

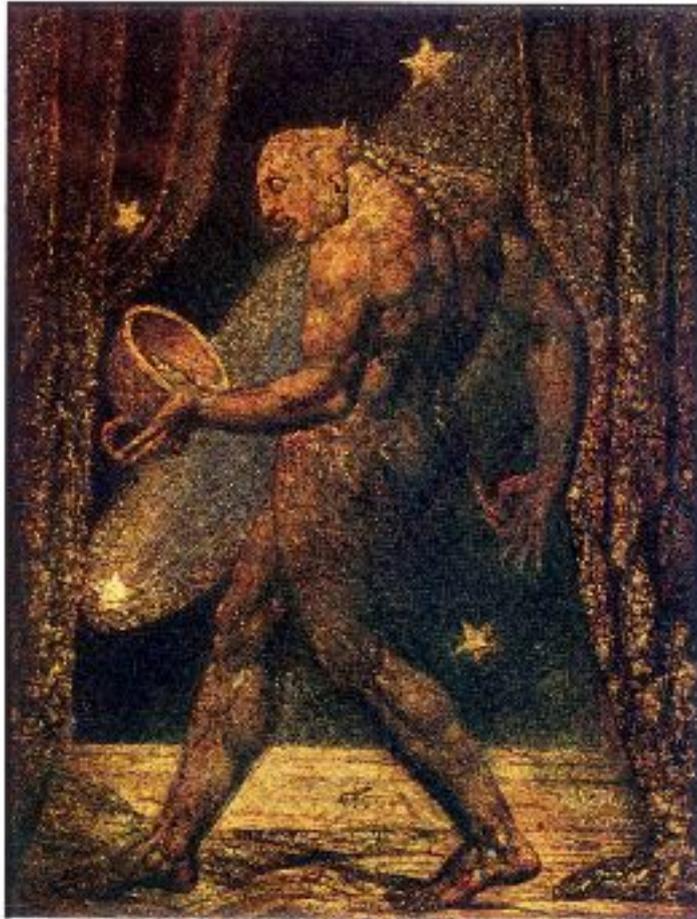
VAN 951


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DOCTOR FOSTER

(Opera in Three Acts)

Words and Music
by
DAVID WARD



LIBRETTO

ISMN M-57011-951-6

Cover: William Blake's *The Ghost of a Flea* - Tate Gallery, London

Mephistophele's "Song of the Flea" from Goethe's Faust Part I
(Compare with M's song "Not a Flea, but a Clone" - libretto page 33, score page 476)

A king there was in story,
Who owned a giant flea,
He loved him and did glory
As if his son were he.
A tailor he called for his treasure,
The tailor came in haste:
"There, clothes for the squire measure,
And make him pants with taste!"

In silks and velvets gaily
He had his favourite dressed,
With ribbons he decked him daily,
Placed a cross upon his breast.
A minister soon in station,
A star he now would sport,
Then every friend and relation
Became a great lord at court.

The lords and ladies were bitten
And plagued at home and at court,
The queen and her maid were smitten,
And stung and sorely hurt;
Yet did not dare to snap them,
Nor frighten them away:
We strangle, snap and slap them,
Whenever we find them astray!

Translated by Frank Claudy, 1886

Set to music by Beethoven, and most famously by Mussorgsky (with many "Ha, Ha"s); but not in the Faust operas by Gounod (*Faust*), Boito (*Mephistofele*), or Busoni (*Doktor Faust*). The "song of the Flea" is, however, used by Berlioz in his dramatic legend *La Damnation de Faust*.

DOCTOR FOSTER - LIBRETTO

Written by David Ward in collaboration with John Cox

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Approximate timings

Act I	50 minutes
Act II	55 minutes
Act III	40 minutes

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ISMN M-57011-951-6

DOCTOR FOSTER

opera in three acts
(source - the Faust legends)

Cast

Dr Henry Foster	<i>a middle-aged molecular biologist</i>	- Tenor
Rev Michael Master (known as “M”)	<i>charismatic minister of an extreme Christian sect</i>	- Bass
Marge	<i>a young woman member of M’s church</i>	- Soprano
Martha	<i>also a member of M’s church</i>	- Mezzo
Helen de Guise	<i>a social anthropologist of great inherited wealth, approaching middle-age</i>	- Mezzo
3 Assistants to Dr Foster		- Tenor - Baritone - Bass
8 privileged members of M’s congregation	<i>who wear distinctive clothes and who ring handbells during Dr Foster’s induction into the sect</i>	- 8 sopranos
M’s Congregation		- Mixed choir
Dancers, Mimes, Supernumeraries		- As available

Scene Changes and Mid-Stage Drop

It is envisaged that the first scene of each act will occupy a down-stage area backed by a mid-stage drop. In each act this will rise at the beginning of the second scene to reveal the chorus ranged in place.

Orchestra

3 Flutes (3 dbl. Piccolo & Alto Flute); 2 Oboes, Cor Anglais; 2 Clarinets, Bass Clarinet, Alto Saxophone (may be doubled by Clarinet 2); 2 Bassoons, Double Bassoon.

4 Horns; 3 Trumpets; 2 Tenor Trombones, Bass Trombone; Cimbasso (ie a valve contrabass trombone to be played by the tuba player).

Timpani; 4 Percussion (Vibraphone, Xylophone, Marimba, Tubular Bells, Flexatone, 2 Wood Blocks, 5 Temple Blocks, Metal Block, Pair Maracas, Whip, Triangle, Tambourine, Pair Cymbals, Small Suspended Cymbal, Suspended Cymbal, Rivet Cymbal, Tam-Tam, Snare Drum, 3 Kit Tom-Toms, Bass Drum).

Mandolin; Harp.

Strings (best/*minimum* - 14/8 Violins 1, 12/8 Violins 2, 10/6 Violas, 10/4 Cellos, 8/4 Double Bases)

On Stage: Electric Guitar, Electric Piano, Bass Guitar; for 8 Sopranos - set of Handbells, 3 tambourines

Back Stage: Electronic Organ (amplified in the auditorium)

Quotes from the Song of Solomon and Revelation taken from the Authorised Version of the Bible.

Poem: “Pied Beauty” by Gerard Manley Hopkins.

Latin from Rule of the Lady Hospitallers, Sigena, 1188 (University of Kansas - Marian Horvat thesis).

DOCTOR FOSTER**Act I scene i**

[The curtain rises to reveal Dr Foster's laboratory. There are test tubes and other paraphernalia associated with a molecular biologist's work. Also large illustrations of famous events in the history of biology. Foster sits at a desk covered with paper and including a telephone, computer, etc. The three assistants are working on paper at a bench, surrounded by test tubes]

The 3 assistants: *[as they work]*

We know our chromosomes and all our DNA codes.
We can work with Ligase Chains and Dawkins,
Dawkins, Dawkins' just a doddle.
But what? what? what is this? -

Polymerase Chain Reaction following through, and then
this sequence replication and HLA markers,
all in this order -

This order? No, it can't be in this order.
[standing to face Dr Foster, then moving towards him]
What are we analysing? Doctor Foster, Doctor Foster,
we need your help. We can't make it out, we can't make it out.

Foster: *[looking up in surprise]*

Don't bother me now.

[The assistants sit again, but do not return to their work]

Foster:

[parlando aside] (And what's happened to the money?)
[arioso] I'm nearly there. *[pointing at his work]*
It's wonderful how it works out.
[parlando] (What's happened? Why hasn't the Foundation
sent its cheque?)
[arioso] Here at last I can find the answer.
It's wonderful. Don't bother me now.
[parlando] (It's bothersome enough facing the trivialities of
funding - what a waste of time.)
[he returns to his paper work]

The 3 assistants:

In this order, in this order. Why so?
How can it be? *[they study their work]*
[they stay at their bench]
In this order, in this order. Why so?
I've never seen anything, anything like this before.
Where can it be leading? I don't understand it,
it doesn't make sense. But we must try, try, try again and again
Working for genius, what a great honour.
What a great ... *[with a sudden hint of irony]* ... honour.
We hardly know what we're doing.
But we must try, try, try again and again.
Again and again, again and again, again and again, again and again.
[they bury their heads in their work]

Dr F

[A light flashes on Dr Foster's desk. He picks up the telephone]

Foster: Must you interrupt me now?
[parlando] (As if all this fussing about money wasn't enough.)
[listens to, then sings into the telephone] Oh him, what a nuisance.
 You'll have to send him in. *[he puts the telephone down]*
 Why did I agree to such a silly meeting? Why did I, I myself,
 arrange to talk to a deluded and deluding fanatic? A mummer in
 Middle Eastern mythology, mixed with mediæval madness and
 muddled by New Age mumblings, moanings and minimalisms.

[M enters]

Foster: *[as pastiche]* Ah! *[melisma]*
[ironically] Laudo dominum.

M: *[rather grandly]* The Lord's peace be upon you.

[He bows to Dr Foster, then they shake hands]

Foster: I need - we all need - a stronger peace than that.

