

Verdi's Construction of Drama and *Tinta*:
The Expanded Role of the Father Figure in *La traviata*

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Abstract

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(Under the direction of John L. Nádas)

The cavatina for Germont in Act II of *La traviata* does not have an analogous moment in the Alexandre Dumas *fil*s play, *La dame aux camélias*, which Giuseppe Verdi and Francesco Maria Piave adapted to create their opera. The aria satisfies the operatic convention that each of the three central characters in the opera— the soprano, the tenor, and the bass— should have an aria, and its construction reflects conventional formal organization. At the same time, Verdi's musical treatment of the conflict between Germont's bourgeois sensibilities and his sympathy for Violetta is a vital component of the unfolding drama, of the development of an expanded father figure, and of Verdi's use of *tinta* to construct through music the geographical and social setting in which the drama unfolds.

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Introduction

Robert Thicknesse writes “Opera should be celebrated for its absurdity as much as for anything else. Plots are often of minor importance, but this is no reason not to laugh at them.”¹ With this attitude, he provides comical synopses of ninety operas in his book, *The Times Opera Notes*. Of the plot of Giuseppe Verdi’s *La traviata*, he asks but one question: “Hey Mr. Germont, who invited you to Flora’s party?”² In Alexandre Dumas *fils*’s play, *La dame aux camélias*, on which Verdi and his librettist Francesco Maria Piave, based their libretto, Duval, the father figure only appears on stage twice. The first time is his pivotal scene in Act III with Marguerite, the courtesan, where he asks her to leave his son. He appears again to offer comfort to his son, but does not speak. At the end of the play, Marguerite reads a letter from Duval in which he expresses remorse for his actions. Germont, Duval’s counterpart in the opera, has a larger on-stage presence.

Thicknesse’s ironic question about Germont’s appearance at the ball in the finale of Act II draws attention to the expanded on-stage role of the father figure in the opera. With his ironic tone, Thicknesse implies that there is something particularly absurd in Germont’s repeated appearances after his pivotal duet with Violetta. By expanding the role of the father, Verdi and Piave create the conventional soprano-tenor-baritone triangle of central characters

¹ Robert Thicknesse, *The Times Opera Notes* (London: Harper Collins Publishers, 2001), 11.

² *Ibid.*, 177.

in Italian opera.³ They tell the story through a series of discrete musical numbers. Germont's cabaletta in Act II is one of these numbers, in which Verdi's formal organization closely mirrors that of conventional models.

Verdi and Piave's development of the Germont role is more than an exercise in operatic convention. The character enhances and adds nuance to the drama of the central conflict. Germont's cavatina after his grand duet with Violetta in Act II, a moment that does not have an analogous scene in the Dumas play, satisfies the operatic convention that each of the three central characters should have an aria. The aria—its placement, formal organization, text, and musical setting—is the center of Verdi and Piave's expansion of the father figure. It is a dramatic moment that unfolds logically from the preceding scene. Verdi and Piave use conventional formal organization to create an effective dramatic tension between Germont's restraint of his own conflicted feelings and Alfredo's agitation. In the context of Verdi's "middle period"⁴ aesthetics of opera composition, the aria functions to develop the father figure and to place the character in Violetta's story. Verdi's choice of subject and its adaptation, and his manipulation of conventional form are especially

³ Catherine Clément characterizes the three principal voice parts in these general terms: "Soprano: Persecuted Victim," "Tenor: Courage and Rebellion," and "Baritone: Organized Opposition." ("Through Voices, History," in *Siren Songs: Representations of Gender and Sexuality in Opera*, ed. Mary Ann Smart [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000], 21-23).

⁴ While the limits of Verdi's middle period vary widely among studies of Verdi's work, *La traviata* consistently falls into the second of three divisions of Verdi's career. Martin Chusid defines the middle period as the operas written between 1849 and 1859 (from *Luisa Miller* to *Un ballo in maschera*). Chusid points to three central factors that led him to define the period between these years: Verdi's own designation of his operas before the 1860s as his "cavatina operas" and those after as his "modern operas," Verdi's choice of subjects that focus on stories of individuals instead of operas with political messages that censors during the Risorgimento may have rejected, and Verdi's depiction of characters who are not stereotypical. By contrast, Julian Budden designates *Rigoletto* (1851) and *Aida* (1871) as the beginning and end of Verdi's middle period. (Martin Chusid, "Toward an Understanding of Verdi's Middle Period," in *Verdi's Middle Period: 1849-1859, Source Studies, Analysis, and Performance Practice*, ed. Martin Chusid [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997], 2-6; Julian Budden, *From Il trovatore to La forza del destino*, vol. 2 of *The Operas of Verdi* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992], 35).

indicative of these aesthetics. The aria also works within the context of the *tinta*, or musical impressions of place and time, that Verdi constructs throughout the opera, creating a stylistic and formal contrast to the waltzes that characterize Violetta's world of the Parisian *demi-monde*.

1. Romantic Aesthetics: Subject, *Tinta*, and Character Development

Continuing debates over the nature of Italian Romanticism, which were sparked in part by Mme. de Staël's 1816 article "On the Manner and Usefulness of Translations" in *Biblioteca italiana*, formed the context in which Verdi developed his attitudes toward the development and composition of opera. De Staël claims that Italian literature has stagnated; it continues to return to the same material and devices instead of exploring new possibilities. It is divided between "the scholars who sift and resift the cinders of the past, trying to find some more flakes of gold, and writers who rely on the sound of their language to create harmony without ideas, to assemble exclamations, declamations, and invocations in which not a single word comes from or reaches the heart."⁵ Without originality, literature as an art cannot exist. De Staël writes that Italians should turn toward translations of literary works from other countries in order to enrich Italian literature through the familiarization with foreign literature.⁶ She concludes her article with a warning for the Italians: "Italians must

⁵ "La littérature italienne est partagée maintenant entre les érudits qui s'assent et ressassent les cendres du passé, pour tâcher d'y retrouver encore quelques paillettes d'or, et les écrivains qui se fient à l'harmonie de leur langue pour faire des accords sans idées, pour mettre ensemble des exclamations, des declamations, des invocations où il n'y a pas un mot qui parte du cœur et qui y arrive." (Anne-Louise-Germaine de Staël, "L'esprit des traductions," in *Oeuvres complètes de Mme. La Baronne de Staël*, Vol. 17 [Paris: Treuttel et Würtz, 1821], 397). My translation.

⁶ "Il importe aux progrès de la pensée, dans la belle Italie, de regarder souvent au-delà des Alpes, non pour emprunter, mais pour connaître; non pour imiter, mais pour s'affranchir de certaines formes convenues qui se maintiennent en littérature comme les phrases officielles dans la société, et qui en banissent de même toute vérité naturelle." [It is important to the progress of thought in lovely Italy, to look beyond the Alps often, not to borrow, but to free Italy from certain suitable forms that remain in literature like official sayings in society and that banish at the same time all natural reality.] (de Staël, "De l'esprit des traductions," 395-396). My translation.

define themselves through literature and the visual arts; if they do not, their country will fall into the kind of apathy from which even the sun could hardly awake it.”⁷

De Staël uses opera as an example of the decadence and stagnation of Italian culture: “You will say to me that in Italy people go to the theater not to listen, but to meet their close friends in the boxes and chat. And I will conclude from this that spending five hours a day listening to the so-called words of Italian opera can only dull, through lack of use, the intellect of a nation.”⁸ In the early part of the century, Italians who were writing in defense of Italian literature did not refute de Staël’s criticism. The changes in the musical and dramatic style of Italian opera shifted as a result of the considerations that Italian writers and composers gave to de Staël’s charge of stagnation, decadence, and lack of creativity, “from musical spectacle with wretched poetry and incidental action to integrated *dramma per musica* was a large leap.”⁹ Creators of opera concerned themselves more with finding original content for their dramas, and the effective presentation of the dramas through music.

A second text that was central in the ongoing debates about Italian Romanticism was Victor Hugo’s 1827 preface to his play *Cromwell*, in which Hugo examines the characteristics of modern theater. Three central characteristics concern the way in which dramatists present the “real” on stage. First, characters, who in ancient epic poems were

⁷ “Les Italiens doivent se faire remarquer par la littérature et les beaux-arts; sinon leur pays tomberoit dans une sorte d’apathie dont le soleil même pourroit à peine le réveiller.” de Staël, “De l’esprit des traductions,” 399.

⁸ “On a beau dire que l’on ne va pas au spectacle en Italie pour écouter, mais pour causer, et se réunir dans les loges avec sa société intime; il n’est pas moins certain que d’entendre tous les jours, pendant cinq heures, plus ou moins, ce qu’on est confenu d’appeler des paroles dans la plupart des opera italiens, c’est, à la longue, une manière sûre de diminuer les facultés intellectuelles d’une nation.” (de Staël, “De l’esprit des traductions,” 396-297; translation in Gary Tomlinson, “Italian Romanticism and Italian Opera: An Essay in Their Affinities,” *19th-Century Music* 10, no. 1 [Summer 1986]: 44).

⁹ Tomlinson, “Italian Romanticism and Italian Opera,” 47.

empty figures who represent abstract ideals, in modern theater are “filled out.”¹⁰ These characters have unique characteristics which make them specific to their time and place. Hugo’s second central idea is that in the representation of the real, the playwright must present the sublime and the grotesque together, as they exist in reality, instead of creating an artificial separation between the two as in ancient comedies and tragedies.¹¹ In Hugo’s model for Romantic theater, he relates closely the reality of the “filled out” characters and that of blending the grotesque with the sublime with his concept of the *couleur locale* (literally, the local color) of the drama. He writes:

We begin to understand in our time that the exact location is one of the primary elements of reality. The characters who speak and act are not alone in etching for the viewer a faithful impression of the facts. The place where a catastrophe happens becomes a powerful and inseparable witness to it; and the absence of this silent character would deprive drama of some of the greatest scenes of history.¹²

By creating the impression of a specific place, a playwright creates *couleur locale*, and enhances the drama. Hugo writes “It is not at the surface of the drama where *couleur locale* rests, but at its base, in its heart. In this manner, it is naturally in all the corners of the drama, like sap that rises from the roots to the last leaf of the tree.”¹³ When a writer effectively

¹⁰ Victor Hugo, *Préface de Cromwell*, ed. Michel Cambien (Paris: Classiques Larousse, 1971) , 104.

