

# Gioachino Rossini, Gaetano Donizetti and Vincenzo Bellini: A comparative study of their libretto themes

## *Gioachino Rossini, Gaetano Donizetti ve Vincezo Bellini: Libretto temalarının karşılaştırmalı bir çalışması*

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### ABSTRACT

This research examines the libretto choices of the pioneer composers of early 19th century Italian opera Rossini, Donizetti, and Bellini. It focuses on how historical, cultural, and social factors influenced their work and helped shape Italian opera. Employing a comparative approach, the study analyzes various operas by these composers to reveal how themes, adaptations, and characterizations differ across their librettos. Historical and literary analysis alongside stylistic exploration highlights common themes and innovations. The librettos were largely inspired by classical literature from French and English authors as Belloy, Voltaire and Scott and the German poet Schiller. They were often adapted or dramatized to fit the operatic format. The recurring themes centered on love and hatred, frequently set against historical backdrops or infused into religious contexts. Rossini's operas range from the Trojan War to the Crusades, Donizetti's cover nearly all of European history, whereas Bellini's are primarily set in the Medieval period. Presentation factors like location and audience expectations influenced both the genre and style of operas. Rossini and Donizetti often adapting their works for different theaters and regions. In contrast, Bellini did not adapt his works, focusing only on subjects that inspired him personally. Censorship also impacted storylines and endings. All three composers occasionally engaged with mythological themes reinterpreted with Romantic or supernatural elements. In terms of character development, each composer approached heroines differently. Rossini's early heroines are gentle, evolving into more complex femme fatale figures. Donizetti presents complex women, such as queens with contrasting roles. Bellini's female characters often suffer due to the violent or unstable behavior of men. A common feature among all is the "mad scene" reflecting intense emotional strain. Nationalism is subtly addressed, with direct references usually avoided. Regarding opera buffa, Rossini and Donizetti revitalized the genre with contemporary settings and humor. On the contrary Bellini did not engage with it.

**Keywords:** Gioachino Rossini, Gaetano Donizetti, Vincenzo Bellini, 19th century Italian opera, libretto thematology

### ÖZ

Bu araştırma, 19. yüzyılın başlarındaki İtalyan operası Rossini, Donizetti ve Bellini'nin öncü bestecilerinin libretto seçimlerini incelemektedir. Tarihsel, kültürel ve sosyal faktörlerin çalışmalarını nasıl etkilediğine ve İtalyan operasını nasıl şekillendirdiğine odaklanmaktadır. Karşılaştırmalı bir yaklaşım kullanan çalışma, bu bestecilerin çeşitli operalarını analiz ederek temaların, uyarlamaların ve karakterizasyonların librettoları arasında nasıl farklılık gösterdiğini ortaya koymaktadır. Tarihsel ve edebi analiz, üslup incelemesinin yanı sıra ortak temaları ve yenilikleri vurgulamaktadır. Librettolar büyük ölçüde Belloy, Voltaire ve Scott gibi Fransız ve İngiliz yazarların ve Alman şair Schiller'in klasik edebiyatından esinlenmiştir. Genellikle operatik formata uyacak şekilde uyarlanmış veya dramatize edilmişlerdir. Tekrar eden temalar, sıklıkla tarihsel arka planlara yerleştirilmiş veya dini bağlamlara aşılmiş aşk ve nefrete odaklanmıştır. Rossini'nin operaları Truva Savaşı'ndan Haçlı Seferleri'ne kadar uzanır, Donizetti'nin operaları Avrupa tarihinin neredeyse tamamını kapsarken, Bellini'nin operaları öncelikle Orta Çağ döneminde geçmektedir. Konum ve izleyici beklentileri gibi sunum faktörleri hem

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operaların türünü hem de stilini etkiledi. Rossini ve Donizetti sıklıkla eserlerini farklı tiyatrolar ve bölgeler için uyarladılar. Buna karşılık Bellini eserlerini uyarlamadı ve yalnızca kendisini kişisel olarak etkileyen konulara odaklandı. Sansür ayrıca hikaye örgülerini ve sonları da etkiledi. Üç besteci de zaman zaman mitolojik temaları Romantik veya doğaüstü unsurlarla yeniden yorumladı. Karakter gelişimi açısından, her besteci kadın kahramanlara farklı şekilde yaklaştı. Rossini'nin ilk kadın kahramanları naziktir ve daha karmaşık femme fatale figürlerine dönüşürler. Donizetti, kraliçeler gibi karmaşık kadınları zıt rollerle sunar. Bellini'nin kadın karakterleri genellikle erkeklerin şiddet içeren veya dengesiz davranışlarından dolayı acı çekerler. Hepsinin ortak özelliği, yoğun duygusal gerginliği yansıtan "çılgın sahne"dir. Milliyetçilik, genellikle doğrudan referanslardan kaçınılarak incelikle ele alınır. Opera buffa ile ilgili olarak, Rossini ve Donizetti türü çağdaş ortamlar ve mizahla yeniden canlandırdı. Aksine, Bellini bununla ilgilenmedi.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** Gioachino Rossini, Gaetano Donizetti, Vincenzo Bellini, 19. yüzyıl İtalyan operası, libretto tematolojisi

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The early 19th century was a transformative period for Italian opera. Rossini, Donizetti and Bellini were at the forefront of reshaping the art form's themes and characterizations. This study delves into the libretto choices of these influential figures, highlighting how their works reflect and respond to the historical, cultural, and social currents of the time. By examining a range of operas and their adaptations, this research sheds light on the distinct yet interconnected approaches these composers took in adapting classical and literary inspirations to suit the operatic stage. Through a comparative analysis of narrative choices, thematic focuses, and character portrayals, the article uncovers how these librettos not only shaped the Italian operatic landscape but also echoed the broader intellectual and artistic trends of the Romantic era.

Given the limited number of studies on this research issue in the existing literature, the article will contribute significantly to the further study of this field.

### 1.1. Purpose of the study

The study aims to explore the following questions:

1. What are the sources of the librettos of Rossini's, Donizetti's and Bellini's operas?
2. What factors influenced the genre and themes of their operas?
3. What role did mythological themes play in their operas?
4. How do the recurring themes of love, hatred, and historical or religious contexts manifest in their librettos?
5. How did the composers' approaches to character development, particularly in their portrayal of heroines, differ across their operas?
6. How did each composer engage with or avoid themes of nationalism in their works?
7. What innovations and commonalities can be observed in their use of "mad scenes" and other emotionally charged elements?
8. "How did the genre and themes of opera buffa evolve in the works of Rossini and Donizetti?"

### 1.2. Importance of the study

This study contributes to the field of historical musicology by advancing the exploration of themes within opera librettos. It introduces a fresh perspective by examining topics such as the portrayal of women, while also shedding light on significant elements like the mad-scene and the tragic ending.

