



The Influence of Orientalism in the 18th and 19th Century Opera Librettos

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Abstract

This study aims to trace the change and transformation of meaning and influence of orientalism and in the West from the 18th century through the 19th century in the operas where both content and visual codes were penetrated in the subtlest way, which first evolved geographically and politically, then diplomatically and culturally, and finally the purpose of domination by the West. While opera librettos embodied orientalism visually, the evolving content of orientalism shaped the operas. From this viewpoint, this study discusses the interaction between the East and the West in the 18th century, and the reflection of the historical memory in the performing arts in the 19th century, in which the attempts for domination emerged. In this context, ‘Tamerlano’ Opera by George Frederick Händel and the ‘Abduction from the Seraglio’ Opera by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart in the 18th century are looked through, and ‘Aida’ Opera by Giuseppe Verdi in the 19th century is construed subsequently.

Keywords: Opera; Libretto; Aida; Seraglio; Tamerlano.

1. Introduction

Etymologically, the word orientalism comes from "orient", which means "east" in French. The root of the word "orient" is "oriens" which means "rising sun" in Latin (The American Heritage Dictionary, n.d.; Emily Dickinson Lexicon, n.d.). Gerhard Endress (1983) suggests that the word "orientalist" first appeared in an article on Edward Pocock in 1779 in England. According to Lowe (1991), the term was coined in French in 1799 in the Magasine Encyclopédique as "orientaliste". It later appeared in an obituary for Louis Langlés published in the Journal Asiatique in 1824. In 1838, "orientalisme" became an article of the Dictionnaire de l'Académie Française.

From another academic viewpoint, Timur argues that the word "orientalism" in academic literacy was used in England for the first time in 1811 by Lord Byron. According to the information based on the Oxford English Dictionary, Timur states that at that time, the British understood orientalism as a discipline, as "knowledge of Eastern languages". However, the author determine that the use of the second meaning of the term "orientalism", which is "qualifications, thoughts, and expressions of the Eastern nations, and their customs", goes back to earlier times, and the term was used for the first time in 1769 with this meaning. Referring to the history dictionary “Le Robert” in France, a history dictionary, suggests that the word “orientalist” was pronounced before “orientalism” (as a noun in 1799, as an adjective in 1803); and thereafter, in 1826, the word “orientalism” appeared. In line with this information, the dictionary records that at this time “orientalism” was used to mean “the science of those who claim that the origins, languages, and

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sciences of Western peoples came from the East". In 1840, it is among the information provided in the same dictionary that the term gained the meaning of "science of things peculiar to the East" as today.

In terms of the meaning of the word, many definitions are included in academic works with different meanings attributed to "orientalism". This is due to the fact that orientalism has taken on different meanings in the historical process, also differences in attitudes towards orientalism. In this context, sticking to one definition of the word will inevitably lead to "taking sides." For this reason, it would be best to explain the different meanings attributed to orientalism and the different definitions that have been brought about so far.

2. Influence of Orientalism on the 18th and 19th Century Opera Librettos

Exoticism, which expresses the interest and curiosity in foreign countries, and that turns out a magical and legendary form, and its source, the Ottoman Empire, the magnificent empire of the East, became the most popular element of the 18th century Western palaces, where wealth and pomp are of great importance (Mason, 1991; Kabbani, 1986; Said, 2001).

Many of the "oriental" themed operas in 18th and 19th century Europe are based on preceding librettos, plays, or prose literature works. There have been numerous studies by Western writers, especially French writers, with regards to the "oriental" literature. This considerable interest in exotic literature among French scholars especially in the 18th century can be attributed to the practices by French authors to explore and popularize this topic. On the other hand, this interest undoubtedly stemmed from the fact that France was the first window of the Ottoman Empire opening to the West. Especially in the 18th century in Europe, the original language was mostly French in opera librettos for the "oriental" themed and similar exotic themes. During the same period, librettos translated from French were used in most operas performed in German-speaking countries and England (Dew, 2009; Duffy, 2021; Hosford & Wojtkowski, 2010; Yee, 2012).

The first French comedy-ballet that dealt with orientalism in various details was the Molière's "Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme", whose music was composed by Jean-Baptiste Lully. Although the play does not much reflect originality due to its partial approach that mocks the statesman character of the East, it draws interest in terms of the ceremonies performed by the dervishes in connection with their religious occasions (Garreau, 1984).

