

The Influence of the Opera on the Spirit and Psychology of People in the 19th Century: Taking the Social Background and Singing Passage of “La Traviata” as an Example

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Abstract: Opera has now become one of the forms of entertainment for the public, not only because people have higher quality artistic pursuits but also because they can relieve the anxiety brought about by life and work when enjoying opera in the concert hall. The acceptance of classics by modern people is significant. However, in the era of opera's origin and rapid development, the relationship between the masses and the social background and the works has essential reference significance for how modern art and stage theatre adapt to the development of the times. This article uses an example of a fragment of the Italian musician Verdi's masterpiece *La Traviata* to explore its influence on the thinking of the masses in the 19th century. The study found that the emergence of *La Traviata* is not only a continuation of the Enlightenment in the last century but also affects people's re-examination of the darkness of the aristocratic class at that time, the inequality between men and women, and the difficult life of vulnerable groups.

Keywords: *La Traviata*, Verdi, 19th century, Enlightenment, men and women

1. Introduction

The opera *La Traviata* is the work of the Italian romantic composer Verdi in the second half of the 19th century, and it is not only one of Verdi's most popular operas but also the most frequently performed opera in the world. Verdi took the art of opera to the highest peak while inheriting the Italian opera tradition.

La Traviata is Verdi's opera based on Alexandre Dumas's novel of the same name, which is of great significance both for the development of European opera and the history of world music. For the first time in the history of French literature, a prostitute has been featured as the protagonist. When Alexandre Dumas's text is combined with Verdi's music, one sees the work rejecting the glitzy ornamentation of the old Rossini style and the pursuit of extreme beauty in traditional Italian opera [1].

So far, many scholars have devoted much research to this work. Many literature studies have explained in detail that *La Traviata* exposes the rotten life of the French July Dynasty high society in the mid-19th century through the love tragedy of a prostitute and makes a bloody and tearful accusation against the hypocritical morality of the aristocratic bourgeoisie. Based on existing research,

this study analyzed the creative background and specific musical techniques of *La Traviata* and extended the following questions. For example, what was the fundamental change in the thinking level of the European peoples of the 19th century? Was it because of the dominant idea of the work that the people were pushing the process of fighting against the decay of French high society? Does it reflect, to some extent, the continuity of the Enlightenment? The discussion of these issues is of great significance to promoting the opera *La Traviata* to people's spiritual thoughts.

This article starts from the social background of France after the Enlightenment in the mid-19th century and how Verdi himself made a musical breakthrough in the Italian social background at that time and still maintained a musical style full of energy and vitality. Combining the two, it is concluded that the birth of the opera *La Traviata* impacted people's perception of women and changes in thinking at the class level at that time.

2. Case Analysis

2.1. Summary of the Plot of the Turning Point of Love in the Second Act

As one of the writers in the transition period from romanticism to realism, Dumas's literary creation mostly came from real life. *La Traviata* is a typical real-life restoration work in this period [2].

The novel so moved the Italian composer Verdi that he composed the play in six weeks and premiered it at the Teatro La Fenice in Venice on March 6, 1853. "Grand opera" is a severe opera genre born in the 20s of the 19th century and prevalent in France in the 30s and 40s, usually containing four or five acts, a variety of roles, the pursuit of luxurious stage effects, often interspersed with gorgeous ballet scenes, the soundtrack throughout, no need to pronounce, no need to pronounce the narrative (Recitative secco), Choruses and grand band effects are often used to create a huge scene. Take the "drinking song" fragment from the first act of *La Traviata*. For example, the party scene is luxurious, the arrival of nobles is numerous, the costumes are gorgeous, and most of the singing is in the form of a chorus [3].

The opera is divided into three acts and five performances. The two scenes in the second act are turning points in the love of the two protagonists, and the love story of Violetta and Alfredo's protagonists turns from sweet country life to failure due to misunderstanding. Compared with the famous drinking song in the first act, the second act lacks a little cadenza fragment, focusing on concise and clear character dialogue. Verdi uses arias and frequent changes in narrative tones to show the ups and downs of the plot, showing the respective changes and collisions of the characters' emotions. As Hegel said in *Aesthetics* about his understanding of theatre, the essence of this theatrical conflict is a conflict of character and purpose. The drama progresses gradually in a conflict that progressively develops between different personalities and different purposes, and this is precisely what Verdi delicately fulfils in the second act."