## 2. METHOD

The method used to write the paper was that of comparative analysis with a focus on thematic exploration. The authors delved into recurring themes in operas -of Rossini, Donizetti and Bellini. They analyzed and

compared them pointing out how the themes were treated in specific works and how they reflect the socio-political and cultural context of the time. They highlighted individual approaches on various elements. At last, they examined how each composer treated their themes over time and how their works evolved within the broader context of 19th-century opera.

### 3. SOURCES OF THE LIBRETTOS

The majority of early 19th century Italian opera seria was based on works of classical literature. This way, the urban class, mostly illiterate, became acquainted with the literary classics of the era. The libretto itself didn't possess independent literary value but was regarded as 'applied' literature, relying both on its original source and the established operatic practices of the time. Librettists usually turned to French authors of the 16th century, as Belloy, of the 17th century, as Racine and Corneille, of the 18th century, as Voltaire, Chenier and Florian, and of the 19th century as Arnaud, Caigniez, Delavigne, Bis, Ancelot, Bourgeois and Hugo. Also to English authors, as Shakespeare, Lord Byron and Scott, as well as to contemporary Italian writers as della Valle, Bianco, Marenco, and Sgricci. Two operas, Rossini's *Guillaume Tell* and Donizetti's *Maria Stuarda*, -were based on the works of the 18th century German poet and playwright Schiller. However, librettists often relied on dramatized versions or previous librettos of narrative works. This was because dramatized versions assisted them in crafting the libretto. Examples include: Rossini's *Otello*, where its librettist Berio used the dramatized version of Shakespeare's work by Cosenza; Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor*, which was based on librettos by various librettists that derived from Scott's novel *The Bride of Lammermoor*; and Bellini's *La Straniera*, where the librettist Romani used the Italian dramatized version of Cosenza's adaptation of Prévot's novel.

### 4. MAIN THEMES IN THE LIBRETTOS OF ROSSINI'S, DONIZETTI'S, AND BELLINI'S OPERAS

The plots of Rossini's, Donizetti's, and Bellini's operas revolve around stories of love and hatred, with references to historical events presented in a liberal manner. References to historical events are superficial and are mostly used as a backdrop to unfold the romantic stories of the plot. Rossini's thematic focus includes the era of the Trojan War, the Roman Empire the Middle Ages, and the Crusades. Donizetti covers nearly all periods of European history, with particular emphasis on the Moorish Wars and the history of England, which is revisited in various operas. The majority of Bellini's works take place during the Medieval period. Two of his works unfold in 17th century England and Ireland, while one is set in the time of the Roman Empire.

The obsession of the composers under study, with love and romance, is evident through the incorporation of romantic elements even in religious operas. Specifically, in Rossini's *Ciro in Babilonia* which was staged as an oratorio, Cyrus is presented as a Christological figure who suffers and ultimately triumphs with divine assistance. Nevertheless, the opera is dealing more with the intrigue created due to the amorous passion of the King of Babylon, Belshazzar, for the wife of his enemy, Cyrus (Ketterer, 2022, pp. 2, 9). Similarly, in the same composer's *Mosè in Egitto* alongside the biblical theme, the love between the Hebrew Anaïde and Pharaoh's son Osiride is explored, as well as the ethical dilemmas arising from it (Osborne, 2007, p. 266).

In Donizetti's *Il diluvio universale*, which was also staged as an oratorio, the servant of Noah's wife seizes her position and schemes against her. *Poliuto*, again by Donizetti, while narrating the martyrdom of a saint, strongly incorporates romantic elements concerning the jealousy of Polyeucte for his wife when her former lover comes to rescue her. However, this is the reason that this particular work didn't pass the censorship in Naples in 1838 and it was not staged at the Teatro di San Carlo as intended. Furthermore, although Donizetti himself aimed to emphasize the romantic element in its original version, when the work was adapted for the more liberal Parisian audience, this aspect was removed as the adapter Scribe, deemed it incongruent with the plot (Ashbrook, 1982, pp. 548-549, Ashbrook, 2002).

From all the operas seriae of the three composers, there are two operas in which romance is consciously avoided. These are Bellini's *Bianca e Fernando*, which belongs to the genre of rescue opera, and Donizetti's *Belisario* (Baxter, 2006, p. 182, Maguire & Forbes, 2002b; Smart & Budden, 2001).

## 5. FACTORS THAT AFFECTED THE GENRE AND THEME OF THE OPERAS

The significance of opera in early 19th century Italy was immense. Its performances constituted a social event. Opera was the place where interaction occurred among various social layers, encompassing all classes except for the rural population. The premiere of the opera was a major secular occasion for the city, and the reviews written in the press would travel throughout Italy. The suppressive control of censorship underscores the importance of opera as a means of influence and reflection of political thought and social norms (Sorba, 2014, p. 55).

But the opera itself was affected by these factors and there was interaction between them as will be discussed below.

The genre in which each opera would be composed, as well as the actual libretto-theme chosen, depended on where and when the opera would be presented (Smith, 1970, pp. 191-192). Generally, composers avoided themes involving regicide and suicide because they would not have been accepted, especially during the early years of the transition to the 19th century (Sorba 2014, p. 55).

Rossini composed his religious operas to be staged on the period of fasting. The majority of his operas seriae were composed during his contract with the Teatro di San Carlo, the most significant theatre in Naples. To establish his dominance there, he had to experiment with the modern style of Romanticism, even though his true inclination was towards composing in the comic genre. The operas he wrote during the same period for other theatres or cities have different styles or belong to other genres (Tomlinson 1986, p. 47). For instance, the opera seria *Adelaide di Borgogna*, written for the Teatro Argentina in Rome, stylistically rather resembles his opera buffa *La Cenerentola* than the operas of Teatro di San Carlo. Similarly, in 1819, when he composed *Ermione* and *La donna del lago* for the Teatro di San Carlo—operas characterized by romantic elements—he also wrote the opera seria *Bianca e Falliero* for La Scala in Milan, with a libretto featuring an outdated structure (Osborne, 2007, p. 64). Also the same year he composed *Eduardo e Cristina* for the Teatro San Benedetto in Venice, belonging to the genre of semiseria opera. Likewise, in 1818, despite being at the peak of his career, he received a commission from a Portuguese patron to write a farsa, a genre considered inferior. The result of this commission is the farsa *Adina* (Osborne, 2002).

In like manner, Donizetti in 1823, immediately after the opera seria *Alfredo il Grande* for the Teatro di San Carlo, presented the opera buffa *Il fortunato inganno* for Teatro Nuovo in the same city, a theatre dedicated exclusively to comic performances. Likewise, in 1827, after he premiered *L'esule di Roma* at Teatro di San Carlo, he composed the farsa *Le convenienze teatrali* as well as the semiseria opera *Otto mesi in due ore* for Teatro Nuovo in Rome. He also wrote the operas buffae *Olivo e Pasquale* for Teatro Valle in Rome and *Il borgomastro di Saardam* for Teatro del Fondo in Naples (Ashbrook, 1982, pp. 292, 299, 301, 302, 304-305).

