

**A PORTRAITURE OF HELEN, QUEEN OF TROY IN BOITO'S *Mefistofele*:**  
***Coincidentia Oppositorum***

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***Abstract***

*In this study we attempt to understand some of the aesthetical features implemented by Arrigo Boito (1842-1918) for the dramaturgic formation of the final act of the opera Mefistofele. Doing that, we will focus on the bifocal character of Helen, both as flash-and-blood woman and as the divine Queen of Troy. Disregarding the controversial criticism of the value of the music, the analysis below reveals deep concern for the dramatic coherence practiced by musical associations and cultural signals. It shows that the composer has sincerely made an effort to characterize both facets of Helen-i.e. femininity and Royalty in the manner of collision of contrasts- **Coincidentia Oppositorum**. That special polar aesthetic approach constitutes a convincing musico-dramatic whole made out of extremes.*

**KEYWORDS:** Arrigo Boito; queen of troy; portraiture of Helen.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Arrigo Boito; Rainha de Tróia; Partitura de Helen.

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Over a hundred and forty years since the premiere of the opera *Mefistofele* by Arrigo Boito (*La scala*, 1868), critics still have many doubts regarding its musical value<sup>1</sup>. In the current article we would like to discuss, without any judgment of the music whatsoever, some of the musical features used by Boito for the creation of musical coherence and dramatic impact. Aiming to draw the outlines of the musical drama in the fourth act of the opera, we will focus on the dual characterization of Helen, both as a woman and as the Queen of Troy, to format a wholeness made of symmetric contrasts. The idea of that special symmetry is actually practiced both in Goethe's *Faust* and in Boito's *Mefistofele*, while the aesthetics of conflicts between opposite values is constitutive in Boito's entire oeuvre as a poet, being a principal *persona* of the *Scapigliatura* movement in late 19<sup>th</sup>-Century Italy<sup>2</sup>.

Nevertheless, we find it necessary to present the principal issues of recent criticism in order to provide a context of reception to our analysis and to emphasize its significance in the quite limited research of Boito's musical oeuvre. Most of the current critics take Boito's success as a librettist and his fruitful cooperation with Verdi of much more value than his musical oeuvre, saying: "Boito was the greatest poet of the Italian Operatic Stage"<sup>3</sup>. Some, such as Ernest Neuman, even suggest that Boito was totally incompetent as a composer:

*“One wonders, again, why a musician like Boito should ever have thought himself fit company for Marlow and Goethe...it is rather surprising what an abject mess he has made of Faust”.*<sup>4</sup>

Fausto Torrefanca, chronologically much closer to Boito's time, finds Boito a great composer<sup>5</sup>. Accordantly, while distinguishing Boito's potential, talent and brilliancy, Jay Nicolaisen still evaluates Boito's music as second-grade. Nicolaisen claims that in *Mefistofele*, Boito attempted to cover too many stylistic aspects ( i.e, Italian, German, and French) within a monumental work regarding its philosophical and dramatic dimension. Boito's interdisciplinary education was then, according to Nicolaisen, the origin of his musical vision, as well as the obstacle to its fulfillment<sup>6</sup>. Referring to the

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<sup>1</sup> William Ashbrook, "Boito, Arrigo" in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2nd Edition (London, 2001), 3:810.

<sup>2</sup> David Del Principe, *Rebellion, Death and Aesthetics in Italy* (London, 1996), p. 12.

<sup>3</sup> Patrick Smith, *The Tenth Muse: A Historical Study of the Opera Libretto* (New York, 1970), p. 337.

<sup>4</sup> Ernest Newman, *Musical Studies* (New York, 1969), p. 77.

<sup>5</sup> Fausto Torrefanca, "Arrigo Boito" *The Musical Quarterly*, VI (1920):532-552.

<sup>6</sup> Jay Nicolaisen, "The First 'Mefistofele'", *19th-Century Music* (Mar.1978):221-232.

*Prologue in Heaven* at the beginning of the opera, Olga Termini praises *Mefistofele* as a unique experiment conducted by a poet-composer striving to combine music and philosophy, while uniquely fusing German poetry into Italian opera aesthetics<sup>7</sup>.

