



HAL
open science

”Singing in a Flower Box”: Don Pasquale’s Exceptional Quartet and Luigi Lablache’s Art of the Comic Performance

Céline Frigau Manning

► **To cite this version:**

Céline Frigau Manning. ”Singing in a Flower Box”: Don Pasquale’s Exceptional Quartet and Luigi Lablache’s Art of the Comic Performance. Isolde Schmid-Reiter; Aviel Cahn. *Belcanto. Tradition and Fascination Today*, Verlag ConBrio, 2024, Schriften der Europäischen Musiktheater-Akademie, 9783949425059. hal-04824135

HAL Id: hal-04824135

<https://hal.science/hal-04824135v1>

Submitted on 6 Dec 2024

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L’archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d’enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.



Distributed under a Creative Commons Attribution - NonCommercial - NoDerivatives 4.0 International License

**“Singing in a Flower Box”:
Don Pasquale’s Exceptional Quartet
and Luigi Lablache’s Art of the Comic Performance**

“Since *I Puritani*, no new opera written for the Parisian stage had been met with such success” declared *La France musicale* the day after the premiere of *Don Pasquale*: “four actors are enough for the dramatic and musical development, and interest for it is growing every day.”¹ On 3 January 1843, at the salle Ventadour in the second arrondissement of the French capital, the “adorned and perfumed audience”² of the prestigious Théâtre-Italien had enthusiastically discovered Gaetano Donizetti’s most recent *opera buffa*. The Italian libretto, composed by Giovanni Ruffini and Donizetti himself, was based on the text written by Angelo Anelli for Stefano Pavesi’s *Ser Marcantonio* (1810). In three convincing acts, Donizetti adapted to the comic stage the happy formula of Vincenzo Bellini’s historical drama *I Puritani*, created in Paris eight years earlier, namely: a quartet of exceptional performers³, this time made up of Luigi Lablache, Giulia Grisi, Antonio Tamburini and Mario de Candia.

“Harlequin’s Companions”

Do you want to hear graceful and lively songs, smooth and refined melodies, admirable ensembles? Go listen to *Don Pasquale*. Do you want to laugh and get a full sense of the spirit of Italian comedy? Go see *Don [p. 38] Pasquale*. Do you want to witness those great artists of the Bouffes stage in their most perfect creations? Go see *Don Pasquale*: Lablache, Ronconi,

¹ *La France musicale*, 8 January 1843: “Depuis *Les Puritains*, aucun opéra nouveau, écrit pour Paris, n’avait obtenu un égal succès . . . Quatre acteurs suffirent au développement dramatique et musical, et l’intérêt va croissant jusqu’au bout”. Performed only two times in extenso in 1842, *I Puritani* had reached a total of 98 performances on the eve of the *Don Pasquale*’s premiere. For a chronology of performances, see Céline Frigau Manning, *Chanteurs en scène. L’œil du spectateur au Théâtre-Italien (1815-1848)*, Paris, Honoré Champion, 2014, p. 590 and 617-618.

² *La France musicale*, 10 November 1844: “public paré et musqué”.

³ On the famous quartet of Bellini’s *I Puritani* at the Théâtre-Italien, with special focus on its most popular number, the Act II duet for bass voices “Il rival salvar tu dêi”, see Sarah Hibberd, “‘La Voix humaine’: Dissecting Luigi Lablache”, *Laboratoire italien*, special issue *Musique italienne et sciences médicales au XIXe siècle*, n° 20, 2017, available online: <https://journals.openedition.org/laboratoireitalien/1585> (consulted 1 June 2023). At the crossroads of music history and the history of sciences, Hibberd argues that this number reveals the timbral specificities of Lablache’s voice, “performing” medical and scientific discoveries of the time.