M: I come not to argue but to bring you the Lord's help.
[makes an expansive gesture towards Dr Foster]

Foster: *[looks with raised eyebrows at M]*
 What help can you and your lord give me?

M: *[solemnly]* He's your Lord as well. *[ecstatically]* The Lord of all creation,
[covered voice] but he moves in mysterious ways.

Foster: He does not exist. Neither he nor you can help me.

The 3 assistants: Working, working, working *(etc.)*

[M points first at the three assistants, then round the laboratory]

M: *[lightly]* Ha ha!

The 3 assistants: *[more in the background]*
 Working, working.

M: To many you are no better than a dangerous magician
 toying with terrifying things
 you can't control and don't understand.

Foster: And what are you?
 Worshipping your Middle Eastern god,
 that figment of mystical fancy.

The 3 assistants: Working, working.

Foster: Who can believe it?
 Who but fools!

The 3 assistants: Working, working (*etc.*)

M: Few can follow your sequences and deductions -
a recipe for outbreaks, disasters and contaminations.
But God [*very sonorously*] we don't have to understand.
[*forcefully*] Faith is all we need.

Foster: So why does your god connive at these outbreaks,
disasters and contaminations? With [*darkly*]
all the evil of the world besides.

M: God has the right, in his mysterious way, to do as he sees fit.
But you, you have no right to meddle in what you can't control.

Foster: [*with fervour*] My human intelligence gives me the right to seek out
[*shouted*] the frontiers of knowledge
[*sung*] and to ...

M: That's [*silencing Dr Foster with a gesture*]
not enough. We deny your right.

The 3 assistants: Working, working.

[*M moves close to Dr Foster and taps him on the shoulder*]

M: [*conspiratorially*] But what if?

Offstage chorus: [*wordless, to chorale from Bach Cantata No.171*]
Da, da, da, da (*etc.*)

M: What if you became a believer?
You could say that God had told you to seek out these things.
Then we all would accept your right.
We would accept your right.

The 3 assistants: Working, working (*etc.*)

Foster: What inane credulity.

M: Faith has more power than logic.
[*coaxingly*] Come, come to our church,
you'll see.

Offstage chorus: Da, da, da, da (*etc.*)

The 3 assistants: Working, working,

Working, working, working.

Foster: Your church is no place for me.

M: Why not?
I know you like pretty young women.
[*he rests his hand on Dr Foster's shoulder, and regards him in a vaguely patronising "man-to-man" way*]

- M: In your secular world how many young women
want an aging man like you?
But in our church there are many, many who would have you ...
- Offstage chorus: Da, da, da, da (*etc.*)
- The 3 assistants: Working, working (*etc.*)
- M: ... if you were one of us.
- Foster: I don't believe it.
- M: It's true. [*conspiratorially*] What have you to lose?
- Foster: What have I to lose?
[*thoughtfully*] A scientific observation of your church at work?
Are there many of these pretty young women?
- M: Yes, yes they flock to our church.
[*pausing*] I've heard, don't ask me how,
that your funding cheque has not arrived.
- Foster: [*annoyed*] What ...?
- M: [*holding up his hand*] I think I can help.
- Foster: I don't ...
- M: There is someone who comes to my church -
not a member, you understand -
someone who can solve your funding.
- Foster: Why should I believe that?
- M: Because it's true. Come, you'll see.
- Foster: [*pensively*] A possible way out of this money nonsense?
I can't ignore it. [*more confidently*] And what's more,
what's more - a scientific observation of pretty young women
in a church. [*wryly*] A scientific observation that's easy
on the eye? Why not? Why not? Show me the way
to your church. Wait here while I get ready. [*he goes off jauntily*]
- M: [*lightly*] Ha ha! Ha ha! [*contemplatively*] I can catch this man. If I
manipulate and beguile and flatter, I will turn his research my way.
[*strongly*] I must have power: power and more power. [*more
gently*] I need to use him. He must help me make men in my own
image - clones I must have to promote my fame and wealth. I shall
join religion and science together - ha ha! - then I can have the
power of both. [*strongly*] I must have power: power and more
power. [*lightly*] Ha ha! If I bring him face to face with the
prettiest young woman, he will forget his lack of money and see
only her, then join my church just to get his chance. He will
pretend, but - [*lightly*] ha ha! - but when I support his pretence my
manipulation of the great Doctor Foster begins.

M: *[lightly]*

Ha ha!

The 3 assistants: *[as they continue their work]*

We know our chromosomes and all our DNA codes.
We can work with Ligase Chains and Dawkins,
Dawkins ...

M:

Yes, my manipulation of Doctor Foster begins.

The 3 assistants:

... Dawkins' just a doddle.
Now look, look, look at this!

M:

My power will grow, my power will grow.
I must have power, power and more power.
Power, power and more power.

The 3 assistants:

Polymerase Chain Reaction following through,
and then this sequence replication and HLA markers,
all in this order - yes!

Yes, it is in this order!
Now we know what we're analysing.
Doctor Foster, Doctor Foster, you're right again.
You are a genius.

[Dr Foster enters, smartened up, but in an inappropriately youthful fashion]

M: *[lightly]*

Ha ha! Here he comes.
[aside] (With fatal curiosity -
I shall use him on my road to wealth, wealth and power.)

Offstage chorus:

Praise God!
Praise God! Praise God ...

M: *[ecstatically]*

Praise God!

Offstage chorus

... as revealed by our master to us.

[Dr Foster and M leave together]

End of Scene

Dr F

Act I scene ii

[The set is M's church. There are props appropriate for a Christian sect. A backdrop has on it a large decorated M. There is a two-person settle down-stage near centre. On a platform mid up-stage centre is a group of instruments awaiting their players - electric guitar, electric piano and fretless electric bass guitar. There is also a set of handbells. The chorus - M's congregation - is ranged either side of this platform. There are more women than men. A number of the women are provocatively, but not downright tartily, dressed. The eight sopranos who later play handbells have full length dresses, on whose bodices are decorated Ms similar in design to that of the backdrop. Marge and Martha are down-stage]

All Chorus: *[chanting in the manner of an Anglican psalm]*

Michael is our master, he shows us the way to the Lord.
Through him we have found the truth, and through him
we know how to live our lives for God.

Men left: Michael will return with a new convert:

Men right: To add to the strength and wealth of our church.

Women left: He'll bring the famous Doctor Foster:

Women right: He who makes so many afraid.

All Chorus: But Michael is not afraid: no-one puts fear into him.

Martha: Michael is not afraid.

Marge: I wonder what Doctor Foster's really like.
Michael knows we need more men.

Martha: Our master is good to us. He will bring us one to like.

Marge: But will he like us?

Martha: Michael always chooses those who fit.

[M enters up-stage with Dr Foster - they move slowly down-stage]

All Chorus, Marge and Martha: *[chanting as before]*

Michael is our master, he shows us the way to the Lord.
Michael is our master.

M: God's peace be upon you all, my children.
Meet Doctor Foster - Henry.

[he gestures to the congregation, then bows to Dr Foster]

Eight sopranos: Has he come to join us?

Marge: *[to Martha]* He's handsome in that "successful man's" way.

Martha: He's too old.

[Dr Foster looks towards Marge, then whispers to M]

Dr F

Marge: Success sits better on maturity - I like him.

Martha: Well, he's noticed you all right.

[M and Dr Foster have now come down-stage near Marge and Martha]

Foster: *[to Marge]* Hello, my dear. What is your name?

M: This is Marge. You'll like her.
Yes, you'll like her, Henry, you'll like her.

Marge: Are you a believer, Henry?

Foster: Well, you see, my dear ...

Marge: Henry?

[M takes Dr Foster aside]

M: *[to Dr Foster]* She will do anything for you if you join.

Marge: (Oh, I do so hope he's a believer.)

Foster: How can I do that? I don't ...

M: Go through the forms and motions.
Treat it as a ritual ceremony, like receiving an honour at Court.
She will not question your sincerity.

Marge: (I pray and hope, I do so hope, I do.)

Foster: *[turning to Marge]* As you are a believer ...

M: (Yes, yes.)

Foster: ... maybe I can learn to be one as well.

Marge: I do hope so.

M: (It begins.
This fool will pretend belief ...)

Foster: You are beautiful ...

M: (... but that is just the start.)

[M moves more up-stage]

Marge: I do admire you.

Foster: ... beautiful.

Martha: *[aside, but harshly and strongly]*
(I cannot trust this man.)

M: *[addressing the congregation grandly]*

My friends, dearly beloved people, today we shall welcome a new addition to our flock. Let us prepare a welcome for Henry.

[The on-stage instrumentalists enter and go to their instruments. Marge and Martha move back somewhat.]

[M comes down-stage again to the centre by Dr Foster]

Chorus: Michael is our master, he shows us the way to the Lord.
Michael is our master.

M: *[to Dr Foster, but also "at" the congregation]*
Do you believe in God?

[Dr Foster looks shocked and about to rebel]

M: *[quietly to Dr Foster]* Just say yes, it's the ritual - Marge won't have you if you don't join us. *[publicly again]* Henry, do you believe in God?

