

Daniel-François-Esprit Auber:  
*L'Enfant prodigue*



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Edited and Introduced by

Robert Ignatius Letellier

**CAMBRIDGE**  
**SCHOLARS**  

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**P U B L I S H I N G**

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*L'Enfant prodigue*,  
Edited and Introduced by Robert Ignatius Letellier

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D. F. E. Auber (c. 1840). Steel engraving by Edmond Hédouin



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## INTRODUCTION

*L'Enfant prodigue*, an *opéra* in five acts, with libretto by Eugène Scribe, was first performed at the Académie nationale de musique (Salle de la rue Le Peletier) on 6 December 1850. The story is derived from the famous parable in St Luke's Gospel (ch, 15).

The scene is set in Old Testament times, in Ancient Israel and Egypt. Azaël, the only son of Reuben, a poor Israelite, leaves the paternal home and his betrothed Jephthèle to go and sample the pleasures promised by the great city of Memphis. In act 2 he ruins himself in gambling and is seduced by the courtesan Nephté and the dancer Lia, who take the scarf given to him as a token of love by Jephthèle. Israelites, including Reuben and Jephthèle, arrive in Memphis looking for Azaël. In act 3 Azaël penetrates the Temple of Isis where the secret mysteries of the goddess are celebrated. But he is discovered, and the Egyptians punish him by throwing him in the Nile. He is rescued from the river in act 4 by the leader of a caravan, and is reduced to tending a flock of sheep. In the final act the prodigal son comes to his senses, and returns home to throw himself into his loving father's arms.

In the libretto, Scribe allows himself the same liberty in dealing with this parable as with his handling of the best known history of the Middle Ages and Reformation (such as the story of John of Leyden in Meyerbeer's *Le Prophète*). This is a libretto without dramatic action—very unusual for Scribe—which, however, provided good static situations for the composer. The orchestral details are full of subtle interest and charm. The overture is the longest Auber wrote (466 bars), followed by *Gustave III* (420 bars). It is divided into three main sections. The first part focuses attention on the tragic aspects of the story. The opening *Allegro maestoso* divides into three: the A-major first section fixes attention, but the C-major middle section takes one to the heart of the story. The departure of the prodigal Azaël from his father Reuben and beloved Jephthèle is cited (on the sweet, slightly reedy nature of the flute in its lower register), as is the prophecy of divine wrath towards an ungrateful son from the act 1 finale. This movement moreover introduces the Neapolitan chord with its flattened root third and melancholy languishing flavour, which serves as a motif throughout the opera—thematically most appropriate to this story of separation, sadness and loss. The use of the Plagal mode in the conclusion of this first section conjures up a sense of antiquity and sustains the mood of high seriousness.

The second section in C major, the *Allegro non troppo*, begins with the *Marche de la caravane*, and is followed by allusion to Nemrod's account of Azaël's rescue and enslavement. The music continues the programme of the action, quoting from Azaël's dream vision with his subsequent agonies of conscience and decision to return to his father, a beautiful clarinet solo. The transition to the other world and the transformation of heart are depicted.

The third climactic part of the overture rehearses the preceding scenario in symbolic transmutation and thematic shift of paradigm. The fleshpots of Egypt are conjured up in the impetuous sweep and timpani of the A-minor bacchanale that accompanies the Festival of Apis at Memphis in Act 3. But there is a build up of harmonic tension, with a sudden shift from the tonic A minor to A major infusing a sense of elation, and leading into the extended triumphant conclusion of considerable

orchestral power with surging, descending trombones. A symbolic transference of implication, emphasized by the recurrence of the Neapolitan chord, raises the thematic implications beyond exotic recollection, and in ecstatic mood captures the pathos of the return of the penitent sinner and his welcome back into his family. The theme of prodigality has been transmuted into one of restitution. There is no other way one can make sense of the emotional charge of the conclusion. Even without contrasting themes and tonality, Auber achieves a symbolically effective and sonorous introduction to this operatic recounting of the Biblical story.

