CHAPTER 1:

INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

A Subject for Our Time

> I want plots that are great, beautiful, varied, daring ... daring to an extreme, new in form and at the same time adapted to composing. If a person says I have done thus and so because Romani, Cammarano, and others did so ... then we no longer understand each other. Precisely because of the fact that those great men did it that way, I should like to have something different done. I shall have *La Dame aux Camélias* performed in Venice. It will perhaps be called *La Traviata*. A subject from our own time. Another person would perhaps not have composed it because of the costumes, because of the period, because of a thousand other foolish objections. I did it with particular pleasure. Everybody cried out when I proposed to put a hunchback on the stage. Well, I was overjoyed to compose *Rigoletto*, and it was just the same with *Macbeth*, and so on ...[1]

The plot of *La traviata* centres on its eponymous heroine Violetta and the development of her character whose *posizione* must be projected musically.[2] Verdi used the term *posizione* to describe the plot-and-character-driven gesture which must be 'articulated musically'.[3] According to Gilles de Van, it 'arises from a particular moment in the plot; a situation [*posizione*] almost invariably corresponds to a phase in

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[1] Werfel, Franz and Stefan, Paul, *Verdi: The Man in His Letters*, trans. Edward Downes (New York: Vienna House, 1973), p. 373.
[2] The term *posizione* and other Italian terms and expressions will be found in the Glossary at the end of this thesis. General definitions have been included for the benefit of a wider audience.
[3] Gilles de Van, *Verdi's Theater*, trans. Gilda Roberts (Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 119.

the development of a character or of the plot and, musically, to the use of a given form'.

As in the English word 'position', *posizione* denotes the concept of place within a material, psychological or social space. It is used, for example, in such expressions as 'posizione sociale' (social position), 'prendere posizione' (to take sides) and 'una posizione imbarazzante' (an embarrassing position). Verdi used the term as the primary dramatic integer in the service of which he composed musical gestures. Gilles de Van restricts the term (and its subsequent replacement, *situazione*) to its use by Verdi in the context of the intersection of a particular musical form with its concomitant dramatic event. Its importance, however, lies in its being the focus of Verdi's musical strategies.

I intend to extrapolate from the term *posizione* as more narrowly applied by de Van, remaining mindful of the fact that it is a concept in the expression of which a musical strategy or tactic occurs. More fluid in its application than 'social position' which may imply a fixed status, the term *posizione* as I shall use it will serve to indicate the flux of social interaction from moment to moment. For the purposes of composition, a musical gesture is used to delineate *posizione* as the relationship of a character with others in a social space at a given time. For the singer, *posizione* is affected by the use of that musical gesture which acts upon the singer's relationship with her audience in a social space at a given time. For Verdi himself, *posizione* is revealed by the use of musical gesture which expresses his own relationship with a character, with singers and with the audience at a given time.

It was the composer's task to use the dynamism of tension and the conflict borne of contrast, together with the impetus of the dramatic action to delineate *posizione*.[4] As his career progressed, Verdi preferred the term *situazione* to *posizione*. The former term 'carries with it the more abstract idea of a network of connections at the heart of the drama'.[5] Verdi had grown to appreciate the concept of *posizione* in flux. This thesis seeks to identify musical strategies, by means of the written score and the performance practices required, which are used to produce the dramatic character and changing manifestations of *posizione* of Violetta Valéry in Verdi's *La traviata*. Since these strategies involve the singer through the use of her vocal and histrionic techniques, this study will also investigate the relationship these may have to the *posizione* of the performer in its wider sense as the singer's relationship to the audience and to the *posizione* of Verdi in his relationship to character, singer and audience.

The plot of *La traviata* centres on its heroine Violetta, the 'lost one' alluded to in the title, and the development of her character through musically projected manifestations of *posizione*. This 'subject from our own time' occupies a place in the 'trilogy' of *Rigoletto, Il trovatore* and *La traviata* whose three protagonists Rigoletto, Manrico and Violetta were marginalised from the society in which they were supposed to exist.[6] Violetta, a courtesan, was regarded as a dangerous woman feared, resented, but also secretly admired by the audiences who saw and heard her portrayed on stage. Susan Rutherford comments that *La traviata* was 'feared for its potential to

[4] Ibid., pp. 119 – 120.
[5] Ibid., p. 317.
[6] de Van, *Verdi's Theater*, p. 226.

contaminate the female audience'.[7] The consumption (tuberculosis) from which its heroine suffered was according to Arthur Groos, widely associated 'with a dissolute life-style' and the exertion of 'a strong sexual attraction'.[8] The portrayal of a character such as Violetta's with the potential to challenge the expectations of an audience required the exhibition of many facets. The role of Violetta uses an extensive and demanding range of the singer's vocal and histrionic techniques in order to portray such a character by its realisation of the musical score and libretto through performance. This in itself creates a uniquely challenging and sociologically significant *posizione* for the performer, in particular with regard to the expectations as to vocal technique which will be demonstrated to have developed from the mid-nineteenth century to the present day.

In executing the role of Violetta and portraying the various manifestations of *posizione,* the performer must demonstrate mastery of diverse and highly challenging vocal techniques. In addition, the twenty-first century soprano must deal with the superimposition of the stage director's ideas for a particular production, which may involve a contemporary staging, or another concept unforeseen by Verdi. She must also allow for cast interaction and audience expectations. Initially the narrative requires that Violetta should show brittle, febrile gaiety and fatalistic cynicism. Later she must portray an honest conviction and devotion leading to courageous self-sacrifice. She must then turn to feigned cynicism and echoes of past gaiety. Finally her actions and mood evoke nostalgic provincialism, which is in effect an implied

[7] Susan Rutherford, *The Prima Donna and Opera, 1815* -1930, Cambridge Studies in Opera (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 265.
[8] Arthur Groos, "'TB Sheets": Love and Disease in "La traviata", in *Cambridge Opera Journal*, Vol. 7, Number 3 (Nov., 1995), p. 240.

return to her original *posizione* before her life as a courtesan. She then undergoes untimely vindication and reconciliation before her demise.

The authenticity of a character's *posizione* was important to Verdi himself. Gilles de Van subscribes to the notion that Verdi would have agreed with the dictum of Alexandre Dumas *fils* that, 'Woman is born for subordination and obedience: first to the parents, then to the spouse, later to the child, always to duty'.[9] In 1894 Verdi wrote in a letter to Italo Pizzi that he did not approve of women studying at universities unless it was to study medicine so that they could look after other women.[10] His was an attitude prevalent in the male-dominated society of the nineteenth century which expected women to be subservient and at the same time exalted as guardians of the home.[11] Although Verdi lived with Giuseppina Strepponi and later with Teresa Stolz, neither of whose histories was without compromising episodes, his views on women were personally compassionate but socially orthodox. De Van remarks that '[Verdi] gave no sign of having the least sympathy for either rakes or fast women'[12] and that it is 'not until *Aida* that Verdi pays any attention to a woman's sensual appeal ... Only then do we see him hint at a voluptuous abandon worthy of Delilah'.[13] In a letter of 1844 quoted by de Van, Verdi simply stated, 'I don't like whores on the stage'.[14] There seems, therefore, to have been a need for

[9] de Van, *Verdi's Theater*, p. 185, quoting Christine Issartel, *Les Dames aux camélias* (Paris: Chêne Hachette, 1981).
[10] Marcello Conati, *Interviews and Encounters with Verdi*, trans. Richard Stokes (London: Victor Gollancz, 1984), p. 352.
[11] de Van, *Verdi's Theater*, p. 186.
[12] Ibid., p. 187.
[13] Ibid., p. 187.
[14] Ibid., p. 372, note 75 referring to *Carteggi verdiani,* 4:79, ed. Alessandro Luzio, 4 vols. Reale Accademia d'Italia and Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, Rome, 1935 – 1947, reprint, Bologna: Forni, 1993.

justifying, for offering a special pleading in order that a courtesan might appear as the heroine of a Verdi opera.[15]

The sense of the courtesan's *posizione* in her every action as an individual marginalized and shunned by society is essential to the dramatic tension required by the role of Violetta. In the Western world since the advent of the so-called 'permissive society' (which according to Petigny, was developing well before the 1960s)[16] it may be difficult for many to appreciate the stigma attached to sexual promiscuity when practised by a woman. Even for myself as a teenager growing up during the 1960s and attending a girls' college, there were persistent warnings of the moral dangers and disgrace which must be sedulously avoided. We cannot lose this sense of perceived transgression and risk if Violetta's *posizione* is to have its intended impact. Any modern directorial construction or de-construction which might see Violetta as nothing more than a party-goer whose time is running out, ignores the grave moral coercion to conform under which a character such as Violetta or even real-life women such as Giuseppina Strepponi herself would have laboured during the nineteenth century. Her status as a dangerous woman by whom the household gods are threatened cannot be underestimated.

The libretto of Francesco Maria Piave seeks to distil the emotional essence of Violetta's changing situation or *posizione,* and proffer it in such a way as to fit Verdi's main idea. Gilles de Van notes that Verdi sought inspiration from the emotion elicited by a text and worked to realize musically the impression it made on him. He

[15] Mary Jane Phillips-Matz, *Verdi: A* Biography, (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1993) offers an in-depth biographical study indicative of Verdi's attitude to women. Further revelations should also be found in Susan Rutherford's forthcoming publication, *Verdi, Opera, Women*.
[16] Alan Petigny, *The Permissive Society: America, 1941 – 1965* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

quotes one of Verdi's letters: 'if the opera is made all in one breath [*di getto*], there is only one main idea and therefore everything must come together to create that oneness'.[17] While constrained by some of the conventions of Italian *opera seria* noted by de Van,[18] Verdi's score is free to allow the voices and orchestration of its performers to fill and to expand its eliciting of emotional responses within the space vacated by verbal description and narrative.

In the case of *La traviata* it was important for Verdi's 'main idea' that the musical setting of the libretto serve the character and *posizione* of Violetta. As the eponymous heroine of the drama, Violetta is placed outside the safe approval of respectable society. This applies both to her fictional world and to the world of her contemporary audiences. When two Italian prima donnas both performed Violetta in London in 1856, Chorley compared what was seen as the distastefully realistic interpretation given by Marietta Piccolomini as the 'willing *grisette*' with 'that half-elegance, half-distraction of manner, which alone make such a heroine supportable'.[19] The performer seen to conform instead with standards of behaviour appropriate to a respectable woman was Angiolina Bosio. Praising the genteel quality of her St Petersburg performance, a critic writing in *The Musical World* felt that she showed the correct air of being in her situation by accident and that the role 'is tolerable under no other circumstances, and that in order not to be offensive, it is necessary ... that she should *not* look like what she is'.[20] Violetta was as deformed socially as the hunchback Rigoletto was physically. They were both individuals from whom people might prefer to avert their eyes.

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[17] de Van, *Verdi's Theater*, p. 311.
[18] Ibid., p. 35.
[19] Rutherford, *The Prima Donna and Opera, 1815-1930*, p. 265, quoting Chorley, *Thirty Years Musical Recollections,* vol. II (London: Hurst & Blackett, 1862), p. 276.
[20] Ibid., p. 265, quoting *The Musical World*, 35/12, 21 March 1857, p. 190.

Social space of the courtesan

Historically, the courtesan has occupied a social space closely allied to that occupied by the female singer. As purveyors of the pleasurable arts to a public clientele of men, courtesans have traditionally included musical accomplishment in their repertoire. In China, singing was essential to the courtesan's arts and regarded as sensual by writers such as Pan Zhiheng because it was produced by the flesh.[21] In fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Italy, where virtuous women were enjoined to keep silent and avoid extrovert behaviour, the courtesan used her musical and literary skills as overt expressions of display seductively advertising other wares.[22] In Japan's 'Floating World' the geisha was valued for dancing, singing and playing the *shamisen*.[23] During the eighteenth and nineteenth century, writes Susan Rutherford, a variety of literary and journalistic sources portrayed female singers 'in three main forms: *demi-mondaine,* professional artist and exalted diva'.[24] The prima donna could find herself in the same social space as the courtesan.[25] The persistent linking of the two traced its origins to the legends of the sirens in Greek mythology described in the *Odyssey* of Homer.[26] Judith Peraino has studied the implications, for those who are deemed to transgress the norms of heterosexual society, of the siren's 'undomesticated eroticism' which lures the listener to forgetfulness.[27] Michel Poizat asks: 'Is the singing woman then the diva, a medium for the angel, or demonia, a medium for the devil, or is she

[21] Judith T. Zeitlin, ""Notes of Flesh" And the Courtesan's Song in Seventeenth-Century China," in *The Courtesan's Arts: Cross-Cultural Perspectives*, ed. Martha Feldman and Bonnie Gordon (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 80.
[22] Bonnie Gordon, "The Courtesan's Singing Body as Cultural Capital in Seventeenth-Century Italy," in *The Courtesan's Arts: Cross-Cultural Perspectives*, p. 189.
[23] Lesley Downer, "The City Geisha and Their Role in Modern Japan: Anomaly or Artistes?" in *The Courtesan's Arts: Cross-Cultural Perspectives*, ed. Martha Feldman and Bonnie Gordon (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 233.
[24] Rutherford, *The Prima Donna and Opera*, *1815-1930*, p. 31.
[25] Ibid., p. 33.
[26] Ibid., p. 36.
[27] Judith A. Peraino, *Listening to the Sirens: Musical Technologies of Queer Identity from Homer to Hedwig* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005), p. 16.

both at once?'[28] Further research may reveal that such legends are manifestations of a deeper psychological connection between song and seduction.

A soprano who takes on the role of Violetta Valéry in Giuseppe Verdi's *La traviata* must embody both an archetypal myth and a reality. Julian Budden holds that the story of the courtesan and her sacrifice, while based on reality, is still the kind of tale on which legends are based.[29] Similarly, Scott Balthazar argues that the music of Violetta's mythic role is set to conventional musical forms.[30] This means that Verdi places a character of deep psychological significance within a musical space at once familiar and confronting to the audience. She is both primeval and commonplace.

Fabrizio Della Seta notes that Italian opera provides a musical setting of poetry whose classicizing influences on Italian literary structure derived from conventions dating back to the Renaissance.[31] These forms are used in the service of the composer's theatrical vision and his avowed regard for the importance of situation or *posizione.*[32] Gilles de Van emphasizes the fact that operas such as *La traviata,* being melodramas, are committed to representing characters of a great moral significance which must be supported by expressive gesture.[33] Such gestures, which correspond to important developments for character or plot and require the use of a given musical form, are what Verdi referred to as *posizione.*[34] These gestures arrive at the moments which

[28] Michel Poizat, *The Angel's Cry: Beyond the Pleasure Principle in Opera*, trans. Arthur Denner (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), p. 131.
[29] Julian Budden, *The Operas of Verdi: Il Trovatore to La Forza Del Destino*, 3 vols., vol. 2 (Cassell, 1973 – 1981), p. 117
[30] Scott L. Balthazar, "The Forms of Set Pieces," in *The Cambridge Companion to Verdi*, ed. Scott L. Balthazar (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 49 – 68.
[31] Fabrizio Della Seta, "New Currents in the Libretto," in *The Cambridge Companion to Verdi*, ed. Scott L. Balthazar (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 70.
[32] de Van, *Verdi's Theater*, p. 13.
[33] Ibid., pp. 92 – 93.
[34] Ibid., p. 119

encapsulate characters' responses to those spaces in the world and in time in which they find themselves. They are particularly relevant to *La traviata* due to Violetta's relationship to what de Van calls 'a defined social space' from which she is marginalised and in which she may never be included.[35] This space marks out the boundary of her difference from and resistance to what Henri Lefebvre calls the 'homogenized realm'.[36] Her *posizione* is defined, especially by transgressively unbounded rhythm and pitch, as being distinct from, and active as a subversive force against, submissively bounded orthodoxy. De Van also sees Violetta's *posizione* defined by the public space of Act I (and Act II, Scene 2) and the intimate spaces of Act II's idyllic retreat and Act III's isolation (which is also sharply contrasted with the external and unconstrained public fiesta).[37]

It is also instructive to note James Davidson's conclusion to his discussion on Greek courtesans in which he remarks on the evanescence and contemporaneity of these women. 'She is' he says 'always ... a calendar girl, hodiernal, a beauty of Today'. More importantly for Violetta as the subject of the present discussion he notes:'[t]he vanishing beauty of the courtesan ... has always configured a particular kind of modernity, city life, urbanity, terribly vivid, but fragile, brief, a present always with an eye on the time ... always latently elegiac, a bygone, shortly'.[38] This point emphasizes the strictures of time as well as space which must plot the co-ordinates of Violetta's *posizione* and indeed that of the singer throughout her own career bounded by physical stamina and appearance.

[35] Ibid., p. 226
[36] Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 1991), p. 373.
[37] de Van, *Verdi's Theater*, pp. 227 – 228.
[38] James Davidson, "Making a Spectacle of Her(Self): The Greek Courtesan and the Art of the Present," in *The Courtesan's Arts*, p. 48.

Performing Violetta

It is necessary to elucidate in some detail the components which have a bearing upon the singer's performance of the role of Violetta in order to form a picture of the character's *posizione* from the singer's perspective. This in turn will establish the singer's own *posizione* with regard to the role as she assumes the character of siren-courtesan. To achieve this, I shall examine the literary and poetic provenance, and the *mise en scène* of the role in conjunction with the singer's understanding of this. The paradoxical nature of this role lies in the highly demanding breadth of vocal techniques required to portray Verdi's musical conception of *posizione*. It includes a gradual lessening of florid coloratura as the physical degeneration and change in ethical perspective of the character portrayed progresses. Carolyn Abbate, discounting the implications of the role's initially febrile quality as noted by Groos,[39] attributes this to the need for a 'musical corrective' in which the 'female singer's capacity to transcend the text' in Act I 'constitutes an offense'.[40] In pursuing the aims of this argument, I shall provide supporting evidence from the personal experience of individual singers of the role, including my own. I shall refer to their perceptions of the changing demands on their own vocal and dramatic abilities as their portrayal of the role of Violetta unfolds.

In discussing female voice-types, Susan Rutherford notes that the role of Violetta successively demands a coloratura, a lyric soprano and finally a *spinto*. This requires a performer to demonstrate great technical virtuosity in articulation and flexibility as well as breadth of range. It does not provide the choice of dividing the role into the

[39] Groos, '"TB Sheets: Love and Disease in "La traviata"', p. 242.
[40] Carolyn Abbate, *In Search of Opera*, (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2001), pp. 45 – 46.

three separate characters sometimes taken by three separate performers in productions of Offenbach's *Les Contes d'Hoffmann,* for example.[41] Robert Lawrence found it difficult to determine the voice-type best suited to the role. In 1961, he could name only Luisa Tetrazzini, Frederica Hempel and Amelita Galli-Curci as coloratura sopranos who could perform *Sempre libera* but also 'sustain a performance of the entire part'.[42] The eminent Australian soprano Joan Carden has commented that to cope with this challenge, it is necessary to maintain a 'fulcrum' and keep a mental connection 'with the middle voice' in order to travel between the 'warmth of the lower register' and the brilliance of the upper register.[43]

The operatic vocal demands which might more usually require only one voice-type are exacerbated and emphasized by the transformations within the role of Violetta. They range from the virtuosic quasi-Donizettian *leggiero coloratura* needed for rapid runs and florid passages at high pitch, to sustained lyricism and the full-toned dynamic of a dramatic soprano. These transformations must always be dealt with in the context of interaction with orchestra, other principals and ensembles. It will be seen, however, that the particular narrative of this opera requires a gradual lessening of strenuously virtuosic skill which is in keeping with the physical deterioration of the character.

The performer must then assume the persona of a mid-nineteenth-century courtesan whose counterparts might still be found in most parts of the world today. Rejoicing in the professional title of call-girl or sex-worker, these later incarnations of the

[41] Rutherford, *The Prima Donna and Opera, 1815*-1930, p. 221.
[42] Robert Lawrence, "Notes on Performance", in Giuseppe Verdi and Francesco Maria Piave, *La Traviata Piano-Vocal Score* (New York and London: Schirmer, 1961), p. viii.
[43] Private communication with Joan Carden, 23 May 2009.

courtesan may be distinguishable by little other than relative income, manners and presentation either from each other or from women who choose more orthodox careers. As Margaret F. Rosenthal makes clear in her chapter on the fashions of Venetian courtesans during the Renaissance, so little often distinguished their dress from that of noblewomen that laws prohibiting their wearing of pearls attempted to enforce a distinction.[44] Virginia Rounding argues that 'the impossible was demanded of the *demi-mondaine* – that she should both display herself and not be seen'.[45] It was necessary for her to flaunt the luxury in which she lived in order to be her benefactor's trophy, yet remain discreetly in the background when that benefactor returned to political and business concerns, where secrecy and discretion would be required.[46] This dangerous woman occupied a space within yet apart from everyday life where the members of respectable society would necessarily be confronted. This could be seen as a nineteenth-century European version of medieval Japan's 'Floating World'.[47]

As the singer encounters this concept of the *demi-mondaine* she must also come to terms with the libretto. This has taken the essentials of Dumas's story and forced them into the Procrustean bed of Italian operatic convention, linguistic tradition, censorial oversight and musical necessity. The visual and aural immediacy of a modern film (which the Baz Luhrmann screenplay version of the myth in his film *Moulin Rouge!* might exemplify) is not available under these circumstances.[48] Joseph Kerman claims that opera should not only be judged by the yard-stick of naturalism and that the

[44] Margaret F. Rosenthal, "Cutting a Good Figure: The Fashions of Venetian Courtesans in the Illustrated Albums of Early Modern Travelers," in *The Courtesan's Arts*, p. 54.
[45] Virginia Rounding, *Grandes Horizontales* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2003), p. 314.
[46] Ibid., p. 315.
[47] Downer, "The City Geisha and Their Role in Modern Japan: Anomaly or Artistes?, p. 233.
[48] *Moulin Rouge!* [2001], directed by Baz Luhrmann, DVD, Twentieth-Century Fox, 2001.

greatest drama is articulated best by poetry or music.[49] Indeed, he maintains that Verdi achieved a greater psychological complexity in his composite arias and also used irregular *parlante* over systematic orchestral motives to achieve 'such astonishingly naturalistic effects as Violetta's outburst leading into *Amami, Alfredo*'.[50]

When at their most engaged, an audience witnessing any dramatic performance may be able to live through a vicarious and possibly cathartic reality. This may be heightened in the case of opera, both by the poetic and the musical. An operatic performer must sometimes deal with certain problems in order to present a compelling persona which will draw in the 'fourth wall' of the audience and effect the desired suspension of disbelief. Were an ideal blend of libretto and score to confront the performer, a delicate balancing-act would still be necessary. An actor of spoken drama is required by dramatic conventions to move, speak, react, pace phrasing and inflection, use facial expression, tears and laughter, whisper and shout. The voice is used 'solely to project thought'.[51] A singer must also use all of these techniques in opera. The composer of *La traviata* writes music which utilizes his singers and instruments to ensure that the most intense possible response is achieved. Verdi's controversial 'subject for our time' demanded a convincing evocation of contemporary society and Violetta's incendiary *posizione* within it.

Music's greater scope for expression can be a two-edged sword. With the variety of means which may be used in the service of dramatic communication, comes also the demand for a variety of technical skills. Speech or song alone will convey less than

[49] Joseph Kerman, *Opera as Drama*, 2nd (Revised) ed. (London: Faber and Faber, 1989), p. 5.
[50] Ibid., p. 116.
[51] Peggy Ashcroft, "Foreword", to J. Clifford Turner, *Voice and Speech in the Theatre,* 2nd ed. (London: Faber and Faber, 1989), p. v.

the combination of these skills. A concomitant physical and intellectual burden is placed on the performer to make the combination of speech and song successfully convincing.