Foster: *[shrugging slightly]* I do.
[aside and shrugging more heavily]

(Who cares about a bit of false witness? Who cares?)

M: And do you understand that he gave his only son, our Lord Jesus Christ, to save us from our sins?

Foster: Yes.

M: And do you promise to acknowledge and support this church here of ours over all others, as the one true church of the Lord?

Foster: *[quietly to M]* What the hell does that mean?

M: *[quietly to Dr Foster]* That you won't give support to a rival church.

Foster: *[impatiently]* Of course not.

M: Then answer yes. *[publicly]* Henry, Henry, do you promise to support our church and only our church?

Foster: Yes, I do.

M: And do you promise to obey the dictates and rules laid down by the representative, the representative of the Lord on Earth, in this our church, me, Michael Master?

Foster: *[at first stunned into silence]* What?

[The eight sopranos move down-stage towards M]

M: *[quietly to Dr Foster]* It's all right. It's just a form, and I won't tell you to do anything you don't want to do. My first order - request, my first request, will be for you to take Marge under your wing - she is in need of a strong protector.

Dr F

Foster: I see.

M: *[to the 8 sopranos]* I'm having to coach Henry in our rituals.
He's new, but learning fast.

[M gestures to the eight, who go back up-stage to take handbells and range themselves behind the stage instruments]

M: *[publicly to Dr Foster]* Henry, Henry, I ask you again, again. Do you promise to obey me, Michael, as your master, as your master? Your master, your master.

Chorus: Michael is our master.

M: As your master.

Foster: If that is the way I join you. Yes, I promise.

[M gestures to the electric instruments on stage to start playing]

M: Let us welcome Henry.

Eight sopranos: Wa ...

Chorus: Let us welcome Henry.

[During the responses the stage instruments play and the eight sopranos ring hand bells]

M: Kneel, Henry.

Eight sopranos: Wa ...

[After a moment's hesitation Dr Foster kneels before M]

M: *[lays his hands on Dr Foster's head]*
With this laying on of hands ...

Eight sopranos: Wa wa wa

Chorus: With this laying on of hands ...

M: Henry Foster ...

Chorus: Henry Foster ...

M: You receive the blessing of the Lord ...

Eight sopranos: Wa wa wa

Chorus: You receive the blessing of the Lord ...

M: And are bound to our church ...

Eight sopranos: Wa wa wa

Chorus: And are bound to our church ...

Dr F

M: And must obey the rules ...

Eight sopranos: | Wa wa wa

Chorus: | And must obey the rules ...

M: As revealed by Michael ...

Eight sopranos: | Wa wa wa

Chorus: | As revealed by Michael ...

M: Who is now
your master.

Eight sopranos: | Wa wa wa

Chorus: | Who is now your master.

M: Rise.
[Dr Foster stands. M shakes hands with him]
Welcome, Henry.

Eight sopranos & Chorus: Welcome, Henry.

Michael is our master, he shows us the way to the Lord.
Michael is our master.

[All on stage stand stock still]

[The congregation relaxes - Marge starts towards Dr Foster]

Marge: Oh, welcome, Henry.

Martha: *[restraining Marge from going right up to Dr Foster]*
I still don't trust that man.

Marge: I'm sure he is true.

[The members of the congregation move slowly down-stage to acknowledge M and Dr Foster as they pass on their way off. The stage instrumentalists leave up-stage]

Martha: I don't think he's a right believer.

Marge: But you saw him accept.

Martha: I saw him hesitate. I do not trust that man.

Foster: *[to M]* So, you order me to take that young woman under my wing?

[The eight sopranos follow the chorus down-stage but remain waiting a respectful distance from M and Dr Foster. As they pass, several of the chorus women give Dr Foster lingering suggestive glances. Martha has led, and keeps, Marge well away from Dr Foster & M]

M: Do that. *[he hands Dr Foster a Bible]* This will help you.

Dr F

Foster: *[aggressively]* What help can that be?
That's not my way to a woman, not
my way.

Martha: *[privately to Marge]* I still don't trust that man.

M: The Song of Solomon - have you read it?

Foster: I have heard of it.

M: *[takes the Bible back and opens it at a marked place]*
Listen, listen to this.
"Thy two breasts are like two young roes that are twins,
which feed among the lilies. Until the day break,
and the shadows flee away, I will get me to the mountain of myrrh,
and to the hill of frankincense."

Foster: Well, well. Such eroticism in the Bible!

M: God's holy book, God's holy book. When the others have gone
ask her to stay a while and read the Song turn and turn about.
[he hands the Bible back to Dr Foster] She will be yours.

Foster: *[aside]* (Oh dear, I hope she's worth it.)

Martha: *[to Marge]* I don't trust that man.

Marge: I'm so glad he's now one of us.

Foster: *[aside]* (Wasn't there something about my money?)

M: *[aside]* (Praise God, praise God - he's mine.)

Foster: *[aside]* (What have I let myself in for?
And who is it will help with my money?)

[Of the congregation only the eight sopranos plus Marge and Martha are left on stage]

Eight sopranos: *[stepping forwards]* Welcome, welcome, Henry.

[They embrace Dr Foster one by one, then follow the chorus off]

[Marge breaks away and approaches Dr Foster and M, followed by a reluctant Martha]

M: *[turning to Martha]* Say your welcome now, Martha.

Martha: I must welcome you, Henry.

[She embraces Dr Foster perfunctorily and stays waiting for Marge, who is gazing with admiration at Dr Foster, who returns the gaze]

M: *[to Martha]* You may go. Go now, Martha.

*[Martha looks at them each in turn before following the congregation off.
Marge embraces Dr Foster]*

Marge: Oh, welcome, welcome, Henry. Welcome.

Foster: I like your welcome.

M: I shall leave you two to get to know each other.

[M heads up-stage]

Foster: *[gazing at Marge]* You are beautiful, you are, you are.

[M pauses on his way, then continues right up-stage]

M: Praise God.

Foster: So beautiful.

Marge: I do admire you. I'm so glad you've joined us now.

Foster: I'm pleased to belong to anything with you in it.

Marge: *[gently]* Now you are a true believer, a member of the one true church.

Foster: *[stymied for a moment ...]*

Yes. [... then he remembers the Song of Solomon and opens the Bible] Have you read this?

Marge: I read the Bible every day.

Foster: Let us read together. *[he leads her to the settle] [spoken] Come, sit beside me.*

[He gestures for Marge to sit, then sits close beside her with his arm behind her along the settle's back, his other hand holding the open Bible]

Both: "Behold, thou art fair, my love, my love; behold, thou art fair; thou hast doves' eyes within thy locks: thy hair is as a flock of goats that appear from mount Gilead."

Foster: So beautiful.

Marge: I didn't realise.

Both: "Thy teeth are like a flock of sheep that are even shorn, which came up from the washing; whereof every one bear twins, and none, none is barren among them."

Foster: "Thy lips are like a thread of scarlet, and thy speech is comely: thy temples are like a piece of a pomegranate within thy locks."

Marge: "Thy neck is like the tower of David, builded for an armoury, whereon there hang a thousand bucklers, all shields of mighty men."

[He puts his hand on her far shoulder]

Foster: “Thy two breasts are like two young roes that are twins,
which feed among the lilies.”

Marge: Oh Henry ...

Foster: “Until the day break, and the shadows flee away ...”

Marge: Oh Henry, can that be us? Can we be like that?

Foster: *[rather patronisingly]* Dear love.

Marge: Can we be like that?

Foster: My dear. *[he embraces her]*

Marge: I do so admire you.

Foster: My dear. *[he puts the Bible down]*
I remember a poem I once learnt.

Marge: A religious poem?

Foster: *[turning aside]* (Is she so obsessed?)
[to Marge] It praises God.
[aside again] (Lucky I remembered this one.)

[He stands and bows to her, then gestures a down-beat as he starts singing]

Foster: “Glory be to God for dappled things -
For skies of couple-colour as a brindled cow;
For rose-moles all in stipple upon trout that swim;
Fresh-firecoal chestnut-falls; finches’ wings;
Landscape plotted and pieced - fold, fallow, and plough;
And all trades, their gear and tackle and trim.

“All things counter, original, spare, strange;
Whatever is fickle, freckled (who knows how?)
With swift, slow; sweet, sour; adazzle, dim;
He fathers-forth whose beauty is past change:
Praise him.”

Marge: Praise him. How
wonderful, Henry.

M: *[from well up-stage]* Praise him,
praise him. Praise the Lord, that man is caught.

[M leaves up-stage]

Orchestra c. one minute.

[Marge and Dr Foster embrace ... The embrace becomes more passionate ... They break their embrace and return to the settle]

[They take up the Bible and return to the Song of Solomon]

Dr F

Both: “Awake, O north wind; and come, thou south;
blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow
out.”

Sopranos: *[off-stage]* | Ah ...

[The off-stage sopranos continue wordlessly throughout the remainder of the duet]

Marge: “Let my beloved come into his garden, and eat his pleasant fruits.”

