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Making Malice Musical: Verdi's Compositional Journey Through the Eyes of Six Villains

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By

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Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

Stephen F. Austin State University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of Master of Music in Theory

STEPHEN F. AUSTIN STATE UNIVERSITY
May, 2023

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Verdi's Compositional Journey Through the Eyes of Six Villains

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ABSTRACT

Giuseppe Verdi is a pillar of the operatic world and had a profound impact on the evolution of the art form. From a rudimentary beginning, he developed over time from a popular creator of operas in the *solita forma* style of 19th century Italy into a master craftsman of combining music, text, and theatrical drama. Verdi utilized the popular compositional formal convention of *solita forma* to begin his career. Over time he evolved beyond its boundaries and shifted his focus to the holistic theatrical presentation of the drama. Much has been written about this evolution through analysis of Verdi's most famous operas and their arias. This paper instead focuses on the arias of six villains, and through those arias, examines Verdi's evolution from *solita forma* to the through–composed, free style he adopted near the end of his life. His desire to provide theatrically suitable accompaniment for the malicious intentions and actions of his villains, and his need to tell a complete theatrical musical story, both influenced his choices in compositional form and led him eventually to leave *solita forma* behind entirely.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of my professors, without whose sage expertise I would not have received such a beneficial education in the wonderful subject of music theory. I am especially grateful to my advisor Dr. Samantha Inman for her ever–available and inestimably valuable assistance, her patience with my general verbosity, and for her expert guidance throughout the process of creating this thesis.

I am profoundly grateful for my wife Suzanne, who has had to live with me while I undertook this degree, and who I look forward to actually getting to spend time with when it is completed.

I am grateful for the time I had with those who left this world far too early, especially my mother, who regrettably passed before she could see me graduate. She was an educator and a graduate of Stephen F. Austin State University, and I know she would have been proud that I have accomplished this goal and share my alma mater with her, my late father William, and my brother Kevin.

I would finally like to thank all composers, past and present, who share so much of themselves with the rest of the world. I hope that someday I may create a work that brings others the joy that your work has brought to me.

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INTRODUCTION

Giuseppe Verdi is well known throughout the operatic world for such memorable contributions as the Brindisi (Drinking Song) from *La traviata*, the anvil chorus from *Il trovatore*, and the famous "Va, pensierio" chorus from *Nabucco*. His music plays an important role in the history of the genre and its development. He began his career working within the constructive boundaries of a popular and established form called *solita forma*, a standardized template that the most popular operas of the mid–19th century Italian *ottocento* period would follow in order to be received well by audiences and critics alike. This boundary may have provided expediency in composition, but it emphasized vocal delivery over theatrical drama. The stylistic norms of the time also relegated the orchestra to the simple role of accompanist.

Over time, Verdi pushed the formal boundaries of the *solita forma*, and ultimately abandoned them by the end of his career. He also promoted the orchestra from simple accompanist to a more atmospheric character in the musical storytelling. A look at this progression, from the boundaries of *solita forma* to the nearly through–composed style he utilized in his later operas, would yield sufficient interesting information as to occupy more than one large book volume. Many excellent articles on the *solita forma* can be

found, such as those by Scott Balthazaar in *The Cambridge Companion to Verdi*,[1] Harold

S. Powers in *Acta Musicologia*,[2] Philip Gossett's article "Verdi, Ghislanzoni, and *Aida*:

The Uses of Convention" in *Critical Inquiry*,[3] and Paolo Gallarati's "Oltre la solita

forma" in a 2009 issue of *Il saggiatore musicale*.[4] Linda B. Fairtitle also provides a

helpful starting point of Verdian scholarship in general with her article in the Music

Library Association's publication *Notes* entitled "Verdi at 200: Recent Scholarship on the

Composer and His Works" which halfway through contains useful information under the

subheading "Analysis and the Uses of Convention."[5]

 This thesis illustrates Verdi's compositional progress through arias of six of his

villains, limiting the project to an attractive but manageable scope. There seems to be a

general fascination with the music that accompanies villains. It could reasonably be

argued that the most remembered music from *Star Wars* is not the music in the cantina,

or Princess Leia's Theme, but the Imperial March motif associated with Darth Vader. If

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[1] Scott Balthazar, "The Forms of Set Pieces," *Cambridge Companions to Music*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 47–68.

[2] Harold S. Powers, "La Solita Forma" and "The Uses of Convention", *Acta Musicologia*, 59, Fasc. 1 (Jan–Apr 1987), 65–90.

[3] Philip Gossett, "Verdi, Ghislanzoni, and Aida: The Uses of Convention", in *Critical Inquiry* 1, no. 2 (1974), 291–334.

[4] Paolo Gallarati, "Oltre la solita forma," *Il saggiatore musicale* 16, no. 2 (2009): 203–44.

[5] Linda B. Fairtile, "Verdi at 200: Recent Scholarship on the Composer and His Works," *Notes* 70, no. 1 (2013): 9–36, http://www.jstor.org/stable/43672695.

one were pressed to name a single musical idea from the soundtrack to *Jaws* other than

the ominously accelerating half–steps of the shark's motif, most people would come up

short. These movie villains are, by no means, an invention of film. Nearly every story

ever told has an antagonist to counter the protagonist. Long before there were movie

villains, theater and opera enjoyed some of the most iconic villains ever to set foot on a

stage. Composers have long sought to provide worthy music to match the malice of

antagonists spanning hundreds of years. Some of the most iconic music throughout the

history of opera has been written to accompany evil characters and their nefarious

intentions. There are many famous operatic villains, each with their own iconic music.

One example is the Queen of the Night in Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte*.

She sings an almost violent "Der Hölle Rache" in Act II, which is arguably the most

famous aria of the opera.

One of the all–time most iconic malicious motifs can be found accompanying

Baron Scarpia in Act I of Giacomo Puccini's *Tosca*. Scarpia's entrance brings a joyous

and playful Bb major *Te Deum* chorus to a screeching halt and introduces his malevolent

character in a grand, sweeping orchestral accompaniment playing just three chords: Bb,

Ab, and E, as shown in Figure 1. The chords are all simple, major chords. They are so

iconic that they have become known simply as the "Scarpia chords."[6] Puccini's brilliant

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[6] Deborah Burton, "Il Segreto Della Form da Giacomo Puccini" (paper presented at the Society for Music Theory 17th Annual Meeting, Tallahasse, FL, November 3, 1994).

use of dramatic context, orchestral color change, and the downward direction of the progression effectively convey a feeling that something (or someone) wicked this way comes.

Figure 1 – *Tosca* Act I, Scarpia's dramatic entrance

Major chords are not normally associated with such a feeling. Puccini accomplishes this by shifting from high voices and instrumentation to the lowest, darkest timbres of the orchestra, then takes the progression in an unexpected direction. A lively and joyful Bb in the higher voices (with chorus children reinforcing Bb on top) is re–established with a dark version of the same chord in the depths of the orchestra. An Ab major chord sounds down a whole step, then as the listener reasonably assumes the Ab chord will be a dominant V to a Db tonic I resolution, Puccini repurposes Ab enharmonically as the G# third in an E major chord. E major is not closely related to Ab

in the circle of fifths. Far from it, in fact. It is distant, as seen in the circle of fifths

diagram in Figure 2. Puccini suddenly veers the progression off its anticipated course.

Baron Scarpia harshly admonishes the entire gathering, especially the children, that The

Church is no place for joyful singing. In a simple set of three chords, a very different

orchestral color, and one simple phrase, the audience immediately knows everything they

need to know about Baron Scarpia.
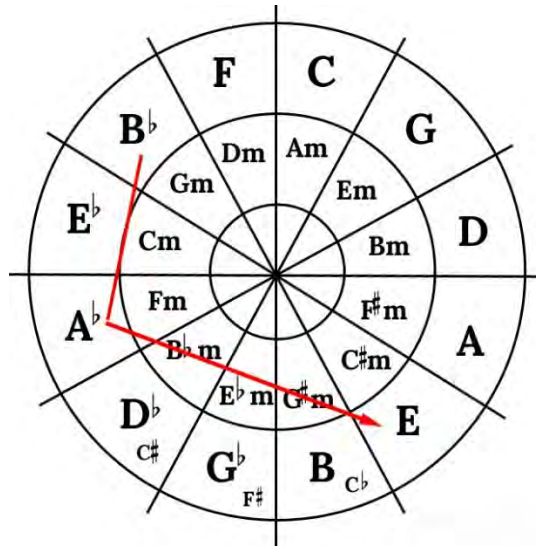
Figure 2 – Puccini's unexpected chord progression to a distant key

Verdi's contribution to the list of operatic villains includes some wonderful arias,

such as Giorgio Germont's "Di Provenza il mar" from *La traviata* and King Philip's

"Ella giammai m'amo" from *Don Carlo. Rigoletto* has many scenes depicting sundry

villainous behavior, but it is debatable who the actual villain is in that story. The

professional assassin, Sparafucile, is arguably one of the most ethical characters in the

entire opera. It would be overwhelming to cover all of the high–quality villainous characters across Verdi's operas. Instead, this thesis will look at six selected arias, shown in Figure 3. They are picked for their use, or non–use, of *solita forma* and for interesting text–painting opportunities Verdi chose to seize.

Opera	Selected Aria and Character
Nabucco (1842)	"Salgo già del trono aurato" (Abagaille)
Macbeth (1847)	"Vieni! t'affretta!" (Lady Macbeth)
Il trovatore (1853)	"Il balen del suo sorriso" (Count Di Luna)
Un ballo in maschera (1859)	"Eri tu" (Renato)
Otello (1887)	"Credo in un Dio crudel" (Iago)
Falstaff (1893)	"È sogno o realtà?" (Ford)

Figure 3 – The six selected arias

These six operas cover a span of over fifty years throughout the prolific opera composer's lifetime. The study investigates methods used to convey malice, such as choices in orchestral accompaniment and melodic line. It also considers how Verdi sought new ways to express his musical and theatrical ideas in hope of striking a better balance between music and the drama it accompanied. The study will also look at how this desire for that balance between music and drama eventually pushed Verdi to seek ways to alter, and sometimes even use specifically as a setup for unexpected formal

changes, the *solita forma*. Verdi's compositional journey took him from a popular form

created by others to a completely new style he entrenched into both the operatic art and

its industry, as well as the public's perception of what defined Italian opera during that

period.[7] Giuseppe Verdi initially wrote in the *solita forma* style that the public wanted

and expected, but felt it would be preferable to have a fully immersive musical and

theatrical experience instead.[8] This spurred important changes in form that would occur

in his operas over many years.

       Verdi is certainly most widely associated with the genre of opera. In the spirit of

also evolving beyond standard forms, each compositional period of Verdi's life shall be

described not in chapters, but in acts. A Prelude will set the stage for the beginning of his

life, and will be followed by Act I, "Humble Beginnings," Act II, "Breaking Boundaries,"

Act III, "Formal Freedom," and finally, a brief Epilogue will provide a conclusion.

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[7] Like Verdi, some of the most important cultural revolutionaries have approached their world the way Steve Jobs described in a May 12, 1998 interview with BusinessWeek. He said, "A lot of times, people don't know what they want until you show it to them." "Steve Jobs: 'There's Sanity Returning,' *BusinessWeek*, May 25, 1998, https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/1998–05–25/steve–jobs–theres–sanity–returning.

[8] Gerald A. Mendelsohn, "Verdi the Man and Verdi the Dramatist," *19th–Century Music* 2, no. 2 (1978): 115, https://doi.org/10.2307/746308.

PRELUDE

Verdi began his compositional career around the middle of nineteenth–century Italy, the *ottocento*. This was not the unified Italy of today, but rather a variety of kingdoms and city states that had not yet been unified by the *risorgimento* soon to come.[9] Italian opera was dominated by the *solita forme* ("customary forms") of set pieces, so termed by Abramo Basevi in 1859,[10] which defined the organization of musical introductions (scenes or simple instrumental introductions), arias, duets, and finales.[11] This form was used by such prominent composers of the day as Gioachino Rossini, Vincenzo Bellini, and Gaetano Donizetti. While commonly attributed to these three composers, it is actually the Bavarian Simon Mayr who first began to deviate from the practice of *opera seria* with its separate and isolated aria that normally ended a scene with the exit of the character who sang it. Mayr frequently divided his arias into three

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[9] *Encyclopedia Brittanica*, s.v. "Risorgimento," accessed January 28, 2023, https://www.britannica.com/event/Risorgimento. The *risorgimento* was a populist movement in favor of the unification of Italy, ultimately resulting in the confederation of the several Italian states into the Kingdom of Italy in 1861. The annexation of Venetia in 1866 and papal Rome in 1870 finally unified Italy into the nation it is known as today.

[10] Abramo Basevi, *Studio sulle opera di Giuseppe Verdi* (Firenze: Tipographia Tofani, 1859) 191.

[11] Donald J. Grout, *A Short History of Opera,* 4th ed. (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2003), 385.

sections: a slow *concertato*, a transition, and a *stretta* (tutti).[12] This form was popular

with audiences of the *ottocento* period, and it also provided expediency for the composers

who were under pressure to create new works of quality with a somewhat unreasonable

frequency. It would eventually become so standardized that many aria set pieces of the

period followed the standardized form shown in Figure 4, borrowed from Scott

Balthazar's article on *solita forma*.[13]

Section:	Scena	Aria		
		Movement 1 *Primo tempo/cantabile*	Movement 2 *Tempo di mezzo*	Movement 3 *Cabaletta*
Style and internal form:	Recitative; may be preceded by a chorus or orchestral introduction	Melody following the lyric prototype	Dialogue; may include chorus and/or secondary characters	Theme Transition Theme' Coda
Key:	Modulation V/?	I	Modulation V/?	New key
Action:	Interaction	Reflection/reaction	Interaction	Reflection/reaction
Poetry:	Recitative verse	Lyric verse		

Figure 4 – Solita forma mid–nineteenth–century Italian aria form

This "double aria" form usually contains an instrumental introduction or *scena* of

some sort, and is then followed by three aria movements. These include a slow movement

(the *cantabile* or *adagio*), the *tempo di mezzo*, and the *cabaletta*. The *scena* furthers the

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[12] Donald J. Grout, *A Short History of Opera,* 4th ed. (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2003), 385.

[13] Scott L. Balthazar, "The Forms of Set Pieces," *The Cambridge Companion to Verdi* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 49–50.

plot, then the *cantabile* stops to reflect upon it. The *tempo di mezzo* provides news and/or interaction to move the plot forward again, and then the *cabaletta* halts the action once more for further reflection or expression of an intent to act upon that information.

The *scena* preceding the aria sometimes includes an instrumental introduction to thematic material in addition to the actions or interactions that move the plot forward. As Morán observes in his doctoral thesis on the *solita forma*, "The orchestra will usually play an introduction to either the *cantabile* or the *cabaletta* and in some instances for both, making use of the first few measures of the vocal line."[14] Sometimes the *scena* is simply *secco* and/or *accompagnato* recitative that sets up the impending *cantabile* through backstory, specific action, or revelation of some piece of important information that the character was about to reflect upon. This action–reflection dynamic serves the dual purpose of telling a story and taking time to reflect upon the feelings of the story's participants. The reflective *cantabile* can also provide a character's backstory for motivational purposes or provide starting points for character development. In practical terms it also provides an opportunity to reduce or eliminate stage motion, allowing for a vocalist to show off some beautiful and/or virtuosic singing.

The *tempo di mezzo* interrupts this reflection in order to bring the character some important piece of information that will inspire them to burst into excited song in the

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[14] Ramón Octavio Moreno Morán, "Verdi's Fulcrum: The Aria Form before and After Don Carlos" (DMA diss., University of Arizona, 2021), 14.

third and final *cabaletta* section. The *tempo di mezzo* typically takes the form of dialogue with another character and often (if sometimes gratuitously) includes the chorus, which frequently remains on stage to occasionally interject reactions during the next movement.

The purpose of the *cabaletta* movement is to showcase the vocalist's technical abilities as they present grand and upbeat musical and dramatic material that responds to information that the character received. In some cases it also describes the plans that this new information may have inspired that character to enact in the coming scenes.

The harmonic structure was also loosely standardized. The *scena* usually ends in a cadential dominant that resolves to the tonic of the key of the *cavatina*. The *cavatina* might contain a modulation of some sort, but not usually. This could be reversed during the *tempo di mezzo* in order to either return to the tonic, or to set up through modulation a completely new key for the *cabaletta*. In the third movement *cabaletta,* the aria often introduced a new key to reflect the new thought of the character's response to the news received in the *tempo di mezzo*.

One of the benefits of this customary form was expediency of composition. The system of opera houses and the contracts those houses created forced composers to work expeditiously in order to fulfill the contractual demands of the impresarios of those houses. Budden describes this "Rossini Code" and elaborates: "Like the *da capo* aria of the previous century… they were partly designed to meet the needs of rapid production,

as well as the tastes of an essentially conservative audience."[15] Composers of the time benefitted from starting with such an established framework in which to work, and were able to thus meet both the rigorous demands of their impresarios and a public that wanted a familiar operatic style.

Verdi's introduction into this world of expected formal structures began later than most. Following his rejection due to age by the Milan Conservatoire (which ironically would be renamed after him many years later), he studied with composer and La Scala concertmaster Vincenzo Lavigna. Verdi felt the lessons were strictly academic and outdated, saying "In the three years I spent with him I did nothing but study canons and fugues. Nobody taught me orchestration or dramatic technique."[16] Verdi frequently presented himself as having come from a background with very little training or proper guidance.

