

Aesthetics, Opera, and Alterity in Herzog's Work

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**Abstract:** In his article "Aesthetics, Opera, and Alterity in Herzog's Work" Jacob-Ivan Eidt analyses Werner Herzog's 1982 film *Fitzcarraldo*. Eidt's analysis is executed in the context of opera, cinema, and aesthetics. Eidt argues that Herzog uses opera as a romantic motif with which he creates a self-critical process whereby elements of the Romantic vision are called into question thus providing a nuanced reading of the main character and the Indigenous world he encounters. This process, Eidt argues, produces a complex narrative of colonial alterity where colonial self-inscription upon an Other is ultimately doomed to failure.

## Jacob-Ivan EIDT

### Aesthetics, Opera, and Alterity in Herzog's Work

A prominent aspect of comparative humanities is not only its emphasis on multiple literary traditions, but also the ability to bring those traditions together to produce nuanced contextual readings of various text types (see, e.g., Finke; Tötösy de Zepetnek). In this study, I analyze Werner Herzog's 1982 film *Fitzcarraldo* and its image construction of colonial South America including the role of Otherness. I postulate that the film's image construction of the Other is based on German Romanticism and paradigms of aestheticism of nineteenth-century music. In keeping with the methods of comparative cultural studies, hierarchical relationships between traditions are avoided. Each tradition is read as contributing to an overall depiction, in this case of colonial alterity. This intertextuality draws attention to other cultures in a way that traditional film reading could not and it is through this contrast that the Other can be approached and thus included into what otherwise would remain a Euro-centric perspective.

Herzog's film is about a white European in the Amazon jungle hauling a steam ship over a mountain with Native labor at the height of the rubber trade of the late nineteenth century in order to build an opera house. Thus, the story deals with colonialism, exploitation, and Western imperialism. Because Herzog is a German filmmaker, German national identity, nationalism, and fascism can also be linked to *Fitzcarraldo*. Familiar antagonistic oppositions are established along the conventional lines of European versus Indigenous culture, machine versus nature, and white skin versus dark skin. Although such narratives play an important part in the film, they can also obscure other equally relevant aspects which I consider central to understand the intertextuality of the film as a whole. One of these central aspects is the role of music in the film and how it is used to delineate otherness. While I do not deny the main character's complicity in colonial exploitation, I argue that nineteenth-century romantic music as motif and context offers a more nuanced reading not only of *Fitzcarraldo*'s character, but also of the Indians and their shared dynamics in constructing alterity. Herzog creates a special kind of romanticism, which Brad Prager calls "a dialectic whereby he appropriates its themes in order to re-write them" ("Werner Herzog's" 29)." As such, the film clearly is more than the sum of its associative parts.

Herzog is often associated with Romanticism and notions of the sublime. But as Prager notes, his use of romantic themes is such that he "is quite evidently aware that there is a capacity for self-reflection and auto-critique already built into Romanticism," which also may be said of how his romantic themes relate the German self to alterity ("Werner Herzog's" 24). Herzog seems to use not only romantic motifs, but also to play with their traditions and their historical contexts. The typical starting point for emphasizing the clash of cultures embodied in the narrative of colonial exploitation is the history of the images that Europeans created around the jungle and its Indigenous peoples. Richard John Ascárate has tried to demonstrate that the imaginary world that Herzog creates cannot be separated from the historical regardless of the director's intentions (486). Although I agree, it is worth noting that there are several different layers of historical and cultural associations at play in the film. These different associations and contexts play off of one another creating a particular kind of dialectic of images and motifs. Like Herzog's earlier remake of *Nosferatu* (1979) we are dealing with a film "located within an historical tradition that is densely intertextual" (Casper and Linville 17). This dense intertextuality with its associations makes some statements about *Fitzcarraldo* like the following seem askew: "Following the familiar pattern of Old World encounters with the New World, African, or Asian Other, *Fitzcarraldo* will, without soliciting their opinions about the venture, conscript the native inhabitants for their labor, divest them of their habitat, and civilize them to the strains of Enrico Caruso" (Ascárate 484). This is certainly a familiar pattern, but perhaps not one that wholly corresponds to all of *Fitzcarraldo*'s contexts.