Both of these composers suffered from strict Italian censorship and aimed to escape its constraints by turning to the more progressive Paris. There, censorship was more lenient and the French audience was accustomed to tragic themes. Both Rossini and Donizetti succeeded in doing so (Goldstein, 1989, p. 161). Thus, Rossini adapted *Maometto secondo* as *Le siège de Corinthe* and *Mosè in Egitto* as *Moïse et Pharaon* for the Paris Opéra, and composed *Il viaggio a Reims* for the Théâtre Italien in Paris and *Le comte Ory* and *Guillaume Tell* for the Paris Opéra. Similarly, Donizetti adapted the semi-seria *Linda di Chamounix* for the Théâtre-Italien. He also composed and staged the comic operas *La fille du régiment* (Ashbrook, 1982, pp. 436-437) and *Rita* at the Opéra-Comique (Osborne, 1996, p. 281), as well as his older opera buffa *Don Pasquale* at the Théâtre-Italien (Ashbrook, 1982, p. 174). Among his operas seriae, he adapted *Lucia di Lammermoor* as *Lucie de Lammermoor* for the Théâtre de la Renaissance (Lindner, 1998, p. 20) and *Lucrezia Borgia* for the Théâtre-Italien (Osborne, 1996, pp. 224-225).

On the contrary, Bellini was very selective concerning the operas he staged. He wasn't interested in adapting or modifying his operas to be performed in other theatres. His priority was expressing his inspiration through intense themes with passion, and embracing his own artistic talent. Furthermore, even though during that era theatre impresarios often suggested themes to composers, Bellini rejected librettos that didn't satisfy him (Greenspan, 1977, p. 8). For instance, when he was given a commission for the inauguration of the Teatro Ducale in Parma in 1829, the impresario of the theatre proposed the subject of *Cesare in Egitto*, but Bellini declined it because he wasn't pleased with the theme. He eventually staged *Zaira*, a work he chose himself (Maguire & Forbes, 2002d; Osborne, 1996, p. 323). Similarly, in December 1830, while he had started composing *Ernani* for the carnival season at Teatro Carcano in Milan, he abandoned it to replace it with

La sonnambula, which he eventually staged. Perhaps he feared the comparison of Ernani with Donizetti's successful Anna Bolena, which premiered the same season in the same theatre. This might be why he opted for a completely different pastoral theme (Osborne, 1996, p. 333). Likewise, for the Teatro La Fenice in 1832, Bellini rejected the subject proposed by his librettist Romani, which was based on the story of Cristina di Svevia. Instead, he compelled Romani to write a libretto based on the ballet Beatrice di Tenda (Boromé, 1961, pp. 320-1; Maguire & Forbes, 2002a).

Furthermore, after the success of his third opera, *Il pirata*, Bellini had the opportunity to demand high fees for his operas (Kimbell, 1991, p. 475). Therefore, he limited himself to composing one opera per year in order to focus on each one. When he died prematurely at the age of 34, he had composed 10 operas. At that same age, Rossini had composed 34 operas, and Donizetti had composed 35. This represented an individual choice that he was able to make, rather than a broader shift in the working practices of composers in his era.

As far as the role of the audience as a factor that affected the subject matter of the operas, from the correspondence of composers, librettists, singers, and theatre impresarios, it is evident that they were interested in its opinion. The attendees of each opera played a significant role in the selection of themes, which varied from region to region (Sorba, 2006, p. 600). The preferences of the Milanese audience differed from those of Naples and Florence. If a performance did not please the audience, it would be halted. Thus, Rossini's opera *Tancredi* has a happy ending for the performances in Venice and Milan, and a tragic ending for the performance in Ferrara. Furthermore, in order to establish his reputation, he wrote a series of operas with "elevated" themes of tragic passion for the cultured audience of the Teatro di San Carlo in Naples. Similarly, in *Il viaggio a Reims* even though it was written for the coronation of King Charles I, the characters in the work are the 18 diverse guests of an inn and its owner who welcomes them. They represent the diverse audience of the Italian theatre in which the performance was staged. It is clear that this specific opera was structured to please the spectators rather than the honored king (Osborne, 2007, p. 310).

In a similar vein, Donizetti, following the dictates of fashion, composed a series of operas for the Mauritanian kingdom, such as *Zoraid di Granata*, *Alahor in Granata*, *Sancia di Castiglia* and *La favorite*, as well as for the history of England, such as *Alfredo il grande*, *Elisabetta al castello di Kenilworth*, *Anna Bolena*, *Rosmonda d'Inghilterra*, *L'assedio di Calais*, and *Roberto Devereux*.

Finally, the writing style in Bellini's last opera, *I Puritani*, demonstrates the composer's intention to meet the demands of the cultured audience in Paris (Brent Smith, 1935, p. 330).

## 6. OPERAS WITH MYTHOLOGICAL THEMES

Due to the opera's origins as a revival of ancient Greek drama, the earliest librettos featured mythological themes. Subsequently, in the second half of the 17th century, librettos moved thematically away from mythology, only to return to it during the second Italian reform, in the mid-18th century (Kimbell, 1991, p. 134, Smith, 1970, pp. 9, 11). From the late 18th to the early 19th centuries, mythological themes gradually fell out of fashion. This was influenced, on one hand, by socio-political circumstances where the emerging dominant bourgeois class preferred action and passion over the previous courtly tendencies that sought distance from everyday life and had a preference for mythological subjects. On the other hand, shifting artistic trends also played a role (Sorabella, 2004). In the early 19th century, the romantic movement flowed from the North to Italy, infusing opera with a more somber tone and a prevailing sense of tragedy. Love became the core of melodrama, with psychological and emotional interventions. Romanticism elevated itself against reason, and love became the sole truth of life. Composers of the early 19th century did write operas with mythological themes, but mythology wasn't their main focus (Kimbell, 1991, p. 245).

Rossini composed two operas with mythological themes, *Ermione* and *Semiramide*. The librettist of *Ermione*, Totola, didn't base it on Euripides' work but rather on Racine's version of *Andromache* (Osborne, 2002). *Semiramide* on the other hand, based on Voltaire's corresponding work, goes beyond it in an entirely romantic way, ultimately revealing an intensely tragic figure within the mythical queen. Thus, although the work is classical in terms of its theme, it transforms into innovative, with numerous romantic and supernatural elements. Moreover, in the already exotic setting of Assyria, the librettist introduces the exotic character of the Indian king Idreno, resulting in an opera with a cosmopolitan character (Senici, 2004, pp. 141-142).

Donizetti dealt with mythological themes only in his early works, and he actually completed only one opera with such a theme out of the total of 70 operas that he wrote. That is *Il Pigmalione* and the composer wrote it as a writing exercise (Ashbrook, 1982, p. 28).

