

PAOLO RUSSO

The “cori d’accompagnamento”.
Towards a dramaturgy of “bell’ornamento”

“A completely different form is the modern aria... with slow or not so slow movements and with its respective *ritornelli*, intermixed... sometimes with choruses: ending with the so-called cabaletta, which, again interwoven with choruses, is heard at least twice.¹”

The chorus interwoven with the aria, therefore: a new feature in 19th-century opera, one increasingly tending to articulate and permeate the musical number.² By 1836 it was viewed as a customary way of using the chorus in opera.³ As vocal pieces “for three, four or more voices, doubled and performed with or without orchestra, having as their object that of expressing the feelings of an entire multitude of people”, the choruses could in fact be “*concertati*” and “therefore form by themselves a piece of music” or be choruses “*d’accompagnamento*, which play a subordinate role in an aria and sometimes enter only in the final cadences”.⁴

¹ PIETRO LICHTENTHAL, *Dizionario e bibliografia della musica*, Milano, Fontana, 1836, I, under the entry “Aria”.

² “Elements that in 18th-century opera seria had been kept separate one from the other – solos, chorus ensemble, recitative – in the first decades of the 19th century undergo a process of fusion, the essential stages of which can be detected in the operas of Mayr and Rossini. Around 1839 we find a complex architecture in which the solo part, that of the chorus and that of the ensemble are accentuated in alternation. The gamut of possible realizations ranges from the solo aria (by then rare and represented above all by the romanza) through the normal aria (which uses the chorus between its sections and in the cabaletta) up to the so-called aria with chorus (like Oroveso’s “Ah del Tebro” in the second act of *Norma*) and the so-called *aria con pertichini* (...), also developing in the direction of the genuine ensembles. In the area of passage from the *aria con pertichini* to the genuine ensemble (with chorus) we find pieces like the conclusion of the second finale of *Norma* or the already mentioned *largo* in the first act of *I Puritani*. In this area of passage the public was not always capable of finding its bearings”: FRIEDRICH LIPPMANN, “Lo stile belliniano in ‘Norma’”, in *Opera e libretto I*, Firenze, Olschki, 1990, pp. 211-234: 211.

³ In spite of its acknowledged importance, the use of the chorus in Italian 19th-century opera has not been greatly studied. Nonetheless, see BEATE HANNEMANN, “Canti rivoluzionari e culto del sole: l’opera rivoluzionaria e massonica al teatro La Fenice 1797-1815”, in “*L’aere è fosco, il ciel s’imbruna*”. *Arti e musica a Venezia dalla fine della Repubblica al Congresso di Vienna*, a cura di Francesco Passadore e Franco Rossi, Venezia, Fondazione Levi, 2000, pp. 299-314, PHILIP GOSSETT, “Becoming a citizen: the chorus in Risorgimento opera”, in *Cambridge Opera Journal*, II/1, 1990, pp. 41-64 and JAMES PARAKILAS, “Political representation and chorus in nineteenth-century opera”, in *19th Century Music*, XVI/2, 1992, pp. 181-202.

⁴ LICHTENTHAL, *Dizionario*, under the entry “Coro”.

“Subordinate”, “present only in the final cadences”, yet nonetheless features of the “modern aria”: if one compares the entries for “aria” and “chorus” in Pietro Lichtenthal’s *Dizionario e bibliografia della musica* one is hard pressed to find a clear dramatic conception of the chorus in opera. Though its presence is undisputed, it is not always clear what its function is, above all when it takes part in the solo arias.

According to Lichtenthal⁵ the chorus had entered opera adopting the Greek model, but was used sparingly by Zeno and Metastasio, and then prevalently in “certain solemn occasions, e.g. sacrifices, celebrations, triumphs, etc.” It was then revived by Gluck, who restored to it

that eminent position that it still occupies with the great composers: ... “il faut l’avoir vu, à ces répétitions, d’un bout du théâtre à l’autre, pousser, tirer, entraîner par les bras, prier, gronder, cajoler tour à tour les choristes, hommes et femmes, surpris de se voir mener ainsi, et passant de la surprise à la docilité, de la docilité à une expression, à des effets qui les échauffaient eux-mêmes, et leur communiquaient une partie de l’âme du compositeur; il faut l’avoir vu dans ce violent exercice, pour sentir toutes les obligations que lui a notre théâtre...”⁶

If, however, we observe how the chorus participates and interweaves with the soloists in one of the most famous operas of those years, this opinion does not seem fully justified. In his *Norma* Bellini almost completely neglects the chorus in the first-act finale, giving it only a few incitements *da dentro* (“Norma, all’ara”). He limits the choral passages to the *introduzione* (no. 1), the second-act finale (no. 8), the prayer “Casta diva” (no. 3) and Oroveso’s aria “Ah del Tebro” (no. 7). It is conjectured that it was Romani who insisted that the role of the chorus should be reduced,⁷ so as to concentrate on the dynamics of the intimate emotional drama, without so much theatrical resonance and “making of noise”.⁸

Far from assuming that active, dynamic role that Lichtenthal attributes to the chorus in modern opera ever since the time of Gluck, in *Norma* it pro-

⁵ On Pietro Lichtenthal, see MARIANGELA DONÀ, “Peter Lichtenthal musicista e musicologo”, in *Ars iocundissima: Festschrift für Kurt Dorfmueller zum 60. Geburtstag*, herausgegeben von Horst Leuchtmann und Robert Münster, Tutzing, Schneider, 1984, pp. 49-63.

⁶ LICHTENTHAL, *ibid.*, here quoting Ginguené: the approximate French spelling is that of Lichtenthal’s original.

⁷ Though doubts about this hypothesis of Scherillo’s are expressed in JOHN ROSSELLI, *Bellini*, Milano, Ricordi, 1995, p. 116.

⁸ Letter from Bellini of 24 August 1832, on which see LIPPMANN, “Lo stile belliniano in ‘Norma’”, p. 214.

vides large, static and solemn sonic tableaux. Only in Oroveso's aria do we find a different attitude. Here the chorus effectively closes the soloist's mouth, thereby reducing his part to that of first coryphaeus and turning the number into a great choral passage. It responds to Oroveso's warlike incitements with fragments drawn from his previous solo number (exs 1a and 1b).

This is the only number in the opera, and then only in the cantabile section,⁹ in which the chorus assumes a leading role without merely forming a picturesque theatrical backdrop.¹⁰ The exception, besides, is clearly motivated by dramatic needs: here the intervention of the chorus serves to connect the private tragedy of the betrayed Norma to the destiny of a people and give it that public significance that prepares from the second-act finale. In short, the political theme replaces what in *Medea*, its 'twin' as a tragedy and a direct literary source for *Norma*, was represented by the savagery of infanticide.¹¹

In fact Romani had had to deal with a similar problem of integrating private drama and collective drama in his very earliest work, when he put his hand to Euripides's tragedy for Mayr's *Medea in Corinto* of 1813,¹² at a time when the choice of Medea as an opera subject betrayed an aspiration to the elevated tragic world and to exemplary public drama. In this case, however, and in contrast with what he would do later in *Norma*, in order to ensure universal significance to this mythical story poured into a tragedy mould, Romani treated the savagery of the infanticide within a monumental dramatic framework and provided a rich presence of choruses.¹³ Since the variety of musical forms corresponds to the variety of situations that each age or each artist sees fit to set to music, the different uses of the chorus in the two operas,

⁹ The aria was to have been complete, but was then cut when the distribution of the voices was revised for Carlo Negrini, who created the role of Oroveso: see DAVID KIMBELL, *Vincenzo Bellini, Norma*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998, pp. 37, 71.

¹⁰ It is "Una delle arie dell'epoca in cui il coro ha qualcosa di proprio da dire": MARIA ROSARIA ADAMO - FRIEDRICH LIPPMANN, *Vincenzo Bellini*, Torino, ERI, 1981, p. 417.

