

SIMILARITIES IN THE USE OF DRAMATIC RECITATIVE STYLE IN THE
MUSIC OF CLAUDIO MONTEVERDI AND GIUSEPPE VERDI
WITH SOME PERFORMANCE-PRACTICE ISSUES
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The objective of this dissertation, inspired by performance experience, was to establish the similarities in the use of recitative style in the music of Claudio Monteverdi and Giuseppe Verdi. To achieve this objective, their use of recitative style was examined through comparative analysis of four scenes from their operas: “Arianna’s Lament” from *L’Arianna* and “Disprezzata regina” from *L’incoronazione di Poppea* by Monteverdi, and “Condotta ell’era in ceppi” from *Il trovatore* and “Judgment Scene” from *Aida* by Verdi. The examination of the similarities included a discussion of the following: (a) the historical influences and cultural backgrounds of the composers; (b) general similarities in their compositional approaches to recitative style; (c) comparable characteristics of the dramatic recitative style in the early Baroque monody and in Verdi’s operas; (d) similarities in musical characterization and expression of affective and emotional content through stylistic musical devices; (e) similarities in the composers’ approaches to vocal and acting issues with special emphasis on the problems of diction; and (f) some related performance-practice issues. A discussion of the poetic lament and the influence of its form and content on musical setting was also a part of this research.

The comparative research revealed numerous similarities in the historical circumstances influencing Monteverdi's and Verdi's choice of musical styles; their motivation; formal and stylistic characteristics of their dramatic recitative scenes; their choice of libretto; their use of the elements of lament; their musical treatment of emotional content of the text; and their prerogatives in vocal and acting issues. Numerous similar characteristics were also established regarding vibrato, tempo, rhythm, and ornamentation in the performance practice of the early Baroque recitative soliloquy and Verdi's dramatic recitative scenes. The similarities of the four scenes' functions, topics, form, and characterization through devices of musical style indicated a fundamental continuity in the development of Italian opera from its inception to the end of the nineteenth century.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	ii
INTRODUCTION	1
State of Research.....	1
Chapter	
1. PRECURSORS OF THE TEXT-DOMINATED STYLE.....	9
Renaissance and Early Baroque	10
Early Italian Romantic Opera	15
2. GENERAL SIMILARITIES OF APPROACH AND STYLE IN MONTEVERDI'S AND VERDI'S DRAMATIC RECITATIVE STYLE.....	22
Motivation	22
Focus on Practice	23
Emphasis on Emotions, not Reason	24
Use of Contrast	25
Interest in Dramatic Expressiveness	29
The Libretto	30
Librettists	35
Ottavio Rinuccini.....	35
Giovanni Francesco Busenello.....	36
Salvatore Cammarano.....	37
Antonio Ghislanzoni	38
Creative Independence and Artistic Integrity	38
Directness	39
3. ABANDONED WOMEN, THE TRADITION OF LAMENT, AND RECITATIVE STYLE	41
Poetic Tradition	41
The Lament in Music	45
Recitative Style of the Early Baroque	47
Verdi's Recitative Style	49

Chapter	Page
Musical Organization	50
Sectional Character	50
Predominant Use of Recitative Style	51
Integration of Vocal and Instrumental Parts.....	51
Extremes of Vocal Range.....	52
Lament with <i>ostinato</i> Bass Line	52
4. STYLISTIC COMPARISON	53
Form	57
Sectional Character	58
“Arianna’s Lament”	59
“Disprezzata regina”	63
“Condotta ell’era in ceppi”	67
“Judgement Scene”.....	77
Avoiding the Fragmentation: Cadential Patterns Between the Sections.....	84
Three <i>Genera</i> and Corresponding Devices of Musical Style	90
Breathing Patterns.....	100
Balance of Emotional Content	100
Contrast	103
“Arianna’s Lament”	103
“Disprezzata regina”	105
“Condotta ell’era in ceppi”	106
“Judgement Scene”	108
5. SINGING-ACTING AND RECITATIVE STYLE	113
Vocal Requirements	114
Speech-like Delivery	119
Delivery of <i>coloratura</i> Passages	120
Chest Voice.....	121
Articulation of Syllables in the High Register	122
Combination of <i>sostenuto</i> and <i>parlando</i> Sections	123
Voice Type-casting.....	123
Acting.....	125
6. SOME PERFORMANCE-PRACTICE ISSUES RELATED TO THE RECITATIVE STYLE	130
Phrasing and Cadences.....	134
Venue.....	135
Vibrato.....	136

Chapter	Page
Rhythm.....	138
Ornamentation.....	139
<i>Coloratura</i> Passages	140
<i>Trillo</i>	143
Dynamics	143
Tempo Flexibility	144
7. CONCLUSION	147
SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY	155

INTRODUCTION

The objective of this dissertation, inspired by performing experience, is to show and explain the fundamental similarities between the dramatic recitative styles of composers Claudio Monteverdi and Giuseppe Verdi. Their use of recitative style for achieving condensed dramatic situations in music will be explored through comparative analysis of recitative scenes from the operas *L'Arianna*, *L'incoronazione di Poppea*, *Il trovatore*, and *Aida*.

On the surface, the dramatic recitative scenes of these two composers, who lived more than two hundred years apart, seem very different in their tonal and formal organization. However, the similarities of the scenes' functions, topics, and characterization devices indicate the fundamental continuity in the development of Italian opera. This comparative approach will permit a clearer view of the individual styles of these two composers, reveal the similarities in their intellectual and aesthetic principles, and show the similarities in their musical definitions of dramatically relevant details.

State of Research

Until now, there has been no substantial and systematic comparative analysis of the creative outputs of Monteverdi and Verdi. Numerous authors, such as Schrade (1950), Arnold and Fortune (1985), Leopold (1991), Fenlon and Miller (1992), Palisca (1994), Pirrotta (1984), Pirrotta and Povoledo (1975), and Testi (1970), cover the

historical influences on and predecessors of Monteverdi's style.¹ Walker (1972), Weaver and Chusid (1979), Kimbell (1981), Nicolodi (1982), Petrobelli (1994), Pistone (1995), and Terenzio (1976) have discussed the predecessors of Verdi's style.² Additionally, Tomlison, in his article "Italian Romanticism and Italian Opera: An Essay in Their Affinities," discusses the influence of Mazzini's philosophical and social teachings on formation of Verdi's style.³ However, at this time, no study has been done that would offer a detailed comparison of the circumstances leading to the creation of the Baroque recitative soliloquy on the one side and to Verdi's prominent use of self-contained dramatic recitative scenes on the other.

While there is no systematic comparative research on the music of these two composers, a number of studies have been done on each of the two individual styles. There are numerous studies on the stylistic characteristics of Monteverdi's music,

¹ Leo Schrade, *Monteverdi: Creator of Modern Music* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1950); Arnold Denis and Nigel Fortune, eds., *The New Monteverdi Companion* (London: Faber and Faber, 1985); Silke Leopold, *Monteverdi: Music in Transition*, transl. by Anne Smith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991); Iain Fenlon and Peter N. Miller, *The Song of the Soul, Understanding Poppea* (London: Royal Musical Association, 1992); Claude V. Palisca, *Studies in the History of Italian Music and Music Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994); Nino Pirrotta, *Music and Culture in Italy from the Middle Ages to the Baroque: A Collection of Essays* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984); Nino Pirrotta and Elena Povoledo, *Music and Theatre from Poliziano to Monteverdi*, transl. by Karel Eales (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975); Flavio Testi, *La musica Italiana nell seicento. Il melodramma* (Milan: Bradamante Editrice, 1970).

² Frank Walker, *The Man Verdi* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1972); William Weaver and Martin Chusid, *The Verdi Companion* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1979); David R. B. Kimbell, *Verdi in the Age of Italian Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Fiamma Nicolodi, *Giusti e tendenze del novecento musicale in Italia* (Florence: Sansoni Editore, 1982); Pierluigi Petrobelli, *Music in the Theater: Essays on Verdi and Other Composers*, transl. by Roger Parker (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994); Daniele Pistone, *Nineteenth-Century Italian Opera from Rossini to Puccini*, transl. by E. Thomas Glasow (Portland: Amadeus Press, 1979); Vincenzo Terenzio, *La musica Italiana nell'ottocento* (Milan: Bradamante Editrice, 1976).

³ Gary Tomlison, "Italian Romanticism and Italian Opera: An Essay in Their Affinities," *19th Century Music* 10, no. 1 (1986): 43-60.

including those of Chafe (1992), Isgro (1968), Tomlison (1987), Aldrich (1966), Gianturco (1978), Palisca (1968), Stevens (1978), and Welch (1946).⁴ The studies on the stylistic characteristics of Verdi's music by Budden (1992), Noske (1977), Godefroy (1975), Gosset (1974), Nicolaisen (1980), and Seta (1991), are of recent date and not as numerous, but they are of very high scholarly standards.⁵ Thus, sufficient information is available that would allow a comparative research study of the stylistic properties found in the music of these two composers. Such a study could bring out similar patterns of thought in their compositional approaches arising from their shared language, culture, and geographic location, and it could show continuity in the development of Italian opera.

Contemporary discussions on the topic of lament in the form of recitative scene are often limited in focus to the recitative soliloquy of the early Baroque. Murata (1979),

⁴ Eric T. Chafe, *Monteverdi's Tonal Language* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1992); Robert Mario Isgro, *The First and Second Practices of Monteverdi: Their Relation to Contemporary Theory* (D.M.A. diss., Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1968); Gary Tomlison, *Monteverdi and the End of the Renaissance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987); Putnam Aldrich, *Rhythm in Seventeenth-Century Italian Monody with an Anthology of Songs and Dances* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1966); Carolyn Gianturco, *Claudio Monteverdi, Stile e Struttura* (Pisa: Editrice tecnico scientifica, 1978); Claude V. Palisca, *Baroque Music* (New Jersey: Englewood Cliffs, 1968); Denis Stevens, *Sacred, Secular and Occasional Music* (London: Associated University Presses, 1978); Robert E. Welch, *The Dissonance of Monteverdi's "Orfeo,"* (M.M. thesis, Eastman School of Music, University of Rochester, 1946).

⁵ Julian Budden, *The Operas of Verdi* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992); Frits Noske, *The Signifier and the Signified: Studies in the Operas of Mozart and Verdi* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1977); Vincent Godefroy, *The Dramatic Genius of Verdi: Studies of Selected Operas*, vol. 2, *Aida* (New York: St. Martin Press, 1975); Philip Gossett, "Verdi, Ghislanzoni, and 'Aida': The Uses of Convention," *Critical Inquiry* 1, no. 2 (December 1974): 291-334; Jay Nicolaisen, *Italian Opera in Transition, 1871-1893* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1980); Fabrizio Della Seta, "'O cieli azzurri': Exoticism and Dramatic Discourse in 'Aida,'" transl. by Arthur Goos, *Cambridge Opera Journal* 3, no. 1 (1991): 49-62.

Rosand (1991), and Tomlison (1981), provide exhaustive studies of baroque lament and recitative style.⁶

The fact that numerous elements of the monodic lament are preserved in the music of the later eras is not emphasized often enough. The use of dramatic recitative style and the elements of lament in Verdi's music did not receive much independent scholarly attention and this topic is discussed almost exclusively within the wider context of the entire operas.

In this dissertation, the comparative research on four dramatic recitative scenes by these two composers is undertaken with the intention of establishing the continuity in the use of the elements of early Baroque lament in the form of recitative soliloquy in Verdi's music. Lipking's (1988) analysis of poetic lament,⁷ will help establish further similarities in the poetic form, character types, and affective and emotional content chosen by these two composers in their dramatic recitative scenes.

From the standpoint of a performer, analysis of dramatic recitative scenes in terms of affective and emotional content and corresponding devices of musical style can be very helpful in interpreting the intentions of composers. The article by Barbara Russano Hanning (1992) offers an overview of the history and theory of the three basic *genera*

⁶ Margaret Murata, "The Recitative Soliloquy," *Journal of American Musicological Society* 32, no. 1 (Spring 1979): 45-73; Ellen Rosand, *Opera in Seventeenth-Century Venice: The Creating of a Genre* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991); Gary Tomlison, "Madrigal, Monody, and Monteverdi's 'via naturale alla immitatione,'" *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 34, no.1 (Spring 1981): 60-108.

⁷ Lawrence Lipking, *Abandoned Women and Poetic Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

(*molle*, *temperato*, and *concitato*) with the corresponding tempos and vocal registers.⁸ It also reveals that the correlation between stylistic musical devices and affective content in Italian recitative style is based on natural speech patterns. This correlation had been standardized and used in different historic periods, becoming a tradition and facilitating the communication between the creators, the performers of music, and the audience. Research in the form of a systematic approach to connecting affective content with the devices of musical style in the recitative soliloquy of the early Baroque has not yet been attempted, but numerous authors, such as Cusick (1994), Chafe (1992), Rosand (1985), Carter (1997), and Tomlison (1982), go beyond a tonal analysis and offer various interpretations of Monteverdi's characterization through music.⁹

Analysis in terms of the three basic *genera* could also be extended to the dramatic recitative scenes of Verdi to a certain point. A comparative analysis of the affects, emotional content and the corresponding stylistic musical devices in the music of Monteverdi and Verdi would enable singers to move from one style to another with more ease and with a better understanding of the similarities and differences found between early Baroque opera and Romantic opera in Italy.

⁸ Barbara Russano Hanning, "Monteverdi's Three *Genera*: A Study in Terminology," in *Musical Humanism and its Legacy: Essays in Honor of Claude V. Palisca* (Styvesant, NY: Pendragon Press, 1992): 145-170.

⁹ Susanne G. Cusick, "'There was not one lady who failed to shed a tear,' Arianna's lament and the construction of modern womanhood," *Early Music* 22 (February 1994): 21-44; Chafe, *Monteverdi's Tonal Language*; Ellen Rosand, "Seneca and the Interpretation of 'L'incoronazione di Poppea,'" *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 38 (Fall 1985): 34-71; Tim Carter, "Re-Reading 'Poppea': Some Thoughts on Music and Meaning in Monteverdi's Last Opera," *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 122, no. 2 (1997): 173-204; Gary Tomlison, "Music and the Claims of Text: Monteverdi, Rinuccini, and Marino," *Critical Inquiry* 8, no. 3 (Spring 1982): 565-589.

Writers on performance practice such as Donington (1982), Palisca (1968), and Mertin (1986), also provide discussions of vocal issues.¹⁰ At this time, however, there is a need for more systematic research on vocal issues, which would cover different stylistic periods and bring together the viewpoints of both musicologists and vocal specialists. Most of the contemporary research on historic practices in vocal music is attempted by authors who are not singers, which might be the cause of some contradictory interpretations of primary sources and early recordings. It is true that primary sources can be unclear and confusing about the vocal issues due to the metaphoric nature of their discourse. A systematic comparative analysis of primary sources from different stylistic periods could provide us with better insights into historical practices and help debunk the myths about the use of chest voice, register divisions, and breathing techniques often encountered in vocal pedagogy. Access to this knowledge can empower performers to search for different ways in which they could enrich their expressive vocal potential.

Scholarly research on acting in both seventeenth and nineteenth century opera is virtually non-existent, despite the importance placed on acting by numerous primary sources. The assertion that acting skills were as important and, in Verdi's case, even more important, than the vocal abilities of a singer-actor is unambiguously stated in the writings of Doni, Coryat, and Praetorius (MacClintock 1995), and the letters of

¹⁰ Robert Donington, *Baroque Music, Style and Performance* (London: Faber Music, 1982); Claude V. Palisca, *Baroque Music* (New Jersey: Englewood Cliffs, 1968); Josef Mertin, *Early Music: Approaches to Performance Practice*, transl. by Siegmund Levarie (New York: Da Capo Press, 1986).

Monteverdi (Stevens 1980) and Verdi (Busch 1978).¹¹ The scholarly neglect of research in this area resulted in serious misjudgment of the acting abilities of opera singers of the past, and it helped to perpetuate the unfounded myth about the supremacy of vocal delivery over dramatic sensitivity and expressiveness in pre-twentieth century opera.

The end of this dissertation will include brief discussion of some performance-practice issues. Whereas there are numerous and easily accessible scholarly writings and primary sources on performance practice of Baroque recitative style, such as the proceedings from the International Congress in London on performance practice of Monteverdi's music (1993), as well as books by Leppard (1988), Borgir (1987), Carter (1997), and Neumann (1989, 1993)¹² research on performance practice of the nineteenth century dramatic recitative scenes is still relatively new and requires further attention from scholars. Crutchfield (1983), Hudson (1994), Philip (1992), and Rink (1995) offer important scholarly research on the nineteenth century performance practice, but none of them gives significant attention to dramatic recitative.¹³

¹¹ Carol MacClintock, ed., *Readings in the History of Music in Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Denis Stevens, ed., *The Letters of Claudio Monteverdi* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980); Hans Busch, ed., *Verdi's Aida: The History of an Opera in Letters and Documents* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1978).

¹² Raffaello Monterosso, ed., *Performance Practice in Monteverdi's Music: The Historic-Phylological Background*, Proceedings from the International Congress held in Goldsmith College, University of London, 13-14 December 1993 (Cremona: Fondazione Claudio Monteverdi, 1995); Raymond Leppard, *Authenticity in Music* (Portland: Amadeus Press, 1980); Tharald Borgir, *The Performance of Basso Continuo in Italian Baroque Music* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1987); Stewart Carter, ed., *A Performer's Guide to Seventeenth Century Music* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1997); Frederick Neumann, *New Essays on Performance Practice* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1980), and *Performance Practice of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, prepared with assistance of Jane Stevens (New York: Schirmer Books, 1993).

¹³ Will Crutchfield, "Vocal Ornamentation in Verdi: The Phonographic Evidence," *19th-Century Music* 7, no. 1 (Summer 1983): 3-54; Richard Hudson, *Stolen Time: The History of Tempo Rubato* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994); Robert Philip, *Early Recordings and Musical Style: Changing Tastes in*

Through a comparison of the historical circumstances influencing Monteverdi's and Verdi's choices of musical styles, their motivation, stylistic characteristics of their dramatic recitative scenes, their use of the elements of lament, musical treatment of affective and emotional content, and similarities in their attitudes toward vocal and acting issues, this study aims to address the lack of comparative research about the music of Claudio Monteverdi and Giuseppe Verdi, and to argue the benefits of comparative research in the practice of performance. This examination of the similarities in the dramatic recitative styles of Monteverdi and Verdi will include a discussion of each of the following: (a) the historical influences and cultural backgrounds of the composers; (b) general similarities in their compositional approaches; (c) comparable characteristics of the dramatic recitative style in the early Baroque monody and in Verdi's operas; (d) similarities in musical characterization and expression of affective and emotional content through devices of musical style; (e) similarities in the composers' approaches to vocal and acting issues; and (f) and the discussion of related performance-practice issues. Because a purely musical analysis of the dramatic recitative would be far from complete, this dissertation will also include a discussion of the poetic lament and the influence of its form and content on musical setting.

Instrumental Performance, 1900-1950 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); John Rink, ed., *The Practice of Performance: Studies in Musical Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

CHAPTER 1

PRECURSORS OF THE TEXT-DOMINATED STYLE

Claudio Monteverdi (1567-1643) and Giuseppe Verdi (1813-1901) were the foremost representatives of the dramatic recitative style in Italian opera in their respective times. Because recitative style becomes a significant element of musical expression when textual concerns and dramatic relevance gain supremacy over musical concerns, an attempt to discover the similarities in the use of recitative style by these two composers must start with an examination of the musical tendencies in Italy preceding and during their compositional careers. Both composers lived at times in the history of music when text-dominated style gained importance in the compositional process and both of them took advantage of those stylistic changes. Monteverdi and Verdi, though innovators, shared in the stylistic norms of their times, and the general trends in music and theater contributed significantly to the formation of their personal styles.

Toward the end of the sixteenth century and at the middle of the nineteenth century, late Renaissance vocal music and Romantic opera, both dominated primarily by musical conventions, gradually gave way to a new manner of vocal delivery closely inspired by spoken language. The Renaissance's strict rules of counterpoint, and the supreme agility and melodiousness of *bel canto*, were slowly replaced by an interest in drama and in realistic characters, for which the development of a speech-oriented musical style was vital. Composers in the first half of the seventeenth century and the middle of

the nineteenth century, interested in achieving strong dramatic impact and more direct contact with their audiences, often deliberately violated musical conventions accommodating textual and dramatic requirements. During periods dominated by musical concerns, the form of the text, including matters such as the number of stanzas, refrain, and metrical patterns, determined the form of a musical setting. This type of external correspondence loses its relevance at times of textual domination. Monteverdi and Verdi, while striving for deeper correspondence of music and meaning and emphasizing the importance of text intelligibility, still skillfully used musical techniques and, in Verdi's case, finite melody, as an essential part of the setting.

Renaissance and Early Baroque

There had been an interest in deepening the relationship between text and music even before the early Baroque experiments of Girolamo Mei (1519-1594) and Giovanni de' Bardi (1534-1612). Late Renaissance composer Orlande de Lassus (1532-1594) often used lavish chromaticism, modal variety, and sharp contrasts of rhythm and of texture in order to express vividly the power of each different emotion found in a text.¹ Adrian Willaert (c.1490-1562), his pupil Cipriano de Rore (c.1515-1565), and Rore's pupil and Monteverdi's teacher, Marco Antonio Ingegneri (1536-1592), deliberately violated the rules of counterpoint in order to achieve expressive chromaticism and depict emotional extremes.² These extremes were their musical response to the emotional dichotomy

¹ For further explanation see Albert Dunning, "Musica reservata," article in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. Stanley Sadie, 12: 827-828 (London: Macmillan Publishers, 1980).

² Arnold and Fortune, *The Monteverdi Companion*, 93.

found in the poetic technique of antithesis extensively used by the celebrated Italian poet Petrarch (1304-1374).³ Giaches de Wert (1535-1596) further developed the madrigal style of Rore by adding bold leaps, recitative-like declamation, and striking contrasts.⁴ Monteverdi's brother, Giulio Cesare, implied the continuity in the musical developments of Renaissance and early Baroque by recognizing Rore as the founder of the new practice that followed Plato's dictum⁵ according to which words came before the other two components of music, melody and rhythm.⁶ Furthermore, Giulio Cesare's assertion that his brother learned craftsmanship from his teacher Ingegneri and the art of expressing passion from Wert⁷ indicated Monteverdi's familiarity with the declamation and extravagant contrasts of composers of previous generations.

Searching for a musical idiom that would provoke strong reactions from the audience, the composers of early Baroque opera turned to ancient Greek models for inspiration. Monodic music texture, consisting only of a vocal part moving free of regular rhythm over subordinated chordal accompaniment, became the predominant vocal style of the new genre. The composers of early monodies believed in the power of text and natural speech inflections to move the audience, and this style ensured that there was no interference with the expressive text delivery.

³ Hanning, "Monteverdi's Three *Genera*," 161.

⁴ Arnold and Fortune, *The Monteverdi Companion*, 98.

⁵ Italian composers of early Baroque strove for recognition of their creative output through association with the more respected members of society, such as poets and philosophers.

⁶ Claude V. Palisca, *Baroque Music*, 12.

