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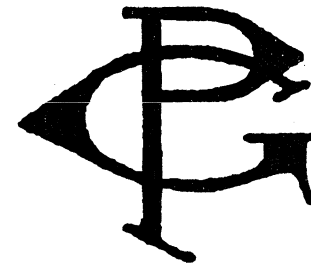
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Rassegna periodica sulla musica e sul teatro musicale nell'epoca di Giacomo Puccini

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STUDI PUCCINIANI

3

«L'insolita forma»

Strutture e processi analitici per l'opera italiana
nell'epoca di Puccini

Atti del Convegno internazionale di studi
Lucca, 20-21 settembre 2001

dedicati a Harold S. Powers

a cura di

Virgilio Bernardoni, Michele Girardi, Arthur Groos



Centro studi GIACOMO PUCCINI, Lucca 2004

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me la corona di fiori, o il valzer o la canzone, ma è l'esperienza medesima: le parole di Roberto hanno valore fondante per la sua relazione con Anna, per il destino di Anna, e infine per il suo.

Ciò nonostante, sono trasportabili nel tempo drammatico, e il loro ritorno, lungi dal marcare staticità o immobilità, marca precisamente il trascorrere del tempo e l'intervento della mutazione che ha portato dalla scommessa metafisica di Roberto alla sua falsificazione. Questa mutazione coincide con la catastrofe tragica, in quanto la ripresa antifrastica della professione amorosa costituisce in bocca ad Anna la prova necessaria e sufficiente alla condanna dell'uomo.

Parallelamente è mutato il senso delle stesse parole per Anna, da massima rassicurazione a massima frustrazione e constatazione dolorosa del tradimento: in tal modo si perpetua la condizione che ha condotto Anna alla morte, e non viene neppure intaccata dal trionfo della vendetta, il cui spazio è rigorosamente confinato al ritmo della tregenda:

Ma è tremendo dolor
In silenzio soffrir!
Senza speranza in cuore
Mi facesti morir.

Se l'onda melodica che accompagna queste parole ha tale intensità da comunicare un degnissimo presagio di *Manon Lescaut*, il prevalere del *pathos* sulla vendetta sortisce l'effetto di mimare un dialogo amoroso, apparentemente simile a quello in cui quelle parole erano state pronunciate per la prima volta. Ma stavolta sarà Roberto a morire «delirando d'amor», come è già accaduto ad Anna, e si inverte la relazione tra carnefice e vittima.

L'espressione concorde di due solitudini e due disperazioni realizza il paradossale compimento del più forte fra i miti amorosi, l'immortalità: «Sei mio», sono le ultime parole di Anna.

Structure, Implication, and the End of *Suor Angelica*

JAMES HEPOKOSKI (New Haven)

The central panel of a triptych of one-act operas, *Suor Angelica* is assembled as a continuity, but not one without seams. Setting aside tonal concerns momentarily, we may characterize the larger spans of this music as commingling multiple strategies of structure-building, each of which contributes to the overall impact of the work. One is the deployment of a succession of lyrical episodes made plausible in their association by sharing common features, most notably the gentle translucency of the religious local color and the purposeful femininity of the voices and pastel-tinted orchestration. Into the *faux*-purity of this texture, as into portions of *Madama Butterfly*, ruthless bursts of material reality and violence tear like knives shredding a flimsy curtain of old-world illusion.

A second factor, intertwined with the first, centers around local harmonic and scalar mannerisms. Throughout this opera Puccini favors a 'modern' harmonic color-syntax relying on often-'weak' tonal suggestions, including modal suggestions and mediant relations; sensuously prolonged dissonances; an astonishingly persistent parallel-triad texture (unembarrassed *non-voice-leading*) for primitivist touches of naiveté and effects of unmediated directness; and occasional exotic brush-strokes, such as pentatonicism, probably with the intention of evoking a wondrous primal innocence that early-twentieth-century urban audiences were invited to perceive as forever lost to themselves.

Yet another strategy is a network of tellingly placed, recurring motives (more like glowing emblems) that encourage a loose binding-together of the episodes. Some of these emblems are interrelated. As will be mentioned later, for instance, there is a melodic affinity between the recurrent, singsong litany-prayer to the Virgin and Angelica's hallucinatory vision of Her at the end. Other motives stand out by their searing otherness, by their inability to assimilate into the prevailingly subdued texture. These include the wrenching twists of the repeated *agitato* motive associated with Angelica's anxiety to ob-

tain news of her son – which soon turns into a wailingly reiterated grief-motive; and the twofold appearance of Angelica's desperate and *fortissimo* «La morte è vita bella» music.¹

None of these aspects of *Suor Angelica* will be my primary focus here. Instead, I shall concentrate on an additional formal strategy. This is what I have called *rotational structure*, something that I have previously associated with other composers.² Grounded in the idea of 'circular', varied repetitions of large-scale blocks of material, rotational structure plays a significant organizational role in much music from at least the mid-eighteenth century onward (and in opera from mid-Wagner onward, as older architectonic principles came to be viewed as obsolete).³ Not only does the rotational principle lie at the structural heart of *Suor Angelica*, it also provides a suitable springboard for a hermeneutic reading of its content.

By *rotations* I mean the multiple recurrences of an extended, ordered layout of musical ideas – for example, in paradigmatic in-

stances, a double, triple, or quadruple recycling of variants of the same material in the same order. One of the most obvious features of approximately the last fifteen minutes of *Suor Angelica* is its explicit, 'ceremonial' double-tracing through essentially the same musical pattern: the model extends from rehearsal no. 61 – shortly into the aria, «Senza mamma», as we shall see – through no. 66. The cyclic repetition of this music, with some variants and interpolations, begins immediately and continues to the end of the opera, which thus closes with an enhanced restatement of the music that had led us into rehearsal no. 66. Such an obvious double-cycling at the close can trigger the suspicion that a more generalized impulse toward circularity and rotation might also have been at work, albeit less self-evidently, in earlier portions of the opera. (In the absence of the opera's double-cycle conclusion, the case on behalf of any earlier rotational features would be more difficult to make.) And indeed, since the music that begins the referential cycle at rehearsal no. 61 had also been heard earlier in the opera, more or less intact – though followed by a very different set of continuations – that possibility invites exploration and interpretation.

