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Tonality and drama in Verdi's "La Traviata"

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TONALITY AND DRAMA IN VERDI'S *LA TRAVIATA*

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
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by

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ABSTRACT

Scholars hold opposing views concerning the importance of large-scale key relations in Verdi's operas. Julian Budden states that, since Verdi often allowed transpositions of his music in performance, one must take care in assigning structural importance to Verdi's key schemes. Others, including David Lawton, place much significance on Verdi's choice of keys. Lawton describes methods by which Verdi intensifies dramatic situations through associative tonality and recurring musical themes. In *La Traviata*, several recurring musical themes undergo transposition, a device that Wagner scholar Robert Bailey calls expressive tonality, which is the repetition or recall of a passage transposed by semitone or tone, either up or down to underscore dramatic intensification or relaxation. Similar in dramatic value are reactive shifts, which are abrupt modulations or tonicizations, depicting a direct response to a statement or thought.

This thesis will show how Verdi uses tonality on a local and global scale to support and intensify dramatic situations throughout *La Traviata*. Locally, he uses reactive shifts in tonality and recurring themes to propel immediate music and dramatic action. Globally, Verdi uses expressive tonality to intensify or relax dramatic situations, which works in conjunction with a referential use of keys as well as large-scale harmonic successions to unify the work as a whole. I begin with a detailed exposition of the aforementioned analytical tools and then apply those tools to *La Traviata*. I will close the thesis with a discussion of the revisions made to *La Traviata* after its initial performances and explore some results of the musical changes Verdi made.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Scholars hold opposing views concerning the importance of large-scale key relations in Verdi's operas. In the second volume of his *Operas of Verdi* (1992), Julian Budden states that placing structural significance on Verdi's choice of key schemes is dangerous, as Verdi would sanction semitonal transpositions in performance as well as in his revisions.¹ In his dissertation "Tonality and Drama in Verdi's Early Operas," David Lawton counters this argument by pointing to the published scores, which he believes demonstrate that one of Verdi's chief concerns was the relation between tonality and drama.² He describes several ways in which Verdi relates dramatic action to tonal structure in the large. The discussion focuses on Verdi's associative use of tonality and he refers to recurring musical themes as a foreground aid in recognizing these large harmonic designs. Nevertheless, Lawton limits his discussion to only untransposed musical devices, which, as we will see, poses a problem in *La Traviata* (1853), where Verdi uses transposition to intensify drama.

The body of scholarship on *La Traviata* is relatively small with only a handful of articles and no full-length studies on Verdi's tonal design. This fact is surprising considering the relative popularity of the opera. Martin Chusid's 1974 article, "Drama and the Key of F Major in *La Traviata*," focuses on the meaning of F major within the opera. He sets forth the proposition that F major is associated with Alfredo and Violetta's romance, but does not explain the subsequent transpositions of a musical theme first heard in the key of F major. James Hepokoski's 1989 article, "Genre and Content in Mid-Century Verdi: 'Addio, del passato' (*La Traviata*, Act III)" concentrates on a single *adagio*, but he does not place it within the context of the work as a whole. Fabrizio Della Seta's 1983 article, "Il tempo della festa: Su due scene della *Traviata* e su

¹ Julian Budden, *The Operas of Verdi*, rev. ed., vol. 2, *From Il Trovatore to La Forza del destino* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992), 144.

² David Lawton, "Tonality and Drama in Verdi's Early Operas" (Ph.D. diss., University of California-Berkeley, 1973), ix.

altri luoghi verdiani,” analyzes the *Introduzione* in *La Traviata*. He sees the first act as based on the logic of sonata form and draws a parallel to the finale of the second act. Della Seta’s article embraces the idea of a large, unified form in the opera, but he does not extend his discussion to the opera as a whole. “The Orchestration of *La Traviata*,” by George Martin (1988), traces Verdi’s use of the orchestra to convey the intimate nature of the opera. He argues that Verdi’s orchestration is quite effective despite the disparaging remarks made by some conductors. The article introduces very pertinent information to the present study but, again, it presents no analysis of the work as a whole. Julian Budden’s treatment of *La Traviata* presents a scene-by-scene foreground explanation of music and drama but does not explain why Verdi chooses particular tonalities.³

These articles comprise the bulk of analytical scholarship on *La Traviata*. For this reason, I have turned to scholarship dedicated to Verdi’s other operas. Most important to me is David Lawton’s dissertation. Even though Lawton carries his research only through *Rigoletto* (1851), his ideas resonate quite well in *La Traviata*. One category he does not address, however, is transposed themes. For this, I turn to Wagner scholarship, namely the writings of Robert Bailey. In his article “The Structure of the *Ring* and Its Evolution,”⁴ Bailey defines expressive tonality and presents examples of its use. It is defined as a repetition of a passage, transposed up or down by semitone or tone in the service of dramatic intensification or relaxation.⁵ Expressive

³ Martin Chusid, “Drama and the Key of F Major in *La Traviata*,” in *Atti del III° Congresso Internazionale di Studi Verdiani, 12-17 giugno 1972*, ed. Mario Medici and Marcello Pavarani (Parma: Istituto di Studi Verdiani, 1974), 89-121; James Hepokoski, “Genre and Content in Mid-Century Verdi: ‘Addio, del passato’ (*La Traviata*, Act III),” *Cambridge Opera Journal* 1 (1989): 249-76; Fabrizio Della Seta, “Il tempo della festa: Su due scene della *Traviata* e su altri luoghi verdiani,” *Studi Verdiani* 2 (1983): 108-46; George Martin, “The Orchestration of *La Traviata*,” Chapter 11 in *Aspects of Verdi* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1988): 195-210; Budden, *Operas of Verdi*, 128-166. Budden, fn. 139, concedes, however, that Chusid does present a convincing case for the importance of F major in *La Traviata*.

⁴ Robert Bailey, “The Structure of the *Ring* and Its Evolution,” *19th Century Music* 1, no. 1 (1977): 48-61.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 51.

tonality is, perhaps, the most dramatic of Verdi's tonal devices. As we will see, it takes root as a structural element, and chronicles the dramatic developments throughout the opera.

Verdi's union of music and dramatic action exists on two levels: the foreground level, and the large-scale level. As one would expect, Verdi uses the foreground level to propel immediate music, most often inserting what I call "reactive" tonal shifts, which are abrupt modulations or tonicizations, depicting a direct response to a statement or thought. Often, the key to which a reactive shift moves becomes intertwined with the dramatic theme of the passage, resulting in a referential use of tonality. In addition to these items, Verdi uses recurring themes and transposition of them to signify pivotal moments in the opera. Verdi uses each of these devices to create a tightly knit union between music and dramatic action in *La Traviata*.

The apparent indifference with which Verdi transposed sections of his operas for particular performances raises concern in a study of Verdi's tonal practices. But, many of these changes were not included in the published scores and, therefore, should not be considered part of the final product. Moreover, David Lawton believes that the revisions Verdi included in the published scores exhibit more tonal coherence than their original versions. *La Traviata*, in particular, supports this argument. Several months after the 1853 premiere, Verdi returned to the score and revised five scenes.⁶ These revisions fall mainly into two categories: semitone transposition of lyrical sections and *puntature*, "the alteration of a singer's line without alteration of the harmonies."⁷ There are several articles dedicated to these revisions, including the recent critical edition of *La Traviata* and Julian Budden's "The Two *Traviatas*."⁸ In the cases where

⁶ Although Verdi regarded the initial performances as a fiasco, there is evidence that he may have exaggerated. See the introduction to Giuseppe Verdi, *La Traviata*, Critical Edition of the Piano-Vocal Score, vol. 2, ed. Fabrizio Della Seta (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press and Casa Ricordi-BMG Ricordi, 2001), L-LI.

⁷ Julian Budden, "The Two *Traviatas*," *Proceedings of the Royal Musical Association* 99 (1972-73): 52.

⁸ Verdi, *La Traviata*, vol. 2; Julian Budden, "The Two *Traviatas*," 43-66.

Verdi transposed the music, evidence shows that the results reinforce the union between tonality and drama.

This thesis will show how Verdi uses tonality on a local and global scale to support and intensify dramatic situations throughout *La Traviata*. Locally, he uses reactive shifts in tonality and recurring themes to propel immediate music. Recurring themes also operate on a global scale where they work in conjunction with a referential use of keys as well as large-scale harmonic successions to unify the work as a whole. In addition, recurring themes undergo various semitone transpositions in the opera, and serve to intensify or relax dramatic action. I begin with a detailed exposition of the aforementioned analytical tools and then apply those tools to *La Traviata*. I will close the thesis with a discussion of the revisions made to *La Traviata* after its initial performances and explore some results of the musical changes Verdi made.

CHAPTER 2: TOOLS AND CONCEPTS

The interaction of tonality and drama in *La Traviata* exists on two levels: local and global. Local details aid in our immediate recognition of music and dramatic action and lead to an appreciation of the overall structural design. In this chapter, we will explore several ways in which specific musical devices serve dramatic ends with examples from *Rigoletto* (1851) and *Un ballo in maschera* (1859) by Verdi and in *Tannhäuser* (1845) by Richard Wagner. I will begin by defining each device and presenting scholarly literature devoted to it. Each section will conclude with a detailed example.

RECURRING THEMES

Joseph Kerman speaks of three types of recurring themes in Verdi's operas: "identifying," "recalling," and the "tema-cardine."⁹ As early as *Nabucco* (1842), Verdi included identifying themes such as a march, and in *I due Foscari* (1844), he employed musical themes for all of the principals, the Council of Ten, as well as the people of Venice.¹⁰

Recalling themes, refer not to a particular person or notion, but to a dramatic situation. Often, this type of theme develops into an essential musico-dramatic element and becomes a "tema-cardine." Gino Roncaglia developed this title, and defined it as a recurring theme around which the entire drama is made to hinge.¹¹ Kerman goes on to say that "these recurring themes do more than recall or identify: they provide, in a single musical gesture, a compelling focus for the dramatic action."¹² We find an example of a "tema-cardine" in *Rigoletto*, where Verdi

⁹ Joseph Kerman, "Verdi's Use of Recurring Themes," in *Write All These Down: Essays On Music* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994): 274.

¹⁰ Ibid., 277.

¹¹ Gino Roncaglia, "Il 'Tema-cardine' nell' opera di Giuseppe Verdi," *Rivista musicale italiana* 47 (1943): 220-22; cited in Kerman, "Verdi's Use of Recurring Themes," 279.

¹² Ibid.

inserts the curse theme at pivotal points throughout the opera.¹³ First introduced in the opening bars of the C minor Prelude to the opera, it occurs without accompaniment, and the double-dotted rhythms are memorable. In addition, the first harmony, an enharmonically spelled dominant seventh chord on A-flat moving to a C minor chord, also becomes strongly associated with the theme (Figure 2.1).



Figure 2.1: *Rigoletto*, Prelude, the Curse Theme¹⁴

In the course of Act I, Count Monterone forces his way into the palace, angry at the Duke's behavior toward his daughter. The scene culminates with Monterone uttering a curse upon the Duke as well as Rigoletto (Figure 2.2). Although the exact rhythm and pitch of the theme—now moving to D-flat—are altered from the Prelude, the dotted rhythms are unmistakably related. The curse deeply vexes Rigoletto and he recalls it throughout the remainder of the Act, where the theme returns along with the initial dominant seventh on A-flat harmony. The first recurrence comes in the following scene while on his way home; on middle C Rigoletto recalls Monterone's words: "Quel vecchio maledivami!" (Figure 2.3).

¹³ This section is based on Lawton's analysis of *Rigoletto* found in his article, "Tonal Structure and Dramatic Action in *Rigoletto*," *Verdi: Bollettino dell'Istituto di Studi Verdiani* 3, no. 9 (1982): 1559-1581.

¹⁴ All excerpts from *Rigoletto* are reprinted with permission from University of Chicago Press (see Appendix below for letter of permission). © Copyright 1985 by The University of Chicago and CASA RICORDI-BMG RICORDI S.p.A. for the piano reduction.

500

Duca
Duke

- sta - te - lo.
pri - so - ner.

Rigoletto

È mat-to!
Themadman!

Borsa

Quai det-ti!
He's raving! Ah!

Marullo

Quai det-ti!
He's raving! Ah!

Ceprano

Quai det-ti!
He's raving! Ah! *

Mon.

(al Duca e Rigoletto)
(to the Duke and Rigoletto)

Oh sia-teen-trambi voi ma-le - det -
Je - ster and Duke now hear as I curse

Tenori

Bassi

CORO-CHORUS

pp

ff

505

Mon.

ti.
you.

Slancia - reil ca - ne
You set your mon - gre's

[Archi]

ppp

pp

Figure 2.2: *Rigoletto*, Act I, Monterone's Curse



Figure 2.3: *Rigoletto*, Act I, recurrence of the Curse Theme

The line moves into a dominant seventh chord on A-flat, enharmonically the same as found in the Prelude, and then to C major before cadencing in F major.¹⁵ The curse theme reappears several more times and culminates in the death of Rigoletto's daughter, Gilda, in Act III: the fulfillment of Monterone's words (Figure 2.4).

We know Verdi considered the curse to be the central focus of the drama in *Rigoletto*, and the structural placement (i.e., the recurrence of the theme) is evidence of this.¹⁶ The curse theme becomes a *tema-cardine* in its use; it occurs not as a reminder to the audience, but to Rigoletto as he recalls it at climactic points in the opera, including Gilda's abduction in Act I as well as her death.

¹⁵ See David Lawton's discussion of the ambiguous modulatory nature of middle C in "Tonal Structure and Dramatic Action in *Rigoletto*," 1571-74.

¹⁶ In a letter of 3 June 1850 to Piave, Verdi states: "The whole subject is in that curse which even becomes moral. An unhappy father who bewails the loss of his daughter's honor is cruelly mocked by a court jester whom the father curses; and that curse strikes the jester in a terrible way. This seems to me to be moral and great in the loftiest sense of the word." F. Abbati, *G. Verdi*, 2 vols. (Milano: Ricordi, 1959), 2: 63-66; quoted in translation in Lawton, "Tonal Structure and Dramatic Action in *Rigoletto*," 1562. In fact, the original title of *Rigoletto* was *La Maledizione* (*The Curse*).

219

Rig. Ah! la ma-le-di-zio
Ah! Mon-te-ro-ne cursed

ff

(strappandosi i capelli cade sul
cadavere della figlia)
(tearing his hair, he falls on the
corpse of his daughter)

221

Rig. ne!
me!

Figure 2.4: *Rigoletto*, Act III, recurrence of the Curse Theme at Gilda's death

Recurring themes operate on two levels: the foreground level and the large-scale structure of the opera. The tonality of a recurring theme may also take on an important role especially when it coincides with a major theme. The next section will explore this topic.

ASSOCIATIVE TONALITY

Robert Bailey defines associative tonality as follows: “when either specific melodies or motives are associated with particular pitch levels or when a particular tonality is associated with particular characters or underlying dramatic themes.”¹⁷ Scholars often refer to associative tonality in Wagner's operas, but Verdi was accustomed to using keys referentially as well. For example, in *Nabucco*, Verdi uses D major to represent the relationship between the Jewish

¹⁷ Bailey, 51. Although Verdi makes use of pitch-specific melodies and motives in *La Traviata*, his relation between particular tonalities and dramatic themes are more important to the present study. Therefore, the term associative tonality will be used solely in connection with Verdi's referential use of keys.

people and Nabucco and Abigaille.¹⁸ Here, the key is the referential item rather than a pitch-specific melody or motive.

David Lawton describes recurring themes as associative foreground aids, which often become structural because the keys in which they appear are usually connected to a larger tonal framework.¹⁹ In *Rigoletto*, there is an extensive use of associative tonality with the recurring theme of the curse. The recurrence of the curse, harmonized with a dominant seventh chord on A-flat, suggests D-flat as the tonal center despite resolutions to C major (refer to Figure 2.3). The manifestation of this suggestion occurs at two crucial points in the opera, first in Act I with Monterone's actual curse. He sings the theme on a melodic D-flat (refer back to Figure 2.2) and, eighteen measures later, prepares for a full cadence in D-flat minor occurring in the subsequent *cabaletta*.

Figure 2.5: *Rigoletto*, Act I, shift to D-flat at the end of Monterone's curse

¹⁸ See Lawton, "Tonality and Drama in Verdi's Early Operas," 70-76.

¹⁹ Lawton, "Tonal Structure and Dramatic Action in *Rigoletto*," 1561.

The relation between the curse and D-flat becomes most apparent in the last act as Gilda dies and fulfills the curse. In a final D-flat minor *adagio*, “V’ho ingannato,” she laments having deceived her father when she sacrificed herself for the Duke earlier in Act III (Figure 2.6).²⁰



Figure 2.6: *Rigoletto*, Act III, Gilda's D-flat minor *adagio*

Rigoletto's attempt at having the Duke assassinated fails, as it results his own daughter's death. He recalls the curse and the orchestra plummets into a fiery final passage of D-flat minor as the opera ends (refer to Figure 2.4).

A second type of associative tonality in Verdi's operas deals with successions of keys. In his 1973 dissertation, David Lawton defines what he calls “double cycles”:

a distinctive structural plan, such as a motion from the dominant through the mediant to the tonic (for example, A-F-D), which is repeated in another number or group of numbers. Verdi generally uses double cycles in order to unify a group of pieces musically for the sake of dramatic continuity, or else to support a parallel between two different dramatic situations. He typically takes great pains to make audible musical associations between the beginnings and/or endings of the cycles. Sometimes he does

²⁰ An *adagio* is the general term used when describing the corresponding movement in the four- to five-part design known as *la solita forma*; it does not refer to the specific tempo of the passage of music. For an in-depth discussion of *la solita forma*, see Harold Powers, “‘La Solita Forma’ and ‘The Uses of Convention,’” *Acta musicologica* 59 (1987): 65-90; Robert Moreen, “Integration of Text Forms and Musical Forms in Verdi's Early Operas” (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 1975); and Roger Parker, “‘Insolite Forme,’ or Basevi's Garden Path,” in *Verdi's Middle Period, 1849-1859: Source Studies, Analysis, and Performance Practice*, ed. Martin Chusid (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 129-46. Essentially, the design is characterized by versification, tempo, and texture; the typical aria will include a *scena*, *adagio*, *tempo di mezzo*, and *cabaletta* and the typical duet will include a *scena*, *tempo d'attacco*, *adagio*, *tempo di mezzo*, and *cabaletta*. Most often, the *scena*, *tempo d'attacco*, and *tempo di mezzo* are movements in which dramatic action takes place, and the *adagio* and *cabaletta* are considered as periods of reflection. Verdi was beginning to dispose of these forms around the time he composed *La Traviata*. Nonetheless, they are still present in the opera and serve to aid in our navigation, as they help describe the work's large-scale structure.

this by means of a recurring theme; at other times, he uses less literal similarities of texture, character, rhythm, harmonic detail, etc. to draw musical parallels between two pieces.²¹

Roger Parker and Matthew Brown (1983) provide an example from *Un ballo in maschera*.²²

They associate a particular tonal succession with Riccardo's assassination, first presented in Act I in a prediction from Ulrica, the witch. Riccardo, the governor of Boston, disguised as a sailor, states that prophecies do not scare him and commands Ulrica to tell his future. The tonal center shifts to E-flat minor as Ulrica begins a *scena* in which she warns that many bold people find themselves in tears at her words (Figure 2.7).

ULRICA

ALL° ASSAI SOSTENUTO ♩ = 76

67 Chi voi sia - te, l'au - da - ce pa - ro - la può - nel

ALL° ASSAI SOSTENUTO ♩ = 76

U

pianto pro - rom - pere un giorno, se chi sfor - za l'ar - ca - no sog -

ppp 4 3 2 4 4 3 2 4

f (p)

Figure 2.7: *Un ballo in maschera*, Act I, Ulrica's "Chi voi siate" in E-flat minor

The cycle formally begins at the point where Riccardo pushes the music into F major and insists that Ulrica read his palm; she takes his hand and the music suddenly moves to a new theme in D-flat major (Figure 2.8).

²¹ Lawton, "Tonality and Drama in Verdi's Early Operas," 76.

²² Roger Parker and Matthew Brown, "Motivic and Tonal Interaction in *Un ballo in maschera*," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 36 (1983): 243-265.

