

## **The Manuscript of Vernon Lee's 'A Wicked Voice' (1890):**

### **A Critical Introduction and Transcription**

Vernon Lee's 'A Wicked Voice' is the story of a conceited Wagnerian composer, Magnus, who is pursued through the canals of Venice by the seductive, ghostly singing of a vengeful eighteenth-century castrato, Zaffirino. Its suggestive exploration of queer sexual desire, the dynamics of history, and the spectrality of the voice have been explored by a number of prominent critics.<sup>1</sup> However, scholars have yet to engage closely with the manuscript of the story, or to consider in detail how the evidence it provides reframes our understanding of the text's composition, translation and subsequent material transmission. Lee wrote 'A Wicked Voice' in April and May 1887, following a commission from Frédéric Masson, then the editor of the Parisian illustrated review *Les Lettres et les Arts* (1886–89). As she noted in a letter to A. Mary F. Robinson, this 'story of [a] voice that makes [a] modern composer go crazy' represented a 'new version' of her earlier text on a similar theme, 'A Culture Ghost, or, Winthrop's Adventure' (published in *Fraser's Magazine* in January 1881).<sup>2</sup> The story was

---

<sup>1</sup> See for example Patricia Pulham, 'The Castrato and the Cry in Vernon Lee's Wicked Voices', *Victorian Literature and Culture* 30.2 (2002), 421–37; Joseph Bristow, 'Decadent Historicism', *Volupté: Interdisciplinary Journal of Decadence Studies* 3.1 (2020), 1–27; Angela Leighton, 'Seeing Nothing: Vernon Lee's Ghostly Aesthetics', in *On Form: Poetry, Aestheticism, and the Legacy of a Word* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 99–124.

<sup>2</sup> Vernon Lee, Letter to A. Mary F. Robinson, 5 May 1887, in *Selected Letters of Vernon Lee, 1856–1935: Volume II, 1885–1889*, ed. by Sophie Geoffroy and Amanda Gagel (London: Routledge, 2021), p. 336. For a detailed consideration of the relationship between the stories,

initially published in French as ‘Voix maudite’ in August 1887, with five illustrations by Albert Lynch.<sup>3</sup> It was subsequently published in English as ‘A Wicked Voice’ in *Hauntings: Fantastic Stories* (1890) (the ‘**1890 Text**’).<sup>4</sup>

### **Reframing the Composition of ‘A Wicked Voice’**

The manuscript of ‘A Wicked Voice’ is bound in a notebook now held in the Radclyffe Hall and Una Troubridge Collection at the Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas. The notebook includes the text in a form that is substantially identical to the first published English version of the text (‘**Version B**’). Alongside this, it includes fragments of an earlier draft of the story, which is narrated in the third-person and concerns a composer named ‘Carew’ (rather than ‘Magnus’) (‘**Version A**’). Lee directly incorporates Version A into Version B in the final third of the story (from the sentence that begins ‘The church was empty, and I expected every minute to be turned out by the sacristan...’). Here, her amendments are generally limited to changing Version A from the third-person to the first-person (e.g. ‘he’ and ‘Carew’ to ‘I’; ‘his’ to ‘my’ etc). In other respects, Version B appears to be significantly different from the fragments of Version A that survive.

Lee’s decision to recast the story in the first-person alerts us to her careful handling of voice in the story. She deftly manages the complex shifts in tone in Magnus’s narrative from

---

see Sophie Geoffroy, ‘Introduction’, in *La Voix maudite: nouvelles* (Rennes: Terre de Brume, 2001), pp. 11–39.

<sup>3</sup> Vernon Lee, ‘Voix maudite’, *Les Lettres et les arts: revue illustrée* VII, 2.3 (August 1887), 125–53.

<sup>4</sup> Vernon Lee, ‘A Wicked Voice’, in *Hauntings: Fantastic Stories* (London: Heinemann, 1890), pp. 197–237.

the paranoid and partial to the personal and impressionistic. In doing so, she draws upon the familiar techniques of other literary genres associated with constrained or subjective perspective, such as the dramatic monologue and the essay form. In contrast to the private diary form of her contemporaneous story 'Amour Dure' (1887), for instance, 'A Wicked Voice' immediately stages a mode of public address reminiscent of the self-serving speakers of Robert Browning (or of Lee's brother, Eugene Lee-Hamilton). In the story's opening section, Magnus bitterly addresses an imagined audience who have been 'congratulating' and 'compliment[ing]' his musical artistry, revealing as he does so his own prejudice, grandiosity and self-obsession. At the same time, Lee's move to the first-person perspective also emphasises the story's debt to her aesthetic essays, particularly those on the subject of music. 'A Wicked Voice' was written shortly after Lee revised for publication her essay 'Signor Curiazio: A Musical Medley' (1887).<sup>5</sup> This essay utilises an often-claustrophobic first-person perspective to recount Lee's intensely somatic experience of first hearing Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*. Its description of the emotional effect of such music has much in common with passages in 'A Wicked Voice' that evoke the enervation and exhaustion of Magnus, as he 'feel[s] his body melt even as wax in the sunshine'.

Evidence from the manuscript also opens up new ways of thinking about the story's fraught negotiation of same-sex desire, effeminacy and gender indeterminacy.<sup>6</sup> Significantly,

---

<sup>5</sup> Vernon Lee, 'Signor Curiazio: A Musical Medley', in *Juvenilia: Being a Second Series of Essays on Sundry Aesthetical Questions*, 2 vols (London: Fisher Unwin, 1887), I, pp. 317–94.

<sup>6</sup> See Carlo Caballero, "'A Wicked Voice": On Vernon Lee, Wagner, and the Effects of Music', *Victorian Studies* 35.4 (Summer 1992), 385–408; Maxwell, 'Sappho, Mary Wakefield, and Vernon Lee's "A Wicked Voice"', *Modern Language Review* 102.4 (2007), 960–74.

one of the very few deletions that Lee made to Version B between manuscript draft and the 1890 Text refers to Zaffirino's voice as characterised by a 'sort of downy vagueness, as if *in a veil of suppressed passion*, of tears withheld' (italics added). Lee may have felt that such a description rendered too explicit the story's engagement with the 'suppressed passion' of same-sex desire. A fragment from Version A is similarly more upfront than Version B about the place of gender deviance in the story. Here, the motivation for Zaffirino's vengeful behaviour is located in a foundational moment of what might be called 'castrato-phobia'. An unnamed woman taunts him: '[if I] wanted a person to sing to me, I would prefer a woman; if I wanted a lover, I should prefer a man'.<sup>7</sup> The passage makes Zaffirino's compromised masculinity explicit in a manner that the published text does not. It also represents an open acknowledgment—unusual in late-Victorian fiction—of the prejudice faced by those whose modes of gendered embodiment exist outside of normative frameworks.

Examining Lee's manuscripts also allows for renewed attention to her prose style, particularly as this is shaped through processes of revision. In the case of 'A Wicked Voice', we can trace how Lee's grammar, punctuation, and syntax are standardised between manuscript and publication: semi-colons are replaced with full stops; dashes become commas; long unpunctuated sentences are broken into sub-clauses through the addition of numerous commas. Such revision at proof stage was, of course, often expected by authors in the late nineteenth-century, and Lee may have welcomed the intervention of her compositors. Yet the effect is, nevertheless, to make her style less immediately 'impressionistic'.<sup>8</sup> The

---

<sup>7</sup> See Fragment 10 below, p. [CROSSREF].

<sup>8</sup> For a fuller consideration of Lee's 'impressionistic' style see Catherine Maxwell, 'Vernon Lee's Handling of Words', in *Thinking Through Style: Non-Fiction Prose of the Long*

manuscript version reproduced below brings us closer, in this respect, to the uninterrupted flow of Lee's distinctive long sentences.

### **Translation: 'A Wicked Voice' and 'Voix maudite'**

Scholars have typically assumed that 'A Wicked Voice' was first written in French, before later being translated by Lee into English. However, the manuscript materials suggest an alternative process, whereby the story was originally written in English (first in Version A, followed by Version B), before only later being translated by Lee into French. The manuscript allows us to trace the different stages of Lee's composition of the story in English—most significantly in the incorporation of Version A *into* Version B in the final third of the story (i.e. where pronouns are altered from the third-person to the first-person). If the manuscript was merely a record of Lee's translation of the story from French to English, we would expect to see a text that works solely to render 'Voix maudite' into English. However, the final third of Version B clearly demonstrates the incorporation of an earlier English version into what becomes the published English text.

Recent work by Sophie Geoffroy and Colton Valentine has done much to enrich our understanding of Lee's engagement with practices of translation and self-translation.<sup>9</sup> Such scholarship has brought to light Lee's sustained multi-lingual collaboration with editors,

---

*Nineteenth Century*, ed. by Michael D. Hurley and Marcus Waithe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp. 282–97.

<sup>9</sup> Sophie Geoffroy, 'Traduction et édition dans l'oeuvre de Vernon Lee (1856–1935)', *Alizés: revue angliciste de La Réunion*, 40 (2016), 113–31; Colton Valentine, 'Vernon Lee, Queer Relations, and a New Guard of Victorianist Multilingualism', *Victorian Studies*, 64.1 (2021), 62–87.

translators and illustrators, particularly in France. Of particular relevance here is Lee's correspondence relating to the publication of 'Voix maudite' in a volume alongside French translations of her other supernatural tales. In July 1889, Lee wrote to the translator Marie-Thérèse Blanc about the forthcoming publication in England of *Hauntings*, noting that she would 'like a French version to be published simultaneously'. A potential challenge, Lee suggested, was that 'French translations ['traduction française'] of the three short stories already exist, and they were made by three different translators: M me Savary for *Amour Dure*, M. Bernard Derosne for *Dionea* and myself for *Voix maudite*' ['et moi-même pour *Voix maudite*'].<sup>10</sup> In a subsequent letter to Blanc in December 1891, Lee refers in similar terms to the translation 'that I made myself' of 'Voix maudite' ['celle que j'ai fait moi-même de *Voix maudite*'], likewise in the context of a discussion of the French translations of Lee's stories completed by others.<sup>11</sup> In both letters, Lee clearly presents herself as the *translator* of 'Voix maudite', categorizing her own work as akin to that carried out by French translators who have translated her other English texts into French.

A comparison of the published texts of 'A Wicked Voice' and 'Voix maudite' also reveals aspects of the French version which suggest that the story was originally composed in English. Brigitte Villequin-Mongouachon's discussion of Lee's practice of 'self-translation'

---

<sup>10</sup> Vernon Lee, Letter to Marie-Thérèse Blanc, 12 July 1889, in *Letters II*, p. 537. 'La difficulté consiste en ce que les trois nouvelles existent déjà en traduction française, et par trois traducteurs différents: M me Savary pour *Amour Dure*, M. Bernard Derosne pour *Dionéa* et moi-même pour *Voix maudite*'.

<sup>11</sup> Vernon Lee, Letter to Marie-Thérèse Blanc, 29 December 1891, in *Selected Letters of Vernon Lee, 1856–1935: Volume III, 1890–1896*, ed. by Sophie Geoffroy (London: Taylor and Francis, 2020), p. 125.

in 'A Wicked Voice' takes as its starting point the assumption that the story was translated from French to English.<sup>12</sup> Yet she nevertheless observes that '[c]ertain sentences from the [French] text [...] seem clumsy, as if modelled on English syntax, producing an effect that is curious, to say the least, and almost suggests that one is reading an awkward translation of a text originally written in English'.<sup>13</sup> She identifies a number of short passages where Lee's French may be practically impenetrable to readers not otherwise familiar with English, such as: 'Ma gondole se berçait immobile' (for 'While my gondola rocked stationary'); and 'il n'y eut pas de conversation entre eux' (for 'not a word passed between them'). Villequin-Mongouachon ultimately concludes that such problems of 'contamination' between English and French are best thought of as 'the best proof of Vernon Lee's bilingualism'.<sup>14</sup> However, when taken alongside the manuscript evidence from the notebook, these aspects of 'Voix maudite' are better understood as reflecting the story's origins in English. To do so it neither to deny Lee's evident facility with the French language nor to reject the important role of multilingualism in shaping her authorial voice, but rather to acknowledge that her engagement with self-translation was more complex than has been previously recognised.

### **Transmission: Hugh Walpole, Una Troubridge, Radclyffe Hall**

---

<sup>12</sup> Brigitte Villequin-Mongouachon, 'L'auto-translation; traduction ou réécriture, dans La Voix maudite/A Wicked Voice de Vernon Lee', in *Traductologie, linguistique et traduction*, ed. by Michel Ballard and Ahmed El Kaladi (Lille: Artois Presses Université, 2003), pp. 279–90.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, p. 280. 'Certaines phrases du texte source, en français donc, semblent maladroites, comme calquées sur la syntaxe anglaise, ce qui produit un effet pour le moins curieux et ferait presque croire au lecteur qu'il s'agit d'une traduction malheureuse d'un texte original écrit en anglais.' My translation.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, p. 280. '[L]a meilleure preuve du bilinguisme de Vernon Lee'.

A renewed focus on the material aspects of Lee's texts also allows us to reconsider the reception and circulation of her writing, particularly in the period that has recently been problematized as the 'late Victorian into modern'.<sup>15</sup> In doing so, we might also reconstruct a specifically queer line of transmission, in which Lee's manuscript was passed from one generation of queer writers to the next. The earliest evidence of the manuscript's provenance shows it in the collection of the novelist Sir Hugh Walpole (1884–1931), before it was then purchased at auction in 1946 by Una Troubridge (1887–1963), the life partner of Radclyffe Hall (1880–1943). It is unclear how Walpole came into possession of the manuscript. Lee is known to have presented her manuscripts as gifts to close friends: *A Phantom Lover* ('Oke of Okehurst', 1886), for instance, was gifted to A. Mary F. Robinson and *Penelope Brandling* (1903) to Augustine Bulteau.<sup>16</sup> There is little evidence to suggest that Walpole was closely acquainted with Lee, though he was part of the broad literary circles in which she moved in London and Florence in the early twenty-first century. It is possible that Lee gifted the manuscript to Mary Wakefield, the story's dedicatee, who then later gifted or sold it to Walpole.

