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DEBORAH BURTON

ORFEO, OSMIN AND OTELLO:  
TOWARDS A THEORY OF OPERA ANALYSIS<sup>1</sup>

*In memoriam David Lewin*

The best thing of all is when a good composer, who understands the stage and is talented enough to make sound suggestions, meets an able poet, that true phoenix ... If we composers were always to stick so faithfully to our rules ... we should be concocting music as unpalatable as their libretti ...

Mozart, in a letter to his father, 13 October 1781<sup>2</sup>

I can only conclude with an apparently simple question, to which however a satisfactory answer would speak volumes: how shall we understand a single Mozart number?

James Webster<sup>3</sup>

At the outset of the twenty-first century, structuralist approaches to analyzing music are facing heavy criticism in the Academy for being 'formalist' and for avoiding more contextual and hermeneutic issues while searching for coherence and unity. The formal and harmonic constructs (among others), originally developed to analyze instrumental 'absolute' music, are, in the case of opera analysis, all the more open to debate, because the narrative content of the work is onstage for all to experience.

But perhaps the analysis of opera is the ideal *topos* for dealing with the thorny problem of coherence. The more clearly the dramatic or programmatic content is presented, the more accessible is the ensuing discourse between that content and the work's abstract structures. This article is an attempt to create a forum for that discourse by exploring the nature of operatic music, in order to better understand the tasks opera analysts face, and, by extension, the issues facing analysts of other narrative-linked repertoires.

<sup>1</sup> The author is very grateful to several colleagues for reading drafts of this article: they include the late David Lewin, Lewis Lockwood, James Webster, Peter Westergaard, Janet Schmalfeldt, and the members of Jane Bernstein's Faculty Opera Seminar.

<sup>2</sup> *Mozart's Letters: an Illustrated Selection*, trans. Emily Anderson, Boston, Bulfinch Press, 1990, 163.

<sup>3</sup> JAMES WEBSTER, *Mozart's operas and the myth of musical unity*, «Cambridge Opera Journal», 2/2, July 1990, p. 218.

Mozart's well-known statement above raises some of the fundamental questions for the opera analyst regarding the composition of opera: how much do the opera composer's 'sound suggestions' control the final result? Which 'rules' of music does Mozart feel the composer is compelled to break? How can analysts even hope to discover coherence in works where rules are broken by design? Herein, a suggested approach to these problems will be introduced, followed by an application of that theoretical paradigm to selections from Monteverdi, Mozart, and Verdi. The aim here is not to provide a one-size-fits-all system of analysis for operas of all types: rather, the more humble goal is simply to clarify the issues at hand.

## I. THE NATURE OF OPERA

Opera is a hybrid. In the centuries-long debate over the nature of the artform, few have dared to suggest that it could be understood unilaterally, as either pure drama or pure music. No opera analysis could be complete without analyzing both the drama and the music, for neither element stands alone.<sup>4</sup> At first glance, a libretto may appear similar to a play in prose or verse, but a reading or recitation<sup>5</sup> would soon prove such a resemblance illusory. In like manner, one who listens to operatic music without any knowledge of the plot, characters, or setting may find the music difficult to follow, though it be composed of the same sorts of melodies, harmonies and rhythms as other music. Only together can the two elements achieve artistic wholeness and integrity.

Multiple layers of meaning and narrative can be unearthed in all sorts of music. But because of opera's unique characteristic (the drama's unfolding before one's eyes), these issues are all the more in evidence. This visual component allows the dramatic aspects of opera to carry more perceptual weight than in other genres, even other associative ones.

One must then consider whether the increased importance of the visual element in opera makes it an equal, or even predominant, partner

<sup>4</sup> Even *Literaturoper*, plays set verbatim to music, cannot be considered as opera without taking into account the music.

<sup>5</sup> David Lewin mentioned to me that during his composition lessons with Roger Sessions, he was advised to expect, as an approximate large-scale estimate, a time increase of four to four and one-half times the amount of time a musical setting for stage would require, in comparison with a text reading. However, as Prof. Lewin pointed out, the musical setting of a Gilbert and Sullivan patter song can sometimes be quicker than a 'normal' reading.

with operatic music. The true hierarchical relation of the visual and the auditory in opera can be discerned through analogy to another multi-sensate artform: film. The test is simple: subtract music from a film and it is still a functioning art form (though not nearly as fluid an experience); indeed many films have been successful without any musical soundtrack. Subtract music from opera, however, and what remains is not viable. Conversely, subtract the visual from opera, and what remains is not only functional, but the very successful source of opera recordings.<sup>6</sup>

Therefore, if opera's uniquely distinguishing element among musical works (the visual) is less essential than its musical element, and if songs, oratorios, and other types of text-linked genres are still considered 'music', then it should follow that opera too must fall into that category.<sup>7</sup> One could thus conclude that opera is a type of music linked to drama, rather than a type of drama linked to music.

A term that Cone has utilized in describing the visual element in film, «controlling consciousness», can be applied to the role of music in opera:<sup>8</sup> one experiences music as «controlling» because, among its many effects, the speed of every stage movement, the rhythm of every line of dialogue, the range of every vocal intonation or stress is influenced, if not outrightly determined, by the musical score. The ever-present music is like a *filter* through which one perceives all the other operatic elements. The earliest term for Italian opera, «dramma per music» – «drama through or for music» – seems to suggest this hierarchical relationship.<sup>9</sup> However, concluding that music is the dominant element in our perception of opera in no way implies that it operates unilaterally. As the «controlling consciousness», operatic music must necessarily be connected to, and transformed by, the other parts of the artform.

There have been some recent, stimulating attempts to analyze opera that take into account its dramatically-linked nature. Among these, sever-

<sup>6</sup> Arthur Groos makes a similar point: «Most listeners appreciate Songs Without Words; many demonstrably prefer 'operas without words'. Nobody seems to want 'operas without music' – the mere rumor of having to sit through one provokes audience unrest in Tieck's *Der gestiefelte Kater*». ARTHUR GROOS and ROGER PARKER, *Reading Opera*, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 1988, 1.

<sup>7</sup> In this conclusion I disagree with Frits Noske, who claims that opera is a form of drama. NOSKE, *The Signifier and the Signified: Studies in the Operas of Mozart and Verdi*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1990, p. VII.

<sup>8</sup> EDWARD T. CONE, *The Composer's Voice*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1974, p. 3.

