

Rossini, His Finances, and His World

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By

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

On August 3, 1829, Rossini premiered what would be his last opera *Guillaume Tell* in Paris with great success. Nineteen years had passed since the premiere of his opera *La Cambiale di matrimonio*, a period during which he composed 39 operas. With his latest opera he had perplexed both his defenders and his detractors. Azevedo¹ in his biography of Rossini exposes different views that Rossini's last opera caused. While a large crowd of people led by Habeneck, French classical violinist and conductor who conducted the premiere of *Guillaume Tell*, stood in front of Rossini's apartment lived in Paris, 10 Boulevard Montmartre, to acclaim the composer and sing some pieces from the work, Breton and Paër, two of the most important critics of Rossini's works, were consuming an ice cream at the Café des Variétés and said: "Art is lost!"

After the premiere of *Guillaume Tell* came his operatic silence. Although Rossini did not stop composing, as he composed religious music, instrumental music, etc., the fact is that his interest for presenting new compositions on stage had disappeared. The public continued to demand new operas from him and attempts were made to get him to compose a new work, but Rossini did not satisfy these demands.

Till² points out that the cause of Rossini's retirement from opera composition may be due to the social and political instability resulting from the July Revolution of 1830 and the subsequent changes in the management of the opera that were to be based more on the principles of the new bourgeois system. This meant, among other things, that it was to be managed as just another business, that is, in a business manner, in which it was necessary to provide a great spectacle, based on music and scenery, which would stimulate demand in order to recover the expenses incurred through income. Faced with this situation, the changes that were made in his last opera, *Guillaume Tell*, which reduced the number of acts or did not

¹ Alexis Jacob Azevedo, *G. Rossini Sa Vie et Ses Oeuvres* (Paris: Heugel et Cia, 1864), 282-283.

² Nicholas Till, *Rossini* (London: Omnibus Press, 1987), 113.

sing them entirely, and given the increasing popularity of other composers, especially Meyerbeer, it is possible that Rossini decided not to enter into this dynamic from which he had little to gain, he had a great reputation and sufficient financial resources, and much to lose.

On the other hand, Rossini had also realized that during his musical career he had created a taste that he could no longer satisfy, as opera had evolved in a way that he did not agree with, since, fundamentally, the principles of *bel canto* were in decline³.

At that time, he was a famous man and liked to live well. Stendhal⁴ states, Rossini had conquered Europe with his music, comparing Rossini to Napoleon, and Stendhal added that after the emperor's death no one spoke of Napoleon, but about Rossini. Part of the press also agreed with this statement. The *Journal des Debats* of October 11, 1826 (source: gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France), affirmed that Rossini had created an empire, the Favart theatre was under his control, and that everyone obeyed and respected him. And Heine considered that Rossini's music was an expression of the French Restoration society⁵.

Rossini spend 19 years of hard and sometimes exhausting work to reach his fame, composing 39 operas during this period, two a year. But his efforts had been rewarded, he was famous, he was welcome by sovereigns, ministers, aristocrats, and bankers, and he had enough income to satisfy his needs. By managing his resources wisely, he could increase his financial resources. Radiciotti⁶ estimated that his fortune reached around 2,500,000 francs (about 13,000,000 euros today), a wealth much higher than that achieved for example, by Donizetti or Bellini, to name some of the most famous composer contemporaries of Rossini, although there are no concrete estimates on the value of these composers' assets. In the case of Donizetti, according to the information provided by Baron Eduard von Lannoy, who was one of the few friends who knew about Donizetti's confinement in the Ivry Clinic due to his illness during the last years of his life, Donizetti had an income of 20,000 francs per year (about 104,000 euros)⁷, so it is reasonable to think that, considering a yield of 4 and 5%, which were the interest rates at which Rossini lent money, the amount Donizetti possessed

³ Till, 115.

⁴ Stendhal, *Vie de Rossini* (Paris: Gallimard (1992), 1823), 36.

⁵ Benjamin Walton, *Rossini in Restoration Paris. The Sound of Modern Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 5.

⁶ Giuseppe Radiciotti, *Gioacchino Rossini. Vita Documentata Opere Ed Influenza Su L'arte. Vol. II* (Tivoli: Arti grafiche majella di Aldo Chicca, 1928), 525.

⁷ CA, *Caro Aniello: I Carteggi Donizettiani Del Fondo Moscarino (1836-1847)*, ed. Carlo Moscarino (Fondazione Donizetti, 2008), 255.

was around 500,000 francs (about 2,600,000 euros). Regarding Bellini, Rossini took care of his assets after his death, and estimated that his assets must have reached approximately 40,000 francs⁸.

Rossini achieved this good economic result in addition to his musical skills, because he had basically also an entrepreneur spirit. He knew how to take advantage of the opportunities provided by the commercial society in which he lived. He studied carefully the demand he was trying to satisfy with his music and the environment in which he was developing his musical activity. Considering the tastes of the public, he composed innovative operas, imposing his own style, which was followed by many imitators. Rossini was successful in everything he set out to do composition, financial operations, etc. He finally achieved his goal and his contemporaries realized it. For example, Berlioz thought that opera was the means to prosperity for those who were not engaged in composing salon songs, and he believed that Rossini lived comfortably thanks to royalties from his operas⁹.

Opera was a product that some countries, especially France and Italy, gave great importance, since it was, among other things, an engine of economic growth. Through opera performances, commerce was stimulated by the manufacture and sale of luxury goods, as well as tourism and the circulation of money, providing employment not only to those who were dedicated to these activities, but also for related businesses, and increasing the prestige of the country¹⁰.

The economic evolution of the countries led to this situation. Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the commercial society spread between countries. Societies had evolved from a society of hunters with a low level of production, to a society in which commerce played an essential role. This new society was characterized by significant levels of production, which generated great prosperity thanks to the skills and industry of individuals¹¹.