Certain musical forms and conventions, including the use of repetition, augmentation or diminution of time values, overlaying of voices with disparate lyrics, use of melisma on a single vowel, or virtuosic vocal display may run counter to a twenty-first century audience's expectations of dramatic realism. The traditional Italian structures of *cantabile* followed by the *cabaletta* which Joseph Kerman called 'one of the worst lyric conventions of early nineteenth-century opera'[52] may appear to have little dramatic justification even though they can elicit a positive response to music, voice and technique.[53]

An operatic singer is likely to expect that an emotional response to his or her performance will occur as the result of several factors, including the musical. Any musical performer who ventures to play or sing for an audience is vulnerable to the possibility of censure, apathy or disappointment. The audience-members are party to the performance and must also play their role. Generally speaking, no audience is made up of the same members from one performance to another. Even were this the case, no audience-member would necessarily receive a performance in exactly the same manner, from one performance to another. While *La traviata* failed at its premiere in 1853, it triumphed in 1854. Ricordi's secretary, Cerri wrote to Verdi: 'You were speaking prophetically when you said: "*La traviata* failed; whose fault is

[52] Kerman, *Opera as Drama*, p. 124.
[53] The term *cantabile* will be used throughout to denote the slower first aria in a composite or double aria. The term *cavatina*, according to de Van, *Verdi's Theater*, (Glossary, p. 345), may also be used in the same context without its being a specific reference to an entrance aria.

it? ... Time will decide". And time has decided, and in the same city and with the same spectators who had at first condemned it'.[54] Consequently, the volatility of reception is a constant hazard for the performer and affects the performance. In this respect at least, the singer must court the affections of an audience with the power of her own body and voice and take on the role of siren.

An instrumentalist however well rehearsed, may be subject to performance nerves. The sound of the instrument played will, nevertheless, not react to the audience but only to the exertions of the performer (which may be affected by nerves) and to the atmospheric conditions within the venue. The potential *timbre* and range are inherent within the sound source, the instrument itself. The only blame that might attach to a poor performance concerns the performer's choice of repertoire, the technique and interpretation. Verdi himself set high standards for the singer who carries the sound source within:

> It will be said that the human voice is also, basically, an instrument, and it is therefore wrong to concede it too great a supremacy. Yes; this is true, in part. But young composers must remember that the human voice, apart from being the finest of all instruments, is not merely a sound; *poetry* is wedded to this sound, and poetry requires an ideal form of expression that is both lofty and always intelligible. Today's young artists forget this rule too easily.[55]

[54] David R. B. Kimbell, *Verdi in the Age of Italian Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
1981), p. 303.
[55] Marcello Conati, *Interviews and Encounters with Verdi*, p. 191, quoting Gino Monaldi, "Un colloquio con Verdi", in *Il Popolo Roman,* Rome, no.45 (15 February 1887).

The singing voice may be no more than a matter of physiological good luck but it has often been the first port of call for praise or disapprobation of a performance. Diligence and training cannot necessarily obscure the fact that a singer may not possess the right combination of larynx, pharynx, facial structure and lung-power to produce a beautiful sound. Viola Tree was ruthlessly told by Tito Ricordi regarding her voice that 'these high notes are worth fifteen cents'.[56] Rossini had asserted that the essentials for a good singer were 'Primo voce, secondo voce, terzo voce' (First voice, second voice, third voice).[57] He placed voice before anything else, whether appearance, acting skill or flexibility of technique. The singer is exceptionally vulnerable to criticism and may be all too aware of that vulnerability which can destroy a career. Viola Tree described her strange relief at the final defeat of her ambitions:

> I think, knowing the truth suddenly, and however bitterly, always gives you a thrill of exultation ... I had the feeling of certainty, of courage, which all the castles in the air had never given me.[58]

Theatrical tradition requires that the speaking stage actor project his or her speech downstage, across the footlights.[59] He or she must use the techniques of vocal projection which allow that speech to be heard with clarity in the back row of the audience.[60] Although the contemporary theatre may have the advantage of electronic amplification, the techniques of vocal projection are still required. The actor needs to convince the audience that what is being said is directed towards the speaker's

[56] Rutherford, *The Prima Donna and Opera, 1815-1930*, p. 116.
[57] Ibid., p. 112.
[58] Ibid., p. 117, quoting Viola Tree, *Castles in the Air: A Story of My Singing Days* (New York: George H. Doran, 1926), pp. 11 – 12.
[59] J. Clifford Turner, *Voice and Speech in the Theatre*, 2nd ed. (London: Pitman, 1950), p. 136.
[60] Ibid., p. 132.

interlocutor or to several other characters on the stage. Meisner insists that 'the problem is to be understandable without losing the emotional life of the scene'.[61] The actor may need to project speech from a seated, prone, or other position, or while moving around or even off-stage, or under the constraint of costume, property or *avant-garde* stage direction. The actor's use of his or her own native language usually permits clarity in the depiction of character and action.

The singing actor (for present purposes, within the context of opera rather than that of musical comedy) has several more strenuous requirements imposed in addition to all of the preceding considerations and difficulties, together with the need for visual appeal and acceptability. The operatic performer seeks to project the greatest possible resonance as well as beauty of tone.[62] This aim is served by exercising rigorous but comfortable control of diaphragmatic breathing to an extent not usually required by everyday speech, as distinct, for example, from public oratory. Its projection demands the retention rather than simply the expulsion of air.[63] The equivalent of the reeds which are activated at the mouthpiece by a clarinettist, for example, are more delicately situated within the singer's larynx and require greater breath control for their proper use. Correct breathing (*appoggio)* and the balance of inspiration and expiration was described by F. Lamperti in 1890 as a contest, *la lutte vocale*. [64] It is defined by Proctor as 'the correct use of the abdominal muscles to provide the control of subglottic pressure in the most effortless manner'.[65]

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[61] Sanford Meisner, *Sanford Meisner on Acting* (New York: Vintage, 1987), p. 200.
[62] David Mason, "The Teaching (and Learning) of Singing," in *The Cambridge Companion to Singing*, ed. John Potter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 212.
[63] Ibid., p. 218.
[64] Ibid., p. 218. Refers to the archaic version of the Italian word *lotta* (struggle).
[65] Ibid., p.218, quoting Donald F. Proctor, *Breathing, Speech, and Song* (Springer-Verlag: Vienna and New York, 1980), p. 110.

Scientific investigation of the 'ringing' vocal tone of the operatic performer and the 'singer's formant' which can carry over the orchestral sound (a vibration of approximately 3000 Herz) first published in 1863 by Heinrich Helmholtz was later entitled *On the Sensations of Tone*.[66] This tone must be concentrated on the melodic potential of vowel sounds, to some extent more strenuously and at greater relative length within the syllable than is directed towards the consonants. Vowels and diphthongs present special difficulties, depending on relative pitch and range and have their own fixed resonating pitches requiring constant compromise.[67] In order to produce the greatest resonance it is necessary to create the greatest possible internal resonating surface within the singer's mouth. Certain vowels become more difficult to produce clearly with beautiful tone as pitch ascends, with the throat and jaw naturally becoming more constricted.

Consonants are the 'transient' sounds which tend to give precise articulation to syllables and words.[68] They are generally effected with a temporary obstruction of the open melodic vowels, by a percussive sound produced, for example, by the striking of tongue against hard palate or teeth, lip against lip. There is a consequent need to return the mouth to a position prepared to produce the next vowel as soon as possible. The dilemma of compromise between clarity of enunciation and purity and strength of vocal *timbre* is an ever-present problem for the singer. These considerations are dealt with at great length and with extensive supporting physiological research and

[66] Ibid., p. 215, referring to Heinrich Helmholtz, *Die Lehre von den Tonempfindungen als physiologische Grundlage für die Theorie der Musiki* (Brunswick, 1863), trans. A. J. Ellis, *On the Sensations of Tone* (London, 1875).
[67] Ibid., p. 215.
[68] Percy A. Scholes, *The Oxford Companion to Music*, 10th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 1091.

illustration, by Janice L. Chapman.[69] They have been the subject of many works on singing for the last three hundred years. In the seventeenth century singers were told to 'take care ... to give forth the voice with *gratia* and to pronounce the words distinctly in order to be understood ...'.[70] In the eighteenth century Giambattista Mancini stressed 'the importance of ... posture and also mouth position'.[71] Manuel Garcia's treatise in the nineteenth century aimed at a physiologically scientific system and emphasized the importance of vowels.[72] Mason's succinct study notes the national variants in diction and tone necessitated by language differences.[73]

Pursuant to the last point, the operatic performer may often need to sing in a language not his or her own. In the writer's experience, the guttural multi-consonantal percussiveness of some German words and the less obstructive pronunciation of French and English do not readily lend themselves to open-vowelled melodic fluency, as is the case in Italian. The difficulty for a non-Italian singer performing in Italian may occur when multiple vowels must be elided on a single note. National styles of vocal pedagogy have arisen to develop forms of attack which compensate for such challenges and singers trained in one style must be versatile when performing in another language.[74]

With the late Romantic trend towards more emotionally expressive plots and more heavily orchestrated passages at dramatic moments, more powerful tone became

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[69] Janice L. Chapman, *Singing and Teaching Singing: A Holistic Approach to Classical Voice* (Oxfordshire: Plural Publishing, 2006).
[70] Richard Wistreich, "Reconstructing pre-Romantic singing technique," in *The Cambridge Companion to Singing*, ed. John Potter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 191, quoting Ottavio Durante, *Arie devote, le quali contengono in se la maniera di cantar' con gratia, l'imitation' delle parole, et il modo di scriver passaggi, et altri affetti* (Rome, 1608).
[71] Mason, "The teaching (and learning) of singing," in *The Cambridge Companion to Singing*, p. 206.
[72] Ibid., pp. 211 – 213, discussing Manuel Garcia, *Traité complet de l'art du chant* (1841/1847).
[73] Ibid., pp. 218 – 219.
[74] Mason, "The Teaching (and Learning) of Singing," pp. 218 – 219.

desirable during the second half of the nineteenth century. Possibly influenced by the French *haute-contre* male voice as the prominence of the *castrato* declined, the tenor voice replaced the higher *falsetto* male tones with chest notes until Gilbert-Louis Duprez was said to have sung a chest-register c^1, his *ut de poitrine* in *William Tell* in 1837.[75] The sopranos who had been asked to produce the gamut of coloratura and dramatic effects by about 1840 began to have more power demanded of them as well.[76] In 1849 (the year of Wagner's essay, *The Art-Work of the Future*) the conductor Michael Costa said that the already established Verdian style 'ruins voices, and singing now consists ... in mere shouting'.[77] From about 1840, the operas of Meyerbeer demanded orchestras of over eighty players, the growing middle classes espoused opera and opera houses able to hold up to three thousand (or even five thousand in America) were built to cater for the demand.[78] By the time Verdi was composing the music of *La traviata* the lightness and delicacy of earlier nineteenth century *bel canto* alone was no longer sufficient for the changing expectations of Romantic expression.

Once the requirements of *timbre* and enunciation as demanded by late Romantic repertoire are met (in isolation, for the recitalist), the operatic singer must make use of these specifically musical techniques in conjunction with directorial demands for the compelling realization of character, action and lyrical commentary. It is no longer sufficient, in an era when audiences have long been inured to the immediacy of the naturalistic 'close-up' at the cinema or on television, to stand at the footlights and

[75] John Rosselli, "Grand Opera: nineteenth-century revolution and twentieth-century tradition," in *The Cambridge Companion to Singing*, ed. John Potter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 98.
[76] Ibid., p. 100.
[77] Ibid., pp. 100 – 101.
[78] Rosselli, "Grand Opera," in *The Cambridge Companion to Singing*, p. 101.

deliver an aria. As the practice of simultaneous or near-simultaneous broadcasting of operas in high-definition digital cinema presentations (such as those of the New York Metropolitan Opera and the Australian Opera) becomes more prevalent, the realistic exposure of performers in larger-than-life format to larger audiences becomes unavoidable.

In a letter to Giuseppe Piroli in 1871, Verdi himself wished for emotional authenticity as well as the synthesis of past and contemporary vocal accomplishments, in singers:

> For singing, I should like the students to have a wide knowledge of music; exercises in voice production; very long courses in solfeggi, as in the past; exercises for singing and speaking with clear and perfect enunciation. Then, without having any teacher perfect him in vocal style, I should like the young student, who by now should have a strong knowledge of music and a well-trained voice, to sing, guided only by his own feelings. This will be singing, not of such-and-such a school, but of inspiration. The artist will be an individual. He will be himself, or better still, he will be the character he has to represent in the opera.[79]

In my own experience as a performer, further factors must be considered. The operatic performer remains mindful of shaping vowels, articulating consonants, supporting and colouring long notes and phrases, or producing *roulades* or other embellishments possibly on notes in high *tessitura.* This is all still to be done without unduly ugly facial, postural or diaphragmatic distortions and the performer still behaving in a way

[79] Rutherford, *The Prima Donna and Opera, 1815 -1930*, p. 98, quoting Charles Osborne (ed.) *Letters of Giuseppe Verdi* (New York, Chicago, San Francisco: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971), pp. 175 – 176.

appropriate to the dramatic action. The face should match every emotional nuance either stated by what is sung, or mask an agenda hidden within the vocal or orchestral music. The implicit nature of ‘body language’ also needs to be compatible with these considerations. Larger bodily movement may add more serious complications. Period dress or other unusual costume, the adjustments of posture to cope with raked stages, as well as any business with stage props will require a good deal of rehearsal to ensure ease of action. Sudden movement, any suggestion of dancing, running, falling, reclining or rising require timely preparation of breath support and facial position for projection of the voice.

In respect of the foregoing points, speaking actors can usually pace themselves when physical action is needed. They may take more time to do things or even pause altogether before speaking, provided that a credible fluency is maintained. The singing stage performer does not have this freedom. A musical score contains stringent requirements that certain things occur at certain points in time, in a particular metre and (subject to interpretation) tempo, and that one singer should co-ordinate correctly with orchestra and possibly with another singer or singers. There is not even the flexibility which would be available to a recitalist, because the orchestral accompanist (and at times the chorus) is not generally equipped to ‘follow’ the singer as would an accompanying piano. All the disparate forces onstage and in the orchestra pit are held together by the conductor’s beat and none has the freedom to create an individual tempo.

Despite such hazards, the singer, having combined music and action to optimum effect, may find that the composer requires the repetition of an effective melody. This may be

done with the aim of reinforcing and extending an emotional moment, or simply because the audience is likely to appreciate it. In a strophic aria the same music must be presented again as a setting for different lyrics. While the mood is essentially the same, it is advisable to manage a new action, gesture or use of props for the sake of realism. This or any other musical form or convention which lends itself to the expansion of the emotional idea through the emphases of similarities, elongation, elaboration or submergence within an orchestral texture necessitates a finely judged balance between competing physical and intellectual demands.

An essential difference between the situation of the recitalist and that of the operatic stage performer as has been alluded to with regard to the growth of nineteenth-century opera's demands, is the sheer physical power which must be maintained to produce notes of sufficient volume. It has long been the expectation since opera preceded the invention of the microphone, that operatic performers should have voices of sufficient unamplified strength to carry, when correctly balanced, over a full orchestra. The stamina required for the performance of a complete, staged operatic role is akin to that physically demanded of a world-class athlete. Even during the nineteenth century, Strakosch noted the endurance required in a contemporary prima donna's career.[80] Exhaustion endured through overwork could affect the quality of performance, while menstruation and pregnancy were often the subject of contractual negotiation and liability.[81] In a late nineteenth-century season from September to June the singers would be expected to sing in perhaps thirty-five operas, some of them new.[82] Rosina Aimo sang in fourteen countries in four continents between 1874 and 1897, with twenty-four separate roles on a tour of Colombia and a schedule which generally

[80] Ibid., p. 193.
[81] Ibid., p. 194.
[82] Rosselli, "Grand Opera", p. 105.

involved singing five times a week. Such feats would have demanded less stamina in the smaller theatres and with the smaller orchestras of the eighteenth century. The increase in venue size and instrumentation of the late nineteenth century imposed greater burdens on singers.[83] At the Manhattan Opera in 1909, for example, Mary Garden sang two operas in one day.[84]

In what has become a progressively more competitive field, the athleticism brings with it the dangers and risks attendant on all such activities. Joan Carden compares the diverse physical demands within and between roles to requiring an athlete to perform both long-distance events and short sprints.[85] The slightest indisposition, whether it be a cold or even a headache, can seriously jeopardize the quality of an operatic singer's performance because of the complex physiological factors at work. In the twenty-first century it appears that indisposition or even imperfection is not to be tolerated. Singers use beta blockers to quell performance nerves, but some also use the steroid cortisone to treat vocal cord inflammation and its overuse causes damage. It is alleged that abuse of alcohol and cocaine by opera singers is increasing.[86] Promoters who deal in prospective budgets of millions expect singers to look like film-stars and to be on call for most of the year for promotion of CDs and DVDs, and for product endorsements. These commitments are additional to the rehearsal and performance

[83] Ibid., p. 106.
[84] Ibid., p. 106.
[85] Private communication with Joan Carden, 23 May 2009.
[86] Kate Connolly, "Angst, Drugs and Alcohol: That's Opera," *The Observer*, 19 August 2007, http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2007/aug/19/germany.classicalmusic

schedules of singers.[87] Vacations may be merely opportunities for other aspiring singers to take a quickly obsolescent performer's place.[88]

A particular voice can colour an audience-member's response to a role or an entire opera, so powerful are the emotional associations of voice with personality. Contributing to the overall effect will be the singer's appearance, stage deportment, acting ability and 'presence' or projection of his or her own internal involvement in the dramatic moment (what Gerald Moore called 'living in the song').[89] The result for the audience who respond positively to a voice used in combination with what they regard as powerfully moving music, may be electrifying and exhausting, but never dull. The successful realization of this entire recipe of ingredients which Wagner called *Gesamtkunstwerk* will stand or fall on the delicate balance between its component parts.[90] The singer though important, is only one of these and subject both to the coalescence and the conflicts which may arise. It is the singer, however, who must overcome such variables and use her own particular tactics to portray Violetta as required by the strategies provided by Verdi.

In the remainder of this thesis, I shall discuss the musical strategies employed by Verdi which inform and transform the role of Violetta, in their breadth of melodic, harmonic, structural and textural aspects. Essential to an appreciation of *posizione* are the roles of the other characters and of the orchestra and how these interact with that of Violetta. The musical and dramatic techniques which are demanded of the singer in

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[87] Emma Pomfret, "The Stressed-Out Opera Singers," *The Times*, 4 January 2008, http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts_and_entertainment/stage/opera/article31

[88] Adrianne Pieczonka, "Divas Battle Booze, Drugs, Depression," *Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 August 2007, http://www.smh.com.au/news/arts/divas-battle-booze-drugs-depression/2007/08/24/11

[89] Gerald Moore, *Am I Too Loud?* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1966), p. 152.

[90] Carl Dahlhaus, *Nineteenth Century Music*, trans. J. Bradford Robinson, California Studies in 19th-Century Music (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989), p. 195.

order to realize the part are directly attributable to Verdi's conception of *posizione.* The social climate of the mid-nineteenth century and the evidence of the opera's reception history as it has developed from its première to the present day are evidence of evolving attitudes to the *posizione* of Violetta as once conceived by Verdi and his librettist, and deserve examination from the historical perspective and from the viewpoints of contemporary singers.

Evidence of the impact which these matters have upon the singer can be gathered from the personal performance experience of this writer, from that of other performers and from audience responses to various performances, garnered from reviews, memoirs, interviews and other recorded sources. Critical analysis of the musical setting of the libretto will demonstrate the demands made upon the singer for the purpose of creating the character's *posizione*, and by extension, that of the singer, which evolve throughout the opera. Through a synthesis of the foregoing, it is hoped to come nearer to an understanding of the role of Violetta within the context of nineteenth-century Italian opera as well as twentieth- and twenty-first century interpretations. I contend that the changing *posizione* of Violetta's character and that of the singer in the role have influenced the perceptions of audiences regarding the courtesan and the singer as social entities. The role possesses a unique provenance and place in Verdi's *oeuvre* and holds particularly significant challenges and consolations for the singing actor who attempts it.

Overview of Remaining Chapters

In Chapter 2, I shall provide an exposition of the method to be used in arguing the proposition that Verdi's musical strategies contribute to the dramatic character and

posizione, i.e., place within social space at a given time of Violetta in *La traviata* through the use of the singer's vocal and histrionic techniques and that these strategies bear a relationship to the *posizione* of the singer. I intend to use critical analysis to arrive at an understanding of the musical strategies used by Verdi which reveal *posizione* and the formation of social space. For the purpose of clarifying my choice of this method I shall review other possible approaches and give my reasons for setting them aside in favour of the approach taken. I shall expound how such analysis can facilitate the interpretation of its socio-cultural meaning in relation to the musical work and practice of performance. I shall set out a framework for establishing the significance of particular musical elements and gestures. In doing so I shall refer to some representative musical examples which will form part of the lengthier discussion in the Chapter 4.

Chapter 3 details the provenance of Piave's libretto and provides the reader with a general understanding of its narrative which will be developed in the following chapter. In particular, it illustrates the implications of its antecedents for the dramatic *posizione* of Violetta. These antecedents include Abbé Prévost's novel *Manon Lescaut*, a literary precursor of Dumas's novel, eventually receiving only a vestigial part in the opera.[91] I shall explore the autobiographical events in the lives of Marie Duplessis and of Alexandre Dumas *fils* which led to his writing the novel and play *La Dame aux camélias*. A general comparison of the differences between Dumas's novel and play will reveal the coarse realism of the former. It will also serve to give a preliminary notice of the horror with which the courtesan and her kind were officially regarded on behalf of *bourgeoise* womankind.

[91] Abbé Antoine François Prévost, *Manon Lescaut,* 1731, trans. Angela Scholar (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). Also available in French at http://www.gutenberg.org, ed. Chuck Greif (Project Gutenberg, 2006).

Chapter 3 will consider the biographical elements of Verdi's life and the society in which he lived to account for his avowed attitude to the courtesan and the singer and his justification for presenting Violetta as a protagonist on the operatic stage. The relative importance of spaces, events, the passing of time and the interactions of Violetta's character with other characters will be given prominence. This will establish in general terms the *posizione* of Violetta's character as set forth in the libretto. Through reference to existing literature, I shall seek to discover a correlation between the roles of courtesan and singer both historically and as relevant to nineteenth-century and modern audience reception of *La traviata.* This will be seen to resonate with an ambivalence on Verdi's part when it came to the possible portrayal of the singer (as also related to the siren) as a dangerous and disreputable person.

Chapter 4 is a critical analysis of the musical score and its musical elements such as structure, tonality, duration, orchestral and vocal texture and their relationship to the setting of lyric and performance directions as found in the libretto for each act of the opera. Score references will be made using the 1990 Dover edition of *La traviata* in full score, a reprint of the G. Ricordi edition published in Milan in 1914.[92] Through this analysis of the musical strategies employed in *La traviata* for creating a sense of *posizione* specific to Violetta I shall provide the reader with a multi-faceted understanding of how her character is situated in space and time. An examination of the recitatives, arias and ensembles performed by Violetta will show that over the course of the opera, music is used first to assert, then to relinquish and finally to abandon particular roles in social space.

[92] Verdi Giuseppe, *La Traviata: Full Score* (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, 1990). This reprint of an edition from Verdi's original publisher has been used because of its ready and inexpensive availability. It has also provided the advantage of allowing this writer to approach it without preconceptions, both as a performer and critical analyst.

In light of the foregoing chapters, Chapter 5 will summarize the range of musical strategies which Verdi used to express the changing *posizione* or place within a social space occupied by the character of Violetta as she responds to the actions of others. Finally, I shall illustrate the significance of my findings for the singer-performer of the role of Violetta in Verdi's *La traviata*.

