

Female Psychological Types for the Soprano Voice in Verdi's Works and their Musical Characterization

Elena HEBEISEN-MOȘUC¹

Abstract: *Verdi was a composer very passionate about music and theater and obsessed with stylistic perfection. His style is characterized by the belcanto technique, enhanced by an organic connection with scenic-dramatic truth, in which he anticipates verismo. The depth of the vocal line is matched by an evocative orchestral treatment, particularly rich, especially in the last compositions. Verdi's Romantic heroine embodies strength, passion and fragility, oscillating between radical decisions and self-destruction. Each psychological type is reflected, in the choice of all vocal characteristics: register, coloratura, ambitus, and particular attention to the treatment of phrasing, intensity and melodic line. The heroine's voice is not just a carrier of sound, but of a message, an emotional statement. The orchestra participates as a real character, supports the shaping of the profile of each heroine and, in addition, often translates into sound language the depths of silences, hesitations, inner strength. The character is built not only in arias but also in the orchestra with the help of specific instruments. Verdi's heroine is, in a world ruled by violent, blind or powerful men, the emotional and moral center of tragedy.*

Keywords: *soprano; psychological type; heroine; musical characterization; opera;*

A brief introduction to Verdi's life and works

"I adore art... when I am alone with my notes, my heart pounds and the tears stream from my eyes, and my emotion and my joys are too much to bear"

Giuseppe Verdi

Giuseppe Fortunino Francesco Verdi is born on October 10, 1831 in Roncole in the Duchy of Parma, the very year that coincides with the last year of Napoleonic French rule, which is why the original birth certificate was in French. Italy in the first half of the 19th century was oppressed by foreign governments, a country divided and separated into autonomous political structures - duchies - which, by their lack of unity and mutual cooperation and even rivalry, further increased external political pressure.

Like all musicians endowed with divine grace, Verdi's love of music was a passion from childhood, and his musical aptitude immediately attracted the attention of everyone around him. The organist of the church he attended agreed to give him organ lessons.

Giovanni Provesi, a meritorious artist of his time, proposed to the young Verdi to go to Milan to attend the Conservatory. The disappointment was devastating when Francesco Basili, one of the last representatives of the Italian school in the 18th century, refused him admission, citing lack of musical talent, a refusal Verdi never forgot. So the young Verdi turned to the composer Lavigna, accompanist at the Scala Theatre, who immediately put him in touch with all the musical technique within the limits that Italians practiced at the time. By this time the young composer had already composed numerous works in all genres. On graduating from the

¹ Faculty of Musical Performance, National University of Music Bucharest, elena.mosuc@bluewin.ch.

Conservatory (1835), Verdi married the daughter of his patron, Barezzi, and then returned to Busseto as the town's music teacher.

His immense desire to have an opera house close to him brought him back to Milan after three years, along with a complete opera entitled *Oberto di San Bonifacio*, written to a libretto signed by Antonio Piazza and Temistocle Solera, which he had been entrusted with while working with Lavigna. The year 1839 brought him fame with the premiere of this opera, which was very well received by the public and brought the young musician's name to the fore. This marked the beginning of a highly successful career as a composer, with theater directors appreciating him at his true worth, making him the most highly rated dramatic composer of his time. While many of his compositions of that era have been forgotten, many have achieved undeniable success: *Nebuchadnezzar*, which remained under the name *Nabucco* (Scala, 1842), *I Lombardi* (Scala, 1843, opera revived in France in 1847 as *Jerusalem*), *Ernani* (Venice, 1844), *I due foscari* (Roma, 1844), *Giovanna d'Arco* (Scala, 1845), *Attila* (Venice, 1846), *Macbeth* (Florence, 1847), *I masnadieri* (London, 1847), *Luisa Miller* (Naples, 1849), *La battaglia di Legnano* (Rome, 1849).

Many of these operas were also successful because of the political innuendos that Italians in that troubled era were seeing everywhere. Verdi became a standard-bearer of the Risorgimento, a symbol of the national liberation movement. For this reason he had some problems with the Austrian censors and was then forced to compose and stage operas in France and England

After the Italian revolution of 1848, the success of the first part of his career waned. This second period of his career was, however, marked by three valuable operas: *Rigoletto* (Milan, 1851), *Il trovatore* (Apollo in Rome, 1853) and *La Traviata* (Venice, 1853). *Les Vêpres Siciliennes* (Paris, 1855), *Simone Boccanegra* (Venice, 1857) and *Un ballo in maschera* (Rome, 1859) were received with reluctance. In 1867, with the premiere of *Don Carlos* (Paris, 1867), Verdi showed a move towards a new, more elegant, harmonious style, with a different scale of the sentences, and he was a huge success. In 1871, the opera *Aida*, written for the inauguration of the Italian theater in Cairo, and the enormous success of the proposed score, showed great progress in style, faithful adherence to dramatic conventions, the general poise of the opera, the strength and nobility of the musical expression, *Otello* (Milan, 1877) and *Falstaff* (Milan, 1893) were also very well received by the public, and were superior in staging, the Italians having more respect for these two operas than the love reserved for the trilogy of *Rigoletto-Il trovatore-La Traviata* and *Aida*.

