

VOX
IMAGO

**BIZET
CARMEN**

JESÚS LÓPEZ-COBOS
VALENTINA CARRASCO
OPERA DI ROMA

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IMAGO**

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**Bizet
Carmen**

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This edition of Vox Imago is dedicated to Bizet's Carmen, the best loved and most influential French opera ever. This is proven by its exceptional success, which has been confirmed in the course of time, in spite of the solemn fiasco that occurred at its premiere on March 3, 1875. That outcome was also due to the fact that the Opéra-Comique, the theatre that hosted it, was mainly frequented by families. It could perhaps be traced back to its explosiveness, seeing that it is reasonable to imagine that the musical performance based on the somber short story by Mérimée must have appeared to be rather innovative for the canons of the day. A murder scene, characters beyond the expectations of the public – an emancipated prima donna, an anti-hero tenor, a male chauvinist baritone –, sensitive social themes – gypsyhood, banditry, the popular masses – were set alongside the elements of fashion in the Paris of those years, such as Iberian exoticism.

To understand the originality of the opera it should also be borne in mind that the author was completely immersed not only in the official Parisian cultural and academic life, but also in what was considered marginal, bourgeois, or popular. Cabaret music, street noises, military marches dominate the composer's inventiveness and find direct confirmation in his musical score.

According to the spirit of the series, the mention of musical values is accompanied, in agile literary essays and a rich iconographic apparatus, by the themes and cultural references that are variously related and often provocative, from the political and social history of the figurative arts, to current affairs. Of great importance are the motifs of freedom reiterated doggedly, the valorization of the role of women, and the ineluctability of fate that imposes itself through the musical sign of a theme repeated throughout the work.

The production that is presented here includes the companies of the Opera di Roma under the guidance of Jesús López-Cobos and the direction of Valentina Carrasco in a performance held in such a unique location as that of the Baths of Caracalla.

This choice falls within a line of continuity with the inclusion in the program of the series of selected performances from the “temples” of lyricism in Italy, from Milan to Turin and now Rome.

Gian Maria Gros-Pietro
Chairman Intesa Sanpaolo

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Libre elle est née et libre elle mourra

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LIBRE ELLE EST NÉE
ET LIBRE ELLE MOURRA





Michele Girardi CARMEN, HEROINE OF FREEDOM

Πάσα γυνή χόλος ἐστίν· ἔχει δ' δύο ὥρας,
τὴν μίαν ἐν θαλάμῳ, τὴν μίαν ἐν θανάτῳ.
Every woman is a bore. She'll give you only two good times:
when you take her to the bridal bed, and when you bury her.
(*The Palatine Anthology*)

Carmen is one of the greatest masterpieces of theatre of all time. Pure theatre. If we assess its original structure, as Bizet left it, dying three months after the premiere on March 3, 1875, it is intensely theatrical, in the finest tradition of Parisian *opéra comique*. There is music, of course: among the most beautiful, living, daring, inspired and intense music ever composed. There is ironic and elegant versification, but also speech: the spoken word, all condensed into a libretto of the highest quality. The authors were two of the

Photos of the staging
of *Carmen* at the Terme di
Caracalla produced by the
Teatro dell'Opera di Roma;
directed by Valentina Carrasco,
sets by Sarmal Blak, costumes
by Luis Carvalho, choreography
by Erika Rombaldoni
and Massimiliano Volpini,
lighting by Peter van Praet.

Act III: Veronica Simeoni
(Carmen).

greatest geniuses of Parisian satirical theatre in the second half of the nineteenth century, Henri Meilhac and Ludovic Halévy. They reigned supreme in the theatres of the Second Empire and were co-authors of some of Offenbach's greatest masterpieces, from *La belle Hélène* (1864) to *La Grande-Duchesse de Gérolstein* (1867), among the most corrosive anti-militarist satires of all time. The two imaginative librettists dramatized their source to perfection, so much so that in many places the protagonists recite pages of Prosper Mérimée's novella *Carmen*. But at many other points it was the composer himself, driven by his dramatic imagination and a desire to keep as close as possible to the spirit of the original text, who compelled his collaborators to make crucial changes to a first, tamer draft (an example is the "Habanera," whose content he sketched out and which was then translated into verse by Halévy). Such fidelity to the scandalous story recounted by Mérimée proved intolerable for the public accustomed to the operatic conventions of the time. This was noted by the renowned music critic and translator Henri Blaze de Bury (a rare exception among the journalists of the day), in a very positive review of the work published in the *Revue musicale* following the disastrous premiere:



Our *opéra comique* no longer wants to joke. It has become serious. Instead of ingeniously dodging the unusual and repellent aspects of a subject, we like, on the contrary, to take it on the chest: duels with daggers and a tragic stabbing in the epilogue, nothing frightens us anymore.

Together with the dialogues, *Carmen* offers “numbers” specific to the *opéra comique*, such as the *mélodrames*, in which speech unfolds over an orchestral passage. The list of *dramatis personae* in the original libretto, with the names of the performers, included the exclusively spoken part of Lillas Pastia, a role so highly developed as to require a good character actor.

The structure I have described, in addition to an explosive story based on utterly unconventional characters, contributes to the creation of one of the most singular and overwhelming dramas of all time, embodied in visual *tableaux* of great expressive power. The theatrical quality is heightened by the stage music, a category which includes the *chansons* and all the other forms sung on stage that fill the two opening acts, from the chorus of street urchins to the rhythm of the military march to the “Habanera,” from the “Séguédille” to the “Chanson bohème” and Don José’s soldierly song, anticipated in the first *entr’acte* and intoned by the tenor before appearing onstage (II.4). The genre *opéra comique* was not exportable as such outside France, and Bizet’s early death in June 1875, one of the heaviest losses that music has ever suffered, has made the staging of *Carmen* a problem that has never quite been solved.

One of the main complications was the length, as the composer himself was well aware. After the opening night, he shortened the work, abridging and altering many passages for the sake of a more effective dramatic synthesis. The declaimed dialogues, which were unusually full, were not intended to be performed outside the Opéra-Comique, so Bizet’s disciple and friend Ernest Guiraud turned them into recitative with musical backing, and even directors who keep the spoken passages shorten them quite drastically. The problem of a text straddling genres is ultimately pretty well insoluble, but it can be argued that both versions represent *Carmen*: if the *opéra comique*, recovered in quite recent times, reflects Bizet’s last wishes (and it is decidedly more singular and attractive), the *opéra* has also circulated in the world’s theatres and until recently

Act I: Timofei Baranov (Moralès) and Rosa Feola (Micaëla).

Act I: Chorus of the Teatro dell’Opera di Roma.

Act I: Chorus of the Scuola di Canto Corale of the Teatro dell’Opera di Roma.



it was definitely more widely performed and better known than the original. Bizet himself, if he had not died before he could do so, would probably have set to music the parts recited, with a view to the work’s revival in Vienna in October 1875.

Much water has passed under the bridge since the Parisian critics, rather than the audience in the opera house, decreed the premiere a failure. Panning the marvelous score would have been a difficult task, so it was the heroine’s immoral behavior that aroused the “disgust” of the critics in March 1875. They included Achille de Lauzières, librettist and writer, well known for having translated Verdi’s *Don Carlos*.

The stage today is increasingly being taken over by courtesans: it is in this social class that we delight to recruit the heroines of our dramas, comedies and *opéras comiques*.

But why? As soon as someone enters the field of social disgust, he is forced to descend even lower, and that is where he chooses his models. [...] He has done his best and found it: she is a young woman in the most revolting sense of the term, driven by her bodily desires, who gives herself to the first soldier she meets, on a whim, out of bravado, randomly, blindly. After destroying him, she leaves him dishonored and mocked to chase after a more attractive young man, whom she would then have ditched in his turn if he had let her. In the meantime, taking care to distract the vigilance of the customs officers with her venal caresses, she assists some smugglers in their work. A wild gypsy, half Egyptian or tzigane, half Andalusian; sensual, mocking, shameless, believing neither in God nor the devil and following no law other than pleasure. [...] She responds with the refrain of a song to the supplications of her lover, who is ready to desert for her; with the sound of castanets to the desperate cries of the poor man who, bewitched, dares to be jealous of this monster. In a word, a true prostitute of the mud and the sidewalk.



In this way a hymn to freedom in love was represented, by one of the most influential critics of the time, as a journey into the heart of abjection.

A Philosopher in the Theatre

It is a relief to turn to Friedrich Nietzsche, who perhaps grasped the essence of *Carmen* better than any other commentator:

This music is wicked, refined, fatalistic, and yet it remains popular—it possesses the refinement of a race, not an individual. It is rich. It is definite. It builds, organizes, completes. [...] Have more painful, more tragic accents ever been heard on the stage before? And how are they attained? Without grimaces! Without counterfeiting of any kind! Free from the falsity of the grand style!—In short: this music assumes that the listener is intelligent even as a musician. [...] Finally love, love translated back into *nature*! [...] But love as fate, as fatality, cynical, innocent, cruel—and for this very reason *nature*!

Despite Nietzsche's polemical purpose towards *Parsifal* and Wagner (who was also, like Brahms and almost all the musicians of that time, a great admirer of *Carmen*), the philosopher formulated in a few paragraphs a series of hermeneutical hypotheses as lapidary as they are appealing, one after the other, with the insight and competence of one who understood the mechanisms of tragic art to a marvelous degree. Every statement by Nietzsche merits reflection: in the following pages I will limit myself to taking a cue from some of his observations to assess the salient aspects of this multifaceted masterpiece.

Refinement

The *refinement*, for example, permeates the whole work, or rather is its hallmark, starting from the expressive level. Bizet creates a fertile relation, left a dead letter by his successors, between reality portrayed in its raw aspects and its representation, thanks to the mediation of the high style. Think of the misunderstanding generated by Italian Verismo: to paint mortal passions in plebeian and degraded environments, it transformed song into a cry, after

Act I: Veronica Simeoni (Carmen) and Chorus of the Teatro dell'Opera di Roma.



Act I: Rosa Feola (Micaëla) and Roberto Aronica (Don José).

Act I: Veronica Simeoni (Carmen) and Chorus of the Teatro dell'Opera di Roma.





Act I: Roberto Aronica
(Don José) and Veronica
Simeoni (Carmen).

crystallizing the forms of Romantic melodrama. We have one of the many demonstrations in the initial scene, when Micaëla is ogled by the soldiers in the square of Seville. The erotic anxiety that pervades the group, intent until then on gossiping about the passers-by, clashes with the young woman's innocence. She deftly keeps the men at a distance by refusing to enter the barracks (with the same attitude and the same innocence, a lamb among the wolves, we will see her again amid the smugglers in Act III). What would have become of her if she had accepted the invitation we can easily imagine (it is evoked by the chromatic throbbing of the orchestra that accompanies her on stage, as if it were the eye of the square). And meanwhile the dialogue, inlaid with explicit advances, is articulated lightly on formal "classical" motifs, and Micaëla extricates herself from her plight with style. She reprises in the guise of a refrain ("Je reviendrai quand la garde montante / remplacera la garde descendante"), the motif with which Moralès and his men have announced the imminent arrival of Don José ("Il y sera," etc.), after which the soldiers again gaze at the passers-by. The transition is quite natural because the calibrated formal development ensures a significant effect on everything that happens on stage.

Another example, even more eloquent, of the relation between the high style and the dramatic reality is quintet no. 15 in Act II ("Nous avons en tête une affaire"), which involves gypsies and smugglers in an overwhelming ode to female powers of seduction. By the elegance of its traits combined with its dramatic pregnancy, the piece sounds like a tribute to Mozart, seasoned with very aromatic French spices. It is wholly pervaded by an antiphonal exchange between the men and women: the two sexes seek complicity, but they are opposed by the strict melodic variations in the first stanza, while in the refrain the voices finally come together in the name of deception, trickery and thieving. An incessant exchange also governs the second stanza, in which Carmen declares enthusiastically she is in love at the height of a bold tonal digression that leads to the precarious B flat major of "je suis amoureuse." But when she begins to withdraw from the pact, the violins sing a sort of tarantella in D minor ("S'il vous plaît de partir... partez"), its melody deriving from that of the refrain. In this way not only the shadow of the game affects the seriousness of the sentiment expressed by the protagonist, but the quintet also gains

Act I: Roberto Aronica
(Don José) and Veronica
Simeoni (Carmen).



in terms of formal coherence by the melodic variation embedded in the general dialogue system, until it results in the reprise, which closes the circle with a vein of brilliance.

The purpose of women's charm will be better understood in the *ensemble* of the smugglers in Act III ("Quant au douanier, c'est notre affaire!"), again a very elegant piece animated by an arsenal of double meanings, which substantiates the relationship between the flirting gypsies, who act as decoys to sidetrack the gallant customs officers (from "se laisser prendre la taille" to "aller jusqu'au sourire").

Popularity

We can turn now to the opera's *popularity*. What melody could lay a better claim to popularity than the sunny refrain of the "Habanera" ("L'amour est enfant de bohème"), in which the protagonist celebrates her first appearance on stage? In the blazing plaza in Seville, she claims her freedom to love, which so upset Lauzières. But listen again with greater attention to the chilling descending chromatic scales traversed by the mezzo-soprano in strophes, like shivers translated into sound, resting on the repeated, *ostinato* accompaniment that never moves from the first degree: Bizet drew these *topoi* from the Parisian musical theatre and he blends them with a linguistically very advanced gesture, creating a spasmodic tension in the audience. From the beginning, Carmen's love affair takes on a sinister tone that the public experiences as charm and at the same time a fear of the unknown. But this result of extraordinary dramatic power is also achieved by a very elegant technique that stylistically elevates the musical means necessary to produce the effect: try shifting the stubborn rhythmic figure that accompanies the voice from the tonic pedal to the dominant, perhaps at the verb "apprivoiser," where the first phrase ends, and all the tension evaporates in a flash.

Finally, each page of the score demonstrates that the composer's undoubted skill, tempered in the highly demanding tradition of the Paris Conservatoire, is never an end in itself. Bizet *builds*,





organizes, completes and invents unusual harmonic combinations without the falsehood of the grand style; he is distinguished “by the unpredictability of his almost Schubertian modulations: he could reach the most remote corners of a tone within a smaller compass than that needed by almost all his predecessors,” as Winton Dean truly observes. He also displayed an outstanding counterpoint technique, as did most of the French composers of his time formed in his same school, especially if they passed through the course of the Prix de Rome, but he succeeded—and this is a gift granted to very few!—in placing it at the service of the drama, as Verdi did, for example by composing a fugue at the end of the Parisian version of *Macbeth* (1865). Think of the account of the brawl between Carmen and Manuelita that the cigarette makers address to Zuniga in chorus no. 8. The listener perceives the imitative potentialities

of the melody that circulates between the two groups of women (the subject is worthy of appearing among those treated by famous teachers such as Théodore Dubois and André Gedalge), virtualities that remain unexpressed until the moment when Don José, after coming face to face with Carmen for the first time in the finale of Act I and hearing her “chanter pour elle-même” the “Séguédille,” gives in to her enchantment and allows her to escape.

Using a precise melodic reminiscence, easily grasped by the audience, Bizet maintains the relationship between the brawl, which attests to the wildness of the heroine’s character, and the issue of the order for her arrest. Moreover the composer accompanies the action by treating a whole exposition of the fugue as stage music, developing it in keeping with the classical scheme (subject and response at the superior fifth together with a counter-subject as far



as the fourth entry). Moreover, thanks to this formal treatment, he musically qualifies the action, which is perceived as a logical consequence of the mechanism of seduction, also providing a further motif. The significant sequence is completed when, in place of the developmental episode expected after the escape exhibition, we hear Carmen reprise the refrain of the “Habanera” to tease Zuniga, the gallant officer, and at the same time reaffirm her convictions about love. On this basis, in the second part of Act II, Carmen welcomes Don José, who has spent a month in prison for helping her. Carmen pays her debts—as she herself says (“Je paie mes dettes... c’est notre loi à nous autres bohémiennes...” II.5)—but with interest: what a miracle of invention her dance is, especially when the cornets from behind the scenes intone a fanfare in contrast with her song, while she accompanies her sensual evolutions with castanets.

“Et vive la musique qui nous tombe du ciel!”: the impression of spontaneity could not be greater, but even this is pure perfection of the style placed at the service of the drama.

A Musician in the Theatre

Another great admirer of Bizet’s masterpiece can help us explore a central aspect of it, on which Nietzsche had already focused.

Act II: Daniela Cappiello (Frasquita), Alessio Verna (Le Dancaire), Veronica Simeoni (Carmen), Anna Pennisi (Mercédès).

Act II: Daniela Cappiello (Frasquita), Gianfranco Montresor (Zuniga), Veronica Simeoni (Carmen), Anna Pennisi (Mercédès).

Following pages:
Act II: Daniela Cappiello (Frasquita), Anna Pennisi (Mercédès), Alexander Vinogradov (Escamillo) and Chorus of the Teatro dell’Opera di Roma.



FRONTERA 2022

EMIGRATION CHECKING
CHEQUEO DE EMIGRACION





Act II: Roberto Aronica (Don José) and Veronica Simeoni (Carmen).

Act II: Roberto Aronica (Don José).

Act II: Roberto Aronica (Don José) and Veronica Simeoni (Carmen).

Act II: Alessio Verna (Le Dancaïre), Veronica Simeoni (Carmen), Gianfranco Montresor (Zuniga), Pietro Picone (Le Remendado).

In January 1876, Tchaikovsky was able to attend one of the last performances of the first cycle of *Carmen* begun at the Opéra-Comique in March 1875 (hence the original version, with spoken dialogues). He was dazzled by it. In his correspondence he praised Bizet's talent several times, and in July 1880 he sent his patron Nadezhda von Meck a broad assessment of the composer's place in the context of contemporary music, closing with a prophecy that would prove accurate:

As a rest from my own work [...] I played through Bizet's *Carmen* from cover to cover. I consider it a *chef-d'oeuvre* in the fullest sense of the word: one of those rare compositions which seems to reflect most strongly in itself the musical tendencies of a whole generation. It seems to me that our own period differs from earlier ones in this one characteristic: that contemporary composers are engaged in the pursuit of charming and piquant effects, unlike Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, and Schumann. [...] Musical ideas give place to this or that union of sounds. [...] This development of musical thought is naturally purely intellectual, consequently contemporary music is clever, piquant, and eccentric; but cold and lacking the glow of true emotion. And behold, a Frenchman comes on the scene, in whom these qualities of piquancy and pungency are not the outcome of effort and reflection, but flow from his pen as in a free stream, flattering the ear, but touching us also. It is as though he said to us: "You ask nothing great, superb, or grandiose, you want something pretty, here is a pretty opera"; and truly I know of nothing in music which is more representative of that element which I call the pretty, *le joli*. [...] I cannot play the last scene without tears in my eyes; the gross rejoicings of the crowd who look on at the bullfight, and, side by side with this, the poignant tragedy and death of the two principal characters, pursued by an evil fate, who come to their inevitable end through a long series of sufferings. I am convinced that ten years hence *Carmen* will be the most popular opera in the world.

Fatalism

"An evil fate": *Carmen's* fever infected the Russian composer in quest of a subject suited to his lyrical vein. When he decided to compose his masterpiece, *Eugene Onegin*, in May 1877, he started from the scene of the letter that Tatyana wishes to send to Onegin, to reveal her love to him. She tears up the sheet she has started to write, then decides to return to her desk. At this moment a theme rises in the orchestra, entrusted to the pure timbres of woodwinds and solo brass, which accompanies much of the writing as a sort of inner voice.



Following pages:
Act III: Alessio Verna (Le Dancaïre), Veronica Simeoni (Carmen), Anna Pennisi (Mercédès),

Daniela Cappello (Frasquita), Pietro Picone (Le Remendado) and Chorus of the Teatro dell'Opera di Roma.





This letter decides the heroine's fate, so that in *Eugene Onegin* we again see that *Fatum* plays an overriding part and was a true obsession of Tchaikovsky's. His last three symphonies were inspired by the theme of fate, the leitmotif of his literary program associated with the Fourth Symphony, which creates a sort of inner soundstage, starting with the initial fanfare. Perhaps for this reason the composer, a true connoisseur of intertextual references, remembered Carmen and her mortal destiny by retracing a manifestation of hers at the start of the peripeteia in that orgiastic dance that opens Act II in Lillas Pastia's tavern, into which Carmen throws herself with her two friends, Frasquita and Mercédès, as if accepting the only course open to her. The phrase "Les tringles des sistres tintaient" which opens the "Chanson bohème" later became the melody entrusted to the timbre of the oboe, which first entwines with Tatyana's voice as she writes the fatal letter to Onegin, sealing her fate.

Tatyana hopes that her beloved can change her *Fatum* and writes: "Now, I know, it is within your power / to punish me with disdain! / But if you nurture one grain of pity / for my unhappy lot, / you will not abandon me." In contrast, Carmen seems to know her destiny from the moment that she provokes the young soldier after, by singing and dancing the "Habanera," she has seduced all the men who crowd the square, except for Don José. "Chien et loup ne font pas longtemps bon ménage," she tells him of their relationship (III.2), already frayed, in words taken bodily from the source. But at the moment of their first meeting in the square, her fate is announced by the vibrant melody of clarinets, violas and cellos on the palpitating *tremolo* of the violins (no. 6), before she throws a cassia flower in a token of love to the handsome soldier. The musical sequence is not resolved by the cadence in the tonic, as happened at its first appearance in the third section of

the prelude (after the anticipation of the music that will be heard again in the mass scene of the last act and Escamillo's *chanson*). Rather it dwells on the G sharp of the violas that floats in the air as Carmen and José begin their brief spoken exchange. The scene in question thus takes the hint that the orchestra, or the author who is "recounting" the tale, had held out at the beginning, a few moments before the curtain was raised. In this way a true dramatic curve is traced, since for the first time the thematic melody is again presented in the same form (whereas just before it was sketched out in a concise and sharp version when Carmen appeared in the square). The sequence promptly accompanies developments, transposed to different heights and in varied forms, until it explodes in the finale, after the tragic fate is accomplished, celebrating the ritual of death. On this last scene Blaze de Bury wrote a comment worth rereading:

Carmen is untamed, a wild creature, who does not lack frankness and courage. She walks straight towards danger. "They told me not to trust you, to fear for my life; here I am!" At the mere idea that she supposes him capable of such a crime, José backs away in horror, only to commit it ten minutes later. First the poor wretch pleads with her, but his pain and his appeals are met with nothing but contempt. Bored, exasperated, the gypsy becomes provocative and throws the ring he gave her into José's face. He turns, quivering with hatred and, to stop her from running to her bullfighter, he kills her. All this great episode, almost a whole act, is treated with superior art. The listener feels moved and involved. The torment of this desperate man, Carmen's attitude in relation to the despair she has caused, her indifference and dissatisfaction, then, at the moment of the tragedy, the contrast between the bloody agony that pervades the front of the stage, while outside fanfares resound celebrating a triumph, all these gradations, all these movements, are analyzed with a rendering that leaves no doubt about the future of a dramatic composer.

We can only agree with this analysis: few authors have succeeded like Bizet in representing the consequences of destiny in these memorable pages.

L'amour c'est la mort

Hence this music is *rich* and *precise* and it *assumes the listener is intelligent, even as a musician*. *Fatum* dominates the plot and



Act III: Daniela Cappiello (Frasquita), Veronica Simeoni (Carmen), Anna Pennisi (Mercédès).

Act III: Veronica Simeoni (Carmen).



conditions the protagonist's actions through the unequivocal thematic allusions, which draw the audience's attention.

Bizet was very skillful in subjecting a story of love and death to a rigorous musical construction, wholly devoted to producing an emotional impact never before attained. The melody in a minor mode that represents destiny starting from the prelude strikes home because it is based on recognized ritual elements that introduce the cadenza to its relative major (the proportion is golden, eight bars, six of them on a tonic pedal). The allusion is built up on three fateful repetitions of a chromatic tetrachord (namely a descending sequence of four notes among the longest and most expressive in opera: ever since the seventeenth century it has conveyed suffering and tension). This heightens the work's tragic liturgy, further underscored by the sharp stroke of the timpanum. In the score the tetrachord also appears alone in forms that contain the augmented second interval (as it is used in Andalusian folk music). This sonority not only adds a touch of disquiet in itself, but at the same time plays the role of a precise "exotic" summons addressed to Carmen's gypsy descent, expressive of her passionate nature. In many cases the tetrachord gravitates within a fourth, augmented rather than perfect: the interval of three whole tones, called by medieval theorists *diabolus in musica*, gives the sequence a sinister character, perhaps that trace of *evil* mentioned by Nietzsche. To enhance the dialectic between the different manifestations of the tetrachord, Bizet also used two main metric arrangements: the first in severe and inexorable down-beat, the second, slightly prevalent, a rising, generally more rapid, flickering and fatuous upbeat.

Bizet entrusts the tetrachord, and the melodies in which it is dominant, with a key role in guiding the reception of the tragic element. From its appearance in the prelude, the fatal motif is heard, as we have noted, when Carmen is about to throw the flower to Don José. It then embodies the demonic charm of the gypsy after the soldier, heartened by his mother's kiss brought to him by Micaëla, plunges into the memory of his village, reflecting for a few moments aloud on the danger he has escaped ("Qui sait de quel démon j'allais être la proie!"), and finally dissolving into a hymn of thanksgiving



Act IV: Chorus and Ballet Company of the Teatro dell'Opera di Roma.

to family affections. It would be hard for any other musical passage to better depict a conflict between the devil and holy water. The tetrachord then returns in further variants, until the moment when the gypsy remains alone with José and effortlessly seduces him.

The theme of destiny is heard only once in the second act, but at a truly crucial moment. When the tenor draws from his uniform the cassia flower that provides the inspiration for his solo in the heart of the duet with Carmen (“La fleur que tu m’avais jetée / dans ma prison m’était restée”), it is not limited, because of the musical allusion, to symbolizing José’s loving expectation, but becomes a vehicle of the fatal destiny that weighs on that love.

In the third act the tetrachord finds its consecration in one of the climaxes of the drama. The arts of a gypsy include the power to foretell the future. After confirming her tragic vision in conversation with José (“J’ai vu plusieurs fois dans les cartes que nous devons finir ensemble”), Carmen re-examines the cards together with her two friends. Both of them will have a great future: Frasquita will live with romantic love between the arms of a young leader of

men, while Mercédès, more prosaically, will marry a rich old man and inherit his estate. Their happy fortunes act as a catalyst for the tragic element, and when Carmen turns up the ominous cards (diamonds and spades) the tetrachord invades the sound space from the acute to the middle register, falling to low B with a chromatic scale. Once again Bizet associates the destiny of death with Carmen, and in the great dramatic arioso that follows (“En vain, pour éviter les réponses amères”) Carmen movingly makes it clear that death (“la mort”) awaits her together with her lover. The gypsy is here an authentically tragic character, because she accepts her destiny, knowing she has disrupted the “natural” order of the world, albeit diminished to Don José’s lethal religious microcosm. She is not, nor can she be, serene, but she does not reject the challenge, even knowing that her fate is ineluctable, and has been written by the music until that moment.

When the melody returns to animate the grand finale of death, introducing the closing duet and sealing her destiny, all the allusions listed here have guided the audience towards that same conclusion.

Act IV: Alexander Vinogradov (Escamillo), Veronica Simeoni (Carmen) and Chorus of the Teatro dell'Opera di Roma.



La liberté

While Don José changes profoundly as events unfold, and from being a man of honor he turns bandit from passion, Carmen remains faithful to herself until the end. Her loves are not made to last, any more than Don Giovanni's. And though she is a gypsy and a woman, hence in a position made more "scandalous" by the prejudices of the community and of men in particular, like the Mozartian hero, she proves capable of saying no to those who want her to give up her freedom. She pays with her life, so becoming an example for all: "Jamais Carmen ne cédera! / Libre elle est née et libre elle mourra!" The fatal tetrachord invades the sound space in the final bars, after José has stabbed his lover to the motif of "Toréador, en garde" (a tragically ironic musical gesture). Carmen has chosen freedom and with it her destiny of death.

