicha explained the layout of the romance in \textit{Art du compositeur dramatique, ou Cours complet de composition vocale} (Paris: 1833), 30.
Spahi also contain visions of blood and sexual references to women. These images indeed reflect the decadent French taste of the time, often masking erotic and sometimes morbid desire with exotic costumes and imagery.\(^5^0\) In the case of Nour-Eddin's dream and romance, however, Thamara's vibrant sensuality has nothing to do with the French view of exoticism. The Sultan's music and words depicting her refer neither to generic exoticism nor to folk or ancient Greek music. Bourgault-Ducoudray instead turned to Western musical devices to depict her mysteriousness and sensuality.

Example 3-6 *Thamara*, Tableau 2, Nour-Eddin's *romance* "Belle..."


\(^{49}\) See pp. 108-109 for the text of the *Romance*.

\(^{50}\) For a discussion of dreams and decadent taste in nineteenth-century France see: Rowden, *Massenet, Marianne and Mary: Republican Morality and Catholic Tradition at the Opera*. 

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The image of Thamara in the Sultan’s dream appears on a repeated d\(^1\) over the tonic chord of B\(^b\); however, on the word *fatale* the composer adds an augmented fifth to create tension. Then, the music gradually modulates a half step lower, to A dominant seventh, creating a shift of mood and dropping the tension on the word *pâle*. Furthermore, in contrary motion to the chromatic descent of the bass notes that starts on b and eventually ends on g\(^#\), the melodic
line of this section ascends a half step from the c’ on moi (me) and femme (woman) to the d♭ on pale (pale), reinterpreted as the c♯ on cœur (heart) and ouvrant les (opening the), to the d on bras (arms).

The opposing motion of bass and melody continues throughout the romance, while chromatic harmonic progressions lead to the third, central stanza. There, melodic turning figures in sixteenth notes on significant words (mortelle, rouge, sang) (deadly, red, blood) add to the dramatic effect:

Example 3-7 Thamara, Tableau 2, Nour-Eddin’s romance “Belle...”

The Tableau picks up its exotic devices after this lyrical episode as Thamara’s appearance fades from Nour-Eddin’s memory and reality embraces him again. The harem’s chorus answers the Sultan, asking him to think of them rather than of such a threatening vision. This short chorus, in line with exotic language, turns to the meter 5/4, features the harmonica (an unusual instrument in French opera), and ends with the addition of the exotic dancers. The Persian soldiers enter to celebrate their leader and their own strength (drums, gong, and threatening descending scales underline their fearsome presence).
When Thamara arrives, her melody contrasts with the active scene preceding her. Her voice alternates with solos by flute, cello, and violin that create an intimate atmosphere. Finally, the music gradually returns to traditional Western form and diatonic harmony in the duet between Thamara and Nour-Eddin. Thamara falls in love with him over melodic turns in the orchestra that echo the Sultan’s account of his dream. She drops her veil, and the scene ends.\textsuperscript{51} The curtain conceals the consummation of their love—their first and only encounter—and re-introduces tonal music typical of the West. At this point Thamara’s predicament—defeating the brutal but attractive exotic enemy—can be depicted only with that style of music.

The final two tableaux bring back the war-like atmosphere, through tonal and austere music, first, during the murder of Nour-Eddin, and afterwards, during Thamara’s suicide. As in the beginning of the opera, Thamara’s people control the stage. Now, however, the tragedy focuses on the loss of the exotic (Nour-Eddin and his power), cheered by the chorus but mourned by Thamara. By eliminating any form of Otherness in the music, the stage returns to a familiar place. However, Thamara, the Judith and the Jeanne d’Arc of the Christian Baku, cannot bear her sins of sex and murder, or her loss. Therefore,

\textsuperscript{51} Nour-Eddin’s romance and Thamara’s following number bear some similarity with Bizet’s \textit{Les Pêcheurs de perles} (1863 and revived in 1891). In Bizet’s opera, at the end of Act 1, Nadir expresses his longing for Leïla in the romance, ‘\textit{Je crois entendre encore.}’ After this, he falls asleep, and Leïla arrives. She takes her veil off and declares her love.
she eliminates herself to terminate her internal conflict with suicide. This convenient ending purges all dreams of the sex, passion, and murder so necessary in French exotic opera yet so immoral at the end of the nineteenth century. Overall, this opera, as other exotic operas premiered in the same decade, presents many typical features of the mal-de-siècle—disillusionment and confusion over ethical issues, religious fervor, and passionate sex, homicide, and suicide, all attached to a refined exploitation of exoticism.
B. *Djelma* 52

1. *The Libretto* 53

*Djelma* makes a particularly interesting study of the evolution of operatic exoticism because of its unsuccessful reception. In fact, the striking majority of the critics considered it a weak work rife with exotic cliches and lacking any dramatic depth in either libretto or music; in addition, Wagner’s operas were thriving during that period in Paris, and comparisons with French operas was inevitable. The musical and textual languages of *Djelma* appear trite in their exotic clichés and devoid of innovative ideas. The opera failed for two main reasons. First, in *Djelma* exoticism is a superficial adornment; second, the exotic counterpart—the West—never appears in the opera either implicitly as it does in *Thamara* and *Thaïs*, or explicitly, as in *Le Spahi* and *L’Île du rêve*. *Djelma* primarily seeks to represent Otherness as a spectacle in which the Encounter never occurs. Exotic settings excluding any hint of the Encounter had been previously staged at the Opéra-Comique, but they generally had the intensity of epic dramas (for example, *Le Roi de Lahore* in 1877). *Djelma*, however, never reaches such a dramatic pitch.

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52 *Djelma* premiered at the Opéra on 25 May 1894 and was performed eight times. The fourth, fifth and sixth times it was performed along with *Thaïs*, and the seventh and the eighth with *Samson et Dalila*. The opera has never been produced again since 1894. There is no evidence of recordings of any section of the opera.

The following analysis establishes, therefore, what made this work belong to the genre of exotic opera, what elements weaken it as such, and finally, what attributes of Otherness it excludes. The reason why the librettist and composer did not accomplish what critics and public wanted seems due to a certain lack of experience on Lomon’s side, and to the eagerness to make music “independent” from all musical currents on the composer’s side. Overall, the work’s modest dramatic depth and its pallid innovative spirit seem to result from the creators’ limited appreciation for the possibilities of exoticism.

Librettist Lucien Lomon had no experience in writing an exotic operatic setting. In fact, although he wrote novels, plays, a ballet, and a féeerie in one act, he had never written a libretto until he created Djelma. Pierre Gailhard, the director of the Opéra (jointly with Eugène Bertrand) introduced the writer to composer Lucien Lefebvre, and encouraged their collaboration. The director’s predilection for Lomon appears clear in the librettist’s statement in an interview. Lomon said, “C’est Gailhard qui m’a donné des conseils excellents ... Gailhard m’a emmené en Afrique, Gailhard m’a fait aimer le velocipede, Gailhard enfin, est de Toulouse ... comme moi” (It is Gailhard who gave me excellent advice ... Gailhard took me with him to Africa, Gailhard made me enjoy the velocipede: Gailhard, finally, is from Toulouse ... just like me).54 But Gailhard’s

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encouragement did not help Lomon to create an original subject, and the librettist never admitted that his idea came from another writer’s work, Joseph Méry’s novel *Heva*. 55

The action of *Djelma* takes place in Mysore, in Southern India, in the eighteenth century, before Great Britain colonized the region. 56 Therefore, British power never does appear in the plot, and all characters are Indian. 57 Raja Raïm and Djelma, a valorous leader and his faithful wife, reign over Mysore. Nouraly and the people of the kingdom love Raïm, with the exception of Kairam and his servant Tchady. Kairam wants Raïm’s power and wife. To acquire both he plans to kill the Raja with the help of Tchady. Tigers threaten the raja’s domain, and all the warriors go to hunt them. Djelma’s servant, the clairvoyant Ourvaçi, recalls a premonitory dream in which blood covers Raïm. She tells her master not to go. The Raja goes anyway and the villains kill him—or so they think. They come back to his palace to take over Raïm’s riches and wife, but Djelma refuses to marry Kairam. After two years, Raïm, who survived as a prisoner of enemies outside his realm, returns to his palace incognito. He finds out that Djelma still loves him, his best friend Nouraly longs for his wife’s love,

56 Although neither the libretto nor the score of *Djelma* mention Mysore, the majority of the critics refer to it as the place where the story takes place.
57 Mysore became a British protectorate in 1799, and from 1831 to 1881 the British ruled it as a territory. The region strongly resisted the British army.
and Kairam and Tchady are the ones who plotted his death. The villains recognize Raîm, try to kill him again by simulating a tiger’s attack in the night, but they do not succeed. Instead, Raîm stabs Kairam and strangles Tchady. Raîm eventually reunites with his wife. Nouraly, who has mistakenly wounded Raîm in the dark, leaves for the desert, to dedicate his life to the god Brahma.

Lomon does not create any opposing and external force to the exotic backdrop of the plot (i.e. foreign enemies, distant lands, or European soldiers). The Raja refers only briefly to the enemies outside his realm who imprisoned him. They remain vague and relatively unimportant. His real enemy, in fact, is one who used to be his friend. The plot hints at the archetypal adventure of the hero; however, the allusion to Ulysses’ epic adventures—the departure of the hero/leader and his return as a disguised mendicant—ends here. No great deeds, no particular valor, and, most of all, no information about his adventures in other lands appear in the plot.

Linguistic paradigms of the exotic abound however, and they permeate the opera. Exotic references abound in Lomon’s libretto. Lomon used metaphors, words, names, and particular dramatic situations to create the couleur locale, taken from a language now considered démodé by the critics. As in Gallet’s libretto of Thamara, Lomon’s main heroine in Lomon’s work is a beautiful exotic woman with an extraordinarily exotic name, a woman
particularly devoted to religion and family. In the first act, the guests in the palace greet Raïm as “Heureux époux d’une femme adorable et fidèle” (lucky spouse of an adorable and faithful woman), and later in the act, they call her “Belle charmeuse” (beautiful charmer). They promise to put at her feet a “proud” tiger hide, the prey of their hunt. Similarly to Thamara, Djelma’s characters all have mysterious exotic names, a premonitory dream occurs, and the native warriors are depicted as courageous and strong men. In Djelma, however, the successful marriage of the main characters constitutes the starting and the ending points of the story. The opera displays only exotic locale and people. The threat comes from inside the community (Kairam) and from tigers, the epitome of exotic danger. Ultimately, there is no explicit conflict between East and West, and thus, a happy conclusion is possible. No interracial marriage occurs; therefore, love can succeed.

In Djelma the imaginary exotic characteristic of earlier operas comes into view in full display. Tropical gardens, an Indian palace, a faraway desert, flowers, and exotic dances celebrating Hindu gods, create the couleur locale. By

58 The name Djelma was used in Daniel-François-Esprit Auber’s and Eugène Cormon/Adolphe d’Ennery’s opera in three acts Le Premier jour de bonheur, that premiered in 1868 at the Opéra Comique. This opera featured a “mélodie indienne... voluptueusement modulée.” See F. De Lagenevais, La Revue des deux mondes 74 (March/April 1868), 265.

59 Lomon, Djelma, 5 and 6.

60 The similarities between Thamara and Djelma and among other operas of the time are pointed out to show that a common exotic language existed, rather than suggesting that composers and librettists copied each other.

61 Similarly to Djelma, Le Roi de Lahore ends with the reunion of the protagonists—the ruler and the priestess of Lahore—but in heaven.
1894, audience and critics could very well appreciate exotic literary and operatic clichés, and in *Thamara* they easily recognized them in many dramatic situations and words. For example, as in several nineteenth-century operas, the association of sun and desert here represents hardship, while blood and sand hint at suffering, flowers embody sensuality, and celebration dances characterize pagan practices. The following diagram lists the most significant characteristics of the plot, and simplifies the libretto’s plan in relation to the “generic” exotic.
Table 3-3 *Djelma's* dramatic layout and exotic characteristics in the set

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acts</th>
<th>Where</th>
<th>Dramatic Elements</th>
<th>Set and Props</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Raïm's residence</td>
<td>Morning prayers.</td>
<td>Morning. Sofa bed. Tropical gardens in the background, large mountains in the back. <em>Moucharaby</em>.&lt;sup&gt;62&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Kairan’s conspiracy.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Raïm and the hunters prepare for tigers’ hunt.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ourvaçi tells her dream.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Djelma gives an amulet to Raïm.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>All hunters and Raïm go hunting.</td>
<td>Amulet. White marble.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Djelma prays.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Raïm’s residence after two years.</td>
<td>Djelma is still mourning but Nouraly and Ourvaçi convince her to join the festivities.</td>
<td>Same set. Raïm’s old trophies on display. Slaves’ garlands of flowers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Raïm comes back during the celebrations for Lakmi. Slaves dance and sing. Musicians, singers and Bayadères (Hindu temple dancers) on stage.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Djelma’s prayer.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Kairan recognizes Raïm and tries to kill him.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Without recognizing Raïm, Nouraly wounds him.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Raïm reunites with his wife. Nouraly leaves for the desert, while praying to Brahma.</td>
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</table>

The locale immediately projects exoticism with typical objects and landscape. The libretto’s stage notes in Act 1, Scene 1, describe a variety of clichés grouped in one scene: mountains in the background—although no high

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<sup>62</sup> *Moucharaby* is a typical balcony built on Muslim castles.
mountains can be seen from Mysore—tropical gardens, and a grand Hindu palace in white marble reminiscent of Muslim architecture. In the interior of the palace, a sofa symbolizes luxury. The text, however, most of time reinforces the imagery of faraway and dangerous places not seen on stage. In Act I, Scene 4, Raïm urges his friends to go to fight the tigers:

"Là-bas, vers la montagne, où le roc sulfureux
Sous l'ardeur du soleil prend des teintes de cuivre,
Les antres sont profonds, et les tigres nombreux."\(^{64}\)

(Over there, towards the mountain, where the sulfurous rock Reflects the color of copper under the heat of the sun, The caves are deep and the tigers, numerous).

In Ourvacî’s dream the threatening landscape appears again: “... Loin d'ici s'ouvre un vallon stérile où toute vie expire” (... Far from here, a small and sterile valley opens where all life expires).\(^{65}\) In the desert she sees Raïm “tout sanglant, sur le sable étendu” (all bleeding, laying on the sand), and “... sur le sable d’or... ton sang coulait encore!” (... on the golden sand... your blood was still flowing).\(^{66}\) Kairam, in fact plotting to kill Raïm in the desert, says, “Le désert est profond et la tombe muette” (the desert is deep and the tomb, mute).\(^{67}\) The reference to the “désert terrible” (terrible desert) recurs,

\(^{63}\) Lomon, *Djelma*, 1. The great palace of Mysore probably inspired Lomon.
\(^{64}\) Ibid., 5.
\(^{65}\) Ibid., 9.
\(^{66}\) Ibid., 10 and 14.
\(^{67}\) Ibid., 12
in Act 2, Scene 5, when Raîm, returning to his palace, remembers where he had been captured.

If distant lands symbolize threat, home represents the ideal. In the celebration scenes, flowers and perfumes reflect sensuality and enjoyment. In Act 2, Scene 4, Nouraly announces, “Les rites d’abondance et de félicité” (the rites of abundance and happiness) must be performed to celebrate the Hindu goddess named Lakmi (a name already loaded with exotic connotation and quite familiar to the Parisian audience). For the celebration, the slaves prepare “fleurs fraîches écloses, jasmins et roses, parfums, couleurs” (freshly opened flowers, jasmine and roses, perfume, colors), in a verse almost identical to the one sung by the women of the harem in Thamara. The celebration of the goddess includes the greatest number of exotic references and clichés in the whole opera. Rice, stocks of wheat, Amrita (a beverage believed to give eternal life in a Hindu legend), symbolize abundance in the rite. Here the pantomime of the Hindu dancers (bayadères) represents the marriage of Lakmi and Vishnou. In the scene, as Lomon explains in the stage notes, “Pendant que celles-ci [les bayadères] symbolisent par leurs gestes les principaux traits de l’histoire de Lakmi, deux groupes de chanteuses se répondant, célèbrent sa gloire et son pouvoir” (While they symbolically mime the principal elements of Lakmi’s

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68 Ibid., 20. By the time of the premiere of Djelma, Lakmé had already been performed more than two hundred times.
69 Ibid., 23; Gallet, Thamara, 10.
story, two groups of singers answer each other, celebrating her glory and power.\(^7\) The opera refers to the domestic Hindu deity Lakshmi, obedient and loyal wife of the god Vishnu, who stands for family prosperity but also represents money and fortune. The goddess’ story reflects Djelma’s predicament: loyal to her husband, Djelma embodies goodness and also attracts all men around her by her beauty and wealth.

Besides Lakmi, other exotic Hindu deities populate the libretto. Prayers to Vishnu, Dourga (the same god that inspired the celebrations in Delibes’ \textit{Lakmè}), Kali, Shiva and Brahma, often reiterated during the opera, were commonplace in end of the century operas. "Nous sommes bondés à saturation des invocations à Wischnou, Siva, Lackmy [sic] et Brahma; des théories de prêtres festonnant la scène . . ." (We have reached the saturation point with the invocations to Vishnu, Shiva, Lakmi, and Brahma, and with the theories of priests who festoon the stage) wrote a critic.\(^7\) In fact, the celebration scene involves little mysticism. It offers the occasion to display exotic costumes and dances, without manifesting any religious sentiment or, in contrast to other operas, any open sexual temptation. Only in the last scene does religious redemption play a momentary role, when the Raja’s friend Nouraly feels guilty

\(^{70}\) Lomon, \textit{Djelma}, 29.
\(^{71}\) F. Régnier, “Premières Représentations,” \textit{Le Journal} (26 May 1894).
for loving his comrade's wife and flees to the desert to give his soul to Brahma. The scene, however, is short and does not explore the man's character at all.

Alfred Bruneau wrote that the use of exotic "défilés religieux, danses intempestives . . . n'est plus tolérable aujourd'hui" (religious processions, inopportune dances . . . is no longer tolerable today). A purely exotic setting was not enough to entertain. Another critic mentioned that the audience was disappointed that the set did not change between the first and second acts, where the display of more exotic could have enhanced the entertainment. In addition, the authenticity of the couleur locale did not convince, and some critics disapproved of dances that had a Middle-Eastern, Muslim flavor rather than an Indian Hindu one; for example, F. Régnier complained that the exotic dance looked like a "pantomime arabe" (Arab pantomime) and another critic described the set as "décors indou qui semble mauresque (Mauresco referens)" (Hindu set design that seems Moorish—Mauresco referens). Djelma's costume, however, elicited positive comments. According to Poisard, soprano Rose Caron in the role of Djelma changed clothes in between acts. "Son costume de divinité indoue, du second acte, lui a mérité presque autant de succès que sa façon de soupirer l'invocation à Lakmi" (Her Hindu goddess costume of the second act

72 Alfred Bruneau, "Premières Représentations," Gil Blas (27 May 1894).
73 Charles Darcours, "Académie nationale de musique."
74 Régnier, "Premières Représentations." Historically, however, the place and times in which the plot takes place reflect an actual blend between Arab and Hindu cultures.
75 A. Boisard, "Chronique musicale."
earned almost as much success as her way she warbled the Lakmi invocation).\textsuperscript{76} On the front page of the piano and vocal score the publisher featured a portrait of the singer in that costume.

Overall, both libretto and set design disappointed the audience and critics because they lacked sufficient dramatic depth and consistent and original representation of the exotic. "\textit{Il est naturel qu'\'une sympathie instinctive nous ramène au berceau de la civilisation, à cette presqu'\'île d'Hindoustan dont notre imagination grandit les magnificences; nous devons pourtant regretter que la poursuite d\'un rêve, simple produit d'atavisme, donne aussi souvent naissance à des drames lyriques où le vide et la banalité de l'action se dissimulent à peine sous l'étalage d'une pompe qui n'éveille plus aucun intérêt}" (It is normal that an instinctive sympathy takes us back to the cradle of civilisation, to this peninsula of Hindustan where our imagination can magnify the splendor; however, we regret that the pursuit of a dream, a simple product of atavism, so often gives birth to lyric dramas in which emptiness and banality of action are concealed behind a display of pomp that does not stir any interest anymore).\textsuperscript{77}

In sum, a general and undiscriminating appreciation of the imaginary and generic exotic was disappearing, while the desire for new, interesting dramatic elements (i.e., a clear conflict between East and West or the representation of a

\textsuperscript{76} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{77} Régnier, "Premières representations."
strongly antagonistic Other) already predominated. To make things worse, Lefebvre’s score for *Djelma* interested neither the critics nor the audience. In particular, his weak treatment of musical Orientalism and the lack of innovation drew the ire of conservative, moderate, and progressive critics.

2. *The Music* ⁷⁸

Two of Charles Lefebvre’s four operas turn to exotic locales: *Zaire* and *Djelma*. Only the latter was produced in Paris.⁷⁹ The faraway land is evoked in the plot just sporadically in the musical layout. Sometimes the composer uses particular instruments to suggest exotic sounds, at other times he briefly employs intervals hinting at Orientalism, but overall the critics felt his music was unsuccessful in portraying exoticism.⁸⁰ In addition, most reviewers agreed that the music, along with the set design and the libretto, brought very little innovation to the *Opéra* repertoire. Nevertheless, with this work Lefebvre attempted to write in what conservatives of the time called a “modern style,” by employing continuous dialogue and some harmonic dissonances. However,

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⁷⁸ This dissertation always refers to the first edition of the piano and vocal score, Charles Lefebvre, *Djelma* (Paris: Durand et fils, 1894), and to the autograph manuscript of the original orchestral score *Djelma*, A. 666 a, 3 vols. Bibliothèque de l’Opéra, Paris, dated June 1893 and January 1894. In this manuscript, in the front page the name of the composer appears as “Ch. Levevre.” There is no evidence of any published score.

⁷⁹ Besides *Djelma*, Lefebvre composed: *Lucrece* (never produced, 1878), *Le Trésor* (Angers, 1883), and *Zaire* (Lille, 1887). He also composed several orchestral and vocal works.

⁸⁰ See: Reicha, “De la couleur locale,” in *Art du compositeur dramatique, ou Cours complet de composition vocale*, for pragmatic suggestions of using certain instruments of the orchestra to imitate instruments characteristic of the exotic culture.
reluctant to commit to either modern school, (i.e., naturalist or Wagnerian), but trying to be up-to-date, Lefebvre ended up displeasing both the conservative and progressive camps. The critics accused his music of being too symphonic, too fragmentary, and too long. Alfred Ernst’s article, for example, implied that the composer should have taken a more conservative route. He called Lefebvre’s music “... longue suite de petites phrases décolorées, sans accent, qui errent sur une symphonie pleine de bonnes intentions, mais pauvre d’effets décisifs, où on l’entend de ci de là trois notes de hautbois, deux de clarinette, un bout de mélodie soupiré par les violons sur quelques arpèges des harpes.” (... long succession of small, colorless phrases without accent, that wander about in a symphony full of good intentions, but poor in decisive effects, and in which, here and there, we hear three notes from the oboe, two from the clarinet, a little melody sighed by the violins on some arpeggios of the harps). The lack of “decisive effects” (Orientalism) and the unclear and sporadic participation of the clarinet, harp, and oboe (instruments typically associated with the exotic) clearly constituted a weakness of the couleur locale. But the composer called himself “un independent.” In an interview he stated, “Fervent d’œuvres classiques et pèlerin convaincu de Bayreuth, je ne dédaigne pas ce qu’on peut apprendre, mais je me garderai bien d’aller y chercher des inspirations” (As a devotee of

81 Alfred Ernst, “Revue musicale.”
classical works and a staunch pilgrim of Bayreuth, I do not despise what can be learnt, but I am careful not to look for inspiration in those [works]).

If Lefebvre maintained the generic and traditional operatic codes of the exotic that his predecessors had established decades before, he did so only in a very limited portion of the opera. However, in several sections, he used other conventional musical formulae to depict dramatic situations as, for example, chromaticism and diminished fifths to represent fear and danger (often associated with the typical figures of the exotic villains), or clear tonal accompaniments to portray honesty and devotion. By applying these musical conventions to particular scenes where exoticism prevails in the set and in the text, the composer linked exotic characters and situations with, for example, fear or devoutness. The following diagram shows how these musical codes are applied in *Djelma.*

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82 "Djelma," *Le Matin* (23 May 1894).
### Table 3-4 *Djelma*'s dramatic events and exoticism in the music

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acts</th>
<th>Main Stage Events in Relation to the Exotic</th>
<th>Musical Events in Relation to the Exotic</th>
<th>Pages in P/V Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Prayers.</td>
<td>Prelude ending with cadenza of the flute, oboe, clarinet, and violin.</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Off stage chorus accompanied by harps. Drone. Repeated motive.</td>
<td>5-9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Raîm states his love for Djelma.</td>
<td>Raîm’s Cavatina accompanied by cello.</td>
<td>23-25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ourvaçi’s premonitory dream.</td>
<td>Chromaticism, timpani roll, trombones.</td>
<td>28-32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kairam plans to kill.</td>
<td>Chromaticism, timpani roll.</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Slaves prepare for festivities.</td>
<td>Offstage songs on arpeggiated accompaniment</td>
<td>91-95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Djelma’s prayer.</td>
<td>Temporary drone and use of augmented sixths.</td>
<td>112-115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Celebrative dance.</td>
<td><em>Divertissement.</em></td>
<td>116-125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Nouraly’s invocation and departure.</td>
<td>Nouraly’s <em>Larghetto</em> with steady and even rhythmic accompaniment.</td>
<td>165-167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Djelma and Raîm join the invocation.</td>
<td>Djelma and Raîm join Nouraly’s melody.</td>
<td>169-173</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As in *Thamara*, the middle portion of *Djelma* (Act 2) hints at the exotic largely through musical clues. Dances, songs, and a mimed account of Lakmi’s story provide the occasion to restate conventional exotic codes. The outer acts also present a little Orientalism in the music, but overall they highlight the central section by contrasting it with them, similar to *Thamara*. However, unlike Bourgault-Ducoudray, Lefebvre’s choice (concentrating on some exotic musical
codes opposed to the general non-exotic layout of the opera) appears dramatically superficial. Only dance and celebrations—the “entertainment” within the opera—give the music a reason for its exoticism; no substantial dramatic event supports it. Whereas Djelma and the slaves occupy most of Act 2, no lyrical moment emphasizes the drama. In this act the music takes up the task of creating the characters’ “Orientalism” through its exotic codes. In the Prelude and prayers of Act 1, too, Lefebvre briefly employs minimal generic codes. Conversely, Raïm always communicates in Western terms, as so do the servant Ourvaçi and the villain Kairam. Rarely does any trace of Orientalism surface in other orchestral parts, leaving all the exotic musical language to Djelma and to the slaves mimicking a pagan celebration. Furthermore, Djelma sings in Western style in the last number, her duet with Raïm that happily concludes the opera with their reunion. The following analysis takes a closer look at these exotic and non-exotic examples and clarifies how the opera lacks a solid musical frame that could project an exotic subject to a world-weary audience in late nineteenth-century Paris. The discussion also investigates how the opera reflects the libretto’s portrayal of Otherness as a vague entity that has no counterpart, by focusing on exotic codes, and by locating and explaining non-exotic passages.

To introduce the couleur locale in Act 1, the prelude features only a brief cadenza played by the flute, the oboe, and the clarinet (typical timbres of the
generic exotic) ending on a series of trills by the violin. Besides the tone color, Lefebvre does not incorporate any other Orientalism.

