

The Libertine Carmen, a Female Don Juan

Michelle Morin-Bompart

Department of Psychiatry, Montsouris Mutualist Institute, University of Paris V, Paris, France

Email address:

michelle.morin75@orange.fr

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Abstract: For the psychoanalyst André Green, there is a link between the creations of a writer and his life. The creators can be totally unconscious or partially conscious of the material arising from the depth of their unconscious. My goal is to show that creations like dreams are a royal path to reveal unconscious. I will try to show it with Mérimée's short story and then with the Bizet's opera. Mérimée's Carmen was inspired during a travel in Spain by a news item from the Countess of Montijo and a gypsy met in a cabaret near Valencia. Mérimée is a bachelor, a libertine. He falls in love with a beautiful, brown-haired, sensual, married woman, Valentine Delessert. After a passion-love of four years she breaks for another lover. The short story was written five years later, a mourning work. His Carmen is a gypsy who steels and lies, a non-moral prostitute, a narcissistic pervert. The Carmen of Bizet and his librettists is a mythic character created for the Comic opera in Paris, a seductress and a manipulator. Don José's passion will lead him to a love crime. Bizet in his twenties has been a seducer, rejected by Celeste Mogador. Celestine Galli-Marié will sing his Carmen. She seduces him and rejects him just before the first performance of Carmen. Bizet died a few weeks later, a drama on stage and in life. A writer or a composer don't choose the subject of a novel or an opera by chance. The success of the opera Carmen is related to the capacity of the creators to give life and emotion to their characters. Carmen's destiny expresses Mérimée and Bizet's death wishes and those of men seduced and abandoned by such a woman.

Keywords: Hypersexuality, Narcissistic Perversion, Death Wishes, Creation

1. Introduction

"No psychoanalyst can't give up the study of the relations between the story of a life and the story of a work". "The unlink" 1971.

For the psychoanalyst André Green, there is a link between the creations of a writer and his life. The creators can be totally unconscious or partially conscious of the material arising from the depth of their unconscious. My goal is to show that creations like dreams are a royal path to reveal unconscious desires and fantasies.

Carmen is born from Mérimée's imagination. It took him a few months to write this short story which takes its inspiration in a news item and an encounter, fifteen years before, during a trip to Spain in 1830.

The news item was related to him in Madrid by the Countess of Montijo (mother of the future empress Eugenia). This beautiful brown-haired woman, intelligent and cultured will become a friend for Mérimée, never a lover. He will

confide to her in an abundant correspondence of four hundred and thirty-four letters. The news item is the following: the countess's brother in law fell under the control of a "cigar maker" who became his mistress.

During the same trip, he met in a secluded cabaret near Valencia Miss Carmencita, who has the reputation of a witch. He draws her portrait in his sketch-book. Mérimée is gifted for drawing like his parents both drawing teachers and his mother portrait painter. He will do also her portrait with words in his "Spain fourth letter" written and published at his return.

When he conceived of this short story in 1845, in his forties, Mérimée is a well-known writer, inspector of historical monuments. He has just been received at the French Academy. Mérimée is a Don Juan who collects love adventures and frequents prostitutes. He never married and nine years before, he experienced a great passionate love

for Valentine Delessert, a married woman, a delightful, sensual brown-haired woman. This shared passion will end four years later when Valentine deserts him for another lover!

We can understand the humiliation, the narcissistic wound for a Don Juan who usually seduce and abandon women and is abandoned by a Carmen after falling in love with her. Mérimée works with a splitting of the object. On one hand there is a tender feeling for the Countess of Montijo (a mother) and on the other hand a sexual desire for the Carmencita of Valence (a prostitute). He seems to have join both with Valentine!

Carmen is a seducer who has gallants by the dozen and whose loves never last long!! We can't talk of Carmen's loves without evoking Don Jose, this man of flesh and blood, possessed by this satanic creature, caught in her trap, being under her influence, on the grip of jealousy and fighting against his rivals, then acting his death wishes toward the object of his desire.

Carmen has become a myth like Don Juan and Faust and the opera has a large part in it.

2. Method

2.1. *Carmen, Mérimée's Short Story*

The short story begins with a quotation of the Greek Palladas: "The woman is a poison, she offers only two goods moments, in bed and in the grave". This misogynous quotation reveals Mérimée's unconscious hate for women. It is a first-person story.

2.1.1. *Narrator Meets Carmen*

In Cordoba, at sunset, the narrator contemplates women undressing and entering the water of the Guadalquivir. He satisfies his voyeurism. One of the women goes up the stairs, sits next to him and comes to entice him. Her name is Carmencita and she is a gypsy. Merimee describes the gypsy, finding his inspiration in his drawing of Carmencita!