Before proceeding further, we should consider the normative characteristics of rotational form more generally. In most cases, with each new cycle or rotation of the defining materials, the individual elements of the succession can be expanded, interrupted, varied, or subjected to *ad hoc* episodic interpolations. Thus the internal contents of successive rotations can differ substantially from one another. They can incorporate differing materials as episodes and can vary markedly in length. In Figure 1 – an abstract paradigm – I have hypothetically proposed an initial stretch of music whose elements might be labeled A, B, C, D, and E. In a second rotation or cycling such a passage might expand A but leave out D; in Rotation 3 we might find an interpolation (call it X) between the second and third elements, along with the absence of E; and so on.

FIGURE 1: Rotations

	<i>Musical Elements Present</i>
Rotation 1 (referential layout)	A B C D E
Rotation 2	A (expanded) B C E
Rotation 3	A B [X.] . . . C D . . .
Rotation 4	[etc.]

¹ The former is introduced in the Zia Principessa scene («Mio figlio! Figlio mio!») shortly after rehearsal no. 53; it accompanies the Zia Principessa's exit around rehearsal no. 59; and it underpins Angelica's realization of the unforgivable crime of self-poisoning («Ah! Son dannata!») following rehearsal nos. 78 and 79. Its association with anxiety and grief have been frequently noted: WILLIAM ASHBROOK, *The Operas of Puccini*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1985, p. 188; MICHELE GIRARDI, *Puccini: His International Art*, trans. Laura Basini, Chicago and London, The University of Chicago Press, 2000, p. 406 («Angelica's desperation»). The latter occurs as a texted, climactic outburst, rehearsal no. 17, in Angelica's brief aria, «I desiderî sono i fiori dei vivi»; the motive recurs, *fortissimo* and untexted, as Angelica turns decisively toward the suicide-bowl of poison, 5 mm. before rehearsal no. 77.

² See JAMES HEPOKOSKI and WARREN DARCY, *Elements of Sonata Theory: Norms, Types, and Deformations in the Late-Eighteenth-Century Sonata*, New York, Oxford University Press, forthcoming, *passim* (which also includes a discussion of the utility of the specific term, 'rotation'); and HEPOKOSKI, *Beyond the Sonata Principle*, «Journal of the American Musicological Society», LV, 2002, pp. 91-154, and *Back and Forth from «Egmont»: Beethoven, Mozart, and the Nonresolving Recapitulation*, «19th-Century Music», XXV, 2002, pp. 127-54. For considerations of rotations a century later see HEPOKOSKI, *Sibelius: Symphony N. 5*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1993, pp. 23-26, 58-84; *The Essence of Sibelius: Creation Myths and Rotational Cycles in «Luonnotar»*, in *The Sibelius Companion*, ed. Glenda Dawn Goss, Westport, Greenwood, 1996, pp. 121-46; *Rotations, Sketches, and [Sibelius's] Sixth Symphony*, in *Sibelius Studies*, ed. Timothy L. Jackson and Veijo Murtomäki, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001, pp. 322-51; and WARREN DARCY, *Bruckner's Sonata Deformations*, in *Bruckner Studies*, ed. Timothy L. Jackson and Paul Hawkshaw, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997, pp. 256-77; and *Rotational Form, Teleological Genesis, and Fantasy-Projection in the Slow Movement of Mahler's Sixth Symphony*, «19th-Century Music», XXIV, 2001, pp. 49-74.

³ Cf., e.g., WARREN DARCY, *The Metaphysics of Annihilation: Wagner, Schopenhauer, and the End of the «Ring»*, «Music Theory Spectrum», XVI/1, 1994, pp. 1-40.

Figure 2 shows another possibility among many. In this case the 'complete' rotation is anticipated as a goal in earlier, fragmentary, or incomplete rotations; each partial or inchoate rotation grows in clarity toward a fuller final statement or set of statements. In Figure 2 we find an initial rotation with only elements A and B; a second that expands to C; a third that includes a non-recurring interpolation (X); and a fourth that grows toward a final, perhaps climactic goal, D. Figure 3 shows another way of accomplishing the same thing. I have called this principle of deploying multiple rotations to produce a goal *teleological genesis*.

FIGURE 2: Rotations (expanding, generative toward a goal)

Rotation 1	A B
Rotation 2	A B C
Rotation 3	A B [X] . . . C
Rotation 4	A B C D

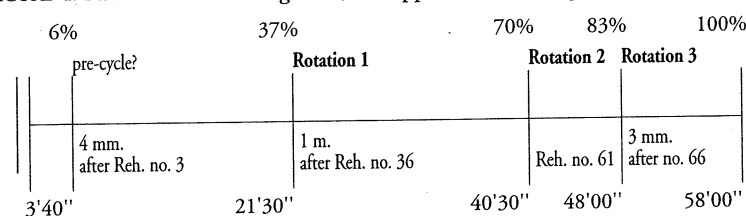
FIGURE 3: Rotations (expanding, generative toward a goal)

Rotation 1	A B C [X]
Rotation 2	A B C [Y]
Rotation 3	A B C . . . D
Rotation 4	A B C . . [Z] . . . D

Something like that appears to be going on throughout the slow-churning deep-structure of *Suor Angelica*, where at least three, and perhaps four, broad rotations successively 'grow' in clarity of statement. In this opera the initial, not fully complete rotational process begins shortly over a third of the way through, about twenty-one minutes into the opera. (This is shown in Figure 4: the approximate percentages reflect the elapsing of real time, not the counting of measures.) This puts the beginning of Rotation 1 at the center of the fourth libretto-tableau, «Il ritorno della cerca», immediately after the announcement by La Cercatrice of the arrival of a visitor in a grand coach, one measure after rehearsal no. 36. Rotation 2 (the first of the self-evident, complete rotations at the end, mentioned above) begins at rehearsal no. 61, about 1 1/2 minutes into «Senza mamma», with Angelica's words «Ora che sei un angelo del cielo». This is about 70% of the way through, and it is a structurally crucial passage of music that, as Gabriele Dotto and Michele Gi-

rardi have noted, was a late addition into the score.⁴ Rotation 3 – the intermezzo, the self-poisoning, and the vision – occupies approximately the last ten minutes of the opera, beginning shortly after rehearsal no. 66.

