

Virtuosity, the Violin, the Devil . . . What *Really* Made Paganini “Demonic”?

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Introduction

Our inherited image of Nicolò Paganini as a “demonic” violinist—a Gothic figure exemplifying Romanticism and epitomizing instrumental virtuosity—has never been analyzed in depth. What *really* made him “demonic”? According to the most popular legend, Paganini, like Faust, made a pact with Satan to acquire magical powers—enabling him to create effects on the violin beyond the reach of anyone else. Others thought he was possessed by the devil and coaxed the violin to produce what they took to be the devil’s music. Still others, encouraged by the spectacle of him literally “lashing” the violin with his bow, considered him “demonic” in the Gothic sense of being corrupt and perverted, a licentious criminal in the tradition of the Marquis de Sade and Byron’s hero-villains. Faust, magician, Satan, sadistic villain: the faces of Paganini were interrelated but not equivalent.

This article aims to sharpen definitions of Paganini’s “demonism” by examining contemporary reviews, caricatures, and audience reactions in their cultural context. By surveying the diverse monikers by which Paganini was known (“Zamiel,” “Mephistopheles,” etc.), by tracing their origins, and by exploring their inherent nuances, I reveal that the nicknames often carried specific subtexts that would have been meaningful to his audiences—whether by reference to literature, theater, opera, or instrumental music. It was in the context of Romanticism, as shaped by Goethe, Byron, and others, that Paganini’s “demonic” image proliferated, especially due to the popularity of *Faust* and rumors of the violinist’s deviant behavior. This image was reinforced by medieval folkloric depictions of the violin as mysterious, enchanted, and feminine, exemplifying another facet of Romanticism—the resurgence of interest in the Dark Ages. Altogether, what emerged was a disturbing picture of the violinist as an agent of death and of the violin as a victimized, eroticized woman. Throwing sex and death together in one explosive image, this Gothic archetype captured the imagination of artists and echoed yet another medieval trope, Death and the Maiden. Paganini’s “demonic” image was thus multi-layered, resonating with a variety of rich cultural overtones, some of which are examined here for the first time. For while the image of Paganini as demonic is well known and often repeated

in literature on the performer, scholarship to date has neglected to examine the construction and social currency of that image.¹

I will also consider what made Paganini's performances "demonic." It was not only the violinist's eradication of technical difficulties that suggested occult forces at play, but also the spectacle of striking the violin with the bow and making it "cry" that helped people imagine him as a demonic figure. This was an unprecedented way of performing, rich with connotation, that relied on the unique techniques and effects Paganini developed, rather than on the devices of "musical diablerie" then in vogue amongst contemporary composers. Thus Paganini's virtuosity in performance and particularly his visually arresting style played a key role in creating the image of a demonic monster.

Paganini and Connotations of the "Demonic" in Nineteenth-Century Europe

Paganini's "demonic" quality as a person and as a performer was remarked upon often by many people, yet the fact that it manifested in manifold ways (rather than singularly) is evidenced by the diversity of appellations by which he was known. Selected monikers ranging over three decades (spanning most of his performing career) and four countries (where he garnered the most press) are shown in table 1.² While these nicknames all connote devilry in some way, they are obviously not synonymous—rather, each name stems from a particular context.

The most popular labels were those identifying Paganini as a "magician" or a "wizard," especially during his tour of Europe in the years 1828–34. "Let us rejoice that this enchanter is our contemporary," wrote Castil-Blaze in the *Journal des débats* (March 15, 1831), and "let him be glad of it himself; if he had played his violin like that two hundred years ago, he would have been burned as a magician" (quoted in Metzner 1998:131). The similar epithets "sorcerer" and "charlatan" had been used early in his career, perhaps carrying the connotation of trickery and the use of artificial or dishonest methods to acquire special powers—akin to cheating at, say, gambling (one of Paganini's favorite pastimes, as it happens).³

Some commentators identified the violin bow as an instrument of sorcery: "Paganini has been recently waving his magic wand," wrote one reviewer for the *Harmonicon* after a Leipzig performance in 1829 (Anon. 1829), and the poet Heinrich Heine remarked that "waving his bow in the air, he appeared more than ever like a wizard commanding the elements" (Heine 1933:48). The French caricaturist Jean Ignace Isidore Grandville even depicted Paganini's bow as a witch's broomstick in one of his humorous illustrations of the violinist.

Table 1: Paganini’s “Demonic” Monikers.

Appellation	From Whom (Where Known), Where, When, and Citation
Sorcerer	Italy 1800–5 (Saussine 1953:42)
Charlatan	Italy 1800–5 (Saussine 1953:42)
Carbonaro	Italy 1800–5 (Saussine 1953:42)
Genoese Wizard	Lipiński, Warsaw c. 1829 (Halski 1959:275)
Wizard	Spohr, Italy 1816 or 1817 (Spohr [1865] 1969, 1:280)
Magician	Castil-Blaze, <i>Journal des débats</i> (March 15, 1831) (Metzner 1998:131)
Magician	Heine, Hamburg 1830 (Heine 1933:48)
Hexensohn	Zelter, Berlin 1829 (Saussine 1953:113)
Goethe’s Mephisto	Rellstab, Berlin 1829 (Courcy 1957, 1:318)
Hexenmeister	Rellstab, Berlin 1829 (Saussine 1953:114)
Dr. Faustus	A. B. Marx, Berlin 1829 (Marx 1829; Saussine 1953:114)
Mephistopheles	D’Ortigue, Paris 1833 (D’Ortigue 1833:247)
Demonic	Goethe, Weimar 1831 (Courcy 1957, 1:361–62)
Zamiel	<i>Athaeneum</i> , London 1831 (Prod’homme 1911:41)
Satan	<i>L’Entracte</i> , Paris 1831 (Johnson 1995:267)
Devil’s Spawn	Vienna 1828 (Courcy 1957, 1:259)
Wandering Jew Incarnate	Vienna 1828 (Courcy 1957, 1:259)

Attributing Paganini’s remarkable abilities to supernatural sources reflected viewers’ helplessness in explaining how Paganini made difficulties of violinistic technique and execution vanish. Notably, such comments were made not only by audiences and critics but also by other violin virtuosi: Karol Lipiński admiringly called him the “Genoese Wizard” (quoted in Halski 1959:275) while Ludwig Spohr said, “He is a complete wizard, and brings tones from his violin which were never heard before from that instrument” (Spohr [1865] 1969, 1:280).⁴

The German nicknames “Hexensohn” (son of a witch) and “Hexenmeister” (witch-master) not only linked Paganini to witchcraft but also referred to one of the compositions he performed most often, “Le Streghe” (“The Witches”). This variation set takes its theme from Franz Xavier Süssmayr’s ballet *Il noce di Benevento* (1802), in which the theme signals the witches’ entrance onto the stage. Paganini composed the piece shortly after he saw the ballet in 1813 and frequently programmed it on his tour of Europe; in his 1829 concerts in Berlin it was billed as “Hexentanz” (“Witches’ Dance”).

