

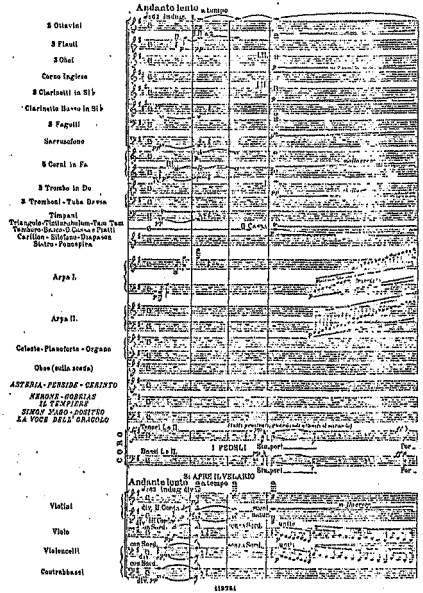
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# Arrigo Boito, librettist and musician

**2015-01-20**
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# ATTO SECONDO
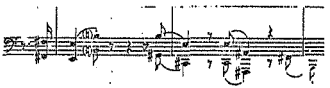





Ex. 11

the sacrarium, no interrupting however, the duologue between Simon Mago and Asteria. As the same time, an oboe on the stage plays a gentle and tranquil tune. The motivation for this quiet melody is dramatically obscure, but is perhaps aimed at suggesting the existence of a world divorced from the passions of the protagonists; musically it adds greatly to the atmospheric color of the scene. When Simon Mago warns Asteria 'Nell'antro ov'io m'ascondo', the tortuous theme associated with him (Ex. 5) returns in the orchestral background. Nerone's entrance into the sacrarium and the following ritual acts are described by small musical figures depicting his hesitant steps (Ex. 12)



his bowing (Ex. 13)



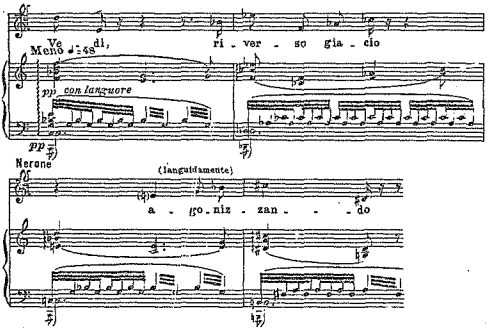
and, finally, the falling of his mantle (Ex. 14).



Simon Mago's solo 'Ecco il magico specchio', sung as he conducts Nerone before the magic mirror, is expounded in simple melodic lines and plainly harmonized, but the orchestration, with those curious 'impasti' obtained by the combination of piano, horns in the lowest notes, and metallic percussion instruments, sounds
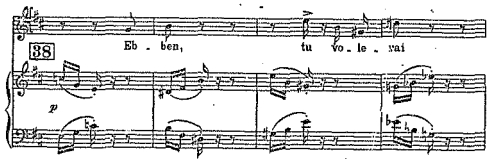
eerie and tremendously fascinating. This imaginative instrumental passage returns after Nerone's scream 'Sparisci!', provoked by the sudden appearance in the mirror of Asteria's ghostly image. Above the tense orchestral figuration first heard in the middle section of the funeral oration in Act I (Ex. 3), Nerone implores his implacable pursuer for forgiveness with the words 'Un giorno in Tauri tu promettesti pace a un matricida' (One day, in Tauris, you promised peace to a matricide). As he collapses before the altar, Asteria gently bids 'Sorgi e spera', - using Rubrio's words of peace and hope (Ex. 8), (this time the theme pitched a tone higher than in the original context). In order to win the Goddess' favour, Nerone throws his emerald necklace at her feet to a harp glissando of remarkable descriptive efficacy. The melodic line in the strings follows Asteria's slow movements as she bends to pick up the jewel; then, reinforcing Nerone's invocation 'Scendi, scendi', the music seems to lure her into descending from the altar. The Emperor's outbursts of erotic desire are intensified by the comment of the orchestra, as dark and excited as the fever of the burning senses. The ensuing duet with Asteria ('Lentissimo') is characterized by a strange, ambiguous and even sad beauty. It begins in a very slow, dream-wise manner, the reappearance in the orchestral accompaniment of the figure associated with Simon Mago (Ex. 5) implying the fact that Asteria is acting under the hypnotic will of the charlatan. However, as she is eventually overcome with passion and desire, the score

responds with accents of great emotional intensity and sensuous urgency. Nerone utters 'con languore' his words 'Vedi riverso giacio agonizzando' to a series of chords of the eleventh and the ninth (Ex. 15)



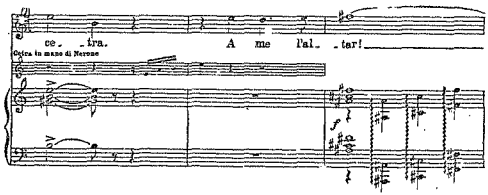

reminiscent of the 'Tannhäuser' Venusberg scene. The violins weave eloquent melodic lines over a very soft rushing figure in violas and cellos, then languishing in a gentle sigh as Nerone and Asteria unite in a kiss. On recognizing, in the supposed Goddess, the woman, Nerone's passion suddenly turns to fury and then to cold brutality. Overflowing with energy, the orchestra emphasizes the Emperor's destructive folly, continually proposing new themes and figures aimed at accompanying Nerone's broken declaration or at describing his actions, graphically. The appearance of Gobrias, who staggering in a drunken stupor, provokes Nerone's amusement,

gives way to a momentary interlude of relaxation - a scenically expedient device, necessary, however, to the balance of the action. Tension is, once more, rapidly built up in the eight bridging bars to which Simon Mago is dragged in by the Praetorian guards. The impostor is derisively condemned to the flight of Icarus over an orchestral background based on a theme which will, from this moment, return in association with the image of Simon's flight. (Ex. 16).




Working himself up into a paroxism of rage, Nerone, 'colla massima violenza', orders that Asteria be thrown 'nel vivario de'serpi'. In a tremendous outburst of passion, the woman adjures her 'cruel God' to kill her. Her grief and torments are given accents of almost inhuman suffering by the anguished leaps shaking her restless melodic lines, the continuous changes in time - signature adding to the violent poignancy of the passage. As Asteria is taken away, a sudden calm descends over the temple. After trying the tuning of the cetra (Ex. 17)
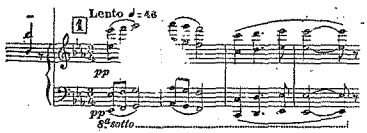
Ex. 17




Nerone announces a song which Boito leaves to the imagination of the listeners.
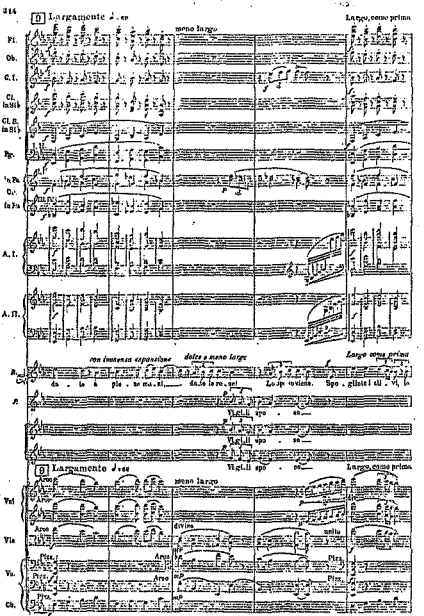
The third act opens quietly and slowly. A few bars of organ-like harmonies, moving enharmonically from D♯ minor to E♭ major establish an atmosphere of unearthly serenity. As if continuing a narration, Fanuèl recounts the Sermon on the Mount; his words, accented with admirable simplicity, are answered by the crowd lost in ecstatic bewilderment. An octave theme, played in unison by divided and muted strings, harp, horn and woodwind, recurs, in passacaglia form, throughout Fanuèl's narrative, linking together the several strophes.

