

Recondite Harmony: the Operas of Puccini

Chapter 5: *Edgar*: scattered jewels

The French nobility—believing [...] that the conquest of Flanders would be like a celebration, or at least a hunting party—had brought with them bags of luxuries and jewels, and even a great number of courtesans. The spurs, which were worn only by the knights, and many jewels were gathered from the battlefield by the victors.¹

- Ferdinando Fontana, *Edgar*, libretto, note to Act III

Puccini's first full-length opera, *Edgar*, is set in Flanders in the year 1302, the scene of the Battle of Courtray,² unlike the play upon which it was based. That earlier work, Alfred De Musset's *La Coupe et les lèvres* [The cup and the lips] (1832), is set in the Tyrol, and its title refers to the saying "there's many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip." Indeed, many an error occurred in the creation of this opera, which was a disheartening debacle.

Edgar actually arose from several failures: Musset's play was written following the disaster of his *La Nuit Vénitienne* (1830), after which he withdrew from presenting plays in public and wrote dramatic works to be read at home. *La Coupe* was one of several plays collected in his ensuing *Armchair Theater* [*Un spectacle dans un Fauteuil*], and is prefaced by a long poem that, in part, reflects the pain of his artistic spurning:

But to think one holds the golden apples of Hesperides,

¹ [la nobilita' franca, la quale credendo [...] di andare alla conquista della Fiandra come un festino o, per lo meno, a una gran caccia, aveva portato seco equipaggi di lusso e gioielli, e persino gran numero di cortigiane. Gli sproni (distintivo dei cavalieri) e i molti gioielli raccolti sul campo di battaglia dai vincitori

² Fontana claims in his libretto note that the battle is known as "the day of the spurs" and also "the day of the jewels" ['giornata degli sproni' ed anche 'giornata dei gioielli']. In most historical accounts, there is no mention of jewels, and the battle is known as "the battle of the golden spurs" ["Guldensporenslag" in Dutch and "Bataille des éperons d'or" in French.]

Yet press tenderly to heart a turnip!
 That, my dear friend, will lead an author straight
 To suicide or to infanticide.³

Ferdinando Fontana⁴ chose Musset's *La Coupe* for his new libretto, and perhaps was also inspired by the Frenchman to write his own diatribe against contemporary theater, *In Teatro*.⁵ Fontana called it his "tirade" [sfuriata] and in it described his antipathy toward contemporary theater, inveighing against its predictability and lack of realism:

Round and round, over and over, on the stage, in general, it is always the same song [...] the theater is reduced, as it had to happen, to a potion made of a known recipe. [...] But art means daring, it means freedom of thought without limits, naturalness without restrictions, candor. [...] The old operas now appear, in general, a hodge-podge of common sense so broken-up, so incoherent, a bloodbath so pitiless and ridiculous at the same time, an exchange of vulgarity and shameless cheap tricks, a heap of such colossal foolery and imbecilic pettiness.⁶

Despite these impassioned words, Fontana filled his libretto for *Edgar* with the most clichéd stereotypes and events: even though the protagonist Edgar rebels against society at the

³ [Mais croire que l'on tient les pommes d'Hespérides / Et presser tendrement un navet sur son coeur! / Voilà, mon cher ami, ce qui porte un auteur / A des auto-da-fés, - à des infanticides.]

⁴ Ferdinando Fontana (1850-1919) was a poet, journalist and librettist. In addition to collaborating with Puccini on his first two operas, Fontana also wrote libretti for Ponchielli, Franchetti, Buzzi-Peccia, and Burgmein (Giulio Ricordi's pseudonym) among others. For more information see Biancamaria Longoni, "Vita e opere di Ferdinando Fontana" *Quaderni Pucciniani* (1992): 237-247, and note 34 above in the previous chapter.

⁵ Fontana, like Musset, began his libretto for *Edgar* with a long poem, which begins, "We are all Edgar, since Fate leads each of us on a vital path, with regular vicissitudes - darkness and light, Love and death." [Edgar siam tutti, - poiché conduce / D'ognun sul tramite - vital la Sorte, / Con vece assidua, - tenebra e luce, / Amore e morte.]

