

VERISMO IN ITALIAN ART SONG:
A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF VERISTIC LITERATURE,
OPERA AND ART SONG

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ABSTRACT

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Verismo in Italian art song is examined through the application of seven primary characteristics, which are identified as the defining tenets of *verismo* in Italian literature and opera. These seven characteristics are: reaction against romanticism, character choice, linguistics, silent author, dramatic structure, milieu and violent extremes. These core elements of *verismo* are initially extracted from the veristic works of Giovanni Verga, as influenced by Émile Zola and French naturalism. Then they are applied to the operas of the *veristi*, including Giacomo Puccini, Ruggiero Leoncavallo, Pietro Mascagni and Umberto Giordano. Finally, having established their relevance to the classification of *verismo* in opera, they are likewise applied to the art songs of the *veristi*. In addition to surveying many art songs composed by the *veristi* from 1875 – 1920, this application identifies two works of pure *verismo* composition: *6 Liriche* by Giordano and *Imploration éperdue* by Leoncavallo.

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“The finest of friends must sometimes be stern sentinels,
who will insist that we become what we have the power to become.”
~ Elder Neal A. Maxell

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CHAPTER ONE:
ÉMILE ZOLA AND FRENCH NATURALISM

Zola's France

Political Scene

The date was 2 December 1851 and the place Paris. Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte transacted his masterminded coup dissolving the National Assembly, which terminated the Second Republic and gave birth to the Second Empire. This new government – Napoléon's empire – would reign until its demise in 1870 brought about by the Franco-Prussian war, which saw the establishment of the Third Republic. The early days of the Third Republic continued to be marred with *Le Commune de Paris* (1871) and its Bloody Week. The political scene was in turmoil, fighting for its ground and presence. At the same time, scientific scholars were emerging. Charles Darwin published his theory of evolution in 1859 and continued to influence French society – politics, art, religion and literature – until his death in 1882. Likewise, Claude Bernard, a physiologist, influenced French critical thought with his publication of *Introduction à la médecine expérimentelle* in 1865.

Literary Scene

Among the political and scientific changes occurring in France – especially Paris – a new form of literature had emerged: Realism. Beverly Gibbs offer a clear, working definition of realism. She states, “realism...aims to attain truth which is attainable only by observation (scientific and impersonal) of reality...and by the unadulterated representation of that reality in the work of art.”¹ For Gibbs, this unadulterated pathway to truth means “the whole object is carefully observed in all its detail, and, if the artist succeeds, the result will be an exact replica of the original.”² This drive for truth in literature was best captured by French realism’s leading and most influential author, Gustave Flaubert (1821-1880).

Flaubert’s first and most significant publication was *Madame Bovary* in 1857. This novel held significance in the realist movement for two primary reasons. First, *Madame Bovary* strove for a precise depiction of mundane life – an exact description of life’s day-to-day reality. Second, its prominence among French realism derived from how Flaubert chose to tell the story. The story itself – an adulterous woman living beyond her means – was not new; yet, the telling of it by Flaubert was. As Sarah Kay, Terence Cave and Malcolm Bowie point out, “Crime, prostitution, and epidemic disease had been discussed only in a prematurely sanitized form...[as]...the literary imagination had slumbered through the debacle of the Franco-Prussian war.”³ It was Flaubert’s imaginative de-sanitizing that brought reality to his work.

¹ Gibbs, “Impressionism as a Literary Movement,” 175.

² Gibbs, “Impressionism as a Literary Movement,” 175.

³ Kay, Cave, and Bowie, *A Short History of French Literature*, 248.

For Flaubert, a critical element of achieving realism was that of impersonality; one must not project his own emotions into the situation being captured. Consequently, as Gibbs acknowledges, an argument could be made that “it would be theoretically possible in a given, controlled situation to have several writers of the realistic school observe the same phenomenon or object and have them reproduce it in the same manner, for each is of necessity engaged in pure imitation.”⁴ However, the portrayal of anything encountered is always skewed by its reception, which is determined by the personality and experiences of the perceiver. Thus, the theoretical possibility of exact replication remains only theoretical. However, Flaubert understood that he must remain as impersonal in his retelling as possible. Giovanni Cecchetti confirms this as he states, “In an unceasing effort to keep his Romantic temperament in check, Flaubert had, in fact, declared that he aimed at reproducing ‘things’ in such a way that they could be touched, and had lent credibility to the theory of ‘impersonality.’”⁵

The goal of presenting things truthfully was at the heart of the realist movement. As Émile Zola remarked, the masses “have no knowledge of any art except officially approved art, which is no more than infantile picture painting. For the man in the street, art is a form of relaxation for the well-off, a priestly hocus-pocus, a religion he mistrusts. He must be told that art is truth.”⁶

Portraying truth in art and literature caught momentum and the success of the French realism school laid the foundation for its offspring: Naturalism.

⁴ Gibbs, “Impressionism as a Literary Movement,” 176.

⁵ Cecchetti, “Verga and Verismo,” 175.

⁶ Hemmings, “The Realist and Naturalist Movements in France,” 180.

French Naturalism

General Background

United together, Gibbs observes that “realism and naturalism have as their purpose the exact, impersonal reproduction of material objects; yet, their intent is still to create the impression of these objects, but the characteristics that they take on are inherent in them – they are as near to photographic reproductions as can exist in literary creation.”⁷ Realism then, having created a fertile ground for growth, evolved into naturalism. This natural progression, as Nicholas White notes, developed because naturalism’s “lineaments were already visible in the Second Empire fiction, not least in responses to the ambivalent realism of *Madame Bovary*.”⁸ Consequently, it was in the 1860s when Zola first applied the term of naturalism to his literary works. Doing so, as White observes, was purposed to “denote a longer realist literary heritage.”⁹

Influence of Scientific Theories

Whereas realism sought to portray objects and events in a truthful fashion, its methods were approached primarily by impersonality. For naturalism, this would change and science would come to dominate its creation. As David Baguley remarks, “Naturalism has traditionally been considered a crude and exaggerated successor to realism, nourished by the pseudo-scientific

⁷ Gibbs, “Impressionism as a Literary Movement,” 175.

⁸ White, “Naturalism,” 522.

⁹ White, “Naturalism,” 522.

theories of its chief exponent, Zola.”¹⁰ This nourishment of pseudo-scientific theories became a defining and differentiating element of naturalism from its precursor, realism. “Henceforth, Zola attempted to establish a clear water between realism and naturalism,” as White explains, “defining the latter as a scientifically rigorous systematisation of the observational realism practised, actually in radically different ways, by...Flaubert.”¹¹

This scientific approach highly favored the natural sciences, especially those of biology and physiology. Yet, there was specific purpose for doing so. Indeed, the goal was truth in re-creation of nature, but it was also to give a truthful impression of nature. This impression needed an interpretive foundation and the natural sciences offered exactly this. Using this scientific approach to replicate nature, Baguley explains that “the term ‘Naturalism’ conveniently evoked the natural sciences, in which Zola sought to ground naturalist methods; materialist and positivist philosophy, which provided the broad philosophical framework of the movement.”¹²

Objectivity and Disinterestedness

In partnership with a scientific approach, naturalism would also utilize the principles of objectivity and disinterestedness. Drawing the connection between science and objectivity, the argument is made that “naturalism in prose fiction, as Zola came to call it, was natural science by an only slightly different name, and a willingness to shift between viewpoints – to think

¹⁰ Baguley, “Naturalism.”

¹¹ White, “Naturalism,” 524.

¹² Baguley, “Naturalism.”

ironically, that is to say – was a sign of its objectivity and disinterestedness.”¹³ According to Jonathan Hunt, this objectivity for the naturalist meant that “human beings are nothing more than a part of this world—like rocks, plants, and animals, they are subject to the laws of physics, chemistry, and biology, which govern human behavior as inexorably as they govern the natural world.”¹⁴ Additionally, for disinterestedness, the naturalist would have no interest or hope in human beings, for they will act solely as nature dictates. Therefore, Hunt concludes that “in its broadest sense, naturalism is a doctrine holding that the physical world operates according to laws discernible through empirical science.”¹⁵

This uniting of science and literature may – at the onset – seem like an unusual and awkward pairing. However, for Zola, they were seen as belonging to the same domain. In fact, this literary naturalist “could build models of society that were strictly comparable with the explanations offered by the biological sciences, for conflicting forces and elaborate interactive mechanisms were characteristic of both domains.”¹⁶ Even ironically, it was from Claude Bernard’s treatise on experimental medicine that Zola had derived his theories on the novel. However, Zola was not just dealing with the sciences, but also with social and political anomalies of his day. Consequently, when Zola and the naturalists were influenced by the philosophies and science of Darwin and Bernard “or to popular versions of their thought,” as Irving Howe points out, “they were struggling with serious and urgent problems.”¹⁷

¹³ Kay, Cave, and Bowie, *A Short History of French Literature*, 248.

¹⁴ Hunt, “Naturalism.”

¹⁵ Hunt, “Naturalism.”

¹⁶ Kay, Cave, and Bowie, *A Short History of French Literature*, 247-248.

¹⁷ Howe, “Zola: The Poetry of Naturalism,” 113.

Zola's Scientific Approach

Zola's success as a naturalist came from using this scientific approach to achieve realism – to depict impressions of nature as they really are. As Gibbs notes, “Naturalism emphasizes objective, scientific treatment to represent material objects and subject matter just as exactly as possible.”¹⁸ Zola's naturalistic method, as Hunt describes, was “modeled after nineteenth-century innovations in the experimental sciences, [and] involves informed, systematic observation of the material world.”¹⁹ This systematic observation, according to Cecchetti, meant that Zola “must study his human subjects with the scientific objectivity of a physiologist or a physician, and must present them with equal detachment.”²⁰ It was indeed to “adapt the form of the novel to the suprapersonal causality that modern science saw at work in the life of the human person.”²¹ Zola's scientific approach – his systematic observation of suprapersonal causality and scientific objectivity – allowed for realistic depiction of those being observed.

As a product of this scientific approach, Zola and naturalism placed a heavy emphasis on description. In fact, the argument may be made that development of the plot is sacrificed as attention to the description of external factors is given priority. Similarly argued, Hunt concludes that “the term naturalism is sometimes used to mean fiction that exaggerates the techniques of realism, sacrificing prose style and depth of characterization for an exhaustive description of the external, observable world.”²² Aware of this critique, Zola countered, “But if

¹⁸ Gibbs, “Impressionism as a Literary Movement,” 175.

¹⁹ Hunt, “Naturalism.”

²⁰ Cecchetti, “Verga and Verismo,” 175.

²¹ Kay, Cave, and Bowie, *A Short History of French Literature*, 249.

²² Hunt, “Naturalism.”

[naturalist art] is also to be truthful, then it must be free, it must say what it has to say and refuse amputation even in the name of decency.”²³

This close observation of reality was often centered around the depiction of everyday life. As Hunt explains, this depiction of unfantasized life focused on “characters drawn from the working class” with whom “perversion and degeneration are associated.”²⁴ The portrayal was, as Baguley describes it, that of “disillusionment and frustrations of a...protagonist caught up in the dilemmas of daily existence.”²⁵ Additionally, the result of utilizing working class characters, as Hunt expresses, was a setting “most often urban or industrial, rather than the geographically or temporally distant settings favored by adventure and romance fiction.”²⁶

Reality was also depicted textually, specifically in the language of the characters. For the naturalist, “sociological research” was conducted “including on-site investigation of a workplace, subculture, or location, expert advice, and incorporation of specialized vocabularies.”²⁷ This specialized vocabulary, or, as White describes, this “middle-class language of the Frenchman in much naturalist fiction ensures the readability of these *texts de plaisir*.”²⁸ Consequently, naturalism was a literary approach, which relied significantly upon a detailed examination of reality, whether as a depiction of everyday life or through textual presentation.

²³ Hemmings, “The Realist and Naturalist Movements in France,” 180.

²⁴ Hunt, “Naturalism.”

²⁵ Baguley, “Naturalism.”

²⁶ Hunt, “Naturalism.”

²⁷ Hunt, “Naturalism.”

²⁸ White, “Naturalism,” 526.

Heredity

Perhaps, most significantly in French naturalism is the concept of heredity and the deterministic nature of environment. As Baguley identifies, “in very general terms, the naturalists shared a materialistic, mechanistic view which tended to subject mankind to deterministic factors, like the laws of heredity or influences from the environment.”²⁹ According to Giovanni Carsaniga, this meant that “human passions were interpreted along positivistic lines as a “mechanism,” and their delicacy and complexity were rated according to social Darwinism.”³⁰ Hunt identifies the consequence of an approach centered on heredity. Specifically, he concludes that the result was a “deterministic plot of decline or degeneration, where characters are crushed by the forces of a universe they can neither understand nor control.”³¹

However, the consequences of this deterministic viewpoint extend beyond the inescapable forces acting upon the characters. For example, Hunt argues that when such views of heredity are advanced, naturalism becomes “materialist and anti-idealist in that it does not recognize the existence of nonmaterial or nonobservable phenomena (such as a spiritual realm or higher moral law); it is also antihumanist in that it grants no exceptional status to human beings.”³² This antihumanist stance is further defined by Hunt. Specifically, he clarifies that “according to the strict naturalist view, every action taken by a human being...has a cause in the physical plane;

²⁹ Baguley, “Naturalism.”

³⁰ Carsaniga, “Literary Realism in Italy,” 67.

³¹ Hunt, “Naturalism.”

³² Hunt, “Naturalism.”

human behavior is thus entirely determined by the laws of cause and effect in the material world.”³³

Consequently, Cecchetti observes that “human reality,” for the naturalist, “must be viewed from the standpoint of its own irreversible deterministic laws of heredity and environment.”³⁴ Thus, heredity becomes an integral element of French naturalism – a critical foundational framework. To portray such a heretical viewpoint, the naturalists sought out “the people of the city slums, the corrupt and the degenerate,” allowing the naturalists to observe “how [their specimens] act and react, and by ascertaining how their degeneracy passes from generation to generation.”³⁵ The novel is consequently a product of this observation; and, as such, Cecchetti maintains it is “‘plotless,’ and almost writes itself through the characters’ actions and reactions.”³⁶ Zola, seeing human beings as “organisms imprinted with their own evolutionary history,”³⁷ “conceived of the novel as a laboratory for the study of human behavior under the influence of heredity and environment.”³⁸

³³ Hunt, “Naturalism.”

³⁴ Cecchetti, “Verga and Verismo,” 175.

³⁵ Cecchetti, “Verga and Verismo,” 175.

³⁶ Cecchetti, “Verga and Verismo,” 175.

³⁷ Kay, Cave, and Bowie, *A Short History of French Literature*, 247.

³⁸ Hunt, “Naturalism.”

Reaction to Romanticism

A final element to present with regards to French naturalism is its reaction against romanticism.

As White observes, “naturalism stands out as a literature defined by its relationship to history.”³⁹

When the term *naturaliste* was used by Zola in the 1860s, Baguley explains it was used to

“denote a heritage of realist literature, inspired by the positivist tradition in philosophy, science, and the arts, that rejected the idealistic aspirations of the Romantic movement.”⁴⁰ Consequently,

White concludes “it makes more sense to view [naturalism] as a reaction to early modern and then Romantic intellectual culture.”⁴¹

As the founder of French naturalism, Zola proclaimed:

Man has no absolute standard left, all he has is individual creation, the human spirit struggling to give birth. That is the guiding spirit of the modern naturalist school, which alone advocates the abandonment of the ancient fables. The mendacious art that thrives on dogmas and unassailable mysteries is gradually dying away as the tide of science rises; and I am constantly astonished that it has survived so long in the face of the spirit of analytical inquiry which has held the field over the past one hundred years.⁴²

This ability to break with tradition is exactly what Zola sought to solidify into naturalism and is what he admired in other artists. As such, Zola continues, “Naturalist art, then, should bear the stamp of an individual creator who must be capable of inventing his own rules, without reference to tried recipes and guide-lines.”⁴³ As F. W. J. Hemmings explains, “What Zola appreciated in the work of Manet and the pre-impressionists was, in part, their efforts to arrive at a truthful

³⁹ White, “Naturalism,” 524.

⁴⁰ Baguley, “Naturalism.”

⁴¹ White, “Naturalism,” 530.

⁴² Hemmings, “The Realist and Naturalist Movements in France,” 180.

⁴³ Hemmings, “The Realist and Naturalist Movements in France,” 180.

representation of the scenes or persons they painted; and, beyond that, their readiness to break with tradition, to innovate, regardless of whether their innovations were acceptable to the critics and the art-buyers.”⁴⁴ Thus, utilizing the tools, concepts and strategies of science, Zola sought to depart from romanticism as he forged progressively forward in the French school of naturalism.

Émile Zola

Biographical Information

Émile Zola (1840-1902) was the founding father and greatest propagator of French naturalism. Beginning his literary career with literary and art reviews, Zola developed into an outspoken political journalist criticizing Napoleon III during the critical transition between the Second Empire and the Third Republic. This political literary activism culminated in the publication of Zola’s *J’accuse* and what was to become the Dreyfus affair. However, it was French naturalism, for which Zola has earned his accolades. In fact, Patrick Brady contends that “with the death of Victor Hugo in 1885, Émile Zola became the dominant literary figure in France.”⁴⁵ This dominance was centered in naturalism, which, as Hunt puts forth, “was so closely identified with Zola’s fiction that few claimed the label after his death.”⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Hemmings, “The Realist and Naturalist Movements in France,” 182.

⁴⁵ Brady, “Zola, Émile,” 634.

⁴⁶ Hunt, “Naturalism.”

Major Works

Zola's major and most prolific works include *L'Assommoir* (1877), *Le Roman expérimental* (1880), *Nana* (1880) and *Germinal* (1885). Yet, at the core of Zola's work is the twenty-volume cycle of novels entitled *Les Rougon-Macquart* (1871-1893), which arguably contains his most successful work. First, Dinah Birch describes *Le Roman expérimental* as Zola's "most sustained theoretical discussion of naturalism, though by the time of [its] publication, he had been putting his theories into practice for several years."⁴⁷ Then, of *Germinal*, Brady describes it as being Zola's "generally recognized...masterpiece, [although] he had already achieved fame, indeed notoriety, by some twenty novels, including *L'Assommoir* (1877) and *Nana* (1880)."⁴⁸ Indeed, *L'Assommoir* and *Nana* – along with *Germinal* – had brought Zola fame as they were each part of *Les Rougon-Macquart*.

Les Rougon-Macquart was Zola's "concept of a series of linked novels" and, according to Jonathan Smith, "was his major literary contribution in this respect."⁴⁹ Specifically, *Les Rougon-Macquart* "is a twenty-novel cycle chronicling the activities of the Rougons and the Macquarts, two branches of a family whose conduct is conditioned through several generations by environment and inherited characteristics, chiefly drunkenness and mental instability."⁵⁰ Further, Birch maintains that "it offers a carefully documented panorama of life in Second Empire France exploring the powerful claims of human appetites and instincts."⁵¹ As will be

⁴⁷ Birch, *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*.

⁴⁸ Brady, "Zola, Émile," 634.

⁴⁹ Smith, "Zola, Emile."

⁵⁰ Birch, *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*.

⁵¹ Birch, *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*.

discussed later, *Les Rougon-Macquart* is a perfect case study highlighting the influence of heredity upon Zola and his naturalism movement.

In addition to its portrayal of heredity, this literary cycle also sought for political commentary of the Second Empire. Specifically, “Zola’s plan for...*Les Rougon-Macquart* was drafted to produce saturation coverage of Second Empire France from the social, geographical and historical points of view.”⁵² In an effort to criticize the “excesses of Napoleon III’s Empire,” according to White, Zola was creating a “genealogical fiction [which] pursues the legitimate (Rougon) and illegitimate (Macquart) strands of the family.”⁵³ Unfortunately, when the first volume of the series, *La Fortune des Rougon*, was published in 1871, the Second Empire had already succumbed to the rise of the Third Republic.

Tenets of Naturalism in Zola’s Works

Heredity

The tenets of French naturalism are readily observed in Zola’s works, with three specifically chosen for examination. Specifically, the novels and their associated tenet are: *Les Rougon-Macquart* and heredity, *L’Assommoir* and textual voice and *Thérèse Raquin* and the reality of everyday life. Beginning with *Les Rougon-Macquart*, Brady informs that “it represents an attempt to “study” the effects of hereditary flaws (neurosis, alcoholism, violence) and various

⁵² Kay, Cave, and Bowie, *A Short History of French Literature*, 249.

⁵³ White, “Naturalism,” 525.

environments on the members of two families during the Second Empire (1851-70).”⁵⁴ To adequately highlight his purpose, Zola subtitled his twenty-volume cycle as, *Histoire naturelle et sociale d'une famille sous le Second Empire* (The Natural and social history of a family under the Second Empire). As Hemmings explains, “By the ‘natural history’ of the family he meant the working out of the genetic disorders due to the sins and excesses of the original progenitors.”⁵⁵ For Zola personally, he wanted to “illustrate how the novelist might continue, in his own sphere, the work of the scientist.”⁵⁶

To unify the twenty novels, Zola needed to identify a common element; as such, the thread binding them all together was the science of heredity. As Hemmings argues, “the bonding element would be the scientific ‘hypothesis’, as Zola called it: that certain genetic characteristics could be traced through in the life-stories of the offspring of an original coupling and in their offspring’s offspring.”⁵⁷ As a natural consequence of such an approach, “Zola’s characters...are arranged genealogically and often presented as the playthings of an implacable destiny.”⁵⁸ As Hemmings continues, this meant that “the workings of heredity had been codified; with a little imagination, a family could be projected of which the various members would illustrate the different mutations of the original hereditary strain.”⁵⁹ Consequently, Hemmings notes that for the characters, “it is genetic, rather than social catastrophe that awaits them.”⁶⁰ After all, “biology has predetermined their deeds and robbed them of all but a fragile illusion of free

⁵⁴ Brady, “Zola, Émile,” 634.

⁵⁵ Hemmings, “The Realist and Naturalist Movements in France,” 186.

⁵⁶ Hemmings, “The Realist and Naturalist Movements in France,” 184.

⁵⁷ Hemmings, “The Realist and Naturalist Movements in France,” 184.

⁵⁸ Kay, Cave, and Bowie, *A Short History of French Literature*, 249.

⁵⁹ Hemmings, “The Realist and Naturalist Movements in France,” 184.

⁶⁰ Hemmings, “The Realist and Naturalist Movements in France,” 185.

will.”⁶¹ Choosing to unify his literary cycle by heredity shows the significance of such scientific influence upon Zola and naturalism.

Textual Voice and Class

Continuing with the observation of the tenets of French naturalism in Zola’s work, it is in *L’Assommoir* that textual voice – an author’s chosen style of narration – is most readily observed. As White identifies, “Zola borrows, most clearly from Flaubert, the technique of free indirect discourse, referred to as *style indirect libre*. Rather than passively conveying the facts of the story as if some caricature of naturalism, the narrator borrows the perspectives, and indeed language, of his characters. The blurring of first- and third-person viewpoints allows the narrator to inhabit their mindset momentarily.”⁶² As is further explained, “stylistically, [Zola’s] main instrument for achieving this continuous double movement is an idiosyncratic version of free indirect speech. He invents a rampaging narrative voice that absorbs the thoughts and feelings of characters into itself and negotiates with enthusiasm between incompatible points of view, whether social, moral, or political.”⁶³

This style employed by Zola and the naturalists is a critical element to presenting reality and the truth. However, it is also put to use for commentary, especially political commentary. As White continues to explain, “this slippage between quotation and narration foregrounds the common

⁶¹ Kay, Cave, and Bowie, *A Short History of French Literature*, 249.

⁶² White, “Naturalism,” 527.

⁶³ Kay, Cave, and Bowie, *A Short History of French Literature*, 250.

verbal wealth of representative politics (in other words, democracy) and fictional representation (*la voix* meaning voice as well as vote).⁶⁴

In an effort to capture the essence of textual truth, Zola attempts to transcribe this urban vocabulary. As White observes, “In *L’Assommoir* the mismatch between radical ideas and mainstream expression is addressed in Zola’s attempt to transcribe the popular language of the urban working class.”⁶⁵ Zola was profoundly effective in this effort; however, this success was also detrimental to his writing. Specifically, in Zola’s attempt to write with the language of his characters, White notes that “so effective was such cross-class defamiliarisation that contemporary readers and critics complained immediately of the unreadability of Zola’s prose.”⁶⁶ Humorously, “to this day, editions include a glossary of terms, thereby confirming the foreignness of this margin at the heart of the Hexagon.”⁶⁷

Understanding the challenge at hand, it is difficult to truly criticize Zola for his textual effort. Again, White explains that “the written word can barely manage to keep up with the immediacy and authenticity of speech, and it is little surprise that Zola was criticised for his failure to capture the rapidly changing nuances of *la langue verte*, in some general sense, the written word alienates language from the body.”⁶⁸ However, although Zola sought for authenticity in language as a realistic depiction of life, it was also used to reinforce a basic tenet of naturalism –

⁶⁴ White, “Naturalism,” 527.

⁶⁵ White, “Naturalism,” 526.

⁶⁶ White, “Naturalism,” 526.

⁶⁷ White, “Naturalism,” 526.

⁶⁸ White, “Naturalism,” 528.

condemnation by heredity. Indeed, “Zola’s cross-class gesture of free indirect speech repunctuates the sentences to which class identity habitually condemns us.”⁶⁹

The Lurid

A very real part of depicting everyday life, which started to be developed in French naturalism, was the violent and irreverent aspects of life. For Zola, this is best identified in the work of *Thérèse Raquin*. In this novel, Hunt observes that there is given “attention to lurid or squalid subject matter, particularly focused on the aspects of human experience conceived to be base or instinctual; main characters are often perverted by uncontrollable appetites, drives, or lusts.”⁷⁰

Hemmings agrees with this assessment and adds that the “violence of this drama was something new in realism, but Zola compounded his audacity by declaring in the most uncompromising terms that he had written the novel deliberately to show characters devoid of moral scruples because they were totally motivated by their instincts; they were human beings, but they had no souls, they were, properly speaking, human animals.”⁷¹ This new radical treatment of such material was something Zola was not going to shy away from and it became a defining characteristic of his writing.

In literature at this time, the presentation of violence was not new; however, what was new was the manner in which violence was treated. As an example, in *Thérèse Raquin*, it was not that

⁶⁹ White, “Naturalism,” 527.

⁷⁰ Hunt, “Naturalism.”

⁷¹ Hemmings, “The Realist and Naturalist Movements in France,” 182-183.

Thérèse and Laurent had murdered Thérèse's husband, Camille. Instead, the unique treatment of violence in this situation was that they felt no guilt or remorse for having done so. Of this treatment, Hemmings notes that "Zola acted in the firm belief that such conscienceless obedience to the promptings of lust and destructiveness was the reality behind the façade of decent, law-abiding behaviour that social conventions had erected."⁷² In essence, as he concludes, Zola "was trying to look at humanity with the coolly dispassionate gaze of the scientist."⁷³

To clarify, in the preface to *Thérèse Raquin*, Zola wrote, "I hope it is beginning to be clear that my aim has been above all scientific... If this novel is read with care, it will be seen that each chapter studies one particular curious physiological case. I have simply conducted on two living bodies the work of dissection that surgeons perform on cadavers."⁷⁴ It was the scientific approach, which demanded such honesty in portrayal, even if it was radical and new. Zola valued this approach and dealt with the inevitable consequences. For example, Hunt states that Zola "often claimed that the lurid, pornographic subject matter of many his novels was incidental to naturalism; what counted was the method – which... shared the careful, systematic observational methods of the emerging social sciences of psychology, sociology, and anthropology."⁷⁵

The reception of such naturalism was mixed. As Hunt describes, "For audiences that consumed Zola's novels as quickly as he could write them and for critics and government censors who called naturalism "putrid literature," the graphic content of the novels was naturalism's most

⁷² Hemmings, "The Realist and Naturalist Movements in France," 183.

⁷³ Hemmings, "The Realist and Naturalist Movements in France," 183.

⁷⁴ Hemmings, "The Realist and Naturalist Movements in France," 183.

⁷⁵ Hunt, "Naturalism."

salient feature, and Zola and his publishers often faced obscenity charges in France and abroad.”⁷⁶

Environmental Factors

In addition to heredity, textual voice and depiction of everyday life as illustrated in these examples, Zola was also very concerned with an accurate depiction of environmental factors. This emphasis makes sense as it is nature and the environment that are the driving causes of heredity’s effect. However, Zola also saw it as a crucial element of his art. According to Smith, Zola’s “many expositions of his aesthetic emphasize that his accurate observation of real-life events was not an end in itself but rather a scientific basis underlying the creative nature of his art.”⁷⁷ Further, Zola stressed “the belief that he could penetrate the depths of human nature only by seeing man acting in the society in which he lived.”⁷⁸

As such, Zola often made on-site visits to the places he would later write about. As example, for *Le Ventre de Paris* he visited the Central Markets in Paris, for *Nana* it was a backstage tour for his theater scenes and for *Germinal*, it was a critical trip to Anzin and descending into the mine.⁷⁹ As Hemmings points out, Zola believed “a community has to have a community centre, which is why [he] took so much care over the details of each of his settings.”⁸⁰

⁷⁶ Hunt, “Naturalism.”

⁷⁷ Smith, “Zola, Emile.”

⁷⁸ Smith, “Zola, Emile”

⁷⁹ Hemmings, “The Realist and Naturalist Movements in France,” 188.

⁸⁰ Hemmings, “The Realist and Naturalist Movements in France,” 189.

This attention to environmental description did have an effect upon his literary writing with portrayals often preempting plot development. According to Hemmings, “It is not as though Zola ever loses touch with reality or describes what is not there; his gift was to restore the living reality of what is universally registered by the mind or eye but either left unsaid or else expressed as a dead metaphor.”⁸¹ However, as Howe puts forth, “The decadence of Zola, which has points of similarity to that of Dickens, comes through in the excesses of local episodes, the vulgarities of particular paragraphs, the flushed rhetoric with which Zola seeks to “reinforce” material that has already been presented with more than enough dramatic vitality.”⁸² After all, T.S. Eliot concluded that Dickens had the discernment of a genius to determine “exactly what, and how much, [the reader is to] feel in any given situation.”⁸³ Howe’s conclusion is that “Zola’s style aspires toward a rich and heavy impasto rather than toward a lucid line-drawing, and it is often marred by excess.”⁸⁴

Zola’s Characters

This unfortunate excess usually comes at the cost of character development, for which Zola is often criticized. As Hemmings puts it, “If one analyses Zola’s characters singly, one finds that they are sadly lacking in what is called autonomy. They rarely develop, they seldom if ever transcend their ‘given’ natures, they never surprise us.”⁸⁵ Expounding upon this Hemmings

⁸¹ Hemmings, “The Realist and Naturalist Movements in France,” 191-192.

⁸² Howe, “Zola: The Poetry of Naturalism,” 120.

⁸³ Eliot, “Reflections on Contemporary Poetry,” 151.

⁸⁴ Howe, “Zola: The Poetry of Naturalism,” 121.

⁸⁵ Hemmings, “The Realist and Naturalist Movements in France,” 188.

continues, “Zola was not, in any case, much interested in the creation of compelling human figures, outstanding or mysterious personalities...who keep the reader wondering what extraordinary adventure they will plunge into next. One never encounters, in *Les Rougon-Macquart*, a character with this kind of unpredictability.”⁸⁶

To understand how Zola could justify this treatment of characters, one must first understand how Zola viewed them. Again, it is the environment leading the charge of causality, not an individual. As such, his “individual characters may lack the power to interest us deeply, but the point is that they are never properly shown as individuals;”⁸⁷ instead, Hemmings suggests that “they are normally presented as part of a network, as members of a community, and Zola achieves lifelikeness by concentrating on the way they interact.”⁸⁸ Finally, as Hemmings concludes, “[Zola] animates [the individual characters] by showing them in conflict or forming alliances, plotting together or confiding in one another. The term ‘social novel’ takes on a new meaning, applied to Zola.”⁸⁹ This new treatment of character by Zola reinforces the scientific approach so critical to French naturalism.

⁸⁶ Hemmings, “The Realist and Naturalist Movements in France,” 188.

⁸⁷ Hemmings, “The Realist and Naturalist Movements in France,” 188.

⁸⁸ Hemmings, “The Realist and Naturalist Movements in France,” 189.

⁸⁹ Hemmings, “The Realist and Naturalist Movements in France,” 189.

Critical Reception

Reception of Heredity

A presentation of Zola and French naturalism would not be complete without an overview of his critical reception. As heredity was at the forefront of his works, so was it in the critiques. In general, the argument is made that “science exerted upon [Zola] a triple fascination: it was a matter of empirical observation; it involved making inferences and tracing invisible causal pathways; and, supremely, thanks to the recent advances of evolutionary biology, it made sense of human time across the generations.”⁹⁰ However, with a modern outlook, his heredity views may seem unfounded. “Zola’s adherence to the idea of heredity can easily seem faddish and naïve to modern readers accustomed to thinking of individual human development as an interplay between nature and nurture. But this and other organizing devices borrowed from contemporary science have real dramatic power when seen in the fictional contexts.”⁹¹ Although his “misappropriated heredity and sensationalized Darwinism” might not concur with every reader, they did bring “him closer to the world-view of tragedy than any other French writer of the nineteenth century.”⁹²

⁹⁰ Kay, Cave, and Bowie, *A Short History of French Literature*, 249.

⁹¹ Kay, Cave, and Bowie, *A Short History of French Literature*, 249.

⁹² Kay, Cave, and Bowie, *A Short History of French Literature*, 250.

Reception of the Lurid

As for his treatment of violence and the lurid, scholars are able to look deeper into his works beyond the surface of sensationalism. Hemmings asserts, “Now the clichés of nineteenth-century criticism have withered away, and the conventional view of Zola as the ‘poet of the cesspool’; the writer obsessed by the bloodshed and lust, poverty, disease and ugliness, has been largely discarded, the true import of his work has had a chance to emerge.”⁹³ As such, the purpose behind Zola’s use of the lurid extends beyond the initial element of shock; instead, it lends credibility to the natural that Zola diligently sought to portray.

Reception of the Scientific Approach

As for his scientific approach, its use stems from his drive to portray the truth – the natural. “The particular power of Zola’s visions comes not simply from his acquisitive admiration for... scientific essays of the day, but from an outraged sense that literature had been shrinking from its main responsibility. It had stopped telling the truth about the modern French state as experienced by its citizens from day to day.”⁹⁴ To tell the truth, Zola would resort to scientific methods where, according to Hemmings, he “would change certain emphases, attaching a little less importance to creative originality and considerably more to the function of art as the rival or working assistant of the natural sciences.”⁹⁵ Accordingly, as Carsaniga points out, “The Zolian

⁹³ Hemmings, “The Realist and Naturalist Movements in France,” 193.

⁹⁴ Kay, Cave, and Bowie, *A Short History of French Literature*, 248.

⁹⁵ Hemmings, “The Realist and Naturalist Movements in France,” 181.

“experimental novel” required writers to place themselves in an ideal laboratory looking patronizingly at their “human documents” as if they were specimens under a microscope, or “poring over reality.”⁹⁶ For Birch, to do so means that “Zola’s scientific ambitions exist in tension with a lyrical and impressionistic descriptive style.”⁹⁷

In conclusion, “the one who became not only the master, but the personification, of naturalism in France was Emile Zola.”⁹⁸ As Brady declares, “Zola developed an aesthetic that combined Hugo’s epic breadth and imaginative power with Balzac’s stress on the material setting and Flaubert’s relative detachment and objectivity.”⁹⁹ However, the effects of Zola’s naturalistic works would extend beyond the French literary culture and come to influence writers throughout Europe. Specifically, its exportation to Italy was received by a group of writers, which would ultimately inspire Giovanni Verga’s development of Italian literary *verismo*.

⁹⁶ Carsaniga, “Literary Realism in Italy,” 66.

⁹⁷ Birch, *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*.

⁹⁸ Cecchetti, “Verga and Verismo,” 175.

⁹⁹ Brady, “Zola, Émile,” 634.

CHAPTER TWO:
GIOVANNI VERGA AND ITALIAN LITERARY *VERISMO*

Literary Italy and the Risorgimento

Italian Risorgimento

Resurgence, revival, resurrection and rebirth: this was the goal of the Italian Risorgimento; a process leading to the unification of Italy. Though it might be argued that the struggle for unification continues today, the official and historical Risorgimento was completed in 1860. Then, on 17 March 1861, the Kingdom of Italy was officially established by the Parliament, although this act was “not of the Italian people, but of the King’s government.”¹⁰⁰ Not being of the people meant an imbalance and this misalignment meant that “the unification of the country...could not but turn several badly balanced parts into one big unbalanced whole.”¹⁰¹ Complicating the matter was the struggle between classes. The effort for unification was not the same for the varying rungs of the social class ladder of the region and only saw real support from those belonging to the higher rungs. As Carsaniga points out, “It would be wrong, nevertheless, to view the Risorgimento as a mass movement, or as a coherent movement at all. Nearly all its protagonists belonged to the educated upper and middle classes.”¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ Carsaniga, “Risorgimento.”

¹⁰¹ Carsaniga, “Realism in Italy,” 326.

¹⁰² Carsaniga, “Risorgimento.”

Opposing the upper and middle classes in this fight for unification was the peasant class of society. This class strongly resisted the very change – any change – the Risorgimento sought to transact. As Carsaniga observes, “The peasants...tended to resist change like a very sick person who finds any movement atrociously painful. Hence they handed the Bandiera brothers over to the police, slaughtered Pisacane’s expedition, and waged a bloody guerrilla warfare against the Piedmontese army that claimed more victims than the three wars of independence put together.”¹⁰³ With such violent opposition, Carsaniga admits that “some of those who wanted reforms clearly saw that the unification of the country would not in itself bring them about.”¹⁰⁴ With effective opposition prohibiting universal support, the Risorgimento – and the ideals of unity it sought to establish and though historically completed in 1860 – continued to plague the political scene for several years to come. Such was the political state of Italy.

Literary Tuscan Italian

During the Risorgimento, literature presented itself as a driving force behind the ideal of unification. In fact, the philosophy that literature itself was the unifying thread began to emerge. In his essay on realism in Italy, Carsaniga states that “there is ample evidence to suggest that national unity was more a literary concept than a deep aspiration of the Italian people, most of whom remained totally indifferent to, and unaffected by, an event in which they played no significant role.”¹⁰⁵ The reason literature could become the tool of unification was because

¹⁰³ Carsaniga, “Risorgimento.”

¹⁰⁴ Carsaniga, “Risorgimento.”

¹⁰⁵ Carsaniga, “Realism in Italy,” 326.

language represented “the only unitary tradition common to the whole peninsula, at least ever since language based largely on literary Tuscan had replaced Latin as a means of communication between cultivated people.”¹⁰⁶ The value of language was its leverage of authority among all the social classes of the Italian peninsula. As a result, Carsaniga acknowledges that the Risorgimento “had a literary language which, though used mostly in writing by a tiny minority of educated people, was recognized even by illiterates as the vehicle of a common culture, much as Latin was accepted by Catholic churchgoers everywhere as the hallowed language of their religion, even if they could not use or understand it.”¹⁰⁷

Thus, whether one could understand literary Tuscan or not was an irrelevant point. Literary Tuscan had established itself as the common denominator – the common thread – which fueled the efforts of literature to be the catalyst of unity. These efforts were crucial; for, the battle of the Risorgimento continued well after the process had been declared completed. Consequently, for those seeking real unity, “Italian literary tradition came to be looked on as the symbol of a national unity still to be achieved and, . . . it was seen first as the means through which the unification of the country could be accomplished, and later as one of the principal agents of its accomplishment.”¹⁰⁸ So strong was the use of literature to forge unity that “many, even among the romantic writers who were in favour of social and political reform, consciously or unconsciously resisted linguistic change and, with the notable exception of Manzoni, failed to

¹⁰⁶ Carsaniga, “Realism in Italy,” 326.

¹⁰⁷ Carsaniga, “Risorgimento.”

¹⁰⁸ Carsaniga, “Realism in Italy,” 327.

bring new life to their literary medium.”¹⁰⁹ Regardless if the fight for unity was being won, literature had established itself as a powerful and influential medium.

Italian Illiteracy

Although literature was at the forefront of society wielding its power and influence, the illiteracy of the Italian peninsula had a grave effect upon the creation of literature. Anyone can look at art, sculpture, architecture or listen to music and be influenced from the experience; however, this is not true of literature – one must be able to read.¹¹⁰ In the Italy of 1871, only 16% of southern Italians were literate and this, consequently, meant that there was not a huge market for literature. This lack of readers drastically reduced the total number of books published because there were no buyers. As an example, from 1847-1899 there were 3,500 titles published of the Italian *romanzo*. Compare this with the French counterpart, which saw 25,660 publications during this period of time in a country where literacy was approximately 70%.

Further, it is argued that this lack of readership reduced what could be written. An absence of mass readership often created a gap between writers and the public.¹¹¹ This rift, as Carsaniga argues, emerges because “authors no longer have full access to the rich cultural storehouse of

¹⁰⁹ Carsaniga, “Realism in Italy,” 327.

¹¹⁰ Carsaniga, “Realism in Italy,” 328.

¹¹¹ Carsaniga, “Realism in Italy,” 328.

experiences, ideas, emotions, and shared aspirations on which they necessarily draw when writing their books.”¹¹²

Literature and Reality

Another negative consequence of illiteracy on the creation of literature was that authors could only write about what those who could read would understand or appreciate. This was stifling to the creation of Italian literature. As a result, Italian writers tended to “form a restricted, elitist caste of intellectuals, using an artificial language, cut off from the rest of the population and therefore insensitive to their needs.”¹¹³ This insensitivity became so perverse that the leading writers of the time, regardless of which literary school they belonged to – realism, classicism, romanticism, etc. – sought to reunite literature with reality. Supporting this claim, G. H. McWilliam identifies Verga – a realist – and Carducci – a classicist – as “total opposites in many ways” but together were “both conscious of the necessity to re-establish the relationship between literature and reality.”¹¹⁴ It is with this background that the influence of Zola and French naturalism were taking root in the Italian literary schools.

