Ornament and Gesture – Approaches to Studying Bellini's Norma and Giuditta Pasta's Performance

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ORNAMENT AND GESTURE –
APPROACHES TO STUDYING BELLINI’S *NORMA* AND GIUDITTA PASTA’S PERFORMANCE

By

Xuan Qin

A THESIS

Submitted to the Faculty of the University of Miami in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Music

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UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Master of Music

ORNAMENT AND GESTURE –

APPROACHES TO STUDYING BELLINI’S NORMA AND GIUDITTA PASTA’S PERFORMANCE

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Giuditta Pasta was an outstanding *attrice cantante* (“singing actress”) in early nineteenth-century Italy. Vincenzo Bellini composed *Norma* for her in 1831, which became one of his most significant works and established Pasta’s position and reputation within Europe. In this thesis I draw on studies by Mary Ann Smart, Melina Esse, and Susan Rutherford in order to investigate the connections between Bellini’s melodic writing and Pasta’s *bel canto* singing and physical expression in *Norma*. In doing so I make a contribution to recent debates about music and performance.

The title role of *Norma* is a priestess who has a strong personality and who is at the same time a woman betrayed by her husband. In order to portray this complicated character, Bellini makes extensive use of ornamentation, including appoggiaturas and turns. I analyze three numbers from three different scenes of the opera, one of them is the well-known aria “Casta diva,” and argue that the appoggiaturas and turns in *Norma* are not only embellishments, but also function as “sighing” figures and thematic elements. I suggest that Bellini exploits appoggiaturas in Norma in both prosodic and melodic
situations as imitations of human “sighs.” In addition, the turns and turn-like figures are essential thematic elements of the composer’s melodies.

Drawing on both Rutherford’s research and reviews and other early nineteenth-century sources, I draw comparisons between Pasta’s singing and acting and those of other contemporary sopranos. I also situate the soprano within the larger theatrical context of the period. I ultimately argue that Pasta’s acting and physical expression lay between a neoclassical approach, which was centered on the imitation of Greek statues, and a more Romantic emphasis on dynamism and using the body to produce what was often described as “living” stage picture. Enriching my discussion of Pasta’s ornamentation is an unpublished notebook that was left by the soprano Adelaide Kemble, who studied with Pasta in the 1830s. The thesis concludes by comparing the ornamentation in the notebook with Bellini’s original and suggests that early nineteenth-century sopranos’ performance of his “sighing” ornamentation may have been more individual and dramatic than Bellini’s scores suggest.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge the numerous people who assisted me during my studies in the United States. I am especially grateful to Dr. Karen Henson, my thesis advisor at the University of Miami, for providing helpful assistance and guidance during my studies. Without her supervision, suggestions, and encouragement, as well as her patience my master’s research would not have been successful. I also would like to thank the other members of my thesis supervisory committee, Dr. Melissa de Graaf and Professor Alan Johnson for their invaluable contributions, including editorial assistance and thoughtful comments.

I also owe Professor Philip Gossett a deep debt of gratitude for his generosity. He provided me with the most significant primary source for my study, the notebook left by Adelaide Kemble with ornamentations for Bellini’s Norma. I was lucky enough to have a short conversation with Professor Gossett during the American Musicological Society annual conference at Pittsburgh in 2012. I wish him health and happiness. In addition, I would like to acknowledge other faculty and students in the Musicology Department at the University of Miami: Professor Frank Cooper, in whose class I found the inspiration for my thesis topic; and Dr. Willa Collins, who always provided me suggestions during my studies. I wish to express my special thanks to Nancy Zavac and the rest of the staff in the Marta & Austin Weeks Music Library for providing plenty of resources and friendly service.

I offer my personal appreciation to my dear colleagues and friends, who helped me with my study and provided advice and support in overcoming the challenges I
encountered during my life in these three years. Last and most important, I extend deep gratitude to my parents, Gengshen Qin and Qiuying Wang, for their enormous understanding, support, and encouragement. As their only child, I feel very sorry for living so far away and not staying with them when they are getting older. I am very grateful for their love and presence in my life.
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Introduction

At the end of 1831, Vincenzo Bellini wrote Norma for the one of most famous singers of the early nineteenth century, the soprano Giuditta Pasta (1797-1865). Although the première was a “fiasco,” the opera has become a symbol both of Bellini’s work and of Pasta’s abilities as a performer. Norma is one of the most important Italian operas of the 1830s within the tradition and practice known as bel canto; Pasta, meanwhile, was an outstanding attrice cantante (“singing actress”) in early nineteenth-century Italy. From the time they first met, Bellini built a solid friendship with Pasta and admired her. He composed Norma for her and even wrote to her to ask for some suggestions. According to Susan Rutherford, a leading historian of nineteenth-century singing: “Pasta was the acknowledged diva del mondo during the 1820s, famed not only for an extraordinary if flawed voice, but also for the physicality of her performance modes.”

In this thesis, I plan to investigate the connections between Bellini’s music and Pasta’s performance in Norma; more specifically, I plan to discuss the relationship between Bellini’s ornamentation and Pasta’s singing and physical gestures. By analyzing three different numbers from three different scenes of the opera and relying on my basic research from a musical aspect, I suggest that Bellini applied turns and appoggiaturas in Norma, not only as embellishments but also as musical thematic elements. In addition, appoggiaturas are most often imitations of human “sighing.” I will then explore a notebook which was left by the soprano Adelaide Kemble (1815-1879), that is relevant to Pasta’s ornamentation and improvisation in Norma, comparing it to similar material that

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survives from the soprano Laure Cinti-Damoureau (1801-1863). Kemble studied singing *Norma* with Pasta in 1838 and the notebook most likely reflects their work together. Cinti-Damoureau was a French soprano who was particularly associated with Italian operas. Her notebooks offer numerous details about improvisations that she employed in *Norma*. These primary sources are unpublished notebooks that were left by significant sopranos of that period and they have enriched my research with their contemporary music-historical detail. They also demonstrate details of the musical differences between Bellini, Kemble, and Cinti-Damoureau in *Norma*. My thesis will finally consider the idea of the “singing actress” in the early nineteenth century, discussing both Pasta’s physical acting and her singing, arguing that both were essential aspects of her performance.

Many excellent studies have approached Bellini’s output from historical, musical, lyrical, and performative perspectives. Herbert Weinstock’s *Vincenzo Bellini: His Life and His Music* and David Kimbell’s *Vincenzo Bellini: Norma* are the most lengthy and significant resources.¹ Weinstock’s book provides a comprehensive account of Bellini’s life and his operas. It has two sections entitled “The Life” and “The Operas and Nonoperatic Compositions.” In the second section, one can find rich details of performances of the operas dating from their premières to 1971, when the book was published. The book also includes analyses of the libretto and the music of each opera. Although Kimbell’s study is a small handbook to *Norma*, it consists of nine essays exploring different aspects of the opera, including the libretto’s sources, the musical context, contemporary reactions to *Norma*, and the opera’s performance history. In comparison to Weinstock’s work, Kimbell’s is a more critical study. For example, in one

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chapter he explores the reception of *Norma* in a particular historical context, that of the unification of Italy. In addition to these two books, Simon Maguire’s *Vincenzo Bellini and the Aesthetics of Early Nineteenth-Century Italian Opera* and John Rosselli’s *The Life of Bellini* are also important to my study of Bellini’s *bel canto* operas.³ Maguire investigates analytical writings on the Italian attitude toward opera regarding Bellini’s compositions. He makes a statement that Bellini’s operatic aesthetics are rooted in classical Greek traditions. Rosselli makes detailed comments on each opera of Bellini and provides a guide to further in-depth studies.

In my work on *Norma*, I have also considered approaches to gender studies on the opera. Susan McClary, a pioneering scholar in this field, offered a new perspective on how we can interpret music in *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality*.⁴ She dealt not only with Western concert music and opera but also contemporary women composers and singers. Broadly speaking, the essays in *Feminine Endings* consist of close critical readings on gender and sexuality: McClary analyzes the music’s symbolism, cadences, keys, motives, themes, and structures. She discusses the question of how to define and interpret feminist criticism of music through elaborate arguments on gender issues and female characters in dramatic music.

More recently, Mary Ann Smart, Melina Esse, and Susan Rutherford have offered feminist analyses of opera from a variety of angles. They explore particular musical figures within Bellini’s music and relate those figures to the performance style of the time. Elements other than the music, such as physical gestures, staging, and even costumes are

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also discussed. Three important pieces are Smart’s chapter “Bellini’s Unseen Voices” (Mimomania: Music and Gesture in Nineteenth-Century Opera), Esse’s article “Speaking and Sighing: Bellini’s Canto Declamato and the Poetics of Restraint,” and Rutherford’s article “‘La cantante delle passioni’: Giuditta Pasta and the idea of operatic performance.” Smart explores Bellini’s musical imitations of human emotions – sighs, groans, and sobs – in his early works. She has also done important research on Bellini’s self-borrowings. Esse, meanwhile, follows Smart’s studies and focuses on the use of appoggiaturas in Bellinian melody to represent and imitate sobs and sighs. Rutherford explores the singers of the nineteenth century and their different styles of performance. I will build upon this work to study the ornaments in Norma and Pasta’s performance.

For this thesis I have also consulted the historical research surrounding Pasta. I have studied primary sources relating to Pasta, including letters between Bellini and his colleagues. I have also studied critiques of Pasta’s performances, most of them in Italian, and some of which I will be presenting here in English for the first time. The most informative source for Pasta’s performance style is taken from a chapter in Stendhal’s famous Vie de Rossini. This book is not only an encyclopedic study of Rossini, but also a documentary of the historical context surrounding opera from the 1810s to 1820s in Europe. Stendhal discusses Pasta’s performance style at length, and his opinions will be an important source for my study.

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The number of documents on the subject of prima donnas in the nineteenth century is plentiful. The first of two comprehensively biographic books is *The Prima Donna: Her History and Surroundings from the Seventeenth to the Nineteenth Century* by Henry Sutherland, and the other is *Five Centuries of Women Singers* by Isabelle Emerson. These books provide the basic biographies of many famous singers and a few reviews regarding their performances. *Great Singers* is a two-volume handbook based on reviews and critics’ memories. In addition, Susan Rutherford’s *The Prima Donna and Opera, 1815-1930* provides significant research on singers and the operatic environment during that hundred years. Besides, Stendhal’s *Vie de Rossini* contains many reviews of contemporaneous singers.

In addition to scholarship about Bellini, *Norma*, and *Pasta*, my research is informed by other literature on *bel canto* opera, nineteenth-century theater and acting, and feminist studies. Sources include Joseph R. Roach’s *The Player’s Passion: Studies in the Science of Acting*, Rodolfo Celletti’s *A History of Bel Canto*, Smart’s *Mimomania: Music and Gesture in Nineteenth-Century Opera*, Philip Gossett’s *Divas and Scholars: Performing Italian Opera*, Naomi André’s *Voicing Gender: Castrati, Travesti, and the Second Woman in Early-Nineteenth-Century Italian Opera* and Karen Henson’s *Opera Acts: Singers and Performance in the Late Nineteenth Century*. 

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The plot of *Norma* is well-known. The opera is set in Gaul of the Roman occupation (about 1 B.C). Norma, a priestess of Gaul, and Pollione, the Roman consul, are secretly married with two children. Pollione, however, has fallen in love with a younger priestess, Adalgisa, who returns his affections. Unaware of Norma and Pollione’s married status, Adalgisa innocently tells Norma of her love and Norma curses Polllione for his treachery. The second act opens with a very disturbed Norma. Greatly distraught over her husband’s treachery, she wants to kill her children, but her love for them as a mother prevents her from doing so. Pollione refuses to leave Adalgisa, but feels guilty about the decision Norma comes to, which is that she will sacrifice herself. At the end of the opera, Norma and Pollione leave to go to the funeral pyre together.

Even though *Norma*’s storyline is widely known, few people are familiar with the opera’s historical background. In the summer of 1831, Bellini was considering the subject for a new opera. In a letter to a friend, he wrote: “I have already chosen the subject for my new opera, which is called *Norma, ossia l’infanticidio*, the play by [Alexandre] Soumet which is now being performed in Paris with tremendous success.”11 This French drama was extremely successful when it was first staged, premiering on April 25, 1831 at Théâtre Royal de L’Odéon. Bellini and his collaborator, the experienced librettist Felice Romani, then turned the play into a two-act *melodramma*, naming their new opera *Norma*. As an opening opera of a carnival, the première of *Norma* took place in Milan, La Scala, on December 26, 1831. Pasta played Norma (soprano), the soprano Giulia Grisi (1811–1869) created the role as Adalgisa (soprano), and the tenor Domenico Donzelli (1790–1873) created the role of Pollione (tenor).