Verdi was a very passionate composer, he worked enormously during his "anni di galera", he was effectively obsessed with continuous stylistic perfection throughout his career, each new opera representing a new step towards perfection. His style is characterized by the belcanto technique, enhanced by an organic link with the scenic-dramatic truth, anticipating verismo. The depth of the vocal line is matched by an evocative orchestral treatment, particularly rich, especially in the last compositions. His compositional conception is distinguished by his concern for conciseness, by the art of distributing the arias, ensembles and choruses that symbolize the popular element, thus proving himself to be a great master. Towards the end of his life, the tendency to suppress the recitative in favor of a more melodic, warm, melodic formulation, to attenuate the cut of the scenes, to maintain dramatic tension and continuous musical discourse, is evident in his work. The expression becomes more vehement, more dramatic, more sanguine. Concurrently with the development of the richness of harmonic means,

of more chosen sonorities and of new melodic formulas, there appears an interest in a broader and more multilateral orchestral treatment, subordinated to singing and voice, unlike Wagner, whom he, moreover admired. His work, always guided by a brilliant intuition at the service of the specific characteristics and demands of the operatic theater, is the perfect embodiment of the Italian style based on the expressiveness of the human voice, on the truthful and nuanced portrayal of feelings.

On his rivalry with Wagner, in a letter to Giuseppe Arrivabene (great Italian patriot), the maestro has a prophetic vision: "And the day will come when there will be no more talk of melody, of harmony, of the German and Italian school, of the future, of the past, etc., etc., etc., and then, perhaps, the reign of music may begin"².

1. Verdi's romantic heroine

*"In Verdi's theater, the woman's voice is the place where tragedy is decided"*³.

Gilles de Van

Italian Romantic melodrama redefines the figure of the heroine, influenced by female spirituality and the beginnings of 19th-century feminism. Romantic opera portrays heroes marked by tragic destiny who die prematurely for an ideal. Although the heroic theme comes from Greek theatre and was taken up in the Baroque and Classicism, the Romantics gave it a social and moralizing dimension.

Romantic heroines become symbols of the mentality of the age, and the boundary between art and life blurs. Stage heroes reflect reality, treating heroism as a reaction to the marginalization of art and artists in previous centuries.

"The deeply dramatic presentation of the chosen subjects (libretti) was the only possible way to assert the human, one's own feelings and experiences, in the sphere of theater. The change of trajectory from the mythological to the fantastic, to the concretization of the human and the psychological in drama and opera, was a necessity of Romanticism. The reorientation of the theater was largely due to the performers, who were forced to give up stereotypical masks under the impetus of the great prefaces of this century. The living, palpable element takes hold of the stage and personal lives of the performers, the depth of pure feelings and their artistic relief through their own psychological explorations becomes the vital center in the stage maturation of the interpreter of the romantic hero. The ecstasy of the moments of creation arouses the interest of the performers, but also of the audience, emotionally involved in deciphering the destiny of the romantic hero. The performer approaches the musical-dramatic text in a different way, seeking within himself the access to the person embodied. Composers and singers become banners carrying with them symbols of the characters they create"⁴.

Romantic heroes of historical drama are distinguished by moral nobility and intense passion. Unlike the classical hero, they defy the limits of existence by sacrificing themselves for an ideal, their death having a liberating significance. Nature becomes a symbolic partner,

² Franz Werfel. 1964. *VERDI – romanul operei*. București: Editura Muzicală, p. 358.

³ Gilles de van. 1998. *Verdi's Theater: Creating Drama through Music*. University of Chicago Press, p. 150.

⁴ Elena Moșuc. 2023. *Tema nebuniei în opera italiană din prima jumătate a secolului al XIX-lea*. București: Editura Universității Naționale de Muzică, p. 52.

reflecting their moods. The contrasts between night and day emphasize the dramaturgic tensions: night brings dream and mystery, day - hope or confrontation with reality.

Verdi's Romantic heroine embodies strength, passion and fragility, oscillating between radical decisions and self-destruction. Whether strong (Abigaille, Leonora), murderous (Lady Macbeth), vulnerable (Gilda, Violetta) or tragic (Desdemona), she fights for an impossible love, often choosing sacrifice. Unlike Baroque opera, which exalted physical beauty, Romantic opera explores inner depth and the spirit of sacrifice. The Romantic hero evolves as a moral idealist, capable of the same renunciations.

The path of the great romantic heroines was opened by Vincenzo Bellini (Norma, Imogene, Elvira), continued by Donizetti (Lucia, then the trilogy of English queens: Anna Bolena, Elisabetta I, Maria Stuarda) and perfected by Giuseppe Verdi.

2. Female psychological types for soprano voice in Verdi's creation and their characterization

"Give her a beautiful voice and a big heart - and the rest will be music"⁵.