OSCAR ALLEGRO ♩ = 126 I. o!

U. - tar.

RICC. ALLEGRO ♩ = 126 (offrendo la mano ad Ulrica) Orsù, a. mi. ci. L' o. nore a me

SAM. Ma il primo chi fi. a? ALLEGRO ♩ = 126

O. E lo si. - - a!

RI. cedi.

ULR. (esaminando la mano) (solennemente) È la de. - - stra d'un

Figure 2.8: *Un ballo in maschera*, Act I, shift from F major to D-flat major in Ulrica's prediction

She quickly breaks away from Riccardo and orders him to leave as the melody shifts to its parallel minor with a prominent $\hat{b}6$ in the bass as well as in the melody (Figure 2.9).



Figure 2.9: *Un ballo in maschera*, Act I, shift to D-flat minor

Riccardo commands Ulrica to continue, and as she predicts his death, Verdi enharmonically reinterprets B-double flat as an A major chord, which functions as a subdominant and suggests the key of E major (Figure 2.10). Moreover, a dominant seventh built on B and the melodic closure in the vocal parts reinforces the key. The E is subsumed into a fully diminished seventh chord built on C-sharp, but eventually makes its way into the bass from which it rises to F as dominant preparation for the following scene in B-flat major (Figure 2.11).

Figure 2.10: *Un ballo in maschera*, Act I, shift to A major chord at prediction of Riccardo's death



Figure 2.11: *Un ballo in maschera*, Act I, E moving to F

This cycle (i.e., F—D-flat major—D-flat minor—A—F—B-flat) returns in the last act of the opera when the prediction becomes reality. The scene begins at the masked ball with a waltz theme in F major (Figure 2.12).



Figure 2.12: *Un ballo in maschera*, Act III, F major waltz theme

A woman approaches Riccardo and begs him to leave because remaining will only lead to his death. Riccardo states that he is not afraid—a very similar statement to the one he made at the beginning of his prediction in Act I—and asks to whom is he speaking. The woman replies that she cannot tell him, but Riccardo recognizes her voice; it is Amelia, Renato's wife and Riccardo's love. At this point, the waltz theme abruptly shifts to D-flat major (Figure 2.13).

Figure 2.13 shows a musical score for 'Un ballo in maschera', Act III, featuring a waltz theme that moves to D-flat major. The score is written for voice (Amelia and Riccardo) and piano. The key signature changes from B-flat major to D-flat major. The piano part includes a triplet figure in the bass and a long motion in Riccardo's vocal line.

Figure 2.13: *Un ballo in maschera*, Act III, waltz theme moving to D-flat major

In addition to the shock of the unprepared move, Verdi inserts a triplet figure in the bass to signal the change. As Amelia's plea becomes more desperate, the theme suggests D-flat minor with a $\hat{b}6$ in the bass as well as a long $\hat{b}6—\hat{5}$ motion in Riccardo's vocal line (Figure 2.14).

Riccardo tells Amelia that she and Renato must return to England in order to prevent any escalation of his affair with her. All seems well, but Renato pushes his way in and stabs Riccardo. The music reflects this action and moves to an A major chord, again functioning as E major's subdominant—Ulrica's prediction has come true (Figure 2.15).

A

RI.

An - - - cuna vol - - ta ad - - di - -

Ohimè!

o! l'ul - - - tima vol - - ta ad -

Figure 2.14: *Un ballo in maschera*, Act III, waltz theme in D-flat minor

ALL. AGITATO ♩ = 160 (d'un grido)

A

RI.

REN.

Soc - cor - - so! soc.

(lanciato! Inosservato fra loro, trafigge Riccardo.) Ahimè!

E tu si - ce - vi il mi - o!...

ALL. AGITATO ♩ = 160

pp

Figure 2.15: *Un ballo in maschera*, Act III, sudden shift to A major as Renato stabs Riccardo

Bystanders react to the tragedy and prolong A, though moving to the parallel minor, but the music eventually moves to an E major chord, via a fully diminished seventh chord on D-sharp,

before rising back to the F major waltz (Figure 2.16). Once again, the return to F major functions as dominant preparation for the following B-flat major section.



Figure 2.16: *Un ballo in maschera*, Act III, E major section before return to F major

Following is a bass line sketch, which compares the two scenes (after Parker and Brown):²³



Figure 2.17: *Un ballo in maschera*, bass line sketch of the double cycle in Acts I and III

Double cycles unify larger spans of music within an opera and ultimately lead to a tightly knit union of music and drama. In this example, tonality unites the prediction of death with its fruition—quite a logical occurrence. Both cycles use F major as their point of departure and

²³ Parker and Brown, 258.

return and both move on to set pieces with a B-flat tonal center. In *Rigoletto*, there are similar double cycles, each revolving around D-flat, the key of the curse as well as its consequences.²⁴

REACTIVE AND EXPRESSIVE SHIFTS IN TONALITY

A reactive shift in tonality is an abrupt modulation, which depicts a dramatic response to a statement or thought. Verdi uses this device to chronicle immediate developments in the dramatic action. Referring back to the example from *Un ballo in maschera*, we recall the sudden shift from D-flat minor to A major as Ulrica predicts Riccardo's death (refer to Figure 2.10). In addition, after a measure of silence, the orchestra enters *fortissimo*, reinforcing the shock of the reactive shift to A major. In Act I, where it first occurs, it underscores the seriousness of the prediction. When the prediction comes true in Act III, Verdi interrupts the waltz melody, plunging the music into a rapid quadruple meter with sixteenth note chromatic passages as the shift takes place (refer to Figure 2.15).

In addition to its shock value, this device also creates a certain amount of tension by suddenly moving from a clearly established tonal center to a distant harmony. Similar in creating tension (or releasing it) is a device Robert Bailey calls expressive tonality, which is the repetition or recall of a previous passage transposed up or down by semitone or tone in the service of indicating intensification or relaxation.²⁵ Wagner uses this device in Act I of *Tannhäuser* when the title character pleads with Venus to release him. There are three strophes to his song with the first beginning in D-flat major (Figure 2.18).

²⁴ For a discussion of the double cycles found in *Rigoletto*, see Lawton, "Tonal Structure and Dramatic Action in *Rigoletto*," 1561-1580.

²⁵ Bailey, 51.

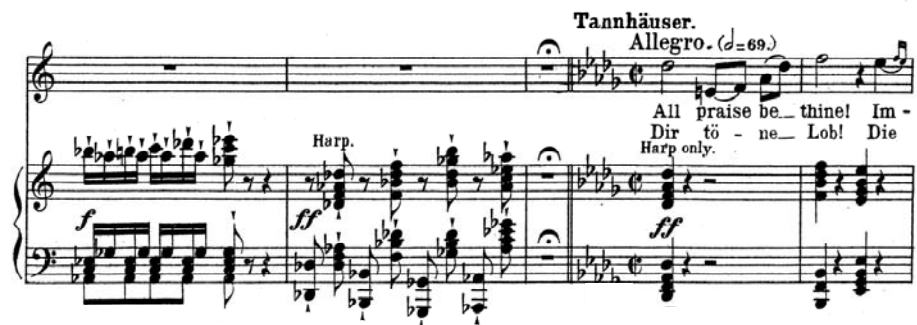


Figure 2.18: *Tannhäuser*, Act I, first stanza of Tannhäuser's song to Venus, in D-flat major

As the song proceeds, Tannhäuser's plea becomes more urgent, and the music reflects this by gradually moving up by semitone in the remaining strophes: first to D major then to E-flat major. Moreover, in the refrain to each stanza, "O, Königin, Göttin, lass mich zieh'n," there is an even more compact rise by tone and semitone; as indicated by the stars in Figure 2.19, Tannhäuser's line ascends from E-flat through F to G-flat.

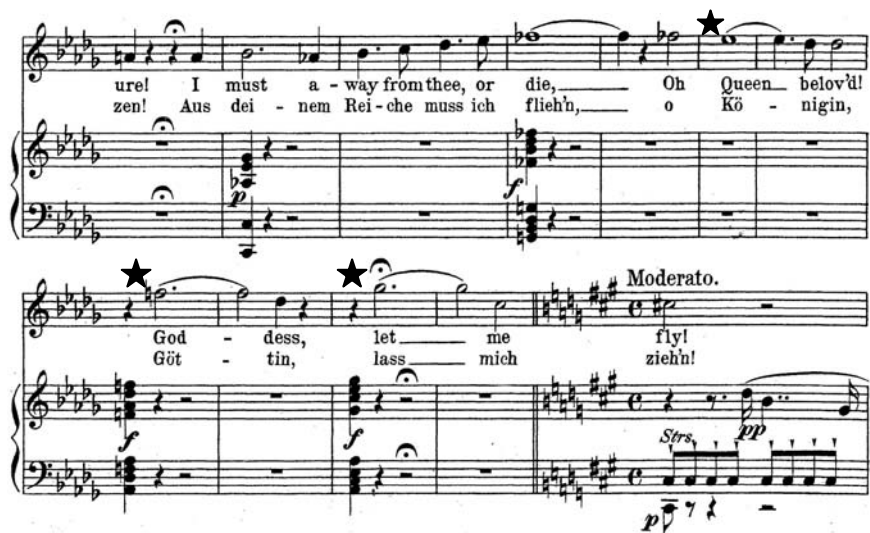


Figure 2.19: *Tannhäuser*, Act I, compact rise from E-flat—F—G-flat

In order to create more coherence within this scene, Wagner also includes changes in the accompaniment. He includes only the harp in the first stanza, in the second he adds *pizzicato* strings, and in the third, the winds. In addition, the tempo gradually increases from $\text{♩} = 69$ to 72

to 76 in the respective stanzas. Even the accompanying rhythms gradually move from chordal strums on the harp to fiery passages of sextuplets in the last stanza (see Figures 2.20 and 2.21).

Every element of this scene points to an intensification in drama: Tannhäuser desperately wants to free himself from Venus's grasp. Although the text to the song is quite clear, Wagner's music intensifies its expressive effect. The foreground elements, including the orchestration and tempi capture our attention, highlighting the rising transpositions and a corresponding increase in the dramatic urgency.

Allegro. $\text{♩} = 72$.

Hrfe.

I. Viol. pizz. mf

II. Viol. pizz. mf

Br. pizz. mf

T. Tannhäuser.

Dank dei-ner Huld, ge - priesen sei dein Lie - ben! Be-glückt für im - mer, wer bei dir ge -

Vcl. K. B. pizz. mf

Figure 2.20: *Tannhäuser*, Act I, move to D major and increased orchestration in the second stanza of Tannhäuser's song

Allegro. $\text{♩} = 76$.

Fl.

Hob.

Klar. in B.

Vh. in F.

Wh. in Es.

Fag.

Hrfe.

I. Viol.

II. Viol.

Br.

T.

Vcl. K.B.

Tannhäuser (auf das Äußerste hingerissen, greift mit trunkenen Gebärde in die Harfe).

Stets soll nur dir, nur

Figure 2.21: *Tannhäuser*, Act I, third stanza of Tannhäuser's song to Venus, in E-flat major

Though most recognizable in a local context, expressive tonality also serves to reflect the most fundamental dramatic developments in an opera and may occur over long spans of music, similar to a *tema-cardine*, which recalls a central dramatic point. In addition, the tonality in which this type of theme appears may take part in associative webs as well. It would seem natural that this kind of theme, so important to drama, may also undergo expressive shifts in tonality. For example, recall the curse theme in *Rigoletto*. In the Prelude, it occurs in C minor (as well as on the pitch C), but in the first act, Monterone states it on a D-flat (refer to Figures 2.1 and 2.2). At the end of the curse, however, he pushes it even further upwards to D-natural, albeit only for a brief time. The semitonal movement of the theme from C to D-flat to D-natural reflects intensification in the drama as it depicts Monterone's curse and its consequences.

CONCLUSION

Each of the tools discussed in this chapter aids in creating unity between music and drama. Recurring themes unify scenes far apart in a work and may become structural in their use, as with a *tema-cardine*. These themes often call attention to important associative tonalities as well as double cycles, which Verdi uses to relate distant passages of music. Verdi also uses reactive shifts to show musically a development in the immediate drama. Expressive tonality operates in a similar fashion, but occurs over large periods of music; it is also strictly associated with a particular recurring musical theme or passage of music. As we will see in *La Traviata*, Verdi uses many of these devices in combination. With these tools in mind, we may now turn to *La Traviata* and explore each of these concepts in more depth.

CHAPTER 3: TONALITY AND DRAMA IN *LA TRAVIATA*

La Traviata (translated as *The Fallen One*) is a tragedy; the title explains this well enough. Nevertheless, we find two lovers on a constant journey to somehow avoid a tragic ending. Despite these efforts, Violetta's sinful past makes a happy ending impossible, and this central dramatic theme manifests itself in the plot as well as in the music. This chapter will expose the opera, taking note of traditional formal aspects, recurring music, and most importantly, the overall tonal plan.

PRELUDE AND ACT I

The large-scale tonal movement in Act I is from A major to A-flat major, an expressive shift down, in which each key is tonicized by a II—V—I global cadence. The Prelude functions as II—V in A major; resolution is provided by the A major tonality of the *Introduzione* (4/2/1).²⁶ The beginning of the B-flat major *brindisi*, “Libiamo ne' lieti calici,” (27/1/1) through the end of the E-flat major waltz section (74/2/2) function the same as they move to A-flat major in the *stretta*, “Si ridesta in ciel” (75/1/1). A-flat major is prolonged through Violetta's aria (“Ah forse è lui”) as the act ends in A-flat major at 112/4/6 (Figure 3.1). Moving closer to the foreground, we find Verdi using two important devices to aid in the large-scale tonal movement: inserting F major as a “hinge” which serves to connect the shift from A to A-flat, as well as a double cycle in A-flat major (VI—V—I) to connect the *Introduzione* and Violetta's aria. F major first enters as the flat-submediant in A major (16/1/1) before undergoing a functional transformation to the natural submediant in A-flat major (62/1/1).


²⁶ References are to the critical edition of the vocal score (cited on page 3). The first number indicates the page, the second the system, the third the measure within that system.





Figure 3.1: Act I, reductive graph of the entire act²⁷


The A-flat major cycle occurs first in Violetta and Alfredo's encounter, outlining VI—V—I, and recurs as the large-scale tonal design of Violetta's aria. Figure 3.2 shows this design:

²⁷ All reductive figures in this document make use of particular notational symbols in a non-traditional way:

 = a structural pitch (the stem will always point upward and have a thick beam)

 = a cycle of harmonies or keys which form a double cycle

 = a reactive shift (no stems)

 = an associative tonality

In general, larger note heads and note heads with a stem indicate more structural importance and smaller note heads and note heads with no stem indicate less structural importance. In addition, a dashed slur indicates a prolongation of a tone (or tonality) and a normal slur is used to group notes together into a progression.

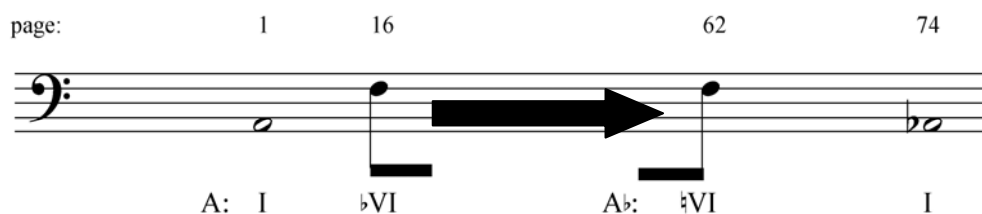


Figure 3.2: Act I, reductive graph showing the F major hinge

F major and A-flat major become extremely important tonalities, as they are the first to acquire associative status (representing love and delusion, respectively). Furthermore, there are even larger implications of A-flat major that arise in the finale of the opera. In addition to these tonal elements, Verdi introduces several musical themes which will recur throughout the opera; the first two occur in the Prelude.

Act I: N. 1. Prelude

Verdi often composed the preludes and overtures to his operas almost as an afterthought, and *La Traviata* was no exception.²⁸ The function of such music is to set the mood for the opera by introducing thematic ideas and motives. Roger Parker refers to the Prelude to *La Traviata* as “a three-stage portrait of the heroine [Violetta], but in reverse chronological order.”²⁹ This timeline can be traced by exposing two essential musical themes, the first being presented in the opening bars of the opera. The Prelude begins with a sparsely orchestrated melody in B minor, characterized by a slow tempo, high tessitura, and diminishing phrase lengths. Moreover, the “roaming” diminished seventh chords and motion by parallel fourths add to the weak sound. This theme depicts the dying Violetta as she finally succumbs to her illness; it will be referred to as the “Frailty Theme” (Figure 3.3). It is important to note that, in spite of the key signature, the

²⁸ The composition of *La Traviata* took place in a somewhat rushed manner; even as late as the end of February, less than two weeks before the premiere, Verdi still had not orchestrated the opera and may not yet have composed the Prelude. The critical edition briefly characterizes this period (p. XLVIII): “concerning this fourth and last period, we have no direct information. It must have been devoted almost entirely to orchestration...If he followed his established practice, it may also have included the composition of the Prelude.”

²⁹ Roger Parker, “*La Traviata*,” in *The New Grove Book of Operas*, ed. Stanley Sadie (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1996), 622.

Frailty Theme is truly in the key of B minor at the opening of the opera, although there is no authentic cadence in that key. The lack of tonal closure in B minor enhances the weak presentation and characterizes further the portrait of the sickly Violetta. The first two phrases close on the dominant, and after measure 8, Verdi briefly tonicizes first E minor and then C major before reaching and prolonging B major as the dominant of E in measures 13-16.



Figure 3.3: Act I, Prelude, Frailty Theme in B minor³⁰

The next musical theme begins in E major—the “true” key according to the key signature—with a grand and sonorous melody. The juxtaposition of this melody to that of the Frailty Theme creates a powerful contrast. The new theme depicts the vigorous life that still resides in Violetta, as we shall find in Act II when she sings of her love for Alfredo. “Violetta’s Love Theme” is characterized by a somewhat faster tempo, warmer tone, and consistent four-bar phrase lengths (Figure 3.4). The fact that these two starkly contrasting themes occur next to each other is

³⁰ All excerpts from *La Traviata* are reprinted with permission from University of Chicago Press (see Appendix below for letter of permission). © Copyright 2001 by The University of Chicago and CASA RICORDI-BMG RICORDI S.p.A for the piano reduction.

significant. Even before a word is sung, Verdi foreshadows the crucial dichotomy of sinful illness and redemptive love.



Figure 3.4: Act I, Prelude, Violetta's Love Theme in E major

Violetta's Love Theme moves to a solo bassoon and cellos as the first violins begin an accompaniment in octaves, depicting the frivolous side of Violetta and moving toward the beginning dramatic action in the *Introduzione*. One small, but significant musical motive occurs near the end of the Prelude. The accompanying strings, winds, and horn begin a plagal progression in E major, but in the third to last bar, a $\flat 6$, C-natural, intrudes into the major key atmosphere. This seemingly insignificant coloration will return at many pivotal points throughout the opera, always foreshadowing the opera's tragic ending.

The beginning of the *Introduzione* takes place during a party at Violetta's house and features another recurring musical theme, which portrays the disreputable side of Paris with its parties and courtesans. The “Party Theme” (m. 5 ff.) is characterized by a festive, yet transparent nature, completing the portrait of the opening scene (Figure 3.7).

(SCENA PRIMA:)
(SCENE ONE:)

Violetta
Violetta,

[Fl., Ott., Ob., Cl.]
tr

[Fg., Ottoni]
p

5

seduta sur un divano sta discorrendo col
seated on a divan, is conversing with

9

Dottore e con alcuni amici,
the Doctor and some friends,

13

tr

Figure 3.7: Act I, *Introduzione*, Party Theme in A major

Violetta assures the crowd that they will drink and be merry, reinforcing the frivolous picture, but the mood of the scene abruptly changes as two more characters walk in: Gastone and his friend Alfredo (m. 59 ff.). The music moves to a theme more intimate in character with a flowing dotted melody and fluttering accompaniment—almost like a heart beating rapidly—as well as asymmetric, seven measure phrases; this is the “Intimate Theme” (Figure 3.8). Here, the

tonal center shifts to D major and Verdi reduces the orchestra to an octet of strings. This theme represents Alfredo, the shy young man who is infatuated with Violetta.

