

## Recondite Harmony: the Operas of Puccini

### Chapter 13: *Turandot*: dawn at dusk

The unknown prince: “And at dawn I will die!”

Turandot: “It is dawn! It is dawn! Turandot’s sun is setting!”<sup>1</sup>

A central image in Puccini’s *Turandot* is that of death at dawn, an ending at a beginning. For the composer as well, his final, incomplete opera represents the conclusion of a life’s work that also marks a broad leap into a modernist sound world. At the same time, *Turandot* is the culmination of the process of intertwining opposing forces—traditional and progressive—that distinguish his entire creative operatic output. But there is no resolution here. The dichotomy has only become more intense: the musical language of Puccini’s last work simultaneously delves much deeper into the past and reaches further into the future than that of its predecessors.

Nor surprisingly, the opera has created two diametrically opposed critical impressions. Ashbrook and Powers see the work as the end of the Great Tradition of Italian Romantic opera. They cite its division into clearly defined units as evidence of the opera’s place in the “number opera” tradition: “*Turandot* [is] a fitting Finale for the Great Tradition, [...] a number opera in the grand manner of *Semiramide* and *Aida*.”<sup>2</sup> Others also recognize long-established traits in the opera: Titone sees neo-Classic strategies in the work,<sup>3</sup> while Budden and Davis place it in the tradition of grand opera. As Davis writes:

an enormous, late-Romantic, Germanic orchestra with large percussion forces and an on-stage band [...] the piece also includes Puccini’s largest and

<sup>1</sup> [Il Principe ignoto: “E all’alba morirò” / Turandot: “È l’alba! È l’alba! Turandot tramonta!”]

<sup>2</sup> William Ashbrook and Harold Powers, *Puccini’s ‘Turandot’: the End of the Great Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 6-7, 13. They have created tables of these numbers on pages 16ff.

<sup>3</sup> Antonino Titone, *Visi d’arte*, 103. Quoted in Girardi, *Puccini*, 456.

most active chorus, cast as a Pekingese crowd of onlookers, but also including servants of the executioner, attendants to Turandot, a group of phantoms (spirits of dead suitors), imperial guards and soldiers, priests, banner bearers, sages, mandarins, and other of the emperor's dignitaries.<sup>4</sup>

In an interview, with Edoardo Savino in May 1924, Puccini seems to second this: “[*Turandot*] has above all a character of grandiosity.”<sup>5</sup>

Certainly with the new *Turandot*, Puccini was turning away from his own success with realism and realistic characters towards an older, more traditional storyline of fantasy and legend.<sup>6</sup> Not since his first opera, *Le Villi*, had the composer attempted this; as Carner writes, he was coming full circle.<sup>7</sup>

At the same time, however, Ashbrook sees modernity in *Turandot*'s “highly individualized orchestration that capitalizes on clashing timbres and unexpected harmonies”<sup>8</sup> D’Amico looks to the work’s ceremonial pacing as a signifier of a modern sensibility: “more than any stylistic character, in *Turandot* the ‘newness’ arises from the structure, from the general pacing that governs it, conferring on the opera its gait of cruel, affected, impassive ceremony.”<sup>9</sup> Wilson has explored the modernist detachment of the title character as “a

<sup>4</sup> Andrew Davis, *Il Tritico, Turandot and Puccini's Late Style* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2010), 171-2, and Julian Budden, *Puccini: His Life and Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 446.

<sup>5</sup> [Ha soprattutto carattere di grandiosità] Edoardo Savino, “*Turandot*, la nuova opera di Puccini,” *Il Mezzogiorno* (Naples) [May 1924], n.p. Puccini goes on to say: “all the elements of the theater are included: the sentimental character of Liù, the comic element of the three masks, the dramatic element and grandiose scenes such as the ceremonies at court and the riddle scene.

<sup>6</sup> The libretto for *Turandot*, written by Renato Simoni and Giuseppe Adami, was based on a play by the Venetian Carlo Gozzi, *Turandotte* (1762) from his *Fiabe teatrali*. Before that, the Arabian folktale was told in *Les Mille & un jour: contes persans*, (1710-12) translated by François Pétis de la Croix as “l’Histoire du Prince Calaf”. Friedrich Schiller had written a version for the Weimar court in 1802, *Turandot, Prinzessin von China: ein tragikomisches Märchen nach Gozzi*, to which Weber later contributed some incidental music. See Budden, *Puccini*, 424-5.

<sup>7</sup> Carner, *Puccini*, 462.

<sup>8</sup> William Ashbrook, *The Operas of Puccini*, 2nd ed. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 216.

<sup>9</sup> [Ma piu’ che da particolarità di stile, in *Turandot* la ‘novità’ nasce dall’impianto, dall’andatura generale che la governa, conferendo all’opera il suo passo di cerimoniale crudele, prezioso, impassibile.] Fedele D’Amico, “L’opera insolita,” *Quaderni Pucciniani* (1985): 73-4.

deliberate, if tentative, move on Puccini's part towards updating his operatic style, an exploration of the ways in which opera might engage with modernist preoccupations in the other arts."<sup>10</sup>

Salvetti, on the other hand, sees a "new Puccini" in aspects of the score itself: he writes that *Turandot* is

a very singular opera because of the boldness of the harmonic and orchestral writing: the use of dissonance gets angular and provocative in the 'comic' scenes; polytonal chords, orchestral sonorities with great resonances of the gong open the third act [...] This true absence of intimacy, this crowding of the scenes in the culminating moments [...] are aspects of a new Puccini, like the impersonal, icy, alienated song of the princess Turandot.<sup>11</sup>

Also viewing the work as modern, Stoianova claims to hear in *Turandot* 's musical language echoes of other contemporary composers: Prokofiev's *Suite scythe*, Ravel's *Daphnis et Chloe*, Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire*, Debussy's *Pelléas et Melisande* and Bartok's *Bluebeard's Castle*.<sup>12</sup>

Indeed, Celli has noted that the melody for "Tu che di gel sei cinta" derives from *Pelléas* (Act III, scene 1, "Un des tours du château").<sup>13</sup> And Puccini quotes, at II/21/1, the main melody from the "Danse des Nounous" of Stravinsky's *Petrouchka*.

