

Gilbert-Louis Duprez primo Polyeucte nel 1840
(Collezione F. S. Lo Presti, Bruxelles)

ON REMEMBERING *LES MARTYRS*

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Of all the operas listed in Zavadini, for years, ever since 1948, when I was first introduced to Donizetti's music, I longed to hear two operas in particular; *Poliuto* and *Les Martyrs*. *Poliuto* was eventually heard thanks to a tape of the unsatisfactory Callas-Scala performance, and again later by a genuinely sincere and moving revival in February 1967 by students of London University. *Les Martyrs* on the other hand seemed to attract little attention being dismissed simply as a rewriting of *Poliuto*. It should be remembered that, for the composer, *Poliuto* was a work lost due to censorship and *Les Martyrs* was his new opera. Indeed it was with this dramatic work that he wished to present himself to his new Parisian audience.

Eventually Donizetti's *grand opéra en quatres actes avec un ballet* came to light and was heard due to the enthusiasm of a dedicated group of persons in London in 1975 using an unsatisfactory edition published in the 1840s by Lemoine of Paris. At the time I wrote in the second volume of the Donizetti Society Journal extensively on the opera with its editorial problems as I then understood them. The opera was also broadcast on BBC Radio London and was subsequently heard in Bergamo and Venice. There have since been further revivals in France and Italy and this gives me much satisfaction, for authenticity of diction and manner of performance are always essential if Donizetti's music is to make its mark.

When remembering those fervid days of 1975 it is no longer possible to go back to what I then wrote concerning the problems of different editions and performances etc. Interest has moved on; however, one thought remains clear: it is now of paramount importance for a critical

edition of the opera to be made, furthermore the music needs to be sensitively performed and recorded. It remains my personal view that *Les Martyrs* is a truly fine work, musically and dramatically even more memorable than *Poliuto*, an opera that has had considerable success over recent years. There is a satisfying austerity, balance, and considered response to the challenge of composing for the French stage in the reworking and amplification of the Neapolitan censored version. It was with this opera, along with *La Fille du régiment*. That Donizetti wished to present himself afresh after *Marin Faliero* to his French public. *Les Martyrs*, as the composer's correspondence amply illustrates, was not a task that he had undertaken lightly.

The opera is very different in feeling to *Le Duc d'Albe*, *La Favorite*, and *Dom Sébastien, roi de Portugal*, though of these three *grands opéras* it is closest to *La Favorite*, for both works have a committed religious theme related to the love between man and woman and how such love relates ultimately to the growth of the inner and spiritual life.

Les Martyrs presented Donizetti to his Parisian public as a follower of Mayr rather than a 'follow-on' from Rossini. He had already taken his bow with a delicious opéra comique. *La Fille du régiment* is French in feel and its melodies still live on in educated and sensitive Gallic minds. At the turn of the century Mayr had been famous for his comic works and had worked with a very different approach to comedy than that of Rossini with its tendency to rhythm, patter and cynicism. From his master Donizetti had learnt a sense of the absurd and a genuine compassion for the human comedy, with the music of a score being subservient and heightening these qualities. Perhaps the older members of the Parisian audience had memories of Mayr's *Che originali!* with its particular flavour of *castigat ridendo mores* still in their minds, for the opera had been successfully performed throughout Europe. Donizetti, having unnerved many a Frenchman with a proud sense of prestige with the unquestionable delicacy of *La Fille du régiment*, then presented at the Opéra, his tragic opera with definite religious overtones, '[a] creed in four acts' as Berlioz aptly described the work. It should be noted that Mayr's *Medea in Corinto* was still receiving performances in the 1830s, an opera of genius which the pupil venerated as being beyond his reach. Intelligent listeners of the

time must have recognised that *Les Martyrs* followed the precepts of the master with its seriousness of approach to its subject matter.

Therefore, when considering Donizetti's first two French operas, it is essential to grasp that he was not standing before his French public as one who was unsure of himself, but on his own terms, proud to be of the school which had produced him.

Because of the teaching he had received and the faith that he embraced from childhood, I would suggest to the reader that both *Poliuto* and *Les Martyrs* have a special place in Donizetti's opus. Donizettians have always drawn attention to the composer's humanity, as well as the fact that he was a truly charitable and likeable man. Those who know his correspondence will hasten to add that it is important in this respect to note the tone with which he corresponded with his master, Johann Simon Mayr, whom he unquestionably considered to be his spiritual father.

This theme of humanity which attracts us to Donizetti may be traced in other pupils of Mayr, think for instance of Bonesi, Dolci and Piatti; then look at Mayr's Notebooks and one quickly realises that Mayr taught them all far more than an ABC catechism of music.

Consider also that Mayr was a dedicated 'maestro di cappella', and like Bach composed music for all sorts of occasions in the Church's liturgical year. For years the young Donizetti had been a hard-working choir boy, and that, through intimate knowledge of the Liturgy, he was a catholic through and through. There are no finer sources for teaching and initiation than the Liturgy and iconography of the Church. S. Maria Maggiore retains to this day frescoes which iconographically teach the significance of the feminine mysteries. We know Donizetti was a Christian who believed and practised the commandments of love and forgiveness to the best of his ability. These personal qualities should be acknowledged even by the most dowdy academic or worldly cynic. Indeed, the composer's creative life was intertwined with his faith, hope and love. The business of romantic love for him was not only an ideal but a way, a knowledge [in the sense of knowing through the meeting of persons and thereby a *gnosis* given in the sense of St Paul's *Scio enim cui credidi* (2 Tim I,12)] and that such a knowledge could lead to enlightenment just as it had done with Dante and others.

During the important years after returning from Bologna in order 'to perfect' himself in Mayr's teaching, his master presented the young man with three masterworks, three *azioni sacre*, that is, staged oratorios: *Samuele, S. Luigi Gonzaga* and *Atalia.* [1] This last mentioned was a work Donizetti saw massacred at the San Carlo, Naples, with poor singers and under the baton of Rossini. From the start Mayr had drawn Donizetti into his Cecilian music festivals, from early performances of works like Haydn's *Creation* to specific Cecilian music festivals which he began to hold in Bergamo certainly as early an 1817 [see A603-A605 in my English book of 1991 - see note 4]. Mayr commissioned music from the young composer and encouraged him to compose simple melodies for hymns to be experimented with during the liturgical revival with which the older composer was intimately involved; such efforts resulted in the vernacular hymn book, *Melodie Sacre* [in association with Luigi Gambale and Samuele Biava]. The Hymn Book went through numerous editions in the 1830s.

With *Les Martyrs* Donizetti clearly aligned himself with these early stirrings of the Cecilian movement as conceived by Mayr, who was in turn inspired by his once lecturer at Ingolstadt, the Jesuit, Johann Michael Sailer (1751-1832), who eventually became the saintly bishop of Regensburg, and whose disciple Karl Proske visited Mayr in Bergamo [26/8/1834] during his researches into sacred music in Italy. Donizetti and especially Mayr were involved with stimulating the Cecilian movement long before composers such as Gounod came on the scene.