FIGURE 4: Rotations in *Suor Angelica* (with approximate timings)



Example 1 shows the melodic incipits of the cycle's defining elements, marked A, B, C, and D. Although the tempo and notation differ in each rotation, the tonal levels of each element remain invariant from cycle to cycle. Each rotation is launched by Element A in F major. Its first full appearance occurs one measure after rehearsal no. 36, filled with bustle and expectation, with the Prima Sorella Cercatrice singing above. Sounded at a relatively brisk *Andante mosso*, though «misterioso e un poco agitato», the music initially suggests little more than the excitement of an unscheduled event – the arrival of «una ricca berlina» – but we immediately learn that all such events trigger the troubled Angelica's hopes for news from outside about her child. (The return of this music in later rotations suggests the fixing or freezing of this initial moment – the recurring psychological snapshot of the coach-arrival and fleeting tremor of hope, soon to be crushed.) In each rotation Element A slides into Element B, Angelica's desperate prayer on A minor, F major's mediant (iii), here at first to the Virgin, later, in «Senza mamma», to the absent presence of her dead son. Element C is a static A-minor codetta to the A-B succession. It combines an atmosphere of foreboding with the dotted rhythms of a death-march, and within a few bars it also ushers in echoes of B, Angelica's desperate prayer.

⁴ See n. 6 below.

EXAMPLE 1

EXAMPLE 1

A 1 after 36

B 39

C 40

C' 62 (end of "Senza mamma")

D 64 (telos)

A, B, and C are always sounded successively, and in the first two rotations they are rounded off with a full-stop fermata. Together, all of this constitutes the first part of the larger conceptual cycle. Eventually a second part will be added, although only as a concluding block of Rotations 2 and 3. This is Element D, the goal-point or *telos* of both the rotations and the entire opera, the implicitly C-major descent of grace, «La grazia è discesa dal cielo». This concluding Element D is itself pervaded by an inner circularity: it is articulated in three quasi-mechanistic subrotations, to which we shall return. Element D, basically the sequential treatment of an escape-tone figure, is related to a number of other motives, but most prominently (as suggested in Example 2) it seems to be an expansion of the sisters' habitual litany-formula to the Virgin that reappears scattered throughout the opera. In this respect it is also similar to Element C, which, among other associations, seems to be a spectral variant of the same litany-formula.⁵

⁵ GIRARDI, *Puccini*, p. 403, makes a more obvious connection between what am calling Element C (the phrase «when the abbess calls Angelica into the parlatory») and the earlier words sung shortly after rehearsal no. 26 by La Sorella Infermiera, «Suor Angelica ha sempre una ricetta buona, fatta coi fiori», thus suggesting «a disturbing link between flowers and death».

EXAMPLE 2

EXAMPLE 2

a 5 before 7

Re-gi-na Vir-gi-num, o-ra pro ea...

b D 64 (telos)

Figure 5 shows more details of the three rotational cycles. Rotation 1 encompasses the arrival of the coach and the fateful meeting with the Zia Principessa. It begins with Elements A, B, and C but does not move forward into Element D. Instead, it diverges into digressive episodes and declines utterly into Angelica's bleak encounter with her unyielding relative. Shortly after no. 43, however, we might notice a brief, E-minor statement of the litany-formula, which in retrospect, perhaps, might be understood as an anticipation of the *telos*-to-come in later rotations. It is possible to construe this nineteen-minute Rotation 1 as a complete conceptual entity, launched by Elements A, B, and C. Alternatively, we might understand it as a rotation that begins (A, B, C, pause) but decays into digression around rehearsal no. 41 and certainly by the first words of the Zia Principessa at no. 44. In this latter interpretation what we have is an aborted rotation whose defining elements (A, B, C) last only shortly under four minutes.

Rotation 2 is the «Senza mamma» cycle, although the rotation's starting-point (rehearsal no. 61) is not coextensive with that of the aria proper (no. 60). The turn toward F major at rehearsal no. 61, «Ora che sei un angelo del cielo», is a rapturously transported, though curiously disembodied, 'floating' through Elements A and B of Rotation 1. Curiously, although these two elements crystallize the rotational structure of the whole, they were not present in this aria until late September or early October 1918, some two months before the New York premiere.⁶ In other words, up until this point

⁶ Thus «Senza mamma» was delivered entirely in a funeral A minor (omitting what I am calling Elements A and B entirely). For the late September/early October dating, see esp. GABRIELE DOTTO, *Tagli floreali e ripensamenti irrealizzati: Sul ripristino dell'Aria dei fiori' in «Suor Angelica»*, program book, *Il Cavaliere avaro e Suor Angelica*, Venezia, Teatro

FIGURE 5: Rotational Cycles in *Suor Angelica*

1 The Arrival of the Coach			
36+1	39	40	43+1
A	... (A) B C [B]	Prayer to Virgin	Litany refrain (minor)
F major	a a	a	a
		41 Requiem	42 Entry motive
		A	c#
			[D anticipation?]
		(e)	(a)
			c#
2 «Senza mamma» (aria begins at 60; Rotation 2 after 21 mm., 61)			
61	61+17	62	63
«Ora che sei un angelo del cielo»	«Oh! dolce fine d'ogni mio dolore... Quando potrò morire?»	Calmo «Dillo alla mamma»	Genoveffa: «Sorella, o buona sorella»
A	B	C'
F major	c	a	A
			D (telos): with 3 internal subrotations
			C major (V of F)
3 Intermezzo—Self-Poisoning—Hallucination—Death			
66+3	67+6	69	75
«La grazia è discesa dal cielo» + intermezzo	Calmo «Suor Angelica ha sempre una ricetta buona»	CUT: Aria dei fiori; «Amici fiori, voi mi compensate»	«Addio, buone sorelle, addio!»
A	B	C'
F major	a	a	A
			D anticipations + «La morte è vita bella» motive, etc.
			76 Self-Poisoning
		
			81 Hallucination
			D (telos): with 3 internal subrotations
			C major (V of F)

«Senza mamma» had been much shorter and in a static A minor throughout. Puccini's late interpolation of a restatement of Elements A and B into the aria's center had decisive structural and dramatic implications. It not only created the broadly thematic central section of «Senza mamma» (thus expanding it into a full-scale aria), but also sharpened a long-range formal principle – rotational structure – that for one reason or another had been less vividly carried out up to this time. Above all, the interpolation's unexpected triggering of a more emphatic rotational circularity (a recycling of the past) suggests the sundering of Angelica's bonds with linear, non-repeatable time – the earlier succession of relatively disconnected episodes.

