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ARRIGO BOITO, LIBRETTIST AND MUSICIAN

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Abstract

Arrigo Boito, librettist and musician.

The subject is considered under five main sections:

Part I - Boito the man

EARLY YEARS: Biographical detail - Early works: Symphony in A minor; 'Il Quattro Giugno'; 'Sorelle d'Italia' - Sojourn in Paris; first collaboration with Verdi: the 'Inno delle Nazioni' - Scapigliatura - Musical journalism - Poetical and literary activity: 'Libro dei Versi'; 'Re Orso'; 'Le madri galanti' and short stories. Début as librettist: 'Amleto' - 'Mefistofele' and 'Nerone'

MIDDLE PERIOD: Collaboration with Verdi - The Duse-Boito relationship. Shakespearean translations: 'Antony and Cleopatra'; 'Romeo and Juliet'; 'Macbeth'.

LAST YEARS: Verdi's death - Publication of 'Nerone' as a tragedy - Boito's death - The 'Nerone première.

BOITO AND VERDI: Verdi and Shakespeare - The revision of the libre .. of 'Simon Boccanegra' - 'Otello' - Falstaff.

Part II - Boito the critic

Boito's ideas on music reform - Wagner's ideas on the subject.

Part III - Boito the librettist.

INTRODUCTION: Main features of Boito's libretti - AMLETO: background. Analysis of the libretto in relation to

Shakespeare's tragedy - UN TRAMONTO and LA FALCE - ERO e LEANDRO: The story. Comments on the dramatic and poetical structure of the libretto - LA GIOCONDA: Boito's libretto and Hugo's melodrama 'Angelo, Tyran de Padoue'. Dramatic and poetic treatment of the story - SEMIRA and PIERLUIGI FARNESE: negative and positive qualities of Boito's lesser libretti - IRAM: analysis of the libretto and its relationship to Shakespeare's Induction to 'The Taming of the Shrew' - BASI E BOTE: the story. Comments on the libretto - OTELLO: background. Rossini's 'Otello'. Analysis of Boito's libretto in relation to the original source. Aptness of Boito's poetry for musical elaboration - FALSTAFF: background - Musical settings of Shakespeare's comedy by musicians other than Boito. Analysis of the libretto in relation to the original source.

Part IV - Boito, the librettist-composer of 'Mefistofele'

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE FAUST LEGEND, from its origin up to Goethe's masterpiece. FAUST AND COMPOSERS OTHER THAN BOITO. Goethe's 'Faust'. Romantic, modern and avant-garde works on the subject. Liszt's, Berlioz's, Schumann's and Gounod's approach to Goethe's 'Faust'. GOETHE'S PLAY AND BOITO'S LIBRETTO. Analysis of the libretto in relation to the original source. BOITO'S OPERA - the score. Relationship between music and poetry. 'Mefistofele', in the light of Boito's new conception of musical drama.

Part V - Boito, the librettist-composer of 'Nerone'

THE LIBRETTO OF NERONE: literary and historical sources. Neronian scores by musicians other than Boito. Analysis of the libretto. THE OPERA: the score. Relationship between music and poetry. Comments of 'Mefistofele' and 'Nerone'.

CONCLUSION.

APPENDICES A Il Quattro Giugno

B Le Sorelle d'Italia

C Scapigliatura

D Libro dei Versi

E Re Orso

F Boito's revision of 'Mefistofele'

G Commedia dell'arte

H Comments of Mefistofele.

Preface

Boito is one of the most highly esteemed Italian librettists of all time. His fame lies principally in the libretti which he provided for Verdi. These are outstanding achievements and their qualities have won the approval of even the most fastidious critics. It is however unfortunate that little is known about Boito's other libretti and his own compositions are but infrequently performed. Conrad L. Osborne writes:

> I think that if I were called upon to select a particular case that would best illustrate the basic injustice of artistic life I would decide on that of Arrigo Boito, who wrote 'Mefistofele': here is a work laden with stunning dramatic effects, blessed by a libretto of real dramatic strength, informed throughout with an intellectual honesty that will not compromise with the philosophical content of its source....[1]

It is however comforting to know that since the New York City Centre Opera's production of 'Mefistofele' in 1969, there has been a renewed interest in his work. Even more pleasing is the fact that Boito's almost forgotten 'Nerone' provoked such enthusiastic reaction when broadcast by R.A.I., Radio Televisione Italiana, in August 1975, that the recording was re-broadcast in October of the same year.

My intention in writing this dissertation has been to show not only Boito's ability as librettist-adapter and librettist-creator; the relationship between music and poetry in the libretti which he set to music himself; his achievement in the light of

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1. Osborne, C.L. High Fidelity. December 1959, p.87.

his idealistic music-reform but also his contribution as a composer.

Boito the man cannot be ignored in a study of Boito the artist and I have therefore also written at some length on this subject. I have tried to collect between the covers of this dissertation as much published and unpublished information as possible about Boito, together with the opinions which I have formed as a result of my study of Boito and his works.

In order to assist English readers I have provided English translations of Italian quotations and portions of libretti. All these translations are my own work unless otherwise acknowledged.

My thanks are due to Maestro Natale Gallini, of Milan, for his help in providing relevant material and Maestro Guglielmo Barblan, Head of the Library of the Milan Conservatory, for his warm encouragement. To my supervisor, Professor U.V. Schneider, Director of the Research Unit in the Field of Music of the University of the Witwatersrand, I owe a special debt of gratitude for his invaluable assistance and criticism.

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PART I

BOITO - THE MAN

CHAPTER 1

EARLY YEARS

Enrico Giuseppe Giovanni Boito, later known as Arrigo Boito, was born in the city of Padua on the 24th of February 1842, the second son of Silvestro Boito, a Venetian painter of good repute, and of Giuseppina Radolinska, a Polish lady of aristocratic but impoverished family. Traces of Boito's mixed parentage may perhaps be found in his conception of art, in the mixture of 'the shining and compact ideal of the man of Italy, who dreams the Doric capitals; the frontons of Aegina; the symmetrical, straight, solemn Palladian lines'[1] and 'the ideal of the man of the North, a darker ideal, more severe but more impregnated with the vapours of the Paradise and the misteries of the soul'.[2]

Boito's writings are characterized by lack of autobiographical references; memories of childhood are non-existent. Of an extremely reserved nature, he never knew the pleasure of sharing confidence, the luxury of self-revelation. In the course of years his reticence was to assume the character of a neurotic fixation; he was capable of violent reactions towards anyone who tried to penetrate his inner soul or to discover his inner thoughts.

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1. Boito, A.: 'Mendelsshon in Italia' in Tutti gli scritti Milan: Mondadori, 1942; p.1249.

2. Ibid., p.1250

Boito's infancy was embittered by the disruption of the family, an experience which was to leave an ineffaceable scar. Perhaps this was why he always loved women who were unobtainable from the point of view of marriage - as if he wanted to preclude the possibility of his fathering a family. We may perhaps also conjecture that Boito's intellectual control over emotions and the lack of freedom which was to influence his work in a negative way, was a consequence of his tendency to create a defensive barrier against the insurgence of memories too painful to be recalled.

The marriage between Silvestro Boito, an irresponsible and extravagant man who was to die in 1856, (it seems as a result of a brawl) and the reserved Polish gentlewoman had been a failure from the beginning. It finally broke down, in 1851. Deserted by their father the two boys - Camillo, fifteen and Enrico, nine, were taken care of by a certain Luigi Plet, a musician, poet and journalist living in Venice where the Boito's family had established themselves in 1844. It is possible that Plet set a model for the future Boito. He was certainly responsible for his early cultural formation. Both the children were initiated into the study of music. Camillo, whose outstanding artistic gifts, inherited from his father, had won him the patronage of Marquis Pietro Selvatico Estense (the honorary president of the Academy of Fine Arts of Venice) was to become an eminent architect and a writer and critic of much originality. He had an important and decisive influence upon his younger brother, not only representing a father image but

also fostering in Enrico a keen sense of beauty. He encouraged and supported him throughout his life in every way possible. As to Enrico: A letter sent by Luigi Plet in 1851 to Giuseppina Boito, temporarily in Poland, perhaps seeking help, or in the hope of a reconciliation between father and sons, informed her that:

> Enrico, who is studying under Giovanni Buzzolla, shows an extraordinary musical talent and an increasing interest in composition. He always invents tunes and writes sonatinas ... Maestro Buzzolla wants me to assure you that, undoubtedly, he has in him the making of a great composer.[1]

In order to encourage the musical vocation of her son, Signora Boito took him to Milan, two years later. In the Lombard capital, which had for years taken the lead in the political, historical and cultural life of the nation, the second, very lengthy chapter of the life of Arrigo Boito started.

The story of Boito's early years in Milan is to be found in the documents and reports preserved in the Archives of the Conservatory of Milan. To this school Boito was admitted in the autumn of 1853 as a student 'on probation'. A letter written by Giuseppina Boito to the Curatorship of the Conservatory applying for a bursary to be granted to Enrico illustrates the difficult circumstances in which the Boito family found themselves at the time. The scholarship was granted and Boito was, in 1854, accepted as a regular student and assigned to the composition class of Alberto

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1. Quoted in Piero Nardi's Vita di Arrigo Boito. Milan: Mondardori, 1942; pp.35-36.

Mazzucato. In the early stages of his studies Boito gave small ground for the expectations of Giovanni Buzzolla - his Venetian teacher. His performance was so unsatisfactory that the authorities of the Conservatory decided to dismiss him. Only Mazzucato seems to have recognized the potential of his pupil and it was through his intervention that Boito was allowed to complete his musical education. According to the final report of the year 1855 - 56, Boito, 'in quanto concerne il ritmo e l'armonia non sorti dalla natura una pronunciata disposizione, ma dell'arte sente però il lato espressivo.'[1] Boito was in fact restive in the shackles of technical rules. His approach to his art was already, at this youthful period, that of the aesthete, the artist, rather than the grammarian. This appears already to reveal the influence of Mazzucato, who, writing in the Gazzetta Musicale' (9th January 1859) proclaimed:

> By the word-technique, I do not only mean the knowledge of the principles of composition, singing, harmony, instrumentation, but also that of the aesthetic, poetical, historical culture of which a sound composer cannot do without.

Carried away by the possibilities of cultural and spiritual enrichment, Boito spent endless hours at the Brera Library. He soon acquired a mastery of the Italian and French languages, learnt the classical languages, and applied himself to the study

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1. 'Not in the least gifted with rhythmical, harmonic and melodic sense; he seems, however, able to exploit the expressive possibilities of art.'

of Italian prosody. He read swiftly and voluminously, assimilating what impressed, his choice rather peculiar for a young boy, already indicating the insatiable curiousity, the passion for research, the multitude of interests which he was to preserve throughout his life.

Mazzucato, a man of high artistic principles, had a profound influence on Boito. His teaching, unusual in the Italy of the time, directed the minds, already trained in the set ideas of the past, towards the trends of the future. It was however through Mazzucato's enthusiasm that Boito retained a lifelong admiration for Palestrina and Marcello, in spite of the fact that the same Mazzucato opposed the views of the uncompromising traditionalists who equated art to nationalism (and, at that time, to patriotism). In a frank discussion on the music of the future which could not be ignored because of false prejudices (Wagner's Das Kunstwerk der Zukunft had been written ten years before), Mazzucato wrote: 'Art today, must be cosmopolitan and not national'.[1] In proposing 'the exchange of ideas, through the assimilation of aesthetic elements which, though foreign to native tradition are, no less than the indigenous, essential to art',[2] Mazzucato asserted both a modern and antique concept in art - a concept which excluded each and every form of nationalism because that which is great and beautiful is beyond any frontier. Mazzucato introduced in the

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1. Gazzetta Musicale, 20th June, 1858.
2. Ibid.

narrow academic atmosphere of the Milan Conservatory, a wind of change which was to transform it into Italy's most progressive school of music.

This spirit of innovation was immediately felt by both the public and critics at the Accademia finale of the Conservatory, in 1860. It was particularly obvious in the essay presented by two students of the second last years - Arrigo Boito[1] and Franco Faccio. Their work was a patriotic cantata entitled 'Il quattro giugno' (The 4th of June), of which the poetic text and part of the music was composed by Boito. Under Mazzucato he had made remarkable progress and was, by this time, one of the most promising students of the school of music, having, in the previous year, written a symphony[2] which had been performed at the Conservatory with success. This was to remain Boito's only instrumental work. Since adolescence Boito had felt himself attracted by dramatic music because of the wide possibilities offered by it. 'The word is the clearest and most precise medium bestowed on man in order that he may portray his mind and his soul'[3] he wrote. From the

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1. The name Arrigo, a romanticized version of Enrico, appears for the first time on the title page of this work.

2. Regarding this symphony Piero Nardi, in Vita di Arrigo Boito (p.49) writes 'Regrettably, of Boito's symphony, there is no trace'. Nardi is incorrect in this statement, as the symphony (in A minor) is to be found in the Library of the Milan Conservatory. I actually have a photostat copy of the autographed score (see Fig.1).

3 'Arrigo Boito, Scritti e documenti', ed. Comitato per le Onoranze ad Arrigo Boito nel trentennio della morte. Milan: Rizzoli, 1948; p.27.

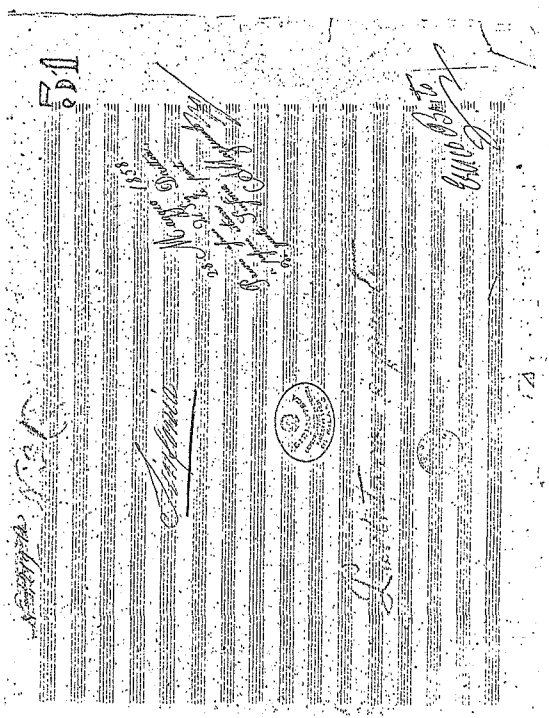

Fig. 1. Symphony in A minor
Title page of the autographed score.

beginning of his career as a composer, he sought the aid of the word so that music could acquire more precise significance. Perhaps he was prompted by the exigencies of his intellectual nature, perhaps, by the example of composers such as Beethoven, Wagner, Berlioz, who, during the first half of the century, had successfully attempted to reintroduce the word amidst the fundamental values of music. Perhaps for this reason, Boito's first important success took the shape of a cantata.

'Il quattro giugno', dedicated to a Garibaldian school-fellow who died on the battle field, was written to celebrate the decisive victory of the liberation of Lombardy. The work is of interest because dramatically as well as ideologically, it anticipates many features of Boito's future production.[1]

A critic of the time wrote: 'In the poetry of Boito there is a warm inspiration, a sincere feeling but there is something more: DRAMA'[2] a perspicacious remark which focuses the true nature of the talent of the budding poet. Another critic, on the Gazzetta Musicale,(16 September 1860) recalled Gluck's famous 'Alceste' letter of 1767, forgetting however that Gluck's attempt to

> endeavour to reduce music to its proper function, that of seconding poetry by enforcing the expression of the sentiment, and the interest of the situations, without interrupting the action or weakening it by superfluous ornament

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1. See Appendix A, p. 385.

2. Il Pungolo - 9 September 1860. (The article is unsigned.)

was little different from the principle stated by Benedetto Marcello in the introduction to the Salmi: 'As regards music, it must be a superimposure which must be submitted to the expression of the word and the sentiment.'[1] In any case, the opinions expressed by both Gluck and Marcello were nothing other than a reiteration of the views of the Camerata Fiorentina and, later, Monteverdi. The nineteenth century reforms of Wagner were of course a summing up of all these views.

The originality of the music, striving after new expressiveness was unanimously acknowledged but, nevertheless, it was noted that the two young composers, Boito and Faccio, could often not resist the temptation of being influenced by German music. It was pointed out to them that what was congenial to the German environment and atmosphere was not ideally suited to that of their home country. The warnings, however, went unheeded, as in the last work produced by Boito and Faccio as students for the Accademia Finale of 1861 - the Mistero 'Sorelle d'Italia'[2] (Sisters of Italy).

On the front page of the 'Sorelle d'Italia' Boito wrote:

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1. Marcello, Benedetto, 'Estro poetico ed armonico', Venice D. Lovisa. 1724.28, vol.1, p.2.

2. See Appendix B, p.387.

> Meglio di ogni altro titolo ci pare alluda all' indole di questo lavoro il titolo di 'Mistero', già usato dal Mickiewicz e dal Byron, a indicare un componimento di soggetto oltranaturale e fantastico a simiglianza dei Misteri' dell' Evo Medio'.[1]

These words confirm a tendency already prevalent in Boito - to conceive 'reality under the cosmic and universal aspect'[2] spurring him on to portraying life as an eternal conflict of the antithetical principles of Heaven and Earth, Light and Darkness, Good and Evil, of which the world represents the final result. These principles are reflected dramatically in the conscience of every man generating the dualism of the Ideal and Reality, of Belief and Negation, of Hope and Despair. We may explain Boito's attitude as the result of the impact made on him by the romantic ideologies of his time, so intensely felt by him as to determine his 'forma mentis' and to play so large a part in his future work.

To return to 'Sorelle d'Italia': All the critics were unanimous in their praise of the literary text 'energico per concetti, sfolgorante per brio d'immagini originale nelle idee e nelle forme',[3] as related by Maestro Gallignani. The music was

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1. 'The word Mistero, already used by Mickiewicz and Byron to indicate a work with a fantastic and supernatural theme similar to the Mysteries of the Middle Ages, seems to suggest the true character of this work.'

2. Croce, B. 'Arrigo Boito', in 'Lo letteratura della Nuova Italia'. Bari: Laterza, 1947, vol.1, p.258.

3. 'Vigorous in concept, vividly imaginative and original both in content and form'. Quoted in Arnaldo Bonaventura's 'Arrigo Boito - Mefistofele', Milan: Bottega di Poesia, 1924, p.23.

reviewed with the same fervour. In particular Boito's music was found, even if interesting, to be far too original and too obviously influenced by the new musical trends prevailing in the Europe of the time. The notices of the most eminent critics of Milan were, however, enough to attract attention to the young composers. Despite lively polemics, or more probably because of them, the interest aroused by the Cantata brought with it success in that the Minister of Public Instruction, at that time the famed literary critic Francesco De Sanctis, awarded Boito and Faccio a grant which enabled them to study further in various capitals of Europe. In the late autumn of the same year (1861) the 'neo maestri' were in Paris, the city of the 'artistic polytheism',[1] where recognized leading exponents of the world of culture foregathered. Having left behind them the stifling, provincial environment of Italian culture, Boito and Faccio were, in Paris, able to breathe the air of the sophisticated world. They came into contact with aesthetic experiences which were only just reaching Italian circles and were not yet fully understood. They paid their respects to Rossini - still the idol of the Parisians; made the acquaintance of Berlioz and Gounod and eventually - at the end of February 1862 - they met Verdi. It is in this year that there commenced the relationship which 'was to reach its glorious

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1. Boito, A. 'Cronaca musicale parigina', in op cit., p.2047.

culmination in the creation of 'Otello' and 'Falstaff'.[1]

The 'Inno delle Nazioni', (Hymn of the Nations) which Verdi, as the representative of Italy, contributed to the International Exhibition held in London in 1862, was the first product of the Verdi - Boito partnership. Boito's text is justly criticized by Francis Toye as 'the kind of panegyric on the supersession of war by commerce and the arts, typical of international gatherings'.[2] It was obviously compiled in a great hurry, for a certain purpose and is hardly worthy of serious consideration.

The period spent in Paris was for Boito an important one. During this time the embryos of 'Faust' and 'Nerone' were taking shape in his mind. It was also here, in Paris, that Boito started preparing the adaptation of Shakespeare's 'Hamlet' for Faccio, thus beginning his career as a librettist-collaborator. With the 'Cronaca musicale parigina', written for the newspaper 'La Perseveranza', (2nd March 1862) the young Boito embarked upon his activities as critic and journalist - an occupation to which he became almost completely dedicated in later years.

In the spring Boito left Paris and went to Mystki, in Poland, with the object of meeting the relatives of his mother, the latter

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1. Walker, F. 'The man Verdi' London, J.M. Dent, 1962, p.447.

2. Toye, F. 'Giuseppe Verdi, his life and works', New York: A.A. Knopf, 1931; p.455.

having died in 1859. In the solitude of the Polish country Boito completed the libretto of 'Amleto' and wrote a few poems of great beauty. He was still working on Faust but at this time, as we gather from a letter to a friend - he had turned his attention to Tacitus and, as a consequence, was pondering over 'the melodramma to be baptized with the terrible name of Nerone'.[1]

Following a circuitous route which brought him into Germany, Belgium and England, Boito returned to Milan towards the end of 1862. He was now twenty. His travels had enlarged his outlook enormously - far beyond the standard of his fellow-countrymen. He became involved with the Scapigliatura,[2] a party of young iconoclasts dreaming of a renewal and regeneration of the arts. He engaged himself wholeheartedly in the battle of reforming Italian music and literature, his energies being, at that time, almost exclusively devoted to literature and journalism.

Boito's activity as a critic was confined to the decade 1862 - 1872. The articles he contributed to La Perseveranza, Figaro, Politecnico, Gazzetta Musicale, became the vehicles for the propagation of his ideals. Especially in Figaro - the periodical founded in 1864 by Boito and Praga - the battle against the conformism of Italian art and the absenteeism of the cultural

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1. De Rensis, R. 'Lettere di Arrigo Boito'. Roma: Novissima. 1932; p.250.

2. See Appendix C, p. 391.

environment, assumed moments of extreme tension and rebellion.[1] 'Whilst in France the ground of the young art was conquered little by little, and a generation of pallid poets died singing, unheeded but not in vain ... in Italy, a contented flock of sheep was reviving the epic poem, the idyll of the Arcadians, the hymn of the Prophets' wrote Praga in the second number of Figaro (2nd January, 1864). And Boito:

> We have lost the critical sense. There is no criticism from the public or from the press. This explains the apathetic tolerance every evening in the pit (stalls) of our theatres; this explains the vacuous prattle every day in our papers. This explains the oblivion in which most vital problems of art are smothered, with nobody thinking of the harm and scorn which lie ahead if things continue in this way for a little while longer.[2]

In 1864 Mazzucato, Boito, Praga and the critic Filippo Filippi, founded the 'Società del Quartetto', with the aim of interesting the exclusively operatic-minded Milanese public in the classics of Italian chamber music and modern music in general. The society had its official 'Giornale' to which Boito was the most active and outspoken contributor.

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1. The battle against conformism in art had already elicited from Praga the blasphemous verses against Italy's most famous novelist and poet Alessandro Manzoni. (in 'Penombre', Bologna, 1963, p.115), and from Boito the 'Ode all'Arte Italiana' (in Tutti gli scritti', pp.1373-74). This Ode, loaded with robust remarks on the debased state of Italian contemporary music, was recited by Boito on the occasion of the first performance of Faccio's opera 'I profughi fiamminghi', (at La Scala, on 11th November, 1863). Published a few days later in the periodical 'Museo di famiglia', the Ode was read by Verdi and taken by him as a personal affront.

2. Figaro, 21st January, 1864; in Tutti gli scritti, p.1103.

All Boito's articles are marked by a passion which is not found anywhere else in his works. They are written in a vigorous prose style; are strikingly imaginative and rich in reminiscences resulting from his vast and catholic reading. They offer a detailed picture of the cultural life of his time, as well as a highly subjective approach to the musical work under consideration. Some of Boito's judgements and valuations seem curious, or exaggerated, today - such as his excessive enthusiasm for Meyerbeer and Mendelssohn and even more excessive dislike of Wagner. Boito was, however, one of the few musicians in Italy able to appreciate Bach, Mozart, Haydn, Schumann and, above all, Beethoven. His admiration for the latter verged on idolatry.

Boito's poetical and literary production belongs to the years from 1861 - 1875 (roughly coinciding with the period of Scapigliatura). It is represented by the 'Libro dei Versi' (Book of poems); the polymetric poem ' Re Orso' (King Bear); the comedy 'Le madri galanti' (The gallant mothers), written in collaboration with Emilio Praga; the remarkable short stories 'L'Alfier nero' (The Black bishop); 'Iberia'; the unfinished 'Il Trapezio', (The trapeze); and the two chapters constituting 'La Musica in piazza', (Music in the piazza) dedicated to 'Barbapedano' and 'Gippa' - characteristic figures of 'modern minstrels' dear to the Milanese of the old days.

The 'Libro dei Versi' and 'Re Orso' are of special importance, first, because Boito's libretti are rooted in his early poety and,

second , because the essence of Scapigliatura is to be found in them.[1] Re Orso, published in 1865, caused a sensation; it even attracted the favourable notice of Victor Hugo. At the age of twenty-three Boito was, by far, the most progressive, independent and original poet in Italy. He was the acknowledged, and much discussed, leader of the Milanese avant-garde. All his doings aroused wide interest. 'Take note of this strange phenomenon' wrote the writer Antonio Ghislanzoni (Verdi's future librettist for Aida)

> for a certain number of people Arrigo Boito is a mental case, an Ostrogoth, a gibbous mediaeval intellect, a Himalaya of presumption. And yet, as soon as he produces something - prose or poetry or music - everyone wants to read it or to hear it; and they talk and discuss and get excited. Masterpiece! Trash! These are their judgements...'[2]

In the same year, on the 30th May, Faccio's 'Amleto' was performed at the Teatro Carlo Felice, in Genoa. The opera did not mark the beginning of a new musical era, as hoped by Boito, who thought to have identified in Faccio the renewer of Italian music, whose advent he, Boito, had advocated in the famous 'Ode All'Arte Italiana:

> Forse già nacque chi sovra l'altare
> Rizzerà l'arte, verecondo e puro,
> Su quell'altar bruttato come un muro di lupanare.[3]

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1. See Appendix D and Appendix E., pp. 393 and 398

2. De Rensis, R. Introduction to Critiche e cronache musicali di Arrigo Boito (1862 - 1870)'. Milan: Treves, 1931, pp. xvi-xvii.

3. In 'Tutti gli scritti, pp.1373-4.

(Perhaps the man is already born who will restore art to its dignity, on that altar defiled like the wall of a brothel.)

Amleto was, however, warmly received by the audience, much talked about and discussed at length in print. In an open letter[1] written by Mazzucato to Ronchetti - Monteviti (Faccio's teacher), Boito's libretto was described as a masterpiece which contributed greatly to the success of the opera. The press was unanimous in the praise of the debutant librettist.

In 1866 the outbreak of war with Austria compelled Boito to abandon temporarily his artistic activity. Together with Faccio and Praga he enlisted with the volunteers under the command of Garibaldi. Boito and Faccio, inseparable through the whole campaign 'brought, even to the war, the independent and adventurous spirit of Scapigliatura, running away from their camp to Milan in order to meet their respective women friends and coming back hastily, just in time to start off on the campaign'.[2] Boito's attentions were, at this time, devoted to the Duchess Eugenia Litta, the first lady of Milan society. She was five years older than the poet, married and, in the words of the then Empresse of France Eugenie, 'une des plus jolies femmes d'Europe'.[3] In addition to

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1. Published in the 'Giornale della società del Quartetto', 31st May 1865.

2. Cattaneo, C. 'Storia della letteratura Italiana' Milano: Garzanti 1968; vol.viii, p.269.

3. Nardi, P., op. cit., p.203.

being beautiful, Eugenia Litta was intelligent, cultured, sensitive. The tone of the letters Boito addressed to her suggests a deep love, a genuine youthful passion that she, apparently, returned. When the campaign was over the lives of Faccio and Boito diverged for a while. Faccio embarked on his career as conductor and went to Berlin and Copenhagen to direct seasons of Italian operas. Boito was invited to join the Parisian Press. Victor Hugo, encouragingly wrote to him 'I am convinced that, should you write in La Liberté about criticism, philosophy, history and art, you will create a sensation .... You deserve and will have success.'[1] Boito appears to have been, for a time, undecided as to whether to accept the offer. Eventually nothing came of the project and he resumed his life in Milan. In spite of being taken up by Milanese society Boito was still immersed in his artistic dreams. In the spring of 1867 he was again at Mystki, in Poland. He needed a fresh inspiration. In the tranquility of the countryside he devoted his main energies to the realization of his Faust project.

The success and the increasing popularity of Gounod's opera on the same subject (first performed in Paris in 1859) did not deter him. He did not wish to limit himself to the Gretchen episode as Barbier and Carré (Gounod's easy-going librettists) had

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1. 'Je suis convaincu que, si vous écrivez dans La Liberté critique, philosophie, histoire, art, vous jetterez tout de suite un grand éclat...' Vous meritez et aurez le succes'. The letter, dated 19th November 1866, is reproduced in Nardi, cit. p.232.

done. As Patrick Smith writes, Boito:

> knew in himself that any opera on the vast subject of Goethe's epic would have to encompass a great deal not only in terms of length and complexity but also in terms of the inclusion of Goethe's far-ranging ideas and ideals.[1]

The theme of the struggle between Good and Evil seen in a cosmic as well as in a human context and the Faust myth, symbolizing that human restlessness that seeks to transform the outer world, must have exercised an irresistible fascination on his mind so given to philosophical brooding. As a poet he succumbed to Helen's magic and wanted to take advantage of the wonderful poetry of the Classical Walpurgis night scene - an episode which no other composer had dared touch. Boito was also attracted to the subject by the conformity between it and his artistic nature, always fluctuating between:

> the ideal of the man of the North,..impregnated with the vapours of the Paradise and the misteries of the soul' and 'the ideal of the man of Italy who dreams the Doric capitals; the frontons of Aegina'[2] and the serene beauty of the classical world.

Dismayed by the almost impossible task of reducing Goethe's huge work to the dimensions of an opera libretto, Boito had originally intended to treat it in two separate operas: 'Mefistofele' and 'Elena'. Eventually he renounced this idea and solved his problem by incorporating both parts of Goethe's Faust in a large scale

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1. Smith, P. 'The tenth Muse - A historical study of the opera libretto' London: Gollancz, 1971, p.334.

2. See p.2.

opera to be called 'Mefistofele'.

In the winter of 1867 the management of La Scala was able to announce 'Mefistofele' (side by side with Gounod's 'Romeo et Juliette' and Verdi's 'Don Carlos') as the new opera d'obbligo for the next Carnival Season. As Boito's critical and literary activity had by this time earned for him a wide reputation, the performance of his first operatic work assumed the importance of a national event. It was preluded and followed by a press campaign for and against the work more intense than anything called forth by the work of other contemporary composers. For the occasion it was decided to set aside some of the rules of the theatre - the libretto was published and sold days before the performance to enable it to be judged as a literary work in itself and to allow the public to come to an understanding of its unusual dramatic-philosophic conception. On Filippi's suggestion, it was decided, perhaps unwisely, to let the composer conduct his own work so as to form a complete trinity - poet, composer, director. From what came to be known during the endless rehearsal as to the originality and the beauty of the music, it seemed that 'Mefistofele' was to be a landmark in the history of Italian opera. The prophecies of Boito's supporters were not destined to be realized, however. If the performance of Mefistofele, on the 5th of March, 1868 remained memorable in the annals of operatic history, it was 'on account of the extraordinary scenes witnessed and the violence, the passion aroused in the audience by the work of a young artist

of twenty-six.'[1] Yet, the evening had begun under the most favourable auspices. A house overflowing with all that was most elegant and noticeable in Milan society received the composer with a spontaneous, unanimous demonstration of sympathy. The last bars of the 'Prologue in Heaven', in spite of being played fortissimo, were made inaudible by the thunderous applause. The first act (The Easter Sunday and The Pact) made little impression but the 'Garden Scene', at the beginning of Act ii, was rewarded with approval. It was during the second part of the same act that violent reaction started. The scene on the Brocken, (The Witches' Sabbath, with the Witches' orgy and the infernal cohorts singing the plainsong of the Tantum ergo during Mefistofele's coronation) was found provocative and irreverent by the majority of the audience. The antagonism between Boito's partisans and his opponents became more and more heated as the evening progressed. The third act - the moving 'Prison scene' - was utterly spoiled by the inadequacy of the interpreters. The grand scene at the Emperor's Palace, with which the fourth act started, was greeted with hisses and catcalls but the following 'Classical Sabbath' scene seemed fleetingly to be found acceptable. The real fracas was reserved for the Intermezzo sinfonico - a descriptive orchestral piece placed between the fourth and the fifth acts. It was meant to

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1. Bonavia, F. Grove's Dictionary of music and musicians. London: ed. Eric Blom, 1954. 5th ed. vol.1, p.798.

portray the clash of the catholic armies of the Emperor with those of the pseudo Emperor, supported by Faust and Mefistofele. The pandemonium reached its height during the fifth act (Faust's death) of which virtually nothing could be heard. At the end of the opera, whilst the audience was in open revolt, the whole orchestra rose to a man to give the unfortunate composer a spontaneous ovation. Fist fights developed; the house was cleared and the exasperated crowd continued to fight in the piazza outside La Scala and the adjacent streets until next morning.

It has been repeatedly said that the audience of La Scala, too conservative and nationalistic in outlook 'was not ready to understand the new language that he (Boito) intended to speak'[1] and that because of prejudice, 'its verdict was bound to be worthless.'[2] It is true that the opera, in which the composer was obviously struggling to free himself from the shackles of the Italian tradition, was not intended to please the ordinary opera-goer. We must however remember that the audience, which had rapturously applauded the Prologue in Heaven - the least traditional and most original part of the opera - was not initially prejudiced against Boito. The excessive length of the opera (the performance had lasted nearly six hours); the intricacy of the plot and - above all - the faulty execution, were mainly responsible

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1. Mazzucato, G. Grove's Dictionary of music and musicians London: ed. Fuller Maitland, vol.1, p.355., 1919.

2. Grove's dictionary of music and musicians, 1954, p.793.

for the failure of Mefistofele. It does however seem, from what appeared in the press, that the young composer had proceeded too far on the way to originality and had, perhaps, undertaken more than he was capable of achieving. Strangely enough, the novelty of the work even disconcerted many of Boito's confrères of the Scapigliatura. Writing in 'La Gazzetta di Milano', (6th March, 1868), Giuseppe Rovani, after praising the librettist for his masterly condensation of Goethe's masterpiece, dismissed the musician with contemptuous remarks. Iginio Ugo Tarchetti, of the Emporio pittoresco, (15 - 21 March, 1868) found the verdict of the audience to be just. Boito's music was lacking in passion as well as in melodic fluency; the recitatives were monotonous and boring in the extreme. Considering Boito's literary gifts to be undoubtedly superior to his musical ones, Tarchetti concluded his article with the remark that it would be highly fortunate if the failure of th pera persuaded its author to follow, in the future, only the path which would inevitably have brought him ultimate fame and success - poetry.
This opinion was fairly generally held.

Boito's future lack of conviction regarding his musical gifts was probably the result of the failure of Mefistofele. It is possible that, being a critic himself, he recognized the justice of much of the criticism which appeared in the press after his unlucky début. Be it as it may, he accepted the fact that the

opera needed many and courageous cuts,[1] at the cost of sacrificing the libretto, though masterly in conception and blessed with original and beautiful verses. Seven years elapsed before Boito's setback was to be reversed. As his financial condition was precarious he resumed work. For the next ten years Boito was indefatigable. Beside continuing his literary and journalistic activities he wrote translations and several libretti, under the pseudonym of Tobia Gorrio (an anagram of his own name). The translations of Wagner's Rienzi, Tristan, Das Leibesmahl der Apostel, the Wesendonk-lieder; of Weber's FreischUtz; of Glinka's Russlan and Ludmilla, may be regarded as the most important ones.

In 1871, Boito, whilst working on Nerone and the re-arrangement of Mefistofele, started setting to music his own new libretto, 'Ero e Leandro'. He also revised the libretto of Amleto for Faccio, but the revival of the opera at La Scala, on 12th February 1871, proved to be a failure. By 1872 'Ero e Leandro' was apparently completed. It did not, however, please its hypercritical author who subsequently destroyed most of the score. The libretto was again set by Giovanni Bottesini in 1879, and, more successfully, by Luigi Mancinelli in 1897. Boito's other libretti - with the exception of 'La Gioconda' written in 1874 - 75 for Amilcare Ponchielli, were intended for talented composers of the younger

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1. See Appendix F, p. 404.

generation. The eclogue 'Un tramonto' (1873), was written for Faccio's pupil Gaetano Coronaro; the oriental tableau 'La falce' (1875) for Alfredo Catalani; 'Semira' (or 'La regina di Babilu', 1876) for Luigi San Germano and 'Pier Luigi Farnese' (1877) - an episode of the Italian Renaissance - for Costantino Palumbo. 'Iram' (1879) was prepared - although never set - for Cesare Dominiceti. It is a most beautiful text for a comic opera foreshadowing 'Falstaff' not only in mood but in verbal virtuosity as well. 'Basi e boto', the date of which is uncertain, is a 'commedia di maschere' in Venetian dialect, full of verve. Boito wrote it originally for himself but it was only to be set in 1927 by Riccardo Pick-Mangiagalli. All the translations and libretti written by Boito during these years are important as they played their part in preparing him for his later role. It was through these relatively unimportant ventures that Boito became acquainted with every style. He acquired an absolute mastery of prosody and vocabulary; he widened, perfected and reinforced his instinctive dramatic genius thus readying himself for the two collaborations of which he was to write: 'The act in my life with which I am most satisfied is the voluntary service that I dedicated to the Man who is just, noblest of all and truly great.'[1]

Verdi appears to have conceived the idea of writing an opera on the subject of Nero in about 1871. Giulio Ricordi (Boito's

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1. Weaver, W.F. 'Boito-Gorrio, the critic'. Opera News. March 28, 1955, p.6.

and Verdi's publisher) enthralled by the possibility of giving 'to Italian art a new musical masterpiece ... perhaps one of its greatest masterpieces' did his best to bring together Verdi and the young poet 'whose very great talents the same Verdi had recently had occasion to admire in Amleto.'[1] Boito could not yet give Verdi unreserved admiration but had arrived at something like a just estimate. Moreover, as Franck Walker writes:

> the position of Boito, a true poet and a man of high literary ideals, was that he saw Verdi heedlessly expending his great gifts in the debased medium of the Italian operatic melodrama, on librettos that were a by-word for absurdity and banality of language. He had a vision of the possibility of a new marriage of poetry and music such as he imagined to have existed in Greek tragedy.[2]

He consistently worked towards the realization of this ideal. Boito was, with an unselfishness which we cannot help but admire, prepared to renounce his own libretto, thus sacrificing his most cherished ambition, in favour of the older composer. Eventually, the idea of Nerone being driven out of Verdi's mind by the prospect of Aida, the project came to nothing. Nearly nine years were to elapse before the possibility of collaboration became reality.

The revision of Mefistofele was finished by the early autumn of 1875. Its performance was due at the Teatro Comunale, in Bologna, on the 4th of October. Bologna, the Bayreuth of Italy

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1. Ricordi's and Verdi's letters on the subject of 'Nerone' are quoted in Frank Walker, op. cit., pp.463-7.

2. Walker, F., op. cit., p.462.

as it was to be named for having first and enthusiastically received Lohengrin and Tannhäuser (in 1871 and 1872 respectively), was by this time Italy's most progressive musical city. Incidentally, it was to Boito that Wagner, after the performances of Lohengrin at Bologna, addressed his famous 'Brief an einen italienischen Freund'. This was repeatedly printed in the press. A passage in it could have been intended to please his young cosmopolitan colleague:

> A new marriage between the geniuses of all the countries is perhaps necessary; and, in the case of us Germans, we could not desire a more beautiful choice of love than that which couples the genius of Italy to that of Germany.[1]

It is not easy to understand Boito's attitude towards Wagner. During the seventies his former dislike of Wagner seems to have turned to sincere admiration. He, Faccio and Filippi, promoted the performance of Lohengrin at La Scala in 1873. Wagner was however to remain an enigma to Boito even in his later life. In 1894, in a letter to the French critic and journalist Camille Bellaigue, Boito, commenting on Wagner, defined him as:

> That adorable and hateful German creator ... Hybrid, monstrous, half man and half brute, faun, satyre, centaur or Triton, or better still, half God and half ass; Dionysus in the divine delirium of his inspiration and Bottom in his foolish stubborness, we will never be able to love him unreservedly.[2]

He ended his letter, however, by paying a tribute to the musician

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1. Nardi, P. op. cit., p.336.

2. Ballo, F. 'Arrigo Boito' Turin, Arione; 1938, pp.30-31.

'who had conquered the whole sphere of harmony of which only half had been explored before him.'

In Bologna the drastically revised Mefistofele won a remarkable success. It was however in Venice that the opera, performed in its final version at the Teatro Rossini on 13th May, 1876, under the baton of Faccio, achieved a real triumph. There were subsequent productions in several other Italian cities. The first foreign performance was given in London at Her Majesty's Theatre on 6th June, 1880. In the same year it reached Boston, New York, Lisbon, Barcelona, and, shortly after, Warsaw, Saint Petersburg and Hamburg, winning sensational acclaim everywhere.

CHAPTER II

MIDDLE PERIOD

In 1876 Boito, freed from the necessity of writing to earn a living, concentrated his energies on Nerone. 'I live immersed in the blood and perfumes of Roman decadence'[1] he wrote to Count Salina on the 15th February, confiding to him his hopes of having the opera completed and performed within one year. Its composition was actually to occupy the rest of his life. The success of Mefistofele, which had affirmed Boito's musical reputation far beyond the boundaries of Italy, resulted in a change in his position. Now, in his early thirties, Boito was a highly esteemed, influential person, well established in the society of the new Milan. The days of Scapigliatura were in the past. Boito, who in the heyday of his scapigliato life had hymned a 'carousel of suicidal poets'[2] had seen too many of them take their own lives in disillusionment and despair. Iginio Tarchetti (†1869), Giuseppe Rovani (†1874), Emilio Praga (†1875), died before their time having destroyed themselves through drink and drugs. Giulio Pinchetti (†1870) shot himself (as Giovanni Camerana was to do some years later) 'tired of chasing phantoms',[3] as he wrote before dying. They were the victims of their own psychological malaise as well as of the

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1. Nardi, P. op.cit. p.406.

2. '... pallida giostra di poeti suicidi...' (Boito's poem A Giovanni Camerana'; in op. cit., p.35)

3. '... stanco solo di stringer fantasmi...'. In Nardi, op. cit., p.349.

unquietness of their age - an age historically and spiritually unsettled which left little, or no room at all, to the dreams and hopes which had accompanied the Risorgimento uprising. Boito was perhaps the only member of the Scapigliatura who both felt strongly and could see the lack of moral roots and security in his fellows. He too, had explored the artificial paradises; he too, had sought every experience but, a man of stronger fibre, he had rejected all that was foreign to his nature and found his way back to reality. He, who had been so fervent an adherent of Scapigliatura referred now to it as 'the time of my blessed and insane and most ignorant youth.'[1]

Boito's life, for the next few years was, on the whole, uneventful, his main occupation, besides working on Nerone, being the polishing and refurbishing of early poems and libretti. Then, there came to him a task worthy of the most 'splendid' and most 'elegant' versifier of Italy, of the poet 'endowed with talents of a truly superior nature'.[2] In these terms had Ricordi described Boito to Verdi at the time of the 'Nerone' project. The task was that of writing a libretto for Verdi. The result was 'Otello', so successful at its La Scala première of 1887 that Boito and Verdi were persuaded to collaborate once more and produce that triumph in the field of humourous opera, 'Falstaff', premièred

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1. Walker, F., op. cit; p.448.

2. Walker, F. op. cit; p.465.

amidst enormous acclaim in 1893.

It is a sign of Boito's control over his personal and artistic emotions that he could write such a brilliantly witty comedy as Falstaff under circumstances far from favourable. Faccio's illness and subsequent death (21st July, 1891) were to Boito a tremendous blow; voluntarily, he assumed on his shoulders all the cares and responsibilities deriving from the tragedy and assisted Faccio and his family in every way possible. 'If you knew in what horror and sorrow I live you would spare me your harsh words and suspicions' he wrote to Eleonora Duse in April 1890, during Faccio's illness - 'I spend my days, all my hours beside him. I hope to be able to accustom myself to this torment'.[1] The wonderful relationship which had, over a few years enriched and enlivened both Boito's and Duse's life of common work and passion, was now practically over.

Boito had first met, and admired, the Venetian actress in 1884, at a party given in her honour by the intellectuals of Milan where she had been playing at the Teatro Carcano for a short season, alternating Dumas' Fils 'La dame aux camelias' with Verga's 'Cavalleria rusticana'. (The play later to be made an operatic success by Pietro Mascagni, in 1890.) Eleonora Duse, then twenty-five, was an attractive, intelligent woman besides being an actress of exceptional talent. Her world-wide renown

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1. Nardi, P., op cit., p.579.

was still to come but her genius was already obvious. She was an extraordinary creature and had had an extraordinary life. A child of the theatre, Eleonora had trodden the stage since her earlier childhood, soon acquiring a thorough knowledge of theatrical conventions and a prodigious mastery of technical means. At the age of fourteen sh. had her first mystical experience. She was playing Juliet at Verona when, on smelling a bunch of roses she had carried with her on to the stage, she ceased to be Eleonora Duse and 'became' the Shakespearean heroine. Before an enraptured audience she 'lived' and suffered her part with almost unbearably poignant intensity of feeling. It was a memorable success; probably the most important to her. She recalled it towards the end of her life when, looking back to her tormented, solitary existence, she said:

> ... happiness ... was perhaps the rose which fell from my hands one evening in a theatre at Verona when I was still a child and my name was Juliet: ... the rose which Romeo picked up and never gave back to me.[1]

From that evening Eleonora Duse rejected all professional mannerisms and conventions in the name of a freer, more human and spontaneous form of art capable of producing on the stage the highest and truest reality for herself and others. Duse's early acting style - nervous, full-blooded, passionate - was wonderfully suited

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1. Simoni, R. Eleonora Duse, in the booklet issued on the occasion of the Mostra celebrativa nel centenario dalla nascita - 1858 - 1958. Museo Teatrale alla Scala. Milan.

to the romantic and melodramatic repertoire dear to the audiences of the nineteenth century. Although it had been enthusiastically praised she was tormented by a profound dissatisfaction and had conceived a new, more exalted and sophisticated ideal of art, far removed from what she had actually achieved.

Boito, whom Duse had met again in 1887 after three years of artistic wandering and sentimental unhappiness, was to be near her in one of the most crucial moments of her restless life. He gave her love, encouragement, protection, playing also a decisive role in the shaping of her artistic personality. Boito made Duse aware of the fact that 'theatre is a trivial thing when one does not reach the summit.'[1] He taught her how to 'raise the ardent centre of life from the heart up to the brain'[2] thus converting instinct and passion into Ideas, sufferance into Poetry. She learned from him that perfection can only be attained through hard work, discipline, inflexible self-criticism and an absolute, almost ascetical devotion to the artistic ideal. Under Boito's influence Duse's art matured rapidly gaining immeasurably in restraint, subtlety and refinement. She was soon to attain a height which, if we accept the testimony of men such as G.B. Shaw, Chekhov, Hofmannsthal, Rilke, Garcia Lorca, Pirandello and all critics of the time, had never been reached on the dramatic stage before.

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1. Signorelli, Olga. Eleonora Duse. Milan: Silvano editoriale d'orte; 1959, p.49.
2. Nardi, P. op. cit., p.564.

As Duse's artistic taste grew more and more refined the old repertoire, including the now uninspiring translations of Shakespeare, became hateful to her. She asked Italian playwrights for new, more original works; she became the ideal, unsurpassed interpreter of the tormented spirituality of D'Annunzio's, Chekhov's, Ibsen's, Maeterlinck's heroines. It was for Eleonora Duse that Boito translated 'Antony and Cleopatra', 'Romeo and Juliet', and 'Macbeth',[1] becoming once again interpreter and mediator of Shakespeare's powerful genius. As with Verdi, Boito guided Duse to the exegesis of Shakespeare, insisting on a more vigorous approach to the text in matters of historical truth, in detail as well as interpretation. On the subject of 'Antony and Cleopatra' Boito wrote to her:

> Discard all those costumes suitable for a choreographic action. TRAGIC lines and colours are needed....; I think that Shakespeare, in striking Iras dead by means of Cleopatra's kiss, intended to offer us the visual and plastic image of the fatality of her kisses. The feeling, soon to be replaced by other emotions, that her kisses have destroyed Antony, his legions, and Egypt comes to her in a flash. She realizes that her kisses are the seal of a violent death.... It is the woman who, in that moment, feels herself an asp. See how pregnant is this episode and what a new light it throws on the whole tragedy![2]

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1. In 1967, Sister Mary of St. Mark (Eleonora Bullough-Duse the granddaughter and last heiress of Eleonora Duse) donated a precious collection of documents which belonged to Eleonora Duse to the Fondazione Giorgio Cini, in Venice. It was among these documents that Piero Nardi discovered the authograph translation of Macbeth, the existence of which was previously unknown.

2. Nardi, P., op. cit., p.555.

The role of Cleopatra was to become one of Duse's greatest interpretations. She included the play in her triumphal Russian tournée of 1891, and was in that country greeted as 'the symbol of the immortality of dramatic art which had been so hard tried by the decadence of the artistic taste of the end of the century.'[1] The uniqueness of Duse's expressive style caused such a sensation as to mark the beginning of a new epoch in the history of Russian theatre. Anton Chekhov who was present at the first performance of 'Antony and Cleopatra' in St. Petersburg left a record of the profound impression made upon him by the Italian actress in his diary and letters as well as in some lines of the 'Seagull'. Directly inspired by Eleonora Duse he entirely changed his style of dramatic composition, influencing, through his new approaches, the famous Moscow Art Theatre.[2] Boito's and Duse's lives were soon to diverge. She, launched on her career, was passing from triumph to triumph, destined for a life of unceasing wandering. He detested the 'circus tent', exile from his own house - the house crammed with books where he lived behind locked doors playing Bach and working with closed shutters and light burning in broad daylight. Duse and Boito met at constantly widening intervals; their love was to decline into a lifelong correspondence only

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1. Signorelli, O., op. cit., p.5.

2. As the same Chekhov and, after him Konstantin Stanislavsky - the founder of the Moscow Art Theatre - often admitted. See: Sheean, V. 'Eleonora Duse. A season of dream in the life of Arrigo Boito'. High Fidelity 9. October, 1959, p.167.

interrupted during the period of Duse's stormy relationship with Gabriele D'Annunzio. After Boito's death, Eleonora Duse admitted to her intimates that she 'owed everything good in her life to him'.[1]

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1. Sheean, V., op. cit., p.168.

CHAPTER III

LAST YEARS

Boito entered the new century with his dream of giving life to Nerone still unrealized. He was still a well respected member of Milanese intellectual society. In 1893, he had received, together with Max Bruck, Saint Saëns and Tchaikovsky, the Degree of Doctor of Music 'honoris causa' from the Cambridge University. (Oxford was to bestow a similar honour, later.) In 1895 he was made Chevalier of the Legion of Honour and many titles had been conferred upon him by the Italian Government. In his dual capacity as writer and composer he was frequently asked to sit on boards for the adjudication of dramatic and musical works. He was still serving the cause of Art (he always wrote it with the capital A) with unquestionable integrity though with less enthusiasm. He had assisted Alfredo Catalani, Giacomo Puccini, Riccardo Zandonai, among others, during their early struggles but he was out of sympathy with the general trend towards 'verismo' and its, in his opinion, ignoble themes. Steeped as he was in the great literature of the past - Dante, Shakespeare and Goethe - Boito was unable to accept the new tendencies increasingly invading Western art in the last three decades of the nineteenth century. The former apostle of the future, who had advocated active participation towards a new European art, now chose to ignore the struggles and ideals of the younger generation. Verdi remained to him the last exponent of

Italy's great musical tradition as well as the harbinger of the future. Through him he had experienced the great joy of penetrating into the sphere of uninhibited creativity, the realm of violent passion, of open air exuberance, from which he had formerly excluded himself. Verdi died on the 21st January 1901, carrying 'away with him an enormous measure of light and vital warmth', as Boito wrote in his wonderful letter to Bellaigue, continuing:

> I threw myself into my work, as if into the sea, to save myself, to enter into another element, to reach I know not what shore or to be engulfed with my burden in exertions (pity me, my dear friend) too great for my limited prowess.[1]

Boito's voluntary servitude to Verdi, not only limited to the preparation of the libretti to 'Otello' and 'Falstaff', had for too many years diverted his attention from his own work. Now, that he could have devoted himself whole-heartedly to the realization of 'Nerone' (the text of which was probably finished as early as 1890), he was exhausted, probably mentally overworked, incapable of recapturing the feverish excitement or the serene joy of working. Of a neurotic, hypersensitive temperament, he was regretfully tormented by a paralyzing distrust of his own ability, by the fear of not being able to accomplish his 'cruel task'. In 1901 he, acceding to the pressure of his friends, consented to the publication of the text of 'Nerone', a tragedy in five acts, with

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1. Walker, F.; op. cit.; p.509.

the added 'Avvertenza' that the book 'does not in all respect conform to the one intended for lyric representation'.[1] The tragedy provoked the liveliest discussion. Whilst the grandeur of its design, the refined beauty of its verse, the aesthetic consistency of the characters were highly praised, the psychological reconstruction of the character of Nero, for whom Boito had deliberately departed from the accepted tradition, excited polemics often assuming a harsh tone. This criticism probably contributed to making Boito more and more doubtful and hesitant. The last chapter of Boito's life - of which the affectionate devotion of Velleda Ferretti and the friendly artistic collaboration with Camille Bellaigue are notable features - is the story of the struggle with his ever-expanding, tantalizing opera. In 1902, after permitting 'Nerone' to be announced for La Scala, Boito withdrew it, fearful of its artistic inadequacies. He attended to its revision tenaciously, fanatically even to the extent of devitalizing the work; he worked with the long patience of the scholar who, secluded in his 'turris eburnea', ignores the value of time. In 1914, Camillo, his much beloved brother, his keenest supporter, died. Boito was now seventy-two. He had, in the past years, lost one by one his oldest and dearest friends - Luigi Gualdo, Giovanni Camerana, Giuseppe Giacosa, Antonio Fogazzaro. He carried on working, in isolation. 'I shall finish Nerone, or

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1. Boito, A. op. cit., p.182.

I shall not finish it', he had written decades before to Verdi, '... if I have not the strength to finish it I shall not complain, but shall pass my life, neither sorry nor glad with that dream in my mind.'[1] However, he, who had worked unflinchingly for all his life, steadfast before his own shrine of discipline, was fully conscious of the duty he had assigned himself. On the 12th of October 1916, Boito wrote the word 'fine' on the last page of the vocal score of 'Nerone' signing 'Arrigo Boito and Kronos'. He was still working on the orchestration when after a visit paid to the front during the first World War, in 1917, he began to feel unwell. He never fully recovered. In March 1918, he was taken to a nursing-home. An internal complaint and an attack of angina pectoris precipitated the calamity. On June 10, after whispering to his friends 'When I will be back home again, with two hours of work a day, for a couple of months, I will be able to complete "Nerone"....'[2], he asked to be left alone. A few minutes later he passed away. He died in solitude - in that solitude he praised so much and from which he had drawn so much inspiration for his works. The news of Boito's death spread immediately over Milan, the city which had become his own by adoption and upon which he had had such a dynamic influence for almost half a century.

The manuscript of 'Nerone', together with the letters

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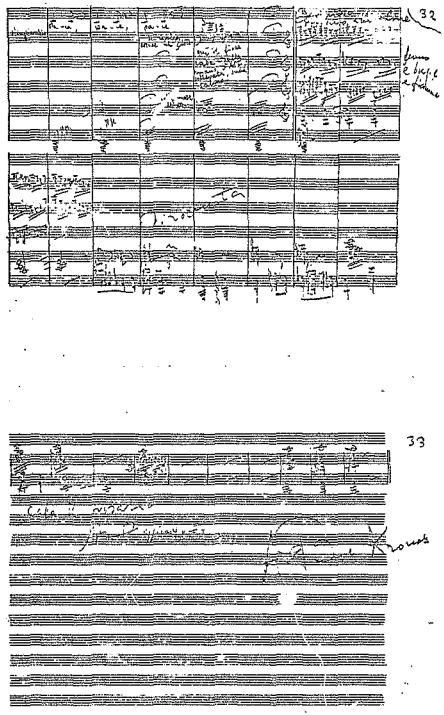
1. See Chapter 'Boito and Verdi', p.53.

