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21M.013J The Supernatural in Music, Literature and Culture
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Gounod, *Faust*
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1. Charles-François Gounod (1818-1893)

compare: Liszt (1811-1886); Goethe (1749-1832)

Early years and Rome

- as a child, Gounod showed great abilities in drawing and music
- at the age of 19 (1837), he won second place in the Prix de Rom, the most prestigious prize in Europe for music composition; he won first place in 1839
- in Rome in 1840, he was greatly influenced by the music of Palestrina (1525/26-1594), the greatest composer of the Catholic Counter-Reformation, whose contrapuntal style was (and is) considered the summa of Renaissance polyphony
- his musical compositions for the Academy include an orchestral Mass and an a cappella *Te Deum*
- he read Goethe's *Faust* at this time

Germany and Austria

- he spent the third year of his fellowship in Austria and Germany, drinking deeply at the well of Beethoven (1770-1827) and Mozart (1756-1791)
- he continued writing sacred music: in particular a Requiem à grand orchestre (1842)
- he met Mendelssohn (1809-1847) in Leipzig; Mendelssohn praised Gounod's compositions and offered the younger man a private performance of his own Scottish Symphony at the Gewandhaus
- the music of Mendelssohn leaves a deep imprint on Gounod (**NOTE:** quotation/homage to Mendelssohn in quoting the opening of his "Midsummer Night's Dream Overture" at the moment when Faust drinks the potion of youth and enters the supernatural world)

Return to Paris

- Gounod returned to Paris in 1843 as the music director at the Séminaire des Missions Etrangères where he hoped to create a center for a sacred music revival in France
- in 1844 he began to speak of studying to be ordained in the priesthood; in 1847 he enrolled at St Sulpice seminary, but abandoned his studies by the February Revolution of 1848

Opera composer and marriage

- his first opera, *Sapho* (1851) was composed for and with the support and influence of the famous singer Pauline Viardot; it was largely a failure, but received praise from Berlioz (1803-1869)
- his marriage to Anna Zimmermann in 1851 caused a permanent breach with the Viardots; her parents supported his continuing career, including his second major opera, *La nonne sanglante* (1854), with a libretto by Eugène Scribe; this also was a failure
- his father-in-law, a music teacher, was the first to notate Gounod's improvisations on the first prelude of Bach, which led to the publication of the *Ave Maria*; one of Zimmermann's students was the young composer Georges Bizet (1838-1875), to whom Gounod became a mentor
- during these years, Gounod continued making important contributions to sacred music: including especially a Messe Solennele de Sainte Cécile (1855)
- in 1856 he had a commission to write an opera called *Ivan le terrible*, but dropped the project; the libretto was ultimately set by Bizet

- 1856 also saw the inception of the opera *Faust*; the opera was completed in 1858 and premiered in 1859 at the Théâtre-Lyrique as a work with spoken dialogue; although it was not immediately popular in this form, Berlioz strongly supported it; Gounod soon after set the spoken dialogue to music with the hope of foreign performances in across Europe, where it became a huge success (even though lambasted by Wagner as a feeble French travesty of a German literary monument); *Faust* was taken over by the Opéra in 1869
- of Gounod's succeeding operas, only the last has had success equal to *Faust: Roméo et Juliette* (1867)

2. *Faust* libretto

- Goethe's *Faust*, Part I (published 1808), exerted a strong fascination over its readers; like Berlioz, who said, "I read it incessantly, at meals, at the theatre, in the street," Gounod says, "The work did not leave me. I carried it everywhere."
 - it was quickly translated; the first French translation (by Albert Stapfer) was published in 1823, but the translation used by Berlioz and Gounod was that by Gérard de Nerval, completed in 1827 when Nerval was eighteen
 - the work also attracted painters: perhaps most famous depictions are the lithographs by Delacroix (1798-1863), published in the second edition of Stapfer's translation in 1828 and separately in 1843: available online at http://www.wesleyan.edu/dac/coll/grps/dela/delacroix_intro.html
 - Gounod, however, seems particularly to have been influenced by the paintings of Ary Scheffer, a close friend of the Viardots, whose series of eleven works on *Faust* were completed between 1829 and 1858; these focus on Marguerite (Huebner writes of the descriptions of the characters and costumes in Gounod's *Faust* being closely modeled on Scheffer's images, and of the composer Camille Saint-Saëns writing of his disappointment in seeing a brunette play Marguerite in a German theatrical production of *Faust*, when he expected someone in the image created by Scheffer and Gounod): some of Scheffer's paintings can be found online by searching on "Scheffer Marguerite"
 - theatrical productions in France (and Germany) were concentrated in the popular theater, frequently comic (the *Faust* puppet play is one example)
 - not surprisingly, music and opera also took up the theme
- Berlioz: *Huit scènes de Faust*, Op. 1 (1829), much of which taken up in his *Damnation of Faust* (1846)
- Berlioz, *Symphonie fantastique* (1830) owes a great deal to *Faust*
- Louise Bertin, *Fausto* (1831) for the Théâtre Italien
- Liszt, *Faust Symphony* (1854-7; chorus mysticus from *Faust*, part II, added in 1857; premiered 1857); the chorus mysticus also set by Schumann (1849) and Mahler (1910)
- Arrigo Boito, *Mefistofele* (1868)
- Gounod's libretto is based on the boulevard play *Faust et Marguerite* (1850) by Michel Carré; the libretto was adapted from the play, with Carré's approval, by Jules Barbier (Carré, to the loss of his legacy, preferred to work with the composer Meyerbeer on an opera entitled *Le Pardon de Ploërmel*, also premiered in 1859)
 - Carré's play focuses on the relationship of Faust and Marguerite; Faust does not attempt suicide; Mephistopheles does not offer a vision of a woman; Marguerite's mother is eliminated; Valentin is given a bigger role as his sister's protector; he leaves Marguerite in the protection of the younger Siebel, who loves her; Valentin is injured but does not

die; there is no cathedral scene with Marguerite; no infant (or infanticide); no prison scene; after Valentin is injured, Siebel and Faust each urge Marguerite to come away; her refusal of Faust secures her salvation and she is taken to heaven by an angel as Mephistopheles takes Faust to hell (see comparison sheet)