The translation of the "Thousand and One Nights" by Antoine Galland, which was published in 1704 under the name of "Mille et une nuits, contes arabes" (The Arabian nights: The Tales of a Thousand and One Nights), became an important source for the staging of orientalism in French literature and performing arts. Of all the stories that Libretto writers were particularly interested in, "Aladdin", Weber's "Abu Hassan", Meyerbeer's "Wirth und Gast" and "Ali Baba" created by Cherubini were the first to come to mind. The story "Barbier von Bagdad", first used by J. André and later used by Peter Cornelius, was amongst the ones drawing spectacular interest. When Galland's "The Tales of a Thousand and One Nights" attracted great attention, and it got translated into English and German, as well as new editions and edits (Griffel, 1975).

A number of imitations of the 'The Tales of a Thousand and One Nights' emerged in the 18th century. One of them was François Pétis de la Croix's "Les Mille et un jours, contes persans" (The Thousand and One Days, Persian Tales) published as a collection of tales between 1710 and 1712. This compilation also includes the tale "Le Calife voleur, ou Aventures d'Haroun" (The Thief Caliph, or Adventures of Haroun), which is the source of François-Adrien Boieldieu's opera "Le Calife de Bagdad" (The Caliph of Baghdad) (Griffel, 1975; McCarthy, 1892; Zakaria, 2004; Amanda, 2001).

Another source of inspiration for the birth of exotic stories in France was Montesquieu's "Lettres persanes" (Persian Letters) dated 1721, which was about two, apparently intemperate and candid, fictional Eastern travellers that questioned the new things they encountered in Europe. But in reality, Montesquieu criticized his own society behind a thin curtain of fantasy in this literary work. However, "Lettres" was particularly useful to the orientalist opera writers, as it presented a

view of the mysterious orient, religion, politics, and an establishment named palace, which aroused curiosity and sensation in Europe, whether real or not (Brunel, 1721; Ozell, 2018).

19th Century Western poets were interested in real and fictional (pseudo) oriental subjects. Goethe is an important example that can be presented at this point. Goethe's deep interest in oriental issues can be noticed in his work "Noten und Abhandlungen zu besserem Verständnis des West-Östlichen Divans" (Theses and Approaches on the West-East Divan). The five poems in the Divan are composed in Schubert's Songs (Lieder); namely "Im gegenwärtigen Vergangenes", "Versunken", "Suleika I", and "Geheimnis". Also, the composer used Goethe's poem Mahomet's Gesang for a song (Lied) (Griffel, 1975).

3. Orientalist Influences in "Tamerlano" Opera in the 18th Century

The events that happened after the 'Ankara War' between Bayezid and Timur have been the notable subject of many operas. Due to the importance of Timur's success for the Western world, it has become a matter of great interest. One of the works that sourced the librettos, J. Pradon's tragedy "*Tamerlan ou la mort de Bajazet*" dated 1675, as well as Racine's famous tragedy "Bajazet" are the most important ones among these sources. Pradon's tragedy was translated to Italian and published. The Bayezid-Timur motif first attracted attention with the composition of Agostino Piovene's Tamerlan-Bayezid libretto by Pietro Antonio Zianni (1625-1684) (Greenberg, 2019; Selfridge-Field, 2007).

Among the operas about the lives of Bayezid and Timur and the historical events between both, the most important one is Händel's "Tamerlano". The libretto of the opera was prepared by Nicola Francesco Haym, taking the work of the librettist Augustino Piovene as the basis for his work. The opera was written in 20 days between 3-23 July 1724 and had its first performance in London on 31 December 1724. The role distribution of the opera was designed as; Tamerlano (Tamerlane)-Tatar emperor (alto), Bajazete (Bayezid)-Turkish emperor (tenor), Asteria (Bayezid's daughter)- soprano, Andronico (Andronicus)- Greek Prince (alto), Irene (Princess of Trebizond)-contralto, Leona (leo)-friend of Tamerlane and Andronicus, Zaide (assistant to Asteria)-designated as the silent role. The opera is about the captivity of the Ottoman Sultan and the humiliation endured by him and his family. However, the romantic element, namely the love triangle between his daughter Asteria, Andronico, and Tamerlano, is also given importance in the work. The most outstanding role in the opera is the Bayezid figure. The most touching moment in the opera is the glorious death scene where Bayezid commits suicide by drinking poison. This magnificence, together with the flamboyant costumes of the characters, entered into an eye-catching form. This scene is described as one of the most affecting scenes among all Baroque operas (Kula, 2001). The opera concludes by emphasizing the superiority of love and peace over hatred (Rodriguez, 2014; Law, 2004; Best, 1987; Harewood & Peattie, 1997).

