

"The Image of the Opera in the History of Painting: Delacroix and Rossini's Otello"

Jos Salvador Blasco Magraner¹ and Francisco Carlos Bueno Camejo²

¹ University of Valencia

Received: 13 December 2013 Accepted: 5 January 2014 Published: 15 January 2014

Abstract

Eugène Delacroix was always a lover of opera and theater. One of his most admired opera composers was Gioacchino Rossini. This article delves into the operatic and theatrical iconography of Delacroix, about "Othello", based on the original work of Shakespeare and the eponymous opera by Rossini and his librettist, Berio. We have also consulted the "Diaries", as they were the original documents of the French painter. The analyzed pictures are "Desdemona cursed by her father" and "Otello and Desdemona." Finally, we have risked venturing into a general view of both Delacroix's oils on canvas.

Index terms— delacroix, rossini, shakespeare, othello, desdemona, opera, theater, iconography.

1 I.

2 State of the Matter

The oil paintings devoted to Rossini's "Otello" by Eugène Delacroix -that is to say, "Desdemona cursed by her father" and "Otello and Desdemona" have been contemplated on both sides of the Atlantic. Among other issues, we have tried to clarify whether the iconographic sources on which the French painter relied upon come from Shakespeare's "Othello", Rossini's "Otello" or it is rather a mélange between the two versions.

The purpose of this article is to make a modest contribution to the operatic iconography of Delacroix and to approach its meaning. ?? Author ? ? : University of Valencia.

Having this in mind we have considered Delacroix's own statements on the matter, expressed in his "Diaries"- and while the French painter does not explain at all the iconographic content of both paintings, he does manifest on his operatic and theatrical preferences. We believe that these could be a valuable source to unravel the origins and the message of the Otellian images.

As far as literature is concerned, although there are published references in English, French and Italian, the most interesting are perhaps the latter. This is the case of the Trentino monograph, published in 2010 by the Museo di Arte Moderna e Contemporanea di Trento e Rovereto, where Guy Cogeval and Beatrice Avanzi have coordinated a splendid book entitled *Dalla scena al dipinto*. The book runs through the theatrical painting from David to Delacroix and from Füssli to Degas. By examining Delacroix, Katharine Lochnan chapter opens precisely with the photographic reproduction of the painting "Desdemona cursed by her father." This Canadian author focuses her research on the influence that Shakespeare had on Delacroix. The corollary-phrase that sums up her dissertation is:

Il giovane Delacroix, immerso nella sua malinconia romantica, si identificava con molte figure tragiche delle opere di Shakespeare e dei romanzi di Sir Walter Scott. 2 II.

3 Delacroix and Rossini. "Otello"

Lochnan does not describe the impact of Rossini's operas in the young Delacroix, as the painter himself acknowledges in his "Diaries".

Other authors, however, are inclined to recognize the combined influence of Shakespeare and Rossini.

a) Premiere of "Otello".

The premiere of the opera "Otello" by Rossini took place in Paris in 1821 and according to Celsa Alonso, professor at the University of Oviedo it was anthological. Together with the famous Giuditta Pasta, it also intervened the famous Spanish singer and composer Manuel del Pópulo Vicente García. ?? I tell him that García, his father, was a great comedian, he himself constantly in all his theatrical roles, despite his apparent inspiration. man of great culture, fine wit and exquisite courtesy, if we stick to Stendhal's attempted version on him. Five years before the anthological premiere in Paris "Otello" was born in Naples in the Teatro del Fondo, 5 in late 1816. The sculptor Antonio Canova became a thoughtful witness of the brilliant success of Rossini, who, with this opera reached the summit as a consummate composer of opera seria. 6 "Otello" was written by Rossini for the Spaniard Isabella Colbran, the best mezzo and dramatic soprano with a great mastery of the coloratura of her time. This Spanish singer played "Desdemona" in the premiere in Naples. 7

4 b) delacroix's admiration for rossini

The admiration felt by Delacroix for Rossini is a fact highlighted by the artist himself in his "Diaries" 8 and reproduced even in informative manuals. 9 , February 24, 1850. (...) In the afternoon, to the divine *Il Matrimonio Segreto*, with Mme. de Forget. That perfection is found in very few human works.