In an article written in 1990, Peter Ross thoroughly examined the reception of the opera and its scandalous rejection after being premiered in Milan (1868). Ross's proposal is that the audience and the Italian musical milieu did not like the opera because it was very unusual regarding its poetic elements, such as meter and rhyming, as well as by its colossal dimensions and weird casting. Boito, says Ross, who was dealing for years with the issue of good and evil, was fascinated by Goethe's *Faust* and by the moral duality in Faust's character, and was very eager to express all these in his opera. Ross points out that as a composer, Boito strived to create a perfect work of art, a Psychological Drama in which evil, ugliness, and decadence would be artistically treated the same way as beauty and morality: a colossal artistic commitment, impossible to carry out<sup>8</sup>.

Fianna Nicolodi accordingly counts Boito's *Mefistofele* as one of the earliest notable works of the post-Verdian *Grand Opera* by its formative innovation, where Boito has swept away many rules and conventions of traditional Italian opera structures. Nicolodi implies that that was the very reason for the opera's negative reception. She thinks that what Boito did manage to achieve, was musical unity (Either tonal, textural, melodic, etc.) throughout the opera, combining rhapsodic structures and dramatic allusions<sup>9</sup>.

Upon that diverse critical layout, of which some aspects project on the polar thought of the opera's dramaturgy, we can now refine and study the dual aesthetics typical for the formation of Helen's musical portrait. Being Queen of Troy she is the principal feminine character in the second part of Goethe's *Faust*, and in the fourth act of *Mefistofele*. In many respects she matches Margarita, the principal feminine personality of the first part of Goethe's play, even though the two characters are contrasts regarding their status in society and moral values. As a part of the symmetric

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<sup>7</sup> Olga Termini, "Language and Meaning in the 'Prologue in Heaven': Goethe's *Faust* and Boito's *Mefistofele* in *Music in Performance and Society*, ed. Malcolm Cole & John Koegel (Michigan, 1997), p. 356.

<sup>8</sup> Peter Ross, "E l'idea fu songo, Arrigo Boito und seine reformoper "Mefistofele", *Jahrbucher fur Opernforschung*, 1990, pp. 69-86.

<sup>9</sup> Fianna Nicolodi, "Italian Opera", *The Cambridge Companion to Grand Opera*, ed. By David Charlton (Cambridge, 2003). pp. 383 - 402.

thought in the entire opera in particular and in Boito's poetic and musical oeuvre in general, as mentioned above, both characters are musically introduced by instrumental prelude which provides the *affect*, as well as by textual associations, summarized in the *motto* of the acts<sup>10</sup>. Margarita represents one facet of an earthly loving womanhood- and she died as a result of a tragic/satanic love affair. Helen, materializes the other facet, that of an immortal, mythological femininity, a woman who has never experienced earthly/spoiling love. Over the fourth act of the opera Helen undergoes a process of maturation facing the sort of love Margarita has experienced before: She gets involved, for the first time in her life, in a passionate, courtly-type love affair with Faust, which is followed by the horrors of the destruction of Troy, burning to ashes while she is watching. Helen is therefore musically illuminated both as a loving woman in the common earthly manner, and as a divine queen facing a national disaster. The composer has indeed recruited all musical means in favor of those dual dimensions of a rounded and rich character. In the analysis below we will soon try to illuminate the musical layout of that dual characterization. The 4<sup>th</sup> act of the opera is in fact a musical portraiture of Helen sketched through the different experiences she undergoes. We will therefore examine the principal scenes which contribute opposite aspects to her personality starting from her introduction to stage up to the final scene of the opera.