Verdi experienced a couple of professional false starts before achieving commercial success. His first opera, *Rocester,* was never performed and would later be recycled into *Oberto. Oberto* did enjoy at least a fair amount of success at the Teatro alla Scala in Milan. This provided the young composer with a commission to create two more

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[15] Julian Budden, *The Operas of Verdi, Vol. I* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1978), 12.

[16] Roger Parker, "Verdi, Giuseppe (Fortunino Francesco)," *Grove Music Online*, ed. Deane Roote, accessed January 28, 2023, https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.29191.

operas.[17] The first, the comedy *Un giorno di regno*, was an opening night disaster in September of 1840. The untimely deaths of Verdi's wife and both of their children during its composition likely had an impact on the work, and after *Un giorno* failed, Verdi renounced composition entirely for a brief time.[18] He eventually returned to writing, achieving greater success after adopting a more populist approach with his opera *Nabucco* in 1842.[19] He incorporated the customary *solita forma* and infused his operas with patriotic choruses and arias.

Rossini's established use of the orchestra thus far had served two main functions: to accompany the singer without obscuring the vocal line, and to "stimulate applause by making a lot of noise."[20] Verdi bucked this trend, providing reinforcement of the vocal line through doubling with various instrument families depending on the needs of the drama. This is especially true in his later operas. For example, Ford's jealousy theme shown in Figure 5 is reinforced through orchestral doubling to emphasize the power of that emotion.

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[17] David Kimbell, *The New Penguin Opera Guide,* ed. Amanda Holden (United Kingdom: Penguin Reference Books, 2001), 977.

[18] Julian Budden, *The Operas of Verdi, Vol. I* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1978), 71.

[19] Budden, 91.

[20] Budden, 28.

Figure 5 – *Falstaff* Act II Scene 1 jealousy theme and doubling of the vocal line

Verdi also used the various instruments in ways that enhanced the accompaniment of the drama, not just the voice. For example, in "Eri tu" from Act III Scene I of *Un ballo in maschera,* orchestration and articulation help establish a feeling of danger and anticipation underneath Renato's simple, linear melody. The accompaniment style shown in the blue solid box in Figure 6 contains rapidly repeated staccato and movement– inspiring pizzicato in the strings and bassoon to create urgency and energy underneath the vocal line. This starkly contrasts the slow and malevolent "It was you who sullied that soul" thought delivered by Renato as he begins the *cavatina,* outlined by the dashed red box in Figure 6. This aria and the specific accompanimental technique used here will be explored more fully in Act II of this thesis.

Figure 6 – *Un ballo in maschera* Act III Scene 1 orchestra as a character

This purposeful use of the orchestra as an active contributor to the drama, rather than a simple accompaniment, separates Verdi from most of the composers of this period. Verdi's treatment of the orchestra as an active participant in the drama to enhance dramatic tension and effect played an important role in his evolution beyond the formal boundaries of the *solita forma*.

ACT I – HUMBLE BEGINNINGS

The aforementioned struggles Verdi had with opera and personal life so thoroughly confounded him that he swore never to write another note. The story of how the impresario Bartolomeo Merelli convinced Verdi to write *Nabucco* is remarkable. Merelli had essentially forced the libretto for *Nabucco* into Verdi's hands in an attempt to convince him to write the second opera in his contract. Verdi was obstinate, and Merelli told Verdi that it would not hurt him to just read it and give it back. Verdi disdainfully shoved the libretto into his pocket and left. In Verdi's own words, according to biographer Arthur Pougin,

> "I went into my room, and with an impatient gesture I threw the manuscript on the table, and remained standing before it. It had opened by itself; without knowing how, my eyes fixed on the page which was before me, and on this verse: "Va, pensiero, sull'ali dorate," (Go, my thought, on gilded wings) I ran through the following verses, and was much impressed by them, the more so that they formed almost a paraphrase of the Bible, the reading of which was always dear to me."

Verdi would go on to say that he closed the book, resolute not to write music, but ultimately could not get to sleep, *Nabucco* running through his head. He returned it to Merelli, who asked what he thought. Verdi said he liked it, to which Merelli responded "Well, set it to music." Verdi responded "Not at all! I will have nothing to do with it." Merelli rammed the libretto back into Verdi's coat, unceremoniously ushered him out of

the office, and shut the door in his face.[21] Eventually, Verdi would be consumed by the story and, thankfully, would rescind his vow never to write another note.

Nabucco is an excellent example of how *solita forma* is used in the composer's early works. It was what everyone was expecting, and what all the best composers of the period were doing. The libretto by Temistocle Solera had a structure that was also consistent with this style. Budden describes it as "a series of various tableaux, rather than a drama relentlessly moving towards its dénouement."[22] All of the pieces fell into perfect place for Verdi to follow this conventional style. After the frustration of his previous and terrible commercial failure, the shrewd Verdi probably would not yet have felt comfortable taking the risk of writing in a different style.

Once *Nabucco* had been hailed as a success, [23] Verdi would spend the next few years writing many operas under rigorous contracts to produce more and more. In the years immediately following *Nabucco*, Verdi wrote six operas: *I Lombardi alla prima crociata* (1843), *Ernani* (1844), *I due Foscari* (1844), *Giovanna d'Arco* (1845), *Alzira*

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[21] Arthur Pougin, *Verdi: An Anecdotic History of His Life and Works*, (New York, NY: Scribner & Welford, 1887), 61–62.

[22] Julian Budden, *The Operas of Verdi, Vol. I* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1978), 96.

[23] *Nabucco*'s most famous contribution to Italian political history may be the Chorus of the Hebrew Slaves, "Va, pensiero." It became so tied to its national identity that there were discussions in the late 19th century on making it the national anthem of the newly unified Italy. Ivan Huber, "'Va, Pensiero' Ensnared in Politics," The Opera League of Los Angeles, accessed February 26, 2023, https://www.operaleague.org/Home/News–Articles/va–pensiero–ensnared–in–politics–1.

(1845), and *Attila* (1846). Verdi referred to these as his "galley years," for he produced an average of one opera every nine months.[24] He had several contracts to write new operas, but a prolonged bout of illness interfered with his fulfillment of those contractual obligations to opera houses abroad. The contracts were either postponed or canceled entirely. Keeping with a particular, standardized form would be useful for those contractually prolific years that would eventually culminate in the tremendously successful *Macbeth*. It would only be with *Macbeth* that Verdi would begin to see the greater possibilities of using the *solita forma* in ways that an audience might not be expecting. That would come later.

As *Nabucco* started Verdi's compositional life anew, it is appropriate that this study should begin there. In this *Atto Primo* the two arias included will be from the operas *Nabucco* and *Macbeth*. Abagaille's "Salgo già del trono aurato" is an excellent example of *solita forma* in its most conventional state, while Lady Macbeth's "Vieni! T'affretta!" shows the beginning stages of deviation from that standard form.

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[24] Richard Wigmore, "Macbeth (1847)," *Gramophone* (February 2013): 27, https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A328107619/PPFA.

Scene 1: *Nabucco* (1842)

The formal structure of Verdi's *Nabucco* is consistent with *solita forma* and is suitable as a point of departure for this study. From its structure, formal comparisons with other arias may be made to track how his compositional process changed.

Section	Measures	Action	Key	Text and Notes
Introduction	1-30	Orchestral introduction	C	Introduction of multiple themes
Scena Part I	31-67	Abigaille learns of her lineage and laments both her station and being passed over for the throne by her father	C	Recitativo secco: "Ben io t'invenni, o fatal scritto!"
Scena Part II	68-81	She vows to let pretty much everyone and everything fall around her	Transition	Change to recitativo accompagnato: "Di Nabucco figlia, quall'Assiro mi crede"
Transition	82-86	n/a	G	Segue ending on D, the dominant of the coming *cantabile* section
Cantabile	87-119	Abigaille reflects on when she used to be kind, compassionate, and empathetic toward the pain of others	G	"Anch'io dischiuso un giorno"
Tempo di mezzo	120-177	High Priest/Soothsayers inform Abigaille of the plot to spread false news about Nabucco's death on the battlefield, paving the way for Abigaille to take the throne.	e-a-b-D-G	"Orrenda scena s'è nostrata agl'occhi miei!" Relative minor e used for H.P.'s news, which concludes in A (the dominant of D Major). Chorus entrance "Noi già sparso abbiamo fama come il re" resolves to D, ultimately ending on a G^7
Cabaletta	178-267	Abigaille vows strength in purpose and that she will take the throne	C	"Salgo già del trono aurato lo sgabello insanguinato" Cabaletta is actually in $ABAB^1$ form, though often cut in performances to AB^1

Figure 7 – *Nabucco* Act II Scene 1 formal structure

As shown in Figure 7, the aria contains a *scena* followed by a reflective *cantabile* section in a dominant key. A *tempo di mezzo* interrupts the reflection with action and news that inspires the character into the *cabaletta*. The aria is a textbook example of the standard form where theater took a back seat to a vocal showpiece. Yet, even in this standard form, there is a glimpse of the text painting that Verdi often engaged in to provide theatrical and musical contrasts for specific words or ideas.

Act II of *Nabucco* begins with a *scena*, sung by Abigaille, that sets the stage for the aria. It tells how she discovered a secret document hidden by King Nebuchadnezzar

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(Nabucco) that reveals her true past: she is the daughter of slaves, not the true daughter of the king. She reflects bitterly that Nabucco has refused to grant her a role in the war with the Israelites, instead sending her back to the palace to merely watch "the amorous doings of others."

The *scena* begins as a *recitativo secco*, with only a single chord played to support a modulation from C to D, shown in the blue dashed box. This serves as a dominant to the destination G chord underscoring "shame" at the end of her second sentence, outlined by the red solid box in Figure 8.

Figure 8 – *Nabucco* Act II Scene 1 opening recitative

The recitative becomes more rhythmic and involved, starting with the strings still the only members of the orchestra accompanying the vocalist, but now at a faster tempo. It is somewhat segmented, with tremolo sometimes replacing the *staccato* chords. The tension builds up to her outcry of "*Oh iniqui tutti* (Oh, wicked all)," which includes the recitative's second highest note and the return of the full orchestra. This outburst provides a climactic point to the recitative section, with Abigaille crying out for everything and everyone to fall to ruin, including herself. The recitative becomes much more *stromentato* here, especially where her desire for everyone's ruin is exclaimed in ascending sequential patterns much like the act's introductory music. Her anger and desire for revenge is made more evident as she sings "On everyone you shall see my fury fall, yes, let Fenena, my pretended father, and the realm all fall!" The recitative begins to take on more character and text painting here. The previous occasional chords are accented by quickly descending lines in the orchestra, one after the other, as she mentions each object of her ire.

In Figure 9, notice the orchestra's rising sequential figures outlined in red boxes as they ominously react to Abigaille's increasing fury, punctuating each name. This use of ascending sequences will be a technique Verdi uses throughout his career to create rising tension and a sense of forward movement.

Figure 9 – *Nabucco* Act II Scene 1 ascending sequential punctuations

This climactic section ends with a final "*O fatal sdegno!* (O fatal anger!)" rising up the C scale to the highest note in the recitative followed by a sudden two–octave drop. This drop provides an opportunity for the vocalist and director to metaphorically – and possibly even physically – bring Abigaille to her knees with the energy of her anger fully spent. As seen in Figure 10, the accompaniment provides an exclamation mark on the end

of her sentence, with unison figures leading up to a *subito piano* flute playing at *adagio*.
The flute's transition is particularly effective in changing the mood from anger into
reflection both musically for the listener and dramatically for the purposes of staging the
scene as it moves into the *cantabile* section.

Figure 10 – *Nabucco* Act II Scene 1 transition from recitative to cantabile section

A duo of flute and clarinet provide a gentler *andante* instrumental texture that
introduces the *cantabile*. It is sad and poignant, filled with nostalgia for when Abigaille's
heart was open to happiness and when she empathized with others. Finally, she asks if
anyone can return that lost enchantment to her for only one day. She begins the aria by
echoing the melodic line established by the orchestra as she sings the opening line,

"*Anch'io dischiuso un giorno ebbi alla gioia il core* (I too once opened my heart to joy)."
As seen in Figure 11, the gentle pizzicato of the cellos and basses provide a pulse for
arpeggiating second violins, as violas and woodwinds take on a tertiary role filling out
the chords. The first violins play occasional ascending figures, outlined by the solid box.
If this had been a descending line, it might have been reasonably interpreted as a sigh. It
is equally reasonable that a similar phrase in an upward direction could be interpretable
as something positive, such as Abigaille recalling the memory of joy in her heart. This
subtle melodic idea is presented three times, starting at the dominant D, passing through
the submediant, and working its way up to the tonic G.

Figure 11 – *Nabucco* Act II Scene 1 multi–layer cantabile section accompaniment

Abigaille delivers the final text of the *cantible* section when she asks, "*Chi del perduto incanto mi torna un giorno sol?* (Who can return to me for one day that lost enchantment?)." At this point, Verdi could launch directly into the *tempo di mezzo* and move the story along. Instead, he explores a *leggiero* accompaniment in the winds and strings as Abigaille ruminates upon her empathy for others and her desire for someone to return that lost enchantment. This repetition is consistent with the *ottocento* bel canto notion that beautiful vocal performance should dominate as the only truly important component of an opera. It stops the drama in its tracks and allows the listener time to enjoy the beautiful music and to empathize with Abigaille, ironic as that may be given what she is saying. The *cantabile* section ends with a beautiful cadenza, and a simple coda of accompaniment to bring Abigaille's journey of reflection to an end. Throughout the *cantabile* the listener is meant to sympathize with Abigaille as a tragic character who has seen many hardships. It is beautiful and delicate, but just as one begins to feel sympathy for her pain, she hears the advance of the High Priest and soothsayers.

The *tempo di mezzo* is a standard part of the *solita forma* in which an outside party (or often an entire chorus) enters and interrupts the scene to deliver some piece of important news which drives the story forward. In this case, the High Priest of Baal brings news of the false rumor they have spread that Nabucco has died on the battlefield. He also informs her that the king's actual daughter, the younger Fenena, has released the Israelite captives. The *tempo di mezzo* contrasts the *cantabile* drastically, which effectively changes the mood in an instant. The *leggiero* feeling of the *cantabile* is

replaced with driving, syncopated rhythms played by the entire orchestra. Accents and octave doubling of the High Priest's lines echoed in the lower strings provide swift, powerful movement as the news is delivered: "*Il potere a te s'aspetta* (Power awaits you)." For this, Verdi eliminates any possible distraction or overbearing sound in the accompaniment by giving the High Priest absolute silence. The orchestra accentuates the importance of this with an exclamation point. The soothsayers then enter in D major with a quick *piu mosso* explanation that the people are calling for Abigaille to take the throne and save the Assyrians. Verdi concludes the chorus with the standard cadential progression IV–V–I.

Each phrase then forming the transition from the *tempo di mezzo* to the *cabaletta* is sung *a cappella* and punctuated by proud, fanfare *tutti* figures ending up in a G^7 chord repeated several times. This signals that the *cabaletta* is about to begin back in the C major which started the scene. Abigaille is excited to exact revenge for her ill treatment and being overlooked for the throne. This is embodied in the *cabaletta,* "*Salgo già del trono aurato lo sgabello insanguinato* (Already I ascend the bloodstained seat of the golden throne)."

This *cabaletta* is consistent with the typical style of *cabaletti* during this period in musical history, which had come to be expected by audiences. The excited tempo and galloping accompaniment convey less of a sense of malice and more a cry of victory for Abigaille in her plans to seek revenge. She has just been offered the throne that had previously been denied to her.

Figure 12 – *Nabucco* Act II Scene 1 triumphant C major start of the cabaletta

Figure 12 illustrates an accompaniment that is triumphant rather than sinister, in a proud C major, properly reflecting Abigaille's joy at this opportunity rather than anything ominous or foreboding. Even though she is literally saying that she is already ascending the bloodstained seat of the golden throne where she will know revenge, the feeling of the music is undoubtedly jubilant. The triumphant bent of the phrase arises from use of major tonality, a repeated rhythmic figure in the second violins, violas, and horns (outlined in red in Figure 13), doubling of the vocal line in the higher winds and first violins (outlined in dark blue), and punctuated for good measure by a cheerful tag (outlined in light blue).

Figure 13 – *Nabucco* Act II Scene 1 triumphant cabaletta accompaniment

In the very next measure, major changes to minor, and much of the orchestra's rhythmic material rapidly changes, as illustrated in Figure 14. The second violins and violas maintain their rhythmic vitality, but now in minor and at *piano* (outlined in red). The high doubling of the woodwinds and violins echoing Abigaille's running vocal line has become long, quiet chords (outlined in dark blue), and the first violin reinforces the minor Eb before doubling the descending vocal line two measures later (outlined in light blue).

Figure 14 – *Nabucco* Act II Scene 1 sudden instrumentation and tonality shift

Verdi shifts abruptly to a different tone in the second phrase, "*Che lo scettro a me s'aspetta tutti i popoli vedranno!* (All the people will see that the scepter rightfully belongs to me!)." Verdi swiftly changes the tone of C major by borrowing the flatted

third from its parallel minor and having Abigaille sing the E–flat to emphasize the shift from major to minor. The dynamic drops to *piano* and the instrumental color abruptly changes from *tutti* to just the strings and a couple of winds playing longer notes. Abigaille switches for a measure to a winding set of triplets instead of the dotted eighth–sixteenths she had been singing up to that point. That set of winding triplets helps to cement Abigaille's malicious nature, and is a glimpse of the text painting that would manifest itself increasingly over Verdi's career. He suddenly changes instrumentation and rhythmic style, showing a moment of Abigaille maliciously enjoying the position in which she has now found herself.