Example 3-8 *Djelma*, Act 1, end of *Prélude*

![Musical Example]

Then, with a prayer to Vishnu and Shiva, the off-stage chorus states a melody over the sound of the harps heard in the distance, a dramatic device suggesting that some exotic instruments—represented by the harps—accompany the prayers. The tenors along with the harps repeat a one-measure motive on a Mixolydian mode in G, while basses and the lower notes of the harp sound a strong drone on the tonic, and the contraltos provide dissonance with a sustained $f^3$. 
Act 2 introduces exotic scenes and images (dances, prayers, celebrations), without changing the set. This economical decision not only provoked negative comments among the audience, as previously mentioned, but impelled Bruneau to criticize Lefebvre for missing a dramatic and musical opportunity: “À court de situations puissantes ou neuves, j’espérais que M. Lefebvre s’élèverait au-dessus de son sujet en nous offrant un beau tableau symphonique du désert” (Short of powerful or new situations, I hoped that Mr. Lefebvre would have raised himself above the subject by offering a beautiful symphonic tableau of the desert). The desert, only mentioned in the text but never seen in the set and never depicted in the music, represents only a remote memory for Raïm. For example, in Act 2, he refers to “le désert terrible” (the
terrible desert) when he is alone, immediately before the slaves’ dances (the highest point of scenic and musical Orientalism of the opera). Nevertheless, the representation of the desert offered a great opportunity for non-logocentric lyricism, in which the landscape could have had a musical voice of its own performed by the orchestra; but Djelma’s desert fails to emerge. Bruneau continued, “Il était en droit d’exiger de son collaborateur une scène qui eût motivé cette intervention orchestrale, dont certain entr’acte de la Statue, de M. Reyer, lui fournissait un magnifique exemple” (He [Lefebvre] had the right to demand of his collaborator a scene that would have justified this orchestral intervention, a great example of which was provided by a certain interlude in La Statue by Mr. Reyer). Bruneau, however, failed to mention Thaïs. Massenet’s opera premiered on 16 March 1894 and was performed throughout the 1894 Opéra season, as well as four days before Djelma’s premiere. In addition Thaïs and Djelma combined in a double bill on June 22, July 2, and July 11 of the same year. In his opera Massenet had taken advantage of the exotic-dramatic function of the desert in the Méditation scene (analyzed in the fourth chapter of

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84 Bruneau, “Premières Representations.”
85 Ibid. The story of La Statue, given at the Théâtre Lyrique in 1861, was derived from The Thousand and One Nights. According to Hugh MacDonald, “The setting – the ruins of Baalbek – was much admired, and the opera was successful for many years.” See: Hugh MacDonald, “Reyer, Ernest” Grove Music Online ed. L. Macy (Accessed 17 January 2004), <http://www.grovemusic.com>.
this dissertation), and the comparison of the two operas must have occurred, if not openly in the critics’ articles, at least among the cognoscenti.

If the stage setting of the second act does not reinforce the *couleur locale* sufficiently, the music does emphasize it with some Orientalism. Offstage the slaves sing about flowers, perfume and colors over an arpeggiated accompaniment in 3/4. Beginning in F major, the melody evolves into a motive (“Ah”) evoking chant and stressing modal tones over the tonic pedal. In addition, the emergent tones in the accompaniment (the highest and the lowest pitches of the arpeggio) do not always match the metric accents, creating a feeling of lightness and dizziness, in a basic hemiola:

Example 3-10 *Djelma*, Act 2, Allegretto
The light exotic mood becomes stronger when the dances and chorus begin the celebrations for the goddess Lakmi. Musical devices typical of exotic dances and chants reinforce the text already loaded with clichés (lotus, rice, sheaves of wheat). The scene immediately acquires a *couleur locale*. The sopranos repeat a chant-like motive over a drone on C (example 3-11 a). The tonic chord C alternates with the borrowed chord $b\text{VII}$ over the words *riz* (rice).
and blé (wheat) (example 3-11 b) eventually leading to the $E_b$ major chord on the word “Ah!”

Example 3-11 Djelma, Act 2, Allegro moderato

a)
Djelma’s participation in the celebrations follows. In the slower tempo
“tranquillo” her song in G♭ major conveys a mystical mood and also reflects the
general exotic celebration.

Example 3-12 *Djelma*, Act 2, Prayer

Lefebvre inserts in her prayer typical musical codes of the generic exotic:
insistent drones (on D♭ and B♭); and a short ascending chromatic fragment
doubled by the oboe (c♭ to f on Djelma’s words “je sens la divine presence, Ô
*Lakmi*” (I feel the divine presence, O Lakmi). But these brief references to the
exotic had little impact on the critics. Bruneau defined Djelma’s character as
inconsistent, and he specified, “[une] *inconsistance qui donne à la pièce une
indecision dont la timidité naturelle du musicien ne pouvait triompher*
(inconsistency that gives to the work an indecisiveness in which the composer’s
timidity prevailed).\textsuperscript{87} Ernst also felt the composer's weakness: "Les idées musicales se révèlent si courtes, si peu nombreuses, si faiblement caractérisées que l'on se prend à soupirer après elles, fussent-elles de qualité inférieure et de formes vieilles" (The musical ideas appear so short, so infrequent, and so weakly characterized, that we tend to murmur along with them, be they of inferior quality or old-fashioned form).\textsuperscript{88}

Besides exotic codes, Lefebvre made use of other operatic conventions. Well established before the nineteenth century, these conventions originated before the codification of the exotic took place. For example, Ourvaçi's premonition turns to typical musical figures that often represent fear of the unknown.

\textsuperscript{87} Bruneau, "Premières Representations."
\textsuperscript{88} Ernst, "Revue musicale."
Example 3-13 Djelma, Act 1, Ourvaçı’s entrance

The older woman enters after the strings play an ascending chromatic scale and the symbolic figure of death.89 Alternating with the interjections of the trombones, she warns Nouraly, “Ne pars pas!” (Do not leave!). The roll of the timpani then anticipates her narration. When she begins to tell her dream nothing seems to differ from the general Western musical tone of the act. As a clairvoyant, Ourvaçı embodies difference and exoticism; however, Lefebvre uses the old servant only to heighten a sense of fear, evident in her first chromatic line.

89 For a discussion on musical figures of death, see: Noske, The Signifier and the Signified, 171-214. Two of his models are: and
Chromaticism and timpani tremolo re-create the same sort of fear at the end of Act 1. In this scene, Kairam, aside, pronounces Raïm’s death, “Le désert est profond et la tombe muette!” (The desert is profound and the tomb is mute!), but it is the image of the desert to be mute. Musical Orientalism does not exist, and operatic conventions (i.e., tremolos combined with chromaticism), once again represent fear of the unknown.
Example 3-15 Djelma, Act 1, Kairam, “Il est à nous”

In other instances, sensuality, the quintessential companion of the exotic, appears only in Western idiom. In Act 1 Raïm reassures Djelma and declares his love in a short aria, which is of particular interest since it does not imply any exotic musical code but communicates sensuality through the text. In the cavatina, Raïm tells Djelma, “... dans mon cœur j’ai senti, comme un trait de flamme, pénétrer ton regard vainqueur” (... I have felt your conquering look penetrating in my heart as if it were a blazing arrow), and accentuates the sensuality with the contrasting exotic imagery, “quand le soir a bleui les monts” (when the evening has turned the mountains blue). The music, however, does
not present any trace of exoticism. In this number neither of the characters embodies Otherness in music; the short reference to the exotic landscape justifies the temporary sensuality of the scene. Instead the music suggests that the couple reciprocates a love between equals that will last forever. Their love, all in all, symbolizes rightfulness and can succeed: Djelma and Raïm belong to the same culture and race. Miscegenation is not a threat, virtue triumphs, and therefore Lefebvre’s protagonists use a Western language that can be comfortably associated with “righteousness.”

Similarly, at the denouement of Act 3 the music makes no reference to exoticism. The villains die while the honorable people live. Celebrating righteousness, the whole finale concentrates on thankfulness and religious devotion. After the protagonists reunite, Nouraly comes to terms with the immorality of his feelings for Djelma—his best friend’s wife—and decides to embrace a religious life. Nouraly’s music echoes his virtuous and ecstatic feelings with a ceremonial chordal accompaniment in a clear D major, slow, and rhythmically stable (example 3-16 a). The protagonists, who never betrayed their love or their moral duties, join Nouraly to conclude the act and the opera. In the last scene they all sing the same prayer to the same god, Brahma, the creator of the universe (example 3-16 b).
Example 3-16 *Djelma*, Act 3, Nouraly’s prayer and final prayers

\[ \text{(with extase)} \]

\[ \text{Maître de la vie, Mon âme, au dé-} \]

\[ \text{...sire as, aar..._vie, Ou...bliait...le chemin...des...cieux...} \]
Overall, Djelma’s failure results from the librettist and composer’s insistence on using older languages of the exotic. They represented Otherness as a dream completely removed from reality and a spectacle per se. However, while Lomon overexploited the codes, Lefebvre did not entirely commit to musical
Orientalism. The imbalance between libretto and music produced a narrative devoid of intense dramatic situations or effective exoticism. Typically, in order to be successful, an opera of this period was either completely committed to exoticism, or created a sharp contrast between the polarities of the Encounter. Disappointing the critics’ expectations for these reasons, *Djelma* also had to compete with *Thaïs* which not only proved to be a most successful opera in theatrical terms, but also provided a great deal of exoticism in both music and libretto.
IV. The Imaginary Other: *Thaïs*¹

In *Thaïs* the vision of Otherness took a sharp turn. Still representing remoteness of time and location, as do *Thamara* and *Djelma*, this opera embraces the conflict and celebrates the polarity between East and West, as would *Le Spahi* and *L’Île du rêve*, the last exotic operas of the 1890s. However, in *Thaïs* the conflict does not appear explicitly as it does in the colonial operas. The Western entity (a Christian monk) hides behind religious and moral issues, contrasting with the Other (a pagan prostitute) and creating a strong drama rich in erotic exoticism. Text and music here collaborate to represent the conflict, reinforcing each other constantly. Librettist and composer, who had previously worked together and who had already benefited from a unique notoriety in the operatic world, collaborated most skillfully in *Thaïs*.

¹ *Thaïs* premiered at the Opéra on 16 March 1894 and was performed 27 times during that opera season. Massenet and Gallet re-worked the opera for a second version that premiered on 13 April 1898, also at the Opéra, when it was performed eight times (*Théâtre de l’Opéra Journal 13, 1891-1910*). The 1898 version eliminated the Interlude between the first and the second scenes of Act 2 and the *Tentation* ballet in the second scene of Act 3; it also added a Ballet at the end of Act 2 and the *Oasis* scene at the beginning of Act 3. I will refer primarily to this last version. The numbers analyzed in the dissertation are similar in both versions. Furthermore, the 1898 version is the most commonly performed today.
1. The Libretto

After working with Jules Massenet on a half dozen projects over a span of twenty years, Gallet wrote him one last libretto, *Thaïs*. For this final collaboration, the two adapted Anatole France’s novel of the same title (1890) that had recently achieved remarkable success in France. This controversial publication of about three hundred pages confronted religious and philosophical issues, and incorporated an exotic backdrop and plot (the Egyptian desert, the city of Alexandria and a passionate sexual desire for an exotic woman). The story of Thaïs fascinated Massenet who, intrigued by the sensual representation of love and religion in an exotic context, found in the novel a perfect source for his opera.

Despite the title *Thaïs*, Athanaël, a Cenobite monk, is the main force of the opera. In the opera, the story occurs in a twenty-four hour time span in the desert around Alexandria and in the city. The monk resolves to convert the

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2 This dissertation always refers to the second version of the libretto: Louis Gallet, *Thaïs* (New York: Charles E. Burden, 1898); in this edition the original version is also translated in English. This 1898 version corresponds exactly to the first (1891) version of the libretto.


4 By 1891 Calmann Lévy had already published nine editions of *Thaïs*.

5 His *Marie-Magdeleine*, *Esclarmonde*, and *Hérodiade* also combine elements of sensuality, religiousness, and exoticism. See Rowden, *Massenet, Marianne and Mary: Republican Morality and Catholic Tradition at the Opéra* (Chapter 1, n. 97).
Alexandrian courtesan Thaïs from a life of dishonor to piety, after dreaming of her. In Alexandria, Nicias, an old friend and Thaïs' current lover, invites Athanaël to a banquet, which also Thaïs attends. Two slaves, Crobyle and Myrtale, array the monk in appropriate dress. At first Thaïs mocks Athanaël; later she invites him to her home to hear him further. On the verge of consenting to his wish, she sends him away. Undiscouraged, Athanaël waits at her threshold. Thaïs resolves to convert and, a few hours later, she appears. In spite of the efforts of the crowd to prevent her departure, she follows Athanaël to a convent. After the nuns have led her away, Athanaël realizes that he loves her desperately. In a dream he sees her dying. He hurries to the convent where Thaïs is dying. The monk confesses his earthly love, as the heroine dies a holy death.

Massenet recognized that France was “non seulement un maître prosateur, mais encore un exquis poète” (not only a masterful prose writer, but an even more exquisite poet). Therefore, inspired by France’s model, Massenet asked Gallet to write a “poème en prose.” Gallet, who saw in France’s style an incentive for innovations in his own approach to libretto writing, accepted the idea. He called his new style “poésie mélique,” a term originally suggested by François-Auguste Gevaert, the director of the Brussels

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7 Steven Huebner discusses the relationship among poetry, prose and poésie mélique in French Opera at the Fin de Siècle (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 135-47.
Conservatory. In this new style, prose alternated sporadically with rhymed poetry to express the harmony, sonority and rhythm of spoken words. "[L'] objet [de la poésie mélique] est d'établir entre les contours de la phrase littéraire et de la phrase musicale, une solidarité constante, afin que rien ne puisse rompre l'étroite harmonie des deux formes, incorporées pour ainsi dire l'une à l'autre" (The objective of [poésie mélique] [melic poetry] is to establish a constant solidarity between the contours of literary and musical phrases, so that nothing can break the close harmony of the two forms, which are embodied, so to speak, in each other). Even before planning Thaïs, the librettist declared his belief in musical and textual equality. In 1891, while surveying the status of contemporary music, he wrote, "S'il ne faut pas, certes, que le poème soit dominateur, il ne faut pas davantage qu'il soit servile" (The poem, of course, must not be domineering, but it must not be servile either).

The concept of a "harmonious," balanced collaboration between text and music provides a relevant framework for the reading of Thaïs. Connected in such an intimate relationship, music and text express the same dramatic idea without contradicting each other. Their sounds combine to create a unity and, through their consistency, they seem to deliver the "truth." Sensing this phenomenon and touching on the question of "harmony" between text and

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9 Ibid., vii-viii.
10 Gallet, Notes d’un librettiste (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1891), 315.
music, Jean-Michel Brèque wrote, "quand Thaïs ou Athanaël chantent, en effet, le spectateur est invité à croire en eux, parce que la musique ne saurait mentir" (When Thaïs or Athanaël sings, the spectator is actually invited to believe in them because the music cannot lie).\textsuperscript{11}

The depiction of exoticism, too, results from the cooperation of music and text. For example, the two languages reinforce each other in expressing Thaïs’ transformation from pagan entertainer to secluded Christian. When she seduces, she represents the exotic, and she communicates in the exotic mode. During her guilt-driven penitence, however, she expresses herself through typical Western text and music. Athanaël’s character evolves in the same manner but in direct opposition to the heroine; he changes from a devoted monk to a heart-broken lover, and his music and lines unequivocally speak a Western language. The story develops as a Biblical parable, and the evolution of the two opposite characters mimics the inverted parallelism of ancient literatures.\textsuperscript{12} In Hebrew and other Oriental literatures, for example, chiasmic inversion assumes the function of a constructive principle, or structural principle of form.\textsuperscript{13} Through this rhetorical device, the narrative focuses on a


\textsuperscript{12} Inverted parallelism involves the figure of speech chiasm, but in a larger narrative context. In a chiasm, the order of words in one of two balancing clauses or phrases is inverted in the other.

central part, the spiritual union between the two characters in the center of the opera, while no ambiguity results from their development.

On the contrary, in France’s novel the irony of the characters’ predicaments constitutes the main force. The monk Paphnuce’s passion for Thaïs develops through years of self-imposed chastity, and his predicament suggests religious bigotry. Paphnuce’s ironic fate consists of the conflict between his moral purpose (saving the pagan entertainer and his own dignity) and his fantasy (his erotic passion for her). The irony of this predicament will destroy both her and him.\(^\text{14}\) Thaïs, on the other hand, starts as a Catholic (the reader is informed of her past), becomes a prostitute who follows the cult of Venus, and eventually re-converts hoping to find in religion an antidote to her aging. Through irony, France attacked religious fanaticism and denounced the puritanical view that associated physical love with sin and guilt.

Yet, if the novel denounces guilt, the opera “cultivates” it.\(^\text{15}\) In the latter, the monk does not speak of his love for Thaïs until the end, but his guilt arises when he realizes how much he desires her (Act 3). She, feeling guilty about her courtesan past, eventually finds absolution in reclusion (Act 3).

\(^{14}\) About irony in France’s book see Albert Gier Heidelberg, “Thaïs: Ein Roman von Anatole France und eine Oper von Jules Massenet” in Romanistische Zeitschrift für Literaturgeschichte 5 (1981): 232-56. Gier also points out the incident in which Paphnuce sees a bird setting his female companion free from a net, but it gets caught in it; Gier envisions this scene as a symbolic anticipation of the monk’s ironic destiny. Ibid., 237.

the opera the incompatibility between the two protagonists and their guilt about sexual desire express the conflict between Self and Other, here embodied in the two opposite religions. She—the exotic Other—dies, and her power to destroy the male victim of her seduction is neutralized by her conversion and her death. Conversely, he—the Catholic Self—survives, enduring his guilt. Whereas the novel expresses the author's anti-clerical agenda, the opera, following a safer route, describes an impossible love. On a deeper reading of the dramatic structure, however, the operatic character of Thaïs appears to be more the result of Athanaël's imagination and desire than his direct counterpart. Athanaël dreams Otherness (both in the drama and figuratively) and leads the audience into believing in his dream. The layout of the libretto accentuates the polarity of reality/Self and dream/exotic Otherness, as shown in the following diagram.
Table 4-1 *Thaïs'* dramatic layout and exoticism in the set

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acts</th>
<th>Where</th>
<th>Dramatic Elements</th>
<th>Set and Props</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Thebaid.</td>
<td>Athanaël’s dreams of Thaïs half naked on the stage of the Alexandria Theater.</td>
<td>Monastery near the Nile.  Wooden pallet. Thaïs’ veil.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Thaïs appears.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a) Interior.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b) Thaïs’ House.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Curtains down.</td>
<td>Thaïs is overwhelmed with contradictory sentiments.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c) Outside Thaïs’ House.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Eros’ statuette illuminated by lamp.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Thaïs declares she is ready to go to the monastery.</td>
<td>Gold.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Crobye and Myrtale. Thaïs burns her house.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Albines’ monastery.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Thaïs’ death.</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

16 Albines are nuns belonging to the Benedictine order.
If Athanaël symbolizes the West, Thaïs represents Athanaël’s desire and frustrations through her embodiment of Otherness. Her beautiful and exotic presence exists solely to express his dilemma from the beginning to the end of the opera. Even before we see Thaïs on stage, Athanaël introduces her character in Act 1, Scene 1, as “une prêtresse infâme du culte de Vénus” (an infamous priestess of the worship of Venus). In a “plus sombre, plus agité” (more somber and excited) manner, he tells the other monks how he met her, and continues, “mais Dieu m’a préservé de cette courtisane et j’ai trouvé le calme en ce désert, maudissant le péché que j’aurais pu commettre!” (but God preserved me from this courtesan and I found calm in this desert, cursing the sin that I could have committed). The monk—who had met Thaïs before the beginning of the story—and accuses her of having ruined his life, and in the desert—the extreme and alien landscape—he has found relief from his emotions. He adds, “la honte de Thaïs et le mal qu’elle fait me causent une peine amère” (the shame of Thaïs and the harm that she does cause me bitter pain). He refers to his pain, for she is only instrumental to his destiny. All attributes of the femme fatale apply to Thaïs: she exists only to draw her male-prey, she succeeds in her destructive endeavor, and she pays with her own

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17 Gallet, Thaïs, 6.
18 Ibid. Staging directions.
19 Ibid.
death.\textsuperscript{20} If Gallet spares Athanaël from condemnation, making his predicament more human than France does, he also portrays Thaïs as a character familiar to the French audience by making her a \textit{femme fatale}. Differently from the novel, the operatic heroine is not “\textit{la courtisane de race grecque frappée par la venue du solitaire et subitement touchée de la grâce; c’est une horizontale lassée, en qui l’habitude a tué le désir et le plaisir}” (the courtesan of Greek race stricken by the hermit’s arrival and immediately touched by grace; she rather is a weary \textit{horizontale}, in whom habit has killed desire and pleasure) explained Henry Bauër, the critic of \textit{L’Écho de Paris} in 1894.\textsuperscript{21} She, however, initially opposes the monk and his principles, and her “being exotic” reinforces her power of opposition.

The monk finds himself facing Otherness and temptation several times during the opera, especially in dreams and visions. These predict disasters (a dramatic tool also used in \textit{Thamara} and \textit{Djelma}) or unconscious states (as in \textit{Thamara}). In the first dream, Thaïs appears to the monk during a dark night, “à demi vêtue, mais le visage voilé” (half-clothed, but the face veiled) dancing and mimicking the loves of Aphrodite.\textsuperscript{22} In this dream Thaïs appears for the

\textsuperscript{20} Rowden gives powerful insight to the significance of \textit{femme fatale} in French opera in \textit{Massenet, Marianne and Mary: Republican Morality and Catholic Tradition at the Opéra}, 200.

\textsuperscript{21} Henry Bauër, Review of \textit{Thaïs}, \textit{L’Écho de Paris}, (18 Mar. 1894) in Claire Rowden, \textit{Jules Massenet- Thaïs: Dossier de presse parisienne (1894)} (Heilbronn: Lucie Galland, 2000), 7. Although the analysis of \textit{Thaïs} in this dissertation focuses mostly on the 1898 production, Bauër’s comments on the first production apply to the later productions as well.

first time. She emerges from the darkness, illuminated by a white light. She exists in a metaphysical and timeless world, while the drama runs its “natural” course in real time (the time of a dream). This opening scene establishes Thaïs’ function as the unreachable Other. In addition, with her sensual dance the protagonist has satisfied the public’s and his own voyeurism, while the “metaphysical” character of her dance would not offend their morals. Athanaël wakes up to this erotic display, and screams, “Honte! Horreur! Ténèbres éternelles! Seigneur, assiste-moi!” (Shame! Horror! Eternal darkness! Oh Lord, assist me!). Focused on his own guilt, Athanaël feels ashamed of his dream.

The second vision occurs in Act 3. The monk sees Thaïs again in his dreams, first as a courtesan and then on her deathbed. Once again, she represents his desire and frustration, and her death seems the only solution to his problems. He has created Thaïs, and he also gives her death.

When the audience sees the courtesan for the first time (Act 1, Scene 2), she calls herself “idole fragile” (fragile idol) in front of Nicias, a typical fin-de-siècle libertine and Athanaël’s friend and alter ego. Later in the scene, Nicias refers to Thaïs with the same words, therefore reinforcing the image of her weakness. The metaphor implied here not only anticipates what will happen to the Venus statuette but to Thaïs as well. The symbol of physical and

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23 Ibid.
pagan sensuality will break (by Athanaël’s hands), as will her body at the end of the story (by Athanaël’s imposition). But the heroine appears alive and not as a direct projection of Athanaël’s desire and guilt, when she sings about her fear of becoming old, at the beginning of Act 2. Alone in her house, she is surrounded by the paradigmatic objects of the Orient (Byzantine carpets, embroidered pillows, lion skins, onyx vases full of flowers, and incense). While venting the anxiety about losing her youth and beauty, she prays to Venus: “Dis-moi que je suis belle et que je serai belle éternellement!” (Tell me that I am beautiful and I shall be beautiful eternally!).

France, Massenet, and Gallet briefly attribute the personality of contemporary femmes mondaines to Thaïs; however, she, the exotic idol, pays for her sins on stage, in front of Athanaël and the public. Venus, symbolized by a small statuette, constitutes her only companion, and Athanaël destroys it (Act 2, Scene 2) as if he were destroying the object of his torment, rather than a symbol of Thaïs’ sin.

The embodiment of the exotic in Thaïs emerges through descriptions by Crobyle and Myrtale, when they sing the Canticle of Beauty with the lyre and the “cytera” (kithara) (Act 1, Scene 2). To them she appears as a Middle-Eastern beauty:

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24 Ibid., 16.
Elle a le teint d’ambre pâle,
Les lèvres couleur de sang,
Et ses yeux sont pleins de nuit!\(^{25}\)

(She has the complexion of pale amber,
And lips of blood color,
And her eyes are full of night!)

In contrast with Thamara, Thaïs represents otherness in her appearance, behavior, and her submission. However, in Act 3, Scene 1, when Thaïs has converted to Christianity and is walking with Athanaël in the desert, he sings, "Ah! Des gouttes de sang coulent de ses pieds blancs" (Ah, drops of blood flow from her white feet).\(^{26}\) Their voyage, the only point in which the two inverted parallel lines of the narrative (Thaïs’ and Athanaël’s predicaments) meet at a common point in the center of the chiasmus, constitutes the focal point of the Encounter. For the first time, the two characters communicate in the same Western mode, that is, on Athanaël’s terms. He describes her appearance again, but this time she looks like a holy picture. In addition, once separated from her exotic jewelry and house, and standing in front the desolate landscape, her image now projects sanctity. The symbolic backdrop of the desert enables her to ponder a virtuous life and “suitable” punishment.

The voyage unfolds under the bright light of the desert sun, one of the exotic elements of French opera and literature. Lacombe writes, “The poetry of

\(^{25}\) Ibid., 24.

\(^{26}\) Ibid., 28.
exoticism is a poetry of light. Sunlight, firelight, and light in general are constantly invoked.” Thaïs’ words “L’ardent soleil m’écrase” (the ardent sun crushes me) describe the bright light of the sun in the desert and paint a metaphorical image. They represent her suffering—a requisite for sanctification—and her eventual religious enlightenment. In sum, Gallet uses her pilgrimage through light and desert as a parable.

As for Athanaël, the desert is the shelter from transgression, the place of spiritual peace, and a sacred place. At the beginning of the opera he opposes it to profane Alexandria, the city of sin and scandal, paganism, and the home of Thaïs.

\[
\text{\textit{Un jour, je l’avoie à ma honte,}} \\
\text{\textit{Devant son seuil maudit, je me suis arrêté,}} \\
\text{\textit{Mais Dieu m’a preservé de cette courtisane,}} \\
\text{\textit{Et j’ai trouvé le calme en ce désert}}...\]

(One day, I confess it to my shame, 
I halted at the threshold of her accursed house, 
But God saved me from this courtesan, 
And I found peace in this desert...)

At the end of the opera the desert turns out to be a deception where Athanaël traps both himself and Thaïs. The priest, whose original purpose was to grant the courtesan salvation through punishment, finally confesses his passion. The desert excludes all worldly reality and becomes symbolic of truth

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27 Hervé Lacombe, \textit{Les Voies de l’opéra français au XIX\textsuperscript{e} siècle}, 192 (see Chapter 2, n. 32).
29 Ibid., 6.
as in a biblical tale, but it also represents the end of a possible encounter
between the West and the Other.

In her journey through the desert Thaïs suffers physically and her
suffering permits her to see salvation and hope for a better life. In the last act,
she reaches the monastery after the white sisters appear almost like a vision.
After twenty days she dies in the gardens of the hermitage, where she has
destroyed her body with penitence. She dies in the arms of Athanaël,
remembering the desert: *Te souvient-il du lumineux voyage, lorsque tu m'as
conduite ici?* (Do you remember the radiant journey when you brought me
here?)\(^{30}\)

Exotic and mystic themes appear again at the end of the opera. In
contrast with Athanaël, whose dreams we could see on stage, we do not see
Thaïs’ vision of heaven; however, we hear Thaïs’ description of it in her last
minutes of life in the final scene of the opera:

\begin{quote}
*Le ciel s’ouvre! Voici les anges
Et les prophètes...et les saints!
Ils viennent avec un sourire,
Les mains pleines de fleurs* \(^{31}\)
\end{quote}

(Heaven is opening! Here are the angels
And the prophets...and the saints!
They come smiling,
Their hands full of flowers!)

\(^{30}\) Ibid., 34.
\(^{31}\) Ibid., 36.
And she continues:

_Le son des harpes d’or m’enchante!
De suaves parfums me pénètrent!
Je sens une exquise béatitude, ah! Ah!
Une béatitude endormir tous mes maux!_32

(The sound of golden harps delights me!
Sweet perfumes surround me!
I sense an exquisite blessedness, ah! Ah!
A blessedness that lulls all my ills to sleep!)