In my opinion it is a stretch to suggest that *Fitzcarraldo* conscripts the Indians and nowhere in the film do we have any indication that he seeks to "civilize" them with opera. This is at best inferred through the image of a blond, blue-eyed man in a white suit surrounded by Indians in the jungle, playing opera. The idea that opera could have a practical didactic function would seem antithetical not only to *Fitzcarraldo*, but also to nineteenth-century aesthetics of music. A closer look at the romantic

context of nineteenth-century music and Herzog's use of it as motif vis-à-vis the Indigenous reveals a different dynamic between the two and the way in which they demarcate otherness.

Alan Singer notes that German idealism is Herzog's cultural context and that the super-sensible often finds its most eloquent expression in Herzog's films through the category of the sublime (183). Most discussions of Herzog's use of the sublime tend to focus on his camera work and imagery (Prager, *The Cinema* 83). *Fitzcarraldo* not only accesses the category of the sublime through its camera shots, but also through its use of nineteenth-century music by suggesting that *Fitzcarraldo* is a product of his age and as such carries with him a view of music and opera that was born out of a specifically German intellectual tradition. Ever since E.T.A. Hoffmann began to characterize Beethoven's music as sublime, romantic music has been associated not only with another invisible world, but also with that world's autonomy over the concrete (see Lönker 37). Reacting to the romantics Hegel found that romantic music aesthetics expressed the superiority of the spiritual over the material rendering it virtually insignificant, demonstrating "the hegemony of content over form" (Mosley 443). Thus understood, the music of Romanticism is the opposite of the classical or enlightenment approach toward aesthetics as an expression of harmony between form and content, inner- and outer worlds, art and nature. *Fitzcarraldo*'s fanatic attachment to opera is an expression of his inability to reconcile these two realms. The aesthetics of Romantic music thus serve as a vehicle for the psychology that underlies a belief in an essential world behind a mere representation of that world. It is important to note that this is the essential view of the Indians and their creation of myth in the film as well.

*Fitzcarraldo* begins with a panoramic view of the jungle. Fog and mist float specter-like around the tree tops of the dense green forest. Thunder is heard in the background and the portentous music of Popol Vuh resounds as words appear on the screen relating the Indigenous myth of the genesis of the jungle. According to the creation myth God was not finished with creation and abandoned its completion until all humans have vanished. This brief prelude consisting of image, text, and music begins to frame the narrative from the perspective of the myth, which informs the Indians' world view. The music, the sublime imagery, and the myth itself establish a connection to romantic motifs. This mythical understanding of the world is the only real knowledge that *Fitzcarraldo* and the viewer have of the Amazon Indians' world. The myth or variations of it are revisited only in passing in second-hand fashion by outsiders. Thus a cloud of mystery surrounds the Indigenous world from the outset. The very first image is a moment of identification between landscape, myth, and the music, which establishes the alien otherness of the three. The prelude is followed by the scene of the opera house in Manaus, placing the world of opera in relation to the world of the Indians.

In Manaus the nineteenth-century tenor Enrico Caruso is singing in a performance of Verdi's opera *Ernani* with Sarah Bernhardt. The unreality of opera is highlighted by shots of a singer in the pit singing for Bernhardt. Bernhardt, played by a man and sporting a wooden leg, seems to be in her own world and does not interact well with other figures on stage. It is an unrealistic performance in which everyone, including the singers, *Fitzcarraldo*, and the audience, are all in their own separate worlds. Opera for Herzog is "a universe all its own. On stage an opera represents a complete world, a cosmos transformed into music" (Cronin 259). While the prelude gives us the Indigenous world of the creation myth against the backdrop of the impenetrable and unforgiving jungle, the first scene gives us opera as a dreamy other world against the backdrop of the decadent pomp of colonialism, highlighted by exterior shots of the opulent opera house, dark-skinned servants in livery, the rich in gala attire, and the grotesque image of a horse drinking champagne. *Fitzcarraldo* has to pass this world in order to gain access to the inner sanctum where the better world of opera is sung. Equally, the Indians' myth sees a better world behind the jungle's unforgiving indifference to suffering and death. The jungle and its exploiters belong to the same realm representing concrete realities flourishing blindly. Herzog is never at a loss for words in describing the cruelty of nature and its ultimate incomprehensibility and it is this view of nature as indifferent and impenetrable that distinguishes Herzog from a true "Romantic" in the traditional sense and it is an important theme in his works (see Prager, "Landscape" 99-100). The colonial world of the rubber barons is brutal and senseless in its blind utilitarian pursuit of wealth while by contrast the mythical world of the Indians is closer to what *Fitzcarraldo* sees in opera.