2. Gatti, Carlo 'Arrigo Boito', in the 'Illustrazione Italiana', 8th March, 1942.

and notes referring to the opera, was entrusted to Arturo Toscanini who, having followed the evolution of Nerone step by step and enjoyed the esteem and confidence of its author, had an intimate understanding of Boito's intentions. Toscanini, with the help of Smareglia and Tommasini, revised and completed the opera, orchestrating those sections in short score, guided by innumerable minute indications contained in the same score, the rough orchestral score[1] and memoranda found among the papers of the deceased. On 1st May 1924, six years after its author's death and half a century after it had been originally started, the opera which had aroused the intense curiosity and the anxious expectation of not only Italy, but the whole of musical Europe, was first performed at La Scala, Toscanini conducting. The audience, comprised of visitors from all parts of the world, had come to Milan to make this gala occasion a glorious tribute to Boito. Nerone, superbly performed by a cast which included Rosa Raisa (Asteria), Luiso Bertaso (Rubria), Aureliano Pertile (Nerone), Carlo Galeffi (Fanuel) [illegible] Journet (Simon Mago), Ezio Pinza (Tigellino), was staged with a magnificence hardly seen before and was received with riotous [illegible]. The contrast between the dying, pagan world of power and corruption represented by Nerone and his court and the new born world of faith and spirituality embodied in the gentle figure of Fanuel and his Christian brethren, was stupendously evoked by the combined resources of music, poetry, scenography and choreography. However, after the curtain fell on the last performance of Nerone, many

1. The existence of this score is not generally known. A reproduction of the last two pages is given at Fig.2.



Ultime due pagine del *Nerone*.

Fig.2 The last two pages of Nerone. (Manuscript Orchestral Score.)

started asking themselves if Boito, in obedience to a theory, had not perhaps sacrificed music - the most important element of all operas - to the other arts. It was noticed also that, in the musical score of Nerone there were no signs of that genial audacity manifested by Boito in his original Mefistofele, nor did it possess the lyrical impulse and the vibrant vitality of his second version of Mefistofele. In spite of pages of striking beauty and noble inspiration, which could not but add to the fame of their composer Nerone was, on the whole, the inevitable result of a too long period of spiritual and artistic strife. Reluctantly, because of the admiration and reverence inspired by the Maestro, it was finally admitted that Boito's monumental music drama was an oeuvre manquée.

Nerone was not, after all, destined to be the crowning achievement of Boito's life. His fame as composer was rather to rest on Mefistofele - the daring experiment of his incandescent youth; as librettist, on the masterful libretti of his maturity and, last but not least, as a man and artist, on the high example of moral and artistic integrity offered by his own, admirable life.

CHAPTER IV

BOITO AND VERDI

The Boito-Verdi relationship is a dominating factor in the lives of both men and it is likely that neither would have reached the highest peak of his art, were it not for his association with the other.

After the success of Aida (first performed at Cairo in 1871) Verdi appeared to have decided to put an end to his operatic career. He had only composed the String quartet in E minor, in 1873, and, in the following year, the Requiem Mass to honour the memory of Alessandro Manzoni, whom he venerated. Giulio Ricordi had viewed Verdi's inactivity with increasing concern. Verdi was to him 'not only the greatest Italian musician of his age but the embodiment of Italy's national aspirations, the essence of (that) 'Italianità'[1] which he, Ricordi, was championing in the battle fought in Italy over the question Verdi versus Wagner. It was at Ricordi's instigation that Boito, in the summer of 1879, prepared for Verdi the scenario[2] for a libretto based on Shakespeare's 'Othello'. Verdi read and approved it, encouraged Boito to write the libretto, and went so far as to admit that it could possibly be of use to him. He did not seem, however, willing to commit himself finally to writing another opera. Through the diplomatic manoeuvres of Ricordi

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1. Carner, M. Puccini. London: Duckworth, 1974, p.51.
2. The scenario is a plan of the stage action without any verses.

and with the complicity of Faccio, Countess Maffei and Giuseppina Strepponi, Verdi's remarkably intelligent second wife, his initial hesitation was eventually overcome. 'Let us allow the stream to find its own way down to the sea' - wrote Giuseppina Strepponi to Giulio Ricordi exorting him to avoid arousing in Verdi's mind the idea of pressure being exerted - 'It is in the wide open spaces that certain men are destined to meet and to understand one another.'[1] Verdi's decision to break his long silence was probably prompted by the desire to prove to the younger generation of Italian composers, in the 1880s under the spell of Wagner, that the principles of the Italian operatic tradition were still valid. It was however Verdi's lifelong admiration of Shakespeare which probably finally determined his capitulation. As far back as 1853,he had mentioned, in a letter sent to the playwright and librettist Antonio Somma that he preferred Shakespeare 'to every other dramatist,the Greeks not excepted.'[2] Again, he acknowledged him to be the greatest authority on the heart of man, 'one of my very special poets', confessing th I have had him in my hands from my earliest youth and I read and re-read him continually.'[3] The supremely tragic figure of King Lear had caught Verdi's imagination already

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1. Arrigo Boito - Scritti e documenti, p.31.
2. Toye, F., op. cit., p.86.
3. Ibid., p.133.

in 1842 - 43. In 1850, Verdi had prepared for the librettist Salvatore Cammarano a complete scenario of 'King Lear' asking him to turn it into a drama, without regard for conventions. The project seems then to have remained in abeyance until 1853, when Verdi returned to it, this time with Antonio Somma as librettist. By 1855 the libretto was finished and, in all probability, much of the music composed. Verdi's dream of a setting of 'King Lear' was however destined to remain unrealized. It seems likely that the music composed for 'King Lear' was included in that destroyed on Verdi's instruction given shortly before his death. Verdi's first Shakespearan opera was Macbeth (1847) 'a splendid and uncommonly interesting failure'[1] to put it in the words of Francis Toye, for which there were several reasons: Verdi had not as yet reached his full maturity as a composer; Piave's libretto was uninspired, and Macbeth was itself an exceptionally difficult play to adapt for the operatic stage. Although Verdi always retained an affection for this opera, he did not consider it to be the

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1. Toye, F., op. cit., p.277.

success which he had hoped to achieve.[1] His ambitions as regards the setting of Shakespeare - and his intention of thus paying homage to him, were then still not realized when he renewed his collaboration with Boito in 1879 and the time was ripe for him to embark on a project of the dimensions of 'Otello'.

Before finally making up his mind about 'Otello' Verdi, who was - as suggested by Frank Walker - probably 'submitting Boito to the practical test of collaboration',[2] entrusted to him the revision of the text of Simon Boccanegra for the Scala revival of 1881. The opera had been a failure at Venice in 1857. The libretto by Francesco Maria Piave, rather unfortunate both in literary and dramatic structure, seemed to Boito beyond remedy.

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1. It *it, perhaps,* ironical that Verdi's Macbeth has now, in the 1970s, nearly a hundred and thirty years after it was *first produced, succeeded* in achieving a more or less permanent position in the repertoires of several opera houses. *This has come about,* to a substantial degree, through Maria Callas' singing of the role of Lady Macbeth at the *Metropolitan Opera* House in 1959 and also through the efforts of the South African soprano, Joyce Barker, who has sung the *role of Lady* Macbeth in Johannesburg, at Sadler's Wells in London, and at a number of American Opera houses. The *reason that* Macbeth is now more acceptable than it was at the time of its first production lies probably in the fact *that the audiences* of the 1840s were not prepared to accept an opera without leading tenor role, whilst this is by no *means* unusual in the twentieth century. Through the years Verdi also continued his attempts to improve the work, *frequently* making elaborate changes. The most significant of these was made for the Paris production (1865) when he added Lady Macbeth's unforgettable aria 'La luce langue', and the third act duet between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth.

2. Walker, F., op. cit., p.484.

On Verdi's insistence Boito, however, undertook the task and accomplished it in masterly fashion. He tidied up the dialogue; suppressed a superfluous change of scene in Act I: made intelligible the cause of the Doge's death adding, in Act II, the episode of Paolo's preparation of the poisoned cup; brought into focus the most important characters. In the superb, highly dramatic Council Chamber scene (added to Act I, on Verdi's suggestion) Boito 'brought to the fore the dynamic and leaderly qualities of Boccanegra, who in Piave's version was seen primarily in his fatherly guise'.[1] All the changes made by Boito in this libretto may be taken as ... examples of his adaptive ability,'of his secret of getting to the core of the story and the characters and being able to express both in a dramatic and concise way'.[2] Needless to say, through the reworking of 'Simon Boccanegra' Boito entrenched himself once and for all in Verdi's esteem. Their further collaboration was characterized by a docility on the part of Verdi unknown to his earlier librettists. Verdi had always required of his literary collaborators the ability to order his scenarios into speeches and then to set them in serviceable, though not necessarily first-rate, verse. He had, in the past, interfered with the libretti maintaining control over the general plan; he had insisted on strong contrasts, strong emotions, strong situations,

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1. Smith, P.J., op. cit., p.343.

2. Ibid., p.345.

without regard for the plausibility of the development of the action. Boito was no mere versifier nor complaisant partner; he was an accomplished poet and dramatist; an highly educated, refined mind; a scholar, eager to improve Verdi's cultural outlook and, above all, to instil in him a new respect for the literary and dramatic value of the libretto. When Verdi suggested a non-Shakespearean but theatrically effective off-stage revolt to take place at the end of the third act of 'Otello' Boito, politely but firmly, objected:

> ... Otello is like a man moving in circles under an incubus and under the fatal and growing domination of that incubus he thinks, he acts, he suffers and commits his terrible crime. Now if we invent something which must necessarily excite and distract Othello from his tenacious incubus, we destroy all the sinister enchantment created by Shakespeare and we cannot logically reach the climax of the action. That attack by the Turks is like a fist breaking the window of a room where two persons were on the point of dying of asphyxiation. That intimate atmosphere of death, so carefully built up by Shakespeare, is suddenly dispelled. Vital air circulates again in our tragedy and Othello and Desdemona are saved....[1]

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1. Letter of Boito to Verdi of October 1880 (Tr. Walker) - In Frank Walker, op. cit., pp. 478-9. This letter is usually quoted as an example of the unique nature of the Verdi-Boito relationship. I would rather emphasize the seriousness of Boito's approach to Shakespeare at a time when Shakespeare was known in Italy through unfaithful translations, absurd operatic and ballet versions, and mutilated theatrical reductions aimed at focusing the attention of the spectators on the 'Mattatore' or 'mattatrice'. (spotlight-chaser). After attending a performance of King Lear, in 1887, Eleonora Duse wrote to Boito '... What a mess, last night! Oh, beautiful soul of Shakespeare ... how much we ruin you'...' (quoted in Nardi, op. cit., p.564.)

Verdi's idea was discarded and Boito elaborated what is the present, magnificent finale defined by Spike Hughes as 'one of the most masterly strokes of pure theatre in the history of opera.'[1] By 1885 the libretto of Otello was, in essentials, finished. The opera was completed the following year, though the meticulous plans for the production delayed the première at La Scala until February 5th, 1887. Otello was performed under the baton of Faccio in an atmosphere of incredible tension before a huge audience which included critics from all over Europe. As soon as 'the tremendous, dissonant opening chord of Otello came crashing out',[2] it was immediately felt that Verdi, sixteen years after his supposed retirement from the musical arena, had still much to say. The immense, simultaneous shout which made 'the theatre rock'[3] at the end of the first act left no doubt as to the reception of the opera. At the end of the performance, acknowledged by Hueffer of The Times as 'the most remarkable first performance of modern times'[4], Verdi took Boito's hand and dragged him out on the stage to share in the triumph. Nearly twenty-four years had elapsed from the time of the 'Ode All'Arte Italiana'. Through his patience, his unselfish devotion, his intelligent co-operation Boito had won for himself

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1. Hughes, S. 'Famous Verdi Operas' London, Robert Hale: 1968 p.467.

2. Werfel, F. and Stefan, P. 'Verdi - The man in his letters'. (Tr. Downes) New York: Fisher, L.B., 1942, p.73.

3. Toye, F. op. cit., p.189.

4. Ibid. p.192.

Verdi's unreserved admiration and a truly affectionate friendship. Yet, this unparalleled example of harmonious collaboration nearly came to an end in 1884. After the performance of 'Mefistofele' at Naples, a banquet was given in Boito's honour at which, according to a misleading account published in some newspapers, he had regretted not being able to set 'Jago' (the title originally intended for 'Otello') to music himself. Verdi, resenting what he thought to be an allusion to his incapacity to create satisfactory music, offered to give Boito back 'his manuscript intact, without a shadow of resentment'[1] if he, Boito, wished to set it to music. Boito's reply is among the most deeply moving, sincere and revealing things which he ever wrote. It is worthwhile to quote it extensively as it is a splendid, autobiographical document which throws light on Boito's human and artistic nature.

After saying that he had written the libretto solely for the joy of seeing Verdi resume composition, for the glory of becoming his working associate, and for the ambition to hear his own name coupled with that of Verdi and their names in turn connected with that of Shakespeare, Boito, humbly declared:

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1. Verdi's letter to Faccio, is quoted in, and translated by Frank Walker, *op. cit.*, pp. 489-90.

> This theme and my libretto are yours by right of conquest. You alone can set Othello to music - all the dramatic creations you have given us proclaim this truth. If I have been able to divine the inherent powerful musicality of the Shakespearean tragedy, which at first I did not feel, and if I have been able to demonstrate it in fact with my libretto, that is because I put myself at the viewpoint of Verdian art, because I felt in writing those verses what you would feel in representing them in that other language, a thousand times more intimate and strong - the language of sound.[1]

The consciousness of not having in himself the strength of genius capable of realizing high ideals dictated to Boito words of discouragement and resignation. Referring to Verdi's offer to give him back the libretto Boito wrote with touching sincerity:[2]

> What you cannot suspect is the irony that, through no fault of yours, appeared to me to be contained in that offer. Look! Already for seven or eight years, perhaps, I have been working on 'Nerone' (put the 'perhaps' where you like, attached to the word 'years' or to the word 'working'). I live under that incubus; on the days when I don't work I pass the hours in reproaching myself for laziness; on the days when I do work I pass the hours in reproaching myself for stupidity; and thus life runs away and I am slowly asphyxiated by an ideal too exalted for my powers. To my misfortune, I have studied my period - that is, the period of my subject - too intently, and I am terribly in love with it; and no other subject in the world, not even Shakespeare's Othello, could distract me from my theme. It responds in everything to my character as an artist and to the conception I have formed of opera. I shall finish 'Nerone' or I shall not finish it, but it is certain that I shall never abandon it for another work, and if I have not the strength to finish it I shall not complain, but shall pass my life, neither sorry nor glad, with that dream in my mind ... Do not abandon Otello, do not abandon it! It is predestined for you. Create it. You had begun work upon it and I was all encouraged and was hoping already to see it finished at some not distant date. You are sounder than I, stronger than I; we tested our strength

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1. Walker, F., pp. 489 - 50.
2. Ibid., pp. 489-50.

> and my arm bent beneath yours. Your life is tranquil and serene; take up your pen again and write me soon: Dear Boito, do me the favour of altering these verses, etc. etc. I will change them at once, with joy, and I shall know how to work for you, I who do not know how to work for myself, for you live in the true and real world of Art, and I in the world of hallucinations.

The collaboration which produced Falstaff has little of the dramatic tension of the story of the creation of Otello. The idea of writing a comic opera - the first since his unsuccessful early attempt 'Il Finto Stanislao' (also known as 'Un giorno di regno', of 1840) had always tempted Verdi. As far back as 1866, according to the testimony of the French singer Victor Maurel[1] - Verdi had sought a librettc in Molière and in the French plays of the nineteenth century but had not been able to find a satisfactory subject. Maurel had sent him a French version of 'The taming of the Shrew' which had been prepared for production by M. Coqueline. Verdi, after recognizing the attractiveness of the lively and witty comedy, confessed that only a Rossini or a Donizetti could have dealt with it properly. In spite of this view, Verdi had resented Rossini's statement that, although he greatly admired Verdi as a composer of dark, serious, meloncholy character, he believed him incapable of writing a light opera such as Donizetti's 'Linda di Chamounix' or 'L'elixir d'amore'. (Quoted in the memories of the sculptor Dupré which appeared in the Gazzetta di Milano in 1879). In 1887, rumours proclaimed Verdi's intention to write a lyric comedy, this time based on Don Quixote. Eventually Verdi did not

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1. In 'Verdi, Boito Shakespeare' - by A. St.John-Brenon. Musical Quarterly New York: P.H. Lang, 1916, vol.ii, pp.151-152.

find even Cervantes' masterpiece to be entirely suitable. It was in 1889 that Boito suggested to Verdi 'The merry wives of Windsor' going so far, it seems, as to prepare a scenario in forty-eight hours in order not to allow Verdi's interest time to flag. Falstaff's character had always fascinated Boito who considered him spiritually akin to Satan and Thersites. He had in fact, in the 'Prologue in the Theatre' of his first 'Mefistofele', written:

> Mephistopheles is the doubt which generates knowledge as well as the Evil which generates Good ... Job has his own Mephistopheles called Satana; Homer has one called Thersites; Shakespeare another one called Falstaff.[1]

Verdi, in turn, had already considered 'Falstaff' as a subject for a comic opera in 1867 - 8 (Ghislanzoni the librettist of Aida, was supposed to write the libretto). Breaking down Verdi's hesitation was, this time, a comparatively easy matter. All the composer's scruples about old age and the conviction that he had with 'Otello' fired off his last cartridge, were put aside before Boito's persuasive words

> It is a great thing to conclude a life of artistic endeavour with a world triumph such as 'Otello'... There is only a better way of concluding a career than with 'Otello' - that is, with the triumphs of 'Falstaff'. After having sounded every note of human sorrow, to end with a magnificent outburst of merriment! That would indeed be outstanding![2]

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1. Boito, A. Op. cit., pp. 100-101.

2. In Pietro Nardi, op. cit., p.514.

The 'Falstaff' libretto was ready in the early spring of 1890. Boito had probably taken to heart Shakespeare's dictum 'brevity is the soul of wit'[1] as suggested by Klein but he had without doubt remembered Verdi's statement that 'in the theatre excessive length is synonymous with boredom and of all styles the boring is the worst'.[2] The libretto was a model of clarity and conciseness. On studying it Verdi probably realized that here was at last an opportunity to write a lyric comedy of the most refined kind. He set to work with immense delight and enthusiasm. Despite the fact that he worked at it no more than two hours a day the score was finished by the summer of 1892. 'Falstaff', premièred at La Scala on February 9th, 1893 before an audience 'that equalled the Bayreuth pilgrims in social and intellectual brilliance'[3] was received with a tremendous enthusiasm, although the charming scene in the Windsor Forest did not seem to have stirred the majority of its listeners as might have been expected. The critics agreed in ranking the work of the octogenarian composer as a masterpiece. Comparisons were made to Mozart, Haydn, Rossini, Beethoven and Wagner. Charles Villiers Stanford, in the admirable article contributed to the Daily Telegraph wrote:

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1. Klein, J.W. 'Verdi and Falstaff'. The Musical Times, July 1st, 1926, p.606.
2. Toye, F. op. cit., p.87.
3. Brookway, W. and Weinstock, H. 'The Opera. A History of its creation and performance'. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1941, p.386.

> The book is in every respect admirable, rich in poetry of the highest order, in situations of an ingenuity so clear in workmanship that they seem both simple and spontaneous; rich also in the mastery of the 15th century Italian which the author uses with such an ease as to make it appear a most natural vehicle of expression, and with an absence of all pedantry which is the highest witness to the depth of his knowledge; above all an opera book which only a musician could have written for a musician.[1]

For Boito it was ample satisfaction to have 'forged a hammer from Shakespeare that caused the bronze colossus from Busseto (Verdi's home) to resound again at a time when age was about to silence him'[2] as he was to write to Bellaigue. Shortly after the success of Falstaff Boito, in the hope of having a third Shakespearean masterpiece added to 'Otello' and 'Falstaff', suggested to Verdi a libretto based on 'Antony and Cleopatra'; then prepared a general plan of King Lear - the opera which Verdi had wished to write for forty years. He selected those scenes of Shakespeare which he intended to use and sketched the opening episode based on Lear's division of his kingdom.

Boito's efforts proved, however, vain. Giuseppina Strepponi, who was watching over the health of her aged husband, put her veto to Verdi's further commitment.

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1. Stanford, C.V. 'Studies and memories'. London: Constable, 1908, p.171

2. Reinhard, G. Pauly 'The later Nineteenth century' in Music and the theatre'. An introduction to opera. New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1970, p.248.

PART II

BOITO - THE CRITIC

BOITO'S IDEAS ON OPERATIC REFORM

Boito's critical writings and essays, especially those containing his ideas on music reforms, are characterized by vehemence and passion, indicative of the incandescent atmosphere of Scapigliatura. The fact that Boito was not only the most dynamic but also the most militant member of the artistic vanguard of Milan is clearly shown in the polemical ardour with which in the interest of his reforms, he opposed the persistence of a tradition which he considered to be incompatible with the new demands of large sections of European thought.

When in the early 1860's the Italian melodramma, far removed from the new musical and dramatic ideals which the Wagnerian reforms had brought about, became the focus of vivacious polemics, Boito entered the fight with defiant, provocative arrogance.

It is known that the relationship between Verdi and Boito - who had previously provided the older composer with the text for the Hymn of the Nations - deteriorated owing to the objectionable allusion made by Boito to those unworthy of a tradition triumphant in the 'holy harmonies of Pergolese and Marcello' who had defiled the sacred altar of Art 'like the walls of a brothel'.[1]

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1. Boito, A. 'Ode all'Arte Italiana (A Sapphic Ode with Glass in Hand), in op. cit., p.1363 - 4.

It is not certain that this allusion was actually aimed at Verdi, but Verdi certainly took offence. Boito's impetuous nature knew no diplomatic subtlety. In reviewing a revival of 'I Lombardi alla prima crociata' at La Scala, for instance he, referring to a remark made by Verdi, wrote:

> 'You must be wall-eyed', Verdi said when he was writing 'I Lombardi' and keep one eye on the public and one eye on Art'. For those times this was a courageous statement, since there were many composers who kept both eyes only on the public, which is bad for the eyesight and for art as well. That was the time to be wall-eyed, and every artist of any gift had to be so (though not all of the wall-eyed artists were gifted). Today, however, it is time to look straight at Art, with both eyes wide open, serene and confident.[1]

This ironic comment must also have displeased Verdi.

After the Scala production of Verdi's new opera 'I Vespri Siciliani'[2] Boito harshly attacked the 'official' poet of the French lyrical stage, Eugène Scribe, describing his libretto as 'wretched, clumsy, ignorant'.[3]

He unceasingly urged his fellow-composers to regard the libretto as the basis of the musical drama, insisting on the necessity to eradicate the absurd melodramatic formulae based on elementary conflicts of passion and character, supported by illogical structures. Moreover, being at the same time poet and musician, his concern was not confined to the dramatic structure of the melodramma but included considerations of the nature of

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1. Figaro - 7 January, 1864. In 'Tutti gli scritti, p.1195.
2. Premièred at the Paris Opera on the 13th June, 1855.
3. Figaro - 11 February, 1886. In 'Tutti gli scritti, p.1118.

the poetic text, which he desired to be flexible, refined and both capable of and inspiring musical elaboration.

> Before being a musician one must be a poet. One must prepare in advance and magnify the images which he wishes to express in sound in order to find those very sounds without looking for them. He must be the one who finds - and not the one who searches. The sounds must be perceived by the ear secretly. The task of the musician is to be able to choose, catch and develop them like cells.[1]

And again: 'A musician needs the thought and the word of a great and profoundly human poet to give the true physiognomy to the notes'.[2] Perhaps when Boito wrote these words he was thinking of a rapprochement of the musical and poetical world based on the example of past centuries when poets such as Chiabrera, Rinuccini, Zeno, Metastasio, Goldoni and Parini had contributed so much to the glory of Italian opera. Reality, however, offered in the Italy of the time, a discouraging picture of craftsman - musicians too easily satisfied with the mediocrity of versifying 'poetucoli', such as Solera, Piave, Somma, Cammarano, Zanardini, still anchored to the 'libretto-convaccio' structured in the 'forme d'obbligo'. Those librettists produced a mere pretext for certain vocal and scenic requirements, obviously 'unaware of the important role which is to-day expected to be played by them' and without thinking in the least that what was required of them was

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1. Arrigo Boito - Scritti e documenti, p.146,

2. Ibid., p.27.

'to shake the entangled music in order that it might proceed on its way'.[1]

Boito considered the rest of Europe, where so much had been accomplished in artistic reforms. Literary musicians like Weber, Chopin, Schumann, Berlioz and Mendelssohn - the latter so close to Boito in his intellectual-artistic aspirations - had revived the musical tradition by means of their cultural involvement and had, at the same time, enriched it with their restless sensitivity, with new values and bold expressive means. No one in Italy, seems to have felt this stimulus, with the exception of Boito who did, however, think that the glorious cycle of instrumental music had perhaps been concluded with Mendelssohn and Schumann. He suggested placing this illustrious tradition at the service of the opera, the renewal of which was the concern, and the main task of contemporary composers. In the theory of the fusion of all arts in a spirit of superior harmony originally formulated by J. Gottfried Herder, and now advocated by Friedrich Nietzche and Richard Wagner, the romantic generation had found a high ideal and a splendid spiritual incentive. This ideal appeared to have reached a definite form in the Gesamtkunstwerk theory and musical work of Wagner. Wagnerianism was by now spreading all over Europe in an almost irresistible manner. Before the phenomenon of Wagnerianism, Boito had been able to maintain an independent critical attitude. From his initial, unreserved acceptance of it, when he thought to have discovered in Wagner, poet, aesthete

1. La Perseveranza - 13 September, 1863. In 'Tutti gli scritti, p.1080.

and composer in one, the destroyer of the operatic formula, 'the manborn and predestined to fulfil the innovatory mission', Boito seems to have passed on to his rejection, identifying Wagner with

> the Bar-Jesus[1] of art in his day. .
> a false apostle ... a false precursor, one of
> those dangerous propagators of ...ths ill said, ill thought
> ill heard; one of those madmen who, with their
> thoughts on the light diffuse darkness; pompous
> disseminators of clamorous confusion; spoilers
> of theories by their practice and of practice by
> their theories; talents more swollen with vanity
> that nourished with knowledge....[2]

It must, nevertheless be admitted that Boito gained from Wagner the example of the militant artist devoted to the realization of high ideals, as well as a few basic principles, mainly of aesthetics, concerning the theory of the importance of all the factors called to contribute to the creation of the music-drama, including the role to be played by the orchestra, the employment of symphonic technique and the relationship between poetic and musical text in the music-drama. These principles ended up by assuming the features of personal aesthetic conceptions in the process of passing from theory to practice and in adapting to the taste and sensitivity of a different race and environment.

Whilst Wagner was concerned with the art-work of the future, Boito did not lose sight of the present. In Figaro, the mouthpiece of the Scapigliato intellectualism which launched the attacks against the bourgeois art, in the name of 'free,

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1. Bar-Jesus is the false prophet mentioned in the Acts, XIII.
2. Boito, A.op.cit. p.1256 (Translation, Walker, F.)

and composer in one, the destroyer of the operatic formula, 'the man born and predestined to fulfil the innovatory mission', Boito seems to have passed on to his rejection, identifying Wagner with

> the Bar-Jesus[1] of art in his day. .
> a false apostle ... a false precursor, one of
> those dangerous propagators of ...ths ill said, ill thought
> ill heard; one of those madmen who, with their
> thoughts on the light diffuse darkness; pompous
> disseminators of clamorous confusion; spoilers
> of theories by their practice and of practice by
> their theories; talents more swollen with vanity
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unprejudiced Art, modern both in form and content Boito, in reviewing the new opera Ginevra di Scozia by Maestro Rota, recently performed at La Scala, wrote:

> The opera of to-day, to have life and glory and to fulfil the high destiny prescribed for it must attain, in our opinion:
>
> i. the complete obliteration of formula
> ii. the creation of form
> iii. the actualization of the most vast tonal and rhythmic development possible today.
> iv. the supreme incarnation of the drama.[1]

For a better understanding of what he was saying, the young critic referred his readers to one of his earlier articles written in La Perseveranza (13 September 1863). In this article Boito, in accusing the second-rate librettist of the opera Il vecchio della Montagna by Maestro Cancogni of having despoiled another great period of history' indicated the remedy in denouncing the malady.

> There are in the language of men words and meanings which are easily confused, and which, especially in aesthetic matters, it is useful to disentangle; two of these words are FORM and FORMULA.... Since opera had existed in Italy, down to our own times, we have never had true operatic form, but always the diminutive - the FORMULA. Born with Monteverdi, the operatic formula passed to Peri (sic), to Cesti, to Sacchini, to Paisiello, to Rossini, to Bellini, to Verdi, acquiring force, development, variety (and acquiring much with these last great figures), yet remaining FORMULA, as FORMULA it was born. The designation ARIA, RONDO, CABALETTA, STRETTO, RITORNELLO, PEZZO CONCERTATO, are all there, drawn up for inspection, to confirm the truth of this assertion. The hour has come for a change of style; form, largely attained in the other arts, must develop, too, in our own; its time of maturity must have arrived; let it take off the TOGA PRAETEXTA and assume the TOGA VIRILIS, let it change name and construction and instead of saying LIBRETTO, the term

1. Figaro, 21 January, 1864. In 'Tutti gli scritti,' p.1107.

> of conventional art say and write TRAGEDY, as did the Greeks....[1]

In order to make of the melodramma an 'elevated poem, tragic and epic, mimic and rhapsodic',[2] it was necessary, in Boito's opinion, to return, for inspiration, to the Greek tragedy and the medieval mystery.

Repeatedly, Boito, in his writings, insisted on the literary quality of the texts, well aware of the fact that this was the prerequisite for a more flexible musical articulation of the melodramma. Driven by a firm intention of reform, and by the desire to demonstrate that his criticism would result in positive example, he decided to put his fine brain and outstanding poetical gifts at the service of other composers. He prepared for them a handful of libretti which, with a very few exceptions, represent as Fausto Torrefranca wrote 'a truly delicious mirage in the desert of poetry adapted for music existing at that period.'[3]

Boito knew, however, that, should the elaboration of both the musical and poetical structure of the music-drama stem from the same creative impulse, the rhythmic and sonorous effects suggested by the verse, and the intensity of the poetical vision conveyed in it, would not be lost, or diminished, in the musical setting. For this reason Boito the poet placed himself at the

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1. Translation by Walker, F.
2. Ibid., p.1257.
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service of Boito the musician, deciding to prove his budding strength in two extraordinarily daring projects: Mefistofele and Nerone, both revolving around the perennially fascinating theme of the struggle between the antithetical powers of Good and Evil.

PART III

BOITO - THE LIBRETTIST

INTRODUCTION

Boito's activity as a librettist, from 1862 ('Amleto') to 1893 ('Falstaff'), coincides with one of the most fluid periods in the history of Italy's cultural and artistic life. It was during this time that the craving for a cultural renewal, first felt by the Scapigliati, materialized in the diverse literary and poetical solutions linked with the names of Giosuè Carducci, Giovanni Verga, Giovanni Pascoli, Gabriele D'Annunzio and the musical reform of Arrigo Boito. 'Mefistofele', 'Nerone', and the handful of libretti which Boito prepared for his fellow-composers, were meant as the actualization of the principles which he promoted indefatigably.

Not all Boito's libretti are masterpieces; Iram, Basi e bote, Otello and Falstaff can however, be described as such. The flexibility of both poetical and dramatic structure, to be seen especially in Boito's last two works, is the result of what Fausto Torrefranca defined as 'a slow process of decantation'[1] - in other words, of endless research and experiment aimed at seizing new beauties of verbal expression, of metrical originality, of brilliantly conceived plots and actions. In channeling his poetical and dramatic gifts into the stream of the musical drama Boito succeeded in re-establishing that ideal of literary pre-eminence which had, owing to the preponderance of music in the

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1. Torrefranca, F. 'Arrigo Boito'. The Musical Quarterly New York: Lang, P.H., 1920; vol. vi, p.537.

romantic conception of the melodramma, practically disappeared after the time of Metastasio. Boito's contributions to the libretto were many.[1] First and foremost, he brought to it a greatly widened concept of poetics, partly derived from the awareness of what Hugo, Berlioz and Wagner had done with the French and German languages in order to revivify them and, partly, from his own musical ear peculiarly sensitive to rhythmical and syllabic scansion and nuances of sound. Boito was the first Italian librettist to move away from the long, singable lines - either pastoral or grandiloquent - which, bequeathed by Metastasio to the generations of librettists succeeding him, had remained the very essence of Italian operatic verse. The short, nervous lines already experimented with in Re Orso:

Re Orso
Ti schermi
Dal morso
De' vermi

became Boito's hallmark.

Not all of the many novelties contributed by Boito to the poetical structure of the libretto met with the approval of the purists. They objected especially to his excessive use of archaic words and modes of expression, to his arbitrary accentuation and to the abuse of sibilant sounds, traditionally used only within comic contexts. They did not appreciate that Boito was, by means of the language of the past, attempting to

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1. See Smith, P., op. cit., p. 337-338.

widen the language and syntax of the present, to extend the range of verbal possibilities even to the extreme extent of considering the words themselves as sound patterns, aiming 'to break open once and for all the closed-in world of the Italian libretto with its ingrained and ever-repeated formulas'.[1]

As a dramatist, Boito was far less radical. Although working within conventions, he did however greatly improve the form and structure of the libretto. His method of construction does not, in fact, differ much from the traditional but is employed in a more consistent and organically conceived manner. Boito was aided, in this, by his inborn dramatic sense, his knowledge of the laws governing the operatic stage and his instinct for well balanced dramatic structure.

If the choice of subjects clearly reflects Boito's breadth of interests and critical snobbism, the fact that he attempted every genre - idyll, tragedy, comedy, epic, historical drama - is an indication of his intellectual curiosity and versatility as well.

There is no such thing as a Boitian libretto. Practically each work possesses its own individual character. There are, however, in Boito's libretti, recurrent traits indicative of his approach to operatic dramaturgy. His libretti, cast in three or

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1. Smith, P., op. cit., p.338.

four acts,[1] are classically structured: the first act for exposition and presentation of characters; the middle section for development, the final act for the major climax and dénouement. Each act is divided into a number of 'scénes', a new scene beginning (as in the French classical drama) whenever the group on stage is altered by anyone leaving or joining it.[2] The first acts, usually the longest, liveliest and best constructed, show Boito at his most resourceful in the technique of stage movement and visual effect. For the conclusion of the work he prefers to dispense with external stage effect rather concentrating on the pathos of the human drama.

However complex the story might be (as in many of the adaptations) Boito gives it a clear and logical design and unfolds it in a sequence of well organized, swift-moving and self-explanatory episodes. Nearly all Boito's libretti begin with large choral scenes of a spectacular nature. The chorus and the setting, for which the most punctilious stage directions are given, evoke an appropriate atmosphere, thus putting the spectator in a receptive frame of mind. The characters are presented successively, a traditional device permitting the audience to become acquainted with one character before the next appears. Detail is added

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1. With the exception of 'Lu falce' and 'Un tramonto', written for Gaetano Coronaro and Alfredo Catalani, when still students of the Conservatory.

2. This refers especially to the early libretti.

whilst the action unfolds. Once having established the atmosphere, presented the characters and situation, Boito sets in motion the action by means of a dramatic incident invariably represented by the clash between the heroine, hero and her/his villainous opponent. This 'conflict situation', which takes the centre of the stage in the middle section of the drama, is often retarded, to create both contrast and suspense, by spectacular scenes such as the ceremonial dances in 'Semiro' the allegorical apotheosis scene in 'Pier Luigi Farnese'; the Dance of the Hours in 'La Gioconda' The action is brought to a rapid dénouement in a final act which is generally short, sombre and rather static.

The most remarkable features of Boito's libretti are:

1) lengthy, carefully worded speeches given, in turn, to the most important characters,

2) extended love scenes ending with reflective or ecstatic duets containing the best of Boito's lyrical poetry. The static effect of such scenes is counteracted by interruptions, often in the nature of ominous announcement, coming from distant voices or off-stage choruses,

3) juxtaposition of strongly contrasting situations which, together with conflict of characters, are powerful and infallible means for emotional tension.

4) the employment of the chorus, consistent throughout all the works for the purpose of engendering atmosphere as well as taking direct part in the action.

The whole apparatus of the stage - scenery, costume, movement, choreography, lighting - is exploited to the full to create the maximum of visual, dynamic and dramatic effect. The painstaking attention devoted to the total organization of the spectacle clearly reveals Boito's adherence to Wagner's Gesamtkunstwerk theory.[1]

Boito's tendency to conceive life as an eternal conflict of antithetical principles is, as we have seen, the result of the impact made on him by the romantic ideologies of his time, and is reflected in the conception, (and embodied in the characters) of his dramas. The couples Mefistofele - Margherita; Nero - Ariofarne; Semira - Zoroastro; Pier Luigi Farnese-Donata; Gioconda-Barnaba; Desdemona - Jago; Nerone - Fanuël are symbolic of the polarity of Good versus Evil which provided the main spring for Boito's dramaturgy and was to achieve universal significance in 'Mefistofele' and 'Nerone'.

Of the eleven libretti which Boito wrote for other Italian composers of his time four are adaptations, the other original works.[2] 'Amleto', 'La Gioconda', 'Otello', 'Falstaff', belong to the first category; 'La Falce', 'Un tramonto', 'Ero e Leandro', 'Semira', 'Pier Luigi Farnese', 'Basi e bote', to the second. 'Iram' belongs to both categories, in that a portion of it appears,

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1. The roots of this total organization, also evident in Grand-opera, actually go back to Lully's spectacles and even earlier.
2. Separate chapterswill be devoted to 'Mefistofele' and 'Nerone' which must be studied in relation to their music.

in all likelihood, to have been an adaptation from Shakespeare, whilst the remainder is of Boito's own invention.

CHAPTER I

AMLETO

Boito prepared his first libretto - 'Amleto' - for Franco Faccio in 1862, when he was twenty years old and already submerged in the visions of 'Faust' and 'Nerone' - the great themes which were to accompany him throughout his life. From this début as librettist-collaborator emerge some features which were to confirm themselves as the constants of Boito's artistic life: the ability to place himself over and above his personal exigencies in order to serve the highest purposes of art; the predilection, in the choice of subjects, for great and deep works of poetry or subjects far removed from the ordinary every-day life; the faculty of impressing in his adaptations 'that seal which limits them in extension and profoundness without diminishing them in significance';[1] and, above all, an inborn dramatic and poetical skill coupled with a great concern for the problems of music. 'Amleto' is far from being a superb libretto 'scarcely less successful at reproducing the spirit of the play than his (Boito's) later work for Verdi',[2] as Winton Dean claims. It is, however, an interesting work in which Boito shows a remarkable degree of originality and achieves valuable results.

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1. Vicinelli, Luigi. Arrigo Boito poeta e il Nerone, Roma: Nuova Antologia, 1924, vol. VI, p.229.

2. Dean, W. 'Shakespeare and Opera', in Shakespeare and music London: Hartnoll, 1964, p.101.

Hamlet, the first of Shakespeare's Four Great Tragedies, was written at the close of the 16th century and first published, in a mangled version, in 1603, at the height of the Renaissance. For over three hundred and fifty years it has remained the most popular, the most frequently performed, the most investigated and the most enigmatic of Shakespeare's plays. The reasons for the plays's enduring appeal are not hard to find. Beside having a most fascinating and enigmatic hero, 'Hamlet' is crowded with visual excitement: a ghost stalking about the ramparts in full armour, court pageantry and intrigue, a play within a play, a brawl in the graveyard and a duel replete with poisoned rapiers. The superb theatricality of the play, coupled with the deceptive simplicity of its plot - at its crudest, a revenge story carried out in a series of sensational incidents - has, over the centuries, tempted many composers (from Caruso's 'Amleto' Florence, 1789) to Machavariani's 'Homlet', (Tbilisi, 1964)and Searle's 'Hamlet' (Hamburg, 1968) with rather disappointing results. In the imaginative process of embodying in a 'modern' setting an old story basically derived from a twelfth century chronicle by the Danish historian Saxo Grammaticus, Shakespeare transformed the revenge motive into something much more significant. He invested it with a variety of interests and a philosophical probing into the nature of life, death and man - all things not easily reducible to operatic terms. If we add to this the great number of important characters and the complexity of the interconnecting strands of

the drama we can understand why 'Hamlet' should present almost insuperable problems of adaptation.

Boito's libretto is by far the most satisfactory solution to those problems. The handling of the play - the five, long acts of Shakespeare cast by Boito into four brief and swift acts - is a miracle of synthesis. Boito succeeded in keeping intact the dramatic development and the organic unity of the plot through the broad lines of the fundamental episodes. The structural framework reveals an inborn and strong sense of the theatre, the episode alternating in well contrasted scenes in obedience to the inalienable laws of the operatic stage without however abdicating to the demand of logic. In order to encompass in a libretto such an intricate and lengthy drama as Hamlet, Boito had to remove episodes which were not easily realisable in music and reduce the number of characters. Other incidents had to be expanded and new facts introduced in order to allow for the operatic distribution of weight rather than the straight dramatic. Boito did this with consummate skill: whilst his excisions do not alter drastically the Shakespearean intent he succeeded in making every addition strictly relevant to the action. A brief analysis of the libretto explains Boito's method of adaptation.

The opening section of the opera is markedly different from the beginning of the play. In the first scene of 'Hamlet' Shakespeare establishes at once the atmosphere of doubt, distrust and suspicion which pervades the tragedy. Two men, soldiers on

guard on the ramparts of the castle of Elsinore, wait to be relieved in the darkness of a cold winter night. Marcellus and Horatio (the latter a friend of Hamlet who has been told of a ghostly apparition resembling the late King of Denmark, father to Hamlet) join the sentries on watch. The uneasy atmosphere of apprehension is intensified by the challenges leaping out of the darkness. When the Ghost has appeared, it is decided to tell Hamlet what has occurred. From the platform we pass to the Court scene where Hamlet is seen for the first time.

Boito eliminates the first scene of Shakespeare's play and his opera starts in the Royal Hall of the Castle with a strikingly effective scene - a coronation feast - which at first glance suggests something not in the literary source. The essence of this scene is, however, actually to be found in Shakespeare, in Laerte's lines:

> .... I came to Denmark,
> to show my duty in your coronation....
>
> (Act I, Sc.ii, ll.52-3)[1]

The exploitation of a significant point such as this, sometimes contained even in only a few words, is an important feature of Boito's adaptive method. There are two other examples:

1. In Shakespeare's Court Scene (Act I, Sc.ii) Claudius, now King of Denmark, in announcing his marriage to the widow of his dead brother uses many figures of speech in which two contrasting ideas are brought together (e.g. 'With mirth in funeral, and with dirge in marriage', line 12). On Shakespeare's use of these

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1. The numbering of lines follows that of W.C. Clarke's and W.A. Wright's edition of Hamlet, in The complete works of William Shakespeare' - New York (undated).

contrasting words are built the King's and the Queen's stanzas in Boito's interpolated Brindisi scene:

RE (con un nappo in mano)

Requie ai defunti. - E colmisi
D'almo liquor la tazza.
Oriam per essi. - E il calice
Trabocchi sull'altar;

REGINA

Requie ai defunti. - E intreccinsi
Poetiche carole.
Oriam per essi. - E un cantico
Alziam di voluttà.

(KING: raising a cup,

Peace to the dead. Let us fill our cups
with vivifying wine.
Let us pray for them. Let our cups
brim over the altar.

QUEEN

Peace to the dead. Let us dance
and sing in circle. Let us pray for them.
Let us raise a voluptuous song.).

2. Boito's whole opening scene with the brindisi, revelry and wild dances is an elaboration of Hamlet's lines:

The king doth wake to-night and takes his rouse,
Keeps wassail and the swaggering up-spring reels;
And, as he drains his draughts of Rhenish down,
The kettle-drum and trumpet thus bray out
The triumph of his pledge....
(Act I, Sc. iv; ll - 8 - 12).

The blasphemous toast 'Requie ai defunti' punctuated by the courtiers' shouts of 'E Gloria al Re', led by Claudio, with Gertrude, Amleto

Ofelia (the last two aside) each contributing a stanza, is a conventional ensemble scene, yet wonderfully functional in its exposition of characters and situation. Amleto, embittered by the hasty and incestuous marriage of his mother curses the two sinners, whilst Ofelia, who sincerely mourns the dead king, cannot bring herself to join in the toast. (Here Boito offers a fine illustration of his skill in integrating purely musical numbers into the dramatic structure of the plot.)

Hamlet's first soliloquy -'O, that this too too solid flesh would melt' (Act I, Sc.ii), opening with the lament that God has 'fixed his canon 'gainst self-slaughter', shortened in length but still containing what is necessary in adhering to Shakespeare's intention becomes, in Boito's first scene, Amleto's sombre passage. 'Ah si dissolva quest' abbietta forma'. Ofelia's aria, in the same scene 'Dubita pur che brillino', is an elaboration of Hamlet's love letter as read by Polonius in Shakespeare's Act II, Sc.ii 'Doubt thou the stars are fire'. Comments uttered by the courtiers and the officials during this coronation scene give information about the political unrest, hinting at Fortenbras' war against Denmark. Several passages containing the essence of the dialogue between Hamlet, Horatio and Marcellus about the ghostly apparition, with which Shakespeare closes the second scene of Act I, are skilfully inserted by Boito among the toasts and the spirited dances of the revellers. By means of this device he provides an occasion for dramatic contrast at the same time motivating the

ensuing Ghost scene. (In Shakespeare the Ghost appears for the second time in Act I, Sc.iv.) In the second part of Boito's Act I the scene shifts from the Royal Hall in the castle to the ramparts outside. As in Shakespeare, Amleto, who is with Marcello and Orario, comes to know the precise history of the events leading up to his father's murder and to Claudio's usurpation of the throne, through the Ghost's revelation. As in Shakespeare, the Ghost charges Amleto to avenge this 'foul and most unnatural murder', a duty which he accepts without hesitation. In this episode the dialogue is taken almost literally from Shakespeare sometimes, however, abbreviated.

The use of the 'terza rima' (a b a, b c b, etc.)

A Tu dei saper ch'io son l'anima lesa
B Del morto padre tuo, su cui lo sdegno
A Dell'Eterna Giustizia incombe e pesa.
B Me stesso fai per mio fallire indegno
C Ed or le colpe della vita lieta
B Purgo col foco del dolente regno...

(You must know that I am the wounded soul
Of your dead father, upon whom the rage
Of the Eternal justice heavily lies.
By sinning, I have debased myself.
And, now, the sins of my too carefree life
I am purging in the fire of the sorrowful reign...)

confers upon the Ghost's speeches curiously Dantean overtones, not unfitted however to the situation, dealing with a damned soul engaged in colloquy with a living person. There is no model in Shakespeare for the 'De profundis clamavi' recited by Amleto,

Orazio and Marcello at the end of Act I. This was, however, one of the numbers most warmly applauded at the first performance of 'Amleto' in Genoa, in 1865.

The second act of the libretto is likewise divided into two parts. The first part encompasses a small portion of Shakespeare's Act II (drastically reduced to a few lines taken from the second scene) and the main sections of Act III, Sc.i, - the 'To be or not to be' speech and the nunnery scene. The second part is wholly dedicated to the 'play within the play' episode, which in Shakespeare takes place in Act III, Sc.ii. By omitting many episodes from the second and third acts of Shakespeare's tragedy, Rosencrantz, Guildenstern and the side plot in which they are involved, are suppressed. The intense compression to which the plot is subjected weakens the dramatic tension of the play as well as the psychological complexity which Hamlet, as a Shakespearean character, possesses. The instability of Hamlet's purposes and his pathological incapability of action - the problem which has occupied critics for many generations - is not only central to the character of Hamlet but is the pivot upon which the play turns. The pensive soliloquy 'To be or not to be', ending with the conclusion that action has disappeared in speculation, occurs, in Shakespeare, in Act III, Sc.i, after several episodes motivating it. Boito transfers this 'scena del dubbio' (scene of doubt) to the very beginning of his second act. It follows so soon on Amleto's encounter with the Ghost that the hero's famous monologue seems to spring from it and

we tend to lose sight of the fact that 'two months have passed and he has done nothing'.[1] The monologue ('Essere o non essere') is followed by a shortened and much paraphrased version of the nunnery scene, undoubtedly one of the weakest, and the only inconsistent point, of the libretto. This strongly dramatic scene of the play, with Ophelia's deceit on the one hand and Hamlet's awareness of it on the other, whilst at the same time conducting his own pretence, is reduced by Boito to a rather pedestrian duologue. The libretto offers no explanation whatever as to Amleto's design 'to put an antic disposition on' in order to conceal his plans for revenge. His sudden change of mood must have seemed inexplicable to those not familiar with the play who, in Boito's time, constituted the majority of the audience. The ensuing short scene, with Polonio announcing the arrival of the company of players, leads to Amleto's speech, based on Shakespeare's 'O, what a rogue and peasant slave am I' (Act II, Sc.ii), in which the hero informs the audience of his intention to unmask the guilty King by watching his reaction during the performance of 'The murder of Gonzago', telling a story similar to Claudio's own. With this speech ends the first part of Boito's Act II.

In the first draft of 'Amleto' (the manuscript version) which differs in many points from both the Genoa and the Scala

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1. Bradley's comment is quoted in Helen Gardner's 'The historical approach: Hamlet'. 'Shakespeare, the tragedies', New Jersey (ed. Alfred Harbage). Prentice Hall, 1964, p.68.

redactions,[1] Amleto's soliloquy is followed by another, interesting episode. A troupe of singer-comedians bursts upon the stage. Boito, in a witty paraphrase of Hamlet's advice to the players to 'suit the action to the word, the word to the action' (Act III, Sc.ii) allows his Amleto to voice his own, Boito's, views on the art of the future jeopardized by the abuses of the singers and the stupidity of the public:

> ... Ma pur ti raccomando - non tempestar le scene
> Cogli acuti furori - dell' ugola feroce,
> A un palo da cuccagna - non ridur la tua voce.
> È ver, 'chi va più in alto - più è sublime e possente.'
> Gridano le platee - d' un' idiota gente.
> Ma mentre tu t'arrampichi - per acchiappar la nota,
> La tuonante parola - riman di senso vuota,
> E l'arte al tocco reo - del vostro abbracciamento,
> Cantori, è profanata - da un grande tradimento.
> ...V' a' nell'arte lontana - un sperato avvenire
> Che lento, lento innalzasi - con luminose spire;
> Badate, le vostr' ugole - potrian tardarne il corso,
> Dio vi tolga l'obbrobrio - di cotanto rimorso.
>
> (... And also, I beg you, do not storm the stage with the violent raging of an angry throat, nor turn your voice into a greased pole. It is true that the audience, a foolish man, shriek acclaim that he 'who rises higher, is more sublime and mighty', but while you surge up to grasp the note your thundering words remain empty, and Art is, at the touch of your rude embrace debased - oh! singers - a great betrayal. There is in the art of tomorrow a promise of hope slowly rising in luminous spirals. Be careful that your throats do not retard its progress - May God keep from you the bitterness of remorse).

All that remains of this reform-motivated episode in the final reduction of 'Amleto' is found in Act II, Sc.ii where, commenting

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1. The variant readings of the libretto are found in De Rensi 'L'Amleto di A.B.', Ancona: La Lucerna, 1927.

on the tragedy being performed before them, the old and the young spectators support the art of the past and of the future, respectively

> Quale incanto! Bravi, bravi,
> Viva l'arte de' nostri avi!
> Noi, più baldi e men devoti,
> Vogliam l'arte dei nepoti.
>
> (What a wonder! Bravi, bravi,
> viva the art of our ancestors! -
> We, more bold and less devout
> hail the art of our descendents).

The play-within-the play scene (Act II, Sc.ii) is largely based on Shakespeare's, but with the ensuing episode Boito introduces an innovation: another ensemble scene, again so cleverly planned musically and dramatically as to fit into the design of the whole without interfering with the development of the plot. Claudio, Gertrude, Amleto and Ofelia, speaking in an undertone while Luciano's monologue is being delivered, reveal the passions by which they are moved. This scene, closing in noise and confusion after the flight of the terrified King, is a stroke of genius and provides a climactic ending to Act II.

The deviation of the musical drama from the play is sharply manifested in Boito's Act III, constructed in two parts. The first presents, besides the King's prayer scene, (Shak. III, iii) highly important incidents from Shakespeare Act III, Sc.iv. - e.g. the dialogue between Hamlet and his mother; the murder of Polonius and the last appearance of the Ghost to Hamlet in the Queen's closet. The second part contains the episode of Ophelia's madness (Shakespeare, Act IV, Sc.v) and death. The King's prayer scene

offered a convenient beginning for Boito's third act. The scene, evolved from the last two lines (given to Claudius) of Shakespeare's Act III, Sc.iii

> My words fly up, my thoughts remain below;
> Words without thoughts never to Heaven go.

is beautifully realized. Claudio attempts to repeat the Lord's Prayer, but repeatedly breaks down and flies in terror.

> O Padre nostro, - che sei nel cielo,
> Sii benedetto, - nel tuo splendor...
> PREGAN LE LABBRA, - MA SON DI GELO ANIMA E COR.
> Venga il tuo regno - e sulla terra
> Si compia l'alta - tua volontà
> AH! CHE UN DEMONIO - PEL CRIN M'AFFERRA.
> PIETÀ, PIETÀ!
> Ne dona il pane - quotidiano,
> O Padre Santo, - dolce Sovran...
> DI SANGUE LORDA - HO ANCOR LA MANO
> E PREGO UN PAN!!
> Perdona al tristo - le sue peccata
> Com'ei perdona - agli offensor...
> CIEL! LA MIA MORTE - HO QUI SEGNATA.
> PIETÀ, SIGNOR!

> (Our Father - which art in Heaven
> Blessed be thou - in thy splendour
> THE LIPS DO PRAY - BUT HEART AND SOUL ARE ICY COLD
> Thy kingdom come - thy will be done
> In earth...
> AH! A FIEND IS SNATCHING AT MY HAIR
> HAVE MERCY ON ME!
> Give us this day - our daily bread
> O holy father! Sweet king!
> MY HANDS ARE STAINED WITH BLOOD
> AND I PRAY FOR BREAD.
> Forgive the sinner his trespasses.
> As he forgives them that trespass against him
> HEAVEN! I HAVE SIGNED MY DEATH!
> LORD, HAVE MERCY UPON ME.)

After this the action follows Shakespeare closely up to the murder of Polonio, whose role is reduced by Boito to a subsidiary one. The Queen's closet scene finds its prototype in Shakespeare

(Act III, Sc.iv) but is much abbreviated and to say the least, ineffective. The dialogue between Hamlet and the Queen is, in the tragedy, one of the most stirring scenes. Hamlet, after denouncing Claudius, urges his mother to repent her incestuous marriage and abandon the King. In his extended, most effective passages, he passes through a gamut of contradictory emotions ranging from bitter contempt to deference:

> You are the Queen, your husband's brother wife
> And - would it were not so! you are my mother....
> ll.16.17

> ... So, again, good night -
> I must be cruel only to be kind, ll.178.9

from rage, to gentle persuasion:

> Nay but to live
> In the rank sweat of an enseamed bed
> Stew'd in corruption... ll.91.3

> O, throw away the worser part of it (the heart)
> And live the purer with the other half.
> Good night: but go not to my Uncle's bed.
> ll.157.9

Boito's Amleto, stripped of the conflicting aspects of his personality is reduced to little more than a melodramatic shadow of himself. His aria 'O re Ladron3', founded on Shakespeare's lines 'A murderer and a villain' and 'A king of shreds and patches' (ll.97 and 103) is but a poor substitute for the intensely emotional Shakespearean original. As in Shakespeare the Ghost appears again to Hamlet, in the Queen's closet, to whet his 'blunted purpose'. The first part of Boito's Act III ends with the Queen's outburst of rage and passion:

> Ah! che alfine all' empio scherno...

which has no counterpart in Shakespeare.

The second part of the act reaches a higher degree of artistic merit. Apart from its admirable dramatic construction and the superb characterization of Ofelia, it contains the most excellent specimens of poetry ever before written for a libretto.