After the overture, there is a sudden shift to the contained rapture of the choral prayer “Ô roi des cieux” in the first scene. Among the more remarkable pieces in act 1 are the romance of Jephthè (“Allez, suivez votre pensée”), and the entry of Reuben accompanied by the bells of the flocks. Act 2 contains Reuben’s lovely romance “Il est un enfant d’Israël”. In acts 2 and 3 the Chorus of the Priests and *Les Fêtes du boeuf Apis* are very arresting. The Scene of the Ordeal was perfectly realized by the great tenor Gustave Roger, and there is a fine quintet finale. A most picturesque effect is created by an extended solo for the oboe in the *Passage de la Caravane*, conjuring up as it does the slow progress of the camel train, and the shimmering emptiness of the desert, a lovely example of Auber’s tone painting. The Camel-Driver’s couplets, sung by Mme Petit-Brière, were very successful. The *andante* of Azaël’s aria (“J’ai tout perdu, Seigneur, oui, tout perdu, jusqu’à l’honneur”) is full of touching expressiveness. The essence of the Biblical parable is captured in Scribe’s dignified paraphrase of the brief Gospel passage “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me as one of your hired servants” (Luke 15:18-19): “Oui, j’irai vers mon père”. This is the key moment of decision and soul-searching in the opera, and carries the story’s emotional burden and spiritual implication.

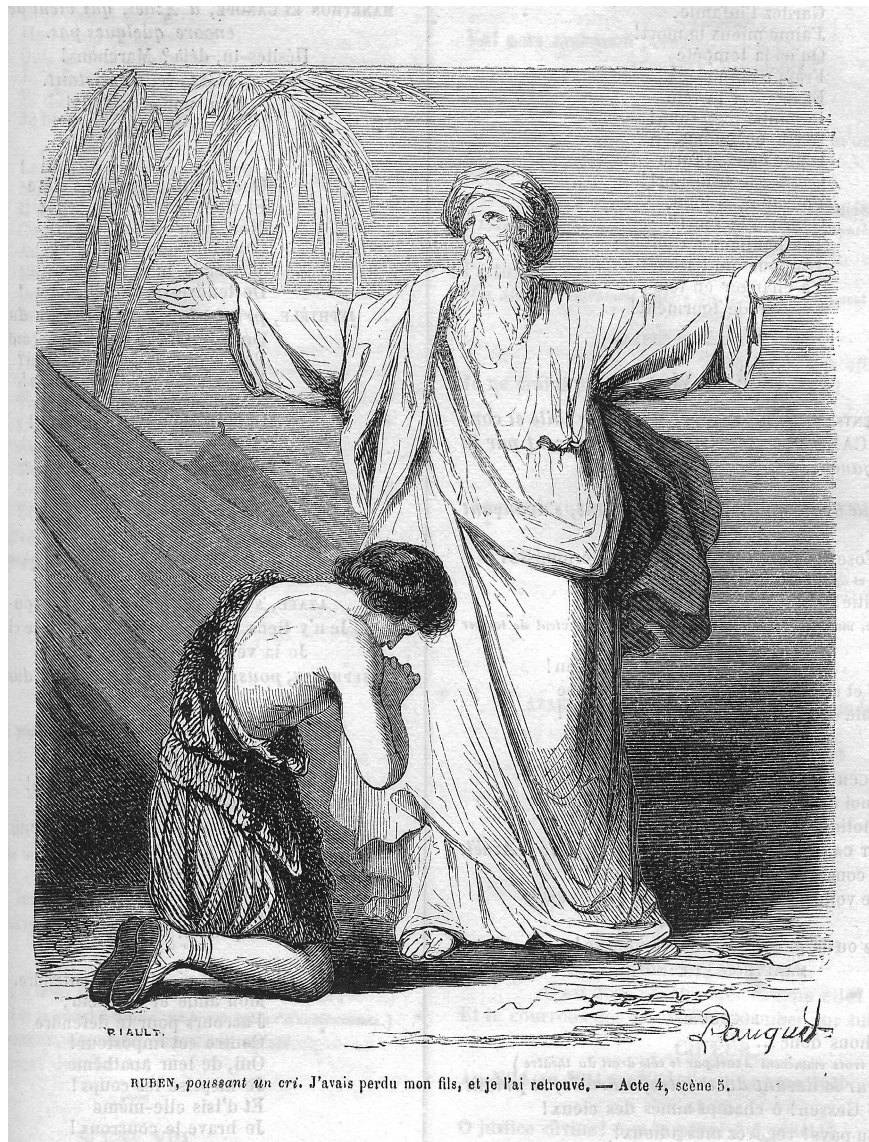
The work is dominated by the figure of the patriarch Reuben, with his act 1 aria “Toi qui versas la lumière”, and in act 2 the romance mentioned earlier (“Il est un enfant d’Israël”), with its recitative of biblical simplicity. The final air of recognition (“Mon fils, c’est toi”) is possibly the most touching piece in the whole work: indeed, it attains a veritable grandeur.