¹¹ Nonetheless, an explicit reminiscence of the theme of infanticide is present also in *Norma*, though the crime is avoided by a very narrow margin. On the literary sources and particularly on the parallel between *Medea* and *Norma*, see, among others, PAOLO CECCHI, "Temi letterari e individuazione melodrammatica in 'Norma' di Vincenzo Bellini", in *Recercare*, IX, 1997, pp. 121-153.

¹² This was Romani's first libretto, produced under the direct supervision of Johann Simon Mayr for the San Carlo of Naples, where the opera was staged in September 1813. On this subject, see my "*Medea in Corinto*" di Felice Romani: storia, fonti e tradizioni di un libretto d'opera, Firenze, Olschki, in press.

¹³ *Norma* is not the only 19th-century opera to portray the terrible drama of *Medea* in intimate and 'decorous' tones: the reworkings of Romani's libretto for Selli (Rome 1839) and Mercadante (Naples 1851), like other 19th-century musical and literary *Medea* settings abandon the intenser modes of representing the barbarous princess and resort to more bourgeois, almost quotidian if not even feminine, tones.

and above all the different ways of combining the chorus with the solo number, show how radically the idea of the chorus had changed in just two decades (the decades dominated by the operas of Mayr and Rossini). To appreciate certain stages of this transformation it is sufficient to concentrate on their production for the Teatro San Carlo, a theatre that made a boast of magnificent productions with an abundance of choral moments.

In *Medea in Corinto* the chorus has a substantial presence. It has a genuinely dramatic role and is not merely a picturesque backdrop. It introduces both the acts; its fugatos and exclamations give relief and dramatic substance to the harrowing scenes of the two finales;¹⁴ it gives a sense of the precipitation of events when it echoes “from within”, only later to come on stage; and finally, it becomes interwoven with many of the solo numbers. At times it behaves as a collective character, at others it appears in the garb of furies, or of a people at times joyful, frightened or threatened; in other cases it assumes the functions of messenger. In I,6, in the manner of a Greek chorus, it enjoins Giasone’s bride to go into exile, though its intervention is limited to the scene that introduces Medea’s first cavatina.¹⁵ In II,12-13, on the other hand, it announces to Giasone himself the death of his beloved Creusa and even breaks right into the middle of the aria “Amor, per te penai” (no. 10), while the prince is singing of the serenity he thinks he has achieved.

In this last case the dramatic impact is such that the chorus actually upsets the structures of the solo number: Romani devises metrical sections that would have surprised a spectator accustomed to the Metastasian conventions and expectations, which were still very much in force in 1813.¹⁶ In fact the aria would seem to round off a normal 18th-century operatic scene in which Giasone, alone, has just commented, in *versi sciolti*, on his own good fortune in love. The recitative then runs into a quatrain of alternately rhyming *settenari*, which as a rule would be followed by a second symmetrical quatrain for the second section of a normal *da capo* aria. But instead the chorus interrupts *da dentro* (from within) and calls for help: to the two *ottonari* of the chorus’s appeal Giasone responds to conclude the second quatrain of the aria. At that point the pace is quickened, shifting from *senari* to *ottonari*, and again back

¹⁴ The *topos* of the “terrible”, though referring to a period slightly prior to that of Mayr, has been studied by MICHELA GARDA, “Da ‘Alceste’ a ‘Idomeneo’: le scene terribili nell’opera seria”, *Il Saggiatore musicale*, I, 1994, pp. 335-360.

¹⁵ Already during the first performances Colbran cut the cavatina “O sommi dei”, which was subsequently definitively suppressed from the opera. The introductory scene with the chorus performing a dialogic function, instead remained present in almost all the repeats of the opera, which by that stage lacked the lyrical number.

¹⁶ Romani himself, and Mayr with him, adopts them in this opera in the scenes entrusted to Egeo, Giasone’s rival and the suitor rejected by Creusa.

to *senari* for a long section in which the chorus divulges Creusa's death, Giasone expresses his terror and dismay and finally announces his plans of vengeance. The chorus thus transforms an elegiac scene, that seems to have served to suspend the dramatic events momentarily,¹⁷ into a dynamic scene, compressed by the relentless march of events (see the text at pp. 222-223).

On his part Mayr goes along with Romani's suggestion and sets the first quatrain to a melody in a Mozartian vein, stably rooted in the home key of B flat. Although the regularity of the phrases is varied with introductory motifs and internal repetitions together with belcanto allurements, the two pairs of lines of the first quatrain are basically set to symmetrical phrases of 4 + 4 bars. The entire quatrain is then repeated to a second phrase with an incipit similar to the preceding one: the phraseological symmetry is here upset by a long 10-bar cadential section that expands the second segment (ex. 2). The overall unfolding of this first section can be set out as follows:¹⁸

Moderato¹⁹
 [Orchestral introduction of 19 bb],
 [2 bb.] a₄₊₄⁴ b₄₊₁₄⁰

The structure is typical of the virtuoso aria, containing varied asymmetries that rest on a regular metrical structure, thematic recollections (though not genuine repetitions of the melodic material) and substantial harmonic stability. The intrusion of the chorus from within at b. 49, however, radically changes the form: the exclamations and the fragmented voices of the populace are set in a long, harmonically unstable section that begins in G minor and touches on the keys of C minor, G minor, E flat major, D major and F major before returning to the home key of B flat. Moreover, the chorus sings its lines of the *ottonari* quatrain to music of fours bars each, whereas Giasone uses six bars to conclude his own distich (ex. 3): the balancing of the musical phrase thus requires a repeat of the chorus's first lines to complete the eight bar pattern.

¹⁷ In Romani's direct source, the tragedy *Medea in Corinto* by Domenico Morosini (Venice, 1806), this scene is in fact an elegiac moment that unfolds without particular surprises. It is the following scenes that rapidly direct the emotional climate towards the tragic catastrophe.

¹⁸ With fermatas and rests, the first two bars detach the invocation "Amor" from the first line, giving them an introductory function indicated here in square brackets. The melody proper begins at b. 3 with the paired *settenari* set to regular symmetrical phrases of (2+2) + (2+2) bars each, harmonically balanced in the customary harmonic progression of I-V | V-I.

¹⁹ In this table and in those that follow in the course of the article, the subscript numbers indicate the number of bars, the superscript that of lines sung, with 0 indicating cases of repeated text.

[*Moderato*]

4 bb (chorus, 1 line, G minor) + 4 bb (chorus, 1 line, G minor) + 6 bb (Giasone, 2 lines, C minor) + 2 bb (reprise of the chorus, 1 line, G minor)

The pace of the chorus dilatates the conventional relationship between text and music: while custom would require two lines to be set for every four bars,²⁰ here the orchestra repeats melodic elements between the hemistichs and dilatates the succession of exclamations. Giasone's phrase, on the other hand, is amplified by means of a sort of sequence. The global effect is one of great movement, in contrast with the substantial stability of the first part of the aria.

The same occurs in the musical treatment of the following *lassa*²¹ of *senari* sung by the chorus, by this time on stage and in dialogue with Giasone. Here Mayr adjusts the metrical scheme: he adds a line for Giasone and a few hemistichs for the chorus, thereby reducing the mechanical character of their exchanges:

4 bb (chorus – Giasone, 1 line each, Eb), 4 bb (chorus – Giasone, 1 line each, Eb), 4 bb (chorus, 2 lines, Eb), 4 bb (Giasone – chorus, 1 line each, Eb), 6 bb. (chorus, 2 lines, with expansion due to 2 bb. of sequence, modulating), 2 + 4 bb. (hemistich for Giasone – a line and a half for the chorus: Giasone's two bars function as a suspension delaying the start of the consequent of the previous phrase, modulating to Db).

In the following quatrain of *ottonari* the dialogue between prince and populace continues and the form is still not concluded. Instead for some time the music remains suspended between D flat and F before cadencing on B flat at the end of the first distich.