Although opera may represent European social power for some groups as Ronald Dolkart has argued in his reading of the film, *Fitzcarraldo* does not represent the power of the upper classes.

Opera as status symbol, cultural bombast, and exponent of civilization may have fueled its success among the rich and powerful, but Fitzcarraldo is presented as an outsider to this class of colonizers. He belongs to an intellectual tradition that saw opera, music, and art in general as cultural antithesis to the small-minded ambitions of wealthy high society. Life and art, and consequently, the artist and society, represented antithetical categories for many intellectuals at the turn of the century, Thomas Mann, Kafka, and Nietzsche to name but a few. Fitzcarraldo is portrayed as a self-absorbed dreamer manipulating colonial culture in order to realize an idealistic, if not solipsistic vision. Although he seeks to get rich by exploiting the jungle, his ultimate goal is not the same as that of European colonists. He wants to use the rubber trade as a means of creating a world distinct from the one which he is exploiting. The reality of his dream trumps concrete reality, even to the point of ethical questionability. Fitzcarraldo appears again and again as an outsider in the real world, even in his attempts to manipulate that world. He does not understand or identify with the world in which he lives and remains himself misunderstood throughout the film. Much like the singers on the stage in the opening scene, Fitzcarraldo looks past all of his interlocutors. He is a perfect self-absorbed outsider.

After one of his unsuccessful trips to the city, Fitzcarraldo returns home and plays the famous aria *Vesti la giubba* from Leoncavallo's *I Pagliacci* on the phonograph for some local children. This is the first of several scenes where Herzog uses an aria from the world of opera to underscore a romantic motif. The text of the aria, although torn from its original context, fits Fitzcarraldo's status as outsider. Just as colonial images bring inescapable historical associations into an imaginary world, so does the aria. This aria in particular expresses great sadness, betrayal, and feelings of rejection. It is an example of Herzog's notion of opera as extremely reduced and concentrated emotion that is immediately recognizable as an archetype (Cronin 259). Pagliaccio sings the aria at the end of the first act after learning of his wife's infidelity right before a performance of the *Commedia dell'arte*. It captures the senselessness of acting out a farce where truth is obscured by absurdity and grotesque irony. Pagliaccio sings of actions performed as if in a delirium (*I Pagliacci* 399) and this mirrors Fitzcarraldo who also has to "act" for money. It alludes to the stark contrast between the superficial popular interest in opera and genuine artistic impulse. Like a clown mocked, misunderstood, and suffering, his business endeavors embody a farce as compared to his dreams. However, Fitzcarraldo's grief is romantic *Weltschmerz*. The same pain underlying the Indigenous myth of creation which suggests that the world is not whole. This juxtaposition of real-world-farce and the ideal world of opera appears again when Fitzcarraldo tries to persuade the rubber barons to support his endeavors.

