The popularity of the *Aeneid* as subject material for operatic librettos has been immense, especially during the 18th century; Dr. Koch draws attention to the fact that before 1856, when Berlioz started to work on his *Troyens*, more than 140 operas based on Vergil’s epic had been written. In this connection it should be taken into account that one single libretto, *Didone abbandonata* by Pietro Metastasio (1698-1782), was set to music at least eighty times (amongst the composers of the Metastasio-text the best-known names are Albinoni, Paisiello, Paër and Mercadante), by some composers as often as three times. To the remarkable figure of Metastasio, the most successful librettist of his time, once celebrated as the greatest poet of his age and nowadays almost completely forgotten, Koch devotes two interesting excursuses (‘Materialien’ IV, V, p. 91-101). With the exception of one, however, none of these early operas has kept the stage, and Koch convincingly shows that Berlioz was not acquainted with any of them. After Berlioz (until 1920) six more *Aeneid*-operas have been composed; none of these works has acquired any degree of reputation.

The major part of the book—which is based on a lecture held at the University of Konstanz—is, perhaps contrary to what the title makes us expect, but considering the importance of the various operas, rightly, devoted to the opera *Les Troyens* (completed in 1858) by Hector Berlioz (1803-1869), one of the most important but at the same time one of the less known works of this composer. Notwithstanding the (relative) Berlioz-renaissance that has started after the centenary of his death in 1969 (with which especially the name of the English conductor Sir Colin Davis is associated) it is evident that the most popular Vergil-opera is not Berlioz’s *opus magnum* (performing length: ca. 4 hours), but the short opera *Dido and Aeneas* by Henry Purcell (text by Nahum Tate; first performance London...
1689). Notwithstanding the rarity of performances of Berlioz's opera, the present staging practice still compares favourably with what happened during the century after Berlioz's death: the work was never performed in its entirety; large parts were the victim of cuts and even re-composing.

The circumstances under which Berlioz's opera came into being are well-known and have been described more than once: when, to his great regret, he was forced by his father to read the classics, Berlioz's love for Vergil was kindled by his reading of the fourth book of the Aeneid. This love for Vergil accompanied Berlioz for the rest of his life, and perhaps not without reason he has been styled as 'l'uomo più 'Vergilian' dell'Ottocento.'

After some methodological considerations, Koch studies three earlier Aeneid-operas, those by F. Cavalli (La Didone, 1641, text by G.F. Busenello; at the end of this opera Dido marries Iarbas and they live happily ever after!), Purcell, and Metastasio's influential libretto (1724). His book culminates in a thorough analysis of Berlioz's libretto, which shows in detail how cleverly the composer—who, like Richard Wagner, used to write his own texts—has adapted the material provided by Vergil's first, second and fourth books to fit into a dramatic plan, resulting into an opera which may well be the greatest French music drama of the 19th century (cf. Koch p. 143 and n. 260 on p. 176-7). Les Troyens is a full-stage grand opéra in five acts; the first two are mainly based on the second book of the Aeneid (Berlioz assigns a major part to Cassandra, who repeatedly prophesies Troy's fall); acts 3-5 are based on books 1 and 4, and culminate in Dido's death in the arms of her sister Anna.

In some respects Koch's book is perhaps somewhat academic, but it is lucidly written and testifies to the author's great enthusiasm for both Vergil and Berlioz. In my view, the most serious but (taking into consideration the nature of the texts to be compared) at the same time inevitable setback is the fact that hardly any attention is paid to the musical aspects of Berlioz's opera (apart from 'Materialien' X: 'Zur Musik der Oper "Les Troyens'”, p. 137-43); there will hardly be any doubt—as Koch points out himself, p. 84—that it is above all the quality of the music that makes an opera into a successful work of art. At any rate, we have to be grateful to Dr. Koch for his careful analysis of a rather unknown aspect of Vergilian Nachleben in the 19th century.

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