The strong exotic connotation of the words here—flowers, golden harps, and perfumes—describe heaven, the religious heaven, in an “oriental” tint as an exotic place. In Act 3, Scene 3, Athanaël, who cannot share her experience of bliss, employs a contrasting language in his verses, less pictorial, more colloquial, and with a weak alternate rhyme riche (abba):

_Viens, Tu m’appartiens!
Ô ma Thaïs! Je t’aime!
Je t’aime, je t’aime!
Viens! Thaïs, ah! Viens!

_Dis-moi: Je vivrai! Je vivrai._33

(Come! You belong to me!
O my Thaïs! I love you!
I love you!
Come Thaïs, ah, come!

Tell me: I shall live! I shall live!)

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32 Ibid.
33 Ibid.
This passage again illustrates Gallet’s style. Challenging the traditional versification of librettos, Gallet chose to write Thaïs in prose. However, he explained, “de temps à autre, pourtant, une rime sonne, inattendue, comme pour surprendre et amuser l’oreille, sans modifier l’ordonnance de la construction musicale” (once in a while, however, a rhyme sounds unexpectedly, as if to surprise and amuse the ear without modifying the organization of the musical construction). What made him choose to use weakly rhymed verses in this particular instance? In the literature of the time, “en cessant d’être pensé comme contradictoire avec l’idée de poésie, la prose s’impose en effet comme synonyme de liberté, de souplesse et d’harmonie” (not thought of as contradictory to the idea of poetry anymore, prose imposes itself like a synonym for freedom, suppleness, and harmony), contrasting with “le caractère artificiel de la rime” (the artificial character of rhyme). The monk’s “artificial” final verses reveal the character’s futility. The simplicity of these verses demonstrates his mundane and trite response to Thaïs’ death, and the end of a dream.

In addition to Athanaël’s unadorned language, Gallet leaves to the priest the last words of sorrow and desperation: “Morte! Pitié!” (She is dead! Mercy!), excluding the sisters’ condemnation present in the novel, and leaving

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the audience with a sense of compassion toward the monk.\textsuperscript{36} Huebner points out, "Athanaël’s flaw and fate imply no great threat to humanity at large, and so he is not expunged in the manner of the tragic hero."\textsuperscript{37} Huebner continues, "No terror, only pity: it is this last emotion that would seem to distance his character from the genre of comedy. But \textit{how much} pity is really raised? To what degree do we take Athanaël’s Christian mission seriously in the opera?"\textsuperscript{38} In this, Gallet’s libretto differs from France’s novel. Ultimately, only the monk’s impossible love life with the exotic woman matters in the opera. Athanaël inspires a sense of pity and sympathy for his misery, while the novel shocks for the priest’s arrogance and his sadistic abuse of Thaïs. Representing just a broken-hearted lover, Athanaël is left alone on stage, facing the folly of his dream, while the audience has experienced the dream of Otherness with him.

2. The Music\textsuperscript{39}

Along with the text, the music of \textit{Thaïs} develops Athanaël’s ultimate vision of the exotic and furthers the conflict between the two opposite dramatic forces as well. In addition, the score creates a pathway for the drama that

\textsuperscript{36} Gallet, \textit{Thaïs}, 36.
\textsuperscript{37} Huebner, \textit{French Opera at the Fin de Siècle}, 157.
\textsuperscript{38} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{39} This dissertation always refers to the first edition of the piano and vocal score by Jules Massenet, \textit{Thaïs} (Paris: Heugel, 1894), and to the orchestral score \textit{Thaïs}, (Paris: Heugel, 1894).
supports the characters' predicaments and their evolution. Massenet’s score anticipates, highlights, and continuously hints at Thaïs’ and Athanaël’s evolution through the use of exotic and Western musical codes. In particular, the score involves a large musical plan that suggests Athanaël’s control over Thaïs. For example, the composer assigns musical Orientalism to Thaïs’ voice to evoke exotic and provocative sensuality when her image and voice originate from Athanaël’s subconscious (visions and dreams), but when she represents sanctity (redemption) to the monk’s eyes, she sings in “Western” terms, the same language as Athanaël. Furthermore, the opposition between Western music (for example, the austere, religious-like chants of the monks and nuns, and Athanaël’s prayers) and music Orientalism (i.e. Thaïs’ vision and the two slaves’ melodic lines in Act 1, and the Divertissement of Act 2) builds a powerful contrast between reality (material life) and the imaginary (the world of Otherness). The two plans, mostly represented by the main characters and reinforced by the minor ones, converge only for a very short time, in the desert (Act 3) and only on Athanaël’s “Western” terms.

In several instances, however, both protagonists sing in C major (i.e., when Athanaël speaks about Thaïs’ possible redemption, when Thaïs first venerates the goddess Venus, and then when she worships the monk’s god). Explaining this phenomenon as “a conflation of the Christian and pagan cults
in Thaïs’s behaviour,” Rowden describes all its occurrences.\textsuperscript{40} “Eros is venerated [with] a chord of C major underpinning Thaïs’s ‘tender and chaste’ supplication of Athanaël to allow her to keep her statuette of the god. C major is used by Athanaël as he addresses his God . . . and chords of C major appear as Athanaël defends Thaïs as an “épouse de Dieu” and on his recognition of the venerable Albine and her pious “filles blanches.”\textsuperscript{41} Rowden also adds that in other scenes the key of C major is linked to Thaïs’ praise of Venus, to religious imagery (suggested by harp and organ), and to the acts that serve her voluptuous cult.\textsuperscript{42} However, on a further reading, the key seems associated primarily with Athanaël. Since his music adopts it first, the C major appears to belong to him and in particular to his fixation with Thaïs. The succeeding instances of its use imply his struggle to control his fantasy.

The following diagram illustrates how musical events support the drama and its construction of Otherness.

\textsuperscript{40} Rowden, \textit{Massenet, Marianne and Mary: Republican Morality and Catholic Tradition at the Opéra}, 206, n. 25.
\textsuperscript{41} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{42} Ibid.
### Table 4-2 Thaïs’ dramatic events and exoticism in the music

<table>
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<th>Musical Events in Relation to Exotic Signifiers</th>
<th>Pages in P/V Score</th>
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<td>He falls asleep.</td>
<td>Diatonic. Slow tempo in C major.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Athanaël’s vision.</td>
<td>Modal harmony from C major to C minor. Chromaticism.</td>
<td>13-14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Athanaël wakes up.</td>
<td>Off-stage flute, English horn, clarinet, harp, harmonium. Augmented fifths. Thaïs’ motif. Voices of crowd gradually louder.</td>
<td>15-18</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Alexandria. Myrtale and Crobyle prepare Athanaël.</td>
<td>Orchestra <em>dans la salle.</em></td>
<td>18-19</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Vocalises.</td>
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<td>70-73</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Thaïs alone in her house. Thaïs meets Athanaël.</td>
<td>Thaïs’ couplets. C major.</td>
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<td>Pilgrimage in the desert.</td>
<td>Prelude.</td>
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<td>Athanaël and Thaïs duet. Voices gradually converge on same melodic line.</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Reprise of theme of Thaïs’ theme (p.70). Athanaël and Thaïs’ duet.</td>
<td>262-270</td>
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The Prelude of the first act establishes a mystical atmosphere with open fifths, slow rhythm, a soft roll of timpani, and a small flute motive. Athanaël’s reality starts here, in the desert, in the shacks of the Cenobite monks; however, the desert is also where his fantasy and anxiety originate. After a dialogue with other monks, Athanaël falls asleep and, through his dream, he introduces us to the body and music of Thaïs. This number plays a significant role in the construction of Otherness and consequently requires an attentive reading of its structure. The number summarizes the monk’s dilemma that develops throughout the opera: he dreams the exotic, desires it, feels guilty about it, and tries to change it. But only at the end of the opera does his obsessive sense of Christian duty come to an end. He fails because he cannot change a dream. The dream, of course, is the exotic Other. In the opera Thaïs exists because of his dream, and she changes according to the monk’s manipulation of her fate. Overall, because of his powerful and “Western” predicament, Athanaël’s sensual dream becomes the public’s dream, and his delusion, the illusory spectacle of Otherness in nineteenth-century France.

To introduce his dream, the monks pray: “donne nous le sommeil sans rêve” (give us dreamless sleep). Over these words an abrupt modulation from C major to C minor occurs, while they sing a brief descending chromatic scale

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43 For a discussion of Massenet’s changes in this number for the 1898 version, see: Patrick Gillis, “Thaïs dans tous ses états” in Massenet Thaïs, L’Avant-Scène Opéra, 69.
(e\textsuperscript{1} to d\textsuperscript{1}) that effectively depicts the descent from reality to the imaginary world.

Example 4-1 *Thaïs*, Act 1, Scene 1, Cenobites’ prayer

Once the monk falls asleep, the harp plays a series of augmented fifth chords that never resolve, creating an effect of anticipation. The harp, an instrument related both to sanctity and exoticism, here symbolizes Athanaël’s dilemma: his morality opposes his desire.\textsuperscript{44}

Example 4-2 *Thaïs*, Act 1, Scene 1, *Vision*

\textsuperscript{44} See p. 113 about the use of the harp in exotic operas.
Then Thaïs appears wearing a veil, facing the Theater of Alexandria on the stage, "par conséquent vue que de dos par le public de la salle" (consequently only her back is seen by the public in the hall), and dancing. In the music, the dramatic representation of the exotic/erotic dream is mirrored by five parameters: timbre, harmony, dynamics, melody, and space. Flute, English horn, clarinet, harp, and harmonium (reed organ)—all instruments linked to the generic exotic—combine to create a far away ambience. Augmented fifths in the harp accompaniment and the unstable but repetitive quality in its harmony accentuate the feeling of strangeness. Clarinet trills interrupt the continuity of the accompaniment, creating uncertainty. And the dynamics regularly fluctuate to give to the music a sense of spinning.

Eventually, the melody, associated with the intangible Thaïs, appears after twenty-one measures of accompaniment figures in the wind instruments, moving from one timbre to another and from lower to higher octaves over a stable C major, restating the repetitive and yet unstable character of the fantasy. The back-stage location of the instruments creates the ultimate sense of distance and mystery.

45 Massenet, Thaïs, 15 n.1.
Example 4-3 *Thaïs*, Act 1, Scene 1, *Vision*, Thaïs’ theme

Over this ensemble the voice of an imaginary crowd, first heard talking softly becomes gradually louder, and, amid the confusion, the only clearly pronounced word is “Thaïs!” and the harmony temporarily loses its stability. Then the commotion stops, the imaginary crowd stops calling her name, the music switches to a different plan, to a clear C major and the monk’s dreamy world of the exotic, erotic desire, and escape. This harmonic plan signifies dramatic motion from the monk’s daydream to his deepest subconscious. Here the gradual crescendo to fortissimo over the C major chord strengthens the power of the vision so that even the crowd does not exist anymore. The melodic line restates a short part of the previous melody associated with Thaïs, but ends going progressively downwards.
Example 4-4 Thaïs, Act 1, Scene 1, *Vision*

This section ends on a dissonant ninth chord. It leads to the following section, in which we hear both Thaïs’ melody and the excited crowd’s screams. This last part of the number develops with a crescendo and increasing tempo (*più appassionato* and then *più mosso*) that lead to the climax. Throughout the whole number, the imaginary Thaïs mimes her provocative scene of “pagan erotica,” representing the loves of Aphrodite, the ancient Greek goddess of love and beauty. In Greek mythology, men celebrated Aphrodite throughout Greece through sexual intercourse with her priestesses (women who represented the goddess) during a festival. This was not considered prostitution, but just one of the many ways of worshiping Aphrodite. The image of Thaïs, therefore, here embodies the concept of union between religion and eroticism, precisely the dilemma that haunts Athanaël.

About this scene Victorin Joncières wrote, “*Une phrase haletante et passionnée accompagne, d’un rythme lascif, les mouvements onduleux de la*
"danseuse" (A breathless and passionate phrase accompanies the dancer’s sinuous movements with a lustful rhythm). She dances on the stage of the Theater of Alexandria and never speaks. In the opera staging she drops her veil, showing her breast, in the semi-darkness, obviously attracting all the attention on herself. Joncières continued, “elle entrouvre, de temps en temps, d’un geste indolent, le voile qui l’enveloppe; puis, rapidement le laisse tomber, pour montrer, dans toute sa splendeur, sa triomphante nudité, aux acclamations de la foule, qui bat des mains, en criant le nom de Thaïs” (Occasionally, with an indolent movement, she half-opens the veil that wraps her; then, faster, she lets it fall down to show her triumphant nudity in all its splendor while the crowd acclaims and claps hands, shouting the name of Thaïs). The audience joins the invisible crowd of the dream. But this crowded and aroused world of Athanaël’s subconscious mirrors the intensity of the monk’s desire, rather than representing an external presence. The real audience of the Théatre de l’Opéra, however, for a few minutes borrows the monk’s eyes, joining the monk’s inner world of the dream. Many critics of the 1894 version even described the vision as if they were dreaming along with the monk. After a detailed description of the stripshow the journalist of Le Journal complained of the brevity of the dream, “ce tableau vivant a été fort goûté . . .

47 Ibid.
non sans regret pour sa brièveté lointaine” (This tableau vivant was really savored ... not without regrets for its remote brevity). In this scene the audience indeed sees the monk’s dream and associates it with erotic fantasy (by means of the visual spectacle) and exoticism (through the musical references to the exotic), just as the monk does.

The orchestra in the house then abruptly ends the dream. It brings Athanaël and the audience back to their respective realities with a sharp chromatic progression in the strings, over which he cries out his shame. Suddenly, the dream dissipates from the stage and from Athanaël’s memory, and his Western, homophonic prayer in C major takes its place.

Example 4-5 Thaïs, Act 1, Scene 1, Athanaël’s prayer

\[ \text{Example 4-5 Thaïs, Act 1, Scene 1, Athanaël’s prayer} \]

48 Le Journal (17 March 1894). Quoted in Rowden, ibid., 71.
Following his enticing dream and expression of guilt, Athanaël goes to Alexandria to redeem the courtesan. There he meets with his friend Nicias, who exemplifies Athanaël’s alter ego, the realization of the monk’s inner but sinful aspiration. Nicias is “an artistic projection of the "fin-de-siècle womanizer who has lost his illusions,” and who uses his money to keep Thaïs. Nicias invites the monk to meet her and his slaves, typical voices of the distant exotic. With no other function than amusing Nicias, the two servants re-establish the couleur locale and re-create the distance between the monk—who sees them for the first time—and the exotic. To deliver a sense of sensual exoticism they do not speak words, but just laugh. Like Thaïs’ voice in Athanaël’s second vision (Act 3), the slaves’ vocalizations, echoed by the oboe and illuminated by the cymbals, tell more than any words can say.

Example 4-6 Thaïs, Act 1, Scene 2, Crobyle and Myrtale

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50 In France’s novel these two characters do not exist. Probably, Massenet and Gallet created these roles to add more characters, since they had to eliminate several from France’s novel. See: Hielderberg, Ibid., 237-38.
After the two slaves have prepared the monk for the evening dinner, finally the focus of the music directs attention first to Nicias and the crowd’s anticipation of the arrival of Thaïs, and then to her “real” appearance on stage. The sequence of these three scenes—the slaves, expectation, and entrance of Thaïs—leads towards the highest point of exoticism. Athanaël and the audience have dreamed her before, the slaves have given a taste of what “real” exoticism looks like, and now “real” people (Nicias and all the people in the party) will finally witness her sensual exoticism. However, Massenet and Gallet decided to show the audience something different. In order to understand how they planned a different climax, first it helps to examine how they lead the spectator to it. Immediately after the slaves’ intervention, Nicias looks at the town from his terrace over an exotic motive in E Dorian. On the image of the city and its exotic musical depiction, Nicias sings to the monk, “voici ta terrible ennemie” (here is your terrible enemy). Thaïs has not appeared, yet all about her has been already presented: she is his exotic and erotic rival. The light galloping rhythm for the animated Nicias and his expectant guests implies, as Monelle suggests, hunt and the masculine. At her entrance, however, the orchestra, which had temporarily taken up the voice of Nicias and the guests, stops. Thaïs enters to an oboe melody in E Dorian—the same mode of the earlier Alexandria motive.

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According to this musical preamble Thaïs should then appear as a strong exotic persona. However, the next musical number characterizes her in Western terms. Suddenly, with no strong orchestral support and detached from the earlier music, her voice and her character become “exposed” and “vulnerable,” in a diatonic, slow, and bare melody.\textsuperscript{52} This happens while “Nicias la contemple amoureusement” (Nicias contemplates her with love).\textsuperscript{53}

The number, in ABA’ form, alternates her brief arioso phrase (A) with the intervention of Nicias (B) and her return to her arioso (A’). A is a slow and step-wise melody over a predictable harmonic progression in G major (I-ii-V-I) on the words, “C’est Thaïs, l’idole fragile qui vient pour la dernière fois s’asseoir à la table fleurie. Demain je ne serais plus rien qu’un nom” (It is Thaïs, the fragile idol who comes for the last time to sit at the table ornate with flowers. Tomorrow I will be nothing more than a name):

\textsuperscript{52} Huebner, \textit{French Opera at the Fin de Siècle}, 151.
\textsuperscript{53} Gallet, \textit{Thaïs}, 64. Staging directions.
Neither *fatale* nor exotic, she immediately looks and sounds weak. Her image appears even frailer in the B section when Nicias tells her—and the public—that they have been together a week, in a brief arioso in F major, and she repeats the same words but in E minor (lower pitch), and *più piano* (lower volume). Still in the B section, a similar exchange happens right after, when Nicias tells her that she will go away from his arms, and she echoes his line. Then, with her own arioso (*A’*) she encourages him to be happy and to enjoy the last hours they have together before she leaves. Without mentioning anything about herself and with a music clearly belonging to her male counterpart Nicias, she establishes her predisposition to be controlled. With this number, she also anticipates her inclination to transform into two possible images, both dear to the composer: the devout Christian and the *femme*
**fatale**—also the fantasies of the monk. She will become both, in her following number, the “mirror aria.” “*L'idole fragile*” sets the foundations of her personality. In fact, while it does not form itself into an aria, it prepares the mood for the following “mirror aria,” in which she hints at her submission to the monk, also in a Western style (Act 2, Scene 1).

In the second scene of Act 2, Thaïs declares her readiness to convert and go with Athanaël to the convent of the Albine sisters. The monk finally can see his selfish aspiration come true: not only will he redeem her, but he will also find peace once Thaïs will be secluded. Before pronouncing her willingness to join the convent, however, Thaïs vents her distress: “*je ne veux plus rien: ni lui, ni toi, ni ton Dieu*” (I do not want anything: neither him [Nicias], nor you or your God), ending with a hysterical laugh that transforms into a cry. But it is Athanaël’s cry emerging in her voice. The true hysterical is Athanaël, whose body and mind are torn apart by his erotic desire. Then, the music of the “*Méditation*” suggests the courtesan’s decision. The lyrical character of the number breaks with the mood Thaïs has established. The famous interlude, played with closed curtains, signifies the West and features prevalent characteristics of the Romantic canon.
The violin plays a solo, diatonic, clear and lyrical line over a homophonic orchestral accompaniment, with a humming chorus towards the end.\(^{54}\) "As the music "detaches" itself from the triviality of the material world, we are compelled to sympathize with Thaïs’ state. Massenet, intending to have the music speak the "truth," eliminates all human presence or landscapes.

"Orchestral music is thus defined capable of expressing the inexpressible, as being the key that, in line with symbolist aesthetics, unlocks the door to the dream world and mysticism," writes Rowden, associating César Franck’s symphonic poem *Psyché* (1888) with *Thaïs*.\(^{55}\) If the music of the "Méditation" has the power to deliver such dream-like symbolism, one wonders who the narrator of this dream or vision is? While the prelude takes place, the audience knows that Thaïs is alone, thinking. The following scene, however, shows that

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\(^{54}\) The vocal score omits this choral part.

\(^{55}\) Rowden, *Massenet, Marianne and Mary: Republican Morality and Catholic Tradition at the Opéra*, 218.
during the "Méditation" Athanaël has been sitting outside Thaïs’ house, just like the audience. After the prelude, during which he had been manipulating her spirit, she sings to the monk, “Père, Dieu m’a parlé par ta voix” (Father, God spoke through your voice).

The intimate character and the transparent texture of the orchestral interlude contrast with the mundane exoticism and the rhythmic complexity of the following Musique de Fête, played on stage. Brought back to the couleur locale, the original color of Thaïs, all spirituality disappears. This number includes three rhythmic levels (played by the Arab drum, the clavier de timbres, and the triangle) while the oboe, followed by the English horn, plays a melody on a modal motive.

Example 4-10 Thaïs, Act 2, Scene 2, Allegretto Moderato

This music persists even when Thaïs informs the priest of her decision to go to the convent and leave her sinful life behind. The exotic music continues for dramatic purposes to depict the ongoing feast of Nicias and his people. Nevertheless, it stops at the very moment in which Athanaël sings,
"Non loin d'ici, vers l'occident, il est un monastère" (Not far from here, toward the West, there is a monastery) over a plain homophonic orchestral accompaniment. Here the West unfolds in the monk's ideals (he leads her there where he believes righteousness can be found), in his words and in the music through the rejection of the exotic and the assertion of Western musical language.

The pilgrimage in the desert represents Thaïs' ultimate effort to become what Athanaël wants her to be. The alien landscape not only witnesses her hardship and the monk's severity and cruelty, but also speaks with its own musical voice. Differently from the "Méditation" interlude, where a humming chorus acknowledges a living presence—even if vague and mostly angelic—the Oasis prelude is characterized only by the orchestra and describes the desert and the pain it inflicts. Massenet symbolizes the desert's inexorability with a slow tempo, a four-measure-long F-minor chord with an extended suspension (d♭) and with a dissonant augmented fourth (F-b♭) highlighted by the orchestra, and a motive played by the oboe that repeats itself with no changes.
Temporarily lightening the heavy presence of the desert, the clarinets play a four-measure motive in F major, moving by thirds, over the short interjections of the violins. This contrasting section conveys an almost pastoral feeling in opposition to the harshness of the “desert” section, almost to recreate a memory of a European nature, not visible but pure. In a very short time span, two levels of Athanaël’s reality appear here: the physical (the desert on stage—representing Catholic chastisement) and the spiritual (the countryside in music—the religious “truth”). Through these two plans the characterization of Athanaël becomes pristine: his actions seem to represent righteousness.

56 Renato Poggioli used the term ‘pastoral oasis’ in literature to describe a section that employs pastoral characteristics within a “non-pastoral” work. Giving several literary examples ranging from Dante to Milton, he also explained that “Pastoral and Christian imagery or . . . bucolic ‘fiction’ and religious ‘truth’ may happily merge.” The Oaten Flute: Essays on Pastoral Poetry and the Pastoral Ideal (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975), 102.
The following dialogue between the two protagonists shows how their communication evolves. The polarity Athanaël/West/Self and Thaïs/Exotic/Other appears in the vocal lines of the two characters while they are travelling in the desert. They never sing the same melody; he is accompanied by the “desert” motive, and she, by the “pastoral.” They have almost reached the center of the chiasmus: while his character still progresses toward redemption, she has already started to take his “Christian” voice. When, however, her feet start to bleed and Athanaël sings “Des gouttes de sang coulent de ses pieds blancs,” the music suddenly takes on a completely Western character. He sings an arioso, accompanied by the strings, and his melody climaxes at the word “Thaïs.” This lyrical moment leads to the duet in which, for the first and last time, the two sing together the same melody. This is the core of the opera and the temporary but ultimate success of the monk. Expressing their mutual desire for love and for God, the duet symbolizes what Athanaël has wanted all along: to blend his religious and sexual obsessions.
Finally, another relevant section for the analysis of duality in *Thaïs* is Athanaël’s second vision in Act 3. 57 Two scenes comprise the vision: in the first, a diabolical and exotic Thaïs re-appears to the monk’s eyes, in a provoking yet “hysterical” behavior. 58 In the second, angelic voices inform the monk that Thaïs is dying. Once again, Athanaël transfers his desires and fears over the contrasting images of Thaïs (demon and saint).

**Example 4-13 Thaïs, Act 3**

a) “Qui te fait si sévère”

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57 Originally, a ballet called *Tentation* preceded the *Vision* number. Criticized by many reviewers, *Tentation* was performed in 1894 only on the first eight nights; see: Gillis, “*Thaïs dans tous ses états: Genèse et remaniements,*” *Massenet Thaïs, L’Avant-Scène Opéra*, 70 and 73-74.

58 Rowden reads this section as the representation of hysterical behavior in women at the end of the nineteenth century in France. See: *Massenet, Marianne and Mary: Republican Morality and Catholic Tradition at the Opéra.*
First, the provocative Thaïs sings the same melody with which she approached Athanaël for the first time, ("Qui te fait si sévère"), but with different instrumentation and with added short embellished answers of the strings to the flutes’ motives (Example 4-13 a). Along with additional complexity in her music, her physical appearance now seems to be more human than in Athanaël’s first dream of Act 1. She sings, instead of dancing only, and she imposes her presence so vividly that set designers Eugène Carpezat and Michael Jambon thought it appropriate to create a sign explaining that she was only a dream. According to Rowden, they planned a “cartoon-like image of Athanaël with a ‘think bubble’, containing his vision of Thaïs for the audience to see,” but Massenet disagreed. Gallet and Massenet took great pains to represent effectively the apparition of Thaïs and the following Vision.

In a Note pour l’opéra addressed to Gallet in July 1893, Massenet asked the

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59 Ibid., 211. The source of this information, however, is not specified.
librettist to make Thaïs “paraissant près de la couche d’Athanaël et le tentant par des paroles et encore plus par les gestes qui accompagnent cette scène jouée” (appearing close to Athanaël’s bed and tempting him with words and even more so by actions that accompany and underline this acted scene). 60

Such a vivid dream represents how the monk’s obsession with the exotic woman has reached a conscious level, and he has accepted his desire.

The following scene substantiates his feelings. Athanaël now imagines and foretells the death and beatification of Thaïs, the only solution to his forbidden dream. The character of this second part of the vision contrasts with the first for its intense religiousness. The White Ladies of the Monastery where Thaïs is secluded sing in unison a “psalmodie” (Example 4-13 b) to which the tremolos in the violins, the pianissimo of bass drum and the cymbals, and the harp accompaniment give “une couleur solennelle et douce” (a solemn and sweet sound). 61 In the Vision, the Ladies are kneeling next to the dying Thaïs, under a fig tree. The symbolism of this tree suggests several but related meanings relevant to the reading of Athanaël’s predicament. It symbolizes “immortality”—what Athanaël and his fantasized Thaïs have been wishing all along. It represents “absolute reality”—the doomed end of an impossible relationship. It creates “an axis linking different worlds,” the worlds of the

60 Gillis, “Thaïs à l’Opéra: Du roman à la comédie lyrique, pertes et profits,” 133.
Dream/Exotic/Other and of the Reality/West/Self. This number in fact expresses the end of Athanaël’s exotic-spiritual adventure that terminates with the on-stage death of the “real” Thaïs, in the arms of the monk who finally admits to have always loved her, his ideal fantasy.

Thaïs’ religious obsession combined with sexual passion for the exotic mirror the fin-de-siècle public’s love for decadent and tragic subjects. Through Athanaël’s eyes and psyche the opera also looks straight into the essence of Otherness. This Otherness represents all desires, but should not be approached too closely. It fascinates but is incompatible with the West. It results from a dream, but turns into a nightmare. Ultimately, it cannot be changed because it is just as the reflection. Furthermore, the critics and audience of Thaïs not only approved of the powerful setting, but also celebrated it as one of the best exotic operas of the time. Massenet and Gallet assimilated the traditional vision of an “ancient” and “distant” world with the strong presence of the West—the Christian monk—and its confrontation with its opposite. Finally, the doors of French opera theaters opened to a new, more modern vision of the exotic, in which materialization of the Self made the spectacle more realistic.