(Ex. 18)



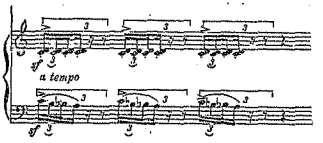

This theme is an almost direct quote from the opening of Luther's well-known chorale 'Ein feste Burg'. The music, flowing on in

smooth, almost continuously legato lines, could not be more simply and yet more touchingly expressive. It becomes joyously animated at the words 'Perchè vedran la gloria del Signore' (For they will see the glory of God) given by Fanuel in a scale-wise, ascending phrase, taken over by all the voices in harmony. When alluding to the afflicted, the poor and the persecuted, the song becomes momentarily tinged with sadness and we note the re-appearance in the brass, of the Luther theme. On the last chords of the chorale there enters the suave voice of Rubria, telling the parable of the wise virgin in expressive lines of recitativo. As she joins the other women and children, weaving garlands, a lively song springs up, sustained by a sprightly instrumental passage ('A me i ligustri, a te allor'). The voices combine in a structure as delicate as a filigree. In a surge of mystical love Rubria's voice breaks out with the sweeping, animated phrase 'O date a piene mani, date le rose', over sonorous arpeggios in the harps, reinforced by staccato chords in the upper woodwind and pizzicato notes in the lower strings (Ex. 19). The Christians answer with soberly scored, gentle phrases, now livelier, now slower, ending with the harmonious invocations 'Amore ... Fede ... Amore ... Speranza!' A fortissimo chord of the diminished 7th (A, C, $E_{\flat}$, $G_{\flat}$) initiates the agitato section dominated by a rustling figure in the violins, heard in the orchestra as the bleeding Asteria bursts upon the scene, provoking the flight of the crowd. Remaining alone with Rubria and Fanuèl, Asteria reveals her longing for the love of


314
Largamente
meno largo
Largo, come prima
Fl.
Ob.
C.I.
Cl. in Sib
Cl. B. in Sib
Bp.
Cr. in Fa
A. I.
A. II.
con intenzia espressiva
dolce e meno largo
Largo come prima
da - le a pie - te ma - ri, da le le re - gi
Le ge - ni - trici
spo - gliate di - vi - le
Virgi - li spo - so
Largamente
Largo, come prima
Vcl
Vla
Vc.
Cb.
divin
sullo
tutti

Ex. 19

compassionate human beings. Short episodes in the woodwind and in the violins underline her first words, heavy with weariness: 'Di pace una dolente a lor favella'. Then, rhythmical patterns of triplets, interspersed with silences, mirror the shivering of her exhausted body. (Ex. 20)
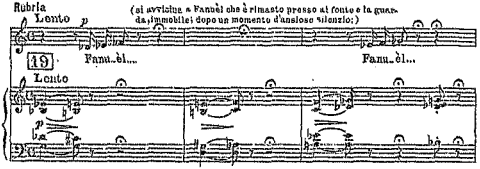



As she talks to Rubria, the orchestra recalls the tranquil motive of Rubria's prayer and, after a return of the shivering triplets, the theme of the flower, also from Act I, is heard. (Ex. 21)
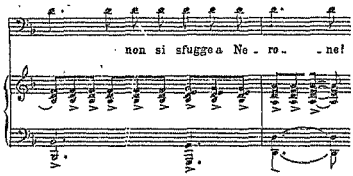



Asteria's drinking of the water offered by Rubria is underlined by gently rippling strings - this passage directly leading to Asteria's sombre and increasingly tense narration of her dreadful experiences and of how she, almost miraculously, escaped from the snake's pit in order to warn the Christians of the impending danger. An energetic, urgent rhythm in the bass, again based on the motive, sustains the last part of her speech, which culminates in

her frenzied utterances echoed by Rubria's frightened cries. Finally, possessed by the evil demons pursuing her, Asteria disappears into the olive grove, now enveloped in the darkness of the falling night. The ensuing duet between Rubria and Fanuèl, filled with shadows and unanswered questions, has a strange and most compelling beauty. The maiden and the apostle are close to each other and yet divided by a wall of darkness and incomprehension. Very effective are the opening bars with Rubria's twice, hesitantly repeated 'Fanuèl' echoed by tenuous and singularly responsive chords. (Ex. 22)




The reappearance in the orchestra of the phrase denoting Rubria's sin (Ex. 9 in augmentation) betrays the secret of Rubria's pain and of the Apostle's dominant thought. During the course of the duet he repeatedly exhorts Rubria to confess her sin whilst she, only, and humanly, concerned with his life, tries to recall Fanuèl to actualities, urging him to flee. Their dialogue, extremely varied and of remarkable dramatic intensity, is interrupted by a plaintive voice coming from the rear of the scene. It is Gobrias, disguised as a beggar, imploring compassion for his blind companion

whose identity is revealed by an orchestral statement of Simon Mago's Theme (Ex. 5). Throwing himself at Fanuèl's feet, the charlatan tries once more to persuade the Apostle to reveal his magic power in a passage uttered against a 9/8 movement in staccato semiquavers interrupted by a recall of the figure accompanying the words 'Plebi nefande....', in the first dualogue between Simon Mago and Fanuèl in Act I, (Ex. 23)




followed by a bar in syncopated rhythm. The last section of the act, dedicated to Fanuèl's farewell to his Christian brethren, is ushered in by a repetition of the eight bars sounded at the beginning of the act. In the apostle's last message of love and peace 'Vivete in pace, in concanto soave d'amor' poetry and music combine to convey the essence of a very deep, genuine spirituality. 'A mezza voce', with simplicity and tenderness, but with growing intense emotion, Fanuèl recalls the hours of fraternal relationship blessed with the divine gift of love, and then announces his approaching end. Lost in a dolorous bewilderment, the Christians gather around him. Their hushed invocations gradually swell to a 'sforzato', suddenly subsiding before merging into a 'funereo'

orchestral tremolo. Fanuèl solemnly invokes a blessing on his brothers, inviting them to follow him whilst singing a joyful song. Rubria approaches him, in tears and with a heavy heart. She demands, to throbbing syncopations, the consolation of a kiss of farewell. Already detached from all earthly desires, he answers 'Donna, ho le labbra di mortale argilla'[1]. With clear and steady voice, Fanuèl gently bids 'Cantate a Dio'. Impetuously, and with all the fervour of her soul, Rubria sings 'Date a piene mani, date le rose...' over a sonorous flood of harp arpeggios. Overcome with despair she cannot continue, but the song is taken over by the Christian women, who, recalling the most caressing phrases from the flower song, sung in the orchard in an hour of perfect bliss, follow Fanuèl, slowly disappearing among the olive trees. As the stage empties, the chanting grows fainter, eventually dying away in the night. Shivering with love and pain Rubria, half hidden in the darkness, listens to the last strains of the song; her broken phrases, spaced by heavy silences, are now almost sobs. Her despairing cry 'Non l'odo più' is swallowed by the tremendous orchestral outburst with which the act, abruptly ends.

The first part of Act four, is prefaced by a rather lengthy and not over-inspired section depicting the tumult of the crowd attending the Circus games, in an implacable rhythm, punctuated
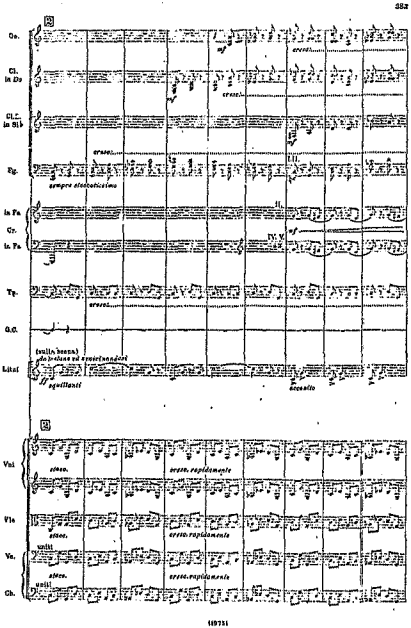
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1. (I have the lips of mortal clay.)

by sharp 'interjections from the litui sounding from near and far (Ex. 24) The time signature changes (from 2/4 to 6/8) as the curtain rises to show the interior of the Oppidum invaded by a multitude of people. The increasing dynamic volume reaches a climax as the outcries of the mob surrounding the Auriga winner of the quadriga race merge with the mighty blasts of buccinae and litui. The short episode of Gobrias and Simon Mago develops against an orchestral background derived from the theme of Simon Mago's flight. (Ex. 16) A new motive blazed out by the litui on the stage as ts itself above the heavy rhythmical figure in the bass supporting the march of a gladiatorial troupe. The growing clamour is mirrored in rapid and energetic passages in semiquavers, tremolos and robust chords climaxed by shouts from the Circus and commingling trumpet peals. The din is suddenly interrupted by a long note held by an oboe on the stage, heralding the episode of the Puella Gaditana. Her graceful dance, to which the lowering of the leading note in the key of G major, lends an archaic flavour[1] is tenuously but imaginatively scored for oboe, horn, timbal and crotalia (Ex. 25):
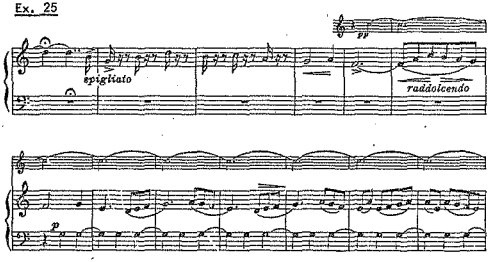
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1. A similar device, aimed at obtaining an archaic effect, is used by Boito in the snatches of songs heard in Act I (see pp. 7, 8, 9 of the vocal score)


382
Ob.
Cl. in Do
Cl.I. in Si♭
Fg.
sempre staccatissimo
In Fa
Cr.
In Fa
Tp.
Q.C.
Litui
(tutti bassi)
Vni
Vle
Va.
Vc.
Cb.
unis.
unis.

