AVVERTIMENTO.

Vittore Hugo, *dal quale è imitato questo Melodramma, in una Tragedia assai nota aveva rappresentato la difformità fisica (son sue parole) santificata dalla paternità: nella* Lucrezia Borgia *volle significare la difformità morale purificata dalla maternità: il quale scopo, se ben si rifletta, rattempera la nerezza del soggetto, e non fa ributtante il Protagonista. Era facile all'Autore francese far risaltare il suo scopo, trattando l'argomento come gli dettava la fantasia, sviluppandolo nello spazio che più gli cadeva in acconcio: difficilissimo a me che racchiudeva in poche pagine un volume, ed era inceppato dal metro e dall'orditura musicale: nè vidi quanto scabrosa fosse l'impresa che dopo aver acconsentito di tentarla. Alla difficoltà del soggetto si aggiunga quella dello stile che, a mio credere, io doveva adoperare; stile di cui non ho modelli, almeno ch' io sappia; che tien l'indole della prosa in un lavoro in versi; che vuolsi adattare all'angustia del dialogo, alla tinta dei tempi, alla natura dell'azione, ai caratteri che la svolgono, più comici la maggior parte, che tragici; stile insomma conveniente in una Opera ove il Poeta deve nascondersi, e lasciar parlare ai personaggi il loro proprio linguaggio. Per osservare in certo qual modo l'unità del luogo, intitolo* Prologo *l'azione che succede in Venezia e tale può veramente chiamarsi, se mal non mi appongo, poichè è questa la protasi del soggetto e produce la catastrofe che si svolge in Ferrara.*

Con questo avvertimento io non intendo por modo all'opinione del Pubblico. Spetta ad esso il pronunziare, all'Autore il rassegnarsi.

FELICE ROMANI.

LUCREZIA BORGIA

By JOHN ALLITT.

Donizetti's choice of Victor Hugo's play Lucrèce Borgia as suitable material for an opera aligned him even closer with the romantic movement. The opera is an important step in his development, and a few notes explaining why this is so, may aid our re-assessment of a work once popular throughout the musical world.

The composer abandoned classical themes after his first three youthful operas. He set out on a long search for subjects which would express his inner creative ideas and concepts. In the world of opera buffa he remained strictly traditional in his choice. The idiom was ideally suited to his intimate understanding of the follies of humanity. He was a master of the style and composed the last great opera buffa, Don Pasquale (1843). Mayr had given Donizetti, through his own operas, a sure grounding in the art of farsa sentimentale. L'elisir d'amore (1832) is perhaps the most perfect example of this genre.

The themes chosen for the tragic and melodramatic works show a constant search for texts and enlightened librettists. There is no one opera which drew out a nutshell of genius as did Don Pasquale and L'elisir d'amore. The opera serie tend to reveal moods and particular insights. Compare for example, Lucia di Lammermoor with Maria Stuarda. Donizetti's genius in his serious works has to be known and appreciated from a number of operas, and among these Lucrezia Borgia (1833) occupies a special place.

Donizetti, the composer of opere serie, matured gradually. In 1826 he wrote an opera for his own enlightenment. Gabriella di Vergy is not only a work full of musical interest, but also the story, though needlessly melodramatic, indicates the way the composer's mind was developing in the choice of plot and inner ideas. The libretto by Tottola had been written for Carafa. Donizetti found in it his theme of contrasting ideal, passionate love with selfish, jealous love. The story shows how negative love (described in later works as l'ira dei mortali) destroys the life it would grasp as its own. Positive love, on the other hand, even when destroyed by mortals, passes through death to a new-found union.

Gabriella di Vergy is placed in the Middle Ages, a period ideally suited to Donizetti's romanticism. Indeed, he called himself il trovatore Donizetti. Furthermore, the dedication of his tomb: trovatore fecondo di sacre e profane melodie is a conscious pun made by those who appreciated the true depths of their brother and friend.