As will be revealed in the following chapters, the singer openly takes it upon herself to enter the space and act out the historically implied character of the siren-like singer-as-courtesan in portraying the courtesan in *La traviata*. These diverse manifestations of *posizione* demanded by Verdi's musical strategies require specific vocal and histrionic techniques, paradoxically more and less demanding during the course of the opera. The use of these techniques also implicates the singer physically, intellectually and sociologically in the process of sacrifice of brilliant complexity and siren-like seductive power and thus in the redemption of the courtesan envisaged in the libretto. Through several musical manifestations of *posizione* as *La traviata* progresses, the virtuoso singer-siren is disarmed and ennobled by an enforced simplicity which gradually takes away her power of complex and seductive song.

CHAPTER 2

METHODOLOGY

Overview of the proposition

This chapter sets out a critical framework directed towards establishing how Verdi's musical strategies contribute to the dramatic character and *posizione* of Violetta in *La traviata* through the use of the singer's vocal and histrionic techniques and what relationship these strategies may have to the *posizione* of the singer. The problem is therefore two-fold: firstly, to discover Verdi's meaning in his use of the term *posizione* and the musical strategies through which he aimed to capture the *posizione* of an operatic character; secondly, to reveal the wider implications which the *posizione* of the courtesan-as-singer have for the performer who takes on the role of Violetta.

Statement of Methodology

In dealing with the first part of the problem I shall utilize a method of critical analysis in relation to the formation of social space. There is a variety of possible alternative methods available for this task. In order to clarify my reasons for the use of critical analysis it is necessary to consider the alternatives in light of the restricted role they may play in exploring a problem or problems of this nature. Critical analysis will reveal salient aspects of the musical performance of Violetta's role as related to social space. From the conclusions arrived at regarding this part of the problem, further questions arise in considering the impact which performance has on the singer herself.

Michel de Certeau has some valuable ideas to offer with regard to types of analysis which may not lend themselves to one single investigative approach. In his study of

the creativity and 'trajectories' of consumption he notes that '[e]ven statistical investigation remains virtually ignorant of these trajectories, since it is satisfied with classifying, calculating, and putting into tables ... in reference to its own categories and taxonomies'.[93] Statistical enquiry finds 'only the homogenous' and the power of its 'calculations lies in its ability to divide, but it is precisely through this ana-lytic fragmentation that it loses sight of what it claims to seek and to represent'.[94]

In order to keep track of the elusive qualities of the musical performance under investigation, I intend to make some use of the conceptual tools which Certeau has found valuable in his own research. His solution is to differentiate between the two perspectives of 'tactics' and 'strategies' in order to view actions not amenable to statistical reduction.[95] In Certeau's view a 'strategy' is exercised by an entity which possesses power and time and which can objectify that which it wishes to investigate or control. A 'tactic', on the other hand, is exercised by the objectified entity in order fortuitously to turn to its advantage the products of whatever 'strategies' a more powerful entity may impose.[96]

He proposes that the discipline of rhetoric offers valuable models 'even though such analysis is in theory excluded from scientific discourse' since its 'manipulations are related to the ways of changing (seducing, persuading, making use of) the will of another (the audience)'.[97]

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[93] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984), p. xviii.
[94] Ibid., p. xviii.
[95] Ibid., p. xix.
[96] Ibid., p. xix.
[97] Ibid., p. xx.

The problem of composition and performance may be viewed as one of the imposition of formal strategies necessitating the practice of tactical responses. Thus Verdi's musical strategies will lend themselves to an examination of their formal structures. Performance by the singer of the role of Violetta as a character occupying a social space then becomes a series of tactical responses to Verdi's strategies. As such it is open to analysis of its effects upon the character, the audience and the singer.

Verdi stated that 'arousing emotion is the aim of art'.[98] It must be noted that Verdi's belief in the power of his music to emphasize and enhance the emotional response of his audience to the drama was based on audience reception and his own intuition, rather than on any scientific rationale.[99] It will, however, be necessary to introduce literature discussing aspects of the continuing philosophical, psychobiological and aesthetic debate on this point in order to validate in part both Verdi's belief and the responses of his audiences then and now. While knowledge of the human brain remains incomplete there are indications that more detailed justifications may yet be found for some of the hypotheses formulated regarding aesthetic response. Cognitive science has already developed the concept of cross-domain mapping and its generation of the conceptual metaphors which enable the perception of meaning in music.[100] This research has been used to argue that musical passages evoke emotions because they 'can be grounded in embodied experience'.[101] The work of Patrik Juslin

[98] Conati, *Interviews and Encounters with Verdi*, p. 284.
[99] Conati, *Interviews and Encounters with Verdi*, p. 346, quoting conversation between Italo Pizzi and Verdi 9 August 1892 published in: *Ricordi verdiani inediti,* Roux e Viarengo, Turin, 1901. Verdi also wrote: 'Music is universal. But some idiots and pedants insist on inventing schools and systems!' *Carteggi verdiani*, 4, p. 150.

[100] Lawrence M. Zbikowski, "Metaphor and Music Theory: Reflections from Cognitive Science," in *Music Theory Online* (1998), p. 3. http://mto.societymusictheory.org/issue/mto.98.4.1.zbikowski.html
[101] Lawrence M. Zbikowski, "Metaphor and Music," in *The Cambridge Handbook of Metaphor and Thought*, ed. Raymond W. Gibbs (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 506. See also research as to the evocation of emotions through mechanisms not unique to music in: Juslin, Patrik N.

and Daniel Västfjäll has postulated a theoretical framework which would bring together the six mechanisms of brain stem reflex, evaluative conditioning, emotional contagion, visual imagery, episodic memory and musical expectancy involved in the musical induction of emotions.[102]

With reference to the available literature I shall investigate the social theory of place and space to elucidate the reasons for the foregoing responses to *La traviata* and performers of the role of Violetta. I shall seek to discover further similarities between female operatic performers (such as Strepponi) and courtesans in relation to the social space occupied, the professional strategies of display and musical prowess they employed and the historical parallels discernible in these professions throughout the world.

Methodological Rationale

It is by no means an irrefutable fact that the sensory discrimination prompted by exposure to a work of art and thus the aesthetic judgements evoked, will result in an emotional response. In the Epilogue to the revised edition of his book *Opera as Drama,* Joseph Kerman acknowledges that it has been a matter of contention between composers of opera who believe it to be so and philosophers who disagree, that music can directly represent or embody feelings.[103] Were it established beyond doubt that universally recognizable emotions could be represented by music, it would not necessarily follow that these emotions would be transmitted to the listener.

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and Västfjäll, Daniel, "Emotional responses to music: The need to consider underlying mechanisms", in *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 31, (2008), pp. 559 – 621.

[102] Patrik N. Juslin and Daniel Västfjäll, "Emotional responses to music: The need to consider underlying mechanisms", in *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 31, (2008), pp. 563 – 564.

[103] Kerman, *Opera as Drama*, p. 215.

Musicologists such as Carl Dahlhaus support the notion that music should in itself and in combination with a libretto have the capacity outwardly to manifest internal emotion. He promotes Wagner's idea that the music is not merely supporting an operatic libretto, but in a sense supplanting it with sounds which 'read' the thoughts and emotions of the characters and communicate them to the listener.[104] He also mentions Wagner's claims for a linguistic dimension in his own *leitmotivs*.[105]

Verdi's writing of *La traviata* occurred during a period in European history when philosophical discourse on aesthetics and music was particularly intense. Arthur Schopenhauer had postulated that the Platonic *Idea* as the complete manifestation of the Will appearing in the object perceived was what constituted the object's beauty. He related aesthetics to emotion by stating that music 'speaks not of things but of pure weal and woe, which are the only realities for the will'.[106] Schopenhauer had earlier fired a salvo in the aesthetic debate with his remark that in the diverse effects of grand opera, 'All these accompaniments [to what he regarded as pure music, which he said, spoke to the heart] are thus diametrically opposed to the attainment of the musical aim'.[107]

Wagner defended opera and commented on 'the aesthetic limitation of the spoken theatre ... only bridged by music: ... what in spoken theatre must remain a transitory ... instant can be expanded and elaborated in opera'.[108] The work of Friedrich Nietzsche and his changing views on Richard Wagner's ideas regarding the all-encompassing nature of the operatic art work circulated after the period during which Verdi was

[104] Carl Dahlhaus, *Nineteenth Century Music*, p. 203.
[105] Ibid., p. 200.
[106] Arthur Schopenhauer, *Essays and Aphorisms*, ed. E.V. Rieu, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1970), p. 162.
[107] Ibid., p. 163.
[108] Dahlhaus, *Nineteenth Century Music*, p. 209.

writing *La traviata.* Nietzsche, whose first book, *The Birth of Tragedy, Out of the Spirit of Music* was not published until 1872, reflected the ideas of Schopenhauer on the involuntary, charismatic nature of art works which achieved the Platonic *Idea* and the manifestation of the universal Will.[109] Wagner himself did not encounter Schopenhauer's works until introduced to them in 1854 by the poet Georg Herwegh.

Although Wagner's innovations could not have failed eventually to make some impression on Verdi, Gilles de Van insists that Verdi was not a theorist, but a pragmatist who did not set down his principles in a written manifesto.[110] In his letter to the librettist Du Locle complaining about the Parisian tendency to theorising about opera, Verdi would later write, 'I believe in Inspiration; you believe in Construction ... I do not want the compromise, the artifice, or the system that you prefer'.[111] In this he was aligning himself against the more detached Apollonian viewpoint presided over by 'the god of order, measure, number, control, and the subjugation of unruly instinct'.[112] For the follower of Apollo, strategies are more important than tactics. Verdi nevertheless later hinted that he, Wagner and the aesthetic philosophers of the time who, like Nietzsche believed in the Dionysian forces at work in art, may have shared a common belief in music's power to affect the emotions of the listener, including the composer himself: 'when I am alone and am wrestling with my notes, then my heart pounds, tears stream from my eyes, and the emotions and pleasures are beyond description'.[113]

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[109] Schopenhauer, *Essays and Aphorisms*, p. 159.
[110] de Van, *Verdi's Theater*, p. 19.
[111] Conati, *Interviews and Encounters with Verdi*, p. 60, quoting Autograph: Bibliothéque de L'Opéra, Paris (draft copy with variants, *I* Copialettere, pp. 219 – 222).
[112] Anthony Storr, *Music and the Mind* (London: HarperCollins, 1993), p. 156.
[113] de Van, *Verdi's Theater*, p. 8.

For Verdi, at least one purpose of musical theatre was to create 'Impressions, impressions, nothing else'.[114] He wished, though he did not presume to predict, that through his work a subject would have the same impact on an audience which it had on him personally.[115] While there may be other desirable effects sought in opera, it is of some importance to the performer that her character should make an emotional connection with the audience. The characters portrayed should elicit sympathies and antipathies, engaging the audience in their conflicts and challenges almost as though they themselves might endure them. The audience, as with those witnessing any dramatic performance, may be drawn to live through a vicarious reality heightened, in the case of opera, both by the poetic and the musical. This enhancement is more visceral than that envisaged by Kant's proposition that aesthetic experience is 'disinterested' and without 'purposive attitude'.[116]

In discussing musical meaning Ian Cross notes that some twentieth-century philosophical thought holds that 'music does not so much express emotion as embody it in a holistic way such that it is not possible to identify just which features of the music are directly responsible for this embodiment of emotion'.[117]

Leonard B. Meyer has argued for a balanced position on why music may be able to affect emotions and feelings. He asserts that meanings can lie 'within the closed context of the musical work itself', that they can excite feelings and emotions in the listener, and that 'absolute meanings and referential meanings are not mutually

[114] Ibid., p. 19. Quoting letter to Émile Perrin in *Carteggi Verdiani* , 1: 150.
[115] Ibid., p. 19.
[116] Ian Cross and Elizabeth Tolbert, "Music and Meaning," in *The Oxford Handbook of Music Psychology*, ed. Ian Cross, Susan Hallam, Elizabeth Tolbert and Michael Thaut (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 6.
[117] Ibid., p. 7.

exclusive'.[118] His is what would at a later date be termed a cognitivist perspective.[119] For Meyer, the emotional response to a stimulus can change depending upon the relationship between the individual and the stimulus.[120] He asserts that aesthetic experience cannot merely be explained by musical psychology as individual pleasure, analytical reduction to sound elements, or subjection to a draconian principle.[121] An important aspect of Meyer's theory is that 'Music activates tendencies, inhibits them, and provides meaningful and relevant resolutions'.[122]

While concurring with Meyer's cognitivist stance, Anthony Storr cites Peter Kivy's objection to Meyer's theories on frustration resolution. Kivy says that it cannot be 'the sole cause of emotion in music' any more than 'it is the sole cause of emotion in our ordinary lives'.[123] Kivy himself has reflected at length on the possible capacity of music to induce an aesthetic response in the listener and how, if at all, this can be seen as an emotional response.[124] He has come to the conclusion, in agreement with Johann Mattheson's book, *Der vollkommen Capellmeister* (1739) that 'the primary response of the listener to the emotive "content" of music is [what would now be termed] a cognitive response, not an affective one'[125] and that this cognitive response is not a response to an expression of emotion but 'a recognition of the emotive content present in it'.[126] Kivy also sees the capacity of music to move the listener as being caused by the beauty of the music. He argues that the emotion evoked by musical

[118] Leonard B. Meyer, *Emotion and Meaning in Music* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1956), pp. 1 – 2.
[119] Peter Kivy, *Sound Sentiment: An Essay on the Musical Emotions* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press 1989), p. 38.
[120] Leonard B. Meyer, *Emotion and Meaning in Music*, p. 13.
[121] Ibid., p .6.
[122] Ibid., p. 23.
[123] Storr, *Music and the Mind*, p.87, quoting Peter Kivy, *Music Alone* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), p. 156.
[124] Kivy, *Sound Sentiment*, p. 38.
[125] Ibid., p. 43.
[126] Ibid., p. 39.

beauty 'is an emotion without a name'.[127] Kivy denies that 'music arouses the garden-variety emotions' but asserts that 'music moves the emotions of listeners'.[128] Here he is in agreement with Meyer who states that 'a clear distinction must be maintained between the emotions felt by the composer, listener, or critic – the emotional response itself – and the emotional states denoted by different aspects of the musical stimulus'.[129] He disagrees with Suzanne Langer's claims that 'the "isomorphism" (her term) of music with the emotive life makes music symbolic of it',[130] claiming instead that 'music is expressive of individual, specifiable emotions, at least within certain limits'.[131] In other words, Kivy concedes that music can signify emotions without its elements (such as pitch and rhythm) having unambiguous meaning.

In his essay on 'Art, Language, and Nelson Goodman,' Roger Scruton is similarly cautious regarding the claims of Goodman, and by extension to those of Foucault, Derrida and others on the semiology of expression. 'Most students of aesthetics', he maintains, 'feel a certain amazement at the ease with which Goodman reduces this to a semantic property, to a mode of symbolization'.[132] In his essay on 'The Impossibility of Semiotics' he controversially dismissed the work of Roland Barthes, its extrapolation from the work of Ferdinand de Saussure and semiology itself and the 'idea of a general science of signs' as 'rooted in fallacy'.[133] His views at this point did not engage with the work of later major authors on semiotic approaches to music.[134]

[127] Ibid., p. 231.
[128] Ibid., p. 233.
[129] Meyer, *Emotion and Meaning in Music*, p. 8.
[130] Kivy, *Sound Sentiment*, p. 60.
[131] Ibid., p. 60.
[132] Roger Scruton, *The Politics of Culture and Other Essays* (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1981), p. 61.
[133] Ibid., p. 32.
[134] J.-J. Nattiez, *Music and Discourse: Toward a Semiology of Music* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990).

Storr issues several *caveats*, particularly with regard to seeking universally acceptable answers, and notes the example of the French carol *Quelle est cette odeur agréable* being a 'tender melody' but 'a rumbustious drinking song, *Fill every glass*, when used in *The Beggar's Opera*'.[135] He is quite clear, however, on the measurable physiological changes of arousal, in the amplitude and frequency of brain waves, which can be recorded on an electro-encephalogram, and muscular 'action potentials' recorded on an electro-myograph when subjects listen to music.[136]

Cross suggests that 'the human experience of music is most adequately conceived of as having a social and interactive dimension ...' and that the acquisition of the capacity to participate in music as a mature listener involves action or interaction.[137] He concludes that 'the notion of exploring music by examining the neurophysiological correlates of the acoustic signal ... must be recognised as severely culture-specific and as likely to afford only partial access to an understanding of the neurophysiology of music'.[138]

The efficacy of music in stimulating mood and behaviour changes has been well documented by Tia DeNora. Her investigation of the commercial use of music with the deliberate intent to induce customers to buy reveals that the business world has found music to be a powerful manipulative tool. She mentions that several psychological studies of and the studies conducted by market researchers 'have suggested that music can be used to structure conduct in public – feeling, comportment, behaviour, energy, conduct style and identity formation'. DeNora also

[135] Storr, *Music and the Mind*, p.73
[136] Ibid., p. 25.
[137] Ian Cross, "Music as Biocultural Phenomenon," in *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences (the Neurosciences and Music)*, ed. C. Falenza, et al. (2003), p. 3.
[138] Ibid., p. 4.

comments that 'what appears to be behaviourism ... is far more complex ... involving questions of meaning, appropriation and interpretive work'.[139] In discussing the physical response of shoppers to music, she refers to Roger Scruton's argument that, rather than studying listening, we should study dancing so that music is placed at the heart of our existence.[140]

Kivy has stated the present aesthetic dilemma well in remarking that '"scientific" theories of the emotions come, and they go; and there seems to me to be something deeply wrong with the way they are put in the service of musical aesthetics by the emotivists'.[141] He can, however, admit 'I think I would be a rash intruding fool if I were to pass judgment, a priori, on the possibility of a behavioral science, and I have no intention of doing so'.[142]

The extent to which and the ways in which, music may elicit an affective reaction to stimulus and the formation of an emotional response are therefore the subject of extended and unresolved debate. Without questioning the psychological sources of his musical devices, Verdi used and experimented with the strategies which his experience had shown would make effective 'impressions' on an audience. He then used audience response as the ultimate arbiter of success. Italo Pizzi wrote that 'what pleased him most, he said ... was when all the audience, carried away by a single emotion, participated in the action that unfolded before their eyes, and followed it trembling, quivering and weeping'.[143] Gino Monaldi's interview with Verdi in 1887

[139] Tia DeNora, "Music as a Device of Social Ordering," in *Music in Everyday Life* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 130.
[140] Ibid., p. 145.
[141] Peter Kivy, *Music Alone* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1990), p. 149.
[142] Ibid., p. 149.
[143] Conati, *Interviews and Encounters with Verdi*, p. 346, quoting conversation between Italo Pizzi and Verdi 9 August 1892 published in: *Ricordi verdiani inediti,* Roux e Viarengo, Turin, 1901.

records him as saying, 'Oh, I have faith in the public, for without them I would not write. I speak naturally of the great publics who have been civilized by art. In the final analysis, such a public will be right.'[144]

In view of the inconclusive nature of the aesthetic-emotive-semiotic-philosophical debate and of Verdi's avowed reliance on audience response, I believe that other avenues of discussion would be more profitable. It will thus be necessary to take on faith as Verdi did, the capacity of music to cause an affective response of some kind, whether through referential metaphor or absolute musical stimulus, and leave the debate to others. Since Verdi referred (in a musical context) to the concepts of *posizione* or *situazione* and thus to the space occupied by a character in relation to the world and to events in time, theories of social space should provide fruitful ground for discourse. They open the discussion to notions of how society has viewed certain classes of individual and how such individuals have dealt with the constraints of the social space (or strategic confinement) in which they have found themselves. This then leads us to confront the social space both of the courtesan and the (female) singer and the question of how such space may be revealed in the (presumably) musically enhancing environment of operatic theatre.

The musical elaboration of a sociological concept is amenable to investigation. Through the existing literature, I shall set out how the critical analysis of music can facilitate the interpretation of its socio-cultural meaning in relation to the musical work and the practice of performance. The writings of Joseph Kerman, Susan McClary, Lawrence Kramer, Suzanne Cusick, Tia DeNora and others provide

[144] Ibid., p. 191, quoting Gino Monaldi, *" Un colloquio con Verdi", in Il Popolo Romano,* Rome, no.45 (15 February 1887).

evidence that the listener's personal experience of a piece of music, by which Verdi set such great store, can give insights into sociological issues, particularly when supported by theoretical detail. This detail is in turn provided by access to the primary sources, in this case, the libretto and score of *La traviata*.

The listener's experience takes on its significance firstly through the personal socio-cultural background which the listener brings to its reception. The written score and libretto (or Certeau's 'strategies') need also to be seen as the (tactical) products of the socio-cultural backgrounds of the composer and librettist. These products must then be realized for the listener through the conduit of performance. The performer's personal socio-cultural background contributes to the moulding of the written material into a personal interpretation (as Certeau's 'tactics'). In the experience of the writer this will, in the reception of a 'live' performance rather than that of a recording, affect the interactive responses of both the performer and the listener. The written material, although amenable to theoretical analysis, is thereby subject to a transformation which may be slightly different at every performance.