In the first act of the opera, Bayezid appears tied in chains. Saddened by this situation, Andronico aims to save the father of the girl he loves from this situation. Against the request to get him unchained, Bayezid said, "I know I owe this short breath of freedom to you, but if even the shadow of this kindness is the order of my enemy, I already reject it to quell my anger". By these remarks of Bayezid, the degree of pride and nobility that he had was aimed to be emphasized. Emphasis on the pride and nobility of the Ottoman is often grabbing attention in the libretto, and it makes sense of the feeling that it was used as a material of orientalist perspective. Nevertheless, despite the emphasis on Ottoman Turk's pride and nobility in Bayezid's person which was constantly reiterated, it was always exposed to Timur's wrath. Referring to the struggle between Ottoman Turk and Eastern Turk in the opera, the concept of "Turkishness" which was considered in these two aspects, Bayezid and Timur, has offered great opportunities for libretto writers and expanded the field of reference to the images of the East (Bernasconi, 1742; Knapp, 1970; Meyer, 1974; Kokole, 2006; Locke, 2009).

4. Orientalist Influences in the “Abduction from the Seraglio” Opera in the 18th Century

The first performance of the ‘Abduction from the Seraglio (Die Entführung aus dem Serail)’ Opera, written by Mozart as a 3-act song-play (Singspiel : cheerful, folksy content with spoken dialogue stage performance), was performed in Vienna on 16 July 1782. The Libretto of the opera was written by Gottlieb Stephanie (1741-1800), inspired by Christian Friedrich Bretzner's libretto named ‘Abduction from the Seraglio’ written for the composer Johann André as the text of the ballad in 1781. It takes place in one of the countries in the Ottoman Empire. While preparing the libretto, it is noteworthy that Bretzner and Mozart did not miss even the finest points of Turkish / Ottoman culture, and that they examined the Ottoman / Turkish / Muslim culture very closely and in detail. The distribution of roles in the opera is staged as; Selim Pasha, (speaking role) - Konstanze (soprano) - Belmonte (tenor) - Blonde, Konstanze's servant (soprano) - Pedrillo, Belmonte's servant (tenor) - Osmin, Selim Pasha's servant (bass) - Klaas, sailor (speaking role) - police station commander (speaking role) - a mute, the sentries and the servants in Selim Pasha's palace. One of the most famous "Turkish" plays in the eighteenth-century English stage is Isaac Bickerstaffe's "The Sultan, or a Peep into the Seraglio", which can be said to be the inspiration for Mozart's "Die Entführung". The theme of the ‘Abduction from the Seraglio’ enlightens eighteenth-century Europe's interest blended with admiration over the Turks as well as Islam culture. Furthermore the role of the Pasha is reflected as a moral exemplar that holds up a mirror to the faults of European civilization (Bretzner, 1962, Bauman, 1987; Fisher, 2000; Burroughs, 2012; Gür, 2012; DOB, 2022).

