

BERLIOZ AND VIRGIL

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LES TROYENS AND THE AENEID

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I, hereby certify that the work embodied in this thesis is the result of original research and has not been submitted for a higher degree to any other University or Institution.

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Signed

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The relationship between Les Troyens and the Aeneid

SYNOPSIS

Berlioz based the libretto of his five-act Grand Opera Les Troyens on books II, the second half of I, and IV of the Aeneid of Virgil, and set it to music which illuminates his vision of Virgil's epic poem. This thesis compares the story patterns, narrative techniques, themes and content of the two works.

Because Virgil uses the technique of retrospective narrative in Book II of the Aeneid, and Berlioz unfolds his story in chronological order, I have used the sequence of Berlioz's work as the basis for the comparison. The thesis analyses in detail Berlioz's re-use of Virgil, the points where Berlioz's treatment coincides with Virgil's, the points where he diverges from Virgil, and the main thrust of Berlioz's argument.

The two most important differences which emerge between the two works are the divergent ideas on the gods, and on the conflict between personal love and duty. Whereas pietas and filial duty are central to Virgil's work, the importance of love between man and woman is central to that of Berlioz. And in Les Troyens the terrific tension between love and duty is illuminated in Act V, where Aeneas must leave Dido even though Berlioz has shown in Act I, with Cassandra and Coroebus, that, fate permitting, such a love can be duty as well.

Virgil shows us the gods at work, and carefully attempts to explain their motivation. Berlioz however structures his music-drama so that the gods, only one of whom (Mercury) makes an appearance, are shown to be cruel by their complete indifference to those who invoke them.

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INTRODUCTION

Berlioz says in his Memoirs: "it was Virgil who first found the way to my heart and opened my budding imagination, by speaking to me of epic passions for which instinct had prepared me."¹

And Hugh Macdonald comments:²

Berlioz's passion for Virgil was aroused in childhood. In his early maturity he appears to have given less thought to Virgil than to his other literary idols, especially Shakespeare; but by 1850 we may detect the first stirrings of a large scale conception based on the early books of the Aeneid which was to bear fruit in the composition of Les Troyens between 1856 and 1858.

Berlioz says:

Four years earlier (i.e. in 1856) in Weimar, while talking with Princess Wittgenstein..... - I was drawn on to speak of my admiration for Virgil and of the idea I had conceived of a vast opera on the Shakespearean plan, based on the second and fourth books of the Aeneid.³

Berlioz wrote the libretto between April, 1856 and 26th June, 1856.

During this time he completed, as well as the words, the music of No. 37 (the love duet which concludes Act IV). The remainder of the music was composed between August, 1856 and 12th April, 1858.

My detailed consideration of Virgil's Aeneid and Berlioz's Les Troyens is primarily concerned with the relationship between Virgil's epic poem and Berlioz's work in its five-act form as presented in the main text of the New Edition.

Berlioz made several alterations to the score; those created in order to allow separate performances of Acts I-II and III-V as self-contained operas are obviously not relevant to this study, and I shall only discuss scenes or numbers which Berlioz discarded where they are relevant to my consideration of the relationship between the Aeneid and the "ideal" form of the work which the New Edition presents.⁴

Les Troyens has been described as a five-act grand opera.⁵ Berlioz called his work Opéra en cinq actes.⁶ He also described it as a lyric poem⁷ and referred to it as "mon grand opéra Les Troyens"^{7a}

This thesis supports the opinion of W.J. Turner, who said "Les Troyens is not an opera in the ordinary sense; it is something much rarer, described by Berlioz himself as a tragédie lyrique."⁸

In fact, David Cairns, in his Editor's Introduction to his translation of the Memoirs says "Berlioz had many roots - in eighteenth century tragédie lyrique....."⁹ These descriptions, poème lyrique and tragédie lyrique seem to lead naturally to Jacques Barzun's description of Les Troyens as "Virgilian Music Drama".¹⁰

Throughout my dissertation I shall refer to Les Troyens as a tragédie lyrique (lyric tragedy) in order to place special emphasis on the sincerity and integrity with which Berlioz approached the tasks of setting Virgil and of writing music drama, in spite of his obligation to conform to the dictates of the Paris Opera.¹¹

The aim of my dissertation is to compare the narrative techniques, story patterns, and implications of the two works. It will be understood that I see the Aeneid and Les Troyens from a special viewpoint, one which is alert to the extremely close relationship between them. As a result, I present their two visions side by side, rather than concentrating my whole attention at any one time on either the Aeneid or Les Troyens. And since my dissertation is comparative, it does not attempt to provide a full treatment of either work in itself.

My discussion aims to unfold the similarities and differences between the epic poem and the tragédie lyrique, and I only discuss the musical

aspects of the tragédie lyrique when these are relevant to and illuminate the establishment of the relationship between the Aeneid and Les Troyens.

Berlioz had to adapt Virgil's text very carefully, so that his audience (of whom he had a very low opinion¹²) would receive a clear-cut impression of events.

He also made occasional notes, in his score, of the lines of Virgil which inspired parts of the action or text, and these are noted and integrated with my argument.

