

The 'real' Marie de Rohan, Madame de Chevreuse, (from a portrait by Daret).

Maria di Rohan.

By Guglielmo Barblan

Maria di Rohan is the 70th work for the theatre composed by Donizetti and his fourth 'Maria,' following Maria Stuarda, Maria di Rudenz and Maria Padilla. It came in the maestro's final creative year, that exhausting year of 1843 which saw the production of four new operas, Don Pasquale, Maria di Rohan, Caterina Cornaro and Dom Sébastien. Having dissipated this immense effort concluding an existence completely stretched to its limit in an inhuman labour, following which came the silence which must have been the prelude to the tragic isolation of madness.

Maria di Rohan was the second opera composed for the Theater am Kärntnerthor in Vienna where the year before Linda di Chamounix had been enthusiasticaly applauded, and the success of which had procured for Donizetti the appointment from Ferdinando I of the post of 'maestro di cappella e della camera' and 'composer to the court,' which was previously held by Mozart. The obligation was therefore great, and Donizetti was conscious of this honour and made no secret of it.

The conception of the opera was somewhat daring for the story is fittingly retold in a score which so rarely leaves the shadows. This treatment adheres to the romantic climate in which the creative genius of Donizetti developed, and it may appear amazing that his unique urge towards work and life was still not satisfied even though he dominated the theatres in the two major musical centres of Europe, Paris and Vienna: as the 'Wiener Musikalische Zeitung' said after the first performance of Maria di Rohan, Donizetti was 'the master of the day'. But no one can escape from his own fate, and the destiny of Donizetti was to work to the end as if driven on by a fever.

By the end of 1842 Donizetti was obliged by his occupation to make the exhausting journey between Paris and Vienna, a journey undertaken through the rigours of winter and the dust and heat of summer. Every journey in his own carriage travelling along those roads, for fifteen hours each day, lasted nine days. In such discomfort, with his health already

broken he had to provide not only for the theatres of the two capitals, but also to satisfy the continuing requests that arrived from Italian cities, in particular from Milan, Rome and Naples. And yet, with such daily anxieties he had still the philosophical good humour to write to Signora Appiani - Strigelli at Vienna (4th June 1842) - 'I don't know if you know the aria of Figaro in Rossini's Barbiere .... everyone calls me, everyone wants me etc.... Such is the situation..... Paris: come at once. No! Naples: Rush ... No ! .... Bologna: settle here. Here are the propositions. No! would you like to accept (here comes the adagio) the position in V..i..en..na.. of maestro to the court ..?' Thus indicating his refusal to become the director to the Conservatory in Bologna and accepting instead the post in Vienna.

Having just recovered from the fatigue of Linda di Chamounix the composer had three operas on the stocks, Don Pasquale for Paris, La regina di Cipro, ossia Caterina Cornaro for Vienna and the grand opera Dom Sébastien also for Paris. At the same time however he had in mind another opera on the subject of Ruy Blas for Naples, and he hoped for the collaboration of Cammarano - a letter from Vienna dated 6th June 1842 to Tommaso Persico says 'does Cammarano ever give me a thought - '. But with dramatic irony the impressario Merelli, who managed not only the major italian theatres but also the Theater am Kärntnerthor at Vienna, let Donizetti know that an opera entitled Catharina Cornaro Königin von Cypern, composed by the Bavarian Franz Lachner for Munich in December 1841 on the same story was successfully still in the Viennese repertory. Thus to avoid any unnecessary unpleasant confrontation he suggested Donizetti should provide a different subject.

To his weariness was now added disappointment and embarassment; the disappointment of having to renounce a work already started, he made no secret of this when writing to his friend Herz, director of the Viennise theatre (from Paris 2nd October, 1842) 'I was at the end of the creation of my first act and I had composed a duet and a quartet for the second[....]and one must start again in Paris without a text ...', while to the publisher Ricordi he added on the 8th November -

'I'm out of my mind[...]my poor Regina di Cipro - I loved that work and I believe that it would not have come out badly'. The embarrassment he revealed to his brother-in-law on November 12th 'what shall I do now? The old subject, or a new one?', worried also by the fact that he could not even take advantage of producing Caterina Carnaro in the Roman theatres as the censorship would not have tolerated the appearance on the stage of 'a crusader with the cross upon his breast,' as one of the persons in the action.

