STENDHAL AND ROSSINI

By HENRY PRUNIÈRES[1]

BEYLE was taking a walk in the *Giardini* at Milan. A German military band was playing and Beyle listened as he eyed the women who passed by. Having grown accustomed to life in Milan he yielded himself to the beauties of art and of nature in Italy, to the charm of amorous confidences, to the delights of the theater and of music. He recognized an impassioned melody by Mozart which "one hundred and fifty *faultless* wind instruments" played with a "particular melancholy," and his sensitive soul was stirred. Then the band began another piece, and this time Beyle was astonished as he heard the light music, effervescent and sparkling like the wine of Asti, which seemed to twit everybody and everything with its mockery. Upon asking who the composer was, he was told that it was "a young man named Rossini," and was urged to go to see the charming *Tancred* of this new, fashionable composer.

From this time forth Beyle heard the name of Rossini on every tongue and was astonished at not having heard his compositions before. Everywhere, at the concerts, at the balls, in the drawing-rooms, in the cafés, on the streets, they played airs from *Tancred* and from *The Italian in Algiers*.

At first Beyle rebelled. All of Rossini's tempi and rhythms were like "eel pie"; and then what did this music, always lively, elegant and smart, pretend to express? It was a ragout, a piquant sauce, a veritable lobster bisque meant to excite blasé tastes and jaded senses. But what enjoyment could this deluge of dancing, leaping little notes afford a man, who like Beyle, demanded of music the expression of tender emotions? The form, the "physique of music" concerned him very little. It is, after all, merely the adornment, the more or less sumptuous cloak, which drapes the composer's thought. The latter alone is important. A melody by Mozart, by Cimarosa, gave him the impression of being in communion with the very emotion, with the sentiment which had inspired it. Soul spoke to soul. He could not help finding Rossini amusing, but how much he preferred Mozart, who never amused

[1]Preface to the author's edition of "La Vie de Rossini" in Stendhal's "Œuvres complètes."

him. "He is like one's heart's mistress, serious and often sad, but all the more beloved just because of her sadness." Cimarosa has portrayed love in all its phases with a marvellous delicacy of touch and richness of color. His gaiety is natural, naïve, spontaneous. Paesiello charms us with irresistible grace. All three in varying degree and by different means gratify the deeper passions of the soul. Rossini contents himself with an agreeable tickling of the epidermis. His crescendos, his finales, provoke explosions of nervous and factitious gaiety, of forced laughter. He electrifies his hearers, he does not move them.

If Rossini had never had other rivals on the Italian stage than Mozart and Cimarosa, Beyle would never have departed from his disdainful attitude toward him. But this was not at all the case. While French audiences accepted novelties with difficulty and remained desperately faithful to works which had once given pleasure, the Italians, on the contrary, grew disaffected with old operas for the sole reason that they had been applauded long enough. Cimarosa, Paesiello, were no longer in fashion. Mozart was enjoyed by a mere handful of *dilettanti*. His music seemed obscure, learned, of a sombre violence. He was admired more than he was loved. Simon Mayr, Paër, Fioravanti, Guglielmi, Generali, Mosca, Anfossi, held the boards. It was they who reconciled Stendhal with Rossini. Beside Mozart the new-comer appeared little; beside Paër he was a giant.

After the void, the interminable *ennui*, of an opera by Simon Mayr, with his emphatic style, his coarse gaiety of the "good fellow without *esprit*," the music of Rossini seemed to Beyle radiant with youth. The composer "scattered out new ideas with lavish hands. Sometimes he succeeded, sometimes he missed his aim. Everything is piled up, pell-mell, all negligence. It is the profusion and the carelessness of riches without limit." Music "fashioned out of nothing," light, vapory and subtle, a veritable magic tissue woven with rays of sunlight. You stifle when you listen to an opera by that Germanic pedant, Mayr. Go to a Rossini opera, and suddenly you feel the pure, fresh air of the upper Alps; you feel yourself breathing more freely, you seem born anew; it was genius you needed.

The mediocrity of contemporary musicians compelled Stendhal to recognize the superiority and the genius of Rossini. He preserved his cult of Mozart and of Cimarosa, but he admitted that Rossini had renewed the *opera seria*, had infused new life into this decrepit *genre*. He admitted that men were thoroughly amused by *The Italian in Algiers*, *The Touchstone* (*La Pietra del Paragone*),

The Barber of Seville, even while he reiterated the dictum of the older *dilettanti*, that Rossini had never written a real *buffo* aria, and that Cimarosa and Paesiello remained inimitable in this style. The welcome given to the first operas of the son of Pesaro in Paris brought about the final conversion of Stendhal to "Rossiniism." He had suddenly realized that this brilliant, superficial music, sparkling with malice and *esprit*, was just made to ravish the Parisians. It was for this very reason, to some extent, that the seductive charms of the "Voltaire of music" had only partly captivated him at first. When he saw that in Paris *Tancred* and the *Italian in Algiers* provoked the absurd criticisms of Berton, whose operas bored one to death, he felt his admiration for Rossini redoubled immediately. Beyle was endowed with a marvellous spirit of contradiction. At Milan, he preserved for a long time his "anti-Rossinian" attitude, but with his Parisian friends he became the apostle of the new music.

In his desire to become better acquainted with Rossini's operas, he ended by loving them. As a matter of fact, he was always, to use his own expression, a "Rossinist of 1815." A fervent admirer of the *Italian in Algiers*, *The Touchstone*, *The Turk in Italy*, and even, though more moderately, of the *Barber*, he never acknowledged the works of the Neapolitan period.

Passages of *Othello* and of *Moses* moved him profoundly, but he never, in their entirety, accepted these operas, in which the German symphonic style appeared to make itself felt to the detriment of the Italian melodic quality. He could never pardon Rossini for the vocal writing of his last compositions, the vocalises, like flourishes on the clarinet, and the embellishments fused into the melodic line.