But also on the other hand, opera gradually became a centre of power and prestige for audiences and rulers¹², so it was essential to have new

⁸ Vincenzo Bellini, *Epistolario*, ed. Luisa Cambi (Milano: Mondadori, 1943), 602.

⁹ David Cairns, *Berlioz, Volume I. The Making of an Artist, 1803-1838* (London: Penguin Classics, 1989), 56.

¹⁰ John Rosselli, *The Opera Industry in Italy from Cimarosa to Verdi. The Role of the Impresario* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 39; Patrick Barbier, *À L'Opéra Au Temps de Balzac et Rossini. Paris 1800-1850* (Paris: Hachette, 2003).

¹¹ Dennis C. Rasmussen, *The Problems and Promise of Commercial Society* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2008), 18.

¹² Roger Parker, "The Opera Industry," in *The Cambridge History of Nineteenth-Century Music*, ed. Jim Samson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 87-117, 88.

productions to maintain this situation. Theatre impresarios engaged composers, librettists, and singers to provide a product, opera, that would satisfy the demand of audiences and allowed them to maintain or increase the prestige of the theatre, and the profits derived from it.

This environment provided a medium in which composers could show off their artistic quality and to receive also a suitable salary. However, since in many cases the remuneration was not very high, the composers were often forced to carry out other tasks to complement it, such as directing theatres, giving music classes, etc. Nevertheless, to compose operas provided them with a certain prestige and over time allowed composers to improve their economic situation.

To achieve this goal, it was necessary for an opera composer to gain fame and popularity through his works, and this usually happened after enough successes. In this way, impresarios would take notice of Rossini and demand his works, and thus, over time, Rossini achieved higher remunerations and better conditions. Among other things, this meant interesting the public and critics with his product, which required not only a good musical score, but also good singers and a good libretto. This was especially important in Paris, where composers were paid according to the number of performances of their work, unlike in Italy.

Rossini not only earned a significant amount of money but also achieved a great popularity. According to Till¹³, Alexandre Dumas father in 1832 gave a costume ball attended by most of French society. Rossini appeared dressed as Figaro, attracting most of the attention. Later, when Rossini returned to Paris in 1843 after a long period of absence, it was said that 2,000 people queued to visit him over a period of two months. And in 1855 when Rossini returned to Paris for the last time, the two topics of discussion were the Crimean War and Rossini's return.

However, he also received numerous criticisms. Radiciotti¹⁴ points out that it is difficult to find a composer more maligned than Rossini, although it must also be considered that on occasions Rossini contributes to feeding some of these images that sometimes transmit messages of self-absorption¹⁵. In an article published in the *Revue Musicale* of January 1847, Louis Desnoyers pointed out that Rossini had been described with the

¹³ Till, *Rossini*, 12.

¹⁴ Giuseppe Radiciotti, *Gioacchino Rossini. Vita Documentata Opere Ed Influenza Su L'arte. Vol. III* (Tivoli: Arti grafiche majella di Aldo Chicca, 1929), 9.

¹⁵ Ruben Vernazza, "L'ozio Di Rossini: Un Problema Político Transnazionale Nella Parigi Degli Anni Trenta Dell'Ottocento," *Bollettino Del Centro Rossiniano Di Studi* anno LX (2020): 99–126, 124.

following adjectives¹⁶: insensitive, selfish, envious, avaricious, and lazy. The journalist pointed out the unfairness of these adjectives, since the composer always showed great affection for his parents and had helped some singers and composers who asked him for support.

In general terms, the criticism that Rossini received can be divided into three aspects: his music, his laziness, and his desire to make money. Regarding his music, Gossett states that great deal of criticisms tried also to trivialize Rossini's works and cast doubt on his seriousness as an artist¹⁷.

In addition, he was criticized because sometimes his operas did not contain completely new music, reusing music from previous works (self-borrowing). Alberto Zedda notes that, if Rossini's self-borrowing could be considered an act of cynicism, instead it had extraordinarily convincing results, indicating a surprising expressive versatility in Rossini language¹⁸. On the other hand, Gossett¹⁹ suggests that, given that very few operas survived over time, it is not surprising that Rossini treated the first ones he composed as repositories for musical ideas that he could use later.

In his old age, Rossini must have been aware of the importance of this criticism. Faced with Ricordi's idea of publishing the vocal scores of all of Rossini's works, the composer was not very pleased with the project, as he wrote in a letter to Giovanni Ricordi dated December 14, 1864²⁰, indicating that such edition will generate, justifiably, much criticism, since the same musical pieces will be found in different works. Rossini indicates two reasons that justify him having to recourse to self-borrowing. First, the little time he had to compose the opera. Second, the need for money, since composing was the only means of subsistence for his parents and his poor family.

A second criticism, somewhat related to the first, was Rossini's laziness. It was considered that because of this indolence he was forced to recourse to self-borrowing. Stendhal²¹ in his *Vie de Rossini* presents an anecdote about this laziness. During the winter of 1813, Rossini was said to compose in bed. He had finished a Duetto and the sheet of music paper fell to the ground, slipping under the bed. Unable to pick up the sheet without getting

¹⁶ Louis Desnoyers, *De l'Opéra En 1847, à Propos de Robert Bruce, Des Directions Passées* (Paris: Imprimerie de F. B. Delanchy, 1847), 8-9.

¹⁷ Philip Gossett, "Compositional Methods," in *The Cambridge Companion to Rossini*, ed. Emanuele Senici (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 68–84, 68.

¹⁸ Alberto Zedda, *A Life with Rossini* (Milano: Ricordi, 2017), 37.

¹⁹ Gossett, "Compositional Methods", 81

²⁰ Gioacchino Rossini, *Lettere Inedite e Rare Di G. Rossini*, ed. Giuseppe Mazzatinti (Imola: Ignazio Galeati e Figlio, 1892), 174-175.