This ominous feeling only occurs for the one phrase, and then the triumphant music returns for the rest of the aria as Abigaille joyfully sings how "royal princesses will come to beg favors from me, the humble slave girl." There are choral interjections and repeats of her material, but for the most part the music is the same triumphant *cabaletta* galloping for the rest of the way.

Nabucco provides an excellent starting point for analysis of Verdi's use of, and eventual deviation from, *solita forma*. Abigaille's *scena* contains everything that was expected, in the expected order, with the expected vocal showpieces accompanied by the orchestra in the expected way. Abigaille's minor chord winding triplet phrase in the *cabaletta* is, so far, the only obvious indicator of the focal shift toward theatricality seen in his later works. It is in that brief moment, when Abigaille shares an isolated and specific malevolent thought, that this spark is present.

Verdi wrote six operas following *Nabucco* which, for the most part, follow the *solita forma* formula. Then, he selected a source material that would inspire him to begin a more direct journey to strike balance between the popular expectations of *solita forma* and the theater of the stories he was telling. In *Macbeth*, he would find greater reason to emphasize the theatrical nature of his compositions: two villains as the lead characters.

Scene 2: *Macbeth* (1847)

Verdi was approached by the Teatro della Pergola in Florence to come up with an opera for the Lenten season Carnival of 1847. One of the subjects Verdi was considering was Shakespeare's drama *Macbeth*. Lady Macbeth is considered one of Verdi's most exciting characters for a dramatic soprano, or even a high dramatic mezzo soprano, to perform. Its attraction stems from the theatrical possibilities of playing such a damaged and driven character, combined with Verdi's masterful writing for that *fach*.

Verdi was an avid reader of Shakespeare's works and had a special affinity for the Scottish play in particular. In a letter to the librettist Piave from September 4th 1846, he said of *Macbeth*, "This tragedy is one of the greatest creations of man. If we can't make something great out of it let us at least try and do something out of the ordinary." [25] The letter went on to give Piave starting instructions for how Verdi wanted the text cut down

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[25] Franco Abbiati, *Giuseppe Verdi Vol. I* (Milan: Ricordi, 1959), 643.

into shorter verses, with a loftier style for all of the characters except for the witches. Verdi would even create his own prose from *Macbeth* and send them to Piave for versification, rather than simply using the libretto that the librettist composed.[26] He was somewhat frustrated with Piave's poetic approach, admonishing him regularly to write in a more concise manner.

Verdi's adaptations changed the original story, causing critics to accuse him of not knowing Shakespeare. For example, in the original *Macbeth,* Macbeth kept Banquo's murder from his wife. In the opera, Lady Macbeth is the one who persuades him to commit the act. Verdi modified the play in order to provide a much more powerful role for Lady Macbeth, including turning Duncan into a mute role, reducing Macduff to a comprimario role, and completely eliminating Lady Macbeth's alter–ego of Lady Macduff. He also made Macbeth's death scene at the end of the opera a noble one, leaving Lady Macbeth as the chief perpetrator of the crimes.[27]

Similar to modern audiences railing against film adaptations of popular and beloved books, critics were less than kind about Verdi's choices to change the story to make it work better for his musical purposes. Verdi was incensed by such criticism

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[26] David R. B. Kimbell, "The Young Verdi and Shakespeare," *Proceedings of the Royal Musical Association* 101 (1974): 64, http://www.jstor.org/stable/766036.

[27] Jane A. Bernstein, "'Bewitched, Bothered and Bewildered': Lady Macbeth, Sleepwalking, and the Demonic in Verdi's Scottish Opera," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 14, no. 1/2 (2002): 35, http://www.jstor.org/stable/3878281.

following the Paris premiere of the revised version, saying in a letter to his French publisher Léon Escudier, "It may be that I have not done justice to *Macbeth*: but to say that I do not know, understand, and feel Shakespeare – no, by God, no! He is one of my favorite poets. I have had him in my hands from my earliest youth, and I read and reread him continually."[28] Verdi eventually would set three Shakespeare plays to music, and frequently was bent toward setting *King Lear* throughout his life.[29]

Notably, this entire *scena e cavatina* is in major. Despite Lady Macbeth's dark plans the overall sound is joyful and powerful. It is early in the opera, and she will certainly descend into a much darker place both dramatically and musically as the opera progresses. This aria is a bit of a trap for both the singer and the stage director. Verdi's desire for these characters to be treated in a loftier way means that the performer must deliver the poisonous undertones of this *scena* in ways that the music itself is not helping deliver as overtly as it will in Verdi's later works. William Berger describes this problem a bit humorously: "If Lady Macbeth can convince you that she is obeying an inner logic, the music comes alive as drama. Otherwise, it's athletic vocalizing, the sort in which the

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[28] Jacques–Gabriel Prod'homme, "Lettres Inédites de G. Verdi à Léon Escudier," *Rivista Musicale Italiana,* XXXV (1928), 187.

[29] Julian Budden, *The Operas of Verdi, Vol. I* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1978), 269.

lady might as well be singing about a great sale at Macy's."[30] It is truly a challenge to convey her evil intentions with music that, without a translation, could easily be interpreted as joyous.

Verdi's loftier Lady Macbeth says, "Now all arise, you ministers of hell who incite and spur mortals to bloody deeds! You, night, wrap us in thick darkness! Let the breast not see the dagger that strikes it!" This is certainly more succinct, if less primal, than the original Shakespeare: "Come to my woman's breasts and take my milk for gall, you murd'ring ministers, wherever in your sightless substances you wait on nature's mischief. Come, thick night, and pall thee in the dunnest smoke of hell, that my keen knife see not the wound it makes, nor heaven peep through the blanket of the dark to cry 'Hold, hold!'"[31]

With *Nabucco* and other operas leading up to this point, for the most part, Verdi stayed within formal conventions. *Macbeth* has structural characteristics that work conveniently with the *solita forma*, especially Lady Macbeth's Act I Scene 2 *scena e cavatina* "Vieni! T'affretta!" and "Or tutti sorgete." The introspective nature of her husband's previous appearance in the opening scene is contrasted by Lady Macbeth's

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[30] William Berger, *Verdi with a Vengeance* (New York, NY: Random House, Inc., 2000), 159.

[31] William Shakespeare, *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare* (New York, NY: Chatham River Press, 1990), 1049.

scena e cavatina, effectively establishing her as the more powerful character. "She now

gets the full range of Verdi's growing power to present a strong–minded female.

Abigaille and Odabella have both opened their accounts with tough, florid, declamatory

arias of crucial impact. So now does Lady Macbeth."[32] The scene calls for a perfect *solita*

forma structure, as illustrated in Figure 15:

Section	Measures	Action	Key	Text and Notes
Orchestral introduction	1-25	Excited, climbing repeated segments build tension to open the scene	Fluid	Sequential ascending motives cadencing in G, Bb, Db, and ending in E
Scena	26-62	Reading of letter	E-G-C-Db	"Nel di della vittoria io le incontrai…" Transitions provide harmonic progression to Ab dominant of the "murder" key Db for the cavatina.
Cavatina	63-94	Lady Macbeth expresses a desire to help her husband do whatever it takes to get him the throne.	Db	"Vieni! T'affretta! Accendere ti vo' quell freddo core!" Given the violent underpinnings of her intention, the slightly faster *andantino* replaces a more lyric *cantabile*.
Tempo di Mezzo	95-136	Messenger arrives and tells Lady Macbeth that King Duncan and Macbeth will arrive to stay the night there.	A	"Al cader della sera il re qui giunge."
Cabaletta	137-167	Lady Macbeth calls upon the ministers of hell to incite Macbeth to kill Duncan	E	"Or tutti sorgete, ministri infernali"
Direct Repeat	167-207	An exact repeat of the Cabaletta so far, with a 9-measure interlude preceding it.	E	This repeat is sometimes omitted and m. 167 will be cut and go straight to m. 207.
Coda	207-226		E	Standard speeding up of the musical intensity with five full measures of big heavy accented chords to let you know the aria is ending.

Figure 15 – *Macbeth* Act I Scene 2 formal structure

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[32] Odabella is the daughter of the Lord of Aquileia in Verdi's preceding opera, *Attila.* Vincert Godefroy, *The Dramatic Genius of Verdi: Studies of Selected Operas, Vol. 1: Nabucco to La Traviata* (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1975), 110–112.

Figure 16 – *Macbeth* Act I Scene 2 orchestral introduction

The orchestral introduction illustrated in Figure 16 creeps up with a trio of
steadily ascending torrential figures ending in accented attacks on perfect authentic
cadences, each starting and ascending higher than the last. The feeling is intense, with the
orchestra beginning softly at a safe distance and sneaking up ever closer by ominous half

steps to finally deliver two fatal, wicked strikes on arguably the most powerful cadential statement. Verdi instantly creates a feeling of menace with what can easily be associated with the strike of a venomous serpent, certainly a potential representation of Lady Macbeth. He then brings the orchestra up and down on a swell, ultimately leading to a tremolo and finally, one long sustained chord at *pianissinissimo* menacingly underscoring Lady Macbeth as she reads the letter.

The dramatic intensity of a letter spoken, instead of sung as a recitative, enhances the drama and provides a sufficiently ominous start to the scene. The strings slowly draw their bows across their strings, droning a single, solemn chord at *piannississimo.* All rhythmic action suddenly halts and all attention shifts to Lady Macbeth. She reads the letter from her husband, which recounts his encounter with the witches and their prophecy that he will become Thane of Cawdor. She responds to the letter completely *a cappella*, and asks the important question of her husband. He aspires to greatness, but to attain it, will he be wicked? And with that word, the ascending sequential orchestral gesture from the scene's introduction is repeated once more. The rest of the *scena* establishes her willingness to push Macbeth to whatever lengths necessary to ascend the throne.

This start to the *scena* is followed by a small bit of text painting. Her exact words are "*Pien di misfatti è il calle dell potenza, e mal per lui che il piede dubitoso vi pone, e retrocede!* (The path to power is strewn with misdeeds, and woe to him whose foot falters

on that path and retreats)." At the end of her line, the orchestra's footsteps falter on the path and retreat from C major to Db through a series of descending staccato gestures. The red dashed area in Figure 17 indicates the V–I G^7 to C cadential end to the recitative, as well as a transitional C^7. The blue solid box shows the same diminished seventh chord in two different ways using an enharmonic spelling and repetition to perform a pivot. He provides an opportunity to hear the same chord again and thus, the opportunity to perhaps think of it a new way. The gesture begins a third time but ends at the area outlined in the green dotted box, ending on a slightly different note. By changing the top note it becomes an Ab^7. This is the V^7 of Db, which is the key for the *cavatina* to come. Verdi provides a simple progression to establish the new tonal center, and ends the transition on a teasing leading tone making the listener wait for a resolution right where he wants them to be.

Figure 17 – *Macbeth* Act I, Scene 2 enharmonic "footsteps" transition

Most double arias feature a contrast between slow/reflective and fast/reactive. In this

case, Lady Macbeth avoids reflection on the past. She is focused purely on the future, so

an *andantino* tempo is appropriate. The energetic major here is more appropriate for her

text as well, as she spurs Macbeth on to dirty deeds. "*Vieni! T'affretta!* (Come! Hurry!)"

she cries out, "*Accendere ti vo' quel freddo core!* (I wish to kindle that cold heart of

yours!) *L'audace impresa a compiere Io ti darò valore* (To accomplish the audacious

deed, I will give you courage)." This is not conducive to a lovely, lyric, wistful *cantabile*

in a minor key. In fact, when he was still in the process of writing the opera, Verdi was

unhappy that the soprano Eugenia Tadolini (his first Alzira) was being considered for the

role of Lady Macbeth because her voice was too beautiful. In a letter to the librettist

Salvatore Cammarano, he wrote "Tadolini has a marvelous voice, clear, limpid and

strong. Tadolini's voice has something angelic in it. Lady [Macbeth]'s should have

something devilish."[33] Once again, this demonstrates Verdi was more concerned with the

theatrical than simply a performance of beautiful singing.

Verdi uses ascending lines and a steadily increasing dynamic to paint the text of

ascendivi a regnar (ascend the throne) in her monologue. As seen in Figure 18, each leap

up is a whole step from the previous summit as Verdi's instructions indicate a *poco a*

poco crescendo throughout the line.

Figure 18 – *Macbeth* Act I Scene 2 text painting of "ascend the throne"

These vocal acrobatics not only show off the singer's ability to leap around the

range, but also to utilize dynamics to enhance the dramatic storytelling. Verdi specifically

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[33] Gaetano Cesari and Alessandro Luzio, *I Copialettere di Giuseppe Verdi* (Milan: Tip.
 Stucchi Ceretti & Co, 1913), 61.

did not want much of this scene sung at full voice, as evidenced by his letter to the first

soprano to sing Lady Macbeth, Marianna Barbiere–Nini. He wrote to her, "It is all said

sotto voce and in such a way as to strike terror and arouse pity. Study it well and you will

see that it will be effective, even if it lacks the usual flowing melodies, such as are found

everywhere and all alike."[34] It is within a malevolent *pianissimo* that her dark soul can be

featured the most. Each "Why delay?" she sings gets softer and softer as the cavatina

progresses. It is also in her last utterance of these words that the only real significant use

of non–major chords appears. After a strong PAC, the minor third degree is substituted

and the dynamic suddenly shifts to *pianississimo*. "What are you waiting for?" is another

interpretation of her text, and her malice holds fast the dominant Ab in the vocal line as a

vii^{o4}_3/V leans hard and dissonantly against it, circled in Figure 19. It is a perfect set up for

her cadenza on V to conclude the *cavatina*, which ends not with a flourish, but with a

malevolent whisper.

[34] Frank Walker, "Verdi's Ideas on the Production of His Shakespeare Operas," *Proceedings of the Royal Musical Association* 76 (1949): 15, http://www.jstor.org/stable/765936.

Figure 19 – *Macbeth* Act I Scene 2, Lady Macbeth's malevolent whisper

Shakespeare courteously provided Verdi with a messenger to interrupt Lady Macbeth's train of thought, setting up a perfect *tempo di mezzo* that leads into a sinister and fiery *cabaletta*. The *tempo di mezzo* begins with a sudden move from Db to A. This is not quite as stark as it seems, if one considers the Db enharmonically as a C#, making this I–bVI. The messenger arrives with news that King Duncan will soon arrive with Macbeth, to stay the night. Once the messenger departs, she is struck with an idea. Once again, upward motion moves the action and intention forward, and with a single note change A^{Mm7} is twisted into a menacing $a\#^{\circ 7}$. Lady Macbeth begins to formulate a plan,

with each epiphany answered by orchestral tags. She will have the perfect opportunity to have her husband placed on the throne. She merely needs to dispose of its current occupant. Verdi's use of this menacing diminished chord also serves a practical function. It is a vii°^{7}/B that ends the *tempo di mezzo*, and which serves as a cadential V to set up E major in the *cabaletta*.
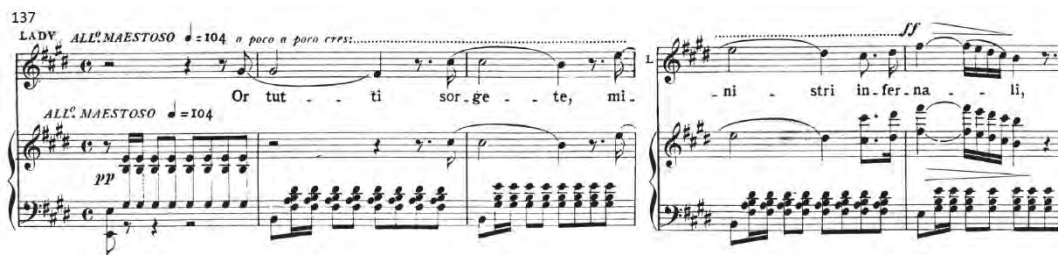
Figure 20 – *Macbeth* Act I Scene 2, cabaletta energy build and release

The *cabaletta* begins with a series of steadily ascending patterns, shown in Figure 20, that build and release as she sings "*Or tutti sorgete, ministri infernali che al sangue incorate spingete imoratli* (Now arise, ye ministers of hell who incite mortals to bloody deeds)." Budden discusses this gesture: "Note how the minims in the second, third and fourth bars act like dynamos storing up an energy which erupts in the fifth into a semiquaver flourish."[35] The build–up and flourish Budden speaks of occurs twice in succession, on the words *infernali* (hell) and *sangue* (bloody.) Again, the drama and the

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[35] Julian Budden, *The Operas of Verdi, Vol. I* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1978), 285.

words dictate the direction of the music. More text painting is found in one of the more haunting phrases of the entire scene. In m. 150, at *sotto voce*, she sings "*Tu, notte, ne avvolgi di tenebra immota* (Night, wrap us in thick darkness)." This dramatic soprano gets to show off her dark lower register for one low B natural held at a fermata, without accompaniment, so that all may drink in the darkness. And as quickly as the moment is given, it is just as quickly taken away. She immediately erupts into a new thought, "*Qual petto percota non vegga il pugnale* (Let the breast not see the dagger that strikes it)," and a vocal flourish that returns her into the wheelhouse of her powerful upper register.

