

Verdi Revisits the Past:  
The Two Versions of Don Carlos's Romance,  
"Je l'ai vue" ("Io la vidi")

The history of Verdi's revisions for his French grand opera, Don Carlos, is complex, and it has been told many times. In brief, there are multiple five-act versions (1867, 1872, 1886) and one four-act version (1882-83, premiere 1884). In terms of plot-locale, the five-act versions contain one French act of informational background (Act 1, in the forest near the Fontainebleau castle) and four Spanish acts of plot-proper (Acts 2 through 5, in and around Spanish courts and monasteries). The most prominent aspect of Verdi's 1882-83 revision was the jettisoning of the first act altogether for the sake of dramatic conciseness. In 1882-83 Verdi agreed to remove the French act totally--except for one lyric moment within it. This was the Act-1 romance for Don Carlos, "Je l'ai vue,"—the tenor's only solo piece. (Please glance at your text-handout, the bottom eight lines.)

[MUSIC: Opening of "Je l'ai vue" (8 mm.)--Domingo, Abbado [30'']

For the 1882-83 revision Verdi wanted this piece to be plucked out of the abandoned France and transplanted into Spain, and into a different dramatic and emotional context, near the beginning of the new Act 1 (that is, the original Act 2). This obliged him, in those

immediately pre-Otello years, to recompose a new “Je l’ai vue,” grounded in the same opening melody but utterly transformed in expressive content. The 1882-83 “Je l’ai vue” (“Io la vidi” in the more usual Italian translation) was thus a different piece, one that we now hear only within the four-act version.

I would like to spend some time with this revision and to think about its larger significance. In order to get to this larger significance, though, we need to consider just what Carlos’s romance was in 1867; and we need to know what it became when Verdi recomposed it in 1882-83. These issues involve questions of genre and structure. First, then, to the 1867 version—“Je l’ai vue.” (TEXT HANDOUT)

Let’s recall the plot at the beginning of the five-act opera. It is winter in the Fontainebleau forest. The Spanish infante, Don Carlos, has arrived in France as part of a peace mission between the two countries, a peace mission to be sealed—or so he thinks--by his marriage to the French king’s daughter, whom he has never met. Concealing himself among the trees, he has just seen for the first time his betrothed, the Princess Elisabeth of Valois, who has momentarily appeared in a brief pantomime, distributing alms to a group of woodcutters. The stage now empty, Don Carlos strides forth to deliver this recitative and romance-soliloquy—Récit et Romance, as Verdi’s manuscript identifies it-- “Fontainebleau! Forêt immense et solitaire!” and “Je l’ai vue.”

Verdi tells us, then, that “Je l’ai vue” is a romance, and this generic term has a wide array of historical connotations. In general at the time of this opera the term suggested three things: first, a middle-class idealizing of simple, heartfelt song; second, the frequent (though not necessary) existence of a narrative component; and third, the song’s isolated, stand-alone

status, not participating in larger, compound-song units. In other words, the nineteenth-century romance was typically an idealized air shorn of decorative artifice, and conveying the impression—this is the most important point—of the spontaneous outpouring of “naïve” or “natural” feeling in “the musical language of the people”—even when sung, as here, by a high aristocrat. (As an added sign of simplicity, romances were usually strophic, though that is not the case here in Don Carlos.)

This particular romance also touches on a favorite theme of middle-class “sentimental” opera: the recounting of the experience of seeing one’s beloved for the first time. These time-honored “first glimpse” songs, as I call them, are often the first important things we hear from operatic tenors and sopranos. Think, for example, of Mozart’s The Magic Flute: Tamino’s song to the image of Pamina, “Dies Bildnis ist bezaubernd schön.” Or think of Meyerbeer’s Les Huguenots, Raoul’s influential “Plus blanche que la blanche hermine,” or from Le prophète, Fidés’s and Berthe’s, “Un jour dans le flots de la Meuse.” There are also several examples in Verdi’s works prior to Don Carlos.

This sentimental “first glimpse” gambit is precisely the one appealed to in Don Carlos’s “Je l’ai vue.” Here the text suggests an outpouring of a sentimentalized innocence (notice the final two words, “chastes amours,” chaste love”), and when this tradition was to be joined musically to that of the romance register (whose expressive aims were similar), Verdi’s compositional objective had to have been clear: to create a ravishingly beautiful song, yes, but to keep it as plain and direct as possible. For Verdi in the latter 1860s, this would have suggested the reversion to a complication-free, square-cut utterance of the simplest song-structure that he knew. This was the formulaic “lyric binary” or “lyric form” structure that had pervaded his earlier works.