²¹ Stendhal, *Vie de Rossini*, 433.

out of bed and because of the cold, he thought the best thing he could do was to rewrite it, since he remembered what he had written. However, he could not recall any note and after a quarter of an hour he decided to compose a new Duetto. As Gossett²² points out, this anecdote, rather than emphasizing Rossini's laziness, actually shows his extraordinary creativity.

Stendhal, for his part, points out that a lack of money could explain this behavior. He wrote that Rossini justified not getting up to pick up the sheet of music to his lack of money, since, from Rossini's point of view, rich composers can have their rooms heated and, therefore, get up whenever they wish.

The criticism of laziness accompanied Rossini throughout his life. This may partly be due to the evolution of society at that time. In a commercial society in which the bourgeoisie was relevant and economic ideas focused on creating and making companies more and more productive, to generate greater economic growth and social well-being, it was not accepted that Rossini, who had shown an important compositional capacity, should stop composing²³. So, Rossini's detractors had an argument to show that the composer did not collaborate with those ideals that supported the basis and evolution of the social well-being.

After his operatic silence, critics began to focus more on a third criticism: his wealth and the remuneration he had received. Isaiah Berlin²⁴ affirms that the figure who dominated the nineteenth century is Beethoven in his garret, poor, rude, with bad manners, but he has not sold out. Beethoven in his garret created new works, according to the inspiration he has. The Rossini of the French period was nothing like the Beethoven described by Berlin. Rossini did not work in his garret, but in well-located apartments in Paris; and he was very well paid. In addition, Rossini had been seen going to the Paris stock exchange to carry out financial operations.

Some of the Rossini's caricatures published in the newspapers depicted him dressed as a bourgeois and surrounded by money. It is true that Rossini always concerned about money. It was a constant in his life. In his youth, he suffered the consequences of poverty, which left a strong impression on him that motivated him to seek the means to achieve economic security to satisfy his needs and help his parents, as well as to improve his social situation and ensure a future free of uncertainty. This interest in obtaining

²² Gossett, "Compositional Methods", 68

²³ Vernazza, "L'ozio Di Rossini: Un Problema Político Transnazionale Nella Parigi Degli Anni Trenta Dell'Ottocento", 102

²⁴ Isaiah Berlin, *The Roots of Romanticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 15.

money made some of his contemporaries, such as Stendhal²⁵, consider him greedy. Balzac was also of the same opinion, but Balzac justified Rossini's avarice by the hardships that the composer was through²⁶. The Spanish writer Alarcón, who visited Paris, echoed these comments:

"It is said - I neither believe nor conceive it - that Rossini has never had a heart, nor affection for art, nor faith in anything immaterial, nor serious love, nor respect of any kind. It is said that his only passion has been avarice, his only ideal gold, his only God the franc...-I repeat that I do not believe it."²⁷

But there were also positive comments on Rossini's behavior about money. For example, Sutherland Edwards²⁸ states that Rossini "was neither extravagant nor penurious" and that he gratefully ceded his author's right to the "Société des Compositeurs de Musique."

Finally, Soubies²⁹ justifies Rossini's interest in earning a lot of money by the need to maintain the luxurious standard of living to which his wife was accustomed, but it must be considered that this was an objective he had set for himself from a young age, because he wanted to maintain a high standard of living that would allow him to buy fine wines, collect luxury items, etc.

Rossini was precisely going to rely on economic aspects, basically on the wealth he achieved, to justify his decision to stop composing operas. In 1862, the painter Guglielmo De Sanctis³⁰, who visited Rossini in Paris and published his memories of the composer, wrote that Rossini told him that if he had had children, he would not have stopped composing despite his

"natural inclination to laziness, but being alone and having enough to live comfortably, I never abandoned my purpose! neither for offer of profits, nor for the flattery of honors. Impresarios, kings, emperors, often have tempted me in every way. Besides, he added, (...) retiring in time requires genius too."

²⁵ Stendhal, *Correspondance de Stendhal, (1800-1842)*. Tome Deuxième, ed. Ad. Paupe and P.A. Cheramy (Paris: Charles Bosse, 1908), 164.

²⁶ Honoré de Balzac, *Lettres à Madame Hanska, (1832-1850)*, Tome II, ed. Roger Pierrot, Bouquins (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1990), 263.

²⁷ Pedro Antonio Alarcón, *De Madrid a Nápoles* (Madrid: Imprenta y librería de Gaspar y Roig, 1861), 64.

²⁸ Henry Sutherland Edwards, *The Life of Rossini* (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1869), 5.

²⁹ Albert Soubies, *Le Théâtre Italien de 1801 à 1913* (Paris: Librairie Fischbacher, 1913), 30.

³⁰ Guglielmo De Sanctis, *Gioacchino Rossini: Appunti Di Viaggio* (Roma: E. Sinimberghi, 1878), 10.

Despite the capital Rossini achieved, it was less than that achieved by Meyerbeer, who was considered his direct rival, or by writers and dramatists such as Victor Hugo or Scribe. Gerhard³¹ points out that Meyerbeer calculated his fortune at the end of 1857 at 1,205,732 thalers, equivalent to 4.5 million francs (about 23,000,000 euros), while Victor Hugo reached a wealth of 7 million francs (about 36,000,000 euros) and Scribe 5.7 million francs (about 20,000,000 euros)³². However, Rossini continued to be reproached and criticized for his wealth.

Finally, the economic sphere was also reflected in some of his operas. Some of them echoes aspects of commercial society, questioning them or treating them ironically.

The objective of this book is not to offer a biography of Rossini, but to expose Rossini's relationship with the economic field. Some of the decisions he made, which affected his composing activity, such as focusing his activity in Paris or accepting some operatic commissions, were made largely for economic reasons.