Giuseppe Verdi

2.1. Historical and aesthetic aspects

Verdi explores the full range of female typologies, both psychologically and emotionally, in the course of his dramaturgy. However, he shows a particular preference for the heroine who sacrifices herself out of love, thus echoing one of the central themes of Romanticism: love to the point of sacrifice. Working in the Romantic era - an artistic and philosophical movement that valued individuality, emotion and the confrontation between the individual and destiny - Verdi helped to reshape the image of women in opera. No longer a mere passive object of love, she becomes an active character with a complex psychology and deep inner conflicts. Verdi's music, intensely dramatic, faithfully expresses these inner feelings through elaborate sonic means, building a veritable gallery of female characters. The romantic heroine no longer appears merely as a victim of the antagonist, but in some cases she herself becomes the dominant force, with strong negative undertones, subjugating the other characters (such as Lady Macbeth or Abigaille). This character is also reflected in the vocal writing, which is marked by technical difficulties, dramatic intensity, ample leaps and the use of the entire vocal ambitus. The appearances of these characters are charged with musical-harmonic tension and express a wide variety of emotional states. The same complexity is found in the heroines of Donizetti's operas, but in Verdi's case the expressivity is taken to a more intense and often aggressive level. Despite the drama, however, there are still moments in which the Belcantist line is marked by lyrical, expressive and often remarkably melodious cantilena.

Since its earliest manifestations, the opera stage has been populated by powerful characters inspired by mythology, history or heroic legends. In order to sustain the dramaturgy coherently from a performance point of view, the subjects chosen for the librettos were often taken out of their original context and historical truth was frequently distorted. The plots were adapted to the taste of the time, centered on complex love stories, usually with a tragic outcome

⁵ Giulio Cesari. 1951. *Giuseppe Verdi, Lettere*. Ricordi, p. 142.

in which the death of the heroes became inevitable. The endings of these works emphasized the exemplary virtues of the characters, the spirit of sacrifice and the triumph of moral and emotional values over reason, regardless of the nature or psychological profile of the protagonist.

2.2. Analysis of some psychological types in Verdi's creation for the soprano voice

*"Verdi's heroines are those who suffer, forgive and die - and through their death, the operas come to life"*⁶.

Massimo Mila

2.2.1. The idealistic and mystical woman, with the qualities of a sacrificed woman

One of Verdi's early female characters is Giselda in *I Lombardi alla prima crociata* (1843). Not as famous as characters such as Violetta, Aida, Desdemona, she plays an essential role in understanding the development of Verdi's typology. Giselda is deeply religious and has a moral and spiritual vision of the life that leads her. The aria from the first act in which she asks for mercy for all, even her enemies "Te, Vergin Santa invoco/Salve Maria" is representative. It is a meditative aria, with ethereal phrases, but technically sustained on the breath, anticipating the sacramental style of *La forza del destino* or *Aida*. She condemns war, murder, religious fanaticism and courageously opposes her father Arvino and the ideology of the crusade. She loves discreetly and suffers nobly.

Giselda is a courageous and very determined young woman, but not in a warlike sense like Odabella in *Attila*, but in the strength of her moral convictions. She is loving, but her love for Oronte is almost sublimated. The role should be performed by a lyric-dramatic soprano, but it can also be performed by a lyric soprano with very good voice projection, able to resolve passages with dramatic leaps, to have control of long phrases that are often close to symphonic construct form, to have the physical stamina for such a long role and great expressiveness.

"Giselda is the first Verdian woman to openly oppose war and hatred, becoming a symbol of humanity and forgiveness in a world divided by beliefs"⁷.

2.2.2. The pure and sacrificial woman

These women in some of Verdi's operas are dominated by purity and extreme altruism. Violetta Valéry (from *La Traviata*, 1853) and Gilda (from *Rigoletto*, 1851) are two of the most representative examples of the typology of the "pure and sacrificial woman" in Verdi's operas. They embody the Romantic ideal of absolute love, carried to the ultimate sacrifice. Here we also add the interesting roles of Luisa Miller in the opera *Luisa Miller* (1849) and Desdemona in *Otello* (1877).

Violetta is an exquisite courtesan who falls sincerely in love, gives up everything for love and dies alone, with dignity. She symbolizes the woman who overcomes her condition through love and sacrifice and succeeds, even on her deathbed, in fulfilling her love and reaching the utopian goal of the romantic heroine - the fulfillment of love. But it is not only destiny that brings Violetta the fulfillment of her love, but also her strong emotional profile, her solid psyche,

⁶ Massimo Mila. 1981. *L'opera italiana nell'Ottocento*. Einaudi, p. 312.

⁷ Julian Budden. 1973. *The Operas of Verdi, From Oberto to Rigoletto*, vol.1. Cambridge University Press, p. 207.

which undergoes, scene after scene, throughout the drama of the opera, through chilling trials and tests of character. Let us think of the climax of the opera represented by her meeting with Alfredo's father, when Violetta shows the other side of her special soul - dignity, nobility, understanding, kindness, depth of feeling.

Musically, the role is characterized by a vocal writing that combines virtuosity with internalized lyricism. In the first two acts of the opera, Violetta vacillates between her love for Alfredo and her return to her life of easy morals. As a character, she is charming, enchanting, beautiful, and the composer portrays these qualities in the music.

