

Artistic Projections of Anger through Musical Language in Lyric Theatre

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Abstract: *This study adopts a transdisciplinary approach, integrating perspectives from both music and psychology. Among the broad spectrum of human emotions, the present research specifically addresses the expression of anger within the context of lyrical theater. Anger is examined as a highly intense affective state that emerges reactively, often disrupting or intensifying an individual's emotional equilibrium. In opera, each character is shaped by a distinct psychological profile, which the composer articulates through sophisticated musical language, thereby accentuating particular emotional states. Through this lens, the study explores how musical composition serves as a medium for conveying complex emotional experiences. Vocal music benefits from the inspired pen of a librettist—an artist who, much like the composer, has traversed the full spectrum of human emotions, ultimately achieving a form of catharsis. Anger, as an emotional construct, often signifies a transgression of personal boundaries, an infringement upon individual autonomy, or a betrayal of loyalty. In this study, by analyzing selected operatic works from the Baroque, Romantic, and Verismo periods, I seek to outline the psychological and emotional profiles of characters overtaken by anger. These portrayals are rendered compelling through the distinct musical language and stylistic choices of each composer.*

Keywords: *anger; emotions; lyrical theater; aggressive behavior; triolets; pauses; distant modulations;*

Introduction

Music represents a realm of sung life narratives. Beyond the complexity of its linguistic elements and technical density, the essence of musical understanding resides in emotion. Music constitutes an outpouring of emotional energy, conveyed by the creator at a particular moment in their life. The spectrum of emotions is vast and deeply individualized, rooted in the very fabric of our human DNA notion supported by physical anthropology. The stories communicated through singing encapsulate the authentic state of each thought, manifested in behaviors that both express and transmit emotion. This applies equally to both instrumental and vocal music.

Instrumental music lacks a literary foundation and may therefore require a deeper, more introspective search for evocative and aesthetically compelling sound. Vocal music, by contrast, benefits from the inspired pen of a librettist – a literary figure who, preceding the composer, has already undergone an emotional catharsis. Through vocal expression and orchestration, the composer constructs a complex representation of a given situation, one that evokes emotions perceived either similarly or differently by each listener.

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In lyrical theater, every character bears the musical imprint of their personality, shaped collaboratively by the librettist and composer. This emotional identity is conveyed through sophisticated musical languages. Through the technical mechanisms of music, a multitude of emotions are thus communicated. **Anger**, as one of the fundamental emotions, is often recognized in works with profound plots and passionate characters who disrupt the sense of emotional balance. This study focuses attention on selected operatic works from the Baroque, Classical, Romantic, and Verismo periods, which portray characters overtaken by the intense emotion of anger. Through these examples, the research aims to delineate the psychological and emotional profiles of such characters.

1. Concepts

a. Emotion

Emotions are like a rainbow through whose colors you sing and paint life. The spectrum of emotions that we carry in human DNA, a fact confirmed by physical anthropology, is vast and uniquely shaped by each personality type. In the academic literature, researchers have proposed various categorizations of basic emotions. For instance, **Paul Ekman** identifies four primary emotions: fear, anger, sadness, and joy. **Daniel Goleman**, on the other hand, expands this list to eight: anger, sadness, fear, joy, love, surprise, disgust, and shame. Beyond these conceptual distinctions, the historical and cultural evolution of humanity has contributed to the diversification and refinement of emotional experience, process that reflects the individual's continuous adaptation to the changing dynamics of social development.

Gábor Maté, a recognized authority in the field of psychology, succinctly asserts that “emotion is the engine of maturation”².

Daniel Goleman states: “I believe that emotion refers to a feeling and the thoughts it evokes, to psychological and biological states, and to the range of propensities for action”³.

In summary, emotions can be understood as encompassing both actions and reactions specific to each individual, shaped by cognitive and affective patterns experienced during childhood whether consciously expressed or deeply embedded in the subconscious as well as by behaviors and attitudes cultivated throughout one's life.

b. Anger

The Dictionary of Psychology defines anger as a “sudden emotion with an aggressive tendency, manifested through vivid expressive, gestural, and verbal animation, sometimes uncontrollable”⁴.

Aristotle (384 BCE – 322 BCE) equated the meaning of anger with that of wrath. He argued that “to be angry is a movement of a certain body, or of a part or faculty thereof, for a particular reason and with a specific purpose”⁵. Even in ancient times, Aristotle envisioned the interconnectedness of body, mind, and soul, and the way in which emotional states are somatized within the body, thus disrupting this triadic balance.

² Maté, Gabor. 2022. *The Myth of Normality* [Mitul normalității]. Bucharest: Editura Herald, p. 148.

³ Goleman, Daniel. 2008. *Emotional Intelligence* [Inteligența emoțională]. Bucharest: Curtea Veche, p. 361.

⁴ Sillamy, Norbert. 2009. *Dictionary of Psychology* [Dicționar de psihologie]. Bucharest: Encyclopedic Publishing House, p. 135.