⁶ Ferdinando Fontana, *In Teatro* (Rome: Sommaruga, 1884), 16- 22. [Gira e rigira, volta e rivolta, sulle scene, in generale, è sempre la stessa canzone. [...] il teatro è ridotto, come doveva avvenire, ad una pozione fabbricata su ricetta nota. [...] Ma arte vuol dire ardimento, vuol dire libertà di pensiero senza limiti, naturalezza senza restrizioni, ingenuità. [...] Il melodramma vecchio appare oramai, in genere, un raffazzonamento così spaccato e così slegato, una carneficina così spietata e ridicola al tempo stesso del senso comune, un mercato di volgarità e di mezzucci così spudorato, un ammasso tale di corbellerie colossali e di piccinerie imbecilli.]

beginning of the story, Fontana sticks to a tried and true operatic recipe, ultimately having Edgar torn between the good girl and the exotic temptress (an addition to the original in the manner of *Carmen*), adding a “dose” of fatherly love, and topped off with (by then) hackneyed choral exclamations of “maledizione” and “orror.”

It is a pity that Fontana did not truly follow Musset who, in the preface to *La Nuit Vénitienne*, argued for an early version of realism. He wrote: “the poor and ignored artist is often of greater value than the conquerors of this poor world, and that there are more noble hearts in the garrets—where we find but three things, a bed, a table, and a grisette—than in the gilded seats of a material ambition.” Had this sentiment been absorbed by the librettist, Puccini might have been given a veristic libretto like *La bohème* to set, rather than a romantic allegory. And Fontana missed an opportunity to learn lessons in realism and clear character motivation from *Carmen*, as well as the value of choosing a musically suggestive exotic setting. Further, by setting *Edgar* in medieval Flanders, instead of the Tyrol of the original, Fontana denied Puccini the opportunity to create the type of identifiable musical atmosphere upon which he relied so much in his later operas: the 18th-century Paris of *Manon Lescaut*, the Japan of *Madama Butterfly*, the wild West of *Fanciulla*, etc.⁷

Fontana argued for the novel concept that opera audiences should receive an explanatory poem to read instead of a libretto, and the not very novel idea that the orchestra (à Wagner) should carry much of the narrative thread. In short, opera should become a “scenic symphony,” with fewer vocal set-pieces:

The theatrical musical work, then, is becoming symphonic *par excellence*, that is, shaping the rest of the production to the form of the best musical art, the

⁷ As noted in Chapter 3, Puccini repeatedly said, “The difficulty for me is beginning an opera, finding, that is, its musical atmosphere.” Giuseppe Adami, *Puccini* (Milan: Fratelli Treves, 1935), 103. [La difficoltà è, per me, cominciare un'opera, trovare cioè la sua atmosfera musicale.]

symphony. This work then can be of two types: the *fantastic symphonic*, and the *scenic symphonic*. The first is entrusted now purely to the orchestra.⁸

But Fontana managed to thwart his own professed desires in this as well: his correspondence with Puccini betrays that the librettist was thinking in terms of the same clichéd, crowd-pleasing arias, duets, etc., he had derided. He writes the composer several letters discussing the placement and efficacy of various standard set-pieces, and includes this admission of artistic self-betrayal: “but if Tigrana has no aria, even if it works for me artistically, I am afraid that it will not go well in the theater.”⁹

Fontana’s progressive ideas for theatrical reform, in which the audience has limited access to textual reference, almost guaranteed failure; *Edgar*, in which the important details of the Battle of Courtray are mentioned only in a note in the libretto, is a prime example of this. As Giulio Ricordi wrote to Puccini, ““Your good Fontana has shown himself to be an eloquent orator, but a cavilling one. More of a philosopher-lawyer than a poet: the subtleties of his reasoning are admirable but they do not convince, they do not persuade.”¹⁰ Puccini took this advice to heart and never again allowed a librettist to lead him away from his theatrical and musical instincts.