<sup>10</sup> Alexandra Wilson, "Modernism and the Machine Woman in Puccini's *Turandot*," *Music & Letters*, 86/3 (2005): 433.

<sup>11</sup> [opera singolarissima anche per l'arditezza della scrittura armonica e orchestrale: l'uso della dissonanza giunge ad essere angoloso e provocatorio nelle scene 'comiche'; accordi politonali, sonorità orchestrali con grandi risonanze di gong, fanno dell'inizio del terzo atto [...] Questa vera assenza di intimità, questo affollamento delle scene nei momenti culminanti [...] sono aspetti di un nuovo Puccini, come il canto 'straniato' gelido, impersonale della principessa Turandot.] Guido Salvetti, *La nascita del Novecento*, Storia della Musica 10 (Turin: Edizioni di Torino, 1991), 275.

<sup>12</sup> Ivanka Stoianova, "Remarques sur l'Actualité de *Turandot*" In *Esotismo e colore locale nell'opera di Puccini* (Pisa: Giardini, 1983), 202.

<sup>13</sup> Teodoro Celli, "Gli abbozzi per *Turandot*," *Quaderni Pucciniani* (1985): 43-65. Originally published as two articles: "Scoprire la melodia" *La Scala* (April 1951) and "L'ultimo canto," *La Scala* (May 1951), 62n.

Always interested in new musical developments, Puccini went out of his way near the end of his life to attend a performance of Schoenberg's revolutionary *Pierrot Lunaire* at the Pitti Palace in Florence during the spring of 1924.<sup>14</sup> After that concert, according to Guido Marotti, Puccini said, "Don't think that I'm a 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."<sup>15</sup> The composer Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco,<sup>16</sup> who was also in attendance, confirms the fact that Puccini indeed followed the score to *Pierrot Lunaire* while listening to the performance.<sup>17</sup>

Castelnuovo-Tedesco spent the month of July 1924—just four months before Puccini's death—in Viareggio and had frequent encounters there with the composer. His description shows how interested Puccini was in modern musical innovations:

I met him on one of my first days there, on the seaside promenade, and he invited me to visit him. [...] Puccini had often been described to me as a typical Italian opera composer, completely absorbed in his work and having few general interests. But in talking with him I soon realized that he was very curious about others' works and that he followed, with great interest, everything that was happening in modern music.<sup>18</sup>

Later, Puccini showed the younger man his latest project, *Turandot*:

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<sup>14</sup> The appearance of moon imagery, common to both works, probably reflects the influence of Strauss's *Salome*. There is much less moon imagery in the Gozzi original. *Turandot* also shares with *Salome* a visible severed head and seductive dancing girls.

<sup>15</sup> Guido Marotti, "Incontri e colloqui col Maestro," *L'approdo musicale* 6/II (April-June 1959): 56. [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.]

<sup>16</sup> Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco: (Florence, April 3, 1895 - Los Angeles, March 16, 1968) Italian-born American composer, studied piano and composition with Ildebrando Pizzetti. He attained considerable eminence in his native country between the wars, until political events and his Jewish heritage forced him to leave Italy. In 1939, he settled in the USA. He wrote film scores in Hollywood but also continued to teach and to write operas, oratorios, orchestral and chamber music. His opera *La mandragola*, after Macchiavelli, won the Italian National prize in 1926.

<sup>17</sup> Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco, "From a Lifetime of Music: Puccini, Schoenberg, Stravinsky and others," Harvey Sachs, trans., *Grand Street*, 9/1 (Autumn 1989): 151.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

He played me various parts and he discussed the scoring with me; then, at one point, he shut the piano score and said: “But I’m tired, now, of writing these operas, in which three acts of chatter are needed *in order to get to the catastrophe, for better or for worse.*” These were his exact words: I remember them precisely because they made such an impression on me. “I would like something that would provide me with *lyrical possibilities*, without requiring so much talk; perhaps some separate scenes, connected only through the music: tragic episodes, comic episodes, dances. But I can’t find anyone to give me what I want!” I was profoundly struck and surprised to realize that Puccini, who had always been essentially an exponent of “traditional” opera, had, at the end of his glorious career, arrived at a concept of the theater that was very similar to the one Malipiero attempted to achieve with his *Sette canzoni*.<sup>19</sup>

But Puccini may have intuited by this time in his life that younger composers were willing to go where he was not. His most frequent complaint is that new works lack a sense of melody, as in this note of 1 May 1922 to Renato Simoni, one of the librettists for *Turandot*: “Nobody writes melody any more, or if they do it is vulgar. They believe that ‘symphonism’ should reign, whereas I think that would be the end of opera. In Italy they used to sing; now no more. Blows, discordant chords, false expression, transparency, opalescence, lymphaticism. All Celtic diseases, a real pox from across the seas.”<sup>20</sup>

Puccini’s turn of phrase here is striking as it completely reverses his earlier statements welcoming foreign influences. Perhaps he felt more patriotic in his later years, or

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 152-153.