⁵ Aristotle. 2005. *On the Soul* [Despre suflet], Translated by Alexander Baumgarter. Bucharest: Humanitas Publishing House, p. 35.

Saint John of Damascus (676–749) identified the fundamental aspects of the emotion of anger, stating: “There are three forms of wrath: irritation, resentment, and hatred. When anger begins and is initiated, it is called irritation. Resentment is when irritation persists; resentment is also referred to as rancor. Hatred is anger that lies in wait for revenge”⁶.

David Hawkins claims that “anger is a very common emotion in society, yet at the level of consciousness, it signifies the dominance of negative energetic fields that reflect the ego’s distorted perceptions”⁷.

Andrei Cosmovici asserts that “anger is triggered when someone offends us in an insulting manner. A fit of rage is marked by facial flushing, thickening of facial and neck veins, bulging and bloodshot eyes, accelerated pulse, gasping, shouting, restlessness, exaggerated gestures, and sometimes the throwing of nearby objects”⁸.

Gábor Maté addresses the dual nature of anger—both healthy and toxic. “Healthy anger is the defense of boundaries; it is a dynamic activated when we perceive a threat to our life or to our physical or emotional integrity”⁹.

Daniel Goleman, echoing Aristotle, treats anger as synonymous with wrath and attributes to it qualities such as “resentment, exasperation, indignation, vexation, animosity, irritability, hostility, and to a certain extent hatred and violence, which are pathological”¹⁰.

Gáspár György highlights that “anger is a natural emotion that deserves attention, as it can convey important messages about our rights, desires, or unmet needs”¹¹.

Based on the reviewed studies, conducted research, and lived experiences, anger is defined as an intensely powerful emotion that manifests reactively, triggering a disruption and escalation of one’s inner equilibrium. This response often signifies a perceived violation of personal boundaries, autonomy, or interpersonal loyalty.

2. The Psychological Nature of Anger

Starting from the assertion that emotions are concentrations of thoughts and affects in response to a triggering cause or stimulus, we can outline a brief psychological trajectory of anger. Anger is an intense reaction, whose primary function is to establish boundaries in response to actions that violate the emotional limits of psychological comfort. The constituent dimensions of anger in its manifestation are cognitive, somatic, and behavioral.

The relationship between thought and emotion is significant, as it traces the physiological pathway from the prefrontal cortex to the amygdala. Anger can be viewed as a form of self-preservation a coping mechanism as long as conscious behavioral control overrides unconscious impulses. However, when the response is impulsive and unregulated, anger becomes a defense mechanism. The unconscious, defined by S. Freud as the *shadow* that complements the human personality, stores and stratifies suppressed conflicts and traumas, thus playing a key role in the consequences of unrestrained anger.

⁶ Saint John of Damascus. 2005. *Dogmatic* [*Dogmatica*]. Translated by Ion Fecioru. Bucharest: Publishing House of the Biblical and Missionary Institute of the Romanian Orthodox Church, pp. 63–64.

⁷ Hawkins, R. David. 2007. *Transcending the Levels of Consciousness: The Stairway to Enlightenment* [*Transcederea nivelurilor de conștiință. Scara spre iluminare*]. Bucharest: Cartea Daath Publishing House, p. 115.

⁸ Cosmovici, Andrei. 2005. *General Psychology* [*Psihologia generală*]. Iași: Polirom Publishing House, p. 226.

⁹ Maté, Gabor. 2022. *The Myth of Normality* [*Mitul normalității*]. Bucharest: Herald Publishing House, p. 384.

¹⁰ Goleman, Daniel. 2008. *Emotional Intelligence*. [*Inteligența emoțională*] Bucharest: Curtea Veche, p. 361.

¹¹ Moldovan, Angela. 2023. *Face to Face with Anger* [*Față în față cu furia*]. Bucharest: Bookzone Publishing House, p. 12.

When anger surpasses the optimal threshold of emotional intelligence, it is expressed through the release of stress hormones that come to dominate both the body and behavior. Consequently, we may often recognize underlying emotions such as fear, shame, or guilt as the true triggers of the explosive state. In such instances, anger also serves a cathartic, tension-releasing function.

Anger can be recognized in its two major forms, marking a distinction between normative and pathological manifestations: ordinary (or so called normal) anger and pathological anger.

Ordinary anger is a momentary reaction that draws attention to the preservation of one's habitual state of equilibrium. "It is situational and limited in duration: it arises when needed, fulfills its task of rejecting perceived threats, and then subsides"¹². Temporary challenges fade relatively quickly, allowing rational calmness to regain control.

