

Recondite Harmony: the Operas of Puccini

Chapter 1: Puccini the Progressive?

Viva Wagner!

Giacomo Puccini = This great musician was born in Lucca in the year.....and it can well be said he was the true successor to the renowned Boccherini. — Handsome with a vast intellect, he brought to the field of Italian art a breath almost as powerful as an echo of the transalpine Wagner.¹

- Puccini, in a school notebook, 1882

A common image of Puccini is at one with Bernard Shaw's when the playwright hailed him as the most likely successor to Giuseppe Verdi.² Yet at the Milan Conservatory in 1882, when the student Puccini doodled this youthfully exuberant, imaginary encyclopedia entry in a notebook, probably during a less than scintillating class (the rest of the notes seem to bear out that hypothesis), he left us a peek at himself that mentions both his Italian roots, as the “true successor” to local Lucchese hero Luigi Boccherini, and the new “transalpine” Wagnerian influences.³

Puccini's fanciful statement could be unpacked in several ways: as evidence (whether directly or indirectly) of the young man's desire to become either the next important Italian composer with influence as great as Wagner's, or the favorite son of his home town, Lucca.

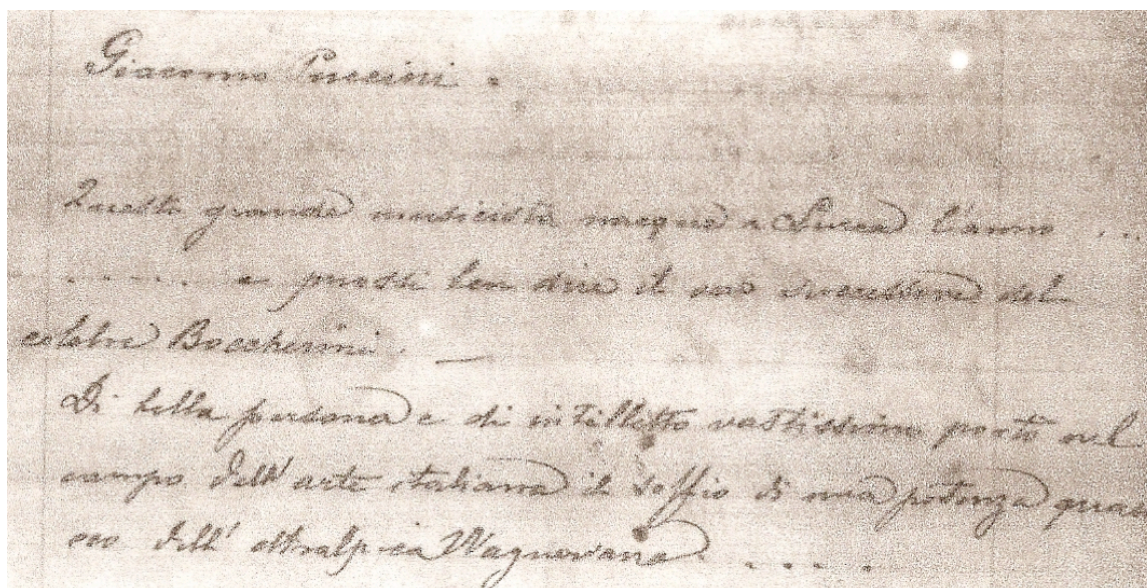
¹ [Giacomo Puccini = Questo grande musicista nacque a Lucca l'anno.....e puossi ben dire il vero successore del celebre Boccherini. — Di bella persona e di intelletto vastissimo porto' in campo dell'arte italiana il soffio di una potenza quasi eco dell'oltrapiaga Wagneriana.]

² George Bernard Shaw, “Born-again Italian Opera” in *Shaw's Music: The Complete Musical Criticism in Three Volumes*, ed. Dan Lawrence, 3 vols. (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1981), 3:217. Puccini has been similarly placed at the end of the “Great Tradition” by William Ashbrook and Harold Powers, *Puccini's “Turandot”: the End of the Great Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), and his connections to Italian musical traditions explored by Nicholas Baragwanath, *The Italian Traditions & Puccini: Compositional Theory & Practice* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2011).

³ Greenwald, among others, has noted a strong French influence in Puccini's works as well: not just in regard to his occasionally Debussy-like harmonic materials, but in the influence of French naturalist literary sources on the *verismo* movement. And as a young man, Puccini saw and admired both Bizet's *Carmen* and Massenet's works. Helen Greenwald, “Puccini, *Il tabarro*, and the Dilemma of Operatic Transposition,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 51/3 (Autumn, 1998): 525.

Or it may suggest the young man's absorption of the artistic, Wagner-influenced reforms put forth by the Milanese futurists [Avveneristi], whose name itself is redolent of *wagnerismo*.⁴ Either way, we can at this early stage already trace the confluence of the native traditional and the imported progressive factors that will be a constant hallmark of Puccini's career.

Ex. 1.0: facsimile of Puccini's auto-description



At the end of Puccini's life too, he still seemed to acknowledge respect for both Italian and German masters, as the Italian writer Ugo Ojetto described after a visit to the composer during his last days at home in Viareggio:

Today, here is Puccini at home, in his ground floor studio, between his shiny black piano and me. [...] No photograph of a singer, nor a photograph of some dear colleague. Only an autograph of Rossini,⁵ inside a small mahogany frame. [...] On the music stand, held in place by two small bronze

⁴ See chapter 4 of this volume for a more extensive discussion of the changing musical milieu that Puccini entered as a young professional.

⁵ It is interesting to note that the Italian composer whose image Puccini kept close by was Rossini who, as William Rothstein and others have shown, was an originator of several innovative compositional techniques absorbed by many European composers. William Rothstein, "Common-tone Tonality in Italian Romantic Opera: An Introduction" *Music Theory Online* 14/1 (March 2008)
<http://www.mtosmt.org/issues/mto.08.14.1/mto.08.14.1.rothstein.html>

tablets, one with the portrait of Beethoven, one with the portrait of Wagner, are standing upright the last pages of his dear *Turandot*.⁶

The antagonistic cultural milieu that pitted Verdi against Wagner (and, by extension, Italy against Germany) into which Puccini stepped at the start of his career has been well documented. Verdi, a national hero of the Italian Risorgimento, saw his competition with Wagner in patriotic terms: a letter of Autumn 1892 reads, “the public wants Italian music and not imitations or travesties of German music. We need other stuff than ‘the Music of the Future.’”⁷ Although Wagner’s writings had been available in Italy since 1856, the first actual performance of a Wagnerian opera was not until 1871, with *Lohengrin* in Bologna. The vehement pro- and anti-Wagnerians in Italy did much to fan the xenophobic flames and fostered Wagnerian and Verdian stereotypes—the shaky binary opposition that Verdi was a melodist and Wagner was a symphonist.⁸ Any tendency to emphasize the orchestra was automatically dubbed “wagneriano.”

Puccini, whose early operas included extended wordless orchestral intermezzi,⁹ seems to have shown his “oltrealpica”¹⁰ tendencies from the start. However, since Puccini’s mentor was Giulio Ricordi,¹¹ Verdi’s publisher and champion, and an anti-Wagnerian—at

⁶ [Oggi, eccolo nella sua casa, nel studio a terreno, tra me e il suo pianoforte nero lucente. [...] Nemmeno la fotografia d’un cantante, nemmeno la fotografia d’un caro collega. Soltanto un autografo di Rossini, entro una cornicetta di mogano. [...] Sul leggio, fermati da due targhette di bronzo, una col ritratto di Beethoven, una col ritratto di Wagner, stanno ritti gli ultimi fogli della cara *Turandot*.” Ugo Ojetti, *Cose Viste* (Florence: Sansoni, 1951): 336-337.

⁷ Letter from Verdi to Giuseppe Perosio, Autumn 1892, Alessandro Luzio, ed., *Carteggi Verdiani*, vol IV. Quoted in translation in Mosco Carner, *Puccini: A Critical Biography*, 2nd edition (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1974), 30.

⁸ Abbate explores the meanings of “symphonic” in regard to Wagner’s operas in Carolyn Abbate, “Opera as Symphony: a Wagnerian Myth” in *Analyzing Opera: Verdi and Wagner*, Carolyn Abbate, Roger Parker, eds. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989): 92-124.

⁹ Even Puccini’s later operas, such as *Tosca* and *Madama Butterfly*, retain long-breathed instrumental passages.

¹⁰ [from beyond the Alps.] See note 1 above.

¹¹ Giulio Ricordi (1840-1912), inherited the Ricordi publishing firm, which had been established by his grandfather Giovanni Ricordi in 1808; he then enlarged and transformed it enormously, restarting the periodical *Gazzetta Musicale*. He was also a composer under the pseudonym J. Burgmein. *La Nuova Enciclopedia della Musica* (Milan: Garzanti, 1983, rep. 1991): s.v. “Ricordi.”

least until his firm acquired the Italian rights to the Wagner operas—the younger man probably tried to keep his affinities disguised.¹² One of Puccini's long-time friends wrote a remembrance in 1926 that read, "Ricordi didn't want even to listen to the music because Puccini was on the black list of the Wagnerians."¹³

As a young man Puccini had walked from Lucca to Pisa to hear Verdi's *Aida*, an event that is often credited with inspiring him to compose operas.¹⁴ But even Puccini's fellow Lucchesi had some notion of their native son's double musical inheritance: in 1891, on the occasion of a performance of his second opera, *Edgar*, they awarded Puccini a diamond ring engraved with portraits of both Verdi and Wagner.¹⁵

Straddling this artistic divide could not have been easy. The group of young Italian composers to which Puccini belonged, was known as the "young school" [giovane scuola], and was an outgrowth of the "wild ones" [scapigliati] and futurists, passionate with

¹² In 1914, Puccini wrote, "although I may be a Germanophile, I have never wanted to show it publicly." [Benché io sia un germanofilo non ho voluto mai mostrarmi pubblicamente.] Claudio Sartori, *Giacomo Puccini* (Milan: Edizioni Accademia, 1978), 306; also partially cited in Eugenio Gara, ed. *Carteggi Pucciniani* (Milan: Ricordi, 1958), 433. Although this statement was written much later in his life, and in the midst of a world war in which Italy and Germany were on opposite sides, the composer's words seems to embrace an extended period of time that could include his younger years as well.

¹³ Arturo Buzzi-Peccia, "The Young Puccini as I knew him" *The Musical Courier*, 93/22 (November 25, 1926: New York: Blumenberg & Floersheim): 33. And in the Ricordi house organ, the *Gazzetta musicale di Milano*, on 1 February 1885, Giulio Ricordi wrote, "[Musical ideas cannot] be acquired by studying and restudying the dots, counterpoint, harmony, disharmony, and sweating for long hours over those hieroglyphs full of science and poison that are Wagnerian scores. [...] Let Puccini remember that he is Italian; he should remember it and not be ashamed of it [...]; he will gain from it, and it will be Italian glory!" Quoted in Michele Girardi, *Puccini: His International Art* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2000), a translated and slightly revised edition of *Giacomo Puccini: L'arte internazionale di un musicista italiano* (Venice: Marsilio, 1995), 24.