⁷ Arnold and Fortune, *The Monteverdi Companion*, 106.

From reading ancient writings on music in the original Greek and studying the notation of a few surviving Greek hymns, Girolamo Mei (1519-1594), a Florentine scholar, came to the conclusion in 1570s that the ancient Greeks had been able to achieve powerful effects with their music, consisting of a single melody, solo or accompanied, due to the combination of oratorical and melodic elements in the vocal part. He concluded that these melodies had a powerful effect on the listeners' feelings because they exploited the natural expressiveness of speech, with its changes in pitch, rhythm, and tempo.⁸ Mei's ideas would be consistently applied by very successful singer-composers of the early Baroque such as Giulio Caccini (1545-1618), Emilio de' Cavalieri (c.1550-1629), and Jacopo Peri (1561-1633), who had to create for themselves new repertoire for changing music trends. Only after the new style became popular did men who were primarily composers, such as Sigismondo d'India (c.1582-1629) and Claudio Monteverdi (1567-1643), begin to adopt it.⁹

In the first published collection of monodies, *Le nuove musiche* (1602), Giulio Caccini, claimed that he invented the monodic style, in which simple chordal accompaniment would not interfere with the audience's understanding of the words.¹⁰ However, his monodies lacked drama and retained an essentially melodious character. Jacopo Peri, the true innovator and founder of the new style, was the one to achieve a real breakthrough in impassioned text declamation: he freed the voice from accompaniment

⁸ Palisca, *Baroque Music*, 29.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹⁰ Arnold and Fortune, *The Monteverdi Companion*, 184.

both rhythmically and harmonically, making it “half-way between song and speech,”¹¹ and yet was able to retain musical coherence. The musical style found in his opera *L’Euridice*, especially in the music for Dafne and Orfeo, departs most radically from the melodious and restrained styles of Caccini and Cavalieri.¹² In his writings, Monteverdi never acknowledged the influence of Peri, but his famous laments from *L’Orfeo*, *L’Arianna*, *Il ritorno di Ulisse in patria* and *L’incoronazione di Poppea*, seem to be indebted to the realistic, passionate, and expressive recitatives of Peri’s *L’Euridice*.¹³

Giulio Cesare, in his *Dichiaratione* of 1607, stated that philosophical foundation for the supremacy of the text could be found the third book of Plato’s *Republic*, in which words were considered superior to melody and rhythm, since only they were able to express the disposition of the soul. Thus, the supreme goal of early Baroque, to move the audience, could be best achieved through the emphasis of text.¹⁴ Claudio Monteverdi supplied the name for the new aesthetics, calling it *seconda prattica*, and in the prefaces to his *Fifth Book of Madrigals* (1605) and *Eighth Book of Madrigals* (1638), he reiterated his belief that textual delivery was of primary importance in moving the affections of the audience. However, the monodic style of *seconda prattica* was not, in fact, a complete break with the practices of the past. Despite his statements about the supremacy of the

¹¹ From Peri’s Preface to *L’Euridice*, quoted in Pirrotta and Povoledo, *Music and Theatre from Poliziano to Monteverdi*, 245.

¹² Arnold and Fortune, *The Monteverdi Companion*, 106.

¹³ Further explanation of particular features of the recitative and the paradox of emphasizing words by obscuring them through devices of musical style will be explained in Chapter 4 of this dissertation.

¹⁴ Hanning, “Monteverdi’s Three *Genera*,” 157.

text, Monteverdi arrived at great expressiveness primarily through musical techniques. The emphasis on textual supremacy caused the change from polyphonic to monodic style, but in essence, numerous old musical conventions were also used in the new monodic context. Expressive dissonances, wide leaps, sudden changes of rhythm, as well as strong contrasts of tempo, range and tonality, were used in both polyphonic and monodic music.

Monteverdi, who is today considered to be the most prominent composer of early Baroque opera, used dramatic recitative style in all of his extant operas. From *L'Orfeo* of 1607 to *Poppea* of 1643, this mode of composition took a prominent place in his vocal writing for the stage, and, in his recitative soliloquies, he continuously worked toward achieving more dramatically powerful and condensed expression.

In the 1640s, the speech-oriented style of the early Baroque composers started to lose its prominence in Italian opera. The experimental phase of early Baroque ended with the need to regulate the wealth of existing musical techniques and forms. Between 1640 and 1690, the free and diverse monodic style was gradually replaced by the regulated use of chromaticism, clearly defined meter, strict polarity between recitative and aria, and tonal organization. Stereotyped expressive stylistic devices and strictly defined formal organization and compositional categories took opera away from the experimental freedom of the early part of the century.¹⁵ By the last quarter of the seventeenth century, musical concerns again dominated the compositional process.

¹⁵ Palisca, *Baroque Music*, 6.

Recitative lost its central role in the opera and was now limited to carrying the action, while the aria, now independent of the main action of the drama, claimed the central interest of both composers and the audience. The function of the aria was the same as that of recitative soliloquy: to fill the moments of repose in which the individual character was able to express personal reactions, but the emphasis was turned away from oratorical skills toward vocal virtuosity.¹⁶

Early Italian Romantic Opera

While searching for perfection of purely musical form, Italian opera risked losing some of its dramatic force. The variety and frequent contrast of textual content and musical styles, essential for dramatic expressiveness, were sometimes undermined by the limited role of recitative and predictability of strictly defined forms, such as *da capo* aria and *cavatina*. Such formulaic organization paired with emphasis on vocal virtuosity led some composers of Italian opera after Monteverdi toward the decrease in the dramatic power of their musical settings. The words of Enrico Di San Martino that “[t]he superimposing of form instead of an idea unavoidably produces the decadence of the art in which it is manifested” ring true for a number of stereotypical Italian operas of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.¹⁷ Still, many composers were able to avoid the perils of the standardized overall design and predictable aria forms and achieve great

¹⁶ Ibid., 17.

¹⁷ “Il sopravvento della forma sull’idea produce infallibilmente la decadenza dell’arte in cui si manifesta,” in Enrico Di San Martino, *Saggio critico sopra alcune cause di decadenza nella musica italiana all fine dell secolo XIX* (Rome: Tipografia della pace di Filippo Cuggiani, 1897), 14.

dramatic power in their work. George Frideric Handel (1685-1759) used a wealth of contrasting musical styles to achieve striking dramatic power and expressiveness in his *opere serie* such as *Giulio Cesare in Egitto* (1723-25) and *Alcina* (1735). The composer of Italian and French opera Christoph Willibald Gluck (1714-1787), inspired by the ideas of music critic Johann Adolph Scheibe (1708-1776), also made an attempt to lead opera toward a stronger emphasis on textual and dramatic elements. In his operas *Alceste* (1767) and *Iphigenie en Tauride* (1779), Gluck followed Scheibe's recommendation that the recitative, not only the aria, could be used to express passions and he consistently used through-composed recitatives in order to avoid sharp division between aria and recitative.¹⁸ His reform, though important, did not change permanently the prevailing attitude favoring the supremacy of music conventions, vocal virtuosity, and polarity of recitative and aria.

Another composer who kept the drama in Italian opera alive was Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791). His operas that deal with class conflict and personal drama, such as *Le Nozze di Figaro* (1781) and *Don Giovanni* (1787), make prominent use of through-composed dramatic recitative and offer sharp differentiation of musical styles which serve to illustrate the layers of meaning found in the text, define the situation on the stage, and provide distinctive characterization.

Further interest in the dramatic aspect of opera in Italy, which ultimately led toward renewed interest in self-contained dramatic recitative scenes, came with Romantic

¹⁸ K. Marie Stolba, *The Development of Western Music: A History*, brief second ed. (Dubuque, IA: Brown and Benchmark Publishers, 1995), 305-307.

rejection of musical conventions and formulae and with ideas of deep emotional involvement and daring innovations.¹⁹ Textual concerns gained significance in the second decade of the nineteenth century, when all recitatives in Italian opera became through-composed, ensuring continuous musical flow and reduced polarization between the recitative and the aria.²⁰ Composers started paying particular attention to the unity of vocal and orchestral structure, and assigned great importance to declamation.²¹ With his *opere serie*, Gioacchino Rossini (1792-1868) became the first composer who attempted to restore the forgotten dramatic power of opera. In his recitatives accompanied by the orchestra, Rossini was able to draw powerful emotional portraits, and the ones found in the last act of his *Otello* (1816) were unsurpassed until Verdi.²²

The strongest impetus for Italian opera to reclaim its dramatic and political relevance came from Italian philosophical idealist and political activist Giuseppe Mazzini, who believed that opera had the power to play the most significant role in the political and cultural revival of Italy.²³ In his *Filosofia della musica* of 1835-36, Mazzini made recommendations for the opera of the future and anticipated numerous changes that would be most fully realized in the works of Giuseppe Verdi. Because it successfully combined music, poetry, and drama, opera was a very popular genre in Italy and it had

¹⁹ Tomlison, "Italian Romanticism and Italian Opera," 48.

²⁰ Weaver and Chusid, *The Verdi Companion*, 73.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 76.

²² Tomlison, "Italian Romanticism and Italian Opera," 47-8.

²³ *Ibid.*, 50.

the potential of becoming a powerful vehicle for engaging the nation in political and cultural struggle.

The most relevant of Mazzini's suggestions regarding the extended use of recitative and the departure from the old formulaic style are related to the individual musical portrayal of specific characters. He maintained that different characters should be represented by different types of musical idioms, and that the aria was a less serviceable dramatic vehicle than recitative. Orchestral recitative, capable of powerful emotional expression, was most suitable for deeply engaging the audience and, therefore, it had to assert its supremacy over the aria.²⁴

The changes in Italian opera proposed by Mazzini started being realized in the 1830s when contemporary taste could no longer be satisfied with an opera that depicted a series of abstract emotional states in arias presented by simply polarized characters. The rejection of Classical and early Romantic Italian opera came with the demand for dramatic relevance and realistically defined individual characters that developed along with the action.²⁵ Vincenzo Bellini (1801-1835) attempted to incorporate more dramatic declamation in his *La straniera* (1829), but later reverted back to his melodious style in *Norma* (1831) and *La sonnambula* (1831). The realism, together with Mazzini's new teachings of opera as drama, before *La traviata* (1853) found its representation mostly in the operas of Gaetano Donizetti (1797-1848),²⁶ especially in his comic operas such as

²⁴ Ibid., 51.

²⁵ Weaver and Chusid, *The Verdi Companion*, 88.

²⁶ "L'opera in musica ... non amo affatto, fino alla Traviata, la relta contemporanea. Questo tipo di melodramm si attuo, ... soprattutto nel Donizetti," in Terenzio, *La musica Italiana*, 28-29.

L'elisir d'amore (1832) and *Don Pasquale* (1843). Donizetti avoided long melodic sections, achieved distinctive characterization, used dramatically expressive recitative passages, and successfully connected orchestral writing with drama. His orchestral preludes were thematically linked with the rest of the opera and brought the listener into the emotional world of the upcoming scene.²⁷

Verdi's work shows that he fully absorbed and implemented Mazzini's philosophical invitation for increasing the political and social relevance of Italian opera,²⁸ even though no documentation survives confirming that Verdi studied Mazzini's writings. Starting with the operas of the middle period, *Rigoletto* (1851), *La traviata*, and *Il trovatore* (1853), Verdi began using new, free forms, increased the role of dramatic recitative, and attempted to eliminate separate numbers within acts. He chose topics that had political and social relevance, gave distinctive musical language to every character, used orchestral music in the close tandem with drama, and achieved strong dramatic effects with contrasting musical styles. His attempts to make numerous formal changes and accommodate dramatic requirements were helped by the gradual elimination of virtuoso singing²⁹ and the disappearance of *stretta*³⁰ and the solo cadenza.³¹ In order to respond better to the demands for dramatic continuity, Verdi tried to eliminate separate

²⁷ Tomlison, "Italian Romanticism and Italian Opera," 56-57.

²⁸ Ibid., 58.

²⁹ Weaver and Chusid, *The Verdi Companion*, 232.

³⁰ Ibid., 100.

³¹ Ibid., 99.

musical numbers as early as in *Il trovatore*, and this idea culminated in his later operas *Aida* (1871), *Otello* (1887) and *Falstaff* (1893).

Introduction of new vocal type and character, the dramatic mezzo-soprano, enabled Verdi to move into the realm of a different, yet old vocal style. With Azucena's narrative, he introduced the long, self-contained, and highly dramatic recitative scenes in which vocal and orchestral parts became organically linked, portraying realistically and with dramatic power the emotional states of the characters. Through the scenes of Azucena, Eboli, and Amneris, Verdi's use of dramatic recitative brought Italian opera back to its very beginnings.

Monteverdi was well informed about the work of other composers, his contemporaries, and his predecessors and he often made references to them in his writings.³² Verdi, on the other hand, wanted others to believe that he had no knowledge about other composers' work. When his personal library at St. Agata was made available to the public, it became known that the "uninformed" farmer of Busseto had an impressive collection of music and books. Most of his collection consisted of music by Italian composers, including Palestrina (c. 1525-1594) and Benedetto Marcello (1686-1739) among others. His penchant for the music of his Italian predecessors is further confirmed by the words of his student Emanuele Muzio, who claimed that the maestro demanded that he studiously analyze the works of Padre Martini (1706-1784) and Padre

³² Palisca, *Baroque Music*, 91.

Mattei (1750-1825).³³ In a letter to Giuseppe Piroli of 20 February 1871, Verdi recommended that young composers devote much time to the serious study of all aspects of counterpoint as well as to the sacred and secular compositions of the old masters.³⁴ In an attempt to improve his compositional style, Verdi avidly collected works of fiction as well as books on philosophy and history. His collection included the letters of Cicero and books by Plinius and Plato.³⁵ With these facts in mind, we can conclude that Verdi's choice of musical style was not simply a stroke of inspiration, but also a result of thorough research and preparation. His reversion to the dramatic recitative style could be a result not only of Mazzini's influence, but also of Verdi's familiarity with some works from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

³³ Luigi Magnani, "L'ignoranza musicale di Verdi e la biblioteca di Sant'Agata," in *Atti del III congresso internazionale di studi Verdiani*, 12-17 June 1972, Piccola Scala in Milan (Parma: Istituto di studi verdiani, 1974), 250-251.

³⁴ "...studi lunghissimi e severi su tutti I rami del contrappunto, studi sulle composizioni antiche sacre e profane," *Ibid.*, 256.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 256.

CHAPTER 2

GENERAL SIMILARITIES OF APPROACH AND STYLE IN MONTEVERDI'S AND VERDI'S DRAMATIC RECITATIVE STYLE

Motivation

From the first public performances of opera in Italy, the genre established itself as part of the popular culture, and this resulted in a proliferation of opera composers. In 1637, Venetian opera was democratized by moving from the noble courts to the public houses, and soon thereafter the city supported a total of seven opera theaters. Members of the patrician families regularly rented boxes, but entrance into the gallery and stalls was allowed to any person of any social class who could pay the admission fee.¹ *Il teatro lirico* was a popular, kaleidoscopic, and democratic institution, inviting a wide variety of classes and socioeconomic groups who enjoyed opera because it was integrated into the local culture and performed within the local context. Many of the social values, tastes, and concerns of the times were presented through characters who seemed real to contemporary audiences, who identified with them. In Verdi's time, opera gained such popularity that it was able to exercise major political and cultural influence during the *Risorgimento* (the political movement for the unification of Italy). Operatic audiences

¹ Leopold, *Monteverdi: Music in Transition*, 197.

were able to participate with a sense of immediacy and to express their opinions and feelings spontaneously and freely.

As integral members of a culture that favored vocal music, both Monteverdi and Verdi composed only a small number of independent instrumental works; vocal music and opera were their primary compositional concerns. Both of them understood and respected the overwhelming involvement and powerful judgment of Italian operatic audiences, and they directed their efforts toward uniting the strong Italian literary and cultural ideals of love, faith, and homeland² with a musical style that was unambiguous, passionate, and fully responsive to textual and dramatic concerns.

Focus on Practice

Both of these composers focused their full attention on compositional and performance practice and neglected the theoretical aspect of music. Despite his promise to write a treatise on *seconda prattica*, Monteverdi wrote only two short prefaces to his works of 1605 and 1638. In them he partially addressed several controversial issues such as the difference between *prima* and *seconda prattica*,³ the division of music into three *genera* (*concitato*, *temperato*, and *molle*), and the description of the *concitato* style.⁴ Unfortunately, he never offered any systematic approach to the music theory and performance style of the early seventeenth century.

² For more information about Italian opera and the three ideals, see Enrico di San Martino, *Saggio critico*, 66.

³ Claudio Monteverdi, Preface to *Il quinto libro de madrigali a cinque voci*, in Domenico De' Paoli, ed., *Claudio Monteverdi: Lettere, dediche e prefazioni* (Rome: Edizioni de Santis, 1973), 391-392.

⁴ Claudio Monteverdi, Preface to *Madrigali guerrieri et amorosi, Libro ottavo*, *Ibid.*, 416-420.

Verdi carefully avoided writing any theoretical work that would explain his approach to the compositional process and performing practices. Numerous comments about various aspects of music theory and practice can be found in his correspondence, but only a systematic analysis of his often controversial statements can lead to a better understanding of his theoretical approach.

Emphasis on Emotions, not Reason

Both Monteverdi and Verdi believed that favorable reception of their work would come as a result of their appeal to the emotions of their audiences. With that goal in mind, they maintained that musicians and poets were justified in breaking any rules and using any means⁵ to portray better the mood of a piece. During the Renaissance, scholars agreed that music should appeal to the intellect (*intellecto*), not emotions (*senso*) of the audience.⁶ The composers of the Classical and Romantic eras, until about 1850s, like the late Renaissance composers, cultivated perfection of musical form. By the time of early Baroque and late Romantic eras, the emphasis in Italian opera shifted away from contemplative passages and formal organization toward more prominent dramatic expressiveness and emotional engagement of the listeners. In his letter to Prince Gonzaga of 1624, Monteverdi emphasized that both he and the audiences were primarily interested in the emotional world of human beings: “Ariadne moved us because she was a woman,

⁵ Regarding Monteverdi, see Leopold, *Monteverdi: Music in Transition*, 189. Verdi believed that boredom in the theater is an unforgivable crime, in Weaver and Chusid, *The Verdi Companion*, 147.

⁶ Leopold, *Monteverdi: Music in Transition*, 48.

and similarly Orpheus, because he was a man, not a wind.”⁷ Verdi’s intent to make opera a politically and socially relevant form resulted in a continuous search for probing verbal and musical treatments of human characters and dramatic situations.

The two composers were inspired by the mental and emotional states of their characters, and through an immediate representation of powerful and rapidly shifting mental states, they were able, directly and indirectly, to raise numerous intellectual, political, and moral concerns as well. They constantly searched for effective musical techniques, which could express clearly the intricacy of human emotional world.

Use of Contrast

It has been observed that Verdi owed to Rossini the style of abruptly changing moods and the effect of balance and contrast.⁸ In a broader sense, however, this compositional practice can be traced all the way back to the first Baroque operas, for Monteverdi, too, skillfully used abrupt changes and contrasts as major devices for generating drama and differentiating between characters. Both Monteverdi and Verdi achieved powerful dramatic effects in musical depiction of rapidly changing moods through juxtaposition of styles, tonalities, and vocal and orchestral color. Bridging the gap between old and innovative practices, they used sharp tonal contrasts. In Monteverdi’s music, the modal and hexachordal theory of the sixteenth century existed in parallel with

⁷ Letter to Vincenzo Gonzaga of 9 December 1616, in Stevens, *The Letters of Claudio Monteverdi*, 117.

⁸ Budden, *The Operas Of Verdi*, vol. 2, 40.

the tonal theory.⁹ With Verdi, similarly as with Rossini, conservative tonal language coexisted with unsuspected tonal shifts and dissonant passages, when the dramatic situation required it. Both composers conformed to the organizing principle of contrasting tonalities that had dominated Italian opera since its inception.¹⁰

We find that Emilio de'Cavalieri, in his *Rappresentatione di Anima, et di Corpo* (1600), recommends that keys should be varied often according to the contrasting affects in order to move the audience.¹¹ The analysis of Ottavia's monologue "Disprezzata regina" shows numerous abrupt changes of unrelated major and minor tonalities, such as the one in m. thirty seven where one subsection ends in *mollis* G and the next starts immediately in *durus* C. On a larger scale, Monteverdi insisted on sharp contrasts between larger sections in the opera, providing music numbers in a great variety of forms and styles.

Verdi achieved a similar effect of contrast in the First Act of *Aida* where the brilliantly orchestrated chorus scene ending in an optimistic sounding key of A major is immediately followed by Aida's recitative "Ritorna vincitor," starting with an F dominant-seventh chord in the third inversion, implying the remote and subdued key of B-flat. Tonal contrast is even more striking between the second and the third scenes of

⁹ Leopold, *Monteverdi: Music in Transition*, 13.

¹⁰ Nicolaisen, *Italian Opera in Transition*, 41.

¹¹ Emilio de'Cavalieri, Preface to *Rappresentatione di Anima, et di Corpo*, in MacClintock, *Readings in the History of Music*, 184.

Act Four, where the difference between the juxtaposed keys of A minor and G major is underlined by contrasts in orchestration, *tessitura*, and rhythmic patterns.

The strong impulse with which both composers reacted to the stimulus of scenic effect led them to disregard traditional formal and stylistic requirements and use freely a wide variety of styles for expressive purposes. Verdi explicitly wanted “new, beautiful, varied and bold to the core forms” to inspire him,¹² and Monteverdi continuously developed and modified the musical language in his operas. Strictly measured rhythms and closed forms were contrasted with free, irregular, and flexible ones, achieving clear and deliberate contrast. In *Poppea*, Monteverdi not only successfully combined open and free forms such as choral scenes and recitative soliloquies, but also achieved a fluid combination of *arioso* and recitative, such as the one found in *Poppea*’s music. Verdi combined conservative forms of duets and choruses with free recitative monologues in order to achieve a continuous contrast of discrete styles. In response to the rapid succession of emotional and mental states, the ever-changing musical idiom used for Azucena and Amneris combined the contrasting style of melodious *sostenuto* lines with the high energy of dramatic recitative.

Both Monteverdi and Verdi made great use of color contrast for character portrayal, dramatic gestures, and mood indication. In *L’Orfeo*, Monteverdi juxtaposed a variety of contrasting styles and textures, such as chorus numbers in madrigal style, monodic recitative scenes, and variety of instrumental timbres. When the opera moved to public opera houses, choruses disappeared and opera orchestras became meager due to

¹² Letter to Cesare de Sanctis of 1 January 1853, in Busch, *Verdi’s Aida*, 7.

financial constraints. Different combinations of single strings and a variety of continuo instruments, such as the harpsichord and theorbo,¹³ provided the necessary variety of instrumental color.¹⁴ As early as in 1600, Emilio de'Cavalieri recommended that the composers should select the instruments according to the affects of the performer,¹⁵ and the individual instrumental sound quality conveyed symbolic significance to the audience: trombones and bass members of the viols were associated with infernal scenes; gods and allegorical or noble figures were accompanied by lutes, viols, cornetts, recorders and harpsichords; and pastoral scenes included wind instruments.¹⁶ These associations were still prevalent in the nineteenth century.