Joseph Kerman states that 'repertories are determined by performers, canons by critics – who are by preference musicians, but by definition literary men or at least effective writers about music'.[145] He supports Edward T. Cone's statement that 'the analyst's insights "reveal how a piece of music should be heard, which in turn implies how it should be played. An analysis is a direction for a performance"'.[146] Kerman questions whether 'the autonomous musical structure itself' had ever functioned 'like an

[145] Joseph Kerman, "A Few Canonic Variations," *Critical Inquiry* 10 (1983), p. 112.
[146] Ibid., p. 113, quoting Edward T. Cone, "Analysis Today," *Musical Quarterly* 46 (1960), reprinted in *Problems of Modern Music*, ed. Paul Henry Lang (New York, 1960), p. 36.

organism'[147] but says that 'it is not only the Schenkerians and the neo-Schenkerians ... who think in terms of a canon of great works. So does a polemical anti-Schenkerian like Narmour and so do analytically inclined critics of all shades, schools, and descriptions ... That categorisation covers ... the great majority of musicians who are trying to practice criticism in the academy today'.[148]

This question arises in Kerman's discussion of the canon and how the works of composers are determined to be eligible for inclusion by means of objective theoretical score analysis. He notes, however, the attack on this academic position by ethnomusicologist John Blacking, who writes 'I am convinced that an anthropological approach to the study of *all* musical systems makes more sense of them than analyses of the patterns of sound as things in themselves'.[149]

Kerman had already conducted a vigorous argument for critical analysis in the sense of 'accountable professional criticism' rather than analysis solely of 'sounds as things in themselves,' in an earlier article for *Critical Inquiry*. 'Perhaps musical analysis, as an eminently professional process, fails to open access between the artist and his audience, and perhaps it does indeed fail [quoting himself] "to confront the work of art in its proper aesthetic terms" '.[150] This may be so in spite of the assertion made by the *Harvard Dictionary of Music* that 'the true focus of analysis, once it gets past the taxonomic stage, is "the synthetic element and the functional significance of the

[147] Ibid., p. 116.
[148] Ibid., p. 116.
[149] Ibid., p. 117, quoting John Blacking, *How Musical Is Man?* (Seattle, 1973), p. xi.
[150] Joseph Kerman, "How We Got into Analysis, and How to Get Out," *Critical Inquiry* 7 (1980), pp. 312 – 313, quoting also "A Profile for American Musicology" *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 18 (Spring 1965), p. 65.

musical detail." Analysis sets out to discern and demonstrate the functional coherence of individual works of art, their "organic unity" '.[151]

Kerman mentions that 'the original masters of analysis' such as Heinrich Schenker and Sir Donald Tovey insisted that their work was essential to 'a fully articulated aesthetic value system.'[152] Later analysts, however, have tended to avoid value judgements in an attempt to garner for their work the status of totally objective scientific enquiry. Kerman cites Allen Forte's book, *The Compositional Matrix,* 'from which all affective or valuational terms ... are meticulously excluded', but also notes that the work concerns the Sonata in E Major opus 109, by Beethoven and that '[a]esthetic judgment is concentrated tacitly on the initial choice of material to be analyzed'.[153]

Kerman regards the question of artistic value as being 'at the same time absolutely basic and begged'[154] and finds the 'true intellectual milieu of analysis ... not science but ideology'.[155] He sees this ideology as '[p]an-German in origin ... a strain of Hegelian aesthetic philosophy ... from Schopenhauer to Susanne K. Langer ... by way of Eduard Hanslick'.[156] He notes that the philosophy, resonating with Hanslick's phrase that music is 'sounding form in motion', regarded instrumental music as pre-eminent, and also that '[it] took no hold in Italy',[157] an indication that vocal music might require further insights than merely the validation of 'a certain body of works

[151] Ibid., p. 312.
[152] Ibid., p. 313.
[153] Ibid., p. 313.
[154] Ibid., p. 314.
[155] Ibid., p. 314.
[156] Joseph Kerman, "How We Got into Analysis, and How to Get Out", p. 314.
[157] Ibid., p. 314.

of art' through a demonstrable organicism.[158] Indeed, Kerman mentions that the first crisis in the development of the analytical ideology begun by J.N. Forkel and continued by E.T.A. Hoffmann, occurred with Wagner's radical new theory of opera. It was not until such works as *Der musikalische Aufbau von Richard Wagner's Tristan und Isolde* by Alfred Lorenz (1869-1939) that organic analysis would attempt to come to grips with music-drama.[159]

The idea that music had followed a teleological development to its most perfect state in the work of the German masters has been eroded if not destroyed by access, in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, to many other types of music which attract their own adherents and hierarchical constructions. Kerman asks: 'Cannot a criticism be developed that will explain, validate, or just plain illuminate these other musical traditions?'[160] He mentions Stanley Cavell's assertion that music is the only art with a 'systematic and precise vocabulary for the description and analysis of its objects' but lacks a 'humane criticism'.[161] In a footnote on David Epstein's preface to his analytical work, *Beyond Orpheus*, which states that 'expression' is outside its purview, Kerman drily remarks: 'One hears the sound of windows closing'.[162]

Kerman uses the example of Schumann's *Aus meinen Thränen spriessen* from *Dichterliebe*, and the ambiguous cadences which should lead a critic to 'what is fine and special about the song' but reduced 'out of existence' by Schenker's analysis.[163] He asserts that neither the composer's reading of the poetry nor the tradition from

[158] Ibid., p. 315.
[159] Ibid., pp.317 – 318.
[160] Ibid., p. 320.
[161] Ibid., p. 321, quoting Stanley Cavell, "Music Discomposed," *Must We Mean What We Say?* (New York, 1969), p. 186.
[162] Ibid., p. 323.
[163] Ibid., p. 325.

which his work comes can be ignored; '... if what we value in an artist is his individual vision, rather than the evidence he brings in support of some general analytical system, we shall certainly want to enter as far as possible into his idiosyncratic world of personal association and imagery.'[164] He suggests that such 'alternative modes of criticism ... should be joined with analysis to provide a less one-dimensional account of the artistic matters at hand'.[165]

Susan McClary has made sometimes controversial strides in contextualising the critical analysis of music. Noted for the feminist constructions in her work, she distinguishes between the feminine/erotic, seen as suspect, and the masculine/cerebral, seen as desirable, by the disciplines of music theory and musicology in 'patriarchal Western culture'.[166] Although she sees, in referring to Bizet's *Carmen*, '[c]hromatic slippage (carefully defined throughout the opera as "the feminine")' and cadential closure to the tonic triad as 'a human ideological construct',[167]she might as easily note the fault-lines between the Dionysiac and Apollonian or between the popular and the 'classical'. Whether or not one adheres to McClary's preoccupations, it is true that she presents an alternative mode of criticism, choosing her own connotative associations for the music she analyses and seeing certain musical motifs and structures as metaphors for the masculine and the feminine. She is careful, however, to distance herself from other scholars such as Peraino who

[164] Ibid., p. 329.
[165] Ibid., p. 331.
[166] Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender and Sexuality*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), p. 54.
[167] Ibid., p. 62.

use her own methods to construe homosexual implications in the music of Tchaikovsky.[168]

Cross-disciplinary studies have assumed an important role in music criticism since the last quarter of the twentieth century. In his paper concerning visual representations of music in portraits painted during the eighteenth century Raj in India, Richard Leppert notes the Western pride in rationality. He mentions John Keeble's tabulation of the Greek harmonic system and finds 'little in the book of value either to musicians or to an understanding of music itself'.[169] His contention is that 'music [according to the system of Keeble and of his predecessor, Jean-Phillipe Rameau] is irrelevant and even interruptive to the discussion, for music is intensely subjective at the experiential level. Only when it remains on paper ... can it be dealt with in pure form: ideally in numbers, and thus totally contained in a logical system divorced from the world'.[170] This is an implicit warning to those of an exclusively analytical bent who, like the architect Robert Morris, would have us agree that 'The joint Union and Concordance of the Parts, in an exact Symmetry, forms the whole a compleat Harmony, which admits of no Medium' and 'immediately acknowledge the Necessity of Proportion in the Preservation of the whole Oeconomy of the Universe'.[171] Leppert goes on to discern assertions of Western patriarchal hegemony in the visual art and instruments which conform to such notions of eighteenth-century rationalism. Like McClary, Leppert finds a rich vein of socio-cultural meaning in the musical matters he discusses.

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[168] Ibid., p. 78.
[169] Richard Leppert, "Music, Domestic Life and Cultural Chauvinism: Images of British Subjects at Home in India," in *Music and Society*, ed. Richard Leppert and Susan McClary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Pess, 1987), p. 73.
[170] Ibid., p. 74.
[171] Ibid., footnote to p. 70, quoting Morris, Robert, *Lectures on Architecture. Consisting of Rules Founded upon Harmonick and Arithmetical Proportions in Building* (London, 1734), pp. 81, 101 – 102.

Cusick speaks of the desirability of 'thinking, always, about music as a set of social processes that include the production of sounds endowed with symbolic meaning, *rather than* thinking about it as a set of objects in an imaginary museum that can now include recorded performances'.[172] She uses the story of composer Ruth Crawford's exclusion from the founding of the New York Musicological Society in 1930 to illustrate what she sees as the desire to legitimize musicology as 'scientific' by masculinising it.[173] Cusick ascribes this to a long tradition 'From Plato to Artusi to Hanslick' of fear at the erotic power apparently held over men by women which has been conflated with the supposedly feminine power of music.[174] After noting the ideas of Arthur Elson that the intuitive and imaginative practice of music was 'woman's work'[175] she also cites the argument of Waldo S. Pratt to the effect that music, as a combination of subjective experience and objective fact should be scrutinized scientifically.[176] Cusick readily concedes that '[i]t is clear that feminist musicologies differ deliberately from the most traditional musicology by making no pretence of objectivity, detachment, or autonomy'.[177]

In her discussion concerning performance as research, Cusick has also addressed the 'rage and fear toward flux and impermanence [which] could easily lead both to the desire for fixed, permanent and transcendent ... texts that Lydia Goehr saw as characterising all so-called "classical" music culture since the nineteenth century ... and to the desire to appropriate and participate imaginatively in cultural practices that

[172] Suzanne G. Cusick, "Performance as Research," in *Music Research: New Directions for a New Century*, ed. Michael Ewans, Rosalind Halton, John A. Phillips (London: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2004), p. 150.
[173] Suzanne G. Cusick, "Gender, Musicology and Feminism," in *Rethinking Music*, ed. Nicholas Cook and Mark Everist (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 474.
[174] Ibid., p. 478.
[175] Ibid., p. 479, referring to Arthur Elson, *Woman's Work in Music* (Boston, 1903).
[176] Ibid., p. 479, referring to Waldo S. Pratt, 'On Behalf of Musicology' *The Musical Quarterly*, Vol. 1, no. 1 (January 1915), p. 4.
[177] Suzanne G. Cusick, "Gender, Musicology and Feminism," p. 484.

seemed unchanging'.[178] Here she is referring to Goehr's principle of 'separability' in which instrumental music of the late eighteenth century is seen to be almost religiously enshrined apart from the world.[179]

While Goehr avoided consideration of opera and focused on what she saw as the formation of the canon of instrumental music from the end of the eighteenth century, there is still a cautionary lesson in Cusick's mention of recorded performances. These can become a 'text' for the purposes of seeking a definitive quality in the edited and archived results of performances made on a particular occasion. Nevertheless, as the product of human realization of the artefacts of composer and librettist and acting upon even the solitary listener they form an interactive nexus and social event. Although some may have sought the numinous in the god-like act of creation, it is the social human being who creates, interprets and responds.

With the concept of music as a set of social processes kept firmly in view, the ideas of Victor Turner and Richard Schechner cited by Cusick are worth noting in full with regard to the present thesis:

> ... they base their work ["performance studies"] on the premise that performance, like ritual, always unfolds in a set of circumstances that render the performed actions liminal - or, as Schechner put it, in the equivalent of grammar's subjunctive mood, where all statements or acts amount to thought

[178] Cusick, "Performance as Research," p. 138, quoting Carolyn Abbate, *In Search of Opera* (Princeton and Woodstock: Princeton University Press, 2001), p. 21, citing Richard Taruskin, *Text and Act: Essays on Music and Performance*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 114, and also citing Lydia Goehr, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Work s: An Essay in the Philosophy of Music*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1992.
[179] Lydia Goehr, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works: An Essay in the Philosophy of Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), Chapter 6.

> experiments because they are temporarily free of "real-world" consequences. Thus, performances by definition constitute events in which social rules are temporarily suspended, and social relations and roles become both the objects and the medium of play that can reverse, mix-and-match, even mock social norms as all those present "restore behaviour,"... that is, repeat in the always unpredictable medium of human activity bits of behaviour by which people organise their relations with each other, with myths, with social concepts of sound, time, space and power. When performances end, some of the relations, rules and roles may be changed, or they may be thoroughly reinscribed, or the situation may be somewhere in between; regardless, however, everyone present has learned or relearned important elements of the story they want to tell themselves about themselves from performance's play.[180]

The above has particular relevance to my contention that such shifting of identity and self-perception through the 'play' of performance may have an impact not only on audiences, but on the performers themselves. It is important, therefore, that awareness of completed and ideal or proposed performances be included in the equation when studying any piece of music.

Before passing on to the next stage of this rationale, it should be reflected upon that the attempts to codify, tabulate and control music through 'readerly' analysis, whether in the manner of Keeble, Schenker or Tovey, whether 'patriarchal' and power-crazed or not, have been genuinely aimed at an understanding of music. The question is whether such attempts do, or even should, possess the status of scientifically objective

[180] Cusick, "Performance as Research," p. 141.

study. According to Nicholas Cook, '... not only formalized theory but also all other thinking or talking about music, consists of metaphors or fictions that become highly dubious or downright bogus if they are regarded as being explanatory in any scientific sense, but ... are at the same time indispensable in their descriptive function'.[181] Later, he says; 'It is by virtue of being ... internal to a culture that mythopoeic explanation is the opposite of scientific explanation ... the theory of music is grounded in the experience of the individual, and for this reason objectivity is neither a feasible nor a desirable aim for accounts of music based on music-theoretical concepts'.[182] After quoting Ian Cross concerning the necessity for music theory to form part, but not necessarily the basis of the scientific study of music, he concludes that '[i]t is up to the psychologist or the social scientist, and not the music theorist, to study music scientifically'.[183]

For Lawrence Kramer, interpretation 'cannot be regimented, disciplined, or legislated – at least not successfully. As a practice, it is opportunistic, unruly, and contestatory ... [and for Nietzche, Marx, and Freud] intimately bound up with questions of power and desire'.[184] His claim is that 'Lacking the power of exclusion, interpretations must convince by other means ... by their power to sustain a detailed scrutiny of a text that also reaches deep into the cultural context'.[185]

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[181] Nicholas Cook, *Music, Imagination and Culture* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1990), p. 242.
[182] Ibid., p. 243.
[183] Ibid., p. 243, referring also to Cross, Ian "Music and change: on the establishment of rules," in *Musical Structure and Cognition*, ed. Peter Howell, Ian Cross, and Robert West (London, 1985), pp. 1 – 20. A further source on music and emotional response can be found in: Juslin, Patrik and Västfjäll, "Emotional Responses to Music: The Need to Consider Underlying Mechanisms", in *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 31 (2006), pp. 559 – 621.
[184] Lawrence Kramer, *Music as Cultural Practice, 1800 – 1900*, California Studies in Nineteenth Century Music (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1990), pp. 14 – 15.
[185] Ibid., p. 15.

Kramer provides examples of his method which address the matter of gender and sexuality in the works of Liszt, Wagner and Wolf. He points to the 'Gretchen' movement of Liszt's *Faust* Symphony as denoting the feminine in its 'unbroken homophony of solo viola and oboe' and 'the terminological convention that identifies the beginnings or endings of melodies as ... feminine if they are unaccented'.[186] He considers it useful to refer to the symphony's themes by 'characterizing them (not a neutral activity: a gradually expanding process of interpretation)' in the context of Goethe's poetry.[187] In this way Kramer shows Liszt as 'mobilizing, or being mobilized by, the cultural codes that support the standard terminology'.[188]

Again, Kramer draws together the psycho-literary text of Sigmund Freud's *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, Wagner's opera and Wolf's song to show how they '(re)articulate certain radical changes in the concept of sexuality that emerge in late-nineteenth-century culture'.[189] He regards close attention to nonmusical issues as 'an advantage, not a drawback, where musical understanding is concerned'.[190] Taking Michel Foucault's *The History of Sexuality* as a lead, he notes the nineteenth-century perspective which interpreted sexuality: 'One is ... as one desires'.[191]

Kramer asks how Wagner incorporates 'the dynamics of libidinal desire into the musical processes of *Tristan und Isolde?*' His answer is that it 'depends on a structural trope that corresponds to the pregnant ambiguity of Isolde's last word, *Lust* ... [and] typically involves a passage that reaches a climactic melodic cadence at the same time as it defaults on a full harmonic cadence. As a general technique, the

[186] Ibid., p. 104.
[187] Ibid., p. 103.
[188] Ibid., p. 105.
[189] Ibid., p. 135.
[190] Ibid., p. 138.
[191] Ibid., p. 138.

overlap of closure and continuation is basic to Wagner's mature style, but its use in *Tristan* ... the *Lust*-trope is nonpareil'.[192] Kramer continues his analysis, noting the interchangeability of musical passages belonging to Tristan and to Isolde so that '[m]asculine and feminine overlap as mirror images of each other ... as the lovers ask for a forgetfulness in which their separate identities will fade away'.[193] For Kramer they are 'constituted as subjects in terms that scuttle the [Freudian] concepts of instinct, of the primacy of the object, of sexuality as a force of nature, even of Nature itself'.[194]

Next, Kramer deals with Hugo Wolf's *Ganymed* (1888), the setting of a text by Goethe. He finds that 'Wolf binds together Ganymede's convulsive advances toward fulfillment with music of undisturbed continuity; moments of textual bliss are enveloped by the pleasures of texture and sonority but not matched by musical closures'.[195] His analysis reveals: 'The ease with which Ganymede evades metrical and harmonic boundaries in his vocal line ... coursing from one love object to another, would suggest a feminized character to a late-nineteenth-century audience, a personal subject that shuttles undecidedly between a masculine and a feminine identity' and concludes that the music of the time addresses questions of sexuality 'as intelligibly as any other cultural practice of the age'.[196]

Kramer's interprations, like McClary's, Shepherd's and other sociologically based models, are vulnerable to criticisms such as those of Nicholas Cook. He comments: 'Take away the homology and the interpretation loses its plausibility as an

[192] Ibid., p. 148.
[193] Ibid., p. 165.
[194] Ibid., p. 165.
[195] Ibid., p. 168.
[196] Ibid., p. 175.

interpretation *of* the music rather than one imposed *on* it; it becomes, in a word, arbitrary'.[197] Taking issue with Kramer's contention that musical meaning is bound up with 'the formal processes and stylistic articulations of musical works', he comments that 'the specific manner of the binding remains unexplained. And in the absence of such explanation, the only safe model of the relationship between music and meaning would appear to be a Saussurian one – in other words, that it is arbitrary'.[198] His suggestion is that the approach taken by Susan Melrose as to 'the way in which dramatic meaning is negotiated between theatrical performers, rather than inhering in the text and being reproduced in performance' is valuable in relation to musical performance as well.[199] Cook maintains that '[a]s constructed in performance ... meaning is emergent: it is not reproduced in but created through the act of performance' and quoting Melrose, it results in 'a cluster of different contributions which produce, even "in the moment" of what looks like "a single action," a tension and a certain semiotic heterogeneity'.[200]

The way forward, then, is to find not only potential semiotic and metaphorical meaning in the musical and literary structures or strategies which are susceptible to theoretical analysis, but to investigate the tactics used in performance from which 'meaning is emergent'.

Approaches to Analysis

In keeping with the integration of theoretical and contextual analysis, I have chosen

[197] Nicholas Cook, "Theorizing Musical Meaning," in *Music Theory Spectrum* 23, no. 2 (2001), p. 172.
[198] Ibid., p. 173.
[199] Ibid., p. 179, citing Susan Melrose, *A Semiotics of the Dramatic Text* (London: Macmillan, 1994), pp. 221 – 222.
[200] Ibid., p. 179.

certain arias and ensembles in which Violetta takes part as data samples in support of my argument. Some ten separate sections of the opera will require detailed critical analysis in order to pinpoint the vocal, psychological and social *posizione* of Violetta and of the singer at each stage of the unfolding action. Each of the elements which combine to form a musical gesture can contribute to a metaphorical signifier for emotion or character, particularly when supported by text and action. These elements may be identified as duration, pitch, form, texture and dynamics. In combination, they form the strategies with which the composer and librettist seek to control the actions of the performer and to elicit a particular response from the audience. These imposed strategies are in turn tactically utilized by each person present within the interactive flux of a performance.

To take the first of these gestural elements, duration, it is well to consider that in all cultures from infancy, music is 'kinesthetically embedded, being closely bound to vocal play and to whole body movement'.[201] It can be seen that Verdi uses rhythm and specifically metre, as a powerful symbol of Violetta's presence, social space and *posizione*. It could almost be regarded as the musical equivalent of the camellia in Dumas's novel and play. The aspect of duration which Verdi uses as Violetta's 'signature' is the configuration of three pulses, whether as simple triple or compound duple metre. A popular dance in triple metre at moderate tempo was developed by around 1800. It owed its origins to the *Landler* or *deutsche Tanz* and was called the waltz.[202] Apel notes that 'the waltz evoked both enthusiastic response and violent protest' because of its requirement that the dancers embrace one another. He mentions an encyclopedia entry early in the nineteenth century which comments on the

[201] Cross, "Music as Biocultural Phenomenon", p. 4.
[202] Willi Apel, *Harvard Dictionary of Music*, 2nd ed. (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1970), p. 922.

'familiar treatment' and 'obliging manner in which the freedom is returned by the females' and which misattributes the name of the dance to a German expression for 'rolling in the dirt of mire'.[203] The same entry muses: '... having seen it performed by a select party of foreigners, we could not help reflecting how uneasy an English mother would be to see her daughter so familiarly treated'.[204] The dance was still acceptable enough for Franz Schubert, Johannes Strauss senior and junior, Frederich Chopin and others to compose waltzes during the first half of the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, enough suspicion of its apparently louche origins would have remained by the middle of the century to connote easy familiarity of female behaviour.

The triple metre of the waltz leads not only to an assumption of social standards and possible social space, but alludes to the movement involved in performing it as a dance. On hearing the waltz, an audience member in any way susceptible to dance music might be forgiven for responding with bodily movement however well disguised or internalized.[205] The strategy is capable of drawing a listener into complicity with both social space and action. The action of a waltz involves the dancers in facing each other and describing the circumferences of circles through the movement of their feet and bodies. The dancers whirl around each other and the whirling partners create larger circles around the area of the dance floor. It is an energetic dance which, in the writer's experience, can create the physical sensation of giddiness and loss of control. Its metre is an efficient metaphorical cue and stimulus for enabling the audience to identify with Violetta and her world.

[203] Ibid., p. 923, citing a quotation attributed to Charles Burney, in Rees' *The Cyclopedia*, c. 1805.
[204] Scholes, *The Oxford Companion to Music*, p. 1110.
[205] Storr, *Music and the Mind*, p. 184.

Early in the opera, the waltz appears in the guise of the *Brindisi* after the quadruple time of a generally male-oriented *Introduzione* in Act I. It becomes both a tribute to and indication of Violetta's focal presence in her social space.[206] The three quavers per bar of the *Brindisi* change to the three crotchets per bar of a waltz proper in the *Valzer-Duetto nell'Introduzione*.[207] During this section, further permutations in 3/8 and 3/4 arise as Alfredo declares his love and as he and Violetta become more intimate.[208] When Violetta is put into a situation or *posizione* of stressful conflict as happens during the *Finale* to Act I, or *Non sapete quale affetto* in Act II, the triple rhythms assisted by the indicated tempi become compressed into the six quavers per bar of compound duple metre.[209] Initially the singer has been put firmly within the constraints of an uncharacteristic time signature with little or no opportunity to demonstrate vocal flexibility, height or power.[210] When in *Non sapete* Violetta frantically rejects Germont's demands, she returns to the compound duple of defiance stripped of its vocal virtuosity. The waltz is thus doubled to a gallop reminiscent of a racing heartbeat.

It is notable that Violetta's space can also be contained within the perimeter of quadruple metre. Verdi uses this when characters or forces other than those of Violetta are prevailing. It appears for example in the *Stretta dell'Introduzione* to Act I, in Alfredo's *Scena ed Aria* in Act II, in Germont's *Pura siccome un angelo* in the same Act and even *Ah! Gran Dio! morir si giovane* in Act III.[211] The *Scena ed Aria* of Act III is first encapsulated within the four walls of Violetta's room and the four beats

[206] Giuseppe Verdi, *La Traviata in Full Score*, pp. 31 – 47.
[207] Ibid., pp. 48 – 64.
[208] Ibid., pp. 55 – 60 and pp. 60 – 64.
[209] Ibid., p. 92 and p. 144.
[210] Ibid., pp. 133 – 180.
[211] Ibid., p. 65, p. 139 and p. 393.

of quadruple metre. It does not return to the triple figures of Violetta's formerly defiant gaiety until in muted form it carries her as she reads aloud, but does not sing, Alfredo's letter in *Scena IV* and moves into the nostalgia of *Addio del passato*.[212]

Metres can suggest and remind the audience of characterisation and *posizione.* The finer details of rhythmic pattern within those metres and supported by text are capable of musical *mimesis* and socially constructed metaphor.[213] Extended durations may indicate a sustained effort to have a passionate and heartfelt emotion heard. This occurs for example, in Violetta's *Amami, Alfredo* in Act II.[214] Short durations can indicate agitation and excitement through their suggestion of movement as happens during Violetta's *Sempre libera* in the Finale to Act I.[215] The interspersing of silences between notes or phrases can simulate panic or breathlessness as is the case in the opening of *Non sapete* in Act II.[216] Dotted rhythms, as on the words 'termine serbato al nostro amor!' in Violetta's duet with Alfredo in Act III, are in their convulsive nature capable of lending themselves to interpretation as sobbing gestures, depending on context.[217] Underlying orchestral rhythms such as the repeated and the traditionally funereal figure of two demisemiquavers followed by a quaver, build by association a palpable sense of foreboding.[218] This happens in Act II, for example, while Alfredo questions Violetta about the note she is writing, as will be discussed in Chapter 4.[219]

Each aspect of duration and rhythm has its effect on the singer as well as the audience. Repetitive rhythms, as well as building tension, can stimulate the listener and singer to

[212] Ibid., pp. 342 – 359.
[213] Cross, "Music and Meaning", pp. 6 – 7.
[214] Verdi, *La Traviata in Full Score*, p. 190.
[215] Ibid., p. 96.
[216] Ibid., p 144.
[217] Ibid., p. 402.
[218] de Van, *Verdi's Theater*, p. 124.
[219] Verdi, *La Traviata in Full Score*, p. 183.

fall into 'step'.[220] In the writer's experience, long passages of sustained notes require reliable control of breath support. Runs and *roulades* of very short notes often require substantial but speedy and unobtrusive intakes of breath between passages in order to propel the voice through its next articulation of notes.[221] Each challenge brings its own tactical response.