Bizet has no little merit for affirming these values against the moralizing of the right-minded and for exalting them in the central finale (of Act II), which, in relation to the last act, assumes a "political" coloring that reverberates throughout the work:

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comme c'est beau, la vie errante,
pour pays tout l'univers,
et pour loi sa volonté!
et surtout, la chose enivrante:
la liberté!

The proportions of this chorus are those of a great hymn, but the word enthroned by it was among the most dangerous ever, so that the Parisians (a privileged audience in Europe) had heard it a number of times in the nineteenth century—and in a particular situation like that of the Opéra in 1829—thanks to Rossini. "Liberté, redescends des cieux, / et que ton règne recommence!": also in the finale of *Guillaume Tell* nature comes to the forestage as a model of human freedom, and the tonality, C major, is the same as in Act II of *Carmen*. But this masterpiece does not show a people reconciled coming to the fore, but rather an army of disinherited individuals who find an identity in emancipation from coercive social schemes.

Act IV: Veronica Simeoni
(Carmen) and Roberto
Aronica (Don José).



39



Act IV: Veronica Simeoni (Carmen) and Roberto Aronica (Don José).

Act IV: Gianfranco Montresor (Zuniga), Roberto Aronica (Don José), Veronica Simeoni (Carmen).

Carmen thus shifts the balance from the previous operatic narratives, determining a new relationship between the theatre in music and major political themes, but above all with the greatest of its arguments, love. We can reflect on the stories of other heroines and other couples: “T’avea il cielo per l’amor creata” (Heaven created you for love): Aida and Radames cannot make love, but only hope that there is a heaven where they can meet again, like Don Carlo and Elisabetta (“Ma lassù ci vedremo / in un mondo migliore”) and many other of Verdi’s characters. “Ora di baci è questa” (This is the time of kisses) whispers Puccini’s Manon, on the point of expiring: she who had made sensual love her main reason for

living. But, before her, Carmen had presented herself to the world’s opera-goers with these words:

Quand je vous aimerai, ma fois je ne sais pas.
Peut-être jamais, peut-être demain;
mais pas aujourd’hui, c’est certain.

Carmen’s love goes hand in hand with life; it is *inexorable* and those who meet her can only accept it. Nowadays, men are perhaps more willing to accept the fact that a woman can openly choose her partner, though cases of femicide are still all too common. So we are moving towards that *tomorrow* promised by the bewitching gypsy? It is impossible to tell, but I believe that being free means being citizens of the world. That a message like this is sung by a chorus of smugglers and gypsies is one further merit of a masterpiece that will never cease to amaze and exalt us.



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Hervé Lacombe THE GENESIS OF *CARMEN*

Carmen is the creation of its composer, but also the result of negotiations between its protagonists: of course, Bizet and his librettists, Henry Meilhac and Ludovic Halévy, but also the directors of the Opéra-Comique, Camille Du Locle and Adolphe de Leuven, as well as its interpreters. Of the latter, the creator of the title role, Célestine Galli-Marié, played a decisive role in defining her character's profile.

It all started in 1872. Bizet had the Opéra-Comique stage a small one-act opera, *Djamileh*, an exotic and highly refined reverie inspired by Alfred de Musset's *Namouna*. Although the work was a fiasco, the score was much talked about and Bizet was recognized by the press as one of the most talented and daring young French composers of the moment. He now felt to have succeeded in mastering his profession and, above all, he knew what he wanted to achieve: "What satisfies me more than the opinion of all these gentlemen is the absolute certainty of having found my way. I know what I'm doing!"¹

Jules-Élie Delaunay, *Madame Georges Bizet*, wife of Bizet and daughter of Fromental Halévy, detail, 1878. Paris, Musée d'Orsay.

The directors of the Opéra-Comique asked him to create a new, more ambitious work in three acts (which at the end would become four). The librettists were chosen from the very best in the light entertainment theatre and the operetta—the ones who had collaborated in the best-known works by Offenbach. Several scenarios were outlined. Finally, Bizet suggested drawing inspiration from a novella by Mérimée. The writer, who had traveled to Spain in 1830, after his return published four *Lettres d'Espagne*, whose titles signal the content of the story: "Les combats de taureaux" (The Bullfights), "Une execution" (An Execution), "Les voleurs" (The Thieves), "Les sorcières espagnoles" (The Spanish Witches), on the *Revue de Paris*, between 1831 and 1833. Mérimée had probably written his novella in just one week in 1845, before publishing it in the *Revue des deux mondes*, in that same year, and having it distributed in book stores in 1847. This edition, published by Michel Lévy, had an additional chapter, which was not directly linked to the plot, but read as a rather scholarly essay on the topic of gypsies. The story inspiring Halévy, Meilhac and Bizet was then found in chapter 3. There, Mérimée told the story Don José shared with a French traveler. In jail awaiting his death



in loco parentis and stands for the values of fidelity, respect and obedience. But the rise of tragic forces could not be suppressed. And even if the libretto played down the scabrous side of Carmen's character and story, it retained an undeniable erotic power and gave the central stage to the death drive, especially in the cards scene and in the final scene, but also in the scenes of the brawls and in the bullfighting theme. Did Leuven feel the flurry of scandal coming his way? Anyway, six months after the commission, he resigned from his post.

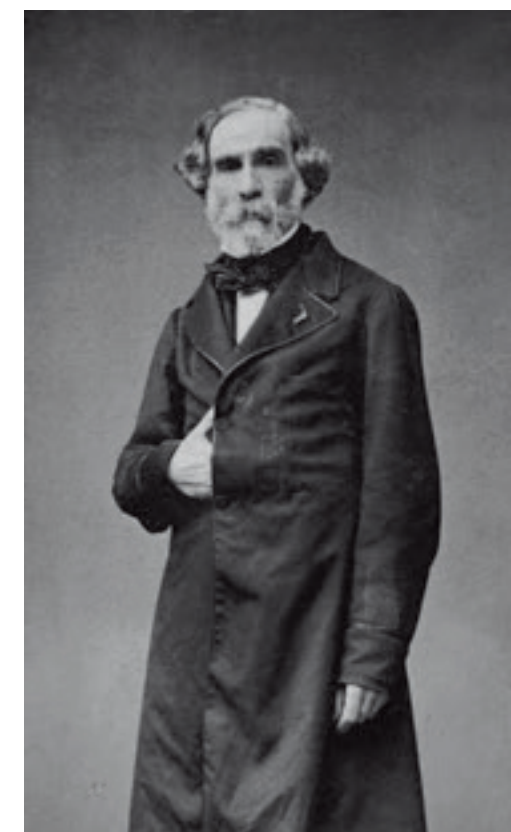
We know very little about the details of the writing of the libretto. Meilhac and Halévy were used to working together and had a well-honed system in place. They had a clear style and a modern sense of comedy built around the slice-of-life depiction. The analysis of social customs was right on mark and combined skillfully with a keen sense of observation and a spirit of fantasy and jokes. They could evoke delicate or salacious subjects without ever being coarse. It is precisely this style of easily flowing writing and simplicity in the dramatic construction that gives a novel brightness and an exceptional effectiveness to *Carmen's* tragedy. No more surprises, no more misunderstandings, no more real vicissitudes: the model of Scribe's imbroglia plays, found in the *grand opéra* as well as in the *opéra comique*, has disappeared. The facts unfold inexorably and propel the drama towards its final catastrophe that beautifully combines the two fights taking place, the one of the bull against Escamillo in the arena, and Carmen's against Don José. Usually, Meilhac took care of the plot and dialogues. In an *opéra comique*, the spoken dialogues were in prose and the musical pieces were all versified. Meilhac took plenty from the text of Mérimée's novella to make the dialogues, while Halévy versified the "numbers" that were to be sung.

However, just saying that would not explain much of the work behind the scene. In the process of creating an opera, in fact, very often the composer intervened so that his librettists reviewed their plans or the details of the versification for the different "numbers." Sometimes he participated more directly in the writing of the lyrics. And this is exactly what happened with Bizet. Thanks to a sheet of handwritten paper kept in the Bibliothèque-musée de l'Opéra, we have the testimony of this kind of work. Bizet hastily scribbled a few lines for Carmen's entrance air:

Georges Bizet, contemporary photograph. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France.

The librettist Ludovic Halévy, contemporary photograph.

Prosper Mérimée, 1861, photograph from the album *Dans l'intimité de personnages illustres*, vol. 7.



44 sentence for his crimes, José recounted events from his past: his honorable origins, his mishaps (he had killed a man in a gambling quarrel), his transfer to Seville to redeem himself, then, immediately thereafter, his fatal encounter with Carmen, his progressive downfall and his final crime.

One of the two directors, Leuven, very conservative in his views, was concerned and even outraged at having his theatre, known for its being a bourgeois, family-oriented establishment, put on stage characters living on the margins of society, loose women, free love and even a crime of passion! Ludovic Halévy recalled his reaction upon hearing the name of the protagonist: "Carmen!... Mérimée's Carmen!... Isn't she killed by her lover?... And this setting of thieves, gypsies, cigarette girls!... At the Opéra-Comique!... the family theatre!... the theatre of the wedding interviews!... Every evening we have five or six boxes booked for these interviews... You will put our audiences to flight... It's impossible!"²

Halévy promised to play down the high drama, while stepping up the lively unfolding of the events and creating a spirit of merriment. He insisted on the sweetness of a new character: Micaëla. She is the messenger of Don José's mother, and actually serves

L'amour est un rebelle
Et nul ne peut l'appivoiser.
C'est en vain qu'on l'appelle
Il lui convient de refuser.

Then he asked Halévy the following: "8 verses similar to the first four. The second, 4th, 6th, 8th, 10th and 12th verses start with a vowel!!!" And he wrote the following lines:

L'amour est enfant de bohème...
Il ne connaît jamais de loi.
Si tu ne m'aimes pas, je t'aime!...
Si tu m'aimes... tant pis pour toi!...

L'oiseau que tu croyais surprendre
Battit de l'aile et s'envola.
L'amour est loin – tu peux l'attendre,
Tu ne l'attends plus, il est là.
Tout autour de toi, vite, vite,
Il vient – il s'en va – puis revient,
Tu crois le tenir – il t'évite –
Tu crois l'éviter – il te tient!

L'amour est enfant de Bohème
Il ne connaît jamais de loi.
Si tu ne m'aimes pas, je t'aime!
Si tu m'aimes... tant pis pour toi!

And he also added: "Please do not change anything at all if it is possible." Now let's move to the details of the rewriting and complementing the air. We can see that the most famous lines of the opera are not the librettists' but Bizet's! Another document, kept at the Bibliothèque nationale, shows once again the composer intervening very precisely in the writing of the libretto. In the scene of the cards, Carmen's monologue written by Halévy is very carefully corrected by Bizet to give a more tragic scale to this momentous turn of the drama: Carmen discovers and faces her own destiny. Halévy's line started as follows:

Mais qu'importe après tout si par cette menace
Mon cœur n'est pas troublé

Bizet corrected:

En vain pour éviter les réponses amères
En vain tu mêleras

He also replaced the easy resignation ("what does it matter after all") with the superb repetition of "en vain." Of the changes he brought to Halévy's text, the most significant one is the mode of

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Georges Bizet's house in Bougival, 1900. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France.

The Opéra-Comique, 1850-1860, lithograph. Paris, Bibliothèque des Arts décoratifs.

enunciation. In Halévy's words, Carmen says "I." With Bizet she says "You" addressing herself, as if she were splitting in two to look at herself in the face of destiny, but also as if to send this existential question back to the audience: "if you must die." Halévy wrote:

J'ai beau recommencer, la carte impitoyable
Répète encore: la mort.

Bizet changed it with an imperative:

Recommence vingt fois - la carte impitoyable
Dira toujours: la mort!

Like any play of the time, a new *opéra comique* had to be cleared by the censorship board. On February 12, Camille Du Locle deposited in the censor's office a handwritten copy of the libretto which probably corresponded to the state of the opera around February 1. Preserved in the Archives nationales, this libretto shows that several small changes were made in writing. For example, in the censorship libretto, Carmen cannot find her castanets when she wants them to accompany her dance. She breaks a plate to replace them with two shards of pottery. In the libretto which will be published for the premiere, this little scene is modified: Carmen tries these makeshift instruments and complains about it ("Ah! ça ne vaudra jamais mes castagnettes!", "Ah, they will never be worth my castanets!") before José finds the real castanets.

In the 1870s, the institution of the Opéra-Comique was still very much entrenched in its ways, and any new work had to be framed within the genre of the *opéra comique*, which alternated musical numbers with spoken dialogues, and was part of a tradition still represented by *La dame blanche* by Boïeldieu and the works by Hérold and Auber. Bizet was fully aware of this and even conceived his new work in the perspective not to deny, but rather to renew the genre. His idea was first of all to combine lightness and the requirements of writing: "It will be cheerful, but with a cheerfulness that allows style," he wrote to his pupil and friend Edmond Galabert.³ Like Mozart composing *Don Giovanni*, Bizet and his librettists sought to combine comedy with tragedy. The plot was constantly swinging from jubilant scenes to moments of danger or threat, from pleasant and socially-controlled entertainment to the Dionysian intoxication which liberates impulses, from amorous banter to murderous jealousy.



The transformation of the score for its international distribution was to remove some of the comedic spirit that had driven its development. Bizet had accepted the principle of these modifications but, because of his sudden death in June 1875, he would not be able to work on this new *opéra* version. It was Ernest Guiraud who took up the score and composed the rather short recitatives, instead of the spoken dialogues, which were often long in the original.

In May 1873, the first act was completed. A postponement of the premiere gave the composer time during the following year to think about other projects—a *grand opéra*, *Don Rodrigue*, an *ouverture symphonique*, *Patrie*, and an oratorio, *Sainte Geneviève*. In the summer of 1873, he sought—not without difficulty—the ideal singer

who could fully embody his Carmen. Thanks to Camille Du Locle, he finally got in touch with Célestine Galli-Marié who would influence the character's vocal profile, but also impose her temperament. Talks took place between the composer, the director and the interpreter to set up her contract. Galli-Marié was fully aware of Bizet's singular place in the French musical landscape. She wrote him the following on October 21, 1873: "You ask me if I care a little bit about you, you know that I understand and that I like your school and that I would be very happy to interpret a work signed by you especially, of which I know almost entirely the last two scores, singing and accompaniment."⁴

The choice of this interpreter was essential: besides her out-of-the-ordinary personality—as we shall see—she imposed in fact



M^{ME} GALLI-MARIÉ

Dans le rôle de Carmen
 Costume dessiné par Georges Clairin



Leon Sault, Imp. Lith.

5, Rue du Quatre Septembre, Paris

her specific mezzo soprano vocality, a bit uncomfortable with low-pitch tones. As proof, this letter of July 9, 1874, addressed to Bizet: "I look forward with great impatience to the pieces we have lately deciphered together. If you want to return them at Malesherbes 18, they will be forwarded where I am.—I'll have time to study them and tell you if something bothers me."⁵

Very few sources enable us to reconstruct the details of the writing of the score. Bizet had probably completed the general outline of his *opéra comique* by the end of spring 1874. This draft has however disappeared, but several drafts for other, never completed works have been found in Bizet's papers and enable us today to establish several re-uses. Like Rossini and many opera composers in the nineteenth century, Bizet recycled themes or whole pieces he had composed in his youth, or for works never staged. In *Carmen*, for example, the air of the flower (Act II) comes from drafts for a *Griséïdis*, and the section of Act III sung by José, "Dût-il m'en coûter la vie" is taken from *La coupe du roi de Thulé*.

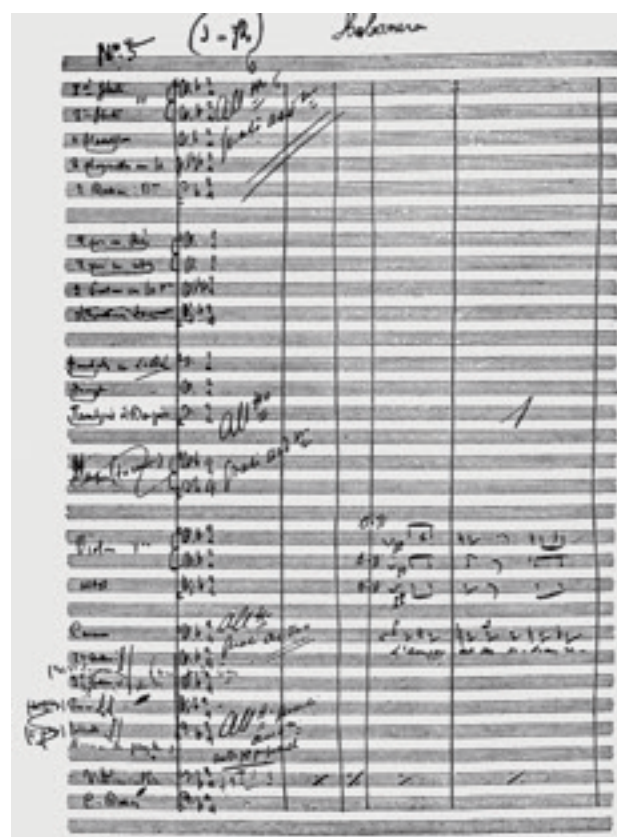
Working on a Spanish theme was nothing new. Spain existed for the French through books, illustrations, painting, music publishing, dance, but also more vividly in the salons, concerts and on the stage. Many Spanish artists passed through Paris. Some completed their studies at the Conservatory, others, like the great singer Pauline Viardot, stayed more permanently. An important production of French operatic works on Spanish themes, ranging from Auber's to Massenet's, preceded *Carmen* and made its relevant contribution to the rich trove which constitutes the culture and the shared imaginary from which Bizet drew his ideas. He also found his inspiration in the scores from his library, which included five pieces of the composer of Basque origin, Sebastián Iradier, and also a collection of thirty-eight melodies edited by Paul Lacôme, *Échos d'Espagne*, published in 1872. *In fine*, he chose to give a Spanish color and flavor to five pieces in his score, essentially to identify and make *Carmen* stand out: "Habanera," "Chanson et mélodrame," "Séguedille," "Chanson bohème," beginning of the duo no. 17 (*Carmen* plays castanets) and the last *entr-acte*.

In the spring of 1874, Bizet rented a small house in Bougival in his search for a place to work in peace. Located on the banks of the Seine, less than 20 kilometers west of the capital, the small town was still completely free from urbanization. It was this same



Paul Lhérie (José) and Célestine Galli-Marié (Carmen), engraving by Léon Sault from a drawing by Uzès, from the *Album rose* published for the first performance of *Carmen*, 1875. In *La comédie illustrée*. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France.

Célestine Galli-Marié in the role of *Carmen*, 1884. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France.



Title page of the reduction for voice and piano of *Carmen*, with a dedication and autograph signature by Bizet, published by Choudens, 1875. Paris, Bibliothèque-musée de l'Opéra.

Autographed page of the "Habanera," 1875. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France.

On January 18, 1875, the four acts were all linked up. The staging itself started on January 25. It was set by Charles Ponchard, former singer who had become stage director of the Opéra-Comique, and most likely under the guidance of Du Locle. The costumes of the protagonist were drawn by the Orientalist painter and illustrator Georges Clairin, who had spent some time in Spain; the uniforms of the dragoons were made by Édouard Detaille, a pupil of Meissonnier, who was renowned for his military scenes.

One might think that everything had already been set for quite awhile at the musical level, but it was not so. Galli-Marié was not satisfied with her entrance air. She would make Bizet rework this air thirteen times before reaching the result we now know: the "Habanera." The original version, probably composed as early as 1873, was found relatively recently. In 2003 it was recorded by Michel Plasson with Angela Gheorghiu for an integral recording of the opera published by EMI. The manuscript of this piece, kept by the publisher Choudens for more than a century, perfectly matches the format of the orchestral score in Bizet's hand. When Bizet succeeded in satisfying his interpreter, he removed the few pages of the early air from his manuscript and replaced them with the "Habanera" we are now familiar with.

The original version of the entrance air was a sort of 6/8 tarantella, with a central part characterized by a Gounodian lyricism, which had absolutely nothing Spanish about it. Galli-Marié felt that something very much different from this conventional air was needed to outline her extraordinary character. In 1864, she had made a sensation by interpreting with wild passion an Arabian Song in *Lara* by Aimé Maillart and, in 1866, a Gypsy song in *Fior d'Aliza* by Victor Massé. She wished to convey a grand effect, to proudly and definitively portray the character of the gypsy, and for that, she wanted a characteristic air. In the midst of rehearsals, Bizet was seeking materials that corresponded to this dramatic-musical configuration: individualizing his heroine, "being exotic" to affirm her otherness, to mark with a lascivious rhythm the entrance of the woman who was the harbinger of troubles and disruption. He borrowed the material from a song, *El Areglito* (The Promise of Marriage), by Iradier, of whom he held several melodies in his library, as we have seen. The literary text of the air ("L'amour est enfant de Bohême"), which Bizet had drafted himself, was just slightly modified on this occasion.



Etching of Carmen and Don José from an 1845 watercolor by Prosper Mérimée, 1890. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France.

50 countryside that Impressionist artists never stopped painting: Renoir, Monet, Sisley, Pissarro never tired of putting their easels there. In his domain, Bizet undertook a similar aesthetic revolution: discarding academic conventions to capture a moment of life; giving the impression of light and movement in the series of the "numbers" in his *opéra comique* where each constitutes a colorful tableau, with ever-changing and nuanced colors.

In the summer of 1874, in two months, he wrote the 1,200 pages of the orchestral score in that little house. This is the first musical document which has come down to us relating to this creative period. The handwritten score is now housed in the Music Department of the Bibliothèque nationale de France. It clearly shows the cuts and additions made in Bizet's hand during the rehearsal period, but also, and unfortunately, traces of the preparatory work for its publishing and, even more, a lot of interventions in Ernest Guiraud's hand in the process of turning the work into an *opéra*: a few modifications in the orchestration and especially brutal cuts to insert the recitatives. This shows a considerable change in the economic and symbolic value attributed to this type of manuscript—which is worth a fortune today and is considered absolutely

inviolable. In Bizet's day, it was primarily a working document. Moreover, when Guiraud manipulated it, he probably had no idea of what *Carmen* would come to represent for posterity. It was not then a world renowned and acclaimed masterpiece, but a more or less successful work by a composer who had died far too soon.

Rehearsals at the Opéra-Comique started in September. Everyone was busy with their specific tasks. The Copying Office of the Opéra-Comique prepared all the separate parts necessary for the orchestral performance, and in particular the score of the conductor, Adolphe Deloffre, which is now preserved in the Bibliothèque-musée de l'Opéra.

The first stage rehearsal of Act I took place in early December. On January 15, 1875, Bizet signed a publishing contract with Choudens. The singing and piano score, reduced by Bizet, was published in March. This is generally considered the last document providing an overall and established view of the score designed by Bizet. On this occasion, he set the metronomic movements. During these weeks of rehearsals, Bizet worked continuously. He confided to Ambrose Thomas: "Carmen does not leave me a moment of rest. I do the accompaniment, I reduce myself..."⁶



Costume plates for *Carmen* (Acts II and III).

52 Thanks to the pugnacity of his interpreter, Bizet achieved this stroke of genius: the “Habanera.” Once written, the line of demarcation separating the characters stands sharper: each style becomes a totally dominated material, associated with a dramatic and expressive function. A music of Gounodian color is associated with sweet Micaëla, as shown in the duet of Act I and in the air of Act III; to Carmen, different in her essence (she is a gypsy), an exotic music of Spanish color. Escamillo, the very image of the virile monolithic man, is individualized by a boisterous air. For Don José, the fragile character of the story, a man shifting between two worlds, and overwhelmed by his feelings, Bizet chose very diverse pages, Gounodian (duet with Micaëla), military (song of the Dragoons), pathetic (air of the flower), etc.

The score was adjusted so that the drama would produce all its effects, without being too long-winded, and arrive at the best possible interpretation. The intonation of the chorus of the cigarette girls was particularly delicate and the chorus of the scuffle after the arrest of Carmen was considered unperformable. Halévy as well would recall that the chorus singers were bewildered and threatened to strike. In order to add more strength to these

choruses, Bizet wished to expand them. He had to redouble his efforts to be heard by the director, who seemed to grow very critical of his work. He therefore sent a letter to Du Locle to explain the situation. As we read this extraordinary letter, we can see how the creation of *Carmen* was experienced by its composer as a fight on all fronts. On the outside, a struggle against tradition, the audience’s expectations and the reviews of critics who were often quite conservative, and an inner struggle against established institutions with their unbending ways and usages, in order to overcome the difficulties of execution:

My dear Du Locle,
You are making great sacrifices for Carmen, please allow me to do a little thing to assure the proper performance of my women’s choruses in the first act. Meilhac and Halévy want faces, and I would like some voices! in there I see a gap, let me fill it, *I beg you!* authorize me to take 6 additional 1st alto voices and 4 2nd alto voices. I keep hearing in my ears the performance of the first chorus of Mireille [by Gounod] and I feel that a similar interpretation will give me the right effect for my two choruses of cigarette girls. The execution must be brilliant in the first 3 performances; in the following ones it will suffice that they are acceptable.



GARMEN.
"Really, this time, if you please,
Love stands first, duty next."

What I ask you cannot delay you by 5 minutes – the women are there. – I will rehearse them myself tomorrow, *Sunday*, and the day after, *Monday!* they can take their places on stage *Tuesday*. I shall do *everything necessary* so that the choruses will be ready in three days. Please forgive my frenzy; but do not think that I am selfish; if I were alone before the enemy, I would be less disturbed. But you are with me, you are risking more than I am; I sense a possible victory, probable, and I would not forgive myself if I had not put all the chances on our side; you had confidence in me for a big part, I am deeply touched, I assure you, and I know that you will be rewarded.⁷

Besides having to solve the technical problems relating to the music, other problems linked to the stage acting had also to be faced: the librettists (or Bizet) wanted to create a real-life effect and, in doing so, to break away from the tradition which did not pay much attention to the movements of the singers on stage. A journalist bore witness of this specific issue: “The poor women singers of the chorus, accustomed to the solemn entrances and

quiet exits of *La dame blanche*, must have been quite unhappy since the staging of *Carmen*. [...] they dance, scuffle and—incredible thing—smoke cigarettes!”⁸ Musical problems and scenic problems combined, plus a problem of dramatic rhythm (the first act was very long) ultimately led the composer to make cuts in the chorus of the cigarette girls no. 4 and the chorus no. 8.

The orchestra was also a place of tension. *Carmen* was one of the most refined orchestral scores of the operatic repertoire of the time. Its instrumental execution required additional rehearsals. Finally, the dress rehearsal took place on March 1, 1875. Thanks to the Opéra-Comique’s Logbook, kept in the Bibliothèque-musée

Célestine Galli-Marié, first performer of *Carmen*, with costumes by Georges Clairin (Acts II and III), 1875. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France.

Lithograph illustrating a scene from Act IV of *Carmen*. Milan, Civica raccolta delle Stampe "A. Bertarelli".





Plate drawn by Auguste Lamy for the first performance of *Carmen*, published in *L'illustration*, March 13, 1875.

de l'Opéra, we have the timing of the various acts during the last rehearsals. On February 25 the first act lasted sixty-six minutes. In the dress rehearsal, the opera proceeded as follows:

Act I	(56 minutes)
Entr'acte	
Act II	(51 minutes)
Entr'acte	
Act III	(40 minutes)
Entr'acte	
Act IV	(23 minutes)

Between February 25 and March 1, the first act became ten minutes short, the cuts had brought the intended results.

