

JAMES HEPOKOSKI

«UN BEL DÌ? VEDREMO!»: ANATOMY OF A DELUSION

Is it possible to say anything not self-evident about the most familiar moment of *Madama Butterfly*, Cio-Cio-San's seventy-measure, G-flat-major aria shortly into Act II, «Un bel dì, vedremo»? Perhaps not. But for the operatic world it persists as a defining Puccini signifier, and for that reason alone it might justify scrutiny. I start from the premise that the aria's meaning is neither single nor unitary. It is not conceptually fixed, not a closed and stable thing to be uncovered once and for all through an act of empirical digging. Instead, the aria harbors a tangle of coexisting possibilities, clusters of potential meaning-effects: multiple, sometimes conflicting resonances that may be activated by the participating listener, scatterings of connotations not contained by the straightforward accounts offered in plot summaries and opera guides.

Submitting «Un bel dì» to such reflections opens up a wide field of considerations, many of which, while of central importance, are not concerns in the present study.¹ Its more narrow purpose is to glance at «Un bel dì» from a music-analytical and generic perspective, to examine it as a consciously constructed set piece. Here we shall pursue the technical question of to which apparent ends Puccini, *qua* compositional craftsman, planned and assembled this aria.² By which poetic and musical means – taking advantage in both

¹ Some of these angles include the aria's later resonances in the opera, its participation within the work's broader rotational structures, and larger interpretive issues of political and cultural implication and literary and operatic intertextuality. «Un bel dì» is situated in a historically given context. The entirety of *Madama Butterfly* capitalizes on issues of pressing concern to Europe in the opening years of the twentieth century: transgressive romance; interracial marriage; an unleashed, franker expression of sexuality and gender roles; New World-Old World cultural clashes; the psychology of Western political power and the effects of colonialism; Europe's own fascination with strains of *fin de siècle* sensationalism and decadence; Italy's nervousness about the decline of its own operatic tradition; the rising political and cultural phenomenon of 'America' and the rushing slippage into the modern, market-oriented, technological world of the twentieth century – with the erasure of once-confident nineteenth-century values, including musical values, by those of the emerging twentieth. Such concerns are omnipresent throughout the opera, which invites us to read it, on differing metaphorical levels, as being about these things.

² This demystifying enterprise is anything but a new exegetical aim, and it may be undertaken

realms of their larger cultural connotations – did the composer (and his librettists) manufacture this dramatic moment, targeting it as a nodal high spot within the work, a focal point for the coalescing (and hence the manipulation) of audience response? How might we, distancing ourselves from the aria's potent sway in terms of emotional response, understand it anatomically, as a musical object calmly and deliberately constructed – and then situated – toward a specific, manipulative theatrical purpose?

When we stop this four-minute musical field in its tracks – throw it onto the examination table for a closer consideration – we find within it differing strata of allusion and implication. In «Un bel dì» we are presented with a constellation of standardized literary tropes, operatic allusions, quasi-formulaic musical patterns, and numerous levels of structural implication. In other words, we encounter a deliberately (or intuitively?) planned harnessing of well-honed genres and techniques toward a specific expressive end. Although what follows will involve much by way of technical dissection and analysis, we shall find that the manufacturing details in play are neither abstract nor considered only on their own terms, as though I were presenting them to justify the aria as an illustration of some sort of absolute music or to argue down the skeptic on behalf of the mastery of Puccini. On the contrary, in each case the technical observations are shot through with cultural and historical implications that can help us to perceive the urges and implications that illuminate the aria from within – exercising their effects on those listeners who choose to submit to the aria's power of intoxication only in a more immediate sense, caught willingly in its expressive grip, happy to remain unconcerned with how the trick is done within what, to us, is obviously 'a carefully planned show'.

Before engaging the music proper, we shall start with some observations about the aria's text (reproduced in Fig. 1). Its leading trope conflates that of the ceremonial lament of the victimized woman, young and beautiful, still poignantly devoted to the one who has used and abandoned her, and that of the wife or lover patiently awaiting the return of a long-absent beloved, typically one who has been called to heroic duty or strenuous tasks elsewhere.

in a number of ways within modern and postmodern criticism. Still eloquent along these lines, for instance, are the remarks written several decades ago by N. FRYE, *The Secular Scripture: A Study of the Structure of Romance*, Cambridge (MA), Harvard University Press, 1976, p. 166: «What the naive, uninstructed, childlike or illusion-ridden viewer accepts as 'real' a more knowledgeable and emancipated one sees to be a carefully planned show, and planned within the framework of a literary convention. It follows that the journey toward one's own identity, which literature does so much to help with, has a great deal to do with escaping from the alleged 'reality' of what one is reading or looking at, and recognizing the convention behind it. [...] The child should not 'believe' the story he is told; he should not disbelieve it either, but send out imaginative roots into that mysterious world between the 'is' and the 'is not' which is where his own ultimate freedom lies».

In this instance the waiting is delusional. Pinkerton will never return as Cio-Cio-San imagines it, that is, as her husband. Everyone surrounding Cio-Cio-San understands what she struggles so pitiably to repress. These bystanders include not only her servant Suzuki, to whom her utterance is nominally addressed, but also, more importantly, every member of the spectating audience (the real addressees of this discourse). The dominant mode of perception here is that of intense irony. The aria's affective force depends on our understanding from a higher position of knowledge what the protagonist insists on denying:

BUTTERFLY (*sorpresa*)

Piangi? Perché?

Ah, la fede ti manca.

(*poi continua fiduciosa e sorridente*)

Senti.

(*fa la scena come se realmente vi assistesse e si avvicina a poco a poco allo shosi del fondo*)

Un bel dì, vedremo

levarsi un fil di fumo sull'estremo
confin del mare.

E poi la nave appare.

E poi la nave è bianca.

Entra nel porto, romba il suo saluto.

Vedi? È venuto!

Io non gli scendo incontro. Io no. Mi metto

là sul ciglio del colle e aspetto, aspetto

gran tempo e non mi pesa

la lunga attesa.

E... uscito dalla folla cittadina

un uomo, un picciol punto

s'avvia per la collina.

Chi sarà? chi sarà?

E come sarà giunto

che dirà? che dirà?

Chiamerà Butterfly dalla lontana.

Io senza far risposta

me ne starò nascosta

un po' per celia, un po' per non morire

al primo incontro, ed egli alquanto in pena

chiamerà, chiamerà:

«Piccina – mogliettina

olezzo di verbenà»

i nomi che mi dava al suo venire.

(*a Suzuki*)

Tutto questo avverrà, te lo prometto.

Tienti la tua paura – io con sicura
 fede lo aspetto.
 (congeda Suzuki)

Fig. 1. «Un bel dì, vedremo»: text.

«Un bel dì» has thus been situated within a network of pre-existing dramatic tropes, literary and operatic. We may be invited to suppose, for instance, that Cio-Cio-San seeks to convince herself that she is taking on the role of Penelope from Homer's *Odyssey*. Like Penelope, she is staged as being surrounded by 'replacement' marriage proposals that, ever-faithful, she persists in rejecting. The flock of persistent suitors in Homer finds its counterpart – albeit in grotesque caricature – in the Act II urgings of Goro, the marriage broker, and in Prince Yamadori, who presses to be accepted as a future husband. In «Un bel dì» Cio-Cio-San may hope that her life-story is to be configured as that of Penelope – projecting the happy ending (much as Penelope had done) – but even as she sings the aria, we are to realize that she is destined instead to play the role of Dido, abandoned by the traveling Aeneas in Book 4 of Vergil's epic (which leads, of course, to Dido's curse and subsequent suicide, first situating herself among the symbolic relics of her past with Aeneas – his clothes, their bed – then dramatically plunging in the sword as the climactic culmination). The characteristically 'modern' or *fin de siècle* touch in *Madama Butterfly* is that the personages involved are historically insignificant: no warrior hero destined for a glorious and historic future, no Carthaginian queen. Instead, all has been socially flattened into a banal, emerging modernity: a mere American Navy lieutenant destined to fade into historical insignificance as only an 'average' representative of an emerging American populace; one of a cluster of young geishas; all set within a disruptively inevitable clash of cultures and emerging new world. (It is only as metaphorical tokens of larger, more anonymous historical processes – as selected members of identifiable groups – that Pinkerton and Cio-Cio-San may be infused with a significance beyond the merely personal).

