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# Parlor Games: Italian Music and Italian Politics in the Parisian Salon

MARY ANN SMART

The unity of Italy was forged outside of Italy, by the exiles.  
—Raffaello Barbiera

## BEYOND “VA PENSIERO”

This grand claim was voiced a century ago by the journalist and historian Raffaello Barbiera, a full-throated champion of the values of the Italian Risorgimento. Barbiera's politics have become as unfashionable as his deliciously gossipy narrative style, although his books on the cultural life of nineteenth-century Venice and Milan remain among the most textured and most affectionate portraits of the period.<sup>1</sup> Even

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“L'unità d'Italia fu preparata all'estero dagli esuli, chi ad essa conciliavano le simpatie riluttanti degli stranieri.” The epigraph is from Raffaello Barbiera, *La principessa Belgiojoso, i suoi amici e nemici—il suo tempo* (Milan: Treves, 1902), p. 97.

<sup>1</sup>Ever since Antonio Gramsci's influential critiques of Italian cultural politics appeared in the late 1940s, the heroic rhetoric of nationalism and idealism that inspired the architects of Italian Unification has been regarded at best as out of touch with reality, at worst as protofascist. On past and current attitudes to the Risorgimento, see Lucy Riall,

if Barbiera sometimes sounds like a cheerleader, his conviction that exiles were central to the Risorgimento reflects a historiography that can appreciate oblique connections, one that looks beyond the revolutionary confrontations and political horse trading that have dominated histories of the Risorgimento. This attention to the peripheries finds a parallel in Barbiera's turn away from official or public events such as speeches or battles in favor of the more subtle shaping of opinion and forging of communities that went on in cafés, on street corners, and in salons.

What was gossipy and amateurish in 1902 has since been reborn as good historical method.

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*The Italian Risorgimento: State, Society, and National Unification* (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 1–10; and John A. Davis, “Rethinking the Risorgimento?” in *Risorgimento in Modern Italian Culture: Revisiting the Nineteenth-Century Past in History, Narrative and Cinema*, ed. Norma Bouchard (Cranbury, NJ: Rosemont, 2005), pp. 27–55.

"Histories of private life" have acquired a prestige derived from their ability to illuminate interior aesthetic experiences, a trend that has stimulated among musicologists a lively interest in unofficial repertoires and private settings for performance. Yet studies of music's role in nineteenth-century Italian politics have tended to focus on public performances and official venues. In his study of the ties between opera and society, historian Theodore Rabb telescoped the key components of the conventional narrative—from an operatic premiere, to the allegorical decoding of the opera's plot by an alert, inflamed public, to the spread of its infectious melodies and subversive content beyond the walls of the theater. "Milanese from all walks of life could be heard humming Giuseppe Verdi's 'Va, Pensiero' only days after the première of *Nabucco* in 1842. Verdi's is the most famous case of a composer who aroused the wrath of authorities over content that they (and audiences) regarded as subversive. The conspiracies, assassinations, and calls to liberty of his early works . . . were understood as comments on Italy's subjection to the Austrians, sparking public demonstrations."<sup>2</sup>

Each of these three sentences contains a claim whose accuracy has been called into question by recent research. Hard evidence of political significance attached to opera in early-nineteenth-century Italy is scarce, given the climate of restrictive censorship that reigned at the time. Yet believers and skeptics alike tend to share an intuitive belief that opera was somehow vital to Italian political consciousness. They further share a tacit understanding that the central questions concern the actions and the opinions of large groups—audiences at the Teatro alla Scala, crowds in the piazza, cleaning ladies singing tunes from *Nabucco*. If we are to continue to grapple with the old question about the role of music in the Risorgimento, it may be time to turn away from the public arena and to investigate instead the ways that private networks and inti-

mate performance venues operated as crucibles of opinion, as sites for social bonding, and as screens for projecting new images of the nation. In what follows I will explore the possibilities of such an approach by focusing on an underexposed corner of the musical culture of the 1830s: songs created by Italian exiles and expatriates resident in Paris, the very community lionized by Raffaello Barbiera.

#### GRIDANDO LIBERTÀ!

For an Italian in Paris in the 1830s, the comfort of one's existence could almost be calculated by proximity to the Théâtre-Italien. Composers and musicians—or at least an elite few of them—were sought after and fêted. Rossini's arrival in 1823 had stoked the demand for new works by Italians. The vogue reached a peak early in 1835 when both Bellini and Donizetti received their first commissions to compose new works for the Théâtre-Italien. Donizetti's *Marino Faliero* and Bellini's *I puritani* were premiered within six weeks of each other; their conjunction provoked a minor media frenzy.<sup>3</sup>

But in the 1830s the city also saw an influx of displaced literati and political figures who had been driven out of Italy after the unsuccessful revolutions of 1831. The French government took an officially sympathetic attitude to these exiles, perhaps to compensate for its failure to support the rebels materially during the uprisings.<sup>4</sup> In his biography of the Princess Belgiojoso, Barbiera describes the exiles' living conditions with novelistic flair. He depicts them as clustered in the old alleys of the Quartier Latin and other dingy neighborhoods, many of which had been erased by Hausmannization by the time Barbiera tried to track them down at the turn of the century:

The wreckers' hammers have not yet destroyed the rue Quincampoix, near Boulevard Sébastopol, nor the long, narrow, shadowy, filthy rue de Vénise, that

<sup>2</sup>Theodore K. Rabb, "Opera, Musicology, and History," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 36 (2006), 323. (For "histories of private life," see *A History of Private Life*, ed. Philippe Ariès and Georges Duby, vols. 1–5 [Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987–98]).

<sup>3</sup>Philip Gossett, "Music at the Théâtre-Italien," in *Music in Paris in the Eighteen-Thirties*, ed. Peter Bloom (Stuyvesant, NY: Pendragon, 1987), pp. 327–64.

<sup>4</sup>On France's failure to come to the aid of the Italian rebels, see Alan J. Reinerman, "Metternich, the Powers, and the 1831 Italian Crisis," *Central European History* 10 (1977), 206–19.

horrifying profanation of the name of the most artistic city in the world! . . . This is the Paris of the Middle Ages: a fetid maze of twisted streets suffocated by tall, cramped houses and greenish oozing foam. Above the narrow doors hang old smoke-stained placards for inns where the guests pay by the night; and at night scrawny, hairless dogs that scabble through the filth for bits of bone mix with the squalid shades of the old and equally malnourished prostitutes. . . .

[The exiles] were young, full of hope and brio: they could even laugh at their own poverty. . . . The poorest among them received a small subvention from the French government. . . . They worked all day, studying, writing, and giving lessons, traversing kilometers across the immense metropolis, under the baking sun, under the belting rain, in the snow, in that city of huge distances. And in the evening . . . they all gathered at an Italian *traiteur*, a certain Paolo, in the rue Le Peletier near the Opéra: there they had a room reserved for them alone, on a mezzanine, with minimal prices and minimal repasts, washed down with water from the well, if not from the Seine. But isn't good cheer worth more than the most effervescent champagne? Celebrations, greetings, and patriotic cheers nourished these meals.<sup>5</sup>

Among the new arrivals were a number of figures who would become important in the fashionable operatic world: Agostino Ruffini, who revised the libretto for Donizetti's *Marino Faliero*, his brother Giovanni, who would write the libretto for *Don Pasquale*, and the journalist Michele Accursi, who became Donizetti's business agent in Paris.<sup>6</sup> The Ruffinis had been school friends of the revolutionary leader Giuseppe Mazzini, and they and Accursi were founding members of Mazzini's secret society, the "Giovane Italia." Three of the four singers who sang the lead roles in *Marin Faliero* and *Puritani* also had ties to the revolutionary movement: the basses Luigi Lablache and Antonio Tamburini would a few years later appear at

benefit evenings for Mazzini's philanthropic causes in London, and the soprano Giulia Grisi was drawn into revolutionary circles through her companion, the tenor Mario, who was a friend and lifelong acolyte of Mazzini.<sup>7</sup>

Perhaps the most important link between the aristocratic world of the Théâtre-Italien and that of the political exiles was the poet Carlo Pepoli, author of the libretto for *I puritani*. The oldest son and heir of a prominent Bolognese land-owning family, Pepoli fell in with the revolutionary generation of the 1820s and served in the provisional government that briefly held power in the province of Romagna after the 1831 uprising. When the rebellion was quashed, the positions Pepoli had held as head of the *Guarda provinciale* and as prefect for the cities of Pesaro and Urbino earned him imprisonment in the Spielberg, a sentence that was commuted to exile thanks to French intervention.<sup>8</sup> Once he arrived in Paris he renewed his acquaintance with Rossini and took on a few libretto commissions to supplement his main income as a tutor of Italian.<sup>9</sup>