The element of pitch within the context of melody and tonality has a variety of ramifications in its metaphorical and physiological significance. It may be used as a strategy for broad modal coloration, or fine melodic detail. Verdi used the change from a minor to a major key as the socially constructed metaphor for change from a negative to a positive emotional mood in *La traviata.*[222] This occurs, for example in the movement from Violetta's doubtfully musing F minor in *Ah, fors'e lui* to her happy abandonment to conviction when she breaks into her own reiteration of Alfredo's love theme as *A quell'amor* in F major.[223]

Verdi does not appear to use any systematic architectural tonal structure for *La traviata*. He does, however, give importance to the keys of D-flat, F and A major which also recur in his opera *Macbeth.*[224] De Van warns against attributing too much semantic significance to this triad of keys or to that of A flat, C and E which occurs in *Rigoletto* and *Simon Boccanegra*.[225] He suggests that as with the Finale to Act I, the pragmatic Verdi used tonality to create dramatic contrast and also to accommodate

[220] Storr, *Music and the Mind*, p. 184.
[221] Johan Sundberg, "Where Does the Sound Come From?" in *The Cambridge Companion to Singing*, ed. John Potter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 235.
[222] Kerman, *Opera as Drama*, p. 157.
[223] Verdi, *La Traviata in Full Score*, p. 84.
[224] de Van, *Verdi's Theater*, p. 328.
[225] Ibid., p. 328.

particular voices, rather than in obedience to any esoteric tonal symbolism.[226] For the character and the singer, however, the physical implications of tonality will bear careful consideration.

Melodic ideas present a fruitful area of investigation for their thematic and metaphorical significance. The most prominent of these in *La traviata* is Alfredo's love-theme first presented as 'Di quell'amor' within the duet section known as *Un di felice eterea* in Act I.[227] It appears several times throughout the opera, on each occasion in a different vocal or instrumental configuration. There can be no mistake as to its significance as a cue to recall Violetta's yearning for the impossible space of love fulfilled. Smaller details such as angular intervals and leaps, repeated semitonal alternations and chromatic runs become significant as reinforcing metaphors for expressions of anguish, agitation, surprise or other emotion when coupled with the text. Where a singer must maintain a high *tessitura* there is a tendency for the notes to increase tension in the listener. This may happen in part because of the sympathetic experience of pressure due to 'exaggerated glottal adduction' which non-singers have when they attempt to produce high pitches.[228] It may also be attributed to the tension similar to the response of an audience to a high-wire act. As Debussy noted about virtuosi: 'There is always a hope that something dangerous may happen'.[229]

Melodic pitch can become a dangerous element for the singer. This may occur when it is high in the singer's range, when it must be articulated very quickly or when it involves an interval which is difficult to execute with acceptable intonation. In the

[226] Ibid., pp. 326 – 329.
[227] Verdi, *La Traviata in Full Score*, p. 55.
[228] Sundberg, "Where Does the Sound Come From?", p. 238.
[229] Storr, *Music and the Mind*, p. 32.

writer's experience the combination of high pitches and florid passage work found in Violetta's *Sempre libera* for example, requires high laryngeal position and mastery of *gorgie* or the precise articulation of notes within the throat. This *bel canto* technique was at its height during the eighteenth century but has outlived neither its usefulness nor its challenges for the singer in the role of Violetta.[230] The role also demands production of lower notes for vocal lines better suited to the lyric or dramatic soprano, requiring low larynx and wide pharynx for unamplified resonance over an orchestra, often in a large venue. The singer must reconcile the problems presented by these extremes of pitch and technique.[231]

De Van makes it clear that 'a situation [or *posizione*] ... almost invariably corresponds ... musically, to the use of a given form'.[232] Verdi himself was loath to abandon the use of closed forms such as the aria. He took great care over which parts of his operas were 'to run or to sing'.[233] Italian operatic tradition held to the 'hidden persistence of the aesthetics of the affetti, all ... traced to this inner stage to which opera periodically migrates so that the affective appropriation of the performance can take place'.[234] It will be necessary to look at Violetta's arias in Acts I and III to see how each one momentarily arrests the action to focus on the 'inner stage' on which she paces out her emotional *posizione* through reflection. Retaining the aria did not mean, of course, that Verdi restricted his strategies for solos to this form alone. In the Finale to Act I Violetta sings two arias, the second an example of *bravura coloratura* technique. Connecting the first as *cantabile* and the virtuosic *cabaletta* is the open form of recitative which propels Violetta's emotional 'action' and becomes highly modified

[230] Mason, "The Teaching (and Learning) of Singing," p. 206.
[231] Private communication with Joan Carden, 23 May 2009.
[232] de Van, *Verdi's Theater*, p. 119.
[233] Ibid., p. 289.
[234] Ibid., p. 51.

with cadenza passages in *Follie! Follie!*[235] The whole Finale as a *scena* containing two closed forms is fluid enough to accommodate thematic aspects which drive the dramatic action. Verdi utilizes the even more flexible open form of *parlante* when Germont gradually persuades Violetta to break with Alfredo in Act II. *Parlante* is found in various places including Violetta's *Ah! comprendo: dovro alcun tempo* as the orchestra works on thematic material indicative of her emotional *posizione* while the singer conducts the action of her agitated conversation.[236] Since the orchestral component carries so much melodic weight, it is very easy for the singer to move from the declamatory into the *arioso* or reflective mode without breaking dramatic continuity.[237] In Chapter 4, it will be necessary to investigate the impact which this continuity has on the singer's technique and artistic status during the course of Act II.

Texture and dynamics are elements closely allied to each other in their effect on the singer as well as on the dramaturgy of an opera. Texture in particular creates a psychological 'space' which is able to emphasize the *posizione* of the singer. Solo recitative or aria immediately puts focus upon the singer. Depending upon the other vocal and instrumental forces used at the time texture can isolate, consolidate or overwhelm, support or cause conflict. Instrumentation may provide subtle background to a vocal exchange as does the off-stage band in the duet between Alfredo and Violetta in Act I.[238] It may punctuate by alternating with voices as happens in the 'Imponete!/ Non amarlo ditegli' exchange between Germont and Violetta.[239] It may grow from *pianissimo* strings only to orchestral and choral *tutti* over which Violetta's

[235] Verdi, *La Traviata in Full Score*, p. 89.
[236] Ibid., p. 142.
[237] Kerman, *Opera as Drama*, pp. 136 – 137.
[238] Verdi, *La Traviata in Full Score*, pp. 51 - 55
[239] Ibid., p. 164.

voice must carry, as occurs in the *Largo del Finale* in Act II.[240] For the singer, this is not a demonstration of the vocal virtuosity found in Act I, but a measured attempt by the character to maintain resolve in her personal sacrifice, now asserting moral power over the lover who has insulted her.

Again, the entire orchestra may be ranged against one singer but constrained by dynamic instructions to play *ppp* as it is in Violetta's 'Prendi; .. quest'e l'immagine', of Act III.[241] In each case the technical skill of the singer and the *posizione* of Violetta are subject to the spare and focused, comfortably buoyant or dynamically demanding textural forces deployed. The further elements of *timbre*, articulation and instrumental technique combine with those others mentioned in reinforcing mood and metaphor. The passing of time, for example, ticks away with *pizzicato* strings joined by quietly lugubrious woodwinds as Violetta sings the words 'Morrò! ... morrò! ... la mia memoria non fia ch'ei maledica' in Act II.[242] De Van notes that Verdi, together with Rossini and Bellini was 'accused of "Germanism," ... of thickening the texture of the orchestra' and '[l]ater in life, Verdi rejected the excesses of the symphonic style, but there is no denying that he had contributed to it'.[243] From my perspective, Verdi's textures in *La traviata* provide the proper acoustic spaces in which to find Violetta at each point of the drama.

Each of the arias and ensembles to be analysed in Chapter 4 demonstrates one or a combination of, the rhythmic, melodic, harmonic, timbral, textural, dynamic, articulatory or structural signifiers of the status and social space of Violetta and of the

[240] Ibid., pp. 326 – 341.
[241] Ibid., pp. 409 – 410.
[242] Ibid., p. 169.
[243] de Van, *Verdi's Theater*, p. 296.

singer within the context of the developing action. They contain recognizable aural cues which function as metaphors for psychological processes which an audience might be expected to understand. They also have wider social implications through their involvement of the singer in the identity of the courtesan, through the flux of performance. The earlier reference to the 'liminal' and 'transgressive' aspects of performance cited in the work of Cusick will be revisited during this discussion.[244] Their relevance will emerge as we note the possible tactics of the singer-courtesan and her audience as they deal with the strategies of Verdi and his librettist.

Recapitulation

The proposed methodology eschews rigid loyalty to any one aspect of analysis. It must assume agreement with Kerman and Cook that valuable insights are available in criticism without pretension to incontrovertible scientific proof. The proposed critical analysis will discover the musical strategies through which Verdi aimed to capture changes in *posizione* in time and space throughout the course of the opera. Further analysis will reveal the wider implications for the singer-as-courtesan as she uses tactics in performance and also for the audience as they use their tactics for reception of the performance.

Initially however, it is necessary to discover Verdi's meaning in his use of the term *posizione* and the specific social context in which that *posizione* has gained relevance. The task then, is to delineate the narrative of *La traviata* and its overall structure as well as investigating the provenance of that narrative. The next chapter will thus reveal the impact of this 'subject from our own time' on Verdi's strategic approach

[244] Cusick, "Performance as Research," p. 141.

and on the ensuing tactical responses.[245] It will be manifest that the *posizione* of one such as Violetta, revealed in the biographical circumstances of Alexandre Dumas *fils*, his novel and play[246] and Francesco Maria Piave's libretto, was sociologically important to Verdi, to his contemporary and later audiences and to the singers who take on the role of Violetta. In the next chapter, I intend to make clear the connections forged by dangerously seductive display within the 'transgressive' and 'liminal' aspects of performance which implicate the singer in the *posizione* of the courtesan.

[245] Verdi, *Verdi: The Man in His Letters*, p. 172.
[246] Alexandre Dumas *fils*, *La Dame Aux Camélias*, Novel, trans. David Coward (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1986). Alexandre Dumas *fils*, *La Dame Aux Camélias* (Paris: Calmann- Levy, 1925). Also ed. Dianne Bean and David Widger (Project Gutenberg, EBook #1608), http://www.gutenberg.orgfile/1608/1608-h/1608-htm.

CHAPTER 3

FROM LIFE TO LIBRETTO

The role of Violetta Valery in *La traviata* is unusual for several reasons, not least of which is the literary provenance of its libretto. In a theatrical tradition which was at that time notable for its concentration on morally edifying portrayals of heroic mythological characters, the story of Violetta was mildly sensational. Susan Rutherford notes Henry Chorley's reference to the opera as being 'distasteful and feeble' and another criticism as to its 'detestable libretto'.[247] In David Kimbell's view, it accorded well with the Positivism of August Comte, whose plan for the reorganisation of society endorsed an exploration of the plight of the underclass and its potential for redemption. [248] The story or its central myth had, according to Julian Budden, been better told in Abbé Prévost's *Manon Lescaut.*[249] The so-called 'myth' and the rejection of his love by Marie Duplessis were real enough for Alexandre Dumas *fils,* who would turn his own discomfort to literary account in his novel and play, *La Dame aux camélias.*

The Play and the Novel

Julian Budden is scathing in his assessment of *La Dame aux camélias*, the novel by Alexandre Dumas *fils* upon which Piave's libretto is ultimately based. In referring to the story, he comments that it is 'essentially a myth, none the less universal for being modern and for having received its definitive form at the hands of a mediocrity'.[250] Budden sees the mythical quality of the transgressive, hedonistic woman who

[247] Rutherford, *The Prima Donna and Opera*, p. 265.
[248] Kimbell, *Verdi in the Age of Italian Romanticism*, p. 643.
[249] Julian Budden, *The Operas of Verdi: Il Trovatore to La Forza Del Destino* vol. 2 (Cassell, 1973-1981), p. 117.
[250] Ibid., p. 117.

sacrifices herself for love of a man who cannot maintain her in luxury, as having its beginnings in Abbé Prévost's novel, *Manon Lescaut*.[251]

Prévost's novel had been published in 1731 as the final volume of *Memoires et aventures d'un homme de qualité*, and was immediately banned in France. The narrative opens with a respectable traveller, intrigued by the sight of 'a dozen of the frail sisterhood' chained together before being shipped off to America.[252] One member of this ragged group, Manon, stands out as so beautiful that she does not seem to belong in a social space such as this.

The traveller meets Chevalier des Grieux who later, after having followed Manon to New Orleans, relates his story. Des Grieux tells the tale of how he naively falls in love with the beautiful Manon who is immediately unfaithful to him. His father enforces their separation for a time, but eventually des Grieux forfeits his inheritance and runs away with her. Manon, who cannot survive without luxury, leads des Grieux into fraud, theft and murder in order to keep her.

Eventually Manon dies genuinely declaring her love for des Grieux.[253] The weight of devotion, however, is balanced more on the shoulders of the man than is the case with *La Dame aux Camélias.* Still, the template of disgrace and sacrifice established more than a century before the Dumas novel, gained relevance for nineteenth-century audiences as a reinforcing cultural cue. It was by this stage a well-known warning to young men, of the consequences of allowing themselves to be seduced and duped by a beautiful but dangerous woman. Such a person could put a young man outside the safe

[251] Ibid., p. 117.
[252] Antoine François, Abbé, Prévost, *Manon Lescaut, 1731*, trans. Angela Scholar (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 8
[253] Ibid., p. 142.

space of respectable society. Such a person might easily destroy a man like Armand Duval or the opera's Alfredo Germont. *Manon Lescaut* continued to be a popular story and was reset by composers in several operas.[254]

Dumas's novel *La Dame aux camélias* (1848) is at first related by an unnamed narrator who sees a poster announcing the auction from the deceased estate of Marguerite Gautier. At the auction, he is impelled to bid for a book which happens to be a copy of *Manon Lescaut.* There is an inscription in the book which reads; 'Manon à Marguerite, Humilité'. (Manon to Marguerite, Humility). [255] The evident denouement is emphasized when the narrator who befriends Armand Duval, the former lover of the deceased, accompanies him to the body's exhumation for removal to a better resting place:

> Les yeux ne faisaient plus que deux trous, les lèvres avaient disparus, et les dents blanches étaient serrées les unes contre les autres. Les longs cheveux noirs et secs étaient colles sur les tempes et voilaient un peu les cavités vertes des joues, et cependant je reconnaissais dans ce visage le visage blanc, rose et joyeux que c'avais vu si souvent.[256]
>
> (The eyes were simply two holes, the lips had gone, and the white teeth were clenched. The long, black, dry hair was stuck over the temples and partly

[254] Daniel Auber, *Manon Lescaut* (1856), Jules Massenet, *Manon* (1884), Giacomo Puccini, *Manon Lescaut* (1893).
[255] Alexandre Dumas *fils*, *La Dame aux camélias*, EBook # 2419 produced by Walter Debeuf and Peggy Gaugy for Project Gutenberg, 2003, http://www.gutenberg.org/dirs/etext00/8dame10h.htm, p. 10. Also Alexandre Dumas fils, *La Dame aux camélias*, trans. David Coward, (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 15.
[256] Ibid., p. 26.

> veiled the green hollows of the cheeks, and yet in this face I recognized the pink and white, vivacious face which I had seen so often).[257]

This unflinching picture possibly had the effect of purging, through literature, the humiliation which Dumas had undergone through his relationship with the original of the Marguerite Gautier character, Marie Duplessis. Born Rose Alphonsine Plessis, Marie was a peasant from Normandy whose mother had died when Marie was six years old.[258] She had been apprenticed to work with a *blanchisseuse,* a laundress, before trying her fortune in Paris.[259] When she was about fourteen, her drunkard father Marin Plessis left her with an elderly bachelor, M. Plantier by whom she may have been abused. After this, Marie was taken to Paris by her father after staying with him in circumstances which caused local gossip.[260] She was then apprenticed to a dressmaker Mlle. Urbain, until beginning her new career by becoming the mistress of a M. Nollet. Strangely, after parting with Nollet, one of her several liaisons was with a certain M. Valéry.[261] Jules Janin commented that 'She [Marie] was a woman of spirit, taste and good sense'.[262] He also said that '[s]he had carried the science of domestic comfort and self-adoration to such a pitch that … the most trivial things connected with her were utterly consuming'.[263]

Alexandre Dumas *fils* hoped to reform Marie by legitimizing their liaison. The project of introducing her into his social space was an inevitable failure. She could not live in luxury without the sponsorship of wealthy men.

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[257] Dumas, *La Dame aux camélias*, trans. Coward, p. 38.
[258] Rounding, *Grandes Horizontales*, p. 31.
[259] Ibid., p. 33.
[260] Ibid., p. 33.
[261] Ibid., pp. 33 – 36.
[262] Gary Schmidgall, "La Traviata Introduction: The Autobiographical Verdi," in *The Metropolitan Opera Classics Library: La Traviata* (Boston, Toronto: Little, Brown, 1983), p. 5.
[263] Ibid., p. 6.

Dumas's parting letter to Marie rings with the sentiments of self-sacrifice which would later be attributed to her literary counterparts:

> Ma chère Marie,
>
> Je ne suis ni assez rich pour vous aimer comme je le voudrais, ni assez pauvre pour vous aimer comme vous le voudriez. Oublions, donc, vous, un nom qui doit vous être à peu prés indifférent, moi, un bonheur qui me devient impossible. (Il ne faut pas vous dire que je suis triste, parce que vous connaissez déja combien je vous aime. Adieu alors. Vous avez trop de coeur de ne comprendre pas la raison de vous écrire cette lettre, et trop d'esprit de n'y pouvoir me pardonner).
>
> Mille souvenirs, A.D.
>
> (My dear Marie,
>
> I am not rich enough to love you as you would wish, and not poor enough to be loved as you would desire. So let us forget – you a name which should be almost indifferent to you, I a happiness that has become impossible for me. There is no need for me to tell you that I am sad, since you know already how much I love you. Adieu then. You have too much heart not to understand why I write you this letter, and too much intelligence not to be able to pardon me for it.
>
> A thousand souvenirs, A.D.).[264]

[264] Ibid., p. 6.

Dumas used almost the same wording in his novel:

> Adieu, ma chère Marguerite; je ne suis ni assez riche pour vous aimer comme je le voudrais, ni assez pauvre pour vous aimer comme vous le voudriez. Oublions donc, vous, un nom qui doit vous être à peu prés indifférent, moi, un bonheur qui me devient impossible.[265]
>
> (Goodbye, my dear Marguerite; I am not wealthy enough to love you as I would wish, nor poor enough to love you as you would like. Let us forget, then, you a name which must be virtually indifferent to you, I, a happiness which is becoming impossible).[266]

On the day after receiving Marguerite's forgiveness for this letter which is much more curt than the original, Armand sends her the copy of *Manon Lescaut.* He will later find the book open and wet with tears, after she has left him.[267]

According to Janin, who observed as Marie fatalistically abandoned herself to the mechanical pursuit of pleasure, 'Ennui was the great misfortune of her life'.[268] This assumed attitude of boredom might well be excused by her unfortunate childhood. It could conceivably have inspired a self-righteous literary reprisal from Dumas. It would not, however, have provided a sufficiently moving plot-line for Dumas's novel. Dumas exercised self-sacrifice pre-emptively in renouncing Marie, with loss to little more than his pride. He attributed this renunciation to her literary version, Marguerite

[265] Dumas, *La Dame aux camélias* (Project Gutenberg, EBook #2419), p. 74.
[266] Dumas, *La Dame aux camélias*, trans. Coward, p. 101.
[267] Ibid., p. 158, and also Project Gutenberg EBook #2419, p. 115.
[268] Schmidgall, "La Traviata Introduction: The Autobiographical Verdi," p. 7.

Gautier, who would lose her life for love. Marguerite could be the Marie he had wished to create.

Dumas's novel places the objective but interested narrator, almost like the commentator Janin, in a position to observe how the relationship between Marguerite and Armand has unfolded. The narrator's perspective places the focus firmly upon Armand. There is much in this very short work not later to be found in the libretto of *La traviata.*

Armand's telling of the story from his own perspective or *posizione* may be seen as an apologia for Dumas's own actions. There is not the same intense focus on the *posizione* of a single eponymous character as will later occur in *La traviata*. It explores what might have happened if Dumas had 'cured' Marie of her life and her illness. The conclusion is that she would have died leaving Armand/Dumas to continue his suffering, as perhaps the greater martyr.

Marie went on to have a liaison with the composer, Franz Liszt, who wanted to take her travelling to Constantinople.[269] She married the Comte de Perregaux in February 1845 at the Kensington registry office in England, for fear of displeasing the Comte's family in France.[270] Some time after her death, Marie's body was disinterred and her remains moved (on 16 February 1847, during a Mardi Gras carnival procession) to a more dignified plot in Montmartre Cemetery, in Paris.[271] Below her original name, Alphonsine Plessis and the dates of her birth and death, the inscription on her tomb reads *De Profundis*. It thus attributes to her the words of Psalm 129 (Vulgate) /130

[269] Franz Liszt, *Franz Liszt: Selected Letters*, ed. Adrian Williams (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), pp. 249 – 250.
[270] Rounding, *Grandes Horizontales*, pp. 49 – 50.
[271] Ibid., p. 52.

(Hebrew/ Protestant), which call out from the depths for God to listen with compassion to the prayers of the supplicant. Her *posizione* is one of humble abasement.

Details and complications in the short novel sustained the conflict between the social spaces of Marguerite and Armand. They were at least loosely based on Marie's life, but did not all find their way into the play which Dumas *fils* wrote in 1849. The economic realities of a courtesan's life are not so extensively elaborated.[272] The details of the lengthy arguments used by Armand's father to convince Marguerite are not revealed.[273] The vendetta carried on by Armand and Olympe against Marguerite after their falling-out is also lost,[274] as is Armand's night of reconciliation with Marguerite and their final parting, she to England and he to the East.[275] There is hardly even a suggestion of the deeply equivocal moral position in which Armand finds himself as the de facto beneficiary of Marguerite's protector, when installed at Point-du-Jour.[276]

Dumas's play avoids the realism of the novel which mentions Marguerite's hearty laughter at dirty jokes, the sexual prowess of Prudence and the five days of every month when Marguerite would signal that she was sexually out of circulation by wearing red camellias rather than white.[277] It is not necessarily a stage presentation which twenty-first century audiences would find compelling, although the similar concept of the film *Love Story* was very popular even during the 1970s.[278] Yet

[272] Dumas, *La Dame aux camélias*, trans. Coward, p. 68, pp. 92 – 93, pp. 110 – 111.
[273] Ibid., pp. 184 – 185.
[274] Ibid., pp. 170 – 173.
[275] Ibid., pp. 180 – 181.
[276] Ibid., pp. 125.
[277] Budden, *The Operas of Verdi: Il Trovatore to La Forza Del Destino*, p. 119.
[278] Erich Segal, *Love Story*, dir. Arthur Hiller, Motion Picture (Paramount Pictures, 1970).

Francesco Maria Piave used many of the same pivotal dramatic points and was faithful to the essence of Dumas's play. With Verdi he created a work which, despite its anachronistic fear of the shameful *grande horizontale*, does not seem to be losing its power over audiences.