From the late-1910s onwards, Walpole was an enthusiastic collector of books and manuscripts, particularly of items connected to the 'Yellow Nineties'. His acquisitions included works by Oscar Wilde, Frederick Rolfe, Robert Louis Stevenson, and Marie Corelli, and Charles Lancelot Shadwell's transcript of Walter Pater's manuscript of 'Diaphaneité' (1864).<sup>17</sup> In 1934, Walpole sketched in his journal a provisional plan for a possible future

---

<sup>15</sup> See, for example, Laura Marcus, Michèle Mendelssohn, and Kirsten E. Shepherd-Barr, eds. *Late Victorian into Modern* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

<sup>16</sup> I am grateful to Sophie Geoffroy and Sally Blackburn-Daniels for this observation.

<sup>17</sup> Part of the Hugh Walpole Collection at the King's School, Canterbury.



work, *The Eighteen Nineties*: ‘Diary of a young poet. This would be an attempt to catch the spirit of the 1890 writers as it hasn’t yet been done. I would try and get some of the humour as well as the pathos. I should be entirely frank about Wilde and the psychology of homosexuality. I hope Alfred Douglas will be dead by then!’<sup>18</sup> This tantalising study was never completed—though it signals something of Walpole’s enduring fascination with the works of the period.

Walpole’s engagement with the ‘A Wicked Voice’ allows us, in particular, to reconsider the story’s reception within queer musical circles in the early twentieth century. From 1920 to 1925, Walpole sustained an intense, devoted relationship with Lauritz Melchior, who was at that time emerging as the leading Wagnerian *Heldentenor* of his generation.<sup>19</sup> He served as patron to the younger singer, travelling with him for months on end to Europe’s leading opera houses. Though characteristically reticent about the nature of their relationship, Walpole wrote in his journal that ‘[n]ever have I had such wonderful perfect accord with anyone’.<sup>20</sup> Work by Carlo Caballero and Patricia Pulham has demonstrated how Lee’s ‘A Wicked Voice’ ambivalently associates the emotional intensity of Wagnerian music with the pleasure and threat of queer sexual desire.<sup>21</sup> More generally, as Catherine Maxwell has observed, the story represents Lee’s own conflicted response to the erotic allure of the powerful contralto voice of Mary Wakefield.<sup>22</sup> Walpole was certainly

---

<sup>18</sup> Cited in Rupert Hart Davis, *Hugh Walpole: A Biography* (London: Macmillan, 1952), p. 345.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 197–212.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 207–8.

<sup>21</sup> See Pulham, ‘The Castrato and the Cry’, p. 427; Caballero, pp. 389–91.

<sup>22</sup> See Maxwell, ‘Sappho, Mary Wakefield, and “A Wicked Voice”’, pp. 970–71.

similarly enthralled by Melchior's singing. 'Just the voice for me', he commented in his journal, after hearing the tenor perform for the first time at a Promenade Concert in London on September 23, 1920.<sup>23</sup> Lee's Zaffirino is, of course, no *Heldentenor*—yet the queer dynamics of vocal seduction in the text are nevertheless framed in a manner that is redolent of contemporary discourses of Wagnerian musical consumption.

The notebook's next owner—Una Troubridge—was similarly alert to the queer power of the singing voice, not least in her relationship with her life-partner Radclyffe Hall. In *The Life and Death of Radclyffe Hall* (1961), Troubridge recalls that Hall's earliest and most intense adolescent crush was on her father's singing student, Agnes Nicholls, whose voice she describes (in terms strikingly reminiscent of 'A Wicked Voice') as 'a strange blend of woman, choirboy and angel'.<sup>24</sup> Hall herself was introduced to Lee's works, including *Studies in the Eighteenth Century* (1880) and 'Amour Dure' (1887) by her first significant partner, the noted amateur mezzo-soprano Mabel Batten (known as 'Ladye', 1856–1916).<sup>25</sup> In this respect, we can situate the text's reception within a tradition of specifically lesbian reflections on the queerness of the (low) female singing voice—what the musicologist Elizabeth Wood has influentially called 'Sapphonics'.<sup>26</sup>

---

<sup>23</sup> Cited in Rupert Hart Davis, *Hugh Walpole*, p. 197.

<sup>24</sup> Una Troubridge, *The Life and Death of Radclyffe Hall* (London: Hammond, 1961), p. 25.

<sup>25</sup> See Sally Cline, *Radclyffe Hall: A Woman Called John* (London: John Murray, 1997), p. 64. For Mabel Batten, see Sophie Fuller, "'Devoted Attention": Looking for Lesbian Musicians in Fin-de-Siècle Britain', in *Queer Episodes in Music and Modern Identity*, ed. by Sophie Fuller and Lloyd Whitesell (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002), pp. 79–101.

<sup>26</sup> Elizabeth Wood, 'Sapphonics', in *Queering the Pitch*, ed. by Philip Brett, Elizabeth Wood, Gary C Thomas, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (New York: Routledge, 2006), pp. 27–67.

Troubridge acquired Lee's manuscript at Christie's in London on 11 February 1946. The sale represented one of six auctions held between May 1945 and July 1946 in which Walpole's extensive library was dispersed following his death in June 1941. Her diary records the following:

One pleasant surprise is that instead of (as I understand it) charging £6.15 0 for A Wicked Voice, i.e. £5 paid at Christie's and 35/. profit, he has charged 35/. for the lot! Quite amazing what controls 1<sup>st</sup> edition and MS values...She wrote such lovely things and no one cares for her at all. Personally I think she was a far finer writer than Katherine Mansfield and certainly as fine as Wilde.<sup>27</sup>

The account is a reminder of just how quickly Lee's writings fell out of fashion following the rise of literary Modernism. Yet it also articulates a form of the 'queer kinship' that Kristin Mahoney has identified as shaping the twentieth-century reception of late-Victorian aestheticism.<sup>28</sup> Lee's works are understood here as a precious repository of outmoded 'lovely things' that are under-appreciated in a contemporary literary marketplace that values more highly works by the (implicitly) unlovely Modernist Katherine Mansfield. Any closer engagement between Troubridge and Hall and Lee is one of the frustrating *might-have-beens* of queer literary history. It is not inconceivable that they crossed paths during the time spent by the former in Florence in the 1920s, and they certainly shared a number of friends in

---

<sup>27</sup> Una Troubridge, [8 February 1946], 'Diaries, 1943–1951: Vol. 33, February 6, 1946 to March 5, 1946', Radclyffe Hall and Una Vincenzo, Lady Troubridge Collection, Harry Ransom Center, MS-01793 (Box 41, Folder 1).

<sup>28</sup> Kristin Mahoney, *Queer Kinship After Wilde: Transnational Decadence and the Family* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), pp. 135–38.

common (most notably the composer Ethel Smyth). However, there is no record of them meeting, or of any of Hall's specific responses to Lee's works.

Tracing the provenance of Lee's notebook through its movement from one generation of queer writers to the next allows us to think about ways in which the transmission of material objects encodes networks of queer transhistorical kinship. We should not overlook, though, the tentativeness and fragility of such affective connections. Hugh Walpole endeared himself to Hall by offering to speak in defence of *The Well of Loneliness* (1928) at the novel's obscenity trial in November 1928: 'I am ready to go anywhere and protest against any censorship and if you want me [...] I will gladly come'.<sup>29</sup> Yet at the same time he privately wrote to Jonathan Cape, the novel's publisher, that he deeply disliked the publicity given to same-sex desire, 'which ought I think to be "let lie"—on both sides'.<sup>30</sup> And it seems unlikely that Lee would have approved of Hall's open discussion of lesbianism in *The Well* (1928), given her general distaste about literary explorations of sexuality.

### A Note on the Text

The manuscript is in the Radclyffe Hall and Una Troubridge Collection, Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas, Austin (Box 36, Folder 6, MS-01793). It is bound with a dark brown leather spine and buff cloth boards. It contains 70 unruled pages, apparently collected and bound together after composition of the text. 'A Wicked Voice' is written on the recto sides. Fragments of an earlier version (lightly scored) are on the verso sides, frequently upside down. The inside front cover of the notebook includes two book plates. The first is

---

<sup>29</sup> Walpole, Letter to Radclyffe Hall, n.d., cited in Michael Baker, *Our Three Selves: A Life of Radclyffe Hall* (London: GMP, 1985), p. 235.

<sup>30</sup> Walpole, Letter to Jonathan Cape, n.d., cited in Baker, *Our Three Selves*, p. 235.

that of Hugh Walpole (including the name ‘Brackenburn’, his home in Cumbria from 1924–1941). The second plate refers to ‘Radclyffe Hall and Una Troubridge’ (although it should be noted that Hall, who died in October 1943, was deceased by the point at which Troubridge acquired the manuscript). On the top left corner of p. 2 is a pencil marking which states ‘£5’. A note in black ink in Troubridge’s hand at the top right corner of p. 3 states: ‘From the Library of Hugh Walpole. / U. V. T.’ The following transcription principals have been followed:

- Deletions are rendered with ~~striketroughs~~.
- Inserted words and phrases are surrounded by carets^.
- Lee’s original punctuation and spelling has been retained throughout.
- Illegible words are rendered as ‘xxxxx’ (where, as far as possible, each x represents a letter in the illegible word).
- Significant textual variants from the 1890 Text are recorded in footnotes. Variants in punctuation are not recorded.
- Words in the manuscript that are not present in the 1890 Text are rendered **in bold**.

Explanatory notes are included for the previously unpublished fragments. For explanatory notes on ‘A Wicked Voice’, see Vernon Lee, *Hauntings and Other Fantastic Tales*, ed. by Catherine Maxwell and Patricia Pulham (Peterborough, Ont.: Broadview, 2006), pp. 154–81. I am grateful to the Harry Ransom Center Distinguished Fellowships Endowment which allowed me to consult the manuscript in Austin, Texas. A copy of the manuscript (referred to as ‘The Wicked Voice’, rather than ‘A Wicked Voice’) is available online in the Harry Ransom Center Digital Collections: <https://hrc.contentdm.oclc.org/>

They have been congratulating me again today upon being the only composer of our days—of these days of stunning<sup>31</sup> orchestral effects and poetical quackery—who has despised the new-fangled nonsense of Wagner, and returned boldly to the traditions of Haydn<sup>32</sup> and Gluck and the divine Mozart, to the supremacy of melody and the respect of the human voice.

O cursed human voice, violin of flesh and blood, fashioned with the subtle tools, the cunning hands, of Satan! O execrable art of singing, have you not wrought mischief enough in the past, degrading ~~the highest of all arts~~ so much noble genius, corrupting the purity of Mozart, reducing Handel to a writer of high-class singing-exercises, and defrauding the world of the only inspiration worthy of Sophocles and Euripides, the poetry of the great poet Gluck? Is it not enough to have dishonoured a whole century in idolatry of that wicked and contemptible wretch the singer, without persecuting an obscure young composer of our days, whose only wealth is his love of nobility in art, and perhaps some few grains of genius?

And then they compliment me upon the perfection with which I imitate the style of the great dead masters; or ask me very seriously whether, even if I could gain over the modern public to this bygone style of music, I could hope to find singers to perform it. Sometimes, when people talk as they have been talking today, and laugh when I declare myself a follower of Wagner, ~~I feel as if~~ I burst into a paroxysm of unintelligible, childish rage, and exclaim, “We shall see that some day!”

Yes; some day we shall see! For, after all, may I not recover from this strangest of maladies? It is still possible that the day may come when all these things shall seem but an incredible nightmare; the day when *Ogier the Dane* shall be completed, and men shall know whether ~~or~~

---

<sup>31</sup> 1890: deafening

<sup>32</sup> 1890: Handel

~~not~~ I am a follower of the great master of the Future<sup>33</sup> or of the miserable singing-masters of the Past. I am but half-bewitched, since I am conscious of the spell that binds me. My old nurse, far off in Norway, used to tell me that were-wolves are ordinary men and women half<sup>34</sup> their lives, and that, if during that period, they become aware of their horrid transformation they may find the means to forestall it. May ~~it not be~~ this not be the case with me? My reason, after all, is free, although my artistic inspiration be enslaved; and I can despise and loathe the music I am forced to compose, and the execrable power that forces me.

Nay, is it not because I have studied with the doggedness of ~~patience~~ ^hatred^ this corrupt and corrupting<sup>35</sup> music of the Past, seeking for every little peculiarity of style and every biographical trifle merely to display ~~this odious xxxxxx~~ ^its vileness^, is it not for this ~~xxxxx~~ ~~that~~ presumptuous courage that I have been overtaken by such mysterious, incredible vengeance?

And meanwhile, my only relief consists in going over and over again in my mind the tale of my miseries. This time I will write it, writing only to tear up, to throw the ~~unread~~ manuscript unread into the fire. And yet, who knows? As the last charred pages shall crackle and slowly sink into the red embers, perhaps the spell may be broken, and I may possess once more my long-lost liberty, my vanished genius.

--- ● ● ---

---

<sup>33</sup> Circled in MS

<sup>34</sup> Circled in MS

<sup>35</sup> Circled in MS

It was a ~~stifling~~ ^breathless^ evening ~~beneath~~ ^under^ the full moon, that implacable full moon beneath which, even more than beneath the dreamy splendour of noon-tide, Venice seemed to swelter in the midst of the waters, exhaling, like some great lily, mysterious influences, making<sup>36</sup> the brain swim and the heart faint, a moral malaria, distilled, as I thought, from those languishing melodies, those cooing vocalisations which I had ~~xxxx~~ ^found^ in the musty music books of a century ago. ~~brain swim and the heart faint, a moral malaria made up ^distilled^, as it seemed to me, of those from those languid melodies, those cooing vocalisations, which I had found in the music scores of the last century, and which haunted me day and night~~<sup>37</sup> I see that moonlight evening as if it were present: I see my fellow lodgers of that little artists' boarding-house: The table on which they lean after supper is strewn with bits of bread, with napkins rolled in tapestry rollers; spots of wine here and there; and at regular intervals chipped pepper-pots, stands of toothpicks, and heaps of those huge hard peaches which Nature<sup>38</sup> imitates from the marble shops at<sup>39</sup> Pisa. The whole *pension* full is assembled, and examining stupidly the engraving which the American etcher has just brought for me, knowing me to be mad about old<sup>40</sup> music and musicians, and having noticed, as he turned over the heaps of penny prints in the square of San Polo, that this<sup>41</sup> ^the^ portrait is that of a singer of those days...