Current Musicology

Figure 1: Johann Peter Lyser, “Karikatur auf die Wiener Konzerte” (c. 1828) from Kapp (1922:plate 9).



Each of these labels (magician, wizard, sorcerer, charlatan, witch’s son, witch-master) were variations on the popular theme of Paganini as a *maleficus*—a person who makes a pact with Satan. Viennese artist Johann Peter Lyser’s illustration captures this perfectly (figure 1). It depicts the violinist balanced at mid-skip, hair on end as if charged with electricity, inside a “magic circle,” having supposedly gained entry into the secrets of witchcraft. Talismans associated with Satanism surround him such as a black cat, a magic sword, a human skull, a pyramid, the bones of a human hand, and a snake wrapped around a staff, along with various occult symbols from alchemy, astrology, and the artist’s own imagination including the Star of David, Mars, Gemini, and approximations of signs for Sun, Fire, and the Black Mass. Floating in the background like apparitions are images from folklore and legend: a possessed nun with hands outstretched in the act of devil-worship, a languishing maiden cradling a skeleton (Death and the Maiden), a number of monstrous creatures at various stages of materialization, and a round of skeletons dancing the *Totentanz* (or “Dance of Death”) where the central figure parallels Paganini’s posture with his violin. In its detailed references to occult mystery, this caricature provides a visual expression of the famous legend that Paganini had sold his soul to acquire superhuman powers on the violin.

While that explanation was by far the most popular, some people concluded that the violinist was actually possessed by the devil. These were not quite the same thing. A *maleficus* entered into the pact voluntarily, whereas alternatively, the devil could inhabit bodies without permission. Stories of extraordinary musical virtuosity arising from demonic possession can be traced to the Middle Ages; for example, a monk named Caesarius at the monastery of Heisterbach (in present-day Germany), wrote in the early thirteenth century that,

There was once a priest whose singing was a joy to all—until one day another priest heard it, and realized that such perfection must come not from a human being but from a demon. So he exorcized the demon, which promptly departed—whereupon the singer’s body fell lifeless to the ground, showing that for some time it had been animated by the demon alone. (quoted in Cohn 2000:27)

For a demon to take possession of someone, the person had to already have died. Thus when people remarked that Paganini was possessed, they implied that he was dead—a claim buttressed by countless observations of his “cadaverous” appearance. Indeed, to Heine, he resembled “a corpse risen from the grave, a vampire with a violin” with his “cadaverous face” and his bow arm guided by the devil himself (Heine 1933:38, 42).⁵

By all accounts Paganini was extremely pale, his complexion accentuated by his dark hair and attire. His unusual countenance and rumored diabolical collusion, when placed in the context of ethnic stereotyping in certain parts of Europe, elicited derogatory assertions that Paganini was Jewish (despite the fact that he was an Italian Catholic). Remarks about his “Jewish cast of features” or his “large black eyes, hooked nose, and jet black hair, which is long and more than half hides his expressive Jewish face” recycled alarming stereotypes and reinforced negative associations with Jewishness, especially in Vienna, where one journalist went so far as to call Paganini “the devil’s spawn, the Wandering Jew incarnate.”⁶

Paganini’s cadaverous appearance was elsewhere interpreted as a symptom of cholera (an epidemic struck Paris in 1832) and his contorted posture was said to mimic the death throes of an afflicted patient writhing with stomach cramps. As art historian Nina Athanassoglou-Kallmyer has shown, the horrors and degenerative effects of the Paris cholera epidemic provided a metaphor for contemporary aesthetics. This was embodied in the grotesque, Death-like figure of Paganini (iconized by Delacroix’s portrait of 1832), especially in his anti-normative music and bizarre performance style: “In the popular imagination, the violinist merged with the diabolical disease, became its live embodiment” (Athanassoglou-Kallmyer 2001:699).⁷

In numerous cases, Paganini was understood to be a manifestation of the devil himself, and since the line between demonic collusion and demonic personification was not always distinct, the critic François-Joseph Fétis's observation is typical: "In reality, everyone had noticed and had guessed for a long time that Paganini and Satan were in the most intimate relationship, that is, provided they are not one and the same thing" (Fétis 1981:40). The French journal *L'Entracte* proclaimed, "He's Satan onstage, Satan knock-kneed, bandy-legged, double-jointed, twisted . . . fall to the knees of Satan and worship him" (quoted in Johnson 1995:267). Similarly, London's *Athenaeum* described him as "truly a Zamiel [*sic*] in appearance"—a reference to Weber's *Der Freischütz*, in which the devil is known as Samiel—"and without doubt a demon in performance" (quoted in Prod'homme 1911:41).⁸ Paganini was also identified as an anti-muse in the story of Baroque violinist Giuseppe Tartini's dream, popularized in the early nineteenth century. A French critic wrote, "Tartini saw in a dream a demon, who played a diabolical sonata. That demon could have been none other than Paganini." But the critic appears to have changed his mind already in the next sentence: "And yet Tartini's sprite, with his double trills, his weird modulations, his rapid arpeggios, was the merest tyro compared to the virtuoso we now possess" ([Castil-Blaze] 1831).

As we have seen, Paganini was sometimes viewed as a maleficus and at other times as the devil himself, a situation which, when framed in terms of Goethe's *Faust*, meant that he could be construed as both a Faustian and a Mephistophelean figure. Indeed, the popularity of *Faust*, Part One (1805) influenced Paganini's reception greatly. The Berlin music critic A. B. Marx called him "Dr. Faustus" (probably referring to Goethe's version rather than Christopher Marlowe's play of 1620). Heinrich Heine's description of Paganini's entrance on stage accompanied by Satan "disguised as a black poodle" referred to the first appearance of the devil in the guise of a dog in Goethe's version of the tale. Other critics invoked *Faust* but assigned Paganini the part of Mephistopheles rather than the title role. Joseph d'Ortigue wrote: "Yes, it's him, it's Mephistopheles . . . I saw him and heard him play the violin" (D'Ortigue 1833:247). Ludwig Rellstab remarked, "Never in my whole life have I heard an instrument weep like this . . . I never knew that music contained such sounds! He spoke, he wept, he sang! . . . There is something demonic about him. Goethe's Mephisto would have played the violin like this" (quoted in Courcy 1957, 1:318).

Faust-mania provided a setting that would prove receptive to Paganini—nowhere more so than in Paris. After the first French edition of the drama appeared in 1814, it quickly became very popular in the French capital, resurfacing in numerous translations, stage productions, operas, and other enactments throughout the 1820s.⁹ By 1830 it had thoroughly

captivated the public and its particular attraction for composers had reached fever pitch: Spohr's opera *Faust* opened in April of that year, for example, and Berlioz's *Symphonie Fantastique*, a work inspired in part by *Faust* (and also by Victor Hugo's *Ronde du Sabbat* and Weber's *Der Freischütz*) received its premiere in December. Therefore, by the time Paganini debuted at the Paris Opéra in March 1831, the city's music-lovers had already been swept up in the craze.