Verdi used every possible musical device to effectively emphasize contrast between musical sections. Texture, range, dynamics, meter, instrumentation, *tessitura*, and a variety of balances between voices and instruments served to show contrasting dramatic developments in his operas. Beginning with *Il trovatore*, the orchestra started to play an important part in musical dramaturgy, but even in his earlier operas, such as in Act Two of *Oberto*, Verdi specified that the orchestra must express “the action of a duel.”¹⁷ Again, high strings were symbols of celestial purity, while trombones and low basses were used

¹³ Leopold, *Monteverdi: Music in Transition*, 198.

¹⁴ Donington, *Baroque Music*, 157.

¹⁵ Emilio de'Cavalieri, in MacClintock, *Readings in the History of Music in Performance*, 184.

¹⁶ Arnold and Fortune, *The Monteverdi Companion*, 277.

¹⁷ Budden, *The Operas of Verdi*, vol. 2, 68.

for subterranean scenes. However, instrumental and vocal color was always used with a dramatic purpose in mind.

Interest in Dramatic Expressiveness

Similarly to many of their contemporaries, in the creative work of Monteverdi and Verdi, the idea to which everything else was subordinated was the impact of their music on the audience. However, in their particular case love, power struggles, and jealousy, frequent topics in Italian opera, generated dramatic action where total theatrical effect had supremacy over the vocal and musical effects. They translated their keen dramatic awareness into musical reality through direct, uncomplicated, and self-evident musical representation of emotional states. Both of them worked for a closer integration of musical and verbal expression, and their occasional use of audacious harmonic language, new forms, and heavy vocal demands was a result of their fundamental orientation toward drama in music. To enrich his dramatic musical vocabulary, Monteverdi developed the concept of *concitato genere*, or agitated style, which was supposed to address the lack of appropriate musical representation for rage and agitation. During the 1860s Verdi started using the concept of *parola scenica*, in which one key “theatrical word” was to stand apart from the words around it, serving as a focal point for the attention of both the singer-actors and the audience. The *parola scenica* was used to release tremendous emotional and dramatic energy, making its effect independently of any musical or poetic form.¹⁸ Perfection of form and poetic and compositional conventions meant little to Verdi

¹⁸ Ibid., 47.

who was convinced that poets and composers should have the talent to deviate from, what he called, “good” poetry and music, in order to serve the drama.¹⁹

The two composers’ belief in the supremacy of dramatic effect and their fundamental orientation towards human beings as centers of dramatic action led them to show great interest in singers’ acting and expressive possibilities rather than in their vocal capacities. Monteverdi gave high praises to Italian singer Adriana Basile not for her vocal skills, but for her powerful interpretive abilities.²⁰ Similarly, Verdi says, in his letter to Felice Varesi, the first Macbeth, ” I’ll never stop urging you to study closely the dramatic situation and the words; the music will come by itself. In a word, I would rather you served the poet than the composer.”²¹ Instead of a simple dichotomy of black-and-white characters, they sought to represent complex people who were able to generate drama. Monteverdi’s characters from *Poppea* and Verdi’s characters starting with his middle period keep puzzling the audience with their complexity. They are vulnerable, vindictive, naïve, and vicious, just like any human.

The Libretto

The libretto can exert a major influence on the composition of vocal music. It was one of the most significant sources of inspiration for both Monteverdi and Verdi, and they played an active part in adapting the librettos to suit their needs. For both men, the

¹⁹ Ibid., 47.

²⁰ Monteverdi’s letter of 28 December 1610 to Ferdinando Gonzaga, in Stevens, *The Letters of Claudio Monteverdi*, 77.

²¹ Letter of 7 January 1847, in Weaver and Chusid, *The Verdi Companion*, 184.

external correspondence between the musical and poetic form was less important than the correlation of music with the meaning and emotional content. They sought direct expression of discrete psychological states through an impassioned and uncomplicated verbal and musical idiom. Monteverdi worked closely with Badoaro on his libretto for *Il ritorno di Ulisse in patria* and made numerous changes in Busenello's libretto for *L'incoronazione di Poppea*.²² Verdi played an active part in preparing the librettos for *Il trovatore* and *Aida* and insisted that the librettists provide him with exactly what he wanted.²³ Both composers looked for librettos based upon human dramas with believable characters and situations, ones which would satisfy the penchant of their audiences for intense passions and a density of dramatic situations on stage.

Besides the above-mentioned similarities, there are also significant differences in Monteverdi's and Verdi's approaches to the libretto, due to the different time periods in which they lived. Monteverdi's librettos had strong literary value, whereas the librettos for *Il trovatore* and *Aida* more closely resemble spoken language.²⁴ The librettists of the early operas were poets, learned writers, and intellectuals, all of whom spoke an elevated and polished language and were held in high esteem by their society. They modeled their librettos on classical types of scenes such as narratives, soliloquies, and messenger scenes, found in serious plays.²⁵ Monteverdi, believing that a respectable poet would guarantee

²² Tomlison, *Monteverdi and the End of the Renaissance*, 216.

²³ Nicolaisen, *Italian Opera in Transition*, 21-23.

²⁴ See the analysis of the part of the second act duet between Aida and Amneris below .

²⁵ Margaret Murata, "The Recitative Soliloquy," 45.

a good libretto, collaborated with celebrated poets who provided him with librettos of high poetic value that could stand alone without music.²⁶

However, by the early nineteenth century, librettists had become craftsmen, and the librettos were formulaic, burdened by absurd and artificial situations and full of two-dimensional characters. Verdi, unhappy with the existing practice, believed that a fresh relationship between poetry and music could be found in the simplicity of ancient Greek tragedy, just as the creators of the first operas had done.²⁷ He turned to condensed verbal expression, which often resulted in clumsy and rude language but also provoked intense operatic moments. For him, the libretto became serviceable and was brought to life by the music with which it was associated. Economy of verbal expression was paramount, and Verdi made sure that no useless word was said.²⁸ In accordance with his ultimate concerns for clarity and theatrical moment, he suggested to Ghislanzoni that, when the action demands it, he should abandon rhythm, rhyme, and strophe, and write unrhymed verse to say clearly and distinctly whatever the action requires.²⁹ He concluded that, “Unfortunately, it is sometimes necessary in the theater for poets and composers to have the talent not to write poetry or music.”³⁰

²⁶ Letter to Duke of Mantua from May 1627, in Leopold, *Monteverdi: Music in Transition*, 23.

²⁷ Walker, *The Man Verdi*, 462.

²⁸ Letter to Antonio Ghislanzoni of 30 September 1870, in Busch, *Verdi's Aida*, 171.

²⁹ Letter to Antonio Ghislanzoni of 17 August 1870, *Ibid.*, 138.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 50, emphasis by Verdi.

In the process of condensing the libretto, Verdi developed the concept of *parola scenica*, or theatrical word, and in his own words, its function was to make the situation precise and evident.³¹ *Parola scenica* is the word that always has the most powerful impact on the audience.³² It sculpts the situation or character, produces the best theatrical effect, and gives actors the opportunity to act and capture the audience's attention.³³ *Parola scenica* is not bound by any verse or rhyme scheme, it is most often sung in the high register and is further singled out with a striking and unconventional musical solution.³⁴

The example shown below, from Act Two of *Aida*, indicates the nature of the changes that Verdi requested from his librettists. Instead of four lines of *settenarii* proposed by Ghislanzoni, Verdi suggested three irregular lines (*versi sciolti*), “so as to be able to say clearly and plainly what the action requires.”³⁵ By avoiding the steady poetic rhythm and rhyme, and by using free irregular verses, Verdi focused attention not on rhymed and regularly accented syllables in a pattern, but on the meaning of the words themselves, so the meaning was no longer obscured by the predictability of the pattern.

³¹ Weaver and Chusid, *The Verdi Companion*, 132.

³² Letter to Ghislanzoni of 30 September 1870, in Busch, *Verdi's Aida*, 171.

³³ Letter to Ghislanzoni of 8 October 1870, *Ibid.*, 176.

³⁴ Budden, *The Operas of Verdi*, vol. 2, 47.

³⁵ Letter to Antonio Ghislanzoni of 17 August 1870, in Busch, *Verdi's Aida*, 50.

In the example given below, we can compare Ghislanzoni's somewhat formal, elaborate, and intricate style with Verdi's more colloquial style, which is also direct and concise. Ghislanzoni's version:

“Per Radames d’amore
Aida e mi sei rivale.
-Che? Voi l’amate? – Io l’amo
E figlia son d’un re.”

(“For Radames’s love, Aida and I are rivals. –What? You love him? –I love him and I am the daughter of a king.”)

Verdi's version:

“Tu l’ami? Ma l’amo anch’io, intendi?
La figlia dei Faraoni e tua rivale! –
- Mia rivale? E sia: anch’io son figlia...”

(“You love him? Well, I love him too, understand? The daughter of Pharaohs is your rival! –My rival? Well then: I am also the daughter...”)³⁶

Ghislanzoni	vs.	Verdi:
-Formal way of address, 2 nd person plural (<i>voi</i>)		- Informal way of address, second person singular (<i>tu</i>)
- Long sentences, arching phrases		- Short, condensed sentences with staccato character
- Starts sentence with an object; such a syntactical solution is easier to follow		- Almost always starts with subject followed by a verb, achieving directness and

³⁶ Ibid., 50, my translation.

in written than in aural medium

- Polite disagreement from a distance

- *Settenarii* (meter for arias)

- Descriptive style

economy of colloquial expression

- Abrasive language, with provocative and inflammatory remarks

- *Versi sciolti* (meter for recitatives)

- The style of powerful emotional release

The word singled out as *parola scenica* here is *Figlia* and it is singled out from its context by the fact that it is the highest note that Amneris sings in this scene, and it is accompanied only by silence in the orchestra.

Librettists

Most often in opera, the librettist is the one who tells the story, illustrates the tempo of events, and provides distinct characterization through subtle use of language. Monteverdi and Verdi found Rinuccini, Busenello, Cammarano, and Ghislanzoni to be poets who were able to express human passion and turmoil in compelling and believable ways.

Ottavio Rinuccini

It is due to Ottavio Rinuccini's (1562-1621) invention of a new recitative style that the new musical genre, called opera, came into existence. Rinuccini, a librettist, poet, and courtier who came from a noble Florentine family,³⁷ was deeply influenced by the

³⁷ Barbara Russano Hanning, "Rinuccini, Ottavio," article in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. Stanley Sadie, 16: 46 (London: Macmillan Publishers, 1980).

Petrarchian tradition of simple, intimate and straightforward poetic expression.³⁸ In his first operas, instead of uniform meters and closed rhymes, Rinuccini used an irregular verse form with irregular alternation of freely rhymed seven- and eleven-syllable lines, making the verses follow speech patterns.³⁹ His short plays *La Dafne* (1594), *L'Euridice* (1600), and *L'Arianna* (1607-8) offered vivid portrayals of human suffering and passion.⁴⁰ The eighty-one lines of his rightfully celebrated “Arianna’s lament” express in a simple and most intimate way the struggle of an abandoned woman.

Giovanni Francesco Busenello

Giovanni Francesco Busenello (1598-1659), a poet, lawyer, and librettist from a wealthy and prominent Venetian family, was a member of several Venetian academies, the most important being the *Accademia degli incogniti*, a circle of libertines and skeptics.⁴¹ He was a follower of a new poetic style by G. B. Marino, who turned poetic expression away from the impassioned, inward-looking Petrarchian style to that of drama in which moral, political and philosophical concepts played a prominent role.⁴² Busenello’s poetry was not a language of spontaneous emotional outpouring. It moved away from the personal and confessional character of the early monologues and objectified feelings

³⁸ Tomlison, “Music and the Claims of Text,” 566.

³⁹ Hanning, “Rinuccini, Ottavio,” 46.

⁴⁰ Tomlison, “Music and the Claims of Text,” 571.

⁴¹ Thomas Walker, “Busenello, Giovanni Francesco,” article in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. Stanley Sadie, 3: 501 (London: Macmillan Publishers, 1980).

⁴² Tomlison, *Monteverdi and the End of the Renaissance*, 228.

through metaphors.⁴³ Introspection is absent from Ottavia's monologues, and instead we hear powerful political statements and unconvincing sentimental metaphors. She directs her anger at the gods, not at her philandering husband, she speaks about herself in the third person, and she seems to be more interested in moral and political consequences than love.

Salvatore Cammarano

After the retirement of Felice Romani, Salvatore Cammarano (1801-1852), a librettist, painter, poet, and dramatist, was considered to be the most prestigious of the Italian librettists.⁴⁴ He collaborated with Donizetti on several of his operas (e.g., *Lucia di Lammermoor* 1835, *Roberto Devereux* 1837, and *Poliuto* 1848), and provided librettos for several early operas by Verdi, such as *Alzira* (1845), *La battaglia di Legnano* (1849), and *Luisa Miller* (1849). His most important collaboration with Verdi was on the libretto for *Il trovatore*, which was not finished by the time of his death and was completed by Leone Bardare. His literary taste, like Verdi's, was typical of his time, favoring high passion and colorful romantic dramas.⁴⁵ He earned great respect from Verdi due to his fine sense for theatrical effects.⁴⁶

⁴³ Ibid., p. 257.

⁴⁴ William Weaver, "Cammarano, Salvatore," article in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. Stanley Sadie, 3: 651 (London: Macmillan Publishers, 1980).

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 651.

⁴⁶ Marcello Conati, "Higher Than the Highest, the Music Better Than the Best," trans. by Jonathan Keats, in *Il trovatore*, libretto (London: John Calder, 1983), 7-10.

Antonio Ghislanzoni

Antonio Ghislanzoni (1824-93), a poet, writer, and librettist, famous for his patriotism and independent character, was considered to be one of the best librettists of his time. He was an expert craftsman. When hired, he was able to produce a text suitable for musical setting, which made him an ideal partner for the demanding and overpowering Giuseppe Verdi.⁴⁷ He wrote approximately eighty-five librettos, and is often called the “versifier” and not the “librettist” of *Aida*, since Auguste Mariette provided the story.⁴⁸

Creative Independence and Artistic Integrity

Both of these composers used every opportunity to present their works exactly as they envisioned them. They wanted to take full responsibility for the reception of their works by the audience. Monteverdi conducted his own compositions and oversaw the preparations for most productions of his operas, especially the ones at Gonzaga court.⁴⁹ He did not hide his demand for thorough preparation or his need for full control over every aspect of the production. He was also deeply concerned about adapting every performance to the particular venue, the vocal and acting skills of the singers, the quality of libretto, and the choice and spacing of the orchestra.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Nicolaisen, *Italian Opera in Transition*, 11.

⁴⁸ Weaver and Chusid, *The Verdi Companion*, 128.

⁴⁹ “... io non faccio le mie cose a caso...”, “... I don’t do my things casually,” (my trans.), Stevens, “Claudio Monteverdi: Acoustics, Tempo, Interpretation” in Monterosso, *Performing Practice in Monteverdi’s Music*, 14.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 52.

Verdi's growing interest in staging was a natural outcome of his dramatic orientation and it followed the early nineteenth century aesthetic trend in which the simultaneously combined expressive potential of music, poetry, and visual elements, was considered to have stronger impact on the audience than those elements used independently.⁵¹ His preoccupation with casting, choice of conductor, music preparation, details of décor, and staging, starting in the 1840s, followed similar attempts by Karl Maria von Weber (1786-1826) earlier in the century, and preceded Wagner's concept of *Gesamtkunstwerk*.⁵² Verdi rehearsed, directed, and conducted almost every one of his world premieres—in the case of *Aida* it was the European premiere⁵³--and did everything in his power to make his operas socially and politically relevant, as well as attractive to the audience.

Directness

With an art form as complex as the opera, the audience cannot be expected to understand everything that is sung on the stage. However, if the essential ideas are made plain and evident, as they are in the operas of Monteverdi and Verdi, the audience can easily grasp the leading concepts and participate in the work presented on the stage. Both of these composers used familiar and traditional musical devices in new ways, and they painted unequivocally the timeless human concerns of love, hate, jealousy, fear,

⁵¹ John Michael Cooper, "'And the Effect of the Whole was Indescribably Beautiful:' Music and *tableaux vivants* in Early Nineteenth-century Germany," in Geoffrey C. Orth, *Literary and Musical Notes* (Berne: Peter Lang AG, European Academic Publishers, 1995), 20.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 23.

⁵³ Weaver and Chusid, *The Verdi Companion*, 146.

indignation, joy, grief, fury, cruelty, and faith. Their music provided an immediate reflection of the psychology of each character and rapidly registered the feelings, conflicts, and changes of mood with immediacy and frankness. Uninhibited by tradition, they used their experience, intelligence, imagination, and will to explore the dramatic characteristics of opera as genre.

CHAPTER 3

ABANDONED WOMEN, THE TRADITION OF LAMENT, AND RECITATIVE STYLE

Poetic Tradition

The four female characters that are the subject of this study express themselves within the poetic and musical form of lament, which arises naturally out of their particular situations. While Monteverdi explicitly called his work *lamento*, in the case of Verdi, the excerpts used here, though not entitled the lament, can be considered as such due to their fundamental similarities with the poetic and musical form and the purpose of the lament, as will be described further in this chapter.

The term “lament” refers to musical and poetic genre in which high value is placed on the emotional struggle of a character. Lament depicts a moment of most anguished sorrow and has the character of a confessional.¹ It is the outburst of a person suffering under the pressure of deep emotion and is traditionally inspired by mourning rites or ritual leave-taking. As a poetic form, the lament originated in Greek drama and was further developed in Latin poetry. In Italy, the tradition of lament extends back into the Middle Ages and is part of Italian folk and sacred poetry.² It enjoyed privileged status in the

¹ Murata, “The Recitative Soliloquy,” 73.

² Leopold, *Monteverdi: Music in Transition*, 123.

European literature of the sixteenth century in both lyrical and epic poetry and gained importance in music around the turn of the seventeenth century.³ Musical and poetic laments have in common the length of the poetic text, great range of rapidly shifting emotions, and the personal engagement of the narrator who presents the situation in the first person.⁴

The tradition of lament in both poetry and music is closely connected with the character of an abandoned woman. In his book *Abandoned Women and Poetic Tradition*, Lawrence Lipking offered numerous insights into the great significance and attraction of abandoned women in literature. These women, who are described and judged through the conventions, prejudices, and material conditions of their societies, occur persistently in most of the literatures of the world.⁵ The term “abandon” comes from the Latin *ad*, “to”, and *bandon*, “power of control,” and it originally signified the relinquishment of power to authority. The setting for a lament is always the same: first the woman is physically deserted by a lover or a male figure who gives her social respectability, and then she turns into a social and spiritual outlaw.⁶ Her unique position is a result of social and moral standards: women are not permitted to take significant action or pursue men; passivity is their social and moral obligation. In the poetic tradition, undoubtedly modeled on real-life examples, a woman who decides to take control of her own fate or chooses a man for

³ A. L. Lloyd, “Lament,” article in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. Stanley Sadie, 10: 407 (London: Macmillan Publishers, 1980).

⁴ Leopold, *Monteverdi: Music in Transition*, 123.

⁵ *Ibid.*, xvi.

⁶ *Ibid.*, xvii

herself is punished and is offered only two solutions: to accept the social “justice” and punishment, i.e. waste away and die, or to proceed with action and retaliate with cruel vengeance that often ends in self-destruction. Such a woman represented the undesirable victory of feminine chaos, imperfection and unreason.⁷ The lament comes at the moment when a woman feels forsaken and unrestrained and is experiencing a rapid exchange of conflicting emotions. An outcome in which she would be able to reclaim her previous position within her family and society was not possible if the poet wanted to achieve an effect of total defeat and powerlessness. Consequently, poems about female abandonment often have an air of inevitability:⁸ the woman was familiar with the possible consequences but, in her “weakness,” she chose to follow her heart instead of the social and moral norm. She is free to describe her feelings with honesty and candor and can disregard the social norm of silent suffering since she has nothing to lose.⁹ Poet Matthew Arnold summarized the situation by describing it as that “in which the suffering finds no vent in action: in which a continuous state of mental distress is prolonged, unrelieved by incident, hope or resistance; in which there is everything to be endured, nothing to be done.”¹⁰

It seems that the magnetic attraction of abandoned women is in the fact that they are part of our reality, not just literary tradition. They came into existence when women became vulnerable due to their dependency on men for their social status and for financial,

⁷ Cusick, ““There was not one lady,”” 22.

⁸ Lipking, *Abandoned Women*, xviii

⁹ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 3.

political, and emotional security.¹¹ Most cultures regard abandoned women with discomfort, since they are seen as unstable and common social values do not apply to them. However, the volatile mental and emotional state of these women can generate dramatic action, making them attractive to both poets and composers.¹²

Despite her “scandalous” predicament, an abandoned woman even further increases the level of discomfort because she does not want to be shamed into silence. However, her outspokenness about her most personal matters, further emphasizes her licentious nature prone to uncontrollable passion.¹³ She demands to be heard, not because of her heroic deeds, but because of her suffering. She makes use of unique linguistic devices, which are available to her as a result of her freedom from social constraints: she often speaks in an abrasive fashion, and her great loss inspires verbal expression closer to cries than to intelligible speech.¹⁴

Poetic lament relies mostly on the woman’s feelings and memory, since she has no control over her future. She often points out the insignificance of mere activity of the heroes and requires them to take feelings into account. She curses masculine heroics, which despise a woman’s wisdom and her need for self-expression and strive to reduce her to a passive ornament in a story where the man is the main hero.¹⁵ Her role is to show

¹¹ Ibid., 8.

¹² Ibid., 5.

¹³ Cusick, ““There was not one woman,”” 26.

¹⁴ Lipking, *Abandoned Women*, 25.

¹⁵ Ibid., 4.

the women's side of the epic: the suffering, and the state of continuous mental distress, which remains long after the actions have passed.

The authors and the audience need abandoned women in purely Aristotelian fashion, to purify themselves from pity and fear. These women remind us of our own fears and warn us against rebelling. Witnessing the punishment of the abandoned woman could be the best cure for women who are skeptical toward authority and existing social order. According to Lipking, men need the abandoned women perhaps more than women do, in order to remind themselves of both their power and their weaknesses, and almost every great male poet has written at least one poem in the voice of an abandoned woman.¹⁶

These desolate women can equally inspire and give voice to oppressed people. Monteverdi, an underpaid and humiliated servant, and rebellious Verdi living in the occupied Italy, were not only mesmerized by abandoned women, but they also found it easy to identify with them. They regarded them with respect and eagerly developed new musical idioms for them.

