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Rough Music: *Tosca* and *Verismo* Reconsidered

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If, seeking refuge from the frenzy of a Roman morning, you find yourself in the basilica of Sant'Andrea della Valle and upon entering the church turn left, you will arrive at the foot of a gloomy chapel concealed behind a sable gate. A sign, with the usual pedantry, identifies the chamber as the Barberini family crypt; yet it also describes the space, more fancifully, as the chapel of the Attavanti clan, the setting of the first act of *Tosca*. The surfaces of Rome are thick with layers of historical revision—moved obelisks, expropriated tombs—but this recourse to pure fiction is remarkable: one wonders with what resistance (or what pleasure) the priests sell postcards of "la Cappella della Tosca," identifying their church with the most anticlerical of operas. And the chapel's double name is but one aspect of the strange shadow cast over Rome by Puccini's opera. The Castel Sant'Angelo has been known to hire dancers to incarnate the operatic ghosts who haunt the place. Perhaps more wisely, the Palazzo Farnese keeps its doors locked to tourists, yet this only intensifies the eerie light that shines nightly from Scarpia's supposed office.

The promise of contact with the "authentic" Rome of *Tosca* supports a minor industry of morbid fascination. Any ambitious guidebook to the city will propose a walk that retraces the paths of Puccini's ill-starred protagonists. Susan Vandiver Nicassio's study *Tosca's Rome* leads the reader on a different sort of tour, using a wealth of primary sources to imag-

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ine the daily lives of these fictional characters in vivid historical detail.[1] To similar ends a 1992 television production filmed the drama in the historic sites themselves. The singers were connected with a studio orchestra via an elaborate system of headsets and microphones, and the whole thing was televised internationally in real time, giving the opera the feel of an unfolding newscast.[2]

This obsession with authenticity began with Puccini himself: *Tosca's* compositional history is full of letters to priests and ethnographers, inquiries about the details of Catholic rites, about the pitch of Saint Peter's bell, and the intricacies of Roman dialect. In the third-act "depiction of the dawn," Puccini used fourteen bells in eight different locations to reproduce, as faithfully as possible, the soundscape of the Eternal City as heard at a specific time of day from a specific vantage point. In all this, and although a history of opera's attraction to commercial tourism and other forms of mass spectacle largely remains to be written, *Tosca* was clearly a child of its time. Think of Verdi's *Aida,* whose representation of ancient Egypt was heavily influenced by the pavilions of the 1867 World's Fair, or of Gustave Charpentier's *Louise*, with its images of Montmartre clearly designed to delight the fairgoers to Paris in 1900.[3] While it feeds a similar appetite for the hyperreal, Puccini's opera might be seen as treading an uneasy middle ground between these other works. Like *Aida,* it tries to recreate a vanished world, the Rome of 1800. Yet, like *Louise*, it attempts to do so through a contemporary soundscape, assuming, rightly or wrongly, that the sounds of modern Rome (church bells and Latin choruses) provide unmediated access to the past.

This aural specificity departs from an earlier scale of operatic value, one that had persisted in Italy through much of the nineteenth century.[4] An art that prized virtuosity and melodrama above all else, Italian opera had at times been blithely indifferent to place, creating a world where Alpine peaks could dot the landscape of southern England, and where it was conceivable for a Swedish king to be refashioned as the "governor" of Boston. *Tosca*'s rejection of this model may have been inspired by a larger vogue for "spectacular realities," yet it also proved (at least temporarily) to be the first major misstep of Puccini's career.[5] The premiere in Rome's Teatro Costanzi must have seemed like an invitation for audiences to compare the sights and sounds of the stage world with the ambiance of their own lives, and local critics were quick to point out a host of inaccuracies in the work (starting with the church in the first act, incorrectly named "Sant'Andrea *alla* Valle"). More significantly, the mere fact of the opera's meticulous soundscape was found to be not only unmusical, but inimical to critics' most deeply held convictions about the nature of opera itself. These early responses have largely been forgotten, a sign perhaps that Puccini's values are now more completely our own. Today, *Tosca*'s Rome occupies a comfortable, if at times embarrassing, place within the operatic landscape, yet something important has been lost in this process of assimilation. By attempting to reconstruct some of *Tosca*'s early reception history here, I thus aim to open up a lost avenue into the interpretation of the work, but also to raise larger questions about the opera's relationship with its historical moment, and with the culture of musical modernism more generally. To begin this investigation, I would like first to turn down another over-

[1]Susan Vandiver Nicassio, *Tosca's Rome: The Play and the Opera in Historical Perspective* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

[2]The production, advertised as "nei luoghi e nelle ore di *Tosca,*" was directed by Brian Large, and featured Catherine Malfitano, Placido Domingo, and Ruggero Raimondi as the unlucky trio.

[3]On *Aida*'s relationship with the Paris exposition, see Katherine Bergeron, "Verdi's Egyptian Spectacle: On the Colonial Subject of *Aida,*" *Cambridge Opera Journal* 14 (2002), 149–59; and Gabriela Cruz, "Aida's Flutes," *Cambridge Opera Journal* 14 (2002), 177–200. For a discussion of the representation of Paris in *Louise*, see Steven Huebner, *French Opera at the Fin de Siècle: Wagnerism, Nationalism, and Style* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 436–67.

[4]For a discussion of "realistic" sound in earlier Italian opera, however, see Luca Zoppelli, "'Stage Music' in Early Nineteenth-Century Opera," trans. Arthur Groos and Roger Parker, *Cambridge Opera Journal* 2 (1990), 29–39.

[5]I borrow this term from Vanessa R. Schwartz, *Spectacular Realities: Early Mass Culture in Fin-de-Siècle Paris* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

grown path and reexamine the question of *Tosca*'s relationship with the phenomenon that scholars have identified, with considerable discomfort, as operatic *verismo*.

I

The term *verismo* has its origins in Italian literature of the 1870s, where it describes the work of a number of writers, Giovanni Verga most prominently, who attempted to apply the "scientific" and "objective" techniques of French Naturalism to the depiction of their nation's rural poor. When, in 1890, the young composer Pietro Mascagni adapted one of Verga's Sicilian tales into his one-act opera *Cavalleria rusticana,* he set in motion a trend that would influence Italian opera for at least the next twenty years. In 1892 two operas that closely followed *Cavalleria rusticana*'s model premiered: Umberto Giordano's *Mala vita,* set in Neapolitan slums, and Ruggero Leoncavallo's *Pagliacci,* which unfolds in the backwaters of Calabria. Before long the interest in "low" subjects extended to more exotic climes, including the Left Bank garrets depicted in Puccini's and Leoncavallo's versions of *La bohème* (premiered in 1896 and 1897 respectively), and the world of Japanese prostitutes imagined in Puccini's *Madama Butterfly* (1904) and Mascagni's *Iris* (1898). At times, these works come remarkably close to the modish excesses of the *Zeitopern* popular in the Weimar Republic. Giordano's *Fedora* (1898) features a plot involving anarchist assassinations, draws heavily on the conventions of popular murder mysteries, and includes a scene where major characters enter the stage on bicycles.[6] Leoncavallo's *Zazà* (1900), which opens in a working-class *café-chantant,* engages the idioms of Parisian popular music. All this must be considered radical for a medium that had concerned itself almost exclusively with noble characters and with suitably glamorous, and historically remote, locales.

Verismo operas are easy to spot from their libretti, yet scholars have had more difficulty explaining the relation between their musical language and their innovative drama. Although it is possible to isolate a number of stylistic features shared by the composers of the so-called *giovane scuola*—jagged vocal declamation, a tendency to conclude acts with massive orchestral groundswells—it is harder to describe these techniques as shared responses to their subject matter. Composers like Mascagni, Giordano, and Leoncavallo did not write in an obviously different style when composing works with more conventionally aristocratic themes. What is more, the roots of their language can all be found in the music of Amilcare Ponchielli, the by-no-means adventurous composer with whom many stars of the *giovane scuola* had studied. Not surprisingly, many scholars have urged caution in any use of the term *verismo*. Comparing Verga's programmatic preface to his novel *L'amante di Gramigna* with the aesthetics of the *giovane scuola,* Egon Voss even claimed that no significant affinity exists between the aims of literary and operatic realism.[7]

More recently, Adriana Guarnieri Corazzol has put the question on a new footing, by arguing, through a detailed formal analysis, that what *verismo* novels and operas do share is "a poetics, as well as a practice, of anti-subjectivity." For Guarnieri Corazzol, both novelists and composers worked to undo assumptions about the proper relationship between an author and his characters, "lowering the linguistic level [of the work] to match the social level of the plot."[8] She describes this attempted collapse of

[6]It is tempting to imagine Giordano's opera as a direct model for Kurt Weill's opera buffa *Der Zar lässt sich photographieren* (1928), which also concerns anarchist assassinations of Russian aristocrats: the notorious scene in which Weill's characters listen to an onstage gramophone recording has a parallel in the second act of *Fedora*, where characters at a party delight in the virtuoso stylings of an onstage pianist. For a broader consideration of modernist irony in *Fedora*, see Emanuele Senici, *Landscape and Gender in Italian Opera: The Alpine Virgin from Bellini to Puccini* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 181–227.