Mario and Grisi are there in all the verve, illusion, grace and strength of their incomparable talent.⁴

A major part of *Don Pasquale*'s success is thus attributed to its performers, forming the same quartet, up to and including the tenor, which had guaranteed *I Puritani* its success. It was one of those successes which occur “when an entire audience catches fire as though by contact with an electric spark, when all hearts beat as one with hurried beats and ask the voice to express their sensations⁵”; a success that, as the *Courrier des théâtres* summarized, “Rubini, Tamburini, Lablache and the very dramatic Mlle Grisi” had “made inevitable through the power of their superb talents.”⁶

If Mario replaces Rubini, the new opera now also depends on a comic quartet, before an audience who is sometimes prejudiced against Italian comic acting:

The work is apparently titled *Don Pasquale* and is of the *bouffe* genre, by way of Lablache, who is responsible for making the public laugh. We know that he does this with cheap tricks: a few pasquinades, a boiled down soup of all the Italian stages, which are always the same from the first performance to the last.⁷

Behind this journalist's relentless critique we can glimpse a major problem of reception. To attack Lablache by treating him in particular as a “butcher's-boy”⁸, just as Manuel García in the role of Almaviva was described as an “Andalucian muleteer”⁹, is to attempt to discredit the entire Italian school through its best representatives, accusing them of making opera fall into vulgarity, of lowering it to the minor and popular genres. It is an effort to take from them their title of actor in order to better bestow it upon their French counterparts, who are supposedly the proponents of an elegant and mastered comic art.

⁴ *Ibid.*: “Désirez-vous entendre des chants gracieux et entraînants, des mélodies suaves et distinguées, des ensembles admirables ? Allez écouter *Don Pasquale*. Voulez-vous rire et avoir une idée complète de l'esprit de la comédie italienne ? Allez voir *Don Pasquale*. Voulez-vous enfin connaître ces grands artistes de la scène des Bouffes dans leurs créations les plus parfaites ? Allez voir *Don Pasquale* : Lablache, Ronconi, Mario et Grisi sont là dans toute la verve, l'illusion, la grâce et la force de leur talent incomparable.”

⁵ *Courrier des théâtres*, 26 January 1835: “quand toute une assemblée prend feu comme par le contact de l'étincelle électrique, lorsque tous les cœurs battent ensemble à coups pressés et demandent à la voix d'exprimer leurs sensations”.

⁶ *Ibid.*: « C'est donc une brillante réussite, . . . Rubini, Tamburini, Lablache et la très dramatique Mlle Grisi l'ont déterminée de toute la puissance de leurs superbes talents”.

⁷ *Le Coureur des spectacles*, 12 December 1842: “L'ouvrage serait intitulé *Don Pasquale* et tiendrait du genre bouffe, de par Lablache, chargé d'y faire rire le public. On sait qu'il s'en acquitte à bon marché : quelques pasquinades, froid résumé de toutes les scènes italiennes, et constamment les mêmes depuis la première jusqu'à la dernière”.

⁸ *Courrier des théâtres*, 16 November 1840: “garçon-boucher”.

⁹ *La Revue musicale*, n° 6, 1829, p. 226-227: “muletier andaloux”.

From the moment of the premiere, however, *Don Pasquale*'s quartet takes up the challenge. While reinforcing the French public's conviction that they are in the presence of a "standardized national product", to [p. 39] use Luca Zoppelli's expression¹⁰, the opera reactivates the memory not only of Pavesi and Anelli's *Ser Marcantonio*, whose libretto it takes as its inspiration, but of the *opere buffe* of the 18th century and beyond, of "old Italian theatre"¹¹ – in other words, of the *Commedia dell'arte*. "Cassandre, the handsome Léandre, Colombine and the skilful Pasquin are the real characters of this play"¹², argues *La France musicale*. Now, to see in Lablache, Grisi, Mario and Tamburini "the companions of Harlequin"¹³ is to recognize in them a filiation with a theater founded on the art of the actor, all the way down to its counter-scenes and tropes, to anything not written in the stage score; in this way, certain choices of interpretation are not only tolerated, but justified.