Paganini's Parisian audiences were thus primed for a "Mephistophelean" performer before he had even set foot in the city. No one knew this better than the ambitious Louis Véron, who had just become the newest director of the Opéra in early 1831. Véron had his own agenda (to popularize the institution as a symbol of bourgeois power) and saw a way to entice the public by offering entertaining spectacles of marauding devils and witches' Sabbaths.¹⁰ He was already busy developing Meyerbeer's *Robert le diable*, an opera that would premiere in November of 1831 and featured, in the words of James Johnson, a scene of "debauched nuns who slid out of their habits to swivel and gyrate and guzzle down wine" (1995:240). As far as Véron was concerned, Paganini's arrival could not have come at a more opportune moment: as Paganini biographer Renée de Saussine has suggested, "Here was the Mephistopheles of Véron's dreams, the very person for his scenes of hell" (1953:158).

Moreover, Paganini fit the bill perfectly because of the French tendency to sensationalize the image of the devil. The French moved away from the philosophical elements of Goethe's original (which they considered bizarre, immoral, and incomprehensible) towards a more visually oriented interpretation of the story, tending to simplify the character of Mephistopheles and preferring dazzling special effects and elaborate stagings of dancing demons. Such emphasis on spectacle and display prepared audiences for Paganini's abnormal appearance and magnetic performance style.

Where French audiences gravitated towards the view of Paganini as a sort of "Mephistopheles Lite"—the devil reduced almost to caricature—the German Romantics emphasized the parallel between Paganini's quest for virtuosity and Faust's thirst for power and knowledge. Goethe himself used the word "demonic" in describing Paganini, pointing to a quality he also detected in the most power-hungry historical figure of the era, Napoleon:

The demonic is that which cannot be explained in a cerebral and a rational manner. It is not peculiar to my nature but I am subject to its spell. Napoleon possessed the quality to the highest degree. Amongst artists one encounters it more often with musicians than with painters. Paganini is imbued with it to a remarkable degree and it is through this that he produces such a great effect. (Eckermann 1925:373–74, quoted in Courcy 1957, 1:361–62)¹¹

Current Musicology

In contemporary German aesthetics, the word “demonic” (*dämonisch*) signified a quality that, together with the “divine” (*himmlisch*), described the dual nature of music itself, as musicologist Mario Puppo has shown (Puppo 1984). E. T. A. Hoffmann, for example, spoke of music’s “divine miracles and diabolical magic”: on the one hand exalting “the capacity of music to transport man’s spirit to a ‘luminous, ultra-terrestrial’ life filled with a divine force” and on the other evoking “the terror, thrill, and pain of Beethoven’s music, which can link up to the diabolical and the sinful, to madness and death” (quoted in Puppo 1984:83–84). This opposition also echoed the dual aesthetic of the demonic and divine identified by W. H. Wackenroder in his treatise *Phantasien über die Kunst für Freunde der Kunst* of 1799.¹²

In *Faust*, this duality can be seen in the union of Faust and Gretchen—the “demonic” man who mercilessly removes all obstacles in the way of his desires, and the “angelic” woman who radiates pure innocence. The duality is also personified by the title character of *Robert le diable*: he is endowed with both his mother’s angelic nature and his father’s Satanic one. But if the “demonic” comprised only half of a double aesthetic, and it was a quality identified with Paganini, then who or what served as his “divine” or “angelic” counterpole?

Ironically, Paganini himself was praised by a few of his listeners for precisely those celestial qualities, but these comments were often overlooked or ignored because they contradicted his prevailing image. For instance, after hearing Paganini play in Vienna in April 1828, Schubert claimed, “I have heard an angel sing in the Adagio” (quoted in Hanson 1997:110). The Paris correspondent of the *Frankfurt Journal* gushed over Paganini’s little-known composition Adagio Religioso (which he often performed as a prelude to his concertos):

He played an introduction which he modestly described as “religious” but which his audience unanimously acclaimed as divine. To compose melodies so sweet he must have been carried away in an ecstasy to hear the singing of the cherubim. It vibrates with the awe, adoration, and love that nature feels in the presence of the Creator. (quoted in Saussine 1953:97–98)¹³

It was generally agreed upon, however, that characteristics related to the “divine” were exterior to Paganini. One might expect, based on the number of “diabolical” violinists throughout history who had been paired with “angelic” ones (because of contrasting playing styles), that the demonic Paganini would have been set into relief by his own opposite figure. In 1728, for example, Pietro Antonio Locatelli’s virtuoso performance at the court of Kassel prompted the comment, “he runs over the violin like a rabbit.” Jean-Marie Leclair played next; the critic paired them by explaining that

“one plays like an angel, and the former plays like a devil” (Dunning 1981, 1:118–19, quoted in Schwarz 1983:94). Earlier in the century, Arcangelo Corelli was apparently so impressed by the nimble playing of German violinist Nicolaus Adam Strunck that he is supposed to have said, “If my first name is Arch-Angel, then yours should be Arch-Devil” (quoted in Schwarz 1983:53).¹⁴ Despite such historical precedents, however, no one was put forward as Paganini’s “heavenly” counterpart,¹⁵ undoubtedly because it was clear that no other violinist played on his level, as even Pierre Baillot, his French contemporary, conceded.¹⁶ But that was not the only reason the critics positioned him as a singular figure. In fact, Paganini already had a Marguerite to his Faust—his own violin. Just as Marguerite ends up deranged and a perpetrator of infanticide under Faust’s maleficent influence, the violin was understood by the Romantics to symbolize an “angelic” woman victimized by destructive forces.

Gender, Sexuality, and the Violin

One meaning of the word “demonic” as it was applied to Paganini pointed to the moral corruption of the archetypal Gothic villain; in such cases the word denoted an intent to harm women physically and sexually for selfish pleasure. Paganini’s apparently altered state while performing was seen to resemble a deviant’s extreme excitement while in the midst of a criminal act, as attested by reviewers’ comments:

He seemed to be striking his instrument, like the unhappy youth, who after conjuring up the image of his murdered mistress, destroys it again in a fit of amorous rage; then once more seeks to revive it with tears and caresses. (Marx 1829, quoted in Saussine 1953:114)

His bow shimmers like a steel blade; his face is as pale as a crime; his smile is beautiful, like Dante’s *Inferno*; his violin cries like a woman. (quoted in Johnson 1995:267)

Here the unusually charged quality of Paganini’s performance was explained in terms of a dramatic spectacle, of eros and murderous destruction. This spectacle comprised a rich conjunction of metaphors and symbols for gender, sexuality, and the body: the violin was figured as an innocent woman subjected to the licentious assaults of a vicious criminal using the bow as a phallus/weapon. While some of this imagery arose specifically in response to Paganini’s virtuosity, much of it drew on the violin’s ancient folkloric associations. It was the combination of these elements that created an explosively violent and pornographic allegory out of musical performance.