Bellini wrote only one opera with a mythological theme, *Norma*. The opera refers to the gods of German mythology, and the heroine of the title reminds us of Medea from Greek mythology, who killed her children in order to take revenge for being rejected by her lover. However, a careful examination of *Norma* reveals that its libretto introduces innovative elements. *Norma* considers killing her children not for the sake of revenge, but to save them from the shame they would experience due to their lineage, and ultimately, she refrains from killing them. Instead, she sacrifices herself for them. Furthermore, the cultural differences among the characters reflect both the tension between paganism and Christianity and the conflict between Neoclassicism and Romanticism in 19th-century culture (David, 2021, pp. 4-5). Bellini's opera succeeds in building a synthesis between these two almost incompatible systems of thought. Thus, Bellini addresses, among other things, the clash of civilizations, the issue of religious fanaticism, the balance of power between men and women, female solidarity, the tension between femininity and holding a position of ultimate power, and the fluidity of national, cultural, and religious identities. Above all, it highlights the tragedy of a mother who sacrifices herself for her child. In many ways, the world of *Norma*, strikingly similar to the Greek Medea, to which the opera has structural affinities, is deeply familiar to the audience while also being distinctly foreign. As such, Bellini's opera moves away from mythological themes in the traditional sense of the term.

## 7. OPERAS WITH EXOTIC THEMES

The subject matter taking place in the exotic East was part of the aesthetic developments of the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Particularly in Naples, the operas that referred to the Mauritanian kingdom were popular due to Spanish sovereignty in the city (Ashbrook, 2000, pp. 499-500).

The "exotic" operas were not based on in-depth research of Eastern civilizations, and composers did not necessarily need to be familiar with Eastern music. They were simply acquainted with the contemporary Eastern fantasy which was based on information extracted from the stories of pilgrims and travelers, as well as the works of writers of the time. Such works are Lord Byron's poetic and often romanticized descriptions of the landscapes and cultures he encountered, and Victor Hugo's collection of poems entitled *Les Orientales* (Greenwald, 2014, p. 801).

Regarding Rossini, the composer wrote a semi-seria opera with exotic elements, *Matilde di Shabran* set in the Gothic castle of Corantino in medieval Spain. Among his operas seriae, *Ricciardo e Zoraide* takes place in the city of Dongola on the banks of the Nile and features exotic elements (Osborne, 2007, p. 68).

Among Donizetti's semi-seriae operas, the following are considered exotic: *Gianni di Calais*, which features the Portuguese princess Matilde and the pirate Gianni and is set in an exotic location; *Il furioso all' isola di San Domingo*, which takes place on the exotic island of Santo Domingo although the theme is urban, and *Torquato Tasso*, which refers to the important poet from Bergamo but, due to censorship, is set in the Caribbean. Of the operas seriae, *Zoraida di Granata* and *Alahor in Granata* are considered exotic, with the primary exotic elements being the names of the characters, and *Il paria*, which takes place in 16th-century India (Ashbrook, 1982, p. 309; Deasy, 2008, p. 6; Freeman, 1972, pp. 245-246; Jellinek 2001, p. 743; Osborne 1996, pp. 221-223,).

Similarly, Bellini chose the world of the Druids for his opera *Norma* (Kimbell, 1998, p. 20).

During that time, anything distant from Italy was considered exotic. Thus, even operas with plots set in Switzerland, Scotland, or England suggested an exotic element, even if there were no actual local elements justifying the exoticism. Furthermore, the choice of foreign royal figures as protagonists, rather than referencing local rulers, was a prudent choice to avoid issues with strict Italian censorship (Plantinga, 1984, p. 135).

At last, the Russian Tsar Peter the Great was a popular subject of the era and appeared in two comic operas by Donizetti, *Il falegname di Livonia* and *Il borgomastro di Saardam*, which are set in Livonia and Saardam, respectively (Ashbrook, 1982, pp. 286, 301-302).

## 8. THE WOMAN IN ROSSINI'S, DONIZETTI'S, AND BELLINI'S OPERAS

### 8.1. The Woman in The Early 19th Century Operas

In Rossini's early operas, the heroine often has characteristics of a sweet person. This is the case with Amenaide in the opera *Tancredi*, even though the corresponding heroine in Voltaire's work on which the libretto is based, was more dynamic. Similarly, Zenobia in *Aureliano in Palmira*, written the same year as *Tancredi*, exhibits gentle characteristics (Osborne, 2007, pp. 205, 218). In some of the composer's other operas, the female characters appear cunning and mysterious. They will do whatever it takes to overcome a situation in which they are oppressed by much stronger forces. These qualities can be seen in Elizabeth in *Elisabetta, regina d'Inghilterra*. The queen displays emotions of jealousy, malevolence and envy. In the end, however, she turns out to be magnanimous as she forgives the couple in love. Similarly, Zomira, the wife of King Agorante in *Ricciardo e Zoraide*, is malicious and envious, planning to kill the two lovers, albeit unsuccessfully (Osborne 2007, p. 36).

### 8.2. Femme Fatale

As the 19th century progressed however, a redefinition of femininity and of the female personality in general took place. Various female archetypes merged into a heroine model expressed as the "femme fatale" (Adetu & Coroiu 2022, p. 267). The first opera where this change is evident is Rossini's *L'Italiana in Algeri*. A thorough reading of Isabella's character suggests an aesthetic approach that utilizes certain romantic aspects of the femme fatale. As such, Isabella emerges as a complex character, a smart, witty, beautiful, and strong woman. She laughs and cries, loves and teases, and seems to be the only character in the opera who has control over the narrative. Isabella is also brave and fearless of her abductor, the Turkish bey. She manipulates everyone, both men and women, to achieve the liberation of her lover Lindoro, herself, and the Italian slaves. Politically, she raises a sense of patriotic uprising. Just as she saves her compatriots, she offers hope for the liberation of oppressed Italy (Zamir, 2011, p. 170). Rossini's approach to the character of Isabella should not be interpreted as a romantic pursuit but rather as a result of his own aesthetic and of the specific socio-political reality of Italy at the time. Therefore, Isabella, though belonging to a previous era, incorporates the evolutionary process of the transformation of the female personality (Dahlhaus, 1989, p. 58).

