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Rossini and the Development of the Mid-Century Lyric Form*

BY SCOTT L. BALTHAZAR

“Cantilena, e cantilena sempre, e cantilena bella, e cantilena nuova, e cantilena magica, e cantilena rara” was for Giuseppe Carpani (1824, 74–75), librettist and noted critic of *primo ottocento* opera, the highest achievement of his Italian contemporaries and particularly of the greatest among them, Gioachino Rossini. Melody was central to the operatic experience, generating the emotional impact of Italian music and distinguishing it from foreign operatic traditions. And Rossini’s particular treatment of melody was a salient feature of his personal style that separated him from his followers. His melismatic *canto ideale*, a “noble, simple, florid, impassioned song” (“canto nobile, semplice, fiorito, appassionato”), gave way in the 1830s and 40s to a plainer *canto declamato* in the operas of Bellini, Donizetti, and Verdi.¹ Rossini professed a distaste for this development that might have been predicted from the style of his own music.² Even his last *opere serie*, *Maometto II*, *Zelmira*, and *Semiramide*, show in traditionally *cantabile* movements little of the impulse toward declamation that would infuse Bellini’s writing only a few years later.³

Rossini’s conservative handling of lyrical detail has, I think, encouraged modern scholars to see his melodic style as conservative in other ways as well. Form has assumed particular importance in this regard because of the attention given to it in a series of studies by Friedrich Lippmann. Lippmann has distinguished two categories in Rossini’s melodies: 1) “open” melodies containing free successions of short phrases separated by pauses and decorated with *colorature*; and 2)

*I wish to thank Professors Philip Gossett, Roger Parker, and Gary Tomlinson for reading drafts of this paper and making many helpful suggestions.

¹ Mazzatinti and Manis 1902, 332. See Lippmann 1969a, 295–97, for a discussion of early assessments of “canto ideale” and “canto declamato.”

² See his letters of 28 June and 26 August 1868 in Mazzatinti and Manis 1902, 325–27 and 329–33.

³ Lippmann has noted Rossini’s use of declamatory melody primarily in the active opening movements of duets. See Lippmann 1968, 825–26. On the rise of declamatory melody in Bellini and Donizetti, see Lippmann 1969b, 84, and Lippmann 1966, 96.

“closed” melodies incorporating longer phrases arranged in more regular periodic groupings. In contrast to Rossini’s dual approach, Bellini, Donizetti, and Verdi wrote closed melodies almost exclusively.⁴ Lippmann has also argued that Rossini’s closed melodies exhaust their thematic content in an initial pair of antecedent-consequent phrases (A A’, the section sometimes referred to as the “thematic block” in mid-century melody).⁵ Composers after Rossini, on the other hand, tended to follow a longer, four-phrase structure that usually involves thematic return (A A’ B A’ or a variant of this arrangement). Lippmann (1981, 428) has attributed the creation of the most concise version of this form to Bellini.

Although Lippmann’s distinctions successfully establish the overall direction in which composers were moving during this period, they contribute little to our understanding of the actual process of stylistic transformation. Furthermore, they imply that Rossini’s participation in that process was minimal, an assumption that deserves further investigation. Rossini’s preference for the florid style of melody would not necessarily have precluded a symmetrical treatment of the underlying form. In fact, he might have seen the simplicity and directness inherent in the mid-century design as enhancing the popular appeal of his melodies.⁶ Thus we have not sufficiently examined the possibility that Rossini—the composer who revitalized Italian serious opera early in the century, who influenced innumerable aspects of its later development, and whose melodies embodied Carpani’s ideal of *cantilena bella*—might also have sown the seeds of Bellinian lyric conventions.

In the present study I will suggest that Rossini did play a substantial role in the development of the mid-century lyric form. Its

⁴ For discussions of closed and open melody, see Lippmann 1968, 817–25, and Lippmann 1969c, 154–69. Parts of the latter study have been revised and translated as Lippmann 1981. See pp. 427–28. On Bellini and Donizetti’s abandonment of open melody in the 1830s, see Lippmann 1966, 82–83 and 96.

⁵ Lippmann 1966, 101. In Lippmann’s words (my translation), “In the case of Italian arias composed between 1800 and 1830 one must generally be happy if, after the musical idea of the initial measures or else of its corresponding phrase, still other ideas follow. Generally, in Rossini’s operas too, true melodic elaborations or even contrasting ideas are unusual, except of course in songs laid out like rondos such as the famous entrance arias of Figaro and Rosina. With only a bit too much exaggeration it can be said that one knows an Italian aria movement of that time if one knows its beginning. Indeed, one often knows it if one only knows four measures; whoever [is] intimate with the style hears the corresponding phrase in advance.”

⁶ Tomlinson (1988) has also noted the “populist” aspect of the Bellinian lyric form. (I wish to thank Professor Tomlinson for giving me a pre-publication manuscript of his study.) See also Tomlinson 1982, 176–77.

elements were common in his melodies throughout his career; particularly in his late works those elements often fused into close approximations of the model described by Lippmann. In short, Rossini's approach to melodic form was much nearer to that of his followers—and much more a part of the tradition of popular operatic melody—than Lippmann and others have suggested.

To clarify Rossini's contribution to the structure of later Italian melody, we must first examine the mid-century lyric form in greater detail.⁷ One example that illustrates the most important features of the form is Abigaille's "Anch'io dischiuso un giorno" from act 2 of Verdi's *Nabucco* (Example 1). Like most melodies written by Bellini, Donizetti, and Verdi (through the 1850s), Abigaille's begins with paired four-measure phrases ($A_4 A'_4$), each of which divides symmetrically into two-measure sub-phrases. This opening eight-measure thematic block presents the principal ideas of the melody and introduces the first four lines of its text.