<sup>20</sup> [La melodia non si fa piu’ o, se si fa, è volgare. Si crede che il sinfonismo debba regnare e invece io credo che è la fine dell’opera di teatro. In Italia si cantava, ora non piu’. Colpi, accordi discordi, finta espressione, diafanismo [transparency], opalismo, linfatismo. Tutte le malattie celtiche, vera lue oltramontana.] Gara, *Carteggi*, 524. In a poem written to Buzzi Peccia, Puccini also complains about the lack of melody in modern scores: “E l’armonia/Sola, soletta/Da tanto aspetta/Quel tal di luce/Che gliela dia/La melodia” [And poor harmony/ All alone / has been waiting a long time for/ that sparkle of light/ that melody can give it.]

was more concerned with projecting *italianità* now that he had the chance to become a senator (or as he jokingly called the title, “suonatore”). In the interview with Savino, Puccini emphasized the Italian nature of the libretto, if not the musical language: “the subject is Italian, very Italian. I know that in Vienna everyone was happy that I chose what, according to them, is a German subject. Instead I demonstrated that Schiller translated Gozzi, which was and remains Italian.”<sup>21</sup> Perhaps Puccini protests too much, since, as mentioned previously, Ugo Ojetti, during a visit to the composer’s home in Viareggio, saw portraits of Beethoven and Wagner on his music stand, standing guard over the *Turandot* manuscript.<sup>22</sup>

Davis has framed the conflict of traditional and modern aspects of the work as a problem of form:

how to achieve a near-total integration of conventionality with unconventionality—that is, an approach that arranges kinetic and static movements into set pieces analogous to conventional melodramatic prototypes and one that simultaneously deploys a series of shorter episodes articulated according to a complex array of musical styles.<sup>23</sup>

One prototype to which Davis refers is the “solita forma,” following Ashbrook and Powers. The term was first used by Abramo Basevi in relation to works of Verdi’s period and earlier: “The usual form of duets, that is a *tempo d’attacco*, the *adagio*, the *tempo di mezzo*, and the *cabaletta*.”<sup>24</sup> The “form” was considered passé early in, if not before, Puccini’s career. In

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<sup>21</sup> [il soggetto e’ italiano, italianissimo. So che a Vienna erano tutti lieti che io avessi scelto quello che—secondo loro—e’ un soggetto tedesco. Invece dimostrai che lo Schiller tradusse il Gozzi, il quale era e resta italiano.]

<sup>22</sup> Ugo Ojetti, *Cose Viste* (Florence: Sansoni, 1951): 336-337. See chapter 1.

<sup>23</sup> Davis, *Il Trittico*, 168.

<sup>24</sup> [La solita forma de’ duetti, cioe’ quella che vuole un *tempo d’attacco*, l’*adagio*, il *tempo di mezzo*, e la *Cabaletta*.] Abramo Basevi, *Studio sulle opere di Giuseppe Verdi* (Florence: Tipografia Tofani, 1859), 191. Quoted in Powers, “Form and Formula,” 13. See also David Rosen in “La solita forma’ in Puccini’s Operas?” *Studi Pucciniani* 3 (2004): 177-199. Ashbrook and Powers define it as “the sequence of four movements is usually introduced with a recitative scena; the first and third lyric movements are “kinetic”—open-ended as to both stanzaic and musical design, with little or no text repetition for musical purposes—while the second and fourth lyric movements are

1899, librettist Luigi Illica had put them firmly in past, with his statement that musical form determined by verse structure used to work well in the days of the cabaletta, but were no longer of use.<sup>25</sup> Although some scholars have been critical of investing Puccini's operas with links to the older forms, it is worthy of consideration that the composer, in reversing his own tracks later in life, may have made references an earlier formal rubric.<sup>26</sup> Yet, Ashbrook and Powers manage to trace the *solita forma* in *Turandot*<sup>27</sup> in Acts II and III.

They also suggest four distinct *tinte* (generalized harmonic colorings): the Chinese, the Dissonance, the Middle Eastern Orientalism, and the Romantic-diatonic.<sup>28</sup> Davis reorganizes these into three *style types*: Romantic, Dissonant and Exotic, with the last subdivided into Chinese, Primitive and Persian. He writes: “the styles in *Turandot*—Romantic and non-Romantic alike—are so strongly asserted and the contrasts among them so apparent that they naturally produce independent, autonomous formal units—*episodes*—on all levels of the structure, global to local.”<sup>29</sup> The juxtapositions of these styles are instances of large-scale *indirect conflation*, or *innesto*, as discussed in chapter 2.

If we look at this formal situation through the lens of old/traditional vs. new/progressive techniques, Davis's style types delineate shorter episodes (new/progressive) that can coincide with or contradict the “number” units (old/traditional), shown together in Ex. 13.0 for Act II. For example, the two formal strategies converge at rehearsal numbers 25 and 50, but do not at 40-43.

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‘static,’ that is, cast in regular stanzas, formally rounded and closed musically, with much musical extension carried on repeated fragments of text already heard in full.” Ashbrook and Powers, *Turandot*, 115.

<sup>25</sup> Luigi Illica to Giulio Ricordi, Gara, *Carteggi*, 186. [Il verso andava bene al tempo delle cabalette]

<sup>26</sup> See, for example, Philip Gosset, “The Case for Puccini,” *New York Review of Books*, 27 March 2003, 42. Quoted in Rosen, “La solita forma”: 2n.

<sup>27</sup> Girardi has also found the *solita forma* in *Manon Lescaut*. Girardi, *Puccini*, 94

<sup>28</sup> Ashbrook and Powers, *Turandot*, 93.

<sup>29</sup> Davis, *Il Trittico*, 172-3.

Ex.13.0 - table of formal units and *tinte* in Act II

rehearsal number	action	Ashbrook/ Powers	Davis
II/0	introduction, ministers appear	A. 0 <i>scena</i>	dissonant
1	ministers lament	A. 1 <i>tempo d'attacco</i>	exotic (Chinese)/ romantic
9	ministers recall country homes	A. 2 andantino	exotic (Chinese)/ dissonant
13	ministers recall executions, hope for wedding	A. 3 <i>tempo di mezzo</i>	exotic (Chinese)/ dissonant
21	“non v'è in Cina”	A. 4 <i>stretta</i>	exotic (Chinese)
25	transition / scene change	B. 1	dissonant
26	processional	B. 2	dissonant/ exotic (Chinese)
34	confrontation between Emperor and Calaf	C. 1	dissonant
39	ceremonial conclusion	C. 2	dissonant
40	reprise of proclamation	D. 1	dissonant
42	reprise of children's chorus	D. 2	exotic (Chinese)
43	Turandot: “In questa reggia”	D. 3	romantic
50	first enigma	E. 1	dissonant
54	second enigma	E. 2	dissonant
59	third enigma	E. 3	dissonant
63	Turandot wants to renege	E. 4	exotic (Chinese) / romantic/ dissonant
65	Prince's enigma	F. 1	dissonant/romantic
67	Emperor's reaction	F. 2	exotic (Chinese)
68	ceremonial conclusion	F. 3	exotic (Chinese)

Each of these styles, in Davis's terminology, is identified by *style tokens*, or specific compositional procedures, such as certain harmonic progressions, rhythms, motives, etc. Davis also employs the idea of *stylistic integration* to denote something similar to what we have termed *direct conflation* in chapter 2. He applies it to situations in which a style token may be combined with a different—he writes, “incompatible”—style type to create new meaning, which could be, for example, the addition of dissonant harmony to diatonic melody.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Davis, *Il Trittico*, 181-4.