The book has been divided into three parts. The first part deals with the relevant characteristics of the commercial society in which Rossini lived. As explained in chapter 2, this society led to the further growth of countries and made it possible for people to enrich themselves through their skills. This involved, among other things, the shift away from rural life and the introduction of new business that facilitated the generation of wealth and the possibility of even the poorest in society living better than their predecessors. This meant that it was necessary to facilitate the expansion of trade, and this required developing more competitive products, with innovations and advances playing a relevant role.

This process led to the creation of new productive companies and the appearance also of speculative businesses that tried to take advantage of the situation derived from the important structural works that had to be undertaken to expand the railway and other important works in the construction sector. The financing needs required by these new activities led to an increase in banking and stock market activities, that generated great fortunes, although they also sometimes caused fraud and ruin.

Thanks to the division of labour and the entrepreneurship of individuals, societies were more prosperous, economic agents were also richer, and inequalities could be reduced through these greater resources. Due to these positive results, some economists were in favour of less state interventionism,

³¹ Anselm Gerhard, *The Urbanization of Opera* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 38.

³² Violaine Anger, *Giacomo Meyerbeer* (Paris: Bleu Nuit Editeur, 2017), 80.

letting private initiative act without restrictions. The private activity would lead to greater social well-being.

But not everyone had this optimistic vision. Rousseau³³, for example, criticized commercial society because despite it being true that the division of labour generates wealth, it is accompanied by the creation of massive inequalities. Holbach³⁴ claimed that commercial activity tends to benefit very few, generating significant inequalities of income. This inequality and low wages gave rise to significant levels of poverty, especially in Paris. It seemed that the industrializing process that was taking place did not entail the “best of all possible worlds” advocated by liberal economists, and this led to the emergence of alternative approaches, such as that of the Saint-Simonians, who defended the need to develop society (“The society in becoming,” as Saint Simon called it) through the organization of production. As the situation became more complicated, discontent increased, leading to the emergence of revolutionary positions.

Rossini knew how to take advantage of the opportunities that this society offered him, from compositional and financial points of view. But he also showed his discontent with some of his innovations, for example, the train.

The second part of the book, which comprises chapters 3, 4 and 5 focuses on the means that Rossini used to achieve his wealth and his fame. His fortune was reached mainly through three ways. Firstly, by composing operas, which brought him fame and popularity, allowing him to obtain better paid contracts. Secondly, by financial operations. Rossini interacted with some bankers, especially Rothschild and Aguado, to increase his capital through speculative operations, obtaining very good results, although he also liked to speculate directly on the stock market. According to Azevedo³⁵, during the years 1833 and 1834, Rossini seems that he was interested in stock market operations, as he was seen several times on the Paris stock exchange giving orders. He also carried out financial operations involving loans secured by mortgages. Thirdly, Rossini earned income from other activities related to the music. His trip to London had important financial consequences for him, since he earned worthy emoluments from the performance of various galas of his operas, as well as from the invitations from numerous wealthy families, who, to spend an afternoon in their homes, paid him substantial sums. As Rossini remarked to Hiller, who had spent a stay with Rossini in September 1855 in Trouville, a Normandy

³³ Jean Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract or Principles of Political Right* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1895).

³⁴ Baron d’Holbach, Paul Henri Thiri, *Système Social Ou Principes Naturels de La Morale et de La Politique, Vol, II* (Paris: Chez Niogret, 1822).

³⁵ Azevedo, *G. Rossini Sa Vie et Ses Oeuvres*, 298-299.

coastal town and one of France's most exclusive resorts, in conversations, at the age of 63, in his entire life as an artist he had never earned as much money as in England, and only by “showing my nose and listening to my wife”³⁶.

This process has been divided into two parts, analysed in chapters 3 and 4. Chapter 3 focuses on the activity he developed mainly in Italy. From a young age, Rossini was always concerned with earning enough income to maintain a certain standard of living, to build up a savings fund for his old age and helping his parents. Rossini tried to achieve this goal by obtaining advantageous contracts to compose operas, seeking also to create through his successes what today we would call a “Rossini brand,” (Galindo and Méndez, 2023, 95), which would provide him with the monetary resources he needed, as well as allowing him to establish relations with the ruling, political and bourgeois elites.

It was also during this period that he carried out financial operations in which he demonstrated great skill and knowledge of the stock market, and began to learn the ins and outs of managing an opera house, obliged by the contract signed in Naples with the impresario Barbaja. It should also be noted that he earned a great deal of money by investing in Barbaja's gambling business.

Chapter 4 focuses on his activities in London and Paris. Despite his fame and the significant income, he was earning in Italy, he sought new markets to increase his fame. The exceptional reception he received in Vienna possibly encouraged him to take that step, and he set his attention on the two most prosperous cities at that time: London and Paris, finally opting for the latter. In this period, his attention focused on obtaining an annuity and financial activities, especially after the premiere of his *Guillaume Tell*, which marked his retirement from composition.

It is also important to note that Rossini became a kind of King Midas. Everything associated with his name was synonymous with success and profits. In modern terms, it would be said that he had created a successful commercial brand and many people benefited of this. Chapter 5 shows that Rossini's fame was so important that businessmen, financiers, politicians, singers, etc., used his name to obtain favours and profits that would otherwise have been very difficult to obtain. His name was a symbol of sales. Music publishers tried to edit his works; some financiers, like Aguado, took him with them on their old business trips, because this facilitated contacts and agreements with governments, etc. His fame and influence had gone beyond the musical sphere, reaching the field of commercial relations and business.

³⁶ Ferdinand Hiller, *Conversations with Rossini* (London: Pallas Athene, 2018), 19.