Don Pasquale's music, tailor-made for the opera's first performers, contains fewer arias than one would expect from such a cast and from the intimate atmosphere of the plot. "Four duets, a nocturne, a trio, a quartet, several cavatinas or romances, and two or three very short choruses: that is the whole opera."¹⁴ The situations of exchange or confrontation involving several characters are thus especially favored, enhanced by the inclusion of large passages of *parlante*¹⁵, a technique which emphasizes even more the singers' acting talent. Escudier specifies that among the pieces most requested by the public are "the duet of the first act, between Tamburini and Grisi [*Pronta io son*]; the admirable quartet of the second act [*Fra da una parte, et cetera*]; the duet between Lablache and Grisi [*Signorina*], and Mario's *Serenata*, in the third act [*Com'è gentil*]"¹⁶, to which may be added the duet for Mario and Lablache [*Prender moglie, sì signore*], described as a "mixture of sentimental expression and buffoonish gaiety which makes for the character of this work."¹⁷ The serenade in particular meets the expectations of a French audience in search of the picturesque and local color. For

¹⁰ See Luca Zoppelli, "En vieux lion moderne", in *Don Pasquale*, edited by Livio Aragona and Federico Fornoni, Bergamo, Fondazione Donizetti, 2010, p. 59-70, cf. p. 60: "produit national standardise".

¹¹ *Le Compilateur*, 15 January 1844: "l'ancien théâtre italien".

¹² *La France musicale*, 8 January 1843: « Cassandre, le beau Léandre, Colombine et l'adroit Pasquin sont les véritables personnages de cette pièce ».

¹³ *Ibid.*: "les compagnons d'Arlequin".

¹⁴ *Ibid.*: "Quatre duos, un nocturne, un trio, un quatuor, plusieurs cavatines ou romances, et deux ou trois chœurs fort courts, voilà l'opéra."

¹⁵ See Francesco Izzo, *Laughter Between Two Revolutions: Opera Buffa in Italy, 1831-1848*, Ann Arbor, UMI, 2005, p. 146 and following.

¹⁶ Escudier, "Un peu de tout", *La France musicale*, 19 février 1843: "le duo du premier acte, entre Tamburini et Grisi [*Pronta io son*]; l'admirable quatuor du second acte [*Fra da una parte, et cetera*]; le duo entre Lablache et Grisi [*Signorina*], et la *Serenata* de Mario, au troisième acte [*Com'è gentil*]".

¹⁷ *La France musicale*, 8 January 1843: "mélange d'expression sentimentale et de gaieté bouffonne qui fait le caractère de cet ouvrage."

Escudier it is a “Roman *cantilena* full of color and character”¹⁸ whose enduring success was ensured from the premiere on, sung moreover by Mario, the talented tenor from the Sardinian nobility: “The tender and melancholy inflections of this serenade are perfectly suited to the sweet and pure voice of the young singer.”¹⁹ Mario thus earned the reputation of having understood “the [p. 40] character of the lover, giving him a stamp of freshness and youth which sufficiently erases his pale vulgarity.”²⁰

The other singers are certainly not left out. A star of the Théâtre-Italien since her Parisian debut in *Semiramide* eleven years earlier, Giulia Grisi in the role of Norina seems to most reviewers to be “ravishing in her grace, coquettishness, and supple vocalization”²¹, while the *basso buffo* Antonio Tamburini, who like Grisi debuted at the Italiens in 1832, is “full of verve, of drive”²² in the role of Malatesta. If these expressions may seem vague or clichéd, they strive to underline, as for Mario, the elegance of vocal and scenic acting, thus implicitly opposing certain prejudices and accusations of triviality. The tactic appears to have worked, if we are to believe the account that *La Revue indépendante* gives of the soprano’s performance in Act II, Scene 3:

Mademoiselle Grisi, dressed modestly, led by the doctor, made a thousand simulated grimaces of beatitude: with a clumsy and innocent air, imitating the gait of a boarder or novice, her face shrouded in a black veil, her head resting on her shoulder, *collo torto*. The sight of a man makes her cry out in terror. . . . She is absolutely Molière’s Agnès.²³

The Italian actress becomes ironically elevated here to the rank of one the most famous comical feminine characters of the French tradition, the ingenue Agnès from *L’École des femmes* (1662). Beyond the sardonic portrait, such a reference to the national paragon of

¹⁸ *Ibid.* : “cantilène romaine pleine de couleur et de caractère”.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* : “Les inflexions tendres et mélancoliques de cette sérénade conviennent à merveille à la voix suave et pure du jeune chanteur.”

²⁰ *L’Artiste*, 14^e année, t. V, 1844 (January-April), p. 32: “le personnage de l’amoureux, en lui imprimant un cachet de fraîcheur et de jeunesse qui en efface suffisamment la pâle vulgarité”.