The Lament in Music

Not surprisingly, the personality of an abandoned woman is very appealing to composers predominantly interested in opera, deep passions, and dramatic portrayal of characters and situations. For Monteverdi and Verdi alike, poetry containing gradual emotional intensification, sudden turns, and social and personal conflict was a perfect

¹⁶ Ibid., xx.

vehicle for the display of dramatic craftsmanship. In its musical realization, the lament is most often associated with the early Baroque monody and is commonly known as “recitative soliloquy.” The monodic style focused on depicting human states of high emotional intensity, found its perfect match in the poetic form of the lament with its vivid imagery, internal dialogue in the form of Petrarchian antithesis, tragic conflict between private emotion and public duty, and searing intensity of expression. The music lament was initially conceived as a madrigalistic recitative, but it soon became one of the crucial constituent parts of early Baroque opera.¹⁷ It had the central role in Monteverdi’s operas, and it gained great popularity after the unprecedented success of the lament from his opera *L’Arianna*.¹⁸ While shorter meters and fixed patterns of mixed meters were found in songs, the laments used lines of eleven syllables freely interspersed with the traditional lines of seven syllables.¹⁹ In its earliest form, the lament contained melodies of narrow range, later significantly extended and, with rare exceptions, it was most often performed by women.²⁰

Laments in the form of recitative soliloquy contain some of the most expressive music. Their decline after 1640 cannot be entirely attributed to the rise of the aria, since it was paralleled by a decline of similar scenes in plays.²¹

¹⁷ Pirrotta and Povoledo, *Music and Theatre*, 277.

¹⁸ Leopold, *Monteverdi: Music in Transition*, 128.

¹⁹ Murata, “The Recitative Soliloquy,” 49-50.

²⁰ Compare the range of “Arianna’s Lament” with the one of Ottavia’s “Disprezzata regina.”

²¹ Murata, “The Recitative Soliloquy,” 48.

Recitative Style of the Early Baroque

As already mentioned, lament as a music form is closely connected with the late sixteenth century theory of recitative. Recitative style was based on the ancient models of Greek drama, presumably sung throughout, and was fundamental in creating opera as a genre. It was a music style based on speech inflections and free of regular or dance rhythm. It was built on what was, at that time, the most recent use of triadic harmony, but also on the rules for controlled dissonance defined in the sixteenth century.²² In what has become known as early Baroque monody or *seconda prattica*, polyphonic texture was reduced to a minimal linear texture with only continuo and vocal lines, and the emphasis shifted toward prominent use of dissonance, angular leaps, and text comprehension. This style allowed for maximum flexibility of tempo and departure from the notated rhythm. It also facilitated speech imitation and expressive delivery of the text. The continuo part was entirely subservient to the vocal line, which owed its superiority to the fact that it contained text.²³ Strict melodic structure and virtuosity were substituted for oratorical skills and introspection,²⁴ making the early soliloquies real dramas in music.

In his foreword to *L'Euridice*, Jacopo Peri explained how he achieved speech imitation.²⁵ He analyzed the speech patterns of Italian language and concluded that intelligibility of the text is obtained by prolongation of the syllables that carry the stress.

²² Palisca, *Baroque Music*, 28.

²³ Pirrotta and Povoledo, *Music and Theater*, 246.

²⁴ Tomlison, *Monteverdi and the End of Renaissance*, 218.

²⁵ "Si doveva imitar col canto chi parla," Jacopo Peri, from Preface to *L'Euridice*, quoted in Worthstorne, *Venetian Opera*, 13.

Therefore, tonal structure should support these longer sustained vowels with consonance, while the ones that are passed over quickly do not need to be reflected in the bass movement even if they produce dissonances on accented parts of the measure.²⁶ He also noticed that the frequency of sustained vowels depended on the affection of the speaker: in moments of joy, a speaker intones long syllables more frequently, so the bass line should move more quickly; in fear or sorrow, a speaker intones long syllables less often, so the bass line moves more slowly.²⁷

Monteverdi's recitative style is derived from Peri's, but Monteverdi uses dissonances more deliberately, most often as *appoggiaturas* and anticipations.²⁸ His innovation is in the use of the sequence as a structural device (not found in Peri) and in his frequent use of text repetition.²⁹ He achieved the illusion of speech rhythm through pauses occurring at irregular intervals of time, but he retained music coherence through cadential patterns. In order to free the music from regular rhythmic and harmonic patterns, he used free-rhyming blank verse of seven- and eleven-syllables of *versi sciolti*, thus successfully avoiding acknowledging the poetic line endings in musical structure.

Verdi's Recitative Style

The fortunate marriage of poetic lament to self-contained dramatic declamation scenes reappeared in Italian opera about two hundred years later in the operas of

²⁶ Palisca, *Baroque Music*, 31.

²⁷ Palisca, *Studies in the History of Italian Music*, 457-459.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 39.

²⁹ Arnold and Fortune, *The Monteverdi Companion*, 267.

Giuseppe Verdi. Starting with his middle period and *Il trovatore*, we find again the outlawed, abandoned women, caught up in sizzling passion and described with vivid imagery. Azucena opened up the possibilities for the dramatic depiction of rapidly exchanged conflicting emotions within the context of the recitative scene. Unhappy with the strict formal limitations imposed on the aria, such as the requirement for short rhymed verse and fixed music forms, Verdi “invented” a different musical idiom for Azucena’s narrative. This innovative style, rooted in natural speech patterns, strongly resembled the recitative soliloquies of early Baroque. Again, only the free form of recitative style could cope with the amount and the character of text in an efficient and dramatically effective manner. Both the monodic and late Romantic dramatic recitative scenes derive their musical organization from the text itself, and were never closed in form. Still, they were conceived as separate entities and were musically isolated from their context.³⁰

In Verdi’s operas, we find again abandoned women who do not comply with the norm and refuse to be silent about their cruel predicament, offering superb dramatic possibilities. The similarities between Monteverdi’s Arianna and Ottavia on the one hand and Verdi’s Azucena and Amneris on the other are striking:

- a) they are in deep anguish, suffering in the state of prolonged mental distress and emotional struggle,
- b) their laments have the character of confessional, i.e. the women are oblivious to

³⁰ Ellen Rosand, “Lamento,” article in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. Stanley Sadie, 10: 412 (London: Macmillan Publishers, 1980).

- their environments, as if talking to themselves,
- c) these women are lamenting a great loss of an important male character that is negatively defined by his visual absence,
 - d) they are spiritual outlaws, repudiated by society,
 - e) they suffer because of the conflict between their inner emotional worlds and the social and moral norms of their respective societies,
 - f) they describe their feelings and situations with striking honesty and openness,
 - g) the consequences of their deeds are fatal and their situations are irreversible,
 - h) by their refusal to submit to the law of passivity prescribed for women, they are the main galvanizers of the action,
 - i) they are individuals set against a group that represents political or superhuman power.

Musical Organization

These poetic similarities in the work of both composers unavoidably resulted in similar musical organization with both composers. The following is an overview of some general similarities found in the four scenes chosen here for analysis:

Sectional Character

The sectional character of any dramatic recitative scene based on the lament is inspired by quickly changing moods, and in some cases the poetic convention of alternating unanswerable questions with opposing replies.³¹ Since the text is told by a

³¹ Murata, "The Recitative Soliloquy," 57.

woman who is considered out of control and to whom no social rules apply, any sense of meticulous formal organization has to be abandoned for the sake of dramatically convincing and realistic representation. A quick succession of most disjunct and contrasting music sections expressing different stages of emotional conflict is the only possible music language for the tragic character enduring fruitless rage and deepest despair. Despite the length and disjunct character of dramatic recitative scenes, they gain musical coherence through dramatic, harmonic, and melodic contrasts and cadential patterns.

Predominant Use of Recitative Style

Due to the importance of text and the focus on deeply personal experience, lament is an exclusively vocal form. It was inspired by real life situations and its expressiveness is derived from speech and crying, not from sustained melody or rhythmic patterns. Only a free recitative with occasional short melodious passages can realistically represent these exceptional female characters and their cruel fates, and explore the dramatic potential of the poetic form.

Integration of Vocal and Instrumental Parts

The instrumental accompaniment, if successful, would be fully integrated with the vocal line, supporting it and expressing the emotions implied by the text or situation.

Extremes of Vocal Range

Vocal range mirrors the range of emotions, and it reflects searing rage in the high register and deepest despair in the low register.

The Lament with *Ostinato* Bass Line

The early Baroque recitative soliloquies were published in collections of monodies until 1630 and occurred regularly in operas until about 1650.³² In the 1630s, another form of lament appears, this time constructed over the descending tetrachord *ostinato* motive in the bass.³³ Monteverdi used the chromatic tetrachord for the first time in his *Lamento della Ninfa* in the Fifth Book of Madrigals (1638). Laments over *ostinato* bass soon became an essential part in Venetian operas, replacing the earlier recitative soliloquies. They retained their popularity throughout the seventeenth century. The close association of lament with the descending tetrachord continued until the beginning of the nineteenth century, and we can still find it mentioned in the influential Jerome-Josep de Momigny's treatise *Cours complet d'harmonie*, printed in Paris in 1803-5.³⁴

³² Murata, "Recitative Soliloquy," 45.

³³ Rosand, "Lamento," 412.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 413.

CHAPTER 4

STYLISTIC COMPARISON

The style of dramatic recitative frequently brings with it a thought-provoking paradox: when using recitative as a compositional framework, composers usually maintain that intelligibility of the text is their major concern; however, for expressive purposes, they often choose stylistic musical devices that actually interfere with clear text delivery, such as thick orchestration or enunciation of syllables in the highest vocal register. The most dramatically sensitive composers, including Claudio Monteverdi and Giuseppe Verdi, had been very successful in communicating the content of the text even though the actual words were often obscured in the setting. Musical elements, which work on a non-verbal level, delivering the message to the human senses, have a much more profound and engaging effect on the listeners than do the words, which appeal primarily to the intellect. Both Monteverdi and Verdi, with their superb sense of drama, understood this paradox very well, and they efficiently expressed in music the multiple layers of meaning found in the text. They used stylistic musical devices to convey the meanings and relationships found beneath the surface of the words, and thus made the theatrical experience more complex, emotionally engaging, and intellectually satisfying.

The convention of using similar stylistic devices for similar extra-musical content was encountered in Italian opera generation after generation. This convention enabled audiences throughout the centuries and geographical distances, to understand easily the

complex layers of meaning conveyed through music even if they did not always understand the words. The convention of basing vocal music on speech and breathing patterns found in normal human communication ensured easy recognition and positive response from the audience. Engaged emotionally and intellectually by familiar and compelling musical language, the audiences actively participated in what was happening on the stage, enjoying the power of their pre-existing knowledge and empathizing easily with the protagonists in the opera. The use of traditional stylistic devices in a fresh context brought balance between the familiar and the innovative in an operatic work and ensured an engaging, relevant, and exciting theatrical experience. Monteverdi and Verdi, whose lives were two centuries apart, each composed music, which was, on the surface, very different from that of the other in its nature and formal organization. Beneath the surface, however, the same major organizing principle and the use of similar stylistic devices for expressing similar extra-musical concepts could be found in the music of both men.

This attempt to establish stylistic similarities in Claudio Monteverdi's and Giuseppe Verdi's approaches to dramatic recitative will include two laments by Monteverdi, "Arianna's Lament" from the opera *L'Arianna*¹ and Ottavia's "Disprezzata regina" from the opera *L'incoronazione di Poppea*,² and two scenes by Verdi, Azucena's

¹ *Tutte le opere di Claudio Monteverdi*, ed. Gian Francesco Malipiero, "Lamento di Arianna," in vol. 11: 161-167 (Asolo:1930). This is a collation of manuscript variants with the 1623 Venetian edition.

² Claudio Monteverdi, *L'incoronazione di Poppea*, ed. Allen Curtis (London: Novello, c. 1989). This is a collation of the two manuscripts from Venice and Naples.

narrative “Condotta ell’era in ceppi” from *Il trovatore*³, and “Scena del giudizio” (“Judgement Scene”) from *Aida*.⁴

Despite their superficial differences, the two laments by Monteverdi and the two scenes by Verdi show fundamental similarities in their overall organization and musical treatment of the text. The obvious differences in the styles of the two composers can be attributed to the diverse musical trends dominating the Early Baroque and Romantic opera in Italy. Those differences seem to be of lesser importance for audiences’ understanding of the pieces than the elements that they have in common.

The four chosen scenes have a number of features in common. Four different women, repudiated by their respective societies, are portrayed, each at the moment when she laments in her own way, a great loss. All of the scenes contain a rapid succession of emotions going from despair, through rage and vengefulness, to either horror or resignation. Arianna, Ottavia, and Amneris lament an imminent loss of their lovers, whereas Azucena recounts and relives the loss of her mother and her son from many years ago. These four women have another important element in common: each of them rebelled against the existing patriarchal social order and is being punished for it. Arianna, after forsaking the home of her parents for the love of a foreign man, Teseo, was seduced by him and then abandoned and left to die; Ottavia, a powerful woman of royal descent who was even ready to commit murder in order to save herself, lost her social status and life when she lost her husband Nerone to a seductive and manipulative Poppea; out of

³ Giuseppe Verdi, *Il trovatore*, in full score, in *The Works of Giuseppe Verdi*, Series: I, vol. 18, ed. Philip Gossett (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993).

⁴ Giuseppe Verdi, *Aida*, in full score (New York: Dover Publications, 1989).

jealousy, Amneris brought to justice the man she loved, and was later repudiated by the Priests, the most powerful force in Egyptian society, because she succumbed to “irrational” emotional impulses and forgot her “role and duty.” In *Il trovatore*, the Gypsies are portrayed as outlaws because of their nomadic and matriarchal social organization. The powerful characters of Azucena and her mother do not have “male protectors” in the play and are punished for being self-sufficient and independent.

After choosing strong and provocative female characters to be the generators of dramatic action and the main protagonists in the recitative scenes, Monteverdi and Verdi used a number of similar stylistic musical devices to represent the women’s emotional intensity and their tragic conflict between private emotion and public duty.

The four dramatic scenes analyzed here take central parts in their respective operas and are set apart from the material that surrounds them. They also have in common syllabic setting strongly dependent on speech patterns, emphasis on voice and text intelligibility, sectional character, subservience of the instrumental parts to the vocal line, triadic harmony, homophonic texture, lack of virtuosity, extremes of vocal range, and contrast as a main organizing principle.

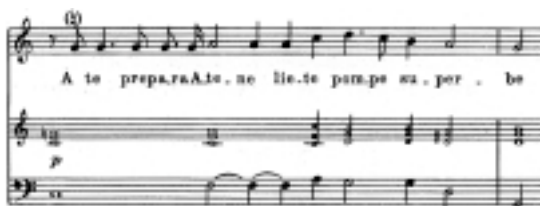
The stylistic similarities in the use of dramatic recitative style in the music of Claudio Monteverdi and Giuseppe Verdi will be established through five important music categories: (1) music form as a result of characterization; (2) sectional character imposed by emotional shifts; (3) cadential patterns and continuity; (4) three basic *genera* and the corresponding devices of musical style; and (5) the use of contrast as a major organizing principle.

Form

Both Monteverdi and Verdi came to the conclusion that strict formal organization had to be abandoned if they wanted to paint a powerful and dramatic portrait of a character to whom no social norm applied, who is experiencing a great loss, is in deepest despair and is, seemingly, out of control. A woman who realizes that her situation is hopeless and irreversible, and who has nothing more to lose, would not express herself in an orderly, formally organized fashion. Consequently, the excerpts used here are in free though closed musical form, and their internal musical organization is derived mostly from the properties of the text. They are fully separated from the surrounding musical material through the combination of rests, contrast, and the finality of perfect cadential movement.

Monteverdi's fluid recitative style in both chosen scenes is fully dependent on natural speech, avoiding almost completely any sense of regularity or music patterns. The only resemblance to a music pattern can be found in the second section of "Arianna's Lament" when Arianna sings about Teseo's happy life at home in *durus* G (ex. 1).

Ex. 1



The implied triple meter and *durus* G mode strongly resemble songs with dance character.

Verdi, however, worked within the framework of an eight-measure periodic setting, which could have brought potentially dangerous regularity and repetitiveness to the recitative scenes. In order to overcome regularity and to achieve an effect of free

form, he used regular periodic patterns with discretion, abandoning them whenever the emotional content and dramatic situation required it. He often shortened or expanded phrases if that would serve dramatic purpose. The deceptive sense of free and irregular formal structure was further achieved by the voice part, which imitated speech patterns. Despite the fact that Verdi's tonal organization followed the strict periodic form, the lack of sustained vocal line brought the necessary sense of irregularity and unpredictability into these two recitative scenes.

Sectional Character

The most prominent feature of laments in the form of recitative soliloquy is their sectional character. Exactly the same could be said about the two dramatic recitative scenes by Verdi analyzed here. The texts themselves, representing women full of contradictions who display a rapid succession of diverse emotional states, are divided into sections that reflect the women's states of mind. These textual properties, in turn, define the musical setting. Each of the four scenes chosen here consists of several discrete sections which bear no resemblance to each other, and most often have no music material in common. The sections, sometimes separated by full cadences are further divided into subsections, which coincide with emotional shifts and always have contrasting musical character. Unity within the section is achieved through repetition of a melodic motive or through tonal organization. Both composers achieve more condensed expression in their later works, where emotional shifts are quicker, and tension and intensity are sustained throughout the whole scene by avoiding cadences or having the cadences overlap with the beginning of the music material in the subsequent sections.

“Arianna’s Lament”

Arianna’s Lament has five distinct sections, each ending in a full melodic cadence with soprano resolving downward by a step, and with bass line leaping from the dominant to the tonic. The musical division into sections and subsections mirrors the emotional shifts in the text (see table 1), and the five sections are uneven with respect to length, melodic range, harmonic structure, meter, and character. The sense of unity in the scene is achieved through repetition of Arianna’s two main musical motives, though not always with the same text, and with the tonal organization around *mollis* D.

Table 1.--Sections and Emotional Content in “Arianna’s Lament” from Monteverdi’s *L’Arianna*

SECTION	MEASURE #	SUBSECTIONS	AFFECTS
Section I	1-20		Desolation
Section II	21-55	Subsection 1, mm. 21-44	Pleading
		Subsection 2, mm. 45-55	His Happiness vs. Her Despair
Section III	56-74	Subsection 1, mm. 56-66	Accusations
		Subsection 2, mm. 57-74	Self-pity
Section IV	75-92	Subsection 1, mm. 75-81	Rage
		Subsection 2, mm. 82-92	Remorse
Section V	93-106		Self-pity

In Section I, which consists of twenty measures, the situation is clearly stated and the main mood of the lament is set. The section is characterized by *cantus mollis* D and it introduces the two main melodic motives of Arianna, which will come back in the subsequent sections, only with different texts. The lament starts with the famous motive

in which the voice moves from the dominant to the lowered submediant of *mollis* D (ex. 2, mm. 1-2). This motive summarizes Arianna’s situation in musical terms. The lowered

Ex. 2

The image shows a musical score for a vocal piece. The top staff is the vocal line, and the bottom two staves are the piano accompaniment. The vocal line begins with the lyrics "Lascia te mi mo-ri-re" and continues with "la scia te mi mo-ri-re". The piano accompaniment features a tempo marking "(Lento)" and dynamics "p" and "pp". The score is divided into two systems, with the first system ending at measure 5 and the second starting at measure 6.

submediant that follows the dominant has a strong tendency to resolve back to the dominant, and it sends a non-verbal message that Arianna is in a hopelessly tragic situation and her attempts to change the flow of events will only lead to failure and bring her back where she started – betrayed and left to die alone on a deserted island. Her second attempt to break out of her predicament, takes her to the tonal “glass ceiling” represented by the upper octave of her D tonality (ex. 2, mm. 4-5). Unfortunately, Arianna does not manage to save herself and break out of the confinements of her tonality i.e., her destiny. Her second motive, in which the voice moves down from the mediant through the supertonic to the lower tonic, is accompanied by perfect melodic cadence and represents her resignation and defeat (ex. 2, mm. 5-6). Subsequently, every return of the voice to the lower tonic at the end of the five sections will represent Arianna’s realization that there is only one thing for her to do – accept her “just” punishment.

Section II consists of thirty-five measures. In the first subsection, Arianna pleads with Teseo to come back. She uses the “resignation” motive to call him back, as if showing him that she could renounce her willfulness and become a passive, obeying, and socially well-adjusted woman if he would only return. The second subsection brings the contrast between Teseo’s brilliant and happy future with his family and his people, reflected in major mode and the implied triple meter, and Arianna’s lonely and painful death, reflected in implied duple meter and the combination of her two main motives (ex. 3).

Ex. 3

The image shows two systems of musical notation for Ex. 3. Each system consists of a vocal line (treble clef) and a piano accompaniment (bass clef). The first system starts at measure 17 and ends at measure 24. The second system starts at measure 25 and ends at measure 32. The lyrics are: "A te prepara. A te ne lie. te pom. pe su. per. a. be. ed i. o. ri. man. - go. el. bo. di. fe. re. in. soli. ta. rie. a. ru. no."

Section III consists of nineteen measures. In the first subsection, Arianna throws at first mild and then increasingly more bitter accusations at Teseo. In the contrasting subsection that follows, Arianna is again hopeless and absorbed in self-pity.

Section IV consists of eighteen measures. In the first subsection, a raging Arianna calls for vengeance, breaking through the ceiling of the upper octave and reaching e” several times (ex. 4). Then she suddenly becomes filled with remorse and the

Ex. 4

The image shows two systems of musical notation for Ex. 4. Each system consists of a vocal line (treble clef) and a piano accompaniment (bass clef). The first system starts at measure 33 and ends at measure 40. The second system starts at measure 41 and ends at measure 48. The lyrics are: "venti. am. me. ge. te. lo. voi. dan. - tr'a. que. l'onda. cor. re. te. or. tu. e. ba. la. na. e. del. le. man. o. ra. in. ca. ze. ste. - p. i. ete. le. vor. ag. i. ni. pro. fon. de. Che. 'par. lo, a. hi. che. va."

continuously descending vocal line, ending in her “resignation” motive, indicates that she understands social rules very well: women are not permitted to rage and ask for vengeance even if they are betrayed and left to die a cruel death. Arianna blames her tongue i.e., her body, for her licentious outburst and uses her “resignation” motive to say that her heart is willing to obey and comply (ex. 5).

Ex. 5



Section V consists of fourteen measures, has no clear subdivisions, and brings the moral of the story. Confused Arianna tries to send a message to the listeners, but her conflicting emotions do not allow her to deliver the moral of her story with coherence. She is in too much pain and fear to be able to grasp intellectually and analyze rationally the hopelessness of her situation. Rinuccini’s poetry and Monteverdi’s music reflect, with short, unconnected and uneven phrases and frequent harmonic changes Arianna’s state of mind as she struggles to subdue her emotions. The final defeat of this naive woman who dared to challenge the social order and make her own independent decisions is once again confirmed through her “resignation” motive, which closes the scene.⁵

⁵ For more detailed analysis of “Arianna’s Lament” see Cusick, ““There was not one lady.””

“Disprezzata regina”

Despite numerous similarities, Ottavia’s soliloquy, written thirty-five years after *L’Arianna*, is in many ways different from Arianna’s. Monteverdi’s refined mastery of composition could be perceived in a more tightly organized formal structure of the scene, resulting in condensed expression. This soliloquy, divided into four sections, has only one repeated motive and the slowing down effect of full cadences is skillfully avoided. Monteverdi combined cadences with quick successions of new emotional states, so that the end of one section and the beginning of the next one are juxtaposed. The intensity is further increased by longer stretches of *concitato* style⁶ resulting in faster pace and expanded vocal range. The same musical motive of Arianna’s “resignation” (mediant-supertonic-lower tonic) accompanied by perfect melodic cadence is used in this aria as well, but this time for Ottavia’s moments of self-pity. Monteverdi weakened the motive by using it only twice and in different keys. We find it first at the end of Section III in *mollis* E and the second time at the end of the soliloquy in *mollis* D (ex. 6a and 6b).