[7]Egon Voss, "Il verismo nell'opera," in *Cavalleria rusticana, 1890–1990: cento anni di un capolavoro,* ed. Piero and Nandi Ostali (Milan: Sonzogno, 1990), pp. 47–55. For another important recent attempt to call *verismo* into question, see Virgilio Bernardoni, "Le 'tinte' del vero nel melodramma dell'Ottocento," *Il saggiatore musicale* 5 (1998), 43–68.

[8]Adriana Guarnieri Corazzol, "Opera and Verismo: Regressive Points of View and the Artifice of Alienation," trans. Roger Parker, *Cambridge Opera Journal* 5 (1993), 39–53, here 42, 43.

subject into object as the adoption of a "regressive" point of view. Although I will want to draw on this concept of regression below, I would first caution that Guarnieri Corazzol and Voss share a basic problem. Both begin by assuming the possibility of an easy equivalence between prose fiction and opera and, in so doing, have underplayed the differences between the two media, undermining how strange and unnatural the idea of operatic realism originally was. In other words, what may be most interesting in these operas are the ways in which their music and staging often pull in opposite directions, in which these works might inscribe the difficulty of a tradition-bound, "irrational," art form entering a self-consciously objective aesthetic order.

To gain a sense of this difficulty, a critic might take his or her bearings not from novels from the 1870s, but rather from the Italian musical press of the 1890s, where the topic of *verismo* was actively discussed. It is important to note that the word does not seem to have been used, in any substantive sense, in the first reviews of either *Cavalleria rusticana* or *Pagliacci;* it was not until around 1895—after a rash of new works, and a significant interest on the part of foreign audiences—that Italian writers realized they had a problem on their hands.[9] On 13 August 1896, the *Gazzetta musicale di Milano* published an essay by Alfredo Untersteiner written in the form of "an open letter to certain German music critics."[10] These critics, Untersteiner complained, had responded to the success of Mascagni and Leoncavallo's operas by dismissing them as "crass realism"; it was time to bring these arguments to a halt. "I confess that the whole question of the musical realism of the modern Italian school strikes me as a word without substance," he declared, "and I would be happy to hear even once, instead of idle chatter, a good definition of this *verismo*."[11] In the ensuing months six Italian writers published essays in response. Despite the appearance of a debate, however, the judgment of these critics was unanimous: music was an abstract and universalizing idiom, and the notion of any close affinity between the style of the *giovane scuola* and the subjects of these operas was simply absurd. The most overtly religious commentators were willing to allow for operatic *verismo* in a more eccentric sense: since humanity, they argued, was divided between divine and material essences, then the dichotomy of noble music and base plot might be considered a sort of spiritual realism.[12] (Valeriano Valeriani, pushing this reasoning to its bizarre conclusion, argued that Palestrina might be considered the greatest realist of all.) But, in general, critics insisted that the only type of musical realism was what they termed *musica descrittiva*, the imitation of thunderstorms and birdcalls, and that this was hardly worth mentioning at all.[13] The whole discussion could be summarized with the words of the critic Arnaldo Bonaventura: "If music cannot signify, even less can it be realistic: and

[9]Recently, Andreas Giger ("Verismo: Origin, Corruption, and Redemption of an Operatic Term," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 60 [2007], 271–316) has suggested that the term *verismo*, as applied to opera, entered circulation in the 1870s, where it referred (and, in subsequent decades, would continue to refer) to any "break with convention" (289). Although Giger may be correct about the earliest uses of the word *verismo*, it seems to me that its meaning changed decisively in the 1890s, taking on something like its current sense. Giger's larger proposal, that we expand our current definition of *verismo* to include any type of late-nineteenth-century operatic innovation, is not just overly broad: it risks reinscribing the very old story about Italian composers gradually freeing themselves of past conventions in the service of dramatic truth.

[10]Alfredo Untersteiner, "Un'accusa ingiusta: lettera aperta a certi critici musicali tedeschi," *Gazzetta musicale di Milano,* 13 August 1896, pp. 556–58. Untersteiner's article and the major responses to it are reprinted (and here cited) in Sergio Viglino, *La fortuna italiana della "Carmen" di Bizet (1879–1900)* (Turin: De Sono, 2003), pp. 119–46.

[11]"Alla musica drammatica italiana moderna viene, quasi senza eccezione, da musicisti e da non musicisti, rinfacciato il crasso realismo e fu ed è questo che le recò maggiormente danno.

Io confesso che tutta la questione del realismo musicale della scuola italiana moderna mi sembra una parola vuota di sostanza e sarei contento di sentire una volta invece di lunghe chiacchiere una bella e buona definizione di questo verismo" (Untersteiner, "Un'accusa ingiusta," p. 121).

[12]See Anton Giulio Corrieri, "Pel verismo musicale," pp. 125–28; and Valeriano Valeriani, "Del verismo nell'arte musicale," pp. 129–31.

[13]*Musica descrittiva* is touched on in Arnaldo Bonaventura, "Il realismo nella musica," pp. 133–35; and Carmelo Lo Re, "Sempre pel verismo," pp. 137–39.

to be realistic it would have to cease being music."[14]

The unanimity of these writers should be taken with a grain of salt. Untersteiner's question was couched in explicitly nationalist rhetoric, and few official voices were willing to consider the possibility that the Italian tradition might be under threat. Smaller, more independent music journals wrote about *verismo* with a much greater sense of urgency, however, while still sharing many of the *Gazzetta*'s key terms. A year before the Untersteiner debate, the Milanese journal *Il mondo artistico* had published a series of hyperbolic articles with titles like "Dangerous Tendencies" and "Opera's Decline."[15] Each was devoted to a new innovation of the *verismo* school—prose libretti, plebian subject matter, modern dress—and each came to an identical conclusion: although all opera was based on the unsupportable fiction of human characters who sing, an increasingly realistic dramaturgy threatened to render this longstanding convention ridiculous. A long essay published by Giuseppe Samoggia in the *Rivista teatrale italiana* went even further, claiming that the *verismo* imperative was leading to the very death of song:

> For some time now, the music in new works has tended to eliminate itself, to slip away ever more: in the culminating points of the action it abdicates, it abstains, in order to cede its place to *parlati* and to the explosions of an orchestral artillery that intervenes to resolve dramatic situations of every genre in the same way: it is not rare to find entire scenes, of capital importance for the action, in which song is lacking and the orchestra fills the space . . . a convention, that is to say, even worse than the one which it intends to abolish.[16]

"With the excuse of realism, the true musical substance is every day becoming scarcer and more pale," Samoggia concluded.[17] It was as if Bonaventura's worry had finally been actualized: in the process of becoming realistic, music had gradually ceased to be.

It would be easy to dismiss these judgments as paranoid and conservative; yet, read in another way, they are among the most perceptive descriptions of *verismo* ever written. The specific claims of *Il mondo artistico* and the *Rivista teatrale italiana*—that the new realism had made operatic song either implausible or simply nonexistent—go a long way toward explaining some of the *giovane scuola*'s most distinctive, and otherwise baffling, obsessions. For example, one of the strangest aspects of Italian music in the 1890s is that operatic plots suddenly begin to rely heavily on characters who are themselves professional performers. The trend began with the itinerant comedians in Leoncavallo's *Pagliacci,* and it continued with the cabaret singers in his *Zazà,* the traveling performers in Mascagni's *Iris,* the professional actors in Franceso Cilèa's *Adriana Lecouvreur,* and of course the diva heroine of *Tosca*. (Even in operas less overtly concerned with conflicts between life and art, classical performers make a remarkable number of cameo appearances: a group of madrigalists show up at the home of Puccini's *Manon Lescaut,* and pianists perform at parties in Girodano's *Fedora* and in Puccini's *La rondine*.) Performer-characters had long fascinated operatic composers, of course, but perhaps only in *verismo* did they become subject to such sustained, intense, and systematic exploration. Keeping contemporary reviews in mind, we might describe the vogue for performer-characters as a strategy for getting conventional music in through the back door, or

[14]"La musica, se non può significare, tanto meno può essere verista: e per essere verista dovrebbe cessare di essere musica" (Bonventura, "Il realismo nella musica," p. 135).

