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Parola Scenica:
Towards Realism in Italian Opera

Hendrik Johannes Paulus du Plessis

ETD

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Arts, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of PhD by Thesis

Abstract

This thesis attempts to describe the emergence of a realistic writing style in nineteenth-century Italian opera of which Giuseppe Verdi was the primary architect. Frequently reinforced by a realistic musico-linguistic device that Verdi would call *parola scenica*, the object of this realism is a musical syntax in which neither the dramatic intent of the text nor the purely musical intent overwhelms the other. For Verdi the dramatically effective depiction of a 'slice of a particular life'—a realist theatrical notion—is more important than the mere mimetic description of the words in musical terms—a romantic theatrical notion in line with *opera seria*.

Besides studying the device of *parola scenica* in Verdi's work, I also attempt to cast light on its impact on the output of his peers and successors. Likewise, this study investigates how the device, by definition texted, impacts on the orchestra as a means of realist narrative. My work is directed at explaining how these changes in mood of thought were instrumental in effecting the gradual replacement of the *bel canto* singing style typical of the *opera seria* of Rossini, Donizetti, and Bellini, by the school of thought of *verismo*, as exemplified by Verdi's experiments. Besides the work of Verdi and the early nineteenth-century Italian operatic Romanticists, I touch also briefly on the *œuvres* of Puccini, Giordano and the other *veristi*.

ETD

Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own work. It is submitted for the degree of PhD by Thesis in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination in any other university.



H J P du Plessis

This seventeenth day of December, 2007

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Contents

Abstract 2

Declaration 2

Acknowledgements 3

Contents 4

List of Illustrations 5

Preface 7

Preamble 7

Realism in literature, and on the dramatic and lyric stage 8

Parola scenica: on the cusp between text and music 9

The way forward 11

Chapter 1 14

Problems of Realism 14

Realism or *realism*: a phenomenon with a dual nature 17

Classical Realism: its sources in nineteenth-century literature and theatre 20

Musical and operatic Realism/Naturalism: some terminological issues 23

Verdi and operatic realism 26

Parola scenica 32

Verdi and *parola scenica* 34

Parola scenica: setting up opportunities for dramatic narrative intent 36

Parola scenica: economy of means 46

The narrative process: audience involvement, multi-spatiality and the inner space; defamiliarization 51

I: Audience involvement 52

II: Multi-spatiality 53

II: 'The artistic inner space' 55

IV: Estrangement 56

Chapter 2 59

Problems of libretto, storytelling and narrative 59

The *mélodrame* 60

An inter-textual comparison between Donizetti and Verdi 62

The Italian librettist as dramatist: artisan *versus* artist 73

The Verdian libretto as drama 76

Verdi, libretto and theatre 78

Narrative intent to serve artist and public 81

Stiffelio and the Verdian narrative 83

Traversing the literary text 92

Chapter 3 98

Problems of theatrical signification in 'programme' music 98

Overtures and interludes: programmatic interpretation of a text 99

Foreshadowing *parola scenica* without words 109

Musico-dramatic narrative '*senza parole*' 112

Untexted *parola scenica* 118

The orchestra in general 121

Parola scenica in the orchestra 123

Chapter 4 127

Verdi's operatic heritage in focus, The Verdian operatic narrative 128

Parola scenica: Verdi's experiments after Paris 133

Verdi takes up *parola scenica* as musical 'ground zero.' 145

Close readings from the third stylistic period *Don Carlos* 148

Close readings from the third stylistic period *Aida* 156

Chapter 5 193

'*Parola scenica* made music . . . ' 193

Is it, or is it not *parola scenica*? 198

The final word on Verdi: comparatively speaking 206

Parola scenica and the *veristi* 213

Giordano: 'Viva Robespierre!', *Andrea Chénier* 215

Juxtaposing narrative and description: operatic jump-cut. 220

Chapter 6 237

Conclusion 244

Post scriptum 245

Table of References 247

5: List of illustrations

Chapter 1

1.1: 'Che è ciò?' from Act I *La traviata* 29
1.2: 'Deus meus' from Act IV *La battaglia di Legnano* 40
1.3: 'Liberamente or piangi . . . sfrenati, o cor' from Act I of *Attila* 43
1.4: Using *parola scenica* to simulate the spoken voice 45
1.5: 'Fu la sorte dell'armi a 'tuoi funesta' from Act II Scene 1 of *Aida* 47

Chapter 2

2.1: *Inno delle Nazioni:* extract 90
2.2: 'Oh qual m'invida ed agita' from Act I of *Stiffelio* 95

Chapter 3

3.1: Prelude to *Macbeth* 102
3.2: Fenella's 'speech' in *La Muette de Portici* 110
3.3: Choir of people in *La Muette de Portici* 111
3.4 Onomatopoeic gestures in *Rigoletto* 113
3.5 Extract from the storm in *Aroldo* 114
3.6 Extract from Schubert's *Erlkönig* 119
3.7 Opening bars from 'Eri tu' in *Un ballo in maschera* 120

Chapter 4

4.1: Extract of *parola scenica* as opposed to recitative in *Stiffelio* 138
4.2 (a) and (b) *Stiffelio's* Act I Scene 10 themes 140
4.3: The 'Plaudiam' chorus in *Stiffelio* 141
4.4: Extract from 'Fontainebleu!', *Don Carlos* 149
4.5: 'Le cerf s'enfuit sous la ramure' from Act I of *Don Carlos.* 150
4.6: 'Le bruit du cor' from *Don Carlos* 150
4.7: 'Fontainebleau!' from *Don Carlos* 150
4.8: Extract from 'Fontainebleu!', *Don Carlos* 151
4.9 'Le bruit du cor' from *Don Carlos* 151
4.10: 'De quels transports' from *Don Carlos* 151
4.11: The love theme in Don Carlos, and how it mutates 151
4.12(a) & (b): Ordinary and obscured stress patterns in simple quadruple time 154
4.13: 'Fontainebleau!' from *Don Carlos* 155
4.14: A *caesura* in thought, and a break in the action 156
4.15: Prelude to *Aida* (Budden 1981: 199) 157
4.16(a) & (b): Motives in *Aida* (Budden 1981; Abbate & Parker 1989) 157
4.17: 'Celeste Aida' from Act I Scene 1 of *Aida* 158
4.18: *Scena e Concertante* from Act I Scene 1 of *Aida* 158
4.19: 'Si, corre voce' from Act I of *Aida* 159
4.20: 'Celeste Aida' from Act I of *Aida* 160
4.21: 'Quale insolita gioia' from Act I of *Aida* 161
4.22: Motives from *Aida* (Abbate & Parker 1989: 224) 161
4.23: Cross-referencing of *Aida* themes (Abbate & Parker 1989: 226) 162
4.24: End of the 'Dance of the Little Moors' 164

4.25: Act II duet between Aida and Amneris 165
4.26: Amneris concluding her first speech 166
4.27: Amneris tries to force Aida to admit to her relationship with Radamès 168
4.28: Amneris gets Aida to speak of her 'love interest' 169
4.29: Amneris' interrogation continues 172
4.30: A mixture of styles 173
4.31: Verdi's preparation for *parola scenica* to follow 174
4.32: The start of the duet proper between Aida and Amneris 175
4.33: Thematic derivation in *Aida* 181
4.34: Application of newly derived theme 181
4.35: Typical 'chest' writing for the 'Verdi mezzo' 182
4.36: The Finale to the duet, with the last word for the soloists set as *parola scenica* 184
4.37: The soloists in opposition to the chorus 186

Chapter 5

5.1: Motivic material in the opening of *Otello* 195
5.2: Lyrical motif in 'Fuoco di gioia' 196
5.3: Introduction to the 'Brindisi' in *Otello* 198
5.4: 'Melismatic' writing for Jago 199
5.5: *Parola scenica* between voices rather than between voice and orchestra 200
5.6: Jago's change of idiom in the third stanza of the 'Brindisi 204
5.7: Extract from the 1857 *Simon Boccanegra* 206
5.8: First lines of dialogue, 1857 version 207
5.9: Paulo indicating the Fiesco mansion in the 1857 version 208
5.10: The same lines in the 1881 revision: note transposition 208
5.11: The opening measures of the 1881 version of *Simon Boccanegra* 209
5.12: 'Viva Robespierre' from Giordano's *Andrea Chénier* 217-218
5.13: Extracts from *La bohème* 224*ff*

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Preface

Preamble

'THERE ARE THOSE who mock the artificiality of opera', says Stephen Brooks. 'It's easy to do, and there is no rational defence [. . .]'. He continues, 'opera lovers know [. . .] that the formal constraints of opera, its supposedly absurd conventions, can heighten rather than diminish its impact. Of course people don't sing their opinions or conversations "in real life". That is the whole point of opera. It articulates in [. . .] music what we "in real life" can only stutter in semi-articulate prose [. . .]' (Exley).

My own childhood interest in opera was from the seemingly indefensible position Brooks describes. A product of a co-educational provincial primary and secondary schooling system, I was one of only a handful of students at the time with a true musical interest and obvious aptitude. My overriding passion, then as now, was for the operatic voice, a passion that isolated me in some measure from my peers, whose main musical interest lay in pop and rock.

The first audio recording to make an indelible impression on me was 'Casta diva' from Sutherland's first commercial recording of Bellini's *Norma*, which I had borrowed from the public library as a teenager. That reading excited me on many levels. I shall never outgrow the admiration I developed, firstly for the Sutherland instrument, and secondly for her uncomplicated, direct approach to that most difficult of roles in particular, and her art in general. Her voice touched me personally, too. My mother's voice was similar to Sutherland's in timbre and in size, if not in technique, and I have an amateur recording of her, years old, but for me a significant (if sentimental) audio document in my compact disc collection. Above all, Sutherland's no-nonsense approach to life and her work has since formed my own approach to music and my study of it.

When I reached university I had outgrown some of the isolation of adolescence and my horizons had widened, but my primary interest still centred on vocal technique and performance practice. In my circle of acquaintances—fellow theatre arts students, mostly—I had endless conversations about the validity of opera as a form of artistic expression, when Shakespeare, the Rice-Webber partnership and Beckett, for example, supposedly addressed the intellect and the emotions more directly and less 'artificially'. Very few of my friends shared my enthusiasm for the lyric stage, and their musical interest for the most part was confined to the contemporary popular rather than the classical repertoire.

My peers challenged their intellects through the modernism of Brecht, the *sang-froid* of Lorca and the naturalism of Chekhov, and they explored the passions of their youth through cult classics such as *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, Stanley Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange* and musicians such as The Who, whose Pete Townsend still regularly tops the rock charts. My self-proclaimed field of speciality became early nineteenth-century opera. I developed a keen interest in why there should have been a decline in the *bel canto* style of singing in favour of *verismo* in opera in the nineteenth century, especially since the star of *bel canto* (and its performers) seemed to be in the ascendancy. In the twentieth century Callas, Sutherland, Sills and Horne emerged between the 1940s and the 1980s. The turn of the twentieth century saw the rise of Renée Fleming, Cecilia Bartoli and most recently Vivica Genaux and Juan Diego Florez. These are all voices that embody the operatic ideals and ideas of the early nineteenth century; yet the philosophical-literary Zeitgeist since the 1890s suggests a move away from early nineteenth-century thought and practice. The notion of an apparent transition from the *bel canto* style of singing to the school of thought of *verismo* always interested me. Now, at the start of the twenty-first century, musicologists and performers alike are trying to revive performance styles that predate the turn of the nineteenth century, moving back to period instruments and 'authentic performance practices'. How does one explain such paradoxes?

Realism in literature, and on the dramatic and lyric stage

When first I read on nineteenth-century theatre, I knew that the decline of *opera seria* was prompted by a need for Realism in opera (and I presently distinguish between 'Realism' and 'realism'). But I was unprepared for the scope of the movement in literature, philosophy and the arts. However, I soon discovered that the Realist movement as a field of study was as large as it was complex.

It is significant that Realism retains a ubiquitous presence, today as in the past, no matter how far back the clock is turned (or forwards, in science-fiction). Gustave Flaubert says that '[f]rom my point of view Reality should be no more than a *springboard*. [. . .] After the Realists, we have the Naturalists and the Impressionists. What progress! A bunch of clowns who want to increase their own importance and make us all believe that they've invented the wheel' (Beaumont 134). Strikingly, the nineteenth-century author who is credited as one of its primary architects viewed literary Realism as a source of inspiration, not as a benchmark, despite the intensely Realist slant of his *L'Éducation sentimentale* (1869).

This is a notion that extends to all of Realism: the *form* is highly constructed, but the *content* is commonplace. When a tale is told, every artistic age will try to ensure believability, or at least plausibility. This includes the fantastical, such as the fairy tale, or the mystical, such as religious literature, no matter how scholars of future generations may regard the project of the past. Rosen and Zerner note this phenomenon too: 'The real problem [. . .] was a confusion between "realism" and "Realist." Realistic portrayal has existed in art for thousands of years, but nineteenth-century Realism was a very much more narrow affair; at least, so it was to the nineteenth century itself' (1971 (1985): 139). This derives from ancient Greek notions of art as mimesis, a stance I note but do not adopt for reasons soon to become apparent. Wellek And Warren argue that

> Realism and naturalism, whether in the drama or the novel, are literary or literary-philosophical movements, conventions, styles [. . .]. The distinction is not between reality and illusion, but between differing conceptions of reality, between differing modes of illusion (1956: 213).

Greek drama developed a certain *verisimilitude,* Renaissance theatre copied it. Brockett and Hildy tell us that neoclassical doctrine included a fundamental demand for the appearance of truth, (26), or 'verisimilitude'. Here a schism appeared between proponents of *opera seria* and the route along which the spoken theatre was developing: operatic *aficionados* chose the spectacle of the voice above dramatic truth. I revisit verisimilitude when I examine the libretto in greater detail in Chapter 2; and for the record, I prefer the term 'the spoken' to 'straight' or 'legitimate' theatre to describe plays such as Shakespeare's or Chekhov's, for example, particularly as opposed to opera as theatre.

If all epochs claim verisimilitude in aesthetics, philosophy and artistic practice, why is nineteenth-century Realism considered so special? The answer lies in Realism's duality. I presently make a very definite distinction between what I have called Classical Realism and Neoclassical realism. For me the former represents a theoretical point of view, the latter an application of that view.

Parola scenica: on the cusp between text and music

The problem of setting words to music so that both receive prominence but neither at the expense of the other has always exercised composers. The operatic text is a major site of this debate. It is documented for us in Gluck's preface to *Alceste* (1767), in which composer and librettist developed an operatic model that would eventually lead to a dramatic text underscored by music rather than beautiful music to which the dramatic intent is only incidental.

A century later, and in outlining what he viewed as imperatives for the development of the school of thought he would call 'naturalism', Émile Zola speculated that only a dramatist of genius would inspire theatre to grow beyond nineteenth-century tragedy and romantic drama, and even beyond operatic models such as Calzabigi's and Gluck's. In this thesis I argue that Verdi was this genius. In his quest for a dramatically telling operatic text that included the device of *parola scenica*, he would come closest to building a particular relationship between word and music that was anticipated even by the Greek theatrical innovator Thespis of Icaria (sixth century B.C.E.).

In assessing Verdi as dramatist, obvious questions emerge: What is this *parola scenica*? How does Verdi speak through it, and what makes *parola scenica* so effective a device, if not for communication, then for communicating theatrical intent? Like the concept of Realism *parola scenica* is problematic, because it is not part of a standard musicological subject terminology, and when the term is used, it is open to a variety of interpretations. Verdi, who coined the phrase, only used it four times in writing (Della Seta *Parola Scenica*: 262); Philip Gossett (*Verdi* 296) has noted a fifth instance. How frequently Verdi actually spoke of it and in what context we do not know. It is especially for this reason that it has become imperative to investigate its nature and provenance, but using different analytical models than have until now been applied to it. Einstein once noted that 'one cannot solve a problem with the same kind of thinking that gave rise to that problem' (Laszlo 17), and I see this as a pivotal argument.

A communicator and supreme authority on the human condition, Verdi gradually became disenchanted with an operatic idiom in which the musical text appeals to the listener's musical awareness at the expense of the dramatic. Budden notes that the operatic tradition Verdi inherited was 'deeply conservative', with strong links to the previous century (1, 1974: 8). But Budden allows us to deduce that as soon as a break with that conservative absolutism became possible, Verdi implemented change. He dispensed with trouser-roles (1, 1974: 7). He developed different formal conventions from his predecessors. In the duet, for example, Verdi introduced different musical material for each voice (1, 1974: 18). He also dispensed with the Rossini-*crescendo* in the body of his operas quite early on 1, (1974: 20). In short, in Carlo Gatti's words, Verdi produced 'a style that is simple, direct and grandiose. The public liked it and asked for more, and Verdi gave it to them' (1, 1974: 27). Verdi's theatre would privilege the dramatic *in addition to* the purely musical; realist effects he created for the sake of the

drama remain foregrounded, while the listener is aware of the musical signification without losing sight of the dramatic signification.

With hindsight it becomes obvious that the most basic difference between *opera seria* and *verismo* is in that the musico-dramatic intent in *opera seria* is located primarily in the melody; in *verismo* it claims the entire musical gesture. The *opera seria* composer impacts through the music (more specifically, the melody), not the text. As Marco Beghelli argues, a constative musical act is favoured over a performative one (30). *Verismo* communicates firstly (but not exclusively) via its text. In his theatre, Verdi exceeds both these techniques.

The object in this preface is to introduce the material I cover without pre-empting my conclusions. As this project developed, it became increasingly difficult to proceed logically while paraphrasing intermediary steps. But I *can* suggest as a means of introduction that Verdi used *parola scenica* to structure the operatic text *to convey dramatic and musical intent at once in more than one cognitive space*. To this end he relied on a process to which I refer as *defamiliarization*. He would juxtapose the commonplace in the text for the listener with sections of material that are treated differently, material that the composer does not allow the listener to interpret as pedestrian or utilitarian musico-dramatic expression.

The over-arching aim of this thesis then becomes to determine how Realism and *parola scenica* articulate in Verdi's hands in the interests of greater musico-dramatic intent. First, however, I briefly map the route I intend to take.

The way forward

Every note Verdi wrote is important; thus I allow the music to speak for itself by referring constantly to scores I have been able to secure, for example the important collection of first editions in the Loeb Collection (http://hcl.harvard.edu/libraries/loebmusic/collections/digital.html) and modern *Urtexts* such as the Kathleen Kuzmick Hansell critical edition of *Stiffelio* for the University of Chicago and Casa Ricordi in 2003.

In an ideal research environment with easy access to all sources, printed and electronic, one might decide upon a scholarly approach based primarily on the autograph scores. But even before taking that step, I would listen to a compact disc or watch a video performance of the printed score, and only then consider scores and what has otherwise appeared in print about a composer or his work. Following this approach, I hope that my close readings remain as first-hand as can be, and a true reflection of the composer's sensibilities through his music.

CHAPTER 1

Before I introduce the notion of *parola scenica* in this chapter, I trace the origins, nature and provenance of Realism, firstly as a philosophical, literary and theatrical concept; then I describe it in musical terms. Chapter 1 is then devoted to some conditions under which *parola scenica* is likely to present, how it is identified, and how it functions. I also outline some significant points concerning the public's reception of both music and text in the light of *parola scenica*.

CHAPTER 2

Here I emphasize the libretto: I describe how philosophical, literary and theatrical developments outlined in Chapter 1 spill over into the work of the poets who created libretti for nineteenth-century Italian opera. I then attempt to cast light on the historic origins of the libretto. When Verdi's creative career was at its zenith, a new relationship was developing between composer and librettist. I devote special attention to Verdi's working relationship with his poets, and how this relationship impacted on the libretto as drama. During its lifetime, the libretto was initially viewed as craft rather than art. It is largely owing to the efforts of Wagner and Verdi that attempts were made to rectify this imbalance.

CHAPTER 3

In this chapter I interrogate the orchestra's role, with reference to how Verdi manipulates the non-texted music and accompaniments to assume a narrative stance through *parola scenica* that taps into the spectator-listener's intellect and capacity to be astonished by what comes unexpectedly in the musical text; or, put differently, by what the composer has defamiliarized as a means of emphasis. This is a highly metaphoric application of the phrase, because it suggests that, while using the strategy of *parola scenica* to bring across narrative and dramatic intent, the *parola*, in the strictest sense, is *implied*, not *stated*.

CHAPTER 4

Here I unite text and music, placing Verdi's music in chronological context. I also interrogate early and mature Verdian styles and the use of *parola scenica* throughout his career, here excluding *Otello*. This material centres on how *parola scenica* became an organic part of Verdi's style, and besides serving as a means of imparting narrative signification, how it ranks with tonality, formal design and orchestration as a major compositional technique in the composer's stylistic armoury. Verdi 'discovered' *parola scenica*, and a detailed close reading of how the device becomes recognizable in the Aida-Amneris duet serves to conclude this section, because it is in connection with this ensemble that Verdi first verbalizes *parola scenica* as a principle in his correspondence.

CHAPTER 5

I pick up the discussion with Verdi where I left off in the previous section. A discussion of the composers's last tragedy *Otello* serves as a link between the *parola scenica* used at the end of his career, and how others used the device. I compare the opening section of the original (1857) version of *Simon Boccanegra* with that of 1881. In the former, *parola scenica* is non-existent, while in the second version it is very conspicuous, alongside other operatic syntax with which it can easily be confused such as *recitativo*, both *secco* and *accompagnato*, and *arioso*. In fact, this chapter serves mainly to show the manner in and the extent to which a more mature Verdi absorbed the narrative abilities of *parola scenica*, adding value to it towards the end of his career.

I cannot but touch briefly on the impact of *parola scenica* on, and its development in, the work of the true *veristi*, both those whose careers overlapped with Verdi's but also those who succeeded him. My intention in the concluding pages of this chapter is to show that *parola scenica* is not a confusion with recitative or *arioso*, but without reasonable doubt a phenomenon in its own right with an identity that sets it apart from traditional syntax, even in the work of composers other that Verdi. My reading of the term is very specific, clearly demarcated, defined and distinguished from the fabric surrounding it. What I describe, then, is not an over-zealous endeavour to turn quite ordinary operatic syntax into something that it was never meant to be, and I am particularly mindful not to read *parola scenica* into every gesture. I have checked and double-checked passages pre- and post-dating Verdi where the line between *parola scenica* and *arioso* becomes blurred, and I am confident that those passages I have identified as *parola scenica* indeed represents this device.

I am also interested in where *parola scenica* ultimately leads, with some of its roots in ancient Greek and others in French *boulevard* theatre, and its development in and post Verdi, and I conclude this chapter by drawing a brief parallel between *parola scenica* as I interpret the device in the operatic context, and how it anticipates and even approaches techniques in twentieth-century film.

CONCLUSION

Verdi enables his listener to grasp the dramatic and also textual and musical narrative intent *simultaneously* in his development of the genre. In this final chapter I conclude this thesis by establishing universal imagery in terms of which Verdi's impact on the development of the listener's process of assimilating dramatic and musical intent may best be illustrated.

Chapter 1

Problems of Realism

> The genuine artist is never 'true to life'. He sees what is real, but not as we are normally aware of it. We do not go storming through life like actors in a play. Art is never real life (Stevens 1959).

'Opera' and 'Realism': it is hard to imagine two apparently more conflicting concepts. As a form of artistic expression, opera on the face of it cannot be further removed from reality (and from Realism as a movement in the arts), essentially because the conventions of everyday communication dictate that human beings speak, not sing. To this one must add that opera is not only sung, it is declaimed in a particularly highly stylized manner: 'the heightened voice', as Gary Tomlinson has called it ('Fear of Song' 2005).

The realist agenda is particularly obvious in the fine arts, in scenes and objects that are depicted as they appear in real life. Thus the Realist movement in French art flourished from about 1840 until the late nineteenth century, and sought to convey a truthful and objective vision of contemporary life. French society gradually embraced democratic reform, and the Realists became preoccupied with depicting modern, everyday subjects, using the working class as subject matter. However Realism (the upper 'R' case is intentional), as the term is understood in the nineteenth century, sought to portray the modern world, concentrating on how art could improve the human condition, and the idealized classicism of academic art and the exotic themes of Romanticism lost ground.

But such a description is deceptive (Miller 'Realism' 7 April 2006). It is already difficult to come to grips with Realism in the nineteenth century, because reality, the basis of Realism, is different for any two individuals. In twenty-first century context, likewise, describing or defining Realism has become no less problematic, as Alexander Miller suggests in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, where he has written '[. . . t]he nature and plausibility of Realism is one of the most hotly debated issues in contemporary metaphysics, perhaps even the most hotly debated issue in contemporary philosophy.' Realism might become one's motivating force, then, or one might reject it; but increasingly philosophers became selectively Realist or non-Realist about various topics. For instance, one might be a Realist about the everyday world of macroscopic objects and their properties, at the same time supporting a non-Realist view about aesthetic and moral value.

In literature, Katherine Kearns 'argues for Realism as a genre committed to depicting the imperiled [*sic*] ecological system of soul and society. More specifically: realism [. . .] suggests to its readers that social and political and economic reform are inextricably tied to spiritual well being. In the process of trying to communicate that suggestion, realism enters into a kind of considerate conversation with its readers that [. . .] rapidly works to destabilize, even undermine, its own assumptions' (inside cover). After decades of intensive research, then, we are not significantly closer to establishing exactly what Realism represents as a philosophical, literary, artistic, musical, or musico-dramatic movement.

Western culture of the second half of the nineteenth century started exploring realist techniques and strategies ever more vigorously, broadly focusing on a search for as Realistic as possible a portrayal of (contemporary) life in the theatre, in print, in the fine artistic and mechanical media. The emergence of early motion pictures underscores this quest for Realism. It is evidence of the persistent search of the theatrical mind for a 'true' portrayal of life as art. Operatic architects would in due course also embark on the same search for a Realist aesthetic, and I attempt to return to the cinematic connection in opera—as *parola scenica* is reflected in twentieth-century film—in a later chapter.

Temporal demarcations associated with Realism are open to dispute, but to serve us here, I follow boundaries suggested by other scholars of the nineteenth century. Jacques Barzun, for example, has suggested that 'the [. . .] initial Romanticism [. . .]—from 1790 to 1850—put forth all the themes and ideas used in Western culture until our own times. Romanticism was encyclopedic. The next three phases, [. . .] Realism, [. . .] Symbolism and Naturalism worked separate veins of the original deposit; they were periods of specialization. None of these [. . .] stops neatly [. . .] to let the next begin' (1956: 165). Similarly, Roland Stromberg holds that 'Realism, naturalism, and symbolism [. . .] in the arts and literature coincide roughly with three generations of European history [. . .]: Realism [. . .] from 1848 to 1871, naturalism from 1871 to 1890, symbolism from 1890 to 1914. [. . .] there is some overlap and there are many exceptions. But they are adequate generalizations' (ix).

Taking root first in philosophical, literary and theatrical circles, this aesthetic is evident in the thought of such intellectuals as Auguste Comte (1797-1857), Hippolyte Taine (1828-1893), Alexandre Dumas *fils* (1824-1895), Gustave Courbet (1819-1877), Émile Augier (1820-1889), Ernest Renan (1823-1892), Émile Zola (1840-1902) in France; and Charles Darwin (1809-1882) and John

Stuart Mills (1806-1873) in Britain. The work of writers such as Émile Zola and Gustave Flaubert inspired the genesis of a new kind of operatic text. Among Flaubert's later major works, for example, is the novel *Salammbô* (1862), which was made into an *opéra* in five acts by Ernest Reyer to a libretto by Camille du Locle in 1890 (Taruskin 'Salammbô' 23 August 2004), as well as a projected grand opera in four acts by Modest Petrovich Mussorgsky to his own libretto (MacDonald 'Salammbô' 23 August 2004). Both the elder Dumas and his son Alexandre saw their work increasingly in demand as opera libretti. But most of all it was the Realism of Dumas *fils* (1824-1895) and Christian Hebbel (1813-1863) and the Naturalism of Émile Zola that suggested new stylistic models for the late nineteenth-century Italian libretto.

In her monograph *Realism* Linda Nochlin eloquently describes how the attitudes of the nineteenth-century mind influenced the rise of Realism in the arts, and she outlines the Zeitgeist as it was represented in the philosophies of such thinkers as Comte, Taine, Zola, Flaubert, Renan and Mills. Although Nochlin's primary concern is with Realism in fine art, she acknowledges its origins in literature, especially in nineteenth-century France, where the Realist movement first made its presence felt. Although its early proponents refused to intellectualize the notion of Realism, it is Gustave Flaubert especially who 'created [in literature] the most striking and veristic image of the revolutionary epoch in *L'Éducation sentimentale*' (1978: 49).

What were the main strategies that nineteenth-century musicians deployed in the interests of musical and operatic Realism, *parola scenica* among them? To determine this, it is necessary to unpack the meaning of the term before tracking how these composers moved into the Realist orbit, including Verdi, whose characters are not 'puppets constructed according to the postulates of some theory, but as sprung from the soil of pure folk-lore and an intuitive apprehension of reality' (Maecklenburg & Baker 211).

A widely-held belief posits that Realism and Naturalism originated in French philosophy before spreading to opera via literature, and this is true of all of Europe, *except of Italy*, where the public resisted change. Deirdre O'Grady makes a startling observation when she argues that 'It is my belief that the true birth of Realism took place on the operatic stage'. She continues,

> Librettists such as Piave and Boito, alongside giants like Verdi and Ponchielli, had carried public taste from the idealistic upholding of patriotic principles to an outright protest against high society, and a rejection of the conventional (1991: 180).

Realism or *realism:* a phenomenon with a dual nature?

> Through its questioning of humanistic values and stereotypical 'truths', the realistic strain [evident in the movement called *realism*] played a crucial part in creating those relativist standards that infuriated conservative audiences and made almost everyone aware that something new was underway in the arts (Brockett & Findlay *The Theatre* 2).

Italy resisted Realism, but not totally. Especially in attempting to find a realist niche for Verdi I am positing that we are in fact not only dealing with Nineteenth-Century Realism, intentionally capitalized again, and to which I refer from here on simply as 'Classical Realism', with the upper case. Then I might refer to Verdi's brand of realism as *neoclassical realism*, or 'realism' (lower case). There are distinct and important differences, but by the same token, there are general and specific tangential points. It is possible to say that elsewhere we *theorize* on Realism; in relation to Verdi *we put realism into practice*.

Nineteenth-Century Realism as a Realist spectacle was first made known or announced as a distinct style in 1853 by Jules-Husson Champfleury (1821-1889), from where it developed to enjoy a relatively short theatrical life. Its proponents agreed on some points: that it provides a truthful representation of the real world; that it is based upon direct observation of contemporary life and manners; and that artists must be impersonal and objective in their attitudes toward subject matter.

Opponents of the Realist school responded that in avoiding the ideal, Realism limited itself to the ugly and trivial; they argued that it emphasized external detail only; that it was completely materialistic; and that it emphasized sensuality and fatalism, and was morally indifferent or even amoral in its outlook. The conflict ultimately resulted in opposing views of nature and the function of art. The detractors of Realism obviously believed that art should, either directly or implicitly, idealize human experience and provide a positive and moral picture of human destiny.

Dumas created characters reasonably like those in real life, and placed them in a such a 'real' setting. In Naturalism the analogy between pathology and art was probably responsible for Naturalists so often choosing subjects from the more sordid aspects of human behaviour.

Zola too maintained that a play should be a 'fragment of existence'. Naturalistic works of France particularly in the 1890s included 'implied criticism by suggesting that social ills required that changes be made in society' (Brockett & Findlay *The Theatre* 23).

At the same time we see what I call *realism* emerging. By the mid 1850s, at which time 'Réalisme' was being debated in publications such as *Réalisme*, *Le Présent* and *L'Artiste*, Verdi had already written some twenty-one works for the lyrical stage, and in the creation of those particular almost two dozen operas he had already moved beyond Classical Realism, and created other bonds between his art and realism. Theatrically, for example, Verdi had chosen from the start to break a cardinal rule of representing on stage incidents from contemporary mid nineteenth-century life, and when he did, he refrained from delivering social comment on them. The only exceptions were *Stiffelio* (1850) and *La traviata* (1853). Critics of realism in opera were quick as a whip to respond. *La traviata* was a fiasco at its first performance, but history has since shown that this was rather more because of a poor performance than subject matter. *Stiffelio*, on the other hand, was not at all well received by critics and public alike, and very much because of its subject matter: a divorce on stage, married clergy and so on augured very much against a successful run, and not even emergency changes Verdi and Piave cobbled to the work could save subsequent runs. It would only be as *Aroldo* (1857) that the work achieved a modicum of success: it was musically stronger, but dramatically weaker, as Budden has reflected (1, 1973: 473).

Other seemingly contradictory elements between how I read Verdi's realism and the Realism we have come to associate with the nineteenth century is that the composer might well recognize a 'social ill' such as Violetta's lifestyle in *La traviata*, but instead of commenting on how this social ill might be 'put right' by trying to rid society of prostitution and *salons* of ill repute, he would far rather comment on how a set of draconian social strictures might negatively impact on the lives of a group of 'real-life' people, one of them a courtesan. In other words, cause and effect is acknowledged, and so is causality: but Verdi does not make his characters slaves of an omnipotent fate, he allows them to be *affected by fate because they make the wrong choices*. Late Verdian figures such as Otello or Aida make good examples. Aida is not 'punished' by some petulant god, she makes choices which are aligned with her nature but against her political and social responsibilities. Likewise, Otello is driven to rage not because of Jago's machinations, not because he is powerless to avoid his fate, but because he *chooses* to follow Jago's council in the face of all that his intellect tells him about Desdemona, and *knowing* on some level that Jago is deceiving him. These characters are driven by human weaknesses they cannot control—Otello by jealousy, and Aida by love and patriotism—very powerful emotions and of the strongest signifiers in the arsenal of Verdi's sense of realist mechanisms or tools.

We have highlighted the differences between Realism (in the nineteenth-century sense) and realism (in the Verdian sense); but how do they agree?

First, there is the choice of subject matter. As in spoken drama, classical Greek theatre was a primary influence. It was through the Camerata, who tried to recapture the essence of classical theatre, that subject matter characteristic of classical Greek theatre also made its way into the Renaissance: nobility, the supernatural, the pastoral and so on were favourite subjects, with little emphasis on contemporary events as a source for plot material. However, there was a gradual shift away from the lofty and poetic style of delivery to subject matter drawn from the lower classes presented in a more 'informal' way, slowly paving the way for Realism.

Formal and stylistic conventions soon developed in opera as in spoken theatre. The Aristotelian unities remained valid; the large and unwieldy five-act format became the norm (especially in France, and in opera as well as in spoken theatre). The verisimilitude that originated with the Greeks developed a more aggressive stance towards art that *reflects*, not *creates* an 'idealized truth' [emphasis added] (Felner & Orestein 2006: 91).

By the 1850s Verdi's particular broader brand of realism had debuted in *Stiffelio* and *La traviata.* The *emergence* of realism in the operatic libretto is thus perhaps not as important as its *development:* when realism as an operatic-literary movement caught on by the 1890s, this 'new' tradition even fell back on the Senecaean notion of shock-theatre; accordingly, what the *veristi* were propagating was nothing new, its roots were firmly entrenched in the narrative traditions of previous millennia.

Things had improved greatly from Metastasio's day, through Calzabigi and Da Ponte to the literature Verdi's immediate predecessors and early peers used. Benedetto Marcello's wickedly satirical comments in his *Il teatro alla moda*, first published anonymously in 1720, no longer applied to Bellini's and Donizetti's poets, and certainly not to the libretti Verdi demanded of his librettists. Thus I have touched in passing on text, the unities and so on, and on how they translate from spoken theatre into opera.

Having introduced the notions of *Realism* and *realism*, I continue now by giving an account, first, of Classical Nineteenth-Century Realism, its history, development and impact, then of neoclassical realism, the broader kind of realism Verdi made his own and of which *parola scenica* forms such a key feature.

Classical Realism: its sources in nineteenth-century literature and theatre

> Realism is a comparatively old term that was first applied in the seventeenth century to Dutch genre painting of everyday life. It came by the 1850s to denote a genre predominantly related to the novel and an aesthetic sensibility uniting Romantic individualism with social determinism (Hadjiafxendi 'Realism' 7 April 2006).

A sample of models from a spectrum of sources reveals a broad spectrum of meanings of the term 'Realism', all of them conflicting. A more detailed probe into literature reveals more confusion. In Stromberg's words, 'Realism and naturalism were often defined by their subject matter: the choice of plain people over richer and more "interesting" ones, sordid subjects rather than pleasant ones, tragic tales instead of stories with conventionally happy endings' (1968: xvi-xvii). Papineau observes that 'reality is independent of thought, in the sense that there is no conceptual link between how things are and how humans take them to be' (1987: ix-x). Rom Harré argues that 'any version of realism must embrace the claim that what can rightly be said to exist is not confined to what can be displayed to the senses or appears as empirical data' (Lopez & Potter 2001: 22).

Although scholars have debated their nature extensively since the seventeenth century, the concepts of Realism and Naturalism still invite reflection. Within music especially, and in opera in particular, they have been described by many, including Czerny (34), Schnebel (66), Powers (Della Seta *Parola Scenica* 260*ff*) and Dahlhaus (*Realism* 13-14), and the debate persists. Lawrence Kramer for one remains doubtful of Dahlhaus's attempts at convincing his reader of his theories on Realism in what he calls the 'magisterial' *Nineteenth-Century Music*. 'If he fails, as proves to be the case', Kramer observes, 'it is because he is unwilling to cross the divide that separates the ideal of form from the unidealizable force of dissemination' (*Classical Music* 46). However, what the words Realism and Naturalism really mean as they appear in literature, theatre and philosophy, and specifically in music (abstract as well as texted), is neither clear cut nor simple. Moreover, these terms were largely interchangeable in the mid nineteenth century (Garratt 467); and in the twentieth century Dahlhaus has added that 'Tonmalerei was always called "realist" or "naturalistic"', and he qualifies this statement by adding 'the two terms were interchangeable in some contexts' (*Realism* 29). Even this notion has been contested. Edward Kravitt notes that 'naturalism and realism are often incorrectly used synonymously,' but he is forced to correct that statement two paragraphs later: '[Naturalism] arouses a strong desire in artists to create works *that are highly realistic* (emphasis mine) and descriptive of man's environment' (537).

To gain some kind of purchase on nineteenth-century Realism (or Naturalism), however, one point of origin might the thought of Zola, the architect of literary Naturalism. In his translation of passages from *Le Naturalism au théâtre*, Eric Bentley notes that '[Émile] Zola was not a great playwright, but like another minor playwright who was also a major writer, [Denis] Diderot [(1713-1784)], he knew how to speak for an epoch and also how to see into the future' (349); and for these reasons his observations are potentially valuable.

In *Le Naturalisme au théâtre* Zola outlines developments in French theatre in the centuries roughly predating 1881 (when the book first appeared). Tragedy, he points out, was replaced by Romantic drama, which, in turn, was by the 1880s ready to be replaced by Naturalism. The monograph describes how theatre grew from its infancy, with its forms drawn from the mystery plays of the Middle Ages. In the hands of Pierre Corneille (1606-1684) tragedy developed, and then ruled theatre with an iron fist for two-hundred years, because it was the right idiom for the time. Romantic drama eventually broke through the formula of tragedy in the 1830s following the French Revolution, after which the people, still in a state of high excitement, looked towards the theatre as an idealized form of entertainment.

Romantic drama was nothing other than the overthrow of one set of strictures—those of tragedy—in favour of its own. More importantly, Zola appears to view the age of Romantic drama as a period of transformation between the ages and theatres of Tragedy and those of Naturalism. And he seems to regard the advent of Romantic drama with some suspicion, giving an account of how it fought tragedy tooth and nail in the interests of 'human passion' (353). In the end, theatrical truth and reality counted for very little for its playwrights; they were driven mainly by the notion of unseating tragedy *per se*, not by the notion of creating a sustainable theatre.

But Zola does not see Romantic drama as intrinsically problematic. On the contrary, although he views novelist Balzac (1799-1850) as superior to the playwrights of his day, he has some positive remarks for Augier and Dumas (*fils*). Other playwrights also identified with the French Naturalist Zeitgeist, of course. Eugène Scribe (1824-1889) developed the well-made play to provide a vehicle for the melodramatic (under Sardou and Boucicault); and there was the transformation of the comedy-farce (spearheaded by Labiche and Byron), and the introduction of contemporary themes, such as Dumas's subject matter. In fact, about the theatre that predated Naturalism, Zola says:

> In a manner of speaking, the naturalistic current has always existed [and I presently pick up this thread again with Verdi (PdP)]. It brings with it nothing absolutely novel. But it has finally flowed into a period favourable to it; it is succeeding and expanding because the human mind has attained the necessary maturity. I do not therefore deny the past; I affirm the present. The strength of naturalism is precisely that it has deep roots in our national literature which contains plenty of wisdom. It comes from the very entrails of humanity; it is that much the stronger because it has taken longer to grow and is found in a greater number of our masterpieces (Bentley 357).

But Zola has reservations, especially about the Romantic drama with historical subject, not least because he views it as by far the most difficult genre to control. He claims, not unjustifiably as we shall see, that the historical Romantic drama in the hands of a skilled dramatist is capable of 'making the public see an epoch come alive with its special quality, its manners, its civilization' (Bentley 361). But it goes awry when a playwright places a Romantic drama in a distant epoch only because that makes its authenticity difficult to check, especially when sentiment also substitutes for characterization. In short, Zola accuses playwrights who do so of avoiding the analysis of life and the people living it, and failing to create characters who function as they do in nature.

However, he is not entirely unsympathetic to the failings of the playwrights of his day, realizing well that it is not easy to create an intelligently developed and realistic character. He acknowledges that Naturalism probably scared authors who were used to finding their subject matter in the annals of history: 'they would have to burrow too deeply into humanity, learn about life, go straight for the greatness of reality and make it function with all their power' (Bentley 365); and he acknowledges that only a superior artistic intellect would arise that would take theatre into the realms of true naturalism, speculating that 'my constant concern, my anxious vigil, has made me wonder which of us will have the strength to raise himself to the pitch of genius. If the naturalistic drama must come into being, only a genius can give birth to it. Corneille and Racine made tragedy. Victor Hugo made Romantic drama. Where is the as-yet-unknown author who must make the naturalistic drama?' (Bentley 366).

What do we have, then, towards the end of the nineteenth century? Zola acknowledges that there was the beginnings of a mind shift that he felt would breathe life into theatre as he knew it: '[t]oday we are beginning to see where we are going, but our steps are still impeded by the melting slush of rhetoric and metaphysics' (Bentley 371). There was an embryonic Realist theory that could treat any subject matter at all, but ultimately confined itself to commonplaces

and the degraded middle and lower classes. Naomi Schor cites the 'celebrated preface to *Germinie Lacerteux*, [in which] the Goncourt [*sic*] call for an extension of the space of representation to include the lower classes' (133). But the remnants of Romantic drama still haunted the late nineteenth-century dramatist, and artists continually responded by creating new devices for adding depth and a fresh Realism to their output. Flaubert created *style indirect libre*, or free indirect discourse, a simple yet effective narrative technique in which the character's exact words are put into the past tense and the third person, and which he uses to give his work a multi-spatial realist impact (and I expand on the notion of 'multi-spatiality' presently). This is precisely the sort of device Verdi had in mind to emphasize the realism of his own writing.

Musical and operatic Realism/Naturalism: some terminological issues

These phenomena require special attention, because they are more problematic than their counterparts in other spheres. I have also just touched briefly on the possible existence of different 'strains' of Realism. Abstract music, like language, impacts narratologically and emotionally, but it is not language, and opera relies on the unrealistic convention of sung over spoken narrative. Dahlhaus's seminal work on *Realism in the Nineteenth Century* might shed some light here.

James Garratt argues that 'the major reason why nineteenth-century Realism became a musical untouchable [is] Carl Dahlhaus's monograph on the subject'. He continues that 'It should not be assumed that Dahlhaus accomplished [the last word on nineteenth-century realism] through exhausting the topic or presenting a theoretical framework so compelling as to render further discussion superfluous' (456). Lawrence Kramer (*Classical Music* 46) holds similar views on Dahlhaus's approach in *Nineteenth-Century Music*, but Garratt's and Kramer's comments aside, musicology is indebted to Dahlhaus for perhaps coming closest to formulating what musical realism means, even if it is by observing what it is not, or by what exceeds it.

Dahlhaus quotes extensively from Norman Cazden, who emphasized that the concept of musical Realism should not be confined to *Tonmalerei*, because other factors are at play. Cazden also says that nineteenth-century opera libretti shared the realist tendencies of contemporary literature, but that this did not automatically render them Realist; that the frequency with which the word 'Realism' appeared in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century literature on music did not define the concept; that it is practically impossible to define the nature of Realism by referring exclusively to any one particular historical epoch;

and finally, that 'bourgeois realism' [*sic*] as Marxist aestheticians and historians understand the term, should not depend 'on the historico-philosophical thesis that the phenomenon is a proto-type of "socialist realism"' [*sic*] (Dahlhaus *Realism* 13-14). Dahlhaus raises interesting issues, then, but does not bring us significantly closer to formulating a descriptive and analytical framework for exactly what constitutes Realism in music or opera. To do so, it is necessary to make a number of assumptions based on the music itself.

Before I turn my attention from Realism as a nineteenth-century European aesthetic movement to Realism in opera, however, I need to digress briefly in order to set boundaries regarding usage of the words Realism and Naturalism, especially as they might apply to Verdi, and as I interpret them.

I discuss above the interchangeability of these terms in mid nineteenth-century studies (Garratt 467). They have also become interchangeable in the contemporary musicological body of research. Thomas Grey, for example, neatly sidesteps the debate round Realism *versus* Naturalism when he remarks that 'Aside from the unusual "naturalism" of the Parisian high-society setting of *La traviata* (the original designation of "*c.* 1700" is not taken seriously), there is little in the overall conception of [*Rigoletto*, *Il trovatore* and *La traviata*] that breaks radically with the practices of Italian *melodramma* of the [. . .] decades [before 1850]' (Samson 374). Later he observes that 'The atmospheric duet between Rigoletto and Sparafucile that follows the Act I *introduzione* of that opera exemplifies the construction of a *quasi-**naturalistic*** [emphasis mine] dialogue over a clearly structured periodic accompaniment [. . .]' (Samson 378).

Other scholars too, Dahlhaus and Gilles de Van among them, feel that Verdi is more easily placed under the broad heading of Naturalism rather than Realism. Naturalism is generally believed to be a more extreme form of Realism, but I suspect that scholars make the terminological transmigration from one to the other not because Verdi's compositional style and his engagement with his subject matter crossed from Realism to Naturalism, so to speak, but because the concept of Naturalism is less problematic than Realism. Dahlhaus famously prefers the term 'Naturalist' in connection with Verdi's art, and scholars such as Parker, Petrobelli, Grey, Samson and Lawton have chosen to follow suit. De Van has argued that Verdi was definitely not a *verista* (literally, *realist):* 'If Verdi was indifferent to *verismo*, it was because *verismo* strips the character of his independence and makes him the helpless plaything of circumstances or his impulses, a determinism that was repugnant to Verdian morality' (340).

For the record, I read *verismo* (literally, *realism*), which I use throughout to denote late nineteenth-century Italian opera with a realist slant, as a style distinguished by realistic depictions of contemporary everyday (lower-class) life rather than historical or mythological subjects. Zola introduced this school of thought, it then moved to Italy with the works of such authors as Giovanni Verga (1840-1922) and eventually into opera, where it found expression particularly in the work of Puccini, Leoncavallo, Giordano and Cilea.

But where does Verdi stand in the context of these labels of Realism and Naturalism? These are categorizations we knew the composer resisted, considering that he preferred to remain ambiguous about the relevance of such theories to his compositional practices. In Zola's statements regarding the movement towards Naturalism in *Le Naturalism au thèâtre*, he remarks that he does not want to be unfair to the Romantic drama of the 1830s, because it gave the mid nineteenth-century playwright a new artistic freedom. Nevertheless, he disdains claims that the movement was announced by some as 'a triumphant entry into human truth', asserting rather that art continually develops, and that the achievements of a certain era, such as Romanticism, only 'reflect different phases of the human mind' (Bentley 354). He concludes paradoxically that, to achieve naturalism, Romantic drama must be abandoned in favour of a renaissance of tragedy, but with a number of caveats. He adds,

> [. . .] we must go back to tragedy—not [. . .] to borrow more of its rhetoric, its system of confidants, its declamation, its endless speeches, but to return to the simplicity of action and its unique psychological and physiological study of the characters. Thus understood, the tragic framework is excellent; one deed unwinds in all its reality, and moves the characters to passions and feelings [. . .] in a contemporary environment, with people who surround us (Bentley 366).

Judging by this passage, Verdi was a naturalist, and by extension the early *realist* of nineteenth-century Italian opera. And following on from Zola, I would even venture to say that Verdi *anticipated* the ideals of naturalism, not in his choice of subject matter, but certainly in terms of how he developed it. But this is a description of the naturalist ideal from Zola's point of view, and from the point of view of naturalist theory. What Verdi himself had to say on the subject may illuminate differently the terminology we might have decided to use.

Italo Pizzi writes of an interview he had with Verdi at Sant'Agata in 1890, when Verdi's talked about his admiration for Shakespeare. He quotes Verdi as saying that Shakespeare's works, 'with their sharp thoughts and profound observations that spring up so suddenly, [makes one want] to cry out: "But that could

well be true! But it is true! It is like that!'" (Conati 341). Verdi then added that Shakespeare's analysis of the human mind was so acute and penetrating 'that the words he puts into his characters' mouths are essentially human, essentially true, as they should be.' Verdi also regarded Zola highly, placing him alongside Shakespeare, and for the same reason: because the French naturalist searched the human heart so deeply (341).

Verdi's 'realism', then, spanned almost the two-thirds of the nineteenth century, and is not confined to the strict nineteenth-century norms governing a Verga, Zola or Goldoni, with their penchant for the commonplaces of an everyday bourgeoisie, and who stylistically 'inhabited' only the years 1848-1871 (Stromberg's (ix) dates). To quote Zola again, Verdi would find his characters by 'fishing great men from the troubled waters of history', (Bentley 365), or he would invent such figures in the tradition of the tragic stage, but his characters' reality depended on their human universality. He adhered strictly to Zola's principles for adapting tragedy to naturalism, with the sole exception of developing characters from his contemporary environment (Bentley 366). But there is an even more convincing link between Verdi and realism that comes directly from the composer's lips. When Giuseppe Giacosa questioned him about his plans after completing *Otello*, Verdi seemed gloomy at the prospect of not having a project planned, because his work kept him inspired. Giacosa quotes Verdi:

> when the opera was finished, there were the rehearsals, the uncertainties, the task of explaining my thoughts clearly to the actors, to make them move on the stage as I wished; and then the new ideas for the staging, that I was forever thinking up in the name of *representational realism* . . . [emphasis mine] (Conati *Interviews* 161).

It is perhaps this naturalistic aspect of Verdi's theatre that inspired so many scholars to lean towards calling him a *naturalist* rather than a *realist*.

Verdi and operatic realism

> Madame Tadolini sings to perfection, but I should like in Lady Macbeth a rough, hoarse and gloomy voice, with something diabolical about it… I think it's time we abandoned the conventional formulas and methods (Verdi in Headington 229).

The Italy in which Verdi launched his operatic career in 1839 may have been geographically and linguistically divided, but the opera house dominated cultural and social thought. Antonio Rosmini notes that 699 towns had 940 theatres in 1871 (Ringer 162). Opera fostered the voices of Rossini, Donizetti and Bellini and their contemporaries: Coccia (1782-1873), Mercadante (1795-1870)

and Pacini (1796-1867). The musical culture these artists represented was the foundation not only of mid nineteenth-century Italian operatic activity, but also of Italian identity. At the heart of contemporary Italian operatic performance, the *bel canto* singing style, however, represented a vocal ideology that gradually fell behind newly developing social and artistic norms. For the record, the term *bel canto* resurfaces occasionally. Owen Jander defines it as 'a term loosely used and open to a variety of interpretations, [it] is generally understood as indicating the elegant Italian vocal style of the 18th and early 19th centuries. [. . .]' ('Bel canto' 11 & 28 April 2005). Despite its ambiguity, I continue to use it to refer to an Italian singing style that was in vogue before and during the first half of the nineteenth century. Otherwise, I refer to opera in which this style of singing is used as 'early nineteenth-century opera' or *opera seria*. Also, James Stark observes that 'expressive singing is based upon a word-note-*tone* relationship, in which the voice itself plays a significant role. This, too, is crucial for an understanding of *bel canto*' (xxv).

Most Verdi scholars, Anselm Gerhard among them (355), describe Verdi as an evolutionary, not a revolutionary, composer, embracing nineteenth-century writing conventions. Only after he had mastered his craft did he begin implementing theatrically imperative changes. In short, and quite without ceremony, Verdi opted for an operatic idiom based—as we have seen—on the traditions of tragedy. In his adaptation of theatrical naturalism and in his development of new musico-linguistic strategies, the composer used as a point of departure the operatic models of Rossini, Donizetti and Bellini, models that he would soon find both musically and dramatically inadequate. Dahlhaus sets out the limitations of early nineteenth-century operatic writing from the dramatic point of view:

> its dramaturgy was largely determined by the curious compulsion to motivate, again and again, a change from *cantabile* to *cabaletta*, as dictated by the conventions of the aria. [. . .] it is not the 'improbability' of many opera texts which is astonishing, so much as the fact that they did not turn out to be less 'probable' (*Realism* 120).

A realist operatic passage should not fall into the stylistic conventions Dahlhaus suggests (*Realism* 120): it should not be classifiable as easily recognizable formal structures such as *aria con pertichini*, because that would date it as *opera seria*: the text should preferably be metrical, or even asymmetrical, unrhymed verse, if it is verse at all, and not prose; and finally, the text should have a contemporary aspect at least, or deal with an ordinary middle class of citizenship, or some debased or otherwise disadvantaged subgroup of the community in which the drama takes place. A tall order, from a theatrical point of view; it remains to be seen how Verdi achieved any or all of these.

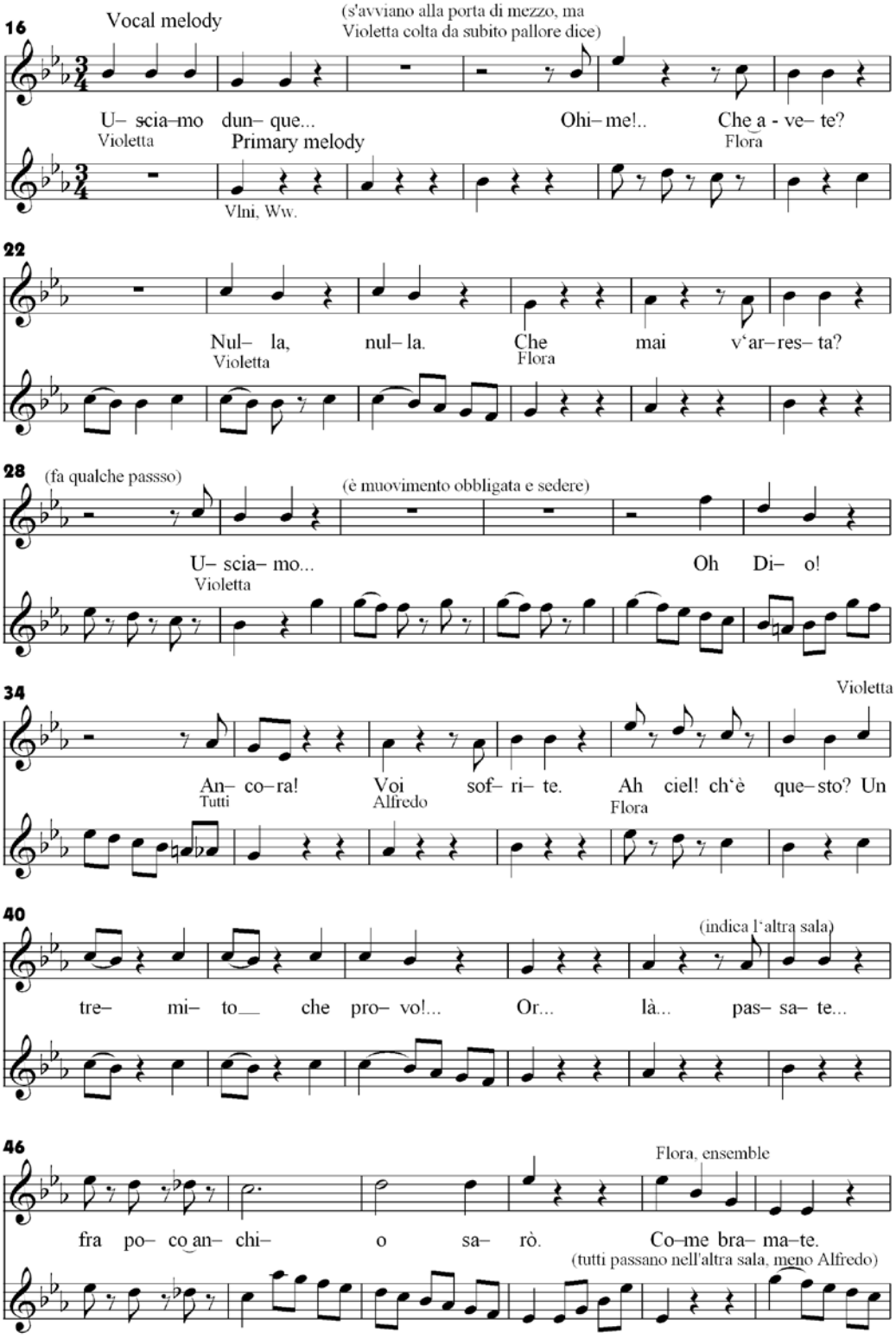
I embark on what Roger Parker has called an 'interrogative path' by giving one scene from *La traviata* a close reading in terms of realism. Parker writes,

> I like the openness [of *Don Carlos*] primarily because it makes me *think*, not because it makes me *feel*. If I stand back for a moment, I am aware of fragments of this vast opera that, far from just contributing to grand shapes and patterns, have the power suddenly to arrest my attention, cause an irrational moment of wonder that escapes my ability to construct a formal context or explanation. To go further on the *interrogative path* [emphasis mine], I need to write about one of these moments[, . . . Posa's death scene in Act IV] (*Leonora* 14).

Thus Verdi's musico-linguistic strategies that drive naturalism ensure that the listener feels *and* thinks the reality of the moment. The textual narrative in Act I of *La traviata* is simple: Figure 1.1 shows the point when Violetta's guests notice she is ill, but she shrugs off their concerns. A fragmented primary melody is conspicuous in the upper strings and woodwinds. But the voices carry what may be called also a fragmented 'secondary melody', and each melodic fragment is carried alternately by a principal or *comprimario*, then the chorus, the orchestra, and back to one of the characters. Verdi's setting makes thirty-five bars of operatic text made up of lines of *tronco* and *piano* verse appear as if they contain verse lengths ranging anywhere from two to twelve syllables. This scansion is derived from the printed libretto (Piave 3, tr. DGG 1977), not the passage which, if spoken, might sound different to an Italian ear:

TUTTI		**ALL**
Usciamo dunque!	(5)	Let's go then!
(S' avviano alla porta di mezzo, ma Violetta colta da subito pallore dice.)		*(The guests move towards the centre door, but Violetta turns suddenly pale.)*
Ohimè!	(2)	Oh!
TUTTI		**ALL**
Che avete?	(3)	What's the matter?
VIOLETTA		VIOLETTA
Nulla, nulla.	(4)	Nothing, nothing.
(Fa qualche passo . . .)		*(She takes a few steps . . .)*
TUTTI		**ALL**
Che mai v' arresta?	(5)	Why do you linger?
VIOLETTA		VIOLETTA
Usciamo—Oh dio!	(6)	Let's go—oh heavens!
(. . . ma è obbligata a nuovamente fermarsi e sedere.)		*(. . . but she is forced to sit down.)*
TUTTI		**TUTTI**
Ancora!	(3)	Again!
ALFREDO		**ALFREDO**
Voi soffrite?	(4)	Are you ill?
TUTTI		**ALL**
Oh ciel! ch' è questo?	(5)	Oh heavens! What's the matter?
VIOLETTA		**VIOLETTA**
Un tremito che provo!		I'm trembling!
Or . . . la . . . passate	(12)	But go along.
(Indicando l' altro sala. Tutti passano all' altra sala, meno Alfredo, che resta indietra.)		*(She indicates the other room. They all go to the other room, except Alfredo, who stays behind.)*
Fra poco anch' io sarò.	(7)	I'll join you in a moment.
TUTTI		**ALL**
Come bramate.	(5)	If you say so.

Figure 1.1: Truncated extract from 'Che è ciò?' from *La traviata* Act I. The fragmented vocal melody is notated on the top stave, regardless of which voice sings (character names have been added). The primary melody appears on the second stave. My own realization of the significance of this section of operatic narrative was a profoundly illuminating experience. I recommend that the reader listen to this extract without prejudice and with an open mind, because Verdi's switch to a realistic mode of expression is so smooth as to be almost unnoticeable.



A close reading of this passage reveals that the *Tonmalerei* Cazden notes in his five point list is certainly present: the listener knows he is at a party with very particular social overtones. The dance music from the off stage *banda* is a nineteenth-century jukebox; yet the grace and fragility of the music tells us that Verdi will treat the character of Violetta sympathetically. The café-like tone of the *banda* nevertheless implies that this is a courtesan's *salon*. Denis Arnold makes the additional point that Verdi obviously wants the audience to realize that 'life goes on inexorably[, which] is pointed out by the sublime indifference of the band which continues playing while the lovers, now alone, have the opportunity to reveal their feelings' (19). He also notes that Verdi does this again in the last act, where Violetta, alone on her deathbed, hears the revellers playing their lively carnival tune outside her window (28).

Dahlhaus warns against oversimplifying the issue by classifying an opera as realist simply because its text may be regarded as such. However, *La traviata*'s libretto fits the salient requirements of realist writing, as does its source, Dumas's *La Dame aux camélias* (1848). It is contemporary and it deals with social issues surrounding the protagonist's liaison with a courtesan. How Verdi speaks though the musical narrative in this passage is also interesting. His approach to realism in music is different from the way Busoni (Lippman *Aesthetics* 200) suggests that some have managed it, typically communicating the realist message of the narrative by tautologically repeating the text in another language. But over and above that, he constructs in the music a contextual, multi-spatial dimension in which its meaning is brought across unambiguously, as I show presently.

The realism here is associative. The waltz tune has a particularly suggestive *colorito*, in the same way that Verdi sets in relief angelic and demonic choruses in *Giovanna d'Arco* (1845). A descriptive tone painting powered by the almost cinematic or 'iconic' quality of the music—a term borrowed from Vera Micznick (163*ff)*—becomes important, rather than musical *onomatopoeia*. Dahlhaus argues that texted music, or specifically, a realist text set to music, does not necessarily make the musical setting realist. In this case it does, however, only partly because Verdi furthers a realist plot. The closeness of the music to natural speech rhythms characterizes this extract as realist. In this context, there is a sense of a spoken rather than sung text. In 'pre-*parola scenica*' writing, recitative is distinguished from aria as the convention of *quasi*-natural speech as well, of course, but there recitative stands *in opposition to aria; parola scenica draws recitative closer to aria, at the same time drawing aria closer to recitative*, thus achieving a more natural, 'speech-like' mode of expression.

Also, by constructing a ten-bar melody for the 'Brindisi', Verdi predicted that classical four-bar phrases would not suit *La traviata*'s realist requirements; the nine-bar primary melody of the waltz reaffirms this notion. And because the secondary vocal melody passes from voice to voice regardless of where phrases coincide with those in the primary melody, cadence points are veiled, and movement across the boundaries of structures (but within the '*solita forma*', see Powers 65*ff*) becomes the rule rather than the exception. Melodic and accompanying phrases overlap, creating a malleable, uninterrupted operatic narrative. Verdi foregrounds the secondary melody in the voice here, thus backgrounding the primary melody in the *banda*. This is a fundamental, architectural feature of operatic realism, and I put it in perspective when I outline what I believe were Verdi's basic reasons for developing such strategies in the first place.

In deciphering other notions of musical realism, and accepting that more than one 'strain' might well exist, I have isolated some features and constructed my own reading. Based on the work of others as well as my own research, I have arrived at a description that reads, 'realist music, whether text-bound or abstract, appeals to the listener in terms of its noetic as well as its poetic narrative intent. In other words (to quote Catherine Belsey), "the classic realist text installs itself in the space between fact and illusion through the presentation of a simulated reality which is *plausible* but *not real"* (119). Realism therefore means an artistic alignment with *an* (not *the*) existing reality.'

This condensed view of musical realism is an attempt to clear already murky philosophical waters. I believe that it is possible to break a concept down to its bare essentials without falling into the trap Wilbur Urban describes as

> [any attempt] to reduce the various realisms to their 'simplest terms' is [. . .] fallacious. When such attempts are made, not only does it become fatally easy for each to convict the other of trivial ambiguities and fallacious absurdities; it becomes equally easy to make the whole of epistemology, if not philosophy itself, a futile revolving about meaningless questions. Any philosophical tendency, when reduced to its essential elements [. . .], as Paulhan insists, ' [does] lose its colour, fade away and die'. By the very process of reduction and abstraction is eliminated all that gives the driving force to idealism and the power of resistance to realism (23).

Roger Parker's interrogative path in *Don Carlos*, crossing here with my own in *La traviata*, shows that in Verdi's quest for dramatic realism the composer has struck a chord that communicates the narrative very particularly and very directly. When listening to the 'Che è ciò?' scene from Act I of *La traviata*, I know that I have responded to a realist strategy, because I am 'aligning myself

with an existing reality'. In *Lucia*'s 'Mad Scene', I remain conscious that I am listening to a story being told. But what exactly is it in *Traviata* that draws forth such a direct response? Presently, again à propos of that extract, and by refering to other sources, I describe a device that Verdi has described as *parola scenica*, and one that is no less problematic than 'Realism' or 'musical signification'.

Verdi coined the phrase in writing in 1871 to describe a strategy he used to mask formal structures and communicate clearer dramatic intent in *Aida* ('Verdi, Giuseppe' 10 September 2002). Initially the device was specific to Verdi, although I intend to show that it can be extended to apply to the relationship between word and music in later *verismo* scores. *Parola scenica* has no direct precedent in eighteenth and early nineteenth-century Italian opera. There are certain passages in earlier operas—by Rossini, Mercadante and Donizetti, to name but three—which bear a striking resemblance to *parola scenica*. On closer examination, however, they are not in fact the same. There are also passages in Verdi which, upon first hearing, strike the listener as possible *parola scenica*. But they also do not conform to all the characteristics of the device, as we shall see presently. *Parola scenica* as such was developed, then, taken up by other composers, and became decisive in creating a widely understood and accepted Italian operatic language after *Aida* in 1871, 'especially in the operas of Leoncavallo and Puccini' ('Leoncavallo, Ruggero' 30 August 2004).

Parola scenica

> Regardless of the meaning they attach to the term, all scholars accept *parola scenica* to be a solid ontological principle clearly defined in Verdi's mind (Della Seta 260*ff*).

Despite general agreement on the location of *parola scenica* in the Act II duet between Amneris and Aida, it is significant that there is no apparent consensus on the meaning of the term. Verdi writes to *Aida*'s librettist Antonio Ghislanzoni, 'I do not know how to explain what I mean when I say *parola scenica;* but I mean to say that the word should sculpt and render the situation cleanly and obviously. [. . .] I know you will say to me, "what about the verse, the rhyme, the strophe? . . . " I do not know what to say . . . except that when the action demands it, one should abandon rhythm, rhyme, strophe; I could abandon verse, if it meant I am saying clearly all that the action demands' (Conati 'Aspetti' 53, the translation is my own). It is interesting to note that the composer does not refer to the music in this discussion: he focuses on the word, on the literary content buttressing the operatic narrative intent.

Conflicting terminology exists in any case round the 'non-*cantabile*' conventions of opera—*recitativo*, *parlante* and *canto spezzato* (Powers 69)—and *parola scenica*, seemingly in that class also, is no exception. Verdi remains vague concerning its meaning, and different scholars interpret it differently. Weaver and Chusid (132*ff*) argue that it is a fusion of recitative and aria, intended to carry text to maximum dramatic effect. Parker ('Verdi, Giuseppe' 10 September 2002) describes it as *scenic utterances*, '[typically a few short words] that would be declaimed immediately before a lyrical set piece, making verbally manifest the key issues of a dramatic situation'. Thomas Grey agrees, describing it as 'a pregnant word or phrase, strikingly declaimed and accompanied' (Samson 412). Budden suggests that *parola scenica* was the textual element lacking in the Act II duet in *Aida* between Aida and Amneris, until Verdi persuaded his librettist to use irregular lines (to which Budden ambiguously refers as *versi sciolti*, and which I call 'metrical, unrhymed verse' throughout), for which Verdi provided the pattern (3, 1981: 174). This terminological uncertainty is not only confined to older studies of Verdi and *Verdiana*. Although current thinking appears to favour Parker's and Grey's conception of *parola scenica*, scholars continue to use the term loosely, even in the most current of contexts. For instance, Jesse Rosenberg remarks that 'a strong D major chord following an unsettled *tempo di mezzo* in the first act duet of *Forza* [. . .] serves both to underline a Verdian *parola scenica* and to effect a transition to G♭ major, the key of the *cabaletta*' (433*ff*). And Geoffrey and Ryan Edwards hold that '[. . .] Mercadante makes skilful use of what Verdi would call the *parola scenica* throwing into relief a particularly telling word or phrase able to capture the emotional significance of an individual vocal line when the full text may be obscured' (2*ff*). On the other hand, however, and more vaguely, Marion Rosenberg argues that 'Many of the opera's choicest examples of the Verdian *parola scenica*—"Ritorna vincitor!", "Traditor!", "O terra addio"—can be understood readily by speakers of any Indo-European language [. . .]' (54*ff*). I refer to this reading of the device as 'pictorial', and I elaborate on this notion in Chapter 2.

Concerning other scholars' readings of the term: in an essay entitled '"*Parola scenica*' in Verdi e nella critica verdiana', Fabrizio della Seta (260*ff*) summarizes what had been written up to 1994 on the subject, concluding that while all authors attempt to define the term from within their own frames of reference, they all agree that *parola scenica* was clearly conceptualized in Verdi's mind; that particular passages in his output informed that concept; that it may constitute a word and music interaction; that it may be a strategy Verdi pressed into service to underscore key dramatic moments; and that it may, and frequently does, occur where there are textual and musical deviations in the operatic tex-

ture[, or moments to which I refer as significant musico-narrative events]. He adds, however, that modern scholars perhaps read too much into a term Verdi used in writing only [five] times (262*ff*) (Gossett 296). How often Verdi mentioned it in conversation, however, is not documented. The phrase appears in the two famous letters to Ghislanzoni ([14 August 1870] and [17 August 1870]), a letter to Ricordi [25 June 1870] (Gossett 296) and in a letter in 1881 to Boito, during the revision of *Simon Boccanegra*, in which he repeats almost *verbatim* what he wrote in 1870. His comments in a letter to Somma [6 November 1857] are clearly also indicative of his later invention of the term.

From *Aida* onwards, Verdi's intention was clearly to broaden the traditional number structure of early nineteenth-century operatic writing in favour of aria and recitative fused into larger, dramatic sequences ('Verdi, Giuseppe' 10 September 2002). This is confirmed by the fact that the composer tried unsuccessfully to have Act III of *Aida* published without headings such as 'Romanza' or 'Duetto' in the score (Budden 3, 1981: 291). Thus *parola scenica* can be argued to represent Verdi's propensity towards a more realist compositional style. It is not, as Fabrizio della Seta emphasizes, merely another way the composer found of describing to a librettist what he meant by 'theatrical impact'. Della Seta seems to suggest, then, that 'all [the readings are] at least partially correct' (261), but that there might still be more to the term than has been noted.

The foregoing suggests that existing definitions of *parola scenica* might well benefit from a revision. I am not suggesting that the views of Weaver and Chusid, Parker, Grey, Budden and others are incorrect, but I am suggesting that another angle might provide new insight, particularly if the objective is to approach some kind of common understanding of the meaning of *parola scenica* in relation to realism in the vocal operatic as well as the orchestral operatic text.

Verdi and *parola scenica*

Verdi never intended to abolish the traditional operatic number structure, but to expand the numbers into larger dramatic sequences by fusing dissimilar forms. This technique inevitably led to a new operatic idiom, because a hybrid of aria and recitative is classifiable as neither. Nondescript terms such as *arioso*, *parlato* or *canto spezzato* became fashionable for any section of writing that does not comfortably fit into classical forms, leading to a terminological laziness which can be resolved by correctly identifying instances of *parola scenica*.

Verdi's correspondence suggests that he formulated the idea of *parola scenica* as a principle while writing *Aida*, on the one hand to get to the theatrical heart of the matter, on the other as a means of masking formal structures. It was not the first time he had used this kind of approach, although it would not be until the *Rigoletto*/*Trovatore*/*Traviata* triptych (1851-3) that he would widen the scope of each number in the construction of an opera by bringing smaller components together in a dramatically more satisfactory, expanded whole.

To gauge the extraordinariness of Figure 1.1, and how it translates into *parola scenica* as I believe it does, I again follow Parker's interrogative path. I test how the music addresses the listener's poetic inner space (I elaborate on this notion presently), while the meaning of the text achieves concurrent noetic intent. I have sought widely for a single term that might encapsulate the notion of 'thinking emotion' or 'emotional intellect'. Babiak and Hare encapsulate such a concept when they note the 'limbic process, which is sometimes referred to as the "thinking brain"' (184). When I use the term *limbic*, then, I mean a stimulus that impacts on both the listener's poetic and noetic faculties. Besides striking me as an attempt towards a more realist writing style, this passage first inspired my idea of what Verdi might have meant with the phrase *parola scenica*. Several elements characteristic of the device are present: all the sentiments voiced in ensemble are clear, and a realist plot continues to develop: the audience is warned that Violetta is ill, but everyone except Alfredo, after having noted her distress, remains oblivious of the gravity of her situation. Concurrently, Verdi avoids narrative breaks, and the *banda* becomes part of a dramatic unity, rather than being superimposed on or overlying it. Verdi achieves each aim by assigning every element of the operatic text its own space; overall, there is a sense of several different but interrelated events taking place.

Verdi also shows how *parola scenica* can be 'inverted'. Rather than focusing on the device, he emphasizes what surrounds it by juxtaposing the two. One operatic narrative that has successfully been highlighted thus and in the process 'through-composed' is Act II Scene 2 of *Aida* (1871). The result of this writing style is that conspicuous breaks between aria, recitative and symphonic materials are practically eliminated. This scene is pivotal to the action, and it is without a doubt intentionally placed centrally in the opera precisely because it is pivotal, as is one of its forerunners, the Act II duet between the elder Germont and Violetta in *La traviata* and its descendant, the last-act duet between Otello and Desdemona in *Otello*.

The scene is a tightly knit unit, with narrative consisting of metrical, unrhymed lines of verse; verses set severally as *parola scenica*, recitative and *arioso* come as surprises. Thus, pivotal lines in the pivotal scene of the opera are highlighted, simply by vacillating between *parola scenica* and other predetermined forms, *recitativo secco*, for example, or *accompagnato*, or even *canto spezzato*. In other words, the text is defamiliarized, or estranged, for the listener by alternating *parola scenica* with what surrounds it. The process of defamiliarization becomes a signifier of great importance, as I show presently.

I mention and draw attention to this specific incidence of the more conventional structure of recitative instead of the expected surrounding *parola scenica*, because it highlights the fact that, early in his career, Verdi realized the plastic possibilities of idiomatic juxtaposition in the service of operatic realism.

Thus evolves my 'narrative' model of *parola scenica*. From a textual/dramatic perspective it is the displacement and fragmentation of the primary melody by a frequently but not necessarily monotonal *quasi-recitativo* vocal style, consisting of the setting of asymmetrical, unrhymed verse that builds plot. Structurally, it is those sections in which expected formal conventions are replaced with a musico-poetic hybrid that develops the foregrounded plot in asymmetrical, unrhymed verse, the background of which is musical commentary with a scenic quality. This background functions like the soundtrack of a film, underpinning the action while significantly adding to the drama. These backgrounded instances of the primary melody also provide subliminal links that sonically connect distant scenes. From the macroformal perspective, *parola scenica* represents the extension of both musical and textual narrative sections.

Parola scenica: setting up opportunities for dramatic narrative intent

I focus next on how Verdi deploys it in a small selection of instances other than Figure 1.1, because that extract shows only some conditions under which the device may occur. These are not the *parola scenica*'s only distinctive features, of course; but they illustrate *the most obvious* circumstances. These extracts also demonstrate what I mean when I say that the incidence of *parola scenica* is as a rule accompanied by significant musico-narrative events. Moreover, *parola scenica* is dynamic and evolves; Verdi's *parola scenica* is not Puccini's.

I examine the *banda* first, because the concept needs clarification. Howard Brown notes that it is not exclusively or uniquely a group of musicians playing military instruments off stage (106-107) for which the composer had to write technically limited music that nevertheless added onomatopoeic colour. 'The

banda' frequently represents a style of playing, often inseparable from a choice of somewhat banal thematic material and instrumentation, commonly involving full orchestra, and reminiscent of such a group of 'local musicians.' The *banda* was frequently incorporated to add what Budden calls *colorito* (3, 1981: 150), and which is meant to describe a subtle coloration in a particular object, or in this case, a particular passage in a musical score, that adds to its uniqueness.

The first condition under which *parola scenica* is likely to occur, then, is Verdi's use of it in relation to the *banda*. He either uses the *banda* as a scenic accompaniment to *parola scenica* as it occurs in Figure 1.1; or he uses it without embellishing or hiding it, purely functionally, as it appears in the opening of Act II of *Giovanna d'Arco* ('Dal cielo a noi chi viene'). There the strains of the *banda* accompany Carlos, about to be crowned king of France, as he moves into the cathedral with Giovanna, carrying his banner, leading the procession. Verdi employs the *banda* at that point expressly for what it is intended: a band of military or ceremonial extraction interacting with the orchestra, as the procession moves across the stage and into the cathedral, until only Giovanna's father Giacomo is left alone in view of the audience. However, this, too, is *parola scenica*, but on a different level: see Chapter 3, on Verdi's orchestral writing.

While Figure 1.1 shows *parola scenica* as I first identified it, Figure 1.2 below shows the device used as a means of dealing with intelligibility. Opera is notorious for sections of the text (such as *strette* and *finali*, and even the ubiquitous *aria con pertichini*) in which two or more principals sing different lines of narrative at once, while the chorus delivers commentary based on a different text, all of which is supported by the full orchestra. In this regard, a request Verdi put to Salvadore Cammarano regarding the libretto of *La battaglia di Legnano* (1849) proves illuminating:

> Allow me to beg a favour of you concerning the last act: at the beginning outside the Church of St. Ambrose, I would like to combine two or three different tunes. I would like, for example, the priests inside and the people outside to have a part in one metre, and Lida to have a tune in a different metre. Leave it to me to put them together. Perhaps you could also, if you agree, have some little verses in Latin for the priests. Do as you think best, but remember that this scene must make an effect (Osborne 55-56).

This request gave rise to the following section of libretto, and reflects what is possibly the original reason for the development of *parola scenica*, even if Verdi had not verbalized it as a principle at this point, namely that the composer has recourse to writing in such a way that the narrative sense is always clear, regardless of how many voices take part in an ensemble.

	ATTO IV **MORIRE PER LA PATRIA!** **Preghiera** **Scena 1**	**ACT IV** **TO DIE FOR THE FATHERLAND!** **Prayer** **Scene 1**
	Piazza di Milano ove sorge un vestibolo di tempio. Donne, vecchi e fanciulli son parte nel vestibolo, e parte sulla via; Lida è pur essa con Imelda, e tutti genuflessi odono in religioso raccoglimento le salmodie che partono dall'interno.	*Public square in Milan, with the porch of a church in view. Women, old men and boys, some on the porch and some in the street; Lida herself is there with Imelda; all listen on their knees in a religious gathering to the psalm-singing that comes from within.*
Music I	**CORO INTERNO** *Deus meus, pone illos ut rotam et sicut stipulam ante faciem venti et sicut flamma comburens montes. Ita persequiris illos in tempestate tua et in ira tua turbabis cos, imple facies eorum ignominia et quaerent nomen tuum, Domine.*	**CHORUS INSIDE THE CHURCH** *Deus meus, pone illos ut rotam et sicut stipulam ante faciem venti et sicut flamma comburens montes. Ita persequiris illos in tempestate tua et in ira tua turbabis cos, imple facies eorum ignominia et quaerent nomen tuum, Domine.*
Music II	**LIDA** *(ad Imelda, sottovoce)* Sei certa dunque? . . . **IMELDA** *(sommessamente fra loro)* Non temer: fu visto Uscir dal flume illeso E raggiunger le squadre. **LIDA** *(alzando gli occhi al cielo irrigati di lagrime riconoscenti)* Io ti ringrazio, o de' portenti Padre.	**LIDA** *(softly, to Imelda)* So are you sure? . . . **IMELDA** *(responding quietly)* Don't worry: he was seen safely leaving the stream and rejoining the troops. **LIDA** *(raising her already tear-stained eyes to the skies)* I thank thee, o Father of miracles.
Music III	**POPOLO** O tu che dèsti il fulmine, Che ciel governi e terra, I figli della patria Reggi nell'aspra guerra, Noi t'imploriamo e in lagrime Dei sacri altari al pie'.	**PEOPLE** Thee that cast down the lightning, Who governs heaven and earth, The sons of the fatherland may you protect in this bitter war, We implore thee with the tears We leave at thy feet on the sacred altar.
Music II	**LIDA** Ah, se d'Arrigo, se di Rolando A te la vita io raccomando, Salvi d'Italia pietoso Iddio, Gli eroi più grandi io chieggo a te. Voto d'un popolo è il voto mio! Amor di patria favella in me!	**LIDA** Ah, Arrigo, Rolando to life I commend you, Save them, merciful God of Italy These heroes I entrust to thee. The voice of the people is my voice also! The love of the fatherland awakes in me!

This translation of the libretto is from the accompanying booklet and printed libretto to the vinyl recording of Verdi's *La battaglia di Legnano*, with José Carreras, Katia Ricciarelli, Mattheo Manuguerra *et al*, Philips 422 435-2, conducted by Lamberto Gardelli (1977/78). I made no attempt to translate the Latin text sung by the church choir, because it is of liturgical nature, it is introduced purely for effect, and is not central to the plot. The material in which the dramatic development takes place is carried exclusively by the two women, Lida and Imelda.

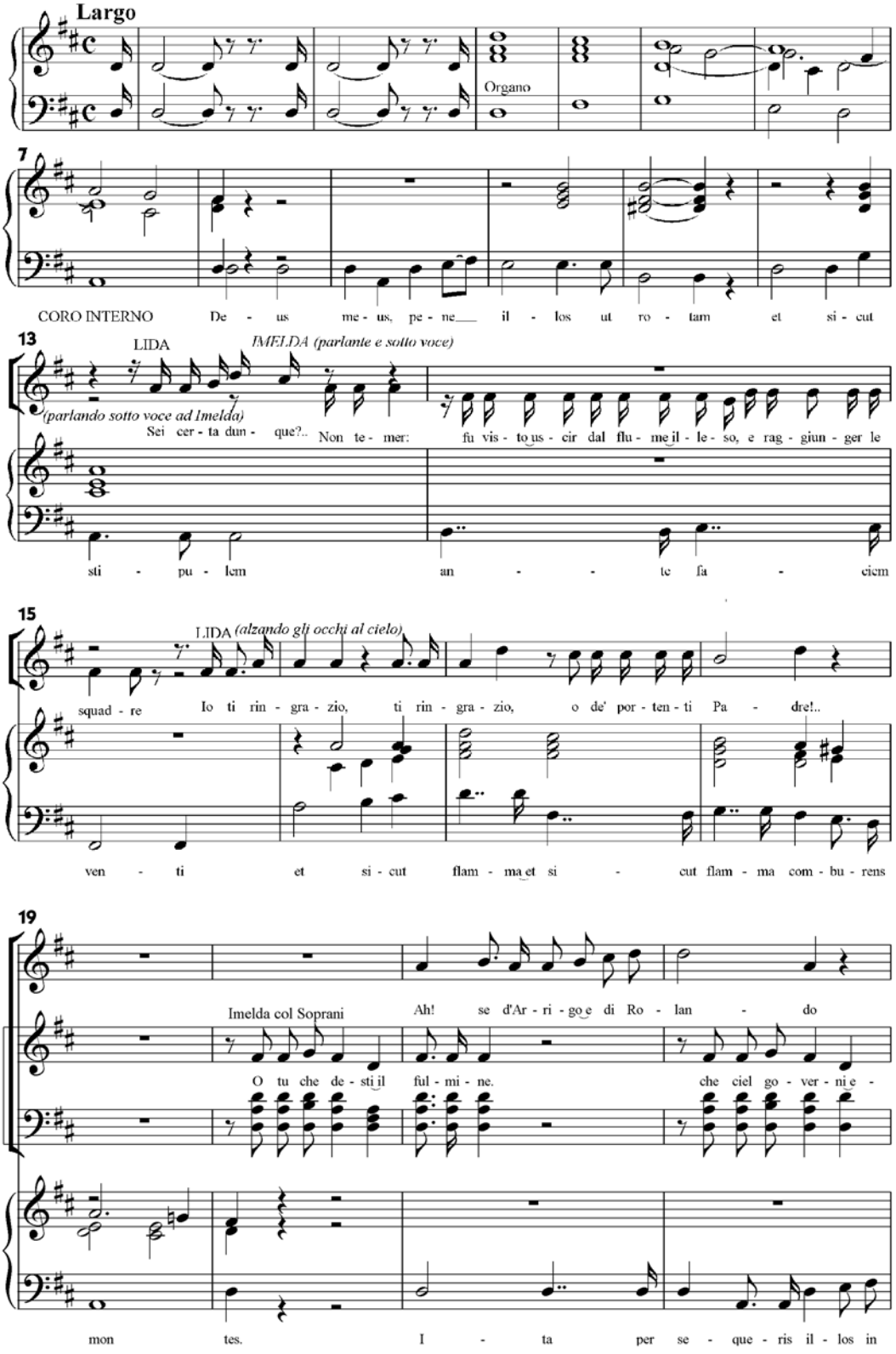
The strands of narrative combined in the scene cited here unite to create a texture similar in many ways to certain polyphonic or contrapuntal compositions, such as the first chorus from Bach's *Passion according to St Matthew*, where the composer set a remarkable example of multi-spatial writing in the opening bars. Bach treats a double chorus antiphonally in addition to a chorale and the contrapuntal strands woven by the instrumental ensemble. One might speculate that Verdi in his big ensemble writing may have taken some of his inspiration from Bach: the use of *parola scenica* has much in common with the multi-spatial contrapuntal style of the Baroque, especially with Bach's compositional technique. We know from Roselli (166) that Verdi 'owned, on occasion played, and in some sense admired Bach's music'. Although he did not favour following non-Italian (or any other) musical traditions slavishly, Verdi certainly held Bach in high esteem, as one reference to his correspondence indicates:

> I see that Count Lurani is one of the committee members. They say he is a passionate admirer of [. . .] Bach alone! But they've been lying about him. If he's on the Palestrina committee, this proves he's a musician with an open mind, free from [. . .] bias. One can admire Bach and honour Palestrina, they are both the true and only fathers of the music of our age [. . .]. Everything derives from them (*Copialettere S. 376* in Osthoff 41-42).