What little attention Pepoli has received from historians of opera has been tinged with condescension. He figures in biographies of Bellini as the fallback to whom Bellini turned after breaking with Felice Romani, and as a neophyte who required instruction in the basics of operatic expression.<sup>10</sup> However, an address that Pepoli

<sup>7</sup>The connections with Lablache, Mario, and Mario's common-law wife Giulia Grisi are documented only from about 1841, once Mazzini had moved to London, where all three singers participated in the Italian season each year. On the politics of the latter two singers, see Elizabeth Forbes, *Mario and Grisi: A Biography* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1985); and Stefano Ragni, "Giuseppe Mazzini e Giulia Grisi," *Bolletino della Domus Mazziniana* 1 (1989), 29–49. <sup>8</sup>For details of Pepoli's early life, see Sandra Saccone, "Carlo Pepoli," in *Giacomo Leopardi e Bologna: Libri, immagini e documenti*, ed. Cristina Bersani and Valeria Roncuzzi Roversi-Monaco (Bologna: Pàtron, 2001), pp. 330–39; and Giuseppe Vecchi, "Un poeta e melico: Carlo Pepoli tra Bologna, Parigi, e Londra," in *L'Italie dans l'Europe romantique: Confronti letterari e musicali*, ed. Anna Rosa Poli and Emanuele Kanceff, vol. 2 (Moncalieri: Centro interuniversitario di ricerche sul "Viaggio in Italia," 1996), pp. 585–608.

<sup>9</sup>Pepoli also wrote the libretti for Vaccai's *Giovanna Grey* (Théâtre-Italien, 1836) and Michael Costa's *Malek-Adel* (King's Theatre, London, 1837).

<sup>10</sup>We owe to Pepoli's inexperience one of Bellini's most informative letters on operatic expression, the 1834 com-

<sup>5</sup>Barbiera, *La principessa Belgiojoso*, pp. 96–98.

<sup>6</sup>The references to Accursi in Mazzini's correspondence are numerous and complex: Mazzini and his intimates spent several years in the early 1830s trying to determine whether or not he was a papal spy. The verdict of history seems to be that he was not and was always loyal to Giovine Italia, but the evidence is murky; see the informative biographical note on Accursi in Mazzini, *Scritti editi e inediti* [Mazzini Edizione Nazionale], vol. V (Imola: Galeati, 1910–), p. 109.

delivered to prize-winning students in Bologna in 1830 reveals not only a surprisingly broad grasp of operatic repertoire but also some forceful ideas about how music could provoke political feeling. Pepoli adopts a modern aesthetic agenda, condemning vocal ornamentation as a dilution of dramatic sense and attacking imitation as cheapening music's inherent, nonverbal language. After touching on exemplary passages from operas by Morlacchi, Vaccai, and Bellini, Pepoli turns to the Marseillaise, arguing that it melds music and poetry perfectly to arouse feeling and provoke action: "for this song, the people fight, win, triumph: Europe and the world shouted 'Liberty!'"<sup>11</sup>

The Italian phrase Pepoli uses here, "gridavano Libertà," strikingly anticipates the duet "Suoni la tromba" in *I puritani*, in which the two basses step outside of the opera's dreamy and nonteological plot for an isolated moment of patriotic fervor. For their homeland they will take up arms and gladly face death:

Suoni la tromba, e intrepido  
Io pugnerò da forte,  
Bello è affrontar la morte  
Gridando: "Libertà!"

munication that includes the passage: "Carve it in your head in adamantine letters. Opera must make people weep, feel horrified, must kill through singing." On Pepoli's contribution to the opera, see Pierluigi Petrobelli, "Bellini and Paisiello: Further Documents on the Birth of *I puritani*," in *Music in the Theater: Essays on Verdi and Other Composers* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), pp. 176–92, here 179; originally published as "Bellini e Paisiello: Altri documenti sulla nascita dei *Puritani*," in *Il melodramma italiano dell'Ottocento: Studi e ricerche per Massimo Mila* (Turin: G. Einaudi, 1977), pp. 351–63. For an alternative reading of the *Puritani* libretto and the dramaturgical opportunities it afforded Bellini, see chap. 3 of my *Mimomania: Music and Gesture in Nineteenth-Century Opera* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

<sup>11</sup>The passage reads in full: "If music and poetry work in concert, they can vanquish any listener. The proof lies in the Marseillaise. Without the music the poetry is not beautiful: without the poetry the music is not complete: when the poetry and music are joined, it becomes a superb composition! For it the people fought: vanquished, triumphed: Europe and the world shouted Liberty! This is the most important event that can be narrated in the modern history of music" (Pepoli, "Del dramma musicale. Discorso accademico," in *Prose e poesie di Carlo Pepoli: Prose* [Bologna: Zanichelli, 1880], p. 191). The talk was delivered at Bologna's Liceo musicale in 1830, but was first published only in a collection of Pepoli's works in the 1860s.

(Let the trumpet sound, and fearless I'll fight with all my strength. It is beautiful to face death shouting "liberty.")

Bellini responded with alarm to the hot-headed patriotism of Pepoli's poetry for this number. He wrote to his poet of "a liberal bent that terrifies me" and correctly predicted that certain key words—especially "libertà"—would have to be changed for the opera's export to Italy.<sup>12</sup> He might also have pointed out that the fierce calls for freedom had little or no justification in the plot. In the duet prior to this point the two bass characters have been discussing the marriage plans of the heroine, Elvira, and the homeland they are suddenly willing to die for is England under Cromwell! But Bellini raised no such objections, and the piece was an immediate, massive success.

The day after the premiere Bellini wrote to his Neapolitan friend Francesco Florimo that

all the French seem to have become mad, they made such a noise, such cries, that it seemed as if they were astonished to find themselves so transported: but people say that the stretta [i.e., cabaletta] of the duet attacked the nerves of everyone present. . . . The entire parterre rose to their feet at the impact of this stretta, screaming, demanding encores, and screaming again.<sup>13</sup>

Mark Everist has plausibly suggested that the frenzy was provoked more by the buzzing energy of the two bass voices combined, an unprecedented sonority at the time, than by the duet's political message.<sup>14</sup> But we should also factor in the force of Pepoli's verses with their promotion of martyrdom and the utter regularity of the music's marchlike phrasing, rare in Bellini's ethereal style. "Suoni la tromba" is a perplexing historical anomaly: an almost isolated example of an extroverted, overtly political statement heard at the Théâtre-Italien, and

<sup>12</sup>Letter of 5 January 1835; Luisa Cambi, *Bellini Epistolario* (Turin: Mondadori, 1943), p. 498.

<sup>13</sup>Letter of 26 January 1835; Cambi, *Bellini Epistolario*, p. 501.

<sup>14</sup>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), pp. 281–308.

an equally rare link between Pepoli's political persona and his role as poet-for-hire. But such overt calls for revolution represent just one possible "political" style. They are not necessarily the most forceful or influential variety of intervention.

#### ELVIRA STEPS OFF THE STAGE

Amid the piecemeal Pepoli picked up during these years was the poetry for a pair of song collections by Rossini and Saverio Mercadante, published in 1835 and 1836, respectively.<sup>15</sup> The two collections clearly converse with one another, suggesting that they may have been conceived for the same audience, or that Mercadante's songs sought to capitalize on the success of the recent publication by the elder statesman Rossini. The link between the two collections is revealed first of all by their titles: Rossini's rather generic *Soirées musicales* becomes in Mercadante's hands the more evocative *Soirées italiennes*. For Rossini, Pepoli penned an assembly of eight faux-folk poems whose images, verse rhythms, and pastoral allusions create a vision of Italy that is predominantly nostalgic and touristic, although at the same time surprisingly eroticized. The collection is filled out to a dozen songs with four settings of Metastasio texts.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup>Pepoli also wrote a number of texts for Paër around this time; see Carmela Bongiovanni, "Bellini e Paër a Parigi: Due musicisti e la loro produzione vocale cameristica a confronto," in *Vincenzo Bellini et la France: Histoire, création et réception de l'oeuvre*, ed. Maria Rosa de Luca, Salvatore Enrico Failla, and Giuseppe Montemagno (Lucca: Libreria Musicale Italiana, 2007), pp. 109–56.