A contrasting four-measure medial section follows, setting lines 5–6. Usually this section consists of a two-measure idea that is repeated exactly, sequentially, or with minor variations.⁸ Rhythmic,

⁷ I have based my system for diagramming melodies on the one proposed by Joseph Kerman (1982, 48–49). Briefly, I have assigned phrases within a given functional section of a melody the same letter, at least at their initial occurrence: A for opening phrases, B for medial phrases, C for closing phrases. Phrases retain their original designations when they return later in a given melody. Phrases within a single functional section that use similar motives are distinguished by primes (A , A' , A'' , etc.); such phrases using essentially unrelated motives are differentiated with numerals (A_1 , A_2 , etc.). Subscript numerals give the number of measures in each phrase. For example, A_4 would have four measures. When a phrase moves toward closure, but then continues without a full cadence, "ex" followed by a numeral shows that the phrase has been extended by the number of measures indicated. A_{4ex2} would mean that a four-measure phrase has a two-measure extension (six measures in all). Finally, in parentheses next to the symbols for melody, "S" followed by a numeral designates poetic stanzas, with subscript numerals specifying lines within each stanza. For example, " S_{1-2} " indicates lines 1–2 of a first stanza.

For additional discussion of Verdi's treatment of lyric form see Lawton 1973, 300–11 and 313–24, and Moreen 1975, 38–47.

⁸ Lawton (1973, 309) is to my knowledge the only writer who has noticed the typical division of the medial section into paired phrases. Lippmann analyzes the medial section as a single phrase (B_4), as did Basevi in the earliest discussion of mid-century melodic structure (1859, 24). Referring to the slow movement "Sciagurata! hai tu creduto" of Pagano's aria in act 1 of *I Lombardi*, in which the medial section does in fact divide into paired $B_2 B'_2$ phrases, Basevi writes: "With regard to form, this *andante* has one of the most common and simple of them, that is a first period of 8 measures in 2 phrases, a second of 4 measures, then the reprise of the second phrase of the first period, [after] which follows another period as an *appendix*, and quickly the *cadenza*." ("Quanto alla forma, quest'*andante* ne ha una delle

Example 1

Verdi, *Nabucco*, act 2

Cantabile

An- ch'i- o dis-chiu-so un gior- no eb- bi al- la gio- ia il

G: I V⁷

4

co- re; tut- to par- lar- mi in- tor- - no u-

I V⁷

7

di- a di san- to a- mo- - re; pian- ge- va all' al-tru-i

I e: i ii§

10

allarg.

pian- - to, sof- fri- va de- gli al- tri... al duol; ah!

ii§ V⁷ i G: ii§ V ii§ V⁷

13

chi del per-du-to in- can- to mi

I V/ii ii II⁷

15

con grazia

tor- na un gior- - - no sol?

I₄ V⁷ I

harmonic, and melodic closure, along with the formal articulation of motivic repetition, define each of these B phrases as decisively as the A phrases. In Abigaille's melody, the separation created by gestural similarities between B_2 (measures 9–10) and B'_2 (measures 11–12)—both begin with an upward leap, then descend, and finally conclude with rocking motion—is reinforced by the E minor cadence in measures 9–10. As in many other pieces, unstable harmony—the inflection to E minor in B_2 and the dominant chords in B'_2 —gives the medial section an expectant character and turns it into a miniature waiting passage.

Typically, presentation of the text is completed with a closing section that either recapitulates an opening phrase literally (A'_4), or draws motives from the opening phrases to create a related closing phrase or phrases (A''_4 , sometimes extended with additional music), or introduces new material (C_4).⁹ These concluding phrases normally avoid or at least de-emphasize the two-measure articulations that have prevailed before them. Thus they complete a closed anapestic rhythm initiated by the shorter medial phrases, joining with them in an eight-measure unit that corresponds in length to the opening thematic block (e.g., $B_2 B'_2 C_4$).¹⁰ They also tend (at least after 1830) to provide a culminating intensification of musical expression and excitement by incorporating greater rhythmic activity, more florid melody, and more prominent climaxes of melodic range. Whenever A phrases recur in the closing section they contribute the additional stability of thematic return.

In Abigaille's melody, the A'' phrase (measures 13–16) acts as an unambiguous four-measure anchor for the end of the theme, since the continuity of its vocal ornamentation, an elaboration on the *gruppetto* from measure 2, eliminates the two-measure level of articulation. It also provides a culminating focus of expressive intensity by combining a melodic climax, *appoggiaturas*, *floriture*, and (in the context of this relatively diatonic theme) piquant chromatic harmony in measures

più comuni e semplici, cioè un primo periodo di 8 battute a due frasi, un secondo di 4 battute, la ripresa poi della seconda frase del primo periodo, cui succede un altro periodo come di *appendice*, e subito la *cadenza*.”)

⁹ In Bellini's melodies the A phrase usually returns. Donizetti preferred new closing phrases until the mid-1830s, when he began using thematic reprise with equal frequency. Verdi chose recapitulation somewhat more often than continuation in his early operas.

¹⁰ Eugene Narmour (1977, 148–52) discusses rhythmic closure and non-closure.

13–15.¹¹ The temporary tonicization of ii in measure 14 further reinforces this concluding progression by supplying the subdominant function that had been missing from previous G major cadences. Abigaille's *primo tempo* concludes with a regularly periodic closing section that comprises what Gary Tomlinson has termed a "false coda" followed by a return to A'₄ from the principal theme, in place of the freely expanded C phrases of many Rossinian and Bellinian melodies.¹²

In sum, an archetypal mid-century melody has these principal features: 1) it includes three kinds of thematic material—an opening "thematic block" (A A' or one of the variants), a contrasting idea (B), and a closing phrase or phrases (some version of A or C); 2) it comprises a regular hierarchy of two-measure sub-phrases, four-measure phrases, and eight-measure periods; 3) units from the two- and four-measure levels combine to create large-scale rhythmic closure across the entire form; and 4) each phrase of music sets two lines of text, with no text other than individual words or short phrases being repeated until its coda reuses entire lines.¹³

In the interest of distinguishing Bellini's style from that of his most important predecessor, scholars have emphasized his nurturing of the mid-century lyric form, while minimizing Rossini's contribution to its development. Julian Budden (1973, 14) has suggested that the lyric form (especially in slow movements) was "one of the areas in which Rossini's successors headed by Bellini moved furthest away from their master." Tomlinson (1981–82, 174–75) concludes similarly that while "the balanced opening phrases, a a', are common in Rossini's lyric movements," his melodies "then typically veer off through a free

¹¹ The climax on the pitch a'' also completes an ascent away from d'', the prior focus of the upper range of the melody, an ascent that had been initiated in measures 9 and 11 by the arpeggiation e''-g''.