Ex. 6a

musical score for Ex. 6a, showing a vocal line and a basso continuo line. The vocal line has lyrics: "miel, i miel, i miel ma - ti - ri. / paine, what paine, what paine of - fiet. me." The basso continuo line has figured bass notation: "6 4 / 2 7 6 4 6 4 V:II 1".

Ex. 6b

musical score for Ex. 6b, showing a vocal line and a basso continuo line. The vocal line has lyrics: "ter - re - to. / which rack - me." The basso continuo line has figured bass notation: "6 4 / 5 - 1 1".

⁶ Vocal style expressing agitation through fast tempo, small note values, and high *tessitura*.

The unity of the soliloquy is achieved through avoiding perfect cadences in the main tonality of *mollis* D and instead offering perfect cadences in *durus* C at the end of Section II and in *mollis* E at the end of Section III. Again, musical subdivisions mirror the emotional shifts in the text (see table 2).

Table 2.--Sections and Emotional Content in “Disprezzata regina” from Monteverdi’s *L’incoronazione di Poppea*

SECTION	MEASURE #	SUBSECTIONS	AFFECTS
Section I	1-37	Subsection 1, mm. 1-10	Indignation
		Subsection 2, mm. 11-37	Self-pity
Section II	37-47		Cursing
Section III	48-67	Subsection 1, mm. 48-56	Accusations
		Subsection 2, mm. 56-67	Self-pity
Section IV	67-87	Subsection 1, mm. 67-77	Vengefulness
		Subsection 2, mm. 77-87	Remorse; Self-pity

Section I is composed of thirty-seven measures and its two subsections reflect Ottavia’s emotional shift from indignation in the first part to self-pity and a diatribe against men and marriage in the second part. From the very first measure, Monteverdi paints a picture of a powerful woman who expresses herself in wide, “masculine” intervals.⁷ Ottavia starts with a descending interval of a fourth, and then reverses it to an ascending one (ex.7).

⁷ Hanning, “Monteverdi’s Three *Genera*,” 160.

Ex. 7

1 OTTAVIA

Dis-prez-za - ta re - gi - na, re - gi - na, re gi - na, dis-prez-
How des-pis - ed an Em-press! an Em-press! an Em - press now des-

87
4
2

Because she is a powerful woman who will stop at nothing to protect herself, her vocal line is most often in ascending motion, having a threatening edge to it. In the second subsection, Ottavia's power is further emphasized by her freely offered political challenge to the existing patriarchal order. Ottavia is not an obedient or unknowing victim of that order. On the contrary, she understands it and resents it.

Section II is composed of only ten measures, and is solidly built around Ottavia's intensifying curses against Nerone.

Section III has twenty measures, and in its first subsection, Ottavia's accusations of Nerone's philandering are expressed in a dance-like triple meter, as if contrasting the "good time" that Nerone and Poppea have together with Ottavia's sad predicament, which is expressed in balanced duple meter (ex. 8). The mood and the meter change in the second subsection where Ottavia suddenly shifts into an unconvincingly long passage of self-pity. As we saw in the first section of her soliloquy, Ottavia is much too powerful, intelligent, and informed to be a subservient victim of her husband or the social order. Because she can still change the tide of events, Ottavia's moments of self-pity don't have

the deep, desolate power of the truly helpless Arianna. Ottavia never mentions love for her husband, and she is concerned with ethical, not personal issues. She is truly entitled to be angry with a man who had killed her father and his own mother and later forced Ottavia to marry him in order to preserve his political power.

Ex. 8

51

pe - a, di Pop - pe - a, Tu di - mo - ri — fe - li - ce — e go - di, — fe - li - ce e go -
 fas - a, In Pop - fas - a nou de - light - ing, — and smil - ing, — ex - joy - ing, — her charms ex - joy -

56

di, e in - tan - to Il fre - que -
 ing! And mean - while let my tor

Section IV has twenty measures, and its first subsection contains Ottavia's angry outburst at Jupiter and her cry for revenge. She suddenly turns to remorse, in the middle of her anger, fearing that she has offended the gods. Like Arianna, Ottavia blames her tongue and not her heart. However, in Ottavia's case, her heart stays faithful to higher ethical and spiritual principles, not to a man. The lament ends in another passage of Ottavia's self-pity, indicating more her exhaustion than her helplessness.

“Condotta ell’era in ceppi”

When *Il trovatore* premiered in Rome in 1853, Azucena’s narrative was considered to be “highly original and exquisitely crafted.”⁸ Indeed, the scene brought several new elements together. Verdi avoided the usual tripartite division commonly found in the early nineteenth century *cavatina*, and divided the scene into four distinct sections. The sections were of different lengths and had no musical material in common. Three of them could be further divided into subsections. They were organized on the principle of tonal and textural contrast, and they organically grew one out of the other (see table 3). The sections ended on full or half cadences that coincided with the beginnings of the transitional material for the following sections, or they ended in a fully diminished chord, blurring the division and building tonal tension.

Another novelty was that Azucena’s vocal style resembled speech patterns in its phrasing and breathing rhythm, and the smaller sections in the scene were unified, not by a long, unfolding vocal line, but by tonal organization and motivic repetition. The character of the vocal writing and lack of full cadences at the end of the big sections obscured the prevalent regular periodic organization within the sections. The periodic structure was supported by tonal organization and often contained one poetic line of two *settenarii doppii* per period.

Emotional shifts found in the text were the defining factor in the choice and the change of stylistic elements throughout this scene. “Condotta” is somewhat different in

⁸ Quote from a review in *Gazzeta musicale de Milano* 11, no. 5 (30 January 1853), 23, in Gossett, Introduction to *Il trovatore*, xi.

character from the other three scenes analyzed here. Azucena narrates about events that happened a long time before, and her vocal line reflects the narrative character through the use of predominantly *temperato* style.⁹ Her sudden emotional outbursts of love, horror, or hatred, are tempered by narrative passages which, to some extent, reduce the intensity of the scene. Unlike the other three women, for Azucena, it is too late to feel any remorse. In her moment of deepest distress, after witnessing her mother's death on a stake, Azucena had mistakenly killed her own child and, when we find her twenty years later, any remorse is overpowered by her desire for revenge. By now, she is ready for whatever her destiny might bring, and that is why this narrative scene is "colder" and doesn't have the searing intensity of the other three scenes. Whereas the other three women are portrayed at the very moment when the tragedy happened to them, Azucena recounts the events from the past, and has enough power to partially restrain her emotions and narrate the tragic story with relative coherence.

Table 3.--Sections and Emotional Content in "Condotta ell'era in ceppi" from Verdi's *Il trovatore*

SECTION	MEASURE #	SUBSECTION	AFFECTS
Section I Mother	24-55	Subsection 1, mm. 24-41 Two periods of 8 mm.	Narration about the mother taken to the stake
		Subsection 2, mm. 42-48 a bridge of 7 mm.	Bitter hatred
		Subsection 3, mm. 49-55 A period of 7 mm.	Narration about the death of her mother; Filial love
Section II Baby	56-66	Subsection 1, mm. 56-61	Agitation
		Subsection 2, mm. 62-66	Maternal love
Section III	67-103		Narration with emotional

⁹ A style of recitative declamation in which voice stays in the middle range and the line is often delivered on multiple repeated pitches.

Vision			Outbursts
Section IV Baby	103-167	Subsection 1, mm. 108-115	Revenge and murder of her son
		Subsection 2, mm. 116 till the end	Mounting horror

Section I is composed of thirty-two measures, including three eight-measure periods and a seven-measure retransition between the second and the third periods. The three subsections are determined according to the emotional content of the text. The first two periods represent Azucena's attempt at narration. Her voice hovers around a' in a monotone drone while she talks about her mother being taken to the stake. The accompaniment contains pictorial elements with a figure that imitates the flickering of a flame in the lower strings on the downbeat of every measure, followed by a sigh figure in the first violins and oboes on the third beat of every measure (ex. 9).

Ex. 9

The musical score for Ex. 9 is set in 2/4 time with a tempo marking of *Andante mosso* and a metronome marking of $\text{♩} = 120$. The score includes the following parts:

- Ob. (Oboe):** Features a monotone drone on the note A' with a dynamic marking of *[pp] sottovoce*.
- Azu. (Soprano):** Carries the vocal line with the lyrics "Con-dot - ta el - la e-ra in cep - pi al".
- VI. I (Violin I):** Mirrors the oboe's monotone drone with a dynamic marking of *[pp] sottovoce*.
- VI. II (Violin II):** Plays a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes with a dynamic marking of *[pp]*.
- Vi. (Viola):** Plays a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes with a dynamic marking of *[pp]*.
- Vc. # (Violoncello):** Plays a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes with a dynamic marking of *[pp]*.
- Cb. (Contrabasso):** Plays a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes with a dynamic marking of *[pp]*.

At the end of the second subsection, in measure 45, when Azucena talks about the stake, we hear only the motive of flickering fire on the two accented parts of the measure, emphasized by *sforzando* chords in winds and timpani, while the bass line proceeds chromatically down from the tonic in m. 44 to the dominant in m. 47 and back to the tonic in m. 49 (ex. 10). As Azucena resumes her narration in the third subsection, Verdi returns to the combination of the fire and sigh motive, doubling their frequency in the last four measures of the section.

Ex. 10

Musical score for Ex. 10, featuring woodwinds, strings, and an arpeggiator with vocal lyrics. The score is divided into two measures. The instruments and parts are:

- Ob. (Oboe)
- Cl. in D_b (Clarinet in B-flat)
- Fg. (Fagotto/Bassoon)
- Timp. in C₄ (Timpani)
- Arz. (Arpeggiatore) with lyrics: "che fra bestem-mio sce - ne pun-
- VI. I (Violin I)
- VI. II (Violin II)
- Vle. (Viola)
- Vc. (Violoncello)
- Cb. (Contrabbasso)

Dynamic markings include *pp* (pianissimo) and *pp* (pianissimo) in the lower strings.

46

Solo

Ob.

Cl. in Do

Fg.

Cor. in Mi

Cor. in La

Timp. in La

Aco.

- ga - - - da - la col fir - si al ro - go la sac - cia - va ca gli mol - to - ti - ti

Vl. I

Vl. II

Vc.

Cb.

47

1

Ob.

Cl. in Do

Fg.

Cor. in Mi

Cor. in La

Timp. in La

Aco.

sgher-ril Al - lor...

Vl. I

Vl. II

Vc.

Cb.

The voice part moves into the higher *tessitura* toward the end of Section I, indicating that Azucena's memories bring back the emotions connected to the past event. The tonal instability of the second subsection, which represents a retransition to A minor and the third period, indicates Azucena's hatred when she sings the emotionally charged line *Che fra bestemie oscene pungendola coi ferri al rogo la cacciavano gli scellerati sgherri*, "In the midst of blasphemous obscenities atrocious bullies drove her to the stake, while poking her with iron bars" (ex. 10). This phrase is only seven measures long, and Azucena restrains her emotional outburst in order to proceed with the narration. In the final period, starting at the end of m. 4, we find Azucena starting with the same narrative motive hovering around a', but her line breaks away from the tonic and repeatedly goes to the upper dominant, indicating by its tension that Azucena is losing her composure and becoming more emotionally involved.

Section II is composed of eleven measures and it contains two subsections. In the first subsection, through the agitated dialogue, Azucena introduces the Count's baby into the story. After only six measures, the story and the music of the burning stake abruptly break off and, after a long pause, Azucena moves into the key of G major, the key of her maternal love, and is overwhelmed with sympathy for the Count's crying baby. These two subsections are only six and five measures long respectively, as if indicating unfinished thoughts of Azucena's tormented, wondering mind. The second subsection ends on the dominant of the new key area, E minor, and we are suddenly reminded of the main motive from Azucena's first aria, "Stride la vampa."

Section III is constructed as one block of thirty-seven measures, and it contains four regular eight-measure periods. Azucena is remembering the vision of her mother on the stake as she sings in the key of E minor – the key of her filial love - in short, spasmodic, and incoherent outbursts. The vocal line still stays in the narrative range while the accompaniment of the second violins and cellos in *tremolo* underneath the “Stride la vampa” motive in the first violins increases the tension (ex. 11).

Ex. 11

Section IV is sixty-two measures long and its first part consists of one regular eight-measure period in which Azucena recounts how she murdered her own son by mistake. The voice is still in the narrative range in phrases comprised of 1-3 short notes. The suspense is sustained through the staccato accompaniment (ex. 12) with the bass line chromatically moving up from the enharmonic mediant to the dominant of A minor. In the second subsection, as Azucena remembers awakening from her delirious state and finding that she murdered her own son instead of the Count’s, the *tessitura* rises through the sequential movement, from the supertonic to the dominant. The vocal line soon loses

Ex. 12

The musical score for Ex. 12 consists of nine staves. The vocal line (Azu.) is in the center, with lyrics "La ma-so-cci-vul" and "ma-do...". The orchestral accompaniment includes Clarinet in D (Cl. in Do), Bassoon (Fg.), Cor in E (Cor. in Mi), Cor in A (Cor. in La), Violin I (Vi. I), Violin II (Vi. II), Viola (Vc.), and Cello/Double Bass (Vc. e Cb.). The score is marked with dynamics such as *pp* and *pp* *agitissimo* *decisivo*. The vocal line is marked with *Solo* and *pp*. The orchestral accompaniment is marked with *pp* and *pp* *agitissimo* *decisivo*.

its narrative coherence as Azucena repeats the words *mio figlio*, “my son.” As the orchestra plunges chromatically downward toward the lower tonic over the tonic pedal in basses and timpani, Azucena regains her composure, but now, exhausted, finishes her story in the lowest vocal range over the accompaniment of the lower strings (ex. 13).

Ex. 13

Musical score for Ex. 13, measures 246-248. The score includes staves for Flute (Fl.), Oboe (Ob.), Clarinet in D (Cl. in D), Bassoon (Fg.), Cor Anglais (Cor. in La), Trumpet in B-flat (Tr. in Bb), Trombone (Tbn.), Timpani in C (Timp. in C), Anvil (Ara.), Mace (Man.), Violin I (Vl. I), Violin II (Vl. II), Viola (Vla.), and Cello/Double Bass (Vcl. e Cb.). The Flute part has a dynamic marking of *pp*. The Cor Anglais part has a dynamic marking of *pp* and a slur over measures 246-248 with the word *scando* underneath. The Violin I, Violin II, and Viola parts have a dynamic marking of *pp* and the instruction *sempre dim.* (always decrescendo). The Cello/Double Bass part has a dynamic marking of *pp* and the instruction *sempre dim.* (always decrescendo). The Mace part has a dynamic marking of *pp* and the instruction *Quasi or.* (Quasi oratorio).

Musical score for Ex. 13, measures 249-251. The score includes staves for Flute (Fl.), Cor Anglais (Cor. in La), Anvil (Ara.), Mace (Man.), Violin I (Vl. I), Violin II (Vl. II), Viola (Vla.), and Cello/Double Bass (Vcl. e Cb.). The Flute part has a dynamic marking of *pp* and a slur over measures 249-251 with the word *Solo* above it. The Cor Anglais part has a dynamic marking of *pp* and a slur over measures 249-251. The Anvil part has a dynamic marking of *pp* and the instruction *sempre dim.* (always decrescendo). The Mace part has a dynamic marking of *pp* and the instruction *Quasi or.* (Quasi oratorio). The Violin I, Violin II, and Viola parts have a dynamic marking of *pp* and the instruction *sempre dim.* (always decrescendo). The Cello/Double Bass part has a dynamic marking of *pp* and the instruction *sempre dim.* (always decrescendo). The lyrics "sul ca-po ni-e te odo" are written below the Anvil staff.

“Judgment Scene”

There is an eighteen-year time gap between Azucena’s narrative and the “Judgment Scene” from *Aida*. A close comparison of these two scenes shows remarkable changes in Verdi’s understanding of theater and of the dramatic potential of recitative style. The “Judgement Scene” has much tighter organization, avoids narration, boasts conciseness and economy of expression, and uses a wide variety of stylistic musical devices to achieve great expressiveness and contrast. The tempo of the musical and dramatic events never slows down and the tension only increases, building the scene to an unprecedented dramatic climax. The tension is intensified by the imperfect authentic cadences or half-cadences throughout the piece. The scene consists of five large sections each of which can be further subdivided into numerous smaller parts that coincide with the emotional shifts and dramatic content of the text (see table 4).

Table 4.--Sections and Emotional Content in “Judgement Scene” from Verdi’s *Aida*.

SECTION	MEASURE #	SUBSECTION	AFFECTS
Section I Lament	1-34		Desperation; Self-accusations; Desperation; Hatred; Hopelessness and Self-accusations
Section II	35-55	Subsection 1, mm. 35-37	Invocations of the priests
		Subsection 2, mm. 37-55	Desperate pleas of Amneris; Invocation of the priests against desperate pleas of Amneris;
Section III	56-105		Trial of Radames, and desperate cries of Amneris
Section IV	106-130		Verdict; Rage and accusations of Amneris; Repeated verdict
Section V	131-201	Subsection 1, mm. 131-150	Pleading; Accusations; Verdict
		Subsection 2, mm. 151-	Hopeless accusations and

		201	desperate challenge; Repeated verdict; Final curse
--	--	-----	--

Section I consists of thirty-four measures and is conceived as a formal whole with four similar music periods. The section resembles Baroque laments and is constructed over an *ostinato* descending bass figure, which is two measures long. In each of the periods, the figure is first repeated twice in its original form, and in the theme's third appearance, its second half is expanded, producing an uneven periodic structure. The voice moves over the bass line with free and independent recitative material (ex. 14).

Ex. 14

The image shows a musical score for a scene titled "SCENA DEL GIUDIZIO". The tempo is marked "And^{te} mosso" with a 3/4 time signature. The score is divided into two systems. The first system includes parts for Trombone (Tr. II), Amneris (Am.), and Cello/Double Bass (Cb.). The second system includes parts for Trombone (Tr. III), Trombone (Tr. I), Amneris (Am.), and Cello/Double Bass (Cb.). The vocal line for Amneris contains the lyrics: "Ohi, mè!... Ohi, mè!... Ohi, mè!...". The instrumental parts feature a prominent descending bass line (ostinato) in the Cb. parts.

The use of trombones and basses in this section is reminiscent of the use of the same instruments in Baroque and later infernal scenes. The four periods are of similar length, consisting of nine, nine, seven, and eight measures, respectively. The emotional shifts are frequent and abrupt. Amneris is going through a wide range of emotions from deepest despair over losing the man she loves to bitter hatred for the priests who will sentence him to death.

Section II is twenty-one measures long, and its first subsection consist of the priests' chant-like *a capella* invocation in unison. The second subsection grows out of the first one and contains another lamenting passage by Amneris, this time without the *ostinato* bass figure. The section starts with a regular eight-measure period and continues with the exchange of the priests' invocations on tonic and Amneris' lamentations on the dominant of the key of A minor. During this exchange, Verdi employs the full orchestra thus intensifying the priests' invocations and Amneris's desperate pleas (ex. 15a, page 80). Amneris's pleas weaken, but never resolve properly and she ends on the mediant of A minor, carrying the tension through to the subsequent section (ex. 15b, page 80).

Section III is the trial scene consisting of forty-five measures divided into three equal parts. In each part, the priests perform their trial in the style of free chant with stepwise motion of the voice and an indication of modality. Their verdict is followed each time by Amneris's five-measure long pleas for the gods to save Radames. This exchange is repeated three times sequentially, rising each time by a half step.

Section IV is comprised of twenty-five measures. In the first ten measures, the priests are condemning Radames to death, now singing in B major though still predominantly in stepwise motion and with sparse punctuating chords of the orchestra. Their verdict is immediately followed by a three-measure outburst of the full orchestra and eight measures of Amneris's bitter accusations. The section ends with the *ostinato* bass motive now in full orchestra and the priests reaffirming their verdict on the dominant of the following key of A minor (ex. 16, page 81).

Ex. 15a

Musical score for Ex. 15a, featuring a full orchestra and vocal soloists. The score includes parts for Flute (Fl.), Oboe (Ob.), Clarinet in E-flat (Clar. in Eb), Bassoon (Fag.), Trumpet in B-flat (Tr. in Bb), Trombone in E-flat (Tr. in Eb), Timpani (Timp.), Snare Drum (Cm.), Bass Drum (Cb.), and Cymbals (C.). The vocal soloists are Soprano (Sopr.), Alto (Alto), Tenor (Ten.), and Bass (Bass). The lyrics for the vocal soloists are: "Egli che lo sai, voi...". The score is written in a multi-measure rest format, indicating a section of music that is not shown in detail.

Ex. 15b

Musical score for Ex. 15b, featuring a vocal soloist and a reduced orchestra. The score includes parts for Timpani (Timp.), Alto (Alto), Bassoon (Fag.), Violin (V.le), and Cello (Cb.). The lyrics for the vocal soloist are: "Egli che lo sai, voi...". The score is written in a multi-measure rest format, indicating a section of music that is not shown in detail.

Ex. 16

Musical score for Ex. 16, left page. The score includes parts for Clarinet in E-flat (Clar. in Eb), Bassoon (Fag.), Horns in E-flat (in Eb), Trumpets (Tr.), Trombones (Tromb.), Timpani (Timp.), and Gong/Cymbal (G.C.). The vocal parts include Alto (Alto), Bass (Bass), and Soprano (Soprano). The Soprano part has the lyrics "Sar dal sotterraneo)". The woodwind and string parts are marked with dynamics such as *p* and *pp*.

Musical score for Ex. 16, right page. The score includes parts for Clarinet in E-flat (Clar. in Eb), Bassoon (Fag.), Horns in E-flat (in Eb), Trumpets (Tr.), Trombones (Tromb.), Timpani (Timp.), and Gong/Cymbal (G.C.). The vocal parts include Alto (Alto), Bass (Bass), and Soprano (Soprano). The Soprano part has the lyrics "Lo stes". The woodwind and string parts are marked with dynamics such as *ff* and *pp*.

Section V is seventy-one measures long. In the first part, Amneris threatens the priests with the gods' revenge, but to no avail. The volatile state of her mind is illustrated with frequent shifts of mode. She starts by pleading in A minor, but after two measures her rage gets the best of her and she shifts into A major for the remaining six measures of the phrase (ex. 17). The second subsection starts with a regular period in which Amneris

Ex. 17

The image displays two pages of a musical score. The left page is titled "Le st. — movimento" and features a vocal line for Amneris (Amn.) and an orchestral arrangement. The Amneris part includes the lyrics: "Diteci - se compite in de - ta - let ti - gri infami di sangue man -". The orchestral parts include Flutes (Fl.), Clarinets (Clar.), Bassoons (Fag.), Oboes (Ob.), Cor Anglais (Coro), Trumpets (Tr.), Trombones (Tbn.), Timpani (Timp.), Snare Drum (Cim.), and Cymbals (Cim.). The right page is titled "Foco mosso 4/4" and continues the vocal and orchestral parts. The Amneris part includes the lyrics: "In la - re - si - stenza! Puniti, dei - ta -". The orchestral parts include Flutes (Fl.), Clarinets (Clar.), Bassoons (Fag.), Oboes (Ob.), Cor Anglais (Coro), Trumpets (Tr.), Trombones (Tbn.), Timpani (Timp.), Snare Drum (Cim.), and Cymbals (Cim.).

sings the only *cantabile* phrase in the entire scene, first accusing the priests in A major and then pleading in A minor. Completely losing control, she makes her final desperate attempt to convince the priests of Radames's innocence, staying in the high and agitated vocal range, but the priests reaffirm that their verdict is final by singing it on the tonic, over a stable eight-measure *tremolo* motive in the orchestra. Finally Amneris throws her deadly curse at the priests in another extended period. The scene closes with the full orchestra playing a repeated motive in a spasmodic, punctuated, and heavy style, ending the scene abruptly with a sense of sudden heavy collapse (ex. 18).