Pathological anger, on the other hand, amplifies unresolved emotional wounds, entrenched cognitive patterns, and overwhelming psychological challenges. It tends to manifest in individuals with personality disorders and is characterized by intense rumination and distorted judgment, resulting in a breakdown of conciliatory behavior and a tendency toward uncontrolled, violent actions. Ruminations are emotionally charged and persistent, preventing the emergence of clear and balanced value judgments. As noted in Rumination is associated with the worsening of negative mood states, greater affective responding to negative material, and increased access to negative memories (for a review see Cooney et al. 2010)."¹³

Aggressiveness an undesirable outcome of anger conceals intense emotional experiences. The reactions and sensations are impulsive and unrestrained. In such critical moments, the impulse to harm others arises, fueled by the belief that wrongdoing originates externally. This externalization of blame ultimately inhibits one's capacity to love. D. Hawkins argues that "the narcissistic perceptual pattern tends to give rise to recurrent episodes of anger"¹⁴.

Some observable traits in an angry individual may include: irritability, irrationality, sarcasm, irony, emotional turmoil, explosiveness, frustration, jealousy, mercilessness, hostility, and vindictiveness.

3. The Biological Nature of Anger: The Brain and Anger

Recent research supports the claim that "the right prefrontal lobe appears to fuel negative emotions (such as fear and anger) and impulses, while the left prefrontal lobe seems to function as an emotional switch, capable of regulating or inhibiting the emotions activated in the right hemisphere"¹⁵.

The trajectory of this incendiary emotion anger originates in the center of the body: the heart. Thoughts of any kind shape and modulate behavior. Specifically, ruminative thoughts

¹² Maté, Gabor. 2022. *The Myth of Normal [Mitul normalității]*. Bucharest: Herald Publishing House, p. 384.

¹³ Siep, Nicolette, Franca Tonnaer, Vincent van de Ven, Arnoud Arntz, Adrian Raine, & Maaike Cima. "Anger provocation increases limbic and decreases medial prefrontal cortex connectivity with the left amygdala in reactive aggressive violent offenders." [Electronic version]. *Brain Imaging and Behavior* (2019) 13:1311–1323, p. 1320.
<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC6732149/>

¹⁴ Hawkins, R. David. 2007. *Transcending the Levels of Consciousness: The Stairway to Enlightenment [Transcederea nivelurilor de conștiință. Scara spre iluminare]*. Bucharest: Cartea Daath Publishing House, p. 116.

¹⁵ Ciolacu, Mihai, Valentin. 2024. *The psychology of emotions and the analysis of facial expressions [Psihologia emoțiilor și analiza expresiilor faciale]*. București: Editura Universitară, p. 18.

triggered by anger contribute to violent reactions. The heart's energetic field first registers the emotional stimulus, which is then transmitted to the brain. The amygdala orchestrates the cascade of emotional states, being the primary processor of the entire emotional spectrum. The immediate response initiates a systemic reaction through the release of neurotransmitters-catecholamines, which trigger the hypothalamus's automatic response: the fight-or-flight mechanism. The hypothalamus then signals the pituitary gland to release another category of hormones, including cortisol, adrenaline, epinephrine, and norepinephrine. These and other neurotransmitters stimulate increased heart activity and elevated blood pressure. As a result, the limbs, body, head, senses indeed, the entire organism become physiologically overwhelmed.

Such reactions impair the function of the prefrontal cortex, compromising the brain's capacity for rational, ethical decision-making. Consequently, actions and verbal responses tend to be impulsive and unregulated.

This emotional pathway outlines both the progression and the impact of emotions on the amygdala, along with their behavioral reverberations. Additionally "Prior research on maladaptive emotional regulation has shown that a combination of reduced prefrontal activity and increased hyperactivity in the limbic system (especially the amygdala) is associated with reactive aggression (e.g., Blair, 2012; Coccaro et al., 2016; da Cunha-Bang et al., 2017, 2018; He et al., 2018; Marxen et al., 2016)"¹⁶.

4. Research: Musical Analyses Reflecting the Emotion of Anger

In the universal musical literature, aesthetic tendencies unfold chronologically, revealing individual developmental processes and communal interactions that took place within the societies of their time. Thus, art serves as a mirror of society across all eras; linguistic elements of music, increasingly elaborate and sophisticated, attest to the depth of the era's blessings or deficiencies.

In ancient times, the Middle Ages, Renaissance, and Baroque periods, prevailing conventions suppressed free expression of varied emotions. Consequently, beauty was perceived primarily from limited normative perspectives beauty as seraphic, graceful, delicate, uplifting, theatrical, symmetrical, and transparent.

With the advent of the Classical and Romantic musical eras, social and political conditions fostered alternative perspectives on the same concept of beauty – now including tragic, dramatic, dreamlike, and somber aspects. Within these socially turbulent dimensions, intense emotions such as anger could be expressed without reservation. Vocal literature contains seminal works wherein conflicts musically embody and evoke the emotion of anger.

The Baroque Era: *Serse* by G.F. Haendel

The emergence of opera as a genre occurred during the Baroque period, coinciding with the need for expressive forms imbued with emotional accents beyond those traditionally associated with Divine service. One of the composers notable for his ability to seamlessly intertwine melodic lines with the metaphorical power of words was G.F. Haendel (1685–1759).