Ex. 24

Ex. 25

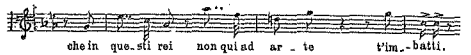



To this delicate dance-tune enters Nerone, followed by Tigellino informing him of Simon Mago's conspiracy. During their exchanges, the catching motive appears darkened by murmuring in the bass. Abruptly, the Emperor orders Tigellino to silence; he is apparently absorbed in the progress of the games and does not want to be distracted, but the reappearance, in the clear tone of the litui, of the theme denoting his guilty conscience (Ex. 2 in an augmented version) tells us that remorse is pursuing him as an implacable Nemesis. With a violent reaction, he bids the head of the histrious to start the torture of the Dirci, giving frantic commands 'with the ostentatious zeal of a director of the show'.[1] His outburst of sanguinary and luxurious folly is thrillingly expressed in a powerful declamato ('Taci, non odi la plebe che rugge') endowed with extraordinary dramatic power. The excitement of the

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1. Boito's stage direction

mob reaches its zenith as the sad procession of the Christian women, preceded by Fanuèl, slowly advance between two rows of 'bestiaries' whipping them. All of a sudden, the strong and serene voice of the apostle soars above the shouts of the crowd and sonorous orchestral passages. The music drops at once to a highly effective 'piano dolce' and, over an arpeggio passage, Fanuèl, steadfast in his faith, continues his prayer 'Credo in un Dio solo ed eterno', the opening phrase being similar to the close of Luther's chorale 'Ein feste Burg'. The prayer is repeated by the Christians to an ascending step-wise octave progression - a luminous trajectory amidst the gulf of chaos and spiritual darkness,('lux vera quae rilucet in tenebris')expressing the victory of the spirit arising above adversities and death. In the following episode of Rubria appearing as a Vestal Virgin, Nerone's rage at having had his cruel game interrupted, translates itself, melodically, into erratic skips and incisive rhythms. (Ex.26)

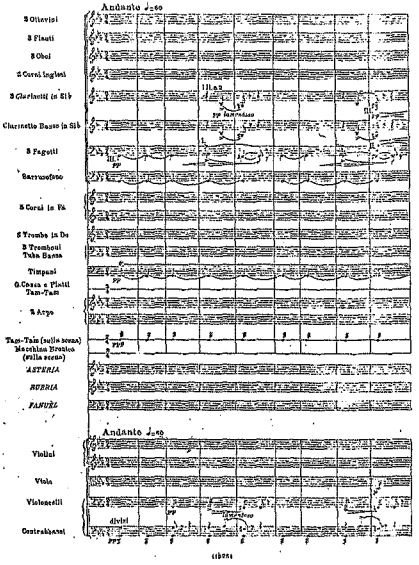



With strong dramatic effect, Fanuèl's cry 'Sorella!' is heard against a vibrante tremolo, swiftly leading to an orchestral quotation of the theme of Rubria's sin. A tumultuous passage in agitated triplets, punctuated by the insistent claims of the mob shouting 'A morte', underlines the scene of Rubria's being brutally carried into the arena whilst the Christians sing aloud 'Credo in un Dio solo ed eterno' (note Luther's motive). Musically,

Nerone's monologue 'Tutte un eroe denudator le abbranchi', does not match the eloquence and forcefulness of the poetic passage but it is by no means ineffective. Beginning in recitativo form, it broadens into a more melodic shape at the words 'nude in poppa al furial nembo dei tauri', under which the orchestra enters with a dark weaving in the bass punctuated by vigorous trumpet calls. The chromaticism of the vocal lines eloquently convey the pangs of the senses, the tension of the man lost in the morbid evocation and anticipation of the pleasures imagined in his perverted erotic desire. Nerone's ironic comment 'E tu ... non voli?', set to the motive of Simon Mago's flight (Ex. 16), ushers in the scene of Simon's punishment. The feeling of stasis produced by this incident is, to a degree, counteracted by the frequent intervention of the chorus, by Gobrias' and Tigellino's ironic remarks and, for a brief but highly effective moment, by the heart-rending cries of the Dirci tortured in the Circus. Their lament has hardly died down when Gobrias' frantic voice is heard announcing the outburst of the flames. The orchestra attacks a convulsive movement which, after mingling with the screams and the frenzied utterances of the terrified crowd, quietens on a series of softly thudding, chromatic chords. These, in turn, dissolve into an orchestral tremolando directly leading to the second part of the act, the macabre setting of which is The Spolarium
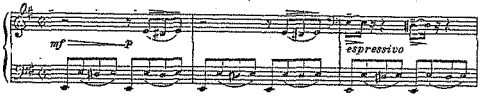
The curtain rises on a sullen murmur in the bass depicting the flames springing up around the Circus (Ex. 27).

# ATTO QUARTO
## PARTE SECONDA




Ex. 27
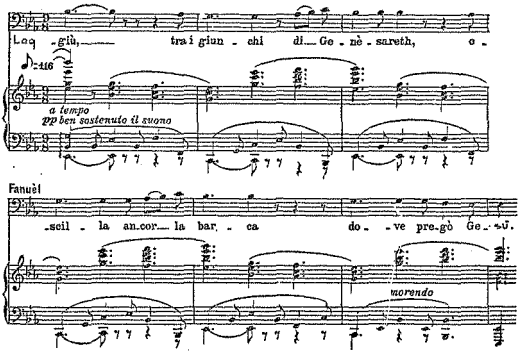
Flashes of lamentation, heard in the doleful tones of bassoons, clarinets and double-basses precede, and accompany, the entrance of Asteria and Fanuel. Their search among the dead is accompanied by hushed words and fragmentary interjections. To a sudden, noisy cascade of notes, followed by a sombre leaden passage made enervating by the reiterated figure in the bass, (Ex. 28)




Fanuel discovers the dying Rubria. Panting, he gives rapid instructions to Asteria. Two notes, twice repeated and more eloquent than words, anticipate the question which he seems afraid to formulate: 'Ebben?' Asteria's chilling answer 'Spavento! Muore' breaks his anxious expectation. With tremendous rhythmic thrust the orchestra explodes in an agitato passage picturing the cracking of the flames, the burst of the terrible conflagration, the shadow of Asteria dancing against the walls, a demoniac vision, as she runs in search of escape. After a sudden, long silence, there begins a duet between Rubria and Fanuel, made of broken words, of brief, anguished questions and of tranquilizing answers. A succession of strikingly delicate chords supports Rubria's stupendous declamato 'Oh! come'è buona e calda la carezza della tua man...' in which, with subduing gentleness, she releases her emotion. The motive of the sin (Ex. 9) is delicately hinted at as she, in

all innocence, at last reveals to Fanuèl that she was a Christian and a Vestal Virgin at the same time. Fanuèl pronounces the absolution in broad, sweeping, strongly diatonic phrases vibrating with the tenderest accents of passion. Rubria unites her voice to his, to an accompanying passage in broken chords of the utmost suavity. At the 'Adagio doloroso' Rubria's agony begins. Ominous shivers in the bass, punctuated by throbbing chords, underline her almost soundless words 'Sento che ascende l'ombra d'un vespero strano'. The succeeding scene, where Rubria asks Fanuel to take her by the hand and to lull her to sleep by telling a story from the life of Jesus, is indescribably moving, the melodic and harmonic simplicity of the music touchingly conveying the poignant sadness of the separation, the pungent taste of repressed tears and the silent bewilderment of the hour of death. Subtly changing chords accompany Rubria's last desire 'Narrami ancora mentre m'addormento...', whilst the gently rocking figure appearing under the words 'Onda che varca in Galilea' anticipates Fanuèl's narration 'Laggiù tra i giunchi di Genezareth'. It is a calm fluctuation of words and sounds, (Ex. 29)

Ex. 29




soberly coloured by the softest harmonies in flutes, horns and upper strings, with clarinets, harp and double-basses contributing liquid sounds. The orchestral texture becomes slightly more complex when Fanuèl sings the second phrase 'Più lento - 'Quella cadenza languida di cuna') over an undulating line drawn by clarinets and violas and when, to a descending progression of chords, he invites Rubria to the peace of sleep. In Fanuèl's arms Rubria dies. Her eyes close on the vision of the praying crowd wandering under the beam of the moon slowly rising from Lebanon ('Escian le turbe oranti'). The progression of descending chords is heard again, this time pitched a third higher than before and in a softly plucked *arpeggiato* version evocative of the faint

glimmer of the waves of the sea. An ominous, very soft tremolo - just a vibration - hints at the tension to come. Brought in by a rapid crescendo, a sonorous explosion of violence, emphasized by sharp syncopated rhythms, takes us back to the grim horror of the Spoliarium. In great agitation Asteria returns, the lurid glow of the flames casting livid shadows around her. Her crazed utterances suddenly calm down as she, dropping Rubria's flower over the martyr's lifeless body, thrice repeats the invocation 'Pace!' With this word of love, which, in Asteria's mouth becomes the symbol of the conquering power of the Christian faith, the drama ends. The orchestra resumes its impetuous sweep gaining rhythmic and dynamic momentum as the sound concentrates in a series of emphatic chords, alternating between major and minor before finally establishing the initial tonality of A major in the climactic tremolo on which the curtain falls. The twice-repeated descending figure in the bass appears to be inspired by the concluding phrase of Luther's great hymn, much chromaticised.