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According to the dates of the letters Bellini sent to his singers, it seems likely that before finalizing the subject of his new opera, the cast of the opera was already chosen. In the early nineteenth century, opera was fashioned according to the singers available and also, in certain cases, as a special entertainment for carnival season. Bellini was commissioned to compose a new work for one such occasion and the composer and librettist, even the manager of the opera house, would have wanted to choose the singer who would most likely guarantee success. Bellini chose to write *Norma* for Pasta’s voice and the première of the opera was her debut performance at La Scala.

Musical discussion will form an essential part of this thesis. In chapter I, I will analyze three numbers from three different scenes of *Norma*: “Casta diva”, which is Norma’s hymn to the chaste goddess of the moon in Act I; “Oh! rimembranza!”, the second movement of Norma and the young priestess Adalgisa’s duet in Act I; and “In mia man alfin”, the second movement of the trio between Norma and the Roman consul and her lover Pollione in Act II. I have chosen to focus on these numbers because they express Norma’s character and show how she deals with the love triangle between herself, Adalgisa, and Pollione. They are also significant for understanding Pasta’s characterization of Norma and the singer’s style of performance. In this chapter, I will re-examine the musical elements from the three scenes and discuss them in terms of Pasta’s acting and singing. Through musical analysis, I will conclude that the ornaments in *Norma* are significant to the development of the melodic structure.

Chapter II will focus on Pasta as a performer, through a discussion of her operatic performances during her career, especially when she lived in Paris. I will provide evidence from many critics and build on previous research regarding Pasta’s physical
acting to argue that she was known as an *attrice cantante* due to her individual acting style. Her work on stage was a transition between neoclassical and Romantic acting in operatic performance. In addition, I will address how theatrical performance influenced Pasta’s acting.

Enriching my argument for Pasta being a remarkable performer, chapter III will continue with a detailed comparison between Pasta and other contemporary sopranos, especially discussing their different styles in *bel canto* opera. I will return to the musical aspect, suggesting that Bellini used appoggiaturas and turns to imitate natural human emotions in *Norma*. However, after discovering and analyzing Kemble and Cinti-Damoreau’s improvisations, I would like to conclude that Pasta applied very different ornaments to Bellini’s scores, and her work influenced later opera singers.

In the final part of this thesis, I will draw all the separate arguments from each chapter together to reach a large conclusion in reference to early nineteenth-century operatic performance. Based on the consideration of Lydia Goehr’s “artwork” concept, I would like to make a statement that during the early nineteenth-century, people considered Pasta to be a “work of art” because of her stylized singing and acting, and that she elevated acting to equal the significance of singing, which positively influenced audience’s appreciation of operatic performance.
Chapter I: The Analysis of Musical Figures in *Norma*

In the first chapter I will discuss and make comparisons between three scenes in *Norma*. This will not only provide a general sense of the style that Bellini applied in *Norma*, but also build the foundation of my further studies. Through detailed analyses, I would like to bring a new perspective to the function of ornaments in *Norma*. Turns and appoggiaturas are not only embellishments in melodies, but are also essential elements for building and developing melodies.

**Part 1. Bel canto Opera and “Casta diva”**

*Bel canto* (literally, “beautiful singing”) is a term that is usually used to describe both an early nineteenth-century compositional style and a style of singing and performance.\(^\text{12}\) Operas written in this tradition were done so with an emphasis on the voice and on vocal virtuosity. Compositional strategies exploited in *bel canto* include *fioriture*, variation, ornamentation, and improvisation. Singers exploited similar strategies in their performances. In terms of technique and sound quality, singers aimed for a full, rich, sweet tone and smooth phrasing. The climax of *bel canto* was in the 1820s and 1830s (though the term itself only began to be xused in the second half of the nineteenth century – that is, retrospectively). Rossini, Donizetti, and Bellini are the three most notable composers who wrote during these decades, producing vast numbers of beautiful arias and their own unique approaches to the *bel canto* style.

“Casta diva” in *Norma* is in some ways typical of a *bel canto* aria. Many scholars have analyzed this famous movement, but I would like to explore it from my own

perspective, including from the point of view of the so-called *solita forma* or “conventional form” of nineteenth-century Italian arias and other scene complexes. This “conventional form” consists of four or five movements that communicate the situation of the characters and the progression of the plot. The structure is as follows:

- *Recitativo*
- *Tempo d’attacco*
- *Cantabile*
- *Tempo di mezzo*
- *Cabaletta* (or *Stretta*)

This formula can be adjusted according to the number of characters involved and the strategies the composer wants to use to communicate the dramatic situation. “Casta diva” is the *cantabile* of a *solita forma* structure appearing in Act I scene 4 (*scena e cavatina*) of *Norma*. The structure of the scene as a whole is as follows:

**Table 1.1 The *solita forma* in Act I scene 4 of *Norma***

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Movement</th>
<th>Characters</th>
<th>Texts</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Recitativo</strong></td>
<td>Norma</td>
<td>Sediziossevoci</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Oroveso and Druids</td>
<td>E fino a quando oppressi ne vorrai tu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Norma</td>
<td>Infranta, si se alcun di voi snudarla</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Norma</td>
<td>Io ne’ volumi arcani leggo del cielo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cantabile</strong></td>
<td>Norma</td>
<td>Casta diva</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tempo di mezzo</strong></td>
<td>Norma</td>
<td>Fineal rito</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Oroveso and Durids</td>
<td>Tuoni e un sol del popol</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Norma</td>
<td>Cadrà punirlo io posso</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cabaletta</strong></td>
<td>Oroveso and Durids</td>
<td>Ah! bello a me ritorna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Norma</td>
<td>Sei lento</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Oroveso and Durids</td>
<td>Ah! bello a me ritorna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Norma</td>
<td>Ma irato</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Oroveso and Durids</td>
<td>Ah! riedi ancora</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Norma</td>
<td>O giorno!</td>
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Norma’s recitative at the beginning of the scene demonstrates her position as a high priestess and a seeress among the Druids – with her strong entrance; we sense Norma’s powerful and authoritative character. In this first movement, Norma sings that Rome will collapse and she commands her people to wait for that moment. She then begins the cantabile of the scene, which is also the most famous melody of the opera. Norma appeases her people by commanding them to wait for their opportunity and at the same time sings a hymn of praise to the chaste goddess (or “casta diva”), asking her to inspire her people to fight for peace.

“Casta diva” begins with an undulating introduction in the strings, marked Andante sostenuto assai. After this brief transitional accompanimental part, which settles into F major, a solo flute then introduces the theme of “Casta diva” in eleven measures. During this long melody, Norma, as indicated in the score, “[C]uts the mistletoe: the priestesses gather it in rush baskets. Norma comes forward and holds her arms up to the sky. The moon shines in all its brightness.” Later, Bellini adds more winds (clarinets and oboes) to draw attention to the theme played by the flute. At the same time, the strings continue to play a pianissimo arpeggiated accompaniment. The music is very simple yet noble, perhaps in an attempt to reflect the pure sounds of nature.

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13 For this thesis I will be using the vocal score of Norma first published by Schirmer in New York, 1920. Other available editions include vocal scores published by G. Ricordi in Milan in 1949, by Kalmus [n.d.] in New York, and by Boosey and Hawkes [n.d.] in New York. A full score has been published by Dover in New York, 1994. There are no critical or scholarly editions of Norma currently available.

Example 1.1 Bellini, *Norma*, Act I, introduction of Norma’s “Casta diva”
“Casta diva” contains two stanzas with an interlude between them. Each verse has three phrases. Norma’s first half-phrase (measures 1-4, see Example 1.2) begins on the median note (A) of F major, as a dotted-half note tied to a dotted-eighth note, followed by an ornamental turn. The melody ascends, and then falls to the tonic note. The range of the second half of the phrase is a little wider than that of the first. After repeating F-G-A twice, the melody ascends to D, which is preceded by a turn on A, and the melodic line resolves by falling to B flat. The second phrase (measures 5-8) follows the shape of the first, but begins on B flat (that is, it is repeated sequentially one half-step higher). This first half of the second phrase imitates the rhythm and thematic structure of the first phrase, with the exception of three sixteenth notes – that is, Bellini ornaments this second half of the second phrase a little more elaborately. In the third long phrase (measures 8-15), the music touches briefly on D minor, then returns to the tonic. The character of this phrase is different because of the presence of a rising perfect fourth (A-D) and a rising minor sixth (A-F), each of which is followed by a brief appoggiatura. The music is no longer peaceful as the soprano sings up to a high A and an even higher B flat. The aria crescendos from piano to accents on repeated high A’s, with a climax on the B flat, and then falls in ornamented stepwise motion.

Oroveso and the chorus join the heroine during the interlude between the two stanzas. In measures 17, 18, 21, and 22, Norma sings two long phrases, each consisting of five small melodic arches. The first two small arches of the melody are similar in shape to turns, and can be thought of as a kind of ornamentation. The other three melodic arches are also short and in the second statement they complete the first stanza. The music of the second stanza is the same as the first. The phrases with melodic arches, however, are
replaced by a cadenza. The accompaniment here and elsewhere consists of broken chords in the strings and supporting chords in the winds. This steady and simple accompaniment provides a subtle background to the elegant and ornamental melody. The simplicity of the accompaniment draws attention to and sets off the touches of chromaticism in the appoggiaturas and melismatic turns in the vocal writing.

Example 1.2 Bellini, *Norma*, Act I, Norma’s “Casta diva”
It is worth taking a moment to observe some of the details of Bellini’s melody, including the structure of each phrase and the composer’s use of ornamentation. In most
of the phrases, the range of the melodic fragments is limited to a third, and the fluidity of
the melody consists of fundamental intervals of thirds. For example, in the first two
measures of the melody (measures 1-2), omitting the turns, we have the tonic triad F–A–
C. The phrase begins on A, then lingers on C, and finally stops on F. Similarly, B flat–D–
F–A are the most important pitches in measures 3 and 4: the voice moves from F to A,
then lingers on D, and ends on B flat. The second feature of this melody is that much of
the ornamentation involves stepwise movement or intervals of a third. The first phrase
can again be taken as an example: the first turn appears at the seventh and eighth beats on
A. The singer must sing A and its neighbor notes, B flat and G, returning to A. Therefore,
the turn consists of four notes arranged stepwise in the interval of a third. The eleventh
and twelfth beats also involve a third (B flat–A–G). Both of these intervals of a third
unfold in the same direction, which is descending. However, there are also ascending
thirds, such as in the last three beats of measure 2 and the first three beats of measure 3
(F–G–A). Therefore, the observable feature of the melody is that it is highly conjunct and
is dominated by intervals of thirds.

Further study of the score reveals that Bellini employed an ingenious method
when constructing these phrases: the first note of any given phrase is the same as the last
note of the preceding one. For example, the first phrase of Norma’s melody begins on A
and ends on B flat. The second phrase begins on B flat, the last note of the former phrase,
and then ends on A. The rest of the aria follows in the same manner. This strategy unifies
the melody and gives it total coherence. It also gives the melody a self-generating quality,
a quality that can also be seen in the manner in which Bellini uses ornamentation in the
aria.
The two most frequently used ornaments in “Casta diva” are appoggiaturas and turns, and turns are particularly common. As can be seen in Example 1.2, there is a turn mark in the middle of the first phrase (measure 3). But there is also an unmarked turn in measure 1, at the very beginning of the phrase. In the earlier case, Bellini wrote out every note. The same situation can be found again in measure 5, following the first pitch, B flat, of the second phrase. Why would Bellini have notated some turns and not others? In bel canto performance practice of this period, the singers used improvisation to add ornamentation and embellishment to the melody, and it is possible that Bellini wrote out some of the turns in order to discourage singers from engaging in improvisation and to encourage them to adhere more closely to the score. Perhaps Bellini also wrote out the turns in order to indicate that they were not merely ornaments, but a fundamental part of his music.

Turn figures also appear later in “Casta diva.” For example, in measures 14, 17, 18, 21, and 39, Bellini exploits different versions of the ornament. In the cabaletta “Ah! bello a me ritorna,” Bellini continues to ornament the melodic line with turn figures. However, the tempo here is fast and the musical character is livelier. In this movement, Norma sings to herself and expresses her wish that Pollione will never leave her. In contrast to “Casta diva,” Norma sings a strong and powerful line, and is accompanied by Oroveso and the chorus.

In my opinion, Bellini’s turns can ultimately be interpreted in two ways. First, they are used to vary and add detail to what would otherwise be a very simple melody. Second, however, they are important elements of Bellini’s melodic writing with their emphasis on stepwise movement and the intervals of a third. Whereas in bel canto
composition and performance, ornaments had been used traditionally to decorate and embellish a melody, Bellini’s ornaments here are a crucial part of the melody. Appoggiaturas and turns in *Norma* are more than just embellishments, they are connective thematic elements. If one removes them, the essence of the line is lost.

