

“Air des lettres”(The Letter aria) WERTHER, Act III, music by Jules Massenet; libretto by Edouard Blau, Paul Milliet, and Georges Hartmann, 1892, based on the novel by Goethe, *Die Leiden des jungen Werther* (*The Sorrows of Young Werther*.)

SYNOPSIS

Werther, a sensitive and somewhat eccentric poet, is deeply in love with Charlotte, who is married to Albert. Secretly attracted to Werther, she sends the young man away, instructing him to return at Christmas to be with her large family.(The oldest of several children, Charlotte has been raising her siblings since the death of their parents.) During Werther’s absence, he has written many letters to Charlotte, all of which she has kept...

CHARLOTTE

(seule, assise près de la table à ouvrage; songeant)

Werther... Werther...

Qui m'aurait dit la place que dans mon coeur
il occupe aujourd'hui?

Depuis qu'il est parti, malgré moi,
tout me lasse! Et mon âme est pleine de lui!

(alone, seated at her work table, day dreaming)

Werther, Werther...

Who could have told me what place in my heart
he'd hold in my heart today?

Since he went away, despite myself,
everything bores me! And I only think of him!

(Lentement, elle se lève comme attirée vers le secrétaire qu'elle ouvre.) *(Slowly, she goes to the desk and takes out his letters.)*

Ces lettres! ces lettres!

Ah! je les relis sans cesse...

Avec quel charme...

mais aussi quelle tristesse!

Je devrais les détruire... je ne puis!

These letters! These letters!

Ah, I read them endlessly...

With what charm...

yet also what great sadness!

I should tear them all up...but I can't

(Reading one of the letters.)

"Je vous écris de ma petite chambre:
au ciel gris et lourd de Décembre
pèse sur moi comme un linceul,
Et je suis seul! seul! toujours seul!"

"I'm writing to you from my little bedroom:
neath the gray and heavy sky of December
weighing on me, just like a shroud.
And I'm alone! Alone! Always alone!"

Ah! personne auprès de lui!

pas un seul témoignage de tendresse...
ou même de pitié!

Dieu! comment m'est venu ce triste courage,
d'ordonner cet exil et cet isolement?

Ah! he has no one nearby,

not the slightest expression of caring...
or even of pity!

Lord! Where did I get the pitiful courage
to impose this exile and isolation?

(Reading another letter.)

"Des cris joyeux d'enfants montent
sous ma fenêtre,
Des cris d'enfants!"

"The happy shouts of children reach me
from neath my window.
The shouts of children!"

Et je pense à ce temps si doux
Où tous vos chers petits jouaient
autour de nous!
Ils m'oublieront peut-être?"
Non, Werther, dans leur souvenir
votre image reste vivante...
et quand vous reviendrez...
Mais doit-il revenir?

And I think of that tender time
when all your little dear ones played
around us there!
They've forgotten me, haven't they?"
No, Werther, in their memory
they can still see you quite clearly...
and when you do return...
But will he really return?

(Taking another letter)

Ah! ce dernier billet me glace et m'épouvante!
"Tu m'as dit: à Noël, et j'ai crié: jamais!
On va bientôt connaître
qui de nous disait vrai! Mais
si je ne dois reparaitre
au jour fixé, devant toi,
ne m'accuse pas,
pleure-moi! "

*(répétant avec effroi, craignant
de comprendre)*

Ah, this last letter chills me and
"You told me,"Till Christmas," and I cried, "Never!"
We will soon both be learning
which of us spoke the truth.
But if I don't make an appearance
on Christmas day, at your home,
don't think ill of me;
weep for me!"

(repeating with fear, afraid to understand)

"Ne m'accuse pas, pleure-moi!"

"Don't think ill of me; weep for me!"

"Oui, de ces yeux si pleins de charmes,
ces lignes...tu les reliras,
tu les mouilleras de tes larmes...
O Charlotte, et tu frémiras!"

"Yes, with those eyes, so full of charm,
these lines...you'll read them again,
you will make them wet with your tears...
Oh, Charlotte, and you'll shake with remorse!"

(répétant sans lire)

(repeating, without reading)

...tu frémiras!
tu frémiras!

"...you'll shake with remorse!
you'll shake with remorse!"

From WERTHER, Act III, English translation by Miriam Ellis, ©2009