¹¹² Carsaniga, “Realism in Italy,” 328-329.

¹¹³ Carsaniga, “Realism in Italy,” 329.

¹¹⁴ McWilliam, “Verga and ‘Verismo’,” 11.

Origins of Italian *Verismo*

Influence of French Naturalism

The vision of capturing reality in literature was at the core of Zola's work and his French *naturaliste* literary movement. No surprise then that the Italian writers looked to him as a means for reestablishing literature with reality in their native works. As Smith confirms, "French writers in general, but Flaubert in particular and Zola perhaps most of all, influenced late nineteenth-century Italian fiction a great deal, if not always in straightforward ways."¹¹⁵ This desire to capture reality in their literary works began to inspire many of the Italian writers and, in Cecchetti's view, what they were "unconsciously looking for was thought to have finally been accomplished by the dynamic young French novelist [Zola]."¹¹⁶

Despite the stronghold of literary Tuscan, French naturalism was having its effect upon the writers of Italy. As Martin Greenberg identifies, "This was a time in which the young writers of Italy, where the old rhetorical traditions were still strong, were responding excitedly to the new ideas of French realism and naturalism exemplified by Flaubert, the Goncourts, and Zola."¹¹⁷ First, some of the new ideas of naturalism making their way into the literary works of Italy were the concepts of impersonality and detachment from the writer's specimen or characters. It was, in essence, the strict scientific approach, which Zola religiously adhered to. Second, the effects of the environment were now being considered in the new Italian literary works. From naturalism, this was the portrayal of man as "viewed from [the] standpoint of [human reality's]

¹¹⁵ Smith, "Naturalism and Anti-Naturalism in Italy," 152.

¹¹⁶ Cecchetti, "Verga and Verismo," 175.

¹¹⁷ Greenberg, "Giovanni Verga's Verismo," 18.

own irreversible deterministic laws of heredity and environment.”¹¹⁸ Third, and perhaps most important, was the necessity of truth and reality in literature. Thus, what Zola began in France with naturalism developed into realism in Italy.

Speaking of the literary change and influence of naturalism, Cecchetti states that “all this has a familiar ring, for it repeats some of the fundamental tenets of French naturalism as they were assimilated by the writers of the Italian *verismo* school.”¹¹⁹ Thus, influenced by Zola and his movement, the Italian *verismo* school was born.

Consequently, *verismo* “must then be defined as the offspring of the marriage between pre-existing realism and naturalism.”¹²⁰ However, observing the natural effects of heredity on this literary child, Cecchetti continues his observation suggesting that “like all offspring, [Italian *verismo*] soon showed its independence from the parents, even if its personality continued to be marked by some of the most conspicuous characteristics of both.”¹²¹ Although the influence of French naturalism was real, it was not – ironically – deterministic. Though influenced by it, Italian *verismo* would evolve independently of naturalism in its own direction.

¹¹⁸ Cecchetti, “Verga and Verismo,” 175.

¹¹⁹ Cecchetti, “Verga and Verismo,” 173.

¹²⁰ Cecchetti, “Verga and Verismo,” 176.

¹²¹ Cecchetti, “Verga and Verismo,” 176-177.

Independence From Naturalism

The literary ideas of naturalism were coming in from France and were influencing the Italian writers. However, instead of a strict new theory requiring absolute adherence, the Italian writers saw a presentation of new ideas with many corridors of exploration. Indeed, “we cannot overlook the fact that the young writers grouped in Milan found more direct and more immediate encouragement to try different avenues in the ideas coming from France.”¹²² These different avenues meant variations and gradients of naturalism as they are applied to *verismo*. As a result, Cecchetti affirms that even though the “Italian veristi believed in some of the principles of naturalism but, with the possible exception of the theory of impersonality, or detachment, they did not make any special attempt to apply them.”¹²³ They did not see their role as merely applying rules. They acknowledged the influence and sought to use this influence to forge toward new territory.

In considering the origins of Italian *verismo*, it is necessary to understand some of the departures – literary liberties – which the Italian writers took. First is the observation of McWilliam that “*verismo* is the Italian counterpart of French naturalism, from which however it differs in one or two vital particulars. Above all, the practitioners of *verismo* concerned themselves less with the morbid and extraordinary aspects of human behaviour and concentrated on the presentation of the day-to-day affairs of ordinary people.”¹²⁴ This presentation of day-to-day affairs will become a foundation of the *verismo* works.

¹²² Cecchetti, “Verga and Verismo,” 175.

¹²³ Cecchetti, “Verga and Verismo,” 176.

¹²⁴ McWilliam, “Verga and ‘Verismo’,” 11.

There is also the consideration of the effects of heredity, which Zola gave prominence to as he used it for his unifying thread in his *Les Rougon-Macquart* cycle. In Italian *verismo*, the characters are not driven nor realized by the effects of heredity. In place of heredity is found the effects of economic laws. However, more contrastingly is the emphasis given to veristic characters for improvement – achieving more and surpassing the previous generation. This replacement of the effects of heredity with economic laws and a belief of self-betterment are supported by Sergio Pacifici as he argues that Verga’s “vision of a society whose structure, drives, and goals can largely be measured by irresistible economic laws and by a persistent human hunger for material improvement.”¹²⁵ Consequently, *verismo* was influenced by naturalism because environment does have an effect upon mankind; however, in naturalism it was an environment of heredity and deterministic laws, while in *verismo* that environment is one of economic laws and a drive for self-improvement.

However, let it not be misunderstood, both in naturalism and *verismo*, external laws are at play and are viable determining factors in the lives of the characters. For example, in Verga’s *I Malavoglia*, the absolute requirement for the characters’ understanding of their environment and its effect upon them is critically stressed. As Carsaniga brings to light, “The mainspring of the story is not social betterment, since the struggle for material needs is motivated not by ambition but by penury. In fact the moral of the story is that human beings will not realize their dignity through social climbing but only through loyalty to their milieu – through a keener class consciousness.”¹²⁶ This keener class consciousness is an understanding of their environment. This inevitably of the environment – hereditary or economic – is observed throughout veristic

¹²⁵ Pacifici, “The Tragic World of Verga’s Primitives,” 4.

¹²⁶ Carsaniga, “Literary Realism in Italy.” 67.

literature. Speaking of Verga's work, McWilliam also identifies that "with few exceptions, [the characters]...are the victims of life itself, which Verga sees as inevitably tragic and full of suffering."¹²⁷

Another streak of independence taken by the Italian *veristi* was their lack of strict adherence to the scientific approach taken by Zola. As Darby Tench argues, the *veristi* were just not as scientific in their approach to the point that they "would eventually find fault with the "hyperscientism" of Zola and the other French naturalists."¹²⁸ However, this eventuality had to play out, which meant that this method was tried and tested by Verga and the *veristi*. As Smith puts forth, "The adjective naturalist may properly be applied to one part of Verga's oeuvre, in the sense that it is informed by a claim to advance a scientific understanding of its subject matter which is, in the broadest of senses, this heterogeneous quality of late nineteenth-century Italian society."¹²⁹ The difference between the two schools lies in the details. Zola wrote by utilizing a scientific approach. Verga, influenced by Zola, did not write by this approach, but also did not deny trying to give a scientific – informed, educated – explanation of the events, which transpired in his characters' lives.

A final observation of the Italian *veristi* and their independence from Zola and French naturalism is that of political purpose. The French naturalist sought aggressively for political reform. With the events of the fall of the Second Empire and the rise of the Third Republic, there was a plethora of political material available for commentary. Also, the French writers had the

¹²⁷ McWilliam, "Verga and 'Verismo'," 13.

¹²⁸ Tench, "The Real, the Ideal and the True," 299.

¹²⁹ Smith, "Naturalism and Anti-Naturalism in Italy," 152.

advantage of an old and well-established country, France. Yes, the political scene was changing, but the country had deep-rooted traditions and culture.

This was not the situation for the Italian *veristi*. Writing during the aftermath struggles of the Risorgimento, there was a definite political reform taking place. However, for the most part, the *veristi* chose not to use their literary works for political commentary. There are, however, some noted exceptions of politically-motivated veristic works. For example, *Inchiesta in Sicilia* (1876) by Leopoldo Franchetti and Sidney Sonnino is a series of essays about the hardships of Sicily's population, which sought political reform. In addition to these essays are the works by Pasquale Villari: *Le Lettere meridionali* (1875) and *La filosofia positiva e il metodo storico* (1866).

As established previously, Italian literature held a place of authority, power and influence in the post-Risorgimento years. Perhaps it was for this very reason that the *veristi* chose not to utilize their literature for political influence; instead, they wanted to show a complete independence from the current literary scene as they established their new art. As Tench points out, "The Italian realists' rejection of political idealism operated under similar historical constraints. The refusal to incorporate political discourse into their discussion of the Real and the Ideal stemmed from their insistence on the modernity of their art: the new novel of the contemporary society had no room for the idealistic and hyperpatriotic art of the Risorgimento."¹³⁰ Speaking specifically of Verga, Greenberg observes "Verga was an Italian patriot, liberal in his political sentiments like many another. But unlike many another, as a writer, he ignores all questions of

¹³⁰ Tench, "The Real, the Ideal and the True," 302.

reform, amelioration, politics, desirable social change. His Sicily is eternal.”¹³¹ Such was the way of the *veristi*.

To round off a thorough discussion of the pathway of independence from French naturalism, which the *veristi* sought, one must consider how far this streak of independence extended. In other words, what was the depth and degree of naturalism’s influence upon the Italian *veristi*? Cecchetti makes the argument that the “works of the *veristi* turned out to be so different in spirit as well as in form from those of Zola that his actual influence on them was rather limited.”¹³² Was Zola’s influence truly limited? One might argue that it was limited by not being wholly implemented – unchanged by the *veristi*. Yet, one must consider the growth of the new genre. Whereas the final output of Italian *verismo* may not exactly or perfectly adhere to the tenets of French naturalism, this final output was an evolutionary growth from naturalism’s influence. Even Cecchetti ultimately concedes, “If anything, in his mind [Verga] was fusing traditional realism with naturalism.”¹³³

Verismo Defined

Having established the influence of Zola and French naturalism upon the Italian literary scene, it becomes necessary to understand the *verismo* movement on its own merits. The method of writing in which Zola engaged – French naturalism – and that of Verga and Capuana – *verismo* –

¹³¹ Greenberg, “Giovanni Verga’s *Verismo*,” 24.

¹³² Cecchetti, “Verga and *Verismo*,” 176.

¹³³ Cecchetti, “Verga and *Verismo*,” 177.

fall under the broad category of realism. Realism in literature reflects the “artist’s intention of modeling the artwork on life as it actually is.”¹³⁴ As realism has presented itself on the literary stage throughout history in many forms, the Italian writers at this point sought delineation. For example, Cecchetti points out how “it is interesting that [the Italian *veristi*] did not even call themselves naturalists, but simple ‘neo-realists’ (which may be an accurate translation of the term veristic).”¹³⁵ Consequently, *verismo* “was the new name given to traditional realism for the purpose of revitalizing it; it simply meant ‘true to life’.”¹³⁶

This new style of writing came to the Italian literary scene in the late 1870s. Although realism had existed before, many of the *veristi* claimed their new style and technique to be more of a social reform, in contrast to a formal or technical reform. This social reform will be detailed more extensively as the specific techniques of the *veristi* are discussed. However, at this time, let it be understood that the *veristi* sought a drastic change from what the readers of northern Italy were accustomed to. Yes, style did argumentatively change; but, the social aspect of their writings were powerfully significant as the veristic authors lead their audiences to the far away provinces of southern Italy – Sicily.

With *verismo*, realism was to take on a high-definition view. The reality of the *veristi* was to become more real than reality itself. Tench supports this claim stating that, “Verismo aspires not to a mimetic reflection of reality, but rather to creating, by way of art or “form” its quintessential

¹³⁴ Carsaniga, “Literary Realism in Italy.” 61.

¹³⁵ Cecchetti, “Verga and Verismo,” 176.

¹³⁶ Cecchetti, “Verga and Verismo,” 173.

counterpart, more real than the Real itself.”¹³⁷ Further, as Carsaniga identifies, this search for authentic reality was “rooted” by an “aspiration towards...the beginnings of the novel as an art form.”¹³⁸

***Verismo* as a Reaction Against Romanticism**

Risorgimento’s Literary Language

Literature was meant to be the unifying element of the Italian Risorgimento. It was the tool by which the Italian peninsula and its diverse cultures and people were to unite solitarily in a single Italian country. Specifically, it was literary Tuscan that was at the forefront, with its acceptance by both the literate and illiterate as the official peninsular language. As such, for this literary tradition to endure, it meant keeping the same high-brow vocabulary and writing style employed by romanticism in all its shades. Recall from earlier that “romantic writers who were in favour of social and political reform...resisted linguistic change and...failed to bring new life to their literary medium.”¹³⁹ It was the repetition of the old, without change.

However, the *veristi* did not fight against unification; but more importantly, they did not actively seek it. Therefore, if literature and, specifically literary Tuscan, are to be the rallying cry for unification, then to embrace them would mean literary support for the Risorgimento. However, not desiring to further promote the romantic ideals and the cause of unification, the first

¹³⁷ Trench, “The Real, the Ideal and the True,” 303.

¹³⁸ Carsaniga, “Literary Realism in Italy,” 63.

¹³⁹ Carsaniga, “Realism in Italy,” 327.

departure for the *veristi* was from literature promoting unification, which employed romanticism's literary Tuscan. In essence, the language needed to change and the *veristi* were the catalyst for the ensuing change.

McWilliam highlights the very change that took place and identifies the *veristi* as the ones leading the charge. He writes, "In the 1870's, the literature of Italy underwent a major transformation, which can be described in broad terms as a reaction against the romanticism of Manzoni and his followers and a new concern with realism."¹⁴⁰ At the crux of this change was literary Tuscan, which was, according to the romantics, to be the unifying element – not the tool of change. The connection between literary Tuscan, reaction against romanticism and the concern with realism is essentially that of vocabulary. As such, Cecchetti states that *verismo* "stood in opposition to the meaningless, worn-out fantasies of late Romanticism."¹⁴¹

Romanticism's Vocabulary

Indeed, the vocabulary of romanticism was worn out. To the *veristi*, it lacked originality and any representation of truth; or, that which is real. The lack of originality came from the repetition of trite catchphrases and expressions, which were commonly found in the romantics' writings.

Carsaniga explains this plight stating that "all writers in the peninsula had a common medium of expression at their disposal and more or less fixed terms of linguistic reference whereby to solve

¹⁴⁰ McWilliam, "Verga and 'Verismo'," 10.

¹⁴¹ Cecchetti, "Verga and Verismo," 173.

technical and stylistic problems.”¹⁴² It was these fixed terms of linguistic reference, which the *veristi* sought to abandon. For example, the *veristi* works had a breadth and depth of linguistic reference unknown previously by the romantics. Speaking of *L'amante di Gramigna* by Verga, Smith explains that “those features of texts...that underscore the pretense that they are products of oral tradition therefore actually have an aesthetic density whose enduring effect has been to distinguish them from the more commercial literature of their day.”¹⁴³ Consequently, the reaction of the *veristi* against romanticism began with a clear departure from its literary Tuscan vocabulary.

Romanticism's Rules

The vocabulary of literary Tuscan was not the only trap of romanticism that the *veristi* sought to avoid. There were other literary rules, which they found to both stifle and constrict their creativity and effort for representation of the truth. It was reacting against these rules that led the *veristi* into uncharted territory. Cecchetti supports this claim asserting that “during the middle of the nineteenth century, realism became popular in various European countries, especially in France and in Italy, where, in spite of the Romantic movement (or perhaps because of it), the continuing tradition of set literary rules had become a stifling trap.”¹⁴⁴

¹⁴² Carsaniga, “Realism in Italy,” 331-332.

¹⁴³ Smith, “Naturalism and Anti-Naturalism in Italy,” 159.

¹⁴⁴ Cecchetti, “Verga and Verismo,” 173-174.

These traps were most apparent to the *veristi* with regard to character development. The romantic movement canonized a small set of character types, from which its writers would employ in their novels. Limited to the number and type of characters, and, the predetermined ways in which they must react, the *veristi* were left feeling constricted and coerced by romanticism's ideals. Pacifici emphasizes this trap by describing Verga as one not intending to "formulate an ideal technique but rather to underscore the fact, . . . that, in order to sound authentic, real, lived, the novelist would have to do away with his customary clumsy treatments that made his characters puppets rather than independent creatures."¹⁴⁵ Romanticism and its rules created puppets; the *veristi* sought authentic characters.

Romanticism's Fatness

What would arguably become a prominent characteristic of *verismo* is the economy with which Verga wrote. Romanticism had created a breed of writers who were gluttonous and indulged in fatness, which is characteristically observable in the writings of François-René Chateaubriand (1768-1848) and Victor Hugo (1802-1885). Greenberg describes it this way, "The nineteenth century on the whole was long-winded, slow-paced, descriptive, achieving its masterpieces by a fullness (often fatness) of exposition."¹⁴⁶ Contrastingly, Greenberg describes Verga's style as "the way of brevity, an intense abruptness striving for absolute impersonality – because any trace of the author's presence was "the mark of original sin."¹⁴⁷ This same viewpoint is echoed by

¹⁴⁵ Pacifici, "The Tragic World of Verga's Primitives," 13.

¹⁴⁶ Greenberg, "Giovanni Verga's Verismo," 19.

¹⁴⁷ Greenberg, "Giovanni Verga's Verismo," 19.

McWilliam. He confirms, “The wordy descriptive passages and lengthy moral considerations of the Romantic novelists were to be entirely eschewed and replaced, as far as possible, by dialogue.”¹⁴⁸ Thus it was with the *veristi* – economy of words.

To summarize, the effects of the *veristi* reacting against romanticism is observable in all the defining characteristics of the veristic art form. The romantics would employ traditional literary Tuscan with its high-brow vocabulary and worn out phraseology. In its place, the *veristi* utilized common, everyday language, which was reminiscent of oral tradition. As a result, any political statement was withdrawn. The *veristi* did not fight against unification, but their new literature was not to fight for it either. Further, where the romantics would employ standard bourgeois, classical or mythological characters, the *veristi* sought for the authentic characters who could move freely from their puppeteer. Lastly, the structure of the novel changed and the fatness of the romantics was cut down. The *veristi* employed an amazingly proficient economy of words; leaving in their wake, no mark of the author. Over time, this reaction against romanticism strengthened, culminating in the works of Verga.

Giovanni Verga and the Veristic Writers

Primary Veristic Writers

On a very macro scale, all major Italian writers of the second half of the nineteenth century and beginning of twentieth century were affected by verismo.¹⁴⁹ However, as it is with any

¹⁴⁸ McWilliam, “Verga and ‘Verismo’,” 11.

movement, prominent and primary authors emerge, providing definitive definition to the new style. The same is true for that of *verismo*. The first of the literary *veristi* was debatably Alessandro Manzoni (1785-1873). Writing before *verismo* was ever considered a proper movement, he is argued to be the first and greatest of the *veristi* because he was the most genuine.¹⁵⁰ His most notorious work was *I Promessi sposi* (1827). Manzoni viewed the underprivileged as those following a course cultivating the Christian virtues of resignation and political non-involvement. In opposition to the political non-involvement of the lower social classes, Manzoni professed the political power of the bourgeois and made argument for their supremacy. He accomplished this through his patriotic messages and his support of the development of a unified Italian language. These characteristics alone would separate him unequivocally with the later *veristi*; but, his genuineness gave breadth to reality and may qualify him as the first *verista*.

A second prominent figure on the veristic literary scene was Francesco de Sanctis (1817-1883). According to Cecchetti, de Sanctis was credited with promoting realism and its approach to literature. However, de Sanctis refused to ever accept the label of *verismo* for his works. Instead, he chose to label them as *il reale*.¹⁵¹ Other Italians belonging to the *verismo* literary school included: Gaetano Carlo Chelli (1847-1904), Salvatore Farina (1846-1918), Matilde Serao (1856-1927) and Federico de Roberto (1861-1927). De Roberto was seen more as the third person in the trinity of Italian *veristi* with Luigi Capuana (1839-1915) and Giovanni Verga (1840-1922) as the primary progenitors.

¹⁴⁹ Cecchetti, "Verga and Verismo," 173.

¹⁵⁰ Carsaniga, "Realism in Italy," 323.

¹⁵¹ Cecchetti, "Verga and Verismo," 174.

Capuana, even with his veristic literary output, is considered “the main spokesman for verismo;” in that, “he expressed in theory what Verga managed to achieve in practice.”¹⁵² Consequently, Tench argues that Capuana was received more as the “primary theorist” of *verismo* than as its transactor; however, he was considered “an influential member of the “new generation.””¹⁵³ As Carsaniga highlights, “Today the importance of Capuana appears limited to his critical work, largely, if not exclusively, because of the impact it made on Verga; and Verga stands out from the herd of minor veristi precisely because, in his artistic practice, he was often able to go beyond the theoretical principles he had learned from his friend.”¹⁵⁴ In conjunction with this argument, Carsaniga proceeds to make the claim that there was really only one writer in the Italian veristic camp, Giovanni Verga.¹⁵⁵

Verga’s Biographical Information

Giovanni Verga was born 2 September 1840 on the eastern coast of Sicily in Catania. His life as a novelist experienced a career spanning from 1861 past the turn of the century to 1902. Unfortunately, his career stopped two decades prior to his death in 1922. Among this vast time span of more than 40 years, the majority of his writing occurred during the decade of 1878-1888. As Pacifici rightfully identifies, it was during this single decade that “the best of [Verga’s] fiction – consisting of a respectable number of short stories and two novels – [were]

¹⁵² Cecchetti, “Verga and Verismo,” 177.

¹⁵³ Tench, “The Real, the Ideal and the True,” 301.

¹⁵⁴ Carsaniga, “Realism in Italy,” 342-343.

¹⁵⁵ Carsaniga, “Realism in Italy,” 330.

produced.”¹⁵⁶ The success realized by Verga during this time period was prepared during his time in Florence and Milan, which he first departed for in 1865 at the age of 25.

Journeying from Sicily to the northern part of the Italian peninsula meant a change of life for the young novelist. This change was deeply accentuated – and his life influenced – by his association with the *scapigliatura*, which he joined in northern Italy. Ann Caesar describes the *scapigliatura* as “a collective name given to a loose-knit, numerically fluctuating group of writers, journalists, and artists who lived and worked in Milan in the years immediately following the Unification of Italy in 1860.”¹⁵⁷ This society took the name of *scapigliatura*, which derives from the Italian *scapigliato* meaning disheveled or unkempt. This appearance of being disheveled undoubtedly extended beyond their physical appearance and into their philosophies, theories and practices, which drew attention to their forward-thinking and progressive mentality. Caesar appropriately describes them as “young patriots between 20 and 35 years old, independent in thought and lifestyle, restless, living in a city from which they feel excluded but of which they form the avant-garde.”¹⁵⁸

Yet, this disheveled appearance perhaps also drew from their electric approach to art; in that, they were not united in their artistic practices. Instead, “what united them aesthetically were aspirations...[as] they shared a common desire to de-provincialize Italian culture, which was furthered by their creative receptivity to literatures from abroad.”¹⁵⁹ This influence to literary practices outside the realms of the Italian peninsula was especially significant for young Verga.

¹⁵⁶ Pacifici, “The Tragic World of Verga’s Primitives,” 4.

¹⁵⁷ Caesar, “Scapigliatura.”

¹⁵⁸ Caesar, “Scapigliatura.”

¹⁵⁹ Caesar, “Scapigliatura.”

Exposure to literature beyond the stifled romanticism seeking a united Italy meant a broadened horizon. This horizon was stretched, especially when influenced by the literature coming from France – Zola’s naturalism.

Verga’s Two Careers

However, this stretching took time as Verga slowly grew into the veristic genius he is now credited with being. In fact, upon examination of Verga’s complete set of writings, it is clear that he really had two distinctly different careers as a writer. His first career may adequately be labeled as his youthful production. This career begins in 1861 with his historical novel, *I Carbonari della Montagna*. This novel is uncharacteristically political in nature and patriotic as it concentrates on the secret society which pledged allegiance to the ideas of the French Revolution. As McWilliam observes, “It is quite untypical of his later work, for it is an historical novel with patriotic overtones – in fact, a novel tailored to the contemporary Risorgimento taste for history, adventure and heroism in literature.”¹⁶⁰ A second novel, *Sulle laguna*, published in 1863 bears similar characteristics and critique.

It is readily observed in Verga’s early works, as Gregory Lucente comments, that Verga “began his literary career writing elegantly stylized novels of romance, illicit desire, and adventure.”¹⁶¹ These stories were typical of the common novels of romanticism produced at this time in Italy. For example, the characters were heroes drawn from either the bourgeois, aristocracy or the

¹⁶⁰ McWilliam, “Verga and ‘Verismo’,” 6.

¹⁶¹ Lucente, “Verga, Giovanni,” 593.

upper middle class; characters which would represent self-portraits of the mainstream consumers of these novels. At times, the characters would extend to pseudo-intellectuals or would-be artists; or, even spineless human beings. Pacifici summarizes this character set as those who “move in a world that is the civilized world of Verga himself, a world of inane talk, trite events, ridiculous passions, exaggerated mannerisms, immature behavior.”¹⁶²

Verga’s plots would also follow the well-established storyline of romantic writing. His typical plots may be described as the following:

Generally speaking, the typical hero of the early Verga is always falling in love with a woman older than himself, invariably attracted by her magnetic personality and power of seduction. The attraction, at first seemingly innocent, becomes a sentimental tie and soon blossoms into a full-fledged love affair, complete with the inevitable sexual fulfillment and the equally inevitable boredom that follows the consummation of love. At times, the relationship proves to be too much for one of the loves, one of whom (usually the heroine) dies of tuberculosis or of a mysterious malady; less frequently we have a suicide.¹⁶³

As typical of the romantic novels, the plots stay the same, with only a small change of characters and scene. It is, in fact, a very small change of scene for these novels. The social setting is one known to the civilized world. There is nothing exotic or different, which invites predictable behavior with characters acting not because they want to, but because they have to. Indeed, they are puppets. Unfortunately, as Pacifici concludes, “After a while [the characters and events] become indistinguishable from the personages and events of the previous books.”¹⁶⁴ McWilliam writes a similar discontent stating that “these early novels, reflecting the ideas and mores of the

¹⁶² Pacifici, “The Tragic World of Verga’s Primitives,” 8.

¹⁶³ Pacifici, “The Tragic World of Verga’s Primitives,” 6.

¹⁶⁴ Pacifici, “The Tragic World of Verga’s Primitives,” 6.

Bohemian milieu of Florence and Milan with which Verga was in daily contact, abound in stock characters, bogus psychological notions, and artificial situations.”¹⁶⁵

In a clear and deliberate manner, Verga chose to move away from these stock characters and artificial situations in what would become known as his second literary career, and the one for which he is best known and respected. The manner of Verga’s writing changes from stock romanticism to grim and harsh-world writings. This change illustrates the influence of Zola and French naturalism upon Verga, as well as the beginning of his veristic writings. Speaking of this transition, Greenberg describes Verga as “a hitherto mediocre writer [who] renounces a shallow subject matter and a traditional style to write a series of vivid, violent short stories and two novels about the abysmally poor, primitive Sicilian life in the midst of which he had grown up.”¹⁶⁶

The first departure Verga took from romanticism into the realm of *verismo* was in 1874. It was in this year that Verga saw the publication of his first novel in a new style: *Nedda* (Nedda: A Sicilian Sketch). Only 20 pages in length, *Nedda* is, “from the purely stylistic point of view...easily classifiable as a story in the tradition of clear, unpretentious short narratives.”¹⁶⁷

Though brief in length, *Nedda* was a milestone in the transitory journey Verga was undergoing.

A major departure for Verga in this composition was the extreme change in social setting. No longer would Verga write of bejeweled women, the affluent bourgeois life or the decadent

¹⁶⁵ McWilliam, “Verga and ‘Verismo’,” 8.

¹⁶⁶ Greenberg, “Giovanni Verga’s Verismo,” 18-19.

¹⁶⁷ Pacifici, “The Tragic World of Verga’s Primitives,” 8.

passions of the flesh. These had been discarded for a world of peasants who were to be exploited by landowners, oppressed by poverty and suffocated by the realities of life. As Pacifici points out, the sweet fragrances of the perfumed ladies of the north had now been replaced with the harsh smells of onions, black bread and *minestra*. The elegant gowns dissolved to dirty rags as pleasure boredom became unknown; now, it was pain, toil and work. The landscape had changed with the characters from the hurried cities of the north to the unforgiving landscape of the Sicilian island. The only joy to be found for Verga's characters was from finding work, which would yield money for the necessities of life – food and shelter.

Amid these drastic changes and harsh truthful circumstances, new heroes emerge. As Pacifici identifies, "Their heroism is in their striving to find the strength to endure a life that offers little joy but imposes continual toil and suffering. Theirs is the heroism which in their most desperate and bleak moments permits them to find a stature and dignity possible to the characters of Greek tragedies."¹⁶⁸ Characters with a stature comparable to the characters of Greek tragedies is an achievement Verga never found in his romantic writings, but which was now emerging as he entered this new literary journey.

With *Nedda* as a departure point, Verga continued to develop his veristic proficiency.

Accordingly, future works were published, which demonstrated his increased maturity for this style. Such works include the series of stories titled, *Vita dei campi* (Life in the Fields).

Published in 1880, this series includes eight short stories, with the most powerful being *La Lupe* (The She-Wolf), *Rosso malpelo* (Evil Hair) and *Ieli il pastore* (The Herdboy). Speaking of *Vita*

¹⁶⁸ Pacifici, "The Tragic World of Verga's Primitives," 10.

dei campi, McWilliam observes that Verga “wrote a number of verismo compositions, some of which were brief sketches, others fully-finished short stories and still others taking the form of semi-confidential letters to friends in which he begins by setting forth some theoretical principles about his art or general observations on life, and then exemplifies and rounds off the piece with a brief story.”¹⁶⁹ A following success for Verga was *Novelle rusticane* (*Little Novels of Sicily*), which was finished in 1883.

However, his most popular works over the span of his literary career were to be part of a five-novel series titled, *I vinti*. Unfortunately, Verga only managed to complete the first two novels of the series, which were *I Malavoglia* (1881) and *Mastro-don Gesualdo* (1889).

Acknowledging the presence and success of Verga’s second – veristic – career, Lucente confirms Verga’s “literary reputation rests predominantly on four works published in the 1880’s, including two collections of stories, *Vita dei campi* and *Little Novels of Sicily*, and two novels, *The House by the Medlar Tree*, and *Mastro-don Gesualdo*, all of which are masterpieces of realist prose.”¹⁷⁰

The characteristics of his writings in this second career were remarkably different to those of his youthful production. Pessimism came to dominate the frustrations of his characters, who were constantly frustrated with an unfulfilled yearning for happiness and well-being. Furthermore, as if taken from the philosophy of Zola and determinism, Verga’s characters were inescapably doomed to a tragic fate. Pacifici summarizes these exact sentiments stating that “actually, everything Verga wrote seems to be characterized by the same pessimism, the same frustrated

¹⁶⁹ McWilliam, “Verga and ‘Verismo’,” 13-14.

¹⁷⁰ Lucente, “Verga, Giovanni,” 593.

yearning for happiness and well-being, the same tragic fate to which most, if indeed not all, of his characters are doomed.”¹⁷¹

Another characteristic came to prominence as Verga continued his harsh veristic writings. Specifically, Verga began making many comparisons to animals and even stressed their importance. It became, after all, the animals who would “poignantly and silently reenact the unbelievably hopeless activity of Verga’s peasants.”¹⁷² For example, the peasants of Verga’s sketches would live like dogs and work like donkeys – the lowest of the animal hierarchy. Further, the characters Verga described were like horses who “exist purely to work the land” or sheep who “take to pasture...and must exhibit meekness of spirit and restrained behavior.”¹⁷³ One illustrative example of the relationship between Verga’s characters and animals is found in *La Lupe*. Pina, who is named after the wolf, is a treacherous, proud animal with allegiance only to itself. Yet, as McWilliam observes, “In all of Verga’s mature novels and short stories, his bleakly pessimistic appraisal of human life is so prominently displayed that it would be almost unbearable if Verga did not possess a marked capacity for humour.”¹⁷⁴ Amidst it all, Verga was able to find appropriate balance in his weighing of reality.

Having firmly and decidedly committed to this new literary style, Verga became a master of *verismo* and defined its characteristics through his novels. In all things, his foremost responsibility was to present the truth, the real and the unadulterated. For Verga, this was accomplished through specific techniques, some of which were adaptations from Zola and

¹⁷¹ Pacifici, “The Tragic World of Verga’s Primitives,” 5.

¹⁷² Pacifici, “The Tragic World of Verga’s Primitives,” 11.

¹⁷³ Pacifici, “The Tragic World of Verga’s Primitives,” 11.

¹⁷⁴ McWilliam, “Verga and ‘Verismo’,” 12.

naturalism and others were original to Verga. However, despite their origins, each of these techniques became so well defined and manipulated by Verga, that they truly became his own. Not only did they become his, but they became the foundational landmarks of Italian *verismo*. Specifically, the following techniques, which will be discussed in detail, came to define veristic literature: Choice of character, literary text, use of a silent author, dramatic structure, engagement of the extreme and offensive and social milieu.

Foundational Elements of Italian *Verismo*

Character Choice

As noted earlier with the discussion of *Nedda*, Verga departed from the standard characters of romanticism for the peasants of Sicily. The decision to do so was driven by outside factors, as well as personal associations of Verga. The first primary influencing outside factor was that of the Italian Risorgimento. The Risorgimento was to unite the Italian peninsula into a single country; but, in fact, this ideal was held only among the upper and middle classes.

Consequently, there was the peasant class, which needed to be addressed if the peninsula were to be concretely brought together. As Tench observes, “The Risorgimento was over, and its ideals had no place to go – except Sicily, Calabria, Puglia, anywhere there was rank poverty to be documented and denounced, before the people and parliament of the new Italian Kingdom.”¹⁷⁵

Accordingly, what had been perhaps a forgotten segment of society among the pro-Risorgimento northern Italians, was now coming onto the political horizon.

¹⁷⁵ Tench, “The Real, the Ideal and the True,” 299.

Indeed, the opinions of the peasants in the south needed to be codified within the intellectual circles of the post-Risorgimento peninsula. Greenberg addresses this need and proposes that there are two ways in which the south and its peasants may be considered. The first option is to consider the “Italian south as fascinatingly picturesque, full of the romantic charm of a remote part of the world left behind by time.”¹⁷⁶ The operative term here is: remote. It was a place mostly unknown to those in the north of the peninsula and subsequently could be depicted and painted in a favorable, but perhaps, misleading light. To do so would have taken a romanticized approach bearing away from the realities, which plagued the south.

The second alternative was to regard the south as “almost another country, primitive, nasty, miserable;” and taken to the extreme, as any part of “Italy south of Naples or even Rome being regarded as where Africa began.”¹⁷⁷ Though not a favorable or picturesque description, this alternative was truthful and properly depicted the miserable conditions, which are vividly captured in Verga’s works. What was given, as Greenberg concludes, is that this question “of the south was a matter of lively discussion in the intellectual circles of Milan in which Verga moved.”¹⁷⁸ It was debated and Verga made a conscious choice. In his effort to portray that which is real, Verga saw value in abandoning the romantic characters and adopting the Sicilian peasants in the most authentic way.

This departure to the peasants of Sicily was also heavily influenced by the tenets of French naturalism. Recall how Zola – in his efforts to capture truth – turned to the underprivileged and

¹⁷⁶ Greenberg, “Giovanni Verga’s Verismo,” 19.

¹⁷⁷ Greenberg, “Giovanni Verga’s Verismo,” 19.

¹⁷⁸ Greenberg, “Giovanni Verga’s Verismo,” 19.

those occupying the lowest status in France's society, for it was here – in Zola's view – that effects of heredity were most readily observed. As Cecchetti explains, for Zola, this was “done by seeking out the people of the city slums, the corrupt and the degenerate, by observing how they act and react, and by ascertaining how their degeneracy passes from generation to generation.”¹⁷⁹

However, although Verga sought out the lowest class of society, his impetus was not the same as Zola's. Verga was not heading to the degenerate of Italian society to study the effects of heredity; instead, his was a search for the most authentic of mankind. As Cecchetti remarks, “[The *veristi*] did not go to the slums in search of characters, but to the far-away provinces, where they thought man to be more genuine, not yet psychologically complicated or deformed by the ‘civilization’ of the big cities.”¹⁸⁰ The deformity of civilization had been captured, told and retold in the romantic writings. Verga chose the Sicilian peasants for their genuineness, authenticity and freedom from artifice.

This motivation for seeking out the impoverished also identifies a different avenue pursued by the *veristi* as opposed to the French *naturaliste*. Zola was after the effects of heredity, which drove him to the slums of France and to the degenerate of society. However, the *veristi*, and Verga specifically, were not concerned with the effects of heredity. Contrastingly, the *veristi* “looked for the reality of human passions in the eternal interplay between man's actions and

¹⁷⁹ Cecchetti, “Verga and Verismo,” 175.

¹⁸⁰ Cecchetti, “Verga and Verismo,” 176.

man's aspirations."¹⁸¹ Instead of being destined to carnal acts and degradation, the emotions captured and portrayed by the Italian *veristi* were born of aspirations – the chance to change.

However, Verga's characters came to encompass the harsh characteristics of his writing. As Pacifici describes it, "Verga's people appear from the outset as vanquished, defeated by the brute force of nature and by an egotism that respects no human values or principles."¹⁸² Yet, this was not a study of heredity, it was a portrayal simply of how life was and the factors which influenced it. For example, speaking of the characters of *I Malavoglia*, Cecchetti detects that "their wisdom is the product of the experience of an untold number of generations, and their human feelings are sound and natural, not spoiled by fictitious yearnings."¹⁸³

The choice to use southern Italian peasants as the primary characters was not isolated to outside political factors or literary influences; but rather, this choice was also influenced by personal associations of Verga and the rest of the *veristi* with the southern peasants. Specifically, the *veristi* found characters in Sicily from their youth. These Sicilians represented those with whom the *veristi* lived, worked and even suffered. This personal association, even for Verga, was powerful and enhanced his ability to capture and portray truth. In speaking of *Fantasticheria* – the first story in Verga's *Vita dei campi* – Cecchetti stresses this very point. He states that Verga "is mainly interested in deliberately contrasting the sophisticated and parasitic world of the rich with the unvarnished, and poor, surroundings he had known in Sicily during his youth. Only in the latter does he feel he can find human drives in their unmarred nudity and, thereby, rediscover

¹⁸¹ Cecchetti, "Verga and Verismo," 176.

¹⁸² Pacifici, "The Tragic World of Verga's Primitives," 10.

¹⁸³ Cecchetti, "Verga and Verismo," 171.

life as it is.”¹⁸⁴ This personal belonging and association elevated Verga’s ability to present truth and reality in its unmarred nudity.

Yet, this personal reason for choosing characters drawn from his youth meant another departure from the influence of French naturalism. Specifically, Zola stressed a rigorous adherence to a scientific approach. Characters must be the specimens in a scientist’s laboratory to be viewed in a completely detached manner. However, such detachment was impossible for Verga; these characters were personally relatable. Thus, Cecchetti concludes, “Yet we must remember constantly that the veristic unfailingly found their characters in the regions of their youth. This would have made it impossible for them to look at those characters with the clinical eye of the scientist, even if they had chosen to stick to the letter of naturalism.”¹⁸⁵

Verga’s choice to utilize characters drawn from the peasants of Sicily presented an obstacle that needed to be dealt with. The majority of the literate Italian readers were in the north and they showed a strong preference for reading novels, which depicted their bourgeois way of life. Not only was this to be a change for Verga, but for his hoped-for readers as well. Additionally, Verga faced the challenge of presenting a culture of Sicilian peasants to those of northern Italy who knew nothing of those south of their residence. Smith addresses this dilemma acknowledging that “Verga’s mimetic aesthetic is in fact defined by its claim to represent one culture to another, the representation belonging to an educated Italian culture and the textual object of representation supposedly belonging to popular Sicilian culture.”¹⁸⁶ There were

¹⁸⁴ Cecchetti, “Verga and Verismo,” 170.

¹⁸⁵ Cecchetti, “Verga and Verismo,” 176.

¹⁸⁶ Smith, “Naturalism and Anti-Naturalism in Italy,” 158.

peasants in the North, which the bourgeois readers would have known about, but which were dissimilar to the Sicilian peasants to be introduced.

With an acknowledgeable obstacle, Verga also had a powerful and useful advantage. Yes, the Sicilian peasants were unknown; but that, in fact, was their advantage. Being unknown to the bourgeois readers meant that Verga was not plagued by anticipations or expectations of his characters' behavior. As Carsaniga explains, "Using the peasants of the south allowed for true "fresh" eyes of the *veristi* as the northern readers were without preconceptions of those peasants in the south."¹⁸⁷ What transpired is that readers "found the exploration of the lower classes as fascinating "as a journey into unexplored lands." For most Italian educated and urbanized readers the "unexplored lands" were the country, especially the southern regions, or the low-life areas of large towns."¹⁸⁸ What was an obstacle became a tool of success for Verga and the *veristi*.

In making a conscious decision to turn to the Sicilian peasants for characters in his writing, Verga was able to remarkably capture the truth – the realism of life. Arguably, as Verga continued to develop his use of these peasants and reach literary maturity, "Verga became conscious of his new characters and of the necessity of creating a style that should be one with and the same as [his characters'] daily existence."¹⁸⁹ As a positive consequence of such a choice, "'realistic' took on the meaning of 'unusual', though in the rather special sense of not having a usual form of artistic representation; in the ordinary sense one could hardly conceive of less

¹⁸⁷ Carsaniga, "Realism in Italy," 334.

¹⁸⁸ Carsaniga, "Literary Realism in Italy." 66.

¹⁸⁹ Cecchetti, "Verga and Verismo," 170.

unusual subjects than those chosen by most realists – commonplace situations in the lives of ordinary people.”¹⁹⁰ Verga’s choice of character allowed him to capture the essence of *verismo*.

