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## **FROM *LE DUC D'ALBE* TO *LES VÊPRES SICILIENNES*: METAMORPHOSES OF A LIBRETTO**

**Abstract.** This paper proposes a comparative study of the libretto of *Le Duc d'Albe*, planned by Donizetti in 1839-1840 but never created during his lifetime, and that of Verdi's *Les Vêpres siciliennes*, created in Paris in 1855 (by Eugène Scribe and Charles Duveyrier). This article examines: the correspondence – or not – between the characters and their evolution; the progression of the structure and the plot from one work to the other – where Verdi intervenes, while also keeping in mind the intermediate plot envisaged by Scribe and focusing on three aspects that stand out more (the scene of the recognition of the son, the question of marriage, and the insurrectional denouement); the scores and the place of versification in their arrangement.

**Keywords:** Opera, Donizetti, Verdi, Sources, 19<sup>th</sup> Century

### **1. Historical background**

The immediate source of the libretto of Verdi's *Les Vêpres siciliennes*, as we know, is Gaetano Donizetti's *Le Duc d'Albe*. This is not the place to go over the long inception of these two works, nor of the incompletion of the latter, whose verses were put to good use for the composition of the former. The existing literature devoted to the two masters of Bergamo and Busseto already deals with this very well (Ashbrook 1982; Budden 1979).

It's worth remembering, however, that between 1839 and 1840, Donizetti was working at the Opéra in Paris on the text which in 1838

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Eugène Scribe and Charles Duveyrier had devised in vain for Jacques François Fromental Halévy and that this project was discarded because of the hesitations of the singer Rosine Stolz, complaining that the role did not spotlight her sufficiently. Practically finished in the two first acts, more incomplete for the last two, parts of the music were to enter into *L'Ange de Nisida*, premiered at the Académie royale de musique on 2<sup>nd</sup> December 1840 in the new revision as *La Favorite*. The composer had some hope of taking up the initial idea again in 1842-1843, but the opera would never be represented during his lifetime and would only be produced in 1882 on 22<sup>nd</sup> March in the Teatro Apollo in Rome, in a version in Italian by Angelo Zanardini. Its musical deficiencies were rounded out under the care of Matteo Salvi, upon request of the publisher Giovannina Lucca, who had acquired the incomplete score the preceding year. Meanwhile, Scribe and Duveyrier's verses were given new life in *Les Vêpres siciliennes* on 13<sup>th</sup> June 1855 at the Académie impériale de musique, after a long gestation beginning with the signature of the contract in February 1852 and continuing, not without clashes, until some time after the date initially forecast. According to Scribe, Verdi would have been aware of the retrieval of the Halévy-Donizetti text<sup>2</sup>. One knows, however, about the *maestro's* hesitation over setting a non-original libretto to music, as he himself affirmed in a letter to Giuseppe Piroli, after the premiere of *Il Duca d'Alba*<sup>3</sup> and a good number of years after the beginning of the Italian run of *Les Vêpres siciliennes* on 26<sup>th</sup> December 1855 at the Teatro Regio in Parma, under the censored title *Giovanna de Guzman*<sup>4</sup>.

In view of the presence of the foreign oppressor, it is easy to understand that the subject of the Vespers war at this time was explosive in Italy, although it was not totally absent. The closest Italian antecedents are the tragedy of Giovanni Battista Niccolini, *Giovanni da Procida* (1831),

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<sup>2</sup> See the letter from Verdi to Scribe of 27<sup>th</sup> September 1852 (Lo Presti 2002: 423) and the letter from Scribe to Duveyrier of 3<sup>rd</sup> December 1853 (Bonneton 1917: 888).

<sup>3</sup> See the letter from Verdi to Piroli of 16<sup>th</sup> (?) 1882 (Luzio ed. 1947: 152); at such a distance from the premiere of *Les Vêpres siciliennes*, we can wonder about the truth of such a remark: isn't it a posture on Verdi's part aiming to build up his own legend?

<sup>4</sup> On this new adaptation, see also the undated letter from Scribe to Mr. X (Bonneton 1917: 895), as well as the new characters and the new plot (Bonneton 1917: 896-898).

and in the opera, the tragic drama of the same title, with lyrics and music by Józef Poniatowski, premiered in Florence privately in 1838, not to mention Omero Fiori's 1843 novel which already has *I Vespri siciliani* in its subtitle. And very obviously, *La Guerra del vespro siciliano* (1843) by Michele Amari, a work of history which dismantles the myth fostered by literature and theatre. And if the source of *Le Duc d'Albe* remains somewhat more uncertain (Ashbrook 1982: 568), that of *Les Vêpres siciliennes* is less so, since Scribe himself identifies it as Casimir Delavigne's tragedy of 1819, restaged regularly beginning in 1832 and up to 1861, stating in an undated letter from Scribe to Duveyrier (Bonneton 1917: 890) that the "titre et le dénouement seront les mêmes que dans Casimir Delavigne ; mais l'intrigue en sera différente et bien plus originale".