[15]See "Il dramma per musica: tendenze pericolose," *Il mondo artistico,* 31 March 1895, pp. 1–2; "La decadenza del melodramma," *Il mondo artistico,* 10 May 1895, pp. 1–2; and "Il costume borghese nel melodramma," *Il mondo artistico,* 31 January 1896, pp. 1–2.

[16]"Da qualche tempo nei nuovi lavori la musica tende ad eliminarsi, ad eclissarsi sempre di più: nei punti culminanti dell'azione essa abdica, si astiene, per lasciare il luogo ai *parlati* ed alle esplosioni di un'artiglieria orchestrale che interviene a risolvere nello stesso modo le situazioni di qualunque genere: non è raro trovare delle scene intere, di importanza capitale per l'azione, in cui il canto manca e l'orchestra fa l'effetto di un riempitivo, accompagna per consuetudine, vale a dire per una convenzione assai peggiore di quella che si intende abolire" (Giuseppe Samoggia, "Il realismo nel melodramma," *Rivista teatrale italiana,* 16 January 1901, pp. 73–76, at 75).

[17]"Colla scusa del realismo, la vera sostanza musicale diventa ogni giorno più scarsa ed incolore: è tempo di tornar indietro" (Samoggia, "Il realismo nel melodramma," p. 76).

for providing stylized singing with a newly naturalistic ground.

Yet even these works bear marks of unease about conventional operatic performance. Consider, for example, a scene from the first act of *Adriana Lecouvreur,* which is set in the wings backstage at the Comédie-française. Adriana, a famous actress, has just gone onstage (i.e., offstage as we in the audience see it) to deliver an important soliloquy in the evening's performance of Corneille. This soliloquy could easily have been the occasion for the sort of diegetic song that operatic composers had delighted in for centuries; instead, we hear not Adriana's voice, but that of the stage director Michonnet, as he describes the effects of her performance (see *Adriana Lecouvreur*, act I, sc. 8, "Ecco il monologo").[18] The music Cilèa writes for Michonnet is calculatedly mundane—declamatory, antimelodic, barely accompanied by the orchestra—and instead of a virtuoso aria the audience is left a chain of somewhat empty substitutions: offstage for onstage, absence for presence, narration for enactment, a man's voice for a woman's, and sentimental comedy instead of tragic drama. A more literal example of song "slipping away" would be difficult to imagine.

Adriana's silence is extraordinary, but she is far from the only *verismo* character to move offstage at key moments. At the very end of the first-act love duet in Puccini's *La bohème,* Mimì and Rodolfo move into the wings to sing their climactic high notes. And in that opera's third act, the lovers only intone their lush last phrase (including a high B♭) after the curtain has fallen. The most extreme example of offstage singing in the decade is, without a doubt, *Cavalleria rusticana,* whose overture is interrupted by the principal tenor, who sings an entire aria behind the curtain. Turridu's classically poised "Siciliana" contrasts with his more rugged discourse elsewhere in the opera, much as Mimì's and Rodolfo's concluding phrases are flashes of pure song in an opera otherwise noteworthy for its "realistically" discursive style. In moments like these, Mascagni and Puccini might be described as trying to find a place for conventional singing apart from the exigencies of realism. At the same time, however, their placement of singers offstage also extends the boundaries of the visual: sound is used in a new way to expand and delineate dramatic space, pushing its horizon beyond the confines of the literal stage, and making characters, if briefly, into a sort of aural scenery.[19]

"Sounding architecture" might also be invoked to make one final point about *verismo* style: its tendency to make extravagant, excessive use of bells. Bells resounding from distant churches were first featured prominently in *Cavalleria rusticana,* where a simple tonic-dominant peal ushers in the opening chorus, and the techniques of Mascagni's "Gli aranci olezzano" would be closely imitated by Leoncavallo in the bell chorus ("Don, din, don—suona vespero") of *Pagliacci*. Less mediated bells chime through a host of other works: *Tosca* and *Iris*, as well as later operas like Mascagni's *Isabeau* (1911) and Puccini's *La rondine* (1917) and *Suor Angelica* (1918). A good indication of the importance of bells for the style can be found by glancing at Jules Massenet's opera *La Navarraise:* the 1894 opera, written for Covent Garden, was widely considered to be a shameless imitation of the Italian style (Shaw quipped that Massenet had less written an opera than "made up a prescription"), and in its final three minutes the singers are supported by almost no other sound. Like the conceit of performer-characters, the use of bells seems to have offered composers a way around opera's basic fiction: unlike song, unlike orchestral music, the sound of bells emanating from a source within the stage world required no elaborate justification. And yet, the limitations of the conceit are well captured in Guarnieri Corazzol's term "regression." If bells offered composers a promise of objectivity, they entailed an equally strong sac-

[18]The classic study of operatic *mise-en-abyme* is Carolyn Abbate, *Unsung Voices: Opera and Musical Narrative in the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991). The qualities that Abbate celebrates in diegetic songs—most importantly, their ability to reflect on the power of live performance—are precisely those that *verismo* operas seem to call into question.

[19]For an important study of the uses of the offstage world in earlier Italian opera, see Mary Ann Smart, "Bellini's Unseen Voices," in *Mimomania: Music and Gesture in Nineteenth-Century Opera* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), pp. 69–100.

rifice of musical richness. Unable to sing or develop, bells in these operas are simply, stupidly, real.

II

The tropes that I have been describing—the fascination with performer-characters, the use of offstage singing, the resource to nonorchestral sources of sound—are configured variously in different works of the 1890s, but nowhere are they elaborated more extensively than *Tosca*.[20] The opera is littered with self-justifying performances, from the chants and Latin choruses of the first act to the shepherd's song of the third, and bells have a nearly ubiquitous presence: they toll the Angelus and they announce the Te Deum; they sound Matins in the "Description of Dawn" in the third act, and an arsenal of sheep-bells even trails the shepherd and his flock. When, in the second act, Scarpia opens his window, allowing the sounds of Tosca's eighteenth-century cantata to waft onstage, he initiates a little allegory about the reversal of traditional operatic values in the work. Tosca's cantata, with its lyrical phrases, its sustained high Bs and Cs, is quite unlike anything she sings elsewhere in the opera; yet this moment of unapologetic singing is treated as mere scenery, the backdrop to Scarpia's more "empirical" pursuits.

A similar case could be made for the self-consciousness of the libretto, which consistently thematizes the conflict between reality and art. Examples range from the trivial—the discussion about the "true" woman lurking behind Cavaradossi's portrait—to the pathetic, Cavaradossi's "staged" execution, which turns out all too real. The opera as a whole is structured around a similar opposition: between Scarpia—the arch-political realist, obsessed with signs of visual and verbal truth—and Tosca, the Italianate performer *par excellence*. Given Scarpia's monstrosity, and Tosca's naive goodness, we might even think of the work as a meta-commentary, far from optimistic, on the operatic reforms of the previous ten years.

This is not, though, how Puccini's early audiences saw it.[21] Reviews of the premiere were harsh, critic after critic despairing that Puccini had pushed the antimusical tendencies of *verismo* to a disastrous conclusion. A mild example of this line appears in the *Cosmorama pittorico*. Commenting on the gavotte and cantata in the second act, Gustavo Macchi noted that "it is the orchestra, the chorus that sing for themselves, more as a descriptive element of the action than as a musical interpretation of it." "These points," he concluded rather guardedly, were "not the least interesting" moments in the opera.[22] The Socialist daily *Avanti!* was more forceful.