The scene opens outside the castle; the rumbles of Laerte's revolt against the King are heard from afar, accompanying the entire scene of Ofelia's madness - the surrounding unrest being the concomitant of her inner disorder. The dialogue between Laerte and the King, taken from Shakespeare's Act IV, Sc.v., contains only the essential exchange of words necessary to the unfolding of the action. Ofelia, driven to madness by the loss of her father and by unrequited love, appears on the stage singing lyric upon lyric - a symptom of her pathetic state. She begins with a requiem for her father's death:

> La bara involta
> D'un drappo nero....
>
> (The bier, enwrapped
> in a black pall....)

which is an elaboration of Ophelia's short passage beginning

> They bore him barefaced on the bier (Act IV, Sc.v.).

The following song, characterized by a sudden change in the metrical scheme:

> Ma quando sarem giunti al camposanto
> E che ci avran levato il bruno manto...
>
> (As soon as we will reach the cemetery
> and, after having lifted the dark cloth...)

is related to the passage in Shakespeare in which Ophelia speaks the language of the flowers. (Act IV, Sc.v.) After the exit the King and Laerte, Ofelia, left alone, moves towards the waters of a running stream singing a sad tune about her unhappy love. Boito's beautiful lines:

Amleto! Amleto! chi parlò d'Amleto?
Cala quieto - vespero; la brezza
È una carezza, - un bacio, una favella;
La brezza è quella - che cantò quel nome....
... Ei mi dicea: "Va! fatti monachella!...
Va! fatti monachella! va! le anella
Del tuo capo recidi" ed io non volli
(Me lassa!) udir la parola profonda!
Ed or men vò co' sospir tronchi e folli...
Per troppo amor della mia chioma bionda.

(Amleto! Amleto! who pronounced this name?
The day sets quietly - the breeze is
a caress, a kiss - or is a voice?
It was, perhaps, the breeze which sang that name...
Go to a nunnery, Go! and cut your curly hair.
I did not heed (alas!) his sound advice.
I am now wandering with dementest sighs
For having loved too much my golden hair.)

which seem to carry already the music within themselves, largely due to the mid- and end-line rhymes, still further intensify the poignancy of the scene. The drowning of Ophelia is recounted, in Shakespeare, in the Queen's powerfully evocative passage beginning with:

There is a willow grows aslant a brook... (Act IV, Sc.vii).

Shakespeare often relies on the evocative power of his language to conjure up scenes of action, landscape, atmosphere. Boito gives a theatrical extension to the episode of Ophelia's death. She disappears among the weeping willows singing a willow song,

traditionally associated with unhappy love:

Ahimè! chi piange? è il salice,
Che piange, e piange tanto
Che l'acqua del suo pianto
Formò questo ruscel...

(Alas! who weeps? It is the willow
which weeps; it weeps so much
that the waters of its tears
gave birth to this brook...)

After a while her body, surrounded by flowers, appears floating on the water of the brook. Boito's stage instructions state simply: Moonlight. Curtain. All the passages given to Ofelia in this superbly dramatic scene rank among Boito's highest poetical achievements. The metres, varying continually, convey the sensation of her innermost anxiety and distraction which Shakespeare obtained by abrupt alternation between prose and verse, speaking and singing. As regards dramatic technique, it is illustrative of Boito's understanding of the requirement of the operatic stage that he was successful, here, in enhancing the pathos inherent in the tragic figure of Ofelia and her no less tragic fate by means of the suppression of all the episodes of the original Shakespeare which, in an operatic context, could have distracted attention from the character central to this scene.

For the last act of Amleto it is advisable to follow the Genoa version which represents Boito's original intention; the Scala reduction of the libretto, absurdly mutilated, should not be considered in a critical evaluation. In the Genoa version the fourth and final act, divided into two parts, follows Shakespeare's

construction very closely. The first part of the act is built up of three episodes, each with its own atmosphere but in connected mood. The first episode, which begins with the grave-digger's macabre humoresque is constructed as a discussion between them and Amleto. Amleto's address to Yorick's skull:

> Ahimè!
> Povero Yorick! mel rammento io pure
> Giovial collega e mattamente gaio...
>
> (Alas, poor Yorick! I knew him,
> a fellow of infinite jest, of most excellent fancy.)

harking back to Amleto's youth, is an intact, transference from Shakespeare. It is suddenly interrupted by Ofelia's funeral procession, the peculiar effect of which is produced by the contrast between the deeply felt 'Oremus pro ea' whispered by the crowd and the 'Mors tua, vita mea' of the grave-diggers, cynically echoing it. The third episode is the well-known struggle between Hamlet and Laerte in Ophelia's grave, which reaches its climax both in Shakespeare and Boito in the hero's cry of passion:

> I loved Ophelia: forty thousand brothers
> Could not, with all their quantity of love,
> Make up my sum -
>
> (Io quella morta, amai più che l'amor di mille e mille
> Fratelli insiem!)

In the second part of the act the scene changes to the hall of the Royal Palace where the duel between Amleto and Laerte before the King, the Queen and the courtiers is followed by the final catastrophe. The only important alteration is the suppression of the scene containing the entry of Fortinbras, the

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successor to the Danish throne, and the removal of Hamlet's body with military rites - the close of Shakespeare's tragedy. The close relation between the opening and the end of 'Hamlet' has been pointed out in the most recent criticism. Helen Gardner,[1] for instance, remarks that the play, beginning with sentries at their watch being relieved, ends with a soldier's laying to rest - he too being relieved from the burden of life. Boito read the tragedy as a revenge play - a one-sided interpretation which helped to reduce the complexity of the play and also, in some measure, some of the inconsistencies in the development of the plot and of Hamlet's character. He deleted Shakespeare's prologue scene (and therefore, logically, the last scene which is related to it) also symbolic of the mystery and darkness of Hamlet's world which in Boito is not much emphasized. He too, however, anticipating the modern critical approach, gave to his 'Amleto' a cyclical structure which was responsible for the perfect symmetry and balance of the 'musical tragedy', as he called it. The setting and dramatic structure of the opening and the ending is, in the Genoa version, the same. Amleto is first seen amidst the hollow glitter and pomp of Claudio's court - a solitary figure dressed in an 'inky cloak', mark of his grief for his father's death, of his melancholic disposition and, possibly too, of his being an 'ambassador of death,' according to

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1. Gardner, H., op. cit., pp. 68-9.

G. Wilson Knight's definition.[1] In his very first soliloquy, opening with the lament that the Almighty would not forgive self-slaughter, Amleto reveals his thought of giving up the battle of life. He joins in the toast led by Claudio and punctuated by the courtiers' shouts of 'E gloria al re', cursing the King and the Queen to death. In circumstances similar to that of the opening - a magnificent court scene in which the Brindisi led by Claudio is accompanied by the reiterated acclamations of the courtiers - the King and the Queen meet their death and Amleto, after having accomplished his revenge is at last relieved, through Laerte's mortal stroke, from the burden of life.

Unfortunately, when the opera was revived at La Scala in 1871 for a single disastrous performance, this second part of the act was suppressed. The murder of the King was taken into the graveyard scene - an arbitrary deviation, not only from Shakespeare but from Boito's original design, which brings the drama to too rapid a close leaving the plot unsolved.

We do not know the reason for this suppression but it might have been because of the limited stamina of the public of Milan which even 'as late as the 1900s had not yet grown inured to the length of Wagnerian opera.'[2] Boito, in his artistic integrity, must have viewed the shortening of his tragedy as a humiliating surrender to the taste of that public he had thought himself able

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1. Quoted in Gino Matteo's Introduction to Hamlet. New York: AIRMONT Classic Series, 1965. p.XXIII.

2. Carner, M., op. cit., p.133.

to educate. He was never to achieve his ambition in this respect, Mefistofele and Nerone, which he conceived as the culmination of his artistic intention being destined for similar emasculation.

CHAPTER II

UN TRAMONTO and LA FALCE

Boito's second libretto - the eclogue Un tramonto (A sunset) - is a small scale, unpretentious work in one act. The poem by Emilio Praga, which prefaces it, is intended as the programme for the descriptive instrumental prologue and also introduces the action of the play. The scene, set at autumn sunset, is a woodland glade close to the legendary Avellana spring, in the Apennines. The time is the Middle Ages. The shepherdess Dori, crouched against the wall of a sheep-fold, comments on the end of the storm which has mercilessly battered the trees of the forest. Her beautiful and vaguely Arcadian speech is punctuated by reiterated sounds of distant hunting horns. She sings a love-song and, whilst musing over its words, gazes at the trees as if hoping for her dreams to become reality. A page-boy, who wanders through the forest having lost himself during the storm which has dispersed his hunting party, appears to Dori, asking for help. She shows him the way back but he, fascinated by her charm and kindness, returns to her. The sound of the horns, the stamping of the horses' hoofs come nearer and nearer but the hunting game, with its joyful excitement, no longer attracts him. On hearing the bell of a distant church ringing the Angelus, Dori and the page kneel down in prayer whilst the last ray of sunlight suddenly flares up on the horizon.

Un tramonto with its inconsistent plot, and lack of action, its unsophisticated symbolism and rather naive allegorical pretentions, is undoubtedly the weakest of Boito's libretti. There are, however, many beautiful passages, especially those given to Dori, which reveal a poetic standard far superior to that of the majority of the Italian librettists of the time.

A finer example of a one-act libretto is represented by La Falce (The Scythe), a kind of symphonic poem dramatized by a lengthy scene constructed in two opposing parts: the first tragic and the second idyllic. An opening instrumental section describes the battle between the Mahometans and the idolaters fought at Bedr, in the second year of the Hegira. As the curtain rises, Zohra, an Arabian girl, is seen wandering through a desert place mourning for those who had died in the battle and invoking death for herself also. Seid, a mower who, carrying a scythe appears to her in the darkness, is believed by her to be Azrael, the cruel and invincible Angel of Death. She eagerly surrenders to him but Seid reveals his true identity. Life and love eventually triumph. The youth and the maiden, wrapped in the same mantle, make their way towards the desert transfigured with happiness. The finale, in the form of a duet, is based upon a song given out by a caravan moving off into the distance.

The oriental setting of the story, the atmosphere of unreality which pervades it, the warm tones of the picture, make of this libretto an extremely attractive work, beautifully suited to the dreamy and gentle art of Catalani, for whom it was prepared.

CHAPTER III

ERO E LEANDRO

By common consent Ero e Leandro (Hero and Leander) is, with the possible exception of Iram, and Basi e bote, the best of Boito's minor libretti. The care with which it is written; the scholarly precision with which the elaborate setting of each act is described and the wealth of stage directions, clearly reveal Boito's intention to conform to those principles of librettistic reform to which he adhered. With Ero e Leandro , conceived and written at the same time as the re-arrangement of Mefistofele , Boito seems to revert to the ideals of the Florentine Camerata who, in search for classical purity, stressed simplicity and brevity as the constants of Greek art. The libretto which, in a true seventeenth century tradition begins with a lyrical Prologue, is concise; the plot, revolving around three characters, is simple and direct. Boito draws the basic story-line from classical sources - among them, an apocryphal poem by Musaios.[1] Whilst the libretto was originally written in two acts, it was re-written in a three act version preceeded by a Prologue for Bottesini in1879, and later modified in 1897, for Mancinelli . The Mancinelli version is the official form published in 'Tutti gli scritti'. My comments refer to it.

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1. Boito may have also known the melodramma bearing the same title written by A. Di Benedetto and set to music by Ferdinando Paër in 1794.

The story runs as follows: In the Thracian town of Sestos, on the European shore of the Hellespont, the celebrations for the Festival of Aphrodite are in progress. Amidst the rejoicing of an exultant crowd, Leandro, a young man of Abydos - a town on the opposite Asian shore of the strait - is proclaimed the victor of the athletic games held in honour of the Goddess of Love. Songs of praise are sung by the chorus whilst he receives the wreath of laurel from the hands of Ero, the most beautiful among Aphrodite's priestesses. Addressing her Leandro sings to the lyre the charming Anacreontea on the mischievous nature of Cupid (masterly translated and adapted by Boito). Ero e Leandro fall in love with each other, provoking the furious jealousy of Ariofarne, Archon of Thrace and King of the Sacrifices - a character introduced by Boito into the story as the embodiment of the overriding power of Evil.

. .ofarne lusts after Ero (Act II) but she disdainfully rejects his advances, rather choosing to spend the rest of her life secluded in the Tower of the Virgin, placed in the middle of the Hellespont. Leandro, however, succeeds in reaching his beloved, swimming the Hellespont nightly, guided by a orch which she places upon the tower. One night, (Act III) during a fearful storm, Leandro, on hearing Ariofarne's steps approaching, casts himself down from the tower into the rough sea and is swept away by the waves. At the sight of Leandro's body, which the waves have carried to the European shore, Ero dies. Ariofarne's cry of rage, as he bends over the dead girl is muffled by the song of the chorus which,

with a few lines of comment on the death of the two young lovers, brings the story to an end. 'Ero e Leandro' is, if not Boito at his best, a remarkably fine, well organized work in which its author makes the most of the dramatic possibilities inherent in the mythological episode. In the first act (Il tempio di Venere), exciting and full of action, everything - singing, dancing, grouping of forms and colours - is designed to appeal to the imagination. The act is most effective from a dramatic point of view. The second act (L'Afrodisio), with its somewhat melodramatic conflict of character, is negligible. The third act (La Torre della Vergine) is, both dramatically and poetically, masterful. It opens with an offstage chorus (La notte diffonde) commenting on the enchanting beauty of the night. Ero sits at her tower window waiting for Leandro. She is in pensive mood. The uneasiness in her mind finds a counterpart in her speech, illustrated by the insistent note created by the mid-line rhymes of the endecasyllables:

Quand'ei la prima volta qui m'apparve
Col passo delle larve (e avea le stille
Nelle pupille a carità sudài),
Mi disse: - Sette stadi d'alto mare
Mi vietan d' baciare il tuo bel viso,
Ma in cuore ho fiso di varcarli, solo
Che m'asseconde e il volo fra le spume
Diriga un lume dalla torre....

(When here he appeared to me for the first time
As silent as a shadow (how touching
were the tears I saw in his eyes!)
He told me: 'Seven stadia of deep sea
Prevent me from kissing your sweet face.
Give me your help, and I will boldly cross them
If, from the tower, you will light my way).

The static effect of this lengthy passage is counteracted by the ominous interjections of the off-stage chorus. She recalls her clandestine wedding to Leandro in an exquisite passage which is a faultless translation of a section of the poem by Musaios:

E fûr compiute poi le dolci nozze;
Ma al segreto connubio alcun poeta
Non inneggiò, ne's'allegrò per teda
La stanza marital nè per ghirlanda....

(We secretly were wedded.
There was no poet to sing a bridal song,
No garlands, nor bright torches, to make
the hymeneals gay....)

The dreamy duet in which Ero e Leandro express their hope to find some distant place 'Andrem sovra i flutti profondi') where they may be happy together, is one of the best instances of lyric poetry written by Boito. It is interrupted by a frightening thunder-clap which brings the two lovers abruptly back to reality. The increasing tension of the ensuing section culminates in Ero's speech which, with its broken, disconnected lines, conveys well her frenzied fear and agony of mind:

.... O mio Leandro ... fuggi...
No... non fuggir ... Là ... l'uragano... resta...
E qua... Ariofarne... Là l'idra... qua... il mostro...

(.... Oh! my Leandro ... flee'...
... No ... remain! There ... the storm ... remain ...
And here ... Ariofarne ... There ... the hydra ...
here... the cruel beast ...)

After the stormy climax of the final scene a beautiful effect of contrast is provided by the intervention of the chorus which, in concluding the story, recaptures the tone of serene beauty and the atmosphere of remoteness established in the Prologue.

CHAPTER IV

LA GIOCONDA

'La Gioconda' is from a literary point of view of the least value and yet the most successfully popular of Boito's minor libretti. It is 'an exercise in French grand-opera, with a show stopping aria for every vocal category and plenty of variant opportunities for confrontations and tableaus'.[1] It was well suited to the ebullient and somewhat crude inspiration of Amilcare Ponchielli - who made of it his masterpiece - but has been often abused and dismissed by the majority of the critics on the ground of its bad taste and melodramatic absurdities. Doubtless, some of the verses, bombastic and rhetorical, are in no way superior to those of Somma, Solera, Piave or Cammarano. As regards dramatic situations and scenical organization 'La Gioconda' seems to me to be, however, a remarkably effective piece of work. Boito was not responsible for the absurdity of the plot. It is known that the libretto was founded on the five acts prose-drama by Victor Hugo 'Angelo, Tyran de Padoue', a farraginous, dark play which had, however, had an enthusiastic reception when first performed in Paris at La Comédie Francaise, on 28th April, 1835.[2]

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1. Smith, P., cit., p.335.

2. The Russian composer César Cui was also attracted by this same story. His 'Angelo' had its première in St. Petersburg on 13th February, 1876. Ponchielli's 'La Gioconda' was first given at La Scala a few weeks later, on 8th April.

The manner in which Boito, by way of important modifications, contrived to make an intelligent and coherent libretto out of such a story is, unquestionably, masterful. After eliminating, together with some exceedingly brutal scenes, all the political and historical events which played so large a part in Hugo's play (and did indeed distract the attention from the essential plot), Boito concentrated on the characters and on the central dramatic and emotional situations, stressing the poignancy of the human drama. He also changed the scene from Padua to Venice of the seventeenth century and cast the story in four acts, each with its own title: 'La bocca del Leone' (The Lion's mouth); 'Il Rosario' (The rosary); 'Ca d'oro (The house of Gold); 'Il Canal Orfano' (The Orfano Canal).

In Act I, the curtain rises to reveal a crowd of gay Venetians who, singing a lively chorus (Feste e pane - Festivities! Bread!) gather in the courtyard of the Palazzo Ducale to celebrate a regatta on the Canal Grande. The Cathedral of San Marco stands in the background and one of the notorious Lion's mouths, into which anyone could put a note secretly denouncing a fellow citizen to the Inquisition, is also prominent. Barnaba, a Jago-Scarpia like character, observes the crowd, pretending also to be in festive mood. His opening: 'E danzan su lor tombe' (They dance upon their own graves) immediately reveals the villany of his soul. He then informs the audience of his passion for Gioconda, a beautiful and popular ballad singer who now appears leading by the hand La Cieca, her blind mother. Repulsing the attentions of Barnaba,

Gioconda leaves her mother seated on the steps of the Cathedral whilst she goes in search of her lover, Enzo Grimaldo - a Genoese nobleman who has been forbidden to come to Venice and is there disguised as a ship's captain. He was once engaged - and still loves - Laura Adorno, the wife of the haughty Alvise Badoero, leader of the Inquisition. The Badoeros arrive just in time to save La Cieca who Barnaba has denounced as a witch. Barnaba's action is part of the scheme which he had devised in order to force Gioconda to submit to his desire. With the appearance of Alvise Badoero and his wife who, splendidly dressed and accompanied by an armed guard, descend the staircase of the Giants to the Courtyard of the Ducal Palace,Boito provides a magnificent visual moment which Ponchielli's music supports well. La Cieca, in gratitude, gives to Laura her treasured rosary with the prophetic words: 'A te questo rosario..... accettalo; ti porterà fortuna;' (I offer you this rosary... Take it; it will bring you good fortune.) The rosary plays a cardinal role in the development of the plot. (Ponchielli, in his musical setting, appropriately uses the theme given to it in the Prelude, pitted against the dark motive of the villain, Barnaba, who is at the end of the opera to murder the blind woman. The same theme is also used extensively, throughout the work.) Enzo, who happens to be present recognizes Laura and she him. Barnaba, knowing their story, thinks he can get Gioconda in his power if he proves her lover to be faithless. He arranges a meeting between Enzo and Laura on Enzo's brigantine

that very evening. He then dictates to a public letter-writer a revelation of Laura's infidelity to be put in the Lion's Mouth for delivery to her husband. From behind a column Gioconda overhears the dictation but does not, however, know for whom the message is intended nor the name of the woman who Enzo is to meet. Barnaba's monologue, uttered whilst he throws the accusation into the Lion's Mouth, is a wonderful passage of poetry in which Boito, in a set of images characterized by contrast, conjures up the splendour and cruelty of seventeenth century Venice:

O monumento,
Reggia e bolgia dogale! Atro portento!
Gloria di questa e delle età future ...
... Gioia tu alterni e orror con vece occulta:
Quivi un popolo esulta
Quivi un popolo muor.

(Oh, monument!
Kingdom and 'bolgia' of the doges! Dark portent!
Glory of this age and of those to come...
Joy and horror alternates according to a mysterious law;
here a people rejoices, here a people dies.)

The finale of the act, intensely dramatic and full of movement perhaps, the finest scene in the whole opera. Maskers enter and dance amidst the happy crowd. The riotous Baccanale is interrupted by the sound of Vespers issuing from San Marco. An off-stage organ and chorus singing the 'Angelus Domini' prepare the way for a religious choral mood on stage. Gioconda's despairing 'O Dio!! Cuore! dono funesto!' (Oh God! Oh, my heart! A fatal gift) rises above the chorus whilst she - hand in hand with her mother - very, very slowly crosses the courtyard toward the church.

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Joy and horror alternates according to a mysterious law;
here a people rejoices, here a people dies.)

The finale of intensely dramatic and full of movement is, perhaps, the scene in the whole opera. Maskers enter and dance amidst the happy crowd. The riotous Baccanale is interrupted by the sound of Vespers issuing from San Marco. An off-stage organ and chorus singing the 'Angelus Domini' prepare the way for a religious choral mood on stage. Gioconda's despairing 'O Dio!! Cuore! dono funesto!' (Oh God! Oh, my heart! A fatal gift) rises above the chorus whilst she - hand in hand with her mother - very, very slowly crosses the courtyard toward the church.

The second act, which takes place on an island of the Fusina Lagoon beside which Enzo's brigantine is moored, opens with a vivacious sailor's chorus. Barnaba, disguised as a fisherman, sings a lovely barcarolle 'Pescator, affonda l'esca' (Fisherman, sink your bait). Then, in rapid succession come: Enzo's most famous aria 'Cielo e mar' (Sky and sea); Laura's and Enzo's love scene culminating in the ecstatic duet 'Laggiù nelle nebbie remote' (Over there ... in the distant mists); Laura' prayer 'Stella del marinar' (Star of the mariner) and the dramatic duet 'L'amo come il fulgor del creato' (I love him like the splendour of creation) between Gioconda and Laura. This represents the climax of the act. What follows is extremely dynamic: overcome with jealousy, Gioconda is about to stab her rival when, at the sight of the rosary which Laura lifts imploring help, she recognizes in Laura her mother's rescuer. Gioconda helps Laura to escape, just in time, as Barnaba comes on deck leading the furious Alvise. Rather than yield to the vengeful husband Enzo sets fire to his vessel and all jump overboard. Strange to say, whilst passages of poetical excellence such as the Enzo-Laura duet or Barnaba's monologue 'O monumento' of the first act did not seem to inspire Ponchielli, he was able to turn the pedestrian verse of the duet between Laura and Gioconda into the richest and most effective moment in the whole opera. A fact which, should not 'Otello' and 'Falstaff' prove that the very reverse is the truth, seems to provide fuel for those commentators who claim that it is unnecessary

for a librettist to be a poet, even going so far as to affirm that good poetry, with its intricate rhythms and musical overtones, can possibly interfere with the free development of music.

Act III, in two parts, is laid in the palace of Alvise Badoero - the Cà d'oro. The first part, is set in a private chamber of the palace and begins with Alvise's uninspired and rhetorical monologue 'Si, morir ella de'! (Yes, to die is her fate), uttered against the sound of distant dance music. The nobleman, after deciding to eliminate Laura, who has deceived him, sends for her to come to his room. When Laura enters, dressed to receive his guests, he hands her a phial of poison, imposing suicide upon her. She must drink it before the lilting serenade 'La gaia canzon' (The merry song), which they hear through the open window, is ended. As soon as Alvise has departed, Gioconda slips in. The gay off-stage chorus provides the background for the scene in which Gioconda persuades Laura to drink a sleeping potion instead of the poison, telling her rival she will save her. When Alvise returns, he finds his wife apparently dead. The second part of the act, laid in the magnificent hall of the Ca' d'Oro, is a sumptuous tableau full of animation and dramatic intensity as well. Alvise greets the guests he has invited to witness the spectacular Dance of the Hours, symbolizing the eternal struggle between Light and Darkness. Suddenly Barnaba appears dragging in La Cieca, whom he has caught praying beside Laura. A tolling bell is heard. On learning of the supposed death of Laura, Enzo, who is among the masked guests

discloses his identity. ('Il tuo proscritto io sono, Enzo Grimaldo' - I am the man you outlawed, Enzo Grimaldo.) In the general confusion Gioconda, in order to save the life of Enzo, steals up to Barnaba promising him that she will yield to him in exchange for his help. He agrees, but seizes her mother as a hostage whilst Alvise, dramatically drawing back a curtain, reveals the motionless Laura to his horrified guests. This scene, with its massing of colours and of action and its superbly climactic 'concertato finale' ('D'un vampiro fatal ... Già ti vedo... Scorre il pianto ... Se lo salvi' - Of a fatal vampire ... I already see you ... Tears are running down - If you save him), given to the whole company, must be accounted, as Lawrence Robert suggests 'as one of the glories of Italian opera'.[1]

For the conclusion of La Gioconda Boito discards all external stage effect, concentrating on the inward drama. He sets the scene in Gioconda's home, a ruined palace on the Giudecca island. She sits alone, awaiting Laura. With nothing to live for, the unfortunate heroine sings the tragic aria 'Suicidio!' (Suicide!) filled with the despairing thoughts of approaching death. Putting her feeling aside, she helps Enzo and Laura to escape. (The poignancy of the scene is musically heightened by two affecting reminiscences: the off-stage serenade which was heard through the window during the Laura - Gioconda duet in Act III and a reprise of the 'rosary' motive, associated with the memory of La Cieca whose life has been saved by Laura). After bidding the lovers farewell, Gioconda suddenly remembers her pact with Barnaba.

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1. Lawrence, L. 'La Gioconda' in Introduction to Opera', New York: Barnes and Noble, 1961, p.104.

He appears, in fact, to claim his reward. Defiantly facing him, Gioconda stabs herself to the heart, leaving the villain to scream in vain that he has murdered her mother.

'La Gioconda' is, undoubtedly, a drama of coarse emotional situations - absurdly melodramatic, if we commit the error of judging it by present-day standards. It actually contains all the ingredients which appealed to the tastes of the fans of the romantic drama and, whatever we think of the story, we must admit that the libretto, characterized by swift dramatic strokes and a close sequence of self-explanatory situations, is unusually well constructed. The rapidity of the dramatic action tends, perhaps, to override the characters who are, in the whole, sketchily delineated. Barnaba, although stereotyped, is a much more sober and, to a degree, a more credible version, of the original, truculent Homodei of Hugo's play. Gioconda, drawn always in strong colours but with remarkable variety and completeness is, by far, the best characterization. She may remain, in essence, a conventional romantic heroine, but she is a strikingly effective operatic figure - an obvious model for Puccini's Tosca and Cilea's Adriana Lecouvreur.[1]

Boito's passion for contrast is to be seen at various levels: in the simultaneous suggestion of contrasting scenes and emotional

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1. Mosco Carner, in his biography on Puccini, suggests a possible influence of Boito's libretto 'La Gioconda', upon Sardou's drama 'Tosca' - See op. cit: pp. 23; 330-1.

situations; in the duel between Good and Evil, as embodied in the antithesis Gioconda - Barnaba and, in a less obvious and more subtle way, in the conflicting aspects of Gioconda's personality as well as in the tragic dualism of her human condition:

> Canta l'amore e il giubilo
> Questo da te si vuole
> S'anco nel sen ti soffoca
> L'onta e il livore e il duol.[1]
>
> (Sing of love and joy...
> this is required of you -
> even if suffocating from shame,
> hatred and grief.)

---

1. Boito wished this passage, which does not however appear in the present version of the opera, to be inserted in Act III, after the Dance of the Hours. See 'Tutti gli scritti', p.1533.

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CHAPTER V

SEMIRA and PIER LUIGI FARNESE

Again, the theme of the struggle between Good and Evil, roughly represented by pitting conflicting characters against each other, returns in Boito's next two libretti: 'Semira' and 'Pier Luigi Farnese', both lyric tragedies, in four acts. In the first work, Semiramis, the legendary queen of Assyria, renowned for lasciviousness rather than for her beauty and bravery, is somewhat arbitrarily chosen by Boito as the polar character of the evil-minded high priest Zoroastro. The action, which shows a close resemblance to that of 'Ero e Leandro', is set in Babylon. The sensuous atmosphere of that land is splendidly evoked in the first act, depicting the Night of Baalthis. The opening stage directions, running to thirty-two lines, besides being a brilliant descriptive passage in itself, is an instance of the grandeur of Boito's scenical conception. Scenography and choreography remain the only interesting features of this libretto, otherwise so disappointing as to make any detailed consideration superfluous.

Of the four acts, of Semira the first must be reckoned the best. The episode of the love of Ara - the young king of Armenia - for the enemy queen Semira, whom he meets for the first time disguised as a Bride of Baalthis (scenes iii, iv), is well contrived and beautifully framed in choruses - the first, the Magi's chorus 'Languidamente l'etere sospira' (The air exhales languor), opening

the ceremonies in honour of the Goddess Baalthis; the last, ('Sia gloria a Zoroastro' - Glory to Zoroaster) heralding the appearance of Zoroastro, whose impressive apostrophe to the rising sun brings the act to an end. The second act (Il tributo - the tribute) which introduces us to the exalted ceremonial atmosphere of Semira's court, is conceived as an imposing stage spectacle. Choral and choreographic movements play a most important part. (Especially effective, the Almeas' prophane dances and the Dance of the Zodiac in the fourth scene). Against this background of pomp and ceremony develops the main conflict of the story - the one between Ara and Zoroastro, who secretly lusts after Semira (Scene iii). In Scene v Ara, disdainfully, pays his tribute to the haughty, powerful Semira, of course not recognizing in the imperious figure seated on a high throne like a golden idol, the maiden of his dreams. Before the end of the act, Semira, conquered by the power of love, reveals herself to Ara as the 'Bride of Baalthis', provoking the rage of Zoroastro who swears vengeance. The third act (La battaglia - The battle) consists of two parts linked by a symphonic interlude. The first part is devoted to the rebellion of Ara and the consequent battle between the Armenians and the Babylonians. In the second part, Ara is wounded by Zoroastro by means of a poisoned arrow. At Semira's imperious request, the dying hero is taken to her palace. At this point there is a tremendous clash between Semira and Zoroastro, so conventionally and melodramatically depicted however, as to make

the whole scene ludicrous, rather than effective. If the first three acts confronted us with dynamic action, Act IV, laid in Semira's apartment, is largely static. On realizing that she cannot live without Ara, Semira resolves to follow him 'into the azure, shining stillness of the kingdom of souls'. As Zoroastro approaches at the head of a riotous mob, who wants the queen's death, Semira stabs herself. The young lovers die in each other's arms, after recalling 'with accent of supreme ecstasy' the wish formulated at the time of their first meeting, in the intoxicating atmosphere of the Night of Baalthis:

> Vivere un'ora sotto i baci tuoi...
> E sotto i tuoi sospir...
> Un'ora e poi...
> Morir...
>
> (To live an hour with your kisses, your sights of love -
> An hour... and then... to die.)

'Pier Luigi Farnese', is a semi-historical libretto, skilfully conceived, although, in my opinion, only partially successful. The abduction of a nun, an attempted rape, poison, orgies, conspiracies and intrigue are the ingredients of the melodramatic story which displays a certain affinity with that of 'La Gioconda'. The historical background is Charles V's invasion of Northern Italy, resulting in the consolidation of Spanish egemony over the peninsula. The libretto has variety and liveliness, but is flawed by a fundamental weakness in the treatment of the characters who seem to exist not as individuals but as the means to create dramatic situations. Pier Luigi Farnese

(1503 - 47), duke of Parma and Piacenza - an historical figure and a typical Renaissance ruler - is presented by Boito as a ruthless despot and a libertine - the stereotyped, sinister villain of the melodramatic stage. His antagonist, Gianni Anguissola, is a singularly colourless, unattractive hero whilst Donata is the model heroine, embodying all the virtues. The only admirable characterization is that of Grillo, a pert, lighthearted adolescent who throws some light on the atmosphere of unrelieved gloom, which pervades the story. The first act (La statua di neve - The snow statue), very exciting from a dramatic point of view, opens in a delightfully unconventional manner in the courtyard of an ancient cloister in Piacenza. A small crowd of townspeople and a troop of acrobats watch in amusement, and with lively comments, a gigantic snowman bearing a striking resemblance to the hated Pier Luigi Farnese. The author of the statue involved in putting the finishing touches to his work, is hailed by the crowd as the 'Michelangelo of the snow'. He is the leader of the troop of acrobats, the boy nicknamed Grillo (the cricket). Among the crowd is Gianni Anguissola, a descendant of a noble family whose power had been usurped by the Farneses, and three of his friends. Their conversation discloses, besides details of the historical and political situation, that a conspiracy is afoot against Pier Luigi Farnese. There ensues a lively little episode in which Grillo introduces himself and his companions to Gianni. His speech: 'Saltando la libera mia vita

guadagno' (My jumps earn me bread and freedom) so spontaneously fresh and joyful, ends with an irresistible 'Saltarello':

Svelto, snello, aguscia, sbalza,
Scorri, sfuggi, salta, salta....

(Svelte! slender! dart! jump! run! frisk! jump! jump'), the hopping and sonorous effect of which is enhanced by the skilful use of allitteration. Conquered by the exuberance of Grillo, Gianni conceives and expresses the idea, eagerly accepted by the volcanic adolescent, of making him his accomplice. A sudden change in mood is brought about as a procession of nuns on their way to the cloister, crosses the stage singing a chaste and serene melody ('Un salmo algelico, s'aggira e canta' - An angelic psalm is heard around us). Among them is Donata, Gianni's former fiancée who, believing him in exile, is to enter the convent that very day. Against the chanting of the nuns, piously answered by the 'Oremus, Domine, in te speravi' of the crowd, are outlined the utterances of Gianni and the other conspirators, unfolding their plans. This scene is constructed with consummate theatrical skill but what follows - Gianni's and Donata's mutual recognition and the heroine's conflict between love and moral obligation - is dramatically weak. As soon as Donata has entered the convent building and Gianni is led away by his friends, Grillo invites all people on the stage to join him in the destruction of the snowman. With growing excitement the crowd throw snowballs at the image of Pier Luigi Farnese giving vent, half laughing and half howling, to their abhorrence of the tyrant. The entrance of

Pier Luigi Farnese himself, in company with his attendants, brings the bustle to a sudden halt. In a moment the stage is cleared and the impudent Grillo is left alone to face the music. Farnese's rage subsides, however, before the fearless boy who, frivously but effectively, defends himself:

Lo scultor son io
Del vostro serenissimo ritratto.
Perchè offendete uno scultor ducale?
Io v'ho fatto e disfatto,
E se nel primo caso sta il misfatto,
Nell'altro caso ho cancellato il male.

(I am the author of the portrait of Your Serene Highness.
Why do you offend a Caesarean sculptor?
I made your image. I have destroyed it.
If in the first instance lies the crime
See, in the second, I have made up for it).

The final scene of Act I, involving the abduction of Donata from the convent by Pier Luigi Farnese and his attendants, is mere melodramatic rhetoric. It is, however, dramatically functional as, with this incident, the action is rapidly set in motion. The second act (Il Giullar Nero - The black jester) takes place in a magnificent setting in the Hall of the Farnese Castle, turned into a Court theatre. A chorus in praise of the Duke brings to an end the allegorical spectacle splendidly staged by Farnese for the entertainment of his guests. Donata, sumptuously clad in blue and gold - the colours of the Farnese House - defiantly rejects the precious gifts with which she is presented during the course of a solemn ceremony. The tension resulting from the incident is, once again, dissipated by the sudden appearance of

Grillo, who breaks upon the stage through an open window, after having successfully accomplished at Farnese's request, a seemingly impossible act of funambulation. Disguised as a black jester, Gianni Anguissola also gains access to the castle. By means of a clever stratagem, and with the complicity of Grillo, he makes himself recognized by Donata, whose co-operation he needs in order to put his plan into action. In the name of their love for each other and for their country, Gianni asks the hesitating Donata to unlock a hidden door in the Farnese's private room. He informs her that, at a given signal, the conspirators will enter the castle through a secret passage leading to the ducal apartments. Sounds and music heard from behind the curtains of the court theatre indicate that the Farnese's orgy is in full progress. An orgiastic chorus ('Si rida, si palpiti, si vuoti la coppa' - Let us laugh, let us love, let us drink) ends this remarkable act, worked with admirable poetical skill and incomparable dramatic effectiveness. Act III (Volpe e Leone - Fox and Lion) which takes place on the ramparts of the castle, shows the open conflict between Pier Luigi Farnese and Gianni Anguissola, who has revealed his true identity. There is nothing to excite interest in this rather mechanical opposition of characters nor is the preceding scene between Gianni and Donata worthwhile. The inner moral conflict of Donata, who sees her holy obligations as a nun opposed to her love for Gianni, is not convincingly conveyed in her rhetorical utterances. The final scene of the third act is quite animated. From outside

a warlike crowd is heard approaching. Bells ringing, the sounding of the tocsin and trumpet calls, announce that the revolt aimed at overthrowing Farnese has started. Gianni promises the tyrant to save his life in exchange for Donata's freedom. Farnese consents. He will, however, keep Donata as hostage in the besieged castle. Taken all in all, the rather lengthy fourth act (L'Ostaggio - the Hostage), laid in the Duke's apartment, is good, although the loquacity of the characters tends to affect the rapidity with which the drama should be brought to conclusion. Especially Donata's interminable opening monologue, in which she expresses her worries for Gianni's and her own fate, seems to me to flout all laws of dramatic structure. The beautifully polished lines of her aria 'Clessidra, limpida urna dell'ore' (Clepsydra, transparent urn of the hours), if admirable from a poetical point of view, are dramatically inapposite, hardly suggesting feeling of anxiety or anguish. The subsequent scene, showing the conflict between Farnese and Donata, his attempt at raping her, her plea for mercy and, finally, her drinking a phial of poison rather than yield to him, is well constructed. Farnese, admirably depicted in his frenzy of rage and erotic passion, may indeed have provided Puccini's librettists Giacosa and Illica - both close friends of Boito - with the model for Scarpia. Donata's touching distress compels sympathetic pity. The episode is brought to an end by the eruption of Gianni, who urges the dying Donata to flee with him. She explains that she has taken poison to escape the Duke

and dies in his arms. Farnese is murdered by an angry mob whilst shouts of victory seal the end of his tyrannical rule. Gianni's despairing utterance 'Maledizione!' brings the end of the act and the drama.

CHAPTER VI

IRAM

Iram begins the series of Boito's masterpieces. It is a witty and original libretto, beautifully written and artistically conceived. The story is in itself extraordinarily attractive, the handling of the plot masterful and the organization of the libretto close to perfection. The poetry is exquisite and the portrayal of the characters - so far Boito's weakest point - superb. The story about a penniless drunkard who, for a practical joke or 'to make a parable of human vanity',[1] as suggested by Francis Fergusson, is treated for one night as a lord so rich as to satisfy his every desire, is found in the Arabian Nights as well as in later versions which might have been known to Boito. The Arabian Nights is generally indicated as the source of Iram. Notwithstanding the fact that this has been maintained by an authority such as Patrick Smith and that there is no mention of a possible Shakespearean derivation in Winton Dean's exhaustive book Shakespeare in music, I would venture to suggest that Boito's direct source might once again have been Shakespeare, who used the very same tale in his Induction to The Taming of the shrew. Indeed, many details in the story as told by Shakespeare and Boito are too alike to suggest mere coincidence. Like Christopher Sly, Iram is a tinker (in

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1. Fergusson, F. Shakespeare. The Pattern in his carpet. New York: Delacorte Press, 1968, p.49.

Boito, a gypsy tinker) who indulges himself in drinking; like Sly, he is kidnapped by a huntsman lord for a day of luxury: like Sly, he, after a very short resistance, allows himself to be seduced by the allure of aristocratic life and to succumb to the temptation of feminine beauty - in both Shakespeare and Boito, a page in disguise. The scene where the huntsman duke plays the trick on Iram (Act I, Scene ii) and the episode of Iram's awakening in the duke's mansion, (Act II, Scene i) seem to me to be obviously based on Shakespeare's analogous scenes. The opening scene of the libretto appears to be an elaboration of the brief exchange between Sly and Marian Hacket, the 'alewife of Wincot', at the very beginning of the Induction; the second part of Act II, and the whole third act are however Boito's own creation. (In Shakespeare we do not witness Sly's return to reality. We leave him a lord ready to watch the play to be presented by the travelling players. He last speaks a few words after the players' first scene and, for some inexplicable reason, his story is thereafter dropped from the action.)

Like Shakespeare's play Iram *opens outside an alehouse;* the scene is not England but a Bohemian dukedom and the time is the seventeenth century. The tinker Iram, in a very high spirit, is celebrating vintage day amidst a crowd of fellow gypsies inciting him to drink more and more:

Versa! trinca! ciocca! affoga
Nel bicchier!
E tracanna, e ti disfoga
Torna a ber!

(Pour! Drink! Tipple! drown in your pot!
Gulp down, drink your fill, and drink again!

Iram's increasing intoxication gives wings to his imagination, inspiring a passage of kaleidoscopic brilliance (foreshadowing that in Act III, Scene i of Falstaff):

Il mondo è un trillo
Per l'uomo brillo.
Un trillo enorme
Di suoni e forme....
Trilla nel calice
La birra bionda
Trilla nel salice
La molle fronda
Tra l'erba il grillo
Strilla il suo trillo
Trillando tremolano
L'aure sui fior
Trillando palpitano
Le fibre in cor

(To a drunk man
the world is a trill.
An immense trill
of sounds and shapes....
Trills in its glass
the golden beer
Trills in the willow
the supple branch.
Amidst the grass
the cricket chirps
its own trill.
Whilst trilling, quivers
the breeze on the flowers.
Whilst trilling, quivers
the fibres of the heart.)

Boito's extraordinary ear for verbal music is well illustrated in the above quoted excerpt remarkable for the peculiar effect produced upon rhythm by the unusual rhyming scheme and by the skilful use of assonances and alliteration (especially effective are the sonorous vibrations produced by the recurrent vibrant

R sound). It is when confronted with passages like this that we fully realise what Boito was aiming at when in his youthful poetry - and especially in Re Orso; he was experimenting with similar devices. It is unfortunately well-nigh impossible to translate such passages into another language and retain even a modicum of the intended effect. An example of Boito's humour is found in the following episode where the staggering Iram, on realising that his legs are also 'trilling', looks for a support and not finding one conceives the brilliant idea of resorting to leaning on a CANTO FERMO:

DOmine va in cantina
REcipe un'ampia tina
MEsura cinque gotti
FA gorgoglior le botti
SOLfeggerò così
LAudando la tua spina
SIno al novello dì
DOmine va in cantina.

(DOmine, go to the wine cellar
REcipe: an ample winevat;
MEasure five mugs:
FAg at the bubbling tub
SOlmizing in this way:
'LAudable is my bunghole'
SInce now to the new day.
DOmine go to the wine cellar.)

One cannot help but feel that Boito was, in writing the above, aware of Guido d'Arezzo's prayer to St. John, the supposed origin of the entire system of tonic-solfa:

Ut queant laxis Resonare fibris
Mira gestorum Famuli tuorum
Solve polluti Labii reatum
Sancte Johannes .

This 'liturgical' mood is taken up by the spirited 'congregation' which, duly answering Iram, seems eager to produce the maximum of choral effect to the fury of Marianna, the luscious hostess, who breaks upon the merrymakers, indignantly ejecting them. Iram is left alone to face the anger of his fiery lover. Invited by Marianna to choose between herself and a bottle of wine which he has, in the meantime, stolen, Iram, torn by the dilemma, gives vent to his feelings in an amusing speech: 'O sposa, o bottiglia?' (A wife ... or a bottle?), obviously parodying Hamlet's famous monologue of 'To be, or not to be'. After gauging the not easily dismissable advantages of each, Iram finally opts for the bottle. Abandoned by Marianna he, by now dead drunk, falls heavily to the ground. According to Boito's stage directions, Iram's sleep is to be accompanied by sweet music, gradually to be taken over by the sounds of an approaching hunting party. The conversation between the Lord and a huntsman, with which Shakespeare opens the hunting scene, is reduced by Boito to a brief exchange between the Duke and his page Folchetto, and is utilized by him at the beginning of *Iram* Scene ii. Then, Boito departs from Shakespeare by making the Duke express his admiration for Marianna of whom he has caught a glimpse during the hunting game, and by making him and Folchetto improvise a serenade in honour of the lovable rustic beauty. The episode of the finding of the sleeping drunkard shows a close affinity with Shakespeare's. Some of the language of the play is also retained in the libretto. The Lord's idea

of playing the joke on Sly is, in Shakespeare, followed by an extended monologue in which the nobleman explains his plan down to the most minute details. Boito made use of these details for the construction of his second act. Thus, according to the Lord's instruction, the drunken man is to be taken to his 'fairest chamber' and the second act of Iram is laid in the sumptuous golden room of the Duke's mansion. As the curtain rises, we hear an excited whispering, occasionally interrupted by bursts of laughter. We see the sleeping gypsy now 'wrap't in sweet clothes', covered with jewels and with 'rings ... upon his fingers', surrounded by 'brave attendants' ready to obey his commands with a low, submissive reverence. Some of the valets are burning 'sweet wood to make the lodging sweet',[1] whilst the Duke, after asking Folchetto to dress himself 'in all suits like a lady', orders a troop of musicians 'to make a dulcet and a heavenly sound' when Iram wakes. As in Shakespeare, Iram's very first words are an imperious request for a drink. This is followed by his determination to persuade the obsequious attendants that:

> Che Altezza? Io son Iram, ramaio ...
>
> Iram, the tinker - call not me Honour ...)

The ... lines of his subsequent speech 'Dormi? sei desto?' (Do I dream or am I wide awake?), modelled after Shakespeare,

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1. All this is given in Boito's detailed stage directions placed at the beginning of Act II, Scene i. See Tutti gli scritti, p.387.

show him, however, responsive and appreciative:

> Se questo è un sogno, un'estasi
> Iram, più non ti sveglia
> E, se codesta è veglia
> Non voglio più sognar.
>
> (If this is a dream, an ecstasy,
> is better not to wake
> but if this is reality
> I won't dream anymore.)

Finally convinced of being 'a lord, indeed', he accepts his new role, ready for the final and most deceptive temptation of all: the love of a beautiful 'lady'. The beginning of the 'love scene' between Iram and his 'Madam wife' is taken almost verbatim from Shakespeare who, with this episode, ends Sly's story. Boito develops the episode in the most hilarious manner. Folchetto, well usurping the grace, voice, gait and action of a gentlewoman', as forecast by the Lord in Scene i, provokes Iram's coarse attentions. This leads to a brilliant series of exchanges in the course of which Iram receives his first instruction in the necessity of accommodating his ungovernable desires to the rule of courtly love. Being warned that: 'Hard play is low' and 'A gentleman only makes love by means of words', he calls forth his strongest efforts at correctness and courtesy in order not to irritate the fastidious lady. Iram's exit is followed by the entrance of Marianna, who, in despair because of Iram's disappearance, calls upon the Duke for help. Charmed by the grace of the simple country girl, who appears dazzled by the glitter of the court, Folchetto offers her his protection. Taking advantage

of his female attire and pretending to be the Duchess the page lovingly embraces and kisses her. The scene is suddenly brought to an end by the entry of the enraged Duke, soon followed by the appearance of Iram and his retinue. Overjoyed by the sight of Marianna,Iram loses his self-control, much to the consternation of his 'Madam-wife' who takes him to task severely. Marianna, implores the Duke - alias Iram - whom she does not recognise, to help her in finding the lost sweetheart and, finally, to consent to their marriage. Iram is, of course, willing to assist. From the moment he starts exercising his power we may be a little inclined to believe that he is exploiting the situation to his own advantage (and to the distress of the Duke, who ends asking himself 'who, of the two, is the one who has been tricked?'). He promises a hundred sequins to whoever will find Iram 'preferably alive', as suggested by Marianna; then, another hundred are offered to the girl as a proper dowry; as a last homage, he decides to put on Marianna's lovely little hand the Duke's precious sapphire ring which he, Iram, is presently wearing. When, announced by the Court Chamberlain, a group of gypsies enters the room asking for a king to be elected, Iram proposes ... Iram for the vacant throne, thus arousing the enthusiasm of the picturesque crowd. Their vivacity seems to be contagious and the last scene of the act shows us the whole company dancing and singing in a lively Romanesca. This is one of the best and most interesting scenes of the libretto being, besides an eye-catching spectacle in itself, a very happy

essay in characterization through verse.

Marianna's sprightly lines:

> Danziamo, o zingari, la romanesca,[1]
> Moviam dei cimbali la gaia tresca,
> E sovra i languidi suoni amorosi
> Il piè riposi, poi sciolga il vol...
>
> (Let's dance, o gypsies, the Romanesca
> Let the gay cymbals start their intrigues
> Let's rest upon the languorous sounds
> then, let's abandon ourselves to the flight...)

convey an impression of spontaneous joy, of delightfully feminine charm and exuberance.

The inspired and vigorous verse of the Duke:

> La danza è un'estasi che l'alme adesca
> È un volo, un impeto fascinator
> Danziamo, o zingari, la romanesca,
> Finchè l'anelito ci affoga il cuor...
>
> (Dancing is an ecstasy which seduces the soul
> It is a flight, a fascinating impetus.
> Let's dance, o gypsies, the Romanesca
> Till the desire will fade away....)

contrast with the feathery charm of Folchetto's lyrical effusion:

> Il labbro vola del labbro all'esca,
> Nota e parola cantan d'amor.
> Alla parola par che si mesca
> Un'aura fresca di veli e fior.
>
> (Answer the lips to the lips allurement
> And notes and words sing a lovesong.
> The freshening breeze, full of shades and flowers
> Seems to be mingled with the lovesong words....).

Iram's poetry is given his own stamp by the robust gaiety of the rhythm:

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1. Tresca refers to the lively movement of a country dance, as well as to an amorous intrigue.

Trillano e balzano timpani e sistri
Pifferi e nacchere con vario suon,
Stridendo fuggono gli augei sinistri,
Dispersi all'eco della canzon.

(Leaping and trilling make a gay sound
Tambourines, sistra, castanets and fifes...
Screaching, the birds of ill omen flee
Scared by the echo of our lively song.)

The choral reprise of the Duke's stanza (La danza è un' estasi...) provides an animated finale to the second act.

The scene of the third act is the same as in Act One, but Marianna's inn is closed and the scene of the former revelry appears to be deserted. Alone on the empty stage, Marianna wonders:

Dove sarà quel nomade
Vagante alla fortuna...

(Where can my gypsy be
At the mercy of fate....)

She has decided to go to the end of the world to find him and promises herself not to return without Iram. Hardly has she left the stage when the Duke, Folchetto and a few attendants appear carrying Iram, motionless under the effect of a sleeping potion. As if guided by a presentiment Marianna returns; overwhelmed by joy she finds herself reunited to her beloved, who is slowly regaining consciousness. Heralded by their tripping song 'Trillano e balzano cembali e sistri' the gypsies happily invade the stage; recognising in Iram their king, they burst into a spontaneous chorus of acclaim and affection - to the astonishment of Iram who ponders:

Da tutto questo imbroglio è forza ch'io deduca
Ch'entro ad un cerchio magico in fallo ho messo il piè.
Io m'addormento zingaro e mi risveglio Duca,
Poi m'addormento Duca e mi risveglio Re.

(From all this tangle I must deduce
that I have been caught in a magic ring,
I fall asleep a gypsy and I awake a Duke.
I fall asleep a Duke and I awake a King.)

The Duke tells Iram and Marianna the whole story, much to their amusement. Folchetto, however, charged with outrageous flirtation with Marianna, must defend himself. With a delightful ditty:

Bacio di paggio è bacio di farfalla,
Sfiora e non punge.

(The kiss of a page is like a butterfly's:
it skims but does not sting...)

he induces Iram to pardon him.

A solemn hymn in praise of copper.

Gloria al rame! Egli è sonoro
Più dell'oro

(Glory to copper
it is more sonorous than gold itself.)

sung by Iram seated on his upturned cauldron as on a throne and accompanied by resounding hammer strokes, leads to a reprise of the gypsies' song. Led by Marianna and Iram, now appreciative of the advantages of living in freedom, in the pursuit of happiness, the colourful crowd moves slowly towards the East where:

Il sol nascente
Irradia il bel sentier della speranza.

(The rising sun
Shines upon the beautiful path of hope.)

Folchetto, the Duke and his retinue, remain on the stage waving

Da tutto questo imbroglio è forza ch'io deduca
Ch'entro ad un cerchio magico in fallo ho messo il piè.
Io m'addormento zingaro e mi risveglio Duca,
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Il sol nascente
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(The rising sun
Shines upon the beautiful path of hope.)

Folchetto, the Duke and his retinue, remain on the stage waving

with their handkerchiefs a good-bye to their friends for a day.

Iram is a unique work; it does not belong to the Italian comic tradition nor to the time during which it was written.[1] It is a modern libretto in the true sense of the word - a model literary comedy in itself and a perfect springboard for musical elaboration. In Boito's production, it represents a brilliant achievement in breaking away from his undoubtedly restricted dramatic world revolving around the immutable axis of Good and Evil. In Iram Boito seems to have overcome the need of a mechanical opposition between hero/heroine and villain: in it, the characters are not black nor white; they have the worldly attributes of plausible human beings and do precisely what under the circumstances they are expected to do.

Iram is also the first and most striking evidence of Boito's capacity to adapt his talent, moulded in his serious libretti, to the spirit of sheer comedy. That he possessed a comic vein, Boito had already proved in Re Orso, in some passages of Mefistofele and Amleto and in Grillo's witty remarks in Pier Luigi Farnese. But, whilst in those works the comic element was either incidental, aimed at relieving the strain and heightening the effect of the tragic interest, or in the nature of sophisticated irony, Iram is pure comedy. Enjoyment is written on every page of it and we

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1. The date of its composition - 1879 - has been established by Piero Nardi from the manuscript copy found in the Archives of the House Ricordi. The libretto was first published in 1942 in Tutti Gli Scritti.

cannot but succumb to the irresistible charm, the vivacity, the engaging spontaneity which infuse it from beginning to end.

CHAPTER VII

BASI E BOTE

When confronted with Basi e bote[1] (Kisses and blows) again we are led into wondering whether Boito's natural inclination was not after all perhaps for comedy. Basi e bote, a Commedia di Maschere which seems to have been originally conceived as a marionette play, is a brilliant piece of work - a theatrical divertissement bubbling with humour and breathing the piquant air of the Commedia dell'Arte,[2] to which it owes a great deal. In Basi e bote we encounter the traditional Italian masks: the old rich merchant Pantalone and his notary Tartaglia, this last stammering, of course, as befits his name; the sophisticated, 'upper class' lovers Florindo and Rosaura; the fast-talker and impudent servingman Arlecchino and his saucy sweetheart Colombina. Pierrot, the mute servant traditionally associated with both Commedia dell'Arte and opera buffa, completes the cast. The story, the usual love intrigue with young men plotting to get a girl away from an old man, is given a new sparkle by Boito's incomparable theatrical verve. The qualities of farce, of mime, of ballet, of comedy alternate and the entertainment seems to shimmer like the water of the lagoon. The Venetian dialect,

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1. Probably written after Irom and before Otello and Falstaff, Basi e bote was first published, in its entirety, in 1914 in the periodical La Lettura (Nº January/February).