Julien Budden, in his work *Operas of Verdi* (1979), gives us a masterly analysis of the Donizetti's score, where he compares it to that of Verdi, making use of the correspondence between the composer and his librettist. There does not seem to have been any serious examination and comparison between the librettos of the two versions. The current paper addresses this point.

We start with a study of the characters and with their development, identifying similarities and differences. Then we shall look at the evolution of the structure and plot from one work to the other, paying attention to three of the most notable moments: the scene of the father's recognition of the son, the question of marriage, and the insurrectional culmination. Finally, we shall return to the scores, to note how the versification influences their organization.

## 2. The characters

The following chart lays out the roles in the two works<sup>5</sup>:

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<sup>5</sup> We use the libretti appearing in Saracino ed. 1993: 958-1016 and in Cabourg ed. 1990: 607-660. The two editions display the translation in Italian on facing pages. In both cases, we use Roman numerals to refer to the acts and Arabic numerals for the scenes.

<i>Le Duc d'Albe</i>	<i>Les Vêpres siciliennes</i>
Hélène d'Egmont	La duchesse Hélène, sœur du duc Frédéric d'Autriche
Henri de Bruges, jeune Flamand	Henri, jeune Sicilien
Le Duc d'Albe, gouverneur des Pays-Bas pour le roi d'Espagne Philippe II	Guy de Monfort, gouverneur de Sicile sous Charles d'Anjou, roi de Naples
Carlos, autre officier espagnol	Le sire de Béthune, officier français
Daniel, maître brasseur	Danieli, Sicilien
Sandoval, capitaine espagnol	Le comte de Vaudemont, officier français
Balbuena, soldat espagnol	Thibault, soldat français Robert, soldat français
Un Tavernier	Jean de Procida, médecin sicilien Ninetta, camériste de la duchesse Hélène Mainfroid, Sicilien

The first thing to notice is the absence in the first version of one of the four main characters: Jean de Procida. Then the single Spanish soldier Balbuena becomes two French soldiers Thibault and Robert. The innkeeper's interventions are so specific that he cannot be considered a model for Mainfroid. Ninetta could be said to soften the harshness of the Duchess Hélène's situation, whose prototype, Hélène d'Egmont, is alone in a world of men.

Nevertheless, this convenient positioning demands to be qualified in view of the development of events. It doesn't seem necessary to give a synopsis of works as well-known as our two titles, *Les Vêpres siciliennes* above all. The reader is referred to the preceding studies (Ashbrook 1982: 568; Cabourg ed. 1990: 661-663) and also to commercial publications, notably those that accompany recordings. Even if in the course of our analysis it means going back over this or that episode, here we shall limit ourselves to this very brief overview: the theme is one of thwarted love on the part of Hélène and Henri on a background of revolt against an invader, Spanish in the first case, Angevin in the second. The action is located in 16<sup>th</sup> century Brussels and Antwerp in *Le Duc d'Albe*, in 13<sup>th</sup> century Palermo in *Les Vêpres siciliennes*. The occupying armies are led respectively by the title role and by Guy de Montfort, each of discovers himself to be the father of Henri, who has remained anonymous until that time. Despite differences of length, both versions end with a crowd scene.

In Verdi's opera, Jean de Procida is leader of the insurgents as well as being a patriot, though despite this he appears rather one-dimensional (Budden 1979: 241). If he is absent from Donizetti's project, he is also the avatar of Daniel, whose role is thus split between Danieli and the doctor<sup>6</sup>. In fact, after the Act II reunion between Hélène and Henri in Daniel's tavern, it is indeed the latter who goes off in search of the conspirators (II, 4), just as Procida rejoins the congregating population (II, 2), thus permitting, in both cases, the hero and heroine's love duet (II, 5; II, 3). Further on, in the course of finale II of 1855, Danieli and Procida indulge in a bit of verbal sparring on the subject of the arms to be used to strike the enemy (II, 9), something that in the original was the reserve of the master brewer (II, 6). And if in finale III, the interventions of the latter only form part of the vocal ensemble, it is he who pronounces, in unison with Hélène and the conspirators, the invective of "deshonneur au lâche / qui nous a trahis!" (III, 7), in terms which Procida repeats, in the same situation of suspicion with regard to Henri's integrity: "Coup terrible, qui m'accable ! / Lui perfide, lui coupable ! / Qu'à jamais il soit flétri ! / C'est un lâche ! / il a trahi !" (III, 7).

