



TEXTS/TRANSLATIONS & NOTES

1 La promessa di Beatrice 3:55

Inghirlandato, in nere note sante
tu scanderai le stelle al sommo cielo
come va in paradisi un cuore amante,

perché so che nel palpito ed anelito
tutta la luce a te raggia e squaderna
un dio togliendo dell'enigma il velo.

Laureled one, in black sacred notes
you will touch the stars at heaven's summit
as a loving heart reaches paradise,

because I know that in the palpitation and yearning
all light shines on you and a deity spreads open
the veil removing the enigma.

This is Cerantola's response to Dante's entreaty in Purgatorio, XXXI: 33-38, in which Beatrice's attendants ask that she reveal to the pilgrim the truths that he has been seeking.

2 Né più la luce 4:45

Né più la luce o l'ombra
ti feriranno/infieriranno, Ernesto,
nella quiete/celeste chiarezza,
ma il silenzio perpetuo ora a disperdere
l'umano trapestio spietato-infesto
ti pacifica il sonno e ti disgiunge
il dubbio estremo poi
che all'armonia su nell'eliso verde
d'altro ritmo inudito
il limine di nostra inattività
/morgana e sortilegio oltrepassasti
attendendo che noi
ad uno ad uno un dì senza contrasti
veniamo al tuo convito.

No more will light or shadow
hurt you, Ernesto,
in the quiet / heavenly clarity,
but perpetual silence now dispersing
the ruthless-infested human travesty
pacifying your slumber and clearing away
the doubt extreme so that
to the harmony above in the elisian green
and a rhythm never before heard
beyond the threshold of our insignificance
sorcery and witchcraft you did pass
waiting that we
one by one one day without differences
come to your banquet.

This is dedicated to Barone Ernesto Rubin de Cervin Zenobio Albrizzi of Venice, a schoolmate of Cerantola, a great humanitarian and intellectual, composer and founder of the New Venetian School of composition, and dear friend. Ernesto passed away in April of 2013. Both the poem and setting were written in his memory. The optical phenomena of light and shadow refer to the near total blindness that overtook him during the last 15 years of his life.

3 Gloria 4:15

Gloria del giorno il vespero vermiglio
se folgorasti in metro di battaglie:
gloria dei cieli se tra nuvolaglie
splende la luna come un bianco giglio.

The red evening is the glory of the day
as you would shine in the rhythm of battles:
the moon is the glory of the heavens
as it glows amidst clouds like a white lily.

This piece is excerpted and adapted from the larger work Sequenza del Vespero Vermiglio mentioned above.

4 Parodia alla Sestina: OPERISTICA (Luce è donna!) 14:57

Grasse o magrotte, vecchie o fresche
all'ombra
del casinetto a Don Giovanni i colli
roseo-rotondi e fervida pur l'erba
non negheranno, poi che a tutte il verde
d'amor ne intenerisce in cuor la pietra,
ed è qual piuma instabile la donna.

Eternità in amor giura la donna
e già del tradimento ordisce l'ombra:
canta la Dorabella esser di pietra
e scoglio in mar la Fiordiligi colli
estranei spasimanti, e l'angue verde
lasciano entrar nel lor giardino d'erba.

Or che gelida borea uccide l'erba
e il chiuso morbo lei, tenta la donna
rinnovare all'amor l'età più verde,
e Rodolfo a Mimì già vede l'ombra
trascolorare il volto e i cerei colli,
calar sugli occhî inesorata pietra.

O principessa del Catai, la pietra
che il fiore opprime a te, che schiaccia l'erba,
perché non stempri finalmente colli
stordimenti d'amor, come ogni donna,
se, disvelata degli enigmi l'ombra,
viene a te Calaf nella notte verde?

Ove alla cieca Venere più il verde
piacque rapir degli anni, arida pietra
americana, Des Grieux nell'ombra
vede Manon discendere: non erba,
non acqua e trine morbide alla donna
ma disperato sol, deserti colli.

Un fil di fumo in mar vede dai colli
di Nagasaki la musmè e il tè verde
filtra a colui che l'ebbe un giorno donna;
ed ecco giunge e in petto ha solo pietra:
ne sente il passo Butterfly sull'erba
e già stilo di sangue bagna l'ombra.