In spite of his reservations, in spite of his resistance, his taste developed almost unconsciously. One day he noticed with sorrow that the music of Cimarosa no longer produced in him the same effect as formerly. The feelings, the passions, seemed to him expressed "like rose water," and he had to agree that, while his chosen composer had "more ideas, and above all, much better ideas than Rossini," Rossini, to make up for this, showed an entirely different mastery of style. The same disillusion in the case of Paesiello. He was charming, exquisite, but after half an hour of this delicacy one surprised one's self in a yawn. Only his Mozart worship remained intact, and suffered no harm from his very lively enjoyment of Rossini.

In his own phrase, Beyle would have said that for Mozart he felt the "love-passion" in all its beauty, its grandeur and its purity;

and that for Rossini he felt only the "love-taste," without allowing himself to be blinded in any way to the defects of the object of that taste.

If Beyle showed indulgence toward the faults of harmonic orthography which aroused the ire of the pedants and of the envious critics of Italy, France and Germany, he did not in return easily pardon Rossini for his indolence, his negligence, his continual repetitions, his errors of sense and taste. Like a disabused lover, he did not fail to mingle a few disagreeable observations with his praises. Now, the defects which he emphasizes are precisely those into which he himself falls. One such criticism, aimed at Rossini, could be applied to Beyle himself without modification. He reproaches Rossini with writing an opera just as he would a letter. Are the *Life of Rossini*, or *Rome, Naples and Florence*, anything else than long letters written by fits and starts? In reality, if Beyle feels for the works of Rossini a singular sentiment of mingled admiration and hostility, of sympathy and repulsion, it is because they too much resemble his own works, and because Rossini is a great deal less the Voltaire of music than the Stendhal of music.

We must, of course, leave Stendhal's *Le Rouge et le Noir* and Rossini's *William Tell* out of consideration; but is there anything which so much resembles Stendhal's early works, with their happy inventions in the way of expression, their delicacy of thought and analysis, the fine observations scattered all through them, lost in an inextricable confusion of loose phrases and the rigmarole of reiterated ideas, as the first operas of Rossini, in which a few pieces, a veritable treat for the ears and for the finer understanding, are knit together well or ill by the most insipid transitions and padded out with most banal formulas? I imagine that Beyle discovered a little of himself in Rossini, and resented the discovery with a certain irritation.

He experienced an analogous feeling when circumstances brought him into personal contact with Rossini. Rossini would have declared that he had never seen this gentleman who was mentioned to him. It is very possible that the musician who, in every town in which he stayed to be present at performances of his operas, had carelessly watched a line of some hundred *dilettanti* pass by him, disputing among themselves the honor of being introduced to him, had preserved no recollection of the little, thick-set, whiskered man with keen eyes, who was a party to his conversations with the poet, Monti, or who, seated at the same table, laughed at his sprightly repartee. Beyle, in 1820, spoke Italian but poorly and could not readily have taken part in a general conversation when

a man with such caustic wit as Rossini's took an active share in it. He preferred to keep silent, to listen and to lose not a word. If Stendhal made of whole cloth his story of his meeting with the composer in the inn at Terracina in 1817, it is certain that he saw him often in Milan in the drawing-rooms which he frequented between 1819 and 1821. Before being presented to Rossini, Beyle knew him well through the many anecdotes, agreeable or scandalous, which were told of the composer. He heard not only the *bon-mots* and gallant adventures attributed to Rossini, that supplied material for conversation in the boxes at the Scala which Beyle visited night after night, but he could pick up bits of most amusing gossip and scandal about the composer in the salon of Elena Vigano, where he went thrice weekly after the theater. Elena was the daughter of the celebrated choreograph whose glory, in the eyes of Stendhal, equalled that of Canova, of Rossini, even of Napoleon. She was a charming woman, a thorough musician, with a pretty voice, who liked to gather round her, from eleven o'clock in the evening until two in the morning, fifteen or twenty amateurs and artists, who, like her, were passionately fond of music. No formality, no ceremony. One went to these soirées in street boots if one wished; one stretched out at ease on a sofa and was charmed by the airs which the fascinating diva sang with consummate art. One was not obliged to contribute to the conversation. One talked or remained silent entirely according to one's natural inclination. There, surely, Beyle heard the most interesting discussions about music, and there he laid in a stock of anecdotes about the composers then in fashion. The amiable "Nina" knew them all. Simon Mayr was an old friend of her father's. Rossini had been her teacher and honored her with his friendship. Michele Carafa was quite at home in that house. Beyle could not be better situated to pick up the echoes of the life of the theater and of music in Italy.

He had, moreover, had a chance, in the house of some other friends, to make the acquaintance of the very young singer, Adelaide Schiassetti, whose angelic face made one forget her slightly deformed body. The daughter of an Italian general and a countess, she was "proud as forty aristocracies," and created a furor when she was in voice. Beyle cultivated her acquaintance and took pleasure in hearing her sing Rossini's airs. She sought, but without avail, to make him enjoy the operas of Mercadante, a new composer in whom she was interested.

Beyle frequented another house in which the memory of the youth, Rossini, had been kept alive. He was well acquainted with the sisters Mombelli. It was for them, to a libretto written by

their mother, and with the advice of their father, a celebrated tenor, that Rossini at the age of fourteen had composed in Bologna his opera, *Demetrius and Polibius*, which the sisters afterwards sang all over Italy. One of them had married a journalist, Angelo Lambertini, a savant and a fool, an excellent violin player and an intimate friend of Rossini's. At the Mombelli house Beyle could hear many a tale of adventure in Rossini's early life, and was amused to hear father Mombelli, who in the days of his glory had been on terms of great intimacy with Cimarosa, Sacchini and Paesiello, declaim against "ornaments and piquant sauce *à la Rossini*."