At m. 167 Verdi ends the *cabaletta* verse with a torrid run in the orchestra that pounds a dominant B major over and over again, to set up an exact repeat of the *cabaletta*. While this is sometimes omitted in performance, the passage adds to the scene dramatically. Even if there is no embellishment by the singer, the purpose of a repeated word or phrase is always to provide emphasis through the change in how that repetition is delivered. At the very least, it is an opportunity to hear this wonderful *cabaletta* and Lady Macbeth's vocal fireworks one more time. At m. 207, where such a cut would end, the coda raises the intensity up a notch and provides the singer with an opportunity to show off that high dominant B on a note held for almost two full measures, finally ending the scene on the tonic E major.

The particular keys used in this *solita forma* reflect certain associations across the entire opera.[36] These included keys for the character of Macbeth, the outside world, murder, power, and escape, as shown in Figure 21.

Key	Associated with…
F or f	Macbeth
A or a	The outside world
Db	Murder
E	Power
Bb	Escape

Figure 21 – *Macbeth* key associations

It is not coincidence, then, that when Lady Macbeth first conceives of the idea of murdering King Duncan, her *cavatina* suddenly changes from C major to Db major. Nor is it coincidental that the entrance of the messenger from the outside world is in A. And finally, the *cabaletta* in which Lady Macbeth then establishes her power is in E.[37]

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[36] He only did this in one other opera, *Il trovatore*.

[37] Julian Budden, *The Operas of Verdi, Vol. I* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1978), 312.

Lady Macbeth's *scena* is a perfect marriage of *solita forma* and theatrical drama. It was certainly serendipitous that Shakespeare's original lent itself so favorably to the double aria form. It was not therefore necessary for the composer to circumvent the formal structure in deference to the dramatic material. Verdi's passion for the source material saw him take a much more active role in the preparation of the libretto and in how his music was performed. [38] Though the form is still solidly in the *solita forma* style, text painting and dramatic impetus moved from a secondary consideration to a primary driver of compositional choices. Verdi made it clear that all elements of the opera must be subordinated to the drama.[39] His use of a particular key to represent murder, Lady Macbeth's progress through the dark scheming, and the fierceness of her determination to make it a reality offered Verdi several opportunities to stay within the standardized form but still give her plenty of vocal and theatrical opportunities to convey her malice.

In the earliest years of his career, Verdi utilized the popular *solita forma* as a blueprint to efficiently write operas during a period of his life when great contractual demands, as well as a desire for commercial success, made it beneficial to him to do so.

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[38] Verdi was very pleased with the success of his work, and in his dedication wrote, "Here, then, is *Macbeth*, which I love above all my other works, and for that reason deem it worthy to be presented to you." Verdi dedicated the opera to Antonio Barezzi, his late wife's father, who had helped make Verdi's career possible. Richard Wigmore, "Macbeth (1847)," *Gramophone* (February 2013): 28, https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A328107619/PPFA.

[39] Gerald A. Mendelsohn, "Verdi the Man and Verdi the Dramatist," *19th–Century Music* 2, no. 2 (1978): 115, https://doi.org/10.2307/746308.

Nabucco provided an early success that would ensure constant work, and constant

honing, of his craft. By the time he had completed *Macbeth*, Verdi's professional

standing provided him more freedom to experiment with the boundaries of *solita forma*

and alter its use during the middle years of his life. His exploration of such damaged,

malevolent characters had resulted in both critical and commercial success. This

undoubtedly emboldened him to take more risks with portraying his villains in a more

musically theatrical way, leading to interesting manipulations of *solita forma*.

ACT II – BREAKING BOUNDARIES

Following the success of *Macbeth*, Verdi started writing music that showed a more advanced style through the three operas leading up to *Rigoletto*. Budden remarks on Verdi's use of improving orchestral resources including replacing concertmasters with dedicated conductors, of his modification of the conventional forms to suit dramatic purposes, and of "a new concentration of lyrical elements within the dramatic scheme."[40] Typically, he would move on once an opera had premiered, and if it was not successful, would not revisit it. However, Gerald Mendelsson opined that the reason Verdi resisted moving on from two of those operas, *Stiffelio* and *La Battaglia di Legnano*, was that it represented the beginning of a new phase in his life as a composer.[41] In these operas, Verdi began to leave behind many of the formal restrictions of the *solita forma* that had been so convenient for most composers and which had been the public expectation. He had known the satisfaction of how *Macbeth* was received when he emphasized the dramatic source material and theatrical presentation. Verdi described the pre–1849 works as "the cavatina operas." According to Martin Chusid, this serves as further indication

[40] Julian Budden, *The Operas of Verdi, Vol. I* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1978), 446.

[41] Gerald A. Mendelsohn, "Verdi the Man and Verdi the Dramatist," 19th–Century Music 2, no. 2 (1978): 115, https://doi.org/10.2307/746308.

that Verdi was becoming increasingly dissatisfied with the older, familiar conventions of his predecessors that he had adopted at the outset of his career.[42] When his next opera, *Rigoletto*, succeeded as much as it did in 1851, it must have inspired Verdi to dive into the deep end of the pool into which he had, so far, only carefully waded. He had bucked the trend and done what few people across history have managed to do: he enjoyed commercial success by driving trends in the public's tastes, rather than simply giving them the familiar and expected.

Two of his operas from this period, *Il trovatore* (1853) and *Un ballo in maschera* (1859), show specific departures from *solita forma* spurred by the need to provide necessary focus on the dramatic flow of the stories being told. In *Il trovatore*, the character of Count Di Luna may lack the specific text painting indications of malice seen in earlier characters such as Lady Macbeth. Instead, Verdi begins manipulating the audience with the denial of formal norms and even contradicts their expectations. In *Un ballo in maschera*, the standard form begins to show significant signs of erosion as Verdi discards certain *solita forma* structural elements to shift the balance toward a more rounded theatrical presentation.

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[42] Martin Chusid, *Verdi's Middle Period* (New York, NY and London: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 2.

Scene 1: *Il trovatore* (1853)

Verdi wanted to set the 1836 play *El Trovador* by García Gutiérrez, one of the foremost Spanish playwrights of the century. The melodrama explores a wide variety of the fantastic and the bizarre. It includes love and vengeance and death and irony, all things that make for great musical storytelling. He worked with his friend, the librettist Salvadore Cammarano, to adapt the work for the operatic stage. Verdi wrote in a letter to Cammarano on April 4, 1851: "If in opera there were neither cavatinas, duets, trios, choruses, finales, etcetera, and the whole work consisted, let's say, of a single number, I should find that all the more right and proper."[43] This reveals his emerging desire to do something that shifts the balance from vocal display to a more immersive theatrical experience. The text, music, vocal display, and staging must work together to build the entire drama as a whole. Drama was the constant, compelling engagement of the spectator with the events happening on stage, the audience in communion with the performers, all absorbed into a sum that was greater than its individual parts.[44] He involved himself not only in the selection of the text and the composition of the music,

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[43] Franco Abbiati, *Giuseppe Verdi Vol. 1,* (Milan: Ricordi, 1959), 122–123.

[44] James A. Hepokoski, "Genre and Content in Mid–Century Verdi: 'Addio, Del Passato' ('La Traviata', Act III)," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 1, no. 3 (1989): 275, http://www.jstor.org/stable/823784.

but in the overall *mise–en–scène* and dramaturgical construction, all for the purpose of creating a certain *illusione*.[45]

Verdi's road to *Il trovatore*'s premiere was a rough one. Before the libretto was fully completed, he learned of Cammarano's death. Verdi's own mother had also recently passed, and he was fighting over his father's debts and claims on Giuseppe's money. He was in a fight with the publisher Ricordi, to boot. It is not surprising, then, that in a letter several years later he would write "They say this opera [*Il trovatore*] is too sad, and that there are too many deaths in it. But after all, everything in life is death! What else is there?"[46] Indeed, during the writing of this opera, Verdi must have been in a dark place. Several houses rejected Verdi's steep contractual demands to present *Il trovatore.* He was able to work with a young librettist named Leone Emanuele Bardare to finish the libretto that Cammarano had started, and finally secured a contract for the piece to have its premiere at the Teatro Apollo in Rome on January 19, 1853.

In Act II, Scene 2 of *Il trovatore,* Count Di Luna and his attendants intend to abduct Leonora before she can join a convent. He has already vanquished his rival in a duel (the left–for–dead Manrico, who in typical operatic fashion is, unbeknownst to either of them, Di Luna's own long–lost brother), and now sees the convent as an even more

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[45] Carlotta Sorba, "To Please the Public: Composers and Audiences in Nineteenth–Century Italy," *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 36, no. 4 (2006): 608, http://www.jstor.org/stable/3656346.

[46] Gerald A. Mendelsohn, "Verdi the Man and Verdi the Dramatist," *19th–Century Music* 2, no. 2 (1978): 113, https://doi.org/10.2307/746308.

powerful rival than Manrico. Di Luna's officer Ferrando and his men's chorus attendants

accompany him onstage throughout the scene.

The structure outlined in Figure 22 is still within the realm of *solita forma*, though

Verdi starts to show signs of manipulating that form for the purposes of creating a more

theatrically dramatic presentation.

Section	Measures	Action	Key	Text and Notes
Introduction	1-8	Di Luna and Ferrando arrive to the convent where Leonora is sheltered	F	Pizzicato step-wise figures mirror the sneaking steps of Di Luna and Ferrando skulking around the convent's exterior
Scena	9-32	Di Luna conveys his anger to Ferrando about Leonora entering a convent	F	"Tutto è deserto; nè per l'aure ancore suona l'usato carme, in tempo io giungo!"
Cantabile	33-62	Di Luna's love song about Leonora	Bb	"Il balen del suo sorriso" Largo tempo, A-B-B^1 form, long cantabile melodic phrases
Tempo di Mezzo	63-88	Di Luna hears the bells indicating the rite is about to begin	f	"Qual sono! Oh ciel!"
	81-88	Di Luna decides to abduct her before she can marry another	Ab	"Ardir! Andiam!" The chorus responds in f's relative major of Ab, which serves as the dominant of Db to come.
Cabaletta	89-108	Di Luna expresses a desire for the fatal hour to come.	Db	"Per me ora fatale, I tuoi momenti affretta" Very brief cabaletta. . .
	109-116	Chorus supports Di Luna and urges him forward	Ab	. . . turns quickly into a chorus *scena*: "Ardir! Andiam, celiamoci fra l'ombre, nel mistero!"
	117-135	Repeat of the cabaletta	Db	"Per me ora fatale, I tuoi momenti affretta" Often omitted in performance
	136-157	Repeat of the chorus	Db	"Non può nemmen un Dio" Cut of cabaletta repeat lands here
	158-178	Di Luna and chorus move into a hidden position, ushering in next scene with nuns offstage chorus	Db	Coda section
Scene Transition	179-212	Nuns offstage chorus	Eb	"Ah! Se l'error t'incombra, o figlia d'Eva" Offstage chorus interrupted by interjections of Di Luna/chorus material from the cabaletta; all sing their material simultaneously m. 205. This is technicially the next scene, but is included here to show how the cabaletta breaks formal tradition by bleeding into the next scene.

Figure 22 – *Il trovatore* Act II Scene 2 formal structure

The largest formal departure Verdi takes here is with the *cabaletta* section. The *cantabile*

"Il balen del suo sorriso" is consistent with the aforementioned *cantabile/cavatina* formal

structure. The *cabaletta* is much shorter, especially given the faster tempo. Di Luna only

sings about twenty measures before the chorus enters and Di Luna only interjects on top

of them. Rather than being a grandiose and virtuosic display of powerful vocal ability, it actually starts strong and gets softer and softer as they all go to hide in the shrubbery. By the time the women enter with their offstage chorus, the audience has been completely denied the big finish they might have been expecting, and the action segues with a whisper into the next scene.

The *scena* begins with pizzicato contrabasses joined by the rest of the strings, moving down from the fourth scale degree to the first, back and forth between various chords. This portrays Di Luna and Ferrando sneaking around outside of the convent. The *scena*'s recitative is *secco* with little accompanying the singers.

Figure 23 – *Il trovatore* Act II Scene 2 transition from scena to cantabile

The transition from *scena* to *cantabile* uses a subtle trick. The *scena* is in F, and the *cantabile* is in Bb. Moving from F to Bb is simple. Rather than taking the easy road by simply adding a 7th to the F major chord, Verdi inserts a couple of increasingly sinister diminished 7th chords to side–step what is expected. As is illustrated in Figure 23, this unusual harmonization creates a stepwise descending bass line that connects the two keys. The chords are *pizzicato*, barely noticeable, but they serve a purpose: to set up the new key in a way that echoes the sneaking around of Di Luna and Ferrando.

The *cantabile* "Il balen del suo sorriso" is a stunningly beautiful aria in Bb that

contains nothing noteworthy in terms of conveying Di Luna's underlying evil

intentions.[47] Di Luna in this moment is so blinded by his passion for Leonora that he is

not concerned about her love for the rival Manrico, nor for her desire to join the convent

when she thinks Manrico has been killed. To this end, Verdi wrote a truly beautiful ballad

for Di Luna. It is very high in the baritone voice and is an exceptionally challenging aria.

In fact, Berger referred to it as "a terror from hell to sing. There's absolutely no place to

breathe, and the slower it is sung, the more the audience is pleased."[48] It conveys the

depth of his emotion and his blindness to the morality of his actions, thus communicating

character traits that resonate throughout the opera.

Di Luna snaps back to reality thanks to the sound of convent bells announcing

that Leonora's rite is about to begin. Di Luna is out of time, and the tempo becomes

much more urgent. Di Luna resolves to seize Leonora and instructs his attendants to hide

in the shade of the nearby beeches. The chorus sings interjected expressions of support

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[47] Outside of the context of what is happening in the larger story, this song could easily be Romeo singing about Juliet or Napoleon serenading his beloved Josephine. This is worth exploring briefly, because Verdi has done this before. Some of the greatest villains in stories do not think they are doing wrong. They are simply driven by something that overrides the harm their desires are doing to others. The Duke of Mantua in *Rigoletto* sings the beautiful ballad "Questa o quella" at the beginning of the opera, which was originally one of the selections I chose for this project. He is not being evil, just narcissistic and driven solely by thoughts originating below his waist.

[48] William Berger, *Verdi with a Vengeance* (New York, NY: Random House, Inc., 2000), 244.

that provide a break between the *cantabile* and *cabaletta* and which constitute a *tempo di mezzo.*

Solita forma structure would typically include a recognizable stylistic break between the *tempo di mezzo* and the *cabaletta*. The material from the *tempo di mezzo* would not normally be revisited because the *cabaletta* it inspired would have moved the plot forward.. In this scene, however, the chorus *tempo di mezzo* material re-appears after the brief *cabaletta*, and is even layered beneath it. The *cabaletta* is not the virtuosic solo fireworks show of compositions in Verdi's earlier years. Instead, Di Luna sings less than two dozen measures and tells God that not even He can steal Leonora away from him. The chorus re–enters with their music from the *tempo di mezzo*, blurring the lines of the form further. They all get softer and softer as the scene shifts and Verdi adds the off–stage chorus women singing from within the convent. Interestingly, the form is still generally consistent with *solita forma.* Di Luna and the chorus sing their lines in between, and eventually on top of, this nun's chorus. For the benefit of the drama, Verdi dissolves segments of his *cabaletta* and *tempo di mezzo* material beyond the aria itself, interjecting them into the next scene.

It would not make sense theatrically to have bombastic vocal fireworks and a grand chorus singing *fortissississimo* outside of a convent when they are supposed to be hiding in the bushes. Instead, Di Luna sings with the chorus in a short, muted, staccato fashion shown in Figure 24. This depicts sneaking and skulking around the church, rather

than embracing a flourish of vocal acrobatics presented in long lines of awe–inspiringly

fast melismatic passages. It is jagged, like desperate panting.

Figure 24 – *Il trovatore* Act II Scene 2 cabaletta with chorus

Verdi's decision to alter the typical use of the *cabaletta* was purposeful from the

very start. He wrote as much to his friend and business intermediary Cesare De Sanctis

on December 14, 1852: "I would like the chorus as they go away to sing a verse in 'settenari' to be sung piecemeal and *sotto voce*, which I would then intersperse with the cabaletta, perhaps rather effectively."[49] This did result in a chorus saying to each other repeatedly that they are going off to hide, though they never actually do.[50] The women's legato off–stage chorus starkly contrasts the on–stage men's deportment and vocal style. What in other *solita forma* operas would likely be a rousing, bombastic end to the scene becomes a smooth, lyrical segue into a larger scene.

Were Verdi's deformations of the *solita forma* a rejection of that form or a shrewd repurposing of it? James Hepokoski argues for the latter, saying that the adaptations were "part of a carefully considered strategy to enhance the expressive potential of those norms. He invoked the conventions repeatedly, set them in place, stressed their conventionality and then, when appropriate, deformed them 'affirmatively' in order to make them speak with resonant clarity, to harness their affective connotations."[51] There is merit to this presumption, as evident in how Verdi treated the *cabaletta* of Di Luna's scene.

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[49] A. Luzio, *Carteggi verdiani Vol. 1* (Reale Accademia d'Italia, 1935), 14–16.