The resonances of abandonment-lament and delusional waiting extend beyond Homer and Vergil. These are well-worn literary tropes, returned to repeatedly as features of transgressive romance.³ Also relevant to these

³ In English literature, for instance, one finds it in Tennyson's poem *Mariana* or in Browning's poem, *In a Year*. Within the German tradition one might catch a foretaste of it in such poems as Goethe's depiction of that autoerotic fantasy-vision from *Faust*, «Gretchen am Spinnrade» – in which a deceived Gretchen imagines her lover becoming more physically present with every line. One especially close parallel in the English-language tradition to the detail-oriented «Un bel dì» – which con-

trope-families are the hallucinatory mad scenes from nineteenth-century opera, each situated within its own plot-context and typically fixating on a troubling aspect of marriage or sexuality. One might also observe some implicit parallels between «Un bel dì» (and *Madama Butterfly* as a whole) with portions of Verdi's *Otello* from seventeen years earlier – still-resonating aspects in the operatic consciousness of 1904 Italy. In terms of dramatic situation and ironic impact Cio-Cio-San's «Un bel dì» is not entirely dissimilar from the lament of the earlier opera's trapped and doomed Desdemona, who also, in Act IV, had confided her innocent, inner thoughts and forebodings to a trusting attendant in the Willow Song and «Ave Maria».⁴

In «Un bel dì» Cio-Cio-San's delusion, her fantasy-vision, is frozen on the opera stage to be gazed upon as a highlighted moment in an ongoing succession of spectacles. To redeploy a highly adaptable metaphor from Act I, the exotic butterfly is skewered by a pin («da uno spillo [...] trafitta») – the pin of the public's gaze (our gaze) – and mounted as a specimen, this time for the gratification of the ticket-purchasing audience, whose manipulated reactions play a significant role within the musical situation offered by this aria. As our pin-like gaze penetrates the motionless Butterfly, it passes through her core, while she continues to project our gaze forward toward her own object of fantasy far in the distance (and actually into a vaporous nothing) – her imagined reuniting with Pinkerton. From another perspective one may perceive that two differing motion-vectors converge on Butterfly, holding her fast. On the one hand, we have the audience's laser-attention beamed toward her alone; on the other hand, we have her construction of the imaginary object, Pinkerton, that absence, that emptiness, that she envisions as still desiring her and giving her worth, an illusion she fantasizes as a vector approaching ever nearer to her.⁵ In this way the audience is made to be co-present and

structs an elaborate scenario of what it will be like, step-by-step, when Pinkerton arrives – is Dante Gabriel Rossetti's pre-Raphaelite (proto-decadent) poem, *The Blessed Damozel*, known perhaps more to musicians in its 1887-88 setting by the young Debussy, *La Damoiselle élue*. In the end, that projected fantasy, like that in «Un bel dì», comes to nothing: it is only the manufacturing of a delusion.

⁴ Needless to say, the two operatic situations also display significant differences. Still, one line of interpretation might explore the degree to which *Madama Butterfly* may be read as a modernist, new-generational response to or recomposition of certain dramatic features or individual moments of *Otello*.

⁵ The dramatic situation is paradigmatic for a process often described in the [post-]Lacanian writings of Slavoj Žižek, in which the fantasy-object is projected as desiring – and hence validating or defining – the decentered subject engaged in the fantasy (one thus projected outward as gazing back with desire at oneself). See, e.g., S. ŽIŽEK, *The Plague of Fantasies*, London, Verso, 1997, pp. 8f.: «[Here we are concerned with] the notion that the subject's relation to his/her Other and the latter's desire is crucial to the subject's very identity. [...] [In the writings of late Lacan] *objet petit a*, as the object of fantasy, is that 'something in me more than myself' on account of which I perceive

co-involved in Butterfly's pathetic immobility. The audience is both the intended consumer and the dramatically necessary activator of its implications.

The text of «Un bel dì, vedremo» spreads out over a generously expansive 29 lines, disposed mostly in what I have called rhymed *scena* verse, a familiar operatic verse-format from the late 1880s and 1890s: unpredictable, jagged mixtures of rhymed *quinari*, *settenari*, and *endecasillabi*.⁶ Apart from the final lines of declaration, the 29 lines convey a vector of motion from the void of Pinkerton's absence in Butterfly's present to the fullness of his arrival in an imagined future. Her text begins with an initial throwing of her imagination into the future and proceeds to the first sighting of the smoke of his returning ship, to the ship itself, to the sound of its cannon, to her first distant glimpse of him («un picciol punto»), to an increasing materialization of him as he ascends the hill where she waits. The fantasy ends with his imagined closer approach to her, first perceptible only through the sound of his voice and his greeting («Piccina mogliettina | olezzo di verbenà»). The increasing physicality of the images – first distant smoke, then the ship, the cannon, the ever-closer glimpses, and finally his voice – conveys an omnipresent eroticism, a discourse of her waiting body, as she imagines this aching absence drawing ever nearer to her receptive and submissive longing. (The metaphorical sexual undertones are unmistakable, particularly as reinforced by the larger cultural context of this turn-of-the-century, sensationalistic *spettacolo*: the fantasized image, «la nave bianca entra nel porto, romba il suo saluto», the moment of physical encounter on the cry of «morire», and so on). With the delusion brought to its completion, the text ends, in the final three lines, with the sealing-off of the fantasy through a personal vow of credence («Tutto questo avverrà»): a final, impassioned declaration to Suzuki that she expects this long-awaited motion-of-return toward herself to come true.

In terms of their poetic format the 29 lines do not immediately suggest how they might be set musically. While they obviously exclude some formats (strophic song, for instance), they do not insist upon any clear alternatives (through-composed song? ternary form?). On the contrary, they furnish a free flow of individual phrases, begun in the middle of a poetic line (triggered by a characteristic word preceding operatic narratives, «Senti») and embellished

myself as 'worthy of the Other's desire.' One should always bear in mind that the desire 'realized' (staged) in fantasy is not the subject's own, but the *other's* desire: fantasy, phantasmic formation, is an answer to the enigma of 'Che vuoi?' – 'You're saying this, but *what do you really mean by saying it?*' – which established the subject's primordial, constitutive position. The original question of desire is not directly 'What do I want?', but 'What do *others* want from me? What do they see in me? What am I to others?'».