I have used the sequence of Berlioz's work as a basis for the comparison, taking the reader through the fifty-two numbers as they occur, and providing, for each of the five acts, a concise introduction which summarises Berlioz's re-use of Virgil, the points where Berlioz's treatment coincides with that of Virgil, those points where he diverges from Virgil, and the main thrust of Berlioz's argument.

It has been necessary to approach my work in this way, firstly because Virgil employs the device of retrospective narrative in A.II-III¹³ whereas Berlioz unfolds the events in chronological order. Secondly, while some of Berlioz's scenes and numbers correspond closely with Virgil, many, while being inspired by Virgil, present the events and characters in a very different way. The reasons for and effects of these widely divergent treatments will be discussed in each chapter and during my conclusion to this work.

Berlioz's style consists of a constant use of vivid and immediately obvious dramatic contrasts - the musical contrasts are often as subtle as

the contrasts in Virgil's poetry - and it is by this means, at least partly, that Berlioz translates the epic poem into musico-dramatic form.

In a letter to Leon Carvalho, July 15, 1863 Berlioz says "Nous ne mettons pas en scène L' Abbé Delille mais Virgile, et Virgile Shakespearianise"¹⁴

Berlioz certainly felt that his opera should resemble a Shakespearean tragedy (see above, note 3). And indeed the opera itself shows many signs of being influenced by Shakespeare (see Nos 2, 12, 36, 37, 39, 40, 42, 52). There is also evidence of direct or indirect influence of some other dramatists and poets - principally Euripides (see Nos 14, 15, 16), Homer (see Nos 6, 16), Seneca (see No.46), Racine (see Nos 24, 45), Webster (see No.42), and the Roman historian Livy (see No.44).

These influences will be discussed as they occur, since they have a considerable effect on the closeness of the relationship between Les Troyens and the Aeneid.

The books of the Aeneid which Berlioz has set, are, in order, II, the second half of I, and IV, with fragments of or ideas from books III, VI, and XII included. I shall discuss his omissions during the course of my argument and as part of my conclusion, especially since Berlioz frequently created new material to compensate for his omissions.

Since Virgil wrote his Aeneid towards the end of the first century B.C. and Berlioz wrote his Les Troyens during the nineteenth century A.D., some of the differences between the two works will simply be the result of the differences between two cultures. These will be discussed briefly as they occur, and during the conclusion.

I have not been able to acknowledge all individual points of disagreement between myself and other scholars. Indeed, the literature on Virgil alone is so vast that it would be almost impossible to read all of it during a lifetime, let alone the time allowed for research at doctoral level. I hope that where my interpretation of either or both works is at variance with those of other scholars, my viewpoint will be adequately supported by positive arguments in the thesis. My interpretation is in no way intended to invalidate the interpretation of others, but to stand beside them as an additional perspective.

The Virgilian scholars to whom my general line of argument owes most are R.D. Williams, R.G. Austin, K. Quinn and G. Highet, while the discussion of Les Troyens tends to be close to the viewpoints adopted by J. Barzun and D. Cairns.

1. D. Cairns, trans. The Memoirs of Berlioz, (Panther, London, 1970), p.39.
2. Hector Berlioz, New Edition of the Complete Works, ed. Hugh Macdonald (Bärenreiter, ^{Basel} Basel, Paris, London, 1970) p.755. (Hereafter N.B.E.)
3. The Memoirs, p.596.
4. All of Berlioz's alterations, rejections, and additions are found in Les Troyens, Supplement Volume 2C. Full details of the dates of composition of Les Troyens, its origins, sources, and most significant problems are found in this work, and many of the same are found in the Preface to the Eulenberg Edition of the study score of Les Troyens, 1973.
5. N.B.E., p.755.
6. Title page of privately printed vocal score (1861) Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, Rés. 1790; title page of autographic libretto, with inscription to Rosina Stolz (Paris, Bibliothèque de l' Opéra, Rés.589).

7. Memoirs. pp.597, 598.
8. J.W. Turner, Berlioz: The Man and His Work. (J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd. London, 1934) p.304.
9. Memoirs. p.7.
10. Jacques Barzun, Berlioz and the Romantic Century. Vol.II. "Virgilian Music Drama" (Columbia University Press, N.Y. and London, 1969) Ed.III. *
11. See Memoirs pp.575, 576, 596, 598, 599, 601, 603, 604.
12. See Memoirs pp.577, 579-80, 584, 591, 592.
13. All references to Les Troyens will be by number, from No.1 to No.52 inclusive, and by bar-lines within these numbers. References to the Aeneid will take the form of A. followed by a Roman numeral designating the particular book of the Aeneid, followed by arabic figures indicating the line number(s).
e.g. the Aeneid, Book II, line 426 will appear as A.II.426.
To avoid confusion, Latin forms have been used for all proper names whether the reference is to the Aeneid or to Les Troyens.
14. Jacques Barzun, Nouvelles Lettres de Berlioz 1830-1868 (Greenwood Press, Publishers, Westport, Connecticut. Second Edition, 1974), p.420.

* However, the strong Shakespearean influence, which Berlioz
(see p.10.)
acknowledged, and which this thesis makes a particular
point of bringing out, adds an element quite foreign to this
genre.