<sup>9</sup> Perhaps the popular tendency to refer to operas as simply Monteverdi's *Orfeo*, or Verdi's *Otello*, even though a composer's work is usually dependent on one or more collaborators, reflects an unconscious acceptance of this fact.

al valuable concepts have been set forth by Robert Bailey and Patrick McCreeless whose work with Wagner led McCreeless to isolate four types of tonality that interact: *classical tonality*, which involves normal tonic-dominant relations, *associative tonality*, in which keys symbolize aspects of drama, *expressive tonality*, in which ascending or descending keys express intensification or relaxation, and *directional tonality*, an interplay between two different tonal centers.<sup>10</sup> Frits Noske, on the other hand, defines a *musico-dramatic sign* as a musical unit that stresses, clarifies, invalidates, contradicts or supplies an element of the libretto.<sup>11</sup> Lastly, multi-valent opera analyses, such as those proposed by Parker, Abbate and Webster,<sup>12</sup> describe the various systems at work, especially the interaction of text and musical forms; this approach (according to Webster) «holds that the various 'domains' of an opera [...] are not necessarily congruent and may even be incompatible».<sup>13</sup>

It might be possible, however, to examine the fundamental issues at stake underneath all these perspectives, and to suggest a fresh taxonomy that could work towards resolving these apparently conflicting analytical constructs. As a further result of such an inquiry, we may discover whether or not musical coherence can be said to exist in opera: for example, if an analysis can ferret out which of Mozart's musical 'rules' have not been – or even should not be – broken, there is no logical reason why those rules cannot comprise a coherent, or even unified, organization.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>10</sup> PATRICK MCCREELESS, *Wagner's "Siegfried": Its Drama, History, and Music*, Ann Arbor, UMI Research Press, 1982, pp. 88-95, summarized in WARREN DARCY, *Wagner's "Das Rheingold"*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1993, p. 52.

<sup>11</sup> NOSKE, *The Signifier and the Signified*, p. 316.

<sup>12</sup> See CAROLYN ABBATE and ROGER PARKER, *Introduction: On Analyzing Opera*, in *Analyzing Opera: Verdi and Wagner*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1989 and WEBSTER, *Mozart's operas and the myth of musical unity*.

<sup>13</sup> WEBSTER, *Mozart's operas and the myth of musical unity*, 198. Yet Webster also concedes that «It cannot be accidental that, from *Idomeneo* on, Mozart always ended his operas in the key of the overture, always articulated the central finale in a different key, and always ended a finale in the key in which it began». *Ivi*, p. 216.

<sup>14</sup> Webster draws a clear distinction between «unity» and «coherence»: «... the distinction between 'unity' and 'coherence' ... is crucial; in essence it entails two fundamental differences of approach. First, unifying analyses tend to be reductive: both in assuming that a single criterion or domain must be primary, and all others secondary and that the aim is often literally to 'reduce' a work to some fundamental entity, such as a Schenkerian *Ursatz* or a Schoenbergian *Grundgestalt* ... Secondly, a 'unifying' analysis usually underplays the experiential aspects of music (temporal succession, rhythm, timbre, musical processes, listeners' psychology, etc.), in favour of a more nearly abstract or 'ideal' mode of understanding. By contrast, a demonstration of coherence remains compatible with adequate attention to these matters». WEBSTER, *Mozart's operas*, p. 217.

## II. THE NATURE OF OPERATIC MUSIC

Operatic *music* is a hybrid: it must make some sense both as music and as dramatic illustration.<sup>15</sup> That neither of these functions is dispensable can be demonstrated by again utilizing a process of *reductio ad absurdum*. An operatic score that pays no attention whatsoever to the plot would be like a symphony with words; on the other hand, one that ignores all musical coherence in order to accompany slavishly every nuance of the drama might approximate a poorly improvised silent-movie accompaniment. Well-made opera is – thankfully – neither of these.

To employ the perennially imperfect linguistic analogy, operatic music must both «tell the story» and be the «language» in which that tale is told.<sup>16</sup> The «language», or the organizing medium through which the content is filtered, would necessarily consist of extra-dramatic material expressed in ‘purely’ musical terms, as far as it is possible to employ that terminology. This «language» would also exhibit a coherent «grammar» that should be analyzable. Any analysis of operatic music, then, must take into account this double identity: the language of the storyteller and the content of the story, or, the organizing musical constructs and the illustrative musical material.

That languages are not neutral entities is a given, and the «language of music» follows suit: the qualities of pitches, rhythms, dynamics, etc., and their combinations may indeed have inherent (and by implication, universal) expressive qualities, but that is not the issue at hand. What is more relevant at present to a discussion of the nature of operatic music is the fact that we (the audience, the composer) can distinguish between what is music and what is not: the extent to which and the way in which these two strands of expressive meanings are intermingled, fused, or avoided – ‘hybridized’ – is the very subject of our discussion.

Perhaps another analogy can clarify these distinctions further: consider painters who paint still-lives. The medium they use is paint on canvas, just as opera composers use the medium of music. The paint is fash-

<sup>15</sup> The terms «illustration» and «illustrative» are not ideal: there does not appear to be a word available in English that adequately conveys the relationship of music to its hermeneutic content. Therefore, until a better solution is found, «illustrative» will have to serve.

<sup>16</sup> Peter Kivy also uses a linguistic analogy in reference to the passage from Mozart’s *Abduction* under discussion here: «The problem for Mozart, then, in representing Osmin’s rage, was to use musical ‘syntax’ at the boundaries of grammatical coherence, to represent human expression out of control, while still remaining within those bounds». Kivy, *Osmin’s Rage*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1988, pp. 59-60.

ioned to visually represent the real objects, but not necessarily in a purely realistic style. Although every bit of the artwork is formed from paint, some paint is to be understood as 'fruit' or 'background', some could be a fanciful and expressive overlaying design, and some may even be used to sign the artist's name. Thus, the same artistic medium – paint – serves in a variety of capacities to express both representational content and the artist's choices in how to convey that content.<sup>17</sup> In opera, where the music often refers to clearly stated dramatic material, some of the music is to be heard as representational, some as a communication medium, and some, perhaps, as the composer's signature. The color green may indeed hold intrinsic meaning, just as a major chord may; but that will not prevent a spectator from distinguishing between medium and message. One cannot say that these two concepts are equivalent, intertwined or simply related, without first recognizing their individual identities as a prerequisite step.

Those who have experience analyzing opera will object that these two 'categories' cannot, in reality, be isolated, any more than a hybrid plant can be re-divided into its progenitors. The extreme states of pure organization and pure illustration are rarely met (the only instance of the latter that springs to mind is the dramatic pause).<sup>18</sup> More importantly, it is in this *interaction* of functions – the solutions that a composer finds to musico-dramatic problems – that gives operatic scores their richness. For example, a composer might employ a non-standard musical organization – an altered sonata form, perhaps – distorted in some way to reflect an aspect of the drama, that would not negate the adapted form's usefulness as an organizational factor. In this case, then, it would be foolish to ignore the dramatic distortions and impose a predetermined mold. A form or a rhythm that has a dramatic association still functions, after all, as a form or a rhythm.

So why pursue these distinctions? Perhaps the only individuals served by such a total division of functions would either be undeconstructed music theorists driven to search blindly for musical unity alone, or authors of program notes ferreting out illustrative events about which

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<sup>17</sup> The author realizes that the word «choices» may be problematic and can be taken to mean only «conscious choice». However, it should be understood in this case to include a wider spectrum of compositional «inspiration», such as unconscious choice, discovery, and invention.

<sup>18</sup> It could be argued that, because there are also dramatic pauses in music having no explicit dramatic narrative, this point cannot hold. However, one might respond to such an argument that there must be some *implied* dramatic reason for that pause, even if it is expressed in musical terms alone. Again, the author is grateful to David Lewin for pointing this out.

to alert concertgoers. (This author confesses to having served in both capacities). But the goal of this discussion is to explore and delineate the issues composers must face, and to discover how they resolve them. We cannot truly appreciate, for instance, how cleverly Verdi used a certain chord *both* to signify a character and to complete a coherent tonal progression, without our recognizing that it was a double achievement to do so.