---

<sup>36</sup> 1890: which make

<sup>37</sup> This sentence is scored out at the top of a new page of the MS, which is written in a slightly darker ink than the preceding page.

<sup>38</sup> 1890: nature

<sup>39</sup> 1890: of

<sup>40</sup> 1890: eighteenth century

<sup>41</sup> 1890: that the portrait is that



Singer, thing of evil, stupid and wicked slave of the voice, of that instrument which was not invented by the human intellect<sup>42</sup>, but begotten of the body, and which, instead of moving the soul, merely stirs up the dregs of our nature. For what is the voice but the Beast calling, awakening, ~~xxxxxx xx~~ that other Beast sleeping in the depths of mankind, the Beast which all great art has ever sought to chain up, as the archangel chains up, in old pictures, the demon with his woman's face? How ~~wretched if the parasite that~~ could the creature attached to this voice, its owner and its victim, the singer, the great, the real singer who once ruled over every heart, be otherwise than wicked and contemptible? But let me try and ~~put down~~ ^get on^ with my story.

I can see all my fellow boarders, leaning on the table, contemplating the print, this effeminate beau, ~~its~~ ^his^ hair curled into *ails de pigeon*, his sword passed through his embroidered pocket, seated under a triumphal arch somewhere among the clouds, surrounded by puffy cupids<sup>43</sup> and crowned with laurels by a bouncing goddess of Fame<sup>44</sup>. I hear again all the insipid exclamations, the insipid questions about this singer:—"When did he live? Was he very famous? Are you sure, Magnus, that this is really a portrait," &c. &c. And I hear my own voice, as if in the far distance, giving them all sorts of information, biographical and critical, out of a battered little volume called *The Theatre of Musical Glory; or, Opinions upon the most Famous Chapel-masters and Virtuosi of this Century*, by Father Prosdocimo Sabatelli, Barnalite, Professor of Eloquence at the College of Modena, and Member of the Arcadian Academy, under the pastoral name of Evander Lilybaean, Venice, 1785, with the approbation of the Superiors. I tell them all ~~how that~~ ^how this^ singer, this Balthasar Cesari,

---

<sup>42</sup> Circled in MS

<sup>43</sup> 1890: Cupids

<sup>44</sup> 1890: fame

was nicknamed Zaffirino because of a sapphire engraved with cabalistic signs presented to him one evening by a ~~masqued~~ masked ~~person~~ stranger, in whom wise folk recognised that great cultivator of the human voice, the devil; how ~~miraculously~~ much more wonderful had been this Zaffirino's vocal gifts than those of any singer of ancient or modern times; how his brief life had been but a series of triumphs, petted by the greatest kings, sung by the most famous poets, and finally, adds Father Prosdocimo, "courted (if the grave muse<sup>45</sup> of history may incline her ear to the gossip of gallantry) by the most charming nymphs, even of the very highest quality"—

My friends glance once more at the engraving; more insipid remarks are made; I am requested—especially by the American young ladies—to play or sing one of this Zaffirino's favourite songs—"For of course you know them, dear Maestro Magnus, you who have such a passion for all ~~of~~ old music. *Do* be good, and sit down to the piano"—I refuse, rudely enough, rolling the print in my fingers. How fearfully this cursed heat, these cursed moonlight nights, must have unstrung me! This Venice would certainly kill me in the long run. Why, the ~~mere~~ sight of this idiotic engraving, the mere name of that coxcomb of a singer, have ~~sufficed~~ made my heart beat and my limbs turn to water like a lovesick<sup>46</sup> hobbledehoy.

After my ~~initial~~ gruff refusal, the company begins to disperse; they prepare to go out, some to have a row on the lagoon, others to saunter before the *cafés* at St. Mark's; family discussions arise, gruntings of fathers, murmurs of mothers, peals of laughing from young girls and young men. And the moon, pouring in by the wide open windows, turns this old palace

---

<sup>45</sup> 1890: Muse

<sup>46</sup> 1890: love sick

ballroom, nowadays an inn dining-room, into a ~~stricken~~ <sup>shining</sup> a ^lagoon^, scintillating, undulating lagoons like the other lagoon, the real one, which stretches out yonder furrowed<sup>47</sup> by invisible gondolas betrayed by the red prow-lights. At last the whole lot of them are on the move. I shall be able to get some quiet in my room, and to work a little at my opera of *Ogier the Dane*. But no! Conversation revives, and, of all things, about that singer, that Zaffirino, whose absurd portrait I am crunching in my fingers.

The principal speaker is Count Alvise, an old Venetian with dyed whiskers, a great check tie fastened with two pins and a chain; a threadbare patrician who is trying<sup>48</sup> to secure for his lanky son that pretty American girl, whose mother is intoxicated by all his mooning anecdotes about the past glories of Venice in general, and of his illustrious family in particular. Why, in Heaven's name, must he pitch upon Zaffirino for his mooning, this ~~absurd~~ old duffer of a patrician?

“Zaffirino,—ah yes, to be sure! Balthasar Cesari, called Zaffirino,” snuffles the voice of Count Alvise, who always repeats the last word of every sentence at least three times. “Yes, Zaffirino, to be sure! A famous singer of the days of my forefathers; yes, of my forefathers, dear lady!” Then a ~~series~~ of lot of rubbish about the former greatness of Venice, the glories of old music, the former Conservatoires, all mixed up with anecdotes of Rossini and Donizetti, whom he pretends to have known intimately. Finally, a story, of course containing ~~abundant~~ plenty about his illustrious family:—“My great grand aunt, the Procuratessa Vendramin, from whom we have inherited our estate of Mistrà, on the Brenta”—a hopelessly muddled story, apparently, fully of digressions, but of which ~~their~~ that singer Zaffirino is the hero. The

---

<sup>47</sup> 1890: furrowed

<sup>48</sup> 1890: dying

narrative, little by little, becomes more intelligible, or perhaps it is I who am giving it more attention.

“It seems,” says the Count, “that there was one of his songs in particular which was called the ‘Husbands’ Air’—*L’Aria dei Mariti*<sup>49</sup>—because they ~~never liked anyt~~ ^didn’t enjoy^ it quite as much as their better halves...My ~~great~~ grand aunt, Pisana Renier, married to the Procuratore Vendramin, was a patrician of the old school, of the style that was getting rare a hundred years ago. Her virtue and her pride rendered her unapproachable. Zaffirino, on his part, was in the habit of boasting that no woman had ever been able to resist his singing, which, it appears, had its foundation in fact—the ideal changes, my dear lady, the ideal changes a good deal from one century to another!—and that his first song could make any woman turn pale and lower her eyes, the second make her madly in love; while the third song could kill her off on the spot, kill her for love, there under his very eyes, if he only felt inclined. My grandaunt<sup>50</sup> Vendramin laughed when this story was told her, refused to go to hear this insolent dog, and added that it might be quite possible by the aid of spells and infernal pacts to kill a *gentildonna*, but as to making her fall in love with a lacquey<sup>51</sup>, never! This answer was naturally reported to Zaffirino, who piqued himself upon always getting the better of any one who ~~had showed~~ wanting<sup>52</sup> in deference to his voice. Like the ancient Romans, *parcere subjectis et debellare superbos*. You American ladies, who are so learned, will appreciate this little quotation from the Divine<sup>53</sup> Virgil. While seeming to avoid the

---

<sup>49</sup> 1890: *Marit*

<sup>50</sup> 1890: grand aunt

<sup>51</sup> 1890: lackey

<sup>52</sup> 1890: who was wanting

<sup>53</sup> 1890: divine

Procuratessa Vendramin, Zaffirino took the opportunity, one evening at a large assembly, to sing in her presence. He sang and sang and sang until the poor Grand Aunt<sup>54</sup> Pisana fell ill for love. The ~~most-sk~~ most skilful physicians were kept unable to explain the mysterious malady which was visibly killing the poor young lady; and the Procuratore Vendramin ~~tried~~ ^applied^ in vain to the most venerated Madonnas, and vainly promised an altar of ~~massive~~ silver, with massive gold candlesticks, to Saints Cosmas and Damian, patrons of the art of healing. At last the brother in law<sup>55</sup> of the Procuratessa, Monsignor Almorò Vendramin, Patriarch of Aquileia, ~~and~~ a prelate famous for the sanctity of his life, obtained ~~the revelation~~ in a vision of Saint Justina, for whom he entertained a particular devotion, the information that the only thing which could benefit the ^strange^ illness of his sister in law<sup>56</sup> was ~~a-se~~ the voice of Zaffirino. Take notice that my poor grand-aunt had never ~~consented~~ condescended to such a revelation.

“The Procuratore was enchanted at this happy solution; and ~~Monsignor~~ His Lordship<sup>57</sup> the Patriarch went to seek Zaffirino in person and carried him in his own coach to the Villa of Mistrà, where the Procuratessa was residing.

~~When~~ “On being told what was about to happen, my poor grand aunt went into fits of rage, which were succeeded immediately by equally violent fits of joy. However, she never forgot what was due to her ~~high~~ great position. Although sick almost unto death, she had herself

---

<sup>54</sup> 1890: grand aunt

<sup>55</sup> 1890: brother-in-law

<sup>56</sup> 1890: sister-in-law

<sup>57</sup> 1890: his lordship

arrayed in<sup>58</sup> ~~her most greatest the most~~ with the greatest pomp, caused her face to be painted, and put on all her diamonds: it would seem as if she were anxious to affirm her full dignity before this singer. Accordingly she received Zaffirino reclining on a sofa which had been placed ~~under a~~ <sup>in</sup> the great ballroom of the Villa of Mistrà, and beneath the princely canopy, for the Vendramins, who had intermarried with the house of Mantua, possessed imperial fiefs and were princes of the Holy Roman Empire. Zaffirino saluted her with the most profound respect; but ~~there~~ not a word passed between them. Only, the singer enquired<sup>59</sup> from ~~her whether whether~~ the Procuratore whether the illustrious lady had received the Sacraments of the Church. Being told that the Procuratessa had herself asked to be given extreme unction from the hands of her brother in law<sup>60</sup>, he declared his readiness to obey the orders of His Excellency; and sat down at once to the harpsichord.

“Never had he sung so divinely. ~~At the~~ At the end of the first song the Procuratessa Vendramin had already revived most extraordinarily; by the end of the second she appeared entirely cured and beaming with beauty and happiness; but ~~with~~ <sup>at</sup> the third air—the *Aria dei Mariti* no doubt—she began to change frightfully, she gave a dreadful cry, and fell into the convulsions of death. ~~By the end of a~~ In a quarter of an hour she was dead! Zaffirino did not wait to see her die. Having finished his song, he withdrew instantly, took posthorses<sup>61</sup>, and travelled day and night as far as Munich. People ~~remembered~~ <sup>remarked</sup> that he had presented himself at Mistrà dressed in mourning, although ~~so far~~ he had mentioned no death among his relatives; also that he had prepared everything for his departure, ~~doubtless~~ <sup>as if</sup>

---

<sup>58</sup> 1890: arrayed with the greatest pomp

<sup>59</sup> 1890: inquired

<sup>60</sup> 1890: brother-in-law

<sup>61</sup> 1890: post-horses

fearing the wrath of so powerful a family. Then there was also the extraordinary question he had asked before beginning to sing, about the Procuratessa having confessed and received extreme unction...No, thanks, my dear lady, no cigarettes for me. But if it does not ~~amoy~~ distress you or your charming daughter, may I humbly beg permission to smoke a cigar?"

And Count Alvisé, enchanted with his talent for narrative, and sure of having secured for his son the heart and the dollars of his fair audience, proceeds to light a candle, and at the candle one of those long black Italian cigars which require preliminary disinfection before smoking.

...If this state of things goes on I shall just have to ask the doctor for a bottle: this ~~stabbing~~ ridiculous beating of my heart and disgusting cold perspiration have increased steadily during Count Alvisé's ~~story~~ narrative. To ~~retain a measure of being like myself~~ keep myself in countenance among the various idiotic commentaries on this cock and bull story of a ^vocal^ coxcomb and a vapping<sup>62</sup> great lady, I begin to unroll the engraving; and to examine stupidly the portrait of Zaffirino, once so renowned, now so forgotten. A ridiculous ~~farrago~~ ^ass^, this singer, under his triumphal arch, with his stuffed Cupids and the great fat winged kitchenmaid crowning him with laurels. How flat and vapid and vulgar it is, to be sure, all this odious eighteenth century!

But he, personally, is not so utterly vapid as I had thought. That effeminate, fat face of his is almost beautiful, with an odd smile, brazen and cruel; I have seen faces like this, if not in real life, at least in my boyish romantic dreams, when I read Swinburne and Baudelaire, the faces of wicked, vindictive women. Oh yes, he is decidedly ~~half-good~~ a beautiful ~~person~~ ^creature^,

---

<sup>62</sup> 1890: vapouring

this Zaffirino; and his voice must have had the same sort of beauty and the same expression of wickedness...

“Come on, Magnus”—~~say~~ sound the voices of my fellow boarders<sup>63</sup>—“be a good fellow and sing us one of the old chap’s songs—or at least something or other of that day, and we’ll make believe it was the air with which he killed that poor lady.”

“Oh yes, the *Aria dei Mariti*, the ‘Husbands’ Air”’—mumbles old Alvise, between the puffs at his horrible<sup>64</sup> black cigar—“~~He killed poor~~ My poor grand aunt, Pisana Vendramin, he went and killed her with those songs of his, with that *Aria dei Mariti*.”