At the party organized by Molly to raise funds for the opera house, Fitzcarraldo plays Caruso singing "O paradiso" from Giacomo Meyerbeer's *L'Africana* for the rubber barons. He alone is moved by the music about paradise as the others ignore it and go on chatting and even laughing at him. When one guest tries to stop the recording, Fitzcarraldo flies into a rage nearly assaulting him. He protectively grabs the phonograph and begins his tirade against the world of his wealthy hosts saying that he is the theater in the jungle and the inventor of caoutchouc, and that only through Fitzcarraldo does caoutchouc become word. When one of the rubber barons then mockingly christens Fitzcarraldo "the conqueror of the useless," Fitzcarraldo calls the rubber barons' reality a bad caricature of what he sees in opera. Caoutchouc becoming word is an inversion of the word becoming flesh in Christ (John 1:1) and Fitzcarraldo reverses the process: instead of the word becoming visible as concrete reality, reality is turned into the less tangible and more abstract word. The word referenced in the gospel according to John is logos, which also stands for the logic and reason that orders the universe. Thus, the allusion can be read as an explanation of how Fitzcarraldo sees himself. His dreams, his imagination, in short, his romantic subjectivity all give reality meaning and order and this is reflected in how music is used in the film.

Holly Rogers examined the filmic relationship between music and image in revealing the dynamic between the opera that Fitzcarraldo plays and the music of Popul Vuh that often accompanies scenes of the forest and Indians. Interesting in Rogers's description is both the function and interplay of diegetic and non-diegetic music, as well as the association of the band with Indians, the jungle, and the non-European Other. Her analysis shows how music is the driving force behind the narrative of the film and I agree with Rogers that *Fitzcarraldo* uses opera as diegetic music heard by all, whereas the non-diegetic Popul Vuh music is only relevant in their sphere, remaining unheard by Fitzcarraldo and his crew (Rogers 94). However, I would challenge the notion that this necessarily constitutes a

diametric opposition. Several scholars describe the first encounter between Fitzcarraldo and the Indians as an aggressive and even absurd confrontation. For example, Roger Hillman claims that the music of the Natives is routed by Fitzcarraldo: "the natives themselves no doubt totally bemused, by the voice of Caruso cranked up on a gramophone" (145). Ronald Dolkart suggests that "the way Herzog uses Caruso's voice is to sharpen the contrast between civilization's arias and barbarism's silences" (135). Rogers sees the musical encounter as something aggressive with the native music undermining the primacy of Caruso's opera (93) and even Richard Leppert, who pays the most attention to details of music in the film, comes to the conclusion that "melody and harmony conquer rhythm" in the scene (105). However, this perception is largely one-sided, and ironically, it lacks a careful consideration of the Indians' perspective, subsuming it into a dominant colonial narrative.

The scene begins aggressively: as the Molly-Aida enters Indian waters, Native drums resound diegetically. Intimidated by this gesture, the crew arms itself taking up defensive positions around the boat. It is not Fitzcarraldo, but the mechanic Cholo, planted on the ship as an agent of the rubber barons, who decides to use dynamite in order to, as he says ironically, "initiate a conversation" with the Indians. Cholo is the realist foil to Fitzcarraldo's dreams. Even in appearance he is a reminder of the concrete world as a large muscle bound pragmatist concerned with money and self-preservation and lords over the underworld of technology in the bowels of the boat. Cholo's explosive rejoinder is but a loud and violent noise, a fearful response in the face of the unknown, signaling ignorance and blind belligerence. The mechanic's brute force does not silence the Indians, as they send the missionary's umbrella floating down the river as a warning that they will kill them just as they did the interlopers that preceded them. The encounter is destined to end as all colonial and Indigenous encounters do in violence, death, and eventual subjugation of one group over another. While the captain, infuriated by the mechanic's actions, commands him to stop, Fitzcarraldo takes the mechanic's ironic statement about initiating a conversation seriously. He responds with the phonograph recording of Caruso. Although he is also using technology to carry across his message, it does not embody the same conquering force as the dynamite and the music silences the drums. Bemusement can hardly have been the reaction of the Indians, as Hillman conjectures. Rogers states that the Caruso recordings are mixed "with little regard for dramatic or even musical coherence" (93), but it is hard to believe that a man so consumed by opera would employ it so haphazardly. Leppert has identified correctly the aria that Fitzcarraldo plays as Chevalier des Grieux's "dream aria" *En fermant les yeux* from Jules Massenet's *opera comique Manon* and has also verified its particular relevance in the encounter (105).