Only here, at b. 113, after finally returning to the home key, does Mayr expand the melody into broad, complete periods. For this the two remaining lines of the quatrain are insufficient and are thus both repeated: they are first

²⁰ This is a custom already studied in the melodic structures defined as "lyric forms" for the Rossini and post-Rossini repertoires: even in *Medea in Corinto*, however, it is the most frequent ratio. On the *lyric form*, see JOSEPH KERMAN, "Lyric form and flexibility in 'Simon Boccanegra'", in *Studi verdiani*, I, 1982, pp. 47-62; and ADAMO - LIPPMANN, *Vincenzo Bellini*, pp. 427-429. More recent are STEVEN HUEBNER, "Lyric form in "ottocento" opera", in *Journal of the Royal Musical Association*, CXVII, 1992, pp. 123-147; and GIORGIO PAGANNONE, "Mobilità strutturale della 'lyric form'. Sintassi verbale e sintassi musicale nel melodramma italiano del primo Ottocento", in *Analisi*, VII/20, maggio 1996, pp. 2-17.

²¹ On the use of the term *lassa*, see ALESSANDRO ROCCATAGLIATI, *Felice Romani, librettista*, Lucca, LIM, 1996, pp. 146 ff.

sung to the canonical four bars, then repeated in sequence to another eight. This melody of 4 + 8 bars is anticipated by an orchestral phrase of four bars, similar in timbre to the introduction of the aria. This recollection, along with the similarity of the thematic material to the first section, the return of the initial harmony and the evident change in orchestral accompaniment – first foregrounded to ensure metrical and phraseological compactness, then moved to the background and restricted to sustaining the tenor line – give this part the appearance of a kind of reprise. With the home key by then stabilized, the *lassa* of *senari* that follows from b. 130 introduces no important novelties from the harmonic point of view and would therefore have the appearance of a cadential vocalized coda, were it not for the new text sung.²²

Considering the different substance of the second section, which can be substantially likened to the music of a *scena*, lacking coherently organized phrases or periods, we could describe this piece as an aria in ternary form with coda (ABA' + coda), given that the setting of the central lines sung by the chorus is clearly distinguished not only in tonal development, but also in timbral patterns and thematic materials. Yet it can also be seen²³ as an aria incorporating different sections (ABA'C) within a single movement.²⁴ For if one

²² Given the variety displayed in Mayr's forms, by "coda" I here mean a section that complies with the first and at least one other of the three requisites identified by ROBERT ANTHONY MOREEN, *Integration of Text Forms and Musical Forms in Verdi's Early Operas*, Ph.D., Princeton University, 1975, p. 163: a) suspension of tonal movement: successive cadences are on the final tonic of the piece; b) suspension of text exposition: the text of a coda is entirely repetition; c) the important characters in the number sing together as equals. The definition of coda given by Pietro Lichenthal in his *Dizionario*, on the other hand, proposes the following rhetorical, rather than formal, use of the term: "Coda, *s.f.* Nome che si dà al periodo aggiunto a quello che potrebbe terminare un pezzo di musica, ma senza finirlo in modo così *completo e brioso*" (my italics).

²³ The score of *Medea in Corinto* very often shows formal ambiguities, above all where it represents animated and excited situations or states of mind, though without thereby rejecting the stylistic references of the virtuoso belcanto tradition. The attempt to satisfy both of these aesthetic and dramatic requirements, which are theoretically and historically divergent, prompts Mayr to propose formal solutions that are sometimes paradoxical, like for example the frequent hints of placid thematic reprises, which seem to show complete indifference to the calamities that in the meantime had occurred in the dynamic sections of the number. Besides, Mayr's continued partiality for the *dal segno* solo aria of the 1780s is stressed by SCOTT L. BALTHAZAR, "Mayr and the Development of the Two-Movement Aria", in *Giovanni Simone Mayr: l'opera teatrale e la musica sacra*, Atti del convegno internazionale di studi (Bergamo, 16-18 novembre 1995), a cura di Francesco Bellotto, Bergamo, Comune di Bergamo. Assessorato allo Spettacolo, 1997, pp. 229-251.

²⁴ On the various patterns that can be presented by the musical structure before Rossini's codification, see SCOTT L. BALTHAZAR, "Mayr, Rossini and the development of the opera seria duet: some preliminary conclusions", in *I vicini di Mozart, I: Il teatro musicale tra Sette e Ottocento*, a cura di David Bryant, Firenze, Olschki, 1989, pp. 377-398: 384, which observes that Cimarosa already in his duets "incorporates into a two-tempo, slow-fast, design" the four sec-

leaves aside the harmonic articulations and observes the rhythmic features of the different parts, the cadential section on the final *senari* has an urgency which, though not confirmed by a change in tempo, is nonetheless evidenced (and emphasized) by the syncopated movement of the orchestra.

To summarize, we have:

Section A, B flat major

Amor per te penai;
 per te più non sospiro;
 la pace al cor donai:
 per te respiro – amor...

Section B, G minor – E flat major – D flat major– F major

CORO Accorrete.... Oh tradimento!...
 Oh perfidia! Oh don funesto!
 GIASONE Giusti dèi! Qual grido è questo!
 Quale in sen mi desta orror!

SCENA 13

Maidens, Corinthians, Giasone

CORO O noi sventurate!...
 O regno dolente...
 GIASONE Che avvenne? Parlate
 CORO Creusa innocente...
 GIASONE Ohimè la consorte...
 CORO In braccio di morte.
 La veste fatale...
 TUTTI veleno mortale...
 in sen le portò.

GIASONE Io moro.

He collapses; the chorus surrounds him and sustains him.

TUTTI Infelice!
 Il cor gli mancò.

GIASONE *after a certain pause*

Dove sono? chi mi desta?
 Sole, ancor per me risplendi?

tions of the future *solita forma*. Similar structures are then evidenced by CHARLES BRAUNER, *Vincenzo Bellini and the Aesthetics of Opera Seria in the First Third of the Nineteenth Century*, Ph.D. Yale University, 1972, who observes that while many duets by Mayr have four parts in the libretto but only three in the music (fast, slow, fast) because they combine intermediate dialogue with the final fast movement, others instead comprise all four sections in a single movement.

Section A', B flat major

Cara sposa! Oh dio! M'attendi:
sul tuo petto io morirò

in the act of leaving

Lasciatemi, o barbari...
seguirla vogl'io...

CORINTI No: vivi la vendica...

GIASONE Atroce, il cor mio
vendetta farà.

Coda or C, B flat major

Ohimé! più non spero
in vita riposo...
Ho tutto perduto,
non sono più sposo...
Orrendo sul ciglio
un velo mi sta.

He departs, followed by the Corinthians and maidens

We have dwelt at considerable (perhaps excessive) length on the analysis of this aria because it effectively shows how Mayr succeeds in co-ordinating the vital, dynamic presence of the chorus with the prominence of the soloist and reconciling the pressing stage action with the formal features of the virtuoso tradition. The fragmentary B section organizes the intervention of the chorus that suddenly interrupts Giasone's amorous outburst and announces (also to the spectators) the beginning of the catastrophe. The tonal reprise (A'), which might seem a little paradoxical at that point, is instead justified as a confirmation of Giasone's initial proposal to unite himself with his bride, though this time in death. The final cadential section accompanies the exit of the hero, who sets off to take vengeance. What give form to a similar succession of events and feelings are the traditional formulas of the virtuoso variation with their balanced phrases, subsequently rendered asymmetrical by internal repetitions and sequences, using thematic material that is always similar though never identical. The entire number oscillates continually between simple thematic phrases and broad varied expansions. Thanks to the limited structural difference between the thematic phrases and cadential phrases, both of which are made up of comparable figures laid out according to principles of variety rather than contrast,²⁵ Mayr succeeds in distin-

²⁵ As is observed also by Philip Gossett in his introduction to the facsimile edition of the Carli score of *Medea* (*Medea in Corinto... a facsimile edition of a printed piano-vocal score*, New

guishing even the final cadential section, which retains the harmonic and vocal features of the coda, yet sets new text instead of restricting itself to the insistent repetition of poetic fragments already heard during the thematic sections.