When the Russian-Austrian alliance was getting more powerful in the 18th century, Mozart was requested to prepare an opera in honour of the Russian Grand Duke Paul's visit to Vienna. The commissioned opera libretto dealt with the Turks, focusing on the most fashionable theme of the period, the 'Abduction from the Seraglio'. In parallel with the changing perspective of Ottoman-Western relations from the 16th to the 18th centuries, Mozart's ‘Abduction from the Seraglio’ is considered the most successful reflection of the “Eastern Image” as it was embodying the image of the East accepted in the West in the 18th century, within the scope of romantic-entertainment opera. While the character of Osmin in the opera is the bearer of Ottoman-Turkish-Muslim images, the noble, high-hearted, wise sovereign character element, which is the style of the enlightenment approach, is embodied in Selim Pasha's personality. In the first act of the opera, the Ottoman figure, who has been geographically closest to the West for centuries, but despite this geographical proximity, who could not escape being the "other" for the West due to his lifestyle and religious differences, is reflected to the audience with its main lines. In the second act, social issues are mentioned more. In the dialogue between Blonde and Osmin characters, the enlightenment movement, which embraces the freedom of women in social life, and the authoritative approach of the traditional Ottoman/Turkish man on the woman figure are presented together in the opera that lodges the audience opportunity to compare the two approaches. Considering the liberal and individual-centered thought structure was developing in the West in that period. It is noteworthy that Blonde's rebellious attitude came to the fore in response to Osmin's imperative orders. The Eastern and Western lifestyles were compared with Blonde's words “A heart born free can never be captured, it is proud of its freedom, even if it loses its freedom”. In this respect, referring to the comparison of the images of the Eastern and Western woman in the opera, the basis of the Eastern lifestyle was emphasized as "no freedom" and the Western lifestyle as "freedom". Selim Pasha is demonstrated as not ruthless and emotionless like his "nemesis" Lastodos since he shows a "noble greatness" by freeing Belmonte, Lastodos' son, and Konstanze, whom Belmonte fell in love with. Selim Pasha's expectation is that Belmonte conveys his words to Lastodos, “It is a greater pleasure to respond to an injustice with good than to pay for evil with evil.” The Christian convert, Pasha, reveals his noble spirit, delicacy, and greatness with his words and behaviour befitting a truly great sovereign. Along with Selim Pasha character who symbolizes the humanism of the East throughout the opera, Osmin represents an opposing oriental character

with his weak faith and willpower changing according to the circumstances and time. (Pearlman, 1996, Kula, 2001, Myers, 2021)

In 18th century operas, it was a common method that the Europeans visit distant countries and criticize civilizations in order to clarify cultural differences, usually with satirical depictions and through a 'foreign look'. In this respect, the orientalist view has used the Ottoman / Turkish image as a backdrop to express its own country's conditions and experiences. This reflection of the orientalist influence on opera is especially seen in Opera Seria (*dramma per musica*) that predominated in Europe from the 1710 to about 1770 and later in Opera Buffa (*commedia in musica*). Mozart realized that an independent opera section was created in Vienna opera, created by the personal initiatives of Joseph II, which was meeting the requirements for a palace theater performance in terms of singers and orchestral elements, and also the exclusive opportunities provided there. These privileged conditions allowed him to move away from traditional opera genres and conventional theatrical patterns, and to create a contemporary musical theater that plans both the theatrical flow and musical instruments down to the smallest detail in terms of dramaturgy and musical language. Mozart, who determines the themes of humanism, love, and freedom as the main motifs in his works, depicts Selim Pasha in this opera as an Eastern character type who is in love with Konstanze, while at the same time noble, generous and forgiving; Osmin is reflected as a character on the stage as a rude and unpleasant type. By creating this contrast between these Eastern two characters, Mozart, on the one hand, affirmed the virtue of Selim Pasha; on the other hand, he provided the criticism of the Osmin figure by emphasizing his vulgar-comic features, as well as his uncivilized irrationality. "Grace, mercy and forgiveness" is portrayed as the moral victory of the Eastern personality through the character of Selim Pasha. In the 'Abduction from the Seraglio' Opera, Mozart used the Turkish image perfectly both in the sense of libretto and musically, and with this work of art, he formed the culmination of the 18th century in the context of this image. (Brockway & Weinstock, 1941; Orrey, 1972; Orrey, 1987; Publig, 1993; McClymonds & Hartz, 2001; Grout & Williams, 2003; Feldman, 2007; Taruskin, 2009; McClymonds, 2010; Eisen & Keefe, 2006; Eisen, 2011).