⁶ J. HEPOKOSKI, *Giuseppe Verdi: Otello*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1987, p. 139.

with end-rhymes that appear irregularly – sometimes closely with each other, sometimes more distantly. This is not to say that the text is without any structural implications – invitations, one might suppose, toward some aspects of a musical setting. The initial four lines, for instance – the first sighting of the ship – are set off as an initial quatrain in *rima baciata* (aabb), while the following line, «Poi la nave bianca», obviously initiating a new section (launched away, shiplike, from the opening quatrain with the verbal push provided by the reiteration of «poi» from the preceding line), reaches back outside of the song-text proper to rhyme with a hanging line from before the aria, «Ah, la fede ti manca». Following this, the implied textual divisions become less clear, although changes of rhyme-patterns might be suggestive. In its second half we find three complementary, rhyming lines, each drawing the vision of an approaching Pinkerton into an increased intimacy: «Chi sarà? chi sarà?»; «che dirà? che dirà?»; and, a few lines down, «chiamerà, chiamerà», which line leads at once into an intimation of the close presence of his voice and words.

Doubtless wishing to situate this expressive moment within a larger, high-prestige operatic tradition, Puccini set the text in a rounded, reprise format, one in which an initially sculpted thematic block in G-flat major at the opening (A) returns at the end in a balancing (or climactic) reprise (A') – with the final three lines of the text (the vow, «Tutto questo avverrà») serving as a coda or appendix to the generic form proper. (See Fig. 2). For this period in the history of Mediterranean opera the flexible ABA' format – an available option for decades, especially within French works⁷ – has usually been described as

⁷ See, e.g., the brief discussion of French «ternary» arias in S. HUEBNER, *The Operas of Charles Gounod*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1990, pp. 232-236, 265-272. The term 'ternary', however – unless carefully unpacked and explained – can be a loaded one, since it is sometimes used also to describe a «rounded binary» structure, as in the «small ternary» designation urged by W.E. CAPLIN, *Classical Form: A Theory of Formal Functions for the Instrumental Music of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1998, pp. 71-86. By the lights of this system (whose terminology I do not use in my own work), the standard song-format of much nineteenth-century Italian opera, aa'ba', which most analysts would consider to be a «rounded binary» (or a «lyric binary», as I call it, a term that also includes the aa'bc format), would be classified, sometimes confusingly, as *ternary* – even though it produces a quite different effect from the larger 'ternary' ABA' formats in question here. For a discussion of the basic elements of the standard 8 or 10-line lyric binary format in Italian opera, ca. 1830-75, see J. HEPOKOSKI, *Ottocento Opera as Cultural Drama: Generic Mixtures in «Il trovatore»*, in *Verdi's Middle Period: Source Studies, Analysis, and Performance Practice*, ed. M. Chusid, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1997, pp. 147-196. Although HUEBNER, *The Operas of Charles Gounod*, p. 236, minimizes the influence of the «lyric prototype» (lyric form, lyric binary) on French ternary practice in the second half of the nineteenth century, see n. 9 below for a more complicated view of its adaptations within the Italian tradition. It is surely correct, however, to suggest that the well-worn Italianate lyric binary *tout court* had become a rarity in Mediterranean opera by the end of the century, and that more flexible reprise-formats (ABA') – perhaps with an ear for aspects of the now obsolete structure? – were far more regularly encountered.

ternary, and Puccini had certainly made substantial use of it before «Un bel dì». ⁸ In the version of the format deployed here, A' is sung to the 'final lines' of the quasi-narrative fantasy (from «morire al primo incontro» through «al suo venire»), not to a textual *da capo* of the original A lines – an older format with near-archaic connotations still occasionally used in the mid-nineteenth century. ⁹ While the melody provides a conceptual reprise-rounding with

⁸ Even when one considers works only from the earlier part of his career, Puccini's set pieces are rarely adequately describable with mere letter-schemes such as ABA'. When ternary forms are in evidence, they are typically sutured into their immediate contexts in complex, integrative ways. These ABA'-informed structures, when they occur at all, are often not self-contained but participate in alternative or larger formal plans as well. With these caveats one might point to two set pieces from *La bohème* in dialogue with ternary formats: Mimi's «Mi chiamano Mimi» (whose thematic block, A proper, begins at the words «Mi piacciono quelle cose»; from the ternary perspective the twice-occurring «Mi chiamano Mimi» material may be construed as an introduction and an interpolation); and Musetta's «Quando me'n vo'» (whose A' reprise expands into an ensemble). Two ABA'-informed set pieces from *Tosca*: Cavaradossi's «Recondita armonia» (reckoning the ternary schema from the onset of those words; the 'ternary' format is actually inset into a larger rotational configuration); and Tosca's «Non la sospiri la nostra casetta» (whose structure is complicated throughout by the recurrences of an 'irresistible' cadential refrain-module; and whose melodic reprise, at its end, swells and expands with the unexpected, impetuous joining-in of Cavaradossi, unable to restrain himself). See also n. 9 below.

⁹ The 'ternary' ABA' concept in nineteenth-century Mediterranean opera might seem self-evident and nonproblematic, but tracing its histories and implications in France and Italy is a substantial project. In a still-unpublished paper from 1994 (*Reading Character, Culture, and Politics in «Les Vêpres siciliennes»: Verdi Confronts the Ternary Principle*, Sarasota Verdi French Opera Conference, 25 March 1994), I distinguished among at least three different ternary formats found at mid-century in slower-tempo closed songs. The stiffest and most 'old-fashioned' (typically the most formalized or aristocratic in implication) are *full ternaries*, in which the A section is either a broad, complete stanzaic unit or a complete lyric binary (aa'ba''), whose music and text return (*da capo* like) in full, or nearly in full, at the end. Examples include Marguerite's «O beau pays de la Touraine» from Meyerbeer's *Les Huguenots*; and Procida's «Au sein de la puissance» from Verdi's *Les Vêpres siciliennes*. The favoring of a simultaneous musical and textual reprise within 'formal' solo set pieces continued in France for much of the nineteenth century. Numerous examples, sometimes with shortened or slightly altered *da capo* reprises, may be found in Gounod and Massenet (e.g., Thais's «Dis-moi que je suis belle» from *Thais* [1894]). See also HUEBNER, *The Operas of Charles Gounod*.

A second, somewhat less imposing variant (with correspondingly fewer aristocratic connotations) is the *compressed ternary*, in which the A section is shorter, consisting only of a brief thematic block (perhaps arrayed in an aa' format) that at first can strike us as the first section of a normative stanzaic unit or lyric binary structure. In the compressed ternary, then, we find a notably *brief* A section; a B section; and a textual and musical reprise of the original A. Examples include Fernand's «Ange si pur» («Spirto gentil») from Donizetti's *La Favorite*, Rolando's «Ah, m'abbraccia d'esultanza» from Verdi's *La battaglia di Legnano*, and Procida's «Et toi, Palerme» from *Les Vêpres siciliennes*. Particularly in the earlier and mid-nineteenth century, this more abbreviated format, especially in Italian hands, is doubtless a hybrid between the larger French (*da capo*) ternary and the more characteristically Italian lyric binary format (which does not feature any textual *da capo*).

A third option – at mid-century also in dialogue (though often in complex ways) with the normative lyric binary melodic pattern (aa'ba'') – is what I called the *mixed ternary* format, in which the ABA' elements are melodically evident, but the textual return found in the first two types is lacking. Thus the format is similar to that of option 1 or 2 above, but without the return of the original words at the moment of musical reprise. Examples may be found in the page's (Urbain's) aria, «Une dame noble et sage», from *Les Huguenots*, in Amelia's «Come in quest' ora bruna» from Verdi's *Simon Boccanegra*, and in two arias from Verdi's *Un ballo in maschera*: Renato's «Alla vita che t'arride»

the return of A', the text at that point continues to be linear, 'new', ongoing, not recursive. Within such a 'melodic-book-end' format – at least by 1904 – the enclosed interior section (B) could be treated flexibly, as the text and occasion demanded.