In its purest appearances, lyric form sets eight lines of text. And, as your TEXT HANDOUT shows, this is the case with “Je l’ai vue”—eight lines. The simplest type of lyric binary features one melodic unit for each pair of lines, disposed thematically as: a a’ b a’ (as indicated on the handout). Another formulaic possibility was a a’ b c, but when the a melody or a variant recurs at the end (as it does in this romance), what is conveyed is the centeredness of the emotion—its security and the certainty with which it is held. In such a case the end of the song balances and intensifies the beginning, marking the song as a single, one-emotion utterance, before entering a free coda-zone of cadential line-repetitions. In addition, it is important to understand that the expressive contour of any lyric form is end-accented. Everything builds to the discharge of tension in lines 7 and 8 as the expressive peak. This high point of the song is also the moment of the confirmation and the closure of the initial idea. This spotlighted emphasis is surely also the reason why lines 7 and 8 usually reverberate in the ensuing coda.

Let’s turn now to the music. (MUSIC HANDOUT: 1867)—We’ll look at it first, then hear it. And the point will be to see how Verdi composed the romance--purposely--as a luscious tracking along the most normative structural lines.

The 1867, lyric-form “Je l’ai vue” begins after the recitative, in the third system of the first page, Andante and cantabile, in C major. Here I have numbered the measures of the song and also numbered (in square boxes) the line-numbers of the text. The initial four lines of text, set in mm. 1-9 (next page), could hardly be simpler in melodic contour or accompanimental texture: they are set as a phrase-pair producing a clear, non-modulating parallel period, antecedent (mm. 2-5) and parallel consequent (mm. 6-9), the lyric binary’s standard a a’. The two phrases rise to a peak (a high a natural) in m. 7 and end, as

anticipated, with a perfect authentic cadence at the downbeat of m. 9. Perfectly standard. Here in the first four poetic lines, the melodic decorations that do exist—the little sixteenth-note turns in m. 2, 6, and 8--lend an affectively chaste elegance to the otherwise plain melodic line. But there is no excess here--though there are some warm chromatic harmonic touches--and the whole is delicately colored with the timbre of gentle winds in the accompaniment, beginning in m. 2--an airy pastel of wind-color, as if Carlos were buoyed upward on air itself.

Mm. 10-15 (with upbeat, m. 9) comprise a slightly expanded b-zone, or medial zone. This is the only section of the piece to show any deviation from the simplest “old-fashioned” norm. In the simplest models, one would expect the singer to move directly into line 5 at m. 9, but here Verdi has Carlos turn silent before proceeding. The point, surely, is that Carlos’s heart and head are momentarily lost, swimming in an inward reverie, thinking (the text soon tells us) of his future with this still-unmet Elisabeth. Instead, Carlos’s line-5 melody is anticipated in a circular orchestral phrase, très doux, mm. 10-11--sounded in the resonant upper strings (their first entrance) and drifting towards a cadence on the subdominant in m. 11. Thus prompted, Carlos repeats the melody in mm. 12-13 to his own line 5 (“Avenir rempli di tendresse”). Fixated on the vision of this blissful future, he repeats the phrase in mm. 14-15, only in a telling, harmonic non sequitur, in sequence a whole step higher (“Bel azur dorant tous nos jours”), as if even more dreamily intoxicated.<sup>1</sup> This upward swell brings Carlos to a G<sup>7</sup> chord (m. 15). And this G<sup>7</sup> chord, of course, is the dominant preparation for

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<sup>1</sup> (Julian Budden uses this evidence to conclude that Carlos, “for all his scheming, is a guileless boy at heart”: “Witness the schwärmerisch, upward-reaching gestures combined with chromatic inner parts, the perfect expression of a young man in love with love.” And—we might add—this is also perfectly in line with the typical romance register of naiveté and innocence.)

the climactic rounding and return to come—the preparation for the expressive “spotlight” to be turned on, as usual, in the final zone.