The three other main roles see their personalities nuanced even more between 1839-1840 and 1855. It has often been stressed that *Les Vêpres siciliennes* is a diva opera – "a prima donna opera" (Budden 1979: 241) – and it is to Hélène that the broadest range of sentiments is given, from the bellicose virago to the tender, joyous fiancée. To that we can add that the latter aspect is more in evidence than the former and that in Verdi she becomes a good deal more tender than she is in Donizetti. The two duets in Act IV are quite vivid in this respect. Although punctuated with many variants, the borrowings are numerous between the two versions. Nevertheless, the Sicilian Hélène is more quickly ready to pardon the man whom she has never ceased loving: after the accusations, she calms down and pleads with God to intercede on Henri's behalf: "Malheureux et non coupable / Prends pitié de ses douleurs, / Ô toi, juge redoutable ! / Toi qui lis au fond des cœurs !" (IV, 2). There where her Donizettian archetype remains impassive in her

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<sup>6</sup> On this topic see also the programmatic letter from Scribe which combines the two characters: Daniel-Procida (undated letter from Scribe to Duveyrier – Bonnefon 1917: 890).

“Va-t-en ! Va-t-en !” (IV, 2), even when she hears the young man’s confession that the Duke is his father. But it’s true that in *Les Vêpres siciliennes* this terrible secret is revealed from the outset, allowing the young woman to rejoice in the declarations of love of her *romanza* “Ami !... le Coeur d’Hélène / Pardonne au repentir !” (IV, 2). Which first leads her to procrastinate in the face of Procida’s intentions (V, 3), then to attempt to convince her betrothed to renounce her, in order to save him, along with his father (V, 4). Hélène d’Egmont’s hesitations, on the other hand, are shorter: she barely delays before raising the dagger and striking the tyrant, thus becoming the instrument of Henri’s death when he moves between them (IV, 3).

Victim of the plot, since he plays the villain, despite the dignity contained in the expression of his emotions (Budden 1979: 241), the young Sicilian shows himself more conciliatory in 1855 than in 1839-1840 and, although in the course of finale III he still refuses to recognize Monfort (III, 7), in the ensemble of Act IV his verses show him more disposed to accept the marriage to Hélène in order to seal the peace between oppressors and oppressed – “Désormais plus de guerre, / Et que sur la terre / La haine et la colère / Fassent place à la paix !” (IV, 5) –, as his father wishes: “Pour réconcilier la Sicile et la France, / D’Hélène et de mon fils j’ordonne l’alliance !”. Although he sacrifices himself, his Donizettian model does not have the opportunity to illustrate this about-face, apart from prohibiting Albe from pronouncing the word he fears: “Ah ! Ne le prononcez pas !... ce nom, qu’elle ignore !” (III, 7). With tenderness, the stage directions tell us, however.

For his part, the Angevin governor has a less cruel bearing than his Iberian counterpart. First harsh and authoritarian, his is a developing personality who then attains a noble and tender loftiness (Budden 1979: 241). It is he, moreover, who defends the idea of peace, undoubtedly, more to earn Henri’s esteem than to save the Sicilian people. Nevertheless, during finale IV he seems sincere in his adhesion to his hopes: “Plus d’humeur vengeresse, / Et que règnent sans cesse / Le bonheur et la paix !” (IV, 5). Words which clearly contrast with the “haine vengeresse”, yet unfulfilled, which Procida invokes on the same occasion. And with the last gesture of the Duke of Alba “debout sur le vaisseau amiral étend[ant] la main vers le peuple comme pour le maudire” (IV, 3). And this after

having been moved to pity over the body of his son, unless it is for himself that he feels sorry: “J’ai perdu mon fils ! / Pitié !... Pitié !... pour un malheureux père !”.

The character identities of *Les Vêpres siciliennes* had, however, an intermediate phase in the letter from Scribe to Duveyrier. This shows us that, at an early stage the librettist was harbouring the project of having the former Henri de Bruges, by then called Luigi di Torella, as not only the illegitimate son of a Monfort whose first name would be Charles, but also the adopted son of Procida. Moreover, the young man’s mother, victim of a rape, would have been “une noble dame de Sicile” who would have remained in any case exterior to the action, a character mentioned but absent from the scene. Hélène, or rather Helena, was still the sister of Frédéric d’Autriche, decapitated by Charles d’Anjou at the same time as Conradin, or could also have been Procida’s daughter (Bonnefon 1917: 891).