Another crucial feature of Rotation 2's revisiting of Elements A and B is its slower tempo – the deceleration through an *Andante desolato* to a *Lento grave*, ♩=42, sung «sempre in ginocchio, con voce desolata». The new *Lento* pulse configures all that follows, especially from rehearsal no. 61 onward, into a dreamlike retracing of prior events at about half-speed. Angelica is now totally isolated. Her prior motivation for continuing to exist, to receive news about her son, has just been extinguished with the cold report of his death. The stage-picture and the text suggest something of an unstable conflation of Angelica's situation with the traditional Catholic images of both the Madonna and Child and – since the son is dead – the Vir-

La Fenice, 1998/II, pp. 80-87, esp. n. 3. The article may also be accessed on the internet at <http://www.puccini.it/bollettino/angeld8.htm>. I am also grateful to Gabriele Dotto for a close description of the original «Senza mamma», provided to me in a personal communication. Another description of the short version, available in the first set of proofs, is provided by GIRARDI, *Puccini*, pp. 408, 410, n. 28: «The structure of the solo, as performed [at the world premiere] in New York, can be seen from a proof copy of pages 189 and 190 [...] [rehearsal no. 60] 'Senza mamma', mm. 1-21 [...] [music from rehearsal no. 62] 'Ora che tutto sai, angelo bello', mm. 22-33». The absence of the F-major music here was also noticed by ASHBROOK, *The Operas of Puccini*, p. 189.

As is surely evident, my claims on behalf of a specific rotational structure in *Suor Angelica* are to some extent intertwined with the presence of this 'late' F-major music, containing Elements A and B, the very signs that a new rotation is underway. Lacking that music, we would have allusions only to Element C passing directly to the *telos*, D. In this case, the putative Rotation 2 would also be incomplete, attenuated – generally participating in the anticipatory looseness of the earlier portions of the opera. Only what I am currently calling Rotation 3 would put all of the elements together in a culminating synthesis. With the definitive addition of Elements A and B, however, the parallels between Rotations 2 and 3 can scarcely be overlooked, and the rotational underpinnings of much of the opera come into a much more clearly enhanced focus.

gin Mourning or *Mater Dolorosa*. Under this implication, should we choose to pursue it, the dead son – present here only as loss, only as an oppressive backdrop of silence into which Angelica registers her grief – could be interpreted as having resonances with a post-Nietzschean, pan-European, and ‘modernist’ intimation of the death of God in a vacantly nihilistic world. Just such a world had been presented to us in full in the preceding opera, *Il tabarro*, as the larger framing context for the interpretation of *Suor Angelica* – a topic to which we shall return.

Even though we now know that Elements A and B in Rotation 2 were not features of Puccini’s earliest conception of «Senza mamma», their inclusion was definitive. And here, at the onset of the rotation, rehearsal no. 61 – as was also suggested by Michele Girardi – is where Angelica’s hallucinatory self-deception decisively begins its course («Tu puoi scendere giù pel firmamento ed aleggiare intorno a me... Ti sento... Sei qui, sei qui, mi baci e m’accarezzi».⁷ The A minor Element B, which in Rotation 1 had been associated with desperate prayer, now reintroduces the explicit wish for death («Oh! dolce fine d’ogni mio dolore. [...] Quando potrò morire?»). And the A-minor Element C at rehearsal no. 62 is a codetta-variant of the earlier, expectant death-march. In this case Angelica’s melodic line carries two additional connotations: a suggestion of a return to the quasi-pentatonic music of the aria’s beginning, rounding «Senza mamma» as a whole; and with the final, *pianissimo* high a, an obvious intertextual allusion to the end of Violetta’s similarly A minor, death-marked «Addio, del passato» from *La traviata*.

Thus Rotation 2 – at least in the definitive version after October 1918 – begins with Elements A, B, C, and the pause, all carried out in an ‘unreal’ slow-motion. As in Rotation 1, the pause ushers in a break or episodic interruption – an external restart. This occurs at rehearsal no. 63, with Genovieffa’s announcement that the Virgin has answered their prayers, and lasts for only six measures. And now, fi-

⁷ Cf. GIRARDI, *Puccini*, pp. 408, 410: «It is as though the protagonist were rejecting her own reality, falling into a trance-like state [...] The cyclic recurrence of this music, with significant differences in the scoring, raises the emotional temperature and suggests an atmosphere of static obsession, almost as though Angelica’s soul were gradually engulfed by it».

nally, the second part of the full rotation, Element D, is released at rehearsal no. 64, «La grazia è discesa dal cielo».

There is much to observe about this *telos*-music, but the first thing to notice is that, paradoxically, it is simultaneously the fulfillment and the negation of all that has preceded it. For instance, its brazenly stark parallel triads (see Example 3a) are an apotheosis of the naïve parallel motion that has dominated much of this opera. But here, especially, they suggest a tonal vertigo, a free-triadic slippage through various chordal levels and major-minor transformations. The three-chord succession at the opening implies the non-progression IV-V-iii on C major. The fall back onto the minor-mode mediant, iii, suggests the collapse of any normal cadential resolution of the dominant – metaphorically, perhaps, the dissolution of a psychological world where such unproblematically ‘resolving’ progressions as IV-V-I have been rendered irrelevant.⁸ By extension, subsequent sequences of the pattern upward by thirds might convey an increased, growing intensity of experience, perhaps in search of the deferred resolution onto C (which will be attained only at the conclusion of the entire rotational cycle).

EXAMPLE 3

Example 3 consists of two musical staves. The top staff, labeled 'D', shows a sequence of chords in C major: IV (F major), V (G major), and iii (E minor). The bottom staff, labeled 'a', shows a descending circle of fifths progression: C (C major), iii (E minor), vi⁷ (A minor), and ii (D minor). The notation includes treble clefs, a 4/4 time signature, and various chord symbols and accidentals.

⁸ From a different analytical perspective, one might consider the E minor triad (iii) to be the result of a 5-6 shift of the G triad (d natural inflected to e natural), whose resulting upper voice (e natural) has been shifted into the lowest voice to provide root support. In the context of such pure, parallel triads, however, it is at best uncertain whether such standard contrapuntal principles are reasonably applicable.