On March 3, *Carmen* had its premiere. It was not the success Bizet had counted on, nor the scandal and fiasco that the theatre director had feared. If that had been the case, *Carmen* would have been quickly taken off the program. However, its thirty-fifth performance was given on June 13 and the play was taken up again after the summer break. It was performed until its forty-eighth run, to be taken off due to dismal takings. Its staging abroad, most

often in the so-called *opéra* version, with the recitatives written by Ernest Guiraud, marked the beginning of an uninterrupted, global success. Meanwhile, Bizet had died on June 3, 1875, three months to the day, after the premiere of a work that had exhausted him.

Carmen's return to the Opéra-Comique, however, took its time. Léon Carvalho, the new director, was reluctant to take up this work again, which in his opinion did not fit in the programming of his opera house. After a lot of pressure from many people, including Ludovic Halévy, *Carmen* was finally brought back to the Opéra-Comique in 1883 on its way to become one of the greatest successes in the history of French opera.

¹ Letter by Georges Bizet to Edmond Galabert, June 17, 1872, in Georges Bizet, *Lettres à un ami: 1865-1872*, edited by Edmond Galabert, Calmann-Lévy, Paris [1909], p. 199.

² Ludovic Halévy, "La millième représentation de *Carmen*," *Le Théâtre*, 145 (January 1905).

³ Bizet, *Lettres à un ami*, p. 200.

⁴ Handwritten letter by Galli-Marié to Bizet, Venice, October 21, 1873, BnF, Paris.

⁵ Handwritten letter by Galli-Marié to Bizet, July 9, 1874, BnF, Paris.

⁶ Letter by Bizet to Thomas, ca. January 25, 1875, in Georges Bizet, *Letters in the Nydahl Collection (Stiftelsen Musikkulturens främjande)*, edited by Leslie A. Wright, Kungl. Musikaliska akademien, Stockholm, 1988.

⁷ Letter by Bizet to Du Locle (handwritten copy), ca. mid February 1875, Paris, Bibliothèque-musée de l'Opéra.

⁸ Un monsieur de l'orchestre [Arnold Mortier], "La soirée théâtrale," *Le Figaro* (March 4, 1875).



Marco Gurrieri

THE MUSICAL THEATRE OF GEORGES BIZET BEFORE *CARMEN*

Bizet's operatic works prior to *Carmen* have attracted the attention of musicologists and music historians, and have even become the subject of specific studies. One famous example is *Bizet Before "Carmen,"* the university dissertation by Lesley A. Wright, which we are using as our starting point to further examine Bizet's early works, bringing the findings up to date in light of the most recent secondary literature. There are several reasons for the special interest shown in the "affaire Bizet": firstly, his artistic trajectory was almost entirely based on a constant quest for professional affirmation that was slow to arrive, and which was repeatedly hampered by failures, second thoughts, and projects that were abandoned or left incomplete. Even the phenomenal *Carmen* was harshly criticized by the public and the press of the era, leaving Bizet in despair, although this new opera would achieve considerable success in the box office (remaining on the playbill for forty-five performances in 1875, with another forty-eight taking place the following year). Already in a

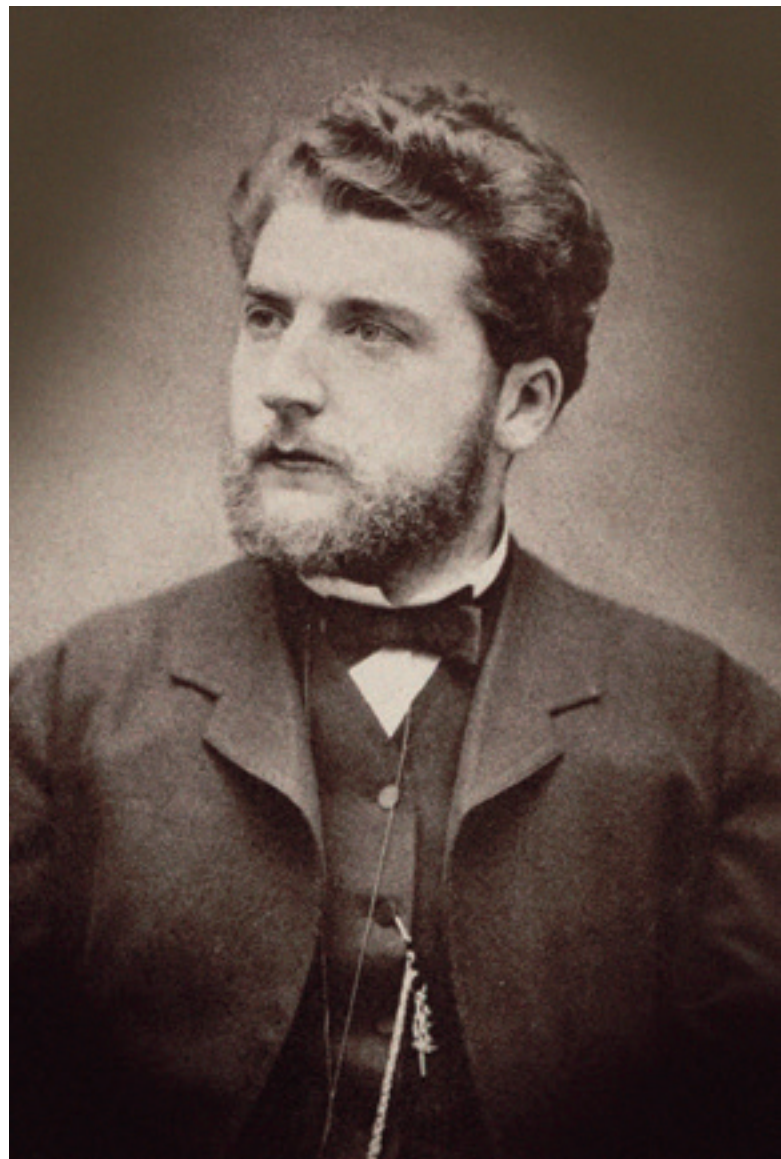
poor state of health, this would lead to the composer's premature death, exactly three months after the premiere of *Carmen*.

Although the intention here is to avoid the temptation of entering into a biographical narrative, in outlining the artistic panorama to be addressed, we cannot ignore certain markers of the composer's somewhat tormented path in both professional and human terms.

La maison du docteur

The genesis of Bizet's first *opéra comique* can be traced back to the years he spent studying, specifically between 1854 and 1855, when the young composer was still attending the Paris Conservatory. This dating is suggested by the fact that the manuscript features a fugue subject provided by Fromental Halévy, his composition teacher at the conservatory. The autograph of the score for voice and piano (MS 426, Department of Music, Bibliothèque nationale de France) of this first operatic effort in one act has been handed down to us, but it is not known whether the work was ever orchestrated and, consequently, performed during Bizet's time. William Eugene Girard created the orchestration in his university dissertation

Félix-Henri Giacomotti,
Portrait of Georges Bizet,
detail, ca. 1865. Paris, Musée
Carnavalet.



(A Performing Version of Georges Bizet's "La maison du docteur"), and he conducted the first performance (in English) at the University of Texas on February 23, 1989. A transcription for violin, clarinet, double bass and piano was completed by Émilie Postel-Vinay and staged on May 28, 2002, at the Palais des Arts in Nogent-sur-Marne, with an overture composed by the musicologist Hervé Lacombe.

Belonging to the *opéra comique* genre, it consists of a play that alternates between spoken parts and sung "numbers" (seven of which were set to music by Bizet). The libretto by Henry Boisseaux

Georges Bizet, 1870. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France.

takes place in a doctor's country house near London. Proud of having just concocted a new poison, the affairs of this character are intertwined with those of two of his patients, the first eager to recover from his pathological *ennui*, the second being a broken-hearted young man in love, who is determined to take possession of the doctor's poison so as to have the proper means to commit suicide.

Le docteur Miracle

With a libretto by Léon Battu and Ludovic Halévy, *Le docteur Miracle* is another one-act *opéra comique*, and in this instance Bizet was awarded the commission as a finalist in an operatic competition. In a long article that appeared in *Le Figaro* on July 17, 1856—and was later taken up by the *Revue et gazette musicale* and *Ménestrel* on July 20 and 27, respectively—Jacques Offenbach, then director of the Théâtre des Bouffes Parisiens, launched a two-stage competition for the composition of an *opéra bouffe*. The preliminary phase required one *mélodie* for choir and piano, one *mélodie* with orchestral accompaniment and a piece for orchestra to be delivered by August 25. The second phase required the candidates to orchestrate a *chanson* assigned to them by the jury.

The jury, which was composed of important playwrights, librettists and composers from the Parisian opera scene, under the chairmanship of Daniel-François-Esprit Auber, selected six of the seventy-eight candidates who had applied: Bizet (still a student at the conservatory), Jules Demersseman, Jules Erlanger, Charles Lecocq, Adrien Limagne, and Antoine Maniquet. The judges included playwrights such as Mélesville (pseudonym of Anne-Honoré-Joseph Duveyrier), Henri de Saint-Georges and Eugène Scribe, while the composers were represented by François Bazin, François-Auguste Gevaert, Charles Gounod, Fromental Halévy, Aimé Le Borne, Victor Massé, and Ambroise Thomas. The candidates were assigned the task of setting the libretto of *Doctor Miracle* to music. On December 29, 1856, the jury awarded the first prize *ex æquo* to the works by Bizet and Lecocq. The prize consisted of a cash sum of 600 francs, a gold medal worth 150 francs, and the staging of the two operas at the Bouffes Parisiens, which duly took place on April 9, 1857. Bizet's *Doctor Miracle* was performed eleven times, alternating with the version by Lecocq. We also know from the *Revue et gazette musicale* of April 19 and May 31 that *Doctor Miracle* was included

Georges Bizet upon his return to France after a holiday in Rome, September 1866, drawing. Paris, Bibliothèque musée del l'Opéra.

Henri Meyer, Caricature of Bizet creating the opera *The Fair Maid of Perth*, published in *Diogène*, September 28, 1867. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France.



on the billing during an English tour by the Bouffes Parisiens, which visited the St James's Theatre in London in 1857. However, it seems that Bizet's version was never staged.

Parisina

Towards the end of 1857, Bizet won the prestigious Prix de Rome from the Académie française, which allowed him to stay at the Villa Medici in Rome for four years. Thanks to a letter of presentation from Gioachino Rossini, he met the famous librettist Felice Romani during this period, and in 1858 he expressed his intention to write a score for Romani's libretto of *Parisina*, which had already served for the work of the same name by Gaetano Donizetti. Unfortunately, although Bizet intended to send the project as a trial-composition for the year 1859 as part of the syllabus imposed by the Académie française, it was set aside in favor of another Italian work.

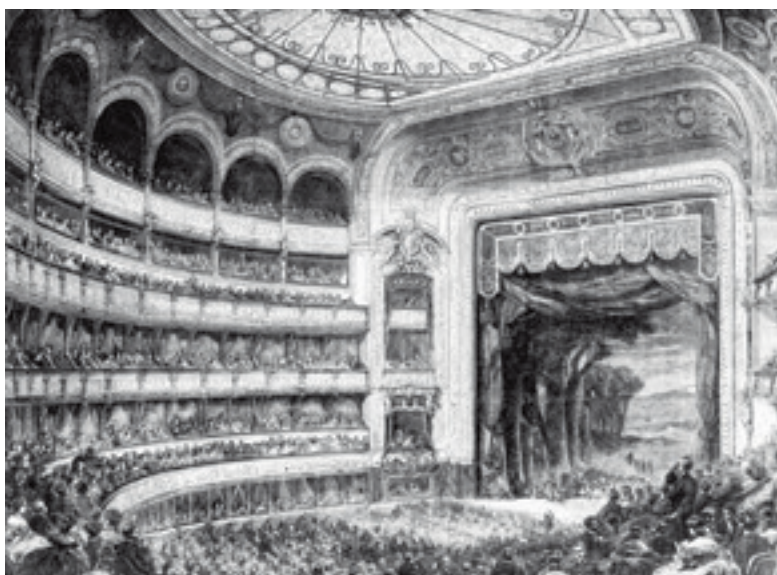
Don Procopio

The Académie française usually required the trial-composition at the end of the first year to be a Mass, but an amendment to the regulation in 1846 opened up the possibility of replacing this with



an Italian or French opera. As we have seen, Bizet promptly chose an Italian piece. Initially interested in Romani's *Parisina*, in June 1858 Bizet changed his mind and instead focused on *Don Procopio* by Carlo Cambiaggio, a comic opera in two acts. In turn taken from an adaptation of the *Pretendenti delusi* by Luigi Privaldi, set to music by Giuseppe Mosca in 1811, Cambiaggio's libretto had already been staged in Trieste in the autumn of 1844 in the form of a cento opera with music by Cambiaggio himself, as well as by Vincenzo Fioravanti, Mosca, Pietro Tonassi, Giovanni Consolini, and Stanislao Mattei. Bizet used another version of the libretto, but it is not clear whether Cambiaggio was aware of the adaptation, or if the modifications were made by Bizet himself.

The musician completed the draft of the score in January 1859 and prepared the orchestration two months later. The opinion of the commission from the Académie française was very positive, but nevertheless the work was never performed or published. Musicologist and composer Charles Malherbe produced a heavily modified version using a French libretto translated by Paul Collin and Paul Bérel, which was published and staged posthumously in 1905. It is worthy of note that in the military march (no. 3) of the



Exterior and interior of the Théâtre-Lyrique in Paris, which held the first performances of *The Pearl Fishers* and *The Fair Maid of Perth*, second half of the nineteenth century, engravings. Private collection.

Léon Carvalho, director of the Théâtre-Lyrique who commissioned *The Pearl Fishers* and *The Fair Maid of Perth* from Bizet. From *L'illustration*, January 1, 1898.

first act, Bizet reused the second subject from the Finale of his *Symphony no. 1*, composed in 1855.

La Esmeralda, Le tonnelier de Nuremberg, Don Quichotte

Bizet was planning to create a *grand opéra* as the second trial-composition to be sent to the commission of the Académie française. He thus began to work on a project that was supposed to be titled *La Esmeralda*, adapted from *Notre-Dame de Paris* by Victor Hugo. However, his interest soon shifted to other titles, such as *Le tonnelier de Nuremberg* (*Meister Martin der Kűfner und seine Gesellen*) by E.T.A. Hoffmann, and *Don Quixote* by Miguel de Cervantes. None of these projects was completed, and no sketches or drafts of these works have survived.

L'amour peintre

In the end Bizet decided to send the Académie française the symphonic ode *Vasco de Gama* as a second composition, which was explicitly inspired by *Le désert* and *Christophe Colomb* by Félicien David. The verses of the ode were composed by Louis Delâtre, who was also lodged in the Villa Medici in Rome, but Bizet was not very satisfied with the result and felt obliged to retouch several passages. Disappointed by this collaboration, he decided to try his hand at the versification of a libretto for his subsequent operatic efforts, an *opéra comique* in one act taken from *Le sicilien ou L'amour peintre* by Molière. Unfortunately, this project was also shelved without any score or draft left for posterity.

La guzla de l'Émir

A one-act *opéra comique* based on a libretto by Jules Barbier and Michel Carré, *The Guzla of the Emir* was sent by Bizet to the Académie française commission as the fourth test composition, but no trace of it has survived. Probably composed between June and September 1862, the piece was promptly conveyed to the committee, which issued its extremely positive appraisal in early October. The work was immediately accepted by the Opéra-Comique, but when Bizet received the proposal to compose *Les pêcheurs de perles* (*The Pearl Fishers*) for the Théâtre-Lyrique in April 1863, he withdrew *The Guzla of the Emir*, as the offer was only valid for composers who had not yet staged an opera.

Although the score of this *opéra comique* has not survived, it would seem that a fair quota of the music was re-employed in the creation of *The Pearl Fishers*, and perhaps some of Bizet's other operas, such as *Ivan IV* or *Djamileh*. The reference to a *guzla* (a sort of traditional monochord violin from Balkan folk tradition) in the scenic indications for Nadir's *chanson* (no. 8) of *The Pearl Fishers* is perhaps an indication that this piece was initially the *air* (no. 4) of *The Guzla of the Emir*. Moreover, the description of the *duo* in *The Guzla of the Emir* found in the judgment published by the commission of the Académie française on October 4, 1862 shows many similarities with the *duo* of Nadir and Zurga in the first act of *The Pearl Fishers*: "a duet that is interspersed with an elegant *sérénade*, accompanied by a harp and a beautiful design of the flute" (Institut, Académie française à Rome, carton 64, f. 31).

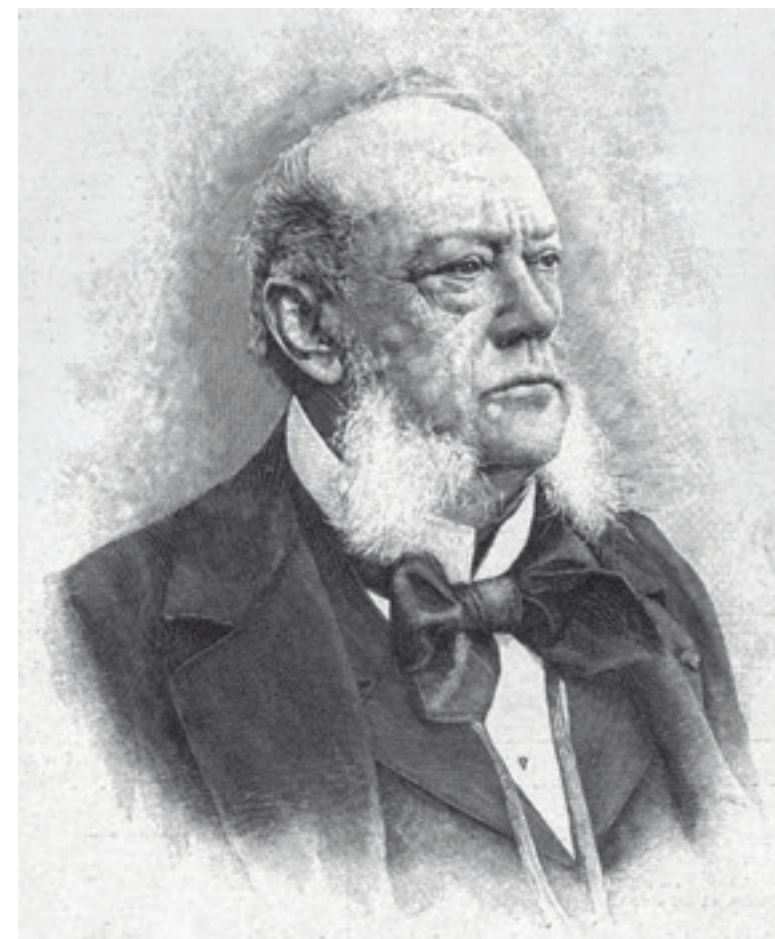
Les pêcheurs de perles

Composed between April and August 1863, Bizet was commissioned for this opera in three acts by Léon Carvalho, director of the Théâtre-Lyrique, to be performed in September of the same year. The original title was *Leïla*, the action was due to take place in Mexico (instead of Ceylon), and it should have been composed in the form of an *opéra comique*, that is with spoken dialogues. These latter were replaced by recitatives in August 1863, and chorus no. 6 was also added during the rehearsals.

The opera saw only eighteen performances during Bizet's lifetime, from September to November 1863. After his death, the opera was reworked several times, especially the final scene, which had already caused considerable problems for the librettists Michel Carré and Eugène Cormon (pseudonym of Pierre-Étienne Piestre) at the time of its conception, as well as for Bizet himself. It is said that the idea of the ending was involuntarily suggested by Carvalho who, faced with Carré's perplexities, apparently exclaimed: "Mettez-la au feu!" (Set it on fire!).

La prêtresse

Now in a private collection, a broad sketch of the cavatina (no. 3) still remains of this one-act *opérette* set to a libretto by Philippe-Émile-François Gille, and which Bizet began composing in the



autumn of 1864. He embarked on this project with the intention of presenting the opera at the Baden-Baden summer festival in 1865, but abandoned the idea when the *Revue et gazette musicale* (November 20, 1864) announced that Baden-Baden had decided to exclude French works from its playbill.

Ivan IV

In the same period, between 1864 and 1865, Bizet began to compose *Ivan IV*, a work in five acts. Commissioned by Carvalho after *The Pearl Fishers*, probably in winter of 1863/64, its libretto had been held back by Gounod until June 1863, and then returned to the librettist François-Hippolyte Leroy, who was then able to make it available to Bizet.

On March 10, 1864, *Le Figaro* announced that Bizet's *Ivan le Terrible* would follow Gounod's *Mireille* at the Théâtre-Lyrique where it would debut nine days later. Bizet's delays accumulated, however. He claimed to have almost completed composing in

November 1864, but at the end of 1865 he was still working on the score, which he would only finish composing in January 1866. When Carvalho refused to stage the work, Bizet offered it to the Opéra in December 1865. The rich orchestration, which even included an organ and saxhorns, could not have been conceived for anywhere other than this important theatrical institution. However, the Opéra showed little interest, and the project was abandoned with only the last two “numbers” still remaining to be instrumented. The composer’s disappointment must have been enormous, given that when in 1869 Jules Pasdeloup expressed a certain interest in the work, Bizet refused to perform it on the piano.

There are various instances of self-citation and the re-use of musical material already composed for other occasions: no. 6 is a reworking of the bolero (no. 5) in the symphonic ode *Vasco de Gama*; some passages of no. 8 recall the beginning of the hymn to Brahma in no. 3 of *The Pearl Fishers*; no. 13 is based on *Le Golfe de Baïa*, a choral piece presented for the preliminary phase of the Prix de Rome; four measures of the verse of Marie “Ah! si ma voix encore” in the *duo* (no. 17) are similar to the Zurga verse “Et nul ne doit la voir” of no. 3 of *The Pearl Fishers*; no. 21, the duet “Adieu, fière Circassie,” has similarities with the melodic line of the *duo* (no. 14b), “Ô lumière sainte” from *The Pearl Fishers*.

Nicolas Flamel

Another project abandoned without any trace left behind was an opera dedicated to the figure of Nicolas Flamel (ca. 1330–1418), a Parisian writer and copyist who succeeded in gaining considerable fortune thanks to his legendary alchemical knowledge. The libretto was to be entrusted to Ernest Dubreuil, who had the opportunity to engage with Bizet’s ideas in a meeting at Le Vésinet in 1865, when the composer improvised an entire scene of the opera on the piano.

La jolie fille de Perth

Bizet signed a contract with Carvalho for *La jolie fille de Perth* (*The Fair Maid of Perth*) in July 1866. He assembled the libretto that Henri de Saint-Georges and Jules Adenis were sending him piecemeal, and he was able to pass the complete score on to Carvalho at the end of the year. Problems were not slow to arise, however: rehearsals were repeatedly postponed, and the soprano Christine Nilsson—for

whom the role of Catherine Glover had been created—chose instead to play the part of Ophélie in Thomas’s *Hamlet*, which was staged at the Opéra in March 1868. Although a dress rehearsal had already been organized in September 1867, the performance was again put off until the end of December. After eighteen performances at the Théâtre-Lyrique in the winter of 1867–1868, Bizet prepared a revision for the Théâtre Royal de la Monnaie in Brussels, where it was staged in April 1868. He rewrote four recitatives to replace numbers 1*bis*, 2, 3*bis*, a fair chunk of no. 5 and a long section of no. 19. After the author’s death, the work was subjected to further cuts, variations, and additions of all sorts.

As per usual, Bizet recycled material from some of his previously compositions that had never been staged. The serenade (no. 13) was an adaptation of the serenade (no. 8) of *Don Procopio*, while the melody that begins at measure 28 of the *prélude* was taken from the *duo* (no. 1) of *Ivan IV*.

Marlbrough s’en va-t-en guerre

Bizet agreed to compose this *opéra bouffon* in four acts in 1867, after Léo Delibes had refused it, but he did so on condition that his name was not revealed because of the contract that bound him to the Théâtre-Lyrique. However, when Carvalho came to know of it he feared that it could be detrimental to the success of *The Fair Maid of Perth*, and warned Bizet against the project. Nevertheless, the musician yielded to the pleas of the directors of the Théâtre de l’Athénée, where *Marlbrough Goes to War* was scheduled to be staged, and entrusted them with the draft of the first act, which he had already composed. Édouard Legouix was then charged with compiling the second act, Émile Jonas the third act, and Delibes likewise recanted and composed the last act. The conductor Bernard Courtois (known as Bernardin) wrote the overture.

Bizet’s first-act draft was probably orchestrated by Bernardin, but most of the music was lost, except for Mme Marlborough’s air (no. 4) “Il n’faut pas vous gêner,” which achieved a fair degree of success at the time. This piece was then re-orchestrated by Delibes and issued separately for singing and piano by the publisher Eugène Heu. Although here the paternity of the piece was attributed to Delibes, in a subsequent letter he clarified that he was not the author.



Prints after drawings by Louis Lemaesquier of scenes from *The Fair Maid of Perth*, 1867. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France.

Les templiers

The plans for *Les templiers*, an opera in five acts, can be traced back to September 1868. In an undated letter from Le Vésinet to Léon Halévy, Bizet is said to have responded enthusiastically to the idea of composing this opera, with a libretto apparently written by Halévy himself in collaboration with Henri de Saint-Georges. However, the work was never realized, adding to the already long list of unfinished projects.

La coupe du roi de Thulé

On August 3, 1867, the Minister of Fine Arts announced a competition for the composition of three operas to be performed in the main Parisian theatres. The choice of the libretto for the performance at the Opéra was made public in April 1868: *La coupe du roi de Thulé* (*The Cup of the King of Thule*) by Louis Gallet and Édouard Blau. The delivery date for the scores was then set for April 30, 1869, but was later postponed to September 1 of the same year. Bizet hesitated for a long time, not knowing whether or not he should apply. In October 1868 he revealed to his friend and pupil Édmond Galabert that Émile Perrin, director of the Opéra, was pressuring him to enter the competition, and moreover that he had already composed the first two acts. In the end, Bizet decided to submit his candidacy, but he did not even make the top four contestants, and the winner was Eugène Diaz.

In truth, Bizet repurposed a large part of the music composed for this work (of which only a few original fragments have remained) for other compositions: three “numbers” were re-elaborated in the form of *chansons* with piano accompaniment; the vision scene in the second act became a duet, with new words by Barbier, entitled *Rêvons*, of which Bizet also created a version for a single voice, with words by Paul Ferrier called *Aïmons, rêvons!*; the mermaid’s *chanson* in the second act became *La sirène*, with words by Catulle Mendès; Paddock’s *chanson* at the close of the first act seems to have been the origin of the song *N’oublions pas!* Some parts were also reused by people other than Bizet. In 1880 the publisher Choudens released the *prélude* under the false name of *Marche funèbre*, and a fragment of the third act was arranged as *Quintette* in a posthumous edition of *The Fair Maid of Perth*.

Noé

Fromental Halévy died on March 17, 1862, leaving his last operatic effort incomplete: *Noé ou Le déluge*. Although Thomas was in charge of completing it, following a meeting organized by Mme Halévy between Thomas, de Saint-Georges, and Bizet, Thomas passed the enterprise on to Bizet, who probably began once Padeloup, the new director of the Théâtre-Lyrique, had signed a contract with the widow Halévy in August 1869. Bizet, who had recently married his maestro’s daughter, undertook to complete and orchestrate the work by December, with a cancellation clause in the event of failure to hire the singers he considered most suitable. Unfortunately, the conditions requested by the composer were not respected, and the project was abandoned. In 1871 Bizet hoped in vain that the new director of the Opéra, Hyacinthe Olivier Henri Halanzier-Dufresnoy, might be interested in the work.

Bizet completed almost all of the orchestration, but establishing which parts he composed from scratch still remains a very delicate task today. Bizet himself revealed that Halévy had almost completed the first three acts, but in reality it would seem that the *introduction* and the recitatives were yet to be created. The attribution of paternity is further complicated by the many changes that occurred after Bizet’s death. Indeed the opera was completed and performed posthumously, in 1885.

