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CHAPTER SIX

The Theatrical Works

Ian Pace

The twentieth century has been a rich and fruitful time for the theatre. Craig's radical rethinking of the relationship between theatre's various elements, Brecht's estrangement devices, Artaud's evocation of a primitive spectacle, the concentration and intensity achieved with the most pared-down resources by Grotowski, Beckett's infinitely beautiful yet fatally bleak offerings, Peter Brook's attempts to reintroduce forms of ritual into the modern world, the experimental forms and narratives of such figures as Heiner Müller or Tadeusz Kantor: all have shown the vast potential implicit in the theatrical medium, although much of this work and its underlying ideas remains unexplored territory for British theatrical practitioners. For composers working in the field of music-theatre, both the abovementioned work and the equally fascinating innovations in such a field by Mauricio Kagel, Sylvano Bussotti, Hans Otte, Dieter Schnebel or Hans-Joachim Hespos, are too often ignored in favour of bland forms of narrative theatre, in which the music serves merely to amplify what is already obvious, spoon-feeding the audience.

Michael Finnissy's theatre works, on the other hand, show an awareness of contemporary developments, and a willingness to build on their foundations. His early work looks beyond narrative and conventions towards new, more urgent and direct forms of communication, drawing variously on ancient, medieval, popular or oriental theatrical traditions, whilst maintaining a contemporary perspective. More recently, he has moved closer to a form of opera (though he would still prefer the term 'stage work') subverting in subtle ways the limitations of the genre for which his works have been requested.

Finnissy's relationship with operatic traditions has expressed itself most obviously in his numerous operatic transcriptions for the piano, in particular the long set of *Verdi Transcriptions*. The work was written in part as an attempt to stand up for Verdi as against the more fashionable (in 'modernist' circles) Wagner; to promote a form of opera that not only privileges melody, but is also more stylised and sectional, allowing the possibility of original creation which is not wilfully obscure, by entering into a dialectical interaction with generic conventions, rather than an opera of more 'organic' forms and the one-to-one correspondence of elements that characterise Wagner's ultimate conceptions. Today Finnissy is inclined to be more ambivalent in taking sides between these two traditions, but the explicitly sectional nature of Italianate opera, closer to popular forms such as the

variety show, would seem to have informed such works as *Vaudeville* and *Soda Fountain*.

As several of these works have not to date received a performance, and productions of the others have been few and far between, I will give a detailed and graphic description of as many of these unfamiliar works as possible, rather than embarking on a highly analytic study of just a few. I believe them to be amongst Finnissy's most interesting, not least because of their wholly original and utterly idiomatic uses of the voice and voices.

Ritual Theatre

The earliest of Finnissy's theatrical works stand as a continuation of some of the most radical elements of contemporary theatre, involving a renunciation both of story-telling and of an excessive dependence on dialogue, in favour of a focus on ritual and a communion with the elemental, pre-rational aspects of the mind - their intentions (if not necessarily their results) have more than a little in common with Peter Brook's forms of 'ritual theatre' in the 1960s, one of the last occasions when innovative theatre in Britain could be presented outside of a fringe environment. Finnissy made use of sources that suggested timeless forms of ceremonial activity, rites that perform some essential function for mankind.

His first acknowledged work involving a theatrical dimension was derived from an earlier form of music-theatre. *Tsuru-Kame* (1971-73), meaning 'The Crane - The Tortoise', is a setting of a recital/concert type of dramatic ballad (*naga-uta*: an extended poem or song, a particular variety of *shamisen* music). The title comes from a *Noh* play 'Gekkyuden' by Kineya Rokuzaemon X, and the structure and emphasis use concepts both from the aristocratic *Noh* and more popular *kabuki* forms:

Introduction - *Jo*

I.   'Oki' - Introductory song to set the mood and scene
II.   'Ageuta' - A song (usually of high pitch) from that section of a *Noh* play where the principal actor makes his entrance.

Exposition - *Ha*

III. 'Mondō' - A dialogue (in the *Noh*)
IV.   'Chu No Mai' - The transference of a dance, originally belonging to a *Noh* play, to a *naga-uta*.
V.   'Odoriji' - A dance (also used in the *kabuki*)
VI.   'Gaku' - *Noh*-dance: used in *nagauta*, usually purely instrumental.

Denouement - *Kyu*

VII. 'Kiri' - Commentary, sometimes the final part of the Denouement, sung by the chorus.
VIII. 'Chirashi-Dangire' - The final section and final cadence in *nagauta*.

As is often the case when Finnissy makes reference to other materials, he freely mixes and alters elements, while retaining the large scale form.

The text, which Finnissy sets in Japanese, consists entirely of a narration of events, rather than words in the mouths of characters, telling of the two magical animals of the title who teach an emperor a dance which will ensure his longevity. Its beauty and simplicity make it worth quoting here in full (in English translation):

> At the banquet held each year to celebrate the awakening of spring, the emperor watches as the sun and the moon shine through the gate of eternal youth.
>
> The emperor's garden: its pathways gleaming gold and silver. Arches of lapis lazuli and brocade, agate and mother-of-pearl. The pond's edge - where the crane and the tortoise rest - is like Mount Hōrai. Praise the emperor for his many graces.
>
> Dialogue: A courtier tells the emperor that it is usual, on such happy occasions, for the sacred crane and tortoise to be seen dancing: after which the court-dances are performed in the palace. Let this happen now.
>
> The tortoise and the crane have been living for many years...
>
> ...For centuries, like the pine-trees, like the grove of bamboo by the side of the pond...the tortoise in the water, the crane, with its feathery sleeve-like wings, dance in honour of the emperor's peaceful reign. The emperor delightedly watches them, and then begins to...
>
> ...dance with them.
>
> The emperor's robes: like the temple-of-the-moon robes of the palace...containing all the colours of the autumn, flowers like the edges of maple-leaves in the rain. The long sleeves - as white as fresh winter-snow - flutter, as the courtiers sing.
>
> The emperor now dances to bring prosperity to his country for all of eternity. The courtiers swiftly carry the shrine away as the emperor returns to the place of longevity.

Traditionally, *naga-uta* would involve an ensemble of voices, a *shamisen* (three-stringed lute), *nokan* (transverse bamboo flute with seven holes), *kotsuzumi* (shoulder-held hourglass drum) and *ōtsuzumi* (side-held hourglass drum). Finnissy's instrumentation has some similarities; a solo female voice, a small female chorus of 3-6 singers, a flute, a viola and two percussionists, who play a celesta, chime bars and a vibraphone, as well as a selection of drums, temple blocks, maracas and chimes (bamboo, etc.). There are also three dancers, representing the emperor, the crane and the tortoise. The staging is shown in Example 6.1.

Finnissy avoids the mere stylistic trappings of Japanese theatre, which might turn the work into a form of costume drama; rather the 'Japanese' element originates from the language and the more deep-seated structural processes.

Musically, the work retains certain stylistic characteristics of traditional Japanese music, without resorting to crude 'naïve' stereotypes. A degree of passivity is realised through the extensive use of monophony, with the

important addition of a mode of singing derived from *gagaku*, a sort of imitative counterpoint in identical register which Finnissy indicates by instructing the chorus to sing in independent rhythms (Example 6.2).
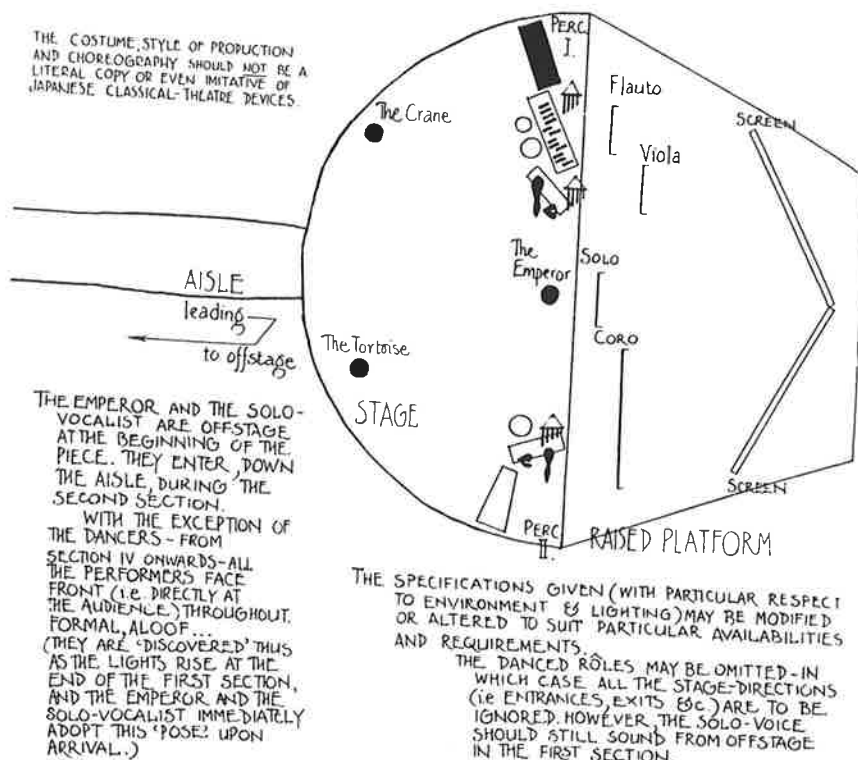
Example 6.1 **Staging for** *Tsuru-Kame*

As the work progresses, Finnissy notates a slightly less literal version of this type of counterpoint, including the use of echoes of the singers' lines in some of the instruments. *Gagaku*-style counterpoint was to become an important part of Finnissy's compositional armoury, which he later used in works with no explicit Japanese connection, such as *Alongside* for chamber orchestra or the *Seven Sacred Motets* for unaccompanied voices.

Yet the opening song is arresting and even passionate, before subsiding into a state of tranquillity, and has a counterpart in the long flute solo at the end of the work, which opens with a procession-like series of sustained notes, then intersperses a long, relatively steady melodic line with occasional flurries of activity, eventually coming to rest on a repeated pitch. It is almost as if the voice has transferred its magical powers to the flute, paralleling the relationship between the animals and the emperor.
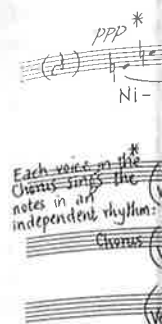
Example 6.2 *Tsuru-Kame*, p. 4. From *Ageuta*

Elsewhere, Finnissy alternates the timeless serenity of the *gagaku*-voices with the death-rattle of temple blocks, maracas and bamboo chimes. The use of various bells to 'cue' the singers serves almost as an alienation device, to contextualise this particular form of phantasmagoria. Spellbinding textures initiate the dance of the crane and the tortoise; when they are joined by the emperor in *Gaku*, the music achieves an almost impossible stillness, only to be broken by the lively and declamatory *Kiri*.

Example 6.3 *Tsuru-Kame* p. 21. From *Kiri*

A mystical effect is achieved at the beginning of the last section by the use of the vibraphone playing random *glissandi* with the fingertips only. As the work is likely to be heard most often by listeners without knowledge of Japanese, Finnissy eschews word-painting in favour of a concentration upon the sound of the language, with numerous spoken phrases.

Tsuru-Kame is a profoundly beautiful work, the first in a cycle of Japanese-inspired pieces (the others being *Gorō, Kagami-Jishi, Hinomi* and *Jisei*). Finnissy describes it as 'a celebratory kind of ritual and the music fleshes that out. In a way, the music is the justification for it - it couldn't exist any more than it could in Japan without the music - the music is the whole point'.[1] Its immediacy and translucence stand beyond rational or narrative explanation (even in the sense of particular relationships between music, text and theatre), instead stemming from, and appealing to, that which is beneath consciousness.

The work which followed, *Circle, Chorus and Formal Act* (1973), is even more concerned with forms of ritualistic experience. The text and scenario, derived by Finnissy and Fergus Early from a variety of folk-sources, is about the passing of the old and its replacement by the young, 'The kind of rhetorical text in which an old king is replaced annually by a young one is, of course symbolic. Symbolic of new crops and of eventually harvesting them. The 'planting' is then humanised - human seed substituted for grain.'[2] Text only plays a role in the first section, however, as an introduction to a series of sword dances and other forms of 'primitive' theatrical activity. Finnissy uses a small group of players consisting of an oboe/cor anglais, two horns and a percussionist, whilst the stage roles consist of an Old Fool, played by a baritone, two choruses of ten voices each, another on-stage chorus of nine percussionists, collectively playing pebbles, maracas or chime-bars, and an assortment of silent roles.

The Fool introduces six youths, who could well be seen as six 'archetypes' of youth: the first 'a handsome lad - brother to the blazing sun', the second 'a shy young man - brother to the pale moon - but don't be tricked he drives bold and hard!', the third 'a lad swift as the golden hawk', the fourth 'joyful as a strong necked stallion, rolling in the sweet night-grasses', the fifth 'son of the whispering sea, his kisses quiet in the soft hair of the reeds', and the sixth the 'fair son of moist and fertile earth'. Musically, the voice of the Fool is echoed or accompanied in an ethereal manner by the choruses, creating the impression that his words and character delineation resonate in a collective subconscious, whilst the oboe and horns provide colouration and commentary, and the percussion chorus serves to provide punctuation (Example 6.4).

The six youths perform the first sword-dance, which is unaccompanied, then bring on a heavily pregnant old woman, to the sound of a grotesque series of oboe trills, interrupted by high *staccato* notes. She gives birth to a doll, which grows into a second (young) Fool, who is raised aloft by the youths. A second sword-dance follows, accompanied by the percussion chorus playing pebbles in 12/8 rhythms (regular rhythms having been

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Example 6.4 *Circle, Chorus and Formal Act*, p. 3

The youths then bring on the spring-bride, to whom is assigned a lyrical cor-anglais solo. The old and young Fools compete for the love of the spring-bride with a clumsy duet for the horns, at one point fixated around a few pitches, which is interrupted twice by cor-anglais solos. As a series of precipatory, ecstatic ascending gestures from the first horn overcome the blustering *glissandi* of the second, the young Fool gains the upper hand and is acclaimed by the spring bride. The old Fool, defeated, falls to the ground, with a 'moan from the bass drum. Then follows the third sword-dance, this time in 4/4, with pebbles, snare drum and maracas, during which the old Fool is slaughtered by the youths; a hobby-horse appears and tramples the dead Fool underfoot.

Example 6.5 *Circle, Chorus and Formal Act*, p. 20

The young Fool and the spring-bride copulate to the sound of a long cor anglais solo, climaxing with tremolos and *glissandi* on the vibraphone. The whole crowd then dance together, with a increasingly energetic percussion accompaniment in 3+3+2 quaver rhythms. The old Fool, old woman, young Fool, spring-bride and hobby horse re-appear from the crowd during this dance, emphasising the artificiality of the scenario. The ensemble percussionist beats a repeated rhythm on the snare drum and walks off during the final dance, 'Quête', with a subdued counterpoint in the cor anglais and horns. From off-stage, a distant echo of the first part is heard, as the old Fool introduces another youth.

As can be seen, the work is less a form of narrative than a formalised enactment. It is particularly unusual within Finnissy's output because of its emphasis on repeated, regular rhythms, which the other, more characteristic, types of music serve to 'frame'. Its success in performance probably depends on an appropriate production and choreography; excessive stylisation or some form of period authenticity would probably dilute the sense of an 'outside-time' ceremonial, described by the composer as 'like a religious service'.[3] Whether or not an average concert- or theatre-goer will respond to the work as such is debatable, but this does not necessarily negate the validity of such an attempt to find new ways of relating to that which is most fundamental in human beings.

The third work in this category is the as yet unperformed *Tom Fool's Wooing* (1975-78) which deals with another, equally fundamental, aspect of people and society: the ritual of marriage, as enacted in the traditional 'Wooing' folk-play. The central section of the work is of this type, taken

from Alan Brody's *The English Mummers and their Plays: Traces of Ancient Mystery,*[4] but Finnissy frames this with a plethora of folk-poems, magical spells and incantations in Rumanian and Greek, and two passages from Edmund Spenser's *Epithalamion.* The work is scored for 14 solo voices, whose parts involve an almost unprecedented degree of difficulty, with the use of many simultaneous wide-ranging lines requiring exceptional stamina and versatility over the whole vocal register. This work's difficulty exceeds in some senses even that of the works for massed solo voices by such composers as Holliger, Kagel, Schnebel and Ferneyhough, relying as it does on a hyper-acute sense of pitch, and a uniquely musical approach to phrasing and melody, rather than particular expertise in extended vocal techniques. As I have opined elsewhere in this book, Finnissy, like Nono, is one of the few contemporary composers who remains prepared to write for the voice (or, for that matter, for instruments) without doctrinaire use of desiccation and fragmentation; his love for expansive and glorious lines reflects immense generosity and love for humankind.

The poems and spells are combined in the opening section to form a type of narrative of the various stages of the wooing ritual, though the languages are used as much for their sound as for semantic purposes, adding a degree of mystification and defamiliarisation. A series of vociferous cries in the sopranos, almost like forms of mating calls, make extensive use of *portamento*, quartertones and trills and whispered endings to phrases.
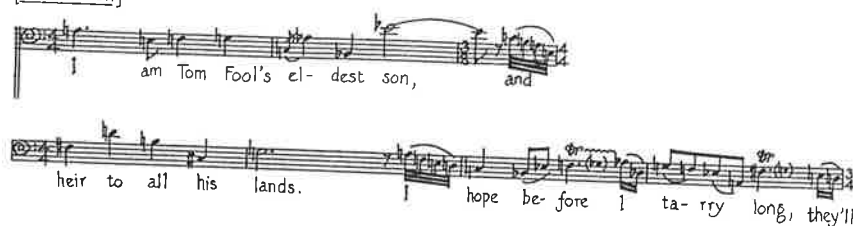

Example 6.6 *Tom Fool's Wooing*, p. 3

This leads to a mysterious *sotto voce* tapestry of sound for female voices, buzzings, rustlings, highly sexually-charged and tantalising undulations, before four of the men burst on with raucous shouts. They are immediately integrated into the women's texture, all now singing on the vowel sounds *a* and *e*, above which the mezzo-soprano sings an evocative setting of the first passage from Spenser ('This day for ever to me holy is...'). Her *glissandi* resonate amongst other of the voices, when suddenly voices are lowered and most speak in an unpitched chant. A few distant echoes of the opening lead to a 'dissolve' into the main play, slow lines in a soprano, contralto and counter-tenor, ('How can I praise you, my love? Thy soul's likeness could nowhere be found...') while others of the singers play drums, as an upbeat to the coming scene.