EXAMPLE 3

b with cadence on C

vi⁷ - ii - V⁷₄ - 3 - I

vi⁷ - ii - V⁷₄ - 3 - I

Similarly telling is Puccini's manipulation of major and minor sound for its own sake. The first three chords, for instance, IV-V-iii, are major-major-*minor* (in which one might hear, following a broadly metaphorical interpretation, two aspiring *Klang*-'positives' followed by a downward drop into a *Klang*-'negative'). The next three, sequenced up a third (A minor, B minor, G major), give us a momentarily brighter reversal, minor-minor-*major*. The next three (C major, D major, B minor) return to the original pattern on a much intensified registral level, and release a temporarily more harmonically functional continuation (a descending circle of fifths). Such transforming color shifts among local materials are palpable, immediately affective aspects of this music.

Element D at rehearsal no. 64 itself unfolds rotationally in three sweeping and elided subrotations, the last measure of each serving as the first of the next, 8+8+17 measures. In effect, Puccini structures Element D as a ritualized, circular processional, presumably a willing and formalized walk into madness. The three smaller cycles are subrotations inside the concluding element, D, of the larger rotation. The anti-linear, circular principle now seems to dominate entirely – wheels within wheels. Each subrotation appears to steer at its end toward some sort of cadential resolution through an implied circle-of-fifths descent, breaking out of the parallel triads. (Examples

3-b and 3-c, hypothetical continuations that are never sounded in *Suor Angelica*, suggest some possibilities.) In the first two subcycles, however, the resolutions are undermined, and the subrotations reconnect back to their beginnings, like an automatic restart, suggesting a potentially endless loop of recursion.

Adding to the effect of Element D as a whole are its reharmonized subrotations 2 and 3 (Example 4) and its carefully managed dynamic contour. Toward the end of the second subcycle, in which Angelica is reinforced by the chorus, the music gains mightily in force. At the climactic, three-chord outset of Subrotation 3, beginning one bar before rehearsal no. 65, the music throws itself brutally onto the third chord («E così *sia!*», no. 65), stilling its ongoing measured tread, as if martyring itself for four long bars on this minor-mode mediant. Indeed, the four bars, *forte-piano* followed by a *diminuendo molto*, are sustained even longer by a fermata, and into their decaying stasis breaks the now-meaningless clatter of the cloister, the nightly signal to retire into one's private cell. Following this negative disclosure and pause, when Subrotation 3 picks up the pieces and continues, *pianissimo* with added affective suspensions – Angelica's returning to the private cell of her own shattered mind – that too could hardly be clearer in its implication: the disarming peace of utter distraction.

EXAMPLE 4

[D] [end of subrotation 1] [subrotation 2]

SUOR ANGELICA

ve - do, so - rel - le, la me - ta!... So - rel - le, son lie - ta, son

CORO DI SUORE

E co - sì si - a!

(reharmonized)

[Subrotation 3]
poco allargando

lie - ta! Can - tia - mo! Già in cie - lo si can - ta! Lo - dia - mo la Ver - gi - ne San - ta!

Can - tia - mo! Già in cie - lo si can - ta! E co - si

f *pp* *a Tempo* *cresc.*

[Subrotation 3, m. 2] 4-bar expansion of third chord (iii)

a Tempo (si ode dal fondo a destra il segnale della tavolette. Le suore vengono da ogni parte, si raccolgono e tutte in fila si

sia! ...

pp *dim. molto*

avviano verso le celle; la teoria bianca entra sotto le arcate di destra; ciascuna suora apre l'uscio della cella, entra e richiude)

a Tempo sost.^{no}

pp

SUOR ANGELICA *p* Ah!..... *rall.* Lo -

CORO DI SUORE *1^{me}* *p* San - - ta! Lo - -
2^{de}, 3^{ze} Lo - dia - mo la Ver - gi - ne San - - ta! Lo - diam, lo -

rall.

SUOR ANGELICA *molto rall.*

- diam!.....

CORO DI SUORE *1^{me}* *3^{ze}*
2^{de} dia - mo la Ver - gi - ne San - ta! A - - men!

pp

(È notte. Si vedono le stelle sulla chiesetta, e la luna dà sui cipressi)

SUOR ANGELICA *lunga pausa* (dalla cella) *Andante molto sost.^{no} ♩ = 54*

La grazia è di - sce - sa dal cie - - lo!

pp *lunga pausa*

Unlike the first two subrotations, the third, expanded subcycle of Element D *does* resolve to C major – as will the end of the opera – but the moment of resolution is broken open and marked with harrowing mixtures from C minor. This features, most prominently, a two-bar quasi-plagal intermixture with C minor, 3-4 mm. before no. 66 – more literally, as notated, an inverted subtonic seventh chord over a C-tonic pedal – interpolated chillingly between the anticipatory dominant-seventh chord, G⁸⁻⁷, mm. 5-6 before no. 66, and its clarified resolution onto C major, mm. 1-2 before no. 66. In sum, the listener ‘glides’ into the C major resolution only through eight steps of an ice-cold death-march, *molto rallentando*, thereby ironizing the off-stage, and fading, proclamations of the sisters re-entering the cloister, «Lodiamo la Vergine Santa!»

Following the *lunga pausa* at the end of the second large rotation, rehearsal no. 66, the third one begins at once with the linkage-text of repeated words, «La grazia è discesa dal cielo!» This is the final cycle, and it incorporates the orchestral intermezzo (Angelica’s preparation of the poison), the self-poisoning and despair, and the ‘miracolo’ hallucination. With some variants, the music retracks what we have just heard in the «Senza mamma» rotation. Rotation 3’s first elements, A and B, replicate those of the «Senza mamma» cycle, still in slow-motion but slightly faster, *Andante molto sostenuto*, ♩=54. The C-element at rehearsal no. 69, which Puccini eventually overlaid with text in a revision, parallels that of Rotation 1, the codetta death-march with the added recall of material from Element B.⁹

In prior rotations the A-B-C complex had been followed by ‘free’, expandable music functioning as a restart after a cessation of motion. That is what also what happens here. This is the location of the deleted ‘Aria dei fiori’, «Amici fiori, voi mi compensate» at rehearsal no. 70 through 74.¹⁰ The expansions continue – or *begin* in the fi-

⁹ The added text is that following rehearsal n. 69, «Suor Angelica ha sempre una ricetta buona fatta coi fiori», and its later underlay at that point – along with the recomposition of the Element C’s final measures («io morirò») – is directly related to the decision to cut the subsequent ‘Aria dei fiori’, which does not appear in the currently printed versions of the opera. See n. 10 below.