Integrating this intermediate project, our first chart is therefore modified as regards the main characters:

<i>Le Duc d’Albe</i>	<b>Scribe’s project (Bonnefon 1917: 891) (intermediate phase)</b>	<i>Les Vêpres siciliennes</i>
Hélène d’Egmont	Helena, sœur de Frédéric d’Autriche ou fille de Jean de Procida	La duchesse Hélène, sœur du duc Frédéric d’Autriche
Henri de Bruges, jeune Flamand	Luigi di Torella, fils naturel d’une noble sicilienne	Henri, jeune Sicilien
Le Duc d’Albe, gouverneur des Pays-Bas pour le roi d’Espagne Philippe II	Charles de Monfort, père naturel de Luigi	Guy de Monfort, gouverneur de Sicile sous Charles d’Anjou, roi de Naples
Daniel, maître brasseur	Jean de Procida, père adoptif de Luigi	Danieli, Sicilien Jean de Procida, médecin sicilien

In the translated Italian versions Hélène and Henri become respectively the Amelia and Marcello of *Il Duca d’Alba*, whereas the name of *I vespri siciliani*’s hero is transcribed as the ancient form Arrigo.

### 3. The plots

Concerning the overall structure of the works, *Le Duc d'Albe* was meant to be an opera in four acts, respectively with seven, seven, seven, and three scenes, whereas *Les Vêpres siciliennes* is made up of five acts with five, nine, seven, five, and five scenes. Broadly speaking, we can say that Verdi's Act I is taken essentially from its Donizettian equivalent, while Act II picks up from both Act II and some elements of Act I of the original, in addition to several new scenes. The Act III of 1839-1840 serves both Acts III and IV, while this latter also includes elements from scenes of the fourth act, despite some new additions. The last act from 1855 was completely unwritten. During the months of preparation, the musician and the librettist got together quite frequently, and we therefore have scarce evidence about Verdi's involvement in the genesis of this title (Budden 1979: 180-181). It is therefore interesting to study the intermediate version of the libretto, as Scribe imagined it in December 1853. In order to better visualize the relative developments of the three versions, the following schema can serve as base:

<i>Le Duc d'Albe</i>	Scribe's project (Bonneton 1917: 891-893) (intermediate phase)	<i>Les Vêpres siciliennes</i>
<b>Act I</b> – City hall square in Brussels Flemish celebration interrupted by the Spanish soldiers...  ...who make the young Flemish girls dance Hélène mourning the death of her father Balbuena orders Hélène to sing: she strikes up a song with double meaning which provokes a popular riot  appearance of the Duke of Alba	<b>Act I</b>  Sicilian celebration during which the Sicilians sympathise with the Angevins  Procida tries in vain to spur the Sicilians to revolt	<b>Act I</b> – Main square in Palermo  The Angevin soldiers' hymn to France in a controversy with the Sicilians  Hélène mourning the death of her brother Robert orders Hélène to sing: she strikes up a song with double meaning which fails to provoke a popular riot  entry of Guy de Montfort



entry of Henri, pardoned by the court, who asks the Duke about his origins		entry of Henri, pardoned by the court, who asks Montfort about his origins
<p><b>Act II</b> – Daniel's brewery</p> <p>Hélène, then Henri, rejoin the Conspirators</p> <p>Henri swears his love to Hélène</p> <p>the conspirators are unmasked by the Spanish soldiers, who arrest all but Henri</p>	<p><b>Act II</b></p> <p>feast of the Virgin during which the Angevin soldiers abduct the Sicilian girls</p> <p>Procida stirs up the vengeance of the Sicilians Luigi is arrested</p>	<p><b>Act II</b> – Beach near Palermo</p> <p>Jean de Procida returns to his home Hélène and Henri meet him again</p> <p>Henri swears his love to Hélène Béthune calls Henri back to the palace</p> <p>Sicilian celebration interrupted by the Angevin soldiers, who make some Sicilian girls dance</p> <p>the Angevin officers and the Sicilian nobility return to Monfort's palace — ship on the horizon</p>
<p><b>ACT III</b> – City hall</p> <p>Henri surrenders at the Duke's home in order to obtain pardon for his comrades the Duke admits to being his father</p> <p>Henri refuses to recognize him but must give in so as to save his comrades entry of the conspirators...</p>	<p><b>ACT III</b></p> <p>Luigi comes to Monfort, who admits to being his father</p>	<p><b>ACT III</b> – Monfort's office</p> <p>Henri comes to Monfort, who admits to being his father</p> <p>Hall in the Palace</p>