In addition, there are some musical tools that seem designed especially to straddle both types of function, such as *genre*. In such a case, the apparent conflict can sometimes be resolved by more clearly defining the tool itself. For example, the *genre* of an aria (such as a 'rage' aria) entails certain traditional textual forms and often informs a certain formal patterning; therefore, *genre* would seem to be an organizational element. But, examining the situation further, one can see that the composer *chose* a particular *genre* for illustrative reasons. Therefore, while the *genre* itself can be considered organizational, the *choice of that genre* for the dramatic situation at hand is illustrative.<sup>19</sup> As we shall see below, the 'choice of' modifier is particularly helpful in unsnarling numerous operatic analytical knots.

What about the musical tool *leitmotif*, which would appear to serve both musical and dramatic masters? In sorting this out, the analyst can often make a distinction between individual leitmotifs (which can represent characters, objects, ideas, situations) and the basic motivic shapes, or other qualities, from which many individual leitmotifs derive. The musical tool can then become redefined as two separate tools – one specific, one general – which makes it possible to regard the former as illustrative and the latter as organizational. But once again, the composer's *choice* of even a basic motivic shape may indicate an extra-musical consideration.

One might imagine that, when composers first approach their libretti, they would search for ways in which their music could best serve the dramatic narrative and its presentation. A new musical score might accomplish any or all of the following: enhance the atmosphere or mood, demonstrate local color, express emotional content or character, represent the physical stage action, convey verbal and textual content or identify characters, objects or thematic ideas in a leitmotivic way. The composer would then utilize various musical means to carry out some or all

<sup>19</sup> Again, the term «choice» will include here more than conscious choice, as in note 17 above.



of these illustrative functions (and might even do so in an indirect or ironic manner). A by-product of this process is that there will remain musical elements in an operatic score that are *not* outrightly affected by dramatic concerns. Those unaffected elements are available to be a source of musical organization or coherence; they comprise those which, to paraphrase Mozart, are the musical rules left unbroken.<sup>20</sup>

### III. I AND O FUNCTIONS

Again, the aim here is not to dictate a formalistic analytic prescription for every opera analysis. Instead, terminology and procedural guidelines that might serve to clarify some fundamental analytical issues are offered as a *first step* towards a more comprehensive theory of opera analysis.<sup>21</sup>

#### Definitions

1a) **I-function** - any illustrative task performed by an element of the opera. Example: *the presentation of verbal or textual content*.

1b) **O-function** - any organizational task performed by an element of the opera. Example: *defining of a structural unit of the opera*.

2a) **IM-function** - any illustrative task performed by an element of the operatic music. Example: *the presentation of musical elements that express verbal or textural content* (perhaps through text-painting).

2b) **OM-function** - any organizational task performed by an element of the operatic music. Example: *defining of a structural unit of the opera by musical means* (perhaps through the establishment of a tonality in which the unit begins and ends.).

3) **M-tool** - any musical tool, which can be used to carry out either I-functions or O-functions. Examples: *instrumentation, harmonic syntax*.

3a) **IM-tool** - any musical tool used to carry out illustrative tasks. Example: in «Voi che sapete» from *Le Nozze di Figaro*, Mozart uses various

<sup>20</sup> Abbate has recently explored the related but distinct issues of «narrative» and «voice»; although her scope is wider than operatic music, she reaches a conclusion parallel to the present one in explicating her conception of musical narration: «To see how music might narrate, paradoxical as the formulation may seem, we must see how it does *not* enact actions from a nonmusical world, but is instead non-congruent with that world in *retelling* it». CAROLYN ABBATE, *Unsung Voices*, Princeton, Princeton University Press 1991, p. 27.

<sup>21</sup> One of those terms, «tool», should not be confused with «analytical tool» here, it refers to any creative tool used by the composer or any of the work's collaborators.

musical tools to illustrate the dramatic situation (i.e., Cherubino is singing a song). One of these musical tools is *instrumentation*: pizzicato strings imitate the sound of the guitar that Susanna is supposed to be plucking as 'accompaniment' onstage. Therefore, *instrumentation* is an illustrative musical (IM-) tool.

3b) **OM-tool** - any musical tool used to carry out organizational tasks. Example: in «Voi che sapete» an ABA' form is utilized to organize the operatic number.<sup>22</sup>

There are also dramatic tools (D-tools), which can also be applied to O- or I-functions, thus giving rise to:

4a) **ID-tools** - any dramatic tool used to carry out illustrative tasks. Example: *stage properties*. Susanna's onstage guitar indicates that she is accompanying Cherubino's song.

4b) **OD-tool** - any dramatic tool used to carry out organizational tasks. Example: *recurrence* (a dramatic repetition that satisfies expectancy). Cherubino has given Susanna a copy of his song earlier in the opera (just prior to the Cherubino's first aria «Non so piu' cosa son», which is *not* meant to be a sung song!), so the audience knows of its existence. When that song is finally performed, it constitutes a recurrence, satisfying expectancy.

Of primary interest to opera analysts are the M-tools, which are the composer's working materials. Most of the musical tools that are employed in dramatic music (melody, rhythm, etc.), are identical to those used in so-called 'absolute' music, although some are applied most often to vocal issues. The cross-pollination between text-linked and non-text-linked music is so great that, this author believes, the composer's palette of musical tools – his or her bag of tricks – is essentially the same in both cases. For example, a melodic line written for the violin might be imitating or be inspired by a traditionally vocal lament; or a vocal line might contain a theme that could have served equally to organize a whole section of symphonic instrumental music. Thus it would follow that the same M-tools could be used for either of the two types of functions of operatic music. Included in this list are elements mentioned by Webster,

<sup>22</sup> As we shall see below, the form of this song is organizational, but the selection of this form was, in fact, illustrative. In other words, Mozart's use of the ABA' form, with its clear repetitions, also helps to tell us that Cherubino is singing a song within the context of the opera.

Abbate and Parker:<sup>23</sup> rhythmic topoi, instrumentation, tessitura, genre, tempi, associative tonality, etc.<sup>24</sup>

The following alphabetical listing of M-tools is simultaneously incomplete and redundant. It is incomplete because the roster can be as long as the composer (or the analyst) is imaginative; it is redundant because some of these tools incorporate or presuppose others. Notwithstanding, this sample itemization reflects some of the tools more commonly used in tonal vocal music. Also included are three Greek-derived terms (*chresis*, *lepsis*, and *metabole*), whose adaptations to this model are set out below.

### M-tools:

*articulation*

*cadences* (or lack thereof)

*chresis* (pitch class isolated from harmonic or rhythmic context)

*consonance - dissonance polarity* (on all structural levels)

*counterpoint*

*design*<sup>25</sup>

*dynamics*

*form*

*genre*

*harmony*

*harmonic syntax* (on all structural levels)

*hypermeter*<sup>26</sup>

*instrumentation*

*intervallic-content-and-interval-class*

*lepsis* (vocal tessitura)

<sup>23</sup> WEBSTER, *Mozart's Operas*, pp. 198 and 204.