In spite of the enthusiastic reception accorded to Nerone at the time of its first performance[1], it did not prove to be a very

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1. According to A. De Angelis 'The enthusiasm of the audience was unprecedented and surpassed the famous premieres of Verdi's 'Otello' and 'Falstaff'. (see: Dizionario dei Musicisti' - 1928. Appendix, p.38.) Franz Lehar, who attended the first performance, wrote: 'I know the musical austerity of Boito, but I never thought he could reach such a prodigious height nor that it could have been possible to elevate our soul, through a theatrical work, to an atmosphere of such lofty purity' (Corriere della Sera, Milano, 2 May 1924.)

successful opera. Its historical importance is negligible, as it came too late to interest a musical world which had been shaken to its foundation by the new revolutionary approach of Stravinsky, Bartok, Schönberg and Alban Berg. Only sporadically[1] revived, Nerone seemed to be doomed to complete oblivion, until its radio performance from R.A.I. of August 1975, created so much interest that the recording was re-broadcast in October of the same year. This renewed interest is welcome as, although lacking the spontaneity, the vitality and the rich exuberance of Mefistofele, Nerone is a nobler and, to a degree, more sophisticated work containing many exciting moments and pages of the most affecting beauty. It is difficult to agree with Guido M. Gatti, writing that we are unable to discern, in Nerone, any signs of innovation or evolution or, withal, of a broader or deeper development of the characters of the drama that was shown in the first of Boito's operas'.[2] We may admit that the emotional intensity of the most stirring scenes of Nerone comes through means which can be more easily defined in terms of sheer musical and poetical powers of expression than by any technical terms. However, in many respects, Nerone does mark a considerable advance on Mefistofele. The musical speech is more highly developed and

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1. Nerone was revived at La Scala, Milan, in 1939 and at the Teatro Costanzi, Rome, in 1950.

2. G.M. Gatti, op.cit., p.613.

the melodic lines, concentrated in powerfully expressive or delicately sensitive forms are, nearly always, admirably appropriate to characters and situations. The harmony, invested with a greater degree of dissonant novelty, is elaborated with fresh subtleties. The leit-motiv technique is applied with more assured dramatic and psychological consistency. As regards characterization, Boito's psychological sense seem to have become more deep and delicate since the days when he wrote Mefistofele. This does not, however, apply to Simon Mago - the most unsatisfactory creation in the new opera. Boito's power of suggestion gives us extremes of opposed characters, e.g. the delicacy and spirituality of Rubria's and Fanuêl's music and the soul-destroying sensuality and pathological anguish of Asteria and Nerone. The treatment of the orchestra, although less pretentious and, at times, more refined in Nerone than in the earlier work, is, on the whole, admittedly less effective, in some instances (e.g. the introduction to the Oppidum scene) even verging on emptiness and banality. What, in my opinion, remains the most problematic feature of Nerone is the lack of a simultaneous, and homogeneous inspiration. The pre-existence of a poetical text so painstakingly polished and so fastidiously elaborated in the most precise detail, seems to have, at times, hindered, rather than stimulated, Boito's musical inspiration, perhaps already exhausted in the too long work of preparation. In Act III and in the second part of Act IV, the music, overflowing with human and divine tenderness, splendidly

translates the ethereal beauty, the spiritual pathos and the touching sincerity of the verse. Many scenes in Act I (as for instance Nerone's and Asteria's first appearance and Rubria's 'Padre Nostro') and in Act II (especially the duet between Nerone and Asteria), are likewise wonderfully realized. There are, however, in Nerone, moments in which music seems to be only 'externally' applied, like paint; it remains an inert comment, failing, as it does, to match the outline of the verbal idea. This is especially evident in Simon Mago's and in some of Nerone's speech, obviously showing the unfitness for musical setting of a prolix and too richly imaginative language and of a too elaborate metrical and rhythmical structure. Other cases in point are the choral scenes in Act I and in the first part of Act IV, more impressive in the literary version than in the final musical setting. For this reason Nerone is, in spite of its many positive qualities, a less successful opera than Mefistofele. It is true that, as Filippo Sacchi wrote immediately after the first performance of Nerone, Boito's music is endowed with the faculty 'of exalting us with its sense of grandiosity, of touching us by directly addressing to the heart and of transporting us into the realms of fancy'.[1] We can hardly however accept his assertion that 'with "Nerone" Boito's art reaches its summit'.[2] Contrasting

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1. Filippo Sacchi in 'Corriere della Sera' - Milano, 2nd May, 1924.

2. Ibid.

the two operas which Boito has left us, we are unmistakably made aware of the fact that they are the product of a different critical and emotional state of mind and of a different intellectual atmosphere. Mefistofele represents the extraordinarily promising début of a young and untried man of genius who, at the time when the most discouraging examples surrounded him sought, with youthful boldness, 'to regenerate Italian opera and substitute the music-drama for the old fashioned meaningless pot-pourri of more or less pretty tunes'.[1] The opera, which startled all Italy in 1868 because of its striking novelty, reveals, even in its most eclectic and less inspired portions, an uncompromising honesty, a spiritual distinction and an intellectual alertness which cannot but be a credit to the young composer. Above all, Mefistofele reveals an unfailing power of suggestion, a vigorous impulse and the warmth of a comparatively uninhibited creative power. Nerone is, as already said, a nobler, more refined and more mature work, a music-drama in the truest sense of the word, but it is obviously conceived from an intellectual, rather than from an emotional point of view. Many of its pages bear traces of weariness, almost of impotence, as though the musician's inspiration were stunted by a fastidious self-criticism, by an awareness that it was impossible to better, or modify, the completeness of the

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1. J.W. Klein - 'Boito and his two operas' - Music and Letters - 1926; p.75.

drama, already achieved in its literary form. Guido M. Gatti has rightly observed that we have the impression that the work has been penned 'in an underground vault, with a breadth of horizon like that of a studio, and worked out by lamplight with laborious minuteness'.[1] Even so, in the luminous act set in the Christians' orchard and in the scene of Rubria's death, Boito does unequivocally show himself capable of dis 'lling a new form of emotional beauty from his art - a precious and quintessential one, probably the gift of old age. This supreme achievement brings to mind once more Torrefranca's wonderfully appropriate definition:

> The long vigil of Boito's art, from the first Mefistofele to Nerone appears to us as a slow process of de antation. Little by little the heavier elemen ts of his fancy are deposited as inert sediment, and that which is fluid or which, because of its lightness, can be held in suspension, remains in little less than the state of absolute purity of a solution which has passed through a filter.[2]

Regretfully, episodes like those quoted above, are isolated examples and, whilst recognizing their beauty, we cannot speak of the beauty of the work as a whole and can therefore understand Nerone's comparative failure. Considered in its entirety, it lacks that spark capable of transforming the inert pages of a score into incandescent audience-inspiring material.

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1. Guido Maria Gatti, op. cit., p.620.

2. ivi, pp. 68 and 390

# CONCLUSION

The performance of Nerone sealed 'an almost legendary story of dreams, patience and meditation - the story of a long and immutable love, of an absolute, humble and yet ardent, devotion to a creation, a vision, an Ideal'. It seems to me that it is in the light of these words, written by Renato Simoni in 1924, that the life and work of Arrigo Boito should be viewed. He, combining in his person the several talents of critic, writer, poet, librettist and composer and achieving eminence in all of these fields, remains one of the most admirable examples of coherence and humility, of moral, intellectual and artistic integrity, of limitless generosity. When we think of him, we think of experiments, hard work and discipline, of devotion to high standards and to ever loftier, tantalizing out of reach and only partially achieved, ideals. In one of the first articles written by Boito (in collaboration with Emilio Praga) in Figaro we read these touchingly prophetic words 'an ideal which we will never be able to reach and which will accompany us, throughout out life, like a gnawing moth of the soul'.[2] At this early stage Boito's energies were almost exclusively devoted to literature and journalism. He had engaged himself wholeheartedly in the battle

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1. Renato Simoni. 'L'autore e l'opera'. Corriere della Sera. Milano - 1 May 1924.

2. Figaro - 4 February 1864.

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1. Renato Simoni. 'L'autore e l'opera'. Corriere della Sera. Milano - 1 May 1924.