(SCENA II: Detti, il Visconte Gastone di Letorières, Alfredo Germont; Servi affaccendati intorno alla mensa)
(SCENE II: The above, Viscount Gastone di Letorières, Alfredo Germont; servants busy around the table)

58 Gastone

In Al - fre - do Ger - mont, o si -
Here's Al - fre - do Ger - mont, dear - est

62 Gas.

- gno - ra, ec - co un al - tro che mol - to v'o - no - ra;
la - dy, you'll find him an ar - dent ad - mir - er.

Figure 3.8: Act I, *Introduzione*, Intimate Theme in D major

Gastone introduces Alfredo to Violetta, but the conversation is cut short by the announcement that dinner is ready. The Party Theme returns in A major as everyone sits down, Violetta in between Alfredo and Gastone (m. 89 ff.).

The Intimate Theme enters again, though shifting reactively from A major to F major (m. 108 ff.). With this unprepared move, Verdi signals an important dramatic development as he proceeds from the bright key of A major to the darker, more subdued key of F major. In addition, he brings the accompaniment to a halt and puts the modulatory melodic line in a high register. These signals underscore the drama of this passage as Gastone informs Violetta that Alfredo adores her and he secretly checked on her every day when she was sick several months ago (Figure 3.9).

The musical score for Act I, *Introduzione*, illustrates a reactive shift from the Party Theme in A major to the Intimate Theme in F major. The score is divided into four systems. The first system shows the piano accompaniment with a forte (*f*) dynamic and a tutti marking, transitioning to a piano (*p*) dynamic for the arches. The second system features vocal entries for Gastone (marked with an oblique line) and Violetta (marked with a slur), with dynamics ranging from *pp* to *piano*. The third system continues the vocal lines, with Violetta's part marked with a slur and a forte dynamic. The fourth system shows the vocal lines for Gastone and Violetta, with lyrics in Italian and English, and a piano accompaniment marked with a slur and a forte dynamic.

Figure 3.9: Act I, *Introduzione*, reactive shift from Party Theme in A major to Intimate Theme in F major

With Verdi's dramatic introduction of F major, he signals its importance to both music and drama as it demonstrates the beginning of Violetta and Alfredo's love as well as the initiation of the modulation to A-flat major.

Following the abrupt shift to F major, Verdi then moves to the *brindisi*, "Libiamo ne' lieti calici," which begins the second II—V—I structural progression, this time in A-flat major (m. 182 ff.). Following it, a band strikes up in the adjoining room and everyone begins to leave (m. 375 ff.). Violetta falters twice and the second time she tells the crowd to go ahead, as she will join them soon; Alfredo, concerned about Violetta's condition, remains with her.

The music moves to the next structural key in the progression, E-flat major, before continuing in a falling-fifths sequence to A-flat major and D-flat major, each of which begin a new musical theme. The climax of this section is the F major *adagio*, “Un dì felice,” in which Alfredo professes his love (m. 555 ff.). The encounter (mm. 441-723) also ends in E-flat major, creating a closed section in that key, which functions as the dominant in the large-scale progression in A-flat major. Each musical theme and key in this section enters as Violetta resists Alfredo’s attempts at getting closer to her. He first tells Violetta that she must find peace and quiet or she will surely die, but Violetta asks how she is to find those things in a life such as hers. Alfredo reminds her of his love and states that he could take care of her. The music then shifts to a strong, matter-of-fact theme in D-flat major as Violetta tells Alfredo that nobody really cares for her. Alfredo replies, “Only I alone.” Violetta sarcastically retorts, “I forgot about your great love,” and at this point, Verdi inserts a reactive shift to a dominant seventh on C, which interrupts the flow of the prevailing D-flat major theme and signals a return to F major. Once again, talk of love coincides with the arrival of F major, and both garner Violetta’s attention, even though her reaction is somewhat negative (Figure 3.10).

519

(ridendo)
(laughing)

Vio. Gli è ve - ro!.. Sì gran - de a -
For - give me!.. I quite for -

Alf. i - - - o.
deep - - - ly.

Figure 3.10: Act I, *Introduzione*, reactive shift away from D-flat major (figure cont'd)



The reactive shift prepares for the arrival of one of the most recognizable themes in nineteenth-century Italian opera, which Alfredo sings in the *adagio*, “Un dì felice.”

The *adagio* begins with a slow, broken melody, but Alfredo gradually gathers strength and pushes toward the climax, “Di quell’amor che è palpito,” which becomes “Alfredo’s Love Theme” (Figure 3.11). The melody from this phrase descends through an octave by step, and then highlights a melodic $\hat{6}—\hat{5}—\hat{1}$ on the word “misterioso,” a motive that will become increasingly important as the opera progresses—and to which the Prelude alluded. Moreover, the theme itself becomes a “tema-cardine,” as it recurs throughout the opera and embodies Alfredo’s unconditional love for Violetta. In addition, Verdi’s return to F major for the theme reinforces the association of this key with love.³³



Figure 3.11: Act I, *Introduzione*, Alfredo’s Love Theme (figure cont’d)

³³ Martin Chusid, in his article “Drama and the Key of F major in *La Traviata*,” associates F major with the brief time of Alfredo and Violetta’s romance, that is, after Violetta accepts Alfredo’s love and before she leaves him in Act II. He separates F major from what we know as Alfredo’s Love Theme, which he associates with the permanent aspects of their love because it recurs throughout the opera with “no overt tonal plan,” 90.

573
Alf. pal - pi - to del - l'u - ni - ver - so, del - l'u - ni - ver - so in - te - ro, mi - ste - ri -
u - ni - verse, love that in - spires ra - diant dreams of life e - ter - nal, strange - ly mys -

579
Alf. - o - so, mi - ste - ri - o - so, al - te - ro, cro - ce, cro - ce e de -
- te - rious, shin - ing in gold - en splen - dor, sor - row, sor - row and
con grazia

583 Violetta
Alf. - li - zia, cro - ce e de - li - zia, de - li - zia al cor.
rap - ture, sor - row and rap - ture, rap - tur - ous joy.

With the abrupt nature of the earlier shifts, Verdi called attention to the importance of F major, and as when it returns for Alfredo's Love Theme, he solidifies its associative status.

Despite Alfredo's emotional plea, Violetta rejects his love and tells him that friendship is all she can offer. Gastone suddenly appears at the door and reintroduces the E-flat major (m. 624). Gastone leaves and Violetta, although adamant about just being friends, gives Alfredo a flower and tells him to return when it withers. This action foreshadows Violetta's following aria, as we will soon see.

The return to F major for the *adagio*, "Un dì felice," thus fulfills two functions: it completes F major's functional transformation and it begins a large cycle in A-flat major. Each of the modulations within the cycle occurs in conjunction with a significant dramatic event: F major, Alfredo professes his love and introduces his love theme; E-flat major, Gastone and the

party music interrupt Violetta and Alfredo's intimate exchange; and A-flat major, the *Introduzione* comes to a close. Following is a graph showing the transformation of F major as well as the double cycle it initiates. Verdi will complete this double cycle in Violetta's aria (Figure 3.12).

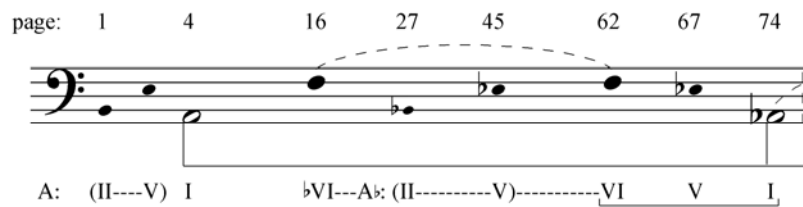


Figure 3.12: Act I, *Introduzione*, reductive graph showing transformation of F major and the VI—V—I cycle it initiates

The *Introduzione* ends with the A-flat major *stretta*, “Si ridesta in ciel,” in which the guests bid *adieu* to their hostess. The return of the Party Theme in A-flat major (Figure 3.13) also completes the overall expressive shift from A major at the beginning of the act to A-flat major at the end of the *Introduzione*. This shift—down by semitone—indicates a relaxation in drama, which occurs as Violetta's guests begin to leave.



Figure 3.13: Act I, *Introduzione*, expressive recurrence of Party Theme in A-flat major (figure cont'd)



Moreover, the key of A-flat major holds throughout Violetta's following aria, thus showing the large-scale movement of the entire act as an expressive shift down by semitone. In addition to the relaxation it conveys, the shift into A-flat major carries an associative value, which Verdi manifests in Violetta's aria.

Act I: N. 3. Aria Violetta

The large-scale design of Violetta's aria shows an enclosed section in A-flat major, beginning with a modulatory *scena*, which moves to F minor/major³⁴ for the *adagio* "Ah forse è lui" (m. 23 ff.) before returning to A-flat major for her *cabaletta* "Sempre libera" (m. 137 ff.) (Figure 3.14).

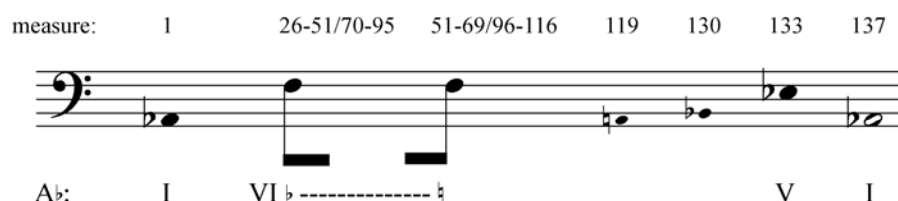


Figure 3.14: Act I, Aria Violetta, reductive graph showing return of the VI—V—I cycle

³⁴ In this instance, the virgule indicates that the passage of music begins in the minor mode, but ends in the parallel major.

The overall movement from F minor/major to A-flat major recalls the previous progression in the *Introduzione* and completes a double cycle. Before addressing the dramatic implications, we should first examine the foreground development of music and drama action in order to understand the relationship between the two cycles. Within the aria, Verdi signals the first important dramatic development with a series of reactive shifts.

Violetta's aria begins with a *scena* in which she muses over Alfredo and wonders about her own capacity to love. In this opening recitative, there are eight distinct sections of text, each sounding more intense than the last. Overall, Verdi uses reactive shifts to demonstrate the development of Violetta's thoughts. The fact that Violetta is a courtesan all but prohibits any kind of monogamous relationship, but Alfredo's words deeply affected her; this battle is quite prominent in both her text and music. Most striking are the reactive shift to F major and from B-flat—B-natural—C occurring at the end as her thoughts climax into the *adagio*, "Ah forse è lui," which includes a reprise of Alfredo's Love Theme.³⁵ Figure 3.15 a and b shows the text and accompanying reactive shift of each line as well as a reductive graph of the *scena*.

The cadence on C major acts as a dominant to the minor/major *adagio*, "Ah forse è lui." The F tonal center recalls the earlier *adagio* in which Alfredo professed his love. In addition, the opening minor section reminds one of the beginning of "Un dì felice" in that the rests in the vocal line intimate each character's hesitancy (Figure 3.16 a and b).

³⁵ The chromatic rise from B-flat—B-natural—C is a reactive shift, but functions like an expressive device in that it moves by semitone and indicates intensification. Despite this similarity, movement by semitone occurring without recurring music will be referred to as a reactive shift.

1. È strano! in core	It is strange! In my heart	A-flat major (m. 1-3)
2. Scolpiti ho quegli accenti!	I have carved those words!	to E major chord (m. 4-8)
3. Saria per me sventura un serio amore?	Would a serious love be a misfortune for me?	II-V ⁷ in A minor (m. 8-10)
4. Che risolvi, o turbata anima mia?	What are you resolving, oh anguished soul mine?	to A minor chord (m. 11)
5. Null'uomo ancora t'accendeva...o gioia	No man yet has aroused you...oh joy	V ⁷ in F major (m. 13)
6. Ch'io non conobbi, esser amata amando!	Unknown to me, to be loved and to love back!	to V ⁷ in B-flat minor (m. 14-16)
7. E sdegnarea poss'io	And can I spurn it (this joy)	to B-flat minor chord (m. 17)
8. Per l'aride follie del viver mio?	In favor of the barren folly of my existence? ³⁶	VII/C to C major chord (m. 19)

(a)



(b)

Figure 3.15: Act I, Aria Violetta, reactive shifts accompanying Violetta's text in the *scena*

³⁶ All translations are from or based on Nico Castel, *The Complete Verdi Libretti*, 4 vols. (Genesco, New York: Leyerle Publications, 1996), 4: 251-327.

22 **Andantino**

Vio. *- o?
me?*

Andantino

[Legni] *(pp)* *3*

[Archi] *pp*

Andantino

p

Andantino

*** Ah for - se
Ah for - se è
Oh, can it*

28 **dolcissimo**

Vio. *lui que - st'a - ni - ma so - lin - ga nei tu - mul - ti,
lui che l'a - ni - ma so - lin - ga ne' tu - mul - ti,
be I dreamed of him when I was sad and lone - ly,*

(a)

555 **Andantino** ($\text{♩} = 96$)

Alf. *dì fe - li - ce e - te - re - a mi ba - le - na - ste in -
day, I've nev - er for - got - ten it, when I be - held your*

Andantino ($\text{♩} = 96$)

[Archi] *p*

[Fl., Cl.]

(b)

Figure 3.16: Act I, Aria Violetta, comparison of “Ah forse è lui” and “Un dì felice”

The slow melody and interspersed rests suggest the pensive nature of Violetta’s thoughts. Most importantly, much like Alfredo’s statement of love earlier, Violetta’s *adagio* blossoms into F major with the reprise of Alfredo’s Love Theme. She recalls the words and music that sparked her attention and it is only proper that the recurring theme reappear in its original key. From this occurrence, Verdi demonstrates that Alfredo’s love has deeply affected Violetta (Figure 3.17).



Figure 3.17: Act I, Aria Violetta, Violetta sings Alfredo's Love Theme in F major

The *adagio* ends with the F major section, as Violetta remains fixed in thought.

Suddenly, she exclaims, "Follie, follie!"; she cannot believe her own daydreams. A reactive shift accompanies this change with a move away from F major to an A major chord, suggesting the key of the earlier party (Figure 3.18). Moreover, this shift implies Violetta's desire to return to life before Alfredo; she attempts to dispose F major as abruptly as it entered at the beginning of the act.

Figure 3.18: Act I, Aria Violetta, reactive shift away from F major following "Ah forse è lui"

Violetta then exclaims that delirium must have brought on her thoughts, as she is nothing more than a lonely woman living in Paris. Knowing that death will soon take her, she states, "I wish to

enjoy myself and perish in the whirl of pleasure” as the music moves toward E-flat major, which acts as a dominant leading into the A-flat major *cabaletta*, “Sempre libera” (Figure 3.19).

128
Vio. *più? che far deg - g'i - o? gio - i re, di vo - lut - tà - ne'*
turn? where is the ans - wer? in pleas - ure, in wild de-light - and

132
Vio. *vor - ti - ci, di vo - lut - tà pe -*
pleas - ure die, in joy - ful pleas - ure *con forza*

133
Vio. *-rir!.. gio - ir, gio - - ir!*
die!.. joy - ful, joy - - ful! *dolce a piacere allargando*

Figure 3.19: Act I, Aria Violetta, cadence in E-flat major

“Sempre libera” reflects the life Violetta knew at the beginning of the opera, replete with frivolous ornamentations as well as the text “I always want to have a good time from joy to joy, whether the day be beginning or dying.” Serving as a response to the uncertainty expressed in the F minor section of the *adagio*, she appears to be quite certain about not giving in to love. Violetta appears to truly believe this, but Alfredo’s voice interrupts her (Figure 3.20). Indicated in the score as “beneath the balcony,” he sings his love theme once more for Violetta, although not in the usual F major. Rather, this statement occurs in the key of Violetta’s *cabaletta*: A-flat major.

168

Vio. - lar dream, il pen - end-less

p

172 Andantino

Vio. - sier. bliss. Oh! Oh!
sotto il balcone beneath the balcony

Alfredo

A - - mor, a - mor è pal - pi - to del - l'u - ni -
Love, love that fills the u - niverse, love that in-

Andantino

[Arpa]

Figure 3.20: Act I, Aria Violetta, Alfredo intrudes with his love theme in A-flat major

Violetta is able to shake off the first intrusion, but Alfredo then begins to enter more sporadically, almost as if chasing her. The *cabaletta* ends with Violetta seemingly in command, but we know, as Julian Budden puts it, she is “hooked without knowing it.”³⁷ Moreover, although the score would make it seem as if Alfredo is physically nearby, Joseph Kerman believes that the recurrence may be a “figment of Violetta’s excellently fertile dramatic imagination.”³⁸ Considering this statement, one might argue that Violetta’s words in the *cabaletta* are a moment of self-denial, delusion; she is only fooling herself. Earlier, Verdi demonstrated how affected Violetta was by Alfredo’s words as she reprised Alfredo’s Love

³⁷ Budden, *Operas of Verdi*, 133.

³⁸ Kerman, 279. In addition, Franco Zeffirelli, in his movie version of *La Traviata* (1983), places Alfredo in Violetta’s subconscious by having him appear in her mirror. Moreover, the indication, “beneath the balcony,” must have been Verdi’s idea, as it is not found in the libretto.

Theme. Looking farther back, she also gave Alfredo a flower and told him to return soon. In the present scene, it is clear that Verdi wanted to highlight the fact that Violetta's actions do not convey her true feelings. As the opera progresses, we will continue to find Verdi using A-flat major to represent delusions such as Violetta's.

With the return to A-flat major in "Sempre libera," Verdi completes the double cycle initiated in the *Introduzione*. In the present scene, each modulation of the large-scale VI—V—I cycle accompanies an important dramatic development as well: F minor/major, Violetta weighs the possibilities of love and restates Alfredo's Love Theme; E-flat major, she rejects the thought of love; and A-flat major, she wishes to keep her life as a courtesan, but cannot escape Alfredo's voice. Alfredo's Love Theme sets off both cycles, each time followed by Violetta's rejection, and ending with similar returns to Violetta's life as a courtesan. In her aria, Violetta recalls the developments of the evening, but Alfredo challenges her rather than leaving quietly as he did in the first cycle. The following bass line sketches of the cycles show their similarities (Figure 3.21):

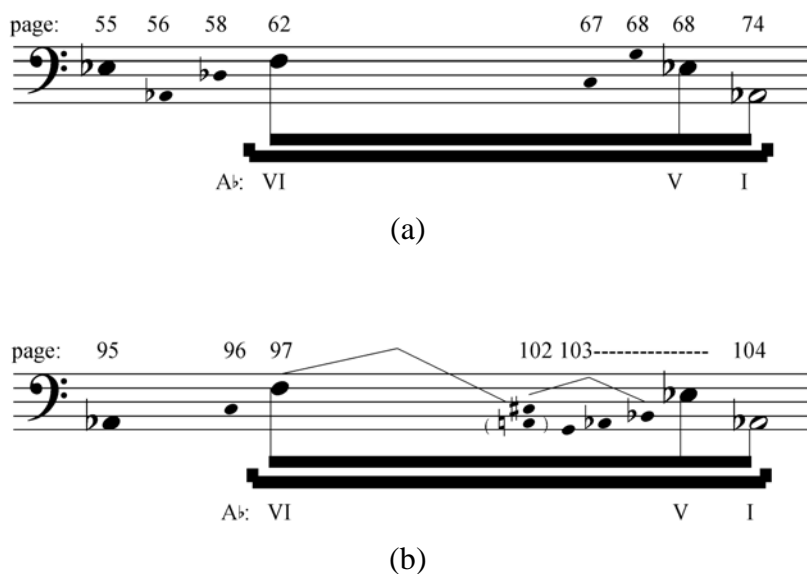


Figure 3.21: Bass line sketches comparing the A-flat major cycle from (a) Violetta and Alfredo's duet (b) to Violetta's aria

This is additional evidence of Violetta's submission to love, as Alfredo's return becomes an interruption in the drama of the second cycle. Although Violetta stubbornly maintains the key of A-flat major (her reality), the effort is in vain. For the remainder of the opera, Verdi will employ this key to represent various instances of deluded hope that a tragic ending may somehow be avoided.