A crucial feature of any rounded binary structure is the harmonic interruption at this point--the set-up on the dominant (or dominant seventh, as here) before the re-beginning of the melody in the reprise. Here the interruption occurs in m. 15, at the end of beat 2, which Verdi also marked morendo and allargando. Such an attenuation at the point of the harmonic interruption helps to create the “spotlight” effect at the reprise of the opening melody, a tempo, the upbeats to m. 16, now setting lines 7 and 8 (“Dieu sourit à notre jeunesse,” and so on--and back to the airy-pastel wind accompaniment). Mm. 16-19, textual lines 7 and 8, are an exact musical reiteration of mm. 5-9, which had set textual lines 3-4. Carlos’s heart may be swimming with “first-glimpse” love, but he also displays a consummate control, balance, and phrase-symmetry. This is the perfect moment in his life, and it is brought to an elegantly symmetrical closure at m. 19.

The cadence in m. 19 closes off the essential formal structure and liberates the romance into a freer coda-space (mm. 20-26). As usual, the coda consists of cadential confirmation and heartfelt line-repetitions (here, lines 7 and 8)--in this case, stretching up to the highest melodic note of the piece, a high B-natural grace note in m. 22, as the peak of a huge love-sigh. Still, this is coda-space: and above all, in what precedes it, in the romance’s lyric form proper, we should be hearing contained balance and stable, foursquare closure. In sum, Verdi affirms strong generic traditions to represent a generic operatic situation--even while coloristically enriching those traditions.

[MUSIC: Placido Domingo, Claudio Abbado “Je l’ai vue” 2:20]

Thus 1867. Fifteen years pass. . . . (Rossini’s and Manzoni’s deaths, Aida, Verdi’s discomfort with the modern operatic stage and his determined withdrawal from it, his Torniamo all’antico letter to Florimo implicitly denouncing modern times, the Requiem, the bitter confirmation of the ascendancy of Wagnerianism, the grudging peace made with Boito, the Boccanegra revision . . . .) The institution of opera was different indeed when “old Verdi” took on the 1882-83 Don Carlos revision—the version with the entire French act excised and this tenor romance recomposed and resituated into Spain.

Even before the curtain has gone up on the revised, four-act version, of course, Carlos, still in love, has been shattered, now knowing that Elisabeth was not permitted to marry him. And the audience needed to know all this, early on in Act 1. Camille Du Locle’s textual solution, which seems to have been written in October 1882, is given on the reverse side of your TEXT-HANDOUT. Here I have provided the new French text of “Je l’ai vue.” Directly below it is the later Italian translation of the whole recitative and romance. This translation was prepared by Angelo Zanardini, and it is the version that, by and large, the public has always heard since the La Scala premiere in 1884. The 1882 French recitative, omitted here but available on the music handout, says virtually the same thing as the Italian, word for word. The Italian recasting of the romance text, though (“Io la vidi”), differs markedly from the 1882 French that was the basis of Verdi’s musical setting.

With the French act gone, the four-act opera opens at the Spanish cloisters of the Monastery of San Yuste. For the first six minutes we have music from 1867: monks chanting a quiet prayer at dawn at the tomb of Carlos’s grandfather, Charles V. Suddenly Carlos bursts onto the scene, Allegro agitato, with a new, distraught recitative, crying out, “Je l’ai

perdue!” or “Io l’ho perduta” (“I have lost her!”) in the most impressively chromatic, late-Verdi manner. Here the positive language from 1867 has been transformed into images of loss and disappointment. Once we get to the romance itself, the original incipit “I saw her” (“Io la vidi”) has now been pre-echoed--and thus framed--by the new recitative’s initial exclamation, “I have lost her” (“Io l’ho perduta!”)

Let’s turn now to the music for the new recitative. (MUSIC HANDOUT: 1882-83) I’d like to call your attention to three things here. First, notice the precipitous veering from the F-sharp major opening (m. 1)--the prior number had ended in this F-sharp major--to the distant C minor a tritone away (mm. 8-16, *Meno mosso*). This jagged key-shift is accomplished through a corrosive diminished seventh chord finally exploding in m. 5 (“Io l’ho perduta”—“I have lost her”). Within the first eight bars Verdi plunges Carlos (and us) from a six-sharp signature to a passage momentarily implying three flats—a jolt some nine notches flatward and from major into minor. “Je l’ai perdue!” indeed! One could not imagine a stronger tonal image of loss and emotional collapse.