2. Figaro - 4 February 1864.

of reforming the stagnant world of Italian culture. With outspoken criticism he had denounced the ignorance and lack of taste of contemporary society, attacking with violence all examples of conservative habits and pedantic idiocy.[1] The poetic 'capriccio' Re Orso (1865) and Mefistofele (1868) - the most original products of the artistic Scapigliatura - represent Boito's answer to some of the problems which he had himself exposed through his critical writings. The reform of the Italian melodramma - so necessary after decades of comparative immobility - had become to him in spite of his youth, a life's ideal. Looking back at past centuries, when sophisticated literary men and poets had contributed to the glory of the lyrical stage, he had fostered the rapprochement of the musical and poetical worlds. He himself produced a handful of libretti which - whether original creations or adaptations from works of poets of the stature of Shakespeare and Goethe - were, in most cases, artistic accomplishments in themselves, beside being perfect springboards for musical elaboration. The poet Antonio Fogazzaro, after the performance of Otello wrote: 'From now on it will no longer be possible to set to music absurd dramas or deplorable verses. As this kind of music follows faithfully the words, the words must be worthy of being followed'.[2] When, after the interlude

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1. See the 'open letter in four paragraphs' to the Minister of Public Instruction, first published in Pungolo , 21 May, 1868 - Now, in 'Tutti gli scritti' op.cit. pp. 1285-92

2. Quoted by Pietro Nardi: in op. cit. p.504.

of verismo, the progressive composers of the generation of the eighties began to turn their attention to the operatic stage, they went back to those aesthetic and stylistic principles which Boito had been unceasingly propagating. It has been pointed out by J.W. Klein that 'progressive musicians like Pizzetti and Malipiero vied with such popular idols as Puccini and Mascagni in expressing gratitude and veneration for the single-minded idealist who was an inspiration to them all'.[1] And Cesare Orselli has remarked that 'without his example Pizzetti would never have approached D'Annunzio and Petrarca'[2], (we can almost certainly add to these T.S. Eliot for 'Murder in the Cathedral'); nor Ghedini, Melville; nor Petrassi, Leopardi in the 'Coro dei morti', nor Malipiero, Pirandello. In his double capacity of librettist (Verdi's librettist, in particular) and musician Boito played an important, active role in the creation of a new form of opera. In the opinion of Richard A Streatfeild, writing in 1895, he influenced through Ponchielli 'what, for the sake of brevity, we call the school of Young Italy (Verismo) in a very remarkable manner'. This influence is understandable 'when we think how very much in advance of its age Mefistofele was and how strongly opposed to the lyric conventions of 1868'.[3] Boito did

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1. J.W. Klein 'The enigma of Boito'. 'Opera', 1968; vol. 19, p. 192.

2. Cesare Orselli. 'Arrigo Boito: un riesame'. Chigiana. Rassegna annuale di studi musicologici. Firenze. Leo S. Olshki editore MCMXXIII, p.214.

3. R.A. Streatfeild 'Masters of Italian Music'. London: Oxford, McIlvaine; 1895, p.158.

not actually reject a fundamentally valid tradition. He rather forced it into a new reality, proving, a few decades before Verdi's Otello and Falstaff, that it was possible to remain essentially Italian without renouncing those innovations which had enriched musical composition in the lyrical, the dramatic, the harmonic and instrumental fields during the first half of the century. As Verdi's librettist and collaborator, the extent of his influence upon the older composer cannot be circumscribed: '... it is not until Otello that we get dignified accomplishment and fine critical taste but here we have unmistakably a new hand in the business, the hand of Boito, observed G.B. Shaw, continuing '...the whole work, even in its most authentic passages, shows that Verdi was responding to the claims of a more fastidious artistic conscience and even a finer sensitiveness to musical sound than his own was when he tried to turn Macbeth into another Trovatore.'[1] It is no exaggeration to say that Boito set spark to Verdi's genius. He disciplined his unruled talent, stimulated his imagination, encouraged him to discover in himself a more intimate feeling, evoked his highest gifts. He showed him, in many ways, the right path, and to such an extent, that Otello and Falstaff may be considered symbiotic creations. From this collaboration Verdi emerged with the perfect balance, the precise

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1. G.B. Shaw. London music in 1888 - 89 as heard by Corno di Bassetto (later known as B. Shaw.) London; Constable, 1950; p. 388. 3rd edition.

colouring, the exquisite lyrism and the refined sensitivity of his later style. With Otello and Falstaff Verdi 'hurled the Italian opera, which without him would have succumbed to the crisis, like a golden discus into a remote future',[1] as poetically expressed by Franz Werfel. It was given to Verdi to close, in the most glorious way, a chapter opening at the same time a new one in the history of the musical drama which had started three centuries before. If the dreams of the cultured gentlemen of the Florentine Camerata had eventually been fulfilled beyond their expectations a considerable share of credit must be given to the genial heir of Rinuccini, Chiabrera, Zeno and Metastasio - to the poet-librettist Arrigo Boito.

A few words remain to be said about the musician to whom Italian critics, with a few exceptions, have scarcely done justice. The paucity of Boito's musical output, the lack of a thorough technical training, a certain eclecticism and perhaps above all, the fact that he belonged to no school, seem to have generated doubts about his musical merits. Boito was certainly not a prolific composer. He was a slow worker, a perfectionist hampered by a too keen critical sense, a sophisticated intellect inclined to making of art an aristocratic game. He was moreover, not only a musician, but a man of letters and a poet expressing

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1 Franz Werfel, op.cit. p. 74

himself also through music. It seems to me nonsensical to underrate him as a musician purely on the ground of technical weaknesses or eclecticism, or simply because he cannot be placed in any category. Weaknesses of this kind can be found connected with even the more eminent musicians. As to his eclecticism: this was the result of creative inquietude, of experimentalism, of the desire to renew Italian tradition by assimilating the new idiom which had been developing in the rest of Europe. That Boito's talent as a composer was equal to his poetical talent is proved by Mefistofele, the work in which the intentions of Boito the poet have been most splendidly realized by Boito the musician and which is still his lasting title to musical fame.

In the history of the Italian culture of the second half of the nineteenth century, Boito remains an exceptional and supremely individual figure. A man of multiform knowledge and of elevated ideals, he seems to have modelled himself after the example of those humanists who, although not of the stature of Leonardo, Michelangelo or Machiavelli, had contributed so much to the glory of the Italian Renaissance. In the framework of a colourless and uninspiring age, he must have felt out of place; this may perhaps account for his ending in isolation after having striven for and accomplished so much and having yet left so much undone. May we conjecture that it was owing to the lack of sympathy with his times, that he sought escape into the illusionary and timeless world of the melodramma, in which human values can be sublimated and fleeting

moments crystallized into patterns of perennial validity? Arrigo Boito devoted his life to the cause of the melodramma, serving it with immense love and dedication, with the discipline of the scholar, the passion of the artist and the honesty of an artistic and yet scientific mind which never knew hesitations.

## APPENDIX A

The cantata Il quattro giugno (1860), the original score of which is, at present, preserved in the Library of the Milan Conservatory, is divided into two parts: 'I Martiri' (music by Faccio) and 'La Profezia' (music by Boito). The poetic text was written by Boito.

The cantata opens with a Chorus of Martyrs invoking the wrath of God against the oppressors. An Angel, acting as a mediator between Heaven and Earth, conveys 'to the holy azure of Paradise' the voices of the Italians longing f r the freedom of their homeland. The Angel's lengthy recitative announcing the advent of the 'long dreamed freedom', leads to a triumphant finale - a hymn of liberty 'which resounds in the vastness of the free heaven'.

The first part of the Cantata is in essence, a preview of the Prologue in Heaven in Mefistofele - the opera with which Boito was to make his début at La Scala as a theatrical composer in 1868. In 'I Martiri', as well as in the Prologue, the similarity is seen in the cosmic vision with which both works open, as well as in the relationship between the heavenly and the human, with an Angel/Mefistofele acting as an intermediatory agent. In both works we observe the passage from grief to hope culminating in final exultation.

In the second part, the dramatic contrast is determined by

the words with which a Prophet evokes the vision in which he is absorbed: the conflict between the Austrian two-headed eagle and the Savoy Cross, 'blazing, glorious and great'. (The vision of the Prophet anticipates not only that of the Bard in Boito's future Hymn of the Nations, but also the vision of Elena, in the second part of Mefistofele.) The Sardinian Royal March silences the advancing oppressors, thereby signifying an Italian victory over tyranny. The full chorus and orchestra strike up a majestic thanksgiving. The Cantata ends climactically with the first section of the Royal March treated in a fugal manner.

From a literary point of view, the best section is the beautiful recitative of the Angel preceding the final chorus of Part One. It opens:

> Ammutolito è il canto; e ancor commosse
> Fremon dell'Arpa le ispirate fila,
> Quasi un magico soffio alla celeste
> Nota incantata prolungasse il suono.
>
> (The song is silent, but the strings
> Of the harp are still vibrating as if a
> Magical breath of wind were prolonging the
> Sound of the enchanted note.)

This passage, so resounding with musical vibrations, heralds the future Boito but the whole work reveals such a mastery of poetical and dramatic technique that it forces us to believe that it had been preceded by other attempts which had perhaps been lost or destroyed.