But for Donizetti these embarrassments were of short duration. On the 12th of November he was all at sea, without a libretto, yet fifteen days later not only was the difficulty resolved, but the new opera was already written. Again writing to his brother-in-law (Paris 27th November) 'I wrote to Milan at once in order that they should send me a libretto of Cammarano's Il conte di Chalais, ossia Un duello sotto Richlieu which Lillo had set to music, without success, and having received it on Sunday I set myself to read it. I called in a poet to make slight adjustments ... now the poem fits, - I'm already beginning to compose ... you can start printing the bills, the opera is finished today; that is as good as saying that everything has been written in eight days. The opera is in three acts and will not be too bad'.

It only requires these few, but very precise lines to illuminate for us the happenings in the composer's Paris studio between Sunday the 20th November, the date on which he received the libretto, and the succeeding Sunday, the 27th when he wrote that the opera was finished. From this the following facts emerge.

i. Donizetti did not ask for just any libretto, but precisely one by Cammarano.
ii. He chose a libretto already set for Naples by Giuseppe Lillo from Puglia which had had little success.
iii. He had brought in an unidentified poet to modify Cammarano's text - Perhaps the same Giovanni Ruffini with whom the composer was at that time in daily contact for Don Pasquale.
iv. Everything was completed in the space of eight days.

In speaking of Cammarano's libretto Donizetti mentions the melodrama by Lillo, launched at the San

Carlo in the autumn of 1839 with the title Il conte di Chalais, but forgetting, or perhaps not knowing that in the August of that same year there had appeared at La Scala the opera Un duello sotto Richlieu by the composer Federico Ricci, the libretto of which had been the collaboration of at least three Venetian poets, who were particularly dear to the generation of the Risorgimento : Francesco Dall' Ongaro, il Gazzoletti and Antonio Somma, who was later to be the librettist of Verdi's Un ballo in maschera. The literary texts of these two works show the same source, French naturally, as was the fashion of the time, and it was based not so much upon the drama Marion Delorme (1831) in which Victor Hugo had continued the story of his previous Un duel sous Richlieu, as on the work by Lockroy and E. Baton where the same subject was introduced the following year under the title Un duel sous le cardinal Richlieu. But between the texts of the two dramas there is a substantial difference. In the older treatment in two acts which was the result of collaboration between the three poets, besides exhilarating verses as this sung by the chorus :

'Viva l'allegra vita francese
regni un ministro di buon umor!'

which is sung at the moment of Richlieu's downfall: or extravagant imagery such as :

'La marital vendetta
solo ha di sangue amplessi'

to underline the terror of Maria confronted by the brutal avenger of her husband, one sees a vague break-up of the characters in the confused surroundings of the court. There is nevertheless sure testimony here for understanding the two versions which Donizetti used for his score. In Cammarano's libretto, besides the bravura of the versification there is the intuitive treatment of the scenic plot, suggestive of a man dedicated to the theatre, We see the story taking shape without any superfluity as well as the precise characterisation of the protagonists who dominate the continuity of the plot, leading to the rapid and sure footed igniting of the dramatic conflict. In his first version Cammarano had titled the three acts: I. Sad consequences of duels, II. Not love but recognition, III. A blind vengeance: captions which give an outline of the plot.

Donizetti was therefore the third composer to treat the subject which now came with the name of the heroine Maria di Rohan. Such is the situation suggested by the chronology of the information we have received: in reality looking through Donizetti's letters one finds that this subject had already been seen by the composer some ten years earlier, when at Naples with Cammarano in September 1837 to choose the subject for a new opera contracted for Venice. This was then another Maria: Maria di Rudenz. At that time in fact, Donizetti declared to his brother-in-law: 'I have chosen for Venice Un duel sous le Cardinal Richlieu, its an effective drama and one can especially see buffo and tragic elements, something which matters for Ronconi and Ungher' (from Naples 19th September, 1837) and some days later (September 26th), he was insisting, again to his brother-in-law 'as for the subject chosen for Venice, it is beautiful and it was good enough to have been considered by Bellini who also wished to use it. * Well there it is arranged for the three singers, Ungher, Ronconi and Moriani. There will be spectacle: the court of Louis XIII. The scenery is original and creates a grand effect. The reason why Donizetti abandoned the French subject is not clear; we only know that on the 30th September he limited himself to announcing to his brother-in-law that: 'the poet Cammarano is finding difficulty with the subject for Venice.' Difficult for what reason? For the scenic plot in the treatment of Lockroy and Baton's drama or for the predictable difficulty with the censorship?