¹² See Tomlinson 1981–82, 176. Budden 1973, 14–15, and Döhring 1975, 521, also discuss the coda of this example.

¹³ The melodic integration and stability that characterizes lyric forms like Abigaille's was matched by the increased poetic continuity of many lyric texts in the 1840s. It is not commonly recognized that, as eight-line texts became standard, poets frequently avoided the *tronco* ending in line 4, which had previously divided the text into two stanzas. (*Tronco* lines end with an accented syllable, producing the effect of a closed downbeat. *Piano* and *sdrucchiolo* lines end with one or two unaccented syllables, respectively, in the manner of open upbeats.) Instead, they moved both *tronco* endings together toward the end of the text, locating them most commonly in lines 6 and 8. This approach united the eight lines in a single stanza, replacing the additive organization of the double quatrain with an integrated structure that emphasizes poetic closure near its end. Abigaille's octet, which has *tronco* endings ("duol" and "sol" in lines 6 and 8), exemplifies the new approach.

succession of contrasting and highly melismatic phrases. . . . From this sort of melody Bellini's a' b a' structures represent a trend toward a more frankly tuneful lyricism, with less elaborate vocal ornamentation, and a marked and straightforward melodic closure." Lippmann (1981, 429) admits that similar forms involving motivic return occur in Rossini's melodies, but claims that there is only a single instance—Desdemona's *preghiera* "Deh! calma, o Ciel, nel sonno" (*Otello*, act 3)—that shows the relationship of text and music found so frequently later in the century, namely A A'(S₁₋₄) B(S₂₋₂) A'(S_{2-3,4}). David Kimbell (1981, 85) attributes this and a few other occurrences of "symmetrical 'closed' forms of lyricism" to an uncharacteristic effort on Rossini's part at creating a "folk-song-like style" in stage songs.

While these assessments rightly point to an unmistakable trend in the direction of simplified, standardized melodic forms, they also obscure important continuities between Rossini's style and those of later composers and thus inaccurately minimize his contribution to that trend. Full-blown examples of mid-century melodic structure hardly saturate Rossini's operas, but Desdemona's *preghiera* is far from unique in its adherence to the later lyric form. For example, Arsace's first cabaletta in *Semiramide*, "Oh! come da quel di" (act 1, number 2; see Example 2 below), has a principal theme that conforms almost exactly to the Bellinian archetype.¹⁴ Its balanced opening phrases (A₄ A'₄; measures 9–16) are followed by a pair of two-measure medial phrases (B₂ B'₂; measures 17–20) that give a prominent role to the orchestra, as is typical both in Rossini's works and in those of his followers. Although the melody avoids the tonic pitch in the fourth measure of its closing section (A'') and extends this passage with additional phrases, the underlying cadential harmonic motion in measures 21–24 and the implied tonic goal of the descending scales in the vocal line (measure 23) define a major point of arrival exactly where an archetypal Bellinian theme would end (measure 24). The remainder of the melody fulfills the function of the coda in the Bellinian lyric form.¹⁵ Distribution of the eight-line text follows the

¹⁴ In citing pieces from Rossini's operas, I have used the standard numerical designations for act and musical number given in the following sources: for *Tancredi*, *L'Italiana in Algeri*, and *La Gazza ladra*, Gioachino Rossini, *Edizione critica delle opere*, vols. 10, 11, and 21 (Pesaro, 1979, 1981); and for *Otello*, *Ricciardo e Zoraide*, *Maometto II*, *Zelmira*, and *Semiramide*, prefaces to *Early Romantic Opera*, vols. 8 and 10–13, ed. Philip Gossett (New York, 1978–81).

¹⁵ Many codas in Bellini's and Donizetti's melodies are no more distinct than the one sung by Arsace. See for example Norma's cabaletta "Ah! bello a me ritorna," which follows her famous *primo tempo* "Casta diva" (A₄ A'₄ B₂ B'₂ A''_{5ex3}).

model, with $A_4 A'_4$ setting lines 1–4, $B_2 B'_2$ lines 5–6, and A'' lines 7–8. Although this piece clearly conforms to mid-century practice, it exhibits neither the unadorned vocal style nor the scenic dramatic function of a folk-like *preghiera* or *canzone*. Instead, in its extravagant vocal display it typifies cabalettas in the 1820s.

Rossini wrote a number of similar melodies in the Bellinian mold, both for arias and for duets, choosing this design often, but not exclusively, for the principal themes of cabalettas.¹⁶ Many of his other melodies differ only slightly from the later archetypal form. He frequently incorporated a long concluding passage with numerous sub-phrases, underscoring the finality of that section.¹⁷ In other examples he took the opposite approach, weakening long-range rhythmic closure by enlarging the B phrases to create an additive rhythm ($4+4+4 \dots$) with the phrases that come before and after.¹⁸

In many cases the similarity of Rossini's melodies to later ones is disguised by his more emphatic articulation of their three functional sections. Brief pauses sometimes separate the A phrases from one another or from the rest of the melody, as in the cabaletta "Si, sperar

¹⁶ A partial list of these includes Ginardo's "Se al intorno voi leggete" (*Matilde di Shabran*, act 1, number 2; $A_4 A'_4 B_2 B'_2 A''_4$ coda₇), which follows an open melody "Chi vi guida a queste mura"; the cabaletta "La forza primiera" of Semiramide's duet with Assur (*Semiramide*, act 2, number 8; $A_4 A'_4 B_2 B'_2 A''_4$); and the slow movement "Giorno d'orrore" from Semiramide and Arsace's second duet, sung by the soprano and contralto together in parallel thirds (act 2, number 11; $A_8 A'_8(S_{1-8}) B_4 B_4(S_{2-4}) C_{10}(S_{2.5-6})$ coda). Examples that follow the lyric form in their music but set fewer than eight lines of text include Lindoro and Mustafà's cabaletta "Ah, mi perdo, mi confondo," which divides two quatrains of text between the singers (*L'Italiana in Algeri*, act 1, number 3; $A_4 A'_4 B_2 B'_2 C_4$); the principal theme of Uberto's slow movement "Oh fiamma soave" (*La donna del lago*, act 2; $A_4 A'_4 B_2 B'_2 A''_4$); and Idreno's *primo tempo* from act 2 of *Semiramide* ("La speranza più soave," $A_4 A'_4 B_2 B'_2 A''_4$).