Mayr traced Donizetti's development in the dramatic operas with insight and perception. He recognized Anna Bolena (1830) as the major breakthrough. The opera encouraged him to address his pupil as 'Master' for the first time. Mayr's journals single out three key operas preceding Anna Bolena. They are: L'esule di Roma (1828), an opera full of 'passions' (affetti — io voglio affetti e non battaglie in scena); Il paria (1829), which is concerned with the theme of true love transcending death; Il diluvio universale (1830), which is a work representing Donizetti's fascination with English romanticism and the poetry of Lord Byron. Mayr's assessment is admirable, for all these themes and ideas are concentrated into Anna Bolena, an opera 'full of beauty of the first order'.

Lucrezia Borgia is an important development in Donizetti's musical and theatrical thought. Victor Hugo had only just written his play. These were the tumultuous years after his controversial play Hernani (1830). The two plays represent the struggle and victory of the romantic theatre. Donizetti's maturity coincided with this shift in European consciousness. Music, operas, and letters, all reveal the composer as a highly cultured and aware person. However, if the subject matter of his operas moved with the times, the musical idiom with which it was expressed entered into conflict with the ideals stemming from German romanticism and Beethoven in particular. Berlioz poured out scorn in the press against Donizetti. Schumann dismissed Lucrezia Borgia as music fit for marionettes. The composer's amour propre was hurt. He recognized there was more at stake in the advent of Beethoven than new ideas and freedom in the use of harmony in order to emphasize the emotions. Through his education with Mayr he would have recognized any change in musical language as being a sign of a deeper change taking place in the moeurs of a people. Europe still had to reep the fruits of the Revolution.

Today, however, it is not the music but the theatre of Lucrezia Borgia which may seem like a marionette show. Take for example the scene in which Lucrezia is exposed as the Borgia:

'Milady, you murdered my brother as he slept!'

'You killed my uncle after confiscating his lands!'

'My uncle was poisoned by you at a banquet!'

'You seized the lordship of Siena from my cousin!'

'I am the relative of one of your previous husbands whom you drowned in the Tiber!'

Lucrezia Borgia prompted Delacroix to regret the part he played in the vogue of criticism against Donizetti. He writes in his Journal: 'In the evening, to hear Lucrezia Borgia; I enjoyed it from beginning to end, even more than I did Cenerentola. Music, acting, scenery, costumes, everything interested me. That evening I atoned for the wrong I have been doing to the unfortunate Donizetti, now dead, and to whom I render full justice, herein, alas! imitating the common run of humanity, and even the best of them .... It is like suddenly falling in love with a person to whom you thought you were indifferent after seeing them every day for several years.'

The opera (along with his next, Rosmonda d'Inghilterra) is an example of the composer considering a new avenue of thought in his art form. Not only does the orchestration along with the literary source look outwards from Italy towards France, but also the inner realm of ideas shows Donizetti considering the image of womanhood (the anima) from the opposite polarity to that of Lucia or Maria. Lucrezia Borgia is a logical development from Fausta (1832), for both operas study woman as the matrix, destroying all that comes into her grasp. She is to be recognized in Lady Macbeth and the Gorgon of classical mythology.

Donizetti's music and libretti open up their inner dimensions once they are considered in the light of traditional thought (philosophia perennis). Thus Lucrezia may be understood as a study in the role of evil and the salvation of the soul from the abyss. Romani, in his preface to the opera, stresses that

the story is about 'salvation through motherhood', just as Le roi s'amuse (Rigoletto) is about 'salvation through fatherhood'. Donizetti grasped the inner realm of ideas of his opera with greater spiritual perception than did Verdi. Rigoletto remains essentially the work of a humanist. He had learnt to recognize how the art of story-telling can be understood on many levels besides the literal. Lucrezia Borgia was not only a story about 'salvation through motherhood', but also a disguised representation of the myth of the fallen intellect and its bride (the soul) lost in generation. Intellect and soul, the unified mystery of eternity, fallen into the labyrinths of space and time become separated and doomed to wander in search of their lost union.