The first big aria "È strano/ Ah, forse lui/ Sempre libera" has the traditional form of *recitative* (pathetic, with unstable melodic lines), *andantino* (moving and vocally demanding a lot of quietness, extreme legato, elegant, refined phrasing, interiorization) and *cabaletta* in a *brilliant allegro* (a real vocal firework, full of coloratura, runs, high notes, culminating in a traditional high E flat, unwritten, but long awaited by the audience). The text and music fit her character and youth wonderfully. Vocal technique is taxed to the max through breath mastery and diaphragmatic control in order to resolve line passages with full, round, beautiful voice, as well as coloratura passages that demand perfect intonation. No impurity should detract from the brilliant quality of vocal purity (corresponding to purity of soul), the expressiveness is maximized.

The central duet with Germont presents us musically with a scene rich in rhythmic and dynamic changes, emphasizing even more, through phrases of an extreme legato and somewhat in a central vocal register, her pain in view of a possible future separation from her great love that she would not want to lose. She appeals to all possible means to defend her right as a woman in love and fulfilled. In the end, Germont emerges victorious and, in an overwhelming *andantino* "Dite alla giovine" full of sorrow and resignation, offers her sacrifice. The scene is moving to tears and builds through an alert tempo, the pain of her soul culminating in the next scene with Alfredo not understanding her confused behavior, from *adagio* to *allegro*, bursting into the famous phrase "Amami Alfredo" (a vocal moment requiring great strength and maximum expressiveness, often requested by conductors in musical auditions).

Verdi builds Violetta on an extremely solid and balanced mental structure, passing through difficult trials without going mad. But she is ravaged by the tuberculosis she has long battled. The third act brings us a woman who, full of determination, accepts the sacrifice she has undertaken. The aria "Addio del passato", a ritual confession of sins and hope for forgiveness for the easy life before, is an aria that is moving in its dramatic significance. This aria, one of the most moving moments in Verdi's creation, is musically a lyrical cantilena, simple and profound, without unnecessary belcanto elements. The descending, repetitive melody suggests the heroine's physical and emotional exhaustion. The short phrases, cut by pauses, express the difficulty of breathing of this sick and fragile person in agony. The text is in perfect harmony with the music, expressing resignation, begging, and dying. The minimalist orchestra supports the atmosphere of intimacy and fragility.

"Violetta is the most humane and modern of Verdi's heroines: a woman who loves with lucidity, suffers with dignity and dies with heartbreaking dignity."⁸

Violetta becomes the embodiment of a person preparing to die. Her agony is sweetened by the arrival of her lover who can only watch helplessly as his beloved dies. This capital

⁸ Julian Budden. 1978. *The Operas of Verdi, From Il Trovatore to La forza del destino*, vol. 2. Cambridge University Press, p. 52.

punishment of Violetta, a self-sacrifice, can be seen as the price of the salvation of a wandering soul, changed and turned from the path of vice and debauchery by pure love.

If in Violetta's case we are talking about a lucid and matur sacrifice, in Gilda from *Rigoletto* we are referring to a naive and idealistic sacrifice. Gilda does not have the psychological depth and mature complexity of Violetta, but she has another strength: absolute purity, unconditional devotion and the capacity for unreserved sacrifice. If Violetta is a self-conscious heroine who transforms as she goes along, Gilda is more of an idealized, almost angelic figure, inexperienced but full of emotional intensity. She is a character full of poetry that is reflected in the tender, almost ethereal music, more Belcantist than Violetta, with ornate passages and drama that develops as she goes along, presenting us with a girl becoming a woman

Being raised in isolation and overprotected by her father, Gilda cannot know the real world, which is why she is the perfect model of naivety and innocence. She falls in love with the Duke of Mantua whom she doesn't really know, idealizes this love and doesn't perceive the danger. This innocence makes her vulnerable but also symbolically pure, contrasting sharply with the cynicism of the world around her. Emblematic in this respect is the aria "Caro nome", a true poem, a musical example of pure refined belcanto for a coloratura soprano. Although she seems a weak character at first glance, often the performer realizing an uninteresting character on stage, Gilda demonstrates throughout the opera that she has a strong personality, transforming herself through an upward path of continually building up tension, released and consummated in a tragic finale. If in the first part of the opera we are introduced to an innocent girl, whose universe is limited to her home and her surroundings, her father and the maid Giovanna, in the second part Gilda is changed not in a negative sense, but in the sense of a natural human transformation. From a naive girl she becomes a woman.

Musically it moves from the ingenuity of the vocal line with airy, high register writing, without dramatic overtones, but technically demanding, to the woman who has become and expressed herself musically through more dramatic phrases in the middle register and with large interval leaps. To the aggressiveness around her, however, she responds with kindness and love. The aria with dramatic overtones "Tutte le feste al tempio" shows us the betrayed but equally in love girl, and the duet with Rigoletto "Si, vendetta" the moment when, pleading with the angry father, she tries to defend her love. Even being deceived, she sacrifices herself to save the life of her beloved, which denotes a mature, strong, empowered woman in control of her own life. In the third act she manages to be independent from her father, ignoring his advice to leave, choosing the ultimate sacrifice for love on her own. It is similar in a way to Violetta's act, Gilda begging forgiveness from her father and promising protection with her mother in heaven and the angels ("Lassu in cielo vicino'alla madre"). Her choice to die in his place is dictated not by reason but by a blind, total love that transcends logic, and this gesture is not heroic in the classical sense but martyric, Gilda becoming a victim of her own purity. Gilda's death becomes the catalyst for the father's transformation, and the drama shifts from her to Rigoletto, who suffers the consequences of the tragedy.