²¹ *La France musicale*, 12 March 1843: “ravissante de grâce, de coquetterie, de souplesse de vocalisation”. The reception was not unanimous, however, as attested in particular by *La France musicale*, November 10, 1844 (in which Giulia Grisi is criticized for a tic – her smile after each daring vocal exploit – that supposedly breaks the dramatic illusion; see also Catherine-Marie Heuls, “Les vocalises de la presse sur Don Pasquale”, *L’Avant-Scène Opéra. Don Pasquale*, no. 108, April 1988, p. 90-93.

²² *Ibid.*: “plein de verve, d’entraînement.”

²³ “Théâtre-Italien. *Don Pasquale*”, *La Revue indépendante*, 1843, p. 294: “Mademoiselle Grisi, vêtue modestement, conduite par le docteur, fait mille simagrées de béate : air gauche et niais, démarche de pensionnaire ou de novice ; le visage enseveli dans un voile noir, la tête penchée sur l’épaule, *collo torto*. La vue d’un homme lui arrache des cris de terreur. . . . C’est absolument l’Agnès de Molière”.

classical comedy underlines an ascent in the opinion of the Parisian columnist. It is a sign that Italian gesture has become acclimatized, accommodated to French taste.

The slap that Norine administers to Pasquale in Act III is considered, however, to be highly out of place, in that it jeopardizes propriety as much as plausibility:

Don Pasquale ventures a remonstrance, his wife gives him a vigorous slap. The poor old man begins to cry. If Mr. Donizetti finds [p. 41] this farcical, so much the better for him. In France, we have other ideas. The public did not laugh at this unfortunate Don Pasquale. How may we also admit that a well-born young woman should dare to push the joke and impudence so far, to the point of slapping the man whose niece she aspires to become?²⁴

The fault is attributed however to the composer alone, while praise is showered on the actor who is able to compensate for such a mistake: “Lablache saves this scene by his tears modulated in trills and cadences, and by his comic despair.”²⁵ It is the singer’s art of *bel canto* which guarantees comic relief and the minimal level of elegance required for the French stage. Indeed, behind the ovation given to the quartet of performers, it is above all the performer of the eponymous role who stands out as the pillar of the opera. The latter is even described as a “thin and slender child”,²⁶ who without Lablache would not have been able to hold out: “Thanks to the help of this skillful tutor, he has been going along happily and for quite some time.”²⁷

“Lablache was singing in a flower box”

Don Pasquale quickly becomes a sensation, producing a substantial and even maximal profit.²⁸ The audience’s favorite pieces are soon sung in concerts, many scores and partitions

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 295: “Don Pasquale hasarde une remontrance, sa femme lui campe un vigoureux soufflet. Le pauvre vieillard se met à pleurer. Si M. Donizetti trouve cela bouffon, à la bonne heure. En France, on a d’autres idées. Le public n’a point ri de ce malheureux don Pasquale. Comment admettre aussi qu’une jeune femme bien née ose pousser la plaisanterie et l’impudence jusqu’à souffleter celui dont elle aspire à devenir la nièce ?”

²⁵ *La France musicale*, 8 January 1843: “Lablache sauve cette scène par ses larmes en trilles et en cadences, et par son désespoir comique.”

²⁶ *Revue et Gazette musicale*, 7 January 1844: “enfant mince et fluet”.

²⁷ *Ibid.*: « Grâce au secours de cet habile tuteur, il marche heureusement et depuis assez longtemps. »

²⁸ “The takings reached their maximum amount, which had not happened in a long time”, notes *La France musicale*, 12 March 1843, in the wake of Mario’s benefit concert.

are printed; and advertisers, to promote the work, even go so far as to use Lablache's legendary belly which, when lithographed, serves as an advertising balloon.²⁹

The opera's management thus begins to favor the work for the openings and closings of the season, and is used by the performers for their benefit evenings. Giulia Grisi, for instance, adds to her own evening Act I of *Norma*; Mario adds to his Act III of *Otello*;³⁰ Lablache's benefit performance of *Don Pasquale*, at the end of the 1844 season, totals some 13 000 francs. This constituted the most significant earnings of the winter, according to *La France musicale*, which declared:

[p. 42] The illustrious artist, in the role of Don Pasquale (which will henceforth remain attached to his name as its finest glorious jewel) provoked universal applause and laughter throughout the evening. The stage, on several occasions, was covered as if by magic in wreaths and flowers. Lablache was singing in a flower box. A colossal, immense bouquet, as large and as big as Lablache himself, greatly entertained the public.³¹

Lablache, as a "delicious Don Pasquale"³², moreover adorned his buttonhole with a camellia which completed his outfit made up of a blond wig, a coat which was tight at the waist, and polished leather boots, which even gave rise to a new fashion trend described as follows by Charles de Boigne: "Since the appearance of Donizetti's comic masterpiece, the most ravishing women in Paris have been vying for the favor to *camelia* Don Pasquale's buttonhole. The honor is given to whoever can discover and send him the rarest flower."³³ Beyond the phenomenon of the passing fad, the anecdote is interesting. If some spectators may have regretted that the action takes place in contemporary times, in modern dress,³⁴ we may glimpse in such flowers the complicity of an enthusiastic audience, who participate in the decorative efforts (and consequent ridiculousness) of a character at the same time as they pay

²⁹ *Valse de Don Pasquale arrangée pour piano par Th. Labarre*, lithograph, Bertauts, 32,5 x 25 cm, Vienna, Diabelli; Londress, Adisson & Beale; Paris, La France musicale, 1843.

³⁰ *Le Coureur des spectacles*, 6 March 1843.

³¹ *La France musicale*, 31 March 1844: "L'illustre artiste, dans son rôle de don Pasquale qui restera désormais attaché à son nom comme son plus beau fleuron de gloire, a provoqué, pendant toute la soirée, les applaudissements et les rires universels. La scène, à plusieurs reprises, s'est couverte, comme par enchantement, de couronnes et de fleurs. Lablache chantait dans une jardinière. Un bouquet colossal, immense, un bouquet aussi grand et aussi gros que Lablache lui-même, a considérablement diverti le public."

³² Charles de Boigne, "Les camélias de Don Pasquale", *La France musicale*, 22 January 1843: "délicieux Don Pasquale".

³³ *Ibid.*: "Depuis l'apparition du chef-d'œuvre bouffé de Donizetti, les plus ravissantes femmes de Paris se disputent la faveur de *camélieriser* la boutonnière de don Pasquale. C'est à qui découvrira et lui enverra la fleur la plus rare."

³⁴ See for instance *Revue et Gazette musicale*, 7 January 1844, or *La France musicale*, 10 November 1844. For a more detailed analysis of the costumes, see Luca Zoppelli, "En vieux lion moderne", *ibid.*, including the reproduction of the sketches of the costumes which were made by Donizetti himself and conserved in Bergamo.

homage to an actor whom they have adored for a dozen or so years. We may also recognize the art of *bel canto* and vocalizing modulations in the supreme adornment of the “flower box”.

Indeed, Lablache is also one of the surest values of the Théâtre-Italien. Trained at the conservatory of the *Pietà dei Turchini* in Naples, where he began to perform as a *buffo* in 1812, he made a triumphant debut with the Italians in 1830. In the role of Geronimo in the *Matrimonio segreto*, critics hailed in him “the union of the talent of both singer and actor”³⁵, and he returned each season from then on, until 1851. Lablache had the reputation of making people laugh without having [p. 43] done anything at all; to be “so naturally a *bouffe*, that he would be funny while sleeping. That is his genius.”³⁶ By his stage presence alone, he made in *Don Pasquale* a variety of triumphant stage entrances: “hardly had we seen his joyful and sympathetic face than, for five minutes long, everyone applauded enough with both hands and feet to make the very room tremble.”³⁷

The singer’s plumpness is in itself the symbolic junction between a comic art that literally “musses up your hair”, to use Gautier’s expression,³⁸ and a sophisticated mastery: “Lablache, as we know, thanks to both art and taste, and with the help of his ample and masterful style, was able to find in his role a truly comedic character”³⁹. He moreover managed this not by practicing euphemism, but “by exaggerating just a little the ridiculous fatuity and credulous bonhomie of the old bachelor”⁴⁰. The audience is fully aware of the scenic capital that this body represents, and congratulates the actor for taking advantage of it: Lablache, as *Le Compileur* affirms, “came back to us with all his plumpness and formidable voice, using both of them to brighten up his roles.”⁴¹ This proudly asserted body indeed provides Lablache with the opportunity for highly effective gestural games:

You have to see him in *Don Pasquale* trying to pick up a note from the flirtatious Norma [sic], a note that seems suspicious to him. There are no sort of antics that Lablache does not use to achieve his

³⁵ *Journal des débats*, 4 November 1830 : “l’union du talent de chanteur à celui de comédien”.