Not having the answer to these questions it is enough to show in evidence these four points (i) the rapidity with which french drama was spreading in the field of Italian melodrama and with which it came to the attention of Italian composers; (ii) the fact that Bellini had previously had the same story under consideration; (iii) how Donizetti had projected the

*Footnote: According to Florimo (La scuola musicale di Napoli - 1882), the story had been shown to Bellini and was considered for production at the San Carlo for the 1836/1837 season. Bellini had divided the story into scenes and presented it to Salvatore Cammarano who had received it with enthusiasm.

characters shaping them to suit the three famous interpreters available to him, the personalities of the singers conditioning the musical concepts; and finally (iv) how ten years later having still at his disposal the superb voice of Georgio Ronconi, the libretto already discussed with Cammarano, should again come to the composers mind. These factors were enough to remind him of those distant plans and in only eight days everything fell into place. The list of Donizetti's 69 operas was enriched by a new title.

This adventure would already in itself be astonishing even if we did not relate the events of that particular week in that prodigious November of 1842 - Donizetti set aside the pieces already composed for Caterina Cornaro and in addition to the composition of the three acts of Maria di Rohan he also worked on the production of the new Paris edition of Linda di Chamounix and completed the orchestration of Don Pasquale, the dress rehearsal of which was fixed for the end of December and the premier for the 3rd January 1843. We should in truth remain perplexed and perhaps incredulous of the reality of this achievement if we did not know of that desperate 'goldrush' madness that was the Italian operatic scene in the first half of the last century: a stupifying and fantasmagorical goldrush - it was sprinkled with disasters but also studded with masterpieces of purest gold, amongst which we may cite Don Pasquale.

If to us - and we are speaking at a distance of more than a hundred years - the situation which I have just mentioned could have seemed to have had no way out, to Donizetti it did not represent anything more than a move in chess, that is, a rush to complete and register Don Pasquale as soon as possible, ensure Maria di Rohan, already virtualy completed, for Vienna; lay to one side Caterina Cornaro and assign Dom Sébastien to the summer and autumn. A little good will and with the aid of genius the game is won.

Without having been able to enjoy in full the success of Don Pasquale, Donizetti left Paris on the 7th January 1843 and after about ten days of icy weather crossing through Bavaria and Salzburg he arrived in Vienna to reassume his duties as a court composer and director of the opera. He carried with him Maria di Rohan which he assures us perhaps with his tongue in

his cheek was composed in eight days, but we must assume that not all the orchestration had been completed, otherwise it would not explain why he should have waited until the following 14th February to inform his friend Antonio Dolci: 'my opera seria in three acts is finished ... I have started another in five acts for Paris;' alluding to Maria di Rohan and Dom Sébastien. Life in Vienna did not turn out to be all that peaceful: he had to prepare for the theatre a new production of Lucia (28th January) and for the opera season which opened on the 2nd April Linda di Chamounix, Furthermore he had to prepare Verdi's Nabucco (4th April), the first appearance of a one act opera La prima donna by his student Matteo Salvi (29th April) not to mention the presentation of his own Don Pasquale (14th May) and La regina di Golconda (23rd May).

As the imperial 'maestro di cappella', he presented in March his Offertorio for five voices with strings, including it in a cycle of Sacred music in which were also performed works by Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven (Beethovenists as Donizetti called them); and on the following Good Friday, 14th April, he directed for the court his important Miserere for soloists choir and orchestra. Thus he was concerned with works already composed at the same time as Caterina Cornaro, Don Pasquale, and Maria di Rohan, during the course of 1842 and definitely registered in Vienna at the beginning of 1843. However also in this period of wearisome existence, it is obvious that during the winter and spring the composer had the time to read, touch up and complete the new opera that he had conceived and spoken of on the 5th June. The overture was most likely composed in Vienna, because, perhaps more than in the overture to Linda di Chamounix there is, one feels, a concentration on refined instrumentation and a tendency to search for orchestral values characteristic of the musical taste in the Austrian capital.

In conclusion, recalling the several months that separated the end of November 1842 from June 1843, the date of its performance; the eight days which legend attributes to the effortless birth of this score seem to have become extended somewhat.