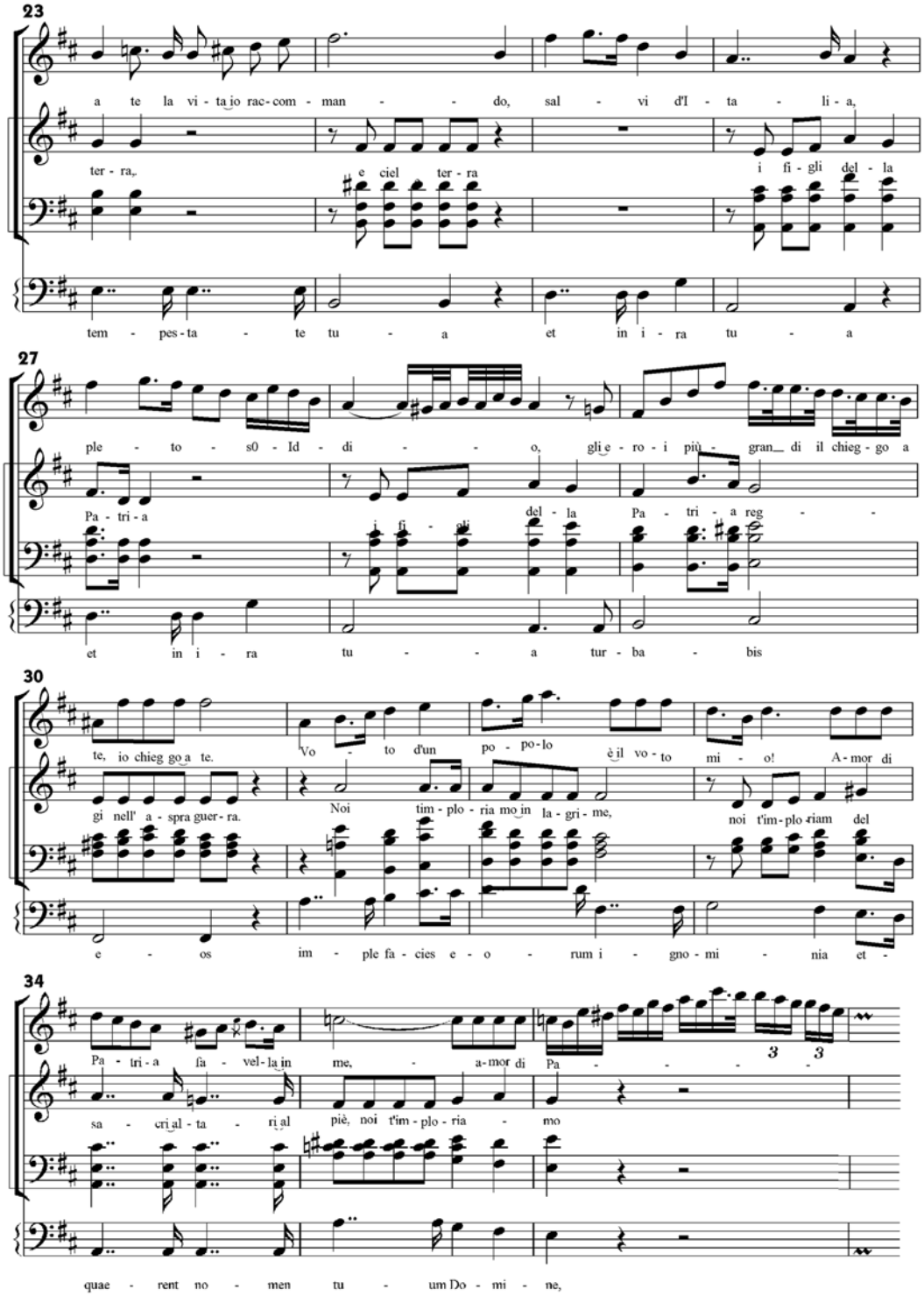
Building the multi-spatial continuum, then, in *La battaglia di Legnano* there is a chorus of clergy inside the church singing a hymn; there are townsfolk outside who voice an opinion of their own; and Lida and Imelda sound almost like *pertichine*, each making herself heard in her own narrative, much like the interaction of the chorale with the chorus in the example from Bach. In addition, there is an orchestra supplemented by a church organ to accompany all this vocal material. All *parola scenica* requirements are met here: the backgrounded primary melody (8^{l}*ff*), Lida's *sotto voce quasi-recitativo* lines to Imelda, and Imelda's response in another monotone *quasi-recitativo*. Verdi does not pursue the monotone after bar 18, opting instead for a more lyrical quality in the principals' lines. He does, however, retain the framework of foregrounded plot furthering, with the two choruses providing a scenic aural background.

The development of the *banda* is important, particularly in conjunction with *parola scenica*. Verdi uses it intermittently, up to and including *Don Carlos*'s (five act) opening scene. However, the sound of the *banda* changes dramatically from the initial small town instrumental *colorito* contained in conventional formal designs. Increasingly Verdi turns the off stage *banda* into an off stage chorus, which not only sounds less banal, but has greater narrative potential, because it becomes texted.

Figure 1.2: 'Deus meus', the 'Preghiera' from Act IV of *La battaglia di Legnano*. Musical illustrations throughout have been reduced to the smallest number of staves wherever feasible as a space saving device (see also Figure 1.1 and elsewhere).



(cont. overleaf)



Changing the configuration of the *banda* or supplementing it with other musical or even extramusical effects is not unique to Verdi, or otherwise unusual. Such sound effects can be heard as early as 1820, when Rossini premièred *Maometto II*, in which the *banda* is introduced in Act II Scene 4 by the rabble of an approaching crowd; or put differently, the chorus is *speaking* rather than *singing*. Then the *banda* is reduced to a *crescendo* on solo snare drum, such as might be heard when a fife-and-drum band approaches.

The orchestral *banda* is missing in *I masnadieri* (1847). But besides its normal dramatic use, an off stage chorus supplies *colorito*. In Act I Scene 1 the tenor's opening recitative is punctuated by snatches of this chorus, which makes two similar appearances in Act II of the opera. Julian Budden's reference to the level of competence Verdi requires from the choristers in these passages also suggests an almost instrumental writing style for the voices, which supports the notion that, for practical purposes, Verdi is replacing the *banda* with chorus. Budden describes the second appearance of the *banda* chorus as

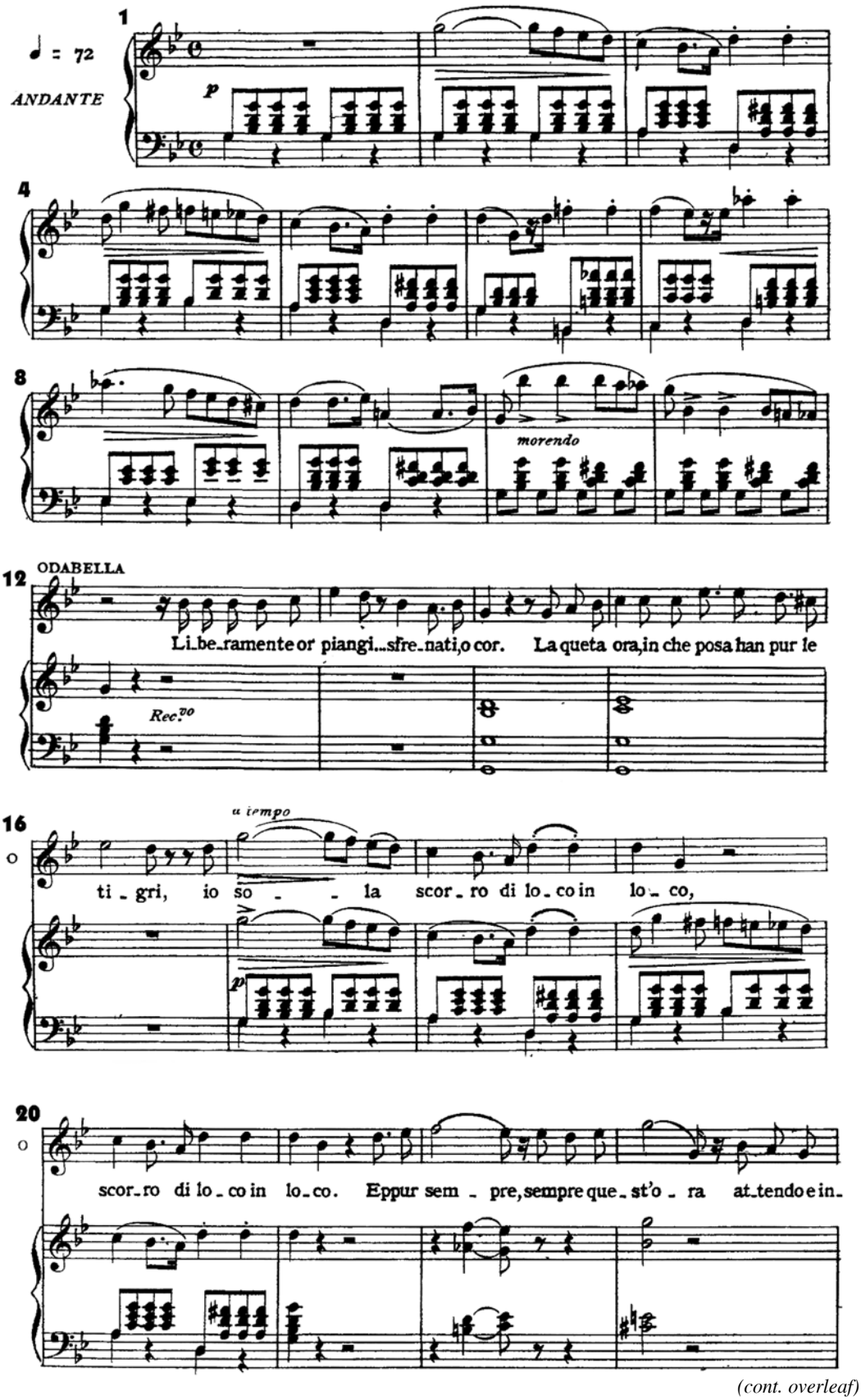
> high above the general din soprano voices rise in chromatic hysteria. Then a group of terrified women flee across the back of the stage, and their wailing can still be heard in the distance after the music has subsided. This is a brilliantly effective movement and one [. . .] that Verdi would never have risked unless he knew he had a strong chorus at his disposal (3, 1981: 328).

In all three instances the chorus is employed here as much for its *colorito* as for its narrative possibilities. In the first two instances Verdi outlines the male quality of the band of robbers; in the third he effectively juxtaposes that masculinity with the fear of the fleeing women.

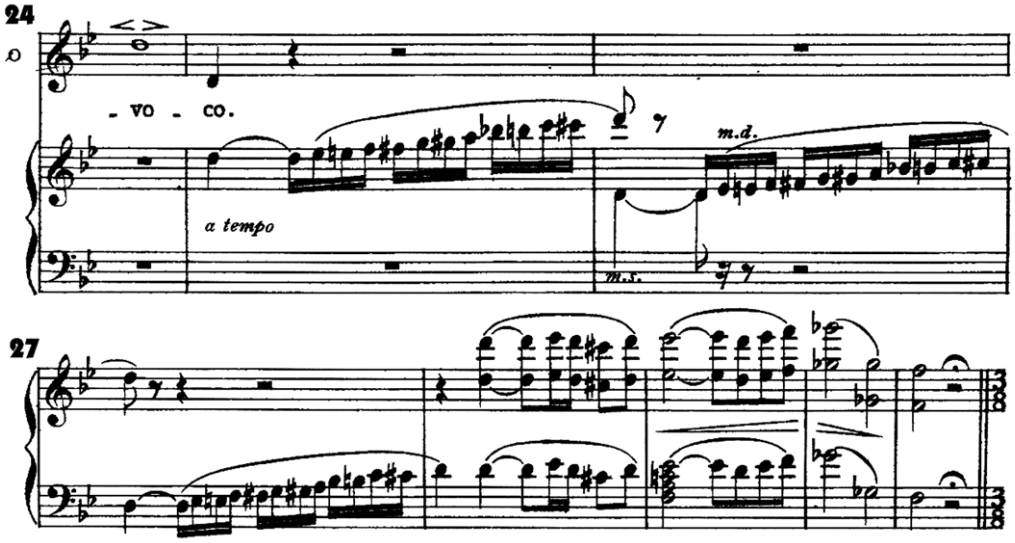
The material I have examined thus far has underscored the reasons behind the development of *parola scenica* as it appears in respect of the *banda*, solving issues of intelligibility, and effectively disguising formal structures. But there is another developmental feature of *parola scenica* deserving of enquiry: its potential to expand the recitative-aria set.

Attila (1846) is Verdi's ninth work for the lyrical stage. Here he reveals another application of *parola scenica*. The descending tune in the melodic minor of the opening scene of Act I introduces another level of development for Verdi, and shows a successful amalgamation of classical formal structures. The composer gives the melody to the strings at the opening of the first *scena* and *romanza* of Act I ('Liberamente or piangi . . . sfrenati, o cor' (2^{1}- 12^{1})). Then the melody gives way to a short *recitativo secco* (12^{3}-16^{4}); the opening theme returns, shared by soprano and strings. Verdi never entirely consigns the melody to the scenic background, as would be the case if he were using classical *parola scenica*. He allows it to oscillate gently between foreground and background, thereby creating a fusion of recitative and aria, and a fusion of the vocal and the symphonic foreground and background. This technique becomes prominent in the mature operas, and in this sense, this passage adumbrates scenes such as Eboli's 'O don fatale' in *Don Carlos* (1867).

Figure 1.3: 'Liberamente or piangi . . . sfrenati, o cor' from Act I of *Attila*.



(cont. overleaf)



This passage does all that is required of it as recitative, as symphonic introduction, and as *parola scenica*. It facilitates a smooth modulation from the opening key of g to the aria's B♭ (I indicate the minor key by the lower case, the major by upper case throughout). This is a neat ploy to avoid the *abuso dei minori*, or starting and ending a scene in a minor key, an unwritten but strict early nineteenth-century operatic law (Budden 1, 1973: 41). The section begins and ends in different keys, a simple, effective way of disguising tonal centres. The passage establishes tone; it develops the plot data, though less prominently than would later manifestations of this technique such as 'O don fatal.' It also gives the audience an insight into the more lyrical side of Odabella, who is usually remembered rather better as a warrior from her opening aria and *cabaletta* 'Allor che i forti corrono . . . Da te questo or m'è concesso'.

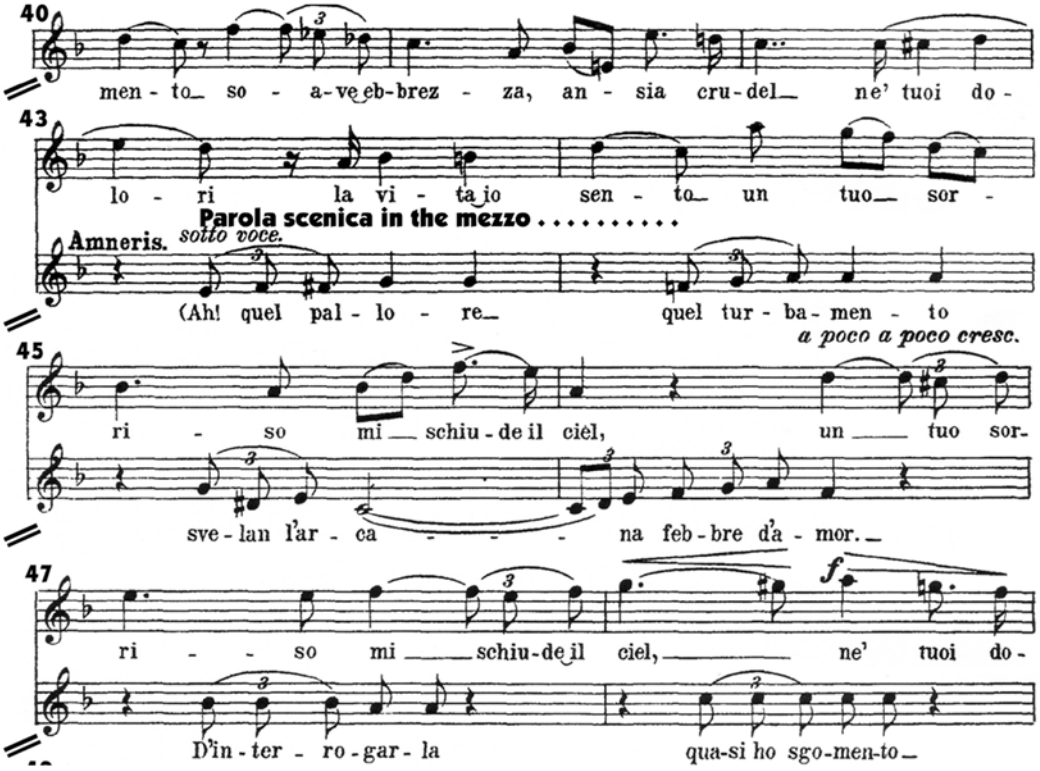
This fused narrative is not only stylistically greater than the sum of its parts, it assumes all the functions of the forms from which it is assembled. The passage is Verdi's first hint at using *parola scenica* to turn the long aria with its introductory recitative and concluding *cabaletta* into a larger, introspective dramatic scene. In so doing he avoids dramatically limiting formal structures. Put differently, he broadens the horizons of the number structure while retaining the elements that made it useful. This technique would stand the composer in good stead later in his career, for instance in *Don Carlos*, in three similar composite designs: Eboli's scene 'O don fatal . . . O ma reine', and the assassination of Rodrigo, 'C'est moi, Carlos . . . C'est mon jour, mon jour suprême . . . Carlos, écoute', both in Act IV; and Elisabeth's Act V *scena* 'Toi qui sus le néant'. The references here are to the original French five-act version of the opera (though not to the uncut score that Verdi suppressed, recorded by Opera Rara in 2006).

There is one more condition under which *parola scenica* is likely to appear that is so obvious that it is careless to miss it. The application of the device thus is less obvious in Verdi than it is in his late peers and successors, and it has its origins in the spoken word of the spoken theatre and in genres such the *Singspiel* or *operetta*, where one is likely to expect the characters to speak most of the time and only occasionally break into song (the modern musical, such as *Cats*, *Chess*, and *Evita* are all famous for this technique); *but not usually in opera.*

Verdi uses the technique of giving the actor lines to speak in three examples of which I can think of off-hand: Lady Macbeth reading the letter from Macbeth in Act I of the opera of the same name, Violetta reading Germont's letter in the final act of *La traviata*, and Rigoletto calling out his daughter's name in vain as she is carried off by the courtiers and he realizes that he has just been instrumental in her abduction by Mantua.

However, Verdi is too much of a traditionalist to abandon *secco* and *accompagnato*, *canto spezzato*, *arioso* and other set forms just yet, alongside the spoken word he uses on the odd occasion to create a special theatrical effect. Once again we may refer to the quintessential use of *parola scenica*, not only to move across the boundaries of conventional forms, but to emulate speech as opposed to singing, as in the Act II duet between Aida and Amneris:

Figure 1.4: Using *parola scenica* to simulate or even emulate ordinary speech in 'Fu la sorte dell'armi a 'tuoi funesta' from Act II Scene 1 of *Aida*. The 'spoken' text is in Amneris' lines.



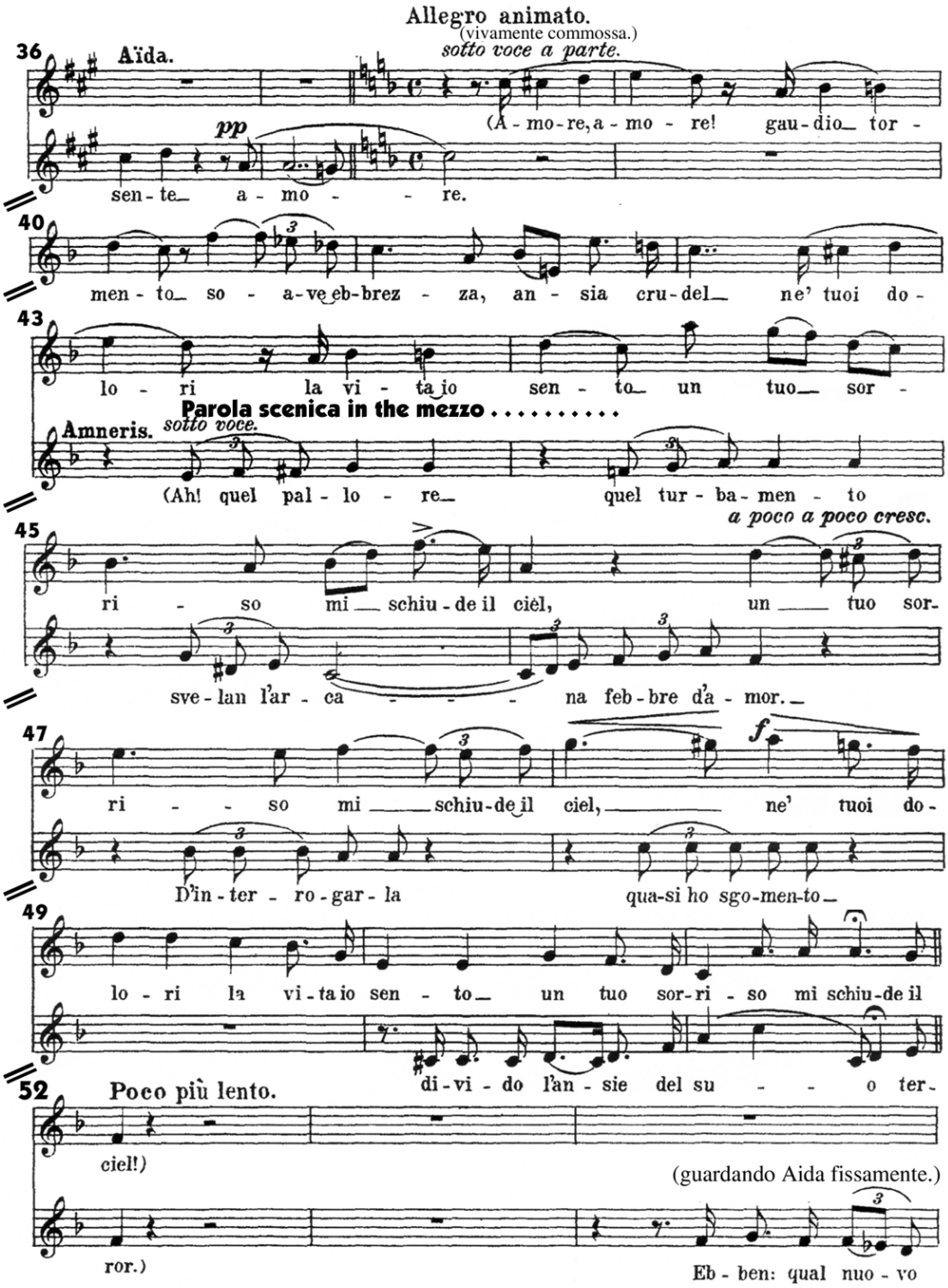
Parola scenica: economy of means

> In [*Alceste*] I sought to restrict music to its true function, namely to serve the poetry by means of expression—and the situations which make up the plot—without interrupting the action or diminishing its interest by useless and superfluous ornament (Gluck in Weisstein 'Golden Style' 122).

In previous sections I have defined and described my reading of *parola scenica* in prose, and I supported my argument with a number of examples from the operatic literature. Before I move on to conclude this chapter, however, I want to ensure that my concept of *parola scenica* is fixed in the reader's mind, and there is no better example in operatic literature than the duet in Act II Scene 1 between Aida and Amneris, the scene around which Verdi first used the term in writing. I give a close reading of the duet in its entirety in Chapter 4. Here I want to set out my understanding of the device by referring to one passage only from this *scena*.

In his essay 'A Study of Verdi' Alexander Brent-Smith tells us that 'The only [operatic] composer who set his face sternly against the use of the voice, apart from its actual use in delivering the text, was Gluck, but then Gluck's music indicates very clearly that, in spite of his sincerity, he had a very inelastic imagination, rhythmically, harmonically and melodically' (689). Nevertheless, Gluck's philosophy in respect of word *versus* music cited above seems to adumbrate Verdi's, if the Italian composer's concern for the word, as suggested by the very term *parola scenica*—or *scenic word*—is anything to go by. The simplicity of its conception is key to Verdi's model of the device. The plainness of the vocal melody is conspicuous in all the examples I have cited thus far. What happens in the backgrounded primary melody is certainly no less conspicuous or even important, but the emphasis is different, because the object here is to convey a poetic meaning; but since opera is meant to be theatre, the content of the noetic message, carried by the text, should be privileged. The conceptual process when assimilating *parola scena* is a two-step process. The primary knowledge that *has* to be imparted for an opera to make sense as theatre is the content of the plot. Accordingly, the vocal melody can be plain, because the words carry the message, not the notes. Vocal melodies set as monotones are by no means uncommon. A monotone would be a perfect example, to quote Gluck again, of writing 'without interrupting the action or diminishing its interest by useless and superfluous ornament'. Figures 1.4 and 1.5 show excerpts from *Aida* in which the emotional, poetic content is concentrated in the backgrounded primary melody while the noetic process dominates the foreground.

Figure 1.5: 'Fu la sorte dell'armi a 'tuoi funesta' from Act II Scene 1 of *Aida*.



This is an interaction between two vocal melodies where Verdi uses *parola scenica* without orchestral participation. Aida has the primary melody, Amneris the line with the *parola scenica*. The distinction is that the primary melodic value is in the soprano voice because it has greater melodic interest. The secondary melody in the mezzo soprano part is fragmented, and the use of the monotone is conspicuous. To make the final decision in respect of which line dominates noetically, however, one must test the textual content.

AIDA
Amore, amore! Gaudio, tormento,
Soave ebbrezza, ansia crudel!
Ne' tuoi dolori la vita io sento,
Un tuo sorriso mi schiude il ciel.
Ne' tuoi dolori, *ecc*.

AMNERIS
(guardando Aida fissamente)
Ah! quel pallore, qual turbamento
Svelan l'arcana febbre d'amor!
D'interrogarla quasi ho sgormento,
Divido l'ansie del suo terror.

AIDA
Love, love! Tormenting joy,
sweet rapture, cruel anxiety!
In thy sorrow I find my life,
in thy smile, I find heaven itself
In thy sorrow, *etc*.

AMNERIS
(regarding Aida fixedly)
Ah, her pallor, her confusion
betray the secret fever of love!
I fear to question her,
for I share the anxiety of her heart!

When this point in the dramatic development has been reached, Aida's feelings for Radamès are no longer a secret for anyone except for Amneris, who has a fair idea of what is going on already, but still needs proof. Aida's lines here, therefore, do not contribute to the development of the plot: they merely illustrate her state of mind (underscored by the fact that Verdi repeats the text). Amneris, however, is strategically backing Aida into a corner, and her lines are central to the development of the plot. She is looking for evidence that Radamès is Aida's lover, as she suspects, and Aida, by her *pallore* and *turbamento*, duly provides it. At the same time, however, Amneris in part sympathizes with Aida's turmoil, depicted for the audience in the lyricism of her final lines ('For I share the anxiety of her heart'), because she has similar feelings. She also loves Radamès, and she, too, had fears for his safety in the war against the Ethiopians, although by now she knows the outcome of the battle. This balance of plot development in the mezzo's character convinces me that Amneris' is the line with the primary noetic value, Aida's is the descriptive-poetic.

The easiest way of identifying *parola scenica* in the score is by its plainness on the printed page: its strongest architectural feature is its simplicity of conception. It is highly condensed. Significant plot data can be imparted in relatively few bars. It is the closest Verdi comes—indeed, a composer *can* come—to the rhythm and cadence of everyday speech outside of the convention of recitative or speech. Moreover, it can be dressed up or down by means of a richer or more sparse orchestral context, or by more or less sophisticated melodies in the poetic background, depending on the occasion. It is possible to combine many melodies against the *parola scenica* in a multi-spatial environment or a homophonic one, and the line that carries the primary noetic value will continue to stand out, because its melodic simplicity—frequently characterized by a monotone—is its most notable means of emphasis. Its plasticity is underscored by the fact that it is usually approached and resolved by splicing it with the primary melody, making a seamless fit with the musical and theatrical fabric.

But where did Verdi source this simple technique? Throughout this first chapter I have tried to motivate clearly the development of *parola scenica*, and in Chapters 2 and 4 I discuss its purely musical prototype in some detail. However, its direct ancestor is as unlikely as it is unpretentious, nevertheless proving a strong link between the theatre of Verdi's day and *parola scenica* as a musico-theatrical device. It can be traced back generally to the Paris *boulevard* theatres Verdi frequented (according to Marcello Conati) between 1847 and 1849 (Sala 185), and more specifically to the *mélodrame* so fashionable during the mid nineteenth century.

In essence, the interaction between music and the spoken word in the *mélodrame* was limited to incidental music written especially for the play, supplying an aural-scenic background to the spoken dialogue, to add to the dramatic intent of the text. Such music was not only specifically written for each play, but the score was also very carefully marked as to where the *violon conducteur* who led the orchestra would cue in each individual number. Sala and Smart describe this musical background as working 'as a kind of nervous system for the drama [. . .]. It does not assert itself as autonomous, but rather functions as an integral element of the "sound track"' (190). In Verdian terms, this is nothing other than *parola scenica*.

The way in which the musico-theatrical amalgam of the Parisian *boulevard mélodrame* unfolded prompted me to reflect on the spoken word as motivating force behind the music. It also set me thinking about the motivating force behind other standard operatic procedures. It led me to wonder, for example, about what actually 'drives' recitative, or aria, or, in my own research, *parola scenica*. The answer is simple in respect of *recitativo*: Joseph Kerman tells us that

> Monteverdi's use of syncopation is particularly striking. Syncopation is rhythmic tension, just as dissonance is harmonic tension; traditionally the two had been carefully used together, mainly for the purpose of strengthening a coming cadence. But Monteverdi made syncopation of the recitative line into a positive mannerism, producing a curious sense of ready displacement, a latitude that allows the singer to drag or rush irrespective of the sober metrical beat. [. . .] This has just the expressive force of *rubato* (*Opera as Drama* 31).

Monteverdi's convention of using dissonance to drive *recitativo secco* would hold true for *secco* throughout the decades, until the aria took over pride of place. It is logical also to suppose that the simplicity of recitative suggests that the theatrical meaning resides in the literary rather than in the musical text. This status quo would change with the advent of Apostolo Zeno and Pietro Metastasio, who

developed stock, generic aria types suitable for most occasions, and at which time the meaning of the text became subservient to the melody, and rather more specifically, the melody *in the aria*. I refer again to Kerman: 'the dramaturgy of Italian Baroque opera rests wholly and solidly on the aria;' and 'as Italian opera worked in practice, the action was regularly halted for lyrical introspection in the arias' (*Opera as Drama* 61). The aria, then, is driven by the melody.

But what drives *parola scenica?* John Drummond describes in opera a process in which 'the inextricable fusion of music, whether in arias or ensembles, communicates in such a way that "musical images take us beyond the text to what lies behind it, while verbal images give focus to the implicit meanings of music"' (in Oliver 35). I would suggest that he has here captured exactly the essence of *parola scenica*. The musical image in the musico-narrative event poetically illuminates the text while at the same time the verbal image in the text states the noetic.

Gary Tomlinson neatly summarizes the notion of how Verdi might have interpreted *parola scenica* when he writes 'in the most general sense Verdi's search for the much discussed *parola scenica* amounts to a search for situations which focus single-mindedly upon the central issues of the drama—and advance these issues' ('After Budden' 174). This reference should make it clear that there is no such thing as ***a** parola scenica;* the device represents a theatrical *situation* rather than an isolated word or phrase of text, and this is where I take issue with other readings of *parola scenica*, particularly the pictorial model, which supports the notion that the device represents a phrase or word that illuminates what follows. As Della Seta ('Parola scenica' 260*ff*) has suggested, such a reading is partially correct—for that is indeed a function of *parola scenica*—but although it is partially correct, such a reading is incomplete, and thus partly wrong also. The true function of *parola scenica* is to defamiliarize the text so that its impact on the public has the patina of newness. James Hepokoski quotes Hans Robert Jauss as saying that 'The more stereotypically a text repeats the generic, the more inferior is its artistic character and its degree of historicity [. . .]. A masterwork is definable in terms of an alteration of horizon of the genre that is as unexpected as it is enriching'. Hepokoski primarily quotes Jauss in this context to support his notion that the 'story' of post-Rossinian opera is often told by making it 'standard practice to identify as the central plot the dissolution of traditional structural types and genres' ('Genre and Content' 249). I would add that Verdi, likewise, tells his own operatic stories by the dissolution of structural types and genres, and that *parola scenica* has become a primary tool in this process.

The operatic narrative process: audience involvement; multi-spatiality and the inner space; defamiliarization

This first chapter is intended as an introduction to the problems of Realism, including a brief enquiry into its nineteenth-century literary and theatrical sources. Where Verdi fits into the realist or naturalist aesthetic as I interpret it also became a primary driving force. In this process I discussed terminological issues, and I also developed a working model for musical realism based on the research of other scholars of the nineteenth century as well as my own. I highlighted the first passage of music that triggered my notion of *parola scenica* and has enabled me to construct a theoretical model. This model is not intended to replace notions currently favoured by other scholars. Rather, it endeavours to present the concept in a different historical and theoretical light. In other words, it is an attempt to find common ground between all the existing models (including my own), thereby perhaps making it easier for the listener to identify and appreciate *parola scenica* for its full theatrical value.

However, if one's research material in this context is to be analyzed, appreciated and evaluated properly, it must take cognizance of the role of the audience, and it is with some caution that I turn my attention briefly to the *reception* of Verdi's realism. In this process I focus on the action and mode of the subject, spectator, or listener—following Bianconi and Pestelli I refer to 'the public' (xiv) or otherwise the 'listener' or 'spectator'—in the aesthetic, technical, musical and literary process of considering the subject matter both as theatre and as music, and how that process unfolds. Elsewhere I set boundaries about my interpretation of certain terminology; and I engaged with others' interpretation of the same material. Here I am about to set boundaries again in respect of the description of the operatic reception process, because that will determine my approach in chapters to come.

Bianconi and Pestelli necessarily engage to a high technical degree with theories of reception in their volume on opera production, extensively quoting Hans Robert Jauss on his notion of a mind shift from the older 'aesthetic of production' of literature to the 'aesthetic of reception' (xiv). Jauss argues that the dynamism of the interaction between author, text and audience creates an historic perspective of the literary work, which means that every new work is 'directed towards a "horizon of expectation" constructed out of the shared literary experience of the collectivity of readers' (xiv). I interpret that *horizon of expectation* differently, as implying that there are as many angles as there are observers, each with a different interest, although they share a collective enjoyment of the work.

To conclude this chapter, I follow four lines of enquiry. The nineteenth-century realist artist created a horizon of expectation for his public, and then supported the public in reaching it. I investigate how that horizon is created, and how the public interacts with it. Firstly I look at the public's experience of theatre and opera as a means of idealized entertainment, and how it identifies with the 'simulated reality' of the stage; then I expand on the notions of multi-spatiality and of the creative 'inner space', both of which I introduced elsewhere without elaborating; and finally I describe the concept of 'defamiliarization', which also becomes increasingly important as this study develops.

I: Involvement of the nineteenth-century Italian operatic audience

There can be no doubt about the involvement of the nineteenth-century Italian operatic audience in the spectacle. For that matter, the involvement of the Italian operatic audience remains unquestioned to this day, as tenor Roberto Alagna discovered in a La Scala performance of *Aida*, during which the audience was severely critical of his reading of 'Celeste Aida', prompting him to leave the stage in a temperamental fit ('Franco Zeffirelli' Westphal 29 December 2006).

On a less whimsical note, however, Powers quotes Budden on the level of audience involvement in Verdi's day, and how it inspired the composer to manipulate the structure of the '*solita forma*': 'The *cabaletta* had another purpose besides that of display. It provided a "vent" for the emotion which was strictly controlled in the *andante*. For an Italian of the period emotion was like a charge of electricity to be earthed, not a warm bath in which to soak' (1, 1973: 16, in Powers 75). Budden continues, 'German audiences were prepared to be edified; Italians wanted to enjoy themselves' (De Van 48). And by quoting Carlo Ritorni and Francesco Degrada, De Van summarizes the ever present audience demand for what is new and challenging, and particularly what is emotionally engaging:

> In nineteenth-century Italy the public thirsted for strong sensations: fine opera was 'all the rage,' provoked 'fanaticism.' One opera lover [. . .] declared that he craved music that 'moves me, electrifies me, draws me out of myself', and Bellini, attending a performance of *La Sonnambula* in Paris, wrote with pride, 'It was as though everyone's nerves had been charged with electricity' (48).

Besides, we have it on Zola's authority that the public viewed the theatre as an idealized form of entertainment after the French Revolution, and that the people, still in a state of high excitement, could identify with the 'simulated reality' of the stage (Bentley 353), without of course confusing real life with fantasy. Moreover, my model of realism makes provision for the listener's 'artistic alignment with *an* (not *the*) existing reality'. There is no evidence to believe that contemporary audiences did not celebrate this artistic alignment.

II: MULTI-SPATIALITY

Concerning the notion of multi-spatiality: on the most basic of levels, Verdi's primary compositional instinct was for writing counterpoint, not harmony. It is clear from the composer's correspondence that he seldom if ever thought of his own music in homophonic terms, and that he viewed counterpoint as the most important compositional skill to be acquired:

> Liberties and errors in counterpoint in the theatre can be allowed, and can sometimes even sound beautiful. But in the conservatorium, no. (Osborne 167-7).

But there is more to multi-spatiality than this. Roger Parker gives a succinct account of Verdi's multi-spatial compositional process:

> First came the parceling up [*sic*] of the subject into operatic forms and the drafting of the libretto ([by the time of *La traviata*] a collaborative process between Verdi and his librettist); second came the business of musical sketching, which eventually produced a 'continuity draft' in which the basic outlines [. . .] were written down. [. . .] [Then] Verdi transcribed the continuity draft onto nested bifolios of manuscript paper (forming a 'skeleton score'); and finally he orchestrated the skeleton score [. . .] during piano rehearsals with the singers (*Song* 24).

His multi-spatial approach applies to the musical text outside of the purely mechanical act of getting it down on paper. For the simulated reality of the stage to ignite the levels of excitement Zola implies, Verdi sought to address it on more than one level. I refer throughout to these levels in the multi-spatial continuum as the 'noetic' and the 'poetic', but this antithesis has been documented by others and in different terms, including by poet Luigi Illica, who on occasion wrote that 'the words [must] correspond to the truth of the moment (the situation) and to the passion (the character)!' (Bianconi and Pestelli 280). I have stumbled on the term 'limbic', which means either 'thinking emotions' or 'emotional intellect', depending on one's point of view, and I use it sparingly.

The notion of the narrative developing multi-spatially with different levels importance impacts on every aspect of Verdi's art. It lies in the way the operatic text is made up: the libretto, upon which is superimposed both the texted and untexted music as narrative, and running concurrently with that *parola scenica*, the intention of which is always to manipulate the literary and musical texts in such a way that the theatrical intention precedes the musical. Musical and dramatic aspects are different perspectives of the same multi-spatial continuum; together they form the stimulus to which the public responds.

The primary aim of Verdi's multi-spatial compositional approach is quite basic. The public must be able to understand the plot. On the other hand, the emotional forces that influence musico-dramatic events are equally important to the development of the opera as drama; but Verdi decides which cognitive

process takes precedence at any given moment. Without knowledge of the foregrounded dramatic, the story of the opera remains a closed book for the spectator. And even if it does follow the content of the plot, but does not experience musically the emotions of the characters, then all the collaborators in such a musico-histrionic event, including the public, will have failed. Such are the complexities of operatic narrative.

It is the artist who chooses which plane of experience will receive more prominence, and Verdi frequently determines that plane by way of *parola scenica*. Moreover, there are degrees to which *parola scenica* can be made to influence the public, the level of potency corresponding to the reason for which the device is used. *Parola scenica* that appears simply to disguise the *banda*, for example, is less sophisticated than when it is used to extend the architectural dimensions of the recitative-aria set. The process escalates. A more sophisticated application of *parola scenica* results in a greater awareness of foregrounded dramatic narrative intent, which creates a higher level of realism. The process does not end there. The foregrounded dramatic narrative impact results in a different, less prominent artistic reliance on the backgrounded musical narrative. The extract from *La traviata* (Figure 1.1) again serves as illustration. That Violetta is fatally ill is more significant than the fact that she is a courtesan in the section following the 'Brindisi'. Verdi relies on the text governing the foregrounded realist dramatic narrative to convince the public that Violetta is ill. That the action takes place in the *salon* of a woman of negotiable virtue is suggested by musical interplay in the scenic background. This is how Verdi arranges and sets in motion *parola scenica*. In a later chapter I attempt to show how this technique is applied to scores other than Verdi's, and that is perhaps the final impact of Verdi's multi-spatial art: his techniques would influence the way in which his contemporaries and successors would manipulate the operatic text.

Ultimately, the narrative is presented in different geometric spaces within the multi-spatial construction. Therefore the public is made to relate to the data in terms of what André Bazin describes as 'psychological modalities', which may be noted in the general framework of

> [. . .] depth of focus brings the spectator in closer relation with the image than he is with the reality. [. . . That is implied] both by a more active mental attitude on the part of the spectator and a more positive contribution on his part to the action in progress [. . .] (35-36).

III: 'THE ARTISTIC INNER SPACE'

Verdi achieves a realist end by juxtaposing the noetic content of what *parola scenica* communicates with, or even superimposes upon, the public's emotional inner response. Following Holly Watkins, I have called that inner response the 'artistic inner space' ('From the Mine to the Shrine' 31 December 2004 179-207). It is that 'depth of inner inspiration' in which the creator conceives of and constructs his art, and it is the corresponding space in the spectator in which the work of art resonates in its musical as well as its dramatic aspect. Watkins writes of a space that exists not only in the creator and the subject, but, as important, in the work of art itself. She argues: 'Indeed, with the rise of instrumental music, German critics began to apply metaphors of depth to music with greater frequency than ever before [these metaphors also apply to vocal music, of course]. In so doing, they began to imagine a musical inner space uncannily similar to the inner space of the listening subject' (179-207).

The inner space is one aspect of the multi-spatial human capacity to experience. Others might be the emotional and the intellectual or cerebral, besides which humans also have the capacity to experience via one or more of the five senses. Watkins' notion of the inner depth is widely researched, and although there is no consensus on the nature and provenance of this intangible 'sixth sense', references to it in philosophical literary sources are intriguing and worthwhile citing. She writes, for example, that

> J G Sulzer [. . .] located the mysterious fount of poetic inspiration somewhere in 'depths of the human soul,' beyond the reach of the inquiring aesthetician. [. . .] For Herder, hearing was the sense best suited to penetrate into the subject's deepest inner realms, an idea he developed as early as the fourth *Kritischer Wald* [. . .], written in 1769. [. . .] At the very least, the fourth *Wald* indicates how an alternative aesthetic philosophy based on the sense of hearing rather than of sight—especially attractive to critics of the vision-centered Enlightenment—operates in tandem with a philosophy favoring [*sic*] depth over surface [. . .] (179-207).

The notion of the inner space remains important throughout this thesis, especially as it may be identified as a specialized vehicle of human experience. As the authors both ancient and modern that Watkins references have observed—W H Wackenroder, Ludwig Tieck, and E T A Hoffmann; Mark Evan Bonds, Edward Lippman, Carl Dahlhaus, John Neubauer, and Bellamy Hosler—it has a bearing on text as well as on both texted and untexted music. Watkins looks at the work of these authors, and finds a correlation between the way in which they address the issue of inner space when communicating with their public, and the way that Beethoven does. She argues, 'As the example of Heinrich von Ofterdingen

[in Novalis's novel of the same title (1800)] suggests, the tension between the knowable and the unknowable permeates the Romantic imagery of depth.' She notes recurring themes and other *topoi* of depth in the fiction of these German authors, mentioning the preponderance of caves [*I lombardi*, II(1), *La forza del destino*, II(10)], wells [*Lucia di Lammermoor*, I(2)], fathomless bodies of water [*Otello*, I(1)], dense forests [*Don Carlos*, I(1)]; I have indicated here works from the Italian *opera seria* canon in which these themes also appear. I can conclude with Watkins that 'it is not surprising that [nineteenth-century artists] also tended to view their intellectual pursuits as efforts to penetrate the depths, whether of the self, art, history, or nature. But there was as yet no consensus about what might be found there' (179-207).

As the listener grew in terms of sophistication, so the musical text needed to be altered to satisfy the demands of an ever more worldly audience. Before the advent of realism in nineteenth-century opera, the listener was satisfied with narrative intent which lay, somewhat superficially, in the melody. As his tastes developed, he came to require narrative intent that sprung from the entire musical gesture, a musical depth that required from the creator a deeper *Besonnenheit*, to use the terminology of another nineteenth-century mind (Jean Paul uses the term in his *Vorschule der Ästhetik*). Walters circumscribes it as

> Jean Paul's words resound in Hoffmann's description of Beethoven, who is said to preside absolutely over the 'inner realm of tones'. In Hoffmann's appropriation of the term, *Besonnenheit* joins two inner worlds: the unconscious, 'natural' laws governing the genius's creative activity and the 'inner structure' of musical works. [. . .] Enhancing the symmetry between listener and music, Hoffmann posited a depth to the musical work corresponding to the inner sphere of the genius's *Besonnenheit*. Extraordinarily, this realm is not left cloaked in mystery but becomes a plumbable depth, one thought to contain traces of the composer's hidden rationality (179*ff*).

IV: ESTRANGEMENT

The process of estrangement is an important one also, more so in the musical text than in the literary in the context of *parola scenica*, as we shall see presently. The poet might defamiliarize the text, either by selecting *versi lirici* as opposed to *versi sciolti* or *versi liberi*, for example; or by dispensing with verse altogether and opting for prose; or, as Victor Hugo suggests, by not discarding verse entirely and adopting an amalgam of verse and prose (56), which is what Verdi's poets attempted when supplying text which the composer may ultimately turn into *parola scenica*. I engage elsewhere with other narrative ideas such as signifier, signified and sign, and the readerliness as opposed to the writerliness of the text.

The notion of defamiliarization, then, belongs to the field of literary theory. Viktor Shklovsky maintains that the reader becomes anaesthetized by ordinary language (Hawkes 62), and suggests that the text can be given a fresh aspect by defamiliarizing aspects of it. I borrow the term 'defamiliarization' from other narrative and literary forms, where it is prevalent in literary criticism and structuralist terminology, and I apply it to Verdi with caution. The notion of *ostranenie* or 'making strange' is well-documented. I prefer to call this process 'defamiliarization' to avoid Russian-formalist echoes. Shklovsky refers to the technique in his essay *Art as Process* (1916) (Lovink 2003):

> The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. The technique of art is to make objects 'unfamiliar', to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged. Art is a way of experiencing the artfulness of an object; the object is not important.

In the musical context, Roger Parker notes in *Remaking the Song* that '[. . .] the idea of "historical performance," [. . .] also attempted to *defamiliarize* [emphasis mine] the all-too-familiar object, adding a patina of newness or modernity that, although it claimed identity with the past, was no more than superficially different from the efforts of those self-styled modernizing stage directors' (3). Ernst Toch particularly eloquently expresses the notion of 'refreshing' the intellect to experience the text anew in the context of Bach's contrapuntal writing style in the *Two-part Inventions:*

> by slackening the tension of 'counterpoint' for a short while these arraigned bars render the ensuing resumption of the chase more effective. The unexpected cessation of the intrigue becomes an intrigue in itself, like the feinting retreat of a fencer. [. . .] At the bottom of this feature lies the principle that any quality is apt to weaken and to lose its effect after a while; and the best preventive for that is an offsetting and reanimating intermission (Kennan 84).

When I use words such as *defamiliarization* or *estrangement*, I do not intend to imbue them with all the content-, genre- or even analysis-specific meaning Shklovsky does. Nor do I agree with Shklovsky that its intention should be to 'make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception' (Lovink 2003). On the contrary, Verdi uses defamiliarization to make he text more easily accessible. The term is to be taken at face value, to mean that, through the use of *parola scenica* combined with an otherwise conventional operatic idiom, Verdi places what he expresses in the 'best dramatic light' rather than 'the most *unfamiliar* light' (in Shklovsky's sense), to extract the most narrative intent from it. In the sense I use the word, it means 'to side-step expectations'.

My short excursion into four aspects of reception is no more than an attempt to illustrate the lines along which artists might have wanted to develop their public's 'horizon of expectation'. Nicholas Cook writes,

> there is, then, a widespread consensus of opinion among twentieth-century aetheticians and critics that listening to music is, or at any rate should be, a higher-order mental activity which combines sensory perception with a rational understanding based on some kind of knowledge of musical structure (60).

It is not difficult to divine what the 'horizon of expectation' might be from that reference. It involves the internalization of the musical text on both poetic and noetic levels, and I believe that Verdi uses *parola scenica* to build bridges for his public between what Cook has called 'sensory perception' and 'rational understanding'.

ETD

Chapter 2

Problems of libretto, storytelling and narrative

> [. . .] an opera cannot be read from its libretto. Put another way, a libretto is not a text as we ordinarily understand that term. Because the meaning of opera is at bottom musical—because its essential argument is posed in musical language—any interpretation of opera derived exclusively, or even primarily, from the libretto is likely to result in a misreading (Robinson in Groos & Parker 328).

As Paul Robinson observes, the libretto cannot be judged entirely on its own. However, its status as genre, its development and contribution to the dramatic impact of an opera as a whole is worthwhile of study. Robinson continues,

> I have put my proposition in categorical form. Naturally, its truth varies considerably from one operatic tradition to another, from one composer to another, from one work to another, even from one passage to another in the same opera. It is, for example, more true of the operas of the nineteenth century than of those of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; more true of Verdi than of Rossini; more true of *Il trovatore* than of *Otello*; more true of concerted passages than of recitative (in Groos & Parker 328).

I have noted my emphasis on the audio-visual experience of opera elsewhere, but since my concern here is the text rather than the music, my approach is a little different in this chapter. Analyzing the text provides a unique challenge, as Robinson suggests. Berlioz too has commented on the difficulties surrounding the operatic libretto:

> It is not possible to transform any sort of play into opera without modifying it, disturbing it, corrupting it more or less. I know this. But there are many intelligent ways to prosecute this task of profanation that is [imposed] by musical exigencies (Schmidgall 373).

The operatic composer has a specialized if unglamorous task. In the first instance he has to derive a particular meaning from the source text that inspired him; in Verdi this might be Shakespeare, Byron or Schiller. Then he has to convince his poet of his own interpretation, before collaborating with the librettist on this text (and as we know, Verdi was a particularly hard taskmaster). Then the libretto needs to be retranslated into music, and this can only be done by testing the response of the text to the musical setting, or, depending on one's point of view, before testing the musical response to the textual stimulus. Moreover, opera is fundamentally *Gesamtkunstwerk*; accordingly, it is not easy to separate its components: text from music, melody from accompaniment, orchestra from accompaniment, and so on, which might explain why the libretto has rarely been studied in isolation.

To trace the literary origins of the operatic text in general and Verdi's libretto in particular takes one all the way back to the ancient Greeks. Similarities between opera and the classical tragedy that gave rise to it have a common ancestry in Greek Tragedy. Marie Stolba notes that the roots of music and drama can be traced back to the 'prize-winning drama of Thespis (534 B.C.E.)' (249); similarly, Tom Sutcliffe notes that 'opera is a revivalist descendent' of ancient Greek Theatre (500). The influence of Greek Tragedy on theatre in general is well known; but I believe that it impacted more significantly on the operatic libretto than generally supposed, and thus on the musical setting itself. As important is the route opera from Renaissance Theatre. Deirdre O'Grady writes that Italian opera drew its inspiration from French classical drama, and that 'the *opera seria* of the close of the eighteenth century and the early years of the nineteenth was a musical enactment of the classical tragedy' (100).

The *Mélodrame*

The *mélodrame* is a splinter of spoken French theatre, and becomes important in this study, particularly in relation to Verdi's middle period. Originally, the *mélodrame*—creators and exponents preferred the title *drame*, and by 1820-1830 the 'correct' term *mélodrame-drame*—was a popular theatrical dramatic genre, the title of which signifies *drama with music*. It is characterized by unreal situations and characters with dualist personalities (usually good against evil, in line with the moralistic tendencies evident in mid nineteenth century thought), but also in the broad strokes Greek playwrights used to paint their dramatic pictures (Brockett *The Theatre* 18). As far as the Greek influence is concerned, Brockett and Hildy also note that 'The dialogue and choral passages were recited or chanted to a musical accompaniment, which served merely to enhance the dramatic effectiveness of the dialogue' (128).

Sala and Smart note that the *mélodrame* underwent significant changes, but that the defining constant was musical accompaniment for the action (186). By the mid nineteenth century, the *mélodrame* with subject matter drawn from the sordid side of life (the so-called *mélodrame 'a décor misérabiliste'*)—bearing the stage direction of 'the action takes place in the present day'—became fashionable in French *boulevard* theatre, and although the *boulevard* would absorb and use it, it was still out of the question for Italian opera (Sala & Smart 189). That Verdi ignored this taboo underscores his boldness of choice when settling on libretti for *Stiffelio* and *La traviata* in 1847 and 1852. Sala and Smart eloquently describe the importance of music in *boulevard* theatre:

> Music continued to be an indispensable ingredient of *boulevard* productions, although now less important than in the early *mélodrame*. *Le Chiffonnier de Paris (The Ragman of Paris)*, for which orchestral material composed by Pilati survives, includes no fewer than fifty numbered pieces and a substantial overture. [. . . A]s in all *boulevard* works, musical accompaniment also contributed significantly to making the scenic action comprehensible. One function of the orchestral interventions was to create a sort of 'interior memory', to supply faintly perceptible links that could connect even far-flung scenes through thematic recall. [. . .] The music also works as a kind of nervous system for the drama as a whole. *It does not assert itself as autonomous, but rather functions as an integral element of the 'sound* track' [empahsis added] (190).

Sala quotes extensively from *Le Chiffonnier*, and it is difficult to describe the function of the music (as opposed to that of the text) differently or more accurately here than in Chapter 1, where I suggested that the music carries the poetic intent, the text the noetic, as it did in Greek Tragedy. Sala summarizes the interaction between music and text as that 'It is no exaggeration to say that the search for effect so typical of the *boulevard* theatre is unthinkable without music, or that entire passages of dialogue, often corresponding to particularly agitated moments of the action, are as it were absorbed into a musical flow' (192). He adds as a footnote that these were referred to as *scènes mystérieuses* by early Verdian scholar Arthur Pougin in his article 'Mélodrame' in the *Dictionnaire historique et pittoresque du thèâtre* (Paris 1885: 512).

What are we left with, then, by the mid to the end of the nineteenth century? What are the elements of spoken theatre that survived in the libretto, and which were the elements that fell by the wayside for one reason or another? And which were the elements that remained common to both genres as they represent different species of dramatic literature?

At the most basic of levels, the three unities of time, space and action remained central to opera and theatre, but in opera time and action are compressed to make up for the fact that words, when sung, take longer to deliver than when spoken. Those features that distinguished Greek Tragedy were still there: the narrative sung by the chorus lost ground because the solo voice gained, but solo voice and chorus still appeared in a state of interaction with each other. The main difference in the opera libretto, however, was that the solo voice from the start represented a character, not just a voice delivering narrative. As the Greek Tragic model developed to cater first for one character, then two, and gradually more, likewise opera developed a *dramatis personae* often of staggering proportions. At the same time, forms such as the solo *cantata* still existed, in which only one voice represents a character, with no chorus at all to act as a dramatic foil, just the orchestra. Haydn's *Arianna a Naxos* (1789 or '90) is a case in point.

Given the exact time and musico-theatrical point of development in his career at which Verdi was exposed to its influence in Paris, it is not surprising that the *mélodrame* had a significant effect on him. But his musico-theatrical development, it is important to note, is not determined by any single influence, but by a whole array of influences, even given his insistence that in music-theoretical terms he was probably the least erudite of composers. It would be useful to compare briefly two texts with corresponding musical features, one from a late Donizetti opera—*Lucrezia Borgia* (1834, with only twelve of his sixty-nine operas still to be written)—and a mid career Verdian work—here *Rigoletto* (1851, the seventeenth of twenty-eight operas), to see how two sets of text react to different settings at different points in the nineteenth century.

An inter-textual comparison between Donizetti and Verdi

> The verses which the librettist writes are not addressed to the public but are really a private letter to the composer. They have their moments of glory, the moment in which they suggest to him a certain melody; once it is over, they are as expendable as infantry to a Chinese general: they must efface themselves and cease to care what happens to them (Auden 'Reflections' 9-10).

The major difference between these two scenes is that the *Rigoletto* extract opens the opera, the *Lucrezia Borgia* (hereafter '*Borgia*') extract forms the *dénouement*. Otherwise, they have much structurally in common, particularly, as Barry Daniels tells us,

> Victor Hugo's *Lucrèce Borgia* (originally titled *Une Souper a Ferrare*) was written in July 1832, shortly after the completion of his *Le Roi s'amuse*. The two plays were conceived as dramatic parallels focusing on central characters with similar dual natures. In *Le Roi s'amuse* physical deformity and moral degradation were combined with the noblest of paternal instincts in the character of Tribollet, in *Lucrèce Borgia* moral deformity was combined with the purest of maternal instincts in the title character (21).

Both scenes feature frivolous guests celebrating to the tunes of off stage *bande;* in both, the festivities are replaced by a sense of dread, in *Borgia* as the guests realize gradually that the banquet is a carefully orchestrated trap, that they are unarmed and there is no way of escape. In *Rigoletto* the aged Monterone bursts onto the scene, having forced his way past the ducal guards, and the element of the curse is introduced within the span of a few bars. In both extracts there is an element of surprise. In *Borgia* it is the result of Lucrezia's dramatic entrance, and with a line of text in response to a question from the chorus of young men in her trap who conveniently asks 'Where are we?'. She answers 'Presso Lucrezia Borgia' ('With Lucrezia Borgia'), with all the menace that implies. In *Rigoletto* Monterone simply forces his way into Mantua's presence.

To facilitate a comparison, I have placed the translations of the texts side by side below with plot events clearly marked. The translation of the Piave text on the left is by Leo Salter. The *Borgia* libretto is by Felice Romani, and was translated by Avril Bardoni. In both cases, however, I have assumed a certain poetic licence on the part of the translators, and I have suggested cosmetic changes here and there to facilitate the graphic layout of the text.

	ACT ONE	**ACT THREE**
	Prelude	**Finale**
	SCENE ONE	**SCENE FOUR**
	A magnificent hall in the Ducal palace, with doors at the back leading to other rooms, also splendidly lit; a crowd of courtiers and ladies, sumptuously dressed, in the background; pages passing to and fro. The festivities are at their height. From within, distant music.	*A magnificent banqueting hall in the Negroni Palace. The apartment is set in the most costly 15th-century style. The Princess Negroni is in the seat of honour at the banqueting table; to her right is Orsini. The party is made up of fourteen members.*
	The Duke and Borsa enter through a door at the back.	*All the banqueteers are in good spirits, except Gennaro, who is silent and pensive.*
	DUKE I must bring to a head my adventure With the unknown beauty in the town.	**VITELLOZZO** Hurrah for Rhenish, that warms and enlivens!
	BORSA The young one you've seen in church?	**GAZELLA** Cyprus is the king of wines.
	DUKE Every Sunday for three months.	**PETRUCCI** All wines, by my faith, are good.
(1)	**BORSA** Where does she live?	**LIVEROTTO** Hurrah for Madeira!
	DUKE In a remote lane; Every night a man goes there secretly.	**PETRUCCI and GAZELLA** Hurrah!
	BORSA And does she know Who her lover is?	**VITELLOZZO** Hurrah for Rhenish!
	DUKE No, she does not. *(A group of women and men cross the hall.)*	**ALL** Hurrah!
	BORSA So many beauties! Look!	**GAZELLE** Cyprus.
	DUKE Ceprano's wife excels them all.	**ALL** All wines are good. Hurrah! Hurrah!
	BORSA *(quietly)* My lord, do not let the Count hear you!	**ORSINI** I prize the wine that sparkles and flashes like a fire, that stirs to life the god of love in the seductive eyes of Princess Negroni.
(2)	**DUKE** What do I care?	**LIVEROTTO, VITELLOZZO** Hurrah for Princess Negroni!
	BORSA He might tell some other lady.	**ORSINI** Hurrah!
	DUKE That certainly wouldn't trouble me.	**LIVEROTTO, VITELLOZZO** Hurrah for Madeira!

(1)

(3)

DUKE
This woman or that, to me they're the same
As all the others I see around me:
I don't surrender command of my heart
To one beauty more than another.
Their charm is the gift
With which fate gladdens life:
If today one finds favour with me.
Tomorrow it may be another's turn.
Constancy, that tyrant of the heart,
We detest as a bitter ill.
Let him he faithful who will:
There is no love without freedom.
At husbands' jealous fury,
At lovers' rage, I mock:
I challenge even Argus's hundred eyes
Once any beauty has aroused me.
The above; Count Ceprano follows some way after his wife, who is partnered by another cavalier; Rigoletto; ladies and gentlemen enter from various parts.

Minuet and Perigordin

DUKE
(With much gallantry to the Countess Ceprano, coming forward to meet her.)
Are you leaving? How cruel!

COUNTESS CEPRANO
I'm obliged to return to Ceprano
With my husband.

(4)

DUKE
But your luminous beauty
Should shine here at court like the sun.
Every heart here should beat faster for you.
For you the flame of love,
already powerfully kindled.
Intoxicates, overwhelms, burns up my heart.
(with emphasis, kissing her hand)

COUNTESS CEPRANO
Restrain yourself!
(He offers her his arm and leaves with her.)

RIGOLETTO
(who encounters Count Ceprano)
What's that upon your head.
Count Ceprano?
(Ceprano makes a gesture of impatience and follows the Duke.)

(5)

RIGOLETTO
(to the courtiers)
He's fuming, do you see?

BORSA AND CHORUS
How entertaining!

RIGOLETTO
Indeed!

BORSA AND CHORUS
The Duke is out for amusement.

RIGOLETTO
Isn't he always? What's new about that?
Gaming, drinking, amusement, dancing,
Battles and feasting, that is his life.

ALL
Hurrah!
Blest are all who drink to her!
Let's drink to her fine eyes!
Love shaped her.
Venus showered upon her all her gifts.

PETRUCCI, GAZELLA
A toast!

LIVEROTTO, VITELLOZZO
A toast!

ALL
Hurrah for Princess Negroni! *(they drink)*

GUBETTA *(aside, rising)*
They are already drunk:
it were prudent to leave them alone.

GENNARO *(aside, walking away)*
I am wearied.

Orsini
So? Gennaro, are you leaving us?
Listen to the new drinking-song
I wrote the other day.

GUBETTA *(laughing)*
Ah, ah!

ORSINI
Who is laughing?

GUBETTA
Everyone here is laughing.

ORSINI
Why?

GUBETTA *(mocking him)*
Ah, ah, ah! The great song-writer!

ORSINI
Are you insulting me?

GUBETTA
If laughter is an insult
I cannot help that. *(laughs)*

ORSINI
Are you insulting me?
(Gubetta laughs) Castilian scoundrel!

GUBETTA
Roman rogue! *(Orsini grabs a knife.)*

LADIES
Heavens! They are fighting!
(Orsini's friends hold him back.)

LIVEROTTO, VITELLOZZO, PETRUCCI, GAZELLA
What are you doing? Calm down!

LADIES
Let's get away from here.
(They withdraw.)

(1)

(5)

Now he's laying siege to the Countess,
While her husband stands by, fretting.
(exit)

The above and Marullo, entering in haste.

MARULLO
Great news! Great news!

CHORUS
What is it? Tell us!

MARULLO
You'll never believe it.

CHORUS
Go on, tell us!

MARULLO *(laughing)*
Ha! ha! Rigoletto . . .

CHORUS
Well?

MARULLO
It's fantastic!

(6)

CHORUS
He's lost his hump? He's no longer crooked?

MARULLO
It's even stranger! The fool has . . .

CHORUS
Out with it!

MARULLO
A mistress.

CHORUS
A mistress? Who'd believe that?

MARULLO
The hunchback has turned into Cupid.

CHORUS
That monster Cupid? a charming Cupid!
The above and the Duke, followed by Rigoletto and, later, by Ceprano.

ORSINI, GUBETTA
I will give you, madman,
something to remember
that will keep you evermore
sober and restrained!

LIVEROTTO, etc.
That's enough, good heavens!
Have some respect for our hostess.
You'll have the whole city
running to see what's happening!

LIVEROTTO
No fighting, no fighting now!

VITELLOZZO
There will be time enough tomorrow
for you to fight like soldiers,
not with daggers like common assassins.

ORSINI, GENNARO, GUBETTA
That's true.

GENNARO
But what did we do with our swords?

ORSINI
We left them outside.

GENNARO, PETRUCCI, GUBETTA, GAZELLA
Think no more about it.

GUBETTA
Let's drink, gentlemen!

GAZELLA
But meanwhile, frightened,
the ladies have left us.

GUBETTA
They will return, and we will humbly
ask forgiveness.

A SERVANT
(dressed in black, carries round a bottle)
Wine from Syracuse.

ALL
The very best, by heaven!
(All pour some wine and drink. Gubetta pours his over his shoulder.)

(1)

DUKE *(to Rigoletto)*
There's no greater nuisance than Ceprano!
His dear wife fascinates me.

RIGOLETTO
Then abduct her.

DUKE
You say that;
but how?

(7)

RIGOLETTO
This evening.

DUKE
And what about the Count?

GENNARO *(aside, to Orsini)*
Maffio, did you see that?
The Spaniard is not drinking.

(2)

ORSINI *(to Gennaro)*
What matter? It's only natural:
he's probably drunk.

GUBETTA *(staggering)*
Now, if he wishes, my friends,
Orsini can scribble all the verses he likes,
for this wine makes every man a poet.

ORSINI
I will, too, in spite of you.
All, except Orsini A song, Orsini.

(1)

ORSINI
To happiness I have the key,
I have proved it, my friends, you'll agree,

RIGOLETTO
Isn't there a prison?

DUKE
Ah, no.

RIGOLETTO
Well then, exile.

DUKE
Nor that, fool.

RIGOLETTO
Then his head . . .
(making gestures of cutting it off)

COUNT CEPRANO *(aside)*
(Black-hearted villain!)

DUKE
(Clapping the Count on the shoulder)
What do you say, this head?

(8)

RIGOLETTO
That's reasonable. What can one do
with a head like that? What's it worth?

COUNT CEPRANO
(drawing his sword in fury)
You scoundrel!

DUKE *(to Ceprano)*
No more, sir . . .

RIGOLETTO
He makes me laugh.

CHORUS *(among themselves)*
(He's lost his temper!)

DUKE *(to Rigoletto)*
Come here, you fool.
You always carry a jest too far.
The wrath you arouse may rebound on you.

RIGOLETTO
What harm can befall me?
I don't fear them;
No one will touch the Duke's favourite.

COUNT CEPRANO *(aside, to the courtiers)*
Revenge on the jester!
Which of us has not a score
To settle with him for his malice?
Revenge!

BORSA, MARULLO, CHORUS
But how?

(9)

COUNT CEPRANO
Tomorrow, let those
Who dare come armed to meet me.

BORSA. MARULLO, CHORUS
We will.

COUNT CEPRANO
Tonight.

for whether the sky be blue or grey,
hot or freezing cold the day,
I joke and I drink, and the madmen
who think of tomorrow I scorn.
Tomorrow who knows what may happen,
enjoy life today while you can.

(1)

GUBETTA, LIVEROTTO, etc.
Who knows what may happen tomorrow,
enjoy life today while you can. *(A bell tolls.)*

VOICES WITHIN
The joys of the ungodly melt
like morning mist.

GENNARO
Strange voices!

ORSINI
Someone is playing a joke on us.

(2)

ALL
Who could it be?

ORSINI
I'll lay a wager that the ladies
are behind this prank.

ALL, except ORSINI
Another verse, Orsini.

ORSINI
The verse is ready.
While we're young
we should live our lives fully,
and pleasure will help time pass slowly;
if pallid old age should appear
at my shoulder, inviting to fear,
then I jest and I drink and the madmen
who think of tomorrow I scorn.
Tomorrow who knows what may happen, etc.

ALL
Yes, tomorrow who knows, etc.
(The bell tolls again.)

VOICES WITHIN
The joys of the ungodly melt
like morning mist.
(The torches go out.)

(1)

ORSINI
Gennaro!

GENNARO
Maffio! See?
The torches have gone out!

ORSINI
This is more than a joke.

ALL
Let's get away . . .
All the doors are shut! Where are we?
(The far door opens and Lucrezia appears
dressed all in black, accompanied
by armed men.)

LUCREZIA
In the power of Lucrezia Borgia.

(3)

(9)

BORSA, MARULLO, CEPRANO, CHORUS
So be it.
Revenge on the jester!
Which of us has not a score
To settle with him for his malice?
(Dancers flock on to the stage.)
All is gaiety and pleasure.
Everything invites us to enjoyment!
See, does this not seem
The very kingdom of revelry?
The above and Count Monterone.

ALL *(in horror)*
Ah! We are lost!

LUCREZIA
Yes, I am the Borgia.
An entertainment, a sad one, you gave me
in Venice: I return your hospitality
with a supper in Ferrara.

ALL
Oh, we are betrayed!

(3)

(10)

COUNT MONTERONE *(outside)*
Let me speak to him.

DUKE
No.

COUNT MONTERONE *(entering)*
I insist.

ALL
Monterone!

COUNT MONTERONE
(with noble pride, gazing at the Duke)
Yes, Monterone . . . my voice like thunder
Shall assail you everywhere.

LUCREZIA
In vain did you believe yourselves
safe from punishment:
for the insult my revenge is already complete:
five shrouds are ready for your cadavers,
for the poison you have drunk works quickly.

GENNARO *(stepping forward)*
Five are not enough: you need a sixth.

LUCREZIA
Gennaro! . . . Oh God!

GENNARO
I am quite willing to die with my friends.

(11)

RIGOLETTO
(to the Duke, imitating Monterone's voice)
Let me speak to him.
(advancing with mock gravity)
You conspired, my lord, against our person,
And we in gracious clemency pardoned you.
What madness is, to keep complaining
All the time about your daughter's honour?

COUNT MONTERONE
(looking at Rigoletto with angry contempt)
Fresh insults! Ah yes, I'll come . . .
(to the Duke) And interrupt your orgies . . .
I'll raise my voice
So long as I see the foul insult
To my family remaining unavenged:
And even if you send me to my execution,
My grisly ghost will return,
Carrying my severed head, crying
To the world and to God for vengeance.

LUCREZIA *(to the soldiers)*
Hurry: bolt all the doors,
and whatever noise you hear,
let no one dare to enter this room.

ORSINI, LIVEROTTO, VITELLOZZO, PETRUCCI, GAZELLA
Gennaro!

GENNARO
My friends! . . . My friends!

LUCREZIA
Go.

ALL
Oh, miserable wretches that we are!
(They are all dragged away except Gennaro.)

(4)

(12)

DUKE
No more; arrest him.

RIGOLETTO
He's mad.

CHORUS
Such words!

LUCREZIA
You here also? Did you not flee?
What adverse destiny kept you here?

GENNARO
All, all did I foresee.

LUCREZIA
You are poisoned again.

(13)

COUNT MONTERONE
(to the Duke and Rigoletto)
May you both be accursed!
'Tis base, o Duke, to set your curs
Upon a dying lion,
(to Rigoletto)
And you, vile snake,
Who mock at a father's grief,
My curse be upon you!

GENNARO
(takes out the phial containing the antidote)
I have the remedy.

LUCREZIA
Ah! I remember, ah!
I give thanks to heaven.

(14)

RIGOLETTO *(aside, overcome)*
(Horror! what do I hear?)

ALL *(except Rigoletto)*
O you who dared disturb our pleasure,
Guided here by a demon of hell,
Get you hence, your words are vain.
Old man, fear your prince's wrath . . .
You have provoked it, you will repent it.
This outburst has sealed your doom. *(Exit Monterone between two halberdiers; the rest follow the Duke into the other room.)*

GENNARO
With my friends I shall die,
or with them I shall share it.

LUCREZIA
Ah! It is barely enough for you,
there's not sufficient for your friends!

GENNARO
Not sufficient?

LUCREZIA
No.

GENNARO
Then, madam, we shall all die.

LUCREZIA
Ah! What are you saying?

GENNARO
You'll be the first, so prepare yourself
to die by my hand.

LUCREZIA
I? Gennaro!

GENNARO
Yes!

LUCREZIA
Listen, madman.

GENNARO
I am determined.

Lucrezia *(aside)*
What can I say? Or do?

GENNARO *(takes a knife from the table.)*
Prepare yourself.

LUCREZIA
Pitiless man! Could you wound me, kill me?

GENNARO
Yes, I can, I am desperate: all, all have you
taken from me. No more delay.

LUCREZIA
Ah! Stay your hand!

GENNARO
Prepare yourself.

LUCREZIA
Gennaro!

GENNARO *(resolutely)*
Prepare yourself.

(4)

LUCREZIA
Stay . . . Ah! You are a Borgia . . .

GENNARO *(dropping the knife)*
I?

LUCREZIA
They were your forbears and mine.
Save yourself from committing a horrendous
crime, do not spill your own blood.

GENNARO
I, a Borgia!
(weeping) Oh God! I can't believe it!

(5)

ETD

LUCREZIA
Ah! Ask no more.
Listen, ah, listen to me, I implore you,
not for the sake of saving my life!
I die a thousand deaths each day,
a thousand times in my wounded heart I pray
that you, that you at least
I'll never wish to harm.
Drink, drink . . . oh, hasten,
do, to counteract the poison!

GENNARO
I am a Borgia!

LUCREZIA
Time flies, do as I say,
oh, hasten to counteract the poison!

GENNARO *(listening)*
Maffio is dying.

LUCREZIA
Do as I say, for your mother's sake!

GENNARO
Away: you are the sole cause of her pain.

LUCREZIA
No, no, Gennaro . . .

GENNARO
You crushed her . . .

LUCREZIA
Do not think so.

GENNARO
What did you do to her?

LUCREZIA
She lives, she lives, and speaks to you
in this pain and terror of mine.

GENNARO
Oh God! Not you?

LUCREZIA
Yes, I am she.

(5)

GENNARO
You! Almighty God! I faint.
(sinking into a chair)
Mother, though I have lived my life
far from the maternal breast,
a compassionate God at least in death
unites us. Mother, may I breathe my
last breath upon your heart.

LUCREZIA
My son!

GENNARO
May I breathe my last . . .

LUCREZIA
God!

GENNARO
. . . may I breathe my last . . .

LUCREZIA
Oh, help me! Help me!

GENNARO
. . . mother . . . *(He dies.)*

(6)

ETD

LUCREZIA
Ah! He is dead! *(A noise is heard outside. The doors open.) My son! . . . He is dead! My son! (The Duke enters with entourage.)*

DUKE ALFONSO
Where is the fellow?
Where is he?

LUCREZIA
There! *(pointing to Gennaro's body)*
Behold him . . . He was my son, my hope, my comfort; he could have stemmed God's wrath, he seemed to make me pure again. Now he's dead all light has gone, my heart has died with him. On my head now falls the bolt of heaven's punishment.

COURTIERS
Secret guilt! Horrible fate!
Help her, she's dying!
(Lucrezia collapses into the arms of her ladies-in-waiting.)

(6)

The Donizetti extract (DECCA 1989) runs to thirty minutes and fifty-three seconds, the Verdi extract to fifteen minutes and twenty-three seconds. Assuming unity of time, place and action, real and story time correspond.

These terms need elaboration. There is in narrative a literary temporal displacement technique that has also become an operatic convention, and which in these two extracts become patently obvious: what in retrospect we call 'real time' and 'suspended time'. When Verdi had barely launched his career and was still experimenting with *Rochester* (now lost) before turning his attention to writing *Oberto*, he would have found, as had his predecessors, the fundamentally problematic storytelling tug-of-war between those areas of the musical and literary texture where the dramatic development takes place in real time (the recitatives) and those where the dramatic development, if any, takes place in suspended time (the arias, choral sections, ensembles and ballets). Brian Trowell reflects on these in a discussion of the preoccupation in some circles with finding a correlation between opera and the more continuous development and uniform time scale of spoken drama ('Words for music' 12 January 2003).

In the *Borgia* extract, there is a significant block of text (the 'Brindisi' and its context) in which the plot does not develop in favour of musico-literary description. In fact, despite the verbosity of the text in comparison with the Piave extract, the plot line is confined to only six real plot elements. (1) Gennaro and his group of friends are making merry at table: they squabble, and the female guests leave the room; (2) they realize something is wrong from the off-stage chorus; (3) Lucrezia triumphantly enters, declaring that they have all been poisoned; (4) Gennaro presents himself (Lucrezia believed him to be out of town);

(5) their mother-son relationship is revealed; and (6) to Lucrezia's bitter anguish, Gennaro refuses to take the antidote, because there is not enough to save him and his friends; he dies with a request that she welcomes him into her arms as her son. The story line is even simpler: having lured them into a trap, La Borgia poisons Gennaro and his friends, because they made a mockery of the 'Borgia' name, changing it to 'Orgia'. Gennaro has insufficient antidote to save him and all his friends, and refuses to take it, and Lucrezia, the woman he had suspected of murdering his mother, and who in fact *is* his mother, must watch him die. The difference here between story time and suspended time is obvious: Donizetti takes almost thirty-one minutes to cover six plot events.

The story line in the Verdi extract is also simple, and in this scene there is virtually no difference between real and suspended time. Mantua prowls for another sexual conquest, his attention initially divided between the Countess Ceprano and the unknown girl he has seen at church, and of whom we know nothing yet, except that she is visited each night by an unidentified man. The courtiers eventually mistake her as Rigoletto's mistress. The ball is interrupted by Monterone, whose daughter was seduced and then discarded by Mantua. As Rigoletto taunts Monterone, he calls down a father's curse on both Mantua and Rigoletto. The plot line is much more eventful, because Verdi develops poetic and noetic elements in parallel (through the use of *parola scenica* almost by default), while in the *Borgia* extract the development of these elements are discrete.

Events are stacked tightly within the fifteen-and-a-half minutes of action in the *Rigoletto* extract. (1) While a ball is in progress, Mantua enters with one of his courtiers, Borsa. They are discussing the beautiful girl Mantua has been watching every day at church, courting her discreetly. He has even found out where she lives by following her, but we are not told who she is, although, in operatic terms, it is almost inevitable that she will have some connection with Rigoletto. (2) Borsa focuses Mantua's attention on the Countess Ceprano, with whom the Duke has already started a liaison. (3) Mantua then gives vent to his easy-going attitude towards women, and his morals in general. (4) A minuet follows during which Mantua approaches the Countess and has a conversation with her. (5) He then takes her by the arm and leads her out, while Ceprano watches helplessly as his wife succumbs to Mantua's wiles. Rigoletto enters. He is a deformed hunchback, for which he makes up by the venom of his sarcastic wit. He makes fun of Ceprano as his wife disappears with Mantua. (6) Rigoletto exits as members of the court dance the *perigourdine*. Marullo, another courtier, enters and tells the other courtiers—all of whom hate Rigoletto—that he has discovered that

the jester has a mistress, and also where she lives. (7) The Duke returns with Rigoletto, complaining that Ceprano is getting in the way of his progress with his wife. (8) Rigoletto suggests (ironically) that Mantua orders Ceprano's assassination, and abducts his wife. This is too much for even the unscrupulous Mantua, who warns Rigoletto that he might be pushing Ceprano too far. (9) The courtiers decide to join forces with Ceprano to teach Rigoletto a lesson. At the same time the jester boasts that no-one would dare touch the Duke's favourite. (10) The party returns to its gaiety, but is interrupted by the aged Count Monterone, whose daughter was seduced by Mantua and then discarded. (11) Rigoletto approaches the old man, mocking him, but (12) Monterone continues denouncing Mantua and Rigoletto, until Mantua orders his arrest. (13) As Monterone is taken to prison, he calls down on the Duke's and jester's heads a father's curse. (14) Rigoletto, patently superstitious, is horrified.

In both the extracts the plot events are numbered. Accordingly the reader has a graphic representation, not only of the number of events that make up each story line, but also the frequency with which these events follow upon each other. It is easy to see which plot carries the greatest variety of information, and how quickly one event follows upon the next, or, comparatively speaking, how static the *Borgia* plot is in relation to the *Rigoletto* plot.

Just from this brief review of two operatic texts set within two decades of each other by different composers, the literary *status quo* Verdi inherited is clear. It also shows what the characteristics would be of a libretto he would find appealing, and interesting enough as theatre to base an opera on it.

Perhaps the most striking feature of the two texts arranged side by side is the sheer volume of Felice Romani's *opera seria* text as opposed to Francesco Maria Piave's *melodramma*. Verdi manages to pack fourteen distinct events into fifteen minutes of copy perhaps two-thirds of the length of the Donizettian *scena*. However, bulk means little; it would be possible, as Rossini once jokingly suggested, to set a laundry list to music.

These are all fairly subjective criteria, but sufficiently 'concrete' for us to be able to base factual deductions on them. For example, the stage setting in both scenes is of a party. In the one instance (*Borgia*) the event was specifically orchestrated to lure and trap a group of unarmed young men, with the express purpose to kill them. One rarely finds such elaborate 'dressing' of the stage in a Verdi *melodrama*, and then only with a very plausible motivation. The last scene of *Falstaff* comes to mind of course, but that is a *farsa*. The scene from *Rigoletto*

has another function altogether. The impression with which it leaves the spectator is not that this is a *event*, but a *lifestyle*. One has the impression that his is Mantua's only pastime, and his sole reason for these *soirees* is that of attracting female socialites, married or single, to the flame of his unbridled, raw sexuality. Note, too, the florid metaphor of the Donizetti text as opposed to the matter-of-fact conversational style in Verdi, even in the supposedly more 'lyrical' *arioso* sections. More important still, it shows the developmental progress of the librettist from *artisan* to *artist*, which I interrogate under the next heading.

The Italian librettist as dramatist: artisan *versus* artist

> The term 'libretto' has been extended from its literal meaning of 'small book' to denote the literary content of an opera, not merely its separate physical existence. [. . .] It is evident that 'literary content' is an insufficient description, [because] the libretto, unlike the play text, is only part of the [theatrical] blueprint (Trowell 12 January 2003).

Neglected until fairly recently, the study of operatic libretti in their own right has become an important musicological and theatrical area of concern, as has the analysis of all musical narrative. Contemporary investigations focusing on the nature and provenance of operatic libretti remain limited, however. Only since the 1980s have serious studies been undertaken round the value of the set text. Issues that arise include whether the libretto might be regarded as art, or rather as craft; what makes a realist libretto; whether the development of the libretto followed the same path as other literary forms; and the nature of the composer-librettist collaboration. My first port of call is the issue of whether the libretto ought to be viewed as craft as opposed to art.

Adriana Corazzol remarks that 'On the level of content [. . .] the distance between *fin-de-siècle* literature and opera seems rather small [. . .]. The theatrical version of Verga's *La lupa* (from the novella of the same name) was simultaneously created as a libretto in which De Roberto acted as versifier; it became a spoken drama only after Puccini and Mascagni had rejected it' (46). Likewise, Albert Visetti (146) is of the opinion that the operatic poem should be placed under the broad heading of art, and notes 'The opera [. . .] is now the domain of the poet. The poet in [the] etymological sense—the maker, the creator, not the rhymemonger [*sic* . . .]' (146). Even the illustrious Hugo Wolf spent his entire life aspiring to the 'artistry' of opera; Susan Youens notes that composers of song remained 'unworthy of respect until they had successfully transferred their word-tone predilections to the larger arena of opera' (277). On some levels, then, the libretto might indeed be considered art.

However, such levels of literary artistry, or even the perception of the libretto at those levels, is exceptional. If, as Reinhard Pauly suggests, 'the professional musician or musician was, as a rule, looked down upon as an artisan rather than as an artist' (222), then I suspect that the libretto was equally regarded as craft. The operatic text, moreover, never achieved the same status as the music. In addition, the libretto has a reputation that one operatic tale is much like another. This is a remnant of the Metastasian tradition in Italy and the Scribean in nineteenth-century France: that one text was frequently set many times by different composers, with various levels of theatrical success in each case.

A number of related points arise, most of them noted by Wystan Auden. Primarily, he views the libretto as a set of directions—a 'private letter'—addressed to the composer, not as a literary work directed at the audience (Weisstein 120). Rather more cynically perhaps, he holds that the librettists's first responsibility is towards writing a text that might be successfully set to music. If, in the process, he manages to write what might also be considered good poetry, then that is a bonus. But the librettist's first task is not to write *good poetry* for its own sake (in Porter 418).

Auden is also ready to point out that the librettist need waste no time considering the probability of the plots he creates. All that matters, he holds, is that the text must be singable. Auden argues that 'a good libretto plot is a melodrama in both the strict and the conventional sense of the word;' such a libretto gives that characters the opportunity of being overwhelmed by putting them in situations too tragic or fantastic for 'words' (Auden 'Reflections' 8-9). The librettist's biggest problem, Auden warns, is that he is likely to be seduced into writing 'beautiful' but not 'singable' words in the verses. He holds that poetry is a reflective art, and not driven by what he calls 'the interjections of immediate emotion'. By contrast, music is immediate. Auden's conclusion does not auger well for libretto as high art, then: 'it follows that the words of a song cannot be poetry. [. . .] In song, the notes must be free to do whatever they choose and the words must be able to do what they are told', he observes ('Reflections' 9).

Auden is not alone in alluding to librettistic craftsmanship *versus* artistry. Alessandro Roccatagliati debates the value of the libretto as autonomous rather than functional text, concluding that the value of the libretto lies in that it always appears to be dominated by, or even hidden behind, something else—this 'something else' is the music, of course—even when the literary value of the libretto is exceptionally high (83). He quotes Groos & Parker on how the scholar ought

to interpret the libretto, and he concludes that the scholar's primary concern should not be the value of the text, but how the text is interpreted in the music (*Reading* 341 in Roccatagliati 90). He takes special care to warn that the value of the libretto should not be overrated, because in the final analysis the libretti 'for the composers, [are] nothing more than pretexts' (90).

Karin Pendle, too, debates the value of the operatic text, tracing its nineteenth-century origins to Scribe and the well-made play. She notes the 'predictability' of the romantic opera libretto which derived its formulas from Scribe's technique for creating well structured events, and she observes that were always

> clearly prepared and resolved; [. . .] characters [that] were familiar types presented in a straightforward manner; and [an] audience [that] could easily follow the complications of the intrigue'. Above all else she describes the well-made play as an ideal basis for music, because it has 'a strong, clearly organized plot set in motion by characters to whom a certain humanity is lacking' (537).