5. Orientalist Influences in "Aida" Opera in the 19th Century

While the image of the East, which was revealed in the West by the diplomatic relations between the East and the West, and by the romanticism of the 18th century, gained momentum with Händel's 'Tamerlano' Opera and culminated in Mozart's 'Abduction from the Seraglio' Opera; It slightly differed in the 19th century. This differentiation is noted in the libretto of 'Aida', written by Antonio Ghislanzoni, with the ideas and contributions of the French Egyptologist and scholar François Auguste Ferdinand Mariette-Bey in the context of its scenario, which includes an ancient theme related to Egyptian history (the Old Kingdom of Egypt). Although Egypt was a part of the Ottoman Empire in the 19th century, it was a country of Eastern culture that always kept its relations with the West tight and attracted the attention of Europe. Attempts by the French to gain sovereignty over Egypt during the Napoleonic era are important in this respect. These attempts were directly related to Egypt's historical value as well as its geographical location between Africa and Asia, where it could easily interact with the West (Said, 2001). The 'Aida' Opera of Giuseppe Verdi was first staged at the Mehmet Ali Theater in Cairo on December 24, 1871. Mariette prepared the archaeological volumes of the 'Description of Egypt' (Description de l'Égypte) at the time of Napoleon's Egyptian Campaign, as well as Champollion's Letter to M. Dacier (Lettre à M. Dacier)(1822), and he also made hieroglyphic analyses of 'The Hieroglyphic System Handbook' (Précis du système hiéroglyphique)(1824). Mariette also assumed the preparation of the costumes and stage decorations of the opera 'Aida' and used 'Description of Egypt' as the main source for work. The story in the opera takes place in Egypt during the Pharaohs, in Thebes and Memphis. The distribution of roles is as follows: Pharaoh (bass), Amneris; daughter of the Pharaoh and the princess of Egypt (mezzo-soprano), Aida; Abyssinian captive princess in Egypt as the slave of Amneris (soprano), Radames; Egyptian commander and warrior (tenor), Ramphis; high priest

(bass), Amonasro; King of Abyssinia and Aida's father (baritone), the messenger (tenor), the female reader of the temple (soprano), priests, nuns, ministers and officials, soldiers, slaves, Abyssinian captives, people (Busch, 1978, McDaniel, 1991; Altar, 1993; Said, 1993; McCants, 2005; Metopera, 2021).

'Aida' Opera is the product of a systematic study of the ancient Egyptian history and life in terms of both the stage decoration and the text of the play. In 'Aida' Opera, which Edward Said (1993) describes as "an imperialist show aimed at influencing the European audience by making them feel like experiencing the ancient times of Egypt", as in many other operas, the subject of war and love is dealt with, but the war and love aspect in this opera is, in its entirety, distinguished from the romantic-comic and happy ending tradition of the 18th-century opera. The love story, which proceeds in parallel with 'Aida's' theme based on Egypt's war of independence, is at least as compelling as the Egyptian-Abyssinian conflict and has a drama effect from beginning to end. The love of the Egyptian commander Radames to the daughter of the enemy king results in his condemnation to death at the end of the game, and, even the love of Amneris, the daughter of the Pharaoh, cannot save the Commander, who is decided that he has betrayed Egypt. One of the most spectacular features of the libretto of the opera 'Aida'; contrary to Egypt's Muslim-Ottoman identity, its polytheistic historical identity is highlighted. In this context, the historical identity of Egypt in the pre-Islamic Pharaonic period is reflected in the libretto from a Western perspective. This has also been the aspect that Western researchers focused on most in terms of the historical heritage of Egypt. The fact that the scenes in the opera 'Aida' take place in historical places of Egypt, such as the Vulcano temple of the city of Memphis, is proof of how these researches are reflected in the opera visually. In addition, many discourses emphasizing the holiness, independence, and heroism of Egypt, which was in the hands of the Ottomans at that time, and encouraging the people, come to the fore in the libretto. Examples of these words are as follows: "O Egypt, O Isis! You saved the homeland.", "Sing the victory song to the great king, to the great Pharaoh", "Heroic Egyptians run along the banks of the holy Nile", "O heroic Egyptians, we have a high cause now", "Barbarian Abyssinians are attacking the holy land of Egypt", "Our word is death and war". In such a way, the image of Egypt envisioned by the West is revealed in this libretto. In other words, the orientalist discursive fiction of the West has made the desired Egypt visible within the 'Aida' Opera. From this point of view, the desired Egypt presented and portrayed at the opera stage is a different Egypt, far from Ottoman domination and Muslim identity, as seen in the libretto. It is also remarkable that Verdi did not create very contrasting features among the characters he included in the opera. In this respect, it is seen that Verdi envisioned rendering his work with real characters rather than artificial ones. Such an approach is important in that it bears similarities with the scientific attitude of 19th century Western orientalism. The magnificence, historical and political references of the libretto and stage design were supported by the up-tempo music and marches that Verdi used in the opera, and finally the opera 'Aida', as a documentary show about Egypt covering aspects from the Egyptian gods to the banks of the Nile, is one of Europe's 19th century operas that was constructed by the orientalist understanding with splendiferous and exotic elements (Altar, 1993; Fisher, 2001a; Fisher, 2001b; Egyptian Museum, 2022).