[50] Gilbert and Sullivan poked some playful fun at this absurdity via the policemen repeatedly singing "Yes, forward on the foe" but resisting the urge to rush off toward their imminent deaths in *The Pirates of Penzance*.

[51] James A. Hepokoski, "Genre and Content in Mid–Century Verdi: 'Addio, Del Passato' ('La Traviata', Act III)," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 1, no. 3 (1989): 255, http://www.jstor.org/stable/823784.

When humans expect one thing and experience another, the senses are immediately put on alert. Verdi's treatment of the end of this *cabaletta* creates a greater emotional and sensorial intensity because the listener has come to expect from the singer a grandiose and loud expressiveness covering every note in a three–octave range within two and a half measures. When they experience an intensely quiet and pin–pricked attack to each note, the normal *solita forma* expectation is subverted for the benefit of dramatic effect and enhancement of the *illusione*. The theatrical needs of his villains begin to take equal importance to the musical form.

The farther down the chronology of his works, the more evident it becomes that Verdi is manipulating or simply discarding the expected form of *solita forma.* Rather than specific text painting based on a certain word or phrase, the entire form is now being adapted to heighten the senses of the listener and draw attention to the actions and expressions of his villains. This manipulation of the form (and the listener) could be either for the purpose of setting up an expectation just to deny it, or as will be revealed in the next selected aria, to ignore parts of the form in favor of telling a more concise and dramatic musical story.

Scene 2: *Un ballo in maschera* (1859)

In 1856, Verdi was contracted by the opera house at San Carlo to compose a new opera, and they suggested *Re Lear* (King Lear) as the subject. The contractual negotiations lingered, as Verdi corresponded back and forth with the San Carlo over the

right singers necessary to deliver that work properly, and eventually, he asked the *Lear* librettist Antonio Somma to prepare a different subject as a backup. Verdi had fallen upon a story from recent history, the assassination of Gustav III of Sweden in 1792. After scaling down a French stage drama of the story, he sent it to Somma to adapt it more specifically for an opera libretto.[52] Somma and Verdi corresponded frequently about the proper adaptation of plays for the purposes of musical delivery. Verdi's directions included many specifics about word changes for musical purposes. In a letter from Verdi to Somma on November 26, 1857, he wrote: "I know quite well that 'prepare yourself for death… commend yourself to the Lord' mean the same thing, but on stage they haven't the same force as that simple 'you must die'.*[53]*

Verdi's insistence upon efficient and effective language did not just apply to word selection, but to structure as well. For "Eri tu," Verdi made a very specific choice about the theatrical pacing that had a profound impact on the overall structure of the libretto, and consequently the aria. It would have been perfectly acceptable to include a moment where Renato cries out against the betrayal he has experienced at the hand of his supposed friend, Gustav III. Such dramatic expressions are well fitted for an aggressive, quick tempo and vivacious rhythmic accompaniment bringing the pre–cavatina *scena* to a

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[52] Julian Budden, *The Operas of Verdi, Vol. II* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1978), 362.

[53] Alessandro Pascolato, *Re Lear e Ballo in maschera: Lettere di Giuseppe Verdi ad Antonio Somma* (Città di Castello: S. Tapi, 1913), 86.

close. Even more appropriately, it could have been the driving expression of rage behind the *cabaletta*, which would be consistent with the standard *solita forma* structure. Yet, Verdi suggested to Somma that it was not necessary to dwell too long upon that thought, as it would slow down the action of the scene: "If you don't object, I would omit the allegro of this aria. The piece becomes too long, the action slow, and all those verses are unnecessary."[54]

Verdi seemed more concerned with the dramatic pacing of the story than he was with finding a way to use the *solita forma* to musically frame the aria. This emphasis on drama being prioritized over musical structure showed the beginnings of his departure from the formal conventions he had adopted early in his career. The aria is certainly in two sections, but eliminates the *tempo di mezzo*. The normal order of the *solita forma* is reversed, in that the *cantabile* section here is actually the second half instead of the first.

Renato's *scena* and aria "Eri tu" takes place near the beginning of Act III, shortly after he has learned of his wife's alleged infidelity with his supposed trusted friend, Riccardo. After the censors in Naples insisted upon a large number of changes to the story so as not to offend the local nobility, the location of the story was eventually moved to pre–Colonial Boston, and Gustav III was renamed Riccardo and made a Governor instead. Renato's wife Amelia swears she never acted upon the feelings of love she

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[54] Alessandro Pascolato, *Re Lear e Ballo in maschera: Lettere di Giuseppe Verdi ad Antonio Somma* (Città di Castello: S. Tapi, 1913), 89.

briefly had for Riccardo and that Renato's honor is still intact. She begs for forgiveness in

vain, as Renato threatens to murder her over the affair. She agrees to die, but asks for one

final kindness. She entreats him not as a wife, but as a mother, that he would permit her

to see her son one final time. The scene and aria shown in Figure 25 begins immediately

after the aria she sings begging for this one final chance to see her son.

Section	Measures	Action	Key	Text and Notes
Scena	1-6	Sending Amelia away	e♭	"Alzati! Là tuo figlio a te concede riveder." Response to Amelia's preceding aria
Scena continues	7-27	Determination to exact revenge	Transition	"Non è su lei, nel suo fragile petto che colpir degg'io." Moves from a♭ to E to F#, to A⁷ of coming d
Aria – A	28-45	Expression of the betrayal	d	"Eri tu che macchiavi quell'anima" Text-inspired chord changes provide smooth segue to dominant of the coming Cavatina
Aria - Cavatina	46-60	Reflection on the past	F	"O dolcezze perdute!" Relative major F of the aria's preceding section. Accompaniment color and rhythm changes drastically to contrast Renato's murderous rage and feeling of betrayal
A¹ interruption	61-65	Jarring return to present	Transition	"È finite: non siede che l'odio" Heavy use of diminished chords in short span
Return to Cavatina	66-72	Return to the reflection	F	"O dolcezze perdute!" Returns to the happy past feeling

Figure 25 – *Un ballo in maschera* Act III Scene 1 formal structure

As one might expect, the opening lines Renato utters after such a plea are not

exactly pleasant, though it is evident there is still love guiding a less violent reaction. He

says, "*Alzati, là tuo figlio a te concedo riveder.* (Arise! I allow you to once again see

your son, there.) *Nell'ombra e nel silenzio, là, il tuo rossore e l'onta mia nascondi.* (In the

darkness and in silence, go and hide your blushing and my shame."

This is delivered as simple recitative, the orchestra only appearing to subtly

outline a *pianissimo* fully diminished 7th arpeggio (indicated by the red dotted outline in

Figure 26). This musical simplicity is a dramatically appropriate representation of Renato's resignation to relent and not kill his wife that very moment. It is darkly simple and deliberate, its apex being *la!* (go!) and the rest of the line being stated in the forced calm of repeated notes, which will prove to be the dominant of the coming section.

Figure 26 – *Un ballo in maschera* Act III Scene 1 opening scena recitative

The string figure at the end of the example leads into the second segment of the *scena*, in which Renato expresses his anger of the betrayal by his trusted friend. It is in this section that Verdi chose not to delay the action or extend the aria too long. That does not mean, however, that Verdi discarded the valuable dramatic opportunities that such feelings could convey. There are several moments in this section worth exploring, to further examine how Verdi used the orchestra to enrich the musical intensity of the drama unfolding throughout the scene.

The four measures leading up to Renato's next line provide a brief window for the performer to deliver a very important new idea: it is not his wife that should die, but Riccardo. Verdi assists the actor by providing a *con espressivo* interlude in a–flat minor that ends with a V^6 in C-flat major (outlined by the red box in Figure 27).

Figure 27 – *Un ballo in maschera* Act III Scene 1 modulation conveys new thought

Renato's next line, as well as its orchestral accompaniment, shifts suddenly to E

major with a tremolo in the strings. As Renato has this revelation, "*Non è su lei, nel suo*

fragile petto che colpir degg'io (It is not her fragile breast that I must strike)," the

excitement of that shift is well conveyed through a sudden change of key from minor to

major, not set up in any way by a preceding and obvious dominant chord. This is another

example of Verdi surprising the listener with an unexpected chord to alert them to the

fact that what is about to be stated requires their undivided attention. And, as suddenly as

Renato has this revelation, the decision that comes next shifts the accompanimental color

just as swiftly and dramatically.

Verdi's connection with the dramatic emotional context is clearly evident in how

he conveys malice in mm. 13–19.

Figure 28 – *Un ballo in maschera* Act III Scene 1 representing malice in recitative

In Figure 28, the red solid boundary identifies a subtle, but effective, shift in the

overall musical feeling. Renato's new thought of the previous phrase had been in E

major, and this segment shifts suddenly to b minor. In the immediate silence afterward,

the orchestra paints the even newer idea that follows, invading his mind. It begins like the

outline of the previously stated E major chord, but instead uses b minor to provide a similar triad outline in m. 13 but with one important difference. The expected high and happy fifth of the E major triad is replaced by the half step lower A# establishing the b minor tonality. The diminished chord thus created notifies the listener that something sinister is afoot in Renato's mind. One single changed note, a mere half step away, makes all of the difference. Verdi further paints the text, outlined in a dashed blue line, on a rather important word: *sangue* (blood). It is hit with a musical exclamation mark, supporting the A# and accented on the F# major chord that will be the driving sound of the coming section. Another's blood must cleanse the offense. Whose blood? Riccardo's, as is revealed in the highest point of the vocal line as Renato sings "*Il sangue tuo!* (Your blood!)" to the painting of Riccardo that is traditionally present on stage for this scene.

In the allegro agitato that follows, Verdi keeps things short and fast–paced rather than dwelling too long on an extensive *allegro* section, which he felt might hinder the theatrical pace. In only nine measures, Renato vows that his dagger, drawn from Riccardo's chest, is the only thing that would vindicate his tears. As shown in Figure 29, Verdi uses this passage practically to move to the dominant A^7 for the coming aria's A section in d minor. He uses a pedal F# in mm. 20–23 and alternates back and forth from I to V through a cadential dominant F# chord. This is also present in m. 28 but the unsettled second inversion from before is now slightly more settled thanks to the inclusion of the tonic root note in the bass line's triplet figure before it jumps down to the root of the dominant A chord.

Figure 29 – *Un ballo in maschera* Act III Scene 1 transition to d minor

In the next segment, mm. 28-45, Renato's vocal line (provided in Figure 30 and Figure 31) seems simple, almost *too* calm. Verdi does an exceptional job of using rhythmic dissonance between orchestra and voice, as well as the overall shape of the vocal line, to create tension that conveys Renato's ticking time bomb of emotion. His vocal line is fettered within the span of a fifth. The accompaniment's quiet urgency paints a more menacing picture of what is going on his mind.

The triplet patterns in the orchestra are in stark contrast to the vocal line, which starts on one pitch and quickly rises as he begins losing his temper. The strings provide energy with a repeated staccato, piano pattern. The bassoon and lower string voices provide additional tension through a pizzicato figure moving upward but landing down on the dominant at first, then unexpectedly ending in m. 35 on the major third F# of a D^{Mm} seventh chord in first inversion. This serves a dominant function for the g minor iv chord he outlines on "*quell'anima* (that soul)" and the F# guides the line as leading tone to the G.

The strings and bassoon all use triplets working against the duple feel in the vocal line, providing additional tension. The constraint in the range of these opening vocal lines provides an eerie "calm" to the aria, like the false calm a person conveys on the surface as an eruption is imminent. The orchestral tension and quiet rhythmic vitality underneath that line is a ticking time bomb that the audience is just waiting to hear explode with Renato's fury.

Figure 30 – *Un ballo in maschera* Act III Scene 1 "Eri tu" aria A section

Figure 31 – *Un ballo in maschera* Act III Scene 1 sudden dramatic harmonic shift

The ultimate destination of the phrase is the A dominant seventh chord accompanying Renato's description of Amelia as the delight of his soul (*delizia dell'anima mia…*). The next thought he has is of how the trusted friend suddenly, in loathsome fashion, poisoned his universe. Verdi highlights the word *esecrabile* (in loathsome fashion) through a sudden vocal leap up to the 7th of a f#$^{\circ 7}$ chord, marked in Figure 31 by the blue dashed square. This choice of harmonic color beautifully paints the pain caused by Riccardo's loathsome betrayal against his trusted friend. It is no accident that Verdi wrote such a jarring and sudden vocal leap to the exact note in the chord that provides the most affectual aspect of its sound.

Mm. 43-45 serve multiple purposes. On a purely harmonic level, Verdi sets himself up for the aria's d minor relative major of F by jumping suddenly from A to a C^7. In practical terms, this is highly efficient and truly does not require much thought. However, the segment also provides a dramatic lift higher into the baritone's voice as he expresses his anguish: "*Traditor! che in tal guisa rimuneri dell'amico tuo primo la fè!* (Traitor! You who repays your best friend's loyalty in such manner!)." It allows the actor to convey multiple emotions at once: regret over the loss not only of his wife's fidelity, but Riccardo's friendship.[55] It is a moment of despair when it would be understandable that one would slow down and reflect on what was lost.

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[55] In a much similar expression of regret as is heard in Freddie Dean Snowden's immortal classic "My Wife Ran Off With My Best Friend and I'm Sure Gonna Miss Him."

Figure 32 – *Un ballo in maschera* Act III Scene 1 B section orchestral color shift

The *cantabile* B section of the aria contrasts the A section. Verdi skips right over the bargaining stage of grief and goes from anger to depression. Changes in rhythm and instrumentation emphasize this shift to F major, as shown in Figure 32. The menacing triplet patterns in the strings are replaced by a beautiful ensemble of harp and flute playing in F major. They echo the contrasting duple–triple texture between voice and orchestra, as the flutes provide a set of duple patterns against the sextuplet arpeggiations of the harp. It is a lovely and poignant text, with Renato lamenting the loss of everything that he treasured: "*O dolcezze perdute! O memorie d'un amplesso che mai non s'oblia!* (Oh sweetness lost! Oh memory of an embrace which hallows my being, when Amelia, so beautiful, so pure, shone upon my breast with love!)."

So far, the structure of this aria has been consistent with *solita forma,* in that it contains an introduction, *scena*, and *cantabile*. Theatrically, there is no call for any specific news or other information that would necessitate interrupting Renato's dramatic

ruminations. His next line is: "*È finita – non siede che l'odio, e la morte sul vedovo cor!* (It is finished – nothing but hate and death dwell in my widowed heart!)." This could be dramatic impetus for forward and aggressive singing, and Verdi could have easily taken that line and written an entire *cabaletta* on it. He instead chose to leave Renato in his reflective state, and simply snaps him back to reality for a moment with a quick musical reference to the A section before ultimately ending the aria back on the B material. He only brings Renato back to that feeling for a moment, providing the singer with the best color note of the chord to convey a beautiful summit point of pain. In this expressive way, opera achieves the emotional goal of conveying such tragic emotions simply by a skilled composer giving the singer the right note in a chord.

The strings enter once more with the triplets on top of the same descending line in the same bassoon/lower strings as before, as highlighted with a red solid outline in Figure 33. To musically craft Renato's dark moment, Verdi uses the resolution of the previous cadence landing on F, and skews the harmony intensely. The diminished chord, and the unsettled nature of shifting from major I to minor i mirrors Renato's unsettled feeling as he says *È finita* "It is finished" and snaps back to the reality of the terrible present.

In the portion highlighted by a green dashed line in Figure 33, the climactic point of the phrase "*non siede che l'odio* ("nothing sits [rests or remains] but hate)" is the high G flat. This provides the most colorful tone of a F^9 chord. It strains against the half step root of the chord. The descending line that follows mirrors his own downward spiral as the progression leads to the F major return of the B section.

Figure 33 – *Un ballo in maschera* Act III Scene 1 fast shift from B to A back to B

Verdi used a variety of tools to highlight Renato's moaning vocal notes that strain against the harmony, and contrasts in style between voice and orchestra. Specific orchestral textures, rhythmic variety, instrument choices, and melodic contour emphasize the drama of the moment rather than focusing upon formal conventions.

Verdi's prioritization of the dramatic content over the previous normal forms of his earlier career displays a distinct lean toward the importance of theatrical practicality and text painting. Aspects of *solita forma* are still present, but signs of its eventual dissolution are becoming more and more evident. In *Il trovatore* he altered the form, using it to provide an unexpected twist in "Il balen del suo sorriso" that enhanced Di Luna's actions on stage as the end of his aria bled over into Leonora's rites at the convent. In *Un ballo in maschera* he subverted the form, avoiding obvious formal choices and eliminating the *tempo di mezzo* entirely. These are the signs which point the way to a more through–composed approach to setting drama to music. As will be seen in Act III, there will soon be less emphasis on a specific formal structure, and more emphasis on musical storytelling.

ACT III – FORMAL FREEDOM

Georges Bizet commented in a March 11, 1867 letter to fellow composer Paul

Lacombe that "Verdi is no longer Italian. He wants to make Wagner. He gave up the

sauce and did not raise the hare."[56] Bizet was apparently disappointed in Verdi's

changing compositional style. Evolution from the formal boundaries of the *solita forma*

was met with resistance from the established order. The style that had come to be so

closely associated with Italian opera was being ignored by its up and coming as well as

its popular champion. Budden remarks that starting with *Don Carlo,* "we find Verdi

having less and less recourse to traditional forms, but allowing the situation of the

moment to suggest a purely individual solution."[57] The music was dictated by the specific

theatrical needs of each moment rather than obeying an expected formal structure. The

librettists, previously constrained by popular verse forms during the ottocento, were now

less constrained by form as well.[58] The result of moving away from the formal

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[56] Hugues Imbert, *Portraits et études; Lettres inédites de Georges Bizet*, (Paris: Fischbacher, 1894), 116.