Mayr's influence on many and various levels over Donizetti cannot be emphasised enough, to neglect this is to fall into many traps and eventually to misrepresent the composer we admire and love. Without the grasp of Mayr's influence, one pitfall is to consider Donizetti a facile composer, another is to value him merely as a forerunner to Verdi... 'e basta'.

Verdi evokes an important theme in my mind: how different are the two men, especially in their treatment and understanding of the figure of womanhood. Both composers wrote operatic masterpieces on the fate of 'fallen' women who had become the victims of men and their caprices, *La traviata* and *La Favorite.* [2] Verdi's opera is crammed full of unforgettable

emotion and 'verismo'. Donizetti's *grand opéra en quatre actes* works on a totally different level, and in the last resort in order to fully appreciate this work, it is essential to have a little insight into traditional symbolism concerning the art of story-telling, otherwise it is possible to end up with all sorts of time-wasting arguments and totally miss the composer's intention. Verdi's opera acts like a novel; Donizetti's like an initiatory tale. Indeed, there is a void between the two men, both culturally and spiritually. 'Guai a chi tocca Verdi! Tocca l'Italia!' Well said, but if Verdi is linked to Renaissance agnostic humanism as maintained by Moravia, let it then be accepted that Donizetti is linked to a far older tradition which Italians may find in Dante and the *Dolce Stil Novisti.*

La Favorite is not too far removed from *Les Martyrs* for its tale too is in a traditional mould concerned with the psyche, its integration and eventual union with the Divine. Before considering Scribe's libretto for *Les Martyrs* it is worthwhile referring back to Cammarano's *Poliuto.* I have shown in my book on Donizetti how an apparently simple tale based on the true event of St Polyeuctus's martyrdom has underlining it an age-old symbolism. The error that moderns make when approaching traditional thought wherever it may be found, be it in architecture, the visual arts, literature, scripture, liturgy, music or the arts of the volk, is to look at what lies before themselves armed with a literal understanding alone. This is to be blinkered, even, it must be said, culturally unaware. Firstly, all the characters of such a tale are within one, even Pirandello grasped this fact. Each character represents part of one's inner worlds. Thus Poliuto, Paolina and Severo are within the hearer as well as the composer. Like the parables, such tales are to be mulled over, contemplated and constantly renewed according to inner growth and spiritual maturity. Poliuto at the beginning of the opera represents the hard, fallen 'old Adam', trapped in his prejudices, assertiveness and self-righteousness. He is incomplete, just as the *animus* [the masculine aspect of the soul] is partial without the *anima* [the feminine aspect of the soul]. [3] Through his baptism [act 1] Poliuto is called through grace to set his lands in order. The secret will be Paolina [the anima] as husband and wife gradually, 'alchemically', actualize their marriage at a true spiritual level and are eventually ready to face death, that is in figurative terms the alchemist's

athanor symbolized by the Martyrs entering the arena: "Di me non ho che l'anima! ... / Eternamente vivere / M'è dato in ciel con te!" Severo represents the fallen-self, the world and its ways, necessary to the working out of the fate and destiny of Poliuto and Paolina.

In the inner life this struggle between the masculine and feminine sides of the soul with the ego and the world is basic to all. Such ideas must have been discussed with Cammarano and Donizetti by Nourrit whose brain-child the opera was. It is well-known that Nourrit was something of a mystic, though in himself neurotic and probably an unintegrated soul. Maybe it is possible to understand the opera as a self-projection by the French tenor, for he too like Poliuto and Paolina yearned to be whole. [4]

Turning to Scribe's libretto which does not adhere to the clear cut symbolism to be found in Cammarano's text, it will be found that Pierre Corneille's play, *Polyeucte* [1642] is helpful only up to a point, for Scribe has used the Italian text with additions of his own. From Corneille he has taken the theme of duty which he contrasts particularly in the characters of Pauline and Félix. Duty is understood here as a necessary obligation for the good of the ethical basis of society. Thus Scribe also enlarged substantially in the light of Corneille's play, the character of Félix, Pauline's father and governor of Armenia, writing new scenes and giving the opera another structural dimension to that of *Poliuto*. The title, *Les Martyrs*, is more evocative of Chateaubriand and the romantic fervour that was seizing hold of the times than Corneille's respectful, controlled and calculated classicism. Furthermore Scribe's libretto is not poor as sometimes made out: it has substance, is perfectly readable and is directly understandable, a quality it must be admitted not always to be found in Italian libretti of the period.

It is easy to recognize from Mayr's *Zibaldone* and his lectures on the theme concerning the origins of the Mysteries and the Oratorio, that for master and likewise for the pupil, *Les Martyrs* was an "azione sacra" and followed in the wake of Mayr's last great staged oratorios. Furthermore that such works were to be understood by a discerning public as taking their stand against works like Meyerbeer's *Robert le diable* which debased the sacred art of the oratorio.

I write as accepting the fact that the opera's music is beautiful, requiring revival and reconsideration due to the ongoing development of the Donizetti renaissance. What interests me here is the libretto and how its thought finds an important place in the composer's commitment to the developing Cecilian movement of the period. Scribe and Donizetti must have discussed the text and its ideas, for the composer was no fool when it came to the world of ideas essential to a cultured outlook. The commentary I offer to the text is grounded in the Tradition to which Donizetti belonged and to which he totally subscribed. I wish to show that one of the better libretti set to music and no doubt guided by him is rich in thought, but thought which is now for the greater part overlooked, forgotten or alien to most people. It certainly indicates the deep difference which exists between Donizetti and Verdi, as well as the folly of attempting to approach Donizetti through Verdi!

With the rise of archeology due to the re-evaluation of Classicism [Winckelmann] and the Napoleonic conquests, it is clear that the Opéra took great care with its production of *Les Martyrs*, a quality appreciated by Gautier. Therefore, we should imagine the acting, singing, and music as having the intellectual approach known to all who have had the privilege of participating in French theatrical productions at their best, an approach far from the emotional ethos generally associated with Italy. Oh yes, the cabals and squabbles still infect the stage as they do throughout the world, but with a difference of emphasis. In France ideas are generally more readily and avidly discussed in the Green Room or along the boulevard, in the bistro. Furthermore religion is not a taboo subject in catholic countries.

The first act: We are amidst the catacombs close by Melitene in Armenia. It is night and there is darkness of sky, rock and the coldness of marble sarcophagi: "*Ô voûte obscure, ô voûte immense / Où règne la paix des tombeaux*".

The Christian initiates and their cathecumens make their way down towards the mouth of the cave within which is concealed their meeting-place. In those days the place for burying the dead was a sanctuary to all, regardless of religion.

The hymn sung stresses their faith in God's preventing grace as they are led by the Spirit into the inner significance of prayer and the Mysteries.