Unlike *direct conflation*, Davis's *stylistic integration* is audibly perceptible on the musical surface, not disguised through dissonant prolongations or compound sonorities.

One style token of Davis's Exotic-Chinese *tinta* is the use of traditional Chinese melodies. Puccini discovered these in two sources. The first was a music box belonging to Baron Fassini Camossi, a former diplomat in China whom Puccini met at Bagni di Lucca in August 1920.<sup>31</sup> The other was a book, *Chinese Music* by J.A. Van Aalst,<sup>32</sup> which had been sent to him by Carlo Clausetti.<sup>33</sup> The specific uses of these tunes have been well documented many times over and will not be reiterated here. We will note, however, that Puccini took note of some salient characteristics of the melodies, such as the lack of leading tones. This is evident in large swathes of *Turandot's* music where a lowered seventh scale degree is employed in the accompaniment (for example, the setting of "Mo-li-hua" in the children's chorus at I/19/0.)

Puccini undoubtedly noticed another feature of Chinese music in the Van Aalst volume as well: the pentatonic scale depicted as five whole-tone steps. In addition, Van Aalst gives accompaniment figures to be performed during the final strophe of the Hymn to Confucius that include the set class (026), Puccini's "signature." The alignment of these "authentic" elements with one of his own trademarks (that, as we have seen, have been used in non-exotic operas such as *Manon Lescaut* and *Tosca*) must have appealed very much to the composer.<sup>34</sup> [Ex. 13.1a and b] Further, this convergence poses a challenge to the strict

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<sup>31</sup> Budden, *Puccini*, 427.

<sup>32</sup> J.A. Van Aalst, *Chinese Music*. China: Imperial Maritime Customs, II. Special Series, no. 6 (Shanghai: Inspectorate General of Customs, 1864)

<sup>33</sup> Kii-Ming Lo, "Turandot auf der Opernbühne. Perspektiven der Opernforschung 2. (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1996), 11. Cited in Girardi, *Puccini*, 450n.

<sup>34</sup> As noted in chapter 2, several of the Japanese tunes Puccini chose for *Madama Butterfly* also have passages that belong to this set class.

division of harmonic and melodic materials into separate *tinte*: the whole-tone scale is both “exotic” and modernist.

Ex. 13.1 - illustrations from Van Aalst, *Chinese Music*

a) the whole-tone pentatonic scale, page 23

If we put this pentatonic gamut in apposition to the corresponding Western notes, we shall have—

蕤 夷 無 蕘 太  
or 宮 商 角 徵 羽

and it will be readily perceived that the C and D are nearly half a tone too flat; but to the Chinese this is no objection, their aim being to prove the irrefutable connexion of their music with astronomy and Nature.

b) accompaniment figures for the “Hymn to Confucius”, containing set class (026), page 50

To illustrate further the notation of the *pien-ch'ing's* music, I give here the part which this instrument has to perform during the first strophe of the Hymn to CONFUCIUS:—

*Huang-chang* is to be the key-note and the Double *I-tse* is to begin the air.

(The sign V means that the Chinese equivalent note is nearly  $\frac{1}{2}$  tone higher than the sound represented by the Western note. The A means that it is nearly  $\frac{1}{2}$  tone lower.)

*I am Puccini*

In the interview with the composer cited previously, Savino raises the issue of *Turandot's* place in the Puccini *oeuvre*:

ES: Is the genre of music close to the preceding one?

GP: I believe to have distanced myself from it. But it is the critics, not I, who must judge this, at the right time. I believe that *Turandot* has its own physiognomy that has no comparison with my other musical creatures. The soul of the author, however, does not change, neither can style change, without becoming insincere. Therefore, it will still be Puccinian.

[...]

ES: Did you want to write an opera of a popular character or did you want to bring about a new musical form?

GP: I told you: I am Puccini...I am, that is, that which I sincerely am, even in my *Turandot*.<sup>35</sup>

Evading Savino's second question nicely, Puccini's equivocal statements here only emphasize the conflicting forces at work in the creation of this opera: it is new, but not new.

But is it only the surface, the "physiognomy" of *Turandot* that is new? Examining the score shows that—quite evident on the surface of the music—are nearly all of Puccini's trademark devices, as we will soon see. Any new "physiognomy" lies mostly in the two areas: the use of bitonality as a norm, and the increased layers of "indossi."

Let us now take a closer look at Puccini's tried-and-true devices that appear in the score. First, as was common practice for Puccini (as well as for some of his contemporaries<sup>36</sup>), he strays into alternative pitch collections in *Turandot*: pentatonic melodies

<sup>35</sup> [ES: Il genere della musica si avvicina a quello precedente?]

GP: Credo di essermene allontanato. Ma di questo non debbo essere giudice io, ma i critici, a suo tempo. Credo che "Turandot" abbia una fisionomia sua propria che non trova riscontro nelle altre mie creature...musicali. L'anima dell'autore pero', non muta, ne' puo' mutare lo stile, a meno di non diventare insincero. [...]

ES: Ella ha voluto scrivere un'opera di carattere popolare oppure ha inteso realizzare una forma musicale nuova?