Current Musicology

The violin had always radiated an aura of mystique, seeming to contain hidden powers waiting to be unleashed; its mysterious origins in the Middle East promoted its status as a “magic box” whose deepest secrets could only be unlocked by the most gifted virtuosos.¹⁷ In medieval folklore the violin was associated with the Grim Reaper, who led the *Totentanz* playing a pair of human bones, a mythology that became popular again with the Romantic interest in the Middle Ages.¹⁸ In seventeenth-century northern Italy, Cremona violins coated with special varnishes concocted from secret recipes recalled alchemists’ attempts to transform common metals into rare ones.

Some violins were said to be “ensouled” via occult procedures with the spirits of dead women, whose intestines were used as strings, and whose voices could be heard emerging from the instrument in tortured wails and screams. The historical identification of the violin as feminine also stemmed from the fact that the instrument’s body was seen to resemble the female form. Indeed, its components are known by the same names given to parts of the human anatomy: belly, back, shoulders, ribs, and neck. Long before Man Ray made explicit the visual pun between the violin and a naked woman with his famous photograph, *Ingres’s Violin* (1924), the violin stood in for the female nude—a favorite subject of early nineteenth-century painters such as Ingres, whose *La Grande Odalisque* (1814) epitomized sensuality, the erotic, and the exotic. The shared origin in the “Orient” of violins and odalisques (virgin slave-girls employed in Turkish harems) may also have helped to reinforce the connection. Moreover, the passivity implied by the violin’s resemblance to a woman without arms or legs reflected the subjugated status of the odalisque, and contributed to the idea of the violin as a helpless victim in the arms of its player.¹⁹

Such subtexts provided ample fodder for Romantic fantasies that centered on the violin as an object of erotic desire subject to the discipline and/or punishment of a patriarch. In E. T. A. Hoffmann’s story “Councillor Krespel” of 1816, for example, an eccentric violin-maker crafts instruments only to play them once, and longs to dispossess his own daughter of her virginity. As Heather Hadlock has argued, the violin-maker’s desire to penetrate both bodies is tinged with dark psychological undertones of “incestuous desire sublimated through music” (Hadlock 2000:40). The untouched violin as a metaphor for chastity was well known, for example, through the legend of Stradivari’s masterpiece “Le Messie” (“The Messiah”); long silent since its creation in 1716, the early nineteenth-century Italian violin-maker Carlo Bergonzi compared “Le Messie” to a woman who is not only beautiful but also pure.²⁰

The violin was thus loaded with centuries-old symbolic baggage primed for reinterpretation under the aegis of Romanticism. By contrast, the

imagery of a violinist as a violent murderer emerged for the first time with Paganini. Certainly, the stereotype of violinists as morally loose, low-class scoundrels because of the violin's associations with dancing and the beer-hall had existed for more than a century. For instance, in 1711 Jonathan Swift explained that he assumed a certain man accused of rape was guilty solely on the grounds that the man "was a fiddler, and consequently a rogue" (Swift [1897] 1948:203). Fiddlers were considered morally suspect because their music provided an incentive to dancing, an activity abhorred by pious individuals because it resembled or even led to debauched behavior.²¹ But to construe a violinist as a wicked brute whose performance staged a vicious attack was new with Paganini. Here was a man whom fellow violinist Charles Lafont described as "a woman-hunter, with a face like a vulture" (quoted in Saussine 1953:160) and whose performance prompted the London *Athenaeum* to report, "The poor violin was a transformed victim in the demon's hand, uttering the anguished complaints of his inflicted torture" (quoted in Codignola 1935:340n1).

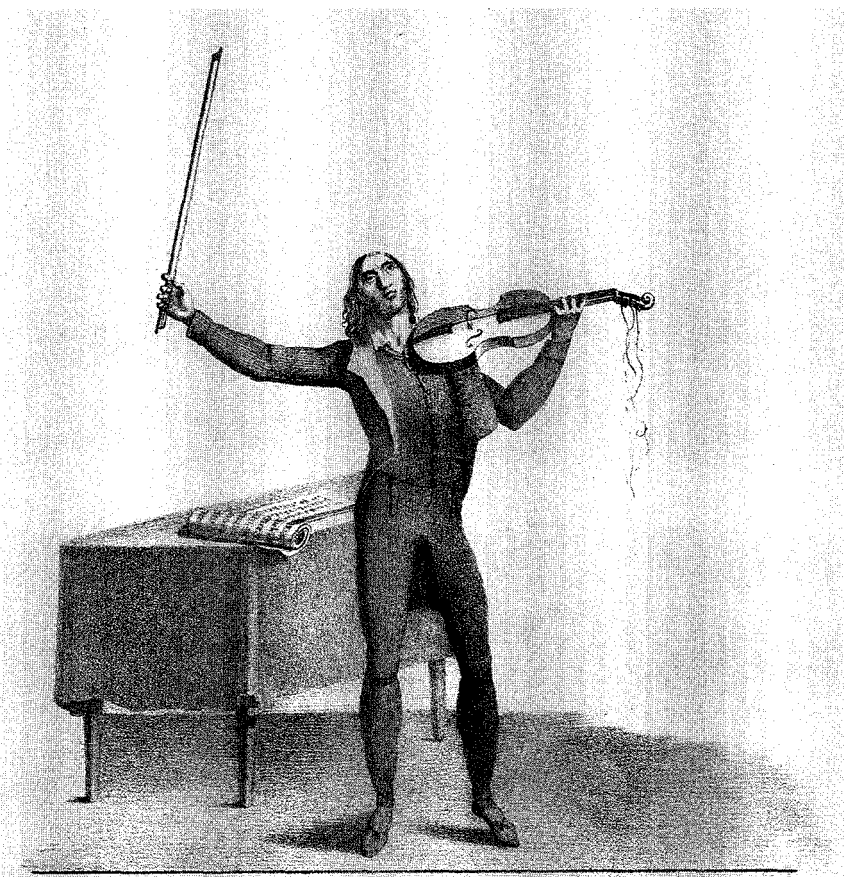
Numerous contemporary illustrations and caricatures depict Paganini holding his bow high in the air, triumphantly, like a talismanic weapon (e.g., figure 2).²² Broken strings hang limp from the scroll of his violin—strings supposedly made from the intestines of murdered lovers, or those of their husbands who had perished attempting to defend their honor in duels. The dangling strings give the appearance of having snapped under excessive force brought on by excessive passion (echoed later in accounts of piano strings giving out under Liszt's overpowering hands). The weapon Paganini used to perpetrate such violent acts was said to be loaded with "magic pellets"—reminiscent of Max's "magic bullets" in *Der Freischütz* and their attendant symbolism of seminal, destructive, and supernatural powers.²³

Rumors of Paganini's violent, criminal past created the image of a remorseless sadist who piled abuse onto women and violins. Stories of evisceration, in particular, led people to draw parallels between the violinist and the Marquis de Sade by speculating that Paganini had practiced the violin to wile away his time in prison just as the Marquis had written *Les Infortunes de la Vertu* (1787) inside the walls of the Bastille. Indeed, such stories, popularized in writing as well as through lithographs depicting imaginary scenes of Paganini in captivity, conflated his identity with that of another violinist-libertine, Giacomo Casanova.²⁴