Gennaro thus portrays the fallen intellect; Lucrezia depicts the prostitution of the soul to the powers of darkness (the Selfhood). The opera traces in four stages the soul's purification from its vain illusions which it has grasped as its own. What it has deemed to possess it must learn to lose. Once more, the symbol of death becomes of paramount importance to Donizetti's thought. Tears must first melt the icy heart (Com'è bello); next Lucrezia experiences rejection by society (Maffio Orsini, signora, son'io, etc.); she then faces condemndation by her husband who is the epitome of the arrogant selfhood (see conclusion of Act I, or Act II if the prologue is counted as an act). Finally, Lucrezia loses the most treasured object of her affection. The soul, having lost everything, is now open to receive all things. She is once more betrothed to the Intellect. The fallen intellect is eventually freed from the consequences of the fall through forgiveness and death. Here is the real reason why Donizetti wishes his opera to conclude with the so-called finale nuovo (Madre, se ognor lontano). He never wanted the vocal hysterics which he had to compose for Madame Lalande. The music and the drama is superior, and the symbolism is clearly more obvious.

It is a strange twist of fate that Donizetti's better judgement is still over-ruled to this day. He composed Madame Lalande's concluding aria (Era desso il figlio mio) with a personal vendetta in mind and not out of creative conviction. A historic set of

parts used for Les martyrs contains in the flute part a cryptic remark pencilled in by a flautist who fancied himself as a caricaturist and as a joker. It reads 'Lalande eternue pour la 8e fois'. Donizetti was not alone in suffering more than his fair share from this prima donna.

Donizetti wrote two important letters to Antonio Vasselli, his brother-in-law, in which he refers extensively to his ideas on Lucrezia Borgia in performance. They reveal the composer's exasperation with the performing editions of his work. Donizetti shows himself to be critical of musical pieces written for vocal display alone. He is also seen as refusing to consider an opera as a masterpiece to be filed away into the archives of history, but rather as being capable of changing from performance to performance, according to circumstances. This is why operas like Lucrezia Borgia and Lucia di Lammermoor have been able to stand up to the extraordinary whims of operatic taste.

* * * * *

The relevant extracts from these important yet somewhat chaotic letters are as follows:

"Concerning Lucrezia *what can I do? What can I tell you? Well, Lanari's score is bound to have Lucrezia's final cabaletta – because they all have. However, remain assured that after the tenor's death you move straight onto the Duke's appearance and down comes the curtain.*

"Regarding the cabaletta you desire to have at the end of Lucrezia *– here is what you must do. Have the cabaletta sung once only as did Boccabadati, Ungher and Grisi due to my advice. That is you take the second cabaletta and you start there. Then instead of all those trills at the end, you jump to the resolving cadenza. Here is the score. Good-bye. You are an old* cazzaccio *along with all the Romans. You want the cabaletta at the end? Well, you will see.*

"I mark the cut:



The first three bars serve to help you understand the cut's marking. The cross (×) serves to show you where you jump – the cut is clear and beautiful. The bar ⊡ is not the same as in the score. The orchestra, however, is quite alright since all that is required is a slight change in the

vocal line."

"In the introduction to Act I where the chorus sings Bando, bando a si tristi immagini, *at the words:*



that temuto *you will find it is lengthened a measure where the orchestra is silent, leaving the tempo to the soloists and chorus to fill out, to link and carry the vocal line so that it falls with* somma forza *with the orchestra on the words* l'arti, l'arti, *etc. I did this in Paris and Lablache, who made up a third part in that scene, himself led the chorus so that it was encored. Since I do not have Ricordi's score I do not know how the first act begins, because the Orsini-Gennaro duet has been touched up as well as Gennaro's romanza. Perhaps Gennaro does not sing the romanza in the first duet, but what saddens me more is if Lucrezia's cavatina . . . at least keep that, the duet and the romanza, if you perform the work – if you do not, go and get . . . . Furthermore in the stretta of the second act between Lucrezia and Gennaro, one makes a pause at the last bar of the cabaletta. Instead of:*



you do:



taking out for those beats the instruments after the first chord."

