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UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

FACULTY OF HUMANITIES

Music

Saverio Mercadante and France (1823-1836)

by

Francesca Placanica

Thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

ABSTRACT

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Francesca Placanica

This thesis explores the impact of Mercadante's operas in France during the 1820s and 1830s. The study covers a period from the French premiere of *Elisa e Claudio* in Paris (1823) up to the period immediately preceding the world premiere of *Il giuramento* (Milan, La Scala, 11 March 1837), which is traditionally regarded as the first of Mercadante's 'reform' operas and the watershed of his mature style. Modern music historians and early biographers have suggested that Mercadante's encounter with French operatic conventions was the trigger for his 'reform' impulse, which the composer himself acknowledged in one of his most famous letters. As a contribution to discussion of Mercadante's stylistic developments, I examine a number of case studies which probe the French reception of his early output. Chapter 1 provides a historical survey of French critical assessments of Mercadante in the nineteenth century, revealed in the ongoing discourse of the time regarding Italian opera in France. Chapter 2 explores the critical reception of *Elisa e Claudio*, staged at the Théâtre Italien in 1823. Chapter 3 studies the process of transfer that brought about the transformation of *Elisa e Claudio* into the pasticcio *Les Noces de Gamache*, produced for the Théâtre de l'Odéon by the composer Luc Guénée in 1825. Chapter 4 reconstructs Mercadante's sojourn in Paris and the genesis of *I briganti* during the 1835-36 season at the Théâtre Italien. Chapter 5 frames the Italian performances of *I briganti* and the related revision process in the context of Mercadante's French experience. In focusing on the intertwined responses of Franco-Italian music criticism, this study of Mercadante's early operas shows the value of the study of pan-European criticism and of cultural transfer as a larger framework within which to locate studies of Mercadante's developments in style and aesthetics.

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DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I, Francesca Placanica

declare that the thesis entitled

Mercadante and France (1823-36)

and the work presented in the thesis are both my own, and have been generated by me as the result of my own original research. I confirm that:

- this work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at this University;
- where any part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification at this University or any other institution, this has been clearly stated;
- where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed;
- where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work;
- I have acknowledged all main sources of help;
- where the thesis is based on work done by myself jointly with others, I have made clear exactly what was done by others and what I have contributed myself;
- parts of this work have been published as:
Placanica, Francesca. "Mercadante in Paris (1835-36): The Critical View".
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Signed:

Date:.....

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Introduction: Cultural Transfer and The Reception of Italian Opera

There are multiple models available to analyse the passage between one culture and another. The simplest one is undoubtedly that of communication. A cultural entity emits a message just as a speaker does. The message is transmitted to a recipient who decodes it. But the emitter and the receiver are not situated in an empty space: they are subject to the observations of third parties, sometimes designated in the message that takes account of their presence. Furthermore, the message transmitted must be translated from the emission system's code of reference into that of the reception system. This semantic appropriation profoundly transforms the object passed from one system to the other.¹

The model adopted by Michel Espagne to describe the process of transfer between 'cultural entities' provides the theoretical framework to the present study, and identifies a number of agents clearly visible in the following chapters. Indeed, in applying the above model to my research, it may be inferred that a number of agents interact to transmit and translate a cultural product – in our case, Italian opera – within two distinct cultural communities (or performance spaces) and in a dynamic context in which the operators and consumers of the product themselves (impresarios, composers, librettists, audience and journalists) profoundly affect the object to the point that, in the transfer from one system to the other, it becomes something else.

¹ 'Ils existent plusieurs modèles pour analyser le passage d'une culture à une autre. Le plus simple est sans doute celui de la communication. Une entité culturelle émet un message comme le fait un locuteur. Le message est transmis à un récepteur qui le décode. Mais l'émetteur et le récepteur ne se situent pas dans un espace vide, ils sont soumis à l'observation de tiers, parfois désignés dans le message qui tient compte de leur présence. En outre le message transmis doit être traduit du code de références du système d'émission dans celui du système de réception. Cette appropriation sémantique transforme profondément l'objet passé d'un système à l'autre.' Michel Espagne, *Les Transferts culturels franco-allemands* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1999), 20.

Semantically, the term 'transfer' entails the material relocation of an object in space, and refers in particular to human movements and travels, and transportations of cultural goods and other materials potentially beyond the intellectual scope. In this context, it implies a profound transformation connected with the host culture: the notion of cultural transfer, therefore, refers to the relationship 'between two autonomous and asymmetrical systems'.²

The study of cultural transfer originated in the mid-1980s with a group of researchers working on nineteenth-century intellectual history in France and Germany, led by Michel Espagne and Michael Werner.³ Their research had a strong philological foundation and followed attentively a new trend emerging in the interpretation of manuscripts, which was leading toward an interwoven history of textual criticism and human sciences. Other areas of study were soon included in this trend, especially those relating to migration, the history of the book and intellectual life. The study of cultural transfer then developed rapidly in the mid-1990s as a consequence of the political changes in Europe, and continues to flourish in all fields of human sciences, resulting in a global perspective and an integrated observation of the 'entangled identities' of which it is composed.⁴

Today, the study of cultural transfer continues to be a meeting point for diverse research which conceives a common theoretical space and methodology, thus responding to a shared need to approach cultural implications in new ways. In defining the methodologies, problems and aims of research studies on cultural transfer, the question of the scale of investigation has become particularly significant. The emphasis on cross-border and transnational processes has focused initially on the dialectics between national cultures, and a deconstruction of the 'national' aspects of

² Espagne, *Transferts culturels*, 5.

³ See seminal article on cultural transfer, Michel Espagne and Michael Werner, "Deutsch-Französischer Kulturtransfer im 18. und 19. Jh.: Zu einem neuen interdisziplinären Forschungsprogramm des C.N.R.S.," *Francia*, 13 (1985), 502-10.

⁴ For a definition of 'Entangled Identities', see "Introduction" in Atsuko Ichijo and Willfried Spohn (eds), *Entangled Identities: Nations and Europe* (Palgrave Macmillan: Aldershot, 2005), 4-5.

this exchange threatened to become the exclusive frame of reference for the interpretation of transnational transfer processes.⁵ In this respect, the German-French pattern, which was initially a fruitful starting point for considerations of European cultural transfer, soon revealed its limitations. The study of mutual national reference has, since the second half of the eighteenth century, highlighted fixity in relation to the pedagogical notion of national cultural models. The pursuit of this orientation was therefore in danger of perpetuating an old functional comparative model. Now emancipated from excessive polarisation between pre-constituted cultural national models, researchers are beginning to enquire into the internal tensions in each observed cultural entity, while broadening the scale of investigation to a larger landscape.⁶ At present, research into cultural transfer examines the 'non-national' aspects of the national and the intercultural character of each culture. The concept of 'culture' itself is increasingly acquiring a notion of intrinsic *métissage*, where none of the results from academic disciplines are socially or politically neutral but are all context-related and intertwined within various contexts.⁷

In our case, framing a study that focuses predominantly on primary sources within the theory of cultural transfer, with the purpose of using Saverio Mercadante as a case study to observe the reception of Italian opera in France, significantly expands the context and scope of the investigation.

There are, indeed, a number of risks in speaking in strictly localised terms about cultural phenomena such as 'Italian opera' and 'French reception'. Firstly, the idea of Franco-Italian cultural transfer implies the existence of two

⁵ Michael Werner, "Maßstab und Untersuchungsebene: Zu einem Grundproblem der vergleichenden Kulturtransferforschung", in Lothar Jordan, ed., *Nationale Grenzen und Internationale Austausch: Symposium Nationale Grenzen und Europäischer Austausch in Literatur, Geschichte und Wissenschaft* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1995), 20-2.

⁶ Werner, "Maßstab und Untersuchungsebene," 22.

⁷ Wolfgang Schmale, *Cultural Transfer*, available from European History Online, <http://www.ieg-ego.eu/en/threads/theories-and-methods/cultural-transfer>, accessed 30 June 2013. More recent studies have indicated the problematic use of the term 'cultural communities' that has recently replaced the old-fashioned concepts of nation and national culture. See for instance, Stefanie Stockhorst, *Cultural Transfer through Translation* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2010), 21.

well-defined and distinct national identities, France and Italy, and therefore entails the concept of a fixed 'border' between the two nations. Such a border did not exist geographically, since Italy was politically fragmented at the time. In addition, speaking of a strongly nationally-connoted cultural product, such as Italian opera, evokes the notion of a self-sufficient cultural entity. Thus, the exchanges described in this thesis may appear to nurture the concept of 'transfer' mostly as an act of export-import between countries with pre-defined cultural identities, in terms of a physical movement of materials and people from one geographical territory to another. This transfer would imply some sort of passivity in the country embracing the cultural product and a certain fixity in the product transferred.

However, these exchanges, even when based on 'isolated elements' or on 'individual biographical pathways', need to be interpreted against the backdrop of the host country, which, more often than not, actively affects the imported object.⁸ Indeed, the receiving system operates a selection process according to its specific 'needs': it intercepts and repulses relevant elements of the exchange, and stores them in a newly-created space where they remain available for further use under new circumstances.⁹

This thesis is devoted to an exploration of this space and the further usage of texts, notions and ideas. This applies to the extant discourse on Mercadante's life and endeavours; to the presentation of two of his operas at the Théâtre Italien; and to the further usages and contextual transformations of these texts.

In the case of Italian opera and France, we are in the presence of contiguous cultural entities. Besides the physical transfer of people and

⁸ 'Les échanges entre cultures même s'ils reposent sur des éléments isolés, sur des itinéraires biographique singuliers, ne peuvent être interprétés qu'à partir d'une compréhension globale de la conjoncture du pays d'accueil qui opère parfois de véritables transmutations des objets importés.' ['The exchanges between cultures, even if they sit on isolated elements, on individual biographical pathways, can only be interpreted by starting with a global understanding of the conjuncture between the host country, which occasionally performs real transmutations on the imported objects.'] Michel Espagne, *Transferts: Les Relations inter-culturelles dans l'espace franco-allemand, XVIII-XIXe siècles* (Paris: ed. Recherche sur les civilisations, 1988), 5.

⁹ Espagne, *Transferts*, 5.

cultural products from Italy to France, Italian composers, librettists and theorists have always referred to France as a repository of literary and musical models; and the process of translation and adaptation of the musical medium from one country to the other, as well as the reciprocal fascination with and rejection of their national 'idiomatic' forms, are not nineteenth-century inventions.

Studies focusing specifically on the mutual exchanges of Italian opera in France have so far ignored or used somewhat inappropriately the notion of 'transfer' or 'cultural transfer' to frame their research.¹⁰ In fact, except for a few examples, they lack reference to the theory and its interdisciplinary *problématique*, and show no interest in tackling its issues or contributing to its methodology. However, despite their horizontal approach, their contributions to topics such as the adaptation and translation of literary sources and the circulation of composers, are in many ways preparatory to the development of the theory also in this field of opera studies.

In the specific case of the French reception of Mercadante's operas, an ostensibly national cultural product is captured and unpacked as it travels to and appears at a venue, the Théâtre Italien in Paris, which in itself constitutes an emblematic site of transfer. It is therefore not surprising that such a

¹⁰ Studies lacking reference to the theory and its ongoing developments, but still describing the exchanges in terms of 'transfer' include, for instance, Damien Colas, and Alessandro Di Profio eds., *D'une scène à l'autre: L'opéra italien en Europe* (Wavre: Mardaga, 2009) 2 vols; Hervé Lacombe, ed., *L'Opéra en France et en Italie (1791–1925): Une Scène privilégiée d'échanges littéraires et musicaux* (Paris: Société française de musicologie, 2000). An example of a study adopting terminology and methodology proper to *Kulturtransfer* theory is Arnold Jacobshagen, *Opera Semiseria: Gattungskonvergenz und Kulturtransfer Im Musiktheater* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2005), 69-101. More recently, Annegret Fauser and Mark Everist, eds., *Music, Theater and Cultural Transfer: Paris, 1830-1914* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), have partially framed its outcomes within the ongoing scholarly debate; but, as Rebekah Ahrendt has shown in her review of this book, the case studies included in the anthology have somewhat neglected this larger framework (Rebekah Ahrendt, "Review Article [Benjamin Walton, *Rossini in Restoration Paris: The Sound of Modern Life*. Cambridge Studies in Opera. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007. Sarah Hibberd. *French Grand Opera and the Historical Imagination*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009. Annegret Fauser and Mark Everist, eds. *Music, Theater, and Cultural Transfer: Paris, 1830– 1914*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2009.]” *Cambridge Opera Journal* 22, no.3 (2012), 353-64.

product, regardless of its attributes, should trigger an ongoing debate about Italian *versus* French opera.

During his lifetime Mercadante experienced an early exposure to audiences outside Italy: as a consequence of the early successes obtained in Italy, he went to Austria (1824) to witness the fall of his *Doralice*, and was then active in Spain and Portugal (1826-31), where he led seasons of the Italian Theatre in Madrid, Lisbon and Cádiz, before finally going to France (1835-6). These experiences contributed to building his transnational fame, although his activities abroad hardly met with consistent success. Nevertheless, scholars tend to draw a connection between these negative experiences and his immediate reactions at the compositional level.¹¹ Both his unfortunate mission to Austria and his ill-fated Parisian sojourn seem to have affected the ensuing stages of his stylistic development. As the following chapters show, the reciprocal Franco-Italian transfer of the contemporary critical appraisal of his work actually also affected and accelerated his stylistic developments.

This thesis demonstrates that the reception of Italian Opera in Restoration Paris cannot be tracked by describing this exchange merely as a transnational circulation of *medium* and people between places. Indeed, the concept of ‘transfer’ only as a transnational act proves insufficient to define the premises and consequences of this exchange, and although this work starts from strongly defined geographical premises, it indicates along the way the need to refer to an enlarged cultural context in order to capture and explain elements emerging from the isolated contexts presented. There is also a danger, in this context, of defining a one-dimensional polarisation between two national cultural models, rather than tracking and identifying transfers and the consequent newly-created spaces within a pan-European perspective.

¹¹ See for instance: Gian-Luca Petrucci, *Saverio Mercadante: l'ultimo dei cinque re*. (Rome: Pantheon, 1995); Gian-Luca Petrucci and Giacinto Moramarco, eds., *Saggi su Saverio Mercadante* (Cassano delle Murge: Messaggi, 1992); Michael Rose, “Mercadante, Saverio.” In *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, vol. 3, edited by Stanley Sadie (New York: MacMillan, 1992), 334-9; Michael Wittmann, “Mercadante, Saverio (Giuseppe Saverio Raffaele)”, in *Grove Music Online*, edited by Deane Root, accessed 30 June 2013.
<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/18426>.

As the case of Mercadante in France shows, transfers were integrated into the production process of opera, from creation to performance and consumption, and each of these transfers was multi-layered. Therefore, describing the mutual *métissage* between Italian and French operatic systems, and trying to track mutual borrowings and acquisitions at the compositional level, is insufficient to uncover the constant transmutations of Italian opera in France and Europe in the nineteenth century.

The critical reception of Italian opera represented the most direct link between the audience's expectations and responses and the composer's work, representing an extraordinary trigger for further development of the artistic product. This was even more the case with Italian opera abroad, where the composer had limited knowledge of his new audiences. Demands from the press, in this case the Parisian reviewers, indicated all sorts of 'need' for integration and adaptation of foreign opera, in accordance with the different aesthetics of the host country. The satisfaction of that need, felt and indicated in strong terms by the contemporary reception, represented a significant element in the development of opera in the nineteenth century. Correspondence and biographical accounts leave little doubt that Italian composers looked constantly at the reception and success of their works and, more or less independently, forged solutions to ensure their success.

In addition, the constant circulation and translation of criticism and reviews between Italy and France was a common practice in nineteenth-century newspapers and magazines. The information translated and imported often pre-determined and pre-assessed the elements of transfer long before they were, in fact, empirically experienced in the host country.

With all these premises, observation of the univocal and horizontal model of 'composer-score-performance-reception' almost immediately reveals its limits, because it neglects the role of criticism in affecting the product itself and therefore in taking the process of transfer to a further stage. We should therefore look at this as a circular process, and disentangle this 'boomerang' effect at the compositional level only after considering the composer's responses to criticism.

Indeed the processes of transfer that were taking place between the performance and the audience were recorded by Parisian reviewers according to their 'point of view', and the 'forced or chosen distance' from which they interpreted and assessed foreign opera.¹² Although the opinions expressed by critics and reviewers should be treated with caution in terms of their historical accuracy, we may examine them within a larger framework, as active vehicles leading to a pan-European hermeneutics that strove to decode opera, and Italian opera in particular, and offered a number of readings to a large and diversified audience.¹³ For this reason, it is important not to neglect the wide-ranging nature of the readership when approaching these sources. Their contribution reduced geographical distances, guided tastes, oriented aesthetic choices and affected successes, thus heightening the perception of Italian opera as a universal code simultaneously being shaped on the European scene.

Italian opera continued to be regarded as an undisputed *koine* and a common currency, attracting audiences worldwide both on the basis of its intrinsic qualities and for its capacity to move fluidly towards a greater assimilation of the aesthetic backgrounds it was encountering. At the same time, the critical intelligentsia that discussed it in the press appeared to experience its penetration in conservative ways. More often than not, even when they supported the Italian school of composition, the critics presupposed and pursued the notion of an ongoing dialectic between two national styles, thus defending and emphasising the concept of border, and partaking in the notion of distinct cultural nations.

The empirical foundations of this debate may be considered as part of a broader rhetoric devoted to the construction of a cultural identity. This would accord with the idea that 'identity feeds on otherness', a concept that found its quintessential rationale in the interwoven history of the concept of nation.¹⁴ At

¹² Werner, "Maßstab und Untersuchungsebene," 22.

¹³ Hans-Jürgen Lüsebrink, ed., *Presse et événement: journaux, gazettes, almanachs (XVIIIe-XIXe siècles): Actes du colloque international "La perception de l'événement dans la presse de langue allemande et française"* (Université de la Sarre, 12-14 March 1998) (Bern: Peter Lang, 2000), 1-6.

¹⁴ Espagne, *Transferts culturels*, 15.

the same time, the new spaces created by the 'transfer' of the artistic product were already proving the vulnerability of these borders. Feeding on the critical responses, the criticised cultural object was drawing closer to the 'needs' expressed by the host culture, and internalising and re-elaborating its main demands in new forms.

In departing from 'isolated' elements and studying an 'individual biographical pathway', Mercadante and his connections with France, this thesis seeks to accomplish a number of goals. Firstly, the micro-history detailed here proves the need to locate the discourse on Mercadante and his output within the broader field of reception studies. Secondly, it suggests possible directions in the study of the transmutations of nineteenth-century Italian opera, drawing into the expanded field of investigation the additional dimension of simultaneous pan-European criticism. In this way, I aim to illustrate the dimensions of a new approach to the overlap between cultures, and contribute to the search for a cultural universality that does not reject national particularities, but embraces them within a dynamic, interdependent integration.

1. The French Reception of Italian Opera and the Case of Mercadante in France

On 1 February 1842, the music column of *La Revue des deux mondes* began as follows:

At this moment, there is in Italy a school which tends to follow the French operatic system. We have so often repeated to the Italians that their roulades did not have any common sense, and that their eternal cavatinas were absurd, that the Italians no longer want their roulades and renounce the cavatinas. At the head of this movement, which is trying its best to highlight action and words and to be inspired more by subject and colour, to establish between text and music a more immediate harmony, at the head of this movement today is Mercadante.¹

This article, by Ange-Henri Blaze (known as Blaze de Bury), was a review of the Parisian performance of Saverio Mercadante's *La Vestale*, which premiered at La Scala in Milan in 1840 and was performed for the first time in Paris on 23 December 1841.² Blaze de Bury acknowledged Mercadante as the Italian composer who best reflected the dramatic sensibility of the 'French operatic system', in the adherence of music to action and in his effort to build less languid phrasing and a more effective relationship between action and words and text and music. This quotation exemplifies the critical reception of

¹ 'Il y a en ce moment, en Italie, une école qui tend à se rapprocher du système lyrique français. On a tant répété aux Italiens que leurs roulades n'avaient pas le sens commun, et que leurs éternelles cavatines étaient absurdes, que les Italiens ne veulent plus faire de roulades et renoncent aux cavatines. A la tête de ce mouvement, qui s'évertue à tenir plus de compte de l'action et des paroles, à s'inspirer davantage du sujet et de la couleur, à fonder entre la musique et le texte une harmonie plus immédiate, à la tête de ce mouvement se place aujourd'hui Mercadante.' – "Revue musicale," *Revue des deux mondes*, February 1, 1842, 469, quoted in Michael Wittmann, "Meyerbeer and Mercadante? The Reception of Meyerbeer in Italy," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 5 (1993), 117. All translations of quotations in this thesis, unless otherwise stated, are by this author.

² Information found in Castil-Blaze, *L'Opéra-Italien de 1548 à 1856* (Paris: Castil-Blaze, 1856), 456.

Mercadante's output in France in the 1840s and suggests the strong connection drawn by French critics between a presumed French style of writing and the composer's operas of the late 1830s and the early 1840s, which eventually came to be known as his 'reform' operas.³

This thesis explores the impact of Mercadante's operas in France during the early 1820s and 1830s, spanning the period from the French premiere of *Elisa e Claudio* in Paris (1823) up to and immediately following *Il giuramento* (1837), which was traditionally regarded as the first of Mercadante's reform operas and the watershed of his mature style.⁴ Music historians and early biographers have often indicated that the encounter with French operatic conventions was the trigger for his reforming impulse, which the composer himself acknowledged in a letter to his friend and biographer, Francesco Florimo.⁵ In particular, his encounter with Meyerbeer's music has been pointed

³ This definition refers to Mercadante's operas composed between the late 1830s and early 1840s, in which a new stylistic trend is evident. Traditional scholarship considers *Il giuramento* (1837) to be the first tangible example of this new 'period', which includes works such as *Il bravo* (1839), *La vestale* (1840) and *Il reggente* (1843). Other studies recognise the appearance of this new dramatic language earlier on, in works such as *I Normanni a Parigi* (1832). For the debate on the operas of Mercadante's mature style, see in particular the brilliant syntheses offered in Karen Bryan, "An Experiment in Form: The Reform Operas of Saverio Mercadante (1795-1870)" (PhD diss., Indiana University, 1994) and Rebecca Kowals, "Issues of Style in Saverio Mercadante's Mature Operas" (PhD diss., Brandeis University, 1997).

⁴ For a discussion of the defining parameters of Mercadante's reform period in historical and contemporary studies, see Kowals, "Issues of Style," 1-43.

⁵ Mercadante expresses his process of emancipation from the abused forms of Italian opera of the time in a very well-known letter to Francesco Florimo in 1838. 'Amico Pregiatissimo, Salute, benzi, felicità. - la mia nuova Opera *Elena da Feltre* arriva in Napoli con la presente - l'esecuzione della medesima è interamente affidata alla tua intelligenza, alla tua amicizia - L'esito mi sta sommamente a cuore, per le tante ragioni facili a comprendersi da te - La precisa interpretazione, il tuo zelo, la buona volontà dei cantanti, dell'Orchestra, del Coro, dell'Impresa, de' copisti, possono molto concorrere a secondare le mie brame e sostenere un patriotta - Nulla ho da rimproverarmi, da quanto dipendeva dalla mia occupazione, studio e piena convinzione che bisognava curare il lavoro: se non riesco mi rassegnerò, sempre che tutti si prestino con interesse - Ho continuato la rivoluzione principiata nel *Giuramento*, variate le forme - bando alle cabalette triviali, esilio à crescendo. Tessitura corta: meno repliche - qualche novità nelle cadenze - Curata la parte drammatica: l'orchestra ricca, senza coprire il canto - tolti i lunghi assoli né pezzi concertati che obbligavano le altre parti ad essere fredde, a danno dell'azione - Poca gran cassa e pochissima banda - Ho procurato di marcare quanto credevo più acconcio a facilitare l'interpretazione, a costo di farvi ridere con delle ridicole note. [Most precious friend, Good health to you, or rather, happiness - my new opera *Elena da Feltre* is coming to Naples with this letter - its performance is completely entrusted to your intelligence and friendship - Its

out as the most influential factor affecting his compositional style and future stylistic choices.⁶ However, as Michael Wittman has asserted, a stylistic revolution was already in progress when Mercadante was travelling and staying in France, and indeed the subsequent impact of Meyerbeer's music was not the only factor which influenced his future undertakings.⁷ My research aims to contribute to the hypothesis that Mercadante's French experience as a whole – and not exclusively the direct influence of French operatic conventions – played a fundamental role in the works of his reform period. I also provide evidence in support of the opinion that *in nuce*, the composer's quest for new formal solutions had already started before he reached Paris.

success is something I deeply long for, for the many reasons that you can easily imagine – the precise interpretation, your zeal, the good intentions of singers, Orchestra, Choir, Company, copyists, all of which can concur in responding to my wishes and sustain a fellow countryman – I don't have anything to blame myself for; as far as my work, study and full conviction of my commitment are concerned: if I fail, I will be resigned to it, assuming that all will give their best – I have continued the revolution I began with *Il Giuramento*, with varied forms – trivial cabalettas banished, crescendos exiled. A shorter tessitura: fewer repeats – some novelties in the cadenzas – the dramatic part more taken care of: the orchestra rich, without swamping the voice – no more long solos in concertato pieces, which forced the other parts to stand cold, for lack of action – little use of the gran cassa and even less of the banda – I have attempted to highlight what is more suited to facilitating the interpretation, perhaps at the cost of causing you to laugh about some ridiculous notes.]’ Letter to Francesco Florimo, January 1, 1838, in Santo Palermo, *Saverio Mercadante: biografia – epistolario* (Fasano: Schena, 1985), 178-9. Part of the Engl. transl. in “Introduction,” in Philip Gossett, ed., *Elena da Feltre: A facsimile edition of the printed piano-vocal score*. Italian Opera 1810-1840, 20 (New York: Garland Publishing, 1985). Indeed he was not the only composer who felt the need for a drastic change in the language of Italian opera of the time. In particular, the following year, Gaetano Donizetti almost seems to paraphrase Mercadante's words, while describing the French conventions to his mentor Simone Mayr: ‘Both the music and the poetry of French opera have a cachet all their own, to which each composer must adapt, whether in recitatives or in set pieces; for example, one must avoid crescendos, etc., etc., just as one must avoid the usual cadences *felicità, felicità, felicità*; and then, between one [statement of the] cabaletta and the other they always have some [new lines of] poetry that escalate the action, without the usual repetition of verses that our [Italian] poets use.’ Letter to Simone Mayr, April 8, 1839, in Guido Zavadini, *Donizetti: vita, musiche, epistolario* (Bergamo: Istituto Italiano d'Arti Grafiche, 1948), 319; Engl. transl. in William Ashbrook, *Donizetti and His Operas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 141.

⁶ See a number of modern scholars who set Mercadante's Parisian experience as the beginning of his ‘reform period’, including the following: Frank Walker, “Mercadante and Verdi: II,” *Music and Letters* 34, no. 1 (1953): 33; Michael Rose, “Mercadante, Saverio,” in *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, 334-9.

⁷ Wittmann, “Meyerbeer and Mercadante?,” 115-32.

In particular, this chapter explores the reception of Mercadante's life and work from the standpoint of the principal French commentators of the nineteenth century, and maps the earliest reactions of music critics to his work in the early 1820s. Chapter 2 is devoted to the critical reception of *Elisa e Claudio*, staged at the Théâtre Italien in 1823. Chapter 3 studies the process of transfer and transformation of *Elisa e Claudio*, which in 1825 was elaborated into the pasticcio *Les Noces de Gamache*, produced for the Odéon by French composer Luc Guénée. Chapter 4 reconstructs Mercadante's stay in Paris and the genesis of *I briganti* in the 1835-36 season at the Théâtre Italien. Chapter 5 studies the revisions brought about by the composer on *I briganti* (1837) for the Italian stages, as a possible response to the joint critical feedback received in France first, and successively in Italy. The overarching aim is to examine the reception of Mercadante's operas in France through an observation of critical appraisal of his work, describing a dynamic interaction between music criticism and its consequences at the compositional level.

1.1 The Case of Mercadante's French Reception

The quotation from Blaze de Bury which opened this chapter represents, of course, only one, rather late example of a multifaceted critique relating to Mercadante's work. In fact, contemporary French critics were rarely unanimous in their responses to a composer's work. In this review, the man of letters, son of Castil-Blaze, highlighted a major difference between Mercadante and his fellow Italian composers and, by associating Mercadante's output with the French *système lyrique*, seemed to hint at the composer's superiority compared to other Italians. However, the French critical assessment of Mercadante's specific contribution to the operatic repertoire, from his debut in 1819 to the emergence of his more mature works in the late 1830s and early 1840s, was not always as distinctive. In fact, the reception was uneven to say the least, and, despite a few sparkling glimpses throughout his career, his name often appeared blurred and buried among those of a whole generation of contemporary composers. Indeed, Clemens Risi has convincingly argued that Mercadante's case was not unique, comparing his and Pacini's dramaturgical

language of the late 1830s and well into the early 1850s with a study of their most distinctive stylistic features, and a constant reference to the reception of the time.⁸

The neglect that surrounded the name of Saverio Mercadante from the end of the nineteenth century well into the 1990s has delayed the shaping of extensive discussion of his early reception and the position he was assigned in the operatic and, more generally, musical world by Italian and French critics. Moreover, even since the race to rescue his name from his restrictive and uncomfortable position as Verdi's precursor has begun to occupy a whole branch of scholarly literature, most efforts have remained unsupported by critical observation of the primary sources.⁹ A study of Mercadante's autograph scores, and of the contemporary critical appraisal expressed in the press of his time is, in fact, still absent in the case of his operatic output. Similar research has indeed contributed significantly to the re-evaluation of composers such as Gioachino Rossini, Vincenzo Bellini and Gaetano Donizetti.¹⁰

European audiences were, and remained, acquainted with Mercadante at least for the first half of the nineteenth century, and his operas received extensive commentaries in the contemporary press. It was indeed telling that by the late 1830s Mercadante was quoted by Stendhal in his *La Chartreuse de Parme* (1839):

⁸ Clemens Risi, *Auf dem Weg zu einem italienischen Musikdrama: Konzeption, Inszenierung und Rezeption des Melodramma vor 1850 bei Saverio Mercadante und Giovanni Pacini* (Tutzing: Schneider, 2004), 316-76.

⁹ Biagio Notarnicola, *Saverio Mercadante nel III cinquantennio dalla nascita: biografia critica* (Rome: Poliglotta, 1945), revised and enlarged as *Saverio Mercadante nella gloria e nella luce* (Rome: Diplomatica, 1948-9); Biagio Notarnicola, *Verdi non ha vinto Mercadante / Biagio Notarnicola; accertamenti e rivelazioni del maestro Giulio Confalonieri il Torrefranca di Mercadante* (Rome: Tip. F. Francioni, 1955); Patric Schmid, 'Rediscovering Mercadante', *Opera* 26 (1975), 332-7; Ottavio Serena, *I musicisti altamurani in occasione del centenario di Saverio Mercadante* (Altamura: Tip. Fratelli Portoghese, 1895); Matteo Summa, *Bravo Mercadante: le ragioni di un genio* (Fasano: Schena, 1995).

¹⁰ Just a few examples: Annalisa Bini and Jeremy Commons, *Le prime rappresentazioni delle opere di Donizetti nella stampa coeva* (Milan: Skira, 1997); Maria Rosa de Luca, Salvatore Enrico Failla and Giuseppe Montemagno, eds., *Vincenzo Bellini et la France: Histoire, création et réception de l'œuvre*, Actes du colloque international, Paris, Sorbonne, Salle des Actes, 5-7 novembre 2001 (Lucca: LIM, 2011); Benjamin Walton, *Rossini in Restoration Paris: The Sound of Modern Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

Fabrice, above all filled with horror at the necessity of shooting first, perhaps at a former soldier of his uncle, Count Pietranera, ran and hid in the hollow trunk of an enormous chestnut tree; he was repriming his pistols when he heard a man approaching through the woods, very tunefully singing a delightful melody by Mercadante, who was fashionable in Lombardy at that period. Now there's a good omen! Fabrice said to himself. The song, to which he was listening with great attention, cured him of the tiny spark of anger which had begun to creep into his thinking.¹¹

During his lifetime, Saverio Mercadante was acknowledged as one of the most prominent and authoritative Italian opera composers of the day, and the way in which his work travelled and was received in the contemporary press all over Europe owed much to this assessment. From early on, his works and endeavours were followed with lively interest by music critics, and discussions of the more or less distinctive features of his style found space in music journals and the *feuilletons* of nineteenth-century French newspapers.¹² A striking example was provided in the year following Mercadante's most overwhelming success, *Il giuramento*, at La Scala in Milan in 1837. In an article appearing in the *Revue et Gazette musicale* in 1838, after bitterly criticising the leadership and the audience of La Scala, and expressing contempt for all the Italian composers featured during that season, no lesser an author than Franz Liszt stated:

One must, however, except Mercadante from this reproach,
most justified as it is for the mass of ultra-montane masters. He

¹¹ *The Charterhouse of Parma*, trans. Margaret Mouldon (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 174-5. 'Fabrice, saisi d'horreur surtout de cette nécessité de faire feu le premier, peut-être sur un ancien soldat de son oncle, le comte Pietranera, courut se cacher dans le tronc creux d'un énorme châtaignier; il renouvelait l'amorce de ses pistolets, lorsqu'il entendit un homme qui s'avancait dans le bois en chantant très bien un air délicieux de Mercadante, alors à la mode en Lombardie. Voilà qu'il est d'un bon augure, se dit Fabrice. Cet air qu'il écoutait religieusement lui ôta la petite pointe de colère qui commençait à se mêler à ses raisonnements.' Stendhal, *La Chartreuse de Parme* (Paris: Nelson, 1839), 195.

¹² For a statistical study of Mercadante's operas performed in Italy between 1800 and 1850, see Marcello Conati, "Mercadante fra Rossini e Verdi," in Gian-Luca Petrucci and Giacinto Moramarco, eds., *Saggi su Saverio Mercadante* (Cassano delle Murge: Messaggi, 1992), 32-6.

has the wisdom to write slowly, and carefully revises his compositions; also his operas are incomparably the most technically sound and the best orchestrated of all those that I have heard in Italy.¹³

Liszt's article, which excited the outrage of Milanese society, was followed by another statement of appreciation, this time for Mercadante's new opera *Le due illustri rivali* which premiered at La Scala in 1838:

I attended the first performances of Mercadante's *Le due illustri rivali*. The score is skilfully and conscientiously written; several of its ensembles are truly remarkable; its success has also been complete. Mercadante's works are incontrovertibly the best written and most carefully considered in the present repertoire.¹⁴

Liszt's comments are indicative of the generally critical attitude surrounding the Italian operatic productions of those years, and especially of how Italian composers of the time were often regarded as an amorphous mass of anonymous authors lacking any distinctive voice. Mercadante himself, as his fame spread throughout Europe, was not exempt from similar kinds of comments. In the above article, however, Liszt asserted Mercadante's positive value as a composer and the novelty brought by his mature operas. It must be said, however, that by the time of *Il giuramento* Rossini was no longer composing for the theatre, Bellini had died, and Donizetti was active primarily in Vienna and Paris.¹⁵ One fact remained significant: Liszt deemed Mercadante to be a learned and profound composer, and these opinions tended to be preserved and replicated by musical critics and historians, even when they were being largely unflattering. Such continuity in the assessment of the composer should not be diminished or neglected.

¹³ Kenneth Hamilton, "Reminiscences of a Scandal – Reminiscences of La Scala: Liszt's Fantasy on Mercadante's *Il giuramento*," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 5 (1993), 191.

¹⁴ Hamilton, "Reminiscences," 192.

¹⁵ Ibid.

1.2 Cultural Transfer and Italian Composers in Paris (1820-1830)

Blaze de Bury's Italophile opinion calls forth broader considerations, because its partiality exemplifies a *modus operandi* typical of French criticism. In particular, the notion of a French *système lyrique*, engaged in a dialogue with a presumed Italianate set of operatic conventions, was a recurring topic in French criticism. In practice, however, the line of demarcation between the French and Italian operatic conventions was a thin one, and was often blurred due to the constant interaction and exchange between the two musical worlds, and to the very widespread circulation of the sources and agents involved.

The operatic language of the early nineteenth century had a strong transnational component, with the emergence and affirmation of genres such as the French *farses*, *tragédies lyriques*, *opéras-comiques* and their equivalent in other languages, transmitted and translated into the respective theatre genres in countries such as Italy, Germany, England and Spain. The exchange of literary and musical materials was only one aspect of the transfer between national cultures, corresponding to the 'physical' circulation of the composers and musicians involved in the dissemination of the Italian operatic language across Europe. In this respect, the opening of the Théâtre Italien in 1801 was a watershed for the diffusion of Italian opera in Europe. The strategic role the theatre would assume in the promotion and transmission of Italian opera was unprecedented, and its influence was arguably greater than any other Italian theatre in Europe, including, in a way, those located on the Italian peninsula. For Italian composers, staging their works in Paris meant rising to the pinnacle of international attention and gaining access to a number of exclusive promotional resources that were not always readily available at home.

To be sure, the flow of Italian composers to European capitals was hardly a novelty of the nineteenth century. Practically since the beginning of opera, composers and works had always drifted from Italy to a number of other places in Europe, enabling the dissemination of the Italian operatic language that was acknowledged in the Western world as a *koine*. The trend intensified in the second half of the eighteenth century and continued up to the second

half of the nineteenth century.¹⁶ The courts of Dresden, Berlin, Vienna, Paris, London and St Petersburg welcomed the creations of Giuseppe Morlacchi, Ferdinando Paer, Gioachino Rossini, Vincenzo Bellini and Gaetano Donizetti. The public reception of their works was often filtered and mediated through a cultural resistance made stronger by a rapidly developing sense of national identity.

This mutual transfer manifested itself in different ways between composers who were addressing different European courts, and those who faced the public Parisian stages. On the one hand, contact with the courts in Germany, London, Lisbon and Madrid influenced the Italian composers with respect to the musical material they adopted, affecting mainly the surface of their new compositions. This was often mirrored in the assimilation of local colour and in the adherence to the superficial garbs of musical forms. Contact with Paris, on the other hand, prompted morphological transformations in symbiosis with the local cultural foundations. This was indeed the case, at the turn of the nineteenth century, for Luigi Cherubini, Ferdinando Paer and Gaspare Spontini, who produced their own versions of typically French genres (in particular, *pièces à sauvetage*, *farses*, *tragédies lyriques*, *opéras-ballets*, *opéras comiques*), thus consolidating their leadership of the cultural institutions of the French capital.

These Italian resident composer-directors resumed the ‘querelle d’invasion’ of Italian opera in France, and proved fundamental to the way in which Italian opera was perceived by Parisian audiences.¹⁷ Gioachino Rossini followed in their wake in 1824, becoming a tremendously powerful influence in

¹⁶ Giovanni Carli Ballola, “Il panorama italiano fra Sette e Ottocento,” *Musica in scena*, vol. 2, ed. Alberto Basso (Turin: UTET, 1996), 203-341.

¹⁷ ‘Quoi, deux grandes partitions à l’Opéra, *les Martyrs* et *le Duc d’Albe*, deux autres à la Renaissance, *Lucie de Lammermoor* et *L’ange de Nisida*, deux à l’Opéra-Comique, *La Fille du régiment* et une autre dont le titre n’est pas connu, et encore une autre pour le Théâtre-Italien auront été écrites ou transcrites en un an par le même auteur! M. Donizetti a l’air de nous traiter en pays conquis, c’est une véritable guerre d’invasion. [What, two great scores at the Opera, *les Martyrs* et *le Duc d’Albe*, two others at the Renaissance, *Lucie de Lammermoor* et *L’ange de Nisida*, two at the Opéra-Comique, *La Fille du régiment* and another whose title is unknown, and yet another for the Théâtre-Italien will have been written or transcribed in a single year by the same author! Monsieur Donizetti seems to be treating us as a conquered country, it is a real war of invasion].’ Hector Berlioz, February 16, 1840, in *Les Musiciens et la Musique*, ed. André Hallays (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1903), 152.

Paris. Italian composers' growing acquaintance with and exposure to the tastes of Parisian audiences influenced the many structural changes which they applied to their works and which affected their stylistic developments. From this perspective, the premieres that saw the light between the 1835 and 1836 seasons, which will feature in an extensive discussion in Chapter 4, marked a year of wonders, with the appearance of three very important Italian operas on the stage of the Théâtre Italien: Bellini's *I puritani* (January 24, 1835), Donizetti's *Marino Faliero* (March 12, 1835) and Mercadante's *I briganti* (March 22, 1836).

Philip Gossett has described these three premieres, providing a concise reconstruction of the three composers' creative process as mirrored in their autograph scores, and probing into their letters, in which many of their compositional intentions were mirrored and justified. Gossett has pointed out the significant extent to which the concern to second-guess the expectations of the French audience affected the genealogy, and then the different reception of the three premieres, indeed registered in the Parisian journals of the time. The opinions expressed by music reviewers represented a direct testimony to the very different outcomes of the three works, whose success was conditioned by the composers' ability to meet the Parisian taste and undertake the risk of moving away from the secure territory of what were reckoned to be 'Italian' conventions. Paris-based Bellini, for instance, knew the operatic taste of the audience of the Théâtre Italien well, and forged his *I puritani* accordingly, agreeing to a progressively restrained use of specifically 'Italianate' characters in the constructions of numbers, cadences, orchestration and use of fioritura, and thus achieving an overwhelming success.¹⁸ In the case of *Marino Faliero*, though Donizetti strove to modify his score as soon as he came to terms with French operatic conventions, his opera remained substantially Italianate in its architecture, and revealed the little experience that the composer had of the Parisian musical taste. His destiny was in some way similar to Mercadante's who, despite becoming progressively aware of his new audience's taste during his stay in the capital, ended up writing yet another Italianate opera in a hurry.

¹⁸ Philip Gossett, "Music at the Théâtre Italien," in *Music in Paris in the Eighteenth-Thirties*, ed. Peter Bloom (New York: Pendragon Press, 1988), 327-64.

In all three cases, Gossett has highlighted the significance of the more or less traumatic Parisian experience in the composers' stylistic quest, and in the case of Bellini, who died in September of the same year, the scholar has hypothesised the secure pursuit of a completely renewed operatic language.

Indeed, in 1820s and early-1830s Paris, the reception of a work, or the way in which a composer was perceived, was much more than an independent and spontaneous process of assessment by both the audience and the specialised press.¹⁹ Very often a specific journal followed and mirrored the profile and ambitions of a single theatre, thus becoming an instrument of publicity and promotion in the theatre management's hands.

At the same time, specialised music criticism was still the territory mainly of a number of French *litterati* who dipped their toes into music appreciation. Nevertheless, their opinion was growing pervasively influential thanks to the contribution of two of the most distinctive writers for the *Journal des débats*: Julien-Louis Geoffroy during the first twenty years of the century, and, more importantly, Castil-Blaze from 1818 onward.²⁰ Though Katharine Ellis has pinpointed the production of the *Revue Musicale* by François-Joseph Fétis in 1827 as the very beginning of professional practice, Castil-Blaze's activity in the early 1820s contributed enormously to its gestation.²¹

Indeed, reliance on previously published criticism was also common practice among music reviewers in France, and constituted a common point of departure for the critical assessment of many other foreign composers. For instance, upon the arrival of Bellini's operas in Paris in the late 1820s, as established a scholar as Fétis reported on, and translated articles from, Italian

¹⁹ Carli Ballola, "Il panorama italiano," 273-337.

²⁰ Katharine Ellis, "A Dilettante at the Opera: Issues in the Criticism of Julien-Louis Geoffroy, 1800-1814" and Benjamin Walton, "The Professional Dilettante: Ludovic Vitet and *Le Globe*," both in *Reading Critics Reading: Opera and Ballet Criticism in France from the Revolution to 1848*, ed. Roger Parker and Mary Ann Smart (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 46-85.

²¹ Katharine Ellis, *Music Criticism in Nineteenth-Century France: La Revue et Gazette Musicale de Paris 1834-1880* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 33-55.

periodicals in his *Revue musicale*.²² These observations were often combined with the ideological resistance which arose against the penetration of Italian cultural products into the host country on the one hand, and the reputation that each opera and composer brought with them from their motherland on the other. Most of all, as in the case of Geoffroy, they were concerned with the way in which new French composers would assimilate Italian and German styles.²³

As a whole, the professional and amateur criticism of the early and mid 1820s did play a significant role in amplifying the critical fortune of operas and composers in the early 1800s.²⁴ Although undeniably partisan, Parisian critics of the early 1820s detected several tangible trends that permeated the reception of Italian opera throughout Europe. For instance, the emergence of a 'new' Neapolitan school, supposedly unworthy of its founders, was a contentious topic. In the early decades of the nineteenth century, Italian opera was still drawing on the *topoi* that had characterised the musical dramaturgy of the eighteenth-century Neapolitan school, with an ever-growing consistency in its adoption of French dramatic and literary models. Mercadante's early production is an exemplary case in this sense; his grand tragic operas, such as *Andronico* (1821), *Amleto* (1822) and *Didone abbandonata* (1823), came across as rather conservative, responding to attempts by his teachers and impresarios to identify and market him as a *compositore napoletano*.²⁵ In addition, his first international success, the *melodramma semiserio* *Elisa e Claudio* (1821), was 'on the surface an innocuous reworking of Domenico Cimarosa's *Il matrimonio*

²² Jean Littlejohn, "France Meets Bellini: The Critical Reaction of François-Joseph Fétis," in *Vincenzo Bellini et la France: Histoire, création et réception de l'œuvre*, Actes du colloque international, Paris, Sorbonne, Salle des Actes, 5-7 novembre 2001, ed. Maria Rosa de Luca, Salvatore Enrico Failla and Giuseppe Montemagno (Lucca: LIM, 2011), 743.

²³ Ellis, "A Dilettante at the Opera," 57-66.

²⁴ Ellis, *Music Criticism in Nineteenth-Century France: La Revue et Gazette Musicale de Paris 1834-1880*, 8-26.

²⁵ Michael Wittmann, "Mercadante, Saverio (Giuseppe Saverio Raffaele)," in *Grove Music Online*, ed. Deane Root, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/18426>.

segreto', and could have belonged to any composer active in the early nineteenth century.²⁶

Furthermore, early nineteenth-century Parisian criticism highlighted the assimilation of Rossinian models by an emerging generation of composers. This notion heavily influenced the reception of Italian opera in Paris and guided the expectations of the audience. Adherence to the conventional forms codified by Rossini represented a somewhat safe pathway to success for younger composers, but was often perceived as a questionable and overly comfortable option by music critics.

During the first decade of the nineteenth century, those European opera theatres that were devoted to the staging of the Italian repertoire, most notably presenting revivals of works by Domenico Cimarosa, Giovanni Paisiello, and Giovanni Battista Pergolesi, represented both the end of an era and the irreconcilable gap between the old Neapolitan school and a newly-emerging generation of opera composers. The common denominator of the latter was the legacy of the teachings of Nicola Sala (1773-1801), Giacomo Tritto (1733-1824), Giovanni Furno (1748-1837) and Niccolò Zingarelli (1752-1837), all of whom were responsible for shaping the compositional style of a new generation of opera composers. In France, most critics and contemporary commentators regarded the emerging Neapolitan composers as unworthy of their ancestors, whom they deemed prophets of a craft that was merely mechanical and functional in its response to the unlimited quantity of music needed by theatres and salons. The trunk of the new school's genealogical tree drawn by French commentators was Zingarelli, who taught Morlacchi, Mercadante, Costa and Bellini, and who directed the Naples Conservatory from 1818 until his death in 1837.

In his *Biographie Universelle*, Fétis passed an utterly negative judgment on Zingarelli's work as Director of the Naples Conservatory, especially during the period when Bellini and Mercadante were studying with him:

²⁶ Giovanni Carli Ballola, "Saverio Mercadante e Giovanni Pacini," in *Musica in Scena – Gli italiani all'estero. L'opera in Italia e in Francia*, vol. 2, ed. Alberto Basso (Turin: UTET, 1996), 315.

The choice of Zingarelli as director was a fatal event for the resurgent school of Naples. Narrow-minded, full of suspicion and prejudices, devoted to the practices of bigoted devotion, he had neither the liveliness nor the energy nor the natural benevolence towards youth, nor even the enlightened sentiment of art which alone can transmit a movement of progress to the establishment of this genre. We might say that, far from having done any good to the prosperity of the Conservatory of Naples, he was not one of the least obstacles to the restoration of teaching. Nothing proves this fact better than the happy change which has come about in this school since his death, when the direction was entrusted to Mercadante, an artist with much greater breadth.²⁷

In Fétis's view, in the Italian operatic world the only positive phenomenon was the rise of Gioachino Rossini. Rossini's distinctive style provided endless opportunities for observations, critiques, and heated debates among French and Italian critics. In the 1820s, in particular, Rossinian operatic models, as well as accounts of his private and public lives, had a decisive impact on Italian and French criticism. Stendhal's famous romanticised account of Rossini's life in his *Vie de Rossini* (1824) and the constant attention that influential critics such as Castil-Blaze devoted to the composer are only two instances of the innumerable responses of French commentators to this unique and extraordinary musical talent.²⁸

Rossini was an overwhelming presence in the musical world of the time, and composers whose careers began to unfold against the backdrop of his

²⁷ 'Ce fut un événement funeste pour l'école renaissante de Naples, que le choix de Zingarelli pour la diriger. Esprit étroit, rempli de préventions et de préjugés, livré aux exercices d'une dévotion bigote, il n'avait ni l'activité, ni l'énergie, ni la bienveillance naturelle envers la jeunesse, ni enfin le sentiment éclairé de l'art qui, seuls, peuvent imprimer un mouvement de progrès à un établissement de ce genre. On peut affirmer que, loin d'avoir fait quelque chose pour la prospérité du Conservatoire de Naples, il n'y a pas été un des moindres obstacles à la restauration de l'enseignement. Rien ne prouve mieux ce fait que l'heureux changement qui s'est opéré dans cette école après sa mort, lorsque la direction en a été confiée à Mercadante, artiste d'une bien plus grande portée.' François-Joseph Fétis, "Zingarelli, Nicolas-Antoine," in *Biographie universelle des musiciens*, vol. 8, 519-20.

²⁸ Stendhal, *Vie de Rossini* (Paris: Boulland, 1824).

supremacy were inevitably compared with him. Thus, they ran the risk of being criticised for being derivative, for departing from well-established models, or for not being sufficiently daring in trying to achieve a greater personal style. Indeed, a number of contemporary critics deemed as despicable the emulation of Rossini's style by contemporary composers. Fétis expressed himself eloquently on the subject:

Italy, saturated with Rossinism, does not have a musician able to make it try something different. All young composers, who think that the material means about which I have spoken are in the music of Rossini, throw themselves completely into an excess of these mechanical procedures, in a way in which there is no hope of obtaining anything but crescendi, canons, and all the paraphernalia of which we are tired, unless there is a complete revolution, which is difficult to foresee.²⁹

These composers contributed enormously to the circulation and codification of the early nineteenth-century Italian operatic repertoire. Many of their works were performed in the major Italian theatres, and several reached important opera houses abroad. The Théâtre Italien was one of the most sought-after stages in Europe, and every composer and work that featured in a season of that institution is evidently worthy of further investigation in order to gain a broader perspective on *primo ottocento* opera, which might expand or even counter the restrictive and old-fashioned notion of 'Rossinism'. Table 1.1 provides an overview of Italian operas featured at the Théâtre Italien between the first appearances of Rossini's and Verdi's operas on the sought-after Parisian stage.

²⁹ 'L'Italie, saturée de Rossinisme, ne possède pas un musicien qui soit en état de lui faire goûter autre chose. Tous les jeunes compositeurs qui se persuadent que les moyens matériels dont j'ai parlé sont la musique de Rossini, se jettent tous dans l'excès de ces procédés mécaniques, en sorte qu'il y a peu d'espoir d'avoir autre chose que des crescendos, des canons, et tout l'attirail dramatique dont nous sommes fatigués, à moins d'une révolution complète qu'il est difficile de prévoir.' François-Joseph Fétis, "Examen de l'état actuel de la musique en Italie, en Allemagne, en Angleterre et en France," *Revue Musicale* 1, February 1827, 88.

Table 1-1: Italian Operas at the Théâtre Italien (1812-1842)³⁰

Opera	Year	Composer
<i>L'Inganno felice</i>	1812	Rossini
<i>La Pietra del paragone</i>	—	Rossini
<i>La Rosa bianca e la Rosa rossa</i>	1813	Mayr
<i>Tancredi</i>	—	Rossini
<i>L'Italiana in Algeri</i>	—	Rossini
<i>Il Califfo di Bagdad</i>	—	Garcia
<i>Medea</i>	—	Mayr
<i>Il Turco in Italia</i>	1814	Rossini
<i>Clotilde</i>	1815	Coccia
<i>La Casa da vendere</i>	—	Chelard
<i>Elisabetta</i>	—	Rossini
<i>L'Orgoglio avvilito</i>	—	Pucitta
<i>Torvaldo e Dorliska</i>	—	Rossini
<i>Il Barbiere di Siviglia</i>	1816	Rossini
<i>La Primavera Felice</i>	—	Paer
<i>Otello</i>	—	Rossini
<i>La Cenerentola</i>	1817	Rossini
<i>Adelaide e Comingo</i>	—	Fioravanti
<i>La Gazza ladra</i>	—	Rossini
<i>La Principessa in campagna</i>	—	Pucitta
<i>Mosè in Egitto</i>	1818	Rossini
<i>Ricciardo e Zoraide</i>	—	Rossini
<i>Il Pretendente burlato</i>	1819	Guglielmi (P.C.)
<i>La Donna del lago</i>	—	Rossini
<i>Il Fazzoletto</i>	1820	Garcia
<i>Mathilde di Shabran</i>	1821	Rossini
<i>Tebaldo e Isolina</i>	1822	Morlacchi
<i>Zelmira</i>	—	Rossini
<i>Semiramide</i>	1823	Rossini
<i>Elisa e Claudio</i>	—	Mercadante
<i>L'Ajo nell'imbarazzo</i>	1824	Donizetti
<i>Il Crociato in Egitto</i>	—	Meyerbeer
<i>La Pastorella feudataria</i>	—	Vaccai
<i>Il Viaggio a Reims</i>	1825	Rossini
<i>Giulietta e Romeo</i>	—	Vaccai
<i>L'Ultimo Giorno di Pompei</i>	1826	Pacini
<i>Gli Arabi nelle Gallie</i>	1827	Pacini
<i>Il Pirata</i>	—	Bellini
<i>Alina</i>	1828	Donizetti

³⁰ Mark Everist and Sarah Gutsche-Miller, *Paris Music Drama Performances*, Francophone Music Criticism Database, accessed 13 April 2012, <http://music.sas.ac.uk/collections/bibliographical-resources-and-work-in-progress.html>

The French Reception of Italian Opera and the Case of Mercadante in France

<i>La Casa nel bosco</i>	—	Niedermeyer
<i>Gianni di Calais</i>	—	Donizetti
<i>Clari</i>	—	Halévy
<i>La Straniera</i>	1829	Bellini
<i>Le Nozze di Lammermoor</i>	—	Carafa
<i>I Capuleti e i Montecchi</i>	1830	Bellini
<i>Anna Bolena</i>	—	Donizetti
<i>La Sonnambula</i>	1831	Bellini
<i>Fausto</i>	—	Bertin
<i>Chiara di Rosenberg</i>	—	Ricci (L.)
<i>Norma</i>	—	Bellini
<i>L'Elisir d'amore</i>	1832	Donizetti
<i>Il Furioso</i>	1833	Donizetti
<i>Beatrice di Tenda</i>	—	Bellini
<i>Parisina</i>	—	Donizetti
<i>Torquato Tasso (frag)</i>	—	Donizetti
<i>Lucrezia Borgia</i>	—	Donizetti
<i>Il Bravo</i>	1834	Marliani
<i>Scaramuccia</i>	—	Ricci (F.)
<i>Ernani</i>	—	Gabussi
<i>Gemma di Vergy</i>	—	Donizetti
<i>I Puritani</i>	1835	Bellini
<i>Inès de Castro</i>	—	Persiani
<i>Nina</i>	—	Coppola
<i>Marino Faliero</i>	—	Donizetti
<i>Lucia di Lammermoor</i>	—	Donizetti
<i>Belisario</i>	1836	Donizetti
<i>I Briganti</i>	—	Mercadante
<i>Malek-Adel</i>	1837	Costa
<i>Ildegonda</i>	—	Merliani
<i>Il Giuramento</i>	—	Mercadante
<i>Roberto Devereux</i>	—	Donizetti
<i>Columella</i>	—	Fioravanti (V.)
<i>Guido e Ginevra</i>	1838	Halévy
<i>Il Bravo</i>	1839	Mercadante
<i>Il Templario</i>	—	Nicolaï
<i>La Vestale</i>	—	Mercadante
<i>Poliuto</i>	—	Donizetti
<i>Saffo</i>	—	Pacini
<i>Don Desidero</i>	—	Poniatowsky
<i>Corrado d'Altamura</i>	1841	Ricci (F.)
<i>Nabucodonosor</i>	1842	Verdi

The frequency and continuity with which Italian operas appeared in Paris was overwhelming. The Italian composers and operas that flooded the French stages left behind a trail of criticism, their works providing material for debate in the newspapers of the capital. Even one of the most influential commentators of the time, Castil-Blaze, studied their position and contribution against the musical milieu in which they appeared and the legacy they came to represent. His views, however partial, certainly had an impact on critics of the

time, and on the way in which the assessment of these composers has been passed down to us.

1.3 Italian Opera and French Criticism in France, 1820s-1830s: Castil-Blaze

An eclectic character, François-Henri-Joseph Blaze (1784-1857), known as Castil-Blaze, was one of the most prominent figures in nineteenth-century French criticism, gifted with an extraordinary ability to build up his fame single-handedly. Having been affiliated for a long time with the *Journal des débats*, one of the principal Parisian newspapers of the time, he opened his own publishing house in 1822, self-publishing his writings later in the century.³¹ These consisted mainly of collections of *feuilletons* he had written for the *Journal des débats*, which contributed substantially to defining an innovative trend in technical criticism. Castil-Blaze's views on music, and particularly on the life of the opera theatres of the French capital, were daily bread for the vast readership of the *Journal des débats*, and became extremely influential. In addition to his pioneering activity as a music critic, Castil-Blaze became one of the main agents contributing to the circulation of foreign opera in France, in particular preparing French translations and adaptations of key Italian and German works. In addition to his growing involvement with the repertoire of the Théâtre Royal de l'Odéon, his numerous translations of operas by Mozart, Cimarosa, Paisiello and Rossini were conceived for and staged in the theatres of the French provinces, thus contributing to the widespread dissemination of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century operatic repertoires throughout France.³² His version of Weber's *Der Freischütz* appeared at the Odéon in 1824 under the French title *Robin des Bois*, and was undoubtedly the most acclaimed example of his work.

His most renowned effort in terms of assembling historical and aesthetic ideas about opera is probably his 1820 treatise *De l'Opéra en France*.³³ The work enjoyed a wide circulation, and its more than favourable reception was a

³¹ Donald Garth Gíslason, "Castil-Blaze, 'De l'Opéra en France' and the Feuilleton of the *Journal des Débats* (1820-1832)," (PhD diss., University of British Columbia, 1992), 3.

³² For a list of Castil-Blaze's French adaptations, see Gíslason, "Castil-Blaze," 3.

³³ François-Henri-Joseph Blaze, *De l'opéra en France* (Paris: Janet et Cotelte, 1820).

decisive factor in his appointment as music critic with the *Journal des débats* at a time when the Bertin brothers, owners of the newspaper, felt the need for more specialised music criticism to respond to the wealth of operatic cross-currents sweeping the city. This first treatise inaugurated a pragmatic and analytical approach to opera, which Castil-Blaze regularly pursued in his *feuilletons*, in which he introduced the custom of describing opera through the observation of scores and literary sources, and also raised a number of issues and questions about the deontology of the music critic as a professional, thus laying the foundations for a newly-conceived professional practice.

While *De l'Opéra en France* showed the rapidly-developing, modern analytical method of the young Castil-Blaze, his later treatise, *L'Opéra-Italien de 1548 à 1856* was the crowning achievement of his career.³⁴ It consists of a *Prélude*, ten *époques*, seventeen sections and a *Cadence finale*, tracking the birth and development of Italian opera, with special attention to its penetration into Parisian culture and musical life. Castil-Blaze recorded the history of major performance venues, described the lives of singers, instrumentalists and music directors, cited reviews of the major musical events of the capital's theatres, starting with their earliest operatic activities, and observed the evolution and passage of Italian opera from the French court theatres to public venues, following the social and political revolutions of the nation from the sixteenth to the second half of the nineteenth century.

Although the historical accuracy of *L'Opéra-Italien* may be debatable, the value of Castil-Blaze's source work is unquestionable. The whole treatise is permeated with an unconditional deference to Rossini, to whom the critic regularly compares the works of other Italian composers of any era. Issues typically discussed by Castil-Blaze include the exchange between Italian and French opera, versification and the *système lyrique*, and the issue of influences from German countries and literatures. Finally, the work also skillfully provides a historical framework for Castil-Blaze's position as a music critic and justification for his convictions as a critic and translator, often debated by his contemporaries.

³⁴ François-Henri-Joseph Blaze, *L'Opéra-Italien de 1548 à 1856* (Paris: Castil-Blaze, 1856).

The opening passage of *L'Opéra-Italien* outlines his overarching argument: Castil-Blaze believed in the natural suitability of the Italian language for music, and regarded it as superior to the French. This view brought to the fore the delicate matter of the translation of libretti, a practice that in his view was much more straightforward and successful from French to Italian than vice versa. In his introduction, Castil-Blaze praised the quality of Italian librettos based on the translation of French prototypes, and acknowledged the craftsmanship of Italian librettists.

I call here *Italian musicians* all the masters who have given us scores written to Italian verses. Do not doubt the delightful irresistible charm, the energy, the effects of ensemble and of rhythm that excite and electrify an immense audience and cause them to emit shouts of admiration; all the seductions of the Italian lyric drama have as a foundation, as a first cause, essential, indispensable, the poetic libretto of a harmonic symmetry, of a perfect cadence, to which a Mozart, a Rossini, set their melodies, their chords; and this melody will naturally clothe the elegant shape of the verses. The drapery hints at, announces the gracious silhouette of the model. One can compose very poor music around the verses of a poet; but it is impossible to compose, around the bad rhymes of a lyricist, a singable opera, an opera which does not bring an audience with a smattering of civilisation to the point of torture.³⁵

³⁵ 'Je nomme ici *musiciens italiens* tous les maîtres qui nous ont donné des partitions écrites sur des vers italiens. N'en doutez pas, le charme délicieux, irrésistible, l'énergie, les effets d'ensemble et de rythme qui soulèvent, électrisent un auditoire immense et lui font pousser des cris d'admiration; toutes les séductions du drame lyrique italien ont pour fondement, pour cause première, essentielle, indispensable, le livret poétique d'une harmonieuse symétrie, d'une cadence parfaite, sur lequel un Mozart, un Rossini vient poser sa mélodie, ses accords et cette mélodie revêtira naturellement les formes élégantes des vers. La draperie accuse, annonce les gracieux contours du modèle. On peut faire de bien pauvre musique sur les vers d'un poète; mais il est impossible de composer, sur la rimaille des paroliers, un opéra chantable, un opéra qui ne mette point au supplice des auditeurs un peu civilisés.' Castil-Blaze, *L'Opéra-Italien*, 7.

Castil-Blaze had already expressed similar views in his treatise *De l'Opéra*, with a substantial section devoted to the correct functioning of text setting.³⁶

The *Cadence finale* of his treatise seals his self-professed position as a supporter of Italian opera, and contains his final defence against the detractors of his role and of his school of thought, in particular those who criticised his work as a translator. In these pages the author described his awareness of the novelty brought about by this activity, both as a translator and as a music critic. Somewhat immodestly, Castil-Blaze recorded the appearance of his first musical contribution to the *Journal des débats* in these terms:

I founded musical criticism in France, and signed as XXX the Musical Chronicle of the *Journal des Débats* on 7 December 1820, with the first article on *Torvaldo and Dorliska*.³⁷

Sections nine and ten (*Neuvième époque, du 1er mai 1801 au 30 avril 1818; Dixième époque, du 20 mars 1819 au 1er avril 1856*) presents a wide-ranging account of early nineteenth-century operatic productions, in addition to the birth and development of the Théâtre Italien. Castil-Blaze's veneration for Rossini emerges fully in these sections, which include descriptions of Rossini's successes and of his conquest of the capital, drawn from his *feuilletons*. The following is a representative example:

Molière gave us *Le Misanthrope* and *Tartufe* [sic]; we owe to Mozart *Le Nozze di Figaro* and *Don Giovanni*; to Rossini, *Il Barbiere* and *Cenerentola*: choose among these masterpieces, you will not go wrong. I do not want to decide the matter, I will just dare to say that, among these beautiful productions, *Le Misanthrope*, *Le Nozze di Figaro*, *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* required

³⁶ For a synthesis of Castil-Blaze's view on opera libretto, see Gíslason, "Castil-Blaze," 90-139; 154-67.

³⁷ 'Je fonde la critique musicale en France, et signe XXX la Chronique musicale du *Journal des Débats*, le 7 décembre 1820, premier article sur *Torvaldo e Dorliska*.' Castil-Blaze, *L'Opéra-Italien*, 391.

as much genius and presented greater difficulties; therefore there is some merit in having made them.³⁸

Castil-Blaze greatly influenced the subsequent reception of Rossini's work in France. The critic was abreast of the progress of the Italian school in Paris and abroad, and established a definitive point of view in his wide-ranging observations of its general performance. One of the issues at stake was the inheritance of the crescendo from the old Neapolitan school and its authorship, disputed by various contemporary composers. The following passage again reveals his Rossini-centred perspective:

In the finale of *L'italiana in Algeri* we encounter the extended crescendo, a tool that Rossini had already used for the finale of *Tancredi*, and that he will continue to employ as often as possible, since he has recognised its positive effect on the audience. Paisiello enraptured his audience by exposing them to a crescendo with economical art, in the famous finale of *Il rè [sic] Teodoro* in 1784. Mosca, a mediocre practitioner, a musician without imagination, has replicated this instrumental and vocal combination in too great a number of stillborn operas, which we cannot remember. The *crescendo*, a usual recourse in the hand of the poor Mosca, delivered only a few feeble blows in his incapable hands, but it becomes the Joyeuse, the Durandal of Rossini; this master conquers the favour of the audience, excites transports of apoplectic enthusiasm, strikes some sure, decisive, victorious blows with the same *crescendo*, launched by the genius across a lively comic or tragic situation.³⁹

³⁸ 'Molière nous a donné *le Misanthrope* et *Tartufe* [sic]; nous devons à Mozart *le Nozze di Figaro* et *Don Giovanni*; à Rossini, *il Barbiere* et *Cenerentola*: choisissez entre ces chefs-d'œuvre, vous ne sauriez avoir tort. Je ne veux point décider la question, je me permettrai seulement de dire que parmi ces belles productions, *le Misanthrope*, *le Nozze di Figaro*, *il Barbiere di Siviglia* demandaient autant de génie et présentaient de plus grandes difficultés; il y a donc plus de mérite à les avoir faits.' Castil-Blaze, *L'Opéra-Italien*, 411.

³⁹ 'Nous rencontrons dans le finale de *L'italiana in Algeri*, le crescendo prolongé, moyen dont Rossini s'était déjà servi pour le finale de *Tancredi*, moyen qu'il emploiera d'autant plus souvent qu'il en a reconnu l'heureux effet sur le public. Paisiello ravit son auditoire en lui faisant ouïr un crescendo, avec art ménagé, dans le finale célèbre

His assessment of other Italian composers was clearly informed by his preference for Rossini, the *terminus ante* and *post quem* of his vision of Italian opera history. In his view, for instance, Pietro Generali and Simone Mayr inspired Rossini in his orchestration; Nicola Manfroce had passed away prematurely (and perhaps opportunely) before he could become a competitor of Rossini:

Generali for the orchestra, Majo [Mayr] for the modulation, opened the way to Rossini. Manfroce, from Palma [Palmi], in hither Calabria, who died in Naples in 1813, at the age of twenty-one years, had already demonstrated genius and talent. *Alzira*, *Ecuba*, by this young maestro, announced a worthy rival to Rossini.⁴⁰

Castil-Blaze's perspective on Italian opera was especially relevant considering that, again, the 1856 treatise represented a synthesis of the views expressed in his weekly *feuilletons* in the *Journal des débats*. For example, the following passage is an expanded version of an 1827 review:

Generali's style has [aspects] of the old and of the new Italian school: this composer succeeded Cimarosa, and prepared the way for Rossini. All these orchestral effects, in which the woodwinds take the place and play the role of the violins; these traits tending to the high notes, sustained by struck chords or by a *pizzicato*; this modern cut of the cavatinas, as well as of their accompaniments, all of this was indicated and sketched only by Generali. We assign to Mosca the use of the *crescendo*.

de *Il rè Teodoro*, en 1784. Mosca, praticien médiocre, musicien dépourvu d'imagination, avait reproduit cette combinaison instrumentale et vocale dans un trop grand nombre d'opéras mort-nés, dont on n'avait pu garder le souvenir. Le *crescendo*, épée de chevet du pauvre Mosca, ne frappait que de trop faibles coups entre ses mains inhabiles, il devient la Joyeuse, la Durandal de Rossini; ce maître conquit la faveur du public, il excita les transports d'un enthousiasme furibond, frappa des coups certains, décisifs, victorieux avec ce même *crescendo*, lancé par le génie à travers une situation vivement bouffonne ou tragique.' Castil-Blaze, *L'Opéra-Italien*, 369.

⁴⁰ 'Generali, pour l'orchestre, Majo, pour la modulation, avaient ouvert la voie à Rossini. Manfroce, de Palma, dans la Calabre citérieure, mort à Naples en 1813, à l'âge de vingt-un ans, avait déjà fait preuve de génie et de talent. *Alzira*, *Ecuba*, de ce jeune maître, annonçaient un digne rival de Rossini.' Castil-Blaze, *L'Opéra-Italien*, 369.

Rossini borrowed these new means, giving them greater proportions, a lively, spiritual and dramatic pace. The genius and taste of the author of *Tancredi* have powerfully sustained him in this endeavour, and have given him the copyright on the loans that he drew from his predecessors and rivals. He perfected this type of dramatic composition; he embellished it with the richness of a fruitful imagination; he raised these effects to their highest periods ... Rossini collected all the honours; he was proclaimed the creator of the genre, and this title has not yet been usurped. We will give justice to Generali; his name will be placed very honourably in the splendours of music, but we will be forced to agree that this maestro did not have a fertile imagination, a very original colour, much rigorous style to set off his conquests and safeguard his possession of them.⁴¹

⁴¹ 'Le style de Generali tient de l'ancienne et de la nouvelle école italienne; ce compositeur a succédé à Cimarosa; il a préparé les voies à Rossini. Tous ces effets d'orchestre, où les instruments à vent prennent la place et jouent le rôle des violons; ces traits à l'aigu, soutenus par des accords plaqués ou par un *pizzicato*; cette coupe moderne des cavatines, ainsi que leur accompagnement, tout cela a été indiqué et ébauché seulement par Generali. On attribue à Mosca l'emploi des *crescendo*. Rossini s'est emparé de ces moyens nouveaux en leur donnant des proportions plus grandes, une marche vive, spirituelle et dramatique. Le génie et le goût de l'auteur de *Tancredi* l'ont puissamment soutenu dans cette entreprise, et lui ont fait acquérir le droit de propriété sur les emprunts qu'il a faits à ses prédécesseurs ou à ses rivaux. Il a perfectionné ce genre de composition dramatique; il l'a embelli des richesses d'une imagination féconde; il a élevé ses effets à leur plus haut période....Rossini a cueilli toutes les palmes; il a été proclamé le créateur du genre, et ce titre n'est point usurpé. On rendra toujours justice à Generali; son nom sera placé très honorablement dans les fastes de la musique, mais on sera forcé de convenir que ce maître n'avait pas une imagination assez féconde, une couleur assez originale, un style assez vigoureux pour établir au loin ses conquêtes et s'en assurer la possession.' Castil-Blaze, *L'Opéra-Italien*, 369-70.

Pietro Generali was Luigi Ricci's teacher and held the post of Maestro di Cappella in Novara until his death in 1832, when Mercadante took over. During his lifetime there were contrasting assessments of his work; his lack of personal style, in particular, was one of the most heavily criticised aspects of his work, which towards the end of his career tended to assimilate the Rossinian style almost completely. Even the notion that he invented the *crescendo*, which then became one of Rossini's signature features, seems to be unfounded. Andrea Lanza, "Generali, Pietro," in *Grove Music Online*, ed. Deane Root, accessed March 31, 2012, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/10861>.

Given these views, it was no surprise that Castil-Blaze was sceptical and somewhat wayward in acknowledging the emergence of a new distinctive voice among the composers of a new generation. In his treatise, Mercadante's name did not appear often, although the popularity of his opera *Elisa e Claudio* was presented almost as a fact taken for granted in some passages of Castil-Blaze's anecdotal narrative.

Castil-Blaze was an influential figure in the musical life of Paris, and his bold positions encountered opposing views and strong reactions from prominent musical figures such as Hector Berlioz, who took a decisive and intransigent stand against 'the invasion' of Italian opera and Rossinism. His most famous negative remarks about Rossinism and Italian opera also found extensive space both in his reviews and in his *Mémoires*, in which he criticised the habituées of the Théâtre Italien as much as the compositions featured there. Berlioz, furthermore, did not refrain from direct personal attacks on Castil-Blaze and his work as a translator and adaptor of foreign works into French. In particular, he bitterly criticised Castil-Blaze's adaptations of Mozart's and Weber's works and expressed in strong terms his opposition to the presumed arbitrariness of his *modus operandi*, even coining the term of *castilblazade* to pour scorn on his arrangements.⁴²

It was against this backdrop that Mercadante's operas were presented to the French audience, which was thereby exposed to a wide range of critical perspectives.

⁴² See Gíslason, "Castil-Blaze," 5-6.

1.4 Saverio Mercadante in French and Italian Literature and Criticism

All Italian operas appearing in Paris during the nineteenth century were exposed to the critical assessment of contemporary reviewers. Indeed, Parisian music critics tended to register and transmit rumours and more or less spontaneous impressions of each event as it happened. Although such comments must be treated with a great deal of caution, they may still be considered as an important source of information owing to their immediacy. The information that they relayed influenced the views of music historians and commentators later in the century, when they were gathered together and transmitted to a more specialised audience in a more extensive form. Without doubt, the earliest information that circulated in France on the arrival of Mercadante's music in the early 1820s and 1830s originated in Italy, and in particular in Naples, when he was still a student at the Conservatory. The confirmation or contradiction of the expectations born in Italy and reported by French journals meant a critical continuity with, or disruption of, the opinions expressed in the country of origin of the work or composer under examination.

The case of Mercadante in France is one that allows us to examine the Franco-Italian cultural transfer that was taking place, not only in the fields of operatic convention, literary sources and musical style but also at the level of the critical debate associated with it. Prior to the first performances of Mercadante's music in Paris, his earliest achievements in Italy were recorded with keen interest by Castil-Blaze, who in 1821 devoted a paragraph of his *Chronique Musicale* to the success of *Elisa e Claudio* at La Scala:

A young composer recently made himself known strikingly in Milan with *Elisa e Claudio*, a melodrama. This opera, performed by Madames Belloc and Schira, la Blache [Lablache] and de [De] Grecis, was a complete success. The experts attribute to its author, Mr Mercadante, Cimarosa's purity of style and Rossini's

fiery genius. If this opinion survives the enthusiasm of novelty, the Italian school will be able to boast of possessing a phoenix.⁴³

Castil-Blaze expressed appreciation for the synthesis of old and new styles in *Elisa e Claudio*, and encouraged attentive observation of Mercadante's future undertakings, as he had the potential to become a new and important musical phenomenon. In January 1822, he demonstrated a renewed curiosity and enthusiasm for the outcome of *Elisa e Claudio*. Going into greater detail, this time Castil-Blaze described the singers' performances and the numbers most acclaimed by the audience.

The success of *Elisa e Claudio*, by Mercadante, performed at the La Scala Theatre, is ever growing. The music of this opera is lively, original, expressive, and does not sound like that of any [other] living composer. Wrongly, it has been said that this maestro tries to imitate Rossini. La Blache [Lablache], a *buffo cantante* of great talent, has contributed greatly to the outcome of the piece; he was ably assisted by M^{me} Belloc and the tenor [sic] de Grecis. A duet between the latter and Lablache was showered with applause; they made them repeat it twice. During five consecutive nights, the Maestro was called up after the performance and applauded with passion. This information, which I take as positive, is taken from a letter written from Milan by a real connoisseur: perhaps it will be convenient to obtain the score of *Elisa e Claudio* this winter, while awaiting the return of M^{me} Pasta, as this opera will undoubtedly be well-received in Paris.⁴⁴

⁴³ 'Un jeune compositeur vient de se signaler à Milan d'une manière éclatante par *Elisa e Claudio*, mélodrame. Cet ouvrage, exécuté par M^{mes} Belloc et Schira, la Blache [Lablache] et de [de] Grecis, a obtenu un succès complet. Les connoisseurs accordent à son auteur, M. Mercadante, la pureté du style de Cimarosa et le génie fougueux de Rossini. Si cette opinion survit à l'enthousiasme de la nouveauté, l'école d'Italie pourra se vanter de posséder un phénix.' "Chronique Musicale," *Journal des débats*, November 30, 1821.