24. Yet, after Ricordi bought out the Lucca publishing house, which held the rights to Wagner in Italy, the anti-Wagnerian rhetoric ceased.

¹⁴ For example, see Carner, *Puccini*, 18-19. Greenwald adds, [Puccini] "was remarkably silent about Verdi the artist. Needless to say, he had had great exposure to Verdi, even as a young man in Lucca, where Verdi's operas were performed often and frequently within a year of their premieres. [...] Yet his letters contain few references to Verdi's operas." Helen Greenwald, "Verdi's Patriarch and Puccini's Matriarch: 'Through the Looking-Glass and What Puccini Found There,'" *19th-Century Music* 17/3 (Spring 1994): 235.

¹⁵ Gino Arrighi, "La prima rappresentazione di un'opera pucciniana in Lucca." *Lucca: Rassegna del Comune* 1/2 (September 1957). Quoted in Dieter Schickling, *Giacomo Puccini: Biographie*, (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt), 91.

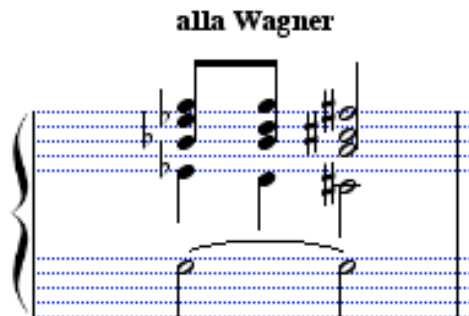
progressive “wagnerismo.”¹⁶ Their compositions—ultimately to be considered works of *verismo* [realism]—could never be taken for Wagnerian imitations today, as they are still under the strong influence of Italian traditions. And, especially after Verdi composed *Otello*, in 1887, which incorporated the newer emphasis on motivic development and continuous flow, there were two operatic gods to be worshipped. But Mascagni made clear in a letter to a friend the relative importance to him of both influences, and which had the more far-reaching influence: “In Rome, you could go hear the *Otello* by the father of maestros,” he underlined, “I am speaking of Italian maestros since you know how much I admire Wagner as the father of all maestros past and future.”¹⁷

From the start of his career to its end, Puccini left written evidence in his compositions—in words as well as notes—that he had Wagner on his mind. As a young student in 1883, Puccini had written a sketch for a song “Ad una morta!” with nonfunctional harmonies, parallel voice-leading, and a dissonant pedal point—and above it scribbled “Alla Wagner.” This could, of course, be interpreted as a critique of a passage he did not ultimately use. [Ex. 1.1]

¹⁶ See also Julian Budden, “Wagnerian Tendencies in Italian Opera,” in *Music and Theatre: Essays in Honour of Winton Dean*, ed. Nigel Fortune (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987): 299-332.

¹⁷ Pietro Mascagni’s letter to Vittorio Gianfranceschi of 8 april 1887, is housed at the Museo Teatrale alla Scala, Milan: [*Otello* [è] del Papà dei Maestri. Parlo sempre dei Maestri italiani, poichè tu sai quanto stimo il Vagner come Papà di tutti i maestri presenti e futuri.]

Ex. 1.1: sketch for “Ad una morta”



Yet, at the other end of his life’s journey, as a dying man, one of Puccini’s deathbed sketches for the unfinished *Turandot* shows the annotation “poi Tristano,” indicating that a theme borrowed from *Tristan* should appear next. And while writing this last opera, Puccini made the following comment to a friend who played the opening bars of *Tristan* at the keyboard: “Enough of this music! We are mandolinists, dilettantes: woe to us if we get caught by it! This tremendous music annihilates us and we cannot finish anything anymore!”¹⁸

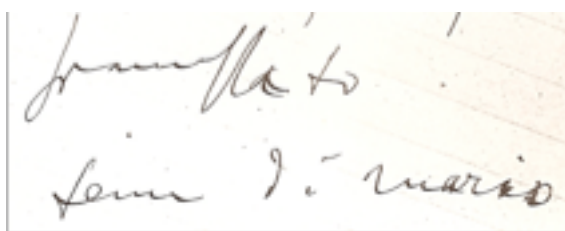
Puccini also adopted the use of leitmotives, as many of his contemporaries did, which he employed consistently from *Manon Lescaut*, his third opera, until the end of his career.¹⁹ He composed at the piano, often using only libretto drafts or the script [*copione*] as a guide, making handwritten notes in the margins. In several *copioni*, the composer left written

¹⁸ Guido Marotti, *Giacomo Puccini Intimo* (Florence: Vallecchi, 1942), 203-4. “Basta di questa musica! Noi siamo dei mandolinisti, dei dilettanti: guai a noi se ci lasciamo prendere! Questa musica tremenda ci annienta e non ci fa concludere più nulla!” In the middle of Puccini’s career, after composing *Madama Butterfly*, Lawrence Gilman, music critic for *Harper’s Weekly*, wrote: “How closely, with what unswerving fidelity, the music clings to the contours of the play; and with what an economy of effort its effects are made! Puccini is thus, at his best, a Wagnerian in the truest sense—a far more consistent Wagnerian than was Wagner himself.” Lawrence Gilman, *Aspects of Modern Opera: estimate and inquiries* (New York: Lane, 1909), 48.

¹⁹ Puccini’s leitmotivic technique differs from Wagner’s in many respects, but he does occasionally transform and combine motives in a Wagnerian manner. Two examples from *La bohème* occur at I/43/1, where Mimi’s theme appears in canonic diminution, and at III/14/18 where the love theme appears together with both Rodolfo’s “cieli bigi” theme and the opera’s opening motive.

indications that he was thinking in terms of leitmotives. The February 1898 *copione* of *Tosca*,²⁰ for example, shows Puccini's notations of themes for both major and minor characters: we find "Mario's theme mixed in" [framezzata tema di Mario] and "small hint of the Sacristan" [petit accenno al Sagrestano], indicating places in the score where those themes do indeed appear [Ex. 1.2a]. In a version of the libretto housed at the Museo Puccini in Torre del Lago,²¹ the composer's notations show that he also created musical themes for concepts ("motivo amore") and for places ("motivo villa") [Exx. 1.2b and c]. Moreover, in a letter to Tito Ricordi of 23 November 1897 about the ending of *Tosca*'s first act, Puccini even uses the term "leitmotif," along with a sketched line of music, writing "Questo sarà il leitmotif della trombata finale per i colleghi e uniti"²² [Ex. 1.2d]

Ex. 1.2a: "framezzata tema di Mario" [Mario's theme mixed in], from the *copione* of *Tosca*, dated 1. February 1898.

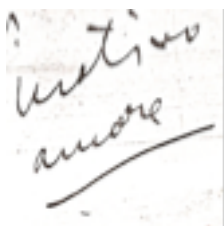


²⁰This is a nearly complete draft of Act I, housed at the Music Division, New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations, New York City.

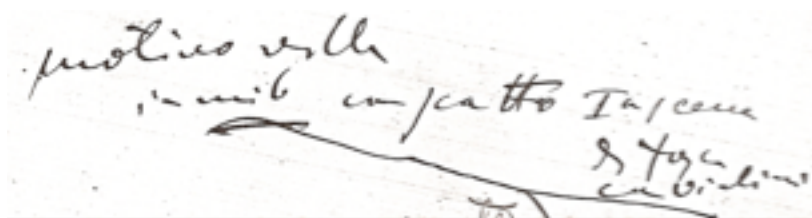
²¹ This manuscript, in a secretary's hand with copious annotations by Puccini, begins part way through scene 5 and extends to the end of Act I, but scenes 6 and 7 are incomplete. This was probably a copy that Puccini used over a long period, as evidenced by his annotations: for example, many musical sketches present here were never used, which would indicate an early draft, yet we can also find here the murmured prayers for scene 10 that the composer located only towards the end of his orchestration work. Also, Puccini has pasted in a page of Illica's comments, and sections of a printed libretto draft.

²² A translation could read: "This will be the leitmotive of the trumpet finale for the ecclesiastics and everyone" but "trombata" is used here as a pun and can also mean "disastrous" or worse.

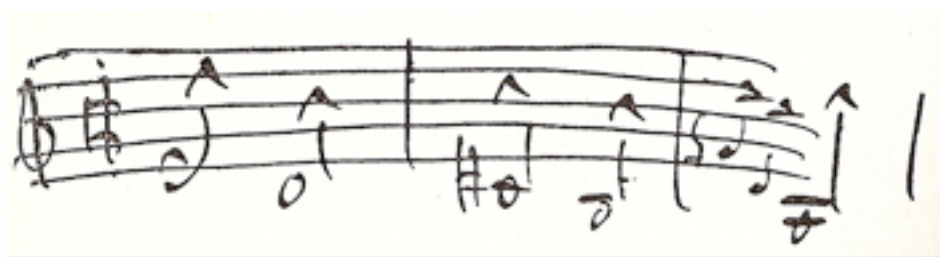
Ex. 1.2b. “motivo amore” [love theme], *Tosca* Act I libretto, Museo Puccini, Torre del Lago, Italy (hereafter TDL).



Ex. 1.2c. “motivo villa in mib con scatto Ia scena di Tosca con violini” [villa theme in Eb with burst of Tosca’s first scene with violins], TDL.



Ex. 1.2d. ‘Il leitmotif della trombata finale’ Fondo dell’Accademia d’Arte, Montecatini, Italy.²³



Puccini also included musical quotations from Wagner operas in his own works, altering their outer appearance with different rhythms or harmonies—but sometimes not even much of that. In one contemporary review of Puccini’s first opera, *Le Villi*, Eugenio Sacerdoti, who knew his Wagner well, admired the new work, but pointed out the following:

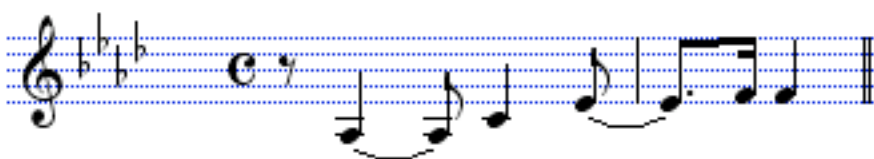
²³ Reproduced in Giuseppe Pintorno, *Puccini: 276 lettere inedite* (Milano: Nuove Edizioni, 1974), 70.