Grieux's dream in *Manon* describes a paradise, which is incomplete because his lover Manon is not in it. The text evokes the image of a white house gleaming in the forest and surrounded by trees and animals. Beneath the shadows cast by this scene run the clear waters of a stream (*Manon, Opera libretto* 169). It is transferable to Fitzcarraldo's dream of building an opera house in the jungle and reminiscent of the image of the white house-like Molly-Aida floating along the river. Hillman observes that the ship is suggestive of an opera house not just at the end of the film when it serves as a floating stage, but even regarding its physical similarities with a theater (144). Also striking is the romantic motif of a paradise, that is not quite a paradise because something is amiss, thus alluding to the Indian myth of creation. Further, it also expresses Fitzcarraldo's romantic longing for a unity of the invisible world of opera with the concrete reality of nature. Fitzcarraldo seems to feel that this aria sums up all he wishes to achieve in audible form. However, unlike the unresponsive rubber barons whose reaction to Caruso's "paradise" was to stop the recording and throw Fitzcarraldo out on the street, the Indians stop their aggressive posturing and take an interest. One does not assume that the Indians understand French, but the music is even more dreamy and revelatory than the text and, according to the aesthetics of nineteenth-century music the text is but an imperfect expression of what the music is more aptly conveying directly. Although it is true, as Leppert observes, that Fitzcarraldo's demeanor during the scene shifts from apprehension to a posture of confidence and even a "self-satisfied gloat" (105), it is not clear what his satisfaction signifies nor how the Indians have actually reacted. They remain unseen. Fitzcarraldo's "self-satisfied gloat" can just as easily be the same feeling that he had towards the rubber barons, namely that his reality is more important. And even if Fitzcarraldo does see the music as conquering the Indians, it does not mean that the



Indians see it that way as well. Indeed, the later behavior of the Indians points to a different reception of the music.

After the initial encounter the terrified crew subdues the captain and abandons the boat, leaving only four members behind. After realizing that the expedition is now more or less lost, Fitzcarraldo plays Caruso for comfort and for his usual escape from reality. The piece is the quartet from Giuseppe Verdi's *Rigoletto*, "Bella figlia dell' amore." Once again, the aria is taken out of context but is nonetheless appropriate for the scene. It is a quartet and only four members are left on board, all experiencing different emotions like the singers in the opera. They sing of comfort in love, of longing, of disbelief in the face of false promises, of betrayal and rejection, and of violent revenge. The music creates an almost circular movement with its bobbing rhythm, conveying not only Herzog's typical sense of futility but also the succession of varying, recurring emotions. This is reinforced textually by the different singers. The Duke of Mantua is trying to conquer Maddalene, singing of beauty, his longing, and her ability to assuage his suffering. Maddalene sings the role of the cynic, warding off incredulously his advances. Gilda is betrayed by the Duke and sings of her anguish at being deserted and fooled. And Rigoletto sings of vengeance, violence, and dreadful justice (*Rigoletto* 1149). All of these sentiments are surely on board the Molly-Aida and perhaps all present simultaneously in Fitzcarraldo. The almost comical rhythm emphasizes a certain helplessness and melodramatic absurdity. This aria will come to serve as a leitmotif for Fitzcarraldo and his crew (see Dolkart 136). Not long thereafter, the Indians appear in small canoes pursuing the Molly-Aida wishing to capture her and blocking her retreat by cutting down large trees. Here, the notion that Fitzcarraldo has conscripted the Indians becomes difficult to uphold. The Indians surround and board the ship, vastly outnumbering the crew who cannot escape even if they stood firm and fought with guns. They mention again and again that the Indians could kill them all at a moment's notice. As the Indians climb on board, they touch the ship and Fitzcarraldo in a gentle but probing way. They are fascinated by Fitzcarraldo and the ship because of their connection to the disembodied music that they heard. When they speak in front of Fitzcarraldo they point at him and begin playing the pan flute. They associate him with the ship and the music and seem to be making the connection that he fails to make with them. Fitzcarraldo even asks wide-eyed and apprehensively, "why are they playing the flute?" Although the question is never answered, it is clear that the music and the man who played it, have not threatened them, but, rather, interested them for particular reasons.