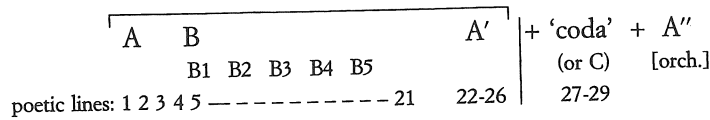


Fig. 2. The ternary format of «Un bel dì, vedremo».

Within the Mediterranean operatic tradition at the time of *Madama Butterfly* such a traditional reprise-format signaled the presence of a deliberately formalized set-piece in dialogue with an imposing history of earlier precedents. The format itself, within an otherwise often-fluid musical texture, had long been a marker of a self-contained operatic highlight, a separately sculpted moment of musical importance: the lyrical payoff. The self-conscious generic formality of the ABA' (+ coda) scaffolding provided yet another eye gazing upon Cio-Cio-San: a structural spotlight shone upon (and hence isolating) her in an intensified, separable theatrical unit, one that underscored its own formality and operatic traditionalism through the well-worn device of thematic reprise and rounding. Indeed, the deliberately 'non-progressive' melodic format of «Un bel dì» – appropriate enough for a character whose wide-eyed trust appealed to simpler traditions in an otherwise decaying and corrosive world – apparently invited some of its earliest listeners to hear it as old-fashioned. One testily critical reviewer of the Milanese premiere, for example, from Sonzogno's journal «Il secolo», claimed that the mere presence of the climactic «ripresa alle parole 'per non morire al primo incontro' invecchia la forma del pezzo» – a presumed detriment betraying a lack of truly progressive creative imagination, redoubled by the even-more-obvious bid for last-gasp theatrical effect heard in yet a *third* sounding of the musical idea at the very end of the set piece, «l'altra ripresa, fortissimo, dopo il canto».¹⁰

and Amelia's «Morrò, ma prima in grazia». The original lyric binary aspect of this format seems to have been eroded away by the late nineteenth century, and the form became a recognizable structure in itself. Werther's «O nature, pleine de grace» is an example from Massenet's *Werther*. Puccini also provided examples in works prior to *Madama Butterfly*: see n. 8 above. «Un bel dì» is in dialogue with this third option.

¹⁰ Quoted in *Carteggi pucciniani*, ed. E. Gara, Milan, Ricordi, 1958, p. 258. On the Sonzogno publishing house as a rival to Ricordi's – thus suggesting that the anonymous critic was commercially predisposed to find fault with *Madama Butterfly* – see BUDDEN, p. 241.

Such a remark brings up the issue of the textual point at which Puccini decided to bring back the original A thematic block (though not its text) in a climactic, rounding reprise. If one were examining the text alone (Fig. 1) and had never heard the aria – but were informed that it was to unfold in some sort of ABA' reprise format – it would be difficult to predict where the composer would choose to begin the normative return of the opening melody near the end. (As mentioned earlier, since the initial four lines are set off as a poetically contained quatrain, rhyming aabb [«vedremo»/«estremo»; «mare»/«appare»], it is easier to imagine that they would underpin the melodic A, the initial thematic block – which is in fact the case. But where was that melody to be brought back?) As we know, Puccini's compositional decision was to begin the melodic reprise, *fortissimo*, on the final word of the twenty-first line, «morire» – «morire al primo incontro», m. 49 – throwing into high relief the textual sense but treating the poetry, at least momentarily, almost as blank prose. (Ex. 1 reproduces the vocal score of the complete aria).

The musical overlay, then, divides the sprawling 29 lines of text into 4 + 17 + 5 + 3: four lines for A (mm. 1-8), the principal G-flat major melody; a lengthy seventeen lines for the middle section, B (mm. 9-48); five lines (plus the triggering «morire») for the tonic reprise of the A melody (mm. 49-56, completing the generic ABA' form proper); and three final lines («Tutto questo avverrà») for the concluding vow (mm. 57-62, technically a coda, though it could also be labeled as an appended C section), which, at its end, brings forth an additional, orchestral eruption of the A melody in its original key, mm. 62-70). The reason for the expanded length of the B section, beginning «Poi la nave bianca», could hardly be clearer. As Cio-Cio-San, *qua* operatic character, waits day after day, month after month, in a suspended, unrewarded absence, so does the middle section lapse into an extended series of nearly static sections, each patiently 'awaiting' the generic reprise of the A melody, the longed-for «Un bel dì» to come. Thus Puccini adapted the operatically traditional reprise-format itself, here with an expanded B section, to participate in the dramatic re-enactment of patient, anticipatory waiting and imagined return. Normative musical form and dramatic content are fused as one and the same.

The much-delayed return of the principal melody, which, like Pinkerton, had been removed from perceptibility in a prolonged loss, is appropriately aligned (in Butterfly's self-deception) with the moment when the absent Other suddenly reappears, physically, before her – the fantasized re-entrance of Pinkerton into her life. Precisely at the point of his imagined re-arrival – «al primo incontro» – the melody of A bursts forth in a psychologically urgent *fortissimo* return. Leading up to this moment, Butterfly's words suggest that

«UN BEL DÌ? VEDREMO!»: ANATOMY OF A DELUSION

A (fa la scena come se realmente vi assistesse e si avvicina poco a poco allo *sōso* del fondo)

AND^{te} MOLTO CALMO $\text{♩} = 42$

1 BUTTERFLY
Un..... bel dì, ve - dre - mo le -

12 *AND^{te} MOLTO CALMO* $\text{♩} = 42$
pp come da lontano *sostenendo*

3 BUTTERFLY
- var - si un fil di fu - mo sull'e - stre - mo confin del

6 BUTTERFLY *poco rall.*
ma - re. E poi..... la nave ap - pa - re.....

Ex. 1. G. PUCCINI, *Madama Butterfly*, Act II, Butterfly's «Un bel dì, vedremo», vocal score (beginning).

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B1

9 BUTTERFLY *Un poco mosso* *ritenuto*

Poi la na - ve bian - ca en - tra nel por - to,

Un poco mosso *ritenuto*

p *mf*

13 BUTTERFLY *Un poco mosso* *con passione* *ritenuto*

romba il suo sa - lu - to. Ve - di? È..... ve -

Un poco mosso *f con passione*

mf

B2

16 BUTTERFLY *dolcemente* *rall.*

- nu - to! Io non gli scendo in - con - tro. Io no. Mi

dolcemente *rall.* *pp*

Ex. 1. (continued).

«UN BEL DÌ VEDREMO!»: ANATOMY OF A DELUSION

19 BUTTERFLY *a Tempo* *con semplicità*
met-to là sul ci-glio del col-le e a-spet-to,
13 *a Tempo*
pp

22 BUTTERFLY
e a-spet-to gran tem-po e non mi pe-sa,.....

25 BUTTERFLY *rit..... a tempo* *animando un poco*
..... la lun-ga at-te-sa. E-u -
a tempo B3
pp rit..... p animando un poco

28 BUTTERFLY
-sci-to dal-la fol-la cit-ta-di-na.....
3 3

The image shows a page of a musical score for the character Butterfly. It consists of four systems of music, each with a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The first system (measures 19-22) is marked 'a Tempo con semplicità' and includes the lyrics 'met-to là sul ci-glio del col-le e a-spet-to,'. The second system (measures 22-25) continues the lyrics 'e a-spet-to gran tem-po e non mi pe-sa,.....'. The third system (measures 25-28) is marked with 'rit..... a tempo' and 'animando un poco', and includes the lyrics '..... la lun-ga at-te-sa. E-u -'. The fourth system (measures 28-31) is marked 'a tempo' and includes the lyrics '-sci-to dal-la fol-la cit-ta-di-na.....'. The piano accompaniment features various dynamics like 'pp' and 'p', and includes a section marked 'B3'. The score is in a key with three flats and a 2/4 time signature.