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The story of Maria di Rohan does not end with the enthusiastic reception it received from the Viennese amongst whom were - 'the whole Imperial family who had come up expressly from the country' - as Donizetti announced to his brother-in-law. The reception of the opera was so good that it had to be repeated for thirteen performances in the space of one month. On the 11th of July Donizetti left for the other of his two positions, Paris, where he found the weather 'even more disgracefully bad' than in Vienna. In August he was again in contact with his collaborater Paul Lacroix to arrange the translation of the new opera which had been immediately secured by the Théâtre Italien and to introduce such changes as necessary' in the case of a translation into French for the provincial theatres' - he added that the Parisian success might correspond 'with the work's triumph in Vienna' -

So as not to interrupt the relentless rhythm of his accustomed labour, on the 2nd September he wrote to Mayr 'I shall put on the stage at the Théâtre Italien in October Belisario and Maria di Rohan which I wrote for Vienna, but before that I martiri at the Académie Royale' *See footnote. Two weeks later, writing to his brother-in-law he pointed out the situation and confided that in Maria di Rohan he had added a duettino between the lovers in the third act. This is the duet in F 'Ah così santo affetto' for Maria and Riccardo in Act 3 Scene 1. Then on the 25th October he informed his friend Thomas in Vienna that for the Parisian production - 'La Brambilla will be Gondì, rewritten for contralto with a ballata' - and on the 9th November he wrote to Leone Herz that for the revival of the opera in Vienna planned for the winter season he would need to bear in mind '- an enlarged 'Maria' - enlarged that is with a ballata for the contralto, the duettino for soprano and tenor, and an allegro in the third act - 'after the scene for the women' - that is, after Maria's prayer. The allegro is in A flat 'Ah madre mia/da morte tu mi salva' which roughly breaks the atmosphere of the prayer. From this it would seem that all was settled - this was not so; while Donizetti mentioned the new

*Translator's footnote: Académie Royale - not the present building commonly referred to as the Opéra, but its predecessor in the Rue Le Peletier.

pieces for the 'enlarged' Maria di Rohan firstly forgetting to say that he has not only to adapt the tenorino part for Brambilla, but in addition to the ballata in the first act, 'Per non istare in ozio', he had composed another aria for the second act, 'Son leggiero, è ver, d'amore'. There is however more, for Donizetti in his letter to Thomas in which he reports the enlargement of Gondì's ballata, mentions also the two - 'bars of music' - with which the new piece commences. But these two bars do not correspond with those composed by Donizetti and included in the published score by Ricordi in Milan prior to the Parisian production of the opera. From the plate numbers of the first edition of Maria di Rohan one deduces that the engraving commenced on the 6th June 1843, the day following the first performance in Vienna, and was concluded in the autumn. In this score, for voice and piano, all the additions appear that Donizetti mentions in his letters. The two arias for Gondì, the duettino, and the conclusion to Maria's prayer. As anyone can see, things are yet more complicated and an attempt is required to clarify them.

The interpreters at the first performance of Maria di Rohan had been the great and youthful celebrities, the soprano Eugenia Tadolini (who had already created Linda), the tenor Carlo Guasco (singing already with a pre-Verdian timbre, so much so that he was to be the first interpreter of I Lombardi, and immediately after that Ernani), the baritone Giorgio Ronconi who was a specialist of this work. Three principal artists, exactly the number called for in Cammarano's dramatic action. But in Paris in the opera company, besides the mighty trio of Giulia Grisi, Lorenzo Salvi and the indispensible Ronconi there was also the Milanese contralto Marietta Brambilla who, because of her bravura style and international fame had been the first interpreter of Orsini in Lucrezia Borgia. Donizetti therefore found himself somewhat obliged to include her, and he also wished to take advantage of her voice and ability. For the work in hand he therefore had to invent a fourth character not envisaged by Cammarano - it was thus necessary for one of the courtiers who was originaly placed in the background of the action to assume the position of a participant in the drama. Which of these anonymous figures would

have to emerge from the shadows?. The resolution of this problem had remained until now without explanation. We are now able to see the libretto of the melodrama Un duello sotto Richlieu which, as I have already said, had been produced at La Scala four years previously. In that opera Marietta Brambilla had sung, taking the part of Armando di Gondì - for which the composer Ricci had provided two generous arias, which approximately correspond in the setting introduced into the Paris edition of Maria di Rohan.