¹⁰ The music of the cut is available in ALFREDO MANDELLI, *Il recupero dell’Aria dei fiori* in «Suor Angelica», «Quaderni pucciniani», 1996, pp. 161-71. («Per quanto se ne sa, il brano non era stato più eseguito dopo la ‘prima’ alla Scala del 1922», p. 163). See also

nal version – with Angelica’s «Addio, buone sorelle, addio» at no. 75, which moves directly to an important anticipation of the swelling *telos*-theme, Element D, at no. 76, «È discesa la grazia benedetta! / Muoio per lui e in cielo lo rivedrò» – as though that theme were now pressing to be sounded. Its full emergence is derailed here, though, by its *fortissimo* slippage into the «La morte è vita bella» motive, the subsequent drinking of the poison «con esaltazione» shortly after no. 76, and the resulting outbursts «Ah! Son dannata!», «Io muoio in peccato mortale!», and «Ho smarrita la ragione!» after nos. 78 and 79. At the same time, Angelica’s despair is punctuated by the sisters singing off-stage the litany-formula to the Virgin – more pressing toward the unfurling of the intervallically related *telos*-theme.

That *telos*-theme, Element D, finally does break through, in its three subcycles, with the ‘Miracolo’ conclusion beginning at rehearsal no. 81. Here the mechanistically reiterative loops, the complete otherness of the musical idea, and the general sense of detachment from reality are enhanced by several factors, such as the voices (including boys’ chorus) and the orchestration (including arpeggiated chords in two offstage pianos, organ, offstage trumpets, offstage *pianissimo* cymbals). Although the dynamic curve of the three subcycles is identical to that heard in Rotation 2, there are some telling differences of detail: at the moment of the negative stilling of subcycle 3, for example – on the mediant chord – we hear this time the grounding litany-formula transformed into a minor-mode nightmare jutting forth garishly, «Gloriosa virginum, Salve, Maria!» (mm. 1-3 before no. 83). The return to *pianissimo* is twice-streaked with Angelica’s *portamento* cries, which (as more than one commentator has pointed out) combine shivers of religious ecstasy, sexual pleasure, and the approach of death.

analytical discussions of this aria and its dramatic function in DOTTO, *Tagli floreali*, and GIRARDI, *Puccini*, pp. 411-13. Both Dotto and Girardi argue that «Amici fiori» is a clear sign of the onset of Angelica’s hallucination. For Dotto, this is «l’inizio dell’allucinazione della protagonista», and as such, he argues, it is dramatically essential: «l’effetto era fondamentale per evitare che la chiusura dell’opera cadesse nella banalità». It is this cut aria, above all, that demonstrates that «il ‘miracolo’ è allucinazione pura, l’estrema ricerca di assoluzione, di negazione personale del gesto compiuto». I agree with these remarks, while pushing back the moment of Angelica’s removal from reality – though not the hallucination proper – to the onset of «Senza mamma» and its rotational implications.

Meanwhile, the 'miracolo'-events unfold on stage: the angels' voices, the flood of light, the appearance of the Virgin (the «Regina del conforto»), lightly pushing the «bimbo biondo, tutto bianco» toward the dying Angelica reaching in vain toward the child with outstretched arms. Once again we are given a multiple-vision of the Madonna and Child merged with the *Mater Dolorosa*. Who is the Madonna? Who is the Virgin? Who is this child? The continuing one-flat signature all the way to end – with locally C-major music – suggests another symbolic point. The principal key of *Suor Angelica* is the F major of its beginning and the recurring Element A. Rotational Cycles 2 and 3 have twice arpeggiated the F major triad: I-iii-V, F major, A minor, C major. In other words, C major has been regularly staged as the dominant of F.¹¹ Whatever its locally tonicized C-major implications, Rotation 3 ends, more broadly or within the middleground, on an unresolved dominant pitch-level. But instead of returning to F or beginning another cycle, the curtain comes down with her death. Like Angelica, the strongest tonal center of the opera, F major, has been reduced to the void of nonexistence.

To be sure, it is possible to perceive all of this in a less problematized way, as the straightforward representation of a genuine miracle or touching local legend, particularly in the absence of specific textual information instructing us to the contrary. Such considerations bring us to the central problem regarding the opera's conclusion: is it to be understood as positive (hence naively sentimental) or negative (hence cruelly nihilistic)? In *Suor Angelica* – unlike the situation enveloping Madama Butterfly's «Un bel dì» – there is no clarifying stage-direction or preceding conversation to establish for certain either that the miracle that we see on stage is actually supposed to be

¹¹ A different interpretation of the F-a-C arpeggiation – one in which the C major is understood as a genuine 'salvation' (p. 232), and hence, one presumes, an adequate resolution – may be found in HELEN M. GREENWALD, *Verdi's Patriarch and Puccini's Matricide: Through the Looking-Glass and What Puccini Found There*, «19th-Century Music», XVII, 1994, pp. 220-36: «The climax is no less apparent musically, as the final C major, now purged of sharps and thus emancipated, resolves the musical tension that surfaced in the [Angelica-Zia Principessa] duet [which had articulated an F-a-C# arpeggiation]» (p. 234). Such an interpretation, in my view, overlooks both the tonic significance of F earlier in the opera and the persistent one-flat signature all the way to the 'C-major' end – which may be understood as a notational, 'non-sounding' sign that should be taken into account in any interpretation of the opera's conclusion.

occurring 'in the story' or that the miracle is only a delusion projected by the dying Angelica. Confronting such an underdetermined text, the audience's perception is left unanchored. It can be stabilized only by appealing to a context from outside in order to precipitate an interpretation.