**Part 2. Similarities of Three Scenes in *Norma***

The elegant melody of “Casta diva” is highly memorable, even if sung only twice. It is therefore not difficult to hear resemblances between the aria and the *cantabile* of the duet between Norma and Adalgisa that follows later in Act I scene 8, “Oh! rimembranza!” The structure of the scene as a whole is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1.2 The <em>solita forma</em> in Act I scene 8 of <em>Norma</em></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Movement</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Orchestra</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Recitativo</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Tempo d’attacco</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Cantabile</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cabaletta</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

At the opening of the scene, Norma walks into her dwelling anxiously and finds her servant, Clotilde, playing with her two children. Her first utterance, “Vanne, e li cela entrambi” (“Go, and hide them both”), follows a lengthy orchestral introduction. The strings play a two-part rising scalar theme, marked with a *crescendo*, which produces a
rise in tension. The recitative between Norma and Clotilde that follows allows Norma to express her anxiety about Pollione perhaps leaving. On hearing her words, “Ei tace il suo pensiero. Oh! ... s’ei fuggir tentasse ... e qui lasciarmi?” (“He does not speak his thoughts. Oh! ... if he tried to flee ... and leave me here?”), one senses that Norma already has suspicions about her husband, and is worried about him leaving and abandoning her and their children. This suspicion is the reason that Norma does not want to see her children, as she cannot help but imagine the worst. In the tempo d’attacco of the scene, Adalgisa comes to meet with Norma and to innocently reveal her secret love affair with Pollione. The two women are good friends and fellow priestesses in the Druid temple. As friends, Adalgisa comes to talk of her guilty but passionate love, and she is hoping for words of comfort from Norma. She wants to confess to the older priestess about her love affair that should not be taking place. Both women are unaware that they, in fact, love the same man, Pollione. Norma encourages Adalgisa to reveal her secret in the tempo d’attacco, and in the following movement, the cantabile “Oh! rimembranza!” they sing together in a slow duet, in which Norma reminisces about her love for Pollione and Adalgisa tells of how she met him. Uncharacteristically, there is no tempo di mezzo separating the cantabile and the cabaletta in this scene. Bellini wrote the cabaletta (or fast movement) directly following the cantabile, and in this movement Norma embraces and sympathizes with Adalgisa. The happy moment, however, is fleeting. They sing together, “Vivrai felice, felice ancora” (“You shall yet live, live happily”) and as the music begins the transition into the Act I Finale, the truth is revealed.

In comparison with “Casta diva,” Bellini chose the key of F minor/major for “Oh! rimembranza!” When Adalgisa is singing of her love for Pollione and Norma is recalling
her memories of him, the key is F minor. However, the music moves to the parallel major as both Adalgisa and Norma become more passionate in their expression. In terms of orchestration, Bellini utilized the same type of accompaniment of “O rimembranza” as he did in “Casta diva”: an arpeggiated accompaniment pattern with a sustained flute melody. As Herbert Weinstock comments: “[T]he flute introduces the melody… [and] Adalgisa will tell of her meetings with her as yet unnamed lover. Her melody (which unfortunately has an arpeggiated eighth-note accompaniment pointlessly recalling that of “Casta diva”) is drenched in very Bellinian melancholy.”

In addition to these similarities, “Oh rimembranza!” like “Casta diva,” makes repeated use of appoggiaturas. There are a total of fifteen appoggiaturas in Norma’s and Adalgisa’s parts in this slow movement. The appoggiaturas are placed, above all, at the ends of phrases. These “sighing” figures are important in communicating the emotions of both Norma and Adalgisa. Adalgisa is confessing her love and Norma is remembering when she first fell in love with Pollione. They are both in love and both feel intense guilt and anxiety because their love is secret and cannot be validated. Not only that, both women are sensitive and suffering from extreme external and internal pressures. The appoggiaturas in the number are an indication of the intensity of both women’s emotions. They produce the sound of “sighing” in every phrase.

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15 Weinstock, Vincenzo Bellini, 284.
Example 1.3 Bellini, *Norma*, Act I, Norma–Adalgisa duet, “Oh! rimembranza!” (mm. 1–10)
Ma... non m'ascolti tu?

Segue... t'a-scolto.

Sola, furtiva, al

Tempio io l'aspettai sovente;
Although “Oh! rimembranza!” and “Casta diva” share similarities, there are also differences between them. In “Casta diva,” Bellini wrote more turns than appoggiaturas, however in “Oh! rimembranza!” appoggiaturas are more dominant. One reason for this is that “Oh! rimembranza!” is a narrative scene. In other words, it is a scene in which the story is being moved forward and information is being conveyed, therefore, the text needs to be heard. The turn is a more melismatic ornament, one that results in greater elaboration of the melodic line, and so is perhaps less appropriate in a narrative-driven setting where the melody needs to be more declamatory than melodic.

There is a further scene that bears some resemblance to “Casta diva,” which is the duet between Norma and Pollione in Act II scene 10, “In mia man alfin.” The orchestral texture here again is similar to “Casta diva.” The key is also F major and the strings play an arpeggiated accompaniment. There are, of course, also some differences. The meter is now 4/4, and the flute is no longer present. The brief orchestral introduction is played by the strings, with the violins playing the theme. In this duet, Norma confronts Pollione, asking him to swear to leave Adalgisa, but Pollione rejects her demand. The music at this point sounds simplistic, but there is a focused intensity that communicates Norma’s disappointed and angry feelings. In terms of ornamentation, the melody evokes “Casta diva” in its exploitation of both Bellinian turns and appoggiaturas.

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Why are “Casta diva,” “Oh! rimembranza!” and “In mia man alfin” so similar? As far as the shared tonality of F is concerned, one must take care not to overrate the resemblances,
as Bellini originally composed “Casta diva” in G major. It is now sung in F major (and appeared in the first printed vocal score of the opera in that key), perhaps because of Pasta herself. According to David Kimbell, “Pasta at first refused to sing ‘Casta diva,’ finding it ill suited to her vocal qualities,” though her “role in the transposition of ‘Casta Diva’ from G major to F major can only be guessed at.” According to Kenneth Stern, on the other hand, the transposition may have been made to make the number more marketable as sheet music: “…to make a piece of vocal music more saleable in a wide market, a publisher would print an aria or a duet in a key that was comfortable to a majority of singers.”

Creating consistency and coherence throughout an opera is important, and surely it is one of the fundamental reasons Bellini chose to exploit similar musical elements in each scene. In addition, I would like to suggest that another reason these three numbers are similar is that they are critical moments in the portrayal of the two principal female roles. Although “Casta diva” is a hymn to the moon goddess, it is also Norma’s first aria and is therefore an opportunity for Bellini to communicate her conflicted feelings regarding her loyalty to her people and her love for Pollione. The duet between Norma and Adalgisa involves the communication of similar feelings and emotions and a similar type of love. Bellini therefore exploits “sighing” ornaments and an arpeggiated accompaniment for each character, in order to draw a connection between the two characters.

Although I have analyzed numerous details in Norma, discussing other Bellini’s operas is also significant to understanding the development of his compositional style. In

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addition, in order to have a better and more complete interpretation of Pasta’s performance and of Bellini’s operas, I will expand on the relationship between the singer and the composer in the next chapter.
Chapter II: Pasta’s Singing and Acting

In turning to the singing and performance style of Giuditta Pasta, I will take an approach that combines studying written descriptions of the soprano’s performance with further consideration of Bellini’s music and his musical development. The first point that should be noted is that Pasta was reported to have had a very wide-ranging voice, one which could sing as low as $a$ and as high as $c''$ sharp and even $d''$. According to written descriptions, the timbre of her voice had the qualities of both a soprano and a mezzo-soprano or even a contralto. This wide range and multi-colored timbre gave Pasta the ability to perform a wide variety of roles.

Early in this chapter, I will discuss three operas that Bellini wrote for Pasta in the 1830s, and compare them by considering his main compositional features. Based on this discussion, the later two parts of the chapter will focus on Pasta’s career in Paris and engage in researching balletic and theatrical influences on her performance style. I suggest that Pasta inherited the neoclassical performance that is characterized by the imitation of Greek statues. At the same time, she also applied a more dynamic style – a style of Romantic, physical acting by combining these paused gestures with graceful movements.

Part 1. Pasta in Relation to Bellini’s Operas

*Norma* was not the only opera Bellini wrote especially for Pasta. The title roles of Bellini’s *La sonnambula* (1831, Teatro Carcano, Milan) and *Beatrice di Tenda* (1833, La Fenice, Venice) were also created for her. In order to fully understand and interpret
Pasta’s performance in *Norma*, the compositional features of her roles in these other two operas also must be considered.

Before writing *La sonnambula* for Pasta, Bellini had already established his own musical style, which critics at the time described as *filosofico* (or “philosophical”). One of the first uses of this term can be found in a review of the première of the composer’s *Il pirata* (1827). According to the pioneering nineteenth-century Italian opera scholar Friedrich Lippmann, *filosofico* was a term used to indicate that Bellini took a new, more psychological approach to opera and to the treatment of human emotion. In musical terms, Bellini took a simpler and more restrained approach to composition and paid more attention than had his predecessors to the relationship between the text and the music. Another expression used to describe Bellini’s approach to operatic composition is *canto declamato* (“declamatory singing”). As Mary Ann Smart explains in her article “Bellini’s Fall from Grace,” *canto declamato* refers to a melodic style in which singing approximates speech; recitative, on the other hand, becomes “more prominent, more melodically vivid, more emotionally intense.”

Through these means, the usual operatic distinction between aria and recitative became less clear. The recitatives that Bellini composed between 1827 and 1829 not only function in the usual way of communicating the opera’s plot, they also communicate a great deal of emotion. At the same time, the melodic style of Bellini’s arias is simpler than was customary in earlier *bel canto* operas.

In spite of the fact that *La sonnambula* and *Norma* premièred in the same year (1831), Bellini’s earlier opera, *La sonnambula*, includes much more coloratura. Indeed, some critics have described the writing in *La sonnambula* as a regression to the more florid style when compared with the composer’s experiments in declamatory style. I

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18 Mary Ann Smart, “Bellini’s Fall From Grace,” *Opera* 53, no. 3 (March, 2002), 278.
suggest, however, that the plot of the opera encouraged Bellini to write in this way. The title role of *La sonnambula* is Amina, a young girl who sleepwalks. In the early nineteenth century people were unfamiliar with this physical ailment and considered it not only strange but even a symptom of insanity. Bellini’s uses coloratura writing to portray Amina’s idiosyncracy and even to suggest madness. Compared with *La sonnambula*, critics viewed *Norma* as much more melodically restrained. With the exception of “Casta diva,” many of the numbers in *Norma* are relatively declamatory and Bellini used simple ornamentation such as appoggiaturas rather than more elaborate forms of embellishments.

At the same time, *La sonnambula* and *Norma* share some features. Indeed, opera scholars generally agree that the year 1831 marked an important turning point in Bellini’s compositional style. *La sonnambula* in particular inaugurates a new Bellinian style of “long melody.” For example, in Amina’s *cantabile* “Ah! non credea mirarti” in the finale of Act II, one can observe not only the florid writing previously discussed, but also a very long melodic line.
Example 2.1 Bellini, *La sonnambula*, Act II, Amina’s “Ah! non credea mirarti”

Similarly, in *Norma*, very long melodic lines can be found in arias such as “Casta diva” and “Oh non tremare, o perfido” in the finale of Act I. The leading scholar of *bel canto* singing and performance, Philip Gossett, has described the melody of “Casta diva” as doubling “back again and again, and even when [it] seems almost ready to conclude, the composer postpones its fall once more.”

Richard Wagner, a composer noted for his rejection of the precepts of Italian opera, admired Bellini’s music, stating: “They all think me an ogre with regard to Italian music and place me in opposition to Bellini. But no, no,

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19 *Norma*, by Vincenzo Bellini, libretto by Felice Romani, performed by Sondra Radvanovsky, Aldksandrs Antonenko, James Morris, Kate Aldrich, Eduardo Valdes, and Sian Davies, Metropolitan Opera Chorus and Orchestra, conducted by Riccardo Frizza, program note by Philip Gossett, Lincoln Center, New York City, November 1, 2013.
a thousand times no. Bellini is one of my predilections: his music is all heart, closely, intimately linked to the word… Bellini wrote melodies lovelier than one’s dream.”

Regarding Pasta’s performance in *La sonnambula*, a critic in the journal *L’Eco* compared Pasta’s voice with the castrato Luigi Marchesi, and admired her graceful singing. He continued “Madame Pasta plays her role, with what truth, with what expression, and with what appropriate and perfect taste…[S]he creates the illusion but, we must say frankly, her figure is rather too well endowed for the character she represents.” Pasta’s and other singers’ performances brought extreme success at the première of the opera. Her creation of Amina became the model of this role.