Second, once the agitation settles to release a flood of perfumed memories, there is the matter of the reminiscence theme starting in C major at m. 17 (NEXT PAGE OF THE HANDOUT). What is quoted here is the cabaletta-theme from the Carlos-Elisabeth love-duet from the original Act 1. But since Act 1 and that love-duet no longer exist in this version, these are allusions to things that we have not heard. For this reason, some critics have cited this reminiscence passage--and its more expanded reappearances in the last act--as flaws in the four-act version. The love-theme recollections, it has been argued, cannot make sense unless we have actually heard them before. On the face of it, of course, this is true. But with only a little imagination this argument can be turned on its head. For example, just



as Carlos declares that he has lost his paradise, his “Fontainebleau” moment with Elisabeth, so too Verdi—and we—have lost the opera’s French act. Carlos cannot recapture that moment in real time: He can preserve it only in decayed memory and reminiscence.

Similarly, in the four-act version Verdi—and we—cannot recover the “lost” Act 1. And yet our awareness of the original Act 1 does persist. It lingers in our historical memories: We know that it once existed, and we know its music, although it is presented as “lost” in this version.

I am suggesting, in other words, that it is entirely appropriate—even desirable—to experience the four-act version, and to interpret it, with the five-act version firmly in our minds. Certainly Verdi wrote it with this awareness. And beyond Verdi, once certain operas become standard repertory pieces and themselves “historical,” this “double-vision,” in fact, is the commonest mode of perception of the knowledgeable listener. It must not be ruled out of bounds.

Restated bluntly: Throughout this recitative Carlos’s text, with its opening cry, “Je l’ai perdue!”, can be read in two different ways. One is limited to narrative concerns purely “within the opera” (as if nothing else is allowed to exist but what is literally presented there). In this restricted reading, the text refers only to aspects of the plot that we must pretend not to know. The second, broader reading transcends the plot and plays metaphorically to Verdi’s—and our—knowledge about the particular history of this opera. This reading supplements the first one by understanding the text also as an allusion to the missing Act 1 itself—to the 1882-83 Carlos’s alienation from his perfect 1867 moment. This double-level of meaning is also available when we consider the text of the recitative’s reminiscence passage (in mm. 20-26, for example, Carlos sings, “Ah! Qu’il fut pur et beau ce jour sans lendemain . . .”

“Ah! How pure and beautiful was that tomorrowless day, in which, trembling with hope, we met alone together in the silence . . . in the sweet land of France . . . . in the forest of Fontainebleau”--in other words, in the now-lost Act 1. That we have not literally heard the missing love-themes (but do know them in our memory) can be a dramatic plus, not a minus.

The third point about the new recitative is this: Once Carlos has spun his reminiscence-fantasies to m. 30, notice the expressive swell into the cadential 6/4 of B-flat, on the magic word, “Fontainebleau” (representing the lost Act 1). This arrival point, the cadential 6/4, unlocks a new motive in the orchestra, crucial for the romance-to-come. [SING] This motive is a summary-cadential figure that represents, as the text implies, Carlos’s hopes of recapturing the “Fontainebleau moment”—and love—once again in real time. The important point about the “Fontainebleau memory-motive” will be this: when this cadential phrase--here, only preparatory—is reinvoked at the spotlighted end of the romance, it will prove incapable of providing closure with a stable, perfect authentic cadence. This inability of the Fontainebleau motive to bring itself to a stable cadential closure at the romance’s end is, I believe, the central image of this new version, the central image of loss.

Let’s listen now to the entire complex: the new recitative and the new romance with its text of loss. Notice also, by the way, that the romance’s key is now darkened by being sounded down a step, in B-flat (not in the original C), and its tempo has been slightly increased: We now have = 66 (the earlier version was = 58).

[MUSIC: 1882-83, Recit + Romance: Luciano Pavarotti, Riccardo Muti; c. 3:20]

This new romance is most richly understood, I think, as existing in dialogue with the “lost” earlier version, as if Carlos, thinking his way through the simpler structure, were submitting his original piece to increasing deformation. We, too, might hear the piece in this way: as Carlos sings the 1882-83 romance, both versions of it can be simultaneously present. The early version is present conceptually, through memory, and the new version comments upon it in foregrounded sound. Through the new version’s references to the earlier piece Verdi presents us with a process of musical dissolution appropriate to the image of loss dominating the text. We must remember, above all, that this piece had been a “naive” aa’ba’, square-cut structure with its own expressive ends. But now things are different. Once past the initial phrase-pair (aa’), Carlos’s earlier lyric-form structure begins to decay further with almost every bar. (MUSIC HANDOUT, p. 3, bottom: 1882-83 ROMANCE)