It is well known that Paganini went to the trouble of denying such rumors about his past and in doing so only inflamed the press and public. What is not so well known is that he was in fact jailed on charges of rape and abduction, an experience he managed to hide from journalists and audiences all his life. In 1814, when he was thirty-two, he became romantically involved

Current Musicology

Figure 2: Anonymous illustration from the Gertrude Clarke Whittall Foundation Collection, Library of Congress, Music Division. Reproduced with permission.



with Angelina Cavanna, a twenty-year-old prostitute in Genoa. After she became pregnant, Paganini took her to nearby Parma with promises of marriage and, doubting his paternity, made her drink a homemade potion that led to the stillbirth of the baby. When Angelina's father discovered what had transpired, he accused Paganini of kidnapping and dishonoring his daughter. Now branded a cad, Paganini spent eight days imprisoned in the Tower of Genoa and paid damages to both father and daughter. Traces of this incident were probably at the root of the exaggerated rumors that later earned Paganini his reputation as an immoral rake in the mold of Lovelace, the licentious hero/villain of Samuel Richardson's 1748 novel *Clarissa*.²⁵

Paganini's reception in fact also bore the imprints of the English Gothic novel, a popular early nineteenth-century literary genre. He was once referred to as the "Magician of the South," a play on the nickname for Sir Walter

Scott, “The Wizard of the North,” so-called because of the enormously popular Gothic novels that Scott published anonymously. Paganini seemed to exemplify the figure of the brooding villain who attacked innocent women, consorted with depraved monks and nuns, and personified the Catholic “South” as a diabolical “Other.”²⁶

His aura of villainy as an artist paralleled rumors of his behavior in private, putting him in the league of Lord Byron, the poet whose sexual excesses were so legendary that in the words of one historian, “his promiscuity seemed almost superhuman” (Gay 1995:93).²⁷ Moreover, the violinist shared a number of “Byronic” traits with the writer’s fictional hero-villains such as the Corsair and the Giaour—men characterized by pale countenances, dark passions simmering beneath a calm veneer, and a “Satanic smile.” Further parallels could be found with the title character of the dramatic poem *Manfred* (inspired by Goethe’s *Faust*), who says of Astarte (his mistress, his victim, and possibly his sister), “I loved her, and destroy’d her”—the kind of words audiences might have imagined Paganini to have uttered about his violin after an impassioned performance.²⁸

The graphic symbolism of violin performance layered with Paganini’s reputation as a dangerous boor served to exemplify a Gothic archetype: the close links between sex and death, and pleasure and pain. If there is a single image that emblemizes this archetype, it is surely Delacroix’s painting *The Death of Sardanapalus* (1827), “a sado-masochistic fantasy” (Wilson-Smith 1992:82) according to art historians, “with its provocative intermingling of sexuality and death, voyeurism and erotic pleasure” (Fraser 2004:134).²⁹ Inspired by Byron’s play *Sardanapalus* (1821), the painting depicts Sardanapalus, the notoriously perverted King of Assyria, watching the slaughter of his harem women. The gory foreground depiction of a voluptuous concubine having her throat slit by one of the tyrant’s henchmen juxtaposes “life and death, voluptuousness and cruelty,” thereby highlighting “carnality under the knife, orgiastic passion flaring up briefly before extinction overwhelms it” (Hemmings 1987:185–87).³⁰

This image of a male assailant taking the life of an eroticized female figure echoed the medieval theme of Death and the Maiden, probably best known in Schubert’s settings as a Lied for baritone and piano (1817) and in his String Quartet in D Minor, D. 810 (1824). The poem Schubert originally set, by German poet Matthias Claudius, comprises an exchange between a terrified young girl—“Go away! Don’t touch me” (Vorüber! . . . Und rühre mich nicht an)—and Death, whose creepy words of reassurance culminate in the line, “You will sleep softly in my arms!” (Sollst sanft in meinen Armen schlafen!). Here Death is a seducer whose “embrace” carries the double-entendre of sexual ownership and forced expiration (like the Erlkönig in

Current Musicology

Figure 3: Melchior von Hugo, "Der Geiger," from Fuchs (1922–26, 1:405).

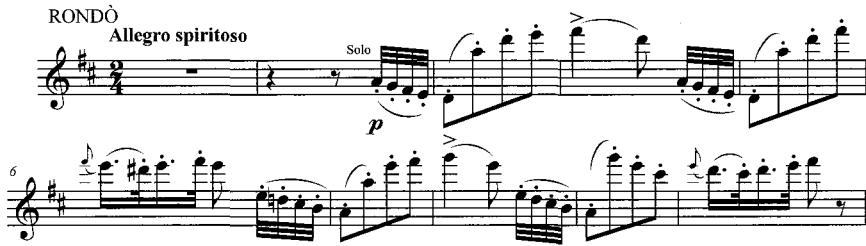


another well-known Schubert Lied), as implied by Lyser's depiction of a young girl overcome by the skeleton in her lap.³¹

As we have now seen, Paganini's "demonism" brought together a variety of rich themes and images to construct violin performance as a fatal, eroticized assault on a helpless, innocent victim.³² Connotations of murder and rape attached to the act of violin playing and implicit in Paganini's performances were made explicit in a drawing by early twentieth-century artist Melchior von Hugo: "Der Geiger" depicts Death dragging a grotesque phallus-bow across a naked female torso (figure 3).³³ This image brought together with disturbing intensity cruelty, sexual arousal, violence, the gender symbolism of the violin and bow, and the Death and the Maiden archetype—all the cultural references underlying Paganini's boorish displays.

Regardless of the hypocrisy or moral complications operating beneath the surface as audiences derived sadistic pleasure from these violent, pornographic spectacles in the guise of musical performance, Paganini's concerts gave audiences the same kind of thrill they experienced from reading Gothic literature. Literary critics have considered readers' enjoyment of the transgression of behavioral codes as a central element driving the reception of Byron's writings, while historians have emphasized the role that his works played in the psychology of fantasy.³⁴ Attending Paganini's performances likely offered a similar outlet for fantasy and aggressive impulses that might otherwise have manifested in more troubling ways.

Example 1: Paganini, Concerto No. 1, Third movement, opening.



Virtuoso Performance

The central piece in the puzzle of what made Paganini “demonic” was his characteristic manner of performing: a dazzling display of awe-inspiring techniques such as double-harmonics, playing entire pieces on a single string, and new ways of using the bow. Since many of these legendary techniques have already been discussed in the literature on Paganini (Penesco 1982; 1997; Salzedo 1946), I will focus here on those that have received less attention from scholars.