The tonality of Eb Major chosen by Boito for Helen's introduction to stage is not a mere coincidence. In addition to the traditional connotation of the key, and while taking into account the influence of Wagner's *Das Rheingold* among others previous works such as Beethoven's *Emperor Concerto*, the key is entirely new as a significant tonal section in the opera up to this point<sup>11</sup>. As a fresh tonality, it therefore implies that the fourth act is indeed the layout for a new spiritual phase. That tonal layout goes hand in hand with the musical genre chosen, which is a simple binary strophic *Barcarole* (mm. 25-45, 51-71). The genre was already well established as a cultural signal for peaceful flow at the time the opera was written. Boito's decision to use the *Barcarole* for Helen's first appearance demonstrates his dramatic thought. The simplicity of the *Arcadia*-like imaginative scenery will soon be rudely interrupted by contradictory Faust's shouts, and that abruptness will become a cause of the musical

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<sup>10</sup> Arrigo Boito, *Mefistopheles* (Kalmus, 1975), act III: "She is condemned"; act IV: "Tell me what I must do to learn an idiom so moving".

<sup>11</sup> Beginning of act IV.

conflict between the secure, quiet *Barcarole* and Faust's erotic/passionate impatience. Another musical conflict to be used as a dramatic power is the destruction of the peaceful *tableau* by the Trojan national disaster. Helen will then have to cope and survive both as a woman and as a queen, after seeing Troy ablaze. Her struggle will be dramatically articulated by the musical reminiscences and allusions of this very bilateral introduction.

Helen appears on stage surrounded by that special *aura* of magic moonlight, swans on calm water, and praising sirens, even though Royalty has not been explicitly mentioned yet. However, after the Greek dance, when she enters stage again as a queen- the composer adds musical Royalty to that layout without breaking the *Barcarole affect*. The queen is then accompanied by a women's choir, and the tonal center shifts to the glamorous D Major while the orchestra is enriched by brass fanfares.<sup>12</sup> These fanfares are in fact quite unusual, sort of an *oxymoron*, since they are soft and tender, different from the traditional military fanfares associated with Royalty in music. That type of fanfare is perhaps an expression of a feminine Royalty, which is reinforced by the women's choir, and by the harp accompaniment with its old gender-oriented allusion. The musical Royalty presented by those features is then an anti-thesis to the conventional musical representations of Royalty up to late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The *prelude* anticipating Queen of Troy, musically alludes to the introduction described and therefore reinforces that feminine type of Royalty while, at the same time, implies Helen's supernatural emotional world. That emotional profile will be shown again shortly when the queen will have to watch her kingdom going up in flames. The repetition would musically connect the two scenes and create a sense of structural coherence, enriching Helen's musical portrait.

Dramatic coherence is then a helpful aesthetic mean when one examines Helen's *Lamento* in the context of her characterization through the 4th act of *Mefistofele*. The tonal plan of the *Lamento*, sung while Helen is watching the war, accords with that dramatic thought. Its opening *prelude* defines dual tonality – both of D Major and of D minor- a conflict of modes sharing the same tonic. D minor is an old and well-known musical symbol for death, sorrow and grief, while D major was in fact the key used for Helen's Royal fanfares mentioned above. Therefore, the dual tonality on the tonic D, and its Neapolitan relation with the previous Royal/archetypal

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Eb major, clearly symbolizes the fusing of glorious feminine Royalty with the horrors of war as expressed by a suffering woman, a devastated queen. Furthermore, after the introductive *prelude*, and while the choir is singing about the sunlight and the trembling sky, (“*iverberi il cielo*”), the stage changes into a thrilling scene colored by the red, orange and yellow colors of fire. An associative link of peaceful sunlight to terrifying firelight is thus created, suggesting that the previous *barcarola* was not the entire story, and that it could be quickly converted into a musical arena of bloodshed.