"Gilda is not a just an innocent victim, but a nearly sacrificial figure whose blind love makes her capable of dying. In her, Verdi creates a form of tragic purity"⁹.

⁹ Gabriele Baldini. 1980. *The Story of Giuseppe Verdi*, Cambridge University Press, p. 135.

Equally interesting is the role of Luisa Miller. In love, blackmailed by Wurm, forced to sign a false declaration, resigned, finally poisoned by her lover Rodolfo, who, after learning the truth about Luisa's innocence, kills Wurm. Luisa is a character who goes through many states throughout the action, she also matures, she suffers enormously; if in the first act, as in *La Traviata*, the soloist has to cope with simpler coloratura like Violetta's ("L'ho vide'il primo palpito"), the second act is full of drama (aria "Tu puniscimi, o Signore"), has passages in which moments of rage alternate with those of resignation and prayer to God, and the third act, the most successful in every respect, is on a particular inner stillness. Vocally it has long, beautiful, long-breathed phrases. Particularly accomplished is the duet with his father with whom he resolves to leave the present lands "Andrem raminghi e poveri" - a duet that moves to tears. The final tercet concludes the situation, with three dead and two desperate people left on stage, a complex situation realized by Verdi rather smoothly. The page is the most direct precedent for the finale of *La Traviata*. For Luisa, the composer wanted a singer who could sustain both a naïve and a highly dramatic part, and this is the exact portrait of the new character for melodrama and for Verdi.

Desdemona in the opera *Otello* is a sweet character, a serene and innocent woman, peaceful, very faithful to her husband Otello, who unfortunately gives in to Iago's intrigues, thus sealing her tragic destiny later on. She is the embodiment of unconditional love but also of powerlessness in the face of destructive jealousy. She is the ideal type of woman in the Romantic conception: pure, devoted, without any trace of vengeance or malice, a victim and an innocent figure, sacrificed in a context of jealousy, manipulation and violence.

"Desdemona is not a passive heroine, but a morally superior character: in the face of violence, she responds with forgiveness"¹⁰. Her angelic figure is characterized musically with phrases that faithfully reflect her states of love (the duet in the first act with Otello is of a rare beauty), anguish, compassion, reacting to her husband's accusation of adultery only by prayer. Verdi's music shrouds her in an aura of lyric purity and restrained emotion, and her role, which is not one of bravura but one of subtlety, is written for a lyric soprano with dramatic nuance. Superb is the aria of the Willow, an old folk ballad about a deserted woman, with wistful, flowing musical lines accompanied by a transparent, almost chamber-like orchestra. In particular the aria "Ave Maria", a masterpiece of sacred lyricism, is an inner prayer, full of serenity and tragic foreboding, expressing much sadness, resignation and inner purity. Desdemona is the type of angel-woman in Verdi's opera, like Gilda, but in the mature and more complex version, she does not die out of ignorance or romantic heroism, but as a victim of a universal drama in which purity is destroyed by male violence.

Other heroines with similar psychology and destiny are, among others, Elvira (*Ernani*) and Medora (*Il Corsaro*).

2.2.3. The passionate and tragic woman

The gallery of passionate women in Verdi's works is impressive, almost all of them being dominated by very intense feelings: love, jealousy, desire, revolt, despair. They are real, living beings with inner conflicts and enormous expressive power, the most relevant being Abigail in *Nabucco* (1842), Amelia in *Un ballo in maschera* (1859) and Leonora in *Il trovatore* (1853).

¹⁰ Gilles de Van. 1998. *Verdi's Theater: Creating Drama through Music*, University of Chicago Press, p. 241.

Abigaille is considered an anti-heroine and is one of the most intense and violent female characters in all of Verdi's operas. She is a complex and contradictory figure, in whom power, hatred, jealousy and personal suffering collide violently. For the dramatic sopranos she is a real test. As the illegitimate daughter of King Nabucco, she claims her throne and power, usurping her father's authority. She thirsts for power, but also for revenge against her sister Fenena, against the Jews, against destiny itself. And Ismael's refusal (in favor of Fenena), with whom she is in love, fuels her jealousy and rage even more. The climax of her hatred will be in the second act when she proclaims herself queen, imprisons Nabucco and orders her sister and the Jews to be executed. The inner crisis as a result of Nabucco's humiliation leads to her breakdown, realizing that hatred has led her to destruction. In the aria "Anch'io dischiuso un giorno" she expresses deep sorrow. Finally she apologizes, begs for heaven's mercy and dies poisoned.