A special aspect of the opera is the dance sequence in act 2—No.10 *Scène*, containing 5 *Airs de ballet*, as part of the celebrations of the sacred bull Apis (there are some further danced passages in act 3 as well). The music is very light, gracious and delicate, full of buoyancy and chamber-like textures.

The part of Lia was mimed by a dancer, with extensive orchestral accompaniment and detailed written instructions about her actions, as both Scribe and Auber revisited their significant balletic achievements in *La Muette de Portici* and *Le Dieu et la Bayadère*. Adèle Plunkett and Élisabeth Robert were the principal soloists at the première. The music subsequently assumed a life of its own as an independent one-act ballet, *Les Rendezvous*, devised and choreographed by Frederick Ashton (Sadler’s Wells Theatre, London, 5 December 1933). The music was arranged by Constant Lambert, using the act 2 dances and the second half of the overture for the new score.

*L’Enfant prodigue* was produced only once, with no reprise, a total of 44 performances. The original cast were: Jean-Étienne-Auguste Massol (Reuben); Gustave-Hippolyte Roger (Azaël); Mlle Pauline-Eulalie Dameron (Jephthè); Louis-Henri Obin (Bocchoris, an Egyptian priest); Fleury (Aménophis); Koenig, Guignot, Ferdinand Prévôt (Canope, Manethon, Sethos, Egyptian priests); Molinier (Nemrod); Mme Laborde (Nefté); Mlle Marie-Adolphine Petit-Brière (A young camel-driver); Mlle Adèle Plunkett (Lia - dancing role). The opera was translated into English,

Italian and German and produced in Brussels, London, Graz, Vienna, Munich, Florence and New York until 1875.



The return of the Prodigal Son. Woodcut from the complete works of Scribe





# L'ENFANT

## PRODIGE

*Cinq ou six notes*

Paroles de M<sup>lle</sup> C. Scribe

Musique de

### D. F. E. AUBER

CONTINUÉ PAR M<sup>lle</sup> C. Scribe

Paris

G. HENRI, DÉPÔTÉ A CTEN

101 Rue Richelieu

Library 20985-1927

*Handwritten signature*

# L'ENFANT PRODIGE.

## PERSONNAGES.

RUBEN	chef d'une tribu d'Israël.	M. MASSOL.	(Baryton.)
AZAEL	son fils.	M. ROGER.	(Ténor.)
JEPHTELE	sa sœur.	M <sup>lle</sup> DAVERON.	(Soprano.)
AMENOPHIS.	voyageur.	M. FLEURY.	(Ténor.)
NEPTE.	sa compagne.	M <sup>me</sup> LABORDE.	(Soprano.)
BOCCHORIS.	desservant du temple d'Isis à Memphis.	M. OBIN.	(Basse.)
CANOPE	Id.	M. KENIG.	(Ténor.)
MANETHON.	Id.	M. GIGNOT.	(Basse.)
SETHOS.	desservant du bœuf Apis.	M. FERD. PREVOST.	(Basse.)
LIA	danseuse de la tribu des Alucées.	M <sup>lle</sup> PLANKETT.	
NEMROD.	conducteur de caravane.	M. MOLINIER.	(Baryton.)
UN JEUNE CHAMELIER.		M <sup>lle</sup> PETIT-BRIÈRE.	(Soprano.)

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# L'ENFANT PRODIGE,

de D. F. E. AUBER.