The first actual distinguished femme fatale among the famous operatic women of the 19th century could be considered the protagonist Armida in Rossini's opera of the same title. However, the composer does not fully exploit the character to portray a femme fatale to the utmost degree. Her charms ultimately do not work, as her beloved Rinaldo decides to escape with his comrades (Osborne, 2007, p. 258). The only thing Armida manages to do in the end is to promise revenge. A true femme fatale is Semiramide in Rossini's opera of the same title (Adetu & Coroiu, 2022, p. 267). Semiramis relies on supernatural elements that were not present in the more human drama *Tancredi*. The crime that torments Babylon, the murder of King Nino by his wife Semiramis, is known only to the perpetrators, to a ghost, and to the gods. It is a real tragedy in which the guilty yet sympathetic anti-heroine, unable to escape the passions of the past, ultimately pays for the crimes and the infamy. We sympathize with her and expect happiness and escape, but there can be no reconciliation. The action unfolds in a series of twists, revelations, and theatrical techniques, culminating in the death of Semiramis at the hands of her son, Arsa. No character punishes her intentionally or knowingly, rather it seems that her fate is the result of supernatural justice translated as divine punishment. This catharsis achieved through sacrifice purifies the city and allows the new generation to start over (Senici, 2004, pp. 141-142). Thus, while *Tancredi* focuses on a hero, Semiramis divides attention between the hero and the anti-heroine and has a complex plot that is filled with moral complexity. The guilty heroine gives the tragic feeling that permeates operas of the 1830s such as Bellini's *Norma* and Donizetti's *Lucretia Borgia*. At the same time, the supernatural elements, such as ghosts and oracles, as well as the mixtures of motherhood and criminality that are pervasive in the Semiramis affair, echo the emerging Romantic tastes. The result is expressed in different tones and dramatic styles in the two operas, and it is clear that Rossini is trying to reconcile Classicism with Romanticism. Londonio's last words in his work, *Critical Observations on Romantic Poetry* (Cenni critici sulla poesia romantica, 1817) are also suitable to describe this opera by Rossini: "We Italians want to be romantics too ... romantics in ideas, opinions and feelings and yet follow the example and the precepts of the classics in the use of form and the rules of art." (Londonio, 1817; Senici, 2004, pp. 141-142, 144, Tomlinson, 1986, p. 48). The dramatic climax of the play includes a scene of madness in the second act. Specifically, the scene of madness concerns Assur who, while determined to kill Arsa, is told that his crimes have been revealed. It also includes an act of romantic horror - the son who kills his mother unintentionally at the grave of his murdered father - reminiscent of the murder of Othello by Desdemona. Here, however, its power is tempered

by his carelessness, the divinely ordained punishment, and finally by the fact that it takes place in the dark. Rossini's *Semiramis* differs from Voltaire's tragic queen. Rossini adds a radiant, erotic side to the original melancholic and savage queen, as in the scene where she is first introduced with her ladies. Voltaire has her almost fainting, supported by her attendants for help, her first words suggesting a mental depression, if not outright delirium. Rossini's *Semiramis*, by contrast, describes the hopes that lift her heart and mind in the stunning coloratura aria *Bel raggio lusinghier*. As in the original work, she ends by calling out to Arsace as the one who will ease her troubles, but her tone is different: "Arsace has returned! He will come to me!" This aria, accompanied by a female chorus, was clearly designed by Rossini to showcase the vocal talents of his leading lady and wife, Colbran. The overall character of *Semiramis* in the opera is designed to match the dominant prima donna, or *femme fatale*, without being rivaled by anyone. It should therefore come as no surprise that great prima donnas of the post-Romantic generation kept *Semiramis* in their repertoire even when other opera series were out of fashion.

From Donizetti, *Anna Bolena*, *Lucretia Borgia* and *Elizabeth* from the opera *Maria Stuarda* have characteristics of a *femme fatale*.

Finally, Bellini's *Norma* can be considered a *femme fatale*.

### 8.3. The Woman as a Queen

A famous woman that protagonized in the operas of the composers under study, is the queen of England. Rossini wrote *Elisabetta, regina d'Inghilterra*. Donizetti wrote four operas based on the queens of England: *Elisabetta al castello di Kenilworth*, *Anna Bolena*, *Maria Stuarda*, and *Roberto Devereux*. The last three are commonly referred to as the Tudor Trilogy. All of these operas explore the division between the public and private self and the emotions beneath the surface. They also depict how unruly emotions of romantic attraction to a man and jealousy towards a rival woman, may disrupt her external control (Ashbrook, 1982, p. 358, Fralick, 1988, p. 2).

The early operas of the Tudor dynasty typically conclude with the common ending of opera seria of the era: a display of mercy from the queen, who pardons the traitors and who gives permission to the man she secretly loves to marry her rival. However, around 1830, as tragic endings became more common in Italy, the Tudor dynasty operas ended in a gloomy manner. Therefore, *Anna Bolena* ends with Anna going to her death with her beloved. Similarly, *Maria Stuarda* ends with her being condemned to death. Both *Anna Bolena* and *Maria Stuarda* forgive those who sent them to their deaths before their demise. In *Roberto Devereux*, Roberto's lover is condemned to death by the queen.

Donizetti's opera that demonstrates in detail the diversity of female characters is *Maria Stuarda*. In this work, the features of the personality of the various roles are presented consistently, with queen Elizabeth establishing her authority immediately. She hides her true feelings and exerts control over them. She also exerts control over those around her, which is expressed through her behavior. She spies on those close to her, Talbot and Lester, and traps them through deception. She is sarcastic and ironic. Only one strong emotion characterizes her: rage, as evidenced by her reactions when forced to directly or indirectly confront her rival, Maria the Queen of Scotland. At the beginning of the second act the Queen of Scotland, who has been the subject of all the conversations up to this point, appears. Elizabeth hates her, Cecil scorns her, Lester loves her, and Talbot is concerned about her; all have expressed their opinions about her. When she finally appears before the audience, she is not perceived as the woman who threatens the English throne, as expected, or as the irresistible angel of love described by Lester and Talbot, which inflamed Elizabeth's jealousy. On the contrary, Maria is a young woman who loves life and nature. At the beginning, this message is conveyed visually. For the first time, we leave the palace of Westminster and find ourselves in a hunting ground in Fotheringay. The indoor venue and seat of power give way to an outdoor scene surrounded by trees, overlooking the ocean. The setting can be interpreted as a reflection of the heroine's mood. Maria's entrance has much to tell us about her personality and mental state: she runs onto the stage, showing her joy and cheerfulness, her desire for freedom, and the need to express her happiness, highlighting her youthful vitality. Thus, the audience forms a clear image of Maria's character even before she opens her mouth. In contrast, the male roles in this work are quite marginalized. Lester seems to have no other purpose than to serve Maria as a lover and, consequently, as a catalyst for Elizabeth's anger. He never manages to acquire his own identity. Talbot and Cecil also play supportive roles, with Talbot supporting the Maria-Lester pair, and Cecil supporting Elizabeth and serving as the queen's treacherous advisor who advocates for Maria's



condemnation. As a result of this substantial reduction in secondary characters, the roles of the two women are highlighted to a greater extent (Frei, 2007, pp. 13-14).

#### 8.4. The Suffering Woman

In Bellini's works, the female figure who suffers because of the behavior and actions of violent or unstable men is a dominant theme. In *Bianca e Fernando*, Bianca suffers because her fiancé has imprisoned her father, the king, and now usurps the throne. In *Il Pirata*, Imogene suffers from her exiled former lover who returns and kills her husband. In *La Straniera*, Aláide suffers due to the destructive consequences of her beloved's jealousy. Zaira in the opera of the same title suffers because of her unfortunate fate and the destructive jealousy of her fiancé. In *I Capuleti e i Montecchi*, the consequences of the enmity between the two families are a catalyst for Juliet's life. In *La Sonnambula*, Amina suffers because of her beloved's jealousy. In *Norma*, the Druid priestess Norma has a tragic story due to her love for the wrong man. Beatrice in *Beatrice di Tenda*, is sentenced to death by her own husband who fell in love with another woman. Elvira in *I Puritani* appears as an innocent, fragile spirit with a noble character, living in an exclusively romantic world, teetering on the boundaries between reality and fantasy (Jellinek, 2001, p. 487, Osborne, 1996, pp. 314, 317, 323, 334, 338, 343, 348).