[57] Julian Budden, *The Operas of Verdi, Vol. III* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1978), 291.

[58] Julian Budden, *The Operas of Verdi, Vol. I* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1978), 21.

boundaries of *solita forma* was that composition of the operas could take on a much more organic and seamless approach.

Two arias in particular stand out from Verdi's final operas as excellent examples of both theatrical musical accompaniment and the abandonment of *solita forma*. "Credo in un dio crudel" from *Otello* is a masterwork in purely theatrical accompaniment for a character that is so overtly evil as to be considered one-dimensional. Ford's prideful lament "È sogno? O realtà?" from Verdi's final opera *Falstaff* completes the journey from strict formal boundaries to almost no discernable form at all. Both arias focus on the drama and how to accompany individual phrases or individual words.

Scene 1: *Otello* (1887)

Verdi started having conversations around 1879 with the librettist Arrigo Boito about a possible setting of Shakespeare's *Othello*. The play is an appropriate choice for opera, and an attractive subject for the succinct theatrical writing Verdi desired. Bernard Shaw famously described this perfect fit: "The truth is that instead of *Otello* being an Italian opera written in the style of Shakespeare, *Othello* is a play written by Shakespeare in the style of Italian opera."[59] Iago's Act II, Scene 2 aria "Credo in un dio crudel" is a

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[59] Bernard Shaw, *Shaw's Music: The Complete Musical Criticism in Three Volumes, Vol. III*, (New York, NY: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1981), 579.

masterwork in the marriage of music and drama. Verdi presents thematic material and perverts it as the aria progresses, reflecting Iago's continually twisting soul. In Iago, Shakespeare created a character unlike most villains, in that there is seemingly no redemptive quality about him. He is evil for the sake of it, without it being borne of some tragedy or betrayal. Whatever backstory there is that would explain his motivations and actions is omitted from the story. He is simply the embodiment of an evil heart. Such a character has no love, no compassion, no traits at all to soften the melodic or harmonic brushes used to paint him.

There are remnants of *solita forma* in the aria, but only in the sense that there is an opening recitative, then a contrast between a slow, thoughtful section and a more rhythmically vibrant declamation. Beyond that, the old form is absent. Instead, the aria is better divided into multiple sections separated by the differences in Iago's thoughts, as outlined in Figure 34.

Section	Measures	Action	Key	Text and Notes
Scena	1-7	Sends Cassio away to do his secretly evil bidding	d	"Vanne; la tua meta già vedo." Begins recitative in *secco* style, at m. 4 shifts to a more accompanied *stromentato* style
Aria	7-20	Statement of belief in his cruel god	f - Eb	"Credo in un dio crudel" **First appearance of the credo theme**, use of octave doubling to create orchestral power
	21-33	Iago explains the origin of his baseness	Eb - c - F	"Dalla viltà d'un germe o d'un atòmo vile son nato." Much less the old "organ grinder" and more in-the-moment responses from the orchestra, **credo theme reappears** mm. 29-33.
	34-44	Iago rationalizes that he is destined to have these evil thoughts by Fate	c	"Credo con fermo cuor, siccome crede la vedo vella al tempio" Rhythmic intensity increases, takes on quality more like a typical aria
	45-64	Iago calls out the righteous man for being a liar, and that man is nothing but Fate's plaything	Fluid	"Credo che il giusto è un istrion beffardo e nel viso e nel cuor" Each new statement of belief outlining various diminished 7th chords
	64-84	Statement that nothing but Death awaits him, and that Heaven is an old wives' tale	f - Db - F	"Vien, dopo tanta irrision la Morte." **Credo theme repeated three times**, each more deformed and perverted than the last until nothing but the abyss remains in the contrabass; sudden and fortissimo gleeful major ending

Figure 34 – *Otello* Act II Scene 1 formal structure

In Figure 35, note the absence of a simple chord to establish a clear tonality. This significantly departs from *secco* recitative style, which might have only included an accompanimental chord played here and there. Verdi takes advantage of this expectation to introduce a more sinister, serpentine use of a triplet figure in the strings that precede the chord tones. Iago sings his initial line as an outline of an e–flat minor chord. The strings wrap around the root and third of that chord as seen in Figure 35, and bordered by a solid red box.

Figure 35 – *Otello* Act II Scene 1 – Establishment of serpentine thematic material

The next couple of lines Iago sings are answered by similar patterns in the strings, which increase their speed and urgency as the repeated Bb and Db dyad turns to Bb and D in the second system. This minor tonic raised to its parallel major continues its

energetic ascent up the line to an inverted e–flat minor. A slight alteration changes it into a German augmented 6ᵗʰ. This provides a more seamless transition to the relative major Db chord to end the phrase. The Gb bass line moving to the Db almost sounds like a Plagal Cadence preceding the Credo. Amen, indeed.

The opening of the aria begins in a *secco* recitative that soon becomes *stromentato.* Figure 35 shows the lower strings inculcating the sinister triplet motif highlighted in the solid red boxes, while the first violins tremolo on a pedal Bb as indicated by the blue dashed box. The triplet figures themselves deserve closer examination. Verdi takes the main note and allows the orchestra to slither around on either side of it in half–steps before arriving upon it as shown in Figure 36. In some cases, the snake then moves on to a new note of tonal significance.
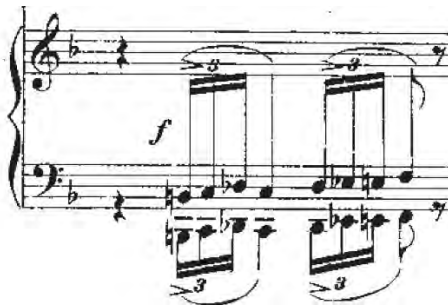

Figure 36 – *Otello* Act II Scene 1 – Triplets snaking around and up to notes

This snake of a triplet figure rears its head throughout the aria, accompanying Iago as if it were his spirit animal, the demon that is dragging him along as he becomes the demon of others. The recitative section ends with this Db major chord on *Iddio* (God)

as Iago reveals that he is dragged along by the one in whom he believes, that inexorable

(unavoidable, unstoppable) god.

Figure 37 – *Otello* Act II Scene 1 – Iago's credo theme

Measures 7-11 contain the main thematic material. This credo theme shown in

Figure 37 is marked *tutta forza* (full power) with octave doubling throughout the

orchestra. Budden describes that power: "As a unison of negative emotion it remains

unsurpassed in Italian opera."[60] It boldly outlines f minor with one slight difference: the

second note is a lowered second degree reminiscent of the sinister half–steps of Iago's

other thematic material.[61] It arrives at a strong tonic–dominant–tonic, and the only

harmony ever heard is on the final trembling cadence. The beginning of Iago's credo is

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[60] Julian Budden, *The Operas of Verdi, Vol. III* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1978), 358.

[61] Why is an ascending half–step so malevolent in this context? It is interesting that a half–step is eerie when the tonal center is the first note, but less so when the second note provides the tonal center. Strangely enough, John Williams's iconic shark theme from *Jaws* somehow seems less sinister if you think of the second note as the tonal center and think of it as Ti–Do.

delivered in recitative fashion as the darker violas, joined by clarinets in their rich

chalumeau register, trill an f minor dyad. The dyad progresses eventually to Eb as shown

in Figure 38. "The absolute, dogmatic nature of Boito's words is undermined by Verdi's

chords."[62] This beginning statement, much like in that of the Nicene Creed, is a simple

statement of belief in one God. The librettist Arrigo Boito took this idea and created an

anti–credo. James Parakilas wrote of this anti–credo, noting "Boito adapted the Christian

creed of [Iago] to the extent that he turned all of its tenets on their heads."[63] Boito's

adaptation of the creed shares the use of the word "credo" to begin three different

phrases, as Iago mocks the creed of Christians with a malicious one of his own, in

defiance of the Church. Iago has clearly chosen a side, and mocks the Church and all of

mankind in the process of declaring it.

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[62] Daniela Bini, "Reticence, a Rhetorical Strategy in Othello/Otello: Shakespeare, Verdi–Boito, Zeffirelli," *Italica* 83, no. 2 (2006): 249, http://www.jstor.org/stable/27669070.

[63] James Parakilas, "Religion and Difference in Verdi's *Otello*," *The Musical Quarterly* 81, no. 3 (1997): 376, http://www.jstor.org/stable/742323.

Figure 38 – *Otello* Act II Scene 1 – credo declamation

Figure 39 – *Otello* Act II Scene 1 – Idea shift through cadence and key change

In addition to the previous triplet sequences, there is a slightly different, secondary winding motive also associated with Iago. Specifically, it accompanies his enticing others into evil deeds. Parakilas elaborates, "These skipping motives can be said to belong to a musical topos that conveys a diabolical spirit of enticement, coupled with a

diabolical contempt for those being enticed."[64] This peculiar motive shown in Figure 39

is seen earlier in the opera as an overall motive for Iago's manipulative acts. It is present

in the previous scene when Iago twists Cassio into doing his bidding, as well as in the

Brindisi scene. Now the motive follows Iago into this soliloquy as he sings "*Dalla viltà*

d'un germe o d'un atòmo vile son nato. (From the smallest germ, or from the base of an

atom I was born.) *Son scellerato perchè son uomo; e sento il fango originario in me* (I am

wicked because I am a man; and I feel the ooze of my origins within me)."

Figure 40 – *Otello* Act II Scene 1 – Serpentine accompaniment

[64] James Parakilas, "Religion and Difference in Verdi's *Otello*," *The Musical Quarterly* 81, no. 3 (1997): 377, http://www.jstor.org/stable/742323.

Verdi establishes the completely new key of E to convey this idea, using the triplet sequences as interjections between phrases, as illustrated in Figure 40. The rising ooze of Iago's origins is mirrored in the slow ascension of the bass line from B to C to D through a series of very quiet snaking triplet figures slithering around his feet as he reveals each twisted thought. Iago rises to a high Eb on *scellerato* ("wicked.") The high Eb that he sings is followed by another on *uomo* ("man") which is colored by the same a^{o6}_5 from before, and the phrase ends with V–i. Instead of simply sounding the chord, the final c minor is articulated as an oozing descension from the fifth to the root.

The credo theme returns, reinforcing Iago's belief and associating the credo motive with an infernal anti-credo. Iago confirms that "*Si! Quest'è la mia fè!* (Yes, this is my faith!)" Verdi associates the main theme's identification with Iago's dark credo by repeating it underneath this powerful declamation, as indicated in Figure 41 by the red solid box. In the first iteration of the credo theme, the final note of the motive is played in tremolo. This time, it is firm, solid, a true punctuation to end Iago's statement of faith.

Figure 41 – *Otello* Act II Scene 1 – Reinforcement of Credo theme

The aria changes its style in m. 34 with a much livelier introduction in c minor, still using the triplets as before as outlined with the dashed blue box in Figure 41. The power of the theme is contrasted by a diminuendo to a more matter of fact delivery for the next section. Iago opines on how natural it is for him to do the evil things that he does. "*Credo con fermo cuor, siccome crede la vedovella al tempio* (I believe firmly in my heart, just like the little widow in church), *che il mal ch'io penso e che da me procede, per il mio destino adempio.* (that the evil I invent is wrought by my destiny)."

This particular phrase highlights two of Verdi's dramatic musical techniques: text painting and rising sequences to provide forward motion. At the word *tempio* (church), Verdi begins inserting the triplet figures (a mocking laugh at the Holy Trinity?). The phrase rises in tension through the use of ascending sequences. When Iago arrives at *destino adempio* (destiny wrought), Verdi places an ironic "Amen" as seen in Figure 42. The triplet interjections slowly rise to the f chord (indicated by the arrow). This leads the line to the fourth scale degree in C major and sets up the fmin-CM plagal cadence.

Figure 42 – *Otello* Act II Scene 1 – The destiny "Amen" minor plagal cadence

In the sentences that come next, Verdi continues his habit of accelerating intensity through the steady ascension of sequential vocal line. The previous credo in m. 36 begins on middle C. The next statement of his creed, now a little more intense, begins on Db in m. 45. The next begins on D at m. 52 and is even more intense: "*E credo l'uom gioco d'iniqua sorte dal germe della culla al verme dell'avel.* (And I believe man is the toy of bastardly Fate, from the germ of the cradle to the worm of the grave!)."

A steadily descending set of unison staccato sequential figures in the various octaves of the strings and woodwinds melodically depict the descent from cradle to grave (solid red box), ending in a ghastly shudder on the final word (dashed blue box), as illustrated in Figure 43.

Figure 43 – *Otello* Act II Scene 1 – Descending from cradle to the grave

Starting in m. 64, the final section of the aria, both tempo and rhythmic movement slow to a crawl. Verdi makes effective use of the orchestra's intense low range and seizes an opportunity to take the credo theme to an unexpected place, as shown in Figure 44. He

uses a legato approach that is slightly less powerful. It is deliberate and thoughtful. The

unison octaves have been replaced by rich harmony, ending with a deceptive cadence.

The expected repetition of the previous Bb chord is exchanged for d minor and is played

at *pianissimo*. In addition, the chord continues to sound as an eerie backdrop to force

focus back onto the voice.[65]

Figure 44 – *Otello* Act II Scene 1 – First perversion of the credo theme

A much more subdued Iago says that after so much derision comes Death. Verdi

has Iago take his time with these words, providing a *lento* tempo and multiple fermatas to

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[65] Verdi achieved the same level of eerie intensity much earlier in his life with another character from Shakespeare: Lady Macbeth as she read the letter from her husband, as discussed in Act I, Scene 2 of this thesis.

let each dark and singular thought truly sink in. The silence between phrases here is

deafening. "Death" receives its own shudder of an angstful b°7. The credo theme is

repeated twice again, each time more wretched than the last.

Figure 45 – *Otello* Act II Scene 1 – Final, withered iteration of the credo theme

Figure 45 shows the penultimate chord of the theme replaced with an insidious

sounding vii°$^4_3$, and a less settled i^6 chord in b flat minor, as illustrated in the solid red

box. Then, the orchestra descends even further. A simple, *pizzicato* representation in the

lowest strings is all that remains of the theme now, and Verdi explores the very darkest

abysmal depths of the contrabass at their most malevolent, as the players drag their bows in an infernal *arco* across the C string for the final *pianissinissinissimo* (illustrated by the dashed blue box). This time, the C does not go up a whole step to the deceptive cadence of a d minor chord, but leans hard into the half step d flat for the darkest thought of all, as Iago grumbles that Death is nothing but oblivion.

In a sudden flourish with the full orchestra's power behind him, Iago suddenly leaps into his upper register and declares that "and Heaven is nothing but an old wives' tale!" as seen in Figure 46. The climactic final high F on the word *ciel* (heaven) makes this final declamation a violent outcry in audacious defiance of God. The F comes as the orchestra shifts from Gb major to F major. The Gb major chord serves to set up the cadential landing through a single Db major chord jumping suddenly up to F major, ending the aria in the previously featured f minor's parallel major. A final mockery of the church is brought to life in the ironic Picardy third to finish the aria.

Figure 46 – *Otello* Act II Scene 1 final flourish and F major cadence

While not in the score, operatic tradition has Iago finishing the aria with boisterous and infernal mocking laughter. The sudden ending explosion in the orchestra and in Iago's vocal line is nothing short of an assault on the sensibilities of the audience,

and a masterful use of music borne not of form or convention, but by the raw power of the theatrical possibilities Boito and Verdi found in the text.

Revisiting the formal structure outlined in Figure 34 highlights that Verdi has now set aside the convention of *solita forma* entirely in favor of concentrating on the use of thematic motifs and the libretto's theatrical resources to compose his music for *Otello*. While there are shadows of *scena* and aria present here, the demarcation points between them are subtle at most. It is difficult to imagine anything more contrary to the traditional *cabaletta* than Iago's final moments in the scene. The *solita forma* convention has been abandoned in favor of an immersive theatrical experience focusing on what can be divined from each dramatic moment.

Scene 2: *Falstaff* (1893)

With only one exception very early in his compositional career, Verdi wrote operas with tragic characters and dramatic settings. None of them were specifically comedies by nature.[66] It is interesting, then, that Verdi would choose a comedic subject matter for his final opera. One could easily speculate that Verdi had practically been dared to do it by Rossini, who had said "Though I greatly admire Verdi, I believe him to

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[66] *Un giorno di regno*, which according to Budden, was a story Verdi was told to choose from a few available libretti by Felice Romani, and which he didn't even like. Verdi reportedly selected that one, saying "because the matter was of some urgency, I chose the one which seemed to me to be the least bad." Julian Budden, *The Operas of Verdi, Vol. I* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1978), 71.

be incapable of writing a comic opera."[67] The gauntlet had been thrown down, and Verdi

gladly took it up. There had been moments of levity in some of his operas like *La*

traviata, *Rigoletto,* and *Un ballo in maschera*, but Verdi protested that he had never truly

been given the chance to write an actual comedy. He had wanted to for some time,

according to Budden, who quotes from a letter Verdi wrote to the impresario and music

critic Gino Monaldi,

> "What can I tell you? I have wanted to write a comic opera for forty
> years, and I have known The Merry Wives of Windsor for fifty.
> However, the usual 'buts' which are everywhere always prevented me
> from satisfying this wish of mine. Now Boito has resolved all the 'buts'
> and has written me a lyric comedy quite unlike any other. I'm enjoying
> myself."[68]

He wrote, after *Otello,* "After having relentlessly massacred so many heroes and

heroines, I have at last the right to laugh a little."[69] The pressures of creating grand

operatic art for the Italian public, and the financial risks he would take on by writing

something so out of character, were no longer relevant in his elder state. He now had the

financial and artistic freedom to sit back and laugh at the world, and laugh he did.