2. See Appendix G., p.407.

fluent, ductile and full of musical cadences, adds enormously to the iridescence of the text and to the excitement of the situations, besides being an appropriate complement to the setting - a picturesque 'campiello' on a bank of the Canal Grande. The curtain rises on Pantalone who, closely followed by Pierrot, walks hurriedly from his shop to his house carefully barring the respective doors behind him. As he is about to leave for a business meeting, he entrusts to Pierrot the task of tending his possessions, including his beautiful ward Rosaura, whom he wishes to marry. Whilst taking snuff he improvises a song in praise of tobacco. This is followed by a dialogue with an imaginary interlocutor, of irresistible comicality. After Pantalone's exit, Pierrot pulls from his waistcoat a placard on which are inscribed in big letters the words 'Pierrot loves Colombina' and mimes a love scene. On hearing Arlecchino, who approaches singing a lilting song 'Son Arlechin, son Truffaldin' (I am Harlequin, I am Truffaldino)[1], Pierrot flees, hiding himself in a nearby gondola. Arlecchino appears on the stage with his love-sick master, Florindo, the elegant young man who, in contrast with the buffo-characters speaks a lofty Italian, affecting prim manners (Scene ii). He is in love with Rosaura and, in a true Commedia dell'Arte tradition, it is through the machinations of Arlecchino (who, on his own, will conquer Colombina) that the two lovers will be brought together at the end of the

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1. Truffaldino means 'a cheater'.

play. The most remarkable numbers in this and the next scene are: Arlecchino's hilarious 'Canzone della spatola - ossia - l'arte de missiar bene la polenta e de metarghe el tocio' (Song of the spatula' - or - the art of stirring the 'polenta' and to finish it with sauce), and the delightful quartet of Florindo - Rosaura, Arlecchino - Colombina. The exchanges of the two couples are designed to characterize each pair; the languid, romantic lovers of the upper class indulge in their mood with extravagant delicacy:

Florindo: Molle e leggiera sospira l'aura
...Dolce Rosaura

Rosaura: Il mare è quieto, il cielo è lindo
...Dolce Florindo

(Florindo: Tender and light the breeze sighs
...Oh! sweet Rosaura

Rosaura: The sea is quiet; the sky is clear
...Oh! sweet Florindo.)

The servant couple, who speaks in dialect, are more straightforward and much more earthbound:

Arlecchino: Xe quasi sera, vien zo la brina
...Ciao Colombina

Colombina: E mi me meto sul finestrin
...Ciao Arlechin

(Arlecchino: It is nearly night, it is getting cold
...Ciao Colombina

Colombina: I will watch you from the window
...Ciao Arlecchino.)

It is amusing to note how Boito, parodying himself, gives to the servant lovers, in Scene iv, one of those rapturous duets

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It is amusing to note how Boito, parodying himself, gives to the servant lovers, in Scene iv, one of those rapturous duets

which regularly appear in his libretti, charged, of course, with ironical overtones:

.... E cerchemo a una a una
Le isolete in mezo al mar,
Fin che el lio de la fortuna
Finiremo per trovar.

(... Let us search one by one
all the islets of the sea
till we find
the haven of happiness.)

Florindo and Rosaura echo their words; the flirtation scene is, however, soon interrupted by the return of Pantalone who angrily, scolds Pierrot for forgetting his duty. Night has, in the meanwhile, fallen on the compiello. Laughing loudly, Pierrot lights up with his lantern the corner where the frightened lovers are hidden. The discovery of the two couples leads to a cudgel play during which, in keeping with the tradition of the marionettes theatre, Pierrot and Pantalone are unmercifully beaten whilst Arlecchino and Florindo take advantage of the confusion to snatch kisses from their respective lovers. The whole neighbourhood is aroused. Men and women appear at the windows and on the stage, variously observing and participating in the tumultuous scene. Attracted by the confusion, a patrol of guards armed with torches and lanterns, come to restore order. Convinced by Arlecchino's accusations that Pierrot is a thief and responsible for the uproar, the guards arrest him and lead him off to jail. With a noisy ensemble of comments the act moves to its close.

For the second and last act the scene is changed to an interior room - Pantalone's kitchen. Colombina, seated knitting near the window, comments gaily on the events of the previous night: 'Quanti basi!' Quante bote!' (How many kisses! How many blows!') The melodious fluency and the piquant overtones of the Venetian dialect give a glittering effect to the verses of her extended 'solo', half sung and half danced, passage: 'Columbina ga un gatin ... el ga nome Trufaldin' (Columbina has a kitten ... whose name is Truffaldino.) Arlecchino, who has in the meantime slipped into the kitchen and reacted to the words of her song now starts making love[1] to her. Their idyll is, however, shortlived. Bemoaning his fate, Florindo appears on the stage. The sustained lines of his recitativo:

> Già da tre lune, o donna, innamorato
> Il cuore mio di lacrime si vela.
>
> (It is three months, My lady,
> that my love-sick heart sheds tears for you...)

are followed by a solemn 'aria' marked by a distinctively Metastasian, poetical mood:

> Qualunque sia l'evento
> Della mia rea fortuna,
> Il fato non pavento
> Non so che sia timor.
> Dalla rapace mano
> Si salvi l'innocente,
> Al barbaro inumano
> La rapirà l'amor.
>
> (Whatever wicked event
> Life has in store for me
> I am not afraid of Fate
> I know not what is fear.

From the rapacious hand
The innocent will be saved.
From the cruel barbarian
She will be saved by love.)

Again, Boito seems to make fun of himself in counteracting the static effect of Florindo's scene by interruptions in the nature of gastronomical interjections from Arlecchino, busy at frying eggs for himself and at the same time providing a rhythmical accompaniment to his master's sentimental effusions by noisily grating cheese. Eventually tired of Florindo's sighing and bewailing, Arlecchino decides to resort to one of his tricks, to be played upon the foolish and easily deceivable Pantalone. He promises Florindo that he will not lose his beloved Rosaura; he explains his scheme to Florindo and Colombina, also giving them instructions as to what to do. The two men withdraw as Pantalone enters, in night shirt and night cap, rather the worse for wear and in a dejected mood. In broken phrases he gives vent to his feelings and, after a great deal of self-commiseration, he angrily calls Colombina. The scene of the old, crabbed master exchanging insults with the witty and cheeky serving girl is, of course, a stock device however cleverly exploited by Boito, as is what follows. Pompously speaking latin, Arlecchino re-enters disguised as a doctor. He takes Pantalone's pulse (flirting, at the same time, with Colombina) quickly coming to the conclusion that the old man is seriously ill. As a consequence, Pantalone decides to put forward the date of his marriage to that very day. The

notary Tartaglia enters, followed by Florindo and Rosaura and, according to Arlecchino's instructions insisting on a handsome dowry, he draws up a wedding contract, eagerly signed by Pantalone. The fake doctor hastily leaves and Arlecchino steps in. Pretending to be dying, Arlecchino asks Pantalone to approve his marriage, 'in extremis'. No sooner has Pantalone signed the second wedding contract than Arlecchino, suddenly recovered, introduces to the bewildered old man the newly married couple Florindo - Rosaura. Disgusted by these antics, Pantalone decides to turn to philosophical solace. After brief hesitation, he gives his blessing to the two young couples, to the delight of all. Finally, and once again in the purest Commedia tradition, all the characters line up at the front of the stage, whilst Arlecchino delivers his last speech:

Viva le maschere
Viva el teatro!
Farse, comedie,
Diavoli a quatro!
  Viva la scena
  De intrighi piena,
  El specio alegro
  Del mondo negro...

(Viva the masks!
Viva the theatre!
Farces and comedies
and hellish uproars!
  Viva the stage,
  full of intrigues -
  the happy mirror
  of the dark world....)

ending with a petition to either applaud the play or to hiss it off stage. We will, of course, applaud. We leave with regret

the joyful, whimsical world of the Masks with its adorable marionettes, paradoxically, so vibrantly alive.

Perhaps because in dealing with the less demanding field of comedy, the emphasis is naturally lead to the human element in both Iram and Basi e bote and Boito succeeded in characterization as never before.

CHAPTER VIII

OTELLO

During many years of working in the field of the libretto, Boito's inborn poetic and dramatic gift had been refined and developed and he was now ready to embark on his greatest achievements, Otello and Falstaff.

Othello, written in all likelihood in 1604 but not printed until 1622, ranks among the masterpieces of Shakespeare's 'tragic period'. The story, taken from a lurid tale by the Italian writer Giambattista Giraldi Cinthio has a sombre, strange fascination. Shakespeare's dramatic treatment of the tale is by his standard surprisingly simple; even the number of characters participating in the action is unusually small. What makes of Othello the unique work which it is, is the splendour of the language, the depth of the characterization and, above all, the desolate and laconic objectivity of the drama itself. Strange to say, whereas the majority of Shakespeare's plays have tempted composers of widely different nationalities over the centuries, Othello waited two-hundred years before finding its first composer in Rossini (1792 - 1868) whose Otello, on a libretto by Francesco Berio di Salsa was first performed at Naples, on December 4th, 1816. After Rossini, Shakespeare's Tragedy of jealousy inspired a few other works including: Verdi's opera Otello, premiered at Milan in 1887 and, more recently, Machavarani's ballet Othello staged at

Tbilisi, in 1963. Until the appearance of Verdi's masterpiece, Rossini's enjoyed a very high reputation, not entirely undeserved. The libretto, only tenuously linked with Shakespeare is absurd. The opera contains, however, numbers of extraordinary beauty justifying the favour accorded to it by audiences more musically minded than critically orientated. These numbers, all found in Act III, which is the only Act which followed Shakespeare fairly carefully, are: the climactic storm scene (transferred from Shakespeare's Othello, Act II, Scene i); Desdemona's Willow Song; the ensuing 'Ave Maria' and the song of a gondolier (heard in the distance, just before the Willow Song) based on Dante's well known verse:

Nessun maggior dolore
Che ricordarsi del tempo felice
Nella miseria....

(There is no greater pain
Than to remember bygone happiness
In deep woe.)

Rossini's sensitive treatment of this last act could have sufficed to save the opera from the oblivion into which it has been confined. Unfortunately, to meet the demand of a public which could not accept the murder of Desdemona, the composer turned the ending of the opera into a happy one. A love duet, adapted from his earlier opera Armida ('Cara per quest' anima'), sealed the final reconciliation of the hero and the heroine to everyone's satisfaction. Such a practice, which was the rule rather than the exception at Rossini's time, would not have been admissible

a few decades later. The alteration ruined the libretto from a drumatic point of view.

During the course of the nineteenth century the growing concept of the artistic purity of the work of art - and, in the case of adoptations, of the inviolability of the original source. (derived from a better knowledge of the literature of the past and from the theories of Wagner, Berlioz and other romantic writers), had put new demands upon librettists and composers as well.

Boito's treatment of the tragedy of Othello clearly reflects this new trend. He remained faithful to the spirit and much of the letter of the original as far as was possible, allowing for the difference between an opera and a play. As Boito wrote to Verdi:

> A melodramma is not a drama, our art lives on elements which are foreign to the spoken tragedy. The atmosphere which has been destroyed can be re-created, eight bars are sufficient to revive a feeling, a rhythm can give new life to a character. Music is, among all arts, the most powerful. It has a logic of its own, freer and swifter than the logic of a thought conveyed by words. It is much more eloquest, too.[1]

To claim as many critics have done, that Boito's Otello is 'written strictly after Shakespeare's original'[2] or that it is 'for the most part a translation of the original'[3] is a mistake

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1. In Nardi, op. cit., p.470.
2. Annesley, C. 'The Standard Operaglass', 1911, p.251.
3. Howes, F. and Hope-Wallace, P. A key to opera London: Blackie and Sons, 1939, p.180.

which does not do Boito justice. His libretto is not an arid imitation of Shakespeare's tragedy. In choosing the most salient episodes presented by the original and in channeling his adaptation to them, he gave one of the many possible readings of the play, at the same time, an intelligent and personal one. Boito's version is based on the assumption of the absolute innocence of Desdemona whom he sees as a symbol of good to be opposed to the evil figure of Jago. Otello, the only character who changes his nature and his attitude towards life during the course of the play, is the slave of his own passions who becomes the instrument, and eventually the victim, of the destructive power of evil. Boito also altered the structural framework of the play giving it an organic unity of his own. Shakespeare's tragedy has five acts. The first of them, which takes place in Venice, is a kind of Prologue which lays down the conditions necessary for the development of the story: Othello's bravery as a soldier and his value to the city of Venice; the enmities to which he is exposed and his recent wedding to the daughter of a Venetian Senator. In this particularly long-drawn-out introduction Shakespeare presents his characters - Othello, Iago, Desdemona, along with the more subordinate Cassio and Roderigo - in clear outlines giving details motivating their past, present and future. In the remaining four acts of the play, which form an indivisible unit localized on the island of Cyprus, the premises set forth in the Prologue are carried out to a logical conclusion. To reduce the tragedy to

opera dimensions Boito decided to remove the first act, the only one which could be spared. Its contents are not essential to the actual drama. Some essential points had, of course, to be retained and Boito incorporated them into his first act, which corresponds to Shakespeare's second, with admirable skill. Thus, whilst Othello opens in a street of Venice, in the middle of Iago's quarrel with Roderigo, Otello opens in the harbour of Cyprus. A crowd of Cypriots, Jago, Montano, Cassio and Roderigo are gazing at the sea where a ship is struggling through a storm. Boito's decision to start the action of the opera with Shakespeare's storm scene was, undoubtedly, a clever one from a musical, dramatic and spectacular point of view. It 'provided Verdi with a superb opportunity to make a tremendous initial impact, and exploit the great musical possibilities of the storm's progress as a means of hightening the excitement of the drama'.[1] It also creates a kind of psychological background, showing the incontrollable forces of nature as it were in league with human passions. As to the spectacular impact of this scene it suffices to remember some of the recent productions of Otello (such as the one given at the Metropolitan Opera House, New York, on March 25, 1972 with Franco Zeffirelli as director and set designer.) Here

1. Hughes, S., op. cit. p.444.

the famous opening chord 'was accompanied by a lightning flash that blinded the audience so that the first thing that they could see was a turbulent dockside with milling crowds, scudding clouds and rocking ships'.[1]

Otello, the winner over the adverse forces of men and nature, arrives on the poop of his vessel from which he descends amidst unfurling banners and the cheers of the crowd.

Before entering the stronghold in company with Cassio and Montano, Otello announces to the jubilant Cypriots the defeat of the Turks and the dispersal of their fleet. His short but impressive passage establishes him at once as a valiant soldier and a commanding personality - an important point, as the tragedy of Otello lies in the extent of his fall.

The ensuing dialogue between Jago and Roderigo,(who secretly adores Desdemona) is taken from Shakespeare's first act to a greater extent than is generally admitted. The two men's first exchange in the opera:

Jago (in disparte, a Roderigo):

Roderigo,
Ebben, che pensi?

Roderigo: D'affogarmi

(Jago: Well, Roderigo, what are you thinking?

Roderigo: Of drowning myself.)[2]

corresponds to Shakespeare's passages in Act I, Scene iii.:

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1. Opera News May 1972, p.20.
2. English version by Peggie Cochrane - RICORDI, libretto issued by the RCA VICTOR RECORD DIVISION LD/LDS 6155.

Roderigo: Iago.

Iago: What sayest thou, noble heart?

Roderigo: What will I do, thinkest thou?
... I will incontinently drown myself.

Jago's cynical comment:

Stolto
È chi s'affoga per amor di donna.

(Fool is he who drown himself
for love of woman.)

is a shortened, and much generalized paraphrase of 'Ere I would say I would drown myself, for the love of a guinea-hen, I would change my humanity with a baboon' and 'Drown thyself? Drown cats and blind puppies (Act I, Scene iii).

Jago's next long passage is built on detached sentences found in the first and third scenes of Othello's Act I and very skilfully pieced together by Boito. The first part of Jago's speech derives from Act I, Scene iii:[1]

There are many events in the womb	Suvvia, fa senno, aspetta
of time, which will be delivered	L'opra del tempo.
(ll.369-70)	
It cannot be that Desdemona should	A Desdemona bella Che nel segreto dei
long continue her love unto the Moor	tuoi sogni adori,
(ll.342-4)	Presto in uggia verranno i foschi baci
	Di quel selvaggio dalle gonfie labbra
I profess me thy friend, and I confess	Buon Roderigo, amico tuo sincero
me knit to thy deserving with cables of	Mi ti professo, nè in più forte ambascia
perdurable thoroughness. (ll.337-9)	Soccorrerti potrei.
If sanctimony, and a frail vow,	Se un fragil voto

1. The numbering of lines follows that of M.R Ridley's edition of Othello. London: Arden Shakespeare Paperbacks, 1971.

betwixt an erring barbarian, and a super-subtle Venetian, be not too hard for my wits, and all the tribe of hell thou shalt enjoy her. (ll.355-9)	di femmina non è tropp'arduo nodo pel genio mio nè per l'inferno giuro che quella donna sarà tua
I hate the Moor (ll.365-6).	M'ascolta:
I hate the Moor (ll.384)	Bench'io finga d'amarlo, odio quel Moro....

The second part, containing Jago's account of Cassio's promotion over him, has been transferred from Act I, Scene i and synthetized by Boito as follows:

... but he, sir, had the election;	Quell'azzimato capitano usurpa
And I, of whom his eyes had seen the proof	Il grado mio, il grado mio che in cento
At Rhodes, at Cyprus, and other grounds	Ben pugnate battaglie ho meritato;
Christian and heathen, must be lee'd and calmed	Tal fu il volar d'Otello, ed io rimango
By debtor and creditor, this counter-coster	
Me, in good time, must his lieutenant be,	Disua Moresca Signoria l'Alfiere.
And I, God bless the mark, his worship's ancient.	

(That foppish captain usurps
my rank, the rank that in a hundred
well-fought battles I have earned.
Such was Othello's will and I remain
of my Moorish Lord ... his ensign.)

The last lines of Jago's speech:

> Ma, come è ver che tu Rodrigo sei,
> Così è pur certo che se il Moro io fossi
> Vedermi non vorrei d'attorno un Jago.
>
> (So, too, 'tis true that,
> were I the Moor I would not wish to see
> an Iago about me.)

are comparable to:

> It is as sure as you are Roderigo
> Were I the Moor, I would not be Iago.

Boito seems to have, however, deliberately given Jago's sentence an ominous ring which has no counterpart in Shakespeare. Whilst Jago leads Roderigo aside, obviously plotting for revenge, the Cypriots celebrate the victory over the Turks lighting the bonfire which they have been preparing since Otello's exit and singing and dancing around it. This episode which Herbert F. Peyser defines as a 'pleasant intermezzo ... which has nothing to do with Shakespeare'[1] and Ernest Newman an 'unnecessary interpolation,'[2] was actually suggested to Boito by a few words in the Herald's proclamation of the very beginning of Shakespeare's Act II, Scene ii:

> It is Othello's pleasure; our noble and valiant general, that upon certain tidings now arrived, importing the mere perdition of the Turkish fleet; that every man put himself into triumph: some to dance, some to make bonfires....

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1. Peyser, H.F. 'Otello' Introduction to Opera New York: Peltz M. E, Ed., 1961; p.164.

2. Newman, E. More Opera Nights. London: 1954, p.657.

The Fire Chorus is, undoubtedly, a wholly operatic affair. It does however, provide a fine illustration of Boito's skill in integrating conventional devices into the plot without upsetting its dramatic structure. The Fire Chorus functions not only as a background but as a transition clearing, in fact, the way for Jago's proposal of a drinking bout. Jago's brindisi, which follows soon after, is another good example of Boito's dramatic use of operatic conventions. It takes its origin in Iago's drinking song 'And let me the cannikin clink' into which Iago breaks, in Othello,without warning. Whilst in Shakespeare the song is a purely musical insertion (a song is expected to function as wine's proverbial ally), in Boito's the Brindisi scene serves to reveal Jago's character, his objectives and details of his plot against Otello. Thus, by the end of this scene, we know that Jago is going to use Roderigo in making probable the 'displanting' of Cassio - Jago's first aim and the starting point towards the ruin of Otello. From this moment on until the return of Otello followed by Desdemona, the action follows Shakespeare's closely enough. A small variation is that Roderigo is present during the increasing intoxication of Cassio whilst Montano is not. Also, Iago's second song 'King Stephen was a worthy peer' is not retained in the opera nor is Cassio's drunken moralizing. Cassio does not say 'For mine own part, no offence to the General, nor any man of quality...' as in Shakespeare (Act II, Scene iii) but he makes a strikingly dramatic utterance when, against Jago's last words of the 'brindisi' song, he says:

In fondo all'anima
Ciascun mi guardi!...
... Non temo il ver...
Non temo il ver ....

(To the bottom of my soul
Let all look...
I do not fear,
I do not fear the truth.)

As George Hauger has pertinently remarked 'the truth is the last thing he needs to fear. Treachery is what he ought to be aware of',[1] as Jago incites Roderigo:

Pensa che puoi così dell lieto Otello
Turbar la prima vigilia d'amor!

(Think how you will be able thus
to trouble the happy Othello's first night of love!)

The drunken Cassio is provoked by Roderigo into a duel which involves also Montano, just arrived to call Cassio to the guard. Whilst pretending to try to make peace, Jago whispers to Roderigo to go and rouse the town:

Va al porto, con quanta più possa
Ti resta, gridando: sommossa! sommossa!
Va! spargi il tumulto, l'orror. Le campane
Risuonino a stormo.

(Go to the harbour with all the speed
you can muster, crying: Revolt! Revolt!
Go! Spread confusion and horror. Let
the bells sound the alarm.)

It is Jago who causes the bell to be rung, whereas in Shakespeare he exclaims:

Who's that that rings the bell? Diablo .. ho
The town will rise.

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1. Hauger, G. 'Othello and Otello'. Music and Letters. London: Oxford University Press, 1969. vol.50, p.83

The episode which follows Otello's entrance in the brawl, and ends with Cassio's degradation, contains passages neatly transferred, and literally translated, from Shakespeare although abbreviated here and there. From the moment of Cassio's downfall up to the end of the act, the opera diverges from the play. Shakespeare has Iago remain on the stage where, in a sequence of duologues (with Cassio and, then, Roderigo) and monologues, he acquaints the audience with his plans for the future: he will take advantage of the guileless affection between Cassio and Desdemona to create, for Othello, the appearance of evil. With mounting delight he determines on the practical moves which will begin to transform into working reality his devilish design. In the opera, it is Otello and Desdemona who are left together after the restoration of order in the town. The remainder of the act is filled with their rapturous love duet which, far from being a conventional insertion, serves an informative and dramatic function as well: it explains the origin of Otello's and Desdemona's marriage; it reveals the dreamy nature of their relationship - so defenseless in a world which contains Iago - and provides a contrast, and a deeper motivation for the following scenes of jealousy. In the need of unfolding the past along with the present Boito resorted, once again, to Shakespeare's first act: the largest section of the duet is closely related to Othello's travel history in Scene iii; its closing lines are, instead, borrowed from the greeting scene in Act II, Scene i, where Othello,

at the height of his still unbroken happiness, says words quivering with the unconscious fear of a menacing, inexorable fate:

> ... If it were now to die,
> 'Twere now to be most happy, for I fear
> My soul hath her content so absolute,
> That not another comfort, like to this
> Succeeds in unknown fate ....

Happiness does, however, prevail favoured by the peaceful atmosphere of the night. 'Già la pleiade ardente in mar discende' (The burning Pleiades already sink into the sea), sings Otello, and Venus, the star of love, shines on high. There is no Jago present planning to break this pure harmony as in Shakespeare's analoguous love scene, which is utterly devoid of intimacy. Otello and Desdemona kiss before retiring together to the castle holding each other in firm embrace. As Edgard Istel has pointed out 'the powers of darkness have indeed begun their spinning of the hidden thread, but they have not as yet succeeded in really disturbing Othello's and Desdemona's peace'.[1] Only the quiet of night has been momentarily interrupted but not the 'vigilia d'amore', which is about to begin.

The second act of Otello is essentially a continuous conflict between Jago and Otello - a strange one because, whilst Otello cannot see his opponent, the audience, which is acquainted with Jago's aims from the beginning - sees with clarity. Again this

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1. Istel, E. The 'Othello' of Verdi and Shakespeare. The Musical Quarterly 1916, v.ii; p.380.

act, full of masterly touches and passages of inspired invention, is an example of Boito's superb adaptive ability. Comparison with the original play shows that whilst most of the action and much of the language have been retained by Boito, he made some alteration in the running order of the episodes. The opening short scene between Jago and Cassio in which Jago suggests the erstwhile captain to await Desdemona in the adjacent garden to plead for her intercession with Otello on his behalf, is taken from Shakespeare's Act II, Scene iii:

> I'll tell you what you shall do .... Our general's wife is now the general....

The rest is drawn from Act III, Scene iii, which is the dramatic centre of the play as it shows how Iago succeeds in subjugating Othello. If Boito, in contrast to Shakespeare, gives Jago a short time for preparation, the process of the awakening of Otello's jealousy follows much the same course as in Shakespeare's tragedy Jago's 'Credo' (I believe in a cruel God) which he, cynically declaims after his exchanges with Cassio, is Boito's own creation but it seems to have been suggested to Boito by isolated passages in Timon of Athens, Titus Andronicus and Othello itself. It sounds, however, so thoroughly Boitian that we cannot but agree with Francis Toye when he says that 'it is conceivable that Boito, the Goethe-enthusiast, the author as well as the composer of 'Mefistofele', was unconsciously tempted to overstress the affinity between Othello's ancient and the spirit that ever denies'.[1]

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1. Toye, F., op cit., p.418.

I find myself unable to accept the word 'unconsciously' as I feel convinced that Boito deliberately emphasized the evilish nature of Iago as this was essential to his own reading of the play. On the other hand, the thesis of Iago's 'motiveless malignity', first put forth by Coleridge, has also been accepted by Lamb, Hazlitt, Swinburne, Bradley, Granville-Barker and other Shakespearean critics who have also pointed out the similarity between Iago and the character role of Vice in the Morality Plays.[1] Iago's paean to the 'Divinity of Hell who has created him in His own image', is followed by Desdemona's and Cassio's meeting and conversation. Boito allows Otello to enter by chance in this crucial scene and Iago slyly turns this to his advantage when, apparently unintentionally, he says 'Ciò m'accora' (I like not that). The effect is stregthened because Otello believes that Iago has not seen him; whilst in Shakespeare the fact that Iago and Othello enter together makes Iago's sudden exclamation less effective. Further alterations can be detected in the ensuing section. In the play the colloquy between Iago and Othello is interrupted by Desdemona who has meantime taken leave of Cassio. Boito causes Desdemona and Cassio to remain in the garden for a while watched by Othello. The scene in which Iago subtly arouses Otello's jealousy, inflaming

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1. See: Introduction to Shakespeare's Othello; Great Britain: Kenneth Muir ed., 1968, p.15, and Wolfgang Clemen Shakespeare's dramatic art, London: Methuen, 1972, p.68.

him by refusing to be more explicit, is taken almost literally from Shakespeare (Act III, iii) but of course, abbreviated. When Jago realizes that his plan to arouse Otello's suspicion of Cassio has been successful he allows himself the triumphant irony of his warning against jealousy:

> Temete, signor la gelosia!
> E'un'idra fosca, livida, cieca, col suo veleno
> Se stessa attosca, vivida piaga le squarcia il seno.
>
> (Beware, my lord of jealousy!
> 'Tis a dark hydra, malignant, blind, it
> poisons itself with its own venom,
> its breast is ripped by an open wound.)

After the scene in which Otello demands proof of Desdemona's infidelity, Boito introduces another innovation. Desdemona reappears in the garden surrounded by women, children and sailors who have come to serenade her bearing gifts and strewing flowers at she approaches. When the islanders' chorus ends Desdemona kisses the children and hands a purse to the sailors whilst the women kiss the hem of her dress. This charming interlude, obviously inspired by Iago's words to Cassio 'She is of so free, so kind, so apt, so blessed a disposition.... (Shakespeare, Act II, Scene iii), besides being an excellent theatrical device, throws into relief Desdemona's goodness and her love and concern for others. Therefore, the ensuing scene in which she pleads for Cassio's restoration to Otello's favour (which in Shakespeare comes before the 'green-eyed monster' scene) appears to be the logical outcome of her altruism and of her trust in all men.

There follows the incident in which Desdemona drops the handkerchief given her as a first-love gift by Otello, whilst wiping his forehead. Emilia picks it up and Jago receives it from her. The 'handkerchief quartet' provided Verdi with a unique opportunity for the characterization of the four personages. Edgard ... says that Otto Ludwig has drawn attention to Shakespeare's 'polyphonic dialogue':

> In scenes of this character the genuine dramatic life pulses most strongly in such polyphonic passages, where different voices in different rhythms, each one with continuing individuality, meet and cut athwart each other. But the number of voices thus interwoven must not be so increased as to render them indistinguishable.[1]

Boito and Verdi made a masterly transcription of such a 'polyphonic dialogue'. In the handkerchief quartet, Desdemona, with touching humility sues for love('La tua fanciulla io sono' - I am your handmaiden); Otello, in an aside, torments himself with doubts and suspicions ('Forse perchè d... ...' - Perchance because I have declined into the vale of years.) At the same time Jago and Emilia are engaged in a quarrel. Jago, the opportunist tactician, realizing that the fortuitous happening can be turned into design, snatches the handkerchief from the reluctant Emilia who, intimidated by the villain's interdiction, dares not resist. Boito slightly alters the character of Emilia who, in contrast with Shakespeare's treatment, is invested with a deeper sensitivity and nobility.

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1. Ludwig's passage is quoted in Istel, E., op. cit., p.381.

Other episodes worthy of mention are: Otello's anguished farewell to war and to his former content and peace of mind:

> Ora e per sempre addio, sante memorie.
> Addio, sublimi incanti del pensier!
> Addio, schiere fulgenti, addio, vittorie,
> Dardi volanti e volanti corsier!
> ... Clamori e canti di battaglia, addio!
> Della gloria d'Otello è questo il fin;

> (Now and forever farewell, holy memories,
> farewell, sublime content of the mind!
> Farewell, brave troops, farewell, victories,
> flying shafts and racing steeds'....
> Sound and song of battle, farewell!
> Othello's glory is gone.)

and Jago's account of Cassio's talk in his sleep ('Era la notte, Cassio dormia' - It was night, Cassio was sleeping) with its wily suggestion 'Desdemona soave' (Sweet Desdemona). This is aimed at driving Otello into a frenzy of jealousy and is followed by Jago's statement that Desdemona's handkerchief (which is in fact in his pocket) is in Cassio's possession. The tremendous final scene shows Otello, his mind already poisoned, falling on his knees with Jago, both raising their hands to heaven as for a solemn oath and invoking the God of Vengeance. Jago and Otello, the active villain and his passive victim, are now tied together in the blind passion of hatred which can only destroy them.... All these episodes are derived from Shakespeare but their compression tightens the structure, producing an effect of admirable intensification.

Boito's third act consists of the last scene of Shakespeare's Act III and of the first two scenes of Act IV, again condensed

into a single act with extraordinary ability. In the opera the curtain rises on Otello and Jago in conversation in the Great Hall of the castle. A Herald announcing that the galley bringing the Venetian envoys to Cyprus has been sighted, interrupts them. This episode has no parallel in Shakespeare; it has, however, the function to remind us of Otello's status and responsibilities and prepare the way for the entrance of Lodovico, the Venetian Ambassador. In a brief dialogue Otello bids Jago to continue outlining his plan to engage Cassio in a compromising conversation which Otello will overhear and which will prove Cassio's and Desdemona's treachery; this is taken from Shakespeare's Act IV, Scene i:

> .... But encave yourself,
> and mark the jeers, the gibes, and notable scorns,
> that dwell in every region of his face.

The episode which follows, that in which Desdemona, perhaps deceived by the apparent calm of Otello, insists again on pleading for Cassio to the ever-rising fury of Otello, is the result of the fusion of two important scenes in Shakespeare: the first, in Act III, Scene iv, from line 31

> Desdemona: 'Well my good lord....

to line 90:

> Desdemona 'I pray, talk me of Cassio;

the second, in Act IV, Scene ii, from line 25

> Othello Let me see your eyes ....
> Look in my face

up to and including Othello's furious outburst beginning with:

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> Othello Let me see your eyes ....
> Look in my face

up to and including Othello's furious outburst beginning with:

Had it pleas'd heaven
To try me with affliction.... (ll.48 - 49)

The incident in which Jago convinces the hidden Otello of Desdemona's guilt by cleverly manipulating Cassio's conversation about his mistress Bianca (his remarks could apply to Desdemona), is essentially the same as in Shakespeare (Act IV, Scene 1). Bianca, who, in the play, returns the handkerchief to Cassio, thus rousing Othello's wrath and passion, does not appear at all in the opera. It is therefore Cassio who produces the handkerchief which Jago had previously placed in his lodging. The succeeding trio('Questa è una ragna...' - This is a spider's web), is all Boito's. Then, as in Shakespeare (Act IV, Scene i), Otello asks Jago to obtain poison to kill Desdemona but Jago advises:

Il tosco - no
....
Val meglio soffocarla,
là, nel suo letto, là, dove ha peccato.

(A poison, no -
'Twe[illegible]etter to strangle her
there her bed, there, where she has sinned.)

and offers his own services for the murdering of Cassio, for which service he is promoted by Otello to the vacant command. The episodes of the arrival of the Venetian messengers; of Othello's reading of the message recalling him to Venice and appointing Cassio as governor in his stead, and of his striking of Desdemona, have an abbreviated operatic counterpart. The public humiliation of Desdemona is, perhaps, the only regrettable innovation. In the play Othello insults her when only Lodovico

is present whereas in the opera she is brutally shamed before a crowd of people and the entire Senate. There follows a great ensemble scene in which all express their reaction to the situation. Desdemona, compassionated by Emilia, laments her lost love ('A terra! .. Sì... nel livido fango' - Fallen ... yes ... in the leaden dust); Roderigo bewails the departure of Desdemona; Cassio views the sudden turn of fortune with fearful misgivings; Lodovico gives vent to his indignation. The chorus contributed sympathetic reflections, now denouncing Otello ('Quell'uomo nero &sepolcrale' - That black man is deadly) now bemooning the wretched Desdemona ('Piangon così nel ciel lor pianto gli angeli' - Thus do the angels shed tears in heaven). This scene is, for the most part, freely invented by Boito and, in part, based on episodes in Shakespeare's second scene in Act IV. After this ensemble Jago urges Otello not to delay his revenge and Roderigo to murder Cassio if he would not lose Desdemona. At the climax Otello furiously bids the crowd go whilst, behind the scenes, a triumphal fanfa : unctuated the off-stage 'Evviva' of the Cypriots. As the stage empties and Otello and Jago are left alone, Otello grows delirious and, haunted by the evil vision Jago has conveyed to him, becomes convulsive and falls senseless to the ground. This short, and extremely painful scene, finds its prototype in Shakespeare's play, Act IV, Scene i, where Othello falls 'into an epilepsy', after raging furiously. As the fanfare sounds forth Otello's fame and the people cry glory to the Lion of

Venice, Jago, putting his heel on the head of the unconscious Otello, shouts with triumphant disdain and diabolical sarcasm, 'Here lies the Lion!' This ending of the act has no counterpart in Shakespeare. It is Boito's invention and, as remarked by Spike Hughes 'with Verdi's music must rank as one of the most masterly strokes of pure theatre in the history of opera'.[1] The fourth act - a masterpiece - is, both musically and dramatically, the best of the whole opera; the highest manifestation of Boito's mastery and Verdi's genius. With dramatic aptness, Boito discarded everything which could interfere in any manner with the continuity of the action and with the dominant tone of the act. If the previous act was filled with the sufferings which are the aftermath of the tremendous conflict of Act II, Act IV brings the denouement which none of the characters, not even Jago, can quite control. This, Boito's last act, covers the ground of Shakespeare's Act IV, Scene iii (the episode between Desdemona and Emilia, ending with Desdemona's farewell to her lady-in-waiting) and Act V, scene ii. The famous scene when Emilia helps her prepare for bed - full of Desdemona's ghostly and unresisting sense of death - is preceded, in the play, by the superfluous appearance of Othello and Lodovico in Desdemona's apartment. At the beginning of Act V, Shakespeare inserts another scene - a very long one - embracing the entrance of many

1. Hughes, S., op. cit., p.467.

characters (and leading up to the murder of Roderigo), completely distracting attention from Desdemona's fate. It is only in the second scene of Act V that Shakespeare introduces us into Desdemona's bedroom. Boito discarded these two unnecessary scenes, joining the episode of the farewell to Emilia directly with Otello's appearance in Desdemona's room. In this way, his fourth act achieved a marvellous symmetry and inner cohesion, further intensified by the heart-breaking sadness of Desdemona's Willow Song (as given in Shakespeare, but with slight variations and so beautifully translated to stand on the same level of poetic beauty as Shakespeare's lines). Desdemona's final scene is given added poignancy by her singing of the 'Ave Maria' which, with the dreadful reiteration of: '... nell'ora della morte', creates the suspense of impending tragedy. This interpolated prayer to the Virgin offers another illustration of Boito's genius in providing Verdi with lyrical opportunities, and at the same time, 'adding to the drama in a way Shakespeare might have wished he had thought of himself'.[1]

The marvellous soliloquy which Shakespeare gives to Othello at the very beginning of Act V, Scene ii, (It is the cause, it is the cause my soul) in which he tells himself that he is sacrificing Desdemona to justice, is replaced by a dumb-show. According to Boito's stage directions:

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1. Hughes, S., op. cit., p.475.

> Othello enters by a secret door. He places a scimitar on the table. He stands before the candle undecided whether to extinguish it or not. He looks at Desdemona, then puts out the light. The room is now illuminated only by the candle burning above the prie-dieu. He draws near to the bed and looks down on the sleeping Desdemona. He kisses her three times. On the third kiss she awakens.

The opening dialogue between Desdemona and Otello follows Shakespeare very closely up to the murder of Desdemona, whilst the scene between Othello and Emilia, ending with Emilia's cry for help, is greatly shortened. The rest of the act is subjected to important modifications. As observed by Francis Toye, few will, however 'regret the suppression of the excessively protracted end of the tragedy as Shakespeare wrote it, in particular the unnecessary murder of Emilia and the promised torture of Iago'.[1] Jago's refusal to answer Otello's question and his flight dispose of him in a satisfactory manner.

Otello's last speech has an infinite, unbearable pathos as he acknowledges the depth to which he has fallen:

> Niun mi tema
> S'anco armato mi vede. Ecco la fine
> Del mio cammin... Oh! Gloria! Otello fu.
>
> (.... Let no one fear me
> though you see me armed. This is my
> journey's end ... Glory! Othello is no more.)

When the final desolation comes upon him, after realizing the being he loved and has murdered was innocent, he cries to the

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1. Toye, Op.cit., p.418.

dead Desdemona:

E tu ... come sei pallida! e stanca, e muta, e bella

(And you ... how pale you are, and wan and mute and beautiful.)

This is a most moving passage, followed by a brief sequence founded on a few words in the play: 'O ill-starred wench!' and 'cold, cold my girl, even like thy chastity', and ending with the agonizing:

Desdemona! Desdemona ... Ah! ... morta! ... morta! ... morta!...

Otello knows that there is no escape from the consequences of what he has done. He draws a hidden dagger and stabs himself. Shakespeare's words:

I kiss'd thee ere I kill'd thee; - no way but this,
Killing myself, to die upon a kiss

are paraphrased by Boito to reproduce the rhythm of the lines heard in the Love Duet at the end of Act I:

Otello:	Act IV
Ah! la gioia m'inonda	Otello:
Sì fieramente ... che ansante	
mi giacio...	Or morendo ... nell'ombra...
Un bacio....	ov'io mi giacio...
	Un bacio ... Un bacio ancora ...
Desdemona: Otello!	un altro bacio.

Otello: Un bacio ... ancora un bacio

With overwhelming poignancy the music recalls the motive associated with the kiss scene bringing memories of past happiness and of a love now so tragically destroyed. By the end of the o,. ra Otello has come full circle, regaining his former nobility. As in Shakespeare, he is 'the one that loved not wisely, but too

well', his weaknesses acquiring the splendour of human passions.

The excellence of Boito's libretto has been so universally acknowledged that little needs to be added to what has been written over many years. Two remarks seem to me particularly pertinent: the first, written in 1903 by the German musicologist Dr Istel who considered Boito's book 'the best written since Richard Wagner's death, and the only one which, based throughout on Wagner's principles, does not really depart from them for a moment'.[1] (We will remember that the insertion of set numbers is always dramatically motivated and in no way hinders the flow of the music or of the dramatic action.)

The second remark is found in the Verdi biography, written a few years later by Gino Monaldi:

> The libretto of Othello (sic) cannot be classified with the semi-literary tribe of earlier opera-texts which were, at bottom, merely a springboard for the musician ... Boito's Othello is a feat in which the poet participates as a genuine collaborator in the musician's work of art. It is dramatic composition, thought out and written down so that from letter to letter it might remain in closest contact with the music and poetically blend therewith.[2]

In justice to Boito a full chapter could easily be devoted to the poetry of the libretto. I must, however, in the scope of this dissertation, confine myself to consideration of a few passages which may serve as examples of Boito's command of language and of his musical-poetic artistry, for it is obvious that the poet bore

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1. Istel, E., op. cit., pp. 385-6.
2. ibid., p.386.

in mind the musician in every line he wrote. The sequence in Act I of the 'Fuoco di gioia':

Fuoco di gioia - l'ilare vampa
Fuga la notte - col suo splendor,
Guizza, sfavilla - crepita, avvampa,
Fulgide incendio - che invade il cor....

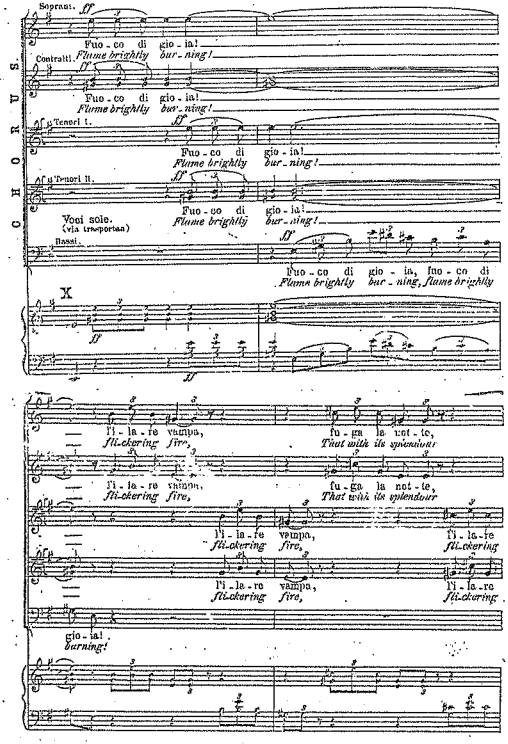
defined by Spike Hughes as 'one of the most fascinating and sensuously original pieces of music Verdi ever wrote',[1] would never have been written in such a way without the rhythmical suggestions of the Boitian text and, incidentally, most probably without the study of the score of Mefistofele.[2] In the Fire Chorus Verdi abandons the broad melodic line so typical of him in favour of a more nervous, fragmentary kind of treatment, perfectly corresponding to the rhythmical pattern of the text. (See Ex.1) The second example is concerned with Jago's dream story (Act II). The double septenary lines of his speech may be divided into five syllable lines in alternate rhymed lines. Thus:

Era la notte, Cassio dormia, gli stavo accanto.
Con interrotte voci tradia l'intimo incanto.
Con labbra lente, lente, movea nell'abbandono
Del sogno ardente; e allor dicea, con flebil suono....

---

1. Hughes, S., op. cit., p.445.

2. Many critics - from G B Shaw to Fausto Torrefranca and Ildebrando Pizzetti - have pointed out the influence (in all respects) exerted by Boito upon the older and much more gifted composer. A propos of Jago's 'Credo', Shaw observes that 'certain touches in Jago's Credo were perhaps either suggested by Boito, or composed in his manner in fatherly compliment to him'. (London music in 1888-89 London - 3rd ed. 1950, p.388.)


CHORUS
Soprani.
Fuo - co di gio - ia!
Flame brightly bur - ning!
Contralti.
Fuo - co di gio - ia!
Flame brightly bur - ning!
I Tenori I.
Fuo - co di gio - ia!
Flame brightly bur - ning!
II Tenori II.
Voci sole.
(via trasportan)
Fuo - co di gio - ia!
Flame brightly bur - ning!
Bassi.
Fuo - co di gio - ia, fuo - co di
Flame brightly bur - ning, flame brightly
X
fi - la - re vampa,
flickering fire,
fu - ga la not - te,
That with its splendour
fi - la - re vampa,
flickering fire,
fu - ga la not - te,
That with its splendour
fi - la - re vampa,
flickering fire,
fi - la - re
flickering
fi - la - re vampa,
flickering fire,
fi - la - re
flickering
gio - ia!
burning!

Ex. 1.

becomes:

Era la notte	Le labbra lente
Cassio dormia	lente movea
Gli stavo accanto	nell'abbandono
Con interrotte	del sogno ardente
voci tradia	E allor dicea
l'*intimo incanto*	*con flebil suono....*

Verdi put to splendid use the possibilities offered by this hidden metrical structure adjusting his music to it and, as Francis Toye remarks: 'It may be doubted whether any fusion of *voice, orchestra and text has ever been more* perfect than this' [1] (See Ex. 2). My last example is concerned with the famous Love Duet at the end of Act I, a number which, in Herbert Peyser's opinion 'for sheer rapturous beauty, stands above anything he *(Verdi) ever wrote....*'[2] *The most lyrical portion of* the duet covers four stanzas, given in turn to Desdemona and Otello, each constituted of four hendecasyllabic lines which can be broken up, at the musician's convenience, resolving themselves naturally *into six, differently stressed (mainly* septenary) lines. The warm, exquisitely lyrical musical lines of Desdemona follow the rhythm of the hendecasyllable (See ex. 3):

Quando narravi l'esule tua vita
E i fieri eventi e i lunghi tuoi dolor
Ed io t'udia coll'anima rapita
In quei spaventi e coll'estasi in cor.

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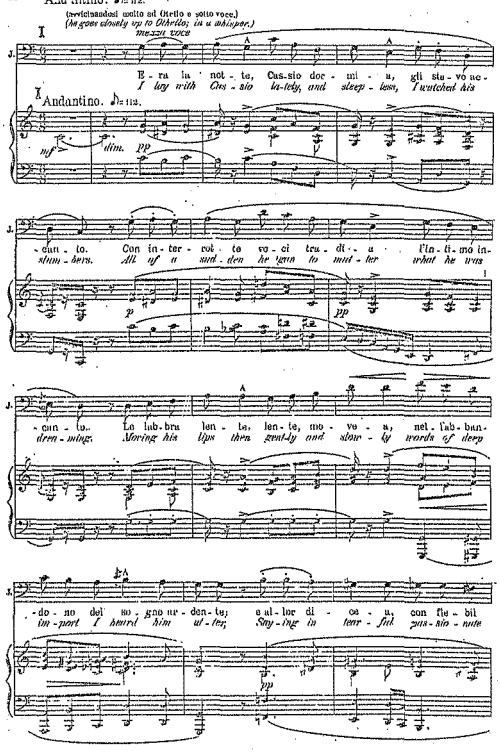
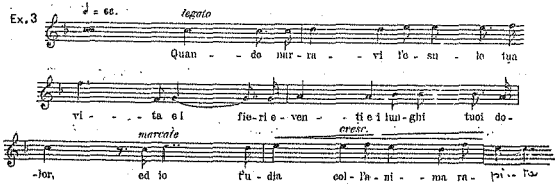
1. Toye, F., op. cit., p.423.

2. Peyser, H.P., op. cit., p.165.


186
Andantino. ♩= 112.
(avvicinandosi molto al letto e sotto voce.)
(Im going closely up to Othello; in a whisper.)
mezza voce
I
E - ra la · not - te, Des-dè - mo dor - mi - a, gli sta - vo ac -
I lay with Des - de - mo na lady, and sleep - less, I watched his
Andantino. ♩= 112.
dim. pp
- can - to. Con in - ter - rot - te vo - ci tra - di - a l'in - ti - mo in -
slum - bers. All of a sud - den he gan to mut - ter what he was
- can - to. La lab - bra len - ta, len - te, mo - va - a, nel - l'ab - ban -
dream - ing. Moving his lips gent - ly and slow - ly words of deep
- do - no del so - gno ar - den - te; e ul - lor di - ce - a, con fie - bil
im - port I heard him ut - ter; Sigh - ing in ten - der pas - sion -

Ex. 2

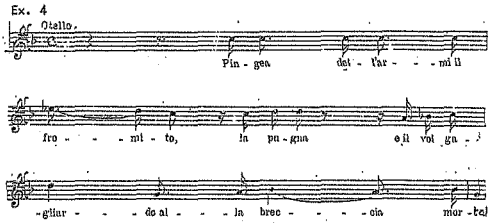
Ex. 3



Otello's magnificently virile phrasing follows the scansion of the most rhythmically incisive septenary meter, apt to the characterization of the hero (see ex. 4).

> Pingea dell'armi il fremito la pugna
> E il vol gagliardo alla breccia mortal.
> L'assalto orribil ecèra coll'ugna
> Nelbalvardo e il sibilante stral.

Ex. 4



As Francis Toye has stressed, Verdi's definite ideal in setting Boito's libretto to music was to give to his verses 'the most true and significant accent possible'.[1] This is why Otello,

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1. Toye, F., cit., p.419.

the drama of 'the suffering mortal who is musically revealed down to the faintest tremor of his nervous system'[1] remains one of the greatest operas ever written. It is, indeed, 'the opera that the musical dramatist, Verdi, had been working his way towards, throughout his long career'.[2]

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1. Werfel, F., cit., p.74.

2. Osborne, C., The Complete operas of Verdi', London: V. Gollancz, 1969, p.470.

CHAPTER IX

FALSTAFF

'If Boito has succeeded admirably in adapting Othello, he performed a miracle in filletting Shakespeare's ploddingly repetitive pot-boiler, The Merry Wives of Windsor, throwing out its poor jokes, turning its bad prose into excellent verse, paring down its clumsily extravagant cast of characters in preparation for Verdi's brilliant musical characterization of Falstaff, the Fords, Mistress Quickly and the adolescent love bundle made up of Nannetta and Fenton,'[1] writes Charles Osborne. Indeed, many critics and Shakespearean authorities, as for instance Francis Fergusson, find that 'Falstaff is less inspired here (Merry Wives) than he is in the "Henry IV" plays and that the comedy as a whole lacks the imaginative distinction of Shakespeare's best works';[2] others, go so far as to dismiss the play as 'a heartless farce, a botchwork ... barely worthy of inclusion in the canon'[3] and to assert that, in reconventionalizing Falstaff in the Merry Wives, Shakespeare 'turned him so decidedly into a gull and a buffoon that the thing is like a rejection in *itself, or a manifesto of complete eventual disinterest*

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1. Osborne, C. 'The complete operas of Verdi'. London, V. Gollancz: 1969, p.437.
2. Fergusson, F. op. cit., p.127.
3. Shattuck, C.H. 'Six episodes in the life of a play' in The Merry Wives of Windsor, New York, Fergusson, 1966, p.20.

in the character'.[1] There is, perhaps, some exaggeration in these two last remarks although we must admit that many signs in the play seem to lend credit to the tradition which wants the play written in fourteen days by order of Queen Elizabeth I who, according to Rowe 'was so well pleased with that admirable character of Falstaff, in the two parts of Henry IV, that she commanded him to continue it for one play more, and to show him in love'.[2] The comedy is obviously hastily built out of diverse and ill-digested materials but perhaps because of its satisfying theatricalism and abundance of broad mirths, it has held the stage since it first appeared enjoying, at times, (especially during the eighteenth century) an enormous popularity. During the eighteenth century it flourished on the stage, a hundred casts and three hundred and thirty-six performances being recorded in London alone. By the end of the century, although the personal popularity of Falstaff as a character had risen to its apogee, the Merry Wives as a play was ignored by serious writers. This decline of appreciation of the play was the natural result of the gradual loss of interest in the classical and the rise of the romantic point of view. 'The last century found its local colour, its rather complacent moralizing, and its good-natured high spirits very much to its taste'[3], but, more recently, the bright and happy version of

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1. Stewart, J.I.M. 'The birth and death of Falstaff'; in Shakespeare. Henry IV, Parts I and II. ed. G.K. Hunter, London: Macmillan, 1970, p.127.

2. Introduction to The Merry Wives ('The complete works of William Shakespeare') New York: W.G. Clark and A. Wright, p.47.

3. Fergusson, F. Op. cit., p.128

The Merry Wives of Windsor produced at Stratford on Avon (during the 1955 season) does not seem to have roused any great critical interest. The Merry Wives of Windsor has often been subjected to many forms of adaptation, from the near ballad-opera production put on by Elliston at Drury Lane in 1824, to actual opera.

Boito's use of Shakespeare's character of Falstaff was by no means the first appearance of the fat knight on the operatic stage. It was in 1761 that there appeared, in Paris, the first opera on The Merry Wives of Windsor. Its title was Le vieux coquet, ou les deux amies, and the author was a french violinist named Papavoine. The opera, killed, it is said, by its libretto, was only performed once. Towards the end of the century The Merry Wives of Windsor was set three times within five years: Ritter's Die Lustige Weiber (1794) and Ditter von Dittersdorf's Die Lustige Weiber von Windsor und der dicke Hans (1796) were both on the same libretto, by G.C. Roemer; Salieri's Falstaff, osia le tre burle, (lib. by De Franceschi) appeared in 1799. Salieri's opera must have enjoyed a certain popularity (Beethoven made a set of variations on one of its themes: La stessa, la stessissima), and De Francheschi's libretto still presents some points of interest. None of these operas, however, is remembered to-day. Balfe's Falstaff on libretto by Maggioni, performed in London in 1838, was another failure. The first successful operatic version of the Shakespearean comedy is therefore Nicolai's Die lustige Weiber von Windsor produced in Berlin in 1849, a sophisticated comedy full of tuneful melodies

and containing episodes almost worthy of Verdi (e.g., the Garden and the Windsor Park scenes, and Mrs Page's[1] ballad of Herne the Hunter). S.H. Mosenthal, who versified the libretto sketched by Nicolai himself and very closely following the play was, as observed by Winton Dean,[2] no Boito, but he was, however, not insensitive to Shakespeare and tried, as Boito was to do with much greater success, to improve upon the original text by borrowing points from other plays: Henry IV, Twelfth Night and A Midsummer Night's Dream. To start the opera with the wives, rather than with Falstaff (who only appears before the 'buck basket' scene) was, undoubtedly, a mistake. Also regrettable is the omission of the characters of Bardolph and Pistol, Falstaff's companions linked with the low life, and more genuinely comic side of his nature. The reduction of Mistress Quickly's role to one of mere insignificance is also a loss to the story. Vaughan Williams' Sir John in Love, written in 1929 and revived at Sadler's Wells in 1945, has not won the success which, according to Hubert Foss this 'lovely opera - wo[illegible]tic at times as well as swift in movement'[3] deserves. In Winton Dean's opinion however, Sir John in Love is a disappointing work 'partly owing to the clumsiness of the libretto, partly because it treats the plot as a slow comedy of rustic life

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1. Mistress Page and Mistress Ford are rechristened in the libretto Frau Reich and Frau Fluth, respectively.
2. Dean, W., op. cit., p.122.
3. Foss, H., Ralph Vaughan Williams, London; G. Harrap, 1950, p.130.

instead of a sophisticated farce.'[1] Dean finds that the folk idiom of the music (twelve genuine folk tunes being included in the score) is not 'really suited to the play which needs a quicksilver deftness if it is not to become tedious',[2] also criticizing, as dramatic miscalculations, the retention of far too many minor characters ('they crowd each other out; the composer, whose gifts in any case were expansive and lyrical rather than dramatic, has no space to develop or differentiate them')[3] and the excessive emphasis laid on the Fenton - Anne Page subplot. Perhaps Hubert Foss is in the right when he observes that 'while Boito and Verdi made out of Shakespeare's Falstaff an eternal work of art, a superlative opera, Vaughan Williams has quite simply translated Shakespeare into music',[4] fully preserving the words as well as the spirit of the age of Shakespeare.

The Boito-Verdi Falstaff (Milan 1893), described by Richard Strauss as 'one of the greatest masterpieces of all time',[5] and by Charles V. Stanford as 'a masterpiece of diction as well as of music, a child of which both the parents may be equally proud'[6]

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1. Dean, W. op. cit., p.127.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Foss, H., op. cit., pp. 69-70.
5. Osborne, Charles, The complete operas of Verdi, London: Pan Books, 1973, p. 488.
6. Stanford, C.V., op. cit., p.170.

seems to have swept the stage clear of both Nicolai's and Vaughan Williams' operas. Boito's libretto, to which Verdi referred as 'a lyric comedy unlike any other'[1], is wholly admirable. With incredible dexterity Boito solved the nearly impossible task of turning Shakespeare's five-act sprawling farce into a beautifully shaped three-act libretto in which the story of Falstaff's frustrated affair with the country dames and that of pretty Anne Page's amorous intrigue, are wonderfully woven together. Although mainly based on the Merry Wives of Windsor, the libretto shows considerable divergences from the play. Many incidents having little relation to either of the main stories and some of the characters connected with them, (such as Master William Page and his Latin lesson, and the duel between Parson Evans and Doctor Caius prevented by the Host of the Garter) are not found in the opera book. Boito's Doctor Caius is a fusion of traits taken from Slender, Shallow, Parson Evans and Caius himself. Anne Page becomes, for convenience, Nannetta Ford; Mistress Quickly, whose role is more prominent in the libretto than in the play, is not Dr Caius' servant but the confidante of Mistress Alice Ford and Mistress Meg Page. By omitting the Mother Prat's episode, Boito reduces the series of Falstaff's misadventures to two: his concealment in the buck basket which is then emptied into the Thames water and his assignation with the merry wives at

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1. The letter to Gino Monaldi dated 3rd December, 1890 is found in Franz Werfel, op. cit., p.396.