It was not before November, 1819, that Beyle was introduced to Rossini, with whom he was already so well acquainted by hearsay. The conversationalist amused him, the man was antipathetic. So much wit, verve, animation and waggishness could not leave him indifferent. He took a lively pleasure in observing him, in listening to his discussions with Monti, and received as oracles his observations and criticisms in musical matters; but the coarse Epicurean, fond of high living, was repugnant to him. He was shocked to find a man who carried out the principles of "Beylism" to their very last consequences. Beyle, it is true, had formulated the theory of the pursuit of happiness and maintained that every man ought to take his pleasure where he found it, but he did not, in fact, feel much sympathy with those who were too easily contented. He who, at this very period and in spite of his truculent letters to his friend, de Mareste, suffered cruelly because of his lofty passion for Matilde Dembrusky-Viscontini, was astonished that an artist like Rossini could limit his desires to being courted and petted by several women at the same time, setting them down plumply and without ceremony when he had enough of them, "eating like three ogres, twenty beefsteaks a day," scrimping, haggling, hoarding, making the lover of his mistress support him, in brief, living like "a disgusting pig." There were also, in the character of the artist, many things that Beyle could not approve of. Rossini did not conceal the fact that he wrote operas only to make money, and that, when he had laid by enough to guarantee his income, he counted on abandoning music and taking a rest. One has gone far afield to find the reasons why Rossini ceased to compose after *William Tell*. It will suffice to cast a glance at Stendhal's correspondence. There, under the date of November 2, 1819, in a letter to de Mareste we read: "I saw Rossini yesterday upon his arrival. He will be twenty-eight years old next April. He wants to quit working at thirty." Ten years later, Rossini,

having secured the income which he deemed necessary, realized the dream of his life. He snapped his pen in two and consecrated himself to the joys of gastronomic art. This decision, although it stunned the public at large, could cause but little astonishment for Stendhal. He, who cultivated letters for the love of letters and above all for the love of the ideas he wished to express, could not approve of such a corruption of the rôle of the artist. The pursuit of happiness, as Rossini practised it, could not but appear to him as a caricature of his dearest theories. And yet he could not bear Rossini a grudge because of this. If a Frenchman or an Englishman had conducted himself in this fashion, he would have despised him. But how could one be indignant with, how could one even take seriously, this Olympian buffoon? He offered sacrifices to his instincts with such tranquil assurance, with such natural ease, with such indifference to opinion! At need, he knew so well how to justify himself with a pun, and to make game of all, of himself before all others. Beyle was too well aware of Rossini's genius to think of measuring him with the common measure, but this somewhat spoiled his great man for him. The more so as his admiration had a certain admixture of antipathy. It is this complex sentiment which manifests itself in all that Stendhal has written on Rossini and his work.

Beyle, driven from Milan in 1821 by calumnies which represented him as a spy of the French government, returned to Paris, where again he found Rossini's music triumphant at the *Théâtre Louvois*. After *The Happy Deception* (*l'Inganno Felice*), *Tancred*, *The Italian in Algiers*, *The Barber of Seville*, there were performed in the course of two seasons from 1821 to 1822, six Rossini operas unknown in France: *The Touchstone*, *Elisabeth*, *Othello*, *The Thieving Magpie* (*La Gazza Ladra*), *Cinderella*, *Moses*. Regretting always the wonderful voices he had but lately heard, the orchestra of the Scala, so discreet and so supple, and the marvellous stage-settings of Senquirico and Perego, who knew so well how to persuade "the imagination to take the first steps into the land of illusions," Stendhal attended the Italian opera assiduously. There he found Madame Pasta again, who in the role of Desdemona made all Paris weep. He attempted to reconstruct his Milanese life. In the evening he went to the opera or into society and toward midnight he made his entry regularly at Madame Pasta's. There, listening to the music or playing faro by way of distraction with the Italian friends of the diva, he imagined himself in Milan again.

Beyle had rented a room at the *Hotel des Lillois*, *63 rue de Richelieu*, attracted, without doubt, by the neighborhood of Madame

Pasta, who occupied the first floor of this hostelry. He had only to go downstairs to imagine himself in Italy. Around the piano the same discussions took place on the subject of Rossini as he had recently heard at the house of Nina Vigano.

In Paris Beyle was surely the man who knew Rossini and his works best. Up to that time there had appeared, in France as well as in Italy, only the criticisms and reviews in the journals, which were written as the works of the master from Pesaro were performed. Of the life of the man not more was known than a certain number of more or less authentic anecdotes. Assembling all his recollections, running through the sketches of his letters to his friends, and aided perhaps by a few scattered publications carefully preserved, Beyle wrote an article on Rossini for an English review published in Paris, to which he was a regular contributor. In January, 1822, *The Paris Monthly Review* published, under the pseudonym of *Alceste*, an English translation of this essay. It reached its aim and profited by the curiosity which the name of Rossini had aroused. Slightly altered it was immediately reprinted in two great British reviews: *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* and *Galignani's Monthly Review*. A Milan journal got possession of it and printed an Italian translation. This article was included in a volume in company with a pedantic dissertation on the æsthetic aims of Rossini's music. This work appeared in Milan in 1824, under the title of *Rossini and His Music*, almost at the same time as the two volumes of Beyle's *Life of Rossini* in Paris.

However ardent a Stendhalian one may be, it is difficult to attribute this great success solely to the merit of the article in the *Paris Monthly Review*. Translated into English or Italian, the grace of the style is dissipated. There remains only the matter stripped bare: facts and opinions. Now, one cannot pretend that Beyle revealed himself in this study as a very well-informed historian or as a subtle critic. It was evidently written to order hastily. The author trusted to his memory for the anecdotes and the information relating to Rossini's youth. It is for the most part wrong, or at any rate very inexact, whether it be a question of the date of the composer's birth, of his family, or of the beginning of his musical career. One finds, moreover, numerous disputable details in the *Life of Rossini:* an air in *Tancred* borrowed from a Greek chant, letters addressed by the musician to "Signora Rossini, mother of the illustrious *maestro* at Pesaro," Rossini's mystification of his travelling companions on the way to Reggio, the first performance of the *Barber* at Rome, instances of the incredible facility with which the composer worked, etc.

Stendhal had ended his article by artfully mingling criticisms with his praises, as a man who refused to be "duped entirely by Rossini's whipped cream and fanfaronades." He admired the extreme rapidity, the brilliance and the freshness of his melodies, but he deplored the fact that the soul could find no deeper enjoyment in them. What will remain of *The Barber of Seville* when that work is as old as *Don Giovanni*?