<sup>16</sup>*SOIRÉES MUSICALES / Huit Ariettes et Quatre Duos Italiens / avec une traduction française / MIS EN MUSIQUE / avec accompagnement de piano / par G. ROSSINI / Ornés d'une superbe lithographie de Jules David* (Paris: E. Troupenas, [1835]). These details are drawn from the Troupenas catalog for 1835, which also reprinted excerpts from reviews of the publication. The announcement also notes that the songs are available for individual purchase, and with guitar accompaniment. My thanks to Peter Mondelli for sharing this document with me. The *Soirées italiennes* were probably composed while Mercadante was in Paris for the premiere of his opera *I briganti* at the Théâtre-Italien (22 March 1836). Schoenenberger advertised the collection under the heading "Musique Nouvelle," as available with text in either French or Italian, in the spring of 1837 (*Journal des Débats* [2 March 1837]). Editions quickly followed in Milan (published by Giovanni Canti), Florence (Lorenzi), London

Both collections balance postcardlike images of characteristic scenes and nostalgic dips into pastoral with an occasional love song (see Table 1 for a comparison).<sup>17</sup> The Metastasian texts included in Rossini's *Soirées musicales* hark back to pastoral tropes of love and courtship, but the poems Pepoli contributes to both collections seem to flow rather from the tradition of Italian travelogues that stretches back to Madame de Staël's *Corinne, or Italy* (1807) and Goethe's *Italian Journey* (1816–17). Most of the regional topoi are stereotypical enough to seem rooted more in a broad cultural legacy than in specific sources. They include sparkling but inert evocations of some of Italy's most recognizable locales: the Alps (in "La pastorella dell'Alpi"), Venice (in the barcarolle "La gita in gondola"), and Naples (in the well-known tarantella "La danza," all from the Rossini collection).

The scene depicted in "La pastorella dell'Alpi" could almost have been pilfered from Goethe. Traversing the Brenner Pass into Italy, Goethe is impressed by the prosperity and apparent contentment of the merchants at an open-air market: "The sun was shining brightly when I arrived in Bolzano. I was glad to see the faces of so many merchants at once. They had an air about them of purpose and well being. Women sat in the square, displaying their fruit in round, flat-bottomed baskets more than four feet in diameter."<sup>18</sup> The initial image of Pepoli's Alpine text follows Goethe quite closely, personifying the Alps as a pretty woman proffering a cornucopia of fruit: "Son bella pastorella, che scende ogni mattino, ed offre un cestellino di fresche frutta e fior" (I am a beautiful shepherdess, who descends each morning to offer a basket of fresh fruit and flowers). But Pepoli's

(d'Almain), and Mainz (Schott, 1838). The most popular songs were also sold separately. Liszt prepared transcriptions of both song collections for piano solo, beginning with two pairs of songs from Rossini's *Soirées musicales* (pub. Schott, 1835–36), and continuing with the complete Rossini collection (Ricordi, 1838), and the Mercadante set complete (Schott, 1840).

<sup>17</sup>The order of songs and the generic labels for each song given in Table 1 are taken from the Troupenas catalog (for Rossini) and the *Journal des Débats* advertisement (for Mercadante).

<sup>18</sup>Goethe, *Italian Journey* (London: Collins, 1962), p. 37.

Table 1  
Contents of Rossini's *Soirées musicales* (1835)  
and Mercadante's *Soirées italiennes* (1836)

ROSSINI, <i>LES SOIRÉES MUSICALES</i> , TEXTS BY METASTASIO AND CARLO PEPOLI (PUB. 1835)	MERCADANTE, <i>LES SOIRÉES ITALIENNES</i> , TEXTS BY PEPOLI (1836)
1. La promessa (Metastasio) [canzonetta]	1. Il desiato ritorno [barcarolle]
2. Il rimprovero (Metastasio) [canzonetta]	2. La primavera [pastorale]
3. La partenza (Metastasio) [canzonetta]	3. L'asilo al pellegrino [chanson]
4. L'orgia [arietta]	4. Il pastore svizzero [tyrolienne]
5. L'invito [bolero]	5. La serenata del marinaio [serenade]
6. La pastorella dell'Alpi [tirolese]	6. Il zeffiro [polonaise]
7. La gita in gondola [barcarolle]	7. Lamento del moribondo [romance]
8. La danza [tarantella]	8. La zingarella spagnuola [bolero]
9. La regatta veneziana [notturmo for two sopranos]	9. La pesca (duet)
10. La pesca (Metastasio) [notturmo for two sopranos]	10. Il brindisi (duet)
11. La serenata [notturmo for soprano and tenor]	11. La caccia (duet)
12. I marinai [duet for tenor and bass]	12. Il galop (text: G. Crescini) (duet)

shepherdess, individualized and flirtatious, goes on to talk of inviting the interlocutor into her garden to sample the "rosy apples" there. She thus gives the song an erotic tinge entirely lacking in Goethe's chronicle (see ex. 1). The juxtaposition of the shepherdess's crystalline yodeling with the frank invitation of her words makes an ironic interpretation irresistible. Many of the Rossini songs seem to play on the same doubleness and sense of faux-secrecy or barely concealed meaning.

Mercadante's collection, identically constructed of eight solo songs and four duets, can be heard as either an homage or a corrective to Rossini. Mercadante matches the characteristic songs in Rossini's collection almost note for note. His Venetian barcarolle ("Il desiato ritorno") is less dark than Rossini's and lacks the folklike invocations of the physical labor of rowing that appear in Rossini's refrain, "Voga, voga, marinar." Mercadante's tyrolienne ("Il pastore svizzero") not only follows Rossini in including a feint at yodeling but also dares to quote Rossini's Overture to *William Tell* in its piano prelude. Both composers include a song entitled "La Pesca," in which sport fishing is

given a sexual spin; for this particular pastoral topos Rossini drew on an existing Metastasio text that Pepoli then imitated for Mercadante. Between the two collections there is one potentially significant point of divergence. The poems Pepoli supplied to Rossini all depict communal activities or generic scenes of courtship, but his texts for the Mercadante cycle include two that could be described as lyric rather than picturesque. There is a canzonetta sung—or improvised—by a troubadour who wanders in lonely, loveless exile ("Asilo al pellegrino") and a fragmented, incoherent lament in the voice of a man who is about to die of unrequited love ("Lamento del moribondo"). It is tempting to see in these two poems and the music they elicit from Mercadante a nascent Romantic sensibility absent from Rossini's songs, the intrusion of the suffering artist into the calculated musical discourse of the salon. But if so, the intrusion is rather choreographed, as if the isolated but hyperarticulate Romantic outcast is just another type to be depicted alongside the shepherd and the gondolier and the fisherman.

The images of Italy presented in both collections seem distanced and idealized, perhaps

Allegro

7

13

1st Strofa: Son\_\_ bel - la pa - sto - rel - la, che  
2nd Strofa: Chi\_\_ nel not - tur - no or - ro - re smar -

19

scen - de - o gni mat - ti - no, ed\_\_ of - fre un ce - stel - li - no di fre - sche frut - ta e -  
ri\_\_ la\_\_ buo - na vi - a, al - la ca - pan - na mi - a ri - tro - ve - rà il cam -

24

fior. Chi\_\_ vie - ne al pri - ma al - bo - re a - vrà\_\_ vez - zo - se ro - se  
min. Ve - ni - te, o pas - seg - gie - ro, la pa - sto - rel - la è qua,

Example 1: Rossini and Pepoli, "La pastorella dell'Alpi," from *Soirées musicales*, mm. 1–32.

packaged for foreign consumption. The French listeners who heard these songs in salons may have experienced them as musical analogues of the Grand Tour. For Italian audiences the picture-postcard aesthetics must have conveyed a

slightly different message. Besides maintaining a kinship with travel narratives like de Staël's *Corinne*, the songs participate in a discourse of the picturesque that was becoming popular in the 1830s through periodicals such as the



29

e — po - ma ru - gia - do - se, ve - ni - te al mio giar - din.  
ma il fior del suo pen - sie - ro ad u - no — sol da - rà.

Example 1 (*continued*)

*Cosmorama pittorico*, which reproduced lithographs of characteristic scenes from around Italy and beyond its borders, along with brief descriptive texts. From its base in Milan, the *Cosmorama* provided northern Italian readers with images of their own region alongside views of the south, from the eruption of Vesuvius to peasants dancing a tarantella. Literary critic Nelson Moe has suggested that the circulation of these images of far-flung locales and distinctive cultural practices was key to helping Italians imagine themselves as diverse yet connected, enabling “a new, pictorial way of articulating bourgeois identity vis-à-vis other peoples and parts of the world.”<sup>19</sup> By the 1840s the Catholic nationalist thinker Vincenzo Gioberti was exploiting this nascent pictorial sensibility and anthropological curiosity to promote the idea that Italy’s ethnographic diversity made it superior to other, more homogeneous countries. In his influential 1843 book, *Del primato morale e civile degli italiani*, Gioberti posited a “national personality” divided just as “the human body is divided into various organs and members, each of which, besides its participation in the common life, has a mode of existence and life proper to it.”<sup>20</sup>

The frequent *double entendres* and delicate innuendo that permeate Pepoli’s poetry for Rossini’s and Mercadante’s songs imply an intended audience of sophisticated insiders, listeners primed to laugh at the same jokes, de-

code the same veiled meanings. This impression that the songs were conceived partly for a tight-knit community of like-minded listeners is reinforced by another detail of their texts, an intrusion that hints at a conscious, playful, and rather cryptic interplay between opera and solo song. Both the *Soirées musicales* and the *Soirées italiennes* contain songs featuring a character named Elvira, echoing the name of the heroine in *I puritani*.<sup>21</sup> This Elvira is not a seventeenth-century Puritan like her operatic counterpart; she is apparently Italian, floating between various aquatic and sylvan locales. Otherwise she is featureless, almost interchangeable with the nymphs and rustic maidens of the surrounding pastoral songs. In Rossini’s *Soirées musicales*, a gondolier sings as he rows in a calm, moonlit lagoon, his beloved “Elvira” in his arms (see Table 2). Mercadante’s song “Serenata del marinaio” retains the maritime setting but reverses the mood, transporting the boatman and his love to Naples (to judge by the rhythms). Instead of a celebration of fulfilled love supported by rippling motion, Mercadante forges a bitter, suicidal plaint, or rather a threat. *This* sailor thinks longingly or angrily of the watery death he will embrace if Elvira rejects his love, and he warns that his ghost will haunt her, its sighs mixed in with the breeze (see ex. 2).