- Barbier's libretto borrows from Carré, but restores a good deal of Goethe, including: attempted suicide; vision (of Marguerite); Mephistopheles leaving jewels for Marguerite; "King of Thule" song; "loves me, loves me not" game (also in Liszt); Valentin's death; cathedral scene with "Dies Irae"; Walpurgisnacht; prison scene; Marguerite's death and redemption

- importance in Gounod's *Faust* of good v. evil; Christianity v. the devil: in the drinking scene, the men on realizing they are in the presence of evil powers protect themselves with the cross; when Valentin curses Marguerite, the crowd plead with him not to blaspheme with his dying breath and to forgive his sister; the cathedral scene pits evil spirits against Christian belief (depicted with settings of sacred texts so familiar to Gounod); the prison scene depicts the power of prayer against the devil

3. *Faust* score

- the opera, of significant length, was originally much longer and a lot of music was cut before the first performance; much of this Gounod simply ripped out of his score and no longer survives; the gaps are clear in the score and by comparison to the libretto

- the original version had spoken dialogue; the through-composed score was written later (1860)

- some other changes, particularly to the role of Valentin were made after the premiere (not all of which have become standard); one of importance was the elimination of a duet between him and Marguerite before she meets Faust; its elimination gives Marguerite an entrance as remarkable as it is brief; also cut was an air at the beginning of the prison scene in which the delirious Marguerite reveals that she has killed her child

- the cathedral scene was originally before Valentin's death and moved later to the end of the act (following its placement in Goethe), but its position has continued to vary to this day (as you know from the differences between your music examples and libretto)

- most of the set pieces (aside from the composed declamation) are in simple forms: stropic (couplets) or ABA

- voice ranges follow typical 19th-c operatic tradition: heroine (soprano); older woman (contralto or mezzo-soprano), teenage boy (female soprano), hero (tenor), mentor or sidekick (baritone), evil (or wise) man / old man / tyrant (bass)

natural declamation of text

- French Alexandrine (12-syllable line+ 6+6) or 10-syllable line (4+6) with accents on final syllable, but observed with great flexibility

- rare use repeated accentual patterns (as in English and Italian) generally precludes repeated use of small motives; compare:

"Laisse-moi" II 3

Laisse-moi, laisse-moi contempler ton visage

Sous la pâle clarté

Dont l'astre de la nuit, comme dans un nuage,

Caresse ta beauté.

“A moi” I 6
A moi les plaisirs,
Les jeunes maîtresses!
A moi leurs caresses!
A moi leurs désirs

• thus, melodies largely syllabic and vocal display rare
(Jewel Song? I 24)
Ah! je ris de me voir
Si belle en ce miroir!
Est-ce toi, Marguerite?

thematic recall / preview

“A moi” after Tavern Scene when Faust speaks of his desire to see the maiden whose image he was shown I 14

Faust-Marguerite meeting I 16 (her setting, different from his, accompanied by his music)

Faust: Ne permettez-vous pas, ma belle demoiselle,
Qu’ on vous offre le bras pour faire le chemin?
Marguerite: Non, Monsieur! Je ne suis demoiselle, ni belle.
Et je n’ ai pas besoin qu’ on me donne la main.

planting a motive ahead of time; Mephistopheles enchantment of the garden contains the primary motive of “Laisse-moi,” as if it is the magic perfume that permeates their love duet afterwards II 2

Love duet: “O nuit d’ amour” (Marguerite’s music lingers under the parlante) II 4

Prison scene: Gretchen sings all of “Ne permettez-vous pas” and her love music sounds under her parlante

harmony

“he loves me, loves me not” (Faust-Marguerite) II 3
built over ascending harmonies moving by third, concluding in a “break-out” new key that sounds like an explosion of light (but the final key is a tritone [the devil in music] away from the starting key): F, a, C, e, G, B

“Tenez! Elle ouvre sa fenêstre” (Mephistopheles) II 6
ascending chromatic line over ascending harmonies a major third apart, stretching an augmented chord: B^b, D, G^b(F[#])

•repetition of large-scale sections at higher pitch (term: “rosalia”)
“A moi” (Faust) in G → “A moi / a toi” (Faust and Mephistopheles) in A^b
“Ange pur” (Marguerite) repetitions rise through successive pitches as she repeatedly refuses to go with Faust and Mephistopheles: G A B C (compare to the boy’s outcries in Schubert’s *Der Erlkönig*, which which ascend in starting pitch d, e, f)

Gounod Questions:

1. In terms of German, Italian and English music we have heard this semester, how is Gounod's different in terms of regularity of rhythm and accent? Is this related to language?
2. How do the scenes in which Mephistopheles conjures a vision of Marguerite for Faust (Act I) and places an enchantment over the garden (Act III) musically relate to the love duet?