At this time the persecution of the Roman authorities of christians was rampant throughout the empire and the faithful had an apocalyptic expectancy, gladly giving themselves up to martyrdom. The chorus emphasizes that all who profess the Faith may be called upon to die in witness to the "*Fils du Dieu vivant*". [With these words the reader already notes a freedom of expression unknown to Donizetti when working in Italy due to Neapolitan censorship where such words and references on the stage were forbidden.]

The Roman authorities imposed a simple test with respect to a person's allegiance to the old gods; it required a suspect to burn incense to the emperor. Incense being a symbol of prayer, quickly showed up the christian who would render to God that which rightly belonged to Him alone and not to the profane world of idols and politics. Stubbornness meant certain death in the cruel sports of the Arena.

Composer and librettist would have known the substance of the words of St Clement of Alexandria: 'Martyrdom means bearing witness to God. Every soul that seeks in pureness of heart to know God and obeys the commandments of God is a martyr, bearing witness by life or by words.' [Miscellanous Studies, 4, 4, 15] Thus the theme of the opera may be easily interpreted as an imaginative elaboration of an historical tale which taught the conscious standing before God needed to be taken by every faithful soul, and not only by model examples like Abraham, Moses, the Prophets, St Stephen or St Polyeuctus. Indeed, in the following scene, Polyeucte stresses, "*Dieu m'a parlé.. Dieu seul règnera dans mon âme*", for such is the desire of all who seek the sacrament of baptism. Scribe's interesting text here gives emphasis to the individual soul's relationship with the ultimate purpose of the universe, and the theme will eventually underlie Polyeucte's trials and martydom. Clearly both librettist and composer intended this to be understood in a wider context than just the theatrical. Donizetti's intention and aim as a pupil of Mayr was to give a contemporary revaluation of the staged oratorio, the azione sacra. His other azione sacra, *Il diluvio universale* is a pallid and immature work in contrast to *Les Martyrs*.

Néarque, friend, priest and sponsor at the rite of baptism, questions Polyeucte as to his resolve, reminding him that his father-in-law, Félix, [5]

the ruthless tyranical governor of Armenia, would certainly not shield him from martyrdom. Also Pauline, his wife, could be outraged and betray him. Polyeucte maintains that he aspires to her eventual conversion and reminds his friend that he came to know the power of prayer on the occasion when his wife recovered from a serious illness. It was then that the Living God had shown him a sign. He remembered praying at her bedside:

Montrez votre pouvoir ! ... rendez-moi tout mon bien,
Rendez-moi ce que j'aime ! ... et je serai chrétien!
Sur ma tête soudain retentit le tonnerre,
Et Pauline rouvrit ses yeux à la lumière ! ...
Et des cieux réjouis j'entends les accents !
C'était la voix de Dieu, qui disait; Je t'attends !

With this emotional outburst he sings his first air. "*Que l'onde salutaire / S'épanche sur mon front !*" The words give emphasis to the desire to make his will conform to that of the divine: "*Reçois-moi dans tes bras*".

A christian comes to warn the two men that soldiers are advancing. Néarque stresses that the catacombs are a place of sanctuary but all the same the three promptly enter the cave for safety's sake.

So far the imagery is that of the initiates descending into the darkness of a cave [death] in order to return enlightened by grace. [6] Willingly, in other words, the seeds of faith descend into the earth to germinate and to grow, in time reaching upwards towards the light. Here is implied an union between the earth and the sun, the female and masculine mysteries for both contrive for the seeds to become the plants which will in time bear fruit. There are parables enough in the Scriptures for a knowing audience to have understood the true significance here underlying the text. The theme of the seed is important for it will be known in a wider context in the next scene.

The soldiers seen from afar were guards accompanying a group of Roman girls and slaves (amongst which is Pauline, Polyeucte's wife) bearing flowers and vases filled with water for libations. All gather around the sarcophagus of Pauline's mother and sing a hymn to Proserpina. Perhaps Donizettians will pick up a theme here beloved of the composer – the role

of the dead mother still casting her fate from the grave. Consider for examples *Lucia di Lammermoor* and *Maria di Rohan*. The significance here becomes clear, the dead mother represents the soul's unregenerate bondage with earth mother, casting her pincer-like power of fate and destiny over those who have not yet been regenerated in the waters of baptism. Under the 'mother' in this sense, the soul is still subject to the stars and elemental spirits of the earth and sky. Conversion and baptism liberate the soul from these chains through regeneration. Polyeucte has descended in order that he may ascend, whereas for Pauline's mother's soul there is only Hades the "*beauté mâle*" that "*règne en ton front pâle*" [that is, Proserpina and the lost souls of Hades]. All are prisoners of the dark underworld: "*De ce sombre empire / Soumis à tes lois...*"

Myth relates that Proserpina (Persephone) was raped and taken to the underworld by Hades (Pluton). Her mother Ceres (Demeter) interceded with Jupiter (Zeus) and obtained release for her daugher for six months in a year. Though linked to the mysteries of fertility, Proserpina was universally worshipped as the presider over death and the underworld. Whilst in Hades she survived by eating the seeds of a pomegranate, this in christian imagery became a symbol of the soul's journey through the vale of mortality. The imagery is often to be seen in the patterns of the rich materials used for liturgical vestments.

Thus far librettist and composer have carefully juxtaposed the old with the new. Like Tasso in his *Gerusalemme liberata*, his fellow bergamasc, Donizetti shows respect to the pagans and does not inflict on them a doleful and damning chorus, rather he sympathizes with their level of consciousness. The dualism of black and white, the evil and the good, as may be found in certain librettos of Boito is alien to the teaching Donizetti had received.

Flowers are scattered over the sarcophagus and the libations are poured, soon the ceremony is over. Pauline asks to be left alone. She then addresses her mother's spirit whom she believes sees into the conflict of her heart. Whilst alive her mother had known her lover Sévère and had approved their mutual love and passion. Pauline, though now married to Polyeucte still holds dear memories of her former lover believed to be lost in battle. Polyeucte has a 'noble charactère' but Pauline's passionate life

is still haunted by Sévère. Lost in the world of spiritism, she fervently prays to her mother's soul:

Qu' ici ta main glacée
Bénisse ton enfant
... Et toi, ma mère,
Reviens calmer mon cœur.
Entends ma voix, ma mère
Rends le calme à mon cœur!

This prayer to a soul lost in Hades is immediately contrasted with the prayers of the christians [overheard by Pauline] as Polyeucte is baptized. The contrast of music and words could not be more marked:

Ô toi, notre Pére,
Qui règne sur la terre
Comme dans les cieux...

Pauline is shocked to have over-heard the chants of the 'Nazaréens', a hateful and impious sect. She turns to leave the catacombs but encounters Polyeucte as he emerges from the cave. Has she also come to embrace the faith asks her husband? "*Ô blasphème!... ô sacrilège*" cries Pauline, 'May Jupiter protect us'. She quickly learns to her horror that Polyeucte has embraced Christianity: "*Mes yeux s'ouvrent à la lumière*". Pauline is aghast, how could he fall for an impostor god, one crucified like a thief! She would have readily denounced the sect to her father but how can she now that her own husband is a member of the cult.