Therefore we can assume that for reasons of opportunity, or to satisfy the caprices of La Brambilla who wanted a role suitable to her position, Donizetti adapted to the new edition of the opera two pieces inspired by the Scala libretto. With these insertions he satisfied the singer and pleased the Parisian public which loved this type of lyrical character, more empty - headed than vain. This also upset the unity of the opera with distracting additions of no dramatic significance, driven like wedges into the fabric. It remains to ask why the bars which have a certain Rossinian flavour in Gondì's ballata which Donizetti mentioned in his letter do not correspond at all with the excerpt in the version published that same week; but this is one of those mysterious components of ottocento opera which create problems in interpretation.

Concluding the discussion on the creation of this opera we reach finally the evening of the 14th November 1843 when only a day away from the entrance upon the opera stage of Dom Sébastien, Donizetti launched the Paris version of Maria di Rohan and with such great success that he could write proudly, two days later to his friend Dolci 'I have made news in the French annals - having offered in twenty four hours one opera in five acts with ballet and another in three acts'; regarding Maria di Rohan he mentioned casually to Dolci 'some things have been added'. This work therefore repeated in an abbreviated form the tradition of the obligatory rewriting for the French stage of works already composed for other theatres, and it should be sufficient to recall the previous successes of Gluck's Orfeo, Rossini's Mosé and L'assedio di Corinto; Linda di Chamounix too, had in part to submit to this same treatment.

The text of the opera, therefore, is based upon the autograph of the score which was composed for Vienna, excepting the additions made for Paris. That Donizetti himself preferred this last version as the definitive one is not to be assumed. That is, the version which be had printed in Vienna, with additions, compared with the originally performed version. Had he not written to Ricordi on the 23rd August 1843, when fully involved in the revision of the score 'Did you see Varese? Did he tell you that I had rearranged the cavatina for 'Chevreuse' in the first act finale? and that I would have liked it if Trieste could have done it'. Observe that the author writes of having 'rearranged' the baritone's aria 'Gemea di tetro carcere' and that he would prefer the Trieste performance to follow this new version. This revival of Maria di Rohan came out on the 9th October 1844 with Frezzolini, Colini, Ferretti and Aldi-Birch - it had already been performed in Malta, Parma and Naples. The opera arrived at La Scala in January 1846 - after being performed in Madrid, Brussels and Budapest. In the space of ten years it was also given in St. Petersburg, Barcelona, Rome, London, Berlin, New York, Lisbon, Constantinople, Prague, Graz, Mexico City and Buenos Aires. These were the 'Imperial years' of Italian opera.

Such considerations cause one to reflect how sometimes the labours of those who willingly, but perhaps excessively, deceive themselves into trying to achieve a critical edition of a nineteenth century opera which becomes like the labour of Sisyphus. Here we have in Maria di Rohan one of those hundred or so cases for those who swear by the autograph as an indisputably truthful document; in this case the autograph reflects only in part the last wishes of its author.

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If Donizetti in the difficult situation of which we know already had again recourse to Cammarano then he must have had good reason. He knew well that from his first meeting with the poet there had been awakened in him that new and immortal inspiration which was to be Lucia di Lammermoor. The excellent libretto of Il conte di Chalais reshaped into Maria di Rohan offered to him at once the best perspective of the drama, neat

situations, clear cut characters, swift action and acceptable verses. There is even a partial Petrarchian quotation in the baritone's invocation in the third act. 'Bella e di sol vestita'. Yet again Cammarano enabled him to form his own musical and dramatic intentions, commencing with the presentation of the three principal actors, one after the other, revealing themselves in their dramatic realisation and dialectic - and at the end creating around each a space in which to evolve the varying musical characterisations of their emotions.