> At the mute scene which concludes the [second] act, a great void opened up in the orchestra as well, and the curtain descended on the coldness of the entire public. . . . Their comments were disheartening, and among the greater part of the spectators there was an impression of stupor. . . . One admired the elegance of the dialogue, one appreciated the scraps of melody that appeared here and there; but as for the drama, no one could find it. The public's coldness persisted in the first part of the third act, so that the prelude, the reawakening of Rome, with the sound of bells, the shepherd's interlude, and the Roman dialect refrain passed by in silence.[23]

[20]For earlier considerations of *Tosca*'s relationship with *verismo*, see Sieghart Döhring, "Musikalischer Realismus in Puccinis *Tosca*," *Analecta Musicologica* 22 (1984), 249–96; and Mosco Carner, *Giacomo Puccini: Tosca* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 6–10.

[21]For another study of the opera's reception, see Alexandra Wilson, *The Puccini Problem: Opera, Nationalism, and Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 69–96.

[22]"In altri punti—la *gavotte,* la *cantata interna*, per esempio—è l'orchestra, il coro che cantano per conto loro, come elemento descrittivo dell'azione, piuttostochè come interpretazione musicale di essa. Nè sono questi i punti meno interessanti" (Gustavo Macchi, "La TOSCA del Maestro GIACOMO PUCCINI al Teatro Costanzi di ROMA: la musica," *Il cosmorama pittorico,* 3 February 1900, p. 2).

[23]"Alla scena muta che chiude l'atto, un gran vuoto si fa anche nell'orchestrale, e la tela scende sulla freddezza di tutto il pubblico. All'autore, agli esecutori ed al maestro Mugnone due chiamate sole. I commenti qui sono sconfortanti, nella maggior parte degli spettatori è una impressione di stupore per la delusione provata, dopo sì febbrile aspettativa. Si loda l'eleganza del dialogato, si apprezzano gli spunti melodici mostratisi qua e là; ma il dramma, il dramma non si trova. La freddezza del pubblico perdura nella prima parte dell'atto terzo, sì che il preludio, il risveglio di Roma, col suono delle campane, il passaggio del capraio e lo stornello romanesco, passano sotto silenzio" ("La 'Tosca' del M. Puccini al Costanzi," [author illegible], *Avanti!,* 16 January 1900).

This critic's sense of the opera as a succession of empty sounds, as a musical "void," would be echoed by the *Fanfulla della domenica*, which provided an extravagant list of *Tosca*'s offenses. "The sonatinas and cantatas from the wings," they complained, "and the organ, and the Gregorian chant, and the drums that announce the march to the scaffold, and the bells, and the cow bells, and the rifle shots, and the cannon fire, which at times constitute essential elements in the development of the opera, are not enough to fill the holes left by the lack of music."[24]

Not surprisingly, given their criticisms of *verismo* quoted above, the *Rivista teatrale italiana* published the strongest denunciation of *Tosca*'s percussive sound world.

> In thirty years, or—if there is a god watching our poor country—even before, *Tosca*, together with all the other operas of its type, will be an obscure and uncertain memory of a time of confusion in which music was subtracted, by the logic of history, from its own dominion, from its own laws, and from common sense . . . [and someone] will remember this about the third act of *Tosca:* a composition where there were the bells of various churches, the great bell of St. Peter's, cow bells, a voice in the distance . . . everything was there, except for music.[25]

Even as august and (one assumes) forward-looking a commentator as Gustav Mahler had difficulty hearing anything of substance in the work. Among his letters to his wife, we find this baffled account of one early performance: "Act 1. Papal pageantry with continual chiming of bells . . . Act 2. A man tortured; horrible cries. Another stabbed by a sharp bread knife. Act 3. More of the magnificent tintinnabulations and a view over all Rome from a citadel. Followed by an entirely fresh onset of bell ringing. A man shot by a firing-party."[26] Mahler's comments could, of course, be dismissed as just one more instance of Germanic disdain for Italian exuberance, but, given the composer's own notorious interest in all manner of crude percussion, it may be more accurate to speak of a moment of shared recognition here, a worry that Puccini's music may have cut too close to home.

The *Tosca* that emerges from these reviews is many things—urban soundscape, *musique concrète,* degree zero of musical meaning—but it is not the work loved by modern audiences for its lyricism and sentimental pathos. The arias and duets, the elaborate leitmotivic structure, everything in short that has interested today's scholars and audiences: all this was noted by *Tosca*'s early critics, but it is not what they found most distinctive or important. The question, then, is how to account for these early responses without lapsing into their rhetoric of empty parataxis; how to describe in musicological detail an opera distinguished by its lack of music.

III

One might begin by considering in more detail those ubiquitous bells.[27] As already mentioned, Puccini took extraordinary interest in the details of Rome's sonic landscape, allegedly spending an evening atop the Castel Sant'Angelo while waiting to observe the tolling of Matins, and corresponding with the Vatican—through the agency of his friend Don Pietro Panichelli—about the precise details of Saint Peter's bell.

[24]"Ma è certo che le sonatine e le cantate dietro le quinte, e l'organo, e il canto gregoriano, e i tamburi che scandiscono la marcia al supplizio, e le campane, e i campanacci delle pecore, e le fucilate, e le cannonate che costituiscono talvolta elementi essenziali nello svolgimento dell'opera, non bastano a colmare i vuoti lasciati dalla deficenza di musica" (Giorgio Barini, "'Tosca' Melodramma di G. Puccini," *Fanfulla della domenica,* 21 January 1900).

[25]"Fra trent'anni o—se esiste un Iddio superstite per questo nostro paese—anche prima, la *Tosca*, insieme con tutte le opere congeneri, sarà ricordo incerto ed oscuro di un periodo di confusione delle lingue in cui la musica fu sottratta, per fatalità storica, al dominio di se stessa, delle proprie leggi e del senso commune. . . . E il nipote più erudito, a citare un esemplare tipico di nullaggine musicale, dopo il preludio al terzo atto di *Iris* che merit il primo posto, ricorderà quello al terzo atto di *Tosca*: 'un pezzo dove erano le campane delle chiese minori, il campanone di San Pietro, il campanaccio delle vacche, una voce in lontananza, una violinata, una strombonata, un caprioleggiare di terzine . . . tutto c'era, fuorchè la musica'" (Ettore Marroni, "'La Tosca' di Giacomo Puccini al 'San Carlo' di Napoli," *Rivista teatrale italiana,* 16 January 1901, pp. 86–89, at 86).

[26]Quoted in Michele Girardi, *Puccini: His International Art,* trans. Laura Basini (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), p. 190, n.47.

[27]For a helpful introduction to Puccini's use of bells in the opera, see Girardi, *Puccini,* pp. 165–67.

Panichelli's memoir of the composer narrates the latter story at some length:

> But the most serious difficulty was finding the pitch of the great bell of Saint Peter's (called *er campanone*) that many had tried, and failed, to guess and to decipher. I asked my friend Orlando Virgili, who told me, "Do you know who would be able to give you precise information?" "Who?" I asked. "Old Maestro Meluzzi, who they tell me has carried out minute studies in this matter." I ran immediately to the elderly musician, a true celebrity in matters of religious music, a real Roman, and connected to the traditions of his time in the manner of [the early-nineteenth-century church composer] Gaetano Capocci.[28]

Panchielli's conversation with Meluzzi was a success, as he reported in a letter to the composer: "Eureka! I have discovered it. Maestro Meluzzi was able to assure me that the pitch—indistinct, confused, elusive—of the great bell of Saint Peter's corresponds to an E natural. And he promised that I can inform you of this with confidence, and that he takes full responsibility in this matter."[29] With its delight in clerical intrigue, Panchielli's narrative makes for an entertaining read, but it also reveals a more suggestive tension: on the one hand, the bell is described as mysterious and inscrutable; on the other hand, it is reduced to an empirical object, an instrument whose exact pitch can be ascertained with confidence.