5 Sunday

Although we must recognize that Delacroix's favorite opera was undoubtedly "*Il Matrimonio segreto*" an opera buffa, Domenico Cimarosa's authentic capolavoro. This was a confession he made in his "Journal" during the three years in which he painted the Rossinian oil paintings: 10 What an admirable fusion of elegance, expression, bufo, how terrible, how tender, how ironic, each in its measure. *Cuncta fecit in pondere, numero et mensura*.

After "*Il Matrimonio segreto*", Mozart and Rossini become his favorite opera composers. In Mozart, he greatly praises "*Don Giovanni*". Rossini is considered a follower of Mozart. And, in a sense, he is. Three years earlier, in 1847, only 1 year before the implementation of the oil "*Othello and Desdemona*" -we must observe the fineness with which Delacroix dissects the Gallery of Mozartian characters, while he openly expresses his admiration for Mozart, first, and then for Rossini:

February 14, 1847. *Lo Bello* is certainly the conjunction of all conveniences. Developing this, remembering the *Don Giovanni* I saw yesterday.

6 11

In Rossini, the Italian aspect prevails, ie ornament dominates the expression. In many of Mozart's operas it is not otherwise as it is always ornate and elegant, but the expression of the delicate feelings takes a melancholy tone that does not suit all subjects. In the *Don Giovanni* he does not fall into this problem. The issue, moreover, was wonderfully well chosen, due to the variety of characters. D. Anna, Ottavio, Elvira, are serious characters, especially the first two, in Elvira one can guess a brighter hue and *Don Giovanni*, alternatively bufo, insolent, insinuating, even tender,. There exists an inimitable coquetry in the Peasant; Leporello, perfect from beginning to end.

Rossini does not really change both characters. ??? Friday, April 15, 1853. (...) April 12, 1860. (...) With the same human element he adds or removes, modifies his stuff and makes men of his invention, which, however, are true ... This is one of the strongest traits of the genius. This also happens with Molière, and Cervantes, and so it happens with Rossini, with its amalgam. A sloppy execution is the only difference with these men. By a uniqueness that is not often found in men of genius, he is lazy, he has formulas, other added customary particularities that prolong his method, which are always a part of his style, but are not marked by a stamp of strength and truth. His fertility is inexhaustible, and he is real and ideal at a time wherever he decides to be.

In April 12, 1860, the French painter emits a late judgment on Rossini, which raises the composer to the genius category, inexhaustible, although somewhat neglected and mannerist, formulaic:

7 i. Iconography

In the canvas painted in 1852 by Eugène Delacroix, with the full title of <*Desdemona at the feet of her father, who curses her for having secretly married Othello*>, preserved in the Musée des Beaux Arts de Reims (Fig. ??), the painter used a mélange between William Shakespeare's drama in five acts, and an amended argument by librettist Francesco Maria Berio di Salsa for Rossini's lyrical tragedy in three acts.

In the interpretation made by the museum of Reims, 16 it states that the scene is <not found in Shakespeare>, but it acknowledges that Othello contemplates that terrible moment. ??? Desdemona's father, Brabantio, -in Shakespeare's original work-receives the news of the secret marriage of his daughter in Scene 3, Act I, in the original drama of the English writer. 18 Some interpretations locate the scene of the picture here, in this precise moment of the plot in Shakespeare's work. ??? In contrast, in Rossini's "*Otello*", Berio places the fateful event as *Finale II* (number 9 in the structure of the opera) Act II, which serves as the culmination and climax of the plot, with the curtain fall at the end of it. Elmiro-name given to Desdemona's father in the work of Rossini and Berio-appears furiously on the scene, in the presence of Desdemona, Emilia, Desdemona's confidant-and

choir. But Othello has already left the scene with Rodrigo, just before the opening of the Finale II, with Emilia's recitative. And this is clearly specified in the script.