Summary of Ideas from Act I

In Act I Verdi introduces the central dramatic issues: Alfredo, a shy young man, loves Violetta, a consumptive courtesan, and he appears to be successful in his courtship. This dramatic development is chronicled by two large-scale tonal devices: the global expressive shift from A to A-flat—achieved by way of a large-scale II—V—I in each key and the recurring Party Theme—and the structural weight of F major, which acts as a hinge connecting the two keys. Moreover, A-flat major and F major develop their associative qualities of delusion and love, respectively.

In addition, Verdi introduces several musical themes, which will recur throughout the opera: the Frailty Theme in B minor, characterized by its overall delicate sound; Violetta's Love Theme in E major, signifying the redemptive qualities of love; and Alfredo's Love Theme in F major, which embodies Alfredo's powerful feelings.

ACT II

The first act introduced the two main characters and chronicled the blossoming of their relationship; at the end of Act I, we know Violetta has submitted to Alfredo's love. Because the plot develops quickly in Act II, the music is often modulatory, with long sections of a single tonality appearing only in the set pieces (e.g., an *adagio* or *cabaletta*). In order to create a coherent large-scale design, Verdi underpins the entire act by returning to E-flat major and its

dominant throughout. The following graphs show the design of the act including associative tonalities, as well as a deeper reduction, omitting the associative keys (Figure 3.22). From this graph, it is apparent that Verdi built the act using E-flat major as a global tonic, a structural key area unifying the act as a whole.



Figure 3.22: Act II, reductive graphs of the entire act

In the first act, Verdi relied on an expressive shift down from A to A-flat, indicating a relaxation and focusing our attention on Violetta’s delusions. Act II relies on a structural tonality, E-flat major, as a pillar to which particular sections of the act return. Verdi also uses E-flat major to chronicle the development of drama in the act, as the tonality enters three times, each in tandem with a major dramatic action:

Table 3.1: List of the occurrences of E-flat major in Act II and the dramatic development accompanying each

Alfredo’s <i>adagio</i> , “Dei miei bollenti spiriti” (116/1/4-119/2/2)	-Alfredo recalls Violetta’s acceptance of his love
Violetta and Germont’s <i>adagio</i> , “Dite alla giovine” (155/3/1-161/2/3)	-Violetta succumbs to Germont’s request to leave Alfredo
<i>Concertato</i> at the close of the Second Finale, “Di sprezzo degno” (296/1/1-328/1/4)	-Alfredo and Germont feel remorse over their actions -Violetta foresees her tragic demise

Most importantly, with the return to E-flat major at the end of the act, Verdi presents a conclusion to the dramatic developments. Verdi also includes two *cabalette* in the dominant of E-flat major (B-flat major) near the middle of the act: Violetta and Germont's "Morrò!...la mia memoria" at 166/1/1 ff. and Germont's "No, non udrai rimproveri" at 194/1/1 ff. These two pieces serve to reinforce the overall design in E-flat major.

Act II/1: N. 4. Aria Alfredo³⁹

Alfredo's aria is preceded by a modulatory *scena* and completes its shift to E-flat major for the *adagio*, "Dei miei bollenti spiriti," in which he recalls Violetta's acceptance of his love. In the ensuing *tempo di mezzo*, Annina, the servant, informs Alfredo that Violetta is selling all of her possessions in order to pay for the couple's new home. This enrages Alfredo and leads to the *cabalette* "Oh mio rimorso" in which he reflects on his disgrace and anger (Figure 3.23).



Figure 3.23: Act II/1, Aria Alfredo, reductive graph highlighting the associative aspects of Alfredo's aria

Before these stable set pieces, Verdi inserts several foreground elements, which foreshadow the developments in Alfredo's aria as well as the rest of the act.

Alfredo enters and begins a soliloquy about how happy he is, dispelling any doubts that his love conquered Violetta.

Lunge da lei per me non v'ha diletto!
Volaron già tre lune
Dacchè la mia Violetta

Far from her for me there is no joy!
Three moons have flown past
since my Violetta

³⁹ I am dividing Act II into two parts because of the set changes: Act II/1 (from the beginning of the act to the end of Germont's aria), which takes place in Violetta and Alfredo's cottage, and Act II/2 (N. 7., the Second Finale), which takes place in Flora's house in Paris.

Agi per me lascio, dovizie, amori, E le pompose feste, Ove agli omaggi avvezza, Vede a schiavo ciascun di sua bellezza...	comforts me [and] abandoned riches, loves, and those lavish parties, where, accustomed to admiration, she saw every man enslaved by her beauty...
--	---

The opening music contains a melody establishing an A minor tonal center (m. 1 ff.), which Alfredo interrupts with the beginning of his second line, “Volaron già tre lune.” He forces a move to a dominant seventh chord on G (m. 18 ff.), which sounds through several lines of text. When he reaches the word “bellezza,” the music resolves to C major (m. 25), but as he begins the next section of text, a striking chromatic shift occurs (Figure 3.24).

Ed or contenta in questi ameni luoghi Tutto scorda per me...	And now happy in these pleasant surroundings All she forgets for me.
---	--

At the word “luoghi” Verdi adds a flat-seventh to a C major chord, thus announcing a modulation (m. 27), the resolution of which arrives as Alfredo completes his last line and the music cadences in F major (m. 28). The tonicization of F major does not last long as Alfredo’s high F becomes the common tone in a move to a D-flat major cadential six-four chord. This reactive shift from F major to its $\flat VI$ is reminiscent of the shift from A major to F major in Act I when Violetta learned of Alfredo’s love. In addition to the harmonic shift, Verdi also indicates a change in tempo from the previous *andante* to *adagio*, signaling further a shift in the flow of Alfredo’s thoughts.

Instead of fully cadencing in D-flat major, Verdi proceeds to a cadence in A-flat major at measure 36. During this short passage, Alfredo speaks about the breath of love regenerating him and how he has forgotten the past—which we may assume to be Violetta’s past—but the full cadence in A-flat major signifies Alfredo’s folly. This moment of delusion foreshadows the news Alfredo receives in the *tempo di mezzo* in which he cannot help but confront Violetta’s past as he finds out about the sale of her possessions. A-flat major then becomes the subdominant in a

cadential progression to E-flat major for the brief *adagio*, “Dei miei bollenti spiriti,” in which Alfredo recalls Violetta’s acceptance of his love (m. 36 ff.).

The image displays a musical score for Act II/1, featuring the Aria of Alfredo. It consists of four systems of music, each with a vocal line for Alfredo (Alf.) and a piano accompaniment. The tempo markings are *Andante* for the first two systems and *Adagio* for the third and fourth. The key signature is E-flat major, and the time signature is 8/8.

System 1 (Measures 24-26): The tempo is *Andante*. The vocal line begins with a half rest, followed by a series of eighth and quarter notes. The piano accompaniment consists of a steady eighth-note pattern in the right hand and a half-note pattern in the left hand.

System 2 (Measures 27-29): The tempo is *Andante*. The vocal line continues with a half rest, followed by a series of eighth and quarter notes. The piano accompaniment continues with the same eighth-note pattern in the right hand and half-note pattern in the left hand.

System 3 (Measures 30-32): The tempo is *Adagio*. The vocal line begins with a half rest, followed by a series of eighth and quarter notes. The piano accompaniment features a half rest in the right hand and a half-note pattern in the left hand.

System 4 (Measures 33-35): The tempo is *Adagio*. The vocal line begins with a half rest, followed by a series of eighth and quarter notes. The piano accompaniment features a half rest in the right hand and a half-note pattern in the left hand.

Lyrics:

24 Alf. - scun di sua bel - lez - za... Ed or con - ten - ta in que - sti a - me - ni
all with her rare beau - ty... And now she's hap - py, con - tent - ed in se -

27 Alf. luo - ghi tut - to scor - da per me... qui pres - so a
- clu - sion; for she loves me a - lone... when I'm be -

29 Alf. lei io ri - na - scer mi sen - to, e dal sof - fio d'a - mor ri - ge - ne -
- side her, my life is en - chant - ment, I em - brace all the world with joy and

32 Alf. - ra - to scor - do ne' gau - dii suo - i tut - to il pas -
won - der, ga - zing on my be - lov - ed, cares are for -

Figure 3.24: Act II/1, Aria Alfredo, reactive shift to D-flat second inversion chord and movement to A-flat major and E-flat major (figure cont'd)



This *scena* can be divided into two essential passages: from the beginning A minor section to the common tone modulation to D-flat major and from that point to the cadence A-flat major. As noted, the passage in A-flat reflects the folly of Alfredo's words, as he has not completely forgotten (or forgiven) Violetta's past. The beginning section, moving from A minor to D-flat major, creates a noteworthy dramatic and musical cycle (refer back to Figure 3.23): the *scena* opens (A minor), Alfredo informs us that he is happy (C major); Violetta has given everything up for him (F major); he feels reborn with her in his life (D-flat major). This exact succession of harmonies will return later in the act when Alfredo receives the letter in which Violetta writes that she is leaving him.

Act II/1: N. 5. *Scena* and Duet Violetta and Germont

Violetta and Germont's duet is one of the most dramatic and complex scenes in the opera, and it bespeaks a kind of continuous development not fully afforded by the more conventional designs. David Lawton describes Verdi's progression:

Somewhat later [after *Luisa Miller*], Verdi began to experiment with expanded duets, duets which were lengthened by the addition of extra movements. This type of piece culminates in the Violetta—Germont duet in Act II of *La Traviata*.⁴⁰

Harold Powers states that although the duet is different from the Rossinian prototype, we can still find the subdivisions of the conventional five-movement design. Moreover, he describes the

⁴⁰ Lawton, "Tonality and Drama in Verdi's Early Operas," 39-40.

additions Verdi made as elaborations that do not disturb the fundamental arrangement.⁴¹ Julian Budden writes that the effect of this design is a “chain of short contrasted movements, each marking a fresh stage in the emotional dialectic.”⁴² The essential dramatic content of the duet unfolds as Germont states his side and Violetta responds. Ultimately, Germont extracts from her the fateful promise to leave Alfredo. Verdi’s coherent tonal design intensifies these dramatic developments as he uses associative keys for the majority of the duet. In addition, Verdi continues using E-flat major as the structural key of the act by placing the stable set pieces, “Dite alla giovine” and “Morro!...la mia memoria,” in E-flat major and its dominant, B-flat major, respectively (Figure 3.25).

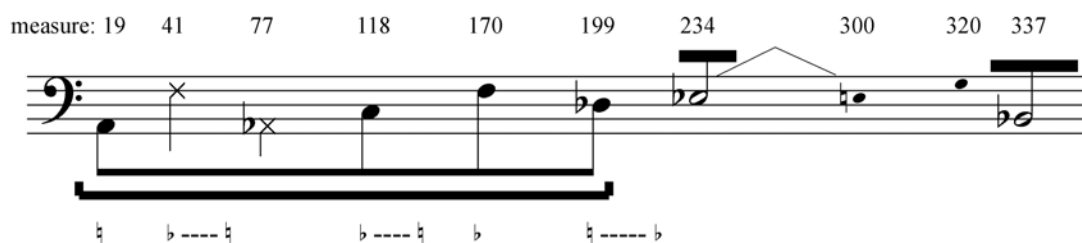


Figure 3.25: Act II/1, *Scena* and Duet Violetta and Germont, reductive graph highlighting the associative and reactive aspects

The opening *scena* of the duet moves the tonality from A minor to A-flat major via F minor, recalling the large A to A-flat shift in Act I. With this reactive shift, Verdi moves into the area of delusion commencing with Germont’s “Pura siccome un angelo” (m. 77). As in earlier modulatory sections, Verdi connects the large-scale design with many reactive shifts. Before moving on to the formal part of the duet, we should first explore the *scena* in order to understand the dramatic developments.

Beginning with Violetta’s entrance and brief conversation with Annina, Germont then enters and states, “I am the father of Alfredo, that unwary boy who is bewitched by you,”

⁴¹ Powers, 80-81.

⁴² Budden, 140.

relaying the disdain he feels toward Violetta (m. 25). The scene continues in this vein as Violetta attempts to change Germont's view of her relationship with Alfredo. Verdi reflects this battle with many reactive shifts as Violetta and Germont try to establish their own musical keys. For example, Germont attempts to assert the primacy of F minor and its relative major. Functionally, this seems logical as the beginning of the *tempo d'attacco*—in which he makes his formal request of Violetta—makes A-flat major its tonal center. In addition, the tonal battle parallels the dramatic action as it demonstrates the vast differences between the two characters. The following reductive graph of the *scena* highlights the most prominent keys (Figure 3.26).

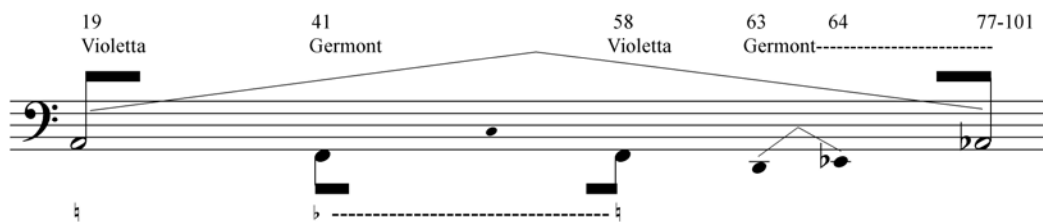


Figure 3.26: Act II/1, *Scena* of the duet, reductive graph of the highlighting the significance of F as a tonal center, and the shift from A to A-flat

Germont consistently moves toward the dark, flat key side of the spectrum and Violetta returns to brighter, natural keys. For example, Germont attempts to cadence in F minor, but Violetta redirects the tonality to F major as she sings a long, melodious phrase about how in love she and Alfredo are (mm. 52-58). The key of this particular passage, as well as Violetta's text, is clearly associated with the redemptive power of Alfredo's love (Figure 3.27).

Germont:	Ah il passato perchè, perchè v'accusa?	Ah, the past why, why does it accuse you?
Violetta:	Più non esiste...or amo Alfredo	It no longer exists...now I love Alfredo
	e Dio lo cancellò col pentimento mio!	and God has erased it with my repentance!

51

Vio.

Ger.

- gliar - vil Ah il pas - sa - to per - ché, per - ché v'ac -
 - ses - sions! Oh, the pit - y! your past is still a -

p

53

Vio.

Ger.

con entusiasmo
 enthusiastically

Più non e - si - ste... or a - mo Al - fre - do, e Dio lo can - cel -
 The past is o - ver... I love Al - fre - do, and in the sight of

- cu - sa?
 - gainst you...

Allegro
 a tempo

56

Vio.

Ger.

allarg.
 pp

- lò col pen - ti - men - to mi - o.
 God I stand re - deemed for - ev - er.

Allegro
 a tempo

f

col canto
 pp

Figure 3.27: Act II/1, *Scena* of the duet, Violetta's reactive shift to F major from its parallel minor

Violetta makes several more attempts to maintain F major, but Germont overpowers her and succeeds in cadencing in A-flat major in which the *tempo d'attacco* (and thus the formal duet) begins. Harold Powers states that this lengthy movement best represents Verdi's elaboration of the Rossinian template:

Each character states an initial position (“Pura siccome un angelo” and “Non sapete quale affetto”); with their positions stated, the characters now interact in dialogue (“Bella voi siete”). The differences from the simplest Rossinian *tempo d’attacco* are twofold: first, the initial positions are stated in music of strongly contrasted character, and the dialogue of confrontation goes on to music of yet a third cut; second, there are transitional passages interpolated between the two initial statements of position (“Ah comprendo...no! giammai!”) and between the dialogue and the set piece (Violetta’s “Così alla misera”).⁴³

In the *tempo d’attacco*, Germont gradually tries to break Violetta down (“Pura siccome un angelo” and “Un dì quando”) until she finally succumbs and states that she will leave Alfredo forever (“Un dì quando,” “Così alla misera,” and “Dite alla giovine”). As the duet progresses, the outcome is already clear: Violetta is leaving Alfredo out of consideration for Alfredo’s sister, although she knows this will lead to her demise. The duet ends as Germont exits and Violetta sits down to write Alfredo a letter.

By far one of the longest continuous scenes in the opera, this duet provides the bulk of dramatic development in the second act. In addition to the importance of the reactive shifts themselves, the keys to which they move also develop points of associative significance. For example, Verdi first asserts the power of F minor in the *scena* as Germont returns to it throughout, although Violetta is able to avoid a conclusive cadence. (Refer to Figure 3.27 where Violetta turns to the parallel major as she tells Germont about God’s forgiveness of her past). Verdi continues to define F minor throughout the *tempo d’attacco*; it first returns at the end of Germont’s initial position (“Pura siccome un angelo”). At the end of that section, a sequence moves from D-flat major to F minor as Violetta begins to realize what Germont is asking (mm. 101-117). Violetta once again deflects the movement to F minor and forces the music toward C minor for her reply in “Non sapete quale affetto.” Not until the dialogue in “Bella voi siete” is Germont able to conclusively establish F minor as a structural key in the duet. Violetta again

⁴³ Powers, 80.

tries to undermine the move, but Germont overpowers her as he begins “Un dì quando.” The text of this section depicts the eventual breakdown of Violetta and Alfredo’s relationship.

Un dì, quando le veneri
Il tempo avrà fugate
Fia presto il tedio a sorgere...
Che sarà allor?...pensate...

One day, when time will
have put lust to flight,
Boredom will quickly set in...
What will happen then, think about it.

This development is important: even though the passage of F minor comprises only twelve measures, it is the first instance in which the key is firmly established as it receives harmonic support and follows a regular phrase rhythm (2+2+4). The depiction of the above text and the inherent meaning of it (i.e., the dissolution of the lovers’ relationship), become strongly associated with the key of F minor. Verdi will confirm this association in the finale of Act II.

In addition to the associative keys of F major and F minor, Verdi also begins to establish D-flat minor as the key of Violetta’s tragic death. For example, in the brief *andantino*, “Così alla misera,” Violetta clearly sees that leaving Alfredo will seal her fate. Even Germont’s words convey a sense of irony as he calls Violetta his family’s guardian angel, while she laments her own downfall. Returning to Act I, specifically Alfredo’s Love Theme, which occurred in F major, we recall the $\hat{b}6-\hat{5}-\hat{1}$ “misterioso” motive; the $\hat{b}6$, D-flat, now begins to function as an associative key. The character of the present passage, with its *pizzicato* bass line, and soft measured tremolo, complete the painful portrait Verdi presents. In addition, there is a distinct rhythmic similarity between this passage and Alfredo’s Love Theme. The initial long notes, followed by shorter dotted figures are a clear and direct reference to that melody as are the descending stepwise contours. This is a logical reference given what has transpired: Violetta is leaving Alfredo not out of hatred, but out of her love for him and his family (see Figure 3.28 a and b).

Così alla misera,—ch’è un dì caduta.
Di più risorgere—speranza è muta!

So, for the wretched girl who one day fell,
any hope of rising again is silent!

Se pur benefico le indulga Iddio,
l'uomo implacabile per lei sarà.

Even if a kindly God forgives her,
man will be implacable to her.

211 Violetta

con estremo dolore
with deep sorrow

(Co - - - sì al - la
(Hope - - - less the

Ger. - spi - ra tai det - ti a un ge - ni - tor.
pit - y a lone - ly fa - ther's heart.

[Legni, Vl. I]

ppp

[Vc., Cb. pizz.]

213 Vio.

mi - - - se - ra ch'è l'un di ca -
fate of the one who has

(a)

567 Alf.

con espansione

p

vis - si d'i - gno - to a - mor. Di quel-l'a-mor, quel-l'a-mor che è
loved and a-dored from a-far... hop - ing for love, love that fills the

[Fg., Cor.]

[Archi pizz.]

(b)

Figure 3.28: Comparison of Violetta's "Così alla misera" to Alfredo's Love Theme

In addition to F minor and F major, Verdi reinforces the association of A-flat major with delusion. For example, in “Pura siccome un angelo,” Germont tries to reach Violetta’s sensitive side by painting a picture of his angelic daughter hopelessly waiting for her wedding. One might argue that Germont’s thought shows signs of delusion as his anger seems to arise not because his daughter’s wedding is on hold, but rather because of the relationship his son has with a courtesan and the financial problems that arise because of it—Germont’s visit is spurred by Alfredo’s efforts to acquire his inheritance early.