The above compositional strategy is in line with the Neapolitan tradition, whose main exponents had for some time been engaged in make the chorus integrate more deeply in the plot.²⁶ The “multitude of the people” is not to be limited to a celebrational role, but must instead engage with the soloists in an authoritative manner. The result is that the formal balance is upset and the structures of the solo aria modified to accommodate the chorus. Such interaction occurs even in those scenes that are given the strongest ceremonial and festive character; where, all things considered, one would expect the role of the people to be that of imparting magnificence, theatrical breadth and musical resonance.

For example, let us examine the *aria di sortita* (“Di gloria all’invito”, no. 2) of the victorious Giasone, acclaimed by the people of Corinth and the army of the Argonauts. The scene serves only to amplify the opening of the drama with grand theatrical ostentation.²⁷ This is stressed in the text by metrical uniformity, the regularity of the accentual scansion and the redundancy of the exchanges between soloist and chorus. The cavatina is laid out in parallel quatrains of *senari*, with different rhyme schemes depending on who Giasone is addressing: in succession the King of Corinth, the Princess, his followers. It is static, because nothing is allowed to disturb the hero’s triumph. In line with the tradition of warlike arias, it is in D major, with trumpets, timpani and mil-

York, Garland, 1986): “Mayr made effort to ‘modernize’ his score ... by attempting to create longer lyrical periods in the Rossinian manner”, and thus correcting his style based on “a succession of shorter fragments. In lyrical scenes this technique is rarely moving, but in highly dramatic scenes the succession of shorter phrases can be striking in its immediacy and emotional power.”

²⁶ It is worth remembering that Calzabigi had worked in Naples for a long time following the period of Gluckian reform to which Lichtenthal alludes, and that together with him (and in competition with him) there had also been much more radical reformers like De Gamerra. On late-18th-century Neapolitan opera and its programmatically reforming tendencies, see FRANCO PIPERNO, “Teatro di stato e teatro di città. Funzioni, gestioni e drammaturgia musicale del San Carlo dalle origini all’impresariato Barbaja”, in *Il teatro di San Carlo*, a cura di Carlo Marinelli Roscioni, Napoli, Guida, 1987, pp. 61-118 and TOBIA R. TOSCANO, “Il rimpianto del primato perduto: dalla rivoluzione del 1799 alla caduta di Murat”, in *Il teatro di San Carlo, 1737-1987: l’opera, il ballo*, a cura di Bruno Cagli e Agostino Ziino, Napoli, Electa, 1987, pp. 77-118.

²⁷ Within the tradition of the Medea myth a triumph scene similar to that of Romani is found only in Cherubini’s *Médée*, where the librettist Hoffmann imagines the golden fleece having been brought to Corinth by all the Argonauts. This expedient had allowed Hoffman to create the necessary theatrical and rhetorical breadth for introducing the coup de theatre of Medea’s sudden and unexpected appearance, which in turn adapts a famous tableau from the Noverre ballet of the same name.

itary band. Preceded by a solemn, prevalently homorhythmic, ceremonial chorus in *ottonari*, the voice of Giasone unfolds in a genuine affirmation of power, indeed one might almost say of erotic exhibitionism.²⁸ The stature of the hero is such that the chorus adapts to his *senari*,²⁹ for this is the metre adopted for the strophe with which the chorus interjects, as a kind of *ritornello*, his tributes to the royal family.

Unexpectedly, however, there are thematic recollections that connect the introductory chorus to the hero's first appearance. In his first distich, set as a stentorian apostrophe (vocalized, ostentatious and high-pitched), Giasone addresses a phrase of a good seven bars to the King (though in actual fact to the audience) aimed at immediately establishing the character's status and social dignity. As we see in the example 5, the initial period is ambivalent because the first seven bars vary the theme of the chorus's second strophe (bb. 49-53), which no longer reappears in the course of the aria; the remaining bars, on the other hand, present metrical regularity in the orchestral accompaniment (first absent),³⁰ and are based on a new harmonic and melodic pattern, similar to that used shortly after to set the aria's following quatrains. The whole thing seems to be constructed with an introductory section acting as a hinge between the opening chorus plus soloist and the start of the aria proper introduced by the three orchestral bars (bb. 8-10).³¹ From that moment on, the chorus and Giasone alternate: after addressing the King in this first quatrain, the hero continues in the two successive quatrains to pay homage to his beloved and then greet the whole populace, with the chorus acclaiming his

²⁸ To grasp the erotic implications it is sufficient to attribute an allegorical meaning to the first line. For an assessment of current thinking and study on eroticism in opera singing, see MARCO BEGHELLI, "Erotismo canoro", and DAVIDE DAOLMI - EMANUELE SENICI, "'L'omosessualità è un modo di cantare'. I contributi 'queer' all'indagine sull'opera in musica", both in *Il Saggiatore musicale*, VII, 2000, respectively at pp. 123-136 and 137-178.

²⁹ The passage from *ottonari* to strongly rhythmical *senari* establishes the character as the stereotype of the hero and not the pathetic lover (a figure instead represented by the rival Egeo). A similar succession is found for example in Arsace's *aria di sortita* in Da Ponte's pasticcio of *Semiramide* (1811). See DANIELA GOLDIN, "Vita, avventure e morte di Semiramide", in EAD. *La vera fenice. Librettisti e libretti tra Sette e Ottocento*, Torino, Einaudi, 1985, p. 200.

³⁰ See the distinction between "open" and "closed" melodies in FRIEDRICH LIPPMANN, "Per un'esegesi dello stile rossiniano", in *Nuova rivista musicale italiana*, II, 1968, pp. 813-856: 817, as well as the comment in SAVERIO LAMACCHIA, "'Solita forma' del duetto o del numero? L'aria in quattro tempi nel melodramma del primo Ottocento", in *Il Saggiatore musicale*, VI, 1999, pp. 119-144.

³¹ Even the harmonic organization contributes to this ambiguity: the antecedent opens in the tonic and closes in the dominant so as to allow the consequent to start again in the tonic. But the three intermediate orchestral bars complete the cadence initiated by the antecedent and open another to launch the consequent:

I-V || I-V⁷ - I-V-I

statements each time. Within each phrase or ‘strophe’ the tonal plan is absolutely stable, thereby guaranteeing a coherent structure beneath the unpredictable aspect of the variants that Nozzari, the composer’s true “completion and prolongation”, would introduce in the solo song.³²

After the ostentatious opening of the first seven bars, “Di gloria all’invito” is thus built up as a crescendo of opulence, in accordance with virtuosic schemes that we could call “varied strophe” modules. The hero’s second and third strophes move in a sufficiently similar way to bb. 11ff. of the first to be identified as reprises, even if their phrasing is syntactically more consistent and regular.³³ Thanks to the chorus *refrains*, the regular and brief orchestral introductions at each of Giasone’s reprises and the stability of the poetic and musical metre, the tenor’s interventions emerge in strong relief and we perceive a very clear strophic structure, which is not even compromised by the sudden tonal shift to the dominant in which the second quatrain, with its respective choral acclamation, is consistently set.

Introductory chorus, D major

Fosti grande allor che apristi
 mari ignoti a ignote genti;
 grande allor che i Tauri ardenti
 il tuo braccio al suol prostrò.
 Ma più grande allor che pace
 col tuo sangue acquista un regno,
 quando al trono fai sostegno,
 che rovina minacciò.

Prelude, D major

GIASONE
 a Creonte

Di gloria all’invito
 fra l’armi volai;

³² RENATO DI BENEDETTO, “Poetiche e polemiche”, in *Storia dell’opera italiana*, VI, Torino, EdT, 1988, pp. 1-76: 8, uses these words to define the role of the singer in Italian opera and to free it of a critical and historiographical tradition that had long depicted it as that of a passive instrument, competitor or usurper of the composer’s creative role. If his observations always apply in the case of Italian opera, they are all the more suitable in the case of an exceptional cast such as that composed of Colbran, Nozzari and García for the performances of *Medea in Corinto*. On this issue, see also DANIELA TORTORA, *Drammaturgia del Rossini serio. Le opere della maturità da “Tancredi” a “Semiramide”*, Roma, Torre d’Orfeo, 1996, pp. 11-17.