The play was given its premiere at the Theatre de Vaudeville in Paris on 2 February 1852. Twenty-seven chapters of the novel were compressed into five acts, yet retained most of the extended cast of characters found in the novel, with the exception of the narrator. Marguerite's friends, in particular Prudence Duvernoy, the milliner, are given sufficiently rounded dramatic personalities to reveal themselves as not being merely convenient ciphers. A translation of the complete play, unlike some nineteenth-century English bowdlerisations, includes the original Act II. It provides an insight into the realistic details which Dumas did not attempt to hide in order to spare his audience.[279]

Act I opens in the boudoir of Marguerite's luxuriously furnished Paris home. Arthur de Varville an admirer of Marguerite's, has made himself at home by the fireside. Nichette, Marguerite's seamstress, calls in. The character of Nichette, who is engaged to the law student Gustave, may be seen as a foil to the unlucky Marguerite, an alternative Marie who could have married Dumas. The maid Nanine discusses with de Varville how it is that Marguerite came to be supported by the elderly Duke (de Mauriac) who met Marguerite at Bagnères, and whose dead daughter she resembles. Marguerite, having been bribed unsuccessfully to reform is in effect a ward rather

[279] Alexandre Dumas *fils*, "Camille (La Dame aux camélias)," in *Camille and Other Plays*, ed. Stephen S. Stanton (New York: Hill and Wang, 1957)

than a mistress, to the Duke.[280] She still imperiously keeps other men like de Varville at her beck and call. This ambiguous nicety may have been enough to salve the sensibilities of bourgeois audiences of the time, who could choose to regard Marguerite as an ex-courtesan.

A small circle of friends begins to arrive, including Saint-Gaudens, who is paired with Olympe, still a courtesan in the play, but not an instrument of vengeance against Marguerite. Gaston is one of Marguerite's admirers. The festivities remain intimate and conversational, using the resources of a small cast. No set-piece requiring the commentary of a large group available for the operatic librettist is needed for the play. The scene where Armand demonstrates his compassion for Marguerite's illness and declares his love to her ends with the re-entry of the others and Saint-Gaudens saying facetiously, 'Long live Monsieur and Madame Duval!' as Gaston plays the piano and the company dance riotously.[281]

From Play to Libretto

The libretto compresses the action from the play's five acts to three. It sets the opening of Act I in the salon of Violetta's house. Her revealed social space makes use of the chorus and immediately places her as a hostess who can afford to entertain a large number of guests. Violetta is to be seated with Dr Grenvil. New arrivals include Baron Douphol, Flora Bervoix and Marchese d'Obigny. Violetta puts the (bass chorus) latecomers at ease with compliments and invitations to join the festivities for 'la notte che resta' (the remainder of the evening).[282] Her gracious behaviour as a

[280] Ibid., p. 108.
[281] Ibid., p. 122.
[282] Verdi, *La Traviata in Full Score*, pp. 12 – 13.

hostess is what might be expected of a member of the *haut monde*, as much as of the *demi-monde*. When asked by Flora and the Marquis whether she is able to enjoy the party, Violetta gives the first indication of her illness by saying that the 'drug' of pleasure dulls her sufferings: 'Lo voglio; / Al piacer m'affido, ed io soglio / Con tal farmaco i mali sopir' (I want to [enjoy]. I entrust myself to pleasure, and with that drug I dull my sufferings).[283] Violetta continues, however, to convey her warmth: 'Miei cari, sedete; / E al convito che s'apre ogni cor' (Dear friends, be seated. At a table all hearts are opened).[284]

Seated beside Gastone, Violetta is told of Alfredo's anxious vigils during her illness. She annoys her protector the Baron by taxing him with not having been as solicitous about her health as this relative stranger, Alfredo. Violetta pours wine for Alfredo, in the process also giving an indication of her intelligence and learning by tossing off a Classical allusion to Hebe, daughter of Zeus and Hera, who was the handmaiden of the gods and poured out their nectar:[285] 'Saro l'Ebe che versa ...' (I'll be Hebe and pour).[286]

Rather than leaving the following *brindisi* which Alfredo has been moved to sing, as a static solo toast to Violetta affirmed by the chorus, Piave gives the next verse to Violetta, who offers her own hedonistic philosophy. She mentions significantly: 'Godiam, fugace e rapido / E il gaudio dell'amore; / E un fior che nasce e muore ... Godiam ... c'invita un fervido / Accento lusinghier' (Let us enjoy ourselves. Love's joy is quick and fleeting; It's a flower that is born and dies ... feverish. Enchanting

[283] William Weaver, "La Traviata: English Translation of Libretto," in *The Metropolitan Opera Classics Library* (Boston, Toronto: Little, Brown, 1983), p. 129.
[284] Ibid., p. 130
[285] Paul Harvey, *The Oxford Companion to Classical Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1937. Reprint, 1986), p. 195.
[286] Weaver, "La Traviata: English Translation of Libretto," p. 131.

words invite us).[287] She also warns Alfredo not to speak of love 'Nol dite a chi l'ignora' (Don't speak of it to one who doesn't know it).[288] Violetta finds herself ill and unable to join the others in what would normally be her space. She insists that the others leave her. With a collective shrug, and in neat contrast with the solicitous lover, they go off to dance, saying, 'Come bramate' (As you wish).[289]

Like Armand in Dumas's play, only Alfredo remains behind to remonstrate with Violetta: 'Ah in cotal guisa / V'ucciderete ... aver v'è d'uopo cura / Dell'esser vostro' (Ah, in this fashion you will kill yourself ... You must take care of yourself). When Violetta asks how she could do this, Alfredo answers: 'Oh! se mia foste, / Custode veglieriei / Pe' vostri soavi di' (Oh! If you were mine, like a guardian, I'd watch over your peaceful days).[290]

Alfredo reminds Violetta that he has kept a year's vigil during her illness: 'E da quel di tremante / Vissi d'ignoto amor ... ch'è palpito / Dell'universo ... / Croce e delizia al cor' (And since that day, trembling in an unknown love ... which is the pulse of the universe ... The heart's cross and delight). Violetta replies: 'Amar non so, nè soffro / Un cosi eroico amore' (I cannot love, nor can I bear such a heroic love).[291]

When Gastone interrupts their conversation, Alfredo offers to leave, but Violetta gives him a flower from her bosom; 'un fiore dal seno,' in Piave's directions, without reference to anything so specific as camellias. She tells him to bring it back, not when it changes colour, as in the explicit novel, but as in the more discreet play: 'Quando

[287] Ibid., p. 133.
[288] Ibid., p. 133.
[289] Ibid., p. 134.
[290] Ibid., p. 135.
[291] Ibid., p. 136.

sarà appassito' (When it has withered).[292] After Alfredo has left, the perfunctory behaviour of her other guests demonstrates that this is an unusual situation for Violetta. They return from their dance and then leave, saying: 'Nel riposa ancor la lena / Si ritempri per goder' (We must restore our vigor by resting so that we can enjoy ourselves more).[293]

This dispatch has also helped to emphasize the isolated *posizione* in which Violetta must contemplate the possibilities of another life. In what would be less than three pages of the Italian libretto, Piave has established Marguerite's social position, her illness and her fatalistic philosophy. He has intimated that she is intrigued by someone who might be more to her than what was called in the Paris of her time, an *amant de coeur* (a non-paying lover, who must be content with restricted access).[294] The finale of Act I then drives home Violetta's pre-eminence in this story, as the eponymous 'one who has been led astray', *la traviata,* the character whose fate has been sealed by an uncaring society, but who seeks a return to the space of innocence.

Violetta begins the finale by showing her bewilderment: 'E strano! ... è strano!' (It's strange ... strange!).[295] She wonders whether she can afford to reject this love: 'E sdegnarla poss'io / Per l'aride follie del viver mio? ...' (And can I spurn it for the barren follies of my life?).[296] Piave has Violetta surmise: 'Ah fors'è lui che l'anima / Solinga ne' tumulti / Godea sovente pingere / De' suoi colori occulti' (Ah, perhaps he

[292] Ibid., p. 137.
[293] Ibid., p. 138..
[294] Rounding, *Grandes Horizontales*, p. 40.
[295] Weaver, "La Traviata: English Translation of Libretto," p. 138.
[296] Ibid., p. 138.

is the one whom my spirit, alone amid tumults, often enjoyed painting). She also echoes Alfredo's words about love being 'the heart's cross and delight'. [297]

The second verse of the *cavatina Ah fors'è lui* is sometimes omitted in performance, but the poignant words which stress the idea of innocence betrayed, should not be passed over lightly. She speaks of her girlish dreams: A me, fanciulla, un candido / E trepido desire / Quest'effigiò dolcissimo / Signor dell'avvenire' (Ah, when I was a girl, an innocent and timid desire depicted him the tender lord of my future).[298]

Her reverie draws to an end with a further repetition of Alfredo's words. Piave's direction is that as she does this, 'resta concentrata' (remaining concentrated) but then, 'scuotendosi' ('shaking' herself),[299] she remembers that she is: 'Povera donna, sola, / Abbandonata in questo / Popoloso deserto / Che appellano Parigi, ...' (A poor woman alone, abandoned in this crowded desert that they call Paris).[300] This is the space in which she has made her lonely yet oppressively crowded home. Vowing always to be free, and with an oblique reference to her own mortality, she says: 'Nasca il giorno, o il giorno muoia, / Sempre lieta ne' ritrovi, / A diletti sempre nuovi / Dee volar il mio pensier' (Whether the day is born or dying, always gay at parties, my thought must fly always to new delights).[301]

The Act ends as she repeats this final declaration of independence while Alfredo, below her balcony, is repeating his declaration of love. There is no place here for the second act of Dumas's play, in which Armand arranges to go away from Paris with

[297] Ibid., p. 138.
[298] Ibid., p. 139..
[299] Verdi, *La Traviata in Full Score*, p. 89.
[300] Weaver, "La Traviata: English Translation of Libretto," p. 139.
[301] Ibid., p. 139.

Marguerite, despite her misgivings and warnings.[302] She does not speak directly to Alfredo as Marguerite does to Armand in Act II of the play: 'For a moment I built a whole future on our love. I longed for the country. I remembered my childhood – one has always a childhood to remember whatever one may have become since; but it was nothing but a dream'.[303] The theatrical effect of Violetta's soliloquy, which focusses on the personal dilemma of her *posizione*, is not obscured by any other action except the siren-like song of Alfredo's serenade. Alfredo will play this out as the courtesan-like kept man.

In Act II of the play Prudence says: 'What a shame it is that men like him [Armand] haven't got a hundred thousand a year!' and 'My dear, I shall pray for you ... Because you are in danger.'[304] This is an intimation of Marguerite's vulnerability and a warning that the courtesan cannot continue to exist on love alone. At one point in Act II Armand mentions *Manon Lescaut*, asking Marguerite whether she has read the book and has any respect for the character of des Grieux. When she asks why, he answers:

> Because there is a moment when Manon, too, thinks of a scheme, which is to get money from another man and spend it with des Grieus. Marguerite, I know that you have more heart than Manon, and I have more honour than des Grieux.[305]

Act II prepares for Act III's presentation of the lovers' country *ménage*. Armand confronts Prudence with the evidence of carriage, horses, cashmere shawl and

[302] Dumas, "Camille (La Dame aux camélias)," in *Camille and Other Plays*, p. 124.
[303] Ibid., p. 133.
[304] Ibid., p. 123.
[305] Ibid., p. 125.

jewellery having been taken and not returned. Marguerite's sale of her possessions to pay off her debts is immediately revealed. Prudence, answering Armand's offer to pay for everything, merely says, 'Nonsense! You'll only quarrel with your father, and ruin your whole future'.[306]

The characters of Gustave and Nichette are involved in the play's Act III as contrasts to Marguerite and Armand. When Gustave, asked by Nichette, if he would marry Marguerite, were he in Armand's place, says: 'Perhaps I should'. Marguerite says ingenuously:

> There are moments when I forget the past and when the Marguerite that used to be and the Marguerite of today are two different beings. I used to spend enough money on flowers to keep a poor family for a year, but now a flower like this that Armand gave me this morning is enough to fill my whole day with perfume.[307]

The *volte face* of the opera's Act II Scene One opening is all the more stunning as it sidesteps the ominous preliminaries of the play. It negates Violetta's closing words of Act I and brings Alfredo's words 'from the balcony' to the foreground. Having telescoped the action, the opera launches into the equivalent of the play's Act III. Violetta has not remained resolute in choosing freedom and the pursuit of pleasure. The country idyll is now a *fait accompli* and Alfredo strides in from outdoors 'in costume da caccia' (in hunting dress) complete with gun.[308] It is the first occasion when the stage and its space have been without Violetta's presence. It is the first

[306] Ibid., p. 135.
[307] Ibid., pp. 136 – 137.
[308] Verdi, *La Traviata in Full Score*, pp. 108 – 109.

intimation of her defeat, even though she has temporarily secured her childhood fantasy. Alfredo is onstage to fulfill a musical convention whereby the tenor must have his aria and now as the 'kept man', his own courtesan's song. The initiative of the social space, as well as the stage, however, has now been taken by the Germonts, in spite of the fact that Alfredo owes the financial upkeep of this leisurely country life to Violetta.

Vincent Godefroy remarks that 'Piave and Verdi are silent about the elderly nobleman who was coaxed into financing the project and has since withdrawn his support'.[309] There is merely an exchange between Annina, Violetta's maid (and confidante) and Alfredo, in which it is revealed that living beyond any social space 'quasi in ciel' (as if in heaven), means that Violetta must sell her furs, jewels, carriage and horses. The sudden realisation that his being a kept man (originally on the proceeds of earnings which must compromise his integrity) is now causing his beloved financial hardship, spurs Alfredo to remorse. He rushes out, vowing to expunge this shame: 'Oh mio rimorso! oh infamia! ... Ah si, quest'onta laverò!' (Oh, my remorse! Oh, disgrace! ... Ah yes, I'll wash away this shame!).[310]

The next section of the opera closely follows many of the words of the play's Act III but trains the focus on Violetta. While Alfredo is away, his father, Giorgio Germont accuses Violetta alone: 'Si, dell'incauto, che a ruina corre, / Ammaliato da voi' (Yes, father of the heedless boy, who rushes to his ruin, bewitched by you).[311] Violetta responds with dignity: 'Donna son io, signore, ed in mia casa; / Ch'io vi lasci assentite, / Più per voi, che per me' (I am a woman, sir, and in my own house. Allow

[309] Vincent Godefroy, *The Dramatic Genius of Verdi*, vol. 1 (London: Victor Gollancz, 1978), p. 264.
[310] Weaver, "La Traviata: English Translation of Libretto," p. 141.
[311] Verdi, *La Traviata in Full Score*, p. 135.

me to leave you, more for your sake, than for mine).[312] In the play Duval says: 'Your indignation is cleverly assumed, madame. They were right when they told me that you were dangerous.'[313] When Marguerite denies knowledge of Armand's plans to transfer his money to her and declares that she would have refused it, Duval counters with: 'This was not always your method, I think' and dismisses her assertion of true love with: 'Fine phrases, madame.'[314] Violetta reveals that, far from accepting Alfredo's money, she is selling her possessions for his sake. Germont *père* is immediately mollified and does not express the horror evident in Dumas's play, where Duval asks whether his son is taking what Violetta receives from others.[315] When Violetta declares her love for Alfedo, and says that the past no longer exists: 'Lo cancellò col pentimento mio!' (Erased it, with my repentance!). Germont answers with the more mildly ambiguous: 'Nobili sensi invero!' (Noble feelings, indeed!).[316]

Germont begins his plea on behalf of his daughter, apparently unaware of its brutal irony in requiring the sacrifice of one woman for the happiness of another: 'Si. / Pura siccome un angelo ... / Deh non mutate in triboli / Le rose dell' amor' (Yes; pure as an angel ... Ah, don't change into trials the roses of love).[317]

In the opera it is made clear that Alfredo has become the only reason for Violetta's wish to survive: 'Non sapete che colpita / D'atro morbo è la mia vita?' (Don't you know that my life is stricken by a dire disease?).[318] In the play, Armand's father manages to make light of Marguerite's illness: 'You mistake for a dangerous illness

[312] Weaver, "La Traviata: English Translation of Libretto," p. 143.
[313] Dumas, "Camille (La Dame aux camélias)," p. 137.
[314] Ibid., p. 138.
[315] Ibid., p. 137.
[316] Weaver, "La Traviata: English Translation of Libretto," p. 144.
[317] Ibid., p. 144.
[318] Ibid., p. 145.

what may be no more than the fatigue of a more or less restless life'.[319] Germont does not even attempt to do this, but simply removes the hopes which underpin her will to live, saying that Alfredo will grow bored with her and not be tied by the bonds of marriage: 'Fia presto il tedio a sorgere ... / ... Poichè dal ciel non furono ... / Tai nodi benedetti' (Boredom will follow quickly, since these bonds were not blessed by heaven). [320]

He asks that she be his family's 'consoling angel.' Violetta echoes the words of Act III of Dumas's play, in which the blunt acceptance of an ordained social space is stated.[321] Like Marguerite, she says: 'Così alla misera, ch'è un di caduta, / Di più risorgere speranza è muta! / Se pur benefico le indulga Iddio, / L'uomo implacabile per lei sarà' (So, for the wretched girl, who one day fell, any hope of rising again is silent! Even if God is kind and indulgent to her, mankind will always be implacable).[322]

Violetta asks Germont to tell his daughter that a 'victim of misfortune' is sacrificing her only chance of happiness for her, before she dies: 'Dite alla giovine si bella e pura, / Ch'avvi una vittima della sventura, / Cui resta un unico raggio di bene ... / Che a lei il sacrifica a che morrà' (Tell the young girl, so beautiful and pure, that there is a victim of misfortune who has a single ray of happiness which she sacrifices to her, and who will die).[323]

[319] Dumas, "Camille (La Dame aux camélias)," p. 140.
[320] Ibid., p. 140.
[321] Ibid., p. 141.
[322] Weaver, "La Traviata: English Translation of Libretto," p. 146.
[323] Ibid., p. 146.

The play's Duval says, 'It is as a man of the world that I am speaking to you, it is as a father that I am pleading with you. Come, Marguerite, prove to me that you really love my son, and take courage'.[324] His honesty only echoes that of Marguerite herself in Act II: 'We seem happy and we are envied. We have lovers who ruin themselves, not for us as they say, but for their own vanity'.[325] She has also said to Armand: 'Don't deceive yourself! Think what I am and who I am'.[326] Germont, sympathetic yet implacable takes the discourse to an entirely different metaphysical level. Piave does not give him unduly ruthless words; he makes it evident that one such as Germont believes in the rightness of his cause and the inevitability of Violetta's failure as a legitimate earthly lover. It is not her place to become his son's wife; an impossible *posizione*. Instead, she will be given her reward in heaven, a space safely removed from his own: 'Mercè di queste lagrime / Dal cielo un giorno avrete' (One day you'll receive from heaven a reward for these tears).[327]

All Violetta asks is that Alfredo be told of her sacrifice after her death. When Germont has left and Alfredo has returned to find her writing her letter of renunciation, Violetta soon utters the *cri de coeur*: 'Amami, Alfredo, amami quant'io t'amo ... / Addio!' (Love me, Alfredo, love me as I love you. Farewell!).[328]

It is at this point that Piave's stage direction has Alfredo 'siede, apre un libro' (he sits down and opens a book).[329] This is the only mention of the book which formerly had such significance for Act II of Dumas's play in Armand's taxing Marguerite with

[324] Dumas, "Camille (La Dame aux camélias)," p. 140.
[325] Ibid., p. 133.
[326] Ibid., p. 134.
[327] Weaver, "La Traviata: English Translation of Libretto," p. 148.
[328] Ibid., p. 150.
[329] Verdi, *La Traviata in Full Score*, p. 192.

scheming like Manon.[330] *Manon Lescaut* is not named specifically, and has no more than an allusive bearing on Alfredo's motivation.

Giorgio Germont, having achieved his aim, reproaches Alfredo for forgetting his family and social space in Provence and then rejoices in his own success: 'Di Provenza il mar, il suol / Chi dal cor ti cancellò? / ... Dio m'esaudi' (Who erased the sea, the land, of Provence from your heart? God answered my prayer).[331] His exultation is shortlived. The Act ends with his following Alfredo, begging him to stop in his flight to avenge himself on Baron Douphol.[332]

The libretto has so far allowed expressive performances from Alfredo and revealed the parochial but heartfelt sentiments of Giorgio Germont as, with the best intentions, he has, metaphorically, twisted the knife into the suffering Violetta. It is she, however, who sustains the greatest burden of action and response. She is the centre of gravity to whom all other actors are drawn. Violetta's *posizione* becomes both more submissive to social pressure and more aggressive in prosecuting what she sees as a noble course of action.

Act IV of the play proves the success of Marguerite's self-destruction for Armand's sake at the crowded gambling party in the home of Olympe. Marguerite attempts to convince Armand privately to leave to avoid being called out by de Varville, whom he has been systematically provoking. Armand regains his resolve to hate Marguerite when she says she has sworn to have nothing more to do with him and has sworn this,

[330] Dumas, "Camille (La Dame aux camélias)," p. 125.
[331] Weaver, "La Traviata: English Translation of Libretto," p. 152.
[332] Verdi, *La Traviata in Full Score*, p. 223.

'To one who had the right to ask such a thing'.[333] She leads Armand to believe that she is referring to de Varville, rather than to his own father, and the insulting public flinging of money to repay Marguerite ensues. The Act closes with de Varville's challenging Armand to a duel by calling him a coward.[334]

Act II, Scene Two, of the opera also plunges directly into the party to which Flora had earlier invited Violetta and Alfredo. The imminent confrontation between Alfredo and Baron Douphol is suddenly postponed by the arrival of masqueraders, ladies dressed as gypsies and gentlemen as matadors, who perform, each group in turn. Seemingly an unnecessary interruption to the action, this actually encapsulates all the realistically seamy aspects of the play's Act II.

In Kimbell's words, '[c]arnal liaisons are casually discussed, the "morals" of the masquerading choruses acclaim infidelity in men and complaisance in women, while one whole movement of the finale is concentrated on evoking the relentless monotony of the gaming-table'.[335] The significance of the gypsy fortune-tellers also appears to be in their conclusion that the past should be forgotten and only the future regarded.[336] It makes a significant contrast with Violetta's later words which farewell the happy past: 'Su via, si stenda un velo / Sui fatti del passato: / Già quel ch'è stato è stato, / Badate (badiamo) all' avvenir' (Come, let's draw a curtain over the deeds of the past. What has been has been Look (let us look) only to the future).[337] The chorus

[333] Dumas, "Camille (La Dame aux camélias)," p. 155.
[334] Ibid., p. 155.
[335] Kimbell, *Verdi in the Age of Italian Romanticism*, p. 646.
[336] Verdi, *La Traviata in Full Score*, pp. 247 – 249.
[337] Weaver, "La Traviata: English Translation of Libretto," p. 155.

of matadors relate the aggressive exploits of bold lovers: 'Colse il premio desiato / Tra le braccia dell'amor' (He took the prize he wanted in the arms of love).[338]

The seemingly innocuous entertainment can be seen as a premonitory reflection of the drama and loss soon to be enacted between lovers and rivals, who now arrive late to the festivities. Indeed, Gilles de Van sees this chorus to be of great significance:

> Is it by coincidence that the libretto piles up the signs of this death sentence? Marie Duplessis died on 3 February 1847, at the height of Carnival; in the novel Marguerite Gautier dies during the night of 19 – 20 February ... The play ... has her die on 1 January ... Verdi and Piave reinstated the tragic coincidence between Marie's death and Carnival, even to the extent of emphasizing it: the bacchanal procession that passes below the dying Violetta's windows celebrates the triumph of the fattened bull ... probably ... from an ancient sacrificial rite. In the same way, in the Finale of act 2, why do matadors come to Flora Bervoix's salon if not to recall that they are the ones responsible for carrying out a solemn ritual killing?[339]

Just as in Act III of the play, Violetta arrives on the arm of her protector, who forbids her to speak to Alfredo who is busy winning at cards. Alfredo says that he intends to win money and return to the country with the one who was with him, but who ran away. Violetta is almost overcome with the palpably dangerous tension and hostility between Alfredo and the Baron, who decides to enter the game. The suspense builds until supper is announced and Alfredo and the Baron must desist. Violetta returns to

[338] Verdi, *La Traviata in Full Score*, pp. 265 – 267.
[339] de Van, *Verdi's Theater*, p. 189.

the stage to speak to Alfredo alone. When she tells him of her fear that he might be killed, Alfredo sardonically replies: 'Un sol colpo vi torria / Coll'amante il protettore ... V'atterrisce tal seiagura?' (A single blow would deprive you of lover and keeper. Does such a disaster terrify you?).[340]

When taxed to identify the one who has made her swear to leave him, Violetta falsely admits that it was Douphol and that it is he whom she loves. Alfredo calls the other guests to join them and as Violetta cowers, he humiliates both himself and her, with his payment of coins thrown at her feet, causing her to faint: 'Or testimon vi chiamo / Che qui pagata io l'ho' (Now I call you as witnesses that here I have repaid her).[341]

Instead of the play's ending of Act IV in a mute onrush of guests, the opera's assembled crowd denounce Alfredo for insulting Violetta. Giorgio Germont, who has entered in time to hear their last words, says he can no longer see his son in Alfredo, who is now remorseful: 'Or che lo sdegno ho disfogato, / Me sciagurato! rimorso n'ho!' (Now that I've unburdened my scorn, wretched, I feel remorse for it!).[342]

While Germont keeps to himself the secret which would have saved the relationship between Violetta and Alfredo, the Baron quietly threatens Alfredo. The chorus now establish a new solidarity and demarcation of *posizione*. They temporarily close ranks by pouring out their sympathy for the silent Violetta. When she recovers consciousness, she tells Alfredo: 'Come t'amassi confesserai ... / Dio dai rimorsi ti salvi allor ... / Ah! io spenta ancora t'amerò' (You will admit how much I loved you.