⁴⁴ 'Le succès d'*Elisa e Claudio*, de Mercadante, représenté sur le théâtre de *la Scala*, va toujours croissant. La musique de cet opéra est vive, originale, expressive, et ne ressemble à celle d'aucun compositeur vivant. C'est à tort que l'on a dit que ce maître cherchait à imiter Rossini. La Blache, *buffo cantante* d'un grand talent, a beaucoup

It is intriguing that the review mentioned the return to Paris of Giuditta Pasta, who would perform the role of Elisa in the 1823 Parisian premiere of the opera.

Given his prominent position in Parisian musical life, it is possible that Castil-Blaze was attempting to influence the decisions of the establishment of the Théâtre Italien and attract the promising rising star Saverio Mercadante. The most relevant passage of this review is the one questioning the widespread notion that Mercadante was an imitator of Rossini. Castil-Blaze instead described his music as distinctive to the point of being different from that of 'any living composer'.

In the final lines of this column, Castil-Blaze acknowledged his source as a 'real connoisseur' who had expressed these views in a letter written from Milan following the premiere of the opera. The 'connoisseur' might well have been Giuseppe Carpani, who at the time was based in Milan and reported in his letters on the mainstream of musical life in the cultural capital of Italy. Known for his controversial, romanticised biographies of Haydn and Rossini, he also translated numerous French librettos into Italian, one of the best known being *Nina ossia La pazza per amore* (1788) from an opéra comique by Dalayrac.

In a letter from Vienna dated 1 December 1821, possibly addressed to the Italian journal *Biblioteca Italiana* and later included in *Le rossiniane*, Carpani described the enthusiastic reception of *Elisa e Claudio* in Milan and outlined his views concerning the future of Italian operatic composition:

It is so, most precious friend: *Rossini and Mercadante*, by recalling the good genre, and increasing it with more richness, will save European music; and if the first refines his admirable creations a little more, by moderating through the bridle of respect for verisimilitude the impetus of his creative skills, and

contribué à la réussite de la pièce; il a été bien secondé par M^{me} Belloc et le ténor de Grecis. Un duo entre ce dernier et la Blache [Lablache] a été couvert d'applaudissemens; on le fait encore répéter jusqu'à deux fois. Pendant cinq soirées consecutives, le Maestro a été appelé après la représentation et applaudi avec fureur. Ces reinsegnemens, que je donne comme positifs, sont extraits d'une lettre écrite de Milan par un véritable connoisseur, peut-être conviendrait-il de se procurer, pour cet hiver, et en attendant le retour de M^{me} Pasta, la partition d'*Elisa e Claudio*, cet ouvrage réussirait sans doute à Paris.' "Chronique Musicale," *Journal des débats*, January 2, 1822.

the second continues to give us operas as judicious and learned as the one that today is intoxicating our Milan, Italian music will again touch perfection, in whatever country it may be composed.⁴⁵

Remarkably, Carpani seemed to refer to the well-established Rossini and to the young *Mercadante* as peers, and suggested possible improvements to the styles of both.

It is tempting to suggest that such a passage might have stirred Castil-Blaze's curiosity to the point that he expressed a wish to obtain the score of the opera. Indeed, earlier in the same letter Carpani did mention that he was negotiating with Ricordi to obtain the score of the opera, as requested by his recipient:

I wrote in order to obtain the excerpts that *Ricordi* publishes immediately, so that I *too* can dispose of them at my will. If rather than one *Rossini*, we have two of them, all the better.⁴⁶

Although it is reasonable and intriguing to hypothesise that Castil-Blaze's correspondent with regard to *Elisa e Claudio* was Carpani, there is no evidence of direct contact between the two. The only time Castil-Blaze mentioned the Italian author was in *L'Opéra Italien*, in which he acknowledged Carpani as the author of *Le Rossiniane* and accused of plagiarism another crucial figure of French criticism during those years, the novelist and *litteratus* Stendhal who, in his *Vie de Rossini*, had included materials allegedly borrowed from Carpani's work.⁴⁷ At any rate, Castil-Blaze's acknowledgement of a

⁴⁵ 'Ella è così, pregiatissimo amico: *Rossini e Mercadante*, col richiamare il buon genere, ed accrescerlo di nuove ricchezze, salveranno la musica europea; e se il primo lima un po' più i suoi mirabili parti, moderando col freno della verità rispettata gl'impeti della sua facoltà creatrice, ed il secondo proseguirà a darci delle opere sì giudiziose e forbite che quella di che in oggi si inebbia la nostra Milano, la musica italiana toccherà di nuovo la perfezione, in qualunque siasi paese dell'Europa venga essa composta.' Giuseppe Carpani, "Sul *Freyschütz* del Maestro Weber," in *Le Rossiniane, ossia Lettere musico-teatrali* (Padova: Minerva, 1824), 104-5.

⁴⁶ 'Ho scritto perché me ne spediscano subito i saggi che *Ricordi* mette fuori di mano in mano, e così ne goderò io *pure* come posso. Se in luogo di un *Rossini* ne abbiamo due, tanto meglio.' Carpani, "Sul *Freyschütz*," 99.

⁴⁷ Castil-Blaze, *L'Opéra-Italien*, 439. Also, Stendhal was in Milan by the time Castil-Blaze's review was written; nevertheless, from a perusal of his writing about

colleague writing from Milan exemplified how close and overlapping were the two musical worlds, and how quickly musical innovations and information could travel between the two countries.

Castil-Blaze's interest in Mercadante remained undiminished during the following year, when he devoted a whole section of his 'Chroniques Musicales' to the life and endeavours of the young composer, a treatment that he does not appear to have accorded to any other Italian composer except Rossini and, in 1830, Niccolò Paganini.⁴⁸

Saverio Mercadante, whose reputation extends today across Italy, and who has often been indicated as a worthy rival to Rossini, was born in Naples in 1798, and completed his musical studies at the Conservatory of San Sebastiano in that city, under the direction of N. Zingarelli. At first Mercadante composed, for more than six years, a great quantity of instrumental music, overtures, ballet airs. When Zingarelli suggested he should devote himself exclusively to vocal music, in 1818 the young pupil wrote a cantata for the *Fondo* theatre. This work paved the way for such expectations, there was no hesitation in entrusting to its author *l'Apoteosi d'Ercole*, an opera destined for the theatre *San Carlo*. This second debut was still more brilliant

Mercadante's early creations, we can conclude that he did not show any particular enthusiasm for the earliest output of the Neapolitan composer: 'Mercatante [sic] de Naples me semble bien pâle ... Mais, comme la musique de Mercatante, celle de Meyerbeer ne me fait rien sentir de nouveau, malgré toute la bonne volonté du monde. [Mercadante from Naples seems to me very pale ... But, like the music of Mercadante, that of Meyerbeer does not make me hear anything new, despite all the goodwill in the world].' Stendhal, "Letter to Adolphe de Marest," August 30, 1820, no. 711; 'Les arts sont morts et enterrés. Nous aurons ici *Mercatante* [sic]. C'est le seul maestro qui se distingue un peu, avec Pacini. [The arts are dead and buried. We will have here *Mercatante*. He is the only composer who stands out a little, with Pacini.].' Stendhal, "Letter to Adolphe de Marest," May 7, 1821, no. 731, in *Stendhal: Correspondance, 1800-1821*, ed. Henri Martineau and V. Del Litto, vol. 1 (Paris: Gallimard, 1967), 1034 and 1062. For further discussion of Stendhal's musical taste in composers, see Giuseppe Pintorno, "I musicisti secondo Stendhal," in *Stendhal europeo: atti del congresso internazionale, Milano, 19-21 maggio 1992*, ed. Rosa Chigo Bezzola (Fasano: Schena, 1996), 369-82.

⁴⁸ See the list of Castil-Blaze's *feuilletons* and 'Chroniques musicales' published in the *Journal des débats* between 1820 and 1832 which are included in the Appendix of Gíslason, "Castil-Blaze," 220-49.

than the first: the piece was applauded with such excitement, and such was the audience's enthusiasm that broke out after the trio, that the maestro, called by loud shouts, came to the middle of Olympus during the performance itself, to receive the compliments and the applause lavished by his transported audience. *Violenza e Costanza*, *Anacreonte in Samo*, *il Geloso raviduto* [*ravveduto*], by the same author appeared in 1819 and 1820. The following year he gave *Scipione in Cartagine* in Rome, *Maria Stuart* in Bologna, *Elisa e Claudio* in Milan; and finally, during the last carnival, his *Andronico* succeeded completely in Venice, at the theatre *La Fenice*. Mercadante is just twenty-four years old, and can already count eight successes.⁴⁹

With writings of this sort, Castil-Blaze might well have been setting the stage for the arrival of Mercadante's music in Paris; if so, his strategy was to attract and arouse curiosity on the part of the French audience which was on the lookout for a likely competitor to Rossini.

In 1830, less than a decade after Castil-Blaze's article, in the *Revue de Paris*, Fétis dramatically scaled down Mercadante's role in Italian opera, mentioning him only in passing along with Pacini and 'some others'. Fétis lamented the almost total lack of a distinctive voice among Italian composers.

⁴⁹ 'Saverio Mercadante, dont la reputation s'étend aujourd'hui dans toute l'Italie, et que l'on a souvent signalé comme le digne rival de Rossini, est né à Naples en 1798, et a fait ses études musicales au Conservatoire de *San Sebastiano* de cette ville, sous la direction de N. Zingarelli. Mercadante composa d'abord, et pendant plus de six ans, une grande quantité de musique instrumentale, des ouvertures, des airs de ballet. Zingarelli lui ayant conseillé de se livrer exclusivement à la musique de chant. Le jeune élève écrivit en 1818 une cantate pour le théâtre *Fondo*. Cet ouvrage fit concevoir de telles espérances, qu'on n'hésita pas à confier à son auteur l'*Apoteosi d'Ercole*, opéra destiné pour le théâtre *San Carlo*. Ce second début fut encore plus brillant que le premier: on applaudit la pièce avec fureur, et l'enthousiasme du public éclata de telle sorte après le trio, que le maestro, appelé à grand cris, vint au milieu de l'Olympe, et pendant la représentation même, recevoir les félicitations et les applaudissements que lui prodiguait son auditoire transporté. *Violenza e Costanza*, *Anacreonte in Samo*, *il Geloso raviduto*, du même auteur, parurent en 1819 et en 1820. Il a donné l'année suivante *Scipione in Cartagine* à Rome, *Maria Stuart* à Bologne, *Elisa e Claudio* à Milan; et enfin, pendant le carnaval dernier, son *Andronico* a réussi complètement à Venise, au théâtre de *la Fenice*. Mercadante est à peine âgé de vingt-quatre ans, et compte déjà huit succès.' Castil-Blaze, "Chronique musicale," *Journal des débats*, May 10, 1822.

From his perspective, Mercadante and others were no more than imitators of Rossini:

The number of dramatic composers diminishes every day, and that must be because every day the ancient classical land of music offers fewer opportunities to employ their talent. Pacini, Mercadante, and some others are nothing but imitators of Rossini, and they do nothing but replicate themselves in the small number of operas they perform; the latter has maintained a stubborn silence for a while. Donizetti, and others of the same ilk, do not even deserve a mention; Morlacchi did not succeed in his last productions; Generali seems exhausted; Bellini is the only one that shows some talent; but the circumstances are so unfavourable that this talent does not find the productivity which once used to warrant the reputation and the existence of the composers. What will be the end of this state of things? We fear to predict it.⁵⁰

Ten years later, Fétis provided a much more detailed account of Mercadante in the *Biographie universelle*. This, however, was hardly more complimentary than the brief mention in the *Revue musicale*:

Considered over the whole of his career, Mercadante makes us regret that he rushed too much with his works and did not entirely accomplish what could have been expected of him. The gift of creativity that would allow him to cope with transformations was not given to him; however, he possessed a natural melody, a feeling for good harmony, an instinct for

⁵⁰ 'Le nombre des compositeurs dramatiques diminue chaque jour, et cela doit être, car chaque jour l'ancienne terre classique de la musique leur offre moins de ressources pour l'emploi de leur talent. Pacini, Mercadante, et quelques autres n'ont été que les imitateurs de Rossini, et ne font que se répéter dans les petit nombre d'ouvrages qu'ils donnent; le dernier garde depuis quelque temps un silence obstiné. Les Donizetti, et autres de même force, ne méritent guère qu'on n'en parle; Morlacchi n'a pas réussi dans ses derniers productions; Generali semble épuisé. Bellini est le seul qui montre du talent; mais les circonstances sont si peu favorables, que ce talent ne trouve point cette activité d'emploi qui assurait autrefois la réputation et l'existence des compositeurs. Quelle sera la fin de cet état de choses? Nous craignons bien de la prévoir.' François-Joseph Fétis, "Nouvelles Étrangères," *Revue Musicale* 4 (1830), 68-9.

instrumentation and a knowledge of voices, many dramatic sentiments, so that one could have hoped to see a certain number of complete works worthy of the esteem of the experts produced by his pen. Unfortunately the young Italian artists of our time learn very early to despise their art. Observing the transitoriness of works that were well-received by the audience at their outset, and the applause lavished on some pieces that they themselves despise, they have been persuaded that there is no reality in art, and that successes are a lottery which must be played often in order to win sometimes. To play this game hoping for luck, they observe the predilections of the audience; if, by chance, they seem to like any idea, immediately that becomes a pattern according to which they formulate everything, and all operas reproduce copies of this pattern until it becomes worn out. It is no longer art, it is manufacturing. Furthermore, in Italy the work of composers is paid so badly that one must do a lot quickly to win one's bread. For this reason, artists of real value, such as Mercadante, spend their whole existence without leaving anything to survive them.⁵¹

⁵¹ 'Considéré dans l'ensemble de sa carrière, Mercadante fait regretter qu'il ait mis trop de précipitation dans ses travaux et n'ait pas réalisé ce qu'on pouvait attendre de lui. Le don d'invention qui fait subir à l'art des transformations ne lui avait pas été accordé; mais il y avait en lui assez de mélodie naturelle, de sentiment de bonne harmonie, d'instinct et d'instrumentation et de connaissance des voix, assez même de sentiment dramatique pour qu'on pût espérer de voir produire par sa plume un certain nombre d'ouvrages complets, dignes de l'estime des connaisseurs. Malheureusement les jeunes artistes italiens de notre époque apprennent de bonne heure à mépriser leur art. En voyant le peu de durée des choses que le public a le mieux accueillies dans l'origine, et des applaudissemens prodigués à des morceaux qu'eux-mêmes méprisent, tandis que d'autres, travaillés avec plus de soin, et meilleurs en effet, sont reçus avec dédain, ils se persuadent qu'il n'y a point de réalité dans l'art, et que les succès sont une loterie à laquelle il faut mettre souvent pour gagner quelquefois. Pour jouer ce jeu avec quelque espoir de bonheur, ils observent les penchants du public; si, par hasard, quelque forme semble lui plaire, aussitôt elle devient un type sur quoi tout se formule, et tous les opéras reproduisent des copies de ce type jusqu'à ce qu'il soit usé. Ce n'est plus de l'art, c'est de la fabrique. D'ailleurs, on paye si mal en Italie les travaux des compositeurs, qu'il faut faire vite et beaucoup pour avoir du pain. C'est ainsi que des artistes d'une valeur réelle, tels que Mercadante, usent toute une existence sans rien laisser qui leur survive.' François Fétis, "Mercadante," *Biographie universelle des musiciens*, vol. 6 (Paris: Fournier, 1840), 375-6.

Fétis' assessment of Mercadante as a whole went beyond the specifics of the composer's work and became a bitter observation and critique of the opera industry in Italy: in his view Mercadante, although a first-rank composer, did not fully realise his potential because he was subject to the financial and temporal constraints which governed Italian operatic production and undermined any creative drive by composers. According to Fétis, the response of the audience affected Mercadante's choices to a great extent, and his adherence to established and safe models did not allow his creativity to develop fully.

In 1862, Fétis updated his article on Mercadante for a new edition of the *Biographie*. At that point he omitted the section about the general decline of Italian composers, and added instead a new paragraph of appreciation, assessing the composer's work as a whole:

Nevertheless, this artist is certainly the last Italian maestro who conserved in his works the traditions of the good school. His scores are well written, and a sentiment of serious art, which disappeared after him, can be found in them. Unfortunately he had too great a love of noise and rhythmic effects. A good harmonist, he proved, in his masses and other sacred works, a knowledge that led him to be chosen for the direction of the Royal Conservatory of Naples in 1840, which he has kept to date (1862).⁵²

⁵² 'Toutefois, il est certain que cet artiste est le dernier maître italien qui conserva dans ses ouvrages les traditions de la bonne école. Ses partitions sont bien écrites, et l'on y trouve un sentiment d'art sérieux qui a disparu après lui. Malheureusement il aimait trop le bruit et les effets du rythme. Bon harmoniste, il a donné, dans ses messes et autres ouvrages de musique d'église, les preuves d'un savoir qui l'a fait choisis, en 1840, pour la direction du Conservatoire royal de Naples, qu'il a conservée jusqu'à ce jour (1862).' Fétis, "Mercadante", *Biographie universelle des musiciens*, 2nd. ed. Paris, 1862, 89. In the 1878 edition of his *Biographie Universelle*, in particular in the *Supplements*, Fétis provides a more thorough and complete account of Mercadante's output, along with a debate over his birthplace, contended between Naples and Altamura, and choosing the latter, a theory completely challenged by Mercadante's most renowned biographer, Francesco Florimo. Compared with the previous entries, the article is a more dry account, and does not allow room for criticism or personal opinion.

This new version of Fétis's entry was written at a time when he was already engaged in negative criticism about Verdi's operas, a striking feature of his late writing and indeed a relevant debate that animated the music criticism of the second half of the nineteenth century.⁵³ Fétis regarded Verdi's innovations as a threat to the principles of tradition, therefore feeling the need to acknowledge and even to establish the supremacy of Mercadante's learned style.⁵⁴

By the early decades of the twentieth century, the French assessment of Mercadante was very articulate, woven into the fabric of a broader narrative that summarised and assimilated the destiny of his fellow Italian composers against the backdrop of the rise of Verdi. The consensus was that Mercadante's vast compositional output had earned him a predominant position in music history; and even if his style was not particularly original, his artistry allowed him to become a stronghold of tradition, and to put to good use what he had learned from his masters, especially in his handling of vocal writing. In particular, his mastery in treating the voice was regarded as unique. In this respect, Mercadante's style was often placed between that of Bellini and Donizetti, or described as the perfect compromise between the sweetness of Bellini and the energy of Rossini:

If we were to transcribe here the many press opinions about Mercadante's operas in his happiest period, those praises and observations, by changing the date, would seem to have been offered for maestro Verdi, as they fit him so well. The greatest

⁵³ Fétis' views were rather influential, and were selectively quoted and criticised by other commentators. Arthur Pougin, in the 1872 "Nécrologie Musicale 1870-71," in *Le Ménestrel*, which, by coincidence, he dedicated to both Fétis and Mercadante, quoted verbatim from Fétis' most recent entry in the *Biographie* – Arthur Pougin, "Nécrologie Musicale 1870-71," *Le Ménestrel*, January 28, 1872.

⁵⁴ Indeed, as early as 1849 Fétis had published two articles criticising Verdi's operas, blaming the Italian publisher Ricordi for being his main supporter. The focus of his negative criticism was Verdi's declaimed vocal writing which, according to Fétis, was left completely to singers with no artistic imagination, with loud instrumentation, a poverty of musical invention, and a lack of symmetry in the building of his musical phrases. Massimo Mila, "Fétis e Verdi, ovvero gli infortuni della critica," *Atti del III Congresso internazionale di studi verdiani* (Parma: Istituto di Studi Verdiani, 1974), 312-21; Paola Colombo, "Fétis-Verdi: cronaca di una polemica," *Nuova Rivista musicale italiana* 25 (1991), 391-425.

praise addressed to him is for the dramatic part; then of all his pieces the short tessitura is highlighted, the replication of these in part or in full, the elimination of the lengthy solos in the great ensemble scenes, the warmth and liveliness in the action, the colourful and energetic instrumentation, a fortunate mixture, in sum, of Rossini and Bellini, a *magnificent principle of innovation* tending to mould the excessive gaiety of the first with the excessive sweetness of the other.⁵⁵

Albert Lavignac, for instance, in his writing published in 1925, identified in *I Normanni a Parigi* (1832) the earliest signs of a major stylistic emancipation from the Rossinian manner. Lavignac also indicated in *Il Giuramento* the beginning of a new artistic season which, even if short-lived, saw the emergence of his best works.

It can be said that with *Giuramento* Mercadante affirmed his new way of composing, with his more dramatic, accentuated style, with a more elaborate orchestration, with the different methods used in the *development* and *ensemble* of the voices. He also introduced some innovations in the forms of the cadences, in the duration of the pieces, expanding the *ensembles* and the *finales*.⁵⁶

He thus synthesised Mercadante's contribution to Italian opera:

⁵⁵ 'Se noi trascrivessimo qui parecchi dei giudizi della stampa a proposito delle opere del Mercadante nel di lui periodo più felice, quelle lodi e quelle osservazioni, cambiandovisi data, potrebbero parer dettate pel maestro Verdi, tanto gli vanno a capello. Il maggior encomio che gli si fa è per la parte drammatica; poi dei suoi pezzi si mette in rilievo la tessitura corta, il replicarli meno in parte od in tutto, l'abolizione dei lunghi assolo nelle grandi scene di assieme, il calore e la vita nell'azione, lo strumentale energico e colorito, un felice impasto, insomma, di Rossini e di Bellini, un *magnifico principio d'innovazione* tendente a fondere la troppa gagliardia dell'uno, colla troppa dolcezza dell'altro.' See "Saverio Mercadante," *Omnibus pittoresco* 17 (1839), cited in Kowals, "Issues of Style," 18.

⁵⁶ 'L'on peut dire qu'avec le *Giuramento* Mercadante affirmait sa nouvelle manière de composer, par son style dramatique plus accentué, par l'orchestration plus fouillée, par la façon différente employée dans le *développement* et dans l'*ensemble* des voix. Il fit aussi des innovations dans la forme des cadences, dans la durée des morceaux, en donnant plus d'ampleur aux *ensembles* et aux *finales*.' Albert Lavignac, *Encyclopédie de la musique et Dictionnaire du Conservatoire – Première Partie, Italie et Allemagne* (Paris: Delagrave, 1925), 869.

All this enormous output could not grant Mercadante a predominant position in the history of music, among those who contributed to the progress of this art. He did not possess the precious gift of originality, but had a talent for assimilation, and his style always floated between the style of Bellini and the style of Donizetti. Thanks to his artistry, he hid his lack of imagination, provoking admiration rather than pleasure. His knowledge of voices is well known, and his serious and difficult vocal lines are accompanied by a refined harmonisation. Working on the instrumentation more than did his predecessors or his contemporaries, he succeeded in distinguishing himself in this respect, although he had a fault of exaggerating the pompous sonorities. Of these qualities, to which we must add his well-developed dramatic sentiment, he gave great proof in his works, always correctly written and in which he conserved the tradition of the good Italian school. However, in all fields where he could easily have achieved the top position, he was easily defeated by the newborn genius of Verdi, who gloriously marked the synthesis, the evolution and the end of the fruitful cycle to which Rossini has given his name.⁵⁷

It is likely that the many assessments and biographical opinions found in French treatises and compendia were derived at least in part from Italian criticism and vice versa. Nineteenth-century critics and music historians were

⁵⁷ 'Toute cette énorme production ne put cependant assurer à Mercadante, dans l'histoire de la musique, une place prépondérante parmi ceux qui aidèrent au progrès de cet art. Il n'eut pas le don précieux de l'originalité, mais un talent d'assimilation, et son style flotta toujours entre le style de Bellini et le style de Donizetti. A force d'art il dissimula le manque d'imagination, provoquant plutôt l'admiration que le plaisir. La connaissance qu'il avait des voix est notoire, et ses chants sérieux et difficiles sont accompagnés par une harmonisation recherchée. Travaillant l'instrumentation plus que ne l'avaient fait ses prédécesseurs et ses contemporains, il réussit à se distinguer dans cette partie, bien qu'il eut le défaut d'exagérer les sonorités éclatantes. De ces qualités, auxquelles il faut joindre le sentiment dramatique très développé chez lui, il donna des grandes preuves dans ses œuvres, toujours correctement écrites et dans lesquelles il conserva la tradition de la bonne école italienne. Mais dans tous les domaines où il aurait pu facilement tenir la première place, il fut vaincu facilement par le génie naissant de Verdi, qui marque glorieusement la synthèse, l'évolution et la fin du cycle fécond auquel Rossini a donné son nom.' Albert Lavignac, *Encyclopédie*, 870.

indeed looking for terms of comparison, critical paradigms and the opinions of others while constructing their own viewpoints. In an attempt to create a coherent critical thread, both Italian and French commentators maintained a comfortable repository of information but also of pre-packaged opinions, which became harder to challenge as the century progressed. In particular on the French side, the model established by Fétis was followed by many and the monumental effort of his *Biographie universelle* proved highly influential to all subsequent biographers and critics.

Indeed, against the context of Franco-Italian cultural transfer, it would be surprising if the assessment of Mercadante by the most authoritative nineteenth-century historian of the Neapolitan school, Mercadante's colleague and lifelong friend Francesco Florimo, did not affect this mutual exchange. Florimo wrote two biographical entries on Mercadante, the first in his *Cenno storico sulla scuola musicale di Napoli* (1869), and the second in *La scuola musicale di Napoli ed i suoi Conservatori* (1880-1883).⁵⁸ Both entries erroneously state that Mercadante was born in Naples in 1797, and reject Fétis' notion that the composer was born in Altamura.⁵⁹ Most importantly, while the first account includes an extremely positive assessment of Mercadante's work and a defence of his role in the history of operatic composition, the 1881 article was a surprisingly negative revisionist account, in which all the positive remarks found in the earlier entry were reversed. Rossini, Bellini, Donizetti and Verdi were considered the 'luminaries of nineteenth-century Italian opera', thus obscuring Mercadante and Pacini.⁶⁰

Much has been written about the possible reasons lying behind the apparent betrayal perpetrated by one of Mercadante's most assiduous confidants. Karen Bryan, for instance, has suggested that Florimo's personal taste and preference for Bellini was one of the principal reasons.⁶¹ Perhaps

⁵⁸ Francesco Florimo, "Saverio Mercadante," in *Cenno storico sulla Scuola musicale di Napoli* (Napoli: Rocco, 1869), 640-67; Francesco Florimo, "Francesco Saverio Mercadante," in *La scuola Musicale di Napoli e I suoi Conservatori* (Naples, 1881-1883), facsimile reprint (Bologna: Forni, 1969), vol. 3, 110-23.

⁵⁹ Kowals, "Issues of Style," 14-5.

⁶⁰ Bryan, "Experiment in Form," 14.

⁶¹ Ibid.

Florimo did not feel sufficiently acknowledged in the successes which Mercadante achieved during his lifetime, and waited until his death to launch an attack on his late friend.⁶² Moreover, the growing consensus with regard to Giuseppe Verdi caused a change of heart in Florimo, who felt compelled to join Verdi's followers. Whatever the reason, well into the twentieth century Mercadante's image also remained damaged by Florimo's sudden and ostensibly disloyal change of heart. An important thread in the early twentieth-century bibliography of the composer actually stemmed from an effort to 'rescue' Mercadante from Florimo's unjust censure.⁶³

However, well away from the clamours of the debate, the praise of Mercadante contained in Florimo's 1869 *Cenno storico* deserves to be quoted, for it provides attractive points of comparison with French criticism:

At that time, a knowledgeable French critic in one of his passionate articles about Mercadante accused him of a lack of genius, and raised as evidence of his conviction the composer's silence during his stay in Spain, defining his *past splendour as an ephemeral meteor*. In response, there is no need to say anything but that the evidence is not completely accurate, given that we have seen that Mercadante was not idle in the two years he spent in the Iberian peninsula, because he composed six operas and one farsa, and all, to a greater or lesser extent, achieved good success. The critic's fortunate mistake, though, served to dent the composer's pride, to awaken his self-esteem, to the point that, having tortured his fervid creativity, he started to find that style that should have characterised him, and those artistic forms that should have given their own characteristics to his music. In fact, after that time, Mercadante dismissed this first way of composing, which smacked too much of Rossini in all composers who came after that great artistic giant: the

⁶² The Altamuran, Biagio Notarnicola, was among those who defended Mercadante from Florimo's insinuations and accused Verdi of stealing his ideas. See a synthesis of this debate in Kowals, "Issues of Style," 12-14.

⁶³ Notarnicola, *Saverio Mercadante*; Notarnicola, *Verdi non ha vinto Mercadante*; Schmid, "Rediscovering Mercadante," 332-7.

spontaneous tendency of young talents was to follow the steps of the great innovator.⁶⁴

Florimo might well have had in mind Fétis' 1830 excoriation of Italian composers, which spoke of a 'stubborn silence' on Mercadante's part.⁶⁵ Be that as it may, the quotation is relevant for a number of reasons: Florimo and Mercadante were aware of criticism expressed in the French press and often shared their views about it in their correspondence. Most importantly, Florimo stated clearly that French criticism did partly affect Mercadante's quest for an alternative to Rossinian formal procedures and other stylistic devices. Florimo's example clearly demonstrated how a composer's work could not only be reflected by the critics, but also affected by the intersection between Italian and French criticism. Using an effective rhetorical tool, by indicating that the French critic was wrong Florimo aimed to show how good Mercadante was, and how far the composer had been able to subvert and turn the negative criticism expressed in the foreign press into a positive outcome, marking the beginning of his so-called 'reform period'. We know that the process that led Mercadante, as well as other Italian composers, toward a change of heart in his compositional style was certainly complex and elaborate. Nevertheless, from Florimo's and Mercadante's letters and the comments in the press of the time, we know that there is a good deal of truth in Florimo's words: Mercadante followed the requests coming from music critics at least as much as the latter followed him.

⁶⁴ 'In quel tempo un sapiente critico francese in un suo passionato articolo intorno a Mercadante lo tacciò di *pochezza d'ingegno*, ed a prova del suo assunto addusse il silenzio del compositore durante il suo soggiorno in Ispagna, dichiarando il suo *splendore passato una meteora fuggitiva*. In risposta non è necessario dire altro se non che la pruova è poco esatta, avendo noi veduto che Mercadante non restò inoperoso nei due anni che soggiornò nella Penisola Iberica, perché compose sei opere ed una farsa, che tutte, qual più qual meno, ebbero felice successo. Il fortunato errore del critico però valse alquanto a scuotere l'orgoglio del compositore, a svegliare il suo amor proprio, a tal punto che messo a tortura il suo fervido ingegno, cominciò a ritrovare quella maniera che doveva individualizzarlo, e quelle forme artistiche che dovevano dare alla sua musica una fisionomia tutta propria. Infatti dopo tal tempo Mercadante smesse quella prima maniera di comporre, la quale pur troppo sapeva del Rossini in tutti gli scrittori sorti dopo che propoteva sul gusto quel gran colosso dell'arte: la spontanea tendenza dei giovani ingegni era di modellarsi sull'arditezza e sulle novità del grande innovatore.' Francesco Florimo, *Cenno storico*, 648.

⁶⁵ See quotation earlier in this chapter.

1.5 Conclusion

The questions and evidence discussed in this chapter indicate that it is indeed worth examining the French reception of Mercadante's early operas. Not only does discussion of the French reception of his work represent a significant contribution to disentangling the composer's general critical fortune, but it also provides one more tool to unpack the debate about the French factors that weighed on his mature style. Indeed, as Florimo's quotation testifies, Mercadante constantly monitored the critical opinions expressed in the press, and was even moved by criticism to effect change, a fact that is also confirmed in his letters.

Furthermore, based on the critical reception of the composer, it is already possible to observe in synthesis the trajectory of Mercadante's fortunes in French and Italian criticism in the early 1820s and 1830s. Following the excitement of the early 1820s expressed by Carpani and Castil-Blaze, a consistent tone of disillusionment characterised Mercadante's late nineteenth-century reception, after his operas actually proved their worth before the Parisian audience. However, as exemplified by Blaze de Bury's statement that opened this chapter, in the late 1830s and early 1840s, Mercadante's shift to his 'mature' style generated a different set of critical opinions; the critical approval received in France seemed at a certain point to be proportional to the effectiveness with which he progressively detached from the 'Italian' way of composing. It is therefore necessary also to distinguish different stages in the reception of Mercadante's work: this thesis gathers and presents sources that probe the earliest years of that impact.

Undoubtedly, Mercadante's earliest endeavours, even as a student, were surrounded by anxious expectations, indicating that he was a promising heir, if not a competitor, to Rossini. David Kimbell has articulated this point clearly, indicating that Mercadante indeed shared a common destiny with many of his contemporaries, most particularly Giovanni Pacini. However, he also emphasises that, in Mercadante's case, there was a visible attempt on the critics' part to single him out as a special case from the outset of his career.

Of the dozens of composers who made their debut in the opera house between 1815 and 1825, only one was regarded as potentially a serious rival to Rossini, and that was Mercadante,

particularly after the triumph of his seventh opera *Elisa e Claudio* at La Scala in 1821. 'If we have two Rossinis', remarked Carpani, 'so much the better' (Mooney 1970: 8-9). Carpani's comment need not to be taken to imply that Mercadante made a better job of imitating Rossini than the rest did. It is more likely that audiences and critics sensed in his music a certain personal quality, an idiosyncrasy of sound, that raised it above incompetent anonymity.⁶⁶

Simultaneously, across the Alps, Castil-Blaze's attention and the feverish anticipation expressed in his 1822 *feuilleton* set an even broader framework of expectations that prepared the critical ground for the Parisian reception of Mercadante's earliest work.

By providing evidence from the French reviews of the time, the next chapters will directly observe the Parisian reception of Mercadante's early production, and the extent to which his output penetrated France during the time spanning the first of his French premieres, *Elisa e Claudio* in 1823, and his fundamental six-month stay in Paris between 1835 and 1836, when *I briganti* saw the light of day. In particular, Chapter 2 gathers and discusses the critical response to *Elisa e Claudio*, the first of Mercadante's international successes to hit the stage of the Théâtre Italien, and destined partly to disappoint the positive climate of expectation set by Castil-Blaze just one year before its Parisian premiere.

⁶⁶ David Kimbell, *Italian Opera* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 467-8.

2. *Elisa e Claudio* at the Théâtre Italien (1823)

In Italy the names that are brought forward to make one forget Rossini are those of Mercadante, Pacini, Meyerbeer. The first of these composers, the author of *Elisa e Claudio*, has genius and inner fire, without which nothing can be done in art.¹

[Stendhal, Naples, September 30, 1825]

Stendhal's statement is especially significant considering the opposite views expressed by the French writer about the composer only a few years earlier: in 1821 Stendhal had deemed Mercadante to be a somewhat 'pale' composer, who left him rather unimpressed.² In contrast with the initial reluctance expressed in his 1820 letters, concerning not only Mercadante but also Meyerbeer and Pacini, in 1825 Stendhal showed a more convinced adherence to the widespread notion that was being built around some of the unique features of Mercadante's style. Stendhal's words are also significant for other reasons, however. Firstly, they establish an important correlation between a younger generation of composers and their older and illustrious master, Rossini. Secondly, they show how, in contemporary literature, Rossini's legacy was romanticised almost as much as the eminence of his career was praised. As seen in Carpani and Castil-Blaze, the anticipation of the rise of a new musical genius, someone who could equal and compete with Rossini, was a recurring theme in French criticism of the 1820s. All the composers mentioned in Stendhal's letter shared a common fate at the time, starting their careers in the shadow of Rossini. Thirdly, Stendhal listed the names of three composers who were prominent in Italy as well as familiar to a

¹ 'In Italia i nomi che si presentano per far dimenticare Rossini sono quelli di Mercadante, Pacini, Meyerbeer. Il primo di questi compositori, l'autore di *Elisa e Claudio*, ha del genio e del fuoco interiore, senza di che non si fa niente in arte.' Stendhal, Naples, September 30 1825, cited in Gaspare N. Vetro, "Saverio Mercadante Maestro di Cappella in Novara," in Gian-Luca Petrucci and Giacinto Moramarco, eds., *Saggi su Saverio Mercadante* (Cassano delle Murge: Messaggi, 1992), 162.

² See Chapter 1, footnote 47.

French literate audience. Indeed, throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, in the accounts of contemporary music historians and critics, Rossini remained an undisputed presence, whereas two of the three younger composers mentioned by Stendhal enjoyed only uneven fortunes and remained somewhat neglected. The one exception was of course Meyerbeer, who at the time was known first and foremost as a composer of Italian opera. He had started his career in and for Italy, with works such as *Romilda e Costanza* (1817), *Semiramide riconosciuta* (1819), *Emma di Resburgo* (1819) and, above all, *Il Crociato in Egitto* (1825). Pacini, on the other hand, was a prominent personality among the Parisian Franco-Italian musical intelligentsia, combining his compositional work with his prolific activity as a music publisher, and active in diffusing the operas of his fellow contemporary Italian composers, such as Mercadante himself.

The final and, for our purposes, most significant element is Stendhal's direct identification of Mercadante with his seventh opera, *Elisa e Claudio* (1821), which is in line with much European criticism and remained unaltered up to the appearance of *Il giuramento* in 1837. At that point, *Il giuramento* was linked with *Elisa e Claudio* at a time when music critics and late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century scholars were looking for parameters by which to identify Mercadante to their readers. However, *Il giuramento* represented a very different case, as it was traditionally viewed as the watershed of his 'reform operas', even according to Mercadante himself. Thus, while it has received a certain amount of scholarly attention, literature on *Elisa e Claudio* is scant.³ The publication in 1989 of the facsimile edition of the 1822 Ricordi piano vocal score in the series *Early Romantic Opera* represented an important step toward the rescue of *Elisa e Claudio* from oblivion.⁴ Despite the lack of an extensive study of the score and of the history of the performance of the opera, many scholars whose contributions are reflected in the present discussion have at least touched on this composition.

³ See, for instance, the recent monograph by Ernesto Pulignano, *Il giuramento di Rossi e Mercadante* (Turin: EDT, 2007).

⁴ Philip Gossett, ed., *Elisa e Claudio and Excerpts from L'Apoteosi d'Ercole: A facsimile edition of the printed piano-vocal score*, Italian Opera, 1810-1840, vol. 14 (New York: Garland, 1989).

Elisa e Claudio was indeed the first of Mercadante's operas to enjoy widespread success in Italy, and the choice of this opera for Mercadante's debut at the Théâtre Italien in 1823 initiated a rather successful trajectory abroad. Before turning to that, it is important to examine the circumstances of the world premiere of the opera in Milan on 30 October 1821, and to explore its early critical reception in Italy. There were indeed substantial differences in the reception of the work in the two countries. In fact, the overwhelming success achieved in Italy was not confirmed by the critical response to the appearance of *Elisa e Claudio* on the Parisian stage.

2.1 The Genesis of *Elisa e Claudio*

In his introduction to the facsimile edition of the Ricordi piano vocal score, Gossett has outlined the circumstances of the genesis and reception of *Elisa e Claudio*.⁵ Before writing *Elisa e Claudio*, Mercadante had secured his first theatrical success with his opera *L'apoteosi d' Ercole*, commissioned for the birthday of Prince Francesco, Duke of Calabria, who would rule the kingdom of Naples from 1825 until his death in 1830.⁶ Premiered at the Teatro San Carlo on 19 August 1819, *L'apoteosi d' Ercole* was set to a libretto that Giovanni Schmidt had adapted from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, and owed its mythological subject to the dedicatee, more or less plausibly represented as Hercules. *L'apoteosi*, which Gossett has described as 'little more than a student work: correct, but largely uninspired',⁷ was well received and inaugurated an intense period for Mercadante. Nine new operas were composed in the following three years for the principal theatres in Naples and in northern Italy, where his fame was rapidly expanding.⁸

⁵ Gossett, "Introduction," in *Elisa e Claudio*, i-viii.

⁶ Michael Wittmann, "Riflessioni per una valutazione delle composizioni operistiche di Saverio Mercadante," in Petrucci and Moramarco, *Saggi su Saverio Mercadante*, 25.

⁷ Gossett, "Introduction," in *Elisa e Claudio*, iii.

⁸ Among the performances of Mercadante operas after *L'Apoteosi* should be mentioned *Violenza e Costanza* at the Teatro Nuovo in Naples and *Anacreonte in Samo* at Teatro San Carlo in 1820; *Andronico*, Teatro La Fenice in Venice and *Maria Stuarda Regina di Scozia*, Comunale in Bologna, 1821; *Alfonso ed Elisa*, Mantua and *Amleto*, La Scala in Milan, 1822.

According to Michael Wittmann, during these years Mercadante encountered difficulties in Naples when his support for the 1820-21 revolutions became apparent:

With *L'apoteosi d'Ercole*, Mercadante was recognised as a professional operatic composer. Although chosen as a musical figurehead for the Bourbon Restoration, however, his attitude during the revolution in Naples in 1820-21 put an end to the associated career opportunities. After the suppression of the Carbonarists, the production of his third opera for San Carlo, *Maria Stuarda*, an unmistakable tribute to the union of king and people and thus to the idea of constitutional monarchy, was cancelled even before its premiere, as was a commission from Palermo. He was forced to leave the conservatory, and had to depend subsequently on commissions from northern Italy.⁹

If this is true, then the subject of *Elisa e Claudio* can be read as a cautious attempt to elude the potential interference of the Milanese censorship. It is an 'innocuous reworking' of *Il matrimonio segreto* by Cimarosa, and it

subtly illustrates the precedence of natural rights over the privileges of nobility, and thus represents the ordinary citizen's desire for self-assertion. This message, which could not be disputed by official censorship, contributed greatly to its success.¹⁰

Whatever the exact circumstances behind the choice of its subject, *Elisa e Claudio, ossia l'amore protetto dall'amicizia* received the greatest acclaim of all Mercadante's early operas. The libretto by Luigi Romanelli is based on Filippo Casari's play *Rosella* (Bologna, 1806) and alternates between maudlin solos and classical *buffo* situations, bestowing the nuances of the *drama*

⁹ Wittmann, "Mercadante, Saverio." Fétis read this event differently, stating that Mercadante was invited to leave the Naples Conservatory because he set Mozart's quartets for orchestra.

¹⁰ Wittmann, "Mercadante, Saverio."

semiserio upon a typically comic substance.¹¹ The plot centres on two young lovers, Elisa (Soprano) and Claudio (Tenor), secretly married and parents of two children, and their elderly antagonist, Conte Arnolfo (Bass), Claudio's father, who for financial reasons wants his son to marry Silvia (Soprano), the daughter of Marchese Tricotazio (Bass). Claudio's stubborn refusal causes his father to confine him to his chambers for about a year. The opera begins at this point, with the Marchese visiting Conte Arnolfo with his daughter Silvia. The latter is followed by her lover, Celso, who in order to be with her has taken service with the Marchese as a servant. *Topoi* typical of *opera buffa*, such as disguises and misunderstandings, are set alongside dramatic elements. To begin with, the forced separation of the two lovers caused by Arnolfo, and Elisa's inner suffering caused by the abduction of her children, enriches the plot with trigger opportunities for lyrical scenes. The libretto runs the gamut of well-studied theatrical effects, which Mercadante emphasises through the music, creating a score alternately 'amusing and touching'.¹² The marriage of Celso and Silvia and the blessing of the union of Elisa and Claudio mark the opera's happy ending.

Elisa e Claudio undoubtedly represented a sudden shift in Mercadante's early creative period, characterised by a substantial number of *opera serie* based mostly on classical subjects of Metastasian inspiration. It was the first of two *melodrammi semiseri* which Mercadante wrote early in his career, together with *Il posto abbandonato*, to a libretto by Felice Romani (Milan: La Scala, 1822). It is no surprise that as *Elisa e Claudio* began to circulate it was sometimes referred to as an *opera buffa*. The distinction between *opera semiseria* and *buffa* was becoming increasingly blurred, as the two genres relied upon similar languages and situations.¹³ In his discussion of the genre,

¹¹ Luigi Romanelli (1751–1839) was for a long time librettist at La Scala. He wrote the libretto for Rossini's *La pietra del paragone*, which received its premiere on September 26, 1812. Of Arcadian literary origins, he was successful mainly as a writer of comedies in the early stages of his career, and then as an exponent of the *semiserio* genre in the early 1820s. John Black, "Romanelli, Luigi," in *Grove Music Online*, ed. Deane Root, accessed May 10, 2011, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/23731>.

¹² Gossett, *Elisa e Claudio*, vi.

¹³ See Hervé Lacombe, ed., *L'Opéra en France et en Italie (1791–1925): Une Scène privilégiée d'échanges littéraires et musicaux* (Paris: Société française de musicologie,

Emanuele Senici has argued that the coexistence of comic and serious elements was a less distinctive feature of the *semiserio* genre; instead, by and large, the presence of a *basso buffo* charged with his critical force against the aristocratic background of *opera buffa* was an element crucial to the distinction between a *serio* and a *semiserio* melodrama.¹⁴ The social implications of *Elisa e Claudio* fit very well with this description. In addition, this characteristic was one of the most successful elements in the reception of *Elisa e Claudio* both in Italy and in France. It is likely that the presence of the emerging young bass Luigi Lablache was a key factor in the positive outcome of the opera. Indeed, it may even have affected its original conception, influencing the choice of the subject. To be sure, the role Lablache played in *Elisa e Claudio* weighed positively on the development of his career; his name remained connected with his creation of Conte Arnaldo during the 1820s. Until Bellini's *Il pirata* (1827), *Elisa e Claudio* enjoyed great prominence, and had a stable position in the European repertoire.¹⁵

2.2 The Milanese Premiere

In a letter written many years later, Mercadante indicated that the premiere of *Elisa e Claudio* in Milan had been an unsurpassed success in his career, equalled perhaps only by the debut of *Il giuramento* at La Scala in 1837.¹⁶ The cast included several well-established Rossinian singers already popular at La Scala: Teresa Belloc as Elisa, Domenico Donzelli as Claudio, Luigi Lablache as Conte Arnaldo, Margherita Schira as Carlotta, and Nicola De Grecis as Marchese Tricotazio. During that year, the same performers were involved in productions such as Rossini's *La donna del lago* during the carnival season and *La Cenerentola*, which appeared alongside *Elisa* in the autumn season.

2000); Francesco Izzo, "Laughter Between Two Revolutions: Opera Buffa in Italy, 1831-1848," (PhD diss., New York University, 2003), 74-132.

¹⁴ Emanuele Senici, *Landscape and Gender in Italian Opera: The Alpine Virgin from Bellini to Puccini* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 153-61.

¹⁵ Wittmann, "Riflessioni," in Petrucci and Moramarco, *Saggi su Saverio Mercadante*, 24-7.

¹⁶ Letter to Florimo, March 30, 1837, Santo Palermo, *Biografia – Epistolario*, no. 65 (Fasano: Schena, 1983), 169-70.

The range of published music criticism in Italy during the 1820s hardly compares to the massive amount of material available in the Parisian press of the same period. One review of the world premiere, however, published in *Il corriere delle dame* on 3 November 1821, provides meaningful glimpses into the reception of the work in Milan. The review began as follows:

Let us move on to the novel production of signor maestro Mercadante, Neapolitan, a youth of great promise, who on Tuesday night obtained with his opera *Elisa e Claudio*, a true and enviable triumph on the stage of the Imperial Royal Teatro alla Scala.¹⁷

As Wittmann has observed, the attention devoted to *Elisa e Claudio* by the *impresa* of La Scala was possibly in response to the general climate of expectations surrounding Mercadante's rise since his early years at the Naples Conservatoire. The operatic establishment of the time, and Domenico Barbaia in particular, was looking for ways to 'market' Mercadante as a competitor to Rossini.¹⁸ Although, as I have mentioned before, this was a broader trend, Mercadante represented a particularly important case, as his endeavours were indeed registered and echoed with unusual detail across the Italian peninsula.

The review in *Il corriere delle dame* concisely summarised the different and contrasting opinions already circulating about Mercadante. A few lines regarding Mercadante's background and the homage he paid to his master Zingarelli in his public statements served to track his kinship with the Neapolitan school of Paisiello and Cimarosa, and to describe his emulation of Mozart's treatment of voices. His orchestration was compared to Haydn, Paer and Rossini:

He shows that he has learned how to imitate not only Cimarosa, but also the illustrious Mozart in his vocal works, as well as the instrumental ones of the supreme Haydn, who clearly features in

¹⁷ 'Passiamo alla novella produzione del signor maestro Mercadante, napoletano, giovine di bellissime speranze, che ottenne martedì sera colla sua opera *Elisa e Claudio* un vero e invidiabile trionfo sulla scena dell'I. R. Teatro alla Scala.' *Il corriere delle dame*, November 3, 1821.

¹⁸ Wittmann, "Mercadante, Saverio."

the distribution of the parts, in numerous chords and in the full orchestral *pieni*; at the same time, he has neither forgotten the egregious Paer nor detached himself too much from his favourite Rossini.¹⁹

In particular, as can easily be foreseen, the main issue at stake was to offer the reader an overview of the different critical opinions already circulating about Mercadante, both in relation to Rossini, but also regarding his connection with the 'old' Neapolitan school:

Some have defined him as a star who will obscure the Rossinian one; others describe him as his imitator at least; some believe that he is the creator of a new unheard style; others make of him only a follower of Paisiello and Cimarosa; some state that he is very far from any imitation of the Pesarese beacon; others say that in many ways the latter is his guide.²⁰

According to this review, one of the principal reasons for the success of *Elisa e Claudio* was that the young composer had given the audience exactly what they were longing for – an opera consisting of several novel-sounding numbers – thus putting an end to their over-long 'abstinence' from newly-composed music.

Thus then, his story is briefly told; in my opinion, Mr. Mercadante was largely worthy of those acclamations given by the Milanese audience, who had been missing a musical work that included more than one original piece for five or six years.²¹

¹⁹ 'Egli mostra di aver saputo imitare non solo Cimarosa, ma l'inclito Mozart nell'opere sue vocali, non che le strumentali del sommo Haydn, le quali nella distribuzione delle parti, in moltissimi accordi e nei pieni viaggiano chiaramente; così non ha dimenticato l'egregio Paer né si è poi scostato affatto dal prediletto Rossini.' *Il corriere delle dame*, November 3, 1821.

²⁰ 'Alcuni lo decretarono un astro che oscurò la stella Rossiniana, altri lo dicono emulo per lo meno; questi lo vogliono apportatore di un nuovo inaudito stile, quelli lo fanno seguace di Paisiello e di Cimarosa unicamente; altri lo affermano lontanissimo da ogni imitazione del Pesarese Lume; altri intendono che in molti luoghi lo abbia tolto a guida.' *Ibid.*

²¹ 'Ecco dunque narrata in breve la sua storia; e secondo io la penso, il signor Mercadante si è reso degno in gran parte di quelle acclamazioni che gli vennero

According to the critic, the composer deservedly earned a curtain call at the end of each act on every single night of the three performances.

This young man, who spontaneously states that he owes his uncommon knowledge to the renowned Zingarelli, had the great fortune to fulfill the wishes of the Milanese people in such a way that from the first note of the symphony to the last of the second act, each piece (the score includes 18 of them) was accompanied by applause; and the audience crowned the composition with endless hurrahs, and on the first three nights, after every act they invited the author many times onto the stage, honouring him with incomparable signs of extreme satisfaction.²²

Moreover, probing the weaknesses in the new opera score, the commentator built a clever critique of the faults of the contemporary school of composition, disclosing his opinion of Rossini and Rossinism and indicating presumed 'borrowings' made by Mercadante.

[Partly] it is the genre of the Sinfonia, the instrumentation of the aria by De Grecis (of which the allegro seems to me neither new nor pretty, because the sweet *gorgheggi* on the word *dying*, said with outrage, are a contradiction), the *stretta* of the duet between this and signora Belloc improves the style again, then the compassionate line sung by signora Belloc, *colle mie calde lacrime non ti mostrar tiranno, o non mi vedrai d'affanno ai piedi tuoi spirar*, is inconveniently repeated by the buffo, with the words: *Ma tu perderesti [perdesti] il cervello invece di ragazzo [dei ragazzi], all'ospital dei pazzi lo puoi ricuperar*.

comparite dal Pubblico milanese, digiuno da cinque o sei anni di un musicale componimento che racchiudesse più di un pezzo originale.' *Ibid*.

²² 'Questo giovinetto, che spontaneamente asserisce di andare debitore del suo non comune sapere al rinomato Zingarelli, ebbe la bella sorte di compiere i voti dei Milanesi e in modo tale che dalla prima nota della sinfonia all'ultima dell'atto secondo, venne ogni pezzo (che 18 circa ne racchiude lo spartito) accompagnato di plausi ed il pubblico d'interminabili evviva coronando il componimento; dopo ciascuno degli atti invitò nelle prime tre sere l'autore reiterate volte sul palcoscenico, tributandogli incomparabili segni di estrema soddisfazione.' *Ibid*.

Furthermore, there are other nice inspirations that Rossini himself stole here and there from Hummel and Cimarosa, and from which, in fact, the modern composers drew the system of assigning in the aria, cavatina and to some woodwinds that 806-bar theme, which the singers do nothing but repeat; this is absolutely a mistake that signor Mercadante makes too often, as there is a way to do it differently, as is proven by the *solo* that the first flute, signor Roboni, performs with artistry in signora Belloc's aria.²³

The passage referred to various sections of the opera, including the aria 'Se mi fai più lo stordito' (Act I, Scene 13), in which Marchese Tricotazio furiously recalls Celso and Claudio to their duties. The second reference was to the cabaletta of the duet between Elisa and the Marchese, 'Dove mai, dove trovarlo' (Act I, Scene 14), in which the female protagonist reports her pitiful situation to the Marchese, hoping to find an ally against the evil plans of Conte Arnoldo. In both cases, the major criticism raised by the reviewer was against the mixture of dramatic and comic elements within the same number. This feature was described as tasteless and inconsistent: the vocal parts, embellished and too full of repetitions, were inconsistent with the dramatic content of the libretto, and ended up trivialising some of the outstanding scenes of the plot. The coexistence of comic and dramatic elements was generally seen as a weakness in Mercadante's setting of the libretto, and possibly underpinned a broader negative criticism of the *semiserio* genre as a whole:

²³ 'Ne fanno [parte?] il genere della sinfonia, l'instrumentazione dell'aria di De Grecis (di cui l'allegro non mi sembra né nuovo né bello, poiché i dolci gorgheggi sulla parola *crepar* detta con ira, vi stanno a controsenso, la stretta del duetto fra questo e la signora Belloc ne risovviene lo stile, e nell'adagio, poi la pietosa cantilena con cui esprime la signora Belloc, *colle mie calde lacrime non ti mostrar tiranno, o non mi vedrai d'affanno ai piedi tuoi spirar*, viene assai fuori di proposito replicato dal buffo, colle parole: *Ma tu perderesti [perdesti] il cerebro invece di ragazzo [dei ragazzi], all'ospital dei pazzi lo puoi ricupera*; e inoltre s'incontrano varii altri pensierucci che Rossini istesso ha rubacchiato da Himmel or Cimarosa, dal quale appunto i moderni trassero il sistema di assegnare nell'aria, cavatine e a qualche instromento da fiato quel motivo di 806 battute che i cantanti non fa che ripetere; ed in questo pecca assolutamente troppo spesso il signor Mercadante, giacché v'è modo di farne di manco, come lo prova il *solo* che nell'aria della signora Belloc eseguisce con tanta maestria il signor Roboni, primo flauto.' *Ibid.*

the applause at the end of the Chorus of Act I could even flatter him [the composer], if the delightful and sweet tune, almost a theme and variations, were not used for the vocal line of some criminals going to abduct two children from a poor mother, and if the latter, crying 'what right ... what insolence!', did not create a very pleasant harmony of thirds with the company, so that you nearly believe that these are all compliments being paid to the bandits upon their arrival; then the *stretta* changes a little, and thus the thing proceeds better.²⁴

Furthermore, by blaming the numerous reiterations, the reviewer demonstrated a cautious but simple negative criticism of one of the most criticised features of the 'Rossinian' system. Although generally regarded as a deviation from melodic inventiveness, the device was not always deemed to be unattractive, however, especially when treated with taste and consistency, as exemplified in the andante of the cavatina 'Giusto ciel' (Act I, Scene 8), introduced by a solo flute. According to this reviewer, the real highlights of the performance were the duet for Conte Arnaldo and Claudio, 'E fia ver' (Act I, Scene 5), the Act I Finale and the duet for the two basses, the Conte and the Marchese, 'Qui fra voi' (Act II, Scene 3).

The Milanese audience was described in less than flattering terms, as a mass who, by applauding each number and every note indiscriminately, failed to distinguish and pay attention to the real highlights of the opera:

I am also persuaded that the signor maestro himself regrets that the Audience, by applauding every note, did not know how to, or did not want to, distinguish the good from the excellent and the mediocre; he is certainly aware that the beautiful duet between Donzelli and Lablache, the finale of Act I, and even more so the original duet between Lablache himself and De Grecis in Act II,

²⁴ 'gli applausi fatti al coro dell'atto I potrebbero anche lusingarlo, se il graziosissimo e dolce motivo, quasi tema di variazioni, non venisse impiegato pel canto di certi assassini che vanno a rapire due figli ad una misera madre, e se questa gridando, qual diritto... che insolenza! Non andasse formando graditissimi suoni di terze colla compagnia?, che le crederesti invece tutti complimenti all'arrivo di que' masnadieri; la stretta cambia alquanto, e la cosa allora cammina meglio.' *Ibid.*

predominate not a little above all the rest.²⁵

Despite this emphasis on the flaws and weaknesses of the opera, the critic's final verdict was in favour of the young composer:

It must be confessed, however, that also in the rest [of the opera] this novel disciple of Apollo is favoured with such great stamina and lively fire, and with a certain praiseworthy conduct generally observed in his pieces; the latter, although sometimes not of refined taste nor of sublime invention, nonetheless produces a good effect, that is to say that he is expected before long to become one of the best living authors.²⁶

Although the reviewer was sceptical of the musical discernment of the Milanese audience, the success enjoyed by the opera across the whole peninsula after its Milanese premiere suggests that the reasons for its successful debut were much more complex than merely the desire to hear new music at La Scala, and that Mercadante and Romanelli were able to satisfy an audience larger and more diverse than that of the principal Milanese theatre.

Despite the association with what, in the critical discourse of the 1820s, were deemed to be weaknesses in Rossini's style, such as repetition and the clash between lyrical pieces and virtuoso vocal writing, the reception of *Elisa e Claudio*'s premiere revealed some positive features in Mercadante's score. The main strands highlighted in the review in *Il corriere delle dame* were maintained as the opera continued its journey around Europe; aspects identified in that article would appear again in the reception of *Elisa e Claudio* in a wider context – especially the comparison with Rossini and with the Neapolitan school of Cimarosa and Paisiello on the one hand, and the sarcastic

²⁵ 'Io sono poi per credere che lo stesso signor maestro è dolente in veggendo che il Pubblico, coll'applaudire indistintamente ad ogni nota, non ha saputo, o non ha voluto sceverare il buono dall'ottimo e dal mediocre; egli sarà certo intimamente che il bel duetto fra Donzelli e Lablache che il finale dell'atto I e più ancora l'originale e bel duetto fra lo stesso Lablache e De Grecis nell'atto secondo, la vincono su tutto il resto e non di poco.' *Ibid.*

²⁶ 'È d'uopo confessare però, che anche nel resto questo novello seguace d'Apollo è favorito di sì gran lena, di vivo fuoco, e di una certa lodevole condotta generalmente osservata ne' suoi pezzi, che quantunque talvolta di non raffinato gusto e di non sublime invenzione, sortono cionullameno un buon effetto, che è quanto dire, lo presagiscono in breve uno dei migliori viventi autori.' *Ibid.*

criticism directed toward the ‘ingenuities’ of Mercadante’s dramatic rendition of the plot on the other. Given these premises, *Elisa e Claudio* raised great expectations all over the Italian operatic circuit, and after consolidating its success on the peninsula it began its international journey in 1823, when it arrived in London (April 12), Barcelona (April 16) and finally Paris.²⁷

2.3 *Elisa e Claudio* at the Théâtre Italien

On 27 May 1826, *Le Globe* published an advertisement for the second series of musical works recently added to the catalogue by music publisher Schlesinger. Mercadante’s *Elisa e Claudio* featured alongside works such as Beethoven’s *Fidelio*, Rossini’s *Maometto II* and *Matilde di Shabran*, Weber’s *Oberon* and Louis Spohr’s *Jessonda*.²⁸ The titles of the works in the list convey an eloquent sense of the operatic environment in which *Elisa e Claudio* was launched in France, against the backdrop of the simultaneous circulation in France of German, French and Italian/Rossinian operatic *koines*.

A brief comparison between Italian and French primary sources of the opera is essential for an understanding of the circumstances which led to interpolations in successive versions of the score and libretto.²⁹ The Parisian libretto, in particular, contains a variant relating to the presence in the cast of the rising star Giuditta Pasta in the title role. According to the French libretto, Elisa’s cavatina for the Parisian performance is ‘Lungi dal caro ben’, one of Giuditta Pasta’s ‘trunk’ arias, composed expressly for Pasta by Giovanni Pacini

²⁷ Alfred Loewenberg, *Annals of Opera 1597-1940* (Totowa: Rowman and Littlefield, 1978), 680.

²⁸ *Le Globe*, May 27, 1826, 359.

²⁹ The cavatina Elisa [Pasta], no. 4, is ‘Giusto ciel, deh! Più sereno’ in all sources except the Parisian libretto, where it is ‘Lungi dal caro ben’. The interpolated number appears in the piano reduction by Schlesinger (1825) and Marquerie Frères (?), suggesting an exclusively Parisian tradition. I have been able to date the appearance of Schlesinger’s score thanks to a review of the new catalogue found in *Le Globe*, May 27, 1836, 359. The aria Carlotta [Cinti] No. 5 begins with the text ‘Ah, d’amor se accorte siete, / no non credete all’arte infide’ in all sources except the Parisian libretto, where the first line is omitted; the entire number (including the preceding chorus, ‘Piegano il collo i fiori’) is cut in the manuscript libretto, contrary to a performance tradition which tended to preserve it anyway, even when the aria was replaced. Janet Johnson, “The Théâtre Italien and Opera and Theatrical Life in Restoration Paris, 1818-1827” (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 1988), 582-4.

in the revival of his opera *La sposa felice* (Turin, Carignano, 1820).³⁰ No other sources for *Elisa e Claudio* include this piece, which was used to replace the aria 'Giusto Ciel'. The interpolation of numbers belonging to other works by the same or a different author was only one of the numerous processes of adaptation that invested Italian operas when staged in Paris. The substitution with or insertion of a 'trunk' aria, or the request for a newly written piece, very often came from the principal interpreters of the season and left the administration of the theatre to face the thorny issue of authorship.³¹

In the 1820s, the privileged administrative status of the Théâtre Italien, as a joint venture with the Opéra, gave its productions a significant and unrivalled resonance. The Théâtre Italien was probably doing better business than any other theatre in the French capital under the Bourbon and Orléanist restoration (1818-1848), with a peak between 1818 and 1838.³²

In 1823, by the time *Elisa e Claudio* had made its debut, the Régisseur Général of the Théâtre Italien was Ferdinando Paer, who had assumed this position in 1812 after Gaspare Spontini renounced his post, possibly as a consequence of disagreements with some members of the administration.³³ During the years of his leadership, Paer wrote mainly Italian operas of the *semiserio* genre for the Parisian audience. In 1821, however, he turned to the production of works based on French libretti, starting with *Le Maître de Chapelle, ou Le Souper Imprévu* (1821), and ending many years later with the *opéra comique*, *Un Caprice de Femme* (1834). These works may be considered as an attempt to captivate the Parisian audience in the face of the inexorable

³⁰ According to Hilary Poriss, Pasta also used Pacini's aria as Imogene's entrance aria in *Il pirata* in the 1830 Viennese production. *Changing the Score: Arias, Prima Donnas, and the Authority of Performance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 73. The aria also appeared in Pacini's *La gioventù di Enrico V* (Bettina) in 1820 and was adapted as *Le avventure di una notte o La bella tavernara* in 1822.

³¹ See a few examples in Johnson, "The Théâtre Italien," 225-240; Poriss, *Changing the Score*, 66-100.

³² Johnson, "The Théâtre Italien," 37.

³³ On the very articulate debate on Spontini's dismissal from his directorship, see: Giuliano Castellani, "Intrigues politiques et rivalités artistiques: Le Théâtre Italien de Paris entre Empire et Restauration," *Revue de Musicologie* 90, no. 2 (2004), 231-52; Jean Mongrédien, *La musique en France des Lumières au Romantisme 1789-1830* (Paris: Flammarion, 1986), 124; Anselm Gerhard, "Spontini, Gaspare," in *Grove Music Online*, ed. Deane Root, accessed March 22, 2012, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/O904779>.

rise of Rossini and Boieldieu.³⁴ In this context, the *semiserio* framework of *Elisa e Claudio*, along with Mercadante's rising fame as a new Neapolitan composer (who had just embarked upon the leadership of the Teatro San Carlo in Naples), probably played in favour of his inclusion in the 1823 autumn season.

When *Elisa e Claudio* made its appearance in Paris, however, Paer and his leadership of the Théâtre had been the object of negative criticism from the press, and in October music reviewers had played down the composer's successes scored at the Salle Louvois.³⁵ Rossini had just made his way for the first time to Paris to negotiate with the French government over the composition of two operas, one for the *Académie Royale* and the other for the *Italien*, and a contract was formalised in December 1823. Even though the document did not mention his forthcoming appointment as director of the Théâtre Italien, by the end of November 1824 Rossini was indeed named 'Directeur de la musique et de la scène du Théâtre Italien', whereas Paer's role was downgraded to that of 'adjoint'.³⁶

Rossini may well have attended the Parisian opening of *Elisa e Claudio* which, as mentioned earlier, involved the participation of Giuditta Pasta.³⁷ The way in which some of the Parisian journals began to discuss the imminent performance encapsulated the climate of expectation surrounding the arrival of a new opera by Mercadante.³⁸ During the summer of 1823, for instance, an

³⁴ Scott Balthazar and Julian Budden, "Ferdinando Paer," in *Grove Music Online*, ed. Deane Root, accessed October 24, 2011, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/20691>.

³⁵ Giuliano Castellani, *Ferdinando Paer. Biografia, opere e documenti degli anni parigini* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2008), 147-8.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 149-53.

³⁷ According to Radiciotti, Rossini arrived in Paris on 9 November and left for London on 7 December. Giuseppe Radiciotti, *Gioacchino Rossini. Documentata opere ed influenza su l'arte*, vol. 2, no. 7 (Tivoli: Aldo Chicca, 1927-29), 23.

³⁸ It may be of interest to report an extract from a letter sent by the director of the Théâtre Italien to the soprano Emilia Bonini, who was initially contacted to cover for Elisa: 'Je désirerais savoir, madame, quel est l'opéra qu'il vous conviendrait de choisir pour votre début. On parle d'un ouvrage qui a eu, dit-on, beaucoup de succès à la Scala. C'est *Elisa e Claudio* del signor Mercadante. Je désire savoir ce que vous pensez de cet ouvrage, quoique j'ignore si le rôle de prima de cet opéra est écrit dans votre voix.' [I would like to know, madame, what is the opera that is most convenient for you to choose for your debut. They are talking about an opera that, they say, had much

article on *L'Étoile* prepared the ground for Mercadante's debut using a quite bombastic circumlocution:

The *dilettanti* are warned that Rossini is going to be betrayed. With the greatest acclaim, the most renowned theatres of Italy have produced an opera by Mercadante entitled *Elisa e Claudio*. We will not delay in enjoying or, at least, judging it. The most important thing for habitués of the theatre is to know that M^{me} Pasta will play the role of Elisa.³⁹

Negotiations to obtain a copy of the score started early in 1823 and involved a singer, Vincenzo Graziani, then based in Munich:

I count on receiving *Elisa e Claudio* which I asked you for in my last letter. If you can obtain the scores of some opera buffas, I will receive them with pleasure.⁴⁰

The Italian singer, who was also involved in the exchange of Meyerbeer's operas between Italy and France, promptly obtained the score:

P.S. The score of *Elisa e Claudio* will be copied on Tuesday and I will send it on Sunday.⁴¹

success at La Scala. It is *Elisa e Claudio del signor Mercadante*. I would like to know what you think of this work, even though I don't know whether the role of the prima [donna] in this opera suits your voice], The director then continues with a list of operas in the 1822 repertoire. *Lettre du directeur du Théâtre-Italien à la cantatrice E. Bonini, à Florence. Samedi 5 janvier 1822*, in "Correspondances et documents administratifs. Registres. Théâtre de l'Opéra – Théâtre-Italien," ad. 34, in Jean Mongrédien, *Le Théâtre-Italien de Paris 1801-1831: Chronologie et Documents*, 5 (Lyon: Symétrie, 2008), 22. Bonini would debut as Angelina in *Cenerentola* in early June 1822.

³⁹ 'Les *dilettanti* sont prévenus qu'on va leur commettre une infidélité envers Rossini. Les théâtres les plus renommés d'Italie ont donné avec le plus grand succès un opéra de Mercadante intitulé *Elisa e Claudio*. Nous ne tarderont pas à en jouir ou, du moins, à le juger. La chose principale pour les habitués du théâtre est de savoir que M^{me} Pasta doit jouer le rôle d'Elisa.' *L'Étoile, Journal du Soir*, July 14, 1823.

⁴⁰ 'Je compte sur l'envoi d'*Elisa e Claudio* que je vous demandais par ma dernière. Si vous pouvez vous procurer les partitions de quelques opéras buffas, et les recevrais avec plaisir.' *Lettre du directeur du Théâtre-Italien au chanteur V. Graziani à Munich, Lundi 17 Février 1823*, in "Correspondances et documents administratifs. Registres. Théâtre de l'Opéra – Théâtre-Italien," ad. 34, in Mongrédien, *Le Théâtre-Italien*, 251.

⁴¹ 'P.S. La partition d'*Elisa e Claudio* sera copiée samedi et je vous l'expédierai dimanche.' *Lettre datée de Munich du chanteur V. Graziani à F. Habeneck, directeur du*

The beginning of stage rehearsals was announced as early as October 9, 1823.⁴² They went on through most of November until the opening night of 22 November 1823, in a benefit evening for Giuditta Pasta.⁴³ On the bill were also a one-act reduction of Paisiello's *Nina* and a divertissement by Pierre Gabriel Gardel. Pasta starred in the roles of Elisa in the first half and Nina in the second part of the programme. According to the press, the performance started later than scheduled and went on well beyond midnight, to the general annoyance of the audience.⁴⁴ The duration of the performance resulted in cuts to Mercadante's score:

This evening was a true feast for the many admirers of M^{me} Pasta's talent. The length of the performance forced the excision, for this first time, of many pieces of *Elisa e Claudio*.⁴⁵

Most music columnists concluded their review by indicating the presence of the duchesses d'Orléans and de Berry, the latter hosted in the King's box.⁴⁶

The music critics reported a success and the warm enthusiasm of the audience, who particularly appreciated the first act. According to the reviewers, and in accordance with the 1821 Italian press, besides Giuditta Pasta's first-act cavatina 'Longi dal caro ben',⁴⁷ the most successful pieces were

Théâtre Italien, Mercredi 12 Mars 1823, in "Correspondances et documents administratifs. Théâtre de l'Opéra AJ 13-130," in Mongrédien, *Le Théâtre-Italien*, 271.

⁴² See *Le Corsaire*, October 9, 1823; *Le Constitutionnel*, *Les courrier des dames*, October 27, 1823.

⁴³ For a partial published press report on the premiere and following performances of the opera, see Mongrédien, *Le Théâtre-Italien*, 404-36; 467-9; 561-9.

⁴⁴ The news of and disappointment over the delayed opening are reported, for instance, in *Gazette nationale ou Le Moniteur universel*, November 23, 1823; *Gazette de France*, November 24, 1823.

⁴⁵ 'Cette soirée était une véritable fête pour les nombreux admirateurs du talent de M^{me} Pasta. La longueur du spectacle a forcé de retrancher, pour cette première fois, plusieurs morceaux d'*Elisa e Claudio*.' *Le Diable boiteux*, November 23, 1823.

⁴⁶ 'Madame la duchesse de Berry, M. le duc, M^{me} la duchesse et M^{lle} d'Orléans ont honoré le spectacle de leur présence. LL. AA. occupaient la loge du Roi.' *L'Étoile, Journal du Soir*, November 24, 1823.

⁴⁷ See, for instance, *Courrier français*, *Journal de Paris*, November 24, 1823.

her Act I duet with the Conte, 'Dove mai, dove trovarlo',⁴⁸ and the Chorus of the Conte's followers, praised for its 'original construction'.⁴⁹ The Trio 'Cessa una volta o barbaro' was singled out by the *Journal de Paris*, while *Le Diable Boiteux* praised the overture. The *Journal des débats* acknowledged many other numbers, including the duet between Bordogni and Zucchelli, 'E fia ver', and the cavatina, 'Da lei per cui respiro', sung by Carlotta, the *seconda donna*.

Going into greater detail, journals such as *Moniteur universel* summarised the outcome of the performance as follows:

The new opera by Mercadante, entitled *Elisa e Claudio*, was not a very brilliant success; this composition, entirely written in the style of the new school, offers many remarkable pieces, but the last act is weak.⁵⁰

By the 'new' school the critic was certainly referring to the new Neapolitan school. The dialectic between the 'old' (and authentic) and the 'new' (and pretentious) was actually a familiar topic to the Parisian audience of the Théâtre Italien. Moreover, the review reinforced the perception that the quality of the second act was somehow unbalancing from a musical point of view. On this subject, the critic of *Gazette de France* laconically commented: 'the first act has mediocre interest and the second is completely ridiculous'.⁵¹ In Act II, only a few pieces were considered worthy of mention – the duet between Pasta and Zucchelli based on a Tyrolienne, the Quintetto and Elisa's final aria with chorus were mentioned by *Le Moniteur universel* as pieces of good craftsmanship.⁵²

⁴⁸ See, for instance, *Courrier français*, *Journal de Paris*, *Diable Boiteux*, *Journals des débats*, November 24, 1823.

⁴⁹ *Courrier français*, *Journals des débats*, November 24, 1823.

⁵⁰ 'Le nouvel opéra de Mercadante, intitulé *Elisa e Claudio*, n'a pas obtenu un succès très brillant; cette composition, écrite toute entière dans le style de la nouvelle école, offre diverse morceaux remarquables, mais le dernière acte est faible.' *Gazette nationale, ou Moniteur universel*, November 23, 1823.

⁵¹ 'Le premier acte a médiocrement d'intérêt et le deuxième est tout à fait ridicule.' *Gazette de France*, November 24, 1823.

⁵² 'Le final n'a rien de remarquable. Le *quintetto* du second acte est d'un bon style; la mélodie en est agréable et pure; mais le morceau est un peu languissant et il gagnerait à être resserré. La *canzone* finale a de l'originalité: suspendue en chant principal, c'est

From his *feuilleton* on *Journal des débats*, Castil-Blaze laid out an argument against the whole scenario and consistency of the plot, and its failure to realise a comic intent:

Many people dared to say that this opera did not resemble anything; I do not share their opinion: I find that there are great similarities with Chinese shadow theatre. We travel continuously from the salon to the garden, from the barn to the cave: each refrain is followed by a whistle, which makes the old curtain fall or rise, representing the arbour of the park or the arcades of the castle ... The Italian poet can boast of having provoked a laugh, but this does not seem to have happened at all in the places where he had deliberately planned to obtain this result.⁵³

In the libretto, the continuous alternation of identical sets between the end of the first and the beginning of the second act must have caused the feeling of dispersion lamented by the press.⁵⁴ In addition, elements strictly related to the peculiar way in which the performance itself was carried out, with a whistle signalling every change of set, must have greatly affected the judgement of the reviewer and his personal enjoyment of the night.

Although Castil-Blaze's assessment of Mercadante's music was positive, he felt that the composer had not done enough to satisfy the taste of the audience:

the author has worked for his reputation; many pieces have

le chœur qui la termine; l'effet est piquant, mais bien voisin de la bizarrerie; au total, ce n'est point un sinistre augure pour Mercadante que cette représentation et l'on peut dire que l'opinion n'a pu, ni sur cette ouvrage, ni sur une seule épreuve, se former à l'égard de ce jeune compositeur que d'une manière favorable à son talent.' *Gazette nationale, ou le Moniteur universel*, November 24, 1823.

⁵³ 'Plusieurs personnes prétendaient que cet opéra ne ressemble à rien; je n'en partage pas leur opinion; je trouve qu'il y a de grands rapports avec les pièces du théâtre des Ombres chinoises. On y voyage continuellement du salon au jardin, du grenier à la cave: chaque ritournelle est suivie d'un coup de sifflet, qui fait descendre ou remonter le vieux paravent qui représente les charmilles du parc ou les arcades du château ... Le poète italien peut se vanter d'avoir fait rire, mais ce n'est point dans les moments où il s'était promis ce résultat.' *Journals des débats*, November 24, 1823.

⁵⁴ Luigi Romanelli, *Elisa e Claudio, o sia L'amore protetto dall'amicizia: melodramma semiserio del Sig.r Luigi Romanelli, da rappresentarsi nell'I. R. Teatro alla Scala la primavera dell'anno 1822* (Milan: Giacomo Pirola, 1822), 25-55.

established it satisfactorily; another time, he will work for our pleasure, if he has the good spirit to get someone to give him a good poem.⁵⁵

The librettist was blamed, as in the same passage Castil-Blaze argued that many numbers in the score would deserve success if detached from the dramatic context.