³³ The quatrain addressed to his beloved is made up of nine bars (owing to the repetition of a hemistich at the end) but then followed by six bars of coda; the last quatrain is sung in another nine bars (again owing to the repetition of an element towards the end) before the chorus joins the soloist in a broad final coda of as many as 26 bars.

Section A, D major

per te s’io pugnai,
tel dica il tuo cor.
CORINTI Di gloria il sentiero
tu calchi primiero;
per te degni eroi
soccombe il valor.

Section A’, A major

GIASONE Spronavami all’ire
a Creusa l’amato tuo nome;
m’accrebbe l’ardire
Imene ed Amor.
CORINTI Di gloria, *etc.*

Section A”, D major

GIASONE Se amante e guerriero,
to his follower combatto con voi,
è vano per noi
nemico furor.
CORINTI Per te degli eroi
soccombe il valor.

The chorus’s triumphal march and Giasone’s cavatina, again with chorus, are wedged in between two long sections of recitative that expound the *ante-fatto* and thus have a mainly rhetorical function. Romani’s intention cannot have been that of creating a “scena e aria”, but instead a broad ceremonial sequence where chorus and soloist come together in a solemn and grandiose design. In spite of its explicit ceremonial rhetorical function, or indeed because of it, the chorus plays a role in the scene and determines the musical form of the soloist’s aria. For Mayr it was a matter of introducing a more complex theatrical conception into the forms of opera: one in which music was accorded various expressive manners, and in which the affective tone could be accompanied by the ceremonial and pantomimic. The unpredictable morphologies adopted by Mayr thus correspond to the different expressive planes of the libretto (affective/narrative, interior action/exterior action) that Romani had derived from the various literary and theatrical sources used: tragedy, opera, melologue, ballet. The different functions assumed by the chorus belong to this same project. As is shown by the frequent formal oscillations in his operas, Mayr’s exploration of musical forms and the ways of articulat-

ing musical numbers was not progressive,³⁴ and it aimed neither to resolve compositional technical problems nor to define new structures that could be applied to any dramatic situation. Instead its purpose was to adopt different formal models in accordance with specific dramatic, ceremonial and conventional considerations.³⁵

The prominent role played by the chorus in these arias gives a measure of the breadth of Neapolitan experimentation in the late 18th and early 19th century.³⁶ It was an experimentation with the forms and dramatic situations that are capable of being ‘set to music’, i.e. that music can aspire to express with its own means, perhaps even by co-ordinating the integration between chorus and pantomime.³⁷ As it turns out, *Medea in Corinto* contemplates all the typologies of the chorus’s dramatic presence later listed by Lichtenthal:

Whether the chorus expresses the tumult of an uprising with contrasting images, or the different parts challenge one another reciprocally, or one demands what the other rejects and defends what his adversary wishes to

³⁴ For example, although the Rossiniesque three-part form of cantabile - tempo di mezzo - cabaletta is already found in *Adelaide* (1799), *Zamori* (1804), *Gli americani* (1806) and *Tamerlano* (1813), it is not a constant feature of Mayr’s operatic approach. It does not even appear in *La rosa bianca e la rosa rossa* (1813), an opera that also includes three arias in different movements: here, though, the variety is such that even the two-part arias fail to be subdivided into slow-fast movements. On this matter, see Charles Brauner, *Vincenzo Bellini and the Aesthetics of Opera Seria in the First Third of the Nineteenth Century*, p. 220 and SCOTT L. BALTHAZAR, “Mayr and the development of the two-movement aria”.

³⁵ An exemplary case, for instance, is that of *Ercole in Lidia*, performed in Vienna in 1803, which LEOPOLD M. KANTNER, “‘Ercole in Lidia’ di Giovanni Simone Mayr e la sua tradizione in Vienna”, in *Giovanni Simone Mayr: l’opera teatrale e la musica sacra*, pp. 279-284 views as a decisively innovative step in Mayr’s opera seria output, whereas it should probably be understood as an occasional adherence to the more French (i.e. cosmopolitan, though not necessarily progressive) taste of that court. Indeed, not even the “reduction of the virtuoso element, of *bravour*”, the abundance of accompanied recitative, the role of the chorus, the scoring with extensive use of brass and harp, the martial elements, and the “bombastic, grandiose style in the manner of Grand’opéra” seem to be definitive conquests on Mayr’s part so much as stylistic options among the many to be used when occasion required (and perhaps even before 1803).

³⁶ Even in the moderate *Fedra* of Salvioni and Paisiello (1788), to give just one example, we find a dramatic scene in which at the appearance of the sea-bull sent by Neptune to attack Ippolito, the chorus suddenly breaks in and upsets the regular structure of a love duet between the Prince and Aricia. See PAOLO RUSSO, “Fedra o Aricia: le ragioni delle cagioni episodiche”, in *Giovanni Paisiello e la cultura europea del suo tempo*, atti del convegno (Taranto 20-23 giugno 2002), a cura di Francesco Paolo Russo, in press.

³⁷ On the introduction of the *ballo ‘analogo’* in opera, see ANDREA CHEGAI, “Sul ‘Ballo analogo’ settecentesco: una drammaturgia di confine fra opera e azione coreutica”, in *Creature di Prometeo. Il ballo teatrale dal divertimento al dramma. Studi offerti a Aurel M. Miloss*, a cura di Giovanni Morelli, Firenze, Olschki, 1996, pp. 139-175.

attack; whether, united by one sole interest, the characters show their fears, their fright, their joy (be it innocent or fierce), their approval, utter vows to heaven or come together in a solemn oath; whether at a triumphal celebration an entire people raises songs of victory to heaven: [whatever the case,] the chorus is one of the finest ornaments of the opera stage, and with its imposing masses offers the most magnificent manifestation of the union of melody and harmony, voices and orchestra.

This, therefore, was the tradition with which, a few years after the appearance of *Medea in Corinto*, Rossini had to come to terms at his Neapolitan debut, when he was told that he was about to venture into a theatre that still resounded “of the melodious accents of the *Medea* and *Cora* of the egregious Mayr”.³⁸ And yet if we count the choral passages in Rossini’s Neapolitan operas – crude though such a method of analysis may be³⁹ – we note that the chorus actually has a very variable role.⁴⁰ Moreover, the occasions when the chorus is not only “concertato” (i.e. intended to “form by itself alone a piece of music” of introduction or scene-setting after a change of scene), but “*d’accompagnamento*” (i.e. interwoven with the solo aria) are not so frequent. Table 1 lists all the pieces with chorus in Rossini’s Neapolitan *opere serie* – including *introduzioni* and act finales – but gives further details only in the cases where the chorus interweaves with the solo numbers.

Table 1

Elisabetta, regina d’Inghilterra (1815)

nos. 1-4, 8, 10, 11, 15; no. 3: Elisabetta’s cavatina; no. 11: Norfolk’s scena and aria; no. 15: Elisabetta’s scena and rondò

Otello (1816)

nos.1, 2, 5, 9, 10; no. 2: Otello’s cavatina

Armida (1817)

nos.1, 2, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 12, 15; no. 5: Gernando’s scena and aria

Mosé in Egitto (1818)

nos. 1, 2, 5, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12; no. 2: quintet with chorus; no. 7: Amaltea’s aria; no. 8: scena and quartet; no. 11: Elcia’s aria; no. 12: Mosé’s prayer

³⁸ The *Giornale delle due Sicile*, in a much quoted article of 25 September 1815.

³⁹ Clearly the quantitative approach fails to take into account the size and compositional commitment of each operatic number and hence distorts one’s perception of the effective impact of the chorus’s dramatic role. It does, however, give some idea of the quantity and variety of situations in which it could be involved.

⁴⁰ DANIELA TORTORA, *Drammaturgia del Rossini serio*, p. 19, prompted by an observation in FRANCESCO DEGRADA, “Al gran sole di Rossini”, in *Il teatro di San Carlo, 1737-1987*, pp. 136 and 164.