In order of appearance we meet first Riccardo, conte di Chalais, who has assumed the position as a minister under Louis XIII during the brief period of Cardinal Richlieu's fall from power and suffering from his love for Maria, contessa di Rohan; so much so that his suffer - ings assume an almost dreamlike ecstasy which he confides in a vague expansiveness in his opening cavatina, 'Quando il cor da lei piagato sul mio labbro amor ponea' The cabaletta which follows seems to illuminate with hope the surge of his emotions. Maria is immediately immersed in the full Donizettian atmosphere — the orchestral introduction which accompanies her appearance reveals itself in a rapidly descending theme in the strings which drops repeatedly in an insistent repetition underlining the state of agitation in the affecting and concise cavatina, 'Cupa fatal mestizia', which reveals her fearful inner most feelings. The pizzicati seem almost to beat time in the silence of the expressive pauses in the voice, whilst in the commencement of the melody a sorrowful echo of the immortal 'Una furtiva lagrima' strikes us, and with these emotional elegaic strokes we become deeply involved with one of the most genuine of Donizetti's creations; and here at the end of the extract we are witness to the unexpected clarification of the passage from minor to major which underlines the sustained impetus of a repressed passion which gasps for liberation. Naturally the contessa di Rohan, as all other true Donizettian characters, does not escape the romantic burden of an impossible love — of a secret and negative nature. In the aria that follows, musically less felicitous, the nostalgia for that dream of happiness is repeated as Maria sings, 'Dee restar fra il cielo e me'.

The reason for such love being condemned to remain an unattainable longing is that a year prior to the action Maria was married to Enrico, duca di Chevreuse, having before this been courted by Riccardo. The marriage has remained secret because Enrico had been condemned to prison under threat of execution after he had killed Richlieu's nephew in a duel. But now Riccardo, using his influence as a minister has interceded on his behalf with the King and has succeeded in having the punishment repealed. And so when the third principal actor arrives upon the scene, and naturally Enrico is a baritone, his cavatina 'Gemea di tetro carcere' is at the same time a gloomy recall of the terrible sentence and a hymn of thanks to his liberator. This is a poignant moment, showing the Donizettian grace in the evocation of a funereal mood which we find emphasised by the choice of the key, C minor. Amongst the unsurpassable pages of Donizetti's art, we may count the narrative progress of the vigorous melody which rises step by step and then descends to pause as if suspended in gloomy silence, the rapid and sustained designs in the orchestral bars that resound like soft shivers, which in the succeeding cabaletta comment almost ecstatically on the opening mood.

Alongside the three characters which Cammarano and Donizetti have presented there stands the figure of the courtier Gondì; a figure completely at odds with the principles of opera seria, theatrically insipid and musically tedious. We could possibly compare the merits of this 'mezzo carattere' introduced into the opera as if to lighten the gloomy atmosphere with that of his obvious successor, Oscar, the page in Un ballo in maschera. The character of Gondì could be dismissed as an intrusion into the original plot made to satisfy Parisian taste.- his task in purely theatrical terms is to slight Maria's reputation before the full court and to provoke the challenge to a duel offered by Riccardo

Concluding the first act with a somewhat conventional ensemble that bears the hallmark of the worst of Donizetti the drama gathers itself together and prepares for a conflict of emotions. Having been saved from the death sentence Enrico has publicly revealed that

Maria is his wife, and now Riccardo, in the solitude of his room, disconsolate after renouncing his love for Maria, gives the last expression to his faithful love in a letter which is to be sent to Maria should he fall a victim in the duel. With his opening words the violins and cellos play the same melody which in Lucia di Lammermoor had accompanied the entrance of the heroine in the betrothal scene - perhaps it is an instinctive self quotation that in the desolation of sadness again in this new opera Donizetti underlines the farewell to this love and this life. The musical portrait of Riccardo reflects in its freedom of movement that desire for death which, accompanied by a kind of voluptuous agony - almost autobiographical, is typical of Donizettian tragedy. The recitative passage carefully blends into an expressive arioso where in the farewell to his beloved is joined a farewell to his dying mother, concluding with the astonishing conciseness of the aria 'Alma soave e cara', testimony to the decisive wish of the composer to renew the traditional structure and to make a break with abused convention, thereby arriving at a more flexible dramatic unity.