The mournful lament indeed shapes the sad, painful facet of Helen's character. In many respects, it is very different, not to say opposite, from the previous *Barcarola*. The musical approach taken in the *lamento* is abstract and vague and provides a good aesthetic background for an emotional tempest. The vagueness is apparent both in structure and in content. The architecture of the aria is not easily perceived since the text is neither strophic nor fits any other structural pattern, and the melody resembles declamation rather than song. As for the D minor tonality- it is retrospectively understood only when the word “blood” (“*sangue*”) is sung with a clear cadence. Instability emerges also from the frequent use of augmented chords, together with irregular syncopated rhythmic patterns (**Ex. 1**). In addition, one feels a sort of detachment of the solo part from its instrumental accompaniment. There are many moments in which the voice is sounded "naked" (such as when the word “wind” is sung), as if the musical instrumentation and other devices generally used for the expression of grief and pain are not sufficient enough to convey the horror. The sorrow of a person who is a symbol of mythological perfection, beauty and intelligence requires perhaps special musical tools. These tools are indeed a result of the powerful text of the *lamento*<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>13</sup> The harmonic shift is carried out by enharmonic change of Db into C#, leading to D Major.

Ex. 1. Boito, *Mefistofele*, Act IV, mm. 10.

(HELEN absorbed as by a terrible vision)

*Largo*.  $\text{♩} = 40$ .

Not-te cu-pa. tru-ce. sca-za. fi-ne. fi-a. no-sel. or-si-da.  
Midnight, low'ring, fearful, dark beyond all ex-pression. Horrible

*Largo*.  $\text{♩} = 40$ .

not-te d'Il-lio! im-pla-ca-to ri-mor-so! Nu-go-li d'ar-sa  
night of I-lium. O im-pla-ca-ble mem-ry. To-lumes of burn-ing

*Piu mosso*.  $\text{♩} = 99$ .

pol-ve-re al ven-to sur-gono e fan-no piu cie-ca la te-ne-  
dust in the wind. a-ries, and the dark-ness grows more blind and darker

*Chorus*  
CHORISTS.  
Pa-ce! us.  
Fear

*Piu mosso*.  $\text{♩} = 66$ .

Di cos-zan-ti su  
With the clash-ing of

The vocal freedom and the *recitative*-like melodic line, contribute to the dramatic presence of Helen, while the choir supplies the "national" context, symbolizing the people. The free structure of the text alludes to a theatrical monologue, written in a declamatory style, overflowing with pathos. The musical description of the horrible vision of a dying city is very vivid, almost visual. The choir (the same women's choir which introduced Helen at the beginning of Act IV) functions as a contradictory highlight of the emotional climaxes of the text by one-word echo interruptions, inserting musical commas and breaths between the recitation parts. This performance practice, based upon a traditional *solo-tutti* dialogue, replaces the conventional structure of musical phrases and cadences, and therefore creates temporal balance which collides with the sustained harmonic relief. All those measures of contrasting emotions in their national and personal context retain Helen's divinity when she is going through tragic moments. Her ability to describe the disaster and to mourn of its dreadful outcome becomes infinite by the poetic-musical features, which strengthen her personality.

Nevertheless, a thorough analysis of the music reveals that unlike the poetic text the lament has an implied overall binary musical structure, while the two parts are similar by their length [the first part ends with the word "blood" (mm. 22), and the second part starts with the prayer to the great Gods mm.41]. That implied structure motivates linear accumulation of emotional energy from the first part to the second. The first part is relatively restrained, a sort of contextual exposition to the emotional eruption which occurs when the word "blood" (*sangue*) is sung. A section of D Major/Minor key functions as a divider between these two parts and alludes to Helens introduction to stage, stressing its tonal ambiguity with a dark subtext. (Ex. 2).

Ex. 2. Boito, *Mefistofele*, Act IV, mm.19-23.

scu-di  
bucklers,  
e di car - ri stro  
and the roll - ing of

-scian - ti e di ca - ta - pul - te so - nan - ti l'e - tere è scossa!  
char - iots, and with the great ca - nopus's thun - der trembles the welkin,

si mu - ta il suol in vo - lu - ta - bro di san -  
and all the ground slides from the feet with the slaugh -

-gue.  
-ler  
CHOREDITS.  
Nu - mi:  
Sparr. u.

*cresc*  
*ff*  
*col canto*

CHOR. CHOREDITS.