Musically this is one of the most difficult roles for the dramatic soprano. The ambitus is very high, from the almost mezzo-soprano low register to the violent and forceful high E flat (unwritten but often sung). The musical writing is chillingly difficult, with passages of dramatic coloratura where agility must be combined with force. The performer's voice must have perfect projection, be flexible, be able to handle the big leaps and the contrast between furious lines and moments of intense lyricism, and at the same time have the right volume and maximum expressiveness. The role requires perfect technique and passion. It is a character built on extremes: love-hate, strength-fragility, pride-humility, it is a symbol of moral ambiguity and feminine tragedy and considered a precursor of another strong character, Lady Macbeth.

"Abigaille is an eagle with broken wings - a being who wanted to dominate the sky, but was brought down to the ground by her own hubris"¹¹.

If in the case of Abigaille we are talking about a heroine with an explosive and ostentatious passion, Amelia in *Un ballo in maschera* is a heroine with an internalized, painful and conflicted passion that consumes her in silence and shame. She experiences a forbidden, but very deep love, at the same time struggling with her own conscience and the moral code of the time. She is married to Renato, but her love for the governor Riccardo makes her experience an intense but repressed erotic tension. She seeks not the fulfillment of love, but freedom from it. "Io pur amandoti, t'odi, colpevole amor" ("I love you and yet I hate you, guilty love!") she expresses in the recitative after the duet with Riccardo. She is a dignified woman who accepts her shame and wants to save her honor "Uccidetemi, ma salvate l'onore mio!" she says to Renato in the second act. He condemns her, but she does not stop begging for mercy for their child. After learning the truth, which will be restored in the end, she remains a tragic but morally pure figure.

The vocality of this role is perfect for a lirico-spinto soprano, with ample, passionate, deep and dramatic vocal lines. Like any Verdian role, it requires a great deal of technical control concomitant with emotional control and very expressive phrasing. She has three very important moments throughout the opera: the aria "Ma dall'arido stelo divulsa" - a disturbing nocturnal prayer in which she asks to be released from this love, the very tense duet with Riccardo, quite erotically charged but never vulgar, and the famous aria "Morro, ma prima in grazia" in which Amelia wishes to see her child just once more, a masterpiece of tragic lyricism.

Julian Budden says that "Amelia is the image of the modern woman in Verdi's drama - not a victim of fate but of her own conscience. Her passion is restrained but devastating"¹².

¹¹ Massimo Mila. 1981. *L'opera italiana nell'Ottocento*. Einaudi, p. 212.

Leonora in *Il trovatore* is an emblem of Verdi's heroines, a spectacular synthesis of lyricism, passion and inner strength. She embodies the tragic, passionate woman capable of absolute sacrifice. Her love for Manrico is total and deep, which makes her act decisively: she faces danger, joins the convent and, with a secret plan, offers herself to the Count to save the one she loves. She has a tragic sense of destiny, but she doesn't victimize herself and takes her death with dignity.

Vocally the role demands much drama and great phrasing, emotional strength, tension and nobility. The whole role is very interesting, but the most representative moments are the following. The first act aria "Tacea la notte placida" is like a dream in which Leonora expresses her love for Manrico in pure lyrical phrases in the first part and full of hope and joy in the cabaletta "Di tale amor". One of Verdi's most sublime arias, a prayer of love, full of resignation and inner light is the aria from Act II "D'amor sull'ali rosee", followed by "Miserere", a heartbreaking musical page in which the choir, heard in the distance, enters musically. The cabaletta "Tu vedrai che'amore in terra" expresses Leonora's longing, but also the certainty that her love for Manrico will be fulfilled after her death. The soprano's vocal stamina is put to the test as, after this scene which lasts about 15 minutes, she has to face the Count of Luna in a difficult duet, a real battle in which neither of them wants to give in. This is the moment when, unseen, she drinks the liberating poison to save Manrico from humiliation and free him.

"Leonora is the Verdian figure of sublime sacrifice: she dies not because she is defeated, but because she wants to save. In her, Verdi projects the image of absolute love, consumed in silence and renunciation"¹³.

2.2.4. Fatal and manipulative woman

Lady Macbeth in the opera *Macbeth* (1847) is perhaps Verdi's darkest female portrait. Her ambition and cruelty are rendered through dissonant music, aggressive vocals, low register, no lyricism and psychological violence in phrasing and orchestration. She is a toxic villain, perhaps equaled by the villain Iago in *Otello*. It is not only Lady Macbeth that is unique, but the opera itself, being a musical-dramaturgical construction apart from Verdi's other operas. Lady Macbeth combines in her character all the *qualities* of the perfect murderer who, if need be, eliminates all those who oppose her. Her maleficence and mental instability are manifested primarily in the dramaturgy of the role, inspired by the famous Shakespearean drama and transposed by Verdi in a highly complex vocal writing, with oscillations from the predominantly dramatic, spirited character to passages of coloratura. The uniqueness of the character also stems from the paradox of, on the one hand, her madness taken to extremes and, on the other, her surprising self-control. She is the type of domineering, manipulative woman with a sick lust for power, and these characteristics are realized musically through intentionally *ugly* but highly expressive writing, with shades of sarcasm, madness and contempt. She pushes Macbeth to murder and does not hesitate to face her destiny. She does not know the meaning of love, she is obsessed only with power and control.

