

‘Old men ought to be explorers’ (*a programme note for Maud, Feb. 2019*)

Maud is the most recent, and not the least ambitious, in a series of semi-staged productions which have kept me busy since my retirement. I have had to learn a lot in the past sixteen years – how to understand and pronounce Ancient Greek; how to use, creatively, the necessary high-tech resources; how to coach and inspire actors; how to persuade audiences to come along to a reading aloud of dense and complex texts in five different languages (none of them Italian). But I have of course been re-deploying my previous knowledge and skills (acquired through the teaching of Dante and Italian Narrative Art); and there are some ‘red strands’ (*rote Faden*) running the whole length of the ‘cable’.

The plays are all abridgements of rarely performed verse-dramas or dramatizations of episodes in classical epics or books of the Bible. All have been enhanced by live music and illuminated by appropriate images. The meaning has always been made crystal-clear by specially composed surtitles for the Greek, Latin and Polish, or by the projection of the English words.

In every case the focus has been on the language of a major text that is to be enjoyed for its own sake, and on its own terms just like a symphony. Every directorial choice is intended to heighten the impact of the Word, to rouse it from its hibernation on the page, to bring it from potency to act. There have been two underlying obsessions; first, my conviction – shared with Dante – that the essence of poetry lies in its verbal music (*armonia*, or *dolcezza*), which is why it does not survive translation: and, second, that a good reading depends on deep understanding and conveys a loving interpretation – which it does more effectively than any written commentary. (And, yes, there is also a thin ‘black thread’ of muted protest against the cult of the Director in the modern theatre and against the dominance of Theory in the teaching of literature at our universities.)

Patrick Boyde

Alphabetical table of the principal works semi-staged between 2002 and 2019

<i>Achilles: The End of his Wrath</i>	Homer
<i>Aeneas I: Troiae Tutamen</i>	Homer
<i>Aeneas II: Teucrorum Spes</i>	Virgil
<i>Ajax</i>	Sophocles
<i>Anticleia, Calypso, Circe, Nausicaa</i>	Homer
<i>Apocalypse</i>	New Testament
<i>Borderers, The</i>	Wordsworth
<i>Horace</i>	Corneille
<i>Job: Trial by Ordeal</i>	Book of Job (Septuagint)
<i>Manfred</i>	Byron
<i>Maud</i>	Tennyson
<i>Gospel of Mark, The</i>	New Testament
<i>Oedipus at Colonus</i>	Sophocles
<i>Paradise Regained</i>	Milton
<i>Pan Tadeusz</i>	Mickiewicz
<i>Penelope</i>	Homer
<i>Persephone and Demeter</i>	Homeric Hymn and Ovid
<i>Phèdre</i>	Racine
<i>Prometheus Bound</i>	Aeschylus
<i>Prometheus Unbound</i>	Shelley
<i>Pulchérie</i>	Corneille
<i>Samson Agonistes</i>	Milton
<i>Two Kinsmen from Lycia</i>	Homer
<i>Two Kinsmen from Thebes</i>	Shakespeare