In their quest to "decipher" the mysteries of the great bell, Puccini and Panichelli were participating in a late-nineteenth-century craze for studying church bells, a historically specific "campanomania" that has been discussed in Alain Corbin's influential study *Village Bells*.[30] According to Corbin, bells had, through the early nineteenth century, been objects of fascination for local communities: sites of magical power, but also of civic pride and intense affection. (A good example of this is the Roman dialect name, *er campanone*, given to Saint Peter's bell itself.) By the 1870s, however, this mysticism had largely ceded to more positivist pursuits: in place of Romantic poets writing odes to sonic ineffability, "specialists attended conferences on the subject and contributed to specialist journals." Bells had, in short, become another object of academic discipline, with much of their original fascination lost in the process. As Corbin writes, "The disenchantment of the world and the desacralizing of life and the environment somehow disqualified the act of listening to bells."[31]

Corbin's history might prompt us to revisit a few familiar moments in nineteenth-century Italian opera. A good illustration of his earlier, enchanted paradigm appears in the last act of Verdi's *Rigoletto,* where a bell announces midnight, the time that Rigoletto has appointed to retrieve his gruesome package. Verdi casually notates the bell's strokes within the space of a single measure and does not bother to support its chiming with any other orchestral sound. Verdi's scene may seem almost naïve in its simplicity, but perhaps this is a sign that the composer assumed his audience would react to the bell's raw force. Like the musical "thunder and lightning" effects, the wordless offstage chorus, and the weird pastoral chords—all the agents, in short, of the uncanny magic that Gary Tomlinson has argued was originally at work in *Rigoletto*—the bell contributes its archaic power to the mystery and terror of the scene.[32]

A bell has a similar agency in the last scene of Verdi's *Falstaff,* where the twelve strokes of

[28]"Ma la difficoltà più seria fu quella di trovare il tono della campana grossa di San Pietro (er campanone) che molti avevano tentato inutilmente di indovinare e di decifrare. Ne feci parola all'amico Orlando Virgili il quale mi disse: —Sai chi ti potrebbe dare informazioni precise? —Chi? —Il vecchio maestro Meluzzi, che mi dicono abbia fatto ricerche minuziose a tal proposito. Corsi immediatamente dal vecchio musicista, una vera celebrità in fatto di musica religiosa, romano di Roma, e attacato alle tradizioni del suo tempo stile Gaetano Capocci" (Pietro Panichelli, *Il "pretino" di Giacomo Puccini* [Pisa: Nistri-Lischi, 1962], p. 52).

[29]"Eureka! Ho trovato. Il maestro Meluzzi ha potuto assicurarmi che quel tono squarciato, indistinto, confuso, inafferrabile del campanone di San Pietro risponde ad un <<mi>> naturale. E mi ha soggiunto che posso scriverlo con sicurezza a lei sotto la sua responsabilità" (Panchielli, *Il "pretino,"* p. 52).

[30]Alain Corbin, *Village Bells: Sound and Meaning in the 19th-Century French Countryside,* trans. Martin Thom (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), pp. 293–98.

[31]Corbin, *Village Bells,* pp. 296, 307.

[32]See Gary Tomlinson, *Metaphysical Song: An Essay on Opera* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), pp. 101–02.

midnight mark the transition to the dangerous fairy world of Windsor Park. Unlike in *Rigoletto,* however, the *Falstaff* bell is accompanied by a series of strangely shifting string chords. Although the sheer beauty of this latter scene, along with its palpable delight in harmonic ingenuity, reflects all that Verdi had learned in the forty years between these two passages, one also suspects that the elaborate chromatic harmonies were there for a reason: greater resources were needed to give bells in 1893 the same numinous force they had had in 1851.

Certainly the early reception of *Tosca* contains ample evidence that bells had lost much of their former charm. The critics cited earlier treat bells as just another type of what Corbin terms "rough music"—equivalent to drum rolls, or (for Mahler) brutal cries—an equation that would have been impossible in the earlier auditory discourse. And, hearing nothing but distracting noise in the opera's bells, critics were also echoing a widespread unease with bells in metropolitan centers. As the modern city developed, its independent rhythms were increasingly found to be incompatible with the enchanted notion of communal time that church bells had long solidified. Urban reformers complained about "torture by bells" and argued that modern workers needed uninterrupted sleep.[33] In contrast to the sense of local attachment captured in the name *er campanone,* one might quote the *Fanfulla della domenica:* "But if, at the beginning of the century, Rome had really been so atrociously infested with the sounds of bells, it would have been quickly depopulated. Who, except for a few deaf people, would have been able to live there?"[34]

Attempting to seal the case for the disenchanting of the sonic landscape, Corbin describes at length a passage from naturalist fiction.

> Zola, the author of *Le Rêve,* gave a precise description of the range of sensations and sentiments aroused by the din of bell ringing: the anticipation of the divine sacrifice, the manner in which the vibrations of the tenor bell from Bourges cathedral permeated the Huberts' house, the collective rejoicing, and Augustine's enraptured state followed by her flight in response to the heavenly call of the angel, which is also that of the wedding bell. Yet the analysis has a distant feel to it as if it were a clinical record. The emotional power of the bell, laid bare here and desacralized, is simply the agency that produces the dream; it is intrinsically linked to hallucination.[35]

A similar case could be made, I think, for the description of the dawn in the third act of *Tosca*. Despite, or rather because of, the massive empirical effort expended on realistic scene painting, the final result is curiously unmoving, dead.

IV

And yet, to return to my starting point, there is a vast distance between a literary depiction of bells and an actual reproduction of them within the space of a musical work. When another critic for the *Gazzetta teatrale italiana* argued that *Tosca* "represents the hegemony of materialism over music,"[36] he gave some sense of what this distance entails: the incursion of a foreign sound world, and an alien set of aesthetic criteria, into the conventional languages of Italian opera. Drawing an opposition between Puccini's empiricist obsessions and a more traditional notion of Italian lyricism ("this Latin substance in which music is music"[37]), the journal also anticipated an argument about realist opera that would be made in 1948 by W. H. Auden. In an essay entitled "Cav & Pag," Auden noted that "the difficulty for the naturalistic writer is that he cannot hold consistently to his principles without ceasing to be an artist and becoming a statistician, for an artist is by

[33]Corbin discusses the rise of urban intolerance for bells in *Village Bells,* pp. 298–308.

[34]"Ma se al principio del secolo, Roma fosse stata davvero così atrocemente infestata dal suono delle campane, si sarebbe in breve spopolata. Chi, se non qualche sordo, avrebbe potuto resistervi?" (Barini, "'Tosca' Melodramma di G. Puccini").

[35]Corbin, *Village Bells,* pp. 305–06.

[36]"*Tosca,* astrazion fatta dai pochi fronzoli melodici che Puccini vi ha sparsi qua e là come per una estrema nostalgia di musicista, rappresenta l'egemonia del materialismo sulla musica" (Roberto Bracco, "Del teatro lirico italiano: sintomi di decadenza," *Gazzetta teatrale italiana,* 19 January 1901, pp. 54–59, at 57).

[37]"Ebbene, proprio questo essenza, proprio questa sostanza latina per la quale la musica è la musica, proprio quest'anima d'ogni organismo musicale è ciò che i nostri giovani operisti tendono a rinnegare" (Bracco, "Del teatro lirico italiano," p. 57).

definition interested in uniqueness."[38] This difficulty, he continued, was even more attenuated when naturalist fiction was remade into opera.

> The role of impersonal necessity, the necessities of nature or the necessities of the social order in its totality upon the human person can be presented in fiction, in epic poetry and, better still, in the movies, because these media can verbally describe or visually picture that nature and that order; but in drama, where they are forced to remain offstage . . . this is very difficult. And in opera it is impossible, firstly, because music is in its essence dynamic, an expression of will and self-affirmation and, secondly, because opera, like ballet, is a virtuoso art; whatever his role, an actor who sings is an uncommon man, more a master of his fate, even as a self-destroyer, than an actor who speaks. Passivity or collapse of will cannot be expressed in song.[39]