The third part of the book focuses on some of the economic aspects that appear in his operas, which will be discussed in the following three chapters. In this respect, there is a generally unfavourable opinion regarding the librettos of some of the operas that he composed, as the plot was sometimes not well developed. While it is true in the case of some operas, there are also other operas whose librettos were written by very prestigious librettists of their time and of a quality above than average, in which deeper themes were dealt with and economic issues were considered. Specifically, there are three economic aspects to be considered in the librettos of Rossini's operas and they will be analysed in chapters 6, 7 and 8.

First, the dynamics of commercial transactions. The expansion of trade required mainly three aspects. First, entrepreneurs to have adequate information about their activity. Second, facilities to be able to make payments, without having to transfer cash from one country to another, due to the significant risks involved in transport. Third, to have commercial agents in the countries with which they traded, who would be responsible for carrying out the orders they received. These three relevant features of commercial dynamics are considered in a comical way in the first opera that Rossini premiered, *La Cambiale di matrimonio* (1810), and will be discussed in chapter 6. In this opera, the object of commercial transaction is not a good or service, but a woman, the daughter of the correspondent Tobia Mill, who constitutes the payment for the bill of exchange to which the title refers. In an ironic way, the different aspects related to the businesses at that time are exposed: accounting, the language used in business letters, capital, etc.

On the other hand, as commercial society developed and new types of products appeared, advertising began to play a relevant role in increasing demand by informing the public about the characteristics of the goods. In this sense, newspapers were of great importance. As in the case of *La Cambiale di matrimonio*, Rossini in his opera *La gazzetta* (1816) again changes the good or service that is usually described in advertisements, for marriage. In this case, the merchant Don Pomponio inserts an advertisement in the press informing that he is looking for a husband for his daughter, Lisetta, giving a description of her, and setting out the requirements that potential suitors must meet. Lisetta's father believes that the advertisement will attract many applicants, which will allow him to choose the best among them and set the best price, represented by Lisetta's dowry.

Second, there are two factors that influence the evolution of commercial society and that have not traditionally been the object of attention: the entrepreneur and the passions. The first of them will be discussed in chapter 7. Thanks to commercial activity and the wealth it generates, this new

society encourages the appearance of new trading activities, resulting, in turn, in the emergence of a novel figure, the entrepreneur. In *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* two different types of entrepreneurs are presented: Figaro and Don Basilio. Figaro represents the modern entrepreneur, ready to use his skills and to adopt all the necessary innovations to achieve his goals. His ingenuity allows him to develop three activities: barber, matchmaker and bearer of letters and messages. As for his barber's activity, his main innovations consist of a modern store with novelties for the time, such as an illuminated shop window to display his wigs. This Schumpeterian entrepreneurial behaviour seems to be successful, and thanks to his innovation-genius he destroys the competition, in what the Austrian economist Schumpeter³⁷ called "destructive creation," as Figaro seems to indicate in the recitative that follows his cavatina "Largo al factotum," saying that, in Seville, without his intervention, no young woman married. Opposite Figaro is Don Basilio. His methods are less ethical, he advises slandering the Count, he is avaricious and does not seem to employ innovations in his business.

The third and last aspect to consider is the role of passions which will be analysed in chapter 8. Classical thinkers considered that it was essential to maintain social harmony, since it leads us to happiness. Therefore, any behaviour that could endanger it or make it disappear must be avoided at all costs. Throughout history, an important literature has been developed that shows the need for harmony to exist in societies so that they can progress properly without generating problems that could severely damage their evolution. Thanks to this harmony is possible to reach what Voltaire called "the best of all worlds" in the criticism of Leibniz in his famous story *Candide*.

Passions are one of the factors that could affect the harmony of society. Spinoza considered that the social well-being is achieved through reason. Specifically, he points out that men are subject to passions, and that as long as they do not control them, they cannot live in harmony (harmonious) with nature. Only through reason do they act in accordance with the rules and order of nature³⁸. Thus, there is the possibility that our "best possible world" is disrupted when reason is not used, leading to disorders that disturb happiness.

³⁷ Joseph Alois Schumpeter, *The Theory of Economic Development: : An Inquiry into Profits, Capital, Credit, Interest and Business Cycle* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1911); Joseph Alois Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* (New York: Harper & Brother Publishers, 1950).

³⁸ Baruch Spinoza, *Ethics* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth, 2001), Part Four, propositions, 32-35.

This is especially important when passions and not reason influence the decisions of the ruler since it affects the society's economy, welfare, and happiness. The passions that the ruler has can lead him to make wrong decisions that cause undesired consequences. But they can also affect the business sphere, regarding the way a business activity is conducted. Both aspects are also considered in some of the librettos of Rossini's operas.

As far as government is concerned, the French economist, writer, and member of the French magistrate, Frédéric Bastiat³⁹, pointed out that the laws enacted by rulers can be detrimental to the activities of individuals, making it difficult to achieve the harmony sought by society. Due to this, Erasmus, for example, pointed out the need to prevent the king from becoming a tyrant, since among other things:

“The tyrant strives to be feared; the king to be loved. The tyrant looks upon nothing with greater suspicion than the harmonious agreement of good men and of cities among...”⁴⁰

Therefore, it is essential to have good advisors to avoid falling into bad government.

This problem is considered by Rossini in different operas such as *La Cenerentola* or *Elisabetta Regina d'Inghilterra*, where it is shown that the opposition between passions and the use of reason prevents problems arising in governance. In the case of *La Cenerentola*, the possible passions that Don Ramiro may have would be counteracted by the Angelina's goodness. In *Elisabetta*, the Queen contrasts the motivating factor of her passion, love, with other more beneficial factors to govern glory and piety.