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[67] John W. Klein, "Verdi and 'Falstaff,'" *The Musical Times* 67, no. 1001 (1926): 605, https://doi.org/10.2307/911833.

[68] Julian Budden, *The Operas of Verdi, Vol. III* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1978), 417.

[69] John W. Klein, "Verdi and 'Falstaff,'" *The Musical Times* 67, no. 1001 (1926): 605, https://doi.org/10.2307/911833.

Arrigo Boito adapted three different Shakespeare plays to create the libretto: *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *Henry IV Part I*, and *Henry IV Part 2*. Verdi was approaching eighty years old and had expressed concern about working on a new opera at his advanced age. Boito responded with subtlety and nuance, further challenging the great old maestro: "I don't think that writing a comedy should tire you out. A tragedy causes its author genuinely to suffer. . .The jokes and laughter of comedy exhilarate mind and body. . .There's only one way to finish better than with *Otello* and that's to finish triumphantly with *Falstaff*. After having sounded all the shrieks and groans of the human heart, to finish with a mighty burst of laughter, that is to astonish the world." And so, with this not–so–subtle nudge, Verdi wrote back "Amen, so be it! We'll write this *Falstaff* then!"[70] and thus agreed to dive once more into the deep end. They collaborated over the next three years to create *Falstaff*.

When a work centers around an anti–hero such as Sir John Falstaff, much like it might with Don Giovanni, an appropriate antagonist to that anti–hero can actually be considered good. Mister Ford is certainly not a villain, but Verdi does provide him with the most dramatic of arias to convey his jealousy and rage over the thought of being cuckolded by the rotund cavalier. Boito's libretto provides a structure that, had Verdi wished, could have easily been used to form a *solita forma* style aria. There is a *scena*

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[70] Julian Budden, *The Operas of Verdi, Vol. III* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1978), 423.

that could have been used as Ford tries to awaken from the surreal situation in which he finds himself. A *cavatina* could certainly have been written on the subject of how he feels betrayed by his wife and fears the gossip that will pass his name along throughout society. Falstaff's re–entry to the scene could have been shifted to an earlier moment as a *tempo di mezzo* further spurring Ford on to express his appreciation for revenge and jealousy as a fiery *cabaletta*. Instead, Verdi continued with his progressive choice to use motives to paint certain ideas into the accompaniment and tell the story of Ford's dismay in a more linear, connected fashion.

Measures	Action	Key	Text and Notes
1-25	Ford tries to get a sense of whether he is dreaming, or if this is actually happening	Fluid	"È sogno? O realtà..." Introduction of the *corno* motif, text painting of rising horns on Ford's head
26-34	Ford is helpless, bemoans his plight	eb	"L'ora è fissata, tramato l'inganno" The (actual) horns mirror Ford's mournful resignation of defeat
35-37	Ford wonders why jealousy is viewed as an insane emotion	Eb	"E poi diranno, che un marito geloso è un insensato!" Introduction of jealousy theme
38-45	Ford is stressed about gossip behind his back	Eb	"Già dietro a me nomi d'infame conio Fischian passando" Introduction of gossip theme
46-54	Ford declares marriage hell and all women to be untrustworthy	Ab	"O matrimonio: Inferno!"
55-69	Comic relief – Ford lists untrustworthy things he trusts more than his wife	Trans.	"Affiderei la mia birra a un Tedesco" Because who doesn't love poking fun at other nationalities? Verdi progresses through several keys with each phrase, starting with C, to a, to a d°7 setting up the next section.
69-78	Stress of the gossip haunts Ford	Trans.	"O laida sorte! Quella brutta parola in cor mi torna!" Begins in Ab and leads up to the Gb of the next section.
79-90	Ford resolves to seize charge of the situation and get revenge	Gb	"Ma, non mi sfuggirai! No! Sozzo, reo, Dannato epicureo!" Gossip theme undercuts his increasing despair and stress, driving his motivation and anger
91-96	Ford collapses under the weight of his rage	Trans.	"Io scoppio!" Descending sequences mirror Ford's collapse
97-109	Ford picks himself up and declares he will get his revenge, and praise be to Jealousy	Eb	"Vendicherò l'affronto!" Return bookend of the Jealousy theme

Figure 47 – *Falstaff* Act II Scene 1 formal structure

Ford's emotional tug–of–war journey through the various emotions he expresses in this aria are visible in the short segments outlined in Figure 47. These emotional leaps

back and forth must have been like Christmas morning for a composer of Verdi's experience and abilities. To accompany Ford's various and wide dynamic swings there are four distinct musical ideas: 1) cuckold horns; 2) helplessness; 3) jealousy; and 4) gossip. There is even a wry moment of levity as Ford shares a few exaggerated comparisons of untrustworthy things that he trusts more than his wife left to her own devices.[71]

The metaphor of growing cuckold horns, the symbol of Ford being the unwitting husband of an adulterous wife, is centuries old. The word cuckold comes from Old English, from the Old French *cucuault*. The word's root is from *cucu* (cuckoo) and refers to the cuckoo's habit of laying its egg in another bird's nest.[72] The implication is that the husband must be lacking in some way, causing the wife to seek satisfaction elsewhere. One excellent example of this being represented long ago can be found the Flemish painter François Bunel's 16th century canvas "Actors of the Commedia dell'Arte" shown in Figure 48.[73] The adulterous wife and her lover on the right are contrasted by the

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[71] See the translations in the Appendix for a list of the people that Ford would trust more than his wife. It's worth reading for a quick laugh.

[72] Deborah Swift, "A History of the Cuckold's Horns," English Historical Fiction Authors, February 15, 2017, https://englishhistoryauthors.blogspot.com/2017/02/a–history–of–cuckolds–horns.html.

[73] François Bunel, *Actors of the Commedia dell'Arte*, ca. 1522, oil on canvas, Musée des beaux–arts, Béziers, https://www.mediastorehouse.co.uk/fine–art–finder/arts/artists–b–francois–bunel/actors–commedia–dell–arte–oil–canvas–12703649.html.

angered cuckolded husband, who is actively being made fun of as the masked man gives him "horns" made by two fingers behind his head.

Figure 48 – Painting of "Actors of the Commedia dell'Arte" by François Bunel

During the scene, Ford suddenly finds himself feeling as if cuckold horns are growing onto his head, a mirror to the sudden realization that his wife is unfaithful. Ford grapples furiously with the surrealism of his situation, and Verdi paints this with a fantastic augmented chord, joined by an Eb that instills it with a whole tone quality, outlined by a blue dashed box in Figure 49. Immediately, the creeping strings that had years ago slithered their way around Iago's feet in *Otello* return, this time rising up one

horn at a time upon Ford's head (outlined by the solid red box). Ford shifts from being dumbstruck to a sudden state of horrible realization.

Figure 49 – *Falstaff* Act II Scene 1, Ford's mental state and growing cuckold horns

Ford expresses fear, anger and confusion in exclaiming that two enormous ram's horns are growing out of his head. Ford tries to convince himself to wake up and look at what is happening. Verdi paints the emergence of Ford's cuckold horns through sequential lines outlined by red solid lined boxes in Figure 50. The first is an ominous precursor, then each line punctuates various ways Ford is being betrayed through Verdi's classic technique of ascending sequences. The horns theme returns as he lists each thing

that his wife's unfaithfulness is ruining: "*Tua moglie sgarra e mette in ma'assetto l'onor tuo, la tua casa, ed il tuo letto!* (Your wife is straying and befouling your honor, your house, and your bed!)."

Figure 50 – *Falstaff* Act II Scene 1, cuckold horn punctuations

Figure 51 – *Falstaff* Act II Scene 1 – Horns echo Ford's helplessness about the horns

In a moment of compositional mischief, Verdi kicks Ford while he is down by introducing a small theme with literal French Horns (*corni,* outlined in the solid red box in Figure 51). This helplessness theme underscores Ford's helplessness about the metaphorical horns that have sprouted upon his head, and about the gossip being spread behind his back. Then, as if the horns lacked sufficient cruelty, the bassoons and cellos (outlined in a blue dashed box) seem to mock Ford after everything he says: "The hour is set, the deceit is plotted. You're mocked and tricked!" Each sentiment is prefaced by this helplessness theme in the horns, and responded to by the mocking laughter of the bassoon

and cello lines. This is one of the best examples of Verdi using the orchestra as another character, accentuating Ford's misery. One person's tragedy is another's comedy.

This could all very easily have been written as recitative, a *scena* to set up a *cavatina* of some sort. That certainly would have been less work for the aging composer. Thankfully, these motivic ideas help paint a much more colorful picture. One particular color Verdi paints with vividly (and ironically[74]) is green, specifically the green–eyed monster of jealousy (a phrase coined by Shakespeare in *Othello*). Arguably the most profound of the different musical ideas contained within the aria, the jealousy theme is introduced in m. 35 as Ford sings "*E poi diranno che un marito geloso è un insensato!* (And then they will say that a jealous husband is a senseless man)."

Figure 52 – *Falstaff* Act II Scene 1 – Jealousy theme

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[74] The Italian word for green is actually *verdi*. Giuesppe Verdi is "Joseph Green."

The jealousy theme illustrated in Figure 52 is strong, with a rhythmic and melodic doubling of the vocal line, and an initial sol–do that provides a robust Eb major tonic feel after the previous section's parallel e–flat minor that swam around back and forth with interjections between Ford's separated lines. Until this moment, the orchestra works against Ford most of the time, but here they are united rhythmically with him as he expresses frustration and incredulity that jealousy is considered insensible behavior.

The jealousy theme returns to provide a prideful, powerful, climactic end to the aria, appropriately on Ford's final word: jealousy. His final phrase, "*Laudata sempre sia nel fondo del mio cor la gelosia!* (Praised forever be in the depths of my heart: jealousy)," is answered by the orchestral return of the jealousy theme in the strings, some of the brass, and most of the woodwinds, as shown in Figure 53. The rest of the orchestra provides rhythmic energy on the tonic Eb through a triplet pulse underneath it.

Figure 53 – *Falstaff* Act II Scene 1 – Jealousy theme climactic finale

The fourth theme is that of the gossiping public, which seems to concern Ford more than anything else. He is a man obsessed with appearances, and the public humiliation of being cuckolded drives him to do insane things for the rest of the opera. Verdi utilizes this gossip motif in the orchestra with a pattern woven throughout the aria. The clarinet provides the first iteration of the primary element of the theme, as outlined by the red solid boxes in Figure 54. The accented entrance on the weaker second beat is jarring and demands attention as being something out of control. The primary element is Verdi up to his old trick of using half–steps on either side of a note to convey something sinister. The horn and bassoon then provide the secondary element, indicated by the blue dashed boxes, as almost an echo of the gossip flying away out of Ford's control to stop.

Figure 54 – *Falstaff* Act II Scene 1, gossip theme

Whenever Ford returns to rumination on the talk likely going on behind his back, the gossip theme returns as well to accompany his anxiety. After his rather comical fourth

wall–breaking aside, the gossip theme returns in m. 69 to drag Ford back into that headspace where he is completely befuddled with the shame of it. He flies suddenly back to a reference to the horns again, shifts the blame squarely to the "damned epicurean," and then the gossip theme returns and becomes even more of an assault on Ford. The ever–increasing use of the theme passed around different voices in the orchestra, as shown in Figure 55, mirror the many voices that are almost certainly spreading around the rumors about Ford being a cuckolded husband. Ford cracks under the pressure and collapses momentarily, before finishing the aria with an outburst in praise of jealousy.

Figure 55 – *Falstaff* Act II Scene 1 gossip theme spreading like actual gossip

These four themes, used creatively throughout the aria to convey the rhapsodic

whirlwind of emotions that Ford is experiencing, create a much more theatrically

satisfying experience for the listener than if Verdi had attempted to fit these ideas

conveniently into a fixed formal pattern. A composer following the *solita forma* might have been forced to omit the wry aside in the middle, or may have had great difficulty navigating the flip–flopping emotional states that Ford exhibits. It is certainly beneficial to the theatricality of the piece, and thus beneficial to the complete audience experience, that Verdi told this story through the additional character of the orchestra and motivic ideas.

During the middle of his life, Verdi had written, "If in opera there were neither cavatinas, duets, trios, choruses, finales, etcetera, and the whole work consisted, let's say, of a single number, I should find that all the more right and proper."[75] With *Falstaff* it seems that he finally got what he wanted. This opera avoids structured arias or set pieces in the traditional sense. One does not go around humming tunes from the opera, nor does one often hear selections from it being performed in recital. It largely consists of scenes smoothly flowing into other scenes, small soliloquies and playful interactions. The music underscores the theater as it occurs, with scarcely a traditional operatic convention present. "The music is welded, rather than wedded, to the text from beginning to end."[76] Berger's comment on why *Falstaff* is at the same time less popular, but more revered, than most of his other operas supports the idea that it was not until Verdi had no interest or concern about box office receipts or criticisms, that he finally wrote the "single

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[75] Franco Abbiati, *Giuseppe Verdi Vol. 1,* (Milan: Ricordi, 1959), 122–123.

[76] William Berger, *Verdi with a Vengeance* (New York, NY: Random House, Inc., 2000), 415.

number" opera he had dreamed of so many years before. Richard Strauss commented that *Falstaff* was "one of the greatest masterworks of all time," applauding the "unity between text and music. . .which has certainly never been surpassed in the annals of opera."[77] That unity, that synchronicity between word and sound, and moving the action along in real time without pausing much for aria–style reflection, places *Falstaff* upon a pedestal of achievement in theatrical storytelling through music. After a lifetime of dramatic storytelling full of death and revenge and murder and betrayal, Verdi's final opera ends with a playful fugue that thumbs its nose at the world. It has but two lines: "*Tutto nel mondo è burla. L'uom è nato burlone.* (All the world is a joke. Man is born a joker)."

Otello is arguably Verdi's greatest success in the marriage of the vocal and theatrical arts. In "Credo in un dio crudel" he deftly conveyed the pure evil of Iago by composing music to accompany individual ideas as they happened. In the "È sogno? O realtà?" of *Falstaff* he nimbly switched between Ford's anxious and frantic emotions, and provided multiple motives used throughout instead of segmented aria sections. In both arias, the boundaries of *solita forma* were abandoned entirely in favor of music that moves the action continually forward, instead of halting the action to reflect upon it.

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[77] Ernest Krause, *Richard Strauss: The Man and His Work* (Boston: Crescendo, 1969), 97.

EPILOGUE

This study focuses on the music and characters of several of Verdi's best–known villains to trace the evolution of his compositional style. He started his career utilizing the popular *solita forma* format for his operas, and as each villain's dramatic opportunities drove the composer to find new and better ways to tell their stories, *solita forma* became increasingly absent. He eventually chose to shift the priority from the popular *bel canto* style of opera as primarily a vocal showcase, to opera as an immersive theatrical experience. The music serves the drama, not the other way around.

The standard *solita forma* was used to excellent effect during the young composer's humble beginnings. It served two important practical purposes. First, it provided a set framework to aid in the efficiency of his writing. Second, it helped make Verdi's operas more readily palatable and acceptable to the Italian opera–going public. The operas *Nabucco* and *Macbeth* formed the start and end points for this personally and professionally volatile period in his life. *Nabucco* (1842) provided him with fame and financial stability, ensuring he would be commissioned to write more operas. Abagille's *cavatina* and *cabaletta* are a perfect example of *solita forma*. Verdi's text painting tendency is shown briefly, but the form dominates the structure overall. By the time he reached *Macbeth* in 1847, his credibility was such with both the opera–going public and with impresarios that Verdi could begin taking more and more creative risks to infuse his

opera with music which personified the sociopathic and ambitious tendencies of Lady Macbeth. With Lady Macbeth's *cavatina* and *caballetta*, Verdi began showing the dramatic potential of operatic performance as something other than a beautiful vocal exercise. For Verdi, the dramatic content was just as important as the vocal performance, and he needed to find ways to express that malice without being tied to a specific outline.

In the middle years of his life, at a time when he was enjoying great commercial success, the *solita forma* that had previously stood in the way of Verdi's dramatic goals started to show signs of breaking away. Emboldened by the success he enjoyed with operas like *La traviata, Rigoletto*, and *Il trovatore*, he began manipulating *solita forma* and using it in different ways to achieve a more dramatic representation of his villainous character's motivations, thoughts, and deeds. In 1853's *Il trovatore* he used the form to do something unexpected for the benefit of telling the story by writing Count Di Luna's *cabaletta* so that it bled over into Leonora's sacred rite. Verdi actually used the expectations of the double aria form against itself, perverting the "natural order" with Di Luna's insistent and insatiable desire for Leonora. By 1859 with *Un ballo in maschera*, Verdi began omitting parts of the *solita forma* entirely in favor of a structure that more closely followed the scenic arc of the story, passing on the opportunity to write a *cabaletta* and choosing instead to focus on the character's specific emotional delivery on stage. Remnants of the *solita forma* structure were still present, and certain structures and forms were still used, but evidence shows Verdi was evolving beyond those forms and moving toward his ultimate end goal of opera being a more holistic dramatic experience.