"Her skin, perfectly smooth, was very close to copper hue. Her eyes had a sidelong glance, but admirably splitted; her lips a little strong but well out-lined and showing teethe whiter than almonds without their skin. Her hair, maybe a little thick, was black, with a blue reflection like a crow's wing, long and shining... It was a strange and wild beauty, a face that surprised at first but could not be forgotten. Her eyes especially had a both voluptuous and fierce expressiveness."

It is a love at first sight for a beautiful brown-haired woman like Valentine, the Countess of Montijo, his mother, mothers and whores....

2.1.2. *Carmen's Loves Narrated by Don Jose to the Narrator*

Don Jose in prison tells to the narrator about his adventures with Carmen. He describes the woman walking towards him moving her sensual body, arising the desire, the sexual drives.

"With a quite short red petticoat, white silk stockings with holes, red shoes with fire-colored ribbons, she pushed back her mantilla in order to show her shoulders and a large bouquet of acacia came out of her shirt. She had another acacia flower in the mouth, and she moved forward swinging on her hips. She answered everyone, with a sidelong glance, her fist on her hip, insolent as a real gypsy."

This is the portrait of the sensual seductress who haunts the masculine imaginary and makes him loose his mind! The gypsy's body waves and suggests the sexual pleasure. With her glance, she fascinates like a cobra. Bizet and his librettists, contemporary opera directors find their inspiration in this description to stage Carmen.

"She took the acacia flower out of her mouth and threw it just... between my two eyes and I had the impression of a bullet hitting me."

This is love at first sight. Don José is in the same time attracted by the gypsy and afraid of her (the bullet). The two coexists: the drive and the defense, the attraction and its opposite. Don José picks up the flower, symbol of the female sex and future enjoyment. Later he will see her dancing for the colonel: "From that day I think I started to love her for good." This reveals his latent homosexuality...

But what sort of love is it? Carmen's dance increases sexual desire in him. Mérimée sketches beautiful portraits but expresses very little feelings for his characters. Mérimée was a cold, distant man, keeping himself from all emotion like his mother.

Carmen will dance for Don José alone and they will spend a day together eating, drinking and making love. It is first the story of a carnal love. Don José has Carmen "in his skin" and she likes him a little. He is her "minchoro", her darling, her lover and she does not charge him, which reveals us that she is a whore. But Carmen, a female Don Juan, gets tired of him and collects male adventures, a lieutenant in Sevilla, an English officer in Gibraltar, a rich merchant in Malaga, and the picador Lucas in Granada. Don José would like to possess her for himself alone. His jealousy will lead him to fight with his rivals and to kill the beloved object.

Valentine and Carmen are female Don Juan who practice sexual freedom. The short story allows the novelist to stage his death wishes towards the beloved woman who abandoned him five years earlier for another lover and to mourn that love.

Mérimée's Carmencita is a gypsy who lies and steals: she is a delinquent, an outlaw without a superego. She is a prostitute who sells her charms for money. She is amoral and narcissistic and don't hesitate to make Don José a bandit. She is a manipulator, a psychopath and a perverted nymphomaniac.

She is exactly the portrait of the libertine, narcissistic pervert described by Alberto Eiguer: a seductress who manipulates, lies, steals and uses her emprise to do what she wants when she wants. She has no capacity of empathy.

Mérimée's Carmen was not a book-store success. Readers may be had difficulty to identify with such unsympathetic

characters. The writing of Mérimée is cold and distant like his personality but we can admire his beautiful descriptions, his talent for writing.

2.2. *The Carmen of Bizet, Meilhac and Halevy*

Mérimée's Carmen will resonate with Bizet's unconscious and stimulate his imagination. He absolutely wants this Carmen for his next opera. Bizet and his librettists are going to turn Carmen in a mythical character: a fearsome seductress for whom Don José will have a great love passion.

2.2.1. *The Man Bizet*

His character is totally different from that of Mérimée. He is a warm, expansive, sometimes a depressed man. Early in his childhood, Bizet was steeped in a musical culture. His father was a voice teacher, his maternal uncle sang in comic operas and his mother was a pianist. He is a happy-go-lucky fellow with great artistic demand.