¹¹ “le caractère du drame est le réel; le réel résulte de la combinaison toute naturelle de deux types, le sublime et le grotesque, qui se croisent dans le drame, comme ils se croise dans la vie et dans la création.” (the character of drama is reality; reality is the result of the natural combination of two types, the sublime and the grotesque, which cross each other as they do in life and in creation.) Hugo, *Préface de Cromwell*, 60. My translation.

¹² “On commence à comprendre de nos jours que la localité exacte est un des premières éléments de la réalité. Les personnages parlants ou agissants ne sont pas les seuls que gravent dans l’esprit du spectateur la fidèle empreinte des faits. Le lieu où telle catastrophe s’est passée en deviant un témoin terrible et inseparable; et l’absence de cette sorte de personnage muet décomplèterait dans le drame les plus grands scènes de l’histoire.” Hugo, *Préface de Cromwell*, 68. My translation.

¹³ “Ce n’est point à la surface du drame que doit être la couleur locale, mais au fond, dans le coeur même, naturellement, également, et pour ainsi parler, dans tous les coins du drame, comme la sève qui monte de la racine à la dernière feuille de l’arbre.” Victor Hugo, *Préface de Cromwell*, 84. My translation.

creates “filled out” characters, a combination of the sublime and the grotesque, and a *couleur locale*, each of these parts may gravitate toward the central action or conflict.¹⁴

Hugo writes that drama must distill reality and concentrate it to focus upon this central conflict. While Romantic drama “reflects” reality, Hugo writes that it is a special kind of reflection:

Drama is a mirror that reflects nature. But if this were an ordinary mirror, with a plain and even surface, it will only produce a dull image without contrast; faithful, but faded. We know that color and light are lost in a simple reflection. It is therefore necessary that drama is a mirror of concentration, which instead of weakening collects and condenses the colored beams. These will make a gleam into a light, and a light into a flame.¹⁵

These texts, by French authors focusing primarily on the nature of Romanticism in literature, were important in the development of the concept of opera as a serious art form in Italy. Giuseppe Mazzini, in his *Filosofia della musica* of 1835-36, recommended operatic reforms that drew heavily from the concepts of de Staël and Hugo. Mazzini wrote of the need to avoid empty imitation of earlier Italian opera. He borrowed heavily from Hugo’s descriptions of Romantic theater in his recommendations for music that reflects the time and place of the drama, and the creation of distinctive characters through musical portrayal.¹⁶ Mazzini’s broader agenda in his recommendations for Romantic opera was to promote a more vibrant political and cultural life in Italy.¹⁷

¹⁴ Hugo, *Préface de Cromwell*, 70-71.

¹⁵ “le drame est un miroir où se réfléchit la nature. Mais si ce miroir est un miroir ordinaire, une surface plane et unie, il ne renverra des objets qu’une image terne et sans relief, fidèle, mais décolorée; on sait que la couleur et la lumière perdent à la réflexion simple. Il faut donc que le drame soit un miroir de concentration qui, loin de les affaiblir, ramasse et condense les rayons colorants, qui fasse d’une lueur une lumière, d’une lumière une flamme. Alors seulement le drame est avoué de l’art.” Hugo, *Préface de Cromwell*, 82. My translation.

¹⁶ Tomlinson, “Italian Romanticism and Italian Opera,” 50-51.

¹⁷ Tomlinson, “Italian Romanticism and Italian Opera,” 49-50.

The texts by de Staël, Hugo, and philosophers and politicians like Mazzini who embraced French concepts of Romanticism, continued to influence operatic criticism of the 1850s. Hugo's image of a mirror that collects, concentrates, and illuminates the drama, and especially the central action, reflects Abramo Basevi's description of the way in which opera is constructed in his *Studio sulle opere di Giuseppe Verdi*. Basevi writes:

Opera in music... would compare badly with a statue or a painting, where the whole is considered first of all. In music we would seek in vain a determined idea such that a number of separate pieces may be clustered around it as though they would make a single whole. The music finds, rather, in the general concept of the drama a *point d'appui*, a center towards which the various pieces that make up the Opera more or less converge, according to the ingenuity of the maestro, and thus arises what is called the *colorito*, or the *tinta generale*. But the attainment of that *colorito* is not the end that the musician aims at but rather the means for suitably associating, with respect to the drama, the various pieces of which the opera is composed... And it is indubitable that the general *colorito* of an opera reveals the genius of the maestro better than anything else, because there he shows his gift for synthesis. When the maestro has come to devise that which is necessary to impart the desired *colorito* to the music, by measure of the disposition of the notes, the use of harmony, the choice of instruments, etcetera, then he has created as it were a type, a norm, a constraint to which the individual pieces, the motives, the accompaniments easily refer, from which results a whole that seizes and irresistibly draws the hearer.¹⁸

Basevi writes that opera is necessarily made up of parts that are not the result of organic evolution, but that work together and converge at the central action. The *colorito* (literally the

¹⁸ "L'Opera in musica... mal si vorrebbe paragonare ad una statua, o ad un quadro, ove prima d'ogni cosa si considera il *tutto*. Nella musica, invano cercheremmo un'idea determinata, e tale da aggrupparvi attorno i tanti pezzi separati, come se dovessero fare un *tutto uno*. La musica trova però nel concetto generale del dramma un punto d'appoggio, un centro verso cui convergono più o meno, secondo l'ingegno del maestro, i vari pezzi che compongono l'Opera; ed allora si ottiene ciò che chiamasi il *colorito*, o la *tinta generale*. Ma il conseguimento di questo *colorito* non è il fine che il musicista si propone, bensì il mezzo per associare convenientemente, rispetto al dramma, i vari pezzi di cui l'Opera si compone... È indubitato che il *colorito* generale di un'Opera rivela meglio d'ogni altra cosa l'ingegno del maestro, perchè ne mostra l'indole sua sintetica. Quando il maestro sia giunto ad immaginare quel che è necessario ad impartire alla musica, mediante la disposizione delle note, l'uso delle armonie, la scelta degli strumenti ec., il tanto desiderato *colorito*, allora egli ha creato come un tipo, una regola, un termine a cui agevolmente riferisce i pezzi particolari, i motivi, gli accompagnamenti ec., onde risulta un *tutto*, che sorprende, e attrae irresistibilmente l'uditore, il quale pieno di meraviglia è costretto a riconoscere l'Opera d'un grande ingegno." Abramo Basevi, (Florence: Tip. Tofani, 1859), 114-115; translation in Harold S. Powers, "La solita forma' and 'The Uses of Convention'," *Acta Musicologica* 59, no. 1 (January-April 1987): 67.

complexion) of the work is the result of the way in which these parts—melody, harmony, formal organization, instrumentation, poetic meter— meet to create the central focus.¹⁹ The conception of the *colorito* or *tinta* therefore goes beyond the depiction of time or place in the music at specific moments in the opera. It is an idea that encompasses the way in which the composer uses a variety of techniques to create an effective drama. Each part of the opera, and the placement of each part in the whole, contributes to the way in which the drama unfolds. The analysis of a single part within the opera will only give a partial view of the opera as a whole.

In this comprehensive view *tinta*, the formal organization of pieces, and the way in which these pieces relate to each other and to operatic convention becomes important. James Hepokoski explores the way in which formal organization can be considered in terms of genre. The organization of a piece has implicit dramatic and social meaning within the context of the opera. In *La traviata*, Hepokoski argues that different patterns of formal organization imply different social positions of the characters. Forms are not only a means of musical organization, but also carry with them generic markers of the relative positions of the characters to one another.²⁰ An important part of Hepokoski's use of formal conventions in his operas is the way in which Verdi changed and modified these conventions. Hepokoski writes that Verdi "invoked the conventions repeatedly, set them in place, stressed their conventionality and then, when appropriate, deformed them 'affirmatively' in order to make them speak with resonant clarity, to harness their affective (or generic) connotations."²¹ In

¹⁹ Powers, "La solita forma' and 'The Uses of Convention'," 67.

²⁰ James Hepokoski, "Genre and Content in Mid-Century Verdi: 'Addio, del passato' (*La traviata*, Act III)," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 1, no. 3 (November 1989): 252.

²¹ Hepokoski, "Genre and content," 255.

this interpretation, form becomes an important factor in the consideration of Verdi's construction of characters, drama, and even *tinta*.

Ralph Locke proposes a method for considering musical exoticism that encompasses both specific musical devices that indicate the non-Western and moments that do not use these devices.²² Locke's proposed "All the Music in Full Context" Paradigm is useful for an analysis of Verdi's construction of a sense of place and time through his music. While the musical world of the *demi-monde* that Verdi creates is not exotic within a construct of exoticism as the depiction of non-Western places or people in music, Locke's consideration of the ways in which a composer depicts place and time through music is applicable. Verdi uses both specific musical devices, like the waltzes he uses to create the impression of the Parisian *demi-monde*, and devices which composers use more widely, like conventional formal organization in the opera. These two kinds of devices are closely related, and work together to create the musical settings in which the characters develop and the central drama unfolds.

Verdi's pragmatic treatment of possible scenarios and revisions of librettos in his correspondence sheds light on the ways in which the ideas of de Staël and Hugo are reflected in Verdi's approach to drama.²³ In a letter dated 14 December 1850 to Carlo Marzari, a member of the *Prezidenza*, the directing body at the Teatro La Fenice in Venice,²⁴ Verdi

²² Ralph Locke, "A Broader View of Musical Exoticism," *Journal of Musicology* 24, no. 4 (Fall 2007): 480.

²³ Gilles de Van points to Verdi's correspondence as a rich source for his views on operatic aesthetics. De Van points to Verdi's pragmatism as a reason for the composer's dislike for putting forth theories, as well as his dislike for revealing the genesis of his works and his technical choices. Gilles de Van, *Verdi's Theater: Creating Drama through Music*, trans. Gilda Roberts (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 24-25.