In the end, Fontana gave up writing libretti, though without accepting any responsibility for his failures: “I am decisively convinced that I bring bad luck [...] The life of the operatic poet no longer seduces me.”¹¹ In the last decade of the century, Fontana turned

⁸ Fontana, *In Teatro*, 110-112. [lo spettacolo musicale, insomma, tende a diventare sinfonico per eccellenza, cioè a sagomare sulla forma migliore dell’arte musicale, la sinfonia, il resto dello spettacolo. Questo spettacolo potrà essere adunque di due specie: lo *spettacolo sinfonico fantastico* e lo *spettacolo sinfonico scenico*. Il primo, affidato ora puramente all’orchestra.]

⁹ Ferdinando Fontana “Lettere a Giacomo Puccini: 1884-1919” *Quaderni Pucciniani* (1992), 17: 21 April 1885 [ma Tigrana senz’aria se mi va molto artisticamente ho paura che non vada teatralmente.]

¹⁰ George Marek, *Puccini* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1951), 68. Translation by Marek.

¹¹ Fontana, *Lettere*, 208, 18 August 1889: [Decisamente sono convinto che io porto sfortuna [...] La vita del povetta melodrammatico non mi seduce più.]

more to radical politics, which eventually forced him into exile in Switzerland.¹² (Perhaps it was his revolutionary bent that attracted him so forcefully to the Battle of Courtray, a true people's rebellion.) It was Fontana, however, who suggested the subjects of *Manon Lescaut* and *Tosca* to Puccini; but the composer fortuitously chose to work with other librettists for these operas.¹³

The score of *Edgar* can also be seen as a sort of battlefield, in that Puccini revised it over and over, with lapidary attention, after almost every performance, in addition to its post-premiere transformation from four acts to three. The current performing edition is from 1905, sixteen years after the opera's premiere at La Scala on 21 April 1889,¹⁴ and there is some evidence that the composer planned to revise it again as late as 1914. He later called the opera a "blunder" [cantonata]¹⁵ and famously annotated its title in a score given to his English muse Sybil Seligman to read "E Dio ti Gu A Rdi da quest'opera!" [May God protect you from this opera!].¹⁶

But Puccini was not casting only pearls before this *porcheria*¹⁷: some responsibility for its failure must lie with the composer. For every startling progressive harmonic innovation,

¹² Longoni, "Ferdinando Fontana" *Quaderni Pucciniani* (1992): 238-239.

¹³ In a letter of 23-24 March 1885, Fontana writes to Puccini, "I will send you that drama based on Manon Lescaut" [ti manderò quel tal dramma su Manon Lescaut] Fontana, *Lettere*, 10. Fontana and Puccini went twice to see Sarah Bernhardt in Sardou's *La Tosca*, once in Milan at the Teatro dei Filodrammatici in February 1889, and once in Turin at the Teatro Carignano on 17 March 1889. Years later, when Puccini was working on *Tosca*, Fontana claimed that it was his idea: "When I heard you were working on *La Tosca*, I hoped that you would have turned to me since, as everyone knew - above all Puccini, that that subject was first suggested by me, and I had already exchanged letters with Sardou. Instead, you would have Giacosa!" [Quando seppi che tu prendevi a trattare la *Tosca*, speravo che ti rivolgessi a me, poichè a saputo di tutti - il Puccini per il primo— quell'argomento era state da me primissimamente indicato, e già erano corse lettere fra me e Sardou..Invece, scegliești Giacosa!] Deborah Burton, "The Creation of *Tosca*," *Opera Quarterly* 12/3 (Spring, 1996): 27-34.

¹⁴ This was Easter Sunday, which probably augmented the offensiveness of some of the opera's more blasphemous moments, such as Tigrana's "You dreamed of fiery voluptuousness, ardent kisses" [Tu voluttà di fuoco, ardenti baci sognavi] set to an organ prelude ("Andante Religioso Sostenuto") and sung in front of a church.

¹⁵ Carner, *Puccini*, 316.

¹⁶ Vincent Seligman, *Puccini Among Friends* (New York: Macmillan, 1938), 19.