GP: Le ho detto: io sono Puccini...sono cioe', quello che sono sinceramente, anche in questa mia "Turandot".]

<sup>36</sup> Tymoczko writes: "The young Stravinsky, like Debussy and Ravel, made frequent use of a variety of collections, including whole-tone, octatonic, and the melodic and harmonic minor scales." [...] [Stravinsky

are employed, for example, in Liù's "Signore, Ascolta" at I/42/0, and the ministers' "Addio amore, addio razza" at II/18/2. The Emperor's statements to Calaf at II/34/0 could be classified as either pentatonic or Dorian. The Lydian mode is heard as an inflection of D major at I/17/7 during the moonrise, and, on Bb, at Liù's "Tanto amore segreto" at III/24/0.

Major-third cycles are present in *Turandot* as well. Augmented triads in expanded form are employed at the opera's beginning: an opening tonality of F# minor moves to D minor (with a bitonal topping of C# major), and then to Bb major (with A major) at I/1/2. In the second act, a clear major-third cycle can be deciphered beginning at II/47/0: here we have Gb major at II/47/0; the same music (the Love motive) is transposed to Bb major at II/47/4 and then D major four bars later. [Ex. 13.2] The next act contains a major-third cycle beginning at III/18/2 where we hear a C-minor statement of the "recognition" motive, followed at III/19/0 by the same material in Ab minor, and by an arrival on E minor at III/20/0.<sup>37</sup>

Ex. 13.2: major-third cycle at II/47/0

uses the] superimposition of elements belonging to different scales." Dmitri Tymoczko, "Stravinsky and the Octatonic: A Reconsideration" *Music Theory Spectrum* 24/1 (Spring 2002): 68.

<sup>37</sup> An expanded diminished chord, without the fourth element, occurs at I/47/12, just before Calaf sounds the gong: Eb minor, then Gb minor, A minor.

Diminished sevenths do appear on the surface of the music at, for instance, II/19/10 and II/50/0, but they are rarely used as minor-third cycles.<sup>38</sup> However, a sketch for the third-act finale, which Janet Maguire has claimed is a twelve-tone passage,<sup>39</sup> can also be interpreted as a series of non-resolving diminished seventh chords, in a larger pattern of three-chord groups that is itself rising chromatically. Further, the bass notes of each chord spell out major triads on C, C# and D, an example of multi-level *direct conflation*, the synchronic interpenetration of diatonic and symmetrical elements embedded in each other.

[Ex.13.3]

Ex. 13.3: from Puccini's sketch 22 for the finale of *Turandot*.

**sketch 22 for finale of *Turandot* w/ annotations**

C - E - G                      C#Db - F - Ab                      D - F# - A

A similar example of multi-level *direct conflation* occurs at III/36/0. Here, diminished sevenths lie atop a standard pattern of descending fifths (F-Bb-Eb). Here the each leg of the underlying schema alternates in the bass with its tritone (F+B, Bb+E, Eb+A). [Ex. 13.4]

Ex. 13.4

<sup>38</sup> See, for example, I/15/0.

<sup>39</sup> Janet Maguire, "Puccini's Version of the duet and Final Scene of *Turandot*," *Musical Quarterly* (1990): 339.

The image shows a musical score for a piano accompaniment. The right hand (treble clef) contains three chords, each labeled "dim 7". The left hand (bass clef) contains three notes, each labeled "tritone". A bracket under the left hand notes is labeled "descending fifths".

Puccini's trademark parallel constructions are plentiful in this opera as well. In the first act alone, there are parallel octaves and fifths at I/9/9, chromatically descending parallel triads on the musical surface at I/18/13; parallel sevenths at I/25/18, and parallel ninths at I/39/11. Later in the opera, we hear parallel 4/2 chords over a pedal at II/10/12, and at III/28/6 are found parallel quartal harmonies. [Ex. 13.5]

Ex. 13.5 - parallel quartal harmonies, III/28/6

The image shows a musical score for a piano accompaniment. The right hand (treble clef) contains a melody of eighth notes. The left hand (bass clef) contains a series of chords, each labeled "quartal harmonies".

And there is no shortage of Puccini's dissonant pedal points. A striking example is the low D pedal point that begins at II/20/6: above we hear, after D major, the chromatically rising diatonic triads of Eb major, F major, and G minor, followed by whole-tone sonorities alternating with D major. Later in the same act, a Db pedal begins at II/30, and the overlaid rising melody begins on Bb and then B, after which the melody is truncated to two-bar units that include a rising step. Overall, the melody ascends from II/31/4, B-C-D-Eb-F-Gb-Ab-Bb, completing an octave ascent Bb-Bb. [Ex. 13.6]

Ex. 13.6 - pedal at II/30-31

The image shows a musical score for piano accompaniment. The right hand (treble clef) features a melodic line with a bracketed section labeled "octave ascent Eb-Bb". The left hand (bass clef) features a sustained pedal point on F#, indicated by a long horizontal line and the label "pedal point". The score is marked with a Roman numeral "II/30" and includes the notation "(etc.)" in both hands.

Puccini also employs pedal points for traditional functions, such as the tonic pedal on F# at I/4/0: here it underlies a descending stepwise motion from C# to G#, harmonized with F# minor, E major, D major, C# major (avoiding parallel fifths with chord inversions). The local key of F# is reconfirmed with a half cadence at I/4/7, and a return to F# in the next bar. [Ex. 13.7]

Ex. 13.7 - pedal point as tonic prolongation, I/4/0

The image shows a musical score for piano accompaniment. The right hand (treble clef) features a melodic line with a bracketed section labeled "(etc.)". The left hand (bass clef) features a sustained pedal point on F#, indicated by a long horizontal line and the label "pedal point on F#". The score includes the notation "V" at the end of the phrase.

Other sorts of extended pitch classes in *Turandot* are also employed for common-tone modulations, such as at II/9/0 and II/47/13. (Additional examples of transformations in this opera are given in chapter 2.)