But in contrast to the negative aspects of passions there are other positive facets to be considered from the business environment point of view. This depends on the type of passion that led to the economic activity. In this sense, two types of passions can be considered: the harmonious and the obsessive⁴¹. In the former, the person considers that the entrepreneurial activity is important to him/her, while in the latter, the person develops the

³⁹ Frédéric Bastiat, *Economic Sophisms*, in *The Bastiat Collection* (Alabama: Ludwig Von Mises Institute 2007, 1845), 169-430, 180-182.

⁴⁰ Erasmus, *The Education of a Christian Prince* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1968), 164.

⁴¹ Robert J. Vallerand et al., “Les Passions de l'Âme: On Obsessive and Harmonious Passion,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 85, no. 4 (2003): 756–67, <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.85.4.756>.

activity for the results he/she will obtain from it, such as social acceptance (for example)⁴².

In *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* both types of passions can be found in the entrepreneurial characters. While the passion that guides Figaro would be basically harmonious, that of Don Basilio would be essentially obsessive.

Finally, an additional aspect to consider is the role played by hubris. In general terms, the ancient Greeks labelled hubris as an excessive pride and arrogance that exceeded established limits⁴³ and endangered social stability, so that those who engaged in it had to be severely punished.

This negative aspect is often reflected in the realm of governance and there are also examples of it in some Rossini's operas. In *Ermione*, where the protagonists, throughout the work, show a major conflict of interests motivated by their respective prides and passions, leading to their own destruction and significant political instability. It can also be observed in *Torvaldo e Dorliska*, where the villagers consider the Count, who is a violent man, as a tyrant, and in the end, tired of his actions, they rebel, arrest him, and condemn him to death. And finally in *Armida*, whose protagonist, queen of Damascus and sorceress, in love with the crusader knight Rinaldo, destroys her palace when she feels wounded in her pride after being abandoned by the knight.

Finally, chapter 9 is dedicated to conclusions, referring to Rossini's inheritance, how it was distributed and the attempts to maintain the memory of Rossini and his work.

To convert the prices and wages of the different currencies that appear in the chapters to prices and wages valued in euros in 2024, we have chosen the franc as the base. To do this, we compared the prices of a basket of early 19th-century products, for which we have information from some novels, letters, and guidebooks published in that period, with the 2024 prices of a similar basket of products and an average has been established. To obtain the value of the rest of the currencies that appear in the text (pounds, ducats, etc.), the relationships established in various letters and documents between

⁴² Secil Bayraktar and Alfredo Jiménez, "Friend or Foe? The Effects of Harmonious and Obsessive Passion on Entrepreneurs' Well-Being, Strain and Social Loneliness," *Cross Cultural and Strategic Management* 29, no. 2 (2022): 320–48, <https://doi.org/10.1108/CCSM-03-2021-0056>; Akuraun Shadrach Iyortsuun and Comfort Shakpande, "Passion, Persistence, and Firm Growth: Moderating Role of Environmental Uncertainty," *BRQ Business Research Quarterly*, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1177/23409444211070297>.

⁴³ Carlo Bordonì, *Hubris and Progress. A Future Born of Presumption* (London: Routledge, 2019).

these currencies and the franc have been accepted. The estimates obtained are similar to those proposed in other publications, for example, that of Weinstock in his Rossini's biography.

CHAPTER 2

THE COMMERCIAL SOCIETY

2.1 Introduction

Rossini was born at the end of the eighteenth century. At beginning of this century, the economy of the countries was basically agricultural and peasants with scarce resources owned or rented a plot of land to cultivate. In certain circumstances and cases, improvements were introduced to increase the fertility of the land and thus increase production. In general terms, agriculture provided the means of subsistence for the commercial systems that were emerging in Europe. But during the eighteenth century in some countries, and especially in Britain, a series of innovations were introduced that led to the emergence of a new mode of production, the factory system, which generated a rapid increase in productivity and per capita income, also giving rise to a feedback effect, since the higher income generated an increase in consumption which in turn stimulated supply to increase its production and provide new types of products⁴⁴. The eighteenth century was for most European countries a period of prosperity and economic expansion that would correspond to the optimism expressed by Voltaire's Dr. Pangloss⁴⁵.

Due to this process, which was called the industrial revolution, radical changes occurred in human and commercial relations, generating new production and trade possibilities. This process produced a greater quantity of goods and services to satisfy demand. But also, this procedure facilitated the introduction of technological advances that modified production processes.

One of the consequences of this process was the significant growth of both internal and external trade throughout this century. International trade continued to grow to a greater extent from the last two decades of the eighteenth century. If during between 1720 and 1789 it had more than

⁴⁴ David Landes, *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations* (London: Abacus, 1998), 186.

⁴⁵ Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution. Europe 1789-1848* (London: Phoenix Press, 2010), 55.

doubled in valour, in the period between 1780-1840 it had increased more than threefold.⁴⁶ Technological advances made it easier to connect different markets, lowering costs, making transportation safer and reducing the time necessary to transport a product from one place to another. This gave producers the opportunity to access to new market niches and encouraged them to try to make their products more competitive, changing production systems and continuing to introduce innovations. This was accompanied by greater demand from the population, so that entrepreneurs could recover their costs through the payments they received from the sale of their products. As a result, new needs arose and therefore, new opportunities to develop products to satisfy them.

From the point of view of internal trade, this implied the appearance of ports specialized in the coastal trade, as would be the case of Pesaro, the city where Rossini was born and the emergence of a financial class that provided the necessary resources to develop this activity. From the external point of view, in general terms trade was carried out with European countries and with the colonies that provided the raw materials necessities in the production processes.

All these processes promoted the development of the commercial society, which is characterized by the leading role of the commerce since through its production is stimulated to satisfy a greater number of needs.