The duet between Anna and Roberto has an introduction that reminds one too closely of the entrance of Pogner and Beckmesser in *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* by Richard Wagner (Act 1, scene 3) and the fact that Puccini has studied this work by the Great Man of Leipzig is clear from the *Andante mosso* with which the first act closes. Here the effect on the public is great and faultless, but the author has done nothing except destroy the prelude from *Die Meistersinger*, imitating it to the point of plagiarism. [...] And to think that when *Le Villi* was performed, everyone sang hymns to the triumph of Italian music, which glowed in Puccini's work with new and inspired melodies! But, you see, Wagner is so rich he can even lend melodies to Italian masters!²⁴

It is somewhat surprising that Sacerdoti did not also notice the theme from *Parsifal* written prominently into the opening bars of *Le Villi*.²⁵ [Ex. 1.3a and b]

Ex. 1.3a and b

Wagner, Parsifal, "Liebesmahl-Spruch" motive



²⁴ [Il duetto fra Anna e Roberto ha una introduzione che ricorda troppo da vicino l'entrata di Pogner e di Bekmesser nei Maestri Cantori di Norimberga di Riccardo Wagner (atto 1, scena 3) e che il Puccini abbia studiato questo lavoro del Grande di Lipsia risulta chiaramente dall'andante mosse col quale si chiude il primo atto. Qui l'effetto sul pubblico è grande ed immanchevole, ma l'autore non ha fatto altro che guastare il preludio dei Maestri Cantori, imitandolo fino al plagio [...] E dire che quando le Villi furono rappresentate, tutti inneggiarono al trionfo della musica italiana la quale rifulgeva nel lavoro del Puccini di nuove ed ispirate melodie! Eppure, vedete, Wagner è tanto ricco da poter prestare melodie anche ai maestri italiani.] Eugenio Sacerdoti (pseud. T.O. Cesardi), *L'opera di Riccardo Wagner e la nuova scuola italiana* (Bologna: Nicola Zanichelli, 1885), 119-120. Sacerdoti received a diploma in law from the university of Bologna in 1884, and was a journalist and art critic. He wrote for the *Patria* in Bologna, then was director of the journals *Il Capitano Fracassa* and *La Tribuna*. He also ran the *Don Marzio* in Naples, and the *Travaso delle idee* in Rome. Teodoro Rovito, *Dizionario Bio-bibliografico dei letterati e giornalisti italiani contemporanei* (Naples: Melfi, 1907), s.v. "Sacerdoti, Eugenio."

²⁵ This has also been noted in Deborah Burton, *An Analysis of Puccini's "Tosca": A Heuristic Approach to the Unifying Elements of the Opera* (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1995), 109, and in Girardi, *Puccini*, 44.

Puccini, Le Villi, Preludio

The intertextual borrowings from *Die Meistersinger* in Puccini's first opera make some sense in light of the fact that, in 1889, Ricordi sent Puccini twice to Bayreuth to see that opera, on assignment to make cuts for the Italian production.²⁶ In 1888, Ricordi had bought the Lucca publishing house, which until then had held the Italian rights to Wagner's opera.²⁷ After this, Ricordi began to publish and produce these operas in Milan and elsewhere, commercial interests apparently outweighing his prior distaste.²⁸ Puccini's task—to shorten the opera as inaudibly and smoothly as possible—required a profound study and analysis of the score.²⁹

There are Wagner quotations to be found in most, if not all, Puccini's operas, borrowings that are used at moments redolent of dramatic events in the source operas. After quoting *Parsifal* and *Meistersinger* in *Le Villi*, Puccini graced *Manon Lescaut* with *Götterdämmerung*'s "salvation of love" leitmotif [Exx. 1.4a and b] sung near the end of Act I by the new *innamorati* Manon and Des Grieux; and indeed it seems that love will save Manon from a forced marriage at this point. In *Tosca*'s second act, full of violence and torture,

²⁶ The first time he traveled with Ferdinando Fontana, Puccini's first librettist, and the second time with Adolf Hohenstein, who would design sets for *Tosca* in 1899. Girardi, *Puccini*, 57. Schickling has revealed that when Puccini and his first librettist Ferdinando Fontana went to Bayreuth in August 1888, they seem to have disguised their identities: in the Fremden-liste their names appear as Puccini, Giocoma and Fontona, Ferdinando. Schickling, *Giacomo Puccini: Biographie*, 74.

²⁷ Giovanna Lucca, who headed the Lucca house, was famous for her support of Wagner. During her pilgrimage to Bayreuth in 1876 she presented the composer with a silver laurel wreath. In 1880, she suggested to Wagner himself that he abridge the *Ring* to fit a single night's performance. Carner, *Puccini*, 29-30.

²⁸ Not entirely, however. During the year of Verdi's death, 1901, Ricordi withheld all performances of Wagner's operas in Italy. Julian Budden. *Puccini: His Life and Works*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 22.

²⁹ Guido Salvetti's reconstruction of Puccini's cuts from the libretto of the La Scala production appear in "Come Puccini si aprì un sentiero nell'aspra selva del wagnerismo italiano," in Gabriella Biagi Ravenni and Carolyn Gianturco, eds., *Giacomo Puccini: L'uomo, il musicista, il panorama europeo*, Studi Musicali 4 (Lucca: Libreria Musicale Italiana, 1997), 73ff.

Puccini quotes the “Kundry” theme from *Parsifal*, a leitmotive associated in the earlier opera’s second act with horrible cries of pain. [Exx. 1.4c and d]. In *La fanciulla del West*, Puccini manages to quote the opening of *Tristan*, presented imaginatively with tritone-related harmonies, at the moment when the two desperate lovers most recall the doomed Wagnerian pair.³⁰ [Exx. 1.4e and f]. When Suor Angelica discovers that her son has died, we hear the “Sorge” [“grief”] motive from *Der Meistersinger* [Exx. 1.4g and h]. Finally, the violent opening chords of *Turandot*, an opera about the transformative power of love, proclaim the “Liebesruhe” motive from *Tristan*³¹ although there are also great similarities to the opening of Iago’s credo in Verdi’s *Otello* [Exx. 1.4i, j, and k].

Ex. 1.4a and b

Wagner, *Götterdämmerung*, “Salvation of Love” motive

Puccini, *Manon Lescaut*, I/57

Ex. 1.4c and d

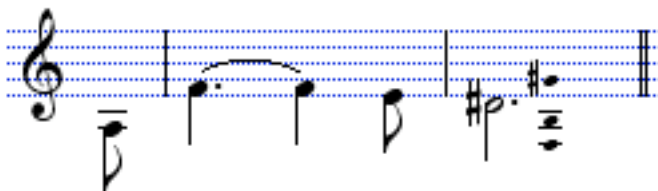
Wagner, *Parsifal*, “Kundry” motive¹

³⁰ At the opening of the next act of *Fanciulla*, this same tritone pair, Eb (D#) and A, is heard imaginatively harmonized with F major and B major, the Neapolitan and dominant of the ultimate tonic, E.

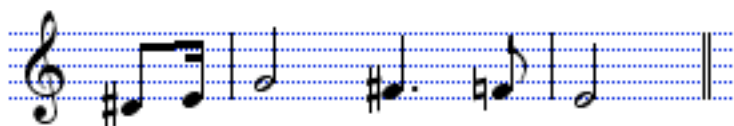
³¹ This motive was also used by Richard Strauss and Paul Dukas. See chapter 13 and Deborah Burton, “*Tristano, Tosca e Torchi*,” in *Studi Musicali Toscani: Giacomo Puccini: L'uomo, il musicista, il panorama europeo*, Gabriella Biagi Ravenni and Carolyn Gianturco, eds. Lucca: Libreria Musicale Italiana, 1997: 127-145.

Puccini, Tosca, Act II/9/3

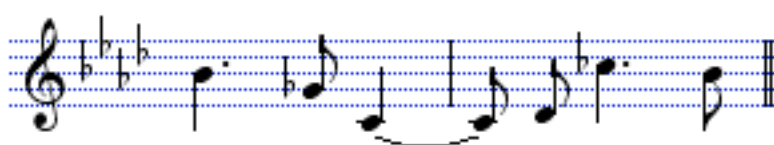
Ex. 1.4e and f

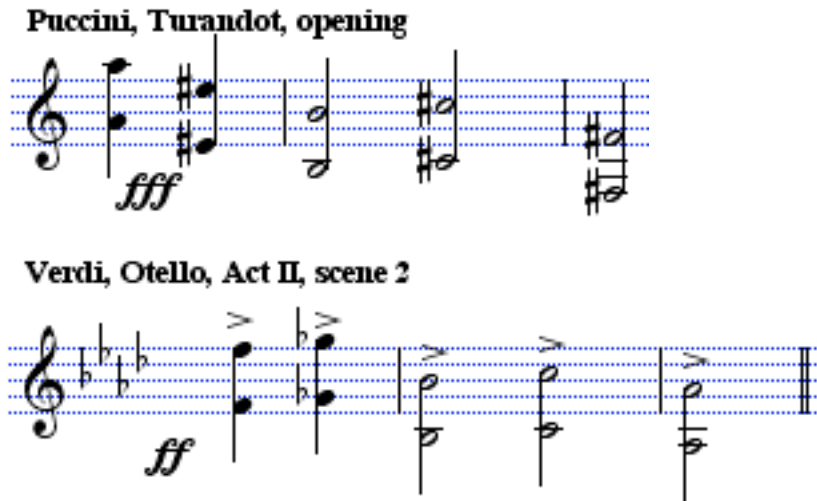
Wagner, Tristan und Isolde, prelude**Puccini, La Fanciulla del West, II/60**

Ex. 1.4g and h

Wagner, Die Meistersinger, "Sorge" [Grief] motive**Puccini, Suor Angelica, 53/2**

Ex. 1.4i, j and k

Wagner, Tristan und Isolde, "Liebesruhe" motive



But what can it mean that, in a sketch for *Manon Lescaut*, Puccini wrote “too *Tannhäuser*” [troppo *Tannhäuser*]?³² That the passage would be a too-obvious borrowing? That it clashed with the eighteenth-century musical ambience? Was he rejecting a Wagnerian influence? There is no definitive way to resolve the issue.

Puccini’s musical and verbal allusions to Wagner are only one facet of a “transalpine echo of Wagnerism.” More general Wagnerian influences, also adopted by many of his contemporaries after Verdi’s *Otello*, include a continuous musical texture without explicit divisions into numbers (after *Le villi*),³³ the use of the orchestra as protagonist and narrator, and the close correspondence of stage and musical gestures. Arthur Wilson, a critic who traveled from Boston to New York for the premiere of *La fanciulla del West* in 1910, observed some of these qualities:

There is a far more elaborate network of guiding motifs than before. [...]

There is a “redemption” theme, a “Minnie” theme, a rapid succession of accented chords for Johnson, and a melodic gem for Rance. The thematic

³² Michael Kaye, *The Unknown Puccini* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 222.