As successful and revolutionary Verga’s choice of characters was, it was not the sole defining identifying mark of Italian *verismo*. In fact, “the choice of lower-class characters might have been enough to mark the break with the old narrative conventions and the shift to different contents, but did not necessarily demand the development of a suitable form.”¹⁹¹ Consequently, there is more to *verismo* than just the use of peasants as primary characters; although, this does represent a clear shift from the romantic Italian novel up to this point. However, with the choice for the type of character now determined, Verga would have to find a way to bring them to life, which he accomplished through his literary text choices.

Linguistics

As was the similar situation influencing the choice of characters, the Risorgimento also held heavy persuasion over the choice of text. Carsaniga observes that, with the peninsula looking to transform from a disjointed collection of kingdoms to a unitary state, the “Italian literary tradition came to be looked on as the symbol of a national unity still to be achieved.”¹⁹²

However, the problem persisted in that, as has been established, this “literary Italian had become the recognized means of expression and interchange among the intellectuals, who constituted,

¹⁹⁰ Carsaniga, “Realism in Italy,” 333.

¹⁹¹ Carsaniga, “Literary Realism in Italy.” 66.

¹⁹² Carsaniga, “Realism in Italy,” 327.

however, a tiny minority in a largely illiterate mass of people speaking some two score mutually incomprehensible dialects.”¹⁹³

Thus, not only did the prevailing literary Italian represent only a small minority of the peninsula, it also was not the language spoken by the characters Verga and the *veristi* sought to portray. Indeed, those Verga was writing about – the underprivileged, poor, peasants – would not have understood nor spoken the proper literary Italian. Consequently, Verga was once again finding himself at a point of departure. Would he continue with the literary tradition; or, would he turn to the everyday language spoken by his peasant characters? In yielding to the goal of presenting the absolute truth, Verga understood clearly that he must reject the literary Italian of the Risorgimento and use the everyday vocabulary and syntax of the Sicilian peasants.

This unavoidable departure with regard to literary Italian was also pressured by Verga and the reaction of the *veristi* against romanticism. The romantic Italian writers held tightly to and reinforced the necessary use of literary Italian, for it was seen as the unifying element of the disjointed Italian peninsula. However, even with the goals of the Risorgimento set aside, Verga considered the romantic literary syntax as worn-out and useless because of its over usage, which he personally realized in his early romantic novels.

The novels of his youthful production, as previously discussed, were streamline romanticism and they suffered accordingly. As Cecchetti describes, Verga’s “phraseology had been drawn from the average literary bourgeois language and was, consequently, made up of expressions that had

¹⁹³ Carsaniga, “Realism in Italy,” 326.

been worn out and rendered nearly meaningless by continuous usage. The characters clothed in that language were equally superficial, often even without a semblance of really profound life.”¹⁹⁴ Verga recognizes that for him to embody the authenticity of his characters, he must find a language that goes beyond the superficial-producing bourgeois phraseology. As Carsaniga correctly identifies, “Outworn images and metaphors, the crutches on which both authors and readers had leaned for centuries, had to be replaced by words and expressions which, if they were to be understood by the honest Dicks and Dolls, must be taken from their immediate experience.”¹⁹⁵

Consequently, Verga embraced the divergent philosophy and knew he must “create an expressive medium, a language and a style perfectly suited to the reticent but extremely resonant medium of [his] characters.”¹⁹⁶ Creating a new literary text was required for “Verga’s Sicilian fisherman and peasants did not know standard Italian at all. Had he translated them into the shallow bourgeois idiom of the time, he would have destroyed the intensity of their feelings.”¹⁹⁷ This attempt to transform the literary text was already observable in his first literary departure of *Nedda*. For example, “its language was simple and direct, with no rhetorical turns of phrase, quite different from the assortment of literary clichés and colloquialisms, southern speech forms and Tuscan words used by Verga in his previous novels.”¹⁹⁸ Indeed, in his journey of capturing truth, Verga forged new territory into the Italian literary text and abandoned the romantic language of the Risorgimento and romanticism itself.

¹⁹⁴ Cecchetti, “Verga and Verismo,” 179.

¹⁹⁵ Carsaniga, “Realism in Italy,” 334.

¹⁹⁶ Cecchetti, “Verga and Verismo,” 171.

¹⁹⁷ Cecchetti, “Verga and Verismo,” 180.

¹⁹⁸ Carsaniga, “Realism in Italy,” 348.

This drive for the truth drove Verga to use the language derived from the environment, in which he was writing about. His literary language was not to be the way of the northern bourgeois, but that of the authentic southern man. How Verga accomplished this monumental task is observed in three distinct literary choices. First, Verga chose to specifically use only those words, which did not require a dictionary for translation. The romantic writings were saturated with high-brow terms and phraseology, which were distinctly different from the language used day-to-day by the peninsula residents. For Verga, no dictionary would be required.

This textual choice to use low-brow everyday language was a foundational element of achieving truth in Verga's veristic writings. As Cecchetti explains, "Verga became conscious of his new characters and of the necessity of creating a style that should be one with and the same as their daily existence."¹⁹⁹ For example, Verga "inferred that an author finds within himself the personal impact of his own words after he has heard them from the lips of those people for whom they carry a profound individual weight, and not by merely looking them up in the dictionary."²⁰⁰ After all, Verga was trying to capture the reality of the characters and their environment; and, Verga both acknowledged and accepted the challenge to "create for himself a language perfectly suitable to the environment and the inner world of his characters."²⁰¹

A second approach utilized by Verga in defining his literary text choices was to use the spoken language of his characters. The first part of this approach is more a formal extension of the first technique described, but is critical in Verga's writings. Not only did Verga want to engage text,

¹⁹⁹ Cecchetti, "Verga and Verismo," 170.

²⁰⁰ Cecchetti, "Verga and Verismo," 179-180.

²⁰¹ Cecchetti, "Verga and Verismo," 180.

which did not require a dictionary, but he wanted to draw the text directly from the lives of his characters. He wanted the text to be a literal extension of the characters themselves and thus allow their truthfulness to emerge. Pacifici asserts the same declaration and states that the characters' "language is real and believable not because it flows effortlessly but because it remains highly consistent with their personality, their experience of life, their background – making use of a vocabulary that is drawn not from literature but from life itself, their occupation and interests."²⁰² Drawing the literary text from life itself was critical for Verga's success in capturing truthfulness.

However, using the spoken language was not only about employing the everyday words of the characters; but rather, using the spoken syntax for the written syntax. For example, in most western languages, verbal communication and its inherent syntax differs from that of its written syntax. Verga recognized this and diligently sought to write with the spoken syntax. This meant that Verga's "syntax is extremely simple, spoken; and its structure consists chiefly in a seemingly unending sequence of co-ordinate clauses linked together by the conjunction *e* (and)."²⁰³ Consequently, the reader hears the spoken language of the peasants, which transmits purity and authenticity to their text.

Carsaniga, in his essay on literary realism in Italy, expounds upon the necessity of why Verga felt compelled to use a literary language derived from the environment he was writing about.²⁰⁴ Specifically, he explains the exigency of using the spoken over the written language syntax.

²⁰² Pacifici, "The Tragic World of Verga's Primitives," 19.

²⁰³ Cecchetti, "Verga and Verismo," 180.

²⁰⁴ See, Carsaniga, "Literary Realism in Italy." 61-62.

First, Verga presents his stories as a spoken narrative because literary texts are language-bound and historically determined. Life is full of facts and literature is only full of words.

Unfortunately, life's facts and literature's words are not congruent. Meaning, truth is robbed in the very first transformation of spoken words to written words. Second, Carsaniga points out that realism in literature does not and can not possess the same abilities of realism in visual art. For example, the visual arts have at their disposal real life elements of shape, color, volume and perspective, which are elements not captured in literature based upon written communication. Consequently, "the model of a written narrative can only be a spoken narration."²⁰⁵ For this reason, for Verga to capture realism in his literature, he must base it upon a spoken syntax.

The determination of Verga to write in the spoken syntax of his Sicilian peasants created a monumental challenge. Specifically, the bourgeois readers of the north – for whom he was writing – would not understand the Sicilian dialect. It would, in fact, come across the same as a foreign language to them and consequently require translation and transformation for comprehension. However, since Verga "could not write in Sicilian dialect, he was forced to create a medium in which those poor and illiterate people could live and express themselves with fully personal implications."²⁰⁶ Therefore, "dissatisfied with the available linguistic options, [Verga] decided to embark on the road that was to lead him to the outright invention of a language capable of expressing the thoughts, feelings, and utterances of his Sicilian heroes in a manner that would be comprehensible to the reader untrained in the dialect."²⁰⁷ Verga was

²⁰⁵ Carsaniga, "Literary Realism in Italy." 62.

²⁰⁶ Cecchetti, "Verga and Verismo," 180.

²⁰⁷ Pacifici, "The Tragic World of Verga's Primitives," 17.

determined to create a language, which fully captured the truth of his authentic characters and was transmittable to his bourgeois readers.

This significant conclusion to create a new literary syntax was not completely foreign at the time. In fact, several well-respected Italian authors broke away from literary Italian and wrote substantial works utilizing language dialects. For example, Carlo Porta (1775-1821) and Giuseppe Gioacchino Belli (1791-1863) were two Italian poets who “acquired a national reputation through their use of dialect.”²⁰⁸ Indeed, dialects had been used in literature successfully at this time, but Verga was to go further. Decidedly, he was to create his own linguistic devices beyond a mere dialect.

The first step in creating such a syntax was to cleanse it of any artificiality. As Pacifici explains, “Ultimately, this operation was clearly one that required reshaping of the literary language, cleansing it of its pomposity and artificiality, transforming it into the aptest expressive tool of characters who are ignorant peasants.”²⁰⁹ It thus became Verga’s responsibility to write in a literary text that allowed for the expressivity of the Sicilian dialect to translate into readable Italian text. Pacifici continues, “In short, the speeches and thoughts of the characters had to be filtered by the author and translated, so to speak, into a language understandable to the general reader without losing the special flavor and cadence of their native dialect or of their personality.”²¹⁰ This filtering process meant taking the “certain cadences and certain rhythms,

²⁰⁸ Carsaniga, “Realism in Italy,” 332.

²⁰⁹ Pacifici, “The Tragic World of Verga’s Primitives,” 18.

²¹⁰ Pacifici, “The Tragic World of Verga’s Primitives,” 18.

which evoke an environment and a way of life belonging only to those characters” and dressing them in a phraseology understandable to the northern readers.²¹¹

Verga’s new literary syntax, as Lucente points out, meant that he would transpose the “locutions, rhythms, and syntax peculiar to the dialect into standard Italian both in dialogue and in descriptive passages.”²¹² This was successfully accomplished by “adopt[ing] a great many local expressive patterns and graft[ing] them on to the old trunk of standard Italian.”²¹³ In essence, he used what the northern readers understood as a foundation and embellished it with the local expressive patterns of his Sicilian peasants. Primarily, Verga would use an “Italian lexicon with Sicilian syntax, flavoring it with other popular-sounding features (repetitions, stereotypes, proverbs) and indirect free speech (reported speech, structured as unattributed independent secondary clauses.)”²¹⁴ Employing these repetitions, stereotypes and proverbs allowed Verga to genuinely translate the Sicilian dialect into comprehensible Italian. Greenberg highlights that these techniques are readily observed in Verga’s *La Lupe*, where all the characters, “speak an Italian whose colloquialisms and touches of dialect make the language more theirs than the author’s.”²¹⁵

The effects of what Verga accomplished through his newly-developed syntax are remarkable.

As Lucente claims, “The dual effects of Verga’s linguistic mastery are, therefore, immediacy and

²¹¹ Cecchetti, “Verga and Verismo,” 180.

²¹² Lucente, “Verga, Giovanni,” 593.

²¹³ Cecchetti, “Verga and Verismo,” 180.

²¹⁴ Carsaniga, “Literary Realism in Italy.” 68.

²¹⁵ Greenberg, “Giovanni Verga’s Verismo,” 20.

objectivity.”²¹⁶ Speaking of *I Malavoglia*, Pacifici quotes Luigi Rosso as he claims Verga “gave a provincial coloring to the language of [the novel] through the images and proverbs of the town [of Aci Trezza], [and] through a choral syntax.”²¹⁷ Pacifici continues with his own recognition of what Verga was able to achieve through his syntax and the depth of reality it brought to his characters. “In the novel seeing is combined with hearing. What we hear a character say, or what is said about him, enables us to recognize him by his personal idiosyncrasies, by his speech and action.”²¹⁸ The separation of realism in literary and visual art was being bridged by means of Verga’s literary creation.

Through his new literary style, Verga was not only able capture the genuineness of his characters – their authenticity and freedom from artifice – but he was able to do so in a very elegant manner. For example, D. H. Lawrence, who came to highly appreciate Verga and his works, and who also translated many of them to English, confessed that “never before had he encountered a prose style that was so original and dynamic, a language so rich and colourful.”²¹⁹ This was a remarkable achievement for Verga, which set him apart from his French counterparts. As Greenberg relates, “Verga’s Italian realism has a lyrical quality. Sometimes Flaubert’s realism, sometimes Zola’s naturalism are touched with poetry; in Verga it isn’t a touch, it’s an element.”²²⁰

²¹⁶ Lucente, “Verga, Giovanni,” 593.

²¹⁷ Pacifici, “The Tragic World of Verga’s Primitives,” 19.

²¹⁸ Pacifici, “The Tragic World of Verga’s Primitives,” 19.

²¹⁹ McWilliam, “Verga and ‘Verismo’,” 3.

²²⁰ Greenberg, “Giovanni Verga’s Verismo,” 20.

Silent Author

In addition to Verga's choice of character and literary text, how the story was to be told became a defining element of Verga's *verismo*. Up to this point in literature, the romantic tradition held sway, which meant that the Italian novel was generally narrated by an omniscient author. This all-knowing author would most often assume the role of the protagonist in the novel. If he were not the protagonist, then the author would insert his omniscience into the novel as he "looked on the events from the outside, remaining a kind of special, partial observer."²²¹ Either way, the author would leave his mark of influence, which attributed to the excessive fatness of the romantic novel. Cecchetti confirms that the acceptance of Verga and the *veristi* "of the theory of impersonality, on the other hand, helped them to get rid of superficial subjectivity and excessive sentimentality."²²²

For Verga, as an author who wanted to escape from leaving his imprint upon the novel – this being the only way to achieve authenticity – no omniscient author was to be used. This specifically meant that the author may neither assume the role of the protagonist or any character of the novel. Consequently, the story could no longer be told through the lens of the writer; the characters would now tell their own story. To do so, Verga had to refrain from ever interfering by referring to himself or an omniscient figure.

Consequently, he could not lecture his readers on the morals of religion or patriotism, as was customary of the romantic writers. By so doing, Verga effectively reinforces the position of the

²²¹ Pacifici, "The Tragic World of Verga's Primitives," 18.

²²² Cecchetti, "Verga and Verismo," 176.

silent author – the impression of impersonality.²²³ By way of example, Pacifici offers that “nowhere does Verga attempt to make a direct comment on, or judgment of, the action he describes, and much less does he try to influence the opinion of the reader. The method he selects is that of a novelist whose function must be deceptively limited to providing the information in as vivid and complete manner as possible so the reader may see and judge for himself.”²²⁴

Assuming the role of a silent author, the novel as a result is created by means of internal narration. In essence, all characters become narrators relating the events which pertain to them. Consequently, “the story [Verga] chose to tell is narrated from the inside, not by one but indirectly by all the personages of the novel. Every character is thus magically transformed into a narrator, each contributing something, with his unmistakable voice, to the description of [the novel.]”²²⁵ In general terms, this is accomplished, as Pacifici notes, in three distinct ways.²²⁶ First, we hear the characters speak, not the author. Second – really a derivative of the first – as has been established by Verga’s choice of spoken syntax, what the characters say mirrors spoken, not written speech. Third, we are told by the characters what has taken place. Additionally, there are minor characters – mostly townspeople – who, as Pacifici notes, act more like the chorus of a Greek tragedy.

For Verga, this meant that “he began to narrate in the words of the characters. Until then, even the most poignant stories carried in every sentence the obvious imprint of the author and the

²²³ Giger, “Verismo: Origin, Corruption, and Redemption,” 273.

²²⁴ Pacifici, “The Tragic World of Verga’s Primitives,” 19.

²²⁵ Pacifici, “The Tragic World of Verga’s Primitives,” 18.

²²⁶ Pacifici, “The Tragic World of Verga’s Primitives,” 18-19.

reader, as Verga himself would say, had to look at them ‘through the lens of the writer.’”²²⁷

However, allowing the characters to narrate their own story allowed the story to be theirs. As Cecchetti supports, “Reading Verga, we are often under the impression that the characters are narrating themselves, in their own peculiar terminology and that, therefore, they are painting their own portraits.”²²⁸ The painting of their own portraits brought a new level of realism and authenticity to literature and captured the rallying cry of *verismo*.

Additionally, it can not be overlooked that this sense of impartiality and authorial detachment shares similarity with Zola and his French naturalism. After all, Zola was rigorous in his determination to be detached from his laboratory specimens. However, as noted before, because Verga chose characters from the regions of his youth, the specificity of authorial detachment required by Zola was impossible to achieve. Despite this, Verga was still able to remain impartial and absent from his prose and in his wake create stories that “sound as if they were related mainly by an invisible popular narrator who belongs to the same social milieu as the protagonists and who has witnessed the events.”²²⁹

Even as an outgrowth of influence from Zola, Verga’s methods were still rather original for the time and yielded the truthfulness for which he was searching. As Pacifici explains, “Verga’s position was one strikingly modern, for he believed that only by disappearing from his work would the novelist make his tale believable without question and give it a spontaneity and a

²²⁷ Cecchetti, “Verga and Verismo,” 181.

²²⁸ Cecchetti, “Verga and Verismo,” 181.

²²⁹ Cecchetti, “Verga and Verismo,” 181.

truthfulness unattainable by conventional narrative techniques.”²³⁰ The result was that Verga “initiated the techniques of modern narrative prose” and found realism in his literary works.²³¹

A specific example of Verga’s employment of the silent author may be examined in *I Malavoglia*. Specifically, the unidentified narrator relates the story from the same viewpoint of the characters. This means Verga’s characters never say anything which would extend beyond their recognition and understanding of culture, ideology or philosophy. Second, the characters never say anything that they would not have said themselves. You don’t find Sicilian peasants speaking like the middle class of Tuscany, the bourgeois of the north or even the peasants of the peninsula. Lastly, the characters never relate any event or happening beyond their own personal knowledge; they must witness it or experience it to relate it. As in the words of Carsaniga, “The unidentified narrator tells the *Malavoglia* story from the same viewpoint as the characters, never going beyond or above their culture and ideology, never saying anything they might not have said themselves or mentioning things they would not have known.”²³²

The overall effect and efficiency of Verga’s silent author can not be discounted as a driving force of his ability to capture and relate the authentic nature of his characters. In fact, it is a critical tool for Verga’s presentation of realism. Recalling the philosophies of French naturalism, theoretically, a realistic art should look as if it created itself. For Verga, this was achieved in his writings. Speaking specifically of *L’amante di Gramigna*, and of Verga’s works generally, it has been noted that “its every part will be so complete that the creative process will remain a

²³⁰ Pacifici, “The Tragic World of Verga’s Primitives,” 13.

²³¹ Cecchetti, “Verga and Verismo,” 181.

²³² Carsaniga, “Literary Realism in Italy.” 68.

mystery...its manner and its reason for existing so necessary that the hand of the artist will remain absolutely invisible;...it will have the imprint of an actual happening; the work of art will seem to have made itself.”²³³

Dramatic Structure

The use of Verga’s silent author, as established, cut down the excessiveness of romantic writing. However, Verga was to engage a second strategy, which would also reduce the fatness of writing known at the time and enhance his attainment of *verismo*. Specifically, Verga aimed for an economy of words. As pointed out with *Nedda*, the masterpiece was only twenty pages in length; and “from *L’amante di Gramigna* on, Verga strove for the greatest possible economy of words and for maximum condensation.”²³⁴ To do so, “Verga relies exclusively on a few bold strokes and details to give his heroes a quality and dimension we are not likely to forget. It is his economy of means coupled with the adroit device of allowing his characters to define themselves through their acts and utterances, complimented by the comments made by the other personages of the book, that constitutes one of the fresh and vital aspects of the work.”²³⁵

Verga explains in his own words his ideology of economy and precision. In a letter to the editor for the publication of *L’amante di Gramisgna*, and as published in *Vita dei campi*, Verga explains:

²³³ Cecchetti, “Verga and Verismo,” 172.

²³⁴ Cecchetti, “Verga and Verismo,” 181.

²³⁵ Pacifici, “The Tragic World of Verga’s Primitives,” 22.

Here is not a story but the sketch of a story. It will at least have the merit of being very short and of being factual – a human document, as they say nowadays...I shall repeat it to you as I picked it up along the paths in the countryside, with nearly the same simple and picturesque words characterizing popular narration, and you will certainly prefer to find yourself face to face with the naked and unadulterated fact, rather than having to look for it between the lines of the book, through the lens of the writer.²³⁶

Greenberg continues these same sentiments as he remarks on some of Verga's works from the collection *Novelle rusticane*. Specifically speaking of *I galantuomini*, *Malaria*, *La roba* and *Libertà*, Greenberg states that "if you knew nothing more about them than their titles you'd think they were essays. Indeed in a certain sense they are: non-dramatic story-essays that arrive through their concrete, realistic matter at a general truth."²³⁷ Such was the economy of words, which Verga was able to manipulate masterfully.

In addition to a compression of text, Verga consequently compressed his plots and changed the traditional dramatic structure of the novel. For Verga, his method was that of a quick rise to action. McWilliam observes, "As usual, Verga succeeds brilliantly in building up, by degrees, an atmosphere of tragic foreboding, as he does also in *Ieli il pastore*, the longest of the stories in *Vita dei campi*."²³⁸ Following this quick ascent to the climax, and in an unorthodox manner, Verga would not dwell on the climactic action, but would swiftly move to a concluding resolution.

This technique is best observed in Verga's *Cavalleria rusticana*. Only six pages in length, it "is a superb example of the sort of structural compactness and precision and clarity of detail which

²³⁶ Cecchetti, "Verga and Verismo," 172.

²³⁷ Greenberg, "Giovanni Verga's Verismo," 23.

²³⁸ McWilliam, "Verga and 'Verismo'," 15.

most practitioners of the short story aim at but rarely achieve.”²³⁹ McWilliam continues his observation noting that in the novel, despite its six pages of length, “each of the half dozen characters is fully realized, and we catch a strong sensation of the deep passions which rage beneath the outward calm of these people.”²⁴⁰ Further, after Verga’s swift ascent to climactic action, which in this case is adultery, the event “itself is barely mentioned: Verga focuses his attention on the circumstances leading up to it and the consequences that flow from it.”²⁴¹ The consequence of such succinctness was the effective creation of real tragedy, to which Verga’s characters seemed doomed. Greenberg, also speaking of *Cavalleria rusticana*, comments that “the story’s few pages, which cover a lot of barely indicated time, don’t produce an effect of speed but rather of deliberateness, inexorability – that is, tragedy.”²⁴²

Milieu

One element of French naturalism, which was not too successfully employed by Verga, was that of accentuating the social milieu of his stories. Recall that Zola would engage in his own fatness as he spent an irresponsible amount of time detailing the milieu of his own stories. This, itself, was indicative of romanticism where the “nineteenth century on the whole was long-winded, slow-paced, descriptive, achieving its masterpieces by a fullness (often fatness) of exposition.”²⁴³

Verga would not partake and as such he “avoided traditional descriptive passages. For most

²³⁹ McWilliam, “Verga and ‘Verismo’,” 14.

²⁴⁰ McWilliam, “Verga and ‘Verismo’,” 14.

²⁴¹ McWilliam, “Verga and ‘Verismo’,” 14.

²⁴² Greenberg, “Giovanni Verga’s Verismo,” 20.

²⁴³ Greenberg, “Giovanni Verga’s Verismo,” 19.

writers, past and contemporary, descriptions were often pretexts to show off their embroidering ability and virtuosity and had very little to do with the characters' emotional vicissitudes."²⁴⁴ To do so would have violated his efforts for authorial detachment and economy of words.

The only milieu Verga would give would be that which was a character's interaction with it. As a result, this left Verga able to mention external elements only when [his characters] mentioned them, that is to say, when they found them relevant to their everyday lives."²⁴⁵ Cecchetti draws upon Verga's *I Malavoglia* to emphasize this point. He states, "Thus in *I Malavoglia* the sea of Aci-Trezza is not Romantic, but is looked at with the very eyes of the fishermen who find in it their means of subsistence, and sometimes their death. A storm, or even the changing voice of the tide under a gloomy sky, are significant only insofar as they become both the repositories and the projections of human hopes and fears."²⁴⁶

At times, Verga would attempt to describe and emphasize the milieu. In these few and exceptional "cases when he had felt the necessity to stress the local social milieu, he had resorted to the photographic reproduction of dialect phrases and expressions."²⁴⁷ However, this was not successful and served to his detriment. Such occurrences are related as being like "abruptly inserting dissonant and shrill notes into the midst of a conventionally smooth musical score."²⁴⁸

²⁴⁴ Cecchetti, "Verga and Verismo," 181.

²⁴⁵ Cecchetti, "Verga and Verismo," 181.

²⁴⁶ Cecchetti, "Verga and Verismo," 181-182.

²⁴⁷ Cecchetti, "Verga and Verismo," 180.

²⁴⁸ Cecchetti, "Verga and Verismo," 180.

Violent Extremes

Despite a lack of complete success in depicting the milieu as Zola did, what characterized Verga's veristic works were his use of violence and that which was found offensive. Zola was heavily criticized for his use of violence and excessive detailed descriptions of offensive material. The same can be observed in Verga's works, but not as a decision to merely provide violent stories for enjoyment or amusement. For Verga, this was a part of his peasants' lives and thus carried itself into his works. As Pacifici points out, "Thus violence, murder, and fighting provide a dramatic contrast to the peace of mind Verga's heroes seek in vain."²⁴⁹ He continues by noting that "a life of deprivations and poverty, of exploitation and betrayals can only produce, in the fiction of Verga at any rate, unhappiness and violence."²⁵⁰

It is true that violence did infiltrate Verga's writings and were ever-present. For example, from the stories of *Vita dei campi*, you have the following: Alfio kills his rival Turiddu in *Cavalleria rusticana*; Ieli, a shepherd, murders his boyhood friend, Don Alfonso, in *Ieli*; and in *La Lupe*, you have Nanni Lusca who slaughters the she-wolf and curses her. Yet, to define Verga's works, and consequently a genre of *verismo*, simply by the presence of violence, would be a dismissal of the pertinent identifying characteristics previously explained, which are the fundamentals of Verga's *verismo*.

What Verga established in Italian literary *verismo* – by way of Zola and French naturalism – would eventually transfer from literature to the operatic stage. However, the tenets set forth by

²⁴⁹ Pacifici, "The Tragic World of Verga's Primitives," 11.

²⁵⁰ Pacifici, "The Tragic World of Verga's Primitives," 11.

Verga would remain, specifically as they related to a reaction against romanticism, character choice, linguistics, silent author, dramatic structure, milieu and violent extremes. In fact, these seven primary characteristics will serve to define veristic opera, just as they have defined veristic literature.

CHAPTER THREE:
VERISMO AND ITALIAN OPERA

Birth and Influence of *Verismo*

Etymology

The Italian term *verismo* has its etymological root in the Italian word for truth, *vero*. To this root is added the suffix *-ismo*, which is equivalent to the English suffix *-ism*. This suffix of *-ism* is often appended to verbs derived from Greek, which forms a noun denoting principles or doctrines. In the case of *verismo*, it is used as an adherence to the doctrine of truth, which is what the producers of *verismo* – *veristi* – in the arts, literature and music universally sought. The first known reference to the term *verismo* as a description of work within the realm of arts, literature or music came from a critique written by Guido Guidi in 1867, just seven years prior to Verga’s publication of *Nedda*.²⁵¹ Guidi was reviewing a painting by Antonio Puccinelli (1822-1897): *Cosimo Pater Patriae riceve i letterati e gli artisti del suo tempo*. In his review, published in the *Gazzettino delle arti del disegno*, Guidi refers to the *veristi* as “artists who depict contemporary topics as opposed to artists who portray historical ones.”²⁵² What pursued following Guidi’s innovative description would be a complex evolution of the term *verismo*, which continues among musical scholars today.

²⁵¹ Giger, “Verismo: Origin, Corruption, and Redemption,” 279.

²⁵² Giger, “Verismo: Origin, Corruption, and Redemption,” 279.

The evolution of the exact definition of *verismo* – especially when applied to the arts – began almost immediately following Guidi’s first reference to it. First, just a few years later in the 1870s, the term came to be associated with a “balance between idealism and realism, as less extreme and thus better than pure realism.”²⁵³ This concept of a less extreme approach to realism was soon discarded, as one might imagine with the fierce truthfulness of Verga’s works. Consequently, a second definition evolved. Specifically, instead of a balance between idealism and realism, *verismo* was soon identified with works that abandoned all traces of idealism and, instead, began to exaggerate realism. Not only was reality portrayed in a search for truth in artistic works, but this reality was overstressed and heightened to a new level. It is this exaggeration of reality, which many of the operatic veristic works were contemporaneously categorized.

Then, a third evolution of the meaning of *verismo* came many years following its initial use in 1867. As it is an evolutionary trend being examined, an exact date for the third meaning can not be determined; but, it is late enough that a retrospective and historical view of the artistic output of the late nineteenth-century may be considered. Specifically, the final evolution of *verismo* came to denote a reaction against convention.²⁵⁴ This reaction was in consequence of the influence exerted by idealism, classicism and romanticism – any school of thought supporting convention of form or language. As Andreas Giger observes, “The *veristi* did not abandon convention out of protest against tradition but as a consequence of the search for new and exciting artistic solutions.”²⁵⁵

²⁵³ Giger, “Verismo: Origin, Corruption, and Redemption,” 281.

²⁵⁴ Giger, “Verismo: Origin, Corruption, and Redemption,” 283-284.

²⁵⁵ Giger, “Verismo: Origin, Corruption, and Redemption,” 301.

Today, both the second and third evolutionary definitions of *verismo* – exaggeration of reality and reaction against convention – must be considered when evaluating artistic output during this period. This dual approach to the definition of *verismo* becomes necessary as an examiner of these works must both place himself in the contemporary events of the time and in his current position, which offers the advantage of a retrospective consideration.

The first application of *verismo* to an operatic composition came with the premier of Pietro Mascagni's (1863-1945) *Cavalleria rusticana*. The publisher, Edoardo Sonzogno, was holding his second one-act opera composition contest and Mascagni's submission would mark the beginning of this new musical style. His opera was based on a stage adaptation, also titled *Cavalleria rusticana*, from Verga's veristic novel, *Scene popolari siciliane*. Whether Mascagni had set forth to establish a new musical genre or was purposefully reacting against modern convention is uncertain. What is known is that "Mascagni was acquainted with the play [and] agreed the choice was appropriate for the many musical opportunities it afforded."²⁵⁶

This revolutionary opera premiered on 17 May 1890 in Rome at the *Teatro Costanzi*. Its reception was overwhelming, even bordering on hysterics. As James Keolker points out, "The Roman press reported there was neither applause nor a shout in response but the entire audience springing to its feet in an instantaneous, unprecedented ovation."²⁵⁷ Not only was the opera well received at its premier, but opera houses throughout the peninsula and Europe rearranged their performance schedules to accommodate it. Accordingly, Keolker notes, "And while it was again

²⁵⁶ Keolker, *Last Acts*, 296.

²⁵⁷ Keolker, *Last Acts*, 296.

performed in Rome, it was also produced within months in Livorno, Florence, Turin, Bologna, Palermo, and at La Scala with Madrid and Budapest soon after.”²⁵⁸

Not surprisingly, *Cavalleria rusticana* was the first-place choice for Sonzogno’s competition and *verismo* in opera was born. Indeed, *Cavalleria rusticana* was the beginning of what would be a controversial genre of opera. However, what was and has been decidedly agreed upon is that a new musical style of opera had emerged. As Matteo Sansone observes, “The year 1890, when the opera was first performed in Rome, was assumed as the official date of birth of a new tendency [*verismo*] of which *Cavalleria* was supposed to be the archetype.”²⁵⁹ Its position as the prototype stemmed from its close association with Verga’s literary output, which had already established a framework for veristic works. Speaking of this union, Keolker concludes that “while *Cavalleria Rusticana* may strike audiences today as musically more conventional than deviant, the work at the time became associated with the latest insurgent literary movement, Verga’s *verismo*.”²⁶⁰ Consequently, the birth of a new musical style – *verismo* – had occurred.

Two years following the premier of *Cavalleria rusticana*, another major veristic operatic work emerged, which may be seen as a literal offspring of Mascagni’s work. This new opera was *I Pagliacci*, by Ruggiero Leoncavallo (1857-1919), which premiered at Milan’s *Teatro del Verme* on 21 May 1892. Coupled together, these compositions represent the foundation of *verismo* in opera and provide needed assistance to further the discussion on the origins of the term *verismo*. Although both were recognized at the time of their premiers as operas of a similar new and

²⁵⁸ Keolker, *Last Acts*, 296.

²⁵⁹ Sansone, “Verismo: From Literature to Opera,” 4.

²⁶⁰ Keolker, *Last Acts*, 296-297.

innovative musical style, neither opera was initially referred to as veristic. As Arman Schwartz accounts, “It is important to note that the word [verismo] does not seem to have been used, in any substantive sense, in the first reviews of either *Cavalleria rusticana* or *I Pagliacci*.”²⁶¹ In fact, he continues, “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.”²⁶² Even with the premiers of two unarguably veristic operas, the term *verismo* was not immediately applied; but rather, it was three to five years later that the term came to be associated with these works.

A final observation about the origins of *verismo* – as a description of operatic works – includes a presentation of the argument of which opera was actually the first veristic opera. *Cavalleria rusticana* is definitely the first opera drenched with the veristic qualities. However, partial veristic qualities were observed in different operas prior to its premier. Most easily observed are the veristic qualities of Georges Bizet’s (1838-1875) *Carmen*, which premiered in Paris on 3 March 1875. Such veristic qualities consisted of an amoral and licentious heroine, characterization through vocal techniques and “passages of unusual intensity with variety of emotive gasps and cries.”²⁶³ As such, Keolker makes the argument that *Carmen* was indeed the first veristic opera.²⁶⁴ Regardless of which opera was truly the first in the *verismo* style, the important takeaway – with regard to the origins of the term – is that the *verismo* descriptor was not readily applied to what are now undoubtedly considered veristic works. The term evolved in the 1890s and continues to evolve today.

²⁶¹ Schwartz, “Rough Music,” 231.

²⁶² Schwartz, “Rough Music,” 231.

²⁶³ Keolker, *Last Acts*, 7-8.

²⁶⁴ Keolker, *Last Acts*, 7-8.

Time Period

Beginning with the veristic literary works of Verga and his publication of *Nedda* in 1874 and concluding with the operatic works of Puccini, the time period of *verismo* encompasses the final quarter of the nineteenth-century. Consequently, as David Kimbell observes, “Its most productive period, as far as Italy was concerned, was the last quarter of the nineteenth century.”²⁶⁵ Specifically dealing with *verismo* in opera, the premier of *Cavalleria rusticana* in 1890 and the birth of a new musical genre, meant that *verismo* had entered the musical repertoire and would remain prominently for at least a decade spanning 1890-1900.²⁶⁶ This period represents operatic works from Mascagni’s *Cavalleria rusticana* to Giacomo Puccini’s (1858-1924) *Tosca* (1900). However, it was between the years 1890-1892 that *verismo* in opera experienced its heyday.²⁶⁷ These years witnessed the premiers of *Cavalleria rusticana* and *I Pagliacci*, as well as Umberto Giordano’s (1867-1948) *Mala vita* (1892). These significant veristic works are historically placed between Giuseppe Verdi’s (1813-1901) *Otello* (1887) and *Falstaff* (1893).

However, additional scholars such as Adriana Corazzol argue that the veristic time period extends another decade into 1910.²⁶⁸ Such an argument would take into account the following significant works: *Jenůfa* (1904) by Leoš Janáček (1854-1928) and *Madama Butterfly* (1904) and *La fanciulla del West* (1910) by Puccini. By way of perspective, other well-known contemporary musical styles included operas from Richard Wagner (1813-1883) to French

²⁶⁵ Kimbell, *Italian Opera*, 621.

²⁶⁶ Sansone, “Verismo: From Literature to Opera,” 1.

²⁶⁷ Sansone, “Verismo: From Literature to Opera,” 12.

²⁶⁸ Corazzol, “Opera and Verismo,” 39.

grand-opéra. Additional prominent composers were Verdi and Jules Massenet (1842-1912).

Finally, the drawing-room song style was also heavily represented.²⁶⁹ However, “by far the most dominant and politically important style...was *verismo*.”²⁷⁰

Continuing the argument to expand the veristic time period beyond a decade, Kimbell postulates that “there were anticipations of [*verismo*] at least thirty years earlier, and echoes of it were still to be heard even after the First World War.”²⁷¹ According to his suggested timeframe, anticipations for veristic opera began in the 1860s, which indeed may be readily identified. One specific anticipation of *verismo* in the 1860s stems from its representation of an abandonment of convention. Giger observes the same as Kimbell stating that “with the 1860s, the conventions of Romantic opera begin to disappear at an increasing pace, and this departure offers a useful and historically legitimate parallel to the rise of *verismo*, especially when we stop to consider how long Italian opera had adhered to conventions of language, plot, form, and production.”²⁷² His contention is supported as he highlights an abandonment of specific romantic traditions, especially with regard to plot and form, in Verdi’s *Don Carlo* (1867) and Arrigo Boito’s (1842-1918) *Mefistofele* (1868).²⁷³

The next decade of the 1870s continued to mark a point of departure and the emerging of a new Italian musical style, which was leading toward *verismo*-rich operas. Julian Budden comments that “it is always tempting to find a historical turning-point at the beginning of a decade, and [it

²⁶⁹ Sansone, “Verismo: From Literature to Opera,” 3.

²⁷⁰ Keolker, *Last Acts*, 7.

²⁷¹ Kimbell, *Italian Opera*, 621.

²⁷² Giger, “Verismo: Origin, Corruption, and Redemption,” 288.

²⁷³ See Giger, “Verismo: Origin, Corruption, and Redemption,” 297n78.

is] usually wrong. But the year 1870 provides a legitimate exception to the rule; enough happened then and immediately afterwards to give a new direction to Italian opera and Italian music in general.”²⁷⁴ What began the decade was Wagner’s *Die Walküre* (1870). The decade then proceeded with the premier of Verdi’s *Aida* in 1871, an opera where authenticity was strongly stressed – especially in the sets and costumes. Then, in 1875, Bizet’s *Carmen* premiered. The argument for this being the first veristic opera has already been presented; however, whether or not it was, it most assuredly gave rise to the full presence of *verismo* in the 1890s.

The 1880s were the final decade prior to the full realization of *verismo* in opera. Again, this was a decade of departure from the romantic ideals, which were now acknowledged by Verdi and others. It was “around 1880 [when]...Verdi...noticed in contemporary opera a departure from the harmony of Romantic melodrama, and...negatively referred to it as *verismo*.”²⁷⁵ Though never classified as *verismo* by himself, such departure can be seen in Verdi’s *Otello* and *Simon Boccanegra* (1881). Other operas foreshadowing the presence of *verismo* include Amilcare Ponchielli’s (1834-1886) *La Gioconda* (1876) and Puccini’s *Le Villi* (1884). Giger’s conclusion of this evolutionary chain is thus well-supported as he states that “seen in this way, *verismo* does not begin but is fully realized in the 1890s and the early twentieth century, and works such as *Don Carlo*, *Mefistofele*, *La Gioconda*, and *Otello* are not isolated masterpieces *sui generis* but milestones on the path to this realization.”²⁷⁶

²⁷⁴ Budden, *The Operas of Verdi*, 3:263.

²⁷⁵ Giger, “Verismo: Origin, Corruption, and Redemption,” 294.

²⁷⁶ Giger, “Verismo: Origin, Corruption, and Redemption,” 289.

Giovane Scuola

Embracing this documented drive toward *verismo* and harnessing its elements in their operatic works were the Italian composers of the *Giovane scuola*. This group known as the Young Italian School were a “conventional grouping of composers with different trainings and cultural backgrounds and, indeed, with distinct artistic personalities.”²⁷⁷ A non-exhaustive list of composers belonging to the *Giovane scuola* maybe assembled through the categorization of several scholars, including Corazzol²⁷⁸, Koelker²⁷⁹ and Budden.²⁸⁰ Such a list would include: Puccini, Mascagni, Leoncavallo, Giordano, Alfredo Catalani (1854-1893), Antonio Smareglia (1854-1929), Alberto Franchetti (1860-1942), Franco Leoni (1864-1949), Ferruccio Busoni (1866-1924) and Francesco Cilèa (1866-1950).

Of this musical *scuola*, it is observed that they “reached artistic maturity in the years of the fin-de-siècle crisis of ethical and aesthetic values.”²⁸¹ What is of additional importance – as also observed in literature – the members of this school grew up in the aftermath of the Italian Risorgimento. As such, “in the new social reality which emerged from the political unification, the function of the nineteenth-century ‘melodrama’ as a unifying cultural and ideological medium had come to an end.”²⁸² Consequently, they felt emancipated to venture beyond the perceived restrictions of romanticism.

²⁷⁷ Sansone, “Verismo: From Literature to Opera,” 4.

²⁷⁸ Corazzol, “Opera and Verismo,” 39.

²⁷⁹ Keolker, *Last Acts*, 1.

²⁸⁰ Budden, “Giovane scuola.”

²⁸¹ Sansone, “Verismo: From Literature to Opera,” 3.

²⁸² Sansone, “Verismo: From Literature to Opera,” 3.