2.2. Verdi's Unique Musical Skills and the Perspective of the Protagonist's Personality

From the perspective of creative content, Verdi pursues the life perception and subjective life experience of human nature and advocates the expression of personal inner emotions and the realism of real life. From the perspective of creative form, Verdi firmly grasped the Italian opera tradition based on vocal music and singing melodies based on absorbing the rich nutrition of his predecessors and has always run through his lifelong opera creation [4]. He showed new breakthroughs with each work for a long time, while his energetic and energetic musical style remained virtually unchanged. He was seen rejecting the glitzy of the old Rossinian ornamentation and the pursuit of extreme beauty in traditional Italian opera [5].

In the early 50s of the 19th century, Verdi's mid-term creation shifted from the early emphasis on historical events and heroic characters to real life and the thoughts and feelings of ordinary people,

and the music also shifted from the early focus on historical scenes to the portrayal of characters. He overcame the tendency of early Italian opera characters and music to be typed accordingly. He made the music more nuanced in depicting character and heart according to the needs of the plot. The melody was still Verdi's primary means of expressing the character of the character and prompting the characters' hearts [6]. This is reflected in the second act of the opera that this article focuses on. Compared with the first act, it can be seen from the score that Verdi uses a large narrative tone, the whole process is like a character dialogue, the sentence meaning is direct and clear, and the plot is straightforward and easy to understand. In addition, the orchestral accompaniment in the opera uses the expression of dominant motives to highlight Violetta's tragic storyline. Violetta has more to lose than either of the Germont. She knows she has contracted TB, incurable at that time, and has no family to fall back on (as the novel spells out). She faces the certainty of an early death. If she loses Alfredo, she faces either poverty, returning to prostitution, or both. She is truly desperate. She is drowning in a realistically terrible situation, tormented by extreme infantile anxieties. Whenever Violetta faced a difficult situation, the band gave a powerful opening.

There are two typical examples. First, after Violetta knew that the purpose of the old Armand's coming to the house was to separate her and Alfredo, Violetta became more and more excited. She collapsed with the sound of the orchestra playing like a rapid heartbeat. The rapid and dense violin's main melody and Violetta's aria worked together at this time, and the atmosphere gradually rose. The second example is that Violetta lets go of love under George's firm persuasion. At this time, the band again plays the dominant motivational melody, echoing the heroine's grief-stricken heart and hinting at the tragic ending of love in advance [7].

In addition to Violetta's emotional expression, her interaction with the two of Armand the Old is also worth mentioning. The libretto is quite clear about the thick-skinned quality of Germont's aggressively adamant decisiveness: Violetta is cruelly beaten down by a stronger and socially more powerful male. However, musically, we have a much more complex state of affairs. Germont's text remains the same, but even as he begins to sing about her bloom fading in the future, his music acquires a softer quality, perhaps implying some unconscious empathy for her predicament. Moreover, when he demands she spare his family, he becomes unequivocally pleading and warmer, the music suggesting he is actually treating her with some respect and incipient affection and also recognizing that she does, in fact, have some power in the situation - musically he does not demand, he pleads.

2.3. Character Traits Reflect the Still Rotten Social Atmosphere in Europe and the Inheritance and Development of the Opera *La Traviata*

A novel is a microcosm of the society of the time, and the plot setting of the characters in *La Traviata* also reflects the difficult living conditions of women in the 19th century and the stereotypes of society about them. The opera is born out of the novel and portrays Violetta's inability to break free from people's prejudices against women. For example, in the second act, Alfredo's father confronts her, thinking that Violetta is coveting her son's property, utterly unaware that Violetta is giving everything for love and life, selling her property for a stable material source. In Alfredo's mistaken belief that Violetta returned to Paris to abandon herself and fall in love with someone else, this scene also shows Alfredo's inner distrust of Violetta and her past taboo as a prostitute.

It is not difficult to find that this opera explores women and women's roles, sexual relations, and societal power dynamics. It not only embodies the power of true love but also exposes the reality that Violetta cannot escape the rules of society. Violetta's strength lies in her insistence on her dignity in the face of Giorgio Germont's hypocritical bourgeois morality. Good Violettas are witty and charming, of course, but there is a severe core—a strength and sense of self-possession that defines the Verdi heroines of this middle period. They are essentially noble and generous people underneath their lightness; the tragedy is that these qualities do not save them from the worlds they live in [8].