Herne's Oak in the Windsor Forest. Boito's Falstaff is a character less hard than his English forebear. As remarked by A. St. John Brenon, Boito 'did not touch heavily on the more sinister features of the witty sensualist, those which made Victor Hugo say of Falstaff, 'glutton, coward and brute, he walked on the four paws of disgrace',[1] but rather brought out his more remarkable qualities: an irresistible enjoyment of life; a boisterous gaiety; an amusing ribaldry and witty insolence. By borrowing lines and passages from the Henry IV plays, notably the monologue on honour, Boito 'restored Falstaff to something of his previous impish glory, and made him a character with whom, rather than at whom we can laugh.'[2] The arrangement of all the incidents drawn from the several Shakespearean sources and of those freely invented by Boito in six scenes, contrived in such a way as to assure dramatic contrast and climax as well as the requisite pace and nimbleness, is a further example of Boito's theatrical mastery. (Each of the opera's three acts is divided into two parts, rather short and almost equal in length.) In contrast with Shakespeare, who starts his comedy with an 'ensemble' scene taking place in a street in Windsor, before Page's house, Boito's version opens in a room

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1. A. St. John Brenon, op. cit., p.152.

2. Granville-Barker, Frank, 'Verdi and Shakespeare'. Music Parade 2. No., 5, (undated: see The Music Index, 1951. Information Service, p.50) England: Unwin, A., p.20

of the Garter Inn where Falstaff, after sealing two letters he has just written, lies back comfortably in a huge armchair, and starts sipping his sherry. Pistola and the red-nosed Bardolfo, Falstaff's old associates, are in attendance when Cajus, the town physician, brushing them aside, takes Falstaff to task for having broken into his house, bullied his servants and stolen one of his horses. The imperturbable knight immediately puts aside Cajus' complaints, not by attempting to excuse or deny the facts, but simply admitting them with deliberate insolence: 'Ho fatto ciò che hai detto... L'ho fatto apposta' (I did everything you say ... I did it purposely). Cajus' further accusations, this time directed at Pistola and Bardolfo, charged with having emptied his pockets after making him drunk, are declared by Falstaff to be unfounded. The dialogue between Falstaff and his minions, characterizing them as inveterate rascals, moves on quickly establishing the tone of the scene in a most effective manner. A string of reciprocal invectives leads to Cajus' solemn resolution:

> Giuro ... che se mai m'ubriaco ancòra all'osteria
> ...
> Sarà fra gente onesta, sobria, civile e pia.
>
> (If ever I get drunk again at the inn, I swear,
> it will be only with honest, sober, civil, pious folk.)[1]

Accompanying him to the door with ironic ceremony, Bardolfo and Pistola try to show some sympathy with their victim by answering his last utterance with the pious chanting of a mock-solemn 'Amen', severely criticized, on aesthetic grounds, by Falstaff who reminds them of the basic rule of art: 'Rubar con garbo e a tempo'

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1. English version by Dale McAdo; libretto issued by Angel Records (Angel Album 3552 C/L)

(Steal deftly and at the right time).

The passage about Bardolfo's rubicund nose serving as a lantern on the journeys from tavern to tavern but too expensive, however, to be maintained in times of financial crisis, is borrowed from Henry IV, Parts I, III, iii. Its insertion after the first episode of the opera book and before the one concerned with Falstaff's planning to assail the virtue of two wealthy wives in order to better his fortune, comes in quite naturally. Falstaff's self-praise of his tremendous belly starting with 'Se Falstaff s'assotiglia non è più lui' (If Falstaff thins, he is not himself) and inspired by a passage in Henry IV, Part II, IV, iii,[1] is sealed by Pistola's and Bardolfo's acclamations of 'Falstaff immenso', 'Enorme Falstaff!' Their enthusiasm is, however, soon to flag under the Knight's injunction to deliver two letters to the buxom dames whom, he believes, have looked on him with greedy intentions. Pistola's and Bardolfo's reluctance to oblige - the commission being against their principles of honour - elicits from Falstaff, the natural enemy of anything moral and respectable, his famous meditation on honour in which he dismisses it as a nonsense by demonstrating that it cannot fill a belly, nor set a leg, or an arm, or anything and that neither the living nor the dead can possess it. The first part of this speech is taken from the Merry Wives, Act II, Scene ii:

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1. 'I have a whole school of tongues in this belly of mine; and not a tongue of them all speaks any other word but my name.'

> You stand upon your honour! Why, thou unconfinable baseness, it is as much as I can do to keep the terms of my honour precise....

The second part is drawn, and almost literally translated, from the speech inspired in Falstaff by the gallant death of Hotspur in Henry IV, Part I; V, iv.

> Can honour set to a leg? No: or an arm? No ... Honour hath no skill in surgery, then? No. What is honour? a word. What is that word honour? air ... A trim reckoning....

At the end of this speech the corpulent knight drops his mortally wounded dignity, angrily chasing his unfaithful companions out of the room. If the opening tavern scene is dominated by Falstaff's massive presence as well as by his fierce vitality and anarchic wit, the second part of the act, laid in a sunny garden near Ford's house, is filled with the chatter and mischievous laughter of the gay wives of Windsor. A fresh country air seems to breathe over this delightful scene, skilfully spun by Boito out of no more than twenty-seven lines (out of two hundred and forty-five) found in the first scene of the second act of the play. As the curtain rises we s[illegible]Mistress Alice Ford who, followed by her pretty daughter Na[illegible] just leaving her house. She has received Falstaff's passionate message and is anxious to tell her neighbours - Mistress Meg Page and elderly Mistress Quickly - about it. Meg Page has also received a similar letter. On learning from Falstaff's identically worded missives that he proposes to seduce them both the wives decide, half amused and half indignant, to punish his impudence. Mistress Ford's allusion to the old libertine's

physical bulk in Shakespeare's Merry Wives (Act II, Scene i):

> What tempest, I trow, threw this whale.. ashore
> at Windsor?

develops, in Boito's hand, into the garrulous quartet of the gossiping women in which each of them contributes, by means of witty remarks, to the characterization of the mountainous knight.

> Quell'otre! quel tino!
> Quel Re delle pance,
> Ci ha ancora le ciance
> Del bel vogheggino.
>
> (That winebag! That winevat!
> That king of paunches,
> still prattling like
> a handsome youth.)

As Ford enters followed by Caius, Bardolfo, Pistola and Fenton (Nannetta's young suitor) the women, keeping together, retire into the background continuing their comments on Falstaff. At the same time, the five men voice together several opinions: Caius tells Ford what 'a rascal, a trickster and a thief' Falstaff is; Bardolfo and Pistola warn him of Falstaff's plan to seduce his wife; Fenton declares himself prepared to pack the old rogue 'off to hell' whilst Ford, dazed by the hubbub, mutters:

> Un ronzio di vespe e d'avidi
> Calabron brontolamento,
> Un rombar di nembi gravidi
> D'uragani è quel ch'io sento....
> ... Parlan quattro ed uno ascolta:
> Qual dei quattro ascolterò?
> Se parlate uno alla volta
> Forse allor v'intenderò?

(The buzz of bees
the whine of wasps
the crash of thunder -
these are all I hear....
... Four speak, one listens -
which shall have my ear?
If you talk one at a time
Perhaps I'll understand.)

Ford's imperious injunction to Pistola 'Ripeti' brings the nonet to an end. Already in 1893 Charles V. Stanford, in the admirable article written on the occasion of the first performance of Falstaff drew attention to the cleverness of Boito's ensemble verses observing:

> Without being cast in the old sterotyped mould or being unduly tramelled by forced rhymes, Boito contrived that nine of his characters should simultaneously utter as many different verses, all exactly balancing each other, all clear and distinctive, without any palpable straining of metre.[1]

It is interesting to note how Verdi, by seizing on the opportunities provided by the metrical scheme of the verse, succeeded in obtaining the irresistible effect of the nonet, by combining the lively $\frac{6}{8}$ rhythm suggested by the six syllable lines of the chattering women, with the rapid $\frac{2}{2}$ rhythm associated with the octosyllabic lines of the muttering men. (see Ex. 1). The ensuing love duet between Nannetta and Fenton ('Labbra di foco! ... Labbra di fiore!...) forms an exquisite transition between the scene of the exit of all the characters and the re-entrance of the women who quickly arrange to send Mistress Quickly as a messenger to the 'faithless wretch.' As

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1. Stanford, C.V. *loc.cit.* pp. 173-4.

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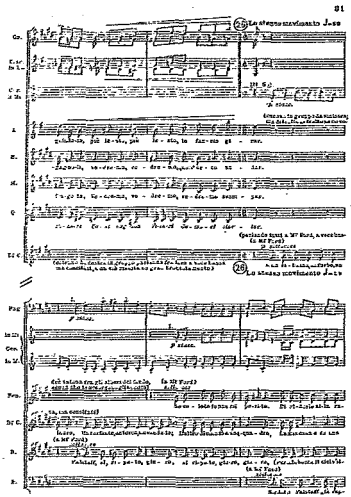
1. Stanford, C.V. *op.cit.* pp. 173-4.

Ex. 1



the three women leave the stage a second time Fenton and Nannetta resume their 'pretty game of love'. It was Boito's idea to have the love episodes of the young couple, (hardly existing in Shakespeare) 'appear suddenly at very frequent intervals'. He wrote in fact to Verdi: 'in all scenes in which they take part they will keep kissing by stealth in corners, astutely, boldly, without letting themselves be discovered, with fresh little phrases and brief, very rapid duologues, from the beginning to the end of the comedy; it will be a most lively, merry love, always disturbed and interrupted and always ready to recommence'.[1]

On hearing people approaching once more (this time the men) Nannetta runs out followed by Fenton singing the wondrously tender 'Bocca baciata non perde ventura' to which Nannetta answers, from a distance 'Anzi rinnova come fa la luna'. The exchanges between the men, still discussing their plot involving Ford presenting himself to Falstaff under another name (Fontana), keep the plot in motion. Eventually the women and men join in an ensemble (musically, a variation of the one already heard), in which all, with the exception of Fenton (who sing a lyrical line soaring above the other's phrases) carry on with their scheming. Alice's reprise of 'Ma il viso mio su lui risplenderà' - a quotation from Falstaff's extravagant love letter - is the cause of the burst of laughter to which the curtain falls. It is impossible to pass from the

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1. The letter to Verdi, dated 11th July 1889, is quoted in Walker: p.497.

consideration of this scene without a mention of its perfectly symmetrical structure, indicated by Hans Kühner as follows:

a) four women (dialogue, then quartet)

b) joined by five men (quintet-nonet, then dialogue)

c) duet of the two lovers

d) return of four women (mostly dialogue)

e) return of the two lovers

f) return of five men, joined by four women (dialogue, then quintet-nonet)

g) four women (dialogue, then quartet).[1]

The opening scene of Act II, set again in the Hall of the Garter Inn, where Falstaff is, as usual, seated in his great chair drinking sherry, shows the return of Bardolfo and Pistola who, singing and striking their chests, pretend to be 'penitent and contrite'. This scene, very closely based on Shakespeare's Act II, Scene ii, divides itself into two main incidents; the Quickly interview and the encounter of Falstaff and Ford, alias 'Signor Fontana' (Shakespeare's Master Brook). Announced by Bardolfo, Mistress Quickly (instead of the page Robin) enters greeting Falstaff with exaggerated humility and respect. ('Reverenza! - Your servant). She informs the fatuous knight that Alice Ford - 'Poor woman!' - is quite upset for love of him, and will be glad to receive her

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1. Kühner, Hans. Giuseppe Verdi, Hamburg, Selbstzeugnissen und Bild dokumenten: 1961, p.139.

suitor - 'Dalle due alle tre'.(Between two and three o'clock)[1] - a sentence twice repeated by Falstaff as if to make sure that he has understood the message. Meg Page, Mistress Quickly adds, is also hopelessly infatuated with him but, unfortunately, her husband is rarely absent from home. No sooner has the 'She Mercury' left than Falstaff, excited at the prospect of his amorous rendez-vous, congratules himself on his good fortune:

Va, vecchio John, va, va per la tua via.
Questa tua vecchia carne ancora spreme
Qualche dolcezza a te.
Tutte le donne ammutinate insieme
Si dannano per me!
Buon corpo di Sir John, ch'io nutro e sazio,
Va, ti ringrazio.

(Go, old Jack, go thy ways.
This old hide of thine still holds
some sweetness for thee.
All women are in a whirl,
To damn their souls for me!
Good body of Sir John, which I nourish to satiety,
I thank thee.)

Escorted by Pistola and Bardolfo, the disguised Ford enters, carrying a bag of money in his hand. After presenting Falstaff with a demijohn of wine and promising him a substantial reward, 'Signor Fontano' exposes a preposterous scheme for conquering Alice Ford, whom he loves hopelessly and passionately. Appealing to Falstaff's vanity and virility Ford/Fontano asks him to break down Alice's scruples, relying on the well known fact that 'one sin begets another'. Assuring Signor Fontano that he will satisfy his

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1. Boito altered the time suggested by Shakespeare 'Between ten and eleven', obviously for reasons of euphony.

desire very soon - between two and three that very afternoon during the absence of Alice's jealous fool of a husband. Falstaff goes out to dress himself for the amorous adventure. Left alone for a while Ford gives vent to his rage and jealousy in the semi-tragic soliloquy 'E' sogno? o realtà?... (It is a dream? ... Or reality?) in which Verdi, providing a masterful rendering of Boito's words (borrowed from Act III, Scene vi, and Act II, Scene ii of the Merry Wives) seems to emphasize the dramatic ambiguity of Ford's feelings. With regard to this passage, we are indeed at a loss to understand whether Verdi expects us to take Ford seriously or not. The prevailing comic mood is, however, unmistakably restored when the dandified Falstaff, all dressed up for seduction, re-enters to a most graceful musical accompaniment. After an exchange of 'courtly' ceremonies - each man requesting the other to precede him, the two finally, and simultaneously, go off through the same door.

The second scene of Act II, taking place in a room of Ford's house, is, from the point of view of action, the most effective of all. Closely packed with incidents, it moves at a breakneck speed - literally overflowing with vivacity and excitement. Boito drew its basic material from Shakespeare's Merry Wives, Act III, Scene iii. The episode of Ford's rummaging into the laundry basket is a survival of the omitted Mother Prat's incident found in the same play, Act IV, Scene ii. Some of the words of Falstaff's brief aria 'Quand'ero paggio', in which he boasts of his attractiveness as a young, slender boy, are reminiscent of

those uttered by Falstaff in 'Henry IV, Part 1; II, IV:

Shakespeare	Boito
When I was about thy years, Hal I was not an eagle's talon in the waist; I could have crept into any alderman's thumb ring.	'Quand'ero paggio Del Duca di Norfolk ero sottile... ... Tanto ero smilzo, flessibile e snello Che sarei guizzato attraverso un anello.

The episode of the loving couple's furtive flirtation and that of the screen are Boito's own contribution. Quickly's account of her interview with Falstaff, with which Boito's Act II, Scene ii begins, is followed by her announcement that the round knight will be seen at Alice's feet 'from two o'clock until three'. This provokes the amusement of Alice and Meg who, helped by Nannetta, briskly set about preparing the 'scene' (a laundry basket, a screen, a chair and a lute) for Falstaff's arrival. The preparation being completed, Alice leads the other three women in a lively ensemble beginning with her solo 'Gaie comari di Windsor! è l'ora! (My merry wives of Windsor! The hour has come!) On the approach of Falstaff the other women retire to keep watch, whilst Alice starts playing the lute. Entering gaily, the gallant knight, sings sottovoce to her accompaniment:

Alfin t'ho colto
Raggiante fiore
T'ho colto...

(At las
I pluck thee
O radiant flower);

seizing her by the waist, he proceeds, without further ado, to

seduce her. It is in the course of this wooing scene that occurs the bright, scherzo-like passage 'Quand'ero paggio del Duca di Norfolk', set to the most exquisite of accompaniments(Ex.2). Suddenly and to the surprise of Alice, Falstaff, and the now genuinely agitated Meg and Mistress Quickly, the room is invaded by the infuriated Ford who, with Caius, Fenton, Bardolfo and Pistola plus a crowd of willing neighbours, begins searching the room. As Falstaff hides himself behind the screen Ford, in a fit of jealousy, empties the laundry basket to make sure that nobody is hiding there. From this moment on, the rhythm of the action speeds up tremendously. Characters come and people go, running and milling around in a kind of moto perpetuo. Whilst Ford and his followers rush off to search the rest of the house, Alice goes to call her servants. To Meg and Mistress Quickly is left the task of squeezing the terrified Falstaff into the basket which is then hurriedly filled with the soiled linen again. During the vertiginous pandemonium Nannetta and Fenton conceal themselves behind the screen, at the same time making themselves comfortable in each other's arms. Ford returns with his men who turn the room upside down, searching even the most impossible places, from the fireplace to the tiny drawer of a table,

1. Ex. 2



Charles Osborne has remarked 'that the accent falls wrongly on the second syllable of "Norfolk". Boito was aware of this, but, finding that his choice lay between a good verse with a bad accent, or vice versa, chose the sensible course'. (op. cit., pp.487-8.)

(this last incident was suggested to Boito by Ford's exclamation 'He cannot creep into a halfpenny purse, nor into a pepper box; but, lest the devil that guides him should aid him, I will search impossible places', in the Merry Wives, Act III, Sc.v). During a moment of silence, the sound of a kiss is heard from behind the screen. The ensuing episode in which Ford, imagining himself to have caught Falstaff and Alice in the open act imparts instructions to his men to unmask the guilty couple, gives way to a masterful ensemble scene in which as many as nine characters joined by the neighbours' chorus, sing simultaneously. They are divided into two groups: at one side of the stage Alice, Meg and Mistress Quickly, busy pushing back Falstaff's face appearing at regular intervals amid the linen, in order to suffocate his ejaculations; at the other side Ford, Caius, Bardolfo and Pistola besieging the screen behind which Fenton and Nannetta, oblivious to the world around them, sing, in sweeping melodic lines, of their joyful love which:

> ... has no ears
> For thunder and storm.
> It flies up to heaven
> To find its blessed joys.
>
> (... non ode
> Tuon nè bufere,
> Vola alle sfere
> Beate e gode).

After a farcical step-by-step advance, Ford throws over the screen to discover, to his rage and disappointment (as he wishes Nannetta married to old Caius) his daughter with the unwanted young suitor. Mistaking the retreating Fenton for Falstaff, Pistola and Bardolfo incite all the men to pursue him, on the stairs, and the hunt continues. Alice summons four servants, bidding them:

Rovesciate quel cesto
Dalla finestra nell'acqua del fosso ...
Là! presso alle giuncaie
Davanti al crocchio delle lavandaie.

(Empty this basket,
out through the window, into the ditch ...
There near the reeds
where those washwomen are.)

All the men return and, amidst the laughter of the women (on and off stage), Alice takes Ford by the arm leading him quickly to the window to enjoy the spectacle of Falstaff floating in the Thames outside.

When the curtain rises on the final act, Falstaff not unnaturally in 'dampened spirits' calls for mulled wine, whilst reflecting on how the world grows wicked as one ages:

Io, dunque, avrò vissuto tanti anni, audace e destro
Cavaliere, per essere portato in un canestro
E gittato al canale co' pannilini biechi,
Come si fa coi gatti e i catellini ciechi...
Mondo reo. Non c'è più virtù. Tutto declina.

(I, then, having lived so long as a brave and skilful
Knight, end up carried in a clothes-basket
Tossed in the river with the stinking wash
Like a kitten or a still blind pup...
Evil world! There is no honour left, all goes to pot.

This passage is almost literally taken from Scene v, Act III of the Merry Wives. Falstaff's following lines:

Va, vecchio John, va, va per la tua via; cammina
Finchè tu muoia. Allor scomparirà la vera
Virilità dal mondo.

(Go, old jack, go thy ways; travel
until thou'rt dead. Then true manliness
Will be gone from the world.)

are a 'dark' variation of the self-encouraging soliloquy heard in Act II, Scene i, of the opera and come from Henry IV, Part I; II, iv ('Go thy ways, old jack; die when thou wilt...) In Falstaff's most brilliant monologue 'Buono. Ber del vin dolce e sbottonarsi al sole' (Good. To loosen one's vest in the sun and drink sweet wine) are preserved some lines of the Fat Knight's long speech in Henry IV Part II (IV, iii) in which Falstaff enumerates the euphoric qualities of 'sherris'. The second part of the monologue is very similar to the passage in 'Iram' (Act I, i) discussed at page 121.

> (Il buon vino).. dal labbro
> Sale al cervel e quivi risveglia il picciol fobbro
> Dei trilli, un negro trillo che vibra entro l'uom brillo
> Trilla ogni fibra in cor, l'allegro etere al trillo,
> Guizza e il giocondo globo squilibra una demenza
> Brillante! E il trillo invade il mondo!!!
>
> (Good wine)... from the lips
> It rises to the brain, wakening the fairy smith
> Of trills, a black cricket who sings in the reeling brain,
> Waking to trills every fibre of the heart. The joyous air
> Quivers to the trill, a thrilling madness drunkens
> The happy globe, the trill quivers through the entire world!).

This is Boito, the poet-musician, at his best. It is an exceedingly beautiful specimen of poetry in itself and also proved to be a stimulating source of inspiration, suggesting to Verdi the celebrated passage in which the gradually expanding effect of the good wine is illustrated by a trill beginning in the orchestra, at first on a solo flute, then on some of the strings and wind, then on more, until the whole orchestra, underlying Falstaff's line 'E il trillo invade il mondo' -(The trill quivers through the entire

world) 'bursts into something like a paean of bibulous triumph'.[1] (See Ex.3.)

The remainder of the scene is a compilation of passages culled from Shakespeare's Merry Wives Acts III, iv and Acts IV, iv. It contains Mistress Quickly's second visit to Falstaff and his acceptance of Alice's proposal to meet her at Herne's Oak in Windsor Park, disguised as the Black Huntsman (Herne the Hunter), as well as the episode in which the three Fords, Fenton and Meg Page, plan to mock Falstaff in an impromptu masque. Diverging from Sahkespeare, Boito makes Alice, instead of Meg, the chief-organizer of the second duping of the gullable knight. As Nannetta's mother, Alice is party to the plot engineered by the other women against Ford so as to circumvent his plan to marry Nannetta to Caius that very night, during the revel.

The final scene of Falstaff finds its prototype in Shakespeare (Merry Wives, V, vi), many details, however, being added, altered or elaborated by Boito. The scene opens in Windsor Park, at night. The moon slowly rises as Fenton, standing near the legendary Herne's Oak, sings an exquisite love song: 'Dal labbro il canto estasiato volo', (From the lover's lips the lovesong flies) gently reverberating through the eerie atmosphere of the night. Answering Fenton's love call with the by now familiar 'Anzi rinnova come fa la luna' (one of the few motives recurring in the opera), Nannetta enters dressed as the

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1. Peyser, F. op.cit., p.77.

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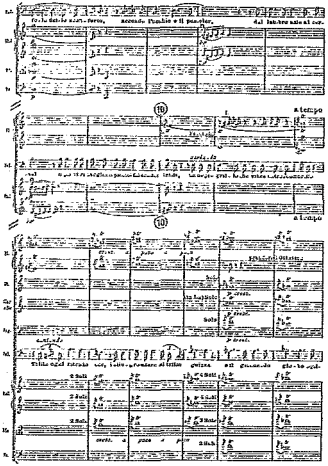

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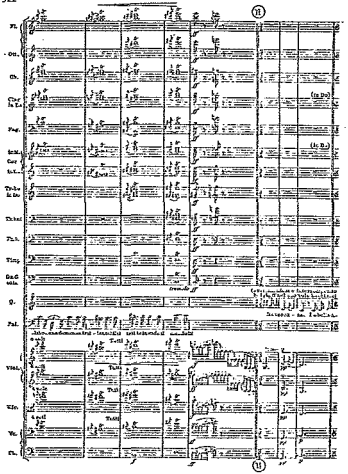

Ex. 3

Fairy Queen. She is accompanied by Alice, Quickly and Meg. Alice instructs the bewildered Fenton to wear the black gown and mask she has brought with her (Caius' supposed disguise) merely explaining that Ford's double-dealing will now turn against him. On hearing Falstaff's steps, they all leave the stage. As the Windsor bells ominously strike midnight Falstaff appears, properly costumed as Herne the Hunter. Looming up in the moonlight with great stag's antlers on his head he pauses to count the strokes of the bell. Then, associating himself (as in Shakespeare, but in a more condensed version) with the erotic Jupiter of pagan antiquity, sings:

...Giove!
Tu per amor d'Europa ti trasformasti in bove;
Portasti corna. I numi c'insegnan la modestia.
L'amore metamorfosa un uomo in una bestia.

(...Jove!
Thou, for love of Europa, didst become a bull;
Thou didst wear horns. The gods teach us humility,
Love changes man into a beast.)

He expects success at last and,when Alice enters, fervently starts to make love to her. She informs him that they are not alone as Meg shadows her. Falstaff's ability to generate comic myths of himself is well portrayed in this scene in which, confronted with the prospect of a double adventure, he triumphantly rises to the occasion:

È doppia l'avventura!
Venga anche lei! Squartatemi
Come un camoscio a mensa!!
Sbranatemi!!! Cupido
Alfin mi ricompensa!

(A double tryst!
Let her come! Tear me limb from limb
Both of you, like venison at table!
Tear me to shreds! Cupid,
At last, answers my prayer.)

His deflation, however, follows soon. Meg's voice is heard crying that the fairy throng is coming. Scared out of his senses Falstaff throws himself, face down, upon the ground. Nannetta enters, as the Fairy Queen, with Alice and several little girls dressed as White and Blue Fairies. They take their places in a circle about their Queen as she starts singing her beautifully ethereal song:

Sul fil d'un soffio etesio
Scorrete, agili larve;
Fra i rami un baglior cesio
D'alba lunare apparve.
Danzate! e il passo blando
Misuri un blando suon,
Le magiche accoppiando
Carole alla canzon...

(Born on the freshening breeze,
Fly fleet spirits
While through the wood shines the bluish gleam
Of the rising moon.
Dance! Let your fairy steps
Be measured by a fairy tune,
Which joins your magic dancing
To a magic song.)

There is such an amount of poetical and musical splendour lavished upon this scene, imbued with the very essence of the supernatural world, that we cannot bring ourselves to believe that it should not be taken seriously. There is a dreamlike quality in the words of Nannetta's song, fragrant and translucent as if impregnated with moon-drops. With rare poetry of mood Verdi

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recaptured, in his music, the magic of the nocturnal woodland evoked by Boito's text thus transforming the supposed farcical climax of the play into a scene of bewitching charm. The entrance of a horde of fantastic creatures (in fact Alice, Meg, Quickly, Bardolfo, Pistola and a group of townsfolk in various disguises) abruptly brings us back to earth and the comedy resumes its nimble pace. Pretending disgust at the sight of such a corrupt, impure being, they all set about Falstaff pricking and pinching and squeezing him until he begs for mercy. The scene of the gulling of Falstaff:

> Pizzica, pizzica
> Pizzica, stuzzica
>
> (Pinch, pinch
> Pinch and poke.)

resolves itself into a pyrotechnical verbal display. With ease Boito plays with the words, obtaining from them such a profusion of sonorous and rhythmical effects that we tend to lose sight of the fact that this amazing dexterity was the result of a lifetime of experiment, discipline and hard work. From the dramatic point of view, the transference of Falstaff's lines about wit:

> Men of all sorts take a pride to gird at me:
> the brain of this foolish compounded clay, man,
> is not able to invent anything that tends to
> laughter, more than I invent or is invented on me:
> I am not witty in myself, but the cause that wit
> is in other men,

from Henry IV, Part II; I, ii to the end of the gulling scene, is, in my opinion, one of Boito's most brilliant innovations. As

remarked by Granville-Barker:

> It has always been a source of discomfort to lovers of Shakespeare that his greatest comic character, cruelly humiliated in the last act of Henry IV, reappears in the Merry Wives of Windsor as a feeble old man, no longer capable of turning the tables on his tormentors.[1]

When, in Boito, Falstaff, after being shown up before all of Windsor, regains his superb self-conceit proclaiming

> Ogni sorta di gente dozzinale
> Mi beffa e se ne gloria;
> Pur, senza me, costor con tanta boria
> Non avrebbero un briciilo di sale.
> Son io che vi fa scaltri.
> L'arguzia mia crea l'arguzia degli altri.
>
> (All kind of common folk
> jeer at me now, and are proud of it.
> But without me, their arrogance
> would be flat and flavourless,
> It is I who season it for you -
> My cleverness creates the cleverness of others.

he is again the shameless, glorious, immortal hero of the Henry IV plays.

It is to Falstaff that the last laugh falls. At the end of a double nuptial ceremony Ford realizes that he has (as arranged by the women) blessed the union of Fenton and Nannetta as well as that of Caius and ... Bardolfo! (in Shakespeare, Caius is married off to a boy of nubile age), the tables are swiftly turned on Ford who, eventually, accepts the situation. The epilogue of the opera is in the form of a 'vaudeville'. All the singers, lined up at the footlights facing the audience, drop their characters and

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1. Granville-Barker, *op.cit.*, p.20.

launch into an ebullient and tumultuous fugue, the words of which stem from Jacques' 'All the world's a stage' speech in Shakespeare's As you like it'. (Act II, vii). This, forms a most appropriate finish to the opera:

Tutto nel mondo è burla.
L'uom è nato burlone,
La fede in cor gli ciurla,
Gli ciurla la ragione.
Tutti gabbati! Irride
L'un l'altro ogni mortal.
Ma ride ben chi ride
La risata final.

(The whole world is but a joke
And man is born a clown.
Within his addled head
his brains are in a churn.
We all are fools! And every man
Laughs at the others' folly.
But he laughs best who sees to it
That the last laugh falls to him.)

The libretto of Falstaff from the literary point of view even excelling that of Otello, is the supreme achievement of Boito's career as librettist, indeed the triumph of his poetical and dramatic genius. It is a masterpiece on all grounds. Defined by the critic Luigi Pagano as 'the masterpiece, in the comic genre, of Italian poetry of the nineteenth century,[1] Falstaff is a comedy on its own merit, deserving to be read for its own sake. As a libretto it has also been praised by Charles V. Stanford as 'an opera book which only a musician could have written for a musician.[2]

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1. Pagano, L. 'La fionda di Davide'. Bocca, Torino, 1928, p.78.
2. Stanford, C.V. op.cit., p.171.

Last but not least, as an adaptation, it represents a dramaturgical ex-' .it of the highest order being, in the opinion of critics such as Toye, Marlowe and Dean, 'a better comedy than the "Merry Wives of Windsor"',[1] 'a greater work of art than Shakespeare's original play',[2] and 'superior to the play both in tautness of design and in the characterization of the principal figures.'[3]

At the earliest stage of the collaboration Boito wrote to Verdi:

> During the first few days I was in despair...
> ... to sketch the characters in a few strokes, to weave the plot, to extract all the juice from that enormous Shakespearean orange, without letting the useless pips slip into the little glass, to write with colour and clarity and brevity, to delineate the musical plan of the scene, so that there results an organic unity that is A PIECE OF MUSIC and yet is not, to make the joyous comedy live from beginning to end, to make it live with a natural and communicative gaiety, is difficult, difficult, difficult; and yet must seem simple, simple, simple.[4]

It is Boito's merit and glory to have succeeded in this most admirably.

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1. Toye, F. op.cit., p.434.
2. Marlowe, R. Verdi, and Shakespeare. Music Review, England: Cambridge, Ed. G. Sharp, 1958, [illegible]; p.231.
3. Dean, F. op.cit., p.123.
4. Walker, F. op.cit., p.497.

PART IV

BOITO - THE LIBRETTIST-COMPOSER OF MEFISTOFELE

CHAPTER I

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE FAUST LEGEND

With the words: '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',[1] Boito, in 1893, had tried to dissuade Puccini from setting to music Mürger's celebrated novel Scènes de la vie de Bohème. After the sensational success of Mascagni's Cavalleria Rusticana premièred at Rome in 1890, the Verismo movement had triumphantly asserted itself on the lyrical stage but Boito was still anchored to his own conception of the music-drama which he had described, in his youth, as a 'high poem, tragic and epic, mimic and rhapsodic ... that grand restoration of Greek tragedy and the medieval mystery play'.[2] He still believed in great subjects taken from the world of history or from the realm of legend and myth in which, as Wagner had taught decades before, life can be seen in its most purely human form. Intending in his own operas to provide an answer to the problem of the creation of a new form of melodramma, Boito had chosen for himself two of the most fascinating themes which history and legend had to offer - Faust and Nero, both involving the idea of the struggle between Good and Evil and of

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1. Arrigo Boito - Scritti e documenti, p.146.
2. Boito, A., op. cit., p.1257.

final spiritual regeneration. Nerone and Faust (later to become Mefistofele) were already taking form in Boito's mind when he was in his early twenties. We know that for some time he worked at both of them simultaneously but finally gave precedence to the 'Faust' theme, a subject 'usé jusqu'à la corde' (as Boito himself admitted in the Prologue in the Theatre of his first Mefistofele) but still open to endless varying interpretations. 'Every century, every country, every civilisation, every artistic and historical cycle has its own Faust' wrote Boito, and 'this theme will live as long as the instinct for Truth, from which it sprang, will exist'.[1] Few characters indeed, have exerted, and still exert, such strong fascination upon the literary, musical, religious and philosophical mind as did, and does, that of Faust. Born from the popular imagination, the story, as old as the world itself - if we accept Boito's view of Adam being the first Faust - did not have, at first, any symbolical or philosophical pretension. In its origins it simply and crudely illustrated the conflict between the power of Good and Evil. The Faust of one of the earliest tales, a shadowy hero who lost his life in a demonstration of flying, seems to hark back in tradition to the sorcerer Simon, of The Acts, chapter VIII. Christian stories include also The legend of Saint Theophilus; The story of Militarius; La Legend du Chevalier qui donna sa femme au diable and Le pact avec le diable.

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1. Boito, A., op. cit., pp. 98 and 100.

It was during the sixteenth century that all the tales woven around the legendary figures of the ancient Magi, sorcerers and alchemists said to have associated themselves with the Devil in order to achieve extraordinary powers, or of human characters in the grasp of demonic force, merged with the story of a real-life Georg of Johannes Faustus. He was born in the late fifteenth century and died, most scandalously, in about 1540, having gained a reputation for eccentric scholarship and miraculous powers. This Doctor Faustus who, according to Victor Lange was actually 'a figure of remarkable independence of thought and belief, typical of the revolutionary spiritual climate of the sixteenth century',[1] became the hero of the first German Faust-book, published by Spiess at Frankfurt, in 1587. It was nothing more than a didactic work, specifically lutheran in character. However, in giving a literary status to the old legend, Spiess created a powerful and irrepressible symbol which was to dominate Western consciousness for centuries to come. Christopher Marlowe, who probably knew the popular ballad of the Life and Death of Doctor Faustus or, perhaps, the English version of Spiess' Faust-Book (published in 1592 under the title The historie of the damnable life, and deserved death of Doctor John Faustus) seems to have recognized at once the extraordinary dramatic potential of the story. He turned it into a play,

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1. Lange, V. 'Introduction to "Faust". The Modern Library College Editions, 1950, New York: p.v.

giving to the legend a tragic dimension and emotional intensity unknown to previous versions. Moreover, by adding visions of unattainable glory and power, he made of his story the expression of some of the Renaissance yearnings and beliefs and of his hero the epitome of the Renaissance mind with its boundless aspirations. Marlowe's The Tragicall History of the Life and Death of Dr. Faustus was written around 1590. Its first German performance took place in 1608.[1] Like many of Shakespeare's plays, it was adapted to German audiences, losing in poetry but retaining its theatricality with enhanced spectacular effects. Its striking success produced, in turn, in Germany itself, a multitude of literary Fausts,[2] of folk dramas, tragedies, farces, pantomimes, puppet-plays. These eventually led to Goethe's masterpiece and after him, to Heine's, Grabbe's, Lenau's, and Stolte's works on the subject as well as to the fictional composer Adrian LeverkUhn in Thomas Mann's novel Doctor Faustus.

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1. See Ferguson, J. 'Goethe and Faust', Great Britain: The Open University Press (Unit 12), 1972, p.63.

2. Among them: Widman's Faustbook (1599) and Pfitzer's revised version of it (1674) in which, for the first time, is introduced a pretty but poor girl in love with Faust - the embryo of Gretchen; Newmann's Disquisitio de Fausto published (in German) in 1702; an unfinished drama by Lessing and two dramatic fragments by F. Müller which can be considered precursors of Goethe's work; Klinger's Faust's Life, Death and Damnation (1791) - a novel with recurrent use of dialogue which may be considered the Sturm and Drang answer to the optimistic rationalism of Lessing.

CHAPTER II

FAUST AND COMPOSERS OTHER THAN BOITO

Goethe's interest in Faust was first aroused by a melodramatic version of the old story performed on the stage of a puppet-theatre. Goethe saw it, apparently, during his years of study at the University of Strasbourg. It was then (c. 1770) that he started working on the subject which was to persist in his thoughts for a period of sixty years - the whole of his working life. The first part of Faust, in the form in which we know it, did not appear until 1808. It had, however, been preceded by the Urfaust,[1] a dramatic sketch, partly in prose, partly in poetry, containg the essential episodes of the story - Faust's association with Mephistopheles, his love for Margaret and his final doom - and by the so-called 'Faust-frugment' of 1790. It was Goethe's intention that Part II should swiftly follow on Part I. As early as 1800 he had begun the 'Helen' episode (later to develop into the third act of Part II), but only in 1825, at the age of seventy-six, did he resume Faust. He worked on it in earnest until the poem was completed in July of 1831, eight months before his death. The complete work was published in 1832, posthumously, as its author had desired.

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1. Probably completed in 1775, it was only published in 1887, after Professor E Schmidt's discovery of a manuscript copy ot it. (See Vittorio Santoli. 'Per la critica dell Urfaust' in Rivista di letterature moderne. Florence: Edizioni le lingue estere. No.1. July 1950, p.31.

It was after the publication of the first part of Goethe's Faust that composers, perhaps attracted by the warmth and tenderness of Gretchen's love episode, found in the Faust story a potent source of inspiration. Many of them considered Goethe's masterpiece with musical intentions at one time or another. Beethoven toyed with the idea of writing an opera on the subject but all he actually composed was the 'Song of the flea'; Wagner got as far as an overture; Meyerbeer used some fragments from Faust in his opera La jeunesse de Goethe; Rossini, tempted by the grandeur of the theme, seemed to be on the verge of breaking his self-imposed silence. Weber might have written a 'Faust' but when given the choice of this subject or Oberon he finally, and perhaps regretfully, chose the latter. Of the many minor composers who ventured to approach the subject, failing however to do it justice, we may remember: Joseph Strauss (who, with his Faust's Leben und Thaten - 1814 - seems to have been the first to introduce the immortal story into the operatic world); Lickl (1815); Spohr (1816); Müller (1818); Bishop (1825); Beaucourt (1827); Lindpainter and Louise Bertin (1831); De Pellaert (1834); Hennebert, Gordigiani and Radziwill (1835); Rietz (1836); Pierson (1854); Roda (1872); Valente (1875); Lassen (1876) and Zöllner (1887). In more recent years, Lili Boulanger set to music a scene from the second part of Goethe's Faust, calling the result a cantata (Helen and Faust). Malhor used the final Chorus Mysticus, from Goethe's Faust, for the second part of his Eighth Symphony (1910); Busoni wrote an

interesting opera - Doctor Faust; based on an old puppet-play (completed after its author's death by Jarnach in 1924). Prokofiev introduced the characters of Faust and Mephistopheles in his opera The flaming Angel (1927), whilst a Communist Faust (a rewriting of Gounod's 'bourgeois' opera) was produced in Moscow, in 1925, as a means of political propaganda. Reutter is the author of the near folk-opera Dr Johannes Faust (1936), as well as of Don Juan and Faust (1950) in which the ageing scholar is introduced as Don Giovanni's unsympathetic rival. Faust III (1964), by the Danish composer Nils Viggo Bentzon; Pousseur's Votre Faust (1969), which its librettist Butor defined as 'a changeable fantasy on the operatic genre' and Gessner's Faust counter Faust (1971), utilizing passages from Boito's, Gounod's and Berlioz's works, are the avant-garde contributions to Faustian musical literature.

Of all the composers who have essayed to give musical expression to Goethe's Faust, Liszt, Berlioz, Schumann, Gounod and Boito appear to have been the most successful.

In Liszt's A Faust Symphony in Three Character Sketches (1854) the first movement, devoted to Faust, is built upon four clearly characterized themes aimed at depicting the conflicting sides of his personality: the philosopher, the lover, and the striver for lofty ideals who, 'when near to victory falls back

into darkness'.[1] Gretchen's delicate charm and tenderness is evoked, in the second movement, by music of marvellous delicacy. Her two themes (the first given to the oboe with a solo viola accompaniment and the second, in repeated chords, appearing on the strings alone and then on the woodwind) alternate with Faust's themes, in a most suggestive manner. The last movement, portraying Mephistopheles, is particularly ingenious. It consists, for the most part, of a parody of Faust's themes which appear here cruelly distorted - incidentally a wonderful achievement in terms of the composer's metamorphosis of themes technique. In fact, as Ernest Newman has remarked

> the being who exists, for the purposes of the drama, only in antagonism to Faust, whose main activity consists only in endeavouring to frustrate every good impulse of Faust's soul, is really best dealt with in music, not as a positive individuality, but as the embodiment of negation - a malicious, saturnine parody of all the good that has gone to the making of Faust.[2]

When the various themes of the work finally appear to be fighting for supremacy, the music rises to a tremendous climax before eventually subsiding in representation of Mephistopheles' defeat. Liszt's Faust Symphony must be considered as one of the successful treatments of the subject because of the modest intentions of its

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1. Humphrey Searle - The Orchestral works, in Franz Liszt - The man and his music. London: Walker A. ed., 1970, p.305.

2. Carl van Vechten 'Relative Difficulties Depicting Heaven and Hell in Music'. The Musical Quarterly - vol V.; 1919 - p.558.

author who, wisely, simply considered his attempt as an essay in characterization.

Berlioz's La damnation de Faust (1846), a dramatic legend in four parts, is a more ambitious work than Liszt's. Based on an earlier Huit Scènes de Faust (1829) it had characteristics of programme music, cantata, oratorio and opera and was actually produced in opera-guise in 1893,[1] twenty-four years after the composer's death. It does not seem however, to have been very well suited to the lyrical stage. The libretto, written by Berlioz himself and Gandonnière after Gérard de Nerval's French version of Faust, covers only a portion of Goethe's poem, the selection of scenes being obviously motivated by musical rather than by dramatic reasons. The setting of the first part on the plains of Hungary, where Faust is found meditating upon nature and solitude, was apparently a device to allow the interpolation of the Rákoczy march which Berlioz had orchestrated in 1845. The second part, set in Germany, opens, rather impressively, in Faust's study. As in Goethe (Faust I; Sc i) the old scholar, profoundly disillusioned, is contemplating suicide when a sudden welling-up of childhood memory, inspired by the sound of the Easter bells and religious canticles from a nearby church, restores his faith in life. There follows the very brief and ineffective

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1. It was adapted for the operatic stage by Raoul Gunsbourg and produced by him at Montecarlo, February 18, 1893.

dramatic episode in which Méphistophélès offers Faust all possible earthly joys and experiences. Faust accepts and they set off together (Goethe, Faust, I; Sc. iv, v). The ensuing scene (Auerbach cellar) takes place in Leipzig where students and soldiers are revelling (Goethe, Faust, I; Sc.v). Brander's 'Song of the rat'; the choral burlesque 'Requiescat' and fugal 'Amen' based on it; Méphistophélès' 'Song of the flea', are remarkable items, full of humour and sardonic ribaldry. The scene shifts again now to the banks of the Elbe where Méphistophélès lulls Faust to sleep in a stupendous aria ('Voici de roses' - Here are roses), admirably conveying the impression of his power and complete dominion over things. The Chorus of the Sylphs and the instrumental ballet which follows, delightfully scored, have the magic touch of Berlioz at his best. The final Soldiers' Chorus (Goethe, Faust I, Sc.ii) mixed with a latin song from the students, is rather undistinguished. The third part, containing the episode of Marguerite, represents the core of Berlioz's work. Marguerite's ballad of the King of Thulé ('Autre fois un roi de Thulé' - Once in far Thulé, Goethe, Faust I, Sc.viii)) characterized by Berlioz as a 'Chanson Gothique', is fascinating in its archaic flavour and mysterious overtones. Other remarkable items are: Méphistophélès' invocation of the Will-o'-the-wisps; his malicious, mocking serenade, and the final Marguerite - Faust's love duet 'Ange adorable' - (Adorable angel) harshly broken into by Méphistophélès who urges Faust to depart (Goethe, Faust, I; Sc.xii). Marguerite's deeply moving romance

at the beginning of Part IV ('D'amour l'ardente flamme' - Love devouring fire) is one of the finest items in the score. Here, Berlioz used a poem of his own in substitution for Goethe's song 'Meine Ruh ist hin' (My peace is gone - Faust, I; Sc xv) famous in Schubert's exquisitely sensitive setting. Next comes the 'Forest and Cavern' scene (Goethe, Faust I, Sc. xiv) in which Faust invokes nature in a tremendously impressive aria ('Nature immense, impenetrable - Nature vast, unfathomable). Learning from Méphistophélès that Marguerite is condemned to death for the poisoning of her mother, Faust promises his soul to the Devil in return for Marguerite's salvation (Goethe, Faust I, Sc. xxiii). The tempestuous 'Ride to the Abyss', with its frighteningly accentuated horse-hoofs beating up from the orchestra, is a fine example of illustrative music, wonderfully effective. Also effective, although somewhat trivial, are the final Pandemonium and Infernal orgy. The Epilogue is devoted to the scene of Marguerite's redemption - an episode utterly spoiled by overwhelming musical and (when staged) theatrical effects. It is a disappointing conclusion, for La damnation de Faust is, on the whole, a grandiose and extraordinarily imaginative work.

Schumann's Scenes from Goethe's Faust (1844 - 1853), in three parts, is an unequal work containing, along with unimpressive numbers, pages of noble inspiration and of extraordinary musical interest. Schumann, who thought of treating Goethe's text as an oratorio, explained that his Faust 'was intended as a counterpart

to the "Paradise und die Peri" theme of reaching heaven after long wandering and striving'.[1] Eric Sams suggests that Schumann's aim was to raise Faust 'the most modern manifesto of humanism, to the status and dignity of a sacred book, by covering it with Christian modes of musical expression, just as Goethe had converted Christian symbolism to his own purposes'.[2] Schumann's choice of the scenes does not seem, however, to adhere to any preconceived ideological scheme, rather being indicative, as was the case with Berlioz, of the author's response to what he personally found most moving and suggestive of musical treatment. He did not even attempt to preserve continuity of action, knowing perhaps that German audiences, familiar with Goethe's poem, would be able to relate each of his scenes to the background of the whole. The passages chosen by Schumann for the first part of his work are: a portion of the first Scene in the garden between Gretchen and Faust; the episode of Gretchen before the picture of the Mater Dolorosa and the Cathedral scene, corresponding to scenes xii, xviii and xx of Goethe's Faust, Part I. For his second part Schumann selected another three scenes, this time from Goethe's Faust Part II: A pleasant landscape (song of the spirits and Faust's monologue) from Act I; the Midnight scene, with the four Grey Hags and the

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1. Eric Sams 'Schumann and Faust'. The Musical Times, June 1972. London: vol. 113, pp.543-44.

2. ibid., p.544.

scene of Faust's death (as far as the words 'Der Zeiger fällt, Er fällt, es ist vollbracht') both from Goethe's Act V. Schumann's third part consists of the final scene of Goethe's Faust and is divided into seven numbers: A mountain gorge; Pater ecstaticus; Pater Profundus; Chorus of the Angels; Doctor Marianus ('Free is the prospect here'); Doctor Marianus ('Thou, o Purest'); and Chorus Mysticus.

The first part, better suited to the lyrical quality of Schumann's inspiration, is, perhaps, on the whole, superior to the second one. Especially happy is the Garden Scene, with its open air atmosphere and idyllic mood, suggestive of the tenderness of Gretchen's first, innocent love. Here Schumann successfully attempts a flexible type of melody resembling the free declamatory style of the dialogue. The delineation of Faust is, however, in this scene, sadly lacking in character. The Scene of the Spirits, at the beginning of Part II, is delicately scored and yet manages to sound strangely unethereal whilst Faust's monologue is laboured and monotonous. The dramatic moment of Faust's death is superb - 'the summit of Schumann's achievement in dramatic music',[1] in the opinion of George Bernard Shaw who considered it the climax of the score. The third part contains pages of impressive choral writing, such as the Chorus in praise of Faust's redemption, in which each group is characterized by other voices as well as by

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1. Quoted in Eric Sams, op. cit., p.546.

music of contrasted style and texture, sometimes polyphonic, at other times homophonic; the Chorus of the Penitent women, made poignant by the sombre splendour of its harmony; the Chorus of the Blessed boys, and the final Chorus Mysticus in which Schumann, inspired by the qualities of Goethe's thought 'seems to reach out beyond his own emotions into the highest philosophical regions that music can penetrate'.[1]

Gounod's Faust, first performed in Paris in 1859 with mixed success, was destined to become one of the most popular of operas. 'It does not voice the deeper verities of Goethe's poem', Frederick Martens remarks, 'but gives the most acceptable musical expression to a theatrically effective book'.[2] It has remained the most popular work based on Goethe's Faust, though it would perhaps be more convenient to call the opera 'Margarethe', as the Germans do out of reverance for Goethe's masterpiece. The librettists Barbier and Carré, did in fact concentrate on the sentimental Gretchen's episode, leaving the story of Faust and his final doom unsolved. As originally presented, the opera was in five acts but there is an increasing tendency to perform it in a more compressed, four act form. For my comments I follow the original five-acts version. The curtain rises (after a not very impressive overture) on the aged Faust who, sitting alone in his

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1. Chissel, Joan, 'Schumann', London: Dent, J.M. 1967, p.176.

2. Martens, F.H. 'A Thousand and One Nights of Opera'. New York: London: D. Appleton-Century Company, MCMXLII, p.460.

study, laments the futility of life and knowledge in the aria 'Rien! En vain j'interroge' (Nothing! I have questioned in vain). In despair, he resolves on suicide by drinking poison; (Goethe, Faust I; Sc i) at the moment of surrender, however, his hand is stayed by the sound of young people singing a lively chorus ('Paresseuse fille' - Lazy girl). Tormented, he abjures all faith, calling the devil before him. Méphistophélès appears a 'vraie gentilhomme', as he describes himself, and offers his services. He promises Faust gold, glory and power, but the old scholar, rejecting them, reveals his longing for youth and pleasure ('A moi les plaisirs, les jeune mistress' - I want pleasure, young mistresses). To break down Faust's hesitation in signing away his soul, Faust summons up the image of a charming young girl sitting at a spinning wheel. This episode is, musically, beautifully realized: under a murmuring figure of violins and harp the horns sing the tender love theme which will be heard, more fully developed, in the Garden Scene in Act III. By drinking a magic potion Faust is transformed into a handsome young man, eager for pleasure and adventure. The second act takes place outside the city gates (Goethe, Faust, I; Sc.ii). It is Kermesse time and a crowd of merrymakers - students, soldiers, burghers, young girls and matrons - are strolling about, singing joyfully. The chorus "Vin ou bière" (Wine or beer) is an admirable piece of characterization each group of people being effectively differentiated by means of individual melodies. Accompanied by

solemn, somewhat religious harmonies, Valentine, a young soldier, brother to Marguerite, appears together with Siebel, Marguerite's young admirer, and a group of students. (In Goethe, Valentine is only brought in in Scene xix whilst Siebel appears momentarily, as one of the drinking students in Scene v - Auerbach's cellar). Valentine, who is about to go to war, delivers a song of farewell, 'Avant de quitter ces lieux (Before leaving this place), one of the most popular of the opera's arias which was, incidentally, added to the opera after its first hearing and to an Italian text ('Dio possente'). Méphisophélès, now on the stage, interrupts a students' chorus with a vigorous song in praise of greed and gold ('Le veau d'or' - The Golden Calf). With an impudent toast to Marguerite, he infuriates Valentine, who draws his sword, finding himself, however, powerless to use it. Recognizing the power of evil, the men exorcise him with the crosses on their swords. The tension is dissipated by a sweeping waltz-tune which prompts burghers and p[illegible]mbark upon a spirited dance, accompanied by the crowd's [illegible]orus 'Ainsi que la brise légère' (Even as the gentle breeze.) It might be objected that this waltz must have sounded somewhat anachronistic in the sixteenth century Germany, where the action takes place. Yet, we must admit that the effect of this scene is wholly satisfying. The entrance of Faust is followed by that of Marguerite, on her way from church. Faust offers to accompany her but she, modestly but charmingly refuses (Goethe, Faust, I: Sc.vii). This short episode brings

in a sudden change over the music, now graceful and captivating in its charming simplicity. As Marguerite, Faust and Méphistophélès depart, the waltz measures return and the dance, going on in rousing fashion, provides an animated close to the act. The third act, describing the episode of the seduction of Marguerite, accomplished by Faust with the assistance of Méphistophélès, is laid in Marguerite's garden (Goethe Faust, I: Sc viii, x, xii, xiii, xvi). It is built up of several scenes and contains a wealth of attractive melodies: Siebel's gracious Flower Song ('Faites-lui mon aveaux' - Bear her my confession of love); Faust's popular cavatina 'Salut! Demeure chaste et pure' (Hail! chaste and pure abode), tender and musically inspired; Marguerite's ballad 'Il etait un roi de Thulè' (There was a king of Thulè), interrupted by reflections on the stranger who has spoken to her, and the famous 'Jewel Song' ('Ah! je ris de me voir si belle' - Ah! I smile at seeing myself so beautiful). This is a valse brillante, 'a trifle incongruous for a girl of such simplicity as Marguerite, until we recall that the Marguerite which the librettists Barbier and Carré invented for Gounod is not the Gretchen of Goethe',[1] as Herbert F. Peyser rightly observes. The act contains also: a very fine quartet growing out of the presence of Faust, Marguerite, her elderly neighbour, Marthe, and Méphistophélès; the well-known love scene ('Laissez-moi contempler ton visage' - Let me gaze upon your face) and Marguerite's wondrous passage 'Il m'aime' (He loves me)

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1. Peyser, H F. Introduction to Opera. New York: Barnes and Noble 1961; p.85.

which swells to a passionate, climactic outburst as the curtain falls. The fourth act falls into three sections - the Room, the Cathedral and the Street Scenes (Goethe, Faust, I; Sc. xv, xx. xix).[1] In the first scene we see the deserted Marguerite who, spinning in her room, expresses in song the anguish of her soul.[2] Siebel offers his love but she refuses, still hoping for Faust's return. The scene then changes to the church. Her conscience oppressed with guilt, Marguerite prays for forgiveness. Contrasting with the pious chanting of priests and choir boys, we hear the utterances of Méphistophélès, reminding her of her guilt and foretelling her doom. A choir in the church, accompanied by the organ, proclaims the coming Day of Judgement. With a strong effort Marguerite wrests her spirit from the torments of her conscience, finally finding release in the fervent prayer 'Seigneur accueillez la prière'. (My Lord, accept this prayer). After the poignancy of the Cathedral scene - a superb musical accomplishment, perhaps the artistic climax of the work - the blatant Soldiers' Chorus 'Gloire immortelle' (Immortal glory) with which the following scene begins, comes as an anticlimax. The best of the remainder of the scene belongs to Méphistophélès with the cynical Serenade which he sings in front of Marguerite's house ('Vous qui faites l'endormie' - You who are shamming sleep). Valentine's furious

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1. Sometimes the order of these is Street - Room - Cathedral.
2. This episode is very often omitted.

reaction leads to a duel during which he is mortally wounded by Faust (Goethe Faust, I, Sc.xix). Before dying, Valentine curses his sister for all to hear, accusing Marguerite, who starts showing signs of insanity, of being the cause of his death. The effective ensemble scene rising out of this situation ends beautifully with the choral prayer 'Que le Seigneur ait son ame'. (May the Lord receive his soul). The final act of the opera consists of two parts - the Walpurgis Night and the Prison Scene. Attempting to play on Faust's sensuality, Méphistophélès offers him the revels of the Walpurgis Night celebration. (This scene is loosely based on Goethe's Walpurgis Night, in Faust, I, Sc.xxi as well as on the Classical Walpurgis Night, in Faust II, Act ii). The most beautiful women of History and legend are brought before Faust to make him forget Marguerite. In the midst of the revels, however, Faust has an anticipatory vision of the fate of the hapless girl (Goethe Faust, I: Sc.xxi). He returns with the help of Méphistophélès, to find her in prison, condemned to death for the murder of her illegitimate child (Goethe, Faust, I: Sc. xxv). Méphistophélès leaves them alone. Half delirious, Marguerite recalls the scene when they first met. Her words 'Attends! ... Voici la rue...' (But wait! ... Here is the Street) are sung to a single note kept for thirty-two bars of music whilst the waltz tune associated with the happier days steals into the orchestra, touchingly reminiscent. The climax of the act is however, the trio Mephistopheles - Faust - Marguerite. The devil

urges them to leave whilst there is still time, Faust presses her to fly with him and Marguerite asks the angels to transport her to heaven. Her beautiful, ecstatic melody 'Anges pure, anges radieux' (Pure, radiant angels) is thrice repeated, each time a tone higher, with breathtaking effect. As Méphistophélès remarks 'Jugée' (She is damned), a voice from above has the final word 'Sauvée!' (Saved!). An unearthly radiance transforms the cell as Marguerite's soul rises to heaven in a somewhat oleographic apotheosis and Faust, to quote the stage directions 'sinks to his knees praying whilst Mephistopheles is hair bent under the luminous sword of the Archangel'. A choral outburst - the Easter Hymn of Christ's resurrection - brings the end of the opera.