Again, aside from the 'certain humanity that is lacking', the origins of the libretto, including the classical Greek, is obvious.

However, Verdi would never have settled for characters that 'lacked that certain humanity'. As Auden tells us, the 'secondary world' of the Italian operatic libretto would only hold the attention of the audience if it had something to say about contemporary life. It is here that I pick up the thread of Verdi in respect of the libretto. Auden is careful to emphasize that the most successful heroes and heroines in opera are mythical figures. 'That is to say', he observes, 'whatever their historical or geographical setting, they embody some element of human nature or some aspect of the human condition which is a permanent concern of human beings irrespective of their time and place' (Auden in Weisstein 114). Thus I return to Verdi's brand of realism as I formulated it in Chapter 1: the realism of the playwright who had 'the power of spiritual insight, [the] formative intuition, the capacity not only to imitate "reality" but to "invent" it' (Maecklenburg and Baker 212), not the Realism of the poet or playwright bent on turning his art into a philosophical movement. It is that realism that inspired Verdi to drive his librettists in search of theatrical 'truth'. Early Verdian biographer Arthur Pougin notes that the composer in fact almost entirely wrote his own libretti. Pougin argues that he needed his librettists only for versifying the poem. In this respect, then, Verdi's librettists were very much the artisans rather than the artists. Verdi found the 'intense emotions, violent clashes, and utter tragedy' himself (Sacks 452), because he was always on the lookout for theatrical works that contained these elements. Pougin emphasizes that all that was left for the poet to do was to turn this raw material into verse.

The Verdian libretto as drama

Jay Nicolaisen observes that human drama remained the ultimate aim for Italian opera throughout the century during which *opera seria* reigned supreme. He also notes that the libretto

> was concerned with specific people [. . .] in specific situations. Aida is not intended to be a symbol for anything, nor is she a mere excuse for pageantry and spectacle. She is an Ethiopian princess, a slave, the lover of Radamès, and the victim of Amneris' jealousy[; . . . h]er story neither teaches nor uplifts us. [. . .] It opens no new worlds. Or rather it opens one very specific world: that in which Aida lived (21).

The relationship between Verdi and his librettists and the demands he made on them can perhaps best be deduced from his letters to them, responses both to new material his poets wrote, or letters they wrote in reply to his correspondence. Verdi's letters abound with meticulous stylistic directions, as the much quoted letter to Ghislanzoni cited in Chapter 1 reflects.

When Verdi was working on *Alzira* (1844), and therefore fairly early in his career, he was already impressing on his librettist (Salvadore Cammarano in this instance) the importance of theatrical impact. By the time he had turned to *La battaglia di Legnano* (his fourteenth opera, written in 1848), his diffident tone had changed subtly. Nine years of 'apprenticeship' were behind him and he had thirteen operas under his belt, so he could risk a more direct approach. After the composition of *La battaglia di Legnano* Verdi's contribution to the development of the libretto continued to escalate. By then he not only made suggestions about the general drift of particular scenes, but prescribed to the poet the content of what he wanted his characters to say. While involved with *Luisa Miller* in 1849 (again with Salvadore Cammarano), his instructions became even more explicit. By 1850 and 1851, when Verdi was entertaining the idea of setting *Re Lear*, and certainly while he was writing *Il trovatore*, the composer supplied Cammarano with fully worked out synopses of both operas, providing a scenic breakdown of the action he required the poet to supply.

The composer's demands on librettists and others were entirely in the interests of greater dramatic truth. 'Verdi's interventions were governed', writes Gilles de Van 'by two great principles, brevity and theatricality'. De Van quotes Patrick J Smith as saying that 'generally speaking, every literary source that was made into a libretto was reduced by half to two-thirds' (79). Since the libretto was usually significantly more compact than its source, Verdi's requirements must therefore have been entirely in the interests of good theatre.

Trowell, among others, has suggested that librettists had no easy task. We have established that they were master craftsmen, but had little scope for creativity. He quotes Andrea Maffei as saying that the poet's greatest skill lies in constructing miniature dramas which the lens of music will magnify. He adds that the narrative, the application of local colour and historical explanations had to be cut drastically, and he also observes that the audience was more often than not familiar with the content of the opera:

> [The librettist] will certainly be able to rely on the audience's bringing with them to the theatre a whole train of associations deriving from the original author's treatment of a subject, and will be spared much of the need to recreate them in time consuming descriptions and explanations ('Words for Music' 12 January 2003).

By contrast, a comparison of Verdi's operas and their libretti against a checklist of nineteenth-century realist or naturalist characteristics reveals that all the elements were already present in his operatic corpus, even in *Oberto* (1839). It remained only to draw his subject matter from contemporary nineteenth-century life (excluding the poems of *La traviata* and *Stiffelio*). Verdi's efforts remained directed throughout his career at securing texts through which he could ensure that his operas would represent, if not 'a slice of life' in the truly naturalist sense of the notion, then certainly 'a slice of [a] life.'

In view of these narrative conventions and problems, the question becomes: Was the libretto Verdi found in the 1830s a fit vehicle for the composer; or did he require from his librettists a more focused style of libretto writing that would be more in line with the realist Zeitgeist of the last half of the nineteenth century? To answer this question, I turned firstly to the style of libretto that predated Verdi (see the extract from *Borgia*), with all its own particular problems and idiosyncrasies. Presently I turn to the libretti Verdi coaxed from his poets, in particular to *Stiffelio*, a text I selected because of its realist leanings which makes it the only other one of Verdi's twenty-eight operas besides *La traviata* a work that most narrowly approaches the notion of musical realism.

Most composers appeared to have been satisfied with the librettos as their poets supplied them, and required few changes, apart from *virgolati*. We know, though, that Bellini had Romani rewrite 'Casta diva' a number of times before he declared himself happy with it. However, Verdi evolved a working relationship with his poets unparalleled before among Italian opera composers, and even after, with the exception of Giacomo Puccini, who laboured particularly intensively and anxiously over his libretti.

Here my interest lies in how the libretto develops as narrative, because a text would have served the composer as a realist means only if it were successful as a realist narrative in the first place. Secondly, I attempt to show how the libretto for Verdi is a story that can be reflected realistically in the musical text, not because of the mimetic quality of the music, but because of the narrative quality of the words.

Verdi, libretto and theatre

Scholars hold that collective cultural changes of mind result from crises, usually revolutions:

> it is significant that 'the very word "revolution" was used in connection with music (specifically with the operas of Gluck) well before it gained political currency, conceivably because drastic changes of an aesthetic nature tend to entail considerably less personal risk than public violence' (Ringer 1).

The Goncourts' *Germinie Lacerteux* was influenced directly by the spread of the Industrial Revolution (1750-1850) and the social upsets that came in its wake. In France, the seat of modern philosophical thought, Orsini failed in his assassination attempt on Napoleon III (1858), upon which followed even greater political repression in that country than before. It is not surprising that Berlioz's *Les Troyens* (1856-1858) would reflect this Zeitgeist, but also that the French, as a means of popular escapism, would welcome Offenbach's *Orphée aux enfers*, which premièred at the Théâtre des Bouffes-Parisiens in 1858.

Many Verdian scholars argue that the development of the composer's dramaturgy too, was influenced by political upheaval. Rosen and Zelner also advance the notion that the French and Industrial Revolutions inspired romanticism and realism (12, 162-163). As long ago as 1970, however, Gabriele Baldini contested generally held ideas that the *Risorgimento* had sparked Verdi's creative impetus. '[. . .] the Italians *almost shamelessly identified* [italics the author's] with the choruses in [*Nabucco* and *I Lombardi*]: as songs of captivity. But Verdi played no part in this liberation: [. . . T]he message was posthumous—and above all accidental' (48). James Parakilas shares this notion: 'The experience [of audiences singing along with performances] is hard to imagine anywhere but in Italy and with any operas but the masterpieces of Verdi, *which Italian audiences consider their national treasure*s [emphasis added]' (1992).

Although Verdi's choice of subject usually avoided contemporary events, his subject matter was always based on events in the life of someone probably fictitious, but certainly plausible. Verdi and his poets always tried to observe and

experience events in a character's life through the five senses, a realist hallmark, no matter in which epoch the work is set. Verdi's choice of libretto is not the result of an external revolution or political struggle, but of his own underlying evolutionary need to present his public with an authentic representation of a tale from the lives of his characters. Herbert Kupferberg notes that Verdi and Wagner would have produced the same operas even if one or the other had not existed. Verdi wrote to a friend that he would never have been capable of setting *Tristan* or *Der Ring* (88-89). He would also not have set *Linda di Chamounix* or *L'elisir d'amore* or even *Il barbiere*, Rossini had noted (Conati *Interviews* 20). The characters are not driven by their own demons, as are Otello, Rigoletto or Abigaille, to name only three. No matter how serious the action gets, the characters remain actors, and they are not controlled sufficiently by heredity, environment or historical moment to engage Verdi's theatrical interest. Neither do they, as Nicolaisen suggests, 'open one specific world: that in which [the character] lived', because, driven by a set of operatic conventions, the *opera seria* librettist was required to provide a train of *tableaux* in which a series of emotions are depicted with very little scope for the development of dramatic narrative, either within each scene, or between them.

Verdi's operas have been categorized along various lines. Budden's encyclopaedic study distinguishes between 'pioneering' (*La traviata*, *Simon Boccanegra*, *La forza del destino*, *Don Carlos* and *Macbeth*) and 'conservative' (*Il trovatore*, *Les Vêpres siciliennes*, *Un ballo in maschera* and *Aida*) (2, 1978: 37). In the pioneering operas, he suggests, Verdi opens new avenues. In the conservative ones he enriches tried forms. But it is also possible to establish thematic categories. *Oberto*, *Nabucco* and *Ernani* are historical operas, as is the largest part of his output; *I Lombardi* is social-historical and *Aida* socio-political. *Un giorno di regno* and *Falstaff* are the only *farse*. The only opera in his output scholars consider essentially realist (because of its subject matter) is *La traviata*, although I disagree here, because *Stiffelio* is no less realist than *La traviata* in terms of both content and form. But the most significant point of contact between Verdi and his subject matter was determined by what would work *theatrically* rather than by what would be *fashionable*. Even when young and inexperienced, Verdi's passion was for telling the story. Some libretti are convoluted, as Budden admits regarding *La forza del destino*. He observes, '"New subjects, new verse-forms," is Verdi's cry during the preparations for *Il trovatore*' (1: 22). 'Indeed for anyone who wanted to change the pattern of opera, the verse must be the starting-point, as Wagner had begun to realize [. . .]. The variety of metres provided by

the libretto of *Les Vêpres siciliennes* was as vital to Verdi's efforts to enlarge his scope as was the *Stabreim* to Wagner's' (1: 22). However, Verdi and his poet always strove for representational realism at least, whether the opera can further be labelled historical, comical, theological or even socio-political (Conati *Interviews* 161).

The transition from a writing style in line with *opera seria* practices to one that challenges the borders of realism required of Verdi and his librettists a subtle but significant mind shift only, not a huge strategic philosophical realignment, just as the change of the complexion of nineteenth-century narrative did. Flaubert developed the simple technique of changing the mood and person of a character's words with *style indirect libre*. Verdi added another operatic narrative dimension by developing *parola scenica*, a solution that in retrospect seemed self-evident. The length of the verse line was—and still is—fundamental to the classification of Italian poetry and to the nature of the libretto. The libretti Verdi found at the start of his career were stilted, because they were bound by the convention of *versi lirici* which, outside of the recitative, was the Italian librettist's staple stylistic fodder. By suggesting that his poets create texts closer to natural speech rhythms and inflections and outside of the stricture of verse schemes such as the *endecasillabo* or *settenario*, Verdi changed the representational style of his own operas, and Italian opera in general.

Verdi's style also reflects another contemporary literary preoccupation: the contest between theatre's pre-nineteenth-century poetry format and nineteenth-century dramatists' desire to discard poetry for prose. The most striking remarks on this issue appear in the preface to Victor Hugo's *Cromwell* (1827). Hugo does not dismiss verse as dramatic base when he comments, 'Verse is the optical form of the stage. [. . .] Constructed in a certain way, it communicates its relief to things which, but for it, would be considered insignificant and trivial' (33).

Verdi and Hugo seem to agree, suggesting that bygone forms and techniques may have served their purpose and need reviewing, but not only for reviewing's sake. Hugo does not plead for well-tried techniques to be abandoned or discarded. Like Verdi, he argues that they be re-evaluated and brought up to date, adding that their detractors may have been too hasty in their negative criticism:

> Disgusted by the stiffness, the ostentation, the '*pomposo*,' of this alleged dramatic poetry, they have concluded that the elements of our poetic language were incompatible with the natural and the true. [. . .] They were mistaken. If in fact the false is predominant in the style as well as in the action of certain French tragedies, it is not the verses that should be held responsible therefore, but the versifiers (56).

Hugo suggests that what would make nineteenth-century drama more palatable for contemporary audiences is not prose, but a different style of verse. 'If we were entitled to say what, in our opinion, the style of dramatic poetry has to be', he argues, 'we would declare for a free, outspoken, sincere verse, which dares to say everything without prudery, express its meaning without seeking for words; which passes naturally from comedy to tragedy, from the sublime to the grotesque [. . .]' (56).

Hugo and Verdi must have experienced similar difficulties, Hugo with drama, Verdi with the libretto, and like Verdi, Hugo searched for similar solutions. Hugo observes that 'Another faction of the reformers incline to drama written in both prose and verse, as Shakespeare composed it [. . .]'. He continues,

> there might however, be some sort of incongruity in the transitions from one form to the other; and when a tissue is homogenous it is much stouter. The rank of a work is certain to be fixed, not according to its form but according to its intrinsic value. [. . .] There is but one weight that can turn the scale in the balance of art: that is genius (56).

Hugo need not have been concerned. As we saw elsewhere, Zola suggested that it would require an extraordinary talent to create the naturalist drama he saw as the future of theatre when he reflected on who the artist would be that would lead theatre down naturalist avenues (Bentley 366). Verdi was equal to this task, and in creating *parola scenica* as operatic realist strategy, he found a way of bridging the 'incongruity in the transitions from [prose to verse]', thus to meet the literary and dramatic requirements of a changing era.

Narrative intent to serve artist and public

> [The composer's] success lies less in comprehending the words he is setting than in feeling them musically, and in being able to convince us of the necessity of his feeling (Rorem in Schmidgall 374).

I think the point Ned Rorem makes here is that to be credible, the composer must first experience the words he is setting in terms of their poetic impact; then he has to convince his public that his experience is a valid one. In musical terms, Rorem argues, the non-verbal, musico-poetic impact is more important than the literary-dramatic, although the impact of the latter is also vital, because understanding the narrative is impossible without it. This notion again points to the principle of music's very particular multi-spatial possibilities, and how important these multiple areas of creating narrative intent are when assimilating both literary and musical messages. Moreover, modern aestheticians have rigorously researched and documented notions of multi-spatial thought in art. Edward Lippman, for one, builds an entire essay in his 'Spatial Perception and

Physical Location as Factors in Music' round the notion of the spatial foreground and background of various sounds in the musical text, and the different degrees of importance they acquire by virtue of the fact that some sound closer and therefore more prominent than others (24). The question that arises is whether the same principles apply to music and to narrative. When one subscribes to the Saussurian view according to which one model of signification in language is defined, the response must definitely be positive.

Robert Scholes has written that 'In terms of [De] Saussure's indispensable distinction between language (*langue*) and utterance (*parole*), a verbal sign in language should be conceived of not in terms of a signifier/signified relationship [. . .] but in terms of a sign/semantic field relationship: one sign with many potential meanings, some determinate, some indeterminate' (in Mitchell 203). It is not difficult to draw a parallel between my notion of a multi-spatial musical texture and the multi-spatial relationship between language and utterance on one hand, and on the other, signifier, signified and sign.

The notion of the tripartite (multi-spatial) Sausurean system of meaning as exemplified by signifier, signified and sign operates not only in respect of literature, but also of film and theatre (including opera) as extensions of narrative expression. De Saussure tells us that the signifier and signified combine to form a sign. If the transition between signifier and signified is a direct one, the sign (or the meaning of the signified in context) is quickly and logically established for the spectator. The structural narrative process, then, is determined by the creation of signs. But Roland Barthes notes that the process does not end there. Each sign in turn becomes a signifier that leads to a new signified and a sign, and so on, in a process called second order signification (Culler in Naipaul 10). He also argues that the readability of the text—or the ease with which it may be understood—depends on the smoothness of passage from signifier to signified and then on to the sign (in Hawkes 130-133). In fact, Barthes makes a fundamental distinction between two kinds of writers and of writing. He argues that there are writers for whom the activity of writing is transitive—it leads to something the author wants to have universal meaning—and there are authors for whom the activity of writing is intransitive, 'whose central concern is not to take us "through" his writing to a world beyond it, but to produce Writing' (in Macksey and Donate, quoted in Hawkes 112).

Verdi prefers a libretto with the transition between signifier and signified as short as possible. His readerliness is evident from *Oberto* (1839) to *Falstaff* (1893), and his intentions as author is always to communicate the drama of his

work to his public in as direct and effective a way as possible. I argue that Verdi falls into the first group of authors, for whom the act of writing is transitive (whom Barthes calls the *écrivant*, and who produce readerly (*lisible*) text), as opposed to those to whom he refers as the *écrivain*, whose aim is writing in itself (Wagner?), and whose style Barthes calls writerly (*scriptible*).

Verdi's stories tell themselves. His plots are strong enough to withstand artistic manipulation, even if his plots are not taken from contemporary life, and his settings are urban rather than rural. His characters react to each other because of heredity, environment and the historical moment rather than geographical location. By the time Verdi met Boito, and when this talented poet first directed his efforts to libretti for the composer, the tide had turned as far as the nineteenth-century libretto was concerned. Realist and naturalist models had been created, and it would be easy for a skilled poet such as Boito to conform to these standards. Earlier on in the century, when Verdi's art was in its infancy, it was up to the composer to set the standards. I attempt in the following pages to trace textual developments in the early part of Verdi's career through an investigation into his collaboration with Piave on *Stiffelio*, the composer's sixteenth opera dating from 1850, a work that resurfaced in revised form almost seven years later as *Aroldo* (1857), following pressure from both the Italian public and censors.

Stiffelio and the Verdian narrative

> Word choice was extremely important to Verdi, as was the proper musical setting of those words. He insisted that the opera must not be acting or mere presentation of drama-in-song but the representation of persons in and reacting to realistic situations and events; this lies at the core of his success (Stolba 536).

I turn my attention now to the operatic libretto, with reference to Piave's text for *Stiffelio* (1850). I had access to the undated Escudier edition, as well as the Ricordi edition from 1850(?). I chose this text for a number of reasons. It exists primarily as *Stiffelio* itself, of course: a collaboration between Verdi and Piave, based on the play *Le Pasteur, ou L'Évangile et le Foyer* by Romantic playwrights Émile Souvestre and Eugène Bourgeois, with their roots squarely in the well-made play, incidentally. This play was based on Souvestre's own novel *Le Pasteur d'Hommes* (1838). After an unsuccessful first run *Stiffelio* was adapted, then reappeared as *Aroldo* (1857). *Stiffelio* premièred at the Teatro Grande in Trieste on 16 November 1850. *Aroldo* had its première at the Teatro Nuovo in Rimini on 16 August 1857 (significantly *after* the première of *Simon Boccanegra*). *Stiffelio* and *Aroldo* thus demonstrate a stylistic hybridity. Although *Stiffelio* was written towards the end of Verdi's first stylistic period, *Aroldo* is in fact the third-last

opera of his second stylistic period (spanning, roughly, 1853-1862). Only *Un ballo in maschera* and *La forza del destino* followed in that period. *Stiffelio* and *Aroldo* therefore span two of Verdi's creative periods, and signify a long-term development. As a matter of interest, many Verdian scholars have questioned the existence of 'creative periods' in Verdi's output, and those who accept them do not agree on chronological borders for them. For the sake of expediency I refer to the composer's output in terms of the categorization according to which Budden has ordered and grouped the operas in his *Operas of Giuseppe Verdi Vols. 1-3*.

Already this early in his career Verdi is intent upon, if not discarding the old conventional number structure of opera, then essentially remodelling it in such a way that the sequence of parts does not get in the way of the narrative, and that inevitable structures such as the aria do not serve as empty vehicles for vocal display, but as functional elements within the narrative flow.

Although its initial run was infelicitous, as much a result of the interference of the omnipresent censors as it was because of Verdi's and Piave's first take on the plot, *Stiffelio* represents a valuable document in the composer's output. Julian Budden remarks that 'it is not difficult to see why Verdi chose it. He was tired of stock subjects; he wanted something with genuine human, as distinct from melodramatic, interest' (1: 450). In essence, *Stiffelio* is as close to the realist mark as *La traviata:* Émile Souvestre was 'well known for the high moral tone of his writings,' as Budden comments.

> *Le Pasteur*, then, was for it a modern piece, symbolizing that trend towards realism and a wider, more understanding view of humanity that marks the literature of the late nineteenth century. It deals not with type, but with a special case. [. . . Stiffelio's] instinct suggests to him a course of action which his cloth forbids. This is the central problem from which the dramatic conflict is born [. . .] (1, 1973: 451).

How this subject matter dovetails with Verdi's realist project is self-evident here. The fact that it opens a window on an instant in the life of a character or a group of characters struck sensitive chords with the realist playwright in Verdi.

The subject deals with a group of middle-class, sectarian people, a type that might certainly have existed in Verdi's day: an element of realism that deeply interested Verdi the dramatist. The composer could not have foreseen that it would strike a singularly unsympathetic note with contemporary audiences and censors alike. In the preface to Kathleen Kuzmick Hansell's 2003 definitive edition of *Stiffelio*, published jointly by the University of Chicago and BMG Ricordi in Milan (henceforth 'UC-RM'), Hansell tells us that

> The anomaly, for Italians, of a married minister, adultery, a divorce taking place on stage, and forgiveness of the sin at the drama's conclusion were so far from the stuff of the usual *melodramma* that it is also surprising Piave, ever wary of the reaction of the authorities, brought it to Verdi's attention. But it was precisely a topic diverging from the norm of Italian serious opera that the composer was seeking, one that would allow him to experiment and more easily leave behind the hackneyed formal schemes of the past' (xv*ff*).

Accordingly, *Stiffelio* required to be recast in some more acceptable form if it was going to appease censors and public alike. Tamer by far than Verdi would have liked, *Aroldo* may have mollified the censors, but it weakened the original story, as did the emergency changes Verdi and Piave had made to *Stiffelio* during its first and subsequent (unsuccessful) runs. In reality, however, *Stiffelio*'s only stylistic and dramatic drawback, matters of censure aside, is the fact that it is too big to treat in its entirety, which means that major parts of its prehistory must be left to the audience to deduce as the narrative develops, or by means of programme notes.

Data on *Stiffelio*'s libretto and its sources are scanty. Besides naming the original source as the Souvestre-Bourgeois play, reference works gloss over its genesis, with the exception of the exhaustive Preface to the definitive University of Chicago-Ricordi score. This score serves as the basis I use, to examine first *Stiffelio* as narrative, with an occasional reference to *Aroldo*.

There are many methods according to which one might explore, interrogate and analyze a text. Umberto Eco has written that art is not organized by a code, but that 'codes provide the rules which *generate* signs which make narrative' (49-50), and because I am more interested in how the libretto develops as narrative, I endeavour here to evaluate, partly through Hansell's commentary in the critical edition of *Stiffelio*, partly through my interpretation of that commentary, how Verdi applied his own code to *generate the signs that make narrative*.

It is perhaps interesting to note the route via which the text came to Verdi. Hansell is careful to emphasize that Piave in all likelihood did not work either from a copy of the Souvestre-Bourgeois play or the Souvestre novel, but from Gaetano Vestri's translation of the play into Italian as *Stifellius*. This version was published in Milan in 1848, and Hansell suggests that it 'circulated not only in printed form but also in performance, and seems to have succeeded better [in Rome] than in Paris'. She also suggests that Verdi may well have seen the play during his frequent visits to the *boulevard* theatres in Paris (2003: xv), but that he simply did not recognize its Italian title.

Hansell makes a detailed study of *Stiffelio*'s narrative flow. Her analysis appropriately describes the story and plot, and includes characterological and motivational readings of the *dramatis personae*. It also exposes unambiguously the narrative and dramatic shortcomings of *Stiffelio*'s younger brother *Aroldo*.

> The play's protagonist [. . .] was certainly a Protestant and head of a purely fictional sect called the Ahasuerians, after the wandering Jew, Ahasuerus. Souvestre had evidently named him after two Protestant historical figures called Stiffelius, as several commentators have pointed out, although the action is entirely the playwright's doing. [T]he composer [. . .] homed in on one of the salient aspects of the play, one that attracted him from the outset and that he would continue to stress throughout the opera's gestation and long afterward. As a married pastor, whose wife Lina is seduced by a playboy and feigned count (Raffaele of Leuthold) while he is away evangelizing, the protagonist must of necessity remain a Protestant minister. The time of the action is far less critical, as long as the relationships between the leading characters pertain. The conflict between Stifellius's dual roles as husband and as shepherd of his flock is the story's *raison d'être*, kindling Verdi's imagination with its dramatic possibilities for musical garb [. . .] (xv).

As this paragraph indicates, the nature of Stiffelio as theologian is central to the dramatic development. That he is a protestant pastor or minister is an important aspect of the multi-spatial narrative surface. Much of the dramatic motivation is lost when he becomes a Saxon knight in *Aroldo*. One instance of many occurs at the point in the score where Stiffelio offers his wife the option of a divorce. She yields, because Stiffelio coerces her, based on the fact that he had been using a *nom de plume* when they were first married. Having signed the divorce agreement, she then entreats him to listen to her not as a husband, but as confessor-priest. Piave and Verdi are guilty of an error of protocol here, of course. Protestant ministers do not officially hear confessions, but be that as it may, in *Stiffelio* this scene is motivated, in *Aroldo* not at all. The fact that Stiffelio is a clergyman in fact entirely motivates his conduct. Having been deceived, he turns the other cheek when struck by his wife's infidelity. His honour and reputation at stake, the reaction of a Saxon knight would have been swift, more to the point and less forgiving.

Stiffelio's supporting characters are three-dimensional as long as he remains a clergyman and evangelist. In *Aroldo* the supporting cast loses its characterological impetus and no longer holds together, because the poise of the main character in the original narrative source is clouded. The character of Lina (she has become Mina in *Aroldo*) remains in *Aroldo* 'a confused, hesitant, indecisive woman', as Hansell describes the character in her commentary on *Stiffelio* (xv).

A close reading of Hansell's characterological study of *Stiffelio* seems to suggest that Stiffelio's and Lina's personalities are shaped by the characters in relief to which they appear: Raffaele, Jorg, Stankar, Dorothea and Federico. My own impression, however, is that in the Piave original (as derived from Souvestre, via Vestri) the reverse applies. The supporting characters are determined by Stiffelio the minister and by his relationship with his wife. It is only in the reworking of the drama as *Aroldo* where the reverse begins to apply, and the lead characters are reflected by the supporting *dramatis personae*.

To illustrate this Hansell gives a line by line extract of sections from the original play, which she compares with the *Stiffelio* libretto, emphasizing what she calls its 'librettistic' conventions. She argues that

> [. . .] the play's text contained ample fodder for deriving a Verdian libretto, since its language was itself filled with 'librettistic' conventions, among them several phrases that would serve the composer as his 'parole sceniche' (or clinch words), around which he built a long sequence. That is why Verdi would remain adamant about the critical importance of retaining such verses as 'Ah! Sacerdote sono!' and 'Ministro, confessatemi . . . ' in their original, uncensored form (2003: xix).

But this is not necessarily *parola scenica*, or the source of success of the Verdian libretto. Hansell draws the same conclusion as others concerning *parola scenica*, where it occurs and how it presents, also making provision for a plural (she refers to *parole sceniche*), suggesting that *parola scenica* translates to words (or phrases) that illuminate those around it. On the surface this description is accurate enough, and, as I read the concept, partly true. But *parola scenica* does not denote a singular, it is a compound noun such as *poetry*. It refers to a stylistic convention, and as such describes a technique or writing style, like *poetry* or *prose*. It is also not only another name for an emotionally and dramatically charged phrase used 'pictorially', to illuminate what follows.

The characterological-motivational approach applied by Hansell and others has its merits in the study of the operatic text. However, a study of the libretto from the point of view of *parola scenica* reveals other striking points of interest that other studies do not show. For instance, Verdi's handling of the setting of the *Stiffelio* Act I 'Introduction' makes for interesting reading when compared with *Aroldo*. Jorg's opening recitative in this opera is far more finely drawn than the *brindisi* which opens *Aroldo*. This is one of Verdi's very few second thoughts that would prove less satisfactory than the first. Julian Budden remarks that 'At the rise of the curtain [in *Aroldo*, i]nstead of that magnificent recitative for Jorg which opened *Stiffelio*, [we find] the most conventional of all opening gambits—

a drinking chorus' (1: 340). In *Stiffelio* the bass eloquently lays the basis for the piety of thought and conservatism underscoring the plot, and his recitative summarizes Stiffelio's persona, preparing the way for the protagonist's interaction with his wife: 'the two elements from which the tragedy will be distilled—piety and worldly frivolity—are set in the strongest relief' (1, 1973: 456). Hansell, too, emphasizes these qualities as fundamental to *Stiffelio*'s action (UC-RM).

The bass's opening recitative is just that. It comprises a short declaimed passage in which he extols the virtues of the poetry from Klopstock's *The Messiah* he has just been reading. A close reading of this passage from the opera appears elsewhere in the context of *parola scenica* as opposed to other musical formal structures, but in summary, Jorg here establishes his own dual character as 'another minister' (according to the *dramatis personae*) and as Stiffelio's conscience. Then he lays the basis for the drama by expressing the wish that Stiffelio's religious fervour should not be diminished by his (presumably fairly recent) marriage to Lina.

JORG	**JORG**
(seduto presso la tavola leggendo	*(seated at the table, reading)*
Oh santo libro, oh, dell'eterno Vero,	Oh holy book, inspired, prophetic words
ispirate profetiche parole!	of everlasting truth!
(Chiude il libro e s'alza.)	*(He closes the book and rises to his feet.)*
Segui, Stiffelio,	Go forth upon your way, Stiffelio;
tua parola sia	may your words be
tempesta che distrugge,	a destroying tempest,
onda che ingoia,	a devouring wave,
e folgore che atterra	a blasting thunderbolt
pei nemici di Dio su questa terra.	for God's enemies upon this earth!
Ei vien . . . la sposa è seco . . .	He comes . . . His wife is with him . . .
Ah voglia il cielo che l'amore non sia	Ah, may Heaven grant that love shall prove
d'inciampo al zelo!	no impediment to his zeal!
(Entrano Stiffelio, al cui braccio	*(Enter Stiffelio with Lina on his arm;*
Lina, Dorotea, Federico,	*also Dorotea, Federico, Raffaele,*
Raffaele e Stankar.)	*and Stankar.)* (Philips 1979/'80: 44)

Key to the text here are the lines marked above: 'Ei vien . . . la sposa è seco . . . /Ah voglia il cielo che l'amore non sia d'inciampo al zelo!' (He comes . . . His wife is with him . . . /Ah, may Heaven grant that love shall prove no impediment to his zeal!). Analytical difficulties arise here, because the literary text is being studied independently of its setting. Verdi has set these lines as *parola scenica*, but all that can be deduced from the libretto is that Piave wrote neither *versi lirici* (which traditionally form the backbone of lyrical set pieces in nineteenth-century opera, and which have an even syllabic pattern and rhyme scheme), nor *versi sciolti* (which Budden for one has cited as vital to the incidence of *parola scenica*, and which follow a set syllabic pattern but have no rhyme). What we find here may rather more accurately be called *versi liberi* or free verse, which neither rhyme nor have a set syllabic stress pattern.

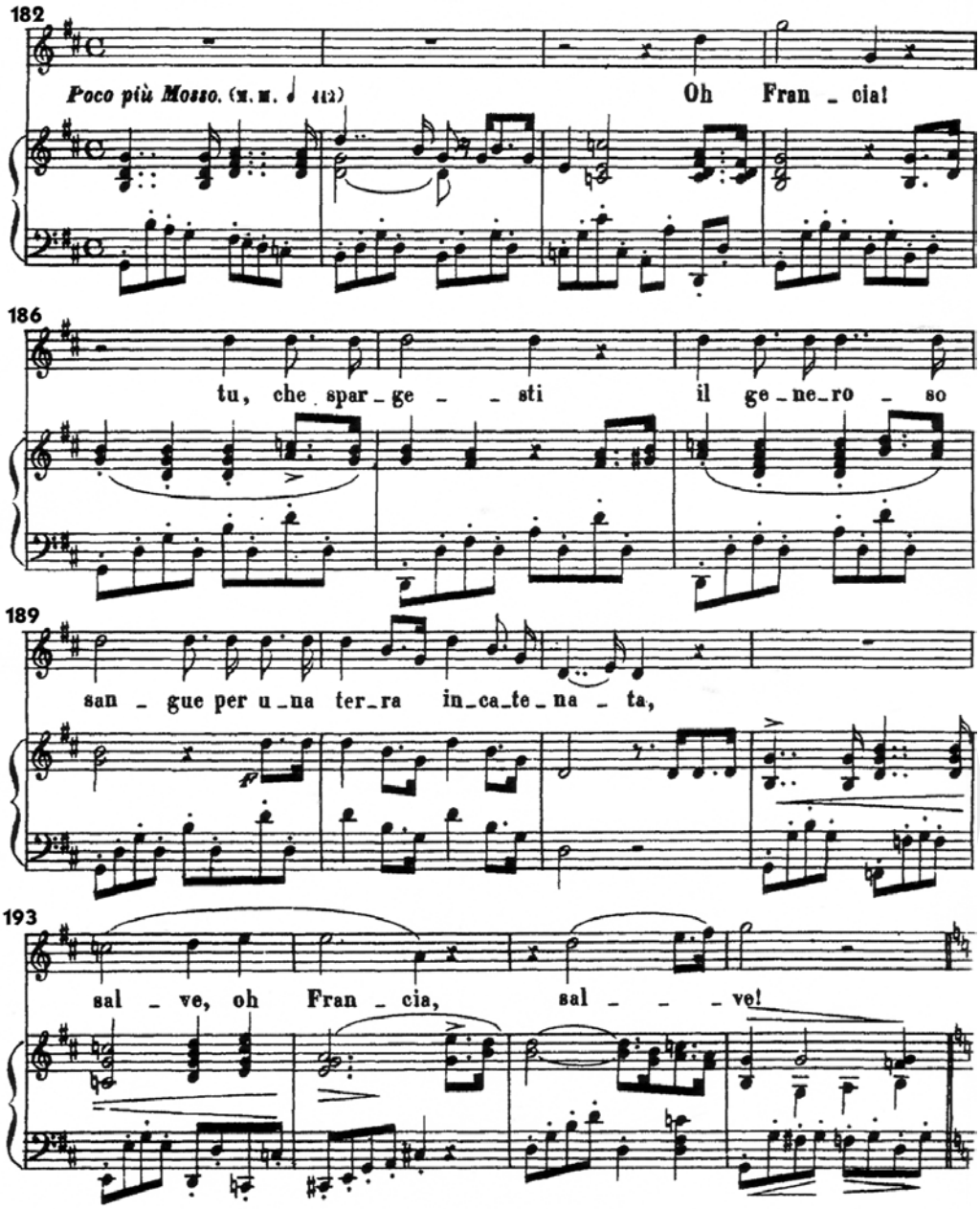
We find other similar instances where Verdi underscores the impact of the text—particularly in the case of *parola scenica*—by such significant musico-narrative events as irregularity of unrhymed verse above in the example from *Stiffelio*. Elsewhere I discussed in some detail the translation of Piave's opening verses to *Rigoletto*, but the original Italian shows a similar irregularity of rhythm and rhyme, again in the interests of achieving two ends in one limbic gesture: the noetic meaning of the text is superimposed on the poetic meaning of the music.

ATTO PRIMO		**ACT ONE**
Prelude		**Prelude**
SCENA PRIMA		**SCENE ONE**
Sala magnifica nel palazzo Ducale con porte nel fondo che mettono ad altre sale, pure splendidamente illuminate; folla di Cavalieri e Dame in gran costume nel fondo delle sale; Paggi che vanno e vengono. La festa e nel suo pieno. Musica interns da lontano e scrosci di risa di tratto in tratto. Il Duca e Borsa che vengono da una porta del fondo.		*A magnificent hall in the Ducal palace, with doors at the back leading to other rooms, also splendidly lit; a crowd of courtiers and ladies, sumptuously dressed, in the background; pages passing to and fro. The festivities are at their height. From within, distant music. The Duke and Borsa enter through a door at the back.*
DUCA		**DUKE**
Della mia bella incognita borghese	(11)	I must bring to a head my adventure
Toccare il fin dell'avventura io voglio.	(11)	With the unknown beauty in the town.
BORSA		**BORSA**
Di quella giovin che vedete al tempio?	(11)	The young one you've seen in church?
DUCA		**DUKE**
Da tre mesi ogni festa.	(7)	Every Sunday for three months.
BORSA		**BORSA**
La sua dimora?	(5)	Where does she live?
DUCA		**DUKE**
In un remoto calle;	(7)	In a remote lane;
Misterioso un uom v'entra ogni notte.	(11)	Every night a man goes there secretly.
BORSA		**BORSA**
E sa colei chi sia	(7)	And does she know
L'amante suo?	(5)	Who her lover is?
DUCA		**DUKE**
Lo ignora.	(3)	No, she does not.
(Un gruppo di inivati attraversano la sala.)		*(A group of guests cross the hall.)*
BORSA		**BORSA**
Quante beltà! Mirate.	(7)	So many beauties! Look!
DUCA		**DUKE**
Le vince tutte di Cepran la sposa.	(11)	Ceprano's wife excels them all.
BORSA *(piano)*		**BORSA** *(quietly)*
Non v'oda il Conte, o Duca . . .	(7)	My lord, do not let the Count hear you!

Another somewhat surprising example is to be found in the *Inno delle Nazioni* (1862), since this is a non-operatic work, and dramatic meaning does not signify. Nevertheless, the text has powerful noetic meaning, the music poetic.

Oh Francia!	(3)	Oh France!
tu che spargesti	(5)	you who spent
il generoso sangue	(7)	your generous blood
per una terra incatenata,	(9)	for a country bound in chains,
salve, oh Francia, salve!	(6)	hail, oh France, hail!

Figure 2.1: Extract from Verdi's *Inno delle Nazioni*, the only non-operatic work of the composer in which I could find traces of *parola scenica*.



Although the work is not operatic, it is nevertheless dramatic in spirit in the same sense that the dithyramb from which modern theatre grew might have had dramatic intent. The libretto by Arrigo Boito, the work is set for a Chorus of People, with which a solo voice for tenor (Boito calls this 'character' the 'Bardo') interacts in the same way one would imagine the dithyramb to have been constructed. In this sense, then, the *Inno delle Nazioni* has exactly the same configuration, say, as Macduff's 'Via le fronde' with chorus in Act IV Scene 4 of *Macbeth*, and practically the same content, as the tenor leads the people with a call, if not to arms, then certainly to fervent patriotism.

Since I argue that *parola scenica* must be regarded as a *development* in Verdi's operatic dramaturgy, it is interesting, then, to note that in *Aroldo*'s opening scene the composer is less preoccupied with using the device in its pure form than one would expect. This is in line with the notion put forth by many that although *Aroldo* presents better in purely musical terms than *Stiffelio*, the latter is better constructed in dramatic terms. By 1857 when *Aroldo* premièred, *Simon Boccanegra* had already been performed and published (but not yet revised; this took place in 1881), and the composer had had ample opportunity to refine his technique of using an amalgam of aria and recitative, in addition to using pure *parola scenica*, as well as a mix of recitative, aria and *parola scenica*. In other words, his technical proficiency had grown to a point where he had control over his idiom. In *Aroldo*, then, the composer only introduces *parola scenica* after opening passages and the faintly dated strains of the male chorus's *brindisi*. For example, Aroldo's entrance is set as *parola scenica* because the libretto is freighted with much understated emotion on the part of both the protagonists:

AROLDO	**AROLDO**
Perchè si triste?	Why so sad?
MINA	**MINA**
Oh Aroldo . . .	Oh Aroldo . . .
AROLDO	**AROLDO**
Tu sei commossa!	You are troubled! (Philips 2001: 48)

Mina has reached the end of her prayer for forgiveness, having been consumed by guilt over her relationship with Godvino. Aroldo enters, and she is almost caught red handed in her act of contrition. It comes as no surprise, then, that Verdi wants to give Aroldo's entrance special emphasis by setting it as *parola scenica* in contrast to what had gone before.

When Verdi next introduces *parola scenica* in *Aroldo*, it happens as part of the tenor's *cavatina* 'Sotto il sol di Siria.' Its positioning here is important, because this is the point in the score where the protagonist bares his soul not only to the entire ensemble, but specifically to the soprano, who is all the more racked by guilt, because Piave makes her realize just to what extent she has been central—and remains so—to the existence of the lead character:

AROLDO	**AROLDO**
Sotto il sol di Siria	Under the burning sun of Syria,
ardente ricoperto d'aspre maglie,	covered with heavy armour,
questo cor nelle battaglie	in battle this heart of mine
non tremava che per te.	trembled only for you.
MINA	**MINA**
(a parte)	*(aside)*
Ah! tai detti qual rovente lava	Ah! These words fall on me
piombano su me!	like burning lava! (Philips 2001: 48)

The fact that Mina's lines of *parola scenica* are marked clearly by Piave as an aside merits special mention, and I shall return to a detailed discussion of this construct in the multi-spatial whole presently. However, before I conclude this chapter by stepping inevitably from the literary to the musical text, I need to make some final observations, especially concerning the notion of a *pictorial* as opposed to my *narrative* reading of *parola scenica*.

Traversing the literary text

> [. . .] Various systems work together in opera, each according to its nature and laws, and the result of the combination is much greater than the sum of the individual forces (Petrobelli in Redmond).

I have devoted a significant portion of this thesis to identifying *parola scenica* and how Verdi uses it as a realist device. In the process I cover what other scholars have defined as *parola scenica*, and while formulating the device in my own terms, I have thus far chosen not to venture an opinion as to why I disagree with widely held notions on its nature.

Kathleen Kuzmick Hansell refers to the librettistic writing style of Piave's text when she describes what I have come to regard as the *pictorial* (rather than my *narrative*) theory of *parola scenica*, as exemplified by models developed by Parker, Grey and others. These models regard a striking word or phrase such as 'Traditor!', which highlights the set piece that follows, as *parola scenica*. Such a pictorial occurrence in an early nineteenth-century sense of the word, then, is a phrase that is repeated or otherwise emphasized, and has become embellished by composer or performer to intensify its significance. But when the operatic text is viewed like this, logically all the pictographs in all libretti must become classifiable as *parola scenica*. For example, Parker writes in the programme notes of Donizetti's *Adelia*, à propos of the stylistically forward looking opening scene:

> The scene hinges on a double aria for Arnoldo, Adelia's father, and at its climax he unleashes a furious *cabaletta* [. . .]. The cut of the *cabaletta* [. . . is] already a powerful example of Verdian musical language [. . .], but it is Donizetti's use of the chorus that is really surprising, their eruption with the *cabaletta* theme at the start of the second stanza putting even famous Verdian examples of *Nabucco* in the shade (BMG RFCD 1999 19).

It is the way in which Donizetti hints at Verdi's writing style, as Roger Parker suggests, that I emphasize through this reference. The text is Felice Romani's, a belated collaboration with Girolamo Marini, who provided a third act that Romani had not written. In this stylistically and dramatically important scene, the pivotal verses read as follows.

ARNOLDO
(fermandosi)
Il nome mio! che fia?

CORO
Ahi! tristo frutto a amaro
Dal suo valore ha colto,
E quanto avea di caro
Un seduttor gli ha tolto,
Se rea di tanto eccesso
La figlia sua si fa.

ARNOLDO
(mostrandosi con forza)
Mia figlia!

CORO
(riconoscendolo)
Ah! É desso!

ARNOLDO
Sì, son desso: v'arrestate:
Desso io son, chi compiangete?

CORO
(Ah! che dir? . . .)

ARNOLDO
Che fu? . . . parlate . . .

CORO
(Sventurato!)

ARNOLDO
(stopping)
My name! what can it be?

CHORUS
Alas! he has reaped a sad and bitter
harvest from his bravery,
and a seducer has stolen all
he had that was dear to him,
if his daughter is guilty
of such excess.

ARNOLDO
(coming forward forcefully)
My daughter!

CHORUS
(recognizing him)
Ah! It is he!

ARNOLDO
Yes, it is me: stop:
it is I: whom are you pitying?

CHORUS
(Ah! what can we say? . . .)

ARNOLDO
What has happened? . . . speak . . .

CHORUS
(Unfortunate man!) (BMG RFCD 1999: 19)

The verse below is from *Aroldo*, taken from just after 'Sotto il sol di Siria,' when Aroldo notices that Mina's ring (which had belonged to his mother) is missing. We learn later that she foolishly and presumably impulsively gave it to Godvino as a love token. When compared with this extract from *Adelia*'s text, the *Aroldo* text reveals that several stylistic constructions are common to both settings. Each poses stylistic problems, because in both operas one can, if pressed, interpret the text according to the pictorial model of *parola scenica*.

AROLDO
Ma!
lacrime ti grondano!
Tu tremi! non m'inganno!
Ti cruccia ascoso affanno?
Parla al tuo sposo.
Ti cruccia
ascoso affanno?

AROLDO
What's this!
Your face is streaming with tears!
You are trembling! I am not mistaken!
Is some hidden sorrow tormenting you?
Tell your husband.
Is some hidden sorrow
tormenting you? (Philips 2001: 52)

The couplet (marked by a solid line) and the five-line stanza (dotted line) are pictographs (because they illuminate their context), as are all the lines marked by solid lines in the *Adelia* extract (above). All these qualify as *parola scenica* in the pictorial sense. Also, for the most part, all the text marked by dotted lines in both extracts rhymes, and presents mostly as *settenarii* (there is one *quinario* in the *Aroldo* verse) and Arnoldo's lines 'Sì, son desso: v'arrestate:/Desso io son, chi compiangete' in *Adelia* are *ottinarii*. In *Aroldo*, from a literary point of view, the couplet features more strongly as a pictograph, but is set as recitative. The quatrain is a pictograph, and Verdi sets it as *parola scenica*. Conversely, in

the extract from *Adelia* where a similar mixture of styles exists, there is no sense at all of *parola scenica* as I have formulated it. Yet, according to scholars who support the pictorial meaning of the term there ought to be. It follows that what Hansell describes as 'clinch phrases' (xix) do not necessarily qualify as *parola scenica* at all. Only when the literary is combined with the musical text does it become possible to distinguish *parola scenica* from other stylistic techniques or formal structures, such as aria and recitative.

What causes this stylistic and terminological entropy? The formulas that make up the Verdian libretto, and hence the Verdian *œuvre*, must finally be given their rightful place in the terminology appropriate to nineteenth-century Italian dramatic literature. Only then can the terminological landscape be cleared of ambiguities such as *parlante melodico*, for example, *parlante*, *canto spezzato*, or *arioso*, all of which are vague, depending on their context.

If *parola scenica* has a logical *musical* prototype, it lies in passages such as the ensemble that forms the centrepiece in Act I of both *Stiffelio* and *Aroldo*. This is the moment in the score when the action freezes—the so-called 'spotlight effect' to which Luca Zappelli has referred (in Sala 192)—as the central character instructs his wife to unlock the book, the Klopstock volume of *The Messiah*, in which the letter from her lover is hidden.

I emphasize that this is not *parola scenica*, but a prototype of the device, because the plot does not develop at this juncture: it is a reflective moment. But as a multi-spatial construction based on a four-line pictograph apparently buttressed by a series of asides, it merits special attention. Budden calls this ensemble 'a *tour de force* of vocal instrumentalization in the manner of Rossini, with Jorg, Stankar and the chorus keeping up a continuous movement of demisemiquavers reinforced by *pizzicato* strings' (1, 1973: 464). I call such passages *floating structures*, which consist of a dynamic main melodic force buoyed by instrumental but especially vocal accompaniment deployed almost instrumentally, and which may be central to the development of the plot, but which are more often designed as a commentary on current events. This term is not entirely unique. Barthes refers to a 'floating' as 'that which would not destroy anything but would be content simply to disorientate the Law' (in Hebdidge 126).

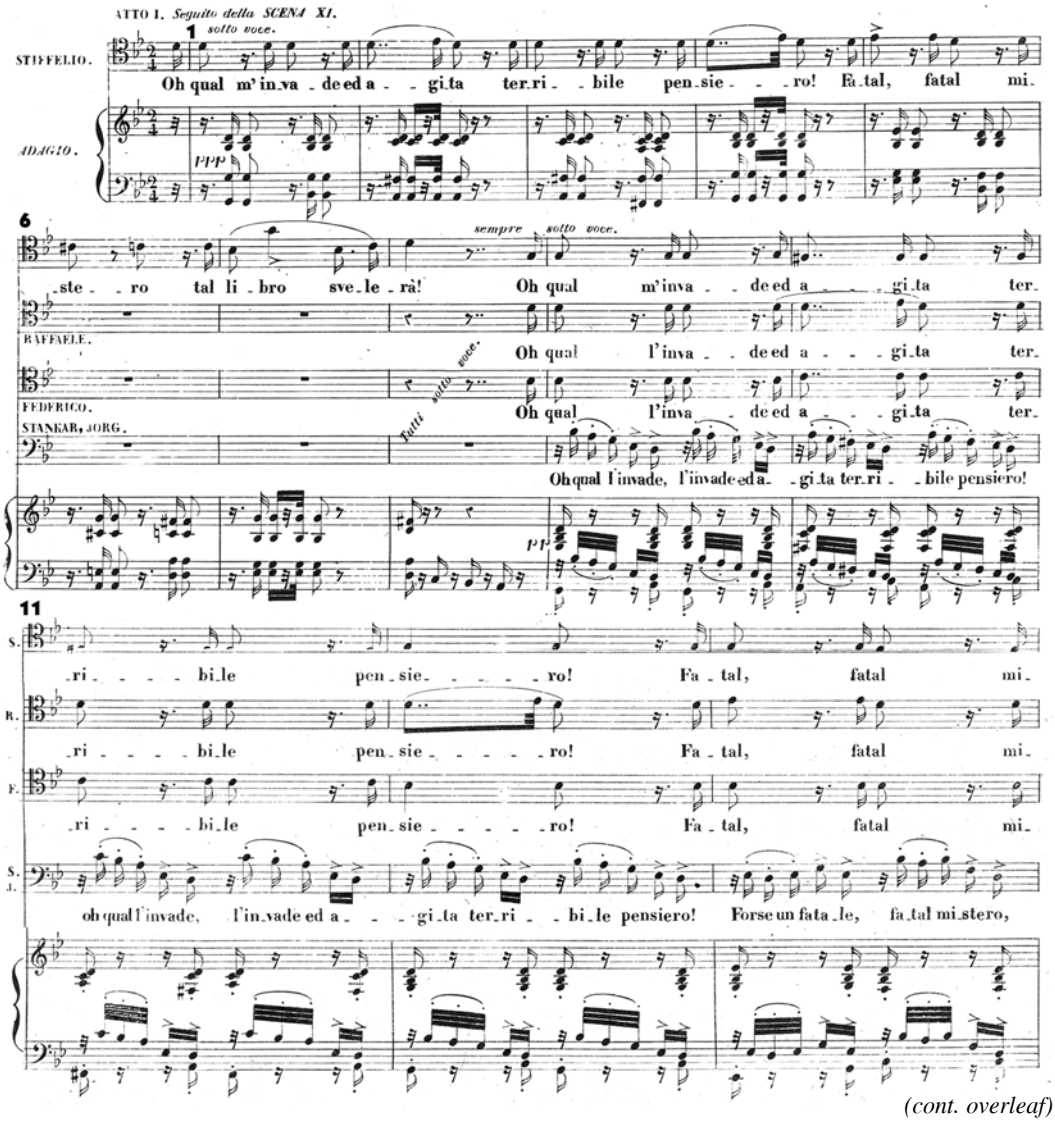
I referred elsewhere to the duality of passages predating Verdi that sound like *parola scenica*, but do not constitute the device. Other extra-Verdian passages include the choral link in Act I between Camilla's aria 'Qual prece e voto' and her *cabaletta* 'Di qual soavi palpiti' in Mercadante's *Orazi e Curiazi*, and the chorus and ensemble followed by Guido's 'Qua Rolando . . . Questo sacro

augusto stemma' in Act I of Donizetti's *Gemma di Vergy*. This, however, is a typical example from within Verdi's output. This extract from *Stiffelio* is worth studying in some detail, particularly because the composer does not change a single note of it for *Aroldo* (Philips 2001 48).

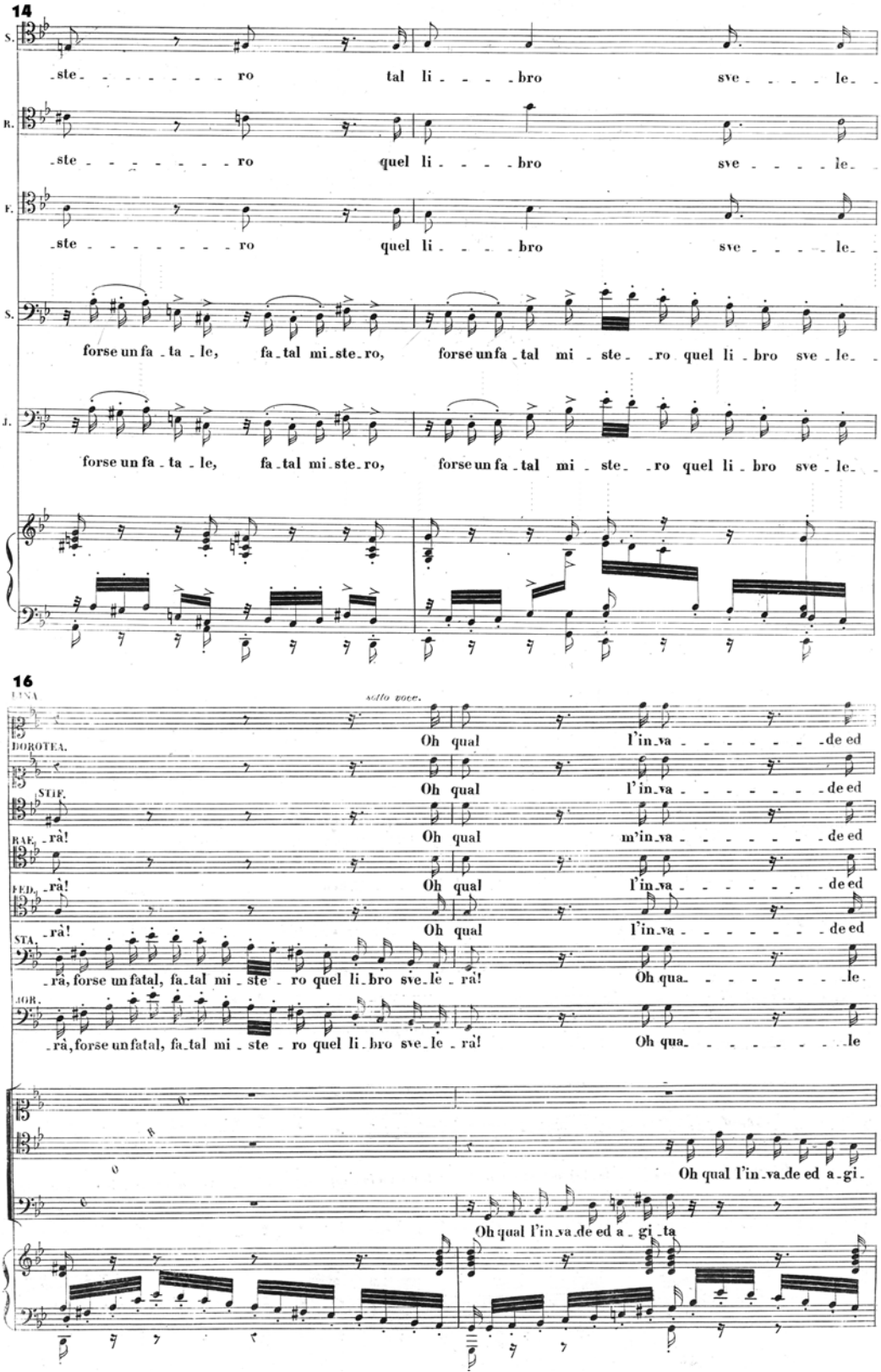
STIFFELIO/AROLDO	**STIFFELIO/AROLDO**
Oh qual m'invade ed agita	What dreadful thought
terribile pensiero.	possesses and troubles me!
Fatal, fatal mistero	Some fatal mystery
tal libro svelerà.	this book will bring to light.
TUTTI	ALL
Oh quall' l'invade ecc.	Ah, what dreadful thought, etc.

The fifty bars of 'Oh qual m'invade ed agita' is some of Verdi's finest writing, relying for its success on its contrast, stylistically, with what surrounds it.

Figure 2.2: Extract from Verdi's *Stiffelio*, the ensemble 'Oh qual m'invade ed agita' from Act I. It recurs *verbatim* in *Aroldo*.



(cont. overleaf)



This musical example is included for reference only, since this chapter focuses on the libretto as a narrative type, among other details. Paradoxically, as I have pointed out elsewhere, *parola scenica* cannot be recognized only from the text, but only by reference to the interaction between text and music.

Exactly how Verdi manages to revitalize the narrative by juxtaposing contrasting materials is a point I made earlier, and I address it again. In *Stiffelio* Verdi defamiliarizes the material round this ensemble, a musical prototype for *parola scenica* along with the dramatic prototype of the *mélodrame*. It is clear that Verdi viewed this *scena* as pivotal to the narrative, and worthy of keeping *verbatim*, by maintaining the free flowing amalgam of recitative and *arioso* and then placing this floating structure in its centre. I devote more attention to this ensemble in chapters to follow.

This brief parallel discussion of a text reworked has highlighted not so much an important analytical tool as an analytical outcome. Richard Kearney makes mention in *On Stories*, his excellent discussion of narrative, of the phrase *multiple microstories* in the context of a narrative being constructed out of a series of 'spotlit' *tableaux* (24). In a way, instances of *parola scenica* function also as *microstories* in relation to the text round them. By expressing parts of the text as *parola scenica*, thus defamiliarizing it by expressing parts of the narrative in a form the spectator does not expect, Verdi encapsulates and isolates those moments, in the light of which the surrounding text is illuminated.

More significantly, *parola scenica* is an important mechanism in Verdi's compositional technique through which he ensures not only narrative contrast and interest, but also narrative coherence. Teresa de Laurentis observes: 'plot, narrative [. . .], and narrativity [. . .]—all the ingredients of the pleasure of the text—are mechanisms of coherence. Which is not to say that these are solely mechanisms of closure or traps in which the subject is totally and necessarily contained, since closure is only an effect of particular narrative strategies [. . .]' (187). Here she reflects on the connection I make elsewhere with Verdi as readerly author, and although her comments are based on film, they apply as much to opera as a vehicle for the telling of stories, and therefore as an alternative extension of dramatic literature.

In the next chapter, as in this one, I review another aspect of *parola scenica*, but at a distance. I noted eslewhere the difficulty of isolating instances of *parola scenica* by textual references without the music. In Chapter 3 I look at the music where there might or might not be a literary text, in other words, in the orchestra, where we are confronted with a kind of *parola scenica*, but without the *parola*, which presents an entirely new set of challenges.

Chapter 3

Problems of theatrical signification in 'programme' music

> The opening of *Otello* is the *parola scenica* made music (Budden 3, 1981: 334).

Finding a point of contact between *parola scenica* (which is by definition texted) and the orchestral operatic fabric where no literary text appears (such as overtures, interludes and so on) and even where text does appear and the accompaniment acquires particular semiotic significance initially promised to be a highly problematic exercise. It would mean that one would be interrogating the notion of *parola scenica* without any *parole*, a concept surely alien to Verdian sensibilities, if not, on the face of it, entirely absurd. However, Julian Budden's comments on *Otello* reflect much more than he perhaps intended or even supposed at the time of writing it in 1981. Moreover, it also suggests that there might very well be other points of contact and avenues to explore, especially given Budden's description here:

> The harmonic outline [in *Otello*] is [. . .] blurred by sonorities that might be described as paramusical: two bass drums including one for the thunder, a gong, suspended cymbals, played with two sticks like a drum [. . .] and three organ notes a semitone apart from each other, to be played in the register of the basses and the timpani. [. . .] It would be wrong to regard [this effect] as an instance of modern discordant harmony since it is not strictly speaking a harmonic device at all but rather an external colouring of the musical landscape, making its effect subliminally. The listener is aware of it only as part of the dark background against which Otello will make his entrance like a brilliant shaft of light. One of those cases, Verdi might have said, where the musician, like the poet, must unlearn his calling in the interests of theatre (3, 1981: 334).

Bearing in mind his operatic use of the orchestra, is it possible, then, to describe Verdi as a nineteenth-century Haydn in terms of the innovative orchestral palette? Although he was a traditionalist at heart, Joan Peyser (318) tells us that he did not invent orchestrally as did Wagner, yet the effects he created were extraordinary.

It is interesting to note, perhaps because of the efforts of influential Verdi scholars and critics such as Parker, Lawton, Petrobelli and Budden on one hand and Wagner and Shaw on the other, that there appear to be two schools of thought regarding Verdi's abilities as orchestrator. George Martin summarizes both positive and negative points of view, but with particular emphasis on the negative, in his *Aspects of Verdi*.

> One of Bernard Shaw's more unfortunate remarks was that Verdi used an orchestra like a 'big guitar'. Though the phrase was not original with Shaw, by his music criticism he made it common [. . .]. Shaw wrote: 'As to the orchestra, until Boito came, it was for the most part nothing but the big guitar, with the whole wind playing the tune in unison or in thirds or sixths with the singer.' Alas, the phrase is catchy and, because associated with Shaw, often quoted. It is nonsense (195). [. . .] (Shaw probably picked up the phrase from Wagner's *Zukunftmusik* (Wagner 3: 295-345, 388), in which the German composer asserted 'The orchestra [in Italian opera] is nothing but a huge guitar for accompanying the Aria').

In support of his argument that Verdi's use of the orchestra is rather more than just adequate, as Wagner and by imitation Shaw suggest, Martin's analysis of 'The Orchestration of *La traviata*' tells us that he intends, 'in what may seem an unreasonable fashion but is not, to argue both ways: that when appropriate Verdi used the orchestra like a guitar, yet when his orchestration is taken altogether it is too varied and skilful to be characterized pejoratively as "the big guitar"' (197).

Before I engage in the complex question of *parola scenica* in the untexted sections and in the accompaniments to the arias especially—those zones of the operatic text to which one, for want of a better word, might refer as 'programmatic'—it might perhaps be useful to get out of the way more 'straight-forward' movements such as overtures and interludes. These are very powerful vehicles of signification, as my analysis of the *Macbeth* overture shows shortly.

Overtures and interludes: programmatic interpretation of a musical text

> [. . .] regarding declamation, Germans and Italians mean quite different things. In many passages [the Germans] would allow a *morendo* to permit the solo voices to unfold [. . .]—Verdi [. . .] never permitted this. To a considerably greater extent than [the] Germans, the Italians use the voice instrumentally—and rightly so, because Italian voices are technically more assured (Anon. in Conati 126).

The opening movements of Verdi's operas go by different titles. There are 'Sinfonias', 'Preludios', 'Overtures' and 'Introductions'. David Kimbell makes distinctions between at least two of the different 'genres' of introductions Verdi uses when he describes a *sinfonia* as a piece that is a 'detachable synopsis of [the opera], or a kind of sounding proscenium arch behind which it could be set; a *preludio* is an integral part of the drama' (Balthazar 159). Four of the operas, on the face of it, have no overtures at all. Where they do occur, these pieces exhibit a variety of formal templates, and they are not equal in duration. But why have such a movement, when on the dramatic stage the play simply begins? The overture is defined as

> from the Italian *overtura*, opening, the word normally used for the instrumental prelude to an opera or play [. . .]. Not until Gluck did the overture have thematic connection with the following drama [. . .]. In Italy the overture [. . .] only incidentally attempt[s] to compose the audience's mind for the opera, so that the same overture often did duty for tragic and comic operas indiscriminately [. . .]. *Verismo* composers on the whole preferred the brief introduction that had latterly become Verdi's habit [. . .]' (Rosenthall and Warrack 295).

Macbeth is the first opera about which Verdi says 'it's time we abandoned the conventional formulas and methods' (Headington 229). He refers to the casting choice of the first Lady Macbeth, but the statement is true generally. Trends appear here that Verdi would use in most of the preludes. From these I exclude those where the opening scene does duty as overture, such as in *Otello* and *Falstaff*, where the listener is thrown headlong into the action, and *Il trovatore* and *Simon Boccanegra* (1881), which have no opening movements at all.

Verdi generally avoids formally complex orchestral introductions: they may be represented as 'Introduction-Exposition-Coda' (see *Macbeth* below), or 'Introduction-Simple Binary-Coda', or 'Introduction-Simple Ternary-Coda' or permutations of these, up to and including the simple rondo form. He does not go beyond these formal conventions, and never strove for anything as complex as the sonata form (although the first movement in the *String Quartet* (1872-3) shows that he controlled the form with great facility). Verdi's opening movements customarily have an introductory section, normally (but not always) contrasting in tempo to the rest of the movement. There are always codas, sometimes as long as or longer than the rest of the movement. *I due Foscari*'s prelude, for example, has a coda of thirty-four bars, almost half the movement.

The overture may open and close in the same key or not. Verdi strives often to obscure tonal centres by confounding expectations, defamiliarizing the operatic narrative, representing '*parola scenica*' in its most basic form. Paul Lang notes that 'the concordance of keys in a Handel or Mozart opera is as important structurally as it is magnificent aurally. The public may not know about this but subconsciously feels its unifying force' (18). Verdi often modulates to the tonic major (if the piece opens in the minor), or *vice versa*. Otherwise, he may modulate by third-relationship or other chromatic means to distant tonal centres, usually shortly after the start of the movement. Here the spectator might feel the disjunctive pull of the different key. The issue of key relationships is a contentious one: Parker and Brown collaborated in 1983 on an essay 'Motivic and Tonal Interaction in Verdi's *Un ballo in maschera*' (243-265). I believe that tonal centres in nineteenth-century opera are at best gratuitous, even in Verdi, and cannot

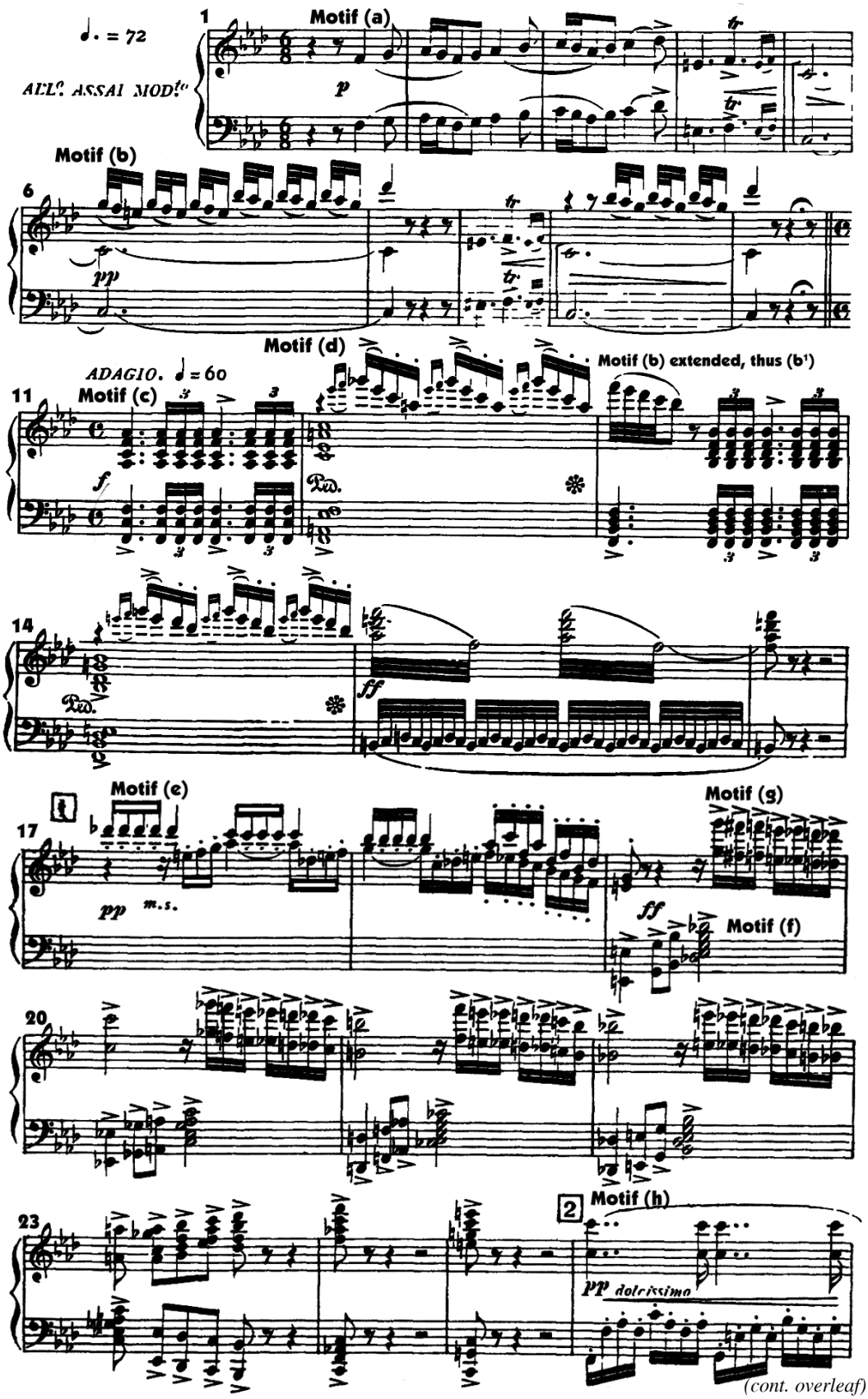
be forced into stylistic 'landmarks' such as *parola scenica* or any others. The tonality of the aria is determined by which pitch is exposed as ultimate tonic or penultimate dominant. Sopranos prefer the arias in A(a), G(g), A♭(a♭), D(d), E♭(e♭) or E(e), because that exposes the D, E♭ or E *in alt* as either the ultimate or penultimate pitch in the vocal line, giving an opportunity to showcase the upper extension of the voice. Rossini wrote practically every major aria for the mezzo-soprano in E, so as to highlight the penultimate note in the melodic line the high B for the singer, a note with a particularly ringing quality in that voice type. It is no coincidence that, even in 1853, Azucena's opening *scena* in *Il trovatore* is set in e. Similarly, tenors to this day prefer arias in C(c), D♭(d♭), F(f) or G(g) for the same reasons. Few baritones will pass up the opportunity of risking a high A or B♭, given even the remotest of chances. Sherrill Milnes' high C♭ at the end of his 1971 studio recording of *Rigoletto* with Sutherland goes through the sound barrier. Such *puntature* can serve as climactic punctuation marks when there are no words to speak of in the dramatico-musical fabric.

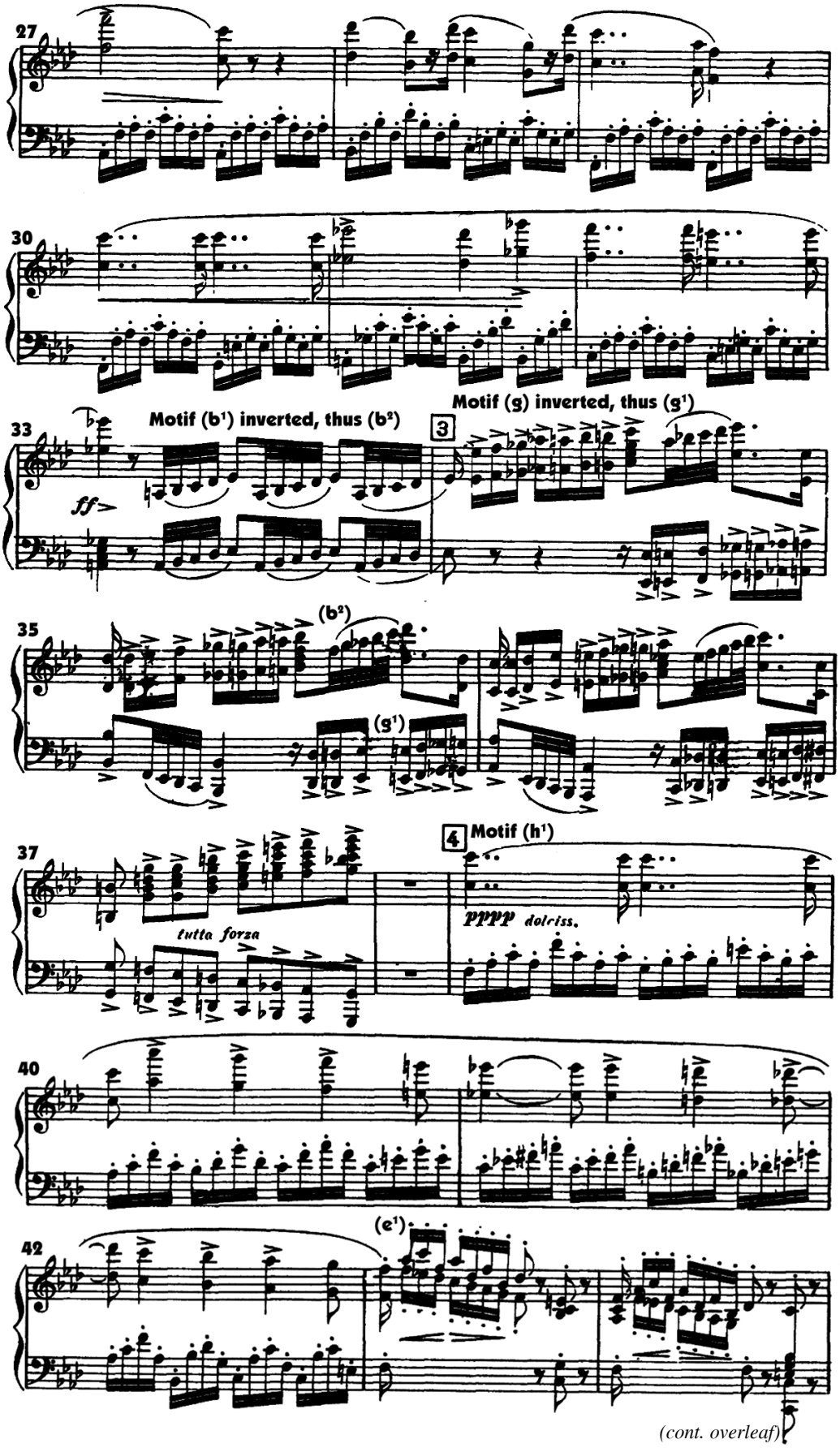
The *abuso dei minori* was an early nineteenth-century operatic convention, but it particularly made provision for opening the aria in a minor key and ending it in the *tonic major*, in music-theoretical terms a distant key relationship, but aurally no more unsettling than a *tierce de Piccardy*. The tonal shift Verdi developed, and which involved opening in one key and ending in another, music-theoretically *and* aurally distant key, is subconsciously unsettling for the listener, and therefore characteristic of a musical defamiliarization. I describe this in Chapter 1 as a feature of musical realism and thus of *parola scenica*.

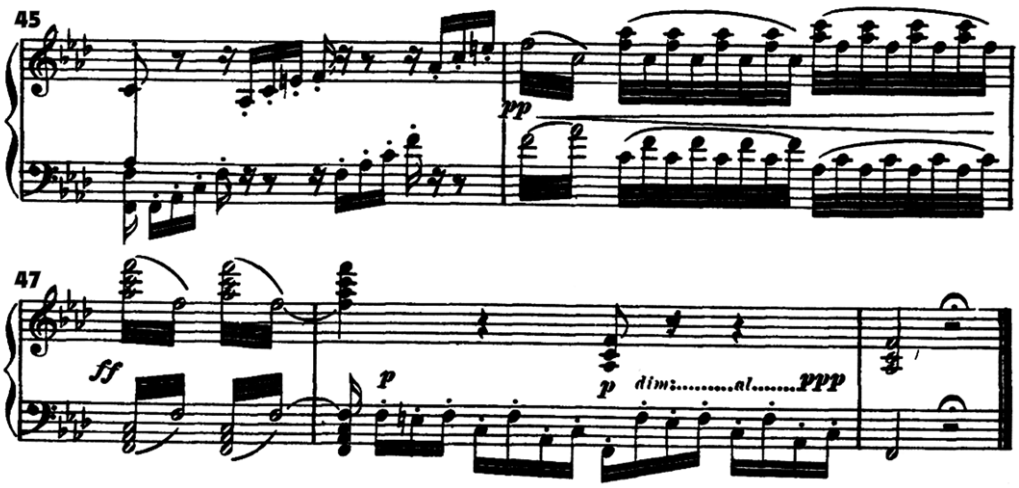
Verdi usually avoids single thematic statements, preferring thematic groups more characteristic of last movement sonata-rondo structures in Mozart. As his orchestral palette developed, he was likely to play off the orchestral families one against the other in stating such compound themes. He might also pit subdivisions of the same family against each other, or against parts or the whole of other orchestral families, *alla concerto grosso*. This style of writing becomes apparent especially from *Jérusalem* onwards, but appeared as early as *Macbeth*, the prelude of which I analyze below. In terms of *parola scenica* this presents as placing the individual or autonomous group in opposition to its society.

I do not differentiate between the terms 'theme' and 'motif,' which for my purposes would reflect a matter of semantics. The prelude to *Macbeth* offers a rich harvest of motivic use, contrast and variation. Significantly Verdi does not 'develop' musical ideas in the classical sense of the term.

Figure 3.1: The Prelude to *Macbeth;* the different motivic structures are annotated for quick reference. Verdi put to use eight easily identifiable themes or motives in this opening movement.




27
30
33
Motif (b¹) inverted, thus (b²)
3
Motif (g) inverted, thus (g¹)
ff>
35
(b²)
(g¹)
37
4
Motif (h¹)
tutta forza
pppp dolciss.
40
42
(e¹)
(cont. overleaf)



This prelude remains throughout in the same tempo, and is based on one tonal centre (f). Verdi depends for musical interest on the rhythmic displacement of the strong beat in the opening bars (see also the opening bars of *Don Carlos*, *Otello* and *Falstaff*), set in a compound duple rhythm, which is recognisable as such only after two-and-a-half bars. He relies also on a kaleidoscopic treatment of thematic germ cells, which he introduces in a formal structure to which the listener has already become accustomed in earlier operas. The movement may be schematically summarised as:

| Introduction | A | Coda ‖
| a, b, c, d, b^1, e, f, g | h, b^2, g^1 | h^1, e^1 ‖
| f (25 bars) | f (13 bars) | f (11 bars) ‖

The opening bars in compound duple rhythm for flute, clarinet and oboe in unison create an eerie, nasal sound Verdi would exploit again orchestrally in the opening of Act I to introduce the witches, and in the vocal quality he sought for the witches themselves (‘*staccato e marcato assai: nè dimenticarsi che sono streghe che parlono*’). This I have called (a), and it is swiftly overlaid by (b) for high strings, by contrast to the woodwind sound of the previous bars, already preparing the way for the witches without the use of words.

The quiet, macabre atmosphere gives way to the roar of the brass, as Verdi introduces (c), which evokes Macbeth’s second visit to the witches in Act III, when the three apparitions appear to him. This motif is significant. When it appears in the main body of the opera, it is possibly one of Verdi’s most explosive moments, and the resultant sound (Verdi employs an orchestra below the stage in addition to the one in the pit) is a miraculous texture of sound, unfortunately all too frequently under-articulated in recordings of the work. Lamberto Gardelli’s 1971 recording of *Macbeth*, with the London Philharmonic Orchestra

(DECCA 440 048), does particular justice to these passages. The ensemble in this recording, of bassoons, trumpets, trombones and *cimbasso* has an unearthly effect which is unsurpassed by any other, even if it is the rewritten 1865 version of the score, rather than the original 1847 version.

As the opening motif of the witches is overlaid by the string motif, so Verdi overlays the roaring brass and lower woodwinds with high woodwind (d), followed by (b), extended to a five-note descending pattern (b^1). At the start of the movement the pattern consisted of only three notes. Now Verdi reveals the second part of the introduction. The strings play a motif from the Sleepwalking Scene.The semiquaver motif (e) that opens the *scena* in Act IV. It is followed by two short motives, a rising arpeggio in the bass, played by brass and strings (f), and a descending chromatic motif played by the strings in the treble (g). These short statements bring to a close the introduction to this movement, which is open-ended. The cadence before the start of the 'main theme' is an imperfect half-cadence in f, then a bar of silence as if the orchestra is holding its breath.

The middle section or main theme has a developmental nature. It is introduced by a broad string theme, adumbrating the Sleepwalking Scene, over a *pizzicato* bass with a harp background. This is the only motif in this prelude that can properly be described as a 'theme', because it contains a cadence, not a close, which establishes its tonal centre. Budden suggests that this harp writing is not authentic. He argues that Verdi, when writing for the harp, always did so by means of a larger gesture, rather than in the context of a means of a backgrounded accompaniment (1, 1973: 280). The melody unfolds in a regular eight-bar phrase, to be interrupted by two motives which had previously appeared in the introductory passages: (b^2), an inversion of the descending five-note pattern which first occurred in bar 13, here scored for brass and woodwind, followed by (g^1), an inversion of the descending chromatic motif which appeared first in bars 19-22, here scored for strings and woodwinds. Verdi then presents (b^2) and (g^1) juxtaposed by canonic invention, which further strengthens the notion that this is a developmental section.

The coda starts off very quietly in bar 39, with an altered restatement of motif (h) as (h^1), because it is incomplete, and with the accompaniment transformed. Instead of strings and harp, Verdi here uses a clarinet in the *chalumeau* register, with *pizzicato* bass. The movement draws to a muted close after a final *tutti* outburst in bar 47, with the final word going to the harp.

For all its forty-nine bars, then, this is perhaps one of Verdi's most complex symphonic movements. Between this prelude and the one that opens *Luisa Miller*, the composer deploys most of the orchestral effects that he would use in all the opening orchestral movements, except for all formal models, of course.

We see the *parola scenica* lying so close under the surface in so many of the gestures Verdi uses in this short piece. The opening motive (a), as I have already noted, forms the first part of the introduction and its purpose is probably to keep the listener off-balance in terms of the metrum. It also ends on a half close, which further unsettles the listener. The introduction is rounded off by motif (b), which is the *dux* of the (a) motif by diminution, but at least here the listener's concept of metrum is restored. But note the cadence: there is a C in the bass, a D in the soprano—which is the correct tonic? Verdi leaves that question hanging.

The motivic material is meant to 'personify', in a manner of speaking, the presence of the witches in Act I of the opera, and Verdi promptly juxtaposes it by putting it squarely next to motif (c), which is a sonic representation of Macbeth's visit to the witches in Act III.

Motif (e), the rising *acciaccatura* followed by the descending diminished seventh broken chord points directly to the Sleepwalking Scene, and Verdi is already preparing the audience for the ultimate disintegration and demise of Lady Macbeth. This motif is followed swiftly by motives (f) and (g), which also refers the listener to Lady Macbeth's fouth-act aria, and again Verdi leaves this section of the narrative open-ended, by finishing what serves as an introduction with a half-cadence in f.

I have marked neither the *tremolando* figure in the upper voices nor the three-note rising and falling motives in bar 15 as independent motives, because they never appear in this prelude again. They do, however, serve as a short, dynamic link to motif (e), that opens the Sleepwalking scene in Act IV of the opera.

Then, gently introduced by theme (g), follows the most lyrical section of this piece. Thematically it points directly to the Sleepwalking Scene, and Verdi is bold enough to turn what is practically a monothematic work into the introduction of a complete opera. He is also careful not to let the audience forget the macabre notion of the witches. This lyrical, regular eight-bar melody is underscored in various formats and guises by the motives that were initially invoked to add the 'witch' *colorito* Verdi required. Thus without a single word being spoken or sung, Verdi has managed to encapsulate the drama of what would be his

first collaboration with Shakespeare, obviously via Piave and Maffei. It is one of the finest of Verdi's introductions and ranks with such works as the opening movements to *Attila* and *I masnadieri* which, had it not been for their brevity, would probably have been exceptionally popular concert pieces.

To continue the theme of Verdi's playing off orchestral families against each other: *La traviata* is the only Verdi opera which scholars unreservedly categorize as realist, based on its subject matter. I have suggested that *Stiffelio* is another, and for the same reasons. It might be instructive briefly to revisit with George Martin Verdi's orchestration of selected passages from *La traviata* before dealing with orchestrational matters as they present in the instrumental sections in which the voice is used to communicate the plot purely for its *colorito*. Then I draw conclusions on Verdi's treatment of the orchestra as representative of narrative and how he transposed the orchestral palette and instrumentational techniques into *parola scenica*, without relying on the word.

The *Traviata* preludes are particularly effective. They are, as Martin hints, characterisable as a 'theme and variation,' although Verdi does not call them that. 'All the themes of this first prelude reappear in the opera [. . .], but the opening seven bars, Violetta's illness, Verdi repeats exactly at the start of the prelude to Act III, before elaborating on them' (197).

It is particularly the effect Verdi creates via the sixteen violins *divisi* that onomatopoeically suggests her illness to which Martin emphatically draws his readers' attention, by quoting Arrigo Boito on the subject. French critic Camille Bellaigue referred to the string sound in his review of *La traviata* as *sottile* (thin, slender, subtle), and Boito commented on Bellaigue choice of words,

> I applaud the word *sottile* applied to the last-act prelude of *La traviata*. [. . .] The prelude seems to say [that someone is dying] with [. . .] elevated, sad, frail sounds, almost without body, ethereal, sick, with death imminent. Who would have thought that music had the power to depict the scene of a room [. . .] where an invalid awakens? That silence! that calm, painful silence created by sounds! (198).

Act I opens with woodwind and brass alone, Martin suggests as a contrast to the string sound of the preceding prelude. I have already noted the function of the woodwind and brass, and how it communicates via *parola scenica* in relation to Violetta's *salon*. Here Martin emphasizes especially Verdi's striking use of the string section, not only in the passages following on the *salon* music, but in this opera in general. As I have remarked elsewhere, the strings play an extraordinarily prominent part in the orchestration of this opera.

> Because strings are the predominant instruments in this opera, to appreciate it fully one should try to hear the different quality of sound as the strings are bowed or plucked, as their groups play in unison, in reduced numbers, or *divisi*, and as their notes are played *legato* [. . .] or *staccato* [. . .] (199-200).