In addition to *La sonnambula* and *Norma*, *Beatrice di Tenda* was also written for Pasta. The title role of the opera is Beatrice, a widow married to the dissolute Duke Filippo. Filippo, tired with Beatrice’s aging, falls in love with one of Beatrice’s young ladies-in-waiting. Filippo then accuses Beatrice of adultery (she is, of course, innocent), because he wants to get rid of her. In the final scene of the opera Beatrice dies. Bellini initially had no plans to set this story to music, but after watching Antonio Monticini’s balletic setting of the subject, which was staged at La Scala in 1832, Pasta suggested Bellini should write an opera on the subject for her. Unfortunately, the soprano’s suggestion and her enthusiasm for the role did not ensure the success of the première. One reason for the failure of *Beatrice di Tenda* was that the librettist, Romani (also the librettist of *Norma*), did not complete his work on time, resulting in the première of the

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opera being delayed. Despite the failure of *Beatrice di Tenda*, the music has long melodies similar to those found in *La sonnambula* and *Norma*.

All three of these operas by Bellini were written for Pasta and were premièred in the early 1830s. They are representative of the peak of Pasta’s career. In addition to this period, one must investigate her early career and also her most important period, when she was in Paris in the 1820s.

**Part 2. Attrice cantante: Pasta in Paris**

In the early nineteenth century, a singer’s reputation was based on a foundation of many years of study and performances and Pasta’s career followed this rule. After studying in Milan, she made her debut in the première of Giuseppe Scappa’s *Le tre Eleonore* at the Teatro degli Accademici Filodrammatici in 1816, when she was only nineteen years old. As with other young singers, she gradually gained experience. A particularly significant turning point in these early years was 1821-1822, when she moved to Paris. At the same time, her performances revealed her talents and attracted Parisians’ attention. During these two years she established an important reputation as a singer and an actress. The two most important works in her repertory in these years were Rossini’s *Otello* (1816) and Niccolò Zingarelli’s *Giulietta e Romeo* (1796).

Pasta first sang the role of Desdemona in Rossini’s *Otello* at the Théâtre Italien on June 5, 1821.22 The opera was of course based on Shakespeare’s *Othello*, but perhaps, as we will see, it was also influenced by a contemporary balletic setting, *Otello* (1818), with music and choreography by Salvatore Viganò (1769–1821) and danced by Antonietta Pallerini (1790–1870), who may have influenced Pasta’s acting. Pasta’s performances as

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22 Théâtre Italien is a company founded by Margerite Brunet in 1801.
Desdemona mark the moment when French critics and audiences first noticed the singer’s talents. Pasta performed the role of Desdemona for three months, which she alternated with appearances in Mozart’s *Don Giovanni* as Donna Elvira. Beginning on August 21, 1821, Pasta revived the travesty role of Romeo in Zingarelli’s *Giulietta e Romeo*, and again her performances were very well received.

Written descriptions of Pasta in this period suggest that critics had different opinions about her voice, some liking it, others expressing reservations. It is much more difficult to find descriptions of her physical expression onstage or her use of gestures in her early career in Paris. However, according to letter written to Pasta and previous studies to be explored below, I would like to suggest that Pasta was becoming a physically distinctive singer and even developing an acting style that was influenced by early nineteenth-century trends in balletic and choreographic expression. We know, for example, that the dancer Pallerini, who played the role of Desdemona in the balletic version of *Otello*, was an acquaintance of Pasta and may have had an influence on the singer. There is much evidence to indicate that these two artists had a very close relationship. As early as 1817, in Italy, Pasta had spent time with Pallerini. Before the visit, the dancer had written to her:

> It will be wonderful to see you, and hear that enchanting voice which delights the difficult Parisian ears, and makes them speak of you with so much enthusiasm… I fear that all the adulation from the Capital of the World may have made you colder towards me. Forgive this conveyance of jealousy, which comes from the most passionate friendship, which I have always brought you and continue to bring you.\(^{23}\)

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According to this letter, Pasta and Pallerini not only knew each other; other references indicate that they shared the stage on a number of occasions, including the first performance of *Norma* at La Scala.\(^{24}\) Although we cannot know exactly how Pallerini influenced Pasta during the première of *Norma*, one can conclude that the dancer had a very close relationship with the soprano, at least.

In a larger historical context, French ballet at that time also prevailed and influenced other countries’ choreography. Since we know that singers and dancers had relationships, and that they performed not only in their own countries but also travelled to many other countries, one can hypothesize that French ballet may have influenced Italian dancers, and even operatic performers. For example, it is quite possible in addition to their friendly letters that Pallerini and Pasta discussed or exchanged their ideas regarding physical performance.

Although, at the present time, the evidence cannot prove that Pallerini influenced Pasta’s physical acting, it is likely the case. In order to understand the significance of this balletic influence, one should understand a little about Viganò, the choreographer responsible for the balletic setting of *Otello* in which Pallerini appeared. Viganò was born in Naples and was known for the majority of his career as a choreographer and dancer. During the last few years of his career he also composed music for ballet. Influenced by French balletic traditions, he created his own style of “coreodramma” that placed the

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Scusa questi trasporti di gelosia che provengono dalla svisceratissima amicizia che ti ho sempre portato e ti porto.” All translations are my own unless otherwise stated.

\(^{24}\) See Rutherford, “‘La cantante delle passioni’,“ 115, footnote 38.
emphasis on drama. According to the Italian writer Count Carlo Ritorni, who studied Viganò’s coreodramma, in these works Viganò developed “an immediately comprehensible gestural language that would exist in its own right rather than as a translation of spoken dialogue and that would require no programme.” Up to this point the principles of ballet had been based on the imitation of nature and included a significant pantomimic element. Movement and gesture were used to represent concrete ideas or texts. Viganò broke with this tradition by using more movement for its own sake, including in unlikely subjects such as tragic works with mythological or allegorical plots. According to Giannandrea Poesio, he favored “rhythmic movement that corresponded more directly to the psychological nuances of the plot.” He also pioneered new visual effects in the staging.

Viganò’s idea of “coreodramma” impacted Pallerini’s movement and gesture when she danced as Desdemona in Otello. In addition, perhaps Pallerini influenced Pasta’s acting in Rossini’s Otello. Pasta’s acquaintanceship and even friendship with Pallerini is referred to in several early nineteenth-century sources. The scholar of Italian operas, Paolo Russo, has gone so far as to suggest that their relationship was close enough that “if [Pasta] did not take acting lessons with Pallerini, her [Pasta’s] friend certainly contributed to her peculiar identity as an actress.” Since ballet does not

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26 Ibid.


involve words (at least not literally and explicitly), a dancer must be a type of actor when performing a given role, in the use of their body. Pallerini was almost certainly a gifted actress in this sense, able to communicate plot and emotion physically. The physical language Pallerini exploited seems to have been specifically imitative of statues. Ritorni commented on her acting: “Pallerini fated a form and an appearance that resembled the model of a Greek statue, and rather than the sharp contours of the sculpture that the soft traits of pictures.”

As Russo has explained, the imitation of statuary and a tendency to hold the body in frozen poses was typical of physical expression in theater more generally in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and was associated with neoclassicism and a neoclassicist approach to movement and gesture. One cannot prove that Viganò or Pallerini influenced Pasta when she performed Rossini’s *Otello*, but we do know that Pasta applied frozen poses and imitative gestures during her performance. Therefore, based on what we know about the friendship between them, I hypothesize that Vigonò and Pallerini may have influenced Pasta’s acting, especially her neoclassical style.

Pasta spent a second important period in Paris, in 1822–1824. Again, she performed at the Théâtre Italien, adding new works to her repertoire. The most significant of these was Simon Mayr’s *Medea in Corinto* (1813), which, after Rossini’s *Otello*, would turn out to be the second most important opera in Pasta’s career. *Medea* is a *melodramma tragico* in two acts. The soprano Isabella Colbran (also Rossini’s wife), who had created the role of Desdemona in 1816, also created the role of Medea; the tenor

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Andrea Nozzari played Jason, and the tenor Manuel García played Adgeus. The opera was successful from its première, but it enjoyed new popularity when Pasta began performing it in the 1820s.

The role of Medea is very different from that of Desdemona. Whether in Viganò’s ballet or Rossini’s opera, Shakespeare’s heroine is a resigned and self-sacrificing personality. She is weak and in need of others’ protection, though she also demonstrates a certain stubbornness. The classical Medea, on the other hand, has supernatural powers as well as being a mother. The opera includes scenes of murder and infanticide, including Medea killing her brother, her children and, finally, her husband’s new bride Creusa. If in Otello Pasta drew on a neoclassical aesthetic for her physicality, she may have been encouraged by the violent elements in Medea to exploit a more dynamic and dramatic physical style in that opera. Reviews of her Desdemona had referred rather vaguely to her physicality, but with Medea critics began to make repeated references to her acting and physical expression.

One example comes from a few years after Pasta’s first performances as Medea at the Théâtre Italien, when she appeared in the same opera in London in 1826 (where she was similarly well-received). A critic writing in the Quarterly Musical Magazine observed:

The Medea of this great actress as well as singer was one of the most classical illustrations of classic antiquity the stage has ever boasted. Few indeed are the triumphs of a similar kind which opera can show, while they are the continual attributes of the two other species of dramatic entertainment – the tragedy and the ballet. It is a peculiar praise of Madame Pasta, that she united to a great degree the several excellences of the drama, the opera and the ballet. Mind, voice and action, all combined to render this performance complete, and it would be difficult to say which
was most predominantly striking. Musicians have left the King’s Theater, without any recollection of the musical traits – so powerful were the effects of the conception and the acting, while persons whose main attention has been given to the drama have been chiefly moved by the admirable art of the singer.31

The critic does not only single out her acting and physicality. He also explicitly describes her acting as neoclassical and connects her work with spoken stage work and with ballet. Although he did not indicate that Pasta was influenced from whom or from which specific drama or ballet, one cannot deny that the critic had already considered that Pasta drew her acting styles from the opera, spoken tragedy and the ballet, together.

Another review offers a little more detail about Pasta’s performance as Medea. According to this critic, during the finale of Act I with Jason, when the soprano has only two notes to sing, “She gave them with the whole power of her voice, at the same instant flung wide her arms above her head, and her whole figure seemed to dilate with a passionate majesty that can only be understood when seen, and when seen too as the climax of the preceding expostulation.”32 Pasta’s flinging arms and holding pose, in some way, is an approach of neoclassical performance. At the same time, her arms are also an element of dynamism. Before the eighteenth century, during the acting in the spoken theater, performers’ arms were never allowed over their heads. In the early nineteenth century, however, it was common to see a performer fling only one arm above the head. In order to express her dramatic emotions, Pasta had already used her open arms in some scenes.

Pasta remained in Paris during the remainder of 1825 and appeared in the title role in Rossini’s Semiramide in 1826 (her debut of this opera was in London, in 1824). By

32 Ibid., 517.
this time she had attracted the attention of a writer who would produce the most interesting and extensive written descriptions of her voice and performance style, the French critic and novelist Stendhal (whose real name is Marie-Henri Beyle, 1783–1842). Stendhal regarded Pasta very highly and devoted an entire chapter to her in his now celebrated *Vie de Rossini* (“Life of Rossini”), which was published in 1824. In three paragraphs at the beginning of this chapter Stendhal expresses his wish that Rossini would write an opera entirely for her. Finally in 1825, Rossini specifically wrote *Il viaggio a Reims* for Pasta. Stendhal goes on to distinguish Pasta from other contemporary singers because of her “ideal beauty.” Stendhal continues that Pasta is “an actress who is young and beautiful; who is both intelligent and sensitive; whose gestures never deteriorate from the plainest and most natural modes of simplicity, and yet manage to keep faith with the purest ideals of formal beauty.” He also describes Pasta’s voice, writing that it is “a voice which never fails to thrill our very souls with the passionate exaltation which we used, long ago, to capture from the great masters of the Golden Age; a voice which can weave a spell of magic about the plainest word in the plainest recitative; a voice whose compelling inflexions can subdue the most recalcitrant and obdurate hearts, and oblige them to share in the emotions which radiate from some great aria.” From this quotation, one can sense that Stendhal greatly admired Pasta’s talent.