Sweet, sentimental, naive and, at times, poignant, Gounod's music is ideally suited to the character and the story of Goethe's tender-tragic, loving heroine - undoubtedly the most fascinating and most vastly popular aspect of Goethe's poem. There is much more in Faust, however, than the Gretchen episode. By placing the familiar incidents of the story of Faust in the framework of the scenes in Heaven, Goethe had added to it a new dimension - the dimension of Eternity.

CHAPTER III

GOETHE'S PLAY AND BOITO'S LIBRETTO

With Danteon audacity Goethe started his drama of Faust - the symbol of mankind - in radiant Heaven, where the theme of the conflict between the creative powers of God and the destructive forces of Mephistopheles is set forth. The wager between the Lord of Light and the Prince of Darkness, having as an object the soul of Faust, is the spring from which the whole action stems. Then, once the human adventure of striving and erring is concluded, the last words are put into the mouths of the Celestial Beings who, in announcing the salvation of Faust, proclaim the victory of God. 'The bearing of the "Prologue in Heaven" upon the subsequent plo' cannot be over-emphasized - it is the key of everything that is to come',[1] Victor Lange has remarked. Boito had realized it decades before. In one of the explanatory notes accompanying the libretto of Mefistofele he wrote, perhaps thinking of Gounod:

> A wager between God and the Devil - this is the starting point of Goethe's poem. If the action ends with the death of Gretchen the wager is left in abeyance and there is no dénouement of the tragedy. The struggle of the Dualism must be followed until the death of Faust, whose soul is the object of the wager, *in order to bring* about a logical conclusion.

And further: 'Goethe, the great worshipper of form, ended his poem as he started it, reconnecting with Heaven the last words of Faust':

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1. Lange, V. *op.cit.*, p.xi.

> Le motif glorieux - writes Mr Blaze de Bury - que les immortel phalanges chantent dans l'introduction de la première partie de Faust, revient à le fin, enveloppé d'harmonie et de vapeurs mistique. Goethe a fait certe fois comme les musiciens, comme Mozart, qui ramène à la dernière scene de Don Juan la phrase imposant de l'ouverture.[1]

In order to adhere to Goethe's intention as much as possible, Boito attempted the severe task of preserving in the limited space allowed by a libretto, the unconventional dramatic structure, the integral, problematic units and the essence of a vast and intricate work, sustained throughout by the strong poetic personality of its author who, as to his own purpose, said:

> They come and ask what idea I meant to embody in my 'Faust'; as if I knew myself, and could inform them. From heaven, through the world, to hell, would indeed be something; but this is no idea, only a course of action. And further: that the devil loses the wager, and that a man continually struggling from difficult errors towards something better, should be redeemed, is an effective - and, to many, a good enlightening - thought; but it is no idea at the foundation of the whole, or of every individual scene. It would have been a fine thing indeed if I had strung so rich, varies, and highly diversified a life as I have brought to view in 'Faust' upon the slender string of one pervading idea.[2]

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1. Blaze de Bury, a French critic, author of a famous 'Essai sur Goethe'. The translation of this passage, quoted by Boito in French, is: 'The glorious motive sung by the immortal phalanges in the introduction to the first part of Faust are heard at the end wrapped in mystic harmonies and vapours. Goethe has sometimes done what musicians do, such as Mozart, who recalls in the last scene of Don Juan the imposing phrase of the Overture'. Boito's notes are found in the Preface of the vocal score of Mefistofele, ed. Ricordi - Milan - Copyrighted 1875.

2. This extract of a conversation with Eckermann is quoted by Victor Lange in his Introduction to Faust, ed. cit., p.x.

If we add to this the fact that Goethe's Faust is not a drama,[1] but a poem cast in dramatic form, full of speeches providing absorbing interest for the reader rather than for the stage and with a poetry which not even a verbal translation can completely reproduce, we will fully realize the difficulty of the task facing Boito when he, as a boy of twenty, decided to condense it into a music-drama, one of the most complex and most enigmatic works of poetic literature. Stelios Galatopoulos' criticism of Mefistofele that 'although the verses are very good and the drama itself is for the most part vividly presented as a fight within the human soul between good and evil, the overall impression that the work leaves is that of a lengthy drama reduced to many disconnected short scenes',[2] refers, of course, to the present version of Mefistofele. As originally conceived, however, Boito's libretto was a superb achievement, in terms of poetic and dramatic technique. It would be absurd to claim that in it survives the unique beauty of Goethe's masterpiece or that Boito succeeded in recapturing the elusive spirit which is so much a part of the perennial fascination of Faust, but he followed Goethe's drama

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1. It is interesting to note 'that no public performance of the great Part One was given until the poet's eightieth year. A further performance in Weimar, for his eightieth birthday, had a striking success, due in no small measure to concentrated coaching by Goethe himself'. (See Introduction to Faust, Part One, by Philip Waine. The Penguin Classics, 1972, p.18.)

2. Stelios Galatopoulos 'Trieglo sings Mephistopheles' in Music and Musicians, March 1974, p.8.

far more closely and more successfully than did other librettists or musicians, retaining not only all the scenes necessary to the development of the action, but the framework of scenes in heaven giving to the drama an all-embracing ethical and 'physical' background.

In his first libretto Boito even preserved Goethe's idea of prefacing the work with a 'Prologue in the Theatre', in spoken dialogue. In Goethe's 'Prologue in the Theatre', a Poet, a Theatre Director and a Comedian support the purity of artistic ideals, the practical necessity to please the public and the wise in-between choice of a compromising attitude, respectively. In the 'Prologue in the Theatre' of Boito, a Critic, an Author and a spectator embark on a long, scholarly dissertation on the origin and development of the old legend as well as on its suitability to literary and artistic treatment. In both Goethe and Boito, this preliminary play is followed by the 'Prologue in Heaven'. In it Goethe presents the Archangels Raphael, Gabriel and Michael 'singing' the praise of the Lord and of his creation. In passages of magnificent poetry, the German poet conjures up the vision of a grandiose, incontaminate Universe, as 'bright as on the earliest days'[1] and resounding with the harmony of rotating world and the

1. English version of Goethe's Faust by Bayard Taylor. (Modern Library College Edition). New York, 1970.

rival music of the unruled elements. Boito gives these opening hymns to the Celestial Host. Some of the splendour of the music of Goethe's verse, if not the daring of his imagination, survives in Boito's adaptation. Regretfully, only one of the three stanzas of the original libretto remains in the final version. It is, however, very beautiful:

Ave, Signor degli angeli e dei santi,
e dei volanti cherubini d'or
Dall'eterno armonia
dell' Universo
nel glauco spazio immerso
emana un verso di supremo amor
e s'erge a Te
per l'aure azzurre e cave
in suon soave
Ave! Ave! Ave! Ave![1]

(Hail, Lord of the angels and saints
and of the flying cherubim of gold
From the eternal harmony
of the Universe
immersed in the grey immensity of space
a chant of supreme love emanates
and rises to thee
through the blue and empty air
in a sweet concourse of sound.
Hail! Hail! Hail! Hail!)

The flexibility of the metrical scheme, the suppleness of the lines, the contrast of vocal sounds, combined with the skilful choice of the words, evoke a sensation of the blue of the heaven, of space, of darting light and fluctuating harmonies. Appearing among the Celestial Host (in both Goethe and Boito) the Prince of Darkness addresses the Lord with mocking courtesy. The cynical wit and

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1. English version of Boito's Mefistofele by Peggy Cochrane (Ricordi). Libretto issued by Decca Ace of Diamonds, GOS 591-3.

racy irony of his first speech is not lost in Boito's clever and nearly literal translation (Ave, Signor! - Hail, Lord). Goethe's exchanges between God and the Devil are reduced by Boito to a series of short passages given exclusively to Mefistofele who, since his first appearance, has established himself as the true protagonist of Boito's drama. Unlike Goethe, Boito employs a Mystic Choir to answer instead of the Lord in the dialogue about the wager concerning Faust's soul, limiting the divine intervention to the question 'T'è noto Faust?' (Is Faust known to you?) and his acceptance of his antagonist's challenge. ('E sia!' - So be it). In Goethe, the 'Prologue in Heaven' ends with Mephistophele's scoffing lines:

> Von Zeit zu Zeit seh ich den Alten gern,
> Und hüte mich, mit ihm zu brechen
> Es ist gar hübsh von einem grossen Hernn,
> So menschlich mit dem Teufel selbst zu sprechen.
>
> (I like, at times, to hear the Ancient's word
> And have a care to be most civil:
> It's really kind of such a noble Lord
> So humanly to gossip with the Devil.)

which are retained by the librettist. Then, by drawing passages (freely translated and freely arranged) from the final section of Goethe's Faust, Boito impressively rounds off the scene, as follows. Irritated by the singing of a Host of Cherubim, Mefistofele vanishes. The Chorus of the Young Angels creates, by means of sonorous and rhythmical effects, the 'visual' impression of flight in varied motion. The very short, airy and tumultuous opening lines:

Siam nimbi
Volanti
Dai limbi
Nei santi
Splendori vaganti
Siam cori
di bimbi
d'amori ....

(We are flying clouds
from limbo
wandering
among sacred splendours
We are choirs
of children
of cupids..),

contrast with the majestic movement of the undulating nine-syllable lines of the middle section:

Fratelli, teniamci per mano;
fin l'ultimo cielo lontano
noi sempre dobbiamo danzar....

(Let us hold one another by the hand, brothers;
to the farthest heights of far-off heaven
we must keep on dancing.)

The dance-like, extremely dynamic rhythm of the last part:

La danza in angelica spira
Si gira, si gira, si gira

(In an angelic spiral the dance
twists, turns and spins.)

reinforces the idea of eternal wandering in celestial spirals.

A doleful invocation ('Chorus of the Penitent Women') heard from earth, establishes the relationship between the Divine and the Human, ringing the theme of sin and grief and of possible eventual divine reconciliation. This is an important detail preparing us for the drama which, originating in heaven, is to have the world as its stage, creatures of flesh and blood at the

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twists, turns and spins.)

reinforces the idea of eternal wandering in celestial spirals.

A doleful invocation ('Chorus of the Penitent Women') heard from earth, establishes the relationship between the Divine and the Human, ringing the theme of sin and grief and of possible eventual divine reconciliation. This is an important detail preparing us for the drama which, originating in heaven, is to have the world as its stage, creatures of flesh and blood at the

mercy of human instincts and passions, as its protagonists. There follows an ecstatic chorus in which the voices of the earthly and heavenly creatures merge in a kind of mystical communion to sing the praise of the Lord of Supreme Love. In a splendid tumult of sound and light the Heavens close and the stage is set for the earthly drama to commence.

The first act of Mefistofele is divided into two parts (The Easter Sunday and the Pact) corresponding to scenes ii and iii of Goethe's drama (Goethe's first scene being entirely omitted). The scene opens in medieval Frankfurt-on-Main, the city which some topographical details at the beginning of Goethe's second scene, seem to indicate.[1] Bells ring out festively as crowds of people from all walks of life stroll on the bastion of the city joining in the merriment of the Easter Festival. Among them, there appears a grey friar (instead of Goethe's black poodle)[2], the object of both reverence and fear in those around him. The uneasiness of the crowd is, however, soon to be dispelled: preceded by tumblers, falconers, and flagthrowers, the Elector

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1. See: Ferguson, J., op. cit., p.67.

2. A change justified by scenical reasons, as Boito himself admitted, as well as by the fact that ancient legends and illustrations usually indicate - a grey friar. Besides this, Boito thought that the religious disguise would have added strength to the anti-catholic character of Goethe's poem. See: Boito's note at p.118 of the first libretto of Mefistofele in 'Tutti gli scritti'.

and his suite appear heading a cavalcade - a scene interpolated by Boito, and carrying a magnificent visual effect. The cavalcade passes on its way occasioning excited comments from the merrymakers. No sooner has the procession passed, followed by many of the crowd, than the aged Doctor Faust enters upon the scene . ,accompanied by his disciple, Wagner. Boito's Faust does not appear to have known that either desperation resulting from being secluded from the rest of humanity or the weariness of life which led Goethe's Faust near to suicide. After learning from Mefistofele's account, in the Prologue, that an 'inassopita bramosia di sapere il fa tapino ed anelante' ('an unassuageable desire to know makes him a poor panting wretch'), we meet Faust for the first time in the context of humanity, among ordinary people and feeling kinship with them, perhaps to remind us that Faust is a man like us, 'the manifestation and synthesis of mankind'[1] as Antonio Borriello remarks. Inspired by the beauty of nature, Faust gives vent to his feeling in a beautiful speech 'Al soave raggiar di primavera...' (In the soft light of spring) - a clever adaptation of Goethe's similarly placed, magnificent monologue 'Released from ice are brook and river'. A throng of merrymakers bursting on the scene provokes Wagner's acid remarks about the coarseness of the 'vulgar herd', now joyously singing in the boisterous chorus 'Il bel giovanetto son vien alla festa'

1. Borriello, A. 'Mito, poesia e musica nel Mefistofele di Arrigo Boito' Napoli: A. Guida ed. 1950; p.104.

(The fine young fellow has come to the fête), the words of which are remarkably close to those of Goethe's Dance and Song Scene under the Linden-tree. Some couples begin to dance the Obertas, a vigorous dance, very popular according to Boito's own annotations,[1] in Poland and Northern Germany. The dance goes round and round in a vortex of animation. As the lively episode comes to an end, and the crowd quickly disperses, Faust and Wagner sit on a stone looking at the houses glittering in the evening light. Their very short, unimpressive colloquy seems, as it is, a very poor substitute for the important deeply philosophical and intensely lyrical passages characterizing the conversation between Faust and Wagner in the original source. (Boito does, however, in the first libretto, superbly translate Faust' speech about his transcendental longing:'O dass kein Fugel mich vom Boden hebt' - Ah that no wing can lift me from the soil - as well as the one in which, speaking of the two souls inhabiting his breast, the old doctor reveals the dualism which torments his most being). The main action in the opera scene centres, however, about Faust's observation of the Grey Friar, again appearing in the fields and now, mysteriously, drawing closer to him in tortuous spirals. In spite of Faust's apprehension, Wagner, the rationalist mind who, as in Goethe, acts as a foil to Faust, fails to see anything supernatural about him, in spite of

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1. Boito, A. op. cit., p.115-6.

'fiery imprints in the ground' beneath his feet. They leave the place, shadowed by the friar whilst the fading sounds of the 'Il bel giovanetto' chorus, heard in the distance, announce the end of the festive day. The scene changes to Faust's study. It is night. In the sombre, nearly claustral atmosphere of his room, Faust, feeling calm and relaxed, meditates upon the love of man and God('Dai campi, dai prati'). Again, regretfully, the second part of Faust's soliloquy, that in which, as in Goethe, he speculates on the meaning of a quotation from the Gospel: 'Im Anfang war das Wort!' (In the beginning was the word), does not appear in the second libretto. Hardly has Faust started translating the sacred book than the howling of the Grey Friar, rushing out from the alcove in which he was concealed, startles him. Confronting him with a book of magic and making the all-powerful sign of Solomon over him, Faust compels the Friar to throw off his disguise: in the attire of a 'squire of high degree', Mefistofele appears. In answer to Faust's question as to his name, he characterizes himself as 'The spirit that denies', and then embarks on an intellectual disquisition of his own entity and powers (adapted from Goethe, Sc.iii):

Parte son d'una latebra
del gran Tutto: Oscurità.
son figliuol della Tenebra
che Tenebra tornerà.
S'or la luce usurpa e afferra
il mio scettro a ribellion
poco andrà la sue tenzon;
v'è sul Sol, v'è sul Sol,
e sulla Terra
Distruzion!
Rido e avvento questa sillaba:
"No".
Mordo, invischio,
Struggo, tento, ruggo, sibilo
Fischio, fischio, fischio, fischio
fischio, oh!...

(I am a part of the innermost darkness
of the great All: Obscurity.
I am the child of Darkness
who will return to Darkness.
If light now usurps and seizes
my sceptre in rebellion
its resistance will not go far
over the sun and over the
Earth their hangs
Destruction!
I laugh and spit out this word:
"No".
I bite, I entice
I destroy, I tempt, I roar, I kiss
I whistle, whistle, whistle, whistle
whistle, oh!...)

This passage, highly original and effective, serves to illustrate not only Boito's infatuation with the musical and expressive aspect of the verses, but his concern with their powers of characterization. It is perhaps not going too far to say that in the hissing, jarring, dissonant sounds of Mefistofele's speech, as well as in the sharp interruptions of the established metrical scheme, Boito has managed to convey much of the destructive power of the 'spirit that denies'. Mefistofele's verse can only be

his, and nobody else's. This characterization is no mean achievement if compared with the approximative poetic delineation of character of the majority of Italian librettists. The remainder of this scene derives from Goethe, Scene iv, where the Devil offers to serve Faust in this world if Faust will serve him in the next. The episode of the pact is, in Boito, reduced to the bare essentials. The Chorus of the Spirits and the long conversation between Mefistofele and the Student - not really relevant to the dramatic action - have been omitted. Faust declares himself only concerned with this world and makes his own terms:

Se tu mi doni
un'ora di riposo
in cui s'acqueti l'alma:
se sveli
al mio buio pensier
me stesso e il mondo:
se avvien ch'io dica
all'attimo fugente:
arrestati, sei bello!
Allor ch'io muoia!
e m'inghiotta l'averno!

(If you will grant me
an hour's respite
in which to compose my soul;
if you can reveal
to my confused thoughts
myself and the world:
if I might once say
to the fleeting moment;
stay, thou art lovely! -
Then let me die
and let hell swallow me up!)

Mefistofele accepts. The contract completed, Mefistofele spreads on the ground his cloak and, after inviting Faust to follow him,

he directs their 'courses' through the air. With the Devil's help, Faust abandons himself to 'universal human experience, whishing personally to sample what is allotted to the whole of mankind'.[1]

Boito's second act, again divided into two well contrasted scenes, opens with the Garden episode, based on Scenes xii and xvi of Goethe's Faust. The librettist made practically no alteration in the passages he selected but dramatically, the Gretchen's episode, to which Goethe dedicates a number of scenes, appears, in Boito, too synthesized.[2]

A rejuvenated Faust, under the alias of Enrico (in Goethe, Heinrich) is seen wooing Margherita whilst Mefistofele courts the elderly Marta. The suggestive remarks passed between Mefistofele and Marta are a parody of the tender, and at the same time passionate, duet between Faust and Margherita, who are genuinely attracted by each other. In Boito's version of Goethe's drama Margherita represents Faust's first human experience, the most important and unforgettable to which he will return even in . . .

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1. Waldeck, M.L. 'The Open University Press' (Unite 12) - Great Britain, 1972, p.87.

2. The episode of Valentine, fully developed in Gounod's Faust is not found in Boito's work. We must, however, remember that Marguerite's brother is only brought in, in Goethe, in the last but seven scene of Part I, a scene criticized by some scholars as irrelevant on the ground that 'it brings in an additional character merely to kill him'. (Ferguson, J. op. cit., p.80.)

the satanic frenzy of the Walpurgis night, during his descent into the realm of purest beauty (Classical Sabbath) and at the moment he reaches 'the final verge of life's extremest limit'. Defenseless under the force of Faust's passion, Margherita agrees to his coming to her 'to spend one hour of love', and accepts a sleeping potion for her mother. The scene ends with the Farewell episode, an entrancing quartet culminating in a burst of laughter - an entirely operatic number, however full of zest and vivacity.

The basic material of the second scene of the second act of Mefistofele is drawn from Goethe's Walpurgis Night (Scene xxi). The Devil's cynical considerations on the 'empty and round' wicked world, comes from the Witches' Kitchen Scene vi, the Me-ape passage 'The world's the ball'which Boito freely elaborates. The Festival of witches and spirits upon the Broken Peak in the Hartz Mountains, to which Mefistofele takes Faust is, both musically and dramatically, a conception 'of magnificent vitality, a work of shining inspiration, diabolical, satanic, stupendously realized'.[1] A rising, red moon casts a lurid glare over the wild, sinister landscape. The voice of Mefistofele, urging Faust on as he climbs the steep slope, is heard above the roge of the wind. A thousand voices, howling from all the trees, the clefts, the peaks and the abysses of the cursed world, accompany Faust's and Mefistofele's difficult ascent. [illegible]ded by the darting lights of

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1. Brindle, R.S. Mefistofele Musical Times 95 - March 1954, p.151.

the Will-o'-the-wisp, they reach a rocky rampart where they are finally revealed, isolated and motionless, silhouetted against the dark sky. To the Devil's delight, a wild, magic chant heralding the infernal congregation, is heard coming nearer and nearer. A throng of witches and sorcerers burst on to the rampart singing, in a frenzied chorus, of their terrible night of pandemonium. Seating himself on a rock shaped like a throne, Mefistofele, interrupts their tremendous 'Sabaè' shouts, bidding them to prostrate themselves before their Lord. Recognized by the sorcerers as the king of 'heaven, earth and sea', he is offered a glass globe, inspiring in him the defiant, scornful 'ballata'

Ecco il mondo
vuoto e tondo,
s'alza, scende,
balza e splende,
fa carole
intorno al sole,
trema, rugge,
dà e distrugge;
ora sterile, or fecondo,
ecco il mondo.

Sul suo grosso
antico dosso
v'è una schiatta
e sozza e matta,
fiera, vile,
ria, sottile,
che ad ogn'ora
se divora
dalla cima
sino al fondo
del reo mondo.

(Here is the world
empty and round
it goes up and down
glitters and bounces
it dances
around the sun
trembles and roars
gives and destroys
now barren, now fertile
this is the world.

On its huge
old back
there is a race
both profligate and mad
haughty, cowardly
subtle and wicked
whose members devour
one another ceaselessly
from the topmost peak
to the bottomost depths
of the wicked world.)

At the end of his song the Lord of Destruction hurls the globe to the ground smashing it to smithereens. Young witches and sorcerers, taking Faust among them, dance an erotic dance 'on the dead fragments of the ill-fated globe'. They dance frenetically until a vision of Margherita - sad and wan, a necklace encircling her throath with a bloody line - appears in the distant, cloud-laden sky. Memories evoked by the gentle music associated with the Garden Scene, resounding dolcissimo - so strange and poignant - in the now silent world of discord, seem to free Faust from the satanic spell. In a paroxysm of rage Mefistofele bids Faust to avert his eyes from the seductive spectre - a Medusa's head -'that rots the heart of him who gazes on it'. With an imperious gesture he dispels the vision; the wild dances are resumed and the act

ends in an orgy of sounds, of flames and moving shapes.[1]

The third act, relatively brief but intensely dramatic, follows the last scene of Goethe's Faust I very closely, also incorporating a few lines concerning the rescue of Margherita, from Scene xxiii. The setting is 'a prison cell lit by the faint glimmer of a lantern hanging from the wall'. Lying on a straw bed, Margherita, mentally wandering, sings to herself the lament 'L'altra notte in fondo al mare'. She remembers as in a trance, the horrible crimes of which she has been accused, without, however, realizing her guilt. The image of a free bird flying in the woods, to which she compares her restless soul, seems to provide a momentary peace. Suddenly realizing, in a flash of consciousness, the helpless misery of her present state, she breaks into the desperate, twice repeated, cry 'Ah, di me pietà' (Oh! have mercy on me) then collapses, exhausted. Faust appears outside the grating with Mefistofele. There follows a brief exchange during which Faust begs for Margherita's life. After reminding Faust of who it was who brought ruin upon her, Mefistofele, finally, consents to help. Faust enters the prison. On recognizing his voice, Margherita is overcome with violent emotion. Her incoherent thoughts wander back to happier days - the street, Marta's garden ... tender

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1. Boito has this very impressive finale in substitution for Goethe's Walpurgis Night Dream (Oberon and Titania's Golden Wedding) - a queer Masque-like Intermezzo, obviously serving no dramatic purpose.

memories of their brief, intense love .... The dreadful reality, again breaks upon her like a sinister shadow. She tells Faust what followed his desertion of her, asking him, in a passage charged with nearly unbearable pathos, to lay her in death under the greenest turf, beside her loved ones: her mother, whom she is accused of having poisoned and her drowned babe, who will rest upon her breast. Faust implores her to fly with him but all she desires is to be relieved from the agony of life. Under the torrential power of Faust's passion, she seems, finally, however to surrender and in a wondrous duet they start dreaming, together, of a still possible, future happiness:

Lontano, lontano, lontano,
sui flutti d'un ampio oceano,
fra i roridi effluvi del mar,
fra l'alghe, fra i fior,
fra le palme,
il porto dell'intime calme,
l'azzurra isoletta m'appar.
M'appare sul cielo sereno
ricinta d'un arcobaleno
specchiante il sorriso del sol....

(Far, far away
on the waves of a broad ocean
amid the dewy exhalations of the sea
among the sea plants and the flowers
and the palm-trees
a haven of intimate quietude
the tiny blue islet appears to me.
I see it on the serene horizon
encircled by a rainbow
reflecting the smile of the sun.)

This duet is Boito's own creation.

With its fluctuating rhythm as of the ocean and the almost hypnotic effect produced by the sound patterns, this passage

provides a welcome relief between the emotional tension of the preceding scene and the horror and agony of what follows. Distraught by the presence of Mefistofele in the 'holy refuge' - the prison being her place of atonement - Margherita, abruptly brought back to reality, chooses to submit herself to the judgement of God rather than to salvation with the Devil's aid. The power of this superbly dramatic scene is intensified by the conflicting, simultaneously expressed, goals of the protagonists: Mefistofele, who does not care for Margherita but must serve Faust, according to their pact, impatiently urges them to hurry; Faust begs her to fly with him, but Margherita, now only intent on her spiritual salvation, prays the Heavenly Beings to protect her, at the same time asking the Lord for mercy. Her stupendous soliloquy 'Spunta l'aurora pallida' (The pale dawn is breaking), a kind of lyrical catharsis, is sealed by Mefistofele's triumphant utterance 'She is condemned'. The chorus of the Celestial Host conveys the final message of the Lord 'She is saved'. In contrast to Goethe's Gretchen who, in dying, calls lovingly 'Heinrich' twice, thus foreshadowing the role she is to play in the redemption of Faust when appearing as a penitent in the final scene, Boito's Margherita, who does not re-appear in his Epilogue, shrinks away from him, feeling only aversion. As Mefistofele bids Faust to follow him, the executioner stands revealed in the background surrounded by his henchmen. Faust's destiny is not yet settled. He must run through a whole range

of experiences - riches, political power, the love of a Goddess, military glory - before accomplishing it.

Whilst the first part of Goethe's Faust is divided into twenty-five freely arranged scenes, the second part, on which the second part of Boito's Mefistofele is based, falls into five, lengthy and rather complex acts. In spite of its more traditional structure 'Part II' is dramatically impossible, not only because of the incredible number of more or less symbolical or fantastic characters and minor incidents, but also because of the wealth of philosophical disquisitions, metaphysical thoughts and discursiveness continually distracting the attention from the main plot concerning the fate of Faust. Throughout the five acts of the Second Part, the hero more than ever dependent on Mephisto_pheles, is seen striving for the attainment of the highest form of life in a somewhat incoherent and capricious way. In Act I we find him at the Court of a pleasure-loving but needy Emperor, of whom he becomes the benefactor by giving him money produced magically by Mephisto_pheles who is disguised as a court-jester. At the Emperor's request, Faust evokes, on a magic stage, Helen of immortal beauty and her lover Paris, after a descent into the spaceless, placeless and timeless realm of the 'Mothers', where Helen dwells. Faust falls in love with the image of Helen and, guided by Homunculus, an artificial man created by Wagner (Act II), reaches the Pharsalian Fields of Greece, where, together with

Mephistopheles, he assists at the 'Classical Walpurgis Night' a gathering of the spirits of the classical world intended as a counterpart to the satanic phantasy of the Witches' Sabbath. His union with Helen (Act III) is no human love-affair - it symbolizes Goethe's much advocated fusion between the Romantic Medievalism of the Germans and the classical genius of the Greeks, their son Euphorion, who loses his life in an attempt to fly, representing Goethe's tribute to the English poet Byron. After the death of Euphorion and the loss of Helen, Faust returns to reality. He realizes that the episode with Helen was nothing but a deceptive dream but his encounter with her, in a superhuman and immortal world, has made him impatient for heroic deeds. He returns to the Emperor (Act IV) and with the help of Mephistopheles wins a crucial war and is given, as a reward, a strip of barren, unhealthy land. Ruthlessly, he orders Mephistopheles to remove a couple of loyal tenants, Philemon and Baucis (Act V) but when the Devil returns to report their destruction, Faust turns away from him. In an impressive scene (V, v) we find him confronted by four Gray Women: Want, Guilt, Care and Necessity . He rids himself of them but no sooner has he recognized the futility of his association with supernatural powers than Care returns to tell him of the approach of death. She blinds him by breathing in his face and in this very moment Faust, surrounded by physical darkness, regains his spiritual sight. He sees, at last, the opportunity of using the power still in his hands for

the benefit of mankind: by draining the marshy plain in his possession he will provide green, fertile fields for a race of industrious men, living and working together peacefully. This is the first assertion of his own will, his first 'creative' desire. Rejoicing in action, Faust 'almost' pronounces the words that in his initial compact with Mephistopheles were to be his doom:

Werd ich zum Augenbliche sagen:
Verweile doch! du bist so schön!
Dann magst du mich in Fesseln schlagen
Dann will ich gern zu Grunde gehn,

(When thus I hail the Moment flying
Ah! still delay - thou art so fair!
Then bind me in thy bonds undying
My final ruin then declare.)

Lost in the vision of a throng of free people on free soil he declares himself prepared to say to this 'highest moment':

Verweile doch! du bist so schön!

(Ah, still delay - thou art so fair.)

Faust's last words are, however, hypothetical and Mephistopheles is defeated by the, now, intervening powers of Heaven. Bearing the immortal soul of Faust the Angels soar in the higher atmosphere singing:

Wer immer strebend sich bemüth,
Der können wir erlösen

(Whoe'er aspires unweariedly
Is not beyond redeeming...)

In Goethe's own words Faust is saved by means of the 'activity mounting ever higher and purer to the end', which is in himself

and by the 'eternal love which helps him in his need',[1] from above. Gretchen who, like Dante's Beatrice is the spirit of Eternal, Redeeming Womanhood, is among those who welcome Faust to heaven because, as the Chorus Mysticus finally asserts:

... Das Unzulängliche
Hier wirds Ereignis
Das Unbeschreibliche
Hier ists getan;
Das Ewig-Weibliche
Zieth uns hinan.

(... Earth's insufficiency
Here grows to Event:
The Indescribable
Here it is done:
The Woman-soul leadeth us
Upward and on!)

Thus, with a message of Love and Mercy, ends the second and conclusive part of the epic of Faust.

The complexity of the material contained in Part Two obviously put Boito's determination to respect Goethe's work into serious doubt. Although limiting himself to the external mechanism of the story, he made, at least in his first libretto, an admirable synthesis of even this second part, undoubtedly, as John Ferguson remarks, 'much more obstruse even than the most difficult passages in Part I'.[2] With assured dramatic touch Boito chose, out of the maze of Goethe's symbolical and philosophical allegories, all those episodes most apt to throw a new light upon the character

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1. Wayne, Philip: Introduction to Faust. (Part Two). The Penguin Classics. Great Britain: Baldick, R., 1973, p.11.
2. Ferguson, J., op. cit., p.82.

of Faust, at the same time illustrating the course of his difficult and restless ascent from darkness to clarity. The fourth act of Mefistofele was, in fact, originally divided into two parts. The first part, devoted to the Emperor's Court Scene, included, besides the incident of the devil producing gold, that of the apparition of Helen (Elena) and Paris (Paride) on the stage of the magic theatre. This last incident was of particular importance because it explained the origin of Faust's passion for Elena, his longing and consequent search for her culminating in the love scene placed by Boito in the context of the Classical Walpurgis Night, to which the second part of the act was dedicated. The Intermezzo Sinfonico before the last act, describing the battle between the Catholic armies of the Emperor allied, paradoxically, to Mefistofele and Faust, and those of the anti-imperialists was, also, dramatically important. Not only does it seem to prepare and give meaning to the last episode of Faust's life, but it completes the gamut of emotions experienced by Faust during his never-ceasing, and always deluded, search for the 'highest, blissful moment'. The excision of the scene at the Emperor's Court and that of the Intermezzo Sinfonico, did, indeed, alter in a negative way, the dramatic structure of the libretto, producing gaps detrimental to the logical development of the action and partly justifying the often repeated assertion that Mefistofele is two operas in one.[1]

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1. Stelios Galatopoulos, *op.cit.* p.8.

At the beginning of the fourth act - The Classical Sabbath - of the final redaction of the libretto we find Faust on the banks of the river Peneus 'flooded by the enchanted light of a moon eternally at the full'. Before the actual appearance of the hero on the scene Boito, resorting to all the resources of the lyrical stage, produced a stupendous re-creation of the luminously vibrant atmosphere of the world of immortal beauty. Elena and her companion, Pantalis, are reclining in a boat of mother-of-pearl and silver, surrounded by sirens and other mythological beings. In splendidly evocative lines they sing of the magic spell of the night whilst, in the distance, the voice of Faust is heard, passionately and repeatedly invoking 'Elena!'
In Goethe Helen is seen, more dramatically, among the Chorus of Captive Trojan women before the palace of Menelaus in Sparta, and a large portion of the third act is occupied by her lengthy speeches and the comments of the Chorus. Preceded by a long procession of boys and squires Faust, now the Lord of a neighbouring castle, appears at the head of the staircase, in knightly Court costume of the Middle Ages, then descending slowly and with great dignity. In Boito, Faust enters less impressively, whilst the boat with Elena and Pantalis disappears from view. He is accompanied by Mefistofele who, feeling ill at ease in the crystal-clear atmosphere of the Attic land, decides to withdraw.[1] After

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1. The detail of the devil's reaction to this Second Sabbath is found in Goethe's Faust, II; Act II, Sc.iii.

a stylized Chorea danced by a group of Choretides, Dorides and sirens, Elena re-enters to the comments of the Chorus singing, 'in lydian mood', praises of her beauty. ('Trionfi ad Elena, carmini corone' - Acclamations to Helen, songs, laurel wreaths.) Lost in a tragic vision, she starts recounting the story of the fatal night of Troy's destruction in splendidly incisive, classical hexameter:[1]

Notte cupa, truce, senza fine funébre!
Orrida notte d'Illio! implacato rimorso!
Nugoli d'arsa polvere al vento surgono e fanno
Più cieca la tenebra. Di cozzantisi scudi,
Di carri stroscianti, di catapulte sonanti
L'etere è scossa! Si muta il suol in volutabro
Di Sangue. I Numi terribili già ruggono, l'ire
Inferocendo della pugna; l'ispide torri
Ergonsi tragiche, negre, fra la caligin densa.
L'incendio già lambe le case. Veggonsi l'ombre
Degli Achei proiette (bui profili giganti)
Vagolar le pareti...[2]

(Night dark and atrocious, endlessly funereal!
Dreadful night of Troy! Oh, implacable remorse!
Clouds of burnt dust rise in the wind and make
the darkness more blinding still. By clashing shields
hurtling chariots, and twanging catapults
the air is rent! The ground turns to quagmires
of blood. The terrible gods now rage
making the fury of the fight more fierce;
bristling towers rear up, tragic and black, in the dense smoke.
The flames already lick the houses. The shadows of the Archaeans
projected (gigantic dark silhouettes) can be seen roaming the walls..)

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1. In this 'Classical' act Boito did, most successfully, essay to reproduce in the Italian language the meters of classical poetry. He adopted the Asclepiadean verse (one spondee, two choriambs, one spondee) in the Choretid's hymn: ... Cĭrcōn| fūsă dĭ sōl| īl măgĭcō| vōltō ...; the hexameters (four spondees, one dactyl, one spondee) in the passage of Elena's vision; Nōttă| cŭpă| trŭcē| sēnzā| fīnĕ fū| nēbrē; the Sapphic hendecasyclable in the Choretids' lines announcing the arrival of Faust, and so on.

2. This passage is adapted from Goethe's Chorus 'Much my experience....', (Faust, Part ii; Act III)

Faust, followed by Mefistofele, Nereo, Pantalis and a group of small fauns and sirens, approaches Elena and kneeling before her, addressed her as the 'perfect and ideal form of beauty' ('Forma ideal purissima). She responds to his adoration but, for a moment, Faust is distracted by the vision of a mild, gentle maid appearing among the midsts of a distant land. The love of the Goddess does, however, conquer him. After this, as in Goethe, Faust teaches Elena to speak in rhymed verse - a device unknown in Greek poetry. Gazing into each other's face they sing in praise of love ('Amore! mistero!' - Oh! love; mystery) whilst the Chorus hails the birth of a new, ideal and powerful poetry ('Poesia libera t'alza pe cielil' - Poetry, rise free to the skies) resulting from the combined sensitivies of the Germans and the Greeks. Pledging their love and devotion to each other they move together towards the peaceful valley in Arcadia where they will have 'the grottoes of the nymphs' as a love-nest. Faust's quest seems to have reached its glorious goal.

Boito's Epilogue is built upon a few passages selected from the fifth act of Goethe's Faust, Part II (Sc. v, vii). The beautiful monologue which Goethe gives to Faust 'Vier sah ich kommen, drei nur gehn' (Four saw I come, but those that went were three), referring to the four Gray Women and retained by Boito in the first libretto, is not found in the final version. The setting of the scene is, again, Faust's study at night. A lone lamp sheds a faint light. Unable to concentrate his thoughts on the

holy book open before him, the now aged Faust wearily muses on the empty illusions of life. Mefistofele stands behind him as a sinister bird of prey. His impatient exhortation 'Cammina, cammina', echoing that of the Witches Sabbath, when he was urging Faust to go on and on, seems to be aimed at counteracting Faust's temptation to resort to something beyond his control. The old philosopher's following speech acknowledges, as in Goethe, 'the tragic, ultimately ambiguous nature of all human effort':[1]

Ogni mortal
mister gustai
il Real, l'Ideale,
l'amore della vergine, l'amore
della dea ... Si ...
ma il Real fu dolore
e l'Ideal fu sogno.

(Every mortal,
mystery have I tasted,
the Real, the Ideal,
a virgin's love and
A Goddess's ... Yes ...
but Reality was suffering
and the Ideal proved a dream.)

In the beautiful soliloquy 'Giunto sul passo estremo' (Having reached the final verge of life's extremest limit) Faust, shaking off his spiritual torpor, starts conceiving the 'supreme and ultimate' dream capable of giving a meaning to his present quest on earth: to be the ruler of a peaceful world of infinite breadth, a world inhabited by a new race of mortals, free from all greed, and lust and selfish passions. Lost in an ecstatic

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1. Victor Lange, op.cit., p.xxi.

vision, he sees this community of people to which he wishes to give his life, slowly rising to Heaven and assuming, in a kind of mystical transfiguration, the features of Heavenly beings. Fearing that Faust can escape him, Mefistofele spreads out his cloak on the ground (as in his first scene with Faust), inviting Faust to fly through the air. Whilst the Hymn of the Celestial Host is heard in the distance, Mefistofele, in a last desperate effort, conjures up a vision of the Syrens associated with the 'divine' ecstasies of the Classical Sabbath night. As in a medieval mystery play the powers of Good and Evil dramatically clash for the possession of a soul. Falling on his knees before the Bible, Faust fervently invokes the mercy of God. He murmurs 'Dio clemente, m'allontana dal demonio mio beffardo' (Merciful God, rescue me from the toils of my jeering demon) against the voices of the Celestial Host which, growing louder and more assured, sing:

> Dall'eterna armonia
> Dell' Universo
> nel glauco spazio immenso
> emana un verso - di supremo Amor....
>
> (From the everlasting harmony
> of the Universe
> in the grey immensity of space
> Emanates a hymn - of supreme love...)

On these last words the voice of Faust, passionately crying to the blessed fleeting moment 'Arrestati sei bello', merge with the Angels' in a, now, indissoluble synthesis. The Cherubim appears singing the prayer announcing the salvation of the soul of Faust,

at the same time scattering a shower of 'sweet-scented petals' of roses over Faust's body. Blinded by the dazzling light from Heaven and tormented by the red-hot rain of flowers corroding his flesh, Mefistofele sinks deeper and deeper into the ground, whistling and cursing, whilst the Celestial choir expands to a majestically impressive climax. On the imperious call of the Divine trumpets, exploding 'con tutta forza' to proclaim the victory of the Lord of Power and Love, the drama ends - a perfect conclusion, highlighting the inner logic of the human and cosmic drama of Faust.

A modern scholar, Professor L A Willoughby, writes that 'Faust is nothing less than the vindication of God's creation and the asseverance of the divine in the face of evil'[1] - This is Boito's exact interpretation of Goethe's poem.

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1. Willoughby, L.A. quoted in Goethe and Faust, op. cit., p.65

BOITO'S OPERA

The first libretto of Mefistofele is, dramatically speaking, superior to the version presently used. We must however admit that, in spite of all its cuts, this second version is still an excellent achievement, limiting, but not drastically altering, the Goethean intention and admirably serving the purpose of musical elaboration. The scenes are neatly constructed and expertly contrasted. Thus, after the opening Prologue in Heaven we have, in the first act, the colourful Easter Sunday episode followed by the tense, sombre scene of the Pact. The second act contains the delightfully fresh and tender Garden Scene and the satanic phantasmagoria of the Witches' Sabbath. Act Three - the gloomy Prison scene - describes the death of Margherita with accents of unbearable poignancy whilst, in the fourth act we are transported to the serene moonlight-flooded landscape of the world of classical antiquity. The end of the Epilogue takes us again into the illimitable region of spaces - the last words of Faust being reconnected with Heaven as wished by Goethe, the "great worshipper of Form".[1] The problem of form was obviously also Boito's concern. He structured his music-drama symmetrically by the use of parallel scenes at different points, the Witches'

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1. See page 223.

Sabbath being the counterpart of both the Prologue in Heaven and the Classical Sabbath. He strengthened the sense of architectural balance by recalling musical elements from the 'Prologue in Heaven' in the final scene of Act III and at the end of the Epilogue. Furthermore, he, who had recommended to all musicians wishing to embark on the composition of opera the study of forms, had chosen the form which he considered the most perfect - the symphony - as a mould for the Prologue in Heaven, which is, in fact, divided into four movements: Preludio a coro; scherzo strumentale; Scherzo vocale; Salmodia finale, linked by an Intermezzo drammatico.

Having once settled the external structure, he devoted himself to the solution of the difficult problem of the relationship between the poetical and the verbal texts in a work destined for the lyrical stage, at a time when the towering figures of Verdi and Wagner employed two completely different, and yet both acceptable, approaches. An analysis of Mefistofele shows the extent to which Boito succeeded in the realization of his ideals of opera reform.

The 'Prologue in Heaven', of all sections of Mefistofele is, in my opinion, the one in which words, music, vocal sound, emotion and ideology, fuse most completely, into a perfectly harmonious whole. It is a wonderfully sonorous 'scenography', well described by Ildebrando Pizzetti as 'a vast fresco in which

we do not know whether one has to admire the movement of the celestial figures or the colours.'[1] The plastic values of music not only translate the images with which the three Archangels of Goethe's Prologue in Heaven exhalt the power of the Creator but enlarge the vision suggesting 'pithagorean, apocalyptic, biblical and catholic recollections'.[2] The initial direction 'Nebulosa - Lo squillo delle sette trombe' I sette tuoni..' is preceded, in Boito's first libretto, by a mention from the Book of the Revelation VIII - x: 'Et septem Angeli, qui habebant septem tubas, praeparaverunt se ut tuba canerent, Et primus Angelus tuba cecinit... Et secundus Angelus tuba cecinit... Et tertius Angelus tuba cecinit, etc... Et cum locuta fuissent septem tonitrua voces suas'. The first movement - Prelude and chorus - suggests conflagrant turmoils of a world in evolution, conflicts of primeval forces moved by a superior will - as it were a comment on the first paragraphs of Genesis. The opening tonic note of E major, held for two bars and a crotchet - is very intense in the fusion of all the orchestral timbres. It appears to be the generating element of the first trumpet call symbolizing the Power of the will of God (Ex. 1A).[3] This 'trumpet-call', played by backstage trumpets and tombones come first from a

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1. Pizzetti, Ildebrando. Musicisti contemporanei. Milan.: Fratelli Treves, 1914; p.43.

2. Borriello, Antonio op. cit., p.31.

3. The musical examples are taken from: Mefistofele, vocal score, Milan, Ricordi. Copyright 1875 (undated); and Mefistofele, orchestral score, Milan: Ricordi, 1919.

Prologo in cielo

I. TEMPO

PRELUDIO E CORO

Nebulosa.– Lo squillo delle sette trombe.– I sette tuoni.– LE FALANGI CELESTI dietro la nebulosa invisibili.– *CHORUS MYSTICUS.* I CHERUBINI. LE PENITENTI.– Poi MEFISTOFELE solo nell'ombra.

Ex. 1A

(squillo dietro il sipario nel centro)

Largo

♩ = 86

ff *squillante* *largamente ritmato* *senza rigore di tempo* *a tempo* *pp*

ff *sempre ff*

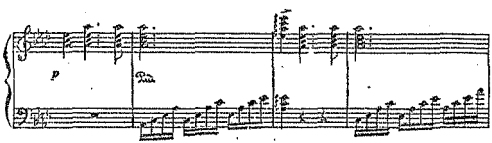
(squillo a destra dietro il sipario)

squillante *senza rigore di tempo* *ff* *pp*

Ex. 1B

Ex. 1A and 1B

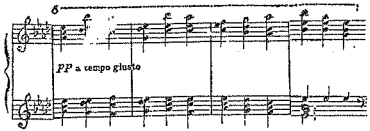
central position, obscured and without a rigorously defined rhythm (according to Boito's instruction), and seem to resound from heavenly distances and lie in the persisting vibrations of the matrix sound. This trumpet motive appears seven times in all during the instrumental prelude: it undergoes changes of figuration, key and instrumentation but is always of four bars length. Given to the woodwind and the harps, in chords arpeggioti, the first thematic fragment of the invocation of the Penitent women (Ex. 1B) introduces the motive of earth with its load of sin and grief. In the following bars the 'gruppetti' of the piccolo can be likened to the flame which sparks off the dramatic explosion of the seven thunders of the Apocalyptic vision. One hears again the trumpet motive this time from the right wing backstage and with a different musical figuration rotating around the thrice repeated A. An enharmonic passage, simple but effective ($G_{\sharp}$ becomes $A_{\flat}$), leads to the second fragment of the phrase of the Penitents (Ex. 2),



accompanied by semiquaver broken chords on the harps and blending with the 'pizzicato' of the strings and then with the whole orchestra in a sonorous crescendo ending, in fine 'stereophonic'

effect, in the fortissimo tutti tonic of A flat supported by a percussion roll and off-stage trumpets. As in the beginning, on the vibrations of the new tonic, the trumpet calls, in simple tonic-dominant alternation and de-rhythmisized, sound this time from the left wing. The last fragment of the Penitents' invocation,

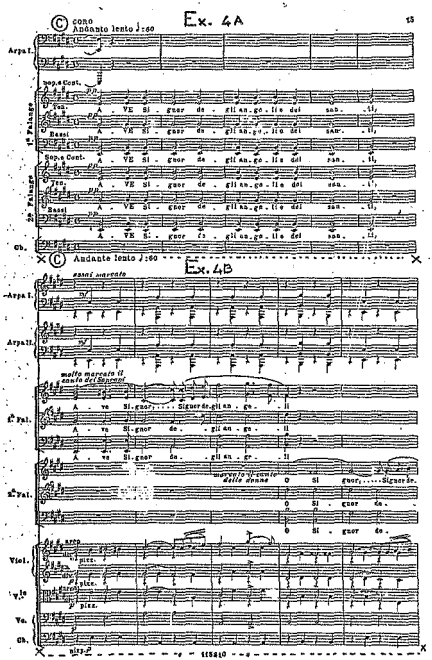
Ex. 3



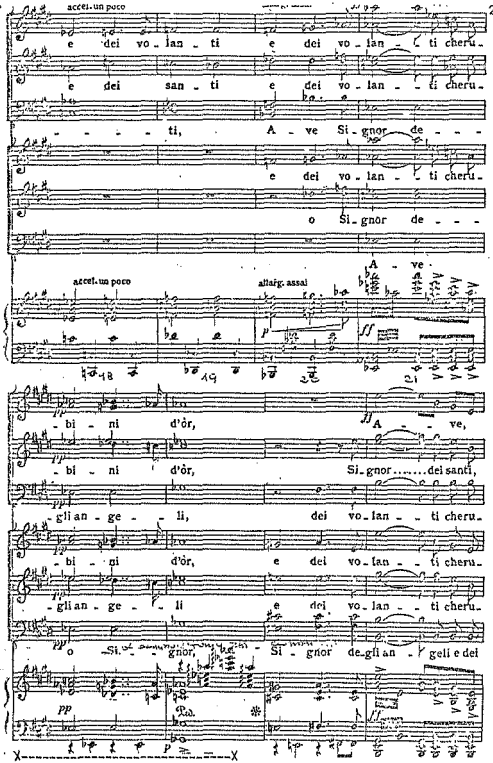
is interrupted by a violent explosion - perhaps the assertion of an imperious Will capable of being inflexible or, more probably, the revelation of a Creative power causing beings to emerge from nothing and then ordaining them according to mysterious and eternal laws. This explosion, alternating the B♭ major and minor chords in different positions, is made more incandescent by the sonority of the brass opposed to the woodwind and strings supported by the thunder of the bass-drum. With this exaltation of the Creative Power, the brief cycle of themes of the prelude is concluded. As in a symphonic form, we have a re-statement of the thematic motives so far presented, this time in the different keys of B flat and then D major, eventually leading to the original key of E major. Supported by a strings tremolo, the initial fanfare returns authoritatively in contrary motion no longer isolated but sustained by the other instruments - with sonorous and ideological intensification. As the climax

fades away, the upper strings take over the last vibratic whilst the lower strings perform a slow, descending scale, supported in the latter part by shifting string chords in the upper structure. Like a last, cosmic echo, the Penitents' theme is heard, pianissimo, in the woodwind. With the soft tonic on the harp, the instrumental prelude ends.

In the meantime the curtain has risen to reveal a region of dense clouds (Nebulosa). In the first Chorus, the Celestial host, singing in praise of the Lord of all Created things, suggest the motive of Universal harmony, from which will develop the earthly dissonance represented by the drama of Faust, the result and symbol of Divine Love. From the depths of the 'nebulosa' the words 'AVE' Signor degli angeli e dei santi' are heard pianissimo, an unaccompanied hieratic declamation on the chord of E major, almost tentative as if the Heavenly Beings, perhaps in their newly created form, struggle to take shape in melody (Ex. 4A). Then, sustained by simple chords given to the strings and punctuated by the tonic of each chord plucked in octaves by lower strings and harps, a majestically beautiful hymn. (Ex.4B), sung alternately by the first and the second phalange, starts soaring higher and higher in chromatic progression. The unexpected downward jumps of an octave retard the explosion on the high A flat, on which the voices climactically merge before falling down in a descending parabolic curve.A cadenza ingannata' (Ex. 5) occurs in the last measures of this first


Ex. 4A
Andante lento ♩=60
Arpa I.
Sop.a Cont.
Tenori
Bassi
1° Palchi
2° Palchi
Ob.
Ex. 4B
Andante lento ♩=60
assai smorzato
Arpa I.
Arpa II.
molto marcato il canto del Bourrer
1° Pal.
2° Pal.
marcato il canto della donna
Viol.
Vc.
Cb.

Ex 4A and 4B


accel. un poco
e dei vo_lan_ti e dei vo_lan_ti cheru_
e dei san_ti e dei vo_lan_ti cheru_
ti, A_ve Si_gnor de_
e dei vo_lan_ti cheru_
o Si_gnor de_
A_ve
accel. un poco
allarg. assai
bi_ni d'ór, A_ve,
bi_ni d'ór, Si_gnor dei santi,
gli an_ge_li, dei vo_lan_ti cheru_
bi_ni d'ór, e dei vo_lan_ti cheru_
gli an_ge_li e dei vo_lan_ti cheru_
o Si_gnor, Si_gnor de_gli an_geli e dei

Ex 5

choral section producing a sense of tonal ambiguity apt to convey the essence of the celestial life which, in the opinion of Martin Roeder 'has neither tonic nor dominant and is a perennial fluctuation between the known and the unknown'.[1] This cadence is repeated immediately, an augmented fifth higher, and occurs again at the end of Act III and before the end of the opera. At the words 'Dall'eterna armonia dell'Universo' the ecstatic melody starts again its irresistible flight, sustained this time, by repeated, continually modulating chords in the strings, then reinforced by the rest of the orchestra in increasingly dynamic rhythmical figuration (quavers, triplets, semiquavers). Musically translating and intensifying the meaning and sound effect of the words 'E s'erge a te per l'aure azzurre e cave in suon soave, AVE' the melody seems to hover in space (the six measures in which it is cast being made more spacious by the 'allargando'), whilst the tremolo of the upper strings and the furious 'glissandi' of harps and lower strings and the rolls of the kettle drum create a terrific impression of vastness, grandeur, of soaring heights and illimitable, resounding depths. On the repeated word 'AVE' the solemn melody slowly subsides and fades away. The imperious trumpet call which we heard at the beginning (Ex. 1) sounds once more from behind the stage, now

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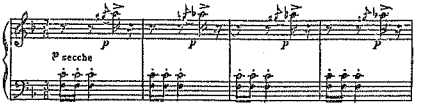
1. Roeder, E: 'Dal taccuino d'un direttore d'orchestra' - Milan: Ottino, 1881, p.202

clothed in a richer harmony. This brings the first movement to an end.