Othello is present in it, next to the Dux of the Serenissima Repubblica di Venezia, and other characters.

8 20

What do we think it has really happened?. Delacroix, indeed, composed the painting's main scene locating it in Rossini's opera, the Act II Finale II. However, the characters in the background have been taken up from the aforementioned scene in Shakespeare's "Othello", Scene 3 Act I. Very little has been written about these three men, who remain at a distance in the shadows, while enjoying the main scene. Only Othello has been identified as such, but without specifying his clothing. The Moor is wearing a hijab and a long scarf wrapped around his head, both white in color. There is a male figure located behind him, wearing a similar dress, without the turban and it seems logical to assume that he is a member of his army. Even more interest has the man on the left of the door; dressed in black, the 16 http://www.crdp-reims.fr/artsculture/dossiers_peda/delacroix_desde_mone.pdf (Accessed in August 2010). ??? We enclose the original French text: <La scène peinte par Delacroix, introuvable dans l'oeuvre de Shakespeare, représente la colère du père de Desdémone, sénateur de Venise, qui lui reproche d'avoir secrètement Otello. Ce dernier surgit à l'arrière-plan assiste à la malédiction .> <http://www.kunst-fuer-alle.de/english/art/artist/image/eugene-delacroix/2511/16/64529/act-i,-scene-3:-desdemona-kneeling-at-her-father-%27s-feet,-1852/index.htm> ??? The version of the libretto by Francesco Maria Berio we consulted is attached to a small inlay folder edition of "Otello" by Rossini for the Philips label. (Cf ROSSINI, GIOACCHINO: José Carreras Otello (Otello), Frederica Von Stade (Desdemona), Salvatore Fisichella (Rodrigo), Gianfranco Pastine (Jago), Samuel Ramey (Elmiro) Condò Nucci (Emilia) Jesus Lopez Cobos (Director). Philharmonia Orchestra. Ambrosian Opera Chorus. Philips. 1978. 2CDs. 432 456-2).

character blends with the brown, blackish color ranges of the environment. It is just as hard to see his disturbing face and his hat, a luxurious black taqiya with beads. It could portray Iago, a villain, yes, Othello's male opponent in the shade, but whose role is to be the servant and confidant of the glorious and jealous Moor of Venice. In sum an officer under General Othello. Iago is a main character in the plot, a member of the quartet of stellar figures: first, Othello and Desdemona, second, the contrafiguras Iago and Rodrigo. It seems plausible to assume that Delacroix endorses his plot relevance incorporating him as an eyewitness at the time that Desdemona is disowned by her father. If so, Iago is not present in the II Finale of Act II of Rossini's "Otello", but he does participate in the 3rd scene of Act I of "Othello" by Shakespeare. And in the above-mentioned Shakespearean scene, Iago makes an appearance on the stage next to Desdemona and servants to listen to Brabantio's parliament, Desdemona's father, in the presence of the Dux, Othello and the Venetian senators.

Delacroix confines the three characters dressed in the Moroccan style under a slightly swollen arcprobably Moroccan too-, communicating with a different room in the scene. This is a clearly theatrical composition, as if the French painter had had in mente a scenic design of "Otello," for the door and the wall that support it are arranged transversely to the viewer located in the pit of the theater, fitting with the legs of the proscenium wings. The door defines the elements from the Maghreb, ie, the Moor Othello and his companions. The painter would probably unfold his imagination here, relying on the trip he made from 1832 by the Maghreb, especially Morocco, with his Tangerine stay to accompany the Count of Mornay on a diplomatic mission, and that allowed him to take plenty of notes and paint a different number of watercolors. 21 b) "Otello and Desdemona"