¹⁶ Nicolette Siep. Franca Tonnaer.Vincent van de Ven. Arnoud Arntz. Adrian Raine5 & Maaïke Cima. "Anger provocation increases limbic and decreases medial prefrontal cortex connectivity with the left amygdala in reactive aggressive violent offenders.". In *Brain Imaging and Behavior* (2019) 13:1311–1323, p. 1318.

In his 42 operatic works drawing inspiration from historical, mythological, and biblical sources Haendel musically sketches characters imbued with aspirations, passions, virtues, and vices.

In the two-act opera *Serse* (1738), Haendel musically portrays the figure of the Persian king Xerxes (contratenor), endowed with the aura of an authoritative monarch but simultaneously revealing a distinctive emotional fragility. When rejected by Romilda, the object of his affection, Xerxes's reaction of anger is predictably depicted by the composer in the aria *Crude furie degli orridi abissi* (*Cruel fury of the horrid abyss*). "Since anger originates from frustrated desire, it is based on the immediately subordinate energetic field (Desire). Frustration arises from the exaggeration of the importance of desires"¹⁷.

Haendel composes the solo part with an agile rhythmic writing in a compound ternary meter (6/8) and an Allegro tempo. The vocal technique is coloratura, influenced by instrumental styles, characterized by predominantly descending but also ascending sixteenth-note passages, frequent large leaps up to an eleventh, and alternations with long, legato notes, revealing evident emotional instability.

Instrumentally, the portrayal of intense anger is achieved through the string and woodwind orchestration, which, through rhythm and melody, serve as faithful accompaniments to the solo voice, enhancing its agitation and tension:



Fig. 1. G.F.Haendel. *Serse*. Aria *Crude furie degli orride abissi*

Classical Music: *Don Giovanni* by W. A. Mozart

W. A. Mozart (1756–1791), a composer whose compositional horizon surpassed both the present of his time and even the future of music, reflected an aesthetic that portrayed beauty as the multifaceted brilliance of a diamond graceful, tragic, sublime, harmonious, conventional. This aesthetic often blurred the sufferings and unfulfilled emotional and social realities. Nevertheless, these realities subtly emerge in both his instrumental and vocal works.

One of the seminal operas revealing the intense emotion of anger is *Don Giovanni*, a *dramma giocoso* in two acts with a libretto by Lorenzo Da Ponte, based on works by Tirso de Molina, Molière, and Bertati. In the second act, Donna Elvira, humiliated by Don Giovanni's deceitful behavior, manifests her emotional pain and the suffering of betrayal expressing a masked fury through Mozartian melodic, harmonic, and rhythmic pathways in the aria *Mi tradi*

¹⁷ Hawkins, R. David. 2007. *Transcending the Levels of Consciousness: The Stairway to Enlightenment* [Transcederea nivelurilor de conștiință. Scara spre iluminare]. Bucharest: Cartea Daath Publishing House, p. 115.

quell'alma ingrata. Behind Donna Elvira's fury (soprano) lie emotions such as offense, humiliation, deception, and wounding.

Mozart, with exceptional artistic insight, translates this emotion through the lens of the aforementioned aesthetic both in the recitative and the aria, traversing a variety of melodic, rhythmic, and dynamic means. The specific musical devices reflect a refined mastery that highlights anger: short note values, brisk tempo, intervallic leaps, interspersed often with short rests, and shifts between major and minor tonal centers.

The melodic trajectory of Donna Elvira's aria, preceded by the recitative, is agitated, stormy, and disturbed, supported by the intervention of the strings playing short notes interspersed with trills a sign of anger and unrest:



Fig. 2. W.A. Mozart. *Don Giovanni*. Recitativ Dona Elvira - *Mi tradi quell'alma ingrata*.

The theme of the aria is versatile; W. A. Mozart does not relinquish melodic delicacy, yet alternates it with agitated passages, signaling an underlying conflict, a repressed anger. The sinuous trajectory of the theme – ascending, descending, and ascending again – even within the tonal boundaries, is supported by incisive poetic lyrics, which facilitate a swift perception of the emotion of anger:



Fig. 3. W.A. Mozart. *Don Giovanni*. Aria Dona Elvira - *Mi tradi quell'alma ingrata*

Alternatively, following Mozart's brilliant inspiration, the anger is expressed on the same thematic path but in the parallel minor key, E-flat minor:



Fig. 4. W.A. Mozart. *Don Givanni*. Aria Dona Elvira - *Mi tradi quell'alma ingrata*.

Musical Classicism. *Die Zauberflöte* by W. A. Mozart

A more pronounced expression of manifested anger, a true model of unleashed emotion, can be observed in the two-act singspiel *Die Zauberflöte* (The Magic Flute), composed in the last year of W. A. Mozart's life, 1791. The Queen of the Night's aria (soprano), *Die Hölle Rache*, is one of masterful complexity and difficulty, with Mozart successfully imprinting the sharp energy of the words in the rapid passages of sixteenth notes: *Der Hölle Rache kocht in meinem Herzen, / Tod und Verzweiflung flammet um mich her!* (Hell's vengeance boils in my heart, / Death and despair flame around me!).