Ricciardo e Zoraide (1818)

nos. 1-3, 5, 6, 8, 9, 12, 14, 15; no. 2: Agorante's scena and cavatina; no. 12: scena and quartet; no. 15: Zoraide's *gran scena*

Ermione (1819)

nos. 1-3, 6, 7, 9, 10; no. 3: Ermione and Pirro's duet; no. 6: Pirro's aria; no. 9: Ermione's *gran scena*

La Donna del Lago (1819)

nos. 1-2, 6, 7, 9, 10, 12, 13; no. 2: chorus and Elena and Uberto's duet; no. 6: chorus and Rodrigo's cavatina; no. 9: duet and *terzetto* for Elena, Uberto and Rodrigo; no. 10: Malcom's aria

Maometto II (1820)

nos. 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 11; no. 3: scena and *terzettone*; no. 4: chorus and Maometto's cavatina; no. 8: scena and Maometto's aria

Zelmira (1822)

nos. 1, 4, 5, 6, 8, [8], 10, 11; no. 4: chorus and Ilo's cavatina; no. 5: Ilo and Zelmira's duet; no. 6: Antenore's aria; no. 8: chorus and Emma's aria; no. 10: quintet

With the exception of the Lenten operas⁴¹ – such as *Mosé in Egitto* (though, before that, also the "dramma con cori" *Ciro in Babilonia*) – the chorus would often seem to be marginal, above all in operas such as *Otello*, *Armida* or *Ermione* which focus more on individual events. Even in works like *Maometto II* or *Zelmira*, which show a radical approach to form, the choral masses are scantily involved and then for the most part only in the large ensemble numbers: *introduzioni*, *finali*, as well as as that incredible number (for size and dramatic conception) that is the *terzettone* of the first act of *Maometto*.

In these operas the dramaturgy of the chorus and its contribution to the solo aria changes radically. With the formal standardization they display, we no find the formal and dramatic variety that had previously characterized Neapolitan experimentation with the chorus, and that of Mayr in particular. Now the chorus is no longer a dynamic dramatic element that distorts the structure of the aria. Instead it normally limits itself to acting as a ceremonial 'crown', underscoring and emphasizing the articulations of the standard structure during the *tempo di mezzo*, the volta of the cabaletta and the coda. Shortly after, Carlo Ritorni was to observe that even if "the chorus is to be

⁴¹ On this tradition, see the studies of FRANCO PIPERNO, "Il 'Mosè in Egitto' e la tradizione napoletana di opere bibliche", in *Gioachino Rossini 1792-1992: Il testo e la scena*, Pesaro, Fondazione Rossini, 1994, pp. 255-271; "'Stellati sogli' e 'immagini portentose'", in *Napoli e il teatro musicale in Europa tra Sette e Ottocento. Studi in onore di Friedrich Lippmann*, a cura di Bianca Maria Antolini e Wolfgang Witzemann, Firenze, Olschki, 1993, pp. 267-298.

combined with the *rondò*, not for that reason is it considered any the less a solo piece"; besides, "the mere sound of instruments can have the same function" as the chorus *da dentro* (from within); and in general "sometimes another character, especially a secondary character, in the cavatina rather than the *rondò*, inserts instead of the chorus what is called a *pertichino*, accompanying subordinately".⁴² There are also cases where the chorus's presence is even more marginal. In Gernando's aria in *Armida* (no. 5) it contributes only the invocation (from within) during the *tempo di mezzo* that triggers the tenor's cabaletta. In the *rondò finale* of *Elisabetta regina d'Inghilterra* it limits itself to animating the *tempo di mezzo* by bursting onto the stage and celebrating the happy ending with a few concluding bars. As for the element interweaving with the *tempo d'attacco* and cantabile of *Elisabetta's* aria, that role falls to a chorus "of musicians"⁴³ consisting of just Leicester, Matilde and Guglielmo. As for the arias of Pirro in *Ermione* (no. 6) and Antenore in *Zelmira* (no. 6), arias that in other respects experiment with new vocal combinations and make a first attempt to overcome the rigidity of the closed number, they use the chorus in the designated points, but do not exploit its presence to change the form of the operatic number. In *Ermione* the interest is focused on the interaction between Pirro and the other soloists (Oreste, Andromaca, Ermione), first in the adagio, which is almost turned into a duet for Ermione and Pirro, and then in the fusion between *tempo di mezzo* and cabaletta. The chorus intervenes only in the coda of the adagio and in the volta and coda of the cabaletta. In Antenore's aria in *Zelmira*, the chorus exceptionally even takes over the adagio from the soloist, though one's overall perception is nonetheless simply that of a fragmented number with a traditional choral piece in a single movement,⁴⁴ combined with the *tempo d'attacco* and *tempo di mezzo*. Its presence fails to affect the structure of the aria in any substantial way.⁴⁵

The exceptions, therefore, stand out precisely as such. For example, in *Elisabetta, regina d'Inghilterra*, the opera that introduced Rossini to the Neapolitan public for the first time, the prominent choral contribution to *Elisabetta's* cavatina (no. 3) lends interest to a celebrated case of self-borrowing

⁴² *Ammaestramenti alla composizione d'ogni poema e d'ogni opera appartenente alla musica, compilati da Carlo Ritorni*, Milano, Giacomo Pirola, 1841, pp. 42-43.

⁴³ RITORNI, *Ammaestramenti* cit., p. 140: "I distinguish between two kinds of chorus. When the crowds speak and when the musicians sing".

⁴⁴ On the single-movement choruses that play a part in larger ensembles or are simply combined with another cantabile piece, see DANIELA TORTORA, *Drammaturgia del Rossini serio*, p. 47.

⁴⁵ See the analysis in LAMACCHIA, "'Solita forma' del duetto o del numero?", p. 130, where the author observes that "in the aria of *Zelmira* the chorus even takes the role of soloist away from Antenore for an entire cantabile movement. Nonetheless, the operatic scheme ... remains unchanged".

from *Aureliano in Palmira* and cloaks in serious garb a comic cavatina that was later to be reused in *Il barbiere di Siviglia*.⁴⁶ As for the concluding chorus of *Armide*, with a dramatically ostentatious gesture it prevents Armida from singing her cabaletta and combines with the pantomime sung by the demons drawing the sorceress's chariot.

Reduced to little more than a *pertichino*, in general the chorus would genuinely appear to be superfluous, particularly if we consider only its formal structure in the operatic number. However, since an important role was (and still is now) attributed to the presence of choruses in perceptions of opera, it is worth assessing the new dramatic framework to which its appeal contributed. It is also worth asking oneself what other reading might make sense of operatic numbers in a way that also accounts for the chorus and its formal predictability.

To this end it may help to assess how Rossini exploits one of the most typical *topoi* of Teatro San Carlo opera. In *Otello* (1816), *Ricciardo e Zoraide* (1818), *La Donna del lago* (1819), *Maometto II* and *Zelmira* he introduces examples of those triumph scenes for the hero-lover that were so dear to Nozzari and had been conceived with particular care by Mayr in his *Medea*. Sumptuous scenes like that in which Giasone was welcomed in the Corinth of Creonte and Creusa (and Medea) are guaranteed by the presence of the chorus, a triumphal march and an on-stage band. A similar scene was most likely planned also in *Elisabetta*, because chorus no. 4 and Nozzari's successive recitative seem to show every sign of preparation for a stentorian cavatina, which instead is remarkably lacking.

In *Otello* and *Ricciardo* the dramatic situation is patterned precisely after that of *Medea in Corinto*: in all three cases it is the beginning of the opera (no. 2) and there is a hero-lover returning victorious, acclaimed by the populace and a festive army. The cavatinas of *Otello* and *Agorante*, however, do not directly follow the march and introductory chorus, but are instead preceded by a few bars of recitative, before duly falling into the four-part aria structure.⁴⁷ The three strophes, which in Mayr served to exalt the virtuosity of the tenor against the background of an essentially choral number, are here reconceived in solo terms as an alternation of different affective moments. The passage from one emotion to another is justified by inner changes in the hero's mind: the tenor is transformed from stentorian exhibitionist to the bearer of more complex and nuanced emotions.