In Italy the article appeared to the Rossini party as a pamphlet against their god. Signora Gertrude Giorgi Righetti, who had created the rôle of Rosina in *The Barber of Seville* and that of Cinderella, believed herself personally involved in the quarrel, for Stendhal had neglected to sing the praises of her voice in speaking of the *Barber*. She had retired from the stage, and, married to a worthy bourgeois citizen, lived in Bologna, without, however, resigning herself to oblivion. She took up the pen to confound the *giornalista inglese*, and to refute, point by point, his lying assertions.

The pamphlet which we owe to the ex-prima donna's rage is entitled: *Notes of a lady, formerly a singer, on Maestro Rossini, in reply to what the English Journalist in Paris wrote of him in the Summer of 1822, as reported in a Milan Gazette of the same year.* This little work of some sixty pages is extremely diverting. On every page the singer's indignation against the foreign journalists breaks forth. Stendhal is not the only object of her invective. Did not an infamous Paris critic dare to insinuate that if, in the book of Cinderella, a lost bracelet was substituted for the traditional glass slipper, it was because the actress who played the title-rôle had big feet?

In the course of her pamphlet Signora Righetti gives us valuable information about Rossini, about his family, and above all, about the memorable evening on which *The Barber of Seville* was performed for the first time in Rome. Did Beyle know the brochure when he wrote his *Life of Rossini*? Evidently many of the inaccuracies pointed out by the singer do not recur in Stendhal's book. But he may have drawn his information from other sources. It seems hardly possible that Beyle would have allowed certain picturesque details in the lady's story to escape him. He knew by hearsay that the piece which was greeted with hisses the first night was repeated with great success the next day. But if he had been aware of the scenes which Signora Righetti describes: the furious crowd interrupting the first performance and then going, the next night, to awaken Rossini from his sleep, invading his bed-chamber to congratulate him in his bed upon the success of his opera, would he not have made use of this in his *Life of Rossini*?

On the whole Signora Righetti does not fulfill her promises. She does not refute Stendhal except in a few biographical details. She confines herself more often to disputing unimportant points and completing certain data only summarily indicated by Stendhal. Her great preoccupation is to keep her own memory green, to remind the world that she possessed "the most beautiful voice ever heard in Rome." In addition she does not fail to slip in a few allusions to her own beauty and to emphasize the boundless admiration that Rossini displayed toward her at the time when she did him the honor to interpret his operas.

While the article in the *Paris Monthly Review* was causing all this excitement, Stendhal sat in his hotel room, writing *An Essay on the History of Music in Italy from 1800 to 1823*. The unexpected success of his article induced him to bring out this new work in English. By the 4th of December it was well advanced, for he wrote to Mr. Sutton Sharpe in London that this *History of Music at the Beginning of the Nineteenth Century* had just been translated into English by a friend, and that it would make a volume of about four hundred octavo pages. "There are not many ideas in this little work," he explains, "but it is full of little facts which have the merit of being true."

Through the mediation of a young English barrister, Mr. Luby, negotiations were carried on with the publishing house of Murray, which had already brought out *The Life of Haydn*, but they led to nothing. Beyle withdrew his manuscript and subjected it to considerable modification. During the Winter and Spring of 1823 Beyle worked at his *Life of Rossini*. He had decided that this work should be seriously authoritative. Friends furnished him with analyses of the scores, others sent him from Italy biographical data about Rossini. The salon of Madame Pasta must have been a rich source of information for Stendhal. In 1823 only ten years had elapsed since the triumph of *Tancred* in Venice, and the history of Rossini's operas was still living in the memories of the *dilettanti* gathered around Madame Pasta's piano. Beyle wrote the preface of his new work in September 1823 and dated it Montmorency, where he often stayed during the warm season. At this time the *Life of Rossini* was ended with a chronological list of the composer's works. The English translator must have worked with a manuscript copy of the *Life*.

In January, 1824, the publisher, Hookham, in London brought out *The Memoirs of Rossini by the Author of The Lives of Haydn and Mozart*. In the preface the translator declines to identify himself with the anonymous author's judgment of the talent of Madame

Colbran. He warns the reader that he has had to cut various passages concerning religion, politics, Italian manners and morals, and that he has added from his own pen information regarding Rossini's trip to Vienna in 1822, and the success of *Semiramis*. As an excuse for the typographical errors which may be encountered, he alleges the haste with which the book had to be printed. Rossini had been in England since December 7, 1823, and we can understand the publisher's desire to bring before the public a work so strikingly opportune.

I imagine that the English *Memoirs of Rossini* represent the first draft of *The Life of Rossini*, revised and corrected by a translator anxious not to let the subject disappear under the accumulation of digressions and accessory details. It is a well constructed work, clear, authoritative, lively, giving valuable historical information and judicious analyses of Rossini's operas. It is, in fine, the material from which *The Life of Rossini* was to be made, but condensed, arranged, reduced by one-half. From the historical point of view this is the first and, without doubt, the best book written on Rossini in the first half of the nineteenth century. For Stendhalians, however, it is far from possessing the same interest as *The Life of Rossini*, which is an improvisation of genius, exuberant with life, bubbling over with ideas.

While Stritch was laboring to translate and summarize the contents of the manuscript which Stendhal had sent him, the latter was at work completing and augmenting it with a view to publication in French. He added notes everywhere. The performances of Rossini operas at the *Théâtre Louvois* suggested to him reflections on the execution of these works in Italy and in France. He wrote several new chapters, most of them entirely foreign to the subject, which he intercalated among the analyses of the operas.

The Memoirs of Rossini had been out for several months in London, and Stendhal, without hurrying himself, was still reworking his manuscript. He had even requested his friend, de Mareste, to furnish him with a chapter on the history of the establishment of the *opéra bouffe* in Paris from 1800 to 1823. He had only to add a note attributing this study to "M. Adolphe de Besançon." In this way de Mareste was enabled to denounce the intrigues of Paër and his associates against Rossini's music.

"If you will not do this chapter for me (writes Beyle), you will give me a devilish lot of trouble, for I was away and have no recollection of the facts. You can pour out your bile on the idiotic administration of Madame Catalani, and you can display your genius by sketching out a scheme of organization for this opera.

The good Barilli, who looks favorably upon you, can give you all the data you may need, between two hands of faro." And Beyle continues to develop his ideas on the ideal constitution of an Italian opera in Paris. We shall find them again in Chapter 43 of *The Life of Rossini*. At the last moment the author adds to the end of his manuscript a long letter from Mademoiselle de Lespinasse. He has succeeded in transforming a coherent work into a monster. Let us not complain, however, for the monster is a masterpiece.