The form of the aria is a tripartite lied and coda: ABA_v/Coda. Within Mozart's masterful, even tonal, musical setting, the emotion of anger easily emerges, beneath which lurks vindictiveness and manipulative force. The tonal color, D minor, supports the composer in sketching the atmosphere of hatred, violence, and revenge. The brisk note values, vocal coloraturas ascending to high C (C3) and F3, performed in staccato (with nine measures repeated in the first section and fourteen measures in the second), and the large leaps of fifths, sixths, sevenths, and octaves serve to delineate the tumult of overt fury. Although the orchestra primarily supports through the string quartet, woodwinds, and timpani, it also interjects sharply, with general chords or rapid sixteenth-note figures:



Fig. 5. *Die zauberflöte*, W.A.Mozart, actul II

Musical Romanticism. *Don Carlos* by G. Verdi

Giuseppe Verdi (1813–1901) was a Romantic composer, a continuator of the operatic tradition, who shaped a new profile for the lyrical genre through exceptional inspiration and a profound and intense dramatic sensibility. Concerned with correlating the psychological profile of characters with their musical development, his works reveal lyrical, epic, and often dramatic accents, with music subordinated to the text. Within the dramatic scope of several of his operas, the emotion of anger is frequently distinguished, supported by intense intrigues and passions, as well as volcanic, often uncontrollable, states of mind.

Don Carlos (1867), an opera in five acts, serves as such an example. Princess Eboli (mezzo-soprano), in the dramatic aria *O don fatale*, experiences the suffering of unrequited love. The ternary ABA form of the aria allows the soloist to alternate between conflicting inner states of anger, frustration, and sadness, oscillating between explosive tension and introspection. The composer writes for the soloist's warm and yet grave timbre predominantly ascending motives, culminating in expressions of fury on notes such as B2 and Cb3, often within triplet figures, which enable emphasis on words conveying the deepest emotions of hatred and revenge. The orchestra accompanies rhythmically and melodically like a shadow, with accents of seventh and ninth chords during moments of peak fury:

co, ti ma-le-di-co, o mia bel-tà! Ah! ti ma-le-di-co, o mia bel-tà!
thee, my curse is on thee, O beau-ty bright! Ah! my curse is on thee, O beau-ty bright!

Fig. 6. G. Verdi. *Don Carlos*, Aria Principesei Eboli - *O don fatale*.

Musical Romanticism. *La Traviata* by G. Verdi

La Traviata, a melodrama in four acts (1853), with a libretto by Francesco Maria Piave based on the novel *La Dame aux Camélias* by Alexandre Dumas fils, is one of Verdi's most poignant examples of psychological and emotional depth. In Act II, during Flora's party (*Seguito del Finale, II, Scene XIII*), the composer creates a vivid portrayal of mounting tension through the indication of an urgent and tumultuous tempo *Allegro agitato assai vivo* in *alla breve* meter. This agitation is further supported by the deliberate harmonic shift from D-flat major toward a semicadence on the raised subdominant (the IV degree), resting momentarily on a diminished seventh chord with an added diminished seventh and minor ninth.

This initial musical tableau presents a state of unrest that gradually unravels, setting the stage for the emotional escalation that follows:

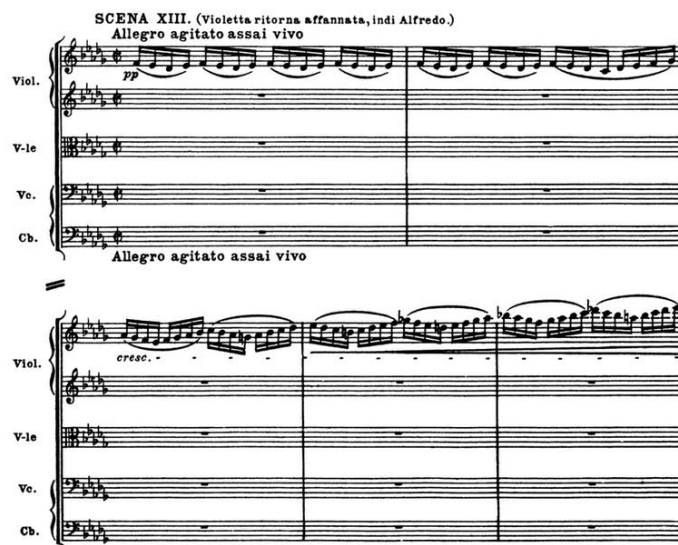


Fig. 7. G. Verdi. *La Traviata*. Actul II, scena XIV, *Invitato a qui seguirmi*.

Violetta's (soprano) inner turmoil stemming from her inability to reveal the truth of her self-sacrifice triggers Alfredo's (tenor) outburst of jealousy, violently expressed through the intense emotion of fury in the aria *Invitato a qui seguirmi*. The composer unfolds the full scope of emotional tension across all vocal parts: rhythmically, through sixteenth-note values interrupted by rests; timbrally, through the support of low-register instruments cellos and double basses in the strings, and bassoons in the woodwinds; and vocally, through the duet between the two solo voices, which intensifies in both intervallic ascent and dynamic range, reaching the very edge of scream:



Fig. 8. G. Verdi. *La Traviata*. Actul 2, scena XIV, *Invitato a qui seguirmi*.