Similar to their literary counterpart – the *Scapigliatura* – the members of the *Giovane scuola* were distinctly different with regards to their musical training and personal backgrounds. Such diversity meant that there was no codified musical language of the *Giovane scuola*. Instead, recognizing the commercialism of opera during this period in Italy and Europe, their styles were often driven by economic forces. Specifically, they looked to compose operas that would translate to financial success with publishers and ticket sales in the opera houses. Additionally, they felt free to experiment with their styles and write according to the changing influences of Italian culture and life.²⁸³

This noncommittal approach to a definitive musical style greatly affected the shelf life of *verismo* in opera. First, it strengthened the presence of *verismo* as each member of the school was influenced at some point in his compositions by the tenets of *verismo*. Unfortunately, this also meant that as quickly as the veristic tenets were embraced, they were also eschewed, in exchange for something else. This lack of commitment is observed in the *Scapigliatura* by Sansone and appropriately adapted for application to the *Giovane scuola*. He states, “In literature, the iconoclastic and regenerating experience of the ‘Scapigliatura’ was followed by a number of contrasting tendencies providing cultural incentives to young composers. The occasional adherence to one or other of the trends – verismo, decadentism, symbolism, exoticism – which were rife in the last quarter of the century, did not imply a commitment to their aesthetics.”²⁸⁴ Regardless of a life-long adherence to any musical style, it was the composers of the *Giovane scuola* who embraced *verismo* and defined its distinctly characteristic style.

²⁸³ Keolker, *Last Acts*, 2.

²⁸⁴ Sansone, “Verismo: From Literature to Opera,” 3.

Challenged Definition of *Verismo*

The Veristic School

The *Giovane scuola* was at the heart of the *verismo* movement in opera. However, playing such a significant role increases the challenge of determining a universal definition for *verismo*.

Specifically, because the composers of the Young Italian School wrote in so many different genres, it is difficult to consider its members and all their works veristic. Consequently, this leads to a confusion of the term. As Sansone observes, “The term first used for *Cavalleria* has become so closely linked with the Young School that some critics are still at pains to assess variable degrees of ‘verismo’ in different composers or in different operas by the same composer.”²⁸⁵

The challenge with the *verismo* label and the Young Italian School continues as the veristic literary movement had lost its drive as veristic operas were coming to the stage. Verga, in his own writings, was even moving away from the veristic style. As Sansone concludes, “It is ironic that the composers of the Young Italian School should be labeled with one term – *verismo* – which they all rejected by either refusing to set libretti derived from the veristic works or pronouncing the uncongenial nature of that movement to their own art.”²⁸⁶ Therefore, *verismo* in opera can not simply refer to all the operatic compositions of the *Giovane scuola*. There must needs be a greater definitive characteristic or set of characteristics by which scholars can judge a veristic work.

²⁸⁵ Sansone, “Verismo: From Literature to Opera,” 5.

²⁸⁶ Sansone, “Verismo: From Literature to Opera,” 5.

Violence

When it comes to defining *verismo* – especially as applied to opera during this time period – it is helpful to consider the current connotations of the term and how it has strayed from the original meaning. Today, at the forefront of descriptors used to define or refer to *verismo* in opera is a single word – violence. Indeed, considering the veristic operas that have continued into the current repertoire of opera companies, *verismo* has incorrectly come to be defined by the presence of brutality and violence, which is ever-present in these productions. Yet, to look upon *verismo* as the mere portrayal of violence is to discredit the genre and forego an enriched understanding of this operatic form.

The domineering characteristic of violence began to emerge in the “absence of quality veristic works like Verga’s *Cavalleria rusticana*,” and, in their place, “mediocre works and styles were substituted.”²⁸⁷ These substitutions were filled with jealousy and contrasted love, rural surroundings, urban derelict areas, vulgar language and, of course, violence – knives, guns and suicide. Violence in veristic operas can not be argued away – nor should it be; but, it is not the ultimate defining characteristic of the movement.

In fact, the mere presence of violence does not qualify a work as veristic.²⁸⁸ For example, operas prior to the 1890s were saturated with violence of one degree or another. Verdi’s *Rigoletto* (1851), *Il Trovatore* (1853), and *La Forza del Destino* (1862) are precise examples. Further, pre-

²⁸⁷ Sansone, “Verismo: From Literature to Opera,” 20.

²⁸⁸ See Macdonald, *Puccini: King of Verismo*, 20.

veristic operas employed what was known as “strong blood-and-thunder action.”²⁸⁹ However, even with the presence of violence, what removes these operas from the genre of *verismo* is that they do not stress reality – they do not seek to portray the truth.

To further this argument against violence as the determining characteristic of veristic opera is a consideration of Puccini’s *Suor Angelica* (1918). This opera – composed by the master of *verismo* – steers away from violence all together. Instead, its veristic nature stems from the realistic picture it paints of conventual life. The storyline focuses on the difficult and real consequences of a young girl’s sins and her brutal treatment by her aunt. Consequently, *verismo* can not be defined simply by the presence of violence. Yes, violence is a part of these operas; but, it is not the absolute defining characteristic.

Character Choice

Similar to the branding *verismo* receives because of the presence of violence – i.e. the sole determining characteristic – the choice of character for the *veristi* also has become elevated in its position as a key trait of *verismo* in opera. However, like violence, the peasants of the *veristi* can not assume a prominent role. They are – along with the other literary and operatic elements – only one of the seven defining attributes. Corazzol falls into this trap when speaking of *verismo* by identifying the “lower-class subjects” as “the strict definition of *verismo*.”²⁹⁰ However, recognizing the need to expand an understanding of what constitutes *verismo*, Corazzol accepts –

²⁸⁹ MacDonald, *Puccini: King of Verismo*, 20.

²⁹⁰ Corazzol, “Opera and Verismo,” 42.

in her own words – that “the regional or lower-class urban setting is only one of many shared aspects.”²⁹¹

Continuing with Corazzol and speaking of “recent historians,” she implies that they “have tended to restrict their definition of musical verismo to ‘repugnant’, rustic dramas or those of urban low life, the recurrent features of opera during this period – especially as regards vocal style and musico-dramatic structure;” however, she is quick to point out that these elements “are also fully evident in settings of aristocratic and bourgeois subjects, whether contemporary or historical.”²⁹²

Examples of veristic works dealing with bourgeois characters may be observed in the veristic works of *Manon Lescaut* (1893) by Puccini and also in *Andrea Chénier* (1896) by Giordano. Specifically, in the latter is found a principal bourgeois character, *La comtesse de Coigny*. In addition, the setting of the opera is Paris 1789 – 1794. The backgrounds include the Palace of the Countess and the Parisian Reign of Terror. Consequently, to judge an opera’s *verismo* by the mere choice of character would lead to a dismissal of definitively veristic operas from the repertoire.

²⁹¹ Corazzol, “Opera and Verismo,” 40.

²⁹² Corazzol, “Opera and Verismo,” 40.

Literature and Opera

From the beginning in literature with Zola and French naturalism, then continuing in Italian literature with Verga and finally culminating in the veristic operatic works of the *Giovane scuola*, the essence of *verismo* is in the portrayal of truth – reality void of artifice. For the composers of the Young Italian School, their goal was synonymous with that of Verga’s and the literary *veristi*. Specifically, in their efforts to capture authenticity, they wanted simply to “present a vivid, melodramatic plot, to arouse sensation by violent contrasts, to paint a cross section of life without concerning themselves with any general significance the action might have.”²⁹³

With identical goals, it would appear logical to apply the veristic label to both the literary and musical *veristi*. However, as Keolker points out, the transition of the label from literary to musical is not as straightforward as one might suppose. Speaking of the musical *veristi*, Keolker acknowledges that the “term *verismo* has remained popular;” however, he concedes that the veristic label “has also remained in dispute since technically it referred to a literary genre, not a musical one.”²⁹⁴ Consequently, the classification of operatic works as veristic must strongly correlate with their tie to the literary movement.

Currently, the similarities between *verismo* in opera and literature are debated by scholars both in affirmation and denial. Speaking of the emergence of literary *verismo* in the 1870s followed by that of operatic *verismo* in the 1890s, Corazzol concludes that “the modern tendency has been to

²⁹³ Fitzgerald and Freeman, *Italian Verismo*, 2.

²⁹⁴ Keolker, *Last Acts*, 301.

regard this as a coincidence of little consequence.”²⁹⁵ In other words, modern thought is to dismiss the influence of veristic literature upon opera.

Such dissension and lack of congruent opinion makes it difficult to apply the veristic label unquestionably to operatic works. However, it is the opinion of this author that there is a correlation between the two mediums, which thus allows for an appropriate transmittal of the veristic label from literature to opera. To support this claim, three dissenting reasons claiming a lack of connection will be presented and argued against. Additionally, further arguments will be discussed establishing a clear connection between the two types of artistic works.

The first argument against a connection between veristic literature and opera is as follows. In his literature, Verga was applauded for restraint. For Sansone, he argues that this restraint was, in fact, Verga’s greatest attribute and consequently what came to define his veristic works.²⁹⁶

Furthermore, Sansone views this restraint as unsuited for vocal expression. He argues, “Verga’s formal restraint and impersonality were incompatible with the essentially subjective nature of the vocal expression in the music drama.”²⁹⁷ In his viewpoint, operatic *verismo* is saturated with excess, which stands in direct opposition to Verga’s greatest contribution. As such, the excess of veristic opera can not coincide with the definitive restraint of Verga’s prose.

Although opera may not employ restraint in the exact manner as Verga did, it does employ restraint – especially as compared with its romantic counterpart. Specifically, restraint in veristic

²⁹⁵ Corazzol, “Opera and Verismo,” 39.

²⁹⁶ Sansone, “Verismo: From Literature to Opera,” 9.

²⁹⁷ Sansone, “Verismo: From Literature to Opera,” 9.

opera is observable in a conciseness of writing, which is a characteristic that will be further explained later. However, it is most easily recognized in the number of one-act veristic operas; or, veristic operas of multiple acts, which are actually a compression of the novel or play upon which they are based. Therefore, Sansone fails to acknowledge that operatic *verismo* is heavily influenced by restraint.

A second area of restraint observable in veristic opera is that of passion. For Verga, his works were driven by passion and there was no restraint for his characters and what their passion would drive them to do. Consequently, there was much violence and brutality in Verga's veristic works. However, where Verga did show the restraint Sansone refers to – and where the operatic *veristi* do as well – is in dealing with these non-restrained passions. For example, even though Verga's characters were unconstrained by what their actions would lead them to do, Verga did not dwell on the actions. They occurred and Verga moved on. The same is true for the characters of veristic opera – the action happens, it is not dwelled upon and the plot moves along.

Sansone, in his arguments against the utilization of restraint in opera, continues to highlight the increased risk of picturesqueness in the veristic operatic works. For Verga, this restraint was most noticeable as he abandoned any embroidery of his work, which was common not only for romantic writers, but also for Zola. Recall, Zola often went on lengthy tangents describing the setting and mood, which came at the sacrifice of the plot. Sansone postulates that the Italian *veristi* would also lapse into such Zolian picturesqueness. He states, "Moreover, the indispensable compression of the plot, the reduction or elimination of the minor roles providing the social background, or their aggregation to an operatic Chorus, increased the risk of lapsing

into picturesqueness and sensationalism.”²⁹⁸ The key to Sansone’s argument is in the details where he foresees an apparent increased risk. Yes, the consolidation as outlined by Sansone did increase the risk of unrestrained embroidery; however, this was not a pitfall to which the *veristi* succumbed.

The second argument made against the connection between veristic literature and opera relates to the source of an opera’s libretto. Proponents of this argument assert that veristic opera is only influenced by its literature counterpart as long as it provides the source material for the libretto. The reverse of this argument – an opera is veristic solely based upon its libretto source – can easily be inferred due to the connection between Mascagni’s *Cavalleria rusticana* and Verga’s novel, upon which the libretto was based. Furthermore, Dahlhaus acknowledges that “the libretto of *Cavalleria rusticana* is based on a play by Giovanni Verga that represented *verismo*, an Italian variant of naturalism;” however, he goes on to support the counter argument that “this by no means implies that musical *verismo* is a genuine analogue of its literary counterpart.”²⁹⁹

Ironically, Sansone provides the crux of the critical argument in opposition to this claim. First, the connection between Verga’s novel and Mascagni’s opera is highly overstated. With specific regards to the musico-dramatic characteristics of the opera, Verga’s impact is limited; shall one say, restrained.³⁰⁰ Additionally, as Sansone continues to point out, suggesting that the influence of veristic literature to opera is only accomplished through the source material for the libretto

²⁹⁸ Sansone, “Verismo: From Literature to Opera,” 9.

²⁹⁹ Dahlhaus, *Nineteenth-Century Music*, 351.

³⁰⁰ Sansone, “Verismo: From Literature to Opera,” 5.

fails to accommodate the reality that realistic tendencies existed prior to Mascagni's opera.³⁰¹

Either way, to claim influence of veristic literature upon opera only through the libretto is faulty due to the aggrandizing of literature's measurable influence of the actual plot. There are more defining characteristics of veristic literature and opera beyond that of the storyline.

However, the ramifications of conceding to this argument are monumental. As established previously, it is arguable that Verga was the only veristic writer in the literature camp, with Capuana as a close second. Yet, with Verga's substantial presence in veristic literature, the number of his stories upon which operatic *libretti* are based is quite limited. Aside from the aforementioned *Cavalleria rusticana*, Verga's only other publication to make it to the operatic stage was *La Lupa*. Even so, this was set by an insignificant composer, Pierantonio Tasca (1858-1934), whose opera premiered in the 1920s. Furthermore, "in the course of the decade... literary verismo ceased to be a source of subjects for any major opera."³⁰² To conclude that an opera is veristic by virtue of its libretto's source material is to limit the veristic operatic genre to one primary composition by Mascagni.

To counter this argument and provide an opposing viewpoint, it becomes necessary to illustrate how an opera is not veristic solely based upon its storyline. Specifically, the argument is that the *Giovane scuola* constantly rejected stories by literary *veristi*, but still composed operas in a veristic style. Extending beyond the significance of the plot – and its source material – is the reality that how the story is represented is critical. Corazzol effectively points out that "one can

³⁰¹ Sansone, "Verismo: From Literature to Opera," 5.

³⁰² Sansone, "Verismo: From Literature to Opera," 4.

identify characteristics shared between musical theatre and prose of the same period that reach beyond the level of plot.”³⁰³

An illustrative example of Corazzol’s argument is – as MacDonald points out – that the same story can be both veristic and non-veristic.³⁰⁴ What determines its characteristic genre is the treatment of the story by both the librettist and composer. The story of *L’histoire du chevalier des Grieux et de Manon Lescaut* by Abbé Prévost (Antoine François Prévost d’Exiles, 1697-1763) is a perfect example of MacDonald’s point. This novel was adapted to opera as *Manon* (1884) by Massenet and *Manon Lescaut* by Puccini. In Massenet’s non-veristic setting, he chose to focus on the atmosphere and surroundings – creating a genuine picture of France during the eighteenth-century. In contrast, Puccini took the same story and created a veristic opera, which focused on the reality of the situation. According to MacDonald, Puccini “concentrates on the reality of the misguided young girl and her weakness for acquiring a lover according to her particular needs at the time, not to mention the reality of her rascally brother who gains all he can for himself by her many unfortunate errors.”³⁰⁵ Consequently, an operatic composition may not be categorically classified as either veristic or not based only upon its libretto’s source, yielding this second argument void.

The final argument to be set straight is raised by Dahlhaus as he argues against a connection between literary and operatic *verismo*. Specifically, Dahlhaus fails to see the relevance between the two forms due to the lack of political commentary in the latter. According to his viewpoint,

³⁰³ Corazzol, “Opera and Verismo,” 39-40.

³⁰⁴ See Macdonald, *Puccini: King of Verismo*, 20.

³⁰⁵ Macdonald, *Puccini: King of Verismo*, 21.

“Mascagni sacrificed one of the basic preconditions of Verga’s plot, social criticism in the Zola mold;” and as such, without social criticism, Verga’s influence was drastically limited.³⁰⁶

However, unlike Zola and the French naturalist, the Italian literary *veristi* were not interested in political or social criticism. As Kimbell states, “All the same, there are significant differences between *verismo* and contemporary French naturalism, as Capuana, the principle theorist of *verismo* recognized: so indeed did Zola....He [Zola] meant, it is generally supposed, that Verga lacked political commitment. Italian writers and critics could see clearly enough that Zola’s novels were an indictment of French society, but the accusatory zeal was an aspect of his work which most of them were not prepared to imitate.”³⁰⁷ Capuana, the theorist of Italian literary *verismo*, and Zola, the founder of French naturalism, both acknowledged that Italian veristic works lacked social criticism. Therefore, Dahlhaus’s claim is negated on dual grounds. First, political or social commentary was not a characteristic of Italian veristic literature. Thus, and second, as this social criticism was not part of the literature of the *veristi*, how could the absence of such commentary in the operatic veristic works be seen as a disconnect between itself and literature.

Connection With Literature

Having negated the primary arguments discounting the connection between veristic literature and opera, it becomes necessary to present a proactive argument of the correlation between the two

³⁰⁶ Dahlhaus, *Nineteenth-Century Music*, 351.

³⁰⁷ Kimbell, *Italian Opera*, 623.

artistic mediums. This correlation is monumental to a proper understanding of *verismo* in opera. After all, even Sansone had to concede that a positive and relevant parallel exists. Speaking of *I Pagliacci*, he reasons that “if a case were to be made of ‘verismo from opera to literature’, the libretto of *I Pagliacci* should be classified as a sensational *feuilleton* with literary pretensions.”³⁰⁸ Further, the scholar, Alan Mallach, rightly concludes that “[verismo] operas are clearly the descendants, however attenuated in spirit, of the literary verismo of Verga and his contemporaries.”³⁰⁹ There is, in fact, a positive relationship between veristic literature and opera.

As established, there is not a universally accepted definition or concept of what constitutes veristic opera. The lack of concrete determiners leads to confusion with the genre. This confusion leads to unfounded theories implying “the essential features of literary verismo could not, and did not, pass into any operatic adaptation of the 1890s.”³¹⁰ Although false, what this argument does highlight is the need to identify the essential features of literary *verismo*. Consequently, one must turn to veristic literature, identify its foundational tenets and then examine their presence and application within opera.

Only by identifying the core framework of the literary work of the *veristi* may *verismo* in opera be appropriately defined and classified. The importance of doing so is highlighted by Jay Nicolaisen. He rightly asserts that *verismo* “is a term that must be handled with greater care if it

³⁰⁸ Sansone, “Verismo: From Literature to Opera,” 1-2.

³⁰⁹ Mallach, *The Autumn of Italian Opera*, 42.

³¹⁰ Sansone, “Verismo: From Literature to Opera,” 1.

is to be used at all, and with a rather more precise idea of the implications its use carries.”³¹¹ It is for this reason that establishing a connection between literature and opera is an absolute necessity.

To do so, the remainder of this chapter will present evidence in support of the argument for such an association. More specifically, it is the opinion of this author that there are seven fundamental tenets, which provide the core identifying traits of veristic literature. Likewise, each of these seven principles are readily observable in operatic works, which may then be classified as veristic. The seven characteristics are as follows: reaction against romanticism, character choice, linguistics, silent author, dramatic structure, milieu and violent extremes. Each of these traits will be examined in detail, which will provide confirmation of the correlation and viable determinants for the classification of veristic opera.

Beginning on a macro level now allows for a holistic viewpoint, which will enhance understanding as each element is dealt with individually. To do so, Puccini’s *La Bohème* (1896) may serve as a model in which each of these literary veristic characteristics are easily identifiable within this veristic opera. As a note, each element will only be identified in the opera; a full discussion of the specifics of the characteristics will be provided later. First, reaction against romanticism is observed by Puccini’s avoidance of the big-role mentality. Second, his character choice aligns with Verga’s due to their low profile and social or political insignificance. Furthermore, the activities of their daily routine are what flesh out the storyline. Next, Puccini’s

³¹¹ Nicolaisen, *Italian Opera in Transition*, 243.

conversational linguistic style stems from his avoidance of indirect dictionary-needed vocabulary.

Continuing, the orchestra's enhanced presence is used to employ Verga's technique of the silent author. The dramatic structure is greatly reduced in *La Bohème*, with the plot reduced to one basic situation, which is the relationship between Mimì and Rodolfo. Our penultimate characteristic of the veristic milieu is observed through Puccini's delineation of the social background – poor artists and roommates. This milieu painting is also seen in his creation of the city's ambience – a chilly winter in a big city. Finally, our seventh characteristic of violent extremes is found in Puccini's demanding and raw vocal writing, most observable in Rodolfo and Mimì.

Having presented a macro view through *La Bohème*, a micro analysis of the seven defining characteristics will now be discussed.

Seven Characteristics of *Verismo*

Reaction Against Romanticism

Verismo hit the opera stage like a lightning bolt. It was powerful, dramatic, enlightening, forceful and caught everyone unaware. Indeed, as *Cavalleria rusticana* premiered, it was all these things. However, had the opera-going public been blind to what had been occurring years prior to 1890? As earlier noted, at least three decades prior to 1890, the groundwork was being

established for the birth of *verismo*. Opera was changing and the realization of this change was undeniable in Mascagni's work. As Mallach observes, "Under the influence of naturalism and verismo, as well as the works deeply steeped in naturalism of the French composers Bizet and Massenet that entered the Italian repertory in the 1880s, the subject matter as well as the musical vocabulary of Italian opera changed dramatically."³¹² Opera had been under the pressure of evolution, which erupted in its new form with *Cavalleria rusticana*.

However, the question to be asked is, "What was driving this change?" In a broad but specific sense, the alteration of the opera scene was influenced by the prevailing romantic traditions of the time. As each composer gradually introduced new techniques into his operatic compositions, he found himself reacting to romanticism – a reaction that was primarily in opposition to it. However, when speaking of reacting against or in opposition to romanticism, it is not necessarily with a derogatory connotation. The prominence of romanticism simply gave the composers – especially the *veristi* – something to push against. To them, it was both a supporting and opposing force.

For example, to paddle a kayak along the water, one must push against the water, which is an opposing force to the forward movement of the kayak. Without reacting against this opposition – paddling against the water – the kayak would not move. The kayaker requires the opposition of the water to move forward. Furthermore, the water – though an opposition – is also a critical element of buoyancy for the kayak; without the water, the kayak would remain stationary on dry ground. In both roles of the water, it provides a healthy and purposeful opposition as well as a

³¹² Mallach, *The Autumn of Italian Opera*, 13.

necessary foundation of buoyancy. The water both supports and opposes in a constructive manner.

The same was true for romanticism and the *veristi*. The abandonment of romantic ideals was not transacted out of disgust. Rather, it was an opportunity, which provided momentum forward – momentum toward *verismo*. Giger supports this concept of positive opposition. In his research, he remarks how “the veristi did not abandon convention out of protest against tradition but as a consequence of the search for new and exciting artistic solutions.”³¹³ Reacting against romanticism provided the *veristi* the required opposition to move forward with innovative and creative artistic solutions.

Perhaps the most observable reaction of the *veristi* against romanticism was the rejection of romantic ideals. The absence of these romantic traditions in the veristic works is a hallmark of identification. For example, when examining the compositional works of the *Giovane scuola*, their operas “may be more or less veristic, depending on the number of abandoned Romantic conventions.”³¹⁴ This disposal of romantic standards was not necessarily a distaste for the standard, but for how they had come to be applied. Consequently, to understand such abandonment, one must accept that “verismo thus condemns not tradition so much as anachronistic appropriation of its conventions.”³¹⁵ It was the appropriation of the romantic ideals to which the *veristi* were reacting.

³¹³ Giger, “Verismo: Origin, Corruption, and Redemption,” 301.

³¹⁴ Giger, “Verismo: Origin, Corruption, and Redemption,” 289.

³¹⁵ Giger, “Verismo: Origin, Corruption, and Redemption,” 285.

Two primary anachronistic conventions of romanticism eschewed by the *veristi* were those of artifice and the moral code. An unwritten but ever-employed moral code saturated romantic operas. Mallach states that “the idea that a moral order existed underlying all things was deeply embedded in the operas of earlier generations, from the recurrent conflict of love and honor with which baroque opera busied itself up to and most emphatically including Verdi himself.”³¹⁶ For the *veristi*, the problem was that the moral code prevented drama, in the pure sense. For them, the moral code was based on the archaic values of father, family and religion, which meant that “characters and actions are far removed from the tragic dimensions of traditional opera.”³¹⁷ Seeking to create characters closer to the tragic dimensions of opera, the *veristi* abandoned any affinity with the established moral code.

What came to be seen as a vast absence in the veristic operas was the presentation of the romantic morality with all of its associated elements. It is not that the rudiments of the moral code did not exist among the characters of the *veristi*; but rather, the *veristi* would not allow it to become a compelling force driving the plot, which had occurred in the romantic operas. For example, Ferdinand Pfohl remarks that “the Romantic feelings of patriotism, sacrifice, and faithfulness, which...also existed among the low social classes, play no role in verismo opera.”³¹⁸ The *veristi* were to abandon this moral order in exchange for the creation of drama – tragedy.

³¹⁶ Mallach, *The Autumn of Italian Opera*, 13.

³¹⁷ Nicolodi, “Italian Opera,” 387.

³¹⁸ Pfohl, *Die Moderne Oper*, 190-193, quoted in Giger, “Verismo: Origin, Corruption, and Redemption,” 294.

Even more than not allowing the romantic moral code to dictate and restrict their drama, the *veristi* were also not interested in subscribing to the moral order because their goal was to portray humanity in its purest, unadulterated form. Their exploration was for raw truthfulness, not the fabrication of romanticism's morality. Similarly stated, "In verismo opera, the traditional moral order has been replaced with a positivist view of human behavior, as significant a common ground among the composers of this period as the similarities in vocal technique or plot construction, and radically different from that of the operatic world of the past."³¹⁹ As a result, the destructive and domineering moral code of romanticism is blatantly absent from veristic opera.

Coupled with an abandonment of the traditional romantic moral order, is the stance the *veristi* took toward the artifice harbored by romanticism. To accurately represent the authenticity of humanity and its behavior, all artificiality by means of convention or tradition had to be removed. This shunning of artifice was such a primary concern to the *veristi*, that the implications of their disassociation from artifice may be seen in several of the remaining characteristics to be discussed. Therefore, this particular reaction against romanticism will be examined within the discussion of the remaining characteristics with which this principle applies.

³¹⁹ Mallach, *The Autumn of Italian Opera*, 44.

Character Choice

The abandonment of romantic artifice is clearly recognizable in the choice of character by the *veristi*. For them, this meant rejection of the standard character collection employed by romantic opera. Specifically, this was transacted through “the abandonment of mythical, historical and dynastic subjects.”³²⁰ However, their reaction to romanticism did not only influence their decision to dispose of the romantic character, it also persuaded them toward their character of choice. Specifically, in the rejection of romanticism by the *veristi*, they were likewise influenced to turn “to subjects drawn from ordinary, everyday life – ‘the first man one comes across will do as a hero.’”³²¹ As they departed from the mythical and historical, the *veristi* clung to the common man to serve as their hero.

This transition of character choice was doubtlessly bold and innovative for the *veristi* and the opera consumers. As Schwartz points out, “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.”³²² Their choice was radical; for, the romantic tradition – and those composers still adhering to it – were not to let go of their hold. The veristic heyday of 1890-1892 was sandwiched between two great Verdi operas. In both operas by Verdi, the romantic characters were ever-present. For example, *Otello*, which preceded the veristic zenith made use of romantic characters, such as a general, captain, gentleman of Venice, an ambassador and governor. Likewise, *Falstaff*, which followed the prime years of *verismo*, continued to use

³²⁰ Carner, *Giacomo Puccini: Tosca*, 9.

³²¹ Carner, *Giacomo Puccini: Tosca*, 9.

³²² Schwartz, “Rough Music,” 230.

romantic characters, like Sir John Falstaff and Ford, a wealthy man, as well as a plethora of suitors, followers and pages. Placed between these two monumental operas, the departure of the *veristi* from this romantic artifice could not have been more accentuated and pronounced.

Through their conscious choice to utilize non-traditional romantic characters, the *veristi* were able to rid themselves of the accompanying artifice such characters – by necessity – clung to. Giger aptly explains the transition of the romantic characters to those of the *veristi* and the artificiality that was left behind in their wake. He states, “The characters lose their unambiguous archetypal functions of “hero,” “heroine,” “tyrant,” “rival,” and “judge” and no longer interact with each other in standard juxtapositions of unambiguous gestures and feelings that in turn lead to standard sequences of arias and ensembles; . . . instead, the characters gain in complexity and refinement in extended dialogue.”³²³ This complexity is the authentic – unprecedented and unscripted – actions that the *veristi* diligently sought for their characters.

An example of what was accomplished through this dismissal of romantic artifice is best observed in Act Three of *Andrea Chénier*. The act begins with the people being called to arms by Mathieu. As his attempt is unsuccessful, Gérard steps in, again trying to motivate the people to give money to support the army of the Revolution. To Gérard, the people respond favorably; and in what might be seen as typical romanticism, they throw in their goods and money in support of the army. However, Giordano deepens the depth of the characters and extends them beyond the limits of romanticism with Madelon. She is a very real and passionate character, who acts distinctly different than her romantic counterparts. Her response to Gérard is to sacrifice her

³²³ Giger, “Verismo: Origin, Corruption, and Redemption,” 296.

grandson – a living and loved possession – to support the army. What Giordano captures in Madelon is a character free to act with great emotion, authenticity and freedom, which epitomizes a veristic character.

As the *veristi* turned away from the traditional romantic character, they found themselves adopting the type of characters portrayed in Verga's novels. Verga went to the peasants and those of the lower social classes. These individuals had all but been neglected in prose and opera prior to the *verismo* movement. As Dahlhaus notes, "As a category of art history realism means, not the presentation of one reality or another, but an attempt to elevate a part of reality previously considered "unworthy of art" into an object presentable in painting, literature, or music."³²⁴ As such, the prominence given to the everyday man began to legitimize his presence. Indeed, it is observed how "nineteenth-century realism in art, literature and music was in this sense a 'bill of rights' for low-life, brutal or 'vulgar' subjects – their entrance into legitimate culture."³²⁵ This elevation began with Zola, strengthened with Verga and continued with the operatic *veristi*.

As Carner describes, "From this it follows that almost invariably the heroes and heroines of naturalist opera stand on the lowest rung of the social ladder – hence the gallery of 'low life' characters: prostitutes, soldiers, poor students, workers, peasants and artists."³²⁶ These low-life characters are identifiable in several veristic works. For example, Puccini's *Il Tabarro* (1918) centers around a barge owner, Michele, and several *stevedore*, or dockworkers. Additionally, the primary characters of *Mala Vita* are Cristina, a prostitute and Vito Amante, a dyer.

³²⁴ Dahlhaus, *Nineteenth-Century Music*, 353.

³²⁵ Corazzol, "Opera and Verismo," 41.

³²⁶ Carner, *Giacomo Puccini: Tosca*, 9.

Additionally, Puccini, in *Madama Butterfly*, provides an excellent example of the mentality of the *veristi* – the first man that comes along will do. As a United States soldier, Pinkerton is just one of many American soldiers sharing a similar circumstance. Consequently, Puccini and his librettists could have chosen any number of enlisted men and arrived at the same situation, story and outcome. Further, Pinkerton's counterpart, Butterfly, is a Japanese Geisha. A literal translation of Geisha would be an artist. Again, no social significance but a character of great dramatic power and depth. Other examples include the characters of *I Pagliacci* – actors in a traveling *commedia troupe*. A final prime example would be Cristina from *Mala Vita* – a local prostitute. Countless examples remain; but, the key point is that the *veristi* turned primarily to the peasant and lower-class citizens for their character base, which was in direct contrast to the romantic tradition.

Another defining trait of the character choice for the *veristi* is their personal relationship to the characters, which is observable on different levels. Similar to Verga, the *veristi* chose characters with whom they could relate. Unlike romanticism's mythical or historical characters, *verismo* saw the infiltration of characters who were a reflection of the background of the *veristi*.

However, this personal connection was elevated notably by Leoncavallo and his creation of *I Pagliacci*. As his own librettist, Leoncavallo chose an account from his own childhood upon which to base the story.

Just a few months shy of eight years of age, Ruggiero's father, Vincenzo, was the judge overseeing a local murder case; a case so local, it affected the Leoncavallo family directly. Specifically, the family had hired Gaetano Scavello, who was soon after murdered in March

1865. His murder was instigated by a romantic entanglement of lust and betrayal. Witnessing the aftermath of the event profoundly affected young Ruggiero, which in turn, influenced his opera.

The advantage of such personal connection with the characters on any level results in character authenticity. Speaking of the characters in *I Pagliacci*, Dryden points out that “the characters are not stifled or self-conscious but authentic and passionate personages, thanks to Leoncavallo’s ability to empathize, without having to approach the work through an academic lens.”³²⁷ Such was the benefit of being able to relate as the *veristi* were able to with their characters.

The driving force behind the choice of character for the *veristi* can not be stated enough. They were seeking to capture reality through authenticity and they saw their new characters as the means by which to accomplish this goal. As Mallach emphasizes, “More important, however, than the choice of subjects was the writers’ attitude toward their subjects, whether poor peasants or Milan industrialists. Their focus was on the real, the tangible, unmediated by the author.”³²⁸ Indeed, it was not the choice of character alone, but how the *veristi* related to them and how their portrayal was treated. As Dryden confirms, “Leoncavallo sought to theatrically present “a slice of life” just as Mascagni had done...in full view of an audience.”³²⁹

This slice of life sought after by Leoncavallo – and each of the *veristi* – is captured musically in *I Pagliacci*. From the Prologue of the opera, Tonio sings the following line: *L'autore ha cercato*

³²⁷ Dryden, *Leoncavallo: Life and Works*, 225.

³²⁸ Mallach, *The Autumn of Italian Opera*, 13.

³²⁹ Dryden, *Leoncavallo: Life and Works*, 224-225.

invece pingervi uno squarcio di vita (“The author has sought to portray an authentic “slice” of life inspired solely by reality.”)³³⁰ Leoncavallo could not have been more clear about his intentions. Furthermore, the importance of this statement is stressed musically. As Dryden observes, “Leoncavallo stresses the importance of “squarcio di vita” by employing a *ritornando* in addition to an up-beat on the word “squarcio.””³³¹ Such emphasis reinforces Leoncavallo’s concentrated focus upon depicting an authentic slice of life.

In a similar effort to capture authenticity in their characters, the *veristi* would often create the impression of improvisation. Effectively used, this would create the illusion of unscripted communication from the character – freedom to emote. Kimbell suggests that a prime illustration of this technique is observed in Cavaradossi’s aria in the third act of Puccini’s *Tosca*, *E lucevan le stelle*. Kimbell remarks that “in Puccini’s hands, the aria can often give less the impression of a musical composition being performed, more than that of an improvisation, of an experience being lived through.”³³² For Kimbell, this is technically achieved through non-urgent orchestral music, hesitant and unemphatic rhythms and an orchestral texture that is mysteriously sophisticated and shadowy. Though the musical techniques may vary among the *veristi*, their goal is the same – depict an authentic character, which allows for an organic experience to be lived through. Thus are the characters of *verismo*.

³³⁰ Dryden, *Leoncavallo: Life and Works*, 216.

³³¹ Dryden, *Leoncavallo: Life and Works*, 216.

³³² Kimbell, *Italian Opera*, 626.

Linguistics

As with each element of *verismo*, the seeds of change were planted prior to their full veristic realization. The same is to be said of the linguistic choices made by the *veristi*; and consequently, by their romantic predecessors. Extending beyond the violence, choice of character and reaction to romanticism inherent in *verismo*, the genre is also distinguished by its treatment of language. As one scholar notes, “It seems more constructive...to view verismo opera as intimately bound up with a crisis in the relationship between language and subject matter.”³³³

Actually, the crises of this relationship is a more accurate description. Specifically, the first crisis dealt with by the *veristi* was that of poetic meter and verse. William Weaver, in his preface to a collection of correspondence between Verdi and Boito, appropriately sets the scene for the challenge of Italian prosody. He instructs, “Italian verses are measured – and denominated – by the number of their syllables.”³³⁴ For example, verses based on eleven syllables – the most common – are called *endecasillabi*. Weaver continues, “This “syllable count” ideally assumes an end-of-line stress on the penultimate syllable and elision of all consecutive vowels from word to word.”³³⁵ Thus, irregular meters arise when Italian verses of different length are set together in verse, which prevent rhythmic rhyming.

³³³ Corazzol, “Opera and Verismo,” 41.

³³⁴ Verdi et al., *The Verdi-Boito Correspondence*, ix.

³³⁵ Verdi et al., *The Verdi-Boito Correspondence*, ix.

The origins of change for this dilemma began with Verdi as he initiated a break from traditional romantic verse. This change originated first in Verdi's *Don Carlo*, which was an Italian translation of his French opera, *Don Carlos*. The original French libretto contained several irregular meters, which needed to be dealt with in the Italian translation. Such a task meant the "translation of irregular French meters into irregular Italian ones in a work by an Italian composer;" the significance was that by doing so, it "helped break down a long-held [metrical] tradition."³³⁶

The translation of *Don Carlo* was the beginning of irregular metrical treatment for Verdi. A later and second important example is found in *Aida*. In the final scene of the fourth act, Radamès's aria, *Morir, sì pura e bella*, also breaks with standard romantic metre. As Giger notes, "Verdi and Ghislanzoni included in the final duet from *Aida*... a particularly interesting sequence of lyrical verse, which broke with the basically regular stanzas of nineteenth-century Italian opera."³³⁷

Another Italian to break away from this romantic contraption was Boito. As the librettist for Franco Faccio's (1840-1891) *Amleto* (1865) and his own *Mefistofele*, he realized the rigidity of the Italian poetic meter. More specifically, "He recognized that the hidebound structures and the rhythmic stiffness of so much Italian opera arose inevitably from the metrical organization of the traditional libretto."³³⁸ As such, he worked to break down the traditional Italian prosody. What had its origins in the works of Boito and Verdi was magnified in the efforts of the *veristi* as they

³³⁶ Giger, "Verismo: Origin, Corruption, and Redemption," 299.

³³⁷ Giger, "Verismo: Origin, Corruption, and Redemption," 298.

³³⁸ Kimbell, *Italian Opera*, 581.

reacted against this romantic tradition. As a result, they would turn to their primary librettist, Luigi Illica (1857-1919) to continue the trend already in motion.³³⁹

Illica's importance in the veristic movement and the accomplishment of the unified goals of the *veristi* can not be overstated. As the librettist for some 35 operas, his significant contribution to *verismo* was in the works of Puccini's *La Bohème*, *Tosca* and *Madama Butterfly*. He also conceived the story for Giordano's *Andrea Chénier*. In these works, Illica was responsible for creating "innovative poetic meters and vocabulary," which challenged the established Italian prosody.³⁴⁰ In fact, as a result of the combined efforts of Illica and the *veristi*, "a whole system of metres which had served Italian opera for two centuries quietly dissolved."³⁴¹ As Budden writes, "Above all [Illica] was instrumental in breaking down the rigid system of Italian operatic metres into lines of irregular length, which Giulio Ricordi jokingly called 'illicasillabi' but which were eminently suited to the prevailing musical style."³⁴² Ricordi's coined term of *illicasillabi* was a play on words; specifically, a combination of *endecasillabi* and Illica's name.

The *verismo* repertoire is flush with examples of the romantic tradition of Italian prosody being de-versified. However, the first example sheds light upon why the *veristi* chose to abandon this tradition. As stated earlier, the *veristi* were not departing from tradition just for the sake of departure – they had a purpose. The purpose – as it is with most departures for them – was in their honest effort to portray truth and reality. The use of irregular metrical verse leading to authenticity is best observed in the first act of *Andrea Chénier*. As the "guests crowd about the

³³⁹ Giger, "Verismo: Origin, Corruption, and Redemption," 299.

³⁴⁰ Giger, "Verismo: Origin, Corruption, and Redemption," 298.

³⁴¹ Giger, "Verismo: Origin, Corruption, and Redemption," 300.

³⁴² Budden, "Illica, Luigi."

handsome fellow [Chénier],” Illica foregoes traditional Italian “prepared verse for a free-flowing poetic comment.”³⁴³ The effect breeds vibrant authenticity similar to the situation created by Puccini with Cavaradossi’s quasi-improvisational aria in *Tosca*. As Keolker notes, “It is what Giordano called the *Improvviso* or improvisation, with music so fervent and skillfully composed it seems as if it were extemporaneous.”³⁴⁴

The use of irregular meters was also the liberating factor for Puccini to create what is referred to as his conversation style.³⁴⁵ Similar to the illusion of improvisation, Puccini’s singing conversations brought an everyday element to his characters – a sense of daily reality. *La Bohème* is perhaps the best example of such achievement for Puccini. Concerning its librettists Illica and Giuseppe Giacosa (1847-1906), Keolker notes that “their artful libretto is also responsible for this naturalistic effect, breaking away from traditional versification and considerably liberating Puccini to write both long-limbed melodies as well as the quick, lyric interchanges.”³⁴⁶ Whether for the impression of improvisation or the capture of a conversational style, the *veristi* departed from romantic Italian prosody and utilized their irregular meters to develop *verismo* – truth.

A second crisis for the *veristi* was the challenge of vocabulary. In the romantic tradition, and “for much of the nineteenth century, librettists still drew on a conventional, stylized, elevated, and one might say idealist vocabulary.”³⁴⁷ The romantics’ vocabulary was not that of the

³⁴³ Keolker, *Last Acts*, 224.

³⁴⁴ Keolker, *Last Acts*, 224.

³⁴⁵ Corazzol, “Opera and Verismo,” 41.

³⁴⁶ Keolker, *Last Acts*, 43n9.

³⁴⁷ Giger, “Verismo: Origin, Corruption, and Redemption,” 299.

peasants'; and as such, the operatic *veristi* faced the same challenge as Verga in his novels – how to capture their characters' everyday language. For Verga, the answer was to literally use the same words that his characters would use. This is most often described as a vocabulary not requiring the frequent use of a dictionary. Likewise, the musical *veristi* “made their characters use the language of everyday in place of the stilted fustian that had obtained hitherto.”³⁴⁸ As Schwartz highlights, “What verismo novels and operas do share is “a poetics, as well as a practice, of anti-subjectivity”...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.””³⁴⁹ Consequently, the language was the language of the characters, not the librettist's or composer's.