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V. The Colonial Other: *Le Spahi* and *L’Île du rêve*

The last French exotic operas of the nineteenth century, *Le Spahi* by Lucien Lambert and André Alexandre/Louis Gallet (1897), and *L’Île du rêve* by Reynaldo Hahn and André Alexandre/Georges Hartmann (1898), diverted focus from the traditional and mysterious exotic ideal to the contemporary real-life world of French colonies. Adapted from two colonial novels by Pierre Loti, *Le Roman d’un spahi* (1881) and *Le Mariage de Loti* (1880), these operas describe the love experiences of European officers in French colonies at the end of the century.¹ Their colonial settings—Senegal (*Le Spahi*) and Tahiti (*L’Île du rêve*)—offered cultural and physical scenes quite different from the stereotypical and popular “Orient.” Viewed as contemporary and primitive cultures rather than ancient and rich civilizations, these two colonies represented Otherness in open conflict with the Self. The titles of the novels and operas suggest this shift of scene at once. Directly focusing on the male European protagonist, the novel *Le Roman d’un spahi* and the opera *Le Spahi* suggest a certain weakening of the spell of the exotic heroine promoted in earlier exotic operas. The titles of both the novel *Le Mariage de Loti* and the opera *L’Île du rêve* also leave off the name of the exotic heroine, the first

¹ Messager and Alexandre/Hartmann’s adapted *Madame Chrysantheme* in a *comédie lyrique* (performed at the *Théâtre de la Renaissance* in 1893), also from a novel by Pierre Loti. According to Charles P.D. Cronin and Klier Betje Black, Delibes’ *Lakmé*, for years considered a loose operatic rendition of *Le Mariage de Loti*, was adapted from the Orientalist Théodore Pavies’ novel; see their article “Théodore Pavies’s *Les Babouches du brahmane* and the story of Delibes’s *Lakmé*,” *Opera Quarterly* 12 (1996): 19-33.
concentrating on the European hero, and the second on his dream—the European vision.

The European soldiers of the novels temporarily live in the colonies, and the stories focus on their experiences. They approach the natives with pragmatism and portray the “degeneration” of those peoples. Loti viewed the two cultures as corrupted worlds contaminated by the West, where European soldiers embrace native customs and predictably attract native women, but long to leave. Following the conventional prescription of colonial literature, the novels suggest interracial love, but reject the possibility of any lasting relationship. The heroines are not able to cope with the loss of their beloved soldiers and dread their own future in the colonies. Loti’s *Le Roman d’un Spahi* is populated with local prostitutes, corrupt merchants, and native slaves on one side, and drunken soldiers on the other. In *Le Mariage de Loti*, the writer describes the decadence of the Tahitian culture following the arrival of the Europeans, expressing nostalgia for a lost, idealized “primitive” culture in true Diderot tradition. Following the departure of her lover, the heroine of *Le Mariage de Loti* sinks further and further into depravity until death consumes her. Less concerned with drama than description, Loti does not focus on the drama but depicts the colonial worlds with ephemeral images. These literary snapshots focus on real places: the African desert and the Senegalese city of Saint Louis (*Le Roman d’un spahi*), and the Tahitian tropical vegetation and a
Polynesian village (*Le Mariage de Loti*). Suggesting exoticism rather than
establishing it, the images of the novels aim to give an impression of already
existing worlds.

The operas, more conventionally designed for the stage of the Opéra-
Comique, focus on the theme of romance. The death of children or explicit
prostitution could not possibly be shown to the public.\(^2\) In addition, the locales
of the novels played a central role in the operas, yet the exoticism in Loti’s
narrative differed from the corresponding operatic accounts. The novels tended
to describe an exotic context rather than concentrating on plot. However, in the
nineteenth century, plot constituted a primary characteristic of the dramatic
arts. For this reason, several reviewers argued that the novels were not suitable
for theatrical performances.\(^3\) Blay adds, “*Mais il est possible aussi, en ces
années symbolistes, que [le texte lotien] ne se prête pas aux codes
traditionnels de la scène et nécessite un autre théâtre, décantré de sa théâtralité
même*” (However, it is also possible that in those symbolist years, the Lotian
text did not lend itself to the traditional codes of the stage, and necessitated
another type of theater free of even its own theatricality).\(^4\)

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\(^2\) Even Bruneau and Charpentier, the most typical composers of *Naturalisme*, never attempted
a depiction of life in France with graphic details.

\(^3\) See: Henri Borgeaud, “L’Œuvre de Pierre Loti et les musiciens,” *La Revue maritime* 46

\(^4\) Blay, “Le Théâtre lyrique de Pierre Loti,” in *Le Livret d’opéra au temps de Massenet*, 93 (see
Chapter 2, n. 64). Blay has been of tremendous help for my study on *Le Spahi* and *L’Île du
rêve*, providing me with his unpublished material and facilitating my research at the
*Bibliothèque de l’Opéra*.
rendition of literary impressionism, in fact, the French public had to wait until 1902, when Claude Debussy adapted the play *Pelléas et Mélisande* by Maurice Maeterlinck, into the opera by the same title. The works by Loti, however, never inspired symbolist composers, either in the 1890s or later.

Not completely naturalist or symbolist, and not embracing or abandoning conventional rules of operatic exoticism—as the following analyses will illustrate—the two works appear less engaging than *Thaïs* and less traditional than *Thamara* and *Djelma*. Blay explains that *Le Spahi* "ne se démarque pas assez des codes scéniques et sonores du théâtre lyrique exotique de la fin du XIXe siècle" (is not dissociated enough from the theatrical and musical exotic codes of late nineteenth-century opera).  

The mixture of genres and the treatment of musical exoticism inspired little approval from the public and critics. Some expected more exotic display, others expressed dissatisfaction with the redundancy of the old exotic clichés. On the other hand, *Le Spahi* and *L'Île du rêve* incorporated some innovations in the text (for example, the natives sing a few words in their original language) and, as previously discussed, in the drama (for example, the endings). Although not primary, these and other structural changes were also symptoms of a change in the perception of the far away. These two works

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5 Blay, ibid., 95.
continued to portray Otherness, but they finally represented it as an entity belonging to reality.

A. *Le Spahi*  

1. The Libretto

As with Gallet's *Thaïs*, the libretto of *Le Spahi* by André Alexandre and Louis Gallet originated in a popular French novel. Pierre Loti published his story in *La Nouvelle Revue*, in 1881, under the title *Le Roman d’un spahi*. There he recounted the life of a Spahi in Saint Louis, Senegal, during the French colonization of the 1870s. The Spahi was a branch of the French military that included native soldiers, founded in Algeria in 1831 and located in North Africa. Along with the first installment of the novel, this issue published “La France au Sénégal,” an article by Auguste Salières that explained the colonial situation in Senegal from the beginning of the eighteenth century to his own time. With a quotation from Victor Hugo, the article set forth its African colonial agenda, “... *Allez peuples! Emparez-vous de cette terre. Prenez-la. À qui? À personne. Prenez cette terre à Dieu. Dieu*

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6 *Le Spahi* was premiered at the Opéra-Comique on 18 October 1897 and was performed nine times. The first three times it was coupled with *Le Maître de chapelle*, the fourth and the ninth times with *Mireille*, the fifth and sixth times with *Lalla Roukh*, the seventh time with *Le Maître de chapelle* and *Mireille*, and the eighth time with *Lakmé*. The opera has never again been produced since 1897. There is no evidence of recordings of any section of the opera.  
7 This dissertation always refers to the first and only edition of the libretto: André Alexandre and Louis Gallet, *Le Spahi* (Paris: Calmann Lévy, 1897). This work was Gallet’s last libretto.  
8 Loti’s novel appeared in five parts, in issues 7 through 11 of *La Nouvelle Revue* (1881).
( . . . Go people! Take over this land. Take it. From whom? From nobody. Take it from God. God gives the land to men. God offers Africa to Europe. Take it). ⁹ In its understanding of the French colonies, the article seems to introduce not only the drama of Le Roman d’un spahi, but also its tragic ending: “Depuis 1724 . . . malgré sa fécondité, malgré ses riches productions . . . cette terre semblait maudite et sans la moindre avenir” (Since 1724 . . . notwithstanding its fecundity and its rich production . . . this land seemed to be cursed and without any future). ¹⁰ The historical account also described the local religious “fanaticism” (Islamic and pagan) and the “absurdes croyances aux fétiches” (absurd beliefs in fetishes), important elements of the novel. ¹¹ In addition to local customs, Salières described with vivid images the difficult conditions of the French soldiers and the relentless fighting among diverse indigenous groups. Loti’s and Salières’ publications in La Nouvelle Revue as well as other literary and many other theatrical works about life in Africa (already discussed in Chapter 1), conveyed a clear impression of the colonies: they represented brutality, corruption, and fanaticism.

When the Opéra-Comique staged Le Spahi, the public, by then quite accustomed to the many and similar depictions of Africa, anticipated seeing a

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¹⁰ Ibid., 8.
¹¹ Ibid., 29.

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staged battleground inhabited by “peculiar” people. To play to this, Gallet and Alexandre introduced the expected colonial setting by taking advantage of the popularity of Loti’s novel, and kept the core of the drama intact.

The story of Le Spahi takes place in Saint-Louis, Senegal, at the end of the nineteenth century. Jean, Muller, and other Spahi live in a camp near the city. Jean is infatuated with Cora, a rich and married Creole woman who has many lovers. She rejects Jean because of his jealousy, but her young slave Fatou-gaye loves him. The slave casts a love spell on him, using an enchanted amulet that she bought from Samba-Hamet, well known as an enemy of the white people. During a pagan celebration of spring and nature, the slave and the soldier declare their reciprocal love under a baobab. Fatou-gaye then takes some golden coins from the Spahi secretly to buy jewels in order to look pretty and more desirable. The soldier, who had set aside that money for his old and poor parents in France, finds out about the slave’s theft and becomes furious; however, he does not reject Fatou. In the meantime, Samba-Hamet has cursed the Spahi’s camp, and the enemies attack and destroy the campground. Jean, struck by a bullet, falls and dies while the little slave holds him for the last time.

If Gallet and Alexandre respected the main plot of Loti’s novel, they also made some fundamental changes to its beginning and to the ending. A major part of the opening of the novel illustrates the disappointment and
jealousy of the protagonist Jean when he discovers Cora making love with another Spahi. Differently from its source, the libretto does not include the scene of infidelity; Cora simply dismisses the protagonist and disappears from the story, leaving room for the slave Fatou-gayé’s affair with the soldier. Furthermore, in the novel the soldier and the slave Fatou-gayé have a boy, whereas the libretto never mentions a child. Finally, the novel ends tragically with the deaths of the Spahi, the native slave Fatou-gayé, and their child. After her lover is shot to death, the slave suffocates their child—the offspring of the European soldier—and poisons herself, fearing the charge of miscegenation. In the end, jackals and vultures eat the threesome. In the opera, however, only the Spahi dies. Alexandre and Gallet clearly knew that these scenes from the novel were not appropriate for the conservative public of the Opéra-Comique. Nevertheless, they left intact the substance of the story, that is, the impossibility of a lasting bond between the West and the colony. In fact, in *Le Spahi* the distance between the two entities goes further than in the novel. In numerous instances Jean (of the opera) evokes home, the mountainous French Cévennes, explicitly contrasting them with the colony Senegal and its desert. This opposition unveils a new and significant aspect in exotic opera: home appears as a dream, and the colony, as reality. With *Le Spahi*, the search for the ideal but illusory exotic world ends. Instead, conservative ideology takes over
with a renewed appreciation for nationalistic values, looking at the “old” home as the ideal space.

In addition to adapting the plot for a different audience and emphasizing nationalistic themes, *Le Spahi* varies from Loti’s novel in its more conventional treatment of the story. The novel expresses a sort of fatalist mysticism, a phenomenon that Blay calls “*mysticisme sans Dieu,*” in which the contemplation of nature, especially the desert, poses metaphysical questions. The libretto excludes that aspect, focusing on a more traditional subject matter, an impossible love. Gallet and Alexandre thus transformed Loti’s suggestive descriptions and impressions into operatic cliches. The changes disappointed a majority of the critics. Bäuer wrote, “*Le charme ineffable et la sensibilité du style . . . l’éclat brûlant du soleil, les nuances colorées du sable, tout ce qui fermait l’atmosphère du livre a disparu de la pièce*” (the ineffable appeal and sensitivity of the style . . . the burning brightness of the sun, the colored nuances of the sand, everything that contained the atmosphere of the book has disappeared in the dramatic work). Bruneau explained that Loti’s “*personnages . . . vont et viennent dans des décors changeants qui captivent toute notre attention. À la scène il ne demeure rien de cela*” (characters come

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12 Blay, “*Le Théâtre lyrique de Pierre Loti,***” 93.
13 In *Thais,* too, Gallet omitted some spiritual themes originally confronted in the novel (i.e. the librettist eliminated the banquet scene where several philosophers of different creeds meet to discuss mystical issues).
14 Henri Baüer, “*Les Premières Représentations,*” *Echo de Paris* (20 October 1897), in *Le Spahi, Dossier de l’œuvre* (F-Po).
and go in the changing sets that captivate all of our attention. On stage none of that remains).  

If the impressionistic landscape made of “brèves notations pittoresques” was missing in the text of the libretto, Marcel Jambon’s stage supplied a suggestive exotic background, according to the critics. Gallet and Alexandre carefully specified their suggestions for stage sets in the libretto. Colors, as we will see, played a major role in the opera production. Not only do the authors mention diverse hues of red and blue, but they, and in particular Gallet, researched specific physical features of the many and diverse Senegalese people. The composer and the librettists agreed with the famous soprano Julie Guirandon, the leading female, that she should not look completely black, like the heroine of the novel. According to Goullet, Gallet then contacted the Civil Administrator of Senegal about the possible skin colors of Senegalese peoples. Finding that one of the groups, the Peuls (Goullet calls them “Peulz”), had a skin “d’un bronze plutôt clair” (of a rather light tan), they decided that the slave Fatou should belong to that tribe. The female choristers also refused to paint themselves black, and the Director of

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15 Bruneau, “Les Théâtres,” Le Figaro (19 October 1897) in Le Spahi, Dossier de l’œuvre (F-Po).
16 Ibid. Paul Orfay, Théodore Massiac, Bruneau, and G.V. (the journalist signed only his initials), agreed about the excellent quality of the stage set. See: Le Spahi, Dossier de l’œuvre (F-Po). Except for Bruneau’s article, the other periodicals are not identified. G.V.’s review of Le Spahi can be found at the library of the Arsenal (RF 65082). For more information about Jambon, see Chapter 2 of this dissertation. According to Massiac, Jambon finished the sets early, in order to allow the singers to rehearse with them.
the Opéra-Comique Carvalho, who at first wanted to reproduce the original characteristics of the people in Loti’s novel, surrendered to their objections.

The setting of Loti’s novel, however, offered great opportunities for an exotic opera. Many exotic codes of the novel—both in the language and in the plot—were perfect for the stage: a native pagan festivity, a crowd scene in a local market, a battle in the desert, jewels and amulets, the oasis, and a dream. The opera also opposes these exotic elements to the strong presence of the West similarly to the novel. It emphasizes nationalistic beliefs, and depicts the distant homeland as the epitome of morality, honesty, and religious virtue. The following diagram organizes the dramatic events in relation to the construction of exoticism and its new, more realistic aspect, along with the depiction of the West as a lost dream.

\[\text{17 Massiac, ibid.}\]
Table 5-1 *Le Spahi*’s dramatic layout and exoticism in the set

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acts</th>
<th>Where</th>
<th>Dramatic Elements</th>
<th>Set and Props</th>
</tr>
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</table>

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18 Griots are musicians who provide advice to the community, serving as spokespersons, reporting news and praise-singing in some African societies.


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Table 5-1 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acts</th>
<th>Where</th>
<th>Dramatic Elements</th>
<th>Set and Props</th>
</tr>
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</table>

Most significant among all the characteristics that have made this opera different from typical exotic operas are the consistent recollection and longing for the homeland France. In all four acts, either Jean (Acts 2, 3, and 4) or his friend Muller (Act 1) evoke and contrast the Cévennes and Jean’s family with the soldiers’ present situation in the colony. In the first act, Muller tries to calm Jean’s passionate jealousy of Cora by reminding him that marriage and family are waiting for him in France. In the second act, Jean falls asleep and in his
dream remembers his French home. Immediately after his dream, Fatou voices a contrasting picture of her ideal space: the African paradise (an occasion for a vivid representation of the exotic). In the third act, first the officer remembers when he used to pray as a child; and after this, he writes a letter to his family, alternating the reading of the letter with comments about the harsh reality of Senegal. In the last act, while dying, Jean vents his fear of never seeing his country and home again; in addition, at the very end, he perceives the victorious French army as a hallucination rather than the triumph of his country. His country, always depicted with a certain vagueness, appears to be an unreachable vision that contrasts with his real struggle (his unreciprocated love for Cora, his shallow affection for Fatou, his meaningless life in the desert, his inability to pray any longer). Like Athanaël in Thaïs, Jean seems to be obsessed by an ideal, the Western ideal of righteousness. Also, they both have a mission—the first, a religious one, and the second, a military one. But, unlike Athanaël, who does not grasp his predicament until the end, Jean clearly knows his faults from the beginning of the opera. Finally, the soldier of Le Spahi lives in the exotic context, while the priest of Thaïs goes only briefly to the ultimate place of exotic perversion, Alexandria.

Le Spahi opens on a busy scene during which Jean and other soldiers drink wine, local merchants sell their products at the market, and Griots tell about their deeds. After the couleur local is established, Jean and Muller
finally talk. Jean voices his infatuation for Cora, crediting her with enlivening his life and making him forget his sorrow.

\[
\begin{align*}
C'est toi, femme au parler charmant, \\
C'est toi, pâle créole, \\
Qui berças le spahi \\
Jeté seul, ébloui. \textsuperscript{20}
\end{align*}
\]

(It is you, woman of charming words.
It is you, pale Creole,
Who rocked the Spahi
Left lonely and dazzled).

Paradoxically the audience never hears her parler charmant.\textsuperscript{21} Cora, who appears only briefly in the first act, is a mute role. In the opera the expression of her thoughts seems not to matter as much as the effect on the Spahi of her charming and attractive way of speaking. In addition, Cora embodies all qualities of a typical femme fatale. She seduces all men around her, but she does not care for any of them. She drives Jean to despair, but she uses no words. The mulatto character—in the novel, the daughter of an important French personality and of an unnamed mother—cannot make a difference to the plot. The use of such a character can probably be explained for practical reasons, perhaps because the composer needed to limit the number of the primary roles, or wanted to concentrate the drama on the main couple Fatou/Jean. However, in a different reading, depriving Cora of a voice might

\textsuperscript{20} Alexandre and Gallet, Le Spahi, 7.

\textsuperscript{21} Parler could also be translated as "dialect" or "way to speak."
have also signified depriving her of a dignified role in society. Being the offspring of an interracial union, prostitution becomes her only choice. Her exotic features—exotic also for the native people who sing about her charms—symbolize sensuality, and she uses her sensuality as her only mode of expression.

The officer finds in her the solution for his miserable situation, acknowledging also the origin of his sorrow, that is, the longing for his homeland.

*Loin de la terre cèvenole,*
*En ce pays brûlé par un soleil de feu.*
*C'est toi qui reçus le premier aveu*
*De mon âme ignorante encore.*

(Away from the land of the Cévennes,
In this country, burned by a sun of fire.
It is you who received the first confession
Of my still ignorant soul . . . )

In these lines, the opposition of *terre cèvenole* and *soleil de feu* converges in the *pale Créole* Cora, who actually disappears from the scene after a quick appearance in Act 1. The officer’s friend Muller, however, reminds Jean of his family and home.

*Songe au pays natal!*
*Laisse là ta folie.*
*Songe à tes parents ...Là-bas, c’est l’hiver :*
*Au logis désert,*
*On attend le soldat, on le pleure en silence.*

---

23 Ibid.
(Think of your native country!  
Leave aside your madness.  
Think of your parents . . . Over there it is winter:  
In the empty dwelling,  
They wait for the soldier, silently shedding tears over him.)

In Act 2, under a baobab tree the officer falls asleep and dreams of home. His dream, unlike those in the earlier operas analyzed in the previous chapters, does not have an explicit narrative function. The soldier describes his dream as a collection of sensations, a series of impressions and images rather than as an event. First, places alternate with people:

\[
O \text{ douceur, une voix chérie}
\]
\[
M'\text{appelait loin d'ici, sous de cieux moins ardents,}
\]
\[
Là-bas, là-bas, dans la patrie;
\]
\[
O \text{ mon village, ô mes parents [...]}^{24}
\]

(Oh sweetness, a beloved voice  
Called me far from here, under less blazing skies  
Over there, over there, in the homeland;  
O my village, o my parents . . .)

Then, objects alternate with sounds:

\[
Et \text{ toi ma mère, sainte femme}
\]
\[
Qui, de tes doigts tremblants,
\]
\[
File ta quenouille et dont l'âme
\]
\[
Est à moi seul! O vieille église! Carillon!
\]
\[
O \text{ musiques sans nombre!}^{25}
\]

(And you my mother, saint woman  
Who, with trembling fingers,  
Threads the distaff and you whose soul  
Belongs only to me! O old church! Bells!  
O countless sounds of music!)

---

\(^{24}\) Ibid., 11.  
\(^{25}\) Ibid.
And finally the dream of familiar places collides with the real African landscape:

Prés verts où chante le grillon  
Sources folles, grands bois de châtaigniers pleins d’ombre!  
Souvenirs radieux!...Mais je vois au réveil  
Les sables, le desert, l’implacable soleil...  

(Green meadows where the cricket sings  
Crazy springs, large woods of chestnut trees full of shadow!  
Radiant memories! . . But when I awaken I see  
The sand, the desert, the implacable sun . . .)

Throughout the opera the contrast of colors appears as a relevant dramatic factor not just in the stage design, but also in the text. In Jean’s dream, green (meadows, cricket, leaves), brown (trees, chestnuts) stand out against the bright yellow of the African sand and sun, and, as we will observe later in this chapter, the blue and red of its sky.

While Jean is dreaming, Fatou, the little slave who devoted her love to the French officer, fancies a life with him in her exotic land that she describes as a dreamlike paradise. While Jean is sleeping, Fatou imagines her future with the soldier.

Nous allions au pays de l’or et de l’ivoire;  
Là-bas où les griots hurlent des chœurs guerriers,  
Où les caimans gris dans l’eau tiède vont boire  
A l’ombre des palétuviers!

26 Ibid.
Les colibris effleurait de leurs ailes
Nos fronts resplendissants des clartés de l'Islam;
La nuit berçait nos amours éternelles
Au pays de Galam.²⁷

(We were going to the land of gold and ivory;
There, where the Griots shout warrior chants,
Where the gray caimans drink in warm water
Under the shadow of mangroves!

The hummingbirds’ wings brushed
Our foreheads glowing with Islamic wisdom;
The night rocked our eternal love
In the land of Galam!)

In the first scene of the third act, while listening to Muslim chants in
the background, Jean remembers his childhood and how he used to pray with
his mother. After his evocation of his country, mother, and religion, the soldier
sings “O mon enfance! Passé d’amour et de bonheur! Égayez-moi de votre
souvenance, et ramenez la clarté dans mon cœur!” (O my childhood! Past of
love and happiness! Brighten me up with your recollection and bring back
wisdom to my heart!)²⁸ Ironically, the word clarté (previously used by Fatou to
describe her ideal future in a Muslim, African paradise) in Jean’s voice
represents Christian purity and his blessed past. His longing for a dissolving
dream, as observed later in this chapter, becomes even more obvious when the
Muslim chants—which are taking place on stage, the soldier’s reality—
interrupt his narration.

²⁷ Ibid.
²⁸ Ibid., 17.
In the third scene of the third act, Jean writes a letter to his parents in France. Alone in his tent, he reads his letter telling them he will return in a few weeks. Alternating with the narrative of the letter, the Spahi comments on what he has written. First, his thoughts go to the future of the native slave. "Les dieux du Sudan béniront ta jeunesse à la fois insoucieuse et grave" (The gods of Sudan will bless your carefree but serious youth). He envisions the pretty slave under the protection of divinities that in his motherland are considered profane. In his acceptance of pagan beliefs, Jean embraces a culture that does not belong to his past, but represents his present, now well rooted in his existence. Fatou also symbolizes the exotic, the soldier's ephemeral dream. "Le ciel de Galam se reflète au fond de tes regards" (The sky of Galam is reflected in the depth of your eyes) he says, while thinking of her. He also predicts his own death after comparing his two homes (the faraway France and his actual foreign residence):

Je frissonne, car il me semble,
Qu'en ce pays au soleil aveuglant
Loin du foyer qui m'attend
Loin de l'ombre des grandes platanes,
Je vais mourir après avoir longtemps souffert...

(I tremble, because it seems to me
That in this land of blinding sun

29 Ibid., 19.
30 Ibid.
31 Ibid., 20.
Far from the home that awaits me  
Far from the shadow of the big plane trees,  
I will die after having suffered for a long time.)

The description of contrasting landscapes once again reinforces his dilemma, the only solution to which seems to be his death. "Mes os blanchirons sur le sable du desert" (My bones will whiten on the desert sand), he adds, suggesting again the embodiment of death in the desert, a theme also stated by previous operas (blood/sand).32

In the final act Jean has been shot by an unidentified indigenous enemy tribe, and vents his fear of dying. Once again he evokes his home in France, already a vague dream. "Reverrai-je jamais le pays, la paisible Maison..." (Will I ever see again the country, the peaceful Home...), while vultures and crows start to attack him.33 The image of his country finally becomes a delusion when the soldier hears the French army coming to the rescue, too late to save him. The stage notes explain, "Soudain, dans un lumineux lointain, et comme évoquée par l'hallucination supreme de Jean, l'armée française défile, étendards déployés, aux accents de la Marseillaise" (Suddenly, in a far-away brightness, and as evoked by Jean's supreme hallucination, the French army marches, its flags flying to the sound of the Marseillaise).34 The reconciliation

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32 Ibid.
33 Ibid., 27.
34 Ibid., Staging directions, 29.
with his roots will never occur, and the rescuers become just part of another
dream.

Fatou, however, does not represent the forbidden dream, as did
heroines of previous exotic operas. Even if adorned in exotic jewelry and
acting as a little "sauvage," she also displays a matter-of-fact attitude. She
takes Jean's money—thinking that she can share it with him—to buy jewels to
appear more beautiful and attractive to him. She makes spells to seduce and
rescue the French officer, hoping to live with him forever. She recognizes who
has betrayed the soldiers. Overall, Fatou represents the reality of the Spahi's
life. Her "savage" and tender attitude and her matter-of-fact behavior seem
more realistic than the officer's dreams of home, the vague entity with which
he has lost touch.

In contrast, the scenes including large numbers of native people convey
the exotic atmosphere typical of other operas. On three occasions—a market
scene (Act 1), a pagan festivity (Act 2), and a Muslim prayer (Act 3)—
librettists and composer emphasized traditional codes of the exotic. The market
scene at the opening of the first act offers a chance to display exotic artifacts,
while the words of the merchants support the images. Many terms—coming
from Loti's descriptions—refer to the show of colors at the market's stands.
The merchants name the items for sale while showing them. They display and
sing about fruit with bright red pulp, pink and blue loincloths, and green jade
pearls along with amulets and perfumes, sometimes using foreign terms (for example, khaliss, Senegalese money, and necklaces of Soumaré, made of scented flowers).\textsuperscript{35} The Griots interject words describing their functions as musicians. While all this action is taking place, the soldiers (brigadiers) watch the scene from one side of the stage, sitting and drinking wine, as if they were sharing the spectacle with the Parisian audience.