At first glance, the initial seven measures may seem to be virtually the same as those of the original. Do note in mm. 2-3, though, that the airy-pastel wind-chords originally in the upper parts have been stripped away: only a bleak, solo clarinet below remains. Here the decay begins with lost timbre, and when the upper parts enter in m. 3, they are carried by strings, not by airy flutes. Carlos’s melody at first tracks its earlier course (notice, though, that it is even plainer in m. 5), but Verdi begins substantially to recompose the piece beginning with m. 8, at the cadential figure of the consequent phrase. Here in m. 8, as Carlos recalls what he has lost--Elisabeth’s “grâce” and her “attraits” (“attractiveness”)--we find a new figure, c-d-c, an important upper-neighbor figure on “grâce” with double connotations: it is both a “sigh” standing for the emotion that he felt for her in the past and also the nagging “sob” of current loss. Notice also in m. 8 that the expression mark, “très doux,” makes sense only with the French text--a cherished framing of her “grace” and “attractiveness.” In mm. 8-

9 the Italian text’s reference to the king, his father and rival (“un padre un re”), would seem an unlikely moment for Carlos to hush downward into a sweet dolcissimo.

(MUSIC: PLAY INITIAL PHRASE PAIR ONLY: Pavarotti, Muti-----THEN STOP TAPE)

As with the 1867 romance, such an opening phrase pair promises a simple lyric binary structure. Here in 1882-83, the lyric binary’s “b” section (or medial zone), beginning with the upbeat to m. 10, is totally recomposed. The earlier, positive version had began with a love-intoxicated move toward the subdominant major at this point. (SING) Instead, the music slips here into a brooding, two-bar half-cadence in the relative minor, G minor (mm. 10-11, repeated mm. 12-13): Carlos has lost his swelling optimism and now lurks in minor-mode shadows. And those G-minor shadows are haunted by the upper-neighbor “sigh” or “sob” figure just introduced: notice the moving inner part in the left hand, mm. 10 and 11 (viola), mm. 12 and 13 (clarinet)--a memory gnawing away at Carlos from “deep inside” the orchestra. This motivic coherence is typically late-Verdian, psychologically brilliant--the kind of thing we associate with Otello or Falstaff.

Even more important, with the sequence up a step in mm. 14-15, line 6 of the poem (“Mon été sera sans beaux jours”), we expect to find a standard preparation for the lyric-reprise-to-come in lines 7 and 8. Thus we anticipate a generic harmonic interruption on the dominant of B-flat at the end of line 6, that is, at m. 15, beat 2, and a subsequent, balanced return of the opening theme, just as had occurred in the original version. But this is precisely what Verdi suppresses here. With an enormous gain of dynamic energy, Carlos re-energizes at the end of line 6 (on C<sup>7</sup>, the dominant of the dominant) and overflows into line 7,

portando la voce--into the climactic words, mm. 15-17, the words that summarize the situation (“J’ai perdu dans l’enchanteresse,” paraphrased, “I have [now] lost everything in her”--and the key word “perdu” here connects tellingly with the opening line of the preceding recitative, “Je l’ai perdue!”).

In short: here at the mm. 15-16 juncture-point the normative strategies of harmonic interruption, affirmational reprise, and a centered recovery of melodic balance are liquidated. The earlier, naive lyric form, aa’b [interruption] a’-- appropriate for the 1867 piece--is now distorted through the experience of loss. We are left with the original a a’ and an extended, decaying b, something with no separately articulated final zone, and something that now, even by m. 16, finds itself grasping for a B-flat cadence and some sort of resolution.

But that B-flat perfect authentic cadence is now repeatedly undermined. Thus the important cadential 6/4 and dominant seventh in m. 16 (lower left corner) are suddenly drained of their dynamic energy—down to pianissimo—and undercut in m. 17 by the F-sharp in the bass. This F-sharp both propels the cadential search onward and re-animates a multiplication of the upper-neighbor “sigh” or “sob” motive, now repeatedly imitated in mm. 17 and 18 between the voice and horn (for the final line of text, “Mon coeur, ma vie, et mes amours”). By the downbeat of m. 19, the eight lines of text have been uttered. By this point—generically--the lyric binary structure should have been concluded--but of course it is not. Hence the desperate “extra” cry beyond the text proper in mm. 20-21, “J’ai perdu ma vie et mes amours”—a synthetic line cobbled out of fragments of lines 7 and 8--now grasping the key “Fontainebleau” memory-motive that had introduced the romance. Notice here in m. 19 the big crescendo to the high B-flat, a dynamic level that Verdi asks to be immediately smothered off to the pianissimo in m. 20.