Underscoring the significance of this, Martin focuses on the practice of some conductors in 'De' miei bolenti spiriti' (in Act II) of playing the string accompaniment *col arco* instead of *pizzicato*, contrary to Verdi's indication in the score. This is an important point, and I touch upon it here before I turn my attention to a brief semiotic view of operatic narrative. Verdi resists change that he did not initiate, and stock figures he used are not interchangeable. When the composer specified a particular effect, he did so presumably in response to the text in a particular way. The first quatrain of 'De' miei bolenti spiriti' reads

ALFREDO	**ALFREDO**
De' miei bollenti spiriti	The youthful ardour
il giovanile ardore	of my fiery spirits
ella temprò col placido	she has tempered
sorriso dell'amor.	with the tranquil smile of love.

Piave's theatrical meaning expressed here in this text was translated by Verdi into a particular melody and accompanying formula, to be played in a particular style. If Alfredo's monologue were worded any differently, then it is safe to assume that Verdi would have found either a different melody or accompaniment figure, or a different articulation, or even an entirely different orchestral family than the strings as main accompanying body.

Martin notes two other important instances of orchestral *parola scenica* in Act II of *La traviata*. The first is the soloistic treatment of the clarinet (which in any case is associated with Violetta's character in Act I) at the point where she writes the letter to Alfredo, telling him that she is leaving him.

> The tune, in a minor key is scarcely more than a phrase, four bars, repeated once with slight embellishment, and it starts with a rising interval of a sixth which it cannot sustain and from which it sadly falls away, ending a fifth below where it started. On the repeat it tries again, and fails again. It is her spirit, noble but broken, just as the related passage in the third act is her fate (204).

Martin also notes the almost soloistic use of the trumpet in the scene where Alfredo surprises Violetta as she finishes writing to him. 'It is her most heroic moment', Martin tells us, 'and she deserves the trumpet's sound' (205). At the same point in the score Verdi brings forth another special effect which, because it is used only once in the opera, lends an air of uniqueness to the moment. 'To underpin Violetta's outcry', Martin writes, 'he scored for the only time in the

opera a roll on the bass drum, swelling and decreasing its volume as it follows her voice for sixteen bars. A bass drum roll, perhaps just because it has no definite pitch, for most persons is profoundly moving, even disturbing, as if the depths themselves were stirred' (205) (see Holly Watkins, Chapter 1).

When a solo instrument appears, it is usually indicative of the conflict between an individual and his society in the development of the plot, or of a homogeneous group of characters in relation to a society, as is the case of the slaves in *Nabucco*, or the band of robbers of which Carlo is the representative in *I masnadieri*, or Violetta as opposed to her society. Throughout his career, Verdi and his librettists would find expression for the drama in the way in which individuals are placed in opposition to the society from which they come. Gilles de Van refers to this notion as *marginality* (225-6). This marginality reflects the sort of effect Martin has described above in his discussion of the Preludes in *La traviata*, or the soloistic motives in the opening movement to *Macbeth* noted above. Exactly *how* these instances of soloistic instrumental appearances or other figurations contribute to the narrative semiotic impact remains a moot point, but I aim to examine it presently.

Foreshadowing *parola scenica* without words

> Just as Luisa Miller's 'Tu puniscimi, o Signore' is an apparent duet scene that really is an aria, so also there are solo arias that are paradoxically duets, in that they grow out of genuine two-person confrontations in which the second character is an equal emotional participant, though he or she remains silent in the lyric movement or movements for some dramatically plausible or even compelling reason. The musico-dramatic effect of an aria that is really a duet is as startling as that of a duet that is really an aria (Powers 'La solita forma' 71).

Auber's *La Muette de Portici* (1828) is a particularly unusual instance of how signification is communicated in the orchestra predating Verdi where the lead character does not say a word, and yet is representative of French *grand opera*. It is built on exactly that effect of a 'silent voice' that Powers describes above, except that the lead character in this extraordinary opus is mute throughout the piece, showing the narrative power of the operatic orchestra.

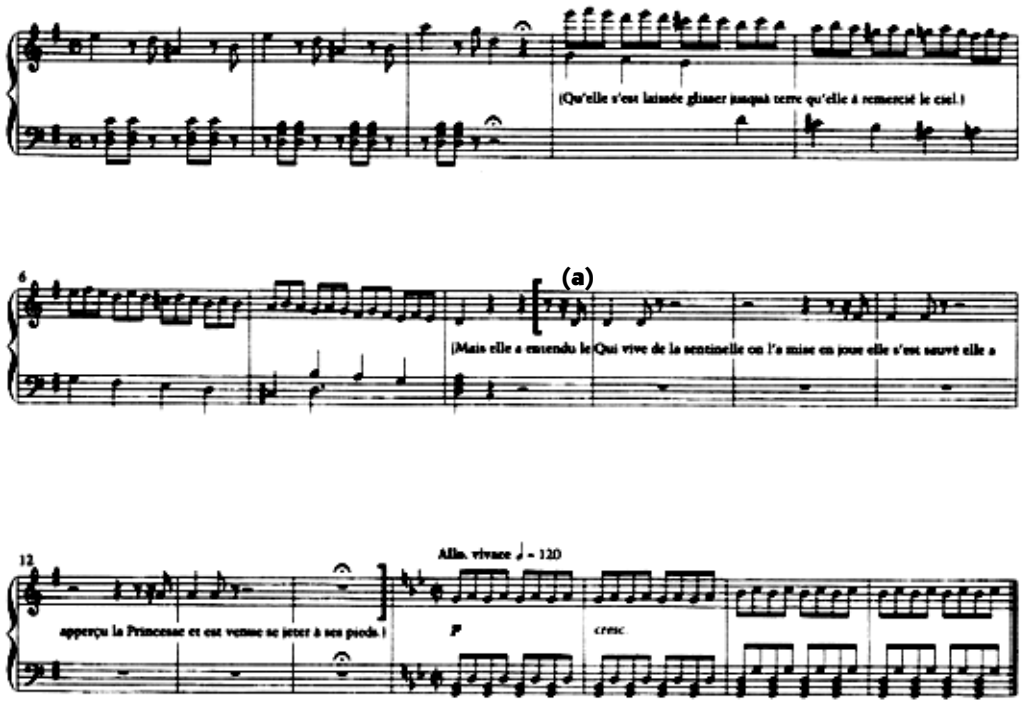
Karin Pendle remarks on Wagner's admiration in 1860 for Auber's opera, when she notes the 'expressive use of the orchestra growing out of the necessity to provide background music for Fenella's miming, [. . .] this is one of the few extraordinary elements of the score that can be linked both to earlier melodrama and to the French tradition of programme music' (547).

Although Maribeth Clark's analysis in 'The Body and the Voice in *La Muette de Portici*' runs along different lines and highlights many aspects of this opera, she, too, notes Wagner's 'illusory impression that, with very few exceptions, "arias and duets in the wonted Operatic sense were scarcely to be detected any more"'. She also remarks on his admiration for the 'theatric plastique' intertwined with Auber's 'visual music' (Wagner in Clark 116). From the time the opera first appeared, critics attributed Fenella, the lead character's utterance, to 'the orchestral music that accompanied her movement and gave her voice' (122). Joseph d'Ortigue commented in 1863 that

> There is . . . one role that rises above all the others, a role for which I have a particular predilection: that of Fenella. [. . .] Poor Fenella is mute, [. . .] [but her] voice and speech are given back to her by the orchestra (in Clark 122).

Clark notes that the orchestra becomes Fenella's voice in its 'full range of pitch, color [*sic*], and stylistic reference', and that it in fact replaces the human voice, which is 'restricted to a particular range, limited to the colors producible by a particular set of vocal cords, and functioning within the general parameters of vocal operatic styles' (122). Firstly, she describes how the orchestra imitates the speaking voice, giving an account of Fenella's description of her escape from prison:

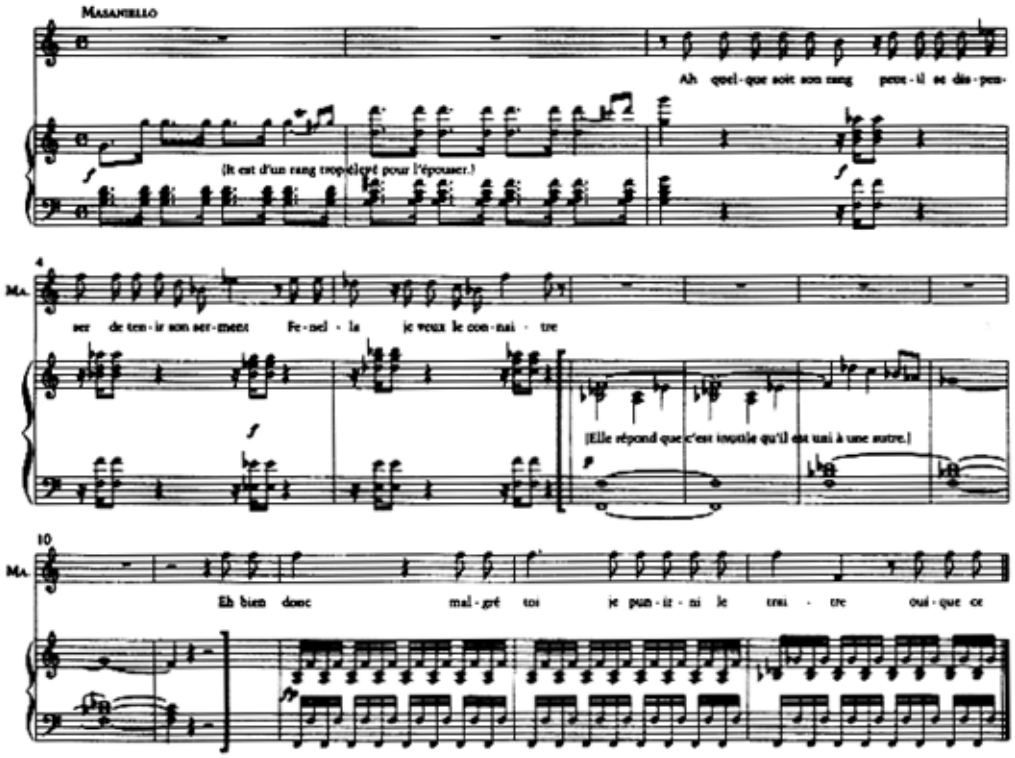
Figure 3.2: Fenella 'describing' in orchestral terms her escape from prison and the call of the guard; the sixteenth-note-quarter-note-eighth-note pattern (a) marks the rhythm of 'Qui vive?' uttered by the sentinel.



Clark then gives an eloquent description of the power of the orchestra to convey that which Fenella cannot communicate either by way of speech, or, as is more customary in *grand opera*, by way of song:

> Music associated with her can trace her physical motion, as in the beginning of [Figure 3.2] when she escapes from the prison; it can be emblematic of social position, as in the beginning of [Figure 3.3], where the martial quality of the passage indicates the high rank of Alphonse [. . .] (Clark 123).

Figure 3.3: Chorale sung by the *chœur du people* reiterated during Fenella's conversation with Masaniello in act II, as she explains her despair over Alphonse to him.



Clark does warn, however, that '[. . . p]ointedly, there are no moments that have pretensions toward the full-blown operatic voice of the *prima donna*. In general, however, the music that accompanies Fenella relates only nebulously to a specific semantic message, even when words are adumbrated' (Marian Smith in Clark 123). I pick up on Clark's warning presently on the hazards of a semiotic interpretation of the operatic text in general, even texted zones of the operatic fabric specifically.

Auber's (not unqualified) success in *La Muette de Portici* in translating Fenella's mime into narrative via the orchestra suggests Powers's notion that it is possible, in opera, to have a second voice in an 'ensemble'—or even a *prima voce*—that is, in fact, silent. He cites as an example Luisa Miller's 'Tu punis-cimi, o Signore', which is in effect a duet in which the second voice (that of Wurm) remains mute throughout.

Musico-dramatic narrative '*senza parole*'

> Carolyn Abbate has argued that moments of musical narration, marked by sonic disjunctions, are rare in instrumental music. In contrast, Lawrence Kramer has proposed that music manifests itself as a continuously enunciating voice that 'disruptively becomes or reveals itself as narrative, not when voice is heard in it, but when its voice is interrupted' [. . .] (in Paley 2000).

Another aspect of Verdi's dramaturgy that deserves comment is his descriptive writing, specifically for the orchestra, that 'enunciating voice that "[. . .] reveals itself as narrative, not when the voice is heard in it, but when the voice is interrupted"', to quote Abbate. The opening movements to the operas and the onomatopoeic sections that Verdi wrote within them are frequently narratologically interrelated, but I discuss them separately.

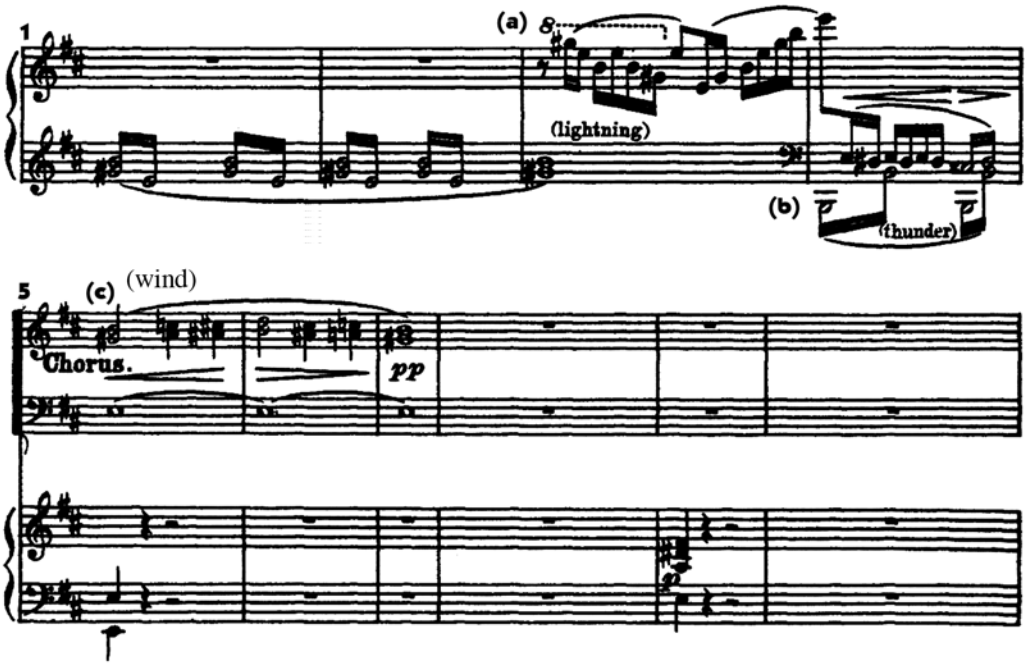
There are passages in Verdi's operas in which the programmatic signification is more important than those zones in which the signification lies in the text. The storm scenes in *Rigoletto*, *Aroldo*, *Otello*, and *Attila* are such instances. There is also the sunrise in the second scene of the 'Prologue' in *Attila*, the inspiration for which, Budden notes,

> Muzio's correspondence enables us to trace [. . .] to that forgotten favourite of Victorian choral societies and begetter off the Franco-Oriental style of the mid-century, Félicien David's *Le Désert*' (1, 1973: 252).

It is to such mimetic music, or music in which the onomatopoeic theatrical signification dominates, that I devote the next section. Boito articulates the essence of Verdi's programme based compositional skills in this passage, with reference to *La traviata*'s Act III Prelude, and I quote here again from Boito's response to Camille Bellaigue's critique of this passage: 'That silence! that calm, painful silence created by sounds!' (Luzio in Martin 198), where the music forms the musico-poetic backdrop to the stage scene, where a desperately ill woman, ostracized by her community, lies dying.

There are four other instances of such tone painting in Verdi's operatic *œuvre* to which I would like to refer: the first is the storm scene in *Rigoletto.* Verdi prepares early for this fifty-nine bar scene. The storm can be heard brewing in the distance through tone painting, or *portrayal* in Georg Lukács's terms, well before the storm breaks in all its fury. I refer to the issue of *reportage* as opposed to *portrayal* in more detail in the closing pages of this research. An *arpeggiando* motif in the woodwinds suggests the lightning (a), *tremoli* in the lower strings suggest the thunder (b), and the chorus, in thirds, humming a chromatic motif over a pedal, suggests the howling wind (c):

Figure 3.4: The three onomatopoeic (storm) gestures in Act III of *Rigoletto*.

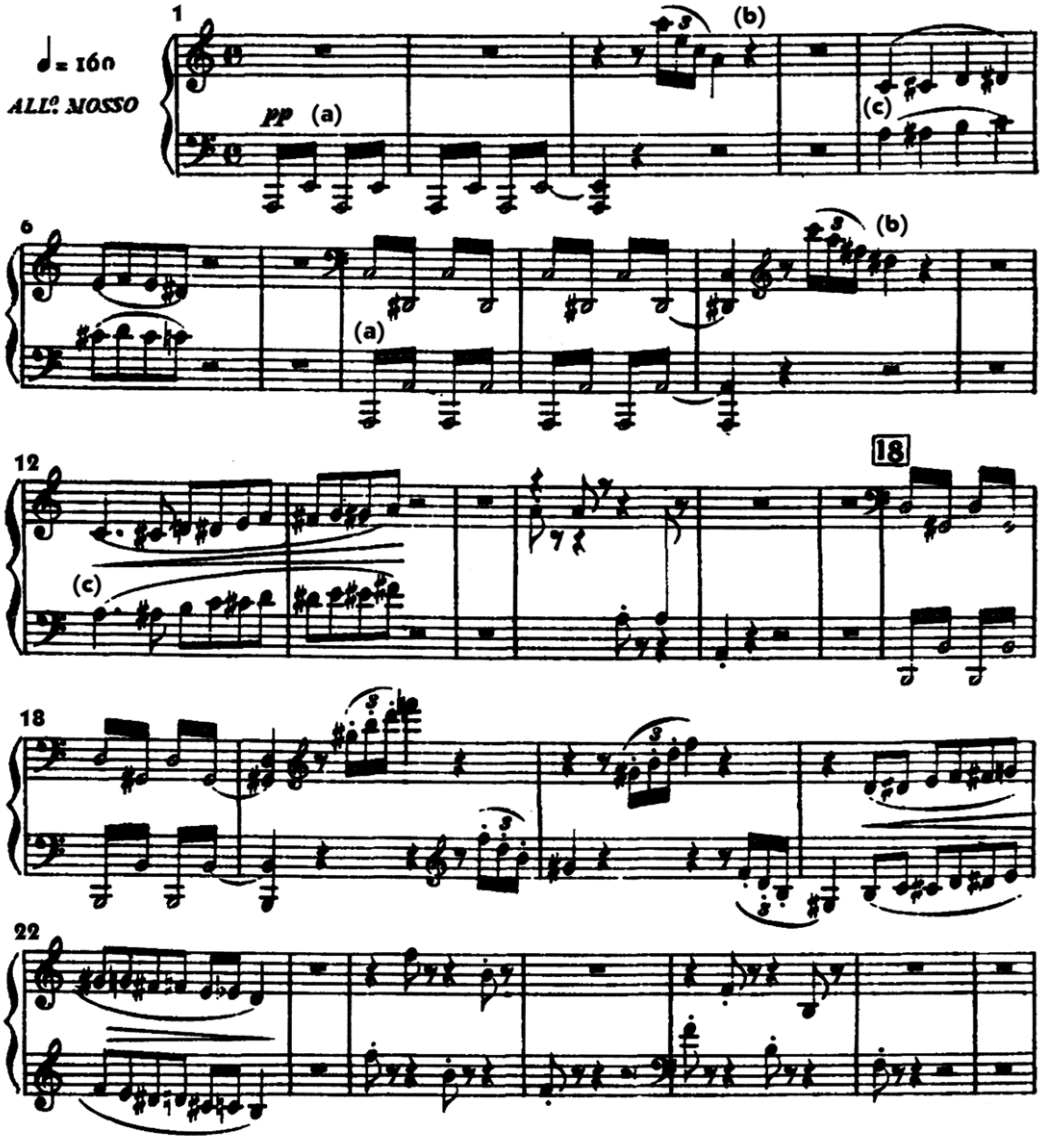


When the storm finally breaks (coinciding with the final cadential passages for the four characters on stage at that point), Verdi deploys the whole of the orchestra in a powerful *tutti* to evoke the might of the elements. However, even if theatrically effective, the movement is less successful than later attempts at 'storm' scoring.

The preludes to *Attila* (1846) and *I masnadieri* (1847), for example, although written earlier, are more eloquent, possibly because Verdi was not trying to write programme music. He relies heavily in the *Rigoletto* storm scene on dark lower string sounds, as opposed to the shrill piccolo sound to represent thunder and lightning. In addition, he uses the orchestra *tutti* to contrast with the almost soloistic deployment of selected strings, and the definitely soloistic treatment of other instruments, for example the flute and oboe. Verdi in fact also relied heavily on the effect of the human voice (in consecutive movement over a pedal point) to denote the howling of the wind. Before this, the convention of using the voice instrumentally in the opening movements of the operas did not exist, nor, for that matter, in any purely orchestral movement, not counting works such as Beethoven's *Ninth Simphony* or the *Chorale Fantasia* Op. 80. It was not until later in his career, in *Otello* and *Falstaff*, where the chorus *does* form part of the opera's opening movement, that Verdi would use the voice instrumentally and orchestrally to such effect.

The ‘Burrasca’ in Act IV of *Aroldo* has no parallel in *Stiffelio,* the earlier version of the opera. In this storm, Verdi reaches a level of sophistication not achieved in *Rigoletto,* although the orchestral means are very similar. The impression is one of the composer achieving a more effective storm using fewer notes. Here Verdi does not attempt to achieve onomatopoeic effects by means of melody and a consistently high dynamic levels, but rather through motivic and dynamic contrast, and orchestral and vocal *colorito*. In fact, Verdi uses almost exactly the same motivic material as in *Rigoletto*, but to greater effect. The same string *tremoli* (a) serves for thunder, the *arpeggiandi* (b) for lightning, and consecutive thirds (c), now played by the strings and not hummed by the chorus, for the soughing of the wind.

Figure 3.5: Extract from the ‘Burrasca’ (storm), Act IV of *Aroldo*.



Verdi also shows an innovative flash when he does use the chorus as part of the orchestral force in the 'Burrasca', but it binds with the supporting harmonic structures, mostly as unisons or in octaves. When the narrative suggests that salvation is at hand, Verdi fills out the chords in four parts. Consequently, the resultant sound is instantly warmer and more vital than the writing in open octaves or unisons. This particular scene is even more forward looking in relation to its motivic invention. The melody upon which Verdi eventually settles for the chorus after its initial entries is one that would not be out of place in the storm scene in Act I of *Otello*. In fact, it bears a striking resemblance to the opening thematic material in that opera's first scene. Verdi established a 'mould' in the opening movement of *Macbeth*: instrumental colours and timbres create a kaleidoscopic effect, created by romantic, not impressionist, techniques. The storm in *Aroldo* depends for its success on exactly this sort of kaleidoscopic writing in which different orchestral colours are played off against each other in the interests of programmatic tone painting.

A comparison between the storm scene in *Attila* (1846) and *Aroldo* (1857) reveals Verdi's increasing orchestral mastery. In stark contrast with the opera's opening movement the storm scene in *Attila* is commonplace and, frankly, ugly. But it contains the motifs that were to fertilize the thematic ideas for the storm scene in *Rigoletto*: the low string rumbling and the *arpeggiandi* in the higher voices.

The sunrise after the storm from the same opera, which Budden tells us 'earned the composer much critical praise at the time' (1, 1973: 252), is no more than a forty-seven bar perfect authentic cadence, the first two-thirds of which rest on a dominant pedal. The movement is built on a rising *arpeggio* (there is no other thematic material), and it depends for its success entirely on the orchestral *colorito.* The kaleidoscopic effect of *Macbeth*'s opening movement has its roots in this little movement. It is an extraordinary piece of orchestration, consisting of a sustained and carefully controlled *crescendo* achieved by the simple addition of instruments, in the way that would one day ensure the success of Ravel's *Bolero*. The effect is also similar. Key to Verdi's music in these movements is that it is never 'self-conscious', in the Gidean sense of the word, which Michael Tilby describes in his translator's preface to Gide's *Les Faux-Monnayeurs* as 'texts [. . .] which draw attention to their own compositional devices and remind the reader that what he is reading is pure make-believe' (17).

The epitome of Verdi's onomatopoeic writing, however, comes in *Otello*'s opening scene, in which the Moor's ship is battered in the storm as it heads for Cyprus. This scene is discussed in detail in the following chapter. The greatest difference between this and other storms, whose success depends on programmatic imagery, is the use of the chorus. Other motivic orchestral structures in *Otello*'s storm scene are stock gestures. The *arpeggiandi*, the lower strings, the consecutive movement (this time of chromatic triads in open harmony) have all been used before, but this scene also contains vocal *parola scenica* in both choral and soloistic parts.

I have established that the 'telling of the story' in operatic terms falls naturally within narrative as I interpret it. Abbate (1991) challenges the 'miming model' that interprets music as narrative, but perhaps the necessary qualification is that music *has narrative traits* as the *Otello* storm shows, and that opera, because of its text, *is* narrative. In *The Poetics of Prose*, Todorov deals with a similar conundrum around narrative as opposed to description in his discussion of Genette's analysis of Flaubert's *Figures*. In 'Silence de Flaubert' the author observes that

> [. . .] Genette speaks of description as if it were self-explanatory; but indeed what is description? Why does it stand in opposition to narration, whereas both seem to belong to the discourse of the narrator as opposed to the discourse of the characters? What opposes description to narrative—is it simply the substitution of a pause for movement? Are these the only notions on this level of generality or are there others as well? We can no longer trust the definitions of classical poetics; in any case, we have forgotten them; but we must produce new ones (1977: 36).

The problem of narrative *versus* description does not exist in opera to the extent that it does in literature, however. In literature, narrative and description are mutually exclusive, but not in opera. Here the two can, and quite frequently do, occur side by side, in juxtaposition and superimposition, particularly where *parola scenica* is in evidence.

In Violetta's *salon* in *La traviata*, for example, the band plays dance music in the background (description), but Alfredo declares his love to Violetta in the foreground (narrative). Alfredo speaking to Violetta addresses the noetic and carries the bulk of the noetic flow, the *banda* playing in the background carries the poetic. Together, the two result in the spectator's limbic impression.

Carl Dahlhaus refers to Dieter Schnebel in *Realism in the Nineteenth Century*, as '[proposing] a definition of Verdian realism which combines features originating in literary theory with specifically musical elements' (63).

> Verdi's gestural style of musical drama makes possible a musical realism which shows the real person in his real, i.e. social, situation, but also directs a light on to the inner reality of the person [. . .] which simultaneously X-rays and sympathetically illuminates them: the radiance, of course, comes from the music [. . .] (*Realism* 63).

He continues,

> But the fourth factor Schnebel mentions is the crucial one: the emphatically gestural nature of the musical expression. The fact that the affections which move the characters in a Verdi opera are such as demand expression in gesture—and that phrases of the text which are vital to understanding should stand out as 'parola scenica'—is the dramaturgical aspect of a situation which rests on the compositional fact that Verdi was before all else a genius of musical rhythm [. . .] (64).

Dahlhaus here almost treats expression and *parola scenica* as separate, as though they are mutually exclusive. This is because Dahlhaus and Schnebel implicate *parola scenica* in the equation, having somewhat arbitrarily described it. I am also not convinced that Dahlhaus might not be referring to *dramatic* rhythm here, rather than *musical* rhythm.

The debate over how *parola scenica* functions when the voices are silent is by no means exhausted. I argue that in the symphonic operatic sections the descriptive power of the text implies the narrative, and thus the sense of *parola scenica* can be said to continue to exist. The narrative is rooted in the accompanimental figures Verdi uses, which spill over into the non-texted sections of the music, and which I examine in greater detail presently.

Moreover, the storms and other programmatic sections in Verdi's operas are not just descriptive events added for *colorito*, as they may seem. They are *always* part of the drama. When the storm scene starts in *Rigoletto*, for example, Sparafucile, Maddalena and Mantua are on stage, Rigoletto having sent Gilda away to change into male attire and to flee to Verona. As the storm increases, however, Gilda reappears and overhears Sparafucile's bargain with his sister to spare the life of Mantua and kill instead whoever first knocks on the inn's door. At the height of the storm, Gilda makes the decision to give her life to save Mantua's, knocks on the door, and is murdered by Sparafucile. The storm then abates, having been fully motivated, introduced and dramatically concluded.

Compare this storm to Rossini's in the last act of *Il barbiere di Siviglia*. There the 'Tempesto', as Rossini calls it, is a purely orchestral movement running into some three minutes. It connects Berta's exit aria and the last scene of the action (or the *dénouement*) of the opera, but it serves no dramatic purpose at all except to effect a change of set, perhaps, and excising it would not affect the plot.

It becomes clear, in the sense that Powers describes a 'duet' where only one voice sings, that Verdi would use as a sonic backdrop onomatopoeic gestures such as storms, sunrises and other programmatic vocabulary, *thereby relegating the primary melody to the background, while the plot develops, albeit in mime, in the foreground*, but this is a prerequisite if it is to correspond to my reading of *parola scenica*. The same may be said of other such onomatopoeic moments. Good examples are provided by two processions. The first is one I described earlier, that of Carlos moving across the stage for his coronation in *Giovanna d'Arco*. The other appears in *Macbeth*, where Duncan and his *entourage* arrive at the Macbeth castle for the night, moving to their quarters while crossing the stage, unaware of his hosts' murderous plans.

Untexted *parola scenica*

However, Verdi did not confine the strategy to those operatic sections that do not carry text. He had an instinctive ability to distil the mood and context from the text and translate it into pure musical gesture. In the process he developed an idiom that impacted on both recitative and aria, and could conceivably fit into either category, hence the development of terms such as *arioso*. From this amorphous fusion grew Verdi's operatic voice, as well as a genuinely Italian operatic idiom for his successors, an idiom in which the symphonic sections of the music are non-verbal gestures that carry the narrative meaning by description and/or by association.

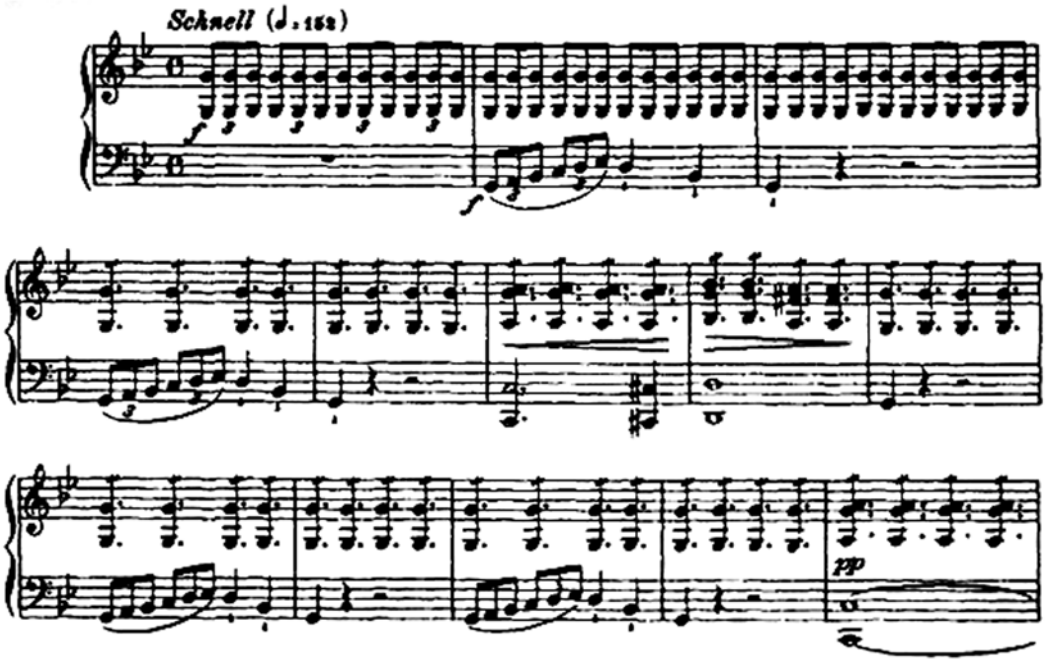
It is particularly in the aria accompaniments, however, that Verdi's ability to encapsulate verbal intent in non-verbal music surfaces most clearly. As do the accompaniments to the *Lieder* of late Romanticism, Verdi's accompaniments spell out sense, tone and meaning very particularly.

In 'Eri tu' (*Un ballo in maschera*, 1859), without using a basic emotion such as *rage* as benchmark, Verdi communicates what one listener may perceive as anger, another as Riccardo's disillusionment at losing his wife to his best friend, and yet another as the emotional force that moves him to react to Amelia's suspected infidelity. What is perceived depends on a particular listener's mind set. By distilling the essential textual dramatic intent in the musical gesture, Verdi avoids the generic gesture of *opera seria* aria accompaniments of a Rossini, Donizetti or Bellini. In *opera seria*, meaning, sense, emotion and tone are embedded in the primary melody. Verdi embeds it in the entire gesture, even if there are no words, or no primary melody to speak of, as in the opening strains of 'Prendi . . . quest'è l'imagine' from Act III of *La traviata*.

Thus the unwritten convention of embellishment loses impetus in Verdi's later output, as in *verismo*. Ornamentation of the vocal line carries much of the emotional impact in the primary melody of *opera seria*. Lucia's mad scene is an important example of this, and different readings of the double *cadenza* traditionally sung in 'Ardon gl'incensi' are noteworthy (Donizetti 232). Such *fioriture* have no function in *verismo* except to add elegance to a melodic line, or as specialized onomatopoeia. Leoncavallo writes *fioriture* for Nedda in *I pagliacci*'s 'Ballatella' to suggest swallows in flight, for example.

In Verdi's semiotically charged accompaniments, his ability to encapsulate verbal narrative intent in non-verbal music is most palpable. As do the accompaniments to the *Lieder* of late Romanticism, Verdi's accompaniments embody very clearly sense, tone and signification. These are *parola scenica* made music, in Budden's terms. As an example one might compare two very telling examples, and give a brief close reading, the first of Schubert's *Erlkönig*.

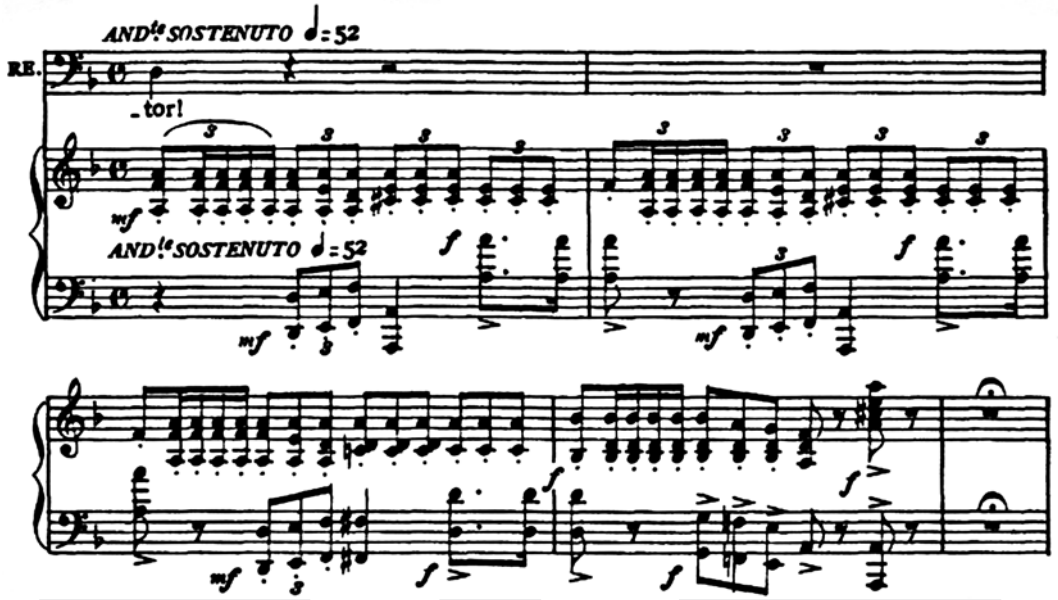
Figure 3.6: Extract from Schubert's *Erlkönig* Op. 1.



Various interpretations exist, of course, but the one favoured by most performers in respect of this accompanying figure is that it imitates the mad race on horseback of the father, trying to get his son to the safety of his home before the Elfin King takes the child, a race the father and son lose, as the child dies in his father's arms. The accompaniment of gunfire-rapid repeated-octave triplets in the piano's right-hand part recreates the horror of the chase and simulates the galloping of the horse.

I have already given a short description of the narrative connotations one might make in respect of the accompaniment to Verdi's 'Eri tu' from *Un ballo in maschera*. The scoring is dominated by heavy string writing, underscored by acrid brass and lower woodwinds, accompanying Renato as he looks at the picture of his ruler and former best friend, Riccardo (or Gustavo, depending on which version of the opera one is considering). In this scene Renato muses that it is not his wife who will die for the suspected infidelity between herself and Riccardo, but Riccardo himself:

Figure 3.7: Opening bars from 'Eri tu' from *Un ballo in maschera*.



The layers of opera are difficult to separate. However, if the use of accompaniment and orchestra in this manner did not originate with Verdi, then this technique certainly became a Verdian trademark.

Music is realist, then, when it appeals to both the listener's dramatic and musical awareness, and draws on what the audience interprets as real life, to the extent that the narrative seems contemporaneously true from the characters' point of view. The realist musical text is reinforced frequently by *parola scenica*. In *parola scenica*, the primary melody is fragmented and displaced by a quasi-recitativo of prose or asymmetrical verse in which plot is furthered. These blocks of plot are also characterized by a musico-poetic hybrid in place of expected formal conventions, and both narrative and musical sections are extended to be able to support greater dramatic intent in the musical and theatrical gesture. This reference touches again on the notion of the inner space: that space where the composer-poet creates verbal meaning, and the space in the listener where limbic impact is created.

The orchestra in general

> Verdi had sensed the potential of Italian orchestras, and it was undoubtedly this potential, coupled with thorough rehearsal, carefully balanced orchestral proportions, and a seating arrangement designed to promote blend and precision in playing while minimizing the defects of the wind instruments that he had in mind when he wrote to the French publisher, Léon Escudier, 'You French, no doubt, perform more correctly, but you will never be able to produce the effects of our choruses and orchestras when they are well conducted' (Prod'homme in Harwood 130).

Before I conclude this chapter on Verdi's use of the orchestra specifically in relation to *parola scenica*, I need to make some general observations regarding his orchestral palette. I believe this will have some value in the discussion of *parola scenica* peripherally rather than specifically.

As the orchestra developed throughout the nineteenth century, audibility of the singers became a significant problem. In his essay 'Verdi's Reform of the Italian Opera Orchestra' Gregory Harwood notes the steady growth of the orchestral body. Surprisingly, before the nineteenth century, the string body was traditionally the smallest, with its weakest spot in the middle strings: the second violins, violas and cellos. Even towards the mid nineteenth century (by 1856), a theatre such as the Teatro Communale in Rimini had only nine violins in total; one viola, one cello and three double bases. This is a total string count of fourteen. To balance this, the rest of the orchestra totalled eighteen conventional woodwind and brass, plus *bombardon* and *catuba* (112). It was only in 1830 that theorist and composer Bonifazio Asioli, writing in his *Il maestro do composizione*, suggested an ideal composition of the orchestra, as follows:

Figure 3.8: From Bonifazio Asioli, *Il maestro di composizione* (Milan, [c. 1830]), page [35] (Harwood 110).

IDEAL ORCHESTRA SIZE		
SMALL ORCHESTRA	MEDIUM ORCHESTRA	LARGE ORCHESTRA
6-8 violins	12-16 violins	20-24-30 violins
2 violas	3-4 violas	6-8 violas
1 violoncello	2-3 violoncellos	5-6 violoncellos
2 double basses	5-6 double basses	8-10 double basses
1 flute	1 flute	2 flutes
2 oboes or clarinets	2 oboes	2 oboes
	2 clarinets	2 clarinets
2 horns	2 horns	2 horns
1 bassoon	2 bassoons	2 bassoons
	2 trumpets	2 trumpets
		1 trombone

By the middle of the century, the theatres where Verdi's operas were heard primarily—Turin, Venice, London, Paris and Rome—all had medium to large orchestras, and audibility may have been an issue. Patrick Smith tells us that 'stock responses, whether of a line or a verse, were swamped by the music and became a jumble of sounds'. Verdi partially solved the problem by using *parola scenica* (195), Smith says, and we know he is referring to the pictorial model of the device, having described it as such. However, my reading of *parola scenica* in this respect would also have solved the problem.

Gilles de Van notes that 'when Verdi took hold of a subject, he saw the opera as a whole and his musical imagination was inseparable from his dramatic understanding' (15). This is particularly true of his orchestration of the work. It is well-known that Verdi only started orchestrating *after* rehearsals had begun, so that he could take into account the voices. Thus the orchestration was determined by the creator of the role, a fact noted, among others, by Joan Peyser (318).

Weisstein (Reflections 108-109) suggests that Verdi never aspired to the esoteric heights Wagner did, and the orchestra as emotional commentator noetic content is a feature I have described broadly, because it is a primary characteristic of *parola scenica*. Joan Peyser also tells us that Verdi abstained from the 'traditionally Italian orientation toward vocal rather than instrumental beauties' (318), and directed the orchestra, instead, towards the business of contributing to the gradual dramatic development of the text.

These few pointers illustrate lucidly what Pougin has described as a 'clear and accurate feeling of harmony and orchestra applied to dramatic music (1887), and Harwood, Weisstein and Peyser have commented eloquently on Verdi's general development of the orchestra and orchestral procedures. However, Peyser enumerates one more 'feature' of Verdi on orchestral unity; it is one with which I disagree. Her suggestion of *parola scenica* in relation to Verdi's 'technique of combining orchestral melody with what is in effect a replacement for recitative [which is] familiar from the works of Rossini' I believe, is a specious argument. In the chapter to come, I demonstrate the role of *parola scenica* when the device is compared with recitative, especially in the inevitably ambiguous cases. The main disqualifying feature is mostly that, although there is usually a melody in the background, it is not the ***primary*** melody. This truly distinguishes *parola scenica* from other techniques that imitate the spoken voice, such as recitative, *parlando*, *Sprechstimme* and *canto spezzato*, among others. This holds for the work of others besides Verdi in which *parola* appears, of course.

Parola scenica in the orchestra

> There is every reason to suppose that the dramaturgy of the Verdian *parola scenica* is applicable throughout his career, from 'Non son più re, son Dio!!' launching the last movement of the act II *finale* of *Nabucco* to [the gesture] launching the *concertato* in the act II *finale* of *Falstaff* (Powers *Simon Boccanegra* 128).

I have shown how *parola scenica* grew in response to a number of imperatives: to disguise formal structures, to make theatrical sense of the *banda;* to turn the long and introspective aria away from the audience and towards the theatrical and dramatic development of the character. I have referred to the above as some of the conditions under which *parola scenica* is likely to appear, including the emulation of ordinary speech. It ensures that all the elements of the musical text are audible, no matter how many voices perform at any given moment.

I deal with the last one first, because, on the face of it, this seems the most straight-forward. It is unnecessary to cite Verdi's references to counterpoint as opposed to harmony, in terms both of his own work and what he viewed as important for students at conservatories to learn. It is clear from the composer's correspondence that he seldom if ever thought of his music in homophonic terms. For Verdi the value of each line lay in its melodic uniqueness, which is why it is so difficult to accept George Bernard Shaw's statement that Verdi treated the orchestra as 'the big guitar' (Martin 195).

Parola scenica used as a compositional device is frequently evident in Verdi's orchestral texture. From the conception of each movement the emphasis for him is the audibility of each line in his musical texture, regardless of whether there is text. That he treats the text differently—via *parola scenica*—when he requires it to have more emphasis than in other sections merely underscores his contrapuntal (or multi-spatial) compositional thought process.

Turning the *banda* into a more dramatic entity is the least sophisticated application of *parola scenica*. I have shown how Verdi achieves this in musico-dramatic terms simply by backgrounding the primary melody in the *banda* and by fragmenting the secondary melody in the foreground, frequently scattering it as monotones, thereby giving it greater narrative value. The second technique Verdi used to give greater expression to the *banda* was by turning the chorus into a *banda*-like entity. By doing this he avoided the vulgarity of which scholars so often accuse him when writing for the *banda*. He also achieved greater expression through the chorus, because its lines are texted, and it is therefore capable of greater narrative impact.

Likewise, Verdi is far from unsophisticated in his treatment of the orchestra in its capacity as pseudo-*banda*, or when sections of the orchestra operate in the role of the *banda*. Examples are legion, but those that come to mind immediately occur in *La traviata*, in the diminished first violin numbers in the Prelude to Act III; in the second act of *I due Foscari*, in the prison scene, where the protagonist is assailed by spectres in the prison (his only accompaniment is a solo viola and solo cello); and the solo violin *concertino* in the third act of *I Lombardi*. In all these instances Verdi breaks up the forces of the orchestra. He backgrounds the main orchestral body, and he places the solo instruments in the foreground, in opposition to the main orchestral force.

In orchestral terms, the third instance under which *parola scenica* is likely to appear—to disguise formal structures—is perhaps easiest to accomplish, because the techniques remain the same, whether a voice participates or not. When the voice is present, Verdi hides the expected formal structures simply by taking the voice over the *caesurae* in the orchestral text, thereby disguising cadence points. When there is no voice to speak of, his favourite ploy is to avoid tonal centres that would normally underpin the expected structures in the architecture.

In the opening movements of the operas, as I have shown, Verdi starts in one key and finishes in another. The result for the listener is a subliminally unfulfilled harmonic musical event, through which Verdi creates an emotional void that must be filled. Thus the movement that follows acquires an inevitability it would not have had, if the previous movement come to an expected close. Others have used this technique: the final chords of Chopin's *Étude in c* Op. 10 N°. 12 (*Revolutionary*), unrelated to the opening is another well-known example. The effect of starting in one key and closing in another is unsettling, because it impacts below the threshold of awareness. I suggest, then, that the modal switch to the tonic minor (or major, as the case may be) is aimed at exactly that same sort of subconscious *colorito.*

The most sophisticated application of *parola scenica* occurs in the long, introspective aria Verdi inherited from *opera seria*. In arias such as Odabella's 'Liberamente or piangi . . . sfrenati, o cor' in *Attila* and 'O ma reine' in *Don Carlos*, the composer places the aria's narrative in the service of conveying narrative signification for the spectator, or as a means of reflection for the character, certainly not only as a means of virtuoso vocal display for singers, but rather as a test of their histrionic abilities.

Verdi allows the orchestra to speak, not the voices, in the same way that the orchestral accompaniment to the arias achieve voice, by allowing the theatrical signification of the text to spill over into the symphonic sections. This shows an applied instance of Powers's principle of having a silent partner present in an ensemble, the same principle he follows in the opening movements to the operas, when there is no voice present to carry theatrical meaning. However, in these he relies on the text resident in the title of the opera to create the sense of story setting of the overture. In the cases of *Un ballo in maschera* or *I masnadieri*, for example, the titles have certain connotations. In most cases, also, the audience would have been familiar with the libretto through its source, even before Verdi had set the opera. It is this narrative meaning that the composer sets about recreating, and through which he conveys meaning to his public. This subtle use of a writing style reminiscent of *parola scenica* is not peculiar nor exclusive to Verdi. Every composer, from the Baroque to the twenty-first century, has had cause to evoke in the listener or spectator a particular narrative idea through a descriptive title, although Gordon Epperson has warned quite specifically against falling into the trap of over-reliance on programmatic titles as a means of instilling meaning in the listener (12).

In conclusion, I make one more point concerning onomatopoeic orchestral gestures. As I have shown elsewhere, there are significant ties between opera as expressive power and its gestural-formulaic origins. These ties are evident again in the manner in which the onomatopoeic gesture in untexted music addresses the inner space of the listener.

Outside Verdi's *œuvre*, the prelude to Act III of Cilea's *Adriana Lecouvreur*, say, is a purely instrumental section of operatic narrative, and is based on a melody that has become synonymous with Adriana's and Maurizio's doomed love. This is one of those instances in which Dahlhaus (*Realism* 13-14) warns the scholar not to oversimplify matters by considering an opera as realist because the text is realist. It underscores, too, Cazden's warning (*Realism* 29), that musical realism cannot simply be reduced to *Tonmalerei*. An instance such as this is not ordinary tone painting. Besides the intellectual response triggered by the recognition, or anticipation, of the thematic material, the musical narrative very directly resonates with the inner space of the listener. It, too, is a perfect example of the composer addressing the listener's capacity for musical as well as dramatic experience at the same time, or evoking what I have come to call the limbic impulse.

Finally, *parola scenica* can emulate natural speech, if one accepts the convention of the sung word as 'natural'. This application of it becomes especially important in the verist period post-Verdi, rather than with the composer himself.

In these opening chapters, I have shown, then, what *parola scenica* is, how it came about, and how Verdi applies it. In pages to come I show how Verdi maximized the device and its use, and I touch upon how composers other than Verdi made *parola scenica* part of their compositional language. In Chapter 5 I bring Verdi's use of the device to a close, and I then conclude by drawing the line of development from *mélodrame* through *recitativo* and other *quasi*-spoken compositional techniques, aria and *parola scenica* to the 'language' of modern film.

I have often wondered about the 'spark' that exists in Verdi and not in some of his peers. In other words, what is it in Verdi's operatic narrative that made his work so immensely successful in his day, to enable it to outlive the work of, say, Mercadante or Pacini? After all, there are passages in these 'lesser' composers' works that approach the best in Verdi. The opening movement of Paccini's *Saffo*, for one, ranks with some of the most expressive opening movements in Verdi's output: *Attila* or *I masnadieri*, perhaps.

Two major differences distinguish Verdi's project from that of his peers. Firstly, Verdi always wrote counterpoint, not harmony. Secondly: when the voice is silent in the operas of Verdi's contemporaries, the noetic intent stops. This is not the case in Verdi. The orchestra remains part of the equation in *parola scenica* to a greater or lesser extent, and in Verdi the limbic signification is so powerful that the signifieds continue to resonate even where there are no *parole*.

Chapter 4

> [Verdi] wants [character] types that, without exactly corresponding to real human beings, are striking enough by their truth to shed light on our understanding of reality (De Van 42).

Having introduced the notion of *parola scenica*, I have shown how it reflects realism as a literary movement, and how contemporary librettists mapped it onto the libretto. Simply put, I have focused on how literary influences impacted on the textual-dramatic element of nineteenth-century Italian opera. I have also described how the non-texted sections of the musical text responded to late nineteenth-century stimuli. In this chapter I begin to interrogate how these influences impacted on the entire musico-dramatic landscape we call opera.

I described also the textual basis of a *parola scenica* prototype, which I revisit as I outlined it elsewhere, and I trace models—predating, contemporary and subsequent—from a musical rather than a literary point of view. Then, besides suggesting that realism lies in how the composer engages the public's foregrounded noetic awareness rather than the backgrounded-poetic, I argue that while dramatic content in *opera seria* is embedded in the melody, in *verismo* it occupies the entire theatrical gesture. With this basic difference in view, I attempt to link literary and musical narrative, in Verdi especially by means of *parola scenica* as an extraordinary signifier in relation to the narrative signs to which it gives rise.

Elsewhere I gave an outline of conditions under which *parola scenica* might occur: while adding expression to the *banda*, it ensures audibility, hides formal structures, mimics natural speech, and develops an idiom that communicates on the limbic level. This opposes *opera seria*'s recitative and *aria*, which split musical meaning into noetic and poetic components only and fairly exclusively. These are not the *only* conditions likely to give rise to *parola scenica*, but the *most common*. Having established its musical nature and provenance, I give in this chapter a description of how *parola scenica* develops, illustrated by a close reading of *Stiffelio* (1850, revised and debuted anew as *Aroldo* in 1857). I follow then with a summary of how Verdi adapts the device for use in particular 'idiomatic' situations, with reference to close readings of *Don Carlos* and *Aida*. The former leads developmentally to the latter, the opera in relation to which we Verdi first mentions *parola scenica* in writing. In the chapter that follows I use as a point of reference *Otello*, Verdi's last tragedy; then I make a brief enquiry into the development of *parola scenica* after Verdi.

Verdi's operatic heritage in focus

Opera seria communicates primarily poetically by means of the melody, and signification therefore could be—and indeed, was—intensified by embellishment, in *da capo* sections in the *cabaletta*, for example. This reflects on the notion of defamiliarization I discussed towards the end of Chapter 1, which became important in terms of what audiences valued in opera before realism became a nineteenth-century theatrical requirement. *Opera seria* is built on the level of 'astonishment' the composer (and singer) could create. It lies in the unwritten convention of the period, in the vocal line in every cadence or close. It is integral in every *da capo*, to be sung *a piacere* the performer. Besides the need for a new narrative style in the nineteenth century, the development of a more natural style of operatic delivery did not result from a revolt against the singers' interpolated *fioriture*, but against their irreverent use of *inappropriately* interpolated *fioriture*.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, signification had moved to encompass the entire musico-dramatic gesture: the melody, accompaniment and dramatic action. In the operatic trajectory, textual meaning resided in the recitative, first *secco*, then *accompagnato*, then *aria*—a texture with primarily musical impact, an *opera-seria* norm—until Verdi revised trends with *parola scenica* to 're-mind' the subject of textual narrative intent. I use the word 're-mind' as David Adams Leeming does (1990), in the context of putting a concept in mind anew, to re-present it and persuade the reader to experience it from another angle than the ordinary. The development of opera from its initial appearance as chanted text follows an 'intensification' of melodic traditions as a result of the dominance of the singer and the composer with melodic facility or flair, such as a Malibran or Bellini. Eventually a decline of gestural-formulaic techniques, emphasizing melodic gesture. The preferred Greek tragic model of creating drama through the text gradually lost ground in favour of melodic beauty.

Exactly how operatic compositional techniques changed pace is complex, but to trace its development is, in a sense, to trace Verdi's methods of preparing for realism, and the development by his peers of ideas that adumbrate *parola scenica*. A review of these trends inevitably induces a sense of *déjà vu*, or a feeling that one has heard a syntax that resembles *parola scenica* before Verdi, which appears to contradict a claim I make in the opening chapter to this research, namely that 'the device [of *parola scenica*] has no direct precedent in Italian opera of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries'.

Lesley Orrey writes, for example, that although 'seemingly up to date, [Rossini's] musical idiom remained [. . .] basically an expansion of eighteenth-century *opera seria* or *opera buffa*' (124). He adds that, although the composer added a spontaneity and melodically decorative inventiveness that drew the attention of his audiences, he also evolved musical formulas, just as Scribe made use of textual and dramatic formulas in the well made play. Gossett argues that

> Rossini's mature Italian operas were constructed as a succession of closed numbers (separated by accompanied recitative), each number usually in multiple sections with a unifying tonality. By a careful arrangement of its individual parts, differentiated in tempo and metre, the closed number could accommodate significant dramatic activity. [. . .] Though the outlines were classical, Rossini's ways of realising these *cavatinas*, arias, duets, trios, etc, were extraordinarily varied (*Tell* Philips 422 391-2 booklet 22-23).

'Classical' and 'extraordinarily varied' are the dominant adjectives, and it seems obvious that the structures that characterize my notion of *gestural-formulaic* are already present in late Rossini, Donizetti, and Bellini. I am also convinced this is where we find the beginnings of *parola scenica*. Gilles de Van notes that Bellini leaned progressively more towards a plainer vocal style of *canto sillabico* in which a note-per-syllable approach is favoured over the floating melismas of his contemporaries (38), and that Donizetti 'frequently roughened the customary vocal forms to rid them of their overly balanced quality and thereby benefit[ting] the dramatic rhythm' (Ashbrook in De Van 39). I believe the result sometimes *approached parola scenica*, but certainly never *constituted* it.

Rossini embarked on *Guillaume Tell*, his last and arguably his finest opera, in 1828, eleven years before Verdi's first opera premièred. Since *Guillaume Tell* was written for Paris, and Verdi spent his entire childhood in the village of Le Roncole where he was born, it is unlikely that he heard this opera until later in life. It is certainly unlikely that he ever heard the original version, because it had become customary to cut the work savagely from immediately after its première, firstly because of its length, and secondly because of the vocal difficulties it poses. Within the first five minutes of his appearance on stage, the score requires two high Cs and a high B from the *comprimario* singing Ruodi, for example (*Tell* 17, 18, 21). The first scene of *Guillaume Tell* is well worth examining in some detail, because the aural impact it makes so nearly predicts the sound of *parola scenica* that it presents the listener with just that sense of *déjà vu* to which I referred above. The opera also presents us with stylistic hybridity. Anselm Gerhard (206) notes that 'the dramaturgy of Italian opera was altogether more inclined to concentrate on protagonists as individuals [than the French grand opéra]'. *Guillaume Tell* has traits of both subspecies.

At three points in the opening chorus of this opera, in 'Quel jour serein le ciel présage' which culminates in 'Il obtient le prix l'addresse', Rossini puts the voice over the distant sound of the hunting party, as Verdi might have done when he wrote for the *banda*. Rossini introduces solo voices as a descant over the accompaniment, or one voice as a descant to another, and the musical texture becomes 'loaded', by which I mean that the dramatic impact of an ensemble is lost because a number of voices sing different lines of text at the same time.

These passages, however, differ from instances where Verdi used *parola scenica*, because all the voices carry the same sentiments, and the primary melody never moves to the background while the action continues in asymmetrical verse and in real time in the foreground. The distant horn part turns in this passage turns it into nothing more noteworthy than an accompanied recitative. Elsewhere I quote examples from Verdi's operatic *corpus* where he uses this technique, but to achieve a different dramatic effect, and where the musical results cannot be classified as *parola scenica* either. *Parola scenica* is frequently characterized by a melodic monotone (particularly in the foregrounded vocal melody). Sometimes this monotone may even represent a pedal point. However, *parola scenica* is not always accompanied by a monotone, nor is a monotone always indicative of *parola scenica*. In other words, sometimes monotones or pedal points are just what they appear to be.

Similarly, 'Accours dans ma nacelle' from Act I of *Guillaume Tell* shows two voices in descant to each other in dialogue, superficially creating the impression of one voice withdrawing into the background, leaving the other to carry the plot in the foreground. However, listening carefully to the text reveals all the dialogue as equally important, and because neither is foregrounded, the passage does not qualify as *parola scenica*. An example from Verdi's *Aida* cited presently will show the difference. This opening section is typical of an *opera seria* multi-spatial text that may easily be confused with *parola scenica*. It is introduced by Ruodi and rapidly develops into a quartet with Jemmy, Hedwiga, Ruodi and Tell simultaneously expressing different sentiments. This passage is disqualified as *parola scenica*, because the melody does not move into the background, both the action and the primary melody remain in the foreground, and the poetry is symmetrical. This loaded vocalization made the decline of *bel canto* inevitable. A *concertante* ensemble of three or more voices makes it impossible to hear any one character's words distinctly, much less all the text, and dramatic value is impaired, no matter how much symphonic value is enhanced.

Similarly, one does not have to look too far in Bellini's operatic output of only eleven works, of which *Ernani* was never completed and only one scene from *Il fù ed il sarà* was ever performed privately, for instances of multi-spatial *opera seria* writing that can easily be confused with *parola scenica*.

Concerning Bellini's realism, Dent argues on one hand that 'the most notable thing about *Il pirata* (1827) is that there is no *recitativo secco;* we are definitely in the Romantic style of continuous opera' (163). He mentions the concept of continuous opera as a hallmark of Romanticism, but it can also be said to be characteristic of the later nineteenth-century realist opera. On the other hand, Dent makes an important observation about Bellini's writing style in *Norma* (1831) regarding an emerging device that points directly towards the development of *parola scenica*, even if unintentionally, and with a different goal in mind. Dent observes,

> Sometimes one person is singing an *aria* and another character makes short comments, probably 'aside', [. . .] as in the duet between Adalgisa and Norma; in other cases, such as the duet in Act II of *La Sonnambula* between Elvino and Amina, the character is too much overcome with emotion to sing. [. . . A]ll she can do is to utter a few broken phrases. [. . .] His operas deal [. . .] with human psychology, with the minute analysis of shades of feeling [. . .] (175).

Bellini is concerned with keeping the dramatic action flowing while other necessary business goes on elsewhere. I am suggesting that Bellini attempted here to obliterate the difference between real and suspended time. The audience is focused on the plot, while 'descriptive music' is backgrounded, for example, in 'Qual cor tradisti' from *Norma*. The *prima donna*'s first stanza (A) is repeated by the tenor (A*) in an $AA^{*}A^{+}$Coda construction. Pollione's threnody is about losing the *sublime donna* whose true virtues he only discovers at the moment of death. Norma repeats her verse (aside), claiming that her heart will forever belong to Pollione, despite his deceit.

The *coda* of 'Nè più fia lieta' in Act I of Bellini's *Beatrice di Tenda* is a similar example. It is a typical extended cadence that concludes an *opera seria* set piece. The repeated text becomes almost meaningless, because the composer uses the words and phrases exclusively to complete cadential formulas. The chorus has been added as musical ballast, and for musico-dramatic rather than textual-dramatic effect. The text sung by the choir is backgrounded, and the baritone line is brought to the foreground. This construction intimates *parola scenica*, but again it must be disqualified as such, because the plot is elaborated upon here but not furthered.

Donizetti's search for a realist idiom in his sixty-nine operas was as determined as that of Rossini or Bellini, resulting in passages in which he aims to break free from contemporary operatic conventions by similar but not identical means as Verdi's with *parola scenica:* a putative effort to unite real and suspended time. These experiments date from as early as *Zoraida di Granata* (1822, revised 1824), in which *parola scenica* is already foreshadowed. Further attempts at a more realist writing style may be found towards the end of his career, as late as *Maria di Rohan* dating from 1839, where the composer can be heard backgrounding the *banda* while foregrounding the voices. This is a technique Verdi would use widely from as early as *Nabucco* (1842). Donizetti's tentative steps towards a multi-spatial compositional style here pass so quickly as to be almost inaudible. However, keeping track of the text is useful: it tells us that 'the Countess amid such jubilation [is] so sad'. It is this theatrical effect the composer wishes to recreate. This example shows Donizetti's attempt to solve the problem of providing for the *banda* without breaks in the action by incorporating it into the drama.

To connect Verdi and these instances of what I may perhaps describe as a prototypical *parola scena* writing style, I refer again to 'O qual m'invida ed agita' from Act I of *Stiffelio/Aroldo*. This ensemble is the centrepiece of Act I in both versions of the opera. It is the point at which the action freezes as the *primo uomo* instructs his wife to unlock the book in which the message from her lover is hidden. In the context in which it appears, and given what precedes it and what follows, it is an almost inevitable construction in terms of *opera seria* conventions. What is especially interesting about it is how Verdi sets it as a floating construction reminiscent of the *parola scenica* which goes before.

While the Act I *finale* in *Stiffelio* itself cannot be described as *parola scenica*, primarily because it is reflective in nature and the transference of plot data is confined to a single key issue rather than a run of events, the scenes that precede it are another matter. Even a cursory inspection of large sections of the musical text in Act I of *Stiffelio*, including the *Scena* and *Coro* leading into the *finale* containing 'O qual m'invida ed agita', reveals the extent to which the composer had by 1850 absorbed the possibilities of *parola scenica* as a narrative tool. Verdi uses it to lead into the floating structure of 'O qual m'invida ed agita', and away from it, into a section of narrative in which the characters comment on events Piave has already set in motion, and which brings to a close Act I of the opera. *Parola scenica* is unlikely to appear in this *stretta*, which develops according to its own, traditional narrative rules.

Parola scenica: Verdi's experiments after Paris

> The technical material of *Nabucco* was in no way ahead of his contemporaries—it was less ambitious than most. What was new was the man behind the work, an angry young man letting rip with chords and cadences against a fate that had nearly engulfed him [. . .]. Not until *Traviata* was Verdi going to let his own feelings intrude into his music—and then it was a very different tale awaiting the telling, and in very different music (Godefroy 21).

I cited elsewhere Dahlhaus's reference to the need of nineteenth-century operatic composers and their librettists to justify, again and again, the switch from *aria* to *cabaletta*. This was the basis of *opera seria* writing, which precludes realist textual expression in opera predating *verismo*. In retrospect, it seems to me that Verdi's *Oberto* and *Un giorno di regno* represent an *étude* for *Nabucco*'s *dramatic* expression, which was ahead of its time, although the *musical* idiom was not, as Godefroy suggests above. It seems likely that Verdi hammered them out in the image of the operatic models he inherited from Bellini, Donizetti, Mercadante, Pacini, Rossini and others. His true dramatic-stylistic development beginning with *Nabucco* and lasting up to 1881 with the revision of *Simon Boccanegra* (including the 'very different music' of *La traviata)* prepared Verdi for the final chapter represented by *Don Carlos*, *Aida*, *Otello* and *Falstaff*. As Stromberg argues in the reference in Chapter 1, there are overlaps as always with generalizations, but these demarcations, if facile, are adequate.

Besides the operas he revised extensively and redebuted under their original titles—*Macbeth*, *Il trovatore*, *Don Carlos*, *Les Veprês siciliennes* and *Simon Boccanegra*—Verdi left rich grounds for enquiry in the lesser known restyled works. *Stiffelio* was revised as *Aroldo*, as we know, and I devote a significant section of this chapter to a close reading of how Verdi manipulated *parola scenica* in such a formative work in ways that reveal a search for a pliable and dramatically telling idiom.

The years 1847 and 1849 were particularly fruitful in Verdi's development. Operas he produced were *Macbeth* (1847), *I masnadieri* (1847), *Jérusalem*, text by Alphonse Royer and Gustave Vaëz after *I Lombardi*, premièred in Paris (1847), *Il corsaro* (1848), and *La battaglia di Legnano* (1849), text by Salvadore Cammarano after *La Battaille de Toulouse* by Joseph Méry, and *Luisa Miller* (1849). However, Verdi's output studied in its totality suggests that he would absorb an influence or a set of influences, allow them to digest, perhaps for months, before applying them to his work. Significantly, then, although the years 1847-49, most of which he spent in Paris, produced four operas, only *Jérusalem*,

specifically completed for his Paris debut, and *La battaglia di Legnano*, which was based on an original French text, acknowledged French influences. However, it was from 1850 onwards that the French connection became really obvious. *Stiffelio* was written in that year, and upon its heels swiftly followed *Rigoletto* (1851), *Il trovatore* (January 1853) and *La traviata* (March 1853). The only other opera written for Paris was *Don Carlos* (1867).

Considering the likelihood that Verdi first saw *Stiffelio* in one of the French *boulevard* theatres (probably under another title, but certainly the same play), that *Rigoletto* is based on the play *Le roi s'amuse* by Victor Hugo, and that *La traviata* was inspired by and based on *La Dame aux camélias* by Alexandre Dumas (*fils*), the French influence is obvious. Of the five operas Verdi produced between and including 1850 and 1855 (which then provides for *Les Vêpres siciliennes* as well, which was based on a libretto by Charles Duveyrier and Eugène Scribe), only one work (*Il trovatore*) had no French connection. Verdi revised it in 1857 for Paris as *Le Trouvère* and added a ballet, as well as a slightly different final scene. As was *Jérusalem*, which in the event was retranslated back into Italian as *Gerusalemme* (a pirate recording with Gencer and Aragall on a private label exists), so *Le Trouvère* found its way back into the standard Italian repertory by way of translation, again as *Il trovatore*. An Italian pirate recording (1976) with 'the French ending' with Cristina Deutekom, conducted by Christopher Keene, was commercially released in 1997 on the Gala label.

I have selected *Stiffelio* for analysis for academic and practical reasons: (1) like *La traviata*, the opera can be considered as realist because of its subject matter, even by the most skeptical of scholars; (2) I own a copy of the Kathleen Kuzmick Hansell (Ed.) critical edition of 2003, and (3) I also have a copy of the first edition of the opera, downloaded from Harvard University' Loeb Library. However, before I proceed to a close reading of scenes from Act I of the opera, there are a number of background issues that need clarification, particularly round Verdi's sojourn in Paris, and the *boulevard* theatre of which, by all accounts, he was particularly fond, especially according to Emilio Sala's and Mary Ann Smart's essay 'Verdi and the Parisian *Boulevard* Theatre, 1847-9', which appeared in the *Cambridge Opera Journal* Vol. 7 No. 3 (November 1995): 185-205. Another informative source on the background of *boulevard* theatre itself rather than Verdi's visits to it is Barry Vincent Daniels' essay 'Victor Hugo on the *Boulevard: Lucrèce Borgia* at the Porte-Saint-Martin Theatre in 1833', published in the *Theatre Journal* Vol. 32 No. 1 (March 1980): 17-42.

Daniels gives a colourful account of Parisian theatre at around 1815, which represents the beginning of the *Restauration* (or the fall from power of Napoleon Bonaparte) in France. He tells us that

> theatrical activity was rigidly divided: popular audiences flocked to the secondary or '*boulevard*' theatres while the aristocracy and the intelligentsia supported the Neoclassical tradition at the government-subsidized theatres—the Comédie-Française and the Odéon (17).

Given Verdi's insistence that he was uncomplicated in terms of his background and his work ethos, I have no doubts as to which of these two theatrical *milieux* probably would have appealed most to him. He is famously quoted as having remarked that

> [. . .] I have never been to a music library nor to a publisher's to study a piece of music. [. . . O]f all composers past and present I am the least erudite . . . I refer to erudition, not musical knowledge. In that respect I should lie if I said that I had not studied hard and thoroughly in my youth (Southwell-Sander 103).

Popular appeal and demand interested the businessman in Verdi, and a number of stimuli would have drawn him to the *boulevard*. Daniels notes the authenticity of sets and props, the use of local colour, the realism of the acting, and dynamic blocking in the stage direction (18-19). In addition, Daniels observes,

> The Revolution of July 1830 had put an end to censorship and to the government theatres' monopolies in the repertory. [. . .] Thus the *boulevard* theatres benefited from the Revolution while the Comédie declined into chaos (19). In [his production of *Lucrèce Borgia* (1832) Victor Hugo] masterfully handled the staging techniques of the popular theatre: elaborate stage pictures, realistic detail, historically accurate scenery and costumes, and 'realistic' emotional acting. [. . .] The plot as outlined, though melodramatic, is much less convoluted than the plots of Hugo's early plays: *Hernani*, *Marion de Lorme*, and *Le Roi s'amuse*. Anne Ubersfeld notes perceptively that 'what Hugo tried to do, in writing *Lucrèce Borgia*, was to give new life to the melodramatic formula by inverting it. He tried to show that it was possible to create modern drama not only by starting with traditional tragedy and an inversion of the tragic rules, but also by starting from melodrama and reversing melodramatic formulas (162, in Daniels 22).

I have already quoted extensively from Sala and Smart's article in my exposition of Verdi's use of the orchestra, but this source also provides ample evidence in general of the influence of the *boulevard* theatre on Verdi the dramatist, as the title of the essay suggests. Sala and Smart quite specifically note that Verdi spent'—with a few short interruptions—[. . .] the summer of 1847 to the summer of 1849' in the French capital' (185). They do not attempt to reconstruct the complete programme of performances that Verdi might have attended, but concentrate on a few works and venues whose affinity with Verdian dramaturgy

seems to be clearest and most representative (185). These scholars are careful to note that their source, the third volume of Charles B. Wicks's comprehensive catalogue of nineteenth-century performances, 'records only the premières; [. . . but] Verdi could also have attended the Théâtre Historique, which staged revivals of the most important Romantic plays, including Victor Hugo's *Marie Tudor* and *Lucrèce Borgia*, and Alexandre Dumas' *Antony*, *Henry III et sa tour* and *La tour de Nesle*' (Wicks, Lecomte, in Sala & Smart 185-186). These scholars further tell us that

> Another consideration that will impinge on this study is the style of production pioneered by the *boulevard* theatres. With its roots in the popular *mélodrame* tradition '*a grand spectacle*', this style—described by Theophile Gautier as '*oculaire*'—played a crucial role in the genesis of the *drame romantique* of the 1830s and indeed of all theatre with a primarily visual orientation (Gautier, Gascar, El Nouty in Sala & Smart 186). Verdi mentioned [Félix Pyat's *The Chiffonnier de Paris* and Dumas' and Auguste Macquet's *Le Chevalier de Moulin-Rouge*] in a letter to Countess Maffei dated 6 September 1847:
>
> 'At the Theatre Historique there is a play by Dumas that is very successful and that also gave me great pleasure: it has serious defects, but also great beauties—with apologies to all those people who raged against *La stracciaiuolo di Parigi* [*Le Chiffonnier de Paris*] in Milan, which is another play that has had great success here. Not much of interest at the other theatres.' (Sartori 249 in Sala & Smart 186)

Verdi had wasted no time in acquiring a good knowledge of Parisian theatre, and Sala and Smart remark on the significance of his favourable reports on the *boulevard* theatres, especially having expressed a particularly low opinion of the Opéra (Sartori 245 in Sala & Smart 187) which, by the way, represents another interesting point of contact between Verdi and Zola. Sartori also observes that, in a letter to Clara Maffei that preceded the one published above, Verdi noted his preference for the small, Italian opera houses. The theatres on the Boulevard du Temple, likewise, were small, elegant and simple, as were the Italian theatres Verdi preferred (Sala & Smart 187).

Sala and Smart give a close reading of the chorus 'Viva Italia!' from *La battaglia di Legnano*, which is subtitled 'Morire per la patria', as is the most famous line of the Girondins' chorus (sung by the young men marching arm in arm on the rue de Rivoli in *Le Chevalier de Moulin-Rouge*). I quote this ensemble in another context elsewhere, but the authors observe here that

> The similarity could be coincidental, but it must be more than pure chance: the echo is emphasised by the fact that Verdi's chorus, heard several times in the opera, is played at the beginning of the overture [. . .] in the same key [. . .] as the Girondins' chorus [. . .]; and that the two melodies clearly share a rhythmic profile (194).

The *Copialettere* also bears testimony to a list of possible works for setting that Verdi compiled, probably during the first part of 1849 when he was still in Paris (in Sala & Smart 196). Adolphe Dennery's *Marie Jeanne ou la femme du peuple* features well as *Atala*, a short story by Chateaubriand adapted by Dumas, and *Hamlet*, all works that Verdi might have seen at the Théâtre Historique.

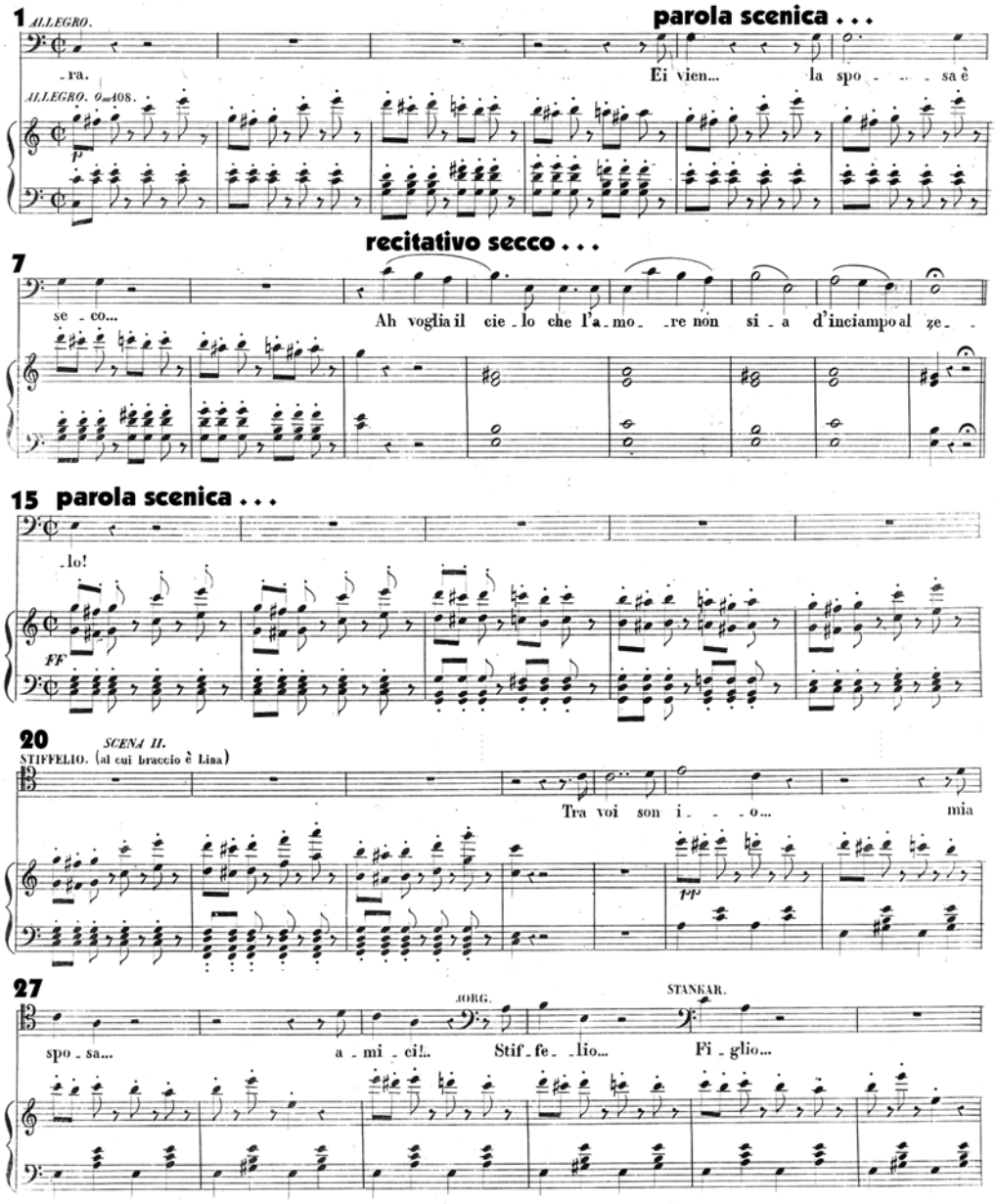
Sala and Smart also note that '[the] importance [of *Stiffelio*] for Verdian dramaturgy is unquestionable, since it became the source for Verdi's most experimental and most problematic opera before *Rigoletto*'. *Le Pasteur ou l'évangile et le foyer, Stiffelio*'s source (by Emile Souvestre and Eugene Bourgeois) premièred on 10 February 1849 at the Porte-Saint-Martin, and Verdi probably did not attend a performance. He wrote to Piave on 28 April 1850: 'I don't know *Stifellius*, send me a synopsis' (Abbiati 59 in Sala & Smart 201).

Sala and Smart are not willing to exclude the possibility that Verdi saw the play or heard of it in Paris but did not recall it, since 'Piave referred to the play under its Italian title of *Stifellius*, while the original French title—perhaps the only one Verdi knew—was quite different'. Sala and Smart (202) further note that 'the accompaniment [to the original source play] draws on all the *topoi* of melodramatic rhetoric, but makes particular use of instrumental solos identified with a particular character (a further reinforcement of *tema cardine*, perhaps?).

Scholars, Hansell and Budden among them, argue that part of the intrigue of Stiffelio the man and *Stiffelio* the opera lies in his ambivalent relation to society: his instinct suggests to him a course of action that his cloth forbids. The *dénouement* of the opera implies that, although driven by cause and effect (a realist feature), the characters only narrowly escaped by intellectual intervention in overcoming their human nature (a romantic notion). Act I of *Stiffelio* opens with a recitative for Jorg, who in the *dramatis personae* is described only as 'another preacher', but who in the psychological, dramatic development has a dual role: that of contrasting with the base and worldly. He also acts as Stiffelio's 'conscience'. In my general analysis of the libretto as a genre, and in *Stiffelio* in particular as a Verdian vehicle for conveying noetic intent, I mentioned the opening recitative, in which Jorg, via the reference to Klopstock's *Messiah* with which Verdi's audience was probably familiar (my German copy is a 1924 reprint, but my English translation published by SA Oddy is dated 1812). This *recitativo* sets the pious tone of the opera, but also lays the foundation for Lina's worldliness, the near undoing of the characters.

JORG	**JORG**
(seduto presso la tavola leggendo	*(seated at the table, reading)*
Oh santo libro, oh, dell'eterno Vero,	Oh holy book, inspired, prophetic words
ispirate profetiche parole!	of everlasting truth!
(Chiude il libro e s'alza.)	*(He closes the book and rises to his feet.)*
Segui, Stiffelio,	Go forth upon your way, Stiffelio;
tua parola sia	may your words be
tempesta che distrugge,	a destroying tempest,
onda che ingoia,	a devouring wave,
e folgore che atterra	a blasting thunderbolt
pei nemici di Dio su questa terra.	for God's enemies upon this earth!
Ei vien . . . la sposa è seco . . .	He comes . . . His wife is with him . . .
Ah voglia il cielo che l'amore non sia	Ah, may Heaven grant that love shall prove
d'inciampo al zelo!	no impediment to his zeal!
(Entrano Stiffelio, al cui braccio	*(Enter Stiffelio with Lina on his arm;*
Lina, Dorotea, Federico,	*also Dorotea, Federico, Raffaele,*
Raffaele e Stankar.)	*and Stankar.)* (Philips 1979/'80 44)

Figure 4.1: Extract from Verdi's *Stiffelio*, the end of the opening recitative from Act I, going into the scene where Stiffelio first appears.



This extract highlights two distinct features. Bars 1-8 are very clearly typical of *parola scenica* as I have defined and described it; it is even more obvious contrasted with what follows. Bars 9-14 represent a particularly clear-cut example of plain, unadorned *recitativo secco*. Then, from bar 15 onwards the *parola scenica* takes over again, marked by the line below. But what does the libretto say at this point in the opera?

STIFFELIO Tra voi son io, mia sposa, amici!	**STIFFELIO** I am here among you, my wife, my friends!
JORG Stiffelio!	**JORG** Stiffelio!
STANKAR Figlio!	**STANKAR** My son!
DOROTEA, RAFFAELE, FEDERICO, STANKAR, JORG Come felici tutti godiam per tal ritorno! In ogni core vivrà tal giorno. Ognun qui v'ama.	**DOROTEA, RAFFAELE, FEDERICO, STANKAR, JORG** How happily we all rejoice at your return! This day will live long in the hearts of those who love you.
DOROTEA Un battelliere qui fu più volte . . .	**DOROTEA** A boatman called here several times . . .
STIFFELIO E m'ha cercato?	**STIFFELIO** Looking for me?
DOROTEA Sì.	**DOROTEA** Yes.
STIFFELIO Desso è Valter; il buon nocchiere su strano caso m'ha consultato.	**STIFFELIO** That must be Walter, the good boatman. He consulted me about a strange event.
DOROTEA, RAFFAELE, FEDERICO, STANKAR, JORG Saper possiamo, che vi narrò?	**DOROTEA, RAFFAELE, FEDERICO, STANKAR, JORG** May we know what he told you?
STIFFELIO Oh sì! ripeterlo non mi vietò. Di qua varcando sul primo albore una finestra ei vide aprire, e come côlto da gran terrore a quella un giovine poi comparire.	**STIFFELIO** Yes; he did not forbid me to repeat it. As he put out from here at dawn's first light he saw a window open, and there gripped by mighty terror a young man appeared.

Verdi is extremely canny here, using *parola scenica* to communicate a very specific part of the narrative. Note, too, how the different sections of the narrative overlap: the last line of Jorg's *parola scenica* coincides with the first line of recitative. Jorg's recitative is contemplative, extolling the prophetic words in the 'holy book' he was reading, and then, as Stiffelio's conscience, he expresses the wish that the preacher would cast his words like a *tempesta che distrugge*, an *onda che ingoia* and a *folgore che atterra* for God's enemies on earth. This is a reflective section, not one in which the plot advances, because these are all qualities one would normaly associate with the leader of a sect. Then follow the three lines in which, on the surface, Jorg heralds Stiffelio's entrance on stage. Rather

more pertinently and certainly centrally to the plot, he predicts, in a manner of speaking, that Stiffelio's wife might well 'prove an impediment to his zeal'. This is asymmetrical, unrhymed verse. Piave then directs the other characters to enter, and the dialogue centres round Walter, who looked for Stiffelio while he was away. These preliminaries lead up to the description of how the man fleeing from the castle dropped a portfolio of papers that might identify him. After the stage directions, these are important details concerning the development of the plot, and are set as *parola scenica*. Plot details have been conveyed, and Piave can return to *portrayal* as opposed to *reportage*, in Georg Lukács's terms (49). This passage also shows the difference that Tsvetan Todorov draws between *narrative* in relation to *description* (36). Appropriately, Stiffelio launches into the narrative describing the man's flight, and the lost portfolio. The *parola scenica* here revolves round the simplest of musical means. The thematic material is bipartite, and consists of the primary melodic themes in 4.2(a) and (b), over which Verdi lays the text in the secondary melody in fragmented patterns, in asymmetrical verse and in real time:

Figure 4.2(a): The opening melodic theme from Act I of *Stiffelio* Act I Scene 10 (Verdi UC-RM 181).