As Pauline shouts out anathemas, other christians emerge from the cave and seeing Pauline they gather around her, kneeling and praying for the salvation of her soul which is still caught within the webs of the old pagan mysteries, as well as her passionate love for Sévère.

'The soul, (we are told by St Maximus the Confessor), is made perfect when its powers of passion have been completely directed towards God.' This is the path which lies ahead for Pauline. The words of the prayer: '*Ô lumière éternelle ! / Brille enfin à ses yeux*", penetrate her ears and unwittingly begin to reach her heart.

Note that the theme of light and darkness is again emphasized.

Even with the news reported by the watchers that a merciless proconsul has been reported approaching the city and the desperate pleadings of this wife, Polyeucte cannot renounce "*le Dieu qui m'anime et m'éclaire*". He grasps Pauline to himself and embraces her and prays as a moving ensemble brings the act to a close:

Object de ma constance,
Amour de ton époux,
Que Dieu dans sa clémence,
T'appelle parmi nous.

Here the theme of light, uncreated light which symbolically fills the stage, shows Donizetti and Scribe wishing to show that their work (both words and music) is firmly rooted in the Christian Mysteries. It is orthodox teaching that each and every christian soul is called to share in the light of the Transfiguration, the *theosis*, the 'deification' spoken of by the early Church Fathers:
'Just as the body of the Lord was glorified on the mountain when it was transfigured in the glory of God and in infinite light, so the bodies of the saints will be glorified and shine like lightening... The glory which thou hast given me I have given them (John 17.22). As countless candles are lighted from a single flame so the bodies of all Christ's members will be what Christ is... Our human nature is transformed into the fullness of God; it becomes wholly fire and light.' (Macarius, Fifteenth Homily, 38)
This is the inner, more hidden theme of *Les Martyrs*, and no wonder Berlioz defined the opera as a creed for it takes us right into the realm of ideas which the composer through his education, conviction and adherence to the Cecilian movement held close to his heart.

The second act: This is divided into two scenes, the second stages the ballet.
In his offices of state, Félix, the governor of Armenia and Pauline's father, urges a secretary to transcribe various edicts with respect to the merciless persecution of christians. He passionately invokes the ancient Roman gods to look favourably upon his work. He believes that their 'empire' in the heavens is reflected in the political strength and glory of the Roman

empire below. For Félix there can be no separation between the heavenly and earthly empires. This is the basis of his sense of duty. Presumably the audience is expected to recall Christ's teaching concerning the Kingdom of God which is not of this world but of the spirit; the ruthless ethos of worldly politics being governed by an order alien to the spiritual worlds. The will and glory of success in this life is of a different order to that of the one, true, and only God. '...Many who are first will be last, and the last first' (Matt. 30).
Pauline is shown an edict written in the name of the Emperor Decius asserting that all who baptize or who receive baptism are to be put to death. She fears for her husband's safety. Félix emphasizes that no pity must be shown, the infidels are all without exception to be cast into the agonies of the arena.
Vengeance must be like Jupiter's thunderbolt immediate and devastating. It is clear that Félix represents pride, a man deluded with his self-importance; his gods being but idols of the ever-engrossing twists and turns of the empire's political greed and malice.
St Augustine said: 'We must avoid pride. If it were able to deceive angels, how much more it will be able to scatter human wits'.
Félix becomes aware of a certain sadness in Pauline's face. She explains her grief for her former lover Sévère, thought lost in battle. She has dutifully followed her father's wish and accepted Polyeucte as husband. At the roots of her love for him is the sense of duty. To quote Corneille: "*Je l'aimai par devoir: ce devoir dure encore.*" (Act III, sc.2, line 790) "*Devoir*" does not have the same feel as "*duty*", Nelson's 'England expects' has given the word for the English an unpleasant sense of a naval or military command and being 'on duty'. 'Devoir' is simply that which one must do in order to get through life. It is the essential expression of a moral outlook on life. When a child says, "*Il faut que je fasse mes devoirs*", he means simply that he has to get one with his homework. Hence a mother has a duty towards her child and likewise the child has a duty towards its mother, and so on. 'Devoir', duty, is the essence of a people's 'mœurs', holding relationships together. It is linked to courtesy and the respect of others. In French the noun is the same as the verb and implies that which one must do. In the opera Pauline's sense

of duty is the strength of her personality and it is through commitment to her husband that she matures, discovering that she truly loves Polyeucte far more than the fond memories of Sévère. She says: "*Oui, mon cœur est à lui sans retour*". In an aside she hastily adds that her love has now doubled due to the danger of the imminent persecution.
Here is another useful quotation from Corneille which helps to understand the dignity of Pauline's character:

... Apprends que mon devoir ne dépend point du sien :
Qu'il y manque, s'il veut ; je dois faire le mien.
Quoi ? s'il aimait ailleurs, serais-je dispensée
A suivre, à son exemple, une ardeur insensée ?
(Act III, sc 2, lines 795-798)

Callysthènes, the high priest enters with his entourage. He announces that a young hero, once thought to be lost in battle, recently named a proconsul, is about to enter the city in triumph... his name is Sévère! Left alone Pauline gives expression to her joy. The old flames of passion uncontrollably rise up within her. These she now contrasts to her sense of duty towards her husband. She must find self-control, "*Tais toi! ... tais toi, mon cœur!*" The meaning and role of duty [devoir] and how to respond to its imperative is fundamental to the characters of both father and daughter. However, their response as will be seen in the last act, take two totally different paths. Rightly understood duty leads to God, providing its motivation is grounded in a selfless love [in the sense of *agape*] and centred in the heart [that is, the overcoming of self-will]. A wrong attitude to duty leads to arrogance, persecution and the distruction of the innocent [this is an aspect of Mayr's and Donizetti's concept of the unforgiving and blind anger generated by mortals which ultimately destroys innocence – the "*ira dei mortali*" of *Lucia di Lammermoor*].
The scene now changes for the central square at Melitene where the crowds gather to greet the returning, new proconsul, complete with his military force. The gods of war are praised and thanked for giving Rome their glory. This scene is meant to contrast the glory of this world to that of God which is essentially related to light and enlightenment. Sévère in his public address stresses that he has been sent by the emperor to put

down the pretensions of the new sect called the christians. Then in an aside he recalls the "*Amour de mon jeune âge*" and longs once more to see Pauline. He recognizes Félix, then he sees Pauline, who at this point does not know that he still lives for her alone.
The ballet commences: first a wrestling match between gladiators, then Greek and Roman dances which culminate with a crown being presented to Sévère.
The young proconsul wastes no time in asking after her who "*... j'avais tant aimée, et que toujours fidèle / J'aime plus que jamais*". Next he sees Pauline with Polyeucte and their friends. She introduces her husband, Sévère is thunderstruck:

Je te perds, toi que j'adore,
Je te perds et sans retour,
Et je dois cacher encore
Ma fureur et mon amour !