These glancing mentions, severed from any context, would not seem so striking were Elvira a more common name in this repertoire. The Rossini and Mercadante collections, like other

<sup>19</sup>Nelson Moe, *The View from Vesuvius: Italian Culture and the Southern Question* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), p. 94.

<sup>20</sup>Quoted in Moe, *The View from Vesuvius*, p. 114.

<sup>21</sup>Patric Schmid noted this allusion in his liner notes for the Opera Rara recording of the Mercadante songs (ORR 206, 1998).

Table 2  
Allusions to “Elvira” in the *Soirées musicales* and *Soirées italiennes*

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A. ROSSINI, “LA GITA IN GONDOLA” (EXCERPT)

---

Voli l’agile barchetta,  
voga, voga, o marinar,  
or che Elvira mia diletta  
a me in braccio sfida il mar.

Take wings, my boat  
o sailor, row, row,  
as my dear Elvira  
braves the sea in my arms.

---

B. MERCADANTE, “LA SERENATA DEL MARINARO”

---

L’estrema volta è questa  
Che udrai il Marinar  
Per notte azzurra e mesta  
Cantar e remigar.

This is the last time  
you will hear the sailor  
in the blue, sad night  
singing and rowing.

Se ognor tu sei crudel  
Al fido mio pregar,  
Io piegherò le vele,  
M’affonderò nel mar.

If you cruelly reject  
my devoted pleas  
I will fold up my sails  
and drown myself in the sea.

Se udrai la sera, oh Elvira,  
Un’aura sibilar,  
È un’ombra che sospira,  
È il morto Marinar.

If you hear in the evening, oh Elvira,  
a whispering breeze,  
it is a shadow sighing,  
it is the dead sailor.

L’estrema volta è questa  
Che udrai il Marinar  
Per notte azzurra e mesta  
Cantar e remigar.

This is the last time  
you will hear the sailor  
in the blue, sad night  
singing and rowing.

---

C. MERCADANTE, “IL ZEFFIRO”

---

Com’ora, o zeffiretto,  
Co’ tuoi leggiadri giri,  
Co’ dolci tuoi sospiri,  
Spiri alle rose d’amor,  
Come del ruscelletto  
Rinrespi le fresch’onde,  
D’Arturo le chiome bionde  
Or vola ad increspar.

Oh breeze, just as you  
with your graceful swirls  
and your sweet sighs,  
breathe of love to the roses,  
just as you ripple  
the cool waters of the brook,  
fly now  
to ruffle Arturo’s blond hair.

Dal bel orecchio mosse  
Che hai le divin chiome  
Sussura il mio nome  
In suon che scende al cor.

Once you have lifted his locks  
from his handsome ear,  
whisper my name  
in tones that will penetrate to his heart.

Se al nome d’Elvira  
Ei trema, sospira,  
Allor, zeffiretto,  
Qual fiato diletto  
Più grato di rosa  
Sul labbro mi posa.

If at the name “Elvira”  
he trembles, sighs,  
then, breeze,  
carry that pleasant breath,  
sweeter than roses,  
back to my lips.

---

18

L'e - stre - ma vol - ta e que - sta che u - drai, che u -

*p marcato* *f* *p* *rinfor.*

24

drai - - - - - il ma - ri - nar, - - - - - il ma - ri - nar, per

30

not - te az - zu - ra e mes - ta, can - tar, can - tar - - - - - e re - mi -

*f* *p* *sf*

36

gar, can - tar - - - - - e re - mi - gar, can - tar - - - - - e re - mi - gar, - - - - -

*dim.* *dim.* *pp*

41

e re - mi - gar.

*f*

Example 2: Mercadante, "Serenata del marinaio," from *Soirées italiennes*, mm. 18–45.

salon songs of the time, frequently have the speaker name the beloved who is being addressed or sighed for, but those women usually go by one of the standard names from the pastoral canon. Nice and Bice, Tirsi and Aminta all make appearances, as does an Eloisa. But the name “Elvira” is rarely used in poetry or music; apart from Donna Elvira in *Don Giovanni*, the only other Elvira in music seems to have appeared in a set of three Vivaldi cantatas, where she is paired with a lover named Fileno.<sup>22</sup> The song that follows “La serenata del marinaio” in Mercadante’s *Soirées italiennes* lays to rest any doubt that the nomenclature might be accidental: it pairs Elvira with a lover named Arturo, just as in the opera. “Il zeffiro” stages a playful love-scene-at-a-distance between the two: Elvira enlists a gentle breeze to travel to Arturo and first ruffle his hair, then breathe her name into his ear (see ex. 3). The Elvira of Bellini’s opera could never sing anything so carefree. The song’s bright, flirtatious tone bespeaks a far less tentative, less intense persona than the operatic Elvira. It is as if Pepoli had tossed in these recognizable names without concern for the surrounding context, perhaps hoping that listeners would notice the allusion and be momentarily unsettled.

#### CHARADES (PERFORMANCE)

Why bury allusions to a popular opera of the moment in a set of solo songs about a completely different subject? One answer might have something to do with Pepoli’s desire to drum up publicity or to lay claim to the *Puritani* libretto. But such explanations seem both trivial and out of step with the playfulness and the subtlety of the connections between song and opera. To understand the messages borne by these fleeting appearances of Elvira and Arturo, it might be necessary to enter the world of the salons, to study the dialects—both verbal and musical—in which their habitués communicated. To do this means sinking for a moment

into the plush fabric of gossip and anecdote that comprises the only surviving record of salon culture.

Most of the individual songs from both the *Soirées musicales* and the *Soirées italiennes* bear dedications, some to influential and titled Parisians, others to singers. Mercadante’s collection includes songs inscribed to three of the four members of the *Puritani* quartet, with only Giulia Grisi left out. Another of the *Soirées italiennes* songs is dedicated to Madame Orfila, a singer who hosted a salon attended by Rossini, and yet another to the daughter of Adolphe Thiers, the French politician and journalist who was an intimate of Cristina Belgiojoso.<sup>23</sup> It could have been at Madame Orfila’s salon where some of these songs had their first hearings, or at the home of the Princess Belgiojoso, or of the Comtesse de Merlin.<sup>24</sup> David Tunley’s survey of repertoire performed at the salons yields two mentions of “romances by Mercadante,” both dating from 1838. In March some romances by the composer were heard at the salon of Madame Rinaldi, and in February “airs by Mercadante and Marleau” were performed at Merlin’s salon; the singers present included the Comtesse de la Sparre (a professional singer who also used the name Madame Naldi), Prince Poniatowski, and Luigi Lablache.<sup>25</sup> I have found no corresponding mention of songs from Rossini’s *Soirées musicales*, but since only a tiny minority of salon gatherings received attention from the musical press, this silence

<sup>23</sup>Mme. Orfila was the wife of Dr. Mathieu Orfila, the chemist and forensic toxicologist who performed the test proving that the famous murderer Madame Lafarge had poisoned her husband with arsenic. In *The American in Paris during the summer* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1844), pp. 213–14, Jules Janin describes a performance in which Mme Orfila sang to her husband’s accompaniment as an example of the commingling of social status and musical talent that typified the Paris of the 1830s.

<sup>24</sup>Rossini biographer Charles Osborne places *his* bet on the Belgiojoso salon, which was known to be a gathering place for the Italian exiles and where Carlo Pepoli was a regular (Osborne, *Rossini* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007], p. 128).

<sup>25</sup>David Tunley, *Salons, Singers and Songs: A Background to French Romantic Song, 1830–1870* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), p. 148. Tunley’s lists of repertoire are drawn from reports published in *La Revue et Gazette musicale* and *Le Ménestrel*.