²⁴ The *Prezidenza* consisted of three noblemen rather than a single impresario, as was common in other Italian opera houses. Nicholas John, ed, *English National Opera Guide to La traviata* (New York: Riverrun Press, 1981), 9.

wrote of his requirements for an effective scenario for an opera. At the time, Verdi and Piave were working on *Rigoletto*, an adaptation of Victor Hugo's play *Le roi s'amuse*. In the letter, Verdi protests revisions to the libretto which Marzari and Guglielmo Brenna made in order to satisfy the Venetian censors. Verdi writes of the revision that it "lacks character, significance, and, in short, the dramatic moments leave one completely cold." Of the character of Rigoletto and his music, Verdi writes:

I thought it would be beautiful to portray this extremely deformed and ridiculous character who is inwardly passionate and full of love. I chose the subject precisely because of these qualities and these original traits, and if they are cut I shall no longer be able to set it to music. If anyone says to me I can leave my notes as they are for this new plot, I reply that I don't understand this kind of thinking, and I say frankly that my music, whether beautiful or ugly, is never written in a vacuum, and that I always try to give it character. To sum up, an original, powerful drama has been turned into something ordinary and cold.²⁵

Verdi required subjects for his opera that left an impression on the audience through what Gilles de Van calls "the emotive shock."²⁶ In the revised version of *Rigoletto*, Verdi protested the absence of this impression. He insisted that he wrote his music to reflect the shock of the original story; it could not be applied to a scenario where this impression was absent. In his *Copialettere*, in which he kept drafts of letters, Verdi made a list in 1849 or 1850 of possible

²⁵ "Io trovo appunto bellissimo rappresentare questo personaggio estremamente deforme e ridicolo, ed internamente appassionato e pieno d'amore. Scelsi appunto questo soggetto per tutte queste qualità, e questi tratti originali, se si tolgono, io non posso più farvi musica. Se mi si dirà che le mie note possono stare anche con questo dramma, io rispondo che non comprendo queste ragioni, e dico francamente che le mie note o belle o brutte che siano non le scrivo mai a caso e che procuro sempre di darvi un carattere. Insomma di un dramma originale, potente, se ne è fatto una cosa comunissima e fredda." Gaetano Cesari and Alessandro Luzio, ed., *I Copialettere di Giuseppe Verdi* (Milan: A Cura della Commissione Esecutiva per le Onoranze a Giuseppe Verdi nel Primo Centenario della Nascita, 1913), 110-111; Translation printed Giuseppe Verdi, *The Letters of Giuseppe Verdi*, ed. Charles Osborne (London: Victor Gollancz, Ltd., 1971), 76-66.

²⁶ de Van, *Verdi's Theater*, 19.

subjects for future projects, which he titled “Argomenti d’opere.” The list includes Shakespeare’s *King Lear*, *Hamlet*, Victor Hugo’s *Le roi s’amuse*, and Byron’s *Cain*.²⁷

As Verdi’s letter to Marzari reflects, the depth and complexity of his characters is a central concern in Verdi’s treatment of scenarios. He drew upon his impression of Shakespeare’s characterizations:

Copying from what is real may be a good thing, but inventing what is real is better, much better. There seems to be a contradiction in these words, ‘invent what is real,’ but ask Papa [Shakespeare]. It is possible that he, Papa, had come across somebody like Falstaff, but it is unlikely he ever met anyone as evil as Iago, and never, ever angels like Cordelia, Imogen, Desdemona, etc., etc., and yet they are so real! To copy from what is real may be a good thing, but it is photography. It is not painting.²⁸

This concept of “inventing what is real” in the creation of characters is important both in terms of the broader ideological context of Romantic thought and in terms of Verdi and Piave’s adaptation of Dumas’s character of M. Duval into Germont in *La traviata*. Like Hugo’s image of the mirror that intensifies the drama as it reflects reality, the development of the character in the context of the drama of the opera works to focus the dramatic action around the three central characters, Violetta, Alfredo, and Germont in a way that the Dumas play does not.

²⁷ A facsimile of this page appears in Gaetano Cesari and Alessandro Luzio, ed., *I Copialettere di Giuseppe*, between pages 422 and 423. Of the possible subjects on the list, the only one which Verdi completed is *Le roi s’amuse* (*Rigoletto*).

²⁸ Letter from Verdi to Countess Maffei, 20 October 1876, in Gaetano Cesari and Alessandro Luzio, ed., *I Copialettere di Giuseppe Verdi*, 624; translation in de Van, *Verdi’s Theater*, 42.

2. *Argomenti d'opere*: Choice of the Subject

Verdi's choice of the Dumas play as the subject for an opera was a difficult one. He had to take many factors into consideration in the first stages of the compositional process. In the search for a new operatic subject, he looked for a story that was original, reflecting the call for creativity in drama in the wake of de Staël's criticisms of Italian literature. The story also needed to be one that Verdi could organize and divide using the forms and conventions of lyric drama as tools to produce his desired dramatic effect. At the same time, Verdi needed a subject that would suit the cast, the censors and the audiences in the city in which the opera was to be performed.

It took seven months for Verdi to choose a subject after he began negotiations for his contract to write a new opera for the Teatro La Fenice for the 1853 Carnival season.²⁹ Negotiations began in April 1852, the contract was drawn up on 4 May, and Verdi signed it five days later.³⁰ In July, Verdi wrote to Marzari requesting an extension of the deadline for the submission of a proposed libretto to the censors in Venice. Piave had not yet found an acceptable subject among the ones under consideration. Verdi writes in this letter that he is

²⁹ In the nineteenth century, there were three main opera seasons each year: Carnival; from Christmas to the end of February or the beginning of March; the Spring season beginning at the end of April through the beginning of June, and the Autumn season in September and October. Alessandro Roccatagliati, "The Italian theatre of Verdi's day," in *The Cambridge Companion to Verdi*, ed. Scott L. Balthazar (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 17.

³⁰ Fabrizio Della Seta, introduction to *La traviata: melodrama in three acts* by Giuseppe Verdi, ed. Fabrizio Della Seta (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press; Milan: G. Ricordi, 1996), xii.

looking for “stimulating subjects, on the choice of which a good part of the outcome depends.”³¹

There are both written and oral accounts that Verdi had seen the Dumas play in February of 1852 when he was living in Paris with Giuseppina Strepponi, and that he had been considering the play as a subject for an opera before he signed the 1852 contract with La Fenice. Léon Escudier, who was Verdi’s French publisher, begins his review of the 1856 premiere of *La traviata* in Paris with an account of Verdi’s first encounter with the play: Escudier writes: “He saw the production of *La dame aux camélias* once, and the subject struck him. He felt the strings of his lyre vibrate as he watched the heroine’s struggle of joy, shame, and repentance. Upon his return to Bussetto, he outlined the scenario for *La traviata*, and in twenty days the libretto and the music were ready to be performed.”³² A Verdi family story recounts a similar narrative, in which Verdi returned home the night he saw the play and immediately began to write music for an opera based on the play, without either a libretto or a scenario.³³

³¹ “I must thank you for having of your own accord granted me twenty days more to present the libretto, but these, I regret to say, are still insufficient. Piave has not yet presented me with any of those original and stimulating subjects, on the choice of which a good part of the outcome depends. We must therefore search and search again. I must say, however, that the choice remains extremely difficult because, apart from my not wanting those banal subjects one finds by the hundreds, there is the difficulty of the censor and, moreover, the mediocrity of the cast. Were there in Venice a first-rate prima donna, I would have a subject ready and of sure effect; but things being what they are, we need to search for something suitable and appropriate to the circumstances, and thus we need more time.” (Fabrizio Della Seta, introduction to *La traviata*, xiii).

³² “Verdi, quittant pour un moment ses grands héros et sa pompe dramatique, a voulu descendre dans les profondeurs du drame intime. Il avait assisté une fois à la représentation de *La dame aux camélias*; le sujet le frappa; il sentit vibrer les cordes de sa lyre en voyant se débattre à travers la joie, la honte et le repentir, l’héroïne de al comédie. A son retour à Bussetto, il traça le scénario de *La traviata*, et en vingt jours libretto et musique furent prêts à aller en scène.” (Léon Escudier, “Théâtre Impérial Italien: *La traviata*,” *La France musicale* 20 [14 December 1856]: 398). My translation.

³³ Mary Jane Phillips-Matz, *Verdi: A Biography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 303.

The extant preparatory material for the opera, which is undated, includes Verdi's synopsis sketch for Act I, in which he laid out the structure of the act.³⁴ This sketch includes the central dramatic events and musical moments—the form and melody of the *brindisi*, the duet between Violetta and Alfredo, and parts of Violetta's cabaletta. Verdi indicates the characters by voice type, instead of by name. It is possible that Verdi drafted this sketch before Piave had finished the scenario and the libretto.

While Dumas fils's *La dame aux camélias* was probably one of the subjects that Verdi considered in the summer of 1852, it was not the only one. On 15 August 1852, Verdi wrote to his French publisher, Léon Escudier, to request a copy of Théophile Gautier's play *La Juive de Constantine*. Verdi also wrote to Piave two days later, "Look! Were I not otherwise occupied [with the composition of *Il Trovatore*], I am sure I would find a beautiful subject, a great subject. Among the jumble of French plays it is difficult to discover one since everyone knows the most beautiful ones."³⁵ The earlier list of "Argomenti d'opere" in the *Copialettere* also suggests that Verdi considered several possible subjects at the same time. It

³⁴ I am using Fabrizio della Seta's designations for the different categories of preparatory materials as he has modified them from Barry Cooper's *Beethoven and the Creative Process* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990). Della Seta identifies five different kinds of sketches: 1) synopsis sketches in which Verdi drafted large sections of a piece, 2) preliminary sketches, which are short melodic snatches that would be developed later in the compositional process, 3) complete drafts of single sections, consisting of a complete working-out of a single unit ready to be copied into the skeleton score, 4) continuity drafts, a long sketch in which fragmentary ideas from earlier sketches are fit together into a larger whole, 5) variants, sketches that are alternatives or modifications of other sketches. (See Fabrizio Della Seta, introduction to *La traviata: schizzi e abbozzi autografi* by Giuseppe Verdi [Chicago: Chicago University Press; Milan: Riccordi, 2000] 43-46). Julian Budden provides a complete English translation of the synopsis sketch in his *From Il trovatore to La forza del destino*, 126.

³⁵ "Vedi! s'io non avessi altre occupazioni sono sicuro che troverei un bel soggetto, un grande soggetto. Nella faragine dei drammi francesi è difficile trovare, perché i più belli si conoscono tutti." Marcello Conati, *La Bottega della Musica: Verdi e La Fenice*, 298; translation in Della Seta, introduction to *La traviata*, xiii.

was not until 18 September that Verdi wrote Escudier to request a copy of Dumas's play. On 25 October, the proposed scenario for the new opera arrived at La Fenice for approval.³⁶

³⁶ Della Seta, introduction to *La traviata*, xiii.