In addition to these associative elements, Verdi also inserts a powerful reactive shift at the end of the E-flat major *adagio*, “Dite alla giovine.” The tonality immediately moves to the parallel minor as Germont offers Violetta advice on how to break off her relationship with Alfredo (m. 290). The talk becomes too painful and Violetta bursts into E minor via an enharmonic modulation (Figure 3.29). This movement, from an E-flat to E-natural tonal center serves to intensify the scene by shifting the tonality up by semitone, much like an expressive shift. Verdi uses this powerful shift to reflect Violetta’s tragic realization that there is no hope for her. The foreground enhances this moment as the texture changes from a sparse, *pizzicato* accompaniment to full orchestra, the tempo increases, and the phrases become more melodic. In addition, as the music turns to E minor, Violetta informs Germont that she knows what to do, but cannot reveal it to him. Instead, she suggests Germont be nearby when Alfredo finds out, as he will be in much pain.

292

Vio. -rà. *false.* Se - gui - ram - mi. *But he'll fol - low!*

Ger. Par - ti - te... *Then leave him...* Al - *Then*

295

Vio. Qual fi - glia, qual fi - glia m'ab-brac - cia - te... *for - te co - sì sa -*
 Em - brace me, em - brace me as your daugh - ter... *then I can bear the*

Ger. - lor... *say...*

[Archi arco]

(s'abbracciano)
 (they embrace)

300 **Allegro** ($\text{♩} = 138$)

Vio. - rò... *pain...* Tra bre - ve ei vi fia re - - so, *ma af -*
 Your son will be re - stored soon, *but*

Allegro ($\text{♩} = 138$)

Figure 3.29: Act II/1, Duet, reactive shift from E-flat to E-natural after “Dite alla giovine”

Setting aside the associative tonalities in the duet, we find Verdi reinforcing E-flat major, the structural tonic of the act (refer to Figure 3.25). The first tonally stable area, “Pura siccome un angelo,” in A-flat major, represented Germont’s delusion, and the following shift to F minor is associated with the dissolution of Violetta and Alfredo’s relationship. Violetta’s reply in “Non sapete quale affetto” is in C minor and moves up by semitone to the D-flat minor *andantino*, “Così alla misera,” which represents her demise—an reactive shift that will return in the final act. The music then moves to E-flat major for “Dite alla giovine” as Violetta submits to

Germont's request before concluding with the B-flat major *cabaletta*, "Morrò!...la mia memoria" in which Violetta reflects on her eventual demise. By teasing these passages out, we see that E-flat major and its dominant, B-flat major, function as the musical and dramatic goals of the duet as they reinforce the structural tonality of the act and occur during Violetta's submission to Germont. In the next scene, the structural status of B-flat major will become still more apparent.

Violetta and Germont's duet carries ramifications for the remainder of the opera; it is the cause of every remaining action. In their duet, Verdi reinforces the associative meanings of F major and A-flat major and introduces two additional associative keys: F minor and D-flat minor. When either character engages in a lyrical passage (Violetta, "Così alla misera"; Germont "Pura siccome un angelo" and "Un dì quando"), Verdi turns to an associative key: D-flat minor and A-flat major to F minor, respectively. These germinal seeds will play an increasingly important role in the remaining dramatic action.

Act II/1: N. 6. *Scena* Violetta and Aria Germont

This scene marks the climax of the opera and Verdi goes to great lengths to make this aurally clear. The *scena*, which lasts from the beginning of the scene until Germont's entrance and aria, constantly modulates, highlighting several associative keys. Figure 3.30 shows that harmony divides the *scena* in two parts: movement toward F major followed by a recurrence of the cycle to D-flat initiated in Alfredo's aria at the beginning of the act. Verdi moves toward F major in preparation for the climatic, expressively transposed return of Violetta's Love Theme, and the cycle recurs as Alfredo receives Violetta's letter.

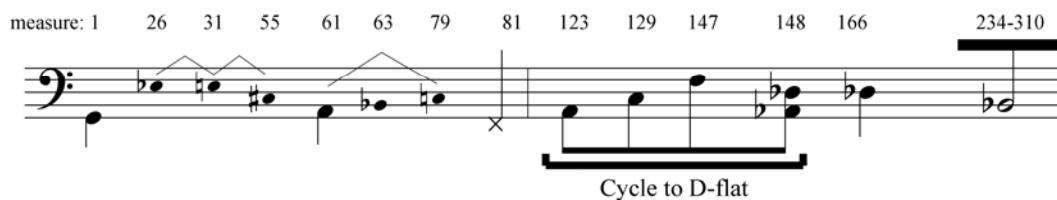


Figure 3.30: Act II/1, *Scena Violetta* and *Aria Germont*, reductive graph highlighting associative aspects

Verdi creates continuity from Violetta and Germont's duet by beginning the *scena* in G minor, the relative minor of the previous tonality, B-flat major. As Violetta sits down to write a letter, the strings present an anapestic rhythm—two thirty-second notes followed by an eighth note—as she states, “Give me strength, oh heaven!” Frits Noske refers to this rhythmic pattern as “the musical figure of death,” an association that holds true given the mood of this *scena* (Figure 3.31).⁴⁴

(SCENA VI: Violetta, poi Annina, quindi Alfredo)
(SCENE VI: Violetta, then Annina, and later Alfredo)

Adagio (♩ = 63) siede
sits down e
and

Violetta

Dam - mi tu for - za, o cie - lo...
God grant me strength and cour - age...

Adagio (♩ = 63)

p [Archi]

4 scrive
writes (poi) suona il campanello
(then) she rings the bell

Vio.

Figure 3.31: Act II/1, *Scena Violetta*, anapestic rhythms as Violetta prepares to write to Alfredo

⁴⁴ Frits Noske, “Verdi and the Musical Figure of Death,” in *Atti del III° Congresso Internazionale di Studi Verdiani, 12-17 giugno 1972*, ed. Mario Medici and Marcello Pavarani (Parma: Istituto di Studi Verdiani, 1974): 350. Noske identifies three different rhythmic patterns used by Verdi: the anapest, double resolved iambic (four thirty-seconds followed by an eighth), and paeon (three thirty-seconds followed by an eighth). The exact rhythmic value, however, is transposable. For example, we may encounter an anapest figure of two sixteenths and a quarter note. Although these *topoi* were not invented by Verdi, he consistently used them throughout much of his career. There will be additional examples in the following act.

In the climax of the opera, Verdi uses a myriad of devices to enhance every aspect of the dramatic development. Beginning with the abrupt shift away from G minor, Verdi then builds tension with a series of reactive shifts, culminating in Violetta's emotional statement of her own theme, which ends the first main section of the *scena*. In addition to the shifting tonality, Verdi includes other foreground elements that signal the intensification:

Table 3.3: Dramatic action and accompanying foreground event in the *scena*

Violetta writes the letter	G minor, somber clarinet melody (m. 15 ff.)
Alfredo surprises Violetta	A-flat major/minor, anapestic rhythmic figure/tempo increases (m. 23 ff.)
Alfredo tells Violetta he is worried	reactive shift to E major chord and accompaniment comes to a halt (m. 31)
Violetta states everything is fine	B-flat major, Act I party theme suggested (m. 63 ff.)

From B-flat onward, Verdi maintains this tension with an anxious viola and cello line, which outlines $ii^\circ-V$, suggesting F minor. In addition, he limits Violetta's vocal line to a fragment of the "misterioso" motive, as she sings repeatedly from D-flat to C: $\flat 6-\overset{\wedge}{5}$ (Figure 3.33).

Figure 3.33 shows three systems of musical notation for Act II/1, Scena Violetta. Each system consists of a vocal line (Vio.) and a piano accompaniment (piano). The key signature is B-flat major (two flats). The tempo is marked 'Allegretto'. The lyrics are in Italian and English. The vocal line features a descending interval from D-flat to C, which is the 'misterioso' motive.

System 1 (Measures 72-74):
 Vio. Sa - rò là, tra quei
 I'll be there, close to
 Piano: [Piano accompaniment]

System 2 (Measures 75-77):
 Vio. fior, pres - so a te sem - pre, sem - pre,
 you, I will be wait - ing in the
 Piano: [Piano accompaniment]

System 3 (Measures 78-80):
 Vio. sem - pre pres - so a te...
 gar - den, close to you...
 Piano: [Piano accompaniment]

Figure 3.33: Act II/1, *Scena* Violetta, maintaining tension before reprise of Violetta's Love Theme

Violetta's Love Theme, first heard in the E major Prelude, is presented here at the opera's climax in F major. It thus illustrates a powerful, long-range expressive shift as well as confirming the association of F major with the love themes of both protagonists. In addition, there are striking similarities between Violetta's Love Theme and Alfredo's Love Theme. Martin Chusid addresses these:

Both melodies descend by step from the tonic; there is the same simple harmonic scheme (tonic, dominant seventh); the rhythmic approach, though not the meter, is similar (i.e.,

each begins with a downbeat tone of long value which is followed by shorter notes with dotted patterns).⁴⁵

Although the two themes are very similar, they do carry significant differences in character. For example, Alfredo's relays the picture of an emotional young man whose hidden feelings for Violetta burst into a declaration of love. Violetta's theme, on the other hand, develops before the audience's eyes; it embodies so much more than Alfredo's because we follow along and see her love for Alfredo develop. Whereas Violetta was once hesitant to accept Alfredo's love, in a desperate plea she now commands him to love her. Verdi reinforces this presentation: full orchestra, *fortissimo*, heavy tremolo in the strings, and placement within the scene (i.e., at the release of much developed tension). In addition, the expressive return of the theme creates an even bigger climax. When the music finally cadences in F major, the orchestra and overall sound completely changes. Violetta's extended melody and long crescendos and decrescendos become an aural landmark that no one could miss. What is more, Verdi supplements the recurrence by adding the familiar $\flat\hat{6}-\hat{5}-\hat{1}$ "misterioso" motive as Violetta, although expressing her love, knows what tragic ending awaits her.

The next section of the *scena* begins immediately as Alfredo sits down to read a book. The overall tonal movement is to D-flat major, which arrives as Alfredo reads Violetta's letter. Moreover, it completes the double cycle Verdi initiated at the beginning of the act in Alfredo's aria. Following is a table of the dramatic and musical design of this section:

Table 3.4: Dramatic action accompanying the return of the cycle to D-flat

"The lady [Violetta] is speeding toward Paris"	to A minor (m. 114 ff.)
"I know, she's gone to hurry the sale of her possessions"	to C major (m. 125 ff.)
Letter from Violetta arrives	dominant preparation in F major (m. 134 ff.)
Alfredo reads letter	F pedal moving to D-flat major chord, second inversion (m. 147 ff.)

⁴⁵ Chusid, 102, fn.

Figure 3.34 compares the two double cycles:

Figure 3.34 displays two musical staves, each representing a double cycle. The top staff, labeled 'N. 4. Aria Alfredo', shows a progression of chords across pages 113, 115, 115, and 115. The bottom staff, labeled 'N. 6 Scena', shows a progression of chords across pages 182, 184, 184, and 186. Both staves feature a prominent D-flat major chord in second inversion at the end of each cycle.

Figure 3.34: Comparison of the two cycles to D-flat

The most noticeable aspect about this cycle is the unprepared move from F major to a D-flat major chord in second inversion. Whereas we hardly notice it in its first appearance, the recurrence is marked by Alfredo's scream and a plunge into *fortissimo* full orchestra. Most important to this section are the F and D-flat sonorities as their associations are directly called upon. Direct motion from F to D-flat juxtaposes the keys which represent the opera's central themes: love and death. In *Violetta* and Germont's duet, Verdi began to expose the associations of D-flat, and in the present scene, the choice of D-flat fulfills its foreshadowing as it alludes to the opera's ending. This discussion brings up the differences between major and minor mode forms of associative keys. While the major and minor forms indicate different specifics, the same global dramatic association guides them. For example, F major and minor represent a particular state of Violetta and Alfredo's love; major for the positive aspects and minor as it disintegrates. As we will later see, the major and minor forms of D-flat both represent death;

major for Violetta's acceptance of it and minor for its tragic arrival. Indeed, Verdi will use this distinction in many ways in Act III.

The present scene ends with a formal aria for Germont in which Verdi extends D-flat major into Germont's *adagio* before reinforcing the structural tonality of the act with its dominant, B-flat major. In "Di Provenza il mar," Germont begs Alfredo to return home to his family. Although this section has a D-flat tonal center, it is in the major mode and does not carry an associative value *per se*. Rather, it is a prolonged version of the reactive shift to D-flat as Alfredo opened Violetta's letter. As we will see, D-flat major arises as an associative tonality in Act III as Violetta comes to peace with dying.

In the *cabaletta*, "No, non udrai rimproveri," in B-flat major, Germont continues his plea for Alfredo's return. It is of structural significance that both Violetta and Germont's duet as well as this scene end with a *cabaletta* in B-flat major. Near the middle of the act, Verdi is using B-flat major as a dominant in the large scheme of E-flat major for the entire act.

In addition to the E-flat tonal center of the act thus far, Verdi also uses the cycle to D-flat to organize the sections of Violetta and Germont's duet.

Table 3.5: The cycle to D-flat occurring in Violetta and Germont's duet

A minor	<i>Scena</i>
C minor/major	Violetta's "Non sapete quale affetto"
F minor	Germont's "Un dì quando"
D-flat minor	Violetta's "Così alla misera"

This ends the *tempo d'attacco* and moves to the *adagio* and *cabaletta*, both static movements. In this instance, the succession of keys manifests itself on a larger scale than in Alfredo's aria or when he receives Violetta's letter. In addition, Verdi's move to the parallel minors of C and D-flat detail the difference between the occurrences in Alfredo's cycles and the duet cycle. The

dark and tragic words of Violetta in the D-flat minor portion of the cycle would not be as effective if in a major key. Following is a graph comparing the three statements of the cycle to D-flat:

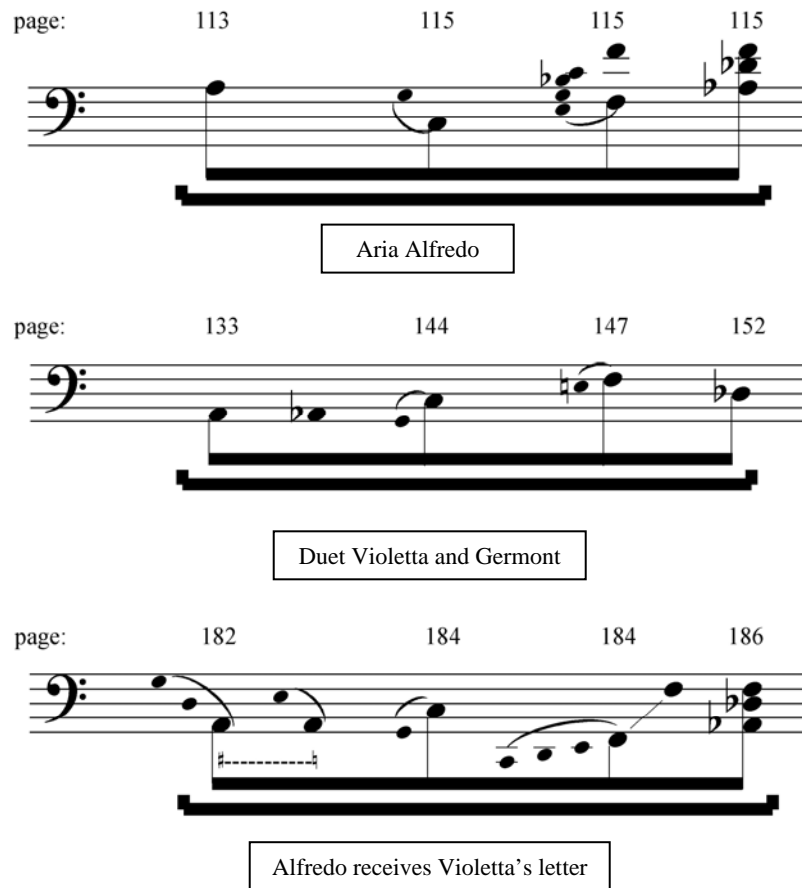


Figure 3.35: Comparison of three statements of the cycle to D-flat

From these cycles, it is apparent that Verdi constructed Act II/1 in order to emphasize the developments in drama. In the first cycle, Alfredo recounts Violetta's acceptance of his love, unaware of the trouble brewing, which foreshadows the act to come. In the duet, Violetta submits to Germont, which leads to her separation from Alfredo and sets up for the opera's tragic conclusion. In the last cycle, Alfredo receives Violetta's letter and, wanting revenge, rushes off to find her, which is the outcome of dramatic action in Act II/1. By using similar cycles in each

of the most dramatic scenes in the act, Verdi effectively foreshadows and constructs a tightly knit, associative tonal design.

ACT II/2

The Second Finale is similar to the *Introduzione* in Act I in that it is a nearly continuous piece of music. The most important aspects of Verdi's tonal design are the emphasis on C major, as it recurs almost as a refrain, and the return to E-flat major at the end. Verdi wanted to emphasize Alfredo's anger throughout the finale (which takes places just hours after Alfredo received the devastating news of Violetta's departure) and he consistently returns to C major to achieve this. Indeed, the only place in which Verdi replaces C major is in the ending E-flat major *concertato*, when Alfredo feels remorse for his vengeance. Furthermore, the return of E-flat major concludes the large-scale design of Act II, in which E-flat major serves as an overall tonic, closing the lengthy and complex drama of the entire act. Following is a reductive graph of the Second Finale.

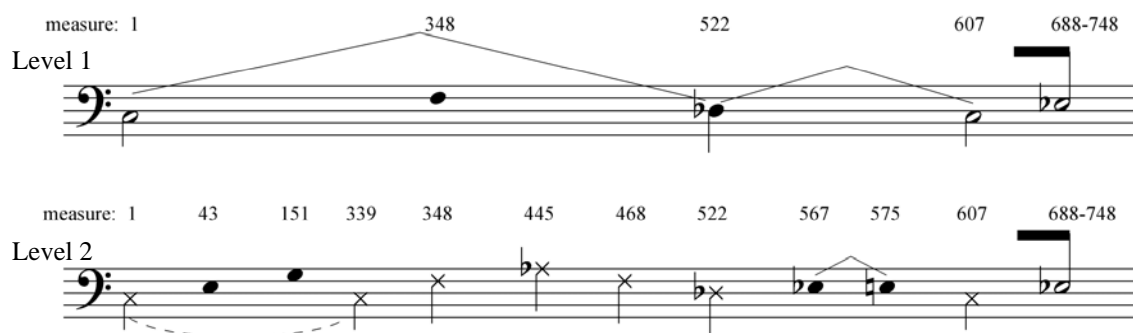


Figure 3.36: Act II/2, reductive graph of the entire Second Finale

A large-scale semitone rise in tonality also occurs in the Second Finale from C to D-flat. C major acts as a tonic for the first third before expressively shifting up to D-flat as Violetta and Alfredo meet again (m. 522 ff.). In between the C major and D-flat major sections is the F minor gambling scene in which Alfredo tortures Violetta with his words (mm. 348-500). Locally, this

section acts as tonic; globally, it begins as the minor subdominant of C major, preparing for the semitone shift to D-flat major. Moreover, D-flat becomes nested in the F minor section through an arpeggiation up and down a D-flat major triad, thereby creating a link. The overall movement is from C major to D-flat major, and is reversed at the beginning of Alfredo's condemnation of Violetta as Verdi returns to C major and the focus returns to Alfredo's anger (m. 601 ff.).

Act II/2: N. 7. Second Finale

The finale of Act II returns to the frivolous Parisian nightlife replete with gaming tables, drinks, and courtesans. The curtain opens on a party at Flora's house; the Marquis informs her and Dr. Grenvil that Violetta and Alfredo have separated and the Baron will accompany Violetta to the party. From this small piece of information, Violetta's plan becomes clear: she has returned to her life as a courtesan.

The scene continues with what Budden calls "a little divertissement...like a Parisian ballet in miniature, though both numbers are sung as well as danced."⁴⁶ The two numbers—the first in E minor/major (m. 43 ff.) and the second in G minor/major (m. 151 ff.)—are further reminders of the opening of the opera in all its frivolity and transparency. Budden states, "above all they provide a dramatic foil to what follows."⁴⁷ More importantly, C major returns in between the two choruses as well as after them, completing a large bass arpeggiation as shown previously in Figure 3.36.