Foster: “I am come into my garden, my sister, my spouse:
I have gathered my myrrh with my spice;
I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey:
I have drunk my wine with my milk.”

Both: “Awake, O north wind; and come, thou south;
blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out.”

[They embrace gently]

Sopranos: *[off-stage]* | Ah ...

M: *[off-stage,
not too distant]* | Praise God, praise God.

Sopranos: *[becoming more distant]*
Ah ...

M: *[a little more distant]* | Praise God, praise God.

Sopranos: *[quite distant]* | Ah ...

M: *[quite distant]* | Praise God.

End of Act I

Act II scene i

[After an orchestral entracte (3½ mins) the curtain rises on Dr Foster's laboratory. The three assistants are working at their bench as at the beginning of Act I, but Dr Foster himself is absent]

The 3 assistants:

What we're working at we're not sure.
What we're working at seems obscure - and strange.
But work we must. (Although our pay is late.)

Working for genius, how hard that is.
Now we know what we're doing, now we haven't a clue.
Where will it lead? How great are the risks?
Are these things best not found? Can it really be for
the greater good? We don't know, we don't understand.
We do what he tells us, we sit here and work, work, work,
work all day. Work all day, work all day, wondering
why, why, why? Wondering what it's all about.
(And when are we going to get paid?)

[Dr Foster enters and vaguely acknowledges the three]

[He comes down-stage]

[The three assistants rise as if to follow, then shake their heads violently, before shrugging resignedly and returning to their work]

Foster:

A silly girl - silly, but rather nice.
What a fool I've been to let that man M - ha! - I let him rope me
into his frightful church. Why should I be a fool among fools?
I thought I was there to find my money - but not a bit of it;
instead I was led through a childish ritual with a young woman as
the prize. Now she thinks she's in love; but already I'm bored.

[fiercely] I must find the beauty that's knowledge.
I must seek out all there is to know.
That is my life, my "why I exist". *[parlando]* (You pretentious
fool, who do you think you are? Nobody cares.) *[He paces about]*
My work was going so well. I felt it was profound. It seemed I
might delay old age. It seemed I might hold back death itself.
[with increasing fervour] It seemed I had a sacred duty. A sacred
duty. To delay old age. To hold back death. My sacred duty.
[parlando] (But now all this nonsense of no money. I can't waste
my time with that.) *[fiercely again]* My sacred duty. To delay
old age. To hold back death. To hold back death. My sacred duty.
[harshly] But nobody wants to know. Nobody supplies the money I
need. Without money for my life's great work I shall lose my very
self. *[tonelessly]* I'd sell my soul to the devil to keep all this
[he gestures around] - even a devil like M, the Reverend Michael
Master - a devil in his church. Oh, if only he would bring me the
money I need. *[again with increasing fervour]* Money to know the
meaning of life itself. Money to delay old age. Money to hold back
death. My sacred duty. My "why I exist".

[as Dr F stares forwards in near ecstasy the three assistants approach him from behind]

The 3 assistants:

When are we going to get paid?

Dr F

Foster: *[looking disdainfully at the three]*
What?

The 3 assistants: How soon will we get paid?

Foster: Don't bother me. Get out. I don't need you today.
[shooing them] Get out, out!

[The assistants hurriedly grab their personal possessions and leave in disorder]

Foster: When will they get paid?

I thought I could rely on the Foundation at least. Have I been complacent? Should I apply for public money? Ha! Not that! How can I waste time filling in forms and satisfying silly irrelevant conditions while pompous officials get in my way and tell me to obey inhibiting laws engineered by vote-hungry politicians eager to appease an ignorant and fearful populace? Science must not be fettered! I must be free. M understands -
[spoken] speaking of the devil ...

M: *[entering]* Ah, Henry.

Foster: Much use you've been to me

M: What, not gratified? Ah well.
Now, your money ...

Foster: Yes, my money.

M: I do have a sound scheme for that.

Foster: Nothing happened last time.

M: You have yet to meet Helen.

Foster: Helen?

M: Helen de Guise.

Foster: Who's she?
Who's she?

M: *[a little surprised]* You really don't know?

Foster: Never heard of her.

M: Rich, still attractive in her maturity, and could be most generous to you - give you all you want for your research.

Foster: Why should she do that when I've never heard of her?

M: Ah, but she knows about you. Come with me to meet her - but it's up to you to impress her.

Dr F

- Foster: Once again I suppose I've nothing to lose. I'll go with you. Should I smarten up?
- M: *[nods affirmatively]* But perhaps a little more discreetly than last time.
- Foster: *[going off]* I won't be long.
- M: Ever the hopeful, ha ha!
- My hope is that this time he dresses for his age. A middle-aged man got up like a twenty-year old off to the disco won't impress Helen.
- Ah, talking of being impressed - look who comes. I shall see but not be seen. *[he hides]*
- Marge: *[entering]* *[in surprise]* No-one.
- [with increasing passion]* Oh, Henry, why stay so short a time with me? Henry, you need me. I may not seem so clever; but yes, I can learn; yes, I can learn, if only you will let me help you. Henry, Henry, our love can last. If only you would take me into your mind. Your mind. Your mind, that is what I love.
- [parlando]* To you do I seem a silly pretty girl? Just a passing *[harshly]* plaything? A gullible little body with no brain?
- [again with passion]* Oh Henry - how can I strike you as more than just a dummy? What must I do to gain your respect? Let me help you. Take me into your mind. Our love can last. Our love can last.
- Martha: *[enters aggressively]* What are you doing in this dreadful place? Chasing that non-believing, wicked fraud?
- Marge: Perhaps it's true, true he doesn't believe. I don't know what he thinks.
- Martha: He is false.
- Marge: He's so clever. If he doesn't believe, could he be right?
- Martha: Our master could never be wrong.
- Marge: But maybe it's Henry who's right.
- M: *[aside, from his place of concealment]* (This is dangerous.)
- Martha: You little infatuated fool. How can you risk apostasy for that - that smooth-talking, lying man?
- Marge: I love him. I believe in him.
- M: (This must be stopped.)
- Martha: Pathetic adolescent nonsense.

Marge: I believe him, not M who calls himself our master.
Henry is right. Henry will
win.

M: (Henry Foster can never defeat me.)

Martha: How can you deny all you've ever learned?

M: *[suddenly revealing himself]*

Now, this is no place for you two.
Go and prepare for Henry Foster's confirmation into our church.
[oleagiously] You are sure to enjoy that.

Martha: *[to Marge]*

Come at once. *[She drags a weakly resisting Marge off]*

M:

Where is Henry? I do hope not tarting himself up
like some youthful dandy. He must impress Helen.

[spoken] How has he not heard she inherited control of the
foundation that's the source of his funds? Is he too full of dreams
to notice what affects him most? She wants to see reproduced,
living before her very eyes, the ancestors of man. This the
Doctor can be made to engineer.

[sung] And this I, Michael Master, can use.

Neither the obsessive dreaming Doctor, nor the so elegant and
clever Helen will notice my control.

[spoken] But first he must get her to like him.
He must have his money.

[sung] Ha ha! Here he is - and quite respectable too.

[Dr F enters wearing a dark blue three piece pinstripe of sober cut]

M: Are you ready
then?

Foster: Yes.

[They leave together]

End of Scene

Dr F

Act II scene ii

[M's congregation is ranged as at the beginning of Act I scene ii, with the eight sopranos prominent and with the stage instrumentalists already in place. Marge & Martha move down-stage and appear to be arguing, while the chorus chants. Helen can be seen to the right: she is an observer, not a participant]

All Chorus: *[chanting as before]*

Michael is our master, he tells us to be ready:
to be ready for the coming of the Lord.

Men left: The signs are all there:

Men right: The signs of the Revelation.

Women left: There will be a new beginning:

Women right: A beginning rising from destruction.

All Chorus: Michael will lead the way: the way to a new world.

[M & Foster enter up-stage and move down as in I ii]

Chorus: Michael is our master.

Martha: | When he is confirmed into our church he must obey ...

Chorus: | Michael is our master.

Martha: | ... the rules.

Eight sopranos: | Our master. And I saw another sign in heaven.

Marge: | Why should Michael impose rules on Henry?

Chorus: *[hushed]* | Another sign. Another sign.

Marge: | Why should he?

Eight sopranos: | Seven angels having the seven last plagues.

Martha: | Michael is our master. We must obey the dictates and rules
laid down by the representative of the Lord on Earth,
Michael our master.

Chorus & eight sopranos:
[variously] | Michael is our Master.
Another sign.
Seven angels having the seven last plagues.

Marge: | I don't know any more

Chorus: *[whispered]* | Seven angels having the seven last plagues.

Marge: I don't think ...

Martha: You don't know? You don't think?
You must believe, that's all there is.

Chorus & eight sopranos: A sign.
Michael is our master.

[Marge & Martha move to the left, no longer singing but miming their argument]

[M & Dr F are now down-stage centre]

Chorus: Pour out the vials.

M: You will know about your money today.

Foster: And will I have to put up with more of that asinine mumbo-jumbo?