If we take a look at the symmetrically structured elements in Puccini's toolbox, we find them present in *Turandot* as well. Tritone shifts marking structural borders occur between Eb minor and A minor at I/25/0, when Timur begs the Prince not to pursue Turandot's challenge, and at III/35/0 after Liù's cortège. Another happens just before the confrontation between Calaf and the Emperor, from Ab major to D Dorian.

Strikingly, all of these instances are preceded by pauses that serve to delineate not only key areas and structural units but new events in the dramatic narrative. Musical transitions, which can sound so fluidly natural in much of Puccini's output (usually helped along by common tones or pedal points), are lacking here: the formal seams are perceptible by design. This marks a change of direction for Puccini—yet it harkens back to the traditional number opera as much as it looks ahead.

The addition of two tritones at III/25/6 (on C/F# and E/Bb) to a restatement of the theme from the Executioner's chorus first heard at I/10/1, creates the “aura” of whole-tone (WT0), although the theme itself has not been projected onto that collection. [Ex. 13.8a and b]

Ex. 13.8

a) I/10/1

b) III/25/6

The score is riddled with whole-tone sonorities (as most of Puccini's operas are), such as the fortissimo whole-tone crash at I/15/9, in the ministers' scene at II/3/10, and in the middle of “Nessun dorma” (III/4/6). Parallel whole-tone chords are interjected into the scene

change processional at II/26/11. However, compared to earlier operas, such as *Madama Butterfly* or *La fanciulla del West*, *Turandot* does not have a strong hexaphonic aura. In this opus, the whole-tone elements are directly conflated with other harmonies, which dilutes that distinctive coloring. For example, in the eerie phantom scene at I/38/0, a whole-tone tetrachord from WT0 (CEF#G#) is overlaid with an F dominant seventh chord, all its members (except C) belonging to WT1. Three bars later, the tetrachord belonging to WT0 has been transposed up a whole step to DF#G#Bb, while it is combined with the tritone A-Eb, a subset of WT1. [Ex. 13.9]

Ex. 13.9 - *direct conflation* in the “phantom chord” at I/38/0

whole-tone + F7 = “phantom” chord

These more complex direct conflations give the *Turandot* score its unique physiognomy, even though the process itself is an extension of techniques Puccini had employed previously. An iridescent example is the coda-like suffix to Liù’s Gb major “Signore, ascolta” at I/42/15. As if it were a traditional diatonic coda, the tonic is prolonged with a pedal on Gb in these four bars. Laid over that, however, is the chromatically rising line Ab-Bbb-Bb-Cb-C-Db. Supporting that line is a third layer of chords: Ab minor, Ebb major, Bb augmented, Fb major, and Ebb half-diminished seventh. The effect is magical,

particularly coming between pentatonic passages, and with the vocal line ascending to high Bb.<sup>40</sup>

*the “new” Puccini?*

We have seen how dissonant pedal points and other direct confluences of contrasting material have been used by Puccini to illustrate multifocal situations. Separate layers of music can represent multiple narrative threads, events, or states of being. The same has been true—up until now—for Puccini’s use of bitonality/polytonality. In *Turandot*, however, Puccini opens each act with a bitonal gesture, as the “frame” so to speak of the canvas; that is, these compound structures no longer must be aligned with any particular aspect in the narrative.<sup>41</sup>

Puccini’s contemporary, Alfredo Casella—writing in 1923, just a year before Puccini’s death—explains polytonality as “the interpenetration of diverse scales,” which presupposes the continued presence of the original tonalities. Further, he claims, polytonality is the next step after (Debussy’s) *successive* polymodality, or *simultaneous* polymodality. Casella also describes polytonality as “simultaneous modulation” and compares it to pictorial Cubism, in which (according to Casella) an object is simultaneously

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<sup>40</sup> Baragwanath analyses this passage in Nicholas Baragwanath, “Analytical Approaches to Melody in Selected Arias by Puccini,” *Music Theory Online*, Volume 14/2 (June 2008), §17. He relates the rising chromatic line in the orchestra as “the logical culmination of a musical process if the overall melody is regarded as contrapuntally determined,” for which he supplies a Schenkerian-style graph. At §19, he adds, “But this explanation does not take into account the unconventional harmony and the melodic direction of the chromatic final section [...] which seems to confound syntactical norms of closure[...] by *rising* to the final cadence. Even the two-measure post-cadential orchestral coda lacks any clear gesture of descent.” In this author’s interpretation, the Schenkerian structural tonic of Gb is reached before this passage, after a 3-2-1 descent in which scale degree 2 (Ab) is implied, and the remainder of the aria is a suffix.

<sup>41</sup> Ashbrook and Powers find associative links for “bicentric” tonality in the pairings of Prince/Princess, fire/ice, sun/moon, and silver/gold. Ashbrook and Powers, *Turandot*, 107. However, thematic oppositions of this sort are common in other Puccini operas where he did not use polytonality.

viewed from diverse perspectives in space and time—the negation of normal time flow.<sup>42</sup> If the polytonality in *Turandot* is seen in this light and no longer represents multiple, overlapping events in a realistic narrative, then perhaps the synchronic interpenetration of different sonic worlds might suggest the absence of an authentic time line—that is, the unreal “non-time” of a legend.

Although polytonality was a widely accepted practice by the 1920’s, thanks in great part to the enormous impact of the *Rite of Spring* (1911),<sup>43</sup> Puccini never before used the technique on such a massive scale. In addition to the opening of all three acts, striking bitonal moments of sonorities occur at I/27/0, on Bb and A major, just before the reprise of the opening motive; at I/30/1 with Ab/Bbb in the outer voices and F/Fb between [Ex. 13.10a], and at II/63/6 with Db minor+ Fb augmented (a slide), transposed two bars later to B minor+D augmented, and then to A minor+C augmented. This passage has already been examined in chapter 2 as an example of an *indosso*—here, the superimposition of dissonance over a traditional bass. However, when the pattern of this polytonal series ends on G major, at II/63/16, the bass notes have also outlined the whole-tone fragment Db-B-A-G, linearizing a tritone. Thus we have here direct confluences that embed tonal and atonal elements in multiple layers. [Ex. 13.9b]

Ex. 13.10

a) polytonality, I/30/1

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<sup>42</sup> Alfredo Casella, “Problemi sonori odierni,” *La prora* (Feb. 1924), 5, 9. English translation Alfred Casella, “Tone-Problems of Today,” *Musical Quarterly* 10 (1924): 159-71.