<p>...who suspect Henri of treason</p>	<p>party: ballet "The Four Seasons" Procida and Helena at the party aiming to kill Monfort as Helena is about to strike Monfort, Luigi interposes himself between them Helena and Procida are arrested Luigi is suspected of treason</p>	<p>party: ballet "The Four Seasons" Procida and Hélène at the party to kill Monfort and save Henri as Hélène is about to strike Monfort, Henri interposes himself between them Hélène and Procida are arrested Henri is suspected of treason</p>
<p><b>ACT IV – Hélène's chapel</b></p> <p>Henri comes to Hélène, who does not wish to hear him Henri tells her he is innocent Hélène asks him to kill the Duke Henri admits to her that the Duke is his father</p> <p>Port of Antwerp the Duke must return to</p>	<p><b>ACT IV</b></p> <p>Luigi intercedes with Monfort so as to obtain pardon for his comrades Monfort is ready to accept if Luigi recognizes him as his father</p> <p>Monfort orders the marriage of Luigi and Helena Helena refuses but Monfort urges her to accept</p>	<p><b>ACT IV – Fortress</b></p> <p>Henri comes to Hélène, who does not wish to hear him Henri tells her he is innocent</p> <p>Henri admits to her that Monfort is his father entry of Procida who announces to Hélène the arrival of Pierre d'Aragon entry of Monfort bringing the condemnation to death of the conspirators Henri intercedes with Monfort so as to obtain pardon for his comrades Monfort is ready to accept if Henri recognizes him as his father Henri refuses, then gives in so as to save his comrades Monfort orders the marriage of Henri and Hélène Hélène refuses but Procida urges her to accept</p>

Spain Hélène approaches him to strike, but Henri steps between them and dies in his place		
	<p><b>Act V</b></p> <p>Procida urges Helena to marry Luigi preparations for the marriage around Helena Procida warns Helena that the marriage bells will give the signal for the start of the insurrection</p> <p>Helena's horror solemn entry of Monfort, Luigi and the Archbishop of Palermo, who is going to celebrate the marriage</p> <p>Helena refuses, but Monfort unites them the bells ring and the Sicilians throw themselves on Monfort, Luigi, and Helena</p>	<p><b>Act V – Palace gardens</b></p> <p>preparations for the marriage around Hélène Procida warns Hélène that the marriage bells will give the signal for the start of the insurrection Hélène refuses to accept that and tells Henri that the marriage cannot take place Henri's despair</p> <p>Monfort arrives and unites them the bells ring and Procida gives the signal, then throws himself on Monfort, Hélène, and Henri</p>

While Scribe would have wished to lessen the Angevins' arrogance, probably in order to flatter his Parisian audience, able to identify with them (Bonnefon 1917: 891), the libretto of *Les Vêpres siciliennes* presents right from the start the French soldiers' attempting to make off with the Sicilian girls – "Toutes les femmes sont à nous ? // Sans doute !" (I, 1) – whereas the first scene of *Le Duc d'Albe* limits this action to the stage directions and under the pretext of dances: "Des soldats espagnols enlèvent les danseuses aux Belges qui se taisent et se retirent" (I, 1). It is only in Act II that the librettist planned a change of behaviour on behalf of the

invaders. In fact, this takes place during the Sicilian celebration of the twelve fiancées at finale II (II, 6), and results in an outcome opposite to that desired by the poet: this renewed abduction means that the oppressors would be unable to win the spectators' sympathy. It may also be noted, moreover, that in the author's draft, Procida appears as soon as Act I, portrayed immediately as leader of the revolt, then renewed in Act II on the occasion of the scene of the dances. On the other hand, it is not the doctor, but Monfort who insists that Helena accept the marriage proposal. Procida's same intervention in this sense is delayed until the opening of Act V, where Scribe projects a duet with the heroine (Bonneton 1917: 892). The absence of the scene between Henri and Hélène (or between Luigi and Helena) at the beginning of Act IV, where it exists in *Le Duc d'Albe*, is probably not so much the desire to suppress the scene from *Les Vêpres siciliennes* than the supposition on the part of an author that this moment can be taken for granted.