The Life of Rossini by M. de Stendhal appeared in 1824, published by Auguste Boullard and Company, booksellers in Paris. It was graced with portraits of Rossini and of Mozart and bore as a motto these words, attributed to Socrates in Aristophanes' *Clouds:* "Let your thoughts go out like this insect, which we set free in the air with a string to its leg."

The work was successful and helped to revive interest in *Rome, Naples and Florence*. Beyle, however, anxious to create the impression that the first edition was immediately exhausted, had a copy of the title struck off with the remark: *Second Edition*, and inserted between the preface and the introduction a notice of four pages on *The Life and Works of Mozart*. We do not know how large a return *The Life of Rossini* brought Stendhal, but it was surely much more than he derived from his famous novels. It spread over the whole world. In the very year of its publication, Professor Wendt in Leipzig brought out a German translation, or to be more exact, an adaptation. If the spirit and the style of Stendhal were somewhat dimmed by the varnish of the English translation, they were effaced still more in the German version under the thick coating with which they were covered by the conscientious German editor, who was not skilful in his handling of the explanatory notes and emendations.

In Italy *The Life of Rossini* was much sought after in spite of its high price, but more through malignant curiosity than because of any taste or understanding for the work. Those who did not simply draw upon the book as plagiarists, were pleased to point out its biographical inaccuracies, and to insinuate that Beyle had been the victim of Rossini's jokes and *rodomontades*. The admirers of Rossini found fault with the author for not having handled their idol more gently in his criticisms, and Rossini's detractors were astonished that Beyle should have taken him so seriously.

Even in France it was a matter of good tone among musical critics to treat *The Life of Rossini* as a work of pure fantasy, which did not prevent them from stealing from it, even reproducing entire chapters in biographies of Rossini published in Belgium. Stendhal was bitterly reproached with having fallen into errors of detail, and

even with a lack of sympathetic spirit. "If he had subjected all his ideas to the domination of one fruitful parent thought," wrote Joseph d'Ortigues in 1829, "this writer would have turned out only a little work, a pamphlet. M. de Stendhal has had nothing but *esprit;* he has written two volumes."

The memory of the famous case of plagiarism of which Beyle had been guilty toward Carpani when he published *The Life of Haydn*, aroused the suspicion that in this case also he might have stolen the property of another. It so happened that in this very year, 1824, Carpani had brought out his *Rossiniane*, a collection of letters on the music of Rossini and Weber which had, most of them, appeared previously in the *Biblioteca Italiana*. So much more reason for accusing Stendhal of renewed plagiarism. But this time the reproach is without foundation. There is not a line in *The Rossiniane* which could have inspired the author of *The Life of Rossini*. If there are, at times, similarities, it is a question of commonplaces without interest. Better still—whether as a result of chance or owing to a fixed purpose—Stendhal had abstained from commenting on those operas of Rossini which had been treated by Carpani. Fétis did not take the trouble to read either *The Life of Rossini* or *The Rossiniane* to bring his charge of plagiarism against Stendhal. In truth, Beyle took his material where he found it with a too graceful ease to escape, perhaps, on this one occasion when he was not poaching, the ill will of his detractors. *The Life of Rossini* is a work at first hand and of immediate conception. In it the personality of Stendhal is manifested tumultuously from end to end with its worst defects and its most admirable qualities.

Those who, on the strength of the title, seek in *The Life of Rossini* a biography in the usual sense of the word, will be doomed to disappointment. It is no more a biography than the *Promenades in Rome* or *Rome, Naples and Florence* are guides to Italy for the use of the ordinary tourist. Some one has characterized *Rome, Naples and Florence* as "a journal of sensations." One might say that *The Life of Rossini* is a journal of sensations experienced by Stendhal in the course of a voyage through the field of music.

Stendhal was acquainted with only a limited territory in this field: Mozart, Cimarosa, Paesiello, Rossini—but he knew that territory well and not indirectly through others. He was ignorant of all the glorious past of Italy. Allegri's *Miserere*, heard at the Sistine Chapel, appeared to him like music from afar, almost barbarous, contemporaneous with Dante and the Gothic cathedrals, even though he takes note of the last offshoots of the polyphonic style which tradition had kept alive in the schools of Rome up to

the end of the seventeenth century. For Stendhal, music begins with Pergolesi, Vinci, and Leo. And yet he knew of these charming composers of the eighteenth century only because he had read of them in the letters of the President de Brosses, in the writings of Jean Jacques Rousseau, and in Burney's *History*. He mentions their names and passes on. Let us be grateful to him for not seeking to make a display of erudition. He would have felt himself obliged to adapt and translate chapters from some more or less well informed foreign historian. We should have had another plagiarism in the style of *The Life of Haydn*, a strong work, very agreeable without doubt, bearing Stendhal's mark, but not contributing much to his glory.

Limiting his desires to the writing of the musical history of his own times, that is to say of the "era of Rossini," he did not have to borrow erudition from others. It would, moreover, have been difficult for him to copy any other writer for the simple reason that, aside from the newspaper articles, the criticisms and the polemical writings in the press, no book summing up Rossini's life and works had yet been written. Now, it is not an act of plagiarism to make use of published documents or manuscripts in writing a historical work.

For the rest, the biographical element in *The Life of Rossini* is reduced to a few data: the date of the composer's birth, his family, his education, his *débuts*, the dates of first performances.... All this could have been condensed into a paragraph of twenty lines for a dictionary. There were certainly in Italy, among Beyle's friends, at least a dozen persons who could have procured this information for him. All the rest of the book is made up of analyses of operas, anecdotes, and æsthetic, political, moral, critical, philosophic and literary considerations. The printed sources of *The Life of Rossini* are, accordingly, insignificant.

There are found here and there, in this book, passages which give the impression of having been adapted from the Italian: for instance, the technical dissertation on singing in Chapter 33; but Beyle contented himself with translating a few pages from some book, or perhaps he made use of a note written especially for him by some obliging friend. Beyle reserved for himself the task of fixing the collective character of his work. It is not his own personal judgment that he gives from beginning to end, but the opinion, or rather the opinions, which he has heard expressed by those around him.