Polyeucte wastes no time in confronting Sévère concerning the policy of persecution. The answer is that Caesar is to be obeyed [blind duty], to which Polyeucte answers "*Au-dessus de César il est un autre maître*". "*Et lequel ?*" asks Sévère. Pauline makes a sign to Polyeucte and whispers, "*Ah! de grâce* ! ..." Sévère does not get the answer he was expecting for the high priest interrupts and speaks of the recent activities of christians. Sévère's attention is clearly not on such matters for he is still in a state of shock and concerned with Pauline being alongside her husband. The act ends with an ensemble: Polyeucte prays that through his zeal God will eventually draw Pauline to Him; Pauline prays to her gods to guard her husband's tongue and to prolong his days; Sévère returns to his theme of lost love; the christians pray for the conversion of Rome; whilst Callysthènes, Félix and the crowd invoke Jupiter to vanquish the hated sect.
Next Sévère is summoned to the temple and gradually the cortège leaves the stage.
Act two has served to heighten the dramatic tension of the passions waxing and waning between the main protagonists, even the ballet should be conceived to this end, preparing the audience for the dramatic

conclusion of act three and culminating in the final chorus of ecstasy in act four as the Christians enter the arena to endure martydom. We have seen Félix lost in pride and thirsting for persecution; Sévère consumed with passion; Pauline torn between her old love and her new dutiful love; Callysthènes clothed in the spiritual fat with which evil cloaks the intelligence; and Polyeucte aflame with his new-found faith, desiring martyrdom and the snuffing out of his ego.

The passions are the battlefield of the spirit where the basic motives for our actions are thrashed-out and their consequences paid for. In this our thoughts become the 'seeds' of our passionate life; soon impulses emerge from the subconscious to become obsessive and then compulsive. They are forms of self-agrandisement and idolatry. In contrast those who are moved by true love must take a long and penetrating look at their heart and the intentions which lie within. True love eventually ousts the idolatrous usurper and lets the Lord of Glory in; and this is exactly what will happen during the course of the opera to Polyeucte and Pauline, for as true lovers, symbolically they must die together, thereby overcoming their own wills and enabling their union to be born afresh and to life eternal.

The third act: During act three the dramatic tension is further heightened. The first scene represents Pauline's bedroom. Alone she prays to her gods to take from her heart the memory of *"un fatal amour"*. Sévère quietly enters and tells her that he understands how being thought dead she consented to marry another, to which Pauline emphatically answers, *"L'époux que j'ai choisi méritait ma tendresse... Je l'aime !"* Note that choice implies a commitment, duty [devoir]. With a deep sense of rejection Sévère gives expression to his misery:

'En touchant à ce rivage
Tout semblait m'offrir l'image
D'un jour pur et sans nuage,
Doux présage
Du bonheur !
Soudain gronde le tonnerre
Qui dissipe une erreur si chère,
Et je reste sur la terre,
Seul, en proie à ma douleur !'

Pauline pleads with her former lover to leave her, to which he responds that her heart ignores the meaning of love and passion. If only he could see into her heart he would understand so much more. Then in a moment of weakness it is as if Sévère will have his way, but Pauline finally stands back beseeching him: *"Laisse à mon âme un seul espoir, / Le sentiment de son devoir !"*

Sévère is stunned. What is duty in respect of love and passion? However he courteously agrees to leave. Once alone Pauline is far from happy.

The attentive listener to the opera or reader of the libretto will note that Pauline's sense of duty is here linked by her to the soul, the innermost part of her being. It is grounded in a strength quite other than just emotional passion. In the first act she came to her mother's tomb through her loving bond [devoir] with her mother. Indeed, her sense of duty is the result of her parental and educational upbringing, the tradition she has inherited. The exchange of vows freely made with Polyeucte was not something she had undertaken lightly. It is this sense of devotional love which through the power of grace will grow until it is enlightened in the final act.

Polyeucte enters talking to himself, but on seeing Pauline he says that he is outraged at the pomp being lavished on the new proconsul. How can he enter the temple and be asked to sacrifice to false gods? Pauline asks him to put aside all such thoughts and action, does he not love her? His answer is that he certainly loves her with all his being, but may be a little less than God, most certainly more than himself and submits to her wishes:

Mon seul trésor, mon bien suprême,
Tu m'est plus chère que moi-même,
Et Dieu seul partage avec toi
Mon amour et ma foi !

Félix interrupts with the news that Néarque has been arrested for being a christian, furthermore he has confessed to baptizing a new convert but refuses to name him. Fèlix recommends that both do not attend the temple precincts that day in order to witness the spectacle of Néarque's

conviction; he will be brutally tortured until he reveals the name of the newly baptized. As Polyeucte moves forwards to give himself up, Pauline impulsively thrusts herself between him and her father. She hustles her father from the room. Alone Polyeucte gives expression to his resolve. May God breathe upon him the inspiration and courage to embrace a martyr's death. Martyrdom is the expression of Polyeucte's sense of duty and this does not permit compromise.

St John Chrysostom wrote in his *Commentary on the Gospel of St Matthew* (59,5) that, 'We cannot be saved by seeking our own individual salvation; we need to look first to the good of others'. Polyeucte in the story is fortunately saved by God's preventing grace from his own blind zeal which is initially potentially self-centred: first, by his selfless desire to stand besides Néarque in his hour of trial; secondly, by his wish to bring Pauline to enlightenment, thus fulfilling their union not only physically but also spiritually.

[This second theme is of course one dear to Donizetti as we may observe from a good number of his tragic works.]

The Commentary on the Gospel of St Matthew also reads, 'All our friendships ought to be cemented with this one bond, the desire to help one another'. 'The desire to help' is here akin to duty. The love of our neighbour is our devoir.

The scene now becomes the area before the steps leading up to a temple. During an extended choral section priests and vestal virgins prepare an altar with appropriate floral decorations, as tripods, sacred vessels and idols are placed on the temple steps. A sacrificial ritual commences. Vessels are presented to the priest to make the necessary libations, incense is burnt on the tripods. The sacrificial victims [presumably cocks for the Romans followed the Etruscans in this practise] are brought in. The high priest takes the salted cake made from wheat flour and honey, then sprinkles the altar with wine. He then drinks from a chalice, giving the sign for the other priests to immolate their victims so as to expose their entrails, in particular the livers, which are duly consulted for signs and portents. Hands are then washed and the final libations made. During the ceremony a hymn has been sung to the honour of Jupiter. The women emphasize that it is he who crowns the nymphs Flora [flowers]

and Pomona [fruit] giving them their own beauty and fertility in child-bearing. The priests turn to the statue of Jupiter and invoke death to the impure who would defile the ancient rites.