9 i. Iconography

This oil painting, which can be seen in the National Gallery of Canada, was painted by Eugène Delacroix in 1849, ie, three years earlier than the last one. Nevertheless, it narrates the outcome of the plot; therefore, and from the point of view of the argument, it comes after the painting we have just analyzed, in the Musée des Beaux Arts de Reims. The size of the canvas is slightly higher: 0.50 x 0.62 meters. (Picture 2)

The iconographical interpretation often used in this painting is that Delacroix based on two sources: Shakespeare and Rossini. Ie a mélange between both versions, the dramatic art and the operatic art. See, for example, Meg Nola's dissertation. Published on December 1, 2009, it acknowledges, in turn, the predilection that Delacroix had for Rossini's "Otello": Delacroix created his painting with Shakespeare in mind as well as Gioacchino Rossini's opera Otello, which Delacroix enjoyed very much and which was of course inspired by the original play. ??? In our opinion, however, we think that only on this occasion the French painter was based on the opera source: Act III of "Otello" by Rossini. Therefore, we do not share the hypothesis that suggests that Delacroix was also inspired in Act IV, Scene II, of Shakespeare's original drama. ??? (Prende la sua arpa) Indeed, in this last scene written by the English author, Othello mistrusts Desdemona. But Emilia, Desdemona's confidant, has an important role in the dialogue between the spouses, defending the honor of Desdemona in the presence of the jealous husband. As the scene goes by, Shakespeare focuses on the two contrafiguras, Iago and Rodrigo. Iago tries to convince Rodrigo to murder Cassio, an honest Othello's lieutenant. Therefore the stabbing of Desdemona by Othello does not take place in this scene.

In the iconography shaped by Delacroix in this painting, there are two objects that unambiguously refer to Act III in Rossini's opera: the harp and the lighted oil lamp.

The harp is certainly the most important iconographic element. At the beginning of Act III, and at the end of it with Emilia's recitative, Desdemona shares her sorrow with the harp, specified as follows by Rossini and Berio:

**10 Oh tu del mio dolor dolce strumento! Io ti riprendo ancora;
E unisco al mesto canto I sospiri d'Isaura, ed il mio pianto.**

24 Without a solution of continuity, the soprano plays the cavatina Assisa a'pie d'un salice, preceded by an extensive ritornello from the harp. The harp will also accompany Desdemona throughout the piece. It is the most beautiful moment of Act III from a melodic point of view. Although the composer labels it as a "canzone" it is not an aria or "A'-A"). Its structure follows the various verses of the literary text, delimited by punctuation. The music remains the same, although, like the bel canto, each subsequent stanza is richly ornamented. After the last of the stanzas, a gust of wind breaks some windowpanes: a foretaste of the subsequent storm that pleases Rossini so much.

11 but a cavatina in three stanzas (

In the text of the cavatina, Desdemona recalls her friend, Isaura who died and was the victim of a cruel love. The soprano foreshadows in this way her dramatic final. The harp is therefore the instrument that symbolizes her pain and her tragic fate.

As for the lighted oil lamp that Otello is carrying in his left hand, it is specified in the script as follows:

(Otello s' introduce nella stanza di Desdemona, per una segreta porta, tenendo in mano una lucerna.) IV.

Who does Incarnate Otello and Desdemona in Eugène Delacroix's Paintings? a Hypothetical Approach If we consider that between 1821 and 1827-this last date he departed to Mexico only to return three years later to France-Manuel García (father) was the principal performer of the opera Otello, and that from the following year, 1828, his daughter Maria Malibrán made her debut triumphantly in Paris-she earned the huge amount of 8000 francs per function-and it was the beginning of his meteoric career in Europe and the United States, then it may not be safe to assume that both father and daughter embody a couple of lovers in the imaginary Delacroix's oil paintings. These are the years in which the passion for the Swan of Pesaro awakes in Delacroix. But nevertheless we insist that all this is reduced to a mere hypothesis.