The dramatic description of war and horrors through the second part of the *Lamento* becomes musically straightforward by a rich orchestral texture, while the melody and several words ("aura", "pieta"), remind the listener of previous parts of the opera, Margarita's song in jail in particular. The matching of the two feminine characters is an aesthetic mean which accords with the concept of *coincidentia oppsitorum* which is, as mentioned, a fundamental feature of the opera in general.

It is therefore quite easy to realize that the differences between the musical characterization of Margarita and that of Helen (especially regarding their response to death and disaster) sharpen Helen's character using a flashback technique. Death is a principal fundamental feature of the philosophic roots of Goethe's play and Boito contradicts the two women by the way they cope with its fears and threats. While Margarita got previously panic and lost control, up to insanity, Helen, being a mythological, immortal, is not afraid to die. She is indeed overwhelmed by the terrifying visions of Troy going to ashes, and the fears she experiences do not refer to her personal faith, but to her people. Therefore, her lament is terminated by a deep cry of pain, sorrow, and protest: That affection is formulated by a chromatic ascendance from an E minor chord which creates a line of augmented chords and as a result the D minor cadence is suspended. The outer voices form a sharp dissonant friction, while Helen loudly cries: "Ah!" The tragic end inevitably comes right after this musical climax, combined with a sense of acceptance, musically symbolized by traditional signals: *tempo largo*, a chromatic descent in the bass line and woodwinds low range sonority. The tonal termination of the episode has a bifocal axe – using the ambiguity of D Major/Minor again (**Ex. 3**).

Ex. 3. Boito, *Mefistofele*, Act IV, mm. 35-41.

den - sa.  
sha - dor.

CHORETIDS.  
L'in - cen - dio già lam - be - le  
Now great tongues of flame lick the  
E - le - na!  
He - le - ne

ca - se. Veggon - si l'ombre de - gli Achi - i pro - jet - to (bui pro - fi - li gi - gan - ti)  
houses, and the great shadows of the Greeks gi - gan - tic (hav - er black - ly a - bore us.)

va - go - lar le pa - re - ti in mez - zo ai co - ghi. Ah! - mi! ah!  
Walls are crash - ing a - round us. the flames are on us. A - las! Ah!

That scene of deep sorrow, grief and bloodshed is linked to a love scene which presents Helen involved in a love affair with Faust towards the end of *Mefistofele*. The love scene was, as a matter of fact, predicted from the very beginning of Act IV (in the motto, actually), and is an attempt to draw both Helen's womanhood and her Royalty simultaneously, fusing them to a coherent whole. In that scene Faust pretends to be a fifteenth century knight (a disguise which symmetrically alludes to the word *cavalier* previously used by Margarita to describe him). The association is not a mere coincidence, since the aesthetics of *coincidentia oppositorum* exists as mentioned in the eclectic formation of universal womanhood out of the two feminine poles in Goethe's play -i.e. Margarita on the earthly side and Helen on the divine side. Unlike Margarita's *cavalier*, Helen's dares to court a mythological queen and the result is that Faust's love resembles the *amour courtois*: it is genuine, pure, without any eroticism throughout the entire act. The use of the Bb tonality for the love scene symbolizes a polar collision, since Bb Major is the key of Satan throughout the opera, and his wickedness is expected to be overruled now by the positive powers of beauty and wisdom.

As a part of that good-versus-evil dramaturgy, Faust now undergoes a sort of conversion regarding his personality up to this point, fitting himself to deserve the divine feminine character. Doing that, he still stays human- a feature symbolizes by Italian traditional *bell-canto amoroso* tenor manners. Still an anonymous *cavalier* to Helen but not to the audience, he sings of his love and admiration for the idol of heavenly beauty and royal perfection. Faust's love song to Helen is all about his will to be loved by her, to deserve her affection. Perfection and beauty are symbolized by the unambiguous Bb tonality throughout, finally getting rid of its satanic associations on one hand, and retaining Satan's relations with Faust, well-known from three previous acts, on the other. That tonal allusion makes the end of the so-called "ideal" love story a subject for speculations, while its uncertainty is expressed by the lack of a proper Bb cadence until the very end of the love confession (mm. 23-24). The type of the melody sung motivates accumulation of tension out of ambiguity since it is not clearly formatted to phrases. Furthermore, the register ascends as the terminology used by Faust becomes more and more pregnant and divine. The melodic climax, the word *amorado* (mm. 20), is located right before the only Bb cadence. That way, the harmonic excitement is juxtaposed with the melodic and verbal agitation, while resolution, which could be interpreted as the love unmentioned physical fulfillment, is suspended. The contrast between the emotional agitation and the rhythmic regularity and homogeneousness of timbre (strings only) reinforces ambiguity and bewilderment posing a question mark over the love scene. Regarding these aspects, the musical features of the love scene resemble those of the *lamento* and contribute to the aesthetic coherence of Helen's polar musical formation, retrospectively reassuring the old, traditional love / death duality.