APPENDIX B

The Mistero Sorelle d'Italia (1861), the original score of which is also preserved in the Library of the Milan Conservatory,[1] is a large scale work, divided into two parts: 'Prologo nel Walhalla-Italia e Ungheria' and 'Polonia e Grecia'. Boito wrote the poetical text and set to music the second part, the rest being provided by Faccio. The Sorelle d'Italia is dramatically more ambitious and better constructed than Boito's previous Cantata 'Il Quattro Giugno but poetically, it is perhaps less spontaneous. The 'Prologue in Walhalla' carries us into the livid regions of Northern mythology where, amidst 'rumbles of thunders and crashing noises of wind', the three Fates weave the

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1. The score of 'Sorelle d'Italia' is preserved in the Conservatory library, and the following statements, made by R A Streatfeild and G Mazzucato are incorrect.
In Masters of Italian music (London: Osgood, McIlvains, 1895, p.142) Streatfeild wrote: 'The score of this cantata has unfortunately been lost, but records of its performance remain, and from all accounts it must have been a really remarkable work'.
In Groves' Dictionary of Music and Musicians (London: Mac Millan, 1919, p.354) we read the following statement by Mazzucato: 'Unluckily the manuscript score, which ought to have been deposited at the library of the Conservatory through the carelessness of the keeper of the library and of the director Lauro Rossi, was lent and never returned, so that, unless chance throws the manuscript in the way of some musician, no hope can be entertained of ever hearing again that interesting work, the authors themselves having kept no copy'. In the edition of Groves Dictionary of Music and Musicians published in 1954 the matter has not been corrected.

destiny of four nations united in distress: Italy, Hungary, Poland and Greece. Then, as in Mefistofele, the action moves to the world where it will reach its conclusion. In the first part of the Cantata two girls - an Italian and a Hungarian, confide to one another their sufferings during the sad days of slavery and their hopes and dreams towards a future of peace and freedom. Inspired by the song of the Valkyries - a macabre toast upon which Boito will mould the King's and the Queen's 'Brindisi', in Amleto - the Hungarians rise in revolt. The March of Rakoczy resounds 'fortissimo', whilst the chorus sings a Hallelujah announcing the dawn of redemption all over the world.

The second part begins with a Litany, the literary text of which is taken from Mickiewicz's Book of the Polish Pilgrims.[1] In this Litany, Boito, inspired by recent events which much have stirred in him his Polish inheritance, inserts a tercet dedicated to:

> Il martirio dei venti inginocchiati
> che morirò cantando una preghiera
> per la povera patria.
>
> (The martyrdom of the twenty who died
> singing, kneeling in prayer for their
> wretched country.)

---

1. On the 8th of April, 1861, some Polish workers chosen at random by their Russian oppressors were destined to be massacred. Condemned to die, they rose up in prayer. The Russian troops advanced, opened fire, murdering twenty of them, while the remaining few continued singing the Hymn for the salvation of their motherland.

The Litany, in the ascendent melodic and harmonic progressions is definitely prophetic of the Celestial Hosts' Prayer in Mefistofele. Particularly interesting is the manner in which Boito has dramatized this lengthy section - the Litany (given to a double chorus) alternating with the sombre recitative of the Vaidelota[1] and the War Hymn of the Polish.

The duet between a Polish and a Greek girl which follows, seems to be very close in construction to the Elena-Pantalis duet in the scene of the Classical Sabbath in Mefistofele (Act IV); whilst the song of Tyrtaeus, lowered from $B_b$ to $A_b$ major, will become the majestic chorus: 'Poesia libera t'alza pei cieli',[2] with which the same scene ends.

The fact that there are so many similarities between Boito's early and later works, leads us to agree with Mario Apollonio's opinion that Boito 'still very young, was already possessing the full amount of the artistic gifts which would accompany him throughout his life'.[3] This observation could well be the introduction to that of Torrefranca who, thirty years previously, defined Boito's artistic development as:

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1. The priest, prophet and poet of the Lithuanians.
2. 'Poetry, rise free to the skies'.
3. Apollonio, M., op. cit., p.612.

> a slow process of decantation (in which) little by little, the heavier elements of his fancy are deposited as inert sediment and that which is fluid, or which because of its lightness can be held in suspension, remains in little less than the state of absolute purity of a solution which has passed through a filter.[1]

Many of these 'heavier elements' are present in the poetic text of the Sorelle d'Italia. They can be identified with the abuse of archaic voices; with the rhetorical emphasis of some passages and with the triviality of certain rhymes. However, the novelty of the verse texture (especially noticeable in the 'Prologue in Walhalla') combined with the sonority and virility of the lines (which have so little in common with the mellifluous ones of Metastasio, Romani, or of Boito's contemporary poets Prati and Aleardi) reveals an intense desire for originality. It also clearly shows Boito's strong urge to break down the limitations of the formal tradition and exploit to the full the possibilities of the language, especially the one destined to music.

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1. Torrefranca, F., op. cit., p.537.

APPENDIX C

Scapigliatura is the name (taken from a novel by Cletto Arrighi of 1862) of an artistic movement which had its centre in the post-Risorgimento Milan. It emerged about 1860 and lasted till about 1880. Its adherents were gifted young artists bound by way of thinking rather than by personalities. The chief figures were: the writer Giuseppe Rovani - supporter of the principle of the 'affinities of the arts' pursued by all the Scapigliati; Arrigo and Camillo Boito; the poet-painters Emilio Praga and Giovanni Camerana; the novelists Igino Ugo Tarchetti and Carlo Pisani Dossi; the painters Tranquillo Cremona and Daniele Ranzoni; the sculptor Giuseppe Grandi. Scapigliatura was a singular form of rebellion. Whilst rejecting the outworn conventions of the too formal, mild and sentimental Italian romanticism, the Scapigliati were recapturing the most conventional - and most extreme forms - of German and French romanticism. The romantic movement in Europe, had by this time been superseded by new trends represented, in the fields of literature and the fine arts, by Realism, Impressionism and the poetry of Baudelaire and the Parnassians.

These new experiences too, (although to a lesser degree) had an influence upon the Scapigliati. This explains the somewhat anachronistic, eclectic - and, therefore, not too vital character of the artistic Scapigliatura. Its historical importance lies in the fact that it prepared the ground for

further experiences, the most important of which was Verismo. Scapigliatura stands, also, for defiance of society (especially of the newly emerged burgeois class), and a protest against the barriers imposed by authority and custom.

## APPENDIX D

The Libro dei Versi, a collection of poems written by Boito between 1862 and 1874 was first published in Turin in 1877 (together with Re Orso), having first appeared in various periodicals ('Museo di famiglia', 'Almanacco', 'Figaro', 'Rivista contemporanea', 'Rivista minima').

Throughout the more significant poems of the Libro dei Versi, the theme of the antithesis[1] - Boito's dualism much emphasized by the critics, returns persistently. Inspired by the Faustian motto 'Two souls, alas! reside within my breast', the theme of the antithesis, typical of the romantic writers, had been taken up by the restless Scapigliati as the symbol of man's inner struggle with himself and of the irreconcilable antagonism between the 'Ideal' and the 'Real' which torments the life of both man and artist.

In 'Dualismo' - his most famous poem - Boito reveals himself as a living antithesis:

> Son luce ed ombra; angelica
> farfalla o verme immondo,
> Sono un caduto cherubo
> Dannato a errar sul mondo
> O un demone che sale
> Affaticando l'ale
> Verso un lontano ciel....

---

1. In the short story, 'L'Alfier nero', for instance, the motif of the antithesis is dramatized in a game of chess played between a black man (symbolizing instinct, passion) and a white man (symbolizing reason).

(I am light and darkness;
a blessed butterfly or a vile worm.
I am a fallen cherub
damned to wander the world
Or a demon who
ascends on tiring wing toward
a distant heaven....)

From the spiritual spnere the 'dualism' moves, somewhat artfully, to an artistic level, identifying itself with the unceasing search for a 'free' form of art, capable of expressing the contrasting images inspired by the Ideal, Eternal Truth, as well as by the modest truth of everyday life:

E sogno un' Arte eterea
Che forse in cielo ha norma
Franca dai rudi Vincoli
Del metro e della forma....
.... E sogno un' arte reposta
Che smaga il mio pensiero
Dietro le basse immagini
D'un ver che mente al Vero....[1]

(I dream of an ethereal Art,
free of the limitations
imposed by metre and form -
an Art which is, perhaps,
only pertinent to Heaven....
I dream of a prosaic art
which attracts my thought to the
images suggested by an earthly truth
vying with the Eternal Truth.)

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1. In his essay on Scapigliatura', (La Scapigliatura a - Un capitolo della storia del Risorgimento, Anaclata Romana Instituti Danici, III Supplementum, Copenhagen 1966), Jörn Moestrup defines Scapigliatura as a transition from Romantic Idealism to Realism (the latter known in Italy as Verismo). The Scapigliati looked upon Verismo as a new form of expression, but were unable to realise it. It was only during the last two decades of the century that the school of Verismo was to assert itself in the work of Capuana and Verga in the field of literature; of Puccini, Mascagni, Leoncavallo in the field of music. In spite of Boito's poetical assertion, realism never gained a foothold in his artistic world.