Chorus: The vials, pour out the vials of the wrath of God,
the wrath of God.

Eight sopranos: Babylon.

M: No words today. Only a test my eight angels will help you pass.

Chorus: The wrath of God on the earth.

Eight sopranos: Babylon, Babylon.

Chorus: On the earth the wrath of God.

Eight sopranos: Babylon.

Foster: *[looking towards the eight sopranos, who curtsey to him]*

That might not be so bad.

Chorus: *[murmured, as by a congregation at prayer]* Babylon the great,
the mother of harlots and abominations of the earth.
Michael is our master.

Eight sopranos: Babylon, Babylon.
Michael is our master.

Foster: But what about my money?

M: By the end of the day you shall have it.

Foster: How? From where?

M: Be patient *[aside, sotto voce]* (and may I have patience too).
Wait ... I promise ...

Foster: *[aside]* (He promises! *[imitating M]* Ha ha! ...
But I must take the chance).
From whom will it come? What must I do?

M: From whom it will come you'll soon see.

Dr F

M: As for what you must do ... not too much to get the money,
perhaps ... but once you have it ...

Foster: *[aggressively]* Once I have it I shall do what I like.

M: Perhaps not so simple. Not so simple.
I can help keep the money coming, but my plans ...

Foster: To the devil with your plans - I will not be fettered.

M: *[lightly]* Ha ha! To the devil perhaps - ha ha -
but you will need me.
I, Michael Master, will see you get your money.

Chorus: Michael is our, Michael is our (*etc*)
Michael is our master.

M: *[M's words clear,
Foster's aside barely heard]* *[aside]* (But then whether you want to or not, you shall
work for me, Michael Master. Together we shall make men
in my image. My image.)

Foster: *[aside]* (What does this man want? What does he want?)

Chorus: Michael is our, Michael is our (*etc*)
Michael is our master.

Foster: When my money comes again I will delay death and old age.
[ecstatically] My why I exist.
Science and I will not be fettered!

M: I shall join religion and science together,
and have the power of both!

Chorus: Michael is our master, our master, our master.

Foster: I will not be fettered.

M: *[aside]* (Ha ha, we shall see.)

Foster: What now?

M: *[signalling to the eight sopranos, who move down-stage]*
First, a little test for you to pass with my angels.

Chorus: Michael is our master.

[The eight sopranos surround Dr F. With the assistance of several near naked dancers they involve him in the enactment of an erotic fantasy. M moves to stand near the studiously observing Helen. Martha can be seen still arguing with Marge and endeavouring to force her up-stage to join the main congregation. Eventually Marge is left alone, opposite M & Helen, when Martha goes up-stage on her own]

Eight sopranos: Come, come now, come into our garden.
Take our milk with our honey - join with us.
Ah (*etc*) *[melisma]*

Dr F

Eight sopranos:	Ah (<i>etc</i>)
M: [<i>to the congregation, monumentally</i>]	Prepare, for the end is nigh!
Eight sopranos:	Ah (<i>etc</i>)
Chorus:	It is time. The signs are here.
Eight sopranos:	Ah (<i>etc</i>)
M:	The angel of the Lord descends. Woe unto you who do not believe ...
Chorus:	The signs are here.
M:	... for the end is nigh.
Eight sopranos:	Come, come now, come, come into our garden. Enjoy our fruits: be one with us.
Chorus:	Signs, signs, the signs are here. The signs are here, here.
Eight sopranos:	Ah (<i>etc</i>)
Chorus:	There are wars and rumours of wars, nation will rise against nation. There are pestilences, famines and earthquakes (<i>etc</i>)
Eight sopranos:	Ah!
Chorus:	The end is nigh!
M:	The end is nigh!
Foster:	Ah, ah!
Eight sopranos:	Ah!

[Up-stage projections & mimes/dancers suggest scenes worthy of Hieronymous Bosch. The congregation begins to appear possessed, and behaves in an increasingly bizarre and hysterical fashion with an element of frustrated eroticism. Down-stage the continuing fantasy surrounding Dr F is more suggestive of erotic consummation]

Chorus:	Babylon, Babylon (<i>etc</i>) Babylon the great is fallen (<i>etc</i>)
Foster:	Ah, ah!
Eight sopranos:	Ah!
Chorus:	... is fallen, and is become the habituation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of unclean and hateful bird.

Eight sopranos:	Ah (<i>etc</i>)
Foster:	Ah (<i>etc</i>)
Chorus:	Babylon, Babylon (<i>etc</i>) Babylon the great is fallen (<i>etc</i>) fallen, fallen (<i>etc</i>)

[Fantastic projections illustrative of the beliefs of Christian millennialists, fundamentalists and others who place a literal interpretation on the Book of Revelation with particular reference to contemporary natural disasters and human power struggles]

Foster:	Ah (<i>etc</i>)
Eight sopranos:	Ah (<i>etc</i>)
Chorus:	Babylon, Babylon, Babylon (<i>etc</i>)
Eight sopranos:	We rise up to open to our beloved. Do not withdraw and be gone. Your mouth is most sweet, you are altogether lovely.
M: <i>[always to the congregation]</i>	Come out of her my people, my people, come out of her that ye be not partakers of her sins.
Chorus:	Babylon is fallen, all nations have drunk of the wine of her fornication.
Foster:	Ah (<i>etc</i>)
Eight sopranos:	Lovely, lovely (<i>etc</i>) Ah, ah!
Chorus:	Babylon, Babylon cage of hateful bird, Babylon.
Foster:	Ah!
Eight sopranos:	Ah!
Chorus & eight sopranos:	Michael Master.

[The chorus and up-stage mimes fall exhausted from their apocalyptic visions, and Dr F falls equally exhausted (with the eight sopranos & down-stage dancers) from his erotic fantasy]

Eight sopranos:	Ah (<i>etc</i>)
Foster:	Ah (<i>etc</i>)
Chorus:	Babylon. The rulers of the earth, who have committed fornication, and lived deliciously with her, shall bewail her and lament for her. Alas, alas. Alas that great city, that mighty city, Babylon.

[Helen & M move centre stage]

- Helen: *[to M]* Well, that was all rather jolly!
- M: Did it further your study of the ways of man?
- Helen: Yes indeed, most interesting.
And now I've seen the great biologist at play.
- M: I hope you're not put off.
- Helen: Oh no. I can see he might be fun to have around. Fun, fun,
fun,
- M: *[aside]* (What an extraordinary woman.)
- Helen: Fun, fun, fun.
- M: *[lightly]* Ha ha.
- [Helen goes up to and stands over the exhausted Dr F, while the 8 sopranos and the dancers slink away up-stage. The on-stage instrumentalists leave discreetly]*
- Helen: *[to the prone Dr F]* Is it you, you whose work puts such great fear,
fear into the weak and superstitious?
- Foster: *[weakly and still prone]*
Madame ... I ... I ...
- Marge: *[still from her position to the left]*
Why does he let them treat him so?
Oh Henry, you are so weak - I must help you. *[she runs off]*
- Martha: *[remonstrating as she follows Marge off]*
Wait!
[off, or nearly off] Wait!
- Helen: Don't worry, my good man. I know your strengths as well.
- Foster: Madame. I'm not at my best just now.
- Helen: Perhaps I can help.
- Foster: You have seen me relax, relax too freely.
- Helen: As your work is so important, no wonder you
need ...
- Foster: Madame ...
- M: *[intervening]* Helen.
Helen, this is Dr Henry Foster, of whom you know:
Henry, this is Madame Helen de Guise, of whom I have spoken.
I have spoken.

Dr F

Helen: *[to Dr F]* You must call me Helen.

Foster: *[standing shakily]* I am Henry. *[he sits]*

M: *[going up-stage to the congregation whom he gradually brings into order by gestures during the ensuing dialogue between Dr F & Helen]*
I must attend to my flock.

Helen: As I was saying. If your work is great, then you must relax in style.

Foster: Madame ... Helen
[sitting erect] I do believe my work is great.

Helen: I'm sure it is, Henry.

Foster: My research can change so much - it can change the way we live.

Helen: Tell me about it.

Foster: *[standing with a return of energy and enthusiasm]*
You know of the double helix of DNA. You know of the chain reactions that ...

Helen: Best not ...
Best not to be quite so technical.

Foster: *[momentarily deflated]*
I'm sorry ... Where was I?

Helen: Double helices I think.

Foster: But how to explain?

Helen: Tell me of ends not means.

Foster: *[with renewed enthusiasm]*
I plan to delay old age, even to hold back death itself.

Helen: A worthy cause.

Foster: My name will last for ever.

Helen: A worthy cause -
but might not recreating the past be more fun?

Foster: Fun?

Helen: Work must be fun.

Foster: But I work for the greater good of man.

Helen: No doubt.