<sup>22</sup>Michael Talbot, *The Chamber Cantatas of Antonio Vivaldi* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2006), p. 102. Talbot notes that the name does not appear in classical or Renaissance poetry, but probably has Spanish associations.

17  
Com' o - ra, o zef - fi - ret - to, co' tuoi leg - gia - dri - gi - ri, co' dol - ci tuoi so -

23  
*rall.* *a piacere* *tempo* *pp*  
spi - ri, spi - ri d'a - mor. Co - me del ru - scel - let - to, rin -

28  
*tr* *cresc.* *tr*  
cre - spi le fre - sche on - de d'Ar - tu - ro le chio - me bion - de, or vo - la ad in - cre - spar, or

34  
*f* *p* *f*  
vo - la, d'Ar - tu - ro le chio - me bion - de, or vo - - - la ad in - cre -

39  
*spar.*

Example 3: Mercadante, "Il zeffiro," from *Soirées italiennes*, mm. 17-43.

hardly indicates that the Rossini songs were *not* performed in salons.

The Princess Belgiojoso was by far the most overtly political of the salonnières. Like Carlo Pepoli, she lived in Paris under duress. The only significant female presence in the “Giovine Italia” circle and perhaps the only woman to be directly involved in the anti-Austrian conspiracies of 1831, Belgiojoso had fled Italy just ahead of the authorities, passing through Geneva before settling in Paris. The Princess sang and played the piano, and on at least one occasion she sang in a trio with the Comtesse de la Sparre, to whom Mercadante’s “Il zeffiro” is dedicated.<sup>26</sup> Belgiojoso’s salon is remembered as the venue for the famous 1837 benefit for the Italian exiles, which became both the setting for the duel between Liszt and Thalberg and the occasion for which the collaboratively composed *Hexaméron*—not coincidentally, a set of variations on “Suoni la tromba” from *I puritani*—was commissioned. Belgiojoso was also a prolific journalist and, later in life, an activist on women’s issues.<sup>27</sup> In the “memoirs of exile” she published in 1850, she says little about her own salon but recalls other such gatherings in near-utopian terms:

[The salon of Madame Recamier was] one of those dwellings between the court and the academy, where

great men and women acted like poets, where one chatted as much as one disputed, where if someone dared to coin a new word, those words would enter straightaway into the dictionary of the Académie, where we had such good fun that it was sometimes possible to forget about Versailles—that is to say the place where they hand out sinecures, pensions, honors of all kinds, and even more important, marks of grace, elegance, and beauty.<sup>28</sup>

In emphasizing the irrelevance of Versailles, Belgiojoso anticipates what has become the established assessment of the social role of the salon as a place of free social and political discourse, crucially autonomous from the court.<sup>29</sup> Yet for all the emphasis on fun and on oblivion to the workings of official power, Belgiojoso also glancingly acknowledges the considerable cultural power wielded within these loosely knit institutions, where casual wordplay could transform the dictionary.

Almost as prolific as Belgiojoso, the Comtesse de Merlin also published memoirs of her Cuban youth (in four volumes) and several novels. In *Les Lionnes de Paris*, an 1845 roman à clé published under a pen name, she paints unflattering portraits of Belgiojoso and of salon culture in general. The novel centers on four formidable women who move into Parisian society, take and discard lovers, and (mostly) come to tragic ends. The book’s final section focuses on Giuditta, duchess of Ferraro, a thinly disguised Belgiojoso, who is described as narcissistic, eager to show off her every achievement, and easily bored, passionate about political causes only as long as they attract attention. Merlin’s Giuditta informally separates from her husband (as did Belgiojoso) and becomes involved with a founding member of a secret society clearly modeled on Giovine Italia. In keeping with the novel’s lugubrious tone, its

<sup>26</sup>The trio performance took place at the Austrian embassy, hosted by the ambassador, Count Rodolphe Apponyi. Anne Martin-Fugier cites that Belgiojoso’s appearance at the Apponyi residence as evidence that commonalities of taste and class trumped political opinion, since the Belgiojosos were fierce opponents of Austria’s rule over Lombardy; see her *La Vie élégante, ou la formation de Tout-Paris, 1815–1848* (Paris: Fayard, 1990), p. 316. On the politics of Belgiojoso and her salon, see Dana Gooley, *The Virtuoso Liszt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 18–77.

<sup>27</sup>During the 1830s and 40s she contributed articles to *Le Constitutionnel*, founded a newspaper for the exile community, and prepared the first French translation of Vico’s *Scienza nuova* (1844). In 1847, when Pope Pius IX declared an amnesty for all exiles connected with the earlier insurgencies, Belgiojoso used her wealth to assemble a personal army and, reportedly costumed as Joan of Arc, led her forces into Rome on horseback. By the time she died in 1871, she had published, among other things, a history of the 1848 revolution, a highly regarded set of “Observations” on the current state of Italy (1868), and a study of the contemporary living conditions of Italian women and their prospects for the future (1866).

<sup>28</sup>Cristina Trivulzio di Belgiojoso, *Ricordi nell’esilio*, ed. Maria Francesca Davi (Pisa: Edizioni ETS, 2001), p. 94; originally published in *Le National* (5 Sept. to 12 Oct. 1850).

<sup>29</sup>For the classic statements of this view, see Joan Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988); and Dena Goodman, *The Republic of Letters: A Cultural History of the French Enlightenment* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994).

assessment of salon life is scathing, almost diametrically opposed to Belgiojoso's:

Most of the salons where polite society gathers can be distinguished only by the name of the man of the house, and by the degree of luxury and the number of lamps that adorn the rooms; they are performances in which everyone believes himself an actor, but in which everyone is no more than a poor bit of the parterre, crowded and confined, jostled and buffeted by the wave; tossed about by the rising tide. We do not look there for men of merit, but for those of position—here powerful men, there the titled, and everywhere dancers. . . . How is it possible to enjoy the charms of wit where conversation, the exchange of ideas, is impossible?<sup>30</sup>

Of course, Merlin writes here in the voice of a fictional narrator who may be taking an extreme position for literary reasons. Yet the evident cynicism of this verdict coincides with the conclusion by historians that by the 1830s the salon was a pale shadow of what it had been a half-century before, and the influence of salonnières correspondingly diminished. After the political fissures and intense factionalism of the Revolutionary period and the Restoration, caution and superficial agreement had acquired a new value for the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie. Although the salons continued to be places in which political influence was brokered and bestowed, overt political conversations were frowned on.<sup>31</sup> Merlin was said to forbid them at her own gatherings, not only because they were so inflammatory and all-consuming, but also because her own views were more conservative than those of many of her guests, particularly concerning universal suffrage.<sup>32</sup>

In this new atmosphere of accommodation, music was an important element within a broad

<sup>30</sup>Prince de Feu [María de las Mercedes Santa Cruz y Montalvo Merlin], *Les Lionnes de Paris* (Paris: Amyot, 1845), pp. 29–30.

<sup>31</sup>On this point, see Steven Kale, *French Salons: High Society and Political Sociability from the Old Regime to the Revolution on 1848* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004); and K. Steven Vincent, "Elite Culture in Early Nineteenth-Century France: Salons, Sociability, and the Self," *Modern Intellectual History* 4 (2007), 327–51.

<sup>32</sup>Anaïs Lebrun, Comtesse de Bassanville, *Les Salons d'autrefois: Souvenirs intimes*, vol. 2 (Paris: H. Anière, 1862–64), pp. 135–36.

constellation of communicative modes. Another of those modes was purposeful *play*. One contemporary account after another records that the habitués of the salons delighted in the decoding and deciphering of puzzles, allusions, and concealed meanings. One game often singled out by writers seeking to evoke the special ethos of the nineteenth-century salon was an operatic parody created at the Merlin salon in 1840. Entitled *L'Incendio di Babilonia* (The Bonfire of Babylon), it featured characters borrowed from *Orlando furioso* and a farcical mad scene in which both the insanity and its eventual cure were manifested only through changes in the heroine's hairstyle. A scene featuring the villain Ferocino (played by Luigi Lablache) stands out for its superb satirical marksmanship: "'Silence!' says Ferocino; 'I hear in the forest the gondolier singing the barcarole!'—'In the forest?' says the chevalier-pilgrim of the Légion d'Honneur. — 'In the forest!' replies Ferocino. And in fact the barcarole commences; 'Zephyr, souffle gentile!' It is something new and strange, this ballad which recalls the barcarole of *Otello*."<sup>33</sup> However broad its humor, this burlesque was clearly conceived on some level by and for true insiders. To laugh at *L'Incendio di Babilonia*, a spectator would have had to be familiar with the correlation between unbound hair and madness in *Lucia di Lammermoor* and other mad-scene operas, to recall the third act of Rossini's *Otello*, and to agree that barcarolles had become ridiculously common in recent operas.