¹⁷ [trash].

there are also hackneyed diminished sevenths¹⁸ and too-obvious chromaticism, usually associated with the villainess Tigrana (such as at I/13/11-18, where we also get an evil laugh, or at II/17/2). For every seamless, common-tone transition (see I/1/9 or III/5/0), there are bombastic, four-square shifts, such as Tigrana's entrance at I/12/0 or the fortissimo choral condemnation of her "D'ogni sozzura" [Of every filth] at I/34/0, a Db-major march tune parts of which could have been written by John Philip Sousa. And in contrast to the less predictable phrase structure of melodies such as Frank's "Quest'amor" at I/21/2 or Edgar's "Nell'abisso fatal dove caduto io son" at II/9/7, we can also hear Tigrana's "Dal labbro mio" at II/14/0, which has a succession of four-bar phrases and a melody that (yes, Joseph Kerman) truly does sound like banal café music fare.

Nevertheless, like the jewels reportedly left strewn on the field of Courtray, well-wrought musical ideas can also be found scattered throughout this score. Like Verdi's *Otello*, which had its premiere two years earlier in 1887, the opera manages to use leitmotives throughout and still contain quasi-numbers identifiable within the continuous texture. The set-pieces in *Edgar* that are separable arias, such as "Quest'amor" or Fidelia's "O fior del giorno" and "Addio, mio dolce amor," are gems that might, and should, survive on their own in vocal collections.

Less likely to sustain interest as an independent piece, but equally deserving, is Edgar's Act II "Orgia, chimera dall'occhio vitreo," a scena that begins in a recitative-like manner with leitmotivic references to Fidelia (at II/5/11 and later at II/8/0), followed by an arioso, and then a ternary aria beginning at II/9/0. At the start of the aria's middle section, at the text "Nell'abisso fatal," [In the fatal abyss] we hear a strange three-beat accompanimental figure, displaced rhythmically from the downbeat to the upbeat and which,

¹⁸ As we have seen in Ex. 1.6b, Puccini also used an expanded diminished seventh chord to organize the passage at I/37-38.

when paired with a twelve-beat vocal phrase, creates an increased sense of unease through metrical dissonance. When this passage is reiterated, transposed up a minor third, it is treated canonically.

This same theme opens the Act III prelude, along with its canonic imitation, alternating with a foreshadowing of the melody from Fidelia's "Addio, mio dolce amor." (starting from III/10/4) Originally, Fontana and Puccini had considered including at this point an instrumental piece that would have aurally depicted the Battle of Courtray, and even have employed gunfire.¹⁹ Fontana offered to supply the composer with a few explanatory verses that most likely would have appeared only in the libretto (as in *Le Villi*). While there is some chance for the current prelude to survive as an independent piece, a Puccinian "Wellington's Victory" would probably have not been as fortunate.

Puccini also uses canonic imitation in the first-act *Andante religioso*: here, the use of strict counterpoint—a fine canon at the second—is appropriate to the church setting, and in fact was borrowed from the "Kyrie" of his *Messa di Gloria* (1880).²⁰ In Act III, there is imitative counterpoint in the requiem (from III/4/3), and Fidelia's aria employs canon at III/8/8 at the text "Nell'ombra ove discendi." Puccini's mastery of the strict imitative style, ingrained in him from years of training in Lucca, was never banished from his technical repertoire, no matter how progressive his style appeared: one need think only of the fugal exposition at the opening of the 1904 *Madama Butterfly*.

¹⁹ Fontana, *Lettere*, 27-28n, 35.

²⁰ Puccini borrowed from several works for *Edgar*: the *Largo Adagietto* in F major (1881-1883), the *Preludio sinfonico* (1882), used in first version of *Edgar*, the song "Storiella d'amore" (1883), the *Capriccio sinfonico* in F major (1883), and the *Capriccio sinfonico*, which supplied thematic material for the requiem, first heard in the opera at III/5/1.

In what could be seen as a twist on the traditional “rule of the octave” which Puccini, and all other musicians of his time and earlier, had studied,²¹ several musical moments in *Edgar* are constructed upon innovative harmonizations of the scale. Tigrana’s Act I “Sia per voi” shows the Puccinian traits of parallel triads and an open-fifth pedal on Eb and Bb, but it also outlines a composed-out descending Eb major scale.²² [Ex. 5.0]

Example 5.0: *Edgar*, I/29/0, composed-out descending scale, with parallel chords and pedal.