I pray the reader to believe (he writes) "that the *I* in this work is but a form of speech, which might be replaced by: "They say in Naples

in the salon of the Marquis Berio . . ." or: "M. Peruchini of Venice, this well informed amateur, whose sentiments are law, told us one day at Madame Benzoni's . . ." or: "This evening, in the circle which gathers around the armchair of Mr. Attorney Antonini in Bologna, I heard Mr. Agguchi maintain that the harmony of the Germans . . ." or: "Count Giraud was of the opinion that Rossini's friend, Mr. Gherardi, had fought to the bitter end. . . ."

And Beyle does not hesitate to declare that "to write this *Life of Rossini* he has collected from all sides, for example, from the German and Italian journals, the judgments on this great man and his works.

This time he exaggerates. A few years earlier he had claimed that he owed nothing to Carpani, whom he had despoiled even while he scoffed at him. Now he exerts himself to convince us that his *Life of Rossini* is nothing but a "cento," made up of extracts from journals. That Stendhal drew useful bits of information from the newspapers, is quite probable; but as a matter of fact, he made little use of them, as one is quite convinced in looking through the pages of the gazettes and journals then published in Italy. As he himself very justly remarks a little farther on, "the articles in the journals are either hymns of praise or Philippics and rarely offer anything positive."

A historical and critical work like *The Life of Rossini*, could not be wholly a work of fantasy. Authorities are necessary. To procure them Beyle certainly made his friends work very hard. We have seen him ask Baron de Mareste for a note on the *opéra bouffe* in Paris. He must have procured from able amateurs the analyses of operas which he used in writing his work. One can thus explain certain contradictions which may be discovered in the course of the book between the rather severe appreciations of certain operas and the eulogies paid elsewhere in the book to the various pieces of which they are made up. Stendhal does not fail to point out that he has forewarned his readers in good faith. It is their task to distinguish between the expression of his own opinions and the reproduction of the opinions of others. It is not always easy to do this, and for the uninitiated reader there are often contradictions between the praises and the criticisms of one and the same work. Stendhal is never very kindly disposed toward Rossini, but he worked with notes furnished him by ardent admirers of the master. Hence the conflict, which is, moreover, very amusing to observe when one is initiated. Precisely because of this abundance of argument for and against Rossini's music, Stendhal's book is truly representative of the opinions current in the drawing-rooms of

Milan about 1820. From time to time the mordant voice of Beyle dominates the hubbub of these impassioned discussions.

As he wrote the successive chapters of his book he submitted his manuscript to the approbation of friends so that they might correct the "errors of fact" into which he often fell "like La Fontaine's astrologer who tumbled into a well while gazing at the stars." And he renders account of these suggestions and corrections. Somewhere he thanks the "Chevalier de Mirechoux, former Minister at Dresden," for valuable corrections made by the latter, and for acceptable and useful ideas which he had suggested. The dialogue which he writes at the head of his analysis of the *Barber* must have taken place often between him and the *dilettanti* whom he interrogates: "Come, let us get to work seriously. Let us open the score. I am going to play you the principal airs. Make a concise and sensible analysis."

They are quite exact and very neat, these analyses of Rossini's operas which Stendhal gives us. He makes no display of technical terms and does not consider that he has accounted for a piece in dissecting its grammatical structure. He seeks to give us in words an idea of the music, and complains of his inability to note down for us in simple fashion the musical motives of which he speaks, because he cannot let us hear them. This had not yet become the custom. Even when we feel that Stendhal is reproducing the ideas of others, he impresses his own stamp upon them and intermingles his analyses with reflections and digressions which forbid our being bored. He is something of a "Jacques, the fatalist" relating the tale of his *amours* to his master, subject to continual interruptions. In the end the analyses are finished and a charming impression remains. This absence of pedantry is not the meanest attraction of Stendhal's book.

We may find in the *Correspondence* judgments on Rossini's operas, which he has just heard, formulated in terms almost identical with those in *The Life of Rossini*. As to Rossini's style, however, Beyle is, in general, more severe in his letters than in his book. He seems to have made use of sketches of letters written in Italy. It is to be regretted that the manuscript of *The Life of Rossini* has disappeared. It must have bristled with passages pasted over and with inserts. To make a note at the head of Chapter 45 he simply pins to his manuscript a fragment of a letter, forgetting that a passage in the second person sounds very strangely in that place:

> In music, conversation or discussion never leads to anything beyond the necessary recitative; melodic song, the aria, is a new atmosphere for which one must have a feeling. Now, this feeling is very rare in France

south of the Loire. It is very common in Toulouse and in the Pyrenees. Do you remember the little rascals who sang beneath our windows at Pierrefite (on the road to Cauterets) and whom we called up to our rooms? Toulouse. . . .

The whole book is written with this nonchalance, often quite charming, this disdain for pompous phrases and emphatic commonplaces. Beyle explains himself boldly in the beginning of Chapter 33:

> If I have had one constant care, it was to exaggerate nothing through style, and to avoid, above all, securing any effect by a succession of considerations or images of somewhat forced warmth, which would lead one to say at the end of the period: "There is a fine page!" In the first place, as I entered the field of literature very late in life, heaven had denied to me entirely the talent of decking out an idea and of exaggerating gracefully. Furthermore, there is nothing worse than exaggeration in the tender concerns of life.

Like Rossini's early operas, Stendhal's book is an improvisation. When he has once set up his canvas satisfactorily he "broiders" it with astonishing ease. At times his threads become tangled and the design appears no longer distinct; but just as one begins to believe that the work is irremediably spoiled, order is reëstablished, and an exquisite flower, of charming color and new form, blossoms out under the fairy fingers of the adroit workman. For Stendhal is infinitely adroit in spite of his continual awkwardness. To point out his inaccuracies, his repetitions and reiterations, would be to imitate those whom he derides for finding fault with Rossini's negligence. Of what consequence are the banal transitions, the rapid cadenzas, the curtailed developments, as long as the opera includes a dozen dazzling numbers written with verve and fine feeling? There is not a chapter in *The Life of Rossini* which does not produce some flower of thought, some turn of expression, which in itself alone is worth a whole volume of chastened and emasculated style.