The spring festivity recalls the exotic again in the second act. While Nubian female dancers entertain the crowd (the slaves in \textit{Thaîs} and \textit{Aida} were also Nubian), the Yolof priests excite the crowd: "\textit{Laisser monter vos cris d'extase! Fièvres des cœurs, baisers ardents!}" (Raise your cries of ecstasy! Fevers of the heart, ardent kisses!)\textsuperscript{36} At the same time the crowd and Fatou sing, "\textit{Anamalis Fobil! Faramata!}" Loti used these words in his novel, but their meaning is not immediately clear. According to Dialo and Gandon, they mean, "\textit{Trousser-toi, que je vois ta ceinture de perles! Le tambourinaire, qu'il y aille!}" (Lift [your loincloths] so that I can see your belt of pearls! Let the drummer start!)\textsuperscript{37} Even if enigmatic for the readers of the novel and the Opéra-

\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., 2. In \textit{Le Roman d'un spahi}, Loti wrote that soumarés are braids made out of several threads of small brown grains; these grains exude a unique perfume, spicy and piercing, characteristic of Senegal. (p. 297). In \textit{Littérature française et langue africaine: l'exemple de Pierre Loti}, Dialo and Gandon note that the term is found only in the \textit{Lexique wolof-français} (CLAD/IFAN, Vol. 3, 1979), as sumaare.

\textsuperscript{36} Alexandre and Gallet, \textit{Le Spahi}, 13.

\textsuperscript{37} The dancers and Fatou wear belts of pearls under their garments, a custom still current in Senegal, as a good luck charm and aphrodisiac. Dialo and Gandon, \textit{Littérature française et langue africaine: l'exemple de Pierre Loti}. 

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Comique public, "Anamalis Fobil! Faramata!" and their repeated sounds had the power to create a spinning effect and excitement, as in an incantation. In addition, reported from Loti’s travels and fabricated by neither Loti nor the librettists, these words inspired credibility even if they did not carry an apparent significance.  

Finally, in the third act, a Muslim prayer heard in the background reinstates the generic Orientalism used in many earlier operas and vocal works. This prayer, however, has no words and it functions as a chant. In the libretto the authors wrote, "Au fond, une mélodie s’élève. Les soldats musulmans prient" (In the background, a chant rises. The Muslim soldiers pray). However, it is Jean who explains, "Lui, le peuple noir, se prosterne et prie!" (They, the black people, bow down and pray) while the Senegalese soldiers pray around their marabout. Then, he comments with sorrow that the French soldiers spend the last hours before the battle singing army songs and drinking.

Overall, in Le Spahi the distance between home and the exotic stretches out even farther than it did in the earlier operas of the late nineteenth century.

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38 In his novels Loti often focused on the explanations of foreign terms, looking for possible translations.
39 Alexandre and Gallet, Le Spahi, 16.
40 Ibid, 15. Staging directions. The marabout is a spiritual Muslim leader of West Africa, and a scholar of the Koran who makes good-luck amulets and presides at various ceremonies.
41 Ibid. Staging directions. In the 1897 vocal score, however, Jean sings, "Lui, le peuple noir, enfant de Mahomet, il prie" (They, the black people, children of Mohammed, pray). Lucien Lambert, Le Spahi (Paris: Choudens, 1897), 124.
The opera constantly reminds the audience that an uncorrupted European home exists, but it does not occupy the reality of the narrative. In contrast to naturalist operas, *Le Spahi* does not include France in its sets, nor ignore it, as previous exotic operas did. If home represents wherever the hero comes from, in *Le Spahi* home becomes a removed dream, and the foreign land takes its place as a reality. And so, the concept of the exotic reverses: the longed-for dream becomes France and its traditional values, while the exotic land—the colony—becomes the place of misery.

2. The Music

Lucien Lambert conceived Senegal as an exotic and peculiar place; yet he cloaked the opera in a primarily Western musical style overall, rather than an Oriental musical garb. Before composing *Le Spahi*, Lambert lived as a French citizen in an “exotic” country, Brazil. When he returned to France, he studied with Massenet, one of the preeminent French composers of the time. In an interview Lambert stated, “*Il m’a semblé que je pourrais, moi qui ai vécu au Brésil, mettre en cette œuvre quelques unes des sensations que, là-bas, j’avais ressenties*” (Having lived in Brazil, I felt that I could put in this work

42 This dissertation always refers to the first and only edition of the piano and vocal score by Lucien Lambert, *Le Spahi* (Paris: Choudens, 1897), and to the manuscript of the original orchestral score *Le Spahi*, № 241 in the Fonds de l’Opéra Comique, 3 vols. Cote F2870 (F-Po). There is no evidence of any edition of the orchestral score.
some of those impressions that I felt over there). In the interview he also compared the landscapes of the two countries. His impressions of the exotic sun and desert, however, were filtered through contemporary musical trends. In addition, his eagerness to please all factions among critics and public impelled him to merge different musical styles. As a result, according to many critics, the music often contradicts the couleur locale presented in the setting and in the text. Bauer accused him of having constructed his work as a “continuous symphony” that offered melodies too short to be appreciated, and Bruneau wrote, “Cette partition ni très avancé, ni tres en retard, n’apparaît pas symphoniquement bâtie” (This score, neither very advanced nor very backward, does not appear to be well-built symphonically).

A man of his own time, but neither an innovator nor a traditionalist, Lambert worked for his public. For this very reason, the opera embodies qualities that reflect not only French music of the time, but also the many and diverse opinions on musical exoticism. His aim to build a symphonic drama and his use of leitmotifs hint at an admiration for Wagner; his abundant melodic material suggests an appreciation for Massenet; and finally, his use of “patriotic” realism resembles Bruneau’s naturalistic style. On the other hand,

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43 J. Lecocq, “Opéra-Comique, M. Lucien Lambert,” La Patrie (19 October 1897). In addition, Lambert’s father, who lived in Louisiana for many years, was a Creole composer.
his insertion of Oriental vignettes (for example, pagan celebrations, scenes with native crowds, and Muslim prayers) demonstrates the composer's willingness to maintain a tie with traditional exoticism. This mixture of musical elements and styles disturbed most commentators. It is precisely Lambert's treatment of the exotic codes in this compound musical context that makes *Le Spahi* an interesting case. Where and how often the composer chooses to use or avoid those codes—rather than how he creates them—become the main questions in the following analysis. While creating the colony as an exotic place where magic (curses and amulets), paganism (celebration of the Spring), and sensuality (Cora and Fatou-gaye) abound, mostly by means of the orchestral score, the composer gave the main characters (Fatou-gaye and Jean) Western melodies only. Fatou-gaye, originally Cora's servant, becomes Jean's slave, metaphorically speaking. Begging for his love, she acquires his musical language; however, her themes often advance the exoticism and "primitivism" of the place through their orchestration and rhythms. This musical ambivalence hints at her attempt at acculturation and to her desire to live with the soldier. The Spahi—the embodiment of French colonialism—also speaks in Western terms, as expected. However, his voice either contrasts an opposed musical exotic plan, or refers directly to the West through, for example, prayer and lullaby.
Fatou-gaye employs a simple, diatonic leitmotif to express her love for the soldier. From the beginning of the opera, her words and music do not seem to function in a traditional depiction of the exotic. However, the lack of evident agreement between the two signifies a change in the vision of the exotic. If Fatou does not sing in “exotic language” when she expresses herself, it means that the audience will not completely see her as a product of the exotic. Her features and her behavior, however, do not remind them of a French woman either. Influenced by Massenet’s melodic skills, Lambert might have given more importance to melodic elegance than to exotic characterization. However, in Thaïs, the heroine expresses herself with several voices (as an exotic, as a femme fatale, and as a religious saint) according to Athanaël’s needs. In Lambert’s opera, the exotic heroine loses her exotic voice, and speaks only in a language clear to Jean. In fact, Jean’s rejection and casual love are her only dilemma, and she does not appear as a seductress to the many. She represents just an incident in Jean’s story, and not his main attraction.

The Spahi consistently sings in Western musical terms about Fatou and Cora. Understandably, Jean also sings about his homeland France and far-away family in the same terms. Cora appears to him as exotic, but she functions only to give more depth to Jean’s character: she causes Jean’s rage and sadness, but in her he has also found consolation. Furthermore, given the realism of the subject, she, a mulatto prostitute, could never have represented an idealized
object of desire; the desired woman would normally be either the racial opposite or the racial same. Therefore, in this score musical exoticism appears only in situations where the poles stand in distinct contrast—both in music and on stage. For example, the first scene of the first act establishes the couleur locale with a market stage in which “Oriental” voices alternate and juxtapose with the Western ones. The Griots introduce themselves immediately, followed by the soldiers, who also present themselves but with a different musical language. The Cérémonie fétichiste, in which spring and sensual love are venerated in a pagan celebration, closes Act 2. The following act begins with the opposite, from all points of view: a prelude titled “Marche militaire française” that conveys a strong patriotic connotation. Finally, another example of exoticism contrasting with its opposite occurs in Act 3, when a Muslim prayer overlaps Jean’s thoughts. The following diagram locates these and other relevant dramatic and musical events in relation to the making of colonial exoticism in Le Spahi.
Table 5-2 *Le Spahi*’s dramatic events and exoticism in the music

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acts</th>
<th>Main Stage and the Exotic</th>
<th>Musical Events and the Exotic</th>
<th>Pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Fatou describes her love for Jean to Samba.</td>
<td>Prelude. Fatou’s love theme in C major and C minor (orchestra). Fatou’s love theme in G major and G minor. Jean’s berceuse.</td>
<td>1-8 6 34 46-8 60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5-2 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acts</th>
<th>Main Stage and the Exotic</th>
<th>Musical Events and the Exotic</th>
<th>Pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Jean listens and comments on Muslim prayers and remembers his home and prayers. Jean writes the letter home. Jean accuses Fatou. Reconciliation.</td>
<td>Prelude: Military March. Muslim prayer in Arabic <em>kifjaz</em> mode. Jean's thoughts and Ave Maria in A major. Declamation rapidly shifting to $\rightarrow$ harsh intervals over celesta playing repetitive arpeggios on diminished chords.</td>
<td>115-8 124-9 137 141-2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Lambert composed a simple and lyrical theme associated with Fatou. By employing it five times throughout the opera, the composer focused on unifying the drama and characterizing situations. Nevertheless, with the recurrent theme he also shows a new perception of the exotic. If Fatou represents Otherness because of her outward appearance (dark skin), her beliefs (paganism and magic), and her social position (slave), her musical depiction sounds Western; in fact, the melody bears similarities to the fluid melodic style that Massenet employed to depict his *femmes fatales* in *Thaïs* and *Manon*. While physically Fatou belongs to the *couleur locale*, the music insistently removes her from her roots. In other words, she is African but she desires to live forever with a Western man. By assigning this theme to her
presence in particular situations, the composer symbolized Fatou’s ruin as a native woman in a colonized country. The leitmotif means love for the colonizer, but describes also extreme anxiety, first for her fear of losing him, and then for the actual loss of him. Finally, the theme helps to portray the Encounter in a very different way: the pre-colonial tale in which “different” used to mean exotic has become a tale of colonial realism.

Although this theme could be called “Fatou’s theme” because it is always associated with her presence (except in the prelude of the first act), the following analysis attributes a different function to it. The dramatic circumstances in which Fatou sings or the orchestra plays the theme suggest that the leitmotif symbolizes her predicament—the impossible love for the colonizer—rather than illustrating her exotic female role. Therefore, “love theme” seems to be a more appropriate label. This theme and the dramatic contexts in which it appears, suggest Fatou’s simplicity of feelings and a full dedication to the soldier. Its five occurrences symbolize honesty and sincerity, remedy and assistance, plea for attention, determination to protect, and finally failure and loss. Fatou represents the Other in the Encounter between the West and the colony; her love symbolizes the colony’s attempt to integrate in the Western world through the main stereotypes associate with the nineteenth-century epitome of “good wife.” This representation of the Encounter reflects the fin de siècle French ideology and designs a new frame for operatic
exoticism that significantly differs from earlier exotic operas. The Prelude in Act 1 presents the theme for the first time:

Example 5-1 *Le Spahi*, Prelude to Act 1, “Love Theme” (1)

The twelve-measure theme consists of a first phrase in C major and a second analogous phrase in C minor. The theme conveys simplicity by following the conventional progression tonic-dominant chords, but its modulation to the parallel minor key indicates a change of mood. In terms of the drama, the “clarity” of the theme suggests Westernt; the melody, however, is carried by the “exotic color” of the oboe solo, implying remoteness as well. Furthermore, the theme stands out within the prelude for its melodic languor in opposition to the preceding passages with military character.
(trumpets playing on a “gallop” rhythm), and to the numerous chromatic scales played by the strings, that pervade the number both before and after the “love theme.” After listening to the prelude, the theme appears unforgettable because it is the only recognizable melody in the prelude and because it contrasts rhythmic animation and dissonance. Although the theme cannot be associated with Fatou since the drama has not yet started, its subsequent uses are always reminiscent of that first statement and its musical context (i.e. chromaticism, “military” orchestration and rhythms), therefore representing Fatou as a simple entity within a stronger world. In the whole opera the simplicity of this theme in fact symbolizes the honesty of Fatou’s love according to conservative, nineteenth-century Western principles of female submission. In addition to its “feminine” nature, the first occurrence also characterizes the outcome of Fatou’s love by means of a repetition of the theme in the parallel minor key (C minor). This type of modulation, often used to display dramatic changes (for example, in Athanaël’s vision in Thaïs) suggests that the course of this love is doomed to fail.

Following the first statement of the “love theme,” the music turns into a series of tonal progressions, in a clear E major key. Here, the absence of other memorable themes or complex modulations or rhythms suggests that the listener need not to worry about relevant dramatic factors, but it may also simply indicate Lambert’s lack of imagination. The musical outcome of the
theme suggests a diversion from exoticism in the ensuing drama. Therefore, rather than looking for musical Orientalism, the listeners tend to focus on the delicate, easy-to-remember theme ending in a minor key within a military musical context.

Following the love statement of the Prelude, Fatou sings the theme on three occasions, always expressing her love for and devotion to Jean. In other situations, the orchestra re-instates the theme anticipating her gestures of love towards the soldier. The first time we see her on stage, she speaks of Jean to Samba, the native villain who will betray the French army. First, she asks him for a love talisman, then, she ponders Cora’s unfaithfulness to Jean and sings the theme.
Her words, “Hélas! Pauvre soldat que j’aime, puisses-tu me trouver lorsque tu souffriras” (Alas! Poor soldier whom I love, may you find me when you will suffer) over the theme played by the strings clarify her role of a remedy to his suffering. In this particular moment of the opera, it is Cora (the “deceiving mulatto prostitute”) who caused his grief. However, the words also predict Fatou’s fate: she will be the only one assisting him at the moment of his death. Ironically, at the end, not only she will be unable to cure him, but
she will also face a future alone. The music renders the irony by means of contrast. Her words do not sound “savage”: her simple leitmotif, this time in G major and G minor, is doubled by the strings, and in this no trace of “exotic” instruments can be found. However, a syncopated and rhythmic ostinato punctuates her vocal line, vaguely suggesting the exoticism of dances or rituals, therefore making the context in which she lives look primitive. The audience remembers that Fatou lives in a “savage” land, even if she sounds “European.” In addition, the ending of her theme differs from its first statement in the Prelude, hinting at the tragic end of the drama and to her unfulfilled love. On the words “souffriras” (will suffer) the strings play a ‘deceptive’ cadence on Eb major that abruptly becomes E major seven, and rapidly goes to the next section of Fatou’s arioso in D major. In this part, with its more spirited rhythm, she explains how she will make him happy. She sings, “Tu me verras sauter, danser, sourir même, et te tendre les bras” (You will see me jumping, dancing, even smiling, and reaching out to you with my arms).

The love theme reappears at the end of the first act, this time played by the orchestra, when Fatou is kneeling at Jean’s feet, ready to declare her love to him.
The strings state the first phrase of the original theme, but in F major and this time ending on an insistent and *sfizato* diminished D seventh chord over his name, making her plea a cry for attention. In her eyes, Jean’s infatuation for the impossible Cora and his melancholy for his unreachable home make him distant; indeed he barely notices Fatou. The chord, however, temporarily resolves to F minor, when she calls his name again, before starting her soliloquy in front of the sleeping soldier. No exoticism appears here, since the soldier is not listening to her and no seduction or representation of otherness seems be necessary.

At the beginning of the second act, Jean sleeps under the “massive” branches of the baobab, while Fatou, according to the staging directions, lays a blue cloth on the branches to protect Jean from the sun.45 At this very moment

the love theme emerges again in the oboe, clarinet, and english horn to create an exotic mood, first in A major (example 5-4 a), and then in F major (example 5-4 b).

Example 5-4 *Le Spahi*, Act 2, “Love Theme” (4)

a)

![Example 5-4 a](image)

b)

![Example 5-4 b](image)

Consistent with the harmonic and melodic path of the first exposition in the Prelude of Act 1 but in different keys, here the love leitmotif comes back (Example 5-4 a and b) with crystalline clarity. However, different from all
previous instances, the two phrases never resolve and are separated by the loud
warnings of the trumpets (the French army), followed by quick descending
chromatic passages by the harp, the flute and the oboe, that, while reinforcing
the sound of the exotic, destabilize the sense of tonality as well. The
Scherzando mood of these sections might suggest Fatou’s excitement while
watching the soldier, but since it breaks the fluidity and lyrical character of the
theme, it also represents threat.

Finally, the last statement of the leitmotif highlights the last words the
native girl speaks to the soldier. These last words are presented also at the end
of the opera and signify the final closure of their love and the failure of the
encounter. Fatou holds the dying soldier, trying to bring him back to life, and
once again she tells him about her love.
This time, the theme presents a change of mode early in the phrase. Underpinned by a pedal on E, it departs from A major and changes into a tension-filled A♭ diminished seventh, that leads to a B minor chord. The melody, this time given to the oboe, ends with a descending three-note chromatic scale fragment (c-b-a♯) before it can develop, highlighting the dissonance of the diminished seventh chord. The quick changes of keys and the descending chromatic line in the melody draw attention to Fatou’s words “c’est Fatou” (it is Fatou). By renouncing its previous simplicity and clarity, the theme suggests conflict. Enough elements of the theme are present so that
the listener can recognize it, but its loss of integrity gives this last statement a relevance to the drama: Fatou cannot help Jean and cannot live with him; therefore, she loses her dramatic function and an intact theme. In addition, the dissonances on her statement of identity “c'est Fatou” give further weight to the words. Fatou wants to affirm her self, but her objective condition (slave, child, African, woman) portrayed in the music, denies her identity. After Jean sees her, the love theme reappears a step higher in the oboe, and the dissonant diminished seventh chord now falls on the words, “Je saurai” (I will know how) followed by “te sauver” (to save you), as if to reinforce the omen of a few measures before. Similarly to Thaïs, Fatou’s predicament depends on her male counterpart who also establishes her destiny. Both heroines’ dramatic function and ruin in fact are caused by the men’s needs and desires. However, where Athanaël dreams Thaïs’ sensuality, Jean longs for another dream: his home in France.

Jean conveys his identity through mostly melancholic and nostalgic text and music. The text often evokes his unreachable home, family, religion, and past in France. The music associated with his words also portrays a longing for a past long-gone, through traditional forms evoking his cultural background. Furthermore, his longing for home becomes even more evident when his musical statements parallel other music identified with the exotic. Even if diverse, all these instances point in the same direction: Jean, the
epitome of French colonialism, patriotism, and masculinity has lost his interest in the exotic dream. In the plot, however, exoticism as a Western projection of desire still exists, and Jean at first promotes it. However, the dream of the exotic, now openly disclosed, serves as merely consolation for his homesickness. Both Cora and Fatou are there to comfort the soldier. Cora, one of the last exotic heroines, refuses him. Fatou, a faithful but “inferior” character cannot get close to the soldier for any longer than a quick encounter. The mute and unfaithful Cora inspires Jean’s first number, a \textit{berceuse}.\footnote{The symphonic character of \textit{Le Spahi} suppresses any sharp division in numbers. However, because of its obvious formal characteristics, we have defined this section as a closed number.} This lullaby characterizes the soldier right away as a melancholic person, not a warrior, and a dreamer. In the number soldier remembers when Cora used to rock him to alleviate his homesickness, reproducing the swaying feeling.

Although not called such by the composer, this piece has all the characteristics of a French lullaby: $3/4$-meter, pedal bass on the tonic, rocking accompaniment, very basic harmonic plan, simple melody, and quiet dynamic level.\footnote{Kenneth L. Hamilton: “\textit{Berceuse},” \textit{Grove Music Online} ed. L. Macy (Accessed 8 April 2004), <http://www.grovemusic.com>. Hamilton suggests, however, that the meter should be compound.}
By admitting that it was she who “reçus le premier aveu de mon âme innocente encore” (received the first confession of my still innocent soul), he suggests that he left France as a pure man but in Africa his purity was tainted by Cora’s exotic sensuality. As a metaphor for the search for and loss of a dream, or the quest for and illusion of Otherness, he “gives” and “loses” his virginity to the exotic woman. She is an illusion—she has no voice, she deceives him, and she has been only a temporary solution to his melancholy. In the end, the exotic has transformed into an instrument incapable of alleviating the mal de siècle.

The correlation of words and music in Jean’s number demonstrates the change in the perception of the exotic. First, the Spahi evokes his past relationship with the exotic woman in a French lullaby, certainly not the usual
form for the depiction of the exotic. Second, by singing a berceuse, the soldier evokes something that she used to do for him—alleviate his heartache—without openly implying erotic fantasies (in contrast to Athanaël’s dream) or suggesting future erotic events (in comparison with Nour-Eddin’s romance).

Third, the use of a lullaby in a French opera on an exotic subject would have reminded the public of Lakmé’s berceuse “Sous le ciel tout étoilé” (Lakmé, Act 3, no. 15) which Lakmé sings while she tends the wounded Gérald in the forest. However, even if both operas display the exotic woman nurturing a Western soldier, the numbers involve different musical characteristics and dramatic meanings that suggest contrasting ways of forming the exotic. The melody in Lakmé’s berceuse sounds “Oriental,” while Jean’s diatonic melody sounds clearly “Western.” In Lakmé, the exotic heroine loves her soldier, and he reciprocates those feelings; and finally, she sings with her exotic voice in real dramatic time, while tending him. In Le Spahi, the soldier sings with his Western voice about something Cora used to do for him in the past—tend to him—with an a posteriori awareness.

Before singing the berceuse, Jean explains his passion for and rage against Cora, whom he refers to in third person. The lines in these three stanzas, as in many other instances in the opera, take an arioso configuration and show no repetitions either in the vocal line or in the orchestra. However, as soon as he describes how he used to feel alone and how she used to comfort
him, he talks directly to her (even if she is not on stage), and the *berceuse* starts. The shift from arioso to a structured form pulls the attention to the music and text of the *berceuse*, and the number assumes more importance.

Although framed in a traditional structure—it develops in two musical sections (a, b) with two stanzas of rhymed verses—the text of Jean’s *berceuse* does not correspond to the musical layout. The music sections overlap the text as in a textual-musical “elision.” This incongruence could be interpreted as Alexandre and Gallet’s misjudgment in the versification. However, before writing *Le Spahi*, Gallet proved his excellent skills as a librettist and had been praised for other works. Lambert, in contrast, did not have much experience in writing operas, and he might occasionally have underestimated the balance between musical and poetic layouts. It is nevertheless safe to say that he was familiar with the tradition of operatic exoticism and its practice, since he lived and composed during the heyday of musical exoticism. Overall, the arrangement of text and music in Jean’s *berceuse* appears significant in the discussion of colonial exoticism in the opera. A short diagram illustrates the relationship.
Table 5-3 *Le Spahi*, Jean's *Berceuse*. Correlation of text and music\(^{48}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text Lines</th>
<th>Music</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prevo</td>
<td>a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C'est toi, femme au parler charmant</td>
<td>( \downarrow )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stanza</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>C'est toi pâle créole</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C'est toi qui berças le Spahi</td>
<td>( \downarrow )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeté seul, éblouï</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stanza</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Loin de la terre Cévenole,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>En ce pays brûlé par un soleil de feu</td>
<td>b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C'est toi qui reçus le premier aveu</td>
<td>( \downarrow )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>De mon âme innocente encore...</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stanza</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Et tu peux me chasser, me trahir...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Je t'adore!</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

As far as their semantic content, the two stanzas are built symmetrically: the first lines of stanzas 1 and 2 refer to the physical aspect of the exotic woman and the exotic locale; the second lines of each stanza introduce the image of her as a nurse to the soldier; the third lines instead introduce the Spahi's past predicament of an innocent, lonely, and dazzled man; and finally the last line of each stanza describes the Spahi's present condition: far from his country and angry, but obsessed with the exotic.

With regard to the formal layout of the verses, the rhymes have another meaning. In the first stanza the rhyming words in the \(a-a\) verses are *Créole* and *Cévenole*. The two words are connected by a rich rhyme (in French poetry, more than three phonemes), and their acoustic resonance suggests a relevant

\(^{48}\) See pp. 248-49 for the translation of this number.
link. Cora’s mixed-race heritage, symbolic of the encounter between East and
West, and the Cévennes Mountains, the French land most different from the
African desert, represent the two contrasting elements in the making of
colonial exoticism in this opera. The Spahi sings these words in his first and
only lyrical intervention, expressing precisely his situation in Africa: he longs
for his far-away home while living in a “corrupted” country. The first line of
the second stanza describes the burning land where he lives, contrasting with
the previous line in which he evokes the Cévennes. The two lines separate the
stanzas and do not rhyme, hence dividing the meaning of the lines even further.

The a-section of the berceuse begins on the last line of the preceding
stanza that also ended the arioso “C’est toi femme au parler charmant”, while
the b-section starts on the last line of the first stanza, “Loin de la terre
cévenole”. Quite regular and predictable, the musical structure is based on the
repetition of the phrase of four measures on the words “C’est toi, femme au
parler charmant, C’est toi pâle créole.”
The melodic phrase in E major, doubled by the flute, bassoon, and piano, repeats twice with no changes, consistent with the message the text is delivering: charming Cora has comforted the Spahi during his past hardship.
However, in the b-section the first phrase contrasts with the first phrase of the previous section, since its character and key evolves.

The melody of the first part of the b-section moves in a motion opposite to the melody in section a. Furthermore, now in G♯ minor, the melody assumes a more dramatic quality in its first four measures. This shift highlights the Spahi’s description of his fundamental predicament: he misses his home in France and he is forced to live in a hostile environment. The accompaniment, conforming to the convention of the berceuse, continues to “rock” him throughout the number, even when he describes the African sun. The original E major melody of the a-section returns in the following phrase, the fourth of the berceuse, when the soldier speaks of how he confessed to her in the past. Finally, in a piú mosso statement, the berceuse ends with a perfect cadence while he asserts his obsessive love for the unreachable Cora. With this number, the soldier declares that he needs this exotic woman to relieve his anxiety over losing his past. Differently from past heroes of French exotic operas, Jean therefore emphasizes the exotic as the cause of his despair and not as a mysterious dream.

When the soldier speaks about Fatou, however, he expresses his images through a combination of musical modernism and exoticism. In the third act, his fascination for the slave is overshadowed by his fear of dying.
Example 5-8 *Le Spahi*, Act 3, "Le ciel..."

"... 11. lui, ma sè deul."

"Call. Pour plus lento"

"... ciel de Galam se reflète. Au fond de tes r...."

"... gards, et lorsque dans la nuit. De mon..."

"... coeur, les baisers ei..."
In the tonal context of his melody, some destabilizing intervals emerge, e.g. a half diminished seventh chord as an arpeggio to the words “au fond de tes regards” (deep down into your eyes), and chromatic passages on the words “de mon cœur” (of my heart). The exotic orchestration of this passage includes celesta, harp, and flutes playing pianissimo. The first two instruments introduce the half diminished D seventh chord in their arpeggios, while the flutes repeat an embellished motive over an open fifth drone to remind the audience that the generic exotic still exists even if it appears temporarily over a Western and “modern” music. Not completely exotic and not uniquely modern, his music highlights the meaning of the words. The semantic combination of text and music symbolizes the exotic skies of the Galam as reflected in the slave’s eyes, and the soldier’s anxiety and fear of being far away from his homeland.