One would expect that Helen will respond to Faust's love song by some kind of a soliloquy or a *duo* leading towards intimacy. Unexpectedly and perhaps anticipated by the previous musical vagueness, Helen's response to Faust's love confession is public rather than private. This is perhaps a philosophic-educational device aiming to approve love in Helen's world which is very different from Faust's previous world. In her world, illegitimate babies, murders and intrigues do not exist. Only heroic national struggles are part of life, and the idol, Helen, has then overcome the satanic black powers. She has become an invincible heroine, adored by the devil himself, succeeding where Margarita succumbed. The musical character of this scene

is symphonic, public, without any intimacy. The Royal happiness, is, like the Royal sorrow, musically sketched in a manner transforming private state-of-mind into a universal value, sweet indeed, but sterile – a feeling, not an emotion. The *Eros* type of love has been turned into the *Agape* type, which converts the absolute brotherhood of man and its affinity to God into an inevitable conclusion on the layout of a mass national disaster.

Regarding the transformation of love into the infinite, it is not surprising that the thematic material of the love scene is, in fact, a magnified version of Faust's music when he confessed his love for Helen. That theme is elaborated throughout the entire orchestra, expanding to large phrases and augmented rhythmic values sung by the choir which make Faust's *solo* sound like a distanced improvisation, or rather a meditation. Everything on stage gradually vanishes. The *tempo* becomes slower, and the total sound diminishes to *pp*, while everyone except Faust and Helen gradually leave stage. Apparently, the musical *aura* is a set-up for a unique intimacy, while the thematic material is a fusion of Faust's music when he sang the word "*amorado*" and Helen's music when she sang "*beata*" (blessed, mm. 37). That heavenly intimacy reassures the uniqueness of their unusual love, which is controversially blessed by heaven, earth, and Satan.

Towards the end of the opera, love is eventually turned into a blessing by the power of a divine woman. Indeed, Helen's is bewildered and embarrassed by her passionate love to Faust. Embarrassment is easily recognizable in her *solo* part which as before, under a different emotional tempest, is detached from the accompaniment, both melodically and rhythmically. The phenomenon indeed resembles the previous lament, but now, Helen has no idea of the source of the powerful emotional state she undergoes for the first time in her life. Therefore, the music implies how detached Helen is from human matters, such as love. Up to this point, she lived in a virtual world where love was an ideal aspect of classical beauty, in Utopia. Even though she has experienced a national disaster, she was unable to become human in person.

Therefore, one might interpret the love scene as an anticipation of the insight of the motto of Act IV. Helen needs the help of a man known as being associated with Satan in order to become acquainted with human feelings which she obviously enjoys. Her *solo* therefore becomes a *duo*, the one previously expected in vain, while Faust simply begs: "tell me that you love me!" (mm. 55). Suddenly, the musical uneasiness

disappears; the woodwinds sweetly support the harmonic shift to Eb (which was Helen's Royal introductive key) with a very strong cadence on the word "t'amo" (mm. 61-67). After both Faust and Helen repeat the motive sung by Faust at the opening of the act (*barcarole* scene), it is quite clear now that the knight is Faust and that he loves Helen and she loves him (Ex. 4).

Ex. 4. Boito, *Mefistofele*, Act IV, mm. 43.