Another diversion, this one purely verbal, is narrated by the Comtesse de Bassanville. The setting is again the Merlin salon; the entertainment a politically charged game of charades:

I remember . . . one evening that took place a short time after one of the summer riots in which Marshal de Lobau had so handily dispersed the insurgents with the help of fire hoses; people recalled this incident there in a charade that was most amusing.

The word was *Jacqueminot*, and General [Jean-François] Jacqueminot, then a colonel in the National Guard, figured among the players. For the first clue, people mimed a pilgrimage to Santiago de

<sup>33</sup>Janin, *The American in Paris during the summer*, pp. 215–20, here, 217.

Compostela [*Saint-Jacques de Compostelle*], for the second, a scene with a grain dealer [*minotier*], and for the finale, a riot.<sup>34</sup>

This vignette beautifully sums up how the performative and the topical or political dimensions of the salon could be melded. In the charade, a recent disturbing political event—the subduing of rebels with fire hoses—is inextricably intertwined with polite conversation and play. It is both fascinating and disquieting that the charade (or the anecdote of the charade) invokes the riot so blithely, oblivious to the violent reality behind the homonym of the word “riot.” Perhaps the casual invocation of the operatic Elvira and Arturo in Pepoli’s and Mercadante’s songs could be seen as another manifestation of this game-playing spirit, a small riddle that functions socially to create a group of insiders who all share some bit of knowledge, however trivial, and who get pleasure from decoding the concealed message.

#### ESCHATOLOGIES (PRINT)

The compulsion to connect these songs to a specific salon perhaps flows from the historian’s desire to fix those elements of history that are the most ephemeral, the least documented—and that thus seem the most precious and most informative. Within a historiographical atmosphere that privileges documented reception and whatever traces we can find of “ordinary” reactions to music, songs like this become a kind of Holy Grail—because they *must* have been popular, must have been rooted in everyday (albeit aristocratic) discourse.

But there is also a musically specific dimension to this quest. The association with a particular salon would seem to ground these rather blank, almost cryptic songs within some precise frame of verbal meaning, as if tying them

to an exact performance venue would allow us to get past their proliferation of poetic and musical topoi and their avoidance of direct expressive utterance. One might even suggest that these aspects of salon song merely magnify the condition of the Italian opera of the time. This music mattered to large numbers of people, and perhaps helped listeners to articulate a shared sense of taste or to communicate common values across geographical barriers. Yet the interpretive vocabulary that exists to talk about individual musical moments gets stuck on cataloguing generic features or compiling measurements and assertions of vocal display and auditory pleasure. The real force of the musical experience remains untouched.

It may be deeply satisfying to imagine the Rossini and Mercadante songs as part of a conversation among initiates, their allusions and intertextuality quietly building a common vision of Italy among their listeners. Yet this vein of interpretation assumes that the songs functioned primarily as performances for specific audiences, that their expressive identities are more firmly attached to live performance than to reproduction and dissemination.<sup>35</sup> Salon culture is clearly part of the story of these songs, but there is also evidence that the vocal music of this period was destined above all for print. The music was composed for distribution and for consumption at a distance by large numbers of unknown (and fairly unskilled) musicians and listeners, some of them located outside of urban centers. For those listeners and performers who encountered the two *Soirées* collections this way, the songs could

<sup>34</sup>Bassanville, *Les Salons d'autrefois*, pp. 114–15; quoted in Kale, *French Salons*, p. 188. The riot that Lobau subdued by turning fire hoses on the crowd took place on 5 May 1831; the image of the Maréchal with (or as) a syringe, symbolizing the squirting hose, became a favorite with caricaturists; see *Daumier: 120 Great Lithographs*, ed. Charles A. Ramus (New York: Dover, 1978), p. ix; and David S. Kerr, *Caricature and French Political Culture, 1830–1848: Charles Philippon and the Illustrated Press* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

<sup>35</sup>Philip Gossett has raised the question of whether these songs were ever heard in salons at all, pointing out that several of the Rossini songs were notated first in various personal albums, as gifts, and only later recopied for publication (personal communications, Oct.–Nov. 2009). However, both the 1835 publication announcement by Troupenas (see n. 16) and some early reviews of the first edition associate the songs explicitly with amateur performance. Troupenas advertises the songs as “composed expressly to facilitate the study of Italian song for amateurs, who may be intimidated by the length and difficulty of opera arias.” Berlioz picks up on this in his review of the *Soirées musicales*, noting that “the vocal part does not present any of the bold features that render so many dramatic compositions inaccessible to salon singers”; *Le Rénovateur* (28 May 1835), rpt. in the Troupenas catalog, p. 3.



not have seemed analogous to charades or to the witty but often highly charged conversations in the salons. A distinct set of reference points and meanings arise when we hear the songs as cogs in a large, mechanized process of cultural dissemination at a distance rather than as direct communications among a tightly knit group of Italian exiles and Parisian aristocrats.

Raoul Meloncelli, who has studied the Italian salon repertoire exhaustively, approaches the “romanza di salotto” almost exclusively as a phenomenon of publishing.<sup>36</sup> Subject matter and musical styles were calibrated purely to sell sheet music, and the complexion of any particular song can usually be explained by a desire to capitalize on the success of an earlier model. Publishers had a strong financial incentive to retread an already successful poetic or musical template as long as it continued to appeal to customers. Meloncelli suggests that these aesthetic calculations became more common and more sophisticated toward midcentury as composers and publishers began to realize how central the *romanza* would be to domestic music-making. The life experience or aesthetic predilections of an individual like Carlo Pepoli, much less the tastes or pleasures of a Belgiojoso or a Merlin, have no place in this interpretive model.

Table 3 shows a partial listing of the thematic ideas and titles that crop up in Italian songs published in the decade after Rossini’s and Mercadante’s collections. Neither the inventory of themes nor the list of specific examples is anywhere near exhaustive, but even this fragmentary overview indicates the reach of the phenomenon.<sup>37</sup> The sheer number of song

<sup>36</sup>Raoul Meloncelli, “Poesie e poeti della romanza da salotto,” in *La romanza italiana di salotto*, ed. Federico Sanvitale (Turin: EDT, 2002), pp. 55–116.

<sup>37</sup>The information in Table 3 is drawn from the songs discussed in Meloncelli, “La romanza italiana di salotto,” and from sheet music holdings cataloged in the unified on-line catalog of Italian national libraries (OPAC SBN), the library of the Conservatorio Giuseppe Verdi (Milan), the Bibliothèque Nationale (Paris), and the British Library. In my grouping of the songs, I have omitted all the exotic and pastoral styles, partly because it seemed less surprising and noteworthy to find clusters of songs about gondoliers and shepherdesses than it did to discover a similar generic proliferation of tragic situations like the suicidal sailor of “Serenata del marinaio” or the wandering, friendless exile.

collections that play on the idea of a place recently left and fondly remembered suggests that nostalgia and loss had themselves become distinct patriotic topoi. The suggestion is supported by the contemporaneous efflorescence of piano miniatures by expatriate Polish composers with titles alluding to homesickness and exile.<sup>38</sup>

Perhaps the most unexpected thematic group to appear in Table 3 consists of the songs whose persona is a man about to die while suffering from unrequited love. This cluster of songs differs from the others in that its currency in the 1830s and 40s may be traceable to a single highly influential poem, Giovanni Luigi Redaelli’s “Odi d’un uom che muore.” Redaelli (1785–1815) was based in Cremona, his career nearly coterminous with Italy’s Napoleonic period and with the career of the much better-known Ugo Foscolo. He died of tuberculosis at the age of thirty, while reportedly dictating “Odi d’un uom che muore” from his deathbed.<sup>39</sup> This, at least, was the account often given in explanatory footnotes when the poem appeared in nineteenth-century anthologies. In the 1843 anthology *Il parnaso italiano*, the footnote not only sketches the circumstances of the poem’s inception, but also connects it im-

<sup>38</sup>Renate Suchowiejko has shown that, although picturesque scenes of Polish locales were almost nonexistent as a musical topos, the Poles, like the Italians, had a penchant for titles that alluded to exile and nostalgia—“Loin de sa patrie” (by Stanislaw Katski), “Le mal du pays,” and “Reflets de mon pays” (both by Antoine Katski), and “Plainte de l’exilé” (Edward Wolff), all by expatriate composers, and all dating from the late 1830s and early 1840s. Suchowiejko, “Polish Pianists in Paris: From *couleur locale* to Stylistic Cosmopolitanism,” in *The Circulation of Music in Europe 1600–1900*, ed. Rudolf Rasch (Berlin: Berliner Wissenschafts Verlag, 2004), pp. 249–64, here 283.

