

Editor's Notes for *Ah! Se morir di pena* from the opera *Il Solitario*

"Il Solitario" was Hilarión Eslava's first opera, sung in Italian from a libretto by Cesare Perini. Premiered in 1841 in Cádiz, it was met with enthusiastic acclaim in Cádiz, Sevilla, Madrid, and Pamplona. For a more complete description of the opera and its plot, please see the Editor's Notes for its overture, at <https://hilarioneslava.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Sinfonia-de-la-Opera-Editors-Notes.pdf>

I originally transcribed this piece in 2019 – one of the first results of our project to recover the music of Hilarión Eslava. The source score contained numerous errors in its Italian lyrics, with practically no punctuation, making it difficult to determine the accuracy of the text, nor did I have then the Italian libretto that would have provided a means of correcting/clarifying the lyrics. My husband and I have recently been able to access the libretto used for the opera's Cádiz premiere, so now I am able to revisit this piece, making appropriate corrections to the lyrics (where I can) as well as applying improved MuseScore formatting and playback techniques I have learned during the past couple of years.

The original source for this transcription is a printed score obtained from the Biblioteca Nacional de España in Madrid. The printer is unknown. Printed musical scores were not common in Spain until the late 1850's or early 1860's, so this work would have been published well after the opera was composed, and when the dramatic works of Eslava were no longer being performed in theatres. The piece is labeled as an "aria" and features a solo soprano part with a piano reduction "arranged by the author."

This dramatic aria belongs to Scene I of the second Act. In this scene, Elodia is waiting impatiently in a monastery gallery, contemplating her love for her beloved but mysterious "*Il Solitario*". The lyrics align with the original Cádiz libretto except for about four lines.

This deviation may be due to changes introduced by the composer after the libretto was printed. We do know of an incident that occurred when the opera was performed in Madrid in 1842, which could have prompted these and other revisions. One of Eslava's contemporary biographers points out that during the rehearsals for the opera in Madrid, a few of the lead singers in the local company were dissatisfied with some of the existing arias, and, with less than a week to the first performance, threatened to quit unless their solos were changed to their satisfaction. The impresario apparently was unable or unwilling to oppose this obviously unreasonable demand. In a feat of incredible musical heroism and talent, Eslava revised the score and added new numbers to suit the singers' wishes in a matter of a few days, saving the performance. This might have well been one of the new or revised pieces.

The Italian lyrics (transcribed to the best of my ability) and my English translation follow:

ITALIAN LYRICS	ENGLISH TRANSLATION
<p>Ne giunge'ancor! Che visto ei non avesse della Nortica Torre il mio fanale? Ah no! Che qual la speme in duol profondo. Ei brillava così trà denso orrore! Ah! vieni, il mio timor dilegua, vieni.</p> <p>Ah! se morir di pena, oggi così degg'io accanto all' idol mio. Io voglio al men morire, io voglio al men, sì, morir. Così vedrà se l'amo, se caro me' il suo affetto, se può un accesso petto penare, soffrire, penar così e soffrir. Te chiamo, e l'eco rendimi soltanto la mia voce.</p> <p>Quest' ore intanto passano vola il pensier veloce. Te chiamo, mio bene. Non so dir se pena sia quel ch'io provo, o sia contento, ma se pena è quel ch'io sento, oh! che'amabile penar! E'un penar che mi consola, che m'invola ogni altro affetto, che mi desta un nuovo in petto ma soave palpitar</p>	<p>He may yet come! Has he not seen my light from the Northern Tower? Ah no! What hope is there such deep pain, He shone so, amid such dense horror! Ah! come, my fear is gone, come.</p> <p>Ah! if I die of grief, I shall do so today beside my idol. I want to die, I want to die, yes, to die. Thus he will see how I love him, How his affection is dear to me, How he can make my heart ache, suffer, ache like this and suffer. I call to you, and there is only the echo of my voice. During these hours the thoughts fly quickly. I call to you, my dear. I can't say whether sorrow is what I feel, or contentment, But if sorrow is what I feel, oh, what lovely sorrow! It is a pain that consoles me, That robs me of every other affection, That awakens in me a new but sweet heartbeat.</p>