Perhaps the most relevant context in any complete performance of *Il tritico* is the preceding of *Suor Angelica* by the first of the three one-act operas, the 'impressionistic-naturalistic' (and ultimately luridly violent) *Il tabarro*. From one perspective, it is certainly possible to understand the pastel tints and miracle-ending of *Suor Angelica* as furnishing a more 'positive' contrast with *Il tabarro* – even to suppose that one goal of *Angelica* is to maximize those contrasts, providing something of a separate interior tableau within the triptych, one that will lead to yet another strong contrast, the concluding comic opera, *Gianni Schicchi*. Indeed, the issue of credibility at the end of *Angelica* – are we to believe that the composer wishes us to understand this miracle as actually happening? – need not surface at all as an inevitable question of interpretation. Even the skeptic may be willing to embrace the conventions of aesthetic distance and suspension of disbelief, realizing that operas are, after all, only ways of telling engaging fictional tales in affective and beguiling ways. Moreover, the many popular and touching legends surrounding regional practices of Roman Catholicism were anything but unfamiliar to Italian audiences. That Puccini's and Forzano's stained-glass *Angelica*-tableau reached directly, almost personally, into this traditional culture-of-miracles need hardly be elaborated here. The opera sought to play emotionally upon deeply ingrained features of local belief – still held or remembered as once-held, still flowingly warm – in obvious ways that could be cherished from many different points of view, even while never insisting on the need to interrogate the story's literal credibility.

A quite different perspective, though, would suggest that it is central to the understanding of *Suor Angelica* to realize that it is placed directly after *Il tabarro*. The operatic *Tabarro*-world is the modern, psychological, and 'realistic' world of desire and violence, placed out in sharp relief against an idealized, quasi-impressionistic backdrop of Paris and the Seine. Set in more current times, *Tabarro* had presented a gritty, urban material world already fallen away from spiritual

illusions and securities. There had been no *deus ex machina* in that brittle arena of things now abandoned by the once-held comforts of religion. (In this respect the situation may recall that of the veristic «orfano mondo» proclaimed nearly three decades earlier at the outset of *Pagliacci*.) Are we to hear *Angelica* as only a self-contained contrast with a temporarily forgotten *Tabarro*? Or should *Il tabarro* and its construction of modern consciousness remain as a persistent memory and undertow as we proceed through *Suor Angelica*, perhaps even to the point of providing the external rule for interpretation of the second opera?

While there are no unequivocally correct answers to these questions (one is of course free to interpret works within a reasonable range of options), it is at least justifiable to pursue the implications of the latter reading. It is relevant, for example, to notice that the three operas of *Il trittico* – *Il tabarro*, *Suor Angelica*, and *Gianni Schicchi* – recede further and further back into historical time. In Puccini's triptych, an image of the late-nineteenth-century Mediterranean world gives way to one of the end of the seventeenth century and finally to one of the end of the thirteenth. After modern urban society is initially constructed in *Il tabarro* as empty and shorn of illusions, we are subsequently invited to examine a precondition for that emptiness in an earlier, pre-Enlightenment world of illusion (though one that the modern person may understand as 'really' powered by the same human drives – and set into motion psychologically through a similarly sensuous, 'modern' musical style). In the third tableau, *Gianni Schicchi*, our 'archeological' dig into the strata of the chronological past brings us to an even earlier historical precondition for the present – from our perspective a more colorful and comic world, in which the 'realistic' *Tabarro*-future that we have come to know is something not yet envisioned by the characters on the stage, whom we are asked to perceive through a profoundly distanced modern lens of irony, a point-of-view conveyed additionally by the still-'modern' character of Puccini's music.

If we choose to regard *Il tabarro* as the standard of reference for all that follows, then it is reasonable to employ its perspective as a mode of critique within *Suor Angelica* – just as the memories of the two operas together can provide an accumulative lens through which one may read *Gianni Schicchi*. All of this produces something of a

paradox. From the standpoint of 'modern' (early-twentieth-century) interpretation (an aspect reinforced by the consistency of the 'modern', even sensational musical style), the chronological order of the operas – *Tabarro*, *Angelica*, *Schicchi* – determines the larger standpoint from which unfolding events are to be understood, even as what we see on the stage recedes away from the present. From the standpoint of historical preconditions, though, the three operas are presented anti-chronologically, in reverse order. One's beginning is one's end; one's end, one's beginning.

There can be little doubt that from the potentially persisting *Tabarro* viewpoint, skeptical of the reality of miracles and *deus-ex-machina* 'happy endings', the final scene of *Suor Angelica* is best regarded as a hallucination. And yet the necessity of such an understanding is not made explicit by either Puccini or Forzano, although one might regard many aspects of Puccini's music as sufficient indicators of the presence of factors that support the 'negative' reading: the dark intermixtures with the minor mode, the sudden outbursts and often-disjointed and desperate musical syntax, the ironized choral appeals to the Virgin, and so on. On this reading, though, it is apparently left to the 'modern we' to construe all that we see and hear in the mode of pathetic high irony. It is we who are to understand what *Angelica* cannot, clinging desperately to the hopes and images of the old world.

On the other hand, to the extent that we choose *not* to question the sentimentalized story of a 'miracolo' – presumably by a willing suppression of skepticism – we enter into the self-deception of the dying protagonist. If this is the case, then once the rotational cycles begin in earnest, the audience's position shifts – from an observational, third-person site external to the dramatic characters to a first-person position lodged inside *Angelica*'s mind. Here we are forced to share her imagined vision and her reaction to it.

Puccini and Forzano have situated the opera's ending in a disturbing space suspended somewhere between cardboard-figure belief – radiantly promised but breathtakingly naïve – and the ashen blackness of lost faith. The implicit nihilism is all the more telling because it is transmitted through a beautiful illusion in which we might wish to believe (and in which our culture once believed) but which we are presumed to know – if we choose to retain *Tabarro*-consciousness –

cannot be sustained in the modern world. The tension that propels the end of *Suor Angelica* is that of a non-resolvable suspension between incommensurable interpretations. On the one hand, we have innocent belief not only fueled by a deep longing for the assurances that have been lost but also reinforced by enticingly sensuous music. On the other hand, we are confronted with the material-world emptiness of modern times.