<sup>43</sup> Casella writes: “After the *Rite*, polytonality became current practice by the majority of the boldest European musicians.” [Dopo la *Sagra*, la politonalità divenne cosa di uso corrente presso la maggioranza dei musicisti europei più arditi. Ed oggi non è più il caso di discutere se il nuovo fenomeno sia stato un bene od un male; esso ci appare come un fatto compiuto] Casella, “Problemi,” 10-11.

b) II/63/6-16

If we examine Ex. 13.9a in context, however, an interesting situation arises. This polytonal section occurs in the midst of a number in clear Ab major with a pentatonic melody (Ashbrook and Powers’s I.C.1); it is, then, an example of a dissonant *innesto* or *indirect conflation*. The bitonal conflict between Ab and Bbb continues for five measures, until another dissonant clash at I/31/0 (including tritones Bb-Fb and A-Eb). But this is followed by repeated returns to Ab major and reprises of the original polytonal configuration at I/31/10 and I/33/19. Thus, throughout this entire long passage, Ab has been re-asserted in the bass. It is possible to conjecture, then, that Ab is being prolonged here and is thus more structural than Bbb. Extrapolating, we might hypothesize that in polytonal combinations such as these, Puccini most probably still thought of the harmony as emanating upward from the bass. If this theory is correct, it would have ramifications for how one understands the larger-scale tonal patterning in this work. And, in the end, it would add weight to the judgment that the “new” Puccini is still the same composer wearing new musical clothes.

We do, however, have written evidence of Puccini's imbuing a diatonic structure with both direct and indirect confluations. In one of his sketches for the finale of *Turandot*,<sup>44</sup> under the heading 'stacco per duettone' [interruption for the great duet], he wrote the following: "Nel villaggio but with chords and harmonized differently and modern movements and reprises and surprises."<sup>45</sup> ("Nel villaggio" is a reference to Fidelia's diatonic aria from Act III of *Edgar*.) In other words, he was planning to interrupt one passage with another (*indirect conflation* or *innesto*), and to adorn a simple diatonic framework with new harmonies, rhythms, returns and surprises (*direct conflation* or *indossi*).

Given this clue, it is possible to construct a hypothetical version of what Puccini might have composed at this spot (except, perhaps for the surprises). Ex. 13.11a shows the melody from the *Edgar* aria accompanied as written, with only tonic and dominant harmonies, and Ex. 13.11b a hypothetical *Turandot* model, with added parallel augmented triads, parallel sevenths in the bass and an extra layer articulating tritones:

Ex. 13.11

a) "Nel villaggio" *Edgar*

The image shows a musical score for a piano accompaniment. It consists of two staves: a treble clef staff on top and a bass clef staff on the bottom. The key signature has two flats (B-flat and E-flat), and the time signature is 4/4. The melody in the treble staff is a simple diatonic line. The bass staff provides harmonic support with chords, primarily tonic and dominant chords, as described in the text.

b) hypothetical version with "indossi"

<sup>44</sup> Ms. sketch 91.A.III.35, probably dating from January 1924. Dieter Schickling, *Giacomo Puccini: Catalogue of the Works* (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 2003), 377. The sketch is reproduced in Teodoro Celli, "Gli abbozzi per *Turandot*," *Quaderni Pucciniani* (1985): 56.

<sup>45</sup> [Nel villaggio ma con accordi e armonizzato diverso e movenze moderne e riprese e sorprese etc.]

The image shows a musical score snippet for the 'poi Tristano' section. It consists of two staves: a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The treble staff contains several chords, with the label 'augmented triads' pointing to a specific chord. The bass staff contains several chords, with the label 'parallel sevenths' pointing to a specific chord and the label 'tritone' pointing to a specific interval. The score is written in a key signature of one flat (B-flat) and a time signature of 4/4.

*poi Tristano*

The Puccini who created *Turandot*—whether he be an old or new version—still loved Wagner. As has been often noted, the composer left a written note in sketch 17 for the Act III finale that reads, “poi Tristano” [then *Tristan*]. Celli has posited that Puccini was at this spot planning to use the unaccompanied Mariner’s theme (Act I, scene 1, “Frisch weht der Wind der Heimath zu”).<sup>46</sup> Maehder has pointed out that the text that would have accompanied this reference to *Tristan*, was, “What does life matter / Death is also beautiful!” [Che m’importa la vita! / E’ pur bella la morte!], thematically related to the<sup>47</sup> sex/death imagery, as well as the juxtapositioning of day and night, in the Wagner opus.

Nevertheless, we dare to suggest that a more central dramatic theme at this final moment is that of love, and that the “Tristano” to which Puccini refers is actually the *Liebesruhe* leitmotive from *Tristan’s* Act II. [Ex. 1.4i] Wagner’s motive, which is set diatonically (Ex. 13.12a shows it over a prolonged Gb major, from Act II, scene 2), has been quoted by Richard Strauss at the opening of *Till Eulenspiegel* (1894-5) [Ex. 13.12b], and by

<sup>46</sup> Celli, “Gli abbozzi”: 62.

<sup>47</sup> Jürgen Maehder, “Studi sul carattere di frammento della *Turandot* di Giacomo Puccini,” *Quaderni pucciniani* 2 (1985): 105. An Italian translation of “Studien zum Fragmentcharakter von Giacomo Puccinis *Turandot*,” *Analecta musicologica* 22 (1984): 297-397; abridged and translated as “Puccini’s *Turandot*: A Fragment: Studies in Franco Alfano’s completion of the score,” *English National Opera Guide*, n. 27 (London and New York, 1984), 35-53. Cited in Ashbrook and Powers, *Turandot*, 139.