"Also the Duke's cavatina (blast all other versions!), at the place Fu la fatal laguna ah:



even here after the forte:



Leave the Duke on the E, long and filled-out as much as he wants, even if he collapses. Ad oltraggiato, *etc., together with the brass, after he has said,* L'ultimo addio che dagli amici ci prende, *cut out, and attach the cantabile* vieni, *etc."*

" . . . . If you can quickly let me know how the third act is, how it begins, it would help. In any case, they may begin with Gennaro's romanza. He then retires for a second time to his house. On comes the chorus. Orsini arrives and knocks and they go away together, with or without the duet, and so [the scene] changes. The words sung by the friars in fifths la gioia de' profani *etc., is performed by voices* alone, alone, *and only on the last beat will they do as follows:*



however remove every instrument, giving to the voices harmonizing together all the harmonies played by the instruments. On the word passegier *on the* gier *give a stroke on the gong."*

"You cut out [the following] in the ensemble, before the arrival of the Borgia woman once only:



because twice is too much. As for the rest let Jacovacci do as he pleases. Lucrezia's cavatina: I dislike it very much if you leave out the allegro alone."

"Since they do not understand a 0 [i.e. "nothing"], what then? Well, here I am!"

"The piece, that is, scene 3 of act 3 which you copied out and began: Rustighello – nol seguite."

"Chorus – A noi s'invola, *etc., it follows the duet between Orsini and Gennaro, that is the contralto and the tenor, that is, it is the music sung whilst those two go into fifths after the duet! Since the ruffians and Rustighello are hidden after the first chorus* Rischiarata è la finestra, *now let them come out and sing,* Nol seguite, *etc."*

"The Orsini-Gennaro duet begins straight after the chorus Rischiarata è la finestra. *The patter of feet heard in the first chorus was the reason why Orsini came to knock at Gennaro's door in order to take him to the Grimani. You there begin the recitative. Next follows their duet; then, as the original tells you, follows the chorus as I told you above. The duet has no cuts. I have merely given pizzicatos to the violins in the cabaletta (*Sia qualunque il mio destino*), the same notes as the second clarinet which makes an arpeggio."*

"Finished for the second time the cabaletta, I jump to where the double-basses play:



and the singers:



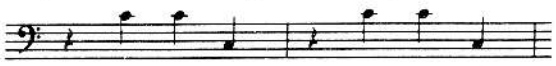
etc., and I leave the chord on C at the end and the two singers pause:



"Where the orchestra is marked calando add (I say it for the 100th time!) the chorus Nol seguite, *and it is sung in its entirety – the scene then changes and we have the banquet which you copied out very well. In this scene when Gubetta says* Ebbri son già, *the cellos instead of playing pizzicato play arco. In the stretta, at the place:*



this is repeated twice – cut one out and follow on. The follow-on is thus:



this is repeated twice and twice it must be. The voices during the brindisi, must be alone instead of being accompanied – all coming in instead of just one voice, thus:



"*And if they cannot keep in tune, give them à bass instrument to guide them, but only so it cannot be heard!*"

"*Regarding the last Rondo after Gennaro's death, Lucrezia says:* È spento. *The double-basses play softly a B flat. She then goes off mad around the stage, pulling at her hair, knocking at every door locked at her own orders. At last the main door opens and in comes the Duke and all. She sings the cabaletta once only after saying:* Mira è là. *If you have an instrumental ritornello cut it out and let her commence* maestosamente. *Then at the cabaletta's conclusion, cut out those trills as I told you in my other letter, so that Lucrezia jumps with the chorus to the cadenzas as they are, as if she had sung it for a second time. But have you really understood? – once, once only – have you understood, everybody does it this way . . . .*"