It is probably no accident that *Il tabarro* and *Suor Angelica* end with chillingly relatable events. In each a distraught, eroticized, and guilt-ridden woman approaches someone else (Giorgetta approaches Michele; Angelica approaches the Virgin) only to have someone dead pushed forth or directed toward her. In *Il tabarro* Michele conceals the strangled Luigi under his cloak. Drawn fearfully out of her cabin, Giorgetta addresses him, vainly hoping that she is about to be forgiven, comforted, she thinks, under the cloak of her husband. «Dimmi che mi perdoni», she requests. He replies, «Vieni nel mio tabarro! Vieni!». What Giorgetta finds there is death – not her own (though that may well follow), but that of her dead lover Luigi – and Michele brings down the curtain by pressing her face into the body of death. In *Suor Angelica* the shattered protagonist, pleading for mercy, also finds death when she hopes for reconciliation. Here one might also remember, noting the irony, the iconographic tradition of the Madonna of the Mantle, the supposedly sheltering and protective cloak of the Virgin. With the experience of *Il tabarro* (*The Cloak*) behind us, it is inappropriate to construe the conclusion of *Suor Angelica* as a monochromatically positive ending.

I have traced the presence of three large rotational cycles in *Suor Angelica*, but in a sense there are four. (Once again, see Figure 4.) As has been pointed out by Michele Girardi, the important F-major melody, our Element A, is foreshadowed early on in the opera – in fact only about three and a half minutes into the work, with the opening F-major words of La Zelatrice, «Sorelle in umiltà, mancaste alla quindena» (Example 5) – words that do not yet form themselves fully into the melody that will be so characteristic later on.¹² Moreover, this proto-Element A leads not to Elements B and C but only to a loose series

¹² GIRARDI, *Puccini*, pp. 399–400.

of episodes, extending for another seventeen or eighteen minutes before Rotation 1 begins with the arrival of the «ricca berlina».

EXAMPLE 5

[proto [A] ?]

4 after 3 LA ZELATRICE (alle due converse che sono passate prima)
Andantino $\text{♩} = 63$

So - rel - le in u - mil - tà, man - ca - ste al - la quin - de - na, ed

an - che Suor An - ge - li - ca, che pe - rò fe - ce con tri - zio - ne pie -

na. In - ve - ce voi, so - rel - le, pec - ca - ste in di - stra - zio - ne,

e a - ve - te per - so un gior - no di quin - dé - na!

rall. e dim.

rall. e dim.

This early eighteen-minute section might be regarded as something of a pre-cycle, a proto-rotation, that far from being precipitated into a palpable structural entity, is only partially suggested by the merest of hints. As such it anticipates Rotation 1, itself incomplete, lengthy, and digressive. (It is only with Rotation 2 that the full clarity of the cycle is made evident.) But if we choose to include into our analysis the pre-cycle *prior* to the arrival of the carriage, we could characterize the structure of the entire opera as a gradual but inexorable *coalescing* of two full rotations (the parallel Rotations 2 and 3) out of two earlier, much looser cycles (the pre-cycle and Rotation 1).

In sum, *Suor Angelica* starts in blandly innocent local-color episodes and gradually 'pulls itself together' into two or three clearer rotational cycles. In doing so, it tracks a broad shift in which paratactic linearity is transformed into slowly revolving circles. It slips away from unshaped, merely successional linear time into the obsessively circular madness and suicide of Angelica. As such, the hour-long span of the opera becomes a structural chronicle of the processes of Angelica's mind, from unformed, mere successions of naïve and pointless labor to crystal-clear but profoundly disoriented rotational reiterations. In the protagonist's words, «Ho smarrita la ragione». In *Suor Angelica* structure and content are not kept apart as separate or even superimposed processes. Rather, they are fused into one and the same thing, before they are emptied out permanently into the silence of death.

Il tabarro ovvero la 'solita' insolita forma¹

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Ha candidamente osservato un autorevole studioso d'opera che «la musica di Puccini [...] spesso all'ascolto sembra migliore di quanto non sia in realtà».² E infatti, proprio questo è il punto: perché la musica di Puccini è destinata a funzionare meglio all'ascolto? e soprattutto all'ascolto in teatro? Forse è il caso di capovolgere il quesito e considerare la sua musica come una componente dell'azione drammatica, destinata a creare l'atmosfera teatrale e a interagire nel tempo e nello spazio come veicolo di tensioni emotive. E così si potrebbe, forse, comprendere meglio l'operato di un musicista, anzi, di un drammaturgo che, per sua stessa ammissione, si sentì destinato dal «Dio santo» a essere non «un sinfonico puro», bensì a scrivere «per il teatro» e «solo per il teatro».³

Solo l'ascolto in teatro è in grado di rivelare elementi strutturali che lo spartito a tutta prima non sembra denunciare. A tale proposito non posso che ribadire un'affermazione fatta in una precedente occasione:⁴ l'analisi musicale, in sé e per sé, non può giungere ad alcuna spiega-

¹ *Nihil sub sole novum*. Il percorso d'indagine del presente contributo parte infatti dal principio sostenuto dal pensiero scientifico: 'tutto si trasforma'. In sostanza, non esiste niente nel mondo della ricerca, se non la rielaborazione dei risultati strettamente legati alle tappe di evoluzione dell'analisi del pensiero. La scelta di diversi o apparentemente nuovi percorsi di ricerca per studiare e analizzare un oggetto che è sempre stato motivo d'interesse scientifico, soddisfa le richieste di convalidare e aggiornare la ricerca, oppure di introdurre nuovi elementi di riflessione per diversificare il percorso della ricerca stessa onde ottenere in seguito nuovi risultati.

² DONALD JAY GROUT, *Breve storia dell'opera*, Milano, Rusconi, 1985, p. 523.

³ «Non avendo libretto come faccio della musica? Ho quel gran difetto di scriverla solamente quando i miei carnefici burattini si muovono sulla scena. Potessi essere un sinfonico puro. Ingannerei il mio tempo e il mio pubblico. Ma io? nacqui tanti anni fa, tanti, troppi quasi un secolo... e il Dio santo mi toccò col dito mignolo e mi disse 'Scrivi per il teatro ... solo per il teatro' e ho seguito il supremo consiglio» (Puccini a Giuseppe Adami, lettera senza data in *Giacomo Puccini: Epistolario*, a cura di Giuseppe Adami, Milano, Mondadori, 1928, pp. 259-60).

⁴ *Tosca 2000*, Convegno internazionale nel centenario della prima rappresentazione di *Tosca*, tenutosi il 24 e 25 giugno 2000 a Roma, Teatro dell'Opera. La pubblicazione degli Atti è prevista presso la Northeastern University Press.