Vercingétorix

Another project that Bizet did not follow through was supposed to be titled *Vercingétorix*. The subject was proposed to him in October 1869 by Émile Delerot, director of the Bibliothèque de Versailles, who had already prepared the libretto. Bizet was very impressed by the female role, but immediately became aware of an insurmountable problem, namely how to make the inherently unmusical character of Caesar sing.

Calendal

Between 1869 and 1870, after taking a break to get married, Bizet began to reflect on his future commitments and toyed with the idea of grappling at least four new operatic projects. The first of these, for which he showed great enthusiasm, was inspired by the Provençal poem *Calendau/Calendal* by Frédéric Mistral, published in

Print after a drawing by Antonio Bonamore of the final scene of *The Fair Maid of Perth*, in the stage setting of the Teatro Argentina di Roma, published in *Teatro illustrato*, December 1883. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France.





Prudent-Louis Leray, Poster for the first performance of *The Pearl Fishers*, 1863, engraving. Paris, Bibliothèque-musée de l'Opéra.

Antonio Bonamore, plate drawn for the first performance in Italy of *The Pearl Fishers* at La Scala, Milan, 1886. From *Il teatro illustrato*, April 1886. The drawing is based on an original sketch by Giovanni Zuccarelli. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France.

1867. The exclusive rights for the creation of the libretto was granted to Ferrier, who submitted his work to Bizet. This exclusivity allowed Bizet to deny the rumors spread by a socialite reporter claiming that Gounod was about to compose a work on the same subject. No trace has remained of what, according to Bizet's intentions, should have been an *opéra comique*.

Grisélidis

The second project taken into consideration was *Grisélidis*. The possibility of putting this work into music was proposed by the direction of the Opéra-Comique at the beginning of 1869, when the libretto was not yet ready. Bizet set to work on *Grisélidis* (often referring to it with the title of *Boccace*) in the summer of 1870, and went back to it in 1871 after the interruption caused by the siege of Paris. The composer most likely intended to reuse material composed for *The Cup of the King of Thule*. Most of the opera was sketched out in the summer of 1871, but later the Opéra-Comique decided that presenting this opera would have been too costly, and in compensation they offered the author the possibility of putting the one-act *Djamileh* to music.

The music handed down to us is fragmentary, in the form of sketches and drafts of some parts of the first two acts. At least three "numbers" were reworked to compose the *chansons Conte, Le gascon* and *L'abandonnée*, published posthumously in the collection *Seize mélodies*. One fragment was reused in *L'Arlésienne*, and another ended up becoming Don José's famous flower song in *Carmen*.

Clarisse Harlowe

The third project from this period was *Clarisse Harlowe*, based on the libretto by Philippe-Émile-François Gille and Adolphe Jaime. Bizet started working on the opera in three acts and five scenes, which was due to be performed at the Opéra-Comique in February 1870. The composition of *Grisélidis* soon became a priority, however, and plans for *Clarisse Harlowe* were temporarily shelved. In 1871 Bizet worked on the two tables simultaneously, but in 1872, when it became clear that the Opéra-Comique no longer intended to stage *Grisélidis*, he briefly returned to *Clarisse Harlowe*. The project was later abandoned, with a draft of the first two acts and some sketches of the third still remaining.





Engraving from a drawing by Antonio Bonamore for the performance of *Carmen* at the Teatro Carcano in Milan, 1883 (finale Act III). Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France.

Four sections of the work were subsequently reused by Bizet to create duets and *chansons* that were published posthumously.

Rama

We know of the fourth project Bizet planned (and never composed) in this period thanks to the *Revue et gazette musicale* of February 20, 1870. Taken from a libretto by Eugène Crépet, *Rama* was intended as a staging of *Rāmāyana*, one of the most important epics of Hinduism. Specifically, it concerns the adventures of prince Rāma, the incarnation of Viṣṇu, who is unjustly exiled and deprived of his bride, but nevertheless wins her back after furious struggles, along with the throne previously denied to him. The project, which involved a four-act arrangement, was abandoned in 1871.

Djamileh

After the Opéra-Comique refused to stage *Grisélidis*, the director Camille Du Locle offered Bizet another opera, with a libretto by Gallet based on the poem *Namouna* by Alfred de Musset. Du Locle convinced Gallet to change the title and the name of the protagonist to *Djamileh*. Bizet composed the music during the summer of 1871, completing the work in two or three months. The one-act *opéra comique* was staged in May 1872, billed alongside two other one-act operas *Le Café du roi* by Louis Deffès and *Le médecin malgré lui* by Gounod. Ten performances followed throughout the rest of the year, receiving enthusiastic reviews. In particular, Jules Massenet praised Bizet's skills as a consummate man of the theatre in a letter to his colleague, and described the orchestration as "a marvel of *charme*, *finesse* and *accent*." Although other performances were announced the following year, as reported by the *Revue et gazette musicale* on January 19, 1873, the opera did not feature on the playbill again for the rest of Bizet's life.

L'Arlésienne

In July 1872, Carvalho, having switched to the management of the Théâtre du Vaudeville, commissioned Bizet to compose the stage music for *L'Arlésienne*, a drama in five acts by Alphonse Daudet. Written in 1869, the drama was based on a recent news story concerning the suicide of the poet Mistral's nephew because of unrequited love for a woman from Béziers.

For the composition of the music, Bizet was inspired by three Provençal melodies contained in the collection by François Vidal, *Lou Tambourin, Istori de l'Estrumen Prouvençau* (Avignon, 1864): *Marcho dei Rèi* (used in the *prélude-ouverture*, and in nos. 22 and 23), *Èr dou Guet* (in no. 13), and *Danso dei chivau-frus* (in nos. 22 and 23).

The drama was not a success, and numerous cuts were made during the eleven performances in October 1872. Bizet extracted the famous orchestral *suite* known by the title *L'Arlésienne suite* [no. 1] from the stage music. The second *Arlésienne suite* is a posthumous adaptation not penned by Bizet.

Sol-si-ré-pif-pan

The attribution of this one-act *bouffonerie musicale* (now lost) is doubtful. The name of the composer that appeared on the posters for the premiere at the Théâtre du Château-d'Eau in 1872 was that of a certain H. Vincent, a pseudonym also used to sign the arrangement of Massenet's *Scènes alsaciennes*. The attribution to Bizet is based solely on the testimony of Charles Pigot, who also claimed, wrongly, that the premiere took place in 1868 or 1869 at the Théâtre des Menus-Plaisirs (Pigot, *Georges Bizet et son œuvre*, p. 68).

Don Rodrigue

Bizet threw himself into the project for this new opera following a proposal by Jean-Baptiste Faure, the leading baritone of the Opéra. In the spring of 1873 he had begun to work on *Carmen*, but he put everything aside to draft *Don Rodrigue*, which was sufficiently complete by the end of October 1873 to allow Bizet to perform it on the piano. However, as he did not have an official contract with the Opéra (which was also destroyed by a fire on October 28), Bizet did not continue with the orchestration.

The surviving autograph (MS 477, Department of Music, Bibliothèque nationale de France) comes in the form of a skeleton-score, that is to say with only the vocal parts written in ink and without orchestration, but with different annotations made in pencil to indicate cues for the harmonization and accompaniment. Only the last bars of no. 22 of the fifth act are complete. Furthermore, the overture and ballet no. 17 of the fourth act are also missing.

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Carlo Vitali
LOCAL VS GLOBAL:
CULTURES OF LISTENING
IN BIZET'S PARIS

An overwhelming popular success, the Universal Exhibitions hosted by Paris from 1855 on, registered the dramatic crises in the balance between major European powers like a sensitive barometer. At the same time they showcased the official *Zeitgeist* of the positivist second half of the nineteenth century which, regardless of empirical refutations, promulgated faith in the peaceful progress of society through the continuous development of productive forces, pure and applied sciences, popular education and the fine arts. In an attempt to vie with his ally Britain, which had invented the formula in 1851, Napoleon III proclaimed the 1855 Exposition Universelle, which coincided with the war being waged in faraway Crimea, to sanction the accreditation of his imperial regime born from a *coup d'état* in December 1852. The colossal Palais de l'Industrie, built for the occasion and soon demolished, was surpassed in 1867 by the Grand Palais on the Champ de Mars. This time the celebrations were for the victories in the Italian campaign followed by the annexation of

Louis Anquetin, *Cabaret Le Mirliton in Montmartre*, detail, 1886-1887. Private collection.

Nice and Savoy, as well as the consolidation of the French colonial empire, which now stretched from New Caledonia to Senegal and from Indochina to Madagascar and the Maghreb.

In music, the 1855 Exposition, celebrated from April 1 to October 31, definitively consecrated the standing of Jacques Offenbach with the opening of a theatre under his management: the Théâtre des Bouffes-Parisiens in Carré Marigny on the Champs-Élysées. Audiences who flocked to the theatre attracted by its peculiar mix of humor and social satire included the sovereign himself and his court. Another well-heeled immigrant, Gioachino Rossini, described his German-born colleague as “the Mozart of the Champs-Élysées.” For the next installment in 1867 Rossini actually overcame his proverbial laziness and accepted the appointment of the imperial commission as honorary president of the committee of musical composition. In this capacity he composed and personally presented to the Emperor the score of a *Hymne à Napoléon III et à son vaillant peuple* for baritone, chorus, full orchestra and military band. (He then recycled it the same year at the Birmingham Festival with a new text in honor of Queen Victoria.) Rossini's anthem, first performed in public on July 1, served as the official soundtrack of the event, nullifying the



Paris in the 1870s.

Edgar Degas, *Café-Concert at Les Ambassadeurs*, 1876-1877. Lyon, Musée Beaux-Arts.



74 competition for a cantata and an anthem intended to solemnize the award of prizes to the exhibitors. Bizet and his friend Ernest Guiraud passed judgment on the terms of the announcement: "The cantata was interesting; they thought they could make real music out of it [...] But the hymn, accompanied by a fanfare, seemed to them nothing more than an *orphéon* chorus, and they took it easy, striving to be vulgar." Among the 103 competitors, Saint-Saëns prevailed over Guiraud, Massenet and Weckerlin in the final verdict, while Bizet did not get beyond being included in a short list of fifteen. As for Offenbach, a French national from 1858, he enjoyed new triumphs with *La Grande-Duchesse de Gérolstein* (an *opéra bouffe* to a libretto by Henri Meilhac and Ludovic Halévy), which debuted at the Théâtre des Variétés on April 12. In that same year no fewer than five different Parisian theatres staged his works; and yet the demand for light musical entertainment ran so high that Camille Doucet, the then director of the theatrical administration, authorized café-concerts "to adopt costumes and disguises; to represent plays, to accept interludes of dancing and acrobatics." This loosening of the legal monopoly hitherto enjoyed by registered theatres quickly gave rise to popular theatres such as the Olympia and the Folies

Bergère, temples of the can-can. For rather more fastidious tastes, the theatre of the Fantaisies-Parisiennes staged nothing less than *L'oca del Cairo* KV 422, a *dramma giocoso* in two acts left unfinished by Mozart in 1783. It is not unlikely that Bizet, a noted admirer of Mozart's genius, helped to some extent to complete and arrange it for the French stage, since in August he also undertook to prepare a piano solo reduction. Little more than a *travail alimentaire* among the many that incessantly kept him busy, and in any case a slight consolation for the twenty-nine-year-old composer anxious to make his name on an occasion of such resonance. Bizet's understandable frustration is enough to explain the bittersweet notes contained in his correspondence about the grand *kermesse* of 1867. To his pupil Edmond Galabert, he confessed between late March and early April:

Here it is beginning to become clear that the Exposition will perhaps not have a very happy effect on the takings at the theatres [...]. The Exposition is very well organized. One can eat cheaply there. Water closets, restaurants (I should have started with these), rooms for reading and writing, music, lighting, *cocottes*, etc., etc. All laid on! By the 15th performance of *Don Carlos* the takings at the Opéra have fallen to shameful levels! The Opéra-Comique is in decline, the Théâtre-Lyrique does nothing!

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Actually, the Théâtre-Lyrique, managed by the powerful impresario Léon Carvalho, had commissioned and almost forced him to set the mediocre libretto of *La jolie fille de Perth* to music. But the opening night, fixed for September and already in the stage of advanced rehearsals, was postponed to December 26—when the Exposition was already long over—for various marketing reasons, among which the composer himself included the following: “because the cosmopolitan public, which at this moment we have the honor of possessing in Paris, are flocking to the known names and not to new works!” (letter to Edmond Galabert, October 1867). To Bizet’s vexations in those months we are indebted for other precious confessions of poetics and human insights, as in his letter of March 11 to Paul Lacombe, his correspondence pupil who never ventured from his native Carcassonne:

I am an eclectic. I lived three years in Italy [as a scholarship holder of the Prix de Rome between 1857 and 1860] and I drew not on the shameful musical procedures of that country, but rather the temperament of some of its composers. More: my sensuous nature lets itself be enthralled by that music, which is easy, lazy, loving, lascivious and passionate. I am a German by conviction, heart and soul, but sometimes I sink into the artistic slums [*je m'égaré quelquefois dans les mauvais lieux artistiques*]. And, I confess to you quietly, I find an infinite pleasure in it. In a word, I love Italian music as one loves a courtesan; but she has to be bewitching!

Having said that, he interrupts the writing of the letter to go to the Opéra where the opening night of Verdi’s *Don Carlos* was scheduled. Returning home at 2 a.m., he reported to his correspondent:

Verdi is no longer Italian; he wants to ape Wagner. He has renounced the gravy and failed to get the hare. A rigmarole with neither head nor tail. He no longer has his faults but not even one of his qualities. He wants to attain a style, but it’s all pretentiousness. Killing boredom... a complete, absolute flop. The Exposition may perhaps prolong the agony, but he is fighting a losing battle. Above all, the public is furious. Artists will perhaps forgive him for an unhappy attempt which, after all, tells in favor of his taste and artistic integrity. But the good public came to have fun, and I think they will never be trapped again. The reviews will be unfavorable.

In the eyes of her “client” Bizet, the Italian courtesan had lost her charms. Here he appears curiously torn between the conscious

artist and the spokesperson for a hedonistic taste whose superficiality he sees clearly. But there is a trace of poetic irony in the fact that a few years later the proverbial metaphor of the hare that got away would backfire against him in one of the many panning reviews that appeared the day after the premiere of *Carmen*, written by François Oswald in *Le Gaulois*: “Mr. Bizet belongs to the school of the stew without a hare [*civet sans lièvre*]. With great talent and refined scholarship he replaces the melodic sap that flowed in rivers from the pens of the Aubers, the Adams, the Hérolds and the Boïeldieus.” Not to mention the accusation, equally unjust and instrumental, of “Wagnerism,” which stuck to Bizet even in the prose of the cautious minority of his admirers.

So Arthur Pougin in the *Ménestrel* of March 7, 1875:

Bizet, one of the most ferocious intransigents of our young Wagnerian school, has softened and stripped himself of the old man [...]. He has written very clear and comprehensible music, sometimes tender and melancholy, sometimes full of charm and gaiety; always tuneful and often even lovable.[...] It is a highly honorable and distinguished work, [...] an attempt [*sic*] worthy of note.

While Paul de Saint-Victor put it more heavily on the *Moniteur*:

As is well known, Mr. Bizet belongs to that new sect whose doctrine consists in vaporising the musical idea instead of enclosing it within definite contours. For this school, of which Mr. Wagner is the oracle, tune is out of fashion, melody obsolete; the singing, dominated by the orchestra, must be only a weakened echo of the latter. Such a system must necessarily produce confusing works. Melody is the outline of music; if we remove it, music loses all form, and nothing remains but a more or less erudite noise.

Thanks in part to the fierce anti-Wagnerian rant of the later Nietzsche, who at least had the merit of excluding Bizet’s masterpiece from the narrow role of a precursor of Verismo in music, the character of *Carmen* came to be raised to the Olympus of twentieth-century cultural archetypes. From the incarnation of the Diony-

Édouard Manet, *Music in the Tuileries Gardens*, 1862.
London, National Gallery.





Édouard Manet, *The Fifer*, 1866. Paris, Musée d'Orsay.

Trombone-player at the Cabaret "Le lapin blanc," 1860, etching.

sian and instinctual tragic associated with the roots of Greek drama (Nietzsche), passing through the Jungian metaphor of love as a half unconscious and half utopian drive towards death understood as the dissolution of the Ego in the relationship with the Other (Josip Pasić), Mérimée's heroine, an ambiguous working woman by chance and a smuggler from passion, has recently been promoted, especially in the English-language literature influenced by neo-feminist themes (Susan McClary, Evelyn Gould) to an emblem of the empowerment of women and their resistance to a patriarchal and phallogocentric society.² A model that is very poorly embodied in the weak-willed Don José, who for her sake throws away all his life plans and passes through a series of degradations: from being a corporal with a career and a legitimate marriage ahead of him, first he is demoted to a private, then becomes a criminal and finally commits femicide.

Since, however, I do not delight in "recentism"—and shun the so-called "deconstructivist" hermeneutical keys, in which the hare of facts often remains a fugitive amid the ideological sauces of gender studies and post-colonial history—I prefer to devote the space that remains to sketching out an investigation into the soundscape of the French capital in the decisive years (for Bizet, and not him alone) between the apogee and the decline of the Second Empire. Nothing more than an impressionist sketch, because to provide a complete fresco of sonic history or "urban musicology" according to the model offered by scholars such as Reinhard Strohm, Tim Carter or Annegret Fauser,³ it would be necessary to peruse and organize such an imposing mass of sources (press articles, ephemeral publications, reports, statistics, catalogues of music publishers, artistic and autobiographical accounts) that they could fill a couple of volumes.

"Je m'égaré quelquefois dans les mauvais lieux artistiques." Bizet's confessed attraction for the "artistic slums" concerned Italian opera in the first instance, but *a fortiori* it seems to have extended to other places, and not just artistic ones, in the metropolis. Certainly less elevated than the Opéra and the academy, namely the Conservatoire and its private counterpart: the École Niedermeyer, the heir to that school of religious music founded by Alexandre-Étienne Choron in 1818 and closed following the 1830 revolution. But the Niedermeyer, oriented on rigorous pedagogical methods, soon developed into a professionalizing institution, while the musical



literacy of the people—already compromised by the suppression of the ecclesiastical *maîtrises* which until 1789 had ensured free basic choral teaching—was dealt a hard blow in 1850, when music disappeared from the compulsory curriculum of primary schools to be readmitted only in 1882. An important duty of substitution was thus taken on by free associations which arose from the bottom up and were variously labeled: Concert, Fanfare, Schola, Harmonie, Philharmonie, Orphéon. This last name, which between 1830 and 1850 designated a male vocal group consisting of workers and boy sopranos, prevailed on all others, consolidating into a genuine mass

movement that in its heydays numbered 3,243 associations with a total of 147,500 singers, and was backed up by a dedicated press with mastheads such as *L'Orphéon*, founded in 1855, *L'écho des orphéons* (1861) and *La France chorale* (1862). In 1842 the evening courses of the Parisian Orphéon were attended by 1,500 adults and 5,000 boys; festivals and competitions were held around the country; in 1851 the French Orphéonistes performed successfully at the World Exhibition in London.

Guillaume-Louis Bocquillon *aka* Wilhem (1781-1842) can be seen as the father of the Orpheonic movement. After a brilliant career



as a military musician he devoted himself in 1833 to the creation of popular choirs based on the method of mutual teaching. His compilations collected in the series *L'Orphéon* offer a surprisingly large and ambitious repertoire of arrangements after the ancient masters (Palestrina, Handel, Philidor, Gluck, Mozart), composers of the Revolution and the First Empire (Gretry, Méhul, Gossec), and composers of operas (Rossini, Piccinni, Monsigny, Dalayrac and Cherubini). The Orpheonic movement, destined in the course of time to acquire increasingly inter-classist connotations with the recruitment of bourgeois amateurs, had been from the start supported by outstanding professionals. It was motivated either by a Christian commitment, as in the case of Gounod, president of the Parisian Orphéon from 1852 to 1860 as well as the author, among much else, of a *Messe aux Orphéonistes* for three male voices and a cappella choir, or by sympathy for Saint-Simonian socialism, likewise marked by ethical concerns that saw the artist the new priest of a humanitarian religion. Among the latter group there were (a far from exhaustive list) Adolphe Nourrit, the acclaimed first tenor of the Opéra, the Halévy brothers, to whose family Bizet was admitted both by marriage and several artistic collaborations, and the composer Félicien David, praised by Bizet himself for his "Orientalist" works.⁴

Around the middle of the century there was also a growing integration between choirs and wind bands (*orchestres d'harmonie*) or brass bands (*fanfares*), originally associated with the Army, the National Guard and the Fire Brigade. In 1836 a high school for military music was opened; between 1845 and 1860 the regimental bands were reorganized—thanks above all to the technical improvements introduced by the manufacturers of reed instruments, piston-valve brasses and percussion; notably by Adolphe Sax, who held a quasi monopoly granted by the Ministry of War—and reached the height of their social and artistic relevance. In 1846 the outdoor concerts held at the Paris Hippodrome testified to the ambitions that animated the best military bands, whose repertoire included operatic arrangements by composers such as Gluck, Auber, Fromental Halévy, Meyerbeer and Berlioz. Observers in the mid-nineteenth century stressed the circulation among cultural levels deriving from this complex and lively reality: "While the farmer bellows his voice out, [...] the worker sings the immortal refrains of Béranger⁵ and Pierre Dupont, the enchanting inspirations of Auber and Donizetti, which



Edgar Degas, *The Orchestra at the Opéra*, ca. 1870. Paris, Musée d'Orsay.

Edgar Degas, *Lorenzo Pagans and Auguste de Gas*, 1871-1872. Paris, Musée d'Orsay.

they have picked up from regimental bands, barrel organs or strolling singers.”⁶ Or again: “All the country folks sing the romances of the city and, by a singular inversion, the cities are avid for peasant songs.”⁷

An instructive parliamentary debate sheds light on some of the modes of this circulation, revealing the socio-economic problems underlying it. By around 1860 the vogue for musical boxes, already begun as curiosities in the late eighteenth century, had revived with a broader repertoire and audiences, in the form of the barrel organ, an instrument played in the street, and the *serinette*, a mechanical pipe organ which supplied music in cafés and popular dance halls. Ever larger and more refined models came out of the Parisian manufactories, like the award-winning Limonaire Frères company founded in 1840. A bill approved on June 21, 1865, by the Conseil Législatif (the lower house of Parliament) decided in favor of the manufacturers in a suit brought by music publishers to ban unauthorized mechanical reproduction, termed “counterfeiting,” of copyrighted music. The following year the bill was debated in the Senate, with Prosper Mérimée (!), speaking in support of copyright. The president of the chamber, Louis-Bernard Bonjean, favored the preservation of the law. According to the famous scholar and novelist, a senator since 1853 by the grace of the Empress Eugénie de Montijo, it would be unfair “to take an aria from a poor musician and give it for free to the manufacturer of mechanical organs.” The multiplication of such instruments would reduce the market for the traditional music publishing industry, degrade the quality of performance and the reputations of composers. The no less illustrious jurist, and stalwart Bonapartist who fell in 1871 under the lead of the Communards, replied with accents familiar to the populist rhetoric of the Second Empire, but which today, stripped of hypothetical conflicts of interest, could also be described as liberal-democratic. Bonjean maintained that the protection given to authors’ rights was a kind of privilege that went against the public interest. Contrasting a brief excerpt or favorite piece with the complete work, he claimed the former was like a “crumb fallen from the table of a sumptuous banquet.” The composers’ reputa-

tions, he declared, would be the gainers, if anything, since their glory did not derive from a few refined connoisseurs, but from the popular public of Paris. “The people cannot attend the Opéra and only know mechanical street music. Therefore please do not take it away from them.” Finally, with a sharp protectionist turn, he argued that the ban on mechanical reproduction would favor foreign competitors, condemning French producers to bankruptcy and their workers to unemployment.⁸ Also in the Senate the thesis of the manufacturers prevailed and the law remained in force in its original formulation.

Bizet’s relations with popular music in general and the Orphéonic movement in particular emerge from the correspondence with his pupils Lacombe and Galabert, cited above. In April 1867 he confided to Lacombe an old-time aversion: “This form reminds me of a horrendous patriotic song that ran through the streets in 1848. The memory of that useless, ridiculous and stupid revolution makes me perhaps unjust towards your melody which, I repeat, contains good things.” Can we consider this childhood memory of a barely ten-year-old Bizet, but already a pianist prodigy and a student of the Conservatoire, as an imprinting with a decidedly elitist aesthetic and political character? In the same letter, criticizing the coda of a chorus submitted to him by his pupil, he stated:

The choral societies of Brussels, Antwerp and Liege would easily perform this peroration. But truly miraculous executions are too exceptional to serve as a basis for operations. The final conclusion is too high for the first tenors. The three great Belgian societies make light of these difficulties. But, I repeat, these extraordinary exceptions—actually unimaginable to those who have not heard those admirable and talented singers—only confirm the rule.

These comments are clarified by Galabert in two passages of his preface to the correspondence. The first, quoted above, was about the deliberately “vulgar” anthem for the Exposition; the other dealt with a chorus for male voices to verses by Victor Hugo that Bizet, on returning from Belgium, played for him on the piano in around May 1864. “I was amazed at the elevated character and the difficulty of this piece. Then Bizet explained to me that the Belgian Orphéon moved in a way completely opposite to that of the French Orphéon.”





Billiard Players in a Parisian Café, 1872, etching.

To conclude, it does not seem useful to dig further into widely explored topics, such as the erotic myth of the Sevillian cigar makers⁹ or the broader Spanish exoticism surreptitiously equated with the generic “otherness” of a feminized Orient to be colonized, exploited and raped, according to Edward Said’s confusing Third-Worldist synthesis.¹⁰ Instead, Winton Dean and Thomas Cooper¹¹ have no trouble showing that the Hispanicism of *Carmen* is no more than a few touches of local color, almost foreign bodies in the context of a typical French Opéra-Comique. And of course we should continue to investigate the soundscape of the Parisian Universal Expositions, especially in 1867, which Bizet seems to have dealt with in the letter mentioned above, not without ironic reservations (“music, illuminations, *cocottes*, etc.”). Perhaps he was right: a Spanish journalist¹² coarsely describes a performance of flamenco at the Parisian event in 1867, dwelling on the ridiculous *zapateado* with the sound of castanets performed by an old, ugly and rude *cantaora* donning a fake tulle mantilla. The interjections mixed with her singing, recorded only “in the criminal

slang dictionary,” delighted the spectators who wrote them down so as not to forget them. It should then be noted that in the exploitation of such myths, which can be classed under the heading of “*espagnolades*,” Mérimée, Meilhac-Halévy and Bizet came next to last within a boundless catalogue of precedents that embraced the whole first half of the nineteenth century,¹³ reaching the zenith of an enduring *succès de scandale* with Alfred de Musset’s romance *L’Andalouse* (1830), set to music by Hippolyte Monpou in the same year as Op. 12. It features all the most titillating stereotypes of “*espagnoliste*” imagery, yet not attributed to a proletarian outcast like *Carmen*, but to a noblewoman, a certain marquise of Amaëgui, in a pseudo-ethnographic *tourbillon* that mixes Seville and Barcelona with Toulouse and Castile.

Where to look then? If anything in the complex dialectic of attraction/repulsion of the “German” Bizet for those infamous places of “easy,” “popular” and “vulgar” taste that in the score of *Carmen* mark, for example, the military music and outdoor festive scenes: the changing of the guard in Act I; Escamillo’s arrival in

People in front of the Passage Jouffroy, etching by Severini, from *The Spanish American Illustration*, 1872.

Boulevard Montmartre in 1870, late nineteenth century.





Léon Bakst, *Carmen*, 1892.
Moscow, Tretyakov Gallery.