The G minor/major chorus ends as Alfredo walks in; everyone is stunned to see him at the party. Upon his arrival, the music immediately begins a turn toward F minor, though first as the minor subdominant in C major. The crowd asks where Violetta is and Alfredo nonchalantly replies, "I know nothing about her." Satisfied with his answer, everyone turns to the gambling

⁴⁶ Budden, *Operas of Verdi*, 150.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

table. After a brief passage of dominant preparation, Verdi cadences in F minor and begins a dark, acciaccatura theme just as Violetta enters on the Baron's arm, completing a highly dramatic portrait: the angry lover, his former partner, and the new man in her life (Figure 3.37).



Figure 3.37: Act II/2, Second Finale, theme from the gambling scene

With the turn to F minor, Verdi signals the tragic state of Violetta and Alfredo's relationship. The music further expresses this characterization with the acciaccatura theme and mostly short, choppy vocal lines; Violetta's lovely *cantabile* interjections are the only relief, but even they portray the dark and tense atmosphere with their slow ascent and descent and even rhythmic figures.

The whole scene is closed in F minor with excursions to D-flat major and A-flat major as Alfredo gambles and tortures Violetta with his careless words; each tonality enters as its particular dramatic association arises (refer to Figure 3.36). For example, the crowd remarks on Alfredo's luck as he continues to win even after the Baron enters the game. The music moves to A-flat major as Alfredo states: "Still victory is mine!" In the midst of this dark and heart-breaking scene, Alfredo attempts to display his happiness in victory, although he has lost his beloved only hours before (Figure 3.38). Considering the circumstances, Alfredo's remark is a moment of self-denial and deluded thought, as he attended the party to convince Violetta to return to him. Rejoicing in victory while his lover leans on the arm of another, Alfredo's words belie his feelings. Verdi makes this association abundantly clear in the following scene when Alfredo tells Violetta he will only leave if she follows him.

450 Alfredo

Pur la vit - to - ria è mi - a!
This is my luck - y eve - ning!

Gas.

set - te...
sev - en...

Dottore

An - co - ra?
Still win - ning?

Marchese

An - co - ra?
Still win - ning?

Donne

An - co - ra?
Still win - ning?

Tenori

An - co - ra?
Still win - ning?

Bassi

An - co - ra?
Still win - ning?

Figure 3.38: Act II/2, Second Finale, A-flat major and Alfredo's deluded comment during the gambling scene

The excursion into D-flat major (mm. 387-410) becomes a germinal seed, which is realized in the following scene as Violetta and Alfredo meet. Although the gambling scene begins and ends in F minor, a more global perspective shows the importance of D-flat major within it. Figure 3.39 shows the arrival of D-flat major as the beginning of an arpeggiation through a D-flat major triad. It first moves back to F minor, the mediant (m. 430 ff.), then to A-flat major, the dominant (m. 445 ff.), before proceeding back down by third, coinciding with the

end of the gambling scene and the beginning of the next scene. This global movement is important because it sows the seeds of Violetta and Alfredo's encounter and musically connects the two scenes. It also provides dramatic material as Alfredo's spiteful attitude during the gambling scene leads to the tense meeting.

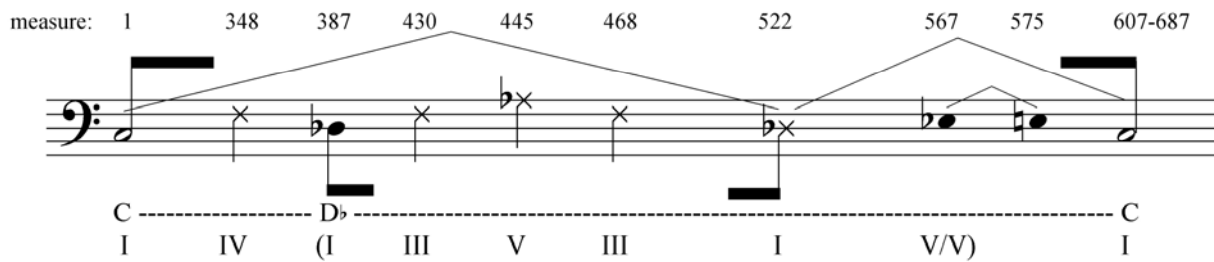


Figure 3.39: Act II/2, Second Finale, reductive graph showing the expressive shift from C to D-flat to C

The gambling scene ends and all exit, but Violetta rushes back into the room, informing us that she asked Alfredo to meet with her (m. 501 ff.); he enters and the scene begins. In this encounter, Violetta tells Alfredo that he must leave, for she fears the Baron's anger will turn to violence. The music begins in D-flat major with another musical figure of death—four sixteenth notes followed by a quarter note—followed by an anapest (Figure 3.40). These small rhythmic figures hold tension high throughout the encounter.



Figure 3.40: Act II/2, Second Finale, anapestic rhythms in Violetta and Alfredo's encounter

The association of D-flat with death is clear throughout the encounter. In it, Violetta tells Alfredo that he must leave in order to save his life, but she may be partially speaking for her own life as well. Although the rhythmic “death figures” may be in reference to either the Baron or Alfredo—the tension between them does result in a duel—they also point to the anxiety and anguish felt by Violetta throughout the scene. These rhythmic figures as well as the D-flat tonal center musically realize the dramatic theme of the encounter. This mood carries through to Alfredo’s condemnation, where he effectively sends Violetta to the coffin with his ruthless words.

The goal of this passage is the semitone descent from D-flat major to C major, which coincides with Alfredo’s condemnation. Verdi also inserts several reactive shifts in tonality as drama develops in order to connect the large-scale movement. He includes a noticeable foreground clue for these: each of the shifts occurs during a lyrical passage in the midst of scattered vocal lines. The first shift (mm. 547-49) follows Alfredo’s reaction to the concern Violetta shows for his life with a shift from D-flat major to A-flat minor, the minor dominant, which is accomplished through mode mixture (Figure 3.41).

Violetta replies her fear is that he may be harmed and implores him to leave. Alfredo answers with another long, lyrical passage moving into the relative major—C-flat major—saying he will leave only if Violetta comes with him (m. 558 ff.). Violetta says she can never do such a thing and forces the music back into A-flat minor before the climax of the scene occurs (m. 565 ff.).

S’ei cadrà per mano mia
Un sol colpo vi torria
Coll’amante il protettore
V’atterrisce tal sciagura?

If he should fall by my hand
a single blow would deprive you
of a lover and keeper at the same time.
Does such a calamity frighten you?

546

Alf.

- man - te il pro - tet - to - re... V'at - ter -
lov - er and pro - tec - tor... Is it

548 Violetta

Alf.

- ri - sce tal scia - gu - ra? Ma s'ei
this that you're a - fraid of? What if

Figure 3.41: Act II/2, Second Finale, reactive shift to A-flat minor in Alfredo and Violetta's encounter

A most powerful reactive shift accompanies this climax as Alfredo asks Violetta to leave with him. She replies that she cannot, “I took a sacred oath to flee from you.” At this point, the music shifts from E-flat major (as V of A-flat minor) to E major (as V of A minor) (Figure 3.42).

572

Vio.

- men - to... di fug - gir - ti un giu - ra - men - to sa - cro io
stay here... for I gave my word that I would nev - er

Figure 3.42: Act II/2, Second Finale, reactive shift from E-flat to E-natural in the encounter (figure cont'd)

575
Vio. fe - a...
see you...
Alfredo
A chi?... dil - lo... chi po-
To whom?... Tell me... who has

577
Vio. A chi drit - - to pien n'a -
One who had the right to
Alf. - te - a?
forced you?

Alfredo thinks she is referring to the Baron. “Then you love him,” he asks; “Very well, I love him,” Violetta replies (m. 579 ff.).

After hearing that Violetta loves another, Alfredo explodes with anger and calls everyone back into the room (m. 586 ff.). He points to Violetta and says, “what she did, don’t you know?” The music bursts into a G major chord in preparation for the next passage, in which Alfredo condemns Violetta (m. 604 ff.). He begins with music similar to his earlier *cabaletta*, “Oh mio rimorso,” but most importantly, he returns to C major.

In this condemnation, Alfredo tells everyone about Violetta’s efforts to sell her possessions and how he blindly accepted it. “But,” he says, “there is time still for me to cleanse myself.” He calls on everyone to witness as he throws a handful of money at Violetta’s feet. The crowd reacts with a chorus in C minor in which they remark on how heartless Alfredo is.

Suddenly, Germont enters and brings the music to a halt (m. 688). He moves the tonality to E-flat major and relays his disgust with Alfredo: “I cannot find Alfredo in you any more,” he says. Realizing the implications of his actions, Alfredo moves to the parallel minor and remarks on his wretched behavior (m. 698 ff.). At the end of his passage, the music returns to E-flat major for the *concertato* (m. 702 ff.).

The similarity between Alfredo’s condemnation and his earlier *cabaletta*, “Oh mio rimorso” is local as well as global. Both begin in C major and move to the parallel minor: in the *cabaletta*, the shift to minor is brief, whereas C minor is sustained in the condemnation scene as the crowd reacts to Alfredo’s actions. In addition, the music preceding each is moving toward the relative minor with a long cadential motion. In the section immediately before *cabaletta*, the music turned toward A minor following the *adagio*, “Dei miei bollenti spiriti.” In that section, Alfredo learned about the secret sale of Violetta’s possessions, which infuriated him and spurred the C major *cabaletta*. The condemnation is also reached via A minor’s dominant, reached during Alfredo and Violetta’s encounter through a reactive shift. Verdi uses the same keys to relate the dramatic parallelism:

Table 3.6: Comparison of tonal and dramatic development in Alfredo’s C major sections

Act II: Aria Alfredo	Act II: Second Finale
A minor: Alfredo learns of Violetta’s sales (120/2/2 ff.) C major/minor: Alfredo displays anger at Violetta’s action (selling her possessions) (123/1/1 ff.)	A minor: Alfredo learns of Violetta’s secret oath (276/1/1 ff.) C major/minor: Alfredo again displays anger at Violetta’s action (leaving him for the Baron) (281/1/1 ff.)

The dramatic events of each correspond as well, as an action by Violetta forces Alfredo to express disgrace and a will to remedy the situation. The *cabaletta* thus previews the condemnation scene, where Alfredo’s actions lead to tragic results.

Locally, the two passages bear striking similarities in both rhythm and melody.

Following is Alfredo's earlier *cabaletta*, in which the accompaniment plays a strong downbeat followed by a sixteenth note triplet and two eighth notes, which is then repeated (3.43a). In the condemnation, the rhythm is similar (3.43b). Moreover, the vocal lines are similar, especially in measure 614 of the condemnation where Alfredo moves up to a high A, reminding us of the similar climax in measures 106-7 in the *cabaletta*.

The image displays a musical score for Alfredo's C major sections, consisting of two systems of vocal and piano parts. The first system, starting at measure 105, features a vocal line with lyrics: "fran - ge - re il ver mi ba - - le -" and "- wak - en - ing, I see the truth at". The piano accompaniment includes a triplet of sixteenth notes. A star symbol is placed above the vocal line in measure 106. The second system, starting at measure 107, features a vocal line with lyrics: "- nò. last. Per po - - co in se - no ac -" and "I'll nev - - er - more know". The piano accompaniment continues with similar rhythmic patterns, including triplets. A box highlights a triplet of sixteenth notes in the piano part of measure 106.

(a)

Figure 3.43: Comparison of rhythm in Alfredo's C major sections (figure cont'd)

613 Alf. mi - se - ro, tut - to ac - cet - tar po -
trust - ing her, I took all she could

615 Alf. - te a. Ma è tem-po an-co - ra, ter - ger - mi
of - fer. But now, at last, the time has come;

Più animato

(b)

Summary of Ideas from Act II

In Act II of *La Traviata*, drama and music develop rapidly, but the consistent return of E-flat major underpins the entire act. Verdi uses E-flat major in Alfredo's aria, Violetta and Germont's duet, and in the closing *concertato* of the Second Finale. In addition to E-flat major, C major and B-flat major develop a structural status. C major also comes to represent Alfredo's anger, which is caused by Violetta's actions: selling her possessions and leaving him. Indeed, Verdi prolongs C major throughout the Second Finale where Alfredo attends Flora's party in order to seek revenge. B-flat major serves to keep structural balance in the large-scale progression in E-flat major. Most importantly, this progression serves Verdi's need for an act of continuous action, as there is a scene change before the Second Finale; E-flat major creates unity within the entire act.

Verdi also reinforces associative keys including F major and A-flat major and introduces C major, F minor, and D-flat major/minor. The associations of these keys develop in several ways throughout the act:

Table 3.7: Associative tonalities and their occurrences in Act II

F major (Violetta and Alfredo's love)	<i>scena</i> from Alfredo's aria, <i>scena</i> of Violetta and Germont's duet, and the reprise of Violetta's Love Theme
F minor (the dissolution of Violetta and Alfredo's relationship)	<i>scena</i> and <i>tempo d'attacco</i> of Violetta and Germont's duet and the gambling scene
D-flat major/minor (death)	<i>tempo d'attacco</i> of Violetta and Germont's duet and the encounter between Violetta and Alfredo
A-flat major (delusion, folly)	<i>scena</i> from Alfredo's aria, Germont's request "Pura siccome un angelo," and Alfredo's remarks during the gambling scene
C major (Alfredo's anger)	Alfredo's <i>cabaletta</i> and condemnation of Violetta as well as the design of the Second Finale, in which C major returns as a refrain throughout.

The examples of reactive shifts in tonality in the act serve to intensify the immediate level of music and drama (e.g., Violetta's goodbye, chromatic move from G to B-flat; Violetta's avoidance of F minor in her duet with Germont). In addition, Verdi inserts the first and only reprise of Violetta's Love Theme, which is expressively transposed to F major, a semitone above its original key. The fact that it occurs in F major is significant because with it, Verdi relays Violetta's fateful acceptance of love. The global semitone shifts up and down in the Second Finale (i.e. C to D-flat to C) accompany the scene in which Alfredo learns of Violetta's sacred oath. This motion becomes the germinal seed of the overall tonal movement in Act III.

ACT III

Act III takes place in Violetta's bedroom as she lies on her deathbed, and the opening music relays this somber mood. Indeed, the opening key of C minor remains the tonic for nearly a third of the act. When Alfredo enters and the two are reunited, Verdi begins a series of double cycles, which last until the close of the opera. The first occurs in A-flat major, moving from

$\flat VI—V—I$ (356/2/2-368/3/1), signifying the deluded hope in the lovers' reunion. Two additional cycles in D-flat minor follow, repeating the same harmonic progression (382/1/1-393/2/1 and 393/2/2-397/1/1). From beginning to end, the act moves up by semitone, from C to D-flat, a shift that intensifies the effect of the tragic outcome of the drama. Following is a graph of the entire act:



Figure 3.44: Act III, reductive graph of the entire act

On the foreground level, the Frailty Theme from the Prelude returns, fulfilling the promise it made at the beginning of the opera. In addition to the mood it evokes, Verdi transforms this recurring theme in several ways in order to depict musically Violetta's declining health.

Act III: N. 8. *Scena Violetta*

Verdi first presented the Frailty Theme in B minor with a reduced section of strings; its recurrence is transposed up a semitone to C minor with further reduced and *divisi* strings as shown in Figure 3.45. This expressive shift informs us that Violetta is nearer to death than ever.

In addition, both occurrences of the Frailty Theme tonicize the Neapolitan: C major in the Prelude and D-flat major here. In the recurrence, D-flat major is prolonged. Verdi presents a new musical theme—which we will call the “Contrition Theme” (mm. 19 ff.)—before returning to C minor. The Contrition Theme represents Violetta’s repentance and her acceptance of death as the music conveys a sense of peace. When it recurs later in the act, Violetta recalls a priest’s visit and says that her soul is at rest, forgiven by God. Indeed, the key in which the Contrition Theme occurs is also important as it develops an associative quality; as opposed to its minor mode counterpart, D-flat major conveys not a sense of doom, but rather a sense of peace.

The musical score is divided into four systems, each with a grand staff (treble and bass clef). The first system is marked 'Andante (♩ = 66)' and features a star symbol above the first measure. The tempo is 'estremamente piano' and the dynamic is '[8 VI.]'. The second system starts at measure 8, marked 'dolente' and '[+Vle, Vc., Cb. pizz.]', with a 'pp' dynamic. The third system starts at measure 13. The fourth system starts at measure 17, marked 'dim.' and 'pp', and ends with a 'cresc. a' marking. A star symbol is placed above the first measure of the fourth system.

Figure 3.45: Act III, *Scena Violetta*, expressive recurrence of the Frailty Theme in C minor, and the D-flat major Contrition Theme (figure cont’d)



The introductory music fades away as a diminishing number of violins play a high trill and focus turns to Violetta, who is lying in bed (m. 36 ff.). This trill will return with the Frailty Theme as it recurs throughout the act, providing a haunting local feature indicating the distress of the situation. Furthermore, the Frailty Theme carries through much of the following scene, which begins with a *scena* before moving into Violetta's aria, "Addio, del passato."



Figure 3.46: Act III, *Scena* Violetta, reductive graph

Through measure 81, Verdi twice establishes C minor with the Frailty Theme, abruptly moves to the Contrition Theme in D-flat major, and returns to C minor as the passages close. Violetta sings the second entrance of the Contrition Theme as she tells Dr. Grenvil about a priest's visit; she says that her soul is at peace. Following is a comparison of the original and recurrence of the Contrition Theme:



(a)

65

Vio.

l'al - ma. Mi con - so - lò ier se - ra un pio mi - ni - stro. Ah! re - li - gi -
peace - ful. Last night I found great com - fort: a priest con - soled me. Ah! for those who

tr

ppp

(b)

Figure 3.47: Comparison of the (a) Contrition Theme and (b) its recurrence in Violetta's vocal line

As Dr. Grenvil asks how Violetta's night was, the harmony abruptly shifts from D-flat major to A major via a chromatic rise from A-flat to A-natural, which creates an intensification in the passage (Figure 3.48).

68

Vio.

- o - ne è sol - lie - vo ai sof - fe - ren - ti.
suf - fer there's such help in faith and pray - ing.

Dottore

E que - sta
And have you

Figure 3.48: Act III, *Scena* Violetta, reactive shift from A-flat to A-natural in Dr. Grenvil's vocal line (figure cont'd)

70

Vio. *Eb - bi tran - quil - lo il son - no.*
Tran - quil I slept the eve - ning.

Dot. *not - te?*
rest - ed?

Co - rag - gio dun - que...
Then keep your cour - age...

On his way out, he informs Annina, “She has only a few hours of life left as a result of her consumption,” and reverses the earlier chromatic shift from A-flat to A-natural, here singing A-natural followed by A-flat as the Frailty Theme returns (Figure 3.49).

78

Ann. *- gno-re?*
bet-ter?

Dot. *(piano e parte)*
(softly, and he leaves)

La ti - si non le ac - cor - da che po - che o - - re.
I'm ver - y much a - fraid all will soon be o - - ver.

estremamente

Figure 3.49: Act III, *Scena Violetta*, Dr. Grenvil’s return to A-flat

Verdi inserts a recurrence of Alfredo’s Love Theme in G-flat major as Violetta produces a letter from Germont and begins to read. The scoring is reduced to two violins playing the melody and one violin, two violas, and one cello providing accompaniment (Figure 3.50). The thin scoring follows in the footsteps of the Frailty Theme, as Violetta is weak and sad, barely holding on to her memories. Germont tells Violetta that Alfredo knows now about her secret

oath and that he will return soon from a foreign land. Verdi's choice of G-flat major for the recurrence is an expressive transposition from the previous F major appearances of Alfredo's Love Theme as it serves to intensify Violetta's anguish. In addition, the tonality, G-flat major, a tritone distant from the prevailing C minor of the Frailty Theme, relays just how far away Alfredo is; Violetta's isolation is compounded by the absence of the man she loves.