I feel a ~~sudden~~ senseless rage overcoming me. Is it that horrible palpitation (by the way, there is a Norwegian doctor, my fellow countryman, at Venice just now) which is sending the blood to my brain and making me mad? The people round the piano, the furniture, everything together seems to get mixed and to turn into moving blobs of colour. I set to singing, the only thing ~~that~~ which remains distinct before my eyes being the portrait of Zaffirino, on the edge of that boarding house<sup>65</sup> piano.<sup>66</sup> The sensual, effeminate face, with its wicked, ~~smirking~~ cynical smile, keeps ~~rolling and unrolling~~ appearing and disappearing as the print wavers about in the draught that makes the candles smoke and gutter. And I set to singing madly, singing I don’t know what. Yes; I begin to identify it: ‘tis the *Biondina in Gondoleta*, the only song of the 18<sup>th</sup> century<sup>67</sup> which is still remembered by the Venetian people. I sing it,

---

<sup>63</sup> 1890: fellow-boarders

<sup>64</sup> 1890: impossible

<sup>65</sup> 1890: boarding-house

<sup>66</sup> 1890: piano; the sensual

<sup>67</sup> 1890: eighteenth century



mimicking ~~all the graces of the old school every kind of~~ every old-school grace; shakes, cadences, languishingly swelled and diminished notes, and adding all manner of buffooneries, until the audience, recovering from its surprise, begins to shake with laughing, until I begin to laugh myself, madly, frantically, between the phrases of the melody, ~~until~~ my voice finally smothered in this dull, brutal laughter...And then, to crown it all, I shake my fist at this longdead<sup>68</sup> singer, ~~who~~ looking at me with his wicked woman's face, with his mocking, fatuous smile ~~and I cry out to this.~~

“Ah you would like to ~~see~~ he be revenged on me also<sup>69</sup>—” I exclaim,—“You would like me to write you nice roulades and flourishes, ~~nice aria~~ another nice *Aria dei Mariti*, my fine Zaffirino!”

--- ● ● ● ---

That night I dreamed a very strange dream. Even in the big half-furnished room the ~~air was hot and stifling~~ heat and closeness were stifling. The air seemed laden with the scent of all manner of white flowers, faint and heavy in their intolerable sweetness: tuberose, gardenias, and jasmines drooping I know not where in neglected vases. The moonlight had transformed the marble floor around me into a shallow, shining, pool. ~~Now thinking of it~~ On account of the heat I had exchanged my bed for a big old fashioned<sup>70</sup> ~~div~~ sofa<sup>71</sup> of light wood, painted with little nosegays and sprigs, like an old silk; and I lay there, not attempting to sleep, and letting my thoughts go vaguely to my opera of *Ogier the Dane*, of which I had long finished

---

<sup>68</sup> 1890: long-dead

<sup>69</sup> 1890: you would like to be revenged on me also!

<sup>70</sup> 1890: old-fashioned

<sup>71</sup> 1890: sofa

writing the words, and for whose<sup>72</sup> I had hoped to find some inspiration in this strange Venice, floating, as it were, in the stagnant lagoon of the past. But Venice had merely put all my ideas into hopeless confusion; it was as if there arose out of its ~~canals and~~ islands and waters<sup>73</sup> ~~a mi~~ a miasma of longdead melodies, which sickened but intoxicated my soul. I lay on my sofa<sup>74</sup> watching that pool of ~~light~~ whitish light, which rose higher and higher, little trickles of light meeting it here and there, wherever the moon's rays struck upon some polished surface; while huge shadows waved to and fro in the draught of ~~the bal~~ the open balcony.

I went over ~~in the that~~ and over that old Norse story: how the Paladin, Ogier, one of the knights of Charlemagne, was decoyed during his ^homeward^ wanderings from the Holy Land by the arts of an enchantress, the same who had once held in bondage the great Emperor Caesar and given him King Oberon for a son; how Ogier had ~~rested~~ tarried in that island only one day and one night, and yet, when he came home to his kingdom, he found all changed, his friends dead, his family dethroned, and not a man who knew his face; until at last, driven hither and thither like a beggar, a poor minstrel had taken compassion of his sufferings and given him all he could give: a song; the song of the prowess of a hero dead for hundreds of years, the Paladin Ogier the Dane.

The story of Ogier ran into a dream, as vivid as my waking thoughts had been vague. I was looking no longer at the pool of moonlight spreading round my couch, with its trickles of light and looming, waving shadows; but the frescoed walls of a great saloon. It was not, as I

---

<sup>72</sup> 1890: for whose music

<sup>73</sup> 1890: shallow waters

<sup>74</sup> 1890: sofa

recognised in a second, the ~~saloon~~ ^dining room^<sup>75</sup> of that Venetian palace now turned into a boarding house. It was a far larger room, a real ballroom, almost circular in its octagon shape, with eight huge white doors surrounded by stucco mouldings, and, high on the vault of the ceiling, eight little galleries or recesses like boxes at a theatre, intended no doubt for musicians and spectators. The place was imperfectly lighted by only one of the eight chandeliers, which revolved slowly, like huge spiders, each on its long ~~rope~~ cord. But the light struck upon the gilt stuccoes opposite me, and on a large expanse of fresco: the sacrifice of Iphigenia, with Agamemnon and Achilles in Roman helmets, lappets, and knee breeches<sup>76</sup>. It discovered also one of the oil panels let into the mouldings of the roof, a goddess in ^lemon^ and lilac ~~and lemon~~ draperies, foreshortened over a great green peacock. Round the room, where the light reached, I could make out big yellow satin sofas<sup>77</sup> and heavy gilded consoles: in the shadow of a corner was what ~~seemed~~ looked like a piano, and farther in the shade one of those big canopies which decorate the anterooms of Roman palaces. I looked about me, wondering where I was: a heavy, sweet smell, reminding me of the flavour of a peach, filled the place. ~~There was~~<sup>78</sup>

Little by little I began to perceive sounds: little, sharp, metallic, detached notes, like those of a mandolin<sup>79</sup>; and there was united to them ~~the notes of a very~~ a voice, very low and sweet, almost a whisper, which grew and grew and grew until the whole place was filled with that ~~note~~ exquisite vibrating note, of a strange, exotic, unique quality. The note ~~grew and grew~~

---

<sup>75</sup> 1890: dining-room

<sup>76</sup> 1890: knee-breeches

<sup>77</sup> 1890: sofas

<sup>78</sup> Fragment 1 is on the opposing page in the MS.

<sup>79</sup> 1890: mandoline

went on, swelling and swelling. Suddenly there was a ^horrible^ piercing shriek, and the sound ^thud^ of a body ~~falling to the gr~~ on the floor, and all manner of smothered exclamations. There, close by the canopy, a light suddenly appeared; and I could see, among the dark figures moving to and fro in the room, a woman lying on the ground, surrounded by other women.<sup>80</sup> Her blond hair, ~~tangled~~<sup>81</sup> white, full of ~~the spar~~ diamond sparkles<sup>82</sup> which cut through the ~~dark~~ half-darkness, was hanging dishevelled; ~~her~~ the laces of her bodice had been cut, and her white breast shone among the sheen of jewelled brocade ~~one of her bare white bare arms trailed like a broken arm~~; her face was bent forwards, and a thin white arm trailed, like a broken limb, across the knees of one of the women who were endeavouring to lift her. There was a sudden splash of water ~~on~~ ^against^ the floor, more ^confused^ exclamations ~~and then a sort of rattle in the throat, a hideous~~ a hoarse, broken moan, and a gurgling, dreadful sound...I awoke with a start and rushed to the window.

Outside, in the blue haze of the moon, the church and belfry of St. George loomed blue and hazy, ~~and~~ with the black hull and rigging, the red lights, of a large steamer moored before them. From the lagoon rose a damp sea-breeze. ~~Fragments~~ What was it all? Ah,<sup>83</sup> I began to understand: that story of old Count Alvise's, the death of his grand aunt<sup>84</sup> Pisana Vendramin. Yes, it was that. I had been dreaming.<sup>85</sup>

---

<sup>80</sup> Fragment 2 is on the opposing page in the MS.

<sup>81</sup> 1890: tangled

<sup>82</sup> 1890: diamond-sparkles

<sup>83</sup> 1890: Ah!,

<sup>84</sup> 1890: grand-aunt,

<sup>85</sup> 1890: it was about that I had been dreaming

I returned to my room, I struck a light, and sat down to my writing table. Sleep had become impossible. I tried to work at my opera. Once or twice I thought I had got hold of what I ~~wanted~~ I had looked for so long... But as soon as I tried to lay hold of my theme, there arose in my mind the distant echo of that ~~strange~~ voice, of that long note swelled ~~gr-gradu~~ slowly by insensible degrees, that long note whose tone was so strong and so ~~subtle~~ ~~penetrating~~ subtle.<sup>86</sup>

--- ● ● ---

There are, in the life of an artist, moments when ~~before your~~, still unable to seize his own inspiration, or even clearly to discern it, he becomes aware of the ~~arriving~~ ^approach^ of that long invoked idea. A mingled joy and terror ~~tell~~ warn him that before another day, another hour have passed, the inspiration shall have crossed the threshold of his soul and flooded it ~~in~~ ~~its~~ with its rapture. All day I had felt the need of isolation and quiet, and at nightfall I went for a row on the most solitary part of the lagoon. All things seemed to tell that I was going to meet my inspiration, and I awaited its coming as a lover awaits his beloved.<sup>87</sup>

I had stopped my gondola for a moment, and as I gently swayed to and fro on the ~~w-moor~~ water, all paved with moonbeams, it seemed to me that I was on the confines of an imaginary world. It lay close at hand enveloped in luminous, pale blue mist, through which the moon had cut a wide and glistening path; out to sea, ~~in the~~ the little islands, ~~moored~~ like moored black boats, only ~~increased~~ ^accentuated^ the solitude of this region of moonbeams and wavelets; while the hum of the insects in orchards hardby<sup>88</sup> merely added to the impression of

---

<sup>86</sup> Fragment 3 is on the opposing page in the MS.

<sup>87</sup> Fragment 4 is on the opposing page in the MS, and continues over the page

<sup>88</sup> 1890: hard by

untroubled silence. On some such seas, I thought, must the Paladin Ogier, have sailed when about to discover that during that sleep at the enchantress's knees ~~had lasted for centuries~~ had elapsed and the heroic<sup>89</sup> had set, and the ~~de~~ kingdom of prose had come.

While my gondola rocked stationary on that sea of moonbeams, I pondered over that twilight of the heroic world. <sup>^Lapping like a sharp noise^</sup> In the soft rattle of the water on the hull I seemed to hear the the<sup>90</sup> ~~voice xxxxx~~ rattle of all ~~those~~ that armour, of all those swords swinging rusty on the walls, ~~abandoned~~ neglected by the ~~weak xxxxx~~ sons degenerate sons of the great champions of old. I had long been in search of a theme ~~for my opera~~ which I called the theme of ~~great force of Ogier~~ the Prowess of Ogier<sup>91</sup>; it was to appear from time to time in the course of my opera, to develop at last into that song of the Minstrel, which reveals to the hero that he is one of a long-dead world. And at ~~that~~ <sup>^this^</sup> moment I seemed to feel the presence of that theme. Yet an instant, and my mind would be overwhelmed by that savage music, ~~grand, solemn~~ heroic, funereal.

Suddenly there came across the lagoon, ~~calling~~ cleaving, checkering<sup>92</sup>, and fretting the silence with a lace work<sup>93</sup> of sound even as the moon was fretting and cleaving the water, a ~~ripple a trickle~~ a ripple of music, a voice ~~breaking its breaking itself and showering itself in a~~ shower of little scales and cadences and trills.

---

<sup>89</sup> 1890: the heroic world

<sup>90</sup> 1890: hear the rattle

<sup>91</sup> 1890: "Prowess of Ogier"

<sup>92</sup> 1890: chequering

<sup>93</sup> 1890: lacework

~~And~~ I sank back upon my cushions. The vision of heroic days had vanished, and before my closed eyes there seemed to dance multitudes of little ~~parcels~~ stars of light, chasing and interlacing like those sudden vocalisations.<sup>94</sup>

“To shore! Quick!” I cried to the gondolier.

But ~~I~~ the sounds had ceased; and there ~~came~~ came from the orchards, with their mulberry trees glistening in the moonlight, and **this and** their ~~cypress~~ ^black^ swaying cypress plumes, nothing save the confused hum, the monotonous trill<sup>95</sup>, of the crickets.

I looked around me: on one side ~~the~~ empty dunes, ~~the~~ orchards, and ~~the~~ meadows, without house or steeple; on the other, the blue and misty sea, empty to where ~~all the~~ distant islets were profiled black ~~at~~ on the horizon.

A faintness ~~came upon~~ overcame me, and I felt myself dissolve. For, all of a sudden a second ripple of voice, ~~flowed~~ swept over the lagoon, a shower of little notes, ~~during~~ which ~~there~~ seemed to form a little mocking laugh.

Then again all was still. This silence lasted so long that I fell once more to ~~the~~ meditating on my opera. I lay in wait once more for the half caught<sup>96</sup> theme. But no. It was not that theme for which I was waiting and watching with baited breath. I realised my delusion when, ~~as we~~ on rounding the point of the Giudecca, the murmur of a voice ~~seem~~ arose from the ~~depths~~ midst of the waters, a thread of sound ~~no wider than a thin as a moonbeam, scarce audible but~~ exquisite, slender as a moonbeam, scarce audible but exquisite, which expanded slowly,

---

<sup>94</sup> 1890: vocalisations

<sup>95</sup> 1890: chirp

<sup>96</sup> 1890: half-caught

insensibly, taking volume and body, taking flesh almost and fire, an ineffable quality, full, passionate, but ~~^wrapped veiled~~ veiled<sup>^</sup>, as it were, in a ~~subtle, downy~~ subtle, downy wrapper. The note grew stronger and stronger, ~~giving in~~ and warmer and more passionate, until it ~~almos~~ burst through that strange and charming veil, ~~emerging~~ and emerged beaming to break itself in the luminous facets of a wonderful shake, long, superb, triumphant...

There was a dead silence.

“Row to St. Mark’s!” I exclaimed. “Quick!”

The gondola glided through the long glittering track of moonbeams, and rent the great band of yellow reflected light, ~~in~~ mirroring the cupolas of St. Mark’s, the ~~laee~~ lace like pinnacles of the palace, and the slender pink belfry, which rose from the lit up water to the pale and bluish evening sky.

In the larger of the two squares, the military band was blaring through the last spirals of a *crescendo* of Rossini. The crowd was dispersing in this great open air<sup>97</sup> ballroom, and the sounds arose which invariably follow upon out of door<sup>98</sup> music. A clatter of spoons and glasses, a rustle and grating of frocks and of chairs, and the ~~clanking-clack~~ <sup>^click^</sup> of scabbards on the ~~flags~~ pavement. I pushed my way among the fashionable youths ~~look~~ contemplating the ladies while sucking the nob<sup>99</sup> of their ~~eanes~~ sticks; through the serried ranks of respectable families, marching arm in arm with their white frocked young ladies close in front. I ~~sat~~ took a seat before Florian’s, among the customers stretching themselves

---

<sup>97</sup> 1890: open-air

<sup>98</sup> 1890: out-of-door

<sup>99</sup> 1890: knob



before departing, and the waiters hurrying to and fro, clattering their empty cups and trays. Two imitation Neapolitans were slipping their guitar and violin under their arm, ready to leave the place.