Callysthènes and Sévère witness Néarque being brought forward. 'Here is the victim!' proudly announces the High Priest. His crime? To worship his God. 'Worship him in your soul and you have nothing to fear', emphasizes Sévère. Néarque's crime has been to preach, proselytize and baptise. Who has he recently baptised? Néarque answers that a christian will never betray a friend. As the interrogation heightens, Pauline feels that she is about to faint and at that moment Polyeucte appears and begins to make his way from the temple and down the steps to join the throng beside the altar close to the steps. 'You ask for his accomplice? It is me,' he announces. A stunned horror seizes all present. "*Moi-même* ! ...*moi* !" re-emphasizes Polyeucte.

The gods have been blasphemed, anathemas must be pronounced, due punishment must take place... amidst the shocked voices is heard Polyeucte's prayer:

Feu divin, sainte lumière,
Qui m'embrase et qui m'éclaire,
Je m'élance de la terre,
Et je brave le trépas !
Oui, l'eau sainte du baptême
De la foi vivant emblème,
Me rapproche de Dieu même
Qui du ciel me tend les bras !

Confused, Pauline believes her gods to be clement and therefore approaches Callysthènes, kneeling before him and pleading for her husband's life. Polyeucte takes her by the arm and raises her to her feet and shows her the temple steps on which stands his friend Néarque, prisoner amidst the priests. Pauline still invokes the gods of old as her husband next approaches the idols and sacred vessels on display, casting them to the ground.... "*Tombez, dieux imposteurs* !"

General furore breaks out. Polyeucte shouts out his creed:

Je crois en Dieu, roi du ciel, de la terre,
Seul Dieu puissant, que je crains et révère.
Et devant Lui, dieux d'argile et de pierre,
Tombez, tombez sous mon bras triomphant !
... Ô sainte martyre ! ... Ô pieuse conquête ! ...
Déjà pour nous, déjà la palme est prête ;
Dieu nous appelle et le ciel nous attend !

The terrified Pauline suddenly finds that there are no gods left to implore, for hers seem to have failed her; in despair she invokes the 'Dieu des chrètiens', praying for His mercy. If He would save her beloved, she too would embrace the faith. But Polyeucte and Néarque persist in their defiance of the pagan gods, openly confessing that they are christians. They are arrested and taken into the temple whilst the act ends in general commotion.

The fourth act: A room in the governor of Armenia's house. Félix is sitting next to a table with Pauline kneeling besides him pleading for her husband's life. Félix is adamant, the decree for the arrest of the christians has gone out. For a man like himself who thinks in simple dualistic terms, all are rebels. He ignores that through marriage Polyeucte is part of his own family; he sees only his son-in-law's crime in the eyes of the state. Ironically Pauline pleads with him, saying that her husband has been blinded [today we would say brain-washed], duped by a false god. But for Félix the gods have decreed, and they are the substance and ground of the state, and the emperor, the matter is clear, all is black and white clear, there are no 'ifs' or 'buts'.
Sévère enters and without recognizing Pauline informs Félix that the populace is impatient and murmuring that the governor is no longer being faithful in his duty as a governor of the state. Félix must act, but then on seeing Pauline, he adds, "*Mais vous écouterez les pleurs de votre fille* !" In stark contrast to Pauline's pleadings, Félix insists that the gods and the emperor are to him dearer than his own family. The role of Félix is becoming clearer; he represents a narrow patriarchal mentality which heartlessly understands the law as duty, a blinkered view in which any

sense of enlightenment of the spirit through the stirrings of love are far removed. He is a fundamentalist in his views, for all the rules may be read up in a book and then conveniently put into action without regards to the promptings of the human heart. If Polyeucte and Néarque represent those who are of God and who are growing in the spirit, Félix is the model of those who serve but Caesar. They always have the excuse, 'Oh! I was only doing my duty', regardless of the atrocities committed by their decisions and actions. For the Félixes of this world there can be no growth in the spirit, for their selfhood has found its 'raison d'être' in the rules and ways of the prince of this world.
Pauline turns to Sévère and pleads for her husband's life, recalling their former love. Sévère is vulnerable. Her argument appeals to the classical concept of virtue which is also linked to the concept of duty:

Oui, je le sens, cruelle est ma demande !
Conserver un rival dont vous êtes jaloux,
C'est un trait de vertu qui n'appartient qu'à vous !
Mais plus l'effort est grand, plus la gloire en est grande.

Sévère regardless of the will of the emperor and the clamour of the masses outside succumbs to Pauline's fervent pleading. Félix is furious for those who defend the victim approve the error committed; it is to participate in the crime according to the law of the gods. Sévère will arrange for Pauline to see Polyeucte one last time and to try to make him see sense. An argument breaks out between the new proconsul and the governor, for here is a question of authority Félix's rule is the "*seul règne en cette province*". What he has vowed to the gods may not be spared, and in a moment of rashness adds even if it was to involve his own daughter. [7] As the christians are prepared to die for their God, so he too is prepared to die for his. Again Félix's role representing blind duty is reinforced, furthermore he is tempting providence: "*Qui sert la justice, Sert aussi les dieux.*"
The flow of emotion between the three is interrupted by the sound of shouts from the populace, Sévère emphasizes that even the military could mutiny at such a time. The christians must be thrown to the lions; 'panem et circenses'!

Desperately Félix turns to Pauline and in a moment of leniency he tells her to go to Polyeucte: "*Qu'il se repente* ! ... *et je sauve ses jours* ! *Mais toi seule à nos dieux peux le rendre* !"
Pauline exclaims with emotion: "*Ah* ! *j'y cours* !"
The scene is promptly brought to a conclusion as she rushes from the stage.
The final scene initially takes place in a dungeon of the Arena. Polyeucte wakes from sleep. He has had a refreshing and moving dream in which he saw Pauline rising towards heaven and both he and she prostrate before the Lord. Her comforting words had been:

Ton Dieux sera le mien... et ta vie est ma vie !
.... Ô célestes amours !
Et j'entendais au loin une sainte harmonie,
Et les cieux répetaient... Réunis pour toujours !
Toujours ! ... Toujours ! ... Ah! c'est point un rêve. [8]