His trademark bowings such as *jeté* and *ricochet* involved “throwing” the bow at the string, thus motivating the impression of the player “lashing” at the instrument with a weapon.³⁵ Paganini used bouncing bowstrokes in numerous compositions, notably in the finale to his Concerto No. 1, where he employed a ricochet stroke of four notes to a single bow (example 1). Paganini left no written clues as to how he executed these bowstrokes—despite his best intentions he never got around to writing his treatise—but others did. Pierre Baillot, for one, explained “How to Play the Ricochet” as follows (with surprisingly precise measurements):

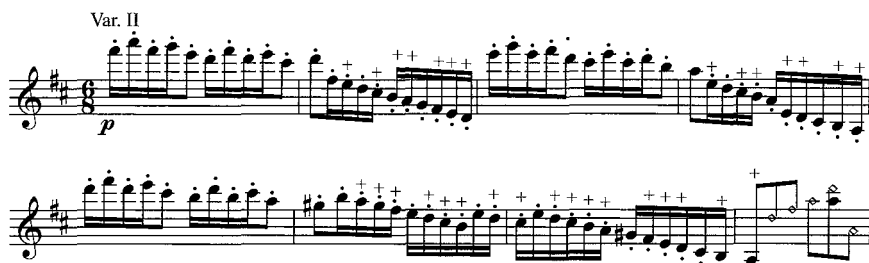
The player throws the bow at the [lower] end of the middle [third], and from about 2.13 inches above the string; the bow rebounds and “bites” several notes by itself . . . In order to articulate a greater number of notes in a single up-bow or down-bow in the ricochet, the player has only to let the bow fall from higher above the string. This will increase the number of rebounds made by the bow. (Baillot [1835] 1991:184–85)

Baillot went on to note that Paganini was the first violinist he had witnessed executing the multiple-rebound ricochet. He then directed the interested reader to Carl Guhr’s treatise on Paganini’s playing style, the relevant section of which employs telling language:

Paganini allows the bow . . . to make a jumping, whipping [*springende, peitschende*] movement and uses for that purpose almost the middle of it

Current Musicology

Example 2: Paganini, “Le Streghe,” Variation 2.



and only as much of its length as is necessary to put the string into vibration. (Guhr 1829:11, quoted in Brown 1988:105)

Another technique that helped create the illusion of assault was Paganini's use of the bow in the midst of passages employing left-hand pizzicato. In variation 2 of “Le Streghe,” for example, where bowed sixteenth-notes are interspersed with plucked ones indicated by a cross (+) (example 2), Paganini would have touched the bow to the string momentarily, with more of a vertical motion (dropping the bow) than a horizontal one (drawing the bow). Because the bow would have hit the string so rapidly and in such an irregular pattern (on the first, second, third, and fifth eighth-note beats of measure 2; on beats 1, 2½, 4, and 5½ of m. 4; on beats 1, 2, 4, and 6 of m. 6, and so on), the viewer would have seen a blur of repeated and erratic “lashings.” This effect, which becomes more pronounced the greater the height from which the bow is dropped, has been exploited by some modern performers of Paganini's music who exaggerate the bow's height for show.³⁶ It may have occurred to Paganini to do this as well, judging from the caricatures mentioned earlier.³⁷

Perceptions of Paganini's “demonism” were thus largely dependent on the visual dimension of his performances. This point, while interesting in itself, becomes especially significant alongside the observation that Paganini's music lacks the usual cues that would have connoted demonism. Paganini, unlike many other composers of his day, never exploited the rich musical vocabulary of “musical diablerie”: tritones (the so-called “diabolus in musica”), diminished-seventh chords, and quotations of the medieval plainchant *Dies Irae*. Berlioz's “Ronde du sabbat” from the *Symphonie Fantastique* (1830) and Liszt's *Totentanz* (1839–65) exemplified “infernal” music, as did numerous operas associating diminished sevenths with sinister characters: Bertram in Meyerbeer's *Robert le diable* (1831), Samiel in Weber's *Der Freischütz* (1821), and supernatural forces in Spohr's *Zemire und Azor* (1819). Weber's *Euryanthe* (1823) even had a section that the critic Joseph

d'Ortigue described as the “violins shrieking in triplets expressing their diabolical joy” (1833:231).³⁸ Such devices had no place in Paganini’s music, however, and the *Dies Irae* was not used in a solo violin work until Eugene Ysaÿe’s *Sonata No. 2, “Obsession,”* of 1924. Paganini’s compositional language therefore could not have contributed to his demonic image (except inasmuch as prescriptions for “violent” bowings and all the other virtuoso techniques comprised aspects of composition). Impressions of Paganini’s “demonic” virtuosity stemmed from his performance of seemingly impossible feats, and, beyond that, from the spectacle of his bravura showmanship.

Conclusion

As we have seen, what made Paganini “demonic” was not one factor alone but rather an array of different elements: his biography, specific connotations of the “demonic” as a cultural category in nineteenth-century Europe, contemporary gender issues, popular Gothic themes, and the symbolism of the violin. Grounding all of these different factors were his remarkable performances, which brought the cultural moment into focus. Even more specifically, it was his spectacular virtuosity and physical presence on stage that shaped this image. As we have also seen, the word “demonic” was polysemous, used by people for the most part to describe aspects of Paganini’s unusual comportment and performance style, but also to describe attributes they wished to project onto the violinist according to private agendas—whether fueled by fantasies (of a fictional world), by fears (of cholera), or by prejudices (such as racism).

Paganini can be said to have exemplified Romanticism because his performances pulled together a constellation of Romantic elements, including Faust-mania, Byronism, and Gothic medievalism. He epitomized the figure of the “Romantic artist” (as many have claimed) not through his compositions, understood as unperformed abstractions, but by embodying virtuosity as a performance aesthetic.³⁹ Finally, Paganini’s actions and appearance while playing, in conjunction with the cultural discourse surrounding him, together form convincing evidence that much of what we hear as present “in the music” is actually dependent on the rhetoric and images surrounding the music. In other words, much of the “demonic” force attributed to Paganini himself emanated from external sources, even while giving the illusion of originating in him. Though it is doubtful that Paganini consciously cultivated such an effect (there is nothing in his biography to suggest that he was that conniving), the image of the “demonic” violinist as self-fashioned is nonetheless a seductive illusion.

Notes

I am grateful to Kevin LaVine of the Music Division, Library of Congress, for his generous help with the Paganini materials in the Gertrude Clarke Whittall Foundation Collection, and to Michael Beckerman, Tyler Bickford, Keith Chapin, Dana Gooley, Karen Hiles, Elisabeth Le Guin, Susan McClary, Anne Mellor, Mitchell Morris, Robert Walser, and my anonymous reviewers for their invaluable feedback and suggestions.

1. Recent treatments of the violinist—as an exemplar of the virtuoso as a cultural phenomenon (Metzner 1998), as an innovator of specialized violin techniques (Penesco 1997), and as biographical subject (Neill 1994)—touch on the “demonic” without exploring it as a central issue, since their aims (and considerable rewards) lie elsewhere. Meanwhile, Sugden’s (1980) study is an entertaining book without scholarly pretensions.

2. My primary focus here on Paganini’s reception by urban, educated classes in Italy, England, France, and German-speaking areas reflects the geographic and social reach of the violinist’s tours (notwithstanding his brief forays to Prague and Warsaw—thorough considerations of which are beyond the scope of this article).