HELEN.  
 par-la! qual ma-gi-co sof-fio co-tan-to bea la tua dol-ce lo-que-la d'a-  
 tell me, this ma-gi-cal cadence, What is it, ringing so sweet thro' your len-der com-  
 -mo-re? Il suon tu inserti al suon qua-si a li-to d'e-co d'e sta-si pie-na.  
 -plaining? that sound, that answer, spout like a soft breath-ing e-cho full of sweet ec-stasy.  
 Lo stesso movimento.  
 rall.  
 Lo stesso movimento.

FAUST.  
 DIM MI CO-ME FA-RO A PARLAR LI-DI-O-MA SO-A-VR?  
 TELL ME WHAT MUST I DO TO LEARN AN I-DIOM SO MOV-ING?  
 E tu-go nel  
 I ask my  
 E mi ri-son-di: A-ve.  
 And answer me by lov-ing  
 cor e ti ri-son-do: A-ve! Co-si tu pur come au-gel-lo a ri-  
 heart, and answer thee by lov-ing As bird calls un-to bird, I say, to...  
 string.

Towards the end of Act IV, then, and right before the epilogue, that very love is glorified by the orchestra and the choir when Helen and Faust, murmuring love words, leave stage together, so excited that they actually speak rather than sing. This is, perhaps, the only explicit indication of erotic fulfillment of their divine love, the fusion of the earthly passion into the mythological realm. That fusion is in fact a representation of the bi-dimensional femininity, the materialization of the principle of *coincidentia oppsitorum*.

The following epilogue provides the opera with a poetic unity, meaning that praises of God, absolute order, and the supreme harmony of the universe are reassured by the heavenly characters. Nevertheless, Faust is still seen as in pursuit of an ideal

which is far beyond the intellectual perception of the human mind, an ideal symbolized by his love for Helen. That ideal is finally externalized in the epilogue as heavenly poetry – an example of the intellectual fusion of the human and the sublime, a fusion inspired by Helen's dual femininity and her character:

*Voglio che questo sogno sia la*                      *I wish this dream to be*  
*santa poesia*    *heavenly poetry*  
*E l'ultimo bisogno-dell'esistenza mia.*      *and the last need of my existence*<sup>14</sup>.

The pendulum-like movement of Helen between the realm of the human and that of the sublime and the dramatic situations she experienced function as layers of her musical portraiture. As a poet, an important figure in the *Scapigliatura* movement, Boito was naturally very concerned with the issue of Good and Evil and was fascinated by Goethe's *opus magnum*. Re-writing *Faust* as an opera *libretto*, he had fulfilled his educational mission as an artist, expressing his philosophic agenda by the aesthetics of *coincidentia oppositprum*. We would therefore like to conclude with Deirdre O'Grady, who studied Boito's oeuvre in the context of Italian opera and Italian literature. Referring to the conclusion of the opera, she says:

*“The conclusion of the work finds Faust again in search of the unattainable, having proved that the means by which he sought to transcend human limitations were both illusionary and transient. This philosophic treatise on art, scientifically and intellectually conceived, can at its conclusion be reduced to the following equations: for Faust illusion proves to be a reality rejected by the mind in favor of an attainable, but non-retainable, absolute illusion [.....] The ideal is triumphant, but the means by which it can be attained remains a mystery*<sup>15</sup>.”

Helen's presence in Faust's world is indeed a symbol of that very triumphant ideal in its feminine respect, as characterized by Boito. She is a divine queen, an idol, who fails to become completely human, just like Faust fails to become heavenly. The collision of human moral values with the mythical realm is the engine which carries the final act of *Mefistofele* towards universal insights, mostly represented by Helen's dual personality.

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<sup>14</sup> Translated by Emili King, CD Jacket Notes 9RCA 09026-68284-2, 19960. Boito: *Mefistofele*, La Scala Orch. and Soloists, conducted by Riccardo Mutti.

<sup>15</sup> Deirdre O'Grady, *The Last Troubadours Poetic Drama in Italian Opera 1597-1887* (London, 1991), p. 193.

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