Much could be written à propos this brief scene in the context of the Cecilian revival; the role of prayer, dream, vision and the significance of matrimony as sacrament and so on. Here I will limit myself to the union of marriage, for it is a major theme which haunted Donizetti's creative and personal life. It is generally known that after Virginia's death, the composer firmly believed that his wife had become 'una donna angelicata', infusing his memory and soul with hope and his mind with Beatrician symbolism. He could not entertain his own salvation except through union with Virginia and her intercession after her death. For just as Beatrice had been sent to inspire and lead Dante out of the 'selva oscura', so had she been sent to him. He believed that their love and marriage went beyond death and had been the foretaste of eternal union. Look again at those words of Scribe. It is possible to imagine the composer leaning over the librettist insisting on the threefold "toujour !", united for ever, to eternity. This is not too far fetched because letters show that Donizetti, whenever he could, influenced his poets.
By the sacrament of marriage there is to be understood an ideal, as well as, a physicality of relationship. The ideal which lovers initially project on each other is in essence nothing less by a veiled vision of the heavenly beauty. In the last analysis the lover and the beloved can be but the

mystery of the Deity itself – God, Trinity but One. [The fact of relationship is at the heart of the Christian understanding of the Deity, hence the doctrine of the Trinity.]
Likewise in sacramental marriage we find the mystery of the recipient – Mary, the Shekinah [that is, the Divine Presence], the Church, the individual soul, the mystery of incarnation, all of which imply the will, and sacrement. For gradually the first narcissistic ideal shared between the lovers is pruned away due to the 'commedia' of life through which we all have to pass, until the realization is made [as with Dante and Donizetti] that the beloved has been and is no other than the divine mystery itself.
Regarding the physical aspect, though the lovers relate in union as one, it is the human virtues and failings of daily life which become through grace the steps of growth. Nothing is lost, every breath and action of each day are caught up with an eventual fuller 'knowing' of each other. Through the other the mystery is unveiled, for just as Hosea, the prophet of old, who learnt the nature of God's love through his marriage, so each and every marriage is particular to the individuals involved and their unique pilgrimage. Clearly no two journeys are alike.
This is the deeper truth binding Polyeucte and Pauline, for they know that they are one, and neither can imagine separation from the other. Pauline arrives at this through her dutiful and devoted [*devoir* and *dévouer* are closely linked] commitment to her marriage vows; Polyeucte through his enlightenment and duty to his Lord. Nothing is more important for him than for Pauline to become a christian and thereby deepen his own faith and realization of the mystery of union.
It is this deeper understanding ["*Réunis pour toujours* !"] that this last scene unravels, concluding in the ecstatic hymn ["*O sainte melodie* !"] sung by the lovers. Symbolically it is important to note that as the opera ends, the hymn is sung by *all* the christians as they enter the arena to face martyrdom [witness]. The love binding Polyeucte and Pauline is no other than the love which binds the whole Mystical Body itself! The mystery of their own bridal chamber has been no other than a foretaste of the Heavenly Bridal Chamber. In christian iconography Mary is said to be the 'the Bridal Chamber of Immortality' [9] and this helps to illuminate

the deep mystery of marriage which is said to signify Christ's love for his Church. The maturing through relationship for the lovers reveals that their two wills unravel for them both the meaning and mystery of the wills of Christ and Mary – 'Thy Will be done'. Mary's 'Be it unto me according to Thy Word' and Christ's 'Nevertheless not my will be done but Thine'.

Donizetti with his love of Dante might well have quoted here the Florentine's realization grounded in Augustinian theology, 'In His Will is our peace'. Our human, frail, fallible love becomes the ground for the knowing of the Will that governs the stars, the sun and the heavens themselves.

But to return to our story, Pauline enters the prison and the two lovers embrace:

Mon époux ! ... Polyeucte !
Ah !, je priais pour toi ! (*answers Polyeucte*)
Je veux sauver tes jours

(that is the years of mortality allotted to each one of us, for as yet Pauline does not know the mystery of regeneration and eternal life.)

To which Polyeucte answers: "*Je veux sauver ton âme... / L'éclairer aux rayons d'une céleste flamme* !"

Once more we note the theme of light and the necessary flame bestowing light. A popular emblem of the period was that of a moth attracted by the light of a candle. The symbolism is obvious, the moth which becomes dust represents our mortality; the light and the flame represent the immortality with which we have to identify through death. [The moth is scorched and eventually dies in the heat of the flame.]

Polyeucte fervently prays for Pauline's conversion. At first she accuses him of beguiling her ["... *tu veux donc me séduire* ?"]. No, responds her husband, I wish to lead you along the paths of immortality ["... *je veux vous y conduire* !"].

Such thoughts are for her still "*Vaines illusions*". No, answers her husband, they are "*Célestes vérités !*". The act of faith for Pauline is an "*Etrange aveuglement !*". No, it is the receiving of "*Éternelles clarités !*".

The act of turning *metania* from the realm of mortality to the kingdom of

immortality is a gift which is given providing there is rooted in the recipient's heart a right will *devoir*; thus it is that Polyeucte prays:

Ô Dieu que j'adore !
Ô Dieu qu'elle ignore !
Descends! je t'implore !
Et parle à son coeur !

Mystical light and harmony then begin to penetrate the prison, and *avec la plus grande émotion* grace is at last poured into Pauline's heart:

Lumière immortelle,
A moi se révêle !
Une ardeur nouvelle
Embrasse mon sein !...

Polyeucte beholds the truth of enlightenment in his wife's eyes [the windows of the soul]: "*La foi sainte brille à tes yeux* !"

Pauline kneels and Polyeucte places his hands on her head: "*Des mains d'un époux sois chrétienne / Et que ma voix t'ouvre les cieux*". The deep mystical union of marriage is known and the lovers break out spontaneously as if they were speaking with tongues with their great hymn of praise "*Ô sainte mélodie* !". [10]

Guards enter and try in vain to separate the lovers from their embrace and of their own free will they make their way to the ordeal of martyrdom. As they move so does the scene change without interruption. Shouts for action and blood herald the arena as the crowds jostle for space and the best view. The lions are being held back in their cages. Callysthènes is beside himself with anticipation. Félix observes that Pauline has not yet joined him and Sévère. The christians are brought into the arena all dressed in white. Father and ex-lover are shattered to see Pauline next to Polyeucte: "*Que fais-tu, ma fille* ?"

Pauline answers:

... Mon devoir !
Notre Dieu, notre foi sont les mêmes,
Et je dois [devoir] partager son trépas ! [11]

"Mon devoir" has not here the ring of dull duty, for she has at last totally broken with the moral imperative linked to her father's dualistic view and has embraced the law of love and forgiveness. Her words have the grasp of Gerontius's "My soul is in my hand: I have no fear..." Sévère pleads with Pauline without success and the lovers in ecstasy exclaim:

Unis sur la terre,
Unis dans les cieux !
Pour vous, pour mon père,
Nous prions tous deux.

Their life is now being drawn into the mystery of prayer, the life of Heaven. [12] There now follows an interesting exchange in which Sévère pleads with Pauline for the sake of her father to reconsider her decision, whilst Félix's words are:

Je te perds, ô ma Fille chérie
Rien ne peut t'arracher à l'erreur !
Et par moi tu vas perdre la vie.
Ô ma fille ! Ô devoir ! Ô douleur !

Together the two men exclaim: "... *Ah ! d'un père, / Par pitié, respectez la douleur* !"
The dichotomy here of the word *douleur* is quite amazing, but it stresses the void between the kingdom of Caesar and that of God, that they are essentially two worlds of consciousness, one linked to mortality and the other to regeneration and everlasting life. Félix and Sévère will remain in their douleur unredeemed, trapped in the underworld of mortality, whereas Polyeucte and Pauline will pass through the agony of martyrdom and death into the hands of their Lord and Redeemer. The christian's continue to sing their hymn as the ferocious beasts are let loose to the wild cheers of the crowd:

Gloire à Toi, nôtre Père !
Pour Toi, le seul vrai Dieu !
Nous disons à la terre
Un' éternel adieu !