The talent of a composer, the success of his duets, of his dramatic trios, depends on the poet's dexterity: the most beautiful air, the most beautiful quartet, sung at rest in the middle of a scene of which nothing has preceded nor raised any fear or hope, loses three quarters of its effect. It is a piece for a concert sung by bizarrely dressed characters, in the middle of a salon decorated in an even more bizarre manner. There is the odd duet, the odd aria in *Elisa e Claudio* that would be excellent if they were placed in another frame; I recommend them to the arrangers: they may already have taken notes on this subject.⁵⁶

The reviews of subsequent performances provided more detailed analytical discussions of the opera and focused on the weaknesses and strengths of the opera. The abundance of thematic materials worked against the homogeneity of the opera, and the lack of consistency made the listening experience too laborious. The critic of *Le Corsaire*, for instance, produced an effective synthesis of its pros and cons, providing details on the reception of individual numbers:

Yesterday we talked about some parts of superior merit; we

⁵⁵ 'L'auteur a travaillé pour sa réputation; plusieurs morceaux l'ont établie d'une manière satisfaisante; une autre fois, il travaillera pour nos plaisirs, s'il a le bon esprit de se faire ajuster un bon poème.' *Journals des débats*, November 24, 1823.

⁵⁶ 'Le talent d'un compositeur, la réussite de ses duos, de ses trios dramatiques, dépendent de l'adresse du poète: le plus bel air, le plus beau quatuor, chantés au repos au milieu d'une scène que rien n'a précédée et qui ne fait rien craindre et rien espérer, perd les trois quarts de son effet. C'est un morceau de concert chanté par des personnages vêtus d'une manière bizarre, au milieu d'un salon tapissé plus bizarrement encore. Il y a tel duo, tel air dans *Elisa e Claudio*, qui deviendront excellents si on les place dans un autre cadre; je le recommande aux arrangeurs: peut-être ont-ils pris déjà des notes à ce sujet.' *Ibid.*

must look for them between the introduction – features of which are almost all borrowed from Rossini – and the finale, in which the composer has sweated blood and water to produce the effect of piling theme upon theme which no happy transition can link and blend, resulting in a mass of jolts to the ear; this mosaic of notes in all tones, which offends and jars on the ear, may offer the elements of twenty finales, but they are too diverse to reach a single one satisfactorily. Notwithstanding, never has the first act of an opera been greeted with such explicit acclamations, and all the boredom resulting from the second act could not make one forget, in the first, a duet between Bordogni and Zuchelli [Zucchelli], an air sung by M^{lle} Cinti, a chorus of the Conte's followers and, most of all, a duet between Pellegrini and M^{me} Pasta. One must go to the Louvois to see with what energy, soul, gestures, physiognomy, such an admirable tragedian demands her children back from their abductor.⁵⁷

Indeed, commentators praised the performance of Giuditta Pasta, who single-handedly 'sustained the performance'.⁵⁸ At the time Pasta, who went on to become one of the most prominent prima donnas of her generation, was already a well-established Rossinian interpreter, having played the role of Desdemona in the 1821 *Otello* at the Théâtre Italien, and then the title roles in *Tancredi* and *Elisabetta regina d'Inghilterra*. The day after the performance of

⁵⁷ 'Nous avons parlé hier de certains morceaux d'un mérite supérieur; il faut les chercher entre l'introduction, dont presque tous les traits sont empruntés à Rossini, et le finale, dans lequel le compositeur a sué sang et eau pour produire l'effet en entassant motifs sur motifs, qu'aucune transition heureuse ne vient lier et fondre ensemble, de sorte qu'il en résulte une foule de soubresauts pour l'oreille; cette mosaïque de notes dans tous les tons, qui se froissent, qui se choquent, pourrait offrir les éléments de vingt finales, mais elles sont trop disparates pour en conduire un seul à bien. Toutefois jamais premier acte d'un opéra n'a été salué par de plus franches acclamations et tout l'ennui résultant du second n'a pu faire oublier, dans le 1^{er}, un duo entre Bordogni et Zuchelli [sic], un air chanté par M^{lle} Cinti, un chœur des affidés du Comte et surtout un *duetto* entre Pellegrini et M^{me} Pasta. Il faut aller à Louvois pour voir avec quelle énergie, quelle âme, quels gestes, quelle physionomie, cette admirable tragédienne redemande ses fils à leur ravisseur.' *Le Corsaire*, November 24, 1823.

⁵⁸ 'M^{me} Pasta a seule soutenu cet ouvrage.' *Gazette nationale, ou le Moniteur universel*, November 23, 1823.

Elisa e Claudio, she received special praise for her interpretation of the title role. According to the reviewers, Pasta was able to create moments of intense lyricism as well as fierce dramatic action. Many considered her the sole reason for the favourable outcome of the performance:

We arrive at the capital object of general willingness: M^{me} Pasta is today at such a height that it is sufficient to report what she did in order to offer worthy praise. We will only say, then, that in *Elisa* and in the role of a mother whose children have been abducted, she excited emotions of surprise and terror. Transformed soon afterwards into *Nina*, she made the audience cry at the fate of this unlucky one.⁵⁹

What really engaged the audience, however, was her interpretation of Paisiello's *Nina*, immediately following the performance of *Elisa e Claudio*.

The attention of the audience, drained by a poem so mortally boring, woke up entirely for *Nina pazza per amore*.⁶⁰

The success of Paisiello's established opera counterbalanced the less enthusiastic vocabulary used for the younger Neapolitan composer, thus establishing an antithesis between what the critics regarded as the 'authentic' Neapolitan style, and the unsound musical language of the new generation of composers which Mercadante represented. On this matter, it should be mentioned that even when Rossini's *Il barbiere di Siviglia* appeared in Paris, critics notoriously maintained that Paisiello's work was superior.⁶¹ With the first resident composer-director Spontini, the Neapolitan school had a major

⁵⁹ 'Nous arrivons à l'objet capital de l'empressement universel: Mme Pasta en est aujourd'hui à ce point d'élévation, qu'il suffit de raconter ce qu'elle a fait pour donner la louange la plus digne d'elle. Nous nous bornerons donc à dire que, dans *Elisa* et dans le rôle d'une mère à qui l'on ravit ses enfants, elle a excité des transports de surprise et de terreur. Transformée bientôt après en *Nina*, elle a fait verser des larmes sur le sort de cette infortunée.' *Gazette de France*, November 24, 1823.

⁶⁰ 'L'attention du public, fatigué par un poème aussi mortellement ennuyeux, s'est réveillée tout entière pour la *Nina pazza per amore*.' *Le drapeau blanc*, November 25, 1823.

⁶¹ Fiamma Nicolodi, "Rossini a Parigi e la critica musicale," in *Saggi, versi, musica e testimonianze in onore di Leonardo Pinzauti*, ed. Daniele Spini (Florence: Passigli, 1996), 202.

representative at the Théâtre Italien, and works such as *La serva padrona* by Pergolesi and *Il matrimonio segreto* by Cimarosa had proven enormously successful in its repertoire.⁶² The fact that the 1823 season was still featuring *Il matrimonio segreto*, as well as Zingarelli's *Romeo e Giulietta* and Paisiello's *Nina*, makes the comparison with Mercadante even more striking. In a way, the actual encounter with Mercadante's music had disappointed the views of the Parisian critics, who had initially hailed him as the rising hope of the Neapolitan school. As shown in Chapter 1 in the example of Castil-Blaze and his anonymous Milanese correspondent, in setting these expectations French reviewers had drawn to some extent on the Italian press, and one of the main threads that migrated from the Italian to the French critics of *Elisa e Claudio* was Mercadante's connection with Rossini.

2.4 Mercadante and Rossini's Legacy

All of my contemporaries, all followed the same school, the same manners; as a consequence, they were imitators, just like me, of the *Sun*. But, good God! What else could we do if there was no other way to support ourselves? If I was then a follower of the great Pesarese, the others were just as well; they may have been more successful than me in their melodic inventions, more accurate in their instrumentation, more knowledgeable; but the structure and framework of the pieces were similar to mine.⁶³

These lines from Giovanni Pacini's renowned *Memoirs* clearly depict the difficult position of young composers who were trying to establish themselves in an operatic culture dominated by Rossini, and who invariably faced

⁶² Albert Soubies, *Le Théâtre-Italien de 1801 à 1913* (Paris: Fischbacher, 1913).

⁶³ 'Quanti in allora erano i miei coetanei, tutti seguirono la stessa scuola, le stesse maniere, per conseguenza erano imitatori, al par di me, dell'*Astro maggiore*. Ma, Dio buono! Come si faceva se non vi era altro mezzo per sostenersi? Se io era dunque seguace del sommo Pesarese, lo erano del pari gli altri, i quali saranno stai più felici di me nei pensieri melodici, più accurati nell'istrumentale, più sapienti; ma la fattura e la quadratura dei pezzi erano simili alle mie.' Giovanni Pacini, *Le mie memorie artistiche* (Florence: Guidi, 1865), 64-5.

comparison with the master. Their seemingly inevitable adherence to Rossini's style favoured the diffusion of formal procedures and stylistic features that during the first decades of the nineteenth century became virtually inescapable.

Thus, published reviews of *Elisa e Claudio* showed French and Italian critics rushing to define Mercadante and his work, identifying points of comparison with, and elements of contrast to, Rossini, focusing on the ostensible stylistic kinship of the two authors, and defining the attitude of the young composer toward Rossini. Some described Mercadante's music as a 'slavish' imitation of Rossini, setting the tone for a tradition of harsh commentary about the opera.⁶⁴ An even more negative view emerged from reviewers who identified Mercadante's affinity with Rossini exclusively in terms of the imitation of his flaws, rather than of his positive qualities. A reviewer for *Le Corsaire* remarked: '*Elisa* is the first work of a young man who seems called to reproduce Rossini's flaws rather than his beauties.'⁶⁵ Another review commented on Mercadante's orchestration and his use of dynamics and timbres, all elements which, in the critic's view, worked against a greater emphasis on the voice:

The music is completely in the modern taste, as the orchestration is heavily scored. Contemporary composers seem to have decided to reproduce Rossini's flaws: every instant noisy instruments cover the main vocal line; it is really wrong to pay so much for singers whom one often can no longer hear.⁶⁶

Indeed, looking at the reception of contemporary operas, or even of Rossini's operas of the 1810s adapted for the Parisian stages, such as *Tancredi* (1813),

⁶⁴ *Courrier des théâtres*, November 23, 1823; *L'Étoile*, November 24, 1823; *Gazette de France*, November 24, 1823; *Journal du commerce*, November 24, 1823.

⁶⁵ '*L'Elisa* est le premier ouvrage d'un jeune homme qui semble plutôt appelé à reproduire les défauts de Rossini que ses beautés.' *Le Corsaire, Journal des spectacles, de la littérature, des arts, des mœurs et des modes*, November 24, 1823.

⁶⁶ 'La musique est tout à fait dans le goût moderne, car l'orchestre est fortement instrumenté. Les compositeurs actuels semblent s'être donné le mot pour reproduire les défauts de Rossini: à chaque instant des instruments bruyants viennent couvrir le chant principal; on a vraiment tort de payer aussi cher des chanteurs que souvent on n'entend plus.' *Journal de Paris*, November 24, 1823.

Il barbiere di Siviglia (1816) and *Otello* (1816), one can see that French critics used a similar vocabulary and found the same kinds of faults in the orchestration, the thematic reiteration, and the predominance of the orchestra over the voices.⁶⁷ In addition to that, Mercadante's style was considered somewhat anachronistic and lacking the ground-breaking, inventive drive of Rossini:

Besides, the influence of Rossini can be heard every instant in the score by Mercadante, although not at all in its libretto. The reminiscences of Pesaro's swan are even less striking, abundant though they may be, than the whole, which is entirely Rossinian, than the use of the timbres, of the musical means, and of the harmonic procedures all inspired by Rossini, except for the verve and originality which he possesses to a supreme degree, but which cannot be imitated. More than once, listening to the chords of *Elisa e Claudio*, we believed we could hear the enfeebled sounds, like a distant echo, of the lyre of Rossini and it may be that, in order to judge Mercadante definitively, one must wait until he himself has been heard.⁶⁸

Castil-Blaze's approach to the score took the same approach:

It is always useless to analyse the libretti that Italian composers set to music. Are they good? It's because they have been taken from us, and consequently everyone else knows them, and our readers do care very little to know once more that Rosine,

⁶⁷ See Benjamin Walton, *Music in Restoration Paris* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Nicolodi, "Rossini a Parigi," 193-219.

⁶⁸ 'Au reste, l'influence de Rossini se fait sentir à chaque instant dans la partition de Mercadante, si elle est nulle dans son livret. Les réminiscences du cygne de Pesaro y frappent moins encore, tout abondantes qu'elles y sont, que le facture qui est toute rossinienne, que l'emploi des tons, des moyens musicaux et des procédés harmonieux empruntés à Rossini, à l'exception de la verve et de l'originalité qu'il possède au suprême degré, mais qui ne peuvent pas s'imiter. Plus d'une fois, en prêtant l'oreille aux accords d'*Elisa e Claudio*, on a cru entendre les sons affaiblis, comme par un écho éloigné, de la lyre de Rossini et peut-être que, pour juger définitivement Mercadante, il faut attendre qu'on l'ait entendu lui-même.' *Le drapeau blanc*, November 25, 1823. Possibly here the commentator expresses a wish for Mercadante to produce an opera expressly for Paris.

helped by the schemer Figaro, tricks the cunning Bartolo, and how the organist of the great convent ends up being dismissed by the besieging and the besieged who, divided by interest, all agree on this point: *Ma che tutti sian d'accordo!* This comical word seems astonished at appearing in an *opera buffa*. Are the pieces bad? We must content ourselves with indicating the situations which have gathered on the scene a sufficient number of sopranos, tenors and basses to form the animated organ that allows us to hear the sextet or the *finale*, without offering an analysis of a pathetic rigmarole. The opera performed last night at Louvois must be placed in this last category.⁶⁹

Castil-Blaze found a striking similarity between the tradition represented by *Il barbiere di Siviglia* and the new composition, and described a climate of tiredness surrounding the production of new Italian operas, all of which were too similar to Rossini's and abused the traditional *topoi* typical of the *opera buffa*.

In other reviews, Mercadante's debt to Rossini was considered to be a positive feature. Some critics explicitly recognised the personal merit of the young composer for his original elaboration of the Rossinian tradition.⁷⁰ Remarkably, there were critics who expressed appreciation for any distinctive features of Mercadante's personal style, and any hint of deviation from the 'Rossinian code'. A reviewer for the *Gazette de France*, for example, remarked:

Fame depicted him as a pupil, or rather, as an imitator of Rossini

⁶⁹ 'Il est toujours inutile de faire l'analyse des pièces que les compositeurs italiens ont mis en musique. Sont-elles bonnes? C'est qu'on nous les a prises; tout le monde les connaît par conséquent, et nos lecteurs se soucient fort peu d'apprendre encore une fois comme quoi Rosine, aidée par l'intrigant Figaro, trompe le rusé Bartholo, et comme quoi l'organiste du grand couvent se trouve éconduit par les assiégeants et par les assiegés qui, divisés d'intérêt, sont pourtant d'accord sur ce point: *Ma che tutti sian d'accordo!* Ce mot si comique semble étonné de figurer dans un *opera buffa*. Les pièces sont-elles mauvaises? On doit se borner à indiquer les situations qui ont réuni sur la scène un nombre suffisant de dessus, de ténors, de basses pour former l'orgue animé qui fait entendre le sextuor ou le *finale*, sans offrir l'analyse d'un pitoyable amphigouri. L'opéra que l'on a représenté hier à Louvois doit être rangé dans cette dernière catégorie.' *Journal des débats*, November 24, 1823.

⁷⁰ See for instance, *Journal du commerce*, November 24, 1823; *Gazette de France*, November 24, 1823.

and fame was not wrong: but our [music] lovers without prejudice would have recognised in the young composer personal qualities which promised the stage a distinguished artist, if he himself wants and knows how to do so. There is melody, grace, brilliant construction, and yet more sensible and sometimes better ordered than that of his illustrious master.⁷¹

Along similar lines, a review published in *Le Moniteur universel* recognised in Mercadante not only an imitator, but even a neophyte who had the potential to rival Rossini:

The new opera was not at all by Rossini, but by a composer who, whether to follow the movement generated by the creator of the new school, or for the effect of his natural conformation, shows himself to be the imitator, and perhaps aspires to become the rival of the author of *Tancrède*, *Othello* and *Barbier*.

The system of composition is the same; there is a similarity in the styling of the pieces, and in the orchestral effects. As in Rossini, there is the use, then the abuse, of lively movements, of the syllabic system and of a manner which, at its core, cannot be anything but the old system of accompaniment, but with a difference: here thousands of embellishing notes seem to be playing around the essential note, like elegant decorations which could be compared in music to the over-abundance of epithets in literature, brilliant accessories, which initially tickle the ear delightfully, but to which we rather prefer the first presentation of the piece, where we can find depth, expression and simplicity. Mercadante yesterday proved this truth; we recognised, not without some impatience, some effects too positively Rossinian; but when the composer took the trouble to

⁷¹ 'La renommée le dépeignait comme un élève, ou plutôt comme un imitateur, de Rossini et la renommée n'était point trompeuse. Mais nos amateurs sans prévention auront reconnu dans le jeune compositeur des qualités personnelles qui promettent à la scène un artiste distingué, s'il veut et il sait être lui-même. Il y a de la mélodie, de la grâce, une facture brillante, et cependant plus sage et mieux ordonnée quelquefois que celle de son illustre maître.' *Gazette de France*, November 24, 1823.

be himself, we could do nothing but applaud. In his score there are, in fact, some really charming things which belong exclusively to him; some features of elegant singing, others which have much sensibility, others where the expression is frank and energetic; to these pieces the audience became attached, giving encouragement to the composer.⁷²

In Paris, the musical reviewers and the audience of the Théâtre Italien appeared as a bi-partisan entity, in which supporters and detractors confronted each other. In this sense, a review in *Le drapeau blanc* uncovered for its readers how some contemporary French critics used Mercadante's new work as a scapegoat of sorts for the perceived faults of the Rossinian school:

There are people in Paris who would have wanted to find the opera by Mercadante detestable, for the pleasure of condemning, through only one work, all of Rossini's school, or to lift him to the greatest honours, just to sadden the maestro with the triumph of one of his pupils. The musical passions are as lively, as blind as the political passions.⁷³

⁷² 'L'opéra nouveau n'était point de Rossini, mais d'un compositeur qui, soit pour suivre le mouvement imprimé par le fondateur de la nouvelle école, soit par l'effet de son organisation naturelle, se montre l'imitateur, et peut-être aspire à devenir le rival de l'auteur de *Tancrède*, d'*Othello* et du *Barbier*. Le système de composition est le même; il y a de la ressemblance dans la coupe des morceaux, dans les effets d'orchestre. Il y a, comme chez Rossini, l'usage, puis l'abuse, des mouvements vifs, du système syllabique et d'un mode qui, au fond, n'est et ne peut être autre chose que l'ancien système d'accompagnement, avec cette différence qu'ici milles notes d'agrément semblent se jouer autour de la note essentielle, élégantes broderies qui pourraient être comparée en musique à la surcharge des épithètes en littérature, brillants accessoires dont l'oreille est d'abord délicieusement chatouillé, mais auxquels on préfère bientôt le premier morceau qui se présente, où l'on trouve du fond, de l'expression et de la simplicité. Mercadante a fait hier l'épreuve de cette vérité; on n'a pas reconnu sans quelque impatience des effets trop positivement rossiniens; mais, quand le compositeur s'est donné la peine d'être lui, il n'a eu qu'à s'en applaudir. Il y a en effet dans sa partition des choses charmantes qui lui appartiennent en propre; des traits de chant plein d'élégance, d'autres qui ont beaucoup de sensibilité, d'autres encore où l'expression est franche et énergique; c'est à ces morceaux que le public s'est attaché pour donner de l'encouragement au compositeur.' *Gazette nationale ou Le moniteur universel*, November 24, 1823.

⁷³ 'Il ne manque pas de gens à Paris qui auraient voulu trouver l'opéra de Mercadante détestable, pour le plaisir de condamner, en un seul ouvrage, toute l'école de Rossini, ou le faire aller aux nues, uniquement pour contrister le maître dans le triomphe d'un

In further instances, as influential a personality as Berlioz expressed the desire to have the Théâtre Italien mined, reminding readers of the heated context in which composers such as Mercadante had presented their operas for the first time to the Parisian audience.⁷⁴

2.5 Conclusion

Even if Parisian audiences were abreast of the Italian successes of the opera, the response of the critics to the French premiere of *Elisa e Claudio* was only lukewarm. In particular, reviewers were not pleased with the hybrid nature of *opera semiseria* or with Mercadante's treatment of it. The libretto and settings of the opera were considered too static and lacking in dramatic action, and the layout of the scenes was criticised for its fragmentary construction. Parisian critics, in sum, found Mercadante's dramaturgical choices unconvincing, and blamed Romanelli for having built an inconsistent and repetitive libretto, which forced the composer into bizarre compromises. These comments might have reflected a broader sentiment of hostility toward a genre, the *semiserio*, which still featured extensively in the repertoire of the Théâtre Italien. Thus, the critical intelligentsia seemed to aim to orientate the taste of the Parisian audience towards the *serio* genre on the one hand, while preserving the most appealing *opera buffa* repertoire of the 'authentic' Neapolitan tradition of the late eighteenth century on the other.

Furthermore, the Parisian press identified Rossinian features in Mercadante's use of formal procedures, orchestration and text-setting; but in these terms, the expectations of *Elisa e Claudio*'s French debut set by Mercadante's Italian fame seemed to be disappointed. Against this critical background, placed somewhere in between its Neapolitan legacy and its kinship with Rossini, Mercadante's music failed to show an individuality that could highlight a distinctive and unmistakable personal style: *Elisa e Claudio*

de ses élèves. Les passions musicales sont aussi vives, aussi aveugles que les passions politiques.' *Le drapeau blanc*, November 24, 1823.

⁷⁴ For instance, Berlioz famously expressed the wish of seeing the Théâtre Italien mined both in *La Gazette musicale* (1834) and in his *Mémoires* (1848). See Gérard Condé (ed), *Hector Berlioz Cauchemars et passions* (Paris Lattés, 1981), 188; Hector Berlioz, *Mémoires*, vol. 1 (Paris: Flammarion, c.1969), 102-3.

was criticised as insufficiently daring and unconvincingly lacking in character. The assessment of Mercadante's composition, however, was in general positive. The features of his style that were judged most successful by many critics were the beauty of his vocal line and the energetic and lively orchestration and rhythm.

Indeed, the latter opinion is consistent with Stendhal's assessment quoted at the opening of this chapter. It would be worth establishing whether the 'fiery and passionate' character of Mercadante's music was one of the qualities that made him stand out in the Italian operatic world of his time. Indeed such an undertaking would need a thorough and extensive examination of the Italian and European reception of Mercadante's works in the 1820s, which would contribute immensely to defining the different perceptions and expectations that surrounded the composer's activities during the earliest stages of his career. A combined study of the technical and narrative elements of his early writing – which were the foundation of this very specific but widespread appreciation – would complete the picture and allow a clearer definition of the different stylistic phases through which the composer went, and in which his 'mature' or 'reform' works represented a later and more distinctive stage. Given the almost complete absence of studies spanning the early years of Mercadante's career, my research cannot aspire to fill this *lacuna*, but has only provided a few elements to begin a broader discourse and, through the case studies observed, attempt to indicate a few potential pathways to follow, in terms of both methodology and possible future investigations.

For the time being, although the presence of *Elisa e Claudio* at the Théâtre Italien was short-lived, the music of this opera resurfaced, possibly while performances of the original were still taking place, in 1825 at the Théâtre de l'Odéon in the garb of Luc Guénée's pastiche *Les Noces de Gamache*. The circulation of this adaptation in France throughout the first half of the century allowed Mercadante to be appreciated by a larger part of the French public until the composition of a new opera for the Théâtre Italien, *I briganti* (1836). It is to this adaptation of *Elisa e Claudio* into *Les Noces de Gamache* that the next chapter turns.

3. *Elisa e Claudio* and Cultural Transfer: *Les Noces de Gamache* (1825)

Throughout its history, Italian opera has been subject to ceaseless, multi-layered transformative processes, responding to the linguistic, economic and aesthetic demands associated with its circulation and reception in different parts of Europe. The transfer of Italian opera in nineteenth-century Paris is arguably the epitome of this phenomenon. The composers and works featured on the bills of the most important theatres of the French capital were a reflection of broader trends in operatic consumption and reception. Theatre managements sought to offer performances that would satisfy the tastes of the most diverse audiences of the city, in accordance with different sets of prescriptive conventions which were characteristic of specific theatrical institutions. The increasing and diverse demands of such a multifaceted landscape often required a reinvention of pre-existing materials: scores and librettos were rearranged and presented in a variety of forms. At times, such a procedure was vital in order to circumvent the constraints of the strict and well-defined licensing system which governed the production and offerings of the theatres of the capital. This was the case for Saverio Mercadante's *Elisa e Claudio* which, as we have seen in Chapter 2, did not achieve an overwhelming success at the Théâtre Italien at its French debut, yet managed to survive and continue its journey in France as a new artistic product.

3.1 *Les Noces de Gamache* at the Odéon¹

Elisa e Claudio occupied a modest place at the Théâtre Italien, where it was staged sporadically until 1828, with a total of twenty performances in five

¹ For an extensive study of the Odéon and fundamental research on *Les Noces de Gamache*, see Mark Everist, *Music Drama at the Paris Odéon 1824-1828* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 189-93.

years.² Indeed, the popularity of *Elisa e Claudio* in France cannot be compared with the reception of its Italian performances, echoes of which had shaped the expectations of the Parisian audiences. Undoubtedly, the opera's international reputation preceded its arrival at the Théâtre Italien, having been staged in major Italian theatres, in Barcelona and in London and, despite its less than enthusiastic Parisian reception, it continued to thrive on its journey around Europe.³

In France, however, the score survived in a different incarnation, becoming known not only to the habitués of the Théâtre Italien, but also to the section of Parisian theatre-goers who regularly attended the performances at the Théâtre Royal de l'Odéon. This incarnation was *Les Noces de Gamache* – a French pasticcio based substantially on the music of Mercadante's *Elisa e Claudio* and *L'apoteosi d'Ercole* – that made its appearance at the Théâtre Royal de l'Odéon on 9 May 1825.⁴ The work was billed alongside *La Mort de César*, *Tragédie en Cinq Actes* by Jacques Corentin Royou, and remained in the programme throughout the whole of the summer, staged in combination with

² "Paris Theatres Drama Performances," *Francophone Music Criticism (1789–1914)*, online database, accessed February 8, 2012, music.sas.ac.uk/sites/default/files/files/FMC/Paris_Music_Drama_Performances.xls.

³ The opera was staged in Italian in London on 12 April 1823 at the Haymarket Theatre. According to music reviews of the time, the opera flopped (William Ayrton, "Account of Saverio Mercadante," *The Harmonicon*, May 24, 1824, 90). It appeared at the Lycaeuum in English as *No Plot Without Danger* on 5 September 1835, in Barcelona on 16 April 1823 in Italian, in Paris on 22 November 1823, at the Vienna Kärntnertor-Theater, in Lisbon on 22 September 1824, in Dresden on 5 February 1825, in Budapest on 28 February 1825 in German and on 7 November 1835 in Hungarian, then in Graz (1827), Berlin (1828), St Petersburg (1829), in the USA, South America and all over Europe and the colonies until 1842 (Constantinople). It was revived in Naples on 13 May 1874 by the Società Filarmonica. Alfred Loewenberg, *Annals of Opera, 1597–1940*, 3rd ed. (Totowa-New Jersey: Rowman and Littlefield, 1978), 680.

⁴ An analysis and comparison of the numbers, reshuffled from the two Italian operas into the French pasticcio, has been carried out by Michael Wittmann in his independent research work on Mercadante, still awaiting publication. I initially learnt about Wittman's primary research thanks to Mark Everist, who granted me access to his personal correspondence with the German scholar, with whom I corresponded personally at a later stage. In particular, I based my research on two letters, dating from August and September 1994, which discuss Wittmann's work on *Les noces de Gamache*.

performances of spoken plays, some of which were new to and some already part of the repertoire.⁵

The libretto for *Les Noces de Gamache* was the result of collaboration between different personalities actively involved in management and production at the Odéon. Thomas Sauvage, one of the librettists, had been involved in the backstage management and leadership of the Odéon since the early 1820s, and then took over Frédéric du Petit-Méré's post as director in 1827. Jean-Henri Dupin was the author of numerous parodies staged at the Odéon and at the Théâtre de Vaudeville, inspired by the most successful operas on the bill at the Opéra.⁶ In 1828, the Sauvage-Dupin duo produced a pasticcio based exclusively on the music of Dalayrac, entitled *Les Brigands de Schiller*.⁷

Luc Guénée, the music arranger of *Les Noces de Gamache*, was a violinist and composer with a long affiliation with the orchestra of the Opéra and with major theatres of the French capital. He composed many opéras comiques during the 1810s, before turning his attention to the translation of Italian operas and their arrangements. According to Fétis, Guénée used to include original music in his pasticcios, a feature which the Belgian musicologist evidently considered sufficiently characteristic to be worth mentioning in his entry on the composer in his *Biographie Universelle*.⁸ However, no clear indication exists regarding the degree to which Guénée interpolated his own music into the works he adapted for the French stage. The appearance of a pasticcio based almost exclusively on Mercadante's music should be framed within the restricted flexibility of the Odéon's management with regard to the limitations imposed by the Parisian licensing system, which monitored and governed repertoires and relationships between the

⁵ *Le Globe*, May 12, 1825; *Le Constitutionnel*, May 16, 1825, *La Pandore*, May 10 and 30, 1825, *Journal des débats* from May 9, 1825 onward.

⁶ For example, Dupin's parodistic adaptation of Boieldieu's *La Dame blanche* into *La Dame jaune*, 1827.

⁷ This pasticcio was based on the French translation, possibly by La Martelière (1792), of *Die Räuber* by Schiller, which will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapters.

⁸ François Fétis, "Guénée, (de) Luc," *Biographie universelle des musiciens*, 2nd ed., vol. 4 (Paris: Didot Frères, 1862), 131.

performance venues of the capital. The Odéon was one of the principal theatres of the French capital, whose licence initially allowed it only to stage spoken plays and, until 1824, to supply full dramatic training to its actors. Despite the restrictions, the theatre's management aspired to stage music drama as well, and this necessarily implied an overlap with other institutions that were originally and exclusively licensed to produce musical and dramatic works. Indeed, the repertoire at the Odéon was destined to compete with other French theatres that featured spoken drama with music, such as the Opéra-Comique. The request to change the repertoire being produced caused animated debate with the institution in charge of licensing in Paris, the Maison du Roi, but the agreement allowed the Odéon to create translated foreign musical works and opéras comiques, the latter on condition that they were in the public domain, and therefore that ten years had passed since the death of the authors of librettos and scores.

In 1825, when *Les Noces de Gamache* first appeared, the Théâtre Royal de l'Odéon was the only theatre in Paris featuring both musical and spoken drama, as well as the production and performance of pasticcios. This practice at the Odéon dated back to the beginning of the nineteenth century and derived directly from the eighteenth-century tradition of setting music by different composers to a new text or providing well-known operas with new librettos. The eighteenth-century pasticcio was problematic with regard to authorship, and often received negative criticism in the press for its lack of consistency and unity; nonetheless, the genre represented an indirect and privileged path for the circulation of foreign musical sources, and more specifically, for the introduction of Italian music into France.⁹ Castil-Blaze, with his numerous pasticcios, was one of the most dynamic agents of this kind of exchange and played a significant role in the promotion of the repertoire at the Odéon, especially with regard to the presence and interpolation of music by Rossini.¹⁰ Of his four pasticcios performed at the Odéon, both *Les Folies Amoureuses* (1823), originally written for the Grand Théâtre in Lyon, and *La*

⁹ Everist, *Music Drama at the Paris Odéon*, 172.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 197-8.

Fausse Agnès (1824) for the Gymnase Dramatique carried extensive borrowings from Rossini, in particular from *La Cenerentola* and *Tancredi*. Of the two pasticcios expressly created for the Odéon, *La Fôret de Sénart* (1826) presented interpolations of Weber's music, while *Monsieur de Porceaugnac* (1827) readjusted to a new libretto music from the two earlier pasticcios.¹¹

In the 1820s, French music critics began to assign a greater value to pasticcios based on the work of a single composer, recognising the artistic merit of arrangers who achieved some level of stylistic consistency by choosing and adapting music by only one author.¹² The idea which led to the genesis of *Les Noces de Gamache* was part of this trend and paved the way for works such as *Ivanhoé* (1826) and *Le Testament* (1827) based on music by Rossini, and the abortive *Nymphe du Danube* and *Les Bohémiens* (1827) derived from Meyerbeer's music. It is known that Rossini and Meyerbeer supervised the reworking of their operas into pasticcios, and that Meyerbeer even composed new music for *Nymphe du Danube*. However, there is no reason to believe that Mercadante, who never visited Paris before 1835, had a role in the reworking of his music into *Les Noces de Gamache*.¹³ Unlike *Ivanhoé* and *Le Testament*, which consisted of materials belonging to up a dozen of Rossini's operas, the works by Guénée, Sauvage and Dupin reshuffled numbers from only two operas.¹⁴ Materials from *Elisa e Claudio* and *L'apoteosi d'Ercole* are presented with no regard to their original order, and sections of Act I of *L'apoteosi* are given alongside both Act I and Act II of *Elisa*. Besides the main body of the

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 193-195.

¹² *Ibid.*, 172

¹³ *Ibid.*, 98.

¹⁴ This was a tradition also present in the original plan for the pasticcio *La Nymphe du Danube*, based on Meyerbeer's *Emma di Resburgo* and *Margherita D'Anjou*, and new music inserted by Meyerbeer. The work was supposed to be performed one year after *Les Noces* but never saw the light of day. In its selection of music, and in the relationship between music, libretto and source, *Les Noces de Gamache* resembles *Louis XII ou la Route de Reims*, which used only Mozart's works *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* and *La clemenza di Tito*. The scope of the two works is also similar: fifteen numbers in *Louis XII* and fourteen in *Les Noces de Gamache*. Everist, *Music Drama at the Paris Odéon*, 175-190.

work, Guénée possibly added three numbers, two of which are indicated as *ajoutée* in the Laffillé edition.¹⁵

The winter season of 1824 at the Odéon saw the substantial presence of German music drama. This was inaugurated on 21 October with the *Singspiel Das Unterbrochene Opferfest* by Peter von Winter, translated into French by Joseph Henri de Saur and Léonce de Saint-Géniés as *Le Sacrifice Interrompu*; this work was well received and fuelled lengthy discussions in the press on translated German drama. This was followed by the triumph of Carl Maria von Weber and his *Freischütz*, staged as *Robin des Bois*, a French version arranged by Castil-Blaze. *Robin des Bois* opened the autumn season of 1824 and was performed throughout the early part of 1825, in conjunction with translated works by Rossini and a parody of Gluck's theatre music. It is in this context that *Les Noces de Gamache* made its first appearance in the summer season of 1825, which continued with works by Rossini and Cimarosa translated into French, alongside works by André Grétry. *Les Noces de Gamache* was well received, although it did not overshadow the great success of Castil-Blaze's reworking of Weber's piece.¹⁶ The preference accorded to Italian opera in the second half of 1825 continued with the staging of *La Dame du Lac* – a translation of Rossini's *La donna del lago* – on the last day of October 1825.

3.2 *Les Noces de Gamache*: Sources and Traditions

In accordance with the spirit of the Odéon, *Les Noces de Gamache* reflected the repertoire of the major theatres of the capital, such as the Théâtre Italien, which had for years staged operas such as *Il matrimonio segreto* by Domenico Cimarosa, and *Le nozze di Figaro*. *Les Noces de Gamache* indeed made explicit reference to repertoires with similar characteristics, in particular the wedding plots that were a signature feature of the eighteenth-century comic repertoire. It is worth mentioning that for years the Théâtre Italien

¹⁵ Saverio Mercadante, *Les Noces de Gamache: Opéra bouffon en trois actes. Paroles de MM. Sauvage et Dupin. Musique arrangée par M. Guénée*. Paris: Laffillé, 1825.

¹⁶ Everist, *Music Drama at the Paris Odéon*, 175-190, 56.

staged operas such as Cimarosa's *Il matrimonio segreto* and Mozart's *Le nozze di Figaro*.

The literary materials which Sauvage and Dupin used for their arrangements of Mercadante's music were, of course, well known, particularly in France. Since Miguel de Cervantes' *El ingenioso hidalgo don Quixote de la Mancha* had first made its appearance in 1605, it had lent its literary material to numerous adaptations for the stage.¹⁷ Don Quixote started to dance and sing almost immediately for the entertainment of both private courts and public venues, thus establishing a trend that continued without interruption from the seventeenth to the twentieth century.¹⁸ Translations began to circulate in Europe almost immediately. The earliest French and English translations appeared in 1612, just a few years after the first part of the original Spanish was completed. The earliest Italian and German translations appeared, respectively, in 1622 and 1648.¹⁹

During the Thirty Years' War (1618-1648), French and German elaborations of the novel tended to portray Quixote as the paradigm of the Spanish stereotype confronted with the professed mutual cultural superiority of the two countries. Conversely, from the eighteenth century onward, Cervantes' work offered a versatile and flexible repository for both tragicomic and purely comic plots. In France, *divertissements*, ballets, pantomimes, operas featuring quotations from *Quijote*, and incursions of Cervantes' characters as incongruous guests adding comic nuances to the plot, circulated widely and almost immediately (e.g. *La Boutade des Incurables* [1640]; *Le Balet du Libraire du Pont-Neuf ou Les Romans* [1644]; *Le Ballet de l'Oracle de la*

¹⁷ Miguel de Cervantes, *El ingenioso hidalgo don Quixote De la Mancha* (Madrid: Juan de la Cuesta, 1605).

¹⁸ Bárbara P. Esquivel-Heinemann, "El Quijote en la música italiana de los siglos XVIII y XIX," in *Cervantes y El Quijote en la música*, ed. Begoña Lolo (Madrid: Centro de Estudios Cervantinos, 2007), 171-6.

¹⁹ Esquivel-Heinemann sets 1612 as the first date for the French translation, but Clara Rico Osés suggests some time between then and 1614 for the first part, and 1618 for the second part.

Sybille de Pansoust, [1645]).²⁰ In the eighteenth century, the inspiration drawn from the various accidents of *Don Quijote* accompanied the rise of opera buffa.²¹ Some ambitious adaptations sought to draw on the entire work, such as Paisiello's opera *Don Chisciotte della Mancia* (1769), set to a libretto by Giovanni Battista Lorenzi that in turn served as the basis for *Il don Chisciotto* (1770) by Niccolò Piccinni. Many composers instead selected discrete episodes of the novel and picked lively incidents, such as *El curioso impertinente*, which is derived from Part I, Chapters 33, 34 and 35.²²

However, the episode of *Don Quijote* most commonly adapted into operas and ballets is *Las bodas de Camacho* (*Don Quixote*, Part II, Chapters 20 and 21). This passage describes the love between Quitterie and Basile, opposed by the powerful and greedy Gamache, who agrees to Quitterie's father's request to marry her for reasons of economic interest. Don Quixote and Carasco arrive in the village while arrangements for the wedding are taking place, and help Basile sort out the difficult situation with a clever subterfuge.

This section provides a brief overview of the most renowned musical adaptations of the incident of *Las bodas de Camacho* surrounding Sauvage's and Dupin's setting for Mercadante's music. By presenting different adaptations of the episode, I attempt to present a broader framework for the

²⁰ Begoña Lolo, "Cervantes y el Quijote en la música española (siglos XVII-XIX). Una difícil recepción," 117-50; Esquivel-Heinemann, "El Quijote en la música italiana", 171-86; Cecilia Nocilli, "La danza en *Las Bodas de Camacho* (*Quijote*, II, 19-21). Reelaboración coréutico-teatral de momos y moriscas," 595-608; Clara Rico, "El Quijote y el ballet de cour francés del siglo XVII," 609-26, in *Cervantes y El Quijote en la música*, ed. Begoña Lolo (Madrid: Centro de Estudios Cervantinos, 2007).

²¹ Bárbara P. Esquivel-Heinemann, *Don Quijote's Sally into the World of Opera: Libretti between 1680 and 1976* (New York: Peter Lang, 1993), 24.

²² This episode inspired opere buffe such as *Il curioso del suo proprio danno* (1756) by Niccolò Piccinni with unknown librettist, *Il curioso indiscreto* (1764) by Filippo Maria Gherardeschi, possibly on a libretto by Giovanni Bertati, and Pasquale Anfossi's *Il curioso indiscreto* (1777) on a libretto by Giuseppe Petrosellini. In France, *Le Curieux Impertinent* by André Cardinal Destouches was presented in 1710, followed by a piece by Louis Fuzelier in 1723. The incident from Part II, chapter 33 (on which Antonio Caldara moulded his *Don Chisciotte in corte della Duchessa*, set to a libretto by Bernardo Pasquini and staged in Vienna in 1727), was also used for six choreographies. *Sancio Panza, Governatore dell'Isola Barataria*, by the same authors, also provided materials for three ballets.

circulation of the piece as yet another canvas for cultural transfer, and identify a number of aspects common to its performative tradition.

Table 3.1 presents a list of works, ranging from music theatre and ballet to operas, based on the incident of *Las bodas de Camacho* from the eighteenth century to the first half of the nineteenth century.

Table 3-1: *Las bodas de Camacho* (*Quijote*, Part II, Chapters 20 and 21). Musical Versions for the Stage (18th-19th century)

Title	Genre	Year	Institution	Music	Libretto	Choreographer
<i>Dom Quichot ou Les noces de Gamache</i>	Ballet d'action	1753	<u>WK</u> -Vienna	Joseph Starzer		Franz Hilverding
<i>Don Quichotte de la Manche ou Les noces de Gamache & de Quitterie</i>	Ballet narrative	1767	Kassel	Schaeffer and François Grenier		EtienneLauchery
<i>Don Chisciotte alle nozze di Gamace</i>	Divertimento teatrale	1771	<u>WK</u> -Vienna	Antonio Salieri	Giovanni Gastone Boccherini	
<i>Le nozze di Gamaggio, o sia Don Chisciotte in casa del Duca</i>	Ballet (part of <i>Creso in Media</i> with text by Giuseppe Pagliuca)	1779	<u>NC</u> -Naples	Joseph Schuster		Charles Le Picq
<i>Le deluse nozze di Camaccio, ovvero L'astuzia amorosa</i>	Ballet (part of <i>Sabino</i> , ballo eroicopantomimo part of Angelo Tarchi's opera seria <i>Ademira</i>)	1783	Milan, La Scala	Luigi de Baillou		Paolo Franchi
<i>Las bodas de Camacho</i>	Comedia pastoral	16 July 1784	Madrid, Teatro de la Cruz	Pablo Esteve	Meléndez Valdés	
<i>Le nozze di Gamacchio, con diverse avventure di Don Chisciotte</i>	Ballet (part of dramma per musica <i>Amaionne</i> , music by Bernardino Ottani, libretto by Francesco	1784	<u>TR</u> -Turin	Vittorio Amedeo Canavasso		Sébastien Gallet

Elisa e Claudio and Cultural Transfer: *Les Noces de Gamache* (1825)

	Sebastiano Gambino)					
<i>Las bodas de Camacho y algunos pasajes del valiente Don Quijote de la Mancha y Sancho Panza</i>	Ballet (part of Los esclavos por Amor, La Molinera Astuta, Los dos Condes supuestos, entre los dos que pleitean el tercero es el que gana, El Arbor de Diana, Una Cosa Rara)	30 June 1789	Madrid, Teatro de los Caños del Peral	Antonio Rossetti?		Domenico Rossi
<i>Les Noces de Gamache</i>	Ballet pantomime folie	18 January 1801	Paris, Opéra	François Charlemagne Lefebvre		Louis Milon
<i>Les Noces de Gamache</i>	Opéra-comique	16 September 1815	Paris, Opéra-Comique	Nicholas Charles Bochsa	Eugène de Planard	
<i>Les Noces de Gamache</i>	Pasticcio	9 May 1825	Paris, Odéon	Saverio Mercadante	Jean-Henri Dupin, Thomas Sauvage	
<i>Die Hochzeit des Camacho</i>	Singspiel	29 April 1827	Berlin, Schauspielhaus	Felix Mendelssohn	Friederich Voigts, August Lichtenstein	
<i>Don Chisciotte alle nozze di Gamaccio</i>	Melodramma giocoso	10 February 1830	Cádiz, Teatro Principal?	Saverio Mercadante	Señor Esteban Ferrero	

The direct source of the libretto for Guénée's pasticcio was August Klingemann's *Don Quixote und Sancho Panza, oder die Hochzeit des Camacho, a Dramatisches Spiel mit Gesang, in Fünf Aufzügen* (play in five acts with songs).¹ The play was produced in Berlin on 30 May 1811, with music from different operas and an overture by Friedrich Ludwig Seidel (1765-1831), and the text was first published in Leipzig in 1815.² The same literary work served as the basis for various musical theatre productions, such as Eugène Planard and Nicholas Charles Bochsa's *Les Noces de Gamache*, an *opéra-comique en trois actes et en prose*, which appeared at the Opéra-Comique on 18 September 1815, and Felix Mendelssohn's *Die Hochzeit des Camacho*. The latter, a *Singspiel* in two acts composed between 1825 and 1827 and premiered at the Berlin Schauspiel on 29 April 1827, was Felix Mendelssohn's first performed opera.³ The Director of the Königlische Schauspiele, Karl August Freiherr von Lichtenstein, enforced his own modifications to the libretto, suggesting deliberate changes to Friedrich Voigts's first setting. To Mendelssohn's disappointment, the opera was unsuccessful.⁴ Interestingly for our purposes, in a letter to his librettist Mendelssohn praised the writer for his rendition of Quiteria: 'You have not made such a moping woman out of her as appears in all other operas', which might suggest a broader knowledge of musical settings already circulating.⁵

Discussion of the musical adaptations of the episode of *Las bodas* would not be complete without a glimpse at the opera with which Mercadante himself appeared in Spain in 1830, with the title *Don Chisciotte alle nozze di Gamaccio*⁶

¹ Everist, *Music Drama at the Paris Odéon*, 189.

² Alfred Loewenberg, *Annals of Opera, 1597-1940*, 2nd ed. (Geneva : Societas Bibliographica, 1955), 707.

³ Clive Brown, "Mendelssohn's *Die Hochzeit des Camacho*: An Unfulfilled Vision for German Opera," in *Art and Ideology in European Opera: Essays in Honour of Julian Rushton*, eds. Rachel Cowgill, David Cooper and Clive Brown (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2010), 44-7.

⁴ See Monika Hennemann, "From Drawing Room to Theatre," in *Mendelssohn in Performance*, ed. Siegwart Reichwald (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2008), 119; and Brown, "Mendelssohn's *Die Hochzeit des Camacho*," 57.

⁵ Brown, "Mendelssohn's *Die Hochzeit des Camacho*," 54.

⁶ For a longer discussion of the topic, see Adela Presas, "Don Quijote en la ópera italiana del XIX siglo: *Don Chisciotte alle Nozze di Gamaccio* de Saverio Mercadante," in

– a one-act *opera buffa* on a libretto by his bass singer, Esteban Ferrero – completed on 9 November 1829 and staged in Cádiz on 10 February 1830. The opera also appeared twice in Madrid in 1841 at the Teatro del Circo, and was converted into a zarzuela and given in 1869 at the Teatro de la Zarzuela, with substantial changes to the libretto.⁷ Curiously enough, this little-known opera by Mercadante was the first ever produced in Spain on this subject. *Don Chisciotte alle nozze di Gamaccio* enjoyed a favourable reception in Spain; the composer's commitment to giving it a Spanish flavour was especially praised, as well as his homage to the host country.⁸ The opera belonged to Mercadante's Iberian period (1826-1830) and saw the light while the composer was in charge of the 1829-1830 operatic season in Cádiz, which concluded with the premiere of *Don Chisciotte alle nozze di Gamaccio*.⁹ In his score, Mercadante used themes and accompanimental figures that recalled popular Spanish dances, as well as idiomatic rhythms traditionally related to typical instruments such as castanets and tambours. Not surprisingly, these musical elements are local garnishes to a musical structure that remains inherently Italian, and especially Rossinian.

The various stages of the adaptation of *Las bodas de Camacho*, with its acutely comic connotations, indeed represented an example of a common thread and the transfer occurring between *opéra comique*, *Singspiel*, *opera buffa* and their Spanish source. The common ground for this exchange was the characteristic of combining spoken dialogues with musical numbers, a

Tus obras los rincones de la tierra descubren: actas del VI Congreso Internacional de la Asociación de Cervantistas, Alcalá de Henares, 13 al 16 de diciembre 2006 (Madrid: Asociación de Cervantistas, 2006), 623-35.

⁷ Presas, "Don Quijote en la ópera italiana," 623.

⁸ Presas, "Don Quijote en la ópera italiana," 626.

⁹ Mercadante had lived in Spain since 1826, working as director of music at the Italian Opera in Madrid. In addition to composing two operas, *I due Figaro* and a second version of *Il posto abbandonato* (originally written for Milan in 1822), Mercadante absorbed the most lively elements of Spanish folklore, expressed in the overture of *Don Chisciotte*, which later lived on independently as his *Sinfonia spagnuola* (1826). After a period spent in Lisbon from September 1827, where he composed *La testa di bronzo* on a libretto by Felice Romani, Mercadante returned to Spain in 1828, moving to Cádiz with a few of his singers. There, he was in charge of organising the spring season of the opera theatre. His own *opera buffa*, *La rappresaglia*, was his personal contribution to the season.

synthesis which offered great opportunities for characterisation to interpreters gifted with particularly histrionic qualities.

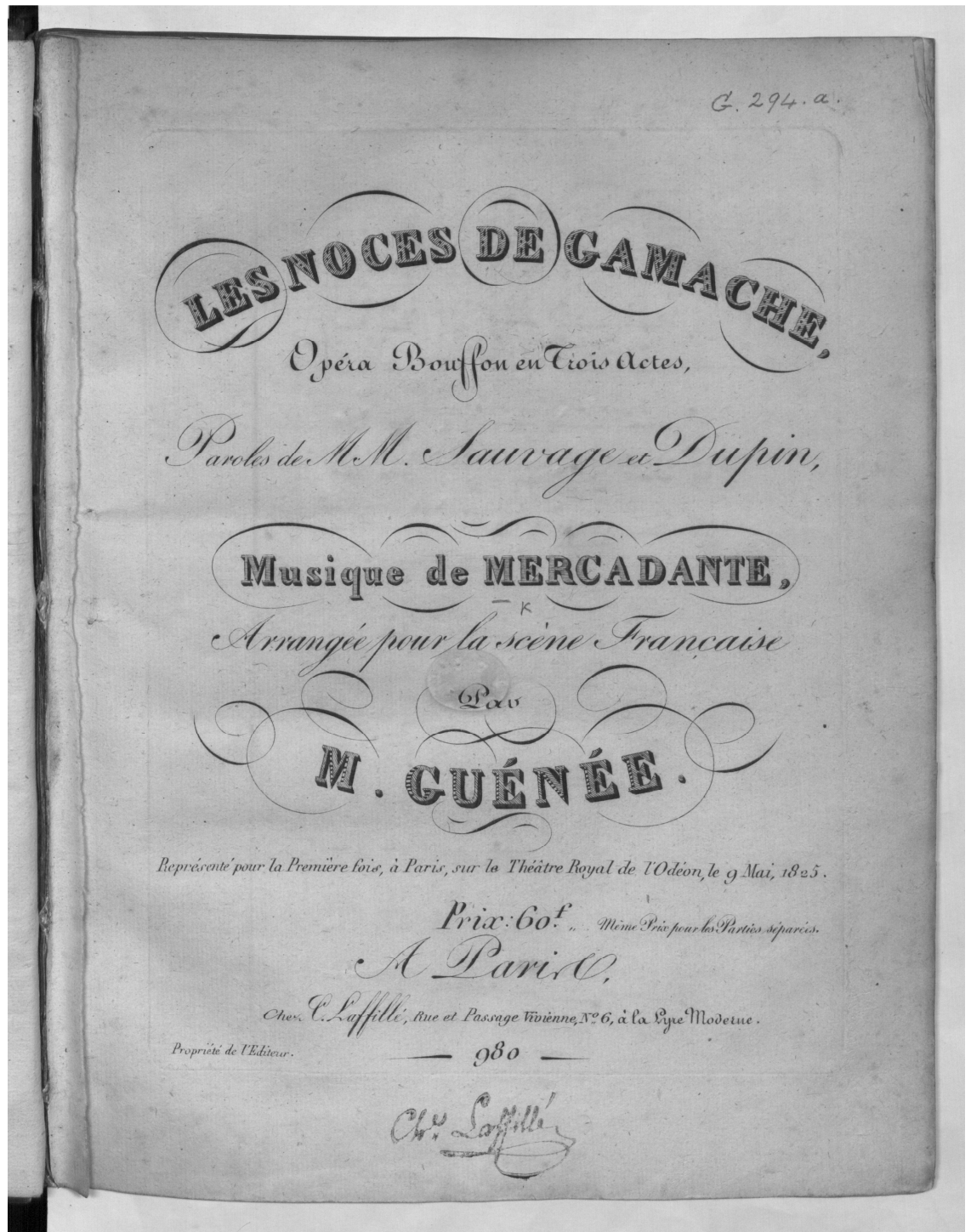


Figure 3-1: *Les Noces de Gamache* (Paris: Laffillie, 1825) Title page.

3.3 The Reception of *Les Noces de Gamache* at l'Odéon

The performance of *Les Noces de Gamache* at the Odéon allowed Mercadante's music to be heard by a different section of the Parisian audience throughout the 1820s, as the work, subject to a range of changes of cast, lasted in the repertoire of the Odéon until 1828. This time span seems to have coincided with the staging of *Elisa e Claudio* at the Théâtre Italien, thus imparting both continuity and a broader exposure to Mercadante's music in the capital. Initial reactions to the creation of the pasticcio were cautious, but by the end of May 1825 the work was playing to a full house. Reviews of the opening night showed an appreciation of the music. For instance, the critic from *La Pandore* reported the news of public acclaim for Sauvage and Dupin and their appearance at a curtain call, and described the music as 'light and cantabile'.¹⁰

The press openly acknowledged Mercadante's authorship of the music; nevertheless, they also credited Sauvage and Dupin for their arrangement of the score, as can be seen in *Le Constitutionnel*. Although Mercadante is cited as the author of the music, there is no indication of the sources of *Les Noces de Gamache*, nor that part of its 'pleasant' music derived from *Elisa e Claudio*, with which the Parisian audience was already acquainted.

The music of *Les Noces de Gamache*, arranged with much good taste by Monsieur Guénée, is, as is known, by Mercadante; it has charm, beauty, and it shines especially with an abundance of well-made themes. It cannot be said that it is great music; yet it is certainly music pleasant to hear, which causes, when listening to it, the desire to sing it.¹¹

¹⁰ 'Les noces de Gamache were more fortunate. Mercadante's music seemed light, cantabile. The authors called for amidst the "bravos" were Messieurs Sauvage and Guénée.' [*Les noces de Gamache* ont été plus heureuses. La musique de Mercadante a paru légère, chantante. Les auteurs demandés au milieu des bravos, sont MM. Sauvage et Dupin.] *La Pandore*, May 10, 1825.

¹¹ 'La musique de *Les noces de Gamache*, arrangée avec beaucoup de goût par M. Guénée, est, comme on sait, par Mercadante; elle a du charme, de la variété, et elle brille surtout par une abondance de motifs heureux. On ne peut pas dire que ce soit de grande musique; mais il est certain que c'est de la musique agréable à entendre, et qu'on éprouve, en l'écouter, l'envie de la chanter.' *Le Constitutionnel*, May 16, 1825.

The libretto was praised for its successful layout. Sauvage and Dupin, already familiar to the Odéon audience, were singled out for their treatment of the plot, and for the fact that they spared no effort in enhancing the comic qualities of the text:

Les Noces de Gamache...which followed the tragedy offers a performance of the most comic genre, and so it had to be, as it presents, in the foreground, the knight with the sorrowful countenance. The authors of the text, Messieurs Sauvage and Dupin, provided the material for these three acts; they were not averse to any sort of comic situation, any *lazzi*; they wanted to make people laugh; and except for the length and coldness of some details, they succeeded.¹²

The authors of the libretto were credited with the success of the pasticcio, thus highlighting the greater prominence assigned to spoken dialogues and live action unfolding through comic situations and performance devices. The latter were interestingly labelled with the word *lazzi*, typical of the Commedia dell'Arte, suggesting an intrinsic histrionic quality in the performance and showing affinity between the performance practices of the two genres. It is easy to imagine that the principal agent of this extemporary quality was the character of Don Quichotte – possibly recalling the characterisation of the Capitano – created at the Odéon by a famous actor of the time, Thénard.

During the following weeks, the reviewer of *Le Constitutionnel* became more concerned with showing appreciation for the management of the Odéon than with the performance or the work itself. The name of Bernard, the director of the Odéon at the time, appeared twice: the first time to highlight his clever choice of the work, and the second to credit him with the success obtained by the production on the nights following its premiere. It is possible,

¹² '*Les Noces de Gamache* qui...on suivi la tragédie, offrent un spectacle dans le genre le plus bouffon, et cela doit être lorsqu'on met en scène, sur le premier plan, le chevalier de la triste figure. Les auteurs des paroles, MM. Sauvage et Dupin, ont fourni la matière des trois actes; ils ne se sont interdits aucun genre de comique, aucun *lazzi*; ils ont voulu faire rire; et malgré la froideur et la longueur de quelques détails, ils y sont parvenus.' *Ibid*.

of course, that the author of the article intended to praise the management of the Odéon or may even have been biased for reasons of mutual interest:

The Monday performance was a benefit for Joanny; it did not attract many people, and Monsieur Bernard, who deals with esteemed artists in the way they deserve, had the generosity to take responsibility for the box office revenue for this representation, and to offer Joanny a more fruitful one, which will take place next winter. This is the way in which a good administrator should behave.¹³

The overall assessment of at the Odéon in *Le Constitutionnel* read as follows:

In sum, these are happy beginnings; they promise a lot, and with a director such as Monsieur Bernard, they will maintain at least what they promise.¹⁴

An explanation for *Le Constitutionnel*'s partisan attitude may be revealed in a controversial article of *La Pandore* which appeared early in June, which reported a letter from the authors of the pasticcio:

The whistles replace the bravos. We are trying to understand this misadventure; they say that the tumultuous events that happened recently between the director and the audience, with the consequent arrest of many people, caused this rigour. Allow us, Gentlemen, to appeal to your journal against these hostile dispositions. Completely uninvolved with all that is happening, it seems unfair to us that we become the victims, and we pray the audience to return and listen to us

¹³ 'La représentation de lundi était au bénéfice de Joanny; elle n'avait pas attiré beaucoup de monde, et M. Bernard, qui traite les artistes estimables comme ils le méritent, a eu la générosité de prendre pour son compte le produit de cette représentation, et d'en accorder à Joanny une autre plus fructueuse, qui aura lieu l'hiver prochain. C'est ainsi que doit se conduire un bon administrateur.' *Ibid.*

¹⁴ 'Ce sont là, au total, d'heureux débuts; ils promettent beaucoup, et avec un directeur comme M. Bernard, il tiendront au moins tout ce qu'ils promettent.' *Ibid.*

with the excellent attitude manifested on the occasion of the first two performances.¹⁵

The authors of the work lamented that a turmoil that followed the third staging of the pasticcio had discouraged the audience from attending the performance the following nights. There is no open explanation of the reasons lying behind this uproar; yet the episode was probably connected with extant internal tensions between members of the administration and Bernard. This context better explains the partisan words of appreciation for Bernard expressed in *Le Constitutionnel*. Most Parisian journals showed favour toward Bernard and his management throughout his activity as a director; yet he left inexplicably in January 1826, probably as a consequence of internal conflicts with the administration.¹⁶

Returning to the premiere of the work, the critics admired the performance of some of the members of the cast, who successfully realised the comic intentions of the plot. All of the singers involved in the staging of the pasticcio were already part of the company of the Odéon during the 1825 season. Léon Bizot's pure and brilliant singing was praised, as well as Léon-Chapelles' interpretation of Basile, and the high expectations surrounding Thénard's creation of the role of Don Quichotte were fulfilled:

The mere appearance of Thénard, in the role of Don Quichotte, was enough to excite general laughter in the hall. Who would ever have

¹⁵ 'Les sifflets remplace les bravos. Nous cherchons à nous expliquer cette mésaventure; on dit que les scènes tumultueuses qui ont lieu dernièrement entre le directeur et le parterre, l'arrestation de plusieurs personnes qui en est résulté, occasionnent cette rigueur. Permettez-nous, Messieurs, de réclamer dans votre feuille contre ces dispositions hostiles. Entièrement étrangers à tout ce qui a pu se passer, il nous semble injuste de nous en rendre victimes, et nous supplions le public de vouloir bien revenir nous entendre avec les excellentes dispositions qu'il a manifestées aux deux premières représentations.' *La Pandore*, June 4, 1825.

¹⁶ On Bernard's management at the Odéon and his 'hasty retreat from Paris', see Everist, *Music Drama at the Paris Odéon*, 46-59.

doubted that Thénard would contribute powerfully to the success of an opera!¹⁷

An old artist from the Opéra-Comique, Thénard was known to the greater Parisian audience for his acting skills, which were an essential feature required for the role of Don Quichotte, according to the librettist's prescription at the bottom of the cast page:

The role of Don Quichotte does not belong to any particular voice type. The singing in it is of little importance; therefore it can be assigned either to an actor of the Opéra or to an actor of comedy, provided that he possesses the physique for the role and the kind of talent suitable for this character.¹⁸

The fact that Thénard was one of the most celebrated Figaros of all time in the theatrical staging of Beaumarchais' *Le Barbier de Seville* creates an intriguing connection between the popular French play and the circulation in Paris of Rossini's *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* and Mozart's *Le nozze di Figaro*, both in their original Italian settings and in their French adaptations.¹⁹

3.4 Mercadante's Music and Cultural Transfer: *Elisa e Claudio* and *Les Noces de Gamache*

The musical material used for the vocal characterisation of the protagonists closely followed the requirements of the cast of the Odéon and adapted flexibly to the form and content of the new libretto (see Table 3-2 for vocal roles in both works).

¹⁷ 'et le seul aspect de Thénard, dans le rôle de Don Quichotte, suffit pour exciter dans la sale un rire general. Qui se serait jamais douté que Thénard contribuerait puissamment au succès d'un opéra!' *Le Constitutionnel*, May 16, 1825.

¹⁸ 'Le rôle de Don Quichotte n'appartient à aucun emploi. Le chant y est peu important; il peut donc être distribué à un acteur de l'Opéra, comme à un acteur de comédie, pourvu qu'il ait le physique et le genre de talent convenables à ce personnage.' *Les noces de Gamache, Libretto, Note on the Cast List* (Paris: Imprimerie De Fain, 1825).

¹⁹ *Les noces de Figaro*, Paris, 1821; *Le Barbier de Seville*, Odéon, 1824. Both operas were translated into French and adapted by Castil-Blaze.

Table 3-2: Characters and vocal roles:
Les Noces de Gamache and *Elisa e Claudio*

Soprano	Quitterie	Elisa/Carlotta
Bass	Gamache	Conte/Luca
Bass	Don Quichotte	Marchese
Baritone	Carasco	Luca
Tenor	Basile	Claudio
Soprano		Silvia
Tenor		Celso

According to *La Pandore*, the pasticcio was initially cast in three acts, but then rearranged into two and performed in this form from June 1.²⁰ The score published by Laffillé on which my discussion is based, however, retains the three acts, and contains no indication of cuts to or compression of the music. Annotations at the top and bottom of the first and last pages of each number of the printed score map out the cues for the spoken dialogues in the libretto.

The music was drawn from *Elisa e Claudio* (Milan 1821; Paris 1823) and *L'apoteosi di Ercole* (Naples, 1819). While *Elisa e Claudio* was already an international success and had arrived in Paris two years earlier, *L'apoteosi di Ercole* was not well known abroad, even though it had enjoyed success in Italy with performances at the San Carlo in Naples and La Scala in Milan. Still, those who read music reviews abroad were informed, if nothing else, of the existence of *L'apoteosi d'Ercole* as well as of the more successful *Elisa e Claudio*. The London periodical *The Harmonicon*, for example, in a harsh review of the London performances of *Elisa e Claudio*, still cited the successful premiere of *L'apoteosi*.

After this, he obtained an engagement at the *Teatro San Carlo*, when his first opera, entitled *L'apoteosi d'Ercole*, obtained considerable applause, and was said to augur well for his future success as a composer. It was on the first representation of this opera, that the young composer was called for by the public at the conclusion of a *terzetto*, which was enthusiastically encored.²¹

²⁰ *La Pandore*, June 2, 1825.

²¹ William Ayrton, "Account of Saverio Mercadante," *The Harmonicon*, May 24, 1824, 90.

Though the trio seemed not to find a place in the newly adjusted score, the Sinfonia from *L'apoteosi* was used as the overture for Guénée's pasticcio. The musical source from which these materials were arranged is unknown; however, some access to a copy of the autograph score of the opera must have been granted.²²

Table 3-3: Sources of *Les Noces de Gamache*²³

<i>Les Noces de Gamache</i>	Source
Overture (Maestoso; 2/4; D: – Andante poco lento; 2/4; d: – Agitato; 2/4; d:-D:), 1-37	<i>L'apoteosi</i> , ²⁴ Sinfonia (1 v-23 r)
1. Introduction du 1 ^{er} Acte, 'Ah! quel beau jour,' 38-63: (6/8; A:), 38 –49 (Andante; 2/4; A: -f#), 50 –53 (6/8; f#:-A:), 54-63	<i>Elisa e Claudio</i> , Act II, Coro, Scena ed Aria con variazioni Carlotta, 'Ah! d'Amor, s'accorte siete'
2. Couplets ajoutés, 'Si par hasard' (Carasco) 64-76 (Allegretto; 3/4; c: – C)	Guénée?
3. Morceau d'ensemble, 'Accourez gens du village' (Quitterie, Carasco, Gamache, Choeur, Dessus), 77-98 (Allegro; 6/8; G:)	<i>Elisa e Claudio</i> , Introduzione
4. Air, 'Pour mon art point de mystère' (Carasco), 99-114 (Maestoso; 4/4; F)	<i>Elisa e Claudio</i> , Act II, Scena ed Aria Claudio, 'Ah se posso ai figli ancora'
5. Chœur, 'Rendons-nous sous l'ombrage,' 115-123 (4/4; D:)	<i>L'apoteosi</i> , Act I, Coro e Cavatina Ercole, 'Dimostrai fra i perigli' (63 r-71 r)
6. Deuxième acte Duo, 'Ce repas est enchanteur' (Basile, Gamache), 124-140 (6/8; F:)	<i>Elisa e Claudio</i> , Act II, Duetto Conte, Marchese, 'Qui fra voi'
7. Choeur et morceau d'ensemble, 'La danse commence, viens à la danse!,' 141-155 (Mouvement de Walse; 3/8; D:)	<i>Elisa e Claudio</i> , Act II, Luca, Coro, 'Tacete, non temete'

²² Such a statement is corroborated by my own observation of the autograph score of *L'apoteosi*, which confirms Wittmann's identification of corresponding numbers found in one of his letters. Wittmann, personal correspondence with Mark Everist, August 18, 1994.

²³ Table 3-3 is modelled on a template provided by Everist on *Ivanhoé*, in Everist, *Music Drama at the Paris Odéon*, 183-4. In addition, I have highlighted in grey the newly composed pieces

²⁴ Saverio Mercadante, *L'apoteosi d'Ercole* *Dramma in due atti di Giovanni Schmidt. Musica del M° Saverio Mercadante Rappresentato al Real Teatro S. Carlo del 19 Agosto 1819*, 2 vols. I-Nc Rari 3.5.10-11.

8. Duetto, 'Ah! Basile, mon ami' (Quitterie, Basile), 156-175 (And.no Poco All.tto; 3/8; D:)	<i>Elisa e Claudio</i> , Act II, Duetto Elisa, Marchese, 'Dove mai, dove trovarlo'
9. Quartetto, 'Ciel! Que vont-ils croire?' (Quitterie, Don Quichotte, Gamache, Basile), 176-212 (Maestoso; 2/2; Eb:)	<i>L'apoteosi</i> , Act I, Sestetto, Iole, Euriclea, Dejanira, Ilo, Ercole, Filottete, 'Questo giorno fortunato giunse alfin' (75r-98r)
10. Entr'acte Ajouté, 213-221 (Grave; 2/2; D:)	Guénée?
11. Introduction du 3 ^{me} Acte, 'Avancez en silence' (Gamache, Choeur), 222-231 (Andante ma non troppo; 2/4; Bb)	<i>Elisa e Claudio</i> , Act I, Scena e Coro, 'Che scompiglio, che fracasso'
12. Romance, 'Dans une folle ivresse' (Quitterie), 232-236 (Andante; 6/8; G:)	<i>Elisa e Claudio</i> , Act II, Scena ed Aria Carlotta, 'Da lei per cui respiro'
13. Quintetto, 'Pauvre Basile' (Quitterie, Carasco, Gamache, Don Quichotte, Basile, Choeur), 237-268 (Allegro moderato; 4/4; Eb:)	<i>Elisa e Claudio</i> , Act II, Terzettino e Quintetto 'Ad ogni fronda che muova'
14. Choeur Final Ajouté, 'Oui, malgré votre mésaventure' (Carasco, Choeur), 269-277 (3/4; Eb:)	Guénée?

Three numbers do not come either from *Elisa e Claudio* or *L'apoteosi*: *couplets* sung by Carasco (no. 2), an *Entr'acte ajouté* (added) (no. 10), and a final chorus (no. 14). It is worth mentioning that both 2 and 14 are fandangos, which was also a recurring element in the other settings of *Les Noces de Gamache*. This dance rhythm featured in some of the eponymous French ballets of the seventeenth century, as well as in the 1801 ballet-pantomime by Lefebvre, which also circulated widely in various instrumental arrangements. This kind of insertion could be considered as a fulfilment of audience expectations, an homage paid to tradition and to the already renowned settings of Cervantes' incident, as well as a strategy to add local colour to the music. Also, of course, Beaumarchais' *Le Mariage de Figaro* included a fandango in the wedding scene of Act IV,²⁵ a feature preserved in the Finale of Act III of Da Ponte's and Mozart's *Le nozze di Figaro*, who may have capitalised on the Spanish dancing skills of the singer who created the role of Figaro,

²⁵ Elisabeth Le Guin, "The Barber of Madrid: Spanish Music in Beaumarchais' Figaro Plays," *Acta Musicologica* 79 (2007), 151-93; Frits Noske, "Social Tensions in 'Le Nozze di Figaro'," *Music & Letters* 50 (Jan 1969), 45-62.

Francesco Benucci.²⁶ This element reinforces the hypothesis that Guénée referenced either Beaumarchais' or Mozart's work, if not both. In both *Les Noces de Gamache* and *Le nozze di Figaro*, the dance scene functions to enhance the dramatic friction between the affections of the positive characters and the evil plots of the negative male contender. Evidently, the use of a dance with strong sexual connotations, such as the fandango, during a controversial wedding feast like the ones in *Les Noces de Gamache* and *Le nozze di Figaro* was becoming a tradition.²⁷

Regarding the authorship of the music, since the printed score of *Les Noces de Gamache* appears to be very consistent, it seems unlikely that the insertion of music by another composer would go unacknowledged. (As shown in Fig. 3-2, the name of Mercadante features clearly on the title page of the score as the author of the music.) Although no positive evidence that Guénée was the author of this music has yet surfaced, there is some external evidence in the press, observed in the articles related to *I briganti* in 1836 (see Chapter 4 and Appendix 2). The *Gazette des salons*, for instance, presented the performance of the new opera as follows:

Les Noces de Gamache, most of which is by Mercadante, and the rest by Monsieur Guénée, a French composer who has often puzzled the finest experts, led us to expect a witty and cunning music rather than a broad and accentuated one.²⁸

The *Gazette des salons* was hardly one of the most authoritative French music journals, and one might question the reliability of this statement. However, this column proves that, more than ten years after the premiere of the pasticcio, even the least specialised Parisian reviewers, and consequently their readership, were aware of the authorship of the music of *Les Noces de*

²⁶ Dorothea Link, "The Fandango Scene in Mozart's *Le nozze di Figaro*," *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 133 (2008), 69-92.

²⁷ It might be of interest to point out that Castil-Blaze's adaptation of *Les Noces de Figaro* (Paris, 1819) retains the fandango scene.

²⁸ 'Les noces de Gamache, dont la plus grande partie est de Mercadante, et l'autre de M. Guénée, compositeur français, qui avait souvent dérouté les plus fins connaisseurs, nous avait plutôt annoncé une musique spirituelle et maligne que large et accentuée' *Gazette des salons*, April 1, 1836, 222-3.

Gamache, of Mercadante's distinctive style, and of the presence of Guénée's music in the score.

Many of the different musical settings of *Les Noces de Gamache* have one common denominator: they all belong to the comic repertoire, with music numbers combined with spoken dialogue and much scope left to the comic interpretation of singing actors. This was especially true in the characterisation of the extraordinary dramatic figure of Don Quichotte.

To be sure, the plots of *L'apoteosi* and *Elisa e Claudio* had nothing to do with the tale of Don Quixote or with Cervantes or Klingemann's versions of Spain.²⁹ Despite the obvious differences in literary source and plot, however, *Elisa e Claudio* and *Les Noces de Gamache* exhibit some similarities. The *topos* of a wedding between two young lovers hindered by older villains was indeed a common one in comic theatre and in *opera buffa*, as witnessed for example by *Le nozze di Figaro*, *Il matrimonio segreto* and *Il barbiere di Siviglia*. Reviewers of *Elisa e Claudio*, as we have seen in Chapter 2, did not fail to recognise the connection with such tradition when the opera appeared in 1823, and the audience of the Odéon in 1825 may well have perceived an underlying parodistic intention by the authors. From a dramaturgical perspective, the interaction and contrast between the old and the young, the negative and the positive, sparked off a series of comic situations, yet there is also room for heartfelt elegiac solos. In *Elisa e Claudio*, this generates an alternation of virtuoso singing and purely humorous moments, resulting in the *chiaroscuro* effect described by Gossett.³⁰ In *Les Noces de Gamache*, however, the *chiaroscuro* gives way to an irresistible comic tension. The action gains in agility what it loses in lyricism and virtuosity. The solos are less articulate than those in Mercadante, and the choruses are more compressed. Apart from strophic numbers, such as Claudio's aria, the Italian numbers do not always appear in the new score in their entirety, but adapt flexibly to the formal French framework of the couplet. In *Les Noces*, several multi-sectional numbers from *Elisa e Claudio* and *L'apoteosi* are rearranged as shorter

²⁹ Everist, *Music Drama at the Paris Odéon*, 190.

³⁰ Gossett, "Introduction," in *Elisa e Claudio*, i-viii.

numbers, in which generally only the slow cantabile or fast closing movement of the original is retained.

The procedures used by Guénée in arranging Mercadante's music are often straightforward. Indeed, the array of elaborations introduced by Guénée illustrates a range of possible patterns of transfer from the Italian *opera buffa* tradition to the French *opéra comique*.³¹ The music used from *Elisa e Claudio* is profoundly affected by the change of scenario, audience expectations and cast available at the Odéon. One of the most obvious circumstances informing the choice and arrangement of pre-existing numbers must have been the absence from the cast of a leading prima donna such as Teresa Belloc, who had created the role in Milan, or Giuditta Pasta, who had sung it in Paris in 1823. It is clear that Guénée had no desire to face possible comparison between Pasta and the prima donna who would interpret the main female role in *Les Noces de Gamache*. In fact, his Quitterie was the soprano Pouilley-Valère [sic], not Stéphanie Montano whose fame had risen rapidly since her arrival at the Odéon in 1824 to the point that she had come to be regarded as the '[Giuditta] Pasta of the Faubourg St Germain'.³² Pouilley-Valère was known as a fine singer but less of an actress since her successful interpretation of Anna in *Robin des Bois*, and was possibly less inclined to engage in more dramatic roles. Thus, it is unsurprising that Quitterie's solo scenes were tailored to Carlotta's role rather than to Elisa's. It is also worth remembering that in 1823 the solo performed by Pasta on the stage of the Théâtre Italien was her 'trunk' aria 'Lungi dal caro ben', a choice that Guénée might either have considered unsuitable or rejected, possibly because the original source was inaccessible.³³

For instance, the *Introduction du 1^{er} acte*, 'Ah! quel beau jour', in which Quitterie interacts with the chorus of villagers, is moulded on the Aria con Variazioni of Carlotta (Act II, Scene 5), 'Ah d'amor s'accorte siete'. In *Elisa e Claudio*, this number sees Carlotta's disillusioned vision of love sympathetically supported by the chorus of gardeners. A short recitative introduces her Andante, then the chorus echoes within a call-and-response

³¹ Michael Wittmann, personal correspondence with Everist, August 1994.

³² Everist, *Music Drama at the Paris Odéon*, 80.