The Indians, too, see music as something other-worldly. A disembodied voice issues from the phonograph, an invisible entity from another realm is singing. Fitzcarraldo's music establishes for them a connection to the supra-reality of the gods they wish to appease. It is for this reason that Fitzcarraldo is not viewed entirely as an outsider like the rubber barons and the missionaries. This is the reason they do not kill him: he somehow fits into their mythical understanding of the world. Fitzcarraldo is aware of the Indians' myth of creation and plans to take advantage of it by portraying his ship as the great white vessel that will carry the white God to appease the evil spirits of the river. However, this masquerade can hardly be executed owing to the lack of nuanced communication between the two groups. Just because Fitzcarraldo believes that he can "trick" the Indians into working for him, this does not mean that they have indeed been tricked. The project is accepted because his music shows him to be a conduit to the other side. If anything, the Indians have "tricked" him into offering up his vessel. However, the exact intentions and thinking of the Indians are never fully revealed. They can no more trick Fitzcarraldo than he them because words are missing and only music and images remain for communication and understanding.

Parts of the myth of creation are related again second hand by Huerequeque. The Indians have wandered ten generations searching for the white god that will bring them in a divine vessel to a promised land where there is no suffering and death. Fitzcarraldo fails to recognize that they too seek resolution and escape from cruel reality through his opera boat. They recognize Fitzcarraldo as a kindred spirit because of the music. But he does not recognize them. His romanticism is too solipsistic and self-referential. Both have a similar goal and plan. The tragic element is that Fitzcarraldo's world shuts out the Other. He is not in a position to understand them despite shared ideas. Huerequeque the drunk, a Dionysian figure related to music, is alone able to communicate somewhat with the Indians in their language. When Huerequeque explains Fitzcarraldo's plan to the Indians they respond with a simple "yes" without further need of convincing. The Indians then take to the brush with machetes

and hack away concrete reality making way for the vessel of music that will carry appeasement to their gods beyond the mountain. They are transforming the forest into a metaphor for what music is, a vessel for the transportation of essential reality, passing over the concrete world. When the panning shot of the mountain is taken we hear the music of the electronic band Popul Vuh extra-diegetically. At this decisive moment, when the plan to drag the ship across the mountain is conceived, we do not hear the opera of Fitzcarraldo's world; rather, we hear the music associated with the Indigenous world.

In subsequent days, as the ship slowly makes its way up and down the mountain, we hear the music of the band Popul Vuh non-diegetically during scenes of work and descent. As the ship makes its final descent, the music resounds with its chant-like choruses evoking an almost religious, sacred atmosphere. As the ship finally hits the water on the other side we hear for the first and only time Caruso non-diegetically. It is the quartet leitmotif from Verdi's *Rigoletto* once again. For the first time, Caruso enters the non-diegetic world of the Indians and is played in tandem with the band's music. Here we have the joining of the two endeavors in a transcendent moment and because both pieces are now non-diegetic, they permeate the scene and thus their ownership cannot be traced to any one realm. The two types of music share the non-diegetic aural space and thus a connection has been made between the two worlds for a brief instant. The Indians rejoice with the crew, having become a part of it. This is followed by the shared nocturnal Bacchanal and the journey along the death rapids. In discussing the scene along the rapids, most scholarship about the film fails to even mention the crucial fact that the Indians are on board the Molly-Aida. Lutz P. Koepnick says of the scene that "nature strikes back, refusing to be improved upon by Western geometry and technology. Once the boat has reached the opposite river, and after a communal feast of intoxication, the Indians cut the cables while Fitzcarraldo's crew is still asleep" (155). Dolkart omits the shared merriment saying that the jungle, the Indians, and the forces of barbarism foil Fitzcarraldo's plan to build an opera house: "with the ship safely on the Ucayali, the entire crew gets drunk" (138). In fact, all are drunk and dancing, and the Indians are playing their drums and pan flutes in celebration. Also Leppert fails to mention that the Indians are on board, commenting only that the crew was tossed about and holding on for dear life (107). These omissions are curious because they not only make it seem as if the Indians are trying to kill Fitzcarraldo, after wooing him into a false sense of security, but they also obscure key elements of the Indians' motivations.