Ex. 1. (continued).

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31 BUTTERFLY *rall. un poco*

..... un uo_mo, un pic_ciol pun - - to s'av -

P *rall. un poco*

34 BUTTERFLY

- via per la col - - li - - na.....

P

B4 *SOSTENENDO MOLTO*
Lo stesso movimento

38 BUTTERFLY *3 P*

Chi sa - rà? chi sa - rà E co_me sa - rà

14 *SOSTENENDO MOLTO*
Lo stesso movimento

P

40 BUTTERFLY *rall.*

giunto che di - rà? che di - rà? Chiamè - rà But - ter -

rall.

dim.

Ex. 1. (continued).

«UN BEL DÌ? VEDREMO!»: ANATOMY OF A DELUSION

42 BUTTERFLY *LENTO*

- fly dal - la lon - ta - na, Io senza dar ri -

B5 *LENTO*

ppp

45 BUTTERFLY *rall. molto.....*

- sposta me ne starò na - scosta un po' per ce - lia..... e un

rall. molto..... col canto

A'

48 BUTTERFLY *con molta passione* *AND.^{te} COME PRIMA* *con forza*

po' per non mo - ri - re al primo in - con - tro, ed

15 *AND.^{te} COME PRIMA* *con molta passione*

ff

Ex. 1. (continued).

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51 BUTTERFLY

egli al-quanto in pe-na chie-me - rà, chie-me-rà..... Pic -

p *rit.*

Detailed description: This system contains measure 51. The vocal line is on a treble clef staff with a key signature of three flats and a common time signature. The lyrics are "egli al-quanto in pe-na chie-me - rà, chie-me-rà..... Pic -". The piano accompaniment is on grand staff (treble and bass clefs). The piano part begins with a dynamic marking of *p* and includes a *rit.* (ritardando) marking. The music features a melodic line in the right hand and a more rhythmic accompaniment in the left hand.

53 BUTTERFLY

- ci - na. mo - glietti - na o - lez - zo di ver - be - na, i

pp

Detailed description: This system contains measure 53. The vocal line continues with the lyrics "- ci - na. mo - glietti - na o - lez - zo di ver - be - na, i". The piano accompaniment features a dynamic marking of *pp* (pianissimo). The musical texture remains consistent with the previous system, with a vocal line and piano accompaniment.

55 BUTTERFLY

no - mi che mi da - va al suo ve - ni - re.....

m.d. *cres.*

Detailed description: This system contains measure 55. The vocal line concludes with the lyrics "no - mi che mi da - va al suo ve - ni - re.....". The piano accompaniment includes dynamic markings of *m.d.* (mezzo-dolce) and *cres.* (crescendo). The piano part features a more active accompaniment in the right hand and a steady bass line in the left hand.

Ex. 1. (continued).

«UN BEL DÌ? VEDREMO!»: ANATOMY OF A DELUSION

"C" ("coda")
(a Suzuki)

57 BUTTERFLY
Tutto que - sto avver - rà, te lo pro - met - to.

59 BUTTERFLY *poco rall. cres.*
Tien - ti la tua pa - u - ra, io con si - cu - ra fe - de l'a -

62 BUTTERFLY *LARGAMENTE* *Opp.*
ff (Butterfly e Suzuki si abbracciano commosse)
- spet - to.

16 *LARGAMENTE* *A"*
fff *meno forte* *dim.*

The image shows a page of a musical score for the character Butterfly. It consists of three systems of music. The first system (measures 57-58) features Butterfly's vocal line with lyrics 'Tutto que - sto avver - rà, te lo pro - met - to.' and piano accompaniment. The second system (measures 59-61) continues the vocal line with lyrics 'Tien - ti la tua pa - u - ra, io con si - cu - ra fe - de l'a -' and piano accompaniment. The third system (measures 62-64) shows the end of the vocal phrase '- spet - to.' and the beginning of a piano section marked 'LARGAMENTE' and 'A"', with dynamics 'fff' and 'meno forte dim.'. The score includes various musical notations such as triplets, slurs, and dynamic markings.

Ex. 1. (continued).

65

68

(Butterfly congeda Suzuki, che esce dall'uscio di sinistra. Butterfly la segue mestamente colto sguardo)

Ex. 1. (conclusion).

she imagines that she will hide herself both as a coy flirtation – «per celia» – and as a protection from the power of her emotions, «per non morire | al primo incontro». But by starting the downbeat of the reprise with the sudden, largely unprepared outburst, the suggestion is inescapable that his eventual return is fated to bring her a more literal death. Finally, one might notice that the text underlying this reprise melody (mm. 49-56) is not poetically parallel with the first four lines, to which the original A-music had been set. Here at the reprise we have five lines (plus the preceding trigger-word, «morire») set in a different metrical pattern, with many more syllables – thereby packing the reprise with an enhanced, more distressed intensity of syllabic delivery – and a differing rhyme-pattern. This produces a situation in which the textual parallelism of the reprise's «chiamerà, chiamerà» with its earlier counterparts (the B-section's «Chi sarà? chi sarà?» and «che dirà? che dirà?») is scarcely perceptible. In this respect, too, Puccini imposed a tradition-alluding musical format onto a text that provides little or no indication of the musical shape that it invites.

For the moment, however, let us set aside the three statements of the G-flat-major, A-section thematic block in order to look at what they enclose: the contrasting B section and the coda (or C section), both of which are dominated by minor-mode tonal centers. The B section – the projected scene of Pinkerton's return – is relatively long in relation to the much briefer, eight-bar thematic block A. B comprises a full forty measures of the generic

ABA' format's fifty-six, extending from m. 9 through m. 48. Puccini constructed this B-expanse as a chain or relay of five subsections, like the pulling-open of a pocket-telescope more normally kept closed. These subsections, labeled in Example 1, are: B1, mm. 9-18 (the arrival of the ship); B2, mm. 19-26 (Butterfly's motionless waiting); B3, mm. 26-37 (Pinkerton emerging from a distance – with a reference as well, mm. 34-36, to the motive that Julian Budden refers to as «wistful longing» and which Michele Girardi has also interpreted as a variant of the Bonze's curse motive from Act I);¹¹ B4, mm. 38-42 (her questions, 'who might it be?' and 'what might he say?'); and B5, mm. 42-48 (the sounding of his voice, calling her name, and the precipitation of the 'promise-of-return' motive introduced before this aria). In this B-zone, as Butterfly sinks into her private vision, she withdraws both from the G-flat-major world of the A theme and from its style of harmony. Much of the B section centers around F minor, a half-step down from the G-flat-major tonic – a slip-page into the nearly total otherness of the remote leading-tone minor. This F minor first appears in m. 13 («romba il suo saluto»), the middle of B1 – the outcome of a sequence up a fifth from B-flat minor – and F minor remains the governing tonal center (with a brief pass through its relative major, A-flat, in mm. 32-36, as the imagined Pinkerton is first sighted from a distance, *en route* to an expectant V of F minor, mm. 36-37) until mm. 42, where it shifts to D-flat major at section B5.