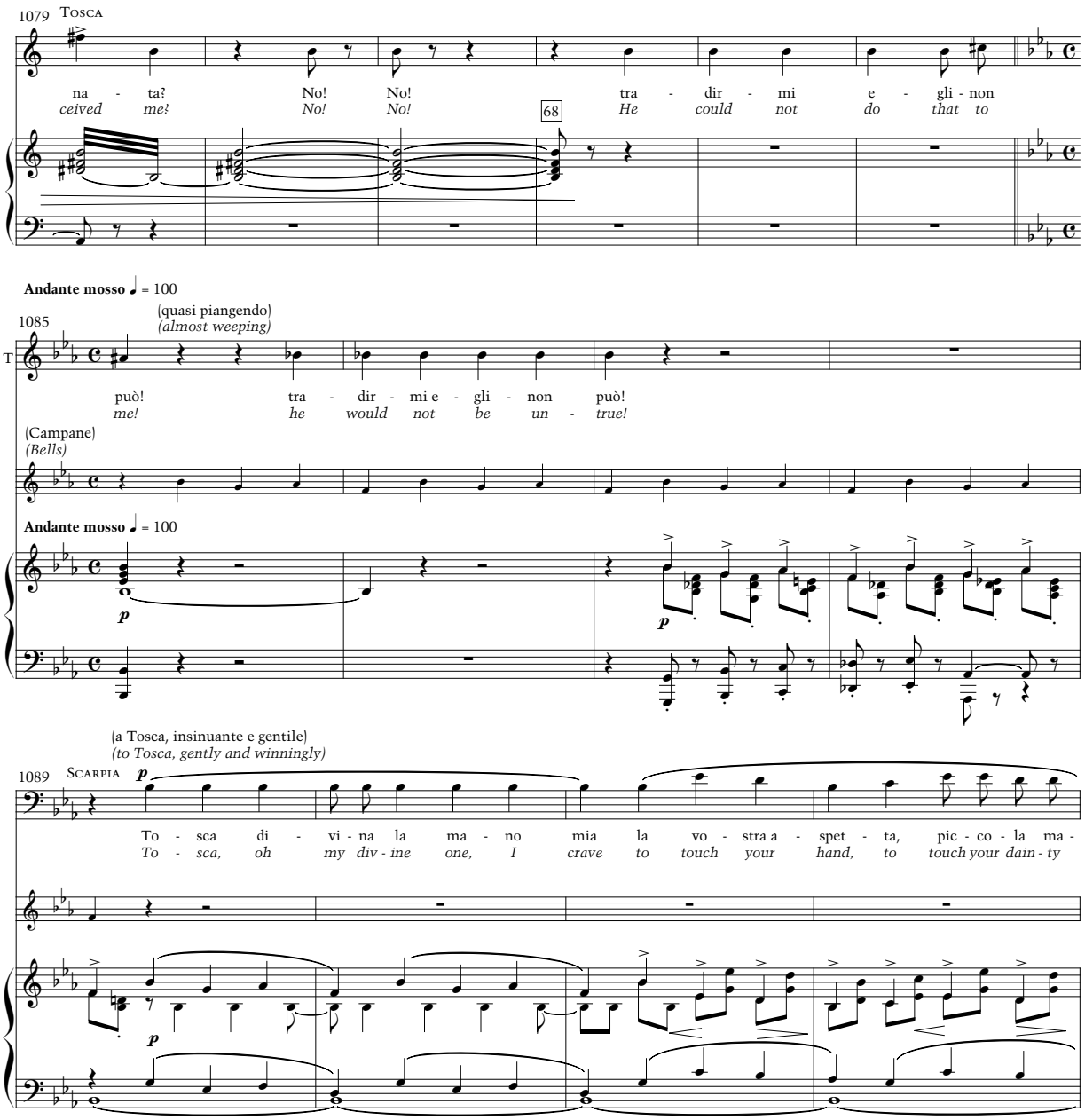
Auden's definition of music as "an expression of will and self-affirmation" seems to me a good description of the values that Puccini's liberal-democratic audiences would have ascribed to singing, values to which Cavaradossi and Tosca themselves give voice. What is most striking about *Tosca* in this context, though, is that—despite its apparent political program—its music often seems to perform the "collapse of will" that Auden found impossible. The opera's bells are threatening not only because of their ubiquity, not only because of their deadness, but also because of their "hegemonic" power over the musical action, which at times makes the characters into sorts of singing puppets.

The first time a bell sounds in *Tosca* is near the beginning of act I (see mm. 186–201).[40] The Sacristan has been puttering around the stage, accompanied by his comic $\frac{6}{8}$ theme, when an offstage bell announces the Angelus, suddenly shifting the musical discourse into a more dignified cut time (marked "Andante religioso" in the score). The bell sounds a single note (an F below middle C), and the Sacristan repeats this note at pitch, using it as the reciting tone for his subsequent prayer, during which the bell functions as a constant pedal point. The sacred mood persists until Cavaradossi appears on stage, restoring a freer style of vocal declamation, and the opera's typically restless chromatic motion. The Angelus episode is short, but it introduces a number of devices—a bell slowing time, halting harmonic movement, dictating the melodic vocabulary of the characters—which will be developed more extensively later in the opera.

Bells make their second appearance during Tosca's and Scarpia's first meeting (see ex. 1). Once again, a metrically and harmonically shifting musical texture is immediately replaced by a stable one; the bells first pull the music into E♭ (reinterpreting Tosca's A♯ as a B♭), and then keep it there, their measured four-note ostinato underlining the action with a steady quarter-note pulse. Even the adversaries are overtaken by an eerie sort of stasis. At the beginning of the scene, Tosca twice exclaims "Tradirmi egli non può!" (He cannot betray me!), and immediately before her second iteration the evening bells begin to chime. Puccini's first setting of Tosca's line is naturalistic, carefully following the rhythms and inflections of the verse. The second time, however, Tosca's voice is subtly made to conform with the rhythm of the bells: syllables are squeezed together, and natural speech patterns stretched out, which produces a line that is both stranger and less dynamic. When Scarpia enters the ensemble, his melody is even more exaggeratedly pinned to the bells: first stuck on their opening pitch of B♭, and then following the texture in mock first-species counterpoint. Imitating both the rhythm of the bells and their distinctive off-beat phrase structure, Scarpia's line is awkward, breathless, and weirdly incantatory. Opportunities for (knowing) pauses after phrases like "Tosca divina" and "Piccola manina" are studiously avoided.

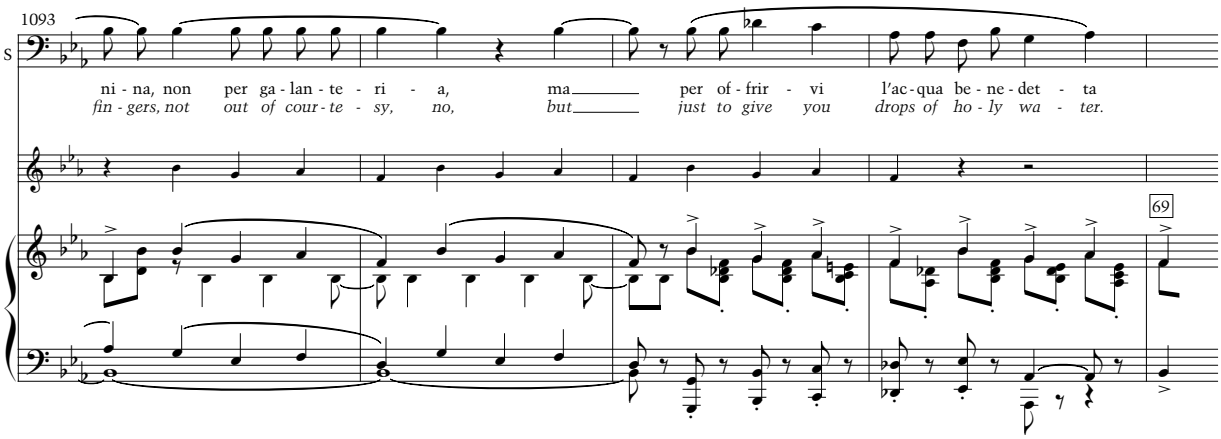
It is credible, perhaps, that the Sacristan would unconsciously imitate the sound of a single bell resonating in the church; but Tosca's and Scarpia's possession is more difficult to explain. In terms of dramatic logic, the first-act finale is even more demonically mysterious. The finale begins with bells sounding the

[38]W. H. Auden, "Cav & Pag," in *The Dyer's Hand and Other Essays* (New York: Vintage Books, 1968 [orig. 1948]), pp. 475–82, here 477.
[39]Auden, "Cav & Pag," pp. 477–78.
[40]All references are to the critical edition of the piano-vocal score, ed. Roger Parker (Milan: Ricordi, 1995).