3. “From foie gras to prosciutto”: Adapting the Dumas Story

In a letter dated 2 February 1853 to a Count Linati of Parma, Verdi’s friend, Cesare Vigna, to whom Verdi dedicated *La traviata*, writes of the difficulties that Piave had adapting the French play into an Italian opera libretto: “What anguish. The poor thing is down there [in Busetto] again for the second time since October to fend off the irritability of the maestro [Verdi]... and to try to perform the miracle of transforming foie gras into prosciutto.”³⁷ For most of Verdi’s operas, once he and his librettist chose a subject, the librettist would write the *selva*, a scenario in which the drama would be organized into acts, scenes, and divisions for musical numbers. From the *selva*, the librettist would write the libretto in verse, which would serve as the basis for composition. While the *selva* for *La traviata* does not survive, Vigna’s description of the difficulty of adapting the scenario reveals the tension that existed between foreign literature and Italian opera in the process of adapting a play into an operatic libretto.

The story of *La dame aux camélias* had already undergone an adaptation, in which Dumas converted his novel, written in 1848, into a stage version. Dumas completed the play in 1849, but censors in Paris would not allow its premiere until 2 February 1852.³⁸ In the play, Dumas eliminated the device of a third-party narrator who recounts the story of Marguerite, the courtesan, and Armand, her lover. The novel begins with the narrator’s first meeting with Armand, and the central story unfolds in a series of flashbacks and

³⁷ Letter in a private collection, transcribed in Della Seta, introduction to *La traviata*, xiii.

³⁸ John, ed. *English National Opera Guide to La traviata*, 29.

Marguerite's letters and diaries. The narrator, who becomes friends with Armand, only learns of Marguerite's reasons for her actions, her meeting with Duval (Armand's father), and her death from consumption at the end of the novel. In the play, Dumas integrates these dramatic moments into the plot, and eliminates the device of flashbacks.

For the operatic adaptation of the play, Verdi and Piave compressed the drama from four acts into three. In the first scene of the play, Dumas uses expository dialogue that outlines both the courtesan's past and the position of her future lover's family before Marguerite and Armand meet. Through the character of Nichette, one of Marguerite's friends, Dumas reveals two details about Marguerite's background that Verdi and Piave suppress in the libretto: Marguerite began her life in Paris as a respectable worker in a shop, and when Marguerite fell ill with consumption, the Comte de Giray agreed to be her protector in return for her promise to abandon her life as a courtesan upon her recovery. In the same scene, Armand reveals important information about his family background: his father is a government official, and he has a sister.

In addition to the suppression of these details about the central characters, Verdi and Piave also eliminate the subplots in Dumas's version of the story. In both the novel and the play, the central trio of Marguerite, Armand, and M. Duval, are surrounded by secondary characters who belong to the *demi-monde*. Through these characters and their relationships to each other, Dumas paints a picture of the Parisian *demi-monde* in which Marguerite lives. Marguerite's neighbor, Prudence, is a woman who worked as a courtesan, but who now survives by borrowing money from other women in the *demi-monde* who are still supported by lovers. Nichette is a young courtesan who worked with Marguerite in the shop, and who is in love with Gustave, a young man of the bourgeoisie. The two hope to receive his father's

blessing to be married, despite Nichette's past. In Act IV of the play, as Marguerite is dying, she receives a letter from Nichette that Gustave's father has given them his blessing, and that they are to be married. Olympe is a third courtesan, whose attitude toward her profession is less sentimental than Nichette's. She treats love as a business, and Saint-Gaudens is her current client. With these secondary characters, Dumas paints a picture of the *demi-monde*, and the nature of Marguerite's profession.

In the opera, there would be no time for the many subplots that Dumas created. Verdi uses waltz music as a musical device to create the atmosphere of the *demi-monde*. These waltzes take the place of and in fact collapse secondary plots in creating the social backdrop for public scenes: Violetta's party in Act I, and Flora's ball at the end of Act II. Alfredo's *brindisi* (drinking song) in Act I is an important moment in Verdi's setting for the introduction of the waltz as well as for Alfredo's call to the other guests to take pleasure in their party (See Example 1).

Example 1: Introduction to Alfredo's *brindisi* (No. 2, m. 182-192)

The musical score for the introduction to Alfredo's *brindisi* (No. 2, m. 182-192) is presented for four string parts: Violini, Viole, Violoncelli, and Contrabassi. The tempo is marked *Allegretto* with a quarter note equal to 69 beats per minute (♩ = 69). The key signature has one flat (B-flat). The music is in 3/4 time. The Violini part features a melodic line with many slurs and ties. The Viole part provides harmonic support with a similar melodic contour. The Violoncelli and Contrabassi parts play a steady, rhythmic pattern, often in octaves. Dynamics include *p* (piano) and *fpp* (fortissimo).

During those moments that take place in a private setting— especially at the country house in Act II—Verdi uses waltzes at strategic moments to create a divide between the

private and the public worlds. In Act II, Violetta returns to the waltz rhythm of the first act in her *cantabile* “Dite alla giovine” (See Example 2). It is at this moment in her duet with Germont that Violetta decides to sacrifice her love for Armand for the sake of his sister. She repeats to herself just before the beginning of the *cantabile*: “Even if God is kind and indulgent, Mankind will always be implacable.”³⁹ The return of the waltz at this moment illustrates Violetta’s dilemma musically. Because she is a courtesan, from the sonic world of the waltzes in the first act, and all the associations with immorality and unrespectable relations, Violetta is trapped. She will never be forgiven for her life before her relationship with Alfredo.

In the finale of Act II, Verdi returns to the waltz at the beginning of the card game, and continues up to Violetta’s confrontation with Alfredo alone after the other guests at Flora’s ball have left. The waltz here does not have the expansive joyful quality of the *brindisi* that Verdi creates through his use of the leaps of a major sixth, and the 3/8 meter. During the card party, Verdi uses the tempo marking *allegro agitato*, uses a 6/8 meter. There are no wide leaps, and the waltz does not have the song-like quality of the *brindisi*. The characters on stage do not join the orchestra to sing the waltz the way they do in the first act. Instead, the waltz depicts the tension of Violetta and Alfredo’s meeting at Flora’s ball (See Example 3).

³⁹ “Se pur beneficio le indulga Iddio, L’uomo implacabile per lei sarà.” Translation in William Weaver, *Seven Verdi Librettos* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1975), 157.

Example 2: “Dite alla giovine” (No. 5, m. 323-237)

Andantino.

Clar. in Do

V.

G.

Viol.

V.le

Vc.

Cb.

(a Germont piangendo) *cantabile*
 per lei sa- rà.) Ah! Di - te al - la gio - vine si bel - lae pu - ra,
 l'angiol con - so - la - tor.

Andantino.

Example 3: Waltz at Flora’s ball (No. 7, m. 348-352)

Allegro agitato

(Gastone si pone a tagliare, Alfredo ed altri puntano)

Clar. in Sib

Viol.

V.le

Vc.

Cb.

pp
estremamente piano
pp
pp
pp

In Violetta's final aria, "Addio del passato," in Act III, Verdi returns to the waltz idiom. In the new context of Violetta's sickroom, removed from the world of the *demi-monde* parties by Verdi's use of the device of the off-stage chorus celebrating Carnival, the appearance of a dance in a minor key takes on a new significance. Hepokoski describes the effect of this change in the dance as "a collapsed or distorted death-dance" in which musical accents are placed on unaccented syllables of the text, signaling Violetta's "strain and weariness"⁴⁰ (See Example 4).

Example 4: "Addio del passato" (No. 8, m. 127-131)

The musical score for Example 4, "Addio del passato" (No. 8, m. 127-131), is presented in a standard musical notation format. The tempo is marked "Andante mosso (♩ = 50)". The key signature is one flat (B-flat). The score includes parts for Oboe (Ob.), Violin (Viol.), Viola (V.le), Violoncello (Vc.), and Contrabass (Cb.). The vocal line (V.) is in the soprano register. The lyrics are: "-ta! Ad-di-o del pas-sa-to bei". The vocal line has markings "dolente e pp" and "legato e dolce". The orchestral parts have markings "pp" and "pizz.".

⁴⁰ Hepokoski, "Genre and Content in Mid-Century Verdi," 261.

Verdi's use of the waltz in different contexts throughout the opera functions as a stylistic device to establish or to remind the audience of the drama's setting. The characters of the *demi-monde* live in a musical world of the waltz. Throughout the opera Verdi's depicts the characters' changing moods and situations through contrasting waltzes. These changing waltzes at once unite the scenes in which Violetta's position as a member of the *demi-monde* is central to the drama, and also allows Verdi to set a wide variety of dramatic situations. These waltzes also create an important contrast to the world of the respectable bourgeoisie, and especially the character of Germont. In addition to this method of establishing a setting for the drama through music, Verdi also makes use of conventional operatic forms in a similar way. He uses form to develop character and advance the plot in a way that complements and interacts with the use of the waltzes.

4. Experimentation with “Solita forma”: The Violetta-Germont Duet

The structure of the pivotal scene between the courtesan and the father is consistent among the two Dumas versions and the libretto for the opera. In each version, this is a central moment in the drama. While the financial pressure that the lovers’ new life in the country outside of Paris and away from the *demi-monde* is a pressing central concern, it is the arrival of the father that destroys the illusion they have created for themselves that they are separated from the world.

Verdi and Piave set this scene using the formal organization of a grand duet between Violetta and Germont. James Hepokoski, Roger Parker and Harold S. Powers have each considered this duet in terms of its formal plan, and how the formal plan informs the way in which Verdi tells the larger story of the opera.⁴¹ These studies examine the complex relationship between Verdi’s use of conventional forms, his expansion and modification of these forms, and what his formal plan means in terms of his compositional process, his development as a composer, and his creation of a dramatic whole in his operas. At the center of these studies of Verdi’s duet is the way in which Verdi reconciled the conventions of formal organization and the unfolding drama. The events in Dumas’s scene do not

⁴¹ Hepokoski, “Genre and Content in Mid-Century Verdi”; James A. Hepokoski, “*Ottocento* Opera as Cultural Drama: Generic Mixtures in *Il trovatore*” in *Verdi’s Middle Period: 1849-1859, Source Studies, Analysis, and Performance Practice*, ed. Martin Chusid (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 147-193; Roger Parker, “‘*Insolite forme*,’ or Basevi’s Garden Path” in *Verdi’s Middle Period: 1849-1859, Source Studies, Analysis, and Performance Practice*, ed. Martin Chusid (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 129-146; Powers, “‘La solita forma’ and ‘The Uses of Convention’.”

correspond directly to the patterns that are at the center of the concept of the formal organization of an operatic duet.