- Helen: But does man agree?
- Foster: Some are afraid of what I do.
Some attack it with a fearful rage.
- Helen: *[almost coaxingly]* I will not attack your work.
I can support you in all you do.
- Foster: And do you - so elegant and civilised - not mind my little foibles?
- Helen: Men must have their play! Their play, their play.
If I took charge of you, would you need all that?
- Foster: Any man who let you take charge
would have time for no-one else.
- Helen: Flatter me if you like.
For my support there is a price.
- Foster: What price is that?
- Helen: You must work for my ends as well.
- Foster: Your ends? What are they?
- Helen: I believe you could recreate living beings
from the DNA of old bones.
- Foster: Maybe; but what's the point?
- Helen: For my own interest and study I want to see
the ancestors of Man paraded living before my very eyes.
The first known near-men and all those that follow,
right to modern man himself.
- Foster: That is not allowed. I can't do it.
- Helen: Why not? I'm told you have the knowledge to create them
fully grown, complete with memories and skills.
- Foster: By chance my research has shown the possibility is there.
But that's not what my work is about!
[aside] (But how can she know? This is not public.
This is dangerous knowledge.)
[to Helen] That is something I must not attempt -
that is against the laws of Nature herself.
- Helen: *[lightly]* Ha ha.
Expanding the possibilities of science, against the laws of
Nature herself? Come, you don't believe that!
"To seek out the frontiers of knowledge," is that not your line?
- Foster: *[aside]* (How does she know?)
Yes, I must seek out the frontiers of knowledge -

but some things are forbidden.

Helen: Forbidden? By whom? What an irrelevance!

Foster: Forbidden by science and by life itself.

Helen: *[spoken]* Come now, do not be such a coward. I demand better of you.

Foster: Beautiful and clever though you are,
[spoken] you have no right to demand anything of me.

Helen: Ah!
Flattery again I see. Rather nice - but you've left out
"rich as well".

Foster: Rich you may be, but if I can get my money ...

Helen: Oh so naïve. Dear Henry. I like you, I really do.
Quite the man for me if you'll do what I want.
Don't you know from where your money comes?

Foster: Of course I do. Five years of generous grant from the
Way Foundation, and a promise of five years more,
five years more if I need. But there seems to be a strange delay
with this renewal. What a nuisance it all is.

Helen: Yes Henry. My uncle was the foundation.
But now I have inherited and make my demands.

Foster: You! You are the Way Foundation, you?

Helen: Why such surprise? That's not so flattering.
There is a committee of course, but they do what I say.
I HAVE THE MONEY

Foster: You have the money? The money I need.

Helen: You can do your own thing, I won't stop that.
You shall have the money as long as you work
for my ideas as well.

[They separate somewhat, each to speak their own asides]

Foster: *[spoken]* (What does it matter? Who cares?
If I can have all the money I need for my real work,
indulging her crazy fancy for living primitives -
is that too great a price?)

Helen: *[spoken]* (Another weak man, but cleverer than most.
He will work for me I'm sure.
What's more he's quite attractive - he can amuse me as well.)

Foster: *[spoken]* (I know how to woo a simple young woman -
But how to impress Madame Helen de Guise?
And how great might be my gain?)

Helen: *[spoken]*

(Shall I act soft and sentimental? Then when he's in my sexual thrall, I can use him how I will.)

[They come together again to sing]

Foster: You are very beautiful.

Helen: You are a most attractive man.

Foster: I feel excited by your challenge ...

Helen: I begin to want you for my bed.

Foster: Very beautiful.

Helen: Most attractive.

Foster: Helen.

Helen: Henry.

Helen: | Henry.

Foster: | Helen.

Both: We are right together. We could fall in love.
Love will show us the way.

Foster: You are very beautiful,
| beautiful.

Helen: | You are a most attractive man.

Foster: | I feel excited by your challenge, *[harshly]* your challenge,

Helen: | I
begin to want you for my
| bed.

Foster: | your challenge.

Both: We are right together. We could fall in love.
Love, love *(etc)*

[Up-stage M has roused the members of his congregation who are now ranged as before and stand to sing as if in an oratorio. M conducts their singing with exaggerated gestures]

Chorus: | Love between man and woman is God ordained.

Foster & Helen: | Love.
Love will show us the way. *[hushed]* The way.

Foster: I shall do all you ask

Helen: I shall allow you all the money you desire.

Dr F

Foster: | All you ask.
Helen: | The money you desire.
Both: Love, love (*etc*)
Chorus: | God has ordained it: man and woman must fall in love.
Foster & Helen: | Love, love!
Foster: You shall see parade before you the clones of early man.
Helen: You can work without fear of failing funds.
Foster: Clones.
Helen: | Funds.
Foster: | Clones.
Helen: Funds.
Both: Love, love (*etc*)
Chorus: It has been ordained.
Foster & Helen: We shall fall in love!

End of Act II

Dr F

Act III scene i

[Stage lights down. A suddenly lit spot reveals M before the closed stage curtain at the exact moment he starts to sing]

M: I must have power!

[as he leaves the curtain rises to reveal Dr F's laboratory as before, with the 3 assistants at work]

The 3 assistants: What we're doing is extreme,
but now the pay is so good we don't care.
We won't tell. We don't care, we won't tell, we won't sell.
We won't sell our story to the press.
The pay is so good, so good, so good.
The pay is so good, so good, so good.

[Marge enters surreptitiously down-stage]

What we're doing is not allowed, but who cares?
What we're doing is a crime, so they say,
but, but the pay is so good.
We don't care, we won't sell, we won't tell.

Marge: I knew that woman, that woman would make him do wrong.
M waits to pounce upon them both.

The 3 assistants: *[more in the background]* The pay is so good

Marge: Oh Henry,
Henry, I know you are clever
but I wish you weren't so weak as well.
I never understood before, Henry.

The 3 assistants: We don't care, don't care *(etc)*
the pay is so good, so good *(etc)*

Marge: Until I met you I believed all M said,
but now I believe you.

The 3 assistants: the pay is so good, so good

Marge: Oh Henry, why don't you act as you believe? You'll be destroyed
by that evil M - he wants you, he wants you in his power.
I must save you, I must save you -
I must save *[harshly]* your soul.

The 3 assistants: We don't care, the pay is so good, don't care, don't care.

[the 3 assistants have finished their work and stand as they prepare to leave]

[M enters. As they depart the assistants nod a greeting to him]

M: Ah my young lady, why have you not attended church today?

Marge: I no longer believe.

Dr F

M: What's this?

Marge: *[accusingly]* You want to use Henry.

M: Henry Foster? You no longer matter to him.

Marge: He matters to me.

M: Stupid girl - he has found one with a brain to match his.

Marge: She is leading him
astray.

M: What
idiocy is this? I don't permit, I don't permit such nonsense.

Marge: You must let Henry ...

M: You must obey me.

Marge: Please leave Henry alone.

M: *[becoming increasingly aggressive]*
I am your master.

Marge: Not any more.

M: You shall be punished.

Marge: I can resist.

M: Do as I say girl.

Marge: I won't.

M: *[threatening her]* Come here.

Marge: No!

M: I won't allow ...

Marge: *[running off]* Leave me alone.

M: Tchah, I can do without that.
How did that one acquire a mind of her own?

What does it matter? *[lightly]* Ha ha.
Henry Foster will soon be in my power, my power.
He is weak, and for now in Helen's thrall.
As for her - she wants only to amuse herself and to gratify her
foolish curiosity. What a pair! She is leading him and herself
just where I want. Just where I want.
All the money she has can't buy her out of this -
she and he have gone too far, too far, too far.
What a field day of news that would be if some hound of the press

were to find the truth! Just that threat will be enough.
 Just that threat will make them work for me.
 His brain and her money. I shall use them both.
 What power I shall have. I must have power and more power.

[Martha enters]

M: *[aside]* (Ah, a true acolyte)
 God is in heaven.

Martha: *[repeating the words of each phrase fervently]*
 God is in heaven.

M: We must worship the Lord.

Martha: We must worship
 the Lord.

M: The church of
 Michael Master leads the way.

Martha: The church of Michael Master leads the
 way.

M: Only we have the route to the Lord.

Martha: Only we have the route to the Lord.

M: Pray!

Martha: I pray. *[she kneels in front of him]*

M: *[aside]* (At least this one will not be led astray - I am her all.)
 You may kiss my feet.

Martha: I kiss your feet.

M: You may rise.

Martha: *[as she stands she curtseys to M]*
 I rise.

[Spoken dialogue]

M: *[after a moment's thought]*
 I shall reveal my plan.

Martha: To me?

M: To you as a special mark of honour.

Martha: Oh thank you, master.

M: The famous Doctor Foster ...