The dramatic debate between the principal actors is now fully represented. Maria, concealed in a cloak and mask, comes to warn Riccardo that Richlieu has regained power and advises him, as Richlieu's political opponent to save himself as his life is now in danger. Enrico arrives unexpectedly, unaware that his wife is present in disguise and making an ironical situation thereby, exhorts his friend to leave his amourous adventure and take up instead arms for the duel. In this way the first tenor/baritone duet, which has few musical surprises except for a sense of isolation and of the irony of the situation, develops into the great duet between Maria and Riccardo which forms the finale to the second act. Alongside the emotions already mentioned there is the romantic theme of 'honour'. For the man she loves Maria does not fear the vengeance of Richlieu so much as the sword of Armando di Gondì, while on his side Riccardo is disturbed by the thought of dishonour in being late in presenting himself on the duelling ground to face his challenger. In this particular episode we can perhaps perceive a situation similar to that of Valentine and Raoul in the fourth act of Les Huguenots, but it also forshadows the

situation of Arrigo in Verdi's La battaglia di Legnano. These delays in the drama of court and politics receive a musical emphasis full of significance in the explosion of love that finally carries the protagonists to forget all other duties and to unite themselves in a desperate embrace we find Donizetti caught in the great passionate force which creates a vibrant and fiery sonority. It is a luminous page in its enriched articulation of harmonic intentions which tend dramatically to return again move exasperatingly to the melancholy solitude of the characters.

From the opera's first appearance the third act was universally considered to be the best. In it all thought of the surrounding court and chorus is forgotten. Already in the second act the personal drama which had become clearly delineated now turns fully to the conflict of the emotions of love, jealousy and vengeance. In the name of friendship and in gratitude Enrico has taken Riccardo's place in the duel and has been injured; we learn of this in the excited dialogue between Maria and Riccardo which is somewhat cooler in tone than in the duettino added, as we know, for the Parisian stage. Unknowingly, Enrico, not withstanding what he has already done, wishes also to help save his friend from political oppression and to organise his flight. Riccardo quickly decides, either Maria will be his companion in exile or he will return and face death by her side. The tension of this dramatic situation has already been foreshadowed in the dark prelude to the act, in the sad and almost lugubrious song of the four horns supporting the prolonged and firm sound of the trumpets - an indecisive melody with pathetic accentuations, which are extinguished by drum rolls, and which only just maintain the key of C major, transporting us by virtue of the Donizettian art into a complete feeling of minor tonality. In contrast to this sombre mood resound instead the few vivacious and persistent bars in the strings, now in C minor, as if to announce the imminent tragic conflict, a conflict which matures in two short passages of lyrical beauty.

Maria informs Riccardo of the impending disaster of which his innocent love is the victim, and of his suffering as he sang at his appearance in the first act; she now invokes the Virgin to save her from an

early and cruel death. The melodic curve of 6/8 announced in the orchestra by the lonely and despondent voice of the bassoon, spreading itself in chaste sadness, in the renewal of the smaller than usual intervals, is in a softly eloquent harmony that at the bottom of the pathetic F minor, changes itself into the colouration of A major - C major - F major- and in a continuous flow of melody that is a lyrical confession of a moving invocation without hope. Following this intensly moving prayer is an episode which would appear to be the expression of a trust in the improvised virtuoso embellishment with which Donizetti matches the vocalisation with the 'sweet images' of the text, inclining somewhat towards the only instance in this work, of the exigencies of 'belcanto' rather than to the dramatic requirements.

The other lyrical pause is that of Enrico when having discovered the supposed betrayal by his wife with his friend, first, before his anger explodes in a thirst for vengence, recalls times past and his regret for vanished dreams. The classic nostalgic aria for the baritone which here anticipates the dramatic situation of Renato in Un ballo in maschera and the emotions of the marvellous 'Eri tu che macchiavi' is accentuated in the orchestra by flutes and clarinets above string arpeggioa. The evocation of the Petrarchian verses 'Bella e di sol vestita'is set in the unusual key of G flat major, which becomes more declamation than song, almost spoken to himself, except for a few explosively tormented outbursts of sudden abrupt modulations.

Then comes the tragedy, Enrico has his wife summoned. With her he will await the arrival of Riccardo by the concealed entrance and thus vent his anger. The duet between Enrico and Maria is a page breathing strong and realistic drama. Strings, timpani and bass drum repeat insistently the rhythm of demisemiquaver triplets, followed by a cadential phrase of regular beats, a rhythm traditionally associated with a funereal mood which here seems to stress a fatal announcement of death. They respond to the sad chords of the clarinets, the dramatic descent of the flutes and oboes or the lament of the flute, sustaining the agitated recitative. That rhythm so strongly evocative which is repeated with a menacing shudder making an underlying accompaminent to the majestical ironic phrases of the baritone,

coalescing the orchestral web of sound which Verdi probably remembered when in La traviata he wrote the memorable farewell of Violetta 'Prende, quest' è l'immagine'. The duet expands and realistically indicates the fierce joy of Enrico in anticipating the fall of his rival. Clipped phrases, keeping time with the dialogue, stand out in sharp contrast with Maria's melody who now, musically speaking resembles Lucia's innocent defencelessness and sacrificial bewilderment. At last Riccardo arrives and the nervous and brief terzetto that all too quickly closes the drama. Riccardo is slain by Enrico while Maria remains as if petrified under the burden of false accusation and infamy. The Donizettian elegy is shattered and negated in the tragic ending.