Beginning with Abramo Basevi's 1859 study of Verdi's operas, *Studio sulle Opere di Giuseppe Verdi*, the integration of formal and dramatic considerations in the Violetta-Germont duet has been the subject of a number of formal analyses and studies of the evolution of Verdi's dramatic strategies. Verdi and Piave set this pivotal scene using an expansion of the conventional grand duet form. In the conventional form, an encounter between two characters falls into a specific framework of events. Basevi's analysis of Verdi's operas includes references to the "solita forma," an abstract concept of the formal patterns that appear in opera. The "solita forma" of the grand duet consists of five subsections: the *Scena*, *Tempo d'attacco*, *Adagio*, *Tempo di mezzo* and *Cabaletta* (see Table 1). Harold S. Powers describes the relationship between these four sections in terms of the active and static sections of a scene: the *Tempo d'attacco* "is the musical embodiment of the active aspects of confrontation", the *adagio* "is a lyric expression of the emotional position or positions, momentarily stabilized, that were reached during the confrontation"; the *tempo di mezzo* is a second section of action which interrupts the stasis of the *adagio*; and the closing *cabaletta* is static."⁴² While this framework is useful to understand the structure of Verdi's duets, Powers points out that terminology that refers to abstract concepts of form appear only in passing, and are not consistently applied in early analyses of Verdi's works, including Verdi's own letters concerning his compositions and Basevi's study of Verdi's operas through *Un ballo in maschera*. Despite the loose, and often inconsistent use of formal terminology in the

⁴² Powers, "'La solita forma' and 'The Uses of Convention'," 70.

nineteenth century, these terms and patterns have become popular, and even representative of criticism and analysis of Verdi's compositions.⁴³

Table 1: The Grand Duet— abstract form and the Act II duet in *La traviata*⁴⁴

“La solita forma”		Act II Germont-Violetta duet	
		Powers	Basevi
Scena		“Alfredo?...” (V) “Madamigella Valéry?” (V, G)	
Tempo d’attacco (active)	Stanzas Dialogue	“Pura siccome un angelo” (G)- <i>stanza</i> “Ah comprendo... no! giammai!” (V, G)- <i>dialogue</i> “Non sapete quale affetto” (V)- <i>stanza</i> “E grave il sacrificio”- <i>extended</i> <i>concluding dialogue section</i>	“Pura siccome un angelo”- Germont’s first <i>cantabile</i> , <i>allegro moderato</i> “Ah! comprendo!”- parlante instead of simple recitative “Non sapete”- <i>melody</i> in 6/8 vivace “Bella voi siete”- parlante, 2/4 andante “Un dì quando le veneri”- developed melody “Così alla misera”- more expansive in nature
Adagio (static)		“Dite alla giovine” (V) “Piangi, o, misera” (G) “Dite... Piange” (a 2)	Dite alla giovine”- cantabile, 6/8 andantino “Piangi, piangi”- Germont’s reply
Tempo di mezzo (active)		“Or imponente... tra breve ei vi fia reso” (V, G)	Brief recitative and parlante
Cabaletta (static)		“Morro! la mia memoria” (V) “No, generosa, vivere” (G) “Conosco il sacrificio” (V) Premiato il sacrificio” (G)	Cabaletta

⁴³ Roger Parker considers the impact of Basevi’s *Studio sulle Opere di G. Verdi* on critical writing about Verdi after 1970 in his article “Basevi’s Garden Path.”

⁴⁴ This is an abbreviated version of Powers’s chart of the structure of this duet in “‘La insolita forma and ‘The Uses of Convention’,” 79.

The duet between Violetta and Germont extends the patterns of the abstract form as Powers outlines it in his article. Parker argues that the language in Basevi's description of the duet suggests that Basevi did not hear the duet as an example of the pattern of his "solita forma."⁴⁵ Basevi does not use formal terminology that might suggest a broad formal scheme in his analysis, and he also writes: "the form of the duet is absolutely new in the variety of its *cantilene* [songs]." The description of the scene that follows, however, suggests, even though Basevi does not write about the dramatic events in the context of an overarching structure, that he took it into account. A comparison between Basevi's description and Powers's analysis reveals many similarities and important sections. Basevi's description concentrates on the details of the sections that Powers labels as the *Tempo d'attacco* and the *adagio*, while he glosses over the details of Powers's *tempo di mezzo* and *cabaletta*: "A brief recitative and a parlante lead to the cabaletta"⁴⁶ (Table 1 compares Powers's abstract formal sections to his analysis of the duet, and both of these to Basevi's description).

⁴⁵ Roger Parker, "Basevi's Garden Path," 140.

⁴⁶"La forma del duo è assolutamente nuova per la varietà delle cantilene. Il primo cantabile di Germont, in *tempo ordinario, allegro moderato* ['Pura siccome un angelo'], porta un ritmo assai adoperato [...]. Con accorgimento ha poi il Verdi adoperato un *parlante*, invece d'un semplice *recitativo*, come vorrebbero le parole ['Ah! comprendo']. Quindi Violetta ha un *motivo vivace* in tempo 6/8 ['Non sapete'], ove il ritmo della *mossa* è troppo ripetuto [...]. Succede ad un breve *a piacere* un altro *parlante*, in tempo 2/4 *andante* ['Bella voi siete'] che conduce ad un *motivo* sviluppato sulle parole 'Un dì quando le veneri' [...]. La risposta di Violetta ['Così alla misera'], in forma più larga, nulla porge di notevole. Assai patetico è il cantabile di Violetta ['Dite alla giovine'], ove entra l'*andantino* 6/8. Sono 16 battute di un solo getto piene di passione. Nè meno affetto incontrasi nella parte di Germont '*piangi, piangi.*' [...] Ripete poi Violetta le predette sue 16 battute, intanto che Germont le si accompagna concertando. Dolcissime e pietose sono le battute d'*insieme* che seguono, e danno fine all'*andantino*. Un breve *recitativo* ed un *parlante* conducono alla *caballetta*."; "The form of the duet is absolutely new in the variety of its *cantilena* [songs]. Germont's first cantabile, in common time, Allegro moderato ['Pura siccome un angelo'], carries a very hackneyed rhythm... Verdi has thus, skillfully, used a parlante, instead of a simple recitative, as the words ['Ah comprendo'] seem to demand. Then Violetta has a melody in 6/8 vivace ['Non sapete'], in which one driving rhythm is repeated too often... Following a brief *a piacere* comes another parlante, Andante and in 2/4 ['Bella voi siete'] which leads to a developed melody on the words 'Un dì quando le veneri.'... Violetta's reply ['Così alla misera'], which is more expansive in nature, has nothing noteworthy. Violetta's cantabile ['Dite alla giovane'], which starts at the 6/8 Andantino, is very moving: sixteen bars in a single, passionate sweep. No less moving is Germont's reply '*piangi, piangi.*'... Then Violetta repeats the aforementioned sixteen bars, Germont offering accompanying phrases. The *insieme* bars that follow are very gentle, and bring a close to the Andantino. A brief recitative and a *parlante* lead to the

Powers describes the sections of the abstract concept of the three forms: the grand duet, the aria/cavatina, and the central finale, in terms of the kinetic and static qualities of the separate sections within each of these forms. In the Violetta Germont duet, the balance between the actions and reactions of both characters plays a more important part in the drama than a balance between action and stasis. In both Basevi's description of the scene and Powers's formal analysis, it is this balance that underlies the division by important moments or formal sections. While Germont is the agent of change, who sets the events into motion that destroy Violetta, by the end of the scene, Violetta becomes the active character. By the end of the scene, Germont is reacting to her actions. Germont accuses Violetta of ruining Alfredo. Violetta's dignified reaction to this accusation causes in turn a reaction from Germont, who is surprised by her manner. He reveals that Alfredo has signed over his inheritance to Violetta, and Violetta argues that if she had known, she would not have allowed it. To prove herself, she reveals that she has already taken action by selling her belongings to support her life in the country with Alfredo, to which Germont expresses his admiration for her "noble feelings" ("Nobili sensi invero!"). While Germont's impression of Violetta has changed, he must still take action by asking Violetta to leave his son, for the sake of his daughter. The family of his daughter's fiancée will not allow the marriage if Alfredo continues his life with Violetta. Germont asks Violetta to leave. Violetta resists, and Germont tries to convince her by telling her of the fickleness of men towards courtesans. At this moment Violetta realizes that bourgeois society will never forgive her past, and she makes her decision to act. It is only at this moment, when Violetta decides to give in to Germont's request, that there is the first moment of lyricism and a relatively stable state in

cabaletta" (Basevi, *Studio sulle Opere di Giuseppe Verdi*, 234-235; translation in Parker, "Basevi's Garden Path," 141-142).

the dramatic action, the *Andantino*, in which Violetta sings “Dite alla giovine.” In the short *Tempo di mezzo* that follows, she asks Germont for his command, but rejects both his proposal to tell his son that she does not love him, and to leave him. In the end, she forms a plan that she does not tell Germont because she is afraid he will oppose it. In return, she asks the father that he comfort his son, and tell him what she has done only after she has died.

5. The Development of Germont's Character

From the beginning of the compositional process, the role of Germont was an important, and problematic part of the opera. Of the three central characters, the role of Germont changed the most in the adaptations from novel to play, and from play to opera. Verdi returned to Germont's cavatina, both in his composition of the 1853 version of the opera, and again in his revisions for the 1854 revival at Teatro San Benedetto. In the opera, the function of Germont's character was changed from that of catalyst for the destruction of Violetta and Alfredo's relationship, and Violetta's downfall, to an agent of change, a character who is deeply affected by his actions and their consequences. Verdi and Piave effected this change in the character both through the structure of the libretto and through the musical setting of the character's words.

In both Dumas's play and his novel, Duval functions as the representative of the bourgeois world and bourgeois ideals of respectability. In Dumas's adaptation of the novel to the play, one of the scenes that he decided to omit was a scene between Duval and Armand in Paris, which takes place before Duval's scene with Violetta. In the scene, Duval tells his son that it is expected and natural in bourgeois society that young men will have lovers whom they support. Bourgeois men can be respectable even if they have lovers. Duval's objection lies in the way in which other members of the bourgeoisie are reacting to Armand's relationship, and that Armand is risking his financial security for Marguerite, and how these reactions have impacted the rest of the Duval family. Duval's view of the world in the novel

reflects the division between the public and the private in nineteenth-century bourgeois society, and the complexities of this division. Richard Sennett outlines this division, writing that that in the private realm, the family is the idealized refuge from society, and it is the family that provides the moral framework with which the members can measure the public realm. In opposition to the private family is the public realm, which is an “immoral domain.” Business in the public world and actions in the public world occur in a space that is “outside” the private, moral realm. This public domain in the nineteenth century was different for men and women. While women who operate in the public realm risk the loss of virtue and public disgrace, as Violetta does, men may withdraw from the strict moral framework of the private world by operating in the public domain. For this reason, the public can be a place where men become free.⁴⁷

In this division between public and private, the *demi-monde* of the novel is a complex domain that lies between the two poles. The courtesans sell their love, bringing an emotion that would normally be reserved for the private into the public realm. Their affairs involve both the private world of love and intimacy and the public domain, in which they sell these elements of the private world. This complex interrelationship between the public and the private, in turn, occurs behind the veil of the *demi-monde*, in which affairs take place in relatively public forums, but are at the same time suppressed in terms of public and private conceptions of honor. The *demi-monde* is a moral limbo between the public and the private. While the women of the *demi-monde* are caught in this limbo, the men who are their lovers move freely between the worlds of private and public respectability.