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33 The roles composed specifically for Pasta include Baronessa Isabella in *Le tre Eleonore* (Giuseppe Scappa, 1816), Corinna in *Il viaggio a Reims* (Rossini, 1825), Giuditta in *Giuditta* (Pietro Raimondi, 1826), Elisa in *La contesa* (Pietro Ray, 1816), Arminio in *Arminio* (Stefano Pavesi, 1821), Matilde in *La sposa fedele* (Giovanni Pacini, 1819), Zora in *La schiava in Bagdad* (Pacini, 1820), Niobe in *Niobe* (Pacini, 1826), Ippolito in *Fedra* (Ferdinando Orlandi, 1820), Emma in *Emma d’Antiochia* (Mercadante, 1834), Bianca in *Ugo, Conte di Parigi* (Donizetti, 1832), Anna Bolena in *Anna Bolena* (Donizetti, 1830), Amina in *La sonnambula* (Bellini, 1831), Norma in *Norma* (Bellini, 1831), and Beatrice in *Beatrice di Tenda* (Bellini, 1833). See Stern, *Giuditta Pasta: A Life on the Lyric Stage*, 512. See also Rutherford, “‘La Cantante delle Passioni,’” 123, footnote 75.

34 Stendhal, *Vie de Rossini*, 377.

He compares Pasta with the great voices from the “Golden Age.” Stendhal indicates that the “Golden Age” refers to the period when castrati dominated the operatic stage. He included several great masters’ names including Gasparo Pacchiarotti (1740-1821, Italian male soprano), Lodovico Marchesi (1755-1829, Italian male soprano) and Girolamo Crescentini (1766-1846, Italian male mezzo-soprano, and the last representative of the old tradition), to express that Pasta had the same pure voice as these castrati who always brought the most natural sound to our souls. In addition, Stendhal states that Pasta can not only sing beautiful arias which affect audiences’ emotions, but that she also has the talent to sing restrained recitatives in a non-plain way, which also causes people to feel her passion.

As far as the soprano’s acting is concerned, Stendhal claimed that Pasta was supremely gifted and a genius of tragic acting, finally sealing her reputation as one of the leading singing actresses of the time. Like other writers, he is vague about specific details, although he observes that the movements with which she accompanied her singing were often highly nuanced. According to Stendhal, Pasta treated physical movement not as an obstacle but as a complement to her voice. Stendhal also notes that by this point people had become curious about whether anyone had taught Pasta to act, suggesting that it was clear that she had been the recipient of some kind of outside influence or advice. He notes that he had “heard” that she was influenced by Pallerini and by the Italian actor, Giuseppe De’ Marini (1772–1829). He concludes, however, that “no-one” taught her and that her acting came rather from her heart and from her observations of life.

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Part 3. *Attrice cantante: Other Theatrical Influences*

As I have begun to suggest, in the nineteenth century, many connections existed between singers, dancers, and actors. These connections not only resulted in friendships but also in certain cases, may have had an influence on these figures’ performances. As a young singer in Italy, Pasta may have been shaped in part by her acquaintanceship with the dancer Pallerini, who employed a neoclassical approach to gesture and physical expression. Pasta perhaps brought this approach with her to Paris, but as she was developing as a performer in Paris she also came under new influences, this time from the world of spoken theater.

A particularly notable figure was the celebrated French tragic actor François-Joseph Talma (1763—1826). Talma witnessed Pasta’s performances at the Théâtre Italien in Rossini’s *Tancredi* and Zingarelli’s *Giulietta e Romeo* in 1826, and made a number of substantial claims about them. Of her acting he declared: “This is the first time I’ve seen tragedy acted, what took me a year of study she knows instinctively.”37 He also wrote that: “Here is a woman [from] whom I can still learn. One turn of her beautiful head, one glance of her eye, one light motion of her hand, is with her, sufficient to express a passion.”38 When Talma had an opportunity to meet Pasta in Paris in 1826, he said: “Madame, you realize the ideal of which I have dreamed, you possess the secrets I have sought to discover during my entire theatrical career – that to touch the heart is the true aim of the tragic artist.”39

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Stendhal noticed and referred to the relationship between Talma and Pasta as early as the 1820s. In his *Vie de Rossini*, Stendhal claimed that Pasta had “talents as a tragic actress almost as outstanding as those of Talma.”\(^{40}\) The relationship between the two performers may have been even more direct and may date from before Pasta’s years in Paris. According to a description in the British press on June 19, 1817, the soprano was involved in a performance at the King’s Theater in London that was entitled “Grand Concert and Recitations.” Talma was also involved, “interspers[ing]” some kind of spoken performance between the musical numbers. The newspaper *The Times*, noted that Talma’s appearance was “[T]he great attraction of the evening.”\(^{41}\)

Regarding Talma’s acting that evening, the same writer observed: “He presented a most interesting picture of wild emotion but it was produced by means to which few English actors could safely resort… When Talma as Oedipus…rushed off the stage…he pronounced the word ‘immobile’ and after a lapse of several seconds returned to proceed with the succeeding line.”\(^{42}\) This description, which emphasizes the drama and dynamism of Talma’s movements, and even his interruption of a line of the play by leaving the stage, suggests that his approach to acting was more Romantic than neoclassical.

Another important figure whose name appears frequently in discussions of Pasta’s acting, is Sarah Siddons (1755—1831), a British theater actress who was part of the famous Kemble acting family and was often referred to as the “Queen of Tragedy.” If descriptions of Talma’s acting emphasized the dynamism of his movements, descriptions of Siddons centered on her facial expressions and her eyes. The actress’s eyes were

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\(^{40}\) Stendhal, *Vie de Rossini*, 52.

\(^{41}\) [Review of “Grand Concert and Recitations”] *The Times*, June 20, 1817, quoted in Russo, “Giuditta Pasta: Cantante Pantomimica,” 507.

\(^{42}\) Ibid.
apparently “piercing” and “could be seen to sparkle and glare from an incredible distance on the stage,” even though theaters were often lit only by candles at the time. Siddons also tended to use her upper body for characterization. According to one observer: “[Siddons’s] action is more from the shoulder, and we now first began to hear of the perfect form of Mrs. Siddons’s arm.”

Critics had varying opinions about Siddons’s acting: some said it was too artificial and lacked naturalness; others described it as highly natural and unforced. Siddons certainly favored naturalness and simplicity in her costuming and physical appearance. She modeled her hair on the neat and tidy look of classical statuary. As the theater historian, Michael R. Booth, has noted, for her attire Siddons preferred the “classically draped costume instead of the…powdered head-dress and hooped skirt” that had been traditional for tragic actresses. In terms of her physical gestures and her arms, on the other hand, surviving imagery suggests that she exploited a style which was unbalanced and asymmetrical. In Gilbert Austin’s *Chironomia; or a Treatise on Rhetorical Delivery* (1806), a significant treatise on teaching rhetoric in the first decade of the nineteenth century, for example, the illustrations for which are based on sketches of Siddons (Figure 2.1), one can see that one of her arms is raised and the other is down at the side of her body.

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46 Gilbert Austin, ed. M. M. Robb and Lester Thonssen, *Chironomia; or a Treatise on Rhetorical Delivery* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1966), plate 11.
Both Talma and Siddons were ultimately transitional figures: their approach to acting and physical expression lay somewhere between the kind of neoclassical approach employed by the dancer Pallerini and a more Romantic emphasis on dynamism and using the body to produce what was often described as a “living” stage picture. Descriptions of Talma suggest that, rather than holding frozen poses, he used continuous gestures or movements to communicate the dramatic situation. Images of Siddons, meanwhile, emphasize her naturalness but also a perhaps Romantic irregularity and asymmetry. How Pasta as a performer may have been influenced by all of this is suggested by a pair of images of the soprano in the role of Mayr’s Medea (Figure 2.2). In this scene, Medea is

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preparing to kill her children because her husband has betrayed her and she is angry and full of hatred. In the images, Pasta’s facial expressions are prominently depicted; her eyes are wide open, she is frowning, and her mouth is slightly open. The position of Pasta’s arms, however, is very different from Siddons’s. In the first image she has them folded over her body, a dagger in one hand and the other hand placed on her chest. In the second image, her arms are stretched out to her children, which suggests the character’s strength of purpose but conflicted situation. Previously, as a mother, Medea’s arms would have been used to protect and shelter her two children. Now she is using her arms to drag her children toward death.
Unlike Pasta’s various encounters with Talma, we do not know whether Pasta ever had any direct interaction with Siddons. Even when Siddons retired from the stage in 1812, Pasta had not yet given her career debut. Many scholars, however, have referred to the relationship between Pasta and Siddons, and compared their acting styles to show that perhaps Pasta was influenced by Siddons’s performances. At least, Pasta perhaps indirectly heard about Siddons’s distinctively natural acting.
In the late 1820s, Pasta’s career in any case entered a new phase, when the singer returned to Italy and finally began collaborating with composers, including Gaetano Donizetti, for whom she created the title role of *Anna Bolena* (1830), and with Bellini in *La sonnambula* and *Norma*. The reviews of Pasta’s acting at the première of *Anna Bolena* were mixed. Some were positive: a critic from the newspaper in Milan, *L’Eco*, wrote, for example, that “The severity in her way of reciting and acting are what constitute that singing actress that she is.”  

48 (I translated this and the original text is shown in the footnote.) Others, however, were negative: another reviewer wrote that “[Pasta] as a singer and actress left something to be desired… These are substituted by certain refinements of action, which, as such, are easily distinguished, but not always well [enunciated].”  

49 As for Pasta’s performance in *La sonnambula*, a British reviewer in *The Court Journal* wrote of her that she “…had the same energy, the same marvelous physical power, that rendered her then, what she still is, the greatest actress in the world.”  


49 Ibid., “[Pasta] come cantante e come attrice, lasciò a desiderare alcune cose … Vi supplisce essa con certe ricercatezze d’azione, che per tali si distinguono sempre, e che non sono sempre bene annicchiate.”  

Chapter III: Singing and Acting in *Norma*

Part 1. Pasta and Other Contemporary Sopranos

As I have suggested, Pasta enjoyed a wide social circle and seems to have had connections with dancers and actors who may have influenced her style of performance. As I turn now to look specifically at Pasta as Norma, I will begin by placing her in the context of one final group of early nineteenth-century performers; some of the other leading *bel canto* sopranos of the period.

Among the most important of these singers was a figure already mentioned, the soprano Isabella Colbran (1785–1845). Colbran was one of the most famous coloratura sopranos of the first half of the nineteenth century; she married Gioacchino Rossini in 1822 and he created many roles for her. The couple collaborated on a number of operas, but the first opera that brought Colbran to widespread attention as an actress as well as a singer, was Rossini’s *Elisabetta, regina d’Inghilterra* (1818), in which she performed the title role of Elizabeth, Queen of England. *Elisabetta* is not an opera that scholars have given much attention. However, in his *Vie de Rossini*, Stendhal went so far as to devote two chapters to it. Stendhal also discusses Colbran’s acting and reports:

Signorina Colbran was magnificent; she allowed herself no gestures; she simply paced up and down, unable to control herself, to force herself into stillness while she awaited the setting of the stage and the arrival of her false lover; her eyes alone betrayed that her mind was burning with the single word which inexorably would send her lover to his death. This is precisely the sort of situation which operatic music requires and thrives on.\(^\text{51}\)

\(^{51}\) Stendhal, *Vie de Rossini*, 159.
In his description Stendhal emphasizes the absence of gesture in Colbran’s performance and her overall physical restraint. He also draws attention to Colbran’s face and in particular, her eyes. In another part of his discussion he repeats the idea that Colbran used few gestures, writing that “Colbran, as Elizabeth...did nothing melodramatic, never descended to what are vulgarly called tragedy-queen poses...Her glance was that of a queen whose fury is restrained only by a last rag of pride; her whole presence was that of a woman who still has beauty, and who for years has grown accustomed to beholding her first hint of a whim followed by the swiftest obedience.”

It is difficult to know exactly how to compare these descriptions with the descriptions and imagery of Talma and Siddons discussed earlier: when Stendhal describes Colbran’s restraint and her absence of “tragedy-queen poses,” does he mean in relation to actors or in relation to singers? It seems likely that he is comparing Colbran with other singers and that the soprano’s acting was simple and restrained compared to what had been seen previously on the operatic stage. But if Colbran was more restrained and dignified than her bel canto predecessors, Stendhal ultimately preferred Pasta’s acting, concluding after seeing both singers in Rossini’s Otello that: “Madame Pasta...holds over her rival, Signorina Colbran.”

The soprano Giulia Grisi (1811–1869) was not only a colleague and collaborator of Pasta, but also in many ways her follower and successor. Grisi thought of Pasta as a model, working with her and learning from her. Like Pasta, Grisi first made her name in Paris at the Théâtre Italien, and in Italy she performed with Pasta in the première of

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52 Stendhal, *Vie de Rossini*, 164.
53 Ibid., 232.
Norma, as Adalgisa. Two years after the première, in 1833, she then herself became a famous Norma, and in 1835 she created the role of Elvira in Bellini’s I puritani.