The image shows a musical score for a piano accompaniment. The title above the staff is "descending Eb major scale". The score is written in a grand staff with a treble clef on the upper staff and a bass clef on the lower staff. The key signature has two flats (Bb and Eb). The upper staff contains a series of parallel triads, each consisting of three notes (root, third, and fifth) of the descending Eb major scale. The lower staff contains a single note, Eb, which is held throughout the passage, labeled as "Eb/Bb pedal". The lyrics "Sia per voi..." are written below the treble staff. The score is divided into measures by vertical bar lines.

Fidelia’s Act III “Edgar, la tua memoria,” at III/10/4, is built upon a rising line spanning an octave that prolongs pitch class F, the dominant of Bb major. [Ex. 5.1]

²¹ ²¹ See Baragwanath, *The Italian Traditions*, chapter 4. Baragwanath also explains that improvisation on a scale was a component of Puccini’s early training in solfeggio: the maestro would play the guiding canto fermo in octaves at the piano, so that the students could hear it while improvising either vocalizzi or solfeggi. He also finds similar structures in “sono andati” from *La bohème*, and “Un bel di” from *Madama Butterfly*. Further, he believes that “Sia per voi, l’orazion’ from *Edgar* is based on an actual solfeggio for training in bel canto singing. *Ibid.*, 270-271.

²² Vlad calls this passage “Debussian.” Roman Vlad, “Esordi di Puccini” *Quaderni Pucciniani* (1992): 18.

Example 5.1, Edgar, III/10/4

There are also underlying scalar patterns at I/4/5, Fidelia’s “O fior del giorno,” where the melodic line descends stepwise, and at I/5/12, where it rises again; we find a descending scale at Tigrana’s *Allegro satanico*, I/17/0 and a rising one at III/30/3, above an open fifth pedal, when she enters; and, at the end of Act II, a rising scale soars upward, with bombastic patriotic fervor, to the dominant before returning to the tonic.

In addition to the canons and harmonizations of the scale, there are pedal points employed in a conventional manner, such as standing on the dominant (see I/15/0). But Puccini also writes dissonant pedal points, such as at II/3/0, where D underlies E major and C# diminished seventh chords, or at III/53/0, where we find F# beneath C# half-diminished.

While this score is in dialogue with some time-tested compositional strategies, however, it could not have been mistaken at the time of its premiere for a traditional work. Perhaps *Edgar*’s composer battled with himself over just how far he could push the harmonic language, since a look at a revision he later made to the score eliminated what

could be interpreted today as bitonality. In scene 2 of Act III of the original version, a B pedal point underlies A minor, G major, and C major chords (see Ex. 1.6c above). In the revised version, at the clash between the B pedal and C major that occurs at III/22/0, C major is now interpreted simply as an overlaid Neapolitan sixth chord (bII6), followed by an F#7 dominant, which resolves immediately to B major: a standard progression. [Ex. 5.2]

Example 5.2: *Edgar* III/22/0, revised version of B/C clash

The image shows a musical score for piano accompaniment in G major. The bass line consists of a single B note held as a pedal point. The treble line begins with a C major chord, which is annotated as a Neapolitan sixth chord (bII6). This is followed by an F# dominant 7th chord, marked with a triplet of notes, which then resolves to a B major chord. The score is written on a grand staff with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#).

Puccini's employment in *Edgar* of parallel constructions is sometimes innovative, sometimes much less so.²³ Testing the boundaries of tonal coherence, he uses parallel augmented triads at I/35/17, parallel 4/2 chords at I/48/4, and, in *Edgar's scena* at II/5/2, parallel half-diminished chords (“*Tristan*” chords), while still reiterating them sequentially along a simple chromatic motion.²⁴ [Ex. 5.3, a-c]

Example 5.3, *Edgar*, parallel constructions

a) I/35/17, parallel augmented triads

²³ Several writers have referred to Puccini's “Ponchiellian” use of parallel octaves: while Puccini's teacher Amilcare Ponchielli does employ parallel octaves in some vocal parts, such as the final scene of Act III of *La gioconda*, the underlying harmonies are much more traditionally constructed. See William Ashbrook, *The Operas of Puccini*, 2nd ed. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 26-7 and 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), 54.