³³ See Chapter 2 of this thesis.

framework. A *più lento* section ('Ogn'alma che geme fra lacci tiranni / si pasce di speme e tempra gli affanni / col dolce pensiero che lieta sarà') follows the Andante, and here the vocal line displays consistency with the virtuoso writing of the previous movement. In this number, beautifully designed to enhance the *seconda donna's* singing skills, Carlotta contemplates the impossibility for the one fallen in love of battling against his feelings. In *Les Noces de Gamache*, the piece involves more prominent activity on the part of the Chorus: Quitterie's sadness at her forced union with Gamache clashes with the excitement of her fellow villagers, busy with the arrangements for her wedding (see Table 3-4). The number maintains and enhances the original call and response framework, but is arranged only on the Andante of Carlotta's aria, whose vocal line is preserved. The chorus intervenes with a different melodic pattern, however, sung mostly in homorhythmic blocks, though the harmonic structure of the scene and its orchestration remain unchanged. Table 3-4 compares only the sections rearranged in the French score.

Table 3-4: Text in *Elisa e Claudio*, Act II, Scene 5, Aria Carlotta vs. *Les Noces de Gamache*, Act I, Scene 1, Introduction du 1^{er} Acte

<i>Elisa e Claudio</i>	<i>Les Noces de Gamache</i>
	CHOEUR
	Ah! quel beau jour, Amis, pour nous commence! Ah! quel beau jour!
	QUITTERIE
	Plus d'espérance!
	UNE JEUNE FILLE
	Avec impatience J'attends la dance.
	UNE AUTRE
	Ici bientôt, je pense, J'aurai mon tour.
	CHOEUR
	Ah! quel beau jour! Dans une douce ivresse, Chantons sans cesse; Dansons, Chantons, Buvons, Chantons.
CARLOTTA	QUITTERIE
<i>Recitativo</i>	<i>Recitatif</i>
Felici voi cui dié propizio il Cielo venustà, leggiadria, soave il canto, Come candido il core: Ma non vorrei, che vi tradisse Amore.	Quand tout respire en ces lieux l'allégresse, Mon cœur se livre à la tristesse. Leur joie, hélas! fait mon malheur! Ce jour pour vous plein de charmes Verra couler mes larmes.
<i>Andante</i>	<i>Cantabile</i>
Ah! d'Amor, se accorte siete, (mentre le giardiniera la circondano, e le offrono de' fiori)	C'est en vain que de mon père, La voix austère

Non credete – all’arti infide:
Dolcemente a voi sorride,
Finché siete in libertà.
Poi se a porvi il tristarello
Giunge alfin tra le catene,
Ei v’addita a questo e a quello
per dispregio e vanità.

CORO

Brava, brava! Parla bene: (*fra loro applaudendo*)
È la pura verità

[RECITATIVO May you be happy, you, the ones to whom Heaven lavished long life, grace, beautiful singing, as much as an innocent heart: I would not wish for you to be betrayed by Love.

ANDANTE

Ah! If you are cautious, do not believe in the treacherous arts of Love: he sweetly smiles to you while you are free, but if the mischievous one succeeds in chaining you, he will expose and mock you before this and the other for disdain and vanity.

CORO

Bravo, Bravo! Well said:
It is just the truth!]

Bannit l’amant qui sait me plaire:
Malgré cet arrêt sévère,
Il possède toujours mon cœur.
Ah! si c’est un bonheur suprême
D’obtenir celui que l’on aime,
Combien est-il affreux, hélas!
De voir sa main enchaînée
Par l’hyménée
Lorsque le cœur ne l’est pas!
Les deux jeunes filles
Infortunée!
Pour ton amour
Plus d’espérance!

CHOEUR

Ah! quel beau jour,
Amis, pour nous commence!
Ah! quel beau jour!

[CHORUS Ah! What a beautiful day, friends, begins for us!

QUITTERIE No more hope!

A YOUNG GIRL With impatience I wait for the dance.

ANOTHER ONE Here, soon,
I will have my turn.

CHORUS Ah! What a beautiful day!

In a sweet excitement,
let us sing without rest;
let us dance; let us sing;
let us drink;
let us sing.

QUITTERIE *Recitative*. While everything in these places breathes happiness, my heart is devoted to sadness. Their joy, alas! means my unhappiness! This day for you so full of fascinations will see me weep.

Cantabile It is in vain that my father’s strict words banished the lover whom he knows I love: despite this strict interdiction, he still owns my heart. Ah! As much as it gives you supreme joy to obtain the one you love, how scary it is, alas, to see your hand chained in a marriage, while your heart is not!

THE TWO YOUNG GIRLS Unlucky one!

No more hope for your love!

CHORUS Ah! What a beautiful day, friends, begins for us!]

Similarly, the *couplets* for Quitterie’s solo in Act III of *Les Noces de Gamache* are shaped only after the Andante for Carlotta’s Act II scena ed aria, ‘Da lei per cui respiro’, which replicates the plaintive tone of the original

number. In the original piece from *Elisa e Claudio*, Carlotta, unaware of the current destiny of her beloved friend, expresses her concern for Elisa. Similarly, in *Les Noces de Gamache*, Quitterie complains to Gamache about his cruelty and incapacity to love, and expresses her sorrow for Basile's destiny, which remains in Gamache's hands. Example 3-1 displays the opening bars of Quitterie's solo, modelled after Carlotta's aria, which is reproduced in part in Example 3-2:

Example 3-1: *Les Noces de Gamache*, Act III, Quitterie, 'Dans une folle ivresse', bars 1-17.

The musical score is presented in five systems, each with a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 8/8. The piano part begins with a *p* (piano) dynamic marking.

System 1 (Bars 1-4): The piano accompaniment features a rhythmic pattern of eighth and sixteenth notes. The vocal line enters in bar 2 with a melodic phrase.

System 2 (Bars 5-8): The piano accompaniment continues with a similar rhythmic pattern. The vocal line has a melodic flourish in bar 5.

System 3 (Bars 9-12): The vocal line begins with the lyrics "Dans u - ne fol - le i - vres - se, vous". The piano accompaniment provides a steady accompaniment.

System 4 (Bars 13-15): The vocal line continues with the lyrics "me par - lez sans ces - se, d'a - mour et de ten -". The piano accompaniment maintains the rhythmic pattern.

System 5 (Bars 16-17): The vocal line concludes with the lyrics "dres - se, c'est vous mon-sieur, qui le fai-tes mou - rir. Vous". The piano accompaniment ends with a final chord.

Example 3-2: *Elisa e Claudio*, Act II, Carlotta, 'Da lei per cui respiro', bars 1-23.

Piano

5

9

13 Carlotta
Da lei per cu-i re - spi - ro oh

18
Ciel io son di - vi - sa se non ri - tro - vo

21
Eli - sa che mai sa - rà che mai sa - rà di me

The treatment of Quitterie's vocal part is different in the ensembles, in which she is often given the top line, thus effectively often taking over Elisa's part. In this sense, Quitterie shares the same fate as many other characters of the pasticcio. There is not always a full and direct correspondence between a

specific vocal role in *Les Noces de Gamache* and its counterpart in *Elisa*. In the musical numbers, the intervention of each character is allocated to the musical part functionally to the entries indicated in the libretto. The characters in *Les Noces de Gamache* often cover for the ensemble indicated in the original score, without necessarily following the dramatic consistency assigned by Mercadante to his roles. An interesting example of such a procedure is in the Quintetto of *Les Noces de Gamache*, in which the parts assigned to Elisa, Carlotta, Claudio, the Marchese and the Conte, are taken over respectively by Quitterie, Carasco, Gamache, Don Quichotte and Basile. The part originally sung by Carlotta is in Carasco's line, although in the lower octave, while the first entry by Claudio, who carries the theme at bar 42, is assigned to Quitterie (see Examples 3-3 and 3-4).

Example 3-3: *Les Noces de Gamache*, Act III, Quintetto, bars 40-47, Laffillé, 1825, 243-4.

Carasco

tre mal - heur! D'un coeur si ra - re,

Quitterie

Piano

44

Q.

toi, qui me se - pa - re, Ty - ran bar - ba - re, Ty

Pno.

Example 3-4: *Elisa e Claudio*, Act II, Quintetto, bars 40-47, [196].

The musical score is for a quintet from Act II of *Elisa e Claudio*. It consists of two systems of staves. The first system (bars 40-43) includes Carlotta's vocal line (soprano), the piano accompaniment, and Claudio's vocal line (tenor). The second system (bars 44-47) includes Cla.'s vocal line (bass) and the piano accompaniment. The piano part features a steady eighth-note accompaniment in the right hand and a more active bass line in the left hand. The lyrics are: Carlotta: tur - no or -ror Ad o-gni mo - to di -; Cla.: sas - tri a -spet - to tu so - la o ca - ra.

The vocal line of the Marchese, who joins the ensemble at bar 87, is taken by Gamache, while Don Quichotte, who enters at bar 94 sings Claudio's line at the lower octave (see Examples 3-5 and 3-6).

Example 3-5: *Elisa e Claudio*, Act II, Quintetto, bars 87-95, [199].

Allegro moderato

89

Marchese

Pro-pria-men-te ad o-gni be-stia que-sta ca-sa è fa-mi - lia - re

Piano

90

Mar.

Ci man-ca-van le Zan - za - re per non far-mi ri - po -

93

Elisa

Par - - mi u - dir

Carlotta

Par - - mi u - dir

Claudio

Par - - mi u - dir

Mar.

sar

Example 3-6: *Les Noces de Gamache*, Act III, Quintetto, bars 87-95, 252-3.

Allegro moderato

89

Gamache

C'est u-ne hor-reur! Jouer ce tour a-bo-mi-na-ble

Piano

90

Gam.

à son a-mi, son bien fai-teur, c'est une hor-

93

Qui.

Quel mal-heur!

Bas.

8

Car.

Quel mal-heur!

Gam.

reur!

Don Q.

Quel mal-heur!

As indicated in the introduction to the libretto and by the press, Don Quichotte has a prominent role in the plot, but his sung numbers are undoubtedly fewer than the spoken passages he delivers. He has a longer line in the quartet drawn from Sestetto, Act I of *L'apoteosi*, and sings a few bars in the aforementioned quintet. The creator of the role, Thénard, was able to sing internal harmony and larger leaps, as much of Quichotte's writing for the Quintetto shows. However, it was not his singing that earned him the praise he received in the press.

Generally, the treatment of the voices in *Les Noces de Gamache* is less accurate than in *Elisa e Claudio*, and the definition of the vocal roles is completely flexible and somehow contradicts the belcanto writing of Mercadante's score. The principle governing the new arrangement is, in a sense, that underlying the pasticcio as a genre: the functional handling of pre-existing material. One aspect resulting from this approach is the interchangeability and, to a certain extent, the instability of the vocal registers. In the cast list of the libretto of *Les Noces de Gamache*, the vocal roles have a nominal definition, but the use of their registers in the context of the music of *Les Noces de Gamache* is far removed from their direct Italian counterparts. Most of the lines assigned to a specific vocal role in Mercadante's works are easily shuffled and given to the characters featured in the numbers adapted by Guénée, generally without previous transposition. A good example is the role of Carasco, presented as a baritone in the cast list of the libretto, but sung by Léon Bizot, a tenor who had stepped in to fill the post left vacant by Gignon, who had abandoned the company at the start of the season.³⁴ Carasco's solo is based on Claudio's aria, of which it retains even the original key.

The arrangement of the duet featuring Basile and Gamache is consistent with this approach. The duet is based on the cabaletta of the renowned comic *duetto a due bassi* for the Conte and the Marchese, originally written for Luigi Lablache and Nicola De Grecis for the Italian premiere of *Elisa e Claudio* and sung by Lablache and Carlo Zucchelli in the 1823 and 1824 Parisian performances. The duet was highly acclaimed, both in its original and adapted versions, and was destined to go down in history as one of the most

³⁴ Everist, *Music Drama at the Paris Odéon*, 73.

characteristic numbers of *Elisa e Claudio*. It became available in a number of transcriptions for domestic and amateur consumption and also enjoyed wide mention in published articles concerning *I briganti* eleven years later. In the context of *Les Noces*, Gamache has just granted freedom to Basile, and the two men celebrate over a lavish banquet provided by the former. Basile indulges in the consumption of alcoholic beverages, and his drunkenness generates comic situations; all of this happens just before a shocked Basile realises that the banquet is just part of the celebrations for the wedding between Gamache and his beloved Quitterie.

Responding to the comic demands of the scene, Guénée used the cabaletta of the original duet, and significantly expanded it (172 bars compared with 109 bars in *Elisa*). The movement follows the melody of the Italian original, and for the most part preserves the writing of the original duet. In *Les Noces de Gamache*, Basile, the tenor, sings the Conte's line, a bass, without transposition. Furthermore, the orchestral part in bars 38-43 was newly inserted by Guénée to depict the pouring of the wine, as the stage direction in the score indicates (see Example 3-7):

Example 3-7: *Les Noces de Gamache*, Act II, Basile, Gamache, 'Ce repas est enchanteur', bars 36-43, 129.

The musical score is presented in two systems. The first system (bars 36-43) includes the vocal part for Basile and the instrumental parts for Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Contrabass. Basile's lyrics are: "doux et com - plai - sant, je suis sur - pris du chan - ge - ment." The instrumental parts include a melodic line for Violin I, a rhythmic pattern for Violin II, and a sustained harmonic background for Viola and Contrabass. The second system (bars 40-43) includes the vocal part for Gamache and the instrumental parts for Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Contrabass. Gamache's lyrics are: "Dieu! Com-me il y". The instrumental parts include a melodic line for Violin I, a rhythmic pattern for Violin II, and a sustained harmonic background for Viola and Contrabass. The score is in 6/8 time and features lyrics in French.

In the pasticcio, the use of pre-existing musical material is entirely subordinate to the practical demands of the performers involved in each number. Even if pragmatism seemed to be the prominent criterion leading Guénée's arrangement, there are places in the score that reveal a certain kinship between the dramatic situation described in Mercadante's score and the way in which it was rendered in *Les Noces de Gamache*.

The duet between Quitterie and Basile, for instance, is based on the Andante section of the duet between Elisa and the Conte. This is the only love duet in the pasticcio and, curiously enough, it is neither based on the love duet of *Elisa and Claudio* in the eponymous opera, nor on the love duet from *L'apoteosi d'Ercole*. In this section of the original, Elisa increasingly moves the Conte with her plea to have her children back. The clash between the laws of honour and society and the laws of family and nature reaches its climax in the

lines pronounced by the two characters. Here, the mutual accusations of the two characters produce an elegant chiasmic effect in the verses.

In the French counterpart of the duet, by contrast, the two lovers have neither confrontation nor argument, but agree on the happiness resulting from being subject to the law of love, constancy and trust. Table 3-5 compares the two texts:

Table 3-5: Text in *Elisa e Claudio*, Act II, Elisa, Marchese, 'Dove mai, dove trovarlo' vs. *Les Noces de Gamache*, Act III, Quitterie, Basile, 'O bonheur extreme'.

<i>Elisa e Claudio</i>	<i>Les Noces de Gamache</i>
ELISA	QUITTERIE
Di natura io le leggi rispetto,	O bonheur extrême,
Tu sei schiavo	O plaisir suprême,
di un falso	Celui que j'aime
splendor.	Obtiendra ma foi!
CONTE	BASILE
Tu sei schiava d'un debole	Amour, constance
affetto	Et confiance,
mentre io servo alle leggi	Voilà ma loi.
d'onor.	[QUITTERIE
[ELISA	Oh extreme happiness,
I respect the laws of nature,	Oh, supreme pleasure,
You are enslaved by a false	The one I love / Will obtain
splendour.	my faith!
CONTE	BASILE
You are enslaved by a weak	Love, constancy /
affection,	And trust,
While I serve the laws	Here is my law.]
of honour]	

This is the case also for the *Morceau d'ensemble* in Act I, 'Accourez gens du village', in which the general anticipation and excitement about Carasco's oracle mirrors the dramatic situation in the Act I *Introduzione* ('Che scompiglio, che fracasso') of *Elisa e Claudio*. In the latter, the general excitement is prompted by the visit of the Marchese, and the scene depicts the frantic activities of the Conte's household servants. The singers' ensembles are also balanced, and the characters involved are as indicated in Table 3-6:

Table 3-6: *Dramatis personae* in ‘Introduzione’ and ‘Morceau d’Ensemble’

<i>Elisa e Claudio</i>	<i>Les Noces de Gamache</i>
Silvia (Soprano),	Quitterie (Soprano),
Celso (Tenore),	Carasco (Tenore),
Conte (Basso),	Gamache (Basso),
Marchese (Basso),	Don Quichotte (Basso)
Luca (Basso)	
Coro, on three lines: Soprani,	Coro, on three lines: Dessus
Tenori, Bassi	(M and F), Bassetaille

The overall structure of the scene in *Elisa e Claudio* consists of two contrasting dramatic situations, which are reflected in Sauvage and Dupin’s arrangement. In the first, the lack of enthusiasm of the chorus of the Marchese’s household in *Elisa* parallels Gamache’s scepticism in *Les Noces de Gamache*, while Gamache’s rumbling lines signal only the initial stage of what will turn into a change of heart. The disappointment of the chorus in *Elisa* instead hints at an ongoing social conflict, and contributes to the negative depiction of the characters of noble descent. In the second, Silvia’s sadness at her imminent wedding enforced by Marchese Tricotazio with Claudio, rather than with her beloved Celso, is strikingly mirrored in Quitterie’s melancholic defeatism.

The French version of this piece is a compressed version of the Italian. In the latter, the call and response between soloists and chorus is predominant. In *Les Noces de Gamache* this dialogic treatment responds to the situation described in the libretto, in which the chorus invites the protagonist to tell their fortune and, in turn, the main characters participate in the situation, inciting Carasco and encouraging the peasants to trust his talents. Table 3-7 shows a comparison between the two texts:

Table 3-7: Text in *Elisa e Claudio*, Act I, ‘Introduzione’, vs. *Les Noces de Gamache*, Act II, ‘Morceau d’ensemble.’

<i>Elisa e Claudio</i>	<i>Les Noces de Gamache</i>
Introduzione, Act I	Morceau d’ensemble, Act I
CORO	CARASCO ET LES BOHÉMIENS
Che scompiglio! che fracasso!	Accourez, gens du village
Per l’arrivo d’ un Marchese	A mon art rendez hommage.
(<i>dandosi molto movimento</i>)	PAYSANS
Che ritorni al suo paese	Accourrons, gens du village,
Se gl’incresce d’aspettar.	A son art rendons hommage.
LUCA	CARASCO
Conte... Conte... ov’è il padrone?	A chacun, moi je présage,

(*con molta smania*)
CORO
Non si trova, non si sa.
LUCA
Voi qui fate confusione (*rimproverandoli sempre con la stessa smania ed impazienza*)
Senza muovervi d'un passo...
Il Marchese è già d'abbasso...
CORO
Che ci stia... (*con dispetto*)
LUCA
Via su, correte,
Via cercate, non sapete...
CORO
Senza far tante parole,
Se lo cerchi chi lo vuole: (*con enfasi*)
Io per me non posso più

LUCA
Che parlar? Che tracotanza? (*sommamente irritato*)
Che si visiti ogni stanza
Presto a voi ... chi su chi giù
Io frattanto andrò di là (*parte in fret.*)
CORO
Più bel pazzo non si dà (*partono in confusione per diverse bande*)
Scena II
Il Conte in furia, indi Luca e Coro di ritorno;
finalmente il Marchese con Silvia sua figlia, e
Celso suo camerier,
CONTE
Qual mai strepito infernale
Per le stanze, per le scale! ...
Io non so che voglia dire
Questo scendere e salire...
Quest'incerto brontolio,
Che serpeggia, che risuona,
Che le orecchie mi rintrona,
Che mai tregua non mi dà.
CORO
Illustrissimo!... (*ansanti da varie parti*)
LUCA
Eccellenza!...
CONTE
Piano...(sbigottito)
LUCA
Sappia... in confidenza...
CORO
La carrozza...
CONTE
(*come sopra*) Ma ch'è stato?
LUCA
Il Marchese... (*senza poter continuare*)
CONTE
Ha ribaltato?
LUCA

Sans mentir,
Son avenir.

GAMACHE, à Don Quichotte
A son talent est-il sage,
Chevalier
De se fier ?
DON QUICHOTTE
Oui sans doute.
CARASCO ET LES BOHEMIENS
Qu'on s'avance:
Demandez

GAMACHE, à part
Agissons avec prudence :
En effet, dans mon enfance
On avait pour leur science
Des égards, des procédés.
(A Carasco:)
Je suis prêt à vous entendre.
CARASCO ET LES BOHÉMIENS.
Commençons donc à l'instant:
Payez, payez; pour son argent
L'on sera, je crois, content.

PAYSANS.
Payons, payons; pour son argent
L'on sera, je crois, content.
CARASCO.
(A Gamache.)
Ici l'on peut vous apprendre
Quel sort un jour
Vous promet l'amour
(A Quitterie avec une intention marquée)
Je présage
Fortune ou mariage;
Je sais taire
A propos certain mystère.
(Quitterie reconnaît Carasco.)
QUITTERIE.
Que m'importe de mon destin,
Mon malheur est trop certain.
DON QUICHOTTE et GAMACHE.
Je crois son talent certain;
Il nous dira notre destin:
Je le crois un grand devin.

Peggio, peggio! (*anelante come sopra*)
CONTE

(*con somma impaz.*) Si è
accoppiato?
LUCA

Il Marchese... eccolo qua. (*veggendolo a comparire*)
CONTE

Il tuo diavolo! (*in atto di partire*)
MARCHESE

Alto là!

[CHORUS What a mess, what a rumble for the arrival of a Marquis. He can go back to his own village, if he is bothered by the wait

LUCA Count... Count... where is the master?

CHORUS He cannot be found, we do not know

LUCA Here you are making a mess without even move further...The Marquis is already downstairs

CHORUS He can stay there...

LUCA Go on, hurry, Go on, look for him, you do not know...

CHORUS Without all this fuss, Who wants him should look for him: I cannot anymore

LUCA What is this way of speaking? What is this arrogance? Every chamber should be searched. Move... go upstairs, go downstairs. In the meanwhile, I will go there

CHORUS There is none crazier than him

CONTE What a hellish rumble, in the chambers, in the stairs! ... I do not know what it means this going up and down, this undefined rumble, that is sneaking, that is resounding, that is jarring my ears, That does not give me a break.

CHORUS Most illustrious!

LUCA Excellency!

CONTE Quiet...

LUCA You should know... in confidence...

CHORUS The carriage!

CONTE What was that?

LUCA The Marchese...

COUNT Did he fall?

LUCA Worse, worse!

CONTE Did he kill himself?

LUCA The Marquis... here he is!

CONTE Your devil!

MARCHESE Stop!]

[CARASCO AND BOHÈM. Hurry here, villagers, Pay homage to my art

VILLAGERS Let us hurry, villagers, Let us pay homage to his art.

CARASCO I foretell to everyone, Without lying, Their future.

GAMACHE to Don Quichotte: Is it wise to trust his talent, o knight?

DON QUICHOTTE Sure, no doubt.

CARASCO AND BOHÈM. For those who come: Ask

GAMACHE, aside: Let's act with prudence; actually, in my childhood we had some consideration, some practises for their knowledge. (To Carasco:) I am ready to listen.

CARASCO AND BOHÈM. Let's start right away: Pay, pay; for the money you pay, I am sure you'll be happy.

VILLAGERS. Let's pay, let's pay; for the money we pay, We are sure we will be happy.

CARASCO. (To Gamache:) Here you can learn which destiny one day will ensure you love (To Quitterie, with a marked intention:)

I foresee fortune or marriage; I know how to hide a certain mystery (Quitterie recognises Carasco)

QUITTERIE. What do I care about my destiny, my unhappiness is all too certain.

DON QUICHOTTE and GAMACHE. I believe his certain talent; He will tell us our destiny: I consider him a great soothsayer.]

In the French arrangement of this passage, the chorus is much more condensed, with shorter interventions than in the corresponding piece in *Elisa e Claudio*. The musical material in the opening of the scene is all extracted from Luca's part, which extensively feeds Carasco's, Quichotte's and

Gamache's lines. The metre respects the Italian versification throughout, providing a trochaic rhythm both in the Chorus and in the solo parts.

The piece offers a good example of how Guénée dismantled and rearranged musical segments into the new score, interpolating snippets of varying length from Mercadante, but retaining the tonal framework and the voice-leading of the original piece. The solo voices use materials both from the chorus and from Luca's solo; Quitterie's intervention is secondary, her line reduced to a simple chromatic line which does not share any common feature with Silvia, her counterpart in *Elisa*.

Sauvage and Dupin drew upon the dramatic substance of Romanelli's libretto in the *Introduction du 3^{me} acte* ('Avancez en silence'), based on materials from Act I Scene 11 ('Tacete non temete') of *Elisa e Claudio*, sung by Luca who enters with a chorus of henchmen to abduct Elisa's children in the presence of Carlotta and Elisa. Both numbers are nocturnal scenes, and describe mischief that is to be made under the cover of darkness – a time-honoured staple of opera buffa. In the original, the counterpoint between chorus and principals creates lively blocks of call and response, in which Elisa's and Carlotta's lines add yet another element of dramatic counterpoint to the musical texture of the scene. In *Les Noces de Gamache*, the interaction is reduced between Gamache and his followers, to whom he appeals to perpetrate his plans. Mercadante's original texture is heavily simplified, and though the thematic idea of the opening chorus recurs (see Examples 3-8 and 3-9) in smaller cells, there is no substantial development in the harmonic architecture of the piece, with a similar bass-line throughout.

Example 3-8: *Elisa e Claudio*, Act I, Scena e Coro, 'Tacete, non temete,' bars 3-11

Coro di Uomini

Ta - ce - te non te - me - te è una co - sa un po' ge -

Luca

Ta - ce - te non te - me - te è una co - sa un po' ge -

Piano

f

f

7

Coro

lo - sa ma con gar - bo e buo - na pa - ce se vi pia ce tut to an - drà

Luca

lo - sa ma con gar - bo e buo - na pa - ce se vi pia ce tut to an - drà

Pno.

Example 3-9: *Les Noces de Gamache*, Introduction du 3^{me} Acte, Gamache, Chœur
'Avancez en silence', bars 10-18, 222-3.

Choeur d'hommes

Gamache

Piano

14 A

Choeur

Gamache

Pno.

A

vis, et son- geons qu'a vec pru den - ce, il pré- tend qu'ils soient sui vis.

vis, et son- geons qu'a vec pru den - ce, il pré- tend qu'ils soient sui vis.

A performance indication on the last page of the number: 'This refrain is repeated in continuous *diminuendo* until the complete exit offstage' clarifies the nature of the piece; the number must have been used as a sort of processional interlude to provide both dynamism to the action and secure an effortless exit offstage for the chorus, allowing a smooth transition to the following scene.³⁵

³⁵ 'Cette ritournelle se dit toujours en diminuant jusqu'à la sortie complete de la Cantonnade' *Les Noces de Gamache*, Laffillé, 1825, 231.

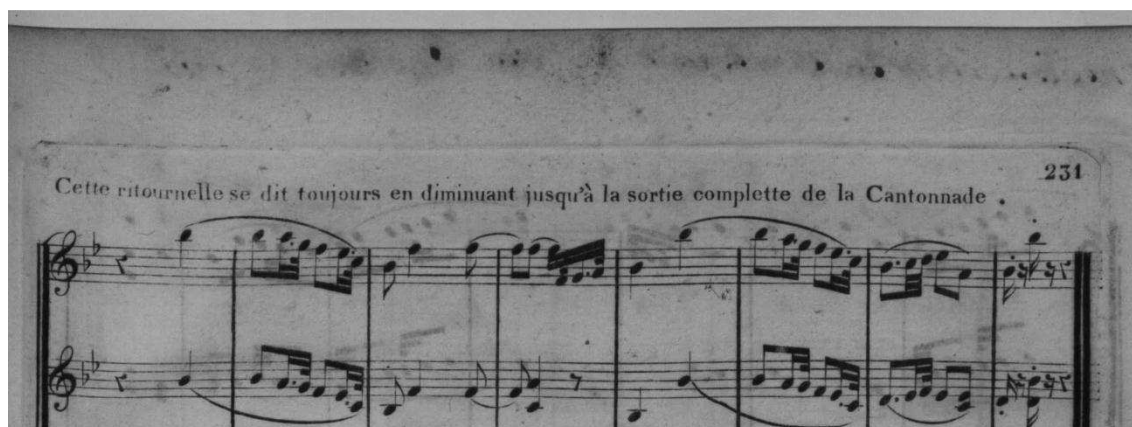


Figure 3-3: *Les Noces de Gamache*, 'Introduction du 3^{me} Acte', Performance Indication, 231.

The choice of *Elisa e Claudio* as a source for *Les Noces de Gamache* may have been determined by a number of factors, including similarity in the cast, the presence of a good number of analogous dramatic situations, and the opportunities to parody the original in the new French libretto. Another factor may have influenced the selection of specific passages from *Elisa e Claudio* for *Les Noces de Gamache*, however. All the pieces drawn from Mercadante's score had been enthusiastically received by the public when the opera was staged earlier at the Théâtre Italien. As we have seen in Chapter 2, the press had praised several pieces as the real landmarks of the performance: 'a duet between Bordogni and Zucchelli, an air sung by M^{lle} Cinti, a chorus of the Conte's followers and, above all, a duet between Pellegrini and M^{me} Pasta'. The fact that Guénée adapted all the numbers of *Elisa e Claudio* that had been positively reviewed in 1823 and 1824 may be a mere coincidence. It seems likely, however, that he made his choices carefully, selecting music that promised to be heard again with pleasure after its initial reception in Paris. If so, *Les Noces de Gamache* offers intriguing insights into the French reception of *Elisa e Claudio* beyond the boundaries of the Théâtre Italien. If, indeed, this was Guénée's strategy, it worked well: the music in *Les Noces de Gamache* attributed to Mercadante in *La Pandore* was deemed to be 'light and cantabile', and was praised for its melodic qualities:

Les Noces de Gamache were more fortunate [than the tragedy].

Mercadante's music seemed light, cantabile. The authors, acclaimed by the audience's bravos, are Mr. Sauvage and Dupin.³⁶

3.5 Conclusion

The appearance of Mercadante's music in the 1825 season at the Odéon raises a number of unresolved questions. The decision to arrange his music seems to have had as much to do with the personal choices of the individuals involved in the preparation of the pasticcio as with a direct response to the success of *Elisa e Claudio* in Paris. This view is reinforced by the insertion into the score of numbers from *L'apoteosi d'Ercole*, which was unknown to the French public. Indeed, it is possible that an influential figure such as Castil-Blaze may have had a part in the decision to draw on an array of works by the young Mercadante, and may even have interceded to obtain a copy of the autograph score. Be that as it may, the audience's appreciation for significant numbers in *Elisa* possibly played a part in the choices made by Guénée while constructing the new score. To be sure, *Les Noces de Gamache* represented another important opportunity for Mercadante's music and name to circulate in Paris while *Elisa e Claudio* was performed, though in arrangements that introduced elements of distance from the composer's style.

The familiarity with *Elisa e Claudio*, *Les Noces de Gamache* and Mercadante's music circulating in the capital set up expectations about the opera which Mercadante was invited to write for the Théâtre Italien at the opening of the 1835 season. The critical discourse around Mercadante's music, to which the critical appraisal of *Les Noces de Gamache* represented a significant addition, remained crucial in defining the evolving perception of Mercadante by a growing number of Parisian audiences.

³⁶ 'Les noces de Gamache ont été plus heureuses. La musique de Mercadante a paru légère, chantante. Les auteurs demandés au milieu des bravos, sont MM. Sauvage et Dupin.' *La Pandore*, May 10, 1825.

Furthermore, in the time span between the premieres of *Les Noces de Gamache* (1825) and *I briganti* (1836), other music by Mercadante circulated and found a niche in the Parisian musical market, as Table 3-8 shows:

Table 3-8: Music by Mercadante published in Paris (1823-1837).³⁷

Year	Publisher	Number	Opera
1825	Laffillé		<i>Les Noces de Gamache</i>
1826	Schlesinger		<i>Elisa e Claudio</i>
1827	Pacini	Duo pour Soprano et contralto: Sei pur Barbara Chanté par madame Malibran et M***	<i>Donna Caritea</i>
		'Ah se estinto', pour voix de contralto	<i>Donna Caritea</i>
		'De secunda amica sorte'	<i>Nitocri</i>
		Rondo: Non reggo a tal	<i>Nitocri</i>
			<i>Elisa e Claudio</i> , 1er livraison
1830	Denné; Bressler	Ouverture des <i>Deux Figaro</i> , composée et arrangée pour le piano forte, par Mercadante	<i>I due Figaro</i>
1832	Richault	Deux rondos mignons à quatre mains, pour le piano sur des motifs d'Elisa e Claudio et de l'Italienne à Alger, de Mercadante et G. Rossini, par Charles Czerny op. 231	
	Schonenberger	Trois mélodies élégantes variées pour le piano, par François Hunten. N.1 Tyrolienne de Mercadante N. 2 Marche de Rossini N. 3 Cavatine de Bellini	
1834	Petit	Variations concertantes et faciles pour piano et violon sur une cavatine de Mercadante, soave imagine, par J. Ghys, op. 18	
	Schonenberger	Le Divertissement. Six thèmes favoris variés pour violon seul, par A. Ropicquet. N. 1 Tyrolienne de Mercadante – Cavatine de Rossini. – La Suissesse au bord du lac	
	Aulagnier	Étincelle (n. 8): variations et finale pour le piano sur un thème d' <i>Elisa e Claudio</i> , de Mercadante, composées par A. Aulagnier, op. 25	<i>Elisa e Claudio</i>
1837	Pacini	Cordo [sic] di donne. Aria di Amelia Sempre ripetemi. Duettino.	<i>I Briganti</i> , opera del maestro Saverio Mercadante, poesia

³⁷ Fétis, *Revue Musicale* 5 (Paris, 1829). 189-191; *Revue Musicale* (Paris, 1830), 96.

		Coro, scena ermano [sic]. E orgia Scena ermano Duetto. Ermano e Massimiliano-Aria corrado Scena ed aria di Amelia	del signor Crescini.
	Meissonnier	Le premier succès. Deux morceaux faciles et brillants sur des thèmes de Bellini et Mercadante, pour le piano, composés par François Hunten, op. 87	
	Prilipp	Les Souvenirs. Rondo et variations pour le piano sur deux thèmes favoris de Spohr et Mercadante, par François Hunten, op. 79	

This table, based on information provided by Fétis in the *Revue Musicale* and scattered evidence found in my perusal of the press of the time, shows the occurrence of selections from *Nitocri* (1824) and *Caritea, Regina di Spagna* (1826), and the fairly frequent presence of pieces from *Elisa e Claudio*. Both *Nitocri* and *Caritea* were successful in Italy; moreover, *Caritea* coincided with the Spanish years of Mercadante, to which the score of *I Due Figaro*, written for Madrid, also belonged. It is also interesting to note that numbers like the Duet between Elisa and the Marchese in *Elisa e Claudio*, based on a Tyrolienne, were amongst the best-known and domestically-consumed pieces. Though not completely neglected prior to the publication of *I briganti* for Pacini's firm in 1837, Mercadante's music seems to have found a very small place in the French market, with no significant addition until the late 1830s. At the same time, Mercadante's fame also continued to expand all over Europe as a consequence of his management commitments in the Italian theatres of Lisbon, Madrid and Cádiz. France, however, seems to have remained fairly sceptical of the successes of the Italian composer, and there is no evidence of any other opera by Mercadante staged at the Théâtre Italien after *Elisa e Claudio* and before *I briganti* in 1836. It is to the latter significant event that Chapter 4 is devoted.

4. Mercadante in Paris (1835–6)

The reception and criticism of Mercadante's *Elisa e Claudio* and its mutation into *Les Noces de Gamache* were decisive in the establishment of Mercadante's reputation in Paris. They laid the groundwork for the genesis and performance of *I briganti*, composed expressly for Paris and premiered at the Théâtre Italien on 22 March 1836.¹ On the wave of his fame as an authoritative composer with remarkable international experience, Mercadante eventually landed in Paris personally to confront audiences there and engage with the multifaceted world of French criticism. The literary source for *I briganti* was Friderich Schiller's *Die Räuber*, which a decade later would serve as the source for Giuseppe Verdi's *I masnadieri* (London, 1847).

4.1 The Road to Paris

Following an invitation from the Théâtre Italien to write an opera for the 1835–36 season, Mercadante made arrangements to travel from Novara (where he was *maestro di cappella* at the cathedral) to Paris late in October 1835.² 1835 was an exceptional year for the management of the Parisian theatre: two new works by prominent Italian composers, Bellini's *I puritani* and Donizetti's *Marino Faliero*, had appeared in the early part of the year, and Mercadante's opera was due to be inaugurated the following season and appear in the autumn. The composition of the new work was planned for the end of October, its rehearsal and premiere for November, and the composer's return to Novara in December, just in time for Christmas. At the same time Mercadante was negotiating with Domenico Barbaia, the impresario of the

¹ This chapter arises from a study of Mercadante and French opera in Michael Wittmann, "Meyerbeer and Mercadante? The Reception of Meyerbeer in Italy," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 5 (1993), 115–32.

² The earliest negotiations with the Parisian impresarios are mentioned in two letters in Mercadante's epistolary, dated July 14 and 19, 1835. In particular, the second also carries evidence of Rossini's direct involvement in the choice of the libretto to set to music. Palermo, *Biografia-Epistolario*, nos. 44 and 45, 141–2.

Teatro San Carlo in Naples, to stage another new opera in September, just a few weeks before his departure for Paris. Although not overly excited about his forthcoming Parisian undertaking, Mercadante indicated in his letters to Francesco Florimo that he needed to leave the provincial atmosphere of Novara, 'where there is nothing to talk about except rice, wheat, wine, corn, etc', and welcomed the opportunities offered by Barbaia in Naples on the one hand and Rossini in Paris on the other.³

During the summer of 1835, Mercadante must have thought of his mission to Paris as still far in the future while his efforts were all aimed at conquering the audience in Naples. Indeed, he was carefully preparing a return to the Teatro San Carlo after his time as a composer-in-residence there between 1823 and 1826. A new success in Naples would have meant a significant step forward in his project to settle there. The initial plan for Naples was to allow librettist Felice Romani to choose 'an extravagant subject, interesting, theatrical and short'.⁴ However, Romani's failure to respond to this request left Mercadante in the hands of the Neapolitan *impresa* who, in order to accelerate the censors' decision, sent Mercadante a libretto by Emanuele Bidera, the author of Gaetano Donizetti's *Marin Faliero*.⁵ The libretto in question, which Mercadante never set, was *Marco Visconti*.⁶

³ 'ed io farò il possibile per scuotermi da questa città di Provincia, dove non si parla che di Riso, frumento, vino, Gran.Turco, e cet.' Letter to Francesco Florimo, July 10, 1835, in Palermo, *Biografia-Epistolario*, no. 44, 141.

⁴ 'Ti ripeto che si può contare sulla Ronzi, Duprez, Ronconi, e se vuoi fare un'opera a due primi bassi come i Puritani, vi è Coselli. Scegli dunque un argomento stravagante, interessante, di effetto teatrale e corto.' Letter to Felice Romani, May 14, 1835. Palermo, *Epistolario*, no. 42, 139-40. On the collaboration between Mercadante and Romani before and after 1835, see Alessandro Roccatagliati, "Felice Romani, Librettist by Trade," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 8 (July 1996), 113-45.

⁵ Letter to Felice Romani, July 14, 1835, in Palermo, *Biografia-Epistolario*, no. 45, 143-4.

⁶ Letter 44 shows the direct involvement of the Neapolitan publisher Cottrau, who apparently advises Mercadante on the composition of the opera. On the plans for *Marco Visconti*, Mercadante and Florimo spent a great deal of ink and paper in their correspondence during the time immediately preceding and overlapping with the planning for Paris. For the title role of *Marco Visconti*, Mercadante had apparently already engaged baritone Domenico Cosselli. This singer was one of the most prominent male interpreters of the 1820s and '30s, starring in numerous operas by Rossini and Bellini, such as *Tancredi*, *Cenerentola* (1823) and *La straniera* (1832), *Il pirata* and *Beatrice di Tenda* (1834), and creating the role of Enrico Ashton in *Lucia di Lammermoor* (1835).

In the meantime, negotiations with the Théâtre Italien were unfolding. The subject that Rossini first suggested to Mercadante for the Théâtre Italien was based on Giovanni Battista Casti's *Re Teodoro*. Mercadante, however, considered it unsuitable for the Parisian stage: the plot was overcrowded and ended coldly. Moreover, in his opinion the part for the bass did not do justice to Luigi Lablache, one of the demands expressed by the French *impresa*.⁷ Nor was Mercadante convinced by the alternatives proposed by the Parisian impresarios Edouard Robert and Carlo Severini to give Luigi Lablache's role more visibility. In particular, the subjects proposed by Severini in order to upstage the rest of the cast in favour of Lablache were Carlo Goldoni's *Il burbero benefico* and Giovanni Giraudo's *Il disperato per eccesso di buon cuore*.⁸ Afraid of fueling any form of rivalry between singers, the composer instead intended to give equal weight to all four principal performers – Giulia Grisi, Giovanni Battista Rubini, Antonio Tamburini and Luigi Lablache (the extraordinary 'quartet' of singers who had recently created the main roles in Bellini's *I puritani* and Donizetti's *Marino Faliero*).⁹ Mercadante concluded as follows:¹⁰

I want you to know that if you delay your libretto I will be forever ruined. I must stage the opera by the end of January; as I must be the first, the date cannot be put off, because in March the company leaves for London. My self-respect requires me to ensure that this happens; therefore it is necessary to have time. With such a company and Romani's libretto there will not be any excuse for me if I do not succeed and if, rather than improving my fortune, I become the target

⁷ Letter to Felice Romani, July 19, 1835, Palermo, *Biografia-Epistolario*, no. 46, 144-6. From this point on, all letters quoted from Mercadante's *Epistolario* edited by Palermo will be abbreviated with recipient name, date, and letter and page number in the *Epistolario*.

⁸ On the 'alternatives' proposed by the French *impresa*, see abovementioned letter to Felice Romani, no. 46, 144-6.

⁹ In the same letter, Mercadante also recalls that Romani had promised him the libretto of an opera buffa the year before, which was never completed or staged because of difficulties with the censors and the lack of an opera company in town suitable for the undertaking. I have been unable to identify the libretto in question.

¹⁰ During the same season the same cast was also involved in Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, and Gnecco's *La prova d'un opera seria*.

of the press I shall have to renounce the Theatre forever....My destiny is in your hands. Do not disappoint me, I beg you.¹¹

This letter is not only an eloquent testament to Mercadante's hope of achieving success as his Parisian mission approached and to his apprehension in dealing with a potentially unreliable collaborator, but also a prophecy of the misadventures that were to follow.

Later in the summer, cholera began to blight northern Italy. Mercadante's attempts to reach Naples, first via Genoa then by land from Milan, were thwarted by quarantine, which extended to all residents of Savoy. Stranded in the Kingdom of Sardinia with his family, Mercadante was forced to change his plans, renouncing his commitment in Naples.¹² First he spent some time in Arona, a small rural town in the province of Novara, then he travelled to France earlier than he had originally intended, probably in late August. The French press reported the news of a meeting in Genoa between Mercadante and Niccolò Paganini on 1 September, which incidentally contradicted the widespread rumours that the great violinist had died of cholera.¹³ Meanwhile, Mercadante was negotiating with Domenico Barbaia regarding the possibility of postponing his Neapolitan engagement until the first period of Lent, as his commitment with Paris now clashed with their original plans.

¹¹ 'Ti fo osservare che se tu mi ritardassi la poesia io sarei rovinato e per sempre. Devo andare in scena immancabilmente per la fine di gennaro; dovendo io trovarmi il primo, non si può dilazionare quest'epoca, poichè in marzo la compagnia parte per Londra. Il mio amor proprio esige ch'io me ne occupi seriamente, e perciò è necessario aver tempo. Con la citata compagnia e il libro di Romani, nessuna scusa vi è per me se non riesco, ed invece di migliorare la mia fortuna sarei bersaglio de' giornali, e dovrei per sempre dare un addio al Teatro....La mia sorte è nelle tue mani, non deludere, per carità, le mie speranze.' Letter to Felice Romani, July 19, 1835, no. 46, 144.

¹² In a letter to Domenico Barbaia, Mercadante explains the reasons for his withdrawal from his commitments with Naples, describing his misadventures with the imposition of the quarantine. Letter to Domenico Barbaia, September 7, 1835, no. 48, 147-8.

¹³ 'Les espérances que nous avons exprimées dans notre dernier numéro, de voir bien sûr démentir la nouvelle de la mort de Paganini, se trouvent heureusement changées en une complète certitude. Malgré les détails officiels de sa fin et de ses funérailles, donné récemment par un journal, Paganini vit, et se porte à merveille. Le célèbre compositeur Mercadante, en se rendant à Paris, l'a vu et lui a parlé à Novarre le 1^{er} septembre. Paganini arrivant de Gênes, avait subi une quarantaine de trois jours, et allait se remettre en route pour Parme. Nous apprenons en outre qu'il a donné le 9 un grand concert à Milan, où il est encore en ce moment.' *Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris*, September 20, 1835.

Quite confident of being able to stage his opera for the Théâtre Italien by the end of 1835, postponing the undertaking for the San Carlo until just after the carnival season seemed a wise decision. On his way to Paris, Mercadante also met the impresarios of the Théâtre Italien in Milan to receive further instructions for the forthcoming opera, which he rapidly communicated to Romani. The work had to be comic but clearly differentiated from the other pieces on the bill in the same season; it was to make each of the interpreters shine equally; and it was to contain a *Duetto a due Bassi*, another duet between the prima donna and the tenor, a fair number of solos for the principals, and a chorus of both men and women. Finally, it should be no longer than two and a half hours.¹⁴ On 2 September, in his last letter to Romani from Italian soil, Mercadante provided the poet with a schedule of deadlines, which he summed up in a postscript:

Do whatever it takes to send me the first act by the end of this month, and the second in October, towards the end, so that I can stage the opera throughout November. Give me your decision on the subject soon.¹⁵

4.2 The Parisian Sojourn

Mercadante summarised the main stages of his voyage to Paris in a letter, which records the date of his arrival in the French capital as 13 September 1835.

Our arrival in this capital only took place on the 13th of this month, after we had stopped over twice, both in Geneva and Dijon, to stretch our legs, which had become sardines in that blessed coach.¹⁶

¹⁴ Letter to Felice Romani, September 2, 1835, no. 49, 148-50.

¹⁵ 'Fai di tutto per spedirmi il primo atto per la fine del corrente ed in 8bre verso la fine il 2° acciò possa andare in scena per tutto 9bre. Scrivimi subito la tua decisione intorno all'argomento.' Letter to Felice Romani, September 2, 1835, no. 49, 150.

¹⁶ 'Il nostro arrivo in questa capitale ebbe luogo soltanto il giorno 13 corr. avendo fatti due riposi, in Ginevra ed Dijòn [sic], per poter nuovamente dare moto alle gambe divenute acciughe salate, in quella benedetta diligenza.' Letter to Giuseppe Savio, Paris, September 17, 1835, in A.S. No., Collezione Giannoni, published in G.N. Vetro,

The French press also devoted considerable attention to his arrival and his commitment to the Théâtre Italien. The main newspapers broke the news as early as 12 September, refreshing the readers' memories on the main reason why Mercadante should have been familiar to the French audience. As Rossini probably expected, Mercadante was remembered by the Parisian press and audiences at large mainly as the composer of *Elisa e Claudio*. His name, as well as his intention to compose an *opéra bouffe* to a libretto by Romani 'expressly written for Paris', appeared in the Théâtre Italien's announcements of the 1835-36 season.¹⁷

Very little is known about Mercadante's early weeks in the French capital. The *Journal de Paris* signaled his presence at a concert held at *le Gymnase musical* later in September, but it is reasonable to assume that this was not the only musical event he attended.¹⁸ This assumption is reinforced by his growing awareness of the type of audience that he would have to satisfy, which he expressed in his unanswered letters to Romani. In particular, the composer drew attention to some aspects of Parisian musical taste:

Here they like delicate things enormously, that is to say Romanze, canzoncine, bei canti, etc. Music too *parlante* [declamatory] gets lost and is not understood. Beautiful *choruses*, some nice *concertato* pieces, [but] not many.¹⁹

Mercadante's main purpose in communicating his impressions to Romani was undoubtedly to obtain poetry suitable for the Parisian audience. On 3 October, the same day he sent his friend and future biographer Florimo his well-known account of Bellini's funeral, Mercadante also wrote another

"Saverio Mercadante Maestro di Cappella in Novara," in *Saggi su Saverio Mercadante*, 157-8.

¹⁷ In Italian in the text 'Espressamente escrito par Parigi', as reported, to quote just some of the consulted sources, in *Revue et Gazette musicale*, September 13, 1835; *Le Charivari*, September 22, 1835; *Journal de Paris*, September 27, 1835.

¹⁸ *Journal de Paris*, September 27, 1835.

¹⁹ 'Qui piacciono sommamente le cose delicate, cioè Romanze, canzoncine, bei canti ecc. La musica troppo parlante si perde e non l'intendono. Bei Cori, qualche bel pezzo concertato, non molti.' Letter to Felice Romani, September 29, 1835, no. 51, 152.

letter to remind the unresponsive Romani of the agreements established with the French *impresa*.²⁰

Mercadante's letters from this period also reveal that at some point Romani had suggested a subject for the libretto for Paris, derived from Goethe's *Torquato Tasso* and perhaps drawing on the play by Giovanni Rosini that had served as the basis for Jacopo Ferretti's libretto for Donizetti (1833). The letters from Mercadante to Romani throughout October suddenly showed a more purposeful attitude and were packed with references to monetary compensation – a clear attempt to keep the librettist's focus alive.²¹ Furthermore, the composer continued to provide Romani with instructions for tailoring the principal roles in the opera, as well as offering comments on the singers:

Do not forget [to write] a little based on the synopsis, the notes for the *Sets*,²² *Costumes*, etc. There is some rivalry between Lablache and Tamburini; I beg you to balance their parts as much as you can. The first is a great actor and also sings well, is unsurpassable in concertato pieces for his *soul, strength, self-confidence*. The second sings delicately ... Rubini is an angel. La Grisi sings beautifully with supreme expression; she really looks good on stage, hardworking. Beautiful, very beautiful. Short pieces, much singing. Avoiding the *parlanti* because here they do not understand them. Romani... Romani... you will laugh like a madman reading these extravagant letters, and I will let you laugh as much as you like, but I beg you to take care of me and not to make me lose this beautiful opportunity to show my worth. Goodbye.²³

²⁰ Letter to Felice Romani, October 3, 1835, no. 53, 155.

²¹ See above-mentioned Letter to Felice Romani, October 19, 1835, no. 54, 155-6.

²² Wittmann translates as follows: 'Don't forget the plot, notes for the Scenery, Costumes, etc.', Wittmann, "Meyerbeer and Mercadante?," 122.

²³ 'Non dimenticare un poco di argomento, le note per le Decorazioni, Vestiario, ecc. Vi è un poco di gelosia fra Lablache e Tamburini, ti prego di equilibrare le parti il più che ti è possibile. Il primo è grand'attore e canta ancora bene, è insuperabile ne' pezzi concertati per la sua anima, forza, sicurezza. Il secondo canta delicato. . . Rubini è un angelo. La Grisi canta benissimo di somma espressione; sta bene assai in scena, è

Mercadante in Paris (1835-6)

Mercadante's optimism did not last long, though, as Romani again fell silent at the beginning of November. The press remained mostly quiet about the composer's activity for some time, but indicated that plans had changed. On 23 October the *Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris* gave a cautious update:

The Théâtre Italien keeps mysteriously silent about the title of the opera Mercadante is preparing, all we *must say* is that the opera is in the *semi-serio* genre, and that it will see, shining in a happy conjunction, the four stars of music beyond the Alps. Lablache's role will be a comic one, and probably it will contrast with the dramatic colour of Tamburini's character.²⁴

Only a week after the *Gazette's* update, Mercadante wrote a desperate letter to Romani:

All of Paris supposes that I am setting your new Drama, the press talks about it continuously, while I am beside myself, I am anxious, quivering without the least support. How much would it cost you to calm me down with only two words? Since you had decided for Torquato Tasso, it would not have been difficult for you to sketch a subject, and let me have at least the introduction.²⁵

Then, on 9 November, Mercadante plaintively reminded Romani of a promise he made on 31 October to provide him with some numbers for the

infaticabile. . . Bella, bellissima. Pezzi corti. Molto canto. Evitare i parlanti, poiché qui non l'intendono. Romani... Romani... tu riderai come un matto in leggere queste stravaganti lettere, ed io ti concedo di ridere sin che vuoi, ma ti scongiuro di occuparti di me e di non farmi perdere questa bella occasione di farmi onore. Addio.' Letter to Felice Romani, October 19, 1835, no. 54, 156.

²⁴ 'Le Théâtre Italien garde mystérieusement le silence sur le titre de l'opéra que lui prépare Mercadante, tout ce que nous *devons* dire c'est que l'ouvrage est du genre *semi-serio*, et que l'on y verra briller dans une heureuse conjonction les quatre astres de la musique ultramontaine. Le rôle de Lablache sera comique, et probablement fera contraste avec la couleur dramatique du personnage de Tamburini.' *Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris*, October 23, 1835.

²⁵ 'Tutta Parigi suppone ch'io sto ponendo in musica il tuo nuovo Damma, I giornali ne parlano continuamente, mentr'io mi rodo, smanio, fremo senza il minimo conforto. Cosa ti sarebbe costato di tranquillizzarmi con due parole? Dal momento che avevi fissato il Torquato Tasso, non ti era difficile tracciare un argomento, farmi avere almeno un'introduzione.' Letter to Felice Romani, October 31, 1835, no. 55, 157-8.

new opera on 2 November.²⁶ On the same day, in a letter to his friend Carlo Lombardi in Novara, the composer expressed his deep concern for Romani's delay but also his confidence that the poet would not abandon him.²⁷ In subsequent letters, Mercadante lamented that the leave obtained from Novara cathedral was coming to an end; requests from the chapel were becoming increasingly pressing, and he feared that he might lose his post. This growing concern, however, ran parallel with a seemingly constant trust in Romani. At this point, we learn from a letter by Ferdinando Paer that the composer was introduced by the Italian music director to the French queen on 14 December 1835.²⁸

At the same time, Mercadante's private correspondence paints him as anguished, in forced idleness, hounded and persecuted by the French press. By 19 December some journals disclosed that Mercadante was going to resort to a new Italian poet 'currently in Paris', whose name they did not know.²⁹ On

²⁶ 'Amico caris.mo. Con la tua del 31, mi promettevi qualche pezzo che avresti spedito il lunedì 2 corr. ma sinora nulla ho ricevuto... [Dearest friend, with your letter of the 31st, you promised me some pieces that you should have sent me on Monday the 2nd, but so far I have not received anything ...].' Letter to Felice Romani, November 9, 1835, no. 57, 158-9.

²⁷ 'Amico Caris.mo. Sempre speranze e mai Poesia - Ogni corriere che passa senza nulla ricevere è una vera morte per me. Sono più che certo che Romani non vorrà abbandonarmi in questa importante situazione della mia carriera, ma pure ci vuole il tempo per fare della musica meno indegna che sia possibile, de' suoi divini versi... Insomma io non ho più testa, e credo di diventar matto se egli non mi toglie di pene col spedirmi il tanto bramato Libretto....io sono ozioso, il pubblico attende grandi cose da me, i Giornali continuamente mi tormentono, ed in conseguenza, dalla mattina alla sera penso sempre al Torquato Tasso. [Dearest friend, Always hopes and no Poetry - every postman passing by without anything for me is a true death for me. I am more than sure that Romani will not wish to abandon me in this important situation in my career, but yet I will need time to make music that could be as worthy as possible of his divine verses ... I am idle, the public is expecting great things of me, and the Press continually torments me; as a consequence, I think constantly of Torquato Tasso].' Letter to Carlo Lombardi, November 9, 1835, no. 56, 157-8.

²⁸ 'Carissimo Direttore. Non posso avere il piacere d'essere dimani al solito Com.té. La ragione è che sono obbligato di presentare io stesso il Maestro Mercadante alla regina, e se mi rifiutassi avrei l'aria di non interessarmi alle istanze a codesto brav'uomo! Onde scusatemi per di ieri. Martedì sarò a' vostri carissimi ordini.' Paer to an unknown destination, Letter No. 138, in Giuliano Castellani, *Ferdinando Paer, Biografia, opere e documenti degli anni parigini* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2008), 612.

²⁹ The news was reported on December 19 by the *Journal de Paris* and *Le Temps*, and on December 27 by the *Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris*.

24 January, in a letter to his friend and colleague in Novara, Giuseppe Savio, Mercadante reported the unofficial story:

Romani perpetrated a mere betrayal, not caring about what he had promised in writing, repeated many times in many letters dating up to December 24. Rossini, who loves me, took me under his protection and, moved by the immense damage caused to me by the ever fatal Romani, wrote directly to Turin, ordering that if he did not mail the whole libretto by courier, we would protest and resort to another poet. In reply, we had a letter in which he claimed to be affected by headache and could not write the verses, without mentioning the four months he has made me spend in this city, causing me six thousands francs of expenses. This last lesson really shook me from my lethargy, and makes me consider this man *dead* from now on, so that I will never think of him as an author for any of my librettos in future. We resorted to a Venetian gentleman, a friend of Rossini, to repair the damage in the best possible way, taking for granted that if I do not stage the opera in this season, I will not earn any money, and I will be the laughing stock of all the papers who celebrate whenever they can attack an Italian.³⁰

Besides testifying to the friendly relationship between the two composers, Rossini's personal intervention showed the seriousness of the

³⁰ 'Romani consumò un mero tradimento, non curando ciò che aveva promesso per scritto e ripetuto in varie sue lettere datate fino al 24 scorso dicembre. Rossini che mi ama prese a proteggermi e commosso dagli immensi danni causatimi dal sempre per me fatale Romani, scrisse direttamente a Torino intimando che se per volta di corriere non mandava l'intero libretto, si sarebbe protestato e provveduto un altro Poeta. In risposta, avessimo una fede con la quale dichiarava che aveva mal di testa e che non poteva fare i versi, senza darsi carico de' quattro mesi che mi aveva fatto inutilmente perdere in questa città, e cagionandomi la spesa di seimila franchi. Quest'ultima lezione mi ha veramente scosso dal mio letargo, e mi fa da oggi in avanti considerare quest'uomo come morto, acciò non mi venga mai e poi mai voglia di farmi comporre un altro libretto. Si ricorse ad un gentiluomo veneziano, amico di Rossini il quale d'accordo con noi si è subito adoprato per riparare nel miglior modo possibile a tanta rovina, atteso che s'io non do l'opera in questa stagione, non prendo un soldo e sarò lo zimbello di tutti i giornali i quali fanno festa quando possono dare addosso ad un italiano.' Letter to Giuseppe Savio, Paris, January 24, 1836, A.S. No., Collezione Giannoni, in Vetro, "Saverio Mercadante Maestro di Cappella in Novara," *Saggi su Saverio Mercadante*, 159.

situation. On 24 January, the *Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris* first named the exiled poet Jacopo Crescini as the new librettist for Mercadante's opera.³¹ The young poet, almost a neophyte, had been mentioned on 12 December in the *Journal de Paris* as the possible author of an ode to Bellini.³² The press also presented a short discussion on the subject of the libretto and its suitability for the featured cast. The libretto for the new opera was based on *Die Räuber* by Schiller, already known to Parisian theatre audiences through a French version in five acts by La Martelière entitled *Robert, Chef des Brigands*.³³

4.3 The Critical View

At the end of January 1836 the Parisian press recorded the beginning of the stage rehearsals for *I briganti*, and indicated that Mercadante was writing in haste, not having composed a single note of the opera before the end of December. At the end of February, in a letter to Luigi Camoletti in Novara, Mercadante gave an account of the progress of the new opera:

Because of Grisi's indisposition (which is coming to an end), rehearsals of my Opera were suspended in order to begin those of *Don Giovanni* by Mozart, and this circumstance will therefore delay the staging by a few days. I have nearly finished, as the only thing lacking is the Aria for Grisi, which I am waiting to compose when she will definitely be better

³¹ See also *Courrier des théâtres*, January 27, 1836 and *Journal des femmes*, January 29, 1836.

³² Jacopo Crescini was a Venetian lawyer who lived in Paris and gravitated around the circle of Italian intellectuals in exile. Although he is known mainly for being Mercadante's librettist on this occasion, he also wrote, with Count Pepoli, the romanza No. 12, 'La caccia', in Mercadante's *Serate Italiane* (Paris, 1836), a collection of 8 ariette and 4 duetti which mirrors Rossini's *Serate musicali* (Paris, 1836). For a comparison between the two collections, see: M.A. Smart, "Parlor Games: Italian Music and Italian Politics in the Parisian Salon," *19th-Century Music* 34, no. 2 (2010), 39-60.

³³ Jean Henri Ferdinand La Martelière, *Robert Chef des Brigands. Drame en cinq actes, en prose. Imité de l'allemand par le citoyen La Martelière* (Paris: Maradan, 1793). For comparison between Crescini's libretto and La Martelière's work, see references in e.g. *Le Charivari*, March 24, 1836; *La quotidienne*, March 25, 1836; *Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris*, March 27, 1836.

and active in order to satisfy her. I have set the first two acts to music and I am now dealing with the third. Some changes to the libretto were needed, given that the poet has little theatrical experience, and we had to compensate for the greatest inconsistencies. The singers seem happy with the music, and they all demonstrated zeal and conviction in the eight rehearsals they have had. So far the pieces which are most appreciated are a duet between Tamburini and la Grisi and another between Lablache and Rubini. The Finale Primo and a Terzettino. I am not talking about the solo pieces because they have not been rehearsed yet on the keyboard, therefore we cannot presume their effect. According to this country's experts, the only negative thing is that we are staging it too late in the Season as, the latter being over on the 31st March, and not being allowed to stage the same Opera more than three times in a row, the result is that the Audience will hear it little, and this will compromise the composition, as the operas are better understood the more they are heard ... This morning, rehearsals will start again and so will those of the Orchestra on the first day of next month. I forgot to tell you that in the Opera there is a Prayer of the Morning which is supposed to be sung in Church, with no other accompaniment but the Organ, and which raises such a prodigious effect that all the Singers, to flatter me, say: 'Here is the Maestro di Cappella of Novara'.³⁴

³⁴ 'Per la malattia della Grisi (che ora è quasi cessata) si dovettero sospendere le prove della mia Opera, e fare quelle del Don Giovanni di Mozart, onde piegare il servizio, e questa circostanza ritarderà di qualche giorno l'andata in scena. Io ho quasi terminato poiché mi manca solo l'aria della d. Grisi, che attendo comporla quando sarà perfettamente guarita ed in attività onde procurare di contentarla. Ho instrumentato i due primi Atti ed ora mi occupo del terzo. Si hanno dovuti fare de' cambiamenti nel Libretto attesa la poca esperienza del Teatro che ha il Poeta, e si è rimediato alla meglio alle più grandi incoerenze. La Musica sembra contentare i cantanti quali nelle otto prove già fatte hanno dimostrato zelo e persuasione. Piace sin'ora un Detto [sic] fra Tamburini e la Grisi ed un altro fra Lablache e Rubini. Il finale Primo, ed un Terzettino. Non ti parlo de' pezzi a solo poiché non si provano al Cembalo, perciò non si può ancora presumere il loro effetto. Il solo male che vi è, a detta degli esperti di questo paese, è quello di darla troppo a Stagione avanzata, poiché terminando la recita questa Italiana Compagnia il 31 marzo, e non potendo qui stesso dare la stessa Opera più di tre volte di seguito, ne risulta che il Pubblicola sentirà poco, e ciò pregiudica la composizione, poiché più si sentono le Opere e più piacciono ... questa mattina si riprendono le prove ed il primo del prossimo mese quella dell'Orchestra. Mi

Mercadante in Paris (1835-6)

Despite displaying a certain cynicism, the press expressed sympathy for the Italian composer and his misfortunes, and treated him with respect and dignity. In March, during the days leading up to the premiere, *Le Courrier des théâtres* followed the rehearsals of the opera with excitement, its epic prose lavishing great praise on the composer:

The play by Schiller, put on the stage so many times, without making us forget the incomplete translation of Lamartellière [La Martelière]'s *Robert Chef de Brigands*, will reappear in its Italian form. The *Bouffes*, who already know the first act, will today rehearse the last two acts and will perform this work next Saturday. The music is the work of Monsieur Mercadante, the famous composer whom theatrical Paris knows only from *Elisa e Claudio* but whose works are in all places where first-rank talents are loved. The finale of the first act is already considered to be a magnificent piece. The success which awaits the latter is the only missing element to Mercadante's glory, one of the most admired men for his genius and most esteemed for his virtues. It is up to our capital city to place the last flowers on his crown.³⁵

The journal also lamented that *I briganti* was destined to enjoy only a short-lived success, since the Théâtre Italien was approaching the end of the season and the singers were preparing to leave for London, much to the disappointment of Mercadante, who after so much trouble would not see his

dimenticavo di dirti che vi è nell'Opera una Preghiera del Mattino che si suppone cantata in Chiesa, quale non ha altro accompagnamento che l'Organo e fa un effetto prodigioso, di maniera che tutti i Cantanti per scherzo dicono: "Si conosce il Maestro della Cappella di Novara".' Letter to Luigi Camoletti, Paris, February 26, 1836, no. 59, 162-3.

³⁵ 'Le drame de Schiller, tant de fois mis à la scène, sans faire oublier l'incomplète traduction de Lamartellière [La Martelière], *Robert chef des brigands*, va reparaître sous la forme italienne. Les Bouffes, qui savent déjà le premier acte, répéterons aujourd'hui les deux dernières d'*I Briganti* et donneront cette pièce samedi prochain. La musique est l'ouvrage de M. Mercadante, compositeur célèbre que Paris dramatique ne connaît que par *Elisa e Claudio*, mais dont les œuvres sont partout où l'on aime les talents de premier ordre. On parle déjà du *final* du premier acte comme d'un morceau magnifique. Le succès qui attend celle-ci manque seul à la gloire de M. Mercadante, l'un des hommes les plus admirés pour son génie et les plus estimés pour ses vertus. Il appartient à notre capitale de poser la dernière fleur sur cette couronne.' *Courrier des théâtres*, March 14, 1835.

work fully recognised: 'As there will be only five nights left, the *Bouffes* will undoubtedly devote all of them to *Briganti* by Monsieur Mercadante. So much expected, so little received, the same old story.'³⁶

In the end, *I briganti* only had four performances: furthermore, of the five performances initially planned, the third, on 26 March, was cancelled due to Grisi's indisposition and substituted with an act each of *Il barbiere di Siviglia* and *La prova di un'opera seria*. The performance was then rescheduled on 30 March.

Overall, the critics acknowledged a solid success, providing a detailed account of the work. As one might expect, reviews of *I briganti* in the Parisian press follow a conventional pattern: they open with an introduction to the composer and his previous works, emphasising especially the operatic repertoire known to the French audience, continuing with a synopsis of the plot, and a thorough observation and critique of the libretto, the score and the performance of the new opera. For example, Edouard Monnais in *Courrier français* discussed some of Mercadante's most renowned successes, such as *Elisa e Claudio* and *Donna Caritea*, making significant connections between Rossini, here defined as 'the sun', and the new production:

A man of talent, he follows the path paved by the man of genius: like his contemporaries, the Pacinis, the Vaccais, the Donizettis, and many others, he gravitated around the sun and he is lit up by the reflexion of its rays. Among all the works composed by him, and the list is long, in Paris only *Elisa e Claudio* is known, played with some success, without however entering the repertory definitively; but a nice duo between tenor and bass which has enjoyed an immense popularity in concerts and salons.³⁷

³⁶ 'N'ayant plus que cinq Soirées à donner, les Bouffes les consacreront sans doute aux *Briganti*, de M. Mercadante. Beaucoup attendre et peu recevoir. Histoire universelle.' *Courrier des théâtres*, March 21, 1836.

³⁷ 'Homme de talent, il entra franchement dans la voie frayée par l'homme de génie: comme ses contemporains, les Pacini, les Vaccai, les Donizetti et bien d'autres, il gravita autour du soleil et s'éclaira du reflet de ses rayons. De tous les ouvrages composés par lui, et la liste en est longue, on ne connaît à Paris qu'*Elisa e Claudio*, joué avec quelques succès, sans toutefois s'être maintenu au répertoire; mais il en est

The *Courrier des théâtres* described the premiere of *I briganti* as a well-deserved triumph, which reconfirmed Mercadante's fame after *Elisa e Claudio*.³⁸ *La Gazette des théâtres*, among others, also reported that the cast, and then Mercadante and his librettist, were acclaimed by the public at the curtain call.³⁹

Castil-Blaze's article in the *Revue de Paris* had a strong personal slant. The review opened with a parody of Mercadante's and Romani's epistolary interaction:

Dear *poeta*, I am looking for the scenes of desolation, the dagger strokes, the waves of poison that you have set aside for me. It is very fortunate that the way from Milan to Paris passes by your door. I could only jump from my carriage to your office; I hug you tenderly, I seize my libretto ... *buona notte, ben di core, i cavalli di galoppo*, greetings to Cimarosa and Rossini, *addio!*

— Gently, gently; less haste, dear maestro.

— No, no, my friend, I cannot stop. My libretto, may I take it, may I seize it, and carry it away!

— I wish, but it is not finished yet. Meanwhile, on this page, here are four verses for the finale of the second act.⁴⁰

resté un beau duo de ténor et de basse qui a joui d'une popularité immense dans les concerts et les salons.' *Courrier français*, March 26, 1836.

³⁸ 'La première représentation d'*I Briganti* a eu lieu, hier, aux Bouffes, avec un grand succès. Des beautés, mais plutôt à la manière allemande qu'à l'italienne, et le mérite de l'exécution ont pleinement justifié ce triomphe de l'auteur d'*Elisa e Claudio*.' *Courrier des théâtres*, March 23, 1836.

³⁹ 'M. Mercadante, demandé à la fin, est venu recueillir d'unanimes applaudissements; puis M^{lle} Grisi, Rubini, Lablache, Tamburini, et enfin M. Crivelli [sic], l'auteur du libretto.' *Gazette des théâtres*, March 24, 1836.

⁴⁰ 'Cher *poeta*, je viens chercher les scènes de désolation, les coups de poignard, les flots de poison que vous m'avez réservés. Il est fort heureux que la route de Milan à Paris passe tout juste devant votre porte. J'ai pu ne faire qu'un saut de ma voiture à votre cabinet; je vous embrasse tendrement, je saisis mon livret... *buona notte, ben di core, i cavalli di galoppo*, salut en Cimarosa et Rossini, *addio!* – Pian, piano; men fretta, caro maestro. – Non, mon ami, je ne puis m'arrêter. Mon livret; que je le prenne, que je le saisisse, et l'emporte! – Je le voudrais bien, mais il n'est pas terminé. Voilà pourtant, sur cette feuille, quatre vers du finale du second acte.' *Revue de Paris*, March 27, 1836, 354.

Castil-Blaze then moved on to a substantial critique of the opera, with a detailed discussion of the most significant numbers in each act. His final assessment of the premiere was favourable to Mercadante, and the composer's artistry was praised as well as the singers. Nonetheless, Castil-Blaze also presented a balanced view of the weaknesses of the opera.

Most of those who reviewed *I briganti* were also quick to criticise the librettist and his poetic choices. In most cases the press refrained from judging the libretto too harshly, but could not help exhibiting a certain amount of scepticism about its substance and poetic style. The *Courrier des théâtres* refrained from taking easy shots at it – 'it would be a bad joke'⁴¹ – and Henri Blanchard, writing in the *Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris* introduced his negative remarks thus:⁴²

The poem is an imitation of the tragedy *Brigands* by Schiller, or rather of the melodrama *Robert, Chef des Brigands*. But the action and the original characters have been radically modified by the work of Monsieur Jacques Crescini.⁴³

After reporting on how Romani had let Mercadante down, Blanchard criticised Crescini for creating 'peculiar' and romantic brigands, and purveyors of positive ideals:

Monsieur Romani, the guardian angel of Italian composers, who had promised to write a libretto for Monsieur Mercadante, did not accomplish this musical and literary mission, and it was necessary to

⁴¹ 'Enfin, les Bouffes exécuteront aujourd'hui leur opéra nouveau, *I Briganti*, dont l'auteur mérite si bien un succès! Tout semble le promettre. Il ne faut pas parler du poème, ce serait une fort mauvaise plaisanterie.' *Courrier des théâtres*, March 22, 1836.

⁴² Henri Blanchard signed his article in *La Revue et Gazette musicale* with the pseudonym J.J.J. Diaz.

⁴³ 'Le poème est une imitation de la tragédie des *Brigands* de Schiller, ou plutôt du mélodrame de Robert, chef des brigands. Mais l'action et les caractères primitifs ont été singulièrement modifiés par le travail de M. Jacques Crescini.' *Le Temps*, April 9, 1836. For similar references to La Martelière's work, see also e.g. *Le Charivari*, March 24, 1836; *La quotidienne*, March 25, 1836; *Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris*, March 27, 1836.

resort to another *signor poeta*; it was Monsieur Crescini who was entrusted with this dramatic task. And so he took a famous German tragedy as a subject for his opera; but ... Monsieur Crescini created brigands such as we see only rarely, or see not at all; brigands who are the most honest people in the world ...; virtuous brigands finally, who brandish their daggers only a little, but only for the sake of appearances, and whose excesses are only an attempt at a restoration in favour of their leader's father.⁴⁴

Le Charivari offered a similar view, but somehow justified Crescini's choice of subject and its realisation by assuming that depicting brigands as villains in the contemporary era would have made the topic anachronistic and, potentially, exposed the opera to charges of plagiarism of the French versions of Schiller's plot, among which La Martelière's 1792 translation for the Parisian theatre was the most conspicuous example.⁴⁵ The same article also quoted Crescini's own words from the introduction to the libretto for *I briganti*:

Brigands, says Crescini, who are represented in the German drama as a troop of villains keen on every vice, here appear like men opposed to all unjust oppressions, friends of this *innocent* independence which violates no order, no law. The *dark aspect of the night, a stormy sky*,

⁴⁴ 'M. Romani, la providence des compositeurs d'Italie, qui avait promis de *venir scritturare* [sic] *un libretto per il signor Mercadante*, n'ayant pas rempli cette mission musicale et littéraire, force a été d'avoir recours à un autre *signor poeta*; et c'est ainsi que M. Crescini a été chargé de cette besogne dramatique. Il a donc pris pour sujet de son opéra, une fameuse tragédie allemande; mais ... M. Crescini nous a fait des brigands comme on en voit peu, ou comme on n'en voit pas; des brigands qui sont les plus honnêtes gens du monde ...; des brigands vertueux enfin, qui brandissent bien quelque peu leurs poignards, mai seulement pour la forme, et dont tous les excès vont seulement à tenter une restauration en faveur du père de leur chef.' *Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris*, March 27, 1836.

⁴⁵ Schiller's work from 1781 was also adapted and translated by Friedel and de Bonneville as *Les voleurs* (1785), and it became extremely popular in the Parisian theatres after the revolution. *Robert, Chef des Brigands*, a prose drama in five acts, was written in 1792, published in 1793 and, according to the 1835-36 press, was staged in the drama theatres of the city at the same time as *Mercadante's* and Crescini's opera saw the light. For more information about Schiller's *Die Räuber* in translation, see P. Mortensen, "Robbing The Robbers: Schiller, Xenophobia and the Politics of British Romantic Translation," *Literature and History* 11, no.1 (2002), 41-61; R. Lelièvre, "Le Théâtre Allemand en France," *Revue de Littérature Comparée* 40 (1974), 256-92.

and nature in its secret horror please their spirit and respond to their character.⁴⁶

Hippolyte Prévost's article in the *Revue du théâtre* was extreme in its criticism:

The new opera by Mercadante, which they had announced in the early days of the Italian season as an *opera buffa*, has nothing of this character. The subject is drawn from *Brigands* by Schiller; the libretto is on the same level as the ones to which the Italian maestros are accustomed to set their music, that is to say, despicable.⁴⁷

And Jean Toussaint-Merle on *La quotidienne* spilled a good deal of ink in criticising first Crescini's libretto and then the inadequacy of the musical treatment of Schiller's plot:

If the libretto was of any importance in the making of an Italian opera, we would incommode ourselves in discussing the choice made by Crescini which, as the German poet himself admitted, is not a drama, but a metaphysical study of the most mysterious operations of the soul. This psychological essay about regrets and conscience, this warm and violent declamation against society, in which, with a deplorable verve, Schiller's young genius placed all his feelings of hatred and contempt towards civilisation, was a subject little suited for melody; thus the Italian poet left aside the philosophical thinking to engage in the banalities of the plot and over-indulged in those commonplaces where Schiller was forced to add to his piece to make

⁴⁶ 'Brigands, dit-il, qui, dans le drame allemand, sont représentés comme une troupe de scélérats rompus à tous les vices, paraissent ici comme des hommes opposés à toutes oppressions injuste, amis de cette *innocente indépendance* qui ne viole aucun ordre, aucune loi. *Le noir aspect de la nuit, un ciel orageux*, la nature dans sa secrète horreur, plaisent à leur esprits et répondent à leur caractère.' *Le Charivari*, March 24, 1836.