Introduced by an instrumental scherzo, Mefistofele appears on the stage, mockingly repeating the words of the Heavenly Beings 'Ave signor' over a sinister chord of the diminished seventh held by the brass for four measures. Mefistofele is variously portrayed by means of themes conveying the essence of his nature - grotesque as Thersites,[1] devilish as Satan and Epicurean as Falstaff - as Boito, referring to Goethe's character wrote in the 'Prologue in the Theatre' of his first libretto.[2] Some of the highly characteristic rhythmo-melodic figures which are nearly always associated with him, are anticipated in the first section of the Scherzo. The first, and main theme, characterized by acciaccatura, and chromatic, (Ex. 6)



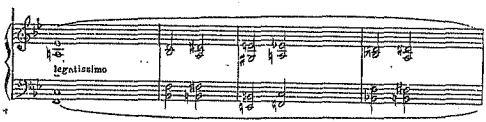
appears, in the very first measures, in the piccolo and flutes, the 'staccato' empty fifths being given out by horns and bassoons. The passage is immediately repeated in the sub-dominant. After a short staccato section it reappears, in A minor, in the dark

1. It is worthy of note that Liszt, in his character portrayal of Mephistopheles ('Faust Symphony' - 3rd movement) also emphasizes the grotesque.

2. Boito, A. op cit. p.101.

timbre of the bassoons and then, in the last four bars of the Scherzo stromentale, reinforced by violas, 'cellos and double basses.

The Scherzo's skittish middle section of plucked strings returns as the accompaniment of the first part of the speech which Mefistofele, with ironic courtesy, addresses to the Lord ('Perdona se il mio gergo'). In the ensuing Trio, Mefistofele sarcastically comments on the proud and tenacious fatuity of the 'teeny god of the weeny earth'. Scorning, in human values, the creation of God, he mocks the previous hymn of praise of the Celestial Host. His words, set forth in a heavy recitativo-like form, are underlined by a sweeping line on the 'cellos and double basses breaking up, at the passage 'al par di grillo saltellante ... fa il suo trillo nell'erba', in an onomatopoeic rendering of the words. A chord of the seventh of B flat, uttered by clarinets and bassoons, heralds a series of eerie, sinister, chromatic chords (Ex. 7A)



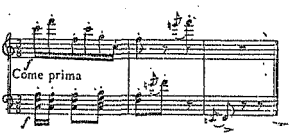
depicting the shifty, malignant nature of the Spirit of negation, so far seen in his grotesque, bizarre and cynical aspect. Over

these chords, Mefistofele, hypocritically declares:

Ah! Sì! Maestro divino
in buio fondo
crolla il padron del mondo:
e non mi da più il cuor
tanto è fiaccato
di tentarlo al mal

(Ah, yes, divine Master
in deepest darkness
the master of the world is going to pieces fast,
And I no longer have the heart
so cast down is he,
to tempt him to do evil.)

This disquieting mood is soon dispelled by the ripresa of two lively, skipping measures from the middle section of the instrumental Scherzo (Ex. 7B).



Given to the whole orchestra, they bring the second movement to its conclusion.

The Intermezzo drammatico, embodying the challenge, is a clash of powerful, antithetical forces. The enemy of Darkness, and the enemy of Light, face each other, contending for the soul of Faust. Over the tremolo of the strings, reinforced by the harp, the Chorus Mysticus utters the question 'T'è noto Faust'. The trombones, reverberating through the ether, proclaim the

motive heard at Ex. 1. Again, in dark lines of recitativo punctuated by simple string chord and isolated notes on the bassoons, Mefistofele challenges the Lord. When, with the words 'Ei morderà nel dolce pomo de'vizi' (He will bite the sweet apple of vice) he lustfully alludes to the sensual temptations to which Faust will soon, inevitably succumb, it is the Epicurean aspect of Mefistofele's character which is presented to us by Boito. Arrogantly, the devil announces, amidst the sound of his own, infernal fanfare, his assumed victory over man and God. The Celestial Host intervenes affirming the invincibility of the Lord by singing a reiterated and impressively resounding 'Sanctus'. Sustained by a descending scale in octaves on the harps, the last words finally merge with Mefistofele's consideration that it is pleasant to hear the Almighty addressing him in so human a manner, and there is a strange feeling of sadness in his last words - something akin to human emotion, perhaps a touch of nostalgia for the lost love of God. The dewy freshness of the Scherzo vocale, defined by Luigi Pagano 'as pure as a sky at dawn',[1] is a vivid contrast to the dramatic atmosphere of the preceding episode. It is one of the simplest and yet most noteworthy pages of the work, the music wondrously matching the fluidity, the nimbleness and the finesse of the verbal text. The Scherzo begins with the airy chorus 'Siam nimbi volanti',

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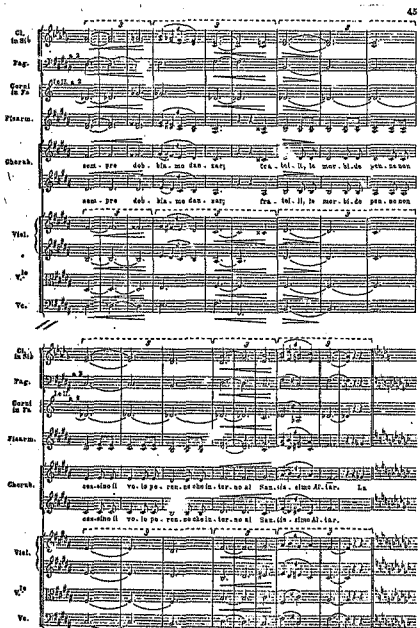
1. Pagano, L. La fionda di Davide (Arrigo Boito: l'Artista). Torino: Fratelli Bocca, 1928 - p.41.

murmured very rapidly on the simple interval $\frac{B\flat}{G}$ and repeated for thirty-three bars over an extremely rarefied harmony provided by the muted strings with the harmonics of the harps, the 'cellos beneath them fluctuating in a slow, ostinato-like figure. Here the interest lies in the curious, and fascinating, effect produced by the sonorous, swiftly alternating sounds of the vowels A - i - o, dominating the musical text, and by the wealth of dynamic contrasts (exactly indicated by the author) aimed at suggesting the visual and acoustic illusion of a restless, now near now far, motion. As the Cherubim disperse (the echo of their voices persisting in the scanty chords of the opening for another twelve bars) Mefistofele, expressing disgust and annoyance, disappears. The return of the Host of the young angels is announced by a beautiful song 'Un giorno nel fango mortale' which has the moving and intense simplicity of a chant. In triple rhythm they sing, in a canon at the unison, of their lapse from grace and of their return to God, in words which are the forecast of a final, divine reconciliation.[1] It is to them that, at the end of the drama, the soul of Faust will be entrusted to receive the mercy of God. As they start dancing in celestial spirals 'La danza in angelica spira', music and words 'twist, turn and spin', the speed of the rhythm increasing restlessly before subsiding at the beginning of the second choral section - 'Fratelli teniamci per mano', still in slow triple rhythm, with a very effective quadruplet alteration on the words 'dobbiamo

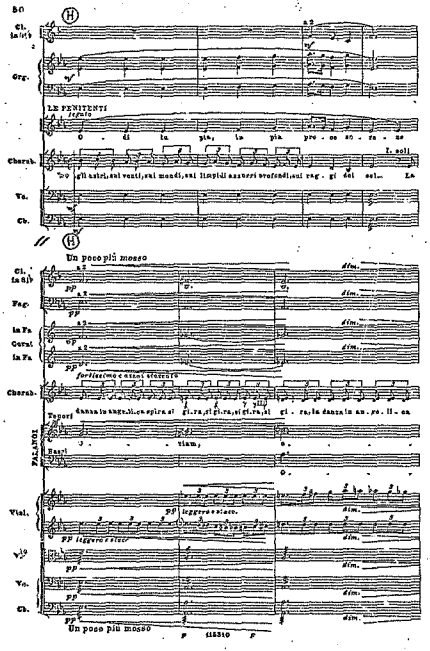
1. This section appears in the Vocal score (Ricordi, copyright 1875) but not in the full score (Ricordi, 1919.)

danzar' and 'Santissimo altar' suggesting a change in the direction of flight (Ex. 8). An enharmonic passage (F♯ / G♭) prepares a ripresa of the whirling dance followed by the nimble initial chorus which gradually fades away. The vast emptiness of Heaven is suggested by softly sounding chords given to flutes, clarinets and the harmonics of the harp over the slowly fluctuating, tranquil line of the cellos.

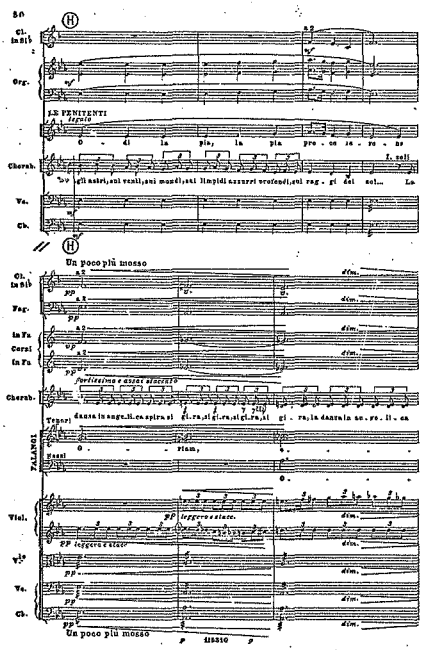
The last movement, termed by Boito Salmodia finale, begins with the chorus of the Penitent Women ('Salve, Regina'). The thematic material has already appeared in fragments in the Orchestra (Ex. 1B, 2, 3) at the beginning of the 'Prologue in Heaven'. It now takes the shape of a broad melody, accompanied by the organ and modulating from one key to another (E flat, C major, A major, D flat). The words 'Col nostro canto, col nostro pianto domiam l'intenso foco del senso'(With our singing and our tears let us subdue the sharp fire of the senses) presage the living drama of Margherita and her redemption through grief and remorse. The voices of the Cherubim join in introducing a beautiful passage 'Su gli àstri, sui vènti, sui mòndi' which, with its triple rhythm follows exactly the cadence of the symmetrically accentuated monosyllabic lines, rendering the solemn motion of the winged creatures floating up and down in the air (Ex. 9). The stately grandeur of the Celestial Host's prayer 'Oriam per quei morienti', contrasts with the nervous rhythm of the Cherubim's dance, now assuming a slightly different, but much


43
Cl. in Si♭
Fag.
Corni in Fa
Timp.
Cembal.
Vlni.
V.le
Vc.
Cl. in Si♭
Fag.
Corni in Fa
Timp.
Cembal.
Vlni.
V.le
Vc.

Ex. 8


Bcl.
Cl. in A
Org.
LE PENITENTI
Cherub.
Vc.
Cb.
Un poco più mosso
Cl. in A
Fag.
Cor. in Fa
Cor. in Fa
Cherub.
Tenori
PALLIDI
Bassi
Vlni.
Vle
Vc.
Cb.
Un poco più mosso

Ex. 9


Cl. in Bb
Org.
LE PENITENTI
legato
O di la pie, la pie pre - ce re - re
Cherub.
gli astri, ai venti, ai mondi, ai limpidi azzurri profondi, ai reg - gi dei sol...
Va.
Vc.
Un poco più mosso
Cl. in Bb
Fag.
In Fa
Corni in Fa
Cherub.
Tenori
danza in sangue si spira al ci - re, al gi - re, al gi - re, al gi - re, al
PALANCHI
Vni
Piam.
Viol.
leggero e stacc.
Va.
Vc.
Cb.
Un poco più mosso

Ex. 9

more dynamic figure, reinforced by the light staccato of the violins. The organ supports the Penitents' passionate invocation to the Virgin 'Ave Maria, gratia plena' whilst clarinets and lower strings double the grave voices of the Celestial Host interceding for the dying. All the voices entwine and expand in lines of soaring energy and grandeur, making up a rich, wonderfully sonorous and yet terse fabric into which the Chorus of the Cherubim introduces a shimmering, silver thread. The different groups of voices and all the orchestral sections merge in a tremendously impressive unison - fortissimo passage to the words 'Odi la pia prece serena' (unexpectedly ending on a C natural), climaxed by the blasting of trumpets and trombones. Starting very softly and then crescendoing, the Penitents and the Celestial Host, repeatedly utter the word 'Ave', in chromatic progression, sustained by spacious orchestral chords, reinforced by the back-stage trumpets. The voices reverberate in the vastness of space, the word 'Ave' being eventually reduced to the vowel 'Ah', as if, in the burning passion of the mystical ecstasy, everything is reduced to pure feeling. This outburst leads to a ripresa of the hymn 'Ave O Signor' (Ex. 4B) sung by the combined groups to a fuller orchestral accompaniment in which broken chords are sounded by clarinets and 'cellos over the tremolos of violins and violas and harp arpeggios. From the words 'Dall' eterna armonia dell'Universo', the hymn grows irresistibly, gaining impetus and pace by means of shorter note values (from triplets,

to quadruplets grouping, to sextuplets grouping) combined with an impressive crescendo, and continually accelerating tempo. The brass blazes out massive chords against the tremolo of the strings and the rolling sound of the percussion instruments. Flutes, piccolo, harps and lower strings sonorously rush up the scale and the whole orchestra, reinforced by the backstage fanfare, attains a mighty pinnacle of sound as the chorus reaches its climax on the fortissimo, vastly resounding AVE. The curtain falls on the orchestra triumphantly proclaiming the initial motive (Ex.1) epitomizing the power of the Will of the God of all created beings. With admirable power of synthesis Boito succeeded in conveying, musically and ideologically, already in the 'Prologue in Heaven'. the most important elements of the whole drama: the relationship between the Divine and the Human and the contrast between the 'principle' of earthly grief and of celestial exultant joy (i movement); the appearance, in the well-ordered universe of God, of the power of Evil embodied in Mefistofele, God's antagonist, and yet serving him in his own peculiar way (ii movement); the clash between the Lord of Light and Creation and that of Darkness and Destruction for the possession of the soul of Faust; the idea of sin and of possible return to the grace of God (iii movement) and, finally, the forecast of Margherita's redemption, and that of the resolution of the earthly dissonance represented by the drama of Faust into the supreme harmony of the Divine world (iv movement).

In the first part of Act I, the festive atmosphere of the Easter Sunday is instantly established by a sonorous peal of bells - an historical and happy touch of local colour being the tradition of the 'campane accordate' very popular in Germany since early times. 'Senza rigore di tempo', the bells sound a short motive, which will be heard over again throughout the scene, on the notes G F D E C. The last note provides the tonic to the martial theme thundered out by the orchestra in vigorous chords, characterized by rapid alternation, frequent changes in time signature (3/4 - 2/4), and by the final, curious effect produced by the oscillation of the cymbals, rendering the din of the excited crowd (Ex. 10). The merrymakers deport themselves to the sound of very rapid ascending and descending five notes scales. A group of students, burghers and hunters intone a lively chorus ('Perché di là'), in the middle of which occurs a charming tune in praise of April sung by eight young girls crossing the stage. With a repetitive little theme in D flat, a trumpet on the stage signals the arrival of a town-crier accompanied by a herald. Part of the crowd is attracted by them, part by a quack who now enters followed by a Merry Andrew, whilst a group of mounted soldiery and townsfolk surround a vendor of beer, breaking in a vigorous toast to 'wild affairs' and 'careless beauty'. As a grey friar appears among the crowd, greeted by some, shunned by others, the initial martial theme (Ex. 10) is heard in a slower tempo and darkened version, as if enwrapped in

ATTO PRIMO

FAUST: Se avviam ch'io dica all'ultimo fagotto:
Arrestati sei bello! allor sì lo mostri.
(GOETHE: Officina di Faust).

La Domenica di Pasqua.

SCENA: Francofort: sul Meno - Porta e bastioni. - Passeggiatori d'ogni sorta. Alcune fanciulle a gruppi. Chiacchiere, risate, grida, mormorio di folla, sedi rivive... A intervalli rampane di festa. Poi FAUST e WAGNER.

Marziale $\frac{d}{d}$=100

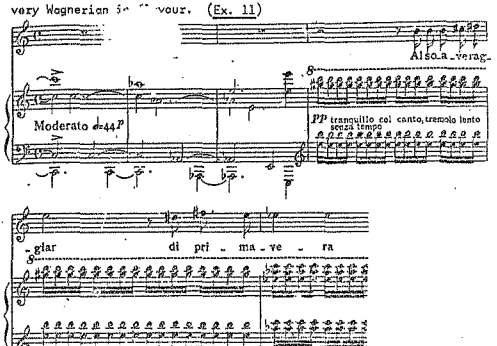
Ottavino
Flauti
Oboi
Clarinetti in Sib
Clarone
Fagotti
I e II in Fa
Corni
III. e IV. in Fa
Trombe in Fa
Tromboni
Oficleide
Timpani in Sol-Do
Tam-Tam, G.Cassa e Piatti
2 Arpe
Organo
5 Campane
Campanelli
Tamburi in Sol e
Trombe in Fa
Tromboni
sul palco
FAUST
WAGNER
MEFISTOFELE
Coro
Tutti soli
Violini I.
Violini II.
Viole
Violoncelli
Contrabassi

marcatissimo

Marziale $\frac{d}{d}$=100

(N.B. Conservando in tutte le variazioni di tempo la stessa misura nei quarti delle battute).

an evil mist. The tonal progression, from B flat to G flat, to D flat, to A major, to E major and, eventually, to the carefree basic key of C major, is both original and effective. The cavalcade of the Elector and his suite, accompanied by the excited comments of the crowd (together and variously, the voices overlapping and merging) is a brilliant piece of descriptive music, beside being tremendously effective from a visual and theatrical point of view. This scene slowly dissolves in the triplets of the strings, then on an orchestral chord in tremolo enlivened by the ringing bells and eventually ending on the tonic note of C major. After a brief transition, Faust appears on the scene followed by Wagner. Supported by a tremolo on the strings, musically conveying the image evoked by the words 'Al soave raggiar di primavera' (In the soft light of spring the ice is melting), the old doctor comments on the beauty of spring, in a recitativo very Wagnerian in flavour. (Ex. 11)



The martial motive (Ex. 10) occurs again, suggestively altered in rhythm and tempi (alternation 6/8 - 3/4). It engenders an atmosphere of wild excitement, corresponding to the bursting on the stage of a throng of merrymakers. There follows (after Wagner's brief recitativo punctuated by the strings) the chorus 'Il bel giovinetto', sustained by a strong, dance-like triple rhythm; begun in G major, it ends on the dominant chord of E minor. The ensuing Obertas, started off by a very rhythmic theme struck up by the double-basses, is irresistible in its impetuous dash and wild whirl. With its vigorous, harmonic dynamic, and rhythmical features and its bright colours, it provides a great contrast to the following episode beginning with the dialogue between Faust and Wagner. Daylight is fading and the crowd melts away. With a few touches, which could not be simpler and yet more suggestive, Boito conjures up the atmosphere of the night, full of disturbing shadows and sinister forebodings. Remarkable is the effect produced by the harmonics of violins, violas and 'cellos combined with the notes held by the piccolo and the flutes, at the words 'Fulgoreggian a vespro', and the passage from D major to D flat in the bass, underlying the words 'Declina il giorno'. Accompanied by a shuddering tremolo on the kettle drums (lower strings, horns and bassoons sounding a long, sustained chord), Wagner exhorts Faust to leave, as 'the horizon is full of fog'. In the passage preceding Wagner's words 'A notte bruna torna dolce la casa', uttered over the

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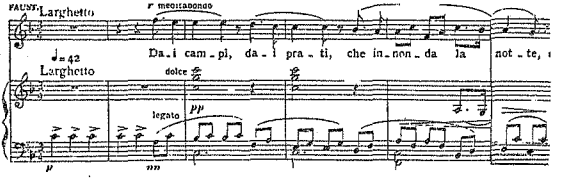
'Ah' sung off-stage (on the interval $\frac{F}{D}$) by the tenors and held for four measures, the eeriness of the atmosphere is enhanced by the modulation from C major to C flat, to B flat minor, to B flat in the alternating thirds and fifths given out, in mysterious pianissimo, by clarinets and bassoons. The theme of Mefistofele (Ex. 6) seems to spring forth quite naturally at this moment, as if it were the incarnation of the supernatural essences impregnating the air. It tells us about the true nature of the Grey Friar who, to a serpentine, chromatic line in the bass interrupted by a sinister trillo on violas and 'cellos, moves in tortuous spiral toward the terrified Faust. Wagner's reassuring words 'No, fantasima quest'è del tuo cervello' take the form of an Allegretto Scherzoso, sounding a trifle incongruous in this particular context. Within the following three bars tension is, however, rapidly built up, reaching explosion point on Faust's frenzied cry. It persists in the series of very slow, perfect chords in different keys 'cupomente religioso', as given by the instruction, interspersing Wagner's calm remark that the mysterious figure is a grey friar, no spectre. (Each group of three chords ends with a pause retarding the resolution on the chord of B flat.) As Faust and Wagner leave, followed by the Grey Friar, a fragment of the chorus 'Il bel giovinetto' is heard, repeated by the sopranos and then vocalized by tenors, in the distance. The tenors' phrase is almost inaudible, and occurs in the middle of a very interesting heavy-moving fourth-relationship enharmonic passage leading,

through downward and upward jumps of fourths, from B flat, to E flat, to A flat, to D flat, to G flat and then, from B natural (held for seven measures) to E, to A, to D, to G, to C. In the meantime, the change of scene has taken us into the study of Faust who, unaware of the presence of the Grey Friar, sings his first aria 'Dai campi, dai prati', (Ex.12)



almost Beethovenian[1] in the terseness of the melodic contour, the classical restraint of the accompaniment given to violins and woodwind and the perfect balance of its ternary form. In the bright key of F major and strongly diatonic, it aptly conveys the sense of restored peace, of profound calm felt by the old doctor now in the familiar atmosphere of his study inducive of meditation. A more anxious note is introduced at the words 'Le torve passioni del cuore' in the darker key of D minor. Then, through a passage in B flat and a diminished chord, the initial melody in F major is resumed, and the aria ends peacefully with a tonic-dominant tremolo pedal. An abrupt change in mood is brought

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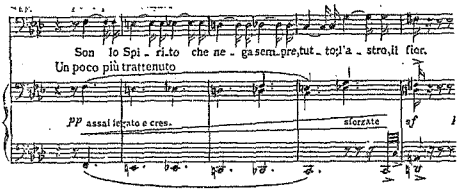
1. Its similarity with a theme of Beethoven's 'Kreutzersonate' (ii movement), has been repeatedly pointed out.

in by chromatic scales storming in the orchestra and leading to Mefistofele's theme (Ex. 6) to which he reveals himself. During his excited dialogue with Faust, Mefistofele enigmatically describes himself as 'Una parte vivente di quella forza che perpetuamente pensa il Male e fa il Bene' (A living particle of that force that perpetually thinks Evil and does Good), to a sequence of eerie chords (Ex 7A). He then embarks on the ballad: 'Son lo spirito che nego', (Ex.13)



impressive in its 'weird suggestion of diabolical malevolence'[1] incidentally, an obvious model for Jago's 'Credo'. Mefistofele has no 'melodic face',[2] as befits the Lord of Destruction, shrieking defiance at all that is good, great and harmonious; his music is intentionally unbeautiful, set in harsh sounds and abrupt rhythms merely emphasizing the qualities of the poetical text. The prevailing imagery of ruin and destruction is well translated in music by the thunder clap on the words 'Fior', 'Creator',

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1. Klein, J.W. 'Boito and his two operas'. Music and letters; 1926, p.76.
2. I borrow this expression from Mosco Carner (referring to Scarpia) op. cit., p.346.

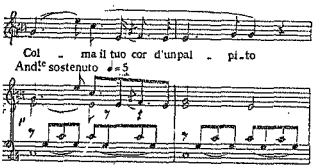
'Mal' at the end of each musical period, by the repeated, defiant 'No', and by the convulsive sixteenth-note broken chords crashing down like a sonorous avalanche. The ballad, twice repeated (the second time to a new text and with some alterations in the accompaniment of the first section) is composed of three parts: in the first chromatic part (modulating from F minor, to G minor, to B flat minor), Mefistofele asserts himself as the Spirit of Denial, the enemy of the Creator; the second part, in an animated staccato form, is an exaltation of his own destructive power; the third part, ending with a shrill whistle, mingled with a furious ascending chromatic figure, is characterized by fiery, repeated diminished fifths on the trombones and by the contrast between the diabolically powerful phrases of scorn and derision 'Rido e avvento questa sillaba...' and the dark, sinister 'No', on the surprising chord of C major in first inversion. The sequence of chords characterizing Mefistofele's shifty nature (Ex. 7) is heard again in the following episode of the Pact, when he, declaring himself Faust's slave and servant says 'Io qui mi lego ai tuoi servigi'. Faust's answer is set forth in a beautiful contabile, 'Se tu mi doni un'ora di riposo', beginning in D flat, modulating to A major at the words 'bujo pensier me stesso e il mondo' and then, momentarily, through an enharmonic passage ($F\sharp$ / $G\flat$), to G flat on Faust's outburst 'ARRESTATI SEI BELLO!' The pact is concluded to an upward, continually accelerating passage leading to G major. Alluding to the

sensual pleasures they are about to experience, Mefistofele sings a lively tune 'Fin da stanotte' (upward leaps reinforced by triangle and piccolo) over his characteristic theme appearing, this time, in a more vigorous, almost dance-like, rhythmic form. Faust joins him, as though, in renouncing to his own individuality, he were surrendering to the devil's now dominating will. Mefistofele invites the old doctor to follow him on his mantle in a broad phrase 'Pur ... ch'io diatenda questo mantel', taken over by the trombones and then, the dynamic volume gradually increasing, by the whole orchestra emphasized by resounding tam-tam beats. As the curtain falls, Mefistofele and Faust disappear, their flight through the air being accompanied by the orchestra, almost 'tangibly' reproducing (through the protusion of stringendo, allargando and other special markings) the movement of the mantle on the wings of the wind.

The first part of Act II, describing, in intensely lyrical terms, Faust' first experience of life, falls into three sections: the first contains the delightfully fresh and spontaneous duet between Faust (rejuvenated and under the name of Enrico) and Margherita followed by the cynical one of the more experienced couple Marta - Mefistofele (the latter, here seen in his Falstaffean aspect). The second section, beginning with Margherita questioning Faust about his conception of religion, is devoted to their passionate love duet and ends with the girl's acceptance of the sleeping potion for her mother. The last part shows the four

characters engaged in an exhilarating and scenically exciting quartet. The act commences with a brief introduction suggesting the homely, charming simplicity of the scene and the purity and innocence of Margherita. The string orchestra plays a gentle motive (strongly reminiscent of the second theme of the andante of Mozart's 'Prague' Symphony) over the undulating line provided by violas and 'cellos alternating the tonic and dominant of the key of F major (then, C major and G minor). On the soft pizzicato of the violins answered by the flutes, the curtain rises to reveal Faust strolling up and down with Margherita. The strings sound tentatively an entrancing little tune out of which eventually develops Margherita's fresh, almost naive melody 'Cavaliero illustre e saggio' upon which the first duet is built. The Mefistofele-Marta duet, intended as a foil to the preceding one, is accompanied by a grotesque succession of rhythmic intervals on the bassoons punctuated by violas and lower strings, ruvido and staccatissimo. (Mefistofele's theme - Ex.6 - is heard under his words 'Purtroppo e trepido vedo quell'ora'). With a ripresa of the gentle, initial motive in F major (to be heard once more during this second section when Faust asks Margherita 'Dimmi, in casa sei sola sovente?') begins the dialogue about religion leading to Faust' simple, yet passionate, cantabile in the predominant key of C major 'Colma il tuo cuor d'un palpito (Ex.14);

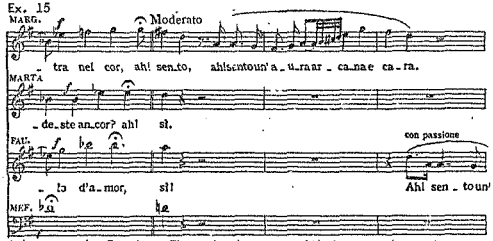
Ex. 14



(which will later acquire a bitterly poignant meaning) culminating on the high B natural on the word 'Amor'.

In the passage which follows the ascending chromatic melodic lines set against a pulsing accompaniment on the cellos, convey Faust's tumult of passion and the conflicting emotions of the hesitating - and finally surrendering - Margherita. As Mefistofele and Marta return the music assumes a syncopated, extremely dynamic rhythmical form (semiquavers and quavers in the bass against chords held by the orchestra). The two couples join in the irresistible quartet in the first part of which the different feelings of the four characters are rendered by individually suitable themes: the square melodic lines of plain Marta contrast with those, more sophisticated, of Mefistofele. Margherita's and F st's reciprocal attraction is conveyed by an almost identical, syncopated motive, culminating in Margherita's sweeping phrase 'Ah! sento un' aura arcana e cara', (Ex. 15):

Ex. 15



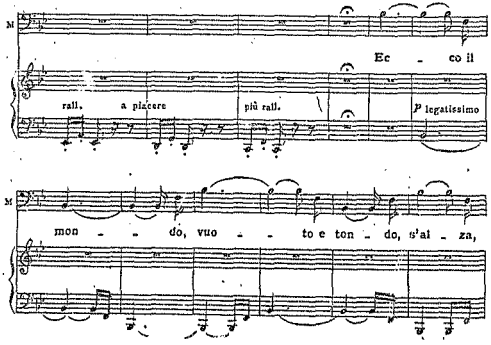
taken over by Faust. The episode moves with increased speed and reaches its highest momentum in the 'presto' which follows the roar of laughter on which the curtain falls.

From the experience of love, to the experience of evil. For the second part of Act II the action shifts to the Shirk Valley - the legendary region of darkness, chaos and turmoil of which Mefistofele is the sovereign lord. Double-basses, 'cellos and bassoons enter with grisly chromatic scales over a double C tremolo in the bass; a restless rustling in the strings, interrupted by ominous sounds in the orchestra most effectively evoke the nightmare quality of the atmosphere. In the distance 'lunga e sotteranea', the voice of Mefistofele is heard, repeatedly inciting Faust to go onward. His words, tinged with a new solemnity, are uttered against his characteristic theme (Ex. 6) here appearing in a darker, fuller vesture over the pizzicato of the violins. The light and darting motive of the will-o'-the wisp, 'flashing' in the piccolo, clarinets and flutes, casts a phosphorescent glow over the sombreness of the

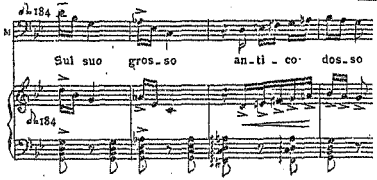
scene. Again, Mefistofele repeats his exhortation, echoed, this time, by unearthly voices resounding from the depths of the mountains. Faust's not too impressive invocation of the Will-o'-the wisp, contrasting with the devil's heavy ten times repeated 'Cammina, cammina...', is followed by Mefistofele's passage 'Ascolta! S'agita il bosco', a stupendous page of descriptive music, vaguely reminiscent of the Wolfschlucht scene in Weber's Der FreischÜtz. It is beautifully scored and full of well devised effects (as, for instance [illegible] wails of the invisible infernal host over the chord of the diminished seventh supported by a tremolando pedal on F in strings and kettle drum). The core of the second scene of Act II is, however, represented by Mefistofele's assertion of power over the world of Evil and Destruction - the dark counterpart of the 'Prologue in Heaven'. This episode, framed between the Witches' and sorcerers' chorus and the 'Ridda e fuga infernale' begins, with the off-stage song of the Witches ('Rampiamo, rampiamo'), declaimed very rapidly, on a single note, a semitone higher every four measures, and set against a series of descending, dissonant, empty chords of sixth. Very impressive is the effect produced by the Witches' explosion on the loud 'Su, su', echoed by the sorcerers, over a chord of the diminished seventh in its second inversion, reinforced by a stroke on the cymbals. Amidst the rush of the orchestra, turbulently sounding ascending and descending five notes scales, witches and sorcerers burst on to the scene intoning a mock-

psalmody, solemnly treated in canon, (basses, tenors, contraltos and sopranos entering at the interval of a perfect fifth) on the words 'Siam salvi per tutta l'eternità.' Directly after this comes Mefistofele's majestic appearance among his subjects. His contemptuous address to them 'Largo, largo a Mefistofele' is answered by an unaccompanied, parodistically liturgical formula of adoration on the reiterated simple interval of a fifth. There follows the dance of the young witches, marked by a sharply defined rhythm and a bold, abrupt change from E major to A flat. It is interrupted by Mefistofele's imperious recitativo starting with a chord of D flat in the brass and emphasized by alternating repetitions in the orchestra, first imitating, then together with and finally anticipating the singer. A ripresa of the dance of the witches leads to Mefistofele's famous 'Ballad of the world', in which the nature of the destructive power represented by him, is focused. The ballad which Mefistofele sings holding a glass globe is made up of three parts, connected by a descending diatonic scale which serves as an orchestral ritornello. In the first part, in B flat, the Lord of Darkness asserts his presumed power over the whole world. Strokes on the triangle, kettle-drum rolls and the pizzicato of the double-basses, interspersed with empty measures, precede Mefistofele's considerations of the world 'vuoto e tondo' (Ex. 16);

Ex. 16

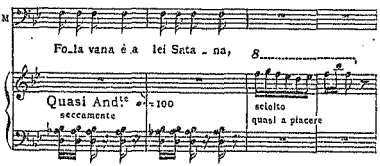


which goes up and down, glitters and bounces, the music graphically mirroring the movement implied in the words. A vigorously incisive rhythm sustains the middle section (Ex. 17)



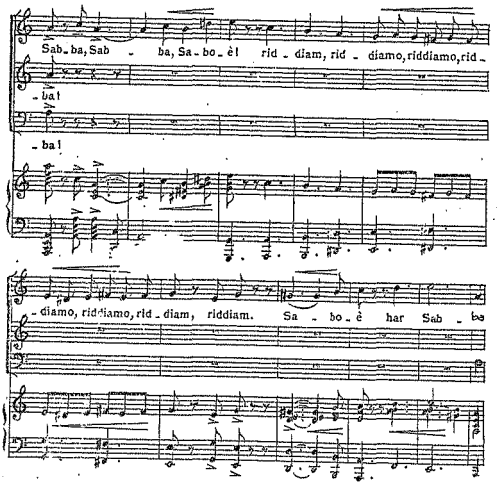
in which Mefistofele scorns the race, 'both profligate and mad, haughty, cowardly, subtle and wicked', unceasingly devouring themselves 'from the topmost peak to the bottommost depths of the wicked world'. The characteristic rhythm of Mefistofele's

theme (Ex. 6) stressed by clarinets, bassoons and kettle-drums in a chord of the seventh, sustains the beginning of the last section of the ballad, inspired by the cynical attitude of foolish mankind towards both Paradise and Hell (Ex. 18).



Enjoying his triumph, Mefistofele eventually, hurls the globe to the ground, laughing and bursting into the exultant 'Ecco il mondo' (There goes the world!), climaxed by the violent, dotted figure rung out by the brass. The dance of the infernal throng - a riotous allegro focoso accompanied by the chorus 'Riddiamo, riddiamo' - ends with a piercing trill on the piccolo, unexpectedly taken over by the gentle tone of the flute. In strong contrast to the preceding pandemonium comes the episode of the apparition of Margherita. Poignantly, the music recalls on flutes delicately supported by clarinets, oboes and violas, Faust's tender and passionate motive 'Colma il tuo cuor d'un palpito (Ex. 14) from the Garden Scene. Against it, Faust utters his wondrously expressive, recitativo-like passage 'Là nel lontano, nel nebuloso ciel', thrice interrupted by Mefistofele's furious command 'Torci il guardo' supported by violent distortions

of his theme in the orchestra. Heralded by a series of chords in rapidly changing rhythm, witches and sorcerers resume their wild dancing and singing out of which grows the tumultuous 'Fuga infernale' - a tremendously exciting visual and sonorous phantasmagory, both picturesque and dramatically to the point, reproducing the infernal atmosphere of firelit darkness, of speeding shapes, of chaos and of wild erotic excitement. The fugue, vocal and instrumental, starts off boldly with a robust theme (Ex. 19)



marked by a square-cut rhythm, announced by the soprano voices and answered first by the basses and then by the tenors. The development is expert in elaboration and neatly designed. After the section in which a fragment of the fugal theme passes through the various registers of the voices (from the second to the first basses, then from the second to the first tenors, then from the second to the first sopranos) - the orchestra, supporting with tremendous vigour - reappears the 'Riddiamo, riddiamo' chorus climaxed by frenzied shouts of 'Sabba, Sabba, Sabboë'. A very fast passage of ascending quadruplet chromatic notes leads to the stretto, in which the theme of the fugue gives way to the 'Saboë' shout, furiously syllabified, higher and higher and backed by the higher woodwind dominated by the piccolo. Noteworthy is the sudden shift from B flat to the fortissimo E major chord, followed by a series of wild ascending chromatic quadruplets on the strings, cutting their way through the impressive instrumental pedal of E major, and the Saboë theme held by all the voices in long, sustained notes. The pedal of E is taken over by all the voices whilst a series of violent diminished chords storm in the orchestra. Voices and orchestra and dancing shapes on the stage combine in an overwhelming example of vocal, instrumental and 'visual' counterpoint. Flashing and flaming, the fuga pushes on to its riotous coda strumentale - a broken chord of A major disrupted in its logical order by the introduction of the foreign notes, B and F.

An extended, fortissimo orchestral tremolo provides an exciting conclusion to the act.

The third act, intense in its music no less than in its drama, begins with a dark, orchestral introduction portraying the gloomy atmostphere of the prison. Out of the very slow, sombre, four-notes motive first introduced by the double-basses, then doubled on the cellos and again repeated over ascending and descending chromatic fragments, develops a chromatic upward-moving figure enriched,in chords, by the tones of violas, violins and flutes. Over a shuddering tremolo bass, a gentle, infinitely sad little theme (the first measures of Margherita's 'Nenia' soon to be heard) steals in in G minor on the horns; it is then repeated on oboes and violins, in G major, after an interruption from the clarinets. With a brief, embellished cadence, the clarinets prepare the tonality of D minor, in which the Nenia is written. The aria 'L'altra notte in fondo al mare' begins in D minor over very simple broken chords in the viola, and shifts to D major after the first five measures. Semiquaver staccato chords sounded pianissimo by violins, flutes and piccolo to the words 'L'aura è fredda' seem to convey the shivering of Margherita's agonized body whilst the twittering on the piccolo in the following bars enhances the image of the flying bird after which her distraught mind is wandering. The cadenza on the word 'Vola' (dramatically motivated, Margherita's aria being the equivalent of Goethe's Gretchen's mad song), ends impressively with a shift from D major

to a crushing D minor chord over which she gasps out 'Ah! di me pietà'. (Original score: 'Ah! pietà di me!) The aria is repeated identically, with the exception of the cadenza which is more florid and with the addition of a high A in the last measure but one. The reappearance of the musical phrase associated with Faust's love motive (Ex. 14) heralds his arrival. He is, in fact, seen outside the grating with Mefistofele who withdraws after a brief exchange with him. A passage in ascending semiquavers, accompanying Faust's entrance into the prison, leads to Margherita's anguished 'Dio di pietà!', at once chilling and pathetic with its abrupt and very effective octave jumps. In contrast to this outburst is the succeeding passage in which Margherita addresses Faust, in recitativo secco, without however recognizing him. Her almost whispered words are punctuated by a few isolated notes on the oboe. After a suspense-creating 'lunga, vuota' measure, Faust passionately calls 'Margherita', his voice merging with the explosion of the orchestra, now recalling the phrase heard in the Garden Scene (Ex. 15). Memories of happier days flash through Margherita's delirious mind, whilst the syncopated rhythm in the accompaniment evokes the gallant skirmish in Marta's sunny garden. The ensuing episode is the most emotionally devastating scene in the opera. Nowhere else does Boito reach a more poignant note than in Margherita's description of 'Il tetro ordin di tombe' (The melancholy order of the graves), which Faust 'must dig tomorrow'. The declamation in which her words are conveyed

-broken utterances in melodious recitative punctuated by merely indicated intervallic motives on the English horn and the flute alternately - is almost impressionistic and seems to presage the Debussy of Pelleas et Melisande, as observed by Vittorio Gui.[1] Notice should be taken of the 'expressive' quality of the continuous modulations to unrelated keys (from C major to D major, to A flat, to E major, to B flat), mirroring the unbearable emotion and anxiety which increases as Margherita passes from one fragment of related thought to the next. On the last note of her declamato the strings enter with an impetuous figuration providing the background to her frenzied expressions of fear which conclude with the desolation of the words 'Che far sulla terra? Mendicare il mio pane a frusto a frusto dovrò colla coscienza paurosa dei miei delitti'. (What is there for me to do on earth? I shall have to beg my bread, morsel by morsel, in the fearful consciousness of my crimes). As if unwilling to prolong further the terrible pathos and tension of the scene, Boito introduces at this stage the languorous duet 'Lontano, lontano', delightfully scored. It is preceded by a Lento ma non troppo, - Faust - Margherita recitativo sustained by a descending

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1. See: Cesare Orselli 'Arrigo Boito: un riesame'. Chigiana. Rassegna Annua-le di studi musicologici. Leo S. Olshki ed. Firenza, MCMLXVIII, p.206. (Debussy, who met Boito in 1885 during his sojourn in Italy as the winner of the Grand Prix de Rome, was greatly impressed by 'Mefistofele'. See: Raffaello De Rensis Capitoli biografici. Firenze, Sansoni, 1942, p.199.)

melodic progression over a pedal point on A flat. Dreaming of a far, far away 'heaven of peace' the lovers sing a quiet, hypnotic declamation, the melodic interest of which is provided by the change of note from phrase to phrase. The vocal line is coloured with the most delicate orchestral tints: ethereal chords sounded first by the strings and then enriched by the tones of clarinets, oboes and flutes above a tonic pedal of D flat (for the first eight measures) on harps and double-basses. The rhythmical figure, shapeless as regards melodic contours, is repeated over and over (the main feature lying in the continually varying relationship between the two voices) until the eleventh measure where, at the words 'spèrànti, migrànti, raggiànti' the vocal movement (quavers grouped in threes - $\frac{12}{8}$ time) suggests the vague fluctuation of the waves. This illusion is enhanced by the change in the time signature ($\frac{12}{8}/\frac{9}{8}$). With a ripresa of the quietly whispered 'lontano, lontano', in its original rhythm, the music fades to its serene end. The appearance of Mefistofele outside the grill abruptly dispells the vision of peace. Confronted with the agonizing reality Margherita invokes the help of God; the voices of Mefistofele and Faust join hers, combining in an agitated terzetto beginning with words rapidly uttered in quavers and semiquavers (in $\frac{2}{4}$) and ending with Faust's dramatic cry 'Ah, non fossi mai nato!' A brief orchestral transition, portraying the dim glow of daybreak, leads to Margherita's swansong 'Spunta l'aurora pallida', a brief, but very moving aria

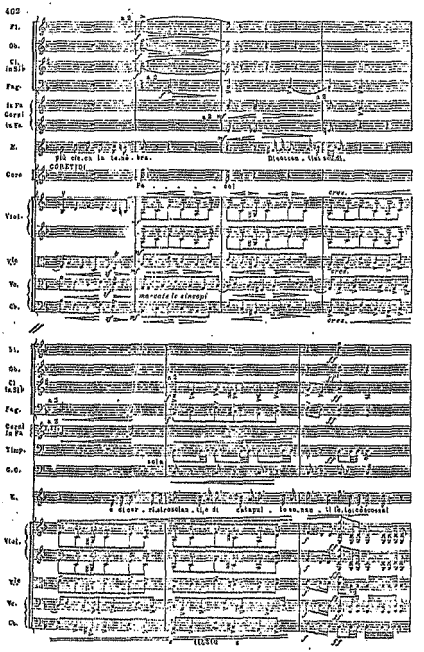
tinged with sadness. This is, in my opinion, the most inspired piece of vocal writing of the entire score. It begins very simply, in an almost subdued manner, in E minor, eventually landing, by way of continually modulating sequences, in the key of E major. The orchestra enters immediately with the material of the Chorus of the Celestial Host (Ex. 4B). Against it Margherita utters her last prayer, her final rejection of Faust - the quasi-parlato 'Enrico, mi fai ribrezzo' - revealing in the most impressive way the change in her nature, from the tender and simple girl of her first meeting with Faust to the woman accused of the most atrocious crimes, now repudiating her illusory and tragic experience of love.

On the repetition of the cadence heard at Ex.5, the Celestial Host, counteracting Mefistofele's assertion 'È giudicata!' proclaim Margherita's salvation. A concise orchestral postlude brings to its end what can be considered the most intensely human and dramatically compelling act of Boito's work.

Act IV, although not over-impressive from a dramatic point of view, is magnificent in its perfect blending of music, poetry, scenography, and graphic effects. To the ethereal sound of strings and woodwind, the curtain rises to reveal the moonlit wooded banks of the river Peneus where immortal Elena is shown, with her companion Pantalis, surrounded by plastically grouped personages of the mythological world. Much of the archaic colour achieved in this orchestral prelude derives from the use

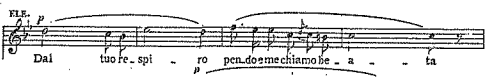
of major and minor triads over the transposed pentachord of the Lydian mode. The opening duet 'La luna immobile', sung alternately by Elena and Pantalis, is remarkable for the way in which poetic and musical structure reinforce each other, both contributing to the creation of a vaguely archaic, extremely suggestive, atmosphere. Noteworthy is also the imaginative use of instruments, the flutes making their graceful appearance over the glittering background provided by arpeggio chords on the harp, the lower strings reinforcing the dominant tonic figure with which each melodic phrase is sealed. A disturbance of this serene atmosphere occurs when Mefistofele enters with Faust. He expresses his uneasiness at being among the 'strange phantoms' of the classical world, illustrated in the orchestra by the grisly chromatic figure previously heard at the opening of the Witches' Sabbath act. Serenity is, however, restored as soon as the Choretides' ring-dance begins. Gracious, delicately scored and almost Gluckean in manner, the Chorea falls into three perfectly balanced sections (each comprising sixteen bars and each with its own theme). The music enhances the sense of delicate enchantment; it is, however, the visual action that here takes the upper hand. The composed movements of the dancers continually creating new forms in space, trace an exquisite arabesque against the moon-flooded, silvery landscape. A repitition of the first section of the Chorea leads, through a shift from D flat to D major, to the majestic chorus 'Trionfi ad Elena' sustained by broken chords

and arpeggios in the harps. This is followed by Elena's narration of the destruction of Troy, cast in a fitting declamatory style. It opens in a recitativo manner growing visionary and powerfully dramatic from the words 'Nugoli d'arsa polvere'. Very effective is the musical representation of the clouds of burnt dust, of the clashing shields, hurtling chariots and twanging catapults accompanied by furious syncopated passages starting in the violas and then passing to the 'cellos as the violins move in implacable propulsion (Ex. 20). Impressive too is the intervention of the Choretides, imploring peace and invoking the gods. Also remarkable is the passage in sextuplet-grouping given to the violins (the first violins playing the interval $\frac{A}{D}$ double stopping, whilst the seconds 'flutter' in the alternation F sharp - F natural), frequently repeated in the accompaniment of the second part of the narration which ends on a fortissimo seventh chord, hammered out by the orchestra. The episode of Elena's narration ends with the words 'Alto silenzio regna poscia dove fu Troia', cast in melologue form, as in the beginning. In Sapphic hendecasyllables, the rhythmical scansion of which is preserved in the music, the Choretides announce the arrival of Faust, who enters followed by Mefistofele. Harps and strings introduce Faust's andante amoroso 'Forma ideal purissima', again almost Beethovenian in its design and classical simplicity. His tribute to the image of enduring beauty gives way to a superb concertato in which Elena's broad,


402
Fl.
Ob.
Cl. in B♭
Fag.
In Fa
Corni in Fa
B.
Corno
CORPTIO
Viol.
V/c
Vc.
Cb.
Tr.
Timp.
C.o.
Tutto

Ex. 20

sweeping melody - 'Dal tuo respiro' (Ex. 21),



soars above the lines given to Faust, Pantalis, Nereo. Mefistofele and the comments of the Chorus. After the episode in which Faust teaches Elena to speak the 'idioma soave', comes the duet 'Amore! mistero', one of the most lyrical sections of the work. Introduced by the reiterated word 'T'amo', sung alternately by Faust and Elena, the duet begins with the voices singing in unison, but later develops into a type of free echoing imitation. Worthy of note is the passage 'Cantiamo l'amore' in which Elena and Faust are supported by string chords in groups of three quavers. The repetition of the first part of the duet is climactically reinforced by chorus and orchestra. After reaching an impressive fortissimo, the music suddenly sinks to a pianissimo A flat chord 'sighed' by the Choretides and held in long sustained, changing chords over the tremolo of violas, 'cellos and double basses. Above this structure, Faust and Elena whisper their words 'Giace in Arcadia...', as if intoxicated with bliss. The ethereal theme with which the act opened is heard on the woodwind, then on the solo strings supported by a very soft timpany roll. Over the last, pianissimo 'Ah! of Choretides and Choriphaei the curtain, very slowly, falls.

In the Epilogue - The Death of Faust - the stage is set

for the final chapter in the struggle between Hell and Heaven; it is a very short act, most of its themes and melodies being derived from earlier episodes. Faust is seen in his study once more. An old man, with death fast approaching, he appears lost in meditation. 'Goethe put, at the beginning of this scene, four hags; surrounding Faust they murmur sinister and obscure words. What Goethe put on the stage we put in the orchestra, using sounds instead of words so as to render more incorporeal and extra-human the hallucinations perturbing Faust on the edge of the grave',[1] wrote Boito in a footnote of his first libretto. This explains and comments on the short orchestral introduction with which the Epilogue begins. Mysterious, almost disconnected sounds based on falling diminished fifths and seeming to adhere to no key-centre, pass through many of the instruments of the orchestra (oboes, clarinets, double basses, bassoons, 'cellos). These impressionistic passages translate the 'magic voices floating in the air' into an orchestral medium and, at the same time, convey the restlessness of Faust's thought. Then, Elena's theme (Ex.21) appears, almost doleful in this context, on the mellow tones of the viola. Into this theme suddenly sounds the voice of Mefistofele exhorting Faust's 'arrogant thought' to go on and on. Against Mefistofele's descending scales ('O canti, o memorie') Faust pensively declaims his melancholy words 'Corsi attraverso il

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1. Boito, A. op. cit., p.176.

mondo e i' suoi miraggi' (I have passed through the length and breadth of the world and all its vain illusions), out of which grows his fine, and appropriately restrained, aria 'Giunto sul passo estremo'. Hard upon this follows the scene of Faust's visionary dream 'Ecco la nuova turba' which provokes Mefistofele's alarmed reaction. The two voices follow each other in imitation over a most interesting harmonic sequence moving through continually changing keys, portraying the instability of the vision which gradually assumes mystical connotations (from E major to B major; then, enharmonically, to G flat and, changing at every bar, from D flat to A flat, to E flat, to B flat, to F major, finally ending in the bright key of C major). It is to the broken chords of harp, violas and 'cellos that Faust rejoices himself in the 'august beam' of the coming, eternal dawn. The motive of the Celestial fanfare (Ex. 1), in a richer and much more extended figuration, asserts itself over the misty background of droning percussions and lower strings. What follows is magnificent theatre. Mefistofele's tempting of Faust (first by inviting him, as in Act I, ii, to follow him on [illegible] mantle and then by evoking a vision from the Classical Sabbath act) is countered by the intervention of the Celestial Host, who announce themselves with the Chorus 'Ave o Signor' (Ex. 4B), heard first unaccompanied, then ever louder, the dynamic volume gradually increasing until, towards the end, the full orchestra is engaged. On the first cadence of the Prologue (Ex. 5) Faust, with a heartfelt

cry, pronounces the words 'Arrestati sei bello'. Foiled in his efforts but still trying to win Faust's soul, the enraged Mefistofele orders once more 'Torci il guardo' (an echo from the Witches' Sabbath) whilst the music of the angelic chorus relentlessly pushes the action forward. Carried away in ecstasy before the vision which becomes more and more clearly defined, Faust, finally experiencing the moment of perfect bliss, explodes in the vehement outburst 'SACRO ATTIMO FUGGENTE, ARRESTATI SEI BELLO'. Into it the voices of the Cherubim enter - a felicitous touch, children being the most natural symbol of new life and hop As a shower of roses descends over Faust's body, all the voices impressively combine contributing to the tremendous expansion of the ensemble. The defiant whistle of Mefistofele, heard at each climax of grandeur, is eventually overwhelmed by the Celestial trumpet-call (Ex. 1), returning with overpowering majesty and vigour over the E held fortissimo for the last five bars by the chorus, the orchestra vibrating with the tremolo of the strings, the sonorities of the woodwind, the rolls of the timpani and the thunder of the tam-tam. This E has been the generating note of the entire music drama and it sounds, as the curtain falls, as it sounded in the beginning, the dazzling splendour of heaven remaining the last image of the story of Faust.

Mefistofele is not, perhaps, the masterpiece which Antonio Borriello - one of the most eminent Boitian scholars - claims it to be in the conclusion of his exhaustive essay 'Mito poesia e

musica nel "Mefistofele" di Arrigo Boito'.[1] It is, however, a powerful, inspired and original work, skilfully conceived, brilliantly constructed and beautifully realized - a work so different from the average Italian opera of the mid-nineteenth century as to justify Abraham's description of it as 'a landmark in the history of Italian opera'.[2] The historical importance of Mefistofele has hardly been questioned. It is sufficient to remember the conditions prevailing in the unimaginative and unenterprising operatic Italy of the eighteen-sixties in order to feel for Boito's youthful work the greatest admiration.[3] Calling attention to the 'beauty, the grandiosity, the meaning and the importance of Mefistofele' Pizzetti, after pointing out the deplorable customs of the Italian lyrical stage, appears to confirm that Boito had achieved his aims of opera reform, when he writes of him:

> It was given to a man in his early twenties to be the first in Italy to understand that ARIA and RECITATIVO are useless words and formulae; that the musical expression of the drama should not be constituted by oasis of melody amidst the sand-desert of the recitativo. He felt that the forms of the melody must not be determined by pre-conceived harmonic schemes; that the chords have their own, invaluable, expressive power; that the field of rhythmical possibility is much more extended than thought by his contemporaries.... the twenty-five years old composer sought and experimented with new melodic, rhythmical, harmonic and instrumental means of expression. As a result,

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1. Antonio Borriello, ~~cit.~~, p.350.

2. G. Abraham. 'A hundred years of music'. University paperbacks. Methuen; London, 1964, p.182.

3. See Appendix H. p.408.

> he conceived and wrote the Prologue of Mefistofele, - a vast fresco, of which we do not know whether one has to admire the movement of the celestial figures or the colours; he discovered the rhythmical richness of the Easter Sunday and the Classical Sabbath Night, and achieved the rare exquisiteness and depth of expression which mark the harmonic sequences found (to quote some example) in the two short colloquies between Faust and Wagner and in Margherita's mad-scene.[1]

It may perhaps be objected that by the time of the first performance of Mefistofele, Verdi had produced no less than twenty three operas (from Oberto Conte di San Bonifacio to Don Carlos), some of them quite successful. But it is true that Verdi, content to work within the confines of the traditional, had never shown the slightest concern for the changes which were revolutionizing music, both vocal and instrumental, during his time. It was only with Otello and Falstaff that Verdi took 'his place beside Wagner as a musical dramatist'.[2] We should not, however, overlook FaustoTorrefranca's observation that, in spite of the diversity of style and of emotive and communicative force, an examination of the scores of Mefistofele (1868) and Aida (1871) reveals obvious resemblances to be seen, not only 'in the easy inflection or even breaking up of the melody always ready to follow the yielding or changing of the verbal rhythm; the poetic use of instrumental colouring unusual at that time, and a tendency broadly "al fresco" in the ensemble scenes', but also, and above all, 'in the desire common to the two operas, to

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1. Ildebrando Pizzetti, op.cit., pp. 42-43.
2. G. Abraham, op.cit., p.185.

overcome the limitations of a musical conscience strictly national and to attain to a larger one which might justly be called European'.[1]

As to the intrinsic value of Mefistofele, its most salient features may be summed up as follows: first, and foremost, Boito's work recommends itself for the interest and beauty produced by the coalescence of fine music and fine poetry - the two elements being so indissolubly fused as to make a distinction between idea and musical expression impossible. We then admire the richness of musical colours, the rhythmical originality, the free and imaginative handling of the orchestra (an orchestra of full symphonic complexity, although not used with a really symphonic technique) which is dominant and yet subordinate to the vocal element. It is perhaps possible to question the quality of Boito's melody, if we expect a vocal line to have the suppleness or the sensuous warmth of the melodic lines of a Bellini or a Verdi; Boito's typical lyrical phrases, marked by leaps and dropping intervals look forward to the melod technique of the early twentieth century and are full of dramatic vigour and tension. The melody is not always strictly dependent on the accent of the words, but it develops directly from the very words and spirit of the text. There are, of course, instances of more traditional melodic writing, the most remarkable items being

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1. Fausto Torrefranca, op.cit., p.544.