Musical Romanticism. *Rigoletto* by G. Verdi

In another emblematic work of the genre, *Rigoletto*, a lyrical drama in three acts (1851) with a libretto by Francesco Maria Piave, based on Victor Hugo's play *Le roi s'amuse*, G. Verdi reaches a dramatic peak in his compositional output, shaping moments of paroxysmal fury in the aria *Cortigiani, vill razza dannata* (Courtiers, vile cursed race). The elements of musical language progressively unfold across all structural dimensions: the tonality, C minor, dark and tense, signifies the emotional state of the character Rigoletto (baritone), a father consumed by

rage over the violation of his personal boundaries. The dynamic marking *Andante mosso agitato* draws attention to the dramatic weight of the situation his daughter having been taken from him by force. The melodic line is descending, fragmented by short rests. The entire compositional structure reflects the intensity of the emotional outburst. The first phrase of the solo part is structured as a descending line, composed of minor and major seconds, punctuated by pauses, resembling a declamatory speech. In the second phrase, the fury interrupted as though by sobs or breathlessness is sustained through repeated high notes rhythmically differentiated, often with double dots. The peak of anger is most strikingly expressed in the forceful attack of the G1 pitch. The final phrase, again rhythmically varied, reflects the urgency and impulsivity of rage, moving in a recto tono line on C1, shaped in triplet figures either equal or extended in value. The orchestral accompaniment amplifies the tension with descending sextuplets in both the upper and lower string sections:

Fig. 9. G. Verdi. *Rigoletto*. Aria Rigoletto – *Cortegiani, vill razza dannata*.

Musical Romanticism. *Il trovatore* by G. Verdi

In the four-act drama *Il trovatore* (1853), G. Verdi composes a lyrical work marked by passionate intensity and characteristically Iberian exaltation. Azucena (mezzo-soprano) emerges as a striking and provocative figure, for whom Verdi envisioned a dramatic mezzo-soprano voice powerful, mature, and resilient. The aria *Stride la vampa* is a harrowing cry of fury, directed inwardly, as Azucena is overwhelmed by the burdens of a tormented past.

The melodic design is rapid and serpentine, shaped closely by the meaning of the text, mirroring the flickering, undulating movement of flames. The music conveys a psychological portrait of internalized rage and emotional turmoil, encapsulating Azucena's haunted memories through swift rhythmic patterns and sinuous melodic lines:



Fig. 10. G. Verdi. *Il Trovatore*. Aria *Stride la vampa*

Musical Romanticism. *Otello* by G. Verdi

Another work in which Verdi's dramatic intensity is fully manifested—where the emotion of rage escalates to the point of murder is the four-act lyrical drama *Otello* (1887), based on William Shakespeare's tragedy. In the fourth act, Otello (tenor), blinded by jealousy, loses all sense of reason and, in a dense and emotionally charged scene of fury, kills Desdemona (soprano).

Verdi's musical language powerfully underscores the intensity of Otello's rage: the characters' dialogue unfolds through a fluid exchange of melodic lines, with each voice adopting pitches from the other, emphasizing the intrinsic emotional bond between them. The use of short rhythmic values eighth and sixteenth notes – interspersed with pauses, evokes a frantic dialogue. The melodic line, chromatic and ascending, builds toward Otello's furious outcry and Desdemona's desperate, dying cry.

Simultaneously, the orchestral writing heightens the dramatic tension. It stands in stark contrast to the solo vocal lines, featuring a descending contour articulated through short, staccato rhythmic values further amplifying the emotional dissonance and fatal resolution of the scene:

Ob.
Clar. in La
Fag.
D.
O.
Viol.
V-le
Vo.
Cb.

Non è ve-ro! lo rea non so-no! Giu-ro!
desti. Nel-la sua man lo vi-di. Con-fes-sa! Bada al-lo sper-giu-ro ...

mf cresc.
mf cresc.
pp stacc.
p
poco cresc.
poco cresc.

Fig. 11. G. Verdi, *Otello*, Act IV, the scene of Desdemona's murder.

Musical Romanticism. *Carmen* by G. Bizet

The aria from Act IV of the four-act lyric drama *Carmen* (1875) is a final duet that brings the opera to its dramatic conclusion. The compositional writing is complex, not only through its musical language but also through the alternation between the chorus and the duet of the two protagonists, Don José (tenor) and Carmen (mezzo-soprano), which reflects the insurmountable tension.