It is also possible that Giuditta Pasta, -the other great star of Italian bel canto -is behind the character of Desdemona, of which she was also a celebrated performer, although the soprano from Saronno had a more ephemeral trajectory: her voice lasted for a period of just over 16 years. In 1837 her decline was evident.

Delacroix recognizes Maria Malibrán's reputation (Fig. ??), although her talent is one of a bourgeois with no ideals. The artist prefers Pasta, a performer he levels with Raphael and Rubens, the artists he considered to make copies in the Louvre as he learned in the workshop of Neoclassical painter Pierre-Narcisse Guérin, between 1815 and 1818: January 27, 1847. (...) In the afternoon I went to see Labbé, then Leblond. García (son) was there. We have talked about Diderot's opinion about the comedian. He claims that the comedian should be, while self-possessed, passionate. I tell him that everything happens in the imagination. (...) García, defending the party of sensitivity and passion, thinks of his sister Malibrán. He told us as proof of her talent as a comedian that she never knew how her performance would turn out. (...) So she could be very energetic and seem very authentic, but it also happened to be exaggerated and misplaced, therefore unbearable. I do not remember having ever seen her nobly. When she approached the sublime, it was never more than a bourgeois can achieve; In short, she completely lacked ideal. She was as young people with talent, but to whom the ardor of age and inexperience always persuade that they will never make enough. It seemed as if she was endlessly searching for new effects in a situation. If one undertakes this journey, one never ends: it is never the way to consummate talent; this, once has studied and has come to the point, does not depart from it. This was the proper thing for Pasta's talent. So did Rubens, Raphael, all the great composers. With the other method, not only the spirit is in perpetual uncertainty, but life would pass in essays on a single topic. When Malibrán ended her performance she was worn-out and the moral fatigue linked to her physical exhaustion, and her brother admits she could not have lived much longer like this.

12 (...)

Posterity knows only the reputation of an actor that his contemporaries contemplated for him; and for our posterity, Malibrán will be placed at the same level as Pasta, and perhaps she'll be preferred when taking into account the exaggerated praise of his contemporaries. ??8 Garcia told us that Malibrán, undecided about the effect that she should get for the moment when the unexpected arrival of his father holds the exultation, when she just discovered that Othello is alive after his fight with Rodrigo, consulted Mme. Naldi about it. (...) This woman had been an excellent actress.

Delacroix, though, echoes the famous melancholy with which Malibrán gave relevance to the role of Desdemona. It was a very studied interpretative feature, as the painter points out as a result of the conversation with her brother, Manuel Patricio Rodríguez García.