⁴⁶ Elisabetta's cabaletta was reused as Rosina's cabaletta "Ma se mi toccano". See Jeremy Commons's introductory essay to the recording of *Elisabetta regina d'Inghilterra* on Opera Rara-arc22. In his introduction to the facsimile of the autograph score of *Otello* published by Garland in 1979, Philip Gossett points out that *Elisabetta* and *La gazzetta*, "while remaining above the level of *pasticci*, show the composer nervously presenting himself to the demanding Neapolitan public by borrowing many of the better pages from early operas" (p. I).

⁴⁷ On the four-part arias, see LAMACCHIA, "'Solita forma' del duetto o del numero?."

OTELLO (I,1-2: Introduzione and Otello's Cavatina, nos. 1-2)

CORO	<p>Viva Otello, viva il prode delle schiere invito duce! Or per lui di nuova luce torna l'Adria a svolgorar. Lui guidò virtù fra l'armi, militò con lui fortuna, s'oscurò l'Odrisia luna del suo brando al fulminar</p>	Allegro, 4/4 F
OTELLO	<p>Vincemmo o prodi. I perfidi nemici caddero estinti. Al lor furor ritolsi [...] A sì per voi già sento nuovo valor nel petto. Per voi d'un nuovo affetto sento infiammarsi il cor. (Premio maggior di questo da me sperar non lice: ma allor sarò felice quando il coroni Amor.)</p>	<p>Vivace marziale 4/4 D</p> <p>Andantino, 6/8 A</p>
JAGO	<p>(T'affrena! la vendetta cauti dobbiam celar.)</p>	
CORO	<p>Non indugiar; t'affretta deh vieni a trionfar!</p>	[Tempo I 4/4] D
OTELLO	<p>(Amor dirada il nembo cagion di tanti affanni, comincia co' tuoi vanni la speme a ravvivar.)</p>	
CORO	<p>Non indugiar, t'affretta Deh! vieni a trionfar.</p>	

RICCIARDO E ZORAIDE (I,1: Introduzione and Cavatina, nos. 1-2)

CORO	<p>Cinto di nuovi allori riede Agorante a noi, degli africani eroi primiero nel valor. Tra bellici sudori fiaccò l'orgoglio insano del temerario Ircano col brando punitor.</p>	Andantino Marziale 2/4 C
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- AGORANTE Popoli della Nubia, ecco tra voi
il vostro duce, il re; vinsi, dispersi
i ribelli seguaci
del fuggitivo Ircano,
ei, che nato nell'Asia, in questi lidi
fondò nascente impero, e ardì negare
di sua figlia Zoraide a me la mano,
che pur ritolsi al rapitor Ricciardo,
per cui sdegnoso contro me già move
tutte d'Europa le nemiche schiere;
proveranno ancor queste il mio potere.
- Minacci pur: disprezzo
quel suo furore insano.
Con questa invitta mano
di lui trionferò.
- Sul trono a suo dispetto
tutti i trionfi miei
coronerà colei
che il core m'involò.
- CORO Sì, con quel serto istesso,
che offrirvi è a noi concesso,
che amor per te formò.
- AGORANTE Or di regnar per voi
tutta la gioja io sento;
e tanto è il mio contento,
che esprimerlo non so.
- Marziale 4/4 F
- Andantino 6/8 Ab
- Allegro 4/4 modulante
- Allegro 4/4 F

The remarkable similarity between the two arias should be no surprise, for the librettos for *Otello* and *Ricciardo e Zoraide* were both written by the same man, Francesco Berio di Salsa. Instead, in successive librettos – in *La donna del lago*, *Zelmira* (both by Andrea Leone Tottola) and *Maometto* – for exactly the same dramatic situation, Rossini removes the recitative between introductory chorus and aria so that the chorus itself can act almost as an introductory *scena*. Subsequently the chorus returns to animate only the standard sections: in *Maometto II*'s cavatina (no. 4), which even succeeds in providing for the four canonic sections with only two quatrains of text, the choir is inserted in the *tempo di mezzo* and echoes in the volta and coda of the cabaletta.

- MAOMETTO Sorgete, e in sì bel giorno,
o prodi miei guerrieri,
a Maometto intorno
venite ad esultar.

CORO Del mondo al vincitor
 eterno plauso e onor.

MAOMETTO Duce di tanti eroi,
 crollar farò gl'imperi,
 e volerò con voi
 del mondo a trionfar.

In Ilo's cavatina, no. 4 of *Zelmira*, the chorus participates both in the clearly delineated cabaletta in *quinari* "Cara, deh attendimi" and in the preceding section, which merges features of both *tempo d'attacco* and *cantabile*.⁴⁸ Its contribution, however, is decidedly secondary compared to the upset created by this irregular opening. In Rodrigo's aria of *La donna del lago* (no. 6), finally, the chorus interrupts the soloist's singing on different occasions with thematic material from the first section of the number. This guarantees a notable sense of compactness that could recall the refrain singing of *Medea in Corinto*. On closer inspection, however, the true novelty here lies not so much in the integration of soloist and chorus as in the fact of opening the aria with a cabaletta-like section. For Rodrigo, who though a hero-lover is arrogant and insensitive and tries to force Elisabetta into the marriage imposed by her father, begins in the *tempo d'attacco* with a short open melody that already has the character, and above all the form, of a cabaletta. On its part, the chorus limits itself to confirming this impression: it engages in dialogue right from this first section in the 'volta' (ex. 6) and coda, and repeats the same formula in the true concluding cabaletta.

This display serves to provide fitting expression for Rodrigo's arrogance. Moreover, his cavatina needs to make a strong mark on the audience's attention because it is one of Rodrigo's few appearances, for though he is a character of scant emotional importance – he appears in only one other number of the opera (terzetto no. 9) apart from this cavatina and, obviously, the finale (no. 7) – he is nonetheless dramatically essential in so far as he brings about all the main turns of the plot.

In this case, therefore, but also in the others mentioned above, the chorus performs a mainly rhetorical function, to throw certain dramatic situations into due relief. Its presence in the vocalized and non-thematic codas fulfils an explicitly dramatic-assertive function,⁴⁹ above all when these sections are considerably

⁴⁸ On the melodic profile of the various sections of the number, see FRIEDRICH LIPPMANN, "Per un'esegesi dello stile rossiniano", *Nuova rivista musicale italiana*, II, 1968, p. 813-856: 917 and also LAMACCHIA, "'Solita forma' del duetto o del numero?", p. 122.

⁴⁹ On this point, it is worth starting with PAGANNONE, "Mobilità strutturale della 'lyric form'" and ID., "Tra 'cadenze felicità felicità felicità' e 'melodie lunghe lunghe lunghe'", in *Il Saggiatore musicale*, IV, 1997, pp. 53-86.

longer than the thematic ones or include elements of text of narrative and dramatic importance. In the restricted context of the individual sections of the operatic number, these cadential sections, when enriched by the chorus, fulfil the same rhetorical role as the *stretta* in the macro-form of the number – according to Lichtenthal “a kind of peroration, and an essential part of the musical discourse”.⁵⁰

We find this new perception of the chorus’s role already elucidated in the “Avvertimento al pubblico” introducing the libretto of *Il barbiere di Siviglia*. Here certain divergences from Beaumarchais’ original are attributed to the “need to introduce the choruses into the subject itself, both because they are desired by modern use and also because they are indispensable to the musical effect in a theatre of considerable size”. The rhetorical importance that the chorus confers on the musical number with which it is interwoven, extends (as if by synecdoche) also to the entire social rite of the operatic performance. In order to transform a *seria* cabaletta like that of Elisabetta into one for Rosina in the comic style, it would have normally been necessary to remove the chorus. But in a large-sized theatre it was by then felt to be a necessary ornament even in an *opera buffa*, in spite of the fact that “the intrusion of the epic manner (the musical-dramatic function attributed to the chorus is eminently narrative in type) creates systematic discrepancies in the perception of time, unsuited to comic opera”.⁵¹

Once its role has been redefined from dramatic-choreutic⁵² to rhetorical-celebrational, the chorus makes a decisive contribution to establishing the hierarchy of the arias (and of the characters). In all the arias cited above – from the cavatinas of Otello and Agorante to those of Rodrigo, Maometto and Ilo – the chorus emerges above all in the codas where it performs an explicitly dramatic-assertive role. In that of Rodrigo, the form apparently comprises two cabalettas, thereby creating various occasions for voltas and codas, increasing the number of choral interventions and enhancing the dramatic ‘weight’ of the chorus. In general when the chorus intrudes at the end of an aria built according to the conventional three- or four-part structure, it alters its proportions, shifts its centre of gravity, amplifies one section to the detriment of the others, and above all distorts the balance between the thematic and cadential sections. This results in forms that we could describe as ‘end-accented’, in analogy with the finales in which the *stretta* is more extended

⁵⁰ LICHTENTHAL, *Dizionario cit.*, s.v. “stretta”.