²⁴ Other parallel constructions can be found in *Edgar* at: I/8/4, I/8/9, I/10/0, I/17/3, I/26/0, I/27/4, I/29/0, I/32/11, I/38/0, I/43/12, III/0/14, III/23/20, III/33/24, III/34/7, III/36/0, III/5/18, III/50/8.

tu la difendi? tu la difendi?

This musical score shows two staves (treble and bass clef) with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a time signature of 4/2. The melody is written in the treble clef, and the accompaniment is in the bass clef. The lyrics "tu la difendi?" are written above the staff. The music consists of four measures, with the first two measures containing the melody and the last two measures containing the accompaniment. The chords are parallel 4/2 chords, meaning they are built on the same interval of a fourth and a second.

b) I/48/4, parallel 4/2 chords

This musical score shows two staves (treble and bass clef) with a key signature of one flat (Bb) and a time signature of 5/2. The melody is written in the treble clef, and the accompaniment is in the bass clef. The music consists of four measures, with the first two measures containing the melody and the last two measures containing the accompaniment. The chords are parallel half-diminished sevenths, meaning they are built on the same interval of a second and a seventh.

c) II/5/2, parallel half-diminished sevenths

This musical score shows two staves (treble and bass clef) with a key signature of one flat (Bb) and a time signature of 3/4. The melody is written in the treble clef, and the accompaniment is in the bass clef. The music consists of eight measures, with the first four measures containing the melody and the last four measures containing the accompaniment. The chords are open octaves, meaning they are built on the same interval of an octave.

A more primitive use of parallels occurs at III/52/8, where open octaves simply climb up chromatically, as Edgar discards his disguise to reveal that he is actually alive. [Ex. 5.4]

Example 5.4: *Edgar*, III/52/8, rising chromatic melodic line

It is indeed difficult to reconcile the composition of such a banal passage with the Puccini who usually seems to be interested in fostering musical innovation and avoiding the trite.

In the score he later gave to Sybil Seligman, Puccini annotated the exclamation here “Edgar vive” [Edgar lives] with the comment “menzogna!” [a lie!]²⁵ But in a sense, the music of *Edgar* does live on. To listen to *Edgar* is to hear foreshadowings of many of his later works—jewels scattered into the future, or rather, scavenged by the composer from this neglected work to serve other purposes, but usually for moments of related dramatic import.

There is, of course, the well-known borrowing from *Edgar*’s Act IV scene 4, which had been cut in the revised version, that Puccini used in *Tosca*. Both scenes depict moments of loving intimacy between the two main protagonists, using the same parallel seventh, eleventh and thirteenth chords, although supporting different melodies: [Ex. 5.5 a and b]

²⁵ Carner, 54.

Example 5.5:

a) *Edgar*, original version, Act IV, scene 4:

Ah, nei tuoi ba-ci io vo-glio tut-to di-men-ti-gar!

b) *Tosca*, III/24/0

A-ma-ro sol per te m'era il mo-ri-re, Da te la vi-ta prende ogni splendore

When the editor Ricordi complained about this recycling to Puccini,²⁶ the composer replied,

“As the passage is, forgetting that it is derived from an idea in another work (the abolished fourth act of *Edgar*), it seems to me to be full of the poetry that emanates from the words.

Oh, I am sure of this, and you will be convinced when you hear it in place, that is,

onstage.”²⁷

²⁶ “[the section] is a piece *talis et qualis* from *Edgar*! It would be stupendous if sung by a Tirolese farmer's wife!! but out of place in the mouth of a Tosca or a Cavaradossi.” [un pezzo *talis et qualis* dell'*Edgar*!...Stupendo se per la sua essenza vien cantato da una contadina tirolese!!...ma fuori di posto in bocca ad una Tosca, ad un Cavaradossi.] Eugenio Gara. ed. *Carteggi Pucciniani*. (Milan: Ricordi, 1958), 177.