Most important, this prolonged B section is carried out largely under the premises of a differing harmonic system from that of the main, A-section music. At m. 9, as Butterfly slips more deeply into her fantasy – a now-separate mode of consciousness – the functional, dominant-tonic moorings of the preceding A-section dissolve not merely into a contrasting minor mode but also into a freer, more coloristic harmony that often operates apart from a strong pull toward authentic cadences. Many of the B section's chordal effects are best described not by traditional harmonic analysis but by recent neo-Riemannian theory, an accounting of harmonic color-shifts by means of maximally efficient voice-leading.¹² The voice-leading models shown in Examples 2a and 2b illustrate the color-shift known as the *Leittonwechsel* ('leading-tonic exchange' or L), a half-step, 6-5 or 5-6 inflection that can deflate a G-flat-major chord into a B-flat-minor one or vice-versa, modally inflating B-flat minor

¹¹ GIRARDI, Eng. trans., pp. 226-228.

¹² See, e.g., R. COHN, *Maximally Smooth Cycles, Hexatonic Systems, and the Analysis of Late-Romantic Triadic Progressions*, «Music Analysis», XV, 1996, pp. 9-40, and *As Wonderful as Star Clusters: Instruments for Gazing at Tonality in Schubert*, «19th-Century Music», XXII, 1999, pp. 213-232; the issue of «Journal of Music Theory» devoted to neo-Riemannian theory, XLII, 1998; and B. HYER, *Reimag(in)ing Riemann*, «Journal of Music Theory», XXXIX, 1989, pp. 101-138.

into G-flat major (Ex. 2a). Transposed up a fifth (Ex. 2b), the *Leittonwechsel* operation, the L-shift, transforms F minor into D-flat major, although that major-mode inflation may be deflated by reversing the process and reverting back to the minor-mode chord whose root lies a third away. In the view of neo-Riemannian theory, these color shifts operate on their own terms, apart from those of the functional diatonic system. They inhabit a different harmonic world, offering an otherness to normative tonality.

a

6	5	5	6
3	3	3	3
G ^b	B ^b	B ^b	G ^b
→ "deflation"		→ "inflation"	

b

5	6	6	5
3	3	3	3
f	D ^b	D ^b	f
→ "inflation"		→ "deflation"	

Ex. 2a-b. Illustrations of the *Leittonwechsel* operation ('L-shift', 6-5 or 5-6 shift).

How may this style of harmonic thinking apply to «Un bel dì»? At the end of section A, m. 8 (Ex. 1), we find a cadentially produced G-flat-major tonic chord that in m. 9 collapses or deflates via the L-shift to the 'color' of B-flat minor. This swerve away from normative tonal harmony (m. 9) marks the instant when Cio-Cio-San sinks fully into her interior vision, *un poco mosso*, oblivious now to the presence of Suzuki. It is this B-flat minor that produces the 'remote' F minor in m. 13 as its upper fifth («romba il suo saluto») – the F-minor governing sonority of the B section. Similarly, the F-minor opening of subsection B4, m. 38 («Chi sarà? chi sarà?»), inflates into its L-shift, major-mode companion, D-flat major at m. 42, subsection B5 – precisely at the imagined first sound of Pinkerton's still-distant voice calling out her name, «Butterfly», and redeeming the promise of his return – with the reappearance of the major-mode music of the 'promise' motive. (In the preceding mm. 40-41 we hear a passing E^{b4} in the bass, a pitch that mediates the shift from a more mysterious, darker, minor mode of absence to a more emphatically 'arrived' major mode of fantasized presence). The D-flat major of subsection B5 (m. 42, merely oscil-

lating chords: tonic and leading-tone seventh) eventually becomes, m. 48, an active V of G-flat major that provides a suddenly-functional springboard to precipitate the return at m. 49 of the A section and a fortified renewal of the tonic-dominant harmonic system that underpins that theme.

The remote L-shifts return, though, at the juncture of mm. 56 and 57 – the move into the coda (or Section C), once again a sinking into minor for Butterfly's declaration and vow, «Tutto questo avverrà, te lo prometto!». Here the G-flat major of m. 56 deflates again via the L-shift to B-flat minor, in this case a B-flat minor mediated by a plagal cadence in that key, the subdominant (m. 57, the E-flat-minor chord, IV of B-flat minor), moving to the tonic (m. 58). This plagal cadence is repeated twice more in mm. 59-61, with determined emphasis, and now with an intensified, dorian coloring (major IV, the E-flat major chord). These plagal ('Amen') connotations after the cadential close of the ternary format proper (which had ended in m. 56) underscore Cio-Cio-San's desperate assertions at the end of the aria. But this B-flat dorian (or minor) color at m. 61 is instantly reinflated back to G-flat major at m. 62 for the third and final sounding of the A melody (rounding out the coda), now hurled forth triple-*fortissimo* by the orchestra. The final G-flat major is not harmonically prepared but is only forced out through the modal inflation provided by the L-shift. And this time, the third appearance of the A melody, the G-flat pedal in the bass for the theme's first six bars, mm. 62-67, underscores the unshakable fixity of Butterfly's delusion, following her vow of determination.

In noticing all of this, the point is not merely to assign labels to chords but to demonstrate how the B- and C-section (coda) music is made to drift away from the tonic-dominant grounded harmonic system of the main theme (A). Puccini probably placed these more fluid, fluctuating color-shifts there to suggest a severing of Butterfly's attention from the locally here and now – her conversation with Suzuki – into a world of delusional interiority, mostly borne forward on a suspended F minor (that is, on the utterly remote leading-tone-minor of the real tonic, G-flat major), freed from the normative constraints of functional-harmonic space. These color-shifts complement the subsectional expansions – the lengthening of the generic ternary's B section – in order to suggest, first, a near-cessation of normal forward motion (at the outset of B2), and then, moment-by-moment, its reanimation through gentle syncopations (B3, B4) and a transformation of the prevailing minor-mode, F minor, into the major-mode 'promise', D-flat, at the first bodily indication of his arrival: the sound of his voice.

We may now turn to the cornerstones of the traditionally rounded, architectural format: the three G-flat-major appearances of the principal melody, or section A, first sounded in mm. 1-8. (From this point onward in the opera, this music will be the identifier of Cio-Cio-San's delusional hopes – recurring

twice more in Act II and again near the beginning of Act III as an *idée fixe*). That idea is eight bars in length – a musical ideogram – and the G-flat major that it prolongs recalls the attainment of the same key in Act I at the moment of her first appearance. The cherished Act I moment, the formalized epiphany of *her* arrival, a G-flat-major epiphany, is resuscitated here both as a tonal memory that seeks to reanimate the single perfect moment of her life and as a tonal assertion that anticipates the future, complementary epiphany of *his* arrival and return to the same spot – including the same G-flat-major tonal spot. This had occurred in Act I, at Rehearsal Nos. 40-42: Butterfly's «al richiamo d'amor, d'amor venni alle soglie», directed toward the emphatic G-flat perfect authentic cadence at No. 41 – the moment of her first onstage appearance, her coming-to-life. In recalling this earlier passage we may perceive the relatedness of the «Un bel dì» G-flat tonality and musical figuration to those of that Act I arrival and particularly to the initial Butterfly ideogram that had followed the powerful G-flat cadence in Act I (the five *largo* measures from No. 41 to No. 42), to which all of the immediately preceding, ritualized music had been pointing. From this perspective the eight-bar «Un bel dì» thematic block in Act II is another musical ideogram: a fixed stamp standing in for the earlier one in Butterfly's present time and in the absence of Pinkerton.