Example 1: *Tosca,* act I, mm. 1079–1096.

pitches F and B♭—majestically, in whole notes—and the two-measure pattern will serve as a massive ostinato in the scene, underlying a full 175 measurers of music. The scene begins with a rushed dialogue in which Scarpia and Spoletta intone only the pitch F, and Scarpia's ensuing monologue is elaborately tied to the bells' pitches: his thrice-repeated command "Va! Tosca!" is set each time to the falling fourth B♭–F, and the majority of his longer phrases either begin or end on those notes. Meanwhile, the orchestra also takes its cues from the bells. The conversation between Scarpia and Spoletta is underpinned with a series of two-measure phrases that rise and fall as the bells do, and the rest of the music in the scene—the orches-



Example 1 *(continued)*

tral part, the diegetic organ, the onstage chorus—will also be constructed out of oscillating two-measure fragments.[41] What Puccini has written, in other words, is a crude passacaglia, with the bells serving as an unusually primal bass. Most commentary on the finale has focused on the contrast between Scarpia's indecent sentiments and the piety of the chorus's Te Deum, but it is also possible to hear a darker message: good and evil marching together, united behind an irrational, archaic force.[42]

V

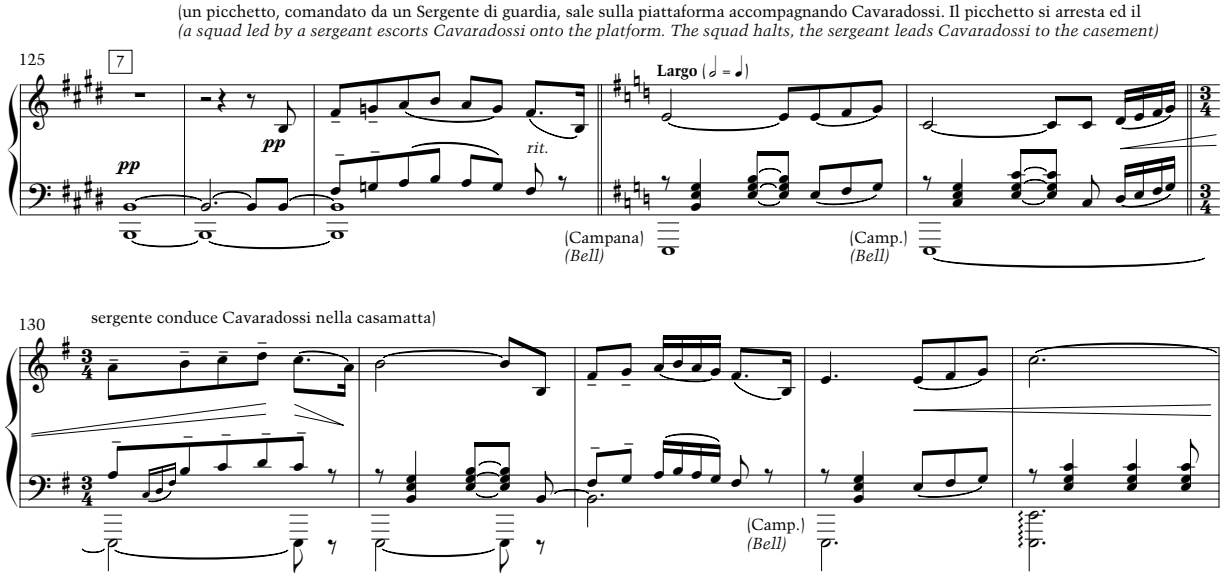
The first act of *Tosca* unfolds like a series of increasingly complex variations of the theme of bells' power and strange agency. Yet none of these scenes quite prepares the listener for the ambition with which Puccini evokes the great bell of Saint Peter's in the third act. The bell's pitch, recall, is a low E, and its sound dominates the opening of the act, well before the tolling of the *campanone* itself. The first 127 measures of the act are written entirely in E, rarely straying far from its harmonic orbit, and at three points the texture is underscored with simple ostinatos on E and B. When, at the end of the depiction of the dawn, and after a hushed dominant preparation, the *campanone* finally sounds, its tone supported by the double basses, the harp, and the contrabassoon, we cannot but feel its grim inevitability.

The bell's E may also be prepared in a much more elaborate sense. *Tosca* opens, famously, with three triads constructed from the bass notes B♭, A♭, and E. Puccini does not notate these chords in any key, and it is hard to imagine any diatonic context in which they would make sense. The three chords will be repeated throughout the opera—always in the same order, and rarely transposed—and they are clearly linked to Scarpia: critics have referred to them as the Scarpia theme, or as a leitmotiv associated with a related but more general concept like "tyranny."[43] Without disagreeing with this interpretation, I would also suggest that the chords function on a level less bound to semantic meaning, as an anticipation of Saint Peter's bell. In its first iteration, "Scarpia's" E chord sounds at the same low pitch level as the *campanone,* and it is harmonized with an open fifth, an interval that Puccini associates with bells throughout the opera. More strikingly, the three chords appear at two points in the third act, which have little connection with Scarpia (who is dead by this point in the drama) but which are explicitly linked to the sound of bells. The orchestral introduction to act III con-

[41]For a discussion of the motivic structure of this scene, see Döhring, "Musikalischer Realismus," p. 271.

[42]For an extensive survey of different ways of reading the psychology of this scene, see Vandiver Nicassio, *Tosca's Rome,* pp. 155–68. Girardi is perhaps unique in his claim that the fusion of different sentiments is part of Puccini's point. See *Giacomo Puccini,* p. 183.

[43]For recent discussion of the use of the chords and their dramatic meaning, see Girardi, *Puccini,* pp. 160–63; and Vandiver Nicassio, *Tosca's Rome,* pp. 123–26.



Example 2: *Tosca,* act III, mm. 125–33.

cludes with a repeated oscillation of the B♭ and A♭ chords; the E chord only sounds, after a measure and a half of silence, at the beginning of the shepherd's song, where it both initiates an ostinato on the pitches E and B and marks the first sounding of the sheep bells (see act III, mm. 40–44). The three chords sound again at the conclusion of the shepherd's first strophe, where they signal a slowing of the ostinato rhythm (from quarter-note triplets to half notes), accompanied by a stage direction that "the tinkling of the sheep-bells dies away in the distance" (see act III, mm. 58–63). Just as Scarpia's presence fades from the drama, so too does "his" theme: transformed from triple *forte* to *pianissimo,* gradually integrated into a harmonic context, and, most importantly, made polyvalent, loosed further from its initial connotations.

While Scarpia's theme vanishes into Saint Peter's bell, a strange alchemy also allows the bell to give birth to one of the opera's other central motives. The *campanone*'s entrance is accompanied by the first statement of the opera's most famous melody: structured around the pitches E and B, making prominent use of "chiming" fourths and fifths, and always supported by a pedal tone, it seems to arise from the partials of the bell itself (see ex. 2). This melody, of course, is usually associated with its later appearance in Cavaradossi's aria "E lucevan le stelle," where it appears three times, first as a setting for the words "Oh! dolci baci, languide carezze" (Oh! sweet kisses, languid caresses). Because of this coincidence of words and music, it is tempting to describe the melody as something like "Cavaradossi's love theme," but other evidence mitigates against this. The melody is elaborated extensively by the orchestra before entering the tenor's orbit, and its simple outlining of an E-minor scale is not obviously languid. Much like Scarpia's chords, the melody is linked with the character of Cavaradossi without ever becoming his exclusive property.

This point is worth stressing because the final appearance of the theme is routinely attacked by critics, the evidence used to seal the case for Puccini's crass opportunism.[44] As Tosca

[44]Especially forceful statements of this position include Joseph Kerman, *Opera as Drama* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988 [orig. 1952]), p. 19; Mosco Carner, *Puccini: A Critical Biography* (New York: Knopf, 1959), pp. 377–78; and Charles Osborne, *The Complete Operas of Puccini: A Critical Guide* (London: Gollancz, 1981), p. 143. Julian Budden's recent study is typically more fair-minded: see *Puccini: His Life and Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 221–22.

jumps from the Castel Sant'Angelo—"throws herself into the void," as the libretto puts it—the full orchestra plays the melody for one last time, now at full volume. If we associate the theme with Cavaradossi, this reprise makes little sense: there is no reason to be reminded of his erotic reverie during Tosca's suicide. If, however, we associate the melody with Saint Peter's bell, and, by extension, the entire sonic landscape of Rome, then Puccini's use of the tune seems rather more appropriate. Disappearing into the scenery—into the void, you might say, left by the lack of music—Tosca fulfills the tendency of all characters in the opera to be overtaken by primal sound, and the bell theme rises up in the final moments to place its grim seal on the process.