Croce e delizia, pietra e vento, ed ombra
giù nella valle e luce ai colli è donna:
muta dal verde al bruno come l'erba.

Young or old, sturdy or slender,
they will not deny Don Giovanni
the hills round and rosy or the glade
in the shadow of his little house,
as love's green after all softens even
a heart of stone, destabilizing it as a
feather.

She swears love for eternity
as betrayal lurks in the shadows:
Dorabella sings of being made of stone,
Fiordiligi of being a sea wall,
yet the sway of foreign suitors
allows the green snake into the garden.

As the boreal ice kills the grass
and encloses her in malady, she
attempts to renew youth and love,
yet Rodolfo already sees Mimi's
colorlessness of face and waxiness of
feature, to wither and lapidify inexorably
before his eyes.

O Princess of Cathay, stone
that crushes the inner flower, that flattens
the grass, why not at last let stunning love
sweeten you, like every woman, when -- the
mystery of mysteries revealed -- Calaf
comes to you in the green night?

Where Venus in blind pleasure
kidnapped the green of the years,
arid American desert, De Grieux see
Manon descend into the shadow: no mossy
blanket, no soft lace or relief from thirst for
her, just sun-scorched desperation, barren
hills.

From the hills Nagasaki the musmè sees a
wisp of smoke in the bay and filters green
tea for him who had a woman one day;
and behold, he arrives and has only
hardness in his breast: Butterfly senses his
step on the ground as shadow bathes the
bloody dagger.

Woman is Crux and delight, stone and
wind, shadow in the valley and light in the
hills: she changes the green to the brown
like the grass.

I used this “sestimento” as a mirror to hold up to opera’s negative type-casting of woman: she is easily flattered and seduced; she professes eternal love while contemplating betrayal; she is frail; if she is not frail or promiscuous, she is heartless and cruel; she is prey; as prey, she conjures and is dealt violence; and if she manages to survive all this, she just dries up and ages like the grass when it turns to brown in the fall.

In composing the monodrama, I set for myself six rubrics to follow:

- 1) that the number 6 would be represented rhythmically, intervallically, or in some other musical way in each passage, even each measure;*
- 2) that the poet’s references to Mozart and Puccini and their operatic characters should cue my culling of their scores for musical material associated with such characters, particularly those examples that melodically feature the interval of the sixth;*
- 3) that beyond these references, I might draw from related examples, for instance, Sesto’s aria in Handel’s Julius Caesar in which he sings about the snake, or the Schlange motif from Tamino’s first scene in The Magic Flute, Liszt’s Dante Sonata, Brahms’s “My Love is Green,” etc;*
- 4) that musical associations connected with geographic location and national identity be included, so that the Principessa verse uses the pentatonic scale (China), the Manon verse quotes “America the Beautiful” and the Dixieland tune “Louisiana,” the Butterfly verse uses a Japanese scale that compares to the Phrygian mode, and so on;*
- 5) that the structure of the whole resemble the flow of recitatives and arias in an opera, and that each verse be treated with stylistic difference – the first is a web of quotations, the second is more of an arioso that develops canonically, the third is frozen in atonal sonorities, the fourth is the pentatonic cantabile, the fifth the Manon quodlibet, much of which is spoken rather than sung, the sixth features a treble pedal point that casts a sword of Damocles sense of suspense over the whole section (erupting ultimately into some very nasty chords that accompany the singer’s climactic outcry about a knife bathed in blood), and the finale (the terzetto verse) presents a Rockabilly transformation of Don Giovanni’s “champagne aria;”*
- 6) that in this context which more often than not shows women in a position of compromised social status, a feminist slant should prevail – just before the final cadence, Donna Anna’s “Or sai” motif dominates Don Giovanni’s slithering melody (“Già cade il sciagurato”), and of course, the soprano appropriating and re-texting the aria in which he brags about augmenting his list completely turns the tables. One of the most precious moments in the piece comes in the Principessa section as the words “ogni donna” are sung. And for the ending, the idea of woman changing from green to brown like grass is manipulated so that she changes (still like the grass) from brown to green again. Green of course we*

associate with Dante's Beatrice, who ushers him through the realms of light. And retrieving an earlier suggestion in the poem, "Operistica" finishes by affirming "luce è donna."