The play is a bawdy affair, as in turn Tom Fool and his sons attempt to win the affections of Lady Jane (mezzo-soprano) with promises of money or land, or declarations of self-worth, which she immediately sees through. The jaunty music is in complete contrast to that which preceded it and each of the characters has distinct types of melodic contours for their *quasi recitativo* delivery, downward curves for Tom Fool's eldest son (Bass 1), a concatenation of descending intervals for the youngest son (Baritone 1) and upwards curves for Tom Fool himself (Tenor 1):

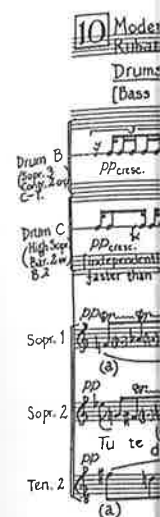Example 6.7a *Tom Fool's Wooing*, p. 15
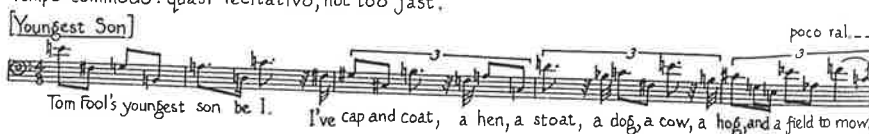
Example 6.7b *Tom Fool's Wooing*, p. 17

Example 6.7c *Tom Fool's Wooing*, pp. 18-19
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Between the wooing attempts, trios of singers, with others playing the drums again, enunciate a commentary, taken again from the Rumanian or Greek poems, the nature of the music serving to clarify the meaning of the texts.

Example 6.8 *Tom Fool's Wooing*, p. 16
Text translates as 'poor boy, you are going away, how can I do without you? You fair maid, will do just fine, There are plenty more lads like me.'
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Onto the stage walks Dame Jane (Contralto 1), carrying a baby wrapped in a shawl, which she declares is Tom Fool's bastard son. Tom denies that such a 'valiant hero' as himself could be responsible, but the two sons declare their intention to cut off his head (Example 6.9).

After bemoaning the ingratitude of his children, Tom agrees to submit, but suddenly topples over. Suddenly the other characters are anxious that he be revived, which a speaking doctor (counter-tenor) manages to do. With a series of swaggering *portamenti*, Tom once again offers his wealth to the Lady, but she replies that (in a remarkable about-turn) it is him alone that she wants. Tom cries 'Let us make a jovial wedding!', leading into the final section.

The mezzo-soprano and Tenor 1, who had previously sung the parts of Lady Jane and Tom, sing a long duet in harmoniously imitative counterpoint, the second section from Spenser ('Early before the worlds light-giving lampe, His golden beame upon the hils doth spred...'), surrounded by a mysterious, dreamlike *pppp* texture as the other 12 voices each vocalise more or less independent parts on vowel sounds (Example 6.10).

Example 6.9 *Tom Fool's Wooing*, p. 20
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With a gradual crescendo, the women work in further folk-sayings and spells, leading to a glorious climax, with the mezzo-soprano singing a solo (Spenser - 'For lo! the wishèd day is come at last'), the women ecstatically undulating, and the men punctuating with chant-like beats on single syllables from their texts. All calms, and the tenor solo (Spenser - 'Now welcome, night!') is accompanied by simultaneous procession-like parts for the women, with much more distant chant-beats from the men.

The use of multiple texts in different languages serves in *Tom Fool's Wooing* to allow for multiple layering of meaning and contextualisation. It is an attempt to demonstrate congruities and resonances between different folk traditions, a panoramic view of the universal rituals of wooing and marriage. The nature of the juxtapositions of types adds to the semantic richness of each. The music is made appropriate to each of the languages being used, allowing their sonic qualities to communicate that which a dictionary could never reveal.

Example 6.10 *To*
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Example 6.10 *Tom Fool's Wooing*, p. 24
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The Mysteries

The most substantial body of English medieval 'ritual drama' is to be found in the various cycles of Mystery Plays. Finnissy's settings of eight of these plays remain largely unknown territory, since only the first and fourth of the individual works have been performed complete (at the time of going to press). The individual works are:

1. *The Parting of Darkness from Light* (1975-76)
2. *The Earthly Paradise* (1977-78)
3. *Noah and the Great Flood* (1978)
4. *The Prophecy of Daniel* (1972/79)
5. *The Parliament of Heaven* (1977-78)
6. *The Annunciation* (1978-79)
7. *The Betrayal and Crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth* (1978-79)
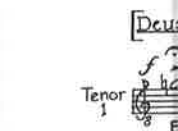8. *The Deliverance of Souls* (1978-79)

The texts, which Finnissy sets in Middle English, derive in particular from the 'Towneley' or Wakefield cycle, and the 'N-town' cycle, probably East Anglian, but also known as 'Ludus Coventriae' because of the mistaken view that it orginated from Coventry. Within these works, however, are also included excerpts from Gaelic folk-poetry, hymns, the 'Exeter Book' (which Finnissy used later in his *Commedia dell'incomprensible Potere che Alcune Donne hanno sugli Uomini*, discussed below) and other sacred and liturgical texts, providing a socio-historical contextualisation, a montage of sources which interact in a dialectical manner, not wholly unlike Heiner Müller's critical re-workings of *Medea* and *Hamlet*.

There are a number of unifying factors throughout the cycle. Each of the characters in their various nomenclatures (God as Deus, Pater, etc.) are sung by the same voice, and their parts are each derived from a specific gestural vocabulary. The character of God, whose solo opens several of the works, is always assigned a declamatory tenor role, which continually fixes on high notes (Example 6.11), while the son, Jesus, is given a spoken part, until his soul alone (Anima Christi) speaks from beyond the dead.

Other recurrent motives include a series of expanding or decreasing intervals, in either voices or instruments, long sustained chords and forms of widely spaced arpeggiated figuration in the celestas. Some works refer to others in the cycle; for example, the opening of *The Betrayal and Crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth* is like an instrumental version of the beginning of *The Parting of Darkness from Light*. The generally florid nature of much of the vocal writing was conceived as a reflection of the ecstatic qualities of medieval wall painting and manuscripts.

Finnissy envisaged the *Mysteries* being staged on a pair of carts, like the wooden stalls with wheels that were used in traditional markets, one of which would represent Heaven, with the throne of God, and the other Paradise, featuring the Tree of Knowledge, thus making explicit the fundamental dichotomy. Performers would act both on and off the carts. He also

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Example 6.11a *The*

specifies, 'no attempt should be made to disguise the fact that the performance is taking place 'on stage' and 'in concert' - the costumes and props should appear *timeless* and ideally of great simplicity or even crudeness, the pace of the acting ritualistically measured with long and still tableaux'.

Example 6.11a *The Parting of Darkness from Light*, p. 1

Example 6.11b *The Annunciation*, p. 146

Rather than create an elaborate musical work in which the text is clearly secondary or, on the other hand, merely provide background music, Finnissy aimed for a balance and interdependence in which neither component would seem inferior, and which allowed for interrelationship and dialogue between the two. His combination of and selection from texts is just as important as the music. Long sections of the third and seventh works remain in spoken text, whereas at other points the type of melodisation of the words or their instrumental accompaniment is used to present a particular perspective on what is being said. Long vocal solos tend to assume a form of *arioso* which express overall perceptions of the characters, rather than indulge in over-

specific and redundant forms of word painting. Hymns and incantations are often presented in the forms of elaborate motets or sometimes huge, terrifying bodies of sound from combined choirs.

Finnissy's interest was as much in what the plays say about the societies in which they were created, and in how sacred events were represented in terms of situations that could be related to fundamentally human concerns, as in what they say about Christianity. The third work, *Noah and the Great Flood*, a highly pared down version of the third play in the Townley cycle, takes on many of the trappings of a domestic drama. After a long solo, in which the Deus expresses his displeasure with the world he has created and declares his intention to destroy it with the Flood, a spoken scene follows in which the Deus tells the decrepit, self-pitying and rather unctuous character of Noe to build the Ark in preparation for the coming events. Noe communicates this message to his wife and three sons, and they proceed to construct the Ark.

For this section, Finnissy uses three percussionists on a variety of drums and woodblocks, who play from five boxes of repeated material (some of which they include gradually on successive repetitions), using each box for an approximately fixed period of time, then moving to the next.

The modulations between boxes are staggered, so each percussionist changes box at a different point, with the first player acting as 'foreman', leading the way and cueing a series of simultaneous *martellato* beats which bring the section to an end (Example 6.12).

The next scene, also a spoken extraction of key lines from the play, is a hilarious comedy of marital relationships, as Vxor taunts her husband by refusing to obey his orders to follow him into the Ark, telling him instead to 'go cloute thi shone' (go clean your shoes). Notwithstanding protestations from the three daughters, Noe and his wife get into a fight, incurring the disapproval of the three sons (Example 6.13).

Example 6.12 *Noah and the Great Flood*, p. 61

Vxor :   In fath I can not fynd
           which is before, which is behynd ;
           Bot shall we here be pynd,
           Noe as haue thou blis ?

Noe :   Dame, as it is skill
           here must vs abide grace ;
           Therfor, wife, with good will
           com into this place.
           Behold to the heuen
           the cateractes all,
           ffull sharp ar thise showers,
           that renys aboute ;
           Therfor, wife, haue done
           com into ship fast.

Vxor :   Yei, noe, go cloute thi shone
           the better will thai last.

Prima mulier :   Good moder, com in sone
                 ffor all is ouer cast,
                 Both the son and the mone.

Secunda mulier :   and many wynd blast ffull sharp ;

Vxor :   In fayth yit will I spyn ;
           All in vayn ye carp.

Tercia mulier :   If ye like ye may spyn
                  Moder, in the ship.

> Vxor: Yei, water nyghys so nere
> that I sit not dry
>
> Noe: I shall make ye still as stone
> begynnar of blunder!
> I shall bete the bak and bone
> and breke all in sonder

[Noe comes out of the Ark and fights his wife.]

Example 6.13 *Noah and the Great Flood*, p. 64

Finally they enter the Ark together, and the rising of the waters is represented by rolls on cymbals, tam-tam and thundersheet. In scene five, forty days later, Noe sends out the dove and the raven to establish whether dry land remains. The treble recorder and cor anglais play different types of 'bird-music' and walk gradually away from the playing area.

Example 6.14 *Noah and the Great Flood*, p. 67

As the dove returns bearing a leaf from an olive tree, the treble recorder player walks back on, playing an extension of the previous music, and all of the characters give thanks. The sexual politics of *Noah* have their

counterpart in Joseph's implied jealousy and fear of redundancy when he discovers Maria's pregnancy in *The Annunciation*.

The fifth work, *The Parliament of Heaven*, is structured in a similar manner to *Tom Fool's Wooing*. The main text, from the N-cycle, is surrounded by a number of hymns and other sequences in Latin, as well as the Gaelic line 'SÙEIL DHÉ MHÓIR' (Eye of the Great God), which had appeared several times in *The Parting of Darkness from Light*. The opening Hymnus is an intricate 21-part motet for three choirs ('Come Creator Spirit, Visit the Souls of Thy People, And Fill with grace from on High, The Hearts which Thou hast Created'), the type of imitative counterpoint bearing a distant relationship to the *gagaku* writing encountered in *Tsuru-Kame*. As this calms, the voice of the Pater emerges, with a solemn stroke on two tam-tams. He is accompanied by a series of decreasing intervals in the four trumpets, from a perfect 11th down to a semitone, which also accelerates and increases in density:

Example 6.15 *The Parliament of Heaven*, pp. 11-12

He speaks of reconciliation and grace to man, but a certain contempt for some of the principles he is supposed to embody is revealed by his inability to sing such words as 'the needy' and 'my contryte creaturys'.

His four daughters, Veritas (Truth), Misericordia (Mercy), Justicia (Righteousness), and Pax (Peace) enter their separate pleas concerning the fate of Adam in the manner of a courtroom drama. Each is associated with a particular instrument, the mezzo, Veritas, with the viola; the soprano, Misericordia, with the oboe; the soprano, Justicia, with the harp; and the extremely high soprano, Pax, with the treble recorder. During their successive initial advocacies, each of these instruments is added to the ensemble, their words coloured cumulatively by what has come before. The viola begins by reinforcing certain key pitches within Veritas's vocal line in the manner of a *cantus firmus*, which continues for Misericordia, with the addition of an oboe embellishment around her part. Different degrees of structural elucidation and ornamentation are progressively introduced (Example 6.16). The manner in which these are utilised suggests Finnissy's particular sympathies.

Example 6.16 *The Parliament of Heaven*, p. 18

A plea from Pax that the tension between Man in Hell and God in Heaven makes peace and the principles represented by the other daughters impossible, convinces the son Ffilius of the need for redemption. His spoken part is accompanied by a counterpart to the earlier section for the trumpets: increasing intervals, with oscillating density of attack, this time in the four instruments used for the daughters, with a long cymbal roll and quiet strokes on the tam-tam. Each now with their respective instruments alone, Veritas, Misericordia and Justicia admit the impossibilities of their positions, and Pax informs the company, with a truly spectacular solo (Example 6.17), that only God is capable of enacting the deed that will bring about peace.

Example 6.17 *The Parliament of Heaven*, p. 24

As the Ffilius and the Pater decide that he who redeems Man must be both God *and* Man, the intervals in the trumpets return, here moving in four successive steps from a perfect 12th to a major 7th, a perfect 4th, then a semitone (once again with increasing density), at which point of harmonic tension the Spiritus Sanctus (also a speaking role) declares that he will take on the task of delivering the son to earth.

The three choirs take over the semitone interval, singing 'Eye of the Great God' in sustained and staccato pitches, then begin another Hymnus. A series of long chords, moving at different rates in each choir, are interrupted by an uncoordinated flurry of lines, after which the chords continue, and each choir moves between these two elements independently. As they consolidate upon a pair of perfect 12ths (G-D-A), the trumpets take over the upper interval, and move in two steps down to a semitone, as the Pater instructs the Angel Gabriel to inform the maid married to Joseph that she will give birth to the son of God. The Spiritus Sanctus bids Gabriel tell Mary that he will 'work all this', with a distant echo of the 'Eye of the Great God'.

For the final Hymnus, the three choirs are joined by a children's choir. They all begin with an extension of the type of motet encountered at the beginning of the work, then the adult choirs break off with a whispered Alleluia. The children's choir continues, their parts leading towards an ornate but calm compound of lines from the four daughters, singing Alleluia, with brief outbursts from their associated instruments, and ending with a strident chord from all the instruments:

Example 6.18 *The Parliament of Heaven*, p. 48

The motet continues, with the addition of more elaborate solo parts at the beginning. This time the Alleluia is spoken *mezza voce*. After a second refrain from the daughters, the motet starts for a third time completely in solo voices together with the children, leading directly to the daughters. All the choirs then have a slow crescendo in slow moving chords, towards a massive B flat^{ll} - E flat^{l} - F$_{ll}$ - $_l$ joined by a piercing cluster in the instruments. The trumpets, *piano*, take over the top two pitches from the choirs, who shout the final Alleluia, and crescendo with tam-tams and cymbals to a huge *ffff* ending. The enormity of what is to proceed is rendered in awe-inspiring, frightening terms.

The *Mysteries* anticipate many musical ideas to which Finnissy would return in his series of sacred works over a decade later, particularly in the approach to choral writing. If and when the cycle is heard in its entirety, it should provide an utterly shattering and completely relevant musical and dramatic experience, a modern recreation of the varieties of mysticism, glory, humour, and trepidation that were felt by those who experienced the medieval originals.

Popular and Street Theatre

Finnissy, ever concerned to avoid the pitfalls of either solipsism or hyper-intellectualism, also looked to popular forms of theatre for models, recalling in particular his love for the circus in childhood. By using forms or genres which were accessible and immediate, it then became easier to introduce dangerous, subversive, defamiliarising elements, as Bertold Brecht had realised earlier. In the works that resulted, Finnissy was able to bring about a fusion of the ideas of Artaud, Brecht and Grotowski, creating a form of music-theatre that could be comprehended by an average spectator, whilst dealing with primal emotions, movements and sounds with the utmost economy of (at least theatrical) means.

One of these works is *Bouffe* (1975), for a solo performer on a stage. It is the act of a type of clown, whose neanderthal act is at different points humorous, sad, pathetic and sinister. He dashes on stage, covered in a sheet, then collapses to the floor. Undeterred, he rises grandly to his feet again, then gingerly sticks one hand out from the sheet, moves it about a little, lifts the sheet up a few inches and makes a loud growl. Suddenly he withdraws his arm behind the sheet, then falls to the floor again. As he rises up once more, he emits a loud sniffle and giggles childishly, then holds his arms out (still underneath the sheet), squawks and chews on his saliva. Suddenly he covers his mouth in an attempt to prevent a loud inhaling sound, and turns ashamedly away from the audience. Moving with renewed confidence towards the audience, he pulls the sheet off, stares at them with incomprehension, then looks down at the sheet, closing his eyes and mouth. He moves his head skywards, then emits a concatenation of sobbing, howling, grizzling and self-reprimanding. After looking suspiciously at the audience with one eye, he turns left as if discovering something highly

unpleasant there, and emits another amalgamation of coughing, choking, cackling, sighing, smacking of lips and panting. Looking back to the front with an ape-like sound of indecision, he appears to fall asleep then wakes up again immediately. With a sad and pained undulation he attempts to extract a tooth from his mouth, squats on the floor, then takes the sheet in his mouth and falls once again to the floor. Raising his trembling hands, which then fall, he wraps himself in the sheet, begins to crawl off, then after a sudden convulsion falls for the last time to the floor.

Bouffe is music in the sense that the various sounds the performer makes are notated using a form of conventional musical notation. Otherwise it relates both to Grotowski's idea of a 'Poor Theatre' consisting of no more than the performer(s) on stage, whose actions deal with the most primitive of emotions and reactions, and to those of Hans-Joachim Hespos's various works which stand in a no-man's land between theatre and music, and deal with the breakdown of conventional language (and by implication modern society), where only the random pulses, tics, breaths and other forms of pre-linguistic utterance remain, a world that would be further explored in Finnissy's ensemble work *Lost Lands*. Finnissy would seem, however, more open to an element of comedy than Hespos (or other German explorers of music-theatre such as Dieter Schnebel or Gerhard Stäbler); the irony here need not detract from the power of what is being communicated.