VI

The best description of *Tosca* that I have come across appears—somewhat improbably, and certainly unintentionally—in Theodor W. Adorno's book *In Search of Wagner*. In the course of a typically abstruse attempt to describe Wagner's "regressive" style, Adorno writes:

> The really productive element in Wagner is seen at the moments when the subject abdicates sovereignty and passively abandons itself to the archaic, the instinctual—the element which, precisely because it has been emancipated, renounces its now unattainable claim to give meaningful shape to the passage of time. This element, with its two dimensions of harmony and colour, is sonority. Through sonority time seems transfixed in space, and while as harmony it "fills" space, the notion of colour, for which musical theory has no better name, is directly borrowed from the realm of visual space. At the same it is mere sonority which actually represents that unarticulated natural state into which Wagner dissolves.[45]

What Adorno seems to have mind here is Wagner's use of piquant but nonfunctional harmonic complexes, but his description of "mere sonority" could be applied, with remarkably little violence, to Puccini's bells. This is most obviously true in Adorno's evocation of an archaic sound that interrupts the normal flow of time, drawing music into an undifferentiated stasis, and his other observations—that, suspended in motion, sound becomes a sort of space; that the freeing of sonority is linked to a renunciation of subjective autonomy—seem equally apt.

What interests me most about Adorno's argument, though, is his attempt to link Wagner's fascination with pure sonority to later developments in twentieth-century music. At one point he notes that Wagner's style "immortalizes the moment between the death of Romanticism and the birth of realism," and at another he attempts to connect Wagner's primal sounds with the more brutal ones that would erupt in Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*.[46] Putting these two observations together, we might describe *Tosca* as a realist stopping point between Wagner's Romantic archaism and the primitivism of Stravinsky: as empirical objects, Puccini's bells look back to the faded magic of Wagner's mythic worlds, while also pointing the way to the dark biologism that would soon fascinate European culture. Less fancifully, *Tosca* might be named as a key precedent for the fascination with unmediated sound that would soon form such an important part of Italian Futurist aesthetics. It is not a long distance from early descriptions of Puccini's opera to a passage like this, taken from Luigi Russolo's 1913 Futurist manifesto.

> Let us cross a great modern capital, with our ears more alert than our eyes, and we will enjoy distinguishing the sucking of water, air, and gas in metallic pipes, the rumbling of motors that breathe and pulsate with undeniable animality, the throbbing of valves, the in and out of pistons, the shrieking of mechanical saws, the bouncing of trams on tracks, the cracking of whips, the flapping of awnings and flags.[47]

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[45]Theodor W. Adorno, *In Search of Wagner*, trans. Rodney Livingstone, intro. Slavoj Zizek (London: Verso, 2005 [orig. 1952]), pp. 52, 80.

[46]See Adorno, *In Search of Wagner:* "Despite a profound affinity in their concern with the prehistoric, or perhaps even because of it, Stravinsky regards himself as the complete antipode of Wagner. Stravinsky is inexhaustible in finding new forms for regression; in his aesthetic ideology, as in the ideology of Fascism, the concept of progress is repudiated. Wagner, however, living a century earlier and rooted in a liberalism whose own atavism he anticipated, would like to present the regressive element as progress, the static as the dynamic" (p. 51).

[47]Luigi Russolo, "L'arte dei rumori," in *Marinetti e i futuristi*, ed. Luciano de Maria (Milan: Garzanti, 1994), pp.

Russolo, it is worth noting, wrote these words in response to a concert of Futurist music performed at *Tosca*'s own Teatro Costanzi.

Of course, the Futurists despised Puccini. They loathed his commercial success, his sentimentality, his embodiment of all they found wrong with the Italian liberal state.[48] There is, then, a simple, revisionist pleasure to be had in arguing for common ground between antipodes. Yet Puccini's modernity is not entirely to be celebrated. Russolo had high praise for "the extremely new sounds of modern war,"[49] and it was clearly their cult of primal force that drew so many Futurists to Italian fascism. Although Puccini died before Mussolini's final imposition of a dictatorship, *Tosca* does share a real affinity with many of the more sinister works of the fascist era, whether Italian Futurism or that dark blend of mechanicity and archaism we associate with *Carmina Burana*.

Recently it has become common to praise *Tosca* as a critique of fascism *avant la lettre*. Both critics and stage directors have seized on Scarpia's fusing of religious spectacle with state-sanctioned violence; they find it an anticipation of Mussolini's own theater of power.[50] Cavaradossi's resistance thus looks all the more heroic: it is also Puccini's resistance against the tide of Italian history. Yet this interpretation is perhaps overly optimistic, overlooking, as I hope to have shown, some of the more complex messages sent out by the opera's score. It is telling that, in the immediate aftermath of Mussolini's regime, *Tosca*'s politics seem to have been viewed in a rather more skeptical light. The first masterpiece of Italian postwar cinema, Roberto Rossellini's *Roma città aperta*, draws on the plot of Puccini's opera, pitting a barbarous police chief against a character meant to embody the strength and beauty of Italian womanhood. But this is less an homage to *Tosca* than a staging of the distance—political as well as aesthetic—between neo-Realism and *verismo*. In marked contrast to Puccini's opera, Rossellini's film does not linger on tourist attractions. Spectacle, however "realistic," is avoided, and there is no vicarious pleasure to be had in the film's ghastly equivalent to the scene of Cavaradossi's torture.

Recent rewritings of *Tosca* help remind us that Puccini's opera is a deeply ambivalent work, and perhaps it is this very confusion that testifies most eloquently to its time, while it also explains some of its continued grip on audiences. The opera simultaneously celebrates freedom and denies autonomy to its characters, embraces realism and calls its value into question, provides the most loving portrait of a diva ever created within an opera and somehow relishes in her demise. If, seeking refuge from a haunted city, you board a train heading north, you will hear a conductor call out "Civitavecchia," and perhaps you will be reminded of Tito Gobbi's intonation when he sings that name. You may feel a chill. But was that a brush with fiction, or with the real?

Abstract.
This article offers a new interpretation of the operatic phenomenon known as *verismo*, and of the relationship of Puccini's *Tosca* with that movement. In contrast to previous scholarship on *verismo*, which often treats the relationship between literature and music as transparent, I stress that marrying empiricist aesthetics to traditional operatic values was a highly unnatural process. I suggest that Italian opera in the 1890s was pushed to a sort of crisis point, and that the very act of singing could no longer be taken as self-evident. Composers developed a set of new techniques—offstage song, performer-characters, an extreme reliance on bells—to deal with this sudden untenability of operatic convention. All of these techniques were elaborated most fully in *Tosca,* and the opera might be read as an allegory of the *verismo* moment, embodying the conflict between hard-nosed realism and unapologetic singing in its two antagonists: Baron Scarpia and Floria Tosca. The plot clearly endorses Tosca's position, but a close reading of the

92–100. "Attraversiamo una grande capitale moderna, con le orecchie più attente che gli occhi, e godremo nel distinguere i risucchi d'acqua, d'aria o di gas nei tubi metallici, il borbottio dei motori che fiatano e pulsano con una indiscutibile animalità, il palpitare delle valvole, l'andirivieni degli stantuffi, gli stridori delle seghe meccaniche, i balzi dei tram sulle rotaie, lo schioccar delle fruste, il garrire delle tende e delle bandiere" (p. 95).

[48]For one Futurist critique of Puccini and the Italian music industry, see Francesco Balilla Pratella, "Manifesto dei musicisti futuristi," in *Marinetti e i futuristi,* pp. 47–53.

[49]"Nè bisogna dimenticare i rumori nuovissimi della Guerra moderna" (Russolo, "L'arte dei rumori," p. 96).

[50]See Girardi, *Puccini,* pp. 191–94; and Anthony Arblaster, *Viva la libertà!: Politics in Opera* (London: Verso, 1992), pp. 245–62.

opera's music suggests a rather different interpretation. By focusing on the role of bells in the opera, I argue that realistic sound often overwhelms the autonomy of the characters, at times seeming to collapse them into the scenery itself. Early critics were disturbed by this aspect of the music. Listening to the opera with their ears may help us realize that—despite its overt celebration of individual freedom, and its much-lauded critique of state-sanctioned violence—*Tosca* exhibits an antisubjective impulse that has much in common with other "Fascist" and "proto-Fascist" texts.

Key words: *verismo, Tosca,* bells, reception history, futurism

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