Giger highlights some of the specific changes that occurred in the *verismo* vocabulary.³⁵⁰ These changes were modifications from the old-fashioned and archaic vocabulary still engaged by the romantics. The core of the change was simply to use the common everyday terminology. For example, the archaic term for hope was *speme*. In its place, the *veristi* would use *speranza*. In similar fashion, horse transformed from *destriero* to *cavallo*; hair changed from *crine* to *capelli*; and finally, wings were no longer known by *vanni*, but instead, *ali*. Where as the change may seem a simple one – no great structural or mysterious change – it allowed for a lowering of the linguistic language to authentically associate with the characters of the *veristi*.

³⁴⁸ Giger, “Verismo: Origin, Corruption, and Redemption,” 300.

³⁴⁹ Schwartz, “Rough Music,” 230.

³⁵⁰ Giger, “Verismo: Origin, Corruption, and Redemption,” 299.

Along with their efforts to use an everyday vocabulary, the *veristi* and their librettists purposefully avoided speaking metaphorically. In other words, they would not speak around the truth; but rather, speak in the truth. As Lorenzo Stecchetti suggests, he would identify those who “were called *veristi* only for using the proper word where the others used the metaphor and [those who] point to the true sentiment where the others disguised it.”³⁵¹ Such rejection of metaphorical speech is significant. Sansone, who argued against a literary connection with veristic opera even acknowledged that this tendency was – in his mind – the only veristic element preserved from Verga in opera.³⁵²

The effect of such direct language was an absolute vividness of dialogue. This point is illustrated in a correspondence from Illica to Puccini in 1907. In this letter, Illica stresses that “the words should correspond to the truth of the moment (the situation) and of the passion (the character). Everything lies in that, the rest is *blague*.”³⁵³ An example of the metaphorical language of the romantics is observed in Verdi’s *La traviata* (1853). In the second act, Germont conveys to Violetta: *deh non mutate in triboli le rose dell’amor* (do not change into sadness the roses of love). This is contrasted with a statement about Puccini’s *La Bohème* by Kimbell, observing that “the traditional high-flown poetic diction gave way to a slangy colloquialism that only at rare moments of exalted feeling returned to anything like the norms of operatic eloquence.”³⁵⁴

³⁵¹ Stecchetti, *Nova Polemica*, 72, quoted in Giger, “Verismo: Origin, Corruption, and Redemption,” 300.

³⁵² Sansone, “Verismo: From Literature to Opera,” 48.

³⁵³ Kimbell, *Italian Opera*, 583.

³⁵⁴ Kimbell, *Italian Opera*, 588.

A final technique engaged by the operatic *veristi* – and shared with Verga – is the use of dialect. Verga was so successful in using dialect that he was credited with the creation of a new literary language. The choice to utilize dialect was placed at the forefront of Mascagni's opera. In fact, the very first vocal line delivered in a purely veristic opera – *Cavalleria rusticana* being the first – was delivered in a Sicilian dialect. Specifically, it is Turiddu's opening aria, which is delivered from behind the curtain. As Kimbell relates, the Sicilian aria, *O Lola c'hai di latti la cammisa* (*O Lola, bianca come fior di spino*), "is a startling moment, this blatantly sensual song in Sicilian dialect by the peasant Turiddu."³⁵⁵

The use of dialect was also employed in another irrevocably veristic opera, *Mala vita*. Sung by Annetiello in the third act, the aria *Ce sta, ce sta nu mutto ca dice* is of Neapolitan dialect. This instance, along with *Cavalleria rusticana*'s first lines, are transparent examples of deliberate dialect usage by the *veristi*. Furthermore, this employment of dialect is a connection shared with Verga, which links veristic literature and opera.

The enduring characteristic of linguistic choices throughout the compositions of the *veristi* testifies of its essential association with the literary *verismo* movement. Just as Verga was credited with forging a new literary medium, so were the *veristi* in their compositions. As Corazzol suggests, "Rustic verismo thus stands out both as a special case of naturalism and as a mode of writing; as an invented language, almost a new, 'low' style of the tragic and melodramatic."³⁵⁶ Most notably, even in the operas where characters were drawn from social classes different than the peasants – i.e. *Andrea Chénier*, *Manon Lescaut* and even *Tosca* – the

³⁵⁵ Keolker, *Last Acts*, 297.

³⁵⁶ Corazzol, "Opera and Verismo," 43.

veristi continued to use the language of the characters. Truly, linguistic choices are indispensable elements similar to both veristic literature and opera.

Silent Author and the Veristic Orchestra

Verga – in his veristic prose – developed and universally applied a new style of writing known as the silent author. The technical execution of this method required the author to remove himself as either an omniscient narrator or internal protagonist. Instead, Verga’s story is narrated from within – through the characters. The purpose for such an approach was to eliminate artifice contributed by the outside author and capture the genuineness of the characters and the unfolding plot. For Verga, this was the pathway to truth. The same is true of the veristic composers as they sought for authenticity in their operas. Highly influenced by Verga’s innovative approach, they set out to develop a method through which any trace of the composer’s hand might be eliminated.

However, to do so would present a great challenge. As Mallach points out, applying the literary silent author technique in music “is not literally possible;” a stance he takes because he feels, “the composer’s hand is always evident.”³⁵⁷ Indeed, the composer’s hand – his approach, style and musical mannerisms – are identifiably unique; but then, are not also those of a literary author? Even among the literary *veristi*, is there not an observable difference between the writings of Verga and Capuana? Agreed, unique style may always be discernible; but, if the

³⁵⁷ Mallach, *Pietro Mascagni and His Operas*, 65.

absence of the author may be achieved in literature – where the same obstacle of personal mannerisms is to be overcome – then why is this not also achievable in music? In reality, the impression of a silent author was indeed achieved by the musical *veristi*. Even Mallach – who argues against the literal possibility – observed in Mascagni’s *Cavalleria rusticana* that through his “musical technique,” Mascagni was able to “fool an audience into believing that the hand of the composer [was] invisible.”³⁵⁸

Mascagni was able to effectively apply the literary silent author technique in *Cavalleria rusticana* by creating another character within the plot. This additional character was the orchestra, which would be used by the *veristi* as a character throughout their veristic compositions. The role of the orchestra’s character would be threefold. First, it would serve to narrate events from its internal perspective, even revealing what the characters themselves can not. Second, the orchestra would take on a descriptive role defining scenery, settings and the action of other characters. Lastly, the character of the orchestra would provide free indirect discourse.

The key to Verga’s success in achieving a silent author – as well as for the musical *veristi* – is in how the story is narrated. Specifically, it must be told through the lens of the characters themselves. Therefore, just as the dialogue of the characters on stage would move action along, so would the orchestra’s character. It, too, would be employed to drive the action of the plot. Narrating the story through the orchestra is what allowed Mascagni to achieve the invisible hand Mallach referred to. The method by which Mascagni applied this in *Cavalleria rusticana* is

³⁵⁸ Mallach, *Pietro Mascagni and His Operas*, 66.

outlined by Mallach. He states, “The orchestra is almost another character in *Cavalleria*. It is the orchestra that both propels Santuzza’s desperate cry and then brings the emotional climate down, setting the stage for her scene with Alfio, and again, with the famous Intermezzo, after Alfio has cried “Vendetta avrò!” one last time and stalked offstage.”³⁵⁹

This example shows how the orchestra’s narrative is used simultaneously with the narrative of the on-stage actors. However, the orchestra as narrator is most influential when it is the only voice heard. Mallach concurs when he asserts that “the orchestra is not only important in its many large, self-contained passages; it is constantly intervening to accentuate the character’s words or, even more important, their silences. Those silences, where the orchestra speaks what the characters cannot, are among the most powerful moments in the opera.”³⁶⁰ Suddenly, by utilizing the orchestra as a character of narration, the composers now have a tool to musically express the silence of the characters.

An application of this is observed in a tense moment in the finale of *Cavalleria rusticana* as seen in figure 1. At this point in the opera, the hostility between Alfio and Turiddu has reached its limit. As they embrace, Turiddu gives Alfio’s ear a vicious bite, which signals a fight to the death. In this poignant moment, Turiddu turns to Alfio and all he is able to mutter is: *compar Alfio*. Then, in Turiddu’s silence that follows, the cello continues on. In doing so, “the cello is not a prelude;” but rather, “it is the sound of Turiddu trying to figure out what to say to the man who is about to kill him.”³⁶¹ The emotive and narrative ability of the cello to reveal Turiddu’s

³⁵⁹ Mallach, *Pietro Mascagni and His Operas*, 68.

³⁶⁰ Mallach, *Pietro Mascagni and His Operas*, 66-67.

³⁶¹ Mallach, *Pietro Mascagni and His Operas*, 68.

inner thoughts as he faces death yields an eerie sense of genuineness of the situation and Turiddu's character.

Figure 1. Pietro Mascagni, *Cavalleria rusticana*, Act One, Finale.

The image shows a musical score for the character Turiddu. The top staff is a vocal line in treble clef, 4/4 time, with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The lyrics "Com-par" and "Al-fio." are written below the notes. The bottom staff is a piano accompaniment in grand staff (treble and bass clefs), also in 4/4 time and one sharp. It features a cello part labeled "(cello)" and includes a triplet of eighth notes marked with a "3".

Another powerful moment found in *verismo* opera where the orchestra explores and reveals a character's state of mind is found in *Madama Butterfly*. It occurs at the beginning of the second part of the second act. Just prior, Cio-Cio San and the other women had heard the ship's cannons announce its arrival. With great anticipation, Cio-Cio San waits for Pinkerton, but he does not immediately appear. At this point, her scene of waiting – full of character development – unfolds. Then, the orchestra's character provides the *Intermezzo*.

In this moving number, the orchestra reveals the inner mind of Cio-Cio San. As Keolker explains, "While [Puccini] had written effective orchestral interludes for both *Le Villi* and *Manon Lescaut* to cover structural plot deficiencies, here the music is an integral part of the drama. Thus within the whorls of woodwind and string discordancies, the ebb and flow of recalled melodies, the ever-changing tensions and harmonies, Cio-Cio San's state of mind is explored,

her burden of overdue expectation, her fervent hope at last to be realized.”³⁶² For Corazzol, the role of the orchestra is crucial in these moments as the orchestra is alone on stage “at the dramatically decisive moment preceding the catastrophe.”³⁶³ The *veristi* wisely understood the power of the orchestra’s narrative power in these situations and wielded this strength authoritatively.

A significant derivative of the orchestra’s narrative ability – especially as observed in these examples – is that the action never stops. There is never an abusive pause where a character elects to elaborately reflect upon her inner thoughts via recitative or aria. Rarely in life does one pause to reflect out loud that which is occurring in her mind. It is unnatural. Such oddity, which had been employed nauseatingly in romantic opera, was now both avoidable and avoided by the *veristi*. The orchestra was a character capable of revealing what on-stage characters could not. Not because these characters were unable to express their inner thoughts; but that in doing so, artifice impelled itself into the plot detracting from the authenticity for which the *veristi* strove.

In addition to narrating events from an internal perspective, the orchestra as narrator was also used to depict scenery and settings, including the action of the on-stage characters. The goal was to enhance ambience and authenticity through the orchestra. As Corazzol acknowledges, “The orchestra contributes ever more decisively towards defining scenic events; it articulates the story through thematic structure, almost functioning as a narrator.”³⁶⁴ In an effort to capture every sense of reality, the articulation of surroundings was of great importance to the *veristi*. The

³⁶² Keolker, *Last Acts*, 65.

³⁶³ Corazzol, “Opera and Verismo,” 44.

³⁶⁴ Corazzol, “Opera and Verismo,” 42.

orchestra allowed for such communication. Kimbell emphasizes this point. He writes, “The ambition was to compose the décor into the music; the evocation of the milieu in which the drama was set became one of the composer’s most stimulating tasks. The insistence of *verismo* writers on creating a vivid picture of the scenes of their stories by the precise documentary description of their most ordinary details prompted a sympathetic response in all the *verismo* composers.”³⁶⁵

As such, the veristic repertoire is replete with examples of this specific role of the orchestra. The opening act of *Tosca* – with Tosca’s initial entrance – provides the first example to examine. Specifically, as Tosca enters the church, her musical theme is heard in the orchestra. However, to emphasize the ambience of the setting and establish the mood, her theme is embellished with “little flurries of woodwinds indicating her haste.”³⁶⁶ Further examples are offered in Puccini’s *La Bohème*. As Keolker educates, “When Rodolfo is forced to burn his manuscript to keep warm, a series of diminishing notes are played, as if the flames were dying away;” in addition, “when Mimì faints, two violins play *pizzicato* indicating the water Rodolfo sprinkles to revive her.”³⁶⁷ In each of these examples, the orchestra’s narrative capacity enhances the setting, scene and actions of the characters, which strengthens the depiction of reality for the *veristi*.

Consequently, the desired result of employing the orchestra as a narrative character was achieved by the *veristi*. As a narrator of action, settings, scenes and a revealer of inner thoughts and emotions, the orchestra was able to contribute to the authenticity the *veristi* desired to cultivate.

³⁶⁵ Kimbell, *Italian Opera*, 627.

³⁶⁶ Keolker, *Last Acts*, 52.

³⁶⁷ Keolker, *Last Acts*, 43n8.

As a result, the orchestra's narrative power provided an invisible hand of the composer – leaving no omniscient outside mark. As Mallach concludes, “The use of the orchestra as narrator or as the composer's voice...all worked to break down the formal frame that separated the audience from unmediated experience of the events depicted on stage, creating parallel of sorts with the verismo fiction of Verga or Capuana.”³⁶⁸

A final role to discuss regarding the orchestra as narrator is that it provided free indirect discourse, or free indirect speech. As Corazzol confirms, “The orchestra increases in importance in the manner described...as ‘free indirect’ discourse, echoing and in some cases equaling the voices.”³⁶⁹ As defined in *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*, free indirect discourse is “a way of narrating characters' thoughts or utterances that combines some of the features of third-person report with some features of first-person direct speech;” further, this style “adopts the idiom of the character's own thoughts, including indicators of time and place.”³⁷⁰ As Gérard Genette explains, “The narrator takes on the speech of the character, or, if one prefers, the character speaks through the voice of the narrator, and the two instances are then merged.”³⁷¹

A simple example best illustrates this technique, tracing its evolution beginning with direct speech, followed by indirect speech and concluding with free indirect speech. First, an example of direct speech: She looked out the window and thought of her sorrow. “Why have I chosen to love a man who does not hold me in his heart?” she asked. Second, an example of indirect

³⁶⁸ Mallach, *The Autumn of Italian Opera*, 43.

³⁶⁹ Corazzol, “Opera and Verismo,” 43-44.

³⁷⁰ Birch, *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*.

³⁷¹ Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, 174 quoted in Stevenson, *Modernist Fiction: An Introduction*, 32.

speech: She looked out the window and thought of her sorrow. She asked herself why she had chosen to love a man who did not hold her in his heart. Finally, the same dialogue expressed with free indirect speech: She looked out the window and thought of her sorrow. And just why had she chosen to love a man who did not hold her in his heart?

With the orchestra now functioning as a character with free indirect discourse narrative capabilities, the *veristi* were able to assume the speech of the characters directly into their composed music. It is with this capability that – as Corazzol pointed out – the orchestra is able to both echo and equal the narrative capabilities of the voiced characters. Not only does the dialogue of the libretto capture authenticity through how the story is told, but now, the orchestra is able to emote in the same manner and characteristics as the other participants of the plot.

Being able to emote in the same manner of the characters is no easy task for the *veristi* to accomplish. As previously discussed, the *veristi* went to great strides in order to get the linguistic level of the libretto to match that of the characters. It took effort and did not occur naturally. Likewise, getting the orchestra to express itself with the same musically parallel linguistic expression required musical tactics. However, as the *veristi* found success with the linguistic challenges of their characters, they would also find success with the parallel musical challenges. In fact, upon examination of their works, Corazzol concludes that “the *veristi* have developed a “symphonic vocality...at the same emotive level as that of the characters.”³⁷²

³⁷² Corazzol, “Opera and Verismo,” 44.

The technical solution allowing the orchestra to emote at the same level as the characters was secured through regression. It is ironic that regression – returning to a former or less-developed state – would actually elevate the works of the *veristi*. Yet, it was precisely the regression of musical techniques, which allowed the orchestra to speak. Consequently, in yet another departure from the romantic traditions, the *veristi* sought to simplify. As Corazzol confirms, “From this perspective, the orchestra’s harmonic and rhythmic gestures in verismo opera are also regressive and simplifying, at least in comparison with other symphonic styles of the period.”³⁷³ In his description of this departure from romanticism, Mallach states that “the most notable musical features of the operas of this period and the most notable departures from the musical language inherited from Verdi and his predecessors include octave doublings, pedals, and ostinato rhythms.”³⁷⁴

As the *veristi* faithfully pursued the path of simplification and regression, they developed technical musical staples, which came to saturate their compositions. The most prominent of these techniques include parallelism, tremolos and pedal tones. Kimbell’s critique of *Cavalleria rusticana* highlights the prominence of these technical elements. He comments, “The naïve fervour with which Mascagni throws himself into his *cantabile* melodies disarms criticism: they are sung in vocal-instrumental doublings against orchestral backgrounds specifically designed to set them off – *Trovatore*-like vampings and tremolos; and they tend to recur in ‘theme-song’-like manner with no particular purpose save that of insisting on a continuous, vibrant emotional ecstasy.”³⁷⁵

³⁷³ Corazzol, “Opera and Verismo,” 44.

³⁷⁴ Mallach, *The Autumn of Italian Opera*, 43.

³⁷⁵ Kimbell, *Italian Opera*, 621.

The result of applying these regressive techniques is that it allowed the orchestra to speak. Corazzol explains the connection between regressive techniques and orchestral speaking. She instructs, “The octave and unison doublings...the use of pedals and tremolos, and various ostinato formulas are redundant or iterative techniques that ‘degrade’ the writing, giving it an oral character, almost one of direct speech – gestural, rather than abstract or logical.”³⁷⁶ Such degradation of writing is interpreted aurally as a simulation of speech.

As a side note, not only did regression allow the *veristi* to capture the linguistic language of its characters in the music of the orchestra, but it also allowed them to further their separation from the composed material. As Giger points out, these regressive techniques reinforce “the impression of impersonality – i.e., authorial detachment – by frequently drawing on speech.”³⁷⁷ Speaking specifically of the regressive straightforward harmonies of Mascagni, Mallach observes the effect this has upon the masking of the composer’s imprint. He states, “While some of this [regression] can be characterized as a sort of “dumbing down” of his musical inclinations, it permitted Mascagni to create a language that fit his characters and that fed the overarching illusion that the composer’s hand was indeed invisible.”³⁷⁸ Drawing on the speech of the orchestra further veiled the mark of the composer upon the veristic composition – allowing for authorial detachment, an invisible hand, a silent author.

The consequence of the orchestra’s ability to speak – just as the characters speak – directly influenced the role of the operatic orchestra. Now, it could genuinely function as a narrator,

³⁷⁶ Corazzol, “Opera and Verismo,” 44.

³⁷⁷ Giger, “Verismo: Origin, Corruption, and Redemption,” 273.

³⁷⁸ Mallach, *Pietro Mascagni and His Operas*, 69.

which is exactly what the *veristi* were seeking to achieve. Consequently, with this enhanced role, it became immediately apparent that the historical rapport between orchestra and voice would be significantly altered. Corazzol confirms by assertion that “if we agree that the orchestra in late nineteenth-century opera functions as a narrator, then...the new relationship between the voice and orchestra in verismo opera becomes clear.”³⁷⁹

In an undeniable fashion, the *veristi* brought about a revolutionary change of rapport between the orchestra and stage voices. The long-held tradition embraced by romantic opera where the orchestra served more as an accompaniment was shunned in *verismo*. Armed with the power of the orchestra’s narrative prowess, the *veristi* elevated the role of the orchestra from accompaniment to equal participant. In defending her stance of this new relationship, Corazzol asserts that “in verismo opera the traditional balance between instrumental and vocal textures is reformulated,” which is accomplished through “an exchange of material, a sense of rapport between voice and orchestra – especially in Puccini.”³⁸⁰

This empowering of the orchestra as narrator – specifically changing the preexisting balance between voice and orchestra – was not necessarily new to the *veristi*. After all, they had observed it in the literary works of both Zola and Verga. For literature, this shift of prominence occurred as the omniscient author was discarded. Instead, elected in its place was the silent author narrative style. For example, utilizing an omniscient author meant that the author was the dominant presence in the literary work. His own words saturated the story. In his wake were the actual characters of the story, left only to serve as accompaniment to be manipulated by what the

³⁷⁹ Corazzol, “Opera and Verismo,” 43.

³⁸⁰ Corazzol, “Opera and Verismo,” 42.

author was seeking to convey. It truly was a role of accompaniment and dominance. However, without a grand omniscient author and the story narrated through each of the characters, this unequal relationship disappeared. Consequently, there were no accompaniment roles; each character was important for he actively contributed to the conveyance of the narrative.

Though not a new approach universally, the insistence of the *veristi* to elevate the orchestra from accompaniment to character participant was – for music – both new and innovative. As Corazzol concludes, “In verismo opera narrative structure assumes greater prominence than it had previously, and thus more attention is given, at least in terms of the Italian tradition, to the instrumental component.”³⁸¹ This greater attention is most readily observed in the carrying of the melody by the orchestra.

In operatic *verismo*, the melodic material is not delivered exclusively by the vocalists. In fact, MacDonald argues that in this genre of opera, the orchestra carries the melody the majority of the time.³⁸² His claim is easily substantiated due to the constant melodic paralleling between the voice and orchestra. As a result, with the orchestra echoing the melodic material of the voice and provided opportunity to carry the melody alone, MacDonald is correct in his assertion.

Opportunities to be the sole provider of the melodic material strengthen MacDonald’s argument that in *verismo*, the orchestra carries the melody the majority of the time. In support of his belief, MacDonald provides the following two scenarios.³⁸³ Specifically, for him, there are two

³⁸¹ Corazzol, “Opera and Verismo,” 42.

³⁸² See Macdonald, *Puccini: King of Verismo*, 24.

³⁸³ See Macdonald, *Puccini: King of Verismo*, 23-24.

specific situations to consider. First, the orchestra clearly has the melody and the vocalist is to sing an obbligato – often monotone – over the melodic material. A straightforward example would be the beginning of Cavaradossi’s aria, *E lucevan le stelle*, which is shown in figure 2. The second situation to consider – similar in fashion to the first – is when the melodic material carried by the orchestra is joined by a countermelody from the singers. The beginning of the love duet near the end of the first act of Puccini’s *Manon Lescaut* provides an illustrative example. In both cases, the orchestra delivers the melodic material, only to be eventually joined in parallel by the singers.

Figure 2. Giacomo Puccini, *Tosca*, Act Three, *E lucevan le stelle*.

CAVARADOSSI

E lu - ce - van le stel - le

ed olez - za va la ter - ra

5

5

Dramatic Structure

Another element tightly linking veristic literature and opera are the choices made by the *veristi* affecting dramatic structure. As was much the case with their other defining characteristics, the choices made with regard to dramaturgy were in direct reaction to the prevailing romantic traditions. Giger confirms the presence of this reactionary response. He states, “In addition to harmony” – the regressive techniques of the *veristi* – “the dramaturgy of Italian opera – i.e., the aesthetics of dramatic structure – sheds many of the Romantic conventions.”³⁸⁴ A very specific aesthetic of dramatic structure targeted by the *veristi* was romanticism’s monumentality.

As characterized by Giger, “Romantic opera achieves “monumentality” through juxtaposition of unambiguous gestures (such as falling on one’s knees in prayer or withdrawing with one’s hands covering the face), which are followed by a “tableau” expressing the appropriate feeling in one of the lyrical movements of the standard form.”³⁸⁵ The unambiguous gestures of any character directly threatened the authenticity the *veristi* fought for. It has already been discussed in great detail the lengths the *veristi* took in choosing veristic characters free of this very artifice. They were not going to sabotage their efforts by adopting the monumentality of romanticism.

In the place of monumentality, the veristic composers – working with their librettists turned to a technique known as miniaturization. As defined by Gilles de Van, miniaturization is “achieved by the accumulation of tiny sections that mark, with far greater precision, the stages of [a

³⁸⁴ Giger, “Verismo: Origin, Corruption, and Redemption,” 294.

³⁸⁵ Giger, “Verismo: Origin, Corruption, and Redemption,” 297.

character's] inner journey.”³⁸⁶ For Giger, he interprets miniaturization as “the gradual transformation of the Romantic scene structure into a freer succession of [events, marking] the stages of a character's development.”³⁸⁷ For example, monumentality provided for no character development. A recurring plot event in romanticism would occur, which would automatically trigger a predetermined response in a generic action. However, with miniaturization, the *veristi* could map out the development and transformation of their characters. This meant that their actions became genuine, as the onlooker would be able to watch the evolution unfold in real time.

A critical component of development was that of the character's psychology. No consideration was given for such progression in the early romantic operas. For example, the concluding actions in *La Traviata* – the death of Violetta – are introduced with a *tempo di mezzo* in the dialogue – the dialogue slows. However, as Giger points out, while the *tempo di mezzo* “propels the drama to a rapid conclusion, it does not in any way contribute to the development of the characters' psychology.”³⁸⁸ Contrast this with what occurs in Verdi's *Otello* – the forerunner to the miniaturization of the *veristi*. Specifically, Giger considers the second half of the fourth act as a “gem of psychological development.”³⁸⁹ In his words he explains why. He states, “Until the very end of the opera, the characters develop dramatically, Emilia into a woman who finally stands up for what is right and Otello into a resigned hero whose glory has passed and who no longer has the energy to harm anyone.”³⁹⁰

³⁸⁶ Van, *Verdi's Theater*, 271.

³⁸⁷ Giger, “Verismo: Origin, Corruption, and Redemption,” 297.

³⁸⁸ Giger, “Verismo: Origin, Corruption, and Redemption,” 297-298.

³⁸⁹ Giger, “Verismo: Origin, Corruption, and Redemption,” 298.

³⁹⁰ Giger, “Verismo: Origin, Corruption, and Redemption,” 298.

The same psychological development – the working out of the characters’ unprecedented actions – is at the core of the *verismo* movement and the impetus behind the dramatic choices of the *veristi*. Two primary examples occur in the exemplary veristic models of *Cavalleria rusticana* and *I Pagliacci*. For *Cavalleria rusticana*, the final three scenes use dialogue to work out the final character development and fate of Turiddu. For *I Pagliacci*, the entire *Commedia* consists of dialogue. No grand finale musical numbers; no moment of gathering the entire ensemble together. The final scenes are devoted to dialogue, which – as Giger points out – “In the 1890s, this kind of ending becomes the norm.”³⁹¹ The development captured through dialogue is the essence of miniaturization – character development breeding authenticity.

A second critical ingredient to the dramatic structure of the *veristi* came in the form of restraint. Restraint – recall from earlier – was raised as an argument against a parallel between veristic literature and opera. However, the *veristi* were greatly influenced by the restraint observable in Verga’s prose. One specific restraint transferred from Verga’s literature to the opera stage was the quick rise and fall of climactic action. As Carner asserts, “Climax follows climax in quick succession, and no sooner is a mood established than it is destroyed by a contrasting mood. Juxtaposition of scenes of diametrically opposed sentiment is almost a general rule of the *veristi*.”³⁹²

Mascagni’s initial veristic opera employs this very technique. Specifically, the single-act opera is subdivided into 12 different scenes, with each scene having its own – yet unequal in significance and effect – micro rise and fall of climactic action. As Sansone points out, “With all

³⁹¹ Giger, “Verismo: Origin, Corruption, and Redemption,” 298.

³⁹² Carner, *Giacomo Puccini: Tosca*, 7.

its musical ‘primitivism’, *Cavalleria Rusticana* has a fast pace which effectively leads to the veristic shout of the catastrophe and secures stylistic consistency.”³⁹³ This fast pace – quick rise and fall of action – is the brilliance of veristic composition. Mallach echoes this sentiment, saying that “it is genius...of *Cavalleria* that by brilliantly building and then releasing tension in precisely measured quantities it creates the overwhelming effect of an inexorable and cumulative increase in dramatic intensity over the course of an hour and a quarter.”³⁹⁴ Consequently, restraint in not dwelling on climactic material – letting it unfold and then conclude – is what ironically gives the impression of excess in *verismo*. However, it is not excess; rather, it is as Mallach described, an overwhelming sensation of cumulative climax.

A final comment about the quick rise and fall of climactic material in Mascagni’s opera: Not only does it illustrate the method of treatment with which the *veristi* would approach the dramatic structure, but it also highlights how it intensified the authenticity of the action. Through restraint of not dwelling on climactic material, the *veristi* are able to give the impression of honesty. Mallach’s discussion of restraint in Mascagni’s opera concludes with the sentiment that “Mascagni’s music enhances the immediacy of the opera, making it feel more direct and unmediated, rather than extending or distancing its events in traditional operatic fashion.”³⁹⁵

Additional examples of the veristic quick rise and fall of climactic action are observable on a more micro level. Specifically, the rise and fall of the climactic action observed over the entire opera of *Cavalleria rusticana* is likewise observable in a single scene. For example, Puccini’s

³⁹³ Sansone, “Verismo: From Literature to Opera,” 11.

³⁹⁴ Mallach, *Pietro Mascagni and His Operas*, 67.

³⁹⁵ Mallach, *Pietro Mascagni and His Operas*, 66.

Tosca serves as an illustrative example. Speaking of the second act of *Tosca*, Keolker summarizes the climactic action as follows. He states, “Puccini carefully continues the tension, however, a scene of psychological as well as physical torture, the essence of melodrama, one emotion coming quickly upon the next, voices and orchestra circling, only to rise higher and circle yet again.”³⁹⁶

This compression of the iconic dramatic structure of the *veristi* is also employed on an even smaller micro level. Again, Keolker elaborates on an example from Puccini’s *La Bohème*. He relates, “*La speranza!* Rodolfo exults suddenly, *It is hope!* when remarking how Mimi’s eyes (*occhi belli*) steal his emotions away (*Ma il furo non m’accora*). And it is from this climactic outburst his voice returns to its conversational tone, *Parlate voi, deh! Now tell me about you.*”³⁹⁷ As illustrated, the ability of the *veristi* to create an ebb and flow of climactic material is conducted on the macro and micro levels of veristic opera and is an element knitting veristic literature and opera together.

A second way in which the *veristi* demonstrated Vergian restraint was in simple, well-constructed plots. These plots were condensed through compression, economy of musical recall and prudent character development. Each of these traits yielded multiple single-act veristic operas. The most obvious example of an one-act opera in the *verismo* genre is *Cavalleria rusticana*. However, to this may be added Puccini’s *Il Tabarro* and Leoni’s *L’Oracolo* (1905). Aside from Leoncavallo’s two-act *I Pagliacci*, Puccini was the only veristic composer able to successfully compose veristic operas extending beyond a single act, which have remained in the

³⁹⁶ Keolker, *Last Acts*, 54.

³⁹⁷ Keolker, *Last Acts*, 43.

current operatic repertoire. As an example, Giordano's *Mala vita* was an extremely powerful multi-act veristic opera, which has since fallen from the repertoire of regularly performed operas.

The compression of the dramatic plot was a welcomed by-product for the veristic composers.

Adhering to the restraint previously described with the quick rise and fall of the dramatic action, it was consequential that the plot would be condensed. This generally meant that the storyline would center around one or two basic situations. Exaggerations and embellishments were to be left to the gluttony of the romantics.

However, beyond being a side-effect of their restraint, the compression served a valuable purpose. For example, Mascagni was tasked with conveying Sicilian peasant life to a peninsula audience who were unfamiliar with the southern culture. In fact, this was the same challenge Verga faced with his bourgeois readers. Therefore, with an opera dedicated to limited situations – for *Cavalleria rusticana* this was a single situation – the veristic composer would avoid bombarding their non-Sicilian audience with more information than they could initially register.

The principal of the veristic plot compression extends beyond the single-act operas. In fact, Puccini utilized this technique in his veristic operas of multiple acts. *Tosca* serves as a primary example, which was based upon the five-act play, *La Tosca*, by Victorien Sardou (1831-1908). Recognizing excess, Puccini – with his librettists – condensed the play into three acts. As Keolker points out, Puccini harassed “his writers Illica and Giacosa to excise every opportunity for standard operatic treatment, jettisoning arias, a quartet for the torture scene, a religious hymn

planned for Act Three, and others. What resulted was a concise plot with little time for lyrical expansion.³⁹⁸

Lastly, this compression of the plot by the *veristi* also led to the reduction – and often elimination – of minor roles, which were commonly used to provide social background. Instead, a handful of major roles in each opera would become characteristic of the *verismo* repertoire. Additionally, in place of these roles, the opera chorus was utilized as a tool of aggregation. Even so, for the majority of veristic operas, the role of the opera chorus was reduced. Though still present in the opera, the chorus was not utilized as much as it was in the contemporary romantic operas. Again, *Tosca* is a fitting example. First, the plot and music center around four primary characters, who are Tosca, Cavaradossi, Scarpia and Angelotti. Second, the opera chorus is used only in a single grand church scene, which falls at the end of Act One. *I Pagliacci* is another relevant example of this veristic characteristic. Again, four primary characters are used, who are Canio, Nedda, Tonio and Peppe. Additionally, the role of the chorus is minimal with three numbers, which are provided more for color than for climactic material. Instead, the basis of the plot and its development belongs to the primary characters.

In addition to a compressed plot, the *veristi* achieved well-constructed plots through the economy of musical recall. This economy was accomplished through the use of musical fragments – leitmotifs. The use of these musical fragments would foreshadow the presence of characters, emotions and actions to be recalled in an instant moment without the need for time-intensive development. Puccini masterfully utilized this technique in *Madama Butterfly*. Speaking of Cio-

³⁹⁸ Keolker, *Last Acts*, 51-52.

Cio San in Act One, Keolker explains Puccini's foreshadowing through musical fragments. He states:

A number of musical fragments are then heard that will be of considerable import later: Butterfly explaining she is poor (*Nessuno si confessa mai nato in povertá, No one ever confesses to being born in poverty*) to an especially dark melody in the winds, to be heard at the close of the opera; explaining her simple gifts (*Uno specchio, Un ventaglio, A mirror, A fan*) to hopeful music that will be developed in the love duet; and at the mention of her father's sword and his suicide (*Cosa sacra e mia, it is very sacred to me*) a very somber figure arises from the orchestra, a foreshadowing of the opera's finale.³⁹⁹

Another example of how the musical fragments are recalled is demonstrated at the end of the first act during the love duet with Pinkerton and Cio-Cio San. Again, Keolker points out that as Cio-Cio San sings, "her music quietly echo[s] her entrance theme, then that of her father, followed by the denunciation of her relatives, in effect a review of all she has yielded for Pinkerton."⁴⁰⁰ Such is the power of musical fragments as utilized by the *veristi* as part of their well-constructed plots.

A final element to discuss is that of the economy in character development of the *veristi*. Within their librettos and musical composition, the psychological, emotional and dramatic development of the characters was concise and dense. For example, speaking of Cio-Cio San's aria, *Un bel di*, it is observed that "this is an extraordinary piece of music, not only for its sentiment, but its construction, thirty-three brief lines of text, and four and a half minutes of voice expressing the young woman's certitude and her growing maturation."⁴⁰¹ Another supportive example is Canio's aria from *I Pagliacci, Vesti la giubba*, which comes at the end of Act One. In this particular aria, the psychological transformation and development of Canio is artfully crafted and

³⁹⁹ Keolker, *Last Acts*, 63.

⁴⁰⁰ Keolker, *Last Acts*, 63.

⁴⁰¹ Keolker, *Last Acts*, 64.

unfolds before the audience as Canio painfully convinces himself to put on the clown costume and make people laugh. The ability to vividly portray dramatic growth in a concise manner is a trademark of *verismo*.

To synthesize the discussion on the choices of the *veristi* pertaining to dramatic structure, another case example from Puccini's *La Bohème* becomes appropriate. To begin, Keolker describes Puccini's writing in *La Bohème* as the essence of brevity in its musical effect, plot and portraiture.⁴⁰² Further, he praises Puccini's approach as "boldly economic," which he successfully accomplishes through an assortment of economy of scale, multitasking, fragments and musical recall.⁴⁰³ Specifically, economy of scale is aptly utilized in the first act when Colline and Schaunard enter. Of this moment Keolker notes, "Puccini is master in these passages, having transformed an earlier technique from *Manon Lescaut* into a bold, quickening effect: the woodwinds leading the melody, the voices entering in harmony, the musical lines going apart among the characters, then coming together in unity."⁴⁰⁴ The economy of writing here allows Puccini to "speedily cover pages of dialogue," which would otherwise artificially inflate the scene, slow the action and bog down the drama's progression.

Further, this economy is observed in Puccini's ability to multitask. For example, Puccini "introduces his heroine Mimì with a *prepared entrance*, that is, audiences *hear* her before they *see* her and with her coming onstage he reduces his musical forces to a hushed quality, a

⁴⁰² Keolker, *Last Acts*, 42.

⁴⁰³ Keolker, *Last Acts*, 42.

⁴⁰⁴ Keolker, *Last Acts*, 42.

sophisticated effect that will come to be associated with the little seamstress.”⁴⁰⁵ Here, Puccini’s economy of scale is captured through his multitasking, in which he both gives Mimì a prepared entrance and utilizes the economics of musical fragments – introducing the hushed quality to be associated with Mimì.

Finally, in *La Bohème*, these musical fragments introduced by Puccini throughout the opera are recalled in an effort to conjure up all of the emotions with which they have come to represent. This is specifically observed in the final act. Now with Rodolfo, Mimì is growing increasingly faint from her illness and she confesses to Rodolfo: *Ho tante cose chi te voglio dire* (I have many things I want to tell you). As she does, “her love music for Rodolfo surround[s] her final words.”⁴⁰⁶ Mimì’s words would lack intent and meaning if not accompanied by her musical fragments of love for Rodolfo. With these fragments, Puccini captures the connotations of love without having to digress from the pace of the drama, and consequently, demonstrating the economy, conciseness and density of the writing of the *veristi*. Of this ability, Keolker remarks that “the opera’s four acts are four *incidents* in the lives of these young people, offering an immediacy and a naturalism rather than a studied cohesion.”⁴⁰⁷ Such immediacy and naturalism may be heard in each of the veristic operas as a result of the insightful choices of the *veristi* affecting dramatic structure.

⁴⁰⁵ Keolker, *Last Acts*, 43.

⁴⁰⁶ Keolker, *Last Acts*, 46.

⁴⁰⁷ Keolker, *Last Acts*, 42.

Milieu

As previously discussed, Verga – despite his success with *verismo* literature – notably struggled to capture the environmental milieu as poignantly as Zola did in his naturalism. However, this was because Verga refused to allow tangential descriptive discussion of the setting to interfere with the dramatic structure of the plot and the development of his characters. The struggle Verga faced is highlighted to illustrate the difficulty of presenting an accurate and acute milieu – a difficulty which also challenged the *veristi*. The difficulty of this task for the *veristi* is observed in the presence of the opera chorus. As Sansone argues, “The characterization of the social milieu was largely marred by the survival of conventional operatic choruses.”⁴⁰⁸ His assertion is that too much emphasis was given to this operatic convention in an effort to establish the sociality of the characters that resulted in the tangential diversion Verga vehemently shunned.

However, in their absolute determination to portray the reality of their characters, the *veristi* had to find a way to capture the essence of the milieu, as it was the driving impetus behind their characters’ actions. As Mallach observes of the characters in *Cavalleria rusticana*, “They have no inner lives, nor do they call upon duty or higher morality, or even seek to justify their behavior in the manner typical of operatic heroes and heroines. Their significance lies not in their personalities but in the social roles they play. They are, above all, a part of a timeless community, and their roles are defined by rules ruthlessly enforced by that community, which surrounds them and in many respects is the true protagonist of the opera.”⁴⁰⁹ Mallach’s

⁴⁰⁸ Sansone, “Verismo: From Literature to Opera,” 186.

⁴⁰⁹ Mallach, *Pietro Mascagni and His Operas*, 66.

description can be universally applied to characters of all veristic operas, as their collective influence is the dynamics of their social setting.

Understanding the irrefutable significance of the milieu, the *veristi* were able to bring it to the forefront without an accompanied diversion. As Dahlhaus aptly identifies, “In *verismo*, milieu moves center stage as a musicodramatic “agent.””⁴¹⁰ The movement of the milieu to the center stage without unwanted distraction was accomplished through aural specificity, sets, costumes and precision of description. First, aural specificity is the attention of detail given to recreate a certain place or atmosphere. With the *veristi*, the detail awarded such aural specificity was unprecedented. As Schwartz acknowledges, “This aural specificity departs from an earlier scale of operatic value, one that had persisted in Italy through much of the nineteenth century.”⁴¹¹

Puccini was religiously faithful in using authentic sound to define the milieu, which surrounded his characters. His *Tosca* provides multiple examples. First, as Schwartz continues to point out, “*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.”⁴¹² However, it was not only Saint Peter’s bell with which Puccini had concerned himself. Specifically, for his depiction of the dawn in the third act, Puccini wanted to create the exact audible atmosphere. For this scene, Schwartz points out that “Puccini used fourteen bells

⁴¹⁰ Dahlhaus, *Nineteenth-Century Music*, 354.

⁴¹¹ Schwartz, “Rough Music,” 229.

⁴¹² Schwartz, “Rough Music,” 229.

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.”⁴¹³

In this scene by Puccini, his creation of aural specificity influences the entire scenic setting. As Keolker remarks, “Puccini musically captures the slow transition from darkness to daybreak with the eloquence of an Impressionist painting: the peaceful call of a shepherd boy, the various chimes and great bells tolling matins, and the dissipation of the brass by the flutes and woodwinds.”⁴¹⁴ For the *veristi*, aural specificity not only lent credibility to their authenticity, but it was also employed to depict the highly-influential milieu of their characters.