6. Discussion and Conclusion

In the 18th century, in parallel with the increase in the interactions between Eastern and Western cultures, interest and curiosity towards Eastern culture increased in the West. In line with these developments, the Eastern culture, which was considered as the "other" with its culture and lifestyle until then, began to add a different colour to Western life, particularly thanks to artistic works and performing arts. And, 'orientalism' began to be discussed and brought about in the fields of literature, painting, and music.

Thanks to the developing means of transportation opportunities in the 18th century, in addition to the elements of the Eastern culture that were carried by diplomats, merchants,

travellers, and artists to the West, who travelled to overseas countries and encountered a culture that was 'foreign and stranger' to them so far, the influence of the high-level official relations developing between the Eastern and Western states enabled both cultures to get to know each other better. In this way, the brutal and ruthless Eastern image, which was shaped in the imagination of the West until the 18th century, turned into an exotic love image in this century in parallel with the close relations between the East-West and especially the Ottoman-West. In this period, especially the Ottoman Empire represented the exotic phenomenon of a culture that the West considered different and distant from itself. When it comes to the 19th century, the orientalist attitude that gained momentum with Napoleon's Egypt Campaign enabled the East to be perceived as a 'reality' that would be dominated.

The operas staged in the West in the 18th century are remarkable as artistic and cultural points of interest, reflecting the entertainment and visual richness of the ornate and pompous palaces of the East. In this study, Händel's opera 'Tamerlano' dated 1724 and Mozart's opera 'Abduction from the Seraglio' dated 1782, are the works of art, which most directly reflect the historical and cultural situation we focused on, and the emphasis on the exoticism of the 18th century that manifested itself clearly.

In Händel's 'Tamerlano' Opera, Sultan Bayezid, representing Istanbul, the centre of the Ottoman Empire, and Timur, representing Central Asia, are confronted. The main emphasis in this opera, which focuses on two Turkish sultans, is the unstoppable powerful and warlike Ottoman's meeting with defeat for the first time, while introducing Ottoman identity that is spectacularly attentive on love and honour. 18th century Ottoman identity that emerged in Händel's opera also overlaps with the romanticism movement of the period in the West. Because the 18th century always glorified the power of love when both exoticism and the rising romanticism in the West were most dominant in art and literature. Thus, in the 18th century, the romantic orientation of the West was revealed as the image of the East associated with intrigue, passion, love, sensuality and tolerance, as seen in 'Tamerlano'.

The most striking scene of the effect of exoticism for the Western audience in Händel's opera is Bayezid's death by drinking poison. The proud and dignified attitude portrayed with the effect of this terrific scene and the love embosomed with intrigues while being kept above all throughout the play are the expression of 18th century romanticism in this opera. At the end of the libretto, although he represents the cruel character from the beginning, Timur's tolerance for Asteria, as well as his sadness of Bayezid's death, are other aspects of the opera that express the romantic sensuality and virtue of the 18th century. Constitutively, Händel's 'Tamerlano' is an opera that reveals the expression of love and virtue with the Ottoman, not in the war, but in the post-war defeat term, and to this respect, it reflects a typical 18th century Western viewpoint towards the East.

On the other hand, Mozart's 'Abduction from the Seraglio' Opera, which is deemed as the most characteristic work of the 18th century, is an important work of art glorified by love, as in Händel's opera. Mozart's opera, which focuses on love, is the most successful representative of the romantic-comic opera of the period with its comic content as well as romanticism. Especially the Osmin character in the opera successfully demonstrates that the West's fear of the Ottomans has diminished. And, in the consideration of the West, the Ottoman Empire is no longer a feared Ottoman. The close resemblance of the name 'Osmin' with the 'Ottoman' confirms this claim. Moreover, the exaggerated attributions, such as the extreme attitudes embodied in Osmin's character, are directly related to the exoticism's exaggeration of the unknown and removing it from reality, making it attractive to Westerners. 'Abduction from the Seraglio' Opera of Mozart generally focuses on concepts such as love, peace, virtue, and freedom, which are frequently used in his works. Especially at the end of the libretto; Selim Pasha, who was in love with Constanze, whom he kept in his palace, allowed her to return to her country with her beloved Belmonte, which drew attention as a notable example of virtue. Opera reflected the Turkish pasha not as "barbarian" or "tyrant" as misperceived before, but as a forgiving and love admiring character. Parallel to that

themed phenomenon reflected in the opera stage, the 18th century was a century in which the image of the Ottoman Empire changed in the perception of the West and transformed from the previously false "barbarian" perception to a "romantic" and "exotic" sense.