One of Finnissy's wittiest works is *Commedia dell'incomprensibile Potere che Alcune Donne hanno sugli Uomini* (1973-75) (Comedy of the incomprehensible power that some women have over men), written for the 'Year of the Woman', a rather camp piece which portrays the primary nature of the interrelationship of the sexes somewhat in the style of the *commedia dell'arte*. The reduction to essentials of characterisation and situations is mirrored in the minimal instrumentation, a cellist (who also plays castanets), a harpsichordist (who also plays a baby-rattle and brass-bell), and a soprano and counter-tenor (who, according to the composer, is by the nature of his voice able to act like a woman). The woman is a Dietrich-like figure, moody, feigning innocence and childishness, able to enact an utterly enfeebling affect on even the most strong-willed of men. The two singers perform their action in five different areas in front of the two instrumentalists. The work is in five sections, changes of scene being signified by a bell:

1. *Il Scontento* (The Discord). The woman manipulates the man's reactions through gazes, mocking, sobbing, causing him to cringe, tremble, squeal and attempt to leave. Hectic trills, arpeggios, *pizzicato* in the instruments. There are no words, emotions are expressed through musical gestures (Example 6.19).

Example 6.19   *Commedia dell'incomprensibile Potere che Alcune Donne hanno sugli Uomini*, p. 4.
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2. *Le Maschere* (The Mask). The woman continually sings the word 'love' in a florid, *bel canto* style. By contrast, the man's counterpoint seems pedestrian, reflecting his inability to express emotion in anything but a repressed manner. The harpsichord and cello serve to reinforce the woman's part in the nature of their writing. At the end of each phrase, each stab each other, suggesting the raw hatred lurking underneath the facade that love can be.

3. *Le Lezione* (The Lesson). The man sings the letters of the Greek alphabet, attempting to teach them to the woman, who responds sullenly while shaking a baby rattle in ways which suggest her moods. She mocks her 'teacher' and, by continually mispronouncing the words, lulls him into a false sense of superiority, whilst nevertheless embellishing the rather basic melodic lines which she must imitate. A counterpoint to the woman's rattle is provided by the harpsichord shaking the same instrument. By the end, she makes clear how she can perfectly easily repeat the words parrot-fashion, and can also outdo the man in other respects (Example 6.20).

Example 6.20 *Commedia dell'incomprensible Potere che Alcune Donne hanno sugli Uomini*, p. 15.
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4. *La Danza* (The Dance). An extremely rapid duet for harpsichord and castanets. The harpsichordist alternates between wide arpeggios around the keyboard and more close-range lines, as well as clapping their hands and stamping their feet in response to the castanets. Strange silences appear at various points.

5. *Il Giardino* (The Garden). A solo for the woman, singing a text from Genesis B in *The Exeter Book*, a tenth century book of riddles, about the light 'beateous and bountiful' that Eve has received from Heaven, and which she can now teach to Adam.

The piece is very funny, utterly direct, and optimal in its clear dependence on both theatre and music. It demonstrates most penetratingly the incomprehensible power that some music has over words, the immediacy of emotions when couched in terms of sounds and gestures, rather than represented at one remove through a text.

But the most raw, brutal and expressionistic of these works is *Mr Punch* (1976-77/79), described by one critic as an 'immorality play'. Completely different in nature to Birtwistle's psycho-drama *Punch and Judy*, Finnissy's work is an uncompromising piece of street-theatre, intended ideally to be performed with a puppet show. All the roles are played by one singer using different voices, with a seven-member ensemble.

The plot is relatively simple: Mr Punch successively encounters the other characters - Dog Toby, the violinist Scaramuccia, his wife Judy's baby, Judy herself, a Doctor, a police constable, the hangman Jack Catch and finally the Devil - and kills each one either because they annoy him or get in his way, or just for the hell of it. Musically, Finnissy uses materials which serve a leitmotivic purpose but are developed and proportioned in such a way that the work is a coherent musical entity, rather than just a text with a redundant musical accompaniment. The main materials in their initial states are as follows (see Example 6.21):

(a) **Action**. Multiple high trills and tremolos.
(b) **Death**. Very loud blows to the bass drum, perhaps a reference to the killing scene in Berg's *Wozzeck*. Rhythms in morse code, usually spelling DEATH or derivations (MORTE for Scaramuccia, DEATH & DAMNATION for the devil).
(c) **Motion**. Multiple rapid smooth lines in changing irrational rhythms.
(d) **Jig**. Dance in triplets.
(e) **Stillness**. Long sustained notes, parts moving independently.

Example 6.21a *Mr Punch*, p. 1

Example 6.21b *Mr Punch*, p. 3

Example 6.21c *Mr Punch*, p. 5

Example 6.21d *Mr Punch*, p. 9

Example 6.21e *Mr Punch*, p. 12
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Individual characters then have their own characteristic voice types and instruments.

> **Punch**: squeaky, parrot-like falsetto. Snare drum, bass drum, sometimes other percussion.
> **Judy**: shrewish, nasal, bullying. Flute, Chinese block (one for each side of her character).
> **Dog Toby**: dog imitation. Guiro.
> **Baby**: baby imitation. Flute (taken over from Judy).
> **Scaramuccia**: pretentious, snobbish (fake Italian). Klaxon horn, violin.
> **Doctor**: wheezing, senile, asthmatic. Piano ripples.
> **Constable**: bumbling, obstinate, authoritarian. Pizzicato violin, but lines are mostly unaccompanied.
> **Jack Catch**: thick-witted, matter-of fact, heavy country dialect. Triangle.
> **Devil**: imposing, sepulchral, basso-profundo. Very low piano, flute with tremolos.

The music of the Devil is anticipated at a few points earlier on in the work, suggesting the diabolic features of Punch himself.

The work is divided into seven musical sections with different tempos, which do not necessarily coincide with the exact delineation of the narrative. Here is how it proceeds in both musical and narrative senses (numbers in bold correspond to section numbers in the score, others to rehearsal numbers).

1. *Allegro moderato*

> Punch's opening lines, with triangle roll

1-4. **Action 1**. Punch encounters, and is attacked by, dog. Increasing rate of change of trills. Guiro (dog) joined by cheap, tacky sound of klaxon horn (Scaramuccia) towards end.

5.   **Death 1**. Punch kills dog. With violin, anticipating next section. A few faint twitches from guiro (dog)

6.   Highly virtuosic violin solo from Scaramuccia.

7-8(a).   **Motion 1**, interspersed with klaxon horn. Fight between Punch and Scaramuccia.

8(b)-9.   **Death 2**, unaccompanied. Punch beats Scaramuccia to death with violin.

The smashing of the violin at this point may be an allusion to Maxwell Davies' *Eight Songs for a Mad King*, first performed by the Fires of London, who commissioned *Mr Punch*.

2. *Adagio ma non troppo e molto espressivo.*

10.   **Flute solo 1**. Entrance of Judy.

11.   **Fight 1** (Anticipation of fight). Chinese block, to be joined by snare drum. Judy clouts Punch. **Flute solo 2**. Judy fetches Baby. **Fight 2**. Struggle between Judy and Punch for Baby.

12-13.   **Fight 3**. Punch knocks Judy offstage. **Flute solo 3**. Punch rocks baby. Interrupted by snare drum roll as baby cries.

3. *Allegro (alla Danza - rhythmic and brutal)*

14.   **Jig 1**. Punch jigs Baby.

15-16.   **Jig 2**. Rhythm of Jig 1 filtered so that beats become isolated. Low chords in bass, anticipating Devil's music later. Baby cries and Punch hits it.

17.   **Jig 3**. Return of triplets.

18.   **Death 3**. With low piano tremolo. Punch beats Baby's head against the floor. **Jig 4** - just snare drum.

19.   **Stillness 1**, with **Fight 4** (Chinese block (echoing Jig) and snare drum). Enter Judy, who Punch tells about Baby.

20-21(a).   **Motion 2** (three rapid gestures, with piano *glissandi*), **Fight 5/Jig 4**. Judy hits Punch with saucepan.

21(b)-23.   **Death 4**, unaccompanied. Punch beats Judy to death. **Flute solo 4**. Last gasps of Judy. Punch throws Judy off-stage.

24.   **Jig 4**. Punch: 'Lose a wife, and set a man free.. use knife or poison, or little stick.. just like ME', then runs off.

25.   **Jig 5**. Snare drum becomes more manic, towards:

26.   **Motion 3** (now in tremolos). Punch flung back on stage, lies on ground in pain.

4. *Adagio quasi un poco andante*

27.   **Stillness 2**. Enter Doctor.

28-9(a).   **Stillness 3**, overlaid with piano ripples. Doctor examines Punch. Anticipation of Constable's and Devil's music.

29(b)-30(a).   **Death 5**, joined by Stillness 4. Punch throttles Doctor

30(b)-31(a).   **Motion 4**. **Jig 6**, now altered as shown in Example 6.22. Punch runs off.

Example 6.22 *Mr Punch*, p. 17
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5. *Allegro molto vivace*

31(b). **Stillness 5**, with violin pizzicato. Enter Constable.

colla voce Dialogue. Constable attempts to arrest Punch.

32. **Death 6**, with piano tremoli. Punch beats Constable to death.

33-4. **Jig 7** (further derivative) with **Stillness 6**, introducing ruminating trills. Further rhyme from Punch. **Motion 5** - final phrase.

6. *Andante ma non troppo e molto cantabile*

35-8(a). **Stillness 7**. Very extended, as stage remains empty. Gradual increase in musical activity, with trills, *accelerando* and eventual *crescendo,* suggesting immanent events. Triangle (Jack Catch) enters at climax.

38(b)-39. Triangle roll (like prison bell) remains. Jack Catch enters with gibbet. **Stillness 8**. Like continuation from part way through Stillness 7, eventual *crescendo*.

40-41. Snare drum. Punch enters. Jack Catch explains gibbet. **Stillness 9**. Like snippet from Stillness 7/8. More snare drum and triangle. Further explanation from Jack Catch.

42-3(a). **Hybrid 1**, of previous materials (Action, Stillness, Motion, etc.) with quick montage of themes for previous characters (Scaramuccia's violin solo, Judy's flute solo, etc.), recalling past events. Punch tries unsuccessfully to insert head into noose.

43(b). Third explanation from Jack Catch, who puts head into noose.

44-5. **Death 7**, with accumulating trills and sustained pitches (also like *Wozzeck*). Punch hangs Jack Catch.

46. **Stillness 10**, but in advanced state (as previously) so no longer 'still'. Punch cuts down corpse and exits.

47(a). **Hybrid 2**, without thematic montage.

7. *Presto*

47(b). Triangle roll. Enter Devil, to drag Punch down to Hell.

47(c)-50. *Totentanz.* Three rhythmically accelerating lines of *staccatissimo* chords and notes in piano (Devil), with **Motion 6**, fragments of tremolos in flute, bass drum anticipates Death (Example 6.23). Punch tells Devil he must remain, for he is the best friend Devil has on earth.

Example 6.23 *Mr Punch*, p. 30
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51-2	**Death 8**, unaccompanied, but with *sfz* interruptions from other instruments. Punch beats Devil to death, proclaims misery (and this story) is now over.
53	**Action 2**, bringing music full circle.

As is true of so many of Finnissy's theatrical works, the use of a familiar text enables a more sophisticated yet comprehensible musical work, in which the music can comment upon the events in question. The positive reception that greeted *Mr Punch*, which grabs the audience by the throat and never lets go, would suggest the underlying sadistic tendencies of many people, which has been suggested as the reason for the attraction of a film like von Sternberg's *Der Blaue Engel*,[5] or of many more recent films, not to mention Jacobian Tragedy. For the audience *Mr Punch* acts as a form of catharsis, precisely the aim of Artaud's 'Theatre of Cruelty'. Utterly void of any warmth or hope for humanity, this most cynical of black comedies may also have served a cathartic purpose for the composer. Or perhaps it is a reflection of the amorality of the twentieth century, after world wars and nuclear technology. After completing the revised version, Finnissy was not to return to the theatre for four years, when he would explore much more 'subjective' concerns.

Alienation and Displacement

Today the Variety Theatre is the crucible in which the elements of an emergent new sensibility are seething. Here you find an ironic decomposition of all the worn-out prototypes of the Beautiful, the grand, the Solemn, the Religious, the ferocious, the Seductive, and the Terrifying, and also the abstract elaboration of the new prototypes that will succeed these.
(F.T. Marinetti, 'From The Variety Theatre' 1913).[6]

Our dramatists have no idea at all of the laws of the true theatre. In the Russian theatre of the nineteenth century the old vaudeville was replaced by a flood of plays of brilliant dialectic, plays *à thèse*, plays of manners, plays of mood... [footnote] I mention the old vaudeville not because we must necessarily revive it in the theatre; rather, I quote it as a dramatic form which is linked on the one hand with theatrical - as opposed to literary - traditions, and on the other with the tastes of the people...the vaudeville originated in the art of the folk song and the folk theatre. (From Vsevolod Meyerhold, 'The Fairground Booth' 1911-12).[7]

American vaudeville produced the cinema's first generation of great comedians, and itself disappeared as a live theatrical genre because of the growing popularity of film as the foremost medium for mass entertainment. 'Although primarily remembered as a vehicle for comedy, the vaudeville show was a very diverse spectacle, incorporating elements of circus (animal acts, trapeze artists), 'serious' theatre (lurid melodramas for the most part), opera (showpiece arias) and other things - such as folk dancing - from the various ethnic traditions that were taken by the emigrants from Europe and Asia to America in the nineteenth century. The average show would contain about a dozen speciality acts, in the bigger cities more, and in the country areas less: the lavishness - and in some cases the wholesomeness - of the spectacle were closely linked to local taste and economics. (Michael Finnissy, programme note to *Vaudeville*.)

Finnissy had been attracted to the variety show since childhood, and its explicitly sectional, non-'organic' nature has more than a little parallel in the ways in which his music is constructed. With *Vaudeville* (1983/87), however, he used the structure of a vaudeville show to deliver a bleak picture of the seven ages of man. To avoid the sentimental pathos that has become something of a cliché since Leoncavallo's *I Pagliacci*, Finnissy specifies that the staging should specify no specific era, and should emphasise 'illusion', stylised, unrealistic performance. The work portrays life as a sequence of 'acts', whereby human beings put on different 'masks' in order to find a role for themselves in a world where their existence is inevitably purposeless. The variety element is played up to the full, but an underlying pessimism seems to inform the generally crude and vulgar music.

The ensemble is essentially the same as that for Stravinsky's *L'Histoire du Soldat* (clarinet, bassoon, flugelhorn (rather than trumpet), trombone, violin

and double b
seven section

1. Birth of f
   cymbal cr
2. Childhood
   and 'Mot
   in turns
   'Mother'.
   possibly s

Example 6.24
Reproduced b

3. Romeo
   Stravins
   lovers m
   monopo

and double bass) with a mezzo-soprano, baritone and two dancers. The seven sections are as follows: [8]

1. Birth of four children - their wailing introduced with grand chords and cymbal crashes.
2. Childhood games: Musical chairs, 'Ring a ring o' roses' (Example 6.24), and 'Mother', in which one girl kneels on the floor with her skirt up, and in turns snatches the two boys away from the other girl, who plays 'Mother'. Then the first girl snatches the other girl, the 'Mother', herself, possibly suggesting lesbianism or alternatively an Oedipal complex.

Example 6.24 *Vaudeville*, p. 10
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3. Romeo and Juliet. Recitativo and Duetto derived in a rather Stravinskyian manner from Bellini's *I Capuleti e i Montecchi*, as the two lovers meet and realise they must escape (Example 6.25). Romeo utterly monopolises the duet, and Juliet can hardly get a word in edgeways.

Example 6.25 *Vaudeville*, p. 28
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4. Settings of two poems from Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, 'Cavalry Crossing a Ford' and 'Bivouac on a Mountain Side'.
5. Middle Age. Monologue by aged vaudevillian (see below).
6. Four fast waltzes, getting progressively out of focus and fragmenting. Between first and second waltzes, Flamenco dance, setting of 'El Gran Teatro del Mundo' (The Great Theatre of the World) by Pedro Calderón de la Barca ('Beauty must die! So goes the sad song. Let me not die! Let me blossom as at my first dawning.') in flamenco style, with hand clapping and foot stamping, often out of time, and becoming demented.
7. Old Age. Four characters sit on chairs. One gentleman and one lady dance slow waltz until lights down, while others fall asleep (and possibly die) in their chairs.

The longest and most important section is the fifth. An aged vaudevillian enters, and proceeds to give an imitation of five famous singers, adopting operatic poses, though he does not actually make any sound - his caricatures are enacted in gestural form only. The first four types are shown in Example 6.26.

Example 6.26a

Example 6.26b

Example 6.26a *Vaudeville*, p. 55

Grass, 'Cavalry

).
d fragmenting.
ing of 'El Gran
Pedro Calderón
Let me not die!
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ng demented.
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p (and possibly

ed vaudevillian
ngers, adopting
his caricatures
wn in Example

Example 6.26b *Vaudeville*, p. 56

Example 6.26c *Vaudeville*, p. 58

Example 6.26d *Vaudeville*, p. 60
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The fifth imitation, which the vaudevillian takes some time in getting round to, consists solely of a coin dropped in a tin, which presumably signifies the poverty that a singer (like this vaudevillian) can eventually find himself in. The vaudevillian repeats some of the imitations, either because he has forgotten which he has already done, or because he (misguidedly) thinks the audience are clamouring to see them again. He also goes on endlessly about the poverty his mother and father lived in (to the accompaniment of a mock-heartbreaking violin solo), then tells the story of his early theatrical days, including an incident where a woman he performed with (and perhaps was deeply in love with, but she would not have him) inadvertently exposed her breasts on stage. A few light moments are provided by musical references to Fred Astaire and the 'Anvil Chorus' (with the clinking coins replacing the anvil). When the audience have finally had quite enough of him, he tunelessly sings the rhyme 'If you've only got a Moustache':

Example 6.27 *Vaudeville*, p. 76
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The repetitions of the singer imitations, as well as the tedium of the stories, most clearly signify the sense of meaninglessness, and perhaps relate to Finnissy's own searches for categorical 'archetypes'. It may not be too fanciful to suggest an autobiographical element in this scene, a fear of ageing and redundancy. The vaudevillian is like a character from a Beckett or Ionesco play: he searches for some point to his existence, but discovers it is merely a sequence of events, then death. The final musical gesture in the last section recalls this scene. *Vaudeville* lacks the degree of objectivity that can make *Mr Punch* entertaining; its effect is to produce numbness and despair,

that need not rely on *verismo* style emotional manipulation to make its point, the sheer awfulness of what is being said requiring no amplification.