In addition to Violetta's character traits, in Act II, Scene 1, "Libiamo ne lieti calici", the difference in emotional attitudes between men and women is more clearly reflected in social reality. In this love with a massive gap between the rich and the poor, the aristocratic bourgeoisie, like Alfredo, needs to rely on the dust woman to support the family, which can be said to be the satire of the opera *La Traviata* on the hypocrisy of bourgeois human nature, and also more reflective of Violetta's pure piety and selfless dedication to feelings [9]. In addition, Alfredo's feelings are far less profound than Violetta's. From the beginning, Alfredo is passionate and crazy about Violetta, who has been secretly in love for a long time. Immediately embarrassed and angry when he misunderstood and did not know the truth because of his father's intervention, he finally learned the truth and quickly changed his face and told his love again. The men's emotional lines rise and fall. The speed of emotional transformation contrasts with the painful, tangled struggle of the women in the play and the single-minded emotions of Alfredo. In addition to Violetta's character traits, in Act II, Scene 1, "Libiamo ne lieti calici", the difference in emotional attitudes between men and women is more clearly reflected in social reality. In this love with a massive gap between the rich and the poor, the aristocratic bourgeoisie like Alfredo needs to rely on the dust woman to support the family, which can be said to be the satire of the opera *La Traviata* on the hypocrisy of bourgeois human nature, and also more reflective of Violetta's pure piety and selfless dedication to feelings [10]. In addition, Alfredo's feelings are far less profound than Violetta's. From the beginning, Alfredo is passionate and crazy about Violetta, who has been secretly in love for a long time. Immediately embarrassed and angry when he misunderstood and did not know the truth because of his father's intervention, he finally learned the truth and quickly changed his face and told his love again. The men's emotional lines rise and fall, and the speed of emotional transformation contrasts with the painful, tangled struggle of the women in the play and the deep emotions of Alfredo.

The novel *La Traviata* is a love tragedy published in the mid-19th century, and its purpose is closely related to the ideas of the French Enlightenment in the 17th and 18th centuries. In the first act, men and women sing drinking songs together, and in the second act, after Violetta is humiliated by Alfred, the people at the party, including Alfred's father, are on Violita's side, all reflecting the expectation of women's advancement and sufficient respect. Alternatively, this is a way for Alexandre Dumas, under the influence of the Enlightenment, to speak out for human rights and the unfair treatment of women, which is the progress of an era.

The Enlightenment ushered in an era of continuity and a significant era in which French women were shaped. During the Enlightenment, the female community was divided into two categories: those who remained marginalized without status, and the other aristocratic women, who were not only more educated than men, had a wider social circle, but also had property and inheritance rights that were expressly protected by law.

Another important reason is that the rise of salon culture also provided a natural but safe place to spread and develop enlightenment ideas. Voltaire, Montesquieu, Rousseau, Diderot and others were frequent visitors to the salons of that period. They often talk about their writings in salon chatter or quote the views of others and argue with those who disagree. In the relatively free field of discourse are nobles, officials and other powers, as well as literati, playwrights and other commoners. However, when entering the discussion of specific topics, the status of the two classes becomes equal. In the communication of words, there is only the level of wisdom, and the subtlety of speech, and there is no coercion of political power. Literati can use their wisdom, freely express their opinions, and promote the advancement of each other's wisdom amid arguments. The consciousness of Enlightenment flourished in this discussion of equality. At the same time, it encouraged works like *La Traviata* and other similar works to appear in the public eye.

3. Conclusions

This study finds that Verdi's *La Traviata* influenced the minds of the masses in the 19th century. Not limited to this work, the large number of operas in Europe in the 19th century was partly a continuation of the Enlightenment of the last century, an era of critical examination of religion, in which attention was turned from God to themselves. Nevertheless, at the same time, because of people's previous neglect of the loopholes in real society, there are problems such as the decay of the social aristocracy, gender inequality, and the problematic lives of vulnerable groups. Art comes from life and is a microcosm of an era. This research mainly summarizes and analyzes the correlation between artworks and social backgrounds to a certain extent. However, because professionalism is not deep enough, the writer must improve the theory of more profound disciplines to facilitate the in-depth study of this topic.

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