³³ Ashbrook and Powers assert that *Turandot* is a return to numbers opera. They make a strong case for this, although the score is not visibly divided into separate arias, duets, etc. Ashbrook and Powers, *Puccini’s “Turandot”*: 15-38.

development begins to suggest music drama from the *Ring*. The pertinent thing is that Puccini has mirrored in his orchestration the salient action, the big moments on the stage with almost unerring instinct and with swift and vivid power. He has characterized admirably the rapid broken hits and minute detail of action in the first act. He has reproduced with splendid puissance in the last act the din, the rush, the stress and surge, the elemental barbarism of the chase of the thief by man and horse.³⁴

Some, such as a reviewer for the *New York Times* during Puccini's first visit to the United States in 1907, were not altogether pleased with the close ties between music and stage action:

Puccini's style was undoubtedly new [...] But the musical treatment was more fundamentally strange. The broad delineation of moods is not enough. [...] The music [is] short-breathed and paragraphic in its minute commentary upon the passing word, the detail of action, with occasional pauses for lyrical expansion at points of emotional climax. Music, text and action are knit more closely together than was ever attempted by the Italian composers of an earlier generation. The music bears along upon its current all the feelings, passions, and incidents of the story as fast as they occur...The touch is lighter, the impression more fugitive. The characterization is less deep.³⁵

The subject of orchestral narrativity in opera is a large and complex subject that has been investigated at length elsewhere.³⁶ Rather than rehashing those issues here in regard to

³⁴ Arthur Wilson, *Boston Daily Globe*, Dec. 11, 1910 "Puccini's New Opera Given: "Girl of the Golden West" a Success."

³⁵ Richard Aldrich, *The New York Times*, 3 February 1907.

³⁶ See, for example, Carolyn Abbate, *Unsung Voices: Opera and Musical Narrative in the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).

Puccini's works, which is beyond the scope of this book, we will briefly take note that, whereas Wagner's leitmotives often bear the brunt of the storytelling while little stage action is visibly occurring³⁷ and thus narrate "inner action" for the audience, Puccini's orchestral writing seems to ally much more closely with the more easily perceptible visual or textual cues.

Nevertheless, there exist moments in which the orchestra seems to comment directly on stage events at a critical distance. One need only think of the opening of *Gianni Schicchi*, where the orchestra presents a riotous *allegro* theme, suggesting the comedy to come (even though funeral drums are indicated), which slows to a *largo* when the curtain opens upon a scene of hypocritical mourners waiting for their meal-ticket to pass on. Here the initial appoggiatura-like pairs of eighth notes—metrically displaced—become transformed into a traditional two-note lament motive. Without this prior instrumental "commentary," the opening lachrymose scene could be initially interpreted as sincere, and the audience would not be in on the joke.

In their quest for greater dramatic realism, the verists employed increased continuity and almost eliminated form-defining breaks in the musical texture, such as traditional divisions into recitative and aria. Musician and publisher Carlo Clausetti, who was close to Puccini throughout most of his career, and was even present at his death, wrote a guide to *Tristan* (which Puccini admired) that was compiled on the occasion of the opera's Neapolitan premiere in 1907. Here, he explains the continuous musical fabric—the Wagnerian "endless melody"—in terms of these Italian operatic formulae:

In *Tristan*, true and proper recitative—that which serves to prepare a sung piece—is completely lacking. Instead passages exist in the course of a great

³⁷ At the end of Act I/scene 1 of *Die Walküre*, between Siegmund and Sieglinde, for example, six different leitmotives appear in thirty-two bars that contain only nine words of sung text and little physical stage action.

tale in a dialogue, for which Wagner uses formulas borrowed from recitative style. But these passages are never separated. In *Tristan* the forms are independent of any musical servitude. [...] they develop in an order that is certainly logical and sagely thought-out, but free of any conventional arrangement, with an extraordinarily varied and agile plan that is adapted to the action, scene by scene, without any break in continuity.³⁸

Yet to simply label Puccini a “Wagnerian,” or even a progressive, is too facile. Just as his ancestors—five generations of successful composers—had absorbed each then-current compositional trend, Puccini also seems to have adopted many of the new ideas affecting his generation, while retaining elements of his traditional education. Not just a question of style, this dichotomy extends to the very construction of his sonorities, the organization of musical passages, and the rhythmic and metric pacing.³⁹ But if Puccini revitalized aspects of the Italian tradition with the “powerful breath” of progressive, non-native ideas, Wagnerism was only one of many innovations yet to come.

³⁸ [Nel *Tristano* il vero e proprio recitativo—quello cioè che serve a preparare un pezzo di canto—manca del tutto. Esistono in vece dei brani nel corso di un grande racconto, in un dialogo, nei quali Wagner si serve di formule chieste in prestito allo stile del recitativo. Ma questi brani non sono mai dei pezzi distinti. Nel *Tristano* le forme sono indipendenti da ogni servitù musicale[...] esse si sviluppano in un ordine sicuramente logico e saggiamente meditato, ma libero da ogni disposizione convenzionale, con una trama straordinariamente varia ed agile, che s'adatta all'azione, scena per scena, senza alcuna soluzione di continuità.] Carlo Clausetti, *Tristano e Isotta di Riccardo Wagner: Notizie e documenti raccolti da Carlo Clausetti* (Naples: G. Ricordi, 1907), 52. Puccini wrote to Clausetti on 5 January 1908: “Very beautiful publication, yours on *Tristan*. It’s very interesting and very well compiled.” [“Bellissima pubblicazione, la tua, su *Tristano*. E’ interessante molto e molto ben compilata.”] Eugenio Gara, ed. *Carteggi Pucciniani*. (Milan: Ricordi, 1958), 362. Clausetti (1869-1943) who worked for the Naples affiliate of Ricordi but who also took charge of the main Milan office briefly, wrote libretti and Neapolitan songs. He often accompanied Puccini abroad to direct his operas. Later in his *Tristan* guide, Clausetti makes reference to “primordial themes” [“temi primordiali”] from which the individual leitmotives are derived. This concept, given voice and credence by a close friend and colleague of Puccini’s, will resonate with the discussion of Puccini’s motivic technique in Chapter 3. Clausetti, *Tristano*, 52.

³⁹ See chapter 2 for a fuller discussion of the conflation of different types of structures in Puccini’s harmonic language.

Astonish me!

Was Puccini a Modernist?⁴⁰ The answer depends in large part on the definition of that term. And as Peter Gay has written, “it is not that defining Modernism has been tried and found wanting, but that it has been found difficult and not tried.”⁴¹ Nevertheless, Gay isolates a general characteristic of the trend that he calls the “lure of heresy”: “the modernist poet who pours obscene content into traditional meters; the modernist architect who eliminates all decoration from his designs; the modernist composer who deliberately violates the traditional rules of harmony and counterpoint.” In essence, “insubordination against ruling authority.”⁴² Thus a key ingredient is an attitude of rebelliousness, and the attempt to shock or astonish. Since Wagner too was something of an insubordinate, it was but a small step for his veristic followers to pick up the torch of ipseity and march onward.

In the musical world of late nineteenth-century Italy, rebellion against the prevailing traditions would have entailed some sort of assault on tonality (especially the beginnings and endings of musical units where the hierarchical power of the tonic is affirmed), and on traditional voice-leading. Puccini certainly did battle with traditional rules of tonality in many ways (as we shall see), and he was so well known for his empty parallel fifths that one French critic described *La bohème* as “La Vide Bohème.”⁴³

⁴⁰ This was the subject of the roundtable discussion *Puccini the Modernist?* held at the November 2008 meeting of the American Musicological Society and Society for Music Theory, in Nashville, TN. Participants were: Nicholas Baragwanath (University of Nottingham), Deborah Burton (Boston University), Andrew Davis (University of Houston), David Rosen (Cornell University, respondent), Matteo Sansone (New York University-Florence), and Alexandra Wilson (Oxford Brookes University). The topic is also discussed at length in Alexandra Wilson, *The Puccini problem: opera, nationalism and modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

⁴¹ Peter Gay, *Modernism: the Lure of Heresy* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2008), 2.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 4.

⁴³ [The empty Bohème] “Willy,” *L’assiette au beurre*, n. 78 (27 Septembre 1902). This commentary, whose author is identified only as “Willy,” was used as a caption to the French caricature of the musician by Aroun al Rascid, pseudonym of the illustrator Umberto Brunelleschi (1879-1949), reproduced above. Punning on Henry Murger’s “Vie de bohème,” it reads in full, “This transalpine devil, as reserved as his music is familiar, has risked a *Manon Lescaut* that does not recoil before the desert scene (What does Massenet think of it?) One can recognize in him a certain theatrical vivacity, but that instrumental emptiness, those harmonies hollow as those

But for each of Puccini's Modernist constructions, there seems to be another in which pure diatonicism reigns. Are we to understand Puccini then as a "transitional" figure? To resort to such a conclusion would not only be unsatisfactory, but would ignore salient aspects of what Modernism entailed. One of the most well known Modernist slogans is Ezra Pound's "make it new."⁴⁴ But that begs the question, "make *what* new?" The answer seems to be to make the *old* new, implying that at least a remnant of prior material must remain in the modernized form, just to be recognized as the new, improved version.⁴⁵

Perhaps a more apt Modernist catchphrase is Sergei Diaghilev's "Astonish me!" with which the impresario of the Ballets Russes reportedly berated his choreographers.⁴⁶ But if astonishment is the criterion for Modernism, this inevitably leads to a process of continual obsolescence: a Modernist work would become less so as soon as it ceased to astonish. Avant-garde composer John Cage seemed to recognize this when he said, "If my work is accepted, I must move on to the point where it is not."⁴⁷ Puccini too, in an elegy on the death of Debussy, seconded this spirit:

Those harmonic progressions which were so dazzling in the moment of their revelation, and which seemed to have in reserve immense and ever-new treasures of beauty, after the first bewitching surprise always surprised less and less, till at last they surprised no more: and not this only, but also to their creator the field appeared closed, and I repeat I know how restlessly he

of *The Empty Bohème*!" [Ce transalpin roublard aussi réservé que sa musique est tutoyeuse, a risqué une *Manon Lescaut*, qui ne recule pas, elle, devant la scène du Désert (Qu'en pense Massenet?) On peut lui reconnaître une certaine vivacité scénique, mais quelle vacuité instrumentale, quelles harmonies creuses que celles de la *La Vie Bohème*!]

⁴⁴ This catch-phrase was invented by Ezra Pound before World War I, but was also the title of a later collection of his essays: *Make it New* (London, Faber and Faber, 1934).

⁴⁵ Louis Menand, in a review of Gay's book, writes: "The 'It' in 'Make It New' is the Old—what is valuable in the culture of the past. A great deal of Pound's poetry therefore takes the form of translation, imitation, allusion, and quotation." *The New Yorker*, 9 June 2008.

⁴⁶ Gay, *Modernism*, 3.

⁴⁷ Interview of John Cage by Peter Gena, 1982. Quoted in Gay, *Modernism*, 266.

sought and desired a way of exit. As a fervid admirer of Debussy, I anxiously waited to see how he himself would assail Debussyism; and now his death has rendered impossible that we shall ever know what would have been the outcome that indeed might have been precious.⁴⁸

Thus, if astonishment (and with it Modernism) is fleeting, then almost all Modernist works would have to be considered transitional, depending only upon when one observes them (and perhaps then Modernism can only cease when it is no longer possible to be astonished.) The question thus arises: *from which point in time* should we try to judge Puccini's art in this regard?