¹⁷ Maometto's second aria "All'invito generoso" (*Maometto II*, act 2, number 8) illustrates this approach. Although it closes with both A_4 and C_4 , necessitating repetition of lines from the second stanza, and appends an unusually long coda, it otherwise adheres to Lippmann's model: $A_4 A'_4(S_{1-4}) B_2 B'_3(S_{2-2}) A_4(S_{2-2}) C_4(S_{2.3-4})$ coda. Bellini himself wrote a structurally similar melody for Pollione's cabaletta "Me protegge, me difende" (*Norma*, act 1). Its closing section uses both a variation of B, modified to cadence, and a new C phrase whose contour is derived from that of B'. The entire melody may be diagrammed as follows: $A_4 A'_4$ (opening) B_4 (medial) $B'_4 C_4$ (closing). A similar alternative often seen in Rossini's melodies involves repetition of the closing phrase. One example is the cabaletta "Amor, dirada il nembo" of Otello's cavatina (*Otello*, act 1, number 2; $A_4 A'_4 B_2 B'_2 C_4 C'_4$).

¹⁸ Aside from this difference, one of Rossini's most famous themes, "Di tanti palpiti," at its second appearance within Tancredi's cabaletta (*Tancredi*, act 1, number 3, at "Sarà felice") comes surprisingly close to the later lyric form: $A_4 A'_4(S_{1-4}) B_4 B'_4(S_{2-2}) A''_4(S_{2.3-4})$.

Example 2

Rossini, *Semiramide*, act 1

fl., cl.
Allegro I
p

E: I

V⁷

4

V⁷/V V I

ii⁶

7

I₄

V⁷

I₄

V⁷

I

I

Oh! co- me da quel

10

dì tut- - to, tut- to per me can- giò, can- giò! quel

g#: i₄

V⁷

i

E: V⁷

13

guar- do mi ra- pì, si, quest' a- ni- - ma av- vam-

I

vi

V

V⁷/V

16

fl., ob., cl.

pò! il ciel — per me s'a- pri, a-

V

V⁷

Example 2, (continued)

19

mo- re, sì, m'a- ni- mò! d'A- ze- ma, di quel

I

22

dì, no, no, no, no, scor- dar- mi io mai sa- prò, no mai, no

I₄ V⁷ I ii⁶

25

mai, no mai sa- prò, scor-dar- mi io mai, no mai sa-

I₄ V⁷ I ii⁶ I₄ V⁷

28

prò, non sa- prò,

I I₄ V⁷ I

31

non sa- prò!

I₄ V⁷ I

voglio contento” of Idreno’s aria in act 2 of *Semiramide*, where fermatas conclude each A phrase (A_{4ex1} A’₄ B₂ B₂ C₄). Rossini occasionally underscored the end of the thematic block by extending the second phrase, delaying the cadence and making it more decisive. *Semiramide*’s *pregbiera* “Al mio pregar t’arrendi” (act 2, number 13) lingers briefly on the supertonic in the fifth and sixth measures of A’ at the word “volta,” recalling a similar progression in the third and fourth measures of its instrumental introduction, before resuming its anticipated motion toward the tonic. (The complete melody may be

diagrammed A₈ A'₁₀ B₅ B'₄ A''₉, coda.) Sometimes he divided the first four-measure A phrase, but not the second, into two-measure motives. The resulting anapestic sub-structure closes off the thematic block rhythmically and separates it from the following B phrases.

Rossini's use of textural contrast in the medial section also contributes to this segmentation of the form. He customarily chose a quasi-*parlante* style or orchestral-vocal dialogue for the B section and in doing so set it off from the more *cantabile* opening and concluding phrases.¹⁹ He also tempered in several ways the anticipatory quality of the medial section and the directness with which it leads to a resolution in the final section. Sometimes he expanded the second B phrase, substituting a closed, trochaic relationship for the open-ended, additive rhythm created by B phrases of equal length.²⁰ In other cases he even added a third, cadential B phrase, further strengthening rhythmic closure at the end of the B section.²¹

Although Rossini continued throughout his career to emphasize these functional divisions in some melodies, in others he united the three sections more strongly, anticipating the approach taken by his followers. Especially in the late operas he often ended melodies by recapitulating part of the thematic block. Table 1, which diagrams the nine melodies in *Semiramide* that incorporate versions of the mid-century lyric form, shows that two-thirds of them end with A' or A''. Moreover, in contrast to many of his early melodies, which tend to maintain relatively uniform levels of expressiveness and excitement throughout, his later ones more often draw their sections together by treating the closing phrase or phrases as a long-range structural goal, much as Bellini's would do later.²² Rossini created this effect by concentrating at the end of the melody chromatic chords, dissonances (appoggiaturas and suspensions), and *fioriture*—the last increasing local rhythmic activity and melodic motion—or by incorporating

¹⁹ For example, in the slow opening movement "La speranza più soave" of Idreno's second aria from *Semiramide* (act 2, number 10), orchestra and voice exchange the same falling motive within the two B phrases, with the orchestra leading off. Lippmann (1969c, 168) has also noticed this characteristic.