“Stop!” I cried to them; “don’t go yet. Sing me something—sing *La Camesella* or *Funiculì*, *Funiculà*<sup>100</sup>—no matter what, provided you make a row;” and as they screamed and scraped their utmost, I added, “But can’t you sing louder, d—n you—you!—sing louder, do you understand?”

I felt the need of noise, of yells and false notes, of something vulgar and hideous to drive away that ghost voice which was haunting me.



Again and again I told myself that it had been ~~the~~ some ~~of~~ silly prank of a romantic amateur, hidden in the gardens of the shore or gliding unperceived on the lagoon; and that the sorcery of moonlight and sea mist had transfigured for my excited brain mere humdrum roudades out of exercises of Bordogni or Crescentini.

But all the same ~~the voice~~ I continued to be haunted by that voice. ~~I~~My work was interrupted ever and anon by the attempt to catch its imaginary echo; and the heroic ~~melodies of~~ harmonies of my Scandinavian legend were strangely interwoven with voluptuous phrases and florid cadences in which I seemed to hear again ~~that~~ that same accursed voice.

---

<sup>100</sup> 1890: *funiculà*

To be haunted by singing exercises<sup>101</sup>! It seemed too ~~much~~ ridiculous for a man who professedly despised the art of singing. And still, I preferred to believe in that childish amateur, amusing himself with warbling to the moon.

One day, while making these reflections ~~at least the hund~~ hundredth time over, my eyes chanced to light upon the portrait of Zaffirino, which my friend had pinned against the wall. I pulled it down and tore it into half a dozen shreds. Then, already ashamed of my folly, I watched the torn pieces float ~~through~~ ^down from^ the window, wafted ~~here~~ hither and thither by the sea breeze. One scrap got caught in a yellow blind below me; the others fell into the canal, and were speedily lost to sight in the dark water...I was overcome with shame. My heart beat like bursting. ~~How miserable I had become~~ What a miserable, unnerved worm I had become in this cursed Venice, with its languishing moonlights, its atmosphere as of some stuffy boudoir, long unused, full of old stuffs and potpourri.<sup>102</sup>

That night however<sup>103</sup> things seemed to be going better. I was able to settle down to my opera and even to work at it. In the intervals my thoughts returned not without a certain pleasure to those scattered fragments of the torn engraving ~~floating~~ do fluttering down to the water. I was disturbed at my piano by ~~the~~ the hoarse voices and the scraping of violins which rose from a one of those music boats<sup>104</sup> that station at night under the hotels of the Grand Canal. The moon had set. Under my balcony the water stretched black into the distance, its darkness cut by the still darker outlines of the flotilla of gondolas in attendance on the music boat, where

---

<sup>101</sup> 1890: singing-exercises

<sup>102</sup> 1890: pot pourri!

<sup>103</sup> 1890: , however,

<sup>104</sup> 1890: music-boats

the faces of the singers, and the ~~backs of~~ guitars and violins gleamed reddish under the ~~xxxxx~~  
~~stain~~ unsteady light of the ~~Japa~~ Chinese lanterns<sup>105</sup>.

“*Jammo, Jammo; Jammo, jammo jà*—”<sup>106</sup> sang the loud hoarse voices; then a ~~phrase of~~  
tremendous scrape and twang, and the yelled out burden, “*Funiculì, funiculà; Funiculì,*  
*Funiculà; jammo, jammo, jammo, jammo, jammo jà* —”

Then came a few cries of “*Bis, Bis*”<sup>107</sup> from a neighbouring hotel, a brief clapping of hands,  
~~and~~ the sound of a handful of coppers rattling into the boat, and oar strokes<sup>108</sup> of some  
gondolier making ~~who had xxxxxxx xxxxx~~ ready to turn away.

“Sing the *Camesella*,”—ordered some voice with a foreign accent.

“No, no! *Santa Lucia*.”—

“I want the *Camesella*.”—

“No! *Santa Lucia*. Hi! sing *Santa Lucia*—d’you hear?”—

The musicians under their green and yellow and red lamps held a whispered consultation on  
the manner of conciliating these contradictory demands. Then, after a minute’s hesitation, the  
violins began the prelude of that once famous air, which has remained popular in Venice—

---

<sup>105</sup> 1890: Chinese-lanterns

<sup>106</sup> 1890: *Jammo, jammo, jammo, jà*

<sup>107</sup> 1890: *Bis!*

<sup>108</sup> 1890: the oar-stroke

the words written, some hundred years ago, by the patrician Gritti, the music by ~~some~~ an unknown composer, La Biondina in Gondoleta.

That cursed eighteenth century! It seemed a malignant fatality that made these brutes choose just this piece to interrupt me.

At last the long prelude came to an end; and above the cracked guitars and squeaking fiddles there arose, not the expected nasal chorus, but a single voice singing below its breath.

My arteries ~~began to~~ throbbed. How well I knew that voice! It was singing, as I have said, below its breath, yet none the less it sufficed to ~~flood with its exquisite tone~~ fill all that reach of the canal with its ~~exquisite~~ strange quality of tone, exquisite, far-fetched—

~~The notes were~~ They were long drawn out notes, of intense ^but peculiar^ sweetness, a man's voice which had much of a woman's, but more even of a chorister's, but a chorister's voice without its limpidity and innocence; its youthfulness was veiled, muffled, as it were, in a sort of downy vagueness, as if **in a veil of suppressed** passion, of tears withheld.<sup>109</sup>

There was a burst of applause, and the old palaces reechoed<sup>110</sup> with the clapping. "Bravo, Bravo<sup>111</sup>! Thank you, Thank<sup>112</sup> you! Sing again, Please<sup>113</sup>, sing again—Who can it be?—"

---

<sup>109</sup> 1890: as if a passion of tears withheld

<sup>110</sup> 1890: re-echoed

<sup>111</sup> 1890: bravo

<sup>112</sup> 1890: thank

<sup>113</sup> 1890: please

And then a bumping of hulls, a splashing of oars and the oaths of gondoliers trying to push each other away, as the red prowlamps<sup>114</sup> of the gondolas pressed round the gaily lit singing boat.

But no one stirred ~~upon it~~ on board: it was<sup>115</sup> ~~a~~ to none of them that this applause was due. And while ~~all those? pressed~~ everyone<sup>116</sup> pressed on and clapped and vociferated, one little red prowlamp<sup>117</sup> dropped away from the fleet; ~~and~~ for a moment a single ~~black~~ gondola stood forth black upon the black water, and then was lost in the night.

For several days the mysterious singer was the universal topic. The people of the music-boat ~~could~~ swore that no one besides themselves had been on board, and that they knew as little as ~~the~~ ourselves about the owner of that voice. The gondoliers, despite their descent from the spies of the old Republic, were equally unable to furnish any clue. No musical celebrity was known or suspected to be at Venice; and ~~all every one~~ everyone agreed that such a singer must be a European celebrity. The strangest thing in this strange business was, that even among ~~musically people~~ those learned in music there was no agreement on the subject of this voice: it was called by all sorts of names and described by all manner of incongruous adjectives; people went so far as to dispute whether the voice belonged to a man or to a woman: everyone<sup>118</sup> had some new definitions.

---

<sup>114</sup> 1890: prow-lamps

<sup>115</sup> 1890: on board. It was

<sup>116</sup> 1890: every one

<sup>117</sup> 1890: prow-lamp

<sup>118</sup> 1890: every one

In all these musical discussions I alone brought forward no opinion. I felt a repugnance, an impossibility almost, of speaking about that voice; and the ~~comm~~ more or less commonplace conjectures of my friends<sup>119</sup> had the invariable effect of sending me out of the room.

Meanwhile, my work was becoming daily more difficult; and I soon ~~found myself~~ passed from ~~to utter bitterness~~ to impotence ~~to a condition~~ ^state^ of inexplicable agitation.<sup>120</sup> I Every morning I ~~awoke~~ arose with fine resolutions and grand projects of work; only to go to bed that night without having accomplished anything. I spent hours leaning on my balcony, or wandering through the network of lanes with their ribbon of blue sky, endeavouring vainly to expel the thought of that voice, or endeavouring in reality to reproduce it in my memory; for the more I tried to banish it from my thoughts, the more I grew to thirst for that extraordinary tone, for those mysteriously downy, veiled notes. And ~~wherever I made an~~ ^no sooner^ did I make an effort to work at my opera than my head was full of scraps of forgotten 18<sup>th</sup> century<sup>121</sup> airs, of frivolous or languishing little phrases; and I fell to wondering with a bittersweet<sup>122</sup> longing how those songs would have sounded if sung by that voice.

At length it became necessary to see a doctor, ~~to whom~~ ^from whom^, however, I carefully hid away all the stranger symptoms of my malady. The air of the lagoons, the great heat, he answered cheerfully, had pulled me down a little; a tonic and a month in the country, with plenty of riding and no work, would make me myself again. That old idler Count Alvise, who had insisted on ~~æe~~ accompanying me to the physician's, immediately suggested that I should

---

<sup>119</sup> 1890: friend

<sup>120</sup> 1890: passed from utter impotence to a state of inexplicable agitation

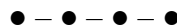
<sup>121</sup> 1890: eighteenth century

<sup>122</sup> 1890: bitter-sweet

go and stay with his son who was boring himself to death superintending the maize harvest on the mainland: he could promise me excellent air, plenty of horses, and all the peaceful surroundings and the delightful occupations of a rural life—"Be sensible, my dear Magnus, and just go quietly to Mistrà."

Mistrà...the name sent a shiver all down me. I was about to decline the invitation, when a thought suddenly loomed vaguely in my mind.

"Yes, dear Count"—I answered—"I accept your invitation with gratitude and pleasure. I will start tomorrow<sup>123</sup> for Mistrà.—"



The next day found me at Padua, on my way to the Villa of Mistrà. It seemed as if I had left an intolerable burden behind me. I was, for the first time since how long, quite light of heart. These tortuous, rough-paved streets, with their empty, gloomy porticoes; the ill plastered palaces, with closed discoloured shutters; the little rambling squares<sup>124</sup> with meagre trees and stubborn grass, the Venetian garden houses<sup>125</sup> reflecting their crumbling graces in the muddy canal, the gardens without gates, and the gates without gardens, the avenues of leading nowhere, and the population of ~~eggars~~ blind and legless beggars, of whining sacristans which issued as by magic from between the flagstones and dustheaps<sup>126</sup> and weeds under the fierce August sun—, all this dreariness merely amused and pleased me. ~~I sensed a further~~ My

---

<sup>123</sup> 1890: to-morrow

<sup>124</sup> 1890: square,

<sup>125</sup> 1890: garden-houses

<sup>126</sup> 1890: flag-stones and dust-heaps

good spirits were heightened by a musical ~~service~~ ^mass^ which I had the good fortune to hear at St. Anthony's.

Never in all my days had I heard anything ~~so extraordinary to compare to~~ comparable; although Italy affords many strange things in the way of sacred music: into<sup>127</sup> the deep nasal chanting of the priests there had suddenly burst a chorus of children, singing absolutely independent of all time and tune, grunting of priests answered by squealing of boys, slow Gregorian modulation interrupted by jaunty barrel-organ pipings, an insane, insanely merry jumble of bellowing and barking, ~~cackling~~ mewing and cackling ^and braying^, such as would have enlivened a witches' meeting, or rather some mediaeval Feast of Fools, and<sup>128</sup> all, and, to make the grotesqueness of such music ~~echo xxxx by the echoing xxxx and xxxxxx~~ ~~that~~ still more fantastic and Hoffmannlike, there was, besides, the magnificence of the piles of sculptured marbles and gilded bronzes, ~~upon the~~ the tradition of the musical splendour for which St. Anthony's had been famous in days gone by. I had read in old travellers, Lalande and Burney, that the Republic of St. Mark had squandered immense sums not merely on the monuments ~~and ornament~~ and decoration, but on the musical establishment of ~~the~~ its great cathedral of Terra Firma. ~~Among this~~ In the midst of this ineffable concert of impossible voices and instruments, I tried to imagine the voice of Guadagni, the soprano for whom Gluck had written *Che farò senza Euridice*; and the fiddle of Tartini, that Tartini ~~to whom~~ ^with whom^ the devil had once come and made music. And the delight in anything so ~~fantastic and profane in its~~ ^absolutely, barbarously, grotesquely^, fantastically incongruous as such a performance in such a place, was heightened by a sense of profanation: ~~there are~~

---

<sup>127</sup> 1890 music. Into

<sup>128</sup> 1890: Fool. And, to make



such were the successors of those wonderful musicians of that ~~odious~~ hated eighteenth century!

The ~~performance had~~ whole thing had ~~aroused~~ ^delighted^ me so much, so very much more than the most faultless performance could have done, that I determined to enjoy it once more; and towards vesper time, after a cheerful dinner with two bagmen at the ~~Trattoria della Stella~~ inn of the Golden Star, and a pipe over the rough sketch of a possible cantata ~~about~~ ^upon^ ~~Tartini's~~ the music which the devil made for Tartini, I turned my steps once more towards St. Anthony's.

The bells were ringing for sunset; and a ~~vague~~ muffled sound of organs seemed to issue from the huge, solitary church; I pushed my way under the heavy leathern curtain, expecting to be greeted by the grotesque performance of that morning.

I proved mistaken. Vespers must long have been over. A smell of stale incense, a crypt like damp filled my mouth; it was already night in that vast cathedral. Out of the darkness glimmered the votive lamps of the chapels, throwing wavering lights upon the red polished marble, the gilded railing, and chandeliers, and plaqueing with yellow the bodies<sup>129</sup> muscles of some sculptured figure. In a corner a burning taper ~~shone~~ ^put^ a halo about the head of a priest, burnishing his shining bald skull, his white surplice, and the open book before him. "Amen—" he chanted; the book was closed with a snap, the light moved up the apse, some dark figures of women rose from their knees and passed quickly towards the door; a man saying his prayers before a chapel also ~~rose~~ ^got up^, making a great clatter in dropping his stick.