Puccini furthered his own bid for Modernist credentials by having attended the Graz premiere of Richard Strauss's *Salome* in 1906,⁴⁹ one of the first riotous performances of Igor Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring* in 1913,⁵⁰ and hearing Arnold Schönberg's *Pierrot Lunaire* in Florence in April 1924 near the end of his life, following along with the composer's personal score.⁵¹ After that concert, according to Guido Marotti, Puccini said, "Don't think that I'm a

⁴⁸ *The Musical Times* (July 1918). Quoted in Mosco Carner, "Portrait of Debussy: Debussy and Puccini" *Musical Times* 108 (June 1967): 502, and reprinted in Carner *Major and Minor* (London: Duckworth, 1980), 139-147.

⁴⁹ In a letter to Ervin Lendvai of 17 May 1906, Puccini wrote, "*Salome* is the most extraordinary thing, terribly cacophonous, there are the most beautiful orchestral sensations, but it ends up exhausting one a lot. It is a greatly interesting show." [La *Salomè* è la cosa più straordinaria cacofonica terribilmente ci sono delle sensazioni orchestrali bellissime ma finisce a stancare molto. È uno spettacolo di grande interesse.] Lendvai (1882-1948) was a Hungarian composer and choir director who in 1905 took some lessons with Puccini.

⁵⁰ Puccini wrote, "I was at the *Sacre de Printemps*; ridiculous choreography. The music a cacophony in the extreme. It was curious however and done with a certain talent. But all together, the stuff of madmen. The public booed, laughed and...applauded." [Fui alla *Sacré de Printemps*: coreografia ridicola. La musica una cacofonia all'estremo. Curiosa però e fatta con un certo talento. Ma nell'insieme, roba da matti. Il pubblico fischiò, rise e...applaudì.] Giuseppe Adami, ed., *Epistolario* (Milan: Oscar Mondadori, 1928, rep. 1982), 153.

⁵¹ Marotti describes the encounter thus: "I [...] accompanied Puccini [...] [who] did not bring with him Schönberg's score of *Pierrot Lunaire* for the simple reason that he did not own it, nor did he ever have the occasion to see it [...] Schönberg, advised of Puccini's presence, wanted to pass him a copy of the score of *Pierrot Lunaire*—on the program— so that he could easily follow it during the performance. [...] Turning the pages on our laps, we followed with concentrated attention this very original score. [...] [At the end of the concert, Puccini went to return the score and to meet and thank the author. Before then, the two musicians had never had the occasion to meet; and Arnold Schönberg showed his deferential enthusiasm (I cannot find more appropriate words) and very clear satisfaction at finally being able to shake hands with Giacomo Puccini. The words he directed towards him [...] were of such great pleasure and lively cordiality that Puccini (who had always remained shy, despite his exposure to the 'ways of the world' and to the triumphs to which he should

traditionalist! [...] I am happy to have had a means of touching with my hand, or rather with my ears, the facts as they are today.”⁵²

Other statements—from all periods of his life—also bear witness to Puccini’s desire to clear new progressive paths. As early as his *Tosca* period, in a letter to Carlo Clausetti from 10 November 1899, Puccini wrote: “I wanted to sail in other seas. [...] We need musical discoveries, essentially musical ones [...] whatever has already been done should not be done again.”⁵³ After composing *Madama Butterfly*, Puccini wrote to Giulio Ricordi on 23 February 1905: “Forward not backward! With a work that is constructed and heard in a modern way.”⁵⁴

That work was to be *La fanciulla del West*, an opera that shocked and astonished many at the time. When it was completed, Puccini wrote to Alberto Crecchi, from Milan on 8 January 1911 saying, “Did the harmonization of *Fanciulla* surprise you? Never fear. In the orchestra everything becomes smoother and softer. The clashes are something different in

have become accustomed, if not indifferent) visibly blushed. [...] Reverting then to French, he said to his illustrious Viennese colleague (almost) word for word, ‘I thank you for having clarified for me your theory by way of *Pierrot Lunaire*, which I followed very attentively and which seemed to me a very interesting work.’” [Io [...] accompagnavo Puccini [...] non recava affatto seco la schoenberghiana partitura del “Pierrot lunaire,” per la semplice ragione che non la possedeva, nè mai aveva avuto occasione di vederla. [...] Schoenberg, avvertito della presenza di Puccini, volle inviargli copia della partitura del *Pierrot Lunaire*—posto in programma—onde avesse agio di seguirla durante la esecuzione [...] volgendone le pagine sulle nostre ginocchia, seguimmo con concentrata attenzione la originalissima partitura. [...] A termine del concerto, Puccini si recò a restituire la partitura, a conoscere e a ringraziarne l’Autore. Prima di allora i due musicisti non avevano mai avuto occasione d’incontrarsi; e Arnold Schoenberg manifestò il suo deferente entusiasmo (non saprei usare più appropriate parole) e molto palese soddisfazione di poter finalmente stringere la mano a Giacomo Puccini. Le frasi che gli rivolse [...] furono di così alto compiacimento e viva cordialità che Puccini—timido com’era sempre rimasto, nonostante gli ‘usi do mondo’ e i trionfi che avrebbero dovuto assuefarlo, se non all’indifferenza, alla disinvoltura—ne arrossì visibilmente. [...] Rivolgendosi quindi in lingua francese all’illustre collega viennese, gli disse (quasi) testualmente: ‘Je vous remercie de m’avoir éclairé sur votre théorie avec le *Pierrot lunaire* que j’ai suivi très attentivement et qui me paraît une oeuvre fort intéressante.’] Guido Marotti, “Incontri e colloqui col Maestro,” *L’approdo musicale* 6/II (April-June 1959): 54-57.

⁵² Ibid. [Non penserai ch’io sia un passatista! [...] sono contento di avere avuto modo di toccare con mano, anzi con le orecchie, i fatti come si presentano oggi.]

⁵³ [volevo navigare in altre acque. [...] ci vogliono trovate musicali, essenzialmente musicali [...] quanto si è già fatto non bisogna rifarlo.] Gara, 182.

⁵⁴ [Ma avanti, non indietro! Con un lavoro modernamente costruito e sentito.] Adami, ed., *Epistolario*, 98.

different timbres than on the piano.”⁵⁵ Later that year, he wrote to Clausetti on 9 July 1911: “Everyone, from Verdi to Mascagni, evolved their style; some for good some for ill. [...] Renew oneself or die? The harmony of today and the orchestra are no longer the same. [...] I resolve, if I find the subject, to continue to do better on the path I have taken, sure not to be left in the retroguard.”⁵⁶

The question of Puccini’s Modernism *qua* astonishment ultimately rests not on whether his music shocks listeners now, but whether it astonished those of his own time—which only his contemporaries can judge. Luigi Parigi had this to say in 1918: “Puccini and Mascagni, who have let themselves be carried along by the current and have been swept away, [...] have followed it and have made themselves into modernists, externally, in various senses and in various ways.”⁵⁷ Then, from the same year, there is Webern’s note to Schoenberg after hearing *La fanciulla del West*: “A score that sounds original in every way. Splendid. Every measure astonishing.”⁵⁸

Despite the many contemporary voices cited in Alexandra Wilson’s informative book on Puccini reception,⁵⁹ there is one whose name is passed over: Domenico Alaleona, one of the few musicians who discussed Puccini’s scores analytically. Alaleona was a musicologist

⁵⁵ [Caro Crecchi, ...Dunque ti ha sorpreso l’armonizzazione della *Fanciulla*? Niente paura. In orchestra tutto si appiana, s’addolcisce, gli urti coi timbri diversi sono altra cosa che al piano.] Dr. Crecchi was a music lover from Livorno.

⁵⁶ [Tutti, da Verdi a Mascagni, hanno evoluto lo stile. [...] Rinnovarsi o morire? L’armonia d’oggi e l’orchestra non sono le stesse....io mi riprometto, se trovo il soggetto, di far sempre meglio nella via che ho preso, sicuro di non rimanere alla retroguardia.] Ibid., 392.

⁵⁷ [Il Puccini, il Mascagni col loro farsi trasportar dalla corrente e col loro avvenuto travolgimento...l’hanno seguita e si son fatti modernisti: in vario senso, in vario modo, esternamente.] Luigi Parigi, “Il momento musicale Italiano” *La critica musicale* (1918), in installments. Quoted in Giorgio Sanguinetti, “Puccini’s Music in the Italian Theoretical Literature of Its Day” in Deborah Burton, Susan Nicassio and Agostino Ziino, eds. *Tosca’s Prism* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2004), 223.

⁵⁸ Postcard of 27 March 1918, now housed at the Library of Congress. Webern goes on to write, “Very special sounds. (Not a trace of kitsch!) And mine is a first-hand impression. I have to say I really like it. How can it be? Do I err so completely? I would like so much to look at this score together with you. Has this opera completely bewitched me?” [Eine Partitur von durchaus ganz originellem Klang. Prachtvoll. Jeder Takt überraschend. Ganz besondere Klänge (Keine Spur von Kitsch!) Und ich habe den Eindruck [aus] erster Hand. Ich muss sagen, dass es mir sehr gefallen hat. Wie ist es nun? Irre ich mich ganz und gar? Ich würde so gerne diese Partitur mit Dir zusammen ansehen. Ganz verhext hat mich diese Oper?]

⁵⁹ Alexandra Wilson, *The Puccini Problem* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

and composer, as well as a theorist, who also worked as a choir director and taught music history at the Conservatory of Santa Cecilia in Rome.⁶⁰ He corresponded and worked with Puccini from about 1919, when he orchestrated his *Inno a Roma* (“disgraziato porcheria,”⁶¹ as Puccini called it), and they knew each other well enough then to use “carissimo” as a form of address. Before that, however, in 1910 and 1911, when Alaleona, certainly no Wagnerian,⁶² published his important theoretical articles, he was part of the Torinese circle of the journal *Rivista Musicale Italiana*, a publication quite unfriendly to Puccini.

In these two articles, one subtitled “the Art of Astonishment,” [“L’arte del stupore”], which were published contemporaneously with the composition of *Fanciulla*, Alaleona describes the modern musical technique of using harmonies and melodies that derive from the equal division of the octave.⁶³ If the octave is divided equally into two tritones, he labels it “biphony” [bifonia]; if it is divided equally into three major thirds, it becomes “triphony” [trifonia]; into six whole tones, it is “hexaphony” [esafonia]; and Alaleona does indeed continue on to “dodecaphony” [dodecafonìa].⁶⁴ Example 1.5 shows the harmonic and

⁶⁰ Alaleona’s life and work are discussed in Sanguinetti, “Puccini’s Music,” 226-232. Sanguinetti also notes, “the most significant aspect noted by writers of the day was—overwhelmingly—Puccini’s modernism, above all with respect to harmony.” Ibid., 222. Also see Mariella Busnelli, “Carteggio Giacomo Puccini - Domenico Alaleona, 1919-1924” *Quaderni Pucciniani*, 1985: 217-219.