The empathy Finnissy shows with the societal 'misfits', who would perform a vaudeville show to an audience who would hate to meet them on the street, is taken further in *Soda Fountain* (1983). This was written in consultation with four singer/actors in Australia, and presents an array of the displaced and marginalised from literary and operatic history. The piece is in fourteen continuous sections, to be performed with minimal costume change, though a few props play a part in distinguishing characters. A chart of the movements, characters, and other details is given in Example 6.28.

As can be seen, each of the four performers has both a spoken and a sung solo, and the ordering of the sections provides for several different symmetries and developments within the whole work.

The displacement is accentuated through the nature of the selections and combinations. In the second part, Mimi, far removed from her Bohemian environment, encounters a Monster from Outer Space. Mimi coughs and sniffles as the Monster moves towards her and attacks her, but all that he achieves is to catch her cold himself. The baffled Mimi, having shed her burden, slinks away (Example 6.29).

In the encounter between Wagner's Brünnhilde and Gounod's Roméo, actual lines are lifted from the two operas (in their original languages), but juxtaposed so as to put both of their words and situations in very different contexts:

> Roméo: (hushed but luminous and ecstatic)
>   Ah! la voilà! c'est elle!
>   (Ah! There is she!)
> Brünnhilde: (frightened and trembling, whisper)
>   Ein Unhold schwang sich auf jenen Stein!
>   (A monster has mounted this rock!)
> Roméo: (ecstatic)
>   Viens, funèbre clarté! viens l'offrir à mes yeux.
>   (Come,... Come and offer yourself to my eyes.)
> Brünnhilde: (frightened)
>   Wer bist du, Schrecklicher? Stammst du von Menschen?
>   Komm'st du von Hella's nächtlich em Heer?
>   (Who are you, dread figure? Are you a mortal?
>   Have you come from Hella's hordes of night?)
> Roméo: (enthusiastic)
>   Ô ma femme! (O my lady!)
> Brünnhilde: (horrified)
>   Weh! (Woe!)

A section from this passage is shown in Example 6.30.

No.	Type	Character	Source	Voices	Props	Actions, Gestures
1.	Solo with Clash Cymbals	Monostatos	Die Zauberflöte - Mozart	Tenor	Lantern, black face-mask	Searching stage.

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No.	Type	Character	Source	Voices	Props	Actions, Gestures
1.	Solo with Clash Cymbals	Monostatos	Die Zauberflöte - Mozart	Tenor	Lantern, black face-mask	Searching stage.
2.	Duet (sounds)	Mimi, Monster from Outer Space	La Bohème - Puccini	Soprano, Contralto	-	Moves towards each other, transference of cough.
3.	Duet	Brünnhilde, Roméo	Götterdämmerung - Wagner; Roméo et Juliette - Gounod	Mezzo-Soprano, Tenor	Ring	Moving around circle as if on pivot.
4.	Spoken solo	Heathcliff and Cathy	Wuthering Heights - Emily Brontë	Soprano	-	Interruptions - whimpering, scratching.
5.	Solo with Clash Cymbals	Julius Caesar	Giulio Cesare - Händel	Contralto	Roman sword, laurel wreath	Brandishes sword, strikes heroic attitudes.
6.	Spoken solo	Mrs Bennett	Pride and Prejudice - Jane Austen	Mezzo-Soprano	-	Interruptions - sighs, sewing/embroidery.
7.	Trio (notes/sounds)	'Vocal Backing' group		Soprano, Contralto, Tenor	-	-
8.	Spoken solo	Sherlock Holmes	The Adventure of the Copper Beeches - Sir Arthur Conan Doyle	Contralto	E.g. pipe, magnifying glass.	Sucking/puffing a pipe, looking at objects through magnifying glass.
9.	Solo with Clash Cymbals	Tatiana	Eugene Onegin - Tchaikovsky	Mezzo-Soprano	Letter, dressing-gown	Reads letter, tears it up.
10.	Spoken solo	Dorian Gray	The Portrait of Dorian Gray - Oscar Wilde	Tenor	E.g. curtain, portrait	Bitter laugh, pulling curtain aside.
11.	Solo with Clash Cymbals	Lakmé	Lakmé - Delibes	Soprano	Anklets of tiny bells, flimsy scarves.	Shaking anklets, playing with scarves.
12.	Trio (spoken)	Hamlet, Lady Macbeth, Carmen	Hamlet - Shakespeare; Macbeth - Verdi; Carmen - Bizet	Soprano, Mezzo-Soprano, Contralto	-	Huddling together, moving to widely spaced positions, running about.
13.	Quartet (notes)	Four sheep/four actors	'Baa baa black sheep' - nursery rhyme	All	-	-
14.	Quartet (sounds)	Tap-dancing contestants in children's Talent Show	-	All	Hard-soled shoes.	Tap-dancing (notated rhythms).

Example 6.28 Overall plan of *Soda Fountain*

Example 6.29 *Soda Fountain*, p. 8

Example 6.30 *Soda Fountain*, p. 11

The manner in which these classic lines are used to construct a dialogue which resonates with aspects of contemporary sexual politics suggests that the seeds of such a world-view are implicit in male-female encounters from any period or place. The language difference serves to add to the effect of this comedy of mutual incomprehension. Both singers wander in a circle, as if attached by a pivot, so they cannot get closer to each other; both also sing in a very similar register, providing for a strained artificial 'heroic tenor' of Roméo contrasting with the more naturalistic register of Brünnhilde. The absurdity of the situation is heightened at the end, when Roméo actually throws his ring at Brünnhilde, whereas in the corresponding part of *Götterdämmerung* it was Siegfried who attempted to wrest the ring from Brünnhilde's finger. A set of different narratives is also used in the twelfth

section; here they are spoken (though the speech rhythms are notated as a musical score) and almost act as a commentary upon each other, rather than providing for a dialogue.

Each of the sung solo movements is marked 'fast, but constantly fluctuating, tempo: "alla turca"'. They are also unified by the same optional part for two pairs of clashed cymbals in each, which consists of four short gestures which are played at different points during the arias. Finnissy makes use of his characteristic techniques of transcription (dividing a line into short melodic fragments which are then re-arranged, halving intervals, etc.), and intersperses each aria with pauses, during which the singers perform their actions:

Example 6.31 *Soda Fountain*, p. 28 (Tatiana from *Eugene Onegin*)

The solo of Julius Caesar suggests a form of butch lesbianism through the assignment of this role to the contralto, who adopts a heroic attitude, brandishing her sword.

Actions are also used to interrupt the flow of the spoken solos. In the lines of Mrs Bennett from Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (whose thoughts on marriage belie the servile situation of women in the period), her words are interrupted at random points by a sigh or a gesture of sewing or embroidery, emphasising the permanence and fruitlessness of her situation. The passage from Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* takes words of Heathcliff, telling

how he dug up Cathy's grave but crucially omitting his declaration of belief in ghosts, which are interrupted by actions which could be attributed to Cathy, whimpering or scratching at the window to be let in.

The other sections for trio or quartet descend into hilarity and meaninglessness. The 'vocal backing' group perform an atonal, rhythmically irregular trio around the line 'Boo poo pi doo' which metamorphoses into percussive sounds such as hiccups and coughs. Their parts also fragment into single syllables, demonstrating the essential silliness of such vocal sounds by putting them in 'inverted commas':

Example 6.32 *Soda Fountain*, p. 25

Most comical of all is the thirteenth section, in which the performers play four sheep. Using the rhythm of the nursery rhyme 'Baa baa Black Sheep', Finnissy constructs two hockets, using pitched 'sheep-like bleating' in each part. The second of the hockets places the original rhythm simultaneously with its rhythmical augmentation, then diminution. In the third such section, derivatives from these two hockets are used to form a freer 'counterpoint'.

For all the humour, *Soda Fountain* nonetheless leaves a bitter taste in the mouth. The distance created between the audience and the spectacle does not disguise the awful reality of much that is said or represented. Many of the physical gestures, by virtue of their repetitiveness, are like nervous tics, symptoms of the characters' fears and senses of uneasiness. To use a phrase which Finnissy has used to describe his transcription materials, the characters

are like 'fish out of water', their hyper-displacement (removed from time and place) serving to counterbalance the ironic stance taken by the composer.

Towards an Operatic Vision

Finnissy dislikes any of his stage works being described as 'operas', because of the plethora of associations conjured up by such a term. Yet his three most recent stage works come closest in conception and realisation to an operatic medium. After finishing the long series of *Verdi Transcriptions* for piano, Finnissy seems to have decided to adopt a less partisan view towards the Verdi/Wagner axis. His subsequent stage works are more organic conceptions and make much use of motivic elements and characteristics.

The first of these works, *The Undivine Comedy* (1985-88, subsequently under revision), which was commissioned by the Almeida Festival, is also the longest and most ambitious of Finnissy's stage works. In discussing this work, I am highly indebted to previous groundwork provided by Finnissy's own programme notes, the essay 'Zygmunt Krasinski and Polish romantic drama' by Maciej Orlos,[9] Lynne Williams' article and interview 'Reinstating The Spiritual Quest'[10] and Andrew Clements' 'Finnissy's Undivine Comedy'.[11]

After exploring several different texts and subject matters, Finnissy decided to set the *Nie-Boska Komedia* (1833) by the Polish playwright, poet and novelist Zygmunt Krasinski (1812-59). Krasinski was born in Paris, the son of Count Wincenty Krasinski, an aristocrat who served as a general under Napoleon. The Count was known and respected for his loyalty, but was actually a terrible opportunist - he switched sides to join Tsar Alexander I's army after Napoleon's defeat. While studying law at the University of Warsaw, Zygmunt was persuaded by his father to break a boycott of lectures organised as a patriotic demonstration (at the time Poland was not an independent state, being variously divided between Germany, Austria and Russia, a situation mirrored in Zygmunt's portrayal of the pull of conflicting forces on his characters). As the only student to continue attending lectures, Zygmunt became the subject of much ill-feeling, and he was forced to leave and continue his studies in Geneva.

In 1830, an insurrection broke out in Poland. Zygmunt at first wished to return to join the insurgents, but was again dissuaded by his father, who portrayed the uprising as mere rabble-rousing from a vociferous minority, not at all the popular movement that it was. Soon afterwards, still in Geneva, Zygmunt wrote *Nie-Boska Komedia*. Poor eyesight prevented his entering a diplomatic career, and he spent most of the rest of his life writing in Italy and France. In 1842 he was forced by his father into an aristocratic marriage which nevertheless survived.

Nie-Boska Komedia is a visionary and apocalyptic play, an incredible achievement for an author who was only 21. It concerns two major characters, a Count who is also a poet, and a Leader of a Revolution. The

trichotomy of Art, as represented by the Count's poetry, Life, by marriage and family and Society, by revolutionary upheaval, act as conflicting forces upon the Count. Krasinski does not present easy solutions to this eternal conflict, rather he demonstrates how each ideal is fatally compromised by the flawed nature of human beings. The Count is ultimately unable to realise his artistic vision, and his poetic abilities are challenged by his wife, while the Leader, as is so often true of those who claim to speak for many, is in reality vain, egotistical and potentially despotic.

Finnissy's libretto is a modified adaptation of Krasinski's original play. Krasinski gave his characters names; Finnissy steadfastly avoids any naturalistic or realistic conventions which might make the work seem historically particular, and simply names the characters as the Count, the Countess, their Son, the Leader and the Muse, archetypal figures outside of time and place. The Muse is an interpolation from a vision of an evil Temptress in Krasinski's play, who drives the Count away from family life. In Finnissy's libretto she becomes a much more complex figure who interacts with all the other characters. She often acts as a voice of moral conscience, penetratingly analysing the situations of the peasants who join the Revolution, and in particular their indifference to the plight of women. She remarks on the volatile nature of humanity ('To the errors of former generations they added those that their ancestors never knew - indecision and timidity. And thus they disappeared from the face of the earth, and only a great silence remains after them.'), and incites men to action ('The crowds shout and call for an order. Why do you delay? Issue the order and it will race like a spark, become a flame and then a thunderbolt'). She urges the Count to desert his wife and pursue his poetry, but on the other hand denounces art's 'fake images', recognising the insufficency of art for providing salvation. Her character was also influenced by the work of Alfred Jarry, as Finnissy points out:

> In *L'Amour en Visites* Alfred Jarry writes of the poet's visit to the gardens of the Muse - they are filled with corpses in grandiose tombs. The poet offers the Muse gifts, but she tells him to go away. Taking her rejection as an indication of the inadequacy of his work, he labours to improve - killing himself in the process. As he dies he realizes that the Muse, object of his strongest desires, is blind - emblematic of the irrational way in which she bestows her favours. [12]

As well as freely transforming Krasinski's text to suit the project in question, Finnissy also introduces extracts from two other works which he believed to have areas of congruence with *Nie-Boska Komedia*. To give some actual example of the type of poetry that the Count might write, he paraphrases two speeches from Friedrich Hölderlin's unfinished Trauerspiel, *Der Tod des Empedokles* (second version - 1799), a play Finnissy had considered while he was looking for suitable operatic texts. In the first the Count invokes Nature (the translation is by Michael Hamburger, published in Friedrich Hölderlin *Poems and Fragments*, Anvil Press Poetry Ltd.; 1994):

O innermost Nature. I have you before my eyes, do you still know your friend? Beloved above all things, do you no longer know me, the poet who offered you living song as a willing sacrifice of votive blood? Into my stillness you quietly stole - deep in the inpenetrable darkness you sought me, and now you are near to me again. By the sacred trees where waters from the veins of the Earth collect, and where the thirsty refresh themselves in the heat of the day - so likewise in me flows the source of life. In me, from the depths of the world it sprang up and merged - and the thirsty came to me. How is it now? Saddened? Am I alone? And is it night out there even by day?

Empedokles is also a poet by whose words crowds are transfixed; he speaks the words of the gods themselves, but after a while begins to believe himself possessed of god-like powers, which angers the 'real' gods. Some of Hölderlin's other lines could equally apply to the Count, or indeed to the very nature of the bourgeois artist, a form of self-conception that remains prevalent today:

> I know him, know his kind, the all too happy,
> Heaven's own spoilt and darling songs
> Aware of nothing else than their own souls.
> If once the moment shakes them out of themselves-
> And those too tender ones are easily shaken-
> Then nothing calms or comforts them, they're driven
> This way and that way by a burning wound,
> Their hearts incurably seething. And he too,
> Calm though he seems; disgusted with the people,
> Deep down he glows now with despotic lust.
> His rule or ours! And we shall do no wrong
> In sacrificing him. His ruin is sure
> In any case.

Finnissy's forms of interaction with musical materials and texts which he did not originate, or indeed random or constructivist devices, have always acted to distance himself from such a self-important view of the artist, solipsistically expecting everyone else to be interested in the closed realms of his 'inner world'.

For the character of the Leader, who Finnissy felt to be weak and undercharacterised in the original, he adapted a section from the fifth dialogue in *La Philosophie dans le boudoir* (1795) by the Marquis Donatien-Alphonse-François de Sade, a section of which - *Yet another effort, Frenchmen, if you would become Republicans* - gained wide circulation as a political pamphlet. These adapted words are equally incendiary:

The world waits for deliverance from the stink of incense and the vanity of kings. We must do away with impossible morality. We must cultivate beliefs to match the republican character, beliefs to suit our customs and habits, beliefs that elevate the spirit and maintain the liberty that is our goal. We

must worship only courage, liberty and equality. We must abandon the tyranny, the vulgar mysteries and the dogma of any religion that can confuse or blunt the edge of the republican spirit. We must resist the renewal of that chaos from which we have just emerged. Let us remember...

The ending of the narrative is also considerably changed:

> In the original play, The Leader is defeated by a vision of Christ, which didn't seem to make any sense after the encounter he had earlier, in which he repudiates the Count's ethics and his religion, and so I had him defeated by a much more hedonistic vision. The light that he sees in the sky is symbolic of the light which plays a part in the undermining of all characters - they all have 'insights'; moments of illumination; moments when they can see inside themselves. The Leader sees the sky about to fall in on him. It's a kind of apocalyptic vision - a premonition - and he just wants to be made blind - he doesn't want the reponsibility of seeing.[13]

Finnissy's adaptation has some parallels in the critical re-workings by contemporary Polish directors, as in Jerzy Grzegorzewski's own production of *Nie-Boska Komedia* or Tadeusz Kantor's experimental productions of Witkiewicz, though Finnissy is less averse to narrative than some such figures. The following is a scene-by-scene synopsis.

1. A poet has deserted his Muse to marry another woman. The Muse calls upon the Spirit of Poetry to tempt and delude him - denouncing mankind for its timidity and indecisiveness. The aristocratic poet - a Count - is concerned that his creativity might have deserted him, and when accused of betraying his ideas, he turns his back on his pregnant wife and promises to follow the Muse - his Fate and Fury.
2. Damning his wife for failing to understand his vision or ambitions, the Count leaves her to write the 'poetry of the future'.
3. Seventeen years have passed. Burnt out by their relationship, the Count and the Muse seem unable to go on.
4. The Count returns to his castle to find that his wife has disappeared.
5. The Muse tells the Count that his wife has been taken to an asylum.
6. The Countess reveals that she has now become a poet, the Count's equal, and offers to describe anything that he asks of her. She relates a vision of the end of the world, and collapses as he begs her to be calm - the way she used to be.
7. The Muse asks why the Count's child is unlike other children...perhaps all children were like him before Adam's fall.
8. The Count orders his blind son to pray for his mother's soul. The son's prayers anger the Count, but - when reproached for not loving his mother - the son explains that he can hear the Countess's voice, and it is her words that possess him.
9. The Revolutionary Leader announces the founding of a Republic, while the Muse tests the Count's social conscience. The Count is too preoccupied with his own thwarted ambitions to notice what is happening around him, until the

Muse tells him of the Revolution, whereupon he finds a new resolve and a way to exploit circumstances to his own ends.