### 9. THE TRAGIC ENDING

The tragic ending is an exception in Rossini's operas, even in the tragic ones. The operas with tragic ending are, *Tancredi* for the Ferrara performance, and *Otello*. In *Maometto secondo*, the protagonist Anna, at the end stabs herself on stage, something that shocked the Italian audience. So, for the next performance of the opera for the carnival season in Venice, Rossini changed the ending to a happy one. But in the adapted version of the opera as *Le Siège de Corinthe* for the Paris Opera, Rossini returned to the tragic ending. The French audience not only was ready to accept it, but also expected it for the composer's debut in France (Osborne, 2007, p. 293).

As far as Donizetti is concerned, in his early operas *seriae*, the composer did not dare the tragic ending, even if he had to change it in relation to the original source. Thus, *Bianca e Falliero* has a happy ending despite the source material, Arnault's play *Les Vénitiens*, has a tragic one. It is noteworthy that Donizetti's first opera with a tragic ending is *Gabriella di Vergy*, an opera he wrote without a commission, as an exercise in dealing with Gothic themes. Since then, he wrote several more operas with tragic endings, including *Parisina*, *Imelda de' Lambertazzi*, *Anna Bolena*, *Fausta*, *Ugo, conte di Parigi*, *Sancia di Castiglia*, *Lucrezia Borgia*, *Rosmonda d'Inghilterra*, *Maria Stuarda*, *Gemma di Vergy*, *Marino Faliero*, *Lucia di Lammermoor*, and *Belisario* (Ashbrook, 1982, p. 541, Osborne, 2007, p. 64).

Intervening is *L'assedio de Calais* with a happy ending, something expected as it was composed for a royal occasion (Black 1982, p. 37). The subsequent operas, *Pia de' Tolomei*, *Roberto Devereux*, *Maria de Rudenz*, *Poliuto*, *Le duc d'Albe* and *La favorite*, have tragic endings. The next opera, *Adelia*, initially had a tragic ending, but Donizetti decided to change it in order for the opera to pass the censorship in Rome (Cametti 1907, p. 189). The same applies to *Maria Padilla* to pass the censorship in Milan (Ashbrook, 1982, p. 466). At last, *Caterina Cornaro*, *Maria di Rohan*, and *Dom Sébastien* have tragic endings.

In Bellini's works, a happy ending is the exception. Thus, the two semi-*seriae* operas, as expected, *Adelson e Salvini* and *La sonnambula*, have happy endings. Also, the operas *seriae* *Bianca e Fernando* and *I Puritani*.

### 10. THE MAD-SCENE

Early romantic music is characterized by imagination, illusion, and a loss of structure, qualities that can be well expressed in insane people. The mad scenes found in early romantic operas are an expression of different emotional facets stemming from emotional causes rather than psychiatric disorders. In other words, mad scenes are the result of overwhelming mental and emotional stress either due to death or rejection by a lover or due to the weight of a difficult situation. Madness as a withdrawal from an utopian world appealed to 19th century audiences. In Rossini's works, we encounter such scenes in *Ermione* (Chong-Gossard, 2015, p. 164) and in *Semiramide* (Senici 2004, pp. 144-145). In the first, the mad scene pertains to *Ermione* herself, and in the second, to *Assur*.

The first opera with a mad scene in Donizetti's repertoire is found in *Il furioso all' isola di San Domingo*, which concerns the heroine's father (Deasy, 2008). Another opera by Donizetti with mad scene is *Anna Bolena* (Peschel, 1992, p. 193). It concerns the protagonist and takes place in the Tower of London. The first mention of Anne's delirium is made by the ladies of the court. Then, when Anne comes on stage, her disorder is evident. Her words are detached from reality and evoke pity, passion and a sense of horror. For, although she expects to be beheaded, she asks the ladies-in-waiting why they are crying on her wedding day when the king awaits her. (Donizetti, 1986, pp. 279-289). Suddenly, she hallucinates that she sees Percy and is terrified, but her mood changes when she thinks he is smiling. Then, in memory of how Percy and she had once promised to love each other, she sings a sweet melody about her past ("Al dolce guidami"). Her intense lyricism here conceals the terror of her real situation, as well as the fact that she is hallucinating. Suddenly, she is jolted by the sounds of a drum and comes out of her fond memories. She is startled to see Percy, her brother, and Smeaton enter, accompanied by guards (Donizetti, 1986, pp. 290-291). She reveals that she is aware of the irony: she has regained her sanity only to understand the horror of her real situation. Anna's bitter outburst of reason does not last, for she soon asks Smeaton who broke the strings of his harp. Smeaton's harp, however, is present only in her delusional mind. Thus, she continues to vacillate between reality and unreality, reason and psychosis (Donizetti, 1986, pp. 294-295). At the sound of cannons and bells, Anna is shaken into bitter consciousness again. When she asks what is happening, she is told that the crowds are cheering their own new queen. Lucid, she proclaims: "To complete the crime, only one thing is missing / is the blood of Anna, / and it will be (Donizetti, 1986, pp. 299-300). Anne's closing caballet, "Coppia iniqua" ("Unjust Couple"), sung with intensity, is her deliberate attempt to forgive her husband and his third wife, Jane Seymour. However, this gripping caballet is a passionate promise of revenge (Donizetti, 1986, pp. 301-306). The madness scene is based on Anne's real mental state. In fact, letters from Sir William Kingston, Constable of the Tower, to Thomas Cromwell, Henry VIII's chief secretary, described Anne's mental imbalance during her 17-day imprisonment. She would change her mood abruptly, jumping from one topic to another, crying, laughing, defending her innocence, at one point she suddenly unbuttoned her dress, asked if she would be acquitted, and laughed when she heard the policeman's dogmatic response (Peschel, 1992, p. 193). Other operas by Donizetti with mad scenes include *and Torquato Tasso* (Osborne, 1996, pp. 221-223), where the mad scene pertains to the title characters, *Lucia di Lammermoor*, the first opera where the heroine goes mad and doesn't recover her previous state, *Maria Padilla*, which concerns Maria's father (Willier, 1998, p. 184), and *Linda di Chamounix*, where Linda briefly loses her sanity (Osborne, 1996, p. 287). In *La favorite*, the protagonist Leonora reaches the brink of madness due to her desperate situation (Mordey, 2018, pp. 302-303).

Similarly, mad-scenes are encountered in Bellini's operas: in *Il Pirata*, where the heroine doesn't recover from her madness (Osborne, 1996, p. 318), in *La straniera*, where the heroine reaches the brink of madness due to her tragic fate (Protano-Biggs, 2016, pp. 149-150), in *La sonnambula*, where the heroine also descends into madness because her fiancé and the people around her don't understand her sleepwalking condition (Simionescu, 2016, p. 85), and in *I Puritani*, where the mad scene involves the protagonist Elvira, who reaches the brink of madness when she wrongly believes her beloved has abandoned her for another woman (Simionescu, 2016, p. 88).