²⁰ See again Maometto's "All'invito generoso," in which a cadenza-like flourish extends B' and defines the end of the medial section.

²¹ See the cabaletta "Alle più care immagini" from the first duet of *Semiramide* and Arsace (*Semiramide*, act 1, number 6; A₄ A'₄ B₁₂ B'₁₃ B₂₂ C₁₇), which cadences on G minor in B₂₂ before launching into closing material. Obviously the enormous C phrase (actually a group of subphrases) compensates considerably for the cadence in B₂₂, but only in retrospect.

²² Celletti (1968, 272) discusses the relatively flat overall profiles of many of Rossini's melodies.

TABLE I
Arias and Duets from *Semiramide*

In the case of movements with lyric-form melodies, these melodies are diagrammed; other movements are represented by dashes.

<i>Arias</i>			
Act/Number	Performer	<i>Primo Tempo</i>	Cabaletta
1/2	Arsace	—	A ₄ A' ₄ B ₂ B' ₂ A'' _{4ex8}
1/4	Idreno	—	—
1/5	Semiramide	—	—
2/9	Arsace	—	A ₁₈ A ₂₈ B ₄ B _{4ex2} A _{1'8ex6}
2/10	Idreno	A ₄ A' ₄ B ₂ B' ₂ A'' ₄	A ₄ A' ₄ B ₂ B' ₂ C ₄
2/12	Assur	—	—
2/13	Semiramide	A ₈ A' ₁₀ B ₅ B' ₄ A'' ₉ *	—
<i>Duets</i>			
Act/Number	Performers	Slow Movement	Cabaletta
1/3	Arsace/Assur	A ₄ A' ₄ B ₂ B' ₂ C ₃ A'' ₄	A ₄ A' ₄ B ₂ B' ₂ C ₄
1/6	Arsace/Semiramide	—	—
2/8	Assur/Semiramide	—	A ₄ A' ₄ B ₂ B' ₂ A'' ₄
2/11	Arsace/Semiramide	A ₈ A' ₄ B ₄ B' ₄ C ₁₀ B' ₄ B' ₄ C ₁₀	—

*Semiramide's *preghiera* "Al mio pregar t'arrendi" within the finale of act 2.

melodic climaxes that resolve linear implications established in earlier sections of the melody.

For example, in Calbo's cabaletta "E d'un trono alla speranza" from act 2 of *Maometto II* (A₄ A'₄ B₂ B'₂ C₄₊₉) the long C phrase extends with the stepwise motion e''-f#''-g#''-a''-b'' an arpeggiated ascent begun in A and A' (e'-b'-e''). It also provides more insistent sixteenth-note motion than the previous phrases and moves more rapidly through the ambitus of the melody, quickly outlining octaves and twelfths. Parallel solos sung by Arsace and Assur in the slow movement of their duet from act 1 of *Semiramide* use harmony as another means of increasing expressive intensity. In this instance, ten-line stanzas complicated the melodic form and caused Rossini to close the melody with both C and A'' sections. (In Arsace's statement "D'un tenero amore," C occurs at "non ami che il trono", A'' at "il core d'Azema.") The entire melody may be diagrammed A₄ A'₄ B₂ B'₂ C₃ A''₄. Compared to the diatonicism of the opening and medial phrases, C provides concentrated chromaticism with a chain of secondary dominants and their resolutions, while A'' adds a series of 7-6 suspensions not heard in the initial version of the A phrase. Climaxes like the ones just noted may not communicate the same sense of inevitable arrival or emotional catharsis that Lippmann (1966, 99) cites as a crucial element of Bellinian melodies in the 1830s. Yet the statements sung by Calbo and Arsace move significantly away

from the relatively flat overall dramatic shape often found in Rossini's early melodies.

So far we have seen that Rossini introduced an early version of the mid-century lyric form roughly a decade before Bellini made it a signature of his style. Rossini's role in its development did not end with these prototypical melodies. Lippmann's presentation of the composer's open and closed melodic styles as two sides of a dichotomy instead of as ends of a continuous spectrum has encouraged us to ignore the wide array of Rossinian melodies that contain elements of the later model in lesser concentrations. It seems inappropriate to neglect such Rossinian examples in light of the frequency with which later composers, too, departed from the model. Even Bellini himself, in his most famous melody "Casta diva," contracted the B phrases, expanded C, and stretched a single quatrain over the entire piece: $A_4(S_{1_1}) A'_4(S_{1_2}) B_1 B'_1(S_{1_3}) C_5(S_{1_{3,4}})$. Consequently, our assessment of Rossini's contribution must consider not only archetypal works, but also the extent to which the principal structural features of the mid-century approach play a role in his more traditional movements.

Both Lippmann and Tomlinson, in passages cited above, have noted the frequency with which pairs of corresponding four-measure phrases, the equivalent of the thematic block in the Bellinian lyric form, begin Rossini's melodies. Other aspects of mid-century style are equally common in Rossini's music. Many of his themes incorporate the three functional divisions found in Bellini's melodies—even though their individual sections may not have the number of phrases that later became conventional, even though each melody as a whole may not strictly observe a hierarchy of four- and eight-measure phrases, and even though the relationship between text and music may not adhere to the later pattern. Melodies of this sort open with a passage that corresponds to the thematic block of the Bellinian archetype, consisting either of paired, symmetrical phrases ($A A'$) or of an irregular succession of motives that resembles open melody. This section normally moves to a half cadence after establishing the home key. A static medial section, similar to Bellini's B_4 or $B_2 B'_2$ has one or more repeated phrases, often set in *parlante* style. Finally, a long cadential closing section of several phrases, corresponding to A'_4 , A''_4 , or C_4 , incorporates coloratura passagework and possibly a cadenza. This type of theme establishes the closed, high-level rhythm of short B phrases followed by longer C phrases that typifies mid-century melody, even though the number and exact lengths of its phrases may differ from the later usage. These extended solos are

particularly common in the first movements of duets and trios; they appear less frequently in the cabalettas of duets and the *primi tempi* of arias.