As negative emotions unfold, they tend to alienate one from rational thought. Don José's behavior in this final scene is that of a man overtaken by his inner turmoil – essentially a victim. At the peak of his unleashed fury, his attitude becomes audacious, even in the absence of boundaries. The tempo of the choral ensemble is brisk, echoing the fervor of the bullfight occurring in the background, while that of the soloists is more measured – an indication of fury already unleashed. The vocal lines of the soloists verge on the quality of a cry, with rhythmic structures composed of ever-changing durations interrupted by rests. These include dotted eighth notes followed by sixteenths, or triplet patterns in syncopated configurations. The string accompaniment is stormy and breathless, characterized by extremely short, trembling note values, intensifying the emotional and dramatic climax of the opera:

Allegro fuocoso. $\text{♩} = 128.$
Vl.
C.
B.

Laisse-moi.
Où vas-tu? Cet homme qu'on ac-clame, C'est ton nouvel a-

pp
pp
pp

Fig. 12. G. Bizet. *Carmen*. Final duet, act IV.

In the following passage, we draw attention to the score marking: *con furia* (with fury):



Fig. 13. G. Bizet. *Carmen*. Final duet, act IV.

Then, in the following passage, the marking in the score is equally telling *con violenza* (with violence). The expression of fury is also evident in the vocal writing of the soloist, Don José: a sinuous melodic line, a dragging rhythm shaped by irregular triplets all signs of unleashed fury accompanied by the cellos, whose heartrending motif foreshadows the tragic outcome:



Fig. 14. G. Bizet. *Carmen*. Final duet, act IV.

Musical Verismo. *I Pagliacci*, by R. Leoncavallo

The opera *I Pagliacci* (1892) by Ruggero Leoncavallo (1858–1919), composed in two acts and a prologue, is a “theatre within a theatre” in which melodrama is seamlessly integrated into the distinct aesthetics of verismo. The main character, Canio (tenor), in Act II, overwhelmed by uncontrollable jealousy and a desire for revenge, experiences the intense emotion of fury, ultimately committing a double murder killing his young wife, Nedda (soprano), and her lover, Silvio (baritone). The compositional complexity lies in the fusion of Italian vocal expressiveness with the vitality of an orchestral writing that is both masterfully crafted and deeply inspired. The vocal lines of the soloists, particularly those of Canio and Nedda, reflect the dramatic text with virulent and poignant intensity, embodying the verismo style: wide intervallic leaps, varied rhythmic patterns, rhythmically structured and declamatory speech, often accented with outbursts resembling cries:

Fig. 15. R. Leoncavallo. *I Pagliacci*. Act II, Final.

Cavalleria Rusticana, a one-act melodrama (1890), is the work that established musical verismo through its concentrated essence of vocality, expansive orchestral developments, and literary text, which, “from the evening of its premiere (60 curtain calls!)”¹⁸ marked a new era in opera.

Amidst moments of deep lyricism in each soloist’s part, cantilenas inspired by Italian folk melodies, and innovative solutions in blending voices with wind instruments, approximately one-third into the work according to the Fibonacci principle the golden section is reached: a moment of volcanic tension, revealed in the duet between Santuzza (soprano) and Alfio (baritone). The second part of this duet, cast in the sombre tonality of F minor, is a true outpouring of the emotion of fury from a betrayed husband. It underscores the idea that “the release of fury is a form of catharsis.”¹⁹ Alfio’s vocal line is marked by accentuated intonation; the melodic motif is narrow in range, repetitive, without bold leaps, but performed *forte*, conveying uncontrollable rage upon learning of his wife Lola’s infidelity. Santuzza’s melodic line, by contrast, is winding and soaring, with wide intervals and piercing vocal attacks at the edge of a scream signs of fury and despair. On this expressive musical plane, Mascagni utilizes the full force of the orchestra, particularly the woodwinds and brass, in cascading thirty-second-note passages from the strings. The visual layout of the score is also telling: the instrumental lines move in contrary motion a powerful symbol of emotional violence unleashed:

¹⁸ Constantinescu, Grigore. 2008. *The Splendors of Opera [Splendorile operei]*. Bucharest: Didactic and Pedagogical Publishing House, p. 234.

¹⁹ Goleman, Daniel. 2008. *Emotional Intelligence [Inteligența emoțională]*. Bucharest: Curtea Veche Publishing, p. 93.

The image displays a page from a musical score for P. Mascagni's *Cavalleria rusticana*. The score is written for a full orchestra and vocal soloists. The instruments listed on the left include Flute (Fag.), Horns (Hör. F.), Trombones (Pos.), Tuba (Tub.), Percussion (Pk.), Saxophone (Sa.), Violins (1. Viol., 2. Viol.), Trumpets (Br.), Cello (Vcll.), and Double Bass (Kbss.). The vocal parts are for a Soprano (S.), Alto (A.), and Tenor (T.). The score features various musical notations, including dynamics like *marcato* and *con agitazione*, and tempo markings like *allegretto*. The lyrics are in German and Italian, with the German lyrics appearing above the Italian ones. The German lyrics are: "Verflucht sind bei-de! Die Schuld wird nicht ver-ge-ben, die In-fa-mi-lo-ro, ad-es-si non per-do-no, ad". The Italian lyrics are: "maledetti siate voi due! Il peccato non si perdonerà, maledetti voi due".