Ex. 18

The image displays a musical score for an orchestral and vocal passage, labeled 'Ex. 18'. The score is arranged in two systems. The upper system contains the vocal parts and the upper woodwinds. The lower system contains the strings and lower woodwinds. The vocal parts include Soprano (S.), Alto (Al.), Tenor (T.), and Bass (B.). The orchestral parts include Flute (Fl.), Clarinet (Clar.), Bassoon (Fag.), Oboe (Ob.), Bassoon (Fag.), Trumpet (Tr.), Trombone (Tromb.), Percussion (Perc.), and Timpani (Timpani). The score features complex rhythmic patterns, including a prominent tremolo motive in the orchestra, and dynamic markings such as 'f' and 'ff'. The notation includes various musical symbols like notes, rests, and articulation marks.

Avoiding the Fragmentation: Cadential Patterns Between the Sections

The sectional organization of these four scenes has the potential of causing fragmentation and lack of unity between the sections. Since the sections generally do not have melodic material in common, Monteverdi and Verdi used overall tonal organization and minimized breaks between the sections to retain the tension and keep the sections interconnected. They were very successful at avoiding fragmentation in their later works, striving for smoother transitions and more unified structures. In “Arianna’s Lament,” Monteverdi marked very clearly the separations between the five sections by ending each of them with full melodic cadence in *mollis* D and allowing for a long repose between them. Unity is successfully achieved through frequently repeating Arianna’s two motives and returning to the same tonal center at the end of each section. Example 19a illustrates the cadential patterns found in “Arianna’s Lament.” In “Disprezzata regina,” Monteverdi weakened the cadence at the end of the first section by rendering the soprano silent while the bass leapt from the dominant to the tonic (ex. 19b). The perfect cadence after Section II ended in a very high vocal register, indicating continuation, not repose (ex. 19c). The full melodic cadence at the end of the third section is weakened by being in the “wrong” key and by the immediately continuing melodic material of contrasting character (ex. 19d). The whole soliloquy is fast-paced and only comes to a real repose at the very end.

Ex. 19a - Arianna

Ex. 19b - Ottavia

Ex. 19c- Ottavia

Ex. 19d - Ottavia

Verdi successfully avoided fragmentation by using final cadences at the end of the large sections as departure points for the transitional material. One example is the imperfect authentic cadence in A minor at the end of Section I of “Condotta ell’era in ceppi,” which is elided with the beginning of the transitional material of Section II (ex. 20a). Even more successful elision is found between Sections II and III, where the key of E minor is already implied in the last measure of Section II. This section ends on the half-cadence in m. 67, leading into the new key area of Section III, E minor (ex. 20b). The division between the third and the fourth sections is obscured through a fully diminished seventh chord that is sustained through the transition and the beginning six measures of Section IV. The listener becomes aware of the new section only after the texture changes

in m. 107 (ex. 20c).

Ex. 20a

Musical score for Ex. 20a, showing a full orchestral arrangement from measure 107 to 110. The score includes parts for Flute, Oboe, Clarinet in Bb, Bassoon, Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Cello/Double Bass. The music features a melodic line in the strings and woodwinds, with some woodwind parts having slurs and accents.

Ex. 20b

Musical score for Ex. 20b, showing a full orchestral arrangement from measure 107 to 110. The score includes parts for Flute, Oboe, Clarinet in Bb, Bassoon, Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Cello/Double Bass. The music features a melodic line in the strings and woodwinds, with some woodwind parts having slurs and accents. The score includes performance instructions: "Fino più mosso Allegretto J = 10" and "Fino più mosso Allegretto J = 10". There are also dynamic markings like "pp" and "ppp".

Ex. 20c

Musical score for Ex. 20c, left page. The score includes parts for Flute (Fl.), Oboe (Ob.), Clarinet in D (Cl. in Do), Bassoon (Fg.), Cor Anglais (Cor. in Mi), Cor Anglais (Cor. in La), Trumpet in B-flat (Tr. in Bb), Trombone (Tbn.), Cymbal (Cymb.), Tom-tom in C (Timp. in C), and various string parts (Violin I, Violin II, Viola, Violoncello, and Double Bass). The woodwinds and strings are playing a melodic line with dynamics such as *dim.* and *pp*. The brass parts are mostly sustained notes.

Musical score for Ex. 20c, right page. This page features vocal lines and woodwinds. The vocal parts include Clarinet in D (Cl. in Do), Bassoon (Fg.), Cor Anglais (Cor. in Mi), Cor Anglais (Cor. in La), and Alto Saxophone (Sax.). The vocal lines are marked with *Solo* and *pp*. The Alto Saxophone part includes the instruction *pp agitato* and the lyrics "La ma-no con-vel". The woodwind parts continue the melodic line from the left page. The string parts (Violin I, Violin II, Viola, Violoncello, and Double Bass) are also present, playing a rhythmic accompaniment.

Ex. 21c

Fl.
Ott.
Ob.
Clar. in La
Fag.
in Mi
Cor. in La
Tr. be in Do
Tr. ni
Cimb.
Timp.
4 Tr. be in Do
4 Tr. ni
G. C.
Amm.
Perc.
SAC
Ra da.
Ra da.
Ra da.
Viol.
V. le
Ve.
Cb.

106

N Poco ritenuto a 2

Fl.
Ott.
Ob.
Clar. in La
Fag.
in Mi
Cor. in La
Tr. be in Do
Tr. ni
Cimb.
Timp.
G. C.
4 Tr. be in Do (dal sottorano)
4 Tr. ni in Do (dal sottorano)
G. C. (dal sottorano)
Perc.
SAC
Ra da.
-més- e deciso il tuo fa.
-més- e deciso il tuo fa.
-més- e deciso il tuo fa.
Viol.
V. le
Ve.
Cb.

N Poco ritenuto

Ex. 21d

129 **0** Lo stesso

In Es
Clar.
In Es
Fag.
In Mi
Corei
In La
1^a Oboe
2^a Oboe
Climb.
Timp.
Ann.
Basso Continuo
Viol.
V-le
Ve.
Ch.

Quasi sempre molto accorato
Sanctus

.tori traditor! tradi . tor!
.tori traditor! tradi . tor!
.tori traditor! tradi . tor!

0 Lo stesso **0**

Three *Genera* and Corresponding Devices of Musical Style

In these recitative scenes, both Monteverdi and Verdi seemed to follow the traditional trifold division of *genera* or styles. This division had been known since

antiquity and its use was widely spread during the Renaissance.¹⁰ Monteverdi acknowledged the existence of the two old styles, *molle*, which corresponded to the basic affections of humility or supplication, and *temperato*, which corresponded to the affection of moderation. He claimed to have invented the *concitato* style, which corresponded to the affection of rage. Monteverdi further related the affections to the vocal registers: the high register should be used for *concitato* style to express anger, the middle register for *temperato* style to express moderation, and the low register for *molle* style to express supplication and pain.¹¹ Similar correspondences between affections and vocal registers could be found in the writings of Galilei and Zarlino. Galilei maintained that the high register should be used for excited and querulous speech, intermediate for a tranquil speech, and low for a lament or a somnolent speech.¹² This correspondence between affections and vocal registers seems to be derived from the nature of the human voice and from the speech patterns idiomatic to particular emotional states.

Monteverdi and Verdi observed this established tradition, and both of them used similar musical elements to represent the same emotions found in the text. Such elements included melodic range, rhythmic patterns, intervallic quality, tonality, and character of orchestral accompaniment. The use of similar musical elements to express the same emotional content in different stylistic periods created tradition in Italian opera. The

¹⁰ Hanning, "Monteverdi's Three *Genera*," 153.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 149.

¹² Palisca, *Studies in the History of Italian Music*, 465.

Traditional use of the stylistic devices accounts for the fundamental similarities of the styles of such temporally distant composers as Monteverdi and Verdi. Audiences exposed to the repeated connection between certain stylistic musical devices and extra-musical concepts learned to understand the meaning conveyed by the music, not the text, and were able to offer predictable emotional responses. Thus, paradoxically, the audience derived the meaning of an opera scene through devices of musical style, not the text, and focused not on what was sung but how it was sung. It seems that music, even though an abstract art, through a repeated connection between devices of musical style and extra-musical concepts carries the meaning of the text with more power and coherence than do the words themselves.

Analyzing the basic tripartite division of the styles, we can conclude that each of them has its own set of elements, which were used by both Monteverdi and Verdi in a similar manner.

Molle is a style used for lamentation and expression of pain, sadness, remorse, and resignation. Stylistic devices used by both composers to express these emotions are:

- low limited range of voice (and orchestra, in Verdi);
- descending stepwise melodic motion, with small leaps most often of minor third (minor third was characterized as sad, melancholy, and effeminate by Doni, Zarlino, and Galilei, while motion by step made the melody soft and sweet, expressing submissive and feminine disposition);¹³
- slow tempo with longer note values in which even the short notes seemed

¹³ Hanning, "Monteverdi's Three *Genera*," 160.

longer;

- stable tonality; and

- slow bass movement.

The examples of *molle* style, taken from each of the scenes, show that both composers used almost identical stylistic devices to express grief, sadness and resignation.

Ex. 22a - Arianna



Musical score for Ex. 22a - Arianna. The score is in 3/4 time and consists of three staves: vocal line, piano accompaniment, and bass line. The vocal line begins with a fermata and the lyrics "te fi - des. si e ti diu glo - ria e vi - ta?". The piano accompaniment features a steady eighth-note pattern in the right hand and a slower bass line in the left hand. The bass line starts with a half note and moves slowly.

Ex. 22b - Ottavia



Musical score for Ex. 22b - Ottavia. The score is in 3/4 time and consists of three staves: vocal line, piano accompaniment, and bass line. The vocal line begins with a fermata and the lyrics "lis - sa in te - si - tu - ra - ge - nie il mi - o tor - mento - to. / soul - seat, in at - tent pain and anguish the tor - ment which rack - me." The piano accompaniment features a steady eighth-note pattern in the right hand and a slower bass line in the left hand. The bass line starts with a half note and moves slowly. The score includes a *ritardando* marking at the end.

Ex. 22c – Azucena

140 a poco ancora allarg. e marcato

Cor. in La

Allarg. a poco a poco marcato

Am. - mi - si an - cor, de - tar - si an - cor, de - tar - si an - cor

Viol. I

Viol. II

Viola

Vcllo e Cb.

ancora allarg. e crescendo

Detailed description: This is a page of a musical score for 'Azucena'. It features a vocal line (Am.) with lyrics and an orchestral accompaniment. The vocal line is marked 'Allarg. a poco a poco marcato' and includes the lyrics '- mi - si an - cor, de - tar - si an - cor, de - tar - si an - cor'. The orchestral parts include Flute (Fl.), Cor Anglais (Cor. in La), Violin I (Viol. I), Violin II (Viol. II), Viola, Violoncello and Double Bass (Vcllo e Cb.), and Bassoon (Bass.). The score is marked with '140 a poco ancora allarg. e marcato' at the top and 'ancora allarg. e crescendo' at the bottom.

Ex. 22d - Amneris

14

Flg.

Cor. II in Mi

Cimb.

Timp.

Am.

-pre - sa-tro-se gu - le - si-a, che la sua morte e il lutto a - terso del mio cor

Viol.

V. le

Ve.

Cb.

Detailed description: This is a page of a musical score for 'Amneris'. It features a vocal line (Am.) with lyrics and an orchestral accompaniment. The vocal line is marked with the lyrics '-pre - sa-tro-se gu - le - si-a, che la sua morte e il lutto a - terso del mio cor'. The orchestral parts include Flute (Flg.), Cor Anglais II (Cor. II in Mi), Cymbal (Cimb.), Timpani (Timp.), Violin (Viol.), Viola (V. le), Violoncello (Ve.), and Double Bass (Cb.). The score is marked with '14' at the top left.

Tempurato is a style used for moderation and tranquil speech. Stylistic devices used by both composers to express these emotions are:

- middle and limited range;
- attempt at speech-like quality through numerous repeated pitches and long passages containing the same note values;
- medium flexible tempo;
- stepwise motion;
- slow or non existent bass line;
- neutral accompaniment; and
- stable tonality.

In each of the examples of *temperato* style from the four scenes, the voice is in the medium range moving stepwise, with numerous repeated notes, tempo is medium and flexible, and bass line and harmonic rhythm are slow in order not to interfere with narration. Amneris does not have *temperato* lines; they are assigned to the priests.

Ex. 24a - Arianna

The image shows a musical score for a vocal line and piano accompaniment. The vocal line is in the treble clef, and the piano accompaniment is in the bass clef. The music is in 2/4 time and features a steady, stepwise melodic line in the voice, with lyrics underneath. The piano accompaniment consists of simple chords and a slow-moving bass line. The score is numbered 103 at the beginning.

103
- tu - na, Mi - ra - te di che duolm'ha fatto here - de l'a - mor mi - o,

Ex. 24b - Ottavia

28

Al non-ter-mpio ti - cum for-mam le mem-bra, Al - lat - tia - ma - jil - ar - no - fi - se ora -
 me da form for sur - seles sur - seuge and ty - rand. We give rock to the sur - d'er and the

Vc. II

Ex. 24c - Azucena

72

ppp

Al - ti - gi spi - ti co - me in an - no - gna ap - par - ve la vi - sion fe - ra - le

sordovox

VI. I

VI. II

Vc. e Cb.

Ex. 24d - Priests

80

senza misura

a tempo

Tu sive, lasti della patria, segra. li al. lestrazio. re..... Di. ocul. patii

DI.

DI.

senza misura

a tempo

Bass.

BASSO in C

Cb.

Concitato is the most prominent style in the scenes with dramatic recitative. It is a style used for the expression of rage and agitation. Stylistic devices used by both composers to express these emotions are:

- ascending phrases and big leaps (according to Doni, major third is appropriate to express agitation, energy, and virility, and moving by leaps or remote intervals gives a song virility.)¹⁴
- quick tempo;
- small note values;
- high *tessitura*;
- often thicker orchestration, in Verdi;
- exclamations;
- tonal instability and gradual intensification through ascending sequence; and
- quick bass movement.

Ex. 25a - Arianna

The image shows a musical score for Arianna, Ex. 25a. It consists of three systems of music. The first system is a vocal line in treble clef with lyrics: ". de m'adora' il eri - ne? Questi gli scelti so - no, questa le gemme e". The second system is a piano accompaniment with chords and moving lines. The third system is a bass line with chords and moving lines.

¹⁴ Ibid., 160.

Ex. 25d - Amneris

The musical score is arranged in a standard orchestral format with the following parts from top to bottom:

- Fl.** (Flute)
- Oob.** (Oboe)
- Ob.** (Clarinet)
- In La Clar.** (Clarinet in La)
- In La Clar.** (Clarinet in La)
- Fag.** (Bassoon)
- In Mi Corni** (Horn in E-flat)
- In La** (Horn in F)
- In Do Tr-ba** (Trumpet in D)
- In Do** (Trumpet in D)
- Tromb.** (Trombone)
- Clar.** (Clarinet)
- Corn.** (Horn)
- Timp.** (Timpani)
- B. C. e P.** (Bass Drum and Cymbals)
- Ann.** (Announcer) with lyrics: *... dal anziano se voi! la vendetta del ciel, del ciel... eccu. da .*
- Viol.** (Violin)
- V. cl.** (Viola)
- Vi.** (Violoncello)
- Cb.** (Double Bass)

The score includes various musical notations such as dynamics (e.g., *ff*), articulation marks, and phrasing slurs. The vocal line for the Announcer is written in a separate staff with Italian lyrics.

CHAPTER 5

SINGING-ACTING AND RECITATIVE STYLE

Since the inception of Italian opera, singer-actors have been the center of attention. As a result, composers have been very sensitive to the quality of vocal performers and have done their utmost to have full control in the choice of singers.¹ Both Monteverdi and Verdi knew very well that inadequate casting could ruin the premiere and, in Verdi's case, the future life of an opera. They wanted to know in advance what singers were available, what their vocal abilities were and, most importantly, if they could act. Due to the strong emphasis put on expressive recitative, Monteverdi and Verdi were greatly concerned with the ability of a singer to immerse him- or herself in the text and to enunciate the text clearly and with true understanding.

The importance of singing-acting cannot be overemphasized in performances of the recitative style. By its nature, this style brings out and puts to the test numerous skills of a singer-actor. Because it is ruled primarily by the organization and properties of the text, and less by the principles of musical organization, this style achieves its expressiveness predominantly through the vocal part. The orchestral accompaniment only serves to underline further vocal expressiveness. In recitative style, the singer-actor has to be able to respond to heavy vocal and emotional demands, and to display an excellent

¹ Weaver and Chusid, *The Verdi Companion*, 81.

command of oratorical and acting skills. A successful delivery of a dramatic recitative scene requires from the singer-actor to focus, above all, on natural inflections of the language, as well as to approximate the speech patterns found in a particular emotional state, and to convey them unambiguously with full mental and emotional commitment. Any intellectual speculation on the part of a singer-actor would bring detachment into the performance, thus defeating the composer's main purpose: to engage the audience emotionally.

Vocal Requirements

The aesthetics that favored expressiveness over vocal virtuosity reached a peak in early Baroque with the recitative soliloquies of Monteverdi, and in Italian Romantic opera with the dramatic recitative scenes of Verdi. Since Monteverdi's and Verdi's compositional styles were a result of their responses to the text, both composers continuously emphasized not vocal properties and virtuosity, but clarity of text delivery and expressiveness. Because the vocal requirements in Italian dramatic recitative style are inextricably connected with the meaningful and expressive text delivery, singer-actors, when approaching a work in this style, should analyze textual properties first. The process of preparation has to start with thorough analysis and numerous readings of the text in order to achieve a natural flow of language. Only after a singer-actor has become fully comfortable with the text can she proceed with musical preparation.

Monteverdi personally trained singers,² and his vocal demands, however heavy, were never unreasonable. Like his contemporaries, he believed that text had supremacy over musical and rhythmical elements in music, and his operatic oeuvre was a testament to the refinement of his musical skills with a view to achieving more powerful textual interpretations. As a result, his vocal writing was syllabic and allowed great flexibility of delivery.

His emphasis on dramatic power in the theater gradually brought more demanding vocal requirements. In comparing “Arianna’s Lament” with Ottavia’s soliloquies, it is clear that the increasingly strenuous vocal requirements, including demands for an extended range both upward and downward, enunciation of words in the highest register, and extremes of dynamics, came as a result of his quest for an intense and condensed theatrical experience. In comparison with the structure of “Arianna’s Lament,” Ottavia’s laments are shorter and more concise and direct in their verbal and musical messages.

Numerous writings by seventeenth century authors confirm that the vocal requirements of the early seventeenth century were in some respects similar to those in later eras. From Monteverdi’s letter to Vincenzo Gonzaga of 9 June 1610, in which he recommended a certain contralto, we learn about his priorities in vocal issues. He was in favor of good *trillo* and ornamentation, high volume achieved without strain, and he also emphasized clarity of diction and dynamic range.³

² Arnold and Fortune, *The New Monteverdi Companion*, 59.

³ “[...] fine voice, powerful and far-reaching; and when he sings on the stage he will make himself heard in every corner very easily and without strain; has very good *trillo* and decent ornamentation, but swallows his vowel a little, and sometimes sends it through the nose, or through the teeth so it makes the word unintelligible, doesn’t soften at certain places...,” *Ibid.*, 26.

Several other writers of the early seventeenth century emphasized above all pronunciation and expressiveness, but also dynamics, range, and beauty of the sound as very important factors in assessing the performance of a singer-actor. Thomas Coryat (1577-1617) praised an Italian singer: "... she pronounces and expresses perfectly well the sense of the words. ... her voice has a wide range, is true, sonorous, harmonious; she softens it and makes it louder without any grimaces"⁴ Emilio de' Cavalieri, another composer of recitative soliloquies, in the preface to his opera *Rappresentazione di Anima, et di Corpo*, also expressed that the main goal of any singer should be to project clearly the words into the audience.⁵

Verdi moved quickly away from the melodious *bel canto* tradition of the early nineteenth century and, from the 1850s onward, included scenes in dramatic recitative style as major dramatic vehicles. Like Monteverdi, he placed great emphasis on textual understanding and delivery. In his letter to Giulio Ricordi of 6 December 1871, Verdi recommended that German mezzo-soprano Maria Waldmann, the first Amneris, should devote her full attention to the words and practice their pronunciation without singing first.⁶ He worried that the audience would not be able to understand her, and that Waldmann's pronunciation would suffer because German, not Italian, was her native language.⁷

⁴ Thomas Coryat, *Coryat's Crudities* (London: 1611), in MacClintock, *Reading in the History of Music*, 144-126

⁵ Cavalieri, *Rappresentazione di anima, et di corpo*, Ibid., 183.

⁶ Busch, *Verdi's Aida*, 260.

⁷ Letter to G. Ricordi of 29 November 1871, Ibid., 258.

Verdi also put increasingly strenuous demands on singers in his later works, but those demands would not pose a threat to the vocal health of a mature singer. A comparison between Acuzena's narrative "Condotta ell' era in ceppi" and Amneris's "Judgment Scene" shows that the *tessitura* is much higher in the "Judgment Scene." Whereas Azucena's highest register is reserved mostly for exclamations, Amneris has to articulate numerous syllables at the top of her vocal range. Such heavy demands are not only theatrically justified because they would prolong and intensify the dramatic power of the work, but they also enable a singer-actor to explore fully her vocal and dramatic potential. Verdi himself clearly understood the exceptional complexity of live performances, and was aware of the high expectations that both he and the audience had from singer-actors. In a letter to a fellow senator Giuseppe Piroli Verdi writes, "The singer is left to himself, preoccupied with the action, the movements, the voice; in addition, those three or four thousand eyes fixed on him. Therefore, the expert and practiced conductor must concern himself first of all with vocal ensemble"⁸

Nothing illustrates Verdi's ideas about singing better than his comment about several German singers that he met in 1875, "... hence their singing is not the *poetic expression of their souls*, but the physical conflict of their bodies."⁹ He knew that a solid vocal technique was essential for expressive singing. However, that technique was not a goal in itself; it served a higher purpose, one of unique and personal expression. In search for an Amneris, Verdi wrote to Giulio Ricordi that "voice alone, no matter how beautiful,

⁸ Letter of 28 June 1887, *Ibid.*, 179.