Although the première of Norma was not a success, Grisi as Adalgisa was well received, and when she began to appear as Norma from 1833, she was very popular. A critic writing for the Musical World wrote of her in the role in December 1834:

In this character, Grisi is not to be approached, for all those attributes which have given her best distinction are displayed there in their fullest splendor. Her singing may be rivaled, but hardly her embodiment of ungovernable and emotion…. In the scene where she discovers the treachery of Pollio[ne]… she exhibits a power, bordering on the sublime, which belongs exclusively to her, giving to the character of the insulted priestess a dramatic importance which would be remarkable even if entirely separated from the vocal preeminence with which it is allied.54

This reviewer’s description suggests that Grisi was less restrained and more physically expressive than Colbran. Perhaps due to this, however, the soprano attracted criticism. Some compared her unfavorably with Pasta, commenting that “Her [Grisi’s] Norma was ostentatiously modeled on that [of] Pasta. Her acting showed less the exercise of reflection and study than the rich, uncultivated, imperious nature of a most beautiful and adroit southern woman.”55

In addition to Grisi, the other singer who was an important contemporary of Pasta and who also performed Norma after her was the soprano Maria Malibran (1808–1836). Malibran was a great singer who, like Pasta, had an unusual voice, which had the range and qualities of both a soprano and a mezzo-soprano. In her brief career – she died very young, when she was only 28 – Malibran was repeatedly compared to Pasta and may

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54 Ferris, Great Singers, 79.
55 Ibid., 108.
have deliberately set herself up as a rival. This comparison and rivalry included the role of Norma. Malibran first sang the role of Norma on February 23, 1834, at the San Carlo in Naples. Two months later, on May 15, she brought *Norma* to La Scala in Milan, at the same time making her debut at this theater.

After Malibran’s performance in Milan, opera lovers divided into two groups, Pastists and Malibranists, and each sought to defend their diva. The Pastists criticized Malibran’s Norma and claimed that she had seemed nervous as a performer. The Malibranists, however, thought that Malibran had exceeded anything that had been achieved by Pasta and even that her Norma represented a new acting style. According to one of Malibran’s biographers, Howard Bushnell, Pasta seemed to audiences at the time to be neoclassical in her approach, while Malibran (to quote Bushnell) exploited “an emotional realism that replaced the accepted attitudes and gestures hitherto used to portray a character’s sentiment. Her emotions, although carefully analyzed in advance, were felt rather than portrayed, and she varied her performances as new subtleties of her part occurred to her.”

The historian of singing, Susan Rutherford, has gone further, exploring an occasion a year later (in 1835) when the two singers performed in two different productions of *Norma*, and further comparisons were made. Although Rutherford is not explicit regarding the dates of these two productions, this is a clearly different occasion from the one mentioned in the preceding paragraph due to the difference in years. Drawing on the discussions that took place, Rutherford comes to a number of significant conclusions regarding the difference between the two singers, arguing that Malibran’s

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approach was more Romantic and freer, particularly in the timing of her gestures and movements in relation to the music. Pasta, on the other hand, employed a more neoclassical acting style, one in which her movements being more closely timed with the music and that ultimately produced a “single, unified expression” of music and gesture.

According to these comparisons among Pasta and other sopranos who were active during the early nineteenth century, one can see that Pasta balanced her physical performances between neoclassical, frozen poses and Romantic, dramatic movements. She neither employed single restrained gestures as did Colbran, nor were her movements too free as Malibran’s were described. Pasta combined both of these acting styles and became the connection and transition between them, and subsequently influenced other sopranos, including Grisi.

Part 2. “Sighing” Ornaments

As was discussed in the Introduction and in Chapter I, even though by 1831 Pasta was known as a great singing actress, *Norma* was nonetheless an opera written in the *bel canto* tradition, which was both a compositional style and a style of singing and performance which emphasized the voice and vocal virtuosity. In her overall career, Pasta’s acting was one of the elements of being a *bel canto* “singing actress” in that period. As was mentioned earlier, the term “*bel canto*” only began to be used in the second half of the nineteenth century (that is, retrospectively), at a time when the compositional style was moving into decline. It is generally used now to refer to a composition and performance style from the second half of the eighteenth and the first half of the nineteenth century. The historian of singing, Rodolfo Celletti, has even gone
so far as to define _bel canto_ as a fundamentally _Baroque_ style and aesthetic. Celletti emphasizes the importance of fantasy and hedonism in the _bel canto_ (and the Baroque) approach to the voice and vocal expression, writing: “Italian opera developed in the direction of hedonism and virtuosity because it was the offspring of the Baroque. But in that it was not an isolated phenomenon. All the music of the period was of a virtuoso and hedonistic nature, inspired by the same sense of amazement as were the aim and object of the poets, the painters, the sculptors, and the architects.”

If _bel canto_, however, was hedonistic in its approach to the voice, encouraging singers to aim for a sensuously full, rich, sweet tone and smooth phrasing, it was also a style of composition and performance that sought to imitate the natural world. This included the imitation not only of the natural, physical environment, but also of human emotions. In the richness and the smoothness of their tone, and in their many ornaments both written and improvised, singers sought to imitate human passion and present it in a type of abstract, transfigured form. In the score, Bellini uses clear and direct forms and symbolic language to mimic speaking tones in specific emotions. For example, appoggiaturas have historically been used to imitate sighs, and turns imitate sobs or joyful sounds. In vocalization, the imitation pivots not only on the singing, the concrete manner in which to transform scores into voices, but also on the physical acting, which is essential to operatic singing. As Pasta was already known as a singing actress and the creator of Norma, she may have performed exclusively in her own way in the opera.

The appoggiatura is the shortest and the simplest melodic embellishment, and it is the basic form and foundation for other forms of vocal and musical ornamentation. It first began to be used widely in the Renaissance and reached one peak of its usage in the

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57 Celletti, _A History of Bel Canto_, 2.
Baroque period. In the Classic and Romantic periods appoggiaturas were also used widely and in a variety of ways. The critic and scholar, Will Crutchfield, has written one of the most significant studies of the appoggiatura.\footnote{Will Crutchfield, “The Prosodic Appoggiatura in the Music of Mozart and His Contemporaries,” \textit{Journal of the American Musicological Society} 42, no. 2 (Summer, 1989), 229-274.} Drawing on eighteenth-century treatises and music (including that of Mozart), he makes a distinction between “prosodic” and “melodic” (or “non-prosodic”) appoggiaturas. For Crutchfield, “prosodic appoggiaturas” are those that “express…weight on an accented syllable of text and find [their] resolution on a weak syllable.”\footnote{Ibid., 229.} “Melodic appoggiaturas,” on the other hand, are musically the same but are sung on a single syllable of text and therefore do not need to resolve melodically because of any “prosodic mandate.” Along with those that were written out by composers, singers in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries conventionally added appoggiaturas to melodies where there were repeated notes. Addressing singers today, Crutchfield argues that performers must endeavor to be aware of the difference between prosodic and melodic appoggiaturas, and they must consider carefully whether appoggiaturas should be added at every repetition of a given pair of notes or phrase. Crutchfield finally discusses the relationship between appoggiaturas and declamation. Appoggiaturas tend to appear in larger numbers in recitatives than in arias as they are used to give declamatory emphasis to text. As a result, when the melodic writing in arias is simpler and more declamatory, such as in \textit{Norma} and in arias such as “Casta diva,” appoggiaturas tend to appear with greater frequency.

Simon Maguire, Mary Ann Smart, and Melina Esse have produced more recent studies of the appoggiatura. Like Crutchfield, Maguire emphasizes the role appoggiaturas
play in drawing attention to specific moments of a declaimed text.\footnote{Maguire, *Vincenzo Bellini*, 176.} He focuses on the phenomenon not in Mozart, but in *bel canto*, and notes that it becomes less of a feature in later Italian operas, such as those of Verdi. Melina Esse, meanwhile, explores the subject of the appoggiatura from a variety of musical, aesthetic, literary, and performative perspectives.\footnote{See Esse, “Speaking and Sighing,” 7-45, and Rutherford, “‘La cantante delle passioni,’” 107-138.} She focuses on the example of Bellini’s opera, *La straniera* (1829), which makes extensive use of *canto declamato*. As was discussed in Chapter II, this is a term referring to a style of singing which is written to resemble speech. When Bellini wrote in a *canto declamato* style, he kept the orchestral accompaniment simple, and this simplicity allowed him to pay greater attention to the relationship of the text and to the melody, which includes an extensive use of appoggiaturas. In her article, Esse argues that the overall sense of restraint in Bellini’s operas from this period was not only produced by *canto declamato*, but was also by singers’ bodies in performance, including the very literal physical restraint of the corset. Here we can see explicit connections being made between musical detail and the actual physical body of the performer, plus her expression of physical as well as vocal emotion.

Mary Ann Smart is even more explicit in drawing a connection between musical figures and the expression of emotions.\footnote{See Smart, “Bellini’s Unseen Voices,” 73-74, 81-86.} She focuses on two Bellinian operas, *Il pirata* (1827) and *I puritani* (1835), and explores the appoggiatura’s potential as a melodic imitation of human sighing and groaning. She includes in her discussion a variety of melodic nuances that can be found in Bellini’s melodies, more than appoggiaturas alone. After analyzing the details of these two operas, Smart concludes that Bellini exploited
what contemporaries called “subjective imitation” or “sentimental imitation,” using figures such as appoggiaturas to encourage audiences to feel empathy for his characters, even when they are singing offstage and heard only as disembodied voices.

As previously discussed, Bellini employed many appoggiaturas in the duet between Norma and Adalgisa in Act I. Although the accompaniment and melody of the cantabile share similarities with “Casta diva,” the cantabile is more declamatory than the aria, and also has shorter phrases. As can be seen in the earlier Example 1.3 and from Example 3.1 that follows, Bellini included an appoggiatura on almost every final or penultimate syllable in each of the phrases.

Example 3.1 Bellini, Norma, Act I, Norma–Adalgisa duet, “Oh! rimembranza!” (mm. 1–27)
Lo fui cosi', io fui cosi' rapita al sol mirar-loin

Volto.}

Ma... non mascol-ti tu?...

Segue... t'a-scol-to.

Sola, furtiva, al
tempio io l’aspettai sovente;
ed ogni di più ferveva crebbe la fiamma ar-

(Io stessa arsi cosi.)

denente, Viem, ei dicea, con-
Oh! rimembranza!

ce - di ch'io mi ti pro - striai

pie - di; lascia che l'aurai o

io fui co - si se -

spi - - - - ri
Drawing from Crutchfield’s, Maguire’s, Esse’s, and Smart’s work, I would like to suggest that there are two ways in which we can understand these small figures. The many appoggiaturas are first prosodic, appearing, as Crutchfield outlined, on those phrases that have feminine endings. Feminine endings are very common in Italian – the term refers to a line that concludes with a strong syllable followed by a weak one. Appoggiaturas on feminine endings can be seen at various points in the cantabile between the two women: for example, on volto (measure 7), ardente (measure 19), sedotta (measure 26). Of this prosodic type, I have noticed that there are two different modes: appoggiaturas on the strong syllables and appoggiaturas inserted between the strong and weak syllables. In Example 3.1, measures 7, 11, and 19 belong to the first type, for examples, and measures 12, 13, and 15 belong to the second.

The second way in which we can perceive these figures is, following Smart, as human “sighs.” Adalgisa is relating her experiences with Pollione to Norma and she is wracked with guilt and worry. Bellini uses “sighing” figures to communicate her fear and anxiety. At the same time, Norma is reminiscing about her love for Pollione and yet, she is also expressing sympathy for Adalgisa. For both women, the sighs communicate love,
nostalgia, and empathy. The ornament is used cleverly to express the two women’s emotional state and unifies the two singers’ expression. Therefore, the composer chose “sighing” appoggiaturas to depict Norma’s psychological activities, and also to unify the two voices. Bellini took the same approach in the duet between Norma and Pollione in Act II, to portray Norma’s anger and sorrow (see Example 3.2, measures 2, 5, 10, 13).

Example 3.2 Bellini, Norma, Act II, Norma–Pollione duet, “In mia man alfin” (mm. 1–15)
Io lo voglio. M'o-di. Pel tuo
dei. E come?
Di-o, pei figli tuo-i... giurar dei che d'o-ra in
po-i... A-dal-gi-sa fug-gi-ra-i... al'l'al
Also a short musical figure, the turn is one of the most virtuosic ornaments. Here, the turns I am addressing include notes with turn symbols and also turn-like figurations that are fully notated. In both vocal and instrumental music, the turn is the most changeable and flexible figure even though it follows a standard pattern. A turn is a figure that is not only able to express both melancholy and joyful emotions; it can also have an influence on phrase structure. According to Clive Brown, “The expressive effect of a turn depends on its position in the melody, its rhythmic configuration, its melodic shape and the speed with which it is executed.” Any nuanced difference of these elements will cause a variety of effects. Composers, singers, and instrumentalists will all demonstrate their own interpretations of the same turn according to their understanding of the music. In addition, any rhythmic change in the placement of a turn will bring about melodic and thematic variation.