⁵¹ FEDELE D’AMICO, “A proposito d’un ‘Tancredi’”, in *Colloquium “Die stilistische Entwicklung der Italienischen Musik Zwischen 1770 und 1830 und ihre Beziehungen zum Norden”* (Rom 1978), Laaber, Arno Volk - Laaber Verlag, 1982 (Analecta musicologica, .xxi), pp. 61-71.

⁵² On the link between choreutic and choral roles in Rossini, see *Di sì felice innesto. Rossini, la danza, e il ballo, teatrale in Italia*, a cura di Paolo Fabbri, Pesaro, Fondazione Rossini, 1996.

than the intermediate *concertato*.⁵³ We have already seen examples in Mayr, in those numbers where the emphatic concluding section either was considerably longer than the thematic sections or else declaimed parts of text of narrative and dramatic importance. In the operas of Rossini, and then in those of Bellini and Donizetti, such instances are increasingly frequent. As Table 2 shows, the codas of the cavatinas are very extended in relation to the whole number and yet necessarily limited owing to the presence of the *banda* on stage which contributes to the emphasis of the number. In the cases that do not contemplate the use of the *banda*, owing to the dramatic situation, the phenomenon is even more conspicuous, as we see in Antenore's aria. For this aria, considering its irregular form, we include the figures for the cabaletta alone.

Table 2

Otello, no. 2 Otello's cavatina

bb.	11 of orchestral introduction	vivace marziale, 4/4, D
"	21 of tempo d'attacco,	vivace marziale, 4/4, D
"	19 of cantabile	andantino, 6/8, A
"	12 of tempo di mezzo	I tempo, 4/4, D
"	63 of cabaletta:	I tempo, 4/4, D
	23 first section	
	5 volta	
	35 second section with coda	
"	40 of concluding march.	

Ricciardo e Zoraide, no. 2 Agorante's cavatina

bb.	17 of introduction	
"	37 of tempo d'attacco	marziale, 4/4, F
"	36 of cantabile	andantino, 6/8, Ab,
"	16 of tempo di mezzo	allegro, 4/4, modulating
"	77 of cabaletta:	allegro, 4/4, F
	23 first section	
	11 volta	
	43 second section with coda	

⁵³ The definition is that of SCOTT L. BALTHAZAR, "Mayr, Rossini, and the development of the early concertato finale", p. 237: a possible Italian translation (borrowing from metrical terminology) would be *forme tronche* (truncated forms): i.e. respecting the substance, but upsetting the correct formal balance.

" 38 of march of the *banda* on stage

Donna del lago, no. 6 Rodrigo's cavatina

- bb. 40 of march allegro moderato, 4/4, C
- " 64 of chorus allegro moderato, 4/4, C
- " 205 of Aria
- " 65 of tempo d'attacco: a piacere, 4/4, C
 - 23 first section
 - 21 bridge with chorus and material drawn from the introductory march
 - 15 abbreviated reprise with chorus
 - 6 coda with chorus
- " 58 of cantabile andante con moto 2/4 F
- " 15 of t. di mezzo of the chorus with material from the introduction allegro, 4/4, modulating
- " 67 of cabaletta: allegro, 4/4, C
 - 15 first section
 - 13 volta
 - 40 reprise with coda and concluding march

Zelmira, no. 6, Antenore's aria

- ...
- bb. 89 of cabaletta: allegro, 3/4, A
 - 17 first section,
 - 14 volta,
 - 58 second section with coda

The transformation of the chorus's role from dynamic and dramatic to ceremonial and rhetorical vis-à-vis the soloist was a convention that we can say was consolidated during the 1820s. And it also had repercussions on the previous repertory by a process of assimilation. In 1829, only a few years before *Norma*, when the Teatro Carcano decided to present the European successes of Giuditta Pasta to the Milanese public,⁵⁴ *Medea in Corinto* was revived and Mayr was asked to make a few changes to the score,⁵⁵ including a new cavatina for Giasone's triumph, "Di gloria all'invito". Mayr reformulated the structure of the cavatina (which we earlier defined as "varied strophe") and by heightening the differences in phrasing, pace, accompaniment and textual content of the intermediate strophe turned it into a genuine four-part aria.

⁵⁴ See my "Giuditta Pasta cantante pantomima", in *Musica e storia*, X, 2002/2, pp. 497-532.

⁵⁵ On this matter, see my "*Medea in Corinto*" di Felice Romani e Johann Simon Mayr, Dissertation for a research doctorate in musicology and the musical heritage, University of Bologna, 2001-2002, supervisors Lorenzo Bianconi and Paolo Fabbri.

Between the tributes to Creusa and Creonte, Romani inserted a nostalgic reflection aside for the hero on Medea, the rejected bride, which Mayr set as an authentic cantabile.

CORINTI Grande sei, primier varcando
nuovo mar fra ignote genti;
grande sei, ché i Tauri ardenti
il tuo braccio al suol prostrò.
Ma più grande allor che pace
col tuo sangue acquista un regno,
quando al trono fai sostegno,
che rovina minacciò.

GIASONE Sposa, signore, è pago
il comun voto: io vinsi. Oh me felice!
che almen potei mostrarvi, amico il fato,
he un cor non serbo a' benefizi ingrato.

a Creonte Di gloria all'invito
tra l'armi volai;
per te s'io pugnai
tel dica il tuo cor.

CORINTI Di gloria il sentiero
tu calchi primiero;
per te degli eroi
soccombe il valor.

GIASONE (Pur, fra sì liete immagini,
Medea scordar non so:
è un'empia, è ver, ma misera,
ma questo cor l'amò.)

L'amante, l'amico
voleste a difesa?
Corinto fu illesa:
nemici non ha.
Di sposo, di figlio
chiedeste il valore?
Corinto terrore
di Grecia sarà.

CORO La patria fu illesa

nemici non ha:
Corinto terrore
di Grecia sarà.

History has therefore come full circle and we now find Mayr taking back from Rossini what he had lent him at his Neapolitan debut, because the model for this revision is that found in the cavatinas of *Otello* and *Agorante*. First, the aria is separated from the preceding chorus by a few lines of recitative. Then Mayr avoids the thematic reminiscences between choral sections and aria. Third, the army and the populace are superimposed on the soloist only at the form's points of articulation. And above all, the concluding coda is considerably expanded. What was previously a grand opening choral tableau⁵⁶ was turned into a genuine aria for the first tenor.⁵⁷ Quite apart from that, the version for the Teatro Carcano considerably increased Giasone's role, at least with respect to the overall distribution of the cast: Egeo, the other first tenor originally sung by Garcia, had an aria cut from Act Two (II,10) and his role reduced to little more than a secondary part.

⁵⁶ On the dramatic functions of the musical numbers in *Medea in Corinto*, see my "*Medea in Corinto*" di Felice Romani.

⁵⁷ A reading of "Di gloria all'invito" as a model of the four-part aria is given in LAMACCHIA, "'Solita forma' del duetto o del numero?".