For Rossini, the process described above had two consequences. First, given that the increase in income of a part of the population modified their consumption and their way of life, there were important changes in the tastes and needs of consumers that led to an increase in the supply of goods and services, not only in quantity, but also in variety, leading to the development of new products to satisfy new needs. Among these changes, it is worth considering the new attitudes towards culture. People with high income was more interested to travel to other countries to admire their natural and artistic resources. This interest was a stimulus to entrepreneurs to supply more theatrical plays and operas to satisfy their leisure needs.

Second, financing needs also increased, both for companies, which had to finance new production processes and innovations, and for household, which wanted to purchase the new goods and services supplied by the firms. This meant the expansion of credit and investment markets.

Rossini took advantage of both circumstances. On the one hand, he contributed to satisfying the increased demand for leisure goods and services, through innovative operatic compositions. This allowed him to

⁴⁶ Eric J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Capital 1848-1875* (London: Phoenix Press, 2010), 49.

achieve rapid fame and earn a significant amount of money, partly because he was able to create a kind of brand, the “Rossini brand,” with his works.

And, on the other hand, Rossini also took advantage of the financial markets and commercial activity, investing in the stock market and lending money at an interest rate above the existing inflation, thus making the resources obtained with his works profitable.

However, Rossini also criticized some aspects of this society in his operas and comments, as will be seen later in chapters 6, 7 and 8, especially regarding some technological advances, such as railways and lighting. To understand his opinion about the economic activity, it is necessary to know the essential elements of commercial society as well as the positive and negative effects of the commercial activity.

2.2 Commercial society characteristics

The Industrial Revolution was broadly characterized by the emergence of a process of industrialization and technological advances that led the countries where it developed to experience a process of economic growth that generated great prosperity. Bairoch⁴⁷ points out that the economic growth experienced by European countries during the nineteenth century was very rapid compared to that of previous centuries. While during the period between 1500-1800 per capita income grew between 0.2-0.3 percent, during the period 1830-1910 the per capita Gross National Product grew 0.9 percent per year. Fontana⁴⁸ shows that the growth of gross national product in Europe increased annually by around 1.42% in the 1830s and 1.43% in the 1840s. Considering the GDP per capita of Great Britain, France, Germany, and Italy, during the period 1820-1870, the highest level corresponded to Great Britain, followed by France, with Italy occupying last place.

One of the consequences of process is that it led to an evolution that, according to the Scottish Enlightenment, was the transition from a society of hunters, characterized by a low level of production, to a society in which commerce became the dominant activity, giving great relevance to

⁴⁷ Paul Bairoch, “Europe’s Gross National Product: 1800–1975,” *Journal of European Economic History* 5, no. 2 (1976): 273–340, 276-277.

⁴⁸ Giovanni Luigi Fontana, “The Economic Development of Europe in the Nineteenth Century (I): Growth and Transformation of the Economy,” in *An Economic History of Europe: From Expansion to Development*, ed. Antonio di Vittorio (Abington: Routledge, 2006), 135–53, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203002605>, 141.

improvement process⁴⁹. The Scottish Enlightenment believed in a society where individuals could obtain wealth through their skills and industry, which would lead to a more prosperous society. Such a society would spread among countries in which there would be division of labour and a significant mobility of production factors.⁵⁰ In this process, trade would play an important role, since, as Voltaire⁵¹ stated that this activity enriches the English and makes them freer.

This commercial society, which spread across many countries during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, generated such major economic impacts that Montesquieu, in his *Spirit of the Laws*, said that while the Greeks had spoken of virtue, currently people only spoke of “commerce, finance, wealth and even luxury”⁵². It was the exodus from rural life and the introduction of new business, which encouraged the generation of wealth and the possibility of even the poor living better than their predecessors. Normally, commercial society refers to a society of traders or of market economic agents in general, in which there is great commercial activity⁵³. Adam Smith⁵⁴ describes this society as follows,

“Society may subsist among different men, as among different merchants, from a sense of its utility, without any mutual love or affection; and though no man in it should owe any obligation, or be bound in gratitude to any other, it may still be upheld by a mercenary exchange of good offices according to an agreed valuation.”

Also, sometimes the concept “commercial society” is used to refer to an economy in which consumption plays an essential role, in which people are interested in achieving a certain social status measured by the type of goods

⁴⁹ Christopher Berry, *The Idea of Commercial Society in the Scottish Enlightenment* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 208.

⁵⁰ Dennis C. Rasmussen, *The Problems and Promise of Commercial Society* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2008), 18.

⁵¹ Voltaire, *Letters Concerning the English Nation* (London: C. Davis and A. Lyon, 1733), 69.

⁵² Baron de Montesquieu, Charles Louis de Secondat, *De L'esprit Des Loix. Oeuvres Completes Vol. II*, Bibliothèque de La Pleiade (Paris: Gallimard 2008, 1748), book 3 Chap. 3.

⁵³ Istvan Hont, *Politics in Commercial Society. Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Adam Smith* (Cambridge Mass: Harvard University Press, 2015), 2.

⁵⁴ Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (London: Henry G. Bohn 1853, 1759), 124.

and services they consume, having a special interest in the consumption of luxury goods⁵⁵.

Despite the lack of affection mentioned by Smith between individuals in this society, which generates problems in individuals' relationships and despite the criticisms enunciated by certain thinkers such as Rousseau, Smith and his followers emphasise the beneficial effects of this society in terms of wealth and prosperity, especially in comparison to the types of society which had emerged in the preceding centuries. In general terms, commercial society, thanks to the extraordinary productivity it generates, leads to all individuals being in better situation. In this sense, Adam Smith, following Locke, states that although some earn more than others, even the most disadvantaged are in a better position compared to the situation in which they would have been during previous stages of society⁵⁶.