⁶¹ [wretched garbage]

⁶² Alaleona writes of Wagner’s Italian acolytes, “his imitators are wretched people.” [i suoi imitatori sono la gente misera]. Domenico Alaleona, *Il Libro d’oro del Musicista*, 3rd ed. (Rome: Manuzio, 1922), 117. But Alaleona still admired the German composer: “If we have admonished the young Italian musician not to submit blindly to his influence in those qualities that are specifically German, at the same time we urge him to give to the figure and the operas of Wagner all the attention and all the study that one gives to the greatest.” [Se noi abbiamo messo in guardia il giovane musicista italiano a non voler subire ciecamente la sua influenza per ciò che v’è in lui di specificamente tedesco, nello stesso tempo lo incitiamo a volgere alla figura e alle opere di Wagner tutta l’attenzione e tutto lo studio che si volge ai grandissimi.] Ibid., 122.

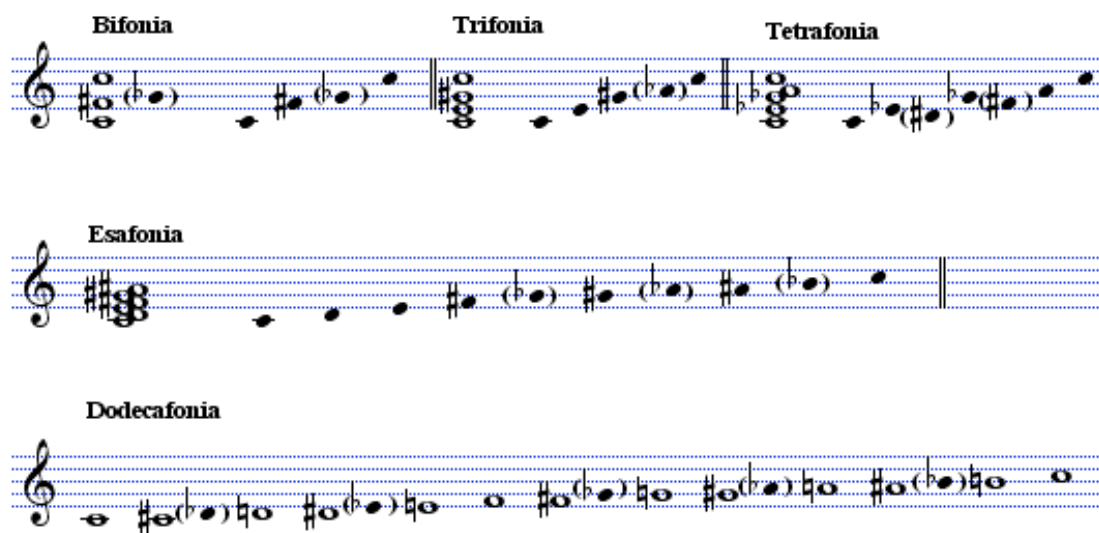
⁶³ Domenico Alaleona, “I moderni orizzonti della tecnica musicale. Teoria della divisione dell’ottava in parti uguali,” *Rivista musicale italiana*, 18 (1911): 382-420, and “L’armonia modernissima: le tonalità neutre e l’arte di stupore” *Rivista musicale italiana*, 18 (1911): 769-838.

⁶⁴ Alaleona, in “I moderni orizzonti,” 386, writes, “In our instruments that are tuned to the tempered chromatic scale, this division [of the octave into equal parts] can be made in five ways: in two, in three, in four, in six or in twelve equal parts. From each division arises a scale (melody), if the sounds are intoned successively, while intoning them simultaneously results in a chord (harmony).” [Nei nostri strumenti a scala cromatica temperata questa divisione si può fare in cinque maniere: in due, in tre, in quattro, in sei e in dodici parti uguali. Da ciascuna

melodic forms of these pitch collections, which he calls “neutral tonalities.” Although part of his articles detail innovative divisions of the octave, such as “pentaphony” [pentafonia], Alaleona separates his new ideas from what he calls “material previously known.”⁶⁵

Ex. 1.5

Alaleona's Neutral Tonalities and Art of Astonishment (1910-11)



Equal divisions of the octave were not new, and well-known examples abound in nineteenth-century opera, with early examples by Rossini and Weber.⁶⁶ But Alaleona individuates two ways in which equal divisions of the octave can be used: tonally and atonally. If the new symmetrical construction, say an augmented triad, resolves tonally, then

divisione nasce intonando i suoni che ne risultano successivamente una scala (melodia) intonandoli simultaneamente un accordo (armonia).]

⁶⁵ Ibid., 383. [materiale già conosciuto]

⁶⁶ In *Der Freischütz* (1821), the keys of the Wolf's Glen scene are based on a diminished seventh chord (F# minor at the opening - C minor at m. 50 - Eb major at m. 102 - A minor at m. 236 - C minor at m. 247 - F# min at m. 412); in addition, from measure 389, rising keys C, D, E, F#, Ab form a whole-tone pattern. Rossini's use of third-relations is discussed in Rothstein, "Common-tone Tonality," §6: "in chromatic third-relations it was Rossini who set the pattern for the rest of Europe to follow." Verdi also used interval cycles of thirds, as Rothstein notes, §49: "Some operas, such as *Macbeth* (1847, rev. 1865) and *Simon Boccanegra* (1857, rev. 1881), rely on major-third cycles and their associated hexatonic systems for their principal keys, each of which may have clear dramatic associations." Bribitzer-Stull has even found an underlying large-scale C-Ab-E-C structure in the Act II finale of Mozart's *Così fan tutte*. Matthew Bribitzer-Stull, "The Ab-C-E Complex: The Origin and Function of Chromatic Major Third Collections in Nineteenth-Century Music," *Music Theory Spectrum* 28/2 (Fall 2006): 175.

it is the tonal form; if not, and if the chord is used structurally, then it is the atonal form.⁶⁷

He rages against the teachers of traditional harmony who regard these chords only as altered forms of diatonic structures.⁶⁸

There are many instances in Puccini's works in which he uses equal divisions of the octave, most notably the tritone, the augmented triad and the whole-tone scale, which were duly noted by the composer's contemporaries. The third one-act opera in the *Trittico*—*Gianni Schicchi*—even shows parallel complexes combining both whole-tone scales (WT0 and WT1) [Ex. 1.6]. This passage exemplifies Alaleona's "dodecaphony."

Ex. 1.6 - *Gianni Schicchi*, reh. 81, two whole-tone sets, or "dodecafonìa"

⁶⁷ Alaleona describes this in quite colorful terms in "L'armonia modernissima," 771: "The scale and the chord of each system can be presented in two forms, one tonal form, the other atonal, in respect to classical tonality. In the first form, the component pitches of the system [...] avidly fling themselves toward the cadential axis of that tonality against which in that moment—since all these phonic orders have the characteristic of being able to belong to several keys—love takes them." [La scala e l'accordo di ciascun sistema si possono presentare in due forme: in una forma tonale e in una forma atonale, rispetto alle tonalità classiche. Nella prima forma i suoni componenti il sistema...si precipitano avidamente sull'asse cadenzale di quella tonalità verso cui in quel momento—poiché tutti questi ordini fonici hanno la caratteristica di potere appartenere a più tonalità—amor li porta.]

⁶⁸ Alaleona, "I moderni orizzonti," 394. "Traditional harmony has considered biphony, triphony and tetraphony [...] only from the harmonic point of view, and even from this vantage point, it has limited its examination to a most restrictive sphere. That is, it considered the chords related to these systems as incomplete forms or alterations of diatonic chords [...] a very grave aesthetic error, understandable given the vicissitudes of harmonic theory and the mentality of the schools of harmony that do not know how to detach themselves from the past, but [an error] that alters and greatly decreases the sphere in which these chords are to be considered." [L'armonia tradizionale ha considerato la bifonia, la trifonia e la tetrafonia [...] soltanto dal punto di vista armonico, e anche da questo punto di vista essa ha limitato l'occhio a una sfera ristrettissima: ha considerato cioè gli accordi relativi a questi sistemi come forme incomplete o alterazioni di accordi diatonici [...] un gravissimo errore estetico, spiegabile nelle vicende della teoria armonica e nella mentalità delle scuole di armonia che non sa distaccarsi dal passato, ma che altera e impiccolisce grandemente la cerchia in cui tali accordi vanno considerati.]

Often, however, Puccini does resolve them into an underlying tonal structure—Alaleona’s “tonal form.”⁶⁹ The whole-tone sonorities at the conclusions of *Manon Lescaut*, *Madama Butterfly* and *Fanciulla*, for example, all move to the tonic, as if they were harmonic “problems” requiring and receiving solutions. The end of *Manon*, accompanying reiterations of the heroine’s theme, shows a superficial use of the whole-tone complex: here, substituting for a dominant, it resolves to a deeper tonal structure, a passage Alaleona would consider a “tonal” use of the hexaphonic resource. [Ex. 1.7]

Ex. 1.7

Manon, Act III/ conclusion: whole-tone resolves tonally

whole-tone

F# minor

The question of resolution is not so simple, however. In *Tosca*, which premiered in 1900, the opening “prelude” (as Puccini labeled just the first three chords) consists of major chords on Bb, Ab and E, which, while diatonic in themselves, belong to no single diatonic collection. In fact, they are aligned along a whole-tone axis (hexaphony, in Alaleona’s terminology). As if to emphasize the “atonal” nature of this musical statement, Puccini notated it in the autograph score without a key signature, as he did in the sketched keyboard version reproduced below in Ex. I.1. It would seem, then, that this gesture does not resolve.

⁶⁹ Brown, Dempster and Headlam hypothesize that a direct tritone motion predicts the limits of Schenker’s theory of tonal music, and that music that has this quality is atonal, at least to some degree. They cite Schenker’s comments from *Harmonielehre* on the tritone juxtaposition of Db and G in Berlioz’s “March to the Scaffold,” from the *Symphonie fantastique*, as “suspended in mid-air”; that is, not directly related to the tonic and disrupting any sense of tonal continuity. Matthew Brown, Douglas Dempster, Dave Headlam, “The #IV (bV) Hypothesis: Testing the Limits of Schenker’s Theory of Tonality,” *Music Theory Spectrum* 19/2 (Autumn, 1997): 175.

However, as Example 1.8 shows, at the conclusion of this opera's first act, the prelude's "atonal" passage is shown transposed down a tritone, almost completing the whole-tone scale in the bass line, and prolonging the dominant Bb—ultimately a tonal move that then resolves to Eb major. (These nested layers of tonal and non-tonal structures⁷⁰ are explored further in chapter 2 as examples of *direct conflation*.)