Gallet and Lambert restate once again the impossible union between the “lost” West and the “present” Other in the Muslim chant alternating with Jean’s thoughts and prayer in Act 3. The scene occurs after a group of Spahi sing a “refrain populaire,” and before the final bloody battle in the desert.49 Their repetitive song describes the adversity of the African land (mosquitoes, crocodiles, snakes, and the scorching sun), interjected with laughter. Native and European soldiers are gathered separately, bonding in different ways, the

49 Lambert, Le Spahi, 119.
first in the background, and the second at the front of the stage. The native soldiers, the “tirailleurs sénégalais,” belong to the Senegalese colonial infantry that has joined the French military. Therefore, in contrast with what the public had seen in earlier exotic operas, the indigenous fighters seen on the stage of *Le Spahi* are not the enemy. Yet, as it probably happened in the real colonial world, the two groups do not physically draw together while waiting. On the one hand, the Senegalese get ready to fight by praying; on the other, the French drink and laugh. In this scene, Jean, separate from his troops, comments on the disparity of approach to the battle, and remembers when he, too, was able to pray.

The interplay between the Muslim prayer and Jean’s contemplation makes this scene particularly interesting for the analysis of exotic codes and their function in the creation of colonial exoticism. In this scene, Lambert and Gallet generated a remarkable dramatic and musical balance between the West and the Other: to Jean, they gave the voice of the Western struggle, and to the orchestra, the function of time and space. The orchestra, in fact, brings back time (Jean’s memories), but also underlines his present in the colony; it symbolizes the far-away space (France), but also the tangible space of the colonial exotic.

The “Muslim” music conveys strong exotic connotations. The intervals reflect the Arabic *hijāz* mode (augmented seconds between the second and the
third, and the sixth and seventh degrees of the scale). The two-measure
Oriental motives repeat several times. A tonic E drone of the double basses
underscores the whole scene. Finally, no words associate with the melody, but
just the sound "ah." In this scene, during an emotional intervention, Jean’s
melody assumes various shapes. Sometimes he follows the “Muslim” music
line, other times he emancipates himself from it. Overall, the orchestra
reinforces and complements the Muslim prayer. However, Jean establishes the
exotic independently from the orchestra and the Muslim prayer when he
describes the religion of the *tirailleurs sénégalois*. Conversely, on two
occasions the Muslims are silenced by Jean’s and the orchestra’s Western
sounds: first, on Jean’s childhood recollections of praying the *Ave Maria* with
his mother; second, on his wish to regain clarity in his heart. The flute, clarinet
and bassoon introduce the scene suggesting immediately the importance of the
Muslim prayer in the background. Following this introduction, Jean, alone in
front of the audience and talking to himself, will have to adjust to the strongly
typified musical background. The nine-measure “Oriental” introduction
(Example 5-9 a) establishes the *ḥiḍż* mode, but only on the higher degrees of
the scale (from the eighth down to the fifth degree). This first statement can
also be perceived as being in E harmonic minor, which connotes exoticism,
too. The following four-measure statement (Example 5-9 b) also brings about
the exotic with a short modal motive and a drone on E.

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Example 5-9 *Le Spahi*, Act 3, Introduction to the Prayer

a)

The *hijāz* mode develops in the following measures where it introduces Jean in his contemplative state. While both orchestra and Muslim soldiers perform the mystical Oriental melody, Jean’s line moves very little, always complying with their music as he had adapted to Senegalese existence. In fact, he compares the French carefree spirit with Muslim faithfulness, suggesting his people’s loss of religion and the Senegalese moral ascendancy. The Spahi
makes clear his view of mysticism tied with exoticism by singing a D♯ on the words “Mahomet” and reiterating the “Muslim music”:

Example 5-10 *Le Spahi*, Act 3, Prayer

After observing the Muslim soldiers’ mystical gathering, the Spahi remembers his childhood prayers with his mother (example 5-11). The music, along with his words, goes into the past, to the days when home was France. Along with the memories (hands joined in prayer, the *Angelus*, the *Ave Maria*), Jean’s melody and the strings join in a chorale in A major, punctuated by the bell on his word “prière” (prayer). However, the “Muslim motives” interrupt his recollections and bring him back to reality, influencing his melody, too. The oboe and the clarinet play the beginning of the phrase in the hijāz mode, similar to the introduction of the scene. Jean’s melody temporarily goes along with the E minor of this “Muslim motive,” and he sings a G♯; but by no means does he adapt to the instrumental Orientalism. Jean simply sings in E minor evoking his childhood religious experiences with nostalgia.
Example 5-11 Le Spahi, Act 3, Jean’s Prayer

Following this nostalgic religious parenthesis, the music of the Muslim soldiers brings him back to reality yet again, and the melody of his reminiscences adjusts to the Orientalism a second time with a lowered F (the second degree of the scale). The soldier then concludes by imploring his memories to bring him back to “La clarté de mon cœur” (Clarity in my heart). On these words, even the exotic instruments comply with Jean’s evocation in a tonal diatonic melody. Finally, the Muslims’ voices interrupt this brief “mystical” scene, close the number, and Jean goes back to his tent. This is the end of his prayer. His plea of hope does not refer to the past or the present, but to the future, and not to a geographical space, but to a place inside the soldier’s soul built on memories, experiences, and reality.
The interplay between reality and dream, memories and present, and Oriental mysticism and Christian faith in *Le Spahi*, evokes the conflict themes presented in *Thaïs*. During the same season as *Le Spahi*, Gallet and Massenet’s opera was produced six times, bringing its total to 36 performances. Aware of the elements that brought *Thaïs* success, Gallet, Alexandre, and Lambert tried to re-create some of its most notable dramatic and exotic features. Gallet, however, knew also that other literary trends and libretto styles were taking over traditional exoticism, significantly leaning towards naturalism and realism (with Emile Zola and Gustave Charpentier) and symbolism (with Maurice Maeterlinck and Debussy). Introducing some characteristics of naturalism in *Le Spahi*, Gallet pushed exoticism towards a different and more complex operatic genre in which the far away land (the colony) appears as a real place and not as a dream. Lambert too conceived the opera in realistic terms, expanding the musical language to military music and traditional forms, while also employing contemporary compositional techniques. For these very reasons—the convergence of different genres and themes in an exotic opera—*Le Spahi* marks a milestone in the development of exoticism. The opera indicates also a change in perception of the exotic because it disregards fantasy, that is, the dream of Otherness, while it embraces a return to strong

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50 Before *Le Spahi* Gallet had already written the libretto for Bruneau’s *L'Attaque du Moulin* (1893) after Zola’s naturalist novel. In addition, by the time he wrote the text for *Le Spahi* he most likely knew about Maeterlinck’s symbolist drama *Pélles et Mélisande* produced in Paris at the avant-garde Théâtre de l’Oeuvre (1892).
French conservative values. These morals, however, appear to belong to an innocent past lost forever.
B. L’Île du rêve

1. The Libretto

The libretto of L’Île du rêve drew its inspiration from the novel Le Mariage de Loti by Julien Viaud, better known under his pen name Pierre Loti, who traveled to Tahiti in 1872, while it was a French territory. Even before his trip to the island, Viaud’s vision of the exotic had developed through the descriptions of his brother Gustave, who had already lived in the Polynesian islands for two years. Married to an indigenous girl and father of two children, Gustave considered himself a resident of the island. The two brothers maintained a steady correspondence sharing descriptions of the dreamy life of the island and the exoticism of its paradisiacal landscape. Gustave then left the island and died at sea. Ten years after his brother’s death, Julien went to Tahiti to find his brother’s children. During his sojourn Viaud changed his name to Pierre Loti and collected notes in a diary, the source of the novel Le Mariage de Loti.}

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51 L’Île du rêve was premiered at the Opéra-Comique on March 23, 1898, coupled with Le Roi l’a dit, and was performed nine times before the end of the opera season. According to Philippe Blay, the opera was produced again on May 15, 1900, in Paris, at the Hôtel of Madeleine Lemaire in the rue de Monceau. Hahn coordinated and conducted another production in June 1903, at the Hôtel de la Préfecture maritime in Toulon, France, and on January 19 and February 21, 1942, at the Casino Municipal of Cannes (see Bulletin de la société des études océaniennes 285/286/287 (2000): 69, n. 84. Finally, the most recent productions of the opera took place on April 6, 7, and 8, 2000, on the beach of the Beachcomber Hotel in Papeete, Tahiti. These productions were coordinated by Jean-Paul Berrie and Philippe Blay, organized by the association Musique en Polynésie, and performed by the Orchestra of Cannes.

de Loti. Calmann-Lévy published the book in 1880, the year Tahiti became a French colony. The novel therefore reflects most of Loti’s experience in the Pacific Island, and promotes a vision of the colony in a pragmatic way, different from the idealized and imagined exotic of earlier nineteenth-century French literature. Le Mariage de Loti had a great success, and in the same year, the publisher distributed a second edition.

Loti’s novel tells the story of the Polynesian girl Rarahu and the English naval officer Harry Grant, and the evolution of their love. The author based all characters on actual people he met, changing their names “presumably for purposes of aesthetic distancing.” In Harry Grant, we find a combination of some of the author’s own characteristics and some personality traits of his brother. Like the author, the fictional hero seeks his brother’s children; and like the author’s brother, the fictional character falls in love with a native girl. During his stay in Tahiti, Harry Grant acquires the Tahitian name Loti, “a strategic corruption of the Tahitian Roti (rose) since the French association [roast] would be more culinary than botanic.” He meets Rarahu

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55 In the introduction to Pierre Loti, The Marriage of Loti (Honolulu: University Press of Hawaii, 1976), xv, James Wright Frierson and Eleanor B. Frierson point out that the French word rôti means roast.
and falls in love with her. Rarahu, according to the narrator Grant, “was a little creature unlike any other, even though she was a perfect specimen of the Maori race that inhabits the Polynesian archipelagoes and is considered one of the most beautiful in the world—a distinct and mysterious race whose origin is unknown.” Harry Grant considers her indolent and careless nature to be an exotic quality. “Her business in life was very simple: to dream, to bathe—especially to bathe—to sing, and to wander through the woods.” Although during Loti’s sojourn she embraces “suitable” European customs—she learns to read the Bible and to speak English—she never marries her lover. Her cultural ties, the brevity of the soldier’s visit, and their racial differences discourage a formalized union in church. After spending several months with her on the island, the soldier inevitably leaves her to return to his homeland. The desperate Rarahu then leads a corrupt life, becomes alcoholic, and dies of consumption, the typical romanticized death of literary and operatic heroines. Back in Paris, Loti learns what happened to her. The Tahitian girl and the image of the island gradually fade from the soldier’s memory, although a gloomy sense of regret overwhelms him: the exotic image is forever lost.

Besides conveying the sorrow of a doomed intercultural love affair, the story also deals with the decadence of the Polynesian culture. The writer

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56 Ibid., 12.
57 Ibid., 19.
perceived this cultural deterioration as the result of colonial exploitation and, in the novel, he makes this clear through the British soldier’s description of Queen Pomare:

In this wrinkled old face, brown, square, and hard, still lingered certain grandeur. Above all, there was an immense sadness, sadness from seeing death take all of her children from her one after another, stricken with the same incurable disease; sadness from seeing her kingdom, invaded by civilization, falling into disorder, and her beautiful land degenerating into a place of prostitution.58

This decline of the idyllic Polynesian islands represented a literary and philosophical trend well known in the French intellectual milieu. Already one hundred years before Viaud’s trip to Tahiti, the French philosopher Denis Diderot had discussed European corruption and intrusion in the Polynesian islands. In his *Supplément au voyage de Bougainville*, written in 1772 and published in 1796, the philosopher gave voice to a fictional old Tahitian man who bears a striking resemblance to Queen Pomare of Loti’s novel. In the *Supplément*, the man makes an impassioned speech as Bougainville leaves:

Nous sommes innocents, nous sommes heureux, et tu ne peux que nuire à notre bonheur. Nous suivons le pur instinct de la Nature, et tu as tenté d’effacer de nos âmes son caractère . . . tu as infecté notre sang. Nos champs seront trempés du sang impur qui a passé de tes veines dans les nôtres, où nos enfants condamnés à mourir et à perpétuer le mal que tu as donné, aux pères et aux mères et qu’ils transmetteront à jamais à leurs descendants.59

58 Ibid., 102.
(We are innocent, we are happy, and you can only spoil our happiness. We follow the pure instinct of nature. You have sought to efface its character from our souls... You have infected our blood... Our fields will be damp with the impure blood that has passed from your veins into ours, where our children will be condemned to nourish and perpetuate the evil you have given to their fathers and mothers, and will transmit forever to their descendants).

Diderot’s argument was quite familiar to European intellectual and artistic circles of the 1880s, and Loti’s reading of the cultural decadence in Tahiti did not surprise the critics. However, Loti’s writing style attracted their interest. His descriptions of landscape and characters do not focus on the action of the story, but suggest impressions. His narration creates feelings of melancholy and languor rather than depending on factual and physical descriptions. Indeed the unifying force of the novel is not love, but rather regret and decadence. The plot provides temporal and spatial development of those feelings by using the predicament of the characters. The failed interracial relationship between Rarahu and Loti, in fact, reflects an overall feeling of sorrow and an impression of cultural deterioration. Ultimately, the novel mirrors French mal du siècle with its insistent vision of death. Draperi explained, “Dire la mort qui précisément n’est pas un concept, est un des tours de force de l’écriture lotienne... C’était toujours ce silence des bois de Polynésie, sombre pays enchanté, auquel il semble qu’il manque la vie.” (One of Loti’s tour de forces is telling about death without making it a concept... It
was always the silence of the woods of Polynesia—that enchanting country—that seems to be lifeless.  

If *Le Mariage de Loti* reflects the culture and age in which the author was living, it also promotes and reinforces a particular exotic vision of the Pacific Islands. For these reasons, the story fascinated a great number of French readers, and Calmann-Lévy published six editions in just four years. Such literary popularity encouraged an operatic setting of the novel, and several librettists considered the challenge.

*Le Mariage de Loti* seemed to be the ideal subject for an exotic opera. According to Bernard Gavoty, the novel had to wait until a jury of prestigious composers (Gustave Charpentier, Jules Puget, Émile Paladilhe, Charles-Marie Widor, and Théodore Dubois) met to decide who could successfully draft the libretto. The jury selected the librettist and publisher Georges Hartmann to write the libretto with André Alexandre. Both of them had already set earlier works by Loti in operatic versions and knew the difficulty of the task. The

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61 According to Philippe Blay and Hervé Lacombe, the writer authorized the librettist Pierre Giffard to adapt his novel as an opera, and gave him permission to make appropriate changes to the plot to meet theatrical requirements. Blay and Lacombe, “À l’ombre de Massenet, Proust, et Loti: Le Manuscrit autographe de *L’île du rêve* de Reynaldo Hahn,” *Revue de Musicologie* 79 (1993): 83-108. The authors specify that while Giffard was in charge of the text, the composer Robert Planquette was supposed to write the music; the project, however, did not come to fruition.
most evident challenge they encountered involved the adaptation of the poetic text into a drama.

Loti’s impressionistic style of writing did not easily lend itself to a theatrical setting, and changes in the story and dialogue were inevitable. In addition, also the fictional setting of the novel called for substantial textual changes. Hartmann and Alexandre needed to supplement the novel with dramatic action while adapting to conventional operatic canons. Leaving aside Loti’s impressionistic descriptions, they focused on the protagonists’ love story but changed several features.

Rarahu became Mahénu; Georges De Kerven replaced Harry Grant, but his Tahitian name Loti remained the same. While the name of the Polynesian girl changed for obvious practical reasons—the letter “r” would have been too hard to sing—the modification of the soldier’s name involves cultural questions. The soldier of the novel has an English name and nationality, while the officer in the opera is French. This change helped to consolidate the public’s vision of French colonial power, but also brought the drama closer to home, to a society that, because it was well understood, could easily oppose the Other.

63 For a detailed insight into the genesis of the libretto see: Philippe Blay, “L’Île du rêve de Reynaldo Hahn” vol. 1, 215-257.
64 Rarahu’s father Tahaapairu became Taïrapa; the wife of Loti’s brother, Taimaha, changed into Téria; and the name of royal princess Aritea, into Oréna. Two minor characters of the novel, the lady-in-waiting Faimana and Loti’s dead brother Rueri, kept their original names in
In addition, the librettists reshaped the characters primarily to serve dramatic purposes rather than the descriptive ones so useful to Loti’s narrative. Blay explains:

... dans l’ensemble, le livret de L’Île du rêve demeure extrêmement fidèle à l’action principale du Mariage de Loti. Il ne la bouleverse pas dans sa structure de base, mais procède par concentration sur un personnage d’éléments relevant d’une même orientation dramatique.  

(. . . overall, the main action of the libretto of L’Île du rêve adheres faithfully to the main plot of Le Mariage de Loti. It does not change the structure of the novel; however, it focuses on each character amplifying specific features relevant to the drama).

The following analyses of libretto and novel view particular characters as necessary expedients for the representation of Otherness. Each of them represents it in a different way, according to his/her predicament, but all of them contribute to creating a more realistic and pragmatic vision of it, an image that reflects life in the colony. Ultimately, this image reveals a certain attitude of the French toward the colonies vis-à-vis the political situation at home. During the prime of its colonial expansion, in the last decade of the nineteenth century, France was an established democratic country where socialist ideals were rising. Generally, tradition-bound French viewed the colony as a geographic entity culturally and ethnically separate from France, yet they regarded it as an essential part of their economy. The colony appeared

the opera. There are no specific evidences why these changes occurred; however, we can assume that the names were recreated for copyright reasons.

to them as an extension of the French political system that could supply a basic force for their economy. Therefore, in their eyes, the colony complemented the working class. Far away from the central power, the French-dominated foreign country had no cultural or ethnic ties with France. So, racial difference became the surrogate of class distinction. Most of colonial literature and opera reflect this ideology, and Le Mariage de Loti and L’Île du rêve contribute to reinforce it. Although in both renditions the natives are part of a class system (a Princess, poor old Tahitian fishermen, the Chinese merchant, etc.), in the eye of the European soldier they all appear as just “inhabitants of the island,” exemplifying the Other (the Colony, the lower class). On the other hand, Loti, a simple navy officer, in the colony becomes an “aristocrat.” He is respected and considered a friend by the royalty and his position in Tahiti signifies Western power. But even if he enjoys his rank, Loti dreams about his humble past in homeland France (as did Jean in Le Spahi). Although at home he is hardly a personality, the officer views France as an ideal place where moral values used to govern men, and where inter-class and interracial marriage did not occur (in both novel and libretto, however, Loti never states that openly). Tahiti, instead, appears to him as a beautiful but decadent place where the natives’ cultural identity has been lost and substituted by compliance to the West. Most characters—with the exception of officer Loti, who is an “observer” and a “temporary resident” of the island—contribute to form the
image of corruption and inferiority. Even if different, all together belong to the “race,” or “social class,” of “Otherness.” The Chinese merchant represents greed; the Polynesian heroine and the native people, ingenuity; the Princess, social ambition; and the Tahitian religious old man, complete and humble devotion to Christianity.

Among all characters in novel and libretto, a minor one, but particularly significant in the new vision of Otherness, emerges; this is the Chinese merchant Tseen-Lee (Tsen Lee in the opera). In the novel, this figure is marginal to the story; however, his presence refers to two important elements—one historical, the other dramatic—carefully inserted by Loti and perpetuated in the opera. The first—a contextual, political, and historical dynamic—suggests how Tahitian people perceived the presence of Chinese merchants on their island. Loti writes, “The Chinese merchants of Papeete are for the Tahitians an object of distaste and aversion. There is no greater shame for a young woman than to be convicted of having listened to the amatory proposals of one of them.” In 1865, just a few years before Viaud visited Tahiti, the first massive arrival of Chinese immigrants in Tahiti took place. They came to work on the plantations, and planned to stay on the island for seven years, according to their contracts. Those who stayed longer mostly worked in commerce and often became quite wealthy compared to the native

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people. The Chinese character helps to establish a certain “realism,” that, even if filtered through the author’s pen, gives a “historical” credibility to the story.

In showing the beautiful exotic clothes and jewels he sells, the Chinese merchant functions also as an estranged element that temporarily disrupts the story in both novel and opera. He represents additional diversity. Not only does he look “different” in the eyes of the readers and the spectators, he also appears removed from the rest of the exotic fictional world, already built on differences. In *Le Mariage de Loti*, the Chinese man functions as an agent of corruption; he looks hideous and almost perverted. In *L’Île du rêve*, he looks ridiculous and takes up a familiar comical role, as if he were coming from an exotic French opera of the 1830s. Trying to please the elderly and conservative audience, or maybe to mock it, the librettists re-introduced a role quite forgotten by the end of the nineteenth century; this time, however, they placed it in a plausible context—the colony.

The second important dynamic feature represented by the Chinese merchant in the novel relates to the drama: while courting Rarahu, he enlivens Rarahu’s character. The fictional Loti recounts, “[Tseen-Lee] drew his lips

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68 At the time of the premiere of *L’Île du rêve*, Chinese in Tahiti were accused of endangering people’s health, spreading corruption, disrupting French commerce, and invading the island.
close to my little friend, who ran off as fast as her legs could carry her, followed by Tiahui [Rarahu’s friend]. The two of them disappeared into the wood like gazelles . . . One could hear them laughing still from a long way off across the forest.⁶⁹ Rarahu’s character surfaces through her reactions to given situations and most of all, from Loti’s descriptions. In both renditions she appears as a naïve, faithful, and uncomplicated exotic girl. Her character, a common stereotype in colonial literature, reflects also another image: “Many critics have remarked on the way in which colonial stereotypes of the ‘Native’ resembled the pictures of the working classes in Europe. The same childish, impulsive, emotional character was invariably ascribed to both groups . . .”⁷⁰ However, even if the heroine of both novel and opera emerges as a poor/native naïve girl, the two renditions depict her in two different fashions. While the limited dialogue and the diary-like quality of the novel compress the heroine’s voice, in the libretto the Tahitian girl’s voice comes across as unique and distinct. Ultimately, in the operatic version she expresses her sentiments and thoughts through her music.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 41.
⁷⁰ Ridley, Images of Imperial Rule, 139 (see Chapter 1, n. 75).
The end of the story highlights another important difference between the novel and the libretto.\textsuperscript{71} In the first, the heroine dies of consumption; in the second, she lives. In the operatic rendition, after her lover leaves, a confused Mahénu evokes Bora-Bora, the island of her origin and the exotic alter-ego of colonial Tahiti. The widow of Loti’s brother Téria, however, predicts the young heroine’s destiny in both novel and opera. Téria’s message suggests that Mahénu’s lover will leave the island forever, just as Téria’s husband did, and will abandon her just as Loti’s brother abandoned Téria. Mahénu, like Téria, will become crazy from the sorrow of her man’s departure. In addition, a subplot involving two other characters helps to strengthen the drama of the departure. The French soldier Henri and the Tahitian girl Faimana will also part when the French vessel leaves, and she accepts her destiny. However, a substantial dramatic difference in the libretto transforms the course of events. While in the novel Rarahu has no say in the officer’s plan, in the opera the soldier asks Mahénu to go with him to Europe and, most significantly, Mahénu refuses. Her decision follows the advice of Tahitian Princess Oréna. With the soldier’s willingness to continue their love relationship, the librettists promoted a more positive image of him. Loti the transitory aristocrat can leave with no remorse since he has offered his support to the girl, and, for that very reason,

\textsuperscript{71} At the time of the first production of \textit{L’Île du rêve}, \textit{Le Mariage de Loti} had achieved a great success. Probably most of the audience had already read the novel before attending the opera.
he can attract the audience’s sympathy. Mahénu refuses because she and the Princess believe that a Polynesian girl’s happiness could not endure away from the Pacific Islands (a situation that could easily be compared to a working class girl marrying an aristocrat and going to live in a rich neighborhood). In fact, it is the Princess, the embodiment of the compromise between the West and the colony, who establishes the course of the events. She is dressed in fine Western clothes; she carries herself with ease on all occasions, whether interacting with the officers in uniform or with the native characters. She represents the colony’s acceptance of the West, but she also understands the corruptive influence of the colonizers. At the very end of the opera, she holds Mahénu’s hand after the soldier’s departure, and it is she who remains on stage with the little Polynesian girl long after the officer has left.

The ending would have seemed plausible to French eyes. Mahénu could not possibly go to France with the soldier. After all, how could the exotic maintain its fascination if removed from its context? Mahénu remains, but remembers her motherland, the island of Bora-Bora. The final message seems to suggest that all should return to where they once belonged (the real exotic and democratic France), without struggling with the perils of Otherness. In L’Île du rêve, interracial marriage once more seemed impossible to realize, as inter-class unions did before and will again in realist operas, but the bilateral acceptance of the failure marks also the end of traditional operatic exoticism.
For the first time in French opera, both exotic and Western characters have finally played an active role in rejecting the Encounter.

The libretto represents the decline of exoticism by alternating and mixing Western and exotic features in the plot, the costumes, and the stage setting. For example, in the first act Loti arrives dressed in full uniform, and he and the other soldiers vividly contrast with the images of native women, dressed in pareu (a Polynesian garment of printed cloth). In the second act, he wears a white shirt with long sleeves and a pareu wrapped around his waist while the Princess wears a long pink dress. The text also advances this interplay by alternating Biblical passages sung by an old Tahitian man, a himene in Tahitian, and a soldier’s popular French song (present in the libretto but never performed). The following diagram illustrates the dramatic structure of the opera with particular attention to the interplay between exotic and Western features.

Table 5-4 *L’île du rêve*’s dramatic layout and exoticism in the set

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acts</th>
<th>Where</th>
<th>Representative Dramatic Elements</th>
<th>Set and Objects</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The Chinese merchant Tsen Lee arrives and offers presents to Mahénu.</td>
<td>Candies, painted blue flowers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Entrance of the Princess Oréna with followers, the French officers, and Georges de Kerven. The Princess introduces the people and the island to the officers.</td>
<td>The Tahitian girls give flowers given to Loti.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Baptism. Georges de Kerven is named Loti.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mahénu and Loti fall in love.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>In front of and inside Mahénu’s hut.</td>
<td>Older Tahitians are sitting besides Mahénu’s adoptive father Taïrapa, who is reading the Bible. At the same time, Tsen Lee looks for Mahénu. Téria, Mahénu and Loti remember Loti’s brother. Taïrapa continues to read the Bible.</td>
<td>The Bible. Tunic with Chinese designs.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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"Fatahua" in the text.
The opera takes place in three different locations in Tahiti, following the acts’ dramatic structure. In the first act, the rich tropical surroundings immediately suggest the exotic setting of the opera. The location of the second act emphasizes the intimate context of Mahénu’s modest dwelling. The third act presents the luxurious scene of a ball and the palace of Tahitian royalty, in contrast to the beach where the lovers part and the denouement of the drama occurs. In all situations, the island is “l’île du rêve,” an island that is believed to be the embodiment of the exotic dream not only for the Europeans, but also for the native people. On three occasions, different characters refer to the title of the opera when speaking of Tahiti. Oréna, mentioning the gardens and falls where the Tahitian girls are bathing, introduces the island to the French soldiers when they arrive. She tells them, “Amis, voilà le salon de l’île du rêve. C’est là qu’avec bruit on se baigne, on bavarde, on rit auprès des mimosas qui fleurissent la grève” (Friends, here is the hall of the island of dream; it is here that we noisily bathe, talk, and laugh near to the mimosas that decorate the shore). Sounding more like a tour guide than a native princess, Oréna describes what the soldiers want to hear—not only an idyllic life in an idyllic place, but also the “real” picture in front of them—people bathing, laughing, and talking near the flowers. She, the link between the West and the exotic, is the first to establish that the island embodies a dream. She, however, will also

74 Alexandre and Hartmann, L’Île du rêve, 559.
be the one who suggests the end of the Encounter at the close of the opera. The Princess has a powerful significance. Her words express not only strength and determination, but also frivolity. Her pivotal character mirrors the two sides of the colonial exotic: its pleasantness and its negativity. Nevertheless, she also identifies with Western manners and enjoys them. She, therefore, also symbolizes a certain Western lower class' admiration for aristocratic fashion.

The second time that we hear the title of the opera mentioned on stage occurs when an off-stage chorus of native girls and Mahénu tell a story about the origin of the island.75 First Mahénu sings:

\begin{quote}
\textit{Jadis, il était une étoile dans les cieux,}
\textit{Une étoile à figure humaine:}
\textit{Ceux qui la regardaient poussaient des cris affreux,}
\textit{Pris de folie âpre et soudaine.}76
\end{quote}

(Long ago there was a star in the skies,
A star with human shape:
Those who looked at it cried out in horrible screams,
As if taken by grim and sudden madness).