OUVERTURE

arrangée pour le Piano par

Henri POTIER.

All.<sup>o</sup> Maestoso.

PIANO.

The musical score is written for piano and consists of five systems of music. The first system is marked *f* (forte). The second system is marked *p* (piano). The third system is marked *dolce* (dolce). The fourth system is marked *f* (forte). The fifth system is marked *p* (piano). The score is in G major, 2/4 time, and consists of five systems of piano accompaniment. The first system is marked *f* (forte). The second system is marked *p* (piano). The third system is marked *dolce* (dolce). The fourth system is marked *f* (forte). The fifth system is marked *p* (piano). The score is in G major, 2/4 time, and consists of five systems of piano accompaniment. The first system is marked *f* (forte). The second system is marked *p* (piano). The third system is marked *dolce* (dolce). The fourth system is marked *f* (forte). The fifth system is marked *p* (piano).

5

*f*

*f*

*pp*

*f*

*pp*

1

*pp*

All. non troppo.

6.

8

*fz* *p* *fz>*

*p* *fz* *fz>*

*fz*

P. 5

*p*  
*dolce.* *p*

*rit.* 1<sup>o</sup>. Tempo.

*Allegro.*

*marque.*

The musical score consists of seven systems of grand staves (treble and bass clef). The first system begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic and a *dolce.* marking. The second system features a *rit.* (ritardando) marking followed by a *1<sup>o</sup>. Tempo.* (first tempo) marking. The third system continues the tempo. The fourth system is marked *Allegro.* and includes a forte (*f*) dynamic. The fifth, sixth, and seventh systems continue the *Allegro.* tempo. The sixth system includes a *marque.* marking. The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, accidentals, and dynamic markings.

The musical score consists of six systems of piano accompaniment. Each system is written for a grand staff, with a treble clef on the upper staff and a bass clef on the lower staff. The music is in 2/4 time and features dense, rhythmic chords and arpeggiated figures. The first five systems show a progression of chords and arpeggios, with some measures featuring a fermata. The sixth system includes dynamic markings *fp* (fortissimo piano) and a *R. o.* (ritardando) marking at the end.



This page of musical notation for piano consists of six systems of staves. The notation is in G major and 3/4 time. The first system features a treble staff with eighth-note patterns and a bass staff with chords, marked *fp* (fortissimo piano). The second system continues with similar textures, also marked *fp*. The third system shows a change in the bass staff texture, marked *f* (fortissimo). The fourth system introduces sixteenth-note passages in the treble staff, marked *fz* (forzando). The fifth system includes the instruction *cresc.* (crescendo) and features a more complex texture with sixteenth-note runs, marked *f*. The sixth system concludes with dense sixteenth-note passages in both staves, marked *f*. The page ends with a final chord in the bass staff.



This page of musical notation, titled "L'Enfant prodigue" and numbered 9, contains six systems of piano accompaniment. Each system consists of a grand staff with a treble and bass clef. The music is written in 2/4 time and features various dynamics including *sf* (sforzando), *f* (forte), and *fp* (fortissimo piano). The notation includes many slurs, ties, and accents, indicating a complex and expressive piece. The first system starts with a *sf* dynamic. The second system also begins with *sf*. The third system has a *f* dynamic. The fourth system has a *f* dynamic. The fifth system has a *f* dynamic. The sixth system has a *fp* dynamic. The page is numbered 9 in the bottom right corner.

9

This page contains six systems of musical notation for piano. Each system consists of a grand staff with a treble clef on the upper staff and a bass clef on the lower staff. The key signature is one sharp (F#). The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings like 'f' and 'v'. The first system has a large slur over the treble staff. The second system has a slur over the treble staff. The third system has a slur over the treble staff and a dynamic marking 'f' in the bass staff. The fourth system has a slur over the treble staff. The fifth system has a slur over the treble staff. The sixth system has a slur over the treble staff. The page number '9' is in the top right corner.

This page of musical notation, titled "L'Enfant prodigue" and numbered 11, displays seven systems of piano accompaniment. Each system consists of a grand staff with a treble and bass clef. The music is written in a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 2/4 time signature. The notation is highly detailed, featuring numerous slurs, ties, and complex rhythmic patterns. Dynamic markings such as "ad lib." and "8va" are present, indicating performance instructions. The page is numbered "11" in the top right corner.