Puccini constructed the eight-bar «Un bel dì» ideogram, the aria's A-section, as a binary phrase, 4 bars + 4 bars. Its leading melodic idea traces out a ceremonial descent from the initial pitch, the high G^{b5} , ultimately settling in m. 8, with a gratifying contrapuntal cadence, *crescendo* and *poco rallentando*, on its concluding G^{b4} an octave below, as if opening up, delta-like, to glide smoothly into that conclusion. The overall textural process of the line could be understood as the 'distant' and wispy high G^{b5} solidifying into the more stable, resonant reality of the lower G^{b4} . This solidifying of G^{b4} *qua* sonority is congruent with the visual process outlined in the text: the first sighting of only the distant smoke (*come da lontano*, as the score indicates) that before long materializes into the first glimpse of the ship. (The effect of increasing focus and clarity of vision is also highlighted by Puccini's treatment of the available poetic rhymes. Notice, for instance, his intentional [?] ignoring of poetic rhyme in the first four bars. Within the composer's square-cut, 2 + 2 melodic formatting, «vedremo», m. 2, pointedly does *not* rhyme with «fumo», m. 4. Instead, the textual rhyme «estremo» is tucked into the next musical module, m. 5. In the second set of four bars, though [again 2 + 2], we find «mare», m. 6, and «appare», m. 8, solidifying into a fully perceptible rhyme). The ritualized, eight-bar, octave-descent ideogram could also be heard as a sweeping ceremonial bow of Cio-Cio-San (as Butterfly and the *geishas* had sung at the conclusion of the Act I G-flat ideogram, «Giù... Giù», Reh. I, 41⁺⁴⁻⁵), the submissive presenting of herself – and her body – to the arriving Pinkerton.

Puccini harmonized several of these eight bars with his characteristic, *fin de siècle* parallel triads – *en bloc* motions of basically parallel sonorities. Example 3a is a reduction of the harmony to its essentials; Example 3b adds some of the swaying motion on the third beats of each bar. (Among the notable features in Example 3b is the nonharmonic third beat of m. 1. This is the ‘added sixth’ also heard prominently in the Butterfly ideogram from Act I [41⁺⁴⁻⁵]. M. 5 also features this added sixth).¹³ Such harmonic reductions, of course, do not tell the whole story. When consulting the orchestral score of this passage (Ex. 4), we observe that the main harmonic motion is a smooth descent of fluttering $\frac{6}{3}$ chords (with one $\frac{6}{4}$ chord) in the violins. The parallel $\frac{5}{3}$ effect is secondary, and it is produced by a doubling of the soprano melody both one octave and two octaves below: in the clarinet and, an octave lower, in the harp, sounding the most essential melodic pitches in the bass clef. (In this respect, the $\hat{5}$ - $\hat{1}$ motion in the harp in bars 7 and 8, with marked accents, locally points toward the effect of a perfect authentic cadence, although only apparently so, since the low D^{b2} is principally a doubling of the melody. The more essential cadence is contrapuntal, with the sliding $\hat{3}$ - $\hat{2}$ - $\hat{1}$ motion in the cellos.

The image contains two musical examples, labeled 'a' and 'b', each consisting of a grand staff (treble and bass clefs) in 3/4 time with a key signature of three flats. Example 'a' shows a series of parallel triads in both hands, with the bass line moving in parallel motion to the treble line. Example 'b' is similar but includes a nonharmonic interval on the third beat of the first measure in the treble staff, where a note is added that does not belong to the triad.

Ex. 3a-b. Harmonic reductions of the «Un bel dì, vedremo»: theme.

¹³ Listening to the chords of Examples 3a and 3b with a historical ear, one might activate further allusions and potential implications. The initial four bars, floating downward from $\hat{8}$ to $\hat{5}$ in treble-clef parallel motion, might be heard as resembling a similar motion in another famous aria sung by a seemingly abandoned ‘exotic’ heroine evoking a lost golden past, Aida in Act III, to the text, «O verdi colli, o profumate rive | O patria mia, mai più ti rivedrò!», there over a dominant pedal. Is there a recoverable layer of tacit connotation here? If so, Puccini may have had Cio-Cio-San audibly declare «Un bel dì, vedremo», while the manufactured music’s subtextual (or intertextual) unconscious might lead one to recall the earlier aria’s words, «mai più ti rivedrò!». Also working to support this allusion: the L-shift from A minor to ‘F major’ at Aida’s words. These L shifts, 5-6 shifts, also lie at the heart of Cio-Cio-San’s aria, moving between G-flat major and B-flat minor.

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12 Andante molto calmo. $\text{♩} = 42$

Fl. I, II. *ppp* *sostenuto*

Ob. *ppp* *sostenuto*

Cltti I. *ppp* *sostenuto*

Arpa *ppp* *armonici*
ppp *ritoccato*
(fa la scena come se realmente vi assistesse e si avvicina poco a poco allo sborsi del fondo)

BUTT. Un bel di, ve - dre - mo le - var - si un fil di fu - mo dal - le -

Viol. I. Solo, senza sord. *ppp* *come da lontano* *sostenuto*
con sord. *ppp* *come un lontano mormorio*

V-le

Vo.

Cb.

Andante molto calmo. $\text{♩} = 42$

Fl. *a due* *poco rall.*

Cltti

Fag.

Corni I, II. *pp* *mf*

Arpa

BUTT. - stre - mo con-fin del ma - re. E poi la na-ve ap - pa - re.

Viol. *con sord.* *div.* *ppp* *p*

V-le *I. solo con sord.* *ppp* *con sord.* *arco*

Vo. *arco* *pp* *gli altri*

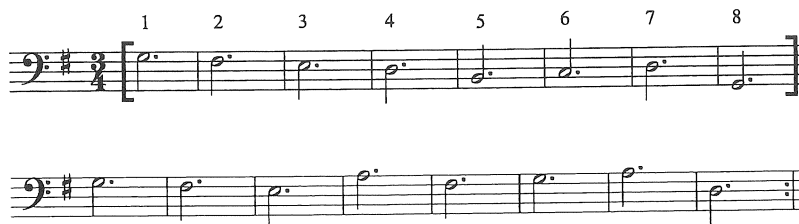
Cb. *pp*

poco rall.

Ex. 4. «Un bel di, vedremo», mm. 1-8: orchestral score.

The two later appearances of the «Un bel dî» ideogram are clearer on this point and do not have the low $\hat{5}-\hat{1}$ motion).

The eight-bar «Un bel dî» chord succession unfolds in a slow-moving triple-time; it features a rhythmic sweep from bar to bar with compelling upbeat pushes; it displays a 4+4 organization, in which the second four bars respond to and reconfigure aspects of the first; it opens with a descending tetrachord, scale degrees $\hat{8}-\hat{7}-\hat{6}-\hat{5}$; and it concludes with a contrapuntal cadence (a $\hat{3}-\hat{2}-\hat{1}$ motion in the bass – not the more definitive closure of a perfect authentic cadence, with dominant and tonic both in root position) an octave lower than where it began. Considered together, these features have powerful historical resonances, since they intersect with long-distant seventeenth- and eighteenth-century prototypes, many of them operatic. Even though the melody here is projected into the upper voice, these eight bars can sound very much like a typical *basso ostinato* pattern, used two and three centuries before as a source for continuous variations: passacaglias or chaconnes. (Indeed, the «Un bel dî» succession, surely coincidentally, shares some background resonances with, for example, the first eight bars of Bach's 'Goldberg-Variations' bass pattern, shown in Ex. 5).



Ex. 5. Schematic version of the bass of the theme of J. S. BACH, *Goldberg Variations*, BWV 988.