But the larger point is that even here, the “Fontainebleau motive” cannot provide a stable, perfect authentic B-flat cadence with which to conclude the essential structure: the past cannot be made fully present. The tenor does his part in m. 21, landing hopefully, though pianissimo, on the tonic pitch, B-flat, for “amours.” The surface effect is strongly cadential, of course, but the orchestra underneath fails to provide a B-flat in the bass: instead, in m. 21 we hear a clarinet sounding a low D and initiating an arpeggio figure. Moreover, Carlos’s pseudo-cadence elides directly with motivic repetition: As if seeking to solidify the seeming instability of the closure-effect, the “Fontainebleau” motive, now slipping away in diminuendo, is echoed in the flute, mm. 21-22, espressivo. Here is also the most notable moment that the airy-pastel woodwind-sonority of 1867 returns: timbre itself--as recollection--becomes a powerful image.

But now the loss is made explicit. Instead of cadencing, in m. 22, beat 3 the Fontainebleau memory-motive shipwrecks on a diminished-seventh chord and disappears forever (“Hélas!”—“Ahimè!”--and an onrush of strings blots out the flute-pastels—blots out the illusion of what once was). By m. 23 the tenor is left alone--far outside the text-block proper, with no more romance melodies available--twice to cry “Je l’ai perdue!” “Io l’ho perduta!”--text now imported from the beginning of the new, preceding recitative. Those words of admission finally bring about full tonal closure, though triple-pianissimo, with the much-delayed perfect-authentic cadence on the downbeat of m. 25. We might notice also the final touch: After the cadence, the key word, “perdue” (“lost”), is replicated in m. 25 for the clarinet arpeggio, marked “perdendosi.”

(PLAY: ROMANCE FROM B SECTION ONWARD: STOP BEFORE MONK’S LINES)

I have proposed two levels of interpretation for this 1882-83 recitative and romance. The first is located within the plot-world of the opera itself and is concerned with Carlos’s expression of his own loss through the deformation of his early romance. In the second, broader interpretation I suggested that the “loss” at hand is not only that one personal to Carlos, but also the absence of the entire first act--that the text and musical deformation (“Je l’ai perdue!”) also refer implicitly to the “unheard” French act from 1867, now lost in the 1882-83 revision.

I would like to close by suggesting--very briefly--the possibility of a third layer of available meaning within the revision. This third reading pushes the hermeneutic issue even further by stepping outside of the opera proper to consider Verdi himself in 1882-83--Verdi sitting at his desk in Sant’Agata or Genoa, in the act of revising this French opera, brimming over with memories from an earlier time. Memories from a different world, Verdi would probably have said--before the Wagner invasion, before the gelling of contentious, “modern” literary theories of opera, before the deaths of Manzoni and Rossini, before “modern” theatrical and conservatory reform, before his own withdrawal and retirement from the theater, before the Requiem. Now in his seventieth year, Verdi himself could have said “Je l’ai perdu” of that earlier world, one of whose last gasps was contained in the 1867 score of Don Carlos.

Was this a level of metaphor that Verdi would have wanted us to explore? We cannot know, of course, nor would current theories of interpretation be considered bound by Verdi’s reply. From this vantage point, though, poignant metaphors are easily multiplied. Like Carlos, Verdi, too, had been in the operatic land of France--more than once, and certainly for

this opera. Notwithstanding his own frequently-voiced objections to the Parisian system, he knew where European operatic power and enchantment lay, and he had returned to it repeatedly. Now, at the end of his career (or so he thought), he was reworking a French-language opera--from that earlier, purer time--into what he believed could only survive as a more concise, Italian-language product in the modern international theater.