10. The Son is lost in his visionary world when the Count tells him of the Revolution. He asks only for his father's protection but the Count's thoughts are elsewhere.
11. The Count has joined the Revolution but his fascination with it has begun to wane. The Muse questions mankind's, and her own, ability to act with honesty and compassion calling for action rather than words. The Revolutionary Leader challenges the Count, and warns his followers of the power invested in him.
12. The Dance of the Revolutionaries. The Muse sings of the new citizens of the Revolution. The Count, suddenly unable to accept the violence and Godlessness of what he hears, turns his back on the Revolution.
13. Neither the Count nor Leader will compromise their visions of the future.
14. The Muse describes the castle at dawn, under imminent attack from the Revolutionaries and hands the Count the venerated sword of Saint Floristan challenging him to defend himself and his values.
15. The Son waylays his father with a vision in which a man stands trial for crimes against humanity. When asked who the accused is, the son tells him 'You, Father, it is you!' Terrified by this outburst, the Count silences his son.
16. The Count prepares for final judgement, claiming that God has appeared to him in the midst of a cloud, like an eternally burning sun, 'ever shining but illuminating nothing'.
17. The Leader asks if the Count has fallen in battle. The Muse hands him the sword. The Leader seems suddenly disturbed by the brightness of the sky. He begs the Muse to blind him, but she cannot. [14]

The text is as much an amplification of contradictions in society and humanity, from which the audience is left to make their own conclusions, as a vision of the future. Elements of Krasinski's own personality and experience can be seen at various points in both the characters of the Count and the Son. As various commentators have pointed out, Karl Marx was only 15 at the time when the play was written, yet it foreshadows not only Marx's ideas, but also those of Lenin (in the character of the Leader) and suggests the possibilities of the forms of totalitarianism masquerading as progress that were to be experienced in the twentieth century. For this reason, the play was banned for a long period in the Soviet Union, where the ruling powers deemed it to be reactionary in nature. Whether this is so, or whether the play stands as a bleak pessimistic, even nihilistic statement, or as an allegory of Christian redemption, are questions beyond the scope of this discussion.

Before considering the music, I should point out that my comments generally apply to the revised version of the score, which has not yet been completed at the time of writing (though the sections still awaiting revision are unlikely to be substantially changed). The original version made use of a nine-part ensemble of flute/alto/piccolo, oboe/cor anglais, clarinet/bass/E flat clarinet, two percussionists, chamber organ/celeste and string trio. Finnissy

felt that this ensemble sounded too much like a substitute orchestra, and in the revised version he instead uses two piccolos, two oboes, two percussion and string trio. The density of the ensemble writing in the original also added what was perhaps an unnecessary degree of incomprehensibility to what was already a complicated scenario, and could sometimes crowd out the voices, so this is considerably pared down in the final version.

The symbolic nature of the work is made apparent through the vocal characterisations. The part of the Count is mainly in a comfortable but narrow register between B flat below middle C to the D below. The registral boundaries act as constraints to generate a compressed energy, which bursts out when the Count becomes angry and oversteps the pitch limits. The Countess begins with a form of plainchant, as does the Count though at one derivative remove, exemplifying a greater 'worldliness'. When the Countess later goes insane in Scene 6, she adopts a form of wild jagged coloratura writing, derived from Bellini and Donizetti, extreme even by Finnissy's standards. Her voice is recorded twice on tape, which are played simultaneously. In the 14th scene, her off-stage voice, in a trio with piccolo and oboe, oscillates between this type of florid writing and something a little more like plainchant. The Count's part in turn moves gradually towards a form of expressionistic parlance, mirroring aristocratic decline. These various types of writing are demonstrated in Example 6.33.

Example 6.33a *The Undivine Comedy*, Scene 1, p. 19

Example 6.33b *The Undivine Comedy*, Scene 16

Example 6.33c *The Undivine Comedy,* Scene 1, p. 1

Example 6.33d *The Undivine Comedy,* Scene 6
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The Son also makes much use of plainchant, in particular the *Veni creator spiritus*, but he also takes over the coloratura from the Countess. Thus it is his mother towards whom he feels closest and is most influenced by, not his father, who deserts him.

The Leader's part shares some melodic characteristics with the Count, but is set almost entirely in a hysterical high voice, mostly falsetto. His impassioned neurosis leads to blood-curdling cries at the end of the work. Most often his part consists of falling contours, reflecting his belief that the wrongs of mankind stem from the 'fall' of Adam:

Example 6.34 *The Undivine Comedy*, from Scene 9
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The part of the Muse has a 'foreign', extra-European quality compared to the other voices. She plunders the seemingly infinite contoural possibilities within an extremely narrow tessitura, some derived from Near-Eastern incantations and Russian folk-recitation, which Finnissy used because of their 'speech-based' nature. Her part could be said to 'infect' the others, and cuts in to the harmonious world of the aristocrats from the beginning (Example 6.35).

The arch-structure of the music is monolithic in nature and parallels the vocal development of the Count. Each of the four Acts (1: Scenes 1-6; 2: Scenes 7-10; 3: Scenes 11-13; 4: Scenes 14-16) centres around a particular interval: a perfect 5th in the first act, through a 4th and 3rd to a 2nd in the last, which finally achieves a unison in the final bars. Such a scheme reflects dominant ideologies, historically given representation through music, from organum (when the church and the aristocracy were at the height of their powers) to extreme dissonance (expressionism, the crisis of capitalism and bourgeois society) with the glimpse of a form of sonic liberation (Scelsi?), for which a societal equivalent is more difficult to evince (or is this a subtle suggestion of the 'Christian redemption' interpretation I mentioned earlier? - this work ushered in a further series of pieces derived from plainchant). Richard Barrett has suggested that 'the gradual contraction of each act's formative interval from a fifth to a unison, cannot bear the structural weight assigned to it, especially given that the vocal writing sometimes tends to obscure an already complex textual argument'.[15] I believe on the contrary that the bare nature of this musical device is most appropriate so as *not* to obscure the text, though other potential obfuscation between music and text will probably be reduced in the final version.

Musical references, in texture, instrumental utilisation and vocal writing, abound, to Wagner's *Das Rheingold*, Monteverdi, Bellini, Donizetti, Busoni's *Doctor Faustus* in the organ fantasia of the first version, Strauss's *Ariadne auf Naxos*, Berg's *Wozzeck* and Szymanowski's *King Roger*, an opera whose concerns are not dissimilar. In Scene 9, which represents the maximum deviation of the libretto from the original text, Finnissy constructs a Verdian quartet for the Leader (who is making his first appearance), the off-stage voice of the Countess, the Muse and the Count, creating an intricate network of relationships between their different characters and ideas.

Divisions of class are given musical representation too: bells and plainsong for the aristocracy, and an invented folk music for the peasants, based on Rumanian bagpiping, using the E flat clarinet and *rute*, a bass drum played with birch twigs. The music is also used to express emotions and sensations which the text alone could hardly encompass, such as the terrifying interior madness of the Son in Scene 8. The violence of his solitude is demonstrated by merciless blows on the drums.

Example 6.35 *The Undivine Comedy*, from Scene 1, p. 3
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To see more precisely how Finnissy relates music to text, characters and narrative, I will now look at Scene 12 (the revised version; the original was taken from a Rumanian-based piece written for television, *Dust in the Road*). In this scene, the Count meets several of the revolutionary peasants, presumably one of the first occasions in which he has come into contact with members of the 'lower classes'. It has been suggested by Orlos that the similarity of this scene to that in *The Divine Comedy* in which 'Dante, led through the Inferno by Virgil, encounters the souls of the sinful and damned' was the reason for Krasinski's title. Certainly such a comparison provides ammunition for those who would criticise the play's reactionary nature.

The most prominent musical material in this scene is a Rumanian-based dance, initially *Andante sostenuto*, but getting more animated, which consists of melodies variously in the oboe, piccolo or violin, accompanied by drones and ostinati in the percussion:

Example 6.36 *The Undivine Comedy*, Scene 12
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A series of characters, about each of which the Muse comments, are 'conjured up' in front of the Count. First is a servant girl, 'She washed dishes and polished forks, and never heard a good word for her efforts. But now it is her turn to eat and dance.' The melody, at first in C, alternates between the oboe and piccolo, and is mainly in 3/4, while the percussion ostinato, on rute and tom-toms, consists of a repeated rhythmic cell lasting five quarter-notes. This changes to a new four crotchet cell, and a lackey enters, who 'has already killed his former master'. The violin joins the piccolo and oboe, playing simultaneously a third apart from each, though the parts begin to go out of phase. A second lackey is greeted with a further diminution of the rhythmic cell to three crotchets' length. During this time, the viola drone also decreases in distance between attacks, from eighteen to seventeen crotchets, and is joined by dissonant drones in whichever of the other instruments is not playing a melody.

After the entry of an escaped prisoner, and implosion of the rhythmic cell, there is a sudden cut into new material, *Molto meno mosso*. The Muse sings 'free men again', referring in an obvious sense to the prisoners, but Finnissy would seem also to be interpreting this as a premonition of the post-revolutionary future, in which *all* men will be 'free'. The hushed melodies and shimmering tremolos in the strings do indeed have a visionary quality (Example 6.37).

Example 6.37 *The Undivine Comedy*, Scene 12, p. 5
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A modified version of the folk dance returns, with a less clearly defined sense of metre, as a butcher enters, 'It's all the same - butchering cattle or slaughtering aristocrats'.

With the first musical entry in this scene of the Count, Finnissy introduces a new type of material, a march, or stomp, *Poco piu mosso*, in the violin and viola, which has a greater impatience (arrogance?) than what has gone before:

Example 6.38 *The Undivine Comedy*, Scene 12, p. 8
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Much more irregular, alienated music in the glockenspiel and vibraphone accompanies the entry of a Woman, whom the Count addresses as 'Milady', upon which he is reprimanded by the Muse. ('She is a free woman. She gives her love freely to all men, to all who acknowledge her rights.') The Count replies curtly ('And did they give her those rings and that amethyst chain in return?') with the stomp once again, and the Muse, undermining the 'language' of the Count from within, sings along with the stomp ('Do not mock her, citizen. She tore those trifling things from the man who became her husband, and was also her gaoler, her enemy, and the enemy of freedom'), causing the beats to disappear. The 'alienated' music returns as the Muse tells the Count that this woman has actually killed her husband in the name of the Revolution.

The piccolo leads back to the folk music, now without the drone, but with pizzicato rhythmic cells in the cello and 'military' triplets in the tenor drum, each of which again diminish in length, as a general enters. The Count questions the Muse's faith in this man's ability to successfully engineer the downfall of the castle, whereupon she retorts that the Count is 'his brother in Liberty, but not his equal in strategy'. Very threatened by these remarks, the Count replies 'My advice would be to kill that man quickly. A new aristocracy will begin with his sort.' Finnissy chooses to remain musically a little aloof from these searching questions, mainly continuing the folk dance.

The Muse is offered a way out from the Count's remark by the arrival of a silk weaver. She avows her hatred for the merchants who exploit such a worker to an ominous pulse on the cello, with single beats and shakes on the tenor drum and tambourine:

Example 6.39 *The Undivine Comedy*, Scene 12, p. 18
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The Count, wishing to tame the Muse's fiery anger, tells her to 'Drain your glass - It will make you feel better', with the melody once again, as if he would prefer her previous state of mind to that which she exhibits now. The Muse, in identification with the silk weaver, replies that 'She lacks the strength even to lift it to her lips. The age of Freedom will not dawn for her'; her sadness is subsequently represented by a short weeping oboe solo, with impassioned strings. As this fades, she returns to lines of hope for the glorious future she envisages, accompanied by a *molto animato* 3/4 beat with oboe melody, though the harsh dissonances suggest the underlying brutality that will be an inevitable part of the upheaval ('Tomorrow the rich will lie dead in the fields like sheaves of corn').

The last character arrives, a builder whose future temples will have only 'one symbol - The Cap of Liberty'; a sudden shift of emphasis is provided by a chorale in the strings, *Largo sostenuto*, punctuated by anvil and bass drum, as the Count realises the Godlessness of the revolutionaries (Example 6.40).

He vows to 'give their God back to them', and the music thins out as a transition to the next scene.

So Finnissy uses a variable degree of correspondence between the music and the characters in this scene, sometimes giving voice to unspoken or unconscious emotions, at others maintaining a distance to allow a more objective form of perception. This form of objectification allows Finnissy to present his own subjective view of the characters, one that is uniquely his; another composer, even if skilled in similar compositional techniques, would almost certainly present a very different picture.

Example 6.40 *The Undivine Comedy*, Scene 12, p. 30
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The choices with which the Count is faced in *The Undivine Comedy*, between Art and Life, have autobiographical connotations for Finnissy. For most of the 1970s, he spent almost every free hour composing, having little time for a life 'outside'. After reaching a point of despair in 1980, unable to find the recognition he deserved, and unwilling to compromise in the name of easy success, he spent some time working in Australia, from which time onwards his music made more extensive use of materials that were themselves 'outside' of his own intentions. Yet the dilemma that a composer, or indeed any artist, faces in a society where individual integrity and sincerity are usually antithetical to success, remains pertinent. Finnissy has stated:

> I understand 'the artist' to be a person who is trying to get underneath the surface of events, and understand and tell others what life is about. That is his responsibility - 'to see, to hear and to care' - as The Muse puts it. That is why it is such a big responsibility that The Count is turning his back on and why the drama is so apocalyptic. [16]

This quasi-shamanistic view of the artist can become problematic when one is forced to compare the importance of their work with more immediate social concerns, as The Count discovers. It is for these reasons that *The Undivine Comedy* is a thoroughly relevant work for our times. The initial production[17] made use of a set constructed of steel bars, to suggest a medieval dungeon, as well as some historically-derived costumes, which can well damp down the contemporary resonance. One can only hope that future productions resist the temptation to make the work into a 'period piece'.

For his next work, Finnissy chose a much more familiar, but no less universal, text, Zola's *Thérèse Raquin*. He adapted Zola's own play based on the novel to produce an extremely concise libretto, omitting the characters of Grivet, Michaud and Suzanne, to leave only Thérèse, Laurent, Camille and Madame Raquin. The 'opera' he constructed as a result is one of the most intense and claustrophobic works he has ever produced, using a synthesis of Wagnerian, 19th Century Italianate, *verismo* and expressionist genres in a manner which rarely involves slavish imitation of any of them, while retaining a thoroughly modernist perspective.

While much more sparce in terms of density of notes than *The Undivine Comedy*, the formal processes of *Thérèse* could hardly be more complex and intricate; the work operates with superimposed layers of activity, in terms of narrative, characterisation, operatic genre, texture, rhythm, interval, melodic contour and musical reference, between which a multiplicity of dialectical relationships also operates. This is on a compositional level; some of the layers are difficult to perceive consciously, but do affect the total experience. Beyond, as Finnissy uses an extremely large number of 'found' materials, further levels of correspondence and dissimilarity ensue. This is of course the case with any music; even seemingly original musical materials have natural and cultural properties that precede a composer's use of them. By using those materials which can be located elsewhere, and whose properties can thus be more readily apprehended, a composer may stand more chance of controlling them. Such an approach is common to many of Finnissy's recent works, such as *Folklore* for piano or *Glad Day* for ensemble.

To try and understand how these factors are manifest, I will try to summarise and describe the work on several different levels. The synopsis is as follows:

Setting: Paris in the mid-nineteenth century. A dingy, narrow back-street near the Pont Neuf. The parlour room above Madame Raquin's millinery shop. Stuffy, cramped and shabby: a large dining-table, several chairs, bric-à-brac.

A: SUMMER
Scene 1: Thérèse meets Laurent. She tells of her childhood and the unhappiness of her situation, married to the sick Camille. When she questions how much longer she can carry on, Laurent suggests murdering Camille; Thérèse is at first indignant; after a sudden burst of passion she no longer argues.
Scene 2: Each of the four characters is in and out of the room. Camille asks Laurent, who is painting his portrait, about his family and his painting. They both go out to get some champagne. Thérèse complains to Madame Raquin that the 'greedy and lazy' Laurent is practically living in the household. Thérèse, alone, looks at the portrait and moves listlessly about the room. Dark ensues. Camille returns and Thérèse continues to complain about Laurent. Camille is a little frightened and suggests that Thérèse is acting like a ghost; he will wake up and think 'some woman with a white face is creeping round the bed to murder me'. Camille

suggests that Laurent come out with Thérèse and him on Sunday. Madame Raquin, concerned for Camille's health, is alarmed when swimming is suggested, but a little reassured that Laurent will look after him. Laurent and Thérèse suddenly embrace passionately.

Scene 3: Thérèse is alone on stage. Both off-stage, Laurent persuades Camille to go for a swim. Laurent drowns him.

B: AUTUMN THE FOLLOWING YEAR

Scene 4: Madame Raquin mourns her lost son, and speaks of her memories of him. Laurent feigns sympathy. Thérèse is mainly silent, but Laurent speaks with a double-irony of blaming himself; he 'dived in after Camille, but he had disappeared'.

C: THE FOLLOWING WINTER.

Scene 5: Midnight. Laurent, now married to Thérèse, tries to excite her in their new found 'freedom', but she is racked with guilt, saying of Camille 'He's here. In that corner, or that one. Laughing.' then pointing out the portrait. She claims Laurent acted alone, but he claims she is equally guilty. Madame Raquin enters and overhears them. When Thérèse turns to her, 'You forgive me!', she collapses, never to speak again.

Scene 6: With Madame Raquin asleep in the corner, Thérése tells of her fears of betrayal by Laurent, and of her futile wish to escape her predicament.

Scene 7: Madame Raquin watches Thérèse and Laurent's every move. The remorseful Thérèse believes she still loves Camille, to which Laurent replies that he has taken his place, 'I have his wife - I have his bed...These two hands are not mine - they are *his*. *I* am Camille!' Thérèse, remembering her feelings towards Laurent expressed in Scene 2, responds with hatred, defying him to kill her. Provoked, Laurent attacks her, and she stabs him. Thérèse begs forgiveness from Camille, and kisses the portrait, before cutting her own wrists.