Ex. 1.8 - *Tosca*, Act I conclusion, whole-tone based motive resolves tonally

The musical score for Example 1.8 is in 3/2 time and features a piano accompaniment. The bass line shows a whole-tone based motive that resolves tonally. The notes in the bass line are Bb, Ab, E, E, D, Bb, Bb dom 7, and Eb. The treble line has a fermata over the first measure. The score is labeled 'molto forza'.

In his second article, Alaleona searches for a way to describe the "atonal" manner in which the equal divisions of the octave function, and he concludes that these "neutral tonalities" entail a suspension of key sense, comparable to the effect that a fermata has on meter and rhythm.⁷¹ He then lists various moods or states of being with which these atonal forms have been used to correspond: enchantment, infantilization, desperation, abandon, ecstasy, nightmare, delirium, madness, annihilation, despondency, drowsiness, dream, and bliss. But he eventually decides on one general term that will cover all the emotions displayed by the neutral tonalities, which is—not astonishingly—"astonishment."⁷²

⁷⁰ The term "non-tonal" here can denote "atonal," "pantonal," "symmetrical" or even "anti-tonal"—a neologism meant to describe features that deliberately flaunt conventional rules of harmonic and contrapuntal progressions.

⁷¹ Alaleona, "L'armonia modernissima," 797. "For tonality and for tonal perception, the neutral tonalities can occupy a position analogous to that of the fermata for rhythm and rhythmic perception." [Per le tonalita' e per il senso tonale le tonalita' neutre possono occupare una posizione analoga di cio' che per il ritmo e il senso ritmico e' la sospensione, la cosiddetta corona.]

⁷² Ibid., 798. "My sentiment has taken me to use the word "astonishment" to embrace largely all these states of being, different from each other, but all reducible to one single fundamental sense; and to call "the art of astonishment" the art based on the neutral tonalities is the typical, natural expression of these states of being." [Il mio sentimento mi ha portato ad usare la parola stupore per abbracciare largamente tutti questi stati

Alaleona viewed the neutral tonalities as atonal because they imply not one key but reference several. Therefore, he would have considered an underlying organization based on equal divisions of the octave and supporting various tonalities to be atonal as well. Thus, if Puccini's music were to make use of the "neutral tonalities" in this more structural manner, it would meet his standard and clear the more restrictive hurdle of Modernism as atonality, as it was known in the composer's own time.

Yet Alaleona believed that to compose in either an all-tonal or all-atonal idiom robbed the piece of contrast: that the preferred use of atonality is *within* the context of tonality. He even writes that completely whole-tone pieces, for example, are boring and monochromatic: "all the fascination, all the exquisiteness, all the artistic and expressive potential of our systems is in the gradual passage of the sonic arrangements from one to another of the tonalities they could approach"⁷³ and, "certain pieces rich in beautiful modulations and tone passages produce in me a dazzling, exquisite sensation of colors and nuances. [...] The music of Debussy seems monochrome or nearly so; I do not see there anything but a gray with here and there some iridescent lights verging on red [...] but always gray [...] the effect is without doubt characteristic and pleasant, but very [...] monotonous and limited."⁷⁴ Puccini agreed and did so in almost the same terms. Witness his assessment of Debussy's only opera: "*Pelléas et Mélisande* of Debussy has extraordinary harmonic qualities

d'animo, diversi tra loro, ma tutti riducentisi ad uno stesso senso fondamentale: ed a chiamare "arte di stupore" l'arte basata sulle tonalità neutre, che di questi stati d'animo sono la propria, natural espressione.]

⁷³Ibid., 779. [Tutto il fascino, tutta la squisitezza, tutta la potenza espressiva e artistica dei nostri sistemi sta nel passaggio graduale, degli ordini sonori risultantine, da un ad un'altra delle tonalità cui possono accedere.]

⁷⁴Ibid., 831. [Certi pezzi ricchi di belle modulazioni e passaggio di tono [...] producono in me una smagliante, squisita sensazione di colori e di sfumature [...] La musica del Debussy a me produce l'impressione di monocromia o quasi: io non ci veggo altro che un grigio con qua e là delle lievi iridescenze verso il rosso [...] ma sempre grigio [...] l'effetto è senza dubbio caratteristico e simpatico, ma assai [...] monotono e limitato.]

and diaphanous instrumental sensations. It is truly interesting, despite its somber color, as uniform as a franciscan habit.”⁷⁵

Alaleona puts great stock in musical structure, however, not just in the surface use of new harmonies, and he criticizes composers for having a taste for “neolalia,” the search for novelty as an end in itself.⁷⁶ In fact, in the one citation of Puccini’s music in Alaleona’s articles, he criticizes the composer for using the equal division of the octave only ornamentally, and not “poetically,” by which he means structurally.⁷⁷ In regard to a simultaneous sounding of a whole-tone complex on C from *Fanciulla*, Alaleona writes: “Let

⁷⁵ Letter from Puccini to Giulio Ricordi, 15 November 1906. Adami, *Epistolario*, 100. [*Pelléas et Mélisande* di Debussy ha qualità straordinarie di armonie e sensazioni diafane strumentali. È veramente interessante, malgrado il suo colore sombre, uniforme come un abito francescano.] During his lifetime, Puccini was often compared to Claude Debussy because both composers made use of whole-tone collections and non-traditional harmonies. One contemporary review of *Fanciulla* from the 1910 premiere in New York noted:

“It is quite true that Debussy holds no copyright upon augmented intervals, whole-tone melodic progressions, and certain sequences of ‘ninth’ chords; but it is nevertheless a fact, unfortunate for Puccini, that certain harmonic combinations, certain ways of grouping particular chords, certain ways of threading a melodic line, have become unalterably associated in the minds of experienced observers with the original and exquisite genius who gave the world a new order of music.” [Lawrence Gilman, “The World of Music: Puccini’s American Opera” *Harper’s Weekly*, 17 December 1910.] If Puccini was deemed derivative, the same must be said then of Debussy, whose “new order of music” (a modernist phrase if ever there were one), insofar as it was based on whole-tone collections, was actually popularized in Western Europe by the Russians, with the help of Franz Liszt. See Jim Sampson, *Music in Transition: a study of tonal expansion and atonality, 1900-1920* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977, rep. 2002) and Mosco Carner, “Portrait of Debussy. 4: Debussy and Puccini” *The Musical Times* 108/1492 (June 1967): 502-505.

⁷⁶ Alaleona, “I moderni orizzonti,” 227. Strangely enough, Adorno, writing in 1947, agrees with him: “Generally, all artistic means that were originally conceived for their stimulating effect rather than for their structural significance grow threadbare and obsolete with extraordinary rapidity.” Theodor Adorno and Hans Eisler. *Composing for the Films*. London: The Athlone Press, 1994 ed. [original edition 1947], 17. In “L’armonia modernissima,” 799 note, Alaleona writes, “we believe that music has a logic, a development, a breath, an architecture of its own, which it cannot renounce without ceasing to be music.” [crediamo che la musica ha una logica, uno svolgimento, un respiro, una architettura sua propria, cui non puo’ rinunciare senza cessare di essere musica.] This statement is quite reminiscent of Mozart’s comment to his father in a letter of 27 September 1781 regarding Osmin’s rage aria from *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*, in which he maintains that “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.” Mozart then explains his plans to end the aria in a key that is not the tonic, but not too unrelated to the tonic either.

⁷⁷ Alaleona’s verbal opposition of “poetic” and “ornamental” indicates that he is using the former term in its sense of “relating to creation,” hence “structural.” This interpretation is seconded in Sanguinetti “Puccini’s Music,” 231.

Ex. 1.10a - *Edgar*, original version, Act II, sc. 4, major-third cycle E-C-Ab

Ex. 1.10a is a musical score for piano, featuring a major-third cycle. The score is divided into three sections, each with a different time signature and key signature. The first section is in E major 6/4, the second is in C dominant 4/2, and the third is in Ab dominant 4/3. The cycle is represented by a series of chords connected by a line, showing the progression from E major to C dominant to Ab dominant. The score includes treble and bass staves with various musical notations, including triplets and dynamic markings.

Ex. 1.10b - *Edgar*, Act I/ 37-38, minor-third cycle

Ex. 1.10b is a musical score for piano, featuring a minor-third cycle. The score is divided into five sections, each with a different key signature and time signature. The cycle is represented by a series of chords connected by a line, showing the progression from G to Bb to Db to E to G. The score includes treble and bass staves with various musical notations, including triplets and dynamic markings.

The score of *Manon Lescaut*, which had its premiere in 1893, also makes structural use of the major-third cycle on E-Ab-C. [Ex. 1.11].

Ex. 1.11

Manon, Act II/35: composed-out augmented triad

Ex. 1.11 is a musical score for piano, featuring a composed-out augmented triad. The score is divided into five sections, each with a different key signature and time signature. The cycle is represented by a series of chords connected by a line, showing the progression from E to Ab to C. The score includes treble and bass staves with various musical notations, including triplets and dynamic markings.

With the 1910 *Fanciulla del West*, Puccini again employs the division of the octave into minor thirds, as well as ending the act on an unresolved C ninth chord. Here, the first

iteration of Minnie's sequential theme is supported by a traditional harmonic progression of I-vi-ii-vii-V-I. But the second time, it is transposed down by four minor thirds, outlining the diminished seventh chord C-A-F#-Eb-C—Alaleona's tetrachord. [Ex. 1.12] Notice, however, that both the diatonic and "atonal" versions begin and end on C: so, despite the overlay of non-traditional harmonies and structures, this last passage functions as a prolongation of the tonic, as many traditional codas would.

Ex. 1.12

Fanciulla, Act I, conclusion: tonal then "atonal" (dim 7th) structures with 9th chords

The musical score consists of four systems of piano accompaniment, each with a treble and bass staff. The first system is labeled with 'C' at the beginning, 'I 9' below the first measure, 'vi 9' below the third measure, and 'ii 9' below the fifth measure. The second system is labeled with 'vii 6/5' below the first measure, 'V 13' below the third measure, 'I 9' below the fifth measure, and a bracketed section labeled 'composed-out diminished 7th' spanning the last two measures. The third and fourth systems continue the harmonic progression without labels.

Madama Butterfly contains what Alaleona would consider both tonal and atonal uses of the “neutral tonalities.” In the second act,⁸¹ at II/83/0, there is a structural tritone shift from a D eleventh chord to G# minor [Ex. 1.13a] but at the conclusion of the opera, in which Pinkerton’s final cry “Butterfly!” is accompanied by a whole-tone theme, it is quickly “resolved” by the following tonal motion to B minor [Ex. 1.13b].