[340] Weaver, "La Traviata: English Translation of Libretto," p. 161.
[341] Verdi, *La Traviata in Full Score*, pp. 311 – 313.
[342] Ibid., pp. 323 – 324.

May God save you from remorse, then. Ah! Even when I'm dead, I'll love you still).[343]

The Act ends with Germont taking away the shamed Alfredo, closely followed by a vengeful Baron. Violetta is led away by the Doctor and Flora as the other guests disperse.

The collective shock and disgust settles like the pall of smoke and sadness after a battle. It is not the *demi-mondaine* courtesan Violetta who is disgraced, but the young, bourgeois gentleman and his provincial family. Yet Violetta will not physically survive this triumph of her own nobility.

In Act V of the play, Marguerite has apparently been abandoned by all her fashionable friends and benefactors. She is now in a frugally appointed sick-room. Only Gaston, Nanine, the Doctor and Prudence appear before Armand's return. A letter from Nichette announces her forthcoming marriage. Duval's letter apprises the audience of the result of the duel, Armand's being informed by his father of Marguerite's sacrifice, and his imminent return.[344] This letter will be read by Violetta in Act III of the opera.[345]

When Armand returns, naively planning a new life (with his sister's assured marital situation ironically mentioned) little remains of the final Act. His grief leads to Marguerite's perceptive remark: 'If I had not been going to die, your father would

[343] Ibid., pp. 328 – 341.
[344] Dumas, "Camille (La Dame Aux Camélias)," pp. 160 – 161.
[345] Verdi, *La Traviata in Full Score*, p. 352.

never have written to you to come back'.[346] Her former status as a dangerous woman no longer poses a threat. She rebukes Armand with: 'Must I be the one to give you courage?'[347] She then produces a portrait miniature of herself to give to his hypothetical bride of the future as of one who 'will never cease to pray for you and her'.[348] When she dies, Armand exclaims: 'Oh, my God, my God! What shall I do?'[349] Nichette arrives with Gustave in time to echo the biblical words attributed to Christ in reference to Mary Magdalene: 'Rest in peace, Marguerite! Much will be forgiven you, because you greatly loved!'[350]

Act III of the opera similarly takes place in the bedroom which reveals only the stark necessities of the sickroom. Violetta now has almost none of her former friends to call on for support as she succumbs further to her illness and her social space loses definition. When Annina opens the shutters, she sees Doctor Grenvil approaching. Violetta calls him 'il vero amico,' (a true friend) knowing that he is one of the few who are loyal to a woman who is no longer has the power to be entertaining or attractive.[351] In the social space which so recently supported her, Violetta's illness has created a vacuum around her. Her status as courtesan has depended upon the physical attributes of display. Unable to produce this effect visually, as the courtesan-singer she will also be prevented from using her vocal powers for seduction.

Still determined to observe the social niceties, perhaps in hope of regaining her power, Violetta moves to the sofa with Annina's help. When the Doctor asks her how she feels, her answer could not be further from the Violetta of Act I: 'Soffre il mio corpo,

[346] Dumas, "Camille (La Dame Aux Camélias)", p. 163.
[347] Ibid., p. 163.
[348] Ibid., p. 163.
[349] Ibid., p. 164.
[350] Ibid., p. 164.
[351] Weaver, "La Traviata: English Translation of Libretto," p. 165.

ma tranquilla ho l'alma / Mi confortò iersera un pio ministro ... / Ah! religione è sollievo ai sofferenti' (My body suffers, but my spirit is serene. A priest comforted me yesterday evening. Ah! Religion is a relief to those who suffer).[352]

When the doctor has left Violetta with false assurances which she does not believe, she instructs Annina to take money to the poor. Once alone, Violetta takes out Germont's letter which she has apparently already read and re-read. It tells of the duel with the Baron; of Alfredo's travel to foreign soil; of his having been told the secret of her sacrifice, and: '"... Egli a voi tornerà pel suo perdono; / Io pur verrò ... Curatevi ... mertate / Un avvenir migliore, / Giorgio Germont"' (He will come back to you for your forgiveness; I too will come. Take care of yourself. You deserve a better future. Giorgio Germont). [353] She then utters the wrenching words: 'E tardi! /Attendo, attendo, nè a me giungon mai!' (It's late! I wait and wait, but they never come to me!).[354]

Violetta sees her altered image in the mirror and declares the hopelessness of her earlier dreams. She believes that Alfredo's love is lost to her and turns to God for solace, asking Him to smile at the wish of the lost one, for forgiveness: 'Ah! della traviata sorridi al desio, / A lei, deh perdona, tu accoglila, o Dio! / Ah! tutto ... or tutto fini' (Ah! Smile at the wish of the lost one. Forgive her, and receive her, O God!).[355] Piave's libretto provides a second verse for Violetta, often omitted in performance, but essential in its emphasis of her standing outside the bounds of acceptable society, even in that afterlife where Germont had assured her of vindication: 'Non lagrima o

[352] Verdi, *La Traviata in Full Score*, p. 348.
[353] Weaver, "La Traviata: English Translation of Libretto," p. 167.
[354] Ibid., p. 167.
[355] Ibid., p. 167.

fiore avrà la mia fossa! / Non croce col nome che copra quest'ossa!' (No tear or flower will my grave have! Nor a cross with a name to cover these bones!).[356]

At this poignant moment of Violetta's desolation the noisy masqueraders, not those of Flora's salon and her own social space, but Carnival merrymakers outside, intrude on the silence of the sickroom. This is no longer the sporting chance of the bull-ring being enacted, but a triumphal procession in which the Ox is brought as a garlanded captive, for the final sacrificial meal. Nevertheless, Annina hurries back from her errand with good news. It is not long before Alfredo arrives. He and Violetta rhapsodize about leaving Paris so that her health 'will bloom again', but Violetta is checked in these effusions by her newfound spirituality: 'Ah non più ... a un tempio ... / Alfredo, andiamo, / Del tuo ritorno grazie rendiamo' (Ah, no more. To a church, Alfredo, let us go. Let us give thanks for your return).[357]

Blaming the sudden joy for upsetting her, Violetta is unable to get up and dress herself, let alone to leave her final space. Alfredo tells Annina to fetch the Doctor whom Violetta orders to return her to health because Alfredo is back and she wishes to live. Later, however, she says: 'Ma se tornando non m'hai salvato / A niuno in terra salvarmi è dato' (But if, by coming back, you haven't saved me, then no one on earth has the power to save me).[358]

Making a final attempt to rise, she moves from denial to anger, echoing the rejection of love in her Act I Finale as love which would not save her: 'Ah! dunque fu delirio /

[356] Ibid., p. 167 .
[357] Ibid., p. 170.
[358] Ibid., p. 171.

La credula speranza! ... / Invano di costanza / Armato avrò il mio cor!' (Ah! So my credulous hope was delirium! I've armed my heart with constancy, in vain!).[359]

Giorgio Germont arrives, satisfied that he can be reconciled with Violetta and 'clasp her to [his] bosom as a daughter,' just as Annina brings Doctor Grenvil. Violetta, once the object of everyone's attention, is now grateful that Germont has not forgotten her. She tells Grenvil: 'Grenvil, vedete? fra le braccia / Io spiro di quanti cari ho al mondo'

(Grenvil, you see? I die in the arms of those dearest to me in the world).[360]

While Germont is overcome with a self-lacerating remorse, Violetta takes a miniature portrait of herself and asks Alfredo to come closer and listen: 'Prendi: quest'è l'immagine / De' miei passati giorni, / A rammentar ti torni / Colei che si t'amò' (Take this: this is the picture of my former days. Let it remind you again of her who loved you so).[361]

Alfredo and his father both exclaim at once, Giorgio, calling her 'beloved', asking forgiveness 'for the torture I caused your noble heart' and Alfredo refusing to countenance the fact that she is dying: 'No, non morrai, non dirmelo ... / Dèi viver, amor mio ... /A strazio sì terribil / Qui non mi trasse Iddio' (No, you won't die, don't say it to me. You must live, my love ... God didn't bring me here for such terrible

[359] Ibid., p. 171.
[360] Ibid., p. 172.
[361] Ibid., pp. 172 – 173.

torment).[362] They have both returned to Violetta's social space only to be rejected by a higher power.

For Joseph Kerman, what is uttered in:

> this six-bar phrase is the truest thing Alfredo sings in the whole opera; there is a new Alfredo a-borning here, with Verdi as midwife. Just as Gilda's death scene reflects on Rigoletto, Violetta's death scene reflects on Alfredo. What is more important, Alfredo's moment works to validate Violetta's hallucinatory fantasy.[363]

Violetta presses her gift on Alfredo, telling him to give it to the bride he may have in the future and to tell her that it is the gift: 'Di chi nel ciel fra gli angeli / Prega per lei, per te' (Of one who, among the angels in heaven is praying for her, for you).[364] She is preparing for a *posizione* outside the world.

Germont, the Doctor and Annina bid Violetta farewell. Alfredo rashly threatens to die with her, if she will not live. Violetta then returns to the two words with which she began her love affair with Alfredo: 'E strano!' and feels reinvigorated, and suddenly without pain. She exclaims joyously that she is returning to life: 'Ah! ... ma io ... ah! ma io ritorno a viver! / Oh gioia!' (Ah! Why, I ... I am returning to life! Oh, joy!).[365] She falls back on the sofa. Once the Doctor pronounces her dead, Annina says; 'Oh, cruel grief!' but Alfredo and Giogio Germont lament; 'Oh, my grief!' as they are now the ones who suffer. Violetta had never sacrificed the actuality of a happy future in

[362] Weaver, "La Traviata: English Translation of Libretto," p. 173.
[363] Joseph Kerman, "Verdi and the Undoing of Women," in *Cambridge Opera Journal* 18, no. 1 (2006),
p. 30.
[364] Weaver, "La Traviata: English Translation of Libretto," p. 173.
[365] Ibid., p. 174.

the social space from which she was excluded, only the hope of such a future. She has regained that hope in her last moments. Violetta's *posizione* has returned to her first innocent childhood dreams of love. Her sacrifice has also put her beyond the need of forgiveness intimated in the play.

Verdi's Posizione and *La traviata*

Included in Verdi's letters is a section entitled *An Autobiographical Sketch*.[366] He dictated this to Giulio Ricordi at his home in Sant' Agata, in 1879. Among other things it relates the fact that Verdi's first wife Margherita Barezzi, when the fifty *scudi* rent could not be found, 'took her few jewels and, I know not how or by what means, got the sum together and brought it to me,' but that, by the nineteenth of June, 1840, 'the third coffin was carried out of my house' so that he was then without his little son and daughter and his devoted wife.[367] These were personal memories of sacrifice and loss which would likely have not gone unrecognized as Verdi worked on the score of *La traviata*. It is tempting to find poignant echoes of those revelations concerning Violetta's material sacrifices, in Act II.

In commenting on the possibility that a composer's life may not be reflected in his art, Schmidgall points out that Verdi, although writing 'one of his most aggressively political operas, *La Battaglia di Legnano*', while still settling down 'in his love-nest', wrote, for Giuseppina Strepponi, an art-song 'ironically titled "L'abandonnée" ("The Abandoned Woman")!'[368] Quoting Isaiah Berlin, as referring to '"…Verdi … the god wholly concealed by his works … A man who dissolved everything in his art, with no

[366] Verdi, *Verdi: The Man in His Letters*, pp. 89 – 93.
[367] Verdi, *Verdi: The Man in His Letters*, p. 86.
[368] Schmidgall, "La Traviata Introduction: The Autobiographical Verdi," Footnote to p. 23.

more personal residue than Shakespeare or Tintoretto,"' Schmidgall demurs, '[e]loquent words, but I am convinced that *La Traviata* is the exception that proves the rule. There is a distinct "personal residue" in this opera'.[369]

Schmidgall describes parallels between Verdi's experiences with Giuseppina Strepponi and that of Alfredo and Violetta, going on to assert that '[i]n Verdi's life, then, social morality did not triumph. He and Strepponi lived out – for almost half a century! – the tantalizing dream of the last-act duet, "Parigi, o cara, noi lasceremo"'.[370] In a telling footnote, he quotes Giuseppina's letter, describing their adopted daughter on the occasion of her wedding. 'The description makes her sound fascinatingly like Alfredo's sister in the opera ("Pura siccome un angelo"): "When I saw her walk to the altar, in her white bridal veil, shyly leaning on Verdi's arm, I was profoundly moved. She seemed to me a true symbol of virginity, with a beauty wholly chaste and innocent, full of modesty and virginal grace"'.[371]

In the transition from play to opera, several adjustments have been made for musical reasons. They serve a more tightly controlled dramatic purpose. Where a novel might be read in an evening, or over many days, a play must deliver actions and dialogue performed in real time and, consequently, those actions and dialogue must convey only events essential to the characterisations and story. Actors, sets, costumes and properties virtually replace any descriptive passages and time is carefully managed. Where a play sometimes permits speeches which describe offstage events or elaborate on philosophical or psychological arguments, such demonstrations may be kept to a minimum in opera. De Van cites Patrick J. Smith who 'rightly claims that one could

[369] Ibid., p. 24.
[370] Ibid., p. 28.
[371] Ibid., Footnote to p. 26.

offer as a motto for the entire Italian tradition, from Rinuccini to Puccini, Rodolfo's reply in *La Boheme*: "La brevità, gran pregio" (Brevity, it's priceless)'.[372] He notes, 'although the spectator had to understand the motivations of an action, these did not ... have to be described as minutely as in the play'.[373] De Van quotes Verdi as saying, '"... an idea expressed in two lines is long when it could be expressed in just one"'.[374] Group declamations must be either a chaotic hubbub, in unison, or organized so that individuals have their say in turn. While the timing of each character's delivery will dictate the fluency of dialogue and action, it is still flexible enough to allow mimetic suggestion of that character's emotions, and can be altered in any performance.

When the logistics of a play are combined with that of music, an entirely new form of drama is possible. Arrigo Boito wrote to Verdi that:

> ... an opera is not a play; our art lives on elements unknown to spoken tragedy. The destroyed atmosphere can be created anew. Eight measures suffice to revive a feeling, a rhythm can restore a character; music is the most omnipotent of the arts, it has a logic of its own, more rapid, more free than the logic of spoken thought and far more eloquent.[375]

To the immediacy of experience permitted by a play is suddenly added the means to allow contemplation, philosophizing, cross-conversations and group commentary, not only without boring or confusing the audience, but actually aiming to enhance their emotional experience. The caveat here is that this new dimension must be confined not only within the economies of any stage performance but kept for the most part,

[372] de Van, *Verdi's Theater*, p. 79.
[373] Ibid., p. 79.
[374] Ibid., p. 80, quoting Franco Abbiati, *Giuseppe Verdi,* 2, p. 71.
[375] Ibid., pp. 50 – 51, quoting *Verdi-Boito Correspondence*, pp. 7 – 8.

(however large and diverse the company onstage), to the conductor's beat. This beat is determined by the composer's setting of the libretto.

Since Verdi had already stated in 1844: 'I don't like whores on the stage'[376] what place did Violetta have in Verdi's scheme of things? What *posizione* captured in musical gesture, would her character occupy with respect to the drama and the audience?

The character of Violetta would be neither as salacious nor as cynical as Marguerite had appeared in Dumas's novel. A contemporary audience in 1853 would have been well aware of the opera's background, but there was to be no explicit revelation of her commerce other than that, without family wealth or chaperone, she lived in luxury, surrounded by adoring men. The camellias signalling her availability would not appear in the opera's title, nor would the question of their significant colour, in her first negotiations with Alfredo. More pure within than her namesake Marguerite, in Dumas's play (and not to be named Margherita as was Verdi's first wife),[377] she would be like the little flower crushed to death beneath the feet of love, in Mozart's setting of Goethe's poem; she would be the violet, Violetta.[378] The title of the opera, *La traviata,* immediately portrayed Violetta as a victim, one led astray and corrupted by social forces beyond her power to withstand.

From such a standpoint, the sympathy of the audience is immediately invited, however scandalous the situation may be to outwardly respectable bourgeois sensibilities. Verdi evidently intended that Violetta's essential nobility, confounded

[376] Ibid., p. 372, Note 75, to p. 188, quoting *Carteggi verdiani,* 4, p. 79.
[377] Godefroy, *The Dramatic Genius of Verdi*, p. 271.
[378] Mozart, Wolfgang Amadeus, *Das Veilchen*, Köchel Catalogue Number 476 (1785).

only by circumstance, must be the rationale of his opera. It may be seen as Violetta's pilgrimage of return to the

simple, provincial social space, the innocence of her childhood. The Germont family, in some ways the embodiment of that provincial innocence, may be seen as the instruments both of her sacrifice and her redemption. The interplay of both space and time will prevent Violetta from permanently returning to the space of her innocence.

For Vincent Godefroy, as audience-member of both play and opera in the same day:

> The play, which had scandalized the French Theatre on account of its photographic realism, was still pitiful and tragic. But it showed mundane, earthy, doomed people. The opera, familiar to the point of staleness sang of souls rather than bodies, immortality rather than death, hope rather than despair. That, it then seemed to me, is what Verdi has done for the Lady of the Camellias. Dumas has left her marbled in Montrmartre. Verdi has raised her in stained glass against the light.[379]

Godefroy apparently sees it as having been Verdi's intention to remove Violetta from the constraints of time and space to place her in the realm of eternity. Piave's brief was to retain the essentials of what Verdi evidently wished to regard as a poignant and edifying transfiguration for Violetta and a chastening tragedy for the Germonts. As this process unfolds, the space or situation in which Violetta acts and expresses her actions musically undergoes several transformations.

[379] Ibid., p. 251.

Verdi was at pains in his use of specific terminology to his librettists, to emphasize the importance of projecting musically the salient moments of a character's actions. Gilles

de Van comments that Verdi sought a directly gestural 'transcription of the "situation"'.[380] He notes that Verdi was impatient with a word which 'does not sculpt well ... isn't clear enough'[381] and that this capacity of a word to 'spurt' or 'leap out' was what Verdi meant by *parola scenica.*[382] He also comments that though Verdi was not greatly interested in tonal architecture, he used 'melodic, rhythmic, harmonic, and orchestral analogies specific to an opera and occurring frequently enough to be significant ... sufficiently clear to be discernible by analysis but not so close as to constitute recurring themes'. These Verdi termed the *tinta* of an opera and 'the analogies that make up the *tinta* of an opera appeal to a memory that is indistinct, an emotional memory ... without perceiving the reason for this association'.[383]

All such terms expressed Verdi's unsystematic but unequivocal insistence on projecting what he called *posizione.* De Van notes that for Verdi this (or later *situazione*) meant 'a gesture ... arising from a particular moment in the plot ... [which] almost invariably corrresponds to a phase in the development of a character or of the plot and, musically to the use of a given form'.[384] Verdi wrote: '... I have tried ... to

[380] de Van, *Verdi's Theater*, p. 80.
[381] Ibid., p. 80, quoting *Verdi-Somma, 8* (1857); *Copialettere,* 641 (1870), 639.
[382] Ibid., p. 80, quoting *Copialettere,* 639 (14 August 1870).
[383] Ibid., p. 331.
[384] Ibid., p. 119.

compose music tied so far as possible to the text and to the situation.'[385] He also said: 'Great characters produce great situations, and effect follows naturally'.[386]

In February 1852, while Verdi was yet to finish working on *Il trovatore,*[387] he and Giuseppina Strepponi attended a Paris performance of *La dame aux camélias*.[388] In Naples, Salvatore Cammarano, Verdi's librettist for *Il trovatore* had become ill and would eventually succumb in July of 1852. By May, Verdi, pressed by various opera houses to undertake new commissions, agreed to compose an opera which was to become *La traviata*, for Venice.

Francesco Maria Piave, the librettist for *La traviata* had been associated with Verdi intermittently since 1843. Verdi had found the unsolicited libretto which Piave had submitted to him unacceptable or uninspiring, for reasons that remain unclear. He wrote to Piave that he must 'insist on brevity ... because that's what the public wants'.[389] and that 'once I have a general picture of the entire poem, [the complete libretto] the music then comes of its own accord'.[390] At all events, *Ernani* opened at La Fenice on 9 March 1844 and was a success. This initiated what was to be a long and fruitful working relationship between Verdi and Piave.