So then: “Je l’ai perdue!”—and multiple losses! In the four-act version we have, usually, the loss of the original French language itself (in which, nonetheless, Verdi insisted on recomposing the piece); and the loss of the whole first act, the “French” act, symbolically a shearing away of the most overtly “French” presence in the score. And again, from “Old Verdi’s” perspective we also confront the loss of a simpler past, a past in which a character like Carlos could still, for one of the last times, stroll onstage and sing a naive “lyric-binary,” rounded romance in the old style--a romance that could now only be re-created through a lens of modern distortion, as a memory, as a structural deformation.

“Ah!,” sings Carlos in the new recitative--but perhaps also with a retrievable Verdian subtext recalling with a pang of nostalgia his own operatic career at one of its peaks--“Ah! Qu’il fut pur et beau / Ce jour sans lendemain où, tremblant d’espérance, / Nous nous sommes trouvés seuls Parmi le silence / Au doux pays de France, / Dans les bois de Fontainebleau!” (“Ah! How pure and beautiful was that tomorrowless day, in which, trembling with hope, we met alone together in the silence . . . . . in the sweet land of France . . . . . in the forest of Fontainebleau.”)



DON CARLOS (seul)

Fontainebleau! Forêt immense et solitaire!  
Quels jardins éclatants de fleurs et de lumière  
Pour l'heureux Don Carlos valent ce sol glacé  
Où son Elisabeth souriante a passé?  
Quittant l'Espagne et la cour de mon père,  
De Philippe bravant la terrible colère,  
Caché parmi les gens de son ambassadeur;  
J'ai pu la voir enfin, ma belle fiancée,  
Celle qui dès longtemps régnait dans ma pensée,  
Celle qui désormais régnera dans mon cœur!

a { Je l'ai vue, et dans son sourire,  
Dans ses yeux pleins d'un feu charmant,  
a' { Tout ému, mon cœur a pu lire  
Le bonheur de vivre en l'aimant.  
b { Avenir rempli de tendresse!  
Bel azur dorant tous nos jours!  
a' { Dieu sourit à notre jeunesse,  
Dieu bénit nos chastes amours!

DON CARLOS (alone)

Fontainebleau! Immense and solitary forest!  
What gardens, sparkling with flowers and light  
Could, for fortunate Don Carlos, equal this frozen ground  
Where his Elizabeth, smiling, has passed?  
Leaving Spain and the court of my father,  
Braving Philip's terrible wrath,  
Concealed amid his ambassador's people;  
I have at last been able to see my fair betrothed,  
She who has long reigned in my thought,  
She who henceforth will reign in my heart.

I saw her, and in her smile,  
In her eyes filled with a charming fire,  
My heart, deeply moved, could read  
The happiness of a life spent loving her.  
Future filled with tenderness!  
Fair sky shining upon all our days!  
God smiles on our youth,  
God blesses our chaste love!

Placido Domingo - Claudio Abbado

DON CARLOS (seul) ("enchanted forest")

track 2

Fontainebleau! Forêt immense et solitaire!  
Quels jardins éclatants de fleurs et de lumière  
Pour l'heureux Don Carlos valent ce sol glacé  
Où son Elisabeth souriante a passé?  
Quittant l'Espagne et la cour de mon père,  
De Philippe bravant la terrible colère,  
Caché parmi les gens de son ambassadeur;  
J'ai pu la voir enfin, ma belle fiancée,  
Celle qui dès longtemps régnait dans ma pensée,  
Celle qui désormais régnera dans mon cœur!

DON CARLOS (alone)

Fontainebleau! Immense and solitary forest!  
What gardens, sparkling with flowers and light  
Could, for fortunate Don Carlos, equal this frozen ground  
Where his Elizabeth, smiling, has passed?  
Leaving Spain and the court of my father,  
Braving Philip's terrible wrath,  
Concealed amid his ambassador's people;  
I have at last been able to see my fair betrothed,  
She who has long reigned in my thought,  
She who henceforth will reign in my heart.

track 3

a { Je l'ai vue et dans son sourire,  
Dans ses yeux pleins d'un feu charmant,  
a' { Tout ému, mon cœur a pu lire  
Le bonheur de vivre en l'aimant.  
b { Avenir rempli de tendresse!  
Bel azur dorant tous nos jours!  
a' { Dieu sourit à notre jeunesse,  
Dieu bénit nos chastes amours!

I saw her, and in her smile,  
In her eyes filled with a charming fire,  
My heart, deeply moved, could read  
The happiness of a life spent loving her.  
Future filled with tenderness!  
Fair sky shining upon all our days!  
God smiles on our youth,  
God blesses our chaste love!