2.2.2. *Sources of Inspiration for Carmen*

Bizet has never trodden the Spanish soil but he frequented Spaniards in Paris: Pauline Viardot (daughter of Manuel Garcia and sister of the Malibran) and the composer Yradier. He loves exoticism and folklore (Djamileh and the Arlesian). He is a "hot rabbit" who frequented the brothels in Rome when he got his first prize and multiplies female conquests before his marriage at age thirty-three. When twenty-seven years old, he fell in love with a neighbor who rejected his advances. Celeste Mogador was fourteen years older, ex countess, dancer in a cabaret and singer. I quote Celeste's words: "My heart never dreamt to live in a heart that resembles to a furnished house where you are housed at night". In her Memories she writes: "I loved with passion or hated with rage... I have always been capricious and haughty. Nobody... feels more pleasure than I to say no. Also, the men who got the most of me are the ones who asked me the least."

Isn't it the character of Bizet's Carmen? One can think that Mérimée's Carmen woke up in his unconscious the traces left by this unsatisfied twenty-years old love.

In June 1872, he was offered three other librettos of comic opera but he wanted Mérimée's Carmen. His librettists defended this project to which the director was hostile: "Death at the Comic opera! Never seen that before!" They will therefore soften Carmen's character and create Micaela the pure and chaste young girl, replace the picador Lucas with the famous bullfighter Escamillo and the death of Carmen will happen after a brilliant finale with procession, fanfare and ballet...

Bizet, Meilhac and Halevy had to make concessions for a light opera audience and shape smuglers and comic opera's gypsies. It is the mix of genres that has led to this masterpiece.

2.2.3. *A Passionate Love*

In this passionate love story, Spanish music and dance mix their sensuality with the lyrics. The capricious diva Celestine Galli-Marié (another celestial woman) had Bizet rewrite

thirteen times her entrance "When I shall love you..."

The Habanera "Love is a child of Bohemia..." is inspired by the voluptuous swing of the hips of Mérimée's text. Bizet reworked the lyrics written by his librettists. He had composed an ordinary melody that Galli-Marié refused to sing, so he replaced it with an Yradier's tune, keeping the melody with a completely different harmonization. Here is the link between the present Celestine and the Celest of his twenties, both of them capricious and haughty! The unconscious does well its job ...

Micaela's character was created by Bizet's librettists from the words in Mérimée's short story: "I never thought there were pretty girls without blue skirts and plaits falling on their shoulders". At one hand there is Micaela the chaste and pure fiancée. She is the representation of a couple, of marriage and descendants, identifying to the mother of the primal scene and on the side of life drives. On the other hand, there is Carmen with the flesh pleasures condemned by Christian morality. The Society encourages the renunciation of these self-destructive impulses. Those two women reflect the conflict that exist in every man: adventures that seduce and the aspiration of a steady home.

The very Spanish music of the Seguedilla was entirely imagined by Bizet on a rhythm of Bolero, a real love parade where mingles seduction and eroticism, rhythm at first languorous then faster and faster, finally frenzied, that ends on an orgasm on a counter B.

The Bohemian song is a more erotic dance with flamenco accents. Its crescendo and accelerando evoke that of Ravel's Bolero, another ascending orgasm. It ends on an unbridled bacchanal.

The entrance of the bullfighter Escamillo starts on a toast which evokes the Spanish bullfights. It is addressed to Carmen: "Bullfighter, while fighting remember that a dark eye looks at you and that love awaits you".

The turn of the opera is the sensual dance of Carmen for Don José alone "I will dance in your honour...". The bugle rings the retreat and Don José will be torn between his passion and his duty then follows a true domestic fight between him and Carmen. She manipulates him and he is going to fall into her nets. When Carmen will obtain from Don José to be her prey and to succumb to her charms, the female Don Juan will drop him and search for another lover. Don José becomes jealous and possessive. He can't bear anymore to be an object completely devoted to her under emprise and to have a rival.

In the Final Duet, Meilhac and Halevy stayed faithful to Mérimée's text. This duet is poignant and the despair of a still in love Don José clashes head on with Carmen who provokes him and brings the tragic end. Don José acts his death drives and kills Carmen with a knife.

The moral ethic requires a punishment. Thanatos gets the upper hand of Eros. The murder appears as a passion crime in the opera. In Mérimée's short story, Don José is a delinquent who went in jail. He tries to find again a normal life with a fiancée and a job in the army. This doesn't appear in Bizet's opera. He is a nice guy engaged with a girl and a soldier. He

is seduced by a sensual and amoral woman. The audience can understand Don José's passion crime.