³⁶ *La France musicale*, 10 November 1844: “si naturellement bouffe, qu’il le serait en dormant. C’est son génie.”

³⁷ *La France musicale*, 7 January 1844: “à peine a-t-on aperçu sa figure réjouie et sympathique, que, durant cinq minutes, on a battu des pieds et des mains à faire trembler la salle.”

³⁸ Théophile Gautier, *Histoire de l’art dramatique en France depuis vingt-cinq ans*, 6 vol., Leipzig, Hetzel, 1858-1859, vol. 2, p. 322: “ébouriffant”.

³⁹ *Ibid.*: “Lablache, comme on sait, à force d’art et de goût, et avec le secours de son style ample et magistral, a su trouver dans son rôle un personnage vraiment comique”.

⁴⁰ *L’Artiste*, 14^e année, t. V, 1844 (January-April), p. 32: “en exagérant un peu la ridicule fatuité et la bonhomie crédule du vieux garçon”.

⁴¹ *Le Compileur*, 15 January 1844: “nous est revenu avec son embonpoint et sa voix formidable, se servant de l’un comme de l’autre pour égayer ses rôles”.

ends. Without a chair that he used to help him bend down and get back up again, the note would have stayed there.⁴²

Between caricature and realism, the balance is certainly delicate. It is perfectly realized for some spectators who see in him “a ridiculous lion, a caricature”⁴³, while for others Lablache’s *Don Pasquale* is at fault for being “too real. This breathless old lion struggling against his own corpulence, we have all met him during a morning’s walk; . . . why bother to find him again in the guise of an actor whom we love?”⁴⁴

If *Don Pasquale* seemed to replay the triumphant scenario of *I Puritani*, there was above all, behind the triumphant quartet, the talent [p. 44] of an actor-singer, and his audience’s passion for his performance. It is thus largely to Lablache that Escudier’s words refer when he proclaims in song: “*Ah! Quel plaisir d’être français! . . . Hands clap, smiles stretch wide, we perform Don Pasquale, this adorable fantasy, the winter success, the fashionable play; Don Pasquale, Donizetti’s own Barber of Seville.*”⁴⁵

Céline Frigau Manning

(Université Jean Moulin – Lyon 3)

Translation by Nicholas Manning

(Université Grenoble Alpes – Institut universitaire de France)

⁴² *Ibid.*: “Il faut le voir dans *Don Pasquale* vouloir ramasser un billet de la coquette Norma [sic], billet qui lui paraît suspect. Il n’est sorte de simagrées que Lablache n’emploie avant d’arriver à ses fins. Sans un fauteuil qui lui sert à se baisser et à se relever, le billet resterait là.”

⁴³ *La France musicale*, 10 November 1844: “parce qu’il est un lion ridicule, une caricature”; “trop réel. Ce vieux lion essoufflé qui se débat contre sa corpulence, vous l’avez rencontré le matin à la promenade ; . . . à quoi bon le retrouver encore sous les traits du comédien qu’on aime ?”

⁴⁴ *Revue et Gazette musicale*, 7 January 1844.

⁴⁵ Escudier, “Un peu de tout”, *ibid.*: “*Ah ! Quel plaisir d’être français ! . . . Les mains battent, les sourires s’épanouissent, on joue Don Pasquale, cette adorable fantaisie, le succès de l’hiver, la pièce à la mode ; Don Pasquale, le Barbier de Séville de Donizetti* ». – This chapter was adapted from an article firstly published in French, “Un quatuor d’exception et son ‘délicieux Don Pasquale’ : Lablache ou l’art d’un jeu comique ébouriffant”, *L’Avant-Scène Opéra. Don Pasquale*, n° 302, 2018, p. 82-86. My warmest thanks to my translator Nicholas Manning.