Through the scene between Duval and Armand in the novel, Dumas exposes the complexity and the hypocrisy of this social system. In the play, this scene is omitted, and

⁴⁷ Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977), 20-24.

while Duval is still presented as a respectable government official, the worldly understanding of the social system that his counterpart in the novel has is missing in the play. In the play, Duval does not show the same understanding of Armand's relationship with Marguerite in terms of the organization of society. Nor does Dumas give Duval a chance to express his reactions to Marguerite's sacrifice or the consequence of his demands in his own voice. His sentiments are revealed in Act IV in the letter which Marguerite reads aloud. For this reason, the Duval of the play is the most superficial of the three versions of the father figure in the novel, play and opera.

Verdi's use of *tinta* to create the social atmosphere of the *demi-monde* in abstract, musical terms, and his suppression of the secondary characters and secondary plots of the Dumas drama shift the relationship between his character and societal structure. While Dumas's novel and play explore the conflict between Marguerite's position as a courtesan and the wider societal structure, Verdi's version examines the changing relationships between the three central characters. In the opera, the social framework acts as a background for the central drama in a way that it does not in the Dumas versions.

With the suppression of the secondary plots, Verdi focuses his audience's attention directly on the central soprano-tenor-baritone triangle. Basevi writes of Verdi's opera: "In *La traviata* Verdi brought chamber music on to the stage with real success,"⁴⁸ Julian Budden describes the effect of the opera as "the language of the drawing-room *romanze* enriched by the dramatic experience,"⁴⁹ and Roger Parker borrows Basevi's designation of the work as a

⁴⁸ Julian Budden, *From Il trovatore to La forza del destino*, 37.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 37.

“chamber opera,” due to the intimate setting.⁵⁰ Verdi concentrates on interpersonal relationships, and on the reactions of each of the three main characters to the succession of events.

In order to allow for Germont to have his own voice in this chamber opera, Verdi and Piave added a section after the grand duet of Act II that does not have a corresponding scene in the Dumas play. In the novel, Armand describes his father’s efforts to distract him after Marguerite leaves him, and his subsequent return to the country for several weeks, but this episode focuses on Armand’s reactions to his situation, and not on Duval’s reactions to his meeting with Marguerite. The cavatina provides a place for the development of Germont’s feelings after his meeting with Violetta in a way that the Duval of the play and novel are denied. Germont finds himself in a difficult position at the end of the duet. He has come to admire Violetta, and to have sympathy for her position. He also recognizes the pain that the separation has caused Alfredo. At the same time, he has acted in the best interest of his family, asking for Violetta’s sacrifice to secure the happiness of his daughter.

From the first performances of the opera, this aria faced criticism, beginning with Felice Varesi, the baritone who created the role of Germont at the 1853 premiere. In fact, as early as November 1852, Varesi was critical of Verdi’s choice for the subject of the new opera. In a letter to Brenna, the secretary at La Fenice, Varesi wrote that he had read an Italian translation of the Dumas play.⁵¹ He criticized the play for being “monotonous” and the plan to set the modern subject in the seventeenth century for being ineffective. He also

⁵⁰ Roger Parker, *New Grove Guide to Verdi and his Operas* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 156.

⁵¹ In addition to a “free translation” of Dumas’s play which was published in Italian in 1852, a traveling theater troupe also presented an Italian translation of the play in Venice in February 1853, the month before the premiere of Verdi’s opera.

believed that Fanny Salvini-Donatelli, the soprano whom La Fenice engaged to sing for the 1853 Carnavale season, was not suited to the part of the courtesan.⁵²

In addition to these general criticisms of the drama, Varesi was not satisfied with the role of Germont, and after the unsuccessful premiere of the opera on 6 March 1853, he complained in a letter to Francesco Lucca that the cast had been unfairly blamed for the opera's failure. He took the bad reviews of the performance personally, he writing that the Italian press made Verdi into an idol who could do no wrong. In the letter, he pointed out that it could not have been his performance that was at fault, as his performance in *Il Corsaro* at La Fenice in the same season was well-received. He claimed that it is Verdi who should be blamed for the problems in the opera:

I do not intend to set myself up as judge of the musical merit of *La traviata*, but I certainly maintain that Verdi did not know how to make use of the abilities of the artists at his disposal. For Salvini, of all her part only the cavatina really suits her well. For Graziani little or nothing. For me an adagio of an aria, and that annoyed the Venetian public, who expected that I would be treated well, since Verdi had already created for me the colossal roles of Macbeth and Rigoletto with such success, so

⁵² Letter from Varesi to Brenna, 10 November 1852: "Da quanto mi dici dell'Argomento *Amore e Morte* capisco e non può essere altrimenti da dove si è preso il fatto. Questo è un Romanzo di Dumas figlio intitolato *La dame aux camelias* [sic] di cui è protagonista una mantenuta ossia meglio *puttana* Lionne del nostro secolo morta a Parigi non è molto.

"Non so però se un fatto della nostra età trasportato più d'un secolo addietro posso produrre la stessa impressione. Riguardo alla scelta del Buondelmonte pel debutto del S. Stefano non so approvarla per nessun conto ed anche per la Salvini perché quest'opera è pericolosissima e non conviene produrla che quando gli artisti sono già apprezzati e gustati." [In Conati, *La Bottega della Musica: Verdi e La Fenice*, 303; cited in Mary Jane Phillips-Matz, *Verdi: A Biography*, 319-320.]

Problems with the casting for the new opera occupied Verdi as early as 14 April 1852, when he wrote to Carlo Marzari, the senior member of the board of directors at La Fenice, concerning the role of the *prima donna* at La Fenice: "please engage as soon as possible someone who will make up the triad with the tenor and baritone." At the same time that Verdi entered into negotiations, La Fenice engaged Varesi, the first of the three principal singers, on 27 March 1852. La Fenice engaged Fanny Salvini-Donatelli as the *prima donna* for the season. In July of 1852, before he had chosen his subject, Verdi describes the cast as "mediocre." Verdi's contract included a clause that allowed for him to request a change in the casting of the soprano for the opera before 15 January 1853. Verdi did not have a chance to hear Salvini-Donatelli sing until after that date. Despite his efforts to get the theater to replace the soprano, whom Verdi described as "appalling," Salvini-Donatelli sang the role of Violetta for the premiere. (Letter from Verdi to Marzari printed in Conati, *La Bottega della Musica: Verdi*, 276; translation in Budden, *From Il trovatore to La forza del destino*, 115; Della Seta, introduction to *La traviata*, xiii; from Piave (in Verdi's name) to Marzari, 4 February 1853, translation in Julian Budden, "The Two Traviatas," in *Proceedings of the Royal Musical Association*, 99 [1972-1973], 48).

much so that before the premiere everyone knew that the Maestro was very satisfied with me.⁵³

Criticism of the 1853 premiere reflected Varesi's description of the Venetian audience's "dissatisfaction" with the cavatina. In a review of 9 March 1853, *L'Italia musicale* reports that the audience responded to the aria with "hisses."⁵⁴ But the reason for the audience's dissatisfaction may have been due both to Varesi's interpretation and to Verdi's writing. In *La Gazzetta ufficiale di Venezia*, Locatelli writes of the "delicate beauty" of the aria, but continues:

What a shame that a phrase from the cabaletta, repeated excessively though in itself very elegant, and not well handled the first evening, offended the audience a little and thus ruined the impression of the whole piece! [the phrase "Un padre ed una suora t'affretta a consolar," m. 247-250 in 1853 version] With the repeats eliminated, and now better understood, not only does it sustain itself, but the crowds leaving the theater are beginning to sing it: an unintentional honor, granted only to music that is well liked and makes a hit.⁵⁵

In response to the criticisms of his opera, Verdi retracted the score, which was to be published by Riccordi, and refused to allow a revival of the opera until the spring of 1854. In the meantime, Verdi returned to Paris. From Paris, he wrote to Riccordi, requesting the scores for five numbers from *La traviata* which he revised for the 1854 revival of the opera

⁵³ Letter from Varesi to Lucca, 10 March 1853: "Io non intendo farmi giudice del merito musicale della *Traviata*, ma certo sostengo che Verdi non ha saputo servirsi dei mezzi degli artisti che aveva a disposizione. Alla Salvini non sta propriamente bene che la sola cavatina di tutta la sua parte. A Graziani poco o nulla. A me un adagio d'aria e ciò ha fatto molto senso nel pubblico veneziano, il quale s'aspettava chi'io fossi collocato assai bene, avendo Verdi creato per me le parti colossali di *Macbeth* e di *Rigoletto* con tanto successo, tanto più che prima dell'andata in scena si sapeva che il Maestro era assai soddisfatto di me. Eccoti la storia di ieri sera, 3^a recita. Recita a beneficio dei poveri: meschinissimo teatro." Reproduced in Franco Schlitzer, *Mondo teatrale dell'Ottocento: episodi, testimonianze, musiche e lettere inedite* (Naples: Fauto Fiorentino Libraio, 1954), 157; translation Della Seta, introduction to *La traviata*, xiii.

⁵⁴ *L'Italia musicale* no. 20 (9 March 1853), 80.

⁵⁵ Locatelli, *Gazzetta ufficiale di Venezia*, no. 59 (12 March 1853), cited from *Gazzetta musicale di Milano*, no. 12 (20 March 1853), 53; translation in Della Seta, introduction to *La traviata*, xiii.

at the Teatro San Benedetto in Venice.⁵⁶ With these revisions, Verdi returned to Germont's aria, for which he had already done extensive sketching and drafting. The extant sketches include five melodic sketches for the aria, spread among eleven fascicles.⁵⁷ Verdi made further revisions to the cabaletta, "No, non udrai rimproveri" for the 1854 version.

⁵⁶ The five numbers were 5 (the Violetta-Germont duet), 6 (from Alfredo's entrance after the duet to the end of Act II, scene i, including Germont's cabaletta), 7 (the Act II finale), 10, and 11 (the final two numbers of the opera).