In conjunction with the focus of aural specificity, the *veristi* recognized the valuable potential of sets and costumes to assist in their efforts. As Giger stresses, the sets and costumes employed by the *veristi* “reflect an interest in the lifestyle of the poor and a greater degree of authenticity.”⁴¹⁵ This enhanced genuineness was observed as a definite break with romantic tradition – one driven simply by necessity. Specifically, the *veristi* introduced new characters and settings to the opera stage that necessitated a change of established scenery. As Mercedes Ferrero points out, “the famous monuments that had featured in the earlier Risorgimental “tours of Italy”” were now to be replaced with “slums, alleys, shady porticos, village churches, shrines, [and] washing hung out to dry.”⁴¹⁶ Indeed, the *veristi* recognized the influential power of the set and costumes to convey the milieu without distraction and used it vigorously to their advantage.

⁴¹³ Schwartz, “Rough Music,” 229.

⁴¹⁴ Keolker, *Last Acts*, 56.

⁴¹⁵ Giger, “Verismo: Origin, Corruption, and Redemption,” 304.

⁴¹⁶ Ferrero, “Stage and Set,” 108.

In addition to new descriptive scenery, the *veristi* also challenged the confines of the stage. For example, they were often known for moving singers and action offstage. The effect of doing so is observed by Schwartz's comment that the "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."⁴¹⁷

An illustrative example of moving characters and action offstage is found in Puccini's *La Bohème*. Schwartz writes, "At the very end of the first-act love duet...Mimi and Rodolfo move into the wings to sing their climactic high notes;" additionally, in Act Three, "the lovers only intone their lush last phrase (including a high B) after the curtain has fallen."⁴¹⁸ Of course, what Schwartz appropriately calls the "most extreme example of offstage singing in the decade" is Mascagni's choice to have the overture of *Cavalleria rusticana* interrupted as Turiddu sings the opening aria of *verismo* from behind the curtain.

Lastly, the veristic presentation of the milieu is strengthened through the precision of description applied to the operas of *verismo*. This comes as no surprise as the goal of *verismo* is authenticity; accordingly, the precise attention of the *veristi* to descriptive detail was energetically engaged. As Mallach describes, "While exotic settings were hardly unknown in earlier operatic eras, the sheer variety of settings, as composers engaged in a hectic search for the new and different, is a distinguishing characteristic of the period."⁴¹⁹ Indeed, exotic settings

⁴¹⁷ Schwartz, "Rough Music," 233.

⁴¹⁸ Schwartz, "Rough Music," 233.

⁴¹⁹ Mallach, *The Autumn of Italian Opera*, 42.

were not unique to the *veristi*. However, these new settings were unique, and with these new settings came the increased importance of an accurate initial portrayal. In fact, Puccini's insistence for realism and authenticity was unprecedented in Italian opera.⁴²⁰ As Giger explains, "In preparation for *Madama Butterfly*, for instance, [Puccini] consulted photographic documents and a series of Japanese woodblock prints because he wanted to go beyond the clichés of nineteenth-century *japonisme*."⁴²¹ Another example of precision in description by Puccini in this opera comes in the second act with the Prince Yamadori's scene. Here, Puccini incorporates into the music a Japanese melody, which he had diligently researched to assure authenticity.⁴²²

Though challenging to create without disrupting the characteristically veristic flow of plot and development, the *veristi* were able to create authentic milieus that genuinely depicted the influential environment of their characters. In the end, this lent creditability to the realism of their characters and the accuracy of their portrayal.

Violent Extremes

The extremes present in *verismo* are blatantly obvious and equally characteristic of the genre. As discussed earlier, violence is ever-present in *verismo* – violence of rape, murder, torture murder, etc. However, this depiction of violence is but one aspect of brutality tied to *verismo*. In other words, violence extends beyond the traditional stereotype into matters of vocal delivery, passions

⁴²⁰ Giger, "Verismo: Origin, Corruption, and Redemption," 305.

⁴²¹ Giger, "Verismo: Origin, Corruption, and Redemption," 305.

⁴²² Keolker, *Last Acts*, 64.

and effect. After all, Kimbell contends that “what really matters in *verismo* is the passion itself: love, jealousy, pride.”⁴²³ Specifically, violent extremes in vocal style came to be fully realized in *verismo*, extremes which had only been non-systemically foreshadowed in preceding works. Bizet’s *Carmen* has been addressed as a forerunner to this vocal extremity.

The violence and extremeness of the veristic vocal style is appropriately captured in Keolker’s observation that “as it ultimately developed, this veristic style came to be associated with vehement utterance, desperate emotions, and a powerful, penetrating vocal delivery. The aim was for emotional “truth.””⁴²⁴ This emotional truth – so crucial to an authentic veristic depiction – was stylistically achieved through the use of the following techniques: deliberate inequalities of vocal color, harsh inflections, anguished cries, shouted utterances, heavily charged melodies and vocal writing exploiting the higher registers. Perhaps more than any of the preceding definitive characteristic discussed, the extremes in vocal style with which the *veristi* wrote was the largest observable departure from romanticism and its established traditions as observed in *verismo*. Corazzol confirms that “the most important element of its ‘elevated’ nature is its novelty of expression, and thus its negation of the classic concept of style.”⁴²⁵

Impure tone and deliberate inequalities of vocal color were initially foreshadowed in Bizet’s opera, *Carmen*. The influence of this opera upon the vocal style of *verismo* can not be underestimated. Two of the most prominent women to perform *Carmen*’s title role were Emma Calvé (1858-1942) and Gemma Bellincioni (1864-1950). Their interpretations of *Carmen* lead

⁴²³ Kimbell, *Italian Opera*, 624.

⁴²⁴ Keolker, *Last Acts*, 8.

⁴²⁵ Corazzol, “Opera and Verismo,” 52.

them to be two of the greatest female performers of *verismo*, as they were able to transfer what they had accomplished in Bizet's opera to the veristic stage. In fact, it was Bellincioni who had created and premiered the role of Santuzza in Mascagni's *Cavalleria rusticana*.

Bellincioni had "prided herself on having abandoned traditional performance practices."⁴²⁶ In return, she cultivated a vocal style that "often sacrificed beauty of tone and perfection of technique for constant nervous excitement and immediate expression."⁴²⁷ This identical approach was also observed in Calvé, whose style embraced "deliberate inequalities of color, harsh inflections, and screams."⁴²⁸ This insistence on raw vocal delivery was constantly exposed in veristic singing through harsh inflections, crude attack and a rough execution. As Giger points out, veristic singers often "abandoned technical purity when they felt the emotional charge of a particular passage required it."⁴²⁹ Dan Marek supports this claim and states that veristic "artists were encouraged to "feel" or "become" their parts... a *bacio di morte* [kiss of death] to the voice."⁴³⁰ Like the veristic librettists and composers, the performers also sought for naked authenticity in an effort to portray realism.

As part of this raw delivery, veristic composers captured the passion of their characters in screams and exclamations of anguished cries. For example, in the first act of *Madama Butterfly*, Puccini gives Cio-Cio San the opportunity to explode emotionally as she declares her love for Pinkerton. Her love has come at the cost of her family, religion and identity and this sacrifice is

⁴²⁶ Giger, "Verismo: Origin, Corruption, and Redemption," 303.

⁴²⁷ Giger, "Verismo: Origin, Corruption, and Redemption," 303-304.

⁴²⁸ Celletti, "Emma Calvé de Roquer," quoted in Giger, "Verismo: Origin, Corruption, and Redemption," 303.

⁴²⁹ Giger, "Verismo: Origin, Corruption, and Redemption," 304.

⁴³⁰ Marek, *Singing: The First Art*, 44-45.

heard in her cry: *Amore mio!* (You are my love!). As Keolker writes, “It is an outcry touched with desperate fervor.”⁴³¹

Likewise, Mascagni in *Cavalleria rusticana* gives Santuzza the opportunity to release the uncontainable emotional energy that has been developed. As the villagers proceed into the church, Santuzza is left behind because she has been excommunicated and not allowed to enter. Now alone with Lucia, she sings her aria, *Voi lo sapete, o mamma*, where she recounts the love she has for Turiddu. The pain comes as she knows Turiddu has returned to the now-married Lola. Santuzza loves Turiddu, not the unfaithful Lola. Confessing her anguish to Lucia, Santuzza cries: *Ah! l’amai!* (Ah! How I loved him!). Mascagni ensures such emotional dedication to the outburst with his musical directive: *con grande passione* (with great passion). The musical notation is given in figure 3.

Figure 3. Pietro Mascagni, *Cavalleria rusticana*, Act One, *Voi lo sapete, o mamma*.

The musical score for Santuzza's aria "Voi lo sapete, o mamma" is presented in two systems. The first system shows the vocal line for Santuzza, starting with the lyrics "l'a - ma - i, ah!" and "l'a - ma - i." The piano accompaniment features triplets and dynamic markings including *più f*, *ff rit.*, and *ff con grande passione.* The second system continues the vocal line and piano accompaniment, with dynamic markings *ff rit. f* and *ff ff grandioso appassion.*

⁴³¹ Keolker, *Last Acts*, 63.

The presence of screams and anguished cries became so prevalent in the veristic repertoire that composers only needed to allude to characters in order to describe their intentions. For example, Keolker draws attention to the fact that in *Fedora* (1898), “Giordano asks Fedora’s final, intense *Ah!* to be delivered as an anguished cry, much in the *verist* manner of Santuzza in Mascagni’s *Cavalleria rusticana*, Tonio in Leoncavallo’s *I Pagliacci* and Rosa Mammai in Cilèa’s *L’Arlesiana*, all recent works.”⁴³² Keolker describes exactly what Giordano was looking for by referring to Tonio. He states that “Tonio’s lines are also an excellent summary of contemporary *verismo*: operas punctuated with painful cries, howls of rage, and cynical laughter.”⁴³³ This is precisely what Giordano sought to capture.

These anguished cries were intensified by the veristic composers as they stretched them to include spoken and shouted utterances. Referring to a remark made by Mascagni, Kimbell relates the following. He states, “The vehemence of much *verismo* lyricism is vividly suggested in a remark of Mascagni’s about his own *Il piccolo Marat*: ‘It has muscles of steel. Its force lies in the voice, which does not speak or sing: it yells! yells! yells!’”⁴³⁴ With such determination to get his characters to yell, returning to Mascagni’s work as an example is only appropriate. Specifically, at the conclusion of the seventh scene in *Cavalleria rusticana*, Mascagni gives Santuzza the line: *A te la mala Pascua!* (On thee come Evil Easter!). His directions for delivery are two fold: *nel colmo dell’ira* (in the height of anger) and *quasi parlato* (almost spoken).

⁴³² Keolker, *Last Acts*, 233n4.

⁴³³ Keolker, *Last Acts*, 257.

⁴³⁴ Kimbell, *Italian Opera*, 626.

Preparing these harsh inequalities, screams, anguished cries and shouted utterances are the heavily charged melodies, which are intuitively composed by the *veristi*. Describing Puccini's adeptness and stunning ability to compose melodies that capture the primitiveness of exposed emotion, Carner points to the murder of Scarpia in Act Two of *Tosca*. He states, "Scarpia's murder is accompanied by sheer situation music in pure verismo style – realistic shouts and groans in the voice-part and a noisy chaotic rhythm in the orchestra, until a descending whole-tone scale marks his demise."⁴³⁵ This situation music – as Carner calls it – is exactly the musical depiction of the intense situation at hand, which is remarkably captured by Puccini and his fellow *veristi*.

Lastly, the vocal style of the *veristi* exploited the high register of each voice. This translates to the difficulty of maintaining a high tessitura throughout the opera. Keolker supports this position using Turiddu from *Cavalleria rusticana* as a prime example. Specifically, he states that "Turiddu is given an especially high tessitura or vocal placement, which will become characteristic for Mascagni's leading tenors."⁴³⁶ For example, the tessitura for the tenor's opening aria, *Lola, bianca come fior di spino*, is C₄-G[#]/A^b₄.⁴³⁷ His following arias, *Viva il vino spumeggiante* and *Mamma, quel vino è generoso*, possess high tessituras of G₃-G₄ and A[#]/B^b₃-G[#]/A^b₄, respectively.⁴³⁸ Similar high tessituras are also required of Canio in *I Pagliacci*. Respectively, the tessituras for *Un tal gioco, credetemi* and *Vesti la giubba* are F₃-G₄ and G₃-G₄.⁴³⁹ These tessituras may be contrasted with a typical example from the contemporary

⁴³⁵ Carner, *Giacomo Puccini: Tosca*, 113.

⁴³⁶ Keolker, *Last Acts*, 297n8.

⁴³⁷ The Aria Database, <http://www.aria-database.com> (accessed 27 February 2015).

⁴³⁸ The Aria Database, <http://www.aria-database.com> (accessed 27 February 2015).

⁴³⁹ The Aria Database, <http://www.aria-database.com> (accessed 27 February 2015).

romantic opera, *Manon*, by Massenet. Specifically, des Grieux's aria, *En fermant les yeux*, has a tessitura of A₃-F₄, which is a significant whole-step below those of the *veristi*.⁴⁴⁰

As with each of their other cognizant choices, the *veristi* had purpose for demanding this vocal style in their works. To restate Kimbell, "What really matters in *verismo* is the passion itself."⁴⁴¹ It is the passion – the emotional truth – conveyed vocally that the *veristi* consciously lifted from the libretto and composed into their music. Describing this quest for passion, Kimbell continues to emphasize the importance of this passion by setting it apart from the romantic traditions of the time. He states, "In Romantic Italian art it had been the quality of man's ideals, his yearnings, his romantic emotions that might set him apart from his fellows, and make him a suitable hero for novel or play or opera; in *verismo* it is savage passion; a passion that drives him beyond reason, beyond morality and beyond the law...to some cathartic deed of perverse heroism."⁴⁴²

A magnificent example of passion captured in *verismo* and expressed vocally is in Leoncavallo's *I Pagliacci* and Canio's aria, *Vesti la giubba*. As Kimbell expresses, "It is typical that in 'Vesti la giubba' one hears more than Leoncavallo's music; there is hysterical laughter too, and sobs of uncontrollable despair."⁴⁴³ He follows this by stating that "such excruciating emotional crises are the very essence of *verismo* opera, and they lead to a musical language which, as far as possible, gives the impression of raw, naked passion, and hovers on the borderline between

⁴⁴⁰ The Aria Database, <http://www.aria-database.com> (accessed 27 February 2015).

⁴⁴¹ Kimbell, *Italian Opera*, 624.

⁴⁴² Kimbell, *Italian Opera*, 624.

⁴⁴³ Kimbell, *Italian Opera*, 626.

music and histrionics.”⁴⁴⁴ In the vocal extremes required by the *veristi*, the passion of the characters is accentuated allowing raw expression to unfold on the operatic stage.

All of this effort by the *veristi* to extract raw expression of passion from their characters relates back to the presence of violence in *verismo*. However, this time it is a violence of effect. As Kimbell describes, “The exceptional refinement of Puccini’s orchestral writing does not disguise his typically *verismo* fondness for violence of effect: extreme contrasts of dynamics, manic tremolos, grim *ostinati*, rasping explosions of brass and percussion continually assail the spectator’s nerves.”⁴⁴⁵ As Mallach concurs, there was a “never-ending effort by [the *veristi*] to provide their demanding new audiences with ever stronger and more powerful sensations.”⁴⁴⁶ As Marek will conclude, “The manifesto of this movement [*verismo*] was to represent the realistic, melodramatic, and violent side of life. This was no doubt shocking to audiences of the belle époque.”⁴⁴⁷

As violent and shocking and extreme as the vocal writing of *verismo* appeared to be, it was not limited only to opera. In fact, each of the seven characteristics discussed – reaction against romanticism, character choice, linguistics, silent author, dramatic structure, milieu and violent extremes – were effectively and purposefully transferred to the non-operatic vocal compositions of the prominent *veristi*. As such, *verismo* extends beyond literature and opera and is identifiable in the art songs of the *veristi*.

⁴⁴⁴ Kimbell, *Italian Opera*, 625-626.

⁴⁴⁵ Kimbell, *Italian Opera*, 626.

⁴⁴⁶ Mallach, *The Autumn of Italian Opera*, 43.

⁴⁴⁷ Marek, *Singing: The First Art*, 44.

CHAPTER FOUR: *VERISMO* IN ITALIAN ART SONG

Introduction

Verismo Extended to Art Song

As part of the *belle époque*, *verismo* established itself as a legitimate genre with implications realized throughout multiple mediums. Specifically, Verga codified the literary language of *verismo* in his veristic novels and short stories, which had a profound influence upon the musical *veristi* of the time. The *veristi* were most noticeably influenced in their operatic compositions and the premier of *Cavalleria rusticana* placed *verismo* center stage musically, with several contemporary composers following Mascagni's lead. The veristic operas that have followed since 1890 have given music scholars much material for analysis and interpretation.

Consequently, interest in this musical genre has cultivated intellectual discussion and yielded much-needed scholarly writings.

Unfortunately, almost all discussion of *verismo* in music has been limited to the operatic medium. *Verismo* in opera is a worthy field of study; however, the musical *veristi* were not solely devoted to operatic compositions. Recall that members of the *Giovane scuola* were characterized as noncommittal to any particular style. Even a cursory glance at the life work of any member of the school reveals an eclectic mixture of compositional output influenced by an equal assortment of stylistic trends and tendencies. This liberty felt by members of the *Giovane scuola* extended not only to stylistic choices, but also to the choice of medium.

A natural extension of the operatic medium for the *veristi* was that of art song. Italian art songs during the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century were compositions for solo voice with piano accompaniment. An important designation of art songs is that they are not extracted operatic arias or other solo vocal movements from larger musical works. Instead, they are vocal works capable of standing alone in presentation. Many *veristi* composed in this medium, including the primary three: Puccini, Leoncavallo and Mascagni.

Composing within the art song medium was transacted simultaneously with operatic compositions by the *veristi*. By so doing, the influence of *verismo* flooding into their operas also highly influenced the creative process of their art songs. As a result, the study of *verismo* as a musical genre should not be limited only to opera, but rather should extend to the Italian art songs of the *veristi*. The following discussion is therefore purposed to broaden the scope of current research in musical *verismo*. It is to extend the field of study in veristic musical compositions to include the non-operatic art song works of the Italian musical *veristi*.

Foreshadowings of *Verismo*

The influence of *verismo* – originating from the literature of Zola and Verga – upon the *veristi* is undeniably observed in their operatic works. These operas are masterpieces of *verismo* and serve to establish the qualities, elements and characteristics of veristic musical compositions. However, the veristic style in which Mascagni wrote *Cavalleria rusticana*, Leoncavallo wrote *I Pagliacci* or even Puccini wrote *Madama Butterfly* did not mysteriously materialize in a single

burst of brilliance. The veristic style was cultivated, practiced and nurtured over time to maturity, so that it might prolifically present itself in the operatic form. As a result, just as the foreshadowings of operatic *verismo* were observed in opera prior to *Cavalleria rusticana* – i.e., *Carmen* – the same foreshadowings occurred in the art songs of the *veristi*.

As early as a quarter of a century prior to the *fin de siècle*, veristic features began to emerge in Italian art song, even though the art song may not be considered entirely veristic. During this period, the art song served as a musical training ground for the *veristi* in preparation for full use of the veristic techniques to be presented in their operas. As such, veristic elements emerged in art songs, which may be retrospectively observed. In addition to foreshadowing *verismo* in opera, veristic characteristics lingered in the art song compositions of the *veristi* in a post-veristic operatic era. The identification of these residual characteristics attests to the proficiency of the veristic musical language which the *veristi* achieved, and it affirms their affinity for the style. Also, just as particular operas may be classified as explicit examples of the *verismo* style, there are art songs which may also bear the *verismo* label. These songs are authentically veristic and provide evidence of *verismo* beyond the confines of the operatic stage. The table in figure 4 identifies a representation of art songs composed by the *veristi* divided into the timeframes: pre-veristic, veristic, post-veristic and unknown date.

Pre-veristic era

<i>O rea Gomorra, o Sodoma perversa</i>	Catalani	1875
<i>Canzone groënlandaise</i>	Catalani	1876
<i>October</i>	Leoncavallo	1880
<i>Pensiero</i>	Leoncavallo	1880
<i>La tua stella</i>	Mascagni	1882
<i>Alla luna</i>	Mascagni	1882
<i>Pena d'amore</i>	Mascagni	1883
<i>Mentia l'avviso</i>	Puccini	1883
<i>M'ama...non m'ama</i>	Mascagni	1884
<i>Ballata</i>	Mascagni	1884
<i>Senza baci</i>	Catalani	c1884

Veristic era

<i>Risveglio</i>	Mascagni	1890
<i>Rosa</i>	Mascagni	1890
<i>Ruit hora</i>	Leoncavallo	1893
<i>Avanti Urania!</i>	Puccini	1896
<i>Canto d'anime</i>	Puccini	1904
<i>Mandolinata</i>	Leoncavallo	1907
<i>Meriggiata</i>	Leoncavallo	1908

Post-veristic era

<i>Lasciati amar</i>	Leoncavallo	1913
<i>Queste parole</i>	Giordano	1919
<i>Canzone araba</i>	Giordano	1919
<i>Ecco L'Aprile</i>	Giordano	1919
<i>Tu sei il cielo</i>	Giordano	1919
<i>L'ami</i>	Giordano	1919

Unknown date

<i>Imploration éperdue</i>	Leoncavallo	
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Figure 4. Art songs by veristic composers

The Seven Characteristics of *Verismo*

Tools for Analysis

Upon examination of the veristic literary output of Verga – coupled with the influence of Zola and French naturalism – seven defining characteristics of *verismo* were identified. These characteristics were subsequently shown to constitute the framework of *verismo* in opera. The result of deriving the characteristics from veristic literature and showing their ability to define *verismo* in opera establishes the premise that these seven traits may consequently be used to evaluate and qualify a musical work as veristic. Therefore, these same seven elements will be used to analyze the presence of *verismo* in the Italian art songs of the *veristi*. Further, the collective identification of these traits in any one specific art song will justify its classification as veristic. To restate the seven characteristics, they are: reaction against romanticism, character choice, linguistics, silent author, dramatic structure, milieu and violent extremes.

Reaction Against Romanticism

The conventions and practices established by romanticism were constantly challenged by the *veristi* regardless of the medium in which they were composing. The retreat taken by the *veristi* and the immense distance placed between the two schools of thought – romanticism and *verismo* – were magnified in their operatic works. However, this departure took time and was incrementally transacted. Fortunately, with an historical viewpoint, the calculated increments

may be identified in the pre-veristic era art songs of the *veristi*, which allude to their non-romantic veristic style. Puccini's composition, *Mentia l'avviso*, illustrates this point.

In 1883, *Mentia l'avviso* was written as a required graduation project while attending the *Conservatorio di Milano*. As this was a graduation project, Puccini was most likely compelled to adhere to the romantic rules in which he had been instructed. Had he abandoned every shade of romanticism, he undoubtedly would have failed the assignment. However, Puccini was already feeling the influences of *verismo* and therefore had to judiciously choose which elements of romanticism to retain and which elements of *verismo* to introduce. The end product was consequently a mixture of the two styles.

The synthesis of Puccini's writing did not go unnoticed. On 26 July 1883 – ten days following his graduation – a critique in *La Musica Popolare* indicated that Puccini “was an assured musician with his own individuality who, inspired by his own imagination, writes without showing allegiance to any fashionable idol.”⁴⁴⁸ Indeed, Puccini showed no allegiance to the icon of romanticism. However, in 1883, it was also too early for critiques to conclude that Puccini was foreshadowing a new style of writing – *verismo*. This lack of total acceptance of the romantic musical style was also observed in the pre-veristic era art song compositions of Leoncavallo, Mascagni and Catalani, as each incrementally abandoned romanticism with an adoption of *verismo* into his musical style.

⁴⁴⁸ Kaye, “The Unknown Puccini,” 34.

Greater abandonment of romanticism in art song occurred during the veristic era. However, disregard for its style did not manifest itself at the rate one might expect. In fact, it is in the latter years of the veristic era extending into the post-veristic era that *verismo* became more prevalent in art song. Despite the timing of its occurrence, reaction against romanticism within the art songs of the *veristi* takes its form in the remaining six characteristics of *verismo*, which will be discussed individually.

Character Choice

The primary character of choice for the literary and musical *veristi* was the southern Italian peasant. For the musical *veristi*, this initial preference later evolved into veristic characters ranging from peasants to bourgeois subjects to completely foreign characters. Despite the evolution of character choice, what did not change was the method by which the characters were portrayed. Authenticity, genuineness and lucidity remained paramount. The same determination taken by the *veristi* to carefully construct the realities of their operatic characters was also applied to the characters of their art songs.

In art songs, definitive descriptions of characters are not always known. As opposed to a character in an opera, an art song character is usually not given a name and exists independently without relevant historical or contextual content. However, the musical style of writing of the *veristi* does offer insight into the choice of character as the music's brashness, intensity and

climactic material conveys powerfully the passion of these characters.⁴⁴⁹ They are alive and free to express themselves in a form free of artificiality, which freedom is given voice through the music. The result is that the genuineness and realism presented in the operatic characters are directly transferred to the characters of the art songs, drawing parallels between the two.

Mascagni's *Rosa* (1890) provides an example of the care taken by the *veristi* in choosing their art song characters. Published in the same year as *Cavalleria rusticana*, *Rosa* is an art song which provides several examples of *verismo* within this medium. With regard to character, the characters of the art song are never named. However, the text reveals key geographical information: *una povera rosa di brughiera* (a poor/simple rose of the heath). The heath here referred to is that of a shrub land habitat. Such habitat is characterized by free-draining infertile soil and a low elevation with woody vegetation. Heaths of this nature are found extensively along the shores of the Mediterranean Sea, including the island of Sicily.

In selecting the characters of his art song, Mascagni consciously adopts the same characters of his opera – Sicilian peasants. The significance of this choice reveals Mascagni's intent which is to portray reality. For multiple veristic operas, the *veristi* chose the Sicilian peasant because they believed he was most genuine and uncorrupted by society. This was the same reason Verga adopted the peasant and Zola went to the French slums. Together, they were seeking the unadulterated man, and the lowest social class provided such a specimen. Likewise, in seeking

⁴⁴⁹ The section on violent extremes will deal directly with this style of writing in art song. However, as the vocal style is indicative of the character choice of the *veristi*, it also elevates the presence of this vocal style within veristic art song as a primary determinant of *verismo* categorization.

to portray reality in art song, Mascagni and the *veristi* also chose characters whom they felt were free of artifice and capable of providing a snapshot of reality.

Another example of character choice comes from *Mentì l'avviso*. In this specific example, the exact character is known because Puccini chose to set a scene from the fourth act of Felice Romani's (1788-1865) play, *La solitaria delle Asturie, ossia La Spagna ricuperata* (1838). The character is Gusmano, a Captain of the Moorish army, also known as Count Giuliano. As one with positional authority and aristocratic title, Gusmano may be considered a direct contrast to the unadulterated Sicilian peasant. However, Puccini chose to set a scene of internal reflection as Gusmano realizes his eventual death: *e qui fatal dimora* (and here the fatal abode). The uninhibited conveyances – realizable because Gusmano is alone on stage at this point – of a man who has comprehended his unavoidable and approaching death must instinctively be free of artifice. There is nothing gained nor served by being pretentious or fraudulent. As such, Puccini – most likely obligated to use a romantic source – chose a character through which he could transmit the reality of emotion through music. As identified with Mascagni and Puccini, the character choice of the *veristi* for their art songs reveals their motive to represent reality, which is the core essence of the *verismo* genre.

Linguistics

The language of Verga's prose and of the operatic librettos of the *veristi* contributed to the veristic nature of their creations. In both literature and opera, linguistic choices centered around

the application of innovative poetic meter, non-metaphorical speech and everyday vocabulary; the artifice of elevated language, high-brow vocabulary and figurative speech was shunned. The cumulative effect of these techniques allowed for the native speech of the characters – words and patterns – to emerge, which was a powerful device for achieving realism. As may be expected, the *veristi* also employed these same methods in their veristic art songs with the goal of portraying realism.

With regard to poetic meter, Leoncavallo's *Merigliata* (1908) provides an illuminative example of how irregular metrical meter was utilized. Recall how classic Italian verse, *endecasillabi*, provides for a regular metrical meter with eleven syllables and the strongest accent falling on the penultimate syllable. The accented tenth syllable is customarily preceded by an accent on either the sixth syllable – *endecasillabi a maggiore* – or the fourth syllable – *endecasillabi a minore*. For Leoncavallo in *Merigliata*, his first departure from the classic metrical verse was to use textual lines primarily of nine and ten syllables – *novenari* and *decasillabi* respectively – instead of *endecasillabi*. In fact, *endecasillabi* is only utilized in line 15 of the text, as observed in figure 5.⁴⁵⁰

As the traditional eleven-syllable line was altered, this consequently affected the preceding preparatory accents and the stronger penultimate accent. For example, line 1 identifies the preparatory accent on the sixth syllable with the penultimate accent on the ninth syllable. More

⁴⁵⁰ The symbols used for mapping prosody are as follows: (|) Syllable break; (||) Accent falls on last syllable, which results in a double syllable count; (\) Accent falls prior to penultimate syllable, which results in the reduction of syllable count by one; (italicized syllables) Syllables stressed musically; (subscript numbers) Refers to the syllable number for the specific syllable; (underlined vowel or vowels) Traditional Italian syllabic stress and (slurred elision marker) Indicates elision of vowels between words, which creates a single syllable.

specifically, Leoncavallo emphasizes the stress on the sixth syllable – the first syllable of *cielo* – musically by placing *cielo* on repeated notes to ensure the two syllables of *cielo* would be easily treated in a strong-weak manner, producing the desired syllabic stress. This stress on the sixth syllable would have such a familiar sound to the Italian ear that the listener would naturally assume an upcoming penultimate stress on the tenth syllable. Thus, Leoncavallo’s alteration of the customary meter with his stress on the ninth syllable produces a noticeable jarring difference to the traditional poetic meter.

Line	Text	Syllables
1	<u>A</u> to spl <u>e</u> n ₃ de nel <u>ci</u> <u>e</u> ₆ lo d’az <u>zur</u> ₉ ro	10
2	Tri on <u>f</u> <u>a</u> n ₃ te di lu <u>6</u> <u>ce</u> <u>i</u> l ₇ gran <u>sol</u> ₉	9
3	E nel l’ <u>o</u> m ₃ bra del bo <u>s</u> ₆ <u>co</u> <u>e</u> <u>_</u> un ₇ sus <u>s</u> ur ₉ ro	10
4	È <u>u</u> no stri <u>4</u> der di <u>pas</u> ₇ se\ri __ al <u>vol</u> ₉ !	9
4 _a	È <u>_</u> u no stri <u>3</u> der di <u>pas</u> ₆ se\ri __ al <u>vol</u> ₈	8
5	Tut to_in <u>n</u> eg ₃ gia_ <u>a</u> la lu <u>6</u> ce fe <u>con</u> ₉ da	10
6	O san <u>n</u> an ₃ do_ <u>o</u> gni pian <u>6</u> <u>ta</u> <u>_</u> o ₇ gni <u>fior</u> ₉	9
7	E_in <u>o</u> gni ₃ stor mi re ₆ di <u>fron</u> ₈ da ₉	9
8	È_ <u>i</u> l gran ba <u>3</u> cio di vi <u>6</u> ta_ <u>e</u> d’a <u>mor</u> ₉ !	9
9	Deh, vien ₂ ! Or <u>che</u> las <u>sù</u> _{6/7} gli_ <u>au</u> <u>gel</u> ₉ li	10
10	Cin <u>guet</u> ₂ tan tra ra mi ₇ d’a <u>mor</u> ₉	9
11	Sciò gli l’ <u>on</u> ₃ da de’ tuoi ₆ ca <u>pel</u> ₈ li	9
12	E cor ri_ <u>a</u> <u>strin</u> ₄ ger\mi_ <u>sul</u> cor ₆ !	6
13	Più <u>del</u> ₃ ciel gli_ <u>oc</u> chi tuoi ₇ son <u>bel</u> ₉ li	10
14	Più <u>ca</u> ₃ do del sol ₆ è_ <u>il</u> ₇ mi_ <u>o</u> <u>_</u> a ₈ <u>mor</u> ₉	9
14 _a	Più <u>ca</u> ₃ do del sol ₆ è_ <u>il</u> mi o <u>_</u> a ₉ <u>mor</u> ₁₀	10
15	Più <u>del</u> ₃ ciel gli_ <u>oc</u> chi tuoi ₇ so no <u>bel</u> ₁₀ li	11
16	Più <u>ca</u> ₃ do del sol è_ <u>il</u> ₇ mi_ <u>o</u> <u>_</u> a <u>mor</u> ₉	9

Figure 5. Leoncavallo, *Merigliata*, mapped prosody

Even though Leoncavallo alters the total number of syllables and the syllabic stress in each line, he still desires to create rhyming verse. For verses to rhyme, their textual meters, or prosody, must be congruent. In traditional Italian sonnets, the rhyming pattern of the first eight lines – the octave – is as follows: a-b-b-a a-b-b-a. For *Merigliata*, this means the prosody of line 1 must match the prosody of line 4 with a stress on the sixth and ninth syllables.

The problem for Leoncavallo is that the chosen text – applying proper rules of syllabification – only provides eight syllables, as identified in line 4_a. If there is to be a stress on the ninth syllable in line 4, it must contain at least nine syllables. To create the needed ninth syllable, Leoncavallo breaches a traditional rule of prosody which dictates that an elision is to be formed between consecutive vowels occurring between words. Through his violation, Leoncavallo does not create an elision between the first two words of *è* and *uno*. This is notated musically with the absence of an elision marking and the independent note assignment for each word.⁴⁵¹ The result is that an additional ninth syllable is created with the word *è*.

The addition of an extra syllable to this line's count serves a second purpose for Leoncavallo. According to convention, as line 1 has a preparatory accent on the sixth syllable, line 4 would require the same to create the standard rhyming scheme. However, in the preceding two lines, the choice was made to depart from convention and stress the seventh syllable, not the sixth. To continue the enforcement of this metrical alteration, Leoncavallo stresses the seventh syllable in line 4, which he may now do because of the additional syllable.

⁴⁵¹ Leoncavallo was consistent throughout his score of *Merigliata* to notate elisions where they were to occur. Thus, the lack of an elision here is not merely an oversight, but a calculated decision.

Another example of Leoncavallo manipulating an elision to create his desired rhyming scheme occurs in line 14. Here, *mio* should be two syllables, and with an elision to *amor*, the final accent of line 14 would fall on the tenth syllable. This proper use of the elision is identified in line 14_a. However, Leoncavallo wants to continue his stress on the ninth syllable which he stressed in line 13 and has stressed throughout the song. To do so, Leoncavallo creates an elision for the entire word of *mio* joined with the initial *a* in *amor* that follows. This is illustrated with an excerpt from the score, which begins with a pick-up to measure 32 in figure 6. The forcing of *mio* to become a single syllable robs the syllable count of line 14 by one and reduces the total count to nine, which continues the established rhyming pattern. Having highlighted only a few examples of the broken metrical conventions used by Leoncavallo, further instances may be observed through a careful study of the entire mapped prosody.

Figure 6. Leoncavallo, *Merigliata*, mm. 32-33

In addition to utilizing irregular metrical patterns, the *veristi* also strayed from metaphorical speech, which was common in romanticism. An example of this is poignantly observed in Mascagni's *La tua stella* (1882). The lyrics by Ezio Cappelli are as follows:

*Quando fanciulla fissi la tua stella,
io ti contemplo in dolce atto d'amore;
l'astro scintilla e la tua faccia bella
s'irraggia del medesimo splendore.*

Dearest, when you gaze at your star,
I gaze at you in the sweetness of love;
the star sparkles and your beautiful face
glows with the same splendor.

*Vorrei saper s'è l'astro scintillante
che illumina così quel tuo semblante
o s'è il fulgor della tua faccia bella
che sale al cielo e illumina la stella.*

I would like to know if it is the star sparkling
that illuminates your face so
or if it is the brilliance of your beautiful face
that rises up to heaven and illuminates the
star.⁴⁵²

This example illustrates the straight-forward manner in which Mascagni chose – through his choice of Cappelli's poem – to musically set a simplistic expression of adoration. First, it is clear who is being addressed, which is his dearest, his beloved. Second, there is no metaphorical or symbolic reference to his beloved – i.e., a place, a state of being or an inanimate object. Third, the comparison between the brilliance of the stars and the sparkle of his beloved's face is direct and translucent. In essence, there is no hidden meaning. The directness of *La tua stella* is representative of the non-metaphorical poetry chosen by the *veristi* for their art songs and illustrates this veristic choice made by the *veristi* prior to the full onset of *verismo* in 1890.

Of equal importance is the level of vocabulary in the art songs of the *veristi*, which is the same as the level of vocabulary used within their operas. It is the no-dictionary-required approach that governs their vocabulary choices. More importantly, it is the language of the characters in the art songs that is represented as the level of social sophistication matches the level of vocabulary complexity. Parallel to the linguistic choices made for their veristic operas, the *veristi* likewise

⁴⁵² Suverkrop, "La tua stella IPA Transcription."

used irregular Italian poetic meter, non-metaphorical speech and everyday vocabulary in their veristic art songs.

Silent Author

The level of detachment with which Zola approached the scientific study of his characters evolved into an ingenious use of the silent author by Verga. The consequential removal of the author's omniscient presence from literature cultivated a level of realism in Verga's writing, which had not been captured previously. Recognizing the significant influence of this approach to portray realism, the musical *veristi* diligently sought to adopt this invisible hand into their compositions. What resulted from their efforts was an absolute regression of their orchestral writing style with an equal elevation of the orchestra's importance, strengthening its rapport with the on-stage characters. This orchestral regression was primarily achieved through the abundant use of tremolos, vocal parallelism and ostinatos.

Identical to the regressive writing of the orchestra in opera, the *veristi* utilized these same techniques in their art songs, which reveals their veristic tendencies. With regard to the first element, the *veristi* would notate tremolos in two primary ways. The first method was to follow the traditional notation style. This manner of notation and the use of the regressive tremolo occur in a veristic manner as early as 1875. For example, Catalani in *O rea Gomorra, o Sodoma perversa* (1875) uses traditionally-notated tremolos in measures 15-19 and 28-29. The same approach was additionally used by Puccini in measures 27-38 and 48-54 of *Mentà l'avviso* and

in measures 19-22 and 47-50 of Mascagni's *Risveglio* (1890). An illustrated example of this technique may be observed from *Mentia l'avviso* in figure 7.

Figure 7. Puccini, *Mentia l'avviso*, mm. 27-30

The musical score for Figure 7 consists of three staves. The top staff is the vocal line, written in a treble clef with a key signature of three flats and a 2/4 time signature. It features a series of eighth notes with accents, starting with a forte (*f*) dynamic. The lyrics are: "Ep - pur d'Au - se - na, è ques - ta L'an - gus - ta". The middle staff is the piano right hand, written in a treble clef, showing a melodic line with a forte (*f*) dynamic that transitions to piano-piano (*pp*). The bottom staff is the piano left hand, written in a bass clef, featuring a rhythmic accompaniment of eighth notes.

A second method of notation used by the *veristi* to imply regressive speech-like tremolos was to rhythmically write it out. An early use of this method was also employed in *Mentia l'avviso*. As observed in figure 8, Puccini notates sixteenth-notes grouped into sixths to create the same quick repetitive alternation of pitch produced by tremolos. This same method of writing was used as well by Mascagni in *Rosa*, with a grouping of thirty-second-notes into twelfths.

Figure 8. Puccini, *Mentia l'avviso*, mm. 92-93

The musical score for Figure 8 consists of three staves. The top staff is the vocal line, written in a treble clef with a key signature of three flats and a 3/4 time signature. It features a melodic line with a slur over it, and the lyrics are: "Che il ri - mor - so u - dir mi". The middle staff is the piano right hand, written in a treble clef, showing a melodic line with a slur over it. The bottom staff is the piano left hand, written in a bass clef, featuring a rhythmic accompaniment of sixteenth notes grouped into sixths, indicated by the number '6' above the notes.

However, regardless of the manner of notation, the effect produced is the primary concern. For example, Mascagni reserves the use of tremolos in *Rosa* for the most climactic material, where the written-out tremolos are employed in measures 23-27 supporting the vocally excited text: *Ahi! tu rispondi: Fugge l'amore!* (Ah! you answer: the love flees!). The regressive tremolos used here are to echo the frantic cry of the vocalist in the orchestra's voice, allowing both narrating characters to simultaneously convey their distressed emotion. Additionally, Mascagni highlights the emotive power of the tremolo by reinforcing its importance. As observed in both *Rosa* and *Risveglio*, when the orchestra employs tremolos, vocal parallelism ceases. However, the rapport between the voice and orchestra has not changed simply because the melody is carried solely by the voice. Instead, Mascagni illustrates how the tremolo is of equal narrative value to the vocal melodic material in that both emote at the same level.

Vocal parallelism – orchestra and voice simultaneously providing identical narrative melodic material – is another regressive technique used by the *veristi* in their art songs. A brief comparative examination of four art songs by Mascagni from 1882 – 1884 reveals the evolution of parallelism within his works. For example, *La tua stella*, published in 1882, utilizes no vocal parallelism; however, a subsequent composition of that year, *Alla luna*, uses some parallelism in the second portion of the song. Later, *Pena d'amore* (1883) shows an increased use of parallelism and the parallelism is presented in doubled octaves. This doubling of the parallelism in octaves strengthens its presence. Finally, *M'ama...m'ama* (1884) is entirely composed of vocal parallelism. This evolution of parallelism in Mascagni's art songs illustrates the increased use of the technique and its importance for regressive writing.

Further, vocal parallelism existing in the art songs of Mascagni and the other *veristi* was often constructed conservatively, which enhanced its effect. An example of Puccini's judicious use of parallelism occurs in *Mentì l'avviso*. Its specific presence is identified in measures 88-89, 101-103 and 105-107. Puccini's self-imposed limitation of parallelism in this art song is for dramatic purposes. Recognizing the powerful narrative nature of this technique, Puccini reserved its use not only for the *lento* section, but more specifically, for the climactic melodic material of this section.