(SCENA IV: Violetta che) trae dal seno una lettera e legge
(SCENE IV: Violetta, who) takes a letter from her bosom and reads
con voce bassa senza suono ma a tempo
in a low voice, murmuring, but paced with the music

100 **Andantino** (♩ = 88)

Vio. *Teneste la pro - messa... La disfida ebbe*
"You kept your promise... The duel took

Andantino (♩ = 88) [2 Vl. I]
[1 Vl. II, 2 Vle, 1 Vc., 1 Vc. pizz.] (pp)

105

Vio. *luogo... il barone fu fe - rito, però migliora... Alfredo è in stranio*
place... the Baron was wounded, but is recovering... Alfredo has gone a -

108

Vio. *suolo. Il vostro sagri - fizio io stesso gli ho sve - lato. Egli a voi torne -*
- broad. I, my - - self, told him of your sacrifice. He will re - turn

111

Vio. *- rà pel suo perdono... io pur ver - rò... Cu - ratevi... mertate un avve -*
to beg your forgiveness... I too will come. Get well again... you deserve a better

Figure 3.50: Act III, *Scena Violetta*, expressive recurrence of Alfredo's Love Theme in G-flat major (figure cont'd)

114 con voce sepolcrale *
in a sepulchral voice

Vio. - nir migliore... Giorgio Ger - mont..." È
fate... Giorgio Ger - mont..." Too

Violetta finishes the letter and cries out, “It’s late! I wait and wait, and they never come to me!” as the music abruptly moves toward A minor. Verdi also inserts anapestic “death” rhythms in the chromatically ascending bass line, further heightening the tension of the moment (Figure 3.51).

114 con voce sepolcrale *
in a sepulchral voice

Vio. - nir migliore... Giorgio Ger - mont..." È
fate... Giorgio Ger - mont..." Too

116

Vio. tardi!.. At - ten - do, at - ten - do... né a me giun - gon
late!.. I've wait - ed and wait - ed... will they nev - er

[Archi, Legni, Cor.] [Archi] ppp

119 (si guarda nello specchio)
(she looks into the mirror)

Vio. ma - i? Oh co - me son mu - ta - ta! Ma il Dot -
reach me? Oh, how can I have changed so? Yet the

Figure 3.51: Act III, *Scena Violetta*, reactive shift away from G-flat major


Verdi here begins a move to A minor for the *adagio*, “Addio, del passato,” in which Violetta says farewell to the past and asks God to forgive and receive her (m. 127 ff.). Immediately following this heartrending *adagio*, Verdi begins a D major *bacchanal* (a dramatic foil far from the tragic center of the plot), which takes place outside Violetta’s house with a crowd celebrating Carnival (346/1/1 ff.). This piece acts as a pivot to the next scene, and where Alfredo enters and the two are reunited.

Act III: N. 10. Duet Violetta and Alfredo

Violetta and Alfredo’s reunion is enveloped in deluded hope as it occurs during a large cycle in A-flat major outlining $\flat VI—V—I$. Beginning with a passage in E major (enharmonically F-flat major) Verdi presents a cadential progression reaching A-flat major at the beginning of the *adagio*, “Parigi, o cara” (m. 75). A return to a C tonal center at the end (m. 239) reminds the two that tragedy cannot be avoided, as Violetta is doomed (Figure 3.52).⁴⁸



Figure 3.52: Act III, Duet Violetta and Alfredo, reductive graphs of the duet

Locally, Verdi begins the duet with a cadential motion toward G major and then E minor, but as Violetta begins to realize who her visitor is, the music turns to the parallel major and introduces a  rhythm, similar to that in Violetta’s Love Theme (Figure 3.53).

⁴⁸ Previously, C major was associated with Alfredo’s anger, but when it enters in this scene, such associations clearly do not apply.

20

Vio. *gio - ia? di - ce - sti? Al -*
pleas - ure? It can't be! Al -

Ann. *Sì, o si - gno - ra...*
Yes, dear - est la - dy...

pp

23 *(Annina afferma col capo, e va ad aprire la porta)*
(Annina nods, and goes to open the door)

Vio. *- fre - do?... Ah tu il ve - de - sti?... ei vien!.. ei vien!.. t'af -*
- fre - do?... Then you have seen him?... He's here!.. he's here!.. please

Alfredo *comparisce Alfredo (pallido)*
Alfredo appears (pale with)

poco cresc.

Figure 3.53: Act III, Duet, recurrence of the rhythm from Violetta's Love Theme as Alfredo enters

Alfredo enters and the couple begins the E major *tempo d'attacco* of their duet in which they vow to never part again (m. 35 ff.). Alfredo states, “No man or demon, angel mine, will ever again separate me from you,” as the music comes to a halt on an incomplete and enharmonically respelled German augmented sixth chord. The bass descends from E—D-sharp—D-natural while G-sharp and B sound in the upper voices (Figure 3.54). To understand this progression, we must add an E-natural to the chord and respell the notes as F-flat, A-flat, C-flat, and D-natural, creating a German augmented sixth chord in A-flat major. Verdi uses this chord to move into the cadential progression reaching A-flat major as the *adagio*, “Parigi, o cara,” begins. This is an important development in the music as Verdi brings the *tutti, fortissimo* orchestra to a halt in preparation for the lighter, waltz-like *adagio*. In addition, the bass notes E (=F-flat), E-flat,

and A-flat are $\hat{b}6-\hat{5}-\hat{1}$ in A-flat major and are a local, embedded example of the large-scale motion of the duet.

The image displays a musical score for a duet in Act III. It includes staves for Violoncello (Vio.), Alto (Alf.), and Piano. The vocal parts have lyrics in Italian. The piano accompaniment includes dynamic markings like *ff* [Tutti] and *pp* [Legni]. A tempo change to *Andante mosso* (♩ = 112) is indicated at measure 75. The score is annotated with harmonic progressions: $\hat{b}6$ is marked in the piano part at measure 68, $\hat{5}$ is marked in the piano part at measure 70, and $\hat{1}$ is marked in the piano part at measure 75. The vocal part at measure 75 is marked *dolcissimo a mezza voce* and includes the lyrics "Pa - ri - gi, o ca - ra, Par - is, be - lov - ed,".

Figure 3.54: Act III, Duet, bass line progression leading from E major to A-flat major ($\hat{b}6-\hat{5}-\hat{1}$) before “Parigi, o cara”

Alfredo suggests that they move away from Paris for Violetta to regain her health. Nevertheless, their delusional happiness is short-lived as a quick anapestic rhythm and a move to A-flat minor crushes any hope of a happy ending. Violetta suggests the two go to church to offer their thanks, but in her attempt to rise, she falters (Figure 3.55).

178

Vio. tem - pio... Al - fre - do an - dia - mo, del tuo ri - tor - no gra - zie ren -
vi - sit the near - by cha - pel to thank the hea - vens for your re -

(p) [Archi]

181

vacilla
she falters

Vio. - dia - mo... È nul - la,
- turn - ing... It's real - ly

Alfredo

Tu im - pal - li - di - sci!...
What is the mat - ter!...

ff >

(p)

Figure 3.55: Act III, Duet, reactive shift moving to A-flat minor, accompanied by an anapestic rhythm

From this point the music moves through several keys, while Violetta struggles to regain her strength; Verdi even inserts a trill in Violetta's line, reminding us of her frailty (Figure 3.56).

190

Vio. - lez - za... o - - - ra son
ser - ious... Dear - - - est, I'm

tr

[Legni, Vl. I]

[Vc. pizz.]

Figure 3.56: Act III, Duet, Violetta's trills (figure cont'd)



At measure 234, it appears that Verdi might cadence in B minor, but suddenly the brass section suddenly enters, playing *con tutta forza* octaves on G, reminding everyone of Violetta's frailty and impending death as it takes the role of a dominant in preparation for the following *cabaletta*, "Gran Dio!...morir sì giovane," in C major (Figure 3.57). With this ending *cabaletta*, Verdi reveals the deluded hope and folly of Violetta and Alfredo's reunion. In the earlier A-flat major *adagio*, "Parigi, o cara," the two spoke of moving away from Paris and being together forever, neglecting Violetta's dire position. Violetta now recognizes the folly as she states that delirium must have brought on her credulous hope and that if Alfredo's return has not cured her, nothing can.

Although the *cabaletta* is in C major, it does not reference Alfredo's anger as in Act II. Rather, one might argue that Verdi substitutes C major for C minor, while still calling attention to Violetta's frailty. Either way, dramatic action at this point demonstrates the lovers' return to the reality of the situation.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ See the discussion of Verdi's revision to this *cabaletta* below on page 109 ff.

222
Vio. vi - ve - re an - cor, che vi - ve - re an - cor vo -
now want to live a - gain, I want to live be -

225
Vio. (Annina parte) (Annina leaves) (ad Alfredo) (to Alfredo) pp
- gl'i - o... Ma se tor - nan - do non m'hai sal - va - to,
- side him... If your re - turn - ing can - not re - store me,

231
Vio. a niu - no in ter - ra sal - var - mi è da - to.
no earth - ly pow - er can cure my ill - ness.

235
Vio. (SCENA VII: Violetta e Alfredo) (SCENE VII: Violetta and Alfredo) (sorgendo impetuosa) (rising impetuously)
Ah!... Gran
Ah!... My

Figure 3.57: Act III, Duet, reactive shift to G at “Gran Dio!...morir sì giovine”

Act III: N. 11. Last Finale

Throughout the finale, Verdi constantly reinforces the tragic ending that is about to occur with D-flat minor tonal centers and anapestic rhythms pervading the music at every turn. Moreover, D-flat is the goal of a double cycle, which provides an inevitable tonal course directed toward the outcome of the tragic drama—Violetta’s death. The double cycle in D-flat minor traces the same progression as the earlier A-flat major cycle: $\flat VI—V—I$. The first cycle begins as Germont enters and ends with the beginning of the *adagio*, “Prendi, quest’è l’immagine.” The

second cycle begins as Alfredo's Love Theme reenters in A major and ends with the close of the opera. The following graph shows the entire Finale:

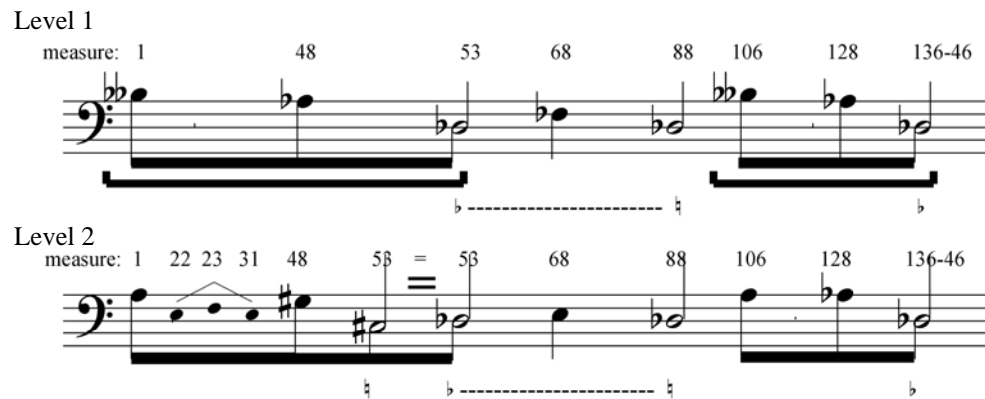


Figure 3.58: Act III, Last Finale, reductive graph highlighting the double cycles in D-flat minor

The double cycle from Act I (Figure 3.21) also followed a progression from submediant—dominant—tonic, but adhered to its major mode, whereas in Act III, all three cycles begin with $\flat VI$, which throughout the opera has become increasingly prominent. Two of the most noticeable examples are the melodic $\hat{\flat 6}—\hat{5}—\hat{1}$, “misterioso” motive from Alfredo's Love Theme, and the brief inflection of $\hat{\flat 6}$ at the end of the Prelude. While the first act displayed the developing relationship between Violetta and Alfredo—a positive outlook—the inclusion of $\flat VI$ in the progressions in Act III reflects the tragic ending.

The finale begins in A major as Germont and Dr. Grenvil enter. Germont sees Violetta's condition and feels great remorse for his actions; the music reactively shifts in a deceptive cadence from V—VI in A minor as Alfredo points out how dire the situation is. In addition, Verdi inserts a tense, chromatic line in the accompaniment (D-sharp—E—F), drawing attention to the intensification (Figure 3.59).

The image displays a musical score for Act III, Last Finale. It features three systems of music, each with a vocal line and a piano accompaniment.

- System 1 (Measures 22-24):**
 - Vio. (Violetta):** "quan - ti ca - ri ho al mon - do... / - braced by those who love me..."
 - Ger. (Germont):** "Che mai di - te? / Do not say that!"
 - Piano:** Accompaniment with dynamics *ff* and *p*. A black arrow points to a measure where the key signature changes from one sharp to no sharps or flats.
- System 2 (Measures 25-28):**
 - Ger. (Germont):** "(Oh cie - lo! / (Oh heav - en!)" and "è ver! / it's true!)"
 - Piano:** Accompaniment with dynamics *pp*. A black star is marked in the first measure.
- System 3 (Measures 29-31):**
 - Alfredo:** "La ve - di, pa - dre mi - o? / You see her state, oh Fa - ther?"
 - Piano:** Accompaniment with dynamics *p* and a marking *[+Legni]*. The key signature changes back to one sharp.

Figure 3.59: Act III, Last Finale, reactive shift to F after Germont's entrance

Verdi returns to E major as V of A minor and prepares for the following *adagio*, “Prendi: Quest’è l’immagine” (m. 53 ff.), which is in E major’s enharmonic submediant. Everything comes to a halt as Violetta steps forward and says, “Come closer to me and listen my beloved Alfredo,” using E as a common tone in the C-sharp minor cadential progression. The music enharmonically cadences into D-flat minor at the *adagio* and completes the first cycle (Figure 3.60).

46 Violetta

Più a me t'ap-pres - sa... a - scol - ta, a - ma - to Al-
 My love, come clos - er... and lis - ten, my own Al-

50 Vio. *Andante sostenuto* (♩ = 56) (somerly)

- fre - dol... Pren-di, que-st'è l'im-
 - fre - dol... Take this, it's but a

col canto

ppp [Tutti] *ppppp*

V i

Figure 3.60: Act III, Last Finale, enharmonic modulation into D-flat minor

“Prendi: Quest’è l’immagine” is a solemn funereal passage, Violetta’s final words; the music characterizes this mood with a slow tempo, anapestic rhythms in the accompaniment, and limited vocal range in Violetta’s line. She tells Alfredo to take the picture of her as a reminder of her love.

The first section ends on A-flat, which is enharmonically reinterpreted as G-sharp as the music returns to E major, the enharmonic relative major of D-flat minor. The entire mood of the passage briefly changes, and Violetta’s lines fill with lyricism; she tells Alfredo that if he should meet another chaste woman, he must marry her (Figure 3.61). She says, “Give her this picture; tell her that it is a gift from who in heaven among the angels prays for her, for you.”

67 Violetta

Poco più animato (♩ = 76)

Se u - na pu - di - ca
If you should fall in

Poco più animato (♩ = 76)

dim. morendo [Archi] pp

A-flat = G-sharp

70
io. ver - gi - ne de - gli an - ni suoi sul
love a - gain, if you should find an -

pp [Tutti]

Figure 3.61: Act III, Last Finale, modulation to relative major (F-flat major), enharmonically respelled as E major in “Prendi: Quest’è l’immagine”

The music returns to D-flat major, indicating Violetta’s sense of peace, but the continuous anapestic rhythms undermine the peaceful accompaniment. Moreover, the anapests only occur as Violetta sings, and her vocal line is limited to singing only the “misterioso” motive, here moving from F-flat to E-flat to A-flat (Figure 3.62).

81 Vio. si - a... lo vo'. Le por - gi que - st'et -
mar - ry... for me. Give her this lit - tle

84 Vio. - fi - gie, dil - le che do - no el - l'è di
to - ken, tell her it is a gift from

cresc. accentato con passione

5 1

6

Figure 3.62: Act III, Last Finale, the “misterioso” motive in Violetta’s vocal line

Verdi is demonstrating the impending tragic ending for Violetta. The quintet reaches a perfect authentic cadence in D-flat major, suggesting once more the impossible happy ending as a tremolo on D-flat deflects complete closure in the major mode. The D-flat is subsumed into an A major chord which marks the beginning of the second D-flat minor cycle. Alfredo's Love Theme enters in A major (and acting as $\flat VI$ in D-flat minor) as Violetta rises, appearing to have regained her strength (Figure 3.63).

104

Vio. *f* gli an - - - ge - li pre - ga per lei, per
heav - - - en who's pray - ing for her and

Ann. *f* - dio ti chia - ma a
calls you to come

Alf. *f* te, m'ac - co - glie - rà, m'ac - co - glie - rà con
both, oh let a sin gle grave re - ceive us

Ger. *f* - dio ti chia - ma, ti chia - ma a
calls you, God calls you come

Dot. *f* - dio ti chia - ma a
calls you to come

(alzandosi rianimata)
(rising with renewed vigor)

106 Andantino

Vio. te. you. È stra-no!
How cu - rious!

Ann. sé. home.

Alf. sé. home.

Ger. sé. home.

Dot. sé. home.

Andantino

pp 12 [VI., Vie] *ppppp* 12

Figure 3.63: Act III, Last Finale, expressive recurrence of Alfredo's Love Theme in A major

“A strange feeling,” she says, “An unfamiliar strength is reborn and agitates me!” Violetta believes she is returning to life, but she suddenly drops back onto a couch. The music begins a long cadential motion in D-flat minor and cadences as Dr. Grenvil checks Violetta’s pulse and states, “She is dead” (Figure 3.64).

134

Ann. - cor - ra - si...
help her now...

Ger. - co - ra - si...
help her now... (dopo averle toccato il polso)
(after having felt her pulse)

Dot. È
It's

V

136

Ann. Alfredo Oh mio do-
God rest her

Ger. Oh mio do-
Ah, my be-

Dot. Oh mio do-
God rest her

spen o - - - - - ta!...
o - - - - - ver!...

I

Figure 3.64: Act III, Last Finale, cadence in D-flat minor as Violetta dies

The realization of D-flat minor as the key in which Violetta expires thus completes several successions of tonalities including the local double cycle in D-flat minor in Act III, the

associative connections of D-flat in Acts II and III, and an expressive cycle initiated in the opening bars of the opera with the Frailty Theme. Verdi first presented the Frailty Theme in B minor in the Prelude and then in C minor at the beginning of Act III. While the theme is not restated in D-flat minor, Violetta's death—the ultimate consequence of her frailty—is set in that key. In addition, we have seen multiple examples of C to D-flat motion (e.g., the Second Finale, the C minor recurrence of the Frailty Theme).

Summary of Ideas from Act III

Much of Act III is in or revolves around D-flat minor, reflecting the impending tragic ending. Indeed, it is the goal of the entire act, even the opera. Throughout the work, Verdi foreshadows the association of D-flat with Violetta's death, and as she expires, the final cadence completes the large expressive shift initiated in the Prelude. Nevertheless, Alfredo and Violetta maintain their deluded hope that they may have a happy ending. Verdi signifies these aspects with the A-flat major cycle.

The cycle in A-flat major (delusion) followed by the double cycle in D-flat minor (tragic death) moves the opera into its final passage. The opening third of the act portrays Violetta's state of health, and with her reunion with Alfredo, Verdi sets the tragic ending in motion. The cycle in A-flat major occurs in conjunction with the reunion and ends as Alfredo sees Violetta falter. Verdi then begins two cycles in D-flat minor, initiated as the Last Finale begins. In the first cycle, the quintet cadences in D-flat major, suggesting a consolation in death, but the attempt is in vain as the next cycle in D-flat minor begins with Alfredo's Love Theme in A major, demonstrating the folly of their thoughts. The powerful, conclusive cadence in D-flat minor occurs as Violetta dies.

CHAPTER 4: VERDI'S REVISIONS TO *LA TRAVIATA*

La Traviata premiered in Venice on 6 March 1853, but Verdi considered it a disastrous performance and withdrew the opera from circulation. He attributed the failure to the poor cast, which he had never fully approved. Later that year, he returned to it at the request of another Venetian theater, an agreement made with the caveat that he would be involved in its casting. The revised score was delivered to the *Teatro San Benedetto* and the following performance there on 6 May 1854 was a resounding success. Verdi stated soon afterward that the difference between the two performances was the casting of each, not the music:

Know then, that the *Traviata* now being performed at *San Benedetto* is the same, the very same as was performed last year at *La Fenice*, with the exception of a few transpositions and a few *puntature* which I myself made to suit it better to these singers...For the rest, not a piece has been changed, not a piece has been added or omitted, not a musical idea has been altered.⁵⁰

In 1983, the University of Chicago Press and Ricordi initiated an edition of critical scores for all of Verdi's works. The critical edition of *La Traviata* first appeared in full score in 1996 and the vocal score followed in 2001. Each edition includes critical notes and an introduction on the genesis of the opera. In the *La Traviata* edition, we are fortunate to have the original music from the 1853 performance. From these sections, it is clear that Verdi did not limit his revisions to simple *puntature* and transpositions.