¹² Julian Budden. 1992. *The Operas of Verdi, From Don Carlos to Falstaff*, vol. 3, revised edition. Oxford University Press, p. 52.

¹³ Gabriele Baldini. 1980. *The Story of Giuseppe Verdi*. Cambridge University Press, p. 225.

Her key arias and scenes are: "Vien! t'affretta!" an aria full of demonic energy in which he calls for murder, the cold and frighteningly calm meditation on death "La luce langue", and the sleepwalking scene "Una macchia è qui tuttora" expresses the final psychic fall with an unsettled, fragmented and trembling voice.

"Lady Macbeth is Verdi's most unusual heroine - not a victim, but an initiator of destiny. Her voice does not weep, but commands. She is a figure of Greek tragedy in the garb of Italian opera"¹⁴

2.2.5. *The warrior woman, heroine of justice*

Odabella in the opera *Attila* (1846) is the daughter of the nobleman Aquileia killed by the Huns, a warlike and determined Verdian heroine, a woman with an exceptional profile: strong, volcanic, strong-willed, vengeful, but also capable of deep love. She uses her position close to Attila to seek revenge after being taken prisoner by him. She oscillates between hatred and love, between the duty of a daughter and the love of a woman, an ambivalence that brings her closer to Abigaille and Lady Macbeth, with the difference that Odabella has a clear moral motivation and a liberating ending.

Musically, the role demands a voice of dramatic coloratura capable of virtuosity, the ability to make leaps with great precision and perfect intonation, in a warlike fury and, of course, expressiveness. The aria "Santo di patria" in Act I is a tour de force that demands a perfect balance of energy. The brilliant cabaleta in which she shows her determination to avenge her father is a moment much awaited and appreciated by the audience. The duet with Attila in which the heroine feigns gratitude is also intense, and the final scene in which she kills Attila is charged with triumph, rage and liberation.

"Odabella is a forerunner of Verdi's later heroines - strong, determined, impossible to control. She is not a victim but an agent of her own story"¹⁵.

2.2.6. *The suffering, mature and morally conscious woman*

The titular heroine of *Aida* (1871) is one of Verdi's most complex and refined female characters, bringing together traits from several of Verdi's psychological typologies. Essentially, she is a suffering, mature woman with a moral conscience, but also with hints of a passionate woman capable of sacrifice. She lives an inner conflict between her love for Radames and her duty to her homeland, Ethiopia. Unlike Violetta or Lady Macbeth, Aida's passion is more silent, deep and tense. She is taken as a slave, but she is energetic and full of personality in her confrontation with the Egyptian king's daughter Amneris, who proves to be her rival. She dies alongside her lover who belongs to the rival country, Egypt, in a final scene presented as transcendence, musically in an almost mystical register.

The lirico-spinto soprano who performs the role must have the capacity for ample register, volume, dramatic force in duets and ensembles. She has two superb arias: in the first act "Ritorna vincitor" - an inner conflict between the desire for her lover to win and the desire to defend her country, and in the second act "O patria mia" in which the soprano, longing for her

¹⁴ Julian Budden. 1973. *The Operas of Verdi, From Oberto to Rigoletto*, vol. 1. Cambridge University Press, p. 309.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 211.

native places, sings suspended pianissimo phrases in a high register. It is a role of great inner nobility and tragedy, in which passion, reason and sacrifice intertwine.

"Aida is the tragic image of a woman who carries the full weight of history and impossible love, without raising her voice, but piercing the listener's soul"¹⁶.

Leonora in the opera *La forza del destino* (1862) lives an impossible love for Don Alvaro, but after the accidental death of her father, she enters a crisis of conscience, renounces the world and seeks isolation, penance and salvation. She is a woman who can be categorized as a spiritualized and martyred woman and is related to Amelia in *Un ballo in maschera* and Desdemona in *Otello*. Her vocal writing is grave and charged with solemnity and interiority. One of the most poignant prayers in the operatic repertoire is Leonora's famous aria "Pace, pace mio Dio", which begs for peace and forgiveness. It is a perfect role for a lyric-dramatic soprano of great emotional depth.

Among the suffering, mature and morally conscious heroines we can add the superb character Elisabetta di Valois in *Don Carlos* (1867). She is a queen of silence and noble suffering, imprisoned by a crown that stifles love, turning it into a symbol of resignation and suffering. The role played by a lyric-spinto soprano can enjoy some superb musical moments: in the first act the aria "Non pianger, mia compagna" full of gentleness and regret and the big aria in the fifth act "Tu che le vanità conoscesti del mondo", a philosophical meditation in a long, deep and elegiac melodic line in which she expresses her longing for love and peace. Moving are the duets with Don Carlo and Philip II, in which the music is highly nuanced and full of inner tension.

2.3. Verdi's orchestration in the characterization of heroines

The orchestra actively participates in the melodic discourse in such a way that it is not just a mere accompanist, but is a real character that comments psychologically or is even an extension of the female voice. It suggests the various subtle emotional states, creates dramatic contrasts and greatly supports character development. The orchestra can be diaphanous and transparent (like in Desdemona's accompaniment) or aggressive, with brutal and syncopated sounds in portraying the destructive force and cold ambition of a character (Lady Macbeth).