5 Paean 6:16

This piano solo piece was written for my dear friends Eva and Dr. Benn Sah to commemorate their 50th wedding anniversary in 2016. It recalls the duet "O namenlose Freude" from Beethoven's *Fidelio*, in which Leonora and Florestan thank God for the gift of conjugal love, reunion and joy.

6 Notturmo elidiano 6:34

This nocturne dates from 1988. The title alludes to the main character Elide in Claudio Saltarelli's libretto *La Canzon della Veglia*, but the piece drifts tangentially, presenting itself as an Elysian reverie about a musical hero – Chopin.

7 (I, madly struggling, cry) 13:37

commissioned by the PostClassical Ensemble, Washington, D.C. for their Whitman Bicentennial program at the National Cathedral

The text assembled for "(I, madly struggling, cry)" draws from Whitman poems and other writings, most centrally *Proud Music of the Storm* and *Passage to India*, which deal with themes of immigration, righteous government, and what it truly means to be "a teeming nation of the nations." Two lines from *The New Colossus* by Emma Lazarus are also incorporated. The piece opens in recitative style, with some lines spoken. This settles into a "Welcome" aria that invites people of all lands to America. After a robust interlude that calls the soul to action, a spirited "Where" section ensues, which describes the attributes of a "great city" that stands as "friend and home-giver to the whole earth." My thanks to Brian Yothers for his invaluable guidance.

Restriction of immigration?

I have no fear for America -- not in the slightest!

America is for one thing only -- and if not that for what?

Let this principle never drift away from us:

America must welcome all -- all yearning to breathe free,

America must welcome all -- all, without exceptions,

be an asylum for all who choose to come,

be a teeming nation of the nations.

Give me to hold all sounds, (I, madly
struggling, cry,)

Fill me with all the voices of the earth,

Endow me with their throbbings --

Utter -- pour in -- for I would take them all.

Lo, soul! seest thou not?

The people to become brothers and sisters,

The races, neighbors, to marry and be given in marriage,
the distant brought near,

The lands to be wedded together.

Welcome are all earth's lands, each for its kind;

Welcome are lands of pine and oak;

Welcome are lands of the lemon and fig;

Welcome are lands of gold;

Welcome are lands of wheat and maize -- welcome those of the grape;

Welcome are lands of sugar and rice;

Welcome the cotton-lands -- welcome those of the white potato and sweet potato;

Welcome are mountains, flats, sands, forests, prairies;

Welcome the rich borders of rivers, table-lands, openings;

Welcome the measureless grazing-lands—welcome the teeming soil of orchards, flax,
honey, hemp;

Welcome just as much the other more hard-faced lands.

Welcome are all earth's lands, each for its kind;

Welcome...Welcome...

Away, O soul! the blood burns in my veins!

Away, O soul! Have we not stood here like trees in the ground long enough?

Have we not grovell'd here long enough, eating and drinking like mere brutes?

Have we not darken'd and dazed ourselves long enough?

The great city stands

Where thrift is in its place, and prudence is in its place;

Where the slave ceases, and the master of slaves ceases;

Where the headsman withdraws and becomes useless;

Where the populace rise at once against the never-ending audacity of elected persons;

Where fierce men and women pour forth, as the sea to the whistle of death pours its
sweeping and unript waves;

Where outside authority enters always after the precedence of inside authority;

Where the citizen is always the head and ideal—and President, Mayor, Governor, and

what not, are agents for pay;
Where children are taught to be laws to themselves, and to depend on themselves;
Where equanimity is illustrated in affairs;
Where speculations on the Soul are encouraged;
Where women walk in public processions in the streets, the same as the men,
Where they enter the public assembly and take places the same as the men;
The great city stands, friend and home-giver of the whole earth,
America stands, bracing the earth, and braced with the whole earth.
America stands, friend, welcoming all, as our forebears were welcomed.
America stands, great city,
the distant brought near, each for its kind,
through the golden door.
America stands,
America stands.