"*The tenor's romanza is not necessary. It is good to cut it out. If they cannot understand now, let them go and* ————. *Explain. Let them keep the adjustments I mentioned in Act I regarding the chorus* Bando Bando; *Lucrezia's new cavatina, and the conclusion for Lucrezia and Gennaro in Act II. For example:*



"*I will now wait for the results of this glorious confusion which I hope I have merited thanks to all these details. By* ————, *not even Lafforge's trial was so long or so discussed.*"

An account of Donizetti's **LUCREZIA BORGIA**

Taken from an English libretto published in 1850

On Thursday, June the 6th, 1839, the Work was for the first time produced in England, it being the occasion of Mme. Grisi's benefit, and of the debut of M. Mario before a London audience. The music was considered like most of the modern Italian compositions, as possessing little originality, but as pleasing, effective, and dramatic; according also with the situations of the piece. Grisi sang, looked, and acted as the haughty voluptuous Lucrezia, with her usual power and spirit and with even more than ordinary dramatic effect; Tamburini was excellent as the Duke of Ferrara. Signor Mario's voice (a tenor) was esteemed "of good quality, as far as it went", but of no extraordinary compass, nor was it very powerful however, his intonation was correct and he sang with considerable taste. He was very well received, and his solo in the Prologue, "Di pescatore ignobile", was encored. Indeed, the Opera itself may be cited as perfectly successful, and the principal singers made their appearance before the curtain, at the conclusion of every Act.—We cannot pass over an opinion expressed by one of the critics of the day, without giving it in its entirety; as by present comparison (the popularity of the Opera considered), it will be seen how much of value and importance can be set upon dicta so authoritatively, dogmatically, and "one sidedly" set forth—the observations alluded to run thus: "... strange to say, the house was but moderately well attended; nor have the lovers of music any loss if they absent themselves from M. Laporte's kingdom as often as the *Lucrezia* is repeated. The ghastly and revolting story of Victor Hugo's Tragedy, stripped of half its horrors by Signor Romani, the Italian librettist, has been set to music alternating between harsh and puling dullness—and as a whole, even less inviting than that of Donizetti's ungracious *Parisina*. There is one effective Terzett in the First Act, and the Introduction, with snatches of ball music coming from behind the scenes, would be very gay and pretty—though anything but new—if the military band were kept in time. Having mentioned these pieces, it were waste of time to specify further. Grisi did her best to make her new part tell—looking in the First Act more striking than we ever remember to have seen her, having put on for the character such a malicious and fascinating beauty as a sorceress of a Vittoria Accoramboni; but the music baffled her exertions. It was a pity too, to introduce M. Mario in a composition so utterly worthless; though making all allowance for its wretched insipidity. We cannot but compliment the new Romeo of the Italian stage upon possessing a handsome presence and a delicious voice, rather than commend him for using either as an artist should do, that is, zealously, and to good effect. His voice (as has been said elsewhere) is sweet and extensive, some of its tones being not quite free from that slight quantity of huskiness, which practise would either clear away, or, as in Pasta's case, convert from a blemish into a beauty; his expression is natural and unforced, his declamation at times too abrupt, at times too indifferent—he is greatest in short, in cantabile singing; having on Thursday evening, neither been given, nor made for himself, any opportunity for the display of executive power; M. Mario's success was complete, but he must work hard to make it lasting. Signora Ernestina Grisi and Signor Tamburini always careful and emphatic, took the other parts in the Opera." These are portions of the above, on which we will leave our readers to make their own comment.



GRISI *LABLACHE* *MORIANI*

Scene from the opera of Lucrezia Borgia, at Her Majesty's Theatre 1845