As I analyzed in Chapter I, regarding the turns in “Casta diva”, Bellini composed turns and utilized them as a function of building melodies. In this aria, these configurations are portrayed in a solemn and tranquil scene. However, in the cabaletta, the fast tempo and incessant turn-like figures demonstrate that these embellishments are strategies for portraying a different mood from the peaceful hymn. In “In mia man alfin,” the turn appears only twice, in measure 4 and measure 12 (see Example 3.2).

Part 3. Pasta as Norma

Having compared Pasta with other bel canto sopranos and explored the significance of the appoggiatura and turn, I will finally return to the subject of Pasta’s singing in Norma.

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Among contemporary accounts of the soprano’s performance at the première, the journal *La moda* reported that Pasta’s singing was well received and that the audience admired her “Casta diva:” “descending scales, the beautiful trill long and magical, the true accent of sadness, certain well, diminished and sustained tones, in sum all those qualities which distinguish that complete singing actress, the true standard [Norma] of whoever studies this divine art.”

This raises the issue of Pasta’s use of ornamentation in “Casta diva” and elsewhere in the opera, and how this related to her acting in *Norma*. As stated previously, Bellini wrote out much of his ornamentation (for example, in many of the appoggiaturas and turns in “Casta diva” and the appoggiaturas in “Oh rimembranza!”) and several reviews have suggested – indeed emphasized – that Pasta preferred to perform the ornamentation as it was written by Bellini and other composers, rather than engaging in the prevailing tendency to improvise.

Direct evidence of exactly what this meant in Pasta’s case is extremely difficult to find. However, in the final part of this thesis I will explore an unpublished notebook belonging to the soprano Adelaide Kemble (1815–1879), who was a student of Pasta. This notebook provides some evidence of early nineteenth century ornamentation and improvisation, and raises important questions about what Pasta did vocally and how we should ultimately understand her performance of *Norma*, including her acting.

Kemble was born into the famous English actors’ family mentioned earlier in relation to Siddons; indeed, she was one of Siddons’s nieces. She studied singing with Pasta in Italy in 1838, at the soprano’s house on Lake Como, and later on December 2,
she performed the title role of *Norma* at the Teatro La Fenice in Venice. Between 1840 and 1841 she performed *Beatrice de Tenda* by Bellini and *Otello* by Rossini. She also appeared in the English version of *Norma* at the Royal Opera House in London in 1841, and her performances here and elsewhere were very successful.\(^67\) The musicologist, Philip Gossett, has studied bel canto opera and vocal practice extensively and it is due to his generosity that I have been able to gain access to a notebook left by Kemble, with ornamentation for arias and duets by Rossini, Bellini, Donizetti and Mercadante.\(^68\) I do not know the date of this notebook. However, during Kemble’s brief singing career from 1835 to 1843, her studies with Pasta occurred in the middle point of her career. Unfortunately, we do not know where the original notebook is currently housed, even though copies of it have been circulating for many years.\(^69\)

Kemble’s notebook is not, as one would expect, an unproblematic source. There is no evidence that it is directly connected with Kemble’s study with Pasta. There is not even any evidence that Kemble herself sang the ornamentations and additions that the notebook details. The document nonetheless provides a fascinating glimpse into early nineteenth-century performance practice and an approach to ornamentation and improvisation that comes from someone who was at one time close to Pasta’s circle. Therefore, studying and discussing Kemble’s notebook is crucial to my investigation of early nineteenth-century bel canto singing, and even to Pasta’s vocal virtuosity.

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\(^68\) For details of Kemble’s memories about Pasta, see Adelaide Kemble, “A Recollection of Pasta,” in *Past Hours* vol.1 (London: R. Bentley, 1880), 203-217.

\(^69\) Gossett, *Divas and Scholars*, 573, footnote 24.
Kemble’s notebook includes five pages of ornamentation for *Norma*; in these pages are sixteen excerpts from different numbers. The second to twelfth excerpts consist of ornamentation for “Casta diva.” The following table (Table 3.1) gives the corresponding positions in the notebook and Bellini’s score (see Appendix A for a more detailed comparison).

Table 3.1 Adelaide Kemble’s notebook, improvisations for Norma’s “Casta diva”  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number on the notebook</th>
<th>Measure number in the score</th>
<th>Page number in the score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>mm. 32-33 &amp; mm. 36-37</td>
<td>p. 64-65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>mm. 47-48</td>
<td>p. 67-68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>m. 51</td>
<td>p. 68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>mm. 53-56</td>
<td>p. 69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>or 4</td>
<td>mm. 53-56</td>
<td>p. 69</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As Example 3.3 clearly demonstrates, there are major differences between the ornaments composed by Bellini and those recorded by Kemble. Consider, for example, the case of “senza vel” in the original melody of “Casta diva.” This phrase occurs during the interlude between the first and second stanzas (measures 17–18). In Bellini’s version, there are two fast turn-like figures followed by three small arches in thirty-second notes. In Kimble’s version, trills on E and G take the place of the original turn-figures, and preserves only the melodic outline: C–E–C–G–E–B flat. In contrast, the

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71 For musical example and detailed analysis of “Casta diva,” see Chapter I in this thesis.
notebook also prescribes a descending scale from the \( b'' \) flat down to the \( e' \) and does not provide any turn or trill for the syllable “za.” Another example can be seen in measures 41–43, in the cadence of this aria, “tu fain el ciel.” In variation 1, the notebook pauses on \( b'' \) flat with a fermata, and then descends to \( a \), which takes the melodic line a full octave lower than in Bellini’s version.

Example 3.3 Comparisons between Bellini’s score and Kemble’s notebook for Norma’s “Casta diva”

**mm. 17-18**

```
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bellini</th>
<th>Kemble</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>( b'' ) flat</td>
<td>( b'' ) flat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sen</td>
<td>sen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>za vel</td>
<td>za vel</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
```

**mm. 35-36**

```
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bellini</th>
<th>Kemble</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>pace, spar-gi in ter-ra, spar-giin ter-ra quella</td>
<td>spar-gi in ter-ra, spar-gi in ter-ra quell-la</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
```

**m. 39**

```
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bellini</th>
<th>Kemble</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>gnan, re-gnan tu fai, tu fai nel</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
```
mm. 41-43

Variation 1:

Variation 2:
Based on my analysis of these and the other excerpts in the notebook, I suggest that we can draw three conclusions about the ornamentation and improvisation contained within it. First, overall the notebook simplifies or complicates Bellini’s ornamentation, for example, in measures 17–18 and measures 41–43. The variations of measures 41–43 also demonstrate that the improvisations tend to draw attention to the singer’s wide range. This example in particular indicates that the improvisation was being used to show off the extensive range of the singer’s voice, and we know, as noted earlier, Pasta had an extremely wide-ranging voice, with the elements of a mezzo-soprano in range and color.

The third important feature of the notebook is that it tends to prescribe the insertion of arpeggios into the melodic line, and many more accented notes, for example, in measure 39 and measure 41. In addition, the notebook suggests more leaps than those in the original score.

One other feature of the notebook can be demonstrated with reference to the cabaletta of “Casta diva,” “Ah! bello a me ritorna.” Rather than Bellini’s melodic fragments which are similar to turns, the notebook prescribes long descending and ascending scales: for example, Bellini writes A–G–F sharp–G, but the notebook gives F–E flat–D–C–B–A (Example 3.4). Bellini’s melody also includes six four-sixteenth-note groupings, but the notebook at this point prescribes descending and ascending scales. Here as elsewhere the ornamentation and improvisation in the notebook greatly alter the original melody.
Documents such as Kemble’s notebook must, of course, be placed in a larger context. One point of comparison is another set of ornamentation in the early nineteenth-century soprano Laure Cinti-Damoreau’s *Méthode de chant composée pour ses classes du Conservatoire par Mme. Cinti-Damoreau* (1849).\(^72\) Cinti-Damoreau (1801–1863) was a French soprano who was known for her performances of Italian opera. She created principal roles in Rossini’s Paris operas, including Pamyre in *Le siege Corinthe* (1826), Anaïs in *Moïse* (1827), Countess Adèle in *Le comte Ory* (1827), and Mathilde in *Guillaume Tell* (1829). During her teaching at the Paris Conservatoire between 1833 and 1856, she left one printed book and seven volumes of manuscripts, although none of them were published. They offer a great deal of detail regarding the ornamentation and improvisation that she employed and/or recommended to students for operas by Rossini, Bellini, Donizetti, and other Italian composers.

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\(^{72}\) These notebooks were discovered by Everett Helm and have been held in the Lilly Library at Indiana University from 1971.
Austin Caswell has already studied Cinti-Damoreau’s notebooks and identified most of the excerpts in relation to their corresponding operas. The ornamentation Cinti-Damoreau notated for Bellini operas includes *Norma*, *La sonnambula*, *I puritani*, and *Beatrice di Tenda*. Until Caswell’s work, all of the ornamentation the soprano prescribed for *Norma* has remained unidentified because no text is given in the examples and they are very difficult to decipher. Two and a half pages of Cinti-Damoreau’s notebooks are devoted to *Norma*. The first page is written in ink in notebook II, on pages 22 and 23. The second page is written in pencil in notebook VI, on page 2. Caswell is responsible for the suggestion that second page is the first folio of notebook VI, which is a small-unpaginated sketchbook; however, there is a number on the upper right corner of the page.

As can be seen in Example 3.5 that follows, I have attempted to transcribe and identify Cinti-Damoreau’s ornamentation for *Norma*. The first point that must be addressed about the soprano’s ornamentation for “Casta diva” is that while Bellini wrote the aria in F major (although, as I discussed earlier, he originally wrote it in G major), in Cinti-Damoreau’s notebook, all the ornamentation for this aria is given in E flat major. In the remainder of *Norma*, the only two movements in E flat major are the *recitativo* and *tempo di mezzo* before and after “Casta diva,” so transposing “Casta diva” to E flat provides some amount of added musical continuity to the scene. In Example 3.5 Cinti-Damoreau’s ornamentations are given next to those in Kemble’s notebook. I provide a detailed comparison of the Cinti-Damoreau source with Bellini’s original in Appendix II.

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74 Ibid., 480.
Based on my comparison of the Cinti-Damoreau and the Kemble notebooks, I would like to draw the conclusion that the ornamentation and improvisation in the Kemble notebook is more dramatic than in Cinti-Damoreau’s. Cinti-Damoreau typically produced several different types of variations for each entry, presumably so that the singer can choose the one most suitable to her voice. However, most of these variations are based closely on the composer’s score. In the Kemble notebook, on the other hand, the ornamentation is more unusual and original. Caswell’s analysis of Cinti-Damoreau to some extent confirms this conclusion: he argues that Cinti-Damoreau adds virtuosity to moments in the score where Bellini had already employed virtuosic figures.\(^\text{75}\)

Example 3.5 Comparison between Bellini’s score, Kemble’s notebook, and Cinti-Damoreau’s notebook for Norma’s “Casta diva”

mm. 17-18

![Example 17-18 comparison](image)

m. 39

![Example 39 comparison](image)

\(^{75}\) Caswell, “Mme Cinti-Damoreau,” 487-492.
As well as the differences, the two notebooks also share similarities. For example, both the Kemble and the Cinti-Damoreau notebooks prescribe trills in measures 17 and 18 of “Casta diva,” replacing the turns written by Bellini. Not only that, but in measure 39, Cinti-Damoreau’s version is exactly the same as Kemble’s (although in a different key). It is difficult to discern why the two documents should overlap in this way. Other than Caswell’s study, very little research has been done on the Cinti-Damoreau notebooks, and none on Kemble’s other than a brief reference in Gossett’s *Divas and Scholars*. There has also been very little research conducted on the possible professional and/or personal connection between the two singers and whether the two may have, in different ways, been influenced by Pasta.

What kind of acting and physical style did Pasta present with the ornamentation that she might have introduced? As mentioned in Chapter I, “Casta diva” begins with a
long stage direction; Norma is asked to come forward and hold her arms up to the sky while those around her prostrate themselves. Musically, the number begins with a long instrumental ritornello, which provides the singer with the opportunity to perform this gesture. There is evidence that, as an actress, Pasta thought about her acting in such moments. In a letter she expressed frustration about finding gestural and physical actions to make in such moments, writing: “[W]e are obliged to repeat four, six, ten times the same verses, and then what should we do during the long ritornelli?” Unfortunately, other than these biographical sources, there is very little information regarding Pasta’s acting in “Casta diva.” Most reviews focused on her voice and on the beautiful melody. One can perhaps speculate that the gestures in the number would have had to be very discreet; any superfluous movement would have broken the continuity of the music and possibly created obstacles for the singer. Perhaps Pasta even relied on her facial expressions to convey the dramatic situation.