In the 19th century, unlike the exotic and romantic-oriented content of the 18th century, a novel orientalist approach emerged particularly by the effects of the outcomes of Napoleon's Egypt campaign. And thus, the East got transformed from a meaning that only attracts attention to the West or has importance as an object of decorative taste, into a "reality" on which to be dominated. The East, which was reflecting the interestingness of what was other than the West itself, in other words, the exoticism of the East, as perceived in the luxurious palaces of the 18th century in the West, became an East to be owned and dominated in the 19th century. Western writers, painters, linguists, travellers, merchants, and, of course, the imperial powers of the 19th century turned to the East and for the first time had the opportunity to get to know the East closely in such a systematic way. However, such recognition was in fact an orientation based on the aim of dominating the East rather than the result of mere interest or exotic curiosity as in the 18th century. Besides, the widespread East-Islam image in 18th century Europe, with the newly generated systematic discourses and methods, stepped away from the pure curiosity of exoticism and manifested itself in the presentation of the performing arts.

Reflecting with great success the definition of orientalism, which gained a new meaning with Napoleon's Egypt campaign, the 'Aida' Opera revealed the concrete interest of France on Egypt for nearly a century. In the 19th century, with Napoleon's campaign to Egypt which was a part of the Ottoman geography, a large mass of orientalist researchers came from France, and even a large research institute was established in Egypt by them. In this period, the 'Aida' Opera was commissioned to Verdi to celebrate the anniversary of the Cairo Opera House, which was reflecting the Western lifestyle, and all the data obtained by French researchers until that time were used as the cement for this opera. 'Aida' Opera, which was created with a wealth of systematic research from decor to costume, music to dance, history to archaeology, was an indisputable and striking example of the West's perception of the East as a "reality" in the 19th century. Despite the theme of love in the 'Aida' Opera, which draws attention as a considerable success of Western orientalist from the reason the opera was commissioned to its preparation stage and magnificent performance, was emphasized as in the works of the previous century, the love story in this libretto in which the lovers die together painfully, did not have a happy ending as in the 18th century operas 'Abduction from the Seraglio' or 'Tamerlano'. Thus, the 'Aida' Opera is the reflection of the fact that romanticism of the 18th century in the West gave way to realism in the 19th century.

In 'Aida' Opera, which focuses on the war between the two countries, all the details regarding the struggle of these two cultures were used following the reality of historical discipline. Thus, unlike the 18th century operas related with orientalism in the West, the 'Aida' Opera of the 19th century was no longer half-real and half-fiction, an exotic East image, but a representation of the East that completely overlaps with the facts of the original cultures and historical events. What makes the libretto of 'Aida' Opera different is that was written based on real information. The reflective design of reality in the performing arts exhibited in the West in the 19th century was, as a subtle fact in the backstage, about the West's attempts to learn the culture, history, geography, and language of the East well, which wanted to seize the East. The opera, which starts with the power of love, grudge, hatred, and enmity, ends with the unhappy act of the same feelings, and the history of ancient Egypt is embodied on the stage with the magnificent visuality of the opera.

In the context of East-West relations reflected in the 18th century and 19th century opera librettos; a considerable transformation from romanticism and exoticism to realism and orientalism is observed through these two different centuries. Nevertheless, it is also a fact that the operas focused on in this study were not effective in the same way. The reason for this effectual difference is considered to be related to the commissioning of the operas by the palace or the empire (the two most powerful Western empires of the period, the Austrian and French empires).

In the transition from the 18th century to the 19th century, the definition and perceptual field of orientalism in the West has also undergone change and transformation. In this study, how the afore pointed change and transformation was shaped in the perspective of the relations between East and West in two different centuries, and then the reflection of this change in the performing arts, particularly in opera librettos, was construed.

The operas of these two different periods and the librettos of these operas discussed in this study are considered as works that most directly reflect two different orientalist contents of the 18th century to the 19th century. Because these operas were prepared and visualized for the palaces representing the imperial powers in both centuries, they also show the cultural and political stances of these empires in their periods.

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