²⁷ [Così com'è, togliendosi dall'idea che appartiene ad altro lavoro (4° atto Edgar abolito) mi sembra pieno di quella poesia che emana dalle parole. Oh, di questo ne sono sicuro, e si convincerà quando lo sentirà a posto e cioè sulla scena.] *Ibid.*, 179.

b) *Madama Butterfly*, conclusion

The musical score shows a sequence of parallel half-diminished seventh chords in B minor. The chords are labeled as B minor, ii, V, and i. A specific interval is highlighted with a bracket and labeled "unresolved 6-5 motion, G to F#".

The parallel half-diminished sevenths shown above in Example 5.3c, which occur at a moment when Edgar reveals his emotional distress over the dissolute life he has been leading with Tigrana, can also be considered a precursor to a passage in *Suor Angelica*, written almost thirty years later. Here Angelica, also in crisis, first encounters her cruel aunt and this dark passage heralds the tragedy to come. In the later, more sophisticated work, however, the parallelisms are offset by contrary motion in the bass and the number of chordal repetitions is limited. [Ex. 5.6]

Example 5.6

Suor Angelica, 43: parallel half-dim 7ths and aug triad

The musical score shows a sequence of parallel half-diminished seventh chords and an augmented triad. The chords are labeled as 1/2 dim and aug triad.

After Edgar reveals himself in Act III, at III/53/0, we hear his angry verbal assault of Tigrana, “O lebbra, sozzura del mondo o fronte di bronzo, di bronzo e di fango” [O plague, filth of the world, or brow of bronze and slime] in a 9/8 melody that descends a fifth

from F# to B, and then reverses course up to the F#: all this is set to a roiling, rhythmically unstable accompaniment. In *Il Tabarro* (1918), the similarly impassioned Luigi has a melody with a similar profile that, above an agitated 9/8 accompaniment, also begins on the fifth scale degree, and descends to the tonic. [Ex. 5.7a and b]

Example 5.7

a) *Edgar*, III/53/0

b) *Il Tabarro*, 45

In *Edgar*'s third act, there is a short exotic-sounding theme played in parallel octaves, to which Edgar sings, “perfido suo cuor fra poco io leggerò” [I will soon read her wicked heart], based on the half-diminished seventh G#-B-D-F#, which finishes a bit too neatly in

F# minor. Puccini's last opera, *Turandot* (1926, posthumous) uses a similar theme (the "Enigma motive"), also based on half-diminished and diminished sevenths, for the moment when the Unknown Prince tries solve the fateful riddles and indeed read Turandot's heart, at II/50/1. However in the later work, the harmonies do not resolve soon to any key, a treatment that is as dissonant as the theme itself. [Ex. 5.8 a and b]

Example 5.8

a) *Edgar*, III/33/24b) *Turandot*, II/50/1

Puccini employs another figure with repeated parallel octaves that is also echoed years later in *Turandot*: in *Edgar*, at III/34/7, three F#s, doubled at several octaves and alternating with D and C#, ring out on the downbeats of their respective measures, underlining Fidelia's exclamation, "Ti seconderò! va! va!" [I will support you! Go! Go!] These repeated F#s slowly dissolve into the only pitch class heard, after which follows a chromatic rise to G, G# and A. In sum, the striking repeated octave pattern serves only as a transition to the ensuing duet "Bella signora." [Ex. 5.9]

Example 5.9: *Edgar*, III/34/7, repeated octaves as transition

In *Turandot*, Puccini does not waste such a memorable musical gesture: repeated Bbs toll like funeral bells at Liu's "Tu che di gel sei cinta" (III/27/0), and throughout the scene of her death, and at III/35/0, they reappear with open fifths at Calaf's "Principessa di morte!" The repeated pounding of these perfect consonances integrates a large swath of music, and even conjures up the insistent thrusting of the opening bitonal chords, which sound a remarkable sixty-one times after the opening curtain before the texture changes at I/2/7.

For Puccini, *Edgar* was a first attempt at a full-length opera from whose failure he would learn much. His next opera, *Manon Lescaut*, shows a newfound mastery of the medium and a talent—no longer rough-hewn and unpolished—that sparkles like a gem.