An example occurs in the first movement of Semiramide's duet with Assur "Se la vita ancor t'è cara" (act 2, number 8), which opens with parallel statements for the two characters. (Hers is given in Example 3.) Each statement consists of an opening section that begins with a distinctive dotted rhythm and moves from tonic to dominant in B^b major (measures 7–18), a pair of cadential medial phrases led by the orchestra (measures 19–26), and a generally florid closing passage that ends with a cadenza (measures 27–41). Admittedly, the initial section displays an additive chain of short motives instead of the Bellinian pairing of antecedent and consequent phrases; the closing material is long by the standards of the Bellinian model (fifteen measures); and this expansive melody sets only a single quatrain of text, dividing it into pairs of lines for the first two sections and reusing the final two lines for the third. (The melody as a whole may be diagrammed A₁₂(S₁₋₂) B₄ B'₄(S_{1-3,4}) C₁₅(S_{1-3,4})). Yet the succession of opening, medial, and closing materials certainly parallels the similar, if more symmetrically executed functional layout of the Bellinian design.²³

In duets and other small ensembles the alternation between singers may complicate the presentation of the three types of material, so that the melody as a whole spans more than a single solo statement. In such cases, variations in texture, from solo passages and imitative dialogues to parallel thirds or sixths, usually underscore functional divisions. In the slow movement "Ah! se caro a te son'io" of Zelmira's duet with Ilo (*Zelmira*, act 1, number 5), each character receives a florid eight-measure A phrase (A₈ [2+2+4] and A'₈). A contrasting passage of rapid imitative interchange between the singers follows (B₄). Finally, a concluding section sung primarily in sixths brings a

²³ The opening movement "Invan tu fingi ingrata" of Zoraide and Zomira's duet from *Ricciardo e Zoraide* (act 1, number 4) illustrates the alternative approach of using corresponding antecedent and consequent phrases for the opening section, in this case five-measure phrases shared by the orchestra and voice. The melody continues with three two-measure B phrases that embellish vocally a descending motive given first in the orchestra, followed by a long closing passage (C₁₆), which implies but evades arrival several times before reaching the tonic.

These three-part themes are not confined to Rossini's late operas. They occur commonly as early as *Tancredi*, for example in Amenaide and Tancredi's first duet "L'aura che intorno spira." Her initial statement begins with asymmetrical antecedent and consequent phrases (A₆ A'₅), followed by a repeated four-measure B phrase of pseudo-canon between the orchestra and vocalist. The melody closes with an extended passage of *fioriture* (C₁₄). The entire melody may be diagrammed A₆ A'₅ B₄ B'₄ C₁₄.

Example 3

Rossini, *Semiramide*, act 2

Allegro

1

4

SEMIRAMIDE

Se la

7

vi - - - ta an - cor t'è ca - ra;

10

va, t'in - vo - la a' sguar - - di mie - i, va, t'in -

14

vo - la, va, t'in - vo - la, va, t'in - vo - - la a'sguardi

17

mie - i, a'sguar - di mie - - - - - i!

19

fl., ob., cl.

io l'a-

Example 3, (continued)

21
 spet- - to non sa- pre- - i, no,

24
 no, più sof- frir d'un tradi- tor! io l'a-

27
 spet- to non sa- pre- i più sof- frir d'un tra- di-

30
 tor, d'un tra- - - di- tor, no, no, d'un

33
 tra- - - di- tor, no, no, d'un tra- - - di-

36
 tor, d'un tra- di- tor, d'un tra- di- tor, no, sof-

39
 frir d'un tra- - - - - di- tor!

varied and extended reprise of A material (A'_{4+5+5}) and a short coda. The cabaletta “Alle più care immagini” of Semiramide’s first duet with Arsace (act 1, number 6) provides an instance in which the layout in three sections is even less obvious, because each part of its principal theme unites the characters in parallel thirds at some point. However, changes in texture still help to articulate the joints between sections: the first contains thirds entirely ($A_4 A'_4$); the second opens with a dialogue of contrasting motives between the singers at the interval of one measure ($B_2 B_{2ex3}$); and the third begins with imitative entries (C_{8+3+6}). In both examples, despite the sprawling C phrases and large-scale metric flexibility, the three-part functional sequence shows a fundamental affinity to later Bellinian practice.

Rossini’s flexible treatment of high-level meter is the aspect of structure that most often separates his melodies from those of later composers. Movements that divide clearly into two-measure motives but combine only weakly into larger phrases still appear even in his late operas. And, more often than Bellini, Donizetti, or Verdi would do later, Rossini distorted the upper levels of the metric hierarchy momentarily to extend a phrase before it cadences. Nonetheless, his melodies tend to fall with increasing frequency into predictable four- and sometimes eight-measure phrases, even when they lack other features of mid-century form. The late operas are filled with such regularly periodic structures as Arsace’s “Ah! quel giorno ognor rammento” (*Semiramide*, act 1, number 2: $A_4 A'_4 C_4$), which differs from the Bellinian norm in the number and arrangement of its phrases but which rigorously maintains a four-measure level of articulation. Other melodies like Ilo’s cabaletta “Cara! deh attendimi” (*Zelmira*, act 1, number 4) deviate only in minor respects from four- or eight-measure groupings: $A_{2+2+4} B_{4+4} B'_{4+4ex1} A_{2+2+4} coda_{4+4+6}$.

For the tonally mobile *primi tempi* that predominate in his early arias Rossini sometimes wrote a type of melody which closely approximates the Bellinian archetype in the periodic structure of its medial and closing phrases, although it differs from the later model in its open-ended tonal design and in the layout of its initial section. This section often consists of a pair of sequential, two-measure sub-phrases, which combine with the typically short B phrases to produce an additive chain of motives resembling open melody. One example is the *primo tempo* “Tu che accendi questo core” of Tancredi’s *cavatina* (act 1, number 3). It begins with an ascending sequence ($A_2 A'_2$), continues with a two-measure medial phrase repeated with only slight variation ($B_2 B'_2$), and concludes with a four-measure closing phrase that cadences on the dominant (C_4).