<sup>24</sup> *Ivi*, p. 210. Webster claims these 'associative' uses of tonality in Mozart: «D for high-born sentiments (or parodies of same); the 'simple' keys C, F and G for 'buffa' numbers, E flat for deeply-felt utterances, A for love-duets (or parodies)».

<sup>25</sup> The terms «structure», «form» and «design» are derived from FELIX SALZER, *Structural Hearing*, reprint ed., New York, Dover, 1962, pp. 220-254. «Design» is the organization of themes, motives, rhythms, textures and other elements of the compositional surface (although «large-scale design» operates on the middleground).

<sup>26</sup> The terms «hypermeter» and «phrase structure» are used in the senses given in WILLIAM ROTHSTEIN, *Phrase Rhythm in Tonal Music*, New York, Schirmer, 1989, pp. 12-13: «hypermeter» is the combination of measures on a metrical basis, including both the recurrence of equal-sized measure groups and a definite pattern of alternation between strong and weak measures; «phrase structure» is the coherence of musical passages on the basis of their total musical content: melodic, harmonic and rhythmic.

*melodic direction*

*metabole* (transition from one rhythm to the next; ritardandos, accelerandos, fermatas, etc.)

*meter*

*mode*

*motion to remote / related keys*

*motives and primary motivic materials*

*phrase structure*

*register*

*rhythm*

*rhythmic topoi*<sup>27</sup>

*scales* (diatonic, chromatic, other collections)

*structure*

*style*

*tempo*

*texture*

*tonality* (including McCreless' four types of tonality: classical, associative, expressive, and directional)

The audible surface of operatic music presents combinations of the above tools, employed both for OM- and IM-functions. In order for the analyst to assert a type of function served by any particular tool, it is first necessary to clarify what the IM-functions are, and then determine how they are being carried out. The following unprioritized list, derived from discussion above, shows the various ways in which a drama can be illustrated musically in an opera.

**IM-functions:**

1. presentation of atmosphere or mood
2. presentation of local or historical color
3. presentation of emotional content and character
4. presentation of physical stage action
5. presentation of verbal and textual content (including stage directions)<sup>28</sup>

<sup>27</sup> These are, as defined by Allanbrook, traditional patterns of meter, tempo and musical phrasing with specific hermeneutic connotations. See WYE JAMISON ALLANBROOK, *Rhythmic Gesture in Mozart: "Le nozze di Figaro" and "Don Giovanni"*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1983.

<sup>28</sup> Stage directions include not only physical actions, but also expressive indications for sections of text.

6. presentation and/or identification of characters, objects, events or thematic ideas.

A composer's individual style and historico-cultural milieu will determine to a great extent which and to what extent these functions become utilized, and which M-tools do the job.<sup>29</sup> The wide disparity of M-tools available to and employed by Monteverdi, Mozart and Verdi will be seen below.

Further, the object of an IM-function illustration, and the illustrative tool that carries it out, might not have a direct relationship: indirect or ironic musical expression could be used to 'editorialize' upon the item. An example of this might be a tragic scene accompanied by mirthful music, expressing the composer's ironic stance (Puccini's *Gianni Schicchi* begins in such a way). A meaningful musical quotation from another work would be another case. These indirect illustrations can be considered to form the 'comment application', represented as follows: C(I) M-tool.

#### IV. APPLICATIONS TO THE REPERTOIRE

##### A. *Orfeo*

The climactic dramatic moment of Monteverdi's *L'Orfeo* occurs in the fourth act, after Orfeo has successfully charmed Pluto, lord of the Underworld, into restoring to him his dead beloved, Euridice. The catch, of course, is that the poet-musician must not look behind him to see if Euridice has really been allowed to follow him out. He does peek and, as this tragic scene unfolds, Monteverdi expresses Orfeo's extreme mood swings, from happiness, to doubt, to fear, to love (when he sees Euridice), to confusion about losing her again. In the present terminology, IM function 3, presentation of emotional content and character, is in play.

The extant score of *Orfeo* from Monteverdi's era was not written for the opera's Mantuan premiere in February 1607, but it is rather a commemorative book printed two years later in Venice (some of the score indications are written in past tense).<sup>30</sup> Despite what may seem to the mod-

<sup>29</sup> Often an opera will be based on a pre-existing work whose author will have found literary or theatrical solutions for some of the above I-functions. A large part of the process that transforms such a work into a libretto is the search for new operatic means to these ends.

<sup>30</sup> For example, «Questo Canto fu concertato al suono de tutti gli stromenti» [«This

ern eye to be a shortage of technical directions for the performing musicians, the written instructions included are more detailed than the norms of the era. For example, at the moment Orfeo turns and sees Euridice, the score indicates that he is to sing «O dolcissimi lumi» [«O sweetest eyes»] accompanied only by a wooden organ. This creates the most affective (and effective) hushed moment of recognition before the chaos descends. It is not hard to imagine a lesser composer setting this moment as a boisterous, despairing exclamation. (In fact, Monteverdi's solution is reminiscent of the scene that his near-contemporary, Shakespeare, wrote in *A Winter's Tale*, Act V, scene iii: King Leontes of Sicily finds the statue of his wife Hermione has become the living woman herself and exclaims with the utmost simplicity: «O! she's warm»).

Monteverdi's stunning use of *instrumentation* as an IM-tool is perhaps only eclipsed by his manipulation of *style*. The passage begins with Orfeo marching confidently out of Hades; his music begins with the text «Qual honor di te sia degno». The music here is of a regular meter and rhythm, and is strophic (each stanza utilizes the same melody and accompaniment, and is bordered by ritornelli). In short, he is singing a happy, marching song of praise to his lyre. But Orfeo stops 'singing' when he arrives at the word «ma» (or «but»: a tell-tale word in operatic arias);<sup>31</sup> «Ma mentre io canto oimè che m'assicura ch'ella mi segua?» [«But while I am singing, alas, what assures me that she is following me?»] [See Example 1] Orfeo is now expressing doubt, and is now 'speaking' or 'reciting'; so the musical *style* reverts to the then-new form of recitative. Gone are the steady rhythm and meter, ritornelli, verses, all of it. (The text also demonstrates that Orfeo knows he was singing, not speaking). It is the illustrative use of *style* that analysts might fix on to explain this situation best.

Example 1: change to recitative in Act IV of Monteverdi's *Orfeo*

\* change here

E nel candido seno De la mia Donn' oggi farò raccolto Ma

song was performed to the sound of all the instruments») is the indication above the first-act chorus «Vieni Imeneo».

<sup>31</sup> One thinks of the «ma» in Rossini's «Una voce poco fa», from the *Barber of Seville*, that heralds a coloratura avalanche.

Continued: Example 1

mentre io canto oi mè chi m'assicura Ch'ella mi segua

ohimè chi mi nasconde De l'amate pupille il dolce lume?

Perhaps it might be illuminating to discuss how the M-tools *meter* and *form* are employed here: the decision Monteverdi made to switch from strict to free meter and from recurring stanzas to through-composed recitative might at first seem to be a simple change from organizational to illustrative functions. Indeed, the strophically organized sections with a steady beat certainly do organize the musical material for the listener. Yet, this “regular” section is as equally illustrative as the next, freer one, since it depicts Orfeo’s triumphant song and his march out of Hades. How can we resolve this seeming dilemma? By recognizing, in fact, that the *choice* of these M-tools is illustrative, not necessarily the M-tools themselves.