Leoncavallo also reigned in the power of vocal parallelism within his art songs, instead, using it to emphasize the climactic material. For example, *Ruit hora* (1893) uses parallelism conservatively and this parallelism is primarily restricted to measures 14-18, which increases the intensity of the vocal line. Extending into the post-veristic era, parallelism may be observed in Leoncavallo's *Lasciati amar* (1913). However, its judicious use had decreased and Leoncavallo now employed parallelism more liberally to echo the sentiments of the melodic material with the vocal line.

An additional narrative practice manipulated by the *veristi* is that of the ostinato. Rhythmic ostinatos began appearing in their art songs as early as 1876 and continued throughout the post-veristic era. The appearance of these ostinatos may be observed in songs as early as Catalani's *Canzone groenlandese* (1876) or Leoncavallo's *October* (1880) and *Pensiero* (1880). The use of ostinatos continued into the post-veristic era with Leoncavallo's *Meriggiata* and Giordano's *6 Liriche* (1919). To clarify, the use of ostinato dates back to the first inceptions of music.

However, its employment as a regressive technique to mimic speech was an unique application by the *veristi*.

An illustration of using an ostinato regressively to mimic speech may be examined in Leoncavallo's *October*. First, figure 9 presents an excerpt of measures 15-18, which illustrates the notation of the ostinato employed. Second, the instruction to the vocalist in measure 16 is of great importance: *Il canto sempre con espressione di stanchezza, senza mai animarlo troppo* (always singing with an expression of fatigue, never too animated). Consequently, the use of this rhythmic ostinato is to stress – to narrate – the idea of fatigue. Leoncavallo was not asking only for an alteration of the vocal color to reflect this mood, a detail that will be discussed later, but he was also requiring the piano part to express this same emotion. What results from this ostinato pattern is a fatigued speech from the piano that echoes the text and vocal color of the vocalist.

Figure 9. Leoncavallo, *October*, mm. 15-18

Il canto sempre con espressione di stanchezza, senza mai animarlo troppo

Muo - - - io.

p calmo

Consequently, these regressive techniques of tremolos, vocal parallelism and ostinatos not only give an oral speech quality to the orchestra – and in the case of art song, to the piano – but they elevate the orchestra's role, making it another narrating character of the drama. As a narrator of drama, the rapport between the orchestra and voice morphed into greater importance given to the

orchestra marked by its prominence in presenting the melodic material. As explained previously, one common method employed by the *veristi* in their veristic operas to elevate the presentation of the melodic material in the orchestra was to have the vocalist sing a monotone line over the orchestral melody.

The operatic example offered for this method was the beginning of Cavaradossi's aria, *E lucevan le stelle*, from *Tosca*. An identical method is employed by the *veristi* in their art songs. Catalani offers an early emergence of this technique in 1876 with *Canzone groenlandese*. Beginning with measures 30-31, the orchestra initiates the presentation of the melodic material. The voice enters in measure 32 with a monotone B₄ and continues as such to measure 33 with the text: *la bionda mia fanciulla*. Catalani's use as indicated here is illustrated in figure 10. Additionally, this same pattern occurs a second time in measures 65-68. Catalani also uses this same approach in *Senza baci* (c1884).

Figure 10. Catalani, *Canzone groenlandese*, mm. 30-33

The musical score for Figure 10 consists of two systems. The top system is the vocal line, and the bottom system is the piano accompaniment. The key signature is three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and the time signature is 3/8. The vocal line begins in measure 32 with a monotone B₄ note and the lyrics "La bionda mia fanciulla". The piano accompaniment begins in measure 30 with the instruction "Assai meno e delicatamente" and continues with "sempre legato". The tempo/mood marking "dolcissimo e piano" is placed above the vocal line in measure 30.

A second pre-veristic occurrence of this procedure is identified in *Mentia l'avviso*. The melodic material is introduced by the voice in the first measure of the *recitativo*, which consists of a

neighbor-tone movement down a half-step, returning and then descending a minor third. This same melodic material is then presented by the piano in measures 34-35 and 36-37. While the melodic material is carried by the piano, the voice engages in monotone recitation on F₄ – excluding a one-time octave drop to F₃ – with the text: *e qui fatal dimora Mi presagiva*. These two examples with Puccini and Catalani identify how the same veristic technique employed in opera was preceded by the similar approach in the art songs of the *veristi*, which established the importance of the piano's role and narrative power.

In addition to the piano carrying the melodic material while the voice sings monotone over it, the *veristi* also placed significance on the piano carrying the melodic material without vocal involvement. This is primarily identified in the increased importance given to the piano's preludes and postludes. Using the same two examples, both Catalani and Puccini illustrate how this was utilized. First, in Catalani's *Canzone groenlandese*, both the prelude and postlude provide integral melodic material. For example, in measures 1-6 the piano prelude introduces the melodic material. Then, even though the voice joins in with vocal parallelism in measure 7, the piano remains the primary provider of the melodic material. This is further supported as the voice drops out on the downbeat of measure 13 and the piano continues with the melodic material until the conclusion of the phrase in measure 14. The unbroken presentation of the melodic material by the piano demonstrates the increased importance given to the piano by the *veristi*.

The postlude of this piece provides another example of such importance. First, not counting pick-up measures, the length of the postlude is similar to that of the prelude. Thus, the piano

both begins and concludes the art song substantially by being the sole provider of melodic material. Second, the postlude contains a musical fragment which relates back to the most recent use of a rhythmic ostinato to represent despair, which is found in measures 71-74. Accordingly, the piano not only carries melodic material, but it is also used to recall emotions previously portrayed. Finally and as before, Catalani also concludes *Senza baci* with a seven-measure solo piano postlude which presents the final statements of the song's melodic material.

Puccini also chose in the pre-veristic era to elevate the role of the piano by giving prominence to the piano's presentation of the melody in the preludes and postludes. Referring again to *Mentia l'avviso*, the piece begins with a twenty-three measure prelude that develops its own melodic material. It is only after this lengthy prelude that the voice enters at the *recitativo*. In addition, Puccini chose not to conclude the piece with Gusmano's powerful vocal outburst in measure 107 and its brief retreat in the following two measures. Instead, Puccini gives the piano the opportunity to continue for another seven measures and conclude the final developments of the melody.

As the *veristi* had successfully given voice to the orchestra in their veristic operas, they also utilized the same regressive techniques in their art songs. The piano was an equal participant in delivering melodic material, but more importantly, the piano was able to emote the same emotions at the same level as the vocalist. This regression was truly a characteristic unique to the *veristi* and was present in both art songs and operas alike.

Dramatic Structure

The dramatic structure of the operas of the *veristi* were of equal importance when it came to delivering truth in their musical compositions. In their operas, the element of realism presented itself through a compression of musical structure, the evasion of monumentality, a quick rise and fall of musical material and the use of musical fragments. Just as these defining dramatic structural choices are identified in veristic operas, these choices are also captured – ironically, on a miniature scale – in the art songs of the *veristi*.

First, a compression of musical structure is observed in veristic art songs like *Pensiero* and *Mentìa l'avviso*. In the latter, Puccini offers the most simplistic example as he specifically divides his art song into two sections: *Recitativo* and *Lento*. This approach was primarily chosen because Puccini was actually setting a scene from a play which had been previously set to music numerous times. However, it also illustrates the desire of the *veristi* to compose complete songs which are a compression of dramatic structure. More specifically, this is in fact a stand-alone art song. Although taken from a play, it does not award the listener with any context. This meant that Puccini was faced with the challenge of composing a contextually complete piece. When *Mentìa l'avviso* is viewed this way, it is clear to see Puccini's intentions to compose an art song with a complete structure in a very concise manner.

In similar fashion to *Mentìa l'avviso*, *Pensiero* is crafted to mimic a format with a recitative followed by an aria. Following a lengthy introduction of thirteen measures, the voice enters with the following instruction: *con semplicità* (with simplicity). This first quasi-recitative section

continues until measure 26, where the voice is given the following instruction: *ben cantata* (well sung). Leoncavallo is asking for a full *bel canto* sound in this quasi-aria segment. This portion continues until another division of vocal quality in measure 38, which is expressly labeled: *Recit.* This recitative continues until measure 46 which begins the final aria section to the conclusion of the piece. In both cases, Leoncavallo and Puccini were able to successfully create a compressed musical structure which was reminiscent of a recitative followed by an aria format of opera.

An interesting observation highlighted by this last example of Leoncavallo's *Pensiero* is the insight it gives to the evolution of departure from romanticism by the *veristi*. Romantic operatic tradition long required the division of material into recitatives, arias, duets, quartets, chorus numbers and so forth. This is what was previously identified as the monumentality of romanticism. However, what eventually emerged with the *veristi* in their operas was a lack of sectional division, yielding a continual evolvment of musical material. The seeds of their self-distancing from romanticism's monumentality is precisely observed in *Pensiero*. For example, the way in which Leoncavallo moves back and forth between quasi-recitative and quasi-aria sections reveals his intentions to create fluidity between the two compositional styles. He does not want sudden breaks; he is striving for continuity. Consequently, the framework for this technique that Leoncavallo was developing in 1880 is exactly what allowed for its full execution in *I Pagliacci* more than a decade later.

What Leoncavallo was beginning to nurture in 1880 was followed by Mascagni in 1890 with greater implications. For example, in *Rosa*, Mascagni also alternates between quasi-recitative and quasi-aria sections, where measures 1-14 and 31-44 are in a quasi-recitative style, while

measures 15-30 and 45-62 are in a quasi-aria style. In this piece, however, Mascagni is not just trying to avoid the monumentality of romanticism; he is seeking to include *parlando* patterns in the lyricism of the vocal line, which will serve to increase realism and authenticity. Viewed in this manner, there is no distinction between quasi-recitative and quasi-aria sections. Instead, there is only a difference of vocal quality.

One of the primary characteristics of the opening measures of *Rosa* is the use of repetitive pitch. This may be observed in figure 11. At first glance, this would appear to be a recitative beginning to the song. However, compare these measures to the first measures sung by Turiddu in *Cavalleria rusticana*, as observed in figure 12. In Mascagni's purely veristic opera, the vocal line – not marked as either recitative or aria – consists of similar repetitive notes which continue throughout Turiddu's opening number. As illustrated here, Mascagni had moved beyond the segmentation of recitative and aria divisions. Instead, in its place he had created a fusion of the two. This synthesis resulted in *parlando* singing, capturing truth and realism at its core.

Figure 11. Mascagni, *Rosa*, mm. 1-7

Mesto e semplice.

p *più p quasi*

U - na po - te - ra ro - sa e rin - ser - vat - ta _____ nel tuo pic - co - lo li - bro di pre - ghie - ra: _____ u - na

p legato *b* *più p*

Figure 12. Mascagni, *Cavalleria rusticana*, mm. 47-56

TURIDDU. (*behind the scenes.*) *mf*

O Lo - la, bian - ca co - me fior di spi - no, ___

p

affrett. *a tempo*

quan - do t'af - fac - ci te s'affaccia, il so - le; ___

affrett. col canto. *a tempo*

Though cultivated by Leoncavallo and Mascagni, the origins of veristic *parlando* lyricism is observable in the early work of Catalani's *O rea Gomorra, o Sodoma perversa*. In measures 13-15 the voice chants the following on an A^b_4 : *sulle iniquerovine Iddio riversa!* (God pours [coals] on iniquitous ruins!). Then, for dramatic emphasis and over rolling tremolos, the following text is chanted almost an octave higher on G_5 : *l'altissimo frastuono desta le genti immemori* (the very loud noise arouses forgetful people). The effect for Catalani, Leoncavallo and Mascagni is all the same. Specifically, *parlando* lyricism is utilized to genuinely capture *verismo* from their character.

Another ability of the *veristi* in their operatic works was the way in which they would employ a quick rise and fall of climactic action. This occurred on a more macro level with plot

development, but it was also observable within micro settings of just a few measures. The example previously offered was from Rodolfo's aria in *La Bohème*. The same technique observed in this example is also utilized by the *veristi* in their art songs, with both *Rosa* and *Risveglio* providing appropriate examples.

In *Rosa*, vocal climactic action arises suddenly in measure 23 and continues intensely through measure 27. This is then followed by a quick climactic retreat in measures 28-29. Just as suddenly as the climax arose, the intensity retreats. An even faster occurring rise and fall of climactic action is observed in *Risveglio* and notated in figure 13. For example, measures 23-24 prepare for the unexpected and sudden drive of intensity through a relatively monotone melodic line. This is followed by a rapid rise to a vocal climax in measure 25 that concludes on the downbeat of measure 26. This climax is accentuated with an interpretive fermata on the downbeat of measure 26, though this is not marked in the score. Then, the remaining beat of measure 26 and the following two measures retreat from the dramatics and return to the tranquil state of measures 23-24. By so doing, Mascagni demonstrates his ability to effectively compose a quick rise and fall of dramatic action even in the most micro situations.

Figure 13. Mascagni, *Risveglio*, mm. 23-28

The image displays a musical score for measures 23-28 of Mascagni's *Risveglio*. It consists of a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line is written in a treble clef with a key signature of three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat) and a 2/4 time signature. The lyrics are: "Scuo-to dal sonno il ci - glio e canto auch io con te, can-to con te...". The piano accompaniment is written in a grand staff (treble and bass clefs) with the same key signature and time signature. The score features several triplet markings (indicated by a '3' above or below the notes) in measures 23, 24, 25, and 26. The vocal line shows a clear climactic rise in measure 25, peaking on the downbeat of measure 26, followed by a retreat in measures 27 and 28.

A final method utilized by the *veristi* to create concise dramatic structures is the use of musical fragments. As previously illustrated in the opera *Madama Butterfly*, musical fragments serve to recall emotions and ideas in an instant, negating the need for time-consuming development or extensive explanation. The best observation of how these musical fragments are used by the *veristi* in their art songs is in Catalani's *Canzone groenlandese*. The musical fragment is first established in measures 71-74, as observed in figure 14. Within these measures, there is a thirty-second-note ostinato on an F[#]₄ in the piano, where each note is individually marked with an accent. Coupled with this, the upper voices of the piano are in parallel with the vocal line stating the melodic material. These measures are marked by specific instructions: *con disperazione* (with despair). Consequently, this ostinato and melodic material constitute the musical fragment representing despair. The ability of this musical fragment to evoke the recall of despair is then harnessed by Catalani in measure 108, which is notated in figure 15.

Figure 14. Catalani, *Canzone groenlandese*, mm. 71-74

The image shows a musical score for measures 71-74 of Catalani's *Canzone groenlandese*. It consists of a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The key signature is three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and the time signature is 3/8. The vocal line is marked *f* and *con disperazione*. The lyrics are: "col ca - lor de' ba - ci mie - i bru - me e ne - vi non pote - i!". The piano accompaniment features a thirty-second-note ostinato in the left hand, marked *f* and *risoluto*. The right hand of the piano accompaniment plays a melodic line that is parallel to the vocal line. The score ends with a double bar line.

Figure 15. Catalani, *Canzone groenlandese*, mm. 105-109

The image displays a musical score for the vocal and piano parts of a piece. The vocal line is on a single staff with lyrics: "del tuo cor, del tuo cor rom - pe - rà". The piano accompaniment consists of two staves (treble and bass clef). The score includes performance markings such as *cresc. ed accel.* and *ff*. The key signature is three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and the time signature is 3/8. The vocal line features a long note on the word "rom" that extends across the measure, with a *ff* marking above it.

In this single measure, the ostinato and melodic material are restated to instantly summon the emotion of despair. However, Catalani further leverages the use of this musical fragment. For example, when the fragment was established, the melodic material was paralleled in the voice and piano. When it is restated, the melodic material is solely in the piano. This consequently allows Catalani the opportunity to layer another element on top of the musical fragment, which he does in the vocal line by inserting a loud vocal outcry on a B₅, which coincides with the word *romperà* from the textual line: *del tuo cor romperà* (your heart will break). As a result of utilizing the musical fragment, Catalani is able to recall the emotion of despair in a single measure and allow the voice to cry out in that very despair. Thus is the power of musical fragments to concisely recall emotions, themes and ideas in a magnificent manner.

Milieu

Zola was prolific to a fault in his effort to painstakingly depict the milieu of his characters. This prominent component of French naturalism was not applied the same way in Verga's veristic prose. However, the milieu still remained important as the environment greatly affected the behavior of his Sicilian peasants. Struggling to transport the literary milieu to the stage was an obstacle for the musical *veristi*. Their solution came in aural specificity, sets, costumes and preciseness of description. Clearly, sets, costumes and other visual cues utilized by the *veristi* to depict the milieu of their characters may not be applied to their veristic art songs. As a result, the identification of this characteristic within the art songs of the *veristi* is limited primarily to aural specificity.

Aural specificity in the veristic operas was illustrated best through the examples of Puccini with *Tosca* and *Madama Butterfly*. Recall that in *Tosca*, Puccini carefully crafted the pastoral dawn in the third act aurally with fourteen specifically-tuned bells in eight precise locations. For *Madama Butterfly*, it was his attention to the Japanese culture with the Japanese tunes he had carefully researched and precisely replicated. The purpose of the aural specificity in both operas – and the other operas of the *veristi* – was to define the milieu of their characters' setting. It was not enough for their characters to participate in a plot; rather, the *veristi* pushed it further so that the plot in which the characters were acting would take place in a carefully crafted environment, heightening the realism of the moment.

This effort of the *veristi* to create an authentic environment in which the drama may occur was carried over to their art songs. Specifically, the *veristi* created an aural environment through their use of what have been labeled as the violent extremes of *verismo*. The intense vocal approach within veristic operas was and remains a definitive auditory clue of the *verismo* genre, both in opera and in art song. Consequently, the *veristi* created their authentic milieu by framing their art songs within the margins of vocal extremes.

Violent Extremes

The violence of veristic opera transmitted to violence within the veristic art songs. However, as discussed with relation to opera, the violence that was transferred to art song was the violence of vocal delivery, passion and effect. The same vocal extremes that came to aurally characterize *verismo* in opera are used just as aggressively in the art songs of the *veristi*. Specifically, the techniques applied to vocal writing in veristic art songs are as follows: deliberate inequalities of vocal color, anguished cries, shouted utterances, heavily charged melodies and vocal writing exploiting the higher registers.

The intimate manner in which art songs are delivered – as opposed to opera – gave the *veristi* an enlarged excuse to exploit the inequalities of vocal color. What resulted were compacted art songs making use of several vocally contrasting colors. Although the inequality of vocal color was a radical operatic idea when first utilized by Calvé and Bellincioni in *Carmen* – and then later by Bellincioni in creating the role of Santuzza in *Cavalleria rusticana* – the concept had

existed in the pre-veristic art songs of the *veristi*. Perhaps one of the first uses came in Catalani's *Canzone groenlandese*, with the instruction: *con disperazione*. As discussed previously with regards to musical fragments, Catalani was indicating that the sense of despair should be reflected in the voice, giving preference to emoting over *bel canto* technique.

With an understanding of its effect and in a desire to capture the aural qualities of *verismo*, Leoncavallo meticulously dictated the desired vocal color in his art songs. The first example refers back to the discussion of ostinato relating to *October*, where Leoncavallo gives specific instruction to the voice in measure 16: *il canto sempre con espressione di stanchezza, senza mai animarlo troppo* (the voice always with expression of fatigue, never too animate). Later in the song, Leoncavallo calls for an elevation of the fatigue as he desires it to be more extreme. This occurs in measure 45 where he provides the following instruction: *un fil di voce* (in a weak voice).

An additional example from the pre-veristic year of 1880 is highly informative and is observed in Leoncavallo's *Pensiero*. In measures 46-52, the voice has the text: *non so perchè mi salga il pianto agli occhi* (I do not know why I ascend to weeping eyes) which coincides with Leoncavallo's instruction: *sempre con un singhiozzo* (always like a sob). Specifically, Leoncavallo is requesting a vocal color indicative of the sobs he has composed into the melodic material as observed in figure 16. Perhaps the most poignant observation of this example is its connection with future sobs to be dictated by Leoncavallo. Indeed, this pre-veristic art song foreshadows the sobs of despair which have become an audible recognition of Leoncavallo's *Vesti la giubba* from *I Pagliacci*.

voice's register. This compositional technique which became extremely prevalent in veristic operas was prepared and practiced in art song by the *veristi* prior to 1890. Catalani's *Canzone groenlandese* offers insight into the technique's formative use. The first anguished cry in this song occurs in measure 63, which is vocalized on G₅ with the text: *Ahimè!* (Alas!). This preparatory cry called for by Catalani is then developed to maturity in a concluding measure. In measure 108 and pitched on a B₅, the voice cries out on the final stressed syllable of the text: *romperà* (will break). The musical notation of this anguished cry is observable in figure 15.

The use of anguished cries in the pre-veristic era is also observable in each of the art songs of the primary *veristi*. First, Leoncavallo calls for an anguished cry in *Pensiero* within the textual line: *e penso a te* (and I think of you), where in measure 60 on an A₅, the vocalist cries: *penso* (I think). Second, Puccini employs this veristic vocal technique in *Mentì l'avviso*. In this song, the anguished cry occurs with the pick-up to measures 56-58 and may be observed in figure 17. Here, Puccini sets the text: *Tu! funesta donna dall'avel risorta* (You! deadly woman resurrected from the tomb). To emphasize the significance of her resurrection, Puccini composes a passionate cry on the text: *risorta* (resurrected). This outburst is emphasized with the dynamics of the piano part – *fortississimo* – the accented repeated notes and the instruction: *veloce* (velocity). Third, Mascagni employed the anguished cry in *M'ama...m'ama*. In measure 23, Mascagni jumps an octave and a fifth to a G₅ on the text: *Ahi!* (Ah!). The anguished nature of this dramatic outburst is clarified with the notation: *doloroso* (sorrowfully).

Figure 17. Puccini, *Mentà l'avviso*, mm. 53-58

The image shows a musical score for Puccini's *Mentà l'avviso*, measures 53-58. The score is in 2/4 time and B-flat major. It consists of a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line has lyrics: "Tu! fu-ne-sta don-na, dal - l'a-vel ri - sor - - - - - ta". The piano accompaniment includes triplets and dynamic markings such as "Veloce", "calando", "fff", and "p".

While this technique was utilized to its full potential in the operatic compositions during the veristic era, the *veristi* continued to make use of anguished cries in their art songs during this time. Although, the veristic anguished cry underwent a transformation, and what resulted were climactic vocal outcries. For these vocal climaxes, the intensity was the same as the previous outcries, but the association with anguish was not always present. For instance, in 1896 and 1904 Puccini composed the songs *Avanti Urania!* and *Canto d'anime*, respectively. In both art songs Puccini includes climactic vocal outbursts. First, in *Avanti Urania!*, the outcry comes on the highest and penultimate note of the piece. Specifically, in measure 32, Puccini creates a dramatic vocal outcry on an A₅, which accompanies the penultimate syllable of the text: *Urania!* (the name of the ship being dedicated). There is no anguish in this cry, but the climactic vocal intensity is reminiscent of the earlier anguished cries. A second similar example of the modified anguished cry comes from *Canto d'anime*. In this example, Puccini has chosen to assign the vocal outburst to the final note and text of this song. The climactic outcry occurs on a B^b₅ on the text: *sol* (sun). Again, anguish is not present in the climactic outburst, but the effect is the same.

Two final examples of the modified anguished cry are observed in Leoncavallo's *Merigliata*. The first occurs in measure 28. The text of this measure concludes the phrase: *E corri a stringermi sul cor!* (And you run to press against me on the heart). Consequently, the vocal outburst occurs on an A₅ on the text: *cor!* (heart). The second climactic vocal outcry occurs toward the end of the song. In measure 36, the outcry is on a B^b₅ coinciding with the text: *sol* (sun). In addition to identifying the presence of modified anguished cries, this example also illustrates one of the purposes for why such vocal outbursts persisted beyond the initial purpose of emoting anguish and its derivatives.

For Leoncavallo, the choice of the outbursts on these texts was strategic. To explain, the two outbursts relate to each other figuratively by means of the text, and it is this connection which Leoncavallo chooses to emphasize with the climactic material. Again, the first textual outcry is with the phrase: *E corri a stringermi sul cor!* (And you run to press against me on the heart), giving emphasis to the heart. The second textual outcry occurs within the line: *Più caldo del sol è il mio amor* (Hotter than the sun is my love). In this line, Leoncavallo stresses the sun with the vocal outburst. Consequently, with the two vocal cries, Leoncavallo connects the character's heart with the sun. Drawing such a parallel between the heart and the heat of the sun justifies the dramatic use of these vocal expressions and it offers an explanation as to the enduring importance of this veristic technique.

The use of the anguished cry – and its modified derivative – by the *veristi* to create an audible characteristic of veristic art songs was further expanded to form passages of shouted utterances, which were inherent in both their art songs and operas. Similar to the solitary moment of

passionate anguished cries, shouted utterances were climactic and composed in the high register of the voice. What differentiated them was that they occurred over several notes – they had an increased duration. A characteristic pre-veristic era example is observed in Catalani’s *O rea Gomorra, o Sodoma perversa*. As observed in figure 18, measure 30 calls for a shouted utterance on a repeated A^b_5 which is to be accented. Textually this occurs with the line: *e l’infernal fiumana* (and the infernal/hellish flood). Further emphasis is given to this passage with the instruction: *con impeto* (with impetus/force). Lastly, Catalani musically supports this prolonged outcry in the piano part with vocal parallelism occurring with doubled octaves.

Figure 18. Catalani, *O rea Gomorra, o Sodoma perversa*, mm. 28-30

The image shows a musical score for three measures (28-30) from Catalani's *O rea Gomorra, o Sodoma perversa*. The top staff is the vocal line in G major, 4/4 time. It begins with the instruction 'accelerando' and 'con impeto'. The lyrics are: 'gran-di - ne pio-ve s'in-fuo-ca - ti sas-si e l'in - fer - nal fiu - ma - na, che'. The vocal line features a repeated note on A5 (the fifth line of the staff) with accents and dynamic markings. The piano part consists of two staves (treble and bass clef). The right hand plays chords and moving lines, while the left hand plays a rhythmic accompaniment with accents. The piano part also includes 'con impeto' markings.

The extended anguished cry, which became the veristic shouted utterance, is also observable in Puccini’s *Mentì l’avviso*. This specific example may be observed in figure 19. Here, this vocal outburst is extended over several measures, which consists of the pick-up to measures 34-39. To ensure the vocal characteristic of a shouted utterance, Puccini places this outburst in the upper register of the male tenor voice, where the cry occurs mostly on F_4 and G_4 . Such placement allows for poignant, powerful projection. In addition, the shouted utterance is set to the text: *e qui fatal dimora Mi presagiva la segreta voce* (and here the fatal abode, [The place] the secret

voice foresaw me). It is no coincidence that the shouted utterance comes precisely at the time of such an eerie realization by Gusmano.

Figure 19. Puccini, *Mentia l'avviso*, mm. 34-39

The image displays a musical score for measures 34-39 of Puccini's *Mentia l'avviso*. The score is written for voice and piano. The vocal line is in the upper register, featuring a melodic line with a long, sustained note at the end of the phrase. The piano accompaniment is in the lower register, providing a rhythmic and harmonic foundation. The lyrics are: "e qui fa-tal di - mo - ra mi pre - sa - gi - va la se - gre - ta vo - ce Che". The score includes dynamic markings such as *f* (forte) and *mf* (mezzo-forte), and articulation marks like accents and slurs. The key signature is three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat) and the time signature is 2/4.

Regarding shouted utterances, a final example to identify occurs in Leoncavallo's *Lasciati amar*, which may be observed as part of the notated example in figure 20. The utterance is preceded in measures 39-40 by the fervent plea: *schiodi le braccia d'amore in traccia* (open the arms of love in sign [to signal]). Followed by this supplication, Leoncavallo sets in measures 41-42 the zealous outcry: *l'amore è bello, lasciati amar!* (love is beautiful, let yourself be loved). As Puccini did in *Mentia l'avviso*, Leoncavallo also sets this outcry in the upper vocal register, which allows for an arousing and commanding delivery. As a concluding thought, the use of the anguished solitary cry and the elongated shouted utterance by the *veristi* in their art song compositions became so common that the absence of such dramatic vocal release might legitimately raise doubt as to an art song's veristic nature, even with other elements present.

As identified in the veristic operas, the *veristi* were gifted with the ability to compose melodies that were described as heavily charged. These melodies were laden with a mixture of emotion

and musicality. Among the *veristi*, Puccini became the most prolific at composing such melodic material. This ability was first observed in his art song, *Ment'è l'avviso*, and is specifically identified in the *lento* section. Here, Puccini masterfully composes a melody that is first stated in measures 82-90, which is then followed by a more emotionally and musically dense statement in measures 97-109. In fact, the melody composed for this song was lifted by Puccini and became the melodic material for *Donna non vidi mai*, in *Manon Lescaut*.

Michael Kaye points out that Puccini borrowed melodic material from multiple art songs, which was then worked into his veristic operas. Speaking of *Canto d'anime*, Kaye states, "Measures 11-13 are particularly evocative of the musical language of *Madama Butterfly*."⁴⁵³ He also identifies musical fragments from *Avanti Urania!*, which are later reworked and used in the first and third acts of *Tosca* and also in the first act of *Madama Butterfly*.⁴⁵⁴ Each reworking establishes a connection between the veristic art songs of Puccini and his veristic operas. This connection is especially apparent with regard to his heavily charged melodies.

Leoncavallo was also successful in composing veristic melodies that swelled with passion, with *Vesti la giubba* as a prime example. In his art songs, this ability is most readily observed in *Lasciati amar*. This particular veristic art song offers examination of the sequential development of such melodic material which is notated in figure 20. Measures 17-18 offer the initial hearing of the melodic material by introducing the rhythmic component. This is then followed by a brief statement of the first half of the melody in measures 29-30, with the rhythm of these measures coinciding with the material established in measures 17-18. Added to this is the melodic

⁴⁵³ Kaye, "The Unknown Puccini," 102.

⁴⁵⁴ See Kaye, "The Unknown Puccini," 62 and 102.

ascension followed by a quick downward retreat. This combined concept is further developed in measures 39-42. Here, in conjunction with the melodic material from measures 29-30, the second half of the melody is presented. Finally, the full melodic material is restated in an altered fashion – one which increases its dramaticism – in measures 46-50. The result is a heavily charged melody which is characteristic of the compositional styles employed by the *veristi* in both opera and art songs.

A final element of the violent extremes of *verismo* to be discussed is the placement of the vocal material in the upper registers of the voice. The deliberate choice to compose within a high tessitura – characteristic of veristic opera – was also transmitted to the art songs of the *veristi*. The first example of how the *veristi* exploited the upper registers of the voice comes from *O rea Gomorra, o Sodoma perversa*. The actual distribution of each note may be viewed in figure 21. First, this song possess a relatively wide tessitura, which ranges in the female voice from A^b_4 to G_5 .⁴⁵⁵ Second, more than twenty percent of the vocalist's pitches lie above F_5 .

⁴⁵⁵ For conversion to the male voice, lower every pitch equally by an octave. For example, the tessitura of *O rea Gomorra, o Sodoma perversa* for a male voice would be A^b_3 to G_4 .

Figure 20. Leoncavallo, *Lasciati amar*

mm.17-18 *con anima*

É un mo-to stra-no, un sen-so, ar - ca - no,

mm.29-30 *f con grande accento*

Tut-to è fio - ri - to, e il cor smar - ri - to

mm.39-42 *con fuoco* *f* *cresc.* *stentato* *ff* *tenuto* *ritardando*

schiu - di le brac - cia d'a - mo - re in trac - cia, l'a - mo - re è bel - lo, la - scia - ti a - mar!

mm.46-50 *riprendendo con fuoco* *tenuto* *ten.*

schiu - di le brac - cia d'a - mo - re in trac - cia, l'a - mo - re è bel - lo, ti la - scia a mar!

f con fuoco *ed anima* *tenuto* *ff*

The image displays three systems of musical notation for the opera 'Lasciati amar' by Giuseppe Leoncavallo. Each system includes a vocal line (treble clef) and a piano accompaniment (grand staff). The first system (mm. 17-18) is marked 'con anima'. The second system (mm. 29-30) is marked 'f con grande accento'. The third system (mm. 39-42) includes performance directions such as 'con fuoco', 'f', 'cresc.', 'stentato', 'ff', 'tenuto', and 'ritardando'. The fourth system (mm. 46-50) includes 'riprendendo con fuoco', 'tenuto', and 'ten.'. The lyrics are in Italian and describe a lover's state of being 'flourished' and 'heartbroken'.

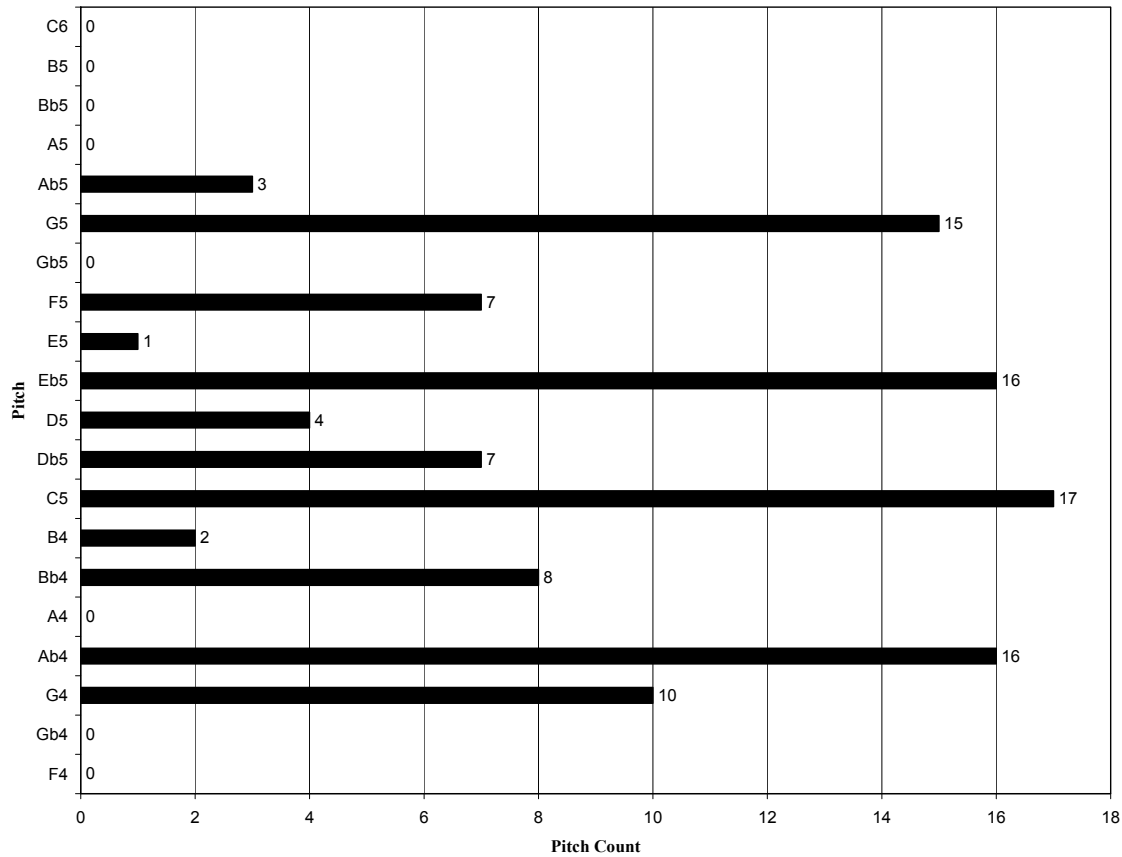


Figure 21. Catalani, *O rea Gommora, o Sodoma perversa*, Tessitura

Another illustrative example may be drawn *Mentì l'avviso*. The tessitura for this song in the male voice is from B^b₃ to F₄, and like Catalani's piece, more than twenty-one and a half percent of the notated pitches lie above F₄ – the male equivalent of F₅. When this range is lowered by only a whole step, the percentage almost doubles. In addition to this high tessitura, however, Puccini also requires the repetition of multiple pitches in the highest segment of the male voice as he calls for G₄ ten times, A^b₄ six times and B^b₄ two times. This repetition of pitches in the upper register is likewise observed in Leoncavallo's *Meriggiata* as he requires the repetition of G₅ twelve times and F₅ seventeen times. The tessitura for *Meriggiata* is also placed high in the voice with a range existing from D₅ to G₅. The exact distribution of pitches for this piece are

illustrated in figure 22. With these examples, it is evident that exploitation of the higher registers of the voice existing in the operas of the *veristi* also exist within their art songs.

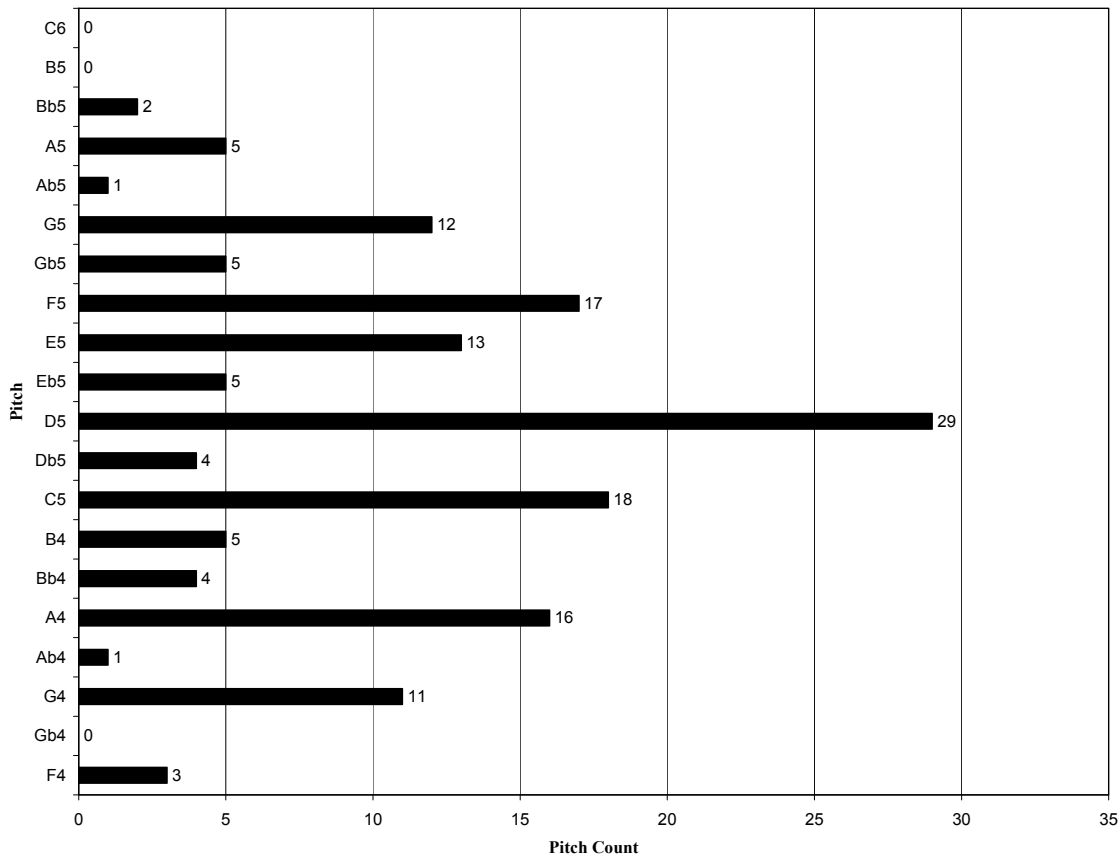


Figure 22. Leoncavallo, *Merigiata*, Tessitura

The employment of a high tessitura, however, was done with a purpose. Again, the *veristi* created a milieu in their art songs that is framed within the vocal extremes of inequalities of vocal color, anguished cries, shouted utterances and heavily charged melodies. By so doing, the *veristi* required force – real vocal power – to bring authenticity to these vocal lines.

Consequently, this necessitated the frequent utilization of the vocalist’s upper register.

Nevertheless, such frequent use of the upper register, coupled with the veristic trademarks of vocal extremes, established the hallmark sound of *verismo* – both in opera and art song.

Veristic Art Songs

Application of *Verismo* Label

In this discussion, the seven characteristics of *verismo* – derived from literature and identified in opera – have been applied to an examination of the art song compositions of the *veristi*. This inspection has identified the presence of veristic components in art songs during the pre-veristic, veristic and post-veristic eras. Additionally, this study has drawn examples selectively from various art songs, in essence, only highlighting an isolated occurrence of the specific characteristic to be identified and illustrated. As such, the question might easily be posed, “Are all seven characteristics of *verismo* identifiable in any complete art song work by the *veristi*?” The consequence of identifying the presence of all seven would be to justly classify specific art songs as equally veristic as their operatic counterparts.

Fortunately, this question may be answered affirmatively. Purely veristic art songs written by the *veristi* do exist. Two specific works meeting this criteria that will be further examined include Giordano’s *6 Liriche* and Leoncavallo’s *Imploration éperdue* (date unknown). The examination of these art songs will transpire with the same methodology that was applied to the previous examples. Specifically, each of the seven characteristics of *verismo* will be identified within the examined work.

6 *Liriche*

Giordano published *6 Liriche* in 1919, a few years following the premier of *Madame Sans-Gêne* at the Met in 1915. This operatic comedy, based upon the play of the same name by Victorien Sardou and Èmile Moreau (1877-1959), was not composed in Giordano's veristic style. As such, the subsequent publication of *6 Liriche* may be viewed as a reconnection for Giordano to his veristic roots – roots which had brought him great success with *Mala Vita* and *Andrea Chénier*. The work, *6 Liriche*, is a collection of six songs set to poetry by three different poets. The first two poets were Pietro Scoppetta (1863-1920) and Rocco Pagliara (1856-1914). The third poet was Giordano himself, writing under an anagram of his last name, Dino Rago. The specific songs of *6 Liriche* and accompanying poets are as follows: *Queste parole* (Scoppetta), *Canzone araba* (translated by Rago), *Ecco l'Aprile* (Rago), *Se tu sapessi* (Rago), *Tu sei il cielo* (Scoppetta) and *L'ami?* (Pagliara).