Melodies of this sort represent a tentative step toward the use of stable melodies in the Bellinian lyric form for the opening movements of arias, the approach that later became the norm. Rossini's examples are particularly interesting because they represent a thoughtful accommodation of the newer principles of melodic design to the larger structural needs of his opening movements. I have argued elsewhere (Balthazar 1985, 1–86) that by leaving his *primi tempi* open-ended and linking them tightly to ensuing cabalettas, Rossini underscored the poetic and dramatic integration of many of his early two-movement arias. Although the *primo tempo* gradually gained poetic and dramatic independence during this period, until the 1830s it remained bound in many arias to the following movements by its dramatic content and by poetic meter and rhyme scheme. The open-ended, additively constructed forms that Rossini often composed for his early *primi tempi* differ from the Bellinian approach in two areas that further his aim of maintaining the anacrusis-like character of these *primi tempi* and their close connection to the remainder of the lyric number.

In sum, Rossini played a central part in the development of mid-century melodic structure. In numerous cases—more than has generally been acknowledged—he wrote melodies that precisely anticipate Bellinian lyric conventions. Others that resemble the later style less clearly include at least some combination of elements that would figure in the later design: the symmetrical thematic block, the three-part functional segmentation of the melody, long-range rhythmic closure created by the medial and closing phrases, and the multi-tiered periodic hierarchy. We have found these features in themes that perform many different structural roles. The most symmetrical, “Bellinian” structures tend to appear in stable, closed movements: cabalettas, slow movements of duets (usually divided between the characters), and closed slow movements of arias. Unstable opening movements of duets and finales and open-ended *primi tempi* of arias use freer themes that combine fewer of the stabilizing elements of the lyric form. In particular, the succession of different motives and textures that characterizes the long, multi-partite statements of many *tempi d'attacco* of duets is especially well suited to the task of opening Rossini's lyric numbers.

I have postponed to this point extensive discussion of an important issue: the relationship between musical structure and the layout of the text. One of Lippmann's main criteria for distinguishing Rossini's melodies from later ones is their lack of a consistent correspondence between the number of musical phrases and the number of lines of

text (for a double quatrain, two lines of text for each phrase of music) and of a constantly paced declamation of text (one line of text for two measures of music). Yet this divergence from Bellinian practice is inevitable, since throughout Rossini's career single stanzas (usually quatrains, although three- and six-line stanzas also occur) were the norm for the principal melodies in reflective movements. Single stanzas naturally preclude the formal relationship between poetry and music found in Lippmann's model. Yet, given the constraint of four lines instead of eight, Rossini's approach to setting his texts usually has important similarities to the techniques of later composers. As in Bellini's arias, many of Rossini's melodies allot two lines of poetry to each four-measure phrase of music. And both the thematic block A A' and the combined medial and closing phrases B C receive one stanza of text (two different stanzas in Bellini, the same stanza repeated in Rossini). The fast *primo tempo* "Ah! si per voi già sento" of Otello's *cavatina* (*Otello*, act 1, number 2) follows this format: A₄(S_{I-2}) A'₄(S_{I3-4}) B₂ B'₂(S_{I-2}) A''₄(S_{I3-4}).²⁴

Nonetheless the general scarcity of double quatrains across Rossini's career cannot explain the infrequency with which the archetypal text-music relationship occurs in the sizeable number of cases where both Bellinian lyric forms and eight-line texts are present. In such cases—*Semiramide* is the most prominent among Rossini's operas—other factors must be taken into account.²⁵ For example, the librettist Gaetano Rossi seems to have reserved the exceptionally long eight-line texts for scenes of particular theatrical or dramatic importance. *Semiramide* sings double stanzas for both the *primo tempo* and cabaletta of her aria in act 1 (act 1, number 5), as does Arsace for his aria of indecision and ultimate heroic resolution in the second act (act 2, number 9). Operatic events such as these—the *cavatina* of the *prima donna* or the hero's moment of moral reckoning—may have suggested to Rossini expansive musical presentations, more expansive perhaps than he could sustain with concise, direct melodies in the Bellinian mold. Ironically, in these instances Rossini probably avoided taut

²⁴ Single quatrains also occur occasionally in the arias of later composers, for example Bellini's famous "Casta diva" from *Norma*, discussed above, p. 114.

²⁵ In *Semiramide*, of the twenty-five movements in arias and duets (excluding *tempi di mezzo* but including *Semiramide's preghiera* from the second act finale) almost half (11) set double stanzas in their lyric statements (in arias: act 1, number 4, cabaletta; act 1, number 5, and act 2, number 9, *primo tempo* and cabaletta; act 2, number 12, cabaletta; in duets: act 1, number 3, slow movement; act 2, numbers 8 and 11, slow movement and cabaletta). In addition, Arsace's *cavatina* (act 1, number 2) includes two quatrains in its *primo tempo*, although Rossini chose to set the second as a transition (see below, p. 121), and provides an eight-line stanza for the cabaletta.

lyric forms for basically the same reason that the poet gave him double quatrains.

In other examples, where the first movement of an aria leads directly to a cabaletta, the two stanzas may be devoted to passages of music that have different functions, so that only one stanza is available for a *cantabile* theme. For example, Rossini set the first stanza of Arsace's "Ah! quel giorno ognor rammento" (act 1, number 2), recalling in general terms the hero's rescue of the princess Azema, to a closed melody, one with two balanced opening phrases and a single closing phrase ($A_4 A'_4 C_4$). However, he employed the second stanza, which describes the incident more graphically, for a more urgent, modulatory transition that leads to a dominant preparation of the cabaletta.

The tradition of text setting in which Rossini began his career—that is, one that valued articulation and restatement over continuity and economy—probably also influenced his treatment of the relationship between poetry and music. Like his eighteenth-century predecessors, Rossini tended to sectionalize texts, even single quatrains, and to reiterate not only individual words but also phrases and whole stanzas to underscore articulations built into the poetry. For example, Semiramide's opening statement "Serbami ognor sì fido" from her first duet with Arsace (act 1, number 6, first movement) sets a typical quatrain of text that follows the rhyme scheme *abbc* and concludes with a *tronco* line:

Serbami ognor sì fido
il cor, gli affetti tuoi,
e tutto sperar puoi,
e tutto avrai da me.

