

# MEFISTOFELE

opera in un prologo, quattro atti e un epilogo

libretto and music  
**Arrigo Boito**

based on Goethe's play Faust

premiere:

Milano, Teatro alla Scala, 5 March 1868

(second version: Bologna, Teatro Comunale, 4 October 1875)

edition by Antonio Moccia

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## Prologue

The prelude is followed by the choir of the celestial hosts. During the instrumental scherzo of the second movement, Mefistofele appears on stage and challenges the Creator on Faust's behalf: I, Mefistofele, will make Faust "bite into the sweet apple of vice" and I will triumph over you, old Father, Lord of the Heavens. This is the dramatic intermezzo, followed by the vocal scherzo with the choir of the angels, before the fourth movement, the final psalmody that mixes the voices of the penitents with those of the angels and the celestial hosts. Conceived as a symphony in four movements, with the addition of the choral element and the addition of a dramatic interlude, the Prologue in Heaven, is thus concluded

## Atto I

Frankfurt am Main. Easter Sunday.

An aged Faust, whose cognitive anxiety has detached him from life and withered away as a result of his studies, walks down a hill with Wagner, towards the festive crowd. People are singing and dancing the Obertas. But the day turns to dusk. People return to the city. Faust and Wagner are left alone on the stage while a grey friar gradually approaches and follows them. It is the hour of shadows. Faust has the impression that the friar is leaving traces of fire on the ground. Having returned from the walk, he sings a romance with a beautiful, serene melody. The grey friar has also entered and, under an exorcism by Faust, is soon transfigured into a young Goethian student-traveller, with a red cloak on his arm: it is Mefistofele, who reveals his own essence. And they make a pact: Faust gives his soul to Mefistofele, the devil, obtaining in return the promise of an hour's rest in which he can repose, appease his sense of distress, and be able to say to the fleeting moment: "Stop, you are beautiful!"

## Atto II

The Garden Quartet.

The two couples are strolling, Faust rejuvenated, under the new name of Enrico, with Margherita, and Mefistofele with her mature friend, Marta. Faust seduces Margherita, persuading her to give her mother a sleeping potion, and to meet him in her room; Mefistofele seduces Martha. Change of scene. The deserted and wild valley of Schirk, under the frightening peaks of Brocken. The Witches



Sabbath. Guided by Mefistofele, Faust arrives to witness the throng of witches and sorcerers around Mefistofele whom they are pronouncing their king. In the meantime, the latter is proclaiming himself arbiter of the world, which he raises in his hand in the symbolic shape of a glass globe and which, after a pessimistic description, he smashes to smithereens. While the witches ascend the peak, the ghost of Margherita in chains appears against a celestial background, her throat encircled by a blood-red necklace: Faust keeps staring at it, while Mefistofele urges him to look away.

### **Atto III**

Prison, where Margherita, accused of having killed her mother with a sleeping draught and having drowned the child born to her from the union with Faust, awaits execution. Mefistofele has arranged for Faust to enter, and he tries to persuade her to escape. However, determined to redeem herself from the seduction of evil, she refuses, and voices from above proclaim she has been saved.

### **Atto IV**

On the flowery banks of the Penejos River, in the light of a clear full moon. Night of the Classical Sabbath. Helen and Pantalis in a silver, mother-of-pearl boat surrounded by mermaids, glide down the river, while Faust lies dormant on the ground, dreaming something that makes him call out: "Helen, Helen." As Mefistofele enters, Faust laughs. In a moment, Helen will re-enter the scene, amidst dances and Coretidi singing. We are witnessing a new experience of Faust who, as a fifteenth-century knight, meets the ancient Helen in classic Greece to implement the ideal connection – as every faithful Goethe reader knows – between Greek beauty and German wisdom, between classic and romantic art, to generate modern poetry.

### **Epilogue**

Back in his study, disappointed by his experience and by the Real and the Ideal, which he experienced through pain (Margherita), and a dream (Helen), Faust enters a mirage of social regeneration: this is the mirage that finally allows him to say to the fleeting moment: "Stop, you are beautiful!" Mefistofele claims his due in vain. The voices of the celestial hosts can already be heard from above. Redeemed by the extreme mirage, Faust falls lifeless to the ground: the fugitive moment has turned into eternal happiness for him. Defeated, Mefistofele collapses on the ground whistling, while the alleluia of the celestial hosts now reigns supreme.