- Martha: ... that non-believer ...
- M: ... knows how to reproduce true believers, just like you.
I fear we must use the devil's work,
but God moves in mysterious ways.
God is giving me power over the Doctor,
and over Helen with all her wealth.
- Martha: The wealth of a heathen.
- M: Remember - "mysterious ways".
- Martha: You are always right, master.
- M: The very devilish ways of this pair give me the power.
Power to bend them to my will.
- Martha: A true judgement of the Lord.
- M: I shall direct the money of Helen de Guise and the brain of Henry Foster to work for my ends, the ends of our church, to work for the Lord through his representative here on Earth, me, Michael Master.
- Martha: They will work for the Lord.
- M: For the Lord through our church. The world shall be peopled by true believers, cloned to my order ...
- Both: *[rhythmically together, ... who will work for the Lord through the church of
as if reciting a mantra]* Michael Master.
- M: And you, Martha, shall play a leading part.
- Martha: Master, I will do anything for the Lord through you.
- [singing again]*
- M: Ha, ha. That is good.
[suddenly grinning] What about a song and dance?
- Martha: Oh yes, master.
- [a ghostly hologram projection of Blake's "Ghost of a Flea" begins to flit about the stage]*
- M: *[he dances as he sings]* Not a flea but a clone
Made by the Doctor for me
[the song is intended to seem spontaneous doggerel] One of my very own
Stranger than ever a flea
Ha, ha. Ha, ha.
Even in his dress
He'll be just like me
What a great success
My clone for all to see
Ha, ha. Ha, ha. Ha! ha, ha, ha.

Not a flea but a clone
 He won't make you itch
 My fame will be known
 Success will have no hitch
 Ha, ha. Ha, ha.
 All will do as I say
 The tune will have my pitch
 Now I'll have my way
 And give new meaning to "rich"
 Ha, ha. Ha, ha. Ha! ha, ha, ha.

[dancing with Martha]

*[lifting her and spinning
 her round]*

Not a flea but a clone
 My enemies to destroy
 To them my power is shown
 But friends will have joy
 Ha, ha. Ha, ha.
 I'll give so much to my flock
 With you as my own true toy
 But beware those who mock
 No-one must M annoy
 Ha, ha. Ha, ha. Ha! ha, ha, ha.
 No-one must M annoy
 Ha! Ha! ha, ha, ha, ha.

Martha: *[falling into
 his arms]*

M:

Master!

My own true toy! *[he breaks the embrace]*
 We must leave now. The Doctor and Helen will soon be here,
 and must be left to prepare their own demise.

[M and Martha leave one side as Dr F & Helen enter the other, followed by the 3 assistants]

The 3 assistants: *[as they return to their bench]*

Isn't this work such fun?
 La, lalala.
 And isn't it good to be paid?
 La, la, lalala.

Helen:

Now Henry dear,
 do as I say and I'll give you a kiss.

The 3 assistants:

Lalala
 Lalala

Foster:

Then I must do as you demand. *[they embrace]*

The 3 assistants:
[very quietly]

Lalala
 Lalala *(etc)*

End of Scene

Dr F

Act III scene ii

[Dr F's laboratory occupies the down-stage area, with M's church up-stage. An area near the divide is given over to Dr F's & Helen's cloning project. In particular there is a large box from which tubes & wires protrude connected to meters in the laboratory. The power lead for this box is connected to an ordinary wall socket down-stage. The chorus, eight sopranos and stage instrumentalists are ranged as before. Dr F, Helen and the 3 assistants move from the laboratory to the cloning area, while M & Martha move from up-stage to this same place. Marge enters down-stage from where she watches anxiously]

The 3 assistants: *[as they begin to move to the cloning area]*

La la la,
la la la la la.

Helen: *[to Dr F]*

Now Henry, you must make this work.
For me,
for us.

The 3 assistants:

La la la *(etc)*
La la la *(etc)*

Foster:

Nothing can go wrong, it's all prepared.

Helen:

I believe you,

The 3 assistants:

La la la *(etc)*
La la la *(etc)*

Helen:

I believe.

Foster: *[aside]*

*(I do hope nothing can go wrong,
[hollow voice] but ...)*

The 3 assistants:

Isn't it wonderful? This is so exciting.
And we're still getting paid. We are still getting paid.

Chorus *[chanting as before]*

Michael is our master, he shows us the way to the Lord.
He knows what must be done: he is always right.

Marge:

Oh Henry, how can I save your soul?

M:

He will soon be mine.

Marge:

Your soul.

M:

Mine.

Martha:

May all power be yours,
master.

M:

Mine.

Chorus:

Michael is our master.

Helen:

You must make this work.

Dr F

Foster: | Nothing can go wrong.

Chorus: | Our master, our master, our master.

The 3 assistants: | This is so exciting.

Marge: | Save your soul, save your soul.

M: | Mine, mine.

Chorus: | He is always
right, our master.

Martha: | Master.

Helen: | Make this work.

The 3 assistants: | So exciting, exciting, exciting.

Marge: | I must save your soul.

Marge: | Master.

Foster: | Nothing can go wrong.

M: | Mine, mine.

The 3 assistants: | Exciting, exciting, and we're still getting paid.

Chorus: | Our master, our master, our master: he is always right.

Helen: [*with manic exuberance*]
Enrico, gioia!

Foster: | What?

Helen: | Oh joy to me, joy to you;
joy, joy to us all!

Foster: | Steady on, steady on there now.

Helen: | O gioia, gioia, gioia!
Enrico, gioia!
Joy for now, joy to come;
joy, joy for ever!
I'll no longer have to wait
my dream is alive and now, alive and now,
alive and now, now, now.

Foster: | It's not quite here yet, in a few minutes ...

Helen: | Nothing can get in its way,
my dream alive and now, now.
Joy to me, joy to you;
joy, joy to us all!

Joy for now, joy to come;
 joy for ever!
 Ever, ever.
 Henry, you shall always have my love.
 Enrico, gioia! Gioia, gioia.

All except Marge & Foster: Now! This is the time.

M: The time.

All except Marge & Foster: Let us see new life.

[Marge has gone unseen to the crucial wall socket]

Marge: Henry, I save your soul!

[She pulls out the plug and collapses as there is a flash of light from the "cloning box". The other principals, the chorus and, to begin with, the 8 sopranos face the front and stand rigidly to attention during the Latin that follows. At the same time there is a visual cadenza - a fantasy for director and designer enacted by dancers, mimes & projections. This can be interpreted as Marge's nightmarish dream while unconscious]

[These seven minutes while Marge is unconscious and the amplified electronic organ plays Bach's incomplete last fugue contain several layers of both blatant and more subtle musical symbolism. Which of these are brought out in the visual cadenza must depend on the production. The Bach clearly represents intellectual, musical and spiritual excellence, the chorus begins with pretentious banality, while the eight sopranos and stage electric instruments enter with a more populist banality. Both the chorus and the eight are forced into false harmonies by their inability to fit to the Bach which eventually takes control before it is shockingly cut off - Bach, weak and ill could not complete it: even he is overcome. After a silence Marge revives and sings to the motto theme from the Art of Fugue accompanied by the B A C H motive. We have returned to stage reality]

[The organ plays the first section of Contrapunctis XIV from Bach's Art of Fugue]

Chorus: Quo audito puelle fragmenta omnia scopis colligentes in discis
 ponant in canistro helemosine quod helemosinaria audito sonitu
 mox debet in medio mensarum ponere atque collectis fragmentis ad
 locum reportare.

[The meaning of these mediæval Latin refectory rules for lady hospitallers is irrelevant, sur-titles should not be provided]

[The organ plays the second part of the fugue]

[The stage electric instruments accompany the eight sopranos with blues related harmony]

Eight sopranos: 3 as soloists: I love Jesus (*etc*)
 Halleluja (*etc*)
 5 as backing: Clap, clap, clap (*etc*)
 Halleluja (*etc*)

[The 3 solo sopranos accompany themselves with tambourines, the other 5 clap rhythmically]

[As the fugue's first subject is introduced into this second part it is doubled by sections of the Chorus in turn singing] Quo audito puelle

[The organ plays the third part of the fugue.

Only Bach's own notes are heard - the SATB chorus sings appropriate fugal lines]

Chorus: Quo audito fragmenta omnia scopis colligentes ...

[as the first fugal subject is introduced again near the end the amplified eight sopranos and electric instruments join in]

Eight sopranos: Halleluja!

[The last few quavers of the fugue are played unison fff by the orchestra, organ and electric instruments, and sung by the eight and the chorus, before being suddenly cut off]

Eight sopranos: Halle-

Chorus: Fragme- *[all stopping abruptly]*

[SILENCE - end of visual cadenza]

Marge: *[reviving and singing to the "Art of Fugue" motto, with a trombone playing BACH (German notation)]* Henry, you have been saved.

[the standing to attention relaxes, and all move about in confusion and sing in a momentarily conflicting cacophony]

Foster: I must seek out the frontiers of knowledge.

M: I must have power and more power.

Marge: I have saved you Henry.

Helen: Do what I say, I have the money.

Martha: I work for the Lord through Michael Master.

Chorus: Michael is our master, he shows us the way to the Lord.

Eight sopranos: Take our milk with our honey - join with us.

The 3 assistants: Working for genius, what a great honour.

Helen: *[dominating and creating musical order]*

What a waste of money and time. Henry Foster, you have failed.
You shall have no more funds-with-love from me.
Without money you will be nothing.

M: Henry, you have failed me too. I am the master, you shall be punished. *[turning to the congregation]* This man Henry falsely pretended to be one of us. He has failed us all. In him I see THE ANTI-CHRIST.