This edition is invaluable to a study such as this thesis, as Verdi made several semitonal transpositions of pieces, namely, "Dite alla giovine" from Violetta and Germont's Act II duet as well as the Act III *cabaletta*, "Gran Dio!...morir sì giovine." These transpositions in particular required adjustment in the preceding measures as well, and they highlight the associative and reactive tonal devices Verdi used.

⁵⁰ Verdi's letter to De Sanctis of 26 May 1854 in Alessandro Luzio, *Carteggi verdiani*, 4 vols. (Rome: Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, 1935-47), 1: 24-5; quoted in translation in Della Seta, *La Traviata*, 2: LIII.

Verdi's transpositions have been used to support the claim that large-scale tonal structures did not matter to him. One particularly notable scholar who argues this point is Julian Budden. Following is a quote from his *Operas of Verdi*:

It is useless to look in the operas of Verdi and his contemporaries for any large-scale key-scheme such as can be found in Wagner's scenes and Mozart's finales...There is no structural reason why the Act II duet in *Rigoletto* should begin in E minor and end with a cabaletta in A-flat major; it was merely that what Schoenberg called the "tonal regions" were no part of Verdi's way of thinking.⁵¹

In addition, in his later discussion of *La Traviata*, he uses the revisions made to the Act II duet for Violetta and Germont to make another comment; in particular, he addresses Verdi's transposition of the *adagio*, "Dite alla giovine" from E major to E-flat major.

Nothing could illustrate better the danger of attributing structural importance to Verdi's key-schemes than the case before us. The alteration of 1854 which brings the new melody into E-flat instead of E makes not the slightest difference to the duet considered as a whole.⁵²

Despite his argument, there are many instances in *La Traviata* where we find Verdi creating more tonal coherence in his revisions. Indeed, we will see that Verdi's revision of "Dite alla giovine" serves both local and large-scale union of music and drama.

This chapter will present each revised section and show how Verdi's changes strengthen the associative and structural tonal designs. It is important to note that Verdi made no revisions to Act I, in which he introduces the most important recurring themes, associative tonalities, and the reactive and expressive shifts. Verdi's revisions to the later acts strengthen these associative ties between music and dramatic action.

The first major tonal revision Verdi made was to the *andantino*, "Così alla misera," which was originally notated as C-sharp minor (Figure 4.1). In the revision, he enharmonically respelled it as D-flat minor (refer back to Figure 3.28a) to reinforce dramatic development—the

⁵¹ Budden, *Operas of Verdi*, 1: 15.

⁵² Budden, *Operas of Verdi*, 2: 144.

realization that Violetta is doomed—and to prepare for the ensuing *adagio*, “Dite alla giovine,” which he revised down a semitone to E-flat major. Figure 4.2 shows the original version of “Dite alla giovine” in E major.

212a Violetta

con (estremo) dolore
with deep sorrow

(Co - - - sì al - la
(Hope - - - less the

Ger.
- spi - ra tai det-ti a un ge - ni - tor.
pit - y a lone - ly fa - ther's heart.

[Legni, Vl. I.]
[ppp]
[Vc., Cb. pizz.]

214a
Vio.
mi - se - ra ch'è un* di ca -
fate of the one who has

Figure 4.1: Act II/1, Duet, original version of “Così alla misera,” notated in C-sharp minor

230a
Vio.
lei, sì, per le - i sa - rà, sì, per le - i sa - rà!... Ah!
she, yes, and she will be doomed, yes, and she will be doomed!... Ah!

Figure 4.2: Act II/1, Duet, original version of “Dite alla giovine” in E major (figure cont’d)

(a Germont piangendo)
(to Germont weeping)

Andantino (♩. = 50)
cantabile

234a

Vio. Di - te al - la gio - vi - ne sì - bel - la e
Tell your be - lov - ed child, gen - tle and

Andantino (♩. = 50)
[Archil] p

We recall that Act II is built with a structural emphasis on E-flat major; it is the most powerful key in the act as it occurs three times and its dominant twice, each as a stable set piece. Alfredo's *adagio*, "Dei miei bollenti spiriti," the present *adagio* from Violetta and Germont's duet, and the ending *concertato* of Act II occur in E-flat major, and B-flat major occurs two times near the middle Act II ("Morrò!...la mia memoria" from Violetta and Germont's duet and Germont's *cabaletta* "Non, non udrai rimproveri" at the end of Act II/1). The original E major did not serve the global tonal structure of the act; rather, it would act as a semitone shift up: E-flat (Alfredo's *adagio*)—E-natural (Violetta and Germont's *adagio*)—E-flat (*concertato* in Act II/2). This shift does not occur in conjunction with the dramatic action, as Violetta's submission ("Dite alla giovine") is not a moment that needs intensification; the revelation that she will leave Alfredo is a denouement, the result of the intense battle during the duet. Furthermore, by transposing "Dite alla giovine" down by a semitone, Verdi demonstrates his preparation for the scene immediately following the *adagio*, where he includes a powerful reactive shift in tonality as Violetta erupts into sadness: the true home for the E-flat to E motion.

Violetta asks Germont how she is to separate from Alfredo and Germont offers two options, each rejected by Violetta. He attempts to make a third, but Violetta bursts into tears saying, "Embrace me as your daughter, then I will be strong!" At that moment, the true power of the E to E-flat transposition of the *adagio* becomes clear as the tonality reactively shifts from E-

flat minor to E major, via and enharmonic modulation, which respells C-flat as B (refer to Figure 3.29). Julian Budden writes about the power of this revision, but refutes the idea that it is part of a broader tonal plan:

The substitution of E-flat for E sheds a revealing light on Verdi's attitude to key-schemes. To Wagner a difference of key in relation to the surrounding material means a difference of emotion. Verdi and the Italians were so used to adapting their music for different performers that they did not allow their ideas of music-drama to evolve on those lines...But it is in the passage following [the 1854 version] that we really get the benefit of the lower key...Notice how the phrase "Qual figlia m'abbracciate" ["Embrace me as your daughter"] now stands out like a pearl.⁵³

In the original version, Verdi maintained E major following the *adagio*. Whereas he suggests tonicizations of C-flat major in the revision, there are suggestions of F-sharp minor and G-sharp minor before moving to a dominant seventh on B in the original, at which point the two scores match up (Figure 4.3).

The image shows a musical score for a duet in Act II/1. It features three staves: Violoncello (Vio.), German (Ger.), and Piano. The key signature is E major (three sharps). The tempo is marked 'Adagio'. The lyrics are in Italian and German. The Vio. staff has the lyrics '- rà. false.' and 'Se - gui - ram - mi, But he'll fol - low!'. The Ger. staff has the lyrics 'Par - ti - te. Then leave him.' and 'Al - Then'. The Piano accompaniment consists of arpeggiated chords in the right hand and a more active bass line in the left hand.

Figure 4.3: Act II/1, Duet, original version of the section following "Dite alla giovine" (figure cont'd)

⁵³ Budden, "The Two *Traviatas*," 58.

295a

Vio. Qual fi - glia, qual fi - glia m'ab-brac-cia - te... for-te co-sì sa-
 Em-brace me, em-brace me as your daugh-ter... then I can bear the

Ger. - lor...
 say...

[arco]

(s'abbracciano)
 (they embrace)

300a **Allegro** (♩ = 138)

Vio. - rò... Tra bre - ve ei vi fia re - so, ma af-
 pain... Your son will be re-stored soon, but

Allegro (♩ = 138)

One might argue that the original version rise by semitone (E to F-sharp to G-sharp) makes the reactive shift to E major less effective. In the revision, Verdi moves from E-flat minor to C-flat major (the submediant) to C-flat major first inversion before the reactive shift (refer to Figure 3.29). In addition to the changes in tonality and mode, there are interesting revisions in the vocal lines. In both versions, the characters use a neighbor motion from $\hat{5}—\hat{6}—\hat{5}$, but the original major mode version does not fully relay the mood of the scene (Figure 4.4).



Figure 4.4: Act II/1, Duet, original version of section following “Dite alla giovine,” which remained in E major

Verdi’s revision changed this passage to the minor mode, and its $\flat 6$ better represents the tragic event unfolding here.

The next major revision occurs in the encounter between Violetta and Alfredo in the Finale of Act II (refer back to Figure 3.40). The tonalities are the same in the original and revised versions, but one important foreground element is missing: the anapestic rhythmic figures associated with death (Figure 4.5).



Figure 4.5: Act II/2, Second Finale, original version of Alfredo and Violetta’s encounter, which had no anapestic “death” figures

The true dramatic reason for this scene is Violetta’s admission that she made a secret promise to leave Alfredo. This revelation causes Alfredo’s condemnation, which then leads to Violetta’s death. The rhythmic death figures add an aurally recognizable element to the scene that helps in recognizing the association of D-flat and death.

In Act III, another revision occurs in N. 10, the duet for Violetta and Alfredo, specifically, the *tempo di mezzo* after “Parigi, o cara.” This section begins as Violetta suggests that the two go to church to offer thanks for their reunion. The music continues from the *adagio* in A-flat major, but suddenly plunges into an A-flat minor chord as Violetta falters; the music then moves to an E-flat minor chord. The remainder of the section moves the music through several different keys before ending up at C major, the key of the *cabaletta*, “Grand Dio!...morir sì giovane.” This section reinforces the aspect of deluded thought by returning Violetta and Alfredo to reality: musically, a C tonal center (refer back to Figure 3.55 and 3.57). In the 1853 version, the music matches up only for a few measures at the beginning; the plunge to the parallel minor is the breaking point. Verdi moves from the A-flat minor chord directly to E major—via the A-flat/G-sharp enharmonic change—rather than E-flat major (Figure 4.6); from that point to the *cabaletta*, the music is simply a semitone higher than in the 1854 version. This semitone difference remains through the *cabaletta*, which is in D-flat major (Figure 4.7).

Figure 4.6: Act III, Duet, original version of section following “Parigi, o cara”

222a

Vio. vi - ve - re an - cor, che vi - ve - re an - cor vo -
 now want to live a - gain, I want to live be -

225a (Annina parte) (Annina leaves) (ad Alfredo) (to Alfredo)

Vio. - gl'i - o... Ma se tor - nan - do non m'hai sal - va - to,
 - side him... If your re - turn - ing can - not re - store me,

ff [Otoni] pp [Archi]

231a

Vio. a niu-no in ter - ra sal - var - mi è da - to.
 no earth - ly pow - er can cure my ill-ness.

ff [Tutti]

235a (SCENA VII: Violetta e Alfredo) (SCENE VII: Violetta and Alfredo) (sorgendo impetuosa) (rising impetuously)

Vio. Ah! Gran
 Ah! My

Figure 4.7: Act III, Duet, original version of the section immediately prior to “Gran Dio!...morir sì giovine”

In this instance, one would think that placing the *cabaletta* in D-flat major would be a more logical choice, as Violetta and Alfredo have come to the realization that there is no hope and that she will die. Nevertheless, D-flat major and its dramatic associations do not fit the text of this *cabaletta*, where Violetta’s first line is “My God! Why must I die so young?” These words certainly do not reflect Violetta’s peace in death. One might argue that Verdi’s choice of C major for the revision is related to the C minor opening of Act III. As we have seen, C major

here does not reflect Alfredo's anger, and the major mode form does not exactly recall the Frailty Theme, but perhaps the pitch C becomes a motivic detail regardless of mode.

One more speculation about this revision deals with the placement of the *cabaletta* within Act III as a whole. D-flat has been established as the pitch and tonality representing Violetta's death; Verdi may have decided that placing an extended D-flat piece midway through the final act would produce an ineffective anticipation of the final key of the opera. In addition, considering Violetta and Alfredo's reunion as a reinforcement of deluded hope, the realization is much less effective. When Verdi transposed the *cabaletta* down to C major, he demonstrated Violetta and Alfredo's return to reality: the C tonal center in which the act began. Moreover, the return of C reiterates the global intensification toward Violetta's death (i.e., recall the Frailty Theme's journey and arrival from B minor—C minor—D-flat minor).

Many problems arise when one begins to speculate about why Verdi revised sections of his operas. While the answers about some are obvious, many fall into a category that we will never be able to conclusively explain. From the revisions we have examined in *La Traviata*, it appears that most fall into the latter category.

CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In *La Traviata*, we find Verdi using specific devices to unify music and dramatic action. Foreground items such as reactive shifts in tonality and recurring themes serve to propel the immediate structure, and often, the sonorities or tonalities of these sections including associative and expressive tonality and large-scale structure, such as double cycles assume structural significance. We may now examine the opera as a whole and speculate about its large-scale structure. Figure 5.1 is a series of reductive graphs that show the musical structure in the large. The bottommost level is similar to our previous expositions, but the higher levels further reduce the design based on the items discussed in this thesis. Level 1 shows a large VI—V—I progression in D-flat minor; of course this has implications for the items exposed in this thesis, since much of the discussion has focused on the $\hat{b}6$ scale degree (inherent in the minor scale), especially as it is used in the “misterioso” motive, where it occurs as a melodic detail. As we move closer to the foreground, previously identified structures come into view. On Level 2, the global tonic, E-flat major, may be thought of as a dominant dividing A-flat major, with C minor in Act III acting as a mediant to A-flat. In addition to E-flat’s role as a dividing dominant, it too has its own divider, B-flat major (which is also divided by its dominant, F major) as shown in Levels 2 and 3. In Level 3, the fundamental structures uncovered in our previous expositions arise, notably, the expressive shift in Act I from A to A-flat, and the large-scale reactive shift in Act III from C to D-flat.

The consistency with which Verdi created this design—especially in regards to the $\hat{b}6$ scale degree—is the most enlightening aspect about this exposition. In addition, the most important associative tonalities, deluded hope (A-flat major) and tragic death (D-flat minor), are

constantly reinforced on the foreground—in set pieces—as well as structurally, as they are each the goal of several double cycles.

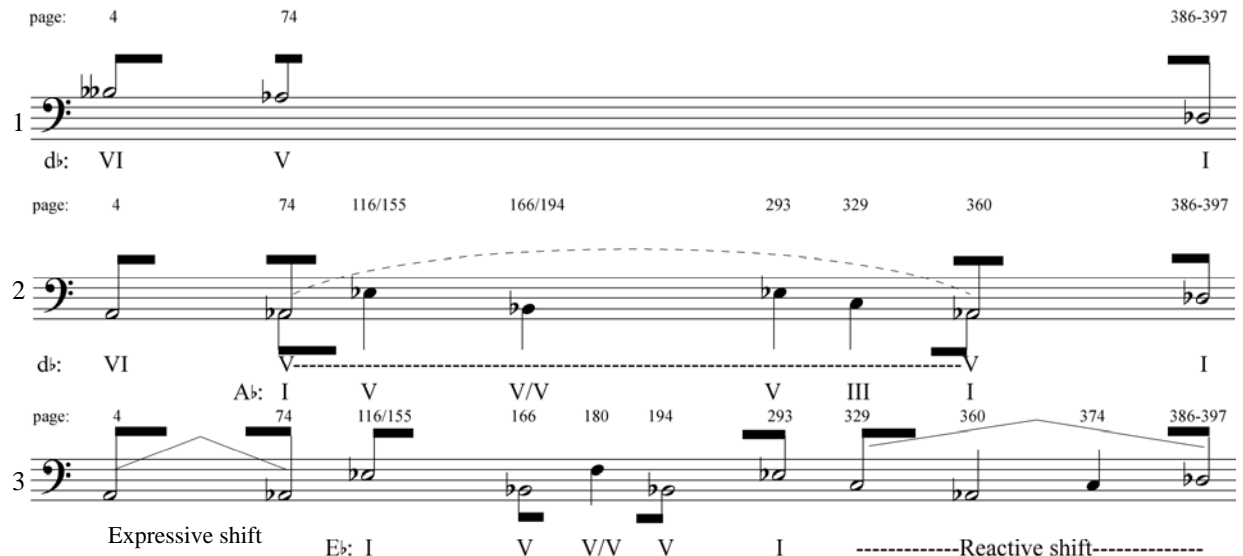


Figure 5.1: *La Traviata*, speculations about a possible fundamental structure

These two referential keys bespeak the entire dramatic progression in the opera: Violetta ignores her societal status and imminent death by choosing to love Alfredo; her death is so tragic because she believes that there can be a happy ending. From the time we realize she has accepted Alfredo's love to their reunion in Act III, every action is in an effort to save their relationship and somehow avoid death, but it is all in vain. Verdi reinforces this aspect by returning to F minor (Dissolution of Violetta and Alfredo's Relationship) and C major (Alfredo's Anger) in Act II as they serve to instigate further the dire situation. Much like Alfredo and Violetta's love themes, these keys are not merely representational devices; rather, they aid in creating dramatic tension. Verdi inserts many reactive shifts when these keys enter. For example, we recall Violetta's recognition and redirection of F minor to F major in her Act II duet with Germont (refer back to Figure 3.27).

In addition to the dramatic tonal devices he used, Verdi also created a large-scale design in a non-associative key: E-flat major in Act II. As we know, drama develops very quickly in Act II, and many foreground shifts in tonality occur. Verdi chose a central tonic and returned to it throughout the act in the most tonally stable set pieces (Alfredo's *adagio* "Dei miei bollenti spiriti," Violetta and Germont's *adagio* "Dite alla giovine" and *cabaletta* "Morrò!...la mia memoria," Germont's *cabaletta* "No, non udrai rimproveri," and the ending *concertato* in the finale of Act II). Over this structure, Verdi inserted musico-dramatic devices in order to complete the design (refer back to Figure 3.22), each of which chronicles the development of drama.

Although expositions such as these are enlightening and demonstrate Verdi's tonal design at the deepest level, those elements occurring closer to the surface are the most important as they comprise the true, distinct characteristics of *La Traviata*. It is natural that elements Verdi uses on the surface—the building blocks of the structure—find their way into more large-scale elements in the opera; for example, expressive shifts in tonality occur at many points on the foreground, and a close examination of Verdi's recurring musical themes shows the same transformation in the background as well. Verdi uses associative tonalities in a similar way, as demonstrated in the reaction caused by the first entrance of F major, where it asserts its structural significance as the music came to a halt before modulating (refer back to Figures 3.9 and 3.12). Even F major as a sonority occurs as Violetta and Alfredo mention their love (Figures 3.15 and 3.24). Later, we realize that the love between Violetta and Alfredo is a surface element plagued by deluded thought; death is the fundamental driving force of the drama and is inescapable. Verdi first foreshadows this in Act I, as Alfredo fears something mysterious (the "misterioso" motive), in Act II, this sentiment returns (Violetta's reprise of the "misterioso" motive), and,

with Violetta's death in Act III, Alfredo's fear becomes a realization with the final cadence in D-flat minor.

Verdi used tonality to help convey these dramatic actions; musical keys were important to him. Among other aspects such as text, orchestration, and melody, tonality, in fact, does hold an important place in *La Traviata*, despite what some scholars say; even Verdi's revisions show concern for the tonal design. In uncovering these types of structural elements, we may better understand Verdi's drama and apply what we have learned to how we hear the opera.

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To appear in: a Master's thesis by David B. Easley, for a degree at Louisiana State University.

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VITA

David B. Easley was born on December 14, 1979, in Saint Louis, Missouri. He began playing guitar and drum kit while in high school and remained self-taught for several years. In August of 1998, he began studies at Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville, majoring in jazz guitar performance as well as music business. By 2000, music theory and composition overtook his interests and he switched programs, graduating in August 2003 with a Bachelor of Music in music theory and composition as well as a Bachelor of Arts in music merchandising after interning at Opera Theatre of Saint Louis that same summer. He then began graduate studies at Louisiana State University where he continued studying music theory, completing his master's thesis, "Tonality and Drama in Verdi's *La Traviata*" in August 2005. In addition to academic studies, Dave performed on drums throughout his undergraduate career, playing over 200 concerts and recording four compact discs between 1998 and 2003 as well as free-lancing occasionally while in graduate school.