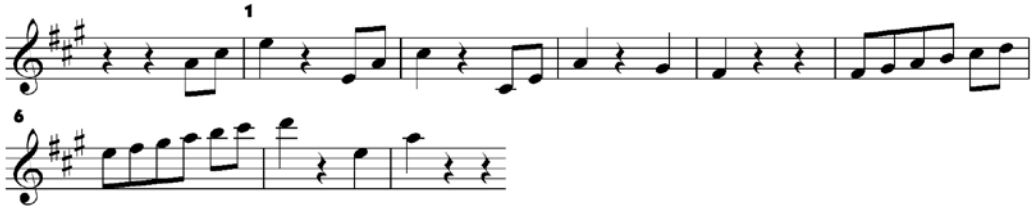
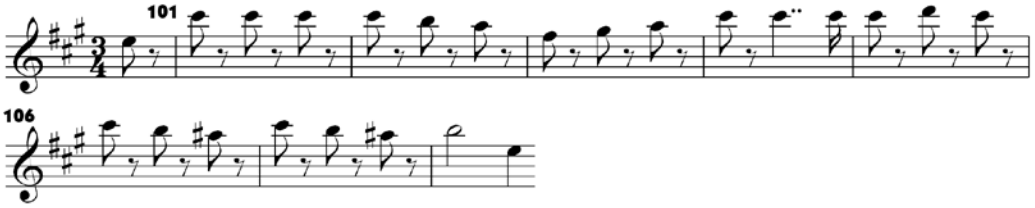
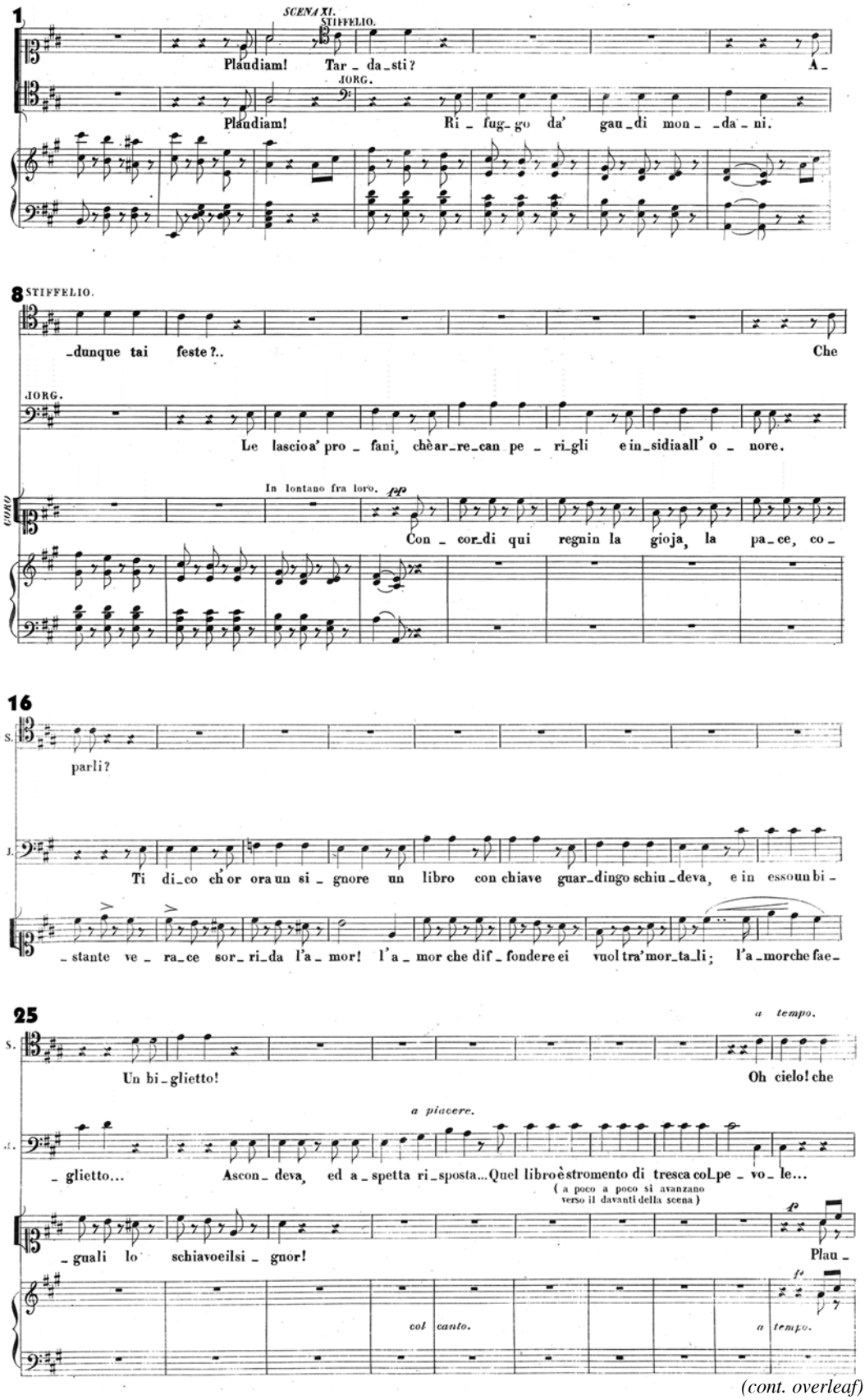


Figure 4.2(b): The second main melodic theme from Act I of *Stiffelio* Act I Scene 10 (Verdi UC-RM 188).

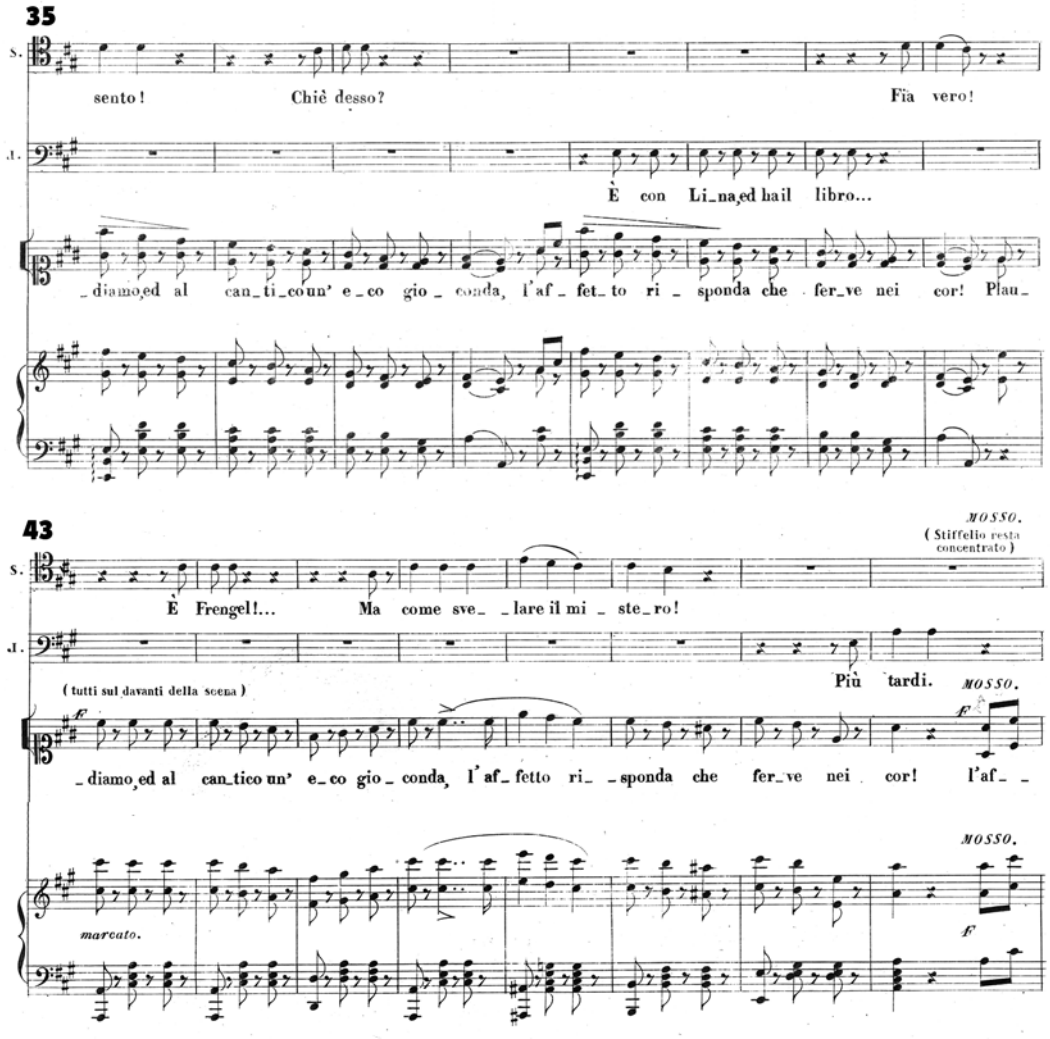


Perhaps the most elaborate instance of *parola scenica* in this opera can be found across the last half of the chorus 'Plaudiam!', which is marked in the score as 'Coro nel Finale 1', and which is the narrative leading towards the floating structure of 'Oh qual m'invade ed agita'. The first eight pages of this chorus, 'Plaudiam!' are written in a conventional choral style such as one would expect from mid career Verdi, but the following five pages, up to the start of the coda, suggest another idiom, and probably count as one of Verdi's most extended single passages of *parola scenica* (I had access to two scores, the Escudier copy, pages 97-104, as well as Ricordi first edition facsimile, pages 96-115).

Figure 4.3: The middle section of the chorus 'Plaudiam!' from Act I of *Stiffelio* Act I (Ricordi 97-104). I have reduced the music to the smallest number of staves, again in the interests of illustrative clarity. The use of the C clefs is indicative of the printing conventions of the time.



(cont. overleaf)



Again, we need to refer to the libretto at this point in the score to determine why Verdi chose this particular text setting model, when he had at his disposal 'ordinary' ensemble, *aria con pertichini*, and *recitativo* (both *secco* and *acccompagnato*), as well as all those other 'styles' to which scholars refer: *arioso, parlante*, *canto spezzato* and so on:

CORO
[. . .] Plaudiam, plaudiam,
al grande orator. Plaudiam.
(Gli amici si ritirano sul fondo della sala.)

STIFFELIO *(a Jorg che entra)*
Tardasti?

JORG
Rifuggo da' gaudi mondani.

STIFFELIO
Adunque tai feste?

JORG
Le lascio a' profani,
chè arrecan perigli
e insidia all'onore.

CHORUS
Let us cheer, let us cheer
the mighty orator. Let us cheer.
(The friends retire to the back of the hall.)

STIFFELIO *(to Jorg, who enters)*
Aren't you late?

JORG
I shun the joys of this world.

STIFFELIO
Even these celebrations?

JORG
I leave them to the profane
for they hold perils
and snares for a man's honour.

CORO *(in lontana)* Concordi qui regnin, *ecc*.	**CHORUS** *(in the distance)* May joy and peace reign, *etc*.
STIFFELIO Che parli?	**STIFFELIO** What are you saying?
JORG Ti dico ch'or ora un signore un libro con chiave guardingo schiudeva e in esso un biglietto . . .	**JORG** I tell you that at this very moment a gentleman furtively opened a book with a key and in it concealed a note . . .
STIFFELIO Un biglietto?	**STIFFELIO** A note?
JORG . . . ascondeva ed aspetta risposta. Quel libro è stromento di tresca colpevole.	**JORG** . . . And he awaits a reply. That book is the instrument of a guilty intrigue.
STIFFELIO Oh, cielo, the sento! Chi è desso?	**STIFFELIO** Oh heavens! What do I hear? Who is the man?
JORG E con Lina ed ha il libro.	**JORG** He is with Lina and he has the book.
STIFFELIO Fia vero? È Frengel! Ma come svelare il mistero?	**STIFFELIO** Can it be true? It is Frengel! But how to uncover the mystery?
JORG Più tardi.	**JORG** Later.

The intrigue here centres round the merry-making of the chorus, which forms an aural backdrop, and the interaction between Stiffelio and Jorg about things they observe which impact on what they suspect, although their assumptions are specious. This text is important because it describes what the protagonists perceive, and then discuss in terms of what they *think* they see, not what *is*.

I deal with the orchestra first. I have noted before that Verdi here uses the simplest of orchestral means: *pizzicato* strings and a preponderance of woodwinds. What is significant, though—and this ties in with a feature I have noted elsewhere—Verdi writes a general *tacet* in bars 7-29. Like the *banda* which is silenced in *I masnadieri* in favour of the chorus with its greater narrative capacity, Verdi silences the orchestra here, using the chorus 'instrumentally' in a *banda*-like accompanimental choral idiom.

All the text the chorus sings after the principal voices have joined the ensemble has been heard before. Verdi's choral writing is particularly lucid in the earlier part of this ensemble, which means that the audience would have had no trouble assimilating the choral textual narrative. The audience has heard the text in the choral section once before, and there is no reason for the composer to emphasize it after the principal voices start their dialogue. In this sense the chorus really is nothing other than an accompanimental sonic backdrop. The story is told in the conversation between the principal characters.

This extended passage of *parola scenica* probably represents Verdi's first 'official' use of the device in its purest form before the operas of the late middle and third creative phases.

In the chapter on the libretto I discussed the operatic scholar's difficulty in isolating devices such as *parola scenica*, which depend for more than half their effect on the music concomitant to the musical text. On the previous page I isolate the lines of text marked by a solid line, where the music surrounding it is the backgrounded primary melody in the orchestra, and the development of the plot takes place in the foregrounded secondary melody. The treatment he here affords those marked lines reflects a very important instance in early Verdi of the *parola scenica* that will eventually reach maturity in *Aida*.

Thus far I have established the 'how' of *parola scenica*. In the next section of this chapter, and by means of reflecting on two of the four final works in his operatic output, I launch an enquiry into the 'why'. Through this I suggest Verdi's ways of maintaining the 'new' idiomatic tradition well into the Italian operatic stylistic phase that would in retrospect become known as *verismo*.

I am attempting here to maintain the link I make with the way in which Verdi has reinterpreted the notion of opera's gestural-formulaic traditions. More than that, I am attempting to show how Verdi, while trying to re-establish those links, endeavoured to put before his public a new idiom that would conform to the vision he had of a newly developing writing style, but which would not alienate his audience . . . a tall order, as De Saussure observed in another context: '[Language is] of all social institutions, the least amenable to initiative. It blends with the life of the society, and the latter, inert by nature, is a prime conservative force' (in Hebdidge 90).

As I noted elsewhere, opera (like all music) is not a language, even if it is driven by language. Nineteenth-century opera was so deeply entrenched in its society, however, that contemporary audiences would have looked upon any change in its structures as they would upon change in their own tongue, as Verdi found in the critics' response to the première of *Don Carlos*:

> The press notices [after the première of *Don Carlos*] were, on the whole, favourable, though some critics spoke of the influence of Meyerbeer and even of Wagner. This Verdi deeply resented. He wrote to Escudier: 'I have read in Ricordi's *Gazetta* the account of what the leading French papers say of *Don Carlos*. In short, I am an almost perfect Wagnerian. [. . .] But the question is not whether the music of *Don Carlos* belongs to a system, but whether it is good or bad [. . .]' (Abbiati in Osborne 352).

Hebdidge summarizes this resistance to change when he argues that

> Any elision, truncation or convergence of prevailing *linguistic* and *ideological* [emphasis mine] categories can have profoundly disorienting effects. These deviations briefly expose the arbitrary nature of the codes which underlie and shape all forms of discourse (91).

Verdi was a composer as well as businessman, artistic as well as mindful of his audience's demands, urging librettists that the composer's biggest sin is to bore his audience. *Stiffelio* represents a very particular work in Verdi's output, not least because, according to Sala and Smart, '[the] importance [of *Stiffelio*] for Verdian dramaturgy is unquestionable, since it became the source for Verdi's most experimental and most problematic opera before *Rigoletto*' (201).

Verdi takes up *parola scenica* as musical 'ground zero'

In an analysis of the composer's operas, it is difficult to remain unimpressed by how Verdi incorporates *parola scenica* organically into the musical text with greater frequency and facility to deal with what musico-dramatic situations that might otherwise have had no or little extraordinary effect. Verdi keeps his subject's interest by viewing the narrative from different angles.

The composer also surprises his audience by presenting works that do not conform to the characteristics ascribed to the stylistic phase in which they appear, and which thus contrast with the operas chronologically on either side of them. *Don Carlos* and *Aida* are particular examples of such stylistic displacement. Even if they are chronologically the first two works in Verdi's third stylistic phase (roughly 1867-1894), an examination of them from a narrative point of view shows that they fall between the second and third stylistic phases, marking them as a turning point in Verdi's career. They do not represent a stylistic school of their own, of course, but a natural detour on the path of Verdi's operatic and dramatic growth.

Gilles de Van observes, 'Where Wagner, asserting that the artist now had new tasks, destroyed tradition by staging a sort of *coup d'état* and creating his own genre, Verdi seemed to accept tradition without apparent effort, even if in fact he gradually broke it down to lead opera into quite new directions'. He continues,

> This explains why Wagner was promptly hailed as an artist of 'modernity', that is, one having a global and problematic vision of man, while Verdi was denied the status of 'modern' and, despite the growing admiration for him as a 'musician', was neither automatically nor immediately acknowledged as a 'dramatist', that is, the creator of a coherent, clearly defined world (1998: 4).

After the première of *Don Carlos* (1867), Verdi's 'greatest essay into character analysis' (Headington *et al*. 205), contemporary French critics were severe, as I note elsewhere. My own instinct about *Don Carlos* is that these impressions were not too far off the mark, especially in terms of the subject matter.

Although historical in origin, the libretto of this opera has an epic or mythical cast, more so than any other work in Verdi's operatic output, because the spirit of Charles V appears from the tomb in the closing scene. This is perhaps the single most important reason why critics perceived the opera as being closer to Wagner than Verdi would have liked to admit. The appearance of the king's ghost in the score, and for such significant reasons, strengthens the notion that Verdi and his librettists, Méry and Du Locle in this opera, cross the storytelling line between history and myth.

But it might have been the critics' choice of words in reviewing *Don Carlos* that offended Verdi. *Don Carlos* can perhaps be described as the most *writerly* of Verdi's operas, which is why his detractors assumed a closeness to Wagner. I refer elsewhere to the distinction between readerly and writerly styles of writing. In *Don Carlos*, without losing his readerly status, Verdi borders upon the writerly by his choice of subject matter, as well as the fact that he aims in many ways for a grandiose, 'transparent way of writing which quickly becomes a style in itself,' in Terence Hawkes' words (108). Moreover, the view that Verdi and Wagner may occasionally have found similar ways around similar compositional issues is not so far fetched, as other scholars have indicated (Abbate & Parker: 1989). I can thus comfortably conclude that *Don Carlos* falls on a stylistic cusp. It serves as a natural culmination of Verdi's second stylistic phase, which Basevi identified as Verdi's 'personal' or intimate stylistic period, according to Andrew Porter (in Abbate & Parker 164), and which, in turn, launches the third. *Aida*, as *Don Carlos*'s chronological successor, signifies a return to the style Verdi favoured for the bulk of his operatic output.

What is also immediately arresting about the operas of the third stylistic phase, *Don Carlos* perhaps more than the others, is the scale on which Verdi conceived and wrote them. Budden comments that the French stage contributed greatly to his style, not least regarding sheer scope, especially from *Jérusalem* onwards (1, 1973: 359). The augmentation of his compositional scale is not confined to the operas written for Paris, however. *Don Carlos* besides, *Un ballo in maschera, Aida*, *Otello* and *Falstaff* all count among Verdi's biggest works for the lyric stage.

Early in his career Verdi determined that the structure of traditional nineteenth-century opera best suited his own compositional style. He thus sought to improve upon rather than to abandon it, and his librettists wrote in Scenes, as most playwrights do anyway. This structure complemented Verdi's style, not because the subdivision of the plot into smaller scenes made it easier for the audience to assimilate, and less taxing for the singers to perform. Breaking the story into smaller pieces is not a new writing technique. Nor is it confined to opera, or in fact to main-stream spoken theatrical genres. The success of the twentieth-century radio and television soap opera depends much on the development of the overall plot almost as a brand name along the lines of smaller, more manageable microstories. These, as noted elsewhere, also correlate on a certain level with the manner in which Verdi uses *parola scenica* in a narrative sense.

Of particular note in *Don Carlos* is the large number of seamless smaller sections into which the narrative naturally subdivides. There are twenty scenes spread over the five-act version, which compute on average to four per act. This is a significant number when compared with the other three operas in the third stylistic phase. *Aida* is made up of only seven scenes, or roughly two per act; *Otello* divides into four acts, made up, like *Don Carlos*, of a number of smaller, seamless scenes. More striking, though, is Verdi's employment of *parola scenica* in *Don Carlos*, as opposed to the relatively larger number of scenes in the opera. It is almost as if Verdi substitutes the increased number of structural microstories, made up of the larger number of scenes, for the more grammatical detail of microstories offered by classical *parola scenica*.

Fundamental to the operas of the third stylistic phase is that Verdi's use of *parola scenica* has come a long way since its first appearance in *I Lombardi*. Without wishing to detract from his early musico-dramatic abilities, I believe that Verdi's mastery of musical narration really comes to the fore after he turned fifty. Creating narrative, which in its literary form is a three-step process—creating, telling and listening—is extended in opera to include a fourth, because there is another element present: the musical re-invention of the poetry after its initial creation. Richard Kearny observes that

> Mimesis may be seen [. . .] as an imaginative redescription which captures what Aristotle called the 'essence' (*eidos*) of our lives. Mimesis is not about idealist escapism or servile realism. It is a pathway to the disclosure of the inherent 'universals' of existence that make up human truth. Far from being a passive copy of reality, mimesis re-enacts the real world of action by magnifying its essential traits (*Poetics* 1451). It remakes the world, so to speak, in the light of its potential truths (131).

'People are storytellers by nature', argue Lieblich, Tuval-Masciach and Zilber. 'One of the clearest channels for learning about the inner [psychological] world is through verbal accounts and stories presented by individual narrators about their lives and their experienced reality' (7). This chapter and the next are devoted to how Verdi re-presents the drama, but also how he avoids mimesis for its own sake. How he retells the story to show his characters' 'inner world', as Lieblich *et al* would have it, is important, as are the mechanics of his operatic gestural-formulaic style. I refer to the micro- and macroformal use of motives and themes, and other musical building blocks, and how these dovetail with *parola scenica* in the interests of a dramatically satisfying, homogeneous whole.

Close readings from the third stylistic period: *Don Carlos*

Scenes from the first two of the four last operas offer unique insights into Verdi's growing facility for creating the dramatic situation, setting the tone, introducing primary characters, and either bringing the audience up to speed by briefly highlighting the opera's prehistory, or introducing the plot, if required.

Don Carlos opens on a scene in the Fontainebleau forest. It is dusk, the royal party is out hunting, and a group of woodsmen is gathering wood while their families warm themselves around a fire. Elisabeth enters and distributes alms among the woodsmen, then moves on with the party. The woodsmen leave too. When the scene is deserted, Don Carlos emerges from the trees. Having discovered the value of the chorus over the *banda*, or even the orchestra used in the role of the *banda* as a means of establishing *colorito*, Verdi leads into the scene by means of the off stage brass fanfare ('Le cerf s'enfuit sous la ramure'). This gives way almost immediately to a double male chorus arranged antiphonally flanking the stage. Those two musical gestures replace the overture or prelude. The orchestral introduction to the opera in its entirety runs to only sixteen bars, but they are sixteen bars of great detail, and show how pliable *parola scenica* can be when used as an instrumental device. The opening chorus is fifty-four bars long. In the first twenty-five bars Verdi suggests all the thematic material of which Act I is made up.

Without compromising his melodic freedom, Verdi finds the means of thematically unifying Act I. The opening arpeggio motif $1^{2\text{-}3}$ stated at (a) in 4.4 overleaf finds expression again at (X) in 4.5, in the sinuous clarinet theme that opens Carlos's 'Scena and Romanza', immediately following the opening chorus.

Figure. 4.4: Extract from 'Fontainebleu!', from Act I of *Don Carlos*.

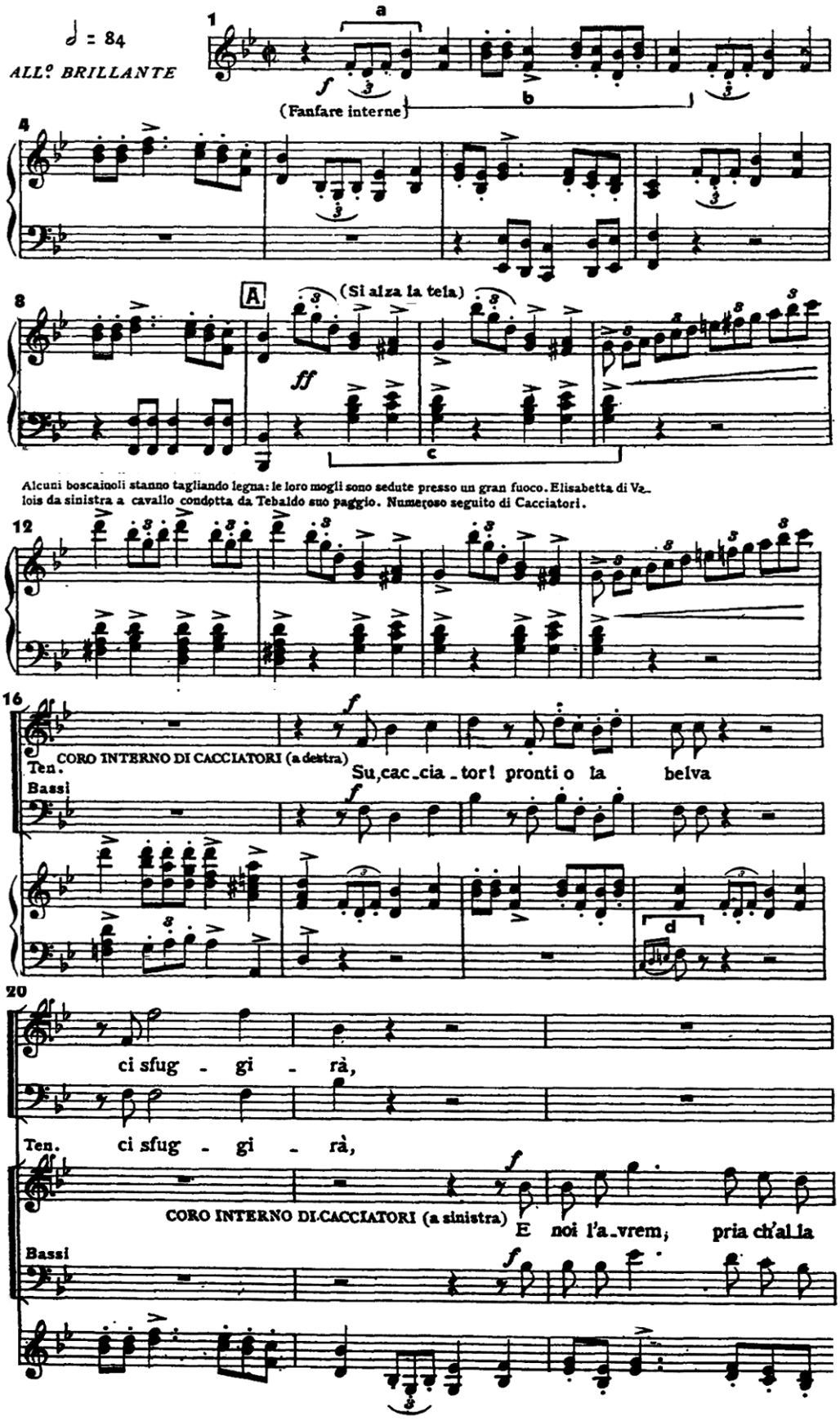
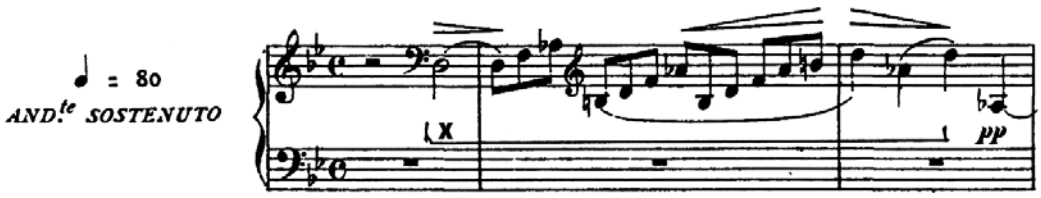
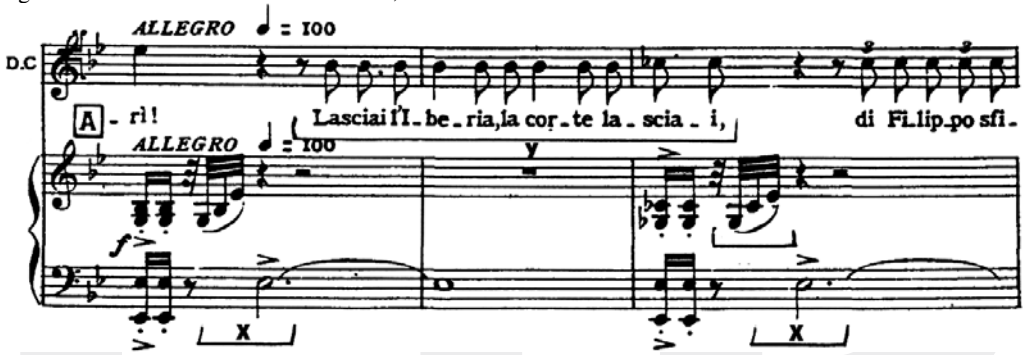


Figure 4.5: The opening bars of the *Cavatina* 'Fontainebleau!', from Act I of *Don Carlos*.



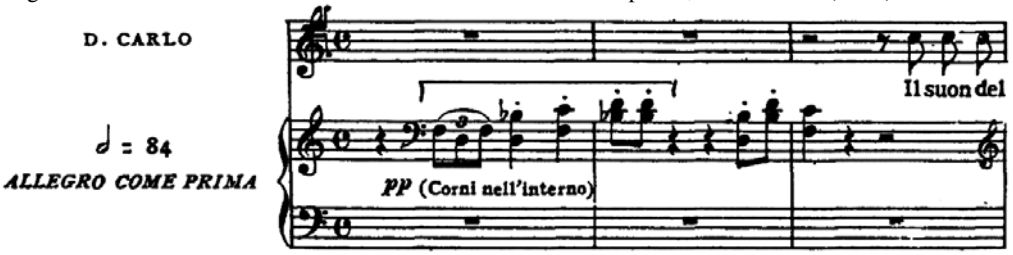
Similarly, the arpeggio motif (a) in 4.4 above is echoed in 4.6 (below), at (X). This 'grace note' motif is stated for the first time at (d) in 4.4, and shortened to the very significant *tema cardine* element in that same example. Gino Roncaglia refers to this 'limited sense of identifying themes' as *tema cardine*, not *Leitmotiv* (in Budden 3, 1981: 255). This terminology applies throughout, with reference to 'signature tunes' as Verdi applies them to particular personages or situations. The prominent monotone at (Y) below can be traced back to (c), also in 4.4.

Figure 4.6: Extract from 'Fontainebleau', from Act I of *Don Carlos*.



The arpeggio motif appears consistently throughout the first act, as shown in 4.5 and 4.6 above. In 4.7 the motif appears *verbatim*, though transposed an octave down. Note, too, the rest on the opening beat of the bar. The introduction to the opera starts on the second beat, and Verdi does this again in the first *scena* and *duetto* between Carlos and Elisabeth, 'De quels transports poignants', where he introduces new thematic material. The opening beat rest in the bar results again in the characteristic three-beat *anacrusis* that is significant throughout the first half of this act. This shift of rhythmic emphasis is amplified by the characteristic accent (>) on the second beat of the bar, in alternate bars of the prelude, see (X), 4.6 above.

Figure 4.7: Extract from 'Le bruit du cor s'etaint sous l'ombre épaisse,' *Don Carlos* (Act I).



The grace note motif (d) in 4.4 also appears consistently, and Verdi sometimes shortens the three-note figure to one grace note. It appears again in the 'Fontainebleau!' *scena*, and in Carlos's 'Le bruit de cor', at (X) in 4.8 and 4.9 below. The monotone at (Y) in 4.8, which recalls (c) in 4.4, is also significant.

Figure 4.8: Extract from Carlos's *scena* 'Fontainebleau!', from Act I of *Don Carlos*.

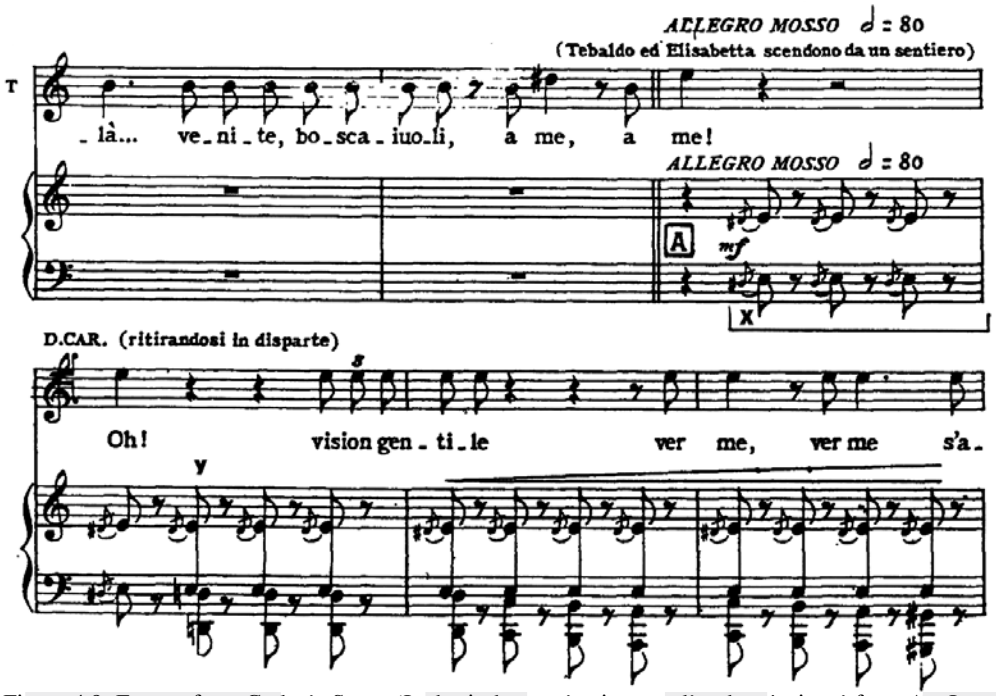
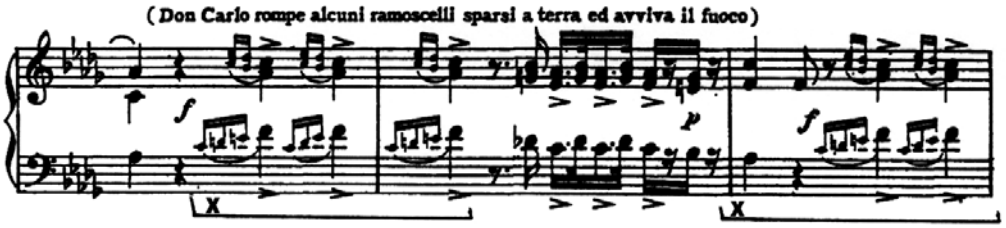
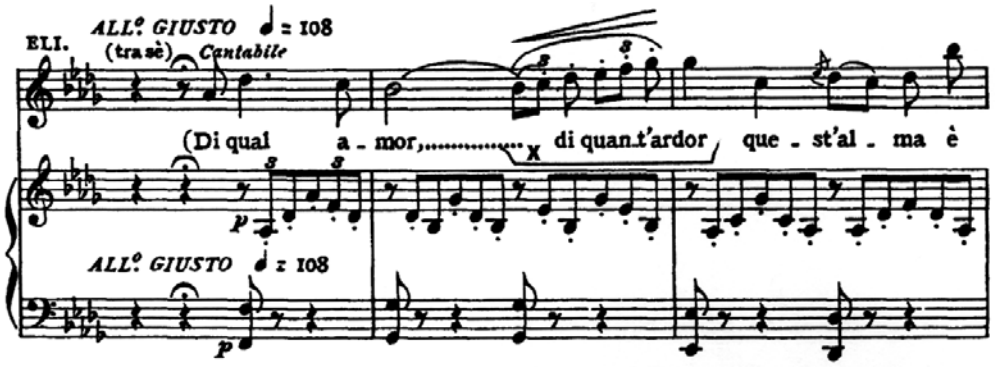


Figure 4.9: Extract from Carlos's Scena 'Le bruit du cor s'etaint sous l'ombre épaisse,' from Act I of *Don Carlos*.



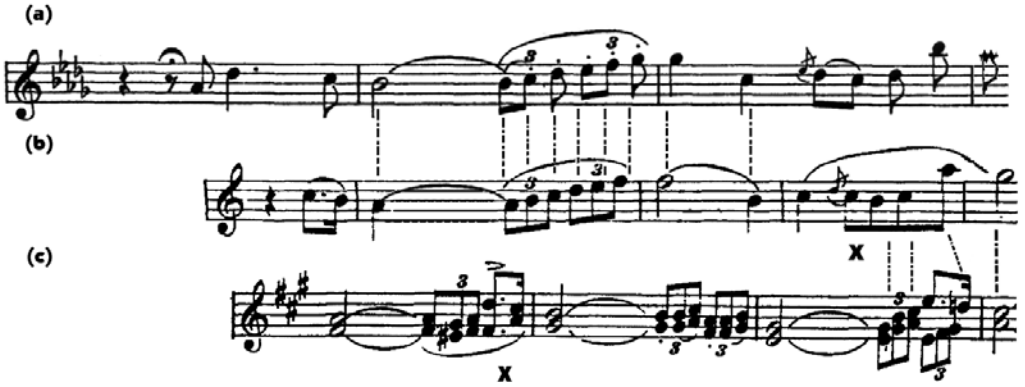
The scalar motif at $11^{1\text{-}4}$ and $15^{1\text{-}4}$ in 4.4 forms the basis of the *tema cardine* representing Carlos and love, see 4.10, (X) below. Verdi does not distinguish between filial or romantic love in this context:

Figure 4.10: Extract from the Act I duet 'De quels transports poignants' from *Don Carlos*.



Thematic similarities at a microstructural level extend beyond the borders of each act. Figure 4.11(a) shows the love theme in Act I. At (b) and (c) it is adapted for use in Act IV Scene 2 to encompass a filial love, where it is associated with Rodrigo and his assassination.

Figure 4.11: The love theme in Don Carlos, and how it mutates:



In *Don Carlos*, passages of *parola scenica* occur side by side with thematic cross-references: in Tebaldo's entrance, in Carlos's *scena* 'Le bruit de cor s'esiant sous l'ombre épaisse', and in the 'De quels transports' duet. Tebaldo's entrance, the announcement that Elisabeth is now betrothed to Carlos's father, the reaction of the lovers, and the unaccompanied chorus leading up to the *finale* of Act I encapsulate in *parola scenica* the motivation for at least part of the conflict between Carlos and Philip II. It is further exacerbated by Carlos's inability to come to terms with the absolutism represented by his father's rule and that of the church. The latter finds expression in the *auto-da-fé* scene.

If the thematic unity in Act I can be described as significant, then its narrative unity is truly remarkable. Introducing the spectator to the drama without ceremony is not a new strategy for Verdi. By the mid 1850s he had abandoned the practice of gradually introducing the characters, the plot and the prehistory in an opening chorus. In *Rigoletto*, for example, the drama, *colorito*, plot, characters and main motivation (Monterone cursing Rigoletto) are introduced abruptly, and in a closely knit opening scene similar to that of *Don Carlos*. The opening scene of *Rigoletto* is however constructed from a train of musically unrelated themes and motives, whereas in *Don Carlos*'s 'De quels transports' (*Don Carlos* Act I) strong thematic coherence is evident. Abbate and Parker (8) remark that '[Von] Wolzogen was not only well aware of but actually took for granted a distinction between closely structured and more diffuse music [in his analysis of Wagner],' but he neither describes the music in these terms, nor makes mention of such a notion in Verdi while thematic coherence or a freer treatment of thematic material in Verdi is actually quite significant.

Before 1851 it was a given that most scenes, opening or otherwise, displayed a variance of thematic material, rather than a train of interrelated thematic cells. After *Rigoletto* Verdi strives for greater formal coherence by various means, both on micro- and macrostructural level. The opening scene of *La traviata*, for example, up to the end of the chorus that leads into the duet 'Un dì felice' between soprano and tenor, is a modified, extended ternary form. In the third creative period, the opening scenes of all four operas can be described as thematically coherent to some extent.

A comparison between the first half of Act I of *Don Carlos* and the pages that follow up until the *finale* demonstrates how the composer's treatment of *parola scenica* has matured. Where he used it previously purely to bypass compositional issues, by 1851 it has become an integral part of the narrative framework, and by accomplishing this Verdi has brought it closer to normal speech without using recitative.

Verdi establishes the underlying tension that is soon to develop in the literary narrative via the character's displaced rhythmic accent in the first bar. The orchestral introduction starts with what the listener perceives as a three-beat *anacrusis*, regardless of the crotchet rest on the first beat of the bar (see also Jackendoff *Structures* 213-239; and *Cognition* 125-155). The result of this rhythmic shift is that the proper first beat of the bar is established for the first time only at the imperfect authentic close, 9^{3}-10^{1} (see 4.4).

As Elisabeth and her party cross the stage in mime, this rhythmic instability continues (4.4, at bars 14^{1}-17^{1}). At first Verdi moves the primary accent to the third beat. Then, in bars 17^{2}-22^{1} the primary and secondary accents move to beats two and four. The traditional first beat accent is restored in bar 34^{1}, only to be disturbed again finally on 35^{4} and 37^{4}.

As I have shown in other motivic gestures, the rhythmic displacement persists until the end of the act. Noteworthy also is the displacement of the first beat in the opening motif of the horns sounding off stage when Verdi reintroduces them at the start of Carlos's 'Le bruit de cor.' The motif shrinks as he 'loses' beats (see also the last movement of Schumann's *Papillons* Op. 2, 1832). The result on one hand is a greater depth of perspective, as the hunting party seemingly disappears into the distance; on the other, this rhythmic displacement not only defamiliarizes the operatic narrative, but also heightens the musical tension, because the listener is never sure what Verdi will do, rhythmically, in the next bar.

Such examples of rhythmic displacement as I have quoted above abound in the text of Act I. However, Verdi reaches the final *coup* in the unaccompanied chorus, leading up to the *finale* of the act ('O chants de fêtes'). Here he moves the primary accent permanently one beat back, to the third beat of the bar, as he launches the curious *gavotte* rhythm that remains in force until the true *finale* starts on the ironic text of 'Gloire a vous!'

The gestural-formulaic association between a rhythmic displacement that persists for an entire act of an opera and the device of *parola scenica* is more obvious than it appears at first. One prominent function of *parola scenica* is to hide formal structures. The technique of displacing the beat in the musical framework is a simple yet effective way of underscoring the developing drama by hiding, and thus defamiliarizing, the regular primary sinus rhythm of the movement.

Figure 4.12(a): A pattern in which the natural sinus rhythm of the simple quadruple time is preserved because the accent falls naturally on the first beat of each bar.

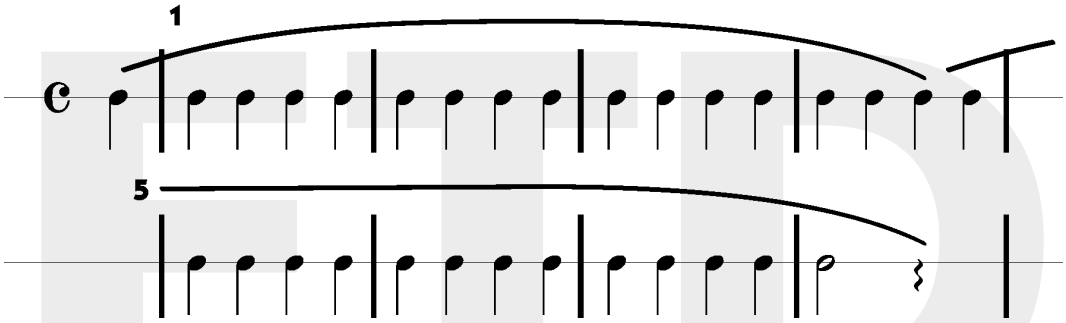
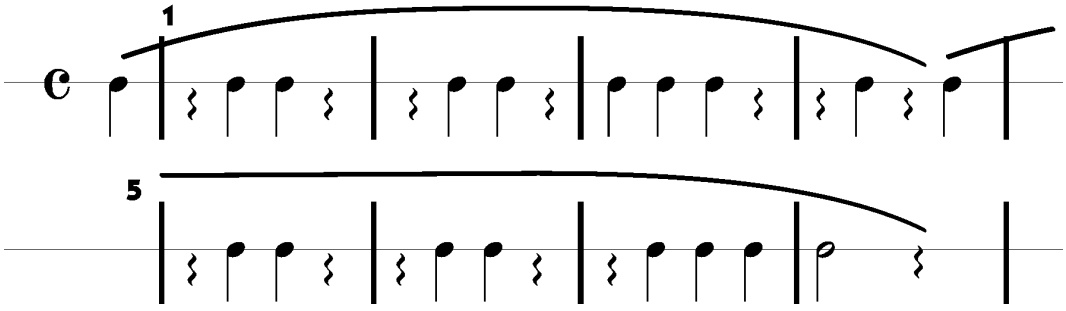


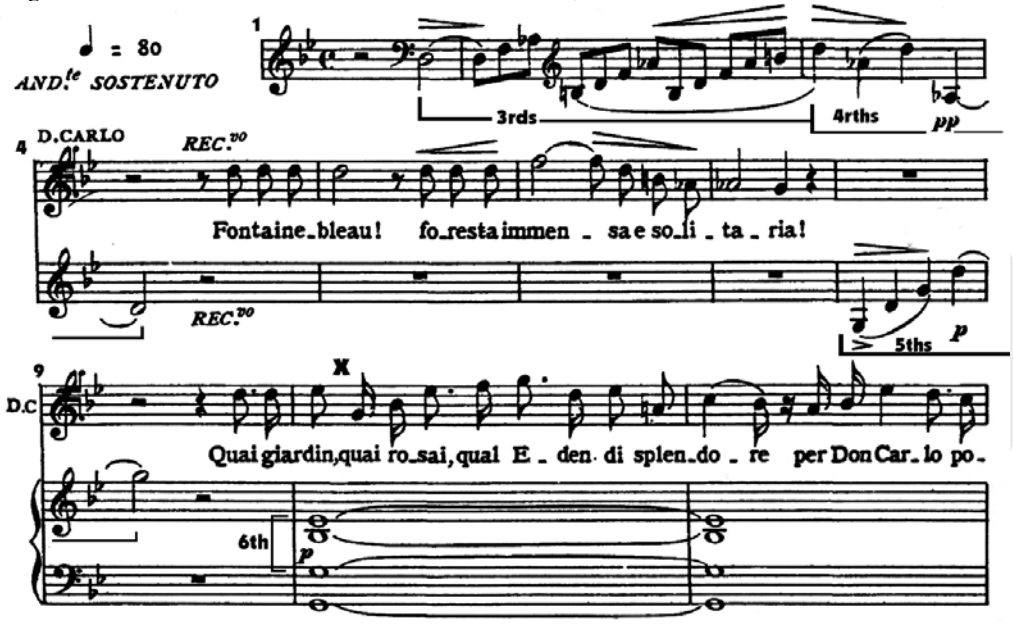
Figure 4.12(b): A similar two-phrase structure, but with the natural accent on the first beat of the bar constantly obscured, as Verdi does with the three-beat *anacrusis* in the opening scene of *Don Carlos*. This rhythmic shift defamiliarizes the musical structure for the listener, because the natural first beat of the bar remains obscured until bar 8 of this passage.



There is another powerful binding element through which Verdi achieves subtle dramatic growth in Act I: the 'development' the initial arpeggio motif (emphasizing the interval of a third) in the opening moments of the opera. Major and minor thirds and augmented seconds recur in the opening bars of Carlos's 'Fontainebleau!' *Romanza*. But these spread, ominously, to become augmented fourths in bar 3 of the *Romanza*, then to open fifths in bar 8. This steadily grow-

ing interval ultimately comes to rest in bar 10, not only on the prominent interval of a sixth, which is the third inverted, marked (X) in 4.13 below, but reinforced by the fact that this triad in the recitative is in first inversion, thus emphasizing the sixth. Within a few bars, then, Verdi manages to convey, by means of the simple widening of his initial motivic interval, the inevitable separation that will mark Carlos's relationship with Elisabeth, as well as the death of and resultant separation from his best friend and confidant. Also suggested are the schism between Carlos and his father, and the ultimate irreconcilability between absolutism and liberalism, at the root of the drama. Verdi then repeats the process of motivic separation. The widening intervals reappear later in the same scene, but only at bars 221- 301.

Figure 4.13: Extract from Carlos's Scena 'Fontainebleau!', from Act I of *Don Carlos*.



But what is the relationship between this motivic detail and *parola scenica*? As Verdi observes the gestural-formulaic traditions of opera through *parola scenica*, so he uses motivic detail to make the subject psychologically (and subliminally) aware of what is conveyed in the text. In the theatre this is known as *subtexting*, where the message 'consists of the unspoken words that run directly beneath the dialogue' (Thomas 127). An awareness of the subtext also has particular value from a performance practice point of view:

> [. . .] Maria [Callas], as [Tullio] Serafin had impressed on her from the beginning, sought the direction in the music. 'When you want to find a gesture, when you want to find how to act on stage,' she said once, 'all you have to do is listen to the music. The composer has already seen to that. If you take the trouble to really listen with your soul and your ears—and I say soul and ears because the mind must work, but not too much—you will find every gesture there' (Stassinopoulos 1981: 129).

Another point of interest marks Verdi's orthography. He tried (unsuccessfully) to publish Act III of *Aida* without headings such as 'Scena' or 'Romanza' in the score as a means of indicating that the act should be read as a whole. *Don Carlos* also has headings, but solid double bar lines punctuate only the opening chorus, Carlos's scene 'Le bruit de cor' and the end of Act I. All other dividing points are marked by feint-ruled double bar lines (below left), indicating a *caesura* in thought rather than a break in the action. I picked this up in the digital score of *Don Carlos* (First Edition Escudier 1867(?) 38), but the convention appears also in the critical version of *Stiffelio* (UC-RM):

Figure 4.14: A *caesura* in thought (left), and a break in the action (right).



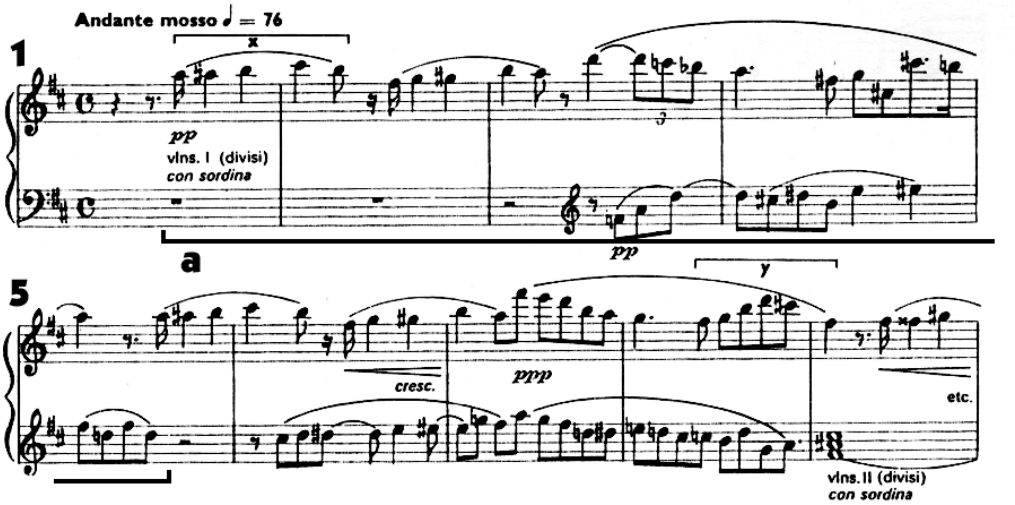
Close readings from the third stylistic period: *Aida*

Verdi's correspondence first refers to *parola scenica* only when he was writing *Aida*. I attempted to show earlier how the composer translates the strategy into orchestral terms, but as the curtain rises Verdi paves the way for the operatic narrative to suggest the uncertainty that awaits the protagonists in the opera, by obliterating the tonal centre in the prelude. Only in the fourth last bar is the tonal centre of D finally established. Verdi is not a pioneer in terms of hiding the tonal centre in the overture. Donizetti achieved such tonal ambiguity in *Gabriella di Vergy*, where the key of c is established only after twenty bars of overture.

If musical unity in *Don Carlos* is achieved by means of thematic coherence in the classical sense, in *Aida* it can be said to have been almost entirely achieved by means of *teme cardine*. Those who commented on Verdi's 'Wagnerianism' in *Don Carlos* would have been even more convinced of Wagner's alleged influence on him upon hearing *Aida*. Although Verdi uses *tema cardine* from *I due Foscari* onwards, *Aida* is possibly the closest he comes to *Leitmotiv*. Verdi himself tells us '[. . .] at the end of the overture, [. . .] the trombone and double basses shout out the melody of the priests and the violins and woodwind scream Amneris' jealousy, Aida's melody is played *fortissimo* by the trumpets'. This shows how nearly Verdi was approaching the concept of *Leitmotiv* without ever following up its structural implications (Busch 271 in Budden 3, 1981: 191). The reference here is to Verdi's first overture to *Aida* (*Pavarotti,* SMK 37228), which was later suppressed and replaced by the current prelude, a substitution which fairly convincingly proves that the notion of *Leitmotiv* (with its attendant thematic development) did not sit comfortably with Verdi right from the start.

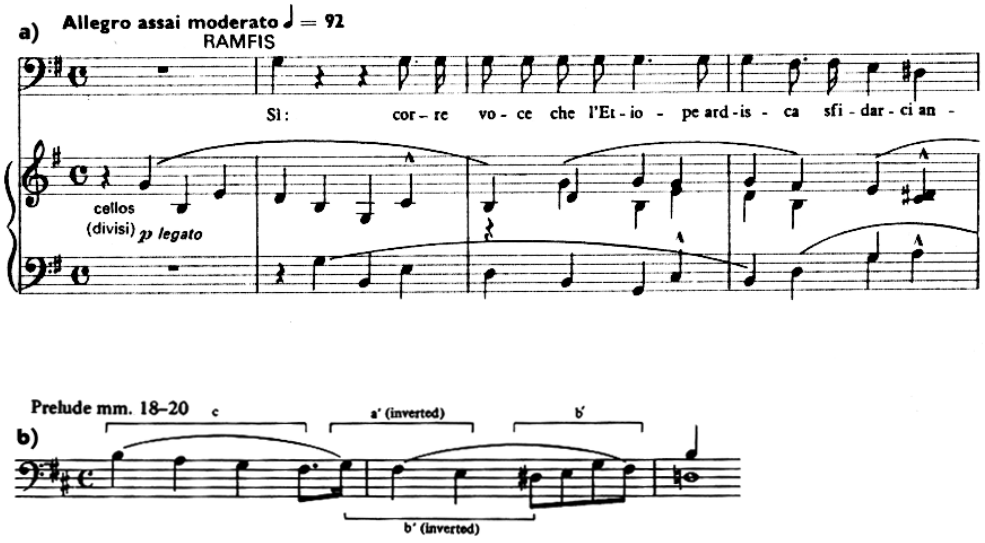
Aida's opening scene is thematically less coherent than that of *Don Carlos*, but is cross-referenced by four *teme cardine*. The first one, which I call the 'Aida' theme, top voice, (a) below, is prominent in those opening measures:

Figure 4.15: Extract from the Prelude to *Aida* (Budden 3, 1981: 199).



The second, according to Budden, (a) below, is associated with priestly power. He argues that it is a scene that 'belongs to Ramfis; [. . .] it is not surprising to find [. . .] a backcloth of orchestral counterpoint, since counterpoint is associated in this opera with priestly power' (3: 201).

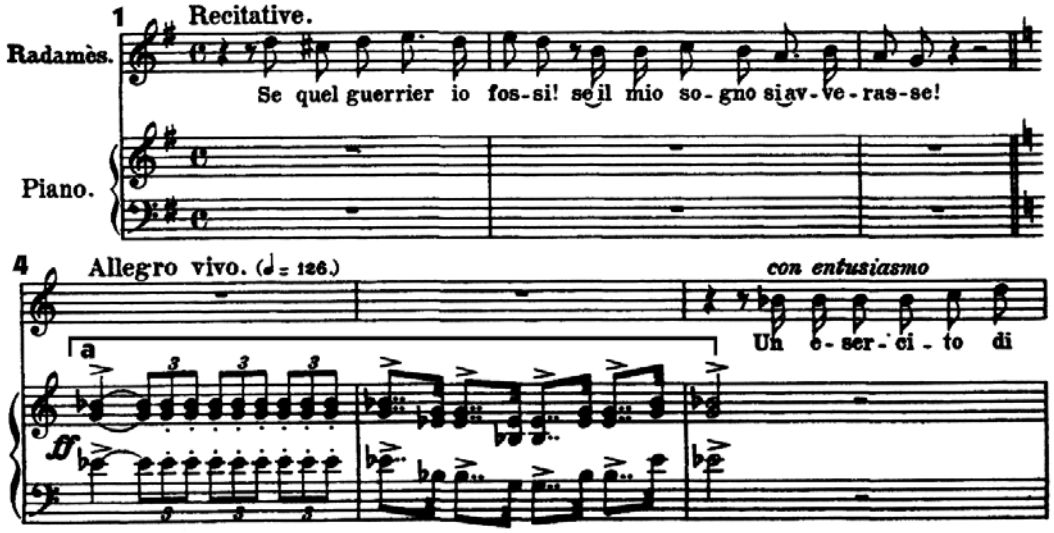
Figure 4.16: Extract from Act I Scene 1 of *Aida* (a: Budden 3, 1981: 201; b: Abbate & Parker 224).



Roger Parker disagrees. In his view the motif associated with the priests comes at 4.16(b) above. But this is not significant. The Budden motif is associated with *priestly power*, the Parker motif with *the priests*. The third motif at 4.17(a) below, which Budden does not acknowledge, is associated with royalty and ceremony. I refer to it as the 'royal' theme. It appears first in the opening

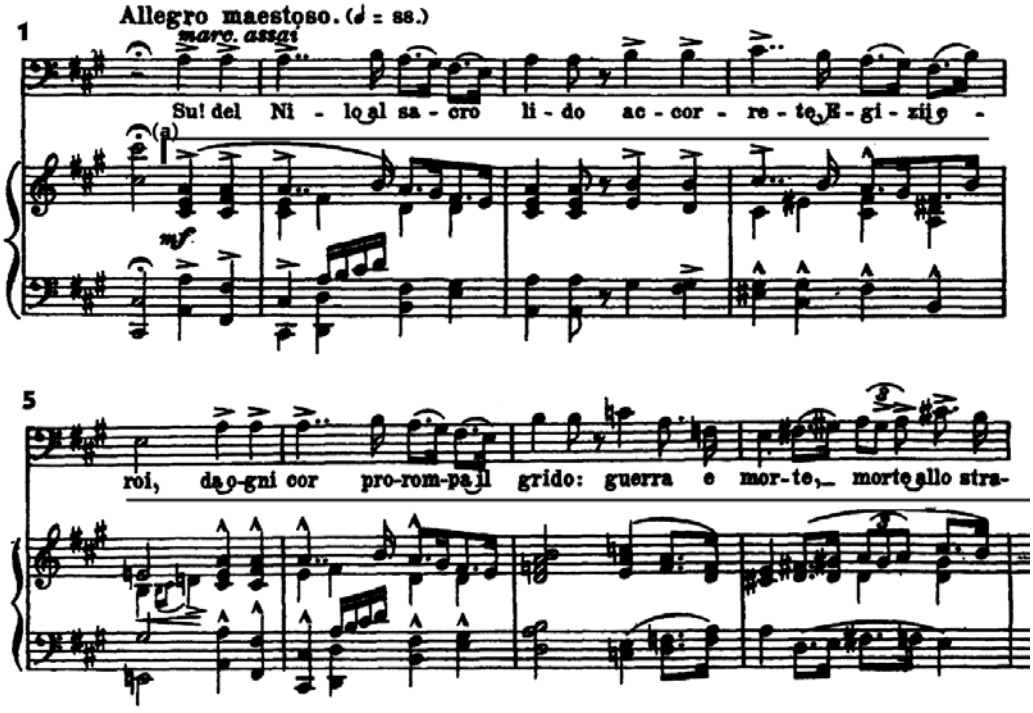
bars of Radamès's *aria* 'Celeste Aida', at the point where the tenor dreams about the honour of joining the ranks of the elite by being chosen to lead the Egyptian army against the Ethiopians.

Figure 4.17: Extract from 'Celeste Aida', from Act I Scene 1 of *Aida*.



The fourth theme at 4.18(a) below, which Budden does not mention either, is associated with triumph and victory. It has thematic links with the royal theme, and appears first shortly after the announcement that Radamès will indeed lead the Egyptian army against the Ethiopians. Significantly, this *tema cardine* is heard at the point in Act II where Amneris contrives to deceive Aida into admitting to being Radamès's lover.

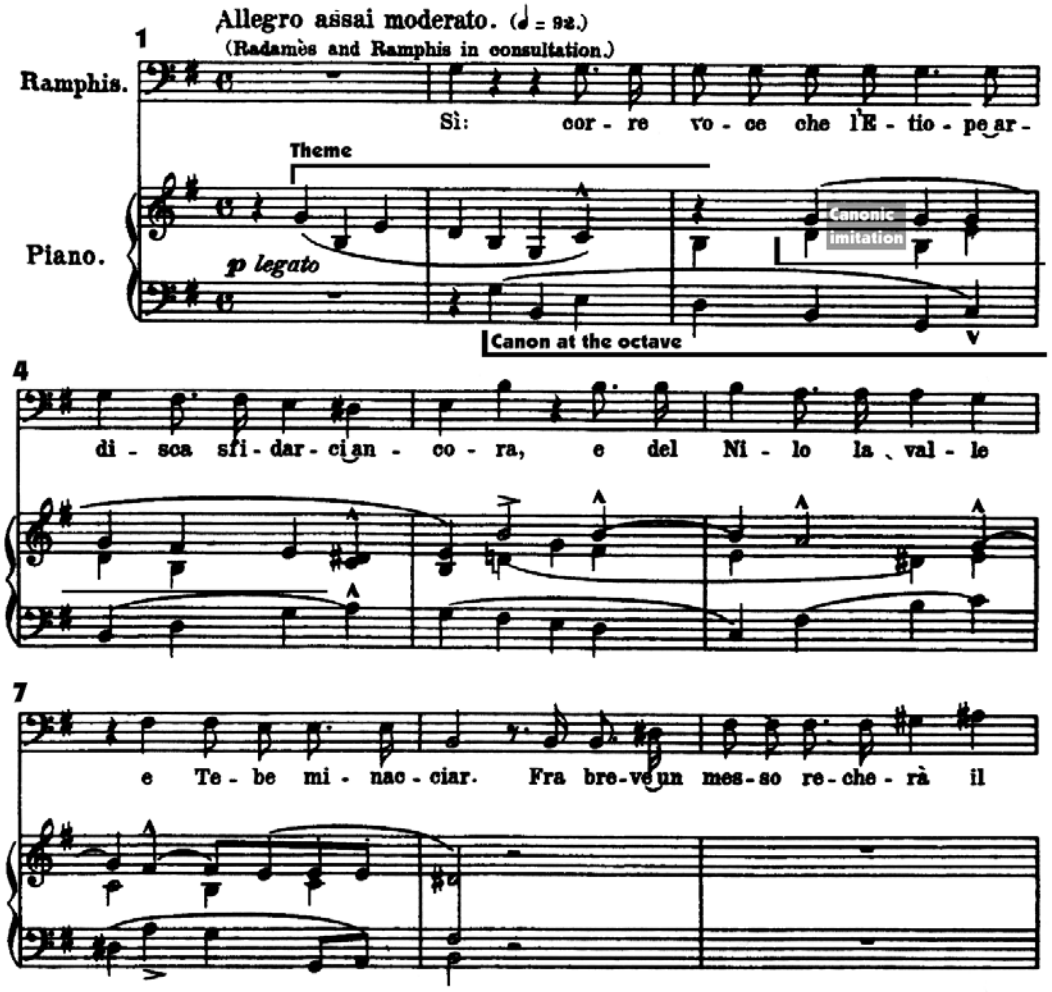
Figure 4.18: Extract from the *Scena e Concertante* from Act I Scene 1 of *Aida*.



If these *teme cardine* are the building blocks of the opera, the incidence of *parola scenica* serves as the cement, to illustrate the plot for the spectator, to make the narrative more easily accessible. The much quoted letter from Verdi to Ghislanzoni to which I refer in Chapter 1 makes mention only of *parola scenica* in Act II of the opera, in the scene between Amneris and Aida, but Verdi introduces the device from the start of the textual narrative, and in so doing uncovers the essence of Ghislanzoni's story, plot and poetry.

The entire Aida-Amneris duet is given a close reading presently (I analyzed a passage from it elsewhere), but the first trace of the device in *Aida*, used as a means of hiding the three-part orchestral canon that accompanies it, occurs in the first lines of sung text, a dialogue between Ramfis and Radamès, 4.19, below. Besides serving to hide formal structures at this level, this mode of setting also eliminates lingering notions listeners may have that what they are hearing might still be called accompanied recitative, or even *arioso*, although telling the difference becomes problematic, as I will show.

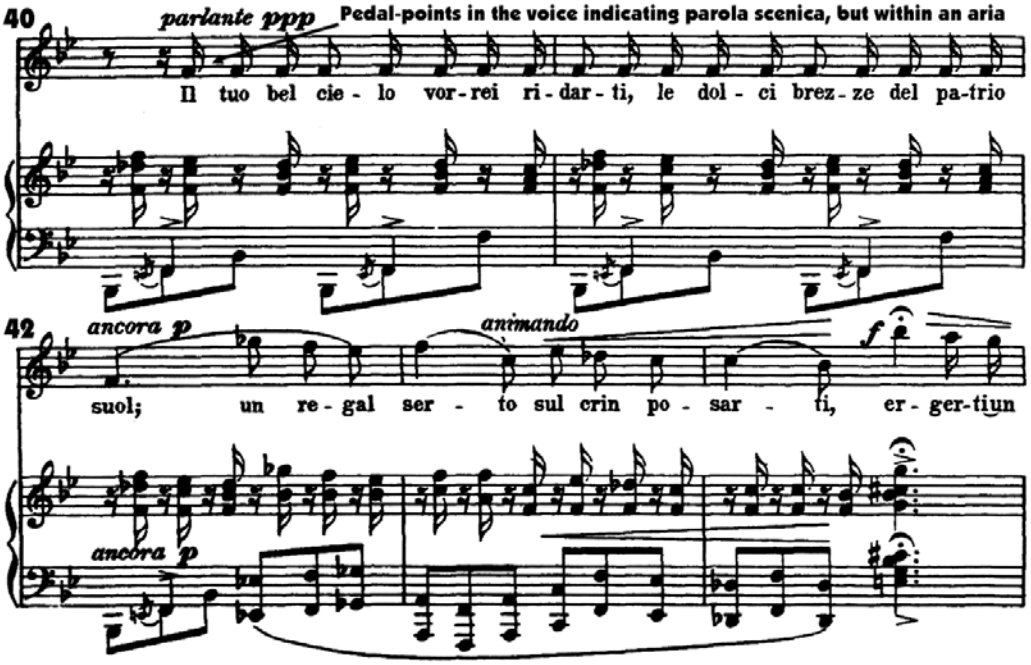
Figure 4.19: 'Si, corre voce' from Act I of *Aida*.



As I have emphasized in my discussion of Act I of *Don Carlos*, the *parola scenica* Verdi writes at this stage of his creative life seldom equals the classical *parola scenica* of his earlier career, and form follows function. Here the salient features still dominate—the monotone in the vocal line, the asymmetrical verse lengths, and the backgrounded primary melody of the orchestral canon. However, as in *Don Carlos*, Verdi's primary motivation is to ensure that the listener does not interpret the narrative as 'just another section of recitative' or 'just another *aria*,' but as a section of dialogue that has significant impact, theatrically as well as musico-dramatically.

Even within the *aria*'s boundaries, Verdi finds a way of illuminating the narrative by means of *parola scenica*, at the same time glossing over the natural transition between *aria* and coda, as this extract from 'Celeste Aida' shows:

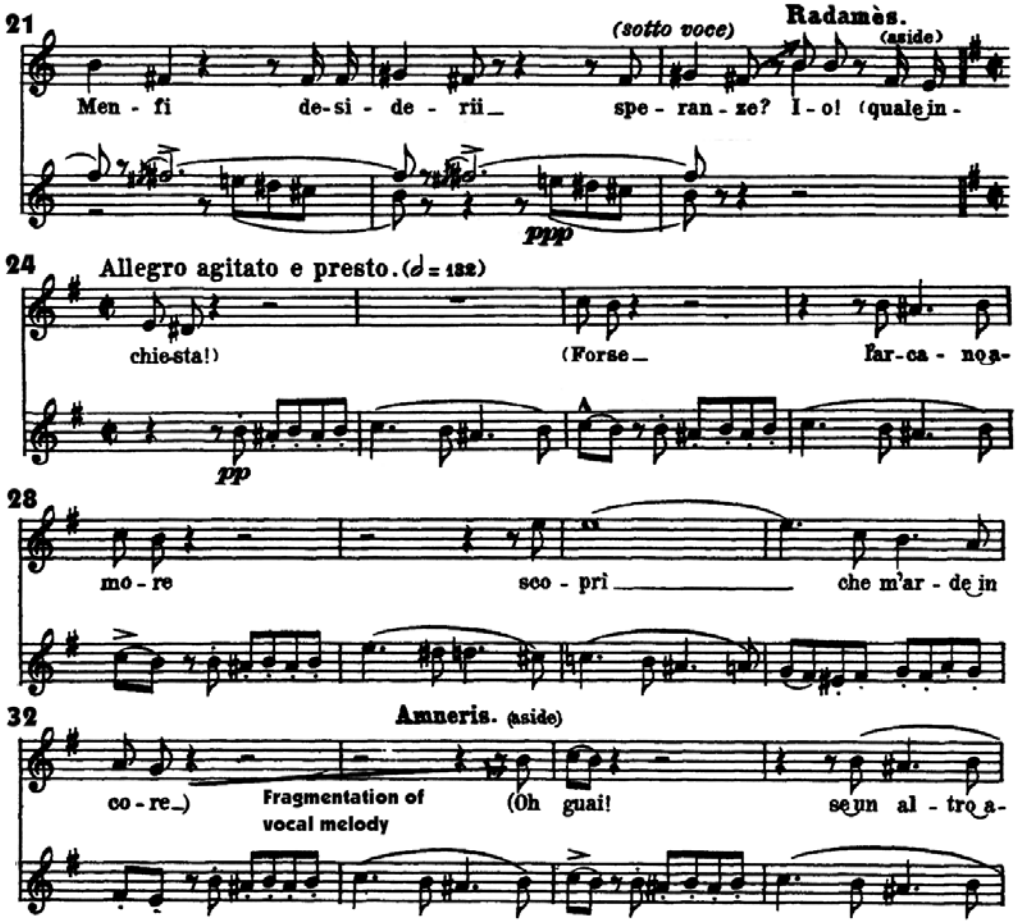
Figure 4.20: Extract from 'Celeste Aida;' Act I of *Aida*.



The extract overleaf, from the duet (developing into trio) 'Quale insolita gioia nel tuo sguardo!' (4.21), again shows how Verdi manipulates expressive and narrative means from within the plasticity of *parola scenica*. The opening bars of this section are devoted to a dance motif similar in tone to the one in Act I of *Don Carlos*, the primary melody of which is backgrounded. Above this melody, the fragmented secondary melody carried jointly by Radamès and Amneris drives the textual narrative. The first fourteen bars are identifiable neither as recitative nor *parola scenica*, except retrospectively. The poetry is symmetrical, and there is no sign of monotones, but the backgrounded primary melody leaves the listener in no doubt that the syntax is in fact that of *parola scenica*.

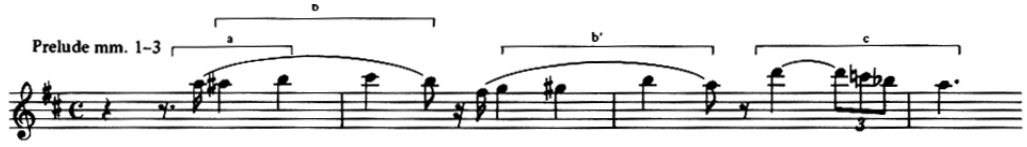
In the section following bar 23 the vocal line fragments even more as the dialogue between Radamès and Amneris becomes increasingly fraught. Amneris realizes that Radamès may well have another lover, probably Aida. This section of heightened narrative tension is interrupted at bar 77. Here the *Andante* section 'Vieni, o diletta, appressati' with its gentler, lyrical tune suggests Amneris' wheedling tone towards the distraught Aida. Amneris' duplicity motivates her to adopt this attitude for Radamès's benefit rather than Aida's.

Figure 4.21: Extract from 'Quale insolita gioia;' Act I of *Aida*. In this reference I have only retained the vocal and primary melodies.



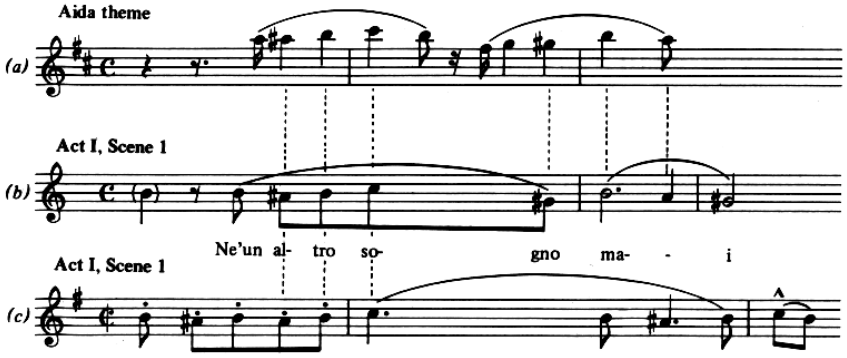
As a point of interest, this trio also shows one of many instances in *Aida* where Verdi states a *tema cardine* as a means of identifying a character, as well as employing it as a means of thematic unity by developing the motif, in a manner of speaking. The 'Aida' *tema cardine* has been noted by both Budden and Parker as 4.22 below.

Figure 4.22: Motif from the Prelude to *Aida* (Abbate & Parker 1989: 224).



Roger Parker makes a strong case for motivic imagery in this first-act trio between Aida, Amneris and Radamès. He schematically presents the periphrasis of the 'Aida' *tema cardine* below:

Figure 4.23: Extract from Act I Scene 1 of *Aida (*Abbate & Parker 1989: 226).



He then makes an important observation concerning the function of this thematic cohesion:

> It will, however, be instructive to mention a few places in this first scene where motivic transformations are used to particular effect. Certainly the densest and most telling episode comes during Amneris' jealous interrogation of Radamès. With highly pointed meaning, she asks him:
>
> | | |
> |---|---|
> | Nè un altro sogno mai | Has another dream |
> | Più gentil, più soave, | Gentler, sweeter, |
> | Al core ti parlò | Never spoken to your heart? |
> | Non hai tu in Menfi | Don't you have in Memphis |
> | Desiderii, speranze? | Desires, hopes? |
>
> It is not, of course, difficult for the audience to divine exactly what this 'altro sogno' is. [. . .] The music that illustrates Amneris' warring emotions and as yet inchoate suspicions also teeters on the edge of discovery. [. . .] 'Nè un altro sogno mai' is a fragmentary, unrealized conflation of the Aida theme [. . .]. The ensuing *allegro* between Radamès and Amneris, 'Quale inchiesta!' is then based on a further version of 'Nè un altro sogno mai' [. . .]. It is thus a moment of extraordinary musical and dramatic clarification when this duet is itself interrupted by a definitive version of the Aida theme, as the heroine appears on stage for the first time (Abbate & Parker 226).

Before leaving *Aida*, it seems useful to examine the Act II duet between Aida and Amneris in its totality, since this is exactly the point at which Verdi first uses the term as a signifier in his musical and theatrical vocabulary. Obviously Parker concerns himself primarily with structure and thematic materials in his discussion of 'Motives and recurring themes in *Aida*' rather than *parola scenica*. However, he does emphasize the occurrence of *versi sciolti*, which I have called asymmetrical verse. Parker also refers in his discussion to the 'cycle of dominant pedals that cuts across the first half of the scene,' the use of which immediately suggests to me the presence of a monotone and therefore the possible presence of *parola scenica*.

This passage is problematic from the start, because Verdi does not introduce the *parola scenica* where one expects it, according to the correspondence round this *scena* and the reams of erudite reasoning put on paper by scholars, probably since 1913, when the *Copialettere* first appeared. This is one of the primary reasons why I follow the analytical process I have chosen. Unless one knows exactly what one is looking for, *parola scena* is not always easy to spot in the printed score, whereas any incidence of it, when one *listens* to a recording of a work such as *Aida*, practically jumps off the page.

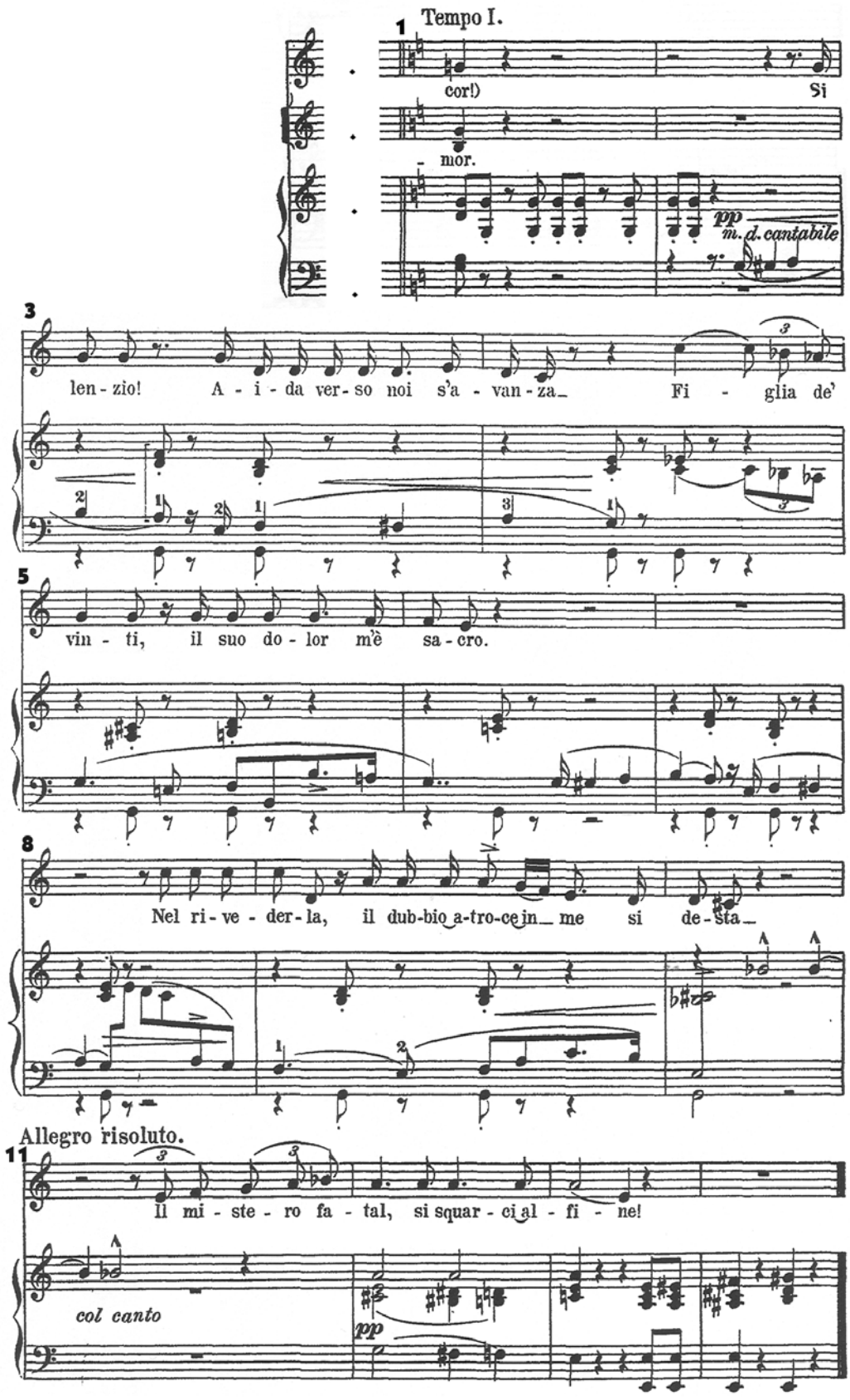
The page of *parola scenica* I quote first is no exception. It is hidden in the last bars of the 'Dance of the Little Moors' and it coincides with the final bars of the Chorus of Slave Women', but to my ear it is a particularly eloquent example of *parola scenica*. Also, the *parola scenica* does not appear 'unspoilt', as it were, by other formal structures. Verdi combines it with *recitativo secco* and what ambiguously almost verges on *accompagnato* (see Figure 4.24, overleaf).

Bars 1-10 are typical of how I hear *parola scenica:* the primary melody, in this case, the 'Aida motive', is played in full in the lower voice, and in fact appears no as the them A, but as the theme A^{+}, because it is extended by an extra two bars. The reason for the appearance of the *tema cardine* is not difficult to find. Amneris says 'Silence! Seeing her now, the fearful doubt/awakens in me again—/now I shall penetrate this fatal secret!', and on the stage Aida can indeed be seen approaching the Egyptian princess.

In bars 11-14 Verdi opts for an idiom that is difficult to identify as either *recitativo secco* or *accompagnato*. I lean towards the latter, because the accompaniment is not as sparse as one would expect from ordinary *secco*, but there is no doubt that they are accompanimental figures, because the primary melody—such as there is of it, because there are eleven notes, but the phrase is dominated by the monotone on A—is without any reasonable doubt with Amneris, as she prepares to trick Aida into admitting to her relationship with Radamès.

The first ten bars for the mezzo-soprano is melodically not particularly eloquent. It is marked by a series of monotones such as one would expect of any extended passage of *parola scenica*. The thematic material is new, but will soon become familiar to the listener. Many of the figurations used in these fourteen bars will be seen in the pages to come, when the duet proper between Aida and Amneris starts, and when Amneris baits Aida gradually into revealing her relationship with Radamès.

Figure 4.24: Extract from Act II Scene 1 of *Aida*. This is the final bars of the 'Chorus of Women' and the 'Dance of the Little Moors'.



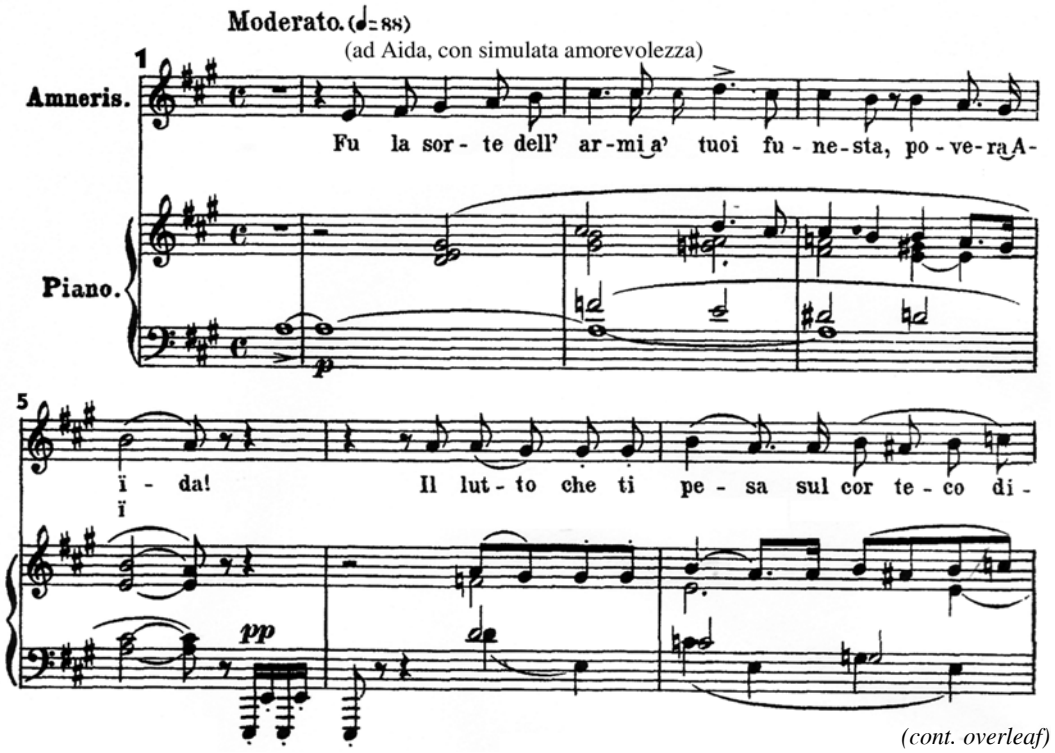
From the start of the Aida-Amneris duet in Act II, Verdi's idiom is problematic. We know from his correspondence that this scene is representative of *parola scenica*, but the commentators point only to these lines

AMNERIS	**AMNERIS**
E ancor mentir tu speri?	And you still hope to lie to me?
Si, tu l'ami!	Yes, you love him!
Ma l'amo anch'io, intendi tu?	But I too love him, do you hear?
Son tua rivale, figlia de' Faraoni!	I am your rival, I, daughter of the Pharaohs!
AIDA	**AIDA**
Mia rivale! Ebben, sia pure,	My rival! Then so be it,
Anch'io son tal . . .	for I too am—
Ah! che dissi mai?	Ah, what am I saying?
Pietà, perdono, ah!	Have pity on me; forgive me, ah!

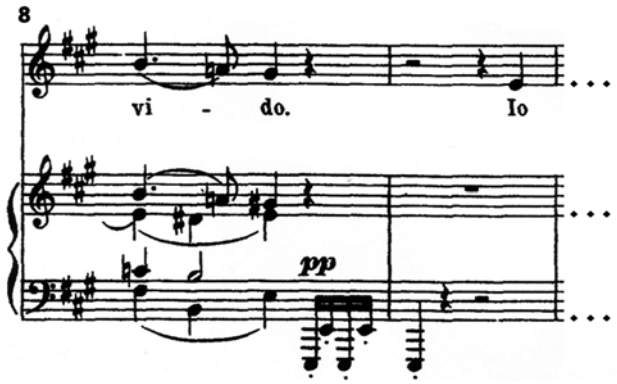
However, I intend to show that the *parola scenica* is not only confined to a verse of perhaps eight lines, but to the scene as a whole, and it is representative of Verdi's *idiom* at this point, not limited to a *single compositional strategy* that pertains to a number of lines only and specifically.

I noted elsewhere how the narrative can be explained in terms of a series of microstories, and this duet is no exception. Not only does Verdi change the idiom he uses when a character starts a new verse of dialogue in Ghislanzoni's text, he even changes idiom halfway through one character's speech (if we were to divide the libretto into 'speeches' rather than 'verses', in other words, if we used theatrical rather than operatic parlance).

Figure 4.25: Amneris' first lines to Aida in Act II of the opera, as she starts setting a trap to lead Aida gradually into admitting her love for Radamès.