Act II, which Bizet himself dismissed as trash (“ordure”), and the *retraite* with the fanfare offstage¹⁴; and in Act IV the parade of the *quadrille*. With them Bizet would perhaps seduce the socially mixed audience at the Opéra-Comique, so enabling them to digest the character of the fiendish Gypsy and the counterpoint virtuosity of the quintet “Nous avons en tête une affaire.” Was he wrong? The judgment of posterity says he was right.

¹ Bizet often omitted the dates on his letters, which have therefore to be dated inductively.

² A typical example of a pseudo-scholarly phantasmagoria in the writings of McClary and her followers is the claim to have traced the name Mérimée gave his heroine to the Latin *carmen* and French *charme*, in a semantic space that intentionally ranges from word to poetry to spells and magic. While Mérimée, a consummate philologist with a first-hand knowledge of Spain, could hardly ignore its derivation from the title of Our Lady of Mount Carmel (Hebrew *Har haKarmel*) or how common it was in a country where the Carmelite order had been established in Seville since 1358. Two years before the first edition of Mérimée’s novella, the mediocre polygraph Henri de Lacretelle had published in *Le bien publique* a *feuilleton* entitled *Dona* [sic] *Carmen*. Then, according to data provided by the Instituto Nacional de Estadística for 2017, María del Carmen is the commonest woman’s name in Spain (660,635), followed by María (615,061) and Carmen (399,758). In her relativistic normophobia (an only apparent oxymoron), McClary also states that Micaëla, a character introduced by Bizet’s librettists for the purpose of appropriately balancing the dramaturgy, “represents the stereotypical Angel in the House: the sexless, submissive ideal of the bourgeoisie”: *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality*, University of California Press, Minneapolis, 1991, p. 57. To quote the Duke of Wellington: “If you believe that, you can believe anything.”

³ Reinhard Strohm, *Music in Late Medieval Bruges*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1990; Tim Carter, “The Sound of Silence: Models for Urban Musicology,” *Urban History*, 29 (2002), pp. 8–18; Annegret Fauser, *Musical Encounters at the 1889 Paris World’s Fair*, University of Rochester Press, Rochester, 2005.

⁴ So Galabert, in the preface to the *Lettres à un ami*: “He appreciated *Le Désert* by Félicien David, for whom he had much sympathy. ‘David [...] is a mirror that admirably reflects the East. He has been there; what he has seen has strongly impressed him, and he knows how to express it very well. His ordinary production is weak; but it is enough that in a text it is about the East, that we put the words: palm trees, minarets, camels, etc., then he does some good things.’” The conditional tenor of this praise seems to contain a tinge of irony that suggests Bizet kept a certain distance from the Orientalist fashions of the period.

⁵ Pierre-Jean de Béranger (1780–1857), a popular *chansonnier* termed a “homme-nation” by Alphonse de Lamartine.

⁶ Eugène Bonnemère, *Histoire des paysans*, 1856, cit. in Maurice Agulhon, “Le problème de la culture populaire en France autour de 1848,” *Romantisme*, 9 (1975), pp. 50–64: 54.

⁷ Jules Champfleury, *Chansons populaires des provinces de France*, Paris, 1860, p. III.

⁸ *Moniteur universel*, 129 (May 9, 1866), report of the Senate session on May 8.

⁹ Jean Sentaurens, “Des effets pervers d’un mythe littéraire romantique: à Séville, toutes les cigarières s’appellent Carmen,” *Bulletin Hispanique*, 96/2 (1994), pp. 453–484.

¹⁰ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, Pantheon Books-Routledge & Kegan Paul, New York-London, 1978; not coincidentally chosen by McClary and followers as a privileged interpretive framework for exoticism in music. Against this thesis, see Judith Etzion, “The Spanish Fandango: From Eighteenth-Century ‘Lasciviousness’ to Nineteenth-Century Exoticism,” *Anuario musical: Revista de musicología del Consejo superior de investigaciones científicas*, 48 (1993), pp. 229–250. Based on an analysis carried out over the long term, Etzion argues that by equating Spanish exoticism with “Orientalism” (as expounded by Edward Said), McClary evades the multiple cultural connotations of “exoticism” and induces some basic misconceptions about Spanish exoticism in particular.

¹¹ See Winton Dean, *Georges Bizet: His Life and Work*, Dent, London, 1948, revised edition 1975, pp. 228–232; Thomas Cooper, “Nineteenth-Century Spectacle,” in *French Music since Berlioz*, edited by Richard Langham Smith and Caroline Potter, Ashgate, Aldershot, 2006, pp. 19–52: 28–29.

¹² Carlos Frontaura, *Viaje cómico a la Exposición de París*, El Cascabel, Madrid, 1867, pp. 199–201.

¹³ Léon-François Hoffmann, *Romantisme Espagne. L’image de l’Espagne en France entre 1800 et 1850*, Princeton University – Les presses universitaires de France, New Jersey – Paris, 1961.

¹⁴ Masterfully analyzed by Massimo Privitera, *Carmen, José, le castagnette e la fanfara* paper read to the Secondo colloquio di musicologia del “Saggiatore musicale,” Palazzo Marescotti, Bologna, November 20–22, 1998; revised version at http://users.unimi.it/gpiana/X/privitera.htm#_ftn7 (accessed May 19, 2018).

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SYNOPSIS

Act I

A square in Seville

Micaëla, a peasant girl from Navarra, approaches the guardhouse and asks to speak with the corporal Don José, her childhood friend, to whom she is engaged. They tell her to come back at the changing of the guard. Now the cigarette girls come from the factory and mingle with the soldiers. Among them is Carmen, a gypsy, who is immediately surrounded and plied with attention. But she has caught sight of Don José and, after singing a provocative song, she throws him a flower. Don José feels the gypsy's attraction. But Micaëla returns, bringing him news of his mother and her blessing. The young man is moved. After saying goodbye to Micaëla, he is about to throw away the flower when loud cries are heard in the factory. In a quarrel Carmen has wounded another girl. Zuniga, the captain on duty, has her arrested and entrusts her to Don José, who is to guard her until she can be taken off to prison. But once Carmen is alone with the corporal, her seductive charms soon get the better of him. He unties her hands and agrees to meet her at the tavern of Lillas Pastia. So when two dragoons march off with Carmen and the corporal, to take her to prison, she manages to escape.

Act II

The tavern of Lillas Pastia

Carmen is singing and dancing for a group of officers, including Zuniga, who has had Don José arrested and who, at the same time, has joined the list of the gypsy's suitors. The bullfighter Escamillo comes in, with a swarm of admirers; he too succumbs to Carmen's charms, but goes off again, unsuccessful. When the officers and the others have gone, El Dancairo and El Remendado, two smugglers of the band to which Carmen also belongs, try to persuade her to return to their old life in the mountains. Carmen refuses. She is taken with Don José and is waiting for him. This is the very evening that the corporal is to come out of prison, where he has been kept for having helped her escape. In fact, Don José arrives,

heedless of everything but his passion for the gypsy. Carmen dances for him and forces him to stay, even after "retreat," the summons to quarters, is sounded. Carmen urges him to come away with her into the mountains. But then Zuniga reappears. Irritated at finding Don José with Carmen, the captain orders the young man to leave. Don José refuses and draws his sword. The smugglers intervene; with drawn pistols they make the officer go away. Now the insubordinate Don José has no choice: he will follow Carmen and the smugglers to the mountains.

Act III

A rocky, deserted spot in the mountains

It is night. In the light of the campfires some gypsies are sleeping, wrapped in their cloaks. Don José wanders about restlessly, thinking with remorse of his old mother from whom he has kept his new life hidden. Carmen is already tired of him and is thinking of the bullfighter Escamillo as her next lover. Her soul is filled with dark forebodings of death, as she inquires of the cards about her fate, imitating her friends Frasquita and Mercédès. But as if the very inevitability of her fate were dominating her, she cannot and will not do anything to oppose its course. Don José, who still desperately loves the woman who has been his ruin, fights with Escamillo, when the bullfighter comes up into the mountains to see Carmen. The men are dueling with their knives when Carmen arrives and separates them. Escamillo goes off, contemptuous and self-confident. Meanwhile Micaëla, who has been hidden amid the mountain passes, pleads with her betrothed to follow her because his mother is dying and calling for him. Don José, threatening the defiant sarcastic Carmen, goes off with Micaëla, racked with grief and jealousy.

Act IV

A square in Seville, near the Arena

The crowd cheers Escamillo as he approaches for the corrida. The bullfighter is accompanied by Carmen, splendidly dressed. Frasquita



and Mercédès warn their friend that Don José has been lurking around the arena. But Carmen is not afraid of her former lover. When she is alone with him, she hurls all her contempt in his face. Overcome with jealousy, the young man begs her to come back to him, to love him again; but his pleas are in vain. Carmen is determined. Shouting harshly that all is over between them, she throws the ring he had given her at his feet. From the arena comes the sound of the crowd acclaiming the victorious Escamillo. Don José, crazed, falls upon Carmen and stabs her. Escamillo,

surrounded by the throng, appears on the steps of the arena as Don José falls sobbing on the body of the woman he has killed, desperately calling her name.

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Engravings by Léon Sault (from drawings by Uzès), taken from the *Album rose* published on the occasion

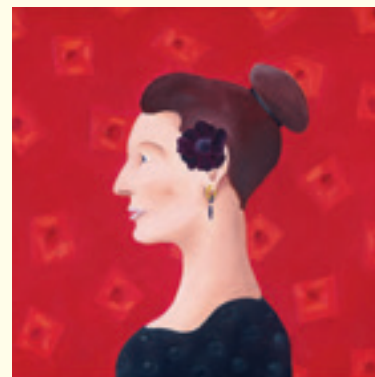
of the first performance of *Carmen*, 1875 (Acts, I, II, III and IV). Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France.

Virtual Directing on Paper, Sets and Costumes

One and a half centuries after the opera was first performed, reconfirming its amazing success, Bizet's work comes back to life in the poetics of the artist and designer Davide Pizzoni, who in 2000 drew inspiration from his passion for lyric opera to conceive a virtual set design for Carmen, with scenes, costumes, and specific accessories imagined for each of the story's characters.

In the artist's visual interpretation, summed up on these pages, the artistic techniques he chose to use—watercolor, tempera, charcoal, painted ceramics—alternate on the paper as though they were voices on the stage. The places, spaces, and ideas inspired by Hispanic culture connote the work of a fairy-tale-like component, to some degree recalling the idealized vision of Spain that was typical of Bizet's day and age.

92



Carmen, oil on canvas.
Je suis Carmen, oil on canvas.



The story of Carmen, like all stories, varies depending on the point of view: that of the characters—Carmen herself, Don José, Lillas Pastia—, the orchestra conductor, the director, the first violin, in short, of all those who are either the protagonists of or witnesses to the facts, or who, instead, subsequently become the artificers of the telling of those same facts.

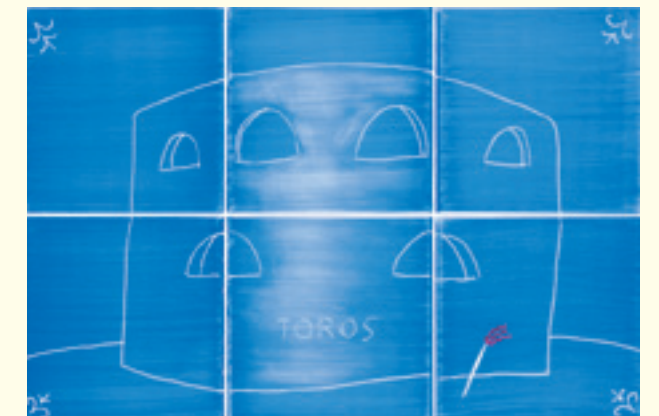
Many stories are apparently equal and yet always different. Suffice to change the physical setting from which to observe a scene to get a whole new *perspective*: the sum of all the points of view enriches the interpretation of the facts that are being narrated.

In a text that is recited, by modifying one's tone of voice, the intensity, the speed as well as the duration of the pauses, the resulting stories will all be different, even when the word sequence is the same.

This also takes place with images. Changing one's point of view comes about not just depending on the place or the distance from which one observes something, but also by way of the instruments and the language chosen to tell *what happened*. A color image tells us a different story from an image that's in black and white. A watercolor expresses something different from an oil painting, a pastel, or a print. In the "directing on paper" illustrated on these pages, for instance, the *azulejos*, blue on white tiles painted by hand, speak to us in a language that is lightweight, the exact opposite of the more dramatic language in black and white, with its lights and shadows, that we find when charcoal is used instead.

Every artistic technique has its voice, a *point of view*, a dramaturgy, capable of telling and showing what other techniques cannot. *Carmen* can be narrated by using lots of different techniques, simultaneously, even on the same page, thus offering a polyphonic tale made up of different *points of view*. This is what occurs in an orchestra where every instrument has its own *voice*. On paper, that of a book, we find different voices and narratives for the same event, that is, the life and death of Carmen. This is a form of "virtual" directing created specially to live in between the pages, one after another, where the different *languages*, both spoken and drawn, pursue each other with equal dignity and truth.

Davide Pizzigoni



The Wait, mixed media on canvas.

Bullfight, mixed media on canvas.

A Clearing in the Forest, oil on canvas.

The Plaza de Toros, hand-painted tiles.

The Penitents, mixed media on canvas.

93



Daide Papotti

THE IDEALIZATION OF SPAIN FROM A FRENCH PERSPECTIVE

Geographical Imaginaries

The geographical imaginary that is shared by people expresses the dominant cultural trends during a specific historical period in relation to a distinct territorial area. If we pause to think about the imaginaries that circulate within a nation with regard to other geographical places, whether near or far, we realize that the image of a nation (akin to a region or a city, although on a different scale) is the product of a complex cultural process involving the selection and fusion of components originating from the most disparate of sources: travel logs, diplomatic documents, pictorial traditions, literary texts, tour guides, musical descriptions, photographs, movies. This flow of information and narratives concerning a nation circulates within a society via a diversity of media channels.

The question becomes even more interesting if we consider bordering countries. In this case, the geographical proximity intensifies the exchanges of information and communication, producing

a huge amount of considerations concerning identity and cultural perceptions, which, through a specular game of influences, contribute to expressing a clear idea of the image of the two nations. As María Victoria López-Cordón writes in her discussion of the development of France's cultural image of Spain in the eighteenth century: "Because of the closeness and constant political rivalry between the two countries, in fact, the materialization of a perception of a Spanish reality, according to concrete physical and moral traits, soon occurred and was developed almost in parallel with the acquisition of its identity." Akin to any identifying process, when dealing with places, a "personality" is built up thanks to the centripetal force of the consolidation of several distinguishing features, but also by way of an opposition with respect to other identities; these can be adjacent and familiar, such as in the case of France and Spain, but they are nevertheless the bearers of a perturbing atmosphere of exoticism and diversity.

These cultural images possess considerable temporal inertia, and the subtle effectiveness of the simplifications and stereotypes they put forth manages to help them thrive across the centuries, with sudden reactivations that attest to periodic karstic-like

Eugène Delacroix, *A Street in Meknès*, detail, 1832.
Buffalo, Albright-Knox Art Gallery.



Henri-Achille Zo,
Aguadora, Seville, 1904.
Paris, Musée d'Orsay.

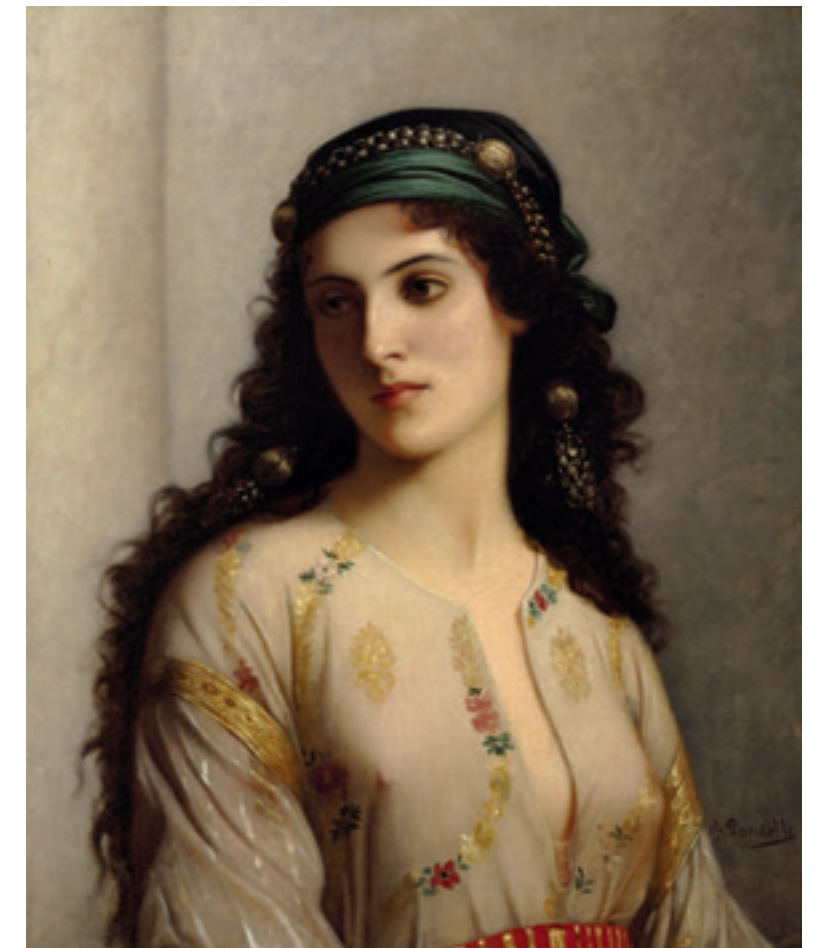
resurgences after periods of latency. The collective imaginary tends to support the existence of reassuring, recognizable, and memorable national images, capable of crossing different periods throughout history.

The Geographical Imaginary and Musical Performances

In view of the specific slant of this essay, it is worthwhile noting how geographical imaginaries intersect with a nation's production of lyric opera. The choice of a setting for a plot can at times be the result of stylistic values, cultural ideas, diplomatic caution, promotional opportunism, or faddish exoticisms. Suffice to think, starting from an Italian geographical imaginary, about the role of the settings in Verdi's operas: the necessary choice of Germany as the place where the story in the opera *I masnadieri* (1847) takes place, whose libretto was inspired by the eponymous work by Friedrich Schiller; or England, where the events of *Luisa Miller* (1849) are set; or, closer to the location chosen for *Carmen*, Spain, as related to the literary source (the play *El trovador* by Antonio García Gutiérrez) for *Il trovatore* (1853; "The events take place in Biscay and in Aragon"). The choice of a geographical setting comes with a vast and differentiated series of facts: the toponyms of the places mentioned in the libretto (in the words that are actually sung as well as in the accompanying captions and explanation), the names of the characters (often themselves symbolizing a geographical origin), and the historical recollections of occurrences and events. But not just that: suffice it to think of the necessary stage choices that, during the *mise-en-scène* phase, will need to or want to be in harmony with (or go against) the original indications vis-à-vis the places and characters' costumes.

This "localization" of the work does not just embody a denotative value, but can also assume, in some cases, a connotative one, not devoid of political and patriotic nuances. Especially famous is the case of Verdi's *Ballo in maschera* (1859), whose setting had to be changed from its original Sweden to the United States (Boston to be precise; but because of censure on the part of the Bourbons, the premiere of the work also had to be relocated, from Teatro San Carlo in Naples to Teatro Apollo in Rome).

The choice of a *location* also invests a people's "geographical conscience." From this point of view, to better understand the



Charles Landelle, *Jewish Woman from Tangiers*, 1874.
Rheims, Musée des beaux-arts.

mental categories activated by the imagination of geographical scenarios, it may be of use to refer to the typologies put forward in 1977 by the French geographer Jean-Marie Miossec. In an article entitled “L’image touristique comme introduction à la géographie du tourisme,” the author speaks of three dimensions in which the tourist image of a place can be articulated, ones that live side by side and interact with each other:

- a “global” image “having to do with deep aspirations, archetypes that transcend tourist behavior at a national and regional level and instead correspond to the biological territorial imperatives of man” (p. 55). This category of image thus refers to the archetypal figures that distinguish the Earth’s environments (seas, rivers, mountains, lakes, etc.) and to the macro-characteristics linked to climate, the morphology of the territory, and the nature of the land;

- a “traditional” image, which is “deep, settling slowly across the centuries [...] so that the tourists’ culture allows them to savor it in all its wealth” (p. 56). This category, whose accurate identification is based on the viewer’s own ability to read and interpret, to his or her degree of cultural preparation, activates the imaginary correlated with historical events, archaeological remains, monuments, the artistic heritage of a specific territory;

- a “current” image, which “corresponds to the space created by fashion, by the contemporary canons of beauty, by contemporary society” (p. 55). This category of geographical imaginary intercepts the fashion of the moment, the evolution of taste, the predilections that a specific society expresses for certain climatic, historical, and cultural elements.

Lyric opera, as a widely appreciated cultural production in Europe, is a reflection of these geographic imaginaries, which are mirrored precisely in the choice of the setting. Suffice to think, to continue with references to Verdi, of the role that the opera *Aida* (1871) played in the reactivation of Egypt in the Western imaginary. Egypt has always been a transitional frontier with the Eastern world. In this sense, the work caused the resonance of consonances having to do with the “global” image of the nearby East (the desert), the “traditional” image of Egypt (with the historical and archaeological vestiges that came to the attention of the public after Napoleon’s conquests), and also the “current” image (the “Orientalist” fashion that crossed the colonial societies of Western Europe).

France and Spain: A Comparison between Geographical Imaginaries

The case of France and Spain, within the scope of research into geographical imaginaries, appears to be especially significant, in that these two nations are geographically adjacent, and their historical paths have crossed each other for centuries.

From a strictly geographical point of view, France and Spain share a relationship with the sea which includes the oceanic side (where the military and economic projections that gave way to their respective colonial empires took place) and a Mediterranean side. Both countries are also geographically “close,” sharing a lengthy land border, equal to about 650 kilometers, aligned along the mountain range of the Pyrenees. We are used to seeing and imagining a border as though it were a straight line, which can even be visualized in bright colors and conspicuous dimensions on a map. But the truth of the matter is that behind that line there is a textual description that defines the course of a border; and sometimes, we can see a practical demarcation that also appears on the territory itself, represented by fences, nets, barriers, or barbed wire. The Franco-Spanish border, in its current form, was essentially already defined three and a half centuries ago by the so-called Treaty of the Pyrenees, signed by the representatives of the two nations in 1659, at the end of a bloody war that had lasted about twenty-five years. The border was then accepted and reconfirmed in the subsequent Treaty of Bayonne of 1856 (hence, only nineteen years before Georges Bizet’s *Carmen*, which “premiered” at the Opéra-Comique in Paris on March 3, 1875). The Franco-Spanish border is thus a “historical” one, which has had time, over the centuries, to assert itself in the shared social imaginary and to acquire its own identity as frontier, a zone of osmotic exchanges, military disputes, crossings, and separations. Like many borders it is surrounded by a frontier area, through which people, goods, ideas, images, and perceptions constantly move back and forth.

Spain as Seen by France: The Gates to the East

As I write these words, I do not want to overlook the comment, a sharp but necessary one, by the musicologist Angelo Foletto who, in speaking about *Carmen*, warns: “Here we are at the second point. The local color, the Spanish way of life, the presumed folklore of the opera. The procession of tiny ants that tried to discover the



paternity of every one of Bizet’s Spanish ways of life [...] has enriched the book of Bizetian curiosities, but certainly not those of a more scholarly analysis of *Carmen*” (1984, p. 52). It is nonetheless interesting, at least to our eyes, to analyze the stimuli that the opera offers in terms of the geographical imaginaries. Not that I want to suggest that its musical essence lies therein (the risk that Foletto rails against), but because its reception crosses the landscape iconography and the national symbolism of the public.

The French imaginary aimed towards southern Europe, and especially Spain, represents, in terms of geographical symbolism, a fertile example to be analyzed. The Iberian country represents, for the French, a land that, beyond the actual border embodied by the mountain range of the Pyrenees, opens its doors to the world of the Mediterranean, joining the “north” with the “south” (a central tension in the gradual stabilization of French identity within modern Europe) and at the same time the cultures correlated with these cardinal points brimming over with symbolic value.

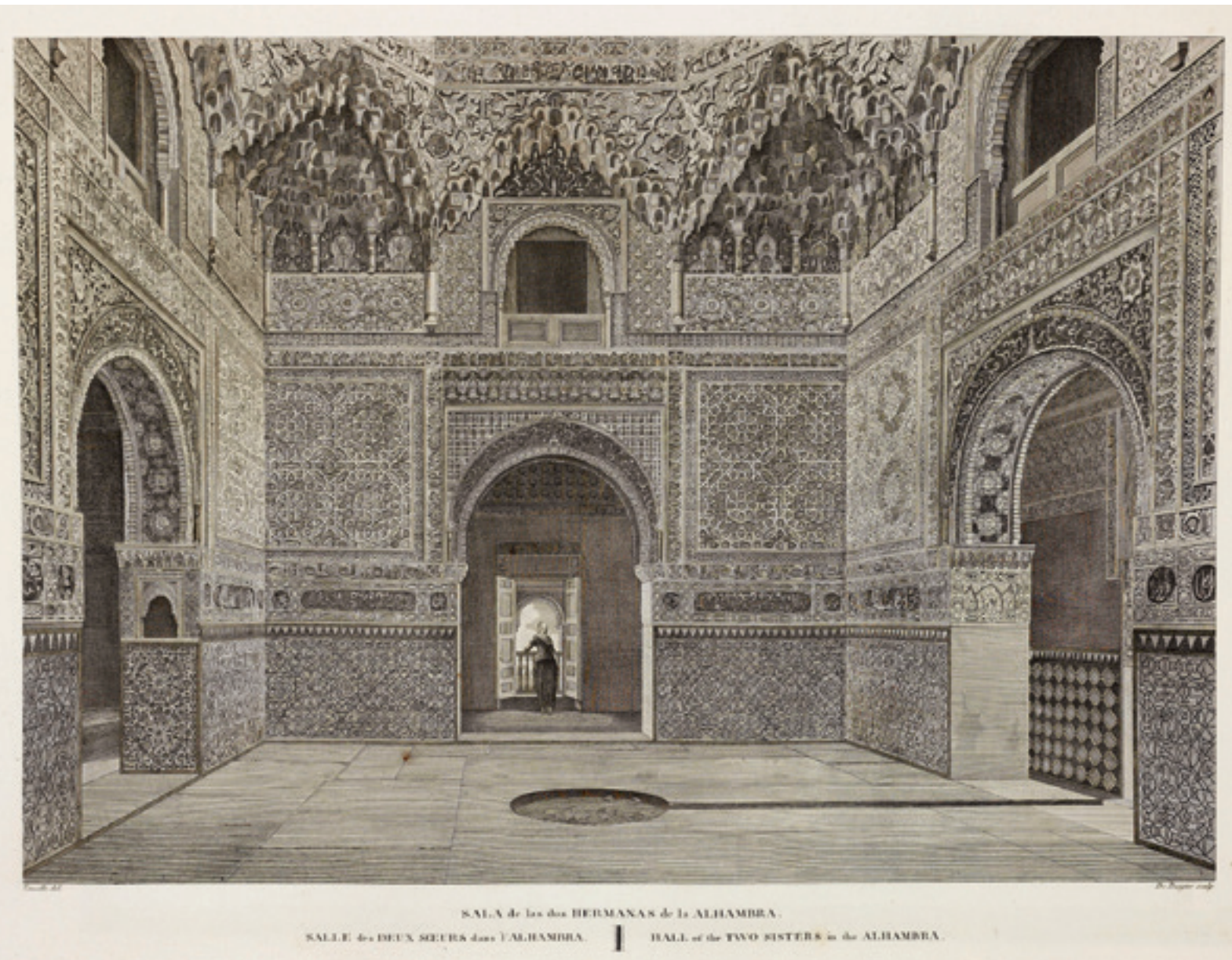
In the second half of the nineteenth century, in particular, a vision of Spain was consolidated in France that was characterized

by many of the “Orientalist” elements (according to the meaning put forward by Edward Said in his well-known book *Orientalism*, 1978) in the European imaginary. The romantic image of Spain, as a land of passion, bandits, mysterious and sensuous women, fascinating Moorish traces, and vivid physicality, began to develop between the end of the eighteenth and the early decades of the nineteenth centuries, overcoming the more negative and critical vision elaborated in the splendor of the Enlightenment culture. The austere gaze of the encyclopedists, in fact, tended to underscore, in their cultural approach to the Iberian Peninsula, its irrational and “primitive” side. This vision had been consolidated in the repertoire of the so-called “black legends” (the *leyendas negras*), which fueled a sinisterly macabre and reactionary *coté*, inextricably linked on the one hand to the invasive religious presence of Catholicism, and on the other to backward and superstitious primitivism. Indeed, María

Pierre-Auguste Renoir, *Odalisque*, 1870. Washington, National Gallery of Art.