At the beginning of the recitative section, when Orfeo’s negative emotions first come to the fore (as shown in Example 1), dissonant melodic intervals and increased use of accidentals occur; for example, his first «oimè» of this section is set to a descending tritone C to F#. His next «ohimè» is again set to a tritone but one step higher, from D to G#. Thus the *melodic direction* is illustrative here in two ways: the «ohimè»s descend, mimicking a sighing motion, yet they rise in sequence, showing Orfeo’s increased emotional anxiety. *Consonance - dissonance polarity* also plays an important illustrative role, especially in the contrast between the more consonant first part and this more chromatically altered second section.

Other IM-tools can certainly be found in this passage. *Dynamics* are not, of course, indicated in the score; but by altering the instrumentation, as with the use of the lone wooden organ, these too carry out the illustrative functions. Example 2 contains a fine example of IM function 5, pre-

Example 2: Monteverdi, *Orfeo*, Act IV: «Danzeranno co' giri hor tardi hor presti»

sensation of verbal and textual content. Here, the M-tool *melodic direction* is utilized in Orfeo's phrase «Danzeranno co' giri hor tardi hor presti» [«twirls now slow and now fast»]: his vocal line, an example of text painting, literally runs in loops for the word «giri». The vocal *rhythm* also reflects the words «slow» and «fast». Later, *melodic direction* expresses the scene's emotional content (IM function 3 again), as Orfeo becomes more and more terrified: after hearing a loud, offstage noise, his vocal line rises a full octave, from F to f.

The next step in this process is to evaluate the remaining M-tools for coherence, and the M-tools *harmony* and *cadences* in this scene provide instructive analytical riddles. Clearly, because of the era in which the piece was written, those terms can only be applied loosely. Nevertheless, in the first 'song' section, the tonality is centered around G (F# is indicated in the signature) and the harmonic atmosphere is quasi-major; at the word «ma», however, where Orfeo's doubts begin to take hold, the continuo part gains a Bb, creating minor harmonies above the Gs in the bass [Example 1], and after Orfeo turns to look, he gets his own Bb in the 'key' signature. One could therefore suggest that M-tools *harmony* (or even *mode*, in the modern sense of major vs. minor) are functioning as IM-tools.

Although it would be an exaggeration to speak of true cadences here, the harmony at the end of Orfeo's 'song' (just before the «ma») strongly suggests one: it consists of a D in the continuo below an A in the vocal line, moving to a G with a raised third (B natural) under a B in the voice [Example 1]. This marks, for the audience, the end of the 'song' and thus could be considered an illustrative tool. But a similar device occurs in a radically different dramatic moment: as Orfeo decides to «obey Love», immediately preceding the offstage noise: a D in the continuo, supporting an A in the voice, moves to Gs in both parts. At the end of the speech, as well, Orfeo's confused question, «Ma qual Eclissi ohime v'oscura?» [«But what eclipses, alas, obscure you?»] is set to a clear 'cadential' move from E with a raised third to A (minor). [Example 3] One would think that Orfeo's question would be presented in a more



Example 3: Monteverdi, *Orfeo*: «Ma qual Eclissi ohimè v'oscura?»

Ma qual Eclissi ohimè v'oscura?

open-ended harmonic setting, but it is not. In short, these 'cadences' mark off sections of the scene, helping to organize it, and their presence appears to have little to do with Orfeo's state of mind or the dramatic situation; their dramatic *irrelevance* allows the M-tool *cadences*, and possibly the M-tool *harmonic syntax*, to be considered OM-tools. [Example 4 contains a translation of the text]

Various M-tools remain unexamined here. Some would ultimately be discarded as irrelevant to the inquiry; others may yield consistent organizational elements. But that is for some future analyst to ponder, as the discussion now turns to Mozart's depiction of a raging Turk.

B. *Osmin*

The passage «Drum beim Barte des Propheten» is indeed in the same tempo, but with quick notes; just as Osmin's rage gradually increases, there comes (just when the aria seems to be at an end) the *allegro assai*, which is in a totally different measure and in a different key; this is bound to be very effective. For just as a man in such a towering rage oversteps all the bounds of order, moderation and propriety and completely forgets himself, so must the music too forget itself. But as passions, whether violent or not, must never be expressed in such a way as to excite disgust, and as music, even in the most terrible situations, must never offend the ear, but must please the hearer, or in other words must never cease to be music, I have gone from F (the key in which the aria is written), not into a remote key, but into a related one, not however, into its nearest relative D minor, but into the more remote A minor.<sup>32</sup>

Mozart, in a letter to his father  
26 September, 1781

This oft-quoted letter from Mozart describing Osmin's first aria from *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* might be of help in answering Webster's challenge cited above, «how shall we understand a single Mozart number?» The composer is explaining here exactly how far he is willing

<sup>32</sup> This translation is quoted from KIVY, *Osmin's Rage*, pp. 59-60.

Example 4: translation of "Qual honor di te sia degno" from *Orfeo*

Italian	English
[Ritornello]	
Qual honor di te sia degno	What honor is worthy of you
Mia cetra onnipotente,	my omnipotent lyre
S'hai nel Tartareo Regno,	If you were in the Kingdom of Hades
Piegar potuto ogni indurata mente?	able to melt every hardened heart?
[Ritornello]	
Luogo havrai fra le più belle	You will have a place among the most beautiful
Imagini celesti,	heavenly images,
Ond' al tuo suon le stelle,	Where to your sound the stars
Danzeranno co' giri hor tardi hor presti.	will dance with twirls now slow and now fast.
[Ritornello]	
Io per te felice a pieno	You have made me completely happy
Vedrò ò'amato volto	I will see the beloved face
E nel candido seno	and in the pale breast
De la mia Donn'oggi sarò raccolto	of my wife today I will be gathered
Ma mentre io canto oimè che m'assocura	but while I sing, alas, what assures me
Ch'ella mi segua? ohimè che mi nasconde	that she is following me? Alas, what hides from me
De l'amate pupille il dolce lume?	the sweet sight of her beloved eyes?
Forse d'invidia punte	Perhaps stung by envy
Le Dietà d'Averno	the Gods of Hades
Perch'io non sia qua giù felice a pieno	so that I would not be fully happy here below
Mi tolgono il mirarvi	forbid me to gaze upon
Luci beate e liete	your blessed smiling eyes
che sol co'l sguardo bear potete?	and let only others delight in them?
Ma che temi mio core?	But what does my heart fear?
Ciò che vieta Pluton comanda Amore	That which Pluto forbids, Love commands
A Nume più possente	The most powerful God
Che vince huomini e Dei	who controls men and gods
Ben ubbidir dovrei	I must obey
[Qui si fa strepito dietro la tela.]	[Here is heard a noise offstage]
Ma che odo? ohimè lasso	But what do I hear? Alas unhappy one
S'arman forse a miei danni	Perhaps they take up arms against me
Con tal furor le furie innamorate	with the fury of the furies in love
Per rapirmi il mio ben ed io l'consento?	to steal from me my love and I consented?
[Qui si volta Orfeo]	[Here he turns]
O dolcissimi lumi io pur vi veggio io pur	O most sweet eyes, I do see you, I do
Ma qual Eclissi ohime v'oscura?	But what eclipses, alas, obscure you?

to go to musically illustrate a man in a rage: Mozart first increases the rhythm (not the tempo) and then, after a false ending and two lines of dialogue, he breaks into a surprising section in a new key and meter. These musical manipulations serve to portray perfectly the dramatic situation. However, Mozart does not want to 'offend the ear', and for him, music must not «cease to be music»; in other words, some rules cannot be broken. Therefore, in the last section, he will jump to a key far enough away to cause shock – but not distress – in his listeners.