(cont. overleaf)

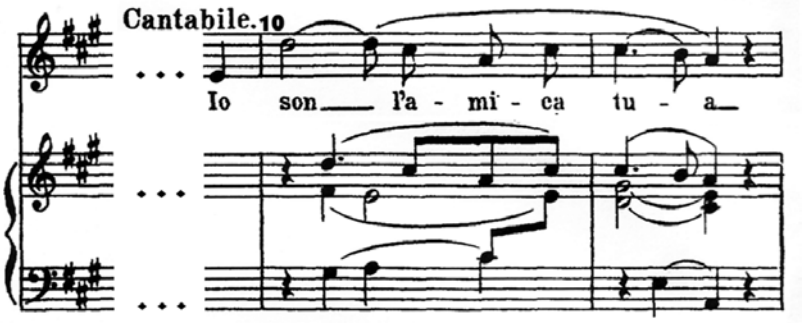


Amneris' speech in Figure 4.24 above and 4.26 below revolves around these lines (the first three lines of text published below are discussed on a previous page. Amneris' first three lines of text precede Verdi's subdivision of Act II Scene 2, as published in the score):

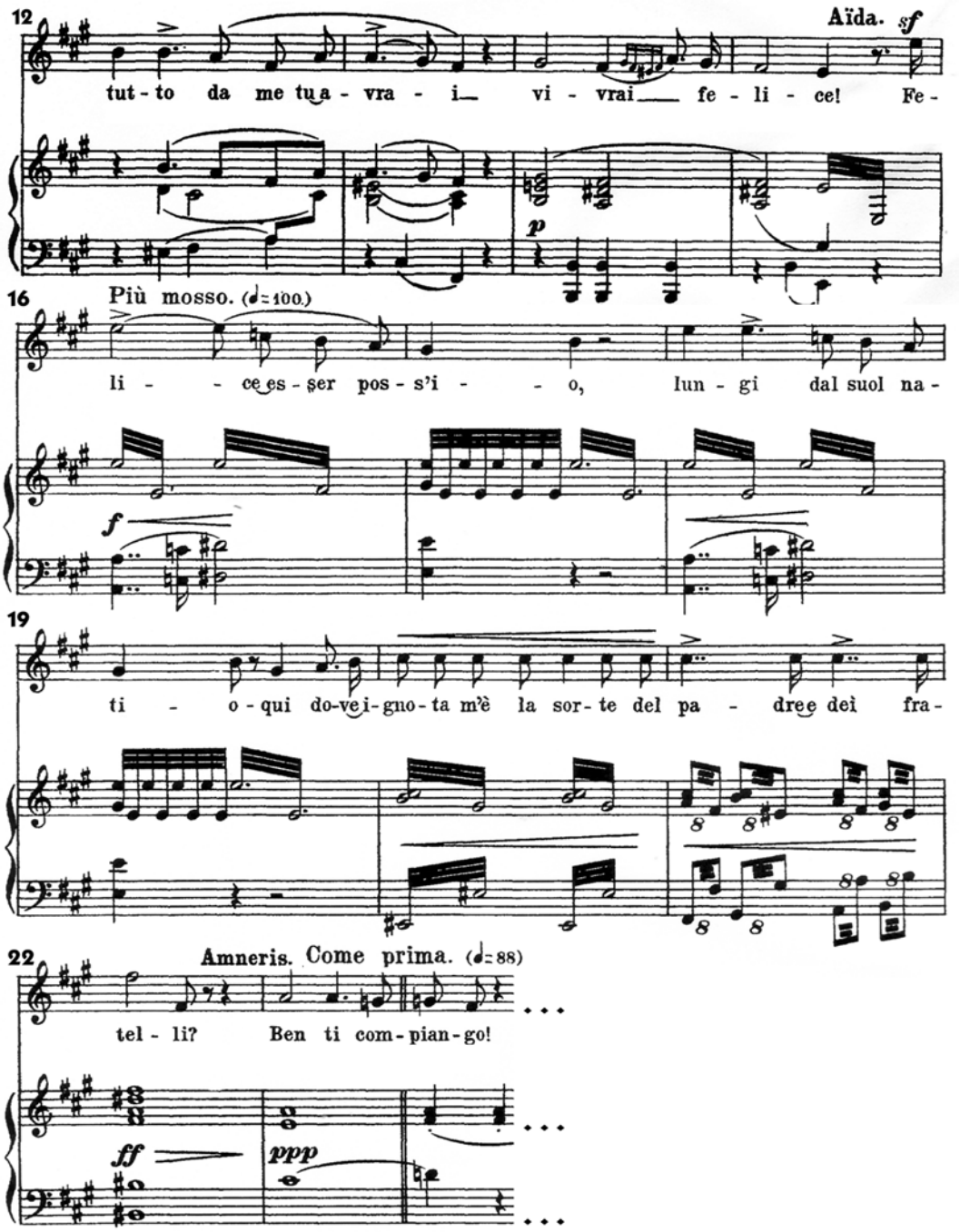
AMNERIS	**AMNERIS**
Nel rivederla, it dubbio	Seeing her now, the fearful doubt
Atroce in me si desta . . .	awakens in me again—
Il mistero fatal si squarci alfine!	now I shall penetrate this fatal secret!
(ad Aida, con simulata amorevolezza)	*(to Aida, with feigned tenderness)*
Fu la sorte dell'armi a 'tuoi funesta,	The fortunes of war have gone against
Povera Aida! Il lutto	your people! Poor Aida!
Che ti pesa sul cor teco divido.	Your heart's grief I share with you.
Io son l'amica tua . . .	I am your friend. You shall have whatever
Tutto da me tu avrai, vivrai felice!	you wish from me. You shall be happy.

The first musical microstory takes the musical text only as far as bar 8, but as what, idiomatically, are those first eights bars best described? By comparison to the bars that follow, I can only conclude that the introductory bars should be marked as *recitativo accompagnato*, because the verse is unrhymed, and presents as two *endecasillabi* split by an *ottonario*, and the accompanimental figuration is idiomatic of *recitativo accompagnato* rather than, say, *aria* or even *arioso*. The last two lines in this verse comprises one *settenario* and one *endeccasillabo* and remains unrhymed, but the setting has changed:

Figure 4.26: Amneris' last lines from her first speech, underscoring the difference between *recitativo acccompagnato* and *arioso*, as Verdi starts building idiomatic 'conventions' for the duet between Aida and Amneris in Act II of *Aida*.



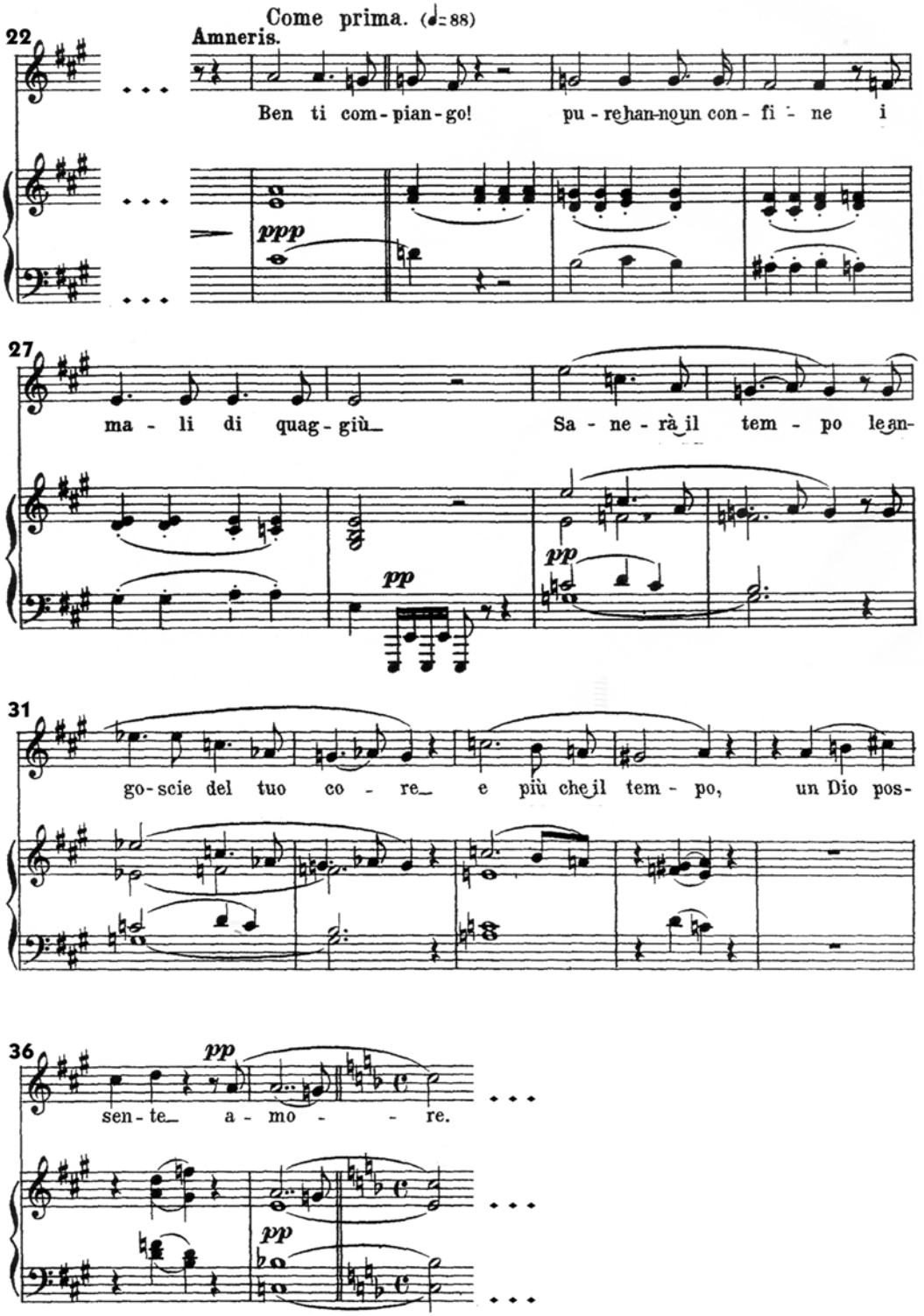
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Here the problematic nature of Verdi's vocabulary in this duet starts emerging. Figurations in the second extract, to which, a moment ago, I referred as *arioso*, echo figurations in the first extract, which I called *recitativo accompagnato*. For example, see the *tremoli* in both upper and bass registers, which are adumbrated in bar 9 of 2.24, and doubled melodic line in bar 12 in 2.25, which are derived from those in bar 2-3 in 2.24. The text tells us why. In Amneris' first lines in this speech her feigned concern appears to be with Aida's people: it is *sociological*. In the remaining lines her concerns appear to be *personal*, and it is this difference Verdi illustrates by using a different idiom.

Verdi further confuses the issue with the *Come prima* indication heading this extract, because the *tremolo* figure in the bass (bar 28), predates to bar 9, but the rest of the accompanimental figuration points rather less to the opening bars than it does to the second section of the text in 4.25, which I have dubbed *arioso*, and the melody here remains lyrical in its impact:

Figure 4.27: Amneris continues to try to get Aida to admit to her relationship with Radamès.



Verdi's reasoning for continuing in this vein is not hard to follow. He switched from the *sociological* to the *personal* mode of communication with (or interrogation of?) Amneris a moment ago. Since Amneris is still trying to get Aida to commit one way or another to being Radamès's love interest, Amneris' idiom remains constant also. Amneris' text for the previous and following illustrations is captured below.

AMNERIS
Ben ti compiango! pure hanno un confine
I mali di quaggiù. Sanerà il tempo
Le angosce del tuo core,
E più che il tempo, un dio possente . . .
Amore.

AMNERIS
I weep for you. But there are limits
to earthly sorrow. Time will quiet
the anguish of your heart—
and, more than time, a powerful god—
Love!

AIDA
(vivamente commossa)
Amore, amore! Gaudio, tormento,
Soave ebbrezza, ansia crudel!
Ne' tuoi dolori la vita io sento,
Un tuo sorriso mi schiude il ciel.
Ne' tuoi dolori, *ecc.*

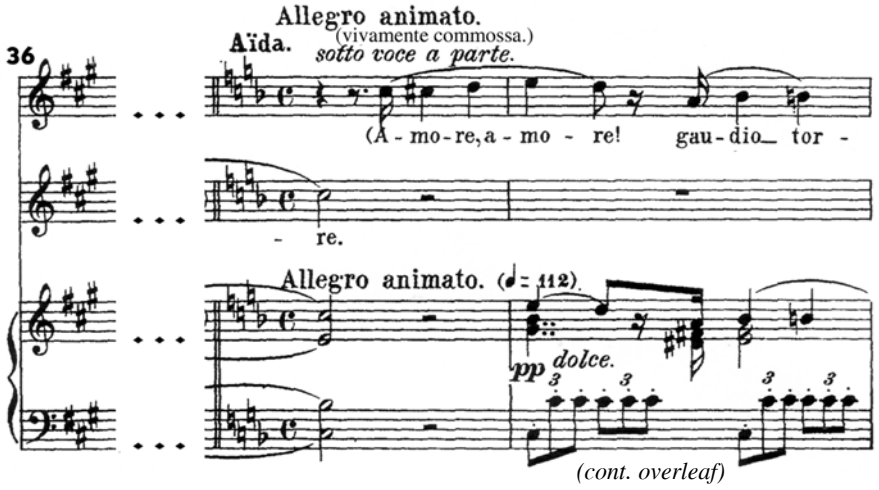
AIDA
(tenderly, aside)
Love, love! Tormenting joy,
sweet rapture, cruel anxiety!
In thy sorrow I find my life,
in thy smile, I find heaven itself
In thy sorrow, *etc.*

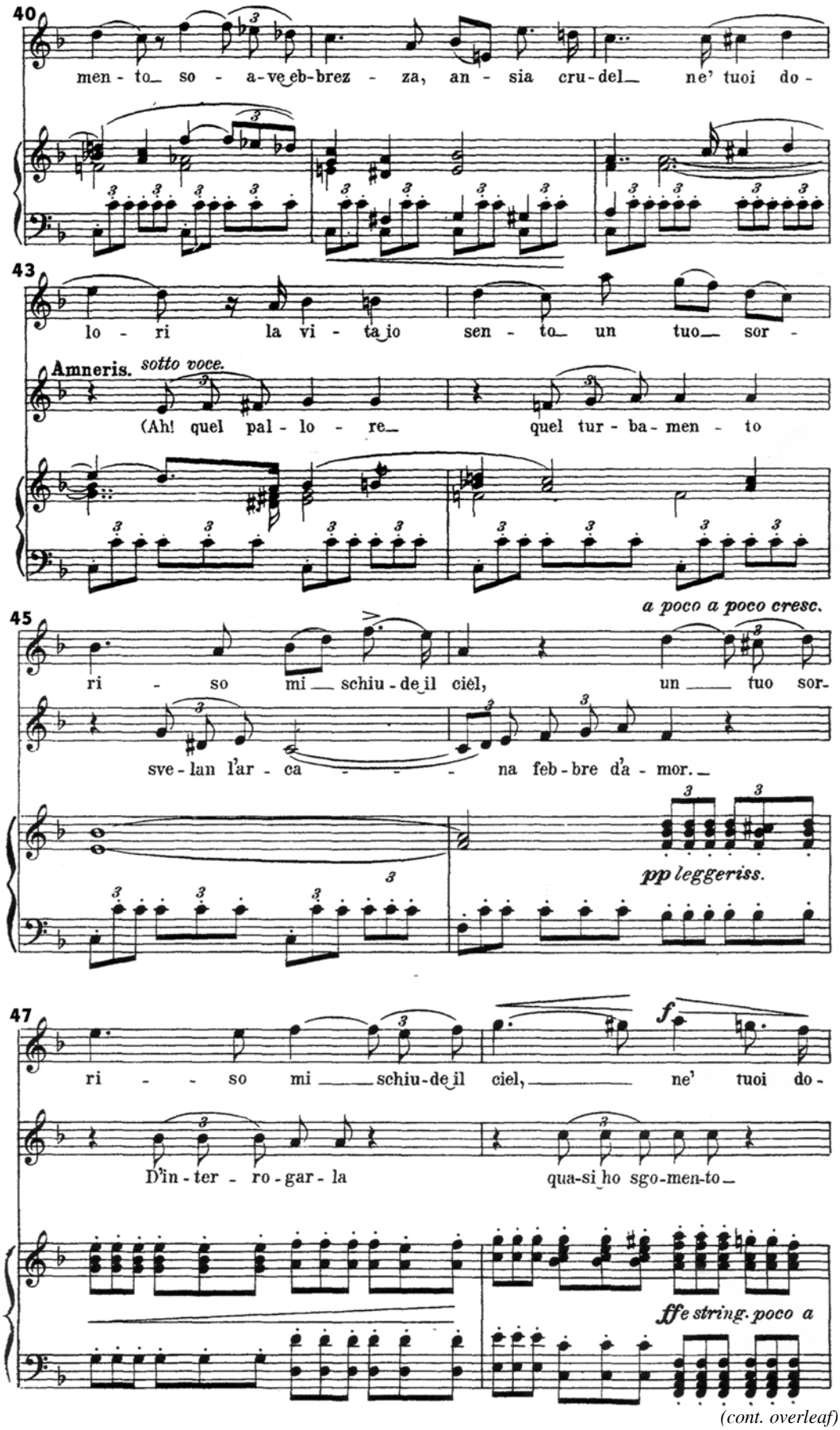
AMNERIS
(guardando Aida fissamente)
Ah! quel pallore, qual turbamento
Svelan l'arcana febbre d'amor!
D'interrogarla quasi ho sgormento,
Divido l'ansie del suo terror.

AMNERIS
(regarding Aida fixedly)
Ah, her pallor, her confusion
betray the secret fever of love!
I fear to question her,
for I share the anxiety of her heart!

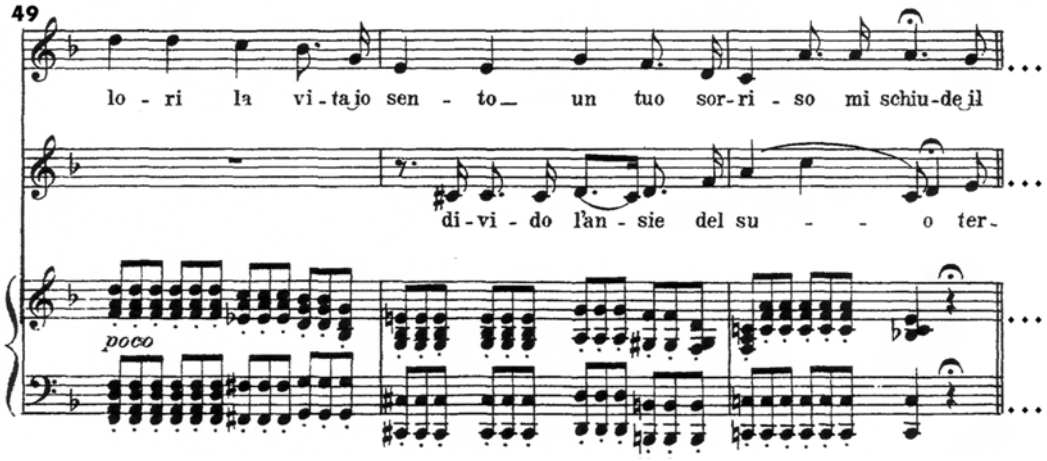
Likewise, Verdi's motivation for a change of idiom in the subsequent section is easy to divine, particularly his choice of melodic theme. The *tema cardine* he chooses unashamedly represents Aida herself in the course of the operatic text, and its appearance at this point, heard *Allegro animato*, shows Aida as a hare caught in the glare of the hunter's spotlight. Although, strategically, she still has the upper hand (because Amneris has no proof of her relationship with Radamès yet), her advantage is slowly shrinking as Amneris' noose tightens.

Figure 4.28: Amneris has succeeded in getting Aida to speak her mind on the subject of a romantic interest, edging ever closer to tricking her into a confession of her relationship with Radamès.





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I gave a reading of these passages elsewhere, but in the context of showing that it is not a *parola scenica* prerequisite that the primary melody moves into the *orchestra,* but that it moves *into an aural background* that may include the chorus *or another voice*, a significant stylistic and idiomatic difference. Here I am comparing Verdi's choice of idiom, as dictated by the changing content of the text, in his process of setting it. However, this is the first section of *pure parola scenica* in the context of this scene. As I described the scene elsewhere, the primary melody, that of Aida, moves into the aural background, descriptive of her state of mind. The all-important information is that of Amneris noting Aida's every reaction to her interrogation, forcing her ever further into a corner.

Stylistically, this passage is utterly typical of my reading of *parola scenica*. When I refer to Della Seta, it is fair to conclude that it also conforms broadly to what he has categorized as other readings of the device,

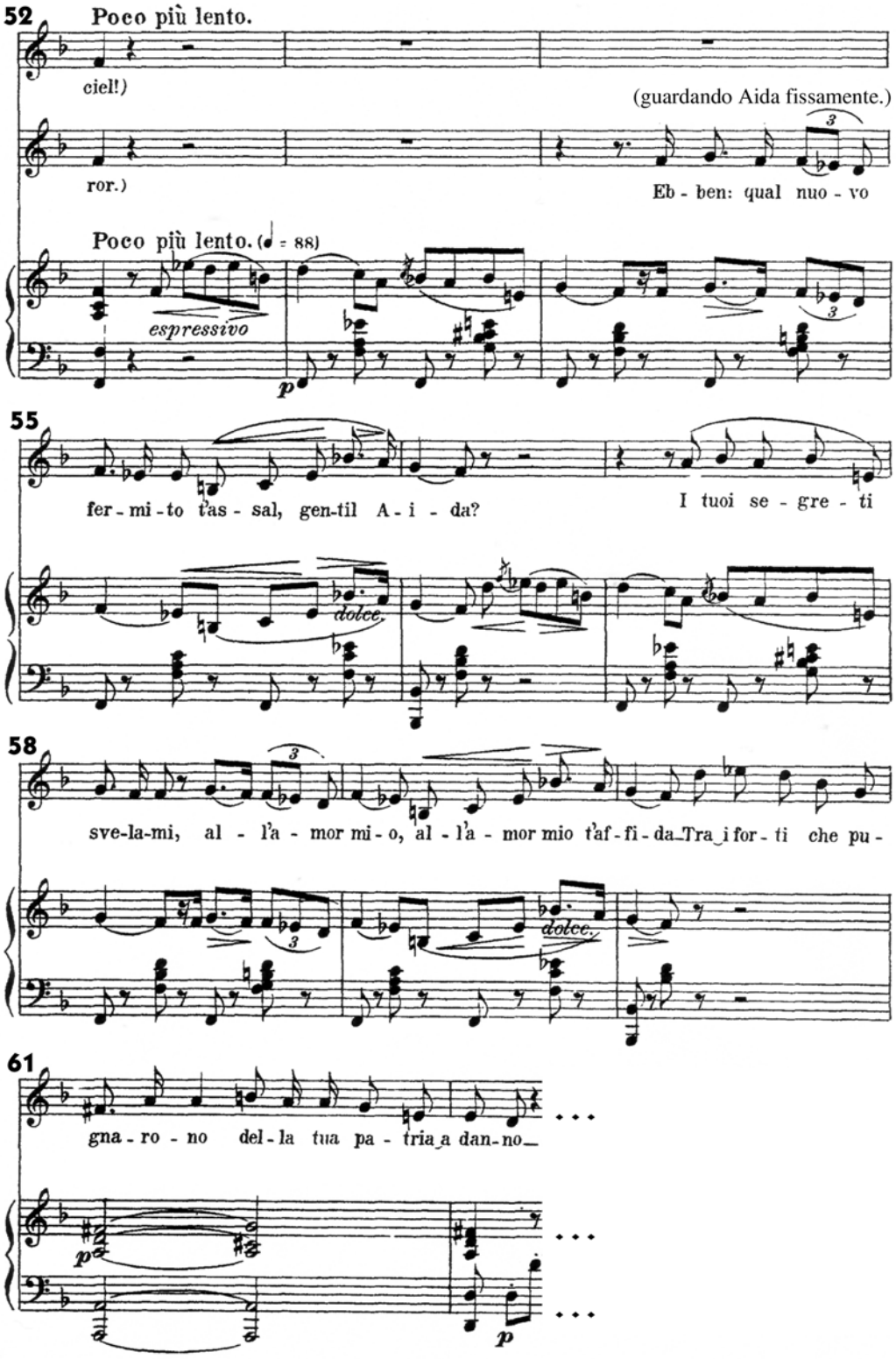
> that *parola scenica* was clearly conceptualized in Verdi's mind; that particular passages in his output informed that concept; that it may constitute a word and music interaction; that it may be a strategy Verdi pressed into service to underscore key dramatic moments; and that it may, and frequently does, occur where there are textual and musical deviations in the operatic texture (262*ff*).

It is precisely that broadness of conception that has inspired my research into *parola scenica*. I find none of the other readings sufficiently *specific*, and it is for this very reason that I offer my reading to complement the others.

It is from here on that we must tread with care in this idiomatic close reading. To tie this *scena* into the general operatic fabric that makes up *Aida*, Verdi has, up to this point, only used the *tema cardine* that signifies Aida herself. Idiomatically, he has given us a choice of *recitativo accompagnato*, *arioso* and *parola scenica*. It remains to be seen how he applies these three complementary modes of expression in fashioning the rest of the *scena*.

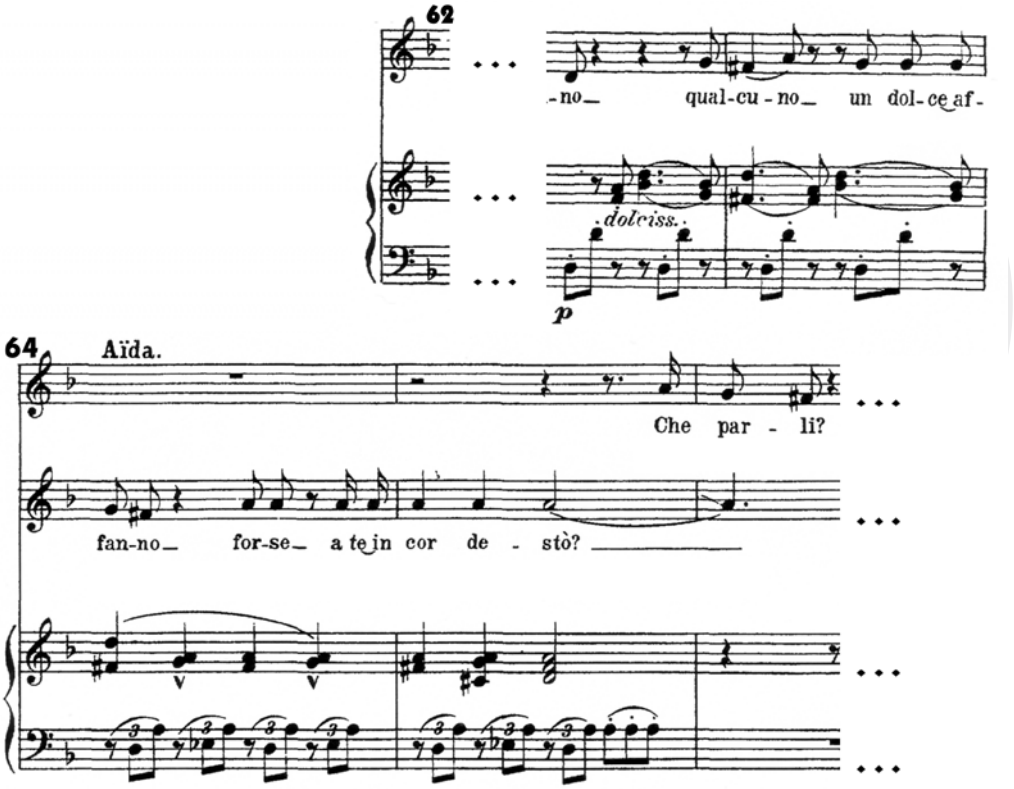
Having introduced all idioms (but not yet all thematic material) he is about to use in this scene, Verdi's next gambit is to sustain the lyrical quality of writing he has created for Amneris, communicating with Aida on a personal level.

Figure 4.29: Amneris continues her interrogation. Here is a change in idiom again as she edges closer to the matter of Aida's love life. Amneris cannot appear more sympathetic . . . she does not *speak* here, she *purrs*, unsheathing the claws one at a time.



Verdi appears to have been extraordinarily fond of this curious '*gavotte*-like' gait in the music. There are many instances where he would use this two-beat *anacrusis*, the most pertinent of which are the ones in Act I of *Don Carlos* to which I referred above. What the music tells us at this point is that Amneris, for all intents and purposes, is 'stalking' Aida in this monologue, as would a predator. But Amneris is not quite in control of the situation, as the next five bars of music tell us:

Figure 4.30: Amneris' cool interrogation does not entirely succeed. Verdi introduces a broken-octave accompaniment starting on the quaver off-beat in the bass, while the fluid melodic pattern continues. Then the accompaniment 'breaks up' as the upper voices hammer out an alternating tonic-dominant-seventh pattern with the accent on the weak beats in the bar, and the bass pattern accelerating into triplets, but with the first note of each obscured by a quaver rest. The result is a series of nervous accompanimental figures for Amneris' part in the dialogue (for Aida responds shortly afterwards in a *pertichino* that very closely resembles *parola scenica*, because it appears like a foregrounded interjection over a backgrounded (in Amneris' part) primary melody.

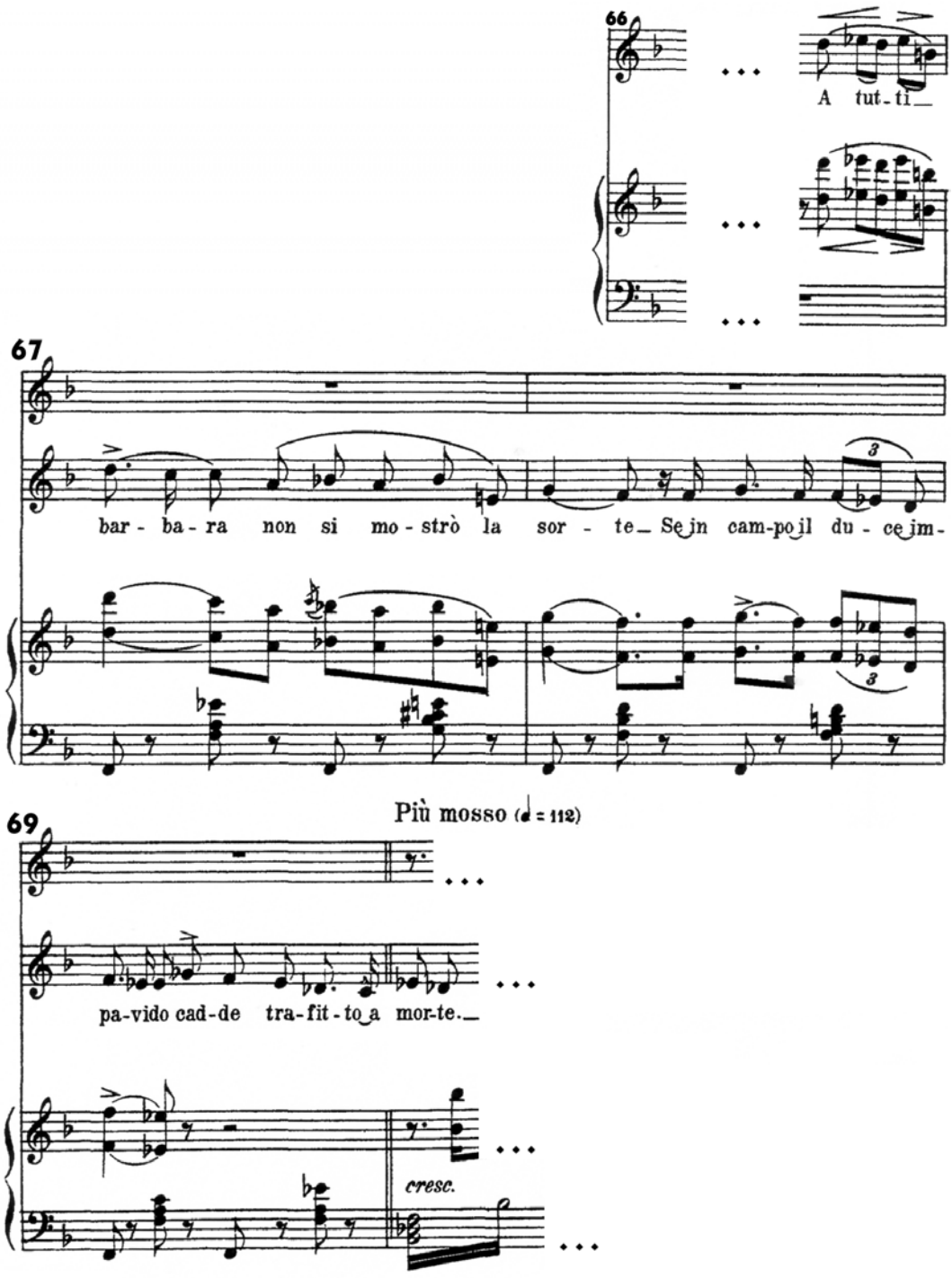


Always master of the dramatic situation, Verdi does not push the envelope by over-emphasizing Amneris' momentary loss of absolute control. The five-bar phrase with Aida's response is just sufficiently suggestive for the listener to remain aware of the fact that this is a power-game between protagonist and antagonist, and that the result of the vocal duel can still go either way—a decisive move is yet to be made by either party. However, when Aida's response is weighted against Amneris' stimulus, it is plain that, at this stage of the match, Amneris has the upper hand.

Amneris subsequently resumes her tactics of lulling Aida into a state of complacency and false security (given the menace of the situation), before delivering the cruel blow:

AMNERIS	**AMNERIS**
A tutti barbaro	Not to all
Non si mostrò la sorte,	has fate been cruel
Se in campo il duce impavido	since our fearless leader
Cadde trafitto a morte . . .	has died on the battlefield—

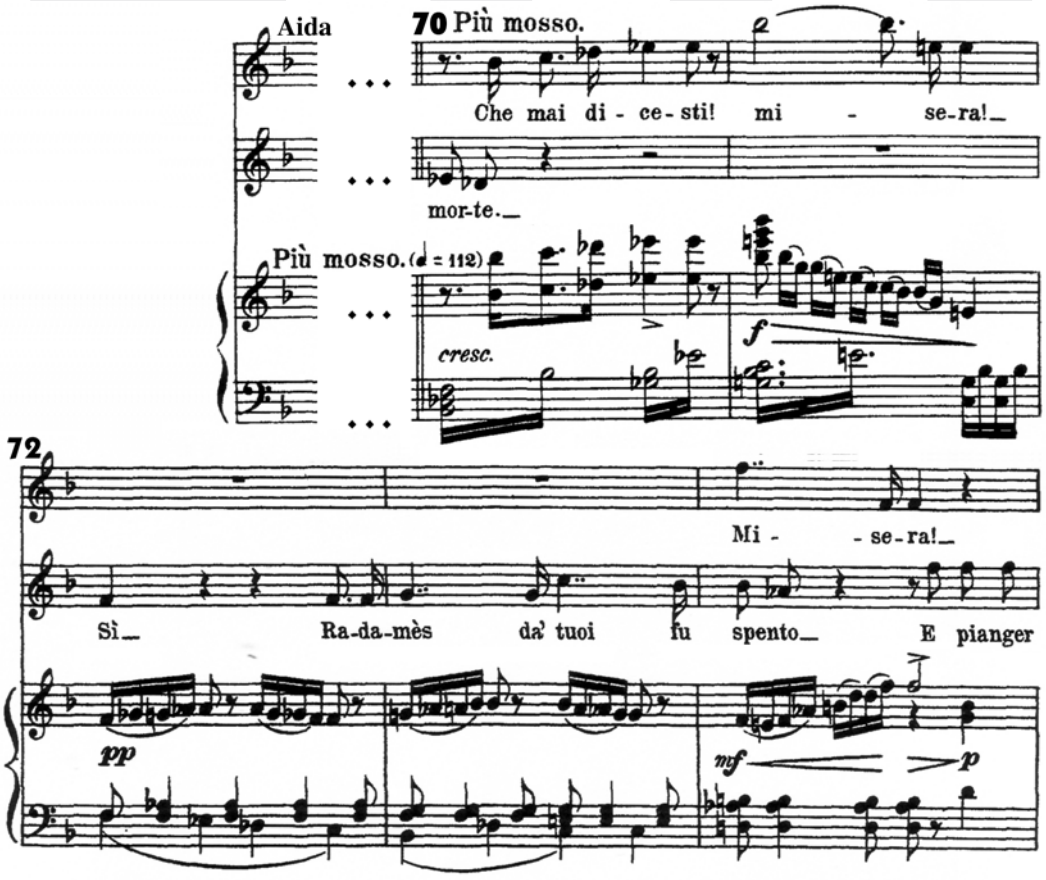
Figure 4.31: Verdi maintains Amneris' lulling *gavotte* melody and rhythm, before, in the last line of this verse, breaking out of the '*solite forme*' he has so carefully prepared.



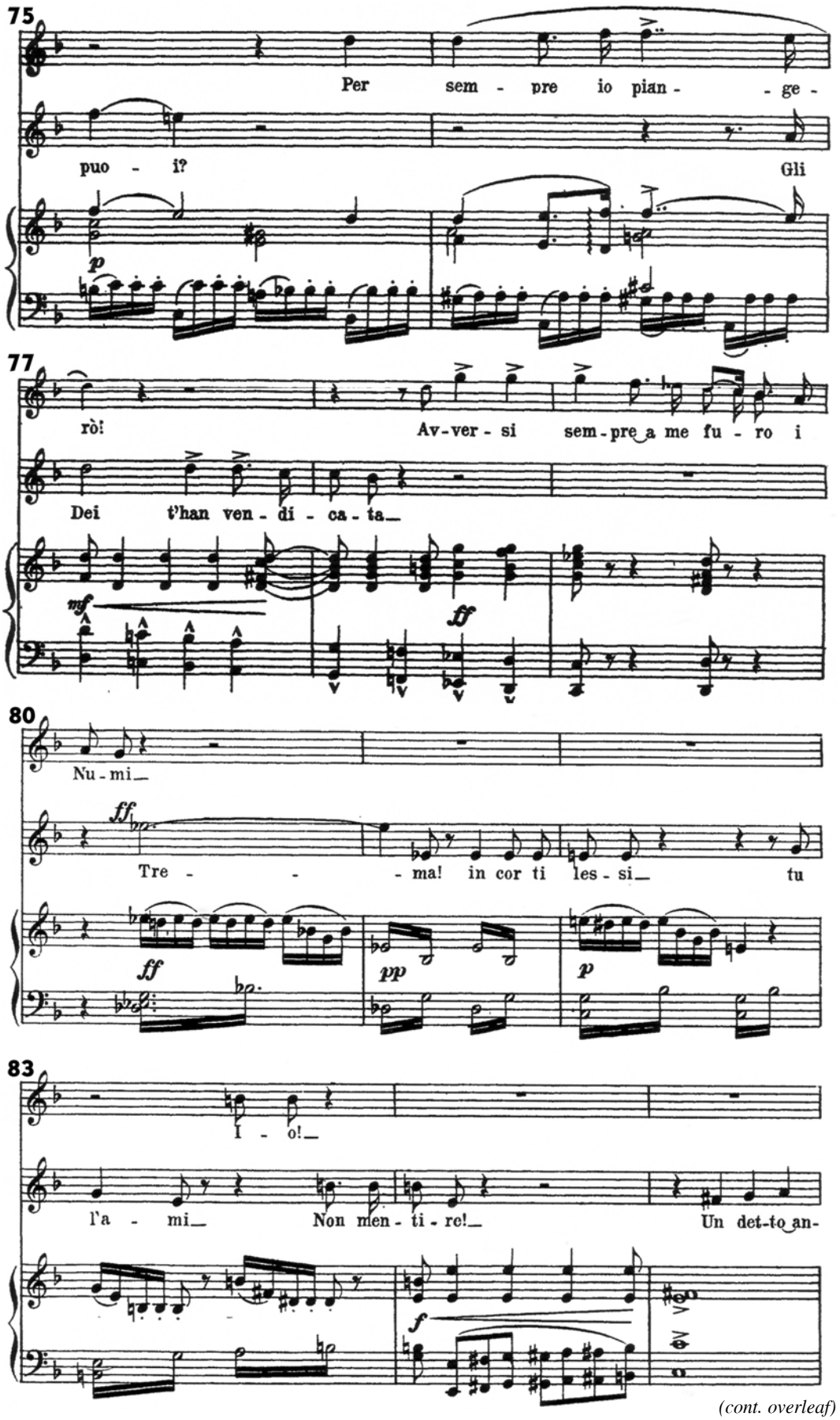
Italian is particularly suitable to opera, because it is a fluid language. Words can be given in full, or in part. *Applaudire*, for instance, still means *applaud* or *celebrate* when it is shortened in the interests of the melodic line to *plaudire* (or *plaudiam*, see *Stiffelio* Act I). If it is the last word in the metric line, it does not influence the metre, since the final, silent syllable is counted in any case in a *tronco* line of verse. Note the word order in the verse above. Ghislanzoni cleverly delays the final, cruel blow, not only to the last line of verse, but to the last word in the last line, when Amneris reveals Radamès's 'misfortune', supposedly having fallen in combat. Verdi changes from the sinuous, *gavotte* melody and rhythm associated with Amneris approaching Aida on a personal level, to another idiom altogether . . . but as what does one classify the idiom in which Amneris sets the fatal trip-wire Aida does not see until it is too late?

This verse is set as three *settenarii* and one *ottonario*, with an *abcb* rhyme scheme. Breaking forcefully out of the *gavotte* into a highly emotive idiom, Aida's opening line in this section of dialogue looks like a cross between *arioso* and *recitativo accompagnato*, but then Amneris enters the ensemble again, and a startling change takes place:

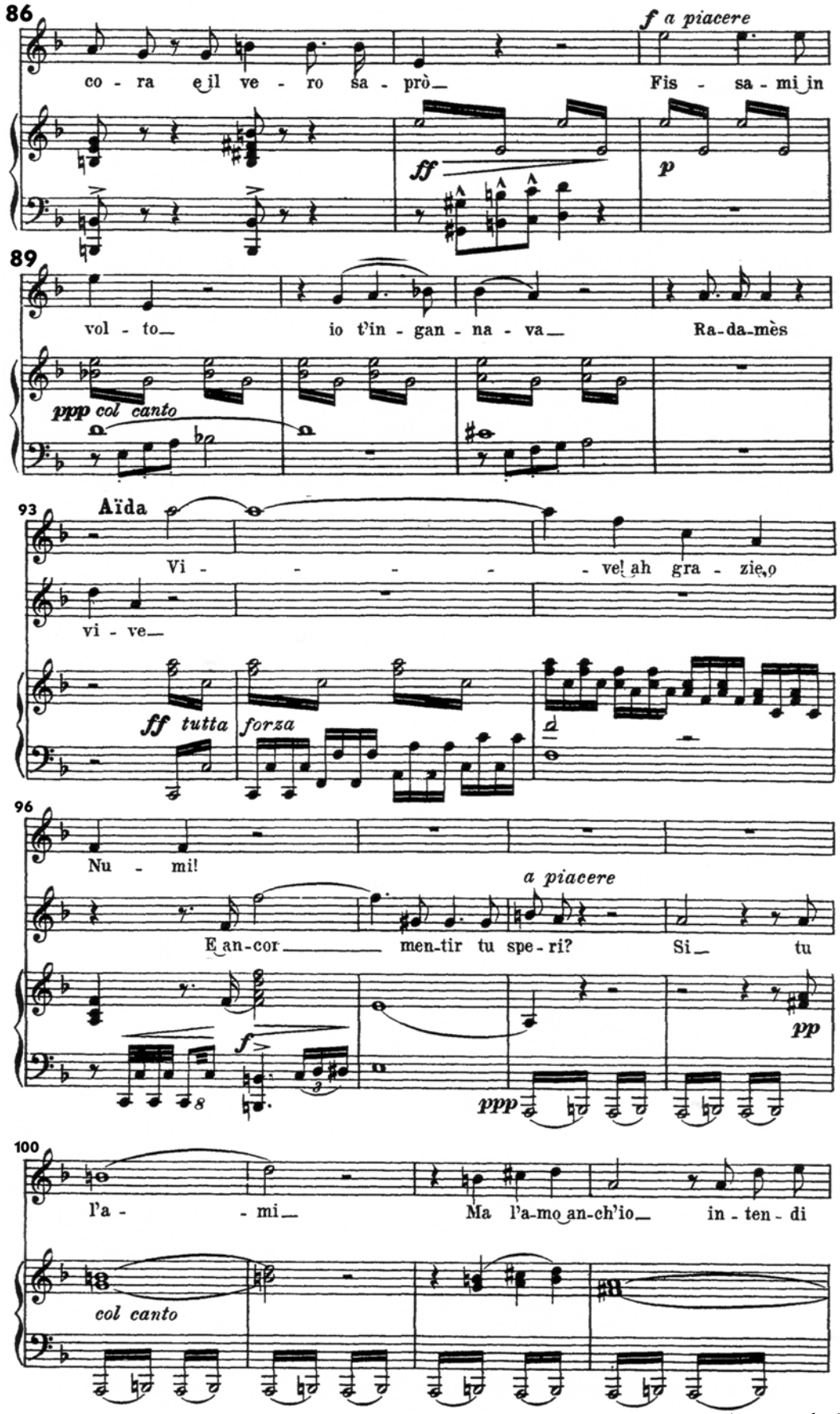
Figure 4.32: The start of the dialogue proper between Amneris and Aida.



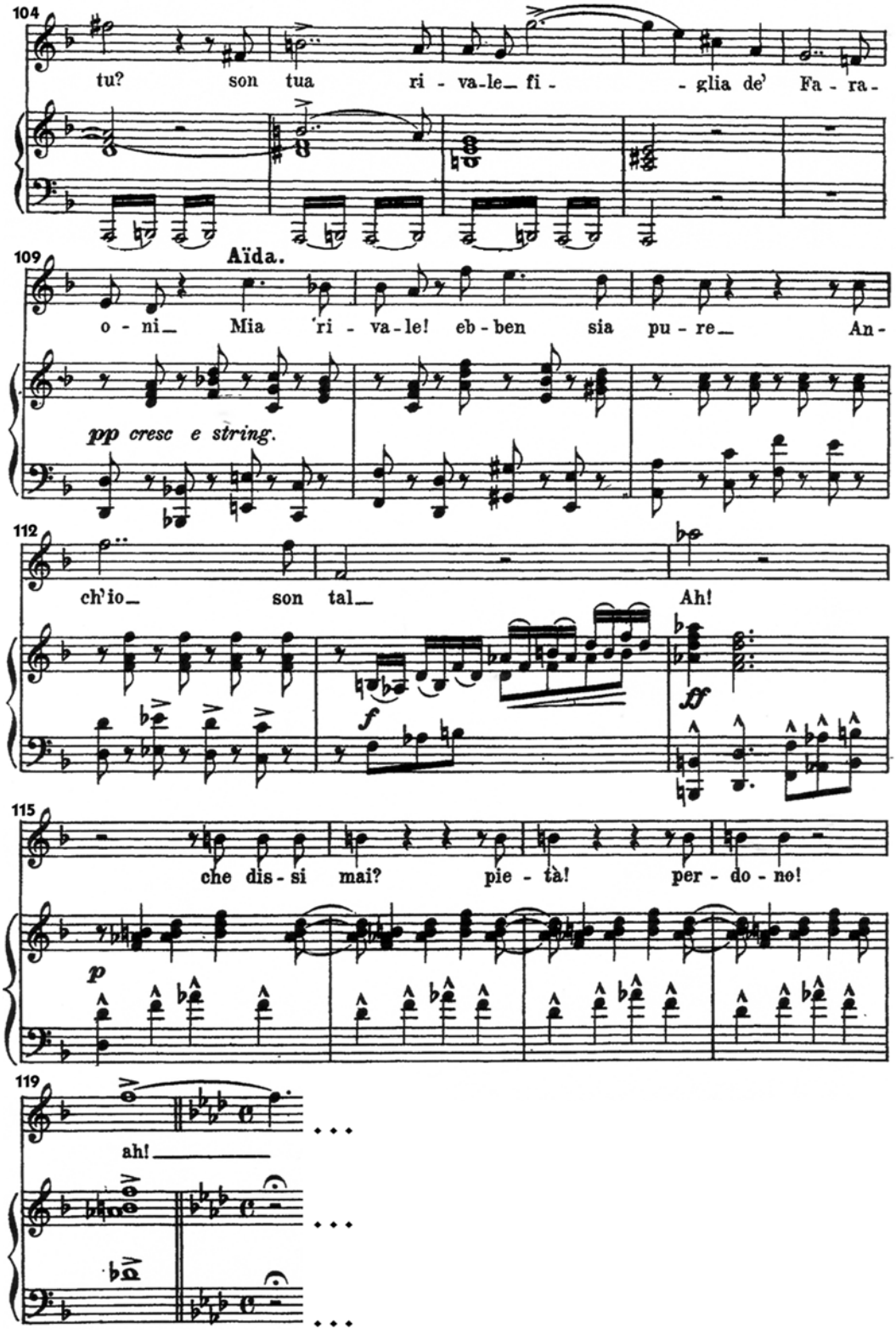
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In bars 70-71, the primary melody appears to be in the soprano's line, if for no other reason than that it is doubled in the orchestra. That would suggest that Amneris' line (bar 72*ff*) might be described as *parola scenica*, once again given the content of the text:

AIDA
Che mai dicesti! ahi, misera!

AMNERIS
Sì, Radamès da' tuoi
Fu spento . . . E pianger puoi?

AIDA
What did you say? Oh! wretched!

AMNERIS
Yes, Radamès was killed
by your people . . . And can you weep?

Aida's line again reflects a state of mind. Scarcely able to believe what she hears, she helplessly calls out against her own wretchedness. Amneris, however, has found Aida's one weakness. Tricking Aida into believing that Radamès has died, she now plays off her grief against her patriotism, questioning the fact that Aida weeps while her country's enemy has been destroyed. By putting Aida in such a position, seemingly to make a choice between a lover and a country, Amneris has found Aida's Achilles heel: the fact that she is indeed Amneris' rival, but a slave, and therefore helpless against Amneris' imprecations.

The operatic fabric from bar 72 onwards grows even more densely complex. Amneris plays her trump card of deluding Aida into understanding that Radamès was killed by her own people in battle. Then she reveals her ruse, and it is too late for Aida to recant. Through her reactions, she has provided the proof Amneris has been seeking, and she can no longer keep up her pretences. Concurrently, of course, she places Radamès in mortal danger. The text reads

AIDA
Per sempre io piangerò!

AMNERIS
Gli dei t'han vendicata!

AIDA
Avversi sempre mi furon i numi.

AMNERIS
Ah, trema! in cor ti lessi! . . .
Tu l'ami...

AIDA
Io!

AMNERIS
Non mentire!
Un detto ancora e il vero saprò.
Fissami in volto Io t'ingannai . . .
Radamès vive!

AIDA
Vive!
Ah, grazie, o numi!

AMNERIS
E ancor mentir tu speri?
Si, tu l'ami!
Ma l'amo anch'io, intendi tu?
Son tua rivale, figlia de' Faraoni!

AIDA
Mia rivale! Ebben, sia pure,
Anch'io son tal . . .
Ah! che dissi mai?
Pietà, perdono, ah!

AIDA
I shall never cease my weeping!

AMNERIS
The gods have avenged you!

AIDA
The gods have always been against me.

AMNERIS
Tremble! I have read your heart—
you love him—

AIDA
I!

AMNERIS
Do not lie!
One more word and I shall know.
Look into my eyes. I deceived you—
Radamès is alive!

AIDA
Alive!
Oh, praised be the gods!

AMNERIS
And you still hope to lie to me?
Yes, you love him!
But I too love him, do you hear?
I am your rival, I, daughter of the Pharaohs!

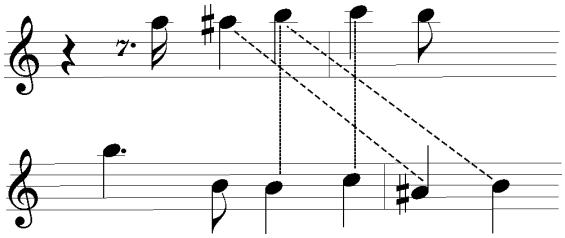
AIDA
My rival! Then so be it,
for I too am—
Ah, what am I saying?
Have pity on me; forgive me, ah!

A frenetic set of accompanimental figures dominates in the orchestra in the bars that follow, and the vocal parts are so fragmented that it becomes difficult to tell where the primary melody lies, unless one refers constantly to Ghislanzoni's text. In fact, there is no significant primary melody in any of the parts, if one would be looking for a 'traditional melody' in a Bellinian sense of the word. The partner most persistently sustaining an unfragmented melodic line is the orchestra, which means that this is where the primary melody lies. Aida is still preoccupied with her own thoughts in which she laments that the gods appear to be bent on her destruction. Her line also appears to carry more 'melodic' weight in the traditional sense of the word than does the mezzo's line. For example, besides the exclamation of 'Misera!' in bar 74, her line in bars 75-80 is marked by a scalar ascent to the seventh of the dominant seventh on A, then a descent to the secondary tonic of g—a graceful ascending and descending sinuous melody. Amneris' material exhibits none of these features. Bars 76-78 present as a sequential imitation of bars 72-74, and the melodic line is characterized by monotones at three instances, four, counting bars 80-82. Moreover, she is still reinforcing the lie she used initially to lure Aida out into the open, and her story of Radamès having been killed is sustained up to bar 78, marking hers as the line with the primary noetic intent. As I interpret the idiom at this point, then, Verdi uses, if not pure *parola scenica*, then certainly an application of it.

This mixture of styles remains in force in bars 80-93, with ascending accompanimental figures in the orchestra. The soloists' lines become more and more fragmented as the dialogue picks up pace. Only in bar 93 does Amneris break off the carefully constructed lie to reveal that Radamès is in fact alive, and Aida capitulates on a tonic six-four in F, which remains unresolved. The primary melodic content remains in the orchestra in the ensuing bars, with the voices following the orchestral melodic contour in bars 96-114. In bar 115, Aida's line becomes a pronounced monotone over an *ostinato* accompanimental motif in the orchestra, as she realizes that she only just avoided compromising her identity. Amneris does not yet know that Aida is the Ethiopian princess, and this line of development in the plot becomes important in scenes to follow, where Aida recognizes her father Amonasro, but does not acknowledge him, in a bid to save his life by preserving his anonymity. Amonasro is believed to have fallen in battle, and it is important for the development of the plot that this remains so. Only at the end of the 'Nile Scene' is their relationship revealed, and neither Ghislanzoni nor Verdi pursues this line of development:. It was only important insofar as Amonasro could use Aida to coax the Egyptian battle plan from Radamès.

Verdi now introduces 'new' thematic material, although it is in fact derived from *dux* of Aida's main motif. Verdi achieves it by swapping positions, or rather, by putting the last two notes of the motif before the first two (omitting the semi-quaver). In the example below, I show how this motif is developed from the original. It is transposed up an augmented fourth just to track its origins. This motif is also the same figuration Bach uses in the 'Crucifixus' from *Mass in b*.

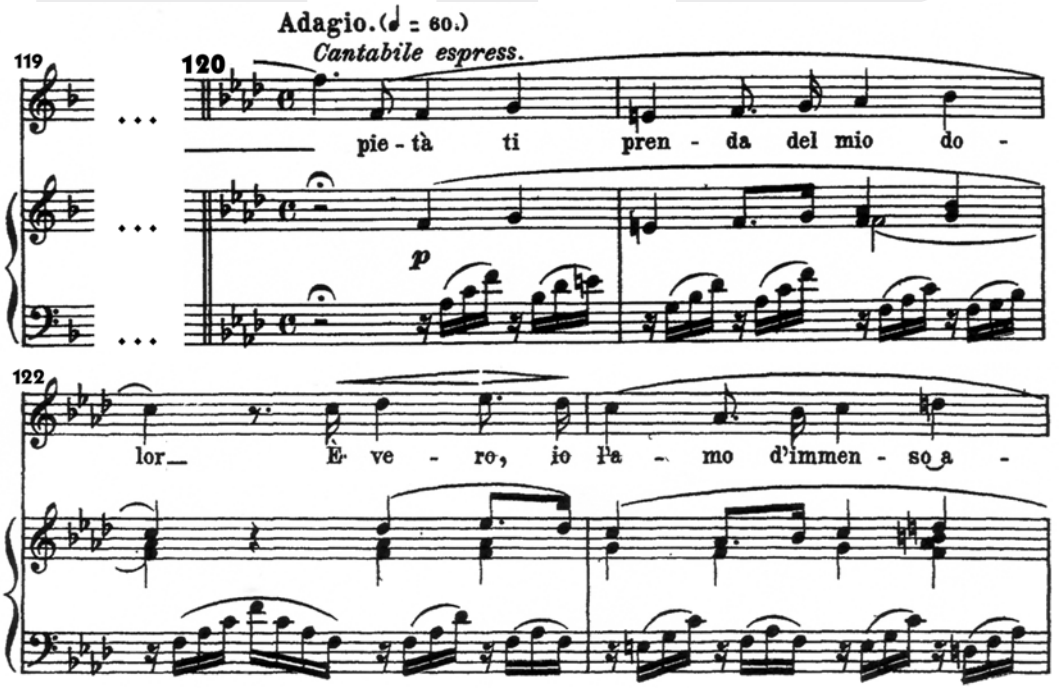
Figure 4.33: How the 'Aida weeping motif' is derived from the *dux* of the Aida *tema cardine*.



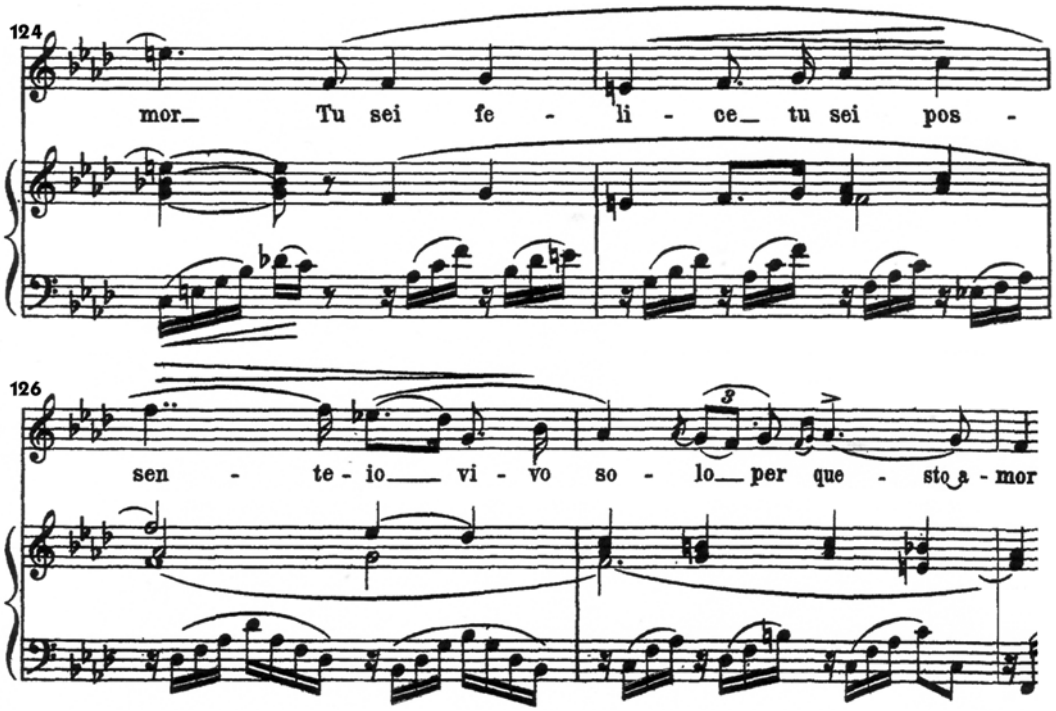
One may speculate, like Noske, about the significance of this 'cross-over' in the motif as well as its construction, being made up of rising semi-tones. Noske has associated the chromatic semi-tone in Verdi with weeping (1977), as indeed, it was also in the doctrine of affects of the seventeenth century in general and in Bach specifically (see again the semi-tones in Bach's 'Crucifixus' motif).

This section, only eight bars in duration, represents Aida final capitulation in the face of Amneris' ruse. She will briefly try to stand up to Amneris' manipulation shortly. After all, she is a princess in her own right. However, the hopelessness of the present circumstances overwhelms her here, and the only way she can respond to the intimidation is to succumb to tears.

Figure 4.34: The 'Aida weeping motif'—as derived from the *dux* of the Aida *tema cardine*—applied.

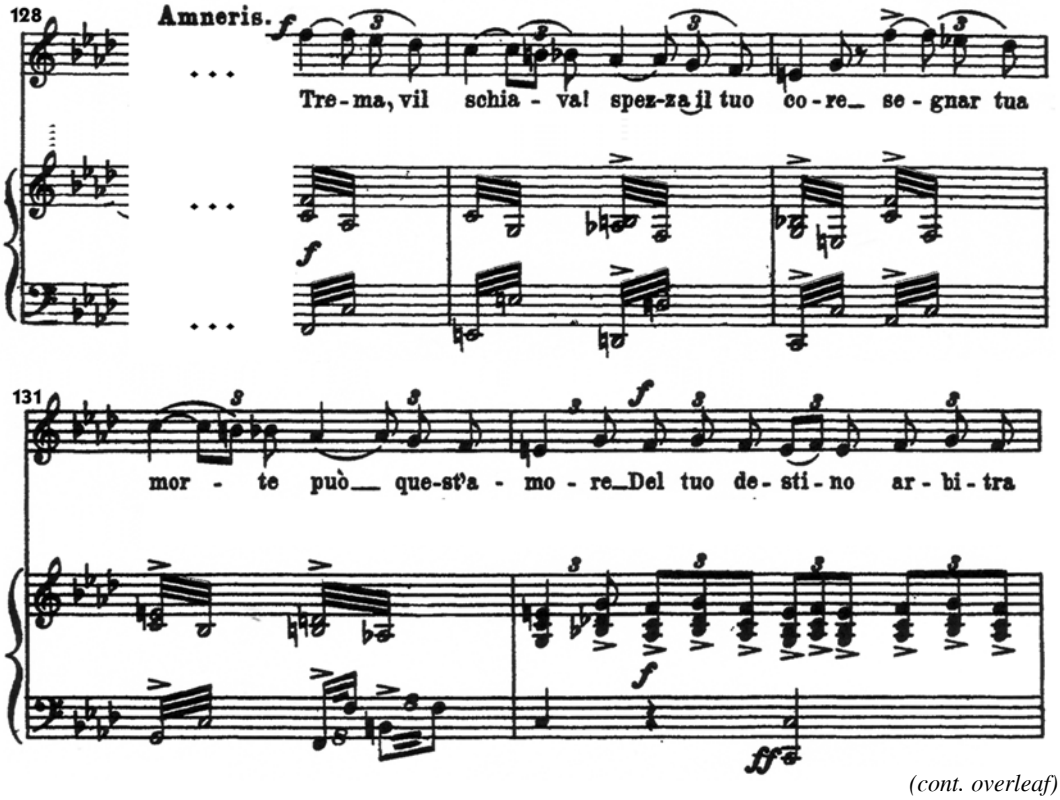


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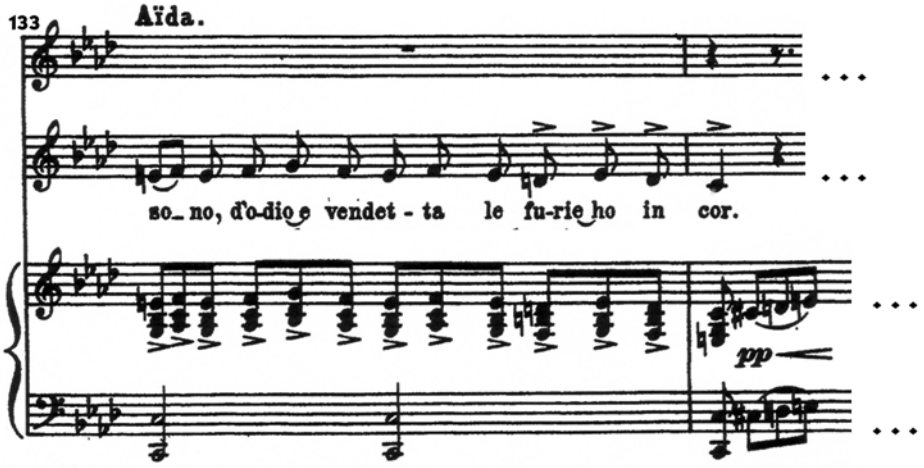


Verdi's idiom now becomes unashamedly lyrical. Amneris has a falling motif, twice taking her down a winding scale between the fifth-line and first-space Fs in the G clef, and then down into the mezzo's chest register. Here the impact of a true dramatic or 'Verdi mezzo' such as Fiorenza Cosotto of the older generation, or Dolora Zajick or Ewa Podles, both current stars, can be truly awe-inspiring.

Figure 4.35: Verdi exploiting the power of the 'Verdi mezzo' in chest register, as Amneris bullies Aida.



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This duet now reaches its wind-down to the *finale* of the scene, and Verdi reinforces the notion of *parola scenica* as I read it. His resources remain simple. Aida's melody from the previous section (bars 120-128) is simply repeated, but with a concluding bar added (the last line of text is repeated) to bring this section to an end in F. In addition, the motivic references to Aida are brought to a close, to be replaced by the *tema cardine* of victory.

In this section, then, the primary melody remains with Aida. The text has not been heard before, but these lines cannot qualify as plot-furthering, because they only continue to describe Aida's despair. Amneris' lines, however, do further the plot. She is set to humiliate Aida even further as the Egyptian army returns victorious from war, the Ethiopian king having been slain in battle (or so Amneris believes), and the better part of the remaining Ethiopians having been captured and brought to Egypt as slaves.

AIDA
Tu sei felice, tu sei possente,
Io vivo solo per questo amor, ecc.

AMNERIS
Trema vil schiava!
Spezza tuo core;
Segnar tua morte può questo amore;
Del tuo destino arbitra io sono,
D'odio e vendetta le furie ho in cor

CORO
(di fuori)
Su! del Nilo al sacro lido
Sien barriera i nostri petti;
Non echeggi che un sol grido:
Guerra e morte allo stranier!

AMNERIS
Alla pompa che s'appresta,
Meco, o schiava, assisterai;
Tu prostrata nella polvere,
Io sul trono accanto al Re.
Vien . . . mi segui . . . e apprenderai
Se lottar tu puoi con me, ecc.

AIDA
You are happy, you are powerful,
in my life there is nothing but my love! etc.

AMNERIS
Fear me now, you slave!
Let your heart break;
this love can mean your death.
I am master of your fate,
and my heart rages with hate and vengeance!

CHORUS
(outside)
Onward! May our breasts be a fortress
shielding the sacred banks of the Nile!
Let no cry sound but our united cry,
war and death to the invader!

AMNERIS
In the Triumph now being made ready,
you shall take part with me, O slave!
You, prostrate in the dust,
I at the King's side, on the throne!
Come, follow me. You shall see
if you are worthy to do battle with me, etc.

AIDA
Ah! pietà! Che più mi resta?
Un deserto è la mia vita;
Vivi e regna, il tuo furore
Io tra breve placherò.
Quest'amore che t'irrita
Nella tomba spegnerò, ecc.

CORO
(di fuori)
Guerra e morte allo stranier!
(Amneris esce.)

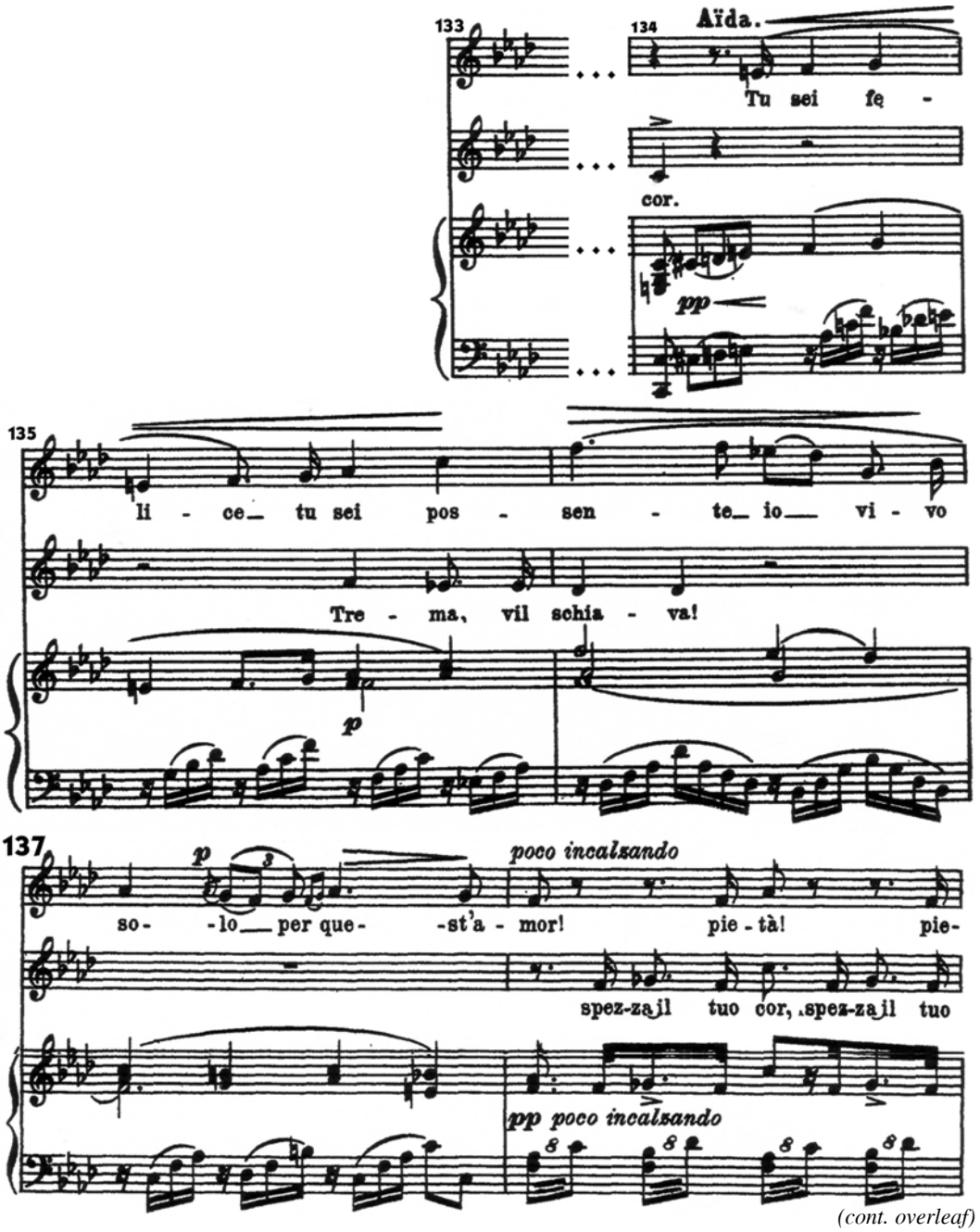
AIDA
Numi, pietà del mio soffrir,
Speme non v'ha pel mio dolor!

AIDA
Ah, have pity! What is left for me?
My life is a desert.
Live, reign—soon
I shall appease your anger.
This love which distresses you
will die with me, in the tomb, etc.

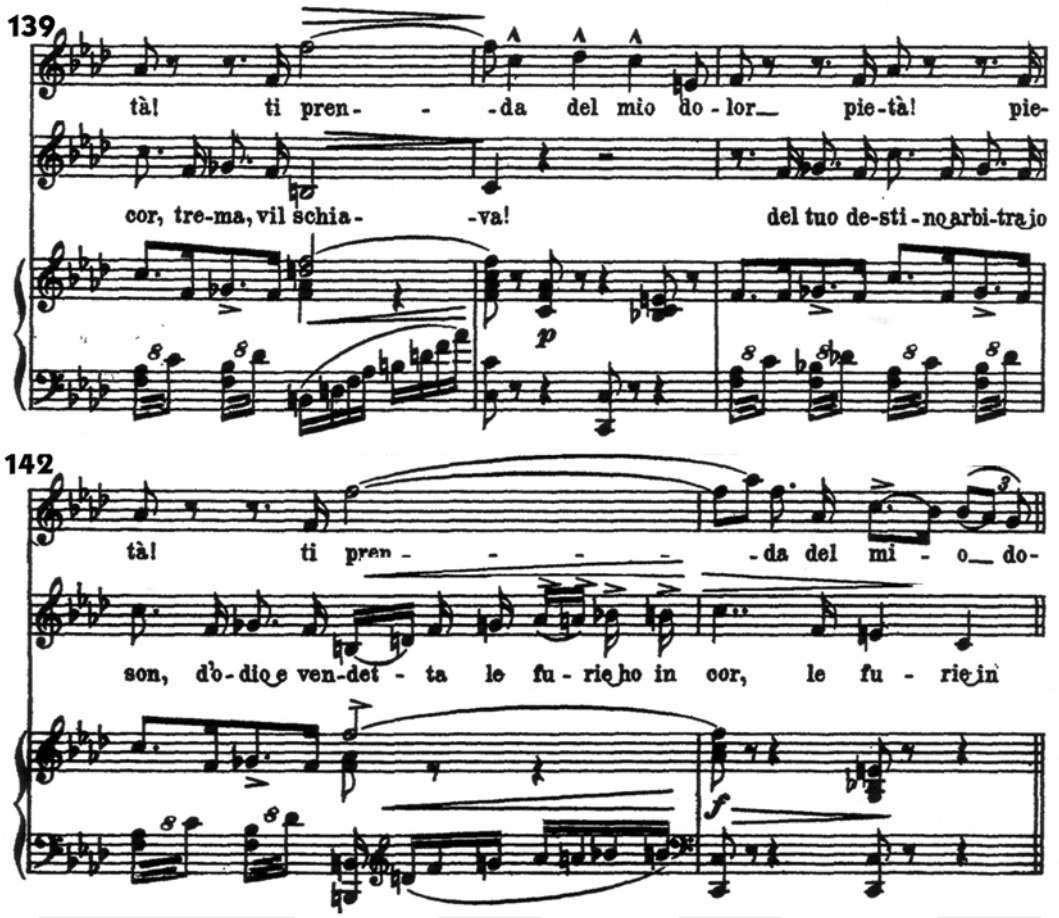
CHORUS
(outside)
War and death to the invader!
(Amneris goes out.)

AIDA
O gods, take pity on my suffering!
There is no hope for my sorrow!

Figure 4.36: Amneris has the last word in the *duetto* as *parola scenica* before the chorus brings the scene to a close, followed by Aida's final prayer to her gods to take pity on her.

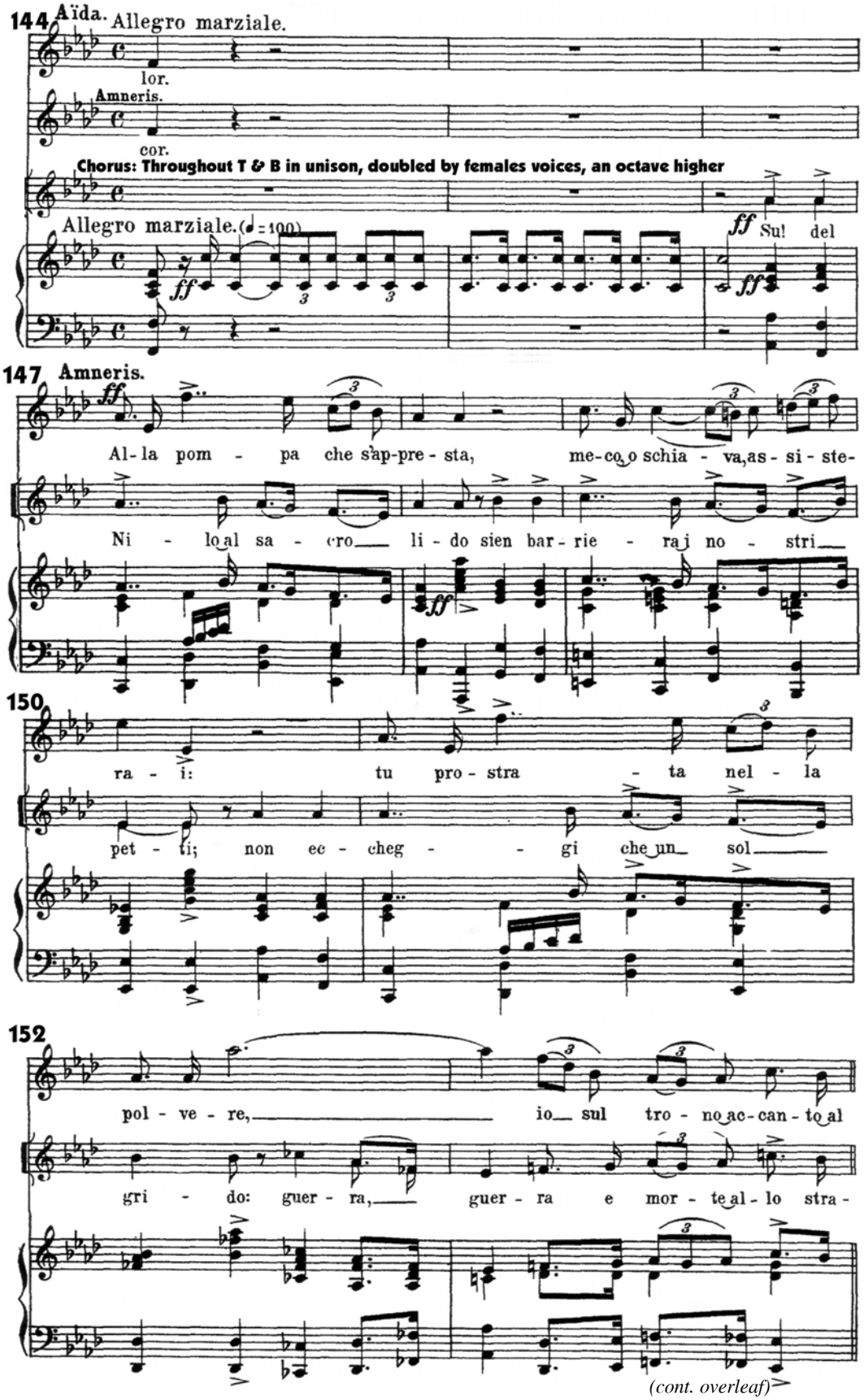


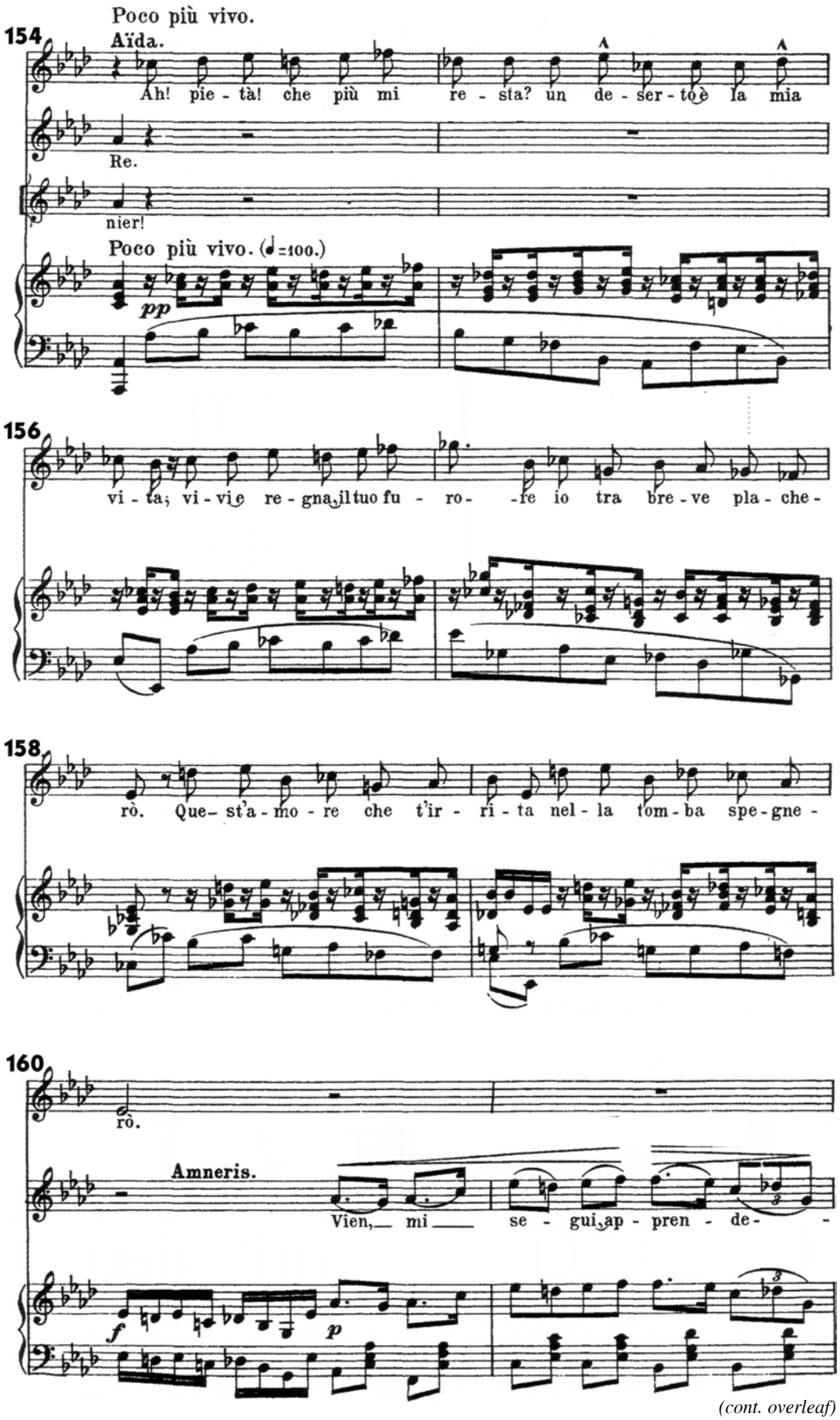
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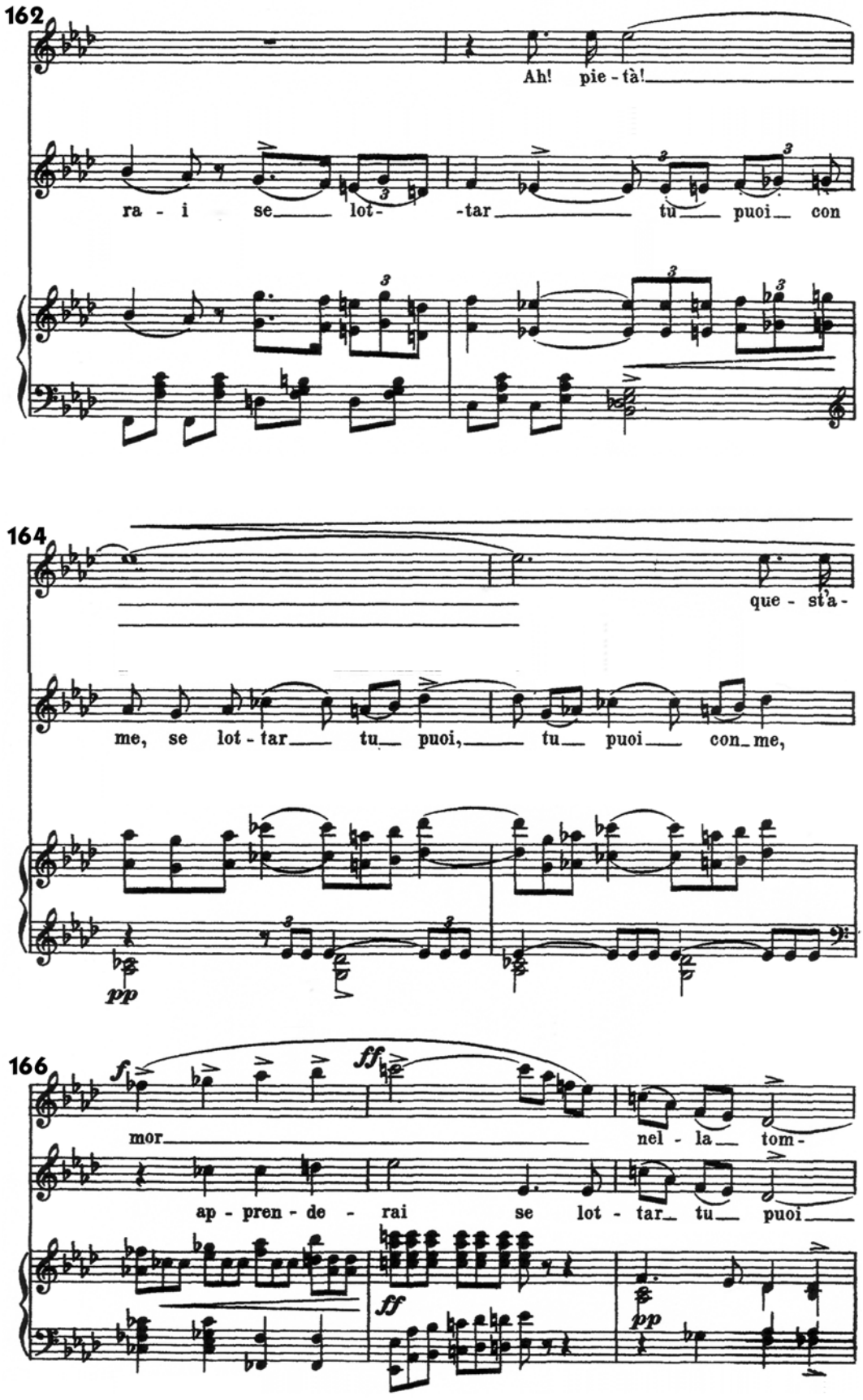
What follows is pure spectacle for its own sake, something in which Verdi very rarely indulges. There are many, many instances, however, of Verdi instructing his poets that a scene 'must make an effect' (Osborne 55-56), and this *finale* is no doubt one such occasion. Many an opera house, especially the outdoor venues such as the Carracalla in Rome or the Verona Arena, build grand productions of *Aida* around this scene and the one that follows (Act II Scene 2), and bring out every special effect to which they have access, including natural trumpets such as the ones Verdi had ordered for the original production of the opera in Cairo in 1871, and usually a specially enlarged chorus and orchestra. Nowadays the singers' voices can be and usually are subtly boosted electronically by means of sophisticated public address systems;. However, when Antonietta Pozzoni and Eleonora Grossi created the roles of Aida and Amneris (Osborne *Complete Operas* 369) on 24 December 1871, their audibility over a huge orchestra and chorus had to be ensured by means other than the electronic, and one can speculate that part of this process lay in how Verdi organised ensembles such as this one, assigning each line—particularly those of the soloists—to different spaces in the multi-spatial whole, to ensure that all the text can be heard and makes sense to the spectator-listener.

Figure 4.37: The concerted *finale* with Aida's and Amneris' voices set over the full chorus and orchestra. It is a unison chorus throughout (male voices are notated and sound an octave lower, but in this extract the chorus is truncated to one stave). Nevertheless all the soloists' lines are clearly audible.