More than that, activating such historical resonances would be appropriate – and much ironized – in this *Madama Butterfly* fantasy-delusion context. As is well-known, the ostinato-bass principle, which often led off with a descending tetrachord (especially in minor, though not exclusively so), served as the basis for numerous operatic laments of grieving or abandoned women, from the seventeenth century, with its lamenting nymphs and Ariadnes, and with Purcell's Dido, to earlier eighteenth-century adaptations as well. To be sure, most of these laments featured descending tetrachords in the minor mode, but a few major-mode laments that have a tetrachordal, quasi-ostinato basis were also composed: Barbara Strozzi's «Voglio morire» from the 1650s, for example; or Cleopatra's lament, «Piangerò la sorte mia» from Han-

del's *Giulio Cesare*.¹⁴ Perhaps by its nature the major-mode lament can be, in part, a lament in denial – or a fantasized counter-lament, as is arguably the case with Butterfly's «Un bel dì».

The question is not whether we are to understand that Cio-Cio-San *qua* character realizes the musical archetype on which she grounds her self-deception. Such speculations are idle; the very inquiry naïve. Rather, the question is the degree to which Puccini consciously wrote such an allusion into the score as a stratagem of expressive manipulation – for clearly, the allusion is there to be perceived, whether or not Puccini himself was aware of it. However it came about, the composer, in the end, manufactured an arrestingly vivid strain of music, a recurring musical ideogram that made these historical connotations available to the listener through a supplementary, more subtle lens of interpretation.

But how are we to understand this more antique implication within the thematic block of «Un bel dì» when we have already produced a reading of this aria as unfolding in dialogue with a quite different structure, the traditionally operatic nineteenth-century reprise-format ternary? Once one activates an awareness of the eight-bar ostinato references, one may perceive the implication of a differing mode of organization, superimposed on this first one. Heard from this alternative, 'ostinato' angle, the three appearances of the «Un bel dì» ideogram function as three musical refrains, ritualistic recurrences of the neo-Baroque ostinato cycles. The aria as a whole enacts an engaged interplay between two generic formats: the ABA' reprise-pattern (the traditionally ternary aspect, here with appended coda) and the historically more archaic ostinato-refrain organization.

What Puccini placed between the three G-flat-major, A-melody refrains – the long 'B' section's narrative and the 'coda-like' C section's declarative vow – may now be reconstrued as flexible, contrasting episodes. They may be heard as conceptual spaces in which the ostinato cycle is suppressed or recedes into temporary silence, even though its natural tendency is to well up again and to recur ever more inevitably. More than that, each refrain ratchets up the sonic intensity of its predecessors. Each recurrence becomes louder, more urgent. Here the psychological principle of obsessive recurrence is clear enough from human experience: Puccini need not have been aware of the musical precedents for this cyclical format. If he was, though, he would have understood that the genre implied, though now in a different musical style, is

¹⁴ See, e.g., E. ROSAND, *The Descending Tetrachord: An Emblem of Lament*, «The Musical Quarterly», LV, 1979, pp. 346-359; and ID., s.v. *Lamento*, in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, ed. S. Sadie and J. Tyrell, London, Macmillan, 2001², 14, pp. 190-192, which also includes a bibliography on this topic.

that of the *passacaglia* (or *passacaille*) with interpolated episodes, often in the contrasting mode. In those (rondo-like) adaptations, the *passacaglia* theme is abandoned for contrasting sections (or *couplets*), only to return in the manner of a refrain, as in François Couperin's famous *Passacaille* in B Minor (from 1717) – or even earlier, such seventeenth-century refrain-like ostinatos as that found in «Pur ti miro» from Monteverdi's *L'incoronazione di Poppea* – itself also featuring the descending major-mode tetrachord.

In «Un bel dì» the refrain's G-flat major stands in stark contrast to the minor-mode saturation of the B and C episodes – although the long B episode does seek to pull itself more than once out of its governing F minor to produce other, major-mode tonalities (A-flat, D-flat), associated textually with the sighting and approach of Pinkerton. Perhaps more significant, both the B and C episodes begin in B-flat minor – the product of the L-shift deflation of G-flat major; and at the end, episode C gives way again to the refrain by reinflating B-flat minor (or dorian) via the L-shift into G-flat major. In other words, at three of its four principal junctures «Un bel dì» as a whole oscillates between this deflation and reinflation of G-flat major and B-flat minor. Which is the real tonic? One might say G-flat major, of course, but it is also possible to hear this G-flat as a false tonic, a major-mode delusion, its ostinato refrain merely inflated into a fantasy-major – a counter-lament – by the B-flat minor reality underneath, into which the self-deceptive G-flat major habitually collapses.

However one interprets the harmonic implications of this aria, perceiving the ostinato connotations of the eight-bar «Un bel dì» ideogram also turns us in the direction of a larger interpretation of this operatic moment. The sub-cycles within the aria are small-scale reflections of the larger-scale cycles within Cio-Cio-San's current condition. In Pinkerton's absence the projected vision of his return has been a recurring ostinato in her life: the imagined complement – the perfect complement – to that moment three years past when *she* had ascended the hill toward *him* in the epiphany of her arrival. Within her present life the «Un bel dì» fantasy-ideogram has been caressed and recaressed as an amulet of hope, a magic charm, an ostinato marker of her stasis and the imperfection of her present ostinato existence, now spent repetitively, spinning empty cycles of the same delusion, waiting vainly for the one thing that can once again transfigure her life and save her from ruin and outcast status. In the aria «Un bel dì» Puccini staged Butterfly as choosing at this moment to disclose it to Suzuki – and to the audience – in its acoustic materiality. The refrain that was normally kept tacit as the animating fantasy of her life – the permanent and returned desire of the Other – is now pushed forward into material sound. From this perspective her day-to-day existence has become a succession of secondary episodes – mostly minor-mode

ones – interrupted only by the reappearances of the delusional obsession, the refrain-like, major-mode-inflated ostinato figure. As a result, Cio-Cio-San does not press forward into life but seeks continually to recapture the presumed perfections of lost time, what Proust would call the search to restore, however fleetingly, the *moment bienheureux* of her past, its only radiantly full moment, for which she has sacrificed everything else – the moment that Puccini had portrayed in such a cyclical and ceremonial fashion in Act I – the G-flat-major epiphany of her original arrival, a significant part of whose music was itself recycled, rotationally, in the concluding Act I Love Duet.

All of this suggests that much of the structural organization of *Madama Butterfly* as a whole is made coherent not so much by the *ad hoc* resurfacings of familiar musical emblems or leitmotifs, or even by tonal organization *per se* – although these are also important factors – but rather by the cyclical recurrences of certain crucial, highlighted musical ideograms, summary-phrases that are nearly all associated with Cio-Cio-San. With their repeated emergences – and their transformations from one into another, as Michele Girardi has shown¹⁵ – one gets the impression of a succession of interrelated, spotlighted refrains throughout the opera, as though most of the plot-details are carried out in freer, episodic spaces that only serve, at various points, to precipitate a renewed presentation of a highlighted refrain. Behind this circularity is what I have called the rotational principle, in which long stretches of music may be governed by the varied recurrences of an ordered succession of referential ideas.¹⁶ The cyclical or rotational implications that one finds in Butterfly's delusion, «Un bel dì», along with its connections to earlier moments in the opera, are neither casual nor haphazard. On the contrary, the interior cycles of «Un bel dì» provide us with a microcosm of one way of construing the larger structure and expressive purpose of *Madama Butterfly* as a whole.

¹⁵ GIRARDI, pp. 225-234.

¹⁶ J. HEPOKOSKI, *Structure, Implication, and the End of «Suor Angelica»*, in «L'insolita forma»: strutture e processi analitici per l'opera italiana nell'epoca di Puccini, Atti del convegno internazionale di studi, Lucca 21-22 settembre 2001, a cura di V. Bernardoni, M. Girardi, A. Groos, «Studi pucciniani», 3, 2004, pp. 241-264.