The recognition scene between father and son assumes a particular interest to the extent that, while it has a single source in the duet from Act III of *Le Duc d'Albe*, it is treated at two very different moments in *Les Vêpres siciliennes*. In Donizetti, it comes immediately after the Duke's admission that Henri must pronounce the words which he has avoided saying "mon père" (III, 6) in order to save the conspirators arrested by the Spanish soldiers in Daniel's brewery at the end of the previous act (II, 7). In Verdi, the father's admission and the son's recognition unfold between Acts III and IV, doubtless because there is no arrest at the end of Act II. Thus, the Monfort-Henri duet comes to an end on the memory of the executed mother – "L'image de ma mère / Qui se place entre nous deux !" (III, 4) – whereas in the Low Countries the young man is more explicit in his reply – "L'image de ma mère mourante / Qui se place entre nous deux !" (III, 5) – continuing with a more serious rebuke: "Elle fut ta victime / et déjà pour moi, c'est un crime / que d'hésiter entre vous deux". Then follows the chorus's *De profundis*, which we find again in scene 5 of the 1855 Act IV just as Henri submits, uttering the fateful words ("Mon père ! Mon père !"), as was the case in 1839-1840.

The recognition scene on Henri's part concludes on another not inconsiderable modification, since it is entirely absent from the first version. The announcement of the marriage as a token of peace (Bonneton 1917: 892) is truly the *coup de théâtre* which leads Verdi to accept Scribe's proposals

without much change. And yet the *maestro* is far from being totally satisfied: “J’aurais espéré que Mons. Scribe aurait eu la complaisance de paraître de temps en temps aux répétitions [...] pour voir s’il n’y avait rien à toucher aux morceaux, aux actes, etc. Par exemple : le 2.<sup>me</sup> 3.<sup>me</sup> 4.<sup>me</sup> ont tous la même coupe : Un Air ; un Duo ; un Final”<sup>7</sup>, he confides to François-Louis Cronier. The union of the young couple nevertheless allows Procida to perceive immediately the opportunity that is becoming apparent, imagining his impending vengeance while forcing Hélène to obey: “Il le faut ! Ton pays... / Ton frère... par ma voix l’ordonnent... obéis !” (IV, 5). He really knows how to choose his arguments.

The occasion of the marriage also prepares the transition to Act V and to the insurrection scene. Scribe no doubt planned a majestic tableau, proposing the solemn entry of the Archbishop of Palermo (Bonneton 1917: 892-893). But Verdi will have none of it: he is not at all satisfied and complains that the librettist “ne se donne la peine de remédier à ce cinquième acte, que tout le monde s’accorde à trouver sans intérêt” (Cesari/Luzio eds. 1913: 158). Instead of the grandiose, “pour finir le drame un de ces morceaux émouvants qui arrachent les larmes et desquels l’effêt [*sic*] est presque toujours sûr”. He very probably wishes an appendix to the last uprising against the invader. All the same the libretto presents an extreme gesture of pity by Henri and Hélène for Monfort and Procida. Set to music in the autograph manuscript, this brief scene was abandoned for the première, the composer preferring to conclude with the bustle of the riot, without the final reunion of the family circle (Budden 1979: 236-237). Absent from *Le Duc d’Albe*, the insurrection is always implicit, from the first chorus of the Flemish “Maudite soit l’Espagne” (I, 1), in response to the soldier’s patriotic hymn, till the last ensemble of the people “Jour d’ivresse et de délire” (IV, 3), rejoicing over the departure of Albe, and in passing, by the conspirators’ action in Act II. Verdi is obliged to abandon the tearjerker, which Scribe does not provide him. Yet the dramatist could have found such an ending in *Le Duc d’Albe* where Henri’s death, from the involuntary dagger of Hélène, would perhaps have supplied him with the situation he was hoping for.

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<sup>7</sup> The letter nr. 148 of 3<sup>rd</sup> January 1855 (Cesari/Luzio eds. 1913: 158).ff

#### 4. The scores

If *Les Vêpres siciliennes* is a prima donna opera, it is also possible to suggest that *Le Duc d'Albe* could also have been, despite Rosine Stolz's hesitations. The vocal distribution of the works is more or less the same: in both, Hélène is a soprano just as Henri a tenor; the Duke and Monfort are baritones, while Daniel and Procida are sung by a bass. The characters' interventions in the two works are as follows:

<i>Le Duc d'Albe</i>	<i>Les Vêpres siciliennes</i>
<b>Act I</b>  chorus cavatina Hélène trio Hélène-Daniel-Duc duet Duc-Henri	<b>Act I</b>  chorus cavatina Hélène quartet Hélène-Ninetta-Danieli-Monfort duet Monfort-Henri
<b>Act II</b>  chorus aria Hélène terzettino Daniel- Hélène-Henri duet Hélène-Henri concertato finale II	<b>Act II</b>  prelude aria Procida  duet Hélène-Henri finale II (barcarole)
<b>Act III</b>  aria Duc duet Duc-Henri trio Henri-Duc-Sandoval quartet Hélène-Henri-Duc-Sandoval/concertato (finale III)	<b>Act III</b>  aria Montfort duet Monfort-Henri ballet (The Four Seasons) finale III
<b>Act IV</b>  aria Henri duet Hélène-Henri chorus arietta Duc finale	<b>Act IV</b>  aria Henri duet Hélène-Henri finale IV
	<b>Act V</b>  chorus siciliana Hélène melody Henri trio Henri- Hélène-Procida (finale)

In fact, Héléne always has primacy, despite the title role of the Donizettian project. In *Le Duc d'Albe* she sings two solo numbers in Acts I and II, participates in the two duets with Henri (Acts II and IV) and in the trio with the Duke and Sandoval in Act I, in addition to finales II, III, and IV, for a total of eight appearances (nine if we add the terzettino in Act II). In *Les Vêpres siciliennes* her two arias are placed in Acts I and V; her duets with Henri occupy the same place in Acts II and IV; the Act I quartet sees her on stage with Ninetta, Danieli, and Monfort; and in the final trio she joins with Henri and Procida; she is present in all the act finales except the first, for a total of nine appearances. This is far more than the seven appearances of the Duke of Alba, who is present for a solo aria (Act III) and an arietta (Act IV), the two duets with his son (Acts I and III), the two trios with Héléne and Daniel (Act I) and with Henri and Sandoval (Act III), and also in finale II. More too than the six interventions of Monfort, of which the duets with Henri and the solo aria maintain their place with respect to the plan of 1839-1840. With his magnificent entrance aria in Act II and his participation in finales II through V, Procida could not be compared to Daniel. Only the tenor could in some way vie with the heroine for first place, since he too totals nine appearances in each of the two works: in fact, he shares four duets with his father and with his beloved – in the same place in the two versions (Acts I to IV) –, sings an aria in Act IV, and adds a melody to Act V in 1855, in addition to the finales II, III, and IV and the Act III trio in Donizetti, and finales III, IV, and V in Verdi. It is undoubtedly this which caused Rosine Stolz to hesitate, despite the importance of her solo performances. It's worth wondering whether she was better served in *La Favorite*, accompanied by Gilbert Duprez as Fernand and Paul Barroilhet as Alphonse XI.

## 5. The verses

With regard to the lay-out of the verses, it is interesting to observe how the most visible borrowings are related more to the closed musical numbers than to the recitatives. The Act I pieces are practically unchanged from one version to the other, including Héléne's cavatina "Au sein des mers

et battu par l'orage" (I, 4; I, 2), the Hélène-Daniel-Duc trio "Moi-même je frissonne // Quelle horreur m'environne // Race faible et poltronne" (I, 5; I, 3), that now becomes a quartet with Hélène-Ninetta-Danieli-Monfort and the Duc-Henri / Monfort-Henri duet "Au sentier de l'honneur // J'aime son audace" (I, 7; I, 5). Other moments are subject to slight modifications; the first Henri-Hélène duet debuts and concludes with the same lines – "Comment dans ma reconnaissance // À vous ma seule providence" (II, 5; II, 3) – but its development proceeds rather by elimination, Scribe shortening markedly the young Sicilian's procrastination over his unmentionable secret. The declaration of love is even more sudden and very probably more spontaneous, following his loved one's reaction. And if the Duc-Henri / Monfort-Henri duet "Comble de misère // Ô destin contraire" (III, 5; III, 4) is still included in this type of borrowing, Monfort's aria which precedes it – "Au sein de la puissance" (III, 3) – reveals a more interesting development in its second part. Its first stanza follows closely the Duc's aria before moving apart, at the point where the words "Mon fils !" are pronounced:

<i>Le Duc d'Albe</i>	<i>Les Vêpres siciliennes</i>
En vain la haine vengeresse Voulut tous deux nous désunir ! Moi je réclame sa tendresse Et je saurai la conquérir Oui je saurai par ma tendresse Forcer son cœur à me chérir !	La haine égara sa jeunesse Mais près de moi dans ce palais Je veux conquérir sa tendresse Et le vaincre par mes bienfaits !