At the conclusion a reference is made to the theme of the overture, a jewel-like scoring of chamber music proportions yet breaking with Rossinian style and exciting in the apt choice of the theme, the equilibrium and sonority, the variety of timbre and the elegance of its development. From this we learn also what melodic cues and rhythmical intervals Donizetti considered most suitable to end the drama, in this case by anticipating it in the overture. The quotation is easily recognised, it is that of the reciprocal declaration of love by Maria and Riccardo from the second act finale, and which now appears softly heralded by the cellos; Marias's first theme is here given by the oboe - an agitated impulse which appears again in the third act prelude; the last verse in which Maria expresses her own desperate retaliation to Enrico's anger - a refined and elaborated instrumental mosaic.

I have often mentioned Verdi's Un ballo in maschera naturally with reference to the dramatic situation, these references are not altogether casual since Verdi's librettist was that Antonio Somma who had collaborated in the setting of Un duel sotto Richlieu, and he certainly had been familiar with Cammarano's text. Of the three principal characters found in fundamentally the same situations, the Count of Warwick, Governor of Boston even has the same name as the Count of Chalais : Riccardo. In both cases the emotion of friendship is undermined by the emotion of love, which has more of the platonic candour of ecstasy than of sensual thrills, and thus gives way to common-place

suspicion, offended honour, a thirst for vengeance, and the constraint of an innocent wife unjustly condemned. Among the Donizetti's innovations; is the emotional use of irony, used jestingly by Enrico to Riccardo in Act two, and without pity in his scene with Maria in the third act, this irony which was to mature in that grotesque moment at the close of the second act of Ballo.

Another element not touched upon is Verdi's use again in Ballo (and, in another context, Falstaff) of the chiming clock, participating externally, but effectively suspending the dramatic action. The clock of the Louvre strikes during the duet between Maria and Riccardo to warn them that the time appointed for the duel is past, and in the third act, it is the chiming clock which lays bare Maria's terror and the anger of Enrico; they know that at that moment Riccardo will arrive through the secret door. These are touches of realism which do not destroy the unity of the tragedy, and which certainly give urgency to the free movement of the melody.

Maria di Rohan is not to be laid aside with the mass of outdated melodrama; it does in fact stand out from its background by reason of its robust style and the intelligent setting of the drama; it is at once distinguisable from its contemporaries. With pleased self-satisfaction, the Viennese critic of 1843 announced that Donizetti having had to compose for the German public was now deeply pledged to severity and dignity. One could possibly object that this new conception of operatic structure and the concise dramatic use of the poem had been provided time and time again by Donizetti and had already been given a fine example in Don Pasquale, which was composed not for the Germans but for the French. We can accept instead, the observation that in Maria di Rohan the composer had deviated from his usual path in hommage to the superior dramatic requirements of the music to the point of not following the 'fulminating force of his melody', not an easy thing 'for a Croesus of melody such as Donizetti'.

The Viennese writer, whilst showing taste in his evaluation of the opera, was mistaken in his consideration of the composer as altogether a Croesus of melody, and in predicting for him a future in which bold flight would enable him to raise himself 'above the present day taste, and beyond his epoch'.

Not realising that Maria di Rohan was the composer's seventieth operatic score and that his health was run down and nearing a state of total collapse. However, everything considered, this aristocratic and intimate opera, which seems to take refuge between the walls of domesticity, in this way blunting the choral contribution, and renouncing melodramatic pomp, this concise and yet transparent score that renews from within the tradition of 'opera seria' giving to the persons of the tragedy the rapid facility of characters in a 'commedia musicale', this testimony to a strenuous defence of drama in which fantasy is not always given adequate support, stays in the heart as the creature which bears in its features more nostalgia, than the total truth of beauty, which can still render more dear to us this sad last Maria of Donizetti.