Ex. 1.13a

Madama Butterfly, Act II/83/0: tritone shift D-G#

The score is in 3/4 time. The treble clef staff begins with a piano (*pp*) dynamic. The first measure shows a D11 chord (D4, F#4, A4, B4, C#5, D5) with a 6th interval bracketed. The second measure shows a G# minor chord (G#4, B4, D5) with a 6th interval bracketed. The bass clef staff shows a D4 note in the first measure and a G#4 note in the second measure. The key signature changes from one sharp (F#) to two sharps (F#, C#).

Ex. 1.13b

Madama Butterfly, conclusion: whole-tone resolves tonally

The score is in 4/4 time. The treble clef staff shows a whole-tone theme (F#4, G#4, A4, B4, C#5, D5) with a 6th interval bracketed. The bass clef staff shows a whole-tone theme (F#3, G#3, A3, B3, C#4, D4) with a 6th interval bracketed. The key signature changes from two sharps (F#, C#) to three sharps (F#, C#, G#). The tempo marking is "Butterfly".

Ex. 1.13c

The score is in 4/4 time. The treble clef staff shows a whole-tone theme (F#4, G#4, A4, B4, C#5, D5) with a 6th interval bracketed. The bass clef staff shows a whole-tone theme (F#3, G#3, A3, B3, C#4, D4) with a 6th interval bracketed. The key signature changes from three sharps (F#, C#, G#) to two sharps (F#, C#). The tempo marking is "Butterfly".

⁸¹ This score indication is in reference to the three-act Paris version of the opera.

Yet, it is difficult to imagine what would be more astonishing, more shocking, to the audiences of 1904, than to hear an opera conclude without a definitive resolution to the tonic [Ex. 1.13c]. Although B minor is clearly implied, the final measures of the work show an unresolved 6-5 motion in which the upper G never resolves to F#, which replaces the B minor with what appears to be G major in first inversion. This one unresolved note opens a door to atonality—in today’s sense—and is quite possibly the first opera to take this step.

Gay’s description of “modernist composer who deliberately violates the traditional rules of harmony and counterpoint”⁸² can fit Puccini quite well. Behaving perhaps like one of the rebellious Bohemians he was depicting, the composer blatantly trumpets empty parallel fifths at the openings of both Act II (in five-bar phrases) and Act III of the 1896 *La bohème*, which had the added benefit of annoying critic Eduard Hanslick, Wagner’s nemesis: “In the most diverse scenes arise columns of ascending and descending parallel fifths of such obtrusive ugliness—preferably blared ‘marcatissimo’ by trumpets—that one asks oneself in vain what the composer wanted to accomplish with these rude monstrosities?”⁸³ [Exx. 1.14a and b].

⁸² Gay, *Modernism*, 4.

⁸³ [Da erheben sich in den verschiedensten Szenen Kolonnen auf- und niedersteigender paralleler Quinten von so aufbringlicher Hässlichkeit - am liebsten “marcatissimo” von Trompeten geblasen! - dass man sich vergebens fragt, was denn der Komponist mit diesen ungezogenen Scheufälchen bezwecken mochte?] Eduard Hanslick: “*Die moderne Oper*,” VIII (Berlin, 1899), 81-83. Quoted in English translation in Groos and Parker. *Giacomo Puccini “La bohème”*, 134-135.

Ex. 1.14a

La bohème, Act II, opening: parallel 5ths

[five-bar phrases]

Ex. 1.14b

La bohème, Act III opening: parallel 5ths

Another characteristic frequently considered Modernist (as in the *locus classicus* of Modernism, Stravinsky's *Le sacre du printemps*) is bitonality/polytonality. The dissonant pedal shown in Ex. 1.15, an excerpt from *Le Villi* at II, number 7, looks forward to bitonality even as it recalls antecedents in tonal works—the dissonant pedal point is a common feature of Baroque keyboard works and can even be indicated with traditional figured bass numeration. It is also, however, a distinguishing feature of Puccini's sketch for the song “Ad una morta,” which he labeled “Alla Wagner” (Ex. 1.1).

Ex. 1.15

Le villi, Act II, n. 7: dissonance over pedal, proto-bitonal

Edgar also shows hints of a proto-polytonality,⁸⁴ in scene 2 of Act III of the original version.⁸⁵ Here a B-F# double pedal point underlies A minor, G major and C major chords [Ex. 1.16a], which will be echoed in a riveting scene of the 1918 *Il Tabarro* (rehearsal number 85), in which the main character, Michele, hears a distant trumpet; the quasi-bitonal clash in the second example is between an A minor pedal and the Bb major of the trumpet [Ex. 1.16b].

Ex. 1.16a - *Edgar*, original version, Act III, scene 2, proto-polytonality

The musical notation for Ex. 1.16a is in 2/4 time. The bass staff features a B-F# double pedal point, with B and F# notes sustained across the first three measures. The treble staff shows a sequence of chords: A minor in the first measure, G major in the second, and C major in the third. The notation includes a triplet of eighth notes in the final measure of the treble staff.

Ex. 1.16b - *Il Tabarro*, 85, bitonality

The musical notation for Ex. 1.16b is in 2/4 time. The bass staff features an A minor pedal point, with A and C notes sustained across the first three measures. The treble staff shows a sequence of chords: Bb major in the first measure, and a melodic line in the second and third measures. The notation includes a triplet of eighth notes in the final measure of the treble staff.

Puccini's final, incomplete opera *Turandot*, shows striking bitonality in its opening bars, when D minor clashes with C# minor [Ex. 1.17].

⁸⁴ As noted previously, we use the term "proto-bitonality" to indicate the superimposition of elements from different diatonic collections, without longer-term establishment of those keys.

⁸⁵ The revised version of *Edgar*, at the parallel moment (III/22/0), shows the dissonant pedal B below C major, but then moving to F#7 and B major: in other words, a much more traditional passage of bII6-V7-I over a tonic pedal.

Ex. 1.17 - *Turandot*, opening with bitonality

The musical score for Ex. 1.17 from *Turandot* is presented in two systems. The first system shows a piano introduction with a forte (*fff*) dynamic. The right hand features a series of chords, while the left hand plays a descending line. The second system continues the piece, with the right hand playing a melody in C# major and the left hand playing a bass line in D minor. The bitonality is explicitly labeled with "C# major" and "D minor" on the right side of the score. A tritone relationship is noted as "E# = F".

In one section of *Il Tabarro*, at rehearsal number 84, we can see three Modernist characteristics almost simultaneously: the section opens with open parallel fourths over Eb, which abruptly end in a tritone shift to A minor. This then is adorned with a C major tune in a bitonal combination [Ex. 1.18].

Ex. 1.18 - *Il tabarro*, 84, parallels, tritone shift, bitonality

The musical score for Ex. 1.18 from *Il Tabarro* is presented in two systems. The first system shows a piano introduction with a *Leato molto* tempo marking. The right hand features a series of chords, while the left hand plays a descending line. The bitonality is explicitly labeled with "Eb major" and "A minor" on the left side of the score. The second system continues the piece, with the right hand playing a melody in C major and the left hand playing a bass line in A minor. The bitonality is explicitly labeled with "C major" and "A minor" on the right side of the score. A tritone relationship is noted as "E# = F".

Despite these Modernist touches, Puccini allies himself with tonal composers when confronted by unambiguously atonal music: after hearing *Pierrot Lunaire* in 1924, he told Marotti: “If one day—who knows how many thousands of centuries from now—the auditory organ and the nervous system that connects it will have undergone a radical transformation, then it may also be that this music will be well accepted, while our tonal system with its related chromatic superstructure, will become repellent.”⁸⁶ He knew he was not wholly part of that future world, and would remain with at least one foot firmly planted in the diatonic system.

And if Modernism entails iconoclasm, one might wonder how to reconcile Puccini’s rebellious bent with his pursuit of commercial success (handily achieved). A partial answer comes from examining the nature of contemporary audiences: opera was, and to some extent remains, a popular medium in Italy, whose adherents thirsted for innovation and eagerly paid for tickets to see the latest opus. As Puccini wrote to Valentino Soldani on 28 June 1904: “One must surprise this blessed public presenting it with a prey more modernly original and with new developments.”⁸⁷ Put another way, the artist must be heretical because heresy is conventional. Puccini’s iconoclasm was thus part of an artistically accepted career path—the Tradition of the New, as Richard Taruskin has disparagingly called it⁸⁸—which Stravinsky, Schoenberg and other acknowledged Modernists have followed.

In the end, then, we are left with complex and compound results. If we judge Puccini by Alaleona’s standards, he is sometimes an atonal composer and sometimes not.

⁸⁶ [Se un giorno, non sappiamo fra quante migliaia di secoli, l’organo auditivo e il sistema nervoso che vi si connette avranno subito una radicale trasformazione, allora potrebbe anche darsi che cotesta musica fosse bene accetta, mentre quella nostra del sistema tonale, e relativa superstruttura cromatica, potrà diventare repellente.] Guido Marotti, “Incontri e colloqui col Maestro,” *L’approdo musicale* 6/II (April-June 1959): 56.

⁸⁷ [Bisogna sorprendere questo benedetto pubblico presentando a lui una preda piu’ modernamente originale e di sviluppo nuovo.] Gara, *Carteggi*, 277.

⁸⁸ Richard Taruskin, “A Myth of the Twentieth Century: *The Rite of Spring*, the Tradition of the New, and “The Music Itself” *Modernism/Modernity* 2.1 (1995): 1-26.

Further, the Modernism of Puccini's operas complements—and puts into relief—his many traditionally tonal passages. One solution is to replace the atonal/tonal binary opposition with a graduated scale. As Richard Cohn suggests, “habits of thought tend to obstruct our ability to conceive of a composition as combining segments that are coherently tonal with others that are not. One such habit is the hypostasization of the tonal/atonal binary at the level of the composition,” which, he adds, is giving way to “alternate paths.”⁸⁹

One of these alternate paths is the one carved out by Andrew Davis, who traces the interplay of Puccini's different “styles” and derives much meaning from their juxtaposition.⁹⁰ But the dichotomy of traditional and progressive elements plays out in almost every parameter of Puccini's output in each of his operas, as we shall soon see—not just in musical styles.

In the end, it is the composer himself, in unpublished interview notes written sometime around 1915, who supplies the best description of his aesthetic: “Let us indeed keep in mind all the harmonic and technical progresses that arrive from beyond the mountains and the seas, but let us keep the clarity, the spontaneity and the simplicity that characterize our music.”⁹¹ Almost an echo of his schoolboy dreams.

⁸⁹ Richard Cohn, “An Introduction to Neo-Riemannian Theory: A Survey and Historical Perspective”, *Journal of Music Theory*, 42/2 (1998), 168.

⁹⁰ Andrew Davis, *Il Trittico, Turandot and Puccini's Late Style* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2010).

⁹¹ [Facciamo pure tesoro di tutti i progressi armonici e tecnici che ci arrivano d'oltre monte e d'oltre mare ma conserviamo la chiarezza la spontaneità e la semplicità che caratterizzano la nostra musica.] Frederick R. Koch Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, n. 734, 5.