Paul Dukas in *Ariane et Barbe-Bleu* (1907) at III/69, which Puccini had seen [Ex. 13.12c].<sup>48</sup>

We believe that “Poi Tristano” refers to the motive that constitutes the opening of *Turandot*—played fortississimo in parallel octaves—its jagged shape an image of Turandot’s cruelty that will ultimately transform into her love.

Ex. 13.12

a) “Liebesruhe” motive from Wagner, *Tristan*, Act II, scene 2

**Gb major:** I I

b) Richard Strauss, *Till Eulenspiegel*, opening

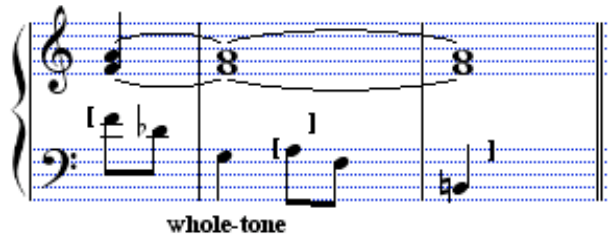
**F major:** (I) V7/IV IV V I

c) Paul Dukas, *Ariane et Barbe-Bleu*, III/69

**Whole-tone**

<sup>48</sup> Celli also mentions this. Celli, “Gli abbozzi”: 63. Puccini was in Paris in June 1907 and saw one of the first performances. In a letter to Sybil Seligman he writes: “Last night I went to Ducas—what a blue-beard! Impossible.” Vincent Seligman, *Puccini Among Friends* (New York: Macmillan, 1938), 135.





This protean nature of this motive embodies the diatonic/non-diatonic flexibility that runs throughout this opera, at almost every level, and leads us to the larger question of whether the opera is ultimately tonal or not. If one accepts the criterion established by Domenico Alaleona (see chapter 1), atonality can only be present if atonal structures do not resolve—and without the ending to *Turandot* composed by its creator, we will never know if, on the largest scale, that occurs. We can, however, venture an hypothesis.

#### *Coda*

In Puccini's operas *Tosca* and *La fanciulla del West*, large-scale dissonant structures find their resolutions at the conclusion. In both cases, these were whole-tone-based sonorities that had been introduced at the beginning in the works and presented as incomplete tonal “problems” awaiting solutions. In *Tosca*, the tritone-related opening motive (BbAb-E) was matched, at the end of Act I, with its own tritone transposition (EDBb) to create an octave span (Bb-Bb) that served as dominant to the tonic Eb; and this was seen, in chapter 3, to be expanded throughout the work. In *Fanciulla*, the initial whole-tone chord (CEG#Bb) resolves at the end to E major, as a common tone sonority to the tonic. Therefore, if such an expanded dissonant structure existed in *Turandot*—and if it were to resolve at the end—it might do so as either a dominant substitution or a common-tone embellishment.

The pitch-classes F#/Gb, Bb and D are reiterated at salient moments throughout this opera. In Act I, we have previously noted two major-third cycles of F#-D-Bb: at the beginning of the opera F# minor moves to D minor (plus C# major), and then to Bb major

(plus A major) at I/1/2. In Act II, another expanded augmented triad can be found beginning at Gb (F#) major at II/47/0.

A larger-scale expansion can also be traced from the opening F# of Act I to Bb at I/9, which returns at I/10 to F#; we have Bb at I/12, F# at I/13. After we hear the opening motive again just before I/17, the tonality shifts to D major (at the moonrise); Bb is reasserted strongly again at I/27, Liù's "Signore ascolta" at I/42 is in Gb/F#, and the act ends in Eb (as did the first act of *Tosca*).<sup>49</sup>

Act II of *Turandot* begins with a bitonal gesture ending on Bb in the bass, and reaches its first clear tonal center of D minor at II/1. The key changes to D major at II/9, and to Bb major at II/13, which resolves to Eb minor at II/14. D is strongly reasserted at II/40 and remains in effect until II/46. After the expanded Gb-Bb-D at II/47, D minor sounds at II/53, and the act concludes in Bb major.

Act III opens with D minor in the lower stratum of the bitonal complex and moves to Bb as in the opera's opening. Rehearsal number III/9 brings a pentatonic melody on D and at III/26 begins a long pedal on F#, which leads to Bb the dominant of Eb minor. While we cannot know how this act concludes, Puccini left a sketch for the finale (17v) that reads, "the end of the serenade" [fine serenata]; it shows a series of D minor chords. Thus, we can conclude that there would have been at least one more articulation point on D in the third act. If we accept these moments as structural waystations, then the plan looks very much like the overall layout of *Tosca*. If this is the case, then the opera would conclude in Eb, as Berio finished it, not in Alfano's choice of D or Maguire's of Db.

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<sup>49</sup> Helen Greenwald has noted the F#/Bb relationship, and the ultimate resolution to Eb in this first act, but gives less weight to the third leg of the augmented triad, D. Helen Greenwald. "Dramatic Exposition and Musical Structure in Puccini's Operas" (PhD diss., City University of New York, 1991), 89-95.

Taking into consideration the many instances in *Turandot* of *indossi*, in which dissonant passages are found to have tonal bases—plus the happy ending of the narrative—it seems likely that a tonal resolution of some kind would have occurred at the conclusion. Davis seems to agree: “Most of the dissonance in *Turandot* never manages to assume tonal-structural status; that is, most of it is used as a highly coloristic effect but still within a larger, conventionally tonal or modal context.”<sup>50</sup> If so, then Puccini’s final work would ultimately have to be regarded as grounded in the traditional more than in the progressive. But we will never know with certainty: perhaps he would have taken another step along *Madama Butterfly*’s path of non-resolution. In the end, the tug-of-war between traditional and progressive elements that informs his entire career cannot be settled, even at the sunset of his life. This Puccinian mystery, among many, must remain unsolved.

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<sup>50</sup> Davis, *Turandot, Il Trittico*, 177.