Henri-Achille Zo, *Granada*,
1860. Pau, Musée
des beaux-arts.





Alexandre de Laborde, "Hall of the Two Sisters in the Alhambra," in *Voyage pittoresque et historique*, 1820.

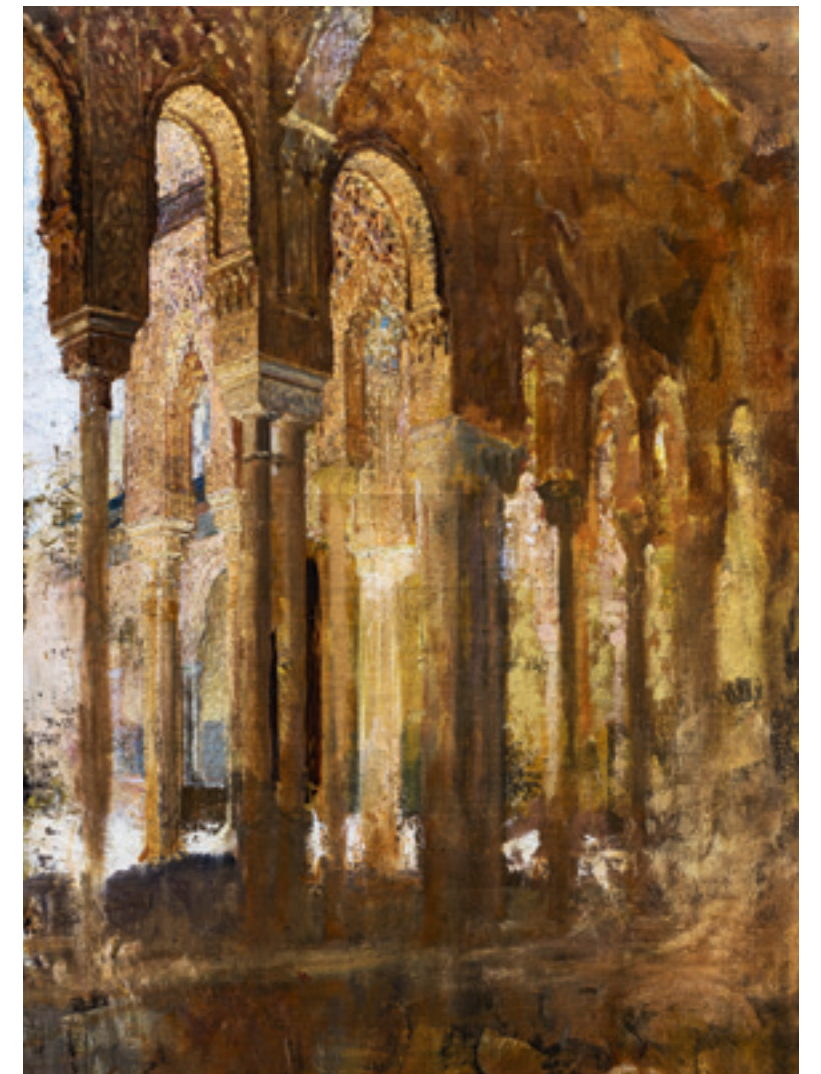
Henri Regnault, *The Gate of the Lions at the Alhambra*, 1869. Toulouse, Musée des Augustins.

Victoria López-Cordón, in discussing the French context, speaks of two "stages of strong affective adherence vis-à-vis Spanish culture, the Late Baroque and Early Romanticism."

Thus, in the early nineteenth century, in the eyes of the French, the Iberian country took on a strongly sensory profile, in which the environmental perceptions expressed a primitive ancestral force, which found in some of the features of the landscape the embodiment of a geographical objective correlative. To go back to the aforementioned categories set down by Miossec, the image of Spain rises up in the eyes of French society as the exemplification of a specific "global" image linked to aspects of the landscape (such as the dryness of the land, whose chromatic hues offer a complete "atlas" for the color brown), to meteorological features (the warm climate, the generalized scarcity of rain), and to botanical aspects. The resulting vegetation which, thanks to the climate, is luxuriant and lush (when suitably linked to the presence of water, an example being the citrus groves left behind by the Arabic occupation) represents a key element in the perception of the idea of the Iberian "south": the flower that Carmen tosses to José, a sort of "vegetal" enchantment, alludes by synecdoche to the luxuriant and "provocative" Andalusian vegetation.

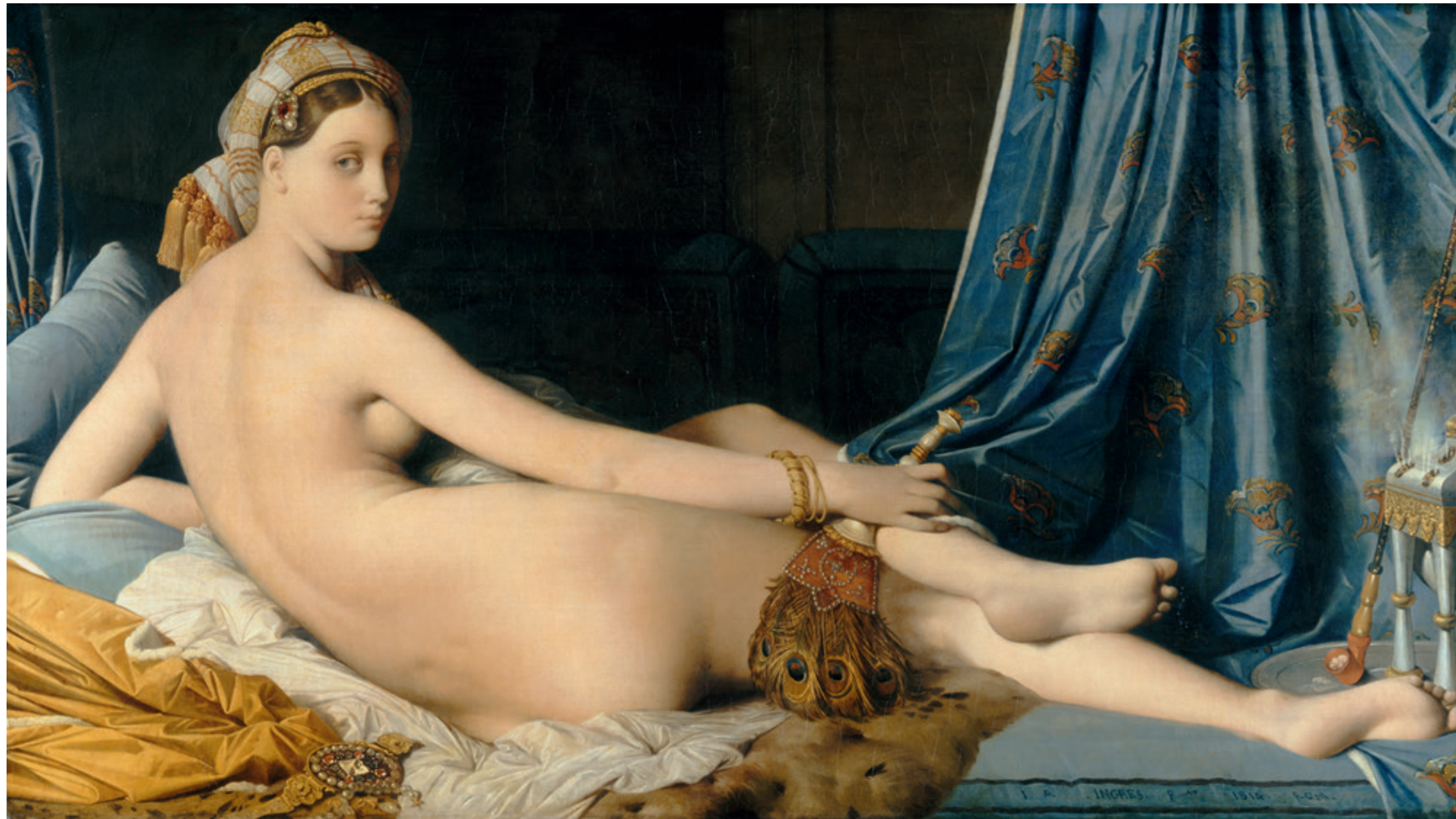
In addition to the natural component, no less important is the role assumed by the "traditional image," linked to historical legacies, which also intersect, at a certain point in time, the "current image," linked to a renewed interest in the artistic and cultural influence of the Arabs, which characterized the Francophone outlook in the late eighteenth century.

Spain's geographical proximity allowed the French point of view to distinguish and focus on the consistent regional diversities within the Iberian Peninsula. In the words of Bruzen de la Martinière in his *Dictionnaire géographique, historique et critique* (released between 1726 and 1739), "L'Espagne ayant été en propre à divers peuples, a souvent été divisée en quantité de souverainetés et il y a pas long temps qu'elle est réunie sous un même souverain [...]. Quoique cette Monarchie soit sous un même roi, on a toujours conservé des traces des anciennes différences de juridiction" (Since Spain was ruled by many peoples, it has often found itself to be divided into numerous states and only recently was it reunited under one king [...]. Although this Monarchy was led by



one sole king, a trace of the ancient differences in its jurisdiction still remains). What stands out in the regional geography of the Iberian Peninsula is the southern identity of Andalusia, the heart of a Spain that is even more distant, physically and culturally, from the other European countries, and inevitably closer to the African coast. The stereotyped setting of the narrative plots in Andalusia's towns is certainly not detached from French culture, as also witnessed by the *Barbier de Séville* written by Pierre-Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais (1775), which inspired both Giovanni Paisiello (1782) and Gioachino Rossini (1816).

The opposite of so many "indoor" works (think, for instance, of Verdi's *Traviata*, composed in 1853, which almost entirely takes place indoors), *Carmen* is a work of open, outdoor spaces. And of "public spaces" as well (the only "interior" is a tavern). In this sense as well, it reflects the image of the Mediterranean's social



Jean-Auguste-Dominique
Ingres, *La Grande
Odalisque*, 1814. Paris,
Musée du Louvre.

spaces, which are both pervasive and ubiquitous. *Carmen* is a work in which the dimension of the “public” is a spatial correlative of the Mediterranean “sense of honor,” in which all that happens in the theatre of society obeys traditional ethical codes. The final act is set on the public stage *par excellence*, the square opposite the temple of the collective cathartic ritual of the corrida.

Hence, in the French imaginary, Spain is a specular country of cultural passages and transits, overlooking, like France, both the Mediterranean and the Atlantic, but more innervated, with respect to the Transalpine country, by features related to the south. It is a category that, via the North African arch and the historical events of Islamism, is culturally open to the intrigue and exoticism of the “Orient,” which in modern times has always been the subject of the morbid attention and restless fears of the European imaginary.

The Image of the Mountains

Time after time, the mountain range embodies the romantic values of a “savage nature,” as well as those of an area characterized by its function as a frontier and a place of exchange—aspects that both emerge, among other things, in the indications contained in the libretto for *Carmen*, penned by Henri Meilhac and Ludovic Halévy: “The curtain rises on a rocky scene. A picturesque and wild place appears before our eyes.” Underscoring the barren naturalistic setting—which we would use the word *wilderness* to describe today—is the connotation linked to the lack of all human trace, moreover, it goes without saying, in a nighttime in romantic style: “Total solitude and the darkest night.”

The romantic sensitivity valorizes the mountain settings, privileged scenarios for apparitions of the sublime and the picturesque. Already Alexandre de Laborde, in his *Voyage pittoresque et historique*, one of the first highly Hispanophile texts published in eighteenth-century France (the first volume saw the light of day in 1806, but the publication of the work was not completed until 1820), stated: “Vous surtout pour qui j’écris, amis des arts, admirateurs, passionnés de la nature, venez contempler tous les genres de contrastes et d’harmonies pittoresques! Chaque coin de la montagne vous offrira un nouveau tableau, chaque moment du jour un effet plus piquant!” (Especially you, friends of the arts,

admirers, nature enthusiasts, for whom I write, come ponder the endless contrasts and the picturesque harmonies! In every mountain view you can discover a new painting, in every moment of the day an effect that is even more interesting!) The “global” image (according to Miossec’s use of the term) underlying those in love with nature (“passionnés de la nature”) is also appealing for an erudite public capable of appreciating the artistic legacies of the “traditional image” (“amis des arts”).

The structure of *Carmen*’s geographical setting, via the spatial articulation of the four acts, is as follows: urban exterior (“A square in Seville”)—urban interior (“The tavern owned by Lillas Pastia”)—natural exterior (“A picturesque and savage place”)—urban exterior (“A square in Seville”). The progression is to be intended in the ultimate triumph of the wilderness dimension, the savage nature of the place, which, unsurprisingly, in the first act must be checked by the ropes that tightly bind (not that tightly though, in spite of the protagonist’s simpering laments) Carmen’s hands as she is taken away by the guards. The metaphor chosen for the libretto efficiently captures the relationship between nature that has been tamed and nature that is inevitably untouchable (the duality would be greatly appreciated by Jack London): “Dogs and wolves don’t get along”... It is no accident that when the adventurous call of civilization ventures into the natural realm of the wild, the mountain, the comments are not flattering (Act III): “Ugly place, isn’t it? And not at all reassuring” (reiterated by Micaëla’s thinking to one side, after she has been left alone: “The guide was right... the place is not at all reassuring...”).

The “picturesque and savage place” of the setting for the third act opens up to a perspectival “verticalization” of space (“there’s danger up above, and down below,” the characters sing); while in town the danger has come to life in the horizontal dimension of the square. The bridge in the opening scene (“at the back, facing the audience, a bridge from one side of the stage to the other”) is perfectly functional to the creation of a passageway, a place of transition, whose identity is linked to transit.

Théodore Chassériau,
Bathing in the Seraglio, 1849.
Paris, Musée du Louvre.

The Geographical Imaginary and Anthropological Typologies: The South as Embodied by the Characters

The same can be said, in this reconstruction of otherness, of the anthropic scenario which, in the deterministic historical-geographical vision characterizing that period (by which populations are “determined,” in their identifying features, by the dominant climatic and morphological features of the space on the Earth), points to a land of hot-blooded passions, indomitable temperaments, Middle-Eastern ascendancies. Montesquieu, as early as the eighteenth century, identified in *L’esprit des lois* (published in Geneva in 1748) the physical-climatic influences of the environment on the dominant attraction to the fabulous inclinations of the Spanish population, inextricably linked to an inveterate laziness and a perennial indolence, the primary causes of the country’s scarce prosperity. The French diplomat and writer Jean-François de Bourgoing, in *Tableau de l’Espagne moderne* (printed in Paris in 1807), hypothesized that also to be ascribed to the peninsula’s climate was one of the characteristics that, over the course of the centuries, most frequently struck Transalpine travelers (and not just them): the peaceful coexistence of deep Catholic religiousness and a relaxation of ethical behavior (including the open-minded freedom of some of the female social classes, a theme that is of crucial importance to our understanding of the character of Carmen).

The same author, in seeking to define Spanish identity, reflects on the role played by the Arab heritage: “Si les Espagnols ont eu des traits caractéristiques, applicables à tous les habitants de leur péninsule, c’est lorsque les Arabes, en s’établissant chez cette nation, l’avaient marquée d’un sceau particulier, et malgré les diverses causes qui les séparaient d’elle, lui avaient communiqué une partie de leurs mœurs, la tournure de leurs idées nobles, grandes, quelquefois gigantesques, orientales en un mot” (If it is true that the Spanish featured characteristic features, applicable to all the inhabitants of their peninsula, it is because the Arabs, who settled in that region, left their particular mark on it, and regardless of the various origins that separated them from it, they conveyed to it some of their customs as well as the expression of their noble, grand, at times prodigious, in a word “Oriental,” ideas). It is worthwhile noting that the adjective capable of summing up the features of that intangible spirit that, in the eyes of the French,





seems exotic, is the same one that is dear to the cultural definition proffered by Edward Said: “Oriental.” A word capable of arousing, in the French imaginary, a series of well-consolidated concepts and iconographies. Suffice to consider, for the sake of example, the paintings by Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres (1780–1867) or the ones by Eugène Delacroix (1798–1863), filled with odalisques, harems, caravans, dromedaries, turbans, daggers, mosques (in his accounts from the theatres of Europe, Alberto Arbasino insists on the existence of these folkloric elements in the making of operas, from a disdainful perspective similar to the one adopted in the field of musicology by Foletto). An iconographic apparatus that, among the various historical contexts of dissemination (Napoleon’s Egyptian Campaign in 1798, the French colonial adventures in North Africa in the following decades) and through the different channels of mass media communication (travel logs, prints and etchings, paintings, music, journalism, and so on) discovers opera to be a privileged channel of resonance. Georges Bizet himself, after all, had offered a significant contribution to these Oriental-style atmospheres in his *Pêcheurs des perles* (composed twelve years before *Carmen*, the opera “premiered” on September 30, 1863, at the Théâtre-Lyrique in Paris), set in a fabulous spatio-temporal elsewhere: the island of Ceylon.

The embodiment of the *genius loci* in a character is functional to a complete identification between the spatial environment and the narrative plot. From this point of view, the gypsy Carmen brings with her that breeze of exoticism that is associated with Spain and, through this geographical door, with the Far East in general: “Mérimée was interested in gypsy color so that he could give his heroine an uncharacteristic personality with respect to the literary environment of the time and to the world scientifically brought back to life in the descriptions by intellectual, sharp travelers. For the musician, Spain represents a collective rite of nature, bursting with colors and the warmth of passion” (Foletto, 1984, p. 52).

Before I end this essay, I wish to emphasize once again how these reflections were only aimed to suggest the contact between the iconographic imaginary put forward in *Carmen* and a repertoire of geographical symbols that pervaded Western society (and continues to do so) with considerable inertia force (it is enough to examine the covers of guidebooks for Spain, even those published

today, to see images that would even be suitable for the libretto of Bizet’s work...). Let us end this discussion on the precise and effective words of Angelo Foletto: “The truth is that Bizet did not try to see his reflection in a documented musical Spain, but rather captured its subterranean moods through the invention of his music. After *Carmen*, the terms Gypsy, Andalusian, and Spanish music were overlapped without much distinction: the credit goes to the reality created by the musician, not to the critics. Bizet offered us *Carmen* in an unforgettable environmental dimension, which by now belongs to the landscapes of our imagination, like Verdi’s Nile that flows leaden underneath the moon. There is no use in seeking to dissect a mechanism that is pure poetry” (Foletto, 1984, p. 53).

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Marcello Tanca
ANDALUSIA AND THE GYPSY WORLD

Introduction

The limited number of settings in the libretto for Bizet's *Carmen* allows us to rather accurately articulate a discourse around the places recalled by the plot of the opera: nineteenth-century Spain and Andalusia, Seville and the tobacco factory with its *cigarreras*, the taverns (*ventas*) where singers and Flamenco dancers perform, the *plaza de toros*, the gypsy world with its actions bordering on the illegal... Let's take, for instance, the scene that in Act II opens up onto one of the micro-places typical of Andalusian conviviality, the tavern run by Lillas Pastia "près des remparts de Séville" ("near the bastions of Seville"), where Carmen dances the "Seguidilla" and sings along with her friends Frasquita and Mercédès. It is a context of great freedom (and promiscuity) in which officers and gypsies smoke together, living side by side in the same space (as Captain Zuniga indeed says to Lillas Pastia: "ton auberge est le rendez-vous ordinaire de tous le contrebandiers de la province" (your tavern is

Joaquín Sorolla y Bastida,
Seville, detail, 1912-1919.
New York, Hispanic Society
of America.

the routine meeting place for all the smugglers in the province). This scene is probably set in a *venta*, a tavern where one would go to relax and enjoy the performances of singers and dancers (in gypsy art the singing is mostly related to men and, while male dancers do exist, dancing is instead typically expressed by women). So here we have a very realistic, concrete, and carnal context, which seems to stage the things that happen in life with absolute naturalness and about which Jean Starobinski has observed: "In *Carmen* there are no enchanted gardens, but only the tavern of Lillas Pastia. The story takes place within the scope of everyday life, it is represented in a simple and 'low' style, and does not aspire to the sublime. [...] No magical panoply, no religious background: the tragic story takes place in the open, without the underworld or the gods coming into it at all. [...] What Nietzsche calls 'the inflexible necessity' is manifested by chance upon the return of the cigarette makers to the factory, in a world governed by the work schedule and by the changing of the military guards" (Starobinski, 2007). Nonetheless, this is material that must be handled with extreme care since this geography, apparently so simple and linear, behind its artistic and literary transfiguration, is much more complex, tortuous, and strat-

ified than it at first seems. Without the necessary precautions, in fact, we risk stumbling onto some risky simplification, ending up once again telling the story (a banal one) of Andalusia as the land of gypsies and matadors, poets and smugglers, the sun and Flamenco.

First, let us clear the field of all facile equivalencies that end up reducing the geographical space to a mere game of nesting boxes. These are, in other words, the simplifications on the part of the collective imaginary that assumes that behind every Spanish man is a *torero* and behind every Spanish woman is a Flamenco dancer. Now, between Andalusia and Spain there is no perfect correspondence, no interchangeability, in the sense that Andalusia is *not* all of Spain in miniature (hence, as such, it does not represent a distilled version of the country's soul and culture); nor is Spain, obviously, simply an extension of Andalusian history and culture. So if every gypsy, in that he or she is Andalusian, is Spanish, then in the same way every Spanish person is not, for the simple fact of being as such, automatically Andalusian and even less so gypsy. Let's conduct an experiment and think for a moment about the typical Flamenco costume, something similar to what Carmen usually wears on stage: a tight-fitting solid-colored shirt or bodice with short sleeves, a *mantoncillo* (a shawl with fringes), a long-tiered skirt in bright colors and covered in polka dots, a *peineta* (small comb) or a rose in her long hair, and then castanets, fans... A foreigner who has in mind a folkloric-picturesque conception of such a world will instinctively tend to recognize it as the quintessence of the Spanish soul: questioned about the origins of this clothing, a Spanish person who is not Andalusian will identify it with Andalusia instead, but an Andalusian will in turn identify it with the culture of the gypsies. Because if it is true that the latter, in that they are *romaní*, are spread around the world, it is only here—in this part of Southern Spain—that that remarkable cultural and identity-related hybrid that we call Flamenco was produced. Now, if *flamencos* are necessarily Andalusian, not all Andalusians are in turn *flamencos*: this art form will indeed become accessible around the mid-nineteenth century thanks first to the *café-cantantes* and later to the profes-

sionalization of interpreters who will not necessarily be gypsies. To further subvert the few things we are sure of is the circumstance by which, if we really want to be rigorous, the name itself of Andalusia is even too vast to indicate such a complicated story, and perhaps it would be best to limit the borders of its geography to a more circumscribed region: the lower valley of the Guadalquivir River, and the area stretching eastward toward Cadiz and Morón.

Andalusia

Very simply this means that trying to understand something of the gypsy world in the nineteenth century without first defining it within its spatial and cultural context of reference is equal to not wanting to succeed. It has been noted, not incorrectly, by many sides that the relationship between this region and the gypsy community, because of the particular forms it has assumed over the centuries, has developed under the sign of an original process of *transculturation* or *osmosis*, in which the contact and overlapping of different sensitivities has triggered something totally new and unknown. To the extent that this process only took place in Andalusia, then this geographical area must be analyzed in its historical-geographical specificity and uniqueness.

Overlooking the Atlantic with the Gulf of Cadiz, and the Mediterranean with the Costa del Sol, Andalusia presents a rich and varied landscape. This includes the snows of the Sierra Nevada, in the province of Granada, which hosts the tallest mountain in continental Spain, the Mulhacén (3,480 meters above sea level); the dry deserts of Tabernas, in Almería, often used as movie sets for westerns (this is where Sergio Leone made most of his films, and where Gabriele Salvatores made *Marrakech Express*); the dunes, the swamps, and the sandbanks of Doñana National Park, between the provinces of Huelva, Cadiz, and Seville, and one of the largest natural reserves in Europe, with over 540 square kilometers of which 135 constitute protected areas. Added to this picture, if we move further north, are the cork-producing areas (the Iberian Peninsula hosts, especially in the south-western area, half of the world's cork forests); Guadalquivir Valley, for centuries, the route of choice for river transportation (it was along this river that in the eighth century BC the original nucleus of today's Seville was built); and the modest Sierra Morena with its 600 kilometers that cut the





country from east to west, but whose reliefs are not particularly tall, and are morphologically rugged and poor. What interests us most is the *historically constructed nature of the Andalusian landscape*, as reflected therein are the articulated events and occurrences that have involved its territory: the Phoenicians and the Greeks brought vineyards and olive groves there; the Romans arrived with their *latifundia*; the Muslims with lemons and oranges, dates, cane sugar, durum wheat, cotton, and silkworm breeding. The latter annotation brings to mind a key element of the identity and history of the country: the fact that it has always been a crucible for distant and heterogeneous cultures which for centuries overlapped and were amalgamated, each of them stealing from each other reciprocally. The very name of the region derives from *al-Andalus*, which is none other than the way the Arabs-Berbers called the part of the Iberian Peninsula that was under their control. Muslim rule,

which lasted for over seven hundred years (710–1492 AD), and only ended with the fall of Granada—the event that led to the era of Christian Spain—left behind more than just sporadic traces of itself. Suffice to recall the so-called *mudéjar* art and architecture (after the *Reconquista*), illuminating examples of which are the Alcázar of Seville, the Arabesque palace that Peter I of Castile had Muslim workers build, as well as the Giralda, the Seville Cathedral bell tower, originally built in the sixteenth century as the Great Mosque of Seville, which was in turn built with materials from the ruins of the Roman city of Italica. This dynamic consisting of overlaps, loans, and the appropriation of heterogeneous elements harks back to the concept of *convivencia*, a term that is used to indicate the cohabitation, for over eight centuries, of Muslims, Jews, and Christians. “Three-Culture Spain” (to use the spot-on expression of Alessandro Vanoli) was an outstanding fertile land in which tensions, productive exchanges, misunderstandings, and reciprocal enrichments all evolved. Whether this projection was “exaggerated” in hindsight, what’s for sure is that the cohabitation of different people was a tradition that, for many centuries, the inhabitants of these regions had become accustomed, day after day, to come to terms with. Whether they wanted to or not. You might say that in some ways it lay the foundations for that “brutal encounter between the East and the West on Andalusian soil” (Bernard Leblon) which was produced when, between the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the gypsies arrived in this part of the Iberian Peninsula.

Gypsies in Spain

Soon after the *Reconquista* things began to change and what prevailed was the desire on the part of the Spanish monarchy to create a Christian State with a single legal statute. Hence, the expulsion of the Jews (1492) was followed in 1609 by that of the *moriscos*, Muslims and converts (forcedly so) to the Christian faith, and heavily opposed (also physically) during those years. That was the period when the gypsies arrived from the regions of north-western India and settled mostly in Andalusia. Why here? The motivations are many but they are rooted in causes of an economic and social nature: the battles against the Muslims waged by Catholic kings had made indispensable those activities in which the gypsies excelled, such as caring for horses and shoeing, metalworking, but also—

Raimundo de Madrazo y Garreta, *Gypsy Girl*, 1872. Madrid, Museo Nacional del Prado.