Maurizio Isabella has shown that nostalgia for the family and for familiar landscapes are key themes in the literary writing of Italian exiles during this period, so that “the *patria* thus emerges as a nostalgic construction”; see his “Exile and Nationalism: The Case of the Risorgimento,” *European History Quarterly* 36 (2006), 493–520, here 501.

<sup>39</sup>Redaelli’s fame now rests mainly on the fictionalized portrait that Stendhal created of him in the essay *De l’Amour* (1822). Stendhal disguises Redaelli as the melancholy military man “Salviati,” whose journal entries documenting a doomed adulterous love affair Stendhal reprints (supposedly) verbatim. In a long footnote to the chapter dedicated to Salviati, Stendhal prints a composite of three of Redaelli’s poems, including the complete deathbed ode. “Extrait du journal de Salviati,” chap. 32 in Stendhal, *De l’Amour* (Paris: Michel Lévy frères, 1857), pp. 76–84.

Table 3  
Themes in Song Collections, ca. 1835–45

NOSTALGIC MEMORY OF A PLACE RECENTLY LEFT (TITLES OF COLLECTIONS):

- Donizetti, *Nuits d'été à Pausilippe* (1836)  
 Donizetti, *Un hiver à Paris* (1838–39; retitled *Rêveries napolitaines*, pub. Naples)  
 Donizetti, *Soirées d'automne à l'Infrascata* (1839)  
 Donizetti, *Inspirations viennoises* (1842)  
 Pacini, *Souvenir de Florence pendant l'hiver à Paris* (also as *Souvenirs... pendant l'hiver de 1835*)  
 Dario Fabiani, *Una sera sul canal grande* (early 1840s)  
 Fabio Campana, *Souvenir de Bains de Lucques, Ricordi di Milano, Souvenirs de Rome*, etc.

SAILOR'S LAMENTS:

- Mercadante, "La serenata del marinaio," *Soirées italiennes* (1836)  
 Donizetti's "Sovra il remo" (1844, Luigi Mira)  
 Pacini, "Bella nel dì novello" (1844)  
 Donizetti, "Il barcaiuolo" (*Nuits d'été*, 1836)

EXILE/PILGRIM SONGS:

- Mercadante, "Date asilo al Pellegrino," *Soirées italiennes* (1836)  
 Pacini's "Il Pellegrino" (1843, anon.)  
 Dario Fabiani, "Il Pellegrino, il cavaliere, e il trovatore" (A. Maffei)

DYING MAN (AND WOMAN) SONGS:

- \* more than thirty settings of Giovanni Redaelli's "Odi d'un uom che muore," between 1820 and 1845, including songs by Donizetti ("Amore e morte" 1839, in *Soirées d'automne*), Marco Aurelio Marliani, Rossini ("Amore e morte," *Péchés de vieillesse: Album italiano*)  
 Mercadante, "Lamento del moribondo," *Soirées italiennes* (1836)  
 Donizetti, "È morta" (1842, Carlo Guiata)

mediately to song: "Versi dettati dal Redaelli moriente; furono posti in musica da valentissimi maestri" (Verses dictated by the dying Redaelli; they were set to music by the most eminent composers).<sup>40</sup>

By the time it was anthologized, Redaelli's poem had been set by at least twenty different composers. Its initial attraction probably stemmed from the poem's flexible *settenario* (seven-syllable) meter and the emotional intensity packed into its sixteen lines.

Odi d'un uom che muore,  
 Odi l'estremo suon;  
 Quest'appassito fiore  
 Ti lascio Elvira in don.

Quanto prezioso ei sia  
 Tu dei saper lo appien;

Nel dì che fosti mia  
 Te lo involai dal sen.

Simbolo allor d'affetto  
 Or pegno di dolor  
 Torna a posarti in petto  
 Questo appassito fior.

E avrai nel cor scolpito  
 Se duro il cor non è  
 Come ti fu rapito  
 Come ritorna a te

(Hear the words of a dying man, hear the last sounds; this faded flower I leave you, Elvira, as a gift. You must know how precious it is: the day you became mine I stole it from your breast. Then a symbol of our love, it is now a token of sorrow. Place it once more on your breast, this faded flower. And you will have engraved on your heart, if your heart is not too hard, how this flower was taken from you and how it returned to you.)

Redaelli's poem and its early reception en-

<sup>40</sup>*Parnaso italiano: Poeti italiani contemporanei maggiori e minori*, ed. Antoine Ronna (Paris: Baudry, 1843), p. 967. The poem's initial publication was in *I Versi di G. L. Redaelli, Cremonese* (Bologna: Masi, 1815).

capsulate the twisted relation between Romanticism and early-nineteenth-century print culture. Almost everything in the language of the poem suggests unicity, irreproducibility. "Odi d'un uom che muore" was not just framed as its author's final utterance; it was the only work from Redaelli's extensive oeuvre that was widely reprinted and anthologized. Isolated on the page with its tear-stained history recorded in a footnote, hemmed in by the garrulous output of contemporaries such as Vincenzo Monti, Giuseppe Parini, Silvio Pellico, and Alessandro Manzoni, this little poem gives the impression of secrecy, rarity, and the utter immediacy of the poet's experience. Yet this aura of individuality is illusory. The sheer conventionality of the poem's imagery belies—if it does not quite undermine—the pose of an ultimate, unbounded outpouring of grief. Like much Italian verse of the period, the poem efficiently packages a number of strong romantic symbols into neat rhetorical units—the plaintive cries of the dying man, the withered flower as symbol of past happiness and subsequent loss, and the whole sad tale carved forever into the stony heart of the beloved.<sup>41</sup>

The aura of specificity is further diminished by the fact that this is just one in a series of five poems in which Redaelli keened over his lost love. The same Elvira makes appearances in four other poems, always in connection with the imagined death of Redaelli's poetic avatar. In one sonnet, the poet imagines Elvira hovering over his tomb with her hair unbound (presumably out of grief), strewing flowers on his grave, and piously calling out his name; in another poem she takes up the lyre that lies by his tomb and exchanges cries with her expired

<sup>41</sup>The balance between passion and poetic convention recalls the aesthetic situation of Anacreontic poetry, described by Marshall Brown: the very overload of emotional words and images works to depersonalize the verse, to distance it from passion and subjectivity. See Brown, "Passion and Love: Anacreontic Song and the Roots of Romantic Lyric," *English Literary History* 66 (1999), 373–404, and "The Poetry of Haydn's Songs: Sexuality, Repetition, Whimsy," in *Haydn and the Performance of Rhetoric*, ed. Tom Beghin and Sander Goldberg (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), pp. 229–50. Redaelli's "Odi d'un uom" is subtitled "Anacreontica," but it shares with the standard Anacreontic ode only the preoccupation with death, omitting the usual emphasis on wine and easy pleasure.

beloved.<sup>42</sup> The pattern of replicating intensely private feeling in a series of copies achieves a kind of logical culmination in the poem's musical reception, in its enthusiastic embrace by so many now-forgotten composers and eventual posterity precisely *as* material for song.<sup>43</sup>

The combination of the poem and Redaelli's personal history exerts a powerful allure, and it could be fascinating to examine the many musical responses to "Odi d'un uom che muore." But in the present context, Redaelli and his deathbed poem are significant mainly as precursors. They form a possible source for the name of Bellini's operatic heroine and a cornerstone of the genre of poems written in the voice of a dying lover popular in the 1830s and represented in the song "Lamento del moribondo" from Mercadante's *Soirées italiennes*.<sup>44</sup> Pepoli probably knew Redaelli's poetry; from 1843 on, both poets were anthologized in Antoine Ronna's *Parnaso italiano*.<sup>45</sup> Whether or not Redaelli's Elvira has any direct connection to the operatic character is impossible to say with certainty. Pepoli and Bellini wavered more than once about what to call their heroine, switching in subsequent libretto drafts from Elvira to the more innocent (and more common) Eloisa and back again.<sup>46</sup> Redaelli's Elvira, although a powerful presence in the poems, has few distinguishing features. A typical Roman-

<sup>42</sup>"Scritta a lume di luna nel cimitero della Certosa di Bologna" and "Non prego mai, nè pianto"; all of the Elvira poems are quoted in Francesco Novati, "Una poeta dimenticato: Giovan Luigi Redaelli e il suo canzoniere," *Studi critici e letterari* (Turin: Loescher, 1889), pp. 137–73.

<sup>43</sup>Redaelli's ode was set to music by Donizetti, Rossini, and Francesco Morlacchi, but also by now-forgotten composers such as Gennaro Bonamici, Scipione Fenzi, Count Michele Oginski, Fernando Orlandi, Dionisio Pagliano, and Domenico Tescari.

<sup>44</sup>A prominent musical example of the genre independent of Redaelli is Meyerbeer's setting of Charles-Hubert Millevoye's "Le poète mourant," probably composed in the early 1830s, but published in 1849. Stylistically and generically, Meyerbeer's song belongs to a different tradition: it is more formal and expansive, more a sculpted funeral utterance than the simple, direct ode to a particular woman that characterizes the Italian settings of Redaelli.