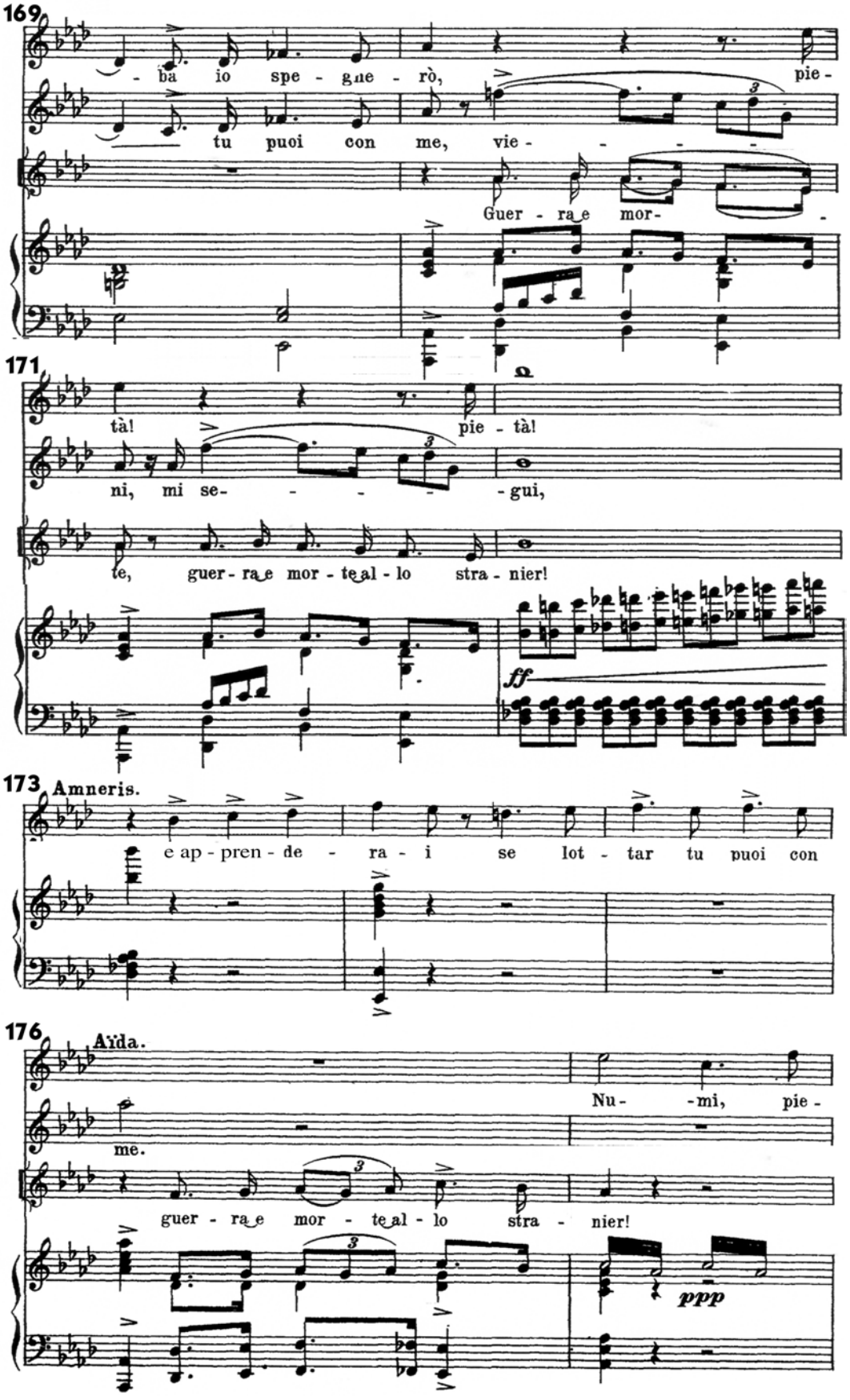




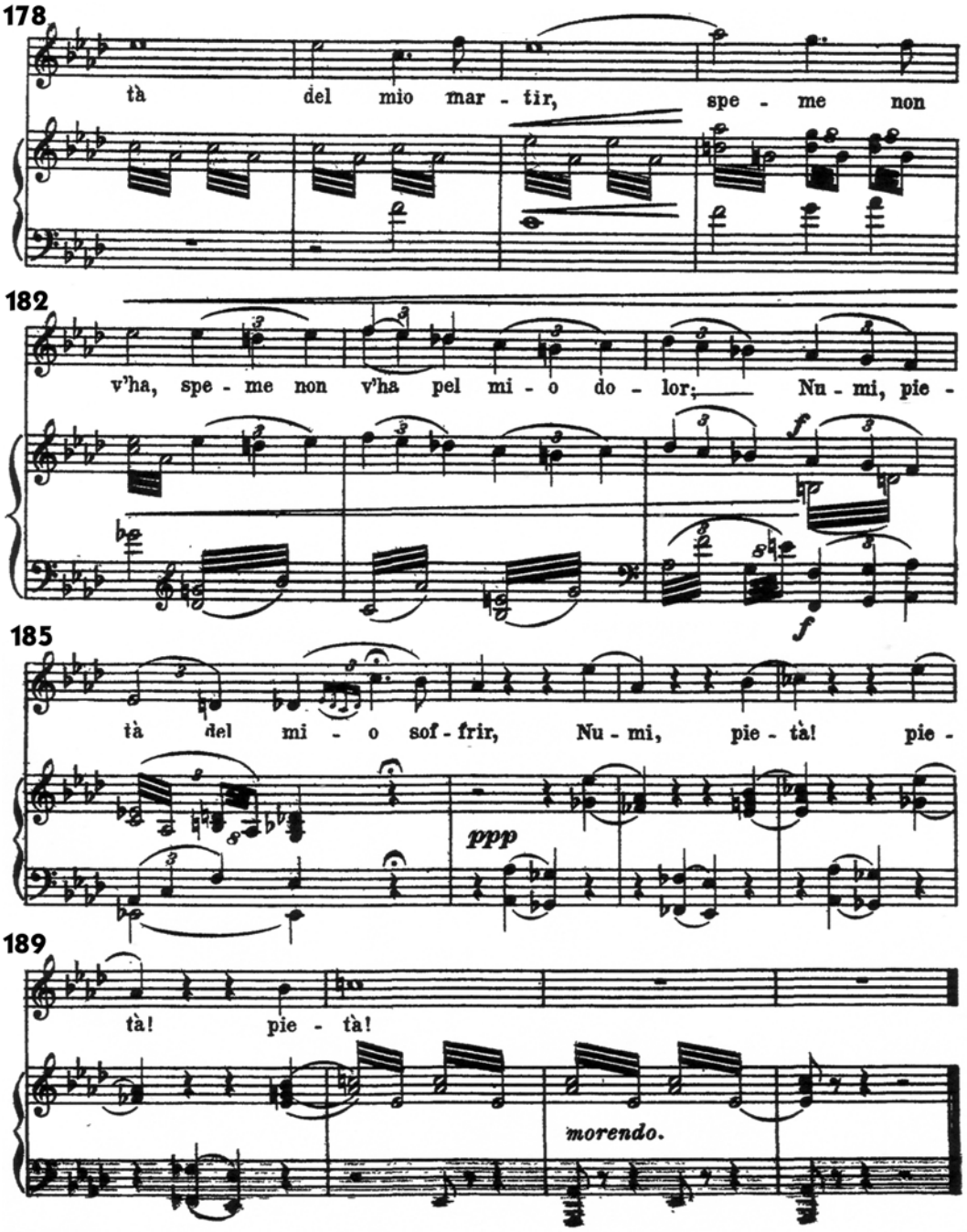
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This section of the *finale* is dramatically aptly dominated by the victory *tema cardine* for two reasons. Firstly, the Egyptian has returned victorious from battle. They are unaware of it, but their captive slaves include the King of Ethiopia, Amonasro. Secondly, in this context this theme is important, because Amneris has achieved a significant triumph over Aida. Not only did she manage to trick the latter into admitting that she is Radamès's lover, she has also destroyed the slave's every shred of dignity, as her lines aptly emphasize: 'You, prostrate in the dust,/I at the King's side, on the throne!/Come, follow me. You shall see/if you are worthy to do battle with me'.

This '*coda*', as I have come to regard this choral *finale* underscoring the two female leads' voices, is a unique microcosm in which Verdi places side by side instances of *parola scenica* and *arioso*. However, they are so carefully juxtaposed that the listener cannot but make a distinction, and with that distinction—even if it is below the threshold of such tangibles as content and form—comes an understanding on two levels of the two personalities involved in this *scena*.

Amneris' victory over Aida is complete. There is an air of smug confidence about her that Ghislanzoni captures beautifully in the verse:

AMNERIS	**AMNERIS**
Alla pompa che s'appresta,	In the Triumph now being made ready,
Meco, o schiava, assisterai;	you shall take part with me, O slave!
Tu prostrata nella polvere,	You, prostrate in the dust,
Io sul trono accanto al Re.	I at the King's side, on the throne!

Verdi underscores this triumph by placing the primary *tema cardine* in the chorus, over which he poises Amneris' line which, musically, is unremarkable, comprising as it does, of an alternately rising and falling *arpeggiando* motif that harmonizes with the *tema cardine* underscoring it, but not to the extent that the *melody* draws undue attention . . . it is on the *words* that Verdi places the emphasis. As I read these lines of verse, I have no doubt that what I am hearing is *parola scenica*.

Aida is given an opportunity to respond after this, and this time Verdi silences not only Amneris, but the entire chorus. With this the idiom changes utterly:

AIDA	**AIDA**
Ah! pietà! Che più mi resta?	Ah, have pity! What is left for me?
Un deserto è la mia vita;	My life is a desert.
Vivi e regna, il tuo furore	Live, reign—soon
Io tra breve placherò.	I shall appease your anger.
Quest'amore che t'irrita	This love which distresses you
Nella tomba spegnerò, ecc.	will die with me, in the tomb.

The only option left for Aida is to plead, to throw herself on Amneris' mercy. Where the Amneris melody in the previous period was martial, triumphant, Aida's melody here is sinuous as it hovers around the upper tetrachord in the octave between the first-line and fourth-space E♭ in the treble clef. Then the melody falls away to end resignedly on the E♭ above middle C. Aida's idiom cannot be described in any terms other than *arioso*, and as Aida reaches the $IV^{\flat 3}$-V^7-I imperfect authentic cadence, Amneris leaps like a trout to the fly. The V^7 chord is in second inversion here, creating a smoother bass line that is in character with Aida's sinuous melody. Surprisingly, Aida's tune falls from the seventh of the V^7 directly to the secondary tonic of E♭, instead of the usual descending semitone resolution.

Amneris' martial *arpeggiando* motif derived from the victory *tema cardine* returns, and now Aida's contribution is reduced to no more than a series of *pertichine* over Amneris' line. Thus her defeat is dramatically, linguistically and musically complete. All she is capable of is a final cry for pity, and that her love for Radamès is all she has left to take with her to the grave.

The chorus and Amneris drive the ensemble inexorably towards its end. Amneris has one brief excursion left into simple *recitativo secco* on the words 'You shall see if you are worthy to do battle with me' before the final *fortissimo* imperfect authentic cadence in A♭, and then the *finale* closes quietly with a concluding, ironic quote from Aida's first-act *aria* 'Ritorna vincitor!'.

Verdi's artistic influence in respect of *parola scenica* might be compared with what physicists have called a *meniscus:* the surface tension that holds together a drop of water, in which exists a tensile zero state. But *parola scenica* does not indicate a zero state of narrative. The device invariably features in the areas of mono- and dialogue where plot is furthered, and where dramatic tension is at its highest level. It is perhaps more accurate to suggest, then, that the meniscus *parola scenica* represents is a natural state of expression to which Verdi keeps returning, not a narrative zero state, but a narrative 'ground zero' from where all dramatic tension originates.

Having reached in my discussion that point in Verdi's development where he first states *parola scenica* as a principle in writing—by way of a close reading of a number of moments from *Aida*, the opera that is most closely associated with the device—I begin the chapter that follows with a similar close reading of moments from Verdi's last tragedy, *Otello*, to determine how he applied the principles of the device in his own work. I then conclude the analytic section of my discussion with a number of applications of *parola scenica* outside of Verdi's *œuvre*. I bring to a close the chapter by tracing the developmental line of *parola scenica* from the *mélodrame*, through nineteenth-century operatic communications techniques and into the modern cinematographic experience.

Chapter 5

'The opening of *Otello* is *parola scenica* made music . . .' (Budden 3, 1981: 334)

> Why should it have taken so ardent a Shakespearian as Verdi so long to arrive at the idea of setting *Othello?* As D'Arcais remarked it is precisely suited to Verdi's means and to those of Italian opera in general. Of all Shakespeare's dramas it is the best constructed and the most vividly theatrical; it is also the one which most nearly conforms to the canon of Aristotle's *Poetics* in everything apart from its time-scale. [. . .] Above all there is no superfluity of characters principal or secondary whose elimination would be essential if the *convenienze* were to be observed. (Budden 3, 1981: 302).

When Verdi reached the final creative period he had developed a musical language not yet common to many of his contemporaries. His influence would soon be undeniable, since *parola scenica*, which conveys narrative intent by a limbic rather than either a poetic or noetic process would soon become accessible to all. Burnham and Lawrence Kramer argue that music has its own set of problems in terms of what and how it signifies. 'The grammar of music is not strictly analogous to the grammar of spoken or written language [. . .] yet our refusal to accept this apparent truism leads us to treat musical grammar as we would treat a defective language that somehow had only a syntactic dimension and not a syntactic one' (*Criticism of Analysis* 71. See also Raffman 1993). Without even attempting to formulate such a theory, this would be exactly the sort of artistic reception problem Verdi would set out to correct.

In this final analytical section the diagnostic process is simple: I discuss in some detail the opening scene and the 'Brindisi' from *Otello* to establish continuity with what had gone before, and to trace *parola scenica*'s development in post-*Aida* Verdi. Then I introduce comparison as an investigative tool. After the section on *Otello*, I compare the opening of *Simon Boccanegra* (the 1857 version, (Ricordi ca.1857) with the revised opening of 1881 (CDSheet Music 2001). There are marked differences, and they serve particularly well to underscore my understanding of *parola scenica*, in that the device as I read it is entirely absent in the 1857 version, and cannot be more conspicuous in the 1881 version.

Finally, I lift excerpts from outside Verdi's *œuvre*, but from more or less the same period. I publish short excerpts to show incidents of *parola scenica* as I hear them in particular scenes. Where appropriate I publish comparative excerpts from some of the Verdian examples I have interrogated already to support the validity of extra-Verdian incidences of *parola scenica*, and to avoid confusion with other, conventional structures.

I have noted the idea of defamiliarization elsewhere, and how a blurred tonal centre in a movement can contribute to that sense of defamiliarization. The opening bars of *Otello* demonstrate this point. Verdi hides tonal centres so effectively that the opening key of the opera remains ambiguous for twenty bars. Abbate and Parker observe,

> Though in different ways, David Lawton and Martin Chusid each see the opera he is discussing as an architectural tonal construct, even though the keys both cite are, typically, presented as 'blocks' rather than as moments of particular articulation within modulatory flux. The question of whether we perceive relationships between these 'blocks' in quite the same way as we would between, say, the beginning and end of a symphonic movement still nags; as does, perhaps even more importantly, that of the status of intermediary passages: are they, tonally speaking, functionless? (1989: 19).

Parker and Abbate raise an important point here. Kofi Agawu has noted elsewhere that

> Not all opening periods are saturated with closure, but all opening periods must have a close. Said's idea that a beginning implies return and repetition is true of music, because what the opening period offers in microcosm is often what is played out throughout the rest of the piece, a beginning-middle-ending paradigm on a grand scale (59).

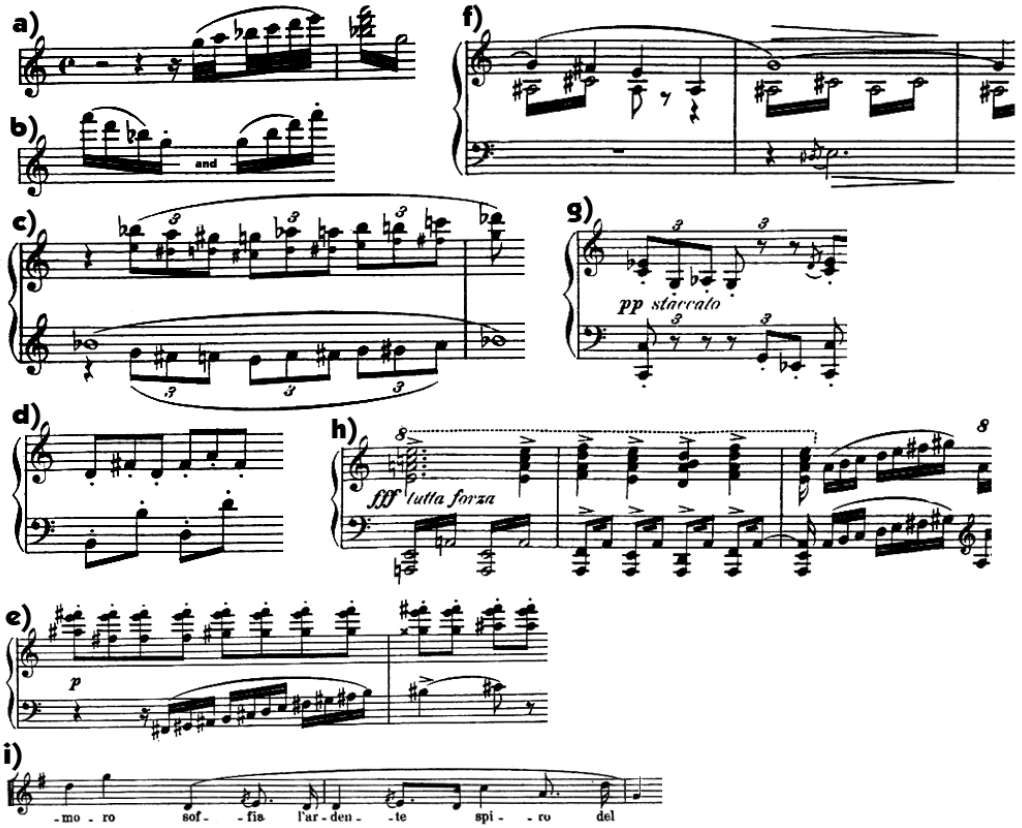
These 'blocks' of musical colour reflect what happens in the whole of the movement, thematically as well as tonally. Another noteworthy point in my study of Verdian opening movements (Chapter 3), is that they not infrequently open and close in different keys. However, how we perceive these tonal blocks remains open to a variety of interpretations, as Parker and Abbate suggest.

Otello's introduction is built on such tonal blocks, in terms of key and thematic statement, exposition and interplay (Verdi as a rule is not given to thematic 'development'). Bars 1-19 can be explicated in F/f, marking the opening chord as a dominant-eleventh, as Hepokoski suggests (*Otello* 1). But the first close occurs only at bars 20-21, in d. I believe that the opening tonality is best described in d, not F/f. In any case, Verdi would not have left a V^{11} construction unresolved. The primary triad of this construction has no third. A V^{11} in F would have had an $E_{\natural}$. I conclude, then, that the first chord has to be either F: ii^9 over a dominant pedal, or d: iv^7 over a flattened seventh pedal (in the descending melodic minor). I lean towards the latter, because that would mean that the first twenty-bar block forms a perfect authentic cadence in d, with the resolution reading iv^7-$V^{(7)}$-i. In this context the opening chord then has subdominant function. Verdi uses the pedal as an means of defamiliarization, because the flattened seventh underneath a subdominant seventh will obliterate tonal centres, representing, as it does, a

dominant/subdominant 'cluster.' A monotone on the flattened seventh is unusual, but this passage was written at a time when romantic music was broadening its tonal landscape. This harmonic reading seems to answer Abbate and Parker's hypothetical question above, too. The structures making up this passage are not in the final analysis 'tonally functionless'.

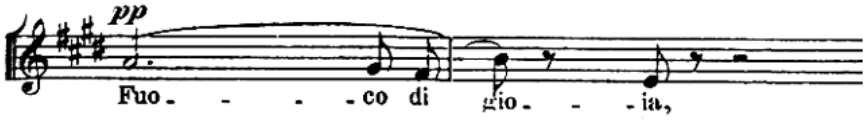
In the opening scene of *Otello* Verdi operates on three levels. Firstly, the tonal murkiness is used purely onomatopoetically, to describe the raging storm in audible terms. Secondly, as Robert Donington suggests, the 'fearful storm [. . .] gives us, deliberately, the measure of that side of Otello's reckless character' (90). Thirdly, I could also argue that the scene between Otello's Act I entrances shows him triumphant, a peacemaker and master of all he surveys. But in the background is Jago the puppet master in control of the Moor, although Otello is unaware of this. The 'Credo' spells out 'what Shakespeare no more than implied, that Jago is not so much an evil man as evil personified', in Donington's words (90). Entire tonal blocks have harmonic function instead of single chords. As the music moves from one tonal block to the next without achieving cadential closure, the resultant tonal palette becomes emotionally chaotic, and lyrical melodic movement is sparse. This opening scene appears to consist of a kaleidoscope of motivic gestures, but there are in fact only eight, with some interrelativity:

Figure 5.1: Motivic material in Act I of *Otello*.



All motives sounded up until the tender string quartet introduction of Desdemona's entrance (with the exception of the lyrical theme in 5.2) may be traced to the motives listed in 5.1 above. The value of these motives lies in the way in which Verdi juggles, juxtaposes and superimposes them.

Figure 5.2: Motivic material form Act I of *Otello*: lyrical melodies introduced in the 'Fuoco di gioia' chorus.



Vocal melodies are further frequently and conspicuously set as repeated notes, which are therefore conceivable, however briefly, as monotones. Vague tonal centres played down in favour of blocks of tonal colour result in a pandiatonic setting almost adumbrating harmonic materials more at home in the twentieth century. Thus the resultant sound is one that would not be out of place perhaps even in Stravinsky. The diminished fifths of motif (c), the snarling and tonally vague fifths in motif (f) and the motoric pressure of motif (e) all point towards a twentieth-century sound, rather than one belonging to nineteenth-century Italy.

Budden tells us at the head of this section that 'The opening of *Otello* is the *parola scenica* made music'. Given the tonal and motivic imagery, and the reading of it in broad terms I just provided, what does the scholar mean in this context? Those techniques Verdi used to give rise to a scene of great complexity and power. How, then, does this ensemble fit into any one of the readings of *parola scenica*, including Parker's, Grey's, Petrobelli, and Della Seta's among others, as well as my own?

Returning to Della Seta's summary featured elsewhere, it is apparent that the effect Verdi wanted to achieve in this scene was clearly conceptualized in his mind, but this holds true of every scene Verdi ever wrote, and thus, in that sense, the opening of *Otello* does not particularly strike one as *parola scenica*. Della Seta's second point covers the fact that a particular passage might inform *parola scenica*. This might mean that this passage qualifies as *parola scenica*, or not, depending on one's interpretation. Thirdly Della Seta says a word-and-music interaction is vital. The 'Brindisi' in *La traviata* is a word-and-music interaction too, and I would not apply the term *parola scenica* to it. Fourthly, this is a key dramatic moment, and Budden might in this sense mean that this is '*parola scenica* made music'. I agree, but only partially. The *Macbeth* Act I Finale should then also be called *parola scenica* (*pace* Budden), and I do not think it can. Nor do I think Budden (or Verdi) would call that finale *parola scenica* either.

Finally, he says that it is likely to occur where there are musical and textual variations in the text, as, for example, in 'Bella figlia dell'amore', and that quartet certainly does not qualify as *parola scenica*. However, let us see how this passage stands up to my own conception of *parola scenica*, which reads

> From a *textual/dramatic perspective* it is the displacement and fragmentation of the primary melody by a frequently but not necessarily monotonal *quasi-recitativo* vocal style, consisting of the setting of asymmetrical, unrhymed verse building plot. *Structurally*, it is those sections in which expected formal conventions are replaced with a musico-poetic hybrid that develops the foregrounded plot in asymmetrical, unrhymed verse, the background of which is musical commentary with a scenic quality. This background functions like the soundtrack of a film, underpinning the action while significantly adding to the drama. These backgrounded instances of the primary melody also provide subliminal links that sonically connect distant scenes. From the *macroformal* perspective, *parola scenica* represents the extension of both musical and textual narrative sections.

I am not going to provide Boito's text with a full translation here. It is enough to say that it is the poet at his most expressive, with references to a sail that is then visible, then not, the wingéd lion that represents Venice that appears fleetingly, thunder like a canon, the vessel then at the crest of the wave, then at its base; thunder and lightning and tremendous waves and winds, the grim heavenly spirits on high; the universe in a spasm, as if rent by ghostly valkyries, and so on. We are thus confronted on an intellectual and poetic level by a particularly vivid yet metaphorical description of the might of the elements. It is the chorus providing the data, they do so *divisi*, and their style of delivery is fragmented. If the contribution of the orchestra is to be described as the primary melody, it very fragmented indeed, as is the text sung by the chorus.

It goes without saying that the lines of text that ride the crests of sonic orchestral waves are unrhymed, and they do not conform to a particular rhythmic structure either. As my definition suggests, then, what we do have is *a musico-poetic hybrid that develops the foregrounded plot in asymmetrical, unrhymed verse, the background of which is musical commentary with a scenic quality*. The scenic background indeed functions like the soundtrack of a film, underpinning the action, while plot data is developed in the foreground.

At this point in the score it remains to be seen if these backgrounded instances of the primary melody will provide *subliminal links that sonically connect distant scenes*. However, from the macroformal perspective, this opening scene does represent *the extension of both musical and textual narrative sections*.

Some scholars, Petrobelli among them (1994) have suggested another intriguing theory which makes perfect sense as well. If one conceives of the opening scene performed without voices, in other words, purely as an orchestral movement, then the writing is so robust and integrated that the scene can with little effort support the idea of being perceived as a purely instrumental prelude. The vocal lines are so carefully interwoven in the musical texture that the concerted whole is not unlike an orchestral-vocal amalgam of a kind more easily associated with the operatic or even late orchestral *Lieder* style of Richard Strauss. I am thinking of an *Orchesterlied* such as *Befreit*, perhaps, with its broad, narrative sweep, which these passages in many ways evoke.

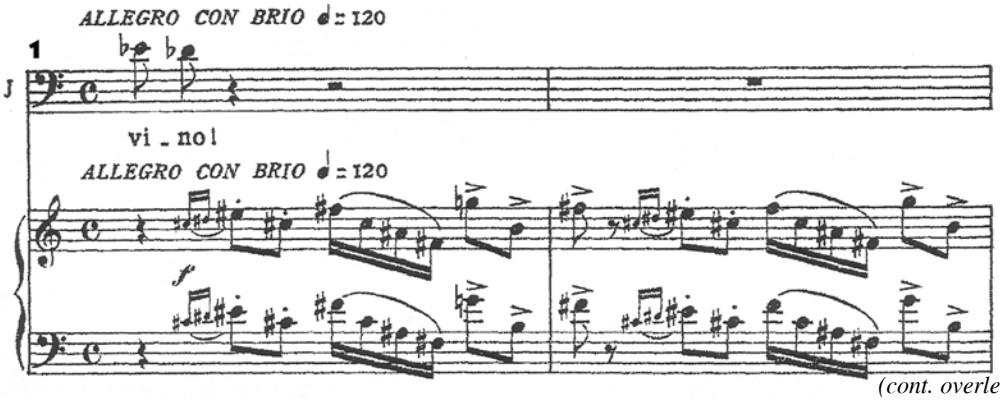
Is it, or is it not *parola scenica?*

The 'Brindisi' is a splendid example of a varied strophic form in which the *parola scenica* directly brings about the variation. Verdi does not introduce it the first strophes I scanned—he carefully reserves its impact for the last of three stanzas, where it is least expected, and therefore will have the maximum effect. It was also the second Verdian extract, after the Act I ensemble of *La traviata*, that convinced me of the legitimacy of my own notion of *parola scenica*. Broadly, the formal scheme may be represented as AAA[1], but Budden goes one step further, describing it as

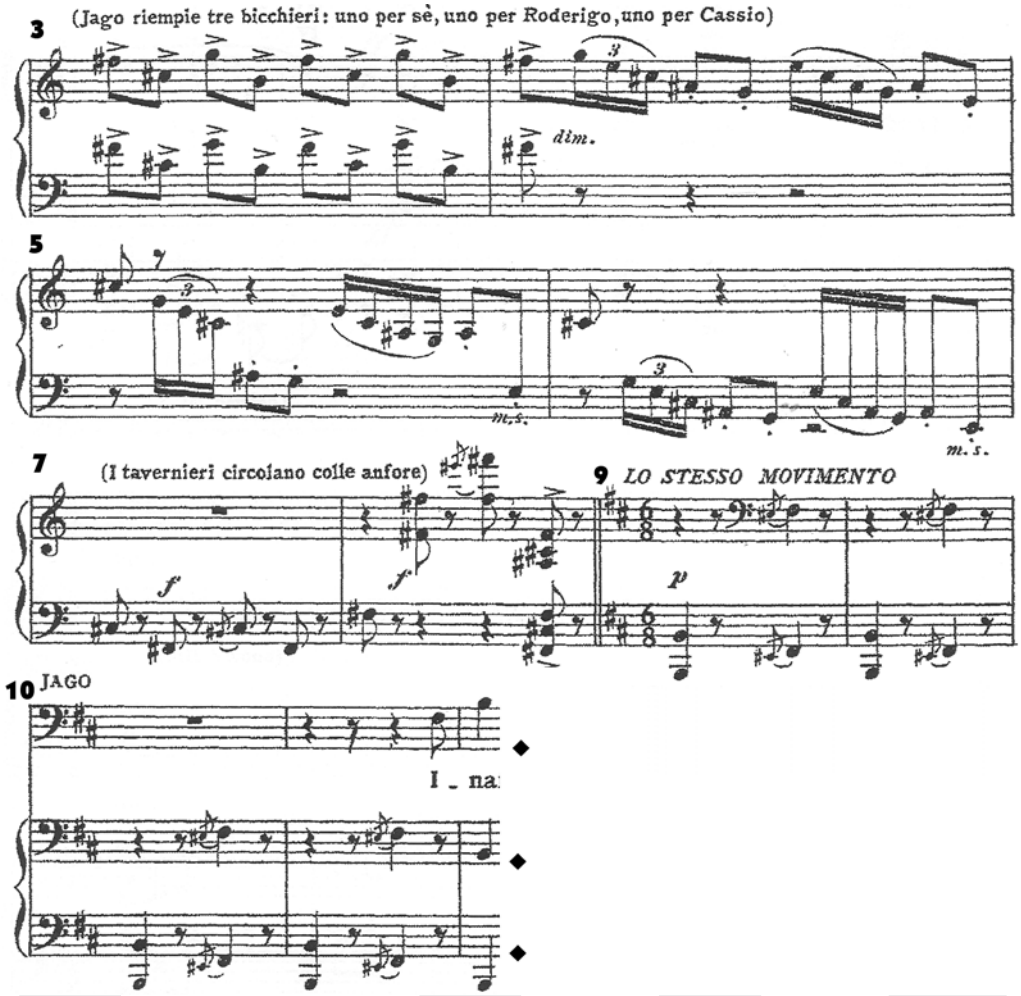
> a fully developed '*pièce d'action*' firmly welded into its context and evolving in a variety of that 'bar-form-with-refrain' (ab-ab-cb) which Verdi had already employed in Amelia's 'Ma dall'arido stelo divulsa (3, 1981: 344).

Its first impact comes in its muscular instrumental introduction, twelve bars characterizing Jago's malevolent *machismo*. Verdi from the start plays rhythmic games, first obscuring the common time rhythm of the *Allegro con brio*. Then, after eight bars, he unsettles the spectator even more by changing into an aggressive compound duple, accentuated throughout by an abrupt grace note motif.

Figure 5.3: Introduction to the 'Brindisi' from *Otello*.



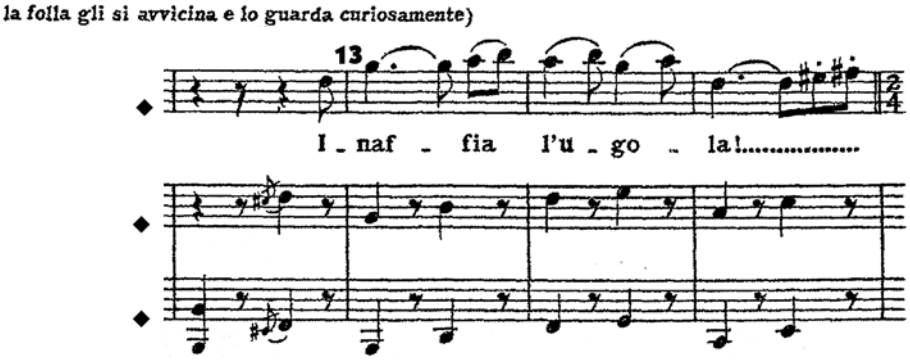
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However, although musically sound, formally balanced and dramatically tight, it is not to the first stanzas that my attention is drawn in this ensemble. It is the third stanza that makes me feel as if I am being drawn into another reality.

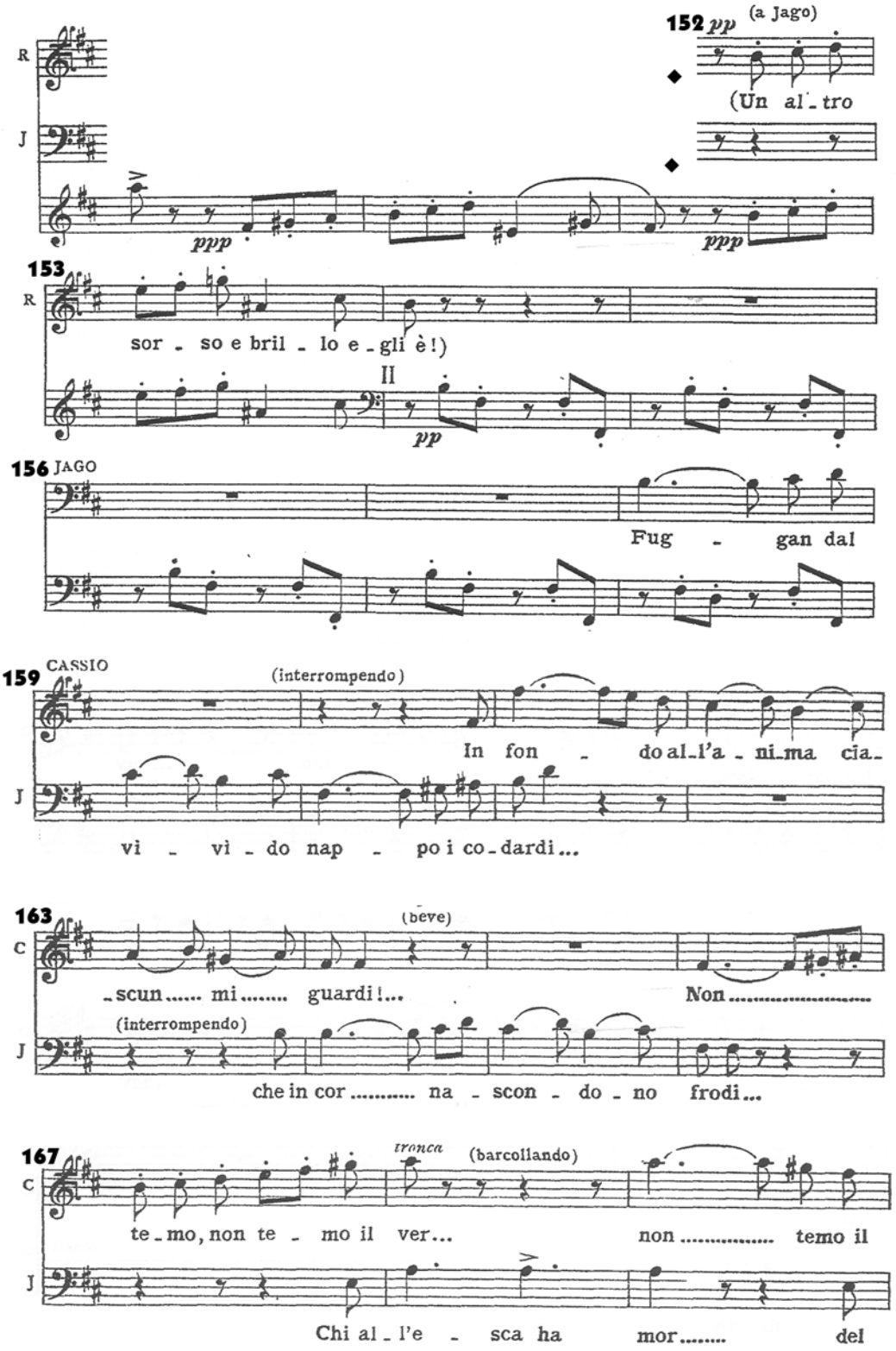
Finally Jago's 'Brindisi' starts, retaining the broken chord formation characteristic of the introduction. But surprisingly enough, right at the end of his career, Verdi resorts to a kind of *melismatic* writing one would associate with the *primo ottocento* rather than the expected syllabic writing style.

Figure 5.4: The 'melismatic' style of Jago's opening bars in the 'Brindisi'.



Verdi is very astute here. The primary melody carries few *melismas*, but the *impression* is one as smooth as silk, as Jago insinuates his way into his scheme. This quality also shows in Rodrigo's line, signifying his compliance.

Figure 5.5: The start of the third stanza of the 'Brindisi'. Then Verdi introduces the *parola scenica* between the voices, rather than between voice and orchestra.



The third stanza starts as do the first and second, with the bulk of the musical interest in Jago's primary melodic line. The choir punctuates the narrative at key points, and the other *comprimiarii*, Cassio and Rodrigo mostly, serve as *pertichine*.

In this stanza, (bars 160-161), Verdi changes his narrative style. Cassio gets entangled in Jago's primary melody, in the process pushing it into the sonic background. Jago interrupts once, but then, as he realizes to his delight that Cassio is going to react—once safely under the influence of alcohol—precisely as expected, the Jago melody gradually moves into the scenic background, and changes style. In the primary melody, backgrounded now, Cassio vocalizes, but his 'speech' becomes disjointed, almost as if Verdi is suggesting the slurring of words and incoherency of the typically drunk. Jago makes Cassio drunker yet, then plants the seeds starting the fight. Nevertheless, Cassio's melody, having taken over the primary melody from Jago, retains the primary melodic status. Jago's lines are reduced to a series of monotones in the foreground.

Verdi achieves the effect he desires—that of making Cassio appear foolish, arrogant and irresponsible when drunk—simply by moving the captain's lines over to clash with Jago's carefree vocalising, rather than dovetailing with it. Cassio's lines appear as interruptions, then, rather than as simple (if inebriated, disjointed) statements. In addition, when Cassio gets his drunken melodic train of thought back on track, Verdi backgrounds Cassio's (now primary) melody, and he foregrounds Jago's comments on the proceedings. This is a brilliant compositional strategy that not only throws into relief the characters of both Jago and Cassio, it also modifies a well-known, tried and trusted formal structure, highlighting the text from a different angle, persuading the subject to appreciate it anew. Budden argues, 'In musical terms this means a fragmentation and *fugato* development of previous material; and so artistic order is imposed in *naturalistic fashion* [emphasis mine] on a scene which is far from orderly' (3, 1981: 347). The ensuing fight is inevitable, and only the force of Otello's presence in his second entrance succeeds in putting a stop to it. But where does the text lead us?

JAGO	**IAGO**
(Jago riempie tre bicchiere: uno per sè, uno per Roderigo, uno per Cassio. I tavernieri circolano colle anfore. A Cassio, col in mano: la bicchiere folla gli si avvicina e lo guarda curiosamente)	*(Iago fills three glasses, one each for himself, Roderigo and Cassio. The potboys move about with wine jugs. People crowd round and watch in curiosity.)*
	(to Cassio)
Inaffia l'ugola!	Now, wet your whistle!
Trinca, tracanna!	Drink up, drink deep!
Prima the svampino	Before song and glass
canto e bicchier!	are ended!

CASSIO
(a Jago, col bicchiere in mano)
Questa del pampino
verace manna
di vaghe annugola
nebbie it pensier.

JAGO
(a tutti)
Chi all'esca ha morso
del ditirambo
spavaldo e strambo
beva con me, beva con me,
beva, beva, beva con me.

TUTTI
Chi all'esca ha morso ecc.
beve con te, beve con te, . . .

JAGO
Beva, beva! ecc.

TUTTI
. . . beve, beve con te, ecc.

JAGO
(piano a Roderigo indicando Cassio)
Un altro sorso
e brillo egli è.

RODERIGO
(a Jago)
Un altro sorso
e brillo egli è.

JAGO
II mondo palpita
quand'io son brillo!
Sfido l'ironico
nume e il destin!

CASSIO
(bevendo ancora)
Come un armonico
liuto oscillo;
la gioia scalpita
sul mio cammin!

JAGO
Chi all'esca ha morso, ecc.

TUTTI
Chi all'esca ha morso, ecc.

JAGO
(a Roderigo)
Un altro sorso e brillo egli è.

RODERIGO
(a Jago)
Un altro sorso e brillo egli è.

JAGO
Fuggan dal vivido
nappo i codardi . . .

CASSIO
In fondo all'anima
ciascun mi guardi!
(Beve e continua ad interrompere Jago)

JAGO
. . . che in cor
nascondono frodi.

CASSIO
Non temo,
non temo it ver.

(glass in hand, to Iago)
This true bounty
of the vine
clouds the mind
with lovely mists.

IAGO
(to the whole company)
He who has tasted
the draught of Bacchus,
bold and fantastic,
come drink with me,
come drink, etc.

ALL
He who has tasted, etc.
drinks with you, . . .

IAGO
Come drink, etc.

ALL
drinks with you, etc.

IAGO
(softly to Roderigo indicating Cassio)
One more sip
and he's tipsy.

RODERIGO
(aside to Jago)
One more sip
and he's tipsy.

IAGO
The world throbs
when I am lit up!
I defy the ironic
Gods and destiny!

CASSIO
(drinking again)
Like a harmonious lute
I vibrate;
joy capers
in my path!

IAGO
He who has tasted . . .

ALL
He who has tasted . . .

IAGO
(aside to Roderigo)
One more sip and he's tipsy.

RODERIGO
(aside to Jago)
One more sip and he's tipsy.

IAGO
Let cowards fly
from the lively cup . . .

CASSIO
Let all look into
the depths of my soul.
(He drinks and continues to interrupt Jago)

IAGO
. . . they who hide
deceit in their hearts.

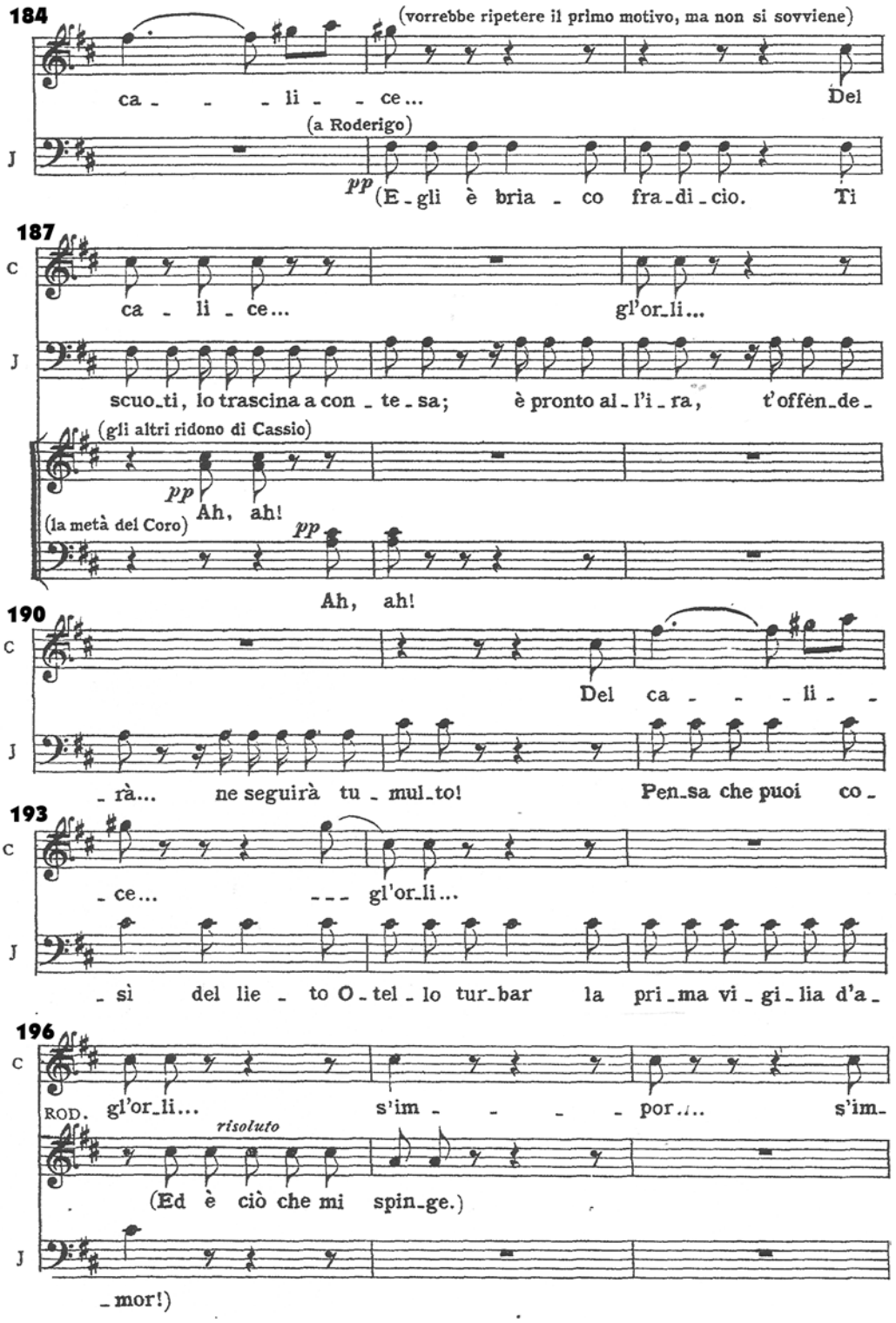
CASSIO
I do not fear the truth . . .
I do not fear the truth . . .

JAGO Chi all'esca ha . . . . . . morso del ditiramb, . . .	**IAGO** You who have tasted the draught of Bacchus . . .
CASSIO Non temo il ver . . . . . . non temo it ver.	**CASSIO** I do not fear the truth . . . I do not fear the truth . . .
JAGO . . . bevi con me.	**IAGO** Drink with me . . .
CASSIO Non temo il ver.	**CASSIO** I do not fear the truth . . .
JAGO Ah, bevi, bevi con me.	**IAGO** Drink with me . . .
CASSIO E bevo e bevo e bevo.	**CASSIO** And I drink, I drink . . .
CIPRIOTI *(ridendo di Cassio)* Ah! Ah ha! Ah ha! Ah ha! . . . . . . Ah ha! Ah ha! Ah ha!	**CYPRIOTS** *(laughing at Cassio)* Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha!
CASSIO Del calice . . .	**CASSIO** The cup . . .
JAGO *(a Roderigo, in disparte)* Egli è briaco fradicio . . . . . . Ti scuoti.	**IAGO** *(aside to Roderigo)* He's blind drunk. Stir yourself.
CASSIO Del calice . . .	**CASSIO** The cup . . .
JAGO Lo trascina a contesa.	**IAGO** Pick a quarrel with him;
CIPRIOTI Ah ha! Ah ha!	**CYPRIOTS** Ha! Ha!
JAGO È pronto all'ira.	**IAGO** . . . he's quick to anger.
CASSIO . . . gli orli . . .	**CASSIO** . . . is brimming ru . . .
JAGO T'offenderà . . . ne seguira tumulto!	**JAGO** He'll attack you . . . a brawl will follow!
CASSIO Del calice . . . gli orli . . .	**CASSIO** The cup . . . . . . is brimming ruby red! . . .
JAGO Pensa che puoi cosi del lieto Otello . . . . . . turbar la prima vigilia . . . . . . d'amor!	**IAGO** Think how you can thus disturb happy Othello's first night of love!
CASSIO . . . gli orli . . .	**CASSIO** . . . is brimming, etc.
RODERIGO Ed è ciò che mi spinge.	**RODERIGO** And this is what spurs me on.

Note the simplicity of conception. The change in bar 160-161 involves two elements. Firstly Cassio's line of the primary melodic line is moved back one bar, secondly, he is given the primary melody. He is an important, even pivotal, character, but compared with Jago he is still a *comprimario*. Jago' next entry (bar 163) is intended purely to help Cassio reinforce the primary melody, leading him to believe he has the upper hand in this conversation. Note, too, the content of what Jago says. The first lines he utters that are out of character with the rest of

the ‘Brindisi’ come at ‘The world throbs\when I am lit up.\I defy the ironic\Gods and destiny!’ However, all of this happens earlier on in the ensemble, and still in the context of the primary melody.

Figure 5.6: Jago’s change of idiom in the third stanza of the ‘Brindisi’.



Jago's style changes markedly in bar 185. Monotones hinting at *parola scenica* occurred earlier, here they dominate. Jago prompts Roderigo to start a quarrel with Cassio, who is by now blind drunk. Because of Cassio's and Roderigo's arrogance, tempers flare and Jago's ploy works. His scheming is further promoted by the aged Montano's intervention and subsequent wound. The timing is also perfect. The wound is inflicted at almost the same instant as Otello's appearance on stage. Jago then feigns total surprise at the fight in general, and at what or who could possibly have instigated it. Jago's lines are totally concentrated and focused, and directed at furthering his own devious plot. Besides the audience, only Roderigo is meant to hear what Jago is saying.

JAGO

He's blind drunk. Stir yourself. Pick a quarrel with him; . . . he's quick to anger. He'll attack you . . . a brawl will follow! Think how you can thus disturb happy Othello's first night of love!

RODERIGO

And this is what spurs me on.

Cassio's lines, on the other hand, have disintegrated into incoherence, and have fragmented completely. Yet it remains what is left of the primary melody, because it is based on the elements that make up that tune:

CASSIO

The cup . . . is brimming ru . . . is brimming ruby red! . . . is brimming, etc.

Verdi could perhaps as easily have set these lines as *recitativo*, either *secco* or *accompagnato*, but the fact is that the *parola scenica* he ultimately chose is a structurally far sounder medium of expression than either form of recitative or, for that matter, *aria* or *arioso*. Because *parola scenica* has the ability to address the intellect directly while imparting emotional stimuli makes it, in modern terms, an almost cinematographic medium of communication.

What *Otello* 'lacks' in scale compared with *Don Carlos* it makes up for theatrically and cinematographically, hence Von Karajan's easy transference of the opera to video (DGG 1987/2001). I conclude this chapter with a description of how close late nineteenth-century opera comes to cinematographic techniques we take for granted. The Storm Scene and the 'Brindisi' are typical examples of how the late nineteenth-century Italian composer approached the narrative style we first encountered in the *mélodrame*, from where it made a successful transference to the opera of the late nineteenth century.

The final word on Verdi*:* comparatively speaking

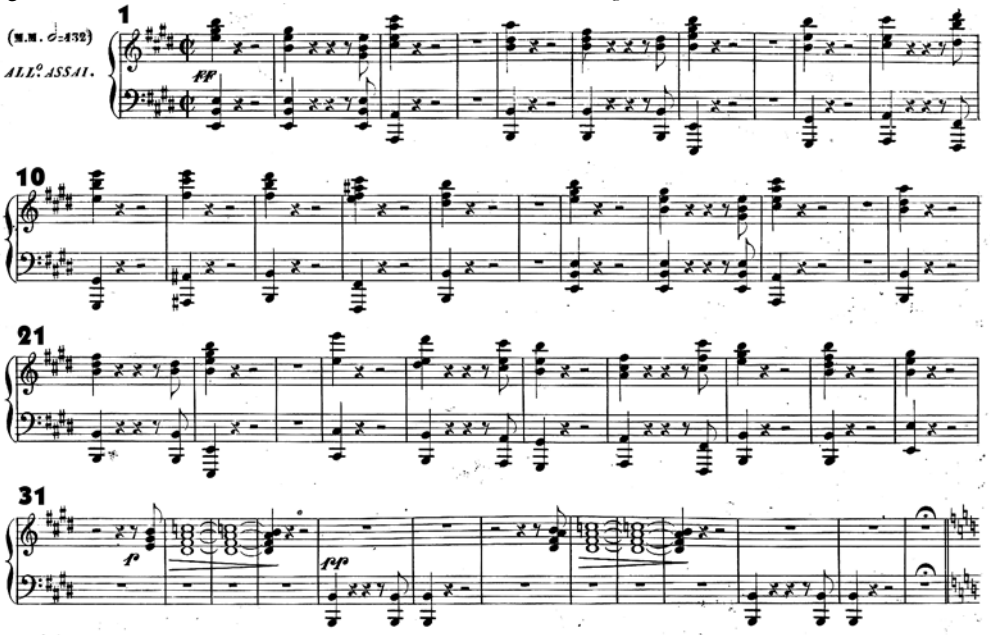
> What do we know of Verdi's first *Simon Boccanegra?* . . . It was the middle of a trio of extraordinarily diverse works. First came *Les Vêpres siciliennes* (1855), written for Paris and an explicit attempt to emulate and surpass the brand of grand opera made famous by Meyerbeer. Then came *Boccanegra* [1857], which returns to the Italian tradition but has few models in Verdi or anyone else, and is best described as an austere attempt to create a lean, Italianate avant-garde. And lastly came *Un ballo in maschera* (1859), which married the new Italian style with a highly successful return to French models . . . (Parker 20 *Simon Boccanegra* Opera Rara ORCVV302 programme notes)

As a means of introducing comparative study as an analytical tool and to conclude my study of Verdi as stylistic innovator, I give here a close reading of the opening of each of the versions of *Simon Boccanegra*, the first dating from 1857, then one from the revision of 1881, to demonstrate how Verdi had 'grown used' to the narrative possibilities of *parola scenica* by the early 1880s.

As source scores I use the Tito di Gio Ricordi score ca.1857, which is downloadable in its entirety on the web (see List of References) and the CDSheet Music edition (2001), which is probably a scan and re-publication of a later Ricordi score in digital format.

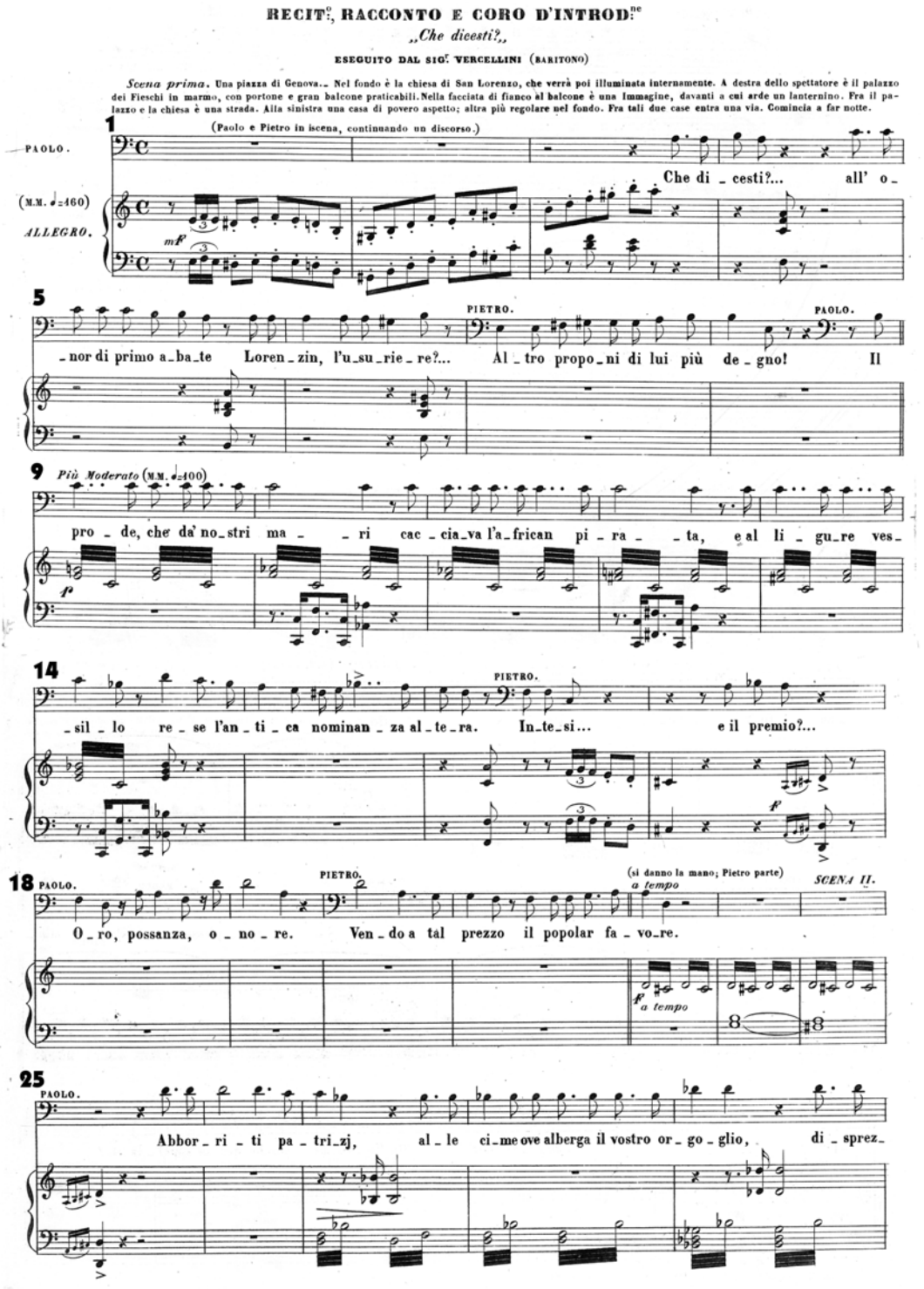
The 1857 opening movement, of which I publish only the first 43 bars here, continues for another 106 bars and, incidentally, opens and ends in the same key, although the final triad is a *tierce di Picardi*. It is an atmospheric piece that sets the austere mood that would prevail for the rest of the opera, but is otherwise unremarkable.

Figure 5.7: Extract from the Prelude of the 1857 *Simon Boccanegra*.



It is unnecessary to cloud the issue by quoting the rest of this introduction; of interest is what follows. In 1857, Verdi opted for an austere, conservative amalgam of *recitativo secco* and *accompagnato.* The austerity was one reason that prompted Verdi to make the 1881 revision, and by then he had written six more operas, and his theatrical vocabulary had matured considerably.

Figure 5.8: Extract from the first lines of dialogue of the 1857 *Simon Boccanegra.*



A detailed close reading here is superfluous. The distinction between sections of *recitativo secco accompagnato* are clear. What distinguishes this extract from the extended extract from the 1881 version below is its *conventionality*. Although written in 1857, the two operas were profoundly influenced by Paris (see Parker above), especially the one from 1857, but that version seems pedestrian; not so the 1881 revision. Note, too, the hint at *parola scenica* in bars 9-13.

The 1881 opening has 27 bars of orchestral introduction only before the first notes are sung. It starts and ends in different keys, understandably, since the vocal 'conversation' that follows is a continuation of the orchestral prelude. It has nothing thematically in common with its predecessor.

In both versions, the opening literary texts or 'conversations' are identical, and both come to an end at the same point: this is Paolo pointing out the mansion in which Maria Fiesco is virtually kept prisoner.

Figure 5.9: Paulo's line of dialogue indicating the Fiesco mansion in the 1857 *Simon Boccanegra*.

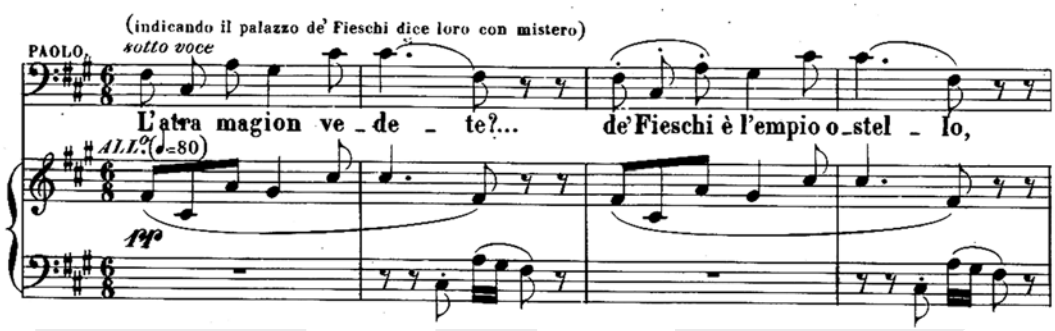
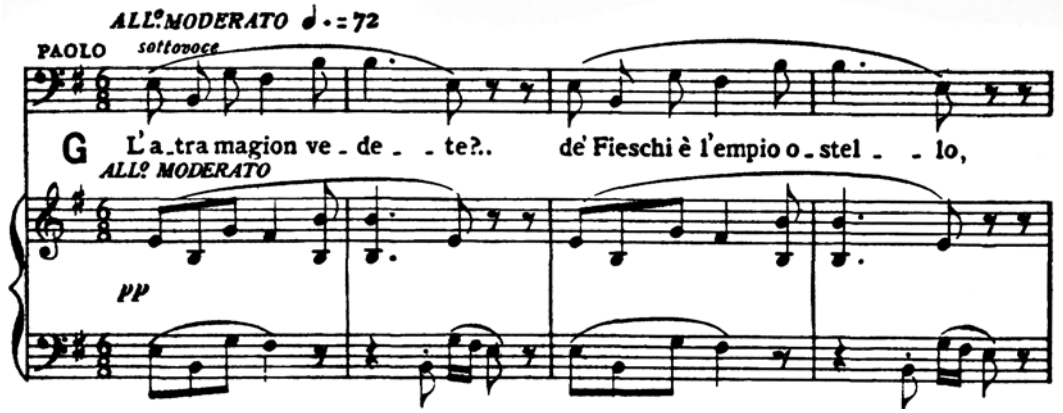
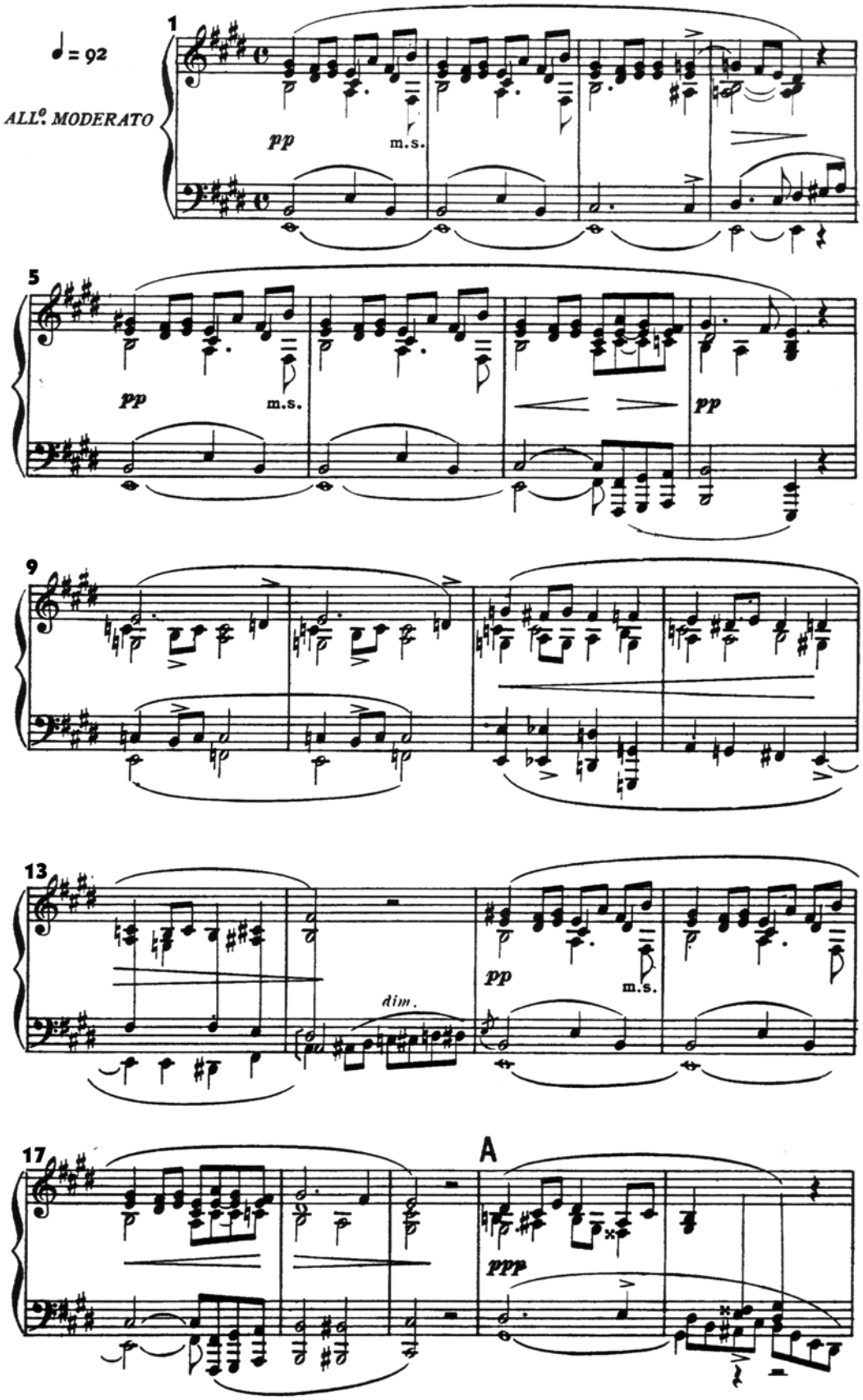


Figure 5.10: The same line in the 1881 version of the opera; note the transposition, a tone down.

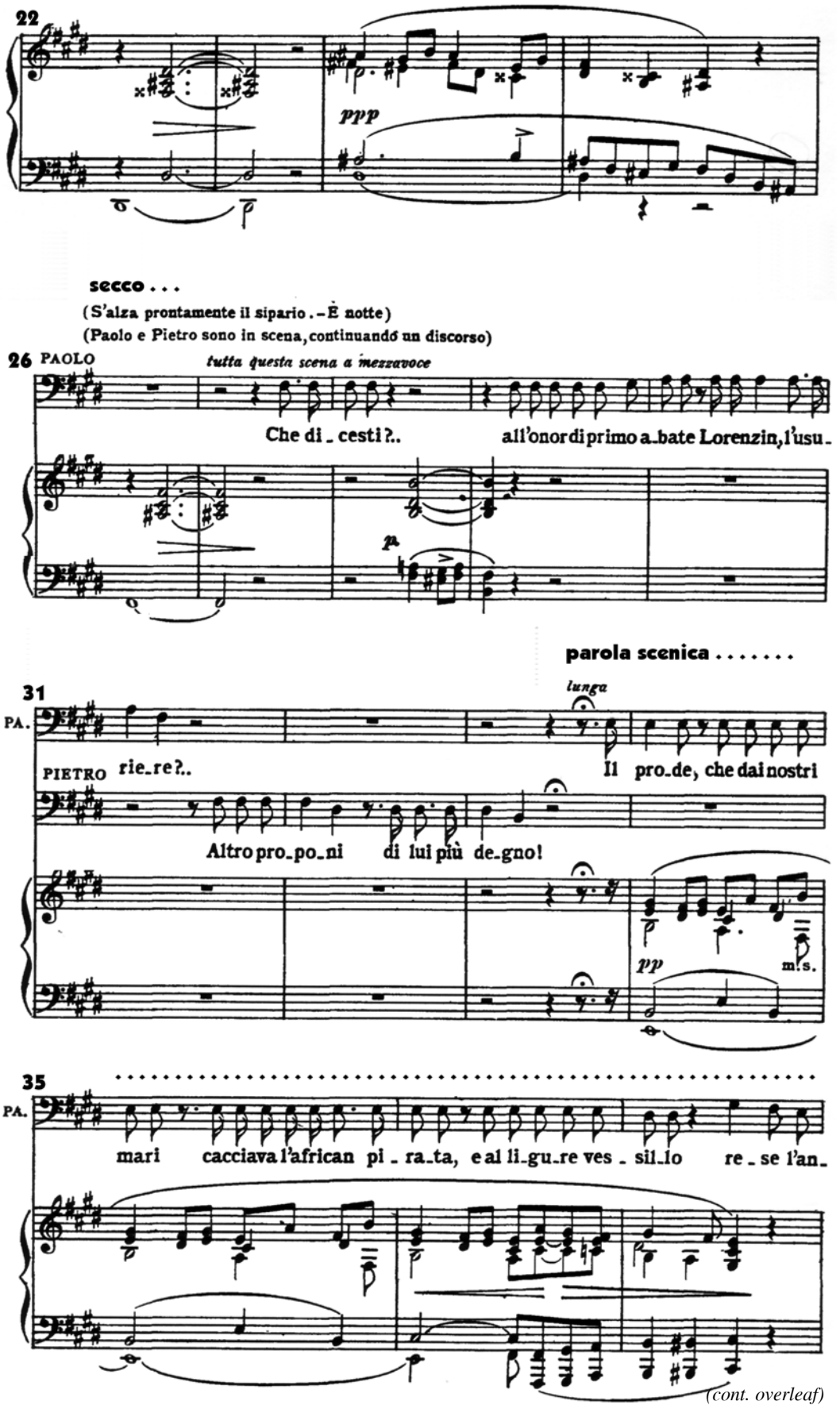


What is particularly interesting about the second version of the opera is the way in which Verdi treats the same lines of libretto. As I have pointed out above, the 1881 version of the opera by comparison with the version of 1857 is more mature, and this is illustrated, I think, with utter clarity in the extended quotation that follows. I quote the opening conversation almost in full, precisely because it highlights so clearly the impact of *parola scenica* as opposed to *recitativo.*

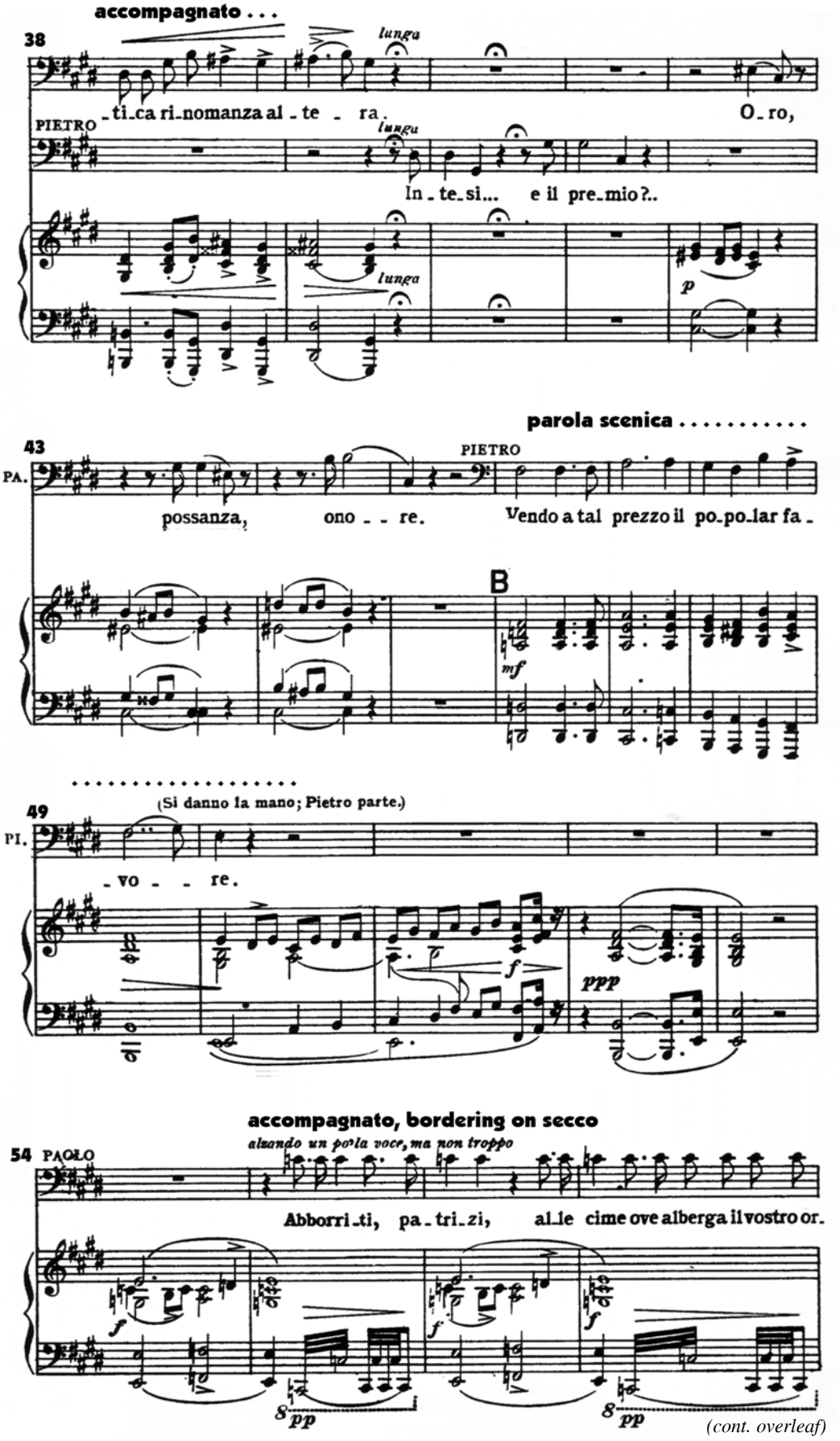
Figure 5.11: The opening conversation in the 1881 version of *Simon Boccanegra*.



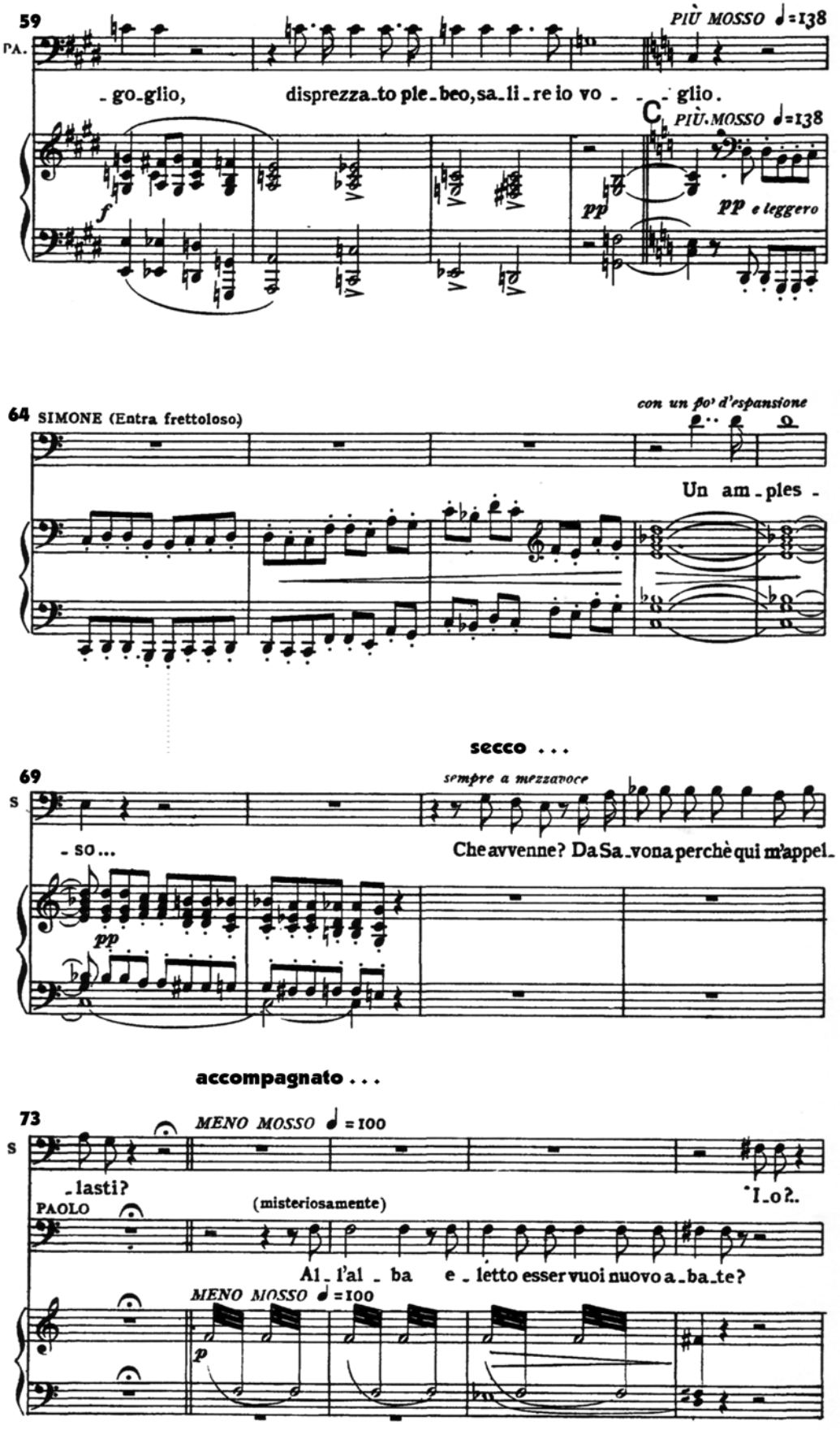
(cont. overleaf)



(cont. overleaf)



(cont. overleaf)


59
PIÙ MOSSO ♩=138
PA.
- go-glio, disprezza-to ple-beo, sa-li-re io vo - - - glio.
C
PIÙ MOSSO ♩=138
f
pp
pp e leggero
64 SIMONE (Entra frettoloso)
con un po' d'espansione
Un am-ples -
secco . . .
69
sempre a mezzavoce
S
- so...
Che avvenne? Da Sa-vona perchè qui m'appel-
pp
accompagnato . . .
73
MENO MOSSO ♩= 100
S
-lasti?
PAOLO
(misteriosamente)
I-o?..
Al-l'al-ba e-letto esser vuoi nuovo a-ba-te?
MENO MOSSO ♩= 100
p

The instances of *parola scenica* I have quoted in the 'freestyle' amalgam of *secco*, *accompagnato* and *parola scenica* we find in these opening bars by no means represent all the instances of the device in this scene. The 'Prologue' ends with Boccanegra and his realization that Maria is dead, but also that he has just been nominated the new Doge of Venice. The persistent monotone beaten out almost brutally on the large triangle that rings out this scene is exactly the '*parola scenica* made music' to which Budden refers at the head of this chapter (3, 1981: 334). It is doubly ironic in this context, because what is to represent a moment of personal triumph and festivity for Boccanegra becomes the death knell for the woman he loved: a signifier with multi-spatial limbic impact.

In the final section to this chapter I continue with the comparative approach I have used while dealing with the two versions of *Simon Boccanegra*, because I can think of no more explicit way of establishing the intrinsic differences between what I genuinely consider to be instances of *parola scenica* and what I consider to be ordinary (or even ambiguous) statements of *recitativo, secco* or *accompagnato*, or *arioso*.

In the final pages I provide a close reading of scenes from both Puccini's *La bohème* and 'Vissi d'arte' and the cinematographic possibilities for the spectator provided by the use of *parola scenica*.

Parola scenica **and the** ***veristi***

> Overwhelmed by the new-found powers of suggestion in tonal tint and the riot of hitherto undreamed-of orchestral combinations, we are forgetting that permanence in music depends upon melodic speech (Edward MacDowell 3).

None of Verdi's peers and successors took up and slavishly followed the model of *parola scenica* as I have described it. Mascagni made use of the device to a limited extent, although he is not strictly grouped with the *veristi*. In his selection of plot material a realist in that 'all the tragic elements of the story are concentrated in a musical framework calculated to convey maximum immediacy, [Mascagni returned] to the closed numbers already abandoned by Verdi' (Girardi in *Grove Music Online* 2004). Giordano, Leoncavallo, Cilea and Zandonai all implemented *parola scenica* with subtle changes in their work, although with all the functionality Verdi initially assigned to it, and more besides. But if these composers had taken up *parola scenica* in spirit only and adapted it to their own ends, then the question arises of how they embraced the device, how it is identified in their output, how it impacts on their musical syntax, and on the way they share dramatic narrative intent with their listener.

The work of the *veristi* as this school of thought is generally defined by scholars exemplify *verismo* as a style of Italian opera distinguished by realistic (sometimes sordid or violent depictions of contemporary everyday life (especially the life of the lower classes), as opposed to historical or mythological subjects. *Verismo* works aim at realism, hence the term '*verismo*' ('realism'). In theatre the verist movement has its origins in mid nineteenth-century French thought, particularly in respect of Auguste Comte (1797-1857), developing through the Realism of Alexandre Dumas *fils* (1824-1895) and culminating in the naturalist thought of Émile Zola (1840-1902). As we have seen elsewhere, however, there appeared to develop two very distinct notions of realism: that of Classical Realism as seen in the thought of the writers I note above, and that of Verdi's realism, which is an *application in practice* of the ideals of Classical Realism, but with a number of very particular important caveats.

A 'satisfactory,' expressive fusion between the text and its setting has been a seemingly unattainable goal since the Camerata, and Richard Strauss would still direct considerable energy to it in musico-philosophical terms in *Capriccio* (1941). However, the fact is that Verdi had already solved this problem in 1842 with *Nabucco*, while eyes in the lyric-theatrical world were gradually turning to the innovations Richard Wagner was making in Germany.

What were the post-Verdian *veristi* in fact seeking in their idiom, as they set about the perennial problem of combining text and music in the theatrical context? We might turn again to Dahlhaus in his comments regarding Verdi for possible answers. He noted, as I observed elsewhere, that

> The fact that the affections which move the characters in a Verdi opera are such as demand expression in gesture—and that phrases of the text which are vital to understanding should stand out as 'parola scenica'—is the dramaturgical aspect of a situation which rests on the compositional fact that Verdi was before all else a genius of musical rhythm [. . .] (*Realism* 64).

Dahlhaus acknowledges the incidence of *parola scenica* in Verdi, then, and one wonders if the 'genius' he ascribes here exclusively to Verdi may not have been at work for composers other than Verdi. I believe Verdi developed a genuinely Italian operatic idiom for his successors of which *parola scenica* is an important component. In the following brief section, by specific reference to scenes from a number of verist works, I set out to show that tangible evidence does exist to support my notion that *parola scenica* became part of a general Italian operatic vocabulary towards the end of the nineteenth century, and running into the twentieth, and with influences stretching even beyond opera.

Giordano: 'Viva Robespierre!', *Andrea Chénier* (1896), Act II

> Like most *verismo* operas of the period *Andrea Chénier* is built, act by act, as a loosely organized continuity bound together by variegated orchestral figuration in which motifs, repeated at short range and in different keys, play a prominent part. [. . .] The vocal delivery is naturalistic, freely mixing conversational, lyrical and declamatory elements. Solos and duets arise directly and without preparation from the dialogue and are rarely marked off by a full close ('*Andrea Chénier*'. Budden, J, 2004).

This scene has much in common with the multi-spatial writing in Act III of Verdi's *Battaglia di Legnano*, a discussion of which appears in Chapter 1 of this thesis. This extract from *Andrea Chénier* contains what is possibly one of the finest and most spectacular examples of *parola scenica* in post-Verdian *verismo* writing. Giordano combines strands of narrative from two principal characters (Chénier himself and Gérard), three *comprimario* characters (L'Incredible, Matthieu and Roucher) and the chorus, in addition to an *en masse* orchestral support. The synopsis here reads 'A group of revolutionary leaders pass, among them Gérard, now a popular hero. Incredible stops him and asks for more details about the woman he has asked him to find. Gérard gives him a lyrical description of the beauty of Maddalena, and the spy, now pretty sure it is the woman he has seen with Bersi, promises Gérard that he will see her soon' (Programme notes: *Andrea Chénier*. Giordano 5).

Giordano and librettist Luigi Illica do not convey much vital plot data in this little scene besides a vivid, impassioned description of the heroine Maddalena, but the *parola scenica* ensures that all the narrative can be heard.

Narrative 1	**MATTHIEU and FOLLOWERS** Viva Robespierre! Evviva!	**MATTHIEU and FOLLOWERS** Long live Robespierre! Hurrah!
Narrative 2	**INCREDIBLE** La donna che mi hai chiesto di cercare — è bianca o bionda?	**INCREDIBLE** *(to Gérard)* The woman you asked me to find — is her hair powdered or blonde?
Narrative 3	**CHÉNIER** Ella cammina solo.	**CHÉNIER** *(to Roucher, referring to Robespierre)* He is walking alone.
Narrative 2	**GÉRARD** Azzurro occhio di cielo sotto una fronte candida; bionda la chioma con riflessi d'or una dolcezza in viso . . .	**GÉRARD** *(to Incredible)* Eyes blue as heaven beneath an innocent brow, Tresses with golden hues, a sweetness on her face . . .
Narrative 3	**ROUCHER** E quanto spazio ad arte fra il nume e i sacerdotti! Ecco Tallien!	**ROUCHER** (to Chénier) And how much space intentionally left between the deity and his priests! There is Tallien!

Narrative 1	**CROWD**	**CROWD**
		(variously)
	Barère! Collot d'Herbois!	Barère! Collot d'Herbois!
	Quello è Couthon! St.-Just! David!	There is Couthon! St.-Just! David!
Narrative 3	**CHÉNIER**	**CHÉNIER**
		(to Roucher)
	L'enigma!	The enigma!
Narrative 1	**CROWD**	**CROWD**
		(variously)
	Tallien! Fréron! Barras! Fouché!	Tallien! Fréron! Barras! Fouché!
	Le Bas! Thuriot! Carnot!	Le Bas! Thuriot! Carnot!
	Robespierre!	Robespierre!
Narrative 2	**GÉRARD**	**GÉRARD**
	. . . ed un sorriso di donna non umano;	. . . and a womanly smile that is celestial;
	nel suo vestir modesto;	modest in her dress;
	pudico velo sovra il tesoro . . .	a chaste veil covering the treasure . . .
Narrative 3	**ROUCHER**	**ROUCHER**
	Ultimo, vedi?	He's the last, you see?
	CHÉNIER	**CHÉNIER**
	Robespierre il piccolo!	The little Robespierre!
Narrative 2	**GÉRARD**	**GÉRARD**
	. . . d'un seno vergineo	. . . of a virginal breast
	ed una bianca coffia sulla testa.	and a white bonnet on her head.
	Ti dissi: Cerca! Indaga!	I tell you: Search! Find her!
	Dinanzi mi è passata baleno un dì,	That radiance passed before me one day,
	ma poscia l'ho perduta!	but since then I have lost her.
	Or più non vivo; peno!	Now I no longer live—I suffer!
	Ma salva tu da questa angiosca —	Save me from this anguish —
	e tutto avrai!	and everything will be yours!
	L'INCREDIBLE	**L'INCREDIBLE**
	Stasera la vedrai!	Tonight you will see her!

Matthieu and the chorus form the scenic background in this scene against which the action develops. The crowd, led by Matthieu, lists the names of the revolutionaries as they step into view (Giordano 75). In essence this section of the narrative performs the same function as the chorus of priests chanting liturgical texts in the *Battaglia di Legnano* score—that of 'aural scenery.' In 5.12(a) overleaf the crowd and Matthieu are heard in the distance hailing Robespierre. Then, in 5.12(b), they list the revolutionaries. Against this background the composer imaginatively presents several other strands of narrative.