Café-Cantante, 1878, contemporary photograph. Madrid, Private collection.



as has always been the case in the world in times of war—illegal trafficking along the frontier zones (let’s not forget that Carmen herself is a smuggler). In times of peace, these people were initially looked upon with benevolence and protected thanks to their talent as musicians; from the seventeenth century onwards, the gypsies filled the spaces left empty by the *moriscos* after their expulsion, and devoted themselves to artisanal activities such as ironworking, but also humbler tasks (e.g. animal shearing, the cultivation of the land, traveling sales, etc.). Nonetheless, the fact that they were a closed group, one “off to the side,” which did not integrate well with society at the time—the gypsies continued to speak their own language and were opposed in many cases to sedentism—attracted persecution and hostility against them; despite this, not having forgotten the economic damage that resulted from the expulsion of the *moriscos*, the Catholic kings never managed to completely banish the group from the country. Attempts made to normalize things, that is, the abandonment of nomadism, must have borne fruit, however, given that already at the height of the seventeenth century in Seville, half of the gypsy population residing in the city was living in the popular district of Triana. The hostility against those

who were the most unwilling to mix with the rest of the population continued until midway through the following century, when in 1783 Charles III granted the gypsy population total freedom to practice any job they wanted to and live wherever they wished. In the late eighteenth century two censuses (1784 and 1785) reported that the gypsies living in Spanish territory numbered over 12,000, and that of these, 8,000 chose Andalusia as their adopted land (hence, this region hosted 67% of the entire gypsy population present in Spain at the time). The provinces of Cadiz and Seville had almost half of the Andalusian gypsies. But Andalusia was number one for something else too: it was the part of Spain with the highest percentage of mixed marriages.

Gypsies and Tobacco Manufacturing

In an article he wrote a few years ago, Jean Sentaurens wondered why *all the cigar makers in Seville are named Carmen*: in other words, for what mysterious reason did this character become a literary legend known even to those who had never read Mérimée’s story, nor attended a performance of Bizet’s opera? The question stems from the observation that the cigarette seller was a rather



common type of factory worker, often visible in about a dozen cities and towns around the four corners of Spain: at the time that Mérimée was writing his story—which it seems is based on a true story told to him by a Spanish noblewoman on the occasion of one of his trips to the Iberian Peninsula—there were at least eight tobacco factories scattered around the territory. Sentaurens' answer is that the legend of Carmen wouldn't have been able to evolve so intensely and for so long without the elements that from her first literary appearance connote her as being a gypsy: "A simple worker who rolls cigars, Carmen could never have been a banal character in an ordinary melodrama. She had to be a gypsy, and consequently someone who lived on the margins, so that her clash with the honest and pious brigadier from Navarra could unleash the dramatic intensity of the antagonism between two races and two cultures. She had to be a gypsy because this fact triggered her ability to accept her fate, and thus assume the dimensions of a tragic heroine. It is therefore as a gypsy that Carmen makes her first appearance in the work, at the beginning of Chapter II" (Sentaurens, 1994). We are tempted to ask this question: if Carmen really had existed, would she have been able to work in a tobacco factory, which is how Mérimée and Bizet portray her? In other words, has the presence of gypsy workers in factories been proven historically, or is this just literary sleight of hand? Is there a *kernel of truth* in the legend of the cigarette maker of Seville?

In the meantime, let's say that at the time tobacco companies were a typical example of *fábricas concentradas*, i.e. structures in which the entire production process was focused in a single location. The need to avoid spreading the work to too many sites led to the construction of large plants in which mills, presses, warehouses, laboratories, and offices for the members of the administration could be assembled. The Real Fábrica de Tabacos of Seville, currently the seat of the University, and from 2019 onwards the site of a museum dedicated to the legend of Carmen, was built in 1757 and began production the following year. It was Spain's most important industrial building in the eighteenth century (in terms of size, second only to the Escorial), which in the future would turn Seville into the European capital of tobacco.

The tobacco industry soon began to use a workforce of women, judged to be more skilled and ready—as well as being less

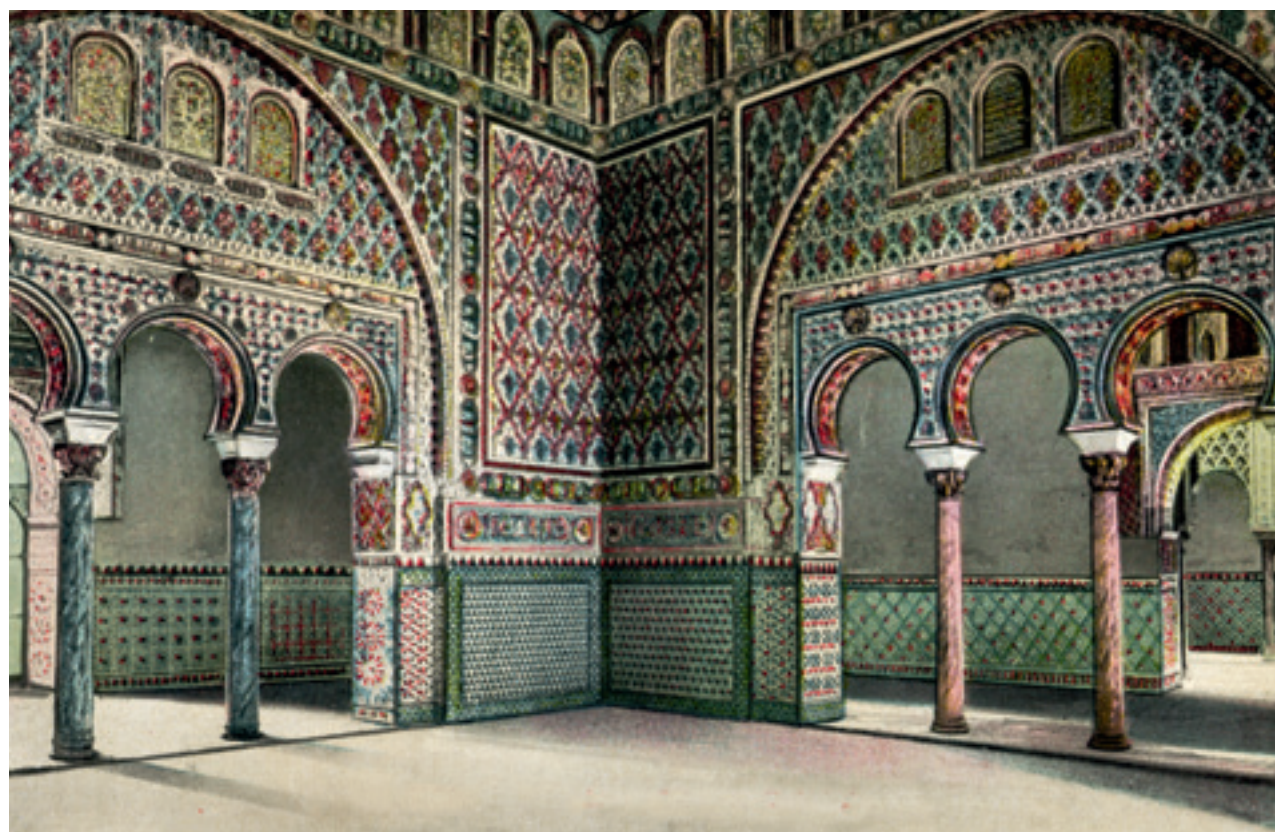


costly—as compared with men. The entrance of women in factories is strictly related to a change in consumers' tastes occurring between the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries: tobacco stopped being sniffed or chewed and was instead being smoked in the form of cigars and cigarettes. This meant that its preparation required precision and manual skill, rather than brute force. The first female cigarette sellers appeared around the mid-eighteenth century in Cadiz and La Coruña, and while they did not arrive in Seville until the first decades of the following century, they soon became more

Joaquín Sorolla y Bastida,
Sierra Nevada in Winter,
1910. Madrid, Museo Sorolla.

Andrés Cánovas y Gallardo,
*Landscape (on the Banks of
the Guadalquivir)*, ca. 1886.
Madrid, Museo Nacional
del Prado.

Rafael Romero Barros,
Still Life with Oranges, 1863.
Cordoba, Museo de Bellas
Artes.



Hall of the Ambassadors at the Alcázar in Seville, ca. 1920, contemporary photograph.

Friedrich Eibner, *Gran Patio del Alcázar de Sevilla*, 1864, lithograph. Madrid, Palacio Real, Colección de pintura.



118 numerous than their male counterparts: around 1835 the Real Fábrica had almost three thousand workers; sixty years later it would have the highest number of female workers in the whole of Spain, with a total of 5,628 cigarette sellers. The work conditions—of an early industrial nature—to a certain extent took into account the workers' needs: depending on the season, work in the factory started at 7 (or 7:30) in the morning until noon, and from 2 (or 2:30) until nightfall, but the hours were very flexible and the workers could bring their children with them and breastfeed them if they wished to. They could chat while they worked, and the work was hereditary, and could be handed down from mother to daughter. In any case, discipline was very strict: the cigarette makers couldn't leave their posts, not even if they felt ill, and upon leaving the factory they were subjected to an inspection to make sure they weren't smuggling any goods out of the plant. Anyone caught stealing was fired.

Recruited between the ages of twelve and thirty, after presenting an ecclesiastical certificate attesting to their good behavior, the *cigarreras* came from the poorest districts of Seville (Macarena, Feria, San Bernardo, Triana). Some of them were also members of the middle class in ruin, or women from some of the surrounding country

villages. After entering the factory at a young age, Carmen would initially have to undergo an apprenticeship under the guidance of a woman who was a veteran. Once she learned to work the tobacco, after two years she could receive a promotion and get a pay raise. Cigarette makers worked around a table under the guidance of an *ama de rancho*. All the tables together formed a team (*partido*), and a series of teams formed a laboratory under the supervision of a teacher. To get this far you had to be over twenty-five years old, capable of reading and writing, and you had to have served at least six years as a worker, and two as an *ama de rancho*. We shouldn't be surprised to learn that many of the nineteenth-century descriptions of the Real Fábrica de Tabacos idealized the conditions of the workers, connoting them in an erotic key: what caught the attention of visitors (mostly men) was the gathering of bodies, their semi-nudity (due to the heat that crept up during the process); another recurring element is the reduction of the entire productive process to a particular function: the one carried out by the cigar rollers—actually just one phase in a more complex chain of tasks and roles.

In a city like Seville, where unemployment especially affected the men, the salaries of these female workers were often the only source



of family income. This fact is compatible with the economically active role of the gypsy woman: she contributed the most to supporting the family (and Caterina Pasqualino reminds us that in the gypsy world, work and savings are always the women's responsibility). It is likely that this is where the romantic image of the determined, independent, and unfiltered gypsy, its utmost representative being Carmen, stems from. These were women who were given the chance

Juan Laurent, *Gypsy Houses in Granada*, ca. 1880. Florence, Raccolte museali Fratelli Alinari.

Valeriano Domínguez Bécquer, *The Dance*, 1866. Madrid, Museo Nacional del Prado.

Walter Gay, *The Cigar Makers of Seville*, 1865-1900. Musée d'Orsay, 1980 on deposit at the Musée Goya de Castres (since 2006).

to work outside the domestic walls and earn money for the family. Indeed, in Act I of the opera, Carmen is arrested for having knifed one of the other workers, Manuelita, after an argument breaks out in the factory during which the cigarette maker has a chance to reveal her irreverent and provocative temperament (“mademoiselle, avec le couteau dont elle coupait le bout des cigares, avait commencé à dessiner des croix de saint André sur le visage de sa camarade”, “the young woman began carving Saint Andrew's crosses on the woman's face with the knife she used for cutting the ends off of cigars”). This episode represents the theatricality and pride in her positive, determined, at times somewhat brusque personality, and above all her refusal to be a subordinate (On m'avait provoquée... Je n'ai fait que me défendre”, “I was provoked... All I did was defend myself”). Jean Sentaurens notes, in this regard, that in the late nineteenth century, gypsy cigarette makers—who prevalently came from the district of Triana—formed turbulent teams that were especially feared during periods when there were strikes and unrest. In Seville, social origin, popular culture, as well as working conditions in plants made up of eight to twelve women grouped into shops where several hundred workers were crowded together in the dust and heat, to a certain extent explain the independent spirit and rebellious nature that were typical of this milieu: “when they entered the factory, in the close relationships with hundreds of women from similar backgrounds, there were many opportunities, in spite of the rigorous discipline, to continue to reinforce their carefree personality. The cigarette maker, like every woman from the city, generally speaking, was an extrovert, someone who constantly lived her life for the exterior; her thinking, which was quick and lively, was always on her lips” (Pérez Vidal 1959).

We know that in the opera version Carmen will pay for the fact that she is obstinately a woman and a gypsy, someone not willing to in any way give up with her life her freedom to love. “Libre elle est née et libre elle mourra!” (Free she was born, and free she will die!). Since 1974, a bronze statue commissioned by the City of Seville portrays her with one hand on her hip as she proudly gazes at the entrance to the Maestranza, the *plaza de toros* where the final act of Bizet's opera takes place. It is the oldest arena in all of Spain. Its construction began in the eighteenth century and was completed in 1881, six years after the opera premiered. Carmen is





Manuel Barrón y Carrillo,
*Bandits in the Cueva
del Gato*, 1869. Malaga,
Carmen Thyssen Museum.

as if stuck in an eternal wait, suspended forever between love and death: she will not see the matador Escamillo emerge triumphant from the arena, nor the dagger raised high against her by Don José, who is incapable of accepting the rejection and abandonment of the woman he loves.

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The pictorial representation of the corrida in the Modern Age¹ first began when the “corrida de toros de a pie” became widespread. That was the moment when, with the affirmation of a new aesthetic of bullfighting, the people became the main actors in a celebration that until then had been exclusively aristocratic. This took place under the rule of Ferdinand VI (1746–1759), who granted taumachy, or bullfighting, to his subjects about two decades after the prohibition that had been imposed while Philip V (from 1723 to 1746) was king. In spite of the fact that in the Age of Enlightenment intellectuals, the nobility, and aristocrats vociferously called for the abolition of this custom in the name of reason and the triumph of civilization, this was a moment of evolution, when the various parties that made up the corrida now saw that bullfighting was hardly ever being done on horseback but on foot instead. The noble horsemen who had at one time faced and slaughtered the bull while on horseback² were replaced by the *picadores*, who weakened the animal’s vigor by using *banderillas* to wound but not kill the animal. Their assistants were actually the ones who became the matadors facing the bull on foot, engaging in a spectacular fight, using the sword to bring it to its death. The first version of the corrida can be visualized in art history, whose portrayals, precisely because of the nature of the event, which was aimed more at entertaining the spectator than serving as a challenge and a test of strength, and above all because of the main objective, i.e. to show one’s skill in the art of war and in the use of weapons, turn out to be simple descriptive chronicles, in which the artist overlooks the symbolic force on which bullfighting was based from its earliest days. Nonetheless, real bullfighting paintings did not begin to be made until after the complete evolution of the sport, from a game for nobiliary and chivalric entertainment, to the art of combat between man and bull. The new subjects represented moments of the corrida in the *plaza de toros*, or images of the public in the arena, or portraits

of toreros, or bull races through the city streets. In addition to the dissemination of related themes, the most authentic painting on the subject of bullfighting mainly dealt with illustrating the symbolic, legendary, and anthropological elements of the contest. This was a new painting genre that began with Francisco Goya (Fuentedetodos, Zaragoza, 1746–Bordeaux, 1828). Goya personally lived through the period when bullfighting was changing, when the people took possession of it, bestowing it with new characteristics that were closer to them, giving back to taumachy its original tragic meaning, and all its symbolic value which had since been lost. Goya was the inventor of the bullfighting genre, a theme he often dealt with and that he felt so strongly about that he signed his letters to his friends “don Francisco, el de los toros” (don Francisco, the one of the bulls). Thanks to his well-known inventions (both engraved on sheets to make prints, and painted on canvas), the purely illustrative tone as well as the anecdotal nature of the chivalric fight were abandoned: taumachy now became an instrument used to avenge the culture of a people that combined this festive celebration with the ancestral rites that had for some time been buried deep down in the collective subconscious. The perspective also changed completely for art. Suffice to mention just some of the elements related to the bull, whose symbolism is vast and ambivalent (demonization and idealization), pausing to examine a few particular aspects. “The bull represents aggressive masculinity in both a positive and a negative sense, grace and sublimity and at the same time terror, Good along with Evil. It embodies strength and sovereignty, it is admired and feared, it is beloved and hated at the same time.”³ The value that always emerges is that of man’s strength, his supremacy over the animal. Undoubtedly, within the complexity of the symbolic values that bullfighting can express, a large part has to do with the exaltation of male violence in sexual symbolism that is asserted between the matador and the bull.

Before the final action which must necessarily be the slaying of the bull, the fight is expressed in figures hovering between courtship, dance, or provocation, which, based on sexual symbolism, recall the supremacy, the force, and the violence of the male over the female.

The Bull, a Noble Symbol

Goya particularly succeeds in transforming the bull into a symbol of the Spanish people: noble and heroic, capable of living its life for the freedom of Spain and thus touching the heart of the people and the culture of its country. *La novillada* (1780, Madrid, Museo Nacional del Prado) is the first work we know of in which the Aragonese painter deals with the bull theme. It is a preparatory cartoon for the tapestries that were to be produced by the Real Fábrica de Tapices and hung in the Princes of Asturia’s antechamber in the Royal Palace of El Pardo in Madrid. This scene, a companion piece to *The Tobacco Guards* (1780, Madrid, Museo Nacional del Prado), was meant to represent male arrogance in contrast with scenes where the main figures were women. Goya’s invention still deals with the bull theme according to the tradition of anecdotal description: this painting does not allude to death, to violence, to the challenge. Instead clearly visible is the festive atmosphere created by the young people around a bull (the real protagonist) as they play and imitate some of the figures of taumachy. Among these figures is the painter himself as the young boy dressed in red who gazes at the viewer. Here, the only element, a frequent one in Goya’s works on this specific theme, which could be a bad omen and allude to tragedy, is the afternoon sky filled with dark, menacing clouds, which make it impossible to fully enjoy its limpidness. The painting expresses the hidden, truthful side of such festivities. The series of later engravings entitled *Tauromaquia* reveals the new ways in which the artist dealt with the theme.⁴ Goya worked on the series





Francisco Goya y Lucientes, *Tauromaquia 12*, 1814-1816. Madrid, Museo Nacional del Prado.

Francisco Goya y Lucientes, *Tauromaquia 32*, 1814-1816, red chalk. Madrid, Museo Nacional del Prado.

Eugenio Lucas Velázquez, *Corrida de pueblo (El encierro)*, 1862, etching. Madrid, Museo Nacional del Prado.



from the end of the War of Independence and the return to the throne of Ferdinand VI (1814) until 1816; made up of forty-four etchings illustrating the work of Nicolás Fernández de Moratín *Carta histórica sobre el origen y progreso de las fiestas de toros en España*, 1777, he uses engraving to express the new symbolic force in its entirety thanks to the clever and confident use of light and shadow. It is precisely the dramatic use of light represented by empty spaces, the elimination of any anecdotal elements, along with a close-up view, that support the strength

of the new representations. With *Tauromaquia 12*, *El desjarrete de la Canalla con lanza, media-lunas, banderillas y otras armas*, whose original title, *Desgarretar* (to break the legs), was much more to the point, a sweeping change came to the series, which until then had not shown so much violence or death. The fury against the bull (similar to the fury of the Spanish against the French soldiers in the third print of *Disasters of War*), calls attention to how violent, unreasonable, and barbaric actions (carried out in the absence of reason), will lead to death as the

Mariano Fortuny Marsal,
Bullfight. Wounded Picador,
ca. 1867. Malaga,
Carmen Thyssen Museum.

José Jiménez Aranda,
A Pass in the Bull Ring,
detail, 1870. Malaga,
Carmen Thyssen Museum.



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only possible solution. *Tauromaquia* 32, *Dos grupos de picadores arrollados de seguida por un solo toro* (1814–1816, both the red chalk version and the etching, Madrid, Museo Nacional del Prado) also harks back to the *Disasters of War*, returning to the intense drama of the *picadores*, an element that Goya would work on repeatedly. A further change in the vision of the corrida is visible in the works of the late period, when the artist was in exile in France. In the canvas *Bullfight, suerte de varas* (1824, Los Angeles, Paul Getty Museum) the new perspective is clear to see: now the hero is the bull, the bulls are the heroes and the martyrs, the symbols of freedom. In the scene of the *suerte de varas* (one of the components of the corrida in which the bull is approached on horseback), the isolation and the fate of the bull are evident (the bodies of the wounded and slain bulls are on the ground): the bull

is alone before the group of *picadores* and far from the public. The viewers have been left colorless, their faces are indistinct, the idea being to place more emphasis on the dramatic moment being represented.

A Romantic Vision

The master of Spanish Romanticism who devoted himself to the bullfighting genre is Eugenio Lucas Velázquez (Madrid, 1817–1870). The artist developed his interpretation starting with Goya's experience (the two men's work was often mistaken one for the other), becoming one of the most original painters of Impressionist bullfighting. Inspired by Goya, Lucas Velázquez managed to elevate to the highest degree of the fight what his predecessor had already expressed in his paintings. *La suerte*



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de varas (ca. 1855, Madrid, Museo Nacional del Prado) portrays the bloodiest moment of the corrida, which takes place in an arena set up in the town square: the bull has just struck the matador (on the ground in the shadow, assisted by his team) and now gores the bleeding horse of the *picador* who in turn deals the final blow. All of this is treated with loose, quick, summary brushwork, and it is considered a high point in the painter's oeuvre. This work presents the twofold sacrifice of the bull and the horse, the innocent victim of the festive event and the symbol of a bloody initiation. As was the case with Goya, the corridas portrayed by Lucas Velázquez are set beneath cloudy autumn skies in order to dampen the tones of the celebration, and, perhaps, to cast a different, newer light on the human tragedy that acts as a backdrop. It is the same gloomy, overcast

sky that we see in the small canvas entitled *Corrida de pueblo (El encierro)* (1862, Madrid, Museo Nacional del Prado), in which the fresh and lively style and the skilled technique of Lucas Velázquez once again tell the story of the attack on the bull who has just brought the matador to the ground. The shouts and cries of the multicolored, myriad spectators fill the background to the scene without overshadowing it, but in the contrasts between voids (the square where the tragedy takes place) and fulls (the crowd at the railings as though barricaded in their houses) has the effect of mitigating the blows, making the event even more dramatic.

The Exaltation of the Rite

Among the leading Spanish artists of the nineteenth century, Mariano Fortuny y Marsal (Reus, Tarragona, 1838–Rome, 1874)

Édouard Manet,
The Bullfight, 1864.
New York, The Frick
Collection.

Édouard Manet, *The Dead
Toreador*, 1864. Washington,
National Gallery of Art.



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deals with the bullfighting theme in many of his works. The painting *Corrida de toros* (1867-1868, Madrid, Museo Nacional del Prado) is set in a large *plaza de toros* until recently believed to be the square in Seville, but now identified as Porta di Alcalá in Madrid, which continued to be used until 1874. The work shows Fortuny's interest in the *suerte de varas*, the horse, and the *picador*. The artist clearly emphasizes the fight with the bull here, overlooking the fact that at the time no one fought this way

without the help of some assistants. Indeed, the artist focuses on just some of the figures. Fortuny seems to want to distance himself from the more traditional way of portraying the corrida, which in his day exalted its tragic side. Yet the artist proves that he knows how to work along those lines as well, for instance, in another work he painted around the same time, *Corrida de toros. Picador herido* (ca. 1867, Malaga, Carmen Thyssen Museum). Very close to the Prado canvas in terms of setting, is the Malaga *Corrida de toros*, a small painting that has been known of for some time (sold at the auction held after the painter's death, its whereabouts were unknown for a long time, until it reappeared on the American antique market not many years ago). While it is unquestionably true that Fortuny loved corridas, this painting also tells us that he was especially drawn to the various components of these celebratory bullfights: from the colors combined with the ritual drama, to the plastic values of the celebration. In the attack on the bull by the *picadores* on horseback and the auxiliary matadors, while in the background the body of the wounded

picador is being carried off, the *suerte de varas* that is being told here contains all the essence of the drama it is based on. Moreover, precisely because the artist was so drawn to this type of scene, his technique became freer: it was more direct, intimate, forgoing the virtuosity that was so often required by the patrons.

Social Painting

The *plaza de toros* painted by the Sevillian José Jiménez Aranda (Seville, 1837-1907) in 1870 (*An Event in the Plaza de Toros*, Malaga, Carmen Thyssen Museum) is undoubtedly the one in Seville. One of the most gifted nineteenth-century Andalusian painters, Jiménez Aranda offered a whole new view of bullfighting, where the bloody scene is only imagined by observing the public's reaction. This type of painting is unquestionably a social commentary, which pleasantly describes the festive atmosphere of the corrida under a sky where the clouds race by, though not one of them is dark or menacing like in the works of Goya or Lucas Velázquez. The tragic moment of the bullfight can only be imagined thanks to the presence of just two figures in the arena: a white horse lying dead on the ground, and another one running free because the *picador* who was riding it has been thrown off following the bull's attack. The bloody scene that Jiménez does not paint is nonetheless clear to the viewer through the horror and fear in the facial expressions of the women who prefer to turn away and not see the excitement and the agitation of the men. In social painting a pleasant tone is maintained while describing the event.

The Effectiveness of a Limited Palette

Lastly, French painter Édouard Manet (Paris 1832-1883) offers us a different view of the bullfight. Today, all that remains of *Incident in a Bullfight*, probably painted in 1863 and exhibited the following year at the Salon, are two distinct canvases: *The Dead Toreador* (Washington, National Gallery) and *The Bullfight* (New York, Frick Collection). It was Manet himself who cut the

canvas in order to make two different paintings, disappointed by all the negative criticism of his work. The impressive Washington painting would be exhibited in Paris in 1867, titled, by Édouard Manet, *The Dead Toreador*. While the final result shows only the body of the torero after being struck and now lying flat on the ground, dead and isolated, this image had already had a huge impact in the first version of the *Incident in a Bullfight*, scorned by the critics not so much because of the way the theme was dealt with, but because of the French artist's interest in Spanish culture. What remains is the attention drawn to the death of the figure of the toreador lying there with his sword beside him (the hilt is close to his right shoulder), and his hand over his chest (where the blood is just visible); the stiffness of the body painted without fully respecting the rules of perspective is compensated for by the remarkable balance of the colors. A palette with just a few colors, but enough to express the highlighting on the black silk of the matador's costume in contrast with the white socks and shirt, and the light pink tie, like the sash around his waist, that matches the color of the small cape abandoned on the brown soil.

¹ The ancient world has given us different representations starting from the painted scenes in the grottos of the Paleolithic period, to vase painting, to the bull-leaping frescoes on the upper story in the palace of Knossos...

² Before the age when matadors began entering the arena on foot, bullfighting was essentially a chivalric contest reserved for the nobility, and more of a game than a fight.

³ Gunzelin Schmid Noerr and Annelinde Eggert, "El reto de la corrida. Sobre el sentido latente de un ritual profano," *Revista de estudios taurinos* 19-20, 2005, p. 316.

⁴ Goya had added some images of bullfighting in nine of his fourteen inventions for the series entitled *Torresilla* (1785-1794), considered a whim by the artist. Here, the description of bullfighting is generally very orderly, but in some cases we begin to see a new way of dealing with the theme, in which the part played by the people themselves is plain to see.

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Giuseppe Scaraffia
MÉRIMÉE'S GYPSY:
VICTIM OR HEROINE?