Keep your heart and affections
ever as devoted to me,
and you may hope for anything,
and you shall have anything from
me.²⁶

Coupled with the syntax of the poem, this structure generates closures of different strengths at the ends of the last three lines. The second line produces a syntactic break by concluding an independent command (lines 1–2, essentially "remain loyal"), which turns implicitly into a conditional dependent clause only after the third and fourth lines are heard ("[if] you remain loyal, you will receive everything"). At the same time, other factors weaken closure at this point: verse structure—a *piano* second line occurs, implying continuation instead

²⁶ The translation has been adapted from Peggie Cochrane's for the London recording of the opera [A 4383; OSA 1383] (1966).

of closure; rhyme scheme—our knowledge of the style leads to the expectation of another line to rhyme with the second, since the first two lines have not already rhymed; and most simply the predominance of quatrains over couplets in *primo ottocento* librettos. Line three provides the expected rhyme for line two (“puoi” for “tuoi”) and finishes a second subordinate thought, achieving a different kind of closure. Finally, the strongest poetic cadence comes at the end of the stanza, when Semiramide completes her offer with a *tronco* line of six syllables.

In this piece, as in many others, Rossini’s music reinforces the articulations of the text (see Example 4). Musical contrasts among the three functional sections correspond to the division of the text into lines 1–2, 3–4, and finally 4 alone. The melody begins with an initial *cantabile* phrase setting lines 1–2 (A₄). It continues with a pair of matching phrases, separated by a typical quasi-*parlante* interchange between orchestra and voice, in setting lines 3–4 (B₄ B’₄, measures 5–12). And it concludes with a sometimes cadenza-like, sometimes more forthrightly cadential passage, reiterating line 4 (C₃₊₄₊₄, measures 12–22). Both the half cadence at the end of the first phrase of music and the instrumental opening of the B phrases further emphasize the disjunction between lines 2 and 3. Line 4 is also set off by its manifold repetition during the closing passage. This impulse to underscore with music the articulations that are built into the poetry extends even to the level of individual lines, as cadential ornaments in the A and C sections segment the melody into two-measure units.

In light not only of this tradition of articulative text setting, but also of the novelty and relative scarcity of eight-line texts during Rossini’s career and the practice of employing such texts in special situations for which simple lyric forms may have seemed inappropriate, the number of instances in which music and poetry join in what would become the standard relationship may in fact be seen as unexpectedly large. Moreover, Rossini’s contribution to the development of mid-century melody appears especially significant precisely because he wrote many lyric-form melodies independently of eight-line texts, to which the formal shape of such melodies seems so closely tailored. Double quatrains and octets became standard in the operas of Bellini and his contemporaries only after Rossini had developed many of the melodic conventions of the mid-century lyric form.

Clearly Rossini’s conception of melodic design embraced many options. At times, his approach to form came surprisingly close to Bellini’s. I have noted a sizeable number of Rossini’s melodies that anticipate mid-century organization with, at most, minor discrepan-

Example 4

Rossini, *Semiramide*, act 1

1 Ser- ba-mi o-gnor sì fi- do il cor, gli af- fet- ti

4 tuo- i; e

7 tut- to spe- rar puo- i,

10 e tut- to a- vrai da

12 me, sì, tut- to a- vra- i, sì, tut- to a- vra- i, sì, tut- to a- vra- i, a- vrai da me, tut-

15 to a- vra- i, si, tut- to a-

17 vra- i, a- vrai da me, e tut- to a- vrai da

20 me, e tut- to a- vrai da me!

cies. Others incorporate many of the salient features of the Bellinian archetype, its division into three sections with different functions, its use of B and C phrases to create long-range rhythmic closure, and its multi-level metric hierarchy. My argument has focused on these innovative melodies because their correspondence with later practice has not been previously acknowledged. Yet we have also seen other, more idiosyncratic melodies that display a great deal of variation among themselves and deviate significantly from the Bellinian model in the number of phrases in each section, in the number of measures in each phrase, and in their disposition of text. In short, Rossini's melodies constitute an enormous array of organizational possibilities delineated on one end by the tightly integrated Bellinian lyric form and on the other by the looser style of open melody.

With this in mind we can begin to distinguish with greater precision Rossini's style from those of his followers. The distinction concerns partly the breadth of the stylistic spectrum adopted by each composer: Rossini wrote a wide variety of different melodic types, while Bellini, Donizetti, and Verdi (early in his career) limited themselves to a narrower range of possibilities centered on the mid-century lyric form. It also concerns the gradual elimination of functional differences among various types of melodies, so that in Bellini's operas the lyric form took over the roles played by different melodic styles in Rossini's. Yet Rossini's participation in the development of the mid-century lyric form is undeniable. Before Bellini, Donizetti, and Verdi brought that design to the forefront of their styles, Rossini established it as an important organizational technique. Thus we should regard Bellini not as the originator of the design that would for many years dominate Italian melody, but rather as the composer who solidified and popularized an approach that Rossini had already tested and made successful.

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ABSTRACT

Rossini's conservative, florid treatment of the expressive surface of melody has encouraged recent scholars to differentiate his approach to melodic structure from that of his followers. In particular, the freedom and complexity of his melodic designs have been contrasted with the conventionality and simplicity of the mid-century lyric form A A' B A' adopted by Bellini and others. However, Rossini's conception of melodic form embraced a broader range of options than we have previously acknowledged. Many of his melodies in fact prefigure later lyric conventions exactly, while others incorporate numerous aspects of later practice. Rossini's role in the development of the mid-century lyric form suggests that we should regard Bellini not as the originator of the design that would for many years dominate Italian melody, but rather as the composer who solidified and popularized an approach that Rossini had already tested and made successful.