⁴⁷ 'Le nouvel opéra de Mercadante, qu'on nous avait annoncé dès les premiers jours de la saison italienne comme un opéra bouffe, n'a rien moins que ce caractère. Le sujet est tiré des *Brigands* de Schiller; le libretto est digne de ceux sur lesquels ont l'habitude d'écrire les maëstri italiens, c'est-à-dire qu'il est détestable.' *Revue du théâtre*, March 1836.

the representation more tolerable; which led him to say 'that his work was like those bad young subjects of which the qualities and vices are inseparable and form a combination which risks being spoiled in trying to correct it'. The Italian libretto has more analogies with *Robert Chef des Brigands* by Lamartellière [La Martelière], played with very much success by Baptiste the elder, in 1793, at the Théâtre Marais, than with Schiller's drama.⁴⁸

Castil-Blaze blamed Crescini for having completely missed Schiller's ironic nuance in the depiction of the 'brigand poltron' (lazy brigand), which represented an enlivening element that could have provided great opportunities for Mercadante's inclination for comic situations.

This drama is completely serious. The comic role of the cowardly brigand, which Schiller threw into the midst of his tragedy, is absent in the Italian libretto. Monsieur Mercadante, who has so often succeeded in the *bouffe* genre, should have taken advantage of this.⁴⁹

Perhaps the most benevolent response to Crescini's and Mercadante's joint efforts came from Monnais in the *Courrier français*. After a vivid

⁴⁸ 'Si le libretto était de quelque importance dans la confection d'un opéra italien, nous donnerions la peine de discuter le choix que M. Crescini a fait d'une œuvre de Schiller qui, de l'aveu même du poète allemand, n'est pas un drame, mais une étude métaphysique des opérations les plus mystérieuses de l'âme. Cet essai psychologique sur le remords et sur la conscience, cette chaleureuse et violente déclamation contre la société, où, avec une verve déplorable, le jeune génie de Schiller a déposé tout ce qu'il ressentait de haine et de mépris pour la civilisation, était un sujet peu propre aux mélodies; aussi le poète italien a-t-il laissé de côté la pensée philosophique du poète allemand pour se jeter dans les banalités du drame et s'est fort bien accommodé des lieux communs que Schiller avait été contraint d'ajouter à sa pièce pour en rendre la représentation supportable; ce qui lui faisait dire "que son ouvrage était comme ces jeunes mauvais sujets dont les qualités et les vices sont inséparables et forment un ensemble qu'on court risque de gâter en cherchant à les corriger". Le libretto italien a plus d'analogie avec Robert chef de brigands de Lamartellière [La Martelière], joué avec un si prodigieux succès par Baptiste aîné, en 1793, sur le théâtre du Marais, qu'avec le drame de Schiller.' *La quotidienne*, March 25, 1836.

⁴⁹ 'Ce drame est tout-à-fait sérieux. Le rôle comique du brigand poltron, que Schiller avait jeté au milieu de sa tragédie, a été supprimé dans le livret italien. M. Mercadante, qui s'est tant de fois signalé dans le genre bouffe, en aurait tiré bon parti.' *Revue de Paris*, March 27, 1836, 256.

depiction of Mercadante's misfortunes, Monnais decisively took Crescini's side, appreciating his willingness to step in to save the day:

At last necessity became obligatory: the season was coming to its end; luckily, a poet turned up without pretence and with good will, who agreed to versify a certain number of choruses, duos, cavatinas and romanzas: the league of librettists will probably be indignant, and will look on him as a false brother; we should only be the more obliged to accord him indulgence and favour.⁵⁰

The majority of the reviewers were tempted to blame the libretto for many of the weaknesses of the musical setting. In particular, the plan for a three-act opera was considered unfortunate, and the third act was generally recognised as the weakest because of its length and unbalanced position in the articulation of the drama. For example, Charles Meruau in *Le Temps* criticised the exceedingly symmetrical and almost pedantic structure of the act and listed the all-too-predictable alternation of individual numbers and ensemble pieces whose only function was to provide equal weight to all protagonists.⁵¹

⁵⁰ 'Enfin, la nécessité est devenue impérieuse: la saison touchait à son terme; heureusement il s'est rencontré un poète sans prétention et de bonne volonté, qui a consenti à rimer au pied levé une certaine quantité de chœurs, duos, cavatines et romances: le corps des librettistes en sera peut-être indigné, et le regardera comme un faux frère; nous ne nous en croyons que plus obligés à lui accorder indulgence et faveur.' *Courrier français*, March 26, 1836.

⁵¹ 'Enfin, le tout est symétriquement disposé, les cavatines sont opposées aux cavatines, les duos aux duos, les chœurs aux chœurs. Les périodes peuvent s'arrondir à loisir, les chants se répéter régulièrement et passer de rôle en rôle sans qu'il y ait le moindre contre-sens apparent entre la situation d'esprit de chaque personnage et la mélodie qu'il redit à son tour. Voyez quelle symétrie:

Au premier acte, un air de basse, un air de soprano, puis un duo de soprano et de basse;

Une romance pour le ténor, une romance pour le soprano, un duo de soprano et de ténor;

Le tout couronné, par un finale, fort beau, du reste, où chantent le soprano, le ténor et la basse avec tous les chœurs.

Le second acte est rempli presque en entier par un grand duo.

Au troisième, c'est comme au premier: un air de basse, un air de soprano, un duo de basse et de soprano;

Puis un trio de ténor, de basse et de soprano avec tous les chœurs.' *Le Temps*, April 9, 1836.

Albert Cler of *Le Charivari* suggested that:

from the musical point of view, the third act does not follow the rule of the *crescendo*. It does not offer anything remarkable but Amélie's cavatina, to the accompaniment of a chorus of followers, the andante of the finale, and the last measures preceding the curtain fall. This act should gain in speed what it lacks in beauty.⁵²

Even while taking a positive view of the premiere, Cler identified possible cuts.⁵³ And in the following review, entitled 'Second Performance of *I Briganti*: Cuts', Cler also suggested that Mercadante had applied all the cuts suggested by the press, thus favouring a more successful outcome to the following performances:

The author of *Elisa e Claudio* and of *Briganti*, Mercadante, had sufficiently established his reputation as a skilful composer; now he has just proved himself to be a man of tact and spirit. On Tuesday, though applauding the truly remarkable complexity of his new score, the audience seemed to have received some pieces less favourably, not because they lacked any merit, but because they were lengthy or because they did not seem to be expressed in the course of the third act. The next morning, some critics, and we were of this number, suggested a certain number of cuts to the composer. Mercadante, rather than responding as the bard of the *Huguenots*..., hastened to submit his own judgment to that of the audience.⁵⁴ Therefore, in the second performance, all the pieces indicated ... have completely

⁵² 'Sous le rapport musical, le troisième acte ne nous semble pas observer la règle du crescendo. Il n'offre guère de remarquable que la cavatine d'Amélie, avec accompagnement d'un chœur de suivantes, l'andante du final et les dernières mesures qui précèdent la chute du rideau. Il faut donc que cet acte gagne en rapidité ce qu'il perd en beauté.' Albert Cler, *Le Charivari*, March 24, 1836.

⁵³ For a longer discussion of these variants, see Chapter 5.

⁵⁴ *Les Huguenots* had only just been premiered on 29 February 1836.

disappeared. This act of good taste and modesty is too rare for us not to mention it with praise.⁵⁵

The willingness to make cuts, praised as an act of modesty by the press, was reflected in Mercadante's private correspondence; the composer certainly felt vulnerable after all the unfortunate events involved in the genesis of *I briganti*. Indeed, Mercadante's few letters from the period preceding the opening night show that the composer was not overly concerned with consistency. He appeared to be concentrating his final efforts on obtaining at least an acceptable baptism for his jinxed creation. On 14 March, just one week before the premiere, he had written again to his friend Luigi Camoletti in Novara:

All days feel like years to us, and only the generosity of the Reverend Canons, which I am unintentionally exploiting – and only because I cannot abandon an opera which is costing me sweat, immense sacrifice, and which is heavily exposing my name – is maintaining me in this city; without it, I would have left everything here and fled, if possible, to accomplish my duties. The first performance of this blessed and cursed opera was fixed for the first of this month, then Rubini fell ill and rehearsals were suspended. It was moved to the 15th, another illness for Grisi, stop and start over again. On the 19th, it should have taken place without difficulty, but then new obstacles, for the orchestra and the chorus are not obliged to rehearse on performance days; I believe that if (by some good fortune) this

⁵⁵ 'L'auteur d'*Elisa e Claudio* et d'*I Briganti*, M. Mercadante, avait suffisamment établi sa réputation d'habile compositeur; il vient de prouver en outre qu'il est homme de tact et d'esprit. Mardi, tout en applaudissant l'ensemble vraiment remarquable de la nouvelle partition, le public avait paru accueillir moins favorablement quelques morceaux, non qu'ils manquaient absolument de mérite; mais parce qu'ils faisaient longueur ou qu'ils ne semblaient manifestée dans le cours du troisième acte. Le lendemain quelques critiques, et nous fûmes de ce nombre, conseillèrent au compositeur un certain nombre de coupures. M. Mercadante, au lieu de répondre comme le chanteur des *Huguenots*...s'est empressé de soumettre son jugement à celui du public. Dès la seconde représentation, tous les morceaux indiqués..., avaient complètement disparu. Cet acte de bon goût et de modestie est trop rare pour que nous ne nous empressions pas de le signaler avec éloge.' *Le Charivari*, March 26, 1836.

theatre's season did not end on the 31st of this month, it would open on the day of the Last Judgement. This morning the first performance was announced for the 22nd. We hope that nothing else will happen and that all will be over at once, while I assure you, I am sick, as fed up as it is possible to be ... Those countless journals put me on the spot, with articles on my life, works, etc. Nevertheless they are not hostile, although I have not suscribed to any of them, otherwise it would have taken my entire pay. The singers seem very keen and the *impresa* and Rossini smile cautiously at me... but I say... let's wait until the 23rd.⁵⁶

Not surprisingly, most reviews of the premiere praised the cast as the main strength of the new production. According to some critics, however, the decision to make the vocal parts equal and balanced, without privileging a main role, made their contribution less relevant to the action. Étienne Jean Delécluse on *Journal des débats* offered the following eloquent comparison:

This opera, with the four great artists who appear in it, recalls a day where four suns follow each other in the cycle, without ever knowing what time it is, where there is no shadow or light on the objects, where the East and the West are confused, and where in the end the eye, and

⁵⁶ 'Tutti i giorni ci sembrano anni, e la bontà dei Rev. Sig. canonici della quale abuso involontariamente, e solo per non poter abbandonare un'opera che mi costa sudori, sacrifici immensi, per la quale è (in alto grado) esposto il mio amor proprio, mi tengono ancora in questa città, altrimenti avrei piantato tutto e volato, se fosse possibile per adempire a' miei doveri. Era fissata la prima rappresentazione di questa benedetta e maledetta opera per il 1° corrente, si ammalò Rubini e furono sospese le prove. Fu rimessa al 15, altra malattia Grisi, *punto e da capo*. Il 19 dovea darsi senza fallo, nuovi ostacoli per l'orchestra ed il Coro i quali non hanno obbligo di provare i giorni di recita, io credo che se (per buona fortuna) la stagione di questo teatro non terminasse al 31 corrente, andrei in scena il giorno del giudizio. Questa mattina si è annunciata la prima recita per il 22. Speriamo che null'altro succederà e che tutto sia terminato una volta, mentre ti assicuro, ne sono stufo, annoiato quanto mai si può esserlo ... Quegl'infiniti giornali mi hanno messo alla moda, facendo continui articoli sulla mia vita, opere, ecc. e anche non hanno un aspetto ostile, benché non mi sia abbonato a nessuno, altrimenti ci voleva l'intera paga. I cantanti sembrano ben disposti e l'impresa e Rossini mi fanno il bocchino a riso... ma io dico... aspettiamo il 23.' Letter to Luigi Camoletti, March 14, 1836, no. 60, 164-5.

then the spirit, not knowing what to focus on, would fall into blindness and amazement.⁵⁷

Also for Castil-Blaze, the composer had indeed taken advantage of the extraordinary cast. Nevertheless, the excessive weight of each role may have weakened the success of individual performers, who were forced to rush from one cavatina to another.

It is an admirable advantage for a musician to have to deal with manoeuvring singers such as Rubini, Tamburini, Lablache, M^{lle} Grisi. This good fortune, though, is not without inconvenience, as it compels the composer to assign solos to all these virtuosos and to make good use of their expressive means; as a result there is an abundance of cavatinas and slow movements. Too much is too much, even of a good thing ... The opera was greatly applauded; undoubtedly it would have been advantageous if the musician had managed more silence for the singers, to give them time to take a breath and to be applauded.⁵⁸

Blanchard criticised the questionable insertion of incongruous folkloric features to add local colour to the action. In particular, he blamed Mercadante's decision to base the rhythmical structure of the chorus of the brigands in the second act on a Spanish bolero rather than on Hungarian or Tyrolean rhythms, which would have better suited the setting of the opera. The harmonic construction of the piece was also criticised, possibly for having a too simplistic and monotonal nature.

⁵⁷ 'Cet opéra, avec les quatre grands virtuoses qui y paraissent, fait penser à un jour où, quatre soleils se promenant dans le ciel, où l'on ne saurait jamais à quelle heure on est, où l'on ne verrait ni ombre ni clair sur les objets, où l'orient et l'occident seraient confondus, et où enfin l'œil, et par suite l'esprit, ne sachant à qui se fixer, tomberaient dans la cécité et la stupeur.' *Journal des débats*, March 24, 1836.

⁵⁸ 'C'est un admirable avantage pour un musicien que d'avoir à faire manœuvrer des chanteurs tels que Rubini, Tamburini, Lablache, M^{lle} Grisi. Cette bonne fortune pourtant n'est pas sans inconvénients, il faut donner des solos à tous ces virtuoses et faire déployer leurs moyens d'expression; de là vient l'abondance des cavatines et des mouvemens lents. Le trop est trop, même dans les bonnes choses ... L'opéra a été fort applaudi; sans doute il le serait davantage, si le musicien avait ménagé plus de silence aux chanteurs, pour leur donner le temps de reprendre haleine et de se faire applaudir.' *Revue de Paris*, March 27, 1836, 258.

Mercadante in Paris (1835-6)

The second act opens with a chorus of brigands, which has the good intention of being original, and which seems instead to be rather unsuccessful, as it shifts quickly from C minor to E flat and vice versa. This piece is accompanied by a storm and with a fairly rich orchestra. Hermann mingles in the orgy with his subordinates, and sings them a bolero in C minor, of which the refrain, repeated by the chorus in the French manner, etc. [is]:

La vita dei briganti

È la vita del piacer.

As far as local colour is concerned, we would have liked some Hungarian or Tyrolean rondeau more characteristic of the country in which the action is set; but it is not possible, even at a pinch, that Hermann travelled to Spain and brought back the bolero, when he starts singing a prayer before the image of the Virgin accompanied by clarinets and cellos.

The following excerpt presents the final C major statement of stanza and refrain of the *Orgia*, which follows the C minor section indicated in the quotation (see Example4-1).⁵⁹

⁵⁹ 'Le second acte s'ouvre par un chœur de brigands, qui a bonne envie d'être original et qui semble y réussir un peu en passant rapidement d'ut mineur en mi bémol, et *vice versa*. Ce morceau est accompagné d'un orage et d'une orchestre assez riche. Hermann vient se mêler à l'orgie de ses subordonnés, et leur chante un boléro aussi en ut mineur, dont le refrain, répété par le chœur à la manière française, etc.

La vita dei briganti

È la vita del piacer.

Pour la couleur locale, nous aurions autant aimé quelque rondeau hongrois ou tyrolien bien caractéristique du pays où se passe l'action; mais il n'est pas possible, à la rigueur, qu'Hermann ait voyagé en Espagne et en ait rapporté le bolero qu'il chante à ses compagnons. Resté seul, il redevient religieux, et s'agenouille devant une image de la vierge, à qui il chante une prière accompagnée par les clarinettes et les violoncelles (M. Mercadante a usé fréquemment de ces instruments dans son opéra).' *Revue et Gazette musicale*, March 27, 1836.

Mercadante in Paris (1835-6)

Example 4-1: *I briganti*, Act II, *Orgia*. Milan: Lucca, [n.d.], bars 64-100.

64

Ermano

Lie - to sem - pre sem-pre can - ti fra la spu - ma_ de' bic

Piano

68

chier, sol la vi - ta___ del Bri - gan - te è la___ vi - ta del pia -

72

cer si la vi - ta___ del Bri - gan - te - è la - vi - ta del pia - cer.

si___ la

si___ la

si___ la

ff

Mercadante in Paris (1835-6)

Example 4-1 Continued

77

vi-ta del Bri - gan-te è la vi-ta del pia-cer, be - viam, be - viam, be - viam, can-tiam, be

vi-ta del Bri - gan-te è la vi-ta del pia-cer, be - viam, be - viam, be - viam, can-tiam, be

vi-ta del Bri - gan-te è la vi-ta del pia-cer, be - viam, be - viam, be - viam, can-tiam, be

82

be - viam, can - tiam be-viam can - tiam ah si la vi - ta del Bri-gan-te è la

viam, be - viam, can-tiam, be - viam, be - viam, ah si la vi - ta del Bri-gan-te è la

viam, be - viam, can-tiam, be - viam, be - viam, ah si la vi - ta del Bri-gan-te è la

viam, be - viam, can-tiam, be - viam, be - viam, ah si la vi - ta del Bri-gan-te è la

Mercadante in Paris (1835-6)

Example 4-1 Continued

87

vi - ta del pia - cer, be-viam, be viam, be-viam be-viam ah si la vi-ta del Bri-gan-te è la vi - ta del pia

vi - ta del pia - cer, be-viam, be viam ah si la vi-ta del Bri-gan-te è la vi - ta del pia

vi - ta del pia - cer, be-viam, be viam ah si la vi-ta del Bri-gan-te è la vi - ta del pia

vi - ta del pia - cer, be-viam, be viam ah si la vi-ta del Bri-gan-te è la vi - ta del pia

93

cer be-viam be-viam ah si be - viam, can -

cer be-viam be-viam ah si be - viam, can -

cer be-viam be-viam ah si be - viam, can -

cer be-viam be-viam ah si be - viam, can -

Mercadante in Paris (1835-6)

Example 4-1 Continued

96

tiam, si si be - viam, can - tiam - - -

tiam, si si be - viam, can - tiam - - -

tiam, si si be - viam, can - tiam - - -

tiam, si si be - viam, can - tiam - - -

The Spanish bolero was a calling card of sorts for Mercadante, who had regularly introduced elements of local colour into the operas he had written in the late 1820s and early 1830s for the Spanish stages. In the context of *I briganti*, however, the dance rhythm appeared extraneous to the drama. The expectation of a tyrolienne instead was possibly due to the past successes scored by the composer, given that the one encountered in the duet of the second act in *Elisa e Claudio* had attracted positive reviews thirteen years previously.⁶⁰

Apart from these touches of scepticism, Blanchard, along with several other critics, praised Mercadante's orchestration, and in particular his mastery and sensitivity in scoring the accompaniments, most suited to enhancing the vocal performance of the cast, and in providing solo instrumental parts that

⁶⁰ Both bolero and tyrolienne are dances and song types in triple metre. While the bolero is usually in tempo moderato, the tyrolienne is traditionally faster. Both were used to evoke local colour, in particular Spanish or Alpine atmospheres. However, in the nineteenth century the tyrolienne entered the realm of pedagogical instrumental music and vocal repertoires (e.g. *Guillaume Tell*, 1829, Act III). In 1836, for instance, a Tyrolienne also featured in Mercadante's *Soirées Italiennes*.

Mercadante in Paris (1835-6)

heightened the lyricism of particular moments. Following the negative remark on his disputable choice of local colour, *La Revue et Gazette musicale* commented positively on Ermanno's prayer (see Excerpt in Example 4-2).⁶¹

⁶¹ I will refer to 'Ermanno' in my own discussion, and keep the wording for 'Ermano' when quoting from reviews, scores and librettos.

Mercadante in Paris (1835-6)

Example 4-2: *I briganti*, Act II, Ermanno, 'Fra nembi crudeli', bars 1-27.

Andante

Piano *p*

6 Ermanno

Fra

14

nem-bi cru - de - li smar - ri - to il cor mi - o smar - ri - to il cor mi - o la

sempre legato a mezza voce

20

via più non sa re - gi - na de' cie - li con

24

u - mil de - si - o ti chieg - go pie - tà Fra

The instrumentation of the prayer presented three solo cellos subsequently joined by clarinets, bassoons, and horns. The writing for clarinets and cellos was highlighted by Blanchard as enhancing Rubini's 'angelic' singing, and Mercadante's writing for the cello section, led by Auguste Franchomme, was compared to that of Étienne-Nicolas Méhul.⁶² In scoring the prayer, Mercadante must also have taken advantage of the presence in the orchestra of the talent of 'the King of the French school', as contemporary critics defined cellist Franchomme on numerous occasions.⁶³

The comparison with Méhul and the old French school of composers was not out of place, especially since the critic must have been referring to the opening of Méhul's overture from the opéra-comique *Ariodant* (1799). Example 4-3 shows the first few bars, in which three cellos and the tutti with basses set the tone for the events described in the opera.⁶⁴

⁶² 'Quoiqu'un peu froid et sévère, M. Mercadante a un style distingué, il possède bien son orchestre et sait écrire pour les voix. Son instrumentation est facile; sa manière de faire chanter les violoncelles rappelle le génie mélancolique de Méhul. [Although a little cold and severe, Monsieur Mercadante has a distinguished style, he has good command of his orchestra and knows how to write for voices. His instrumentation is simple; his way of making the cellos sing recalls the melancholic genius of Méhul.] *Revue et Gazette musicale*, March 27, 1836.

⁶³ Valerie Walden, "Franchomme, Auguste," in *Grove Music Online*, ed. Deane Root, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/10107>.

⁶⁴ John Warrack, *German Opera from the Beginnings to Wagner* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 199-201.

Mercadante in Paris (1835-6)

Example 4-3: Cellos' entry in *Ariodant*, Overture, bars 1-11. Étienne-Nicholas Méhul, *Ariodant*, Early Romantic Opera 39, ed. Charles Rosen (New York: Garland, 1978), 1.

Adagio

The musical score is for the cello entry in the Overture to *Ariodant* by Étienne-Nicholas Méhul. It consists of two systems of staves. The first system contains bars 1 through 6, and the second system contains bars 7 through 11. The parts are labeled Cello 1, Cello 2, Cello 3, and Tutti. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/4. The tempo is marked Adagio. The dynamics are marked *mf* (mezzo-forte) at the beginning of the first system and *p* (piano) at the beginning of the second system. The score shows various musical notations including notes, rests, and slurs.

In a review of one of the earliest 1829 performances of *Guillaume Tell*, Castil-Blaze had also referred to the overture to *Ariodant* to compare the instrumentation of the opening bars of both works. On that occasion, the critic blamed both Méhul's and Rossini's choice in entrusting the opening bars of the overture to a cello ensemble, especially because it conveyed a religious atmosphere that clashed with both dramatic situations depicted by the overtures.⁶⁵

⁶⁵ 'Un quintette de cinq violoncelles sert de début à cette symphonie. Le dessin en est moelleux, les accords adroitement variés, la mélodie vague, c'est comme une espèce de vapeur harmonieuse qui s'élève de l'orchestre. L'auteur a voulu peindre le calme qui précède le lever de l'aurore. Sous le rapport de l'invention et du style, ce début présente l'image que le compositeur s'est proposé d'offrir à notre oreille. Mais aurait-il dû confier l'exécution de ce prélude à cinq violoncelles ? c'est ce que je ne pense pas. Les forces de l'orchestre doivent être réunies, combinées, fondues ensemble pour

More recently, the orchestration of Raoul's aria from *Les Huguenots*, 'Plus blanche que la blanche ermine', in Act I may also have provided a model for the particular orchestration of Ermanno's prayer. Raoul's solo is accompanied only by a viola d'amore, and its distinctive instrumentation was widely recognised as a stroke of beauty in its French reception.⁶⁶ Though Mercadante might still have been revising his opera when the most successful pieces of *Les Huguenots* received the earliest praise in the press, the short lapse of time between the two premieres leaves little room for the hypothesis of a Meyerbeerian inspiration for the instrumentation of Ermanno's prayer.

In his review of the instrumentation of *I briganti*, Blanchard also singled out the performance of Jacques-François Gallay, the first horn of the Théâtre Italien, who had previously received praise for his opening solo in the bass duet of *I puritani*.⁶⁷

exprimer un sentiment dramatique général de calme ou de trouble. Si vous rassemblez plusieurs instrumens de même nature pour rendre une image de cette espèce, il est à craindre que les auditeurs ne se trompent sur l'intention du musicien, et ne voient dans cette association de sons homogènes, le désir de produire exclusivement le genre d'expression, le caractère que l'on attribue spécialement à l'instrument favori. Un groupe de cors annonce des chasseurs, un groupe de trompettes des guerriers, un groupe de violoncelles des prêtres ou des cérémonies religieuses. Ces idées, ou si l'on veut ces rébus musicaux, sont adoptées, et la science des sons a besoin de ces points d'appui pour guider l'auditoire à travers les écueils que son langage, un peu énigmatique, présente à notre intelligence. . . . Méhul a fait précéder son opéra d'*Ariodant* par un quatuor de quatre violoncelles et pourtant il n'y a rien de religieux dans cette pièce.' *Journal des débats*, August 11, 1829.

⁶⁶ 'L'accompagnement du récitatif de Raoul, est d'une expression fort piquante; on y entend les cris joyeux, les agaceries insultantes des étudiants dont il a trouvé entourée sa belle maîtresse. La romance qui suit est plus remarquable peut-être, par la manière dont elle est accompagnée, que par le chant lui-même. La viole d'amour y fait merveille, et l'entrée de l'orchestre, retardée jusqu'au vers: "Ô reine des amours" est une heureuse idée.' Hector Berlioz, *Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris*, 13 March 1836. 'Immédiatement après le chœur, vient la romance de Raoul, *Plus blanche que la blanche hermine*, avec accompagnement successif de viole d'amour et d'alto. Les accens vagues, aériens, mélancoliques de cet instrument, abandonné j'ignore pourquoi, mariés à la douce voix de Nourrit, ont produit un effet magique. Je ne sais quel étonnement se trouvait mêlé au plaisir qu'a fait cette romance, fort habilement encadrée au milieu du chœur joyeux et bruyant des convives du comte de Nevers.' Hippolyte Prévost, *Revue du Théâtre*, 1835-36, 364-7. Julia Lu and Kerry Murphy, "Giacomo Meyerbeer, *Les Huguenots*, première, dossier de presse," Francophone Music Criticism Database <http://fmc.ecs.soton.ac.uk/#m-columnbrowser@|m-informationcontrol?url=html/home.php>.

⁶⁷ 'Il commence par un solo de cor, dit avec la sureté, la grâce mélodique et le bon style qui caractérise le talent de M. Gallay. [He starts with a solo horn, given with the assurance, melodic grace and good style which characterises the talent of Monsieur

The most positive reviews described Mercadante's setting as brilliant and expansive:

Those who heard the first performance of *I briganti* were able to appreciate the breadth and grandeur of this score, and give justice to the musical knowledge with which this great composition was treated, and whatever may be their opinion on the prodigious facility of the Italian masters, they will learn with surprise that, barely two months ago, not only had not a single note of the score been written, but the poet himself had not written a single verse of the libretto. In paying homage to the inconceivable fecundity of the composer, it is right to shield him from the reproach which might be directed toward him for having, in some way, worked in haste.⁶⁸

Delécluse's review offered a balanced synthesis of the overall attitude of the press:

The music of *Les Brigands*, as all of Mercadante's music, is conceived neatly and written with much art and elegance. Few composers know as much as Mercadante about the importance and effect of instruments combined with the voice. This is proved especially by the opera we have just mentioned. Moreover, this merit, keenly appreciated, has by no means prevented the audience from appreciating the beauty of certain innovations in *Brigands*. The introduction, the women's chorus, the sacred chorus and the finale of the first act, as well as the

Gallay.]' *Revue et Gazette musicale*, March 27, 1836. See also Mark Everist, "Tutti i francesi erano diventati matti: Bellini and the Duet for Two Basses," in *Giacomo Meyerbeer and Music Drama in Nineteenth-Century Paris* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 281.

⁶⁸ 'Les personnes qui ont entendu la première représentation d'*I briganti*, ont pu apprécier l'ampleur et le grandeur de cette partition, et rendre justice à la conscience musicale avec laquelle cette grande composition est traitée; et quelle que soit leur opinion sur la facilité prodigieuse des maîtres italiens, elles n'apprendront pas sans surprise qu'il y a à peine deux mois, il n'y avait pas non seulement une note écrite de la partition, mais que le poète même n'avait pas fait un seul vers du poème. En rendant hommage à l'inconcevable fécondité du compositeur, il est juste de le mettre à l'abri du reproche qu'on pourrait lui faire d'avoir, en quelques sorte, travaillé en poste.' Jean Toussant-Merle, *La quotidienne*, March 25, 1836.

prayer to the Virgin and the duet of gratitude in the second act, set Mercadante among the most skilful composers of the present time.⁶⁹

Like Delécluse, others favourably placed Mercadante's career and his merits as a composer within a larger frame, but also identified the weaknesses and strengths of his opera, highlighting especially effective numbers but also analysing the reasons for a mixed outcome.

Not surprisingly, the criticism of Mercadante's *I briganti* sat squarely within a broader ongoing debate concerning Italian opera in France. In his *feuilleton* in *Le Temps*, Merruau wittily framed the lukewarm reception obtained by *I briganti* within the time-honoured debate between the supporters of the French and Italian operatic systems.⁷⁰

In music, no more than in painting, we can no longer distinguish the schools. We therefore need to understand what it is that we call the Italian system. We have for a long time reproached our opéra-comique for placing the composer after the author of the piece, and for putting the singing at the service of the couplet; we have accused Grétry of having studied declamation to compose arias, and of having become the servant of what we call dramatic convenience. Therefore, we say, no inspiration, no music is possible ... What is the importance of the words? What we ask of the poet is a framework, an excuse, some resounding and measured syllables. Look at the Italian theatres! Do they bother to justify the entrances and the exits? Do they require local colour, the accuracy of the historic events, the progress of the plot? Do they analyse the meaning of the words? We only ask for a

⁶⁹ 'La musique des Brigands, comme toute celle de Mercadante, est conçue avec netteté et écrite avec beaucoup d'art et d'élégance. Peu de compositeurs connaissent aussi bien que cet auteur la portée et l'effet des instruments combinés avec les voix. C'est ce que prouve surtout l'opéra dont nous venons de parler. Au surplus, ce mérite, vivement apprécié, n'a point empêché l'auditoire d'être très sensible aux beautés d'invention que renferment les Brigands. L'introduction, le chœur des femmes, le chœur religieux et le finale du premier acte, ainsi que la prière à la Vierge et le duo de la reconnaissance au second, et le trio de la fin du troisième, placent M. Mercadante au nombre des habiles compositeurs de nos jours.' *Journal des débats*, March 24, 1836.

⁷⁰ Everist, *Giacomo Meyerbeer and Music Drama in Nineteenth-Century Paris*; Bloom, *Music in Paris in the Eighteen-Thirties* (New York: Pendragon Press, 1988).

sufficiently interesting libretto, for situations that lend themselves to musical development, and for words harmoniously arranged in the beautiful language of Metastasio ... Didn't Rossini often make his heroes walk to their death to the tune of airs which later we would adopt as *contredanses*? Today there has been a reaction against these theories. But they are always at the base of what we call the Italian system.⁷¹

Attacks on the Italian school and the Italianisation of French operatic taste were recurring themes in the 1830s, possibly even more vehement than in the 1820s. Thus, for some reviewers *I briganti* was yet another Italian opera, and therefore an easy target to attack in favour of the French tradition.

Buloz of *La Revue des Deux Mondes* outwardly appreciated the entertainment value of Mercadante's melodies, and recalled the common root that inspired and shaped a new generation of Italian composers. Thus the critic effectively managed to downplay the contributions of Bellini, Mercadante and Donizetti, defining their compositions as 'little', and depicting their melodic inventions as derivative of Cimarosa and Rossini:

For those of us who very simply allow ourselves to be entertained by our sensations, it is impossible not to like it. An Italian sits at his piano, and his melody pours out: this latter is easy, abundant and clear, and the usual trajectory is followed with pleasure. All these little compositions by Bellini, Mercadante and Donizetti are as many

⁷¹ 'En musique, pas plus qu'en peinture, on ne peut guère aujourd'hui distinguer les écoles. Il faut donc bien s'entendre sur ce qu'on appelle le système italien. On a longtemps reproché à nos opéra-comiques de placer le musicien après l'auteur de la pièce, et de mettre le chant au service du couplet; on a presque fait un crime à Grétry d'avoir étudié la déclamation pour composer des airs, et de s'être fait le serviteur de ce qu'il appelait la convenance dramatique. Alors, disait-on, pas d'inspiration, pas de musique possible....Qu'importent les paroles? Ce qu'on demande au poète c'est un canevas, un prétexte, des syllabes sonores et mesurées. Voyez les théâtres d'Italie! S'embarrasse-t-on de justifier les entrées et les sorties? Exige-t-on la couleur locale, l'exactitude historique, le progrès de l'intrigue; analyse-t-on même le sens précis des paroles? On ne demande qu'un poème suffisamment intéressant, des situations qui se prêtent au développement musical et des mots harmonieusement arrangés de la belle langue de Métastase....Rossini n'a-t-il pas souvent fait marcher ses héros à la mort sur des airs dont plus tard on pu s'emparer les contredanses? Aujourd'hui on a produit une réaction contre ces théories. Mais elles sont toujours la base de ce qu'on appelle le système italien.' *Le Temps*, April 9, 1836.

charming brooks sprung from the great rivers of Cimarosa and Rossini.⁷²

Whatever the judgement expressed by the two sides of the debate, it is still difficult to determine whether a negative or positive assessment was being directed toward Bellini, Donizetti or, in this case, Mercadante, or toward the whole tradition that they represented.

4.4 'Du côté de...': *I briganti* alongside Bellini, Donizetti and Meyerbeer.

France undertakes to lead *Donizetti and Mercadante* to immortality as fast as possible: France wants to take custody of two monuments of their own genius, France summons *Donizetti and Mercadante* to Paris. The call arrived, and they accepted it with alacrity. The first to go there was the one from Bergamo, and he responded to the transalpine yearning in a way we can judge for ourselves, as we hear his *Marino Faliero* more often than necessary. However, in *Donizetti* the habit of writing in a hurry has become natural. *Mercadante* is wiser, more cautious, and even more expert, more grounded in the science of the art; if he takes up this significant obligation, then he will undoubtedly accomplish it with success.⁷³

⁷² 'Quant à nous, qui nous laissons tout simplement entraîner par nos sensations, il nous est impossible de ne pas l'aimer. Un italien s'assied à son clavier, et la mélodie aussitôt s'en épanche: cela est facile, abondant et claire; on en suit avec plaisir la pente accoutumée. Toutes ces petites musiques de Bellini, de Mercadante et de Donizetti, sont autant de ruisseaux charmants sortis des grands fleuves de Cimarosa et de Rossini.' *Revue des deux mondes* 4, no. 6 (April 1836), 126-8.

⁷³ 'La Francia s'incarica di guidare all'immortalità più speditamente *Donizetti e Mercadante*: la Francia vuol farsi custode di due monumenti del loro genio, la Francia domanda *Donizetti e Mercadante* a Parigi. Corse la chiamata, ed essi l'accettarono alacramente. Il primo a recarvisi fu il Bergamasco, e come rispondesse egli alla bramosia ultramontana noi stessi possiamo giudicarlo ancora al sentirci più spesso che non occorrebbe ripetere il suo *Marino Faliero*. Ma in *Donizetti* l'uso di scrivere in fretta si è fatto natura. *Mercadante* è più giudizioso, più cauto, è anche più esperto, più fondato nella scienza dell'arte, se *Mercadante* assume il significante impegno, lo

This passage, taken from a review of the Milanese premiere of *I briganti* at La Scala on 6 November 1837, shows how attentively Italian critics followed the vicissitudes of Italian composers staging their operas abroad, and how they were able to offer comparisons between different authors and works. Indeed, *I briganti* came after a number of Italian stagings, and closely followed the modest acclaim received by Donizetti's *Marino Faliero* and the extraordinary success of Bellini's *I puritani*. The lukewarm reception of *Marino Faliero*, created at the Théâtre Italien just one month after *I puritani*, is reflected in the critical response to the opera.⁷⁴ Indeed, its disappointing debut caused Donizetti to return to Naples, where later that year he scored a greater success with *Lucia di Lammermoor*. Bellini's premature death in September 1835 also created quite a sensation. French critics and aficionados of *Les bouffes* were often drawn to a comparison of the three composers (all three always in the shadow of Rossini). Furthermore, the premiere of Mercadante's opera, repeatedly postponed, ended up following in the wake of the first performance of Meyerbeer's *Les Huguenots* at the Opéra (29 February 1836). It is no surprise that the critical reception of *I briganti* reflected, and sometimes explicitly referenced, the appearance of these works on the Parisian stage.

Indeed, in comparison with Bellini, who had already risen to mythical stature following his death, Mercadante appeared somewhat diminished in the view of Parisian commentators. The response to the expectations of the French audience concerning *I briganti* clashed with the halo of divinity which surrounded Bellini and his final work. Merruau explicitly recognised the difficulty of the task which Mercadante had to accomplish, unwillingly competing with Bellini's memory and with posthumous performances of *I puritani*.

Mercadante, in fact, wrote *Les Brigands* under the impact of the success of *Puritani*. It is easy to see in *Les Brigands* the search for the same effects, the same simplicity of forms; the musical phrase is short,

sosterrà indubitatamente con gloria.' *Il censore universale dei teatri*, November 8, 1837.

⁷⁴ William Ashbrook, *Donizetti and his Operas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 90-3; 368-74.

Mercadante in Paris (1835-6)

the slow movements are privileged, the melody has, in the pieces which have been rightly applauded, a marked character of sadness and grace; the andante of an air sung in the first act, the pathetic duet between Rubini and Lablache, a trio in the third act by mademoiselle Grisi, the finale of the first act, evidently awaken the memory of Bellini. Mercadante was one of the earliest friends of the young and unfortunate composer; he had known him since his entry into the Conservatory. When Bellini was close to death, Mercadante arrived in Paris in haste, in tears to embrace him one last time. I do not know what fatal circumstance impeded this sad farewell; but would one not say that while Mercadante wrote his opera in a few days, which a delay by Romani forced him to improvise, the plaintive ghost of Bellini came at times to lean on the composer's piano, slowly to brush the emotional keys and make them sing some plaintive melody? Only, when rapid, turbulent passages arrived, when the melodrama of the libretto required a great noise, and when it was necessary to hasten the notes of a brilliant allegro, then his inspiration withdrew, the melody became vulgar, the most common formulae replaced expression, and the harmonic ghost stopped singing. It is therefore Bellini who has actually had the honours of the Théâtre Italien this year, and it is not at all against his compositions that war has been waged.⁷⁵

⁷⁵ 'Mercadante, en effet, a écrit les *Brigands* sous l'impression du succès des *Puritains*. On remarque aisément dans les *Brigands* la recherche des mêmes effets, la même simplicité de forme; la phrase musicale est courte, les mouvements lents sont préférés, la mélodie a, dans les morceaux qui ont été applaudis à juste titre, un caractère marqué de tristesse et de grâce; l'andante d'un air chanté au premier acte, le duo pathétique entre Rubini et Lablache, un trio de troisième acte par mademoiselle Grisi, le finale du premier acte, un trio de troisième acte, réveillent évidemment le souvenir de Bellini. Mercadante était un des plus anciens amis du jeune et infortuné compositeur; il l'avait connu et aimé dès son entrée au Conservatoire. Lorsque Bellini était près de mourir, Mercadante était arrivé à Paris en toute hâte, les larmes aux yeux, pour l'embrasser une dernière fois. Je ne sais quelle fatale circonstance s'est opposée à ce triste adieu; mais ne dirait-on pas que pendant que Mercadante écrivait en quelques jours cet opéra, qu'un retard de Romani le forçait à improviser, l'ombre plaintive de Bellini soit venue par intervalles se pencher sur le piano du compositeur, effleurer lentement les touches émues et leur faire chanter quelque plaintive mélodie? Seulement, lorsqu'arrivaient les mouvements rapides, tumultueux, lorsque le mélodrame du livret exigeait un grand bruit, et lorsqu'il fallait presser les notes d'un

This passage described the close friendship between the two composers, and established a connection between the way their music and personalities were perceived by the greater Parisian audience. Mercadante had expected to find in Bellini a strong supporter of his Parisian undertaking;⁷⁶ and on a strictly personal level, Bellini's death certainly affected him deeply. The names of the two composers were drawn together not only by life circumstances, however. Mercadante's style would often have been referred to as something between the sweetness of Bellini and the energy of Rossini: 'a *magnificent principle of innovation* tending to mould the excessive gaiety of the first with the excessive sweetness of the other'.⁷⁷

Comments such as Merruau's certainly reflected such a notion. The slowest, pathetic movements of *I briganti* that received greatest acclaim were compared to Bellini, while the most energetic ones were considered vulgar and less inspired. Merruau's commentary was certainly partisan, and the reviewer was possibly directing the article toward the construction of Bellini's myth, using the comparison with Mercadante as yet another tool to increase Bellini's posthumous fame and perhaps diminish Rossini's legacy. Moreover, while Bellini was considered the prophet of a new dramaturgy, which emphasised more effectively the exigencies of drama, Mercadante was depicted as the heir to a tradition which consolidated, but also fossilised, the achievements of the Rossinian school:

étincelant allegro, alors l'inspiration se retirait, la mélodie devenait vulgaire, les formules les plus communes remplaçaient l'expression, et l'ombre harmonieuse avait cessé de chanter. C'est donc Bellini et son souvenir qui ont eu réellement cette année les honneurs du Théâtre-Italien; et ce n'est point à ses compositions qu'on a fait la guerre.' *Le Temps*, April 9, 1836.

⁷⁶ Letter to Florimo, July 20, 1835, no. 44, 142.

⁷⁷ 'Se noi trascrivessimo qui parecchi dei giudizi della stampa a proposito delle opere del Mercadante nel di lui periodo più felice, quelle lodi e quelle osservazioni, cambiandovisi data, potrebbero parer dettate pel maestro Verdi, tanto gli vanno a capello. Il maggior encomio che gli si fa è per la parte drammatica; poi dei suoi pezzi si mette in rilievo la tessitura corta, il replicarli meno in parte od in tutto, l'abolizione dei lunghi assolo nelle grandi scene di assieme, il calore e la vita nell'azione, lo strumentale energico e colorito, un felice impasto, insomma, di Rossini e di Bellini, un *magnifico principio d'innovazione* tendente a fondere la troppa gagliardia dell'uno, colla troppa dolcezza dell'altro.' See "Saverio Mercadante," *Omnibus pittoresco* 17 (1839), cited in Kowals, "Issues of Style," 18

Bellini had understood: despairing of melody and rhythm, since he considered them to have been abused over a long time, he returned to dramatic expression, with more intention than genius. The author of *Elisa e Claudio* adhered to Rossinian traditions: we have therefore the right to ask of him a little of what his maestro and model generously provided: we have the right to tell him that in the score of *I briganti* imagination ranked far below art.⁷⁸

Merruau thus interpreted the petitions of all those Parisian critics who encouraged greater imagination in the research of forms and a detachment from the Rossinian tradition.

During the initial planning of Mercadante's opera for Paris, one of the most significant points in common with *I puritani* should have been a duet for two basses which, as mentioned earlier, was originally a requirement of the French impresario Severini, mindful of the extraordinary success of 'Il rival salvar tu dêi' in *I puritani*;⁷⁹ but the opera imagined and planned by the composer and the French impresarios never saw the light of day. Still, a duet for two male characters did feature in *I briganti*: this was the 'Duo de la reconnaissance', created to great acclaim by tenor Rubini and bass Lablache. Buloz thus praised the duet, in this case for the sweetness and beauty of the vocal line:

The duet between the two men, in the second act, is absolutely worthy of the author of *Elisa*. The beautiful and touching phrase of the adagio moves you to tears; we must also say that Lablache and Rubini sing it with admirable expression. Nothing equals Lablache's dramatic sentiment, unless it is the magnificence of his instrument, while Rubini has in his voice something plaintive and tender, which in certain situations allows him, almost without wishing it, to achieve singular

⁷⁸ 'Bellini l'avait compris, qui désespérant de la mélodie et du rythme, les supposant usés pour long temps, en était revenu à l'expression dramatique, avec plus d'intention que de génie. L'auteur d'*Elisa e Claudio* s'en est tenu aux traditions rossiniennes: on a donc le droit de lui demander un peu de ce que son maître et modèle prodiguait à pleines mains: on a le droit de lui dire que dans la partition d'*i Briganti* l'imagination est demeurée beaucoup au-dessous de l'art.' *Courrier français*, March 26, 1836.

⁷⁹ Everist, "Tutti i francesi," 281.

effects forever forbidden in the vulgar comedies in which gesture is the sole resource.⁸⁰

However, in discussing Mercadante's new opera, Bellini was not the French reviewers' only yardstick. References to Meyerbeer, 'le génie austère de l'Allemagne', were frequent. Most critics who mentioned Meyerbeer in their reviews of *I briganti* acknowledged the extraordinary circumstances under which it had been born, and matter-of-factly indicated that Mercadante's new work could not compete with the success achieved by *Les Huguenots*. Nonetheless, analogies were found between passages in *I briganti* and dramatic devices in *Les Huguenots*, such as the use of timbre, treatment of the orchestra, and crescendos and dynamics.⁸¹ The *Revue et Gazette musicale*, especially, offered detailed references and comparisons. In reference to the finale primo, for example, the journal stated:

Corrado, the cruel tyrant, arrives unexpectedly, and there a trio with choruses begins, which links to the finale of the first act and which can be considered as the only piece of some value, the crucial piece of Mercadante's score. A beautiful and broad melody dominates the orchestra without stifling the scenic effect. Tamburini's voice emerges just there, explodes in a moment, perhaps a little too laboured for a musician, with these words:

La rabbia mi preme,

M'arresta il terror!

⁸⁰ 'Le duo des deux hommes, au second acte, est digne, en tout point, de l'auteur d'*Elisa*. La belle et touchante phrase de l'adagio vous émeut jusqu'aux larmes; il faut dire aussi que Lablache et Rubini le chantent avec une expression admirable. Rien n'égale le sentiment dramatique de Lablache, si ce n'est la magnificence de son organe, et Rubini a dans la voix je ne sais quoi de plaintif et de tendre qui fait que, dans certaines situations, il atteint aussitôt, et presque sans le vouloir, à des effets singuliers interdits pour jamais aux comédies vulgaires dont le geste est la seule ressource.' *Revue des deux mondes* 4, no. 6 (1836), 128.

⁸¹ With reference to the finale primo: 'Là, tourbillonne aussi par deux fois un crescendo du plus puissant effet et qui n'a que le tort de venir après celui du quatrième acte des *Huguenots*. [There swirls twice also a crescendo with greater effect and which does not make the mistake of coming after that of the fourth act of the *Huguenots*.]' *Revue et Gazette musicale*, March 27, 1836.

There, a crescendo swirls twice with more powerful effect, whose only fault is that it comes after that of the fourth act of *Les Huguenots*.⁸²

Whether the similarity related only to the extemporaneous experience of the opening night or to a direct knowledge of the two scores and their dynamic markings, if one looks at the *crescendo sempre* in the fourth act of *Les Huguenots* the comparison appears well-founded.⁸³

Sympathisers with the Italian school praised Mercadante's humble and pragmatic attitude in contrast to Meyerbeer's aristocratic detachment; according to critics such as Cler and Buloz, Mercadante's music embodied an ideal of humility, familiarity, and peaceful and harmonic simplicity as opposed to Meyerbeer's austere style. Buloz's passionate case for Mercadante in *La revue des deux mondes* perfectly synthesised this viewpoint:

You agree that the duet between Lablache and Rubini in the second act of *Brigands* is one of the most delightful things that can be heard in an evening; and, well! Therefore, what is this great anger against a system which has no goal other than your entertainment and which nearly always achieves its goal? No one more than us admires the male characters created by the severe genius of Germany. The duet of *Armide* is of a sublime inspiration, the symphony in A a magnificent piece of music, the chorus of monks in *Les Huguenots*, a masterpiece;⁸⁴ but, certainly, we are very far from believing that this religion cannot be reconciled with the acquaintance of a more familiar Muse; nothing

⁸² 'Corrado, il crudel tiranno, survient, et là, commence un trio, con cori, qui s'enchaîne au final du premier acte et qu'on peut considérer comme le seul morceau de quelque valeur, le morceau capital de la partition de M. Mercadante. Une belle et large mélodie domine à l'orchestre sans étouffer l'effet scénique. La voix de Tamburini se dessine bien là, éclate en un trait un peu trop scandé en musicien peut-être, sur ces paroles :

La rabbia mi preme,
M'arresta il terror!

Là, tourbillonne aussi par deux fois un crescendo du plus puissant effet et qui n'a que le tort de venir après celui du quatrième acte des *Huguenots*.' *Revue et Gazette musicale*, March 27, 1836.

⁸³ Giacomo Meyerbeer, *Les Huguenots: A facsimile edition of the printed piano-vocal scores*, ed. Philip Gossett, 2 vols (New York: Garland, 1980).

⁸⁴ Buloz is possibly referring to the duet of Armide and Renaud (Act V, Scene 1) in Gluck's *Armide* (1777), to Beethoven's Seventh Symphony (1811) and to the Morceau d'ensemble, Act 4 'Conjuration et Bénédiction des poignards' in *Les Huguenots*.

is more boring than people who shed their tears for a cabaletta sung out of season, and who, on an untimely roulade of la Grisi, put their heads in their hands, everywhere announcing to the universe the forthcoming ruination of art.⁸⁵

According to his letters, Mercadante attended the premiere of *Les Huguenots*; at that point he was still writing *I briganti*, whose opening night was scheduled for 18 March.⁸⁶ The hypothesis that he ‘borrowed’ from Meyerbeer within such a narrow time lapse would be weak indeed. Many elements are similar in the two works: the presence of an *orgia*, a female chorus and a solo for tenor with a very sparing orchestration and, most importantly, the religious elements that feature in *I briganti* and find their utmost expression in the prayer to the Virgin. Yet they responded to a general set of conventions to which both Meyerbeer and Mercadante were appealing in different ways.⁸⁷

Returning to 1836, whatever the reviewers’ opinions of *I briganti*, the excitement and general enthusiasm following the premiere of *Les Huguenots* left relatively little room for discussion of other performances that took place during the following weeks. The *Journal de Paris* grumbled that there was no chance of Meyerbeer sharing his success with other composers, no matter how

⁸⁵ ‘Vous convenez que le duet (duo) entre Lablache et Rubini dans le second acte des *Brigands* est une des plus ravissantes choses qui se puissent entendre le soir; eh bien! alors, que signifient ces grandes-colères contre un système qui n’a pour but que votre amusement et qui presque toujours atteint son but? Personne plus que nous n’admire les males produites du génie austère de l’Allemagne. Le duo d’Armide est une inspiration sublime, la symphonie en la un magnifique morceau de musique, le chœur des moines dans *les Huguenots*, un chef-d’œuvre; mais, certes, nous sommes bien loin de croire que cette religion ne puisse se concilier avec la fréquentation d’une Muse plus familière; rien c’est plus ennuyeux que ses gens qui versent des larmes pour une cabaletta chantée hors de saison, et qui, sur une roulade intempestive de la Grisi, se couvrent la front partout annonçant à l’univers la ruine prochaine de l’art.’ *Revue des deux mondes*, April 1836, 127.

⁸⁶ ‘The day after tomorrow at the Grand Opera will occur the first performance of Scribe’s and Meyerber’s [sic] new composition entitled Gli Ugonotti, otherwise known as the famous S. Bertelemei’. Engl. Trans. in Wittmann, “Meyerbeer and Mercadante?” 122.

⁸⁷ See for instance, Steven Huebner, “Italianate Duets in Meyerbeer’s Grand Operas,” *Journal of Musicological Research* 8 (1989), 203-58.

different were the two artistic realms represented by *I briganti* and *Les Huguenots*:

While the Académie Royale enjoys its brilliant fortune untroubled, and sees with pride its petitioners stake their privileges to obtain one of these hotly contested places, while Meyerbeer gets drunk on his glory, and nowhere sees any champion threatening to share the public attention, the Théâtre Italien calmly commissions and hastily produces a new opera.⁸⁸

Indeed, by the end of the decade, *Les Huguenots* had swept through Paris and become an international success, with performances all over Europe and even in New Orleans (1839), while *I briganti* had featured only six times in Italian seasons between 1837-39.⁸⁹

4.5 Mercadante in Paris: The Aftermath

According to Buloz' idealised review, having fulfilled his ill-starred commission in Paris, there was little left for Mercadante but to return to his quiet Novara and its cathedral:

The opera of *I briganti* succeeded as it deserved. From the night of the premiere, the audience appreciated all the melody and charm of this good music, which can be understood without any painful struggle of the intellect; and now that Mercadante has gathered among us his humble harvest of glory, here he is, returning happily to his small

⁸⁸ 'Tandis que l'Académie royale de Musique jouit paisiblement de sa brillante fortune, et voit avec orgueil les sollicitateurs mettre en jeu leurs protections pour obtenir une de ces places si disputées; tandis que Meyerbeer s'enivre de sa gloire, et n'aperçoit sur toute la ligne aucun champion qui menace de partager l'attention publique, le Théâtre Italien faisait composer sans bruit et montait à la hâte un opéra nouveau.' *Journal de Paris*, March 27, 1836.

⁸⁹ For a detailed list of performances of *Les Huguenots* from the nineteenth century to the twentieth-first see, for instance, Robert Ignatius Letellier, *The Operas of Giacomo Meyerbeer* (Madison, Farley Dickinson University Press, 2006), 150-2. For following performances of *I briganti* see Chapter 5.

town, to which the duties of his position call him back, as Mercadante is *maestro di cappella* in Novara. It is there that the worthy maestro spends his life, in the midst of the little choir boys whose high-pitched voices he conducts, and the peaceful canons who listen to his music, sitting majestically in their stalls. Every year he writes a mass in honour of the patron saint of his town; and this chapel to which Mercadante has devoted his religious Muse is not dependent upon the Pope or grand dukes, a clergyman founded it in ___ at his own expense. From time to time, the maestro asks his directors for leave to go and write an opera in Venice or even in Naples; and then, three months later, after he has made la Tacchinardi and Dupré [Duprez] sing, after he has loudly triumphed on stage, he remembers his small choirboys and his good canons in Novara, and returns among them, to sanctify in the chapel the honours received in the theatre. What serenity! What charming peace; it can be said that Italy is still the land of peaceful art which makes one happy.⁹⁰

This idyllic, and to some extent patronising, description of Novara highlighted the striking difference between, and possibly the inadequacy of, Mercadante's humility and mastery and the clamour of Parisian cultural and social life.

⁹⁰ 'L'opéra des *Brigands* a réussi comme il le méritait. Le public a dès le premier jour apprécié tout ce qu'il y a de mélodieux et de charmant dans cette bonne musique, qui se laisse comprendre sans travail pénible de l'intelligence; et maintenant que Mercadante a recueilli parmi nous son humble moisson de gloire, le voilà qui s'en retourne heureux dans sa petite ville, où le rappellent les devoirs de sa charge, car Mercadante est maître de chapelle à Novarre. C'est là que le digne maestro passe sa vie, au milieu de petit enfants de chœur dont il dirige les voix aiguës, et de chanoines paisibles qui écoutent sa musique, gravement assis dans leurs stalles. Chaque année il écrit une messe en l'honneur de la patronne de la ville; et cette chapelle à laquelle Mercadante a voué sa muse religieuse ne dépend ni du pape ni des grands-ducs, c'est un chanoine qui l'a fondée en [...] de ses propres deniers. De temps en temps, le maestro demande un congé à ses directeurs pour aller écrire un opéra à Venise ou bien à Naples; et puis, trois mois après, quand il a bien fait chanter la Tacchinardi et Dupré, quand il a bruyamment triomphé sur la scène, il se souvient de ses petits enfants de chœur et de ses bons chanoines de Novarre, et revient parmi eux, pour sanctifier dans la chapelle les couronnes du théâtre. Quelle sérénité! quelle paix charmante; on a beau dire, l'Italie est encore la terre de l'art calme et qui rend heureux.' *Revue des deux mondes*, 1836, 128.

But there were far more complex issues at stake. The French experience left a lasting mark on Mercadante's future inspiration, and the final evaluation of the French critics in the 1830s was far from definitive. Mercadante's encounter with the Parisian theatrical world and musical culture influenced his later choices of romantic subjects, as well as his compositional style. Many of the French plays billed in the Parisian spoken theatre during his sojourn became the sources for operas such as *Il bravo*, *Il giuramento* and *Il reggente*. Certainly, by the time of the premiere of *Il reggente* in 1843, Mercadante was looking into ways to render grand-opéra in Italy.⁹¹ Mercadante's contribution to the transfer of grand-opéra into Italian is yet another avenue worth exploring in order, ultimately, to disentangle Mercadante's mature style and also but not exclusively, in the terms beloved of scholars, his Meyerbeerian borrowings.⁹²

Investigation of Mercadante's original ideas for his Parisian opera, destined never to see the light of day, as well as his work on *I briganti*, is essential for an understanding of the development of his musical taste and dramaturgical choices.⁹³ A letter written after the successful premiere of *Il giuramento* (11 March 1837), for instance, reveals that during the negotiations for the Parisian impresa, Florimo and Mercadante had shared views about new compositional solutions to apply to the opera for Paris:

I would never believe that I could obtain at La Scala a more outstanding success than *Elisa e Claudio* before I die, let alone that which happened with *Il giuramento*. To that contributed the fact that I applied the advice you gave me when I had to compose Marco Visconti, *short pieces, varied tessitura, some extravaganzas that break the usual trends and so forth*. The vigour of the concertato pieces and of the instrumentation have

⁹¹ It is certainly no coincidence that the title page of the autograph score of *Il reggente* carries the Italianate label 'Grand-opera'. *Il Reggente: Grand'Opera in 3 Atti, Poesia del M° Salvatore Camarano, Musica Di Saverio Mercadante. Egregiamente composta per il Regio Teatro di Torino Nel Carnevale del 1842 in 43, per commissione Dell'Appaltatore Sig. Vincenzo Giaccone. Partitura Originale Napoli, [Nmo] di Ottobre 1842*. Autograph Score, 1843.

⁹² On this matter, see Gloria Staffieri, "Grand Opéra in Preunified Italy: Metamorphoses of a Political Genre," *Opera Quarterly* 25 (2009), 203-229.

⁹³ See Wittmann, "Mercadante and Meyerbeer?" 115-32.

also contributed. Thus I thank you, I thank you for your role in this, while I beg you not to leave me without your suggestions, assuring that I will always take them into account the way they deserve, as they are stated out of friendship, experience and an exquisite sensibility.⁹⁴

This passage confirms an ongoing stylistic research, which the French experience might sensibly have accelerated.⁹⁵

In addition to this, and even before his journey to France, Mercadante appeared to be well aware of the way in which critics responded to his works, and also to those of his contemporaries. One of his letters, which refers to Donizetti's and Pacini's success with more than a hint of sarcasm, mentions and criticises their failed achievements:

Thus *Dozinetti* (I mean Donizetti), having immortalised himself with *L'esule di Roma*, is now the exile of Naples. I find his virtuous efforts have been well rewarded, and I have no doubt that in Milan he will deserve the same destiny. Thus, in becoming the exile of Milan, he will go to take a breath in Constantinople where his brother is. With all of my heart I wish the same destiny for Pacini, and I believe he is not far from responding to my righteous wishes. In Paris the *Pompeano* flopped, it actually crashed to the point that the journals of that capital are inviting him to compose for their Theatre of Vodville [sic], as they find him extremely suitable. The vogue for fiasco at the Teatro Massimo is therefore becoming a habit and we can say like Gennaro Greco that success breeds success. – What I most admire is that the

⁹⁴ 'Non avrei mai creduto che prima di morire potessi avere alla Scala un'esito [sic] più brillante ancora dell'Elisa e Claudio, pure ciò successe con il *Giuramento*. Come a ciò ha molto contribuito l'avere praticato i consigli che mi dasti quando dovea comporre il Marco Visconti, *pezzi brevi, tessitura diversa, qualche stravaganza che rompe il solito andamento e cet.* La robbustezza de' pezzi concertati e dell'Instrumentazione ha pur'anco contribuito. Dunque grazie, grazie per la tua parte, pregandoti di non privarmi mai de' tuoi consigli, assicurandoti che ne farò sempre quel conto che meritano, dettati dall'amicizia, dall'esperienza e da uno squisito sentire.' Letter to Francesco Florimo, April 15-20, 1837, no. 67, 172.

⁹⁵ Both Kowals and Wittmann refer to the plan for *Marco Visconti* as an interesting point of observation for Mercadante's developments in style. Wittmann, "Mercadante and Meyerbeer?" 115-32; Kowals, "Issues of Style," 23-6.

composers of Ballet do not wish to be overcome by the composers of music, and the Audience by neither of those, imagine the joy!⁹⁶

The harsh passage contained in Mercadante's letter probably referred to the unsuccessful premiere of Donizetti's *Imelda de' Lambertazzi* in Naples on 5 September 1830, and to the upcoming engagement with La Scala for the production of *Anna Bolena*, which was to prove significantly more popular.⁹⁷ The second paragraph mentioned the poor Parisian reception of *L'ultimo giorno di Pompei* by Pacini, yet another composer whose destiny Mercadante was following closely. However, there is more to be inferred: the almost obsessive interest in the successes of the others that we read in his letters was, in fact, accompanied by a thorough study of his fellow composers' scores, which he was constantly trading and enquiring about through the remarkable intercessions of the elusive and yet invaluable figure of Francesco Florimo. Indeed Mercadante had built for himself a constant and privileged acquaintance with the tastes and orientations of contemporary composers and audiences.

Coming back to the French press, in the early days of April 1836 both the *Courrier des théâtres* and the *Revue et Gazette musicale* reported a brief but intriguing piece of news. Following the success of *I briganti*, just before beginning his journey back to Novara, Mercadante may have received a proposal to compose a new opera for the Opéra Comique on a French libretto by 'one of the most productive and fortunate poets of this theatre'.⁹⁸ The

⁹⁶ 'Dunque Dozzinetti (voglio dire Donizetti) dopo essersi immortalato con l'*Esule di Roma*, ora è l'esule di Napoli. Trovo ben ricompensate le sue virtuose fatiche, e non dubbito [sic] punto che a *Milano* non demeriterà punto della stessa sorte e diventando così l'esule di *Milano* anderà a prendere fiato a Costantinopoli dove si trova suo fratello. – La stessa sorte desidero di tutto cuore a *Pacini*, e mi sembra che non è lontano d'aderire alle mie giuste brame. In *Parigi* il *Pompeano* è caduto, anzi precipitato al punto che i giornali di quella capitale l'invitano a comporre per i loro Teatri di *Vodville* [sic], poiché lo trovano adattissimo. La moda di fiascheggiare al Teatro Massimo è dunque in uso e diremo secondo Gennaro Greco *segue seguire*. – Quello che più ammiro che i compositori di Ballo non vogliono farsi soverchiare da' maestri di musica, ed il Pubblico da nessuno dei due, figuriamoci che allegria!' Letter to Francesco Florimo, Madrid, November 2, 1830, no. 9, 89.

⁹⁷ *L'esule di Roma*, by Donizetti, on a libretto by Gilardoni, was premiered at the Teatro San Carlo on 1 January 1828.

⁹⁸ The news is reported in the *Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris*, April 10, 1836 and the *Courrier des théâtres*, on the same date.

librettist in question was probably Eugène Scribe or Jules-Henri Vernoy de Saint-Georges. The invitation to compose for one of the major traditional Parisian theatres after his initial exposure at the Théâtre Italien was uncommon, though not unique. Among the Italian composers who wrote for the Opéra-Comique, a few examples are Michele Carafa, who by then was *de facto* a French composer (*Jeanne d'Arc à Orléans* [1821], *Le Solitaire* [1822], etc.), as well as Donizetti with his *La Fille du Régiment* (1840). From this perspective, and given the relatively modest success obtained by *I briganti*, Mercadante's invitation to write an *opéra comique* was an occurrence that certainly deserves further investigation. Mercadante's surviving correspondence, however, provides no explicit reference to future French engagements. The first letter which Mercadante sent to Paris after his return to Novara was addressed to Eugène-Theodore Troupenas, very likely in relation to the publishing rights of *I briganti*, although the letter contained no explicit mention of the opera.⁹⁹ And for almost a year after his return to Italy, Mercadante's surviving correspondence does not refer to his experience in Paris until 30 March 1837, a couple of weeks after the successful premiere of *Il giuramento* at La Scala, when in one of his letters to Florimo he wrote:

I requested 10 thousand francs to compose the second new opera, but so far nothing has been decided; actually, I do not think it is going to happen, as there is an intricate matter between Pasta, Donizetti, Lanari, and those Gentlemen. If that happens, I will spend the winter in Paris, where I will stage an Opera in French in the comic genre.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ Letter to Monsieur Troupenas, June 17, 1836, no. 61, 166. In the 1830s Troupenas, having published operas such as Rossini's *Le siège de Corinthe*, *Moïse*, *Le comte Ory* and *Guillaume Tell*, as well as the *Soirées musicales* and the *Stabat mater*, was busy producing Auber's output. Besides Rossini, he was especially keen on producing French opera by composers such as Bazin, Gomis, Labarre and Isouard and vocal scores by Meyerbeer.

¹⁰⁰ 'La mia domanda è stata di 10 mila fr. per comporre la 2/da Opera nuova, ma sin'ora nulla di deciso, anzi ci spero poco essendoci dell'intrico fra la Pasta, Donizetti, Lanari e que' Signori. Se ciò avviene, l'inverno lo anderò a passare a Parigi dove darò un'Opera in francese di genere Comico.' Letter to Florimo, March 30, 1837, no. 67, 172-3. See also Wittmann, "Meyerbeer and Mercadante?" 122, f.21.

Mercadante's words strongly suggest that the press had been correct about his possible future involvement with the Opéra or the Opéra Comique.¹⁰¹ In 1847, in an even more interesting letter, not bearing the recipient's name but very likely destined for Florimo, Mercadante wrote:

I never really gave up on the idea of that business in Paris, but it is not convenient for me to push, after what happened with the Director Monsieur Leon Pilé [Pillet] – this latter wrote to me, and in this current theatrical year he wanted me to produce a four-act-opera by Dumas in four months – I refused as it was not humanly possible for me to accomplish such a rushed undertaking, but I offered to accept for the following year, if they agreed to give me eight months to do so – they did not reply.¹⁰²

Léon Pillet was, at this point in his career, the manager of the Opéra, a circumstance which makes the hypothesis of a commitment with the major Parisian theatre as intriguing as the previous hint of a commission from the Opéra Comique. Later in the century, Giuseppe Verdi himself originally composed his *Vêpres Siciliennes* for the Opéra in 1855. What is clear, however, is that Mercadante never gave up on the idea of returning to Paris with a brand new opera written expressly for its public, in this case most likely a *grand opéra* or 'grand-opera' in four acts. However, evidence in the correspondence about such an endeavour stops here, and so does the speculation.

¹⁰¹ See previous reference in *Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris*, April 10, 1836 and *Courrier des théâtres*, same date, f.49.

¹⁰² 'Non ho mai dimesso il pensiero per l'affare di Parigi, ma non mi convenne di spingermi, dopo l'accaduto con il D.re Mond Leon Pilé [sic] – Questi mi scrisse, e volea che in tutta fretta nello spazio di soli quattro mesi nel cor.te anno teatrale io ponessi in musica un'Opera in 4 atti di Dumas – Mi negai non potendo umanamente adempiere ad un impegno così precipitato, ma offersi di accettare per l'anno venturo qualora mi accordassero 8 mesi di tempo – Nulla mi fu risposto...' Letter to Florimo?, July? 1847, no. 122, 238-9.

4.6 Conclusion

Private correspondence and published records and criticism show not only the French perceptions of Mercadante at the time of *I briganti*, but also the composer's attitude toward French music criticism and his self-fashioning, as filtered through the press.

We know from their letters that Mercadante, Bellini, Pacini and Donizetti, were constantly aware of the way in which their operas were received, and preoccupied with audience feedback, to the point of agreeing with it on many occasions, especially when undertaking reworkings of an opera.¹⁰³

Italian composers called to Paris looked at ways of realising the 'French cachet', seeking compositional devices that would be closer to the French taste.¹⁰⁴ At the same time, the adherence to French musical and literary taste meant a definite detachment from the Italianate forms that were so often criticised in French newspapers, producing a set of solutions which, in sum, led composers such as Donizetti and Mercadante to engage with new stylistic attitudes. This quest was taking place at the same time as they were experiencing the French stages; therefore, their tormented relationship with French criticism and the feedback from it affected them heavily. For an apprehensive composer trying to prove his worth in a foreign country, music reviews represented the most immediate link between the composer's creativity and the audience's response.

Most importantly, Florimo's and Mercadante's letters, and the way they responded to the comments reported by the press of the time, suggest that Mercadante was inclined to follow the criticism expressed in the press. The influence that the opinions of French music critics had on his work was therefore an effective tool, and the largely negative criticism that followed his unfortunate mission to France was yet another trigger to his ongoing quest for new dramatic and compositional possibilities.

¹⁰³ See, for instance, letters spread throughout all the major composers' correspondence: Palermo, *Biografia – epistolario*; Zavadini, *Donizetti*; Luisa Cambi, ed., *Vincenzo Bellini, Epistolario* (Verona: Mondadori, 1943).

¹⁰⁴ See Letter to Simone Mayr, April 8, 1839, in Zavadini, *Donizetti*, 319, cited in Chapter 1 of this thesis.

Mercadante in Paris (1835-6)

Mercadante was a tireless reader, and he endeavoured to respond to the characterisation built up over the years by the press regarding his successes and failures. His constant concern for approval, which emerged throughout his correspondence, was not only an eloquent and unique testimony to his individual qualities, but also to the influence that the published criticism exerted on the composer who, we can imagine, like Donizetti and Bellini, composed with one eye on the music paper and the other on the music columns of the press. This double orientation decisively drove the European dimension of Mercadante's work, his self-assessment as a composer, and the development and adjustments of his style to the expectations of his audiences. Exemplary in this sense is the revision work which the composer undertook on *I briganti* for the Italian stages in 1837, which will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

5. Saverio Mercadante's *I briganti* (1836–7): A French 'Revolution'?

As observed in Chapter 4, the French premiere of *I briganti* met with a lukewarm reception, partly as a consequence of the many difficulties and delays that Mercadante had to face during its composition. Mercadante's relationship with France seems to have ceased there, despite surviving evidence of invitations to return and compose for two of the most prestigious institutions of the capital.

Following its French debut, *I briganti* reached Italy only in the autumn 1837 season, playing first at the Teatro Gallo di San Benedetto in Venice, then the Teatro Lirico in Cagliari, and finally at La Scala. In March of that year, La Scala had witnessed the triumph of *Il giuramento* which, according to Mercadante, was the starting point of his 'rivoluzione'.¹ The production of *I briganti* in that theatre the following November did not enjoy half the acclaim that *Il giuramento* had received. Nonetheless, as Michael Wittmann has suggested, an examination of Mercadante's revisions of *I briganti* for Italian audiences is helpful in tracing the roots of his stylistic 'revolution'.² This chapter traces the modifications associated with early Italian productions of this opera, drawing on printed librettos to identify different variants. Furthermore, I suggest ways in which those changes may be read as responses to published criticism in France and Italy.

5.1 *I briganti* in Paris: An Overview of Critical Response

The Parisian premiere of *I briganti* ended the season at the Théâtre Italien, just before the Italian cast left for London at the beginning of April 1836. The opera was regarded as 'Italianate', a view broadly shared by the

¹See Mercadante's letter to Florimo, 1 January 1838. The full text of the letter is given in Chapter 1, footnote 5.

² Wittmann, "Meyerbeer and Mercadante?" 123-7.

French press at the time and still adopted by modern scholars.³ The appearance of *I briganti* in the 1835-6 season of the Théâtre Italien triggered a largely one-sided discourse in commentaries on the conventions of Italian opera in terms of dramaturgy, musical forms and singing style. Yet Parisian critical reception, as evidenced in many influential journals of the time, exhibited some specific viewpoints. Leaving aside the negative criticism of its libretto – a text that was hastily prepared and so packed with dramatic situations that, according to the critics, it ended up weakening and betraying its literary source – Mercadante's compositional mastery was deemed indisputable, and his expert handling of vocal writing was extensively praised. Conversely, he was criticised for his excessive eagerness to please the singers, which resulted in the creation of conventionally laid out numbers, suited to enhance virtuoso singing rather than to promote the dramatic flow of the action. One of the main concerns of the critics was the overuse of cavatinas, and although the duet 'de la Reconnaissance' between Ermanno and Count Massimiliano in Act II was unanimously praised, its cabaletta was considered to have spoiled the emotional peak of the number.⁴ Of the three acts, the final one was deemed to be the weakest, and was criticised across the board for its excessive length and predictable layout. Cler of *Le Charivari* wrote: 'The third

³ See for instance Piero Mioli, "Saverio Mercadante: un florilegio drammatico," in *Saggi su Saverio Mercadante*, ed. by Gian-Luca Petrucci and Giacinto Moramarco (Cassano delle Murge: Messaggi, 1992), 58-9; Roland Jackson, "Mercadante's Resumé of Opera Reform," in *Ars musica, musica scientia: Festschrift Heinrich Hüschen* (Cologne: Gitarre & Laute Köln, 1980), 271-6; Wittmann, "Meyerbeer and Mercadante?" 123.

⁴ 'La première partie du duo de la reconnaissance d'Hermann et de son père, qu'il vient de délivrer, est bien traitée; la phrase d'Hermann: *Sfoga, sfoga il tuo cordoglio*, est touchante et belle, et bien accompagnée par l'orchestre; Lablache et Rubini y sont très-pathétiques; mais les trois temps en mi naturel et en mouvement de valse, qui forme la seconde partie de ce duo, démesurément long, n'est pas heureux, et l'ensemble qui le termine est aussi commun par la mélodie que par les batteries de violon qui l'accompagnent.' [The first part of the Duo de la reconnaissance between Hermann and his father, whom he has just freed, is well treated; Hermann's line *Sfoga, sfoga il tuo cordoglio*, is touching and beautiful, and well-accompanied by the orchestra; Lablache and Rubini are very pathetic; but the three stanzas in E natural and in waltz rhythm, which forms the second part of this duo, excessively long, is not fortunate, and the ensemble that concludes it is banal both for its melody and the number of violins that accompany it.]. *Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris*, March 27, 1836.

act needs to gain in speed what it lacks in beauty'.⁵ And Blanchard, of *La Revue et Gazette musicale*, stated:

The current authors of the librettos have renounced, we know not why, the excellent form of operas cut into two acts to emulate the French manner: this is wrong. In consequence, *I briganti* is in three acts.⁶

The critic of *L'Artiste* commented laconically on the subject and reacted thus to the premiere of the opera:

The third act is the weakest; I noticed nothing but the opening Chorus.⁷

And the following day he went into greater detail:

The third act is the least rich in musical beauties; the pieces are too long, especially the duo of M^{me} Grisi and Lablache. The composer has neglected the action too much, in order to worry only about ways to develop and display the singers' voices. The only really original piece of this third act is the trio sung by M^{me} Grisi, Rubini and Lablache, which serves as a Finale.⁸

The critic of *Le Constitutionnel* took a similar stance:

In the third act ... the fight lasts long enough to allow Amelia to express, through a well-sung aria by M^{me} Grisi, the terror caused her by this fratricidal fight. Finally, after a long and tiring duet between old Maximilien and this poor Amélie, Hermann arrives pale and distressed; he has defeated Conrad; sad victory, in which the two brothers have

⁵ See Chapter 4 for extended quotation from this article.

⁶ 'Les auteurs actuels de libretti ont renoncé, nous ne savons trop pourquoi, à l'excellente forme des ouvrages coupés en deux actes pour se rapprocher de la manière française: c'est un tort. *I Briganti* sont donc en trois actes.' *La Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris*, March 27, 1836.

⁷ 'Le troisième acte est le plus faible; je n'y ai remarqué que le chœur qui le commence.' *L'Artiste*, 1836.