In an initial attempt to relate these choices to the present terminology, it would appear that Mozart has utilized the M-tools *rhythm*, *meter* and *motion to remote/related keys* for illustrative purposes; specifically, as in the previous example, the composer is utilizing them to carry out IM function 3, the presentation of emotional content and character. This is clearly the case for the IM-tool *rhythm*. However in the case of *meter*, the picture is not so simple. In the first part of the aria the meter is common time, and this does not vary; in the second part, the time signature is 3/4, which remains to the end. Except for some brief recitative-like interpolations (to be discussed below), the meter is steady. More importantly, the steadiness is reinforced by dynamics: in the second part the main beats are often adorned with *fp* or *sfp*: no rules have been broken here. It is rather Mozart's *choice* of «a totally different measure» that is illustrative, while the meter itself continues to organize the music normally. In the case of *motion to remote/related keys*, Mozart's decision to move from F major to A minor is clearly illustrative. Even in the body of the first part (mm. 55 ff.), Mozart sets the return of the text on an octave-accompanied D (not F), in the key of G minor. However, G minor becomes the ii of the tonic, and the section ends normally in F major. In addition, the move to A minor at the end of Osmin's aria seems less outrageous when examined in context: it is followed by Belmonte's recitative and aria in A major. Therefore, one might conclude that Mozart has declined to break the rules of *harmonic syntax* on a deep level, and *harmonic syntax* can then be termed an OM-tool, at least provisionally.

In Osmin's aria, the character's rage gradually increases, and many elements of the musical score serve to illustrate this, not just the few that Mozart mentions. For example, as one notes in Example 5, there are numerous rising sequences – mostly 5-6 motions – often supporting vocal lines with rising lines and/or large leaps. Here *melodic direction* is illustrative.<sup>33</sup>

*Metabole* comes into play in the short recitative-like sections, which

<sup>33</sup> Other examples occur in measures 22 ff., 36 ff., 48 ff., 66 ff., 75 ff., 89 ff., 101 ff., and 109 ff.

Example 5: Mozart, *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*: «Solche hergelaufne Laffen», sequence with 5-6 motions, mm. 12 ff

The image shows two systems of musical notation. The first system includes a vocal line for Osmin and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line has lyrics: '-fen, mag ich vor den Teu-fel nicht, mag ich vor den Teu-fel nicht,'. The piano accompaniment features a prominent 5-6 motion pattern in the right hand, with dynamics like *f* and *fp*. Fingerings 5 and 6 are indicated for both hands. The second system continues the vocal and piano parts with similar 5-6 motions and dynamics.

emphasize Osmin's unsteadiness (mm. 30-31 and 83-84 on the text «doch mich trägt kein solch Gesicht»). Other M-tools that could be assigned to illustrative tasks include, in alphabetical order, *dynamics* (the orchestral crescendo at the aria's end), *hypermeter* (no real sense of hypermeter until «Eure Tücken, ...» m. 31 ff.), *lepsis* (vocal tessitura) and *register* (Example 6 shows Osmin's repeated, very high leaps up to an E above middle C at mm. 154 ff.) These last can be compared to the extremely low notes of his second aria, including a D below the bass staff held for eight bars, followed by a leap up of two octaves! Such manipulations of *lepsis* and *register* aurally paint Osmin as a man of extremes.

All said and done, the most striking features of Mozart's IM-procedures lie in his use of *phrase structure*: the final section in A minor opens with four repetitions of an identical tonic-dominant two-bar idea (mm. 147-154), as Osmin sputters out all manners of killing.<sup>34</sup> The insistent

<sup>34</sup> The choice of A minor might also be a reference to the music's Turkish character, as in Mozart's A minor «Rondo alla Turca».

Example 6: Mozart, *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*: «Solche hergelaufne Laffen», octave leaps, mm. 154f.

m. 154

Erst ge-kopft, dann ge-hangen, dann ge-spiesst auf heissen Stangen,

repetition forcefully enhances the image of a man obsessed and blind with rage. In the following measures, the harmonic motion disappears along with the phrases: Osmin remains stuck on the dominant, E major, repeating obsessively an octave leap on that pitch class. [Example 6 shows the octave leaps under square brackets]. Other IM-tools join in here to complete the picture: dynamic accents come more frequently, and his rhythm increases to all eighth-notes. The final twelve bars contain no harmonic motion whatsoever: one hears only a unison melodic outline of A minor gradually increasing in volume from *pp* to *f*. Harmonically, this extended A minor is a resolution of the long dominant that came before, yet labeling the entire twenty-two bars as one phrase seems extreme. Rather, *phrase structure* is used illustratively on a foreground level, while it remains organizational in the background.

One musical tool that appears to function 'normally', that is, as an OM-tool, is *form*: the aria is basically in a binary form with several codas, and could be considered sonata form without development.<sup>15</sup> There are three codas, if one counts the final A minor section, which would necessitate ignoring the usual tonic-affirming purpose of the coda. (The traditionally static harmony is clearly in place – it is just the wrong harmony). The first half of this binary form is made up of three contrasting sections, which are then repeated in the same order under the same text, but with varied harmonies and melodies [Example 7].

This enhanced binary form clearly organizes the music in a cohesive manner. But is that all it does? The simple fact that there are three codas should be a hermeneutic clue that something unusual is going on here.

<sup>15</sup> I thank Janet Schmalfeldt for suggesting this latter interpretation.

Example 7: formal plan of "Qual Solche hergelaufne Laffen", *Die Entführung*

Musical Section	Measures	Harmonic Motion	Text
A	mm. 1-21	I-V	Solche hergelaufne Laffen / die nur nach den Weibern gaffen / mag ich vor den Teufel nicht, / denn ihr ganzes Tun und Lassen ist
B	mm. 22-31	V6-V/V	uns auf den Dienst zu passen, / doch mich trügt kein solch Gesicht.
C	mm. 32-55	V-V	Eure Tücken, eure Ränke, / eure Finten, eure Schwänke, / sind mir ganz bekannt. / Mich zu hintergehen, / müsst ihr früh aufstehen, / ich hab auch Verstand.
A'	mm. 56-74	V/ii-I	Solche hergelaufne Laffen, / die nur nach den Weibern gaffen / mag ich vor den Teufel nicht, / denn ihr ganzes Tun und Lassen ist,
B'	mm. 75-84	16-V	uns auf den Dienst zu passen, / doch mich trügt kein solch Gesicht.
C	mm. 85-116	I-I	Eure Tücken, eure Ränke, / eure Finten, eure Schwänke, / sind mir ganz bekannt. / Mich zu hintergehen, / müsst ihr früh aufstehen, / ich hab auch Verstand.
coda 1	mm. 116-124	I-I	ich hab auch Verstand.
coda 2	mm. 125-146	I-I	Drum beim Barte des Propheten, / ich studiere Tag und Nacht, / ruh nicht, bis ich dich seh töten, / nimm dich wie du willst in acht! [spoken interjection]
[coda 3]	mm. 147-176	iii-iii	Erst geköpft, dann gehangen, / dann gespiest auf heisse Stangen, / dann verbrannt, dann gebunden / und getaucht, zuletzt geschunden. <sup>36</sup>

<sup>36</sup> A translation of this text might read: "By the Devil, I don't care for such cowardly fops, who only watch the girls, because their whole conduct is to watch out for us while we're on the job, yet no such sight deceives me. Your pranks, your intrigues, your wiles, your hoaxes are all known to me. To fool me, you must get up early. I also have a brain. By the Prophet's beard, I study day and night no rest, until I can see you killed, however carefully you watch out for yourself! First beheaded, then hanged, then speared with hot rods, then burned, then bound and soaked, finally skinned".