St John Chrysostomus wrote in his *Homilie on Lazarus:*
'Think of actors, they wear masks, they dress up... These disguises help to create an illusion, to hide the reality. The world is a theatre too. The human condition, richness, poverty, power, subjection are merely the pretences of actors [that is, we must be wary of the roles we engage in order to act out our days].
But when the day is done and the night falls ... when the play is over, when we all find ourselves confronted with our own actions and not with the riches or dignity or the honours we have had or the power we have wielded, when we are asked to give an account of our lives and our works of virtue, ignoring the feats of our opulence and the humility of our need, when we are asked: "Show me your deeds!", then the disguises will fall and we shall see who is truly rich and who is truly poor.'
Compare St John Chrysostom's thought with Donizetti's own on the nature of death in the first three paragraphs of letter No 555 in Zavadini. [They are translated on pages 136 and 137 of my English book on Donizetti.] The similarity of thought is outstanding. A great Saint and a humble composer find themselves united in thought.
Donizetti's cultural world is still waiting to be taken seriously by musicologists. The sooner they recognize what lies dormant in his art, the better, for we might then be able to look forward to more sensitive and authentic performances of his work.

The quotations from the Church Fathers are taken from *Drinking from the Hidden Fountain: a Paristic Breviary* by THOMAS SPIDLIK, London 1992. [Breviario Patristico, Turin, 1971.]

1. *Atalia* [San Carlo, Naples 10/3/1822] unquestionably dates from before 1822 and may be a reworking of *Gioas salvato* which it is said was performed between 1816-17 at the Teatro Carolino, Palermo. Donizetti in ZAVADINI n. 11 writes: 'Si aspetta adesso a rappresentarlo [*Atalia*] dopo tre anni che è scritto... in un momento il più sfavorevole che sia'. Donizetti is here referring to poor singers and Rossini's lamentable approach to the work as maestro concertatore. The story of the boy king Joash [Gioas] and the evil queen Athalia is the same tale.
2. When I write *La Favorite*, I definitely refer to the original French version and not the unsatisfactory Italian *La favorita* which betrays the genius of the work. We are most grateful to Casa Ricordi and Rebecca Harris Warrick for a long overdue critical edition which at last may put to right the many wrongs done to this opera over many, many years.
3. I use these terms in the sense of the School of Chartres rather than as they are to be found in Jungian thought.
4. For a more complete discussion of the concepts that lie dormant in the opera, see pp. 177-181 of my book, *Donizetti in the light of Romanticism and the teaching of Johann Simon Mayr*, Shaftesbury, 1991.
5. The role of Félix is a much more important role than that of Felice in *Poliuto*: this is in keeping with Corneille's play; however, unlike the play which ends with Félix converting to Christianity and Sévère promising an enlightened and tolerant governorship, we have a role of hatred and malevolence towards the new faith. For example in the opera he is torn between duty and love for his daughter. His last words as to be quoted later on in the text are:

'Je te perds, ô ma fille chérie
Rien ne peut t'arracher à l'erreur !
Et par moi tu vas perds la vie.
Ô ma fille! Ô devoir! Ô douleur !
...Par pitié, respectez la douleur.'

Whereas Corneille gives Felix words of great dignity which conclude the play:
"Nous autres, bénissons notre heureuse aventure:
Allons à nos Martyrs donner la sépulture,
Baiser leurs corps sacrés,
les mettre en digne lieu,
Et faire retenir partout le nom de Dieu".
(Act V, sc 6, lines 1811-1814)

6. In Christian iconography the cave is an essential image to be found in the Nativity; beneath the cross at Calvary; the sepulchre; the victory over Hades [The Resurrection, in the West the icon is referred to as The Descent into Limbo]. The cave is also a symbol of the human heart which must give birth to Christ and begin to radiate the uncreated light of God's Glory... the mystery of the Transfiguration.
7. Here is the theme of the nature of vows and vows undertaken. It was popular at the time of the opera's writing; for example, the novel *I promessi sposi* by Alessandro Manzoni, the second edition [version] of which was published in Paris. Manzoni and Mayr were both in their separate ways pillars of the Church's 'aggiornamento' of the times. There is no way in which Donizetti could have ignored Manzoni's work and thought for they were both of the same intellectual family.
8. This scene [as well as many others!] was missing from the old printed parts from which the 1975 London revival was played and which I insisted was restored due to the overall symbolism to be found in the libretto of the opera and which for sure was close to Donizetti's heart. Not having the original manuscript to hand, Polyeucte's vocal line was sung over the orchestra's strings following faithfully the piano-vocal score. The dramatic effect was stunning and such

cuts restored endorse my view that a critical version now needs to be made from Donizetti's manuscript for the full beauty of this neglected masterpiece to be recognized.

9. Quoted from one of the canticles for Matins of the Annunciation according to the Eastern Rite.
10. The melody is that of *Poliuto* and the words are basically Scribe translating Cammarano. It is important to note here that Donizetti on reading the original words in Cammarano's autograph immediately drafted the melody besides the words so as not to forget it. Here is an example showing how the composer was deeply involved with his opera, for he certainly found his own love for Virginia embodied in both story and words. Though Scribe recast, as we have seen, much of Cammarano's [and Nourrit's!] libretto, the French text is marked 'paroles traduites par M. E. Scribe'.
11. That is, her faith is her husband's and vice-versa, she can do no other than be united with him in this his supreme hour of trial and certain death.
12. Donizetti believed profoundly in power of prayer. See for example not only his letters but also the illustrations of his icons and the prayer that he carried sown into his jacket next to his heart. These are illustrated in my book, *Donizetti in the light of Romanticism and the teaching of Johann Simon Mayr*, Shaftesbury, 1991.



Les Martyrs

Opera in quattro atti di Eugène Scribe
Musica di GAETANO DONIZETTI
(in forma d'oratorio - in lingua francese)
(ed. H. Lemoine & C. Paris)

Personaggi	Interpreti
Félix	LUIGI RONI
Pauline	LEYLA GENCER
Polyeucte	MARIO DI FELICI
Sévère	RENATO BRUSON
Callisthènes	VINCENZO SAGONA
Néarque	RENATO CAZZANIGA
Un Chrétien	OSLAVIO DI CREDICO
Grand Prêtre	AMBROGIO RIVA
Une femme	N. N.

Maestro Concertatore Direttore
ADOLFO CAMOZZO
Maestro del Coro VALENTINO METTI
Maestro Collaboratore GASTONE DE AMBROGI

Orchestra della Regione Lombardia (Ente Pomeriggi Musicali)
Artisti del Coro del Teatro « G. Donizetti »
Consulente linguistico per il Coro: ANGELO PESENTI

Locandina della prima esecuzione in Italia di *Les Martyrs* (Bergamo, Teatro Donizetti, 22 settembre 1975) Bergamo