⁸ 'Le troisième acte est le moins riche en beautés musicales; les morceaux en sont trop longs, surtout le duo de Mlle Grisi et de Lablache. Le compositeur a trop négligé l'action, pour ne s'occuper que des moyens de développer la voix des chanteurs. Le seul morceau vraiment original de ce troisième acte est le trio chanté par Mlle Grisi, Rubini et Lablache, et qui sert de finale.' *L'Artiste*, 1836

fought against each other, and Hermann's sword has been plunged into Conrad's breast. Hermann is in despair, Amélie moans, and Maximilien repudiates the fratricide. There is an interminable piece, the length of which inevitably prevented an appreciation of its true merit; it was midnight; the audience was in its fourth hour of singing and music; we were tired, bored, done in; M^{me} Grisi, Lablache, Rubini themselves were insufficient to surmount this weariness. Mercadante would be wise to restrain himself to more appropriate limits and reduce this excessive abundance somewhat. This moderation is all the more necessary for Mercadante, as his manner is somewhat regular and monotonous, we are touched by the suavity of his melodies, we follow with interest the harmonious work of the voices and of the orchestra, but we are rarely stirred in Mercadante's compositions, by his lively, gripping, daring and unexpected inspirations.⁹

In particular, critics such as Delécluse and Cler were unanimous in highlighting the unnecessary length of the duet between Amelia and Massimiliano which preceded the final trio, a number that was praised as one of the highlights of the opera. Delécluse advised the composer to amend the duet, specifically suggesting the suppression of the Andante that would result in a faster dramatic pace:

Some cuts are needed: they are perhaps difficult to apply, considering the importance of each piece for the action as a whole, and the

⁹ 'Au troisième acte.... Le combat dure assez longtemps pour laisser à Amélie le loisir d'exprimer, dont un air bien chanté par Mlle Grisi, la terreur qu'ici cause cette lutte fratricide. Enfin, après un long et fatigant duo entre le vieux Maximilien et cette pauvre Amélie, Hermann arrive pâle et égaré; il a vaincu Conrad; triste victoire où deux frères ont combattu l'un contre l'autre, et où l'épée d'Hermann s'est plongée dans le sein de Conrad. Hermann se désespère. Amélie se lamente, et Maximilien repousse le fratricide. Il y a un interminable morceau dont la longueur a dû empêcher d'apprécier tout le mérite; il était minuit; le public en était à sa quatrième heure de chant et de musique: on était fatigué, ennuyé, rendu; Mlle Grisi, Lablache, Rubini eux-mêmes ne suffisaient plus à triompher de cette lassitude. M. Mercadante ferait sagement de rentrer dans des limites plus convenables et de retrancher quelque chose à ce luxe excessif. Cette modération est d'autant plus nécessaire à M. Mercadante, que sa manière a je ne sais quoi de régulier et de monotone, on est touché de la suavité des mélodies, on suit avec intérêt le travail harmonieux des voix et de l'orchestre; mais on est rarement éveillé dans les compositions de M. Mercadante, par ses inspirations vives, saisissantes, hardies et imprévues.' *Le Constitutionnel*, March 28, 1836.

legitimate requests of the artists who each cling to their quota. We will indicate, as something which could and should be reduced, the duet of the third act, between Mme Grisi and Lablache; it is cold in the situation, and should proceed without the *andante*.¹⁰

Cler of *Le Charivari* went even further, suggesting the suppression of the entire duet:

We advise Mr Mercadante to make some extensive cuts. We would especially request the complete disappearance of the duet between the count and Amelia, a piece that has nothing noteworthy but its length. We would say the same about the three adagios for Hermann, which disagreeably weaken the finale. It would also not be bad to cut out some redundancy in the singing of the first two acts. We insist on this point because all these redundancies damage the effect that this beautiful score should produce, and the distinguished place that we think this piece should occupy in the next season of the Théâtre-Italien.¹¹

In the following issue of *Le Charivari* the same critic indicated that Mercadante had applied the suggested cuts, having complied with the requests coming from the press, and that from the second performance all pieces indicated by the journalists, including the Act III duet, had disappeared.¹²

¹⁰ 'Des coupures sont nécessaires: elles seront peut-être difficiles à pratiquer, vu l'importance de chaque morceau pour l'ensemble de l'action, et les prétentions légitimes des artistes qui tiennent chacun à leur contingent. Nous indiquerons, comme pouvant et devant être réduit, le duo du troisième acte, entre Mlle Grisi et Lablache: il est froid dans la situation, et devrait marcher sans *andante*.' *Journal des débats*, March 24, 1836.

¹¹ 'Nous conseillons à M. Mercadante d'y faire des larges coupures. Nous demanderions spécialement la disparition complète du duo entre le comte et Amélie, morceau qui n'a de remarquable que sa longueur. Nous en dirons autant des trois adagios d'Hermann, qui alanguissent désagréablement le final. Il ne serait pas mal non plus d'élaguer quelques surabondances de chant dans les deux premiers actes. Nous insistons sur ce point parce que ces superfétations nuisent à l'effet que doit produire cette belle partition, et à la place distinguée qu'elle nous semble appelée à occuper dans le répertoire de la prochaine saison musicale du Théâtre-Italien.' *Le Charivari*, March 24, 1836.

¹² 'Dès la seconde représentation, tous les morceaux indiqués, et entre autres le grand duo qui précède le dernier final, avaient complètement disparu.' ['From the second

The promptness with which Mercadante reacted to the requests of the French reviewers indeed reveals his eagerness to receive immediate approval. At the same time, it also affected his own awareness of the need for formal and stylistic innovation, which he had manifested on many occasions in his letters.

5.2 *I briganti* in Italy (1837)

As noted previously, on 11 March 1837 *Il giuramento* opened at La Scala.¹³ Whether the opera represented the conscious realisation of a genuine 'reform' impulse remains a moot point in Mercadante scholarship. Roland Jackson, for instance, has summarised the break marked by *Il giuramento* compared with Mercadante's earlier production, and has highlighted in detail the innovative qualities of the score, paraphrasing the 'rivoluzione' described by Mercadante in his letter to Florimo. The discussion compares *Il giuramento* with his earliest operas, including *I briganti*.¹⁴

In the wake of the success of *Il giuramento*, the opera which Mercadante had written for Paris received its Italian premiere. Table 5-1 lists all Italian performances of *I briganti* in the 1830s.

Table 5-1: Italian Performances of *I briganti*, 1837-9

Location	Venue	Year
Venice	Teatro Gallo di S. Benedetto	1837
Cagliari	Teatro Lirico	1837
Milan	La Scala	1837
Padua	Teatro Nuovo	1838
Turin	Teatro Carignano	1838
Naples	Teatro San Carlo	1839

performance, all pieces indicated, and among the others the grand duet preceding the last finale, had completely disappeared.'] *Le Charivari*, March 26, 1836. See also Chapter 4 for a larger excerpt of this article.

¹³ Letter to Florimo, January 1, 1838.

¹⁴ Roland Jackson, "Mercadante's Resumé of Opera Reform," in *Ars musica, musica scientia: Festschrift Heinrich Hüschen* (Cologne: Gitarre & Laute Köln, 1980), 271-6.

At the end of September 1837, *I briganti* reached the Teatro Gallo in Venice. The printed libretto for Venice exhibits no substantial modifications compared with the one for Paris; the latter seemingly carries the first uncut version of the opera. There is no evidence that Mercadante was directly involved in the Venice production, and it is very likely that the opera was presented in its original version. The most striking difference between the two productions is that Corrado, the role created by Tamburini in Paris, became a trousers role, sung by the famous contralto Marietta Brambilla. Brambilla was already renowned for her performance of male roles, such as the title role for *Tancredi* (her debut in 1827), Adriano in *Il crociato in Egitto*, and Arsace in *Semiramide*, as well as for the creation of Maffeo Orsini in Donizetti's *Lucrezia Borgia* (1833). In the previous La Scala season she had already starred in the role of Bianca in *Il giuramento*. The journal *Teatri, Arti e Letteratura* praised her for her interpretation:

In the first act the cavatina of Corrado, sung by Signora Marietta Brambilla, was well received; it was sung with all the artistic mastery typical of this actress-singer; she obtained repeated applause, and had to appear twice on the proscenium.¹⁵

Even more interesting is the comment on the opening scene of Act III sung by Corrado, which placed greater emphasis on the final act as a whole:

In the third act the rondo by Brambilla was well received, sung with much mastery, and the closing of the opera, the *rondò* of the tenor, was applauded, because it was sung with excellent style and much expression. But this is not a suitable finale for this score, which will be an eternal glory to his composer.¹⁶

¹⁵ 'Nel primo atto piacque la cavatina di Corrado Signora Marietta Brambilla, quale fu cantata con tutta la maestria dell'arte propria di questa attrice-cantante; essa ottenne replicati applausi, e dovette ricomparire sul proscenio per ben due volte.' *Teatri, Arti e Letteratura*, October 12, 1837.

¹⁶ 'Nel terzo atto piacque il rondò della Brambilla cantato con molta maestria, e la chiusa dell'opera, ossia rondò del tenore piacque, perché cantato con ottimo stile e molta espressione, ma non è un finale adattato per questo spartito, che sarà di eterna gloria al suo compositore.' *Teatri, Arti e Letteratura*, October 12, 1837.

In the opinion of the Venetian critics, the merits of the production seemed to lie more in the performance than in the intrinsic quality of the composition. However, recalling the main criticism expressed by the Parisian press, the Venetian reviewer deemed the third act to be unsuitable for the score.

At the end of October *I briganti* was successfully staged in Cagliari.¹⁷ It then reached La Scala on 6 November 1836, with tenor Giovanni Paganini as Ermanno, Desideria Derancourt as Amelia, Orazio Cartagenova as Corrado, and Ignazio Marini as Massimiliano. The premiere was delayed due to Paganini's indisposition. Milanese critics received the opera less than enthusiastically, and reconstructed its circulation, recalling its mixed reception by the French audience. *Il censore universale dei Teatri* reported:

They wanted no less than for us to judge this opera; they hoped we would be able to refute those in France who did not appreciate it; this wish increased on reading news that reported the warmest praise in Cagliari and Venice; but Cagliari and Venice surely do not have performers of the same quality as those at La Scala, therefore the effect in Cagliari and Venice should have been multiplied at La Scala, even more so if we consider that the maestro was keen to rework and improve his score, and conduct rehearsals prior to the staging of the opera.¹⁸

Intriguingly, the same review indicated that the composer was still revising his score when rehearsals began in Milan. The critic also blamed the lukewarm reception on the mediocre performance of the singers. It did not

¹⁷ References to the Cagliari performance are found in articles related to the La Scala premiere. See for example the quotation of a review in *Il censore universale dei teatri*, November 8, 1837.

¹⁸ 'Si voleva nondimeno da noi stessi giudicata quest'opera, si sperava di potere dar torto a chi non l'aveva in Francia apprezzata; questa speranza s'ingrandiva alla lettura di certe notizie, che le davano i più clamorosi suffragi di Cagliari e di Venezia; ma Cagliari e Venezia non hanno per certo adesso esecutori da misurarsi con questi della SCALA, dunque l'effetto di Cagliari e Venezia deve centuplicarsi alla SCALA, e ciò tanto più, se la speranza trasformava in certezza il vedere lo stesso maestro qui infervorato a ritoccare e migliorare il suo lavoro, a condurne le prove fino alla sua messa in iscena.' *Il censore universale dei teatri*, November 8, 1837.

spare Mercadante, however, who was criticised for having excessively reworked the score, enhancing the orchestra rather than favouring the cast.

They say that the maestro expressly devoted himself to the instrumental parts foremost, even above the singing; but even if this was his purpose, as I do not dare to believe it, it would be a wrong one; ... one can say with certainty, that he favoured the noise of the instruments over the physical construction of his singers, constantly forced to scream to make their voices heard against the orchestra, always drowned out as they were by the instruments.¹⁹

As Wittmann has indicated, changes in the orchestration were indeed introduced at the time of the Milanese premiere, partly because the orchestra of La Scala was larger than that of the Théâtre Italien.²⁰ This change in instrumentation produced an adverse reaction from the Italian critics, although the handling of the vocal lines had received extensive praise in the Parisian journals. *Il Pirata* commented as follows on the Milanese premiere of the opera:

Either for the great reason that the artists were not in their places, or just because of all the innovations that had affected the whole work, or because there were insufficient rehearsals, Mercadante's poor score did not produce the effect promised by the *impresario* and, even more importantly, hoped for by the audience. *I briganti* will appear again tomorrow night, they say. But will it meet a happier destiny?²¹

¹⁹ 'Si dice che espressamente si sia dedicato il maestro a coltivare la parte strumentale di preferenza ed anche in pregiudizio del canto; ma quanto questo fosse il suo, come non oso crederlo; non sarebbe che un falso scopo; ... si può dire con certezza, ch'egli preferisca il fracasso degli strumenti a pregiudizio della costituzione fisica dei cantanti, obbligati costantemente a gridare per fare sentire la loro voce sempre coperta dall'orchestra.' *Il censore universale dei teatri*, November 8, 1837.

²⁰ Wittmann, "Meyerbeer and Mercadante?" 123-4.

²¹ 'O per la grande ragione che nessuno degli artisti si trovasse a suo posto, o perché le tante innovazioni ne avessero guastato l'insieme, o perché ancora non si fossero fatte prove sufficienti, il povero spartito di Mercadante non produsse l'effetto che si riprometteva l'*Impresario*, e quel che più importa, sperava il pubblico. *I Briganti* ricompariranno, e domani sera, si dice; ma incontreranno essi più fausti destini?' *Il Pirata*, November 10, 1837.

When the run of performances at La Scala came to an end, *Il censore universale* offered a conclusive assessment of the opera, discussing the many possible reasons for its failure.

The opera was suspended, the indisposed artist was allowed to rest, healthy cuts were applied to the score, some of the pieces were transposed, other changes were made; that should have allowed a better appreciation and evaluation of the essence, one might say, of this as yet not well-understood composition: all of this was done in its favour from Monday to Saturday. That Saturday there was more clarity in the tenor's performance; but the audience demonstrated it was happier with the singers than with the music. Do you still want to procrastinate further before expressing a final assessment? Let's wait for the third performance, and here is the third night. All that could be done was done, all that could be heard was heard. But the repetition of the doing and hearing was more to the detriment of the opera than to its advantage.²²

The article provided a synthesis of the vicissitudes of *I briganti* in Milan. The composer was revising the score up to the day of the premiere, and the press was aware of the changes introduced in the orchestration. After the premiere, compromised by the poor performance of the singers, Mercadante continued to work on the score and applied a number of cuts. The modifications to the score deserve to be examined in detail.

²² 'L'opera fu sospesa, l'artista indisposto lasciato a riposo, si praticarono nella partitura salutarì mutilazioni, si trasportò il tuono di qualche pezzo, si operarono varie altre modificazioni, atte a far meglio conoscere e valutare l'essenza, dirò così, di questa non per anco ben compresa composizione: tutto ciò fu fatto in di lei favore da lunedì al sabato. In quel sabato ci fu in generale più franchezza di esecuzione, progressi vi furono nell'esecuzione del tenore; ma l'udienza si mostrò più contenta dei cantanti, non più contenta della musica. Volete che si ritardi ancora un assoluto giudizio? Si aspetti un'altra apparizione, ed ecco la terza recita. Quello che si poteva fare fu fatto, quello che si può sentire fu sentito. Ma la ripetizione del fare e del sentire riesce qui all'opera più di danno che di vantaggio.' *Il censore universale dei teatri*, November 18, 1837.

5.3 *I briganti* in Italy: An Observation of Sources

Observation of Mercadante's autograph manuscript of the opera would probably shed light on the revision process of *I briganti* in Milan.²³ Access to this source, however, has been limited by its owner, the Ricordi historical archive. The following discussion of the revisions of this opera therefore relies on other sources, including the piano vocal score published by Lucca (see Table 5-2), a manuscript copy relating to a 1839 performance at the San Carlo, Naples kept in the library of the Naples Conservatory,²⁴ and several printed librettos (listed in Table 5-3).²⁵

Table 5-2: *I briganti*, Milan: Lucca, [n.d.]. Index of Numbers.

1383	INTRODUZIONE
1384	SCENA ED ARIA Amelia angiol divino, per Basso
1385	CORO DI DONNE [Come un etereo spirto]
1386	ARIA Quando il guerrier mio splendido, per Soprano
1387	DUETTO Questa è la volta estrema, per Soprano e Basso
1388	SCENA ED ARIA Questi due verdi, Salici per Tenore
1389	FINALE PRIMO [Qual soave armonia -Ermano, Come turbar poss'io]
1390	INTRODUZIONE ATTO 2do [Accorrete-Briganti]
1391	ORGIA [Giunge Ermano - Trova ovunque e patria e tetto il Brigante]
1392	SCENA E PREGHIERA Fra nemi crudeli, per Tenore
1393 e 1394	SCENA E DUETTO Deh risparmia ch'io racconti, per Tenore e Basso
1394	FINALE 2do [All'armi]
1395	CORO Il Silenzio doppia
1396	ARIA Ah! No vivi, per Basso
1397	ARIA Ciel del mio prode Ermano, per Soprano
1398	TERZETTO FINALE [Giunge alcun]

²³ Besides textual differences found in the librettos, Wittmann – who evidently had access to the autograph score at the time of his 1997 article – also indicates changes in the musical structure and instrumentation, in particular in the writing for the chorus of the Finale Act I. Wittmann, "Meyerbeer and Mercadante?," 123.

²⁴ Saverio Mercadante, *I briganti*, Milan: Lucca, [n.d.] Piano Vocal Score, GB-BL, Music Collections E.123.g. Saverio Mercadante, *I briganti: Melodramma in tre Atti, Poesia di Giacomo Crescini, Musica del Maestro Mercadante, Rappresentato al Real Teatro San Carlo l'anno 1839*. Copyist Score, 1839. Naples: Biblioteca del Conservatorio di San Pietro a Majella, 1839, 2 vols, I-Nc MS NA0059 29.7.35.

²⁵ In addition to examining these source materials, I also received advice from Michael Wittmann, who provided me with a few details on the autograph score and shared his hypotheses with me.

Table 5-3: *I briganti*: Librettos for Italian Performances

Location	Year	Publication Details	Siglum
Paris	1836	<i>I briganti: melodramma serio in tre parti, parole di Jacopo Crescini, musica del Maestro Mercadante.</i> Paris: Rue Grange Batelière, 1836.	P ¹⁸³⁶
Venice	1837	<i>I briganti: melodramma serio in tre parti. Parole di Giacomo Crescini, musica del Maestro Mercadante. Da rappresentarsi Nel Teatro Gallo a S. Benedetto L'Autunno 1837.</i> Venice: Rizzi, 1837.	VE ¹⁸³⁷
Cagliari	1837	<i>I briganti: melodramma serio in tre parti. Da rappresentarsi Nel Teatro Civico di Cagliari L'Autunno del 1837.</i> Cagliari: Monteverde, 1837.	CA ¹⁸³⁷
Milan	1837	<i>I briganti: melodramma in tre parti, da rappresentarsi nell'I. R. Teatro alla Scala l'autunno 1837. Parole di Jacopo Crescini, musica del Maestro Mercadante.</i> Milan: Pirola, 1837.	MI ¹⁸³⁷
Padua	1838	<i>I briganti: melodramma serio in tre parti. Parole di Giacomo Crescini, Musica del Maestro Saverio Mercadante. Da rappresentarsi Nel Teatro Nuovo di Padova L'Autunno 1838.</i> Padua: Penada, 1838.	PD ¹⁸³⁸

Comparison of the three 1837 Italian librettos with the 1836 Parisian version reveals a number of variants, especially concerning Acts I and III. Integrating significant incipits and texts of the librettos and the index of numbers in the piano vocal score (in bold), Tables 5-4 and 5-5 show the scene layouts of Act I and Act III as featured in the Paris and Venice librettos, and highlight the most relevant variants and cuts introduced into the Cagliari and Milan productions.

Table 5-4: *I briganti*, 1837. Variants in Act I

Scene	Characters	Incipit of Libretto and PV Number	Variants
1 VE ¹⁸³⁷ 1 CA ¹⁸³⁷	Coro di Cortigiani e Dame	"Le gramaglie, i funèbri doppieri"	MI: CUT
2 VE ¹⁸³⁷ 2 CA ¹⁸³⁷	Corrado, Coro	Scena ed aria, "Ove a me tu volga un guardo... Amelia angiol divino"	MI: CUT
3 VE ¹⁸³⁷ 3 CA ¹⁸³⁷ 1 MI ¹⁸³⁷	Coro di Ancelle	Coro "Come un etereo spirto"	
4 VE ¹⁸³⁷ 4 CA ¹⁸³⁷ 2 MI ¹⁸³⁷	Amelia, Coro di ancelle	Cavatina "Quando, o guerrier mio splendido"	
5 VE ¹⁸³⁷ 5 CA ¹⁸³⁷ 3 MI ¹⁸³⁷	Amelia, Corrado	Duetto "Quest'è la volta estrema"	
6 VE ¹⁸³⁷ 6 CA ¹⁸³⁷ 4 MI ¹⁸³⁷	Ermanno, Rollero	Scena ed aria "Questi due verdi salci"	
7 VE ¹⁸³⁷ 7 CA ¹⁸³⁷ 5 MI ¹⁸³⁷	Amelia, e detti	[Finale Primo] "Tutto quaggiù si solve" [Duetto] "Come turbar poss'io ... Sì un fratel fu il disumano"	MI: DUET: 'A 2' CUT
8 VE ¹⁸³⁷ 8 CA ¹⁸³⁷ 6 MI ¹⁸³⁷	Rollero, e detti	"Erman." "Che avvenne"	
9 VE ¹⁸³⁷ 9 CA ¹⁸³⁷ 7 MI ¹⁸³⁷	Corrado, e detti	"Che veggio! Entro mie soglie"	
Scena Ultima VE ¹⁸³⁷ CA ¹⁸³⁷ MI ¹⁸³⁷	Teresa, Partigiani, Ancelle, Armigeri, Paggi, Castellani, etc.	[Finale Primo] "Amelia, sì turbata?" "Incerto, che penso?"	

As Table 5-4 shows, the opening Chorus and Corrado's cavatina, which form the original Introduzione of the opera, were suppressed in Milan. The same passages are present in the 1839 score, however, which suggests that the omission may have been a temporary cut. The 'a 2', 'No no non crederlo, T'amai costante', of the Amelia-Ermanno duet in Act I was also omitted in

Milan, whereas it appeared in the Venice and Cagliari versions and in the piano vocal score. This variant was probably due to the vocal indisposition of the tenor Paganini, ill at the time of the La Scala performance. The hypothesis of a temporary variant is reinforced by successive versions of the libretto: in fact, the 'a 2' of this duet reappeared in the 1838 libretto for Padua, and in the 1839 Neapolitan full score.

Table 5-5: *I briganti*, 1837. Variants in Act III

Scene	Characters	Incipit of Libretto and PV Number	Variants
1 VE ¹⁸³⁷ 1 CA ¹⁸³⁷ 1 MI ¹⁸³⁷	Cori di Partigiani ed Ancelle	"Notte i silenzi addoppia"	
2 VE ¹⁸³⁷ 2 CA ¹⁸³⁷ 2 MI ¹⁸³⁷	Corrado	Aria "Ah! No, vivi"	
3 VE ¹⁸³⁷ 3 CA ¹⁸³⁷ 3 MI ¹⁸³⁷	Partigiani, ancelle, paggi, e detto.	"Sì; parmi udir in campo"	
4 VE ¹⁸³⁷ 4 CA ¹⁸³⁷ 4 MI ¹⁸³⁷	Amelia	Aria "Ciel, del mio prode Ermano"	MI: CUT, ONLY A RECITATIVE
5 VE ¹⁸³⁷ 5 CA ¹⁸³⁷	Teresa, Coro di ancelle, e detta	"Oh! Di quali dolci immagini Tutta inebbriar mi sento"	MI: CUT
6 VE ¹⁸³⁷ 6 CA ¹⁸³⁷ 5 MI ¹⁸³⁷	Conte e detta	"Quanto è dolce mai di stringersi" [TERZETTO FINALE Giunge alcuno]	CA: SHORT RECIT AND STANZA MI: TEXT CHANGE
7 VE ¹⁸³⁷ 7 CA ¹⁸³⁷ 6 MI ¹⁸³⁷	Ermanno e detti Briganti	"Qual vista, quale orror" [In TERZETTO FINALE]	
Scena Ultima: VE ¹⁸³⁷ CA ¹⁸³⁷ MI ¹⁸³⁷	Briganti e detti	"Vien, rammenta i giuri tuoi" [In TERZETTO FINALE]	

As illustrated in Table 5-5, the most substantial modifications concern Act III, in particular Scenes 4, 5, and 6. Originally, these scenes were set to two large numbers: a scena and aria for Amelia and a duet for Amelia and the Count. These preceded Ermanno's entrance and the trio in the *Terzetto Finale* (Scenes 7-11 in the Parisian and Venetian librettos). In the Paris and Venice librettos, Scenes 4-6 unfold as follows. In Scene 4, Amelia is alone after Corrado has left to engage in the duel with Ermanno (*Recitativo*: 'Dove corre l'iniquo? ... Oh! me perduta!'). Concerned for the two brothers' destiny, she

wishes that Massimiliano, whom she believes dead, could be there to comfort her; she prays for Ermanno (*Andante*, 'Ciel! del mio prode Ermano'). In Scene 5, Teresa, followed by other housemaids, makes a sudden entrance to inform Amelia that the Count is still alive (*Tempo di mezzo*, Amelia, Teresa and Coro di Ancelle 'Amelia, esulta, splendere'); Amelia's exclamations of joy are combined with her now explicit wish to see Ermanno win over his brother (*Cabaletta*, 'Oh! di quai dolci immagini'); the scene ends with the entrance of Massimiliano (Amelia, 'Giunge alcuno: ad ogni aura'). Scene 6 is the widely criticised duet, whose poetry is clearly structured so as to be set as a multi-movement duet consisting of the conventional alternation of static and kinetic sections.²⁶ According to the Parisian libretto, Amelia and Massimiliano engage in a tender duo in which they sing of their mutual relief in finding each other and recall the hardship of the times they have spent apart ([*Primo tempo*], 'Quanto è dolce mai di stringersi'); then Massimiliano states the need for Amelia to leave Ermanno ('Ermano tu per sempre dei lasciar'); Amelia reacts with her admission of unconditional love for Ermanno ([*Cantabile*] 'Ei m'apparve risplendente'); Massimiliano invokes divine protection on her, then a transition ([*Tempo di mezzo*] 'Tremi o padre? Io per te tremo') leads to Massimiliano's explicit explanation: Ermanno is the robbers' leader and is living as an outlaw. Amelia breaks into a desperate cry, then the two join in a pathetic 'a 2', in which they weep together and comfort each other ([*Cabaletta*], 'Piangiamo insieme'). At the end of their duet, the announcement of a fatal wounding resonates. Massimiliano invokes death above himself ('Forse i miei figli pugnano? Crollate antiche mura'). At this point, Ermanno enters the scene (Scene 7), and the Terzetto ('Qual vista! Quale orror!') begins.

In the libretto for Cagliari a large portion of Act III Scene 6 is cut: the duet between Amelia and Massimiliano disappears completely, preserving only a rapid exchange ('O Padre, amato Padre! / O figlia mia!) —already featured in the Parisian and Venetian librettos — that follows the entrance of the Count

²⁶ See Harold S. Powers, "'La solita forma' and 'The Uses of Convention,'" *Acta Musicologica* 59, 1 (1987), 65-90; Scott L. Balthazar, "Evolving Conventions in Italian Serious Opera: Scene Structure in the Works of Rossini, Bellini, Donizetti, and Verdi, 1810-1850" (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1985) and "The Primo Ottocento Duet and the Transformation of the Rossinian Code," *Journal of Musicology* 7 (1989), 471-97.

and leads swiftly to the final *terzetto*. Clearly, the change heavily affects the musical form of the scene. After Amelia's solo, the pace of the action changes drastically with Massimiliano's entrance. Their interaction is reduced to an exclamation, in which they acknowledge their mutual relief at seeing each other again. This large cut was presumably the same introduced and described by the journalists at the time of the Parisian performance. At this point, as in other librettos and scores, the news of Corrado's death during the duel with Ermanno begins to unfold. Massimiliano expresses his mournful foreboding, singing a five-line stanza that dovetails the action into the following scene and number. Ermanno enters the stage to join Amelia and the Count in a trio, marked *Andante sostenuto* in the 1839 score.²⁷ The latter carries Amelia's solo in its entirety and the cut in the duet; the same version is retained in the piano vocal score, while the whole scene goes under the indication of *Terzetto Finale*.

The Milan libretto also presents substantial modifications in Act III. Notably, Amelia's solo number, which corresponds to the poetry for Scenes 4 (Recitativo, Andante) and 5 (Tempo di mezzo, Cabaletta) of the Paris and Venice librettos, is absent, replaced by a short recitative in Scene 4, followed by the abrupt entrance of Massimiliano in Scene 5. Considering that both the piano vocal score and the 1839 manuscript copy still carry the whole solo number, the omission of Amelia's solo scene from the Milan libretto was perhaps a non-definitive revision, which may be explained by the presence in the cast of a weaker or indisposed interpreter – in this case Derancourt rather than Grisi who had created the role. Following Massimiliano's entrance, the duet begins. The poetry is altogether new, however; the dialogue has become less pathetic. Massimiliano curses Ermanno and his love for Amelia ('Maledetto fu l'istante Ch'egli nacque... e ti fu amante') and vehemently asks her to renounce her feelings. The stage directions in the libretto (*con emozione, avanzando; Si volge, e colpita da subito terrore, vuol fuggire, vacilla; osservando con pena*, etc.), show a visible concern to create a strong dramatic and emotional effect. The passage in *versi lirici* consists of two stanzas of eight-syllable lines:

²⁷ The piano vocal score does not carry a tempo indication for this number.

Con. Più quel nome
Sul tuo labbro... al mio cospetto
Ame. Squarcia... Oh squarcia questo petto!
Vibra il corpo al core oppresso:
Ma sia tal d'orrori eccesso
Ch'io ne possa qui morir.
Sì, se amar più no'l poss'io
Non so vita più soffrir.
Con. Maledetto fu l'istante
Ch'egli nacque... e ti fu amante
Tradì tutto... fede, onore...
Ei de' popoli è terrore...
Dell'Impero è di già al bando
Infamato Cavalier!
E... d'orror colmo esecrando
Capo vil di masnadier!
[*Con.* Never more that name
On your mouth... before me
Ame. Tear... Oh tear this breast!
My body is trembling like my oppressed heart:
but the excess of horrors be such
that I may die here now.
Yes, if I can't love him anymore
I can't tolerate life anymore.
Con. Cursed was the moment
In which he was born... and became your lover
He betrayed everything... trust, honour...
He is the terror of the people...
He is already banned by the Emperor
Dishonoured Knight!
And... full purveyor of horror
Coward leader of the robbers!]

Wittmann has described this musical passage as 'two brief *arioso* sections' in which Mercadante chose not to have the two characters sing together up to the following trio.²⁸ Then the duet morphs into a trio, triggered by the onstage rumble that announces Corrado's death. Before seeing Ermanno, the Count declaims the following:

[I figli miei si uccidono]
Crollate antiche mura,
L'onta e la mia sciagura
Coprite – io sia sepolto,
Al disonor sia tolto
Che cadde sopra me.

²⁸ Wittmann, "Meyerbeer and Mercadante?" 125.

[My sons are killing each other?
Fall, old walls
Cover my dishonour and my disgrace,
May I be buried and taken away
from the shame that fell on me.]

This connecting stanza features in all librettos, though the first verse, 'I figli miei si uccidono' (My sons are killing each other), is omitted in the musical setting.²⁹ In both the 1839 full score and the printed piano vocal score, a short recitative followed by a transitional dialogue (Amelia, Coro di ancelle) and the interaction between Amelia and Massimiliano link Amelia's cabaletta to the connecting stanza, which in turn merges into the following trio. As a whole, the passage bridges the preceding Scena and Aria, which ends in G Major, and the trio, which is in Db Major. In the original version (Paris and Venice), the long duet scene took place in between these two numbers. In the new version, which presumably reflects the amended Parisian version and the Cagliari reprise, that passage is rendered as shown in Example 5-1.

²⁹ In the Parisian libretto the verse is: 'Forse i figli miei pugnano?', 74.

Saverio Mercadante's *I briganti* (1837): A French 'Revolution'?

Example 5-1: *I briganti*, Act III, Amelia, Massimiliano, Coro,
Terzetto Finale, bars 1-65.

Amelia

Piano

6

A. cun ad o-gni au - ra che spi - ra in - cer-ta io tre - mo co-

11

A. si il mio spir-to è da ter-ro - r per - cos - so che an-co

15

A. pres - so al pia - cer nò gio - ir nò non pos-so

19

Coro A. Nel - la re-gal sua ve - ste qui vie-ne il pa - dre mi - ra

Saverio Mercadante's *I briganti* (1837): A French 'Revolution'?

Example 5-1 Continued

23

A. Ah! non tra - veg - go

Coro A. Il ciel a te lo in - vi - a

27

A. Pa - dre a - ma-to pa - dre a - ma-to pa - dre *f assai*

M. Fi - glia ah! fi-glia mi - a ah! fi-glia mi - a

31

A. qual la - men - *p*

M. qual la - men - *p*

Coro A. qual la - men - *p*

Saverio Mercadante's *I briganti* (1837): A French 'Revolution'?

Example 5-1 Continued

38

A. *to* *che fu?*

M. *to* *che fu?*

Coro A. *to* *che fu?*

Uom. *Ei lan - gue re-spi-ra ap - pe -*

43

A. *ah!* *for - se Er - ma - no ohi - mè ohi - mè*

M. *ah!* *for - se Er - ma - no ohi - mè ohi - mè crol*

Coro A. *ah!*

Uom. *na*

48

M. *la - te an - ti - che mu - ra l'on ta e la mia scia - gu - ra co - pri - te e sia se - pol - to*

cresc.

Saverio Mercadante's *I briganti* (1837): A French 'Revolution'?

Example 5-1 Continued

The musical score is for a scene from Saverio Mercadante's *I briganti*. It features a male soloist (M.), an alto soloist (A.), and a chorus (Coro A.). The piano accompaniment is shown in grand staff notation. The key signature has two flats (B-flat and E-flat), and the time signature is 8/8. The tempo marking 'Più Lento' appears above the piano part at measure 57. Dynamics include *f* (forte), *pp* (pianissimo), and *ppp* (pianississimo). The lyrics are in Italian, with some words in French: 'al di-so-nor sia tol - to che cad-de in tor - no a me', 'qual vi - - sta', and 'qua - le or - ro - - r'. The score includes measure numbers 54, 58, 61, and 63. The piano part features complex rhythmic patterns, including triplets and sixteenth-note runs.

54
M. al di-so-nor sia tol - to che cad-de in tor - no a me

Più Lento

58
A. qual vi - - sta
M. qual vi - - sta
Coro A. qual vi - - sta

61
A. qua - le or - ro - - r
M. qua - le or - ro - - r
Coro A. qua - le or - ro - - r

63

Table 5-6 summarises relevant sections in the passage leading to the trio of the *Terzetto Finale*.

Table 5-6: Opening Passage in *Terzetto Finale* (bars 1-65)

[overlap]

Cabaletta	Recitative (Amelia)	Transitional dialogue--- Exclamation (Amelia, Coro di Ancelle, Massimiliano)	Connecting Stanza (Massim.)	Terzetto (A, E, M)
	bb. 1-18	bb. 19-47	bb. 48-64	
G	G→(g)→	→Bb-C(V/V)→ (Eb →Ab)→F	b-flat→A-flat	D-flat
		(bb. 30-47)		
G	g	B-flat -----F	B-flat ----A-flat	D-flat
I	i	I-----V/V----- (IV-VII)----V	i-----VII (V7)	I

It is worth examining in detail the passage where the cut might have occurred (bars 30ff). The passage is characterised by remarkable harmonic instability, ultimately leading to V of Db Major ('Qual vista! quale orror', bars 58-64). This will eventually resolve to the tonic at the beginning of the ensuing trio ('Quai vesti! oh Dio qual sangue!'). It is possible that the same passage featured between the duet newly composed for Milan and the final trio.

5.4 *I briganti* in Context

The variants included in the 1837 Italian librettos of *I briganti* provide evidence of Mercadante's response to the demands of the press, but the modifications that appear first in the Cagliari libretto and are then finalised in the scores used for this discussion show a significant effort to compress and connect different numbers, foreshadowing a trend that was to become essential in later works, such as *Il giuramento*, *Il bravo* and *La vestale*, and in the operas of his so-called 'reform' period. In her discussion of these operas, Kowals has identified these stylistic features as technical devices for the creation of 'local continuity', describing different strategies of compression between discrete numbers in Mercadante's mature operas in terms of 'interruption', 'elision,' and 'overlap', and examining a number of examples

which are clearly analogous to the principles behind the Act III revisions in the Cagliari and Milan versions of *I briganti*.³⁰

Specifically, the passage in Example 5-1, which leads from the conclusion of Amelia's solo to the omission of the duet and to the stanza dovetailing into the final trio, highlights a procedure that might be identified as 'overlap' (bars 30-47), a 'component which inhabits both ending and beginning' to create continuity between two consecutive numbers (See Table 5-6).³¹

A similar example is the Act I finale of *Il giuramento*, in which Mercadante bridges the close of Viscardo's Eb minor romanza 'Ti creò per me l'amor' and the beginning of the ensuing duet with Bianca.³² Particularly fitting to our case is also the example of the 'juncture' between the end of Violetta's romanza, 'La sera malinconica', and the following abrupt entrance by Pisani that leads to the opening of the duet in Act II of *Il bravo*, 'Dal dì che sei fuggita'; Pisani's and Violetta's single line of recitative just after Violetta's romanza provides an essential moment of 'delicate, but essential ... continuity between the romanza's close, and the reunion ... and acts as a transitional passage to the opening of the lovers' duet proper'.³³

Kowals synthesised the duet from *Il bravo* into a structure that can easily be applied to the form of the duet appearing in the discussed scenes in Act III of *I briganti* (See Table 5-7):

³⁰ I am here agreeing with and pursuing the hypothesis presented by Kowals and using her terminology; Kowals, "Issues of Style in Saverio Mercadante's Mature Operas," 44-73.

³¹ In Kowals' words, Mercadante used overlap to create 'seamless junctures between separate numbers'. The concept of Overlap in analytical terms was introduced by Fred Lerdahl and Ray Jackendoff in *A Generative Theory of Tonal Music* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1983), and William Rothstein, *Phrase Rhythm in Tonal Music* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1989). See Kowals, "Issues of Style," 47-8.

³² *Ibid.*, 57-61.

³³ *Ibid.*, 53-64.

Table 5-7: Overlap in Duet Violetta-Pisani in *Il bravo*, Act II

[overlap]³⁴

romanza – exclamation (Violetta) – transitional dialogue – **duet**

G Major I – → I 7

G Major – → I 7 [V7]

C Major

In the duet and trio of Act III of *I briganti*, an overlap takes place between the joint utterance of Amelia and Massimiliano and the ensuing transition to Massimiliano's connecting stanza (See Table 5-6).

In this case, the construction of a large-scale scene arises as a consequence of a cut. The strategy, which Mercadante had probably already deployed in Paris and Cagliari, was maintained in later productions of the opera. It was then adopted with growing conviction by the composer, perhaps as a result of his work on *Il giuramento*. This fact assumes specific relevance if we consider that both the premiere of *Il giuramento* and the reworking of *I briganti* took place against the backdrop of the criticism received in Paris, which indicated a pressing need for a more fluid pace in the action.

In the original Parisian version of *I briganti*, the pathetic quality of this section of the opera, with two consecutive, intensely lyrical numbers (Amelia's solo and her duet with Massimiliano), halted the action in a place where the dramatic rhythm needed to increase.³⁵ In the Milanese version, the compression of these scenes achieves the desired effect, fast-forwarding the action between Amelia's aria and the final trio. This aptly prepares the tragic final scene, in which Amelia dies abandoned by Ermanno, at least in the Paris, Venice and Cagliari librettos. In Milan the epilogue also changes, however. Ermanno, dragged away by his companions from his distraught father and his dying lover, kills himself after pleading for forgiveness.³⁶ For the Milan

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 57.

³⁵ Wittmann, 125.

³⁶ Jacopo Crescini, *I briganti: melodramma in tre parti, da rappresentarsi nell'I. R. Teatro alla Scala l'autunno 1837. Parole di Jacopo Crescini, musica del Maestro Mercadante* (Milan: Pirola, 1837), 42.

performance, Mercadante probably felt that the duet should anyway have been in place, and asked an unidentified librettist to provide new poetry that would increase the pace of the scene. The new duet constitutes a wholly different type of number compared with the more extended and conventional duet written for Paris. This transformation perfectly exemplifies one of the rules of thumb of Mercadante's 'revolution': 'variate le forme' (varied forms).³⁷

I briganti continued to change even after the Milan production. The libretto for an 1838 Turin performance at the Teatro Carignano skillfully condensed the second and third acts into one.³⁸ In this libretto, all variants present in the Milanese score were preserved (including the new Act III duet), while major cuts affected the chorus. Possibly as a response to different casts and critical reactions, various contemporary versions of *I briganti* circulated simultaneously: one version, close to the Cagliari libretto, the piano vocal score and the 1839 Neapolitan version, retained the original libretto and Amelia's scene in Act III but omitted the duet; and another followed the Milan performance, in which Amelia's scene was turned into a short recitative and a new duet was provided. It would indeed be worth examining whether Mercadante's extant operas staged in the same period were subject to this unceasing process of transformation, which would reveal his creative process and the whole journey to his 'rivoluzione'.

5.5 Conclusion

The Italian revisions for *I briganti* represent an important step towards the 'rivoluzione' that Mercadante himself acknowledged in the process that took him to the composition of *Il giuramento*. Examining the ways in which he revised *I briganti* for Milan at the same time as or immediately after the creation of his most successful opera, *Il giuramento*, shows the progress towards greater formal flexibility which the composer deemed to be

³⁷ See footnote 1 of this Chapter.

³⁸ Jacopo Crescini, *I briganti: melodramma in due parti. Da rappresentarsi Nel Teatro Carignano L'Autunno del 1838* (Turin: Favale, 1838).

'revolutionary'. In the case of the Italian performances of *I briganti*, Mercadante seems to have taken into account the reaction of the Italian reviewers and modified his score, responding to the immediate reception of his work, much as he seems to have done in Paris. This is demonstrated by the versions of *I briganti* produced in Cagliari and Milan, in which a few numbers are suppressed or compressed, giving greater prominence to the action and employing a heavier orchestration. The cuts result in greater continuity between closed numbers and in the creation of larger and more flexible dramatic units, which in turn achieve a more continuous and intense dramatic flow. In addition to a changing aesthetic awareness, the critical response to his music, both in France and Italy, may well have accelerated this process. As Wittmann has observed, the quality of this new dramaturgy and the effort to circumvent the time-honoured conventions of number opera, was possibly the reason why, in the 1840s, a French reviewer such as Blaze de Bury acknowledged Mercadante as the Italian interpreter *par excellence* of the French *système lyrique*, finding a stylistic kinship between his newly-acquired compositional language and the French system.³⁹ Rather than a declared intent on Mercadante's behalf to follow the French cachet, this kinship was instead apparently a pragmatic response to an integrated transfer between Italian and French audiences, and stemmed from the need to satisfy the practical demands of an evolving taste, which both French and Italian critics expressed in their reviews.

³⁹ Wittmann, 125-6.

6. Conclusions

In examining and cross-referencing biographical events and evidence from public reports, this thesis has provided new insights into a neglected and yet highly significant aspect of Mercadante's career, his presence and involvement in French operatic life.

Broadly speaking, the research into nineteenth- and early twentieth-century critical accounts of the composer has highlighted the development of a tendency, still visible in contemporary scholarship, to criticise Mercadante's achievements in relation to his Italian contemporaries. This is certainly true also of Mercadante's fortunes in France.¹ Indeed, many have been tempted to view Mercadante's French experiences as a failure in comparison to those of Rossini, Bellini, and Donizetti.

In this thesis, however, I argue that the case of Mercadante in France was remarkably different from those of his better-known contemporaries. For one thing, composers like Rossini, Bellini, and Donizetti lived and worked in Paris for longer periods, and were able progressively to overturn the multifaceted strands of criticism that surrounded their Parisian debuts. The French success of these composers did not materialise overnight, but was the result of a constant and laborious acquaintance with the tastes of the audiences, with various outcomes. They became increasingly familiar with French operatic life and audiences, and critical discussion of their works unfolded and developed in different directions.

Furthermore, unlike Rossini, Bellini and Donizetti, Mercadante never aspired to settle in Paris for an extended period of time. As we have seen in Chapter 4, after the premiere of *I briganti* Mercadante left France never to return (although he seems to have wished to do so on a couple of occasions in 1837 and 1847). Hence, the composition of *I briganti* for Paris remained a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Despite his international experience and the

¹ See for instance David Kimbell's assessment of *I briganti*. 'Then in Paris in 1836 his *Briganti* was produced: for any Italian composer the challenge to win over the cool, critical French public was the acid test of mastery. Rossini, Bellini and Donizetti had triumphed gloriously: Mercadante failed.' David Kimbell, *Italian Opera* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 479.

fame that preceded him by the time *I briganti* made its appearance at the Théâtre Italien, Mercadante was more of a newcomer to the Parisian audiences, and he failed to make a distinctive and long-lasting impression. Nevertheless, the revisions for successive productions of *I briganti* in Italy (discussed in Chapter 5) highlight a dynamic interaction between the critical response to his work and the composer's reaction on the compositional level, thus proving the significance of the French reception in tracking his artistic development during the years following his Parisian sojourn.

Despite (or perhaps because of) the limited circulation of Mercadante's works in France during the 1820s and 1830s, the transfer between French and Italian criticism created a context for the establishment, exchange and stability of a fairly coherent view of Mercadante. This thesis has traced the presence of Mercadante in the French press during the years leading up to his so-called 'reform period'. As we have seen in Chapter 1, Castil-Blaze attentively reported on the Italian success of *Elisa e Claudio*, and sought to portray Mercadante as 'different' from the plethora of Italian composers approaching the French stage who, like him, faced the challenge of being compared with Rossini. In the wake of favourable Italian criticism, Mercadante's promising beginnings received remarkable attention in Castil-Blaze's journal, and were discussed in numerous articles, with a whole *feuilleton* devoted to him even before his operas first reached Paris. Central to my discussion was the mutual influence of Italian and French journalism, which shared the practice of importing and translating pre-packaged notions from one country to another.

As shown in Chapter 2, the unenthusiastic evaluation of *Elisa e Claudio* in the French press following the Parisian debut of the opera suggested that the expectations created by Castil-Blaze were not completely fulfilled. *Elisa e Claudio* disappointed the Parisian audience in comparison both with the models of the old Neapolitan school and with Rossini. Considering the disappointment of the French premiere of *Elisa e Claudio*, as seen in Chapter 3, the appearance of Mercadante's music from *Elisa e Claudio* and *L'apoteosi d'Ercole* under the garb of *Les Noces de Gamache* in the 1825 season at the Odéon may have had more to do with the personal choices of the those involved in the management of the theatre – as well as, probably, with Castil-Blaze himself – than with a broader reflection of public favour toward the composer. Meanwhile, as seen in Chapter 4, on the other side of the Alps Mercadante was extremely attentive to the reception and outcome of his

operas in Italy and France; his letters show deep awareness of the way in which critics responded to his works and to those of his contemporaries.² Indeed, Florimo's and Mercadante's letters conformed to the comments reported by the press of the time, and this mutual transfer testified to an open attitude to satisfying the audience's tastes. Mercadante's prompt and constructive reaction to the suggestions of French and, later, Italian journals should not be seen as exceptional. Rather, it is indicative of a broad pattern of interaction between nineteenth-century critics and composers, which deserves to be explored in depth in future studies.

The horizontal 'composer-score-performance-reception' model shows, therefore, its limitations, as in the case of *I briganti* the critical response seriously affected the work, thus establishing a circular continuity between criticism and creative process. In other words, the critical discourse on the performance exerted a dynamic influence on the development of the cultural object itself.

In broader terms, Espagne's model to describe cultural transfer, cited at the beginning of this thesis, has framed this study perfectly: indeed the product proposed to the French audience did not appear in an empty space, nor did it remain impermeable to transmutations in the process of reception.³ The French audience operated a selection, accepted some materials and rejected some others, capturing a 'need' which was neither entirely French nor entirely Italian, but interpreted changing orientations in taste affecting the Italian operatic *koine* as a whole. This dynamic transfer proposes new approaches and new issues that emerge when unpacking the stylistic developments of a composer, especially within the broader perspective of a career with a transnational breadth.

Keeping the larger framework of cultural transfer in sight, I have aimed to provide sources and historical tools for an expanded perspective in the discussion of Mercadante's 'mature' style and, through the examination of a number of case studies, to shed new light onto the French influence on his

² This seems also to be true in relation to the Italian press of the time, as can be seen on numerous scattered occasions in his letters. Palermo, *Biografia-Epistolario*.

³ See Introduction to this thesis.

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‘reform’ or ‘mature’ operas. By focusing in particular on the immediate responses of French music criticism to his work, my research has indicated the fundamental need to broaden the spectrum of investigation of his work and style to include pan-European criticism and to cultural transfer.

To be sure, the materials and ideas presented in this thesis call for further research in numerous directions. For example, a broader investigation of the reception of *Elisa e Claudio* and Mercadante’s early production, extending beyond the boundaries of Italy and France, would be desirable. In regard to *I briganti*, a critical study of the autograph score and of the layers of variants introduced in Italian revivals may lend further strength to the hypothesis that the revisions of this opera laid the groundwork for his more mature works.⁴ Such a study would also provide important insights into Mercadante’s creative process, an area of investigation that is still in its infancy.

My research may prove relevant to yet another prominent topic of discussion: the almost complete disappearance of Mercadante in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century criticism, a phenomenon in which the views of authoritative French and Italian commentators possibly played a part. Perhaps as a result of a changed aesthetic perception, or as a consequence of the rise of Verdi’s star and a growing interest in grand-operatic forms, Mercadante seemed to gradually fade from the musical scene already in the late 1840s, and by the 1880s his presence in the historiography of *ottocento* opera had been dramatically scaled down.⁵ In delineating the critical response to Mercadante’s operas in France in the early 1820s and 1830s, I have observed that his critical fortune was directly proportional to the effectiveness with which French criticism perceived his progressive detachment from the ‘Italian’ way of composing. This merit was meticulously acknowledged by Parisian critics. The general disillusionment was as great as the initial expectations, however, and the uneven success of the works of his maturity

⁴ Wittmann, “Meyerbeer and Mercadante?” 115-32.

⁵ Wittmann and Marcello Conati summarise these hypotheses in two essays: “Mercadante tra Rossini e Verdi” and “Riflessioni per una rivalutazione delle composizioni operistiche di Mercadante,” in *Saggi su Saverio Mercadante*, 21-9.

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was crucial in consolidating the ultimate sense of missed accomplishment that to this day seems to surround Mercadante's position in the history of opera.

Appendices

Appendix 1

Table 7-1: Mercadante in Paris (1835-36): Articles Examined

Journal title	Dates	Weekday	Pages	Issue	Title	Signature
<i>L'Artiste</i>	1836		106-107	Tome XI	Théâtre Italien	
	1836		116-117	Tome XI	Théâtre Italien	
<i>Le Charivari</i>	22 sept	Mardi	1-4	265	Théâtre Italien	A.C.
	24 mars	Jeudi	1-6	84	Théâtre Italien	A. C.
	26 mars	Samedi	1-2	86	Théâtre Italien	A.C.
	27 mars	Dimanche	8	87	Carillon	
	28 mars	Lundi	7	88	Carillon	
<i>Le Constitutionnel</i>	28 mars	Lundi	1	80?	Théâtre Italien	A.
<i>Courrier des Théâtres</i>	2 nov.	Lundi	4	6159	Nouvelles de Paris	
	27 jan.	Mercredi	4	6245	Nouvelles de Paris	
	12 mars	Samedi	4	6290	Nouvelles de Paris	
	14 mars	Lundi	4	6292	Nouvelles de Paris	
	16 mars	Mercredi	4	6294	Nouvelles de Paris	
	19 mars	Samedi	4	6297	Nouvelles de Paris	
	20 mars	Dimanche	4	6298	Nouvelles de Paris	
	21 mars	Lundi	4	6299	Nouvelles de Paris	
	22 mars	Mardi	4	6300	Nouvelles de Paris	
	23 mars	Mercredi	3	6301	Nouvelles de Paris	
	24 mars	Jeudi	3	6302	Nouvelles de Paris	
	25 mars	Vendredi	3	6303	Nouvelles de Paris	
	26 mars	Samedi	3	6304	Nouvelles de Paris	
	28 mars	Lundi	4	6306	Nouvelles de Paris	
	30 mars	Mercredi	4	6308	Nouvelles de Paris	
	31 mars	Jeudi	3-4	6309	Nouvelles de Paris	
	1-2 avril	Vendredi, Samedi	3	6310, 6311	Nouvelles de Paris	
	10 avril	Dimanche	4	6319	Nouvelles de Paris	

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<i>Courrier français</i>	26 mars	Samedi	1	85	Théâtre Italien	ED. M.
<i>Le Corsaire</i>	24 oct.	Samedi	1-2	2705	Académie Royale de Musique	
	10 nov.	Mardi	4	2719	Butin	
	21 Nov.	samedi	4	2730	Butin	
<i>L'entr'acte</i>	22 Mars	Mardi	1	82	Théâtre Italien	
	23 Mars	Mercredi	1	83	Théâtre Italien	
<i>Gazette de France</i>	22 mars	Mardi	4		Spectacles	
	24 mars	Jeudi	4		Nouvelles des Théâtres	
	26 mars	Samedi	1-4		Feuilleton de la Gazette de France. Théâtre Royal Italien.	A.
	27 mars	Dimanche	4		Nouvelles des Théâtres	
	28 mars	Lundi	4		Nouvelles des Théâtres	
<i>Gazette des salons</i>	1836		95		Variétés	
	1836		223		Revue Théâtrale	
	1836		400		Variétés	
<i>Gazette des théâtres</i>	20 sept.	Dimanche	409	743	Nouvelles diverses	
	24 sept.	Jeudi	408	749	Nouvelles diverses	
	1 nov.	Dimanche	79-80	760	Nouvelles diverses	
	20 mars	Dimanche	400	800	Nouvelles diverses	
	24 mars	Jeudi	416	801	Nouvelles diverses	
<i>Journal de Paris</i>	18 sept	Vendredi	3	2862	Nouvelle des Théâtres et des Arts	
	27 sept	Dimanche	3	2871	Nouvelle des Théâtres et des Arts	
	12 déc.	Samedi	3	2948	Nouvelle des Théâtres et des Arts	
	19 déc.	Samedi	3	2955	Nouvelle des Théâtres et des Arts	
	23 mars	Mercredi	3	3040	Nouvelle des Théâtres et des Arts	
	25 mars	Vendredi	3	3051	Nouvelle des Théâtres et	

					des Arts	
	26 mars	Samedi	3	3052	Nouvelle des Théâtres et des Arts	
	27 mars	Dimanche	1-3	3053	Théâtre Royal Italien	ZZ.
	28 mars	Lundi	3	3054	Nouvelle des Théâtres et des Arts	
	4-5 avril	Dimanche et lundi	2	1661	Nouvelle des Théâtres et des Arts	
	31 mars	Jeudi	424	803	Nouvelles diverses	
<i>Journal des débats</i>	24 mars	Jeudi	1-2		Théâtre Royal des Italiens	D.
<i>Journal des femmes</i>	30 octobre	Vendredi	214-216		Bulletin Théâtral	
	13 nov.	Vendredi	247-248		Revue	Fanny Richomme
	29 janvier	Vendredi	79-80		Variétés	
	5 février	Vendredi	95-96		Variétés	
	25 mars	Vendredi	198-201		Modes du jour	
	1 avril	Vendredi	222-223		La revue théâtrale. / <i>briganti</i>	
<i>La quotidienne</i>	12 sept	Samedi	1	255	Nouvelles et faits divers	
	31 oct.	Samedi	2	304	Nouvelles et faits divers	
	23 déc.	Mercredi	3	357	Nouvelles et faits divers	
	20 mars	Dimanche	4	80	Nouvelles et faits divers	
	23 mars	Mercredi	4	83	Bulletin dramatique	
	24 mars	Jeudi	4	84	Bulletin dramatique	
	28 mars	Lundi	1-3	88	Revue dramatique	
	6 avril	Mercredi	2	97	Théâtre Italien.	
<i>Le ménestrel</i>	31 jan.	Dimanche	5	9	Chronique	
	27 mars	Dimanche	5	17	Chronique	
<i>Le rénovateur</i>	17 sept	Jeudi	5	260	Bigarrures	
	27 sept.	Dimanche	4	276	Bigarrures	
	19 nov.	Jeudi	4	323	Bigarrures	
<i>Psyché</i>	24	Jeudi	93	94	Théâtres	

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	mars					
	31 mars	Jeudi	103-104	95	Théâtres	
<i>Revue de Paris</i>	27 mars	Dimanche	254-259	Tome 27	Revue du monde musical	C.-B.
<i>Revue des deux mondes</i>	1 avril	Vendredi	126-128	Tome Vi, 1 avril 1836	Revue musicale	F. Buloz
<i>Revue du Théâtre</i>	28 fév.	Dimanche	143	169	Nouvelles diverses	
	14 mars (ca)	Lundi	407	177	Nouvelles diverses	
	27 mars (ca)	Dimanche	434	180	Nouvelles diverses	
	1 avril (ca)	Vendredi	7-11	181	Théâtre Italien. / <i>briganti</i>	Hippolyte Prévost
<i>Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris</i>	30 aout	Mardi	290-291	35	Des concerts	
	13 sept.	Dimanche	303-304	37	Nouvelles	
	20 sept.	Dimanche	310-311		Nouvelles	
	27 sept.	Dimanche	319-320	52	Nouvelles	
	25 oct.	Dimanche	351-352	43	Nouvelles	
	22 nov.	Dimanche	387-388	47	Nouvelles	
	20 déc.	Dimanche	420	51	Musique Nouvelle	
	27 déc.	Dimanche	428	52	Nouvelles	
	24 janvier	Dimanche	31-32	4	Nouvelles	
	21 février	Dimanche	64-65	8	Nouvelles	
	27 mars	Dimanche	99-101	13	<i>I briganti</i>	J.J.J. Diaz
	10 avril	Dimanche	118-119	15	Nouvelles	
<i>Le Temps</i>	30 oct.	Vendredi	3	2203		
	19 déc.	Samedi	3	2258		
	22 mars	Mardi	4	2347		
	24 mars	Jeudi	3	2349		
	26 mars	Samedi	2-3	2351		
	28 mars	Lundi	3	2353		
	9 avril	Samedi	1-3	2365	Le Théâtre Italien	C. Merruau

Appendix 2

Saverio Mercadante, *I briganti* (Paris, 1836) *Dossier de presse*

The following *dossier de presse* documents the Paris premiere of Mercadante's *I briganti* on 22 March 1836. It is a collection of reviews from daily papers, musical periodicals and artistic journals in which operatic criticism is regularly found (See Table 7.2, p. 228). The collection contains mainly *feuilletons* and larger reviews that spanned the days between the opening night and the following performances of the opera, between March 23 and April 9 1836. Research on these materials was conducted between 2010 and 2011 at the Bibliothèque nationale de France, the Département de la Musique de la Bibliothèque Nationale de France (Site Richelieu), and the Bibliothèque-Musée de l'Opéra Paris. A number of documents were also available in digital format and accessible online both as electronic sources accessible at the Bibliothèque nationale de France and on Gallica.

In compiling and editing the transcriptions from the articles and in accordance with the editing guidelines of this thesis, I adopted the editorial criteria employed by the Francophone Music Criticism, 1789-1914 Network.¹

¹ Rachel Moore, Notes for Managers_Research Assistants (Updated January 2011), Francophone Music Criticism Online Database, accessed July 4, 2013 <http://music.sas.ac.uk/fmc/project-description>.

Table 7-2: *I briganti*, Dossier de presse: Consulted Journals (Years 1835-36)

Journal	Location
<i>L'Artiste</i>	NUMP-70
<i>Le Charivari</i>	MICR 735, Pn
<i>Chronique de Paris</i>	Pi 313, Po MICR 4LC2-1384, Pn
<i>Le Constitutionnel</i>	NUMP 3206
<i>Le Corsaire</i>	Pi 577, Po
<i>Le Courrier des Théâtres</i>	Z 5386, Pn
<i>Le Courrier Français</i>	Per MICR D-124, Pn
<i>L'Entr'acte</i>	NUMP-6369
<i>La Gazette de France</i>	Per MICR D-138, Pn
<i>La Gazette des Salons</i>	NUMP-3133
<i>La Gazette des Théâtres</i>	Z-5424, Pn
<i>Journal des dames et des Modes</i>	RES 8- LC14- 4 Pi 316, Pn
<i>Journal des débats</i>	NUMP-1347
<i>Journal des femmes</i>	MI 8109, Pn
<i>Le Ménestrel</i>	NUMP-5413
<i>Le Moniteur universel</i>	Per MICR D-71, Pn
<i>Petit Courrier des dames et des modes</i>	8-LC14-8 (9), Pn
<i>La Presse</i>	NUMP-1359
<i>Psyché</i>	8-RJ-145
<i>La Quotidienne</i>	MICR D-98, Pn
<i>Le Rénovateur</i>	MICR D-1197, Pn
<i>La Revue de Paris</i>	NUMP-1159
<i>Revue des deux mondes</i>	NUMP-499
<i>Revue du théâtre</i>	Z5424, Pn
<i>Revue et Gazette musicale de Paris</i>	VM BOB- 501 (SL)
<i>Le Temps</i>	MICR D-165
<i>Le Voleur</i>	Pi-688, Po

L'ARTISTE, 1836, pp. 106-107.

Le Théâtre-Italien a voulu finir la saison musicale par un éclatant succès; le nouvel opéra a été applaudi avec enthousiasme, surtout pendant les deux premiers actes.

Le libretto de M. Crescini est emprunté on ne sait à quel temps et à quel pays. Au premier acte, nous voyons des courtisans, hommes et femmes, qui se félicitent de n'avoir plus à porter le deuil du comte de Moor, souverain du pays; on le croit mort. Son fils Conrad n'a rien de plus pressé que de se marier avec sa cousine Amélie d'Édelreich. Mais Amélie aime un autre cousin que Conrad veut faire passer aussi pour mort. Il a mal pris son temps; car ce cousin Herman arrive tout juste pour le convaincre d'imposture, de là une scène de provocation et de colère qui forme le finale du premier acte.

Au second acte, Herman [Hermann] est à la tête d'une nombreuse troupe de brigands; il cherche à noyer son chagrin et son amour pour la belle Amélie dans le vin et les chansons. Ici, une orgie obligée pour le compositeur. Après l'orgie, est abandonné à ses méditations solitaires; il aperçoit un ermite portant des vivres à un prisonnier enfermé dans une tour. En vrai brigand, Herman efforce les portes de la prison et délivre le prisonnier, dans lequel il reconnaît son père, le comte Moor. Le père et le fils forment une alliance offensive et défensive contre le cruel Conrad. Celui-ci, au troisième acte, se montre toujours passionné pour Amélie, transporté de jalousie et prêt de l'immoler à sa fureur, lorsque les vertueux brigands entrent au château et tuent Conrad. Tout devrait finir là par un mariage; mais, à ce qu'il paraît, le signor Crescini a l'humeur sombre; il a préféré laisser son héros Herman à la tête de ses brigands, avec lesquels il a contracté un pacte d'honneur; la belle Amélie, qui ne veut pas être la femme d'un voleur, meurt, plutôt que de suivre son amant.

M^{lle} Julie Grisi remplit le rôle d'Amélie; Rubini, celui de Herman; Tamburini, celui de Conrad, et Lablache celui du comte Moor.

Cet opéra n'a pas d'ouverture; on a beaucoup applaudi l'introduction, ainsi qu'un chœur de femmes, plein de grâce et de charmantes modulations. M^{lle} Grisi, Rubini et Tamburini ont fait admirer la magie de leur talent dans les trois airs qu'ils ont successivement chantés. Un morceau composé avec un art très-habile, c'est le chant pour les morts; il a produit un grand effet. Le finale est un admirable *crescendo*, où sont exprimés avec énergie tous les sentimens de jalousie, de fureur, de désespoir des différens personnages.

Au second acte, les principales parties sont: le chœur d'ouverture et l'air à boire de Rubini; la reconnaissance du père et du fils, duo plein de sentiment; puis le serment de vengeance des brigands, enfin une délicieuse prière à la Vierge, délicieusement chantée par Rubini.

Le troisième acte est le moins riche en beautés musicales; les morceaux en sont trop longs, surtout le duo de M^{lle} Grisi et de Lablache. Le compositeur a trop négligé l'action, pour ne s'occuper que des moyens de développer la voix des chanteurs. Le seul morceau vraiment original de ce troisième acte est le trio chanté par M^{lle} Grisi, Rubini et Lablache, et qui sert de finale. // 107 //

Cette partition atteste dans Mercadante un compositeur habile, dont le style se distingue surtout par la précision et l'élégance. *Les Brigands* prendront une place très honorable dans le beau répertoire des Italiens. L'exécution a été entraînant; il suffit de dire que M^{lle} Grisi, Rubini, Tamburini et Lablache se sont surpassés; ils ont été rappelés sur la scène, ainsi que Mercadante, et applaudis avec le plus grand enthousiasme.

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L'ARTISTE, 1836, pp. 116-117.

La musique de *I Briganti* paraît manquer de caractère et ressembler un peu à tout ce qu'on a entendu, sans cependant être copiée: elle frise la réminiscence. Je dois même dire que la fin du premier air de Corrado (Tamburini), au premier acte, a une telle analogie avec un air d'*Un'Avventura di Scaramuccia* de Ricci, que cet air m'est revenu dans la mémoire pendant même que Tamburini chantait; je l'avais entendu à Florence et tout-à-fait oublié depuis. Un chœur aussi m'a paru un moment avoir de l'analogie avec un chœur de *la Norma*. C'est là l'impression que m'a laissée l'ensemble de la musique à une première audition; mais il y a pourtant quelques morceaux fort agréables: le premier chant, l'air du Corrado (peut-être parce qu'il m'a rappelé la charmante musique de *Scaramuccia*), un air qui doit beaucoup à la manière dont il est chanté par M^{lle} Grisi, et un chœur chanté hors du théâtre avec accompagnement d'orgue, m'ont fait plaisir. Cette dernière scène a, du reste, le défaut d'être évidemment imitée de celle de *Robert-le-Diable* et de lui être fort inférieure. Quant à M^{lle} Grisi, si j'osais lui présenter humblement une observation, je lui dirais que son chant dégénère souvent dans les notes élevées en gazouillement de petit oiseau très-agréable à entendre, mais qui m'inspire quelques scrupules sous le point de vue dramatique.

Au second acte, une scène entre Ermano (Rubini) et Massimiliano (Lablache), son père, est, je crois, ce qu'il y a de plus remarquable dans la pièce. La partie de l'orchestre m'a paru habilement traitée; c'est le morceau qui a fait le plus d'impression sur le public. Il est d'ailleurs exécuté avec la perfection qu'on ne peut attendre de deux artistes comme Rubini et Lablache. Un air chanté par ce dernier à la fin du même acte a plus de verve et d'inspiration qu'en a généralement le reste de la musique, mais il manque d'élévation et n'est nullement en situation: on croit entendre un air à boire, ce qui n'est pas applicable.

Le troisième acte est le plus faible; je n'y ai remarqué que le chœur qui le commence.

Les décorations sont comme celle qu'on voit en Italie, c'est-à-dire qu'elles ne rassemblent qu'à elles-mêmes et nullement à ce qu'on voit dans la nature.

Les costumes sont mieux, surtout ceux de Tamburini et de Lablache au troisième acte; mais je ne sais où Rubini a été prendre celui dont il s'est affublé: c'est un costume qui n'est d'aucun pays ni d'aucune époque; c'est un assemblage fort singulier d'une espèce de petit spencer noir par-dessus une cuirasse, et un // 117 // petit jupon jaune-abricot, couvrant en partie une large culotte violâtre, le tout surmonté d'un casque, qui, j'en conviens, n'appartient précisément à aucun temps, mais qui cependant se rapporterait plutôt au quinzième siècle qu'au commencement du dix-septième, époque de tous les costumes de la pièce.

Malgré ces petites imperfections de détail, l'opéra de Mercadante vient finir dignement cette brillante saison musicale. Jamais peut-être les Italiens n'ont été aussi assidûment fréquentés par l'élite de la population parisienne. Quelle continuité de succès ne peut-on pas obtenir avec des exécutans comme M^{lle} Grisi, Rubini, Tamburini, Lablache, Iwanoff [Ivanoff]! Nous avons la promesse de revoir, l'année prochaine, tous ces merveilleux artistes. Ainsi nous n'avons qu'à leur souhaiter bon voyage jusqu'à Londres, des admirateurs

aussi passionnés que nous, et surtout un prompt retour. Félicitons MM. Robert et Severini du zèle qu'ils mettent à répondre à l'accueil du public et de toutes les vives jouissances musicales qu'ils nous ont donnés cet hiver.

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LE CHARIVARI, 24 Mars 1836, pp. 1-8.

Au temps où le brigand pure race florissait sur la scène dramatique, c'est-à-dire avant que Robert Macaire, lui attachant le grelot du ridicule eut étouffé sa voix sous les grincemens de sa tabatière et écrasé définitivement cette intéressante création du ci-devant talon de sa botte éculée, la fameuse tragédie de Schiller, *Die Rauber* [*Die Räuber*] (les Brigands), avait fourni le sujet d'un lamentable mélodrame en cinq actes, intitulé: *Robert, chef de brigands*. L'auteur du nouveau libretto, M. Jacques Crescini, en empruntant également son scénario au chef d'œuvre du poète allemand, a bien senti qu'aujourd'hui le brigand ne saurait plus être pris au sérieux. Mais ne pouvant traiter le brigand facétieux et fashionablement déguenillé, à cause du plagiat, force lui a été de créer une nouvelle variété, celle du brigand astronome, amant de la pluie et du clair de lune.

Nous laissons M. Jacques Crescini développer cette ingénieuse idée dans une espèce d'avant-propos placé en tête de son libretto. «Les *Brigands*, dit-il, qui, dans le drame allemand, sont représentés com- // 2 // -me [comme] une troupe de scélérats rompus à tous les vices, paraissent ici comme des hommes opposés à toute oppression injuste, amis de cette *innocente* indépendance qui ne viole aucun ordre, aucune loi. Le *noir aspect de la nuit*, un *ciel orageux*, la nature dans sa secrète horreur, plaisent à leur esprit et répondent à leur caractère.» Il est vrai que ces amans de la belle nature sont armés de carabines et d'espingoles: mais ces instrumens leur tiennent sans doute lieu de télescope et de parapluie, ou bien encore de cannes pour se promener dans leur *innocente indépendance*.

Ces brigands sentimentalesques reconnaissent pour chef Hermann, fils d'un prince de Bohême, que son goût pour le *noir aspect de la nuit*, le *ciel orageux*, etc., sans compter son expulsion de la maison paternelle, par suite des machinations de son frère aîné Conrad, ont contraint à chercher un refuge parmi eux. Le motif de la haine qui divise les deux frères est une rivalité amoureuse; tous deux adorent leur cousine, la belle Amélie. Il va sans dire que la jeune personne préfère l'amant proscrit et le sentimental promeneur au clair de la lune. Hermann revient au château paternel pour arracher sa maîtresse à son rival: n'ayant pu y parvenir, il va réclamer l'assistance de ses compagnons, qu'il prie de s'arracher pour un instant, à cet effet, à la contem- // 3 // -plation [contemplation] du *noir aspect de la nuit*, du *ciel orageux*, etc. Chemin faisant, il retrouve dans une forteresse isolée le vénérable auteur de ses jours que son frère Conrad y avait fait enfermer, en ayant soin de répandre le bruit de sa mort, uniquement parce que le vieillard refusait de consentir au mariage de l'aîné de ses fils avec la belle Amélie. Ce procédé remplaçait peut-être en Bohême, à cette époque, ce qu'on appelle de nos jours les sommations respectueuses.

Hermann ne sait comment s'y prendre pour ouvrir les portes de la prison; heureusement, il se rappelle que ses compagnons, les brigands-astronomes, sont munis de fausses clés, lesquelles leur servaient, sans doute, à forcer les secrets de la nature. Avec l'aide de ces instrumens, Hermann force les serrures de la forteresse, et délivre son père. Il court ensuite avec sa bande, je me trompe, avec sa société attaquer le château de Conrad; ce dernier succombe dans cette lutte entre ces deux nouveaux *frères féroces*. Hermann fait observer qu'il n'a tué son frère qu'à son corps défendant; il obtient, en

conséquence, son pardon de son père, et va s'unir à celle qu'il aime. Mais, au moment où le vieillard s'apprête à prononcer la bénédiction d'usage, surviennent les honnêtes brigands, lesquels rappellent à leur chef qu'il a fait serment d'observer perpétuellement avec eux le *noir aspect de la nuit* et le *ciel orageux*. Hermann ne sait que répondre à cet argument; il se décide, quoiqu'à regret, à les suivre. Sa maîtresse, blessée de cette passion excessive pour l'astronomie, et pensant que l'aspect de ses charmes vaut bien le *noir aspect de la nuit*, tombe évanouie; son père change immédiatement la bénédiction qu'il allait lui donner en malédiction. La toile tombe.

Ce libretto est heureusement coupé sous le rapport musical, et il offre des situations intéressantes. Quant à la poésie, elle vaut certes mieux // 4 // que les éternels *Quel est donc ce mystère?* et les *Vierges divines, plus blanches que la blanche hermine* de M. Scribe. Ce grand fabricant aurait probablement vendu un pareil libretto avec 50,000 fr. de dédit et de prime.

L'auteur de la musique, M. Mercadante, n'est guère connu, en France, que par son opéra d'*Elisa e Claudio*, représenté avec un brillant succès en 1827. Nos lecteurs nous sauront gré, sans doute, de leur donner quelques détails biographiques sur ce compositeur. Saverio Mercadante est né à Naples en 1799. Après avoir étudié la composition sous le célèbre Zingarelli, il débuta, à l'âge de vingt ans, par l'opéra de *l'Apotéose d'Hercule*. Ce début était de nature à faire concevoir d'heureuses espérances, que Mercadante a depuis réalisées. Dans le cours de ces quinze dernières années; il a composée successivement, pour les grands théâtres de Naples, Venise, Milan, Turin, Vienne, Madrid et Lisbonne, dix autres opéras qui, presque tous, ont obtenu un honorable succès. On cite entre autres, la *Donna Caritea*, comme pouvant rivaliser avec *Elisa e Claudio*.

Malgré ces triomphes cosmopolites, Mercadante, a compris qu'il lui manquait, pour mettre le sceau à sa réputation musicale, le suffrage du public parisien qui, en matière d'arts, du moins, continue encore à occuper le rang qui lui appartient en Europe, c'est-à-dire, celui d'arbitre suprême. L'auteur d'*Elisa e Claudio* a donc quitté Novarre, où il occupe une modeste place de maître de chapelle, pour venir composer à Paris la musique des *Briganti*. Hâtons-nous de dire que cette épreuve lui a complètement réussi.

Le caractère dominant de sa musique nous paraît être la grâce, l'abondance et la fluidité. Seulement, elle laisserait désirer quelquefois un peu plus d'énergie, et surtout un rythme plus suivi. Pour satisfaire // 5 // ce besoin qu'on éprouve généralement d'établir une analogie entre le genre des divers compositeurs, nous dirions que Mercadante se rapproche de Bellini, principalement sous le rapport de l'expression naïve et touchante des sentimens ou la tendresse domine à défaut de passion. Ses chants d'amour, de regrets et de mélancolie, comme ceux du chantre des *Puritani*, vont à l'âme et y excitent une douce émotion.

Mercadante a prouvé en outre qu'il possède également bien l'entente des grandes masses d'harmonie et d'instrumentation. La partition d'*l'Briganti* offre plusieurs chœurs remarquables d'agencement et de facture; le style des trois finals rappelle celui des grands maîtres. L'andante du final du premier acte, surtout est très beau, d'un ordre supérieur. Nous avons remarqué dans ce morceau des traits de violon et de violoncelle qui tantôt serpentent autour

des masses du chant, tantôt surgissent au-dessus de leur harmonie, et concourent à un effet ravissant de charme et d'originalité.

Nous citerons encore comme méritant des éloges sans restriction le duo de réconciliation entre le comte et son fils, admirablement chanté par Lablache et par Rubini.

Viennent ensuite trois cavatines, espèce de thèmes assez heureusement disposés, que Rubini, Tamburini et mademoiselle Grisi brillent de toutes les richesses de leur merveilleuse vocalisation – un gracieux duetto – une prière touchante au pied de l'oratoire de l'hermite – et enfin le service funèbre qui se chante dans l'intérieur de la chapelle du château. L'harmonie de ce dernier morceau est large et ne manque pas de solennité. Seulement, comme il s'agit d'une messe de morts, nous aurions désiré qu'elle fût empreinte d'un caractère plus exclusivement funèbre. M. Meyerbeer n'aurait // 6 // pas manqué, en pareille circonstance, de nous offrir des variations du *Dies irae*, et de faire mugir un serpent en *ut mineur*, avec accessoire de glas de cloche, de cierges funéraires, de larmes d'argent et de tibias en croix.

Maintenant, pour faire la part de la critique, nous dirons que sous le rapport musical, le troisième acte ne nous semble pas observer la règle du *crescendo*. Il n'offre guère de remarquable que la cavatine d'Amélie, avec accompagnement d'un chœur de suivantes, l'andante du final et les dernières mesures qui précèdent la chute du rideau. Il faut donc que cet acte gagne en rapidité ce qu'il perd en beauté. Nous conseillons à M. Mercadante d'y faire des larges coupures. Nous demanderions spécialement la disparition complète du duo entre le comte et Amélie, morceau qui n'a de remarquable que sa longueur. Nous en dirons autant des trois adagios d'Hermann, qui alanguissent désagréablement le final. Il ne serait pas mal non plus d'élaguer quelques surabondances de chant dans les deux premiers actes. Nous insistons sur ce point parce que ces superfétations nuisent à l'effet que doit produire cette belle partition, et à la place distinguée qu'elle nous semble appelée à occuper dans le répertoire de la prochaine saison musicale du Théâtre-Italien.