---

<sup>129</sup> 1890: muscles

~~Carew~~ The church was empty, and ~~Carew~~ I expected every minute to be turned out by the sacristan ~~coming to close~~ making his evening round to close the doors.<sup>130</sup> ~~He~~ I was leaning against a pillar, looking into the greyness of the great arches, when the organ suddenly burst out into a series of chords, rolling through the echoes of the church: it seemed to be the conclusion of some service. And above the organ rose the notes of a voice, ~~light~~, high, soft, enveloped in a kind of downiness, like a cloud of incense, and which ran through the mazes of a long cadence. The voice dropped into silence: with two ~~great~~ thundering chords the organ closed in. All was silent. For a moment ~~Carew~~ ^I^ stood leaning against one of the pillars of the nave<sup>131</sup>: ~~his~~ ^my^ hair was clammy, ~~his~~ ^my^ knees sank beneath me, an enervating heat spread through ~~his~~ ^my^ body; ~~he~~ ^I^ tried to breathe more largely, to suck in the sounds with the incense laden air. ~~He felt happy~~ ^I was supremely happy^, and as if<sup>132</sup> ~~he~~ ^I^ were dying; then suddenly a chill ran through ~~him~~ ^me^, and with it a vague panic; ~~He~~ ^I^ turned away and hurried out into the open.

The evening sky ~~was~~ ^lay^ pure and blue ~~above~~ ^along the jagged line of^ roofs; the bats and swallows were wheeling about; and from the belfries all around, half drowned<sup>133</sup> by the deep bell of St. Anthony's, jangled the peel of the *Ave Maria*.

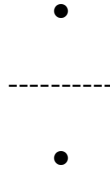
---

<sup>130</sup> From here until noted, the MS is in the lighter ink of **Version A**, with the emendations in a darker ink of **Version B**; the third-person perspective of **Version A** is changed to the first-person perspective of **Version B**

<sup>131</sup> Fragment 5 is on the opposing page of the MS

<sup>132</sup> 1890: and yet as if

<sup>133</sup> 1890: half-drowned



“You really don't seem well—” young Count Alvise had said the previous evening, as he welcomed him ~~me~~, in the light of a lantern held up by a peasant, in the weedy back garden<sup>134</sup> of the Villa of Mistrà.<sup>135</sup> Everything had seemed ^to me^ like a dream ~~to Carew~~: the jingle of the ~~bells~~ horse's bells driving in the dark from Padua, as the lanterns ~~were~~ swept the acacia hedges<sup>136</sup> with their wide yellow light; the grating of the wheels on the gravel, the supper table, illumined by a ~~portable?~~ ^single^ petroleum lamp ^for fear of attracting mosquitoes^, where a broken old laquey<sup>137</sup>, in an old ~~laquey?~~ ^stable jacket^, handed round the dishes among the fumes of onion; Alvise's fat mother gabbling ~~dialect~~ in a shrill, ~~dialect~~ ^benevolent^ voice behind ^the bullfights on^ her fan; the unshaven ~~fr~~ village priest, perpetually fidgeting with his glass and foot, and sticking one shoulder up above the other— And now, in the afternoon, ~~he~~ ^I^ felt as if ~~he~~ ^I^ had been in this long, rambling, tumble-down Villa of Mistrà<sup>138</sup>—a villa three-quarters of which was given up to the storage of grain and garden tools, or to the exercise of rats, mice, scorpions and centipedes—all ~~his~~ ^my^ life; as if he ^I^ had always sat there in Count Alvise's study, among the piles<sup>139</sup> of undusted books on agriculture, the sheaves of accounts, ~~the ink-stains~~ the samples of grain and

---

<sup>134</sup> 1890: back-garden

<sup>135</sup> Fragment 6 is on the opposing page of the MS

<sup>136</sup> 1890: acacia-hedges

<sup>137</sup> 1890: lackey

<sup>138</sup> Fragment 7 is on the opposing page of the MS.

<sup>139</sup> 1890: pile

silkworm seed, the ink stains and the cigar ends<sup>140</sup>; as if ~~he~~ ^I^ had never heard of anything save the cereal basis of Italian agriculture, the diseases of maize, the peronospora of the vine, the breeds of bullocks and the iniquities of ~~tenants~~ farm labourers; with the ~~blue~~ ^blue^ cones of the Euganean hills closing in the green shimmer of plain outside the window.

After an early dinner, ~~Count Alvise dressed?~~ again with the screaming gabble of the fat old Countess, the fidgeting and shoulder raising of the unshaven priest, the smell of fried oil and stewed onions, Count Alvise made ~~Carew~~ ^me^ ~~mount~~ get into the ~~his day~~ cart beside him, and whirled ~~him~~ ^me^ along among ~~the~~ clouds of dust, between the endless glisters of poplars, acacias and maples, ~~between the stagnant~~ to one of his farms.<sup>141</sup>

In the burning sun some twenty or thirty girls, in coloured ~~bodices~~ skirts, laced bodices and big straw-hats, were threshing the maize on the big red brick threshing floor; while ~~some~~ others were winnowing the grain in great sieves. ~~Count~~ Young Alvise III (the old one was Alvise II: everyone<sup>142</sup> is Alvise, that is to say, Lewis, in that family; the name is on the house, the carts, the barrows, the very pails)<sup>143</sup> picked up the ~~gra~~ maize, ~~ta~~ touched it, tasted it, said ~~spoke~~ something to the girls that made them laugh, and something to the head farmer that made him look very glum; and then ~~led~~ Carew<sup>144</sup> ^me^ into a huge stable, where some twenty or thirty white bullocks were stamping, switching their tails, hitting their horns against the mangers, in the dark. ~~Count~~ Alvise III patted each, called him by his name, gave him some

---

<sup>140</sup> 1890: ink-stains and cigar-ends

<sup>141</sup> Fragment 8 is on the opposing page of the MS.

<sup>142</sup> 1890: every one

<sup>143</sup> This clause in parentheses has been added in darker ink to the earlier MS.

<sup>144</sup> 1890: then led me (led deleted in error in MS)

salt or a turnip, and explained which was the Mantuan breed, which the Apulian, which the Romagnolo and so on. Then he bade ~~Carew~~ ^me^ jump into the trap, and off ~~they~~ ^we^ went again through the dust, among the ~~glad?~~ hedges and ditches, till ~~they~~ ^we^ came to some more ~~farm-brie~~ red brick farm buildings with pinkish roofs smoking against the blue sky.<sup>145</sup> Here there ~~was~~-were more young women threshing and winnowing the maize, which made a great golden Danaë cloud<sup>146</sup>; more ~~bull-cattle~~ bullocks stamping and lowing in the ~~stable~~ ^cool darkness<sup>147</sup>; more joking, fault finding, explaining; and thus through five farms, until ~~Carew~~ ^I^ seemed to see the rhythmical rising and falling of the flails against the hot ~~blue~~ sky, the shower of golden grains, the yellow dust from the winnowing sieves on to the bricks, the switching of innumerable tails and plunging of innumerable horns, the glistening of huge white flanks and ~~high~~ foreheads, whenever ~~he~~ ^I^ closed ~~his~~ ^my^ eyes.

“A good day’s work!” cried Count Alvisè—stretching out his long legs with the ~~Wellington~~ ~~boots-in-high~~ tight trousers riding up over the Wellington boots—“Mamma, give us some aniseed ~~syrup~~ water<sup>148</sup> after dinner: it is an excellent restorative and precaution against the fevers of this country.”—

“Oh! You’ve<sup>149</sup> got fever in this part of the world, have you?— Why, your father said the air was so good”—

---

<sup>145</sup> Inserted superscript in darker ink: ‘with pinkish roofs smoking against the blue sky’

<sup>146</sup> Inserted superscript in darker ink: ‘which made a great golden Danaë cloud’

<sup>147</sup> Inserted superscript in darker ink: ‘cool darkness’

<sup>148</sup> 1890: aniseed syrup

<sup>149</sup> 1890: Oh! you’ve

“~~Oh~~ Nothing, nothing—” soothed the old Countess. “The only thing to be dreaded are mosquitoes; take care to fasten your shutters before lighting the candle”—<sup>150</sup>

“Well—” rejoined young Alvise, with an effort of conscience—“of course there *are* fevers— But they needn’t hurt you. Only don’t go out into the garden at night, if you don’t want to catch them—Papa told me that you ~~sometimes~~ have fancies for moonlight ~~rambling~~ rambles —It won’t do in this climate, my dear fellow; ~~I’m afraid~~? it won’t do. If you must ~~walk~~ ^stalk^ about at night, being a genius, take a turn inside the house; you can get quite exercise enough—”

After dinner the aniseed-~~syrup~~ water was produced ~~with~~ together with brandy and cigars, and they all sat in the long, narrow, half furnished room on the first floor; the old Countess ~~ma~~ knitting a garment of uncertain shape and destination, the priest reading out the newspaper; Count Alvise puffing at his long, crooked cigar, and pulling the ears of a long, lean dog, with a suspicion of mange and a stiff eye. From the ^dark<sup>151</sup> garden outside rose the hum and whirr of countless insects, and the smell of the grapes which hung black against the starlit, blue sky, on the trellis. I went to the balcony. The garden lay dark beneath; against the twinkling horizon stood out the tall poplars. There was the sharp ~~ery~~ cry of an owl; the barking of a dog; a sudden ~~gush~~ of whiff of warm, enervating perfume, a perfume that made one ~~me~~ think of the taste of certain peaches, and suggested white, thick, wax like petals.

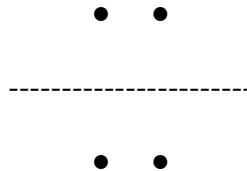
---

<sup>150</sup> This section (“Oh! You’ve got fever [...] you can get quite exercise enough”) is an addition to the earlier draft; it is included as a rider on the page that follows and is written in a darker coloured ink.

<sup>151</sup> Inserted superscript in darker ink: ‘dark’

~~Carew~~ ^I^ seemed to have smelt that flower once before: it made ~~him~~ ^me feel languid and almost faint.

“I am very tired,” ~~he~~ ^I^ said to Count Alvise. “See ~~ju~~ how feeble we city folk become!”<sup>152</sup>



But, despite ~~his~~ ^my^ fatigue, ~~Carew~~ ^I^ found it quite impossible to sleep.<sup>153</sup> The night seemed to ~~beco~~^ perfectly stifling. ~~He~~ ^I^ had felt nothing like it at Venice. Despite the injunctions of the Countess<sup>154</sup> ~~he~~ ^I^ opened the solid wooden ~~shut~~ shutters, hermetically closed against mosquitoes, and looked out.

The moon had risen; ~~xxx~~ and beneath it lay the big lawns, the rounded tree tops<sup>155</sup>, bathed in a blue, luminous mist, every leaf glistening ~~from~~^ and ~~seeming~~ trembling in what seemed a heaving sea of light. ~~Be~~ Beneath the window was the long trellis, with the white shining piece of pavement under it. It was so bright that ~~Carew~~ ^I^ could ~~see~~ ^distinguish^ the green of the vineleaves<sup>156</sup>, the dull red of the catalpa flowers<sup>157</sup>. There was in the air a vague scent of cut grass, of ripe American grapes, of that white flower (it must be white) which made ~~him~~ ^me^

---

<sup>152</sup> Inserted in darker ink: ‘See ~~ju~~ how feeble we city folk become!’

<sup>153</sup> From here until the end, the MS is all in a darker ink of **Version B**.

<sup>154</sup> Inserted superscript in identical ink: ‘Despite the injunctions of the Countess’

<sup>155</sup> 1890: tree-tops

<sup>156</sup> 1890: vine-leaves

<sup>157</sup> 1890: catalpa-flowers

think of the taste of peaches all melting into the delicious freshness of falling dew dew. From the village church came the stroke of ~~two~~ one: Heaven knows how long I had been vainly attempting to sleep. A shiver ran through me, and my head suddenly filled as with the fumes of some subtle wine; I remembered the all those ~~dying~~ weedy embankments<sup>158</sup>, those canals full of ~~greenish~~ stagnant water, the yellow faces of the peasants; the word malaria returned to my mind. No matter! I remained leaning on the window, ~~longing for this xxxx quality of heavy perfumes, longing to plunge deeper into the blue light, misty light into this with a~~ thirsty longing to plunge myself into this blue moon ~~light~~ mist, this dew and perfume and silence<sup>159</sup>, which seemed to vibrate and ~~palpitate~~ quiver like the stars that strewed the depths of heaven...What music, even Wagner's, or of that great singer of ~~moonlight~~ ^starry^<sup>160</sup> nights, the divine Schumann, what music could ever compare with this great silence, with this great concert of voiceless things that sing within one's soul?

As I made this reflection, a note, high, vibrating, and sweet, ~~broke through~~ rent through this ^the^ silence, which immediately closed around it. I leaned out of the window, my heart beating as though it must burst. After ~~a short space the silence was rent once more by the~~ a brief space the silence was ~~rent~~ ^cloven^ once more by that note, as the darkness is cloven by a falling star or a firefly rising slowly like a rocket. But this time it was plain that the voice did not come as I had imagined from the garden, but from the house itself, from some corner of this rambling old villa of Mistrà.

---

<sup>158</sup> 1890: I remembered all those weedy embankments

<sup>159</sup> Written above is deleted text that has been scored out so as to be illegible: 'with a thirsty longing to plunge myself into this blue moon ~~light~~ mist, this dew and perfume and silence'

<sup>160</sup> The style of hand changes from this point in the MS until the end.



Mistrà<sup>161</sup>, Mistrà! The name rang in my ears, and I began at length to grasp its significance, which seems to have escaped me till then. Yes, I said to myself, it is quite natural.<sup>162</sup> And with this odd impression of naturalness was mixed a feverish, impatient pleasure. It was as if I had come to Mistrà on purpose, and that I was about to meet the object of my long and weary hopes.

~~Taki~~ Grasping the lamp with its singed green shade, I ~~se~~ gently opened the door, and made my way ~~to~~ through a series of long passages and ~~of~~ of big empty rooms in which my steps reechoed<sup>163</sup> as in a church and my light disturbed whole swarms of bats. I wandered at random, farther and farther from the inhabited part of the buildings.

~~All this~~ This silence made me feel sick; I gasped as ~~from~~ ^under a sudden disappointment.