More succinct, since they avoid useless reprises and repetitions, the 1855 verses convey the father's sentiments with ever greater force in their continuity: of the dislike which could appear shared by both men in the first version there remains only the young patriot's hate of his people's oppressor. Always a warrior in his lexical choices, Monfort seems from now on more determined to win over Henri than to require him to love him.

Likewise, the second Henri-Hélène duet begins with nearly identical quatrains – "Écoute un instant ma prière ! // Jamais de pardon pour le traître" (IV, 2) – which in the second version becomes "Jamais de pitié pour le traître" (IV, 2); no doubt devised to avoid repetition with "Pardon pour le lâche peut-être", the new adjective shining a different light at the



same time on Hélène who pronounces it and on Henri to whom it is addressed. More monolithic, the Donizettian Hélène can barely contemplate pardon, treachery being assimilated to cowardice. Her Verdian namesake, on the other hand, is more carefully nuanced: she would not be able to pity a traitor. Nevertheless, the modification can also show that, even unconsciously, the young woman could possibly succumb to the man she loves: if he betrays, the reason must be noble. That is made clear in the following couplets where just the most significant transformations come into play:

<i>Le Duc d'Albe</i>	<i>Les Vêpres siciliennes</i>
HENRI Je ne suis pas coupable ! J'atteste en mes malheurs, le juge redoutable qui lit dans tous les cœurs !	HENRI Malheureux et non coupable, J'en appelle, en mes malheurs, À ce juge redoutable Qui lit au fond de mon cœur !
HELENE Le remords qui t'accable trahit ton déshonneur, et tu trembles, coupable devant un Dieu vengeur !	HELENE Malheureux !... et non coupable, Il ose encore... l'imposteur, Prier le Dieu redoutable Qui lit au fond de son cœur !

Henri's self-defence develops stylistically toward the coordination, doubtless more flexible, which avoids the double verb; the appeal to God then appears less harsh, in the form of a request for help which he no doubt hopes to find more readily in Hélène than in a heavenly Father: she too is able to read in his heart. The duchess's response remains scathing in her allusion to imposture, but she abandons the accumulation of remorse, depression, treachery, and dishonour from 1839-1840; and even if she doesn't clearly give voice to it, the young man can now clearly discern a prayer, and he ceases to tremble before a fearsome but no longer vengeful judge. We know, moreover, the outcome of this first situation.

## 6. Incompletion and translation

Beyond the links we have been able to establish between the characters, the structures, the frameworks and the scores, when one approaches *Le Duc d'Albe*

and *Les Vêpres siciliennes*, and above all when one wishes to compare them side by side, the double question arises of their incompleteness and rhythmic translation. Both are Parisian grand operas, but this is not the only point they have in common.

In some way, their incompleteness seems almost to ensue from this very property. Recalling the letter to Cronier (Cesari/Luzio eds. 1913: 157-158), Julian Budden feels that Verdi would almost be inclined to condemn the opera in advance (Budden 1979: 242). Although it is played less than other Verdi's operas and has experienced its period of purgatory, the work is now part of the repertory and there exist a very large number of studio and performance recordings. Not to speak of its influence in the history of Italian opera (Budden 1979: 26, 264). Nevertheless, only recently has it been presented in its original version in French; a fate it shares somewhat, with *Don Carlos*, *Jérusalem* and *Macbeth*, though in these last two cases the French versions came after the Italian one.

It's a similar fate that links it to the incomplete *Le Duc d'Albe*. Although, by its very nature as an unfinished project, the latter occupies only an anecdotal place in operatic programming, it has almost always been given in Italian ever since the publisher Lucca's commission in 1882. There was an attempt to restore the score in its totality, notably in June 1959 at the Spoleto Festival and by Thomas Schippers (Ashbrook 1982: 435-436), then in June 2007, at the Festival of Radio-France and Montpellier Languedoc-Roussillon for a concert which gave rise to a 'philological' recording directed by Enrique Mazzola (Donizetti 1988; Donizetti 2008). During the months of May and June 2012, there was, however a notable effort by the Vlaamse Opera which gave performances in French in the Operas of Antwerp and Ghent. The Opera Rara edition followed (Donizetti 2016).

*Le Duc d'Albe* or *Il Duca d'Alba*, *Les Vêpres siciliennes* or *I vespri siciliani*? Beyond the resemblances and the divergences between the libretti and the scores, there is also the question of translation which is posed in both cases. A question from which chronology definitely excludes Donizetti and where Verdi has little place.

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