It is clear that the Indians want to make the journey with Fitzcarraldo as part of the crew. This explains the initiation ritual and the fusion of the two types of music into one non-diegetic sphere. Before Fitzcarraldo awakens, the Indians are on board smiling and singing, as if they were trying to mimic the *Rigoletto* quartet. As the ship tosses about helplessly in the water, there is a shot of the phonograph playing and then we hear the sextet from Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor*. Leppert asserts that "we're given to believe, the boat's movement sets the gramophone into motion and it gives us Caruso in the sextet from *Lucia*" (107). It remains unclear how the movement of the boat could place the needle properly, much less manually crank up a gramophone. Much more reasonable is to conclude that the Indians have turned on the phonograph after watching Fitzcarraldo. Thus, they are a part of the musical sacrifice to appease the gods and they sing when the ship makes it through the rapids. After this climax, we hear the band's music in the last scene with the Indians, not Caruso, as the ship returns to Don Aquilino's outpost. Leppert is correct in his analysis of the sextet and its relevance for the scene. It speaks of hopelessness and dreams lost with Lucia claiming to have been betrayed by both earth and heaven (*Lucia di Lammermoor* 237). The two realms will not find romantic union or resolution. However, it also acts as a companion piece to the first aria played in the jungle on the gramophone, the dream-aria from *Manon* that first intrigues the Indians. Whereas the *Manon* aria promised a dream, *Lucia's* prophesies is its undoing. Leppert also notes that at some point we hear only the sextet, which silences diegesis (107). The dream world and its delusion are regulated back into invisible inner reality. While the two are only briefly united and blindly so, the film ends with Fitzcarraldo bringing opera to Iquitos in the form of castle towers, singers, and an orchestra floating on the water like reality sinking, the concrete world being dissolved, when in fact unreality has been placed on top of reality, the absurd image of opera on a ship.

Singer calls Herzog's use of the sublime "the ironic sublime" noting that "Herzog's films situate the viewer uncomfortably between the human and the superhuman (the natural sublime) as though the



two realms of existence demanded reconciliation" (203). This expectation is, however, a false one. Herzog always sets the viewer up for disappointment as his protagonists are rarely reconciled in any meaningful way with the superhuman forces that they encounter. One of the reasons for this is a feature of romanticism that Herzog exploits self-critically. The romantic tendency to seek harmony with nature entails an appropriation of nature, what Prager calls "an inscription of the self on an Other" and as such "Romanticism frequently stands for a potential failure to comprehend difference" ("Werner Herzog's" 24). Thus my reading that Fitzcarraldo's actions are a result of his failure and his inability to understand the Indians: he attempts to inscribe himself on the jungle and on the myth of creation. And although this is not for colonial, civilizing purposes, his self-absorbed romanticism prevents him from understanding the Other and their shared intersections. The Indians, in contrast, seem to fare better in comprehending difference, but in the end neither the romantic aesthete nor the people of the Amazon are able to reconcile themselves with their hostile environments.

Fitzcarraldo's "triumphant" return to Iquitos to the music of Bellini's *I Puritani* is ironic. The aria, a duet, is about past troubles in light of imagined happiness. However, in truth the aria takes place in the first act and although the opera ends happily, at this stage it is far from resolution with many trials and tribulations ahead. Herzog does not choose the happy end of the opera but the imagined one from act one (see Leppert 110). Despite it all, Fitzcarraldo appears again as conqueror with a "self-satisfied gloat" complete with cigar, a symbol of colonial wealth, power, and luxury. As if in an opera, he is playing a part, masquerading as conqueror, but not as a colonialist conquistador. He is, in fact, a conqueror of the useless," ironically still unable to realize the futility of his imagined world in the face of the real one.

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