⁵⁷ Della Seta, introduction to *La traviata: schizzi e abbozzi autografi*, 49-51.

6. Convention, *Tinta*, and Drama: Germont's Aria

The form of the aria, its placement in the drama, and the existence of drafts and sketches all contribute to the way in which Verdi developed the role of Germont and his place in the central conflict of the opera. The conventional *cavatina* form contrasts with Verdi's creative expansion of the similar grand duet form in the same act. Verdi's setting of the text follows the conventional pattern: a *scena* ("Di Violetta! Preché son io commosso?"), *cantabile* ("Di Provenza il mar, il suol"), a *tempo di mezzo* connecting the cantabile to the *cabaletta* ("Né rispondi d'un padre all'affetto?"), and the *cabaletta* ("No, non udrai rimproveri"). Germont's aria occurs directly after Alfredo discovers Violetta's letter telling him she has left. The placement of the aria allows Germont to offer comfort to Alfredo, as he had promised Violetta he would in the duet, but it also limits Alfredo's reactions to the news expressed in the *scena* and the *tempo di mezzo*. With his use of convention at this moment, Verdi creates dramatic tension between the conventional father-figure role and the nuance of the Germont character.

In studies of Verdi's use of form and drama in *La traviata*, the conventional characteristics of the aria are often cited as evidence that Germont's aria reflects Verdi's use of convention in his opera over any concern he might have had for a logical unfolding of the drama. In the introduction to his edition of Verdi's sketches, Fabrizio della Seta points to the fact that the extensive sketch material for "No, non udrai rimproveri" reflects the difficulty that Verdi had in writing an aria that would be of "slight interest, the only one in the entire

opera that would seem to have been dictated more by the ‘convenience’ than by real necessity (and one may doubt whether Verdi ever succeeded with it).”⁵⁸ Clyde T. McCants calls Germont’s aria a “conventional necessity” that does not contribute to the drama.⁵⁹ Roger Parker claims that the presence of a conventional cavatina interrupts the focus of the drama, that the drama should focus on Alfredo, “but operatic convention requires a two-movement aria for baritone.”⁶⁰

A closer examination of the way in which Verdi set the text for this aria in the context of the construction of the Germont role reveals that the aria unfolds logically from the drama that precedes it, that it reflects and develops the depth of the Germont role as a nuanced character, and that the aria should not be dismissed as a mere reflection of Italian opera conventions.

Arrigo Bioto, in a review of Cagnoni’s *Il Vecchio della montagna*, summarized the problem he saw in Italian opera: that composers were confusing “form” with “formula.” He complained that formula, the lesser of the two, had dominated Italian opera for so long that it was impossible to write good music using these formulas, which would be used to make up a libretto.⁶¹ In Verdi’s letters, a recurring theme is his search for new forms as well as original subjects. At the same time that Verdi and Piave were developing the scenario for *La traviata* and drafting the libretto, Verdi was also completing *Il trovatore*, an opera based on *El trovador*, a play A. Garcia Gutiérrez, with a libretto by Salvatore Cammarano and Leone

⁵⁸ Della Seta, introduction to *La traviata: schizzi e abbozzi autografi*, 54.

⁵⁹ Clyde T. McCants, *Rigoletto, Trovatore and Traviata: Verdi’s Middle Period Masterpieces On and Off the Stage* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2009) 100.

⁶⁰ Roger Parker, *New Grove Guide to Verdi and his Operas*, 155.

⁶¹ Reference in Budden, *From Il trovatore to La forza del destino*, 15.

Emanuele Bardare.⁶² During the compositional process for *Il trovatore*, Verdi wrote to Cammarano to explain the qualities he valued in a subject for an opera:

As for the distribution of the pieces, let me tell you that when I'm presented with poetry to be set to music, any form, any distribution is good, and I'm all the happier if they are new and bizarre. If in operas there were no more cavatinas, duets, trios, choruses, finales, etc., etc., and if the entire opera were, let's say a single piece, I would find it more reasonable and just.⁶³

Despite his letter, Verdi set *Il trovatore* using conventional forms.⁶⁴ Verdi's continued use of conventional forms leads Roger Parker to suggest that the call for new forms and alternatives to convention were Verdi's way of inspiring his librettists to be creative in their adaptations of the chosen subject.⁶⁵

He continued to use conventional forms in *La traviata*. In the subject of Dumas's play, Verdi found a drama which was at once what he described in a letter to Cesare de Sanctis as "a subject of our times," that could be molded into an opera that uses conventional forms, and which lent itself to the conventional triangular relationship between the soprano, tenor and baritone.

In his 1856 review of the opera, Escudier wrote of the andante: "The baritone's *romance, di Provenza il mare, il suol*, is the kind of elegiac poetry that one cannot resist. The father, wanting to console his heartbroken son, uses pathetic accents that resonate with every fiber of tenderness. Nothing is as touching and effective as this melody in the style of

⁶² Cammarano died on 17 July 1852 before he finished writing the libretto; Bardare completed it.

⁶³ Roger Parker, *The New Grove Guide to Verdi and his Operas*, 145.

⁶⁴ Budden identifies *Il trovatore* as the most conservative of Verdi's operas in terms of the forms used, of the period he identifies as the middle period (from *Rigoletto* to *Aida*). Julian Budden, *From Il trovatore to La forza del destino*, 35.

⁶⁵ Roger Parker, *New Grove Guide to Verdi and his Operas*, 34-35.

Bellini!”⁶⁶ Verdi combines the tenderness that Escudier describes with a musical expression of Germont’s conflicting emotions. While Germont is sympathetic towards Violetta, he must still ask her to give up her life with Alfredo. But, as mentioned earlier, in the play and the novel, Duval expresses his remorse only in the letter that he sends Marguerite near the end of her life. In Verdi’s setting, the character already expresses remorse at this point: the conflict between his duty to bourgeois conceptions of honor, his role as a father, and his admiration for Violetta are central to the aria.

The simple melodic contour of the *cantabile*, and the stress that Verdi places on the third beat of each bar contrast with the waltzes in other scenes (See Example 5). Here, Verdi establishes a second musical image, of Provence and bourgeois respectability, to contrast with that of the waltzes of Violetta’s world. By creating this contrast, Verdi constructs a richer *tinta* than the waltzes alone would have produced.

The vocal line of the aria uses four-bar phrases, and Verdi sets each couplet so that the second line repeats, followed by a restatement of the first line. For example, Germont sings, “Di Provenza il mar, il suol/ chi dal cor ti cancellò,/ chi dal cor ti cancellò/ di Provenza il mar, il suol” (See Table 2 for the text of the aria and an English translation). The aria begins with a straight-forward tonic-dominant harmonic relationship (D flat Major to A flat Major and back again. See Example 5). These characteristics reflect an archetypal baritone role, as Catherine Clément describes it: Baritones are “older, more prudent, they hide their rebellion and calculate their plots.”⁶⁷ Germont’s song is deliberate, with a clear structural

⁶⁶ “La romance du baryton, *di Provenza, il mare, il suol* [sic], est une de ces poésies élégiaques à l’effet desquelles on ne saurait résister. Ce père qui veut consoler son fils de l’abandon de celle qu’il aime, trouve de ces accents pathétiques qui font résonner toutes les cordes de la tendresse. Rien n’est touchant et suave comme cette mélodie à la manière de Bellini!” Léon Escudier, “Théâtre Impérial Italien,” 399. My translation.

⁶⁷ Catherine Clément, “Through Voices, History,” in *Siren Songs: Representations of Gender and Sexuality in Opera*, ed. Mary Ann Smart (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000) 22-23.

framework. The character has considered what he will say to his son (perhaps while he waited in the garden after his scene with Violetta).

Example 5: First phrase of “Di Provenza il mar, il suol” (No. 6, m. 166-173)

Andante piuttosto mosso (♩ = 60)

Fl.

Ott.

Ob.

Clar. in Sib

Fag.

G.

Viol.

V-le

Vc.

Cb.

(Alfredo, disperato, siede presso il tavolino col volto fra le mani)

Di Pro-

Andante piuttosto mosso (♩ = 60)

G.

Viol.

V-le

Vc.

Cb.

-ven-zail mar, il suol chi dal cor ti can-cel-lò? chi dal cor ti can-cel-lò? di Pro-

Table 2: Text and translation of “Di Provenza il mar, il suol,” “Né rispondi d’un padre all’affetto?” “No, non udrai rimproveri”⁶⁸

Germont	<p>Di Provenza il mar, il suol Chi dal cor ti cancellò? Al natio fulgente sol Qual destino ti furò? Oh rammenta pur nel duol Ch’ivi gioia a te brillò E che pace colà sol Su te splendere ancor può... Dio mi guidò... Dio mi guidò! Ah il tuo vecchio genitor Tu non sai quanto soffrì! Te lontano, di squalor Il suo tetto si coprì... Ma se alfin ti trovo ancor, Se in me speme non fallì Se la voce dell’onor In te appien non ammutì Dio m’esaudi... Dio m’esaudi</p> <p><i>(scuotendo Alfredo)</i> Ne rispondi d’un padre all’affetto?</p>	Germont	<p>Who erased the sea, the land Of Provence from your heart? What fate stole you From your splendid native sun? Ah, recall even in your grief That joy glowed for you there, And that only there Can peace still shine on you... God led me... God led me! Ah, you don’t know how much Your old father suffered! With you far away, his roof Was covered with shame... But if I’ve found you at last, If my hope didn’t fail, If the voice of honor Isn’t completely dumb in you God answered my prayer... God answered my prayer. <i>(shaking Alfredo)</i> Don’t you respond to your father’s love?</p>
Alfredo	<p>Mille serpi divoranmi il petto... <i>(respingendo il padre)</i> Mi lasciate...</p>	Alfredo	<p>A thousand serpents are devouring my breast... <i>(rejecting his father)</i> Leave me...</p>
Germont	<p>Lasciarti!</p>	Germont	<p>Leave you!</p>
Alfredo	<p><i>(risoluto)</i> (Oh vendetta!)</p>	Alfredo	<p><i>(resolved)</i> (Oh, vengeance!)</p>
Germont	<p>Non più indugi, partiamo... T’affretta...</p>	Germont	<p>No more delay, we are leaving... Hurry...</p>
Alfredo	<p>(Ah fu Douphol!)</p>	Alfredo	<p>(Ah, it was Douphol!)</p>
Germont	<p>M’ascolti tu?</p>	Germont	<p>Are you listening to me?</p>
Alfredo	<p>No!</p>	Alfredo	<p>No!</p>
Germont	<p>Dunque invano trovato t’avrò? *[No, non udrai rimproveri; Compriam d’oblio il passato; L’amo che m’ha guidato Sa tutto perdonar. Vieni, i tuoi cari in giubilo Con me rivedi ancora; A chi penò finora Tal gioia non negar.</p>	Germont	<p>Then have I found you in vain? No, you will hear no reproaches; Let us cover the past with oblivion; The love that has guided me Can pardon everything. Come, you will see with me You loved ones rejoice again; Don’t deny such joy To those who have suffered till now.</p>

⁶⁸ Translation from Weaver, *Seven Verdi Librettos*, 164-169.