## 11. THE NATIONALIST ISSUE

Regarding the nationalist issue, the political climate of the era we are studying was quite reactionary and the social situation was unstable (Senici, 2012, p. 418). The composers we are referring to, avoided direct mention of it, as censorship was particularly strict in Italy. It may not be a coincidence that Rossini primarily chose the comic genre to make his few references to the nationalist issue. The first takes place in the opera *L'Italiana in Algeri* where the action takes place in exotic East in a harem governed by the Turkish Bey. In this setting, the rule of law differs significantly from that of Europe. Therefore, the opera would pass the censorship and simultaneously, the audience would easily identify with the Italian heroine (Senici, 2004, pp. 58-59). The second reference occurs in *Il viaggio a Reims* where one of the guests of the inn is a young orphan from Greece. The Italians of the time were informed about the Greek matter, and the presence of the Greek girl would undoubtedly evoke associations with their own struggle for independence (Osborne, 2007, pp. 93-97). Another opera with nationalist references is Rossini's *Maometto secondo* which deals with the Venetian colony of Negroponte's fight against the Turks in the 15th century. The opera's references to the glorious death in battle, combined with the revolutionary music in a march rhythm, could be paralleled with the uprising against Ferdinand I in Naples at the very time the opera was written. However, the choice of this specific subject was probably not the composer's intention. When Rossini chose it, there was peace in the

city, and the certain subject was considered safe. It is worth noting though, that the adaptation of the same opera for the Parisian stage a few years later coincides with the Greeks' struggle against the Turks (Osborne, 2007, pp. 65, 287-288).

From the way Donizetti handled his librettos, it becomes apparent that he was not interested in the nationalist issue, or at least, he did not want his work to be stigmatized by nationalistic characteristics. Some references are made in his opéra comique *La Fille du régiment* set in a French legion, featuring a brave girl who does not hesitate to praise her love for her homeland, France (Izzo, 2004, pp. 152-153). Also, in the melodramma giocoso *L'elisir d'amore* there is hostility towards the army officers, expressed through the character of Sergeant Belcore. This particular character boasts about his bravery but ultimately ends up being defeat (Izzo, 2004, pp. 148-149).

Regarding Bellini, patriotic sentiments are expressed in *I Puritani*, where the word "freedom" is heard at the duet "Suoni la tromba". Beyond this isolated example, references to the Italian nationalist movement in this particular opera are indirect, as its plot unfolds in England and refers to the civil war between the Puritans and the Cavaliers (Maguire & Forbes, 2002c).

## 12. THE EVOLUTIONARY TRAJECTORY OF ROSSINI'S AND DONIZETTI'S OPERAS BUFFAE

Opera buffa in the early 19th century Italy was in decline. Its most significant composers had either passed away or were already quite old. Further more, there was a prevailing perception among critics and intellectuals of the time that the comic genre was inferior (Tomlinson, 1986, p. 47). Rossini made his debut during this period, followed shortly after by Donizetti. Both composers engaged with opera buffa and breathed new life into it. Their activity in the genre focuses mainly on their young years, but some of these works became milestones in the history of opera. Bellini did not engage with the genre at all. Among the three, Rossini had a preference for the comic genre and felt more comfortable composing for it. However, he almost completely abandoned it after *La Cenerentola* in 1817, possibly due to economic reasons, as comic operas yielded lower pay for their contributors. Thus, after *La Cenerentola*, his only engagement with the genre includes the farsa *L'inganno felice* in 1818 for a Portuguese patron, *Il viaggio a Reims* in 1825 for the coronation of Charles X, and *Le comte Ory* in 1828.

Usually, Rossini's and Donizetti's farsae and operas buffae deal with intrigues and misunderstandings created by romantic triangles. Examples from Rossini's operas include *L'Italiana in Algeri*, where the bey is tired of his wife and plans to marry one of his slaves, *Il Turco in Italia*, where Selim, in love with Zaida, falls for the sexually liberated Fiorilla, and *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, where the elderly Bartolo desires to marry his young ward, who is also pursued by the young Count Almaviva. From Donizetti, *Il campanello di notte* features a love triangle where the old pharmacist Don Annibale marries the young Serafina whom Enrico loves. In *L'elisir d'amore*, Nemorino loves Adina, who flirts with Sergeant Belcore. In *Rita*, there is a trio, but it involves the two men mistreated by the protagonist of the title and thus neither wants. In *Don Pasquale*, the elderly Don Pasquale desires to marry a young girl. Marriages for convenience or for money are also common themes, as seen in Rossini's farsa *La cambiale di matrimonio* and the operas buffae *L'equivoco stravagante* and *La gazetta*.

Rossini's operas buffae are often adaptations of contemporary Italian or French works, many of which have already been transformed into operatic productions. His farsae reflect the basic trends of the time in the genre. Some are outrageously funny with devilish coincidences, while others are more realistic, semi-serious, and emotional. However, the boundaries between them are not clear, and there are often transitions from one style to another. All of Rossini's comic operas have enjoyable plots, wit, and twists. Most of them unfold in the contemporary period.

Exceptions include the farsa *Adina*, which takes place in the palace of the caliph of Baghdad during the 16th century, and the opera buffa *L'Italiana in Algeri*, which refers to the contemporary era but is set in Ottoman Algeria. They typically involve young lovers and their adventures until they end up together. Alongside the main plot, they also involve and satirize contemporary social issues such as capitalism, entrepreneurship, trade, as well as ethical concerns like patriarchy, marriages of convenience, infidelity, castrati, military service, local customs, etc. For example, in *La Gazzetta*, the role of the media is satirized, while in the farsa *Il signor Bruschino* and in the opera buffa - *Il turco in Italia*, theatrical conventions are lampooned.

L'Italiana in Algeri transitions from the purely comedic genre to realistic comedic opera. It explores a multitude of social and ethical issues of the time, such as the contrasts between Western and Eastern cultures, relationships between the two sexes, arranged marriages, women's emancipation, and initiation into secret organizations. Notably, it addresses the Italian nationalist issue.