All of a sudden ~~that~~ there came a sound—chords, metallic, sharp, rather like the tone of a mandolin<sup>164</sup>—close to my ear. Yes, quite close: I was separated from the sounds only by a partition. I fumbled for a door; the unsteady light of my lamp was insufficient for my eyes which were swimming like those of a drunkard. At last I found a latch, and, after a moment's hesitation, I lifted it and gently pushed open the door. At first I could not understand what manner of place I was in. It was dark all ~~over?~~ round me, but a brilliant light blinded me, a light coming from below and striking the opposite wall. It was as if I had entered ~~the~~ a dark box in a half ~~light-the~~ lighted theatre. I was, in fact, in something of the kind, a sort of dark

---

<sup>161</sup> 1890: Mistrà—

<sup>162</sup> 1890: “Yes,” I said to myself, “it is quite natural.”

<sup>163</sup> 1890: re-echoed

<sup>164</sup> 1890: mandoline

hole with a high balustrade, half hidden by an ~~up-~~indrawn<sup>165</sup> curtain. I remembered those little galleries or ~~the-box~~ recesses for the use of musicians or lookers-on which exist ~~in~~ under the ceiling of the ballrooms in certain old Italian palaces.<sup>166</sup> Yes; it must have been one like that. ~~And,~~ Opposite me was ~~the-v~~ a vaulted ceiling covered with gilt mouldings which framed great ~~black~~ time-blackened canvases; and lower down, ~~illuminated by the~~ in the light thrown up from below, stretched a wall covered with faded frescoes. Where had I seen that goddess in lilac and lemon draperies foreshortened over a big green peacock? For she was familiar to me, and the stucco Tritons also, who twisted their tails round her gilded frame. And that fresco, with warriors in Roman cuirasses and green and blue lappets, and ~~xxxxxxx xxxxx~~ knee-breeches—where could I have seen them before? I asked myself these questions without experiencing any surprise. Moreover, I was very calm, as one is calm sometimes in extraordinary dreams—could I be dreaming?

I advanced gently and leaned over the balustrade.<sup>167</sup> My eyes ~~met~~ were met at first by the darkness above me, where, like gigantic spiders, the big chandeliers ~~were~~ rotated slowly, hanging from the ceiling. Only one of them was lit, and its Murano glass<sup>168</sup> pendants, its carnations and roses, shone opalescent in the light of the guttering wax. ~~Its light~~ This chandelier lighted up the opposite wall and that piece of ceiling with the goddess and the green peacock; it illumined, but far less well, a corner of the huge room, where, in the shadow of a kind of canopy, a little group of people were crowding round a yellow satin

---

<sup>165</sup> 1890: up-drawn

<sup>166</sup> Fragment 9 on the opposing page of the MS

<sup>167</sup> Fragment 10 on the opposing page of the MS

<sup>168</sup> 1890: Murano-glass

sopha<sup>169</sup> of the same kind as those that ~~lined~~ lined the walls. ~~And~~ On the ~~sofa~~ sopha<sup>170</sup>, half ~~hi~~ screened<sup>171</sup> from me by the surrounding persons, ~~lay~~ a woman was stretched out: the silver of her embroidered dress ~~gleamed out~~ and the rays of her diamonds ~~shot out shots~~ gleamed and shot forth as she moved uneasily. And immediately under the chandelier in the full light a man stooped over a harpsichord, his head bent slightly as if collecting his thoughts before singing.

He struck a few chords and sang<sup>172</sup>... Yes, sure enough, it was the voice, the voice that had so long been persecuting me<sup>173</sup>. I recognised at once that delicate, voluptuous quality, strange, exquisite, ~~of~~ sweet beyond words, ~~neither clear~~ but lacking all ~~freshness~~ ^youth^ and clearness; that<sup>174</sup> passion veiled in tears which had troubled my brain that night on the lagoon, and again on the Grand Canal singing the Biondina; and yet again, only ~~xxx~~ two days since, in the deserted cathedral of ~~Ca~~ Padua. ~~Only~~ But I recognised now what seemed to have been hidden from me till then, that this voice was what I cared most for in all the wide world.

The ~~w~~ voice wound and unwound itself in long, languishing phrases, in rich voluptuous *rifiorituras* all fretted with tiny scales, and exquisite crisp shakes; it stopped ever and anon, swaying as if panting in languid delight. And I felt my body melt even as wax in the

---

<sup>169</sup> 1890: sofa

<sup>170</sup> 1890: sofa

<sup>171</sup> 1890: half-screened

<sup>172</sup> 1890: sang—

<sup>173</sup> 1890: me!

<sup>174</sup> 1890: clearness. That

sunshine, ~~it seemed~~ and it seemed to me that I too was ~~becoming fluid~~ turning fluid and vaporous, ~~to~~ in order to mingle with these sounds as the moonbeams mingle with the dew.

Suddenly, from the dimly lighted corner by the canopy came a little ~~half~~ piteous wail; then another followed, and was lost in the singer's voice. During a long phrase ~~of~~ on the harpsichord, ~~metallic~~ and sharp and tinkling, the singer turned his head towards the dais, and there came a plaintive little sob. But he, instead of stopping, struck a ~~jangling~~ sharp chord; and ~~like~~ ^with^ a thread of voice so hushed as to be scarcely audible ~~he~~ slid softly into a long *cadenza*. ~~And~~ At the same moment he threw his head backwards and the light fell full upon the handsome, ~~sullen~~ effeminate face, with its ~~ashy~~ ~~w~~ ashy pallor and big black brows, of the singer Zaffirino..<sup>175</sup> At the sight of that face, sensual and ~~cruel~~ ^sullen^, of that smile which was cruel and mocking like a bad woman's, I understood, I knew not why, by what process, that his singing *must* be ~~immediately~~ cut short, that the accursed phrase *must* never be finished. I understood that I was before an assassin, that he was killing this woman, and killing me also, with his wicked voice.

I rushed down the narrow stair which led down from the box, pursued, as it were, by that exquisite voice, swelling, swelling by insensible degrees. I flung myself on the door which must be that of the big saloon. I could see its light ~~through the~~ between the panels. I bruised my hands in trying to wrench the latch. The door was fastened tight. And<sup>176</sup> while I was struggling with that locked door, I heard the voice swelling, swelling, rending asunder that downy veil which wrapped it, leaping forth clear, resplendent like the sharp and glittering blade of a knife that seemed to enter deep into my breast. Then, ~~ag~~ once more, a ~~moan~~

---

<sup>175</sup> Two full stops in MS.

<sup>176</sup> 1890: tight, and while

^wail^, a death groan, and that dreadful noise, that hideous gurgle of breath strangled by a rush of blood. And then a long shake, acute, brilliant, triumphant.

The door gave way beneath my weight. One<sup>177</sup> half crashed in. I entered. ~~A flood of moonlight~~ I was blinded by a flood of ^blue^ moonlight. It poured in through four great windows, peaceful and diaphanous, a pale blue ~~moon~~ mist of moonbeams ^light^, and turned the huge room<sup>178</sup> into a kind of submarine cave, paved with moonbeams, full of shimmers, ~~a~~ of pools of moonlight. It was as bright as at midday, but the brightness was cold, blue, vaporous, supernatural. The room was completely empty, like a great hayloft.<sup>179</sup> Only there hung from the ceiling the ropes which had once supported a chandelier; and in a corner, among stacks of wood and heaps of ~~m~~ indian corn<sup>180</sup>, whence issued ~~spread~~ a sickly smell of damp and mildew, there stood a long, thin harpsichord, with spindle legs<sup>181</sup>, and its cover cracked from end to end...<sup>182</sup>

I felt, all of a sudden, very calm. ~~I~~ The one thing that mattered was the phrase that kept moving in my head, the phrase of that unfinished cadence which I had heard but an instant before. I opened the harpsichord, and my fingers ~~fell~~ ^came down^ boldly upon its keys. A jingle-jangle of broken strings, ~~so horrible and laughable was the~~ and ~~horrible~~ dreadful, was the only answer.

---

<sup>177</sup> 1890: weight, one

<sup>178</sup> 1890: and turned the huge room

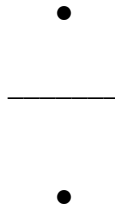
<sup>179</sup> 1890: hay-loft

<sup>180</sup> 1890: Indian-corn

<sup>181</sup> 1890: spindle legs

<sup>182</sup> 1890: end.

Then an extraordinary fear overtook me. I clambered out of one of the windows; I rushed up the garden and wandered through the fields, among the canals and the embankments, until the moon had set and the dawn began to shiver, followed, pursued for ever by that jangle of broken strings.



People expressed much satisfaction at my recovery; it<sup>183</sup> seems that one dies of those fevers.

Recovery? But have I recovered? I walk, and eat and drink and talk; I can even sleep. I live the life of other living creatures. But I am ~~consumed~~<sup>^wasted^</sup> by a strange and ~~fatal ill~~ deadly disease. I can never lay hold of my own inspiration. My head is filled with music which is certainly by me, since I have never heard it before, but which ~~is~~ still is not my own, which I despise and abhor: little tripping ~~patter~~ flourishes and languishing phrases, and long drawn, echoing cadences.

O wicked, wicked voice, violin of flesh and blood made by the Evil One's hand, may I not even execrate thee in ~~in~~ peace; but is it necessary that at the moment when I curse, the longing to hear thee again ~~should~~ parches my soul like hell thirst? And since ~~I cannot satiate~~ ~~I cannot satisfy~~<sup>^I have satiated^</sup> thy lust for revenge, since thou hast withered my life and

---

<sup>183</sup> 1890: recovery. It

~~take?~~ withered my genius, is it not time for pity, may<sup>184</sup> I not hear one note, only one note  
~~alone~~ of thine, singer, ~~miserable~~ wicked<sup>185</sup> and contemptible wretch?

## APPENDIX: FRAGMENTS OF EARLIER DRAFTS INCLUDED ALONGSIDE THE NEAT MS

### Fragment 1

**Note:** This text is on the opposing page of the neat MS, upside down, and lightly scored with red crayon hatching (p. 30).

[*Sentence illegible*] and then broken into a ~~rapid~~ gradual shake”

And similar unreal worlds of former days.

Also passages from memoirs and books about the triumphant absurdities of the singers of the past, the plumes four feet high of Signor Marchesi<sup>186</sup>, whose miniature the ladies wore five copies at once on their persons, in bracelets, earrings and shoebuckles; of the nobles of Ferrara going to meet Signor Rossi<sup>187</sup> like a royal personage three miles outside Modena; of

---

<sup>184</sup> 1890: pity? May

<sup>185</sup> 1890: O singer, O wicked

<sup>186</sup> Luigi Marchesi (1755–1829), Italian castrato, one of the most celebrated performers of *opera seria* in eighteenth-century Europe, including in Venice, Milan and London. See Vernon Lee, *Studies in the Eighteenth Century in Italy* (London: W. Satchell, 1880), p. 100, 184, and 203, hereafter *SEC*.

<sup>187</sup> Michelangelo Rossi (1601/1602–1656), Italian composer, violinist and organist, noted especially for his contribution to development of early Italian opera, the keyboard toccata, and the polyphonic madrigal.

Signora Gabrielli saying to Catherine of Russia “Tell your general to sing for all”<sup>188</sup>; the partisans of Signora Faustina and Signora Cuzzoni coming to swords in the streets<sup>189</sup>, of Signor Farinelli governing Spain for twenty years by the charm of his voice<sup>190</sup>; an anthology

---

<sup>188</sup> Caterina Gabrielli (1730–1796), celebrated Italian soprano. When Gabrielli requested payment of 5,000 ducats to perform for Catherine the Great (1729–1796) in St Petersburg, Catherine observed that she did not pay her field-marshal so much. Gabrielli responded to the minister with whom she was negotiating: “Tell your mistress that she may set her field-marshal to sing”, in *A General Biographical Dictionary* (London: Whittaker, 1835). See *SEC*, pp. 204 and 329.

<sup>189</sup> Faustina Bordoni (1697–1781), celebrated Italian mezzo-soprano, noted for her performances of opera by George Frideric Handel and Johann Adolf Hasse; Francesca Cuzzoni (1696–1778), Italian soprano, also noted for performances of opera by Handel, particularly in at the Royal Academy in London. The notorious rivalry between Bordoni and Cuzzoni caused a scandal when it led to a fight on stage during a performance of Giovanni Bononcini’s *Astianatte* at London’s King’s Theatre on 6 May 1727. See Suzanne Aspden, ‘The “Rival Queens” and the Play of Identity in Handel’s *Admeto*’, *Cambridge Opera Journal* 18.3 (2006), 301–31.

<sup>190</sup> Carlo Farinello Broschi (1705–1782), popularly ‘Farinelli’, Italian soprano castrato, the most admired of all the castrato singers in eighteenth-century Europe. In 1737, he was called to Madrid, in the hope that his singing would help cure the debilitating depression of King Philip V of Spain. He reputedly serenaded Philip V serenade every night, until the King’s death in 1746. Following distinguished service, under Ferdinand VI, as the artistic director of the royal theatres at Buen Retiro (Madrid) and Aranjuez, he retired to Bologna in 1759.



gleaned rapidly from the papers of Mancini<sup>191</sup>, Tosi<sup>192</sup>, Burney<sup>193</sup>, Hawkins<sup>194</sup>, Stendhal<sup>195</sup>, or Beckford<sup>196</sup> and a dozen others, in glorification of every forgotten soprano or contralto, in [devotion?] of the music of the eighteenth century.

“Upon my word, I should like to give up composing and take to studying

## Fragment 2

---

<sup>191</sup> Giovanni Battista Mancini (1714–1800), Italian castrato and singing teacher, noted for his vocal treatise *Pensieri, e riflessioni pratiche sopra il canto figurato* (Vienna, 1774). See Vernon Lee, ‘The Art of Singing Past and Present’, *British Quarterly Review* 72 (October 1880), 318–42.

<sup>192</sup> Pier Francesco Tosi (1654–1732), Italian castrato and singing teacher, noted for his vocal treatise *Opinioni de’ cantori antichi e moderni* (Bologna, 1723).

<sup>193</sup> Charles Burney (1726–1814), English music historian, whose *The Present State of Music in France and Italy* (1771, 1773) and *General History of Music* (1776, 1782) represent significant sources for *SEC*.