Finnissy's rather melodramatic ending is a change to that in Zola's original (a suicide pact). He describes this alternative as more suitable to an operatic/theatrical setting. It also corresponds with his ambivalence towards Zola's conviction that the characters are nothing more than animals, driven by brute forces, unable to make conscious choices. Thérèse's feelings of guilt, though smothered by the volatility of her emotional reactions, nonetheless reflect her sense that choices are and were possible. She deliberately provokes Laurent into attacking her, so that she can then kill him in self-defence, suggesting a more calculating mind than is evident otherwise. I would not agree with those that say this makes her a better person (nor indeed with disproportionate sympathy for her character - her situation is deeply unpleasant, but she is still in some sense an accomplice to the murder); I mention these aspects merely to demonstrate that Finnissy's work is informed by a rather more complex view of the pre-determination/free choice paradigm than was prevalent in the 19th century.

Despite the chronological sequence of events, narrative is not the primary purpose of the work. The story is familiar to many, and for those for whom it is not, the first scene should make subsequent events quite predictable. Rather, the narrative is just one of many threads which hold the work together. Finnissy explores much more complex considerations concerning the characters, their inner motivations, the extent to which they are products of the societies and eras they inhabit, the interdependence of their actions and the sense in which our responses to them are conditioned by musical archetypes and genres, challenging us to rethink many 'natural' responses which are in fact highly indebted to cultural conventions.

The four singers (Thérèse - soprano/mezzo, Camille - counter-tenor, Madame Raquin - mezzo/contralto and Laurent - baritone) are joined by a piano placed on the stage itself; a fifth protagonist who both observes and comments on the others and their situations. It is perhaps not too fanciful to suggest that the pianist, whose presence on-stage acts as a theatrically defamiliarising device, relates to Finnissy himself, representing his experience as a repetiteur and his thoughts and identifications with the many operas and operatic characters he encountered during such work.

For the vocal characterisation, Finnissy attempts to locate the characters in that time and place from which they derive their essential identity. Thérèse's lines derive from Parisian opera of the 1860s, specifically Meyerbeer's *L'Africaine*, demonstrating an affinity between her and Meyerbeer's African girl Inès:
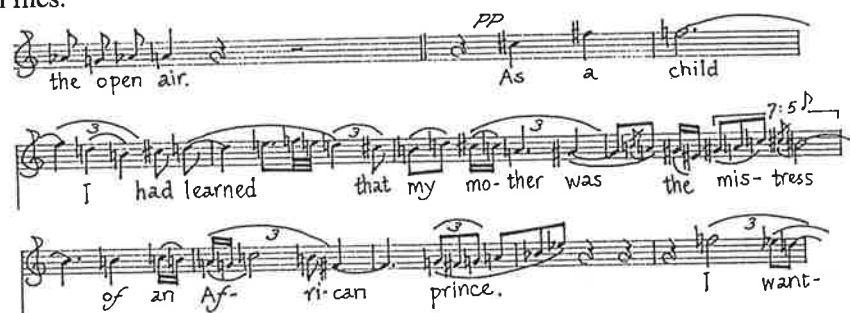
Example 6.41 *Thérèse Raquin*, Scene 1, p. 11
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The first section of the work to be composed was Thérèse's long aria, or credo, in Scene 6, from which much of her subsequent material is derived. Camille, as a country boy who yearns to return to his birthplace, uses folk-songs from Haut-Normandie or related derived material. Example 6.42 shows a clear arrangement of 'Quand j'étais petit'.

Example 6.42 *Thérèse Raquin*, Scene 2, p. 28
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His lines generally exhibit a greater smoothness and fluidity than the others, at first suggesting innocence and naïvete. The use of a counter-tenor for his role suggests that he is still a boy, which is certainly the way he is treated both by Thérèse and his mother.

For Madame Raquin, Finnissy uses selections from French opera of around 1800, the time of her birth, by such composers as André Grétry, with more extensive late-baroque ornamentation (when her material is played on the piano) than for the other characters:

Example 6.43 *Thérèse Raquin*, Scene 2, pp. 25-6
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Her part is often doubled in thirds by the piano, suggesting stability or perhaps straight-lacedness.

Laurent is a Faustian figure, lacking in sincerity, who steals elements of each of the other three characters' melodic material, and configurations. He was a childhood friend of Camille's (or rather he was someone whom Camille looked up to both then and now), so some of Camille's folk-songs infiltrate Laurent's pitches, though their parts are configured in different ways. It is possible that the relationships between their materials could produce an unconscious connection in the mind of a listener (or remind them of this connection which they have gleaned from the text).

Thérèse, Laurent and Camille's parts are divided into short pitch and rhythmic cells, which are usually randomly permutated and modified to produce lines. Multiple levels of derivative are common, as the characters develop according to their experiences, though such procedures can also occur in a non-chronological manner to effect premonitions. Material is sometimes exchanged between characters to reflect the extent of their determination through interactions with others. Vocal devices such as fragmentation of line and angular contours are used at key points in the work to provide emotional immediacy, their effect heightened by their sparing use.

The piano part, when playing together with the singers, is very often monodic and relates to the vocal parts. As well as creating clear 'critical' relationships (sometimes corresponding, at others not), this provides for the extreme sparseness of the work, the tension within the closed room. At some other points, however, it enters into areas of musical referentiality, or provides cross-referencing between different parts of the work to suggest memories, premonitions or other unspoken thoughts. In the interludes, the piano is usually given a more rich and contrapuntal part, allowing for a summary of emotional and intellectual associations with what has gone before and is about to follow.

An outline of the operatic and theatrical structures is shown below. Characters never sing simultaneously, so 'duo' or 'trio' would be inappropriate terms. 'Dialogue' refers to sung exchanges between characters.

Scene 1	Introduction
	Aria - Thérèse
	Dialogue - Thérèse, Laurent (murder)
	Interlude
Scene 2	Introduction
	Dialogue - Madame Raquin, Camille, Laurent, Thérèse
	Dialogue - Camille, Laurent ('portrait' section)
	Dialogue - Thérèse, Madame Raquin (about Laurent)
	Interlude
	Dialogue - Camille (uneasy), Thérèse (Laurent)
	Dialogue - Camille, Madame Raquin, Thérèse, Laurent (plan to go out)
	Interlude
Scene 3	Dialogue - Camille, Laurent (murder)
Scene 4	Introduction
	Dialogue - Laurent, Madame Raquin
	Aria - Madame Raquin ('I haven't counted the days')
	Dialogue - Laurent, Madame Raquin
	Interlude
Scene 5	Dialogue - Laurent, Thérèse - Madame Raquin at end.
	Transition
Scene 6	Introduction
	Aria - Thérèse ('She'll not talk. She'll say nothing. The dream of escape')
	Transition
Scene 7	Dialogue - Thérèse, Laurent (Argument - murder)
	Fragmented attempt at an aria - Thérèse

The boundaries between the delineated sections are sometimes blurred, at others clear. While this outline might imply that the work is a 'number opera', in form it is just as close to a Wagnerian model, as I will show next.

The range of musical reference is immense. Finnissy makes use of a vast number of operatic fragments, many from France in the related periods, though not all (one cannot erase the memory of what has happened in the

intervening period, nor ignore historical determinations). Certain types of French operatic archetypes also figure prominently, such as tremoli, diminished sevenths and a particular 'turn':
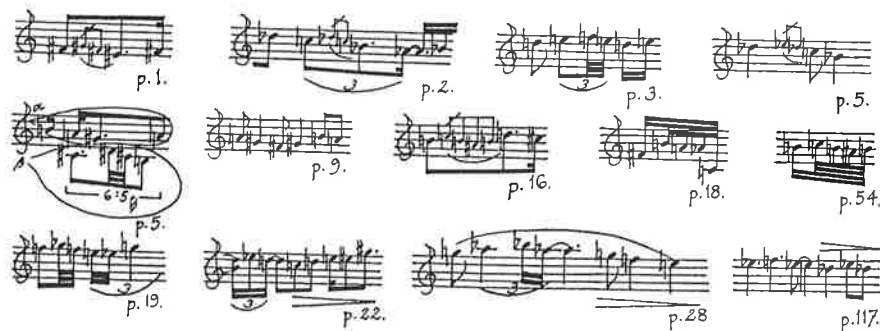
Example 6.44 *Thérèse Raquin*
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This referentiality makes its effect through resonance rather than recognition - there is perhaps little for a listener to achieve (other than smug self-satisfaction) through spotting recognised materials. It is not necessary to know the sources in order to appreciate the work; I detail them in order to demonstrate how the work is able to achieve its ends.

In the following analysis, the delineation of sections and nomenclature of materials is my own, although some of my ideas are influenced by conversations with the composer. The material types (the most important of which I will call **Excitement** (buzzing trills or tremolos), **Drowning** (ascending lines, usually in the bass), **Copulation** (wild, ravishing writing in the piano) and **Bach/Passion** (derived from a Chorale Prelude - 'Passion' refers to the emotion brought about by the notion of escape, not the St. Matthew or John Passions!) are usually not static motives; they are given differing representations according to the degree of their presence either in the characters' minds or that of the composer. It is therefore practically impossible to find and illustrate them in some sort of 'essential' form; the extent of development, modification and cross-referencing demonstrated in the sketches makes such a search an impossible task!

Scene 1
A: Piano Introduction: General feeling of claustrophobia; plodding chords, from which melody arises - Thérèse material (from Meyerbeer), shown in Example 6.45.

As Thérèse goes out and returns with Laurent, occasional chords appear within bare melodic line, providing a modicum of warmth.

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Example 6.45 *Thérèse Raquin*, Scene 1, p. 1
Reproduced by permission of Oxford University Press

B: Thérèse aria:
B1: *'I've waited so long for you... and set me free.'* Still, rapt writing for
Thérèse (pitches from basic material). Piano continues quicker melody,
sometimes counterpoint of two lines, occasionally introducing harmonisation
of individual notes. The buzzing of the trills or tremolos, **Excitement 1**
(with an eye towards Ravel's *Shéhérazade*) are used at the moments when
Thérèse enters deeper into her inner sensual world:
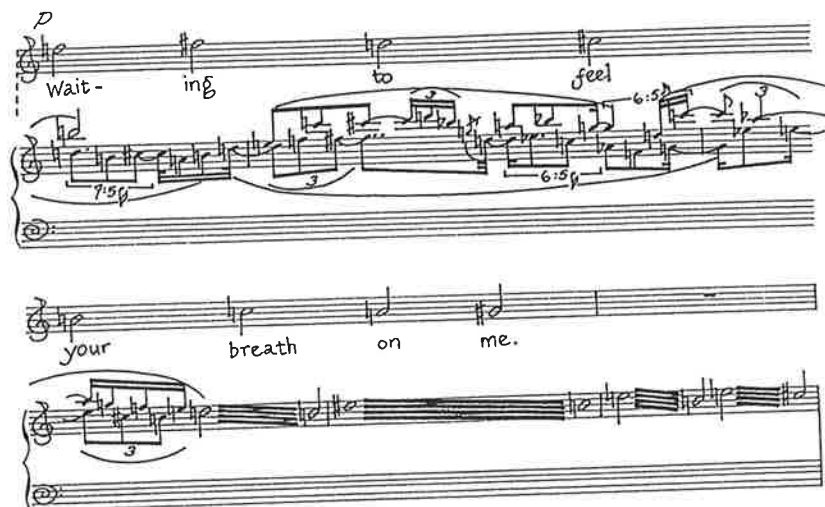
Example 6.46 *Thérèse Raquin*, Scene 1, p. 4
Reproduced by permission of Oxford University Press

'Twice I meant to run away... while I dreamed of hitting and biting.' Piano material to be later used for 'T & C childhood'. Wider intervals for Thérèse with last words leading to:

Copulation 1: *piano*, thoughts of rough, animal-like sex.

B2: *' I can't think now why I ever agreed to marry Camille...I refused to share with him'*. Continuation of main B1 material. More potential 'T & C childhood' material.

Commentary 1: Piano presents elaborate four-voice amalgam of Thérèse material, with many minor 3rds and diminished 7ths.

B3: *'Their house by the river, kept inside when I longed for the open air'*. Trills then tremolos, **Excitement 2**, lead into *Sostenuto, visionario*. *'As a child...'*. Most direct reference to *L'Africaine*. Later, Thérèse's 'Staring at the flames...' invokes premonition of particular motive from the Bach Chorale Prelude BWV 646 to be used in Scene 6, **Bach/Passion 1**, also used for 'passion' music associated with Laurent in forthcoming interlude. Such words as 'crushed, dazed' produce fragmentation of Thérèse's melodic line. Section concludes with further tremolos, **Excitement 3**.

C: Thérèse and Laurent:

C1: *'Couldn't we get Camille out of the way...We could enjoy each other all the time.'* Exchange between the two characters, each of whose lines derive from random permutations of cells. Piano line intensifies harmonically, but also gradually slows down.

C2: *'Kill him?'* Very sparse, with slow bare lines in piano, from Thérèse material, as she sings hesistantly, but a little excited. As Laurent suggests ways of disposing of Camille, *Animato*, and appeals to Thérèse's passion, rapid arpeggio and trills, **Excitement 4** (with descending bass anticipating, in inversion, the **Drowning** motif used in the following scene), *'Do what you like with me!'*, leads to:

Copulation 2: Now *fff*. Much more directly implied.

C3: *'We can be happy...happy together, for a lifetime.'* Solo for Laurent. Piano, after a low chord again anticipating **Drowning**, has a two-part canon on the 'Passion' motif, **Bach/Passion 2**, relatively upbeat, leading towards:

Interlude: 'Passion music' associated with Laurent, **Bach/Passion 3**, but configured in a Wagnerian manner (viz. *Tristan*) (Example 6.47). Some short interruptions to main line recalling material from previous scene, including short reminiscences of **Excitement** and **Copulation** (and yet more low chords to pre-figure **Drowning**).

Example 6.47 *Thérèse Raquin*, Scene 1, p. 24
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Scene 2
Introduction: Camille's music in the piano (monodic). Entry of Madame Raquin (with medicine) introduces ornamentation in her style.

A: All four characters:
A1: Thérèse tries medicine before it is given to Camille. First proper introduction of 'Drowning music', **Drowning 1**, derived from Berg's *Wozzeck* (ascending scales and arpeggios), in piano (Example 6.48):
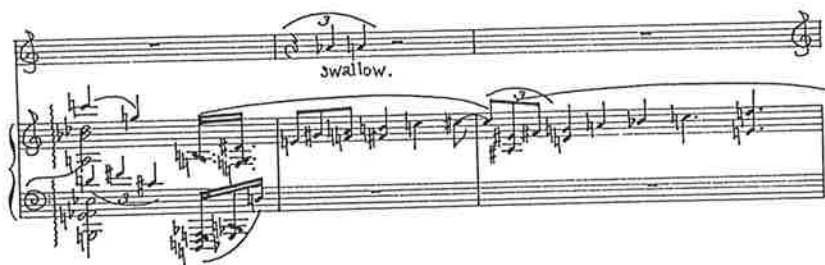
Example 6.48 *Thérèse Raquin*, Scene 2, p. 26
Reproduced by permission of Oxford University Press

A2: *'You have such good health, Laurent'*. Waltz-like 3/4 for Camille. As he asks Thérèse *'we are spoilt, aren't we?'*, sudden shift to sustained chords - her desolation. Thérèse, *'Yes'*, followed by melancholy lines of her music in piano.
A3: *Allegretto.'Do you remember the money my mother gave us when we were children?'* Most immediate 'motif' for Camille - relatively direct reference to Haut-Normandie folk song 'Quand j'étais petit', lyrical, boy-like. Laurent's part is more speech-like, matter of fact, rhythmically;

involves modified permutation of his pitch cells. Piano generally plays Camille-like line, suggesting particular sympathies.

A4: *'It's better than my place'*, preceded by *'On rainy days you'd think this was the cellar'*. As Laurent is reminded of sexual encounters with Thérèse, **Copulation 4** in piano, leading to **Drowning 2**, this time as staccato chords in piano.

A5: *'Poor Camille you are never satisfied'*. Madame Raquin's line recalls 'T & C childhood' material from Scene 1. Her line *'I would have started business in the country again'* to be used in Scene 4. As Camille remembers fondly the trees and the river, buzzing trills and **Drowning 3** in piano indicate his future death.

B: *'The shop bell rings'*. Thérèse couldn't care less about the shop, so Madame Raquin has to go down. Piano plays **Copulation 5**, interrupted by silence and single slur; then bare Thérèse melody again.

C: Portrait Scene.

C1: Camille asks Laurent about his father and his work. Both use mainly permutations of their pitch cells. Camille's part is now more 'talkative', adopting Laurent's language in order to endear himself to him. Piano in RH is derived from Fauré's *Le Secret* Op. 23 No.3, with a regular crotchet pulse, and in LH from Berlioz's *Symphonie Fantastique (Episode dans la vie d'un artiste)*, presenting Finnissy's view of Laurent's self-image (Example 6.49).

Example 6.49 *Thérèse Raquin*, Scene 2, p. 39
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As Laurent's talk ranges back to his own childhood (*'He wanted me to be a lawyer - acting for him in those endless disputes with his neighbours'*), piano shifts momentarily to folk-song material, with short **Drowning 4** in the bass. Note portamento in Laurent's part (*'So I strangled my muse'*).

C2: Piano part much slower. Portrait is finished, Madame Raquin tells Laurent to go with Camille to get champagne.

D: Madame Raquin and Thérèse

D1: Piano only for first three bars. Thérèse attempts to make Madame Raquin believe that she dislikes Laurent (*'Laurent eats and drinks like a wolf...'*) but portamento (as in Laurent's part in C1) belies her real feelings.

D2: Madame Raquin expresses her sympathies for Laurent, with more Berlioz material, though configured in her own way (Example 6.50)

Example 6.50 *Thérèse Raquin*, Scene 2, p. 42
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Interlude: Thérèse studies Camille's portrait, then moves listlessly around the room. The light fades. A myriadic array of Thérèse's material is configured in two sections, the mid-point provided by two sustained chords, anticipated in previous texture. Second section is clearer (in contradistinction to the increasing uncertainty of both the light and Thérèse's mood). Included are a trill and a tremolo, **Excitement 5**.

The long association in the first scene of the **Excitement** motif with Thérèse should mean that when it appears subsequently, a listener will make the unconscious connection of the piano with Thérèse's thoughts at that time. However, in the second section of Scene 2, she is the only character with whose voice the motif never appears. The association might then be loosened and re-attached in a listener's mind.