Then the girls’ chorus adds, “\textit{Mais Taora, dieu de l’immensité, la conjura, dans sa bonté”} (But Taora, the god of immensity, cast it out, with his goodness).77 Mahénu continues:

\begin{quote}
\textit{Mais Taora, dieu de l’immensité, la conjura, dans sa bonté”} (But Taora, the god of immensity, cast it out, with his goodness).77
\end{quote}

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75 Mahénu’s and the choir’s texts are present in the libretto but not in the score.
76 Ibid., 578. The text is omitted in the orchestral and the vocal score.
77 Ibid. The text is omitted in the orchestral and the vocal score.
L’étoile tressaillit; l’étoile par les mondes
Se mit à courir jusqu’au soir,
Puis, lasse, elle tomba dans la mer, et les ondes
S’ouvrirent pour la recevoir.\(^{78}\)

(The star shuddered; the star started to run
Throughout the worlds until evening,
Then, exhausted, it fell into the water, and the waves
Opened up to embrace it).

The chorus then concludes the story, “Où le flot c’est ouvert chante une
verte grève, et c’est notre pays d’amour, l’île du rêve!” (Where the waves
opened up, a green shore sings, and that is our land of love, the island of
dream!).\(^{79}\) After this folk tale, an officer takes up the song from the stage,
announcing that the French soldiers will leave the île du rêve the following
day.\(^{80}\) The Tahitian legend of the island—a tale that includes the misspelled
name of the god Ta’aroa—reinforces the princess’ words by placing them in
the “indigenous context.”

In sum, the title and the vision of the island project Loti’s (both the
writer’s and the protagonist’s) experience, of course. This “indigenous
context,” on the other hand, becomes closer to the Western world, during the
old Tahitian man’s reading of the Bible. Removed from any dramatic action,
Ta’irapa gathers people around him, telling the story of Adam and Eve. The
scene’s grave quality, charged with symbolism, interjects Western religious

\(^{78}\) Ibid., 579. The text is omitted in the orchestral and the vocal score.
\(^{79}\) Ibid.
\(^{80}\) Ibid.
values. The Tahitians truly believe in the solemn reading and look up to Taïrapa as the wise priest; the scene illustrates the natives' devotion to Christianity. There are no pagan rituals, no exotic festivities, and no provocative dances to entertain the French public in the second act.\(^8^1\) But the Biblical passage retelling Adam's dream of Eve belongs to a second dramatic plan. The dream does not directly involve the story, but suggests—as dreams inevitably do in many French operas of the time—the desire for happiness through sensuality. The mixture of religious, sensual, and exotic aspects indeed reminds us of Massenet's approach in _Thaïs_.

Furthermore, in _L'Île du rêve_ the librettists added yet another facet to this already multi-layered scene. The comic Chinese merchant, even if irrelevant in the evolution of the love story, adds an additional meaning to the creation of the exotic in the opera. He appears with his bright and exotic clothes, loudly interrupting the reading of the Bible, looking for Mahénu. He humorously comments on the reading of the Bible, "_L'amour! Chose bénie et vraiment immortelle!_" (Love! Blessed thing and really immortal!)\(^8^2\) He thinks he can seduce the young girl with his gifts, without knowing that she loves Loti. When Mahénu finally arrives, he gives her a piece of cloth "_où l'aube semble avoir mis comme un reflet d'or_" (where dawn seems to have set a

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\(^8^1\) In the 2000 Tahiti production, however, local Polynesian dancers introduced a series of dances in this number.

\(^8^2\) Ibid., 569.
golden reflection). Adding exotic and comic touches to his character, he presents the young girl to her friends and says, “Voyez! Voyez! Elle est la fleur de volupté” (Look! Look! She is the flower of sensual delight); and, gesticulating with enthusiasm he adds, “Confucius, le sage, eut frissonné d’amour à son passage” (Confucius the wise man quivered from love when she passed by). In contrast with the introverted quality of Christian devotion, he indirectly suggests the bold and spirited image of paganism. Finally, in the same number—already juxtaposing Tahitians reading the Bible, the comic and eccentric Chinese, the Tahitian young girls, and the flattered Mahénu—the naval officer meets the tragic character of Teria. Embodying the eternal failure of the Encounter, her tragic role serves as a direct counterpoise to the Chinese man’s comic role. Overall, these secondary characters balance the dramatic opposites (the comic and the dramatic), and the two versions of Otherness (the old exotic and the colonial).

The old Tahitian man’s reading of the Bible in Act 2 also offers a chance for the French officer to remember his home and past. Similar to Jean in *Le Spahi* (beginning of Act 3), Loti evokes the lost religious days of his childhood when he hears some natives praying. Both Jean and Loti have forgotten how to pray, and suggest that the natives can do it instead. Loti sings,

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83 Ibid., 570.
84 Ibid.
“Je pleure en écoutant ces chants religieux... Je revois la maison maintenant solitaire...” (I cry while listening to these religious chants... I see again the house now deserted...).\footnote{Ibid., 576. Text published only in the libretto.} He concludes, “Ô! [sic] Mon enfance, oh! Mes soirs de prière!” (Oh! My childhood, oh! My evenings of prayer!).\footnote{Ibid.} However, in contrast to Le Spahi, in L’Île du rêve it is the native’s reading of the Bible, which brings back Christian memories into Loti’s mind, and not exotic Muslim prayers and chants. The natives’ beliefs resemble his own faith. Nevertheless, the soldier does not participate in the religious event. Still removed from the natives because of his physical appearance, cultural background, and military position, he thinks of his own prayers and past.

Mahénu, too, inspires Loti to think about the distance between the soldier’s homeland and the island. Quite similarly to the book, the heroine asks Loti how high on the mountain she must go to see his country on the horizon. Loti answers, “Mon pays est si loin de cette île odorante! Mais Mahénu, toi-même es-tu pas [sic] vision?” (My country is so far away from this scented island! But, Mahénu, are you not a vision yourself?).\footnote{Ibid., 565. Text published only in the libretto.} The visions of the West and of the exotic appear equally frail in the eyes of the soldier. The contrast between these poles temporarily weakens when Loti sees them both as unreal. Loti’s dilemma between his temporary powerful position on the island (how
“high” on the top the mountain does she need to look for his home), and his past situation at home where he used to humbly pray with his mother, both seem unreal.

In Act 3, the stage finally offers the common ground between the entities once viewed as polar. In the sky, the Southern Cross shines more radiant than the others. Not visible from most latitudes in the Northern Hemisphere, this group of stars was used by explorers of the Southern Hemisphere as a navigation guide. The symbolism of this image suggests exoticism (as something that cannot be seen in the Northern Hemisphere), but it also implies return to the West (in providing direction to European travelers) and Christian symbolism.

In addition, Mahénu too, dreams of her motherland. She wishes to go back to Bora-Bora and in several instances she repeats her desire. She does not belong to the colony although she lives in it. At the very beginning of Act 1, twice she sings,

Ô pays de Bora-Bora,
Grande morne bercé par le flot sonore! . . .
Dans les parfums de mimosa,
Dans l’ombre de la nuit, dans la naissante aurore,
C’est toi que je revois, que je respire encore,
Ô pays de Bora-Bora.\(^8\)

(Oh land of Bora-Bora,
Great peak rocked by the resonant waves! . . .
In the perfumes of mimosa,

\(^8\) Ibid., 556-7.
In the shadow of the night, in the nascent dawn,
It is you that I see and breathe again,
Oh land of Bora-Bora.

Later in the same act, she explains her longing for Bora-Bora to Loti, when telling how she was brought to Tahiti from her island in a canoe with white sails. Finally, she repeats her first act stanza at the very end of the opera. She knows she will never see Loti again, and, while losing her strength, she sings about her only remaining hope, to return to Bora-Bora, scene of her past. Thinking of Loti, she sings again the same lines but changes the last one into: “Mon cœur, mes yeux mourants le reverront encore” (My heart, my dying eyes will see him again). She knows that he will become just a dream and his image will be only a vision.

Finally, the island of Tahiti represents a temporary backdrop for a transitory encounter between the Polynesian girl and the French soldier. They will each return to their land of origin, as many literary and operatic heroes and heroines of past adventures did. However, unlike those, the main characters of L’Île du rêve clearly recognize the failure of their love affair in a land that does not belong to either of them: the colony. A background for the display of old conservative values, Tahiti has offered the opportunity to show the power of the West—represented by the French officer in a colonized land—over a

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89 Ibid., 564.
90 Ibid., 591.
subservient colonized people, who, in a different stage set, could have easily been characters of a Naturalist opera. In addition, none of the characters dies, breaking operatic custom. The two sides have acknowledged the failure of the Encounter and admitted that a union between them would be the ultimate mistake. French opera had finally accepted the existence and danger of Otherness (social and racial) and found a solution to the conflict: not a tragic ending, just a retreat.

2. The Music

Reynaldo Hahn approached Loti’s story by constructing and resolving the idea of exoticism quite differently from his fellow composers. Consistent with the librettists’ realization of a more sophisticated Western and exotic interplay, the composer manipulated musical and dramatic elements of the exotic and placed them in a conventional musical frame. He gave the opera a clear and symmetrical structure, but he also conceived the opera as a continuous work in which numbers are joined without interruption, in line with the Wagnerian trend. However, his melodies and orchestration mirror a typically French conservative style that reflects a certain Parisian taste of the time.

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91 This dissertation always refers to the first edition of the piano-vocal score by Reynaldo Hahn, *L’Île du rêve* (Paris: Huegel, 1897), now property of Leduc, and to the orchestral score *L’Île du rêve*, (Paris: Huegel, 1898), today property of Leduc as well.
Although Hahn (1874-1947) was born in Venezuela from a Jewish family, he became a Paris resident at the age of three. By the early 1890s, Hahn had already achieved popularity in the Parisian salons. His ease in writing melancholic and elegant melodies was well known. His Chansons grises (1893), based on poems by Paul Verlaine, made the concert repertoire in the salons of many houses of French bourgeoisie and petite noblesse, and his melodies were well appreciated among artists and musicians. Jules Massenet, his teacher and mentor, encouraged the young composer to prove his compositional skills by setting Le Mariage de Loti. Hahn, sixteen years old at that time, enthusiastically took on the task.

More concerned with symmetrical form and tonal layout, and following the librettists’ general plan, Hahn assigned each act a particular phase of the protagonists’ love. In the first act Mahénu and Loti meet; in the second, their love develops; in the last, they separate forever. For the soprano Hahn composed a recurrent theme and a short bravura passage. For the tenor and protagonist Loti, he included an expressive but brief lyrical number in the baptism scene. To Mahénu’s religious adoptive father, the composer assigned a hymn-like melody, and to Loti and Mahénu, three long duets. Finally, the chorus of native people sings one Tahitian song several times. The comic Tsen

92 For the salons Hahn attended, see “Salons” in Gavoty, Reynaldo Hahn, le Musicien de la Belle Epoque, 71-88.
Lee sings in two numbers, one in the first and the other in the third act. Nevertheless, Hahn achieves characterization and dramatic advancement through orchestral accompaniment and its statements of motives. Blay classifies and analyzes nine motives of the opera included in vocal and orchestral parts. He labels them motives of the Island, Princess, Chinese man, Catastrophe, Love, Hut, Passion, Happiness, and Bora-Bora.

Within this frame of long themes and short orchestral motives, Hahn has left very little room to traditional musical exoticism; instead, an overall song-like music pervades the score, absorbing Otherness into the West. The only instance in which Hahn explicitly promoted musical exoticism occurs in Act 3, in the song for the Tahitian people. The lack of exotic musical elements within a scenic and textual exotic context makes this opera particularly significant not only for the study of the evolution of French exotic opera, but also for the understanding of French political ideology during the end of the nineteenth century. Before discussing how the West absorbs the exotic in *L'Île du rêve*, looking at the following diagram helps explain the basic musical layout of the opera. It pays particular attention only to specific motives and numbers since these most significantly relate to exoticism.

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93 Léon Parsons described the composer’s plan in the article “*L’Île du rêve*,” *La Presse* (24 March 1898): 2.
94 For Blay’s analysis of motives, see: Blay, “*L’Île du rêve* de Reynaldo Hahn,” vol.1: 265-417.
# Table 5-5 *L'île du rêve*’s dramatic events and exoticism in the music

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acts</th>
<th>Main Stage Events in Relation to the Exotic</th>
<th>Musical Events Relevant to Exoticism</th>
<th>Pages in P/V Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Mahénu and her friends bathe and lay next to the waterfall.</td>
<td>Orchestral introduction.</td>
<td>1-11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>She evokes Bora-Bora.</td>
<td>Mahénu’s aria about Bora-Bora.</td>
<td>14-17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tsen Lee courts Mahénu.</td>
<td>Lively aria. Repeated motive in the accompaniment.</td>
<td>18-19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Entrance of Princess Oréna. Entrance of French soldiers. She introduces Mahénu to them. Baptism. Mahénu names the officer, Loti.</td>
<td>Oréna’s motive, Mazurka-like accompaniment. Oréna’s motive.</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mahénu and Loti fall in love. Mahénu tells Loti about her childhood. The soldiers’ song.</td>
<td>Duet. Mahénu’s phrase recalling Bora-Bora.</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tsen Lee looks for Mahénu and interrupts Talrapa’s reading. Their dialogue.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mahénu arrives.</td>
<td>Mahénu’s motive in the orchestra.</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tsen Lee’s monologue. He gives the robe to Mahénu.</td>
<td>Mahénu’s motive in the orchestra.</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Loti arrives and declares his love to Mahénu. Téria arrives.</td>
<td>Tsen Lee’s motive in the orchestra. Tsen Lee’s lively music and repeated motive in the orchestra.</td>
<td>30-64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mahénu and Loti conclude their dialogue about his brother. She is afraid Loti will leave her. Taïrapa and the elder Tahitians end the lecture of the Bible.</td>
<td>Love duet. Téria’s aria. Duet. Religious music.</td>
<td>33-69 76-84 84-85</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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95 Hahn omitted the soldiers’ song in the orchestral score.
Although acknowledging the fundamentally structural function of all themes and motives of the opera, the following examination of musical exoticism concentrates only on three vocal numbers and four recurrent motives in the orchestra. The three vocal numbers are the Tahitian song, Taïrapa’s religious music, and Mahénu’s aria to Bora-Bora, while the orchestral examples include the motives of Tsen Lee and Oréna. All these musical

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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Celebrations at the Palace of Princess Oréna. Officers discuss their return to France.</td>
<td>Prelude. Tahitian song. Princess’ motive in the orchestra repeated several times.</td>
<td>86-87 88-94 95-99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Loti thinks about his separation from the island and Mahénu.</td>
<td></td>
<td>104-108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Celebrations continue. The Princess and Loti discuss his return.</td>
<td>Tahitian song. Princess’ motive and Mahénu’s motives in the orchestra.</td>
<td>108-110 110-113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mahénu finds out that the soldier will leave. Loti and Mahénu’s dialogue about their future.</td>
<td>Duet.</td>
<td>114-130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Oréna and Mahénu discuss the girl’s future.</td>
<td>Dialogue. Princess’ motive in the orchestra, incomplete.</td>
<td>130-136 130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Taïrapa, Oréna, and Téria confort Mahénu.</td>
<td>Mahénu’s aria to Bora-Bora.</td>
<td>135-139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Celebrations.</td>
<td>Tahitian song.</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
examples play a fundamental role in the representation of cultural assimilation in the colony. They in fact mirror French political ideology and its change of perception of the exotic. From a detached and desired image of faraway, to a violent reality, the exotic becomes here an absorbed entity in which class issues take the shape of racial difference.

As previously mentioned in the analysis of the libretto, with the Tahitian song (Act 3), Hahn attempted to give couleur locale to the opera. However, as several critics stated, the music failed to impress the audience as exotic. Hahn called this aria “Air populaire de la Polynésie” (Polynesian popular aria), because it involves characteristics of Tahitian himene (hymns, songs); however, its origin is not known. Blay writes that after consulting with many specialists, he could not find the source of the song, and that probably Loti gave the melody to the composer. The text of the song is in Tahitian, and Blay reports it with Louise Peltzer’s French translation in his dissertation:

\[
\begin{align*}
Tihi 'ura teie & \quad C'est Tihi 'ura \\
I te vai to'eto'e & \quad A l'eau fraîche \\
Te Hamuri te mata'i & \quad Le vent de Hiro \\
O Hiro è. & \quad Est le Hamuri. \\
I ta'oto noa na ho 'i au ê & \quad Je dormais \\
I te ona aua & \quad Sur le sable où l'on amait \\
I pa'epa'e. & \quad Se reposer. 97
\end{align*}
\]

96 Ibid., 338.
97 Ibid., 336.
(It is Tihi 'ura
By the fresh water
Hamuri is the wind
Of Hiro.
I used to sleep
On the sand where we loved
To rest).

By singing this song, the natives supposedly embody the image of the island’s beauty and ideal life, while music and landscape reinforces the representation. The effect, however, did not succeed. Even if the text in Tahitian appears exotic because of its foreign sounds, the content of it remains obscure (there is no French translation in the libretto). In addition, while singing the Tahitian song, the natives and their exotic garments cannot be seen, since the chorus is off stage. The song seems to come from a dimension separate from reality, almost as if the human component of couleur locale has been removed from the exotic “reality” of the stage. This separate dimension also suggests a division between the “lower-class” Tahitian singing group and the soldiers’ “higher-class” dance in the palace happening at the same time on the stage. Finally, the native music sounds very Western for its melody and harmonization, and ultimately, the song did not impress the public as a convincing illustration of exoticism. 98 Nevertheless, it either originated from a

98 The author of “À l’Opéra-Comique” in L’Éclair (25 March1898) suggested that the melody of the song reminded him of a piano piece by Louis Lefébure-Wély, La Retraite militaire, famous in the 1860s. Blay argues that the two do not have much in common; see Blay, “L’Île du rêve de Reynaldo Hahn” vol. 1, 342.
real source, or it imitated a possibly existing *himene*. The *himene* of *L’Île du rêve*, suggests Blay, “appartient . . . vraisemblant, à un répertoire quasiment contemporain au séjour de Pierre Loti à Tahiti (1872)” (belongs . . . most likely to a repertoire quasi contemporary to Pierre Loti’s sojourn in Tahiti (1872). 99

*Himene* had strong links with the early nineteenth-century establishment of Protestantism in Tahiti, and they reflect characteristic Protestant hymns’ choral texture and tonal layout. This Tahitian musical genre was very popular throughout the nineteenth century, and has persisted till now. On the other hand, many French and British popular songs, originally brought by navy soldiers at the beginning of the nineteenth century, became part of the song repertoire in Tahiti. As a result, a great deal of Western music was—and still is—assimilated by pre-missionary Tahitian repertoire during the whole century.

Hahn wanted to be faithful to Tahitian customs as reported by Loti, and so he used the “Tahitian song” the writer supposedly gave him with the intention of including an exotic element in the opera. Hence, the composer resolved to arrange the melody following some general musical guidelines—reported by Loti—that apply to Tahitian *himene*. The music that he reconstructed, however, did not sound “primitive” enough to the public. By the

99 Ibid., 339.
time Hahn composed the opera, in fact, much of the music heard in the island sounded common to European ears. The journalist of La Liberté commented that L'Île du rêve lacked “couleur exotique,” writing that the Tahitian song “... ne suffit pas à me donner la sensation d’un pays que je ne connais pas.” (. . . is not enough to give me the impression of a country that I do not know). 100 Henry Gauthier-Villars had a similar impression, and described the song as having “... l'allure toute européenne, d’un guilleret imprévu [qui] ne déparerait pas le répertoire des casinos d’Uriage ou de Cabourg” (a completely European feel, with a perky hitch that would not spoil the repertoire of the casinos in Uriage or Cabourg). 101

A close look at the musical structure of this song shows how Hahn implemented the features of himene, and how he filtered and elaborated them though his personal style. The discussion about this number focuses on two main points: first, how both the source of the song and Hahn’s arrangement of it relate to traditional and generic musical codes of the exotic; second, how the song in the opera functions in the dramatic construction of colonial exoticism.

The group of Tahitians performs this song in unison three times during Act 3. In the first occurrence, the song (one stanza) consists of the two four-

100 “Feuilleton de La Liberté” La Liberté (28 March 1898).
measure phrases A and A'; a contrasting section of four measures, B; and a
two-measure return to the last part of A.

Example 5-12 L'Île du rêve, Act 3, Tahitian Song. First instance.

a) A:

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CHŒUR boisant et chantant fort.
à l'aise, mais pas trop lent. (avec une certaine langueur.)
Sup.Contr.
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b) A':

c) B:

d) A'' (last part of A):

326
This pattern varies in each of the three occurrences; in the first instance, for example, at the very beginning of the act, each section alternates with orchestral interjections and Mahénu’s vocalizes. In the second, there is no orchestral intervention between sections, but the orchestra accompanies the vocal part. In the last occurrence the Tahitians sing the theme without orchestral interjections or accompaniment. Before analyzing each instance, a comparison between the general structure of original himene and Hahn’s interpretation of the Tahitian musical genre helps to understand the evolution of the chorus in the opera.

Amy Ku’uleialoha Stillman explains that himene is a transliteration the English term hymn, introduced by English missionaries, and, by the nineteenth century, “the term covered all choral singing, Christian or not.” Stillman continues, “Tahitians differentiate two categories of musical performance, based on the perceived origins of the music: styles of reputedly indigenous origins . . . [and] styles of reputedly foreign origins.” Among the styles of indigenous Polynesian origins, she lists the himene tarava, the type of himene that Blay sees as a model for the Tahitian Song of Act 3. The characteristics

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103 Ibid.
of this himene involve the type of text, its polyphonic nature, the number of vocal parts, and singing procedures.

Stillman writes that the texts of Tahitian tarava “draw upon the extensive extant body of indigenous legends, myths, and traditions.”¹⁰⁵ They are “veritable catalogues of names associated with environmental features (mountains, trees, streams, reefs, passes, etc.) . . . and characters (gods, demigods, mythical figures, local heroes).”¹⁰⁶ The text of the Tahitian song does indeed describe nature and evokes the god Hiro. Furthermore, Stillman adds that in himene tarava three strata combine to create the polyphonic texture: the upper stratum (the decorative part), the central stratum (texted foundation parts), and the lower stratum (untexted rhythmic drone).¹⁰⁷ The three vocal levels do appear in the Tahitian song. She explains, “One soloist (usually a woman) ascends to the perepere, the highest decorative part. At the back of the choir, young men and teenaged boys perform grunting (hau) in a powerful rhythmic unison.”¹⁰⁸ In between the two outer strata, the central parts evolve. The maru and the maru tamau sing the text, with the fa’aaraara

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 183.
¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 277.
prompting the group to sing, giving out the first line. With the exception of the prompting part, all roles surface in the Tahitian song of *L'Île du rêve*, in which a group of men and women sing the text, Mahénu takes the decorative part, and, in some instances, the basses simulate the *hau* by shouting “Ha!”

The traditional *himene tarava* develops in several identical strophes with different texts. According to Stillman, generally a strophe conforms to the following structure (although varying according to the region and the performing group): two verses (one couplet) for one musical phrase; and four verses (two musical phrases) for one musical period. Each musical period Stillman calls with a capital letter (i.e., A, B, C). A strophe consists of up to five periods. Her study suggests that the general form of a strophe includes the following pattern: A, B, B', B or A, B, B, C, C'. However, the structure of the Tahitian Song in the opera is in the following Western popular form:

- **A:** two verses—one musical phrase (a b), four measures
- **A':** two verses—one musical phrase (a' b'), four measures
- **B:** two verses—one musical phrase. (c d), four measures
- **A'':** one verse—half of a musical phrase (b), two measures.

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111 Ibid., 194.
The ending of the Tahitian song and the ending of a strophe in a traditional *himene tarava* as indicated by Stillman, differ substantially. First, Hahn’s arrangement entails only one strophe. The presentation of the same strophe (same text and almost same music), however, occurs three times. Second, the strophe of the operatic Tahitian song concludes on a familiar and recurrent b, without leaving “open” the end of the strophe, as in a strophe of traditional *himene tarava*. The partial return to A (b) as a refrain in the operatic Tahitian song characterizes the strophe with a typical form of nineteenth-century popular songs. In many European popular songs of the nineteenth century, “commonly (though not universally) each stanza ends with a short refrain,” writes Richard Middleton.112 “The phrase structure is generally made up of regular two-, four- and eight-bar units, phrases are often repeated, either immediately or after a contrasting phrase, and there is an important role for open–closed (antecedent–consequent) relationships between adjacent phrase-endings, produced melodically or harmonically, or both.”113 This structure, according to Middleton, suggests completion. He continues, “The folding of repetition into lyrical shape through sequence and the rhyming effect produced by permutations of symmetry and contrast between phrases and by open–closed relationships between cadences create a sense of balance, of quasi-

113 Ibid.
narrative movement balanced by degrees of closure, which is typical of this period [late-19th century]. The reshaping of the ending in the strophe of the operatic Tahitian song, however, does not exclude authenticity. As we mentioned earlier, changes in the traditional Tahitian himene were occurring in Tahiti because of Polynesian acculturation to European styles of music. Natives not only would often reproduce English songs, but also incorporate elements of those songs in their traditional, pre-contact music. So it is plausible that at the time Loti went to visit Tahiti, he indeed heard the himene the way he reported it later to Hahn. Nevertheless, Hahn’s choice to reconstruct the traditional form of himene tarava and to reshape it as a popular song conveys a strong dramatic meaning, paramount in the discussion of the construction of colonial exotic in French opera. Through the nineteenth-century European popular song form, Hahn characterizes the Tahitian chorus as an unsophisticated, simple lower-class entity. Locating the song in its performative context illustrates its significance.

In the first instance, the song is performed when the curtains are still down, at the beginning of the third act. The natives perform the only strophe of the himene in its entirety (A, A’, B, A”). The song anticipates the scene of the party at Princess Oréna’s palace, in which “Les invités vont et viennent entre le salon et la véranda, mêlés aux tahitiennes de la cour qui ont de longues robes

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114 Ibid.
de soie trainantes et des long cheveux dénoués (The French guests come and go between the hall and the veranda, interacting with the Tahitian ladies in waiting who wear silk dresses with trains and long unbraided hair).\textsuperscript{116} Both the staging directions and the music suggest interracial acceptance. The libretto implies Tahitian acculturation by staging the Princess hosting European soldiers who “mix” with native girls, dressed in European clothes. The music hints at assimilation of European customs into native culture by incorporating elements of “popular” Western music (i.e., form of the song) into a pre-contact musical genre (i.e., text, polyphonic texture, and roles of the voices). This interrelationship between styles becomes even more evident when analyzing the role of Mahénu and of the orchestra in the number.

Hahn’s treatment of Mahénu’s vocal part as a \textit{perepere}, the ornamental part in the \textit{himene}, excludes a connection with any possible original Tahitian music, from either pre- or post-contact eras. Her vocalize corresponds with typical and trite operatic clichés of \textit{bel canto} style:

\textsuperscript{115} Blay discusses the article in “\textit{L’Île du rêve} de Reynaldo Hahn” vol.1, 342.
\textsuperscript{116} \textit{L’Île du rêve}, 577. Staging directions.
Example 5-13 *L’Île du rêve*, Act 3, Mahénu’s vocalisation

According to Stillman, travelers of the past described the *perepere* as a “cry or wail,” or “melodic skirl.” In her study and examples, she gives examples of *perepere* that are brief and display repeated short notes and step-wise passages that never involve scales. Hahn acknowledged the existence and the relevance of this part in traditional Tahitian music, but took advantage of its virtuoso role to transform it into a soprano bravura part.

The orchestra, however, promotes the exoticism of the song with the generic exotic colors of flutes, oboe, clarinet, bassoons, triangle, and celesta. But it also provides typical Western harmony that in some cases does not conform to post-contact Tahitian *himene*. For example, at the beginning of the song, the orchestra echoes A and A’, harmonizing the melody in Db with a simple I-V-I progression (example 5-14a), whereas the second echo (example 5-14b) ends on the subdominant chord, temporarily interrupting the harmonic

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cycle and the flow and simplicity of the song, an improbable ending for a traditional *himene*.