Figure 3.1 is an illustration of Pasta when she was singing the entrance recitativo “Sedizïose voci” preceding the aria “Casta diva.” She stands in a statuesque posture with her outstretched arm. In this scene, she makes a prediction about Rome’s collapse. Pasta maintains a stable and poised posture during this recitativo to embody the solemn moment. Although this figure is not drawn for “Casta diva,” it indicates a possible glimpse into her acting later in the same scene, possibly with similar emotional expressions. In “Casta diva,” the singer might have had to use restrained gestures rather than lively movements. However, another possibility is that Pasta perhaps employed a different performance style, or even more dramatic acting in “Casta diva” than in the preceding recitativo.

76 Stern, Giuditta Pasta, 480.
Figure 3.1 Giuditta Pasta as Norma singing the *recitativo* “Sediziose voci” before “Casta diva” (colored lithography, published in the Milan periodical *L’Eco*)

In the *cantabile* between Norma and Adalgisa, both are lost in their thoughts. According to the stage direction, before Adalgisa tells her story she must prostrate herself.

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before Norma, and then Norma must raise Adalgisa up and embrace her. Again, there is very little documentation of Pasta’s acting in this number, but critics commented on other scenes in the opera, particularly the most dramatic moments. For example, a critic of *The Times* wrote about Pasta’s performance in London, 1833:

> There are some very effective situations in the opera, and they were greatly heightened by the exquisite acting of Madame Pasta. Her scene with Pollio[ne], after she has discovered his treacherous intentions, and love, rage and jealousy, alternately triumph in her heart, was equal, in grandeur of conception and boldness of delineation, to anything which the stage, for a long period could boast of.  

During the trio for Norma, Adalgisa, and Pollione, when Norma knows her husband has betrayed her in the finale of Act I, Pasta may have used her arms to express her rage, fury, and hostility. First, when Adalgisa learns, and is shocked, by the truth that Pollione has married Norma, the libretto notes “Norma seizes Adalgisa by her arm and forces her to look at Pollione.” At the end of Act I the libretto notes: “Norma thrusts Pollione away with her arm and motions to him to leave.” The two movements are strong and aggressive and express Norma’s anger as well as her authority.

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78 [Review of *Norma*] *The Times*, 1 July 1833, quoted in Stern, *Giuditta Pasta*, 381.
Figure 3.2 Giuditta Pasta as Norma, Giulia Grisi as Adalgisa, and Domenico Donzello as Polllione, trio in Act I of Bellini’s *Norma* (colored lithography, 1831. From the Theatrical Almanac of 1833)\(^79\)

\(^{79}\) Landini, “*Son Regina Son Guerriera,*” 124.
In other operas Pasta seems to have used her arms to communicate strong feelings such as rage, sorrow, rejection, and desperation. The infanticide scene in Medea (Figure 2.2 on page 43) and the mad scene from Anna Bolena (Figure 3.3) illustrate such moments. The historian of singing Rutherford has studied the reviews of Pasta’s Norma in 1835 (during the comparisons with Malibran’s different production of Norma in the same year), and has concluded:80

Pasta raised her arms frequently at cadences and trills (an echo, perhaps, of the gesture that found such acclaim in Medea), and … she repeated this movement with each refrain; it is apparent too that her gestures were always and precisely choreographed to the music.81

81 Ibid., 126.
I, too, have found reviews that refer to Pasta’s arms. In the *Quarterly Musical Magazine* in 1826, a description of her performance of Medea’s infanticide scene, for example, states:

> Her folding her arms across her bosom, and contracting her whole form as it were in order to shrink from approach of the children, was touching beyond description – nor was her pursuit of them and her manner of striking the blow less powerfully conceived and executed.\(^{82}\)

This review offers us a glimpse of the exaggerated gestures that Pasta used to communicate Medea’s madness and violent behavior. In *Norma*, however, the mother does not follow through with the infanticide and saves her children’s lives.

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Regarding the ornaments in “Casta diva,” Bellini composed turns and appoggiaturas as part of the building blocks of the melody. However, Kemble’s notebook suggests that early nineteenth century sopranos’ performances, perhaps especially Pasta’s performances, of Bellini’s ornamentation may have included a more individual and dramatic element. As we can see, the notebook exhibits not just turns and appoggiaturas, but trills, arpeggios, scales, accents, and leaps. Could these figures have some relationship with the two kinds of acting styles Pasta was known for employing? As I mentioned in Part 1 of this chapter, Rutherford suggests that Pasta’s movements were more closely timed with the music than were those of other nineteenth-century sopranos. She ultimately produced a “single, unified expression” of music and gesture. According

to Rutherford’s statement and my research on Pasta’s singing and acting, I would like to suggest that Pasta perhaps matched her physical acting with specific musical improvisation. For instance, she interpreted delicate turns as the vocal-musical equivalent of neoclassical poses. At the same time, leaps and accents are the vocal-musical equivalent of her more Romantic style of acting. From Pasta’s singing and acting, one can feel a more impressive and distinctive Norma than Bellini’s score alone portrays.

Although my conclusion is only a hypothesis as there are no witnesses to the nineteenth-century and there are no recordings of any performance during that early period, I still feel there is room for discussion on the matter of the relationship between the appreciation of and operatic performance in the early nineteenth-century bel canto style.
Conclusion

Drawing from all of the previous research in this thesis regarding Pasta’s singing and physical performance in Norma, plus the historical context and singing performance practice in the early nineteenth-century, I will discuss and make an argument that the “singing actress” is a unique concept of the bel canto singer in the early nineteenth century, who not only practiced more dramatic, physical acting than previous opera singers, but also met the special requirements in vocal practice, especially in the areas of improvisation and ornamentation. This idea influenced the appreciation of audiences in that period, when spectators paid equal attention to acting and singing in operatic performance.

In the context of the “artwork” argued by Lydia Goehr, the opera Norma could be considered as a musical work of the early nineteenth century. These musical works were created by composers functioning independently from patrons, as in Beethoven’s time and throughout the entire Romantic period. These composers relied on the copyright protection of their publications. People of their time considered each performance a work of art, because each production, together with its performers, formed a singular and unique creation of the musical work. Bellini’s Norma and Pasta’s portrayal of Norma are indivisible, although today the opera is mentioned much more frequently than the singer. Spectators of that era, in contrast, preferred the singing actress and her performance to the opera itself. Pasta had already been viewed as a “work of art” in the early nineteenth century. Rutherford also argues that Pasta was almost “unassailable.” 83 In addition, a review originally published in Vienna acclaimed: “What Madame Pasta does is like a

83 Rutherford, “‘La Cantante Delle Passioni’,” 121-122.
work of art so particular for itself, and so important with respect both to its time and to art in general.”

From my perspective, people considered Pasta an “artwork” due to both her acting and singing. Spectators regarded her performance as a natural performance style in that period. One indispensable element is that she did not limit her performance to a simple imitation of human nature in her body, but also her natural singing voice. One of the most important and fundamental contexts of art is based on the form of natural expression, derived from human nature and its surrounding natural environment. As early as the 1730s, a theorist asserted: “Art must imitate nature.” In this Romantic, aesthetic idea, nature was broadly defined to include the natural environment and the human spirit. The evolution of aesthetics during this period emphasized that human feelings and emotions were the critical elements of any art form. According to my study, scholars had already known that Pasta’s identity as a singing actress was due to her natural acting style. I insist that natural singing is also an indispensable element when discussing this type of figure, especially in bel canto operas.

The significance of bel canto is found in stylized singing. Audiences considered Pasta to be a singing actress in her performances of bel canto operas and appreciated her physical acting, gestures, postures, and facial expressions, even every specific movement. Through my studies, I have concluded that her acting style was a combination of neoclassical and romantic performances. This is one of the reasons why audiences admired her acting in that period, because Pasta brought a new acting style and helped to

84 This review was reprinted in Il censore universale dei teatri in Italian. Rutherford translated in her article, 121.
evolve operatic performance. I, however, argue that if Pasta’s stylized singing were absent of her special acting, people would not have regarded her so highly as a singing actress.

At the same time, from the many reviews and critiques, one can deduce that audiences of that period not only focused on the singing but increasingly began to pay attention to the acting as well. Regarding this context, Rutherford further offers her statement that Pasta is very important because she brought acting to equal significance with singing. “Pasta’s contribution to the development of the operatic stage lay therefore in creating a style of performance in which the dramatic element of the role was at least as important as the singing.”86 When people refer to the subject of operatic performance from the 1820s to 1830s, singing and acting are usually discussed together. For example, the most obvious comment is quoted in the previous chapter, in a review of Pasta’s singing in “Casta diva.” In this review, the critic indicated that her dramatic singing propelled Pasta to become a singing actress who was to set the standard and influence future performances. In addition to this quote, we also find the same idea from Stendhal. As mentioned earlier, Stendhal’s opinions reflect the “professional appreciation,” and provide evidence for understanding the dominant appreciation of singers in this period. Besides his descriptions of Pasta’s physical performances, Stendhal gave detailed analyses of her voice. For example, Pasta’s broad vocal timbre was the primary foundation for her being a singing actress. She could use “opaque” and “suffocated” tones to portray violent emotions and passionate anguish in her natural movements.87 In describing Pasta’s voice in detail, Stendhal expressed that the “unusual sedateness” of

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86 Rutherford, The Prima Donna, 236.
87 Stendhal, Vie de Rossini, 375.
Pasta’s voice distinguished her from her contemporaries: “She possesses the great secret of imprinting a fresh pattern of color upon old music, not through the medium of the words, or thanks to her genius as a great tragic actress, but purely and simply as a singer.” From this quotation, it is not difficult to interpret that although Stendhal greatly admired Pasta’s acting, he still thought that one’s vocal skills were the foremost priority for a singing actress.

Referring to her singing, Pasta improvised the ornamentations in her performances. These unique representations became symbolic of Pasta as a singer. One reviewer commented, “Pasta never changed her reading, her effects, her ornaments. What was to her true, when one arrives at, remained with her true for ever.” Her ornamentations, which greatly differ from Bellini’s manuscripts, display her natural operatic talent. Carolyn Abbate argues that in the operatic performance, singers had the authorial voices to “make” music or “create” the roles. They are singers, performers and, at the same time, the second composers of operas. This is the reason people listened enthusiastically to different singers’ performances.

Bellini applied turns and appoggiaturas as an imitation of human emotions. All of these soft figures reflect characters’ feelings and emotions. However, in Kemble’s notebook, the singer changes not only turns (in “Casta diva”) but also nuanced fragments that are similar to turns (in Norma’s cabaletta “Ah! bello a me ritorna”). Kemble employed more directly descending scales and arpeggios that differ greatly from turns and do not imitate Bellini’s writing. In my opinion, these different embellishments from

88 Stendhal, *Vie de Rossini*, 377.
Kemble mark the distinction of the character between the singer and the composer. Kemble sang another kind of natural expression that is different from Bellini’s imitations.

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Pasta was history’s first Norma and it is appropriate to say that she held a significant position with Bellini and Romani. Bellini employed his own musical writing methods to portray the plot and characters, and during the compositional process, created a character particularly befitting Pasta’s vocal abilities and physical acting. Pasta’s signature performances brought authority to her creation of Norma. However, from my study, I found that current scholars focus more on the acting and the relationship between the acting and the music in their discussions of singing actresses. In addition, they usually investigate the approaches that are applied by singers to demonstrate composers’ music through their own physical expressions. Few, however, investigate the effects of stylized ornamentations and discuss their relationship to acting. I argue that more research can be conducted to discuss the singing actress in the historical context of the bel canto period. More attention and consideration can be given to Pasta’s and other singing actresses’ vocal performances when discussing the general subject of operatic performance. Although my research attempts to uncover new material in the relationship between music and gesture in bel canto, the discussion on these unpublished notebooks is not guaranteed to fully reflect Pasta’s, or even generally singing improvisations in Norma, therefore it is still significant for further studies. In the future, more research, such as detailed comparisons and discussion regarding Bellini’s manuscripts and singers’
notebooks, needs to be done in order to better understand and verify the relationship between music and gesture in *bel canto*. 
APPENDIX A
Ornamentations and Variations on Norma in Adelaide Kemble’s Notebook
(For “Casta diva”, see Example 3.3)

Act I scene IV Recitative “Sediziose voci – In pagine di morte”

Act I Norma’s cabaletta “Ah! bello a me ritorna”
APPENDIX B

Laura Cinti-Damoreau’s Ornamentations and Variations in *Norma*

(For “Casta diva”, see Example 3.5)

Act I Norma’s *cabaletta* “Ah! bello a me ritorna”

mm. 2-5

Bellini

Cinti-Damoreau 1

Cinti-Damoreau 2

mm. 7-9

B

C.D. 1

C.D. 2
mm. 10-11
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Online Resources

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