⁹ Weaver and Chusid, *The Verdi Companion*, 180, my emphasis.

is not enough for that role,” and added that polished singing mattered little to him.¹⁰ For an artist committed to her art, Verdi’s scenes in the style of dramatic recitative represent the ultimate test of her vocal, dramatic, and musical competence.

Today, in our search for a better understanding of Verdi’s vocal requirements, we can refer to the recordings of opera singers who were trained in the nineteenth century but made their recordings at the beginning of the twentieth century. In the vocal delivery of singers such as Francesco Tamagno, Celestina Boninsegna, Mattia Battistini, and Adelina Patti, who was highly praised by Verdi himself,¹¹ anything was permitted to reach the supreme ideal: an expressive and deeply involved interpretation of the text and the music. Today’s fashion of unified standards, which favors the cold and detached approach of technically perfect vocalism over expressiveness, could not be further from the wishes of Verdi and his contemporaries who glorified the ideal of personal, poetic, and dramatic expression.

Many questions of vocal style can be adequately addressed by consulting primary sources and early recordings, as will be done later in this dissertation. The writings of the two composers and their contemporaries can provide us, to some extent, with information about the vocal practice during their respective eras, and about what the composers deemed to be relevant and acceptable. The early recordings of singers brought up in the nineteenth-century style could give us an insight into an aesthetics that seems foreign

¹⁰ Letter of 10 July 1871, in Busch, *Verdi’s Aida*, 182-183.

¹¹ *The Golden Age of Singing: 50 Years of Great Voices on Record*, vol. 1, 1900-1910 (Nimbus NI-7050/1).

today, but which addressed Verdi's demands more accurately than many contemporary interpretations.

Speech-like Delivery

There is little doubt that the successful delivery of recitative style in an idiomatic fashion is possible only if a singer-actor speaks the language in which the opera is presented. No amount of diction study can substitute for the intuitive knowledge possessed by those who speak the language fluently. The finer points of punctuation, and sensitivity to sense groups and subtle connotations cannot be learned in a diction course. A singer-actor who attempts a speech-like delivery in a recitative scene should be able to speak the language with considerable fluency. As Pier Francesco Tosi suggested in 1723, a singer should deliver the recitative in opera with clear enunciation, avoiding emphasis on the last syllable, and should be energized, natural, involved in the delivery and, most of all, expressive and sensitive to the language and meaning.¹²

Even if the singer-actor is fluent in the language, there still remains the question of how to convey the content of the text to the audience. The focus on precise and crisp pronunciation of consonants and correct articulation of vowels will stay on the surface and not satisfy the main requirement of soliloquy, dramatic scene, or narrative, which is to convey the meaning and emotional content of the text. Emphasis on isolated elements of diction, such as length or quality of vowels or correct formation of consonants, will

¹²Pier Francesco Tosi, *Observations on the Florid Song; or Sentiments on the Ancient and Modern Singing*, trans. by Galliard (London: J. Wilcox, 1743); reprint (London: William Reeves Bookseller Ltd., 1967), 69-70.

leave the audience indifferent, since it conveys only one thing: correct pronunciation. Successful speech-like delivery entails much more than clearly and correctly produced sounds of a particular language. It requires an understanding of the relationship between emotional content and speech patterns, and only this understanding can result in naturally inflected speech and enable the singer-actor to convey all of the layers of the text in the most coherent and clear way. Specifically chosen stylistic devices, such as range, timbre, orchestration, harmonic rhythm, or tempo, will facilitate the conveyance of the emotional content and the layers of meaning to the audience, on an unconscious level. Agitation, for example, can be conveyed not only by stylistic musical devices, but also by naturally crisp articulation, short phrases, and a high energy level, whereas melancholy will be depicted by longer sustained vowels and consonants, sustained phrases, and a lower energy level.

Delivery of *coloratura* Passages

Coloratura passages are not usually found in recitative scenes and, indeed, we find them in only one of the four scenes analyzed here. The *coloraturas* found in Ottavia's "Disprezzata regina" in mm. 71-73 are not of ornamental nature and have illustrative and dramatic function. They are used as madrigalisms to denote the meaning of the words *hai fulmini* "have thunderbolts," and to express rage. They should be clearly articulated and delivered with full voice and forceful intensity to ensure dramatic power.

Chest Voice

Both Monteverdi and Verdi had great appreciation for the expressive potential of chest voice and were strongly in favor of using it. In a letter of 1610, Monteverdi admired “a fine voice, strong and long” because it was produced by “singing in the chest.”¹³ For Verdi, chest voice was more important for the character of Amneris than her high notes, “Tell me, . . ., whether la Fricci has the G and the A flat in chest voice for her fourth act melody. . . . If she doesn’t, that would be more fatal than whether the high B natural were powerful or weak.”¹⁴ On the earliest recordings and all the way through the early eighties, we can still hear a clear break between chest and middle voice in singers. When singing Italian repertoire, the singers like Conchita Supervia, Fiorenza Cossotto, Giulietta Simionato, Marilyn Horne, or Agnes Baltza, used clearly audible break when switching into the chest register, which is considered unhealthy and unacceptable today. Chest voice can be a very effective dramatic device and, even though it might cause some unevenness in the transition between the middle and lower registers, expressiveness, not vocal virtuosity, should be the determining factor.

Monteverdi did not make significant use of chest voice in “Arianna’s Lament” since its lowest notes are never sung loudly. In “Disprezzata regina,” however, Ottavia has the chance to express her rage against Jupiter in her highest as well as her lowest registers. The low notes on the last beat of m. 73 and the note c’ in m. 74, if not sung in

¹³ Donington, *Baroque Music*, 16.

¹⁴ Letter to G. Ricordi of 7 November 1870, in Busch, *Verdi’s Aida*, 98.

chest voice would substantially weaken the dramatic power of the section and reduce the musical contrast between Ottavia's rage and her remorse that follows.

For Verdi, singing in chest voice was an essential part of dramatic expression. When deciding on whether to cast Waldmann in the role of Amneris, one of his first questions was related to her low notes and the lower extension of her voice.¹⁵ He believed that chest voice was essential for the portrayal of this character and was outraged to discover that in one of the subsequent productions, Amneris was played by a soprano.

We find very effective use of chest voice at the end of Azucena's narrative, sending a strong message of chilling horror to the audience. With Amneris, Verdi used chest voice as an immediate contrast to her raging in the high register. The raw color of chest voice is always used with a dramatic purpose in mind and avoiding it would not only weaken the performance but also defeat the composer's intention to produce a stark contrast and searing intensity.

Articulation of Syllables in the High Register.

The most challenging vocal issue in these four scenes is the enunciation of syllables at the top of the singer's range. If delivery in this part of vocal range is focused on clear diction only, there is a danger of slowing the tempo, weighing down the sound, and dragging down the pitch. The economy of vocal delivery should lead toward a free but lighter sound with minimal jaw movement, quick tempo, and reliance on the tongue for vowel and consonant formation.

¹⁵ Letter to Giulio Ricordi of 25 May 1871: "Does la Waldmann have good low notes? How low can she go?" in Busch, *Verdi's Aida*, 165.

The sections that rely on repeated articulation of syllables at the top of a singer's range contain one of the paradoxes of recitative style. Due to the very high *tessitura*, it is often hard for the audience to understand the words of the section clearly, but musical devices such as short note values, broken phrases, *forte*, and quick tempo will convey the meaning and the emotional content of the imperfectly delivered text.

Combination of *sostenuto* and *parlando* Sections

A singer-actor should approach with great care the continuous exchange of *sostenuto*, *cantabile*, or sung-through phrases with those of broken or *staccato* character, which are often called *parlando*. Vocal delivery should be deliberately and continuously adjusted to accommodate these two styles. If a phrase is in *cantabile* fashion, then music elements will have priority. The singer should focus on fuller and sustained sound, legato, musical phrase structure, *messa di voce*, vocal color, and observance of the written note values. In *parlando* sections, where clear text delivery is paramount, the singer should focus on her oratorical skills, crisp diction, and natural speech inflection. The note values written on the page should be adjusted to accommodate various lengths of the syllables.

Voice Type-casting

For centuries, there have been predetermined effects that musicians and the audience have expected from a particular voice type. These effects are the result of values assigned to particular sounds, and they also coincide with the division of instrumental colors.

In 1640, Giovanni Battista Doni, in his *Trattato della musica scenica*, suggested the following distinctions for voice type-casting: low sopranos should be cast as good goddesses who are elderly and virile, such as Juno - Jupiter's middle-aged wife; Venus - sensuous goddess of love and beauty; Ceres - sensible goddess of agriculture; and Minerva - goddess of intelligence. High sopranos should be cast in the roles such as Diana goddess of chastity or young Proserpina, who was loyal to her parents even after her marriage.¹⁶ This type-casting is similar to the instrumental division, where high viols and harps were used for celestial scenes, and lower viols and basses for the scenes in the underworld.

The "officially correct" line representing lofty sentiments, loyalty, and high moral and religious ideals was most often assigned to the high female voices. The low female voices were in charge of everything else. They were allowed to be strong, sensuous, intelligent, seductive, sinful, vicious, revengeful, unethical, greedy, generous, nurturing, reasonable, wise, enterprising, resourceful, and many other things. When Verdi established for the first time the polarization of two prima-donnas in *Il trovatore*, he labeled the lower voice type mezzo-soprano. This voice type used a high vocal range, almost the same as that of the soprano, but it also used the extended lower register of the female contralto. Verdi understood the dramatic potential of such an extended vocal range combined with the voice-type expectations, and he offered in-depth portraits of powerful tragic women with rich personalities, who were counterparts to the morally and socially desirable sopranos. With the portrayal of characters as complex as Azucena, Amneris,

¹⁶ Giovanni Battista Doni, *Lyra Barberina* (Rome: 1640), in MacClintock, *Readings in the History of Music*, 203.

and Eboli, who were the main generators of powerful human drama, vocal virtuosity had to give way to the devices of expressive recitative.

Ottavia is portrayed as still young, but her powerful position and intelligence give her a certain maturity. Considering the complexity of her character, her powerful social status, vengefulness, anger, and intelligence, as well as her vocal range that extended in both directions, there can be no doubt that Ottavia should be type-cast as a mezzo-soprano.

Type-casting for Arianna is somewhat less clear because the score for the opera is not extant any more. The choice of a vocal type would depend on what character traits were to be emphasized. If she were to be portrayed as an innocent but misled young woman, a victim, then a soprano would be the traditionally appropriate choice. However, because the *tessitura* of her lament is mostly between c' and c'', a soprano would have technical problems in projecting the sound without fatigue and force. Another option would be to portray her as a counterpart for a possible "young, beautiful and chaste" woman Teseo might have found as a wife in his homeland. An emphasis on Arianna's active role in committing sin, her licentious rage, willfulness, and disobedience could lead toward casting her as a mezzo-soprano. This voice type would also negotiate the *tessitura* with ease.

Acting

The subject of acting in opera has, for the most part, escaped the attention of scholars, perhaps because some consider it to be of lesser importance in music-oriented

research. For a performer, however, this is one of the major issues, and it requires careful and thorough research. Although there are numerous primary sources addressing the problems of acting, there is a surprisingly strong prejudice regarding the acting abilities of singers of the past. They have been inaccurately portrayed as putting the strongest emphasis on musical and vocal issues and disregarding acting.

The necessity to train singers in acting as much as in singing is clearly asserted in numerous writings from both the Baroque and Romantic eras. In fact, acting was viewed as a major device for engaging the audience. Emilio de' Cavalieri required that the singers accompany their singing with “gestures and movements, not only of the hands but other gestures that are efficacious aids in moving the affections.”¹⁷ Monteverdi was aware of the power of acting and often praised the interpretive powers of performers. In a letter to the librettist Alessandro Striggio (7 May 1627), Monteverdi emphasized the importance of acting skills for the actress doing the part of Licori in his comic opera *La finta pazza Licori*.¹⁸ Thomas Coryat praised Italian opera singers in 1611 by saying that “... they are almost all actors by nature, and it is for this reason that they succeed so perfectly in their musical comedies. ... for the expression of the words, the postures and gestures of the characters they play naturally and very well.”¹⁹ Tosi insists that it is necessary to

¹⁷ Ibid., 183.

¹⁸ Arnold and Fortune, *The New Monteverdi Companion*, 64.

¹⁹ Coryat, *Coryat Crudities*, in MacClintock, *Readings in the History of Music*, 122.

teach singers to act²⁰ and recommends that singers “... avoid convulsive Motions of the Body and of the Face”²¹

Recitative soliloquies and scenes in dramatic recitative style are fundamentally dependent on the acting skills of the singer-actor and on her ability to immerse herself in the text. Stylistic musical devices are also geared toward revealing the layers of textual meaning, and the success with the audience depends almost exclusively on the singer-actor. A focus on musical elements and vocalism would defeat the composer’s intention and the purpose of this style. The powerful theatrical effect of “Arianna’s Lament” on the audience could not have been achieved through pure vocalism. The first interpreter moved the audience profoundly because she was an excellent actress and the audience identified with her portrayal.

Verdi made sure to have control over choosing the singers for his premiers, and he always insisted on hiring those who may not have had impeccable vocal technique or abilities, but had great stage presence and could interpret the drama convincingly.²² While trying to cast *Don Carlos*, he wrote to his publisher Giulio Ricordi (11 January 1868): “Tell me about the quality and the power of their voices, about their intonation, their style of singing, their enunciation, and above all about their acting.”²³ His mind operated so strongly within the framework of the theater and drama that he admitted to Giulio

²⁰ Tosi, *Observations on the Florid Song*, 70.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 88-89.

²² Weaver and Chusid, *The Verdi Companion*, 148.

²³ *Ibid.*, 179.

Ricordi that he was not able to judge a singer “in a room and not even in an empty theater, without costumes and make up”²⁴ He insisted on breaking all poetic and compositional rules in order to give actors a chance to act and capture the audience’s attention.²⁵ Good singing was certainly not enough for him. In his letter to Giovanni Battista Lampugnani (9 May 1871), he inquired about a singer, Emma Viziak, “... and if she is more than a singer, a very dramatic actress, she would be fine for the role of Amneris.”²⁶

Verdi knew how great the demands for Azucena were and was proud of his creation: “It’s a principal, *the* principal role; finer and more dramatic and more original than the other. If I were a prima donna ... I would always rather sing the part of the Gypsy in *Il trovatore*.”²⁷ In searching for Amneris, he was even more demanding. He did not emphasize vocal skills or musicianship but looked for “an artist with highly developed dramatic sensibility who is a mistress of the stage.”²⁸ According to Verdi, the success of the whole opera depended on the dramatic abilities of the singer-actor who played Amneris, and who “... has a powerful voice, is very emotional, and very, very dramatic We must not make a mistake on this role. A mediocre Amneris means a ruined opera.”²⁹

²⁴ Letter to G. Ricordi of 17 June 1892, *Ibid.*, 179.

²⁵ Letter to Antonio Ghislanzoni of 8 October 1870, in Busch, *Verdi’s Aida*, 76, emphasis by Verdi.

²⁶ Busch, *Verdi’s Aida*, 156.

²⁷ Budden, *The Operas of Verdi*, vol. 2, 68.

²⁸ Letter to G. Ricordi of 10 July 1871, Busch, *Verdi’s Aida*, 182.

²⁹ Letter to G. Ricordi of 24 May 1871, *Ibid.*, 163.

The importance of acting in recitative style cannot be overemphasized. Quick exchanges of emotional extremes, focus on textual properties, and imitation of natural speech require tremendous vocal stamina and, even more so, great potential for generating drama. In all, it is obvious that acting represents a vital and essential part of operatic tradition, and that it deserves to be addressed adequately in scholarly research in order to correct contemporary prejudices and improve performing abilities of singer-actors.

CHAPTER 6

SOME PERFORMANCE-PRACTICE ISSUES RELATED TO THE RECITATIVE STYLE

For a vocal performer, any scholarly research or personal experience can enrich her understanding and interpretation of the music she performs and it can help her to make the music become alive and accessible to the listeners. With the works of Monteverdi and Verdi analyzed here, a performer can often achieve successful interpretation without having a familiarity with the composers' lives or historical circumstances. However, scholarly research will allow a performer to put into context the music she sings, enrich her interpretive possibilities, and enable her to offer a more striking and stimulating performance.

An attempt to perform the works of Monteverdi and Verdi in our time should carefully consider the existing information about the original performances and the possibilities of implementing old practices within the contemporary circumstances. An attempt to reconstruct past productions accurately will be difficult due to lack of evidence about the exact nature of those productions. Even in those cases in which we do have information about past practices, it might not be possible to recreate similar performance in a contemporary setting, or our ears might not be accustomed to such practices. With the help of the recording industry, newly acquired information about

performance practices of past eras implemented by numerous musicians is easily shared with wider audiences. A fast-growing number of commercial recordings that feature performances sensitive to the issues of past performance practices offer fresh, different, and compelling interpretations of familiar. Research results about early Baroque performance practices are easily accessible and quite extensive. The research on nineteenth century performance practices in general, and on Italian opera in particular, is much less developed and performers still struggle to find information that would help them to make informed interpretive decisions.

These new historically informed interpretations of music often go beyond the somewhat pedantic *come scritto* practices of the second half of the twentieth century. Scholars and performers are gradually realizing that the conventional notation printed on the page represents general guidelines that should lead to an individual interpretational approach, a unique collaboration between composer and performer. In the course of their training, singers are sometimes limited by trying to emulate the one “right” interpretation of a score, imposed on them by their teachers or coaches. In this age of global communication and unified standards, we seem to forget that, as Tosi pointed out, “by copying others [we] become very bad ones.”¹ Scholarly research can help liberate the singer-actor from the chains of the one “perfect” interpretation and enable him or her to offer a number of informed yet different interpretations of the same score. To reduce ourselves to offering only one accurate performance of the musical score would be in

¹ Tosi, *Observations on the Florid Song*, 153.

direct opposition to the intentions of Monteverdi and Verdi, who sought innovative, inspired, dramatic, exciting, and bold forms of expression. Their strong interest in the interpretive and acting skills of the singer-actors and their repeated suggestions to performers to follow their personal and dramatic instincts, imply that they valued unique and individual approaches to their music.

The performer's task of conveying the meaning of the text in a dramatic recitative setting is facilitated by musical tradition and the audience's understanding of the implied connections between stylistic musical devices and extra-musical concepts. This tradition ensures that the audience's understanding of these musical works will not erode over time or geographical distances. Despite the number of conventional stylistic musical devices found in the scores of both Monteverdi and Verdi, performers are given numerous options and room for unique contributions when interpreting their music. Their works contain order and proportion indicated in the notation as objective parts of the music. They also provide ample space for subjectivity reflected in passion, creativity, and fantasy. The objective and subjective elements, combined with the commitment to historically informed readings of the scores, are of great importance today when we perform for audiences unfamiliar with the language, poetry, or musical style of the works. The freedom and strong local color of dramatic recitative style based on natural speech patterns requires more than any other style that we put our pedantic preconceptions about the notation aside and dig into our personal experience for a unique and compelling collaboration with the composer.

For both Monteverdi and Verdi, true art was found in practice, not in theory, and their primary concern was successful and involved communication in a specific and highly controlled theatrical setting. Their works continue to be attractive today to both performers and audiences because of the dramatic power, focus on familiar human experiences, and wide possibilities for personal interpretations. Because the two composers aimed at portraying basic human emotions and familiar situations, the four scenes analyzed here can be presented in any society and at any time, provided there are performers who have the ability to interpret the scenes with power and commitment. The universality of the emotions and situations found in these scenes, however, does not absolve the performers of having to search for a better understanding of the composers' intentions and to learn the complex conventions of the composers' times and geographical locations.

Every realization of the score, be it in rehearsal or performance, is an act of interpretation. The performer is the one who makes sense of the relationships and patterns implied in the notation and then conveys them to the listeners. The choice of features, such as phrasing, articulation, tempo, timbre, dynamics, vibrato, pitch, or duration, many of which are not notated, makes each interpretation unique and different from all of the others. These choices have the potential for generating frequent variations in the energy of the performed music, making each performance the result of the inspiration of the moment, never to be repeated in quite the same manner again. The purpose of this chapter is to compare some information from primary sources about

certain relevant performance-practice issues in recitative style, and it will include short discussions about phrasing, venue, vibrato, rhythm, ornamentation, and tempo.

Phrasing and Cadences

In recitative style, phrasing is derived from speech patterns and the organization of notes into groups is most often based on sense units. In order to organize meaningfully the transmitted information, it is essential to make slight separations between the sense units and make longer rests after perfect cadences. The properties of a specific venue can influence the lengths of the rests and separations, and those rests should be longer in larger and more resonant venues.

One of the most important stylistic devices for organizing the information in recitative are cadential points. They coincide with the end of an idea and require clear recognition by performers. Neither Monteverdi nor Verdi included any instructions in the score regarding the tempo change at cadential points, but primary sources and early recordings indicate that every cadential point involved a certain tempo adjustment. The recognition of a cadential point is achieved by slowing down the penultimate note in a phrase or slowing down a few notes before the cadence. The practice of slowing down at cadences was acknowledged by Michael Praetorius (c.1571-1621) in his *Syntagma musicum*² (1619) and it is also found in the early recordings of nineteenth century music. The slowing down should not stop the flow of music at an internal cadence, especially in *temperato* and *concitato* styles, and it should be limited to the penultimate note most of

² Michael Praetorius, *Syntagma musicum*, (Wittenberg: 1619), in MacClintock, *Readings in the History of Music*, 151.

the time. In *molle* style, the slowing down is more perceptible and can be expanded to several notes preceding the cadence. The final decision about how much and when the tempo should be adjusted depends on numerous conditions of each individual performance.

Venue

The venue in which an operatic work is performed has a major influence on a number of performance decisions. When recitative style is concerned, the acoustical properties of a hall will influence, among other things, decisions about tempo, diction, length of rests, and overall dynamics. If a hall has “dry” acoustics, the tempo should be faster in order to achieve continuity. In such a hall, the rests between phrases and sections can be shorter, diction and articulation crisper, and dynamics intensified. If a hall is resonant, the tempo should be slower, rests longer, dynamics relaxed, and the consonants should be more sustained in order to achieve clarity.

The problem of adequate instrumentation for Monteverdi’s operas is closely tied with the question of venue and can be solved in a number of ways. We do not have precise information about the instrumentation for *L’Arianna* or *Poppea*, but we know that Monteverdi adjusted the instrumentation of his works to fit the acoustics of a particular hall.³ Cavalieri in his *Rappresentazione di Anima, et di Corpo* of 1600, also argued for flexible view of instrumentation, “The instruments also should be well played,

³ Stevens, “Claudio Monteverdi: Acoustics,” in Monterosso, *Performing Practice in Monteverdi’s Music*, 9.

and their numbers be more or less according to the place – theater or hall...”⁴ This flexibility, however, should never allow instruments to overpower singer-actors or to assume an independent role. In the recitative style of early Baroque, vocal line and textual delivery were paramount.