For this second section, the piano part consists of a fragmented cut-up of Scene 1, the idea being that the thoughts and words of Scene 1 are determinants for this section, which in turn is a determinant for future scenes.

E: Camille and Thérèse. Camille, frightened by the strange way Thérèse is acting, sings long legato lines, in contrast with Thérèse's hypertrophised and fragmented repetition of Madame Raquin's 'Laurent is like one of the family now'. Piano disappears with Thérèse's 'I'm not joking', returning only at

Camille's 'I shall think that some woman with a white face is creeping round the bed to murder me', with **Drowning 5**, this time descending in chords with increasing numbers of notes.

F: All four characters. Each **Excitement** is a brief interruption of the main line.

F1: Madame Raquin and Laurent enter. Camille tells Laurent that Thérèse frightened him, and about the champagne. Piano generally higher than voices, includes **Excitement 6** (4 crotchets) and **Bach/Passion 4**, and is more continuous. Camille suggests going to the country with Laurent. Piano descends, then tremolo, **Excitement 7** (4 crotchets). Laurent *'jumps ditches full of water and throws stones up to the sky'*, with **Excitement 8** (5 1/3 crotchets).
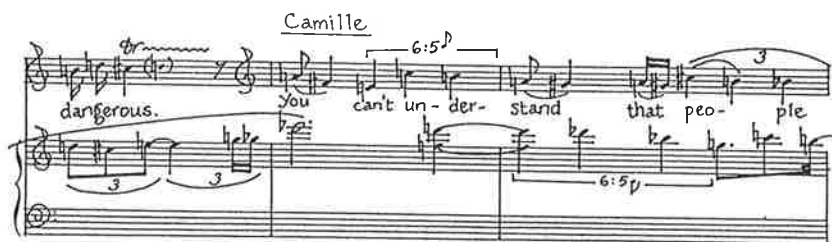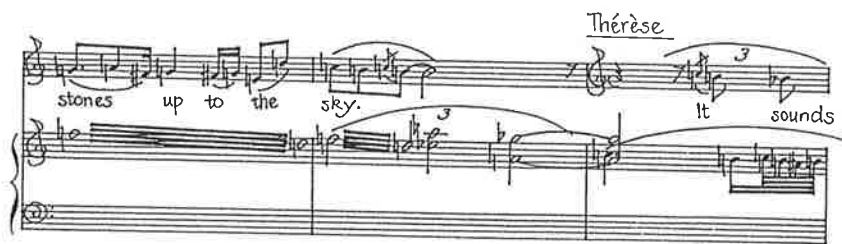
Example 6.51 *Thérèse Raquin*, Scene 2, p. 54
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Camille is less interested in Thérèse, *'She sits on the ground and stares at things'*, with which comes **Excitement 8** (4 crotchets).

F2: *Molto Animato.* Madame Raquin asks Laurent to take care of Camille. Includes **Excitement 9** (9 crotchets).

F3: *Presto Agitato.* Camille doesn't 'like being treated like a little boy'.

F4: *Molto meno mosso. Calmo.* Camille makes plans, Laurent suggests 'A swim in the river'; **Excitement 10** (4 crotchets, pause), with **Drowning 6**.

F5: *Più mosso. Agitato.* Madame Raquin is worried. **Excitement 11** (3 crotchets) and Thérèse mentions how frightened Camille is of water, then **Excitement 12** (4 crotchets) and **Drowning 7**. Laurent recalls their swimming at school, with trills in his part and tremolos in the piano, **Excitement 13** (11 crotchets), as well as **Drowning 8**.

F6: *Animato.* Camille is determined to go swimming. **Excitement 14** (4 crotchets, 3 crotchets, 5 crotchets, descending pitches). Madame Raquin tries to stop him.

F7: *Meno mosso.* Camille suggests tea, then tells again of childhood: '*Laurent imitated the horses trotting, and the cracking of the whips*'. As he and Madame Raquin depart, Thérèse repeats Camille's last phrase, leading to:

Interlude: Copulation 6. *Appassionato.* Most prominent, as actual copulation occurs (Example 6.52). Makes use of Laurent's pitches and another multiply-derived set, but intensity of writing probably makes this imperceptible.

Example 6.52 *Thérèse Raquin*, Scene 2, p. 63
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Piano part thins out (though interrupted towards end with one bar **Copulation 7**), reducing to single slow line of Camille's material.

Scene 3

Thérèse on stage, Camille and Laurent sing from off.

With Camille's first entry, piano stops. As previously, Camille's line is sustained and lyrical, while Laurent's is more urgent and speech-like (Example 6.53a). Thérèse's one line (by which she could be said to become an accomplice) is frightened but with glimmers of the future (Example 6.53b)

Example 6.53a *Thérèse Raquin*, Scene 3, p. 66

Example 6.53b *Thérèse Raquin*, Scene 3, p. 67
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The piano returns briefly with Camille's folk music as he emits an unpitched '*Ow*' on feeling the water, then stops again. His line becomes quicker and fragments as it is clear that Laurent is starting to perform his terrible deed. With his death cries, the piano starts again, with a longer line (Example 6.54).

This is the focal point of the narrative, yet it does not coincide with those of theatrical action and musical intensity (the end of Scene 2). The piano line at this point is, however, the longest exposition of Camille's material - the essence of his existence is only graspable at the moment of death. The increased urgency of Camille's part as Laurent is starting to drown him relates to his appropriation of Laurent's manner in the Portrait scene.

For the fourth scene, which centres around Madame Raquin, Finnissy makes use of operatic fragments from the 1760s, earlier than had previously been used for her material. He explains this as wishing to suggest the fact that she has aged beyond her natural years, as a result of the tragedy. The fragments come in pairs and between each successive pair one of the composers (though not the particular opera) remains the same.

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Example 6.54 *Thérèse Raquin*, Scene 3, p. 68
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Scene 4
Laurent, Madame Raquin and Thérèse (who does not sing at all during the scene).
Introduction: 1760s Opera 1. The two hands of the piano derive from Monsigny (*Le Déserteur*) and Philidor (*Air du Cocher*) for four bars (Example 6.55), then from Grétry (*Lucille*) and Monsigny (*Rose et Colas*). The part thins to one line, then to melodic fragments.
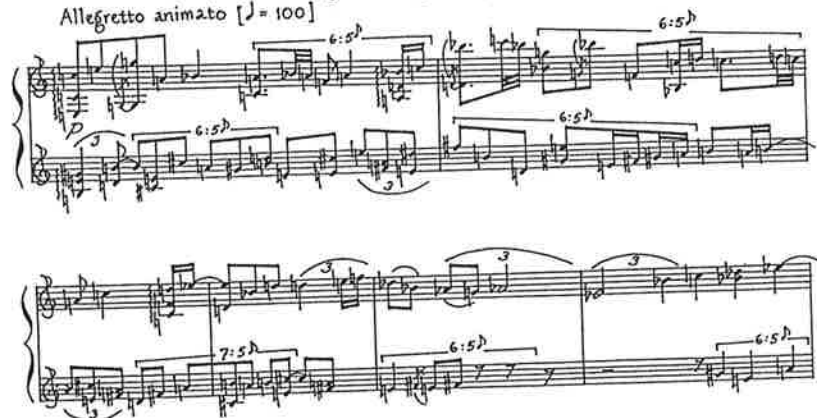
Example 6.55 *Thérèse Raquin*, Scene 4, p. 69
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A. Laurent and Madame Raquin:
A1: Laurent, unaccompanied, tries to interest the others in cards
1760s Opera 2: From Grétry - *Ariette d'Anacréon* - and Spontini - *Hymne au Soleil (Milton)*.
A2: Madame Raquin, a broken woman, in correspondingly broken phrases, still unaccompanied. Her pauses bring short piano phrases derived from the operatic material. Laurent tries to console her, with smoother lines, though **Excitment 15** belies his true feeling.
1760s Opera 3: Spontini - *Oedipe à Colone*, Paër - *Le Maître de Chapelle*.
A3: Laurent with Madame Raquin again, with more continuous piano line. Includes **Excitement 16**.

B: Madame Raquin's aria. In nine phrases:
B1: *'I haven't counted the days.'*
B2: *'I cry because the tears just come.'*
B3: *'All the time I can see my poor child.'*
B4: *'I see him when he was little.'*
B5: *'It was such an awful death.'*
B6: *'I begged him to give up the notion of going in the water.'*
B7: *'He wanted to show he wasn't afraid.'*
B8: *'If only you knew how I cared for him when he was a baby.'*
B9: *'For three whole weeks, when he had typhoid, I held him in my arms without ever going to bed.'*
Madame Raquin's line, which sometimes refers back to material from Scene 2, begins low (Example 6.56), and is less continuous than the piano, which plays a single line from her material, usually starting a few beats after the beginning of her phrases.

Example 6.56 *Thérèse Raquin*, Scene 4, p. 75
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In **B4**, the pia[...]
memories, but [...]
piano line doe[...]
with the long[...]
middle of the [...]
and **B8** end wi[...]
'factual' even[...]

C. Laurent an[...]
C1: *Animato.* [...]
9 and **Exciten**[...]
Molto Anima[...]
refuses to acc[...]
1760s Opera[...]
Ariodant, Nic[...]
C2: *Allegro* [...]
anymore.'
Thérèse wal[...]
child and I l[...]
made real. [...]
forays into t[...]
Madame Rac[...]
agitato subit[...]
Interlude: 1[...]
Piano writin[...]
notes anticip[...]

Scene 5
The tempo [...]
tempi, with [...]
rallentando. [...]
pitch cells, [...]
increasing v[...]
A. The pia[...]
(two bass n[...]
A1: Crotche[...]
managed to[...]
for last wor[...]
liberation.
A2: Crotch[...]
us', the dur[...]
A3: Crotch[...]
grace notes[...]

In **B4**, the piano starts earlier, and her voice rises, as she recalls her fond memories, but in **B5**, in a similar register, she is 'stranded in mid-air', and the piano line does not start until after her last word. A similar process occurs with the longer **B9**. Overall, Madame Raquin's tessitura rises towards the middle of the aria, then falls again, though this arch is small. **B1, B2, B3, B4** and **B8** end with an allargando; those that don't seem to refer to more directly 'factual' events. **B7** contains a trill, **Excitement 17**.

C. Laurent and Madame Raquin:
C1: *Animato*. Laurent, *'These memories are so painful'*, leads to **Drowning 9** and **Excitement 18**.
Molto Animato. As Laurent pretends to have tried to save Camille, piano refuses to accompany.
1760s Opera 4: *a tempo*. Méhul (who was heavily influenced by Grétry) - *Ariodant*, Nicolo-Isouard - *Joconde*.
C2: *Allegro risoluto*. Madame Raquin decides *'to be sensible. I shan't cry anymore.'*
Thérèse walks out to **Bach/Passion 5** when she tells Laurent *'You're my child and I love you'* - her fake feelings towards Laurent in Scene 2 are now made real. Piano line mainly continuous and monodic, with occasional forays into two- and three-part writing, and more sustained chords. After Madame Raquin's last line, *'She doesn't cry easily'*, the piano plays two lines *agitato subito*, separated by one *calmo*, producing a sensation of unease.
Interlude: 1760s Opera 5. Boïeldieu - *Jean de Paris*, Grétry - *Lucille*. Piano writing progresses towards more florid, arpeggiated style. Low pedal notes anticipate next scene.

Scene 5
The tempo scheme in this scene forms an arch - progressively increasing tempi, with accelerandi at the end of each, then decreasing, with similar rallentando. Laurent and Thérèse each use random permutations of their pitch cells, though modified (or given octave displacement) to produce increasing vocal intensity and hysteria.
A. The piano for the first section alternates bell-like low B flat, A, A flat, A (two bass notes for each subsection).
A1: Crotchet = 63. Laurent tells Thérèse *'The room belongs to us now... We managed to kill Camille and remain free'*, with portamento towards high note for last word (within generally moderate tessitura) suggesting possibility of liberation.
A2: Crotchet = 72. As Thérèse says that Camille's *'corpse is here, between us'*, the durations of her pitches become generally shorter (greater urgency).
A3: Crotchet = 80. Thérèse's voice becomes 'possessed', and uses single grace notes, as opposed to the more casual tones of Laurent:

Example 6.57 *Thérèse Raquin*, p. 85
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A4: Crotchet = 88. Thérèse in shorter phrases, frightened. Laurent more accentuated (impatient), with more 'cavalier' portamenti. As he describes Camille's body at the morgue in explicit detail, he sings more quickly; sadistic excitement has been aroused.

A5: Crotchet = 100. Continuation of **A4**. Laurent calms down a little, but Thérèse will not stop believing that Camille is amongst them.

A6: Crotchet = 112. She gets his portrait (first double grace notes). To Laurent's sarcastic staccato at the end of *'And we'd do it again, wouldn't we?'*, Thérèse now becomes angry and strident in tone, denying any involvement in Camille's murder.

A7: Crotchet = 132. Thérèse continues to protest. Her reference to Laurent as 'you' uses a perfect fifth, whereas the rest of her line in this section is in close tessitura. The second piano knell is a chord instead of a single note, as Madame Raquin appears in the shadow, unseen by the others. This is described by the composer as the beginning of her stroke. Laurent becomes hysterically angry, with detached triplets, *'We killed Camille'*.

B: Laurent and Thérèse suddenly notice Madame Raquin. Their parts do not necessarily mirror the falling tempos.

B1: Crotchet = 152. Madame Raquin's part has a narrow tessitura, in musical response to which Thérèse calms down, though Laurent remains

equally hysterical, *'She didn't love him, said he stank like a sick child'*
(detached triplets again). Two more dense chords in piano.

B2: Crotchet = 112. Thérèse alternates angular line with keening high
tessitura (Example 6.58). Laurent is more animated (shorter durations).

Example 6.58 *Thérèse Raquin*, Scene 5, p. 91
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The second of the piano chords begins a series of decreasing note-densities,
from four notes down to one.

B3: Crotchet = 88. Thérèse, still with relatively wide or high tessitura, sings
to Madame Raquin, begging her mother to take her side. Madame Raquin's
collapse is not amplified by any parallel musical interspersion. Thérèse's
singing of *'You forgive me!'* as Madame Raquin collapses is one of the most
disturbing moments in the whole work.

B4: Crotchet = 63 (no rall). Thérèse, anxious, now sings low, and mainly in
triplets. Laurent's impatient reponse pulls these out of shape. Terrified,
Thérèse sings *'She must be put in her bed'* in single detached notes.

Transition: Quite direct reference to Bach Chorale Prelude BWV 646, 'Wo
soll ich fliehen hin' (How shall I escape?), including **Bach/Passion 6**. Single
line, with pedal notes.

Scene 6

This scene consists of a long aria for Thérèse, whose part consists of
fragments from Meyerbeer. Piano part from **A** alternates with voice, and is
exclusively based on fragments from a Bach chorale prelude, from a phrase
of which germinates **Bach/Passion** music. It has three types of phrases: (a)
Long notes, (b) Monodic lines, (c) Two part counterpoint, one part moving
more quickly than the other.

Introduction: Two part counterpoint, from Bach, a little blurred, coming
twice to rest on sustained pitches. Single line continues.

A: All Thérèse's 14 phrases begin on a G.

A1: She speaks of the dream of escaping Camille and starting a new life.
Middle register, narrow tessitura (Example 6.59). Piano type (a).

Example 6.59 *Thérèse Raquin*, Scene 6, p. 96
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A2: Piano type (b) in E flat minor, only at beginning and end. Thérèse sings of how she cannot escape Laurent in an emotional sense, *'We'll end up tearing each other to pieces'*. She begins nervously, *molto animato*, then is resigned, *molto calmo*, while her melodies rise, though a descending portamento is the converse of her passion in Scene 2. Madame Raquin will hear them talk, but *'Say nothing about it'* - she returns to E flat minor for second piano phrase.

A3: She now envisages the physical consequences of a literal escape, *'Filth and squalor'*. Increased resignedness.

B: Now phrases (15 of them), begin on A sharp/B flat.
B1: Narrative continuation of **A3**. In very first phrase, trill signifies **Excitement 19**. Piano has one note, after *'Don't tell anyone anything'*. With *'Silent' 'Cold' 'Threatening'* and *'Doing nothing'*, Thérèse's line almost comes to a halt.
B2: Piano has regular, longer, lines, first type (c), then (b). Thérèse is worried about betrayal by Laurent, *'Not ever happy until the pain drives me mad'*.

C: Phrases begin on C sharp. Increased emotional intensity.
C1: Thérèse's first climax, *'It's a lie'* (preceded by *'That I made him kill Camille?'*). This line *ff*, those before and after *p*. Piano ends with type (b).
C2: Second climax, *'Oh Laurent, your blood seemed to radiate warmth as I passed you'* (interestingly no **Excitement**), dynamics fall from *f* to *ppp*. Appearance in piano of **Bach/Passion 7** (Example 6.60).
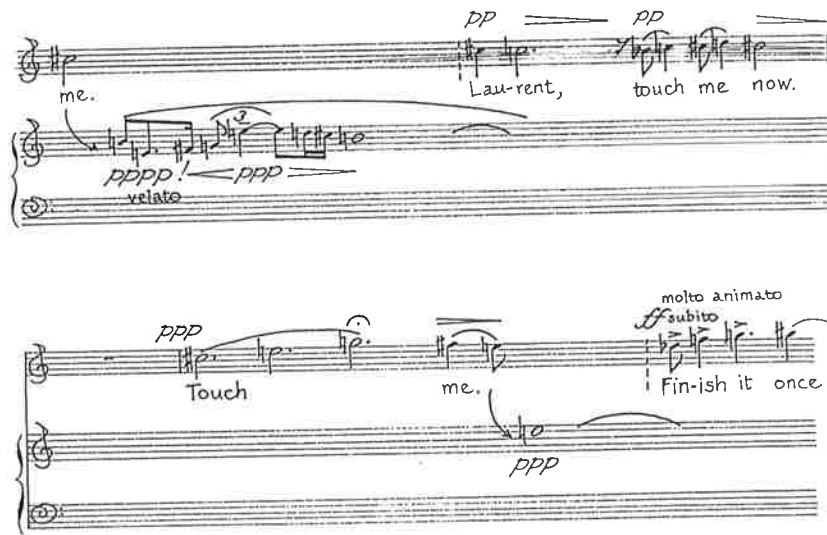
Example 6.60 *Thérèse Raquin*, Scene 6, p. 104
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C3: Third 'climax', *molto animato* '*Finish it once and for all*' - Thérèse wonders if escape really is a possibility, though perhaps the 'escape' she imagines is death. A possibility of hope is expressed through her final line, '*All these people are blind*', *molto animato*, but the piano continues the Bach material, *calmo*, leading to

Transition: Elaboration of Bach material into denser texture. Hints of **Copulation** and **Excitement**.