Verdi uses various musical means to suggest the psychological traits of his characters:

- Weave and vocal register - coloratura or lyric sopranos for innocent women (Gilda, Desdemona), dramatic sopranos for passionate ones (Leonora, Abigaille)
- Recurring themes and musical motifs - associated with moods (theme of sacrifice in *La Traviata*)
- The orchestration - orchestral timbres support the character's feelings; flute and harp for innocence, bass winds for tragedy.
- Phrase structure and rhythm - long, flowing phrases for love, jerky rhythms or dissonance for inner conflict or madness
- Delicate features played with long pianos, slow tempo, broad phrases
- Passionate, unstable or contradictory personalities are accompanied by sudden changes of tempo, high dynamic contrasts, precipitous rhythms
- Unexpected modulations or dark harmonies to reflect inner turmoil
- Diatonic harmony, clear, without chromatic excesses for pure or noble heroines.

¹⁶ Massimo Mila. 1981. *L'opera italiana nell'Ottocento*. Einaudi, p. 349.

"Verdi knew the orchestra not only as a support for the voice, but as a voice of the soul itself"¹⁷.

3. Conclusions

The feminine psychological types for the soprano voice in Verdi's works are extraordinarily varied and interesting. The study of feminine psychology considers not only the stage action or the voice, but also the deeply thought-out musical language. Verdi was a great portraitist of the feminine human soul captured in all its facets: from the purity of the self-sacrificing woman to passionate violence, from resignation to struggle, from nobility to tragic degradation. The diversity of the heroines characterized above and grouped into several broad psychological categories demonstrates the evolution of femininity in Verdi's work, in which the composer progressively abandons romantic idealization and moves ever closer to complex and living reality. Each psychological type is reflected, as we have observed in the analysis, in the choice of all the vocal characteristics: register, coloratura, ambitus and a particular attention in the treatment of phrasing, intensity and melodic line. The heroine's voice is not just a carrier of sound, but of a message, an affective statement : Gilda "floats", Violetta "burns", Lady Macbeth "cuts". The orchestra participates as a real character, supports the shaping of the profile of each heroine and, moreover, often translates the depths of silence, hesitation, inner strength into sound. The character is built not only in arias but also in the orchestra with the help of specific instruments. Verdi's heroine is, in a world ruled by violent, blind or powerful men, the emotional and moral center of tragedy.

4. References

• Books

- Baldini, Gabriele. 1980. *The Story of Giuseppe Verdi*. Cambridge University Press.
- Budden, Julian. 1973. *The Operas of Verdi*, From *Oberto* to *Rigoletto*, vol. 1. Cambridge University Press.
- Budden, Julian. 1978. *The Operas of Verdi*, From *Il Trovatore* to *La forza del destino*, vol. 2. Cambridge University Press.
- Budden, Julian. 1992. *The Operas of Verdi*, From *Don Carlos* to *Falstaff*, vol. 3. revised edition. Oxford University Press.
- Cesari, G. 1951. *Giuseppe Verdi, Letters, Memories*. Ricordi.
- Derham, Katie (ed.). 2018. *The Classical Musik Book*. London: Dorling Kindersley Limited.
- de Van, Gilles. 1998. *Verdi's Theater: Creating Drama through Music*. University of Chicago Press.
- Mila, Massimo. 1981. *L'opera italiana nell'Ottocento*. Einaudi.
- Moșuc, Elena. 2023. *Tema nebuniei în opera italiană din prima jumătate a secolului al XIX-lea [The Theme of Madness in Italian Opera from the first half of the 19th Century]*. Bucharest: Editura Universității Naționale de Muzică București.
- Pahlen, Kurt. 1995. *Pahlen Opern Lexicon*. München: Wilhelm Heyne Verlag GmbH & Co.KG.

¹⁷ Julian Budden. 1978. *The Operas of Verdi*, From *Il Trovatore* to *La forza del destino*, vol. 2. Cambridge University Press p. 144.

- Tintori, Giampiero. 1983. *Invito all'ascolto di VERDI*. Gruppo Ugo Mursia Editore S.p.A.
- Verdi, Giuseppe. 1951. *Lettere*. G. Cesari, Ricordi.
- Werfel, Franz. 1964. *VERDI - the opera novel*. Bucharest: Editura Muzicală.

Musical scores

- Verdi, Giuseppe. 2007. *La Traviata*. Milan: Ricordi, BMG Publications srl.
- Verdi, Giuseppe. 1986. *Luisa Miller*. Milan : Ricordi.
- Verdi, Giuseppe. 1976. *Macbeth*. Milan: G. Ricordi & C. Editori.
- Verdi, Giuseppe. 1973. *Nabucco*. Milan: G. Ricordi & C. Editori.
- Verdi, Giuseppe Verdi. 1990. *Rigoletto*, Peters Edition, no. 2185. Frankfurt-London-New York.
- Verdi, Giuseppe. 1963. *Il Trovatore*. Milan: Ricordi.
- Verdi Giuseppe. 1963. *Otello*. Milan: Ricordi & C.S.p.A.