<sup>45</sup>Just a few pages earlier in the *Parnaso italiano* anthology (pp. 961–64) appear four poems by Pepoli, including his "In morte di Vincenzo Bellini."

<sup>46</sup>In Bellini's sketch for the second and third acts of the opera the heroine is designated as Eloisa; the sketch is transcribed and reproduced in facsimile in Petrobelli, "Bellini and Paisiello," *Music in the Theater*, pp. 182–85.

tic muse, she is blond and beautiful; she weeps and she strums the lyre. If this Elvira did inflect the characterization of Bellini's and Pepoli's heroine, it would have been in the direction of passivity and Romantic mysticism. Bellini's Elvira is dreamier and more volatile than most operatic heroines. She famously veers into madness at three separate moments and returns to her senses only to be set off by some new disappointment or fear.

The narrative frame for Mercadante's "Lamento del moribondo" is nearly identical to that of "Odi d'un uom che muore": a dying man makes a final grandiloquent proclamation of love to an absent, probably indifferent woman. Even so, Pepoli's poetry strikes a tone at once more dignified and more direct. Where Redaelli begins with a commanding injunction, "Odi," twice repeated, Pepoli's verses begin with a plea that asks only for the speaker's voice to be remembered: "Non scordar gli estremi accenti d'un meschin che per te muore" (Do not forget the dying cries of the unfortunate who died for you). At the end, where Redaelli coldly fantasized that the story of failed love might be engraved on Elvira's heart, Pepoli remains in the present moment, vividly depicting the speaker's death.

Mercadante's setting embodies an expressive contradiction, familiar to those who appreciate the Italian music of the early nineteenth century. The "Lamento" is built from an elaborate lexicon of conventions for projecting strong emotion, packed with mimetic devices for physical collapse and emotional breakdown. The vocal line for the opening stanza is constructed almost completely from sustained sigh figures; the piano supports the singer with chains of throbbing syncopations (see ex. 4a, mm. 17–22). The opening section revels in expanses of empty space; in silences between distinct gestures in the piano prelude, in unisons, in lean voicings from the accompaniment, and in small gasps between chunks of the vocal melody. Mercadante's setting of the final quatrain exploits many of the same topoi for grief and physical collapse, but it adds a tinge of realism at the moment of death. As the speaker begins to lose strength ("Più non veggo . . . io manco"), the spaces between vocal gestures expand and the voicing thins out yet more, until

the voice is left alone on the final repetition of "t'amo" (see ex. 4b, mm. 63–72). The song's last word, "Addio," is sung on a sudden *fortissimo*, its bitter finality underlined via a downward leap by fifth and a descending chromatic scale, staccato, in the bass (mm. 75–76). The effect recalls operatic death scenes, but the final moments of this suffering soul are more extreme—more rhythmically distended and less vocally virtuosic—than similar moments in any opera of the period. The overall effect resembles sleight of hand, and pleurably so despite the subject matter. As listeners we seem to have been made privy to a unique moment of self-revelation and extremity. Yet this intensely individual utterance is phrased in a poetic and musical vocabulary that is generic and familiar, and thus easily grasped in all its force. In this sense, Mercadante's "Lamento" instantiates the delicate balance between intimacy and dissemination that is fundamental not only to Romantic print, but also to the special flavor of Italian Romanticism.

One of the obstacles for historians seeking to link the aesthetic developments of the early nineteenth century to Risorgimento politics has been the strong conservative strand in Italian literature and music. Rather than making sharp "revolutionary" breaks with existing styles, most Italian writers preferred to nourish their work on a carefully cultivated canon of works from the past that showcased the most admirable elements of the national spirit. Thus many literary histories of the time proudly dubbed Dante, Ariosto, and Shakespeare exemplary Romantics. In opera, the melodic styles and aria forms that audiences had come to expect prevailed over compositional experiment, even in works whose subject matter ventured into the territory of Gothic thrills.

Despite this tendency, most historical inquiries into the reciprocal links between culture and politics in the Risorgimento have emphasized heroic subjectivities and revolutionary narratives. The most influential recent approach is that of Albert Mario Banti, who has mined the literary works read by the revolutionary generation to uncover a set of recurring metaphors, images, and myths that he sees as models of subject formation for the Risorgi-

a. mm. 1-28.

*Largo sostenuto*

*pp*

5

9

*ff* *pp*

17 *sotto voce*

Non scor - dar\_ gli e - stre - mi ac - cen - ti, gli e - stre - mi ac - cen - ti d'un mes chin\_ che per\_ te

*pp*

22

muo - re. For - se av - rai più bel - lo a - mo - re, più bel - lo a - mo - re, ma non av -

27 *con sonna [!] passione*

rai\_ un più\_ fe - del.

*p*

Example 4: Mercadante, "Lamento del moribondo."

61 *Piu lento e pp*  
 Più non veg - go, non veg - go, io

66 *affrettando...più...più*  
 man - co, o Di - o, o Di - o, ti per - do - na, io t'a - mo, io

71 *pp* *lento come Prima*  
 t'a - mo, t'a - mo, ad - di -

76  
 o!

*f* *pp*

Example 4 (continued)

mento movement.<sup>47</sup> For Banti, the most significant stories—told and retold in novels, memoirs, and in opera—concern polarized situations

such as female purity threatened with contamination by a foreign invader and oaths of brotherhood sworn in secrecy. In the musical sphere, Simonetta Chiappini has explored the possibility that the real significance of opera for Risorgimento thought lay in its heroic vocal archetypes and in the sharp contrasts and tensions

<sup>47</sup>Albert Mario Banti, *La nazione del Risorgimento: parentela, santità, e onore della patria* (Turin: G. Einaudi, 2006).

created by opera's infinite variations on double aria form.<sup>48</sup> These approaches keep a canny distance from decoding opera plots as allegories of actual political conflict or reading fictional events in one-to-one correspondence with contemporary offstage reality. Yet at the same time, they stress stridently heroic, exceptionalist models of expression.

What is perhaps most interesting about Carlo Pepoli's poetry for the two *Soirées* collections, and about the musical styles in which that poetry was clothed by Rossini and Mercadante, is their almost complete avoidance of the heroic. The collections are mosaics of anonymous characteristic scenes, voiced by personae who are anything but elevated, some of whom barely count as speaking subjects at all: the sailor rowing steadfastly, the flirtatious merchant of fruit and flowers, the lovelorn girl appealing to the breeze and the brook to confirm that her love is reciprocated. No doubt the illustrative canvas is scaled back for the salon or the parlor, compared to the larger-than-life characters and scenes that often dominated opera. But it is just as significant that these various subgenres—the songs of the eroticized shepherdess, the sailor's suicidal laments, and the complaints of the dying man—militate against any kind of dialogue with everyday reality. The characters involved, almost without exception, are abstracted from all family ties or practical backdrops.

These songs would be unlikely to inspire identification, emulation, or heroic action in

listeners, as Pepoli had imagined could happen when words and music were perfectly fused in the Marseillaise, but they might forge subtler connections between listeners and between the various images they evoke. The thread that connects all of the various picture postcards and melodramatic poses of this song repertoire is a strong undercurrent of regret, loss, and distance. Perhaps one important purpose served by the proliferation of songs on each of these themes is to fabricate through quantity and repetition a sense of recovery and plenitude, to beat back the alternately flat and overwrought images by embracing them, over and over again.



### **Abstract.**

Among a community of Italian political leaders and artists who settled in Paris after the failed Italian revolutions of 1831 was Count Carlo Pepoli, author of the libretto for Bellini's *I puritani*. During his years in Paris, Pepoli also wrote the poetry for two song collections: Rossini's *Soirées musicales* and Mercadante's *Soirées italiennes*. Both collections are conceived as a series of picturesque images of Italian locales interspersed with pastoral scenes; they are also linked by allusions to a character named Elvira, perhaps a projection of the heroine of *I puritani*. This article explores the connections between the Rossini and Mercadante songs and their possible link to Bellini's opera, in relation to two distinct audiences: the Parisian salons of the 1830s, with their strong Italian expatriate presence, and the market of amateurs who purchased sheet music. In both contexts, the poetic content and musical style of the songs may have fostered favorable attitudes to Italy and to Unification, showing that even music composed for private and domestic uses could be politically influential. Key words: Gioachino Rossini, Saverio Mercadante, Carlo Pepoli, Risorgimento, salon music

<sup>48</sup>Simonetta Chiappini, "La voce del martire: Dagli 'evirati cantori' all'eroina romantica," in *Storia d'Italia: Annali 22 Il Risorgimento*, ed. Banti and Ginsborg (Turin: G. Einaudi, 2006), pp. 289–329.