By the end, with 1887's *Otello* and 1893's *Falstaff,* Verdi finally completed his departure from the formal boundaries of the *solita forma* and arrived at what he always felt was more important: striking a balance between the text, music, vocal display, and staging. The music evolved from simple accompaniment to its own character in the story. The overall audience experience became much more immersive as Verdi moved away from the earlier forms that were expected, but predictable. In *Otello* he deeply explored the abject savagery of man through Iago's creed, and in *Falstaff* he explored the laughable nature of man's insecurities through Ford's roller coaster ride of jealous desperation. In both arias, Verdi strips away the formal structure in favor of word–specific text painting and the use of motives to express specific concepts. The metamorphosis from emphasis on standardized form to theatrical impetus for each musical moment is complete.

Certain tools such as the use of half–steps around a tonal center or unexpected harmonic progressions are used throughout his career to paint the malevolent emotions and intentions of his villains. In the end, one of the most effective ways Verdi found to convey such malice was to drill down on the darkest details within a character's words and actions. This resulted in Verdi eventually discarding *solita forma* and spending ample time developing one insidious moment to the next. It allowed him to explore the depths of villainy in its darkest places, the apotheosis of which can be found in the final moments of Iago's aria. Verdi's use of intense silence between phrases shows the

craftsman at his most masterful, proving that sometimes the best music for a villain can be no sound at all.

Through all of his trials and tribulations, his personal tragedies, the difficulties he encountered with the production of his work, and critical resistance to his musical evolution, Giuseppe Verdi persevered and created masterworks that are so regularly a part of the repertory that at any given moment, one of his operas is likely being performed nearly every weekend of the year around the world. Budden concludes his three volumes on Verdi with a succinct summation that may serve to end this study with an appropriate level of awe and respect: "Starting with a technique cruder and more primitive than that of any young composer of comparative stature, the provincial from Busseto achieved a refinement of musical craftsmanship and thought that has never been surpassed and rarely equaled."[78] Indeed, Verdi's legacy endures and shall endure for ages to come. His name truly is synonymous with the genre of opera, and the inestimable treasures he left to the world will almost certainly continue to be produced and enjoyed for centuries.

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[78] Julian Budden, *The Operas of Verdi, Vol. III* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1978), 531.

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APPENDIX A – TRANSLATIONS

Translation by the author with the aid of Nico Castel libretti[79]

*Nabucco***, Act II, Scene 1***:* Abagaille, High Priest, Chorus

Ben io t'invenni, o fatal scritto!

Happily I found you, oh fatal document!

In seno mal ti celava il rege, onde a me fosse di scorno!

In his bosom badly did the king hide you, that it would be shameful for me!

Prole Abigaille di schiavi! Ebben! Sia tale!

Abigail, the progeny of slaves! Very well! Let her be such!

Di Nabucco figlia, qual l'Assiro mi crede,

The daughter of Nabucco, as the Assyrians believe me to be,

Che sono io qui? Peggior che schiava!

What am I here? Worse than a slave!

Il trono affida il rege alla minor Fenena,

The throne confides the king to the younger Fenena,

Mentr'ei fra l'armi a sterminar Giudea l'animo intende!

while he, with his weapons, sets his intentions to exterminate Judea!

Me glia mori altrui invia dal campo a qui mirar!

Me, he sends from the battlefield to watch the amorous doings of others!

Oh, iniqui tutti e piú folli ancor!

Oh wicked all, and more deluded still!

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[79] Nico Castel, *The Complete Verdi Libretti: In Four Volumes.* (Genesco, NY: Leyerle Publications, 1995-6).

D'Abigaille mal conoscete il core!

You badly know Abigail's heart!

Su tutti il mio furore piombar vedrete!

You will see my fury fall upon everyone!

Ah, si! Cada Fenena, il finto padre! Il regno!

Yes! Will fall Fenena, my pretended father! The realm!

Su me stessa rovina o fatal sdegno!

On myself ruin as well, oh fatal anger!

Anch'io dischiuso un giorno ebbi alla gioia il core;

I too opened once my heart to joy.

Tutto parlarmi interno udia di santo amore;

Everything around me spoke of sacred love.

Piangeva all'altrui pianto, soffriva degli altri al duol;

I wept at others' tears, I suffered the pain of others.

Ah! Chi del perduto incanto mi torna un giorno soil?

Who can return to me just one day that lost enchantment?

(Tempo di mezzo)

Chi s'avanza?

Who approaches?

HP: Orrenda scena s'e mostrata agl'occhi miei!

A terrible scene showed itself to my eyes!

A: Oh! Che narri?

What are you telling me?

HP: Empia è Fenena, manda liberi gli Ebrei!

Fenena is wicked, she is liberating the Hebrews!

Questa turba malesetta chi frenare omai potrà?

Who can stop this accursed rabble now?

Il potere a te s'aspetta.

Power awaits you.

A: Come?

How?

HP: Il tutto è pronto già.

Everything is already prepared.

SS: Noi già sparso abiamo fama come il re cadesse in guerra.

We have already spread the rumor that the king has fallen in war.

Te regina il popol chiama a salvar l'Assira terra.

The people call for you as queen to save the Assyrian land.

Solo un passo, è tua la sorte! Abbi cor!

Only one step, and fortune is yours! Be stout of heart!

A: Son teco! Va!

I am with you! Go!

Oh fedel, di te men forte questa donna non sarà!

Faithful one, this woman will not be less strong than you!

Salgo già del trono aurato lo sgabello insanguinato;

Already I ascend the bloodstained seat of the golden throne.

ben saprà la mia vendetta da quel seggio fulminar.

I'll know well how to unleash my revenge from that seat.

Che lo scettro a me s'aspetta tutti i popoli vedranno, ah!

All the people will see that the scepter rightfully belongs to me.

Regie figlie qui verranno l'umil schiava a supplicar.

Royal daughters will come here to beg favors from me, the humble slave girl!

HP, SS: E di Belo la vendetta con la tua si, saprà tuonar!

And Baal's revenge will thunder forth with your vengeance!

***Macbeth*, Act I, Scene 2:** Lady Macbeth, Servamt

"Nel di della vittoria io le incontrai. . . stupito io n'ero per le udite cose;

"On the day of victory I met them. . .rapt in wonder I was at the heard things;"

"Quanto I nunzi del re mi salutaro Sir di Caudore, vaticinio uscito dale veggenti stesse che predissero un serto al capo mio.

"When the messengers of the king hailed me Thane of Cawdor, the same prophecy made by the seers who predicated a crown on my head."

"Racciudi in cor questo segreto. Addio."

"Lock this secret in your heart. Farewell."

Ambizioso spirto tu sei, Macbetto alla grandezza aneli ma sarai tu malvagio?

Ambitious in spirit you are, Macbeth. You aspire to greatness, but will you be wicked?

Pien di misfatti è il calle dell potenza, e mal per lui che il piede dubitoso vi pone, e retrocede!

Full of misdeeds is the path that leads to power, and woe to him whose foot falters on that path and then retreats!

Vieni! t'affretta! Accendere ti vo' quel freddo core!

Come! Hurry! I wish to kindle that cold heart of yours!

L'audace impresa a compiere Io ti darò valore.

To accomplish the audacious deed, I will give you courage.

Di Scozia a te promettono Le profetesse il trono...

The seers have promised you the throne of Scotland…

Che tardi?

Why delay?

Accetta il dono, ascendivi a regnar.

Accept the gift, mount the throne and reign!

S: Al cader della sera il re qui giunge.

At nightfall, King Duncan will come here.

LM: Che di'? Macbetto è seco?

What are you saying? Is Macbeth with him?

S: Ei l'accompagna. La nuova, o donna, è certa.

He is accompanying him. The news, oh lady, is certain.

LM: Trovi accoglienza quale un re si merta.

May he find a reception as befits a king.

Duncano sarà qui? Qui la notte?

Duncan will be here? Here for the night?

Or tutti sorgete, ministry infernali che al sangue incorate, spingete I mortali!

Now all arise, you ministers of hell who incite and spur mortals to bloody deeds!

Tu notte ne avvolgi di tenebra immota;

You, night, wrap us in thick darkness;

Qual petto percota non vegga il pugnale.

Let the breast not see the dagger that strikes it!

***Il trovatore*, Act II, Scene 2:** Count Di Lua, Ferrando, Chorus

Tutto è deserto: Nè per l'aure ancora suona l'usato carme.

All is deserted: Nor in the air yet resounds the usual hymn.

In tempo io giungo!

I have come in time!

F: *Ardita opra, o signore, impredi.*

A bold errand, master, you are undertaking.

Ardita, e qual furente amore ed irritato orgoglio chiesero a me.

Bold, and what a furious love and provoked pride have demanded of me.

Spento il rival, caduto ogni ostacol sembrava a'miei desire;

I have killed my rival, every obstacle to my desires has fallen;

Novello e piú possente ella ne appresta… l'altare…

A new and more powerful desire she prepares… the altar…

Ah no! Non fia d'altri Leonora! Leonora è mia!

Ah no! She must not belong to another. Leonora! Leonora is mine!

Il balen del suo sorriso d'una stella vince il raggio;

The flash of her smile outshines the ray of a star;

Il fulgor del suo bel viso nuovo infonde a me coraggio.

The splendor of her fair face instills new courage in me.

Ah! L'amore, l'amore ond'ardo le favelli in mio favor,

Ah! The love the enflames me,

sperda il sole d'un suo sguardo la tempesta del mio cor.

let the sun of one of her glances dispel the tempest in my heart.

Qual suono! Oh ciel!

That sound! Oh heaven!

F: *La squilla vicino il rito annunzia.*

The tolling of the bell announces the approaching rite.

DL: *Ah! Pria che giunga all'altar… si rapisca!*

Before she reaches the altar, let her be seized!

F: *Bada!*

Beware!

DL: *Taci! Non odo! Andate. Di quei faggi all'ombra celatevi.*

Silence! I am not listening! Go. Hide yourselves in the shade of those beeches.

Ah! Fra poco mia diverrà! Tutto m'investe un foco!

Ah! Soon she will be mine! A fire runs through all of me!

F: *Ardir! Andiam, celiamoci fra l'ombre, nel mister! Ardir! Andiam, silenzio!*

Courage! Let's go, let us hide in the shadows, in mystery! Courage! Let's go, silence!

Si compia il suo voler!

Let his wish be done!

DL: *Per me ora fatale, I tuoi momenti affretta:*

Hour, fatal for me, hasten your moments:

La gioia che m'aspetta gioia mortal non è, no!

The joy awaiting me is not the joy of mortals, no!

Invano un Dio rivale s'oppone all'amor mio…

A rival God opposes my love in vain…

Non può nemmeno un Dio, donna, rapirti a me!

Woman, not even a God can steal you away from me!

Un ballo in maschera*,* **Act III, Scene 1:** Renato

Alzati, là tuo figlio a te concedo riveder.

Arise! I allow you to once again see your son, there.

Nell'ombra e nel silenzio, là, il tuo rossore e l'onta mia nascondi.

In the darkness and in silence, go and hide your blushing and my shame.

Non è su lei, nel suo fragile petto che colpir degg'io.

It is not her fragile breast that I must strike.

Altro, ben altro sangue a terger dèssi l'offesa!

Another, quite another's blood must cleanse this offense.

Il sangue tuo!

Your blood!

E lo trarrà il pugnale dallo sleal tuo core: Delle lacrime mio vendicatore!

And my dagger, the avenger of my tears, will draw it from your disloyal heart!

Eri tu che macchiavi quell'anima, la delzia dell'anima mia...

It was you who sullied that soul, the delight of my soul…

Che m'affidi e d'un tratto esecrabile l'universo avveleni per me!

You who trusted me and suddenly in loathsome fashion poisoned the universe for me!

Traditor! che in tal guisa rimuneri dell'amico tuo primo la fè!

Traitor! You who repays your best friend's loyalty in such a way!

O dolcezze perdute! O memorie d'un amplesso che mai non s'oblia!

O sweetness lost! O memory of an embrace which hallows my being!

Quando Amelia sì bella, sì candida sul mio seno brillava d'amor!

When Amelia, so beautiful, so pure, shone upon my breast with love!

È finita – non siede che l'odio, e la morte sul vedovo cor!

It's finished – nothing but hate and death dwell in my widowed heart!

***Otello*, Act II, Scene 1**: Iago

Vanne; la tua me to già vedo.

Go to it! I already see your end.

Ti spinge il tuo dimone e il tuo dimon son io,

You are driven by your demon, and that demon is me,

E me trascina il mio, nel quale io credo inesorato Iddio.

And I am dragged along by my own, the inexorable God in whom I believe.

Credo in un Dio crudel che m'ha creato simile a sè e che nell'ira io nomo.

I believe in a cruel God who created me in his image, and whom in my wrath I name!

Dalla viltà d'un germe o d'un atòmo vile son nato.

From the smallest germ, or from the base of an atom I was born.

Son scellerato perchè son uomo; e sento il fango originario in me.

I am wicked because I am a man; and I feel the ooze of my origins within me.

Sì! questa è la mia fe'!

Yes, this is my faith!

Credo con fermo cuor, siccome crede la vedovella al tempio,

I believe firmly in my heart, just like the little widow in church,

che il mal ch'io penso e che da me procede, per il mio destino adempio.

that the evil I invent is wrought by my destiny.

Credo che il guisto è un istrion beffardo, e nel viso e nel cuor,

I believe a just man is a mocking actor in both face and heart.

Che tutto è in lui bugiardo:

Everything in him is a lie:

Lagrima, bacio, sguardo, sacrificio ed onor.

Tears, kisses, sacrifices, and honor.

E credo l'uom gioco d'iniqua sorte dal germe della culla al verme dell'avel.

And I believe man is the toy of bastardly Fate, from the germ of the cradle to the worm of the grave!

Vien dopo tanta irrision la Morte.

After so much derision, comes Death.

E poi? E poi? La Morte è il Nulla.

And then? A then? Death is oblivion.

è vecchia fola il Ciel.

And Heaven is nothing but an old wives' tale!

Falstaff, **Act II, Scene 1:** Ford

E' sogno o realtà?… Due rami enormi crescon sulla mia testa.

Is it a dream or reality? Two enormous branches are growing over my head.

E' un sogno? Mastro Ford! Mastro Ford! Dormi? Svegliati! Su! Ti desta!

Is this a dream? Master Ford! Are you sleeping? Awake! Up! Rouse yourself!

Tua moglie sgarra e mette in mal assetto l'onore tuo, la casa ed il tuo letto!

Your wife is straying and befouling your honor, your house, and your bed!

L'ora è fissata, tramato l'inganno;

The hour is set, the deceit is plotted.

Sei gabbato e truffato!

You're mocked and tricked!

E poi diranno che un marito geloso è un insensato!

And then they'll say that a jealous husband is a senseless man!

Già dietro a me nomi d'infame conio fischian passando, mormora lo scherno.

Already behind me infamous names pass by, whistling, murmuring contempt.

O matrimonio, inferno! Donna: Demonio!

Oh marriage: Hell! Women: Demons!

Nella lor moglie abbian fede i babbei!

Having faith in a wife is for simpletons!

Affiderei la mia birra a un Tedesco,

I would sooner entrust my beer to a German,

Tutto il mio desco a un Olandese lurco,

My entire table to a gluttonous Dutchman,

La mia bottiglia d'acquavite a un Turco,

My bottle of brandy to a Turk,

Non mia moglie a se stessa.

Than my wife to herself!

O laida sorte! Quella brutta parola in cor mi torna:

Oh foul fate! That ugly word comes back to my heart:

Le corna! Bue! Capron! le fusa torte! Ah! le corna! le corna!

The horns! Ox! Billygoat! The crooked spindles, ah! The horns! The horns!

Ma non mi sfuggirai! no! sozzo, reo, dannato epicureo!

But you won't escape me! No, filthy man, guilty man, damned epicurean!

Prima li accoppio e poi lo colgo!

First I pair them, then I catch them!

Io scoppio!

I am bursting!

Vendicherò l'affronto!

I shall avenge this affront!

Laudata sempre sia nel fondo del mio cor la gelosia!

Praised forever be in the depths of my heart: jealousy!

VITA

Michael Chadwick is a former stage director and *basso cantante* with more than thirty years of experience in the opera industry. He attended Westminster Choir College, where he sang under the batons of such esteemed conductors as Dr. Joseph Flummerfelt, Riccardo Muti, Kurt Masur, Robert Spano, Hugh Wolff, and Zdeněk Mácal. As a member of the Westminster Symphonic Choir, Michael performed regularly with the New York Philharmonic, the Philadelphia Orchestra, and the New Jersey Symphony. For more than twenty years he sang with various professional opera choruses including the Dallas Opera, Fort Worth Opera, and Opera Festival of New Jersey.

Since 2002 Michael has provided supertitle translations to more than 250 organizations globally, creating one of the largest supertitle rental libraries in the world. His translations have been seen at over a thousand presentations of opera and oratorio on four continents. Michael is in the process of completing his Master's Degree in Music Theory at Stephen F. Austin State University, in hopes of becoming a better composer and arranger.

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This thesis was typed by Michael Chadwick and uses style guide Turabian, 9th Edition.