This explains why Morena Pagliai considers the poem 'Dualismo' to be the 'Manifesto of Scapigliatura'.[1] The actual word, 'dualismo' has come to be regarded as a psychological dimension as well as a critical category in which the whole life and work of Boito has been seen. Resuming the thesis put forward by Benedetto Croce[2] in 1904 (upon which the criticism of Boito still pivots), Arnaldo Bonaventura wrote:

> The conflict between the Ideal and the Real; the struggle between the Good and the Bad; the contrast between Belief and Negation set the dreams of the poet against reality as Margherita is to Mefistorele; Gioconda to Barnaba; Ero to Ariofarne; Desdemona to Jago; the dawn of the newborn Christian civilization to the twilight of the corrupt, dying Paganism; the gentle characters of Fanuel and Rubria on the one side and those of Nerone and Simon Mago on the other.[3]

The Libro dei Versi is the expression of a restless personality, as well as the manifestation of a subjective world, moulded by the artist's creative power and capable of providing an escape from reality.

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1. Morena Pagliai 'Un Manifesto della Scapigliatura: Il libro dei Versi di A.B.' - La Letteratura, Roma, XXXI, (1967) N.85.87. p.126.

2. 'Boito conceives life as a drama in which powerful destructive forces - such as passion, evil, crime - opposes, as frail as broken flowers swept by the storm, gentle Desdemonas, good, love and kindness' Benedetto Croce, op.cit.p.258.

3. Bonaventura, A., cit. p.38. I think that this thesis is valid but it can, perhaps, be suggested that, Boito being essentially a dramatist, the contrast was, also, a necessity. Boito himself wrote: 'The law of the contrary and contrasts was born together with the primitive drama and will live until the drama will live on earth'. in 'Tutte le opere', op. cit., p.1210.

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The Libro dei Versi is the expression of a restless personality, as well as the manifestation of a subjective world, moulded by the artist's creative power and capable of providing an escape from reality.

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1. Morena Pagliai 'Un Manifesto della Scapigliatura: Il libro dei Versi di A.B.' - La Letteratura, Roma, XXXI, (1967) N.85.87. p.126.

2. 'Boito conceives life as a drama in which powerful destructive forces - such as passion, evil, crime - opposes, as frail as broken flowers swept by the storm, gentle Desdemonas, good, love and kindness' Benedetto Croce, op.cit. p.258.

3. Bonaventura, A., cit. p.38. I think that this thesis is valid but it can, perhaps, be suggested that, Boito being essentially a dramatist, the contrast was, also, a necessity. Boito himself wrote: 'The law of the contrary and contrasts was born together with the primitive drama and will live until the drama will live on earth'. in 'Tutte le opere', op. cit., p.1210.

In the two poems dedicated - and entitled - to 'Emilio Praga' and 'Giovanni Camerana', the conflict between the 'Ideal' and the 'Real' is felt by Boito as a spiritual wound. The consciousness of the futility of the struggle towards unrealizable ideals suggests to him moments of sincere and intense emotion, destined to remain unique in his poetical works other than the libretti. In the other poems, the tendency to eliminate each and every form of personal emotion and realism is obvious. This unrealistic bias was to lead Boito to regard melodramma as the ideal scheme for portraying the visions inspired in him by the classical and oriental world ('Ero e Leandro'; 'Lo falce'; 'Semira'; 'Nerone'); by the Middle Ages or Renaissance ('Un tramonto'; 'Pier Luigi Farnese'; 'La Gioconda') as well as those suggested by the poetical world of Goethe ('Mefistofele'), or Shakespeare ('Amleto'; 'Iram'; 'Otello'; 'Falstoff'), or the Commedia dell' Arte ('Basi e bote').[1]

The themes of 'Georg Pfecher'; 'A una mummia' ('To a mummy'); 'Un torso' ('A Torso' of Venus ), are taken from archaeology. These poems, after the Parnassians' model,

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1. In his biography on 'Puccini' (Duckworth, London, 1958; p.39) Mosco Carner relates that when Puccini was considering the subject of Bohème, Boito tried to dissuade him, his principal argument being that 'music is written to bring to life episodes worthy of being remembered....; music is the essence distilled from history, legend, the heart of man and the mysteries of nature'.

overflow with erudition and abound in preciosity. 'Castello antico' ('Old castle') - set as a contrast to 'Case nuove' ('New houses') - evokes a legendary medieval world.

'Le foglie' ('The leaves'), inspired by a 'motto' by Victor Hugo ('... la première faute ... fut le premier poids') is Boito's most lyrical and - in my opinion - most beautiful poem.

Many of the poems contained in the 'Libro dei Versi' ('A una mummia'; 'Un torso'; 'Georg Pfecher'; 'Lezione d'anatomia - A Lesson of Anatomy) are stamped with whimsical jests - a la Heine[1] - which destroy the pathos of the poem. This is a typically romantic device, probably derived from Freidrich Schlegel's principle that the destruction of his own work on the part of the Artist creator is an indication of spiritual freedom or, more probably in the case of Boito, the assertion of the control of the mind over the heart. This is the beginning of what was to become Boito's characteristic 'cerebralismo' probably an extreme form of self-control of which Re Orso represents the most conspicuous example.

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1. Heinrich Heine was one of the idols of the Scapigliati together with Hugo, Musset, Poe and Baudelaire. The contrast, the dissonance, is the main feature of Heine's poems contained in the 'Buch der lieder'. Chopin, too, 'used often to end his dreamiest improvisations with an unexpected discord' (Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians, 1919; p.313).

## APPENDIX E

## RE ORSO

Re Orso, an ingenious divertissment, has been defined by Alfredo Galletti as a 'kind of rhythmical capriccio, a Trillo del Diavolo set to verse rather than music which, howling and scornfully laughing, skims the surface of the spirit without ever reaching its depth,'[1] an admirable definition except that I would find the structure to be rather that of the symphony - or symphonic poem than 'a kind of rhythmical capriccio'. Indirectly related to Hugo's 'Epopée du Ver; to Heine's 'Atta Troll'; to Poe's 'Le Ver Conquerant'; and to Baudelaire's 'La Carogne', Re Orso is, in spite of so many derivations, an original work. Boito's ability to assimilate and re-elaborate the most varied experiences without losing his own originality is certainly responsible for his greatness as a librettist.[2] Re Orso is formed by a Prelude; two Legends (divided into many episodes and linked by an historical Intermezzo); a Moral. The main theme is the struggle between Re Orso - a ferocious and mighty tyrant of Crete - and a Worm, as implacable as Fate and as

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1. Galletti, A. 'Arrigo Boito e il suo Re Orso', in Poeti, poesie e storia. Milan: Risorgimento. 1926, p.248.

2. P. Smith has remarked: 'What must be done in any study of Boito as librettist is to concentrate on his own strengths, which are adaptive in the fullest sense, yet do the man the credit of examining just how much of him there is in the works: just how much Boito the creator slipped through Shakespeare or Goethe and stood on stage himself'. op. cit., p.333.

eternal as Time. During a banquet Re Orso kills the Worm, but, the poet says,

> Vermis non Morietur,
> ... morrà il leone
> Morrà l'uom, morrà l'aquila, ma il verme
> Vivrà in eterno.
>
> (The worm never dies.
> The lion dies,
> man dies, the eagle dies
> but the worm lives forever.)

The Worm will, eventually, be the victor. Around the main theme evolve many episodes to which the most bizarre characters give life. In the first legend, in addition to Re Orso, there are: twelve Counts; the beautiful Oliba - a Jewish girl disputed between Re Orso and a gentle Troubadour, and the tyrant's four servants: a vulture; a boa constrictor (Ligula); a giant cook/executioner (Trol) and a dwarfish fool (Papiol). In the second legend - of which the Worm is the protagonist - the dying Re Orso is assisted and confessed by a Friar/Devil. A toad; a knight (who perhaps is only an empty suit of armour); a beetle and a Ghost, complete the characters.

It seems to me pointless to try and find a meaning in Re Orso; many critics[1] have done so, ignoring Boito's warning, to

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1. For instance, Benedetto Croce (in op. cit., p.265) identifies Re Orso and the Worm with Evil and Death, respectively. Piero Nardi, who also sees the Worm as a symbol of Evil and general destruction suggests affinities between Re Orso, Mefistofele and Nerone, (cit. p.172). This last thesis is taken up by Patrick Smith. 'Boito's image is powerful because it embraces not only the immediate - the Worm eating the coffined body - but also the general destructive principle; the prevalence of evil and its continual nihilistic scourge.' (op. cit., p.336).

be found in the Moral of the fable:

> Nè savio motto - nè aforismo dotto
> Nè sermo o perno - di morale eterno
> Nessun ricerchi in me.
>
> (I beg you, do not search in me for a wise motto,
> or a learned aphorism; a sermon or an eternal
> principle of the moral law.)