This page contains seven systems of musical notation for piano. Each system consists of a treble staff and a bass staff, both with a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#). The notation includes various musical elements such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings. The first system shows a complex texture with many notes in the treble and some in the bass. The second system features a more active treble staff with many sixteenth notes. The third system has a simpler treble staff with mostly quarter notes. The fourth system shows a treble staff with some chords and a bass staff with a long, flowing line. The fifth system includes a measure with a fermata and a dynamic marking of '8'. The sixth system features a treble staff with many chords and a bass staff with a long, flowing line. The seventh system shows a treble staff with many chords and a bass staff with a long, flowing line.

ACTE I.  
N<sup>o</sup> 1.  
INTRODUCTION.

And.<sup>te</sup> (♩ = 100.)

HYPHILE.

RUBEN.

PIANO.

*p* Soprani.  
O Roi des cieux! ô Roi des an \_ ges! lors \_ que naît ou fi \_ nit le

*p* Ténors.  
O Roi des cieux! ô Roi des an \_ ges! lors \_ que naît ou fi \_ nit le

*p* Basses.  
O Roi des cieux! ô Roi des an \_ ges! lors \_ que naît ou fi \_ nit le

jour, ver-toi-sé-lè-vent nos lou-anges vers toi sé-lè-venotrea-mour!  
 jour, ver-toi-sé-lè-vent nos lou-anges vers toi sé-lè-venotrea-mour!  
 jour, ver-toi-sé-lè-vent nos lou-anges vers toi sé-lè-venotrea-mour!

*p*  
 tu fé-con-des nos sil-lons, tu pro-tè-ges nos moissons Seigneur ô  
 tu fé-con-des nos sil-lons, tu pro-tè-ges nos moissons Seigneur ô  
 tu fé-con-des nos sil-lons, tu pro-tè-ges nos moissons Seigneur ô

*comp! ad lib.*

Roi des cieux! ô Roi des an-ges! lorsque nait ou fi-nit le jour, ver-toi-sé-  
 Roi des cieux! ô Roi des an-ges! lorsque nait ou fi-nit le jour, ver-toi-sé-  
 Roi des cieux! ô Roi des an-ges! lorsque nait ou fi-nit le jour, ver-toi-sé-



le vent nos louanges vers toi s'élève - ve notre amour! vers toi s'élève -  
le vent nos louanges vers toi s'élève - ve notre amour! vers toi s'élève -  
le vent nos louanges vers toi s'élève - ve notre amour! vers toi s'élève -

le - ve no - tre notre a - mour  
le - ve no - tre notre a - mour  
le - ve no - tre n - tre a - mour

All.<sup>o</sup> non troppo, (♩ = 120.)

*f* *p*  
*fp*

B.

(à part.)

J. Il n'est pas de re - tour

R. O fil - le de mon frè - re et désormais ma

(à Ruben)

J. Il n'est pas de re - tour A - za - ël

R. - fil - le Eh qui donc N'im - porte per - pa -

- rez le re - pas de fa - mil - le

(à part)

R. Qui peut le re - te - nir loin du toit pa - ter - nel ?



N<sup>o</sup> 2.

## AIR.

Andante (♩ = 69.)

TROMB.

PIANO.

Andante (♩ = 69.)

*f*

Toi qui ver - sas — la — lu - miè - re sur Mo -

*p*

i - se et ses en - fants Sei - gneur Sei - gneur — no - tre pè - re d'un

pè - re vois les tour - ments — d'un pè - re vois les tour - ments —

*oposo**f**pp**f*

d'un pe-re vous les tour-ments Quel le

*anîmez.*

va-gue in-qui-è-tu-de de mon fils de mon fils trouble le

œur Pour-quoi pourquoi dans la so-li-tu-de er-re-t-il

som-bre et rê-veur er-re-t-il som-bre et rê-

*cresc.*

*1<sup>o</sup> Tempo.*

-veur Toi qui ver-sas la lu-

*f* *p*

6.