Example 5-14 *L’Île du rêve*, Act 3, Orchestral echoes to A and A’:

a)

b)

Stillman asserts that in *himene tarava*, "the harmonic sonority in performance results from the combination of individual parts over the course of the strophe."\(^{118}\) The type of polyphony that she describes obviously differs from Hahn’s preconceived homophonic texture of both the chorus and the orchestra. Following the B phrase, the orchestra, instead of reinstating the vocal section, repeats the song from the beginning, without any vocal intervention and with a more “sophisticated” harmony, completed by a few

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\(^{118}\) Ibid., 277.
non-harmonic tones (escape tones, pedal points, passing tones, retardation) played by the strings.\textsuperscript{119}

Example 5-15 *L’Île du rêve*, Act 3, Orchestral restatement of the Tahitian Song:

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{example5-15.png}
\end{figure}

The orchestral intervention and Mahénu’s vocalizations break any possible realistic link to the originality of the song, but, dramatically speaking, they both reinforce the powerful presence of the Western colony on stage. The orchestra becomes more relevant as an accompaniment to the ball, where all guests are projecting “high-class” Western customs, rather than supporting the Tahitian “popular” song. In fact, Mahénu, who represents the ultimate struggle

\textsuperscript{119} For an extensive harmonic analysis of this piece see Blay, “*L’Île du rêve de Reynaldo Hahn*” vol.1, 337.
and failure of the Encounter, distorts her *perepere* performance to please the ears of the French audience.

Finally, following Mahénu’s solo, the chorus of Tahitians repeats the song with the accompaniment of the strings and the intervention of the *hau*. She again sings her vocalises, and eventually the song ends on one more reinstatement of A. Celebrating the adulteration of the exotic, Hahn ends the first presentation of the song here.

The second time the natives present the number occurs after Loti ponders his imminent return to Europe, grieving his departure from Mahénu and the island, and foreshadowing the degeneration of Tahitian culture: “*Tu périras, île charmante*” (You will perish, charming island). This time the chorus presents the song with the *hau* part a third higher than before, the strings play fast repeated notes, and the number does not end with the refrain b. The orchestra seems detached from the simplicity of the song, suggesting that the upcoming conflict that does not concern the natives. Eventually, the familiar refrain will not recur because the Princess motive played by the orchestra interrupts the song to announce her arrival. She comes to discuss with Loti his departure. She knows that Loti will leave, but she does not show any sadness; she only worries about Mahénu’s grief. The peaceful background of the island, represented by the “simple” and always invisible Tahitian chorus, and its temporary balance with the West are now threatened. The chorus of

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Tahitians does not end the song on the tonic the way it did it at the beginning of the act; in fact, they do not end the song at all for stability has been compromised. And, interestingly, the Princess disrupts the song with her arrival. Her music, as I will discuss shortly, represents her important role throughout the opera as the mediator but also as the separator between the West and the Other and between different classes.

At the very end of the last act of the opera, the Tahitians sing their song for the last time. This time in E\(\flat\), they sing a cappella, again from afar, as the curtain is closing. They do not finish the song, as they did in the previous instance, leaving the melody on a half cadence. The full orchestra then takes over with a loud series of E\(\flat\) chords, pulling the public back to reality. Then, the curtains close permanently, separating the audience from the remote yet real world, the colonial world inhabited by “lower-class” people who cannot impose their original voice.

If the orchestra has a strong dramatic power, so does Princess Oréna. They both suggest objectivity, and do not elicit empathy from the audience. With its recurrent motives, the orchestra does not represent any apparent character; instead, it highlights conflicts, sentiments of love, sadness, and longing. The Princess never struggles, and she always exudes power and composure. She represents the voice of reason and tradition. She, at the end, establishes Mahénu’s destiny without imposing force but just through good
sense. However, her voice never sings a characteristic melody. Her authority and gentle voice come from the orchestra four times in the opera. A distinct orchestral “motive” always anticipates her physical arrival; nevertheless, this motive tends to represent a predicament (Mahénu’s and the colony’s destiny) instead of symbolizing the Princess’ character. In fact, with her music Oréna exemplifies local aristocracy (in contrast to Mahénu who is of more humble social status) and, ultimately, the success of the French policy of association. She represents the last historical phase of the Encounter and not a dramatic persona. The orchestral motive embodies only typical Western characteristics and never changes:

Example 5-16 L’Île du rêve, Act 1, Oréna’s motive

Before approaching its four occurrences, a closer look at the characteristics of her motive will help explain how it was perceived at the time. Pierre de Bréville wrote that within the smooth development of the music some

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120 For an explanation of French policy of association, see 24-25.
themes came out, and among them he listed “celui de la princesse Oréna (une mazurke)” (the one of Princess Oréna—a mazurka). 121 The critic obviously had Chopin’s mazurkas in mind, since several characteristics of Chopin’s style apply to this motive and its development. Stephen Downes suggests that first, Chopin’s mazurkas are—as the original popular dances—in triple meter, and have a rhythm that “shifts the accent to the weak beats of the bar,” dotted notes, and a tempo fugato. 122 In Chopin’s mazurkas the melody in the high range often develops in triplet and irregular groups, Blay suggests, sometimes presenting intervals of a fifth. 123 This motive indeed is reminiscent of Chopin’s mazurkas in its meter, irregular groups, and shifted accents. Then, the question left to answer is why Hahn turned to this genre to portray the Princess. At the time of the creation of the opera, mazurkas represented a “low” yet fashionable genre. Originally part of folk repertoire, the mazurka connoted regional music, rather than music from the “art” repertoire. Chopin elaborated the genre into a style overwhelmingly accepted and appreciated in the intellectual Parisian milieu. Consequently, the motive of the Princess in mazurka style seems to portray a certain regional taste (Polish, but generic exotic) adapted to a sophisticated French appearance. Overall, Hahn made an appropriate choice

121 Pierre de Bréville, “L’Île du rêve” Revue internationale de musique (1 April 1898): 182.
for a character symbolizing the merger of the powerful West and the weak Other (of course according to his French view of Otherness).

The orchestra plays the motive throughout the first and the third act, while in the second act the motive never appears. The placement of the motive in those particular sections of the opera serves dramatic purposes. In the second act, in fact, the presence of the Princess is not necessary. The act already involves many elements that help to establish the ground for the drama. Religion, comic exoticism, madness, and a love duet fill the central part of the opera. However, in the first act, Oréna introduces Loti and the soldiers to the islanders, interrupting the scene of the Chinese merchant. Her motive immediately establishes her function by opposing her to the Chinese man’s “vulgarity,” and by presenting her as spokeswoman of the Encounter. In the last act, her motive interrupts the Tahitian song and underlines the dialogue of Loti and Oréna, in which Loti expresses his distress. The scene represents the first stage of the separation of Loti and Mahénu, and more symbolically, the disconnection of the Tahitians’ song and the Western music of her motive. She represents the voice of the West disguised as native authority. Significantly, this last occurrence of the motive also takes place right before the Princess sings to Mahénu, “Tu ne peux pas le suivre!” (You cannot follow him!). This time, however, it does not conclude as the previous one did, leaving out the descending C scale:
Example 5-17 L’Île du rêve, Act 3, Oréna’s motive.

The symbolism behind the unfinished motive indicates the Princess’ turn away from her role as a mediator. She loses her function as a catalyst in the Encounter between West and the colony, and she acquires the voice of “reason” in Western terms. She introduces in her lines everything that would keep Mahénu from continuing to love Loti: her father, the harshness of exile, and the separation from the beauty of the homeland. Even at the end of the nineteenth century miscegenation represented depravity. The best solution to the dilemma seemed to be a final and voluntary separation between the exotic and the West, at least on the stage of the Opéra-Comique.

Then again, Hahn reprised a role from earlier exotic operas, the Chinese merchant Tsen Lee. He resembled the “fool exotic” character (usually belonging to a generic “Orient”) of earlier Opéra-Comique exotic operas; and the “oddness” of his customs recalled the days of the 1889 Exposition Universelle. However, the context in which he operates has changed: he lives neither in his land, nor in a European country, but on an island in the middle of

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124 See Jacques Offenbach’s and Ludovic Halévy’s Ba-ta-clan (1855).
the Pacific. Ultimately, he represents the “odd” exotic to the eyes of the native characters of the story, and to the French soldier’s eyes, he stands for slyness and corruption within the colony. His weak and funny predicament (trying to make Mahénu fall in love with him) does not shape him as a profound character, in the tradition of the Opéra-Comique. His oddness serves to relieve the dramatic tension, but also to re-create a true story that takes place on a real land increasingly populated by Chinese immigrants.

Tsen Lee’s motive, as the Princess’ motive, is played by the orchestra. It delineates the character comically, with no use of exotic musical codes. In fact, except for the initial statement of the motive by flutes and clarinets, only the merchant’s physical appearance suggests exoticism.

Example 5-18 L’île du rêve, Act 1, Tsen Lee’s motive

The ascending notes of the scale, the sudden drop of a ninth below the last note of the scale, and the motive’s resolution on the tonic, function as comic elements. Overall, his acting, text, and orchestral accompaniment make him a comic character. His voice, never singing the motive, fluctuates over the accompaniment, sometimes with recitatives, other times in brief *arioso*. In fact,
although he appears to be a tenor bouffé, neither piano-vocal nor orchestral score indicates the specific quality of his voice. Hahn accomplishes the comic effect by inserting Tsen Lee’s lively motive in a dramatic scene. It disrupts the recitation of the Bible in Act 2, a scene permeated with introspective, timeless, and religious atmosphere. The brisk abandonment of serious elements and the introduction of unexpected opposite elements create the comic effect.

The contrast between the Chinese merchant’s lively and comic motive and the “serious” and meditative music that accompanies Taïrapa’s recitation of the Bible highlights the triviality of Tsen Lee’s predicament. To introduce Taïrapa’s aria and Tsen Lee’s contrasting intervention, a tripartite orchestral prelude of “religious music” opens Act 2 and precedes the scene of the Bible reading.

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Blay suggests that Tsen Lee’s range (from c to a) belongs to a tenor bouffé. Blay, “Annexe 4: ambitus des voix,” in the piano and vocal score of L’île du rêve (1898), third page, not numbered.
Its chorale texture, scored for a string quintet, conforms "avec les pratiques musicales polynésiennes du XIXᵉ siècle, centrées autour des psaumes harmonisés" (to Polynesians' musical practices of the Twentieth century, centered on harmonized psalms). Although Hahn never went to the Pacific Islands, he became familiar with some Tahitian musical practices by reading Loti's novel and meeting with him several times. The critics, however, saw the number as a purely French form. Some of them called the number

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126 Blay, "L'Île du rêve de Reynaldo Hahn" vol.1, 361.
127 Ibid., 69.
“Glückiste,” pointing out its similarity to *Alceste*. Yet the music hinted also at a practice dear to Hahn’s teacher Massenet, that is, inserting “old style” numbers in his operas for dramatic purposes (for example, in Act 2 of Massenet’s and Henri Meilhac/Philippe Gille’s *Manon*, 1884). The combination of text and music is also reminiscent of Massenet’s taste for the blend of religious, exotic, and sensual elements in one number. After the choral texture of the prelude dilutes into accompaniment, Taïrapa sings:

*Or, Adam qui venait de bercer un long rêve,*  
*Adam ouvrit les yeux. Elle était près de lui,*  
*Belle, pure et souriante: Ève,*  
*Dit-il, sur mon sommeil ta blancheur avait lui.*

(Now, Adam, who just cradled a long dream,  
Adam opened his eyes. She was next to him,  
Beautiful, pure, and smiling: Eve,  
He said, on my slumber your fairness has gleamed).

The intervention of Tsen Lee looking for Mahénu, followed by the arrival of Loti and Mahénu, momentarily interrupt his reading and the religious music. Then, at the end of Act 2, Taïrapa continues:

*Et quand il la pressa contre son cœur fiévreux,*  
*Les chants de la forêt, les brises s’apaisèrent,*  
*Il régnait un silence odorant…et tous les deux*  
*Sous le regard jaloux des étoiles, s’aimèrent!*

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130 Ibid., 576.
(And when he pressed her against his feverish heart,
The songs of the forest and the wind calmed down,
A scented silence reigned...and both of them loved
Under the jealous look of the stars).

The old Tahitian man sings always these words on the same motive:

Example 5-20 *L’île du rêve*, Act 2, Taïrapa’s motive

Taïrapa’s motive and its religious accompaniment start and end the act,
enclosing several events and musical interventions that differ from his
introspective music. Tsen Lee’s interjections recur two more times, Téria
confronts Loti, and Mahénu and Loti sing their love duet. The reading of the
Bible serves a dramatic purpose. Adam and Eve’s story represents the
attraction between Mahénu and Loti, and it hints of their idyllic life before the
first sin, predicting the failure of their union. In addition, the passage from the Bible describes the confusion between Adam’s dream and the live image of a woman: a rhetorical and typical image representing the desire for Otherness. Furthermore, the music of the Bible reading is set to give a subliminal meaning to the scene. Because Taïrapa sings a recognizable motive, his recitation appears personal, realistic, and credible. He reads the Bible with his own distinctive and repeated vocal melody, projecting the text clearly, and giving it credibility (he sings it, not the orchestra). In addition, to strengthen the importance of his truthful statements, Taïrapa states his melody at the beginning of Act 2 and restates it at the end of the act. The rest of the characters do not sing any recognizable motive in the second act, and Taïrapa’s music becomes still more important by opposition with other musical elements. All other events within the act are incidental, and Hahn gave the orchestra the task of symbolizing their transient quality with instrumental motives, rather than assigning them a real "voice."

In fact, along with the religious song, the other only instances in which characters sing with recognizable "voices" within the whole opera are in the Tahitian song and, as we will discuss next, Mahénu’s “Bora-Bora” aria.131

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131 Hahn also wrote a French popular song for the French soldiers, but he included it only in the vocal score and not in the orchestral score. The song was never performed, therefore this analysis does not include it. Blay writes that the reasons why Hahn decided not to incorporate this number in the performance remain mysterious. Blay, “L’île du rêve de Reynaldo Hahn” vol.1, 347.
These three musical instances describe the predicaments of the people who sing them (the Tahitians, Taïrara, and Mahénu), and suggest loss of cultural identity, assimilation to European customs, and also social disparity. The Tahitian song includes European (popular) and native musical elements. It begins Act 3 and it ends it, with only a few changes. The religious song in Act 2 evokes European “high” musical style, but the singer is a native and poor old man. The third example, Mahénu’s Bora-Bora song in Acts 1 and 3, represents the heroine’s longing for her past in an island that she came to idealize after living in Tahiti, and also fear to blend with a different race, culture, and class.

Mahénu first sings about Bora-Bora in Act 1, after the orchestral prelude, in E♭ major (Example 5-21 a). This theme characterizing Bora-Bora is found in the A sections of her tripartite aria. In the central B section the chorus of the Tahitian girls introduces contrasting text and music. Excited about the Princess’ upcoming party, they sing about the French officers, anticipating the performance of the himene and Mahénu’s voice. Later in the first act, Mahénu repeats the phrase “Bora-Bora,” also in E♭ major, when she tells Loti about her childhood (Example 5-21 b). Since the E♭ major key opens and concludes the opera, the conclusion of these phrases with the E♭ major suggests relevance in the drama. These two statements seem consistent to the overall feeling of nostalgia pervading the opera. However, she repeats the same melody in D major at the end of the opera, when Loti has left, just before the final
restatement of the Tahitian song and the final orchestral motive reminiscent of the beginning of the opera (Example 5-21 c). At the end, her nostalgic dream becomes alienated from the dramatic action.

Example 5-21 L'Île du rêve, Act 1, Mahénu's Bora-Bora Aria

\[ \text{Example image of musical notation} \]
Example 5-21 (continued)

b) La reprise des petites femmes, au loin.

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Au polo...
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c) "Tahe et Tahepa s'embrassent triomphalement.

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Au pa... de Bora-Bora.
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The text of her aria suggests a melancholy mood, while the music enhances the longing quality with small intervals, soft dynamics, repetition, and the accompaniment of the harp. It shows no musical exoticism at all; it promotes instead a typical fin-de-siècle languor characteristic of Hahn’s vocal music. The composer builds the climax of the nostalgic aria on the words “Bora-Bora,” “Mimosa,” “nuit,” “aurore,” and “c'est toi” (“Bora-Bora”, “Mimosa”, “dawn”, “it is you”) by introducing the interval of a second, a degree higher on each occurrence: (Bora) B♭-C; (Mi) B♭-C; La nuit: C-D; Au-ro- (re): D-E♭; C'est toi: E♭-F. The name of the island, its flowers, its flowing and yet unchanging time, and the words “it is you” (the island of Bora-Bora), reflect the beauty and mysteriousness of the ultimate exotic and unseen place. The harp and the strings play the tonal accompaniment with brief and discreet interjections of the woodwinds, providing the melody with a pastoral feeling. The orchestration and the melodic line give the text a sense of idyllic peacefulness. Finally, with similar texture, harmonic plan, and theme, Mahénu sings the aria one the last time, in Act 3, when she dreams of her home island. This time, quite dissociated from the dramatic context—“gravement, l’œil perdu” (gravely, with a lost look)—she sings only the first section of the aria. Her voice expresses once more the longing for a place far away from grief and false hopes. To her and to the audience, Bora-Bora represents the quintessence of a peaceful and beautiful
world. It is the world of her past, before she moved to Tahiti and before she met her "Other," that is, the West, the symbol of cultural and social corruption. Finally, we recognize the aria as a "true" voice because she owns her melody, and also because she sings it at the opening and at the conclusion of the opera. The encounter has failed, the characters have expressed their grief, and *L’Île du rêve* remains an evanescent space, the place where their love has briefly lasted. The polar opposites, irrevocably changed by the Encounter and the consciousness of their dilemma, have returned to their original positions.

By combining the three recurrent vocal numbers (the Tahitian song, Taïrapa’s religious music, and Mahénu’s aria of Bora-Bora) with the orchestral repeated motives (in particular, Tsen Lee’s and Oréna’s motives) a new contour of the exotic shapes up. If we contemplate the three vocal numbers as representative of dramatic truth, we can clearly see how the making of exoticism in this opera differs from previous French operas. First, Christian religion—an essential element for the affirmation of Western culture—has finally overcome its counterpart, paganism, as Taïrapa’s number suggests. Pagan, brutal or erotic rituals have disappeared from the stage, leaving room for the "truth" spoken by natives. Second, the Tahitian *himene* and its

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132 In Loti’s novel, she dies in Bora-Bora. In *L’Île du rêve*, she just foresees her decline; at the end she sings, "*Mon cœur, mes yeux mourants le reverront encore*" (My heart, my dying eyes will see him again).
references to original Tahitian music represent the original native voice in French terms. We find no presence of augmented seconds or any "generic" code of the exotic, but a conscious adaptation of "true" original native music, which had itself already gone through a process of assimilation. Finally, Mahénu's Bora-Bora aria, also deprived of any form of traditional exoticism, implies a desire to end any attempt to compromise. Corruption, just as Loti described it in his novel, has taken place and all characters of the opera live with it. She, however, sees a solution—which is the return to one's origin.

Altogether the message of cultural assimilation appears strong in the opera, and the music makes very little attempt to strike the listener with exotic color. This new representation of the exotic, or in better words, its termination, suggests an appreciation for realism and all its characteristic social dilemmas. In addition, the lack of strong exotic idioms implies that the process of Western assimilation had succeeded. Hahn and the librettists, taking acculturation as a useful dramatic device, turned their attention to their very own world, the French world of the fin de siècle with all its social predicaments, regrets, melancholy, and social changes. In sum, in L'Île du rêve the plot and characters reflect the times in which the opera was first performed. Exoticism, as intended in traditional French operatic terms—the desire for Otherness and for an alternative world—has exhausted its resources. The colony has taken the place of the dream, appearing as a physical reality and a
symbolic mirror. This opera establishes the premises to a new operatic taste that, from that time on, turns its back on the "generic" representation of other countries, but opens up to other signs of Otherness.
Conclusion

By analyzing the semantic layout of text, music, and stage setting in *Thamara, Djelma, Thais, Le Spahi*, and *L'Île du rêve*, and by acknowledging earlier scholarly publications on exotic librettos and music, I have aimed to show how the view of exoticism developed during the last decade of the nineteenth century in France. As a result of my research, I have established how this view clearly reflects the society and culture of fin-de-siècle France and its opinions about politics, religion, imperialism, and sexuality. In order to accomplish my goal, I have approached these operas in a comparative study that includes multiple fields of analysis. Furthermore, I have brought to light three scores (*Thamara, Djelma, and Le Spahi*) long forgotten in the archives of the Opéra, and revealed their cultural and artistic importance.

After completing my investigation, I have come to the conclusion that in these five operas literary and musical languages depend on each other for the representation of the exotic, and their collaboration is indispensable for the dramatic creation of Otherness. After looking at the words, music, and set design as a plurimodal language that relies on performance, I came to realize that through this approach I was able to unveil meanings hidden in the deep structure of each drama.

Furthermore, by including other cultural fields for analysis, I was able to make my case stronger by contextualizing it. Scholarly studies on exotic opera and opera in general have too often limited their examination either to
the text (libretto and score) or just to the cultural significance of particular operas. Taking the study of opera a step further, I have proven that embracing multiple extra-musical disciplines—history, literature, semiology, and reception—in a musicological study can drastically enhance the sophistication of the investigation.

With an historical approach to French colonial expansion I have investigated the factual basis of imperialistic policies, but I have also showed the spirit of inquisitiveness of French explorers and researchers. French expansionism and racial discrimination progressed in tandem with French fascination for other cultures, and both prejudice and curiosity created the basis for exoticism, a new trend in all the arts. Exoticism flourished from these roots.

The inclusion of a study of nineteenth-century literary works (from Baudelaire to Loti) has also helped to determine the antecedents of musical exoticism. Nineteenth-century literature reflects diverse political ideologies that are also often represented in opera. In both arts the dream of an alternative existence prevails, and both genres hint at a desire for change.

The semiological reading of the five operas has brought to light ideological meanings imbedded in the score and libretto. Through this deconstructive approach I have revealed how these operas express the desire for change in fin de siècle French society. As a first step in this method, I have established the strong binary oppositions depicted in the surfaces of the librettos (male/female, Western/non-Western space, Christianity/paganism,
soldier/slave, etc.), of the scores (diatonic/modal, consonant/dissonant, drone/melody, etc.), and of the stage settings (night/day, flowers/desert, red blood/white sand, etc.). Consequently, I have defined which of the two poles represents power according to French political and cultural ideology of the time—already established in my previous examination of French colonialism and literature. I have then invalidated that hierarchy and demonstrated that the most powerful position loses its control when desiring its opposite. As a result of this methodology, I have determined that the opposites are just two sides of one entity: fin de siècle French society.

Furthermore, by analyzing the semiological relationship between libretto, score, and stage setting I have explained how these media coordinate to build oppositions. This particular step has permitted the identification of characteristic surface elements of the exotic. For example, a pagan slave in Indian attire singing in the hijâz mode is the exotic who openly contrasts with a Christian heroine in a white tunic, and whose entrance is accompanied by chorale-like music. However, through a deeper reading of the sophisticated network created by music, text, and stage set, I have also given an explanation of how exotic signifiers can assume diverse meanings as a result of simultaneous contrasting messages from different media—for example, a pagan man who sings a lyrical Western-sounding tonal melody, but dressed as a sultan—and characterize reverse exoticism. A subject still young in cultural and literary studies and rarely addressed in musicological studies, reverse
exoticism in drama and literature consists of the exchange of labels between Self and Other. In the case of Thamara, for example, the main heroine is a devout Christian and a courageous patriot, traits that nineteenth-century France could identify with. Her male counterpart instead, embodies exotic characteristics: he is a rich Muslim sultan with many wives, surrounded by sexy slaves. In the sultan's dreams and music, however, the object of desire is Christian Thamara, whose image for him represents the exotic.

With the aid of reviews and critical articles about the five operas, I have verified how public and critics perceived the idea of the exotic not only in the five operas, but also as a general cultural issue. Always concerned about its realization, the articles praised or criticized the making of exoticism of the productions in a consistent fashion. In some cases plots and musical settings disappointed the critics for their weak depictions of the exotic. The fact that four out of the five operas examined here did not achieve great success and (since only Thais enjoyed the praise of critics and public) gave me additional incentive to undertake this study. Since I have situated the productions within a cultural frame that centers on the perception of the exotic, both appreciative and disapproving criticism concerning aspects of exoticism have helped me to prove how relevant this subject was to France during the 1890s. Criticism and praise of particular numbers by contemporary press have led me to choose certain examples for many of my in-depth textual and musical analyses.
Through my examination I have explained what specific elements have enhanced or prevented a successful representation of the exotic.

However, in my study I have also acknowledged that other factors contributed to the success and failure of the five operas. The notion of success is a complicated one that involves contingent factors as well. In the last decade of the nineteenth century, some of these factors might have been the competition with concurrent productions of popular or more innovative operas; the quality of the productions (for example, stage settings and musicians' performance); the length of some evenings (in many instances two operas were shown as a double bill); or even the critics' aesthetic and political agendas. In addition, the critics' reception of these works also reveals how operatic exoticism was re-shaped by Wagnerisme and naturalism, two musical and philosophical trends flourishing during the last two decades of the nineteenth century.

My comparative approach has contributed to forming a holistic picture of the genre of exotic opera. This was accomplished through the examination and comparison of various interpretations of exoticism in earlier operas and the exploration of other contemporary exotic and non-exotic works, and by relating the five operas to each other and to past exotic operas. Through this comparative approach I have intended to expand the awareness of how conventional musical and textual languages formed and changed in a short period of eight years and in turn shaped exoticism. I have concentrated on
three main themes: love, landscape, and religion, and verified how these elements apply in each opera. Through a close look at the five operas’ diverse but consistent use of these themes, I have established the language that composers and librettists chose to portray the encounter between the West (France) and the rest of the world. The three themes adopted diverse aspects in each opera, while promoting the basic idea of Otherness. When different races or cultures meet, love never lasts and death often occurs; when lovers share the same ethnicity and social background, they marry and their wedded life lasts forever (Djelma). When the Encounter occurs—mostly implied by sexual attraction—it is the exotic heroine who dies (Thamara and Thaïs). However, in the last exotic operas of the century, at the end, it is the Western hero who leaves the stage. If he dies, his death represents a sacrifice for his country (Le Spahi); if he survives, he simply returns to France (L’Île du rêve). Dreams of mysterious women from faraway lands represent the Western male’s erotic desire for the exotic, until the homeland France takes over in the dream. Home comes to represent the righteous place and the “exotic” colony, a crude reality. Finally, Christianity, the quintessence of Western “truth,” and paganism, the epitome of Otherness, are antagonists in the first three operas; then, toward the last part of the century, Christianity assimilates paganism, as it really happened in many French colonies. In sum, if the three main themes of the exotic may vary according to composers’ and librettists’ aesthetic preferences and choice
of plot, they also depend on the setting of the plot (i.e., far past or present, removed exotic or tangible colony).

The research into surface codes and “hidden” messages shared by the five operas starts from solid grounds for two main reasons: first, because these messages exist within a common context (same period, theaters, type of public, cultural milieu, critics, and sometimes, even librettists and performers); and secondly, because they are expressed in the same genre, the opéra lyrique. Embedded messages in librettos and scores always exist, waiting to be deciphered; however, only with a systematic contextualization of these messages does the argument become convincing. Furthermore, I recognize that writers and musicians have not always intended to create hidden meanings; by using already established codes and by placing them in diverse contexts, however, they have inevitably created new languages.

Overall, with this study I hope to engage in a dialogue on exotic opera and opera in general that extends beyond structural analyses of text or music. Opera should be seen as a vehicle of cultural expression in which multiple languages converge to optimize artistic quality. In particular, I hope that the discussions of nineteenth-century French opera could more often confront issues of gender, class, and race—distinctive traits of nineteenth-century arts—since they appear so consistently in the subtext of the drama. Furthermore, since multidisciplinary methodology has proven to be successful, I hope that future studies will consider this approach for better understanding musical
works in their cultural and historical context. Finally, I trust that a future
discussion of exoticism in general will specifically refer to a precise West, and
not to a general entity that includes everything that is not “the Orient.”
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