Re Orso is an extraordinary 'pezzo di bravura', aimed at producing effect. It is obviously the result of experiments in verbal sounds, verse forms and rhyming combinations. Boito's virtuosity, at times almost acrobatic, leads us to think of the ingenious technical sophistications of the Netherlands contrapuntists or of the literary extravagances in which writers of the Middle Ages, including Dante and Petrarch, took delight. (The 'Miserere, written upside down and the Troubadour's acrostics may be taken as examples.) Oddities such as the grotesque 'Litany', in which the words have a purely sonorous value; the 'Confession scene', with verses cast in prose form; the recurrent quotations in foreign languages, Latin, Hebrew, Provencal, anticipate certain devices of Futurism and modern poetry. Re Orso is undoubtedly the most provocative and most significant work produced by the Scapigliatura. Filled with anachronistic historical references, Boito's bizarre fable was surely meant as a parody of history - as the triumph of the creative power of the unbridled imagination over the orthodoxy of the bourgeois culture. In the same way, the practically unlimited gamut of stylistic solutions proposed by Boito was certainly intended as a liberation from the restraining conventions

of rhyme and metre upon which poets such as Carducci, Prati and Aleardi still placed reliance. Re Orso is a product of major importance in the history of Scapigliatura in that it represents the realization of the theory of the 'affinities of the arts' only partially achieved in the works of the Scapigliati. The fact that Boito in his poem aimed at overcoming the limitations of verbal expression, striving to attain plastic, pictorial and, especially, musical effects, seems to me beyond argument. The characters of Re Orso, Oliba, Trol, Papiol appear to be carved in wood. Some of the passages, as those found in the fourth, sixth and the ninth numbers of the first legend[1] are pictures translated into words. There are rare images capable of evoking at the same time visual and aural sensations, for example:

E ancor la luna
Splende sull'ermo
Bianca ed immota
Come una nota
Di canto fermo.

(The moon still shines
over the hermitage
As white and motionless
As the note of
a 'canto fermo'.)

The stanzas of the Troubadour's song, built upon the letters of the name Oliba acquire by means of this device, a polyphonic effect:

O la luna, la luna era una mesta
L anguida Dea!
I nvan, per essa ardea
B elial, dimon dall'ebre voglie impure
A ntico mostro che l'inferno appesta

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1. (Nightmare i; Nightmare ii; The banquet.)

(Oh! the moon, the moon was a sad
Languid Goddess!
In vain conceived for her a passion
Belial, the demon with impure desire - the
Ancient monster, who is the plague of Hell...) etc.

As I previously mentioned, the structure of Re Orso is that of the symphony - a symphony in which the cyclic principle is used. The refrain:

Re Orso
Ti schermi
Dal morso
Dei vermi

(King bear,
beware of the bite
of the Worms.)

acts as a thread connecting the various episodes. In the 'Banquet scene' this refrain appears metamorphosed as follows:

O Verme
Ti scherme
Dal morso
Dell'orso.

(O Worm,
beware of the bite
of King Bear.)

The recurrence of other 'motives', associated with particular characters, scenes or episodes, gives unity and some kind of coherence to what would otherwise be a fragmentary succession of scenes. Boito's craving for musical effects is also evident in the text: the metres used with astonishing freedom are responsible for the irresistible rhythmical vivacity of the poem; the verses are accentuated according to musical rather than poetical exigencies. Sonorous effects are produced

by the combination and wealth of rhymes - often occurring two, even three times in a single line unit:

> Si gonfia e rappiglia - s'allunga e assottiglia, quel vil viator
> Si snoda e s'annoda - dal capo alla coda - con lento vigor.

by the lavish use of word-assonance and allitteration especially of harsh and sibilant consonants:

> Il rebolo buffa - in rapida zuffa col mare lontan
> E l'irta tempesta-inzacchera e pesta - lo squallido pian.

by the contrast of vocal sounds.

> La notte nereggia
> tristissima è cupa
> La iena a la lupa
> Son sotto la reggia.[1]

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1. To attempt to translate these passages is futile as the poetry depends entirely on sound-effects in the Italian language.

## APPENDIX F

The first score of Mefistofele (or, at least, the parts not retained in the new version) was destroyed by Boito himself. A comparison of the two libretti nevertheless enables us to determine the alterations made. As originally produced Mefistofele was in five acts (the fourth and the fifth linked by a symphonic interlude - 'Intermezzo sinfonico-La battaglia'), with two Prologues: the 'Prologue in the theatre', in prose which paralleled Goethe's, and the 'Prologue in Heaven.' For the Bologna performance Boito discarded the 'Prologue in the theatre, the Emperor Court scene, the 'Intermezzo sinfonico' and made extensive changes throughout the opera recasting it into four, condensed acts and an Epilogue. The parts suffering most through the modifications are: the Easter Sunday Scene (Act I, Scene i) reduced by a good third and the Romantic Sabbath (Act II, Scene ii) diminished by about half. The fifth act, 'Faust's death' entirely remodelled, became the present Epilogue. Its opening scene, involving the four spirits was suppressed and Faust's lengthy monologues were metamorphosed into the alternating recollections of the old dreamer and the tempting of the ever youthful demon. Mefistofele's role, which was in the original edition limited to a few verses, was now extended to embrace the

entire Epilogue; in this way the figure of the tempter is used to open and close the episode, consequently, and logically, dominating it. The libretto was, through these changes, reduced to more normal dimensions and became more acceptable. The music also underwent considerable revision. All those sections so appropriately lyric in the first score, were retained in the second and others were added, whilst the philosophical, oratorical and discursive parts were either shortened or discarded. Among those discarded was the scene in prose intended by Goethe, and first retained by Boito, to increase the sense of brutal reality in the episode of Margherita's death. The assignment of the role of Faust to a tenor instead of a baritone brought about a definite improvement. As Giannandrea Mazzucato pointed out: The absence of a tenor makes an opera acoustically dull and engenders monotony, especially in a long work'.[1] The inclusion in Act III of the beautiful duet: 'Lontano, lontano, lontano' (taken from the music of Ero e Leandro') and of the aria 'Spunta l'aurora pallida'[2], aimed at animating the episode of Margherita's death added further interest. The repetition of the greater portion of the music of the Prologue in Heaven in the Epilogue is responsible for a

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1. Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians; 1919, p.356.

2. The duet 'Lontano, lontano...' was added to the Bologna version of Mefistofele (1875). Margherita's aria 'Spunta l'aurora pallida' and the final fugue of Act II, were added to the Venice edition of the opera (1876).

stronger cyclic, more balanced structure of the opera as a whole.

The final version of Mefistofele appears to be musically more vital than was the original. We must, however, also admit that the excision of important episodes such as the Emperor's Court Scene and of the Intermezzo sinfonico, proved detrimental to the dramatic conception of the opera, now reduced to a beautiful, but somewhat disconnected selection of scenes.

# APPENDIX G

The Commedia dell'arte, also known as Commedia a soggetto or 'improvvisa' (improvised comedy), grown out of both the Sacra Rappresentazione and the literary theatre, had first appeared in the middle of the sixteenth century in Italy and had, by the early seventeenth century, established itself as a major form of art. Troupes of travelling players spread it throughout Europe making it immensely popular. The players (each of them impersonating a 'type' or traditional character), used scenarios derived from the latin comedy but improvised the acting, the movements and the dialogue with the exception of songs and a few set speeches and antics known as 'lazzi'. It clearly influenced the earlier 'intermezzi' as well as the opera libretto of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and inspired some of the greatest dramatists: Shakespeare, Molière, Lope de Vega and the early Goldoni. During the second half of the eighteenth century, Goldoni set out to reform the Commedia dell'arte which had fallen into decadence because of excesses, obscenity and domineering actor-control. The Commedia dell'arte, eventualy disappeared leaving its place to the modern Italian theatre.

## Appendix H

Many musicians, composers, writers and critics have passed comments on Boito's Mefistofele. Whilst some have been unable to give wholehearted approval, most have recognized the originality and the importance of the work. For instance: Saint-Saëns considered the Prologue in Heaven 'one of the miracles of modern music' (A. Bonaventure, op. cit., p.90) and Mefistofele 'a musical work wonderful for its originality, boldness and for the facility of its inspiration' (Scritti e documenti, op. cit., p.35).

Martin Roëder pointed out 'the novelty of the form, the amplitude of the lines, the originality of the harmonic, rhythmical and orchestral treatment'. (op. cit., p.179).

Edward Hanslick, although adversely criticizing Mefistofele as a whole, found: the Prologue in Heaven a very effective page 'to the peculiar charm of which it is difficult not to succumb'; the Witches Sabbath, 'a striking sonorous, pictorial and scenographic creation which reveals the strongest aspect of Boito's talent'. [illegible]d much of the third Act 'containing the most intimate and touching moments of the entire work' and found the final scene most cleverly conceived. Hanslick concluded that Boito was a composer who knew how to use the most felicituous effects employed by both Wagner and Verdi, fusing them, with a specifically theatrical talent, into a composition which is eclectic but capable of producing the due effect in the most essential moments . (Hanslick's article, written after the first

performance of Mefistofele in Vienna, in 1882, is reproduced in 'Opera - Rassegna internazionale' Milan: July. September 1966, pp. 17-21.

G.B. Shaw, in Music in London 1890 - 94 (p.269) wrote: We could spare La Traviata better than Mefistofele ... Boito is 'refined, subtle, imaginative'.

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