Giordano uses this writing style for two very specific reasons. Firstly, the *tutti* orchestral writing and sweeping melodies evoke a very particular mood, that of victory and ceremony. Secondly, the narrative content of the text is crystal clear. Here the setting does not rely on the sound painting of the words for its success; the text is music-driven, and onomatopoeically communicates narrative. This scene, in fact, has much in common with the Act II between Aida and Amneris, particularly the conclusion of that duet, because the musical forces are identical.

Figure 5.12(a): 'Viva Robespierre' from Giordano's *Andrea Chénier*. The 'calls' from the chorus are heard over the primary melody, carried by the strings.

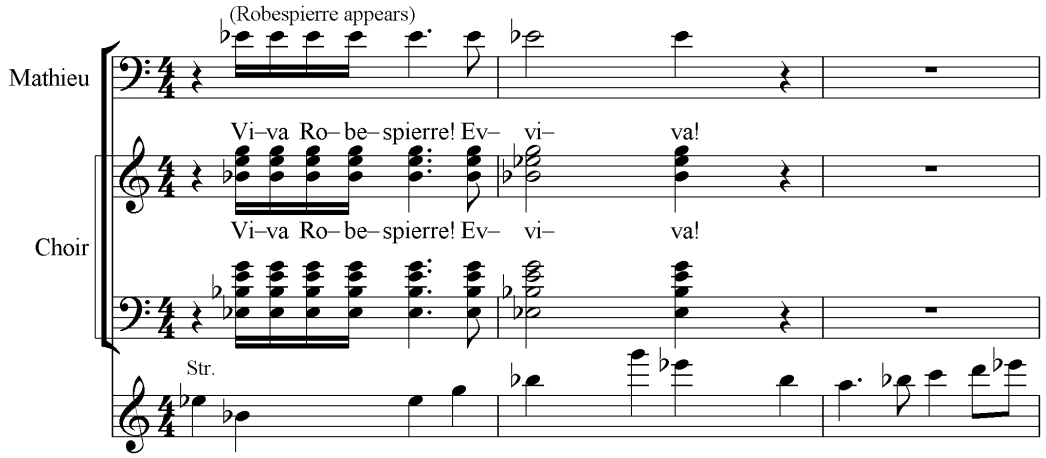
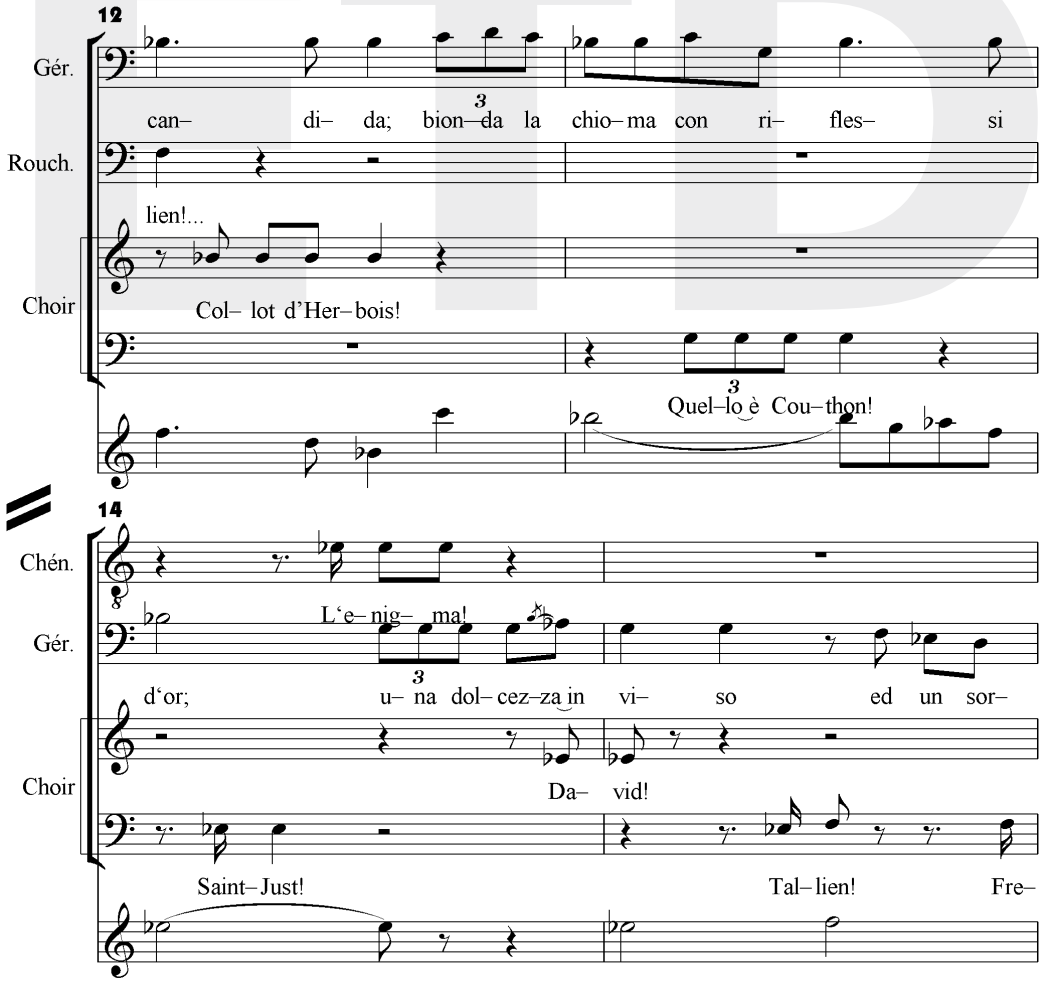


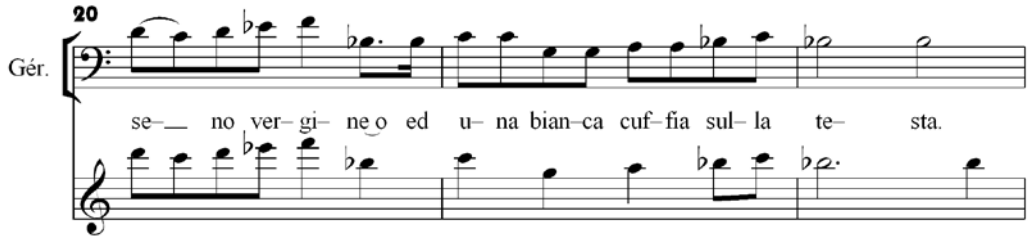
Figure 5.12(b): Bars 12-17: 'Viva Robespierre' from *Andrea Chénier*. The 'calls' from the chorus are taken up by Chénier and Roucher, as the primary melody continues in the strings, in counterpoint with the vocal melody, which appears in Gérard's voice.



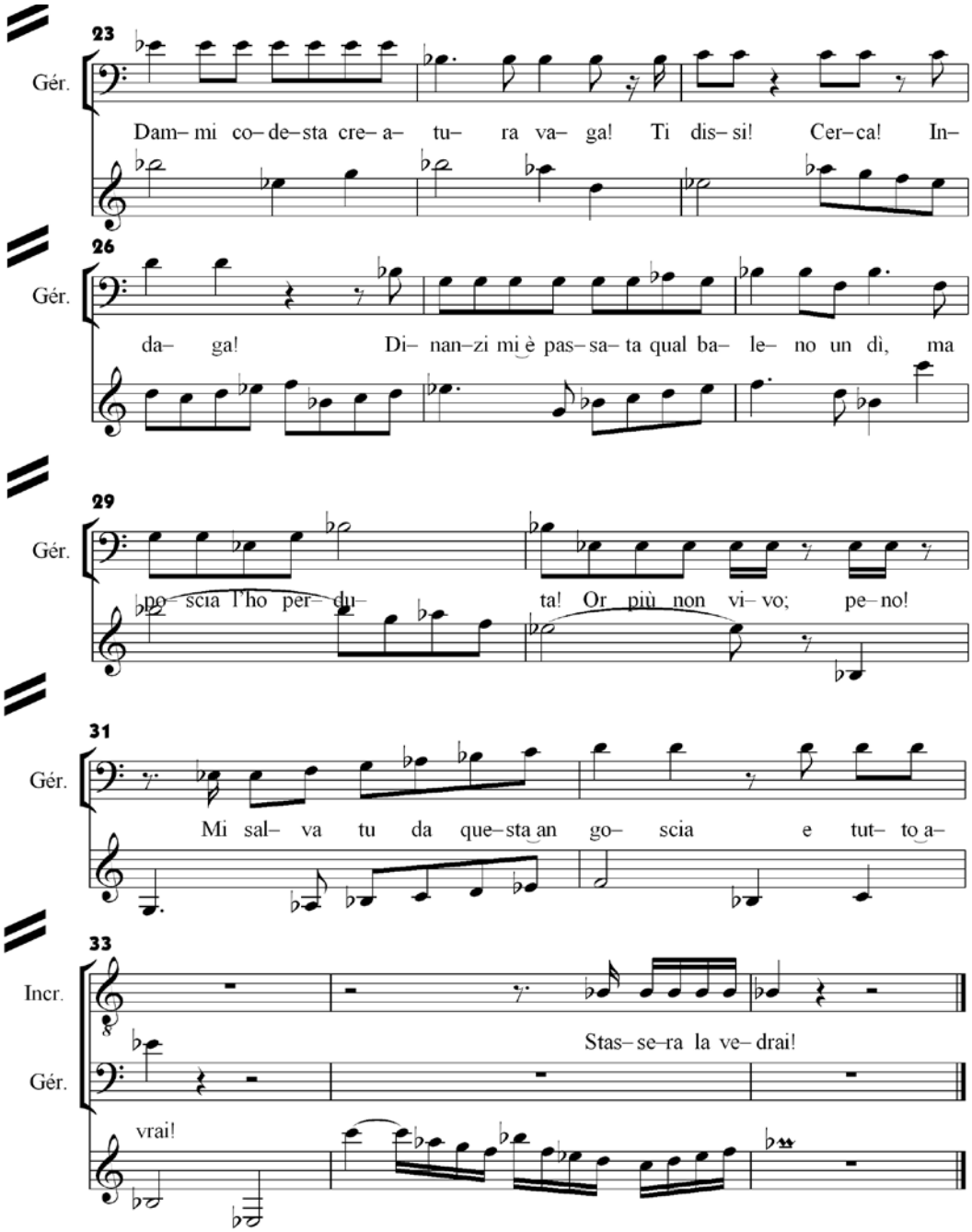
Note the backgrounded primary melody in the strings (the bottom-most treble stave in the excerpt), Gérard's line of dialogue, which is directed at the spy L'Incredible, and Chénier's dialogue, which is aimed at Roucher. These strands of dialogue compare with the lines sung by Lida and Imelda in the scene quoted from *La battaglia di Legnano* in Chapter 1. In fact, this scene architecturally has so much in common with the *Battaglia* scene that it might have been modelled on it, or the end of the Aida-Amneris duet. Gérard and L'Incredible's narrative is concerned entirely with the mystery woman the spy saw on the street earlier in the scene, and whom Gérard knows to be Maddalena. Chénier and Roucher are commenting on the revolutionaries and what they are doing. In a manner of speaking these characters also deliver social commentary on the revolutionaries, because Chénier refers to 'il piccolo Robespierre', which was the unflattering nickname given to Augustine, the younger brother of Maximillian Robespierre.

The fusion of recitative-*parola scenica* in which the bit players and Chénier deliver their lines is important. Giordano keeps these lines short and pithy, as close as possible to the naturally spoken word. They are best described as *pictorial* in this context—a particular view of *parola scenica* that may account for some scholars' notion of the term as being '[typically a few short words] that would be declaimed immediately before a lyrical set piece' (Parker 2001). Also, the primary melody, a broad string construct that at times evokes the strains of the *Marseillaise*, is conspicuously in the background. In contrast to this, the composer presents the main body of the plot in the baritone's line. It is that line of narrative, especially, that deserves a closer reading in this context. Giordano's idiom of choice here becomes almost a fusion between *arioso* and *parola scenica*—a technique also in evidence in the *Stiffelio* extract closely read earlier. In bars 20-21, for instance, the vocal melody is doubled in the primary melody. In bar 23, however, and for the following eleven bars, the vocal melody is nothing more than a series of monotones, constructed in such a way that it forms a counterpoint to the primary melody (carried by the strings), but with the main melodic interest clearly in the primary rather than the vocal melody.

Figure 5.12(c): 'Viva Robespierre' from *Andrea Chénier*.



(cont. overleaf)



Through p*arola scenica* Giordano, then, emulates the rabble of the crowd, highlighting the soloist's lines, ensuring the audibility of all the narrative strands and placing *Andrea Chénier* chronologically, musically and theatrically, late in *verismo*. Another Verdian equivalent of this passage, where the *parola scenica* is used in the same way and to achieve the same ends, is the Consecration Scene in *Aida*, where Radamès is named the leader of the Egyptian army to be sent against the Ethiopians, and the military expedition is dedicated in the Temple of Vulcan ('Su! del Nilo al sacro lido'). The way in which the soloists interact with the orchestral and choral forces in these scenes is strikingly similar.

Juxtaposing narrative and description: operatic jump-cut

> Our perceptions have in some ways caught up with Verdi's methods. Critics as late as the 1950s tended to smile at his lightning changes of mood [. . .]. No one these days seems to notice—probably because we have got used to the jump-cut technique of films [. . .]. In anticipating the jump-cut Verdi was not so much prophetic as impatient: to make his operas work in the theatre he again and again demanded fewer words, more rapid action [. . .] (Rosselli 2000: 3).

Elsewhere I suggested that a realist operatic narrative style incorporating *parola scenica* anticipates realist narrative in film, and that the development of the motion picture in the 1890s was evidence of humanity's quest to see itself represented as realistically as possible. I elaborate here. It is in this sense that I read the quotation above. I understand Roselli as saying in this paragraph that the jump-cut Verdi introduced caused comment in 1850, but that Verdi had already used the technique in the mid nineteenth century, long before it became part of modern motion picture vocabulary. I am not suggesting that Verdi influenced film, merely that what we as twenty-first-century film viewers actually expect caused quite a stir in Verdi's theatre. Late nineteenth-century poets and composers could not have known what dramatic genres lay in their future, nor would they predict that the operatic narrative styles they were developing be reflected in the artistic endeavours of those who would succeed them, not only in opera specifically, but in the dramatic arts in general. In nineteenth-century Italian opera houses stood or fell by the new works they presented, and repertory works were rare. Although, by 1900, sound still lay in the future of film (which grew from man's preoccupation with audio-visually capturing reality), the realism that would eventually characterize twentieth-century film has as its prototype the Realism that had developed in nineteenth-century literature, theatre and opera.

It is easy to find similarities between nineteenth-century naturalist and realist theatre on one hand, and twentieth-century film on the other. They have the same components: stylized action, scenery, costume, make-up, spectacle. Opera, however, has one ingredient one element that naturalist and realist theatre does not have by default: music. A narrative style in which a plot being developed in the foreground, with music in the background—or *parola scenica*, as I have described it—would become important for the development of the language of film. Besides opera and *mélodrame* film is the only theatrical strategy that deliberately combines mood and dramatic message. *Parola scenica* was the first realist narrative technique to make a tangible link between noetic and poetic awareness, and in conclusion I describe two more nineteenth-century operatic scenes, viewed through the lens of film.

The reference above points directly to Verdi. However, I describe here two more instances of post-Verdian *parola scenica* in which the narrative is treated quite differently, but with the same 'cinematographic' goal in mid. This is one of those instances where a close reading comparing how *parola scenica* dominates (*Tosca*) and one in which it is implemented with less urgency (*La bohème)*, because both extracts are characterized by the same features, yet each carries its poetic and noetic message in some respects differently.

I hypothesize that a musical style of delivery in which the narrative technique is based on a foregrounded plot supported by a backgrounded musical 'scenery' is native to realist Italian opera as well as film, and therefore, that there are closer links between opera and film than generally supposed, provided one accepts the concept of a sung language as 'natural'. However, depending on the subject matter and how it is developed, the quality of *parola scenica* is not the only feature that makes it 'cinematographic'. I turn presently to what is perhaps one of the most satisfying and cunningly deployed instances of the *parola scenica* outside of Verdi, lending great *chiaroscuro* to a scene otherwise steeped in searing realism, and at a point in Puccini's *Tosca* (1900) where one would least expect the device: it is Tosca's poignant prayer 'Vissi d'arte.' But before I give that close reading, I look in some detail at the last scene of *La bohème* (1897), which is as adaptable to film as is 'Vissi d'arte', and which shares many features with the scene from the later opera. I with an analysis of the *Bohème* text before I examine the music:

MIMI
Sono andati? Fingevo di dormire
perché volli con te solo restore.
Ho tante cose the ti voglio dire,
o una cola ma grande come il mare,
come il mare profonda ed infinita . . .
Sei li mio amor . . . e tutta la mia vita.

RODOLFO
Ah Mimi, mia bella Mimi!

MIMI
Son bella ancora?

RODOLFO
Bella come un'aurora.

MIMI
Hai sbagliato it raffronto.
Volevi dir: bella
come un tramonto.
'Mi chiamano Mimi . . .
perche non so.'

RODOLFO
Tornò al nido la rondine
e cinguetta.
(Leva la cuffietta di dove
l'aveva riposta in sul cuore.)

MIMI
Have they gone? I pretended to sleep
because I wanted to be alone with you.
I've so many things to tell you,
or just one thing—huge as the sea,
deep and infinite as the sea . . .
I love you . . . you're all my life.

RODOLFO
Ah! my beautiful Mimi!

MIMI
Am I beautiful still?

RODOLFO
Beautiful as the dawn.

MIMI
You've mistaken the image:
you should have said,
beautiful as the sunset.
'They call me Mimi . . .
but I don't know why.'

RODOLFO
The swallow has come back
to her nest to twitter.
(He takes the bonnet from its place
over his heart.)

MIMI
La mia cuffietta!
La mia cuffietta!
te lo rammenti
quando sono entrata
la prima volta la?

RODOLFO
Se lo rammento!

MIMI
Il lume s'era spento.

RODOLFO
Eri tanto turbata.
Poi smarristi la chiave . . .

MIMI
E a cercarla tastoni ti sei messo!

RODOLFO
E cerca, cerca . . .

MIMI
Mio bel signorino,
posso ben dirlo adesso,
lei la trovò assai presto.

RODOLFO
Aiutavo lt destino.

MIMI
Era buio e it mio rossor
non si vedeva . . .
'Che gelida manina . . .
Se la lasci riscaldar . . .'
Era buio e la man
lo mi prendevi . . .
(Mimi è presa da uno spasimo
di soffocazione.)

RODOLFO
Oh Dio! Mimi!
(Schaunard rientra in quel momenta)

SCHAUNARD
Che avvien?

MIMI
Nulla. Sto bene.

RODOLFO
Zitta. Per carità.

MIMI
Si, si, perdona. Or sarò buona.
(Tornano Marcello e Musetta, poi
Colline. Musetta pone un tome sulla tavola.)

MUSETTA
Dorme?

RODOLFO
Riposa.

MARCELLO
Ho veduto il dottore. Verrà.
Gli ho fatto fretta. Ecco il cordial.

MIMI
Chi parla?

MUSETTA *(porgendo it tnanicot to)*
Io, Musetta.

MIMI
O come à bello e morbido!
Non più, non più, le mani
allividite. Il tepore le abbellirà.
(a Rodolfo)
Sei tu che me lo doni?

MIMI
My bonnet!
My bonnet!
Ah! do you remember
when I came in here
the first time?

RODOLFO
Do I remember!

MIMI
The light had gone out.

RODOLFO
You were so upset.
Then you lost your key . . .

MIMI
And you knelt to hunt for it!

RODOLFO
I searched and searched . . .

MIMI
My dear sir,
now I can tell you:
you found it quick enough.

RODOLFO
I was helping Fate.

MIMI
It was dark. You couldn't
see me blushing.
'How cold your little hand is . . .
Let me warm it for you . . .'
It was dark. You took
my hand in yours . . .
(Mimi has another spasm, a fit
of choking.)

RODOLFO
Good God! Mimi!
(Schaunard enters at that moment.)

SCHAUNARD
What's wrong?

MIMI
Nothing. I'm fine.

RODOLFO
Please . . . don't talk.

MIMI
Yes, yes forgive me. Now I'll be good.
(Marcello and Musetta come back, then
Colline. Musetta sets a candle on the table.)

MUSETTA
Is she sleeping?

RODOLFO
She's resting.

MARCELLO
I saw the doctor. He's coming.
I made him hurry. Here is the medicine.

MIMI
Who's speaking?

MUSETTA *(handing her the muff)*
Me. Musetta.

MIMI
Oh, how lovely and soft it is.
No more, no more . . . my hands all
ugly and cold . . . The warmth will heal them.
(to Rodolfo)
Did you give it to me?

MUSETTA
Sì.

MIMI
Tu! Spensierato!
Grazie. Ma costerà.
Piangi? Sto bene.
Pianger così perche?
Qui, amor . . . sempre conte.
Le mani . . . al caldo . . . e dormire.
(Silenzio.)

RODOLFO
Che ha detto it medico?

MARCELLO
Verrà.

MUSETTA *(pregando)*
Madonna benedetta,
fate la grazia a questa poveretta
che non debba morire.
(interrompendosi, a Marcella)
Qui ci vuole un riparo
perche Ia fiamma sventola.
(Marcella mette un libro sulla tavola da paroventa al lume.)
Cosi. E che possa guarire.
Madonna santa, io sono
indegna di perdono,
mentre invece Mimi
è un angelo del cielo.

RODOLFO
lo spero ancora. Vi pare
che sia grave?

MUSETTA
Non credo.
(Schaunard s'avvina al letto.)

SCHAUNARD *(piano a Marcello)*
Marcella, e spirata.

COLLINE
(entra e dò del danaro a Musetta)
Musetta, a voi.
Come va?

RODOLFO
Vedi, è tranquilla.
(Rodolfo si accorge dello strano contegno degli altri.)
Che vuol dire?
Quell'andare e venire . . .
Quel guardarmi così? . . .

MARCELLO
Coraggio.
(Rodolfo accorre al lettuccio.)

RODOLFO
Mimi! . . . Mimi! . . . Mimi!

MUSETTA
Yes, he did.

MIMI
You spendthrift!
Thank you . . . but the cost . . .
You're crying? I'm well.
Why are you crying like this?
Here, beloved . . . with you always!
My hands . . . the warmth . . . to sleep.
(Silence.)

RODOLFO
What did the doctor say?

MARCELLO
He's coming.

MUSETTA *(praying)*
Oh blessed Mother,
be merciful to this poor child
who doesn't deserve to die.
(breaking off, to Marcello)
We need a screen here;
the candle's flickering.
(Marcella sets a book on the table which acts as a screen.)
That's better. Let her get well,
Holy Mother, I know
I'm unworthy of forgiveness,
but Mimi is an angel
come down from heaven.

RODOLFO
I still have hope.
You think it's serious?

MUSETTA
I don't think so.
(Schaunard approaches the bed.)

SCHAUNARD *(softly to Marcellol)*
Marcello, she's dead.

COLLINE
(enters, and gives money to Musetta)
Here, Musetta.
How is she?

RODOLFO
You see, she's resting.
(Rodolfo becomes aware of the strange expression of the others.)
What does this mean?
This going back and forth?
Why are you looking at me like this?

MARCELLO
Courage.
(RodoIfo runs over to the bed.)

RODOLF0
Mimi! . . . Mimi! . . . Mimi!

Translation: William Weaver © Capitol Records, Inc., 1952

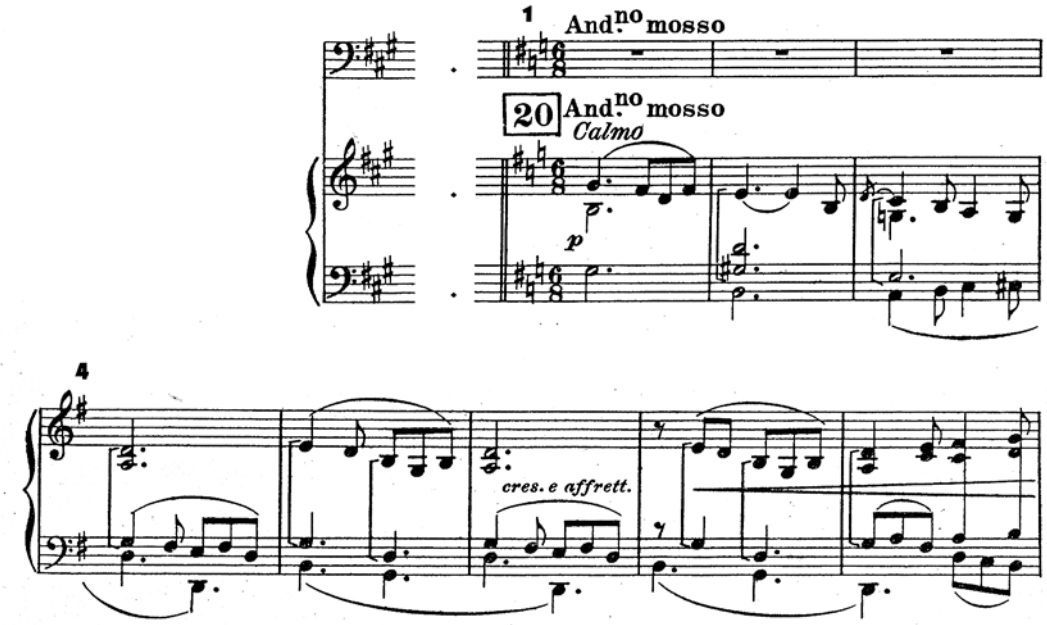
The text, by Giacosa and Illica, is after Henri Murger's novel *Scènes de la vie de bohème* (which was serialised in 1847-9), and is typical of the era, in the sense that the squalor of a group of ambitious but pitifully poor young people who live the lives of the bohemians of the title is brought into the full glare of the view of the public. The men and women in this narrative could have been representative of many mid-nineteenth-century Parisians.

The scene could be from any period *mélodrame*, because it emphasizes the struggle of middle-class citizens, such as a poet-dreamer such as Rodolfo with his head in the clouds, as opposed to Mimi, who chides him for 'buying' her the muff, although it was probably a gift to Musetta from one of her many rich lovers. Of all the characters, Musetta is probably the wealthiest. It seems she is a nineteenth-century call-girl who is still in her prime, and therefore can live fairly comfortably. The characters are sharply drawn, and this Puccini transfers eloquently to the music. Colline, for example, is sentimental about the coat he is prepared to pawn or sell to buy the medicine Mimi needs, but forceful enough to make the doctor come out on a house call without delay, even though he will in the event be too late.

The scene, starting with Mimi feigning sleep to be alone with Rodolfo, through the business round scraping together money to buy medicine, Musetta parting, like Colline, with an item dear to her, and Mimi's quiet death breaks up into a number of microstories that would transfer well to film, as they do to the operatic stage. But how does Puccini deal with compositional issues?

The first impression this scene leaves on one is the thematic recall Puccini contrives by bringing the opera 'full circle', in a way, because the *tema cardine* associated with Schaunard quietly leaving the room to give Mimi and Rodolfo time alone is a direct reference to the boisterous opening gestures of the opera, where the characters are introduced to the audience one or two at a time.

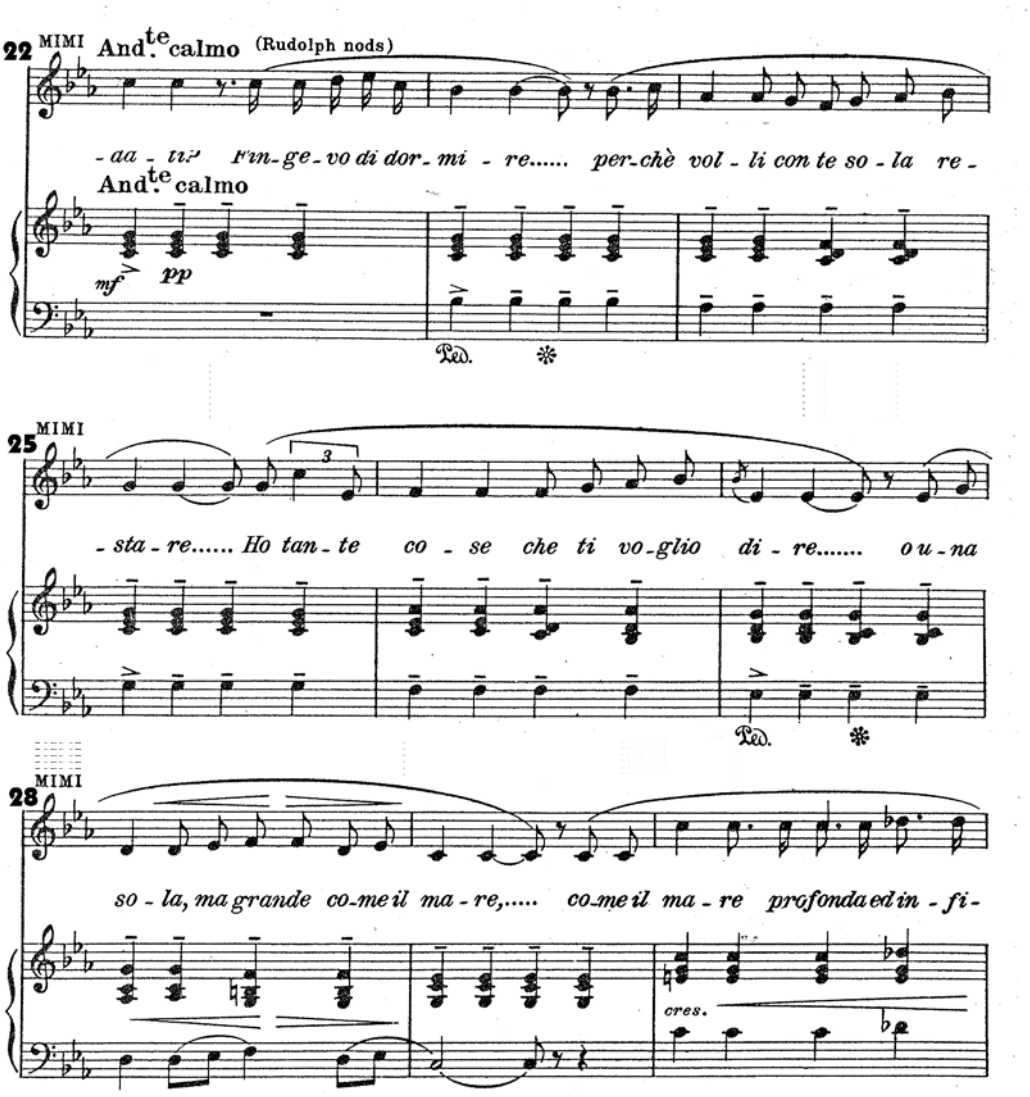
Figure 5.13(a): Extract from the final scene of *La bohème*.



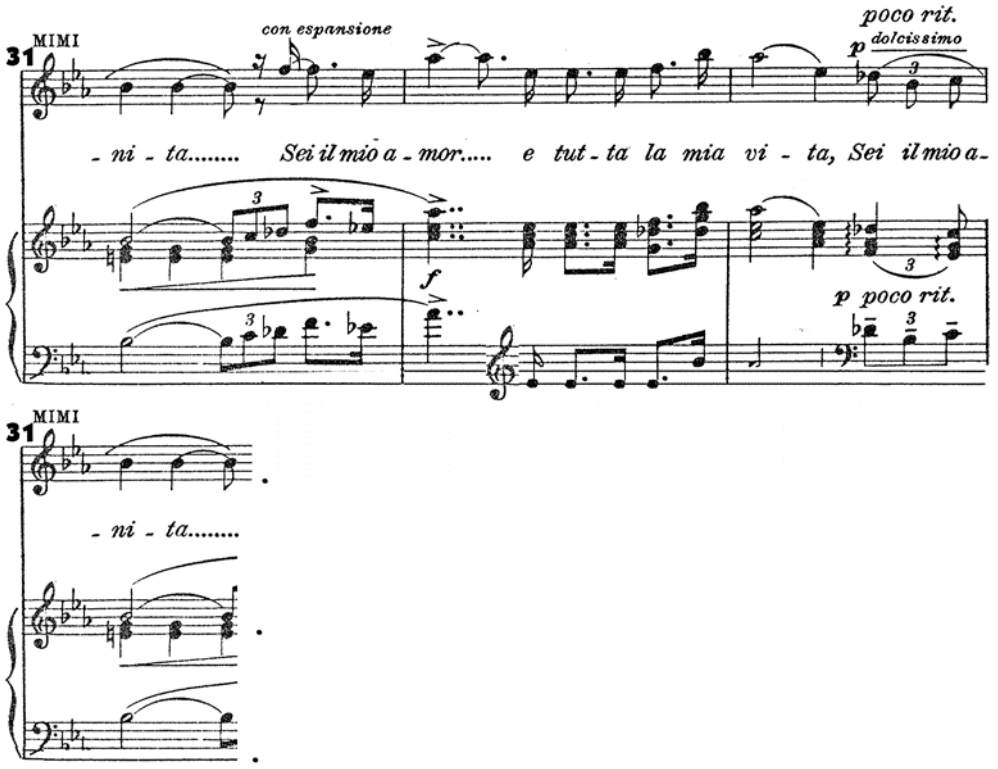
The *tema cardine* is subdued—it is only played *Andantino mosso* here as opposed to the quite lively tempo with which it is introduced at the start of the opera, obviously in line with the seriousness of the situation. The stage directions tell us that Schaunard, alone with Mimi and Rodolfo at that moment, looks around for something to do, then picks up a water bottle to refill it, leaving Mimi and Rodolfo alone in each other's company.

Then Mimi is heard softly describing her love of Rodolfo, and it is as if the time they spent in separation vanishes: the plot takes up again where it left off at the end of Mimi's ' . . . senza rancora' in the previous act. It is impossible to call this piece of 13 bars 'plot-furthering'. It is purely a reflection of Mimi's emotions, but the poetic quality of the music is such that listeners feel as though they are looking at Mimi through Rodolfo's eyes.

Figure 5.13(b): Extract from the final scene of *La bohème*; Mimi's soliloquy.



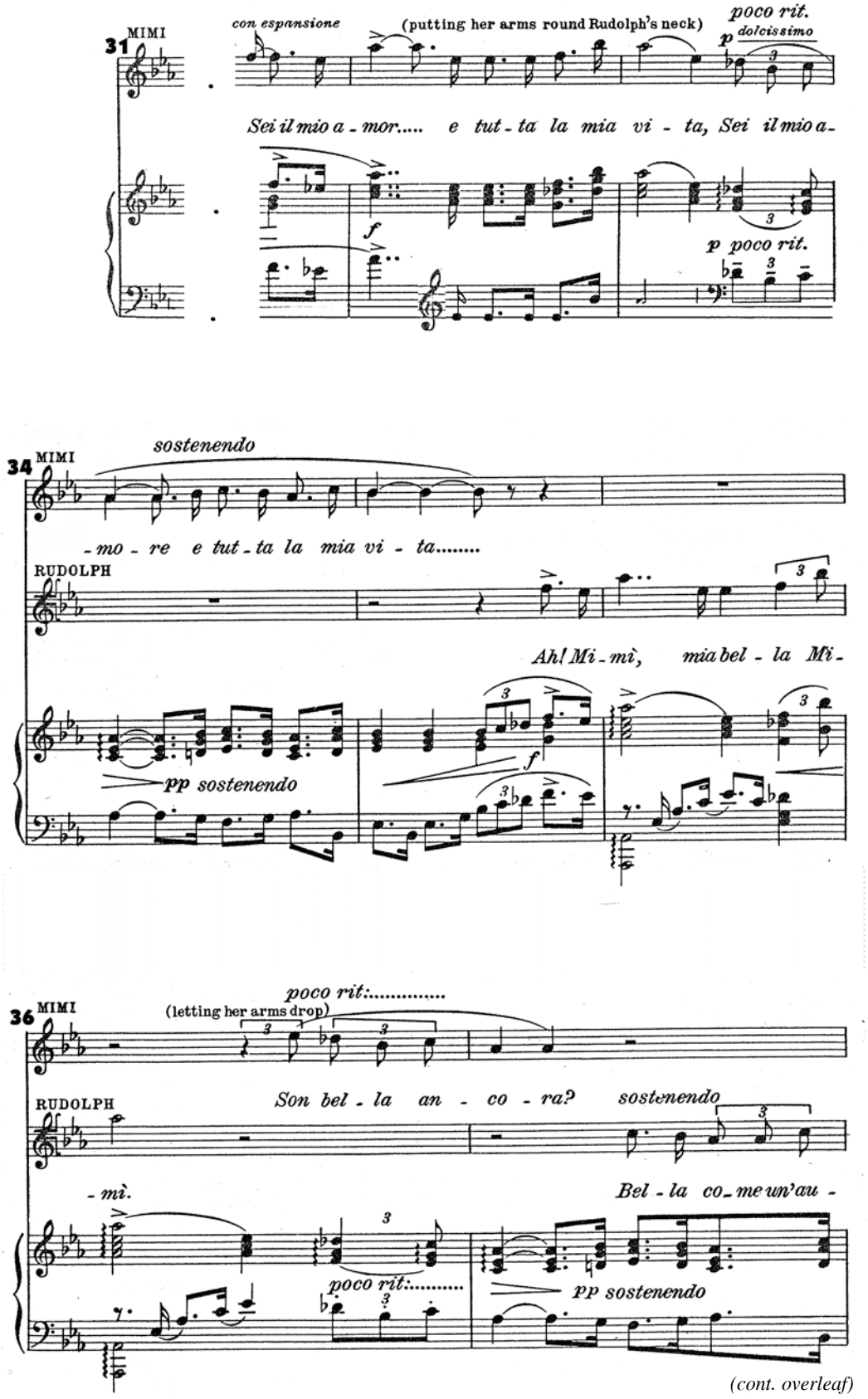
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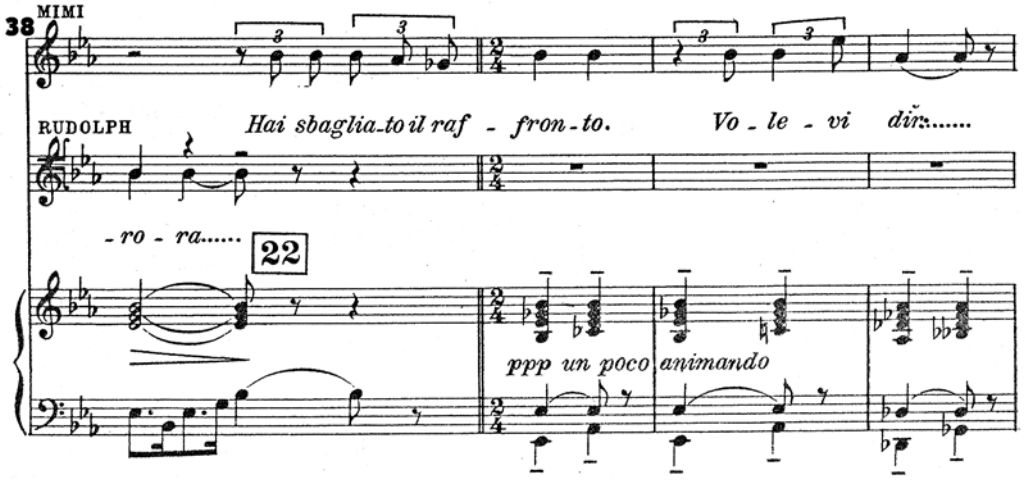
Mimi's words of adoration are sincere, softly spoken and greatly affective as well as effective, which is why Puccini keeps the accompaniment as simple as possible. Nothing is allowed to clutter Mimi's quietly-spoken words.

The section is followed by dialogue of great eloquence, but a stylistic problem crops up here. Puccini almost always doubled the solo voice in the upper strings, probably as a musical 'handle' for singers who suffered from bad intonation. There are more of these than one would like to admit, even today. Adelaide Negri and Maria Dragoni are serious contemporary examples, and then there are dozens of early twentieth-century matrixes that are gradually being rereleased on compact disc, and many of them show that intonation was for many singers rather of a hit-and-miss affair. The technical and grammatical question here is, 'What does one call this passage?'. If Puccini had not doubled the voices in the upper strings, this would have been a grand example of *parola scenica*, because the vocal melody, although not rife with monotones, has sufficient evidence of them to consider *parola scenica*. Plot is sufficiently furthered as Rodolfo tries to buoy Mimi's spirits by insisting that she is as pretty as ever, although death is fast and inevitably approaching. The vocal melody, also, is continually fragmented, which is a prerequisite, *verbatim*, of my own reading or 'definition' of *parola scenica*. However, for the simple fact that Puccini maintains the primary melody in the foreground, this is not *parola scenica.*

Figure 5.13(b): Extract from the final scene of *La bohème*; Mimi's soliloquy.

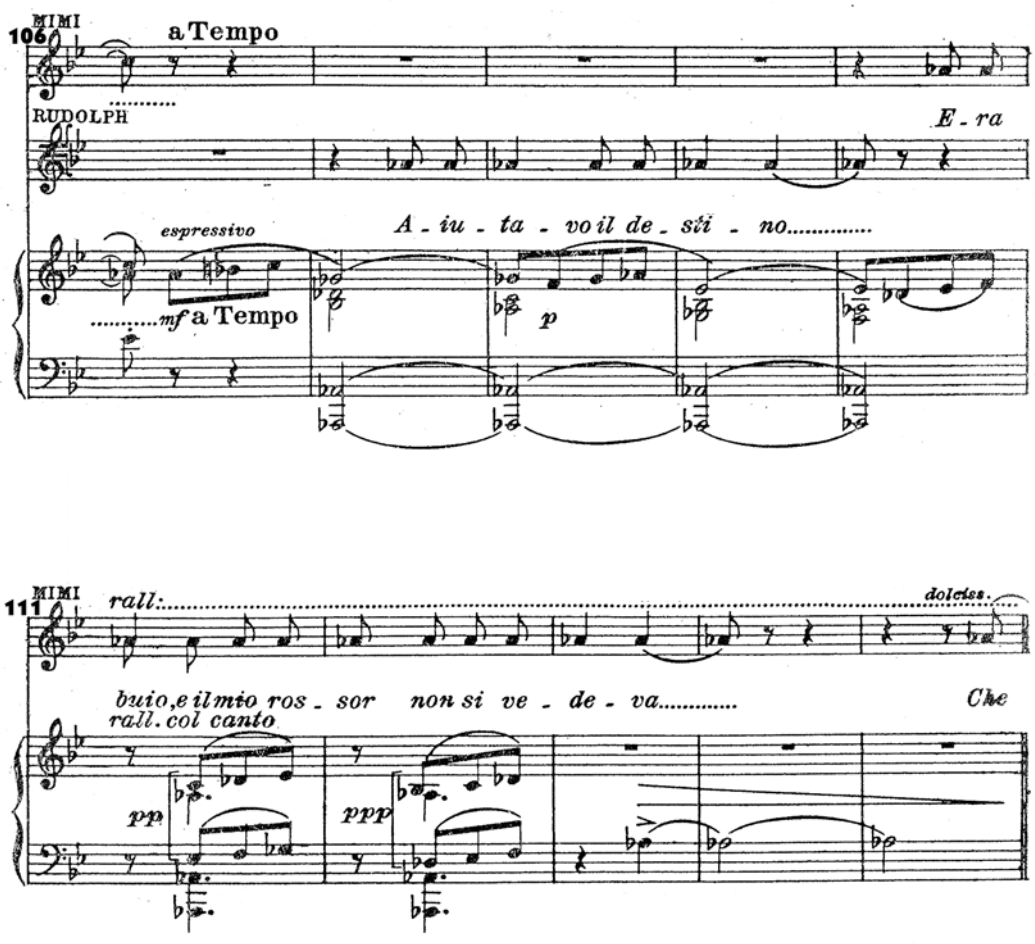


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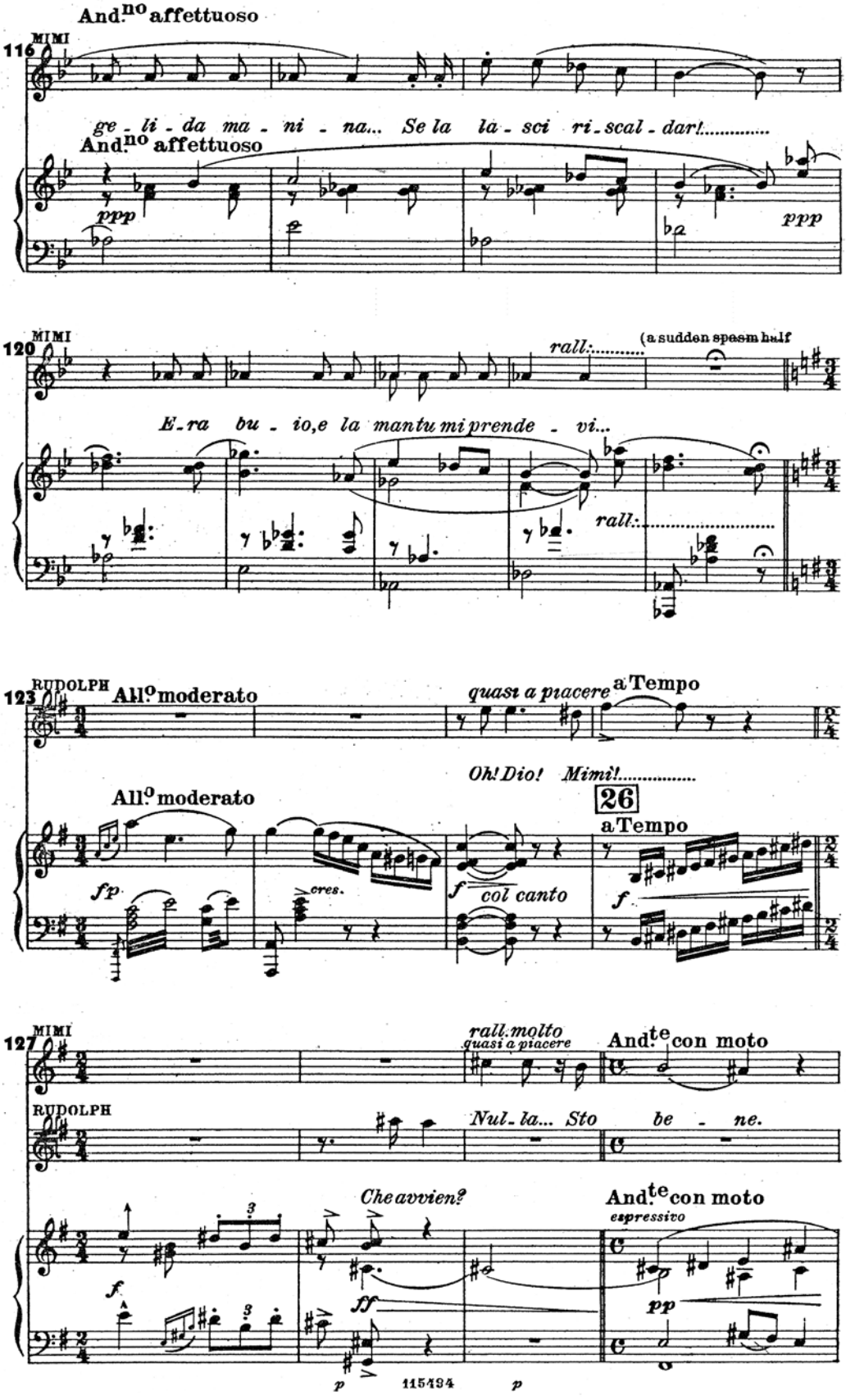


However, it is not too much further in this ensemble piece that *parola scenica* does appear, and true to its nature, its appears at a singularly appropriate dramatic moment:

Figure 5.16(c): Extract from the final scene of *La bohème*; the last bars of Mimi's and Rodolfo's reminiscences are abruptly interrupted by *parola scenica*.



(cont. overleaf)


And.no affettuoso
MIMI
116
ge - li - da ma - ni - na... Se la la - sci ri - scal - dar!.....
And.no affettuoso
ppp
ppp
MIMI
120
rall.:.....
(a sudden spasm half
E - ra bu - io, e la mantu mi prende - vi...
rall.:.....
RUDOLPH
123
All.o moderato
quasi a piacere
a Tempo
Oh! Dio! Mimì!.....
All.o moderato
26
a Tempo
fp
cres.
f
col canto
f
MIMI
127
rall. molto
quasi a piacere
And.te con moto
RUDOLPH
Nul - la... Sto be - ne.
Che avvien?
And.te con moto
espressivo
f.
ff
pp
p
115494
p

Puccini here anticipates a fair amount of action. Accordingly, in bars 106-115, he prepares his audience for the change of idiom that is about to happen. Rodolfo is still reminiscing about his first meeting with Mimi on Christmas Eve, and in bar 116*ff* Mimi echoes the words he spoke that evening, which does take us back to the plot. It is not unexpected for Puccini to put Rodolfo's 'Che gelida manina' as the primary melody in the background, while Mimi 'speaks' the lines in a quiet monotone in the foreground (this is a sung monotone).

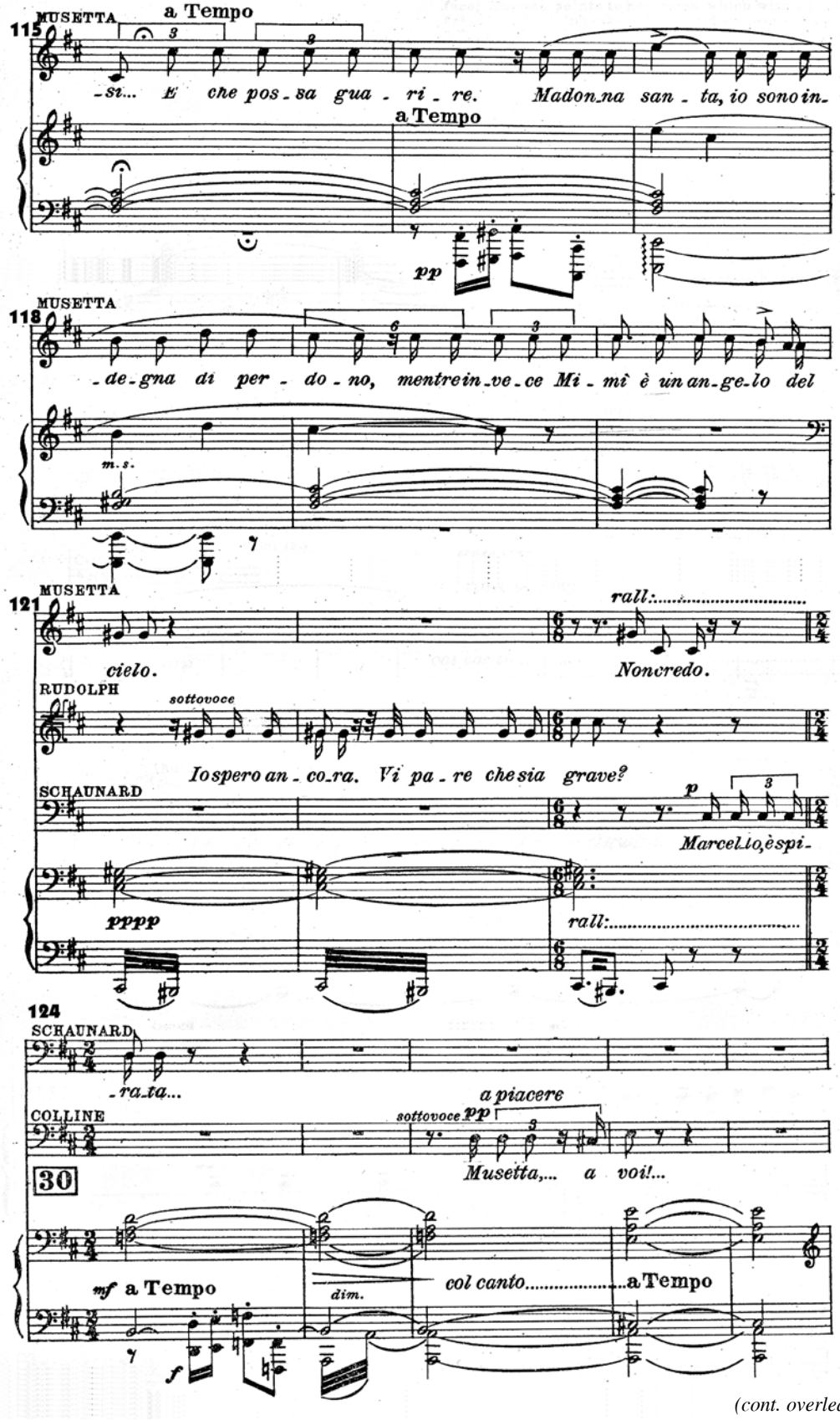
The atmosphere changes abruptly in bars 125*ff*, as Mimi, suffocating, falls back against the pillows. At that moment, Schaunard enters again, and once more the *tema cardine* of the opera's opening movement is heard as the primary melody in the background, while Rodolfo lifts up Mimi in alarm. The action subsides, as Mimi 'opens her eyes and smilingly reassures Rudolph and Schaunard', as the stage directions in the score tell us.

The final extract from *Bohème* finds us midway in Musetta's prayer for Mimi's soul. It is another ironic touch in the text: the call-girl praying for the soul of the pious Mimi. Marcello returns with the medicine, and a promise of the imminent arrival of a doctor. However, all in the room are aware that time for Mimi is quickly running out, except Rodolfo, who steadfastly believes 'I still have hope. Do you think it is serious?', a moment before Schaunard tells Marcello ' . . . she is dead'.

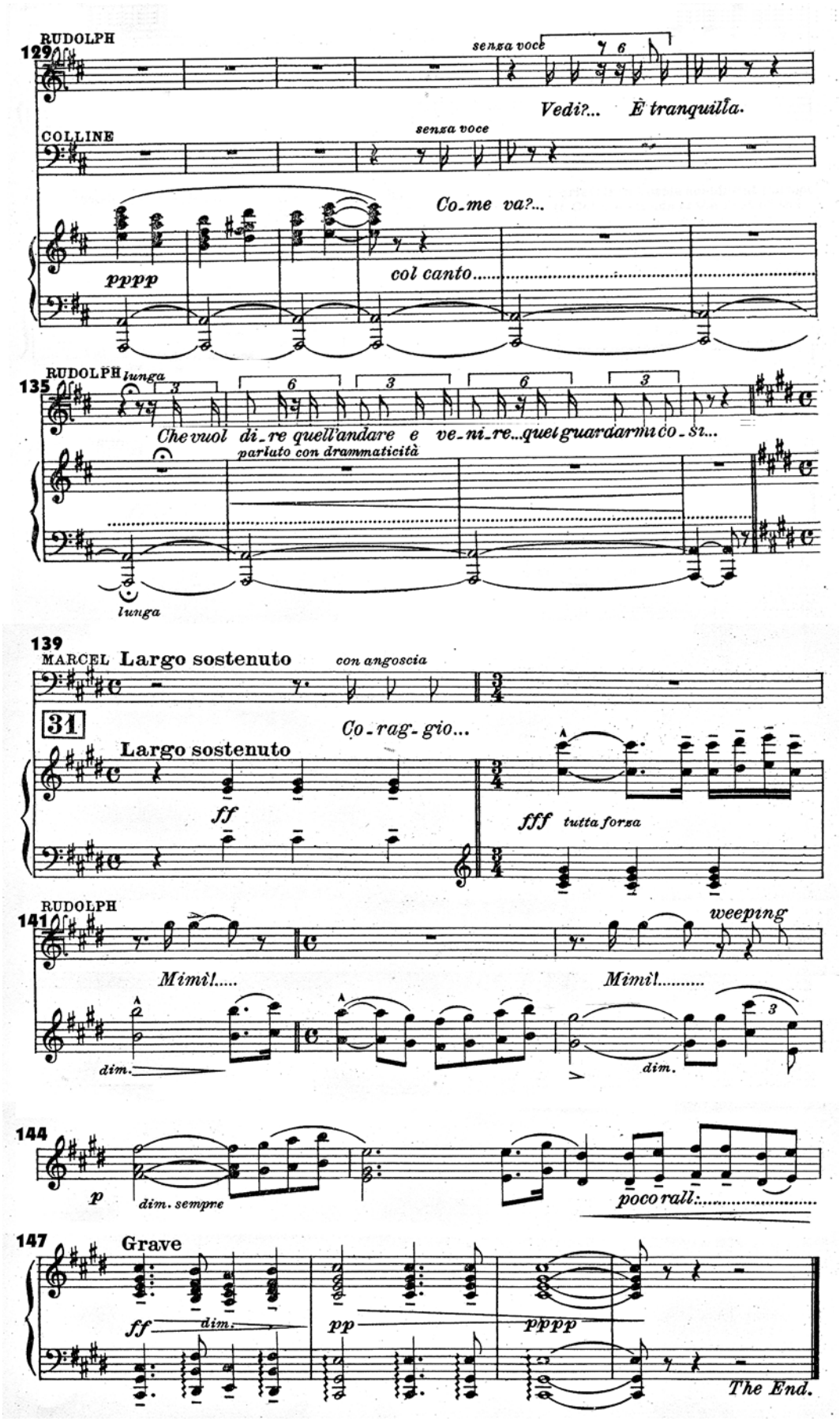
There are various bits of stage business going on. Musetta prays, Schaunard steps up to the bed-side and notices that Mimi is dead, and then turns to Marcello to tell him, Marcello checks for himself and steps back in alarm, Rodolfo tries to cover the window with Musetta's cloak to shade Mimi's face from a final ray of sunshine, Marcello puts the remaining money down on the bed-side table, Musetta still goes through the motions of preparing the medicine, and finally, Rodolfo becomes aware of the strange behaviour of the others.

Bar 115-121 is no more complex than simple *recitativo accompagnato* for Musetta, who is saying her prayer. Rodolfo continues the line with his statement that he still has hope, and he wonders if she is still all right, to which Musetta replies that she does not know. The *accompagnato* continues in bars 121-131, at which point Puccini presents us with *parola scenica* perhaps at its most brutal format: actual spoken words indicated by notes with no heads, only tails, to indicate the rhythm at which they should be spoken over the now unquestionably backgrounded primary melody. The scene acquires a cinematographic reality which in opera is perhaps only equalled in *Tosca* (1900).

Figure 5.13(d): The closing of *La bohème*; a curious mixture of *parola scenica* and *accompagnato*; the final word, with the primary melody in the background and Rodolfo on a G♯ monotone above the stave, goes to *parola scenica.* The bass line in some of the final bars were omitted to facilitate layout.



(cont. overleaf)


129
RUDOLPH
senza voce
Vedi?... È tranquilla.
COLLINE
senza voce
Co_me va?...
pppp
col canto.....
135
RUDOLPH lunga
Che vuol di_re quell'andare e ve_ni_re...quel guardarmi co_sì...
parlato con drammaticità
lunga
139
MARCEL Largo sostenuto
con angoscia
Co_rag_gio...
31
Largo sostenuto
ff
fff tutta forza
141
RUDOLPH
weeping
Mimì!.....
Mimì!.....
dim.
dim.
144
p
dim. sempre
poco rall:.....
147
Grave
ff
dim.
pp
pppp
The End.

Finally: recall the imagery that the character of Tosca is able to evoke in the opera of the same name, in her second act scene with Scarpia, when the fact finally catches up with her that, for her to escape Scarpia and save her lover's life, she will have to negotiate her virtue. The *aria* comes from nowhere. Instead of a phrase or even a measure of introductory music, Puccini gives his soprano a silence on which to construct this highly evocative piece. In fact, there *is* an introduction after all. In the sense that Verdi creates overtures by means of vocal material, here Puccini creates an entire opening period of thirteen bars consisting of an introductory passage for the soprano.

To describe this scene and its narrative intent, I approach the drama from a distance, like Puccini. The composer prepares for this *aria* through an extended passage of classical *parola scenica*. Tosca and Scarpia are at a seeming *impasse*, when from outside the strains of the side drum are heard as Cavaradossi is led to the scaffold, or so Scarpia would have Tosca believe.

The use of *parola scenica* in this passage is conventional, but its effect is extraordinary. There is a fragmented primary melody—a macabre counterpoint between winds and side drum—and Scarpia has the vocal melody, unsurprisingly, a monotone, assuring Tosca that if she does not comply to his demands her lover will die.

Puccini has the fife and drum tune retreating into the background, and he gives Scarpia an angular little melody to round off the monotone of the previous section. 'Less than an hour of life remains for him', the police chief says. There is an extra cutting edge to this melodic fragment, because of the unresolved horizontal augmented fourth between the E♭ and the A that form the outer contours round 'one hour' and 'life'. It is an utterly convincing scheme, and the nine bars of 'interlude' that follow equally convincingly describe Tosca's ultimate capitulation. Not only does the melody follow the expected monotonal writing idiomatic of *parola scenica*, the plot is developing at a frantic pace despite the relatively low dynamic level of the music, because Tosca must be furiously juggling options in her head, while Scarpia calmly awaits the inevitable decision.

Puccini describes the retreating scaffold music in the primary melody, first by silencing the side drum, then by having the interval of a biting second resolving initially onto a minor, then a major third. Also, the time values lengthen. Thus the composer paints the expectant silence before the soprano's prayer. The dynamic level is brought to the lowest levels possible before Tosca alternately bargains with and recriminates God.

This is a text-driven setting, finely honed to a point where the composer achieves extraordinary musico-dramatic tension. Of equal interest are the mental images Puccini creates with the minimum of tonal means. By the time the fife and drum accompaniment has disappeared into the distance, the pictures of Cavaradossi's imminent death—and Tosca's ultimate despair—are graphically fully developed.

The opening phrase, a pious descending pentatonic scale intended to invoke Tosca's religious fervour, followed by the tonal descending phrase over a fifth—similar to Violetta's 'Amami Alfredo' in *La traviata*—describes the soprano's fall from grace. Like *La traviata*'s Violetta, here Tosca tries to remain heroic in her moment of ultimate humiliation. Puccini repeats Tosca's pentatonic motif of despair, and then expands it to a grandiloquent phrase spanning an octave when she protests: 'Whenever I encountered misfortune, I always attempted to help without ostentation. . .'. It is especially the half-close in the orchestra rounding off this period that draws interest. It is a continuation of the soprano's melody. Subtly Puccini prepares the way for the primary melody in the background, as the orchestra finishes Tosca's melody for her. Here Tosca is ruminating on her own 'goodness', always helping others in need.

Then Puccini falls back on another Verdian technique. He has found a melodic gem, and he is not about to relegate it to the background, which is what would happen if it were made into pure *parola scenica*. Consequently, on the text 'In pure faith, I always brought flowers to the altars. In this hour of pain, why, oh Lord, why dost Thou repay me thus?', he shares the melody between the soprano and the strings. It is interesting to note that the line Puccini decides to set as *parola scenica* is not directed at Scarpia, but it is a continuation of Tosca questioning God's fairness.

However, Puccini also retains the *parola scenica* of the first period by the monotonal quality of the melody, otherwise he would lose thematic coherence. 'Vissi d'arte' is in its entirety only about three minutes in duration in any case, and if it were allowed to lose thematic coherence, it would certainly lose its piety and impact. But Tosca's dialogue with God is not over, and there is more text that requires the directness of *parola scenica*: Puccini returns to this idiom in the third period of the *aria*.

Here, then, Tosca has used the last bit of ammunition in her bargaining arsenal, and by now obviously, because she is addressing Scarpia directly, her idiom becomes *aria*. Having pleaded that 'I brought jewels for the Madonna's mantle,

and songs for the stars in heaven that they shone forth with greater radiance', there is nothing more for her to say. As a means of emphasis, Illica and Giacosa see fit to repeat the middle stanza of the text.

TOSCA	**TOSCA**
Nell'ora del dolore perchè	In this hour of distress, why,
perchè, Signore,	why, oh Lord,
perchè me ne rimuneri così?	why do You repay me thus?

Because this text has already been heard, and has nothing new to contribute dramatically, Puccini responds by using these lines of text for Tosca's last outburst, intended to address God, Scarpia and the listener on a purely poetic level. Accordingly, all melodic means move into the foreground for Tosca's final, heroic phrase.

If one studies the scene that includes and surrounds 'Vissi d'arte,' how can it be said to reflect what would happen in a similarly highly charged scene in a film?

In this scene, as in film, the music retains its status as a 'definite story-telling device' (Thomas, 1973: 17). The music creates atmosphere, it darkens the mood (in this case), and 'most subtle of all—[it allows the composer] to allude to thoughts that are unspoken and situations that are unseen.' There is no doubt about the cohesion Puccini achieves here, both in and outside the strategy of *parola scenica*. Opera does not need to rely, like film, on an extraneous source (music) to provide a sense of continuity, because it is already built into the dramatic text. The theatrical build-up, even in this three-minute *aria*, is significant, and for that Puccini relies entirely on the musical vocabulary.

Many fine Toscas have sung the role since 14 January 1900 in Rome. Others will follow. However, what is regarded by many as the definitive *Tosca* has been preserved on compact disc, and partly in video format. I refer here to both the official and pirated audio recordings made over a number of years of Maria Callas as the protagonist, and to the video recording of her final season as *Tosca* at Covent Garden in 1964, opposite the Scarpia of Tito Gobbi, which was released by EMI Classics on DVD in 2002. The Callas reading of 'Vissi d'arte' in a live video recording is an education, because the soprano approaches it in the way she customarily did stage performances, making no concession for the fact that it was simultaneously being recorded. Unlike other film readings, there is no evidence in the Covent Garden recording that Callas was consciously working cinematographically, but owing to Puccini's compositional skills, the end result is pure cinematography.

Verdi's primary contribution to the development of opera through *parola scenica*, was that he effectively broke down the boundaries between musical and dramatic modes of narration. In so doing, he accomplished what musical wordsmiths have been trying to achieve since the Camerata: a sonic medium that functions across the traditional parameters of *recitativo secco* and *accompagnato*, *aria*, *arioso* and *cabaletta*. As it went along it absorbed the positive elements of the underlying, traditional formal structures, while at the same time discarding the elements that made those older conventions cumbersome and dated. Thus a new syntax emerged, a pliant, expressive operatic idiom that is bigger than the sum of its parts.

In creating and implementing *parola scenica* as an alternative narrative mode to what had been in use early in the nineteenth century, Verdi broadened the story-telling scope of the Italian operatic composer, so that the contents of the plot could transcend easily the limitations of those traditional, conventional and inarticulate formal structures that bound Italian *ottocento* opera almost inextricably to the pre-verist Italian operatic canon. But Verdi's impact extended well beyond just the operatic. He also broadened the dramatic and narrative horizons of artists outside the genre of opera, even in film, although he would have been unaware that his art would have had such a profoundly specific influence.

Chapter 6

> Some composers seemed to want to turn almost every phrase into a debased *parola scenica*, where music became exclamation, shriek, sob, gesture, flamboyant theatricality. This made *verismo* opera a peculiar cousin to its literary and theatrical cousins where understatement and naturalism were all-important in challenging the expectations of the audience and shifting their perceptions (Kimbell in O'Brien 1 September 2004).

VERDI'S SOLUTION to the sated tastes of his public and to finding a medium that for him would be dramatically convincing was as subtle and effective as it was ingenious. Gilles de Van holds that 'Verdi seemed to accept tradition without apparent effort, even if in fact he gradually broke it down to lead opera into quite new directions' (4). Verdi embraces existing conventions, enlarging their scope and their efficacy, to put across the dramatic intent of the text, creating through *parola scenica* what was to become a singularly characteristic musical idiom. Verdi does not do away with conventional formal structures, he combines them, conceiving of what one might call, as William Berger suggests, a 'proto-cinematic' technique of address (310), as we saw in Chapter 5.

Initially Verdi's innovations lay in discarding what he deemed inappropriate to a new age of operatic writing. The first cut was the *cabaletta* (although the composer could write an effective *cabaletta* when required), overturning the need to change seemingly arbitrarily from *tempo primo* to *tempo secondo*. Denis Arnold summarizes Verdi's solutions to broadening the scope of formal conventions when he writes 'The difficulties were, in the first place, those of a musical language. Realism involves an abandonment of at least the most improbable operatic conventions, the inevitable succession of *cavatina* and *cabaletta*, and the reliance on *aria*' (17). He approaches a description of my own model of the device, but contemporary scholars certainly never considered that particular word-music configuration as *parola scenica*.

> Verdi, never a revolutionary, had yet more or less solved these problems [of operatic conventions] in *Rigoletto*, with its single true full scale *aria* ('Caro nome') and its exploitation of a peculiarly subtle accompanied recitative and *arioso*, the result of the development of techniques known to Rossini and Donizetti where, by using the orchestra to give continuity of melody, the action could continue naturally without the protagonists singing in clear cut patterns (17).

What Arnold describes in the last sentence above is nothing other than *parola scenica* as I define it. He also touches upon the notion of the dramatic narrative intent spilling over, by association, into the untexted sections of the operatic narrative:

> Finally, there was a need for a new orchestration. Again, *Rigoletto* had lead the way. The composer who uses the low register of the clarinet and the high one of a muted double bass to convey the sinister atmosphere of the assassin's alley near the Mincio is ready for further adventures in sound. It was in *La traviata* that these succeeded (17).

Besides discarding the *cabaletta*, Verdi's art gradually evolved generally, as I noted elsewhere. He abolished trouser-roles (the last one was Tebaldo, the page in *Don Carlos*), he developed a new formal syntax, and disposed with the Rossini-*crescendo* in the body of his operas. To summarize: in the preface to my research I noted that Verdi's theatre would privilege the dramatic *in addition to* the purely musical. Put differently, he would authorize his listener to experience the realist effects he created dramatically, while keeping the music above his threshold of awareness, but never at the expense of the dramatic.

How does Verdi accomplish the collision of musical and dramatic intent, in terms of opera's evolution as extension of dramatic literature?

Firstly, he reaches for realism by way of emphasizing the importance of the dramatic significance of the text. De Van comments that 'The new reality that emerged in the nineteenth century, at least in the works of farsighted composers like Verdi and Wagner, was that words and music must yield pride of place to an idea overarching them both, that of drama' (13). Thus Verdi's primary concern is the word, as William Berger reminds us à propos of *La forza del destino* (316).

Secondly, because Verdi always engages dramatically with an existing reality, his style of communication can almost be described as that to which Lukács refers as *reportage* (Lukács is careful to articulate very carefully the distinction between *reportage* and *portrayal* in his *Essays on Realism*). As such, it 'makes the right connection between the general and the particular, the necessary and the contingent, that is appropriate to its particular purpose. Genuine reportage is in no way content simply to depict the facts; its descriptions always present a connection, disclose causes and propose consequences' (49). However, although Verdi's style of communication may be described as reportage, in some respects he also tends towards portrayal, because he transforms form into content through the strategy of *parola scenica*, and content into form, which Lukács maintains is characteristic of portrayal. And not only does he transform form into content by means of *parola scenica*, as we have seen, he also does so by combining existing, conventional forms into new ones, in the process ensuring that such a newly emerged tautological formal construction is always bigger than the sum of its parts. Lukács writes of something that becomes art when it has become

'emptied of meaning' (221). William Berger refers more than once to Verdi's form dissolving into content, and *vice versa:* '"La luce langue" [from *Macbeth* (1847, revised 1865)] is hard to categorize; it has the feel of recitative, *cavatina* and *cabaletta* all at the same time' (161); and 'The [. . .] duet [in Act II Scene 1 of *Il corsaro*] begins in an almost courtly atmosphere, slowly becoming wilder as the two cast off formalities and reveal their true feelings. [. . .] It is a study in formal disintegration towards anarchy' (182).

Verdi was a traditionalist. He would not allow formal structures to 'dissolve into anarchy', as Berger suggests. Scholars describe this process in operatic evolution variously, but the salient features remain constant. De Van writes that

> Massimo Mila has noted that in *Otello* it is possible to distinguish five ways in which words and music are linked together: the traditional melody of song; *cantabile* and *declamato melodico*, corresponding to the mixed types of the *arioso* and accompanied recitative; traditional recitative; and, finally, *parlato*, an extreme form of simple recitative (30).

But Berger also argues that '[. . . t]he Prologue [to *Simon Boccanegra*] is indeed dark and sinister in tone. Beginning an opera *with a conversation* was unheard of at the time, but is the perfect signal that we should listen closely for subtleties rather than expect bombast' (291).

I believe that both scholars are partly correct, but that neither, unfortunately, has considered *parola scenica* as an alternative. This is not unexpected. They use a different frame of reference from mine. While being unaware of what I believe he is describing, Adorno might have been reading my mind when he wrote

> In *Das Liebesverbot* there are occasional examples of the custom borrowed from the *Spieloper* of giving the principal melodic part to the orchestra while the singing voice 'declaims' in accompaniment, for example, by holding on to a note. One might hazard the guess that opera composers such as Rossini and Auber even owe their reputation for wit to idiosyncrasies of this sort. What was probably intended by this was that the *Spieloper*, without sacrificing its purely musical texture, was able by this means to allow the meaning of the words to filter through and so to relax something of the stylistic rigour of grand opera for the benefit of empirical existence (57).

I believe Verdi's greatest achievement and contribution to the advance of opera to have been the liberating expansiveness of *parola scenica*. I have described in detail some of the significant music-narrative events that may herald the appearance of *parola scenica* in a score: 1) a new libretto format presented in asymmetrical verse or prose in which the commonplaces of an everyday life are elevated to poetic status; 2) an innovative treatment of the *banda*, absorbing it into the operatic narrative, and dressing it with plot carrying devices; 3)

a search for a means of hiding and/or replacing expected formal structures; 4) a tendency towards renewing the *aria*, turning it away from a public who traditionally looked forward to it as a pyrotechnical vocal showcase, and towards the character, as a means of introspection; and 5) an on-going search for new compositional techniques that would ensure audibility of all plot related data, at all times. Key words seem to be 'new,' 'innovative,' 'renewing,' 'replacing' and 'search for,' all of which imply something as yet unknown, or a new angle of presenting the operatic text so that the content acquires a fresh aspect devoid of cliché. Accordingly, *parola scenica* presents on different levels of complexity, and one incidence of it may be more or less densely complex than another. Essentially, however, it remains a musico-textual device that impacts on the human intellect and emotions at once as it furthers the plot (*reportage*) and engage in poetic description (portrayal) simultaneously, as opposed to static sections (such as *aria*, *cavatina*, *cabaletta*, *strette* and other ensembles) which are purely descriptive, and in which the plot is typically not developed.

As I reach this point in my research, it is time to review the reading of *parola scenica*, and to measure it against other models. My narrative model as opposed to the pictorial model others have developed reads

> From a *textual/dramatic perspective* it is the displacement and fragmentation of the primary melody by a frequently but not necessarily monotonal *quasi-recitativo* vocal style, consisting of the setting of asymmetrical, unrhymed verse building plot. *Structurally*, it is those sections in which expected formal conventions are replaced with a musico-poetic hybrid that develops the foregrounded plot in asymmetrical, unrhymed verse, the background of which is musical commentary with a scenic quality. This background functions like the soundtrack of a film, underpinning the action while significantly adding to the drama. These backgrounded instances of the primary melody also provide subliminal links that sonically connect distant scenes. From the *macroformal* perspective, *parola scenica* represents the extension of both musical and textual narrative sections.

I have referred constantly to Fabrizio della Seta's article 'Parola scenica' *in Verdi e nella critica verdiana* in which he had documented all descriptions of *parola scenica* he could locate by 1994. There will have been new developments in this field since, of course, including my own model. I conclude the analytical section of this thesis by comparing my model of *parola scenica* with the ones Della Seta listed in 1994, to see if my notion eclipses, overlaps with, amplifies or even replaces any of the others, but ultimately with the aim of finding out if my model dovetails with the body of research on the topic, perhaps to provide a better understanding of a term, the meaning of which we might never know, because Verdi is no longer with us to clarify the matter.

Regardless of the meaning they attach to the term, all scholars accept *parola scenica* to be a solid ontological principle clearly defined in Verdi's mind.

It goes without saying that my model of the device, as do all the others, assumes the solid existence in Verdi's mind of *parola scenica* as a practical tool to reach his operatic end of 'making an effect'. Verdi uses that phrase so often that it is superfluous to quote many instances of it, but one specific example that springs immediately to mind is the letter the composer wrote to Salvadore Cammarano I quoted elsewhere in connection with the arrangement of the text for Act IV Scene 1 in *La battaglia di Legnano*, where he wrote 'Do as you think best, but remember that this scene must make an effect' (Osborne 55-56).

While older scholars used the term freely, they remain vague about its meaning, regarding it as almost self-evident. From the sixties onwards attempts were made to establish one analytical definition, often based on a specific compositional, isolated procedure and in a specific segment of operatic text.

Since the sixties the pictorial interpretation of *parola scenica* has been particularly highly regarded by its proponents. They tend to defend that model acutely, and I have found in that interpretation little room for other views of the evidence. However, it is easy to subscribe to a particular model, especially if one seems to find one form of the device emerging frequently, and even more so when one has made such a discovery and is particularly excited by it. While this is no doubt true in my own case also, I have found the proponents of the pictorial model of *parola scenica* hard to persuade, but I am hoping that the model of *parola scenica* I have developed might in the fullness of time gain the following I think it deserves.

For some, *parola scenica* is an essentially verbal statement (and some overemphasize the theatrical rather than the literary specificity of the concept), while others see it as an interplay between word and music, although they make no attempt to describe to what extent it applies to the dominion of music.

To recognize what I have come to regard as 'true' *parola scenica* according to my interpretation of the device, one has to accept that it does not exist only in the literary, or only in the vocal musical text. It is without a doubt mostly an interplay between word and music, except when it applies to the orchestra. But even in that lies a subtle interplay between word and music, if only for the reason that

the voice happens to be silent at a given moment, but continues to impact on the whole. This is one point where my interpretation of the device does what other models do not do. It spells out the extent to which voice and orchestra relate to each other, and even how the orchestra behaves when there is no verbal text present, and which one, accordingly, cannot strictly call *parola scenica*, because there are no *parole* to speak of in the equation. To summarize, then, *parola scenica* is not an essentially verbal statement. It may be a verbal statement that interrelates with the orchestra, or two voices that interrelate with each other, or it might lie in the manner in which the orchestra carries both poetic and noetic intent when there is no voice present on which to rely for noetic input. And although *parola scenica* relies on the literary value of the text, its main impact is theatrical, because opera is a theatrical medium.

***Parola scenica* is sometimes read as the oral and/or musical operatic text unified into one element, but more often it is read as an element underscoring a peak in intensity, [. . .] clarifying dramatic context, and in particular, underscoring critical moments in the action.**

Although *parola scenica* does underscore a peak in intensity, clarifies dramatic context, and highlights critical moments in the action, it does not necessarily rely on oral and/or musical operatic text unified into one element; it relies on the different messages carried by different elements in the ensemble for its effect.

Often *parola scenica* is read as a characteristic element resulting from a literary or linguistic deviation (particularly metrically) or from a musical deviation (rhythmically or harmonically), to heighten dramatic effect.

Parola scenica is often the result of some deviation in literary or musical text in the interests of greater dramatic impact. It is for this very reason that I argue that it is usually accompanied by significant musico-narrative events.

It is to be expected that all scholars' interpretations of the concept reflect their own interests, the direction of their own critical discourse. Critics influenced by the idealistic generation see *parola scenica*, firstly, as a pervasive dramatic declamatory feature, early on already discernible in its embryonic stages, later to culminate in *Otello*; secondly, they see it as the concept of a Verdian evolutionary theatre growing from antidramatic formalism, but already anticipating in his juvenile works the authentic musical drama of his mature style. More recent scholars reject this presupposition, believing *parola scenica* to be a dramatic stylistic hallmark of all of Verdi's opera.

It is inevitable that one's view of a concept that does not feature in the standard terminological framework for musicology and is widely disputed in any case will become clouded by one's own vision of it. In my own case this is especially true, because the notion of what Verdi might have meant by the phrase hit me 'come un baleno rapido', in Angelina's immortal words from *Cenerentola*. I could hardly contain my enthusiasm as I listened to Iago's 'Brindisi' from *Otello*, in the final stanza of which I picked up the device again, as I heard Iago's melody forming the backdrop to Cassio's drunken babbling. These two extracts from Verdi's *œuvre*, wide ranging as they are historically and stylistically, provided me with two important instances of what I interpret as *parola scenica*. The extract from *La traviata* displays the primary melody moving into the orchestra while the *parola scenica* is constructed over it in the secondary (often monotonal) voices of chorus, soloists and *comprimarii*. The extract from *Otello* provided an example of *parola scena* being constructed between two voices without involving the orchestra.

I then set myself the arduous but pleasant task of listening to the whole of Verdi's operatic output from *Oberto* all the way through *Falstaff.* When I had noted all the instances that comply with the model of *parola scenica* that had started emerging for me, I buckled down to every opera by every Italian composer I could find. My last port of call was every secular and sacred work in my own comprehensive collection by every Italian composer representative of the *ottocento* and beyond, until my bibliography resembled the catalogue of a well stocked compact disc store. I was surprised at the number of instances of what I have come to recognize as *parola scenica*, despite eminent Verdi scholar Roger Parker's warning against reading instances of my version of *parola scenica* into everything. Nevertheless, I recognized a sizeable collection of instances of the device, including ones in places where one would be least likely to find them, such as Verdi's *Inno delle Nazione*, which, after all, is not a theatrical piece.

It is safe to say, then, that my model of *parola scenica* does indeed reflect the direction of my own critical discourse. It is also safe to assume that I saw the device, to quote Della Seta, as a pervasive dramatic declamatory feature, early on already discernible in its embryonic stages, later to culminate in *Otello*. I also see it as the concept of a Verdian evolutionary theatre growing from antidramatic formalism, but already anticipating in his juvenile works the authentic musical drama of his mature style. And I tend to agree with those who believe *parola scenica* to be a dramatic stylistic hallmark of all of Verdi's opera.

The next logical question, then, must be: what does my interpretation of the device offer that other readings do not? The answer is simple: it lies in the reception of the literary-musical amalgam. All the other models of *parola scenica* are built on the technical aspects of the music-text combination, and do not make allowances for (1) the fact that Verdi imparts both poetic and noetic narrative intent simultaneously; (2) that the message interacts with the spectator on a level—that of the inner space—in a way the other models do not; (3) that this model stands or falls by how the music is defamiliarized for the public in such a way that both text and music achieve a patina of newness; and (4) that music and text engage the spectator multi-spatially, or on more than one level.

Conclusion

I conclude by formulating a brief *coda* to all the initial and intermediate stages of argument, counter-argument and engagement with evidence invited by *parola scenica* as Verdi and others used the device to approach realism in Italian opera. It remains only to pull together logically all the strands of data.

When I first realized that what I was hearing in Act I of *La traviata* was *parola scenica*, a conceptual window opened, allowing me to define the device. Yet I felt I needed to find a universal statement regarding *parola scenica*, Verdi and his art., and an opportunity offered regarding just such a statement, prompted by a passage from Thomas Mann's *Tod in Venedig:*

> Long ago, in [Aschenbach's] parental home, he had watched the sand filter through an hour-glass—he could still see, as though it stood before him, the fragile, pregnant little toy. Soundless and fine the rust-red streamlet ran through the narrow neck and made, as it declined in the upper cavity, an exquisite little vortex (70).

But it is in Lucchino Visconti's film *Death in Venice* that this passage achieves greatest expression, when Visconti and Badalucca put it as words in the mouth of the lead character, Gustav Aschenbach, shortly after he has suffered what appears to be a mild heart attack, and he finds himself in conversation with his loyal friend and retainer Felix, who has no parallel in the novel. Aschenbach says

> I remember we had one of those [hour-glasses] in my father's house. The aperture through which the sand runs is so tiny, at first it seems as if the level in the upper glass never changed. To our eyes it appears as if the sand runs out . . . only at the end. And until it does, it's not worth thinking about . . . till the last moment . . . when there's no more time . . . there's no more time left . . . *to* think about it (Visconti & Badalucco after Mann).

It is debatable whether Verdi, the reluctant revolutionary at best, could have foreseen the impact of the one element of his musical vocabulary that he verbalized as a principle only fleetingly in writing during his creative lifetime, leaving us with a riddle that we are unlikely ever to solve. But for me the notion of opera in general and *parola scenica* in particular is neatly encapsulated in the metaphor of the hourglass, an image Aristotle also used (Rowell 30). There are two globes containing the past and the future. The globes also contain, in operatic terms, those elements of the text to which I have been referring as the static elements: the arias, *cabalette*, *cavatinas*, *strette* and other ensembles. In these the poet and the composer rely on the listener's imagination, or what Linda Nochlin calls 'the stage of the mind' and Holly Watkins the spectator's 'inner space' to keep the dramatic flow active. The tiny flow of sand from the future into the past, which happens so delicately, leaving the static elements almost untouched in the globes, 'as if the sand runs out only . . . only at the end', in Aschenbach's words, represents for me the flow of *parola scenica*. The movement of the sand is so slow as to be almost imperceptible, just as cunningly obscured as the primary, backgrounded melody in *parola scenica*. Before the listener is aware of it, the level of the sand, like the plot which changes in the foreground in the primary performance space, has moved, and the story line has progressed. The time that passes as the sand flows is always the present, as Nochlin remarks: 'Realist motion is always motion captured as "now", as if perceived in a flash of vision' (29).

Post scriptum

In the 'Introduction' to his *Semantic Structures*, Ray Jackendoff anticipates questions readers might ask about the technique of semantic analysis he advocates. The last on his list of possible questions reads

> 'I'm a syntactician. Why should I get involved with all these strange semantic solutions? [. . . S]uppose the problems we're working on turn out to be purely syntactic after all—won't I have wasted my time?'.

Jackendoff's reply is simple: '[. . . T]his strategy essentially amounts to looking for a lost coin under a streetlamp [*sic*], because that's where we can see. The strategy I am adopting is to build more lamps' (*Cognition* 4).

His reply is easily translocated into musical and operatic terms, with reference to Verdi and *parola scenica*. Verdi's strategy of imparting musical narrative and dramatic intent essentially amounts to leading his subject to look for a lost coin under a street lamp, because the composer knows that is where we can see. The strategy Verdi adopts with the use of *parola scenica* is to build more lamps.

In every way that is important to us, Verdi is a composer of great simplicity. There is a tendency in musicology to overlook the obvious, and to read more into the music than the composer intended, despite warnings such as Roger Parker's, that 'the operatic text's 'multivalency' is [. . .] something to welcome; there is no need to [. . .] bend it into grand shapes' (Parker & Atlas 232). One must allow Verdi simply to speak for himself.

Finally, David Kimbell's comment, quoted at the head of this chapter, underscores again the idiosyncrasies of the pictorial model of *parola scenica*, which I describe in this thesis, and which I continue to contest here. If the hallmark of theatrical and literary realism are indeed, as Kimbell suggests, that 'understatement and naturalism were all-important in challenging the expectations of the audience and shifting their perceptions,' then a *parola scenica* based on 'exclamation, shriek, sob, gesture, [and] flamboyant theatricality' is unlikely. The original object of narrative, dramatic and musical intent in Verdi's operatic project is always to examine a slice of someone's life, amplifying it with a musical lens. One particular aspect of this musical treatment was *parola scenica*, that not only allowed Verdi to achieve greater dramatic operatic expression, but that also provided a new musical language for his successors, and hints of broader developments in all twentieth-century dramatic-literary canons.

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