Stendhal never creates the impression that he is forcing himself, but rather that he is indulging in play. He writes "to while away the morning," and the "trade of author" fills him with deep disgust. He writes what comes into his head, what he believes, without caring whether he runs counter to or offends the opinions of others. In fact, he takes pleasure in stirring up his own spirits. He does not plume himself on his impartiality. This may be a very fine quality for historians, but in the arts it is, "like reason in love, the portion of cold or feebly smitten hearts." He says what he thinks without the slightest faith in his own infallibility. He does

not pretend that his judgments are law. He thinks thus and so, but he is quite free to admit that others may have received a widely divergent impression of the same work. He asks only that they be sincere and that they refrain from simulating feelings which they do not experience. He agrees with the best grace in the world that he may have shown himself unjust to the operas in Rossini's second manner:

> I myself am probably as much the dupe of my feelings as any of my predecessors, when I proclaim that the style of *Tancred* is the perfect union of antique melody with modern harmony. I am the dupe of a magician who afforded me the most lively pleasure in my early youth; and on the other hand, I am unjust to the *Thieving Magpie* and to *Othello*, which arouse feelings that are less sweet, less entrancing, but are more piquant and, perhaps, stronger.

One cannot picture a critic with more good faith than Stendhal, or less systematic. His perpetual contradictions give an amusing incoherence to his work. He loves Rossini, but with reservations. He has no great affection for the noisy Rossini of *The Thieving Magpie*. He prefers the *esprit*, the delicate charm, the grace and the waggishness of *The Italian in Algiers* or of *Tancred*. Above all he finds fault with the composer for having encroached on the prerogatives of the interpreter. In Italy Beyle was privileged to hear Velluti and two or three other singers who preserved the method and the tradition of *bel canto*. He was captivated. Surely, then, it makes little difference what music they sing. One forgets the composer and thinks only of the virtuoso who transfuses his soul into his song. Velluti with his voice, Paganini with his violin, Liszt on his piano, transfigure the themes which they take as a pretext for their sublime improvisations. Beyle was charmed by them, just as we would still be charmed today if such singers could be found; but Rossini complains that he no longer recognizes his own music. And then, every singer pretended to follow the example given by such high authority. The most mediocre prima donna embroidered with trills, figures and flourishes the air which fell to her, and of which shortly no substantial part remained. Rossini resigned himself to the inevitable, but saved what he could.

He himself wrote out the embellishments and demanded that his interpreters sing the airs as he had written them and not otherwise. Stendhal could not reconcile himself to this reform, and found that Rossini was in the wrong, even though he recognized the disadvantages for the art of music which resulted from the excessive liberties in which the virtuosos indulged to the point of abuse. Under the old system the interpreter was enabled to express the

subtlest shades of feeling of which his soul was capable at the moment when he appeared upon the stage. Now he was constrained to discover the feeling which the composer meant to convey, and hence he sang with less sensibility. Now, for Stendhal, sensibility was everything in music. "Good music is merely our emotion." Surely his is not a technical judgment. He feels a profound disdain for those who are interested only in the "physics of sounds." Music must call forth emotions in him, must arouse reveries. "Every work which lets me think of the music," he declares, "is mediocre for me."

With what authority, then, and—let us speak boldly—with what good sense, he justifies Rossini in the tricks which the composer sometimes plays the sacrosanct rules of the art. These rules, which hamper the genius of the artist, are idle, mathematical stuff, invented with more or less cleverness or imagination. Each of them must needs be submitted to the test of experience. The sure method, the impeccable logic of his master, Tracy, forbids his implicit belief in the value of rules. The Abbé Mattei, when Rossini requested him to explain the reason for his corrections, answered: "One ought to write thus!" Beyle rebels against this dogmatism in which he scents a mystification. "If one has the scandalous temerity to want to inquire into the justification of the rules, what will become of the self-importance and the vanity of the conservatory professors?" So much the worse for grammar, if an artist like Rossini offends against its laws. Stendhal has too intense a love and feeling for music to descend so low as to examine minutely its dismounted mechanism. Of what importance is the mechanism to him, when the sound that it produces alone moves him?

Few men were more sensitive than he to the *nuances* of musical expression. He takes pleasure in defining in words its intangible complexity. He discovers in music the passion which he himself has so subtly dissected: Love. On another occasion, in the book which he has devoted to the phenomena of "crystallization," Beyle was impelled to have recourse to quotations from airs by Mozart, by Cimarosa and by Rossini to portray more exactly a certain shade of sentiment. In analyzing Rossini's operas he continues his psychological work, and in order to enable us better to seize the sense of the music, he relates anecdotes which illustrate feelings like those expressed in the music. There is a close relationship between the book on *Love* and *The Life of Rossini*, and the theories formulated in the earlier work are illustrated and commented upon by means of musical illustrations in the latter.

In Stendhal's opinion, we can in no wise understand the music of Italy, if we do not render ourselves an exact account of the soil from which it is sprung. As he writes to a friend: "This species of froth which one calls the Fine Arts is the necessary product of a certain fermentation. To acquire a knowledge of the froth one must know the nature of the fermentation." Here we have, in fine, the whole theory of the influence of environment, so brilliantly formulated and exemplified in the systematic method of Taine.

Stendhal, in order to reveal to us the meaning of Rossini's music, or to be more exact, of Italian music in Rossini's time, outlines for us a picture of contemporary manners and morals, evoking with each page the memory of the manners of times past which have contributed to forming those of the present. There is no more lively element than this in Stendhal's book. To tell the truth, he often merely repeats what he has already said in *Rome, Naples and Italy*, but one has not the heart to complain of that. A delineation of this kind we find, for instance, in the account of the representation at Como of *Demetrius and Polybius*, which ranks among the finest pages in Stendhal.