Margherita's two arias in Act III ('L'altra notte' and 'Spunta l'aurora pallida') and the Faust - Elena duet in Act IV ('Amore, mistero'). Harmonically Boito does not strike us to-day as being excessively original: chromatic alterations, enharmonic passages, sequences of empty fifths and octaves, constant modulations from one key to another, sudden shifts from major to minor or vice versa, have long been commonplaces; they were, however, found to be almost revolutionary in the Italy of 1868, and as such, harshly criticized.[1] What should surely be reckoned among Boito's most valuable achievements is the effectiveness of his declamatory style - a kind of musical prose unadorned and yet tremendously eloquent. The subtlety of the composer's use of this device for dramatic truth, can hardly be exaggerated: Margherita's mad-scene is the inevitable example but we must not forget Elena's vision-narration in Act IV, her simple melologue accompanied by essential chords emphasizing, without interfering, however, the expressive quality of the words. Such a dramatic conciseness is to be found in the works of Pizzetti, Malipiero and the other composers of the generation of the eighties. Although still retaining elements of the old melodramma Mefistofele, obviously moving from the traditional form towards a greater flexibility of structure, looks toward the future. It is not

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1. Referring to the 'Prologue in Heaven' Verdi, in a letter to his friend Arrivabene wrote'... and I, listening to the harmonies of that piece, based almost always on dissonances, seemed to be ... not in HEAVEN, certainly'. In Frank Walker, op.cit., p.473.

surprising that the conservatively orientated Milanese audience should have found Mefistofele disturbingly revolutionary, and reacted with a scene comparable to that of the Paris première of Tannhäuser, seven years before. It is even less surprising that the charge of Wagnerism was levelled against Boito, the composer being repeatedly accused of seeking to destroy the traditional characteristic of Italian opera, of striving too much after originality, of giving undue importance to the symphonic element (in spite of Verdi's warning that 'opera was opera and a symphony a symphony')[1] and, most of all, of following too closely in the footstep of the German composer. This charge of Wagnerism need hardly be answered. Apart from the nobility of its conception there is nothing Wagnerian either in the structure or in the music of Mefistofele. A few passages (Faust's 'Dai campi, dai prati', 'Forma ideal purissima', the duet 'Lontano, lontano') betray the influence of Beethoven, whom Boito venerated, whilst in others, we can feel the shadow of Schumann, Chopin, Weber, of those romantic composers who had enriched music with their restless sensitivity and with new means of expression. As already said, Boito accepted from Wagner nothing more than some basic principles of aesthetics, mainly concerning the Gesamtkunstwerk theory of the equal importance and combination of all the arts in the theatre. Boito could not have remained insensitive to the strength of

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1. Toye, F., op. cit., p.468.

Wagner's personality and probably gained from him the example of the militant artist devoted to the realization of the highest ideals. This devotion to the cause of Art, always identified with an ever-expanding Ideal, was to accompany him throughout his life. It was to assist him during his endless striving for the unattained perfection which he sought in Nerone.

PART V

BOITO, THE LIBRETTIST-COMPOSER OF NERONE

CHAPTER 1

THE LIBRETTO OF NERONE

In 1876, with joyous excitement, Boito wrote to Count Salina: 'I live immersed in the blood and perfumes of Roman decadence, amidst the whirling life of Nero's court'.[1] In 1901, the year of the publication of Nerone as a tragedy, referring to the polishing of the libretto (derived from his own tragedy) and to the composition of the music, he confessed to Antonio Fogazzaro: 'I have forged with my own hands, with infinite love and pain, the instrument of my tortures'.[2] Indeed there are few instances of such painstaking work of preparation, involving historical research, meditation, patient and prolonged studies, as that accompanying the creation of Boito's gigantic roman epic. As to the various literary sources of Nerone, Romualdo Giani, in his authoritative and most scholarly essay Il Nerone di Arrigo Boito, after mentioning Octavia (for a long time wrongly attributed to Seneca), Racine's Britannicus, Alfieri's Ottavia, Gazzoletti's Paolo, Cassa's Nerone, Hamerling's Ahasuerus in Rome, wrote:

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1. See p. 30.

2. Nardi, P., op. cit., p.638.

> Unlike Hamerling, not satisfied with the more familiar aspects, (Boito) grasped at every reminiscence and every hint giving a clue to the secret of the soul; and sought for realism, not among the second-hand rendition of the historians - the Annales of Tacitus, the portrayals of Suetonius, the Decades of Dion Cassius, the Judean anthology of Flavius - but rather in the emotional tales of the poets, the ingenuous testimony of the unscholarly, the ardent lyricism of legendary lore; in the pages of Seneca, of Lucanus, of Petronius, of Persius, of Juvenal, of Martial; in the writings of Clemens Romanus, of Ireneus, of Hippolytus, of Epiphanius, in the Epistles of the Apostles, and in the Apocalypse.[1]

It goes without saying that such an amount of research led to an opera quite different both in scope and historical accuracy from those on the same subject which had preceeded Boito's. Among these were: Monteverdi's L'incoronazione di Poppea (Venice, 1624), to a most beautiful libretto by Giovanni, F. Busenello; Perti's Nerone (1693); Kunst's The Cruelty of Nero (Moscow, 1703); Handel's Nero, or love attained through blood and murder (Hamburg, 1705); Keiser's Nero and Octavia (Hamb , 1705); Duni's Nerone (Rome, 1735); Torchi's La Morte di Nerone (Venice, 1792) and Rubinstein's Nero (Hamburg, 1879).[2] Boito had attended a performance of Rubinstein's work in Dresden and had come to the conclusion that the librettist Carrier was by no means a great dramatic genius and that the music was rather disappointing.. On both the dramatic and the lyrical stage the figure of the Roman Emperor associated with deeds so terrible as to become

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1. Giani, R. 'Il Nerone di Arrigo Boito' Turin: Bocca ed. 1924, p.55.

2. Other Neronian scores, appeared after Boito's Nerone, are Giovannetti's Petronio (Rome 1924) and Mascagni's Nerone (Milan, 1935), the latter on libretto by Targioni-Tozzetti founded on the'comedy'by Pietro Cossa.

legendary, had always appeared in the 'crystallized' pattern of a type symbolising crime, folly and infamous tyranny. Boito was not, however, concerned with abstractions. With a critical and psychological approach nearer to the twentieth century's idea of historical reconstruction than to that of his own time, he conceived a 'study' aimed at explaining not only the complex personality of Nero, but also the cause of his bloody, destructive folly. Relying on a few passages found in Tacitus and Suetonius who, referring to the murder of Agrippina related that 'Nero only understood the horror of his crime when it was done'[1] and that 'he was never thereafter able to free his conscience from the guilt of this crime,'[2] Boito made the action of his drama pivot around Nero's remorse for having had his mother killed. This remorse was to become both the source and the unquenchable expiation of his endless cruelties and destructive delirium. Historical and legendary traditions, enlivened by the power of a glowing imagination, contributed to the re-creation of the background - the imperial Rome of the first century of the Christian era, the new Babylon, as she was referred to by the Fathers of the Church, splendid and corrupt as a courtesan

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1. Tacitus, The Annals of Imperial Rome, XIV.10. 'The Fall of Agrippina'. Great Britain - 1974: Penguin Classics, p.317.

2. Suetonius The Twelve Caesars - 'Nero'. Great Britain: Penguin Classics, 1972, p.223.

contaminated by all the vices, extravagances and excesses of the Orient and impregnated with blood, luxury and folly. Among the servile patrician and plebian crowd and the mob of mimes, histrions, dancers and ephebes, eager for pleasure and strong emotions, excited with lust and violence, ready to hail their Caesar and to condemn the new Lord's disciples, stand out the figures of Simon Mago, Asteria and Tigellino. Simon Mago is the false doctor and false prophet of the Acts[1] associated, according to the tradition, with Nero and thought to be the promoter of the first persecution of the Christians. The character of Asteria, the snake charmer, is founded on Helen, the harlot, bought by Simon Mago with the money stolen from the Apostles. Tigellino is commander of the Guard and Nero's favourite. Opposed to them are Fanuèl, the mariner of Palestine, who sums up in himself the gentle ardour of the apostle Paul and the inflexibility of Peter; Rubria, the Vestal virgin raped by Nero (according to Suetonius[2] and not for 'purposes of the opera'[3] as suggested by Patrick Smith) and then converted to Christianity, and the crowd of early Christians, singing and praying in the serene atmosphere of the

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1. 'Simon had been astonishing the Samaritan nation by the practice of magic, claiming that he was a remarkable person'. (Acts; VII, 9).

2. Suetonius, op. cit., p.223 ('Nero raped the vestal virgin Rubria')

3. Smith, P., op. cit., p.348.

Orchard whilst waiting for their martyrdom and glory.

The first act of Nerone - The Appian way - stems from Tacitus' Annals (XIV, 10 and 13):

> For the rest of the night, witless and speechless, he alternately lay paralysed and leapt to his feet in terror, waiting for the dawn which he thought would be his last[1] ... Nero lingered in the cities of Campania. His return to Rome was a worrying problem. Would the Senate be obedient? Would the public cheer him? Every bad character ... reassured him that Agrippina was detested. .. They urged him to enter boldly and see for himself how he was revered ... they found even greater enthusiasm than they had promised. The people marshalled in their tribes were out to meet him, the senators were in their fine clothes, wives and children drawn up in lines by sex and age.[2]

From Suetonius' Nero comes the detail:

> He often admitted that the Furies were pursuing him with whips and burning torches; and set Persian mages (Simon Mago, in Boito's drama) at work to conjure up the ghost and make her stop haunting him.[3]

The first scene is set in a field 'situated at the sixth mile-stone of the Appian Way. The night is misty; the moon is obscured by dense clouds. The darkness which envelops the Appian Way and the adjoining tombs is scarcely broken by the dying gleam of a funerary lamp'. Amidst the fragments of distant love-songs, carried and dispersed by the wind into the vast stillness of the campagna, the dreadful cry 'Nerone-Oreste, il Matricida', is heard. Two men ,

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1 - 2 Tacitus, op. cit., p.317(1) and 319(2).

3. Suetonius, op. cit., p.228.

hardly perceivable in the darkness, are waiting for Nerone; they are Simon Mago, intent on digging a grave and Tigellino who stands motionless, on guard, gazing in the direction of Albano. Shrieking in terror the Emperor rushes in, enveloped in a funeral toga and hugging to him the urn containing the ashes of Agrippina. Fearful and trembling he reveals that he is being haunted by the vision of a hideous woman, carrying a torch, with snakes around her neck, seeming to his distracted mind an avenging fury. 'Dolce, ridente Lalage' (My sweet, smiling Lalage), sings a voice in the distance answered by another voice recalling, in Petronius' sensuous verse, memories of erotic pleasures:'Trasfondeva col bacio il labro al labro l'anima errante' (From lip to lip, the errant soul, transfused upon a kiss.) As the songs melt away there resounds the apocalyptic prophecy of the son of Hanan 'Voce dall'Oriente! Voce dall'Occidente! Guai a Roma!' (Voice from the Orient! Voice from the Occident! Woe to Rome!') immediately followed by the cry 'Nerone. Oreste! Il Matricida'. With the words 'Lava il mio matricidio! Orrenda vita vivo' (Clean me from the taint of matricide! I live a life of horror), Nerone implores Simon Mago to save him from the threatening ghost of his mother. Whilst preparing himself for the expiatory rites, he delivers a high-sounding funeral oration'Queste ad un lido fatal, insepolte ceneri tolsi' (From a foreign shore I took these unburied ashes), built on the principal of classical rhetoric and strongly echoing Aeschylus' Oresteia. A few moments of sincere emotion are

overcome by the thought of kinship with Orestes, the hero chosen by the Fate as the accomplisher of a similar deed transcending every human law. His crime, thinks Nerone, will also be the cause of his grandeur and the funeral oration, began as a prayer, ends with the outburst 'Io sono Oreste, e mia Tauride è Roma' (I am Orestes and Rome is my Tauris), expressing his tragic megalomania. Interspersed with the rites of the lengthy burial ceremony - and providing contrast to it - are the episodes of the marching gladiators crossing the stage at the rear, and of the pleasure-loving passer-by singing and playing the oboe in the sleepless Roman night. The sudden and frightening apparition of the snake-uncircled Asteria amidst the tombs provokes the flight of Nerone, followed by Tigellino. To Simon Mago, who boldly remains to challenge her, she reveals her morbid and yet burning passion for Nerone, the 'cruel angel' whom she follows everywhere, as a supernatural creature, not daring to appear to him as a real woman. Asteria, an ambivalent figure, is intended to be the living symbol of Nerone's remorse but she is the woman-demon as well, beautiful and perverse, fascinating and even touching because of her hopeless burden of love and pain. Realizing that she may be of use to him Simon Mago promises to bring her to Nerone if she is prepared to do his bidding. She tells him that a sepulchre nearby is the Christians' place of meeting. The magician, leaving her weary on the ground, goes inside to investigate. As the first gleam of dawn begins to dispel the darkness, Rubria, clad in a white robe, appears to lay

flowers on a grave recently built. Kneeling down in prayer, she recites the 'Padre ...stro' (The Lord's Prayer), one of those fine paraphrases of prayers often recurring in Boito's libretti and assuming different emotional connotations according to the dramatic context.[1] Her voice, pure and passionate, rises high in the silence surrounding her. Attracted by the tenderness of these new words telling of hope and forgiveness, Asteria discloses herself. As in a trance she accepts some flowers from Rubria's hands - a gentle token of love destined to act as a link between the woman who seeks her God in the pure world of the spirit and the one who seeks hers in the passion of the senses. Finally overcome by the demons in her, Asteria tears herself away from Rubria, rushing in the direction of Albano. Fanuèl now enters dressed as a mariner. His dialogue with Rubria is interrupted by Simon Mago's return. The following episode, the Temptation scene, based on the 'Acts' VII, 18[2] is a crucial one: Fanuel's refusal to reveal the secret of his power of performing miracles in exchange for gold and power makes of Simon Mago his deadly enemy. From here comes the Thaumaturge's hatred of the Christians, resulting in the persecution which is to occupy the final part of the drama. Simon Mago's speech, delivered whilst

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1. It suffices to compare Rubria's Lord's Prayer with that of Claudio in the libretto of Amleto, Act II, i. We may also remember the Angelus in Un tramonto; the prayer in La Falce; The Angelus Domini in La Gioconda; The Ave Maria in Otello.

2. 'Acts VII, 18'. Now, when Simon observed that through the laying on of the Apostles' hands the Holy Spirit was conferred, he offered them money and said 'Give me this power...'

showing to Fanuèl the spectacle of the corruption of the Roman world and against the sound of voices and trumpet blasts announcing the triumphal return of the Emperor to Rome, is a superb example of Boito's imaginative and evocative power. Simon's lines are grandiloquent, sparkling with sumptuous imagery, rich in rhymes and assonances and irresistible in their impetuous movement:

S'avanza una gran nube
Di turbe, Echeggian trionfali tube.
È il Matricida, ei vien col suo corteo
D'istrioni e d'Eumenidi all'assalto
Del mondo reo.
....
Guarda quaggiù: Pel sangue che l'inonda
L'arca d'oro di Cesare sprofonda,
Furibonda ruina e precipizio;
Plebi nefande confuse nel vizio
Plaudono a Roma chè canta e che crolla.
Tremano tutti: Cesare la folla,
Le coorti. Fischiò dagli ongiporti
Gia il greculo rubel. Cadono i morti
Nel Circo e cadon nel triclinio i vivi
E in Numi in ciel! Ma tu su quei coptivi
Del fango e della porpora distendi
Le tue mani, la tua virtù mi vendi;
Due Soviaumani vedrà il mondo allor!
Vendi il miracolo t'offro dell'or.

(A great crowd is advancing
in a large cloud. Triumphal trumpets echo.
It is the matricide; he is coming with his train
of histriöns and Furies to assault the guilty world...
Look over there, the golden world of Caesar
sinks in the blood that floods over it -
furious ruin and headlong fall;
an evil populace confused in vice
Applauds Rome which sings and crumbles.
Everyone trembles: Caesar, the crowd, the cohorts.
The Greek rebels have already hissed
from the narrow lanes. The dead fall in the Circus,
the living in the Triclinium
and the Gods in Heaven. But you

extend your hands over those captives
of mud and purple! Sell me your virtue
The world will then see two supermen.
Sell me your prodigy, I offer you gold.

In the meantime the news of Nerone's return has reached Rome and a great procession (for which the most detailed and historically precise stage directions are given) moves to meet him. Inspired by Tacitus and Suetonius,[1] the vision of the triumph, intimately connected with the action, envelops the end of the act in a blaze of colours and in a burst of images. Directed, from the height of a mound by Tigellino (returned to the Appian Way in company with Nerone) the procession begins to file past. All Imperial Rome marches towards the still doubtful and distraught Emperor; the Mauritians horsemen, adorned with jingling bracelets and phalerae, open the defilade at a gallop, followed by the buccinators; the singing 'ambubaie' and the dancing throng of the maidens of Gades; the 'phalangarii'; the colourful mob from the distant provinces; the German warriors, the Lictors, Centurions and Praetorians, carrying Lictor's fasces, eagles and banners; the patricians, the populace and the car with the Dionysiac actors singing Nerone's hexameters 'L'ebra Mimallone già diè fiato alla bacchica tromba....' (The drunken Mimalloneis did already blow the Bacchic trumpet....) On hearing his own song Nerone's pride is aroused, and stepping forth upon the Appian way, he shows

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1. Tacitus; XV, 15; op.cit. 319 and Suetonius; XXV - XXX op.cit., pp. 222 and 224.

himself to the exultant mob. He is now splendidly dressed in 'hyacinthine and gold', the living reflection of the sun which, now breaking forth, floods over the scene lighting the picturesque multitude intoxicated with joy and excitement. The enthusiasm reaches delirium as the imperial litter embedded with sparkling gems advances, carried by Ethiopian slaves and surrounded by Asiatic ephebes and all the voices merge in the single cry 'Evion! Gioia! Almo sol! Alma Roma! Ave, Neron!' Amidst the shouts of the crowd and the blasts of the triumphal trumpets the curtain falls, whilst a shower of flowers, ribbons, fronds of palm and wreaths seals the apotheosis of the Caesar. The second act - 'The temple of Simon Mago' - is laid in a subterranean hall which is divided into two parts. A curtain separates the 'cella', where the faithful worship and pray, from the sacrarium, where Simon and his adepts perform their mysterious rites. Mystical lights, strategically placed, envelop the figures of the priests, and especially that of the thaumaturge, in a mysterious glow. Simon, in a sumptuous robe, ornamented with gems and precious stones, stands at the altar. From the chalice which he raises with a hieratic gesture, a jet of blood gushes out, falling into a golden basin below. At the same moment, a dense cloud of smoke and incense, rising from the braziers supported by two hierodules, pervades the sacrarium, hiding Simon Mago from the eyes of the astonished believers. When the curtain closes, the deceptive rite being accomplished,

the worshippers intone the theurgical formula 'Proàrche, Bythos, Sigeh, Lagos, Anthropos, Zoè, Noùs Ecclesia, eccelsa Ogdòade '.[1] The priests Gobrias, Cerinto and Dositèo, mockingly join in improvising a burlesque. This lively little scene is interrupted by Simon Mago bidding them to dismiss the congregation. Wishing to take advantage of Nerone's superstitions and fears, the charlatan has planned another deception, intending to use Asteria, now brought into the 'cella', as a bait. He induces her to ascend the altar with the words:

> Egli la dea ti crede
> Che sulla notte e sui terrori ha regno ...
> ... Tu, schiava mia,
> Ravviva in lui la speme o la paura
> E tuo schiavo sarà chi ha schiavo il mondo.[2]
>
> (He will think you to be the Goddess
> reigning over darkness and terror....
> You, my slave,
> keep alive in him hope or fear,
> and the one who has enslaved the world will be your slave.)

Meanwhile, announced by a buccina sounding the 'classicum', Nerone appears in the 'cella' and demands admittance to the 'sacrarium'. Simon Mago conducts the frightened Nerone to the magic mirror in which 'the infinite Abyss reflects its astral light'. As soon as the magician is gone, an iridescent ray of light falls from

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1. The theurgical idea conveyed by this brief hymn belongs to Valentine's gnostic theory on which Simon Mago's doctrine was partly based. For details, see Romualdo Giani, *op.cit.* pp. 102, 103.

the height of the antrum lighting up Asteria, whose ghostly image appears in the mirror. Recognizing in her the horrible spectre pursuing him, Nerone implores her to relieve him of his guilty conscience; 'Al par d'Oreste non senza ragion la madre uccisi' (Like Orestes, it was not without a reason that I killed my mother,) he explains, attributing his crime to the Fate's will. With a fixed and languid gaze, Asteria, perhaps involuntarily echoing the first words addressed to her by Rubria on the Appian Way, replies 'Sorgi e spera'. (Rise and hope.) Passing from fits of hysterical fear to fits of hysterical remorse, Nerone performs acts of devotion to secure the favour of the Goddess whose ambiguous and distant beauty starts inflaming him. Calling her with divine names, and imploring her love:

> .... Selene, Ecate, Asteria!
> Vaga Ebne lunar! Magica Iddia
> Dai mille nomi, scendi! Ognun
> Di quelli sarà un nome d'amore!
>
> (.... Selene, Hecate, Asteria!
> Shadowy lunar being! You, magic Goddess
> of the thousand names, come down!
> Each of your thousand names,
> will be a name of love!)

he works himself into a frenzy. Finally overcome with desire he mounts the stair clasping her in his arms. In vain the priests, instructed by Simon Mago, try to turn him back with crash of clashing bronze blending with the voices of the false oracles intoning the curse 'Nerone Oreste' and then warning him 'Fuggi Nerone (Nerone, flee!) Trembling with passion, Asteria answers to Nerone's delirious utterances and a strange love-duet, shivering

with the accents of pleasure and agony, develops against the dark background and the ominous atmosphere of the temple. As the kiss in which Nerone and Asteria are united at the end of the duet reveals to Nerone the woman, his erotic infatuation disappears at once. Rejecting Asteria, who collapses on the altar, Nerone, in an excess of fury, smashes the temple idols with an iron hammer and throws a burning torch into the open mouth of the oracle idol, hiding Dositeo. Then, calling his Praetorian guards into the temple, he reveals the fraud and orders them to arrest Simon Mago and his followers. His destructive frenzy suddenly turns, through one of those contrasts characterizing his bizarre nature, to amusement. He grants pardon to Gobrias, comically creeping out from the altar-stair, because his witty replies please him. With subtle cruelty, he mockingly condemns Simon Mago, who had long boasted of his prodigious ability to fly, to perform 'the flight of Icarus' in the circus, in the next festival. Shortly afterwards he decrees that the snake-charmer Asteria shall be thrown into the serpent's pit. In spite of Nerone's sentence, Asteria reaffirms her adoration for 'her God' asking him the grace of being killed by his own hand. If this favour is not granted, she will eternally haunt him as she is immune to the snake's poison. Scornfully, Nerone answers 'We will see', as the guards drag her away. Looking at the smashed idols surrounding him, Nerone, enjoying his victory over the Gods, solemnly ascends the altar. He crowns himself with a laurel wreath offered him by Gobrias;

then, striking the attitude of Apollo Musagetes, he tries the tuning of a cetra proudly announcing to the courtiers 'Io canto' (I sing).

The third act - The Orchard - takes us into the fresh and peaceful world of Fanuèl and his Christian brethren - a welcome contrast to the excitement, the hysteria, the deceptions and the dark passions of the preceding acts. The orchard, surrounded by an olive-grove, is suffused with the mild light of the dying day. Under a pergola, on the left side of the stage, there are two tables. One carries the remains of a simple meal. Around the other table, full of fronds and flowers, are sitting women and children, weaving garlands. On the opposite side of the stage Fanuèl, leaning against the edge of a rustic fountain, expounds the Beatitudes to an attentive crowd. 'Over these humble folk and the entire orchard there radiates an atmosphere of profound calm. Every soul is filled with a sense of immense expectation' say the stage directions. And indeed Fanuèl's words (almost literally drawn from the Gospel according to St. Matthew - Ch. V, 1 - 11) sounding softly and clearly in this oasis of calm, have the hypnotic flow and the relieving effect of the sound of rippling waters:

E vedendo le turbe ad udir pronte
Salì sul monte,
La benedisse
E disse:
- Beati i mansueti,
Perchè saranno della terra i Re.
....
Beati quelli che hanno puro il cuore,
Perchè vedran la gloria del Signore
E beati, fra l'anime fedeli,
Tutti gli afflitti, i poveri, gli oppressi,
Perchè per essi
È il Reame del ciel.

(When he saw the crowds, eager to listen to him,
He went up into the mountain,
He blessed them
And said:
Blessed are the meek
Because they will inherit the world....
Blessed are the pure in heart
For they will see the glory of God
Blessed, among the faithful,
the afflicted, the poor, the persecuted
For theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.)

Again from Matthew's Gospel (from the parable of the wise and of the foolish virgins XXV. 1-14) is derived the allegory of 'the bridegroom who is coming but no one knows when' alluding to the peaceful death of the righteous. It is a very fine, lyrical passage, murmured by Rubria as she appears on the stage, as light as a shadow, carrying a burning lamp. Gently, she takes her place among the women and children, twining garlands and singing with them songs for the living and the dead, for the pains of love and grief, for martyrdom and prayer ('Fiori sui vivi! Fiori sui morti'!). To their final invocations 'Amore ... Fede ... Amore ... Speranza!' (Love ... Faith ... Love ... Hope!) a faint voice far back in the Orchard answers 'Pace!' (Peace). A rustling

noise reveals the presence of Asteria, bleeding and lacerated, among the olive trees. Escaped from the snake-pit, she tells in broken words that Simon Mago has tried to purchase his freedom by betraying the Christians to Nerone. Before bending her lips to the cup of water offered by Rubria, Asteria, smiling, shows her the flower which sealed their friendship in the clear, Appian dawn. Then, after quenching her thirst, Asteria, seized by a sudden convulsion, rushes wildly from the stage. Remaining alone with Fanuèl, Rubria urges him to fly but, neglecting her exhortation, he, in his turn, asks her to confess the sin which she is trying to hide. Their dialogue is interrupted by the arrival of Simon Mago and Gobrias, who appear disguised as beggars in the quest of alms. Fanuèl, however, immediately recognizes the impostors. Throwing himself at the apostle's feet, Simon asks him once again to reveal the secret of his magic power so that he may fly and escape death. Enraged by Fanuel's refusal, Simon Mago gives him over to the praetorian guards who have been following him. As the Christian brethren attempt to liberate him, Fanuel, echoing the words of Christ 'Non resistete al malvagio' (Do not oppose the wicked one) orders them to submit. The last part of the act is entirely devoted to Fanuel's touching farewell to his followers, now silent, as if oppressed by the thought of a painful uncertainty. With immense tenderness and the utmost simplicity, he tells them that his journey is ended:

La giornata è compita
Pel fratel vostro e il suo carco depone.
Voi camminate in novità di vita
Ed in pienezza di benedizione.
Quando torna la sera
Col mesto incanto delle rimembranze,
Unite anche il mio nome alla preghiera,
Unite anche il mio nome alle speranze.
....
(For your brother the day is over
And he lays down his burden.
You are now walking in a new path of life
And in the abundant blessing of God.
When evening falls, in the sad hour of remembrances,
Add my name to your prayers
Join my name with your hopes.
....)

Growing more and more serene, he kisses his brothers in God invoking on them the blessing of the Lord. He seems to avoid Rubria, the loving woman who, all humility and tears, approaches him begging for a last word of farewell. Fanuèl slowly walks away, his last words being 'Cantate a Dio' (Sing to the Lord). As the Christian women, led by Rubria, strew a path of flowers before him, resounds the song 'Fiori sui vivi, fiori sui morti.... Lieto è chi muore nel Dio verace' (Flowers on the living, flowers on the dead .... Happy is the one who dies in God'). All the Christians follow Fanuèl except for Rubria who, left alone with her unbearable pain, listens with almost spasmodic concentration to the receding song. A few words, borne back by the wind, are still audible 'Amore ... Fede ... Amore' (Love ... Faith ... Love). But, this time, there is no voice answering 'Pace' (Peace!). The fourth act - The Circus Maximus - is divided into two scenes. The first scene, spectacular and full of movement, is set in the

Oppidum - the atrium - where the crowd attending the games gather and through which pass the gladiatorial troops, the charioteers, all the people attached to the circus entertainment, as well as the train of the Christians doomed to torture. The second scene is laid in the Spoliarium, the crypt of the Colosseum, where the corpses of the dead are thrown. When the act opens, a crowd is seen struggling around the winner of the quadriga race, the contending factions either applauding the victor or raising threatening cries. The peals of off-stage trumpets mingle with the shouts and the burst of laughter of the excited mob. Marginal episodes - as that of the dance of the 'puella gaditana' - are skilfully introduced to evoke the life of Rome in one of its most characteristic aspects. Simon Mago enters, closely followed by a guard and exchanges a few rapid words with Gobrias. We learn that he has arranged for his followers to set fire to Rome so that he may escape the punishment awaiting him. We learn also that the torture of Laureolus, who has been put on the cross and torn to pieces by wild bears, is planned for Fanuel. The conspiracy to burn Rome, is made known to Nerone by Tigellino, but he refuses to interfere, scornfully declaring:

> Il mondo è mio! Prio di Nerone
> Nessun sapea quant'osar può chi regna.
>
> (The world is mine! Before Nerone
> No one knew how much one who reigns could dare.)

The savage crowd has already cried for the promised torture of the Dirci - their favourite spectacle - and Nerone, determined to please

the mob, inquires whether the bulls (to which the Christian virgins are to be bound), the ropes, the torches, the harriers, the Sagittarii are all in readiness. Amidst the insults of the crowd, slowly and solemnly advances the throng of the Christians doomed to martyrdom. Led by Fanuèl, they sing in full voice 'Credo in un Dio solo ed eterno'. (I believe in one God eternal God.) The thrice repeated sound of the buccinae brings a sudden silence. A white robed vestal, her head covered with the sacred infula, appears at the top of the podium stair, preceded by a lictor. By virtue of privilege accorded by law to the sacred virgins, she demands the release of the victims. Angrily, Nerone orders the veil to be torn from her and the pale face of Rubria is revealed to the crowd. By Nerone's command, she is condemned to the torture of the Dirci. She faints and is carried by two bestiaries into the amphitheatre. In a paroxism of luxury and sanguinary folly, the 'spectator incredibilium' anticipates the pleasure of the spectacle of the agonized virgins riddled with the Sagittarii's arrows, 'beautiful and naked under the sun', in the pulsant passage 'Tutte un Erie denudator le abbranchi'. (Be all of them seized by a hero who will strip them.) Soon after Simon Mago's 'performance' of the flight of Icarus,[1] Gobrias' voice is heard announcing the first outburst of the flames. The

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1. A case which happened to an actor in the Circus (he died whilst performing a flight in the Daedalus and Icarus ballet), recorded by Suetonius (cit., XII) gave origin to the legend of the death of Simon Mago.

Oppidum is enveloped in flame and smoke whilst the crowd, in a babel of cries, rushes towards all the exits of the Circus. Gradually the deafening din calms down and the chaotic vision of maddened shapes seems to dissolve into thin air. The curtain falls rapidly on this vision to rise again without interruption to show the Spoliarium, the asylum of the dead, lit by the sinister glow of the flames which are consuming Rome. Two livid shadows, lighted by a torch, descend cautiously to the crypt, stumbling over the corpses. They are Asteria and Fanuèl who have escaped alive thanks to the fire, and now search for Rubria. They discover her, still alive, near the body of Simon Mago, shattered in his flight. The arrow of a Sagittario has mortally wounded her but, as in a dream, she recognizes Fanuèl, the mystical lover who thought her 'quella gran dolcezza di sorrider nel pianto'. (The great consolation to smile amidst the tears.) Before dying, she wishes to confess her secret sin, explaining, with touching simplicity:

> Tentai confonder nella stessa vampa
> L'ara ardente di Vesta e la pia lampa
> Della vergine saggia. Ecco il peccato.
>
> (I have tried to mingle in the same flame
> The ardent fire of Vesta and the pious glow
> Of the lamp of the wise virgin... This is my sin.)

With infinite tenderness, Fanuèl pronounces absolution, calling on her the blessing of God. As Rubria feels life ebbing she asks him to tell her once more the tale of Jesus, of his mission of peace in the distant land of Galilee:

Narrami ancora, mentre m'addormento
Del mar di Tiberiade, tranquillo
Onda che varca in Galilea....

(Tell me once more, as I fall asleep,
Of the sea of Tiberias, of its tranquil
Waves lapping on the shore of Galilee....)

With the softest voice, as if timorous to disturb her sleep,

Fanuèl summons up a vision of enchanting peace:

Fra i giunchi di Genèsareth, oscilla
Ancor la barca ove pregò Gesù.
Quelle cadenza languida di cuna
Invita a stormi i bimbi sulla prora....

(There, amidst the rushes in Genèsareth still floats the boat,
Where Jesus prayed.
That gentle cadence, like a rocking cradle,
Invites swarms of children on its prow....)

'Again .... Again' implores Rubria in a thin voice and Fanuel, almost lulling her, continues the gentle story, insisting on those little details which make of an image the shadow of a dream:

Lento salia dal Libano la luna
Era quell'ora in cui sorgon gli incanti....
Escian le turbe oranti per la lunare aurora...

(Slowly, did rise from Lebanon the moon
It was the time when all enchantments spring...
the praying crowds walked under the lunar beam.)

On this last vision Rubria falls asleep in death. With Asteria's cry we are jolted from the purest peace back into the hideous reality of the crypt. The flames are approaching and the vaults start collapsing. A small door, discovered by Asteria, offers an escape from the burning bolgia. Crossing the threshold, Fanuèl turns to Rubria bidding her the last farewell. 'Rubria! Addio!'. On hearing this name, Asteria is seized by a spasm: she realizes

that Rubria was the virgin outraged by Nero within the sacred precincts! Rushing to Rubria's side, she clutches the lifeless body of Rubria asking her, with savage rage how could she win Nero's cruel heart. Then, overwhelmed by a sudden pity, she takes Rubria's flower from her breast and, letting it fall over the martyr's body, she kneels near her, invoking 'Pace!' She finally escapes whilst the walls crumble and the Spoliarium sinks into the flame.

Here ends the tragedy destined for the lyric stage, a trifle incongruously, when we remember that Nerone's remorse was the motivation, and intended to be the fulcrum, of the action. Boito's drama has, however, a fifth act, logically concluding the story and which in the author's original plan, was to be retained in the libretto (see Fig. 3). A summary runs as follows. In his private theatre, Nerone, surrounded by a crowd of courtiers, is celebrating the unexpected spectacle offered by the burning city.[1] After the banquet, enlivened by lascivious dances and the orgiastic music of crotalia, cymbals, sistra and tymbals, Nerone, to the grandiose and terrible background of the collapse of Rome, begins to recite a scene from Aeschylus' 'Eumenides. Wearing a dark tragedian's costume, the cothurni and a tragic mask, he repeats Orestes' lines (I did expiate my crime) in cleverly

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1. An historical detail, found in Suetonius: 'Nero watched the conflagration from the tower of Maecenas, enraptured by what he called 'the beauty of the flames'; then put on his tragedian's costume and sang 'The Fall of Ilium' (XXXVIII, cit., p.231). See also Tacitus XV, op.cit. p.363.

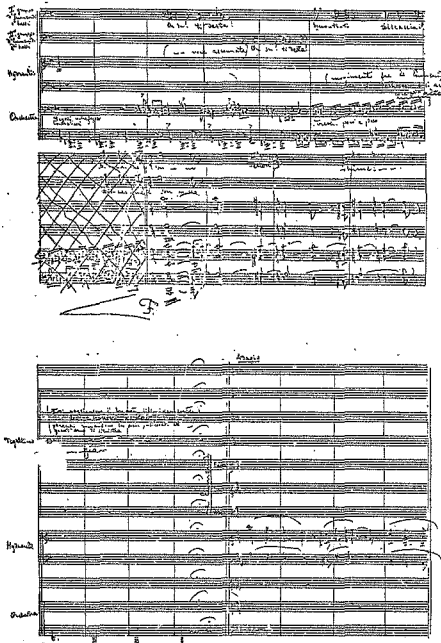

Fig. 3 This fragment of the introduction of the fifth Act of Nerone is from the original manuscript.

stressed, rhythmical cadences. At first the representation faithfully follows the Greek text; but when the chorus of Furies, after recalling in details the scene of the murder, breaks in with the cry 'Matricida', terror seizes him. In vain Gobrias tries to bring him back to the 'reality' of the scenic fiction. In the arch of the portal, he thinks he sees the accusing ghost of Aggripina. With growing terror, he strips off his mask and tears the theatrical garb into pieces. From this moment the action fluctuates between two realities: the one which he is reviving on the stage (perhaps, the only one which is true) and the one actually visualized by him. As Asteria appears, carrying in her hand a bunch of live snakes, everyone, except the Emperor, flees. Motionless, Nerone looks at her with the fixedness of madness, inquiring:

> Sei tu? o la tua larva?
> O una scenica larva? O un sogno, o un'ombra
> Del mio rimorso?....
>
> (Is it you? or your ghost?
> Or a scenic spectre? A dream, perhaps, or the
> shadow of my remorse?)

Now the clouds of smoke which cover the sky of Rome have become thicker and more coruscating. In the semi-darkness of the scene shines the gilded inscription Nero Caesar. Again, in the distance resounds the apocalyptic cry 'Voce dall'Oriente! Voce dall'Occidente! ... Guai a Roma', heard at the beginning of the drama. A horrible vision slowly takes shape before our eyes: the figures of the mosaics adorning the proscenium take on life, transmuting themselves

into the corpses of the Dirci, martyred in the Circus, of the women and children, victims of Nerone's folly. Terrified and inebriated by the vision, he clasps Asteria in a voluptuous agony; she yields ecstatically, then kills herself with a small dagger. Nerone is left alone amidst thousands of voices calling down malediction upon him and his empire. The flames reach the walls of the theatre which starts crumbling around him. He seeks escape but all the doors are obstructed by the ghosts of his victims. In the background are seen the 'luminarie degli orti di Nerone' - the Christians burning at the stake. He throws himself at the feet of a statue representing Pallas, asking for protection, then, proudly rising, he strikes twice the shield of the Goddess with tremendous vigour. At the third attempt, his hand is as if paralysed by the maledictions of the spectres closing in on him. He falls in a swoon whilst the scene darkens almost completely and the terrible crash of thunder is heard.

The suppression of this essential and most original act could not be more regrettable. It has, in fact, altered the balance of the dramatic structure of the work, doing capital damage to what could have been, otherwise, considered to be Boito's finest libretto. From a poetical point of view, Nerone is beyond praise. In it, the formal and aesthetic problems which were Boito's life-long preoccupation, seem to have found their solution in the perfection of a style tremendously elaborate and yet rendered with marvellous freshness. A comparison of the Nerone

libretto with some of Boito's youthful works[1] in this same field, clearly evidences the extent to which the poet had worked upon, and matured, an already outstanding initial gift in order to achieve the command of a most perfect instrument of expression. Worthy of note is the way in which metres and rhythms shape themselves, not only according to the nature of the characters but, within the characters themselves according to the prevailing emotion: the long, high-sounding, arrogant, pompous or rhetorical lines of Simon Mago and Nerone contrasting with the simply structured and clearly scanned lines of Fanuèl and Rubria; Asteria's verses, throbbing and full of dynamic energy, shiver under the wave of passion or break down under the weight of anguish but they can also assume a cadential, almost trance-like rhythm as, for instance, in those scenes in which she seems to be redeemed by the pure presence of Rubria.

When confronted with the outstanding qualities of the literary text, the question which inevitably arises is: how could music be expected to add to a work possessing, both from the poetical and dramatic points of view, the characteristics of a finished work of art? Only an analysis of the score provides the answer.

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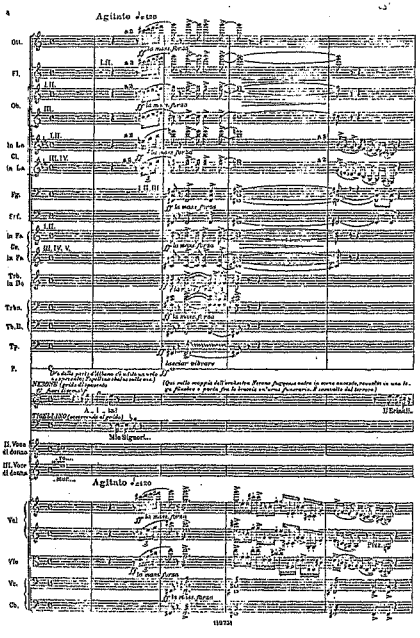
1. Mefistofele, born in a period of exceptional youthful creativity, must be considered as a case apart.

CHAPTER 2

THE OPERA

Of the four acts of Nerone, the first, the one from which the entire musical and dramatic action stems, is the longest and most carefully articulated. It consists of six distinct sections, each with its own atmosphere and emotional character. The opening section, devoted to the evocation of the Roman night against which are projected the figures of Simon Mago, Tigellino and Nerone, ends with the spectral apparition of Asteria amidst the tombs. The second section contains the duologue between Simon Mago and Asteria. This is followed by the episode of the encounter of the demon-possessed woman with Rubria, the gentlest of maidens. Sections four and five are dedicated to the brief exchange between Rubria and Fanuèl and to the clash of the antagonistic characters Fanuèl and Simon Mago, respectively. Finally, we have the e s-catching scene of Nerone's triumphal return to Rome.

The curtain rises, without prelude, on the nocturnal via Appia scene. The silence of the night is broken by gay snatches of songs (off-stage solo voices) coming from different points and distances. Against this diaphanous musical background are heard the short exchanges between Simon Mago and Tigellino, preparing us for Nerone's arrival. The orchestra enters with a tremendous outburst over a dissonant chord, as Nerone appears in a state of frenzied terror (Ex. 1). He is calmed down by Tigellino, and the


Agitato ♩=120
Ott.
Fl.
Ob.
In La.
Cl.
In La.
Fg.
Cnf.
In Fa.
Cn.
In Fa.
Trb. In Do
Trbn.
Tb.B.
Tp.
P.
Agitato ♩=120
Vni
Vle
Vc.
Cb.

Ex.1

orchestral tumult, accordingly, subsides, giving way to the brief interlude containing the episode of the two lovers singing in the distance ('Dolce, ridente Lalage') and that of the procession of the merry-fellows, crossing the stage whilst singing the epigram 'Citarizzando scorda l'impero'. Again, resounds in the darkness, the lugubrious voice announcing woe to Rome and to its guilty Emperor. Soon after this a dark, slow motive steals into the double basses, echoed by violins and bassoons. Over it Nerone anxiously asks for Simon Mago, hidden by the darkness. At the words 'Orrenda vita io vivo...' a strongly rhythmical, stormy theme, depicting Nerone's perturbed conscience, is heard in the clarinets over a pedal point on E. (Ex. 2) Prone upon the grave, the Emperor recites the funeral oration, which evolves from an octave motive anticipated by the orchestra. His first words, 'which seems to have been studiously prepared beforehand',[1] are uttered, over broad chords, supported by nervous chromatic figures. They sound, at first, rhetorical and insincere but, after the invocation 'il mio contempla madre, interno orror', the music becomes charged with tension (Ex. 3).

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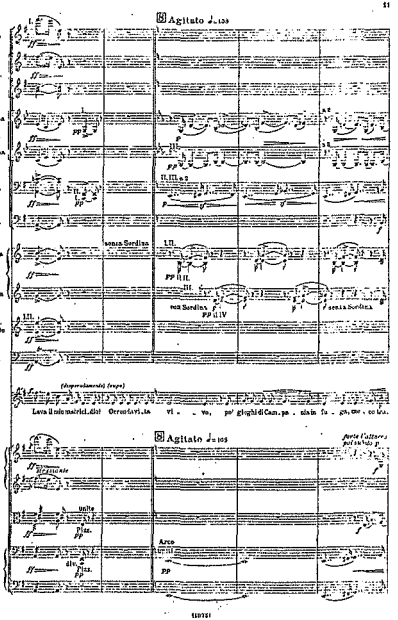
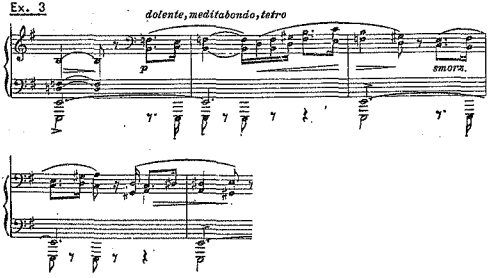
1. Boito's stage direction.


Agitato
Fl.
Ob.
In La.
Cl.
In La.
Fg.
Srf.
senza Sordina
In Fa.
Cr.
In Fa.
con Sordina
Trb. In Do
Tb.
(dispreziosamente) (rispr)
Agitato
Vcl
Vle
unite
Arco
Vc.
Cb.

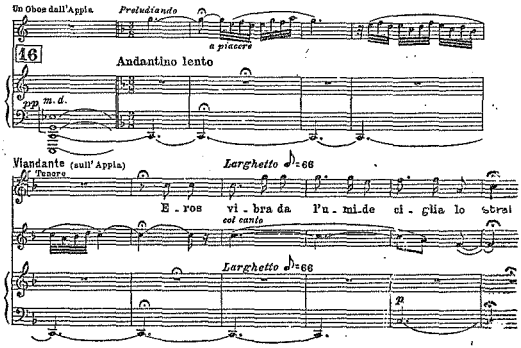
Ex. 2

Ex. 3



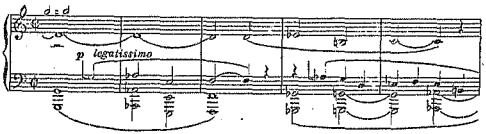
This emotion does not however last and the threnody ends with the strongly emphatic utterance 'Io sono Oreste'. Following the episode of the gladiators marching in heavy rhythm, comes the ceremony of burial, accompanied by the unquiet motive quoted above (Ex. 3). The cinerary urn is finally committed to the ground to a descending octave theme whilst a small, reiterated figure in the base, represents Simon Mago's throwing earth on the urn. Boito here indulges his penchant for musical depiction of scenic details. Very effective, by way of contr , is the attractive, vaguely archaic tune, played by an approaching oboe over a long sustained pedal point on C, against which is heard the sensuous love-song ('Eros vibra da l'umide ciglia') sung by a lonely passer-by (Ex. 4).

Ex. 4

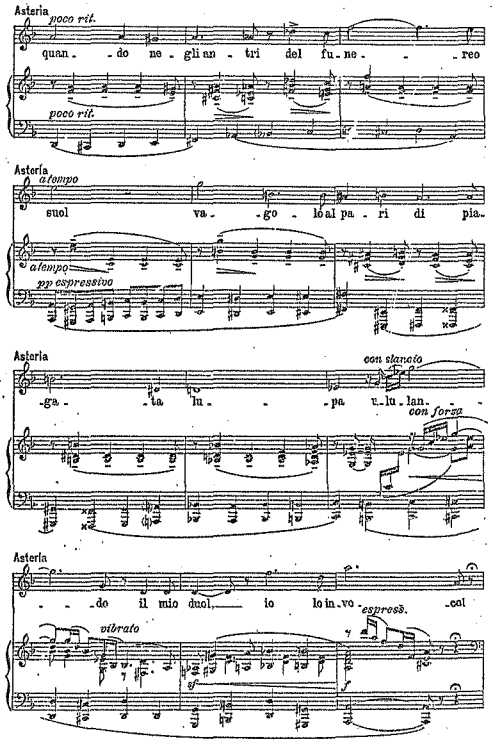


During the ensuing passage, the orchestra becomes increasingly agitated until a climax is reached in the gust of sounds, throbbing rhythms and frenzied cries, accompanying the apparition of Asteria. This highly emotional incident leads to the scene between Simon Mago and Asteria. A dark, creeping theme, mirroring the tortuous nature of the thaumaturge, insinuates itself in the orchestra.

(Ex. 5)

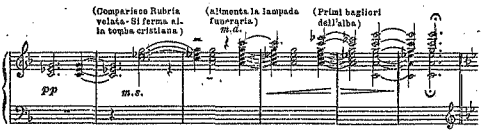


The opening motive of this theme reappears against the scanty instrumental background supporting Simon's questioning of Asteria. In the woman's narration 'A notte cupa', the orchestra plays an important part in building up the nervous tension and the atmosphere of unreality surrounding her, by means of the restless, chromatic weaving in the clarinets, the tugging syncopated rhythms and the extremely dynamic contrary motion figurations in the strings. Asteria's melodic lines, tense and charged with emotional incandescences, have a febrile quality superbly characterizing the pathological traits of her nature. (Ex. 6) She confesses that the contact with the snakes twining round her body makes her dream of the embrace of the cruel God whom she adores and who fearfully avoids her, the orchestra supporting pianissimo with a sinous, allusive motive. The theme of Simon Mago (Ex. 5) returns during the ensuing duologue, pointing the fact that, from this moment, the destiny of Asteria will be dominated by his will. She remains alone, lost in the pains and languors of her voluptuous longing whilst the music, so galvanic during her crazed outburst 'Amor che non uccide, no, Amor non è' dies down in descending octave figure in the bass, symbolically accompanying Simon Mago's descent into the crypt. The appearance of Rubria, clad in a white robe and carrying flowers in her hand, serves to introduce a needed moment of repose and of lyrical contemplation. Her 'Padre nostro' is preceded by a passage in which the minor chord is expanded to a chromatic chord of the 7th on A in a moment of the most

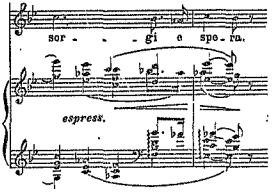

Asteria
poco rit.
quan - do ne - gli an - tri del fu - ne - reo
poco rit.
Asteria
a tempo
suol va - go ló al pa - ri di pia -
a tempo
pp espressivo
Asteria
con slancio
- ga - ta lu - pa - lu - lan -
con forza
Asteria
- do il mio duol, io lo in - vo - cal
espress.
vibrato

Ex. 6

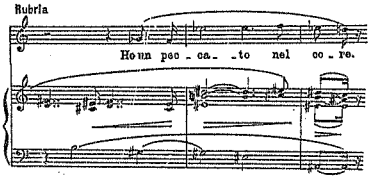
marvellous delicacy, depicting the gleams of dawn beginning to disperse the darkness, and the pristine peace and freshness of the newborn day. (Ex. 7.)



Rubria's prayer develops in touchingly expressive lines of recitativo underlined by harmonies growing more and more assertive during the course of the modulatory sequences. Above these transparent, ascending chords of third and sixth, the violins weave melodic lines charged with the most tender inflections. At the words '... perdona ... Fa ch' io riveda quel che m'abbandona', the orchestra swells to a forte appassionato, then suddenly subsides into a pianissimo dolcissimo as Rubria, in a murmur, asks the Lord 'Liberaci dal male' (Deliver us from evil). The beauty of the message conveyed by the maiden's simple words seems to provoke a soothing sensation in Asteria's conscience. In the brief scene following Rubria's gentle bidding 'Sorgi e spera' (Ex. 8.),

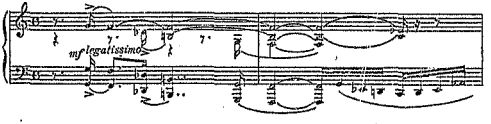


(this scanty theme is to be heard in Act II in a widely different emotional context). Asteria's music assumes an unexpected tone of mildness and relaxation. After the fierce allegro section accompanying her sudden flight, the music becomes again clear and luminous, almost imperceptibly shivering in the subtle play of enharmonic modulations. Into this highly sensitive atmosphere enters Fanuèl. His short dialogue with Rubria is not memorable, the most interesting aspect being the appearance in the orchestra of the rhythmo-melodic theme, recurring throughout the opera and standing for Rubria's sucret sin, (Ex. 9)



and the return of the motive underlying her words 'Fa ch' io riveda quel che m'abbandona', giving away the secret of her love for the apostle. This momentary episode is followed by the all-important confrontation scene between Simon Mago and Fanuel, regretfully, one of the most anticlimactic numbers of the music-drama. The Thaumaturge's rehearsal of the corruption of Rome is musically realized in a lengthy passage which, in spite of the variety in the declamation and of the saturated colours in the orchestra, fails to match the glow, the intensity and the evocative power of

the verses. Fanuel's outbursts are melodramatic rather than impressive. The same can be said of the ensuing duet concluding with the declaration of war between the two adversaries, now leaving in opposite directions over a tumult of upward and downward moving, heavy accented, passages. A concise instrumental interlude representing, by means of transparent sonorities, the light of the day growing more intense, leads into the last section of the Act. Nerone's and Tigellino's reappearance on the scene is heralded by a slightly modified version of the motif heard at the beginning of the opera, during their first exchange. (Ex. 10)



The theme associated with Nerone's guilty conscience (Ex. 2) also recurs in this scene. Nerone is, in fact, still overcome by dread, haunted by the thought of the spectral figure interposing herself between him and Rome - perhaps a phantom of his imagination or, perhaps, the living image of his remorse, certainly a bad omen. In the midst of this almost electric tension we hear the festive calls of buccinae and litui announcing the approach of the jubilant crowd, coming to pay tribute to their Caesar. The triumphal scene is superb pageantry, and, at the same time, a fine example of how the spectacular effects of Grand Opera can be soundly

harnessed to dramatic purposes - in the case of Boito, the evocation of Rome in all the splendour of its grandeur before moving to destruction. The music effectively portrays the movement and the 'physical' excitement of the crowd by way of surging and tremolando figures, heavy reiterated chords, rhythmical motives in the off- and on- stage trumpets, the trombones in the orchestra providing an almost continuous background. The episodes press one on another giving way to many exciting moments, for instance: the choruses of the 'Ambubaje', the first 'Apollo torna', introduced by a delicate arpeggio passage and sustained almost throughout by ascending and descending octaves in the bass; the second, 'Al colle, gioia!', sung to a most graceful march rhythm. Worthy of note is the section 'Sostenuto con anima' accompanying the slow march of the throng from the distant provinces. The homophonic, unaccompanied chorus 'Ave, Nerone! tua lieta stella splende' resounds impressively in the momentary pause of silence preceding Nerone's appearance to the crowd. The climax, so skilfully prepared, is reached as the mob, inebriated with joy at the sight of the Emperor bathed in the radiant light of the sun, bursts forth in the jubilant shouts 'Evion, gioia'. The full orchestra is engaged in providing support. Imperiously, buccinae and litui cut their way through the thick wall of brass and wood-wind tones, impressively accompanied by an extended tremolo in timpani and strings. On the last, long sustained orchestral chord [illegible] scaling the day of Nerone's apotheosis the curtain slowly falls.

The Second act commences, again without prelude, with the stupefied exclamations of the worshippers attending Simon Mago's rites in the mysterious precincts sacred to his cult. The peculiar colour which envelops this act in an atmosphere of magic enchantment is at once established by the pianissimo A, climbing up by octave intervals in the most tenuous sounds of strings, harp and upper woodwind and diaphanous background created by the harps glissando over the soft rustle in the violas and 'cellos (Ex. 11). The faithful's hymn 'Proarche, Bythos, Sigeh, Logos ...' sung by the first and second basses, is set forth in the form of a Passacaglia. Whilst the hymn develops, smoothly and softly, the voices of Simon Mago, Gobrias, Cerinto and Dositeo, enter gradually with mocking remarks, their restless lines, continually broken by leaps, providing a sharp and effective contrast. A short 'fugato' passage with the theme proposed by Gobrias ('Ah! no, senza riso non posson gli auguri') and answered by Dositeo, leads to a section in which the increasing merriment of the priests is mirrored in the brilliantly conceived contrapuntal quartet of Cerinto, Dobrias, Sim ositeo. With the exit of the worshippers ends the first section of the Act. An off stage buccina announces the arrival of Nerone, who enters the cella followed by Terpnos, Tigellino and a group of his Praetorian guards. Simultaneously, Simon Mago is seen entering the Antrum, leading Asteria by the hand whilst talking to her. Accompanied on the cetra by Terpnos, the Emperor sings pleadingly for admittance to

Author Duse Yucci Maria Orsini
Name of thesis Arrigo Boito, librettist and musician. 1976

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