Osmin «oversteps all the bounds of order», as Mozart writes, and the final «coda» – in a new key – is intended to illustrate that fact by coming as a surprising appendage to the ‘normal’ form. So, in order for there to be a *surprise* continuation, there must first have been a ‘normal’, but false, tonic close. In other words, Mozart has used the form for organizational purposes, but again, he has *chosen* it for illustrative ones.<sup>37</sup>

Now let us turn to another operatic moment, one depicting a most violent situation, which Mozart might perhaps have felt would “offend the ear” – the opening of Verdi’s *Otello*.

### C. *Otello*

Verdi’s penultimate opera, *Otello*, begins with that most Romantic of images – the storm – made even more intense by being paired with a battle at sea.<sup>38</sup> For many Romantics, the appeal of the tempest, and of Shakespeare’s oeuvre as a whole, derived in large part from the juxtaposition of dramatic extremes. In this scene, for instance, we see, but mostly hear, violent contrasts between life and death, lightning and darkness, hope and despair, the rising and falling of the ship, the smallness of man and the infinite power of Nature, failure and success.

The ship’s battle in the storm, as in the Shakespeare play, is offstage: we hear about it through the sung dialogue and the orchestral accompaniment. In short, the music is the principal storyteller here. But which aspects of the story is it relating? We certainly hear depicted the frenzied atmosphere and mood (IM function 1) and the physical stage action (IM function 4) – even if that offstage action is only being described, and IM function 5 (presentation of verbal and textual content, including stage directions) is certainly in force. In all of these, however, the primary goal seems to be to portray extreme instability – until the joyful outcome. This is not, however, an ordinary tale of tragedy averted. When *Otello* appears onstage victorious and safe, it belies the fact that his destiny will

— The first half of the heavy storm is made up of three contrasting sections, which are then repeated in the same order under the same text.

<sup>37</sup> The A minor coda is reprised in the middle of the opera’s Act III finale, the «Vaudeville», which is in F major. Here, however, the A minor tonality is internalized (or «rationalized» to use David Lewin’s term) into the F major: it is approached from F’s dominant, C major, followed by a German augmented sixth chord on F, which opens onto E Major, the dominant of A. After the reprise, the A minor is treated as iii of F, followed by a C dominant seventh, and a resolution to F Major.

<sup>38</sup> Shakespeare’s drama, by contrast, opens with an expository chat between Iago and Roderigo, and a whole act in Venice; the move to Cyprus with the storm scene appears only at the beginning of the play’s Act II.

be neither of these. Surely there must be musical elements that betray this ultimate outcome.

The first sound heard is neither a tonic chord nor a dominant, but a shocking C eleventh chord. The present paper is not the forum to argue the question of what constitutes a 'tonic' in an opera that traverses many keys.<sup>39</sup> However, if there *were* to be a single tonic, it would certainly have to be E major, the key of the ultimate resolution in this opening scene, which arrives when the storm is over (at «Si calma la bufera»)<sup>40</sup> as well as the final tonality of the opera. The C eleventh sonority, especially when heard above the deep organ pedal of C-C#-D, bears little relation to E major and it plunges the opening harmony deep into the tonal chaos of the musical sea.<sup>41</sup> Perfectly depicting the extreme instability of the dramatic moment at hand, Verdi seems to be utilizing *harmony* as an IM-tool.

Parker and Brown list several other «stock devices of operatic storms» present here, including abrupt changes of texture and irregular periods.<sup>42</sup> These can be 'translated' into IM-tools *texture* and *hypermeter*. Aural images of the deluge are portrayed as well by IM-tools *tempo* (*allegro agitato* followed by *allegro vivace*), *rhythm*, and *articulation*. A three-against-two pattern, first heard seven measures after rehearsal letter B, is performed staccato in all parts, suggesting the cross-currents of the stormy water; too, the isolated staccato eighths at the end of the scene remind one of the last raindrops of the spent storm. Two measures thereafter, at the text «Or s'affonda or s'inciela», both the vocal line and the accompaniment rise and fall in a fine example of text painting.<sup>43</sup> Example 8 shows the passage, in which *melodic direction* is used illustratively. In addition, the extremes of the moment are paralleled in the *dynamics* (they range from *ff* to *pp* to *ff* in the first twenty-one measures), *register* (the first chord reaches from the depths of the low organ point to high *f* above the treble staff in the violins and flutes), *scales* (chromatic scales are contrasted with major and minor ones) and *consonance-dissonance polarity* (the harmony is extremely unstable and chromatic until the people's desperate prayer, which lends it temporary shelter in A minor, and which

<sup>39</sup> For a further discussion of this topic, see EDWARD T. CONE, *On the Road to Otello: Tonality and Structure in Simon Boccanegra*, «Studi Verdiani», I, 1982, pp. 72-98.

<sup>40</sup> «The storm is dying down». This translation and all others following are from *Seven Verdi Librettos*, trans. by William Weaver, New York, W. W. Norton, 1975.

<sup>41</sup> Wagner frequently compared composing to swimming in the sea of harmony. Perhaps Otello's crew can spy him swimming out there.

<sup>42</sup> ROGER PARKER and MATTHEW BROWN, *Rebearings: Late Verdi, Ancora un bacio: Three Scenes from Verdi's Otello*, «19th-Century Music», 9/1, Summer 1985, pp. 53.

<sup>43</sup> The text can be translated as «First it sinks down, then it rears up».



Example 8: Verdi, *Otello*, Act I, Scene 1: 2 vs. 3 rhythm and text-painting

Montano.

Or s'af - fon - da, or s'in -  
Now th'up - hea - ving Swell en -

M.  
- cie - - la ...  
shrouds her.

reflects the more stable situation of the marshalling of communal hopes.<sup>44</sup> Cases could be made as well for several other IM-tools, including *harmonic syntax*: a deceptive cadence to C# minor, in an E major context, accompanies the text «È salvo!» [«He's safe!»], implying that Otello is anything but out of danger – in fact he will be deceived.<sup>45</sup>

Is there, then, no musical element that makes this scene coherent? Parker and Brown mention a few thematic returns and a «distinctive pattern to the arrangement of the diminished-seventh chords».<sup>46</sup> Yet it seems that, if coherence were to be found in this scene, a great part of it would lie in Verdi's organizational use of *motive*, *chresis* (pitch class iso-

<sup>44</sup> «Dio fulgor della bufera, Dio sorriso della duna! Salva l'arca e la bandiera Della veneta fortuna! Tu, che reggi gli astri e il Fato! Tu, che imperi al mondo e al ciel! Fa che in fondo al mar placato Posi l'ancora fedel». [«God, lightning in the storm! God, the smile of the shore! Save the vessel and the flag of Venetian destiny! Thou, who rulest the stars and Fate! Thou, who governest world and sky! Grant that the faithful anchor rest on the bottom of the calmed sea»].