Up until *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, Rossini's main characters resemble the stylized figures of *commedia dell'arte* (Tartak, 1969, p. 453). However, in his final Italian opera, *La Cenerentola*, Rossini shows a progress. Its main characters, Cinderella and Don Ramiro, exhibit increased emotional sensitivity, and their actions have social implications. Genuine laughter is replaced by skepticism, and the opera comes closer to the mixed genre of semi-seria opera. Furthermore, while he maintains the basic traditional characters of comedy, making substitutions such as the stepmother with the stepfather and the fairy godmother with the servant, he abandons the supernatural elements that characterized the original fairy tale: there is no longer a fairy, a magical wand, or a pumpkin. It is interesting though that Rossini rejected supernatural elements in *La Cenerentola* while a few months later, he had written the opera seria *Armida*, which featured supernatural elements. Nevertheless, there is a notable difference. In *La Cenerentola* the supernatural is associated with the innocence of the fairy tale, whereas in *Armida* it is linked to the mystic spirit of romanticism (Osborne, 2007, p. 257). The same happens with the last two comic operas he wrote for the Paris Opera, *Il viaggio a Reims* and *Le comte Ory*. In these operas, Rossini is now far from the style with which he had begun. In these two final works, stereotypical comic characters are absent. These operas constitute spirited urban character comedies. As the setting is placed in medieval chivalric romanticism, Count Ory appears to be romantic. However, the opera essentially satirizes medieval ballads. For example, holding the hand of your beloved is highly romantic, but it becomes hilarious when Ory holds his beloved's hand disguised as - "Sister Colette".

Donizetti's operas buffae do not have the innocent, almost childlike mood found in Rossini's early works. They are character comedies with a mocking and ironic attitude. In general, like Rossini's operas, they are set in contemporary times and satirize social reality. There are, of course, exceptions. Thus, *Il falegname di Livonia* and *Il borgomastro di Saardam* unfold in the late 17th century in the Baltic state of Livonia and refer to Peter the Great. Also, *Betty* and *La Fille du régiment* take place in Switzerland. Finally, *Don Pasquale* unfolds in Rome. The latter is the composer's masterpiece and perhaps the last notable work of opera buffa. The libretto is simple and does not complicate itself with many strategies or excessive use of coincidence, which are usually encountered in this genre of opera. Also, although the characters resemble the stereotyped characters of *commedia dell'arte*, they are more human.

Donizetti's operas buffae are drawn from Moliere and Cornelius as well as contemporary Italian, French and German works that have already been adapted for opera. He also wrote the libretto of his farsa *Le convenienze teatrali* and *Il campanello di notte*. *Le convenienze teatrali* is an opera that belongs to a long tradition of comedy that satirizes the situations and characters of the operatic world, centering on the rehearsals of an opera and the dominance of the prima donna. Its humour arises from the hilarious situations that develop during the group's rehearsals at the provincial theatre. With the same theme deals the opera *Il fortunato inganno*.

Other themes encountered in Donizetti's works are: strict education and its unpredictable and unwanted consequences in *L'Ajo nell'imbarazzo* and the Romantic movement in the farsa *La romanzesca e l'uomo nero*. This particular farsa did not have a long duration in performances. Apparently, the decision of its librettist Giardini to excessively mock romantic affectation at the dawn of the romantic era seems to have been unfortunate (Ashbrook, 1982, p. 324).

Particularly noteworthy is *Il campanello di notte*, which the composer wrote despite the personal difficulties he faced due to the death of his parents and the birth of his stillborn child. Obviously, he needed to find balance through theatrical activity, and additionally, the Nuovo Theatre, which staged only comedies, was the only open theatre in Naples during the summer of 1836. This opera differs from the composer's other comic works, leaving a bitter sensation. The protagonist seems to hide behind the comedic mask, a self-centered and heartless man. The passion and human warmth that are usually found in Donizetti's comic works are missing and it leans more towards black comedy.

As far as the exotic element, it was used in comic opera as a means to create comedic situations. Differences in language, culture, and lifestyle were employed to elicit laughter from the audience. Rossini used it in the farsae *La cambiale di matrimonio* where an American comes to London to buy a wife, and *Adina*, which unfolds in a harem in Baghdad. It is also present in the comic operas *L'Italiana in Algeri*, set in Algiers, *Il*

Turco in Italia, featuring a Turkish prince, and *Il barbiere di Siviglia*. Among Donizetti's comic operas, *Olivo e Pasquale*, which unfolds in Lisbon, and *Alina, regina di Golconda*, which takes place in the exotic location of Golconda in southern India and has an exotic setting.

In comic operas, the use of the Neapolitan local dialect was common in order for the audience to identify more easily with the heroes. Thus, Rossini's *La gazetta* and Donizetti's *La Zingara* include the traditional buffo characters who speak the local dialect. However, over time, the composers tried to escape from this earlier tactic. For example, in Donizetti's semi-seria opera *Emilia di Liverpool* in 1824, the local dialect was included, but when the composer revised it four years later, he eliminated it.

### 13. FINDINGS

In Rossini and Donizetti, the content and character of each opera was adapted to the circumstances of each presentation, to the audience in attendance, and the time and place of the performance. In contrast, Bellini did not tolerate such restrictions and dismissed themes that did not satisfy him, which is why he wrote only a few operas.

All three composers chose works from classical literature of their time with romantic themes and historical or exotic backgrounds, without delving deep into them. They considered mythological themes outdated, and even when they dealt with them, they approached them in a romantic manner. Composers of this era were particularly sensitive to the female protagonist: the suffering woman subjected to scenes of madness and the woman who controls and manipulates the threads in her relationships with men, creating the well-known *femme fatale*. For all three composers, the endings were happy in their early operas and tragic in later ones. Despite the politically turbulent times, the nationalist issue is not reflected in their operas.

Regarding opera buffa, Rossini and Donizetti engaged with the genre, especially in the early stages of their careers, infusing it with new life. The themes were taken from contemporary times. Rossini focused on the absurdly humorous, while Donizetti's operas buffae are romantic comedies. Bellini, on the other hand, did not engage with the genre at all.

### 14. CONCLUSION DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The analysis concludes that the libretto themes in the works of Rossini, Donizetti, and Bellini distinctly reflect their artistic identities while responding to the evolving tastes of the early 19th century. Rossini's operas progress from humorous and sentimental librettos to more complex emotional narratives, Donizetti's works shift from romantic conventions to darker, Gothic themes of betrayal and madness, and Bellini's librettos emphasize Romantic ideals of passion and sacrifice. These thematic explorations, particularly the frequent use of mad scenes, align with the Romantic era's fascination with heightened emotional states and psychological depth, showcasing a shared commitment to advancing operatic expression.

To further this understanding, future studies could examine the interaction between these libretto themes and their musical settings, explore thematic parallels in other operatic traditions, and assess audience reception to better understand the enduring impact and cultural significance of these works.

#### **Ethical approval**

In this study, no data collection process requiring Ethics Committee approval was carried out.

#### **Author contribution**

Study conception and design: AT, A-MR, data collection: AT; analysis and interpretation of results: AT, A-MR; draft manuscript preparation: AT, A-MR. All authors reviewed the results and approved the final version of the article.

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The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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Bu çalışmada Etik Kurul onayı gerektiren herhangi bir veri toplama süreci gerçekleştirilmemiştir.

**Yazarlık katkısı**

Çalışmanın tasarımı ve konsepti: AT, A-MR; verilerin toplanması: AT; sonuçların analizi ve yorumlanması: AT, A-MR; çalışmanın yazımı: AT, A-MR. Tüm yazarlar sonuçları gözden geçirmiş ve makalenin son halini onaylamıştır.

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