Fig. 16. P. Mascagni. *Cavalleria rusticana*.

5. Conclusions

Daniel Goleman, who distinguished emotions in his seminal work *Emotional Intelligence*, explains that: "Essentially, all emotions are impulses that compel you to act."²⁰ The same clinical psychologist further delineates the nuances of anger: "Anger includes fury, resentment, exasperation, indignation, vexation, animosity, irritability, hostility, and to some extent, pathological forms such as hatred and violence."²¹ The primary objective of this comprehensive study was to identify the emotion of anger in several representative operatic works, as well as to analyze the linguistic elements through which composers have interpreted this emotion within their musical writing.

The history of opera, in its magnificent evolution from the Camerata Fiorentina to today's Postmodernism, encompasses a multitude of libretti and roles expressing the intense emotion of anger. The evolutionary stages of humanity and the history of the arts have prompted leaps in musical thought and consciousness, reflected in increasingly skillful techniques of vocal writing, orchestration, and dramaturgy. The psychological exploration of characters through the lens of musical composition has developed gradually, historically aligned with the dissolution of social conventions. Consequently, specific linguistic elements can be observed at each stage of music history: in the Baroque period, melodic lines were shaped within a polyphonic syntax; in the Classical era, melodic continuity was maintained alongside an emerging emphasis on dynamics and rhythmic variety, within a homophonic syntax; Romanticism added a focus on timbre, expressed across three syntactic dimensions monody, polyphony, and homophony; Modernism elevated freedom of expression to prominence; and Postmodernism sees the eruption of all

²⁰ Goleman, Daniel. 2008. *Emotional Intelligence [Inteligența emoțională]*. Bucharest: Curtea Veche Publishing, p. 32.

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 361.

elements, sometimes to extreme dimensions, across all syntactic forms monody, polyphony, homophony, and heterophony.

Key terms associated with anger, which characterize the emotions of characters marked by this experience, include: frustrated, nervous, angry, enraged, furious, beside oneself, and raging with fury²². Reflecting these varied manifestations of anger, this study identified several important musical writing elements that portray anger in operatic creation:

- Tonalities are predominantly minor, outlining the character's psychological tension. Occasionally, the opposite occurs, where an abundance of chromaticism detracts from the brightness typically associated with major tonalities;
- The alternation between major and minor is frequently encountered within the same aria sections;
- Sometimes, the use of parallel keys also emphasizes major conflicting states;
- Melodic lines often display broken, ascending, and descending contours, frequently involving vocal coloratura, signaling emotional imbalance and desperate fury;
- Melodic lines sometimes have a reduced ambitus but marked intonations, featuring ascending and daring intervallic conclusions that signify the visceral hatred underlying the anger;
- Often, the melodic line resembles declamation, indicating intense determination in expressing anger, frequently through revenge;
- Operatic works from the mid-Romantic period, Verismo, and subsequent eras feature intonations approaching speech, even surpassing it, extending to shouting;
- The semiotics of musical language adapt to these transformations in expressive techniques;
- Durations tend to be short sixteenth notes, quarter notes, eighth notes with frequent interruptions by varied pauses that enhance emotional intensity;
- Rhythm is constantly modulated according to the meaning and accent of words, with sixteenth note and triplet patterns predominating to facilitate the fluidity of verbal expression in anger;
- Duets often appear, where soloists exchange musical ideas via connecting sounds that intensify the audience's perception;
- Dynamics are forceful, with gradual amplification of nuances depending on the aesthetic: more restrained in Baroque and Classical periods, more intense in later aesthetics. Similarly, accents, marcato markings, and expressive indications consistently align with emotional intensity;
- Orchestral accompaniment evolves alongside musical trends, introducing new elements. Strings often create a tense sonic background through tremolos and short note values, especially in Baroque and Classical music;
- From the late Classical period into the Romantic era, significant emphasis appears on bass instruments, brass winds, and percussion, particularly timpani;
- Since "many emotional reactions arise practically before we fully understand what is happening,"²³ composers precede anger-associated passages with orchestral interventions: string tremolos, forte timpani strikes, rapid and sinuous flute passages,

²² Moldovan, Angela. 2023. *Face to Face with Anger [Față în față cu furia]*. București: Bookzone, p. 387.

²³ Goleman, Daniel. 2008. *Emotional Intelligence [Inteligența emoțională]*. Bucharest: Curtea Veche, p. 365.

voice doublings through clarinet and bassoon interventions, grave brass intonations, and choral interjections.

Life's balance unfolds between stimuli and reactions. Stimuli arrive precisely to push us beyond limits. Anger is a reaction, often impulsive, with potentially destructive consequences on interpersonal and social levels. In opera, through vocality and orchestration, the composer, endowed with knowledge and boundless creativity, succeeds in shaping a complex image of a character or situation imbued with profound emotional charge, revealing remarkable depths of the human psyche.

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