Scene 7
During this scene, Laurent and Thérèse are joined on stage by Madame Raquin, 'propped up at the table - stiff, passive, only her eyes watching every movement' and the portrait of Camille (as in the previous scenes). The original version had a derivation of Madame Raquin's music in the piano part; the final version uses the Fauré-derived part of the 'portrait' material from Scene 2. Its characteristic regular beats are here greatly slowed down (at first from one crotchet to seven) and transposed (Example 6.61).

A: Thérèse, remembering the best of Camille, sings a form of lament, while Laurent continues his angular, but rhythmically speech-like material from Scene 5. Word-painting accompanies Thérèse's reminiscence of Camille's 'delicate nature'. With '*now I remember, and I love him*', her triplets recall Scene 5. A rising portamento accompanies Thérèse's '*I love him and hate you*', and for '*You are covered with Camille's blood*', **Excitement 20** (horrible sadism). Thérèse wishes to '*kiss the ground where he lies at rest. That will be my final joy*', and her line becomes more sedate, anticipating the final section.

Example 6.61 *Thérèse Raquin*, Scene 7, p. 108
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B: Laurent becomes more deranged and Thérèse provokes him into attacking her.

B1: After Laurent's tentative *'I have his wife'*, he has a rising portamento for *'I have his bed'*. Falling portamenti then enter his line, for *'My hands don't belong to me anymore'* and *'inside my head. Hammering at it with his fists.'* His encroaching madness is demonstrated by the filtering of his line into short bursts of activity. When he sings *'I am Camille'*, his material is (extremely obliquely) derived from Camille's 'Quand j'étais petit' from Scene 2 (reminding us that he comes from the same place as Camille).

B2: Thérèse berates Laurent for sponging from her and Madame Raquin, leading him to move to strike her. She has falling portamenti for *'Go on - finish it - kill me as you killed him'*, and for her following *'Go on - kill me!!!'* she is almost screaming. She takes the bread-knife, provokes him further with a rising contour, then stabs him as he attacks her. The piano part avoids melodrama; it changes in two respects, larger intervals, and two *sfzp* chords, just before and during the stabbing (Example 6.62).

C: Thérèse's final 'aria' moves towards sedateness and serenity, as in section **A**. The piano part has smaller intervals again, then single pitches. She falls on her knees in front of Madame Raquin, begging her forgiveness. Taking the portrait, *'reverencing it as though it was a religious relic'* and kissing it 'slowly and without passion', her last line *'I kiss...the ground...where you lie...at rest'*, shows that she has attained some sort of peace, before she slits her wrists. The bleakest of endings uses several rising major seconds in the piano, fragmenting.

Example 6.62 *Thérèse Raquin*, Scene 7, p. 114
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I would not for a moment pretend that this analysis represents anything more than a highly particular and subjective view of the work. The choice of 'subtexts' in either text or music (or relation between the two) is my own - doubtless another analyst would give priority to a different set of features. I hope if nothing else to have given some idea of the multi-layered nature of the work, the means of its construction, the particular 'take' on the music-text dialectic (so much more sophisticated than mere word-painting) and the 'paths' taken by several relatively distinctive material types.

For many of the critics at the time of *Thérèse*'s première, the work amounted to little more than a musically redundant salon style accompaniment to a text. Expecting some sort of high-octane grand opera, they were unable to see beyond the deliberate narrow confines of text, set and musical means and to appreciate how Finnissy's work manages to place a certain distance at the outset between the audience and the spectacle, while still conveying with the utmost immediacy the closeted nature of the situation in which the characters find themselves. Certainly anyone will come to this work with pre-conceptions and prejudices, and a 'naïve' listener probably does not exist. However, if one desires exaggerated emotions and subservience of music to textual purposes, or believes objectification and/or 'close-focus' to be inappropriate to an operatic setting, one would do better to listen to *Tosca*.

Thérèse Raquin is of course open to many possible criticisms - the absolute centrality of Thérèse within the later scenes is a little dogmatic and overpowering, whilst Laurent's demonism can seem somewhat one-dimensional. At a few places (particularly in Scene 2), the proximity of

some of the types of material can occasionally lead to a degree of greyness, which requires a number of listenings to overcome. However, I believe it to be an immensely powerful, wholly individual and inexhaustible work, which yields up ever new perceptions of a familar story.

The most recent of Finnissy's stage works is *Shameful Vice,* an altogether more didactic and polemical work, based on the life of Tchaikovsky. Since childhood Finnissy had an immense love for Tchaikovsky's music (and had argued its merits vehemently against the advocates of 'high' modernism) and felt empathy towards the marginalisation of another homosexual composer. After scrupulous research into his biographies, letters and music, Finnissy came to believe in the 'kangaroo court' theory of Tchaikovsky's death, in which he was ordered to take his own life by a committee of the 'great' and the 'good' in St Petersburg, appalled that he had had sexual relations with members of the lower classes.[18]

The work was commissioned by Vocem Electric Voice Theatre and the Endymion Ensemble, presenting Finnissy with an interesting musical challenge: to write the work he desired using six voices (3 sopranos, tenor, baritone and bass) with an ensemble consisting of 2 clarinets, 2 trumpets, guitar, harp, 2 violins and double bass. He uses the bass for the role of Tchaikovsky, while the other five singers are unspecified characters, given only a number in the score, who assume different roles within the drama. Their anonymity reflects Tchaikovsky's sense of persecution - all people around are turning against him. He is presented as a sensitive character, maintaining a certain dignity despite the terrible circumstances that befall him, and his vocal line often refers to fragments from the operas.

Bearing in mind Tchaikovsky's intense religiosity, Finnissy structures the work in 14 scenes, relating to the 14 Stations of the Cross:

1.	Jesus is condemned to death.	1.	Tchaikovsky is condemned by his judges.
2.	Jesus receives his cross.	2.	He stands accused by the crowd.
3.	Jesus falls the first time.	3.	In Italy he falls in love with Vittorio.
4.	Jesus meets his mother.	4.	He recalls his mother.
5.	Simon the Cyrene helps Jesus carry the cross.	5.	Tchaikovsky and Saint-Saëns dance an impromptu ballet.
6.	Jesus and Veronica.	6.	Nadezhda von Meck.
7.	Jesus falls a second time.	7.	Tchaikovsky falls in love with Vasya.
8.	Jesus comforts the women of Jerusalem.	8.	He meets the women of St Petersburg.
9.	Jesus falls a third time.	9.	He falls in love with his nephew.
10.	Jesus is stripped.	10.	He is drawn into confession.
11.	Jesus is nailed to the cross	11.	He is reviled.
12.	Jesus dies.	12.	He drinks poison.
13.	The body is taken and laid in Mary's bosom.	13.	He calls upon his mother to lay him to rest.
14.	The body is laid in the tomb.	14.	Apotheosis.

Tchaikovsky's predicament is made clear in the very first scene, so that most of the subsequent scenes consist of flashbacks to events in his life. The two pivotal scenes are numbers 5 and 12, both purely instrumental. Each consists of an intensely beautiful and melancholy solo for harp, derived from Tchaikovsky's *Fifty Russian Folk-Songs* for piano duet (Example 6.63).
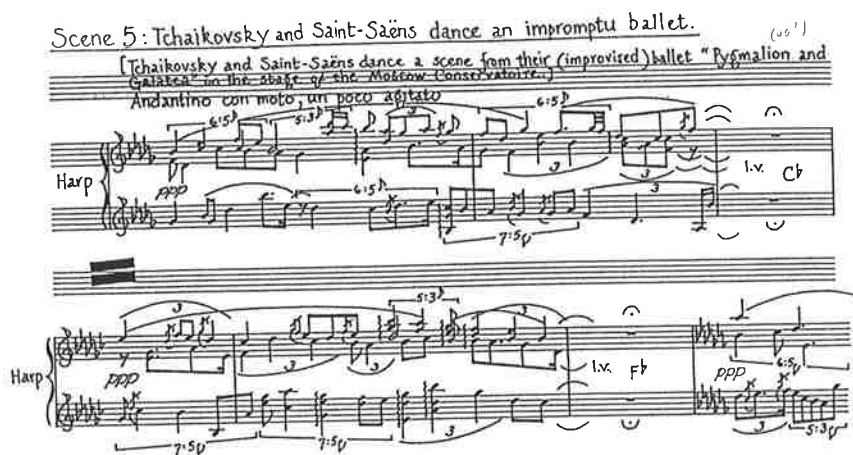
Example 6.63 *Shameful Vice*, Scene 5, p. 32
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The 12th scene interrupts this type of solo with violent double-bass tremolos, and sets against it staccato quavers and triplets in the violins, derived from *Swan Lake*.

As might be expected, other musical and textual references abound: in Scene 3 to a song *Pimpinella Op. 38 No. 6*, which Tchaikovsky heard from a street urchin with whom he had a sexual encounter, to the *Souvenir de Florence*, in Scene 11 to the piano piece *Mother Op. 39 No. 4* when his mother is recalled; in Scene 6 to the letter scene in *Eugene Onegin*, using texts from letters between Tchaikovsky and Nadezhda von Meck; in Scene 11 to the *Manfred Symphony* , with a re-working of Byron's text; in Scene 13 to Tchaikovsky's verses written in the notebooks of Fanny Dürbach, his governess; to Wagner's *Tannhäuser*, Schumann's *Genoveva* and Meyerbeer's *Robert le Diable* (Example 6.64), which Tchaikovsky saw at the times of his respective encounters with Vittorio, Vasya and his nephew, and the first two of which were major musical influences upon him; in Scene 10 to Delibes' *Coppelia*, in relation to which Tchaikovsky described his own work as 'vastly inferior', and whose scene of girls turned into mechanical dolls by an enamelling process relates to the brothel in which the scene takes place; in Scene 13 to Stravinsky's *Berceuse du chat*. Characteristic features of Tchaikovsky's instrumental and vocal writing also inform the work, such as his continual revoicing of chords (c.f. the last movement of the *Pathetique Symphony*).
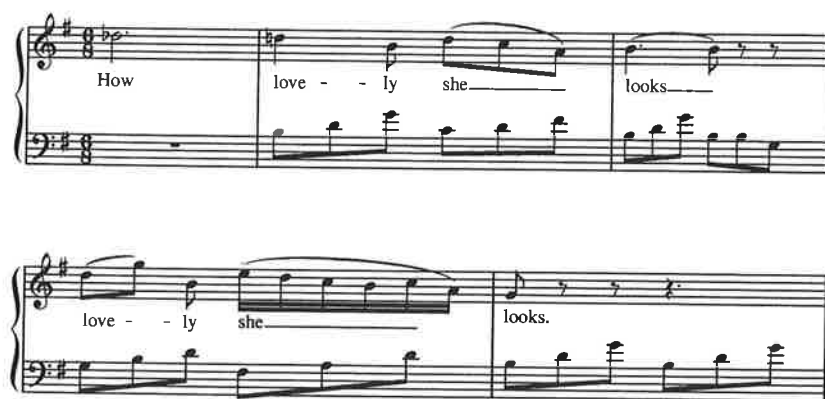
Example 6.64a Meyerbeer - Cavatinetta: 'Oh! come è bella' from *Robert le Diable* Act IV (part of grand seduction scene)

Example 6.64b *Shameful Vice*, Scene 9, p. 50
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Much of the time, several references appear simultaneously, presenting a blurred musical picture, or even a form of pan-Tchaikovsky.

The character of Nadezhda von Meck is not at all that of a generous benefactress; rather she is a harsh, intolerant figure, whose words (all taken from actual documents) show an appalling condescension towards Tchaikovsky ('Perhaps his "illness" is incurable - he doesn't want it to go away', 'You know I think he's scared of *clever* women.'). In the original draft for the libretto, she was to appear in later scenes as a dominatrix, brandishing whips and chains. She is in the final version only referred to explicitly in the 6th scene, while other lines previously attributed to her are

given variously to the women of St Petersburg and other characters, so that in Tchaikovsky's eyes her personality is subsumed into all women he encounters. Both Scenes 6 and 8 make use of Tchaikovsky's musical 'signature' (E-E-C-B-A), consisting of all the letters within his name for which an equivalent note can be found, that he wrote in his letters to Madame von Meck (see Example 6.65), as an instrumental backdrop.

Example 6.65 Tchaikovsky's musical signature, used in *Shameful Vice*

The incessant nature of the prejudice that Tchaikovsky encountered is made most explicit in Scene 2, in which the five other characters whisper lines of bigotry ('I know about disgusting perverts like him. They wear women's clothes...It would be no great loss if all such "polluted men" perished utterly'), to the accompaniment of breathy unpitched rhythms in the clarinets and trumpets. Tchaikovsky maintains his dignity in the face of such insidiousness, but with an underlying tone of bitterness, replying 'My good will to those who have taken my life, equally to all those who tried to save it. All are my brothers and sisters now.'

The final scene of *Shameful Vice* is a parody of *The Sleeping Beauty*, in which 'The Lilac Fairy enters with the Prince. In balletic mime she indicates the sleeping Tchaikovsky. The Prince approaches Tchaikovsky...bends over him and gently kisses him - first on the forehead, then on the mouth, then on the right hand...which he then holds as Tchaikovsky rises. The evil spell is broken.' Tchaikovsky transcends the role of tragic hero which he is usually assigned; he returns from the dead both because his music lives on, and to haunt contemporary society in which intolerance is still rampant. Finnissy's music is appropriately brash and 'in your face' (Example 6.66).

For all Finnissy's love for Tchaikovsky, it is immediately clear when listening to the work that he is uninterested in hearkening back to the sort of musical 'emotionality' and consequent view of the autonomous individual that was prominent in Tchaikovsky's class and era. Tchaikovsky's fate came about because he overstepped the dominant ideological assumptions which he inherited; his particular type of music is a reflection of this form of interaction. It is highly unlikely that a composer living in the 1990s could authentically produce a similar response to their own particular circumstances (in an era where the 'self' is known to be a rather more complicated entity); those who attempt to compose mock-Tchaikovsky will either fail (in which case the nature of the disjunctions can be the most revealing aspects) or end up producing glib pastiche, void of all that makes Tchaikovsky's own music special. In *Shameful Vice*, Tchaikovsky's life and work are contextualised, viewed with the benefit of modernist hindsight, and shown to be utterly relevant to modern times in a thoroughly non-nostalgic manner.

Example 6.66   *Shameful Vice*, Scene 14, p. 82
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Conclusion

It is extremely difficult to generalise about Finnissy's stage works, as they present as diverse a selection as any cross-section of his output. What is revealed is a continually transforming view of the stage and its conventions, the relationships between stage, text and music and music-theatrical predecessors. There are a number of areas which Finnissy has not yet explored, such as a more 'experimental' approach to texts, in which cut-ups and textual montage might be used according to chance or formalist concerns, rather than for the production of meaning. These sort of procedures certainly have precedents in much of Finnissy's musical technique. However, the innate conservatism of many potential theatrical

commissioners in Britain militates against such possibilities being realised; one can but live in hope.

What stands to date is an important and neglected body of work that ventures into areas that are certainly unprecedented in British music-theatre (one might mention Birtwistle, but his very much more structurally-based work, where form has a capital letter, is a wholly different concern). Because of the relatively small scale of Finnissy's works (in instrumental and theatrical terms) they have rarely been given the serious consideration they deserve. Works such as *Circle, Chorus and Formal Act, Mr Punch, Soda Fountain* and *Shameful Vice* are accessible and immediate, but nonetheless explore areas of depth. Others such as *Vaudeville, The Undivine Comedy* and *Thérèse Raquin* are altogether more demanding, but do not require specialist powers of cognition to be apprehended. All these and the other works require more frequent (or even first) performances, demonstrating as they do a composer who is willing to take a serious approach to all aspects of the theatrical medium, concerned with the totality of the experience.

Notes

1. Quoted in Lynne Williams, 'Reinstating "The Spiritual Quest"', *Contemporary Music Review* (1995), Vol. 13, Part 1, p. 56.
2. Ibid., p. 56.
3. Ibid., p. 56.
4. *The English Mummers and their Plays: Traces of Ancient Mystery*, edited Alan Brody (Routledge, 1969).
5. See Siegfried Kracauer's *From Caligari to Hitler*, (Princeton University Press, 1947), especially pp. 217-18.
6. Reproduced in *Twentieth Century Theatre - A Sourcebook*, edited Richard Drain (Routledge, 1995), pp. 171-4.
7. Ibid., pp. 165-8.
8. All my comments refer to the revised version of the work. The printed copy available at the time of writing is actually the earlier, now withdrawn version. The changes are thus: Replacement of the original third section (Frankenstein) with a new Romeo and Juliet passage, and in the sixth section, cut from 79 to 85, inserting in its place 96-99, then cut 88 to 103, 106 to 110, 112 to 116, 117 to 120. There is also a small cut in the fifth section (between 63 and 65).
9. Reproduced in the programme booklet for the Almeida Festival production. This fascinating booklet also includes provocative quotes from Pier Paolo Pasolini, The Quran, Andre Tarkovsky and William Blake.
10. See note 1.
11. 'Finnissy's Undivine Comedy' in *The Musical Times*, Vol. 129 (1988), pp. 330-32.
12. From the Almeida programme booklet.
13. Quoted in Williams, op. cit., p. 52.
14. By Pierre Audi and Michael Finnissy. First printed in the Almeida programme booklet.

15. Quoted in Richard Barrett, 'Michael Finnissy - An Overview', *Contemporary Music Review* (1995) Vol. 13, Part 1, p. 56.
16. Quoted in Williams, op. cit., p. 53.
17. Discussed further in Williams, op. cit., p. 61-3.
18. This theory is expounded in David Brown's *Tchaikovsky: A Biographical and Critical Study* (4 volumes), (Gollancz, 1978-91).