2.2.4. *Drama on Stage and in Private Life*

Celestine Galli-Marié is an ideal Carmen, a mezzo-soprano with a piquant and mellow voice and her play is a mixture of feline grace and fierce energy. Capricious like the Celeste of Bizet's twenties, she seduces the composer, attracts him in her bed and rejects him a few days before the first performance.

Moreover, Bizet's couple is in a sorry state. The spouses separated one year before and got together again. Bizet, caught in the net of a seductress and abandoned by her, is also abandoned by his wife Geneviève (the daughter of the composer Halevy) a charming brown-haired woman who consoles herself with a pianist who frequents their house in Bougival. And this will end with the death of Bizet.

At Carmen's first representation the audience will be cold and scandalized by the shameful subject and the very credible interpretation of Galli-Marié. Abandoned by his audience, his mistress and his wife, Bizet, who put all his energy in this work, exhausted morally and physically, will die three months later at the age of thirty-six, of a sour throat complicated by a heart attack of rheumatism fever.

3. Result

Mérimée's short story was not a success because it was a non-emotional story which talked about a man in prison, a delinquent who was seduced by a woman lying, stealing, collecting male conquests. Don José jealous will kill his rivals and at least the object of his love.

But this story interested Bizet and he is the one, with his librettists, who gave life and feelings to a passionate love story. This is a typical œdipian story with a "forbidden" love and rivalry between men and between women. There is a splitting of the love object. On one side the pure and loving Micaela who respects the law and rules of marriage. On the other side the libertine Carmen who has gallants by the dozen and manipulates them. They represent the mother and the whore.

A writer and a composer don't choose by chance a subject for their book or opera. They find themselves in the characters they create. Mérimée is a libertine, a Don Juan and Bizet has been so when he was a young man. They both experienced a disappointment with a Carmen.

Bizet's opera was written for the Comic Opera in Paris and was not a success at first because the audience was not used to see death on stage. But it became an international success because it shows real life, a mixture of drama and comedy, a very modern opera for the 19th century.

The myth of Carmen strikes the collective imaginary. Many men have experienced such a love disappointment from a Carmen and have been caught in a very carnal passion. Many women unconsciously would like to be a seductress like Carmen and the object of such a love passion.

4. Discussion

Carmen acts like a Don Juan. Alberto Eiguer made a description of the libertine: a seducer who wants to enjoy life unrestrainedly, who does not want to be tied up because he will lose his independence, who is interested in the conquest of women. We find more and more libertines in our society because of a permissive education and a lack of authority, encouraging licentiousness. Don Juan is a narcissistic pervert who seduces, lies, manipulates, exerts emprise and sometimes rapes.

For Michel Fain, the "imitators" of Don Juan present an hypersexuality. Master in the art of seducing women, they fool husbands and give great pleasure to women. When they talk of love they lie because they only love themselves. Because of an exaggerated œdipian conflict, they can't be attached to a woman and they flee from one to another.

The adolescent goes through a phase of collecting love experiences. The persistence and the increase when an adult, are pathological. The parental outline is a cold mother and a father who doesn't assume limits. The children become King children, capricious who rebel against what is forbidden. They laud liberty for them and the others. Isn't it the evolution of our contemporary society towards licentiousness?

Alberto Eiguer, distinguish minor libertines (Casanova), sexual addiction (actual society), narcissistic pervert (Don Juan) and sadistic perversion (marquis of Sade). For me, you can find sexual addiction in all these cases but more or less.

5. Conclusion

Carmen is part of a long list of female seducers. Cleopatra and Catherine the Great of Russia have a minor form like Casanova. Cleopatra put slaves in her bed then Julius Caesar and Mark Antony. Catherine The Great had more than twenty-one lovers and an erotic cabinet. The roman empress Messalina was a narcissistic pervert who had her rivals killed. Her sexual appetite was immoderate and she changed part of her palace in a brothel.

Carmen has an addict sexuality but she is also a narcissistic pervert. She seduces, lies, steals, manipulates and exerts emprise on Don Jose. He becomes an object she uses and throws away when she decides. She nourishes herself of the depreciation of Don Jose and reinforces her ego.

Carmen wants to live freely, unrestrainedly. She doesn't want to attach herself and be dependent. We don't find in her the sexual predator, the Don Juan of Tirso di Molina (the creator of Don Juan) who rapes non consenting women but this type of women exists, raping the sexuality of young boys for their own pleasure (for example Ingmar Bergmann in his youth!).

We can say with André Green that there is a link between the life of Mérimée and the one of Bizet and their creations. In their unconscious, they want to get revenge from a

Carmen who abandoned them and act in fantasy their death wishes.

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