3. These terms originated in a series of pamphlets circulating in Lucca (Saussine 1953:42). Another nickname from this time, “carbonaro,” branded Paganini a member of the Carbonari, a secret revolutionary society similar to the Freemasons and struggling to unify Italy. The name probably referred to Paganini’s liberal stance and pro-Jacobin views (one of his first compositions was a set of variations on the revolutionary song “La Carmagnole”), although there is no evidence to suggest that Paganini was ever involved in political subterfuge.

4. Interestingly, Paganini himself spoke of having been inspired as a boy by the “magic” playing of Polish virtuoso Auguste Durand (also known as Duranowski): “Paganini, as he himself related to Fétis, credited Durand-Duranowski with his consecration in all of the marvelous magic, with which he later astonished the public in every country” (quoted in Moser 1967:145).

5. Paganini was a walking compendium of medical ailments, eliciting comparison to another “threadbare” musical virtuoso, the castrato Giovanni Battista Velluti. As recent research has shown, castrati were understood to have had “weak heartbeats, poor eyesight, almost no pulse and lacked blood pressure. Medically, their absence of inner heat, susceptible temperaments, pale countenances and enervated sensibilities bore out their emptiness of being” (Davies 2005:279). According to Davies, the manager of the King’s Theatre in the 1820s reported that Velluti’s customary breakfast was only a cup of coffee and a little dry toast, and that his other meals were similarly sparing; Paganini was also said to require minimal nourishment.

6. Comments from Colonel Maxwell Montgomery’s memoirs, *My Adventures* (1814), Weimar writer Friedrich von Matthieson (1829), and an anonymous Viennese journalist (1828) are quoted in Courcy (1957, 1:356, 131, and 259, respectively). Meanwhile, Jewish authors in eastern Europe (writing mainly in Yiddish) had their own set of iconographic meanings associated with Paganini; I am grateful to one of *Current Musicology*’s anonymous readers for pointing this out to me.

7. I am grateful to one of *Current Musicology*’s anonymous readers for this reference.

8. After its 1821 premiere in Berlin, Weber’s opera had arrived in London by 1824 in a number of knock-off productions, well in advance of Paganini’s first appearance there in 1831. Notably, the violinist is compared with Samiel rather than with Max, the Faustian character who barter with Samiel for a magic bullet that will enable him to win the competition and marry his beloved.

9. This summary draws on the work of Sarah Hibberd (2001).

10. For more on Véron's mission to associate the Opéra with an increasingly powerful economic and political class on the heels of the July Revolution, see Petrey (2001).
11. Interestingly, Goethe also proposed a "demonic" source for Mozart's creative powers, thus instigating an alternative to the traditional attribution to divine inspiration (Solomon 1995:117–18).
12. Wackenroder's "divine/demonic duality," according to Puppo, "describes music as being divine—but with an ambiguous turn, reflecting together joy and pain, joking and a shudder of fear, innocence and crime, light and darkness" (Puppo 1984:83, my translation).
13. Paganini had originally composed this work for a concert in Berlin on May 13, 1829, the so-called Day of Penitence. According to the critic Ludwig Rellstab in the journal *Vossische Zeitung*, "Paganini composed an introduction stemming from the monastic forms and customs of his fatherland in the naive belief that only such a prelude was appropriate for the Day of Penitence" (quoted in Courcy 1957, 1:326).
14. The comments about Locatelli and Leclair are attributed to Kassel's court jester. The Corelli story is quoted from a Dutch translation of Charles Burney's *Music in the Netherlands*. Such pairings can be found even earlier in music history: of Marin Marais and Antoine Forqueray, France's most accomplished viol players, for example, it was said "L'un jouait comme un diable et l'autre comme un ange" (The one plays like a devil and the other like an angel, Hubert Le Blanc, quoted in Pougin 1924:37).
15. One exception to this circumstance was the description of the violist Chrétien Urhan as "the seraphic pendant of the diabolical Paganini" by German music historian Reinhold Sietz, a play on the image of Urhan as the pious counterpole to the demonic Berlioz. Urhan had served as soloist in Berlioz's *Harold in Italy* after Paganini (who originally commissioned the work) abandoned the project. See Kawabata (2004). Meanwhile, D'Ortigue's observation of "the antinomy that existed between the musical personality of Baillot and that of Paganini, the countenance of the first opposing itself to the eccentric attitude of the second" compared and contrasted the violinists but never identified the Frenchman as "angelic" or "divine" (D'Ortigue 1833:266, quoted in Fauquet 1986:66).
16. He wrote, "We saw from the very first that his manner of playing the violin was generally his own, and had but very little resemblance to that of any other virtuoso . . . the violin in his hands becomes a different instrument, just as the artist himself has gained a place which is out of the ordinary" (Baillot [1835] 1991:9).
17. The violin's origins can be traced to the medieval *rebec*, a small two- or three-stringed instrument primarily used for dance music and first brought to Europe around 1000 AD. The *rebec* was a descendant of the even older *rabab*, a bowed stringed instrument of Arab origin. For more on this topic, see Cooke, Dick, and others (1989:129–36).
18. For more on the iconography of "Death as a fiddler," see the excellent study by Rita Steblin (1990).
19. François Girard's recent film *The Red Violin* (1998), in which a violin-maker uses his dead wife's blood to varnish an instrument and thereby gives it her soul, shows that the issues under discussion still have resonance today. The "red violin" arouses and escalates the virtuosity and sexual desire of a fictional violinist character modeled on Paganini.
20. Bergonzi apparently told Luigi Tarisio (the violin dealer who discovered and disseminated many priceless Cremona instruments, including "Le Messie"), "Remember, 'Le Messie' has never been played, therefore one can only guess at the voice. You have looked upon women who were pure and women who were just beautiful. No? . . . So, when you look up on the face of purity, somehow you know it. Your eyes say something to your heart. It is the sort

Current Musicology

of feeling one has when one gazes upon the features of a sleeping infant. That will be your impression when you finally feast your eyes on *Le Messie*." Allegedly, the violin was not played until as late as 1855, when Delphin Alard, the son-in-law of French violin-maker Jean Baptiste Vuillaume, finally touched a bow to its strings. See Silverman (1981:115, 245).

21. Heinrich Heine wrote a poem in which "a ghostly fiddler entic[es] a young maiden to dance herself to an early death" in the "Heimkehr" series of 1823–24 (Steblyn 1990:286–87).

22. N.B.: The desk with the open score that stands behind Paganini in figure 2 was an element of the artist's imagination—there is no evidence to suggest that Paganini ever performed from scores.

23. Silverman relates an interpretation circulating in the early 1830s: "The reason Paganini can play staccato so marvelously is that his bow is hollow and filled with little leaden pellets which run up and down the bow when required to, and stop at once when so desired" (1981:77).

24. Such stories were printed in, for instance, G. Imbert de Laphaleque's collection (1830:48–49). One of the best known lithographs imagining Paganini in prison is by Louis Boulanger (1831). Casanova was in reality a professional violinist briefly incarcerated in 1755 by the authorities on suspicion of witchcraft, an imprisonment which temporarily interrupted the amorous adventures for which he is best known today.