<sup>194</sup> Sir John Hawkins (1719–1789), English music historian, author of the *General History of the Science and Practice of Music* (1776).

<sup>195</sup> Marie-Henri Beyle (1783–1842), French writer, now best known for his novels *Le rouge et le noir* (1830) and *La chartreuse de Parme* (1839); he wrote extensively about eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century opera, including in *Vies de Haydn, de Mozart et de Métastase* (1814) and *Vie de Rossini* (1824).

<sup>196</sup> William Beckford (1760–1844), English writer and musical patron, notably of the Italian castrato Gaspare Pacchierotti (1740–1821); his letters in *Dreams, Waking Thoughts, and Incidents* (1783) were a source for *SEC*.

**Note:** This text is on the opposing page of the MS scored out with a cross in with red crayon (p. 31).

It was not, as I very quickly perceived, the saloon of that Venetian palace now turned into a boarding house drawing room. It was much larger, a real ballroom, an octagon, with eight great doors encased in gilded stucco; and beneath the vaulted ceiling, eight little galleries or boxes, intended, no doubt, for musicians or spectators. The place was half lit by a single one of

### Fragment 3

**Note:** This text is on the opposing page of the MS, upside down, lightly scored with red crayon hatching (p. 32).

[...] mechanical the making of ~~our speaking~~ the xxxx that say Mamma and Papa”—he would explain— “in the hope of inventing a musical instrument that could articulate words and become a substitute human voice, so as to protect the world from any possible return of another eighteenth century—Oh that eighteenth century! I never ~~detested it so much~~ felt how great a pest it was until coming to Venice, where not only the chairs”—and he would give an angry kick and a push to some delicate pallgreen piece of furniture painted with minute bouquets—“the chandeliers and decanters and glasses, the gondola hooks and mirrors and tassels are eighteenth century, but where the very waters of the lagoon and the light of the moon seem to have been made in those days and for the benefit of Biondinas in gondoletas<sup>197</sup>

---

<sup>197</sup> ‘La biondina in gondoleta’ (1788) was a well-known song in Venetian dialect, with a text by the poet Anton Maria Lamberti (1757–1832), usually attributed to German opera

with their [*four words illegible*] and soprano singers—”

“Poor wild Wagnerian!” Carew’s hostess would say, after having teased him into

#### Fragment 4

**Note:** The text runs in line with the neat MS on the opposing page (until // below), and then in a central fold over the page (p. 33).

[...] throat, or can’t be each entrusted to an industrious and conscientious performer like a fiddle, a hautboy, or a flute— It is ~~a thing~~ ^an instrument^ dependent upon the mere body, not ~~a th~~ an instrument ~~constructed~~ derived by the mind. It is a thousand mechanical tricks that tickle the ear while leaving the mind untouched, and what is much worse it has an emotional power which is physical, sensual, personal, which diverts the hearer from the thoughts of the composer to the personality of the performer. And worst of all the human voice presupposes the existence of the very worst enemy that music can have: the degraded piece of conceit called the singer.” After he had made such speech our Wagnerian would strum a series of fiddle-faddle little minuets, or of endless variations, which some Master of the 18<sup>th</sup> century had stuck in the more dramatic parts of his opera. Or he would give a selection of sentences ~~from~~ culled from various old books in glorification of “two little scales of shakes, rapidly executed”, of “harmonised notes marked lightly in expectation of extending the breath”, of “notes swelled and diminished” //

---

composer Simon Mayr (1763–1845). It is referred to repeatedly in ‘A Wicked Voice’, see [CROSSREF] and [CROSSREF].

[...] some such tirade by an impassioned enthusiast for a half-forgotten air by Gluck, Scarlatti, or Paisiello<sup>198</sup>, a xxxx, some moonlight night, behind the Giudecca, that the lagoon no longer echoed with the voices of the Faustina and Cuzzoni and Farinelli<sup>199</sup> of past days—“Poor wild Wagnerist!—he is irritated at finding that although the Master did select the Vendramin Calergi for his death bed<sup>200</sup>, Venice does not help him on with his opera of *Ogier*, but keeps suggesting songs by Mozart and Paisiello, and heaven knows what Biondinas in Gondolettas<sup>201</sup> and other Consuelo stuff<sup>202</sup>. And the cruellest part of it all is that the poor

---

<sup>198</sup> Christoph Willibald Gluck (1714–1787), Bohemian composer of Italian and French opera, credited with the reform of opera in the second half of the eighteenth century, see Lee, ‘Orpheus in Rome’, in *Althea* (London: Osgood McIlvaine, 1894); Alessandro Scarlatti (1660–1725), Italian opera composer, associated with the development of the *Da capo* aria, see *SEC*, pp. 196–97; Giovanni Paisiello (1740–1816), Italian opera composer, prominent in the late eighteenth century.

<sup>199</sup> See note [**CROSSREF**] above.

<sup>200</sup> Ca’ Vendramin Calergi, a fifteenth-century *palazzo* on the Grand Canal; Richard Wagner died here on 13 February 1883. See Vernon Lee, ‘Out of Venice at Last’, in *The Golden Keys* (London: John Lane, The Bodley Head, 1925), pp. 71–77: ‘It does not seem a mere association of fortuitous coincidences that Venice should make me understand what Wagner’s music is to some other folk: Wagner was right to die there [...]’ (p. 76).

<sup>201</sup> See note [**CROSSREF**] above.

<sup>202</sup> *Consuelo* (1842–1843), a novel by French writer George Sand (1804–1876), first published serially in in the *Revue indépendante*. Set in eighteenth-century Europe, the text recounts the musical education of a young operatic soprano as she travels from poverty in Venice to artistic triumph in Vienna at the Habsburg court of the Empress Maria Theresa.

creature likes it all at last very much, ~~and finds~~ and cannot muster up the proper interest in Ogier the Dane and all that swash-buckling on the ice and sailing made in Walhalla” —

• •

-----

• •

## II

One afternoon, after an unsuccessful morning’s work on *Ogier the Dane* and a despairing walk through half the tortuosities of Venice, Carew entered the drawing room of Palazzo Bragadin<sup>203</sup> with an air of savage satisfaction, and spread out upon the table, without saying a word, a large engraving which he had solemnly unrolled.

The engraving, which was unusually good, represented a Grecian portico somewhere in heaven, and alongside it, upon a bank of jonquils under a neatly looped up curtain a man elegantly dressed in the fashion of 1760 or thereabouts, with a long embroidered waistcoat, stockings rolled over the knees, lace frills and ruffles and hair gathered at the back with a silk bag. Between his well formed legs lay a lyre, and at his delicately shod feet an open music book. All round chubby Cupids pelted him with roses; ~~and the~~ while Fame, a buxom goddess with dress slit over her thigh, fluttered down from the

---

<sup>203</sup> Palazzo Bragadin Carabba, a palace in Castello, dating back to the fourteenth century. It was restored in 1875 by Count Angelo Papadopoli. It is also the setting for Lee’s story ‘Deux Romans’, *Les Lettres et les Arts, revue illustrée*, XVI (1 December 1889), 289–352; the text includes illustrations by Albert Lynch, including two of scenes at the Palazzo Bragadin. The story was published in English as ‘Lady Tal’, in *Vanitas: Polite Stories* (1892).

## Fragment 5

**Note:** The text is upside down on the opposing page of the neat MS, lightly scored in pencil (p. 54).

[...] miserable creature of an unmusical age, only the wretched stuff of men like Wagner and Berlioz, while we shall never, never, never hear Baldassare Cesari sing the rondò—‘Infelice pastorello’—in Rossi’s opera of Mithridate!’<sup>204</sup>

Carew spoke with mock solemnity which by the end of his speech rose to the highest perfection of comic pathos—“Ah that voice,” he repeated, “nothing can ever make us hear that!”— Everyone burst out laughing: there was something incredibly comic<sup>205</sup> this apotheosis, a man no one had ever heard of, and who continued to sit, smiling placidly in his Grecian portico among the clouds, while Fame blew her trumpets and the cupids pelted her with roses. He sat there in the engraving, ~~a fat and self-satisfied Neapolitan, with his thick lips~~ smiling sarcastically among his dimples and double chins, and gazing

## Fragment 6

---

<sup>204</sup> Lee may possibly have in mind the libretto for *Mitridate* (1827) by Gaetano Rossi (1744–1855), an Italian librettist whose collaborators included the castrato Farinelli. Music for the opera was composed by Giovanni Tadolini (1789–1872), and it was first performed at La Fenice in Venice on 26 December 1826. However, the libretto does not include a setting of the words ‘infelice pastorello’ (‘unhappy shepherd’), which may be represent a generic example of opera in its pastoral mode.

<sup>205</sup> Sic

**Note:** The text runs in line with the neat MS on the opposing page, lightly scored in pencil (p. 55).

Laurel wreath on the well frizzled locks of the hero.

“Look at this”, said Carew after they had crowded round the engraving—“and look at it with reverence. This engraving which I picked up in the xxx fair at S. Polo for fifty centesimi (so fallen are our times) represents the greatest man of the eighteenth century: Baldassare Cesari, usually known as [ ]<sup>206</sup> You have never heard of him? You might as well have never heard of Orpheus or Amphion, who, as the critics inform us, turned pale in the Elysian fields at the mere thought of his superior powers. ~~Te~~ Never heard of him? Why he was the greatest singer of the century when music attained its utmost perfection, and the singer, of course, the greatest perfection of the perfection of music: his voice extended over nearly two octaves and ~~five~~ six notes, from the low mi to the

### Fragment 7

**Note:** The text runs in line with the neat MS on the opposing page, lightly scored in pencil (p. 56).

through the most tortuous streets of Venice. Carew entered the drawing room of Palazzo Bragadin with an air of savage satisfaction, and [*words scored out and illegible*] spread on the table, without saying a word, a large engraving, which he unrolled very solemnly.

The engraving, which was unusually good, represented a Grecian portico somewhere in Heaven, in which sat, upon a bank of jonquils, and under a neatly looped up curtain, a young man elegantly dressed in the fashion of the year 1760, with a long embroidered waistcoat,

---

<sup>206</sup> MS is blank here, as if Lee was planning to fill in the name later.

stockings rolled over the knees, lace frill and ruffles and his hair gathered to the back in a silk bag. Between his well formed legs lay a lyre, and at his feet an open music book; ~~above~~ all round chubby cupids pelted him with roses, ~~and in the clouds, surrounded by a xxxxx~~ Fame, a buxom scantily dressed young lady, ~~leaned down~~ fluttered down from the clouds blowing her trumpet and placing a

### Fragment 8

**Note:** The text is upside down on the opposing page of the neat MS, lightly scored in pencil (p. 57).

story of the Paduan botanist who had ~~fed~~ brought up his daughter upon the juices and exhalations of poisonous plants.<sup>207</sup> Then, as dusk was coming on, he turned towards his inn, and in so doing, entered the square of Saint Anthony, where Donatello's bronze general loomed against the sky on his immense cart horse charger.

As he passed by the church door, it seemed to him that he heard an organ within. He would have been pleased to hear once more that ~~extraordinary~~ grotesque performance of this afternoon; so he entered. The church was empty and quite dark: out of the gloom flickered the lamps of the chapels, illuminating spots of gilding, of polished red marble, behind them,

---

<sup>207</sup> 'Rappaccini's Daughter' by Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804–1864), first published in the *United States Magazine and Democratic Review*, December 1844. For Lee's discussion of the short story see 'The Italy of Elizabethan Dramatists', in *Euphorion: Being Studies of the Antique and the Mediaeval in the Renaissance*, 2 vols (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1884), I, pp. 55–108 (87); 'Beauty and Sanity', in *Laurus Nobilis: Chapters on Art and Life* (London: John Lane, The Bodley Head, 1909), pp. 115–59 (134).



bringing out the nimbus of a frescoed saint, or the top of some marble head. A smell of incense was heavy on the air, and ~~with it mingled~~ coming from the warmth outside, the vast nave felt like a cellar.

### Fragment 9

**Note:** The text runs in line with the neat MS on the opposing page, lightly scored with the same, coloured dark ink (p. 66).

a frantic fury against the Italian music of the last century, and especially against the supremacy of the voice, and of singing, which, he said, emasculated the genius of Mozart, defrauded the world of its greatest musical dramatist in Gluck, ~~and~~ reduced Handel to a writer of high class singing exercises; and which had now merely deferred by a century and a half the advent of intellectual, poetic and ennobling music, and had so depraved the feelings of men that the works of Wagner could even now only be given on alternate nights by the same performers and before the same audiences as the operas of Rossini—

“The human voice, as the eighteenth century conceived and worshipped it—” he would often say, “—was the thing of all others most hostile to all real music. An instrument inferior to all others from the intellectual point of view since it varies from individual to individual, as no fiddle or flute or hautboy ever did, and since, ~~it was~~ being located in a living

### Fragment 10

**Note:** The text runs in line with the neat MS on the opposing page, lightly scored with the same, coloured dark ink (p. 67).

with contempt saying—“if I wanted a person to sing to me, I would prefer a woman; if I ~~would should~~ wanted a lover, I should prefer a man”—Zaffirino was told then, and swore to

be revenged. She had refused to go to hear him, so he managed to be at a party where she was, and sang – he sang, sang, sang,— the three airs; and sure enough great grand aunt Pisana, by the end of the third was head over ears in love with him. He always refused to speak to her, or look at her, but he sang, and sang, and sang, and poor<sup>208</sup> lady fell more and more in love with him, though hiding it from all the world, till she ~~fell ill~~ began to sicken and fell ill from love of Zaffirino and his voice; it went on like that for months, neither even speaking to the other, but Zaffirino singing, singing, singing, and the lady growing thinner and thinner, and fainter and fainter.

At last poor great grand aunt Pisana was at death's door: and felt she wanted only one thing on this earth: a song from Zaffirino. But she was too proud to

---

<sup>208</sup> Sic



**Citation on deposit:** Riddell, F. (2024). The Manuscript of Vernon Lee's 'A Wicked Voice' (1890): A Critical Introduction and Transcription. *Studies in Walter Pater and aestheticism*, 9, 79-127

**For final citation and metadata, visit Durham Research Online URL:** [https://durham-](https://durham-repository.worktribe.com/output/2782547)

[repository.worktribe.com/output/2782547](https://durham-repository.worktribe.com/output/2782547)

**Copyright statement:** This accepted manuscript is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 licence.

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>