

## **The Unpunished conqueror in the Opera “*Rigoletto*” by Giuseppe Verdi**

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*Giuseppe Verdi creates, in his opera “Rigoletto”, a different type of Seducer, who is not punished for his deeds; he creates the Duke of Mantua. Verdi’s Don Juan is the man of the ephemeral moment, of the futureless conquests, He characterizes himself in his ballad:*

*“La donna è mobile.”*

*“The woman changes her mind, oftentimes,  
Insane is the one who believes in her.”*

*Giuseppe Verdi went even further than W.A. Mozart and opened other gates to the Seducer, where the moral does no longer exist or is no longer considered. Verdi, in contrast with Mozart, played with the real and the surreal, with the sublime and the grotesque, alike.*

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Giuseppe Verdi opened new paths towards development, for the Italian national opera. His clarity of conception, his sincere passion, the scenic character, the simplicity and expressivity of the musical language, closely connected to the popular melodies, are a few of the great composer’s characteristic features, which manifested themselves in his most beautiful operas. Verdi succeeded in creating living people, in unveiling not only feelings, but also characters, through his musical images. When creating, the composer imagined not only the character’s temper, but also his/her appearance, physiognomy and movements. They would turn into real people, for him. The expressivity specific to Verdi’s melodies reflects the composer’s insight into his characters’ souls. As shown by Escudier, due to this deep knowing of the subject, Verdi accomplishes the unity of the whole, combined with the variety of the details – unity which is characteristic for the composer. “Verdi creates dynamic scenes, with highlights on the characters’ particularities, with a tempestuously unfolding action, wherein the episodes of *arioso* harmoniously interweave with the melodic recitatives, changing into dramatic wholes, full of life.” (Solovţova, Liubov 1960, 147)

Among the manifold of characters created by Giuseppe Verdi, we encounter a charming conqueror, the Duke of Mantua, in the opera “*Rigoletto*”. This opera was inspired by the play “*The King Amuses Himself*”, written by Victor Hugo and

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brought him a huge popularity. The work bears the seal of inspiration, conferring a psychological depth, which will be characteristic of Verdi's Romantic Realism. The great composer started the work on this opera in 1850. Initially, he had wanted to title the opera "La Maledizione" ["The Malediction"], as the drama node consisted in the curse that had fallen upon the dishonoured maiden's father.

"Triboulet is helpless. He is the court jester. He is a loving father and his daughter grows up innocent, faithful and chaste."

Triboulet is opposed to the light-minded king.

"Evening parties, music, dance, jesters and troubadours,  
Walks arm-in-arm, in secrecy, by the evening, through the woods;  
Thousand pleasures mysteriously sprinkled by the night;"  
Hence, which is the formula to be happy?  
Let's cling to life insatiably, ardently,  
Let's drink! Enjoy! And Love!

Passionate with Hugo's play, Giuseppe Verdi sketched by himself the plan of the opera, outlining the guiding lines and dramatic situations of his creation and assigning the characters' main psychological traits. The opera libretto was written by Francesco Maria Piave, starting from Verdi's sketches. This opera is, undoubtedly, one of Verdi's genial creations, with strongly highlighted dramatic plot and well defined characters. The contrasts form the underlying musical dramatic principle of the opera, which dwells, in its entirety, upon the confrontation between light and dark.

Giuseppe Verdi creates, in *Rigoletto*, a different Seducer; he creates the Duke of Mantua, who remains unpunished, in the end of the opera, for his frivolous life. As in Mozart's opera, the Duke is superficial and uncaring with his victim. "He knows no limit in debauchery and intrigue" (Stanislavski 1955, 39)

The first victim, whom we know about, is old Count Monterone's daughter. He curses the Duke for having dishonoured his daughter; but he also curses *Rigoletto*, for having plotted the maiden's disgrace.

The second victim is Gilda, the court jester's daughter, whom he had kept away from the palace, hidden from sinful gazes. The bright colours of the opera are conveyed by Gilda's apparition, with her purity and innocence. She experiences her first love, she hasn't known yet +despairs; the heroine looks forward with serenity and candour. Her portrait, Gilda's perfect characterisation, is rendered by the aria "*Caro nome*".



pri - mo pal - pi - tar, le de - li - zie del ra -  
 fac - ca să pal - pit. Al meu su - flet plin de

Being left alone, Gilda indulges in the feeling that overwhelms her.

Gilda's melody is genial by its simplicity, with a melodic line of a plastic purity, which is enriched with coloraturas, proving the emotion and joy of the first love felt by this pure soul. These vocal ornaments, traditional for the Italian opera, acquire, in this case, a new signification; they abound in a psychological content, conveying the maiden's enthusiasm. The melody develops under the form of variations, which are a part of this character full of light and candour.

a te sem - pre va - le - re  
 do - rei meu te va che - ma

Unlike Gilda, Donna Anna is moved by conflicting feelings. The aria no. 10, “*Orsai chi l'onore*” unveils the character’s tragic inner nature; and in the aria no. 25, “*Non mi dir, bell’ idol mio*”, the heroine gives expression to her conflicted feelings. She loves, but also hates; she sings her melody with elegant coloraturas, with a warm atmosphere; yet, they are not of innocence and hope, but of tragic endeavour.