Chorus, 8 sopranos & Martha: *[horrificed]*
The Anti-Christ!

M: The Anti-Christ must be destroyed.

Dr F

Helen: Money does it all!

Chorus: *[as distant sounding as the theatre allows]*
Kill him

[Marge & Dr F sneak on up-stage unnoticed by M or Helen. Marge draws aside a section of the M backdrop to reveal a huge mains switch]

Helen: You know, you're quite an attractive man.

M: Don't you need to dominate? You can't do that with me.

Helen: I want a change. You have a strange appeal.
Perhaps if I direct my funds to you, you can manage it all.

M: Now that is what I like to hear.
Give to the manipulator not the doer -
that is the way of the world.
I will dish out just enough to keep the work going,
I know how to manage others.

First we must get the files, then find a jealous, ambitious rival of
the great - ha ha! - the great Henry Foster.

Helen: I like you. You are a most impressive man.

M: I will not fail.

Helen: I shall give you money.

M: Money for power.

Helen: Money does it all.

Both: We will succeed.

Helen: What a man you are.

M: You can trust me.

Both: We will succeed *(etc)*

[They are about to embrace, but then they turn to face up-stage. They see Marge lit prominently and with her hand on the switch.]

[All lights except those on Marge dim rapidly. Her hand remains on the switch]

[Blackout - Silence - Curtain]

End of Opera

Dr F

COMMENTARY

It does not seem very likely that we shall ever be able to clone the primitive ancestors of man from the DNA of old bones, and it is virtually impossible that these could be recreated as instant adults “complete with memories and skills”. Nevertheless this is just the sort of thing that a scientifically ill-informed public fears. At the time the mediæval Faust stories first appeared any “alchemist” who sought what was seen as forbidden knowledge was thought of as having a pact with the devil and was greatly feared. A superstitious society, led by the church, forced recantation or condemned the adventurously curious seeker after natural knowledge to torture and death. Today’s superstitions come from many directions, but ignorance remains the driving force.

Foster is weak and desires that feeling of eternal youth that a middle-aged man can obtain from dalliance with an admiring young woman. The mephistophelian M plays on this as a means of enhancing his own wealth and power. Foster cannot believe that his experiment will really succeed, but so desperate is he for Helen’s funds that he not only fully convinces her, but half believes in his own powers to do the impossible. Helen herself is blinded by a conviction that she can buy whatever it is she wants, however fantastic. Marge is at first totally naïve, but contact with Foster frees her imagination so she begins to grow up. Her eyes are opened to see M for the power and wealth seeking manipulator that he is, while in Foster she recognizes a powerful intellect combined with a weak character. What excuse Foster would have given Helen for the inevitable failure of his experiment we don’t know, but he is saved from the need to do this by the action of Marge when she pulls the plug both literally and figuratively. Helen comes to her senses for a moment; but then the smooth talking M convinces her that what she wants to believe is true: money can buy her anything she desires. M himself believes nothing, but plays on and develops the beliefs and aspirations of others to further his own ambitions for wealth and power. The Three Assistants typify those who will do any work as long as the pay is good, and who are concerned about little beyond that pay. All too common in a society in which achievement is more often measured by wealth gained than by contribution made to the good of others.

* * *

The initial inspiration for this piece came from a series of programmes on BBC Radio 3 about evangelical religion, marginal in Western Europe, but strong in the USA. Many of the people interviewed claimed, when questioned about some of their practices, that “God told them” (or else “wanted them”) to do things this way. On a separate occasion a US senator, when interviewed on Radio, was asked why the death penalty was so prevalent in his state. He replied that he had “prayed to the Lord” and that the Lord had “told” him that this was what the Lord “wanted”. When M says to Foster that he could say that God had told him to do his research, he is not only playing with Foster, whose reaction is entirely predictable, but he is also revealing to the audience that he is a user of, rather than a believer in, religion. He is in effect ridiculing one of the more zany explanations “God told me ... (or “wanted me”) ... to do it” of a certain type of believer. What the Christian Right’s more extreme evangelists really believe one may sometimes wonder: perhaps they’re just in it for the money - one might almost prefer it if the reality is that they are cynical manipulators!

The Radio 3 programmes interviewed a TV evangelist, with more than 30 million paying supporters, who placed a literal interpretation on the *Book of Revelation*. He identified the Roman Empire of *Revelation* as the European Union (Treaty of Rome and all that), and even identified Mikhael Gorbachev as the Anti-Christ. He claimed that the birth mark on Gorbachev’s head is described precisely in *Revelation*, and alarmingly said that Gorbachev’s attempts to promote peace in the Middle-East is what one would expect from the Anti-Christ. His reasoning was that *Revelation* describes violent war in Israel as the necessary precursor of the second coming, which he claims the Anti-Christ is attempting to delay. This man has more than 30 million paying followers!? There were many other equally extraordinary manifestations of evangelical belief. M is not so much the leader of an obscure cult as a representative of the scary end of religious orthodoxy. He may be the devil in disguise, but one might feel this makes him more attractive than he might be were he genuine.

M’s congregation is first heard off-stage singing a Bach chorale, which represents the noblest manifestation of Protestant orthodoxy. When the congregation is first seen on stage it is singing an Anglican psalm chant (this time original), but to less than orthodox words. When Foster is inducted into the church the vocal responses are musically church-traditional, but the instrumental accompaniment is not and the words are definitely odd.

Could Foster be persuaded to the irrational by the promise of a sexual adventure? One only has to look around to see men of intelligence and authority who can be led into absurd situations by the offer of sexual favours. Even when these favours are ludicrously trivial, as with President Clinton, they can lead to the abandonment of rational judgement.

Dr F

Now the visual cadenza! For some a recurring nightmare involves music cherished being drowned out by music detested. In Marge's dream there are three parts, corresponding to the three sections of the Bach fugue. First the chorus sings block chords against the fugue while Ds toll and a saxophone waffles. The clash is not too great and those with poor musical taste might find it acceptable. This part perhaps represents the insidious "opium of the people" aspect of certain religious practices. The second section is musically horrendous. The on-stage group plays a 12-bar chord sequence against the fugue. Occasionally the chords do fit, but most of the time there is a dreadful clash and there is nothing 12-bar in the fugue's structure. Worse, the 8 sopranos who are doing the singing are not always sure whether to fit to their on-stage accompaniment or to the organ fugue. It is dreadful to torture the Bach in this way, it goes against sound musical principles and training, but there is a real theatrical point to be made (and something cathartic about recreating this nightmare). Marge has an awakening of intellect which in her dream is fighting against her pop/religious past. In the third part Bach (together with intellect and sound taste) wins until he too is cut off by things beyond human control.

In *Dr Foster* we may pass through cynical commentary on matters social, religious, moral, political and cultural; but Marge grows up and, despite everything, her love remains constant. There is the possibility of an almost Wagnerian redemption through this love, but unlike the Wagnerian heroine she doesn't have to die to achieve this. The end is a question; but there is also hope.

One should like the audience to leave with laughs, with some feeling of disturbance to its members' complacencies, and with a sense of hope that is nevertheless questioning. And of course one should also like it to leave with that feeling of intellectual, emotional and cultural stimulation that can be gained from a good performance of a challenging piece!

* * *

The above was written in the year 2000. In 2005 Magnus Linklater wrote an article published in *Scotland on Sunday* on the 27 February, excerpts from which are quoted below.

A recent Gallup poll showed one-third of the American people believe the Bible is literally true, while a CNN poll found that 59% of the US electorate are convinced the prophecies in the Book of Revelation will be fulfilled.

The dangers of this trend were starkly outlined recently in a remarkable lecture given by the highly respected TV journalist Bill Moyers, once an adviser to Lyndon Johnson, to the Harvard Medical School. "For the first time in our history, ideology and theology hold a monopoly of power in Washington," he said. He told his audience that Creationist theories had infiltrated the highest circles in the White House and in Congress, and were now influencing policy. He quoted James Watt, a former Secretary of the Interior, who told a Congressional inquiry that campaigning against global warming was unimportant because of the imminent return of Jesus Christ.

Biblical prophecies, he said, show that the Messiah will return for a final showdown with the forces of evil in the Valley of Armageddon, and usher in something that the evangelicals refer to as 'the rapture'. They even believe that environmental destruction is to be welcomed because it is a sign of the coming apocalypse. The best-selling books in America today are those that detail in painstaking detail precisely how that apocalypse is to come about.

All this, as Moyers points out, belongs in the realm of fantasy. But it has caught on to an almost unbelievable extent. "I'm not making this up," he said. "I've reported on these people, following them from Texas to the West Bank. They are sincere, serious and polite as they tell you they feel called to bring 'the rapture' on as fulfilment of biblical prophesy." They back the Jewish settlements in Israel and see the invasion of Iraq as a warm-up for the final confrontation with Satan. They believe that a war with Islam in the Middle East is not something to be feared but positively welcomed - "an essential conflagration on the road to redemption," as Moyers described it

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