25. See Courcy (1957, 1:133–42). The much-publicized story of Paganini supposedly abducting singer Charlotte Watson could not have shaped his reception on tour in Europe because it allegedly took place in June 1834 (at the end of his tour). Moreover, the incident was most likely a publicity stunt staged by John Watson, the girl's father, with a view to gaining access to Paganini's fortune. Watson, along with the French police and officials from the British Consulate, intercepted Paganini at Boulogne-sur-Mer, where the violinist and Charlotte had planned to be reunited. Journalists from both sides of the Channel picked up the story, depicting Paganini as a "roué" who had "abducted" Charlotte, whom they erroneously reported as being underage (Courcy 1957, 2:161–68).

26. For discussions of Matthew Gregory Lewis's *The Monk* (1796) as an instance of the anti-Catholic, pornographic, and transgressive bent of Gothic literature, see Tuite (1997), Tienhooven (1997), and Whitlark (1997).

27. According to Peter Gay, Byron was said "to have committed incest with his half-sister, sodomized his wife, conducted a string of love affairs with women of all ranks, and varied them with homosexual flings" (1995:93).

28. See Praz (1970:53–94) for more on Byron's hero-villains. It is perhaps worth noting here that in spite of his habit of breaking strings and bow hairs (which were easily replaceable), Paganini was not a violent man. He did not actually destroy his instruments—in fact, he took care of them lovingly and was especially attached to certain violins. According to a famous story from the early 1830s, he took his favorite Guarneri, "The Canon," to the luthier Vuillaume for repairs following an accident in which it fell off the front bench of a horse-drawn carriage (Paganini having entrusted it, uncharacteristically, to two women who did not observe his custom of carrying the instrument inside the passenger coach on his lap); when Vuillaume began to work with his tools, Paganini reportedly began "moaning and grimacing, uttering loud exclamations which plainly revealed the affection he had for his violin" (Silverman 1981:73).

29. See also Spector (1974:89–105).

30. For a color reproduction of the painting, see Huyghe (1963:123). As a side note, Delacroix's focus on "the female body as an object of violence as well as pleasure" (Fraser 2004:134) was,

interestingly, mirrored in his own life. He recorded the frequency of his copulations with his models along with how much he paid them. According to Spector, he described these encounters using the “Italian slang expression ‘*io ho fatto una chiavatura*,’ probably learned from an Italian helper, and meaning ‘I’ve had sexual intercourse.’ *Chiavatura* is a substantive of the verb *chiavare*, literally ‘to nail’ but colloquially ‘to fuck,’” and Spector concludes that “the double meaning of this word—probably known to Delacroix—provides one more link between the erotic and the painful” (Spector 1974:98).

31. Two related points emerge, touching on themes already mentioned above. First, the theme of Death as a molester recurred in the form of an incubus, a demon who sexually abuses sleeping women. Henry Fuseli’s *The Nightmare* (1781) depicted an incubus hovering over a naked woman, an arrangement echoed in James Marshall’s painting, *Tartini’s Dream, or the Devil’s Trill Sonata* (1868), in which Tartini lies prone as the devil plays the violin above him, thereby recycling the theme of “demonic” virtuosity. Second, Paganini was also associated with Death through his connection with the cholera epidemic, itself personified in contemporary culture as a Death-like skeleton; the disease exposed the “medieval” state of medicine (cholera was still incurable despite scientific advances) and provoked fears of death on a massive scale (Athanasoglou-Kallmyer 2001:691).

32. Various binarisms emerge from this construct—performer/instrument, man/woman, attacker/victim, and so on. The pairing of demonic violinist/angelic woman was even dramatized, several years after Paganini’s death in the ballet *Le Violon du Diable*, a “ballet fantastique” with music by Cesare Pugni. It was first staged in Venice in 1848, revised for a Paris production in 1849, and presented in various European cities through the 1850s. The story concerned a violinist who makes a Faustian pact with the devil for a magical instrument which he plays to win over the girl he loves. Its star, the extraordinary Arthur Saint-Léon, was a leading dancer particularly known for his athletic leaps and spins; he was also a virtuoso violinist. The ballet was designed to showcase his dual talent. His real-life wife, the ballerina Fanny Cerrito, played his love interest—wearing a costume with angelic wings.

33. I am grateful to Lisa Parkes for bringing this illustration to my attention.

34. Mario Praz has described what he calls Byron’s “criminal eroticism” as hinging on the act of transgression (1970:53–94). Anne Williams has posited the eroticization of “obsession with transgression, with violating taboos” as one of a set of literary conventions underpinning Gothic poetics (1995:172); Jacques Barzun has suggested that the Byronic hero appealed to women readers because he represented the seducer they secretly longed for (2000:485–86); and Peter Gay has written about the ambivalence of bourgeois men and women in their attitudes towards the libertinism of exhibitionistic romantics like Byron—outraged and enthralled at the same time (1995:93–94). Lastly, Punter (1980) points out that one characteristic feature of Gothic novels (and every other popular art form for that matter) is “precisely that they are not realistic” (20), thereby underscoring the element of fantasy.

35. Of interest here is the modern bowing directive “*battuto*” (from the Italian *battere*, to hit or beat) but which does not appear to have arisen again until a later historical period (in Schoenberg’s String Trio, for example). In his treatise, Baillot discusses *détaché*, *martelé*, *staccato*, *perlé*, *spiccato*, *ricochet*, and specialized strokes such as *saccade* and *bariolage* but does not mention *battuto* (Baillot [1835] 1991:158–226).

36. The extraordinary Alexander Markov, for example, whips his bow theatrically through the air in rendering the left-hand pizzicato variation to the Caprice, No. 24, in Bruno Monsaïgeon’s film, *The Art of the Violin* (Idéale Audience, 2000).

37. Meanwhile, Paganini’s penchant for improvising wretched cries may have contributed to his “demonic” image—albeit by mistake. Contemporary accounts state that Paganini “imitated

with extraordinary truth the nasal sounds of a scolding old witch” (Anon. 1828:211) so that one “imagined a pale old woman, dancing and whining, with a sort of ghastly affectation of the ridiculous” (Leigh Hunt, quoted in Courcy 1957, 1:123–24). These comments were made in response to improvisations Paganini inserted into performances of “Le Streghe.” Although it is not known exactly how or why he produced such effects (he never notated his improvisations), it is clear that he was motivated by comedic intent within a performance aesthetic stemming from the eighteenth-century *commedia dell’arte* tradition (Gooley 2005). The violinist’s link to this tradition was probably lost on most of his audiences outside of Italy, however, leading them to (mis)interpret his improvisations through the filter of Romanticism as being “demonic.”

38. D’Ortigue was probably referring to the duet “Komm denn, under Leid zu rächen” for Eglantine and Lysiart in act II of that opera.

39. Recent studies of Liszt’s virtuosity and models of the “self” in performance have made similar points (albeit via diverse approaches), espousing the view of performance as a site for generating meaning, rather than understanding musical meanings as being present in scores and “transmitted” through performance. See for instance Gooley (2004) and Cumming (2000).

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