<sup>45</sup> Just before we hear «È salvo!», Iago exclaims «L'alvo frenetico del mar sia la sua tomba!» [«Let the frenzied bed of the sea be his grave!»] on a diminished seventh containing both pitch classes C# and E (written Db and Fb). David Lewin has observed that Iago's deception, symbolized by the Db/C#, is already present here.

<sup>46</sup> PARKER and BROWN, *Rebearings*, p. 53.

lated from harmonic or rhythmic context) and *background harmonic syntax*. The source of the motivic patterning can be found, not surprisingly, right at the start, in the dissonant organ pedal.

The pitch classes C, C $\sharp$  and D, the notes of the organ pedal point, have numerous ramifications for the opera, but as pure pitch classes (*chresis*), they serve to structure the first moments of the opera: We first hear C as the root of that shocking opening eleventh chord, but it soon moves to Db, as a pianissimo tremolo in the violas. This Db is not only the source of the diminished-seventh chord that immediately follows, but it is ultimately transformed into C $\sharp$ , which leads into a V 6/5 of the next motivically-related pitch class, D, presented as D minor. (The moment is accompanied by a bolt of lightning and clap of thunder.) Thus, Verdi has composed out an expanded rising chromatic segment C-C $\sharp$ -D in the first twenty-two bars. The overall bass of Example 9 portrays the effect.

Example 9: Verdi, *Otello*, Graph of expanded motive C-C $\sharp$ -D in opening 22 bars

The musical score for Example 9 shows the expanded motive C-C $\sharp$ -D in the opening 22 bars of Verdi's *Otello*. The score is in G major and 2/4 time. It features a treble clef with a vocal line and a bass clef with a piano accompaniment. The piano part shows a series of diminished seventh chords: C11 1/2 dim 4-3, dim 4-2, dim 4-3, dim 4-3 (A), V7/d, and d minor. A rehearsal mark 'A' is placed above the first measure of the piano part.

This D minor is anything but stable, however, and the harmony moves quickly through several diminished sevenths, a rising series of major-minor chords, Bb minor and C minor until we get to the prayer in A minor. At the end of the A minor section, a cadence is averted by a descending fifth-series of unresolved major-minor sevenths on F, Bb and Eb, and another major-minor seventh on A $\sharp$ , which leads to a cadential 6/4-5/3 on B, heading towards the friendly port of E. As noted above, however, a deceptive cadence on C $\sharp$  minor at the word «saved» casts a shadow this happy landing. C $\sharp$  major is asserted as Otello enters triumphantly, singing «Exultate!» [«Rejoice!»], which leads to a clear cadence in E major, the presumed tonic, at rehearsal letter M. A 6/8 victory chorus, written with the key signature of E minor, follows, actually finishing in E major. Even after E major is confirmed with a firm cadence (at Q+8), the orchestra flies in unison halfway around the circle of fifths, from E to A $\sharp$  before resolving completely. Verdi is taking us for a bumpy harmonic voyage here, paralleling the dramatic content: if there is to be

any tonal coherence found here, it would have to be on a very deep background level.

If one assumes that E major is indeed the 'real' tonic for this scene, then, the temporary harmonic refuge of A minor (at the prayer), which ultimately leads to a diminished seventh on A $\sharp$  and then to a cadential 6/4-5/3 on B, can be viewed as the progression IV-VII $\sharp$ /V-V. Example 10 shows the progression after rehearsal letter H. Of course the deceptive cadence intervenes and E major is not reached conclusively until letter M. Nevertheless, enough functional harmony is present to convey a certain logic in the musical organization.

Example 10: Verdi, *Otello*, Graph of Act I, Scene 1

It should be noted that both C $\sharp$  minor and C $\sharp$  major play an enormously important role in the harmony of this scene: they are reiterated over and over, the deceptive cadence on C $\sharp$  minor and Otello's C $\sharp$  major «Exultate» being only two examples. Because the concept of deception is so central to this work, one cannot lightly dismiss the obvious hermeneutic connections. But how then to resolve the question of organizational versus illustrative functions? Perhaps the harmonic syntax is functioning illustratively at the foreground and middleground levels, while in the background, a more musical organization is the controlling factor.

But there is still another puzzling layer to be sorted out here: C $\sharp$  in an E major context 'represents', to some extent, the minor mode (because it is tonic of the relative minor key), and thus functions as a symbol more for tragedy than comedy, in the tonal vocabulary of the period. Yet when juxtaposed with C natural (as in the initial expanded motive) it is C natural that would denote the minor as a member of the E minor scale (with its negative associations) and C $\sharp$  the major (the positive). All this would be fairly irrelevant were it not for the starring role that C natural plays in this scene (the opening sonority) and in the opera as a whole. David Lawton has described its special significance in the «Bacio» theme, which recurs at the most climactic moments of the work, and

in many tragic moments, such as at the end of Act III, where Otello has completely collapsed amid off-stage cheers and Iago's ironic «Ecco il Leone!»<sup>47</sup> It would seem that Verdi's choice of key here betrays an ironic stance: C major has a uniquely friendly and innocent reputation, one might even say an «unsullied» or «innocent» one.<sup>48</sup> How brilliantly shocking then, is it for Verdi to use that tonality in an associative manner, to represent tragedy and even evil at work, tying it closely to the many layers of deception in the drama. The musical language here is reflecting the two-faced nature of the dramatic language; but a detailed discussion of those parallels will have to await another day.<sup>49</sup> In sum, then, Verdi's *choice* of key is illustrative, but the coherent use of that key is organizational.

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How shall we understand a single Mozart number, or a Verdian scene, or an entire opera? Perhaps the complexity of the wondrous art-form under consideration here defies a single answer to these questions. Hopefully, though, the concepts set forth here have, if not solved the problems, at least made some progress toward defining what those problems may be.

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<sup>47</sup> DAVID LAWTON, *On the 'Bacio' Theme in Otello*, «19th-Century Music», 1/3, March 1978, pp. 211-220.

<sup>48</sup> Another piece that uses C major in a hostile or negative manner might be Schumann's «Ich grille nicht», in which the narrator proclaims, «I bear no resentment even if my heart breaks». It would seem that the choice of C major represents the narrator's attempt to appear content with the painful situation, whereas the passionate and even violent nature of the song belies this. In another example, Berg has Wozzeck give his unfaithful Marie money, accompanied by a C major triad. Tovey has written that C major maintains connotations of innocence for many, since it is the first, and most simple, key learned.

<sup>49</sup> The subject will be explored in this author's «Miscegenation and Modal Mixture in *Otello*», forthcoming.