Quant à l'exécution, elle a été véritablement admirable. Il semblait que nos quatre grands artistes, Rubini, Tamburini, Lablache et Mlle Grisi, sur le point de nous quitter voulussent, par un surcroît de perfection, augmenter les regrets de leurs amis, et se venger en même temps de leurs détracteurs passionnés et fausement nationalesques. C'est une noble vengeance qui rappelle celle du soleil sur les habitants des rivages du Nil.

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Pseudonym:
Author: Albert Cler
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LE CHARIVARI, 26 Mars 1836, pp. 1-2.

L'auteur d'*Elisa e Claudio* et d'*I Briganti*, M. Mercadante, avait suffisamment établi sa réputation d'habile compositeur; il vient de prouver en outre qu'il est homme de tact et d'esprit. Mardi, tout en applaudissant l'ensemble vraiment remarquable de la nouvelle partition, le public avait paru accueillir moins favorablement quelques morceaux, non qu'ils manquaient absolument de mérite; mais parce qu'ils faisaient longueur ou qu'ils ne semblaient pas à la hauteur des autres. Cette disposition s'était principalement manifestée dans le cours du troisième acte. Le lendemain quelques critiques, et nous fûmes de ce nombre, conseillèrent au compositeur un certain nombre de coupures. M. Mercadante, au lieu de répondre comme le chanteur des *Huguenots*, par exemple, à propos des beautés hiéroglyphiques des deux premiers actes: «Vous ne comprenez pas? ... Donnez-vous la peine de repasser; ma musique n'est pas faite pour être comprise à une première audition par la foule.» M. Mercadante, disons-nous, s'est empressé de soumettre son jugement à celui du public. Dès la seconde représentation, tous les morceaux indiqués, et entre autres le grand duo qui précède le dernier final, avaient complètement disparu. Cet acte de bon goût et de modestie est trop rare pour que nous ne nous empressions pas de le signaler avec éloge.

Du reste, M. Mercadante a été suffisamment récompensé de sa prompte condescendance aux conseils de l'opinion publique. La partition d'*I Briganti*, ainsi épurée, a produit, à la seconde représentation, un effet beaucoup plus entraînant et plus complet. Il est fâcheux que la clôture prochaine du théâtre Italien doive sitôt interrompre le succès de cette œuvre remarquable, et nous force de dire, comme les almanachs: *la suite à l'année prochaine*.

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LE CONSTITUTIONNEL, 28 mars 1836, p. 1.

Le sujet de cet opéra est emprunté au fameux drame de Schiller; mais les brigands du Théâtre-Italien sont moins terribles et raisonneurs que les brigands allemands. L'auteur du livret, *il signor Crescini*, a cru devoir adoucir leur férocité, et émonder le luxe de leur métaphysique de grand chemin. Ils chantent beaucoup plus qu'ils ne pillent et ne tuent; ils font plus de roulades que d'argumentations philosophiques. Je ne crois pas leurs opinions dangereuses; on ne court pas le risque avec eux de voir nos dandys du balcon prendre une escopette, une paire de pistolets et des poignards, pour s'organiser en bandes de Cartouches vertueux et de Mandrins philosophes, comme l'envie en prit aux étudiants de Stuttgart [Stuttgart], à la lecture de l'ouvrage de Schiller. La vie de ces brigands, ainsi corrigés et diminués, est une pure affaire de cavatines, de duos, de chœurs et de finales. Leurs dièses ne se mettent pas en révolte contre l'espèce humaine et leurs bémols sont innocents de toute tentative de réforme sociale.

L'opéra de M. Crescini commence par où nous en avons vu commencer tant d'autres, par les apprêts d'une noce et d'une fête. Le méchant, Conrad, le François Moor de Schiller, a ordonné cette fête pour célébrer son [mariage] avec sa cousine Amélie. Un chœur de courtisans chante d'avance le bonheur des deux époux dans une introduction dont l'harmonie est soutenue par des fanfares, de la trompette et du cor. Ces honnêtes seigneurs ont d'autant plus de mérite à chanter ainsi le plaisir et l'amour, que peu de temps auparavant ils pleuraient à chaudes larmes le père de Conrad, mort et enterré en grande cérémonie. Mais l'homme de cour a un tempérament commode, comme on sait, il joue dans le même jour, à la même heure, dans la même minute, le rôle de Jean qui pleure et celui de Jean qui rit, avec une rare facilité et une égale vraisemblance. Conrad paraît au milieu de ces joyeux préparatifs; son humeur triste et farouche contraste avec la bonne humeur de sa cour. Conrad est gai tout justement comme un tyran, bourrelé de remords. Ces tourmens d'une mauvaise conscience servent de texte à une cavatine que Tamburini a exécutée avec un art admirable; et à entendre cette voix large, ferme, vibrante, tout à la fois vigoureuse et suave, on est tenté de pardonner à Conrad tous ses crimes. J'aime beaucoup mieux, pour mon compte, un infâme scélérat qui sait chanter comme Tamburini, qu'un homme éminemment vertueux dans le genre d'Auletta ou de Profeti pour le mérite vocal.

Un chant gracieux de femmes succède aux sombres accens de Conrad. Un peu après, Amélie vient nous confier ses secrets et ses douleurs. Ce mariage qu'on prépare fait son désespoir. Elle déteste Conrad: celui qu'elle aime, c'est Hermann, le frère de ce mauvais prince. La haine de Conrad a contraint Hermann à s'exiler: on ne sait où il a porté son infortune; Amélie l'attend; Amélie l'appelle. Quand reviendras-tu, mon bien aimé? hélas! Tu es loin de moi; tu n'entends pas mes gémissements. Hermann, où es-tu? vis-tu encore? es-tu toujours fidèle? M^{lle} Grisi a eu de très heureux éclats de passion dans ce chant de tristesse, d'amour et d'espoir. La beauté de M^{lle} Grisi m'a d'ailleurs rendu très indulgent pour ce Conrad, que j'ai traité tout-à-l'heure si sévèrement. On conçoit qu'il eut grande envie de garder pour lui la belle Amélie, et qu'il emploie certains moyens pour obtenir sa charmante possession. Je lui pardonne donc bien volontiers l'écharpe, teinte de sang, qu'il jette aux pieds d'Amélie pour la convaincre de la mort d'Hermann. La pauvre amante reconnaît en effet le gage de tendresse qu'elle avait donné à Hermann en des jours meilleurs.

Elle pleure, elle se désole, elle croit son amant à jamais perdu. D'autres pourront chicaner Conrad sur la banalité de cette écharpe, employé déjà dans cent et un mélodrames pour le même usage; mais j'excuse tous dans un tyran bien épris. Ce qu'on pourrait plus justement reprocher à l'écharpe, c'est d'être cause d'un duo long, froid, vague et diffus, entre le tyran et sa victime.

Les faits ne tardent point à donner un démenti à l'imposture de Conrad. A peine est-il parti avec Amélie, qu'une barque amène au rivage deux hommes armés et la visière baissée. C'est Hermann et un de ses sbires. Je dis sbire, et c'est le mot. Hermann proscrit, dépouillé de ses domaines, et de l'amitié de son père par les trahisons de Conrad, Hermann est devenu chef de brigands. Il exprime son désespoir, sa honte et le remords de cette vie criminelle: puis, tout-à-coup il pense à Amélie, au bonheur de revoir, après une si cruelle absence, le sol natal et le château de ses pères. Ses accens sont pleins de tendresse et d'émotions, car c'est la voix de Rubini qui donne l'âme et la vie à ces angoisses, à ces souvenirs amoureux, à cette joie mélancolique du retour.

Une douce romance, partie d'un kiosque, révèle à Hermann la présence d'Amélie. Bientôt il la voit s'agenouiller aux pieds de la chapelle, et mêler sa douleur aux harmonies graves et pieuses qui s'élèvent de l'intérieur du temple. Un duo succède à ces saints hymnes. Il faut bien qu'Hermann et Amélie se retrouvent et reconnaissent, [...] leur souffrances et renouvellent le serment de leur amour. Cette scène est nécessairement troublée par l'arrivée du tyran. Conrad survient en effet, accompagné de ses pages, de ses hommes d'armes et de ses gentilshommes. Hermann se fait reconnaître. La surprise, la jalousie, la crainte, la colère que cet événement soulève de toutes parts, composent les élémens du finale, le morceau capital de ce premier acte, et, on peut de dire, de l'ouvrage tout entier. On a beaucoup admiré et applaudi l'art avec lequel M. Mercadante a rendu ces émotions opposées dans les mouvemens habilement combinés d'un magnifique *crescendo*. L'acte s'achève par une provocation des deux frères, qui conviennent de se disputer Amélie, l'épée à la main.

Du château de Conrad, nous passons dans une sombre forêt. C'est le séjour des brigands commandés par Hermann. En attendant leur chef, ils entament un chœur vigoureux; au retour d'Hermann, les voici qui remplissent leurs verres, trinquent, boivent et célèbrent les plaisirs et l'indépendance de leur vie errante. Ce chant d'orgie a de l'originalité. Nos bandits s'endorment ensuite, tandis qu'Hermann, tourmenté par son amour, veille et écoute les accens religieux d'un solitaire agenouillé aux pieds d'une madone. Tout à coup une voix lamentable sort d'une vieille tourelle. On voit une figure de vieillard passer tristement derrière les barreaux de ce cachot. Hermann éveille ses compagnons, brise les portes et délivre le malheureux prisonnier. Dans ce vieillard il reconnaît son père, qu'il croyait mort. L'infâme Conrad l'avait précipité dans cette tour pour s'emparer de ses biens. Ici un beau duo entre le vieux Maximilien et Hermann. La situation en est tout-à-fait dramatique: d'une part, Hermann n'ose se nommer au vieillard qui naguère l'a chassé et maudit; de l'autre Maximilien, affaibli par les douleurs d'une longue captivité, regarde son fils sans le reconnaître; l'un gémit de l'excès de souffrance et d'infortune où il retrouve son père; l'autre raconte le crime de Conrad, et l'horrible supplice auquel ce fils parricide l'avait condamné; peu à peu il en vient à regretter cet autre fils qu'il a rejeté de sa maison sur des soupçons injustes. Les remords, le désespoir déchirent le cœur de Maximilien. Pourquoi ce

malheureux fils n'est-il pas là? Que ne peut-il le presser dans ses bras et lui demander pardon de l'avoir si injustement banni? Vous comprenez bien qu'Hermann ne laisse point échapper l'occasion. Il se jette dans les bras de son père et se fait reconnaître. Dans cette scène, Lablache a été d'un pathétique achevé. Les brigands surviennent, Hermann leur fait prêter le serment de venger son père. Maximilien est un peu effrayé de voir son fils en aussi mauvaise compagnie; Hermann lui dit de se rassurer; par une réminiscence de Schiller, il affirme que ses bandits sont les plus honnêtes gens du monde qui ne se sont décidés à se faire brigands que pour le plus grand honneur de l'innocence et de la vertu. Un *presto* d'une facture triviale termine singulièrement ces scènes dramatiques et contraste d'une manière malheureuse avec les touchantes inspirations du grand duo que nous avons loué tout à l'heure.

Au troisième acte, on retrouve Conrad avec ses remords, son amour et son désir de vengeance. Poursuivi par le souvenir de son père qu'il a si cruellement emprisonné, il est furieux de la haine que lui témoigne Amélie; Tamburini a renouvelé dans ce morceau les merveilles de cette pure et puissante vocalisation dont il avait déjà donné une magnifique preuve au premier acte. On crie aux armes! Hermann et ses compagnons entourent et assiègent le château. Le combat dure assez longtemps pour laisser à Amélie le loisir d'exprimer, dont un air bien chanté par M^{lle} Grisi, la terreur que ici cause cette lutte fratricide. Enfin, après un long et fatigant duo entre le vieux Maximilien et cette pauvre Amélie, Hermann arrive pâle et égaré; il a vaincu Conrad; triste victoire où deux frères ont combattu l'un contre l'autre, et où l'épée d'Hermann s'est plongée dans le sein de Conrad. Hermann se désespère. Amélie se lamente, et Maximilien repousse le fratricide. Il y a un interminable morceau dont la longueur a dû empêcher d'apprécier tout le mérite; il était minuit; le public en était à sa quatrième heure de chant et de musique: on était fatigué, ennuyé, rendu; M^{lle} Grisi, Lablache, Rubini eux-mêmes ne suffisaient plus à triompher de cette lassitude. M. Mercadante ferait sagement de rentrer dans des limites plus convenables et de retrancher quelque chose à ce luxe excessif. Cette modération est d'autant plus nécessaire à M. Mercadante, que sa manière a je ne sais quoi de régulier et de monotone, on est touché de la suavité des mélodies, on suit avec intérêt le travail harmonieux des voix et de l'orchestre; mais on est rarement éveillé dans les compositions de M. Mercadante, par ses inspirations vives, saisissantes, hardies et imprévues.

Pour en finir avec Hermann, il obtient son pardon en affirmant à son père qu'il n'a pas tué volontairement Conrad, mais que Conrad s'est enfoncé lui-même en se précipitant au-devant de son épée. On peut croire qu'Hermann, Amélie et Maximilien vont enfin se consoler de leurs malheurs passés et vivre tranquilles. Point du tout; les brigands viennent réclamer leur chef. Enchaîné par son serment, Hermann est forcé de les suivre et d'abandonner son père et maîtresse.

Toute compensation faite, M. Mercadante a obtenu un succès digne de l'auteur d'*Elisa e Claudio*. Nous avons cité les morceaux de sa partition qui ont été le plus remarquables. Mais ce qu'on ne saurait trop louer, c'est l'excellence de l'exécution: M^{lle} Grisi a été fort belle dans le rôle d'Amélie; Tamburini, Lablache et Rubini se sont surpassés. Au moment de se séparer de ces

admirables artistes, on sent plus vivement l'inappréciable qualité de leur talent.

Journal Title:	LE CONSTITUTIONNEL
Journal Subtitle:	Journal du commerce, politique et littéraire
Day of Week:	Monday
Calendar Date:	28 MARS 1836
Printed Date Correct:	Yes
Volume Number:	
Year:	
Series:	
Pagination:	1
Issue:	80?
Title of Article:	THÉÂTRE-ITALIEN
Subtitle of Article:	I BRIGANTI, Opéra en trois actes, <i>Musique de Mercadante</i> (1 ^{re} représentation)
Signature:	A.
Pseudonym:	
Author:	
Layout:	Front-page feuilleton
Cross-reference:	

COURRIER DES THÉÂTRES, 23 Mars 1836, p. 3.

— La première représentation d'*I Briganti* a eu lieu, hier, aux Bouffes, avec un grand succès. Des beautés, mais plutôt à la manière allemande qu'à l'italienne, et le mérite de l'exécution ont pleinement justifié ce triomphe de l'auteur d'*Elisa e Claudio*. L'air de Rubini, au premier acte (qu'on a fait répéter), le final, en crescendo parfaitement amené, du même acte, un duo par Rubini et Lablache, une cavatine par Mlle Grisi et le dramatique de plusieurs morceaux sont ce qu'on a d'abord remarqué. Le *poème* est un soupçon de mélodrame antique qui ressemble aux *Brigands* de Schiller comme l'auteur de *Robert chef de brigands* ressemblait à Shakespeare. M. Mercadante, demandé à la fin, est venu recueillir d'unanimes applaudissemens; puis Mlle Grisi, Rubini, Lablache, Tamburini, et enfin M. Crivelli [Crescini], l'auteur du *libretto*.

Journal Title:	COURRIER DES THÉÂTRES
Journal Subtitle:	
Day of Week:	Wednesday
Calendar Date:	23 MARS 1836
Printed Date Correct:	Yes
Volume Number:	
Year:	19 ^e ANNÉE
Series:	
Pagination:	3 à 4
Issue:	6301
Title of Article:	NOUVELLES DE PARIS
Subtitle of Article:	
Signature:	
Pseudonym:	
Author:	
Layout:	Internal column
Cross-reference:	

COURRIER DES THÉÂTRES, 24 Mars 1836, p. 3.

— Rubini, Lablache, Tamburini et Mlle Grisi chantant dans un opéra nouveau sont ce qu'on sait qu'ils sont; or, il n'y a point de louanges à leur donner. On les nomme et la besogne est faite. — *I Briganti* ajouteront une palme à la belle réputation de M. Mercadante. La croix d'honneur de Bellini n'est pas encore donnée.

Journal Title:	COURRIER DES THÉÂTRES
Journal Subtitle:	
Day of Week:	Thursday
Calendar Date:	24 MARS 1836
Printed Date Correct:	Yes
Volume Number:	
Year:	19 ^e ANNÉE
Series:	
Pagination:	3
Issue:	6302
Title of Article:	NOUVELLES DE PARIS
Subtitle of Article:	
Signature:	
Pseudonym:	
Author:	
Layout:	Internal column
Cross-reference:	

LE COURRIER FRANÇAIS, 26 mars 1836, p. 1.

S'il faut s'en rapporter au témoignage d'un chroniqueur musical, l'auteur de la nouvelle partition d'*i Briganti*, Saverio Mercadante, serait né dans la Pouille en 1798, il aurait donc trente-huit ans, environ six de moins que le grand maestro dont il suivit les traces. Elevé au collège royal de Naples, il eut pour maître de composition le vieux Zingarelli, qui le prit d'abord en amitié, mais qui un jour le chassa impitoyablement de l'école, parce qu'il l'avait trouvé occupé à mettre en partition un des quatuors de Mozart. Ce crime de lèse-majesté envers la musique italienne indiquait la première vocation du jeune homme. Habile violoniste, il devint chef d'orchestre au conservatoire, et avait écrit beaucoup de musique instrumentale, lorsqu'il aborda la composition dramatique. Rossini brillait alors de tout son éclat printanier: l'art venait de subir une révolution par le prestige de sa mélodie enchanteresse et de son rythme puissant. Mercadante avait-il le choix du genre et du style? Homme de talent, il entra franchement dans la voie frayée par l'homme de génie: comme ses contemporains, les Pacini, les Vaccai, les Donizetti et bien d'autres, il gravita autour du soleil et s'éclaira du reflet de ses rayons. De tous les ouvrages composés par lui, et la liste en est longue, on ne connaît à Paris qu'*Elisa e Claudio*, joué avec quelques succès, sans toutefois s'être maintenu au répertoire; mais il en est resté un beau duo de ténor et de basse qui a joui d'une popularité immense dans les concerts et les salons. On connaît encore plusieurs morceaux de *Donna Caritea*, partition écrite à Venise en 1825, et par laquelle Esther Mombelli signala son retour de France dans sa patrie, retour qui ne devait être que momentané, et que la couronne de comtesse a rendu définitif.

Depuis qu'il avait été décidé en principe, de par messieurs les autocrates de Favart, que chaque notabilité ultramontaine viendrait écrire son opéra à Paris; depuis que Bellini, Donizetti avaient comparu, on attendait Mercadante, ou plutôt on ne l'attendait pas, car il s'était rendu ponctuellement à son poste; mais c'était lui qui attendait un libretto. Voyez la malice! On s'est tant et tant moqué parmi nous de ces poètes à l'entreprise, de ces versificateurs à l'aune, de ces faiseurs de canevas à vingt écus pièce; on les a tant salués d'épithètes inciviles et mal souriantes, qu'ils en ont gardé rancune, et que le plus renommé d'entre eux a saisi l'occasion de venger l'honneur du corps. Ah! vous méprisez les libretti! vous les traitez de platitudes et de niaiseries! Venez en demander: on vous en promettra; mais quant à les livrer, ce sera autre chose. Ainsi a dit et fait Romani l'illustrissime: *il signor poeta* a promis, repromis, et jamais livré. Mercadante était toujours là, une main à la plume, l'autre au piano, et le libretto désiré n'arrivait pas! On aurait eu le prévoir, et puisqu'on établissait entre les rues Favart et Marivaux une manufacture de partitions italiennes, il eut été prudent d'ouvrir dans les alentours une fabrique de libretti de même espèce. On aurait eu alors une Italie complète, paroles et musique, sans sortir de Paris. Enfin, la nécessité est devenue impérieuse: la saison touchait à son terme; heureusement il s'est rencontré un poète sans prétention et de bonne volonté, qui a consenti à rimer au pied levé une certaine quantité de chœurs, duos, cavatines et romances: le corps des librettistes en sera peut-être indigné, et le regardera comme un faux frère; nous ne nous croyons que plus obligés à lui accorder indulgence et faveur.

M. Crescini nous apprend comment et pourquoi il a choisi le sujet des *Brigands*, de préférence à on fait tiré des annales de France ou d'Italie. Mais

ces brigands, il ne les pas acceptés tels que les avait rêvés le génie allemand, terribles, sanguinaires, commettant mille forfaits odieux dans un intérêt prétendu de beauté morale et de justice sociale. Chez lui, ce sont tout simplement des hommes opposés à toute oppression injuste, amis de *cette innocente indépendance* qui ne viole aucun ordre, aucune loi. Ils *bravent le malheur* et *se rient des périls: le noir aspect de la nuit, le silence des forêts*, un ciel orageux, la nature dans sa secrète horreur, plaisent à leur esprits et *répondent à leur caractère*. Prenons garde; M. Crescini se fait illusion ou veut nous dorer la pilule: ses amis d'une *innocente indépendance*, qui aiment *la nuit, les forêts*, qui *bravent le malheur*, et qui vont par bandes, armés jusqu'aux dents, ne nous inspirent pas la moindre confiance; il nous font l'effet d'être honnêtes gens, à peu près comme le père de M. Jourdain, qui se connaissait en étoffes, et qui en donnait à ses amis pour de l'argent, nous fait l'effet d'un bon et pur gentilhomme.

Quoi qu'il en soit, le libretto de M. Crescini réunit toutes les conditions requises. On y voit un tyran barbare, une princesse malheureuse, un héros cru mort, et ressuscitant à point nommé dans un final pour détirer le tyran à un combat singulier. On y voit une tour obscure, dans laquelle le père du tyran et du héros, nouveaux frères ennemis. Le héros délivre son père, se bat avec son frère, qui a la délicatesse de s'enfermer lui-même. Tout finirait donc le mieux si les compagnons du héro, ces amis d'une *innocente indépendance*, ne venaient lui rappeler qu'il a juré d'être leur chef, et lui déclarer qu'ils le forceront bien à continuer d'en exercer les prérogatives. C'est entendre assez mal le système de l'indépendance. N'importe! le héros se résigne à partir, et la princesse à expirer de chagrin!

Tel est le moule dans lequel Mercadante a du jeter rapidement sa partition. Le temps pressait: l'œuvre s'en est ressentie. Il n'était pas possible au compositeur d'attendre les idées, et quand elles lui manquaient, il n'avait d'autre ressource que l'habileté savante d'un musicien consommé: jamais, par exemple, cette dernière ressource ne lui a failli. La facture générale d'*i Briganti* est large et brillante: l'orchestre a de la richesse, de l'éclat, de l'intérêt: l'emploi des instrumens divers y nuance les couleurs de la manière la plus heureuse. Dans l'invention des mélodies, dans la coupe des morceaux, l'artiste se montre moins inspiré, moins habile: rien d'original ne se révèle en lui: ses motifs ont presque tous une physionomie connue ou vague, une allure empruntée ou indécise, et c'est un grand tort. La musique italienne, dédaignant le mérite de la fidélité au sens individuel des paroles; se contentant d'envelopper son texte a plis flottans, onduleux, sans accuser minutieusement les formes de chaque phrase, de chaque mot (comme l'ont toujours plus ou moins tenté la musique française et la musique allemande), ne peut se dispenser, en échange de l'expression, de donner la mélodie, le rythme, où elle s'expose à n'être plus rien qu'un peu de bruit. Bellini l'avait compris, qui désespérant de la mélodie et du rythme, les supposant usés pour long temps, en était revenu à l'expression dramatique, avec plus d'intention que de génie. L'auteur d'*Elisa e Claudio* s'en est tenu aux traditions rossiniennes: on a donc le droit de lui demander un peu de ce que son maître et modèle prodiguait à pleines mains: on a le droit de lui dire que dans la partition d'*i Briganti* l'imagination est demeurée beaucoup au-dessous de l'art.

Pas d'ouverture, pas même d'introduction: quelques accords et la toile se lève. Un chœur élégant et chaud se fait entendre: puis, une belle ritournelle de cor, supérieurement exécutée par M. Gally, précède la cavatine du tyran

Corrado; c'est Tamburini qui remplit ce rôle, et qui chante la cavatine faible, sans caractère; aussi l'admirable chanteur s'est-il efforcé d'en relever la péroraison par un luxe inouï de roulades ou *gorgheggiamenti*. Est-ce là de la musique et surtout de la musique de tyran? A un cœur léger et gracieux succède la cavatine d'Amelia, M^{lle} Grisi, où l'on remarque de charmans effets; la clarinette s'y joue délicieusement avec la voix sur ces vers:

Vedi come il cor mi trema,
come brilla il mio pensier.

Le duo qui suit, entre Corrado et Amelia, nous a semblé commun; au contraire, la chansonnette qui sert d'entrée à Ermano a de la finesse et du coloris. Nous n'aimons pas l'excessive audace de gosier déployée par Rubini à la fin de son air, nous ne la croyons pas sans périls, et l'événement l'a prouvé. Des imprudens on redemandé obstinément ce hasardeux passage: Rubini a pris sa revanche en vrai héros; mais, de grâce, qu'à l'avenir il s'épargne des épreuves et à nous de pareilles frayeurs. Il possède un moyen si sûr de nous charmer sans troubler nos plaisirs par de pareilles alarmes! Dans le premier acte, nous citerons encore une prière d'un beau style, accompagnée de l'orgue inévitable, et le magnifique crescendo du finale, qu'une certaine ressemblance avec le finale des *Puritains* ne nous empêche nullement d'admirer.

Au second acte, l'orgie des brigands, non moins inévitable que l'orgue, et la chanson à boire, méritent peu d'attention. La pièce de résistance, c'est le duo d'Ermano et de Massimiliano, le héros et le père, qui sort de sa tour. Disons, en passant, que le physique de Lablache ne convient guère à la situation: au lieu d'un vieillard frêle, efflanqué, sans haleine, on aperçoit une façon de chanoine, gros et gras comme le rat de Lafontaine, sorti de son fromage de Hollande, et qui crie d'une voix de stentor. Lablache a eu beau faire pour se maigrir et s'alanguir, il n'a pu dompter la nature. Le troisième acte est sans contredit le moins bon. Le compositeur était à bout de son temps et de ses forces: l'improvisation a gâté son dénouement; aussi, à la chute du rideau les applaudissemens ont-ils été rares, et, après quelques minutes de réflexion, n'a-t-on rappelé le maestro et les chanteurs pour obéir à une sorte de consigne. Une autre fois, s'il écrit encore pour nous, que Mercadante prenne mieux ses mesures, et qu'il se prépare un succès plus durable par le temps donné à son travail et par l'époque de la saison. L'opéra d'*i Briganti* ne pourra obtenir que quatre ou cinq représentations cette année.

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Day of Week:	Saturday
Calendar Date:	26 MARS 1836
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Year:	1836
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Pagination:	[1]
Issue:	85
Title of Article:	THÉÂTRE ITALIEN
Subtitle of Article:	Première représentation d' <i>I Briganti</i> , opéra seria en trois actes, libretto de M. Crescini, musique de Mercadante.
Signature:	ED. M.
Pseudonym:	Édouard Monnais
Author:	Édouard Monnais
Layout:	Front-page Feuilleton
Cross-reference:	

L'ENTR'ACTE, 22 mars 1836, p. 2.

C'est une coquetterie, une galanterie de l'administration du théâtre Favart d'avoir convié à la répétition générale de l'opéra nouveau sa haute et fashionable clientèle. C'est lui dire: Nous partons, regrettez nous.

Les invités n'ont, certes, pas manqué à l'appel. Jamais première représentation, vivement attendue par tout ce qu'il y a de dilettanti dans Paris, n'a pas été aussi brillante que cette répétition générale.

Les loges, l'orchestre, la scène et même les corridors étaient envahis dès onze heures du matin, par la plus élégante foule qui se puisse voir. Le parterre même, garni de dames, présentait l'aspect, qu'on nous pardonne ce fade jeu de mots qui n'est cependant pas sans vérité, d'un parterre émaillé de mille fleurs.

Quoiqu'artificielles, ces fleurs garnissant les plus élégantes coiffures, répandaient dans la salle un parfum délicieux qui, joint aux flots de l'harmonie suave de Mercadante et aux mélodies enchanteresses dites par Grisi et Rubini, faisaient oublier aux auditeurs la vie positive, et les ont transportés dans un monde idéal.

Il n'est pas jusqu'aux *Brigands* de Schiller que *il signor* Crescini n'ait idéalisé dans libretto d'*I Briganti*. Ses brigands ne sont pas des scélérats rompus à tous les vices, et vous demandant la bourse ou la vie comme on demande une prise de tabac: ce sont des hommes opposés à toute oppression, amis de cette innocente indépendance qui ne viole aucun ordre, aucune loi.

M. Mercadante a trouvé de nobles et belles inspirations pour peindre ces brigands vertueux, et nous parlerons avec conscience de cette nouvelle partition de l'auteur d'*Elisa e Claudio*, dont la réputation est faite depuis longtemps en Italie.

Journal Title:	L'ENTR'ACTE
Journal Subtitle:	
Day of Week:	Tuesday
Calendar Date:	22 mars 1836
Printed Date Correct:	Yes
Volume Number:	
Year:	6 ^e ANNÉE
Series:	
Pagination:	2
Issue:	82
Title of Article:	THÉÂTRE ITALIEN
Subtitle of Article:	Répétition générale d' <i>I Briganti</i> .
Signature:	
Pseudonym:	
Author:	
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Cross-reference:	23 mars 1836

L'ENTR'ACTE, 23 mars 1836, p. 2.

La réputation d'*il signor* Mercadante est contemporaine de la gloire du *gran' maestro*, qui a fait deux chefs-d'œuvre si dissemblables: *Il Barbiere* et *Guillaume Tell*. Mercadante s'associa aussi à l'idée de faire autrement que Rossini, et marcha de front avec Bellini et plusieurs autres dans la voie de la musique scénique et dramatique.

Si ce genre est moins rythmé, moins entraînant que l'autre, il plait davantage aux gens graves, il se rapproche plus de l'école française. C'est dans ces conditions qu'ont été composées les partitions d'*I Puritani*, de *Marino Faliero* et *I Briganti*, qui nous sont apparus hier au soir au théâtre Favart.

Les *Brigands* de Schiller étant bien connus par la traduction du Théâtre étranger, et d'ailleurs le libretto se vendant dans la salle, nous ne ferons pas ici l'analyse de la pièce de M. Crescini. C'est la lutte, comme on sait, de deux frères, Étéocle et Polynice du moyen-âge, qui se disputent le trône et la main de leur cousine. Le plus jeune, usurpateur, a fait renfermer son vieux père, et l'aîné s'étant fait chef des brigands, se trouve forcé, par l'engagement qu'il a pris avec eux, de continuer la profession libre qu'il avait adoptée précédemment avec enthousiasme; et Amélie, sa cousine, dont il est aimé, en meurt de chagrin.

Sur ce canevas, qui renferme des scènes touchantes et surtout éminemment musicales, le maestro Mercadante a écrit une musique d'un style tour à tour sévère, pathétique et pleine d'animation.

L'introduction et un air chanté par Rubini, avec ces notes dans les cordes hautes attaqués avec cette audace qu'on lui connaît, ont d'abord merveilleusement disposé le public en faveur de l'ouvrage. Tamburini avait chanté un bel air dans lequel il avait déployé cette vocalisation si ferme, si pure et si brillante. Dans l'introduction de cet air on a distingué aussi un solo de cor en *fa* exécuté par M. Gallay avec cette sûreté d'intonation et ce charme d'expression que cet habile instrumentiste sait mettre à tout ce qu'il joue.

Le chœur avec accompagnement d'orgue dans l'église, et sur lequel dominant des sons de cloche, ainsi que les deux voix d'Ermanno et d'Amélia, est d'un beau caractère et d'un bon style de musique sacrée. Le duo de la reconnaissance des deux amans: *Tu ancor vivi? Non è un sogno!* est plein d'âme et de feu. L'orchestre l'accompagne peut être un peu trop fort. Un admirable trio vient ensuite qui prépare on ne peut mieux le beau final du premier acte. Dans ce trio, Tamburini fait entendre un trait sur paroles:

La rabbia mi preme,

M'arresta il terror,

qui fait trépigner d'enthousiasme le parterre et les loges; puis un *crescendo* qui n'a rien de rossinien, mais qui rappelle plutôt celui si terrible du beau chœur des catholiques dans le 4^{me} acte des *Huguenots*, sans en être ce pendant une servile imitation, termine dignement ce final splendide d'harmonie et d'effet scénique.

Après une première audition nous ne pouvons mentionner tous les morceaux saillans de l'ouvrage. Nous avons cependant remarqué dans les actes un charmant boléro, *con cori*, chanté par Rubini; une suave prière *alla Regina dei Cieli*; un beau duo entre Lablache et Rubini; un bel air au 3^{me} acte chanté par la *diva* Grisi avec une indicible expression. Il est résulté de tout cela un grand et beau succès. Le maestro et ses éloquens interprètes, redemandés unanimement, sont venus recevoir l'ovation attendue et méritée. Il n'en pouvait être autrement, et M. Robert, chef des *brigands* qui chantent comme Rubini et les artistes qui le secondent, ne peut que lever une forte contribution sur la population dilettante de Paris.

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Subtitle of Article:	(PREMIÈRE REPRÉSENTATION) <i>I Briganti</i> , melodramma-serio, musique de M. Mercadante, libretto de M. Crescini, décors de M. Ferri.
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GAZETTE DES SALONS, 1836, pp. 222-223.

Faite en un mois, répétée et jouée en trois semaines, cette musique, d'un des maestros les plus célèbres de l'Italie, a obtenu un droit de cité en France, et les Italiens en ont enregistré les lettres patentes. Mais il y a une remarque à faire, c'est le progrès marqué de Mercadante dans la science de l'orchestre et l'art de préparer le final par les notes successives de la scène. Les noces de Gamache, dont la plus grande partie est de Mercadante, et l'autre de M. Guénée [Guénée], compositeur français, qui avait souvent dérouté les plus fins connaisseurs, nous avait plutôt annoncé une musique spirituelle et maligne que large et accentuée: mais les Brigands ont dépassé même nos espérances; aussi est-il vrai de dire que les acteurs ont admirablement secondé Mercadante, et que tous ont mérité le grand succès qu'ils ont obtenu; Lablache, Tamburini, Rubini et M^{lle} Grisi ont ajouté à leur réputation.

Le sujet des Brigands de Schiller, ce drame d'une portée si élevée, si dangereuse pour les têtes étroites et ardentes, a subi des modifications; mais la pensée mère est la même, et avec elle reste l'effet dramatique qui perce même au travers de la musique. Parmi les morceaux les plus // 223 // applaudis, on cite la cavatine de Tamburini, celle de M^{lle} Grisi; un duo entre Rubini et M^{lle} Grisi; un autre entre M^{lle} Grisi et Tamburini: l'air de Rubini, au second acte, avec l'accompagnement de chœurs de brigands: l'air de Tamburini au commencement du troisième acte, celui que chante ensuite M^{lle} Grisi, et le trio de Lablache, Rubini et M^{lle} Gisi [Grisi], etc. : il est difficile d'admettre qu'un mois ait suffi pour composer une partition aussi étendue et aussi riche; mais la pensée stimulée par le temps et par le succès qu'une saison peut retarder, enfante des prodiges. Cette composition fait un grand honneur à Mercadante, et l'assied aux Bouffes à côté de Rossini et de Beethoven.

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Journal Subtitle:	Journal de musique, de littérature et des modes
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JOURNAL DE PARIS, 27 mars 1836, pp. 1-4.

Tandis que l'Académie royale de Musique jouit paisiblement de sa brillante fortune, et voit avec orgueil les solliciteurs mettre en jeu leurs protections pour obtenir une de ces places si disputées; tandis que Meyerbeer s'enivre de sa gloire, et n'aperçoit sur toute la ligne aucun champion qui menace de partager l'attention publique, le Théâtre-Italien faisait composer sans bruit et montait à la hâte un opéra nouveau. Une ancienne renommée, l'auteur d'*Elisa e Claudio*, était chargé de ce soin. Comme Bellini et Donizetti, Mercadante a été tenté par le désir des applaudissemens parisiens. Cette ambition lui a fait reprendre la plume après un assez long silence. Grâce à un bel ouvrage, qu'il vient de présenter comme carte d'admission, il a été accueilli à souhait. Mais ce triomphe sera éphémère, du moins pour cette année: c'est une considération qui doit réassurer les susceptibilités rivales, les intérêts que la concurrence pourrait effaroucher.

L'heure du départ va sonner: la Seine doit à la Tamise sa part d'un plaisir que nous avons savouré pendant six mois. L'arrêt est irrévocable, et la partition de Mercadante fera partie des bagages.

L'administration du Théâtre-Italien semble avoir pour système de donner une pièce nouvelle tout à fait à la fin de la saison musicale. Une pareille manière de procéder peut être sujette à quelques objections, mais elle peut aussi se justifier. Si le nouvel ouvrage est reçu froidement, on ne se sera pas fait illusion en comptant sur un renfort trompeur: on n'aura pas à combattre le mauvais effet produit par un *fiasco*: ce sera un épisode inaperçu dans l'histoire de l'année. Si, au contraire, l'ouvrage obtient un brillant succès, on laissera des regrets aux auditeurs, et on les fera soupirer après le retour. Peut-être aussi n'est-on pas fâché d'établir la réputation d'un opéra, avant de l'emballer pour Londres. Comme les Anglais ne sont pas très fins connaisseurs, on leur apporte en même temps une opinion toute faite. Un premier jugement est une sauvegarde pour une œuvre de mérite: les dandys s'y référeront volontiers.

Le titre de la pièce *des Brigands* n'est pas un piégé, car elle n'est pas de M. Scribe. La tragédie de Schiller en a fourni le sujet. Des changements ont été nécessaires pour l'appropriier à la scène lyrique, et aussi pour effacer parfois un cachet pas trop germanique. Une courte analyse fera connaître les emprunts et les différences.

Maximilien, comte de Moor, prince de Bohême, a été détrôné par Conrad, l'un de ses fils, et condamné par lui à mourir de faim dans un cachot. L'usurpateur se propose de placer avec lui sur son trône sanglant Amélie d'Edelreich, sa cousine, qui voit avec horreur les apprêts d'hymen. Elle avait donné son cœur à Hermann, frère de Conrad, et banni par ses calomnies du toit paternel. Après une longue absence, elle lui garde encore sa foi; mais Conrad pense la guérir en lui annonçant la mort de son amant, et en lui montrant une écharpe ensanglantée dont elle lui avait elle-même fait présente.

Malgré cette assurance, Hermann est plein de vie: il s'est mis à la tête d'une bande de brigands, forcé de devenir criminel pour sauver sa tête. Nous le voyons qui déplore sa condition et vient revendiquer, non pas le trône, mais le cœur, qu'on veut lui ravir par dessus le marché. Amélie sort d'un kiosque et va s'agenouiller sur les marches d'une chapelle qui retendit de chants funèbres. Hermann s'approche, et les deux amants se reconnaissent; mais

Conrad surprend cet entretien. Hermann est bientôt entouré de troupes: il lève sa visière et réclame Amélie. Conrad lui oppose de prétendus droits, et les deux frères conviennent de disputer leur conquête le fer à la main.

Au deuxième acte, nous voyons une sombre forêt qui sert de retraite à la troupe d'Hermann. Dans un coin du théâtre s'élève une vieille tour, d'où l'on entend sortir des gémissements. Un ermite s'approche mystérieusement des barreaux de la fenêtre, et tend des vivres au prisonnier, dans lequel on a déjà reconnu le prince dont la cour a porté le deuil. Hermann, témoin de cette scène, est ému de pitié et grâce aux rossignols et aux monseigneurs de ces messieurs, le prisonnier est libre en un clin d'œil. Reconnaissance et explication entre le père et le fils: Maximilien se repent d'avoir cédé aux coupables instigations de Conrad. A un signal de leur chef, les brigands se lèvent et se réunissent: le comte est un peu effrayé de la mauvaise mine de ses défenseurs; mais Hermann lui assurant que ce sont de fort honnêtes gens, il accepte leur secours, à condition que la vengeance n'ira pas jusqu'à frapper un fils dénaturé. Hermann s'engage à faire respecter les jours d'un frère qu'il déteste.

Le troisième acte nous montre Conrad en proie aux tourmens du remords et de la jalousie. Tout à coup on annonce que le château est entouré d'hommes en armes: il court repousser cette perfide agression.

Amélie voit paraître Maximilien avec les insignes de son rang. Sa joie est bientôt troublée par les rapports qu'elle reçoit sur le compte de son amant: il avait fait de la toilette lorsqu'il s'est présenté à ses yeux: elle le croyait toujours un brave et loyal guerrier. Le comte lui dévoile la véritable profession de celui qu'elle aime, et lui dit de ne plus songer à une indigne union. Mais où sont donc les deux frères? sur le terrain où ils se sont donné rendez-vous la veille. Un seul reparait: c'est Hermann, dont l'épée sanglante et l'air égaré révèlent le crime. Vous ne pensez pas qu'après un pareil coup, il conduise tranquillement à l'autel l'innocente Amélie, et obtienne par un fratricide un hymen longtemps désiré et le trône en perspective. Ses compagnons d'armes, devant lesquels, à ce qu'il paraît, s'incline la police du pays, ne veulent point perdre leur chef; Hermann lui-même se ferait conscience de les abandonner; il faut, comme expiation, qu'il aille piller et assassiner pendant le restant de ses jours: ainsi que Fieschi, il a un engagement d'honneur qu'il remplira. Il dit un éternel adieu à son père et à sa fiancée, et il se livre, dit-il, à la fatalité qui l'entraîne.

Ce libretto me semble présenter un bon cadre d'opéra, et je m'étonne que nos faiseurs ne soient pas allés puiser à la même source. On y trouve de nombreuses péripéties, qui se succèdent d'une manière assez vraisemblable; si l'intérêt qui s'attache aux personnages est complexe, il ya du moins un certain intérêt de curiosité qui se soutient jusqu'au bout. Il faut // 2 //avouer cependant que la représentation a paru longue; car elle excède d'une heure les représentations ordinaires des Italiens. Cette longueur tient, non pas à la surabondance des incidens de la fable, mais à un certain luxe de développemens poétiques, qui est surtout sensible dans les monologues, et d'autre part aux grands nombres des cantabile qui enchainent le bâton du chef d'orchestre. Des coupures sont nécessaires: elles seront peut-être difficiles à pratiquer, vu l'importance de chaque morceau pour l'ensemble de l'action, et les prétentions légitimes des artistes qui tiennent chacun à leur contingent.

Nous indiquerons, comme pouvant et devant être réduit, le duo du troisième acte, entre Mlle Grisi et Lablache: il est froid dans la situation, et devrait marcher sans andante. C'est ici que la monotonie du patron italien est palpable et choquante.

Mercadante est le premier qui, en Italie, se soit annoncé comme le continuateur de Rossini. Il y a une douzaine d'années, il eut un règne si brillant, qu'il réussit à éclipser son maître, dont on était saturé. Puis des réputations plus jeunes vinrent lui ravir les faveurs d'un peuple volage, qui use vite les ouvrages à force d'en user. On est revenu à Rossini; mais l'auteur d'*Elisa e Claudio* était tombé dans l'oubli: il était temps qu'il donnât signe de vie et fit quelque chose pour rajeunir sa gloire.

Mercadante est un de ces artistes du second ordre qui, incapables d'enrichir l'art de formes nouvelles, travaillent avec succès sur celle qui leur sont fournies. Je compare le génie au dieu qui tira l'homme du néant, et ces imitateurs à Prométhée, qui moule une statue sur ce type et l'anime d'une étincelle qu'il dérobe au ciel. Sans Rossini, je ne sais ce qu'aurait été Mercadante; mais il est sur qu'après Rossini il a été quelque chose. On ne peut refuser à ce compositeur une riche imagination: à condition qu'il restera dans les limites qui lui semblent consacrées par un grand exemple, il n'est pas embarrassé pour trouver une foule d'agréables motifs, de petits dessins élégants, qu'il sait encadrer de la manière la plus heureuse. Circonscrit dans un cercle plus étroit, et peu jaloux de se frayer une route inconnue, il peut davantage soigner les détails et s'abandonner à une inspiration que ne viennent point modifier et réformer des considérations esthétiques.

Le mérite le plus distingué de Mercadante est peut-être celui de l'instrumentation, et je ne crains pas de dire que, sous ce rapport, il s'élève au niveau des plus grandes réputations de l'époque.

I Briganti seront regardés comme un des meilleurs ouvrages, si non comme le chef-d'œuvre de l'auteur. En déduisant les nombreuses réminiscences, les morceaux qui accusent la précipitation du travail et ceux qui n'ont d'autre mérite que de faire ressortir le talent des chanteurs, il restera encore une assez grande somme de beautés réelles; quelques-unes même sont d'un ordre plus élevé que les conceptions antérieures du même musicien.

L'introduction est d'un beau caractère, et présente ce style large qui nous semble un perfectionnement dans la manière de Mercadante. L'air de Conrad a un andante plein de charme, que Tamburini dit avec la perfection que l'on sait. Mais non, l'on ne devine pas jusqu'à quel point Tamburini est admirable dans cette pièce, avec quelle douceur et quelle énergie, quelle légèreté de vocalisation, quels accens profondément sentis il dit tout son rôle. Dans cette première cavatine, dans son duo avec Amélie, dans la scène du troisième acte, où il appelle ses soldats aux armes, mais particulièrement dans le final du premier acte, il se montre chanteur achevé et acteur pathétique. Si, comme on l'annonce, Tamburini ne doit pas nous revenir l'année prochaine, il a trouvé le secret d'exciter les regrets les plus vifs, et je ne me figure pas comment l'administration pourra le remplacer.

Il manquerait quelque chose à mon plaisir, si ce grand artiste, envers lequel on s'est souvent montré un peu avare d'applaudissemens, n'était ici

convenablement accueilli; mais le public fait son devoir. *I Briganti* doivent être donnés dimanche pour la représentation au bénéfice de Tamburini. Ce qui propagera sa gloire au-delà du cercle restreint des abonnés.

Les connaisseurs me feraient un crime de passer sous silence un délicieux chœur de femmes: *Come un etereo spirto*, chanté avec exactitude, mais avec un peu de mollesse. Voilà un de ces morceaux qui semblent une inspiration du ciel italien, naïves mélodies, dont, en parlant des *Huguenots*, je trouvais, en général, le génie allemand déshérité. Dans la cavatine d'Amélie, le mouvement lent mérite d'être remarqué: Mercadante réussit presque toujours dans les morceaux de ce caractère. Mlle Grisi a voulu aussi se parer de toutes ses grâces au moment des adieux: jamais son chant n'a été plus élégant, plus délicat, plus fini, ni son jeu plus dramatique. Ceux qui ont entendu Mlle Grisi à ses débuts, ne l'auraient pas reconnue au commencement de cette année: elle a encore fait des progrès pendant cette saison. Elle obtient maintenant le succès qui est, à mon sens, le plus flatteur de tous: elle est parvenue à ramener ceux qu'avaient indisposés contre elle des applaudissemens exagérés.

Voici maintenant Rubini, à qui il faut bien sa part de triomphe. Une romance pleine d'une douce mélancolie, *Questi due verdi salci*, est merveilleusement confiée à sa voix. Le chant des morts, qu'on entend dans l'église, accompagné par l'orgue, offre un reflet des belles compositions de l'école italienne. Le duo entre Hermann et Amélie est médiocre. Le chœur final est le morceau capital de la pièce: on y trouve une puissance qu'on n'aurait pas attendue de la lyre élégante de Mercadante: un crescendo habilement ménagé, et que l'oreille suit comme l'œil suit une vague qui vient de la haute mer, finit par acquérir un déploiement si gigantesque, que l'on se sent transporté à se lever de sa banquette. Un musicien qui écrit de pareilles choses ne doit pas renoncer à la carrière, et s'il s'adresse au parterre de Paris, il le trouvera toujours aussi disposé à l'enthousiasme. Tamburini et Mlle Grisi, par les élans passionnés de leur jeu, concourent à faire de cette scène une des plus remuantes que je connaisse.

Le deuxième acte s'ouvre par un chœur de brigands, morceau d'une teinte rembrunie et vigoureuse, pour lequel l'auteur me semble d'être inspiré d'une scène de Weber, celle de la fonte des balles dans le *Freyschütz* [*Freischütz*]. Rien de plus suave qu'une prière à la vierge, chantée par Rubini avec quelque chose d'angélique. Le duo entre Rubini et Lablache, dont le commencement languit un peu, se relève au récit du père: *Io si che un figlio aveva*. L'andante dans lequel les deux voix se réunissent, offre, à défaut de formes nouvelles, une charmante mélodie; le dialogue qui suit est plein d'expressions dramatiques; il est à regretter que la cabalette soit commune. En somme, ce morceau est un de ceux qui produisent les plus d'effet: l'exécution en est parfaite. Les Italiens n'en sont pas encore venus à oser baisser la toile sur un duo. Cette innovation, qui a déjà réussi deux fois à l'Opéra, sera ici habile, loin d'être téméraire. Le chœur des brigands, qui termine l'acte, ne fait qu'affaiblir l'impression. Ce chœur ne manque pas d'un certain nerf et d'une certaine puissance instrumentale: mais son style lui donne par trop la physionomie d'une contredanse de Musard: la trompette à piston qui entonne la ritournelle, ajoute encore à l'illusion. Lablache tient tête à tout le bataillon de son fils, et montre que ses forces n'ont pas été // 3 // délabrées par le régime de la tour: ce qui fait infiniment d'honneur au pieux solitaire.

L'air de Tamburini, qui commence le troisième acte, est froid, ainsi que les deux scènes où Mlle Grisi chante seule, puis avec ses suivantes. Dans la première, le cantabile avec accompagnement de harpe: *Ciel! del mio prode Ermano*, est plein de suavité. Dans la seconde, dont le goût réprouve davantage l'étendue, la musique ne fournit pas la même excuse: nous ne donnerions pourtant pas le conseil de la supprimer, tant nous sommes séduits par l'exécution ravissante de Mlle Grisi. Nous avons critiqué la scène entre Amélie et le comte; nous ajouterons que la musique n'en rachète pas la langueur. Mais voici encore une des gloires de la partition nouvelle. C'est le trio entre Rubini, Mlle Grisi et Lablache, dans lequel le musicien a dignement rendu une belle situation. On admirera la mélodie et l'harmonie d'un larghetto qui commence, puis la teinte dramatique de la partie dialoguée: dans son ensemble, c'est un morceau achevé. On devine ce que doit être l'exécution. Dans la dernière scène, nous signalerons les adieux touchants d'Hermann: *Deh! non scemar con lagrime*. Quand de pareils sentiments sont exprimés en bonne musique, nul n'est plus pathétique que Rubini.

Pour achever la tâche de notre justice distributive, nous devons dire que les chœurs, plus fournis que d'ordinaire, ont manœuvré avec ensemble et fermeté. Dans le final du premier acte, l'effet magique du crescendo fait honneur à leur éducation et à leur intelligence, l'orchestre revendique aussi sa part d'éloges pour sa verve dans les morceaux de force, sa discrétion dans les *piano* et le fini de ses solos. Enfin, M. Ferri a peint spécialement pour cette pièce quelques décors d'un heureux effet.

Le présent panégyrique ne rassemble pas mal à une oraison funèbre. Encore deux ou trois représentations, et *les Brigands* nous échapperont. Que le printemps nous console; acceptons en échange le lilas et les roses. Puis, quand reviendra la saison des frimas, que les cygnes d'Italie viennent visiter cette terre hospitalière; que pas un ne manque à l'appelle; qu'un de ses plus beaux ornemens ne se détache pas de cette troupe harmonieuse. Que Mercadante, encouragé par le succès, nous revienne avec la bonne volonté qu'il a manifestée dès le commencement du semestre musicale et que les faiseurs de libretti lui laissent plus d'un mois pour composer une partition en trois actes.

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JOURNAL DES DÉBATS, 24 Mars 1836, pp. 1-2.

Les deux premiers actes de l'opéra des *Briganti* ont eu un brillant succès; la longueur du troisième a nui à l'effet de plusieurs morceaux fort beaux qu'il renferme, et en somme l'auteur de la musique, M. Mercadante, à qui l'on doit *Elisa e Claudio*, a été appelé sur la scène à la fin de la représentation, et y a reçu les applaudissemens du public.

L'exécution de cet ouvrage a été plus parfaite encor, s'il est possible, qu'elle ne l'est ordinairement au Théâtre-Italien. Tous les rôles, écrits exprès pour M^{lle} J. Grisi, pour Rubini, Tamburini et Lablache, ont été rendus par ces quatre virtuoses avec un éclat et un ensemble dont aucun récit ne peut donner une idée. Les chœurs ont chanté avec aplomb et souvent avec verve. L'orchestre a vigoureusement aidé les chanteurs, et plusieurs solos de cor et de violoncelle ont fourni au public l'occasion d'applaudir MM. Galley [Gallay] et Franchome [Franchomme].

Comme libretto, comme canevas dramatique; celui des *Brigands* n'est pas bon. Sans appuyer sur l'obscurité profonde du sujet, il suffira de faire observer que dans un drame dont les quatre personnages sont également importants, soit par leur rang, soit par leur situation, il est impossible de concentrer l'intérêt. Il n'y a rien de plus essentiellement monarchique au monde, que la composition d'un drame ou de tout autre ouvrage d'art. Il ne se forme, il ne vit et n'excite l'attention que sous la condition expresse d'avoir un centre et une circonférence, de présenter de l'unité et par conséquent de porter l'attention du public sur un fait et un personnage principal.

Nous avons aussi reproché plus d'une fois aux compositeurs et aux faiseurs de librettos italiens, le choix de leurs sujets, pris dans les histoires ou les romans français, allemands et anglais. Au fait, on a de la peine à concevoir comment un peuple, dont l'histoire est si riche en faits, en anecdotes, et en personnages intéressans, dans les recueils de nouvelles fourmillent d'aventures si originales, si variées et empreintes d'un caractère national, si vif et si brillant; ait la complaisance ou la paresse d'aller faire de pâles imitations des romances ou des drames du nord. Le grand inconvénient qui résulte de cette mode ou de cette manie, est de faire éclore une foule de libretti insignifiants tels que *Matilde de Shabran*, *l'Etrangère*, *Claire de Rosenberg*, et enfin les brigands dont nous avons à parler aujourd'hui.

Ces *brigands* n'ont pas même le titre de commun avec ceux de Schiller, car ces derniers sont tout bonnement des *voleurs*. De plus, toute l'action dramatique du libretto de M. Crescini est concentrée sur les sentimens d'amour ou de haine que ressentent les personnages les uns pour les autres. Quant au mépris pour la société régulièrement instituée, qui jette le héros de Schiller et ses compagnons dans un genre de vie fabuleusement criminel, il n'en est question, dans le libretto, qu'incidemment et pour résoudre les difficultés de la fin du drame. Ce n'est pas que nous regrettions le moins du monde toutes les déclamations sophistiquées et ampoulées auxquelles cette combinaison fautive aurait pu donner lieu mais nous ferons observer seulement que la fable de M. Crescini, qui aurait pu être présentée, tous simplement comme une aventure italienne, a le grave inconvénient, en faisant penser aux voleurs de Schiller, de reporter maladroitement l'attention du spectateur sur une œuvre qui a un grand mérite littéraire et dont le sujet

réveille des idées graves, profondes hardies que le poète et le compositeur italiens n'auraient pu même indiquer dans leur opéra.

On reproche souvent aux musiciens de l'Italie, de manquer de profondeur et de ne pas mettre de *couleur locale* dans leurs compositions. C'est une opinion que l'on peut soutenir très raisonnablement. Mais il y a des personnes guidées sans doute plutôt par l'instinct que par la réflexion qui pensent que toutes les idées abstraites, que tous les sentimens réfléchis comme l'amour de la patrie et les passions politiques, qu'en un mot, tout ce qui a besoin d'être appuyé par des développemens et des raisons, est assez peu musical. Ces personnes, et nous ne craignons pas de nous ranger à leur avis, vont même jusqu'à croire que de sentimens et des passions trop complexes, comme on en trouve la peinture dans les romans modernes du nord, sont hors du domaine de la musique. Et ces personnes ajoutent que cet art ne satisfait pleinement que quand on l'emploie pour exprimer des sentimens simples, comme l'amour, la haine, la colère et la joie.

Quant à la *couleur locale*, nous pensons encore ainsi que bien d'autres, que les musiciens, tout aussi bien que les peintres, s'abusent fort souvent sur cette prétendue qualité qui, la plupart du temps, pousse les compositeurs et ceux qui tiennent le pinceau à faire des pastiches. On ne croit donc pas que si l'on mettait l'écrivain Erasme sur la scène dramatique, on dût lui faire chanter de la musique dans le style de Hobrecht [Obrecht] qui enseigna cet art à ce spirituel écrivain, ni qu'un peintre de nos jours fut obligé de copier la manière de Cimabue et de Giotto, pour nous représenter Dante, Ugolino ou Farinata des Uberti.

Certes on ne fera pas un semblable reproche à l'auteur du libretto des *Brigands*, car on n'y trouve pas un seul mot excepté les noms propres qui indique dans quel temps et chez quel peuple la scène se passe, ni qui donne même le plus léger renseignement sur les causes antécédentes qui ont pu mettre les personnages du drame dans la position où ils se trouvent quand la toile se lève. On voit seulement au premier acte, des courtisans des deux sexes qui se félicitent de ce que le deuil du comte de Moor, souverain du pays, et que l'on croit mort, est fini. Cette gaîté se manifeste à la cour de son fils Conrad, et elle a lieu à l'occasion du mariage projeté de Conrad avec sa cuisinière Amélie d'Edelreich. Mais Amélie aime son autre cousin le frère de Conrad Herman [Hermann] dont on ignore le destin. Impatient donc de satisfaire sa passion, Conrad pour déterminer Amélie à oublier celui qu'elle aime et à lui accorder sa main, lui présente un voile ensanglanté comme un gage envoyé par Herman, tué dans un combat. Comme de raison cet argument indispose la jeune Amélie qui ne se fie que médiocrement à ce stratagème.

En effet Herman non seulement est plein de vie, mais plus amoureux que jamais de sa cousine. Il arrive près du château de son frère au moment où Amélie mêle ses prières à celles que l'on fait dans une église pour les morts. La reconnaissance ne tarde pas à avoir lieu entre les deux fideles amans, et Herman, devenant toujours plus entreprenant à mesure qu'il se sent plus aimé, brave la présence du souverain son frère, lève sa visière et redemande impérieusement celle qu'il adore, mais que son rival lui soustrait.

Après ce premier acte, et sans une seule parole sur le caractère et la destinée de Herman, on retrouve ce personnage entouré d'une troupe de brigands dont il est chef. Ses soldats le trouvent bien quelque peu triste, mais

ils l'engagent à éloigner le chagrin en buvant et en chantant. Après cette orgie, Herman reste seul et voit tout à coup un ermite portant des vivres à un prisonnier enfermé dans une tour. Il demande quel est ce malheureux, et dans l'impossibilité où se trouve l'ermite de lui donner les clefs qui ont été jetées dans le lac, Herman justifiant sa qualité de voleur, prend ce qu'il appelle *istosomenti fatali* ce qui veut dire des *rossignols* ou des pinces, et crochette ou enlève la porte de la tour d'où il retire le vieux prisonnier. Ce captif, on le pense bien, n'est autre que le comte de Moor, père d'Herman et du cruel Conrad, par l'ordre de qui il a été si cruellement traité. Le père et le bon fils le brigand se reconnaissent et l'on se promet de tirer vengeance de Conrad et de rétablir le vieux comte dans ses droits.

Enfin, au troisième acte, Conrad, bourrelé de remords, mais toujours poussé par sa passion jalouse pour Amélie, est sur le point d'aller l'immoler à sa fureur, lorsque les honnêtes brigands, conduits par Herman, // 2 // entrent dans le château. Les deux frères en viennent aux mains, et Conrad est tué. Herman serait assez disposé à vivre régulièrement; mais devenu meurtrier et engagé d'honneur avec les brigands, il se voit obligé de rester leur chef, et, pour les suivre, de quitter son père, qui le maudit, et Amélie qui, honteuse de l'affreuse profession de son amant, tombe évanouie ou morte à la chute du rideau.

M^{lle} J. Grisi chante le rôle d'Amélie; Rubini, celui d'Herman; Tamburini, la partie du Conrad, et Lablache représente le vieux père.

Au premier acte, les morceaux de musique qui ont été le plus applaudis sont l'introduction, car il n'y a pas de symphonie d'ouverture; un chœur de femmes plein de grâce et de fraîcheur, dont les modulations sont variées avec une rare habileté. Les trois airs chantés successivement par Tamburini, M^{lle} Grisi et Rubini ont surtout fait valoir la rare perfection du talent de ces trois chanteurs. Le chant pour les morts, exécuté par le chœur soutenu des voix de M^{lle} Grisi et Rubini, est un morceau sévère et gracieux tout à la fois, que l'on a écouté avec attention, mais que l'on entendra aux autres représentations avec bien plus de plaisir encore. Le duo qui suit, entre Herman et Amélie, est trop long, quoique fort agréable.

Mais le morceau capital du premier acte est le finale. Il a pour sujet l'arrivée d'Herman, auprès de son frère Conrad, en présence d'Amélie et de toutes les personnes du château. Les deux frères cherchent d'abord à modérer leur fureur, puis se laissant aller ensuite à toute la jalousie que fait naître la présence de celle qu'ils aiment, ils en viennent bientôt des invectives aux menaces, et à un défi qu'ils se portent l'épée à la main. Le compositeur a exprimé cette gradation de sentimens, depuis ceux qu'éprouvent les principaux personnages jusqu'à la part qu'y prennent les assistans, avec beaucoup de bonheur. Le chant principal, répété successivement par les chanteurs et les différentes parties du chœur, donnent l'idée d'un orage d'abord lointain, qui gronde sourdement, s'approche et éclate enfin avec fracas. Ce *crescendo*, dicté par le sujet, et conduit avec un art remarquable, a produit le plus grand effet sur l'auditoire. C'est un fort beau morceau de musique.

Les chœurs abondent dans l'opéra des *Brigands*, et en général ils sont fort beaux. Plusieurs représentations rendront sans doute le public plus

sensible à cette partie importante de l'ouvrage. Le chœur qui ouvre le second acte, où les brigands chantent pendant l'orage, et l'autre qui suit et sort d'accompagnement à un air à boire que chante si bien leur chef, Herman (Rubini), sont d'une facture très ferme et d'un dessein bien arrêté.

Tout ce qui suit dans ce second acte est fort beau et a vivement remué l'auditoire. Ce sont les scènes où l'ermite, après avoir allumé la lanterne de la madone et donné des alimens au vieux comte, prisonnier dans la tour, est accosté par Herman, auquel il raconte le sort du vieillard; puis la reconnaissance du père et du fils, et le serment des brigands, qui promettent de venger le prisonnier.

La prière à la Vierge, chantée par Rubini, est un morceau plein de grâce et d'onction. Outre cela, jamais ce chanteur n'a peut-être dit avec plus de pureté et de grandeur qu'en chantant cette charmante prière.

Tous les amateurs de musique ont présent à la mémoire le beau duo de *tenor* et de *basso* d'Elisa e Claudio. Celui de la reconnaissance d'Herman et de son père, chanté par Rubini et Lablache, dans *les Brigands*, n'est pas moins remarquable. Plein de vérité d'expression dans sa partie dialoguée, tendre et passionnée lorsque les deux personnages chantent ensemble, il est gradué avec art, travaillé avec goût et plein de verve. Rubini et Lablache ont été admirables pendant tout le cours de cette grande scène et comme chanteurs et comme acteurs.

Malheureusement le *presto* qui suit ce duo n'a pas été jugé digne de ce qui le précède, et le chant du vieux père, accompagné du chœur des brigands, a paru porter le caractère de nos contredanses. Ce chant d'ailleurs est annoncé par des cornets à piston, instrumens qui, comme le moiré métallique, ont fort surpris d'abord et ensuite fatigué tout le monde en quelques jours.

Au troisième acte, après un chœur de courtisans, on entend successivement deux cavatines, admirablement chantées, il est vrai, l'une par Tamburini, l'autre par M^{lle} Grisi, mais qui arrêtent entièrement l'intérêt dramatique. On applaudit les chanteurs, ce qui s'est renouvelé encore après un immense duo entre M^{lle} Grisi et Lablache. Ces trois morceaux seraient sans doute avantageusement placés et fort bien reçus dans un premier acte; mais à la fin d'un ouvrage ils ne peuvent rester, au moins avec toute l'étendue que le compositeur leur a originairement donné. D'ailleurs ils ont encore le grand inconvénient d'épuiser tellement l'attention des auditeurs qu'il n'en reste plus pour apprécier les beautés remarquables du grand trio chanté par M^{lle} Grisi, Rubini et Lablache, et qui sert de finale à la pièce.

Par son mérite particulier, ainsi que par la manière ravissante avec laquelle les trois chanteurs le disent, ce duo ferait aller un opéra où l'on aurait été plus sobre de musique que dans celui des *Brigands*. Mais on le sait: trop de richesse appauvrit la matière.

La musique des *Brigands*, comme toute celle de Mercadante, est conçue avec netteté et écrite avec beaucoup d'art et d'élégance. Peu de compositeurs connaissent aussi bien que cet auteur la portée et l'effet des instrumens combinés avec les voix. C'est ce que prouve surtout l'opéra dont nous venons de parler. Au surplus, ce mérite, vivement apprécié, n'a point empêché

l'auditoire d'être très sensible aux beautés d'invention que renferment les *Brigands*. L'introduction, le chœur de femmes, le chœur religieux et le finale du premier acte, ainsi que la prière à la Vierge et le duo de la reconnaissance au second, et le trio de la fin du troisième, placent M. Mercadante au nombre des habiles compositeurs de nos jours.

L'opéra des *Brigands* manque d'unité, défaut qui résulte d'abord de l'égale importance donnée par le poète aux quatre personnages du drame, et ensuite du mérite si remarquable des quatre chanteurs chargés de ces rôles. Après les représentations de *Norma*, où la druidesse assume sur elle seule tout l'intérêt et le poids de l'opéra, le public a témoigné le désir que l'on écrive un ouvrage où l'on entendit aussi également les trois chanteurs. M. Mercadante a cherché à répondre à ce désir, et il a fait trop de musique, surtout trop d'airs dans les *Brigands*.

Cet opéra, avec les quatre grands virtuoses qui y paraissent, fait penser à un jour où, quatre soleils se promenant dans le ciel, on ne saurait jamais à quelle heure on est, où l'on ne verrait ni ombre ni clair sur les objets, où l'orient et l'occident seraient confondus, et où enfin l'œil, et par suite l'esprit, ne sachant à quoi se fixer, tomberaient dans la cécité et la stupeur.

Mais avec un opéra aussi riche en musique que les *Brigands*, et dont le poème est si peu raisonnable, on peut facilement ramener l'unité que nous réclamons, en retranchant tous les morceaux parasites qui s'y trouvent. Peut-être qu'au moment on nous écrit ces lignes, ces indispensables coupures sont déjà faites, et que notre critique ne restera là que pour constater tout à la fois les vicissitudes et les succès de la première représentation des *Brigands*.

Après la chute du rideau on a demandé le compositeur qui a été amené sur le devant du théâtre pour recevoir les applaudissements de toute la salle.

Les chanteurs, qui ont si admirablement exécuté l'opéra, ont été redemandés aussi; et le beau quatuor de M^{lle} Grisi, de Rubini, Tamburini et Lablache a été accueilli par une salve de *bravi!* et d'applaudissements.

Journal Title:	JOURNAL DES DÉBATS
Journal Subtitle:	
Day of Week:	Thursday
Calendar Date:	24 MARS 1856
Printed Date Correct:	24 MARS 1836
Volume Number:	
Year:	
Series:	
Pagination:	1 à 2
Issue:	
Title of Article:	THÉÂTRE ROYAL ITALIEN
Subtitle of Article:	Première représentation de <i>I Briganti</i> , opéra en trois actes, paroles de M. Crescini, musique de M. Mercadante.
Signature:	D.
Pseudonym:	
Author:	Étienne Jean Delécluse
Layout:	Front-page feuilleton
Cross-reference:	

JOURNAL DES FEMMES, 1^{er} Avril 1836, pp. 222-223.

Faite en un mois, répétée et jouée en trois semaines, cette musique, d'un des maestros les plus célèbres de l'Italie, a obtenu un droit de cité en France, et les Italiens en ont enregistré les lettres patentes. Mais il y a une remarque à faire, c'est le progrès marqué de Mercadante dans la science de l'orchestre et l'art de préparer le final par les notes successives de la scène. Les noces de Gamache, dont la plus grande partie est de Mercadante, et l'autre de M. Guénée [Guénée], compositeur français, qui avait souvent dérouté les plus fins connaisseurs, nous avait plutôt annoncé une musique spirituelle et maligne que large et accentuée: mais les Brigands ont dépassé même nos espérances; aussi est-il vrai de dire que les acteurs ont admirablement secondé Mercadante, et que tous ont mérité le grand succès qu'ils ont obtenu; Lablache, Tamburini, Rubini et M^{lle} Grisi ont ajouté à leur réputation.

Le sujet des Brigands de Schiller, ce drame d'une portée si élevée, si dangereuse pour les têtes étroites et ardentes, a subi des modifications; mais la pensée mère est la même, et avec elle reste l'effet dramatique qui perce même au travers de la musique. Parmi les morceaux les plus // 223 // applaudis, on cite la cavatine de Tamburini, celle de M^{lle} Grisi; un duo entre Rubini et M^{lle} Grisi; un autre entre M^{lle} Grisi et Tamburini: l'air de Rubini, au second acte, avec l'accompagnement de chœurs de brigands: l'air de Tamburini au commencement du troisième acte, celui que chante ensuite M^{lle} Grisi, et le trio de Lablache, Rubini et M^{lle} Gisi [Grisi], etc. : il est difficile d'admettre qu'un mois ait suffi pour composer une partition aussi étendue et aussi riche; mais la pensée stimulée par le temps et par le succès qu'une saison peut retarder, enfante des prodiges. Cette composition fait un grand honneur à Mercadante, et l'assied aux Bouffes à côté de Rossini et de Beethoven [Beethoven].

Journal Title:	JOURNAL DES FEMMES
Journal Subtitle:	
Day of Week:	Friday
Calendar Date:	1 st April 1836
Printed Date Correct:	Yes
Volume Number:	
Year:	
Series:	Deuxième
Pagination:	222-223
Issue:	Livraison du 1 avril 1836
Title of Article:	REVUE THÉÂTRALE. Théâtre Italien
Subtitle of Article:	I BRIGANTI, <i>musique de M. Mercadante.</i>
Signature:	
Pseudonym:	
Author:	
Layout:	Internal main text
Cross-reference:	

LE MÉNESTREL, 27 Mars 1836, p. 5.

En attendant la clôture du Théâtre-Italien, qui est fixée à jeudi prochaine, l'administration Favart vient d'offrir à ses habitués la partition de M. Mercadante. *I. Briganti* [*I briganti*] ont reçu du public, l'accueil le plus flatteur: plusieurs morceaux, empreints d'un style sévère et dramatique ont excité d'unanimes bravos. Le finale du premier acte, un chœur avec accompagnement d'orgue et de cloches, un Duo écrit avec verve (*Tu encore vivi* [sic]), un Boléro *con cori* sont les élémens les plus remarquables de cet ouvrage. Inutile de dire que Rubini, Lablache, Tamburini et mademoiselle Grisi font les honneurs de cette partition avec cet admirable talent qui ne se dément jamais.

Journal Title:	LE MÉNESTREL
Journal Subtitle:	
Day of Week:	Sunday
Calendar Date:	27 MARS 1836
Printed Date Correct:	Yes
Volume Number:	
Year:	
Series:	TROISIÈME ANNÉE
Pagination:	5
Issue:	17
Title of Article:	CHRONIQUE
Subtitle of Article:	
Signature:	
Pseudonym:	
Author:	
Layout:	Internal column
Cross-reference:	

PSYCHÉ, 31 MARS 1836, pp. 103-104.

Si vous voulez avoir l'analyse du livret, voici:

La Bohême regrette son grand-duc Maximilien, qui n'est plus. A la place de ce prince règne son fils Conrad. Conrad veut épouser sa cousine la duchesse Amélie, mais Amélie ne l'aime pas. Le cœur de la charmante duchesse appartenait à un frère de Conrad, le prince Hermann. Hermann est mort, a dit Conrad à la duchesse Amélie, et pour preuve voici une écharpe teinte de son sang.

Amélie est désolée. La prière est son refuge ordinaire contre sa douleur. Un jour à l'église elle rencontre un chevalier qui se fait reconnaître pour Hermann. Qui ne fut pas satisfait de cette aventure? ce fut Conrad. Il voulait se défaire d'Hermann, mais Hermann lui échappa.

Au second acte, nous sommes près d'une vieille tour où se réunit une bande de brigands, *I Briganti*. Cette vieille tour est percée d'une fenêtre; à cette fenêtre est un vieillard qui gémit. Hermann s'approche, et dans ce malheureux prisonnier reconnaît, qui? son père, le grand-duc Maximilien, que Conrad a fait passer pour mort, afin de régner à sa place, et qu'il tient dans un cachot depuis dix ans.

Hermann, qui était tout simplement chef de brigands, met sa bande à la disposition de son père, qu'il replace sur le trône. Après quoi, l'heureux Hermann épouse Amélie.

L'imitation de Schiller est complète.

La musique est digne de l'auteur *d'Elisa e Claudio*, de *Zaira* et de tant d'autres ouvrages. On remarque surtout, dans *I Briganti*, d'admirables // 104 // chœurs, une chanson chantée par Rubini et un magnifique duo entre Rubini et Lablache.

Le succès de M. Mercadante a été complet et brillant.

Journal Title:	PSYCHÉ
Journal Subtitle:	Journal de Modes, Littérature, Théâtres et Beaux-Arts.
Day of Week:	Thursday
Calendar Date:	31 MARS 1836
Printed Date Correct:	Yes
Volume Number:	TOME III, TREIZIÈME VOLUME
Year:	3 ^e ANNÉE
Series:	
Pagination:	103 à 104
Issue:	95
Title of Article:	THÉÂTRES
Subtitle of Article:	THÉÂTRE ROYAL ITALIEN. <i>I Briganti</i>
Signature:	
Pseudonym:	
Author:	
Layout:	Internal main text
Cross-reference:	

LA QUOTIDIENNE, 28 MARS 1836, pp. 1-3.

— Le Théâtre-Italien vient d'accomplir la seconde promesse de son programme de la saison, en nous donnant l'opéra nouveau de Mercadante, *opera espressamente escrita per Parigi*, chose qui flatte singulièrement le dilettantisme parisien, qui se pose dès ce moment en juge suprême d'une partition ni plus ni moins que le public de la Scala et de San Carlo. Le maestro à qui était confiée la mission de terminer brillamment la campagne de 1836 est très fameux en Italie, quoiqu'il ne soit guère connu à Paris que par l'opéra d'*Elisa e Claudio* joué il y a plusieurs années à Milan. Un grand nombre d'autres partitions de différens genres, lui ont acquis une grande réputation parmi les musiciens, et on ne conçoit pas que notre Théâtre-Italien ait laissé si longtemps son public dans l'ignorance presque complète des chefs-d'œuvre de ce maître. Parmi ceux que nous ne connaissons que par quelques morceaux exécutés dans des concerts particuliers, on en trouverait très certainement quelques-uns dignes de tenir une place distinguée à coté des compositions de Bellini et de Donizetti, et dans ce // 2 // nombre nous citerons l'*Apoteosi d'Ercole*, *Scipione in Cartagine*, *Didone*, *Donna Caritea*, *I Normani* [Normanni], *Zaira*, *Gabriella di Vergi* [Vergy], opéras sérieux qui ont obtenu de brillans succès à Naples, à Rome, à Turin, à Venise, à Lisbonne; et surtout on trouverait une ample récolte à faire parmi les opéras bouffes de ce compositeur, dont la verve originale s'est presque toujours révélée dans les compositions de ce genre, si rares aujourd'hui en Italie, et qui varieraient si agréablement notre répertoire. Nous ne doutons pas que l'administration du Théâtre-Italien ne trouvât de grandes ressources dans *Violenza e Costanza*, *il Posto abbandonato* [abbandonato], *il Podestà di Burgos* et *I due Figaro*, joués avec un grand succès à Madrid; car il n'y a pas un grand théâtre en Europe sur lequel Mercadante n'ait été applaudi.

Les personnes qui ont entendu la première représentation d'*I Briganti*, ont pu apprécier l'ampleur et le grandiose de cette partition, et rendre justice à la conscience musicale avec laquelle cette grande composition est traitée; et quelle que soit leur opinion sur la facilité prodigieuse des maîtres italiens, elles n'apprendront pas sans surprise qu'il y a à peine deux mois, il n'y avait pas non seulement une note écrite de la partition, mais que le poète même n'avait pas fait un seul vers du poème. En rendant hommage à l'inconcevable fécondité du compositeur, il est juste de le mettre à l'abri du reproche qu'on pourrait lui faire d'avoir, en quelque sorte, travaillé en poste. Mercadante a été victime de cet incurable *far niente*, qui semble être une infirmité italienne. Il a attendu pendant plus de six mois, de Milan, un libretto que le poète Romani s'était engagé à lui faire, dont le sujet et les principales scènes étaient convenues depuis un an, et dont le poète Lazzaroni est encore à lui envoyer la première cavatine. Force a été à Mercadante, qu'un traité solennel liait avec l'*impressario* Robert, de solliciter la verve d'un autre poète — le signor Jacopo Crescini, afin d'en obtenir un libretto, tant bon que mauvais, pour y jeter à profusion ces brillantes inspirations, et ses suaves cantilènes répandus dans la partition d'*I Briganti*. Quoique dans les arts la question de temps soit celle qui intéresse le moins le public, il est certain qu'elle devient ici un motif d'excuse et un sujet d'éloge pour le poète, pour le musicien et pour les acteurs, qui, chacun dans leur sphère, ont concouru à produire, à concevoir et à exécuter, en moins de deux mois, une si large et si grande composition musicale.