	Un padre ed una suora T'affretta a consolar.] <i>Alfredo, scuotendosi, getta a caso gli occhi sulla tavola, vede la lettera di Flora, esclama:</i>		Hasten to console A father and a sister. <i>Alfredo, recovering himself, glances at the table and sees Flora's letter, exclaims:</i>
Alfredo	Ah! . . . ell'è alla festa! volisi L'offesa a vendicar. <i>Egli fugge precipitosamente inseguito dal padre</i>	Alfredo	Ah!. . . She is at the ball! Let me fly To avenge the offence. <i>He rushes out, followed by his father</i>
Germont	Che dici? ah ferma!	Germont	What are you saying? Ah, stop!

* Brackets denote passage often omitted in performance.

At the same time, Verdi undermines the deliberate nature of the aria in several key places, showing the conflict between what Germont says and does and what he feels. The introductory melody for the aria (m. 166-169), like Germont's first phrase, is in D flat major, but at the end of the phrase (m. 169), the melody does not resolve to D flat. Verdi leaves it unresolved in E flat minor. In the next measure, the return to D flat does not act as a resolution of this line, but the beginning of Germont's first phrase. The harmonic interruption here breaks down the straight-forward nature of the opening of Germont's aria before Germont begins to sing, which destabilizes the phrases that follow. In the second half of the stanza, Verdi leaves the tonic-dominant harmonic relationships by tonicizing the dominant. Verdi approaches the end of the stanza using a sequence of diminished seventh chords resolving by step (m. 183-185).

Both the text and the music extend the stanza beyond its deliberate four-bar phrase construction at this point. Germont's cry, "Dio mi guidò" at the end of the stanza does not fit

the pairs of text lines that came before. Hepokoski points out that this use of a truncated final line in is not unique to this cabaletta. It is a device that can be used “either as a despairing truncation of an otherwise conventional utterance or a concluding statement beyond the normative form, delivered as an aside or personal exclamation.”⁶⁹ This moment is important in that Germont must convince not only Alfredo, but also himself that his behavior is justified. Germont repeats this line three times. It begins on an F minor harmony in m. 185, moving to the dominant of Db Major in m. 186. Verdi expands the transparent orchestration at this moment, so that the flute, oboe, B-flat clarinet, and strings double Germont’s second exclamation. Verdi creates a stark contrast between the second and third iterations with the *subito pianissimo* in the second half of m. 186. Germont’s song has moved away from the stable Db Major, the harmonic rhythm has become twice as fast, and he repeats a short textual idea three times.

Germont’s exclamation “Dio mi guidò” is the climax of the stanza. It is a new idea that does not connect smoothly from the previous one. Germont’s insistence that God has guided him leads him back to the stability of Db Major. He finds certainty in his belief that he is acting for the best, despite his conflicting emotions. With the return to the unresolved melody of the introductory phrase at m. 187, the musical conflict between stability and uncertainty returns, and the process of increased tension in the music begins again with the repetition of the music for the second stanza. At m. 206, Germont proclaims, “Dio m’esaudi,” reaching the cadence in Db Major at m. 208. The coda for the cavatina, beginning at m. 208 superimposes Germont’s final affirmation of “Dio m’esaudi” and the opening motive that does not resolve.

⁶⁹ Hepokoski, “Genre and Content in Mid-Century Verdi,” 259.

The *cabaletta* that follows “Di Provenza il mar il suol” extends and develops Germont’s distress further. In the *tempo di mezzo*, Alfredo says he is not listening to his father, and is consumed with thoughts of vengeance. The calm and transparent orchestration of the *cantabile* is disrupted by agitated triplets in the strings, and a sequence of ascending fifths replaces the stable D flat major harmonic area. Germont stops the momentum of this movement with his emphatic “Dunque in vano trovato t’avrò!” in m. 230. At m. 234, a variation of the “Di Provenza il mar il suol” melody returns in the violins. As in the introduction to the *cantabile*, this melody does not resolve, but ends in a grand pause, and the new melody in B flat major begins in m. 239.

In the final 1854 version of the *cabaletta*, Germont is more agitated in his *cabaletta* than in his *cantabile*. Alfredo is not listening to reason. Unlike the setting of the *cantabile*, Germont sings the text from beginning to end without repetition, until his last line, “Un padre ed una suora t’affretta a consolar.” The rhythm of Germont’s vocal line becomes more agitated than it was in the *cantabile*. The sixteenth-dotted eighth rhythm at the beginning of each phrase, and the neighbor-note motive in sixteenth notes at the end of each phrase contrasts with the repeating eighth notes of the *cantabile* (See Example 6).

Germont repeats his text beginning at m. 251, but the text is shortened, using only the lines “No, non udrai rimproveri; copriam d’oblio il passato” and “l’amor sa tutto perdonar” and “Un padre ed una suora t’affretta a consolar.” The harmonic rhythm increases, and the orchestration becomes thicker when Germont returns to the line “Un padre ed una suora t’affretta a consolar,” beginning at m. 255. The resolution of the extended dominant at the end of Germont’s plea, in m. 262, only lasts for half a measure before Alfredo enters again, with his phrase, “Mille serpi divoranmi il petto.” In reply, Germont reprises the second

section of the *cabaletta*, with the distilled text. In the coda, beginning in m. 286, Germont is reduced to the repetition of his plea that Alfredo's father and sister want to console him. This time, Alfredo's entrance with "Ah! ell'è alla festa!" delays the resolution of Germont's plea with an E flat diminished chord for five measures, until Germont's closing exclamation "Che dici? Ah, ferma!"

The way in which Verdi breaks down the structure of Germont's train of thought into "excessive repetition" of a single line, as Locatelli described it, within the context of the regular phrase lengths and logical harmonic relationships in the *cabaletta* depicts an important shift in the character of Germont. Alfredo's reaction to Violetta's letter challenges Germont's fragile confidence in his actions. In desperation, he tries to convince Alfredo through repetition that he should return home, and not take impetuous action.

In the 1854 version of the *cabaletta*, Verdi refined the repetition of the text so that Germont's desperation is more apparent. In the 1853 version, Germont repeats the complete text twice, and does not use the condensed version of the text that Verdi sets beginning at m. 251 in the 1854 version. Verdi also eliminated a cadenza that appeared at m. 263 on Germont's text "t'affretta a consolar." He replaced this moment with his setting of the neighbor-note motive in the orchestra at m. 260 in the 1854 version. Verdi also made a change in the opening period in the vocal line. In the 1853 version, he continued the use of the neighbor-note figure through the cadence at the downbeat of m. 247. In the 1854 version, Verdi breaks the pattern at the end of the phrase by placing the figure in the second half of the bar, and by extending it through two beats.

Example 6: "No, non udrai rimproveri" (No. 6, m. 234-242)

Assai Moderato (♩ = 96)

G. *pp* No, non udrai rim-

Viol. *pp* *allarg.*

V-le *pp* *allarg.*

Ve. *pizz.*

Cb. *pizz.*

Assai Moderato (♩ = 96)

Fl. *I Solo*

Clar. in Si *pp*

Fag. *pp*

Cer. III. in Fa *pp*

G. -pro-ve-ri; copriam d'oblio il pas - sa - to: l'a-mor che m'ha gui - da - to sa tut-to per-do -

Viol.

V-le

Ve.

Cb.

Verdi uses the *cavatina* here as an important moment of development of the Germont character, who, as Thicknesse points out, continues to appear on stage, uninvited throughout the rest of the opera. In the finale to Act II, Germont appears at Flora's ball at the moment that Alfredo tries to pay her for "services rendered." Germont is the only character at the ball who knows the reason why Violetta left Alfredo.⁷⁰ Germont's renunciation of his son's actions reaffirms the dramatic tension between the bourgeois attitude toward courtesans and Violetta's character. In Act III, Germont appears just before Violetta's death to beg for forgiveness and to accept her as his daughter. With the character's reappearances after the first scene in Act II, Verdi resolves the conflict at the center of the musical setting of the aria. When he sings his aria, Germont is torn between his obligations to bourgeois society and his family and his sympathy for Violetta. By Act III, his sympathy for Violetta dominates his sense of obligation to social convention. Verdi and Piave express this resolution in the text of Germont's letter and his appearance at the very end of the Act, and in the way the text is set. The letter, which Violetta reads at the beginning of Act III, reveals Germont's actions after the ball, which signal the resolution of the conflict that he expresses in his aria. At the same time, the setting of the text reflects the larger central conflict of the opera. Violetta speaks the text instead of singing it, and the violins play the phrase from Alfredo and Violetta's love duet in Act I. Germont's decision has come too late, and as a result, Violetta has lost her chance at happiness.

⁷⁰ McCants, *Rigoletto, Trovatore and Traviata*, 102.

Conclusion

Thicknesse's question in his synopsis of *La traviata*, "Hey Mr. Germont, who invited you to Flora's party?" implies that Germont's repeated appearances after his pivotal duet with Violetta are unnecessary, and even absurd. Evaluations of Germont's aria in Act II by Della Seta, McCants, and Parker focus on the way in which the piece reflects conventions of opera. Verdi and Piave use these conventions to develop of Germont's character. Germont's character creates an important dimension in the drama through the contrast of the musical depiction of Violetta's world of the Parisian *demi-monde* and Germont's world of bourgeois respectability. By creating this musical contrast, Verdi constructs a *tinta* for his opera that includes the use of musical devices that are specific to the setting of the drama, especially the waltzes that depict the Parisian salons, and devices that are not specific to place, including the conventional formal organizations. The construction of the opera reflects both Victor Hugo's concept of drama mirroring and intensifying reality and concentrating upon a central conflict, and Basevi's concept of *tinta* that creates a "silent character" which situates the drama. The way in which Piave and Verdi expand upon Dumas's father-figure in *La dame aux camélias* is an important element in the reflection and "invention" of reality.

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