The weather was hot in June 1830, when Prosper Mérimée and his servant crossed the border into Spain on horseback. It was an adventurous trip at the time, in a country where the streets were rough and treacherous, the taverns primitive, and the food scarce. Nonetheless, even though he had had to forgo his much-desired encounter with bandits, the twenty-seven-year-old Frenchman had found the landscape to be pleasantly primitive, and the Spanish surprisingly intelligent. His guide was convinced he was English, not so much because of the cap he wore that was typical of Londoners, but because he wasn't trying to sell anything, he didn't kneel before every Madonna he saw, and he was inexplicably attracted to ruins. Prosper had learned to love England from his parents and their English friends. Furthermore, a series of trips across the Channel had turned him into an impassible dandy.

Of course, not everything was perfect in that country, which was fortunately far-removed from the outbreak of progress. The

mosques had been turned into churches and the mosaics left behind by the Arabs hidden in the hastily whitewashed interiors.

After initially finding it repugnant, Prosper had become a great fan of bullfighting, although his applause was not for the matador but for the bull instead. He alternated those primitive emotions with the more refined ones aroused by the paintings of Velázquez at the Prado Museum. Besides that, he "had done all sorts of foolish things" with the women there. In Granada a graceful gypsy had let herself be tempted by the money he had offered her, but she was an exception, for her companions were usually ugly and dirty.

In Madrid he had befriended the Counts de Montijo. He was rather fond of the unconventional Countess Manuela, who gambled and made risky financial dealings, and of her two daughters aged ten and twelve. One of them, Eugenia, would become the wife of Napoleon III.

Spain was to Mérimée as Italy was to Stendhal: a land where miraculously all things new had not as yet eroded the passion and the taste for life. The sophisticated writer was proud to have slept under the same roof as gypsies and matadors, and he was perfectly at ease in the markets of Andalusia.

Adrien Moreau, *The Fortune Teller*, detail, 1878. Private collection.



The lives of the humbler strata of the Iberian people attracted him much more than the revolution in France that was overthrowing the Bourbons. Like many romantics, Mérimée saw tradition as being an inexhaustible container of legends and stories capable of resisting the onslaught of modernity. "To be honest, for me poetry is only conceivable in a state of semi-civilization or even barbarism."

In the evening, in villages located in far-flung places, he would improvise charming tales for the peasants. "I've shared my supper with people an Englishman wouldn't even dare to look at... I've drunk from the flask of a gypsy man." In truth, with all his nostalgia for what was natural, Prosper was most of all, according to Taine, an insatiable collector of characters that he could then use in his stories.

Mérimée had unexpectedly left Paris due to a complicated love affair. "I was about to fall in love when I left for Spain. It was one of the best things I ever did in my entire life. She who was behind my parting never knew. If I had stayed, I might have done something truly foolish, that of offering a woman worthy of all the

happiness that is possible, in exchange for all that was dear to her, a tenderness that I felt was greatly inferior to the sacrifice she would have had to make. Remember what I always say: "love will make excuses for anything, but you have to be sure that it truly is love."

It wasn't easy to understand that young man who had already had several literary and theatrical successes. Sometimes Prosper would become introverted, hiding behind the artificial meanness of an arrogant smile. All one needed to do was look into his eyes to see his willful indifference. More often the charming homeliness of his thin face was subjected to a purposeful calm. Even with his friends the twenty-seven-year-old put on a series of masks, which ranged from the affectation of obscenity to purely imaginary idleness. The pantomime had fooled Turgenev, however, who, having surprised him still asleep during his morning visit, had grown seriously concerned.

To explain his unique personality, Sainte-Beuve enjoyed telling an anecdote from the writer's childhood. When he was just five years old, Prosper had done something naughty and been told to stand outside the door by his mother, who was busy painting. But instead of accepting the punishment, he began begging for her forgiveness, promising her he would never make her angry again. At first, his mother didn't answer him. But the child's tone and the words he used were so convincing that when Prosper, as soon as she opened the door, came in on his knees imploring her forgiveness, the woman burst out laughing. At which point the boy leapt to his feet and angrily shouted: "Well then, seeing that you mock me, I will never again ask for your forgiveness." And he had kept his promise, looking at the world with inextinguishable irony.

"While I am not sure about his affection, I am about his talent," remarked Stendhal, his close friend, in spite of the twenty-year difference between them. And indeed, Prosper, with that strange combination of daring and prudence, might have been one of Stendhal's least successful characters, who viewed him with friendship imbued with suspicion, though missing in the young man's behavior were the flaws, the leaps, and the sudden surrenders of the heroes of Beyle. Behind his shield of impassibility, the only light that filtered was the one that was destined to writing.

The year 1830 was an important one for the writer. That was when he decided to give up the pseudonyms he had used to

Simon Jacques Rochard, *Portrait of the Young Mérimée*, ca. 1850, print. Paris, Musée Carnavalet.

Marc Paumier, *Prosper Mérimée in Uniform as Inspector of the Cultural Heritage Seated in Front of a Castle*, 1837. Charenton-le-Pont, Médiathèque de l'architecture et du patrimoine.



sign his first books, to suggest that everything, even the thing he was mostly closely bound to, art, was a feeble joke. And yet his style had the clear-cut sobriety, the tacit provocativeness, and the imperceptible eccentricity of the dandy. Although Mérimée participated in the romantic "battle of *Hernani*," he wasn't really involved. In every environment he always felt like a stranger and sometimes it seemed to him that nothing could lessen the squalor of the world. One evening, after a particularly melancholy dinner in spite of the quality of the guests, from Hugo to Chateaubriand, Prosper took refuge in the home of a friend who amused himself with easy women. But there too he found the same sadness.

Regardless of his modest income, one year earlier he had politely declined the offer to join the diplomatic corps. He had no interest in serving the Bourbons, whom he loathed as much as Stendhal did. "I wrote a few mediocre books and for that reason my name has appeared in the newspapers. Distant, in life, from politics, in my books I have expressed my opinions (perhaps too bitterly). I thought that accepting a job, albeit a very modest one, under the current administration, would mean contradicting myself."

In the meantime, Prosper was becoming Mérimée. A perfectionist, he was constantly revising his work. He wanted to achieve the utmost with the smallest amount of expressive means.



“Concentrating, abbreviating, summing up life, that is the purpose of art,” explained the historian Hyppolite Taine in a memorable essay on the writer. To be able to do so, Prosper would copy his manuscripts over and over again. *Colomba* (1840) was submitted to sixteen different revisions before he was finally satisfied with the results. Furthermore, before they went to print, Mérimée would submit his pages to the public for their opinion, reading them at cultural gatherings and handing them out to his female friends for them to read as well.

Together with a group of friends, Prosper attended a series of high society cultural gatherings, from the one hosted by Madame Ancelot to those of Delécluze or Baron Gérard. For that cool, calm, and collected young man “society was divided into the pleasant and the dull.” To group discussions he preferred the quiet corners of such gatherings. A woman famous for her travels,

Lady Morgan, understood the hidden charm of that sardonic and reserved dandy: “You want him to come, but then you fear he may leave.” Spontaneous and original, Mérimée knew how to forget his greatness to deal with a whole host of topics. And yet you could always sense his detachment. He was, Taine explains, a spectator who was always watching himself, forever careful not to let his emotions show. Even the cordial Dickens, struck by his coldness, had commented: “Do you know what Mérimée needs to be a true friend?” “No, what?” “Friendship. He keeps it all to himself.”

Upon returning from Spain the writer quickly rose to the rank of a senior official. The head of cabinet in several ministries, under Louis Philippe, Mérimée referred to the public administration as “the workshop of dilatory promises.” Appointed inspector general of historical monuments, he embarked on a series of journeys through France. In 1832, during a terrible cholera epidemic, he and

his friend Antoine Fontaney visited the Hôtel-Dieu, the cholera hospital, ignoring everyone’s advice to the contrary. Silently challenging death, the two men meticulously patrolled all the rooms, the eyes of the sick, bewildered and frightened, following their footsteps. They parted while standing in front of Nôtre-Dame, surrounded by the air filled with juniper burnt in the illusion that it would stave off any contagion.

A year later, a lover’s unfaithfulness accentuated Mérimée’s cynicism toward women, at the same time unveiling his taste for exotic beauties. “I am so brutalized that I have nothing better to do than smoke, write up administrative memorials, and screw a mulatta.” When his heart was occupied he thought he could only distract it by using his sexual organs for “monsters.” “Mulattas are fine specimens.” The vague exoticism of George Sand, who was not a mulatta but a Creole, seemed the perfect distraction. Having escaped a disastrous marriage and a disappointing love affair, Sand pondered her frigidity: “How to escape from this marble?”

For a moment, in that distant 1833, the two of them had fooled themselves. She of having been set free by that young writer from her countless lovers, he of not having seduced one of the many silly ladies of the Opéra as usual, but an attractive, daring intellectual instead. She had chosen a man’s name, he had signed his first work Clara Gazul. It all seemed so perfect. It was one evening at dusk on the banks of the Seine that George decided to succumb to her admirer, though she warned him that she would not be able to feel any pleasure. At home, Sand got undressed in front of him with a lack of modesty, the man thought to himself, bordering on indifference. “At the age of thirty I behaved in a way that would have been unbecoming to a sixteen-year-old girl, committing the most incredible foolishness of my entire life.” Then the rumors began to swirl and contradict each other. According to some, she was the one who made the first pass, and Prosper, intimidated by it all, succumbed. She was incapable of animating him, he reacted with bitterness and sarcasm. There were even those who said she bit his shoulder. Whatever the case may be, when she was alone again, George began sobbing. “If he loved me, he would have subjugated me to his will, and if I had been able to be subjugated to a man, I would have been saved, for this freedom is wearing me down, it is killing me.”



Both of them reacted poorly. She was believed to have said something awful—“Last night, I had Mérimée. He’s nothing special.”—which she never denied. Speaking to Sainte-Beuve, Sand confessed that she had had high hopes for that encounter.

The other thirty-year old in the story, Mérimée, behind the mask of the *bon viveur*, drew up a melancholy balance of that year with a friend of his: “You love, you are loved, and you don’t make love, that’s the only way to be totally happy. I make love without loving and being loved and it bores me.” And yet it is likely that Sand’s aggressiveness and independence contributed to the creation of the character of Carmen.

Prosper had for some time become interested in gypsies, that strange population said to come from Egypt. In a letter he wrote

Joaquín Domínguez Bécquer, *Bullfight*, after 1841. Private collection.

Édouard Manet, *Portrait of Émilie Ambre as Carmen*, ca. 1879. Philadelphia, Philadelphia Museum of Art.

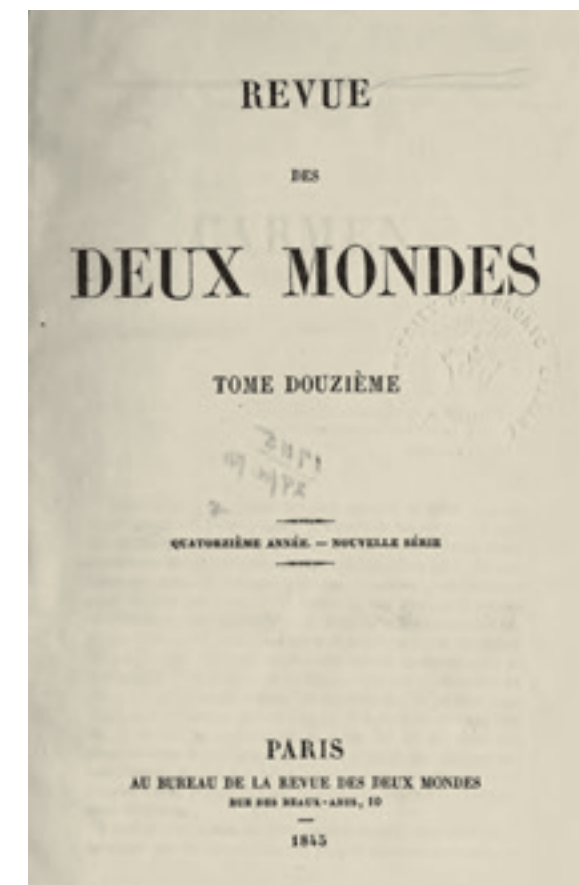


Eugène Delacroix, *George Sand Dressed as a Man*, 1834. Paris, Musée National Eugène Delacroix.



Caricature of George Sand Dressed as a Man with a Pipe, 1835.

Title page of the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, which published Mérimée's story in 1845.



138 on May 16, 1845, to the Countess de Montijo, Mérimée made fun of George Borrow, the ingenuous author of a monographic text on those eternal nomads which he entitled *The Zincoli, or Account of the Gypsies of Spain*, 1841. “He says some rather odd things about gypsies, but because he is English and a saint, he did not notice or did not want to talk about many aspects that are instead well worth discussing. He assumes that gypsies are very chaste and that a ‘busno,’ i.e. a man from another race, can get nothing out of them. Now, in my day, in Seville, Cadiz, and Granada, there were gypsies whose virtues could not resist a ‘duro’” [a Spanish coin]. Borrow, however, was not the writer’s only source. Indeed, in his correspondence Mérimée made various references to his studies on gypsies.

In that same letter Mérimée confided to the Countess: “I just spent eight days holed up in my house writing not about the facts and the deeds of the late Don Pedro, but about the story you told me fifteen years ago and that I am afraid I may have spoiled. The story is about a rascal from Malaga who murders his lover because she spends more time performing for the public than for him. After *Arsène Guillot* [1844] I found nothing more

moral than that story to offer the lovely ladies. And since I have been studying gypsies rather closely of late, I turned my heroine into a gypsy as well.”

It took Mérimée just eight days to write that brilliant story. But, as always, he was in no hurry to publish it. Only “the miserable, inevitable consequence of a long journey encouraged me to hand *Carmen* over to Buloz [the powerful director of the *Revue des deux mondes*].” In a letter to an acquaintance he specified: “You will soon be reading some trivia by your servant, which would have remained unpublished if the author hadn’t been forced to buy himself a pair of trousers.” On October 1, 1845, printed without fanfare in the *Revue des deux mondes* was what would become Mérimée’s most famous short story, *Carmen*.

In the second edition, published in 1846, he added a chapter, the fourth, in which he specifically discussed the nomadic population. However, Mérimée’s interest in gypsies would not end with that story. After translating Pushkin’s narrative poem *The Gypsies*—which resurfaces in Bizet’s opera in the words sung by Carmen at the time of her arrest—he wrote to Count de Gobineau for information about Persian gypsies.

By now the Iberian peninsula had become fashionable, just as gypsies had, where the romantics saw the embodiment of some of their anti-bourgeois ideals, from nomadism to independence. Eugène Sue exploited their legendary aura in three books, *Le Gitan* (1831), *Le commandeur de Malte* (1841), and *Paula Monti ou L’Hôtel Lambert* (1842). Unsurprisingly, Musset chose to write *Contes d’Espagne et d’Italie* (1830), and the heroine in Hugo’s *Notre-Dame de Paris* (1831) is the gypsy Esmeralda. Moreover, a famous Irish courtesan better known by the stage name Lola Montez debuted under her Spanish pseudonym, performing a fanciful variation of the local dances.

In 1845, the same year that *Carmen* first appeared, *Voyage en Espagne* by the great romantic Théophile Gautier was also published. The famous French writer had come across a tribe of gypsies on the road to Mount Sagrado. The gypsies inhabited the grottoes white with limestone, closed off only by a rope from which the laundry hung down. “Teeming, pullulating inside was the savage family: the children with skin darker than Havana cigars whose sex was impossible to distinguish played naked on the threshold, rolling around in the dust shouting, making shrill, guttural sounds.” After going on about how these people made a living—blacksmiths, veterinarians, cattle merchants—Gautier concluded that their real occupation in the end was that of thieves.

They sell amulets, work as fortune tellers, and practice suspicious trades that are common to the women of that race: I have seen few that are attractive, though their faces are rather handsome. The dark skin brings out the limpidness of their Oriental eyes, whose ardor is tempered by an indescribable and mysterious sadness, like the memory of a distant homeland or the greatness of a decline. The shape of the mouth, albeit slightly heavy, recalls the fullness of African mouths; the smallness of the forehead, the hook nose, betray the origins they share with the gypsies of Wallachia and Bohemia, that entire bizarre population that crossed, under the generic name of Egypt, the society of the Middle Ages, and for which so many centuries have not succeeded in interrupting enigmatic filiations.

A great admirer of female beauty, Gautier had noted the natural majesty of the way they carried themselves, which, in spite of the filth and the poverty, seemed to reveal an awareness of their antiquity and the purity of a race that had remained intact “because

139 gypsies only marry gypsies.” And he also wondered whether gypsies, in spite of their proclaimed Catholicism, were actually Muhammadans, having seen a naked child dancing the *zorongo* (a popular gypsy dance in Andalusia) to the sound of a guitar strummed by her emaciated sister with eyes like burning charcoal. “The mother, elegantly dressed, her neck laden with trinkets, kept the tempo with the tip of one blue velvet slipper. The unrefined pose, the strange attire, and the extraordinary color of the group would have been an excellent subject for Callot or for Salvator Rosa.”

Mérimée was very attracted to the lifestyle of this strange people, to their language—“as concerns linguistics, I studied the language of the gypsies for several days”—to their love of dance and black magic. He had even, for a short period of time, mulled over the idea of adopting a young gypsy girl.

However, there were other sources as well. Count de Montijo’s brother was as blind as Carmen’s husband, and he was in love with a cigarette roller, just like Mérimée’s heroine, who had tried to marry him. As for Carmen, one day, the thirsty traveler stopped at the door to a small tavern, where a delightful girl, “not too dark,”



Esmeralda Dancing, illustration for *Notre-Dame de Paris* by Victor Hugo, published in *L'Illustration*, no. 1786, vol. 69, 1877.

Jean-Baptiste Camille Corot, *Gypsy Girl at a Fountain*, 1865–1870, Philadelphia, Philadelphia Museum of Art.

Jean-Baptiste Camille Corot, *Gypsy Woman with Tambourine*, 1865–1870, Paris, Musée du Louvre.

brought him some cold water in a terracotta pitcher. After enjoying some delicious gazpacho, as he was on his way out he asked his servant, who was always ready to stop at every tavern, why he hadn't come inside this time. The man explained to him that the attractive waitress was actually a witch capable of giving the evil eye and of casting all sorts of other spells. It was right then that Mérimée decided to use her name, Carmencita, for the main character of the "immoral" story he was writing. However, he had gotten the idea for the femme fatale from the events in the life of Don Pedro, King of Castile, and, according to legend, the lover of the queen of the gypsies. Many suspected that it was only a disguise to be able to tell, without offending national pride, the story of a lover who had betrayed and humiliated him.

Both Hugo and Mérimée had attenuated the belonging of their heroines to the ambiguous tribe of the gypsies, turning them into little girls who had been stolen from their families. All the same, other, profound differences separated the two gypsies. Carmen does not only sing and dance and read palms; she steals, she is a smuggler, a spy, and capable of healing the riskiest wounds.

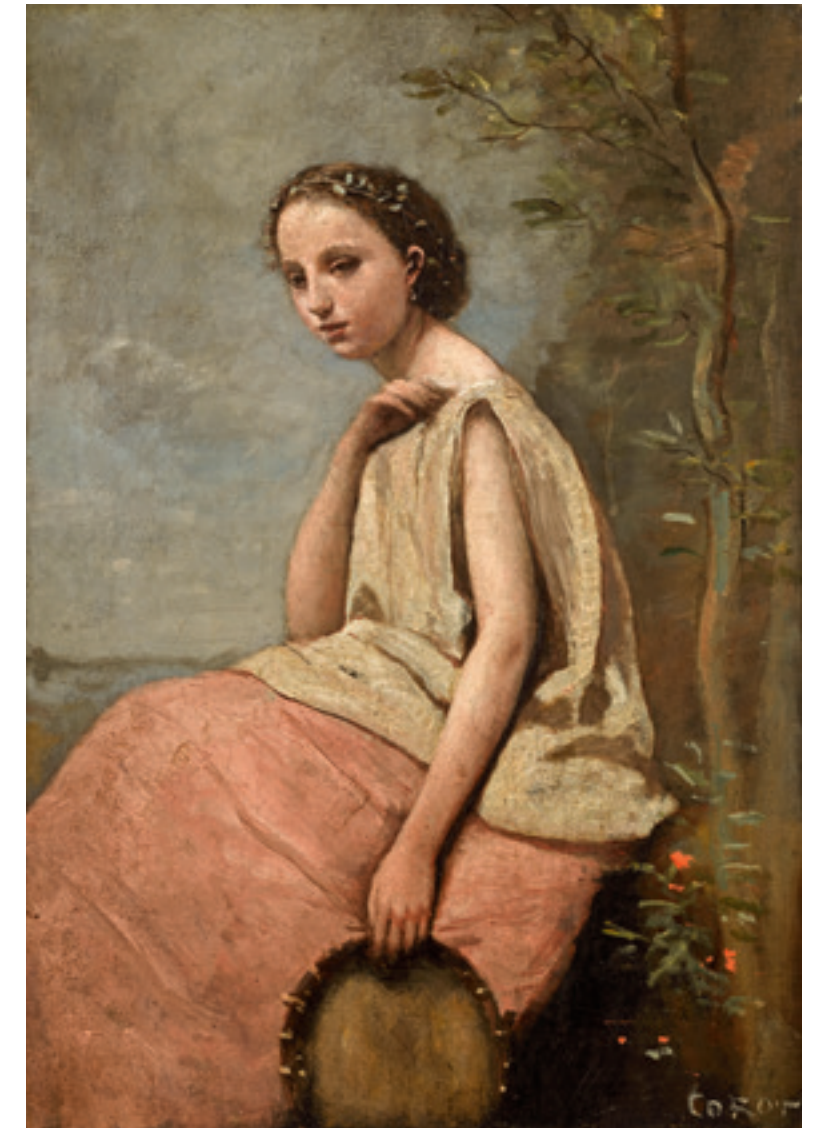
Already in the *Chronicle of the Reign of Charles IX* (1829) an attractive yet treacherous gypsy woman name Mila had appeared, dressed in "a mixture of poverty and luxury," capable of reading cards and playing the mandolin. Her salty language was matched only by the arrogance in her eyes. Another possible source for Carmen should be sought in the character of Maria Padilla, the queen of the gypsies and Don Pedro's lover in the story dedicated to him entitled *Don Pedro I, King of Castile*, 1843. However, it is in *La Venus d'Ille*, 1837, that the character of the femme fatale was stronger than ever. In the story, the silver flash in the large eyes of the statue of Venus contrasts with the bronze surface of her perfect body. Although it is inanimate, visitors find it hard to withstand the shimmering gaze. Her perfect forms are naked to the waist, where one hand holds a gown that has been marvelously draped. The position of the other hand is curious, held still at the level of her breasts, the thumb and two fingers raised. In her hair are traces of ancient gilding. Her small head, slightly bent forward does not have the usual placid beauty of sculptures. Her facial features are pervaded by a strange impression of cruelty. Her evil smile and slanted eyes seem to conceal irony that arouses a sense of malaise



in the viewer. "I wondered whether the superior beauty that had to be afforded to the statue did not for the most part come from its expression that resembled that of a tiger. Because energy, even in evil passions, always arouses wonder and a sort of admiration in us."

A young man, on the eve of his wedding, to be able to play a game more freely, places his wedding ring on the statue's index finger. When he goes back to get it he realizes in terror that the statue has bent its finger, making it impossible for him to remove the piece of jewelry. The night before his wedding day there is a terrible accident. Venus wakes up from her sleep, goes into the room of the man who, because of the ring, she believes is her groom, and suffocates him in her metallic embrace.

The Venus d'Ille even seemed to outdo the ferocious misogyny in the inscription with the words of the poet Palladas



which Mérimée had placed right at the beginning of the story. "Every woman is a bore. She'll give you only two good times: when you take her to the bridal bed, and when you bury her." The woman's diabolical nature is of course a recurring motif in Mérimée's output. In *Théâtre de Clara Gazul* (1825), the author's pseudonym, one *pièce* is entitled *A Woman is a Devil*. The woman who is wounded by Carmen accuses her of being a "daughter of Satan," the elderly woman who looks after her house is "a true servant of Satan." When Carmen suggests murdering the rich Englishman supporting her, she has the "diabolical smile she sometimes had, and no one would have wanted to imitate that smile." Another time she warns José: "You have seen the devil, yes, the devil," to then clarify that the Lord of Darkness "isn't always black." Already in the first pages of the story, a remarkable metamorphosis of her beautiful gypsy face is described,



Mary Cassatt, *Offering the Panal to the Bullfighter*, ca. 1873. Williamstown (Massachusetts), Sterling and Francine Clark Institute.

distorted by her effort to convince her lover to murder and steal from the narrator. "His eyes were bloodshot and grew terrible, his facial features were contracted, he stamped his feet on the ground."

"Nothing doing," Sainte-Beuve observed in his *Cahiers*, "you can't do away with all your own Christianity. Although Mérimée does not believe that God exists, he is not entirely certain the devil does not." Of course, Prosper was also drawn to the continuing legends that said that gypsies could evoke demons. Nevertheless, in *Carmen* irony triumphs, and this dark side becomes an expedient used by a gypsy to get a betrayed woman to hand over the money that, she believes, would bring her husband back to her after a ceremony at the cemetery.

Mérimée's stylistic models were the Greek medals in which the bas-relief accentuated the most prominent features of the profile, arousing "a deep and long-lasting impression." Indeed, for Mérimée the succinctness of one's writing style was not just a moral choice, but a question of efficacy as well. This is why he rejected all the efflorescence typical of nineteenth-century writing, from the descriptions of landscapes to the moral dissertations. "I loathe useless details, and in any case I don't feel obliged to tell the reader all that they can easily imagine." His "naked, dry, fleshless" style, according to Sainte-Beuve, did not prevent him from having fun provoking the reader, tearing off the mask of hypocrisy by putting together scandalous situations. Mérimée's lucid skepticism was not blinding. In his stories, nightmares, irrationality, and violence always lay in wait. "You speak of reason, of course, but is it always there ready to guide us?"

There were some, including Sainte-Beuve, who saw in *Carmen* an echo of Prévost's *Manon Lescaut*, the first of a long series of femmes fatales who were to succeed each other in literature and in art. Some resemblances were indeed undeniable, from the first-person narrative of a male character overcome by passion, to the ambiguous character of the seductress.

No one knew that the batch of stories by that self-restrained author would end Mérimée's narrative season early. But the legend of Carmen seemed unstoppable. There were many who were sure they knew exactly who she was. Also in 1907, "Les filles de Carmen" appeared in the *Télégramme de Toulouse*, an anonymous article that promised never-before-published information about Carmen

and her offspring. According to the author, Carmen was actually Ar Mintz (the Indomitable) Nadushka, after the name of her tribe. By coincidence, something that was totally normal when it had to do with characters like the famous gypsy, one of her nieces, also named Mintz, became a famous singer and was most successful in the role of Carmen. That triumph would also be the cause of her ruin, however. It seems that the gypsies, who couldn't bear to see her singing dressed as one of them before an audience, poisoned her while she was in England.

In 1852, Théophile Gautier celebrated *Carmen*, the dangerous seductress, in a poem.

Carmen is lean - a trace of yellow / Shadows her gypsy eye; / Her hair is a sinister black, / Her skin, tanned by the devil. / Women claim she's ugly, / But all the men are crazy about her: / The Archbishop of Toledo / Kneels at her feet to sing Mass; / For above her amber nape / Is coiled a large chignon / That, undone, in the private room / Gives her lovely body a cape, / And through her pallor, gleams / A mouth with a conquering smile, / Red chili, a scarlet flower, / Which takes its red color from the heart's blood. / With this shape, the Moor girl / Outdoes nobler beauty, / And with her eyes that burn / Revives satiety. / She has, in her hot ugliness / A grain of salt of that sea / From where rose naked and provocative / Acrid Venus with her bitter abyss.

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