V. Conclusion: Delacroix's Worldview. Theatricality

We believe that the worldview that underlies both pictures is different from those oil paintings that in 1831 took part in various painting competitions about the French Revolution. It is not a question of classical Venus now, wearing a Phrygian cap, which embodies the freedom, with the utopian socialist ideal of the union of classes compared to an ultra decrepit restored Louis XVIII's monarchy and especially the monarchy of his younger brother, Charles X, as it is the case of "Liberty Leading the People" ("The Barricade") because Delacroix, from Luis Felipe de Orleans monarchie citoyenne, lost interest in historical themes of the nineteenth century. ??0 Through Rossini / Shakespearean oils, Delacroix is still worshiping the woman, as did in its time the early Romantic opera, especially the one developed in France by Italian composers. ??1 Desdemona is a heroine who embodies freedom of choice across racial and cultural conditions, and who is cruelly rejected by her father, who represents the European, social conventionalism which is waterproof to the different. The French painter could have sought other much more dramatic scenes in Rossini's opera: the Finale Act I (L'ingrata, ahimè, che miro), where Othello and Rodrigo threaten one to the other with sword in hand while Desdemona is separated from her beloved; or the duel between Rodrigo and Othello, Desdemona futilely trying to separate them, in Act II (Terceto: Ahimè! Fermate!). Having traveled the Maghreb, admiring the Islamic civilization-the harem he visited seemed to him the stronghold of a beautiful Mediterranean world from the time of Homer-32 Furthermore, Desdemona is a woman with a tragic fate. In this sense, Delacroix understood the Shakespeare and Berio / Rossini's thematic for what it is: a lyrical theatrical drama. Both paintings seek theatricality. The second, "Othello and Desdemona" is the expression of pure romantic drama. Surely the tragic sense of Delacroix expressed here is also, pace Shakespeare, the one which the operas of his time represented in France aroused, now the tragédie lyrique, now the opera seria, the Italian bel canto melodrama and of course, the Grand Opéra, whose captain was always the great Meyerbeer. the election of the theme of Desdemona's paternal curse is not trivial because it is the reaction of contempt for the marriage of his daughter with a Moor. The picture thus becomes a document denouncing intolerance, although within a proscenium. 33 And all this seasoned with its own theatrical stage movement of the nineteenth-century operas, but for which the painter may also add a bit of Baroque monumentality. Friedlaender's idea will perhaps come true in this case. 34 30 ROSENBLUM, R. AND JANSON, HW: The art of the nineteenth century ??adrid, Akal, col. Art and Aesthetic No 28, 1992, p. 159. 31 Since the model rescue operas, genuinely French, then cultivated by Beethoven in "Fidelio" to the predecessor Italian composers of the French Grand Opéra as Luigi Cherubini ("Medea"), and, of course, the bel canto composers exercising their work in France as Vincenzo Bellini ("Norma"). 32 ROSENBLUM, R. AND JANSON, HW: The art of the nineteenth century Ibid. ??3 Excuse me Wagnerians by my praise to the German composer Yaakob Liebmann Beer. ??4 FRIEDLAENDER WALTER: From David to Delacroix Madrid, Form Alliance, 1989, p. 121. 1 2 3 4 5



Figure 1:



Figure 2:



Figure 3:



Figure 4:



Figure 5:

22

NOLA, MEG (2009): In
Shakespearean scenes in art.

http://modernarthistory.suite101.com/article.cfm/shakespearean_scenes_in_art (Accessed in August 2010).

23

Cfr.<http://cybermuseum.gallery.ca/cybermuseum/search/artwork.php?mkey=7660>

(Accessed in August 2010).

[Note: 24]

Figure 6:

¹This article is a continuation of a previous one, published in the journal "Itamar". We now have provided documentation extracted from the "Diaries" of Delacroix, and a neater bibliography consultation and analysis, we believe, more complete. For a view of the primeval article (Cf: BUENO CAMEJO, F:Las operas y los pintores: Rossini y Delacroix: "Otello" Itamar, No. 3, 2010, pp 139-147.).

²The famous Teatro San Carlo had suffered a fire shortly before.⁶ VITOUX, FRÉDÉRIC: Rossini. Alianza Música, Madrid, 1989, pp. 119- 120. ⁷ A year earlier, in 1815, Isabella Colbran was romantically attached to Rossini.⁸ We have consulted the anthology selected by Guillermo Solana. Cf: DELACROIX, EUGÈNE: The Bridge of vision. Anthology of the Diaries. (Introduction and notes by Guillermo Solana Díez). Tecnos, Madrid, 1987. ⁹ PELLEGRINO, FRANCESCA AND POLETTI, FEDERICO: Episodes and characters in literature Barcelona, Electa, col.. "The dictionary of art," 2004, p. 163: <Delacroix manifested himself very impressed by the lyrical work of Rossini>. ¹⁰ DELACROIX, EUGÈNE: The Bridge of vision ... Cit., p. 20. ¹¹ <Everything he did, he did in weight, number and measure>.

³On this trip he also made a break for Western Andalusia, visiting Seville and Cadiz, the silver cup.

⁴"The Image of the Opera in the History of Painting: Delacroix and Rossini's Otello"

⁵DELACROIX, EUGÈNE: The Bridge of vision. Op. Cit., pp. 6-8.²⁹ Ditto.