Convinced that we cannot study the music of a people if we abstract from the land, the customs, the ideas, the passions of that people, he seeks to give a combined impression of the whole, and tries to make the French understand Italy through Rossini's music. The whole book is written with an eye to the French public for which it is intended. Beyle, faithful to his rôle of "*bon cosaque auxiliare*," harrying the laggards of the column with his lance, seeks to excite the curiosity of his compatriots, and to arouse in them the desire to know more of this beautiful land of Italy where one lives and loves after another fashion than the French. Like all those who have lived long in a foreign land, he is enraged by the self-sufficience and the complacent pride of those who have never travelled beyond Saint-Cloud, and who live in the firm belief that there is nothing under the sun which can compare with what is done in Paris. As Sainte-Beuve very aptly remarks, Stendhal addresses himself not so much to the public at large, as to the artists and above all to the critics, whom he urges "to get out of the academic circle, too narrowly French, and to become aware of what is going on outside."

In his disdain for the "patriotism of the antechamber" he hurls the truth at the heads of French musicians. Carried away by his ardor for the fight, he goes too far and at times becomes unjust; but who would have the heart to find fault with him for taking sides against Berton? His rebukes for the noisy orchestras, the expressionless and voiceless singers, seem only too well founded, if we

judge by what our ears suffer to this very day in our lyric theatres.

Stendhal does not confine himself to overwhelming with sarcasm the public of the *Feydeau* and the *Louvois*, with ears "lined with parchment." He never misses an opportunity to war upon the national vices, against the defects which, according to him, are French *par excellence:* vanity, the fear of ridicule, affectation, materialism in art. He exaggerates a great deal, but what an admirable preacher of idealism is this Epicurean! Noble souls cannot escape the infection of his enthusiasm. "I have read through *The Life of Rossini*," confesses Eugène Delacroix in the pages of his diary. "I saturated myself with it, and I did wrong. As a matter of fact, this Stendhal is an insolent fellow who is right with too much arrogance and, at times, reasons falsely!"

Certainly he reasons falsely, but often—and probably Delacroix understood him thus—it is just then that he is all the more right. And then, what luminous *aperçus*, what prophetic views of the future of the art! In particular, he predicts with astounding surety as early as 1824, the fusion in French grand opera of opposing æsthetic principles of Italian and German opera, a prophecy which was to be realized by Rossini five years later in his *Othello:*

> These two great currents of opinion and varying sources of enjoyment, represented today by Rossini and Weber, will probably be blended to form but a single school, and their union, forever memorable, ought to take place under our very eyes, in this Paris, which in spite of the censors and the rigor of the times is more than ever the capital of Europe.

If we overlook certain whims, certain venturous strokes of the pen, we are struck by the justness of his judgments on the musicians of his day. No one, perhaps, has spoken with more tenderness or sensibility about Mozart. As for Rossini, one is astonished both by Beyle's criticisms and by his enthusiasms, for alas! who knows Rossini to-day? I mean the Rossini whom Stendhal loved, the author of *Tancred* and of *The Italian in Algiers*. It is very difficult to judge from the French adaptation of *Le Barbier de Séville* which we are offered at the *Opéra-Comique;* and how many are there who have really heard an Italian troupe in *Il Barbiere di Siviglia?* Those who have taken the pains, or rather those who have had the pleasure of studying the operas of Rossini's youth, can only admire the stern equity of Stendhal's judgment:

> Vivacious, light, piquant, never tiresome, rarely sublime, Rossini seems born expressly to throw mediocre minds into ecstasies. However, though far surpassed by Mozart in tender and melancholy situations,

and by Cimarosa in the comic or in the impassioned style, he is superior in vivacity, celerity, piquancy and all the effects derived from these qualities.

To some people this judgment will appear surprising. "What! Is this all that Stendhal finds to praise in a composer about whom he has been telling us in more than five hundred pages? 'Vivacious, light, piquant, never tiresome . . . ' Does an artist who is no more than this deserve our attention for so long a time?" To be never tiresome, this in itself is reason enough for Stendhal. If one cannot attain the sublime heights of Mozart or Beethoven, if one cannot dispense to men profound emotion or serene joy, then, to amuse them, to give them a pleasure which is more ready, more amiable, but which distracts them from the realities of daily life and transports them into the world of agreeable illusions, is in itself a great deal.

Our age has succumbed to the fascination of the imposing monuments erected by the Romantics. It finds it difficult to imagine that one can listen to music outside of the coffee-house in any other mood than that of receptive ecstasy; that one can enjoy cheerful or tender airs with lively pleasure, and talk or sip sherbets during unimportant recitatives. We listen to the *Barber* to-day as we do to *Parsifal*, religiously from beginning to end. How Stendhal would laugh, and what would he not say of these people who go to the opera as to a sermon!

To be sure, there is music which is nothing but a sublime prayer, which introduces us into mysterious sanctuaries; there is music which fills us with holy horror, which arouses in us delight, woe, superhuman joy; there is music which takes possession of us, carries us along, tosses us upon its irresistible flood and abandons us on the sandy shore, broken as one who recovers consciousness after a long swoon. But is there no place, then, for music of another kind, and is it necessary that the passionate admiration which it calls forth for artists, highly gifted but falling just short of genius, should still impose upon us for any length of time this host of honest, respectable works, proclaiming the highest ideals, but which we cannot hear without yawning? Stendhal teaches—and there are people who have taken his words to heart:

There is room for a less severe, a less dogmatic art. I pray you, gentlemen who compose, put aside this superannuated equipment of sonatas, fugues and canons. Do not persist in resuscitating a dead tongue. What is the use of writing Latin verses? That is good enough for the college. You are no longer, so far as I know, college students. Do not hypnotize yourselves with the contemplation of the past. Belong

to your own times. It is not given to every one to be born a giant. If Nature has not fashioned you thus, make your effort proportionate to your strength. In seeking to plunge men into ecstasies you risk putting them to sleep. Flee from boredom, pedantry, affectation. Life is hard, full of troubles. Aid men to escape them through the imagination. Ponder the example of Rossini who, feeling neither the strength nor the desire to take Destiny by the throat as Beethoven did, prefers to snap his fingers at her. His lusty laughter dissipates the shadows. We forget our misery, the emptiness of life, and we are transported into a world of illusion and delight, wherein, dusted over with golden light, entrancing phantoms are wafted into view.

(*Translated by Otis Kincaid.*)