Si le libretto était de quelque importance dans la confection d'un opéra italien, nous nous donnerions la peine de discuter le choix que M. Crescini a

fait d'une œuvre de Schiller qui, de l'aveu même du poète allemand, n'est pas un drame, mais une étude métaphysique des opérations les plus mystérieuses de l'âme. Cet essai psychologique sur le remords et sur la conscience, cette chaleureuse et violente déclamation contre la société, où, avec une verve déplorable, le jeune génie de Schiller a déposé tout ce qu'il ressentait de haine et de mépris pour la civilisation, était un sujet peu propre aux mélodies; aussi le poète italien a-t-il laissé de côté la pensée philosophique du poète allemand pour se jeter dans les banalités du drame et s'est fort bien accommodé des lieux communs que Schiller avait été contraint d'ajouter à sa pièce pour en rendre la représentation supportable; ce qui lui faisait dire «que son ouvrage était comme ces jeunes mauvais sujets dont les qualités et les vices sont inséparables et forment un ensemble qu'on court risque de gâter en cherchant à les corriger.»

Le libretto italien a plus d'analogie avec *Robert chef de brigands* de Lamartellière [La Martelière] , joué avec un si prodigieux succès par Baptiste aîné, en 1793, sur le théâtre du Marais, qu'avec le drame de Schiller. M. Crescini a pris les principales situations du mélodrame, la rivalité des deux frères et leur amour pour Amélie d'Edenlreigh; il a cherché des effets dans la haine de François de Moor pour son frère Charles, et dans la touchante situation du vieux prince Maximilien de Moor, descendu vivant dans la tombe victime de la barbare ambition de son fils, espèce de monstre dont les vices rappellent souvent le Gloucester [*Gloucester*] de Shakespeare.

La partie la plus importante de cette œuvre, ou pour mieux dire la seule importante, c'est la musique; Mercadante s'est révélé avec toutes les qualités d'un grand compositeur: fécondité de chants, ampleur de style, grandes ressources harmoniques, profonde science d'instrumentation, rien n'y manque. Ces mérites se retrouvent dans la plupart des morceaux, dans ceux du moins qui ont produit le plus d'effet, et ces morceaux sont en grand nombre. L'introduction, qui est courte et simple, amène bien la cavatine de Tamburini, dont le cantabile *ove a me tu volga* est d'une belle expression; l'air d'Amélie est plein de verve et de hardiesse, et Mlle Grisi l'a chanté avec un *brio* et un entraînement qui en ont augmenté l'effet. Tout ce qu'elle y a entassé de difficultés de vocalisation est inimaginable, et toutes ces difficultés, elle les a surmontées avec une prodigieuse facilité. La duo entre Amélie et Corrado, duo de menaces et de terreur, est bien fait comme morceau de scène, mais produit peu d'effet. En revanche, la cavatine de Rubini, *questi due verdi salci*, est d'une mélancolie ravissante, et dans l'allegro: *Vane speranza a segui*, où la première fois le chanteur ne s'était pas satisfait, le *bis* a été réclamé par toute la salle, afin de lui fournir l'occasion de se montrer audacieux, brillant et prodigieux comme il ne l'avait jamais été. Le morceau capital de l'ouvrage est le final du premier acte, auquel se lie un chant et un trio d'un bel effet. La pensée de ce final est puissante et bien exprimée; le *crescendo* y arrive avec tout son prestige harmonique, porté au plus haut degré, et au milieu duquel brille de toute son expression la voix de Mlle Grisi à laquelle se mêlent les plus belles notes des voix vibrantes de Rubini et de Tamburini: ce final est le morceau que l'auteur a placé dans sa pièce pour se poser devant le public de Paris, à côté des grands maîtres de la grande école italienne.

Dans les deux autres actes, nous avons remarqué le chœur de brigands, chanté au milieu d'une forêt sombre, à la lueur des éclairs et au bruit du tonnerre, il est terminé par les chants de l'orgie, et finit par une *stretta* des plus originales sur ce refrain:

Sol la vita dei briganti
È la vita del piacer.

L'orchestration de ce morceau, habilement travaillée, jette une couleur des plus vives sur la situation; la prière d'Ermano, et surtout le beau duo où le fils retrouve son père, qu'il croyait mort, sortant miraculeusement de son tombeau, offre à Lablache et à Rubini l'occasion de lutter de touchans accens et d'expression dramatique. Ce duo est écrit sur un beau thème, mais *l'agitato* qui le termine laisse à désirer un rythme plus vif et plus accentué. Nous avons remarqué que presque tous les morceaux de cet opéra, dont les cantabile sont largement et savamment développés, manquent de ces strettes brillantes et animées qui terminent si bien un grand morceau musical. Le final du second acte n'est pas heureux; le motif en est vulgaire et trop dans le style des contredanses, et bien qu'il soit dominé par le chœur des brigands, comme les deux principales parties de chant y sont tenues par deux personnages nobles, on aurait aimé à y trouver quelque chose de plus élevé dans la pensée. Ce morceau est à refaire ou à supprimer.

Le chœur qui ouvre le 3^e acte a de la grandeur et de la solennité, et après deux grands airs, l'un de Tamburini, et l'autre de M^{lle} Grisi, la pièce se termine par un très beau trio, où sont exprimés, avec un rare talent, tous les accens du remords, toutes les anxiétés de l'amour, et tous les déchiremens de la tendresse paternelle, si bien exprimés par ces vers, où Lablache est du pathétique le plus admirable: // 3 //

Ciel! Mi serbavi a piangere
Estinto un figlio ancor!

Le brillant succès que vient d'obtenir l'opéra d'*I Briganti*, termine la saison du Théâtre Italien d'une manière éclatante; il assure, pour l'autre prochaine, un beau commencement à la direction de M. Robert. D'ici là le savant maestro aura le temps de retrancher de sa partition les morceaux qui ont fait longueur à côté de tant de morceaux qui ont excité l'enthousiasme. Un homme du mérite de Mercadante doit avoir le droit de s'affranchir des vieux usages italiens qui exigent une cavatine d'entrée pour introduire en scène chaque premier rôle. Ces cavatines obligées, arrivant à la suite l'une de l'autre, jettent beaucoup de froid sur la représentation: des chanteurs du mérite et du talent de Rubini, de Tamburini, de Lablache et de M^{lle} Grisi, brillent autant dans des morceaux d'action que dans les airs à une seule voix. On peut aisément couper deux ou trois cavatines dans la partition d'*I Briganti*, et les quatre grands chanteurs auxquels l'exécution de cet opéra est confiée, n'en brilleront pas des suffrages moins flatteurs ni moins unanimes. Le maestro Mercadante a joui, à la première représentation, des honneurs du triomphe, le public a voulu l'applaudir en personne, il a été entraîné sur la scène par les quatre grands interprètes de sa musique.

L'exécution de l'opéra de Mercadante a été complète, les chœurs ont mis une précision et une vivacité dans leurs attaques dignes des plus grands éloges. L'admirable cor de Gallay et les suaves solos de clarinette de Berr, ont aussi fait merveilles: enfin, pour que rien ne manquât à l'ensemble, le pinceau si habile de Ferri a jeté sur la mise en scène, l'éclat de trois belles décorations, exécutées avec cette entente parfaite des effets de la peinture scénique, dans laquelle les bons peintres que possède encore l'Italie, ne sont plus nos maîtres, mais sont encore nos rivaux.

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REVUE DE PARIS, 27 mars 1836, pp. 254-259.

L'auteur d'*Elisa e Claudio*, de *Dona [Donna] Caritea*, de *Zaira* et de quarante autres ouvrages, Mercadante, qui partage avec Donizetti l'empire du drame lyrique en Italie depuis que Rossini s'est fait bourgeois de Paris, Mercadante a fait son entrée dans notre bonne ville au mois de septembre dernier. Engagé par les administrateurs de notre Théâtre-Italien pour écrire un opéra, Mercadante devait se munir d'un livret convenablement disposé. Le musicien s'est donc rendu préalablement à Turin pour réclamer le drame que le fameux Romani lui préparait; canevas poétique sur lequel il allait dérouler ses mélodies, ses marches harmonieuses, ses cabalettes de ténor et de soprane.

« Cher *poeta*, je viens chercher les scènes de désolation, les coups de poignard, les flots de poison que vous m'avez réservés. Il est fort heureux que la route de Milan à Paris passe tout juste devant votre porte. J'ai pu ne faire qu'un saut de ma voilure à votre cabinet; je vous embrasse tendrement, je saisis mon livret.... *buona notte, ben di core, i cavalli di galoppo*, salut en Cimarosa et Rossini, *addio!*

— *Pian, piano; men fretta, caro maestro.*

— Non, mon ami, je ne puis m'arrêter. Mon livret; que je le prenne, que je le saisisse, et l'emporte!

— Je le voudrais bien, mais il n'est pas terminé. Voilà pourtant, sur cette feuille, quatre vers du finale du second acte.

— A merveille! bravo! puisqu'il en est ainsi. Donnez-moi le premier acte.

— Il n'est pas écrit.

— Comment ? et ces vers du second.

— Je commence toujours par le second; ma gouvernante en fait de même quand elle tricote une paire de bas. // 255 //

— Se peut-il que vous me laissiez partir ainsi, les mains vides?

— Prenez toujours ces quatre vers, ou bien attendez....

— J'ai bien le temps d'attendre!

— Partez donc, mais soyez tranquille, je vais vous expédier cela d'urgence, et les scènes, mises à la poste, marcheront vivement. S'il vous prend la fantaisie de vous arrêter deux ou trois jours à Lyon pour visiter les curiosités du pays, mon introduction vous gagnera de vitesse.

Si par fortune vous tombiez malade à Châlons, le drame entier vous attendrait à Paris. Allez, mon cher maître, partez, et fiez-vous à la plume de votre très dévoué Romani. Ce n'est pas moi qui apporterai le moindre retard à vos nouveaux triomphes.»

Le confiant Mercadante part, il arrive à Paris, n'ayant pour tout bagage théâtral que la promesse d'un livret, chargement bien léger sans doute. Mille

pensées musicales naissaient dans sa tête mélodieuse et se jouaient, voltigeaient autour de cette promesse; elles finissaient par s'envoler, s'enfuir comme des oiseaux qui ne trouvent pas de branche pour se reposer. Dix jours se passent, un mois, trois mois, et Mercadante ne reçoit rien; cent lettres sont expédiées, le musicien demande des vers à cor et à cri, son poète ne lui expédie que des lambeaux de vile prose pour s'excuser d'un impardonnable retard. Enfin, au mois de décembre, M. Mercadante, les bras croisés, était encore en tête-à-tête avec sa promesse; il fallait pourtant que l'administration du théâtre tînt ses engagements envers le public. Deux mois restaient seulement pour faire le drame, le mettre en musique, le copier, l'apprendre, le répéter et l'exécuter. Tout cela s'est fait avec l'aide de M. Crescini, poète vénitien, qui a improvisé un livret avec des fragmens de la tragédie de Schiller. Mercadante nous a donné un opéra dont la représentation a duré quatre heures; il eut été plus court si le musicien n'avait pas été si pressé. Un brillant succès l'a payé de ses fatigues. Les applaudissemens lui ont fait oublier sa mésaventure; je pense pourtant qu'à l'avenir il ne s'embarquera plus sans livret.

Il y avait une fois en Bohême un grand-duc Maximilien; ce prince, d'un caractère charmant, possédait une chevelure superbe, légèrement argentée sur les tempes. Ses qualités précieuses devaient rendre Maximilien bien cher à ses sujets; aussi l'aimaient-ils beaucoup et le vénéraient-ils comme un père. Ce grand duc est mort; bien plus, il est enterré. Son fils Conrad règne en sa place, et veut épouser sa cousine Amélie, qui possède aussi un fort beau duché. Conrad est-il réellement amoureux, ou bien n'aspire-t-il à la main de sa cousine Amélie que pour doubler à l'instant ses capitaux? C'est ce que je ne vous dirai pas. Ce qu'il y a de certain, // 256 // c'est qu'Amélie ne l'aime pas du tout. Elle a donné son cœur à Hermann, frère aîné de son prétendant. Hermann s'est éloigné des états de son père pour des tracasseries de famille. Hermann a disparu depuis longtemps, et Conrad remet à Amélie un mouchoir teint du sang de ce chevalier errant, qui a trouvé la mort en cherchant les aventures.

On commence à se réjouir un peu au château de Moor; on a quitté le deuil, mais on prie encore pour le repos de l'âme de Maximilien. Amélie se rend à la chapelle et rencontre un chevalier, qui lui parle, et qu'elle ne reconnaît pour son amant que quand il a levé sa visière. Hermann vient réclamer la main de sa cousine; Conrad la lui dispute. Après des provocations violentes, les deux frères ennemis se séparent paisiblement, et Conrad laisse échapper Hermann, qu'il tenait en sa puissance.

Au second acte, une troupe de brigands est assemblée auprès d'une vieille tour. Il fait nuit; les brigands attendent leur chef; c'est Hermann. Il revient prendre le commandement de ses braves, et chante avec eux un boléro, une polonaise, si l'on aime mieux. Des gémissemens se font entendre; un homme paraît à la fenêtre grillée de là vieille tour, et dit, en récitatif mesuré, ce vers de Saurin:

Qu'une nuit paraît longue à la douleur qui veille!

ou cet autre, légèrement imité par Delille:

Que la nuit paraît longue à la douleur qui veille!

Le tout en italien, comme vous pouvez bien l'imaginer! Cet homme est un vieillard: depuis dix ans il est dans cette tour; mais sa fenêtre, qui s'ouvre

sur les champs, est à quatre pieds de terre; elle lui donne la faculté de prendre la nourriture que lui apporte l'ermite du canton, et l'agrément de faire la conversation avec les passans. Singulière manière d'enclorre les prisonniers d'état. On a changé de système depuis lors; demandez plutôt à Maroncelli, à Silvio Pellico, à tous les échappés du Spielberg. Cet infortuné qui se plaint d'une voix mourante, ce reclus abandonné parmi les hiboux et les chouettes, c'est le grand-duc! Hermann le délivre, et reconnaît Maximilien, son père, que Conrad a mis dans cette tour obscure, tandis qu'on le pleurait sur un autre tombeau.

Maximilien, cet Œdipe bohémien, revient à la vie, à la lumière, entre les bras de son fils bien-aimé, d'Hermann. Le grand-duc est tant soit peu scandalisé des compagnons de fortune que l'héritier du trône ducal s'est donné. Cependant ils l'ont délivré du *carcere duro*; ils vont marcher avec lui contre Conrad, et de tels services réclament au moins de l'indulgence. Armés pour une cause aussi sainte, les brigands combat- // 257 // -tent [combattent], triomphent; Conrad est tué. Hermann obtient son pardon et la main d'Amélie. Vous croyez que tout le monde est content, et que la pièce va finir, comme *OEdipe à Colone*, par un trio de soprane, ténor .et basse, qui dise encore une fois:

Le vrai bonheur sur la terre

Est dans la paix de la vertu.

Non; les brigands viennent réclamer leur vertueux chef, le somment de tenir ses sermens, et la désolée Amélie, l'inconsolable Maximilien, voient s'enfuir, à jamais le futur grand-duc, le prince, héréditaire de Moor et de Thunderthentronk. Hermann obéit à la voix des brigands, et part avec eux, sans chanter pourtant, comme il l'a fait déjà:

La vita di brigante

È la vita del piacer.

Ce drame est tout-à-fait sérieux. Le rôle comique du brigand poltron, que Schiller avait jeté au milieu de sa tragédie, a été supprimé dans le livret italien. M. Mercadante, qui s'est tant de fois signalé dans le genre bouffe, en aurait tiré bon parti. Le chœur d'introduction est d'une coupe originale et d'un effet charmant; et le duo chanté par Amélie et Hermann renferme encore beaucoup de jolies choses, bien qu'il ait été abrégé.

Le chœur religieux qui le précède a été généralement applaudi; l'effet qu'il produit est dû à la belle disposition des masses du chœur, dont les accords changent la face de l'harmonie sans déranger le dessin mélodique présenté d'abord avec plus de simplicité. Le finale surtout est un morceau capital; l'ensemble de *l'andante* est modulé avec beaucoup d'artifice, et la basse, qui monte par degrés chromatiques, tandis que les voix et l'orchestre ajoutent une augmentation de vigueur à cette progression ascendante, est d'un résultat admirable. La strette est pleine de chaleur et de véhémence, et tient tout ce qu'a promis le majestueux *andante* qui la précède.

La chanson du brigand est parfaitement dite par Rubini, et le chœur forme un agréable contraste avec la prière à la madone, prière suave, dans laquelle la voix du merveilleux ténor est soutenue par les violoncelles. Le

grand duo de la reconnaissance est un morceau fait de main de maître, bien posé en scène, et dont l'intérêt, la force et le mouvement s'avancent *crescendo*. Rien n'est expressif et passionné comme les élans de Lablache, de Rubini. Je ne puis rien ajouter à ce que j'ai déjà dit de ces deux virtuoses sous le rapport de l'exécution musicale. Je ne parlerai que de leur jeu scénique; il atteint les dernières bornes de l'art. // 258 //

Cet effet puissant, irrésistible, est produit sans efforts, sans gestes outrés, et presque par le seul charme de leurs belles voix si diversement caractérisées. Ce duo maîtrise tout l'auditoire, on ne veut pas en perdre le moindre accent. On a raison, mais il faut l'écouter jusqu'au bout, et ne pas exiger mal à propos que les chanteurs redisent *l'adagio*. Cette répétition, bien flatteuse sans doute pour Mercadante, Rubini, Lablache, nuit à l'effet du morceau, qui n'a plus les justes proportions que le musicien a voulu lui donner. La cabalette finale de ce duo manque d'originalité; le tour en est connu. Si M. Mercadante en avait eu le temps, je pense qu'il aurait changé quelques mesures, pour éloigner sa mélodie d'une route déjà battue. Le motif du chœur final, attaqué par Lablache, aurait fait fortune à l'Opéra-Comique; il est original; la basse marche bien sous le chant; l'harmonie en est élégante. Mais les *dilettanti* de l'Opéra-Italien ont trouvé cette phrase trop dansante; le cor à piston les a désenchantés en les ramenant au bal, où cet instrument règne en souverain. Il est difficile qu'une phrase d'un mouvement vif n'ait pas des rapports de caractère avec les airs destinés à la danse.

On a remarqué de beaux mouvemens- dramatiques dans le trio qui termine le troisième acte; C'est un admirable avantage pour un musicien que d'avoir à faire manœuvrer des chanteurs tels que Rubini, Tamburini, Lablache, M^{lle} Grisi. Cette bonne fortune pourtant n'est pas sans inconvéniens, il faut donner des solos à tous ces virtuoses et faire déployer leurs moyens d'expression; de là vient l'abondance des cavatines et des mouvemens lents. Le trop est trop, même dans les bonnes choses. Cinq cavatines figurent dans le premier et le troisième acte de *Brigands*; il y en a deux de trop: les deux premières. L'opéra a été fort applaudi; sans doute il le serait davantage, si le musicien avait ménagé plus de silence aux chanteurs, pour leur donner le temps de reprendre haleine et de se faire applaudir. Le public connaît trop bien les règles de la civilité pour interrompre un chanteur qui tient sa note, afin de la lier à celles du mouvement qui suit. Le rôle de Rubini, le plus fort de tous, est écrit trop constamment dans la quinte aiguë. Les chanteurs ne veulent pas renoncer à la coupe adoptée pour les cavatines, et les compositeurs, retenus dans ce cadre donné, sont fort embarrassés pour donner du nouveau.

L'exécution a été parfaite; cela ne doit surprendre personne, puisque j'ai déjà nommé le quatuor par excellence. Les solos de cor et de clarinette ont eu leur part des bravos, recueillis par MM. Gallay et Berr. Les chœurs et l'orchestre méritent une mention honorable. Le *maestro*, les virtuoses, appelés sur la scène, sont venus recevoir de nouveaux applaudissemens. // 259 //

Rien ne manque au brillant succès de Mercadante. La troisième représentation de *I Briganti* est offerte aujourd'hui au public non abonné; tous les billets étaient enlevés depuis jeudi dernier. Cette épreuve hardie répond à bien des argumens.

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REVUE DES DEUX MONDES, 1^{ère} avril 1836, pp. 126-128.

Le Théâtre-Italien vient de clore la saison musicale de cette année par la mise en scène d'un opéra nouveau de M. Mercadante. L'auteur d'*Elisa e Claudio*, homme d'un bon sens rare et d'un talent plus que distingué, est du petit nombre de ces artistes insoucians et modestes, qui, voyant de bonne heure, quelles facultés surnaturelles exige le travail de la création pure et combien peu il est donné à tous d'atteindre la première place, prennent volontiers la seconde, et plutôt que de suer sang et eau à gravir inutilement des pics arides, cheminent tranquillement à l'ombre, le long des saules verts: *verdi salci piantati ai lieti giorni*, laissant à d'autres moins sages les soucis cuisans du succès, les susceptibilités puériles et les ambitieuses préoccupations de la gloire. Aussi, avant que M. Mercadante eut emis son opéra pour le Théâtre -Italien, personne en France ne le connaissait encore, ce qui toutefois n'empêchait pas M. Mercadante d'avoir fait deux partitions fort remarquables, et surtout cet admirable duo d'*Elisa e Claudio*, qui vaut mieux que trois partitions.

Aux termes de son engagement, M. Mercadante est venu en France pour écrire un opéra, et certes ce mot-là me semble parfaitement choisi: *scritturare*. Le pauvre *maestro*, en arrivant, n'avait devant lui que tout juste le temps nécessaire à cette œuvre toute matérielle. C'est pourquoi je trouve fort ridicule qu'on vienne lui reprocher certaines négligences dans la composition générale de son œuvre et le choix de ses // 127 // mélodies. Si M. Mercadante s'était attardé en de pareils détails, le temps lui manquait; il arrivait au Théâtre-Italien les lustres éteints et les portes fermées; et dès-lors les directeurs pouvaient exiger de lui une somme énorme, en disant: Que parlez-vous de composition et de travail d'orchestre, il s'agit bien de tout cela: nous vous avons engagé, ainsi que cela se pratique aujourd'hui en Italie, pour écrire un opéra, et non pour le composer.

Quoi qu'il en soit, il faut le dire, les Italiens tiennent de la nature, les dons de la mélodie et du rythme, trésors de tous temps inappréciables. Des hommes forts et militants pour la cause de l'art *pur*, dont ils gardent le sanctuaire impénétrable, protestent, nous le savons bien, contre cette faculté heureuse de produire sans peine. Peut-être ont-ils leur raisons pour en agir ainsi. Quant à nous, qui nous laissons tout simplement entraîner par nos sensations, il nous est impossible de ne pas l'aimer. Un italien s'assied à son clavier, et la mélodie aussitôt s'en épanche: cela est facile, abondant et claire; on en suit avec plaisir la pente accoutumée. Toutes ces petites musiques de Bellini, de Mercadante et de Donizetti, sont autant de ruisseaux charmans sortis des grands fleuves de Cimarosa et de Rossini.

La partition nouvelle de M. Mercadante abonde en phrases touchantes, en cantilènes tendres et plaintives, en motifs ingénieux et faciles. Je le sais, cette mélodie a le tort de manquer souvent de distinction et d'originalité, de franchise et de puissance. C'est là une inspiration qui compte quelque peu sur celle du chanteur; mais, après tout, qu'importe? puisqu'une si délicieuse harmonie en résulte, pourquoi se gendарmer si fort contre tout ce qui fait plaisir? Vous convenez que le duo entre Lablache et Rubini dans le second acte des *Brigands* est une des plus ravissantes choses qui se puissent entendre le soir; eh bien! alors, que signifient ces grandes colères contre un système qui n'a pour but que votre amusement et qui presque toujours atteint son but?

Personne plus que nous n'admire les mâles produits du génie austère de l'Allemagne. Le duo d'*Armide* est une inspiration sublime, la symphonie en *la* un magnifique morceau de musique, le chœur des moines dans *les Huguenots*, un chef-d'œuvre; mais, certes, nous sommes bien loin de croire que cette religion ne puisse se concilier avec la fréquentation d'une Muse plus familière; rien c'est plus ennuyeux que ses gens qui versent des larmes pour une cabalette chantée hors de saison, et qui, sur une roulade intempestive de la Grisi, se couvrent la front de cendres et vont partout annonçant à l'univers la ruine prochaine de l'art. Autant le grand art est admirable chez lui, dans la salle du Conservatoire, lorsqu'il emporte toutes les âmes vers le ciel dans les chaudes inspirations de Beethoven et de Weber, autant il est insupportable lorsqu'il chemine par la ville, en robe noire de docteur, et tance ventement ceux qui se permettent de chanter à leur guise et sans lui demander conseil. Il me semble voir un pédant qui se promènerait par une belle matinée de printemps, un volume d'Horace à la main, et parlerait latin aux chardonnerets jaseurs éveillés dans les arbres.

Comme Donizetti, M. Mercadante traite l'harmonie avec un soin bien // 128 // rare chez les Italiens de l'école nouvelle. La scène dans laquelle Amélie et son amant se reconnaissent, écrite dans un style élevé, simple et pur, a donné surtout occasion au maestro de développer à loisir les hautes qualités instrumentales qui possède. Le trio avec chœur qui suit et s'enchaîne au finale, est d'un effet puissant; la mélodie imposant qui règne dans l'orchestre, donne à ce morceau un caractère d'originalité. Le duo des deux hommes, au second acte, est digne, en tout point, de l'auteur d'*Elisa*. La belle et touchante phrase de l'adagio vous émeut jusqu'aux larmes; il faut dire aussi que Lablache et Rubini le chantent avec une expression admirable. Rien n'égale le sentiment dramatique de Lablache, si ce n'est la magnificence de son organe, et Rubini a dans la voix je ne sais quoi de plaintif et de tendre qui fait que, dans certaines situations, il atteint aussitôt, et presque sans le vouloir, à des effets singuliers interdits pour jamais aux comédiens vulgaires dont le geste est la seule ressource. Il y a trop de cavatines dans la partition des *Brigands*; chacun chante la sienne, plusieurs même en ont deux à chanter. A tout prendre, puisque c'est là une coutume du théâtre italien, M. Mercadante devait s'y soumettre; mais il devait aussi chercher à éviter la monotonie par la variété de ses formules. Sans doute que les exigences des chanteurs auront mis obstacle à ses bons désirs. Chacun aura voulu son cantabile pour commencer, et sa cabalette pour finir; de telle sorte que le pauvre maestro, dans la nécessité d'écrire autant de cavatines qu'il avait de chanteurs dans son opéra, s'est tiré d'affaire tant bien que mal en donnant à l'un le cor, à l'autre la clarinette pour jouer les ritournelles, et, ne pouvant varier les formes, a varié les instrumens.

L'opéra des *Brigands* a réussi comme il le méritait. Le public a dès le premier jour apprécié tout ce qu'il y a de mélodieux et de charmant dans cette bonne musique, qui se laisse comprendre sans travail pénible de l'intelligence; et maintenant que Mercadante a recueilli parmi nous son humble moisson de gloire, le voilà qui s'en retourne heureux dans sa petite ville, où le rappellent les devoirs de sa charge, car Mercadante est maître de chapelle à Novarre. C'est là que le digne maestro passe sa vie, au milieu de petit enfans de chœur dont il dirige les voix aiguës, et de chanoines paisibles qui écoutent sa musique, gravement assis dans leurs stalles. Chaque année il écrit une messe en l'honneur de la patronne de la ville; et cette chapelle à laquelle Mercadante a voué sa muse religieuse ne dépend ni du pape ni des grands-ducs, c'est un chanoine qui l'a fondée en [...] de ses propres deniers. De temps en temps, le

maestro demande un congé à ses directeurs pour aller écrire un opéra à Venise ou bien à Naples; et puis, trois mois après, quand il a bien fait chanter la Tacchinardi et Dupré, quand il a bruyamment triomphé sur la scène, il se souvient de ses petits enfants de chœur et de ses bons chanoines de Novarre, et revient parmi eux, pour sanctifier dans la chapelle les couronnes du théâtre. Quelle sérénité! quelle paix charmante; on a beau dire, l'Italie est encore la terre de l'art calme et qui rend heureux.

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REVUE DU THÉÂTRE, Avril 1836, pp. 7-11.

Qu'est devenu l'*Opéra buffa*, cette musique, dont une seule note épanouissait les visages, et amenait par un *crescendo* gradué, cette explosion de gaîté bruyante, dont la tradition retentit encore aujourd'hui? Eh, mon dieu! le génie de Cimarosa repose côte à côte avec celui de Molière. On ne rit pas plus à la Comédie-Française qu'au Théâtre Italien. Le caractère de notre époque, comme celui de toutes les époques critiques et de transition, est grave et sérieux. L'art, cette traduction multiforme de la pensée, s'est inévitablement empreint, dans ses œuvres, d'une teinte rembrunie. La littérature dramatique et d'imagination, au milieu de ses charniers, de ses orgies, a jeté quelquefois des figures grimaçantes qu'elle a crues comiques; d'autre fois, et ici nous nous sentons plus d'indulgence, elle a pris l'esprit pour de la gaîté. Le marivaudage embelli et perfectionné, de M. Scribe et compagnie, a tenu lieu de la verve comique de Molière. Dans la peinture, Téniers et l'école flamande n'ont pas eu de successeurs, car la caricature, cette fille bâtarde de l'esprit et de la folie, n'ose sans doute pas revendiquer l'héritage de la vérité et de la vie.

Et comment notre époque, livrée aux angoisses du doute, en quête de solutions aux questions les plus importantes pour son existence même; comment incertaine, non pas seulement de la règle politique, mais de la morale domestique, pourrait-elle avoir assez de liberté de cœur pour s'égayer aux dépens des travers et des ridicules? L'esprit seul est resté libre, et à ses créations extravagantes et monstrueuses, on s'est assez aperçu que le cœur n'était plus là pour le contenir dans ses égarements.

Si l'art, en général, a perdu à cette transformation, parce que surtout elle n'a eu ni règle ni mesure, la musique n'y a-t-elle pas gagné? n'a-t-elle pas été replacée sur son trône, n'a-t-elle pas ressaisi toute sa puissance? De tous les temps, ses accents les plus vrais ont répondu aux sentiments nobles ou mélancoliques de l'âme. Les chants patriotiques n'ont manqué à aucune époque, à aucun pays; l'histoire nous redit leurs magiques effets; et pour ne rappeler qu'un exemple presque contemporain, aux refrains de *la Marseillaise*, la jeunesse se précipitait avec enthousiasme contre les ennemis de la république. Mais c'est peut-être surtout aux sentiments religieux que la musique doit ses plus belles inspirations. Et en effet, la religion et la musique devaient former une association intime. Dieu, le néant, // 8 // l'éternité? A ces idées mystérieuses et vagues, il fallait une langue plus vague et plus mystérieuse encore, la langue des sens. Ne lui demandez pas, à cette langue fantastique, l'expression nette d'une idée, d'un sentiment particulier; non, l'indécision et l'obscurité sont sa puissance; la clarté et la précision seraient au contraire des signes évidents de décadence et de barbarie.

C'est ainsi que les grands législateurs et les grands moralistes ont compris la musique, quand ils en ont signalé la favorable influence sur les mœurs des peuples, quand ils lui ont assigné une place parmi les institutions sociales.

Rossini est la personnification éminente de cette transformation de la musique; presque toutes ses partitions appartiennent au genre, sinon religieux, du moins sérieux ou tragique. La *Cenerentola* est la seule œuvre bouffe de ce célèbre compositeur, car la délicieuse musique d'*Il Barbiere* est plutôt spirituelle que comique.

Le nouvel opéra de Mercadante, qu'on nous avait annoncé dès les premiers jours de la saison italienne comme un opéra *bouffe*, n'a rien moins que ce caractère. Le sujet est tiré des Brigands de Schiller; le *libretto* est digne de ceux sur lesquels ont l'habitude d'écrire les *maëstri* italiens, c'est -à-dire qu'il est détestable. Ce poème, fut-il écrit dans notre langue, nous n'aurions pas besoin de nous alarmer des effets qu'il pourrait produire sur de trop inflammables imaginations; nos étudiants, à l'instar de ceux de l'Allemagne, n'abandonneraient pas leur Cujas et leur Barthole, quelque peu aimable que soit leur entretien, pour s'armer de l'escopette, et former *une bande de brigands* honnêtes et vertueux.

Le premier acte de *I Briganti* s'ouvre par un chœur de seigneurs qui adressent leurs félicitations à Conrad, appelé à succéder à son père, le grand-duc Maximilien, dont les funérailles viennent d'être célébrées. La tristesse du tyran contraste avec la gaîté de sa cour; les remords s'est déjà comparé de son âme; il en étouffe la voix, et cherche, dans les enivremens de la puissance et des plaisirs, à s'étourdir sur le crime qu'il vient de commettre. Car Maximilien n'est pas mort; ce cercueil, sur lequel hypocritement vient de pleurer Conrad suivi de sa cour, était vide. Le grand-duc a été secrètement enfermé dans une tour, et condamné à y passer le reste de sa vie.

La belle Amélie, sa cousine, dès son enfance, a été promise à Hermann, frère aîné de Conrad; mais ses persécutions avaient forcé Hermann à fuir; on ignore son sort; on n'en a jamais eu de nouvelles. Le cœur d'une amante est le dernier asile de l'espérance; Amélie attend donc Hermann, lui conserve sa foi. Mais Conrad, dont nous avons déjà pu apprécier la délicatesse des sentiments filiaux, et leur cruelle traduction, n'aura pas, comme on le pense, de forts scrupules pour tromper Amélie sur le compte d'Hermann. Il lui présente l'écharpe qu'elle a brodée elle-même, et qu'elle a remise à son fiancé, comme gage de sa foi. Le moyen est tant soit peu usé; peu importe à Conrad; il lui réussit à merveille. Amélie, qui n'a pas vu tous les mélodrames de la Porte-Saint-Martin, de l'Ambigu et de la Gaîté, sans compter quelques tragédies, où l'écharpe joue un grand rôle, s'y laisse prendre. La voilà livrée au plus violent désespoir; car elle ne consentira jamais à oublier Hermann: Conrad ne lui succédera jamais dans son cœur. Le tyran, homme fort brutal de son naturel, reçoit assez mal les confidences explorées d'Amélie. C'est là qu'en étaient les choses, quand le premier tableau a disparu.

La musique jusqu'ici n'a pas beaucoup racheté la faiblesse du *libretto*. Le chœur des seigneurs porte des chants sans originalité que tout le monde a déjà entendus. Où? Partout et nulle part. L'air de Tamburini-Conrad, écrit tout-à-fait dans le style Rossinien, est des plus difficiles; les roulades ne cessent pas depuis la première jusqu'à la dernière note; Tamburini y déploie cette merveilleuse vocalisation dont il a lui seul le secret. Mais qu'est-ce que cela prouve? Nous sommes loin de proscrire les roulades, les fioritures; nous savons trop tout le parti qu'en a tiré le génie de Rossini; cependant nous ne leur accordons que la seconde place; elles sont de brillantes broderies, des accessoires bien précieux; mais, avant tout, nous voulons un bel et solide vêtement qui puisse les supporter, c'est-à-dire une mélodie franche et bien dessinée que l'on puisse saisir au travers de tous les ornemens, qui ne soit pas absorbée par leur profusion. Le solo de cor, dont est précédé *l'andante* de cet air, a été fort bien exécuté par M. Gallay.

Reprenons le *libretto*. Au second tableau, Hermann suivi d'un ... nous ne savons trop // 9 // comment nommer son compagnon, nous dirions volontiers d'un *brigand*, si nous ne nous rappelions que le lecteur ignore encore que cet honnête fils de famille, jeté par la haine de son frère dénaturé hors de la maison paternelle, est, par opposition et par vertu, devenu chef de brigand. Estimable famille!!! Hermann vient donc furtivement revoir les lieux de son enfance auxquels tant de souvenirs le rattachent. Une romance qu'il entend derrière une croisée lui révèle la présence d'Amélie. Bientôt après, elle vient elle-même prier sur le théâtre et mêler sa voix aux chants religieux qui s'exécutent dans une église voisine. Deux étrangers, le casque baissé sur les yeux, l'abordent: nous ignorons comment et à quel propos Amélie leur raconte ses malheurs, la perte de son amant et sa douleur inconsolable. Hermann ne peut résister à ses plaintes; il lève la visière. Reconnaissance conditionnée, avec tous les transports, toutes les larmes et tous les embrassements usités en pareille circonstance! Mais, comme vous le devinez bien, Conrad vient troubler toute cette joie. Les deux frères ne peuvent se revoir sans se donner les marques les plus vives de leurs sentimens. Un combat à mort va avoir lieu entre Hermann et Conrad. Amélie se précipite entre eux, mais sa douleur et ses supplications ne peuvent désarmer ces cœurs de rocher. Les seigneurs de la cour, les femmes, tout s'en mêle. — Chœur.

Ce second tableau du premier acte renferme peut-être les plus beaux morceaux de l'ouvrage. Ce n'est pas de l'air de Rubini que nous voulons parler. Le musicien, en l'écrivant, nous semble avoir été exclusivement préoccupé du chanteur qui devait l'exécuter. Cet air est rempli de ces oppositions si extraordinairement rendues par Rubini entre la voix de poitrine et la voix de tête la plus aigue. Je le demande franchement: croit-on qu'excepté le petit nombre d'auditeurs à qui des études spéciales de chant en fait comprendre et apprécier toute la difficulté de ces transitions, ces cris, plutôt que ces sons, que Rubini emprunte à ses cordes les plus élevées aient un charme mélodique, produisent autre chose que de l'étonnement?

Mais, si nous passons au duo de la reconnaissance, aux magnifique chants d'église avec accompagnement d'orgue, et au final du premier acte, nous n'aurons à faire que des éloges sans restriction. C'est de la grande, de la belle musique: ces trois morceaux ne dépareraient aucune partition de Rossini. Il y a du mouvement, de l'orchestration et de la mélodie, c'est-à dire les conditions d'une musique complète.

Le second acte nous transporte dans un lieu isolé, dans un véritable repaire de brigands. Une vieille tour et une image de la vierge (pour les besoins du drame) sont placées des deux cotes de la scène. Hermann a échappé, on ne sait trop comment, à son frère, et rejoint ses dignes et vertueux compagnons. Il est le chef d'une bande de braves gens auxquels le préjugé a fait donner le nom de brigands. Le chœur des brigands et la chanson étaient indiqués par la situation; le fabricant du *libretto* se serait bien gardé d'y manquer. Les brigands se retirent; ils vont se livrer au sommeil tranquille réservé aux âmes pures.

Un saint hermite vient adresser une prière à l'image de la Vierge, et de là se dirige, avec un panier rempli d'alimens, vers la tour solitaire. Un vieillard paraît à une petite ouverture et reçoit les offrandes du bon hermite. Hermann

lui aussi s'est agenouillé devant l'image de la vierge et a lui adressé sa prière. Il aperçoit le religieux anachorète, le force à lui dévoiler ce mystère. Bientôt les portes de la tour volent en éclats et le malheureux vieillard est rendu à la liberté. Hermann reconnaît Maximilien en son père, qui, trompé par Conrad, l'avait maudit: il apprend de Maximilien son père lui-même le crime dont il a été la victime. Hermann ne peut plus se contenir, il se fait reconnaître de son père. Après les premiers épanchemens de la reconnaissance (celle-ci encore bien conditionnée aussi), Maximilien regarde plus attentivement tout cet entourage, et en fait à son fils quelques morales observations. Ce vieillard stupide, s'il eût comme nous été initié à la physiologie et à la philosophie du crime... que dis-je? ... du protestantisme social, n'eût pas eu l'idée de trouver rien à redire. O bienfait de la civilisation! — Hermann explique du mieux qu'il peut son étrange situation; et les brigands terminent par un chœur.

Ce second acte est très beau. Le chant des brigands, dont Rubini dit les couplets avec accompagnement des chœurs, a fait le plus grands plaisir. La prière à la vierge, chantée encore par Rubini, forme le second degré de ce *crescendo* de beautés musicales qui va éclater dans le duo entre Rubini-Hermann et Lablache-Maximilien. Il est difficile d'entendre un duo d'un plus bel effet dramatique et exécuté d'une manière aussi pathétique. Pour satisfaire à l'en- // 10 // -thousiasme [enthousiasme] du parterre, les deux chanteurs en ont répété les seize dernières mesures. Malheureusement cette ascension musicale qui devait naturellement trouver sa résolution dans le final, s'arrête ici. Le chœur des brigands est une vraie contredanse: rien n'y manque, pas même le cornet à piston qui accompagne à l'unisson la grosse voix de Lablache. Contredanse pour contredanse, j'aime mieux celles de Musard, non pas celles qu'il extrait, en défigurant un morceau d'opéra, mais celles qu'il sait si bien composer lui-même, quand il veut s'en donner la peine.

Nous nous retrouvons, au troisième acte, dans le château de Conrad. Le remords le poursuit toujours, — ce qui est, on l'avouera, quelque peu étonnant, — car il pouvait ouvrir à son père les portes de la tour. Il est furieux aussi de la haine qu'Amélie éprouve pour lui, plus vive encore depuis qu'elle a revu son Hermann. Le remords et la fureur se font mutuellement diversion dans son âme, et on ne sait jusques à quand durerait sa perplexité, sans l'arrivée d'Hermann et de sa bande, qui vient attaquer le château. Conrad est vaincu, et, dans sa fureur, il va, l'étourdi qu'il est, *se passer lui-même* au fil de l'épée de son frère; c'est, du moins, ainsi que le rapporte Hermann à son père, pour apaiser l'indignation qu'a soulevée, dans son cœur, cette butte fratricide. Après les premiers moments passés, les émotions calmées, nous nous attendions, avec bien d'autres, sans doute, à voir tout le monde s'embrasser, le père pardonner, les amants s'épouser; mais nous avions tous compté sans les brigands, qui ne lâchent pas si facilement leur chef. Ils viennent en effet redemander leur capitaine. Lié par des promesses sacrées, Hermann s'arrache aux bras de son père, aux larmes de son amante, et va rejoindre ses honorables compagnons..... de brigandage. Ainsi soit-il.

Deux grands airs de Tamburini se succèdent au commencement de ce troisième acte. Nous ferons, à leur égard, la même observation que pour celui du premier acte. Le chanteur a fait encore le plus grand tort au musicien. Celui-ci a voulu tirer parti de ce talent supérieur de vocalisation que lui offrait Tamburini; il a écrit des exercices qui font ressortir toute la flexibilité de la

voix du chanteur; mais nous ne trouvons pas encore, là-dessous, un air, de la musique.

Le trio entre Grisi, Rubini et Lablache, accompagné par quelques voix de femmes, est peut-être le morceau capital de l'ouvrage; ici, Mercadante a su merveilleusement employer, marier les trois voix de ses chanteurs, les présenter de la manière la plus favorable, sans négliger tous les moyens mélodiques et harmoniques, qui pouvaient donner à son trio un mérite intrinsèque, indépendant de ceux qui seraient appelés à le mettre en œuvre.

Nous mentionnerons encore avec éloge un air que chante Rubini, dans la scène qui précède ses adieux. Oh! que les chanteurs se trompent, s'ils favorisent, encouragent, réclament peut-être eux-mêmes ces sacrifices de la part des musiciens! Combien Rubini a été plus complètement satisfaisant, plus admirable dans ce dernier air, d'un style franc, que dans l'air de l'acte précédent, où ses cris de fausset ont excité des mouvements instinctifs de répugnance chez toutes les personnes qui ne trouvaient pas, dans leurs études spéciales, un moyen de réaction contre cette première impression pénible.

Cet ouvrage, sur les détails duquel nous venons de présenter notre jugement, se ressent de la précipitation avec laquelle il a été écrit. C'est ainsi que l'on peut s'expliquer la couleur indéterminée de l'ensemble, ces disparates nombreux que nous avons signalés. Nous ne voulons pas revenir sur les éloges que nous avons donnés à plusieurs morceaux de l'ouvrage; mais nous dirons que, même dans ces parties, l'on reconnaît le défaut de travail de ce seconde vue, qui comble l'harmonie, émonde les phrases et les notes parasites, qui dégage l'inspiration, et lui donne une tournure facile, une démarche assurée, qu'elle n'a presque jamais nativement. En musique comme en littérature, l'œuvre la plus coutante, qui se ressent le moins des efforts de l'auteur, est le plus souvent celle qui lui en a le plus coûté. Le génie sait entourer son inspiration de toutes les ressources de l'art, tout en déguisant le travail de science et de patience, sans lequel il n'y a pas d'œuvre durable.

L'on sait en effet que Mercadante, engagé par l'administration de Favart à écrire une partition pour le Théâtre-Italien de Paris, avait demandé un poème au célèbre Romani. Depuis plus de six mois, le musicien était à Paris, sans avoir reçu la première ligne du poète. La saison marchait rapide, et bientôt tout retard devenait irréparable. M. Crescini improvisa // 11 // alors le *libretto* que vous savez, et, grâce à M. Crescini, nous avons eu le nouvel opéra de Mercadante. En deux mois, le *maestro* a composé et dirigé l'étude de *Briganti*.

Nous pensons que Mercadante, après le départ de la compagnie italienne pour Londres, reverra, retravaillera sa partition, en fera disparaître les morceaux sans caractère et sans couleur qui font lâche, et donnera à ses inspirations la monture riche et brillante, sans laquelle le diamant le plus beau perd la majeure partie de son éclat.

Pour revenir à la thèse que nous avons développée en commençant notre article, nous ferons remarquer que le poème de Schiller présentait, au poète et au musicien, un caractère comique, tout fait, tout tracé, celui du *Brigand poltron*, si amusant dans le drame allemand: il n'y avait qu'à le prendre. Le poète, à la recommandation sans doute du musicien, l'a mis de

coté, parce que l'inspiration sérieuse nous est tellement sympathique, qu'en quelques jours nous écrivons trois actes d'une partition dramatique; et que Mercadante lui-même, qui a imprimé sur plusieurs de ses productions ce cachet *bouffe*, dont l'empreinte s'efface tous les jours d'avantage, a peut-être besoin aujourd'hui d'une surexcitation extraordinaire, d'un travail pénible, de suer sang et eau pour trouver un de ces motifs comiques, si familiers à l'école musicale italienne, qui a précédé la révolution rossinienne.

Comme nous publierons incessamment une appréciation musicale du talent de nos célèbres chanteurs italiens, nous nous bornerons à dire que Lablache, Rubini, Tamburini et Grisi ont été dignes d'eux-mêmes, c'est-à-dire, admirables.

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REVUE ET GAZETTE MUSICALE DE PARIS, 27 Mars 1836, pp. 99-101.

M. Romani, la providence des compositeurs d'Italie, qui avait promis de venir *scriturare un libretto per il signor Mercadante*, n'ayant pas rempli cette mission musicale et littéraire, force a été d'avoir recours à un autre *signor poeta*; et c'est ainsi que M. Crescini a été chargé de cette besogne dramatique. Il a donc pris pour sujet de son opéra, une fameuse tragédie allemande; mais, craignant de blesser les susceptibilités aristocratiques du public éminemment délicat qui fréquente le théâtre Favart, en lui présentant les *Brigands* de Schiller dans leur nature abrupte, M. Crescini nous a fait des brigands comme on en voit peu, ou comme on n'en voit pas; des brigands qui sont les plus honnêtes gens du monde, des brigands à l'eau rose, quoiqu'ils aient des barbes noires et qu'ils n'aient pas de rouge; des brigands vertueux enfin, qui brandissent bien quelque peu leurs poignards, mai seulement pour la forme, et dont tous les excès vont seulement à tenter une restauration en faveur du père de leur chef.

Il s'agit, dans le libretto de M. Crescini, comme dans la pièce de Schiller, d'une rivalité de pouvoir, et d'amour entre les deux fils de Maximilien, comte de Moor. L'aîné, qu'il affectionne, se fait chef de brigands par une sorte d'exaltation romantique, de vertu mal entendue; et son frère, après avoir fait enfermer son père, dont il a proclamé la mort, aspire à la main de sa cousine Amélie, qui le déteste, et chérit son cousin Hermann, le chef de brigands.

On voit dans tout cela les ingrédients qui constituent un opéra italien: *Il furore, l'amore, la gelosia*, et l'éternelle *felicità* avec ses nombreux *palpiti*.

Les auteurs actuels de *libretti* ont renoncé, nous ne savons trop pourquoi, à l'excellente forme des ouvrages coupés en deux actes pour se rapprocher de la manière française: c'est un tort. *I Briganti* sont donc en trois actes. Le premier commence par un chœur en *lieux communs de morale lubrique*, que le compositeur a peu *réchauffé des sons de sa musique*; mais cette introduction n'est là que pour préparer, annoncer un bel air en *fa* de Tamburini. Il commence par un solo de cor, dit avec la sureté, la grâce mélodique et le bon style qui caractérise le talent de M. Gallay.

Le cantabile: *Ove a me tu volga un guardo* est d'un beau caractère, et l'*agito* [*agitato*]:

Per lei che mi sprezza

Ond'ardo e deliro...

est plein de verve et se distingue par une vocalisation brillante que Tamburini rend admirablement. Nous remarquerons à ce sujet que Tamburini chanteur pur, correct, dont tous les traits sont avoinés par le goût, qui est plein d'expression et d'âme, produit moins d'effet que Rubini. Cela viendrait-il du peu de finesse d'appréciation de nos dilettanti français pour ce qui est délicat et vraiment artistique, et de leur penchant pour ce qui nous ramène à l'*urlo francese*? Il n'en devrait pas être ainsi, ne fût-ce que par esprit national.

Survient Amélie, nièce du vieux comte de Moor, annoncée par un chœur vague sur ces paroles quelque peu métaphysiques:

Comme un etereo — spirto di leguasi [*dileguasi*]

Fra la caligine — che il mondo accerchia,
 Ella invisibile — si strugge in lacrime,
 E l'età vergine — sfiora in sospir.

La diva Grisi-Amelia, attaque ici un air en *sol majeur*

Quando, o guerrier, mio splendido.

avec toute la hardiesse vocale qu'on lui connaît, prodiguant les cadences forcées, à tel point que la note martelé fait presque entendre un intervalle de tierce. Mais à côté de ces défauts, que d'entraînement, de verve, de poésie musicale! Sur un *si* haut, ténu, elle change trois fois le registre de sa voix, avec un art et une grâce infinis. Chanté ainsi, cet air qui, du reste, est d'une mélodie assez distinguée, a produit beaucoup d'effet. Le duo qui suit, entre Amelia et Corrado morceau de scène, est moins heureux.

Soit que ces menaces du tyran n'aillent pas à la muse paisible de M. Mercadante, soit qu'il n'ait pu guère s'inspirer du moyen si connu de cette écharpe ensanglantée que le cruel Corrado remet assez naïvement à sa cousine, pour lui prouver la mort de son amant, il en est résulté un duo sans couleur et sans caractère, une scène musicale démesurément longue. Enfin, Rubini vient, et après une ritournelle de clarinette, dite avec tout le charme qu'est capable d'y mettre M. Berr, le chanteur favori des habitués du théâtre Favart nous a dit, avec non moins de charme que l'habile instrumentiste, un suave cantabile sur ces paroles:

Questi due verdi salci

Piantati ai lieti giorni.

Dans l'allegro:

Vane speranze e sogni!

Juvarno io vi richiamo,

il a attaqué avec son audace habituelle, mais non pas avec son bonheur ordinaire, ces notes hautes qui frappent d'admiration les demi-dilettanti et qui ne sont le plus souvent qu'un tour de force de larynx. Le *bis* prévu et de rigueur, demandé par ces messieurs et ceux qui garnissaient la première banquette du parterre, on sait à quel titre, a offert au chanteur qu'avait échoué, l'occasion de // 100 // prendre sa revanche, et il est vrai de dire qu'il l'a reprise.

Le théâtre qui a changé dans la scène précédente, représente un site éminemment romantique, un lac, des montagnes, des saules pleureurs, une église gothique, tout cela brossé GROSSO MODO à l'italienne, c'est-à-dire poussé à l'effet et peint en quelques jours par M. Ferri, qui ne manque pas de talent. Dans l'église on entend le chant des morts. Les sons de l'orgue et d'une cloche, se mêlent à cette musique sacrée.

A vrai dire, c'est seulement ici que se révèle, que se montre le compositeur dramatique. Le style sévère, simple et pur de ce morceau, les accens religieux d'Amélie, sur le seuil de l'église, le chant si plein de mélancolie de Rubini-Hermann, qui se mêle bien à cette situation, tout cela est

d'un bel effet et vous impressionne profondément; et puis ils chantent un duo de tendresse comme on en entend partout. Disons pourtant que la cabalette de ce duo est bien écrite pour les deux voix, que le dessin mélodique en est varié, que les traits sont bien orchestrés et se croisent on ne peut plus artistement.

Corrado, *il crudel tiranno*, survient, et là, commence un trio, *con cori*, qui s'enchaîne au final du premier acte et qu'on peut considérer comme le seul morceau de quelque valeur, le morceau capital de la partition de M. Mercadante. Une belle et large mélodie domine à l'orchestre sans étouffer l'effet scénique. La voix de Tamburini se dessine bien là, éclate en un trait un peu trop scandé en musicien peut-être, sur ces paroles:

La rabbia mi preme,

M'arresta il terror!

Là, tourbillonne aussi par deux fois un *crescendo* du plus puissant effet et qui n'a que le tort de venir après celui du quatrième acte des *Huguenots*. La *coda* en *la* mineur de ce final tombe un peu dans les idées communes; mais l'auditeur n'a pas le temps de s'en apercevoir, émerveillé, enlevé qu'il est par l'expression si éminemment pathétique de mademoiselle Grisi.

Le second acte s'ouvre par un chœur de brigands, qui a bonne envie d'être original et qui semble y réussir un peu en passant rapidement d'ut mineur en mi bémol, et *vice versa*. Ce morceau est accompagné d'un orage et d'un orchestre assez riche. Hermann vient se mêler à l'orgie de ses subordonnés, et leur chante un boléro aussi en ut mineur, dont le refrain, répété par le chœur à la manière française, etc.

La vita dei briganti

È la vita del piacer.

Pour la couleur locale, nous aurions autant aimé quelque rondeau hongrois ou tyrolien bien caractéristique du pays où se passe l'action; mais il n'est pas possible, à la rigueur, qu'Hermann ait voyagé en Espagne et en ait rapporté le bolero qu'il chante à ses compagnons. Resté seul, il redevient religieux, et s'agenouille devant une image de la vierge, à qui il chante une prière accompagnée par les clarinettes et les violoncelles (M. Mercadante a usé fréquemment de ces instrumens dans son opéra). Ce chant, digne de celle à qu'il s'adresse, est dit par Rubini avec une pureté et une onction tout angélique.

La première partie du duo de la reconnaissance d'Hermann et de son père, qu'il vient de délivrer, est bien traitée; la phrase d'Hermann: *Sfoga, sfoga il tuo cordoglio*, est touchante et belle, et bien accompagnée par l'orchestre; Lablache et Rubini y sont très-pathétiques; mais les trois temps *en mi naturel* et en mouvement de valse, qui forme la seconde partie de ce duo, démesurément long, n'est pas heureux, et l'ensemble qui le termine est aussi commun par la mélodie que par les batteries de violon qui l'accompagnent.

Les brigands reviennent, et Hermann remet son père sous leur protection pour lui faire rendre le trône que son frère a usurpé, et ici commence un chant dit par Lablache, accompagné à l'unisson par le cornet à piston, mélodie qui semble spécialement destinée à certaine danse populaire que la police correctionnelle défend dans nos guinguettes par respect pour les

mœurs. C'est peut-être un trait de génie de la part du compositeur pour peindre les mauvais garnemens qui opèrent la restauration du vieux comte de Moor; mais comme du sublime au ridicule il n'y a qu'un pas, cette phrase nous semble une aberration musicale, ou, qu'on nous passe le mot, une *brioche* mélodique des plus singulières et des plus complètes.

Le troisième acte renferme beaucoup de musique, trop peut-être. D'abord un chœur en mi-bémol des courtisans de Corrado, d'un assez beau caractère, puis une longue scène avec récitatif obligé dans laquelle le tyran entend, d'après la belle expression de Schiller,⁽²⁾ le remords aboyer dans son chœur. Ce récitatif est suivi d'un air en la-bémol, dans lequel Tamburini descend admirablement une gamme chromatique. Il déploie toute la richesse de sa vocalisation dans un air guerrier en fa qui suit, et qui est accompagné par les trompettes et le chœur. — Amelia Grisi vient à son tour nous chanter un air en fa-mineur, accompagné de la douce clarinette de Berr, et d'une harpe assez inutile; puis vient encore une cavatine en sol, qui n'est pas sans analogie avec celle du // 101// *Crociato: l'aspetto adorabile d'un tenero oggetto*. Et puisque nous en sommes aux similitudes, nous ne pouvons passer sous silence celle que renferme le trio, fort beau d'ailleurs, dans lequel Hermann annonce qu'il a tué son frère involontairement. Sous ces paroles de son père:

Ciel, mi serbavi a piangere

Estinto figlio ancor!

une pédale et une rentrée identique en imitations, rappellent la fin de l'admirable trio de Mozart, au moment où Don Juan dit, en regardant mourir le commandeur:

E dal seno palpitante

Vego l'anima partir.

Seulement, dans ce trio de M. Mercadante, Amélie et Hermann remplissent les rôles que jouent le hautbois et le basson dans la partition de Mozart.

Et maintenant si l'on trouvait que nous avons beaucoup parlé des interprètes de M. Mercadante, et peut-être pas assez de l'œuvre du compositeur, nous serions en droit de renvoyer le reproche à l'auteur *dei Briganti*. On dirait maintenant que la seule préoccupation des compositeurs italiens est de fourrer leurs partitions de cavatines et de cabalettes, comme la seule pensée des compositeurs français est de mettre, dans un opéra, force romances, contredanses et galops.

Quoiqu'un peu froid et sévère, M. Mercadante a un style distingué, il possède bien son orchestre et sait écrire pour les voix. Son instrumentation est facile; sa manière de faire chanter les violoncelles rappelle le génie mélancolique de Méhul. Quand on peut réussir par une belle et fort création,

²Bien entendu, suivant la traduction française. (Note du Rédacteur)

par la puissance de son talent, on ne fait pas sa muse courtisane des chanteurs et des cantatrices, on croit en soi et l'on n'abdique pas son avenir. *Il Barbiere*, le *Freyschütz* [*Freischütz*] et *Robert-le-Diable*, écrasent ou soutiennent leurs interprètes, et n'ont pas besoin de s'appuyer sur eux pour vivre; *I Briganti* ne vivront qu'autant que le voudront bien Rubini, Tamburini, Lablache et la diva Grisi.

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La saison musicale est près de finir. Déjà Londres nous a emprunté les Italiens, et nous a envoyé en échange de Rubini le savant docteur Bowring, avec deux magnifiques projets de chemins de fer; le conservatoire ne nous doit plus que deux de ses admirables matinées; M^{me} Damoreau prend un congé au moment même où le printemps nous ramène le rossignol, comme s'il y avait mutuelle jalousie. Le trio des *Huguenots* veut bien recueillir encore deux ou trois fois par semaine jusqu'au mois de juin les applaudissemens de la foule et les palmes du martyre, mais déjà il parle aussi de congé. La fureur des concerts privés et publics commence enfin à se calmer; les variations ont presque épuisé leur fécondité stérile, et la romance exhale lentement ses derniers soupirs.

De tout ce mouvement musical de l'hiver, que nous reste-t-il surtout? Le regret de la mort de Bellini, la possession des *Huguenots* de Meyerbeer, la vague espérance du réveil de Rossini; et puis encore de vives querelles, une tentative de guerre civile dans l'empire de la musique.

Dès l'ouverture du Théâtre-Italien, on a voulu se séparer en deux camps: on a déclaré qu'on prenait parti contre l'Italie ou contre l'Allemagne; on s'est efforcé de renouveler l'ancienne dispute de l'harmonie et de la mélodie; on a beaucoup parlé aussi de musique nationale, avec force éloges de Beethoven, de Mozart ou de Rossini; on a essayé de rendre la critique musicale, dogmatique et exclusive.

Mais, au fond, en mettant à part les préoccupations de personnes et les influences industrielles, toute cette querelle a-t-elle été bien sérieuse? Nous, qui ne savons plus nous passionner pour rien, aurions-nous recueilli au fond de notre âme le peu qui nous reste de sentiment et de foi, pour nous faire de la musique une dernière religion, et quand nous disputons sur elle, est-ce une ardente et pieuse controverse que nous élevons pour défendre des dogmes chéris? J'ai peur en vérité qu'il n'en soit rien et que la musique elle-même ne soit dans tout cela pour fort peu de chose.

Voyons-nous en effet en présence, des systèmes bien arrêtés? A-t-on une règle constante dans l'éloge ou dans le blâme? Non, sans doute. On loue à chaque instant dans les œuvres de ceux qui sont morts les mêmes procédés, la même facture qu'on déclare ne pas pouvoir souffrir dans les œuvres des contemporains. On attaque à la fois les *Huguenots* et les ouvrages italiens par des raisons tout à fait opposées qu'on ne s'inquiète pas le moins du monde d'accorder ensemble. Quelle est la cause de cette apparente confusion? C'est qu'il est impossible à la critique musicale d'avoir un autre système qu'un éclectisme sévère mais juste, et qu'elle s'embarrasse elle-même dans ses propres argumens dès qu'elle veut se faire intolérante.

Comment, en effet, se soustraire à l'autorité du passé? Peut-on faire table rase en musique? Comment ne pas associer dans une admiration commune tout ce qu'ont produit de beau les écoles de l'Allemagne, de la France, de l'Italie? Et vraiment on ne l'essaie pas. On accepte sans murmurer les gloires toutes faites; on se prosternerait même volontiers devant toutes les notes des maîtres qui ne sont plus, on les compterait presque afin d'en consacrer le nombre comme les rabbins on fait pour les lettres des livres saints. Est-il possible ensuite de se venger sur le présent, de n'avoir plus

d'estime que pour un seul genre, et de proscrire tous les autres, seulement à partir de telle ou de telle année du XIX^e siècle?

Aussi n'est-ce point la musique elle-même qui a été le sujet réel de la discussion.

Ce n'est pas à la musique italienne, par exemple, que les adversaires du Théâtre Italien ont voulu s'en prendre.

Ils se garderaient bien de hasarder un anathème contre tous les opéras de Rossini qui ont précédé *Guillaume Tell*; ils professent pour l'homme de génie et pour ses compositions une admiration trop sincère. S'ils attaquent ses imitateurs, c'est probablement pour n'avoir pas fait d'aussi bonne musique italienne que la sienne. Quant à Bellini, il avait essayé de se frayer une route nouvelle, de s'affranchir des traditions, de secouer le joug de tout ce qui était devenu formule. Sa chevelure blonde, sa taille svelte, sa physionomie bien plutôt anglaise que méridionale, ses inspirations rêveuses et tendres, son nouveau penchant pour les modulations savantes, sa conversation tout empreinte de spiritualisme et le succès de sa musique en Allemagne auraient pu faire douter qu'il appartint réellement à l'Italie. L'Angleterre, au moins autant que la France, était folle de lui et semblait reconnaître en lui avec amour un fils de ces Normands qui possédèrent si longtemps la plus belle et la plus riche des îles de la Méditerranée. Bellini aurait donc pu compter bien plutôt sur les éloges que sur l'antipathie des antagonistes de la musique italienne.

Or, ses opéras ont occupé la scène du Théâtre-Favart pendant la plus grande partie de la saison qui vient de se terminer. Les *Puritains* ont reparu sans cesse, et jamais jusqu'au dernier jour, la salle n'a été plus remplie, le public plus recueilli, les applaudissemens plus frénétiques. La *Norma*, le *Pirate*, la *Sonnambula*, les *Montecchi* ont été repris tour à tour; et si, peu de jours avant le départ des Italiens, un nouvel opéra a été soumis au jugement du public dilettante, c'est un opéra dont Bellini semble avoir inspiré les meilleurs morceaux.

Mercadante, en effet, a écrit les *Brigands* sous l'impression du succès des *Puritains*. On remarque aisément dans les *Brigands* la recherche des mêmes effets, la même simplicité de forme; la phrase musicale est courte, les mouvemens lents sont préférés, la mélodie a, dans les morceaux qui ont été applaudis à juste titre, un caractère marqué de tristesse et de grâce; l'andante d'un air chanté au premier acte, le duo pathétique entre Rubini et Lablache, un trio de troisième acte par mademoiselle Grisi, le finale du premier acte, le duo pathétique entre Rubini et Lablache, un trio de troisième acte, réveillent évidemment le souvenir de Bellini. Mercadante était un des plus anciens amis du jeune et infortuné compositeur; il l'avait connu et aimé dès son entrée au Conservatoire. Lorsque Bellini était près de mourir, Mercadante était arrivé à Paris en toute hâte, les larmes aux yeux, pour l'embrasser une dernière fois.

Je ne sais quelle fatale circonstance s'est opposée à ce triste adieu; mais ne dirait-on pas que pendant que Mercadante écrivait en quelques jours cet opéra, qu'un retard de Romani le forçait à improviser, l'ombre plaintive de Bellini soit venue par intervalles se pencher sur le piano du compositeur, effleurer lentement les touches émues et leur faire chanter quelque plaintive mélodie? Seulement, lorsqu'arrivaient les mouvemens rapides, tumultueux, lorsque le mélodrame du livret exigeait un grand bruit, et lorsqu'il fallait presser les notes d'un étincelant allegro, alors l'inspiration se retirait, la

mélodie devenait vulgaire, les formules les plus communes remplaçaient l'expression, et l'ombre harmonieuse avait cessé de chanter.

C'est donc Bellini et son souvenir qui ont eu réelle- // 2 // -ment [réellement] cette année les honneurs du Théâtre-Italien; et ce n'est point à ses compositions qu'on a fait la guerre. On a rendu justice universelle à l'effort qu'avait tenté le jeune compositeur pour spiritualiser la musique italienne, pour la rendre interprète des sentimens les plus intimes de l'âme, pour inventer des mélodies simples, expressives. On l'a encouragé à ravir au chant la brillante parure de notes dont il était chargé, à lui ôter ce ruban des fioritures qui enlaçait les mesures entre elles, et courait d'un accord à l'autre comme un serpent à mille couleurs. On lui a passé sa faiblesse dans les ensembles, un peu de brièveté dans la pensée, d'uniformité même, en récompense des impressions qu'il savait produire, des pleurs qu'il savait faire couler.

Ce qu'on a le plus vivement attaqué du Théâtre Italien, c'est tout ce qui n'est pas la musique. C'est l'administration, c'est le public, c'est le rapport de la musique avec le livret, c'est la mise en scène, c'est en partie l'exécution. On n'a point blâmé le tableau, on en a critiqué la toile, le prix, les admirateurs et la bordure.

Les compositeurs d'Allemagne, d'Italie, de France, agissent l'un sur l'autre par voie de mutuelle imitation. Il y a tel de nos compositeurs qu'on pourrait croire sorti du conservatoire de Naples, et tel autre qui s'est fait élève de Beethoven ou même d'une symphonie de Beethoven. Meyerbeer a longtemps écrit des opéras pour l'Italie, Rossini ne s'est-il pas transformé et n'a-t-il pas transformé l'art avec lui en écrivant *Guillaume Tell*? En musique, pas plus qu'en peinture, on ne peut guère aujourd'hui distinguer les écoles.

Il faut donc bien s'entendre sur ce qu'on appelle le système italien. On a longtemps reproché à nos opéra-comiques de placer le musicien après l'auteur de la pièce, et de mettre le chant au service du couplet; on a presque fait un crime à Grétry d'avoir étudié la déclamation pour composer des airs, et de s'être fait le serviteur de ce qu'il appelait la convenance dramatique. Alors, disait-on, pas d'inspiration, pas de musique possible. Le métier du compositeur consistait à aiguïser sur son piano les traits d'esprit du vaudevilliste, à rendre une interrogation par une gamme ascendante, une folle répartie par un arpège, une saillie par le ricanement d'un trille grotesque. A la musique le premier rang, s'écria-t-on avec enthousiasme! Qu'importent les paroles? Ce qu'on demande au poète c'est un canevas, un prétexte, des syllabes sonores et mesurées. Voyez les théâtres d'Italie! s'embarrasse-t-on de justifier les entrées et les sorties? Exige-t-on la couleur locale, l'exactitude historique, le progrès de l'intrigue; analyse-t-on même le sens précis des paroles?

On ne demande qu'un poème suffisamment intéressant, des situations qui se prêtent au développement musical et des mots harmonieusement arrangés de la belle langue de Métastase. La musique alors est à peu près dans une convenance générale avec le poème, mais elle se prête aussi par le vague de son expression à toutes les rêveries, à toutes les passions de l'auditeur.

Rossini n'a-t-il pas souvent fait marcher ses héros à la mort sur des airs dont plus tard on pu s'emparer les contredanses?

Aujourd'hui on a produit une réaction contre ces théories. Mais elles sont toujours la base de ce qu'on appelle le système italien.

Voyez, pour exemple, l'opéra de *Mercadante*.

Le poème est une imitation de la tragédie des *Brigands* de Schiller, ou plutôt du mélodrame de *Robert, chef des brigands*. Mais l'action et les caractères primitifs ont été singulièrement modifiés par le travail de M. Jacques Crescini. Il lui fallait d'abord, pour suivre les traditions en vigueur, adoucir ce que son sujet pouvait avoir de trop énergique, user tous les reliefs, arranger avec décence et modération les mœurs de ses personnages, de peur qu'un geste violent ou quelques accès de passion dramatique, ne vint à rompre le rythme, à briser la période du compositeur, à jeter le désordre dans la phrase musicale.

Or, rien n'est certes plus calme et plus pacifique que ce poème annoncé par un titre formidable. Il y a dans l'ouvrage un tyran, basse chantante, qui, à force de calomnier son frère, l'a fait exiler par son père abusé; ce malheureux père a ensuite été enfermé dans une tour en ruines, et condamné à périr de faim par son fils dénaturé, qui l'a fait passer pour mort et a usurpé son trône.

Voilà certes bien de crimes, mais comme l'odieux en est atténué par les remords qu'il éprouve! comme l'amour dont il est possédé pour la jeune Amélie lui sert d'excuse! comme il demande d'une voix tendre et plaintive, à l'air embaumé, «le souffle qui pourra inspirer à Amélie une parole d'amour!»

D'ailleurs, hormis le tyran, tout le monde, dans cette pièce, est la vertu même. Amélie est fidèle jusqu'à la mort à Hermann, le frère exilé. Celui-ci s'est fait le chef d'honnêtes brigands, les meilleures gens du monde, chevaliers errans enrégimentés, redresseurs de torts, «amis de ce cette innocente indépendance qui ne viole aucune loi.»

Hermann retrouve et sauve de la faim son père, bon vieillard crédule, qui ne veut de mal à personne, et qui après avoir gémi avec Hermann, se laisse conduire et habiller en roi par les brigands; rentre dans son palais sans obstacle; pleure avec Amélie pendant que ses enfants s'égorgent; pardonne au tyran qui meurt, à Hermann qui l'a tué sans le vouloir, aux brigands qui viennent réclamer leur chef et lui enlèvent le seul fils qui lui reste. Amélie meurt de douleur en voyant partir Hermann, les brigands plaignent tout le monde, et le père reste seul avec ses larmes.

Pour aplanir encore la route qu'avait à parcourir le musicien, M. Crescini a pris soin de rejeter dans le récitatif la plus grande partie de l'action. Les airs et les morceaux d'ensemble n'arrivent guère que pendant les repos du drame, comme une réflexion sur l'action qui s'achève ou sur les malheurs qu'on prévoit encore.

Enfin, le tout est symétriquement disposé, les cavatines sont opposées aux cavatines, les duos aux duos, les chœurs aux chœurs. Les périodes peuvent s'arrondir à loisir, les chants se répéter régulièrement et passer de rôle en rôle sans qu'il y ait le moindre contre-sens apparent entre la situation

d'esprit de chaque personnage et la mélodie qu'il redit à son tour. Voyez quelle symétrie:

Au premier acte, un air de basse, un air de soprano, puis un duo de soprano et de basse;

Une romance pour le ténor, une romance pour le soprano, un duo de soprano et de ténor;

Le tout couronné, par un finale, fort beau, du reste, où chantent le soprano, le ténor et la basse avec tous les chœurs.

Le second acte est rempli presque en entier par un grand duo.

Au troisième, c'est comme au premier: un air de basse, un air de soprano, un duo de basse et de soprano;

Puis un trio de ténor, de basse et de soprano avec tous les chœurs.

Sans doute le musicien n'a pas à réclamer du poète une plus grande complaisance. Il est difficile d'abdiquer plus complètement toute prétention dramatique. On comprend que la musique composée sur de pareils ou- // 2 // -vrages [ouvrages] soit bien moins dramatique que lyrique. Les morceaux peuvent aisément se détacher et se chanter dans un salon; le public dilettante peut n'arriver que pour entendre l'air favori, l'intérêt du drame ne lui tendra pas de pièges et ne ravira pas à d'autres occupations la fin de sa soirée; Rubini peut se croiser les bras et se reposer dans la perfection de son chant; si Lablache est grand comédien, c'est que cela lui fait plaisir, rien n'y l'oblige. Les chœurs ne jouent guère dans tout cela que le rôle des spectateurs. Ils s'étonnent, pleurent ou se réjouissent toujours pour le compte d'autrui. Qui peut donc leur reprocher de se ranger en ligne, pour mieux voir, des deux côtés de la scène? Je ne vois pas non plus pourquoi il serait défendu au corps des basses de serrer le poing et d'étendre le bras vers la terre, tandis que tous les autres choristes lèvent la main droite vers le ciel en même temps qu'ils attaquent une note élevée. Ils auraient vraiment grand' peine à inventer une autre pantomime.

Aussi ce n'est point pour les personnages qui sont en scène que se passionnent les auditeurs, c'est pour les acteurs eux-mêmes. C'est mademoiselle Grisi, Rubini, Lablache ou Tamburini qu'on applaudit, bien plutôt que leur rôle.

De belle musique, composée sur un tel poème, pourra être brillante, touchante, passionnée, mais elle sera nécessairement calme et symétriquement drapée comme une statue antique ennemie de l'action et du geste.

Alors, l'importance de l'exécution est doublée. On étudie les détails et les nuances, on s'extasie sur la perfection d'un trait, on frémit de plaisir lorsque Rubini lance quelque-une de ses trois ou quatre notes aiguës, si éclatantes et si douloureuses à la fois. On admire la rare agilité de la voix de Tamburini, les délicates broderies que dessine mademoiselle Grisi, si bien qu'il faut une sorte d'initiation pour arriver à l'enthousiasme.

Ce système n'est-il pas un peu étroit et borné? La musique ne puise-t-elle pas une nouvelle vie dans une union plus intime avec le drame; ne trouve-t-elle pas alors des effets plus variés, plus puissants? Je le crois sans doute, et Rossini a depuis long-temps décidé la question, quand il a abandonné tout à fait le cadre italien pour composer *Guillaume Tell*. Mais est-ce une raison pour proscrire ce plaisir délicat qu'on va chercher au bouffes; pour condamner cette merveilleuse étude des ressources de la voix humaine et de tous les effets que peuvent produire sur l'oreille et dans l'âme les nuances d'expression, les différens degrés d'intensité du son; faut-il enfin anathématiser ce culte du chant pour lui-même?

C'est donc une bonne nouvelle à donner que celle du retour des quatre chanteurs Italiens à la saison prochaine. Tamburini qui chante à ravir le rôle de Conrad dans les *Brigands*, et dont l'engagement expirait au mois d'avril, a contracté avant de partir pour Londres un engagement nouveau.

Il faut souhaiter seulement que l'orchestre soit mieux conduit désormais, que le chœurs, s'il est possible, chantent avec plus d'ensemble, et que l'Italie nous envoie de bons ouvrages.

J'aurais voulu ajouter ici quelques mots sur quelques-uns des concerts qui ont été donnés cet hiver; sur les soirées trop rares, par exemple, de M. Baillot. La dernière avait lieu le jour même de l'anniversaire de la mort de Beethoven. C'était une touchante solennité. La musique du grand maître en a fait presque tous les frais, avec un fort beau quintette d'Onslow et un concerto de Viotti. Tout a été dit sur le talent de M. Baillot. La grâce, l'énergie, la verve, la puissance, que manque-t-il à ce prodigieux artiste, le premier peut-être des artistes français? La sérénade de Beethoven [Beethoven], si spirituelle, si pleine de jeunesse et d'amour, a été exécutée comme tous les autres morceaux avec une grande perfection.

M. Hillier a joué un concerto de Beethoven pour le piano, et une des plus belles sonates du même auteur, avec beaucoup de talent. La manière franche, large et vigoureuse du pianiste convient parfaitement à cette musique profonde et puissante. M. Hillier a cherché naïvement à faire comprendre Beethoven; c'est un beau succès que d'avoir réussi.

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