Not only Adam Smith showed the benefits of commercial activity. The French philosopher, Étienne Bonnot, Abbé de Condillac (1714-1780), in his book *Commerce and Government* (published in 1776), considered one of the most relevant publications on political economy of its age and only eclipsed at the time of publication by Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*, describes how trade increases the wealth of nations⁵⁷. Wealth is increased because the merchants

“are channels of communication through which the surplus runs”⁵⁸.

Thanks to commercial activity and the wealth generated, this new society encourages the appearance of new trading activities⁵⁹, a new social elite emerged, the merchants, whose main objective was to generate the necessary resources to support their families and continue improving their business. And their commercial activity was expanded to other territories.

As the merchants increase their incomes, the money earned will be used not only to satisfy the usual needs for food, clothing, and housing, but also for leisure. This is an attraction for new entrepreneurs who want to satisfy these new needs. Thus, the demand for cultural goods increased, as these goods were now demanded not only by the nobility, but also by the

⁵⁵ Paul Sagar, *Adam Smith Reconsidered. History, Liberty, and the Foundations of Modern Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2022).

⁵⁶ Adam Smith, *Lectures on Justice, Police, Revenue and Arms* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1896), 207.

⁵⁷ Étienne B. Condillac, *Commerce and Government Considered in Their Mutual Relationship* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund 2008, 1776), First Part, Chap. 6.

⁵⁸ Condillac, 121.

⁵⁹ Samuel Gregg, *The Commercial Society. Foundations and Challenges in a Global Age* (Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2007), 16.

merchants themselves. This is a changing and demanding demand that forces both entrepreneurs and composers to offer new works, and those who know how to satisfy better with the public demand will obtain the greatest benefits. It is not an easy task, but Rossini who traditionally studied the tastes of audiences, was the most likely to succeed.

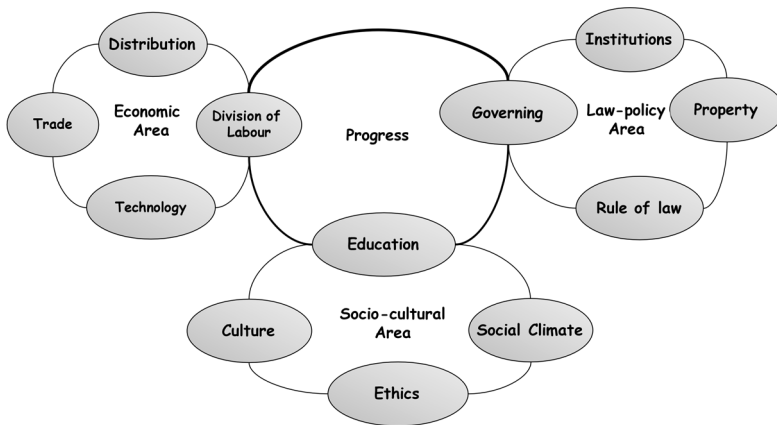
This process that the countries experienced had important implications on the economic and political relations that they maintained, as their objectives were directed towards achieving greater power and prosperity. This led to policymakers to design and to modify their economic policies and objectives to try to improve the nation's prosperity. And this prosperity would help to avoid or to reduce social tensions. Some nations, such as France, believed that political power was supported by economic growth and by the accumulation of wealth⁶⁰. But they also comprehended that all these measures had to consider the effects they would have on other areas of society, such as education, the institutions behaviour, etc., so that social tensions could arise, having negatively affect the progress they were trying to achieve.

To improve the quantitative and qualitative social means, that is, to progress, it was necessary to consider the relationships and effects of at least three areas, the economic, the socio-cultural, and the law-political, on society and how the changes in one of these are would able to disturb to the other two areas. Decisions taken in one of these areas, for example market legislation, would affect one of the other two areas, depending on how the measure was adopted, favouring, or slowing down, the expansion of that area. For example, an improvement of the rule of law (law-political area) would enhance entrepreneurs' activities (economic area). It is therefore important to consider the main factors influencing each of these areas, as shown in Figure 2.1 (based on Fontela and Guzman's⁶¹ development virtuous/vicious circles).

As far as the economic area is concerned, four factors can be considered: trade, technology, division of labour and distribution. According to Adam Smith and his followers, the economic sphere was positively affected by the higher productivity generated by the division of labour, that is, the specialization of labour that is achieved by fragmenting the production process of goods and services into different tasks to be performed by workers specialized in them, and the introduction of new technologies. This increased production is distributed in the markets through trade, increasing the wealth of the nations and of the individuals.

⁶⁰ Landes, *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations*, 220-221.

⁶¹ Emilio Fontela and Joaquín Guzmán, "La Teoría Circular Del Desarrollo. Un Enfoque Complejo," *Estudios de Economía Aplicada* 21, no. 2 (2003): 221-42.

Figure 2.1 Commercial Society

Source: Own elaboration

This positive process required an appropriate legal framework, considered in the second area, law-policy area. An adequate rule of law was needed, since without an administration of justice that protected property, it would not be possible for commerce to prosper. Alongside this, proper governance and institutions are also necessary.

Both areas are complemented and influenced by the existence of a sociocultural environment that favours the above, the socio-cultural area. There must be adequate education and training to be able to assume and take advantage of the technological advances that are being generated, a social climate that promotes business activities and avoids social tensions, and finally, social values must be established through ethics.

The interaction of these factors and areas leads to society to progress and to become increasingly prosperous, generating virtuous circles that lead to higher levels of wealth, with more resources to distribute among the components of that society.

In this process there are two factors that play a relevant role: the entrepreneur and passions. Thanks to commercial activity and the wealth it generates, this new society encourages the appearance of new trading activities, resulting, in turn, in the emergence of a novel figure, the entrepreneur. The entrepreneur will supervise developing productive activity, generating employment, and stimulating economic growth. Considering existing risks and uncertainty, the entrepreneur will provide the goods and services to satisfy demand. For all these reasons, it is a factor that is of great importance in promoting the progress of society.