By 1845 Verdi was successful and much sought after, to such an extent that his business dealings and simultaneous commitments to opera houses and publishers and

[385] Ibid., p. 119, quoting *Verdi's "Macbeth": A Sourcebook*, p. 29.
[386] Ibid., p. 119, quoting *Carteggi verdiani,* 4, p. 19 (1853).
[387] Charles Osborne, *Verdi: A Life in the Theatre* (London: George Weidenfeld and Nicolson 1987), p. 115.
[388] Ibid., p. 112.
[389] Ibid., p. 35.
[390] Ibid., p. .36.

his ownership of *libretti* were becoming difficult to manage.[391] It was within this *milieu* of deadlines, counter-commitments and public expectations that *La traviata* would begin to take shape. Foremost among Verdi's considerations, after the subject itself, was the company and cast for which the opera was being written.[392] In 1850 La Fenice opera house had been the location for a battle, first over the contract and then with the censorship of the Venetian Chief of Police when the authorities had objected to *Rigoletto* (at the time called *La maledizione*) on grounds of religion, politics and good taste.[393]

In his memoirs, Léon Escudier, Verdi's friend and French publisher wrote: '[h]e studies the characters, the passions, and spends whole months seeking the proper way to clothe them ... As in nature, gestation is long, birth is prompt'.[394] No birth would eventuate unless Verdi could be happy with those who were to play his characters. Writing to Marzari, the President of La Fenice he says: '... you will understand that I cannot sign a contract without knowing the company'.[395] Clause Three of the contract with La Fenice which he eventually signed, stipulated with regard to the singer who would take the lead in his next opera: 'In the event of his not finding her suitable, he will declare this not later than 15 January 1853, and the management will be obliged to engage as substitute for the Lent season 1853 an artist satisfactory to the composer'.[396]

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[391] Ibid., p. 48.
[392] Luke Jensen, "An Introduction to Verdi's Working Methods," in *The Cambridge Companion to Verdi*, ed. Scott L. Balthazar (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 260.
[393] William Weaver, ed., *Verdi: A Documentary Study* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1977), pp. 180 – 182.
[394] Ibid., p. 187, quoting Léon Escudier, *Mes Souvenirs* (Paris: E. Dentu, 1863), pp. 79 and ff.
[395] Kimbell, *Verdi in the Age of Italian Romanticism*, p. 147, quoting letter of 4 February 1852: Nordio, *Verdi e la Fenice.*
[396] Ibid., p. 295, quoting Abbiati, *Verdi,* II, p. 214

Piave was with Verdi at Sant' Agata in October 1852, working in fulfilment of this contract, on a libretto which was 'nicely finished off ... when the maestro took fire from another subject'.[397] David Kimbell believes that the new subject was inspired by Verdi's receipt in late October, of a copy of *La Dame aux Camélias* from Léon Escudier's brother Marie in Paris.[398] Verdi composed *La traviata* with great dispatch during January and February of 1853.[399]

Verdi found the reports of the La Fenice performance of *Ernani*, in which Fanny Salvini-Donatelli had played Elvira, 'so depressing that I am obliged to declare that I shall certainly not give the role of *La Traviata* to Signora Salvini!'[400] He attempted to invoke Clause Three of the contract although the deadline had passed, to avoid using her. Only a singer 'with an elegant figure, who is young and sings passionately' would do.[401] He wrote to Marzari that Rosina Penco '... would be the best, I think. She has a good figure, plenty of spirit and a good stage presence; excellent qualities for *La Traviata*'.[402] With these comments Verdi made it evident that he sought a woman whose appearance and passion the audience could identify as the magnetic qualities of the courtesan, rather than simply a singer with brilliant technique. Years later Verdi was to remark on the role of Violetta that 'even a mediocrity could possess the right qualities to shine in that opera and be dreadful in everything else'.[403]

Kimbell comments: 'More than with any other of his operas, Verdi was blithely disregardful of the qualities and capabilities of his cast when he composed *La*

[397] Ibid., pp. 296 – 297, quoting letter of 26 October: ibid., p. 177.
[398] Op. cit., p. 297.
[399] Kimbell, *Verdi in the Age of Italian Romanticism*, p. 297.
[400] Ibid., p. 298, quoting letter of 30 January 1853: Nordio, transl. Walker, *The Man Verdi,* p. 210.
[401] Ibid., p. 299, quoting letter of 30 January 1853: Nordio, ibid., p. 210.
[402] Ibid., p. 298, quoting ibid.
[403] Budden, *The Operas of Verdi: Il Trovatore to La Forza Del Destino*, pp. 164 – 165, quoting Gino Monaldi, *Verdi 1839-98,* p. 152.

Traviata; as a consequence they proved incapable of realizing it convincingly'.[404] The premiere on 6 March 1853 was for Verdi 'a fiasco, a decisive fiasco'[405] and 'what is worse, they laughed'.[406] This happened in spite of the fact that Salvini-Donatelli whom Verdi had not wanted, was said to have sung: 'with an indescribable accomplishment and perfection: she ravished the house which, quite literally, overwhelmed her with applause'.[407] The other members of the cast, in particular Felice Varesi, who played Giorgio Germont, were incensed at the composer's refusal to make use of their known abilities.[408] Yet the laughter of the audience may have had more to do with the reputedly stout Salvini-Donatelli being far from the alluring courtesan Verdi wished to portray.

Originally, the subject of *La traviata* and the *posizione* of that subject had been confronting, even as portrayed in the distancing seventeenth-century costume insisted upon by the censors. The Venetian authorities had caused difficulties for *Rigoletto* although there had been far less overtly salacious behaviour to find in that opera. Notorious and successful in Paris as a stage play, *La traviata* was a story and a character's *posizione* which Verdi insisted on imposing on an outwardly conventional and easily scandalised Italian operatic audience.

Verdi had an unshakeable conception of the 'subject for our time' which would later be vindicated on 6 May 1854 at the Teatro San Benedetto. Writing to De Sanctis he said: '... *La traviata* ... being performed at the *Teatro San Benedetto* is the same ... as the one performed last year at the Fenice apart from one or two transpositions of key

[404] Kimbell, *Verdi in the Age of Italian Romanticism*, p. 300.
[405] Ibid., p. 300, quoting Nordio, trans. Walker, *The man Verdi*, p. 296.
[406] Ibid., p. 300, quoting Nordio, trans. Walker, *The man Verdi,* p. 296.
[407] Ibid., p. 300, quoting *Gazzetta Privilegiata di Venezia*, cited Nordio, op.cit., p. 50.
[408] Ibid., p. 301, quoting Abbiati, *Verdi* II, p. 22.9

and a few *puntature* ... For the rest not a single piece has been altered ... not a musical idea changed. Then it was a fiasco; now it has created a furore. Draw your own conclusions'.[409] Although the music with the exception of thorough but subtle alterations in five movements[410] had essentially not changed, the prima donna and the accepting attitude of the audience had.

Gilles de Van is certain that what Verdi wished his audience to see in Violetta was not the same as the prurient perspective conveyed in Dumas's play. Any coarseness involved in her initial situation was to serve only as a contrast to her inner purity and longing for the return of her girlhood innocence.[411] She is caught between two worlds in what Dumas *fils* insisted was a *demi-monde* 'not synonymous with the "mob of courtesans"'[412] but forced into a situation which she only pretends to like through necessity. Violetta will convey this explicitly in the words 'Povera donna, sola, abbandonata in questo popoloso deserto che appellano Parigi'.[413] This would represent one of the key moments in which Verdi and Piave established Violetta's *posizione* as one trapped outside the place and time of innocence.

In order to arrive at the point where such moments could occur, a collaborative process established through convention and experience was conducted. The process itself was influenced to some extent by the kinds of audiences for whom Verdi was writing. During the 1830s and 1840s, musicians visiting Italy were appalled at the offhand and unappreciative way in which audiences and performers behaved at the

[409]Budden, *The Operas of Verdi: Il Trovatore to La Forza Del Destino*, p. 125, quoting letter to De Sanctis 26 May 1854, *Carteggi Verdiani,* I, pp. 24 – 25.
[410] Kimbell, *Verdi in the Age of Italian Romanticism*, pp. 302 – 304.
[411] de Van, *Verdi's Theater*, p. 188.
[412] Rounding, *Grandes Horizontales*, p. 1, quoting Alexandre Dumas *fils, Théâtre complet, avec Préfaces inédites,* Vol. II, Calmann Levy, Paris, 1895, p. 11.
[413] Verdi, *La Traviata in Full Score*, p. 90.

opera. Both Mendelssohn and Berlioz had registered their disgust, and Gounod thought that the French and the English showed more appreciation for Italian opera. In 1846, Charles Dickens intimated that English audiences would not put up with Italian opera as it was performed in Italy.[414]

Distractions from the suspension of disbelief might come about through the persistent shining of house-lights, the constant chatter of audiences, the capricious re-ordering of acts and arias to suit the singers, the orchestral practice of using indiscriminate ornamentation, the composition of the orchestras themselves being not entirely of professional musicians and the licence given to some pit orchestras to come and go, and to applaud and chat at will.[415] Although the stage scenery could be architecturally convincing and sumptuous, the principal singers were permitted to dress according to their own personal taste. The chorus relied on the impresario to provide costumes or improvised (occasionally with hilarious results) themselves. Gounod saw Roman warriors in firemen's helmets and tunics in *Norma* at the Apollo theatre in 1840 and declared it 'utterly ridiculous and might have been a Punch and Judy show'.[416]

Italian audiences, with or without the paid and unpaid *claques* of supporters and hecklers, might applaud wildly, howl the performance down with laughter, whistle, or turn their backs on the stage. Since silent audience attention might only be hoped for at the more impressive passages of singing, conventions such as the *aria di sortita,* in which the prima donna made her entrance, the *cadenza* at the end of a *cavatina,* to warn of the need

[414] Kimbell, *Verdi in the Age of Italian Romanticism*, p. 33.
[415] Ibid., pp. 49 – 50.
[416] Ibid., pp. 55 – 56.

for applause, and the loudly accompanied repetition of the *cabaletta,* grew up as sign-posts to guide audience response.[417] Opera audiences of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, accustomed to darkened house-lights and reverent hush might be as appalled as Dickens was in 1846. Verdi himself 'lived in terror that the public would be bored and distracted ... The audience must therefore be kept "awake", and brevity was a stratagem to hold attention'.[418]

The public in whom Verdi would later profess great faith[419] could not be placated, but required the exceptional ideas with which he sought to startle and engage them. Once he hit upon a scenario which inspired his imagination, as did that of *La Dame aux camélias,* Verdi was thoroughly dependent on his libretttist to assist in its realisation as a work amenable to musical setting. He confessed in a Viennese newspaper interview that he could not write his own librettos, as Wagner did.[420]

Verdi demanded the succinct distillation of ideas which were too prolix in prose. His view was that poetry 'must say everything that can be said in prose but using half the words'.[421] The thoughts of the characters were traditionally expressed in an unrealistically exalted rhetorical language which all Italians, whatever their particular local dialect, could be expected to understand. Verdi made it clear in a letter to Antonio Somma in 1853 that there was little that could improve on the usefulness for him, of the stanza which was essential 'for cantabile sections ... for ensembles ... for

[417] Ibid., pp. 79 – 81.
[418] de Van, *Verdi's Theater*, p. 79.
[419] Conati, *Interviews and Encounters with Verdi*, p. 191, quoting Gino Monaldi, *An Interview with Verdi*, in *Il Popolo Romano*, Rome, no. 45, 15 February (1887).
[420] Ibid., p. 109.
[421] de Van, *Verdi's Theater*, p. 63, quoting Abbiati, *Giuseppe Verdi*, Vol. 2, p. 674.

largos ... for allegros, etc., and all these in alternation so that nothing seems cold and monotonous'.[422]

In the case of *La traviata* expectations of mastery in all the techniques and traditions of Italian prosody had fallen on the shoulders of Piave. As the servant of two masters, his brief on behalf of La Fenice was to act as diplomatically and with as much finesse as possible to ensure that Verdi was content with the *libretto* which would be Verdi's property, and with Salvini-Donatelli who was the preferred soprano of La Fenice. Piave wrote to Marzari, President of La Fenice ' ... he is in an infernal bad temper, perhaps because of his indisposition, [a problem with his arm] but still more because he has no faith in the company'.[423] Verdi was single-minded in his desire to achieve believable characterization and action, initially insisting on the use of contemporary dress and forbidding the use of wigs.[424]

Between finding the subject which inspired him and finalising orchestrations before the premiere, Verdi was engaged with Piave in the time-honoured process. This would involve negotiating and complaining about casting, avoiding '... some longueurs that would put the public to sleep',[425] giving instructions about costuming and trying to

pre-empt any objections from the censors. It would also involve the normal mechanics of setting to music those sections of the libretto of which Verdi approved.

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[422] Emanuele Senici, "Words and Music," in *The Cambridge Companion to Verdi*, ed. Scott L. Balthazar (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2004), p. 89.
[423] Kimbell, *Verdi in the Age of Italian Romanticism*, p. 299, quoting Letter of 30 January 1853: Nordio, *Verdi e la Fenice*, pp. 48 – 49.
[424] Budden, *The Operas of Verdi: Il Trovatore to La Forza Del Destino*, pp. 121 – 122, quoting Memorandum from Lasin, 11 January 1853. Archives of the *Teatro la Fenice,* busta Spettacoli, I, no. 132.
[425] Kimbell, *Verdi in the Age of Italian Romanticism*, p. 298, quoting Letter of 30 January 1853: Nordio, op.cit., p. 48.

Felice Romani wrote of the challenges involved in writing a libretto:

> Do you think it's so easy to reduce a French tragedy or comedy to an Italian melodrama? Render a whole volume in a few pages? Create miniatures of the characters and situations, take a composition made up entirely of dialogues and eliminate the dialogue, its primary element? ... to satisfy all the musical requirements to try to meet all the singers' demands, distribute the so-called pieces in such a manner that one party doesn't get angry at the other, arrange the scenes without letting them get monotonous, using sopranos here, basses there, combine poetic inspiration with practical necessity, widen a concept into a particular number of verses and meters, and narrow it down to so many verses of a particular measure? To say everything in a few words and be brief without being obscure?[426]

Only one Italian source, Tommaso Grossi's for *I Lombardi,* was used for any of Verdi's operas. Gilles de Van asserts, however, that Verdi owed his enthusiasm for 'strong, resounding language that energetically "sculpts" a situation or a passion' to his admiration for the work of Vittorio Alfieri. He also comments that 'the gradual emergence of the spirit of reconciliation and forgiveness in Verdi's dramaturgy' was influenced by Alessandro Manzoni, the poet to whom Verdi referred as 'the saint'.[427] De Van notes that Verdi's librettists were also influenced by Manzoni whom

[426] de Van, *Verdi's Theater*, p. 66, quoting Felice Romani in 1839, as quoted by Giuseppe Vecchi, "*Il libretto di Giuseppe Verdi," ISV Rigoletto,* no.8 (1973), p. 881.
[427] Ibid., p. 73.

Giuseppe Mazzini believed to have driven one of the trends for awareness of 'the tragedy of history, resignation, and compassion' in Romantic literature.[428]

Once the literary text from which Verdi 'took fire'[429] had been found, the scenario (*programma* or *selva*) whether a sketched or detailed prose outline, needed to be accepted not only by the composer, but also the theatre and the censors. Following this came the elaboration in verse form. At times it was Verdi himself who undertook the division into scenes and stipulated the form of the verses, the type and number of lines.[430] It was then generally his practice to supervise the structural organisation of the opera. Even before a synopsis had been drafted, Verdi condensed the French play on which *Ernani* was based, using its first three acts as Act I.[431] De Van cites this as proof of Verdi's concentration 'above all else on the linking of a number of fundamental situations.[432] He asserts that, once the versification began, 'the situation of the character counted for more than the detail of the lines [of poetry] especially in the case of fast arias and ensembles. Conversely, where there were key moments of dialogue or narrative, the text took precedence in Verdi's consideration.[433] He had no use for exclamations which were rendered poetically without reference to character and action. Otello's cries of 'morta' and Lady Macbeth's of 'follie' were of a similarly penetrating quality that would, in Verdi's words, 'carry the whole secret of the effect of this piece' as had Violetta's 'Follie!' in *La traviata.*[434]

[428] Ibid., p. 74.
[429] Kimbell, *Verdi in the Age of Italian Romanticism*, p. 296, quoting letter of 26 October: Abbiati, *Verdi,* II, p. 177.
[430] de Van, *Verdi's Theater*, p. 76.
[431] Ibid., pp. 76 – 77, citing Conati, *La bottega della musica,* 74 (letter of 5 September 1843).
[432] Ibid., p. 77.
[433] Ibid., p. 77.
[434] Ibid., p. 77, quoting *Copialettere,* 454.

Gilles de Van also comments that many of Verdi's excisions for the sake of censorship would remove useless words but that he insisted on keeping words from an original source which were psychologically accurate and calculated to produce the right effect.[435] He also notes that the necessity of submitting libretti to the censors made Verdi precise in the justification of every detail of his dramaturgy.[436] Verdi himself might suggest his own prose or even verse versions of pieces, issuing instructions and complaints as the librettist went about the work of refining what he and Verdi had produced. Verdi insisted on brevity and required that the text either 'run' or 'sing' depending on whether the opera's rhythm demanded a fast *scena* or a slower lyrical number respectively.[437]

De Van calculates that every libretto's literary source was reduced by at least half and that long lines could be reduced by one-third. He also notes that because of operatic conventions of character stereotyping, descriptive motivation was not as necessary as it would be in a play.[438]

In Verdi's references to words which 'sculpt well', 'spurt' or 'leap out'[439] later to be called the '*parola scenica*',[440] can be seen a sense of the plastic and spatial in Verdi's conception of words and dramatic situation. Through the words they were given, Verdi's characters were to become solid creatures seen in the round. They were to act out or suppress their inner desires and be acted upon in time within an architecture of emotional stimuli. The *posizione* in which Violetta is found to use certain musical gestures at any given time reflects upon her own character, the lives and society of her

[435] Ibid., p. 78.
[436] Ibid., p. 84.
[437] Ibid., p. 79.
[438] Ibid., pp. 79 – 80.
[439] Ibid., p. 80, quoting *Copialettere* , 639 (14 August 1870).
[440] Ibid., p. 80, quoting *Verdi-Somma,* 80 (1857), *Copialettere,* 641 (1870), 639 (14 August 1870).

creators, Dumas *fils,* Piave and Verdi, her historical originals, including Marie Duplessis (and obliquely, Giuseppina Strepponi), and the singers who attempt to portray her. I shall investigate these gestures in detail in the following chapter.

The Social Space of the Singer-as-Courtesan

In setting Piave's libretto according to his established procedure, Verdi was composing music for the character of a courtesan who manifested herself as a singer, and also for a singer who manifested herself as a courtesan. As will be demonstrated, both singer and courtesan were also bound historically to archetypal identity of the siren.

The role of Violetta may be simultaneously a curse and a gift for the performer. It demands several seemingly mutually exclusive vocal abilities also requiring an aptness both to characterization and to convention. This aptness circumvents objections from critics such as Carl Dahlhaus, who appear to favour Wagner's ideas concerning 'endless melody'. Although Dahlhaus defends Verdi against charges of producing mindless and tumultuous 'singer's opera' rather than 'music drama',[441] he gives some credence to the notion that the 'foursquareness' of regular periodic phrases tends to demand meaningless padding rather than musical integrity.[442] The aptness of the conventional forms used in

[441] Dahlhaus, *Nineteenth Century Music*, p. 207.
[442] Ibid., p. 200.

La traviata, possibly unique to the Verdian *oeuvre*, may render them far from meaningless. This point has been illustrated in detail by James A. Hepokoski in his study of one of Violetta's arias, *Addio del passato.*[443]

The singer, despite being constrained by musical convention, finds herself in several different vocal spaces throughout the opera. While required to perform as a coloratura in Act I, she must become a lyric soprano in Act II and a spinto in Act III.[444] In addition to the virtuosity and flexibility required for these transformations, the ambiguities of her own *posizione* become more apparent when considered in the light of her historical function as a vocal performer.

There is little doubt that, although able to achieve an enviable professional and material status within her own *milieu,* historically the courtesan has existed on the margins of safely acceptable society. Alexandre Dumas *fils* called her world the *demi-monde,* that social twilight between the legitimate and the criminal.[445] She occupies a relationship with society, a situation which Verdi termed *posizione,* regarded with both fear and secret admiration. She is the archetypally dangerous woman from whom respectable women's eyes are averted, surviving in a world of men who desire her. To other members of society she is tolerated as an unpalatable necessity and treated as though she does not exist. [446] She is a carrier of social instability and disease who must be registered with the Parisian Prefecture of Police and undergo regular medical

[443] James A. Hepokoski, "Genre and Content in Mid-Century Verdi: 'Addio, Del Passato' ("La Traviata", Act III)," in *Cambridge Opera Journal* 1, no. 3 (1989).
[444] Rutherford, *The Prima Donna and Opera*, p. 221.
[445] Rounding, *Grandes Horizontales*, p. 1.
[446] Ibid., p. 10.

examination.[447] Her virulence is feared by parents whose sons may succumb to madness and death through syphilis.[448]

An apposite relationship may be found between the historical courtesan and the character of Violetta, whose physical fate is linked to the relentless passing of time. To quote more fully James Davidson's comment mentioned in Chapter 1:

> The vanishing beauty of the courtesan ... has always configured a particular kind of modernity, city life, urbanity, terribly vivid, but fragile, brief, a present always with an eye on the time, a present distinguished not only from the past but from the future, a future from which it knows it will be looked back on with nostalgia, the latest fashion until the next big thing, not just a moment, but a moment captured for posterity, always latently elegiac, a bygone, shortly.[449]

In the same way, Timon Screech finds in Japan, that:

> The domain of pleasure ... was referred to as the Floating World, an ancient Buddhist term indicating the ephemerality of all things ... used in distinction to the "fixed" world of responsibility and labor.[450]

For centuries there has existed a link between the courtesan and the singer. The pleasurable arts of the Japanese *geisha*,[451] the Chinese *ji*,[452] the sacred Indian

[447] Ibid., p. 13.
[448] Ibid., pp. 20 – 21.
[449] Davidson, "Making a Spectacle of Her(Self): The Greek Courtesan and the Art of the Present," in *The Courtesan's Arts: Cross-Cultural Perspectives*, p. 48.
[450] Timon Screech, "Going to the Courtesans," in *The Courtesan's Arts: Cross-Cultural Perspectives*, ed. Martha Feldman and Bonnie Gordon (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 255 – 256.

devadasi[453] and the dangerously sensuous *cortegiana Venetiana* of the Italian Renaissance[454] all included the cultivation of skill in music and particularly in the seductive power of song. Such a power brings with it the association of the courtesan-singer and the ancient mythological identity of the siren.[455] Naroditskaya and Austern find that the name 'siren' 'is drawn from the ancient Greek term *siren*, such as the Russian *sirin*, the Italian *sirena*, and the Andean *sirinu*. The term also incorporates a range of archetypal beings [and] ... as portrayed in this book, the siren is a human being whose particular musical abilities have led her to be referred to as one of these creatures, or who has chosen to usurp such a title or the behavioral signifiers that would mark her as one... Her alluring vocal powers and other distinctive traits have been borrowed by nightclub singers and MTV stars many years and half-a-world apart'.[456] Peraino, whose studies emphasize gender identity, has also found a wide variety of musical creatures both legendary and human, who have been notable for their transgressive behaviour and breaches of convention.[457]

In these traditions, the primary seductive power over the will of men of a woman living as a courtesan might be seen to emanate from her mouth and her voice. A woman living as a singer might equally be seen to exert a seductive power over the will of men. Susan Rutherford explores the nineteenth-century fascination with sirens and the analogies by which female opera singers were associated with them. She

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[451] Miho Matsugu, "In the Service of the Nation: Geisha and Kawabata Yasunari's *Snow Country*,´in *The Courtesan's Arts: Cross-Cultural Perspectives*, p. 243.
[452] Zeitlin, '"Notes of Flesh" And the Courtesan's Song in Seventeenth-Century China," p. 75.
[453] Doris M. Srinivasan, "Royalty's Courtesans and God's Mortal Wives: Keepers of Culture in Precolonial India," in *The Courtesan's Art: Cross-Cultural Perspectives*, p. 164.
[454] Bonnie Gordon, "The Courtesan's Singing Body as Cultural Capital in Seventeenth-Century Italy," p. 185.
[455] Ibid., p. 186.
[456] Inna and Austern Naroditskaya, Linda Phyllis, *Music of the Sirens* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), p. 2.
[457] Peraino, *Listening to the Sirens*.

quotes William Hazlitt's 1814 description of the 'Opera Muse' as 'a tawdry courtesan' and his later attack on the 'Siren sounds' of opera in which 'there is hardly a vice for which the mind is not thus gradually prepared'.[458] Both the courtesan and the singer held a non-domestic power over men, were free to demonstrate intellectual and artistic prowess and maintained financial independence in that the powers of their bodies were negotiable commodities rather than contractually forfeit in marriage.

Any woman who, like Verdi's mistress Giuseppina Strepponi, ventures onto the operatic stage, takes on by association the mantle of the siren-courtesan. Verdi's music in *La traviata* first renders Violetta and her alter ego the singer, in the *posizione* of skilled and virtuosic seducer. In her case it is not the sinuously seductive vocal eroticism of Bizet's Carmen for example, but the egregious display of one whose taste for luxury and opulence is not subject to restraint.[459] Gradually the narrative and its musical setting divest her of her dangerous brilliance until her physical power over the will of men is sacrificed to simplicity and love. In this process Violetta and the singer, now no longer dangerous, become together the siren disarmed.

[458] Rutherford, *The Prima Donna and Opera*, pp. 38 – 39.
[459] Georges Bizet, *Carmen* (1875) (New York: Kalmus, n.d.), pp. 84 – 96.