Unlike Donna Anna, who wants revenge, after Don Giovanni’s attempt to seduce her, Gilda is only seized by a touching sadness. The maiden confesses her experience to her father, and Verdi envelops her story in a form of lied, simple and sad. The composer finds an adequate orchestral colouring, with an oboe solo, expressive and painful:



Gilda does not want to take vengeance. Rigoletto is the one who devises the retaliation; his daughter’s seducer must pay with his life, must be killed by a murderer.

The frivolity of the Duke’s song, “*La donna e mobile*”, comes in overt contradiction with the tragic atmosphere in the beginning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> act. A splendid dramatic contrast is created, which prepares the climax of the act, to wit the quartet. This one brings together melodies that express the various frames of mind of the characters.

- the duke’s indifference and light-mindedness
- Maddalena’s gaiety, who laughs out loud
- Gilda’s suffering
- Rigoletto’s gloomy determination

The four voices melt in the harmony of the whole. Overhearing the discussion between Sparafucille and his sister, Gilda sacrifices her life, in order to save the duke, whom she still loves. Unlike Mozart’s two female characters, who want **to** take revenge and even plan their vengeance, Gilda, overwhelmed by pain, sacrifices herself, with a view to saving the Seducer. Hence, the Conqueror portrayed by Verdi is not punished; he is saved by his victim. Gilda’s nobleness cannot be found in Mozart’s female character.

The Duke of Mantua, Verdi's Don Juan is the man of the ephemeral moment, of the futureless conquests. He characterizes himself in his ballad:

*"La donna è mobile."*

*"The woman changes her mind, oftentimes,  
Insane is the one who believes in her."*

We find these words in the Palace of Chambord, engraved on the window with the ring diamond, by Francis the 1<sup>st</sup> and taken over by Victor Hugo. The Duke's song intertwines vulgarity and elegance; and it translates, by its melodic simplicity, the character's light-minded frame of mind. As Don Juan, the Duke of Mantua seeks happiness on the realm of egoistic voluptuousness. After having seduced Gilda, he moves, indifferent, uncaring and egoistic, to another conquest, Maddalena. Although he does not disguise himself, as Don Giovanni does, De Mantua passes for a poor student, with a view to attaining his goal. With all his misdeeds, the conqueror created by Verdi remains unpunished. This time, Rigoletto, the court jester is the one who is punished by Gilda's death, as what else can be more awful for a parent, than to see his child dishonoured and killed?!

Monterone was avenged and the curse was fulfilled. The orchestra, by laconic features; yet, as adequate as possible, emphasizes what is the most important and concludes what was left unfinished. By Rigoletto, Verdi sought the "ideal of the beautiful", in the field of the "the awful and hideous" (Bonaventura, Almado, 1956 : 78). Going even further, we dare say everything that Gilda believed in, the purity and beauty of the feeling of love, decomposed in sadness and pain, because of the lie and betrayal; everything changed into hideous, because of this unscrupulous seducer. For the heroine, life had no longer importance, as she had been betrayed in her love and dishonoured. The supreme sacrifice was her escape, as hatred and revenge were unknown to Gilda, as opposed to Mozart's female character. The opera "Rigoletto" succeeded in creating special characters, with a dramatic force worthy of a genius.

"Had I benefited from the possibility, in my dramas, to make four characters speak concomitantly and the audience distinguish their different words and feelings, I would have obtained as great an effect as Verdi." (Bonaventura, Almado 1956, 79)

For any researcher and critic of the vocal phenomenon by the opera, the parallel Mozart-Verdi is a temptation and, at the same time, a risky enterprise, given the courage and force (s)he should possess, so as to analyze and criticize the two "Great Chosen Ones" by Divinity to change senses and hypostases, by means of the sound. The fact that Mozart and Verdi lived and composed in utterly different historical periods led to differentiations, both in the themes of the operas and in the dramatic content, as well as in the characters' experiences and feelings. And yet, both of them brought in their creation, the confrontation between Eros and Thanatos.

Starting from Schopenhauer's quote, "*Love is the compensation for death*", we dare say that Don Giovanni chooses death not as an element of rest, not as a

compensation for his life as a perpetual seducer, but out of immeasurable vanity and complete negation of the honest feelings of moral and faith. Verdi went even further and opened other gates, where moral no longer exists or is no longer considered. The composer entered the realm of the spirit's struggle for immortality, of the eternal fight between good and evil, through demonism and salvation, through the emphasis on the truth, as against the darkness of offence." (Bonaventura, Almado 1956, 80) Rigoletto paid for his errors with his most precious treasure, with Gilda's life. The heroine's sacrifice was, for the jester, the most atrocious punishment. The conqueror portrayed by Verdi was not punished, as the world created by the composer is deprived of moral. Mozart stopped, in his drama, on the realm of the "Punished Debaucher", bringing for the first time, in the opera, the picture of the human soul's immensity and complexity. Verdi, in contrast with Mozart, "played" with the real and surreal, with the sublime and the grotesque alike.

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