Verdi’s two scenes work well in any size hall or arena. Monteverdi’s two soliloquies, however, require smaller venues. This is especially true of Arianna’s personal and intimate lament. Too many delicate details would be lost in an average hall seating three to four thousand people. A performance in a smaller venue would bring out all of the power of these refined scenes and inspire a performer to truly reach out and move every individual member of the audience, thus fulfilling the composer’s intention.

Vibrato

Vibrato is a slight modulation in pitch and volume and it is a natural property of any freely produced vocal sound. If such modulation becomes more prominent, vibrato draws attention to itself and obscures other elements of vocal production such as timbre, pitch, dynamics, articulation and diction. In recitative style, which attempts to imitate natural speech inflections, most of the notes are of short duration and the vibrato is limited to infrequent passages containing longer sustained notes.

We do not know Monteverdi’s views on vibrato since he never made any observations about it in his letters.⁵ At this time, there is no evidence that continuous

⁴ MacClintock, *Readings in the History of Music*, 183.

⁵ Anna Maria Vacchelli, “Monteverdi as a Primary Source for the Performance of his own Music,” in Monterosso, *Performing Practice in Monteverdi’s Music*, 52.

vibrato was used in vocal, string or wind music of the early Baroque. However, a natural and unobtrusive vibrato was part of the performance practice in the vocal music of early Baroque and Praetorius recommended that singers should have “a pleasantly vibrating voice (not, however, as some are trained to do in schools, but with particular moderation).”⁶

In later writings, which most likely included aesthetic standards from earlier practices as well, we find that the use of vibrato depends on the actual character of the music. Early nineteenth century authors Louis Spohr (1784-1859) and Pierre Baillot (1771-1842) suggested that singers should use vibrato in very emotional passages and, according to Baillot, the vibrato is effective only on long notes or when the same note is repeated.⁷

This practice of the selective use of the vibrato continued into the nineteenth century. Charles-Auguste de Beriot (1802-1870), a student of Baillot, recommended in 1858 that the vibrato should be used with great moderation and only for particular dramatic situations.⁸ Manuel Garcia II (1805-1906) and his student, celebrated vocal pedagogue Mathilde Marchesi (1821-1913), were more specific in suggesting that vibrato is a natural effect of the powerful emotions on the vocal instrument, and therefore should be used for the feelings that move us deeply in real life.⁹

⁶ Praetorius, *Syntagma musicum*, in MacClintock, *Readings in the History of Music*, 164.

⁷ Philip, *Early Recordings*, 208-209.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 209.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 211.

In dramatic recitative, emotionally charged moments are found in sustained exclamations, the expressiveness of which is increased by the presence of the vibrato in the sound. When approaching a cadence in slower tempo, the sustained penultimate note is often long enough to include the vibrato for expressive purposes, but this vibrato should not be so prominent as to obscure the words, pitch, texture, or timbre. The note with vibrato represents a contrast to the surrounding short notes and it should be used as an effective dramatic device combined with dynamic changes such as *crescendo*, *decrescendo*, or *messa di voce* to increase expressiveness. Early recordings of singers trained in the nineteenth century confirm that a more prominent vibrato served expressive purposes and was used only in powerful and emotional moments.

Rhythm

Recitative is not subject to the notated measure since it is based on natural speech, and the rhythms intended by the composer cannot be discovered through the inadequate symbols of musical notation. An accurate reading of the notated rhythm would only lead to an awkward, dry, and lifeless performance. The contemporary fashion favoring clarity of rhythmic detail, literal interpretation of note values, and avoidance of rhythmic irregularities, is in direct opposition to the nature of the recitative, for which flexibility of rhythm is crucial.

In order for a performance of Italian recitative to become vibrant, engaging, and meaningful, a singer-actor has to take into consideration the duration and the stress of the syllables. In Italian language, stressed syllables have a longer duration than unstressed

ones. However, the length of long syllables or shortness of short syllables depends on numerous factors such as the meaning of the word, syntactic position, emotional connotation, the performer's interpretation, and the particular performing situation. Each syllable may be given different duration in every performance. The length of the syllables will also depend on the style. Thus, short, unstressed syllables will be much shorter in *concitato* than in *molle* passages, and long stressed syllables will be shorter in *temperato* or *concitato* passages, than in *molle* passages.

In Monteverdi's laments, instrumental accompaniment provides chordal support for the harmonic structure of the piece and has no unison passages with the freely moving vocal line. In Verdi's recitative scenes, there are numerous places where the voice and the orchestra perform notes of short duration at the same time. At such moments the orchestra, accurately playing the notated rhythms, and the singer-actor, emulating speech patterns, actually perform different rhythms. Such rhythmic dislocation can have a major impact on the clarity of the texture. Careful dynamic balance between orchestra and voice should preserve the clarity of textual delivery, since in Verdi's recitative scenes, the role of the orchestra is similar to that in Monteverdi's: to contribute to the human drama on the stage.

Ornamentation

Dramatic recitative, having great consideration for words, allows little room for ornamentation that would endanger the intelligibility of the text. Recitative, tending to emulate natural speech patterns, is set in syllabic fashion and it contains mostly notes of

short duration thus precluding the use of certain ornaments. Early Baroque soliloquies allow more freedom in ornamentation than Verdi's two dramatic scenes; thus most of the discussion about ornamentation will be concerned with Monteverdi's soliloquies.

Coloratura Passages

Caccini's suggestion to use long ornaments over long syllables in less impassioned music implies that impassioned recitative setting is not appropriate for adding *coloratura* passages.¹⁰ A century later, Tosi expressed similar opinion, "... let Truth prevail, where passion speaks, all *Shakes*, all *Divisions* and *Graces* ought to be silent, leaving it to the sole Force of a beautiful Expression to persuade."¹¹ Vacchelli believes that Monteverdi used *coloratura* passages in less affective compositions and that the performers should limit themselves only to the written embellishments, without any further addition even in the cadences.¹² Most of all, they should avoid any ornamentation in the affective and dramatic compositions.¹³ It is true that in *temperato* and *concitato* passages there is no room for *coloratura* due to the short note values. However, the study of Monteverdi's own ornamentation for Orfeo's lament "Possente spirito" from *L'Orfeo* proves the opposite. Monteverdi used *coloratura* extensively in emotional passages with *molle* character, which contained longer notes, but he was always careful to illustrate the

¹⁰ Donington, *Baroque Music*, 97.

¹¹ Tosi, *Observations on the Florid Song*, 68.

¹² Vacchelli, "Monteverdi as a Primary Source," in Monterosso, *Performing Practice in Monteverdi's Music*, 47.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 51.

affective content of the text (ex. 1). A performer can add similar ornaments to some longer notes in *molle* passages in Arianna’s and Ottavia’s laments, using “Possente spirito” as a model, but she should always have great consideration for the meaning of the words.

Ex. 1

The image shows a musical score for a vocal piece. It consists of six staves. The top three staves are instrumental accompaniment: the first two are in treble clef and the third is in bass clef. The bottom three staves are vocal lines. The lyrics are written below the vocal staves. The lyrics are: "già mai per huom mor . tal non vas . . ." on the first line, and "per huom mor . . . tal non vas . ." on the second line. There is a small '(b)' marking above the second line of the vocal part. The music features various ornaments and melodic lines.

At the end of some sections in “Arianna’s Lament” a short *coloratura* passage could enhance or add another layer of meaning to the text. For example, a fast ascending and then descending ornament on the word *non* “not” in mm. 91, at the end of Section IV (ex. 2), could single out such an important word from its context and enrich its meaning symbolizing Arianna’s struggle between her rational wish to conform and her impetuous nature unable to change or accept her fate. Such ornament would also draw attention to the cadential movement.

Ex. 2

The image shows a musical score for a vocal line and piano accompaniment. The vocal line is written on a single staff in treble clef, with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a common time signature (C). The lyrics are: ". l'ò il do - lo - re , parlò la lingua sì ma non già il co - re". The piano accompaniment consists of two staves: a right-hand staff in treble clef and a left-hand staff in bass clef. The music is in a simple, recitative style with a steady accompaniment.

The fact that we don't find much ornamentation in "Disprezzata regina" does not mean that singer-actors did not add them in performances. The two incomplete and different extant scores of *Poppea* do not prove even the authorship of a composer, let alone give final guidance about the possible realization in a performance. Again, approach to cadence in *molle* sections could be a good place to explore possible layers of meaning and further emotional shifts through carefully chosen *fioriture*.

In Verdi's two scenes with dramatic recitative, the use of interpolated *coloratura* passages is not found today. Further research about his dramatic recitative style, especially the one from *Il trovatore*, might prove that Verdi allowed some additions to his score. At the contemporary state of research it is assumed that these two scenes had been performed without interpolated ornaments due to their dramatic character. If such assumption were true, than the approach to the performance of dramatic recitative scenes would be different from the performance approaches to other types of scenes and arias, which were regularly ornamented. Verdi himself added some expressive *coloratura* passages in the duet between Azucena and Manrico in Act II, and later even expanded

them to accommodate the request from a performer. More research in the performance practices of these particular scene types will clarify whether some added passages could be appropriate for expressive purposes.

Trillo

This ornament is found only in Monteverdi's music and it also has expressive purpose. It is attached to the cadential formula and most often performed on the penultimate note since the last note should be left plain.¹⁴ Trillo is combined with the fluctuation in dynamics, and the speed of repeated notes will depend on the expressed affect.

Dynamics

Subtle shades of dynamics are essential for the expressiveness of dramatic recitative in both Monteverdi's and Verdi's scenes. From comments made in his correspondence, we can see that Monteverdi considered dynamic range to be an important expressive device in vocal music. Additionally, his contemporary Caccini believed that dynamics is the foundation of passion.¹⁵ Detailed dynamic markings found in Verdi's scores confirm that he considered it to be a very important part of interpretation.

Reaching into the wealth of personal experiences can help a performer decide about the dynamic changes. Passages in *concitato* style will be much louder than passages in *molle* style. Dissonances, when having a deliberate expressive purpose, should be

¹⁴ Donington, *Baroque Music*, 97.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 31.

sung louder than consonances, and *messa di voce* can provide a beautiful expressive contrast to the surrounding notes of shorter duration. Most importantly, all dynamic changes in the scenes with dramatic recitative should be derived from the meaning of the text and should emulate the natural dynamics of human speech idiomatic to the particular emotional state.

Tempo Flexibility

Good tempo is not a precise or definite quality in recitative style, and monotony of machine-like punctuality would be directly opposite to the expressive demands of Monteverdi and Verdi. Many writers of the early Baroque confirm that flexibility of tempo is the key for achieving a unique, expressive and moving performance of a recitative soliloquy. Praetorius insisted that, “Music should not be hastened and the text would decide on the tempo.”¹⁶ Bonini wrote in 1615 that depending on the words we should “...sing quickly or slowly, now sustaining, now quickening the beat, for thus demands the Florentine style”. Monteverdi required in 1615 that the *genere rappresentativo* or theatrical style should be “sung without beat,” and in 1638 described it as “...sung to the time of the heart’s feeling, and not to that of the hand.”¹⁷ Around 1635 Doni further confirms such practice by saying that “in the *stile recitativo* the singer is not

¹⁶ MacClintock, *Readings in the History of Music*, 150.

¹⁷ Stevens, “Claudio Monteverdi: Acoustics” in Monterosso, *Performing Practice in Monteverdi’s Music*, 10.

in the habit of confining himself to any beat...¹⁸ Monteverdi, understanding how important the tempo was for interpretation, writes to Annibale Iberti on 21 November 1615 that the performance of *Tirsi e Clori* should be "...directed with a beat suitable to the character of the melodies..."¹⁹ Therefore, when performing recitative soliloquies of the early Baroque, singer-actor should not confine herself to any beat or tempo, but should freely respond to the emotional content of the text also implied in the music.

In Verdi's music tempo is indicated in two ways: one is by metronome marking and another one is by mood description such as *allegro* (cheerful) or *grave* (serious). Verdi was specific and consistent about the tempo markings in his scores, but taking those markings literally would be a serious misjudgment on the part of performers. Numerous nineteenth-century writers indicated that tempo flexibility was of great importance in Italian Romantic opera as well.²⁰ The indicated tempo is just a frame, which should be filled with expressive use of *rubato*, *accelerando* and *rallentando* as the meaning of the text indicates.²¹ The performers should be aware that, as Weber put it, every slow tempo has to have quick passages and vice versa,²² and they should avoid monotony and literal interpretation of tempo markings.

¹⁸ Donington, *Baroque Music*, 23.

¹⁹ Arnold and Fortune, *The New Monteverdi Companion*, 33.

²⁰ Philip, *Early Recordings*, 217.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 218.

²² *Ibid.*, 219.

Every performer brings a temperament of her own and her own expressive potential into the performance. When making performance decisions, it is important to remember that those should not only reflect historic practices and satisfy the requirements of contemporary audiences, but also allow the performer to offer her own expressive reading of the score. Both Monteverdi and Verdi were sensitive to the needs of the audience, but also to the needs of the performers. Careful balance between composers' wishes designated in their scores and individual interpretations of those scores should result in a variety of different interpretations all of which would be equally historically informed, but also a product of dynamic relationship between the composers and imaginative and inspired performers in a particular moment.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

The prominent place of dramatic recitative scenes in the music of Claudio Monteverdi and Giuseppe Verdi came as a result of the historical moment in which they lived. Both composers lived at times in the history of music when text dominated style, inspired by spoken language, emphasis on drama, and realistic representation of characters and situations on the stage succeeded the styles of primarily musical considerations, i.e. Renaissance polyphony of the sixteenth century and early nineteenth century *bel canto* opera. Monteverdi's choice of dramatic recitative scenes was conditioned by the general stylistic trends of the early seventeenth century music, whereas Verdi's was innovative contribution to the development of the nineteenth century Italian opera. The orientation toward text dominated style in Monteverdi's case had its philosophical foundation in Plato's dictum that, in music, words are more important than melody and rhythm because they reveal the disposition of the soul. The orientation toward text dominated style in Verdi's case had its philosophical foundation in Mazzini's teachings that opera, and especially dramatic recitative, could have a powerful potential to engage the audience politically and culturally.

Knowing that Italian operatic audiences wanted to be moved, not impressed, Monteverdi and Verdi chose recitative scenes as vehicles for powerful and engaging

dramatic effects. Neither was interested in revolutionizing the genre, but their personal interest in human drama and good theater inspired them to deliberately transgress poetic and musical rules in order to achieve condensed theatrical moments and close integration of musical and verbal expression.

For both composers the libretto was a very important source of inspiration and they actively participated in its writing. Monteverdi cared about the quality of poetry and sought collaboration with good poets, while Verdi sought economical and condensed poetic style, often resembling colloquial language. Such differences in their approach to libretto were a result of the different stylistic periods to which they belonged, but in both cases, passionate and complex human beings represented the center of their dramatic interest and inspiration.

The four dramatic recitative scenes analyzed here have a significant number of fundamental features in common. Verdi's scenes "Condotta ell'era in ceppi" from *Il trovatore* and "Judgement Scene" from *Aida*, resemble the two Monteverdi's laments, "Arianna's Lament" from *L'Arianna* and "Disprezzata regina" from *L'incoronazione di Poppea*, in their purpose, musical organization, and the choice of characters. The protagonists of these scenes are women who are social outcasts, and who undergo great emotional pressure while experiencing a conflict between their personal needs and their social duty. These women are galvanizers of action and their recitative scenes represent the pinnacles of dramatic tension in their respective operas. They experience rapid shifts of conflicting emotions and their manner of speaking is often closer to cries than to intelligible speech. In all the four scenes, the music represents immediate reflection of the

women's mental states, and the dominating role of the voice is achieved through homophonic texture and integration of vocal and instrumental parts. In addition, these scenes are characterized by long texts, syllabic setting, strong emphasis on speech patterns, extremes of vocal range, predominately triadic harmony and lack of vocal virtuosity. The first section of the "Judgement Scene," containing an *ostinato* figure in the bass, indicates the connection to the Baroque laments with similar organizing principle. Monteverdi used *ostinato* figure for the first time in his "Lamento della Ninfa" in the *Fifth Book of Madrigals* (1638).

All the four scenes analyzed here derive their formal organization from the text. The scenes are divided into sections, which reflect emotional shifts of the characters, and those sections are uneven with respect to length, melodic range, meter, harmonic structure, and character. The sections are organized on the principle of contrast and reflect the emotional contrasts found in the text. In order to make the shifts more striking and unexpected, both composers closely juxtaposed multiple stylistic elements, such as harmonic rhythm, tonality, *tessitura*, timbre, orchestration, bass line movement, rhythmic patterns, meter, tempo, note duration, and dynamics.

While Monteverdi's fluid recitative style is free from almost any patterns, Verdi worked within the eight-measure periodic structure, which he often abandoned when dramatic effect required it. However, Verdi achieved deceptive sense of free and irregular style similar to Monteverdi's, by making vocal part resemble speech and breathing patterns. The unity in all the four scenes is achieved through repetition of melodic motives and tonal organization. In their two later works, both composers achieved more

condensed expression and better unified structure. They sustained the intensity throughout the scenes with more rapid exchanges of contrasting musical styles, avoidance of perfect cadences in the target tonalities, and by minimizing the breaks between the sections.

A paradox of recitative style, in which the composers, despite proclaiming text intelligibility as their ultimate goal, often used musical elements that interfered with clear text delivery, is present in all the four scenes. Both composers communicated the content of the text primarily through a set of devices of musical style, which were inspired by natural patterns of human speech that corresponded to particular emotional states. The use of these stylistic devices for expressing similar content by numerous composers made them become a convention in music, and by appealing to the senses of the listeners, they had more powerful effect than the words, which appealed to the intellect. Therefore, in order to interpret and empathize with the emotional content of a recitative scene, a listener should focus not only on what is said, but most importantly how it is said.

Comparative analysis of these four scenes shows that, despite some differences in tonal and formal organization, there is striking similarity in Monteverdi's and Verdi's approach to the use of stylistic musical devices for expressing similar extra-musical content in dramatic recitative scenes. Their use of the conventionalized devices based on the characteristics of natural speech was most likely derived from their orientation toward human drama and their need for successful and efficient communication with their listeners. However, the mastery of their compositional approach is reflected in their particular ability to combine the conventional with the new elements in their music,

offering familiar yet not redundant, on the one hand, and novel yet not incomprehensible, on the other.

With minor exceptions, both composers observed the basic tripartite division of *genera* or styles to *molle*, *temperato* and *concitato*, and musically represented them in similar way. In sections of *molle* character, expressing grief, sadness, and resignation, both used low limited range, descending melodic motion with small leaps, slow tempo, longer note duration, stable tonality, and slow bass movement. In sections of *temperato* character, used for moderation, narration and tranquil speech, they used middle range, numerous repeated pitches, long stretches containing the same note values, medium flexible tempo, stepwise motion, slow bass line, neutral accompaniment to not interfere with text delivery, and stable tonality. In sections of *concitato* character, used for expression of rage and agitation, they used ascending phrases and angular leaps, quick tempo, small note values, high tessitura, wide vocal range, thick orchestration, exclamations, tonal instability, and rapid bass movement. The balance between the three types of stylistic musical devices in these four scenes shows how different the four characters and their respective situations are. Arianna is helpless and bewildered, Ottavia is powerful and angry, Azucena is only seemingly in control of her emotions, and Amneris is impetuous and angry, yet vulnerable.

The analysis of affective and emotional content is not often encountered in scholarly research or vocal training. Whereas analysis of musical form and factual content of the text can be sufficient for some musical forms and genres, the analysis of dramatic recitative scenes, which are fundamentally oriented toward emotional expressiveness, has

to go beyond that. When approaching the interpretation of dramatic recitative, a systematic analysis of affects and emotions represented could enrich a performer with a clearer view of characterization through the elements of musical style and open wider spectrum of interpretive possibilities. After determining the affective and emotional content of the scenes, the performer can choose to give a number of different interpretations by modifying any of the musical aspects or balances found in the score to fit her current interpretational approach, while still staying within the scope of historically justified performance choices.

Monteverdi and Verdi also have in common great interest in practical realization of their music in performance. Their interest in success with the audience motivated them to be very articulate about the requirements that they had from singer-actors. Both of them had appreciation for the expressive possibilities of the chest voice, and also posed great, though dramatically justified, vocal challenges in front of the performers. Monteverdi and Verdi favored expressiveness over vocal virtuosity, and both believed that it would come as a result of long and detailed study of the text.

For a contemporary performer who is not a native speaker of Italian and who wants to meet the composers' demands for expressiveness, immersion into the text cannot end with correct articulation of syllables and word-for-word translation. Emphasis on isolated elements of diction will reveal only one thing - correct pronunciation. Understanding the meaning of the individual words will not reveal the nuance of their meaning in a particular context. Expressive delivery of dramatic recitative entails understanding of the relationships between emotional content and speech patterns

idiomatic to one culture and its language. Therefore, sensitivity to the layers of denoted and connoted meaning can come only through cultural immersion and fluency in its language.

In their correspondence, both composers devoted major attention to the acting abilities of the singers, considering those abilities to be as important, and in Verdi's case, even more important than the singers' vocal dexterity. Despite the fact that acting skills had been emphasized by numerous writers about opera in the past, contemporary scholarly research in this area is almost non-existent. If we aim at thorough investigation of performance practices of the past, the research on acting practices in opera can be of great interest to both performers and scholars, and can help debunk the popular myth that good acting is recent achievement in operatic practice.

Comparative research of the performance practices of dramatic recitative styles of Monteverdi and Verdi reveals further similarities: phrasing is most often derived from speech patterns, vibrato is used in emotionally charged passages for expressive purposes, and the tempo is flexible and constantly fluctuates. Rhythm is derived from the speech and the length of syllables and rests varies with the emotion, syntactic position, acoustic properties of the venue, and vocal range. The practice of adding occasional expressive *coloratura* passages in the performance of these recitative scenes requires further investigation. At the current state of research, it is believed that such ornaments should be avoided, however there are indications that occasional *coloratura* added to the dramatic recitative scenes, with the intention to increase their expressive power might have been a part of accepted practice.

Comparative analysis of the stylistic features and performance requirements pertinent to the four scenes by Claudio Monteverdi and Giuseppe Verdi chosen here revealed the existence of numerous and fundamental similarities in their approach to the dramatic recitative style. Conscious awareness of these similarities could liberate a performer from often frustrating chains of stylistic “specialization” and enable her to move with more confidence between early Baroque and Romantic styles in Italian opera. Further comparative research in this area could encourage continuous, historically informed revisions of the possibilities found in the score, allowing wider creative freedom to performers. Verdi greatly appreciated the liberating power that knowledge could have on performers:

For the singer, I would want a wide knowledge of music... Then, without any master teaching him perfect vocal style, I would want the youngster - a secure musician with a trained and flexible voice - to be guided by his feelings when he sings. That would not be academic singing but inspired singing. The artist would be an individual; he would be himself or, better yet, he would be the character he should represent in the drama.... It goes without saying that these studies must be combined with a broad literary education.¹

Empowered with the knowledge of fundamental similarities found in various styles, a performer would be able to substitute one “perfect” interpretation with a number of different ones, which would reflect her personal approach, her accumulated scholarly knowledge, and also be able to communicate successfully with the contemporary audiences.

¹ Verdi’s letter to Giuseppe Piroli of 20 February 1871, in Busch, *Verdi’s Aida*, 139.

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