As the completeness of this work is dependent upon all six compositions, the examination of the veristic characteristics will be distributed throughout and each individual song will contribute to the veristic nature of *6 Liriche*. However, some individual songs may also be viewed as stand-alone works in the *verismo* style. Additionally, as applied with the preceding analyses, Giordano's veristic reaction against romanticism may be observed through his employment of the accompanying six characteristics.

In *6 Liriche*, Giordano's choice of character is directly related to his linguistic choices as the simplicity of the poetic vocabulary reveals the nature of the characters it portrays. An example may be viewed with the poetic text from *Queste parole*, which is as follows:

*Queste parole sature di pianto,
toccherebbero il cuor di chicchesia,
non toccheranno il tuo.*

These words full of tears
Would touch everybody's heart
But won't touch yours.

*Il tuo cuore guarda dall'altra parte
e non m'ascolta.*

Your heart looks on the other side,
And does not hear me.

The plainness of this text is identified through its lack of metaphors, its employment of everyday vocabulary and its straight-forward nature. The choice of Giordano to musically set such unsophisticated language is reflected in the type of character Giordano is depicting as this text reveals a simple peasant who is uncomplicated and down-to-earth. This kind of character directly parallels the characters chosen by Verga for his prose and the musical *veristi* in their operas. Giordano's choice also reveals his motives for his musical setting. To be exact, his choice of an uncomplicated character is a choice for authenticity and genuineness – a choice of realism and truth.

Additional veristic linguistic choices which continue to reveal the nature of Giordano's chosen character are seen in the use of simple analogies. *Tu sei il cielo* offers a specific example. The text and translation are as follows:

*Tu sei il cielo io sono il mare,
io sono il specchio.*

You are the sky and I am the sea,
I am your mirror.

Io sorrido se tu sorridi.

I smile if you smile.

Io mi turbo se tu ti annuvoli.

I get worried if you are troubled.

M'agita la tempesta se le furie ti agitano.

A storm upsets me if you are in a fury.

Perchè farmi dei rimproveri?

Why to blame me?

Io non sono che il tuo specchio.

I am nothing but your mirror.

In this poem, a basic analogy is offered: the sea is a mirror of the sky. The meaning is extremely transparent, there is no guess work involved and there are no hidden undertones. An identical approach is also used in *Ecco l'Aprile*, with text and translation provided.

*Ecco l'aprile che ritorna tutto in fiore
e il tuo cor si dischiude ai raggi del sol.*

Here is April, with its blooms
and your heart opens up to the sunlight.

Ma il mio cor spento è già.

But my heart is dull.

L'amor tuo fugge via, va lontan.

As your love flies away, far away.

Tutto è gelo intorno a me, morirò.

Everything is chilly around me, I will die.

The simplicity of this text stems from clearly understanding whose heart is being sung about and the literal representation of *aprile* and April. The reference to April blooming and the heart opening could be taken as a metaphor. However, its delivery is bluntly straight-forward, which allows the author to state exactly what he means. In each of these examples, the basic nature of the vocabulary utilized and the direct delivery of meaning are linguistic choices indicative of *verismo* and reveal the simplistic personalities of the songs' characters.

Coupled with these specific linguistic choices, Giordano also departs from the tradition of romanticism by setting text that is of irregular meter. The mapping of Scoppetta's prosody in *Queste parole* may be observed in figure 23. To begin, Scoppetta sets the first two lines in the form of *endecasillabi a maggiore* with eleven total syllables and syllabic stress placed on the sixth and penultimate syllables.⁴⁵⁶ The third line is a minor departure in that it has only six total syllables. However, the sixth and final syllable is stressed to create a rhyming pattern with the stress placed on the sixth syllable in the two preceding lines. This traditional start is offered to highlight his departure which most pronouncedly occurs in line 4. This textual line is of twelve syllables. As such, the penultimate syllable is stressed, but the stress occurs on the eleventh syllable, not the tenth. The disruptive nature of accenting the eleventh syllable is magnified by Scoppetta's stressing of both the fourth and sixth syllables of line 4. With the stress heard on the standard syllables, one would expect a stress on the tenth syllable to follow. It is this preparation of expectation and lack of fulfillment that highlights the irregular metrical choice.

Line	Text	Syllables
1	Ques te pa ro ₄ le sa ₆ tu re di pi ₁₀ nto,	11
2	toc che re _b be'ro _{il} cu _{or} ₆ di chic che s ₁₀ a,	11
3	non toc cher an ₄ no _{il} tu ₆ o.	7
4	Il tu o cu _o ₄ re guar ₆ da dal l' _{al} ₉ tra pa _r ₁₁ te	12
5	e non m'a sco _l ₄ ta.	5

Figure 23. Giordano, 6 *Liriche*, *Queste parole*, mapped prosody

⁴⁵⁶ Technically, this is a ten-syllable line because *sature* is accented on the first syllable, which would reduce the syllable count by one. However, in the music, Giordano sets each syllable separately with no elision. The result of doing so is a forced syllable, which gives the line a total of eleven syllables.

Scoppetta's *Tu sei il cielo* provides another example of the irregular metrical poetry Giordano selected for this veristic set of songs. The mapping of this song's prosody is made available in figure 24. As with *Queste parole*, Scoppetta sets the initial line in the traditional form of *endecasillabi*. However, this time he has chosen *endecasillabi a minore*, with a stress on the fourth syllable.⁴⁵⁷ Following this initial statement of tradition, Scoppetta immediately departs in line 2 by giving stress to the third and seventh syllables in a textual line of eight syllables. In line 3, with musical emphasis given to the fourth syllable, a listener might appropriately anticipate a return to *endecasillabi a minore*. Again, this expectation is created and left unfulfilled with stress given to the ninth syllable. With line 4 offering the final metrical setting of *endecasillabi a minore*, the remaining lines continue to fluctuate with total number of syllables and the choice of which syllables are musically and textually stressed. Consequently, the use of irregular metrical poetry was a conscious veristic choice employed by Giordano in *6 Liriche*.

Line	Text	Syllables
1	Tu sei il <u>cie</u> ₄ lo <u>i</u> ₆ o son no <u>_il</u> <u>ma</u> ₁₀ re,	11
2	<u>i</u> ₁ o <u>son</u> ₃ no <u>_il</u> ₄ <u>tu</u> ₆ o <u>spe</u> ₇ chio.	8
3	<u>I</u> ₁ o sor <u>ri</u> ₄ do se ₆ tu sor <u>ri</u> ₉ di.	10
4	<u>I</u> ₁ o mi <u>tu</u> ₄ bo se ₆ tu ti an <u>nu</u> ₁₀ vo\li ₁₁ .	11
5	M' <u>a</u> ₁ gi\ta la tem ₄ <u>pe</u> ₅ sta ₆ se le <u>fu</u> ₉ rie ₁₀ ti <u>a</u> ₁₂ gi ta\no.	14
6	Per <u>ch</u> _è <u>far</u> ₄ mi dei ₆ rim <u>pro</u> ₈ ve\ri?	9
7	<u>I</u> ₁ o <u>non</u> ₃ <u>so</u> ₅ no ₅ che <u>_il</u> ₆ <u>tu</u> ₆ o <u>spe</u> ₉ chio ₁₀ .	10

Figure 24. Giordano, *6 Liriche*, *Tu sei il cielo*, mapped prosody

⁴⁵⁷ Also similar to *Quest parole*, Giordano has manipulated the first line to create the eleven syllables. Specifically, an elision would traditionally occur between *sei* and *il*, which would create a single syllable. However, Giordano sets each syllable with its own note, which consequently adds the eleventh syllable to the line.

The regressive musical techniques employed by the *veristi* to create an invisible hand – a silent author – within their compositions was also engaged by Giordano. In *6 Liriche*, this was achieved through the use of vocal parallelism, ostinatos and tremolos. First, vocal parallelism is reserved in *6 Liriche* for only the most poignant emotional expressions. In this manner, parallelism is observed in the first four songs of the set. An example of its judicious use is observed with the pick-up to measures 7-9 of *Queste parole*, which may be viewed in figure 25. Here, to strengthen the sentiments of his beloved's heart looking the other way, the piano enters in octaves parallel to the voice. A typical veristic use of vocal parallelism, which is illustrative of Giordano's use of parallelism in *6 Liriche*.

Figure 25. Giordano, *6 Liriche*, *Queste parole*, mm. 7-9

The image displays a musical score for three measures (7-9) of the song 'Queste parole' from the opera '6 Liriche' by Umberto Giordano. The score is written in a key signature of three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat) and a common time signature (C). The vocal line is on a single staff with a treble clef, starting with a forte (*f*) dynamic. The lyrics are: 'Il tuo co - re guar - da dal - l'al - tra par - te e non m'a'. The piano accompaniment consists of two staves (treble and bass clefs) with a grand staff bracket. It begins with a forte (*f*) dynamic and features a rhythmic ostinato of repeated notes in both hands, which then transitions to a piano (*p*) dynamic in the final measure.

Second, in *L'ami?* tremolos are observed with an ostinato encompassing the entire piano part. As seen in measures 1-5 of figure 26, the rhythmic ostinato of the piano, with its quick movement between repeated notes, functions as a tremolo. The tremolo, with its oral speech quality, intensifies the anxiety the character of *L'ami?* feels toward his beloved.

Figure 26. Giordano, 6 *Liriche*, *L'ami?*, mm. 1-5

All. agitato (♩ = 116) *f* con accento

Io non ti chie - do se mu - dri - sti ma - i per

Lastly, additional use of the regressive ostinato is observed in *Se tu sapessi* and *Ecco l'Aprile*. In *Se tu sapessi*, Giordano completely composes the piano part within the boundaries of a rhythmic ostinato. This repeated rhythm may be observed in the introductory measures 1-4, as seen in figure 27. In *Ecco l'Aprile*, Giordano utilizes an ostinato of running sixteenth-notes. These persistent and obstinate sixteenth-notes speak to the inescapable nature of what the unfolding text reveals. In fact, its inescapability is emphasized in measure 22, which is the only measure – excluding the final measure – without the rhythmic ostinato. This cessation of the ostinato accompanies the word: *morirò* (I will die). In essence, the only way to escape the inevitability of the outcome is to stop living – to die. As occurred in the orchestral role of veristic opera, this is a moment in the music when the piano elevates the meaning of the vocalist's words, which Giordano accomplishes through the regressive ostinato.

Figure 27. Giordano, *6 Liriche, Se tu sapessi*, mm. 1-4

Moderato ♩ = 84

p

Fan - ciul - la

pp

This ability for the piano to be an equal narrator of events is a core component of *verismo* and it is a compositional technique that Giordano utilized on multiple occasions in *6 Liriche*. In *Queste parole*, for example, the entire song is preparing for the closing question which is asked by the piano in the final two measures. The character of this song declares in his final text that his beloved's heart does not hear him: *e non m'ascolta*. In response, the piano asks the direct question, "What?" This question is posed by the running arpeggio of two diminished chords followed by two major-minor-seventh chords. It is Giordano's conscious choice to leave the major-minor-seventh chords unresolved as the tension generates the question.

Another example of the piano's narrative ability is observed in *Tu sei il cielo*. Here, the opening ascending arpeggio and its conclusion in the first two measures is symbolic of the sea – at the bottom – reflecting the sky – at the top. This symbolism is repeated in the piano part in measures 5-6, as well. The reflection additionally reverses with a descending piano line in measure 13. This solo moment for the piano follows the text that indicates the sky reflects its fury upon the sea: *m'agita la tempesta se le furie ti agitano*. In both cases, Giordano uses the piano music to narrate the symbolism of the sea as a mirror of the sky.

The dramatic structure of *6 Liriche* is also developed in a veristic manner. The first and obvious observation is the short length of each of the six songs, as the average measure count for each of the six songs is thirty-six. However, the longest two songs of *Se tu sapessi* and *L'ami?* – measure counts of fifty and seventy-six, respectively – are repetitive. In essence, the two verses are set as a through-composed song. Considering therefore only half of the measures for these two songs, the average measure count is reduced to twenty-five measures. In fact, the shortest piece is *Queste parole*, with a total of eleven measures.

Despite its short length, *Queste parole* demonstrates the ability of Giordano to compose a complete dramatic structure on a miniature scale, which is similar to that observed in Leoncavallo's *Pensiero*. To do so, Giordano divides *Queste parole* into two distinct sections. The first section is comprised of measures 1-6 which are reminiscent of recitative in that a *parlando* quality is composed into the music. This is accomplished with a quick delivery of text, the use of repeated notes and pitch selection that mimics the natural inflections of speech. The second contrasting section is found in the pick-up to measures 7-10, where the approach is more *arioso*, or *bel canto*. The notes are sustained much longer, fewer words are set and the parallelism in the piano adds to the section's melodic nature. The result is that in only eleven measures, Giordano composes a work with a very miniature dramatic structure which is indicative of *verismo*.

Another prominent veristic technique used by Giordano relating to dramatic structure is the engagement of miniaturization, a technique that provides for the sequential development and the revealing of a character's psyche. In *6 Liriche*, this may be observed as each of the six songs are

viewed individually. Although the songs do not trace one specific character throughout, Giordano's selection of the individual poetry does serve to reveal isolated moments of psychological development. For example, through the six poems Giordano traces the emotional development of being ignored by a beloved – *Queste parole* – to the complete loss of a beloved to another – *L'ami?* This miniaturization of a character's psyche was in direct contrast to the monumentality of romanticism and is indicative of *verismo* in art song.

A final observation of the veristic dramatic structure evident in *6 Liriche* is the quick rise and fall of climactic action. This is most readily observed in *Canzone araba*, where, in measures 10-22, Giordano creates climactic tension and quickly retreats to a sense of serenity. Measures 10-13 begin the process by offering a rapid ascension of dramaticism, with the A₅ in measure 12 as its zenith. Following this, in measures 14-22, Giordano retreats through a dismissal of vocal parallelism and the incorporation of tension-reducing ascending arpeggios. This example of a quick rise and fall of climactic material is illustrated in figure 28.

Lastly, the *verismo* milieu is captured through the vocal excesses saturating Giordano's writing. The veristic excesses employed by Giordano consist primarily of shouted utterances, anguished cries, violence of effect and high tessitura. To begin, the previous musical example in figure 28 of measures 10-13 from *Canzone araba* provide an illustrative glimpse of Giordano's shouted utterances. Here, the vocalist is crying out about his tears which have accompanied his offerings to his beloved. Giordano structures this as a shouted utterance both by the pitch placement and his editorial marks. First, the pitches chosen for this passage – ranging from F[#]₅ to A₅ – are strategically placed in an area where the vocalist has projective power. Second, Giordano marks

in measure 10 the instructions: *un poco affrettando* (with little rushing). In essence, he calls for the vocalist to push the tempo a little faster, which creates a shouted utterance full of urgency, emphasis and power.

Figure 28. Giordano, *6 Liriche, Canzone araba*, mm. 10-22

The musical score for Figure 28 consists of two systems. The first system shows measures 10-14. The vocal line begins with a forte (*f*) dynamic and the instruction *un poco affrett.* The lyrics are: "Io t'of - frii nel pian - to mio, i ca - mel - li le". The piano accompaniment starts with a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic. The second system shows measures 15-22. The vocal line has dynamic markings *dim. e un poco rall.*, *Meno*, and *f*. The lyrics are: "per - le le schia - ve i te - sor. Scher - no m'eb - - bi, cru - del. Ma". The piano accompaniment has dynamic markings *dim.*, *p*, and *pp*.

In addition to shouted utterances, Giordano also composes anguished cries into *6 Liriche*. The first example is drawn from measure 14 of *Ecco l'Aprile*. Here, the vocalist cries out in anguish on an A^b_5 which accompanies the word: *l'amor* (the love). Literally, the vocalist is in anguish because the love of his beloved is flying away – vanishing. A second example of an anguished cry occurs in *L'ami?* In this song, the anguished cry occurs twice. The first occurrence is in measure 35, and the second occurrence is in measure 73. For both instances the vocalist is

crying out on an A^b_5 with the text: *tu?* (you?). The pain of *tu* being his beloved is emoted vocally in these cries. A final observation of these anguished cries is Giordano's use of them to punctuate his veristic set of art songs. Specifically, the cry in measure 73 is the final note vocalized in *6 Liriche*. By so doing, Giordano concludes with a veristic exclamation mark by ending with such a pronounced veristic compositional technique.

Within *6 Liriche*, several of the anguished cries and shouted utterances serve a dual purpose in that they are used for a violence of effect. The first example of this dual purpose comes from measure 7 of *Queste parole* and is observable in figure 25. The vocalist's cry here on the A^b_5 is also a violence of effect because it is preceded by *parlando* material as previously described. The second example occurs with the beginning of a shouted utterance in measure 23 of *Canzone araba*, which is also employed as a violence of effect. Again, in the preceding measures, Giordano retreated from the climactic material and created a sense of serenity. As such, this outburst has a startling effect. In both instances, Giordano used the vocal outburst – either momentary or sustained – as a veristic violent effect.

The final observation of *verismo* in *6 Liriche* relates to the tessitura of the pieces. To illustrate this, the tessitura of *Canzone araba* and *L'ami?* has been graphed and is displayed in figures 29 and 30, respectively. In *Canzone araba*, it is observed that the tessitura consists of the pitch range from E_5 to G_5 . Most noticeable is the repetition of the pitch E_5 which represents thirty percent of all the song's notes. Likewise, the tessitura of *L'ami?* is shown to have a range from C_5 to F_5 . As similarly observed in *Canzone araba*, *L'ami?* also has two pitches that are consistently repeated. Specifically, they are the pitches of the tessitura and represent thirty-six

percent of all the song's notes. This utilization of a high tessitura is veristic in nature and is utilized effectively by Giordano to create the veristic aural milieu.

To conclude with *6 Liriche*, through the application of the seven characteristics of *verismo*, this set of songs by Giordano may be classified in the genre of art song *verismo*. In addition to Giordano's *6 Liriche*, Leoncavallo composed a particular stand-alone song which may accompany *6 Liriche* in its classification as veristic. The title of this composition is *Imploration éperdue* and will be discussed next.

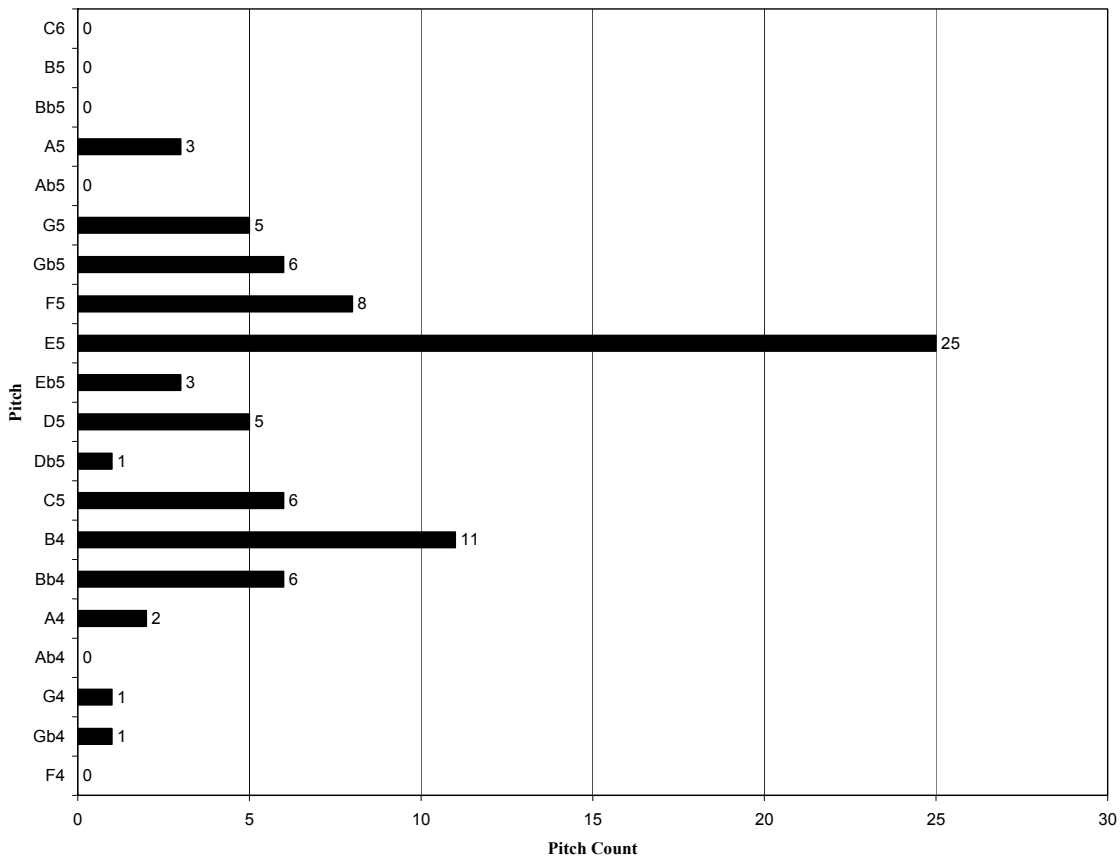


Figure 29. Giordano, *6 Liriche, Canzone araba, Tessitura*

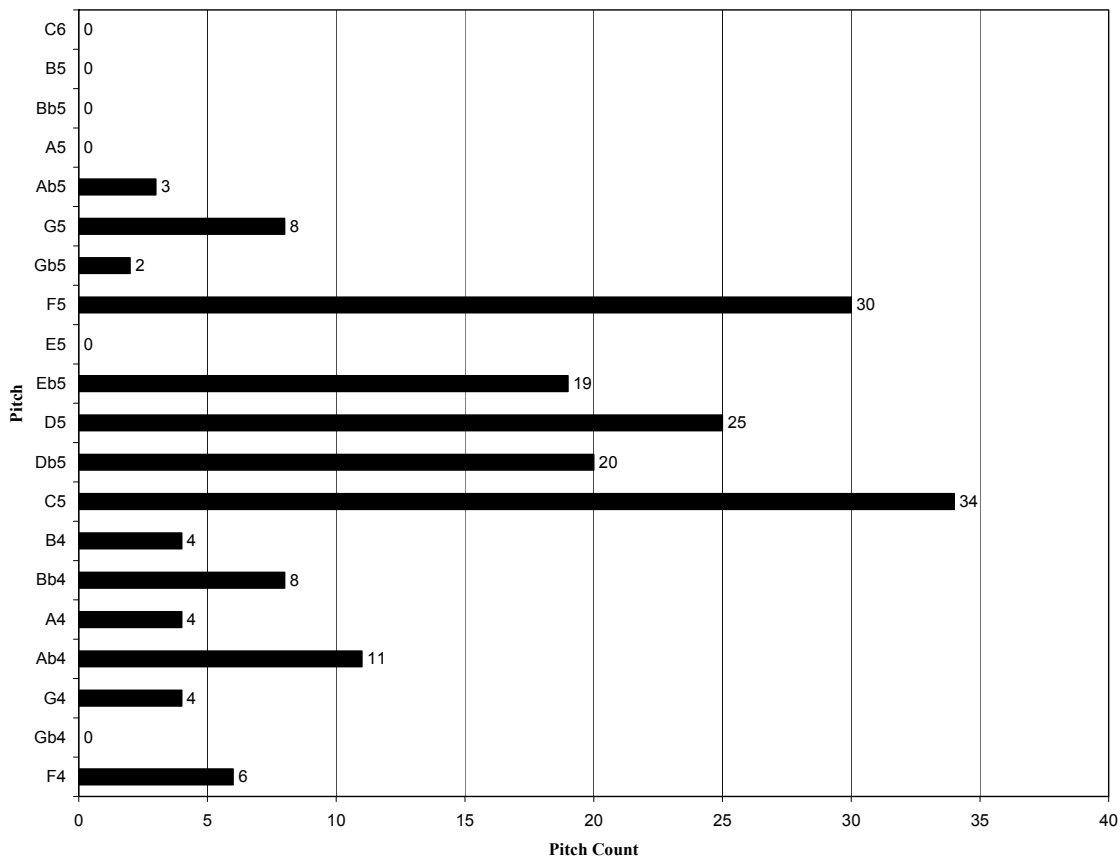


Figure 30. Giordano, *6 Liriche, L'ami?*, Tessitura

Imploration éperdue

As a member of the veristic trinity, Leoncavallo masterfully wielded the musical tenets of *verismo*. In opera, this ability culminated in an archetype of *verismo*, *I Pagliacci*. Further, the specific veristic musical elements which allow for the classification of musical *verismo* were also prevalent in Leoncavallo’s art songs. However, in no other art song composition by Leoncavallo – or any musical *veristi* – are the veristic tenets more synthesized into a single piece than they are in *Imploration éperdue*.

Imploration éperdue is an unpublished art song attributed to Leoncavallo. The sole manuscript resides in the *Fondo Leoncavallo Locarno*, which is part of the *Biblioteca Cantonale* in Locarno, Switzerland. Upon examination of the manuscript, it becomes apparent that it bears no date nor composer autograph. However, as part of Leoncavallo's archive it is rightly considered his work. Also, as no composer is notated, neither is a lyricist; but, as Leoncavallo wrote the poetry for the vast majority of his art songs, it is also understood that he is the contributing author. In any case, *Imploration éperdue* is an iconic example of art song *verismo*. In support of this assertion, an examination of the defining characteristics of *verismo* present in this art song will be undertaken.

Leoncavallo's choice of character for *Imploration éperdue* will be the first consideration. As revealed in the text, the song centers around the loss of one named Aniello. This name, Aniello, is a traditional southern Italian name. The name's heritage consequently offers a locale for this art song from which deductions may be made regarding Leoncavallo's choice of character. With no surprise, Leoncavallo has chosen a southern Italian – most likely Sicilian – as his primary character. Furthermore, given the song's veristic nature, it may be assumed that Leoncavallo has not only chosen a Sicilian, but has specifically chosen a Sicilian peasant reminiscent of his characters in *I Pagliacci*.

These claims are further substantiated through textual clues, with the entire text of *Imploration éperdue* as follows:

*Madonna!
O mia Madonna!*

*Tutte le grazie che ti fan regina
trafiggano il mio cor!
Pur che una sola
Abbia l'incanto della tua piet !*

*Guarda il mio pianto
e se non so stasera
dirti quell che nell'anima mi sta!*

Fammi la grazia tu che mi consola!

Vedi? il fiore pi  bello manca sull'Altare!

*Manca la voce d'Angelo, Aniello!
Ah!*

*Madonna mia proteggimi e fammelo
tornare! fammelo tornar!!!*

Madonna!
O my Madonna!

May all the graces that make you queen
pierce my heart!
As long as one
May receive the gift of your mercy!

Look at my crying
and if tonight I cannot
tell you what is in my soul!

Grant me the grace that will console me!

See? the most beautiful flower is missing
from the Altar!

The Angel's voice is missing, Aniello!
Ah!

My Madonna, protect me and make him
come back to me! come back to me!!!⁴⁵⁸

First, the character's simplicity is derived from his inability to be articulate. As an example, he states: *e se non so stasera dirti quell che nell'anima mi sta* (and if tonight I cannot tell you what is in my soul). This sentiment also suggests a humble, unassuming person. Second, his genuineness is emphasized by his actions, which are not hindered by romanticism's overused unambiguousness. In contrast, they are unpredictable, wild and filled with passion. For example, instead of showing absolute reserved reverence before the Madonna, he is in hysterics. His emotions are uncontrolled with great agitation, anxiety and immediacy. All of these clues assist in developing the type of character used by the *veristi* in their operas, which provided the

⁴⁵⁸ Translation by Andrea Cordani.

transmission of truth and realism in their work. The same is true for the veristic character of *Imploration éperdue*.

The linguistic choices of *Imploration éperdue* also reveal its veristic nature, especially given that Leoncavallo is the author of the poem. The most obvious use of veristic language is identified in a study of *Imploration éperdue*'s prosody. There are many intricate nuances to the prosody of Leoncavallo's text, but only a few will be mentioned here. First, Leoncavallo strategically creates poetic lines with an emphasis on the fifth syllable. These occur in lines 2, 4, 5 and 13 and may be examined in figure 31. Doing so, he unites the sentiments of each line into a summarizing plea of the text: *O mia Madonna / purchè una sola / guarda il mio pianto / fammelo tornar!* (Oh my Madonna / as long as one [you] / look at my tears / [make him] come back to me!). What is created is a plea that as the Madonna looks upon his tears, she will let him be released from his pain, which would result in the return of Aniello.

Line	Text	Syllables
2	O mī a Ma don ₅ na!	6
4	Pur ché _u na s ₂ la a _b bia l'in can ₁₀ to de la	18
5	Guar da _il mī o pian ₅ to, e se ₈ non so ₁₀	22
13	Fam me\lo tor nar ₄₋₅ !!!	5

Figure 31. Leoncavallo, *Imploration éperdue*, mapped prosody, lines 2, 4, 5 and 13

In conjunction with this emphasis of the fifth syllable, it is important to notice the omission of the final *e* from the last phrase: *fammelo tornar*. Just prior, the phrase was: *fammelo tornare*.

The reason for doing so is directly related to Leoncavallo's emphasis on a phrase which accents the fifth syllable. By omitting the final *e* in line 13, Leoncavallo forces a textual line of only five

syllables. Thus, the final syllable of the song’s text – and the final accented syllable of the song’s text – falls precisely on the fifth syllable. This structure relates back to the opening cry in line 2: *O mia Madonna*. Again, this unites his plea with the Madonna to be make Aniello return to him.

A second example of Leoncavallo tying words together to enhance their meaning occurs in lines 7 and 11, which are mapped in figure 32. Line 7 begins with the word: *vedi?* (you see?), with the accent placed on the first syllable. This is also stressed musically with a notated half-note on a G₅. In conjunction with this, Leoncavallo has a monosyllable word in line 11, which obviously will bear its stress on its sole syllable – the first syllable of the line. Musically, this is also notated as a half-note on G₅. Therefore, by stressing the first syllable of lines 7 and 11, and by uniting them musically, Leoncavallo adds depth to the cry in line 11 and associates the frantic petition with the pleading in line 7 for the Madonna to see that the symbolic flower is missing.

Line	Text	Syllables
7	<i>V</i> <u>e</u> ₁ di? il fi <u>o</u> ₄ re più b <u>e</u> ₁ lo m <u>a</u> ₁₀ nca sul l’Al t <u>a</u> ₁₄ re!	15
11	<i>A</i> h! ₁	1

Figure 32, Leoncavallo, *Imploration éperdue*, mapped prosody, lines 7 and 11

Similar to the use of prosody by Giordano, Leoncavallo also creates expectation which is left unfulfilled and is outlined in figure 33. The expectation is set up with the only *endecasillabi a minore* in the text, which is in line 6. The stress on the fourth syllable in line 6 is established to prepare the expected accent on the tenth syllable, which occurs in this metrically-traditional line. This is then followed by a stress of the fourth syllable of line 7, leading also to a stress of the

tenth syllable in this fifteen-syllable line. As such, the listener is developing an aural habit of hearing the fourth syllable stressed. Therefore, to break this expectation, Leoncavallo violates multiple rules of Italian prosody in line 8. This is accomplished with the first word of line 8: *manca*. This Italian word bears its natural stress on the first syllable, which is what Leoncavallo stressed as the tenth syllable of line 7. However, to deflate expectation, Leoncavallo places a musical accent on the second syllable of this word. The result is that it creates a hard accent on the second syllable of the phrase, which prohibits the expected stress on the fourth syllable. These are but just a few of the ways in which Leoncavallo used the veristic trademark of irregular meters to compose *verismo* into *Imploration éperdue*.

Line	Text	Syllables
6	Fam mi, la gra ₄ zia tu che mi con so ₁₀ la!	11
7	Ve di? il fio ₄ re più be lo ma ₁₀ nca sul l'Al ta ₁₄ re!	15
8	Man ca ₂ la vo ₄ ce d'An ge l ₈₋₉ , d'A niel ₍₁₁₎ lo!	12

Figure 33. Leoncavallo, *Imploration éperdue*, mapped prosody, lines 6, 7 and 8

A final comment regarding the linguistic choices of Leoncavallo for this art song relates to the use of the informal command: *vedi* (you look). The imperative command to look used informally with the Madonna is highly irregular. After all, Leoncavallo's humble peasant is addressing deity and respect would be expected, which would be indicated by using the formal imperative: *veda*. The strategic use of the informal command, however, stresses the low-brow nature of the song's text. It shows an abstinence from romanticism's inflated vocabulary and an adoption of the humble man's everyday terminology.

As expected, the regressive techniques of *verismo* are heavily utilized by Leoncavallo. In *Imploration éperdue*, these techniques consist of tremolos, vocal parallelism and pedal tones. First, tremolos are used extensively in this song. In fact, more than a quarter of the composed music consist of tremolos. Tremolos are first introduced in measure 50 and continue heartily until the conclusion in measure 68. The type of tremolo used by Leoncavallo consists of both types found within the works of the *veristi* and may be identified in figure 34 which includes an example of each. Specifically, tremolos employed are those of traditional scoring, identified in measures 61-62, and those of rapidly repeated chords, identified in measures 63-64.

Figure 34. Leoncavallo, *Imploration éperdue*, mm. 61-64⁴⁵⁹

The image shows a musical score for measures 61-64 of Leoncavallo's *Imploration éperdue*. The top staff is the vocal line, and the bottom two staves are the piano accompaniment. The vocal line includes the lyrics: "d'A - niel - lo! A - niel - lo! Ah! Ma - don - na mi - a". The piano accompaniment features tremolos in measures 61-62 and rapidly repeated chords in measures 63-64. A *rit.* marking is present above the vocal line in measure 61.

Second, vocal parallelism was actively employed, which gives the piano a chance to echo the narration with melodic material. In *Imploration éperdue*, parallelism is judiciously presented and used in a progressive manner. To begin, it is moderately used throughout measures 21-42. This moderate use indicates that it was not consistently note-for-note, but was used for accentuating purposes only. Then, beginning in measure 43 and continuing through measure 49,

⁴⁵⁹ All excerpts for Leoncavallo's *Imploration éperdue* used by permission. Autograph score held in Locarno, Switzerland, *Biblioteca Cantonale Locarno, Fondo Leoncavallo*.

parallelism is consistently employed on a note-for-note basis. Finally, this consistent use is magnified when parallelism is introduced in octaves beginning in measure 50, which continue to the conclusion of the song. Such a controlled and methodical use of parallelism speaks to the virtuosic capabilities of Leoncavallo to compose with this highly veristic technique.

Third, pedal tones are used effectively in the piano part. As observed in veristic operas, such use degrades the piano's composed music, giving it an oral quality. Again, the purpose of these regressive techniques – tremolos, vocal parallelism and pedal tones – was to allow the *veristi* to compose with an invisible hand. In other words, to allow the transmission of Verga's silent author into their musical works. In *Imploration éperdue*, the pedal tones begin in measures 32-42. These measures prepare the rhythmic vamping of the pedal tones, which begins in measure 43 and may be observed in figure 35. This rhythmic vamping continues through measure 49. Finally, in measure 50 and to the conclusion, the pedal tone pitches of B and F are used relentlessly to the song's conclusion.

Figure 35. Leoncavallo, *Imploration éperdue*, mm. 43-46

The image displays a musical score for Leoncavallo's *Imploration éperdue*, measures 43-46. The score is in G major and 4/4 time, marked *Andante*. It consists of two staves: a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line has lyrics: "Guarda il mio piano e se non so starà". The piano accompaniment features a prominent rhythmic vamping of the pedal tones in the bass register, which is the focus of the figure.

A product of employing the silent author technique into veristic music was the change of rapport between the voice and orchestra, or, in this case, the voice and the piano. This change of rapport is also identified in *Imploration éperdue* and is transacted in measures 21-37. An excerpt consisting of measures 21-29 is available in figure 36. As with previous examples, Leoncavallo notates monotone singing in the vocal part with the melodic material placed in the piano part. Again, this is reminiscent of Puccini's *E lucevan le stelle*, which illustrates the prominence the *veristi* gave to non-vocal parts and is illustrated in figure 2.

Figure 36. Leoncavallo, *Imploration éperdue*, mm. 21-29

The image shows a musical score for two staves. The top staff is a vocal line in G major (one sharp) and 2/4 time. It consists of a single note (monotone) with lyrics: "Tut - te le gra - - - zie ___ che ti fan re - gi - - - na ___". The bottom staff is a piano accompaniment, also in G major and 2/4 time. It features a complex, rhythmic accompaniment with many sixteenth notes and chords, creating a dense texture. The piano part includes tremolos and pedal tones, as mentioned in the text.

A final observation relating to the role of the veristic piano part in *Imploration éperdue* relates to a combination of the silent author and the veristic milieu. For example, the introductory material – provided solely by the piano – is tasked with immediately creating the ambiance of the piece. This is accomplished in the opening twelve measures which consist of frantic sixteenth-notes echoed in octaves as an agitated atmosphere of immediate intensity is vividly forged. Likewise, the mood of the song is continually developed by the piano through methods already mentioned, consisting of tremolos, pedal tones and vocal parallelism. The result is a complete narrative

provided by the piano that depicts the milieu of the piece and the sorrowful sentiments of its character.

With regard to the dramatic structure of *verismo*, *Imploration éperdue* makes use of four primary components. These elements are a break from monumentality, miniaturization, quick rise and fall of climactic material and a concentration on a single idea and emotion. First, romanticism's monumentality of the standard recitative followed by an aria was broken down by the *veristi* and this is evident in this composition. For example, there is an identification of two parts to this song, which may be seen as a quasi-recitative introduction followed by a quasi-aria conclusion. The quasi-recitative section comprises measures 12-42 and the quasi-aria section continues from measure 42 to the end. However, unlike romanticism's definitive approach, the *veristi* were magnificent at blurring the lines between the two. The consequence is that in *Imploration éperdue*, there is not a drastic distinction between the two, and there is definitely no break in musical material or intensity.

Second, in a very microscopic sense, miniaturization is observed within this piece. An example of such miniaturization is given in figure 37, which contains a musical excerpt of measures 56-62. Here, there is the repeated text: *manca la voce d'Angelo, d'Aniello!* (the Angel's voice is missing, Aniello!). Each time the text – or a phrase of the text – is repeated, the hysterics and intensity of the moment increase. This process of developmental intensification leads to the vocal outbursts that follow. In essence, Leoncavallo's character does not prematurely jump ahead and deliver the outburst. Instead, it is prepared with repeated text and musical

composition which reveal mental frenzy. To accomplish miniaturization on such a minute scale is truly a brilliant veristic accomplishment by Leoncavallo.

Figure 37. Leoncavallo, *Imploration éperdue*, mm. 56-62

The image displays a musical score for two systems of music. The first system (measures 56-62) features a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line is in a soprano register, with lyrics: "Man - ca la vo - ce d'An - ge - lo Man - ca la vo - ce". The piano accompaniment consists of a right hand with a melodic line and a left hand with a rhythmic accompaniment. The second system (measures 63-69) continues the vocal line with lyrics: "d'An - ge - lo d'A - niel - lo! A - niel - lo! A - niel - lo! Ah!". The piano accompaniment continues with a similar rhythmic pattern. The score is written in a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a common time signature (C). The tempo is marked as *rit.* (ritardando) at the end of the second system.

Third, turning to a quick rise and fall of climactic material, *Imploration éperdue* offers two primary examples. The first example comes from measures 38-42 and may be examined in figure 38. Here, Leoncavallo uses a sudden burst of vocal energy to further the drive of intensity, which is notated in measures 38-39. Then, there is a quick retreat in the following measures that concludes in measure 42. A second example comes from the musical material which directly follows in measure 43. In measures 43-49, Leoncavallo creates a sub-climactic

point in the music in measure 47 with the powerful A₅. This climactic moment – prepared by the preceding measures – is quickly retreated from in measures 48-49. The significance of this quick rise and fall of action is as follows. The *veristi* were known for climactic material building upon climactic material until it exploded in the primary climax of the opera. The same is occurring here for Leoncavallo. By building a sub-climactic point within the art song, he is layering the climaxes and preparing for an ultimate climactic outburst. As such, the quick retreat from this sub-climactic moment ensures that the intensity level achieved here will not overshadow the intensity level of the primary climax.

Figure 38. Leoncavallo, *Imploration éperdue*, mm. 38-42

A fourth and concluding thought regarding the veristic dramatic structure comprising *Imploration éperdue* is the compression of the plot into one single idea and solitary emotion. This compression was observed in Mascagni’s ability to compose a single-act opera, *Cavalleria rusticana*. It was also observed in the simplicity of Puccini’s *La Bohème* plot and his *Tosca* plot which reduced a five-act play into a three-act opera. For Leoncavallo, this ability is transferred to his art song by focusing on one single event – a plea to the Madonna. Additionally, there is a

single emoted emotion – hysteria. Consequently, the plot of the text does not extend beyond this single event and solitary emotion, which is a hallmark of *verismo*.

A discussion of this veristic art song would not be complete without identification of the vocal extremes ever-present in the musical works of the *veristi*. Fortunately, Leoncavallo did not shy away from the dramatics of these extremes as he utilized them intelligently and forcefully. As discussed with other veristic art songs, the core vocal techniques applied by Leoncavallo were anguished cries, shouted utterances and a high tessitura. To begin, the tessitura of *Imploration éperdue* is equal to that previously identified in both veristic opera and song. The tessitura for this piece has been graphed and may be viewed in figure 39. Important to note is the range of the tessitura, which is C[#]₅ to G₅. Also of significance is the fact that more than twenty percent of the notes are pitched at F₅ or higher.

Next, Leoncavallo utilizes the veristic anguished cry strategically in this song. The primary anguished cry comes from measure 47 which has already been discussed with reference to a quick rise and fall of climactic material. However, it can not be overlooked as one of the critical passionate pleas to the Madonna. On an A₅, Leoncavallo sets the word: *dirti* (I tell you). This vocal cry is, in essence, a plea to the Madonna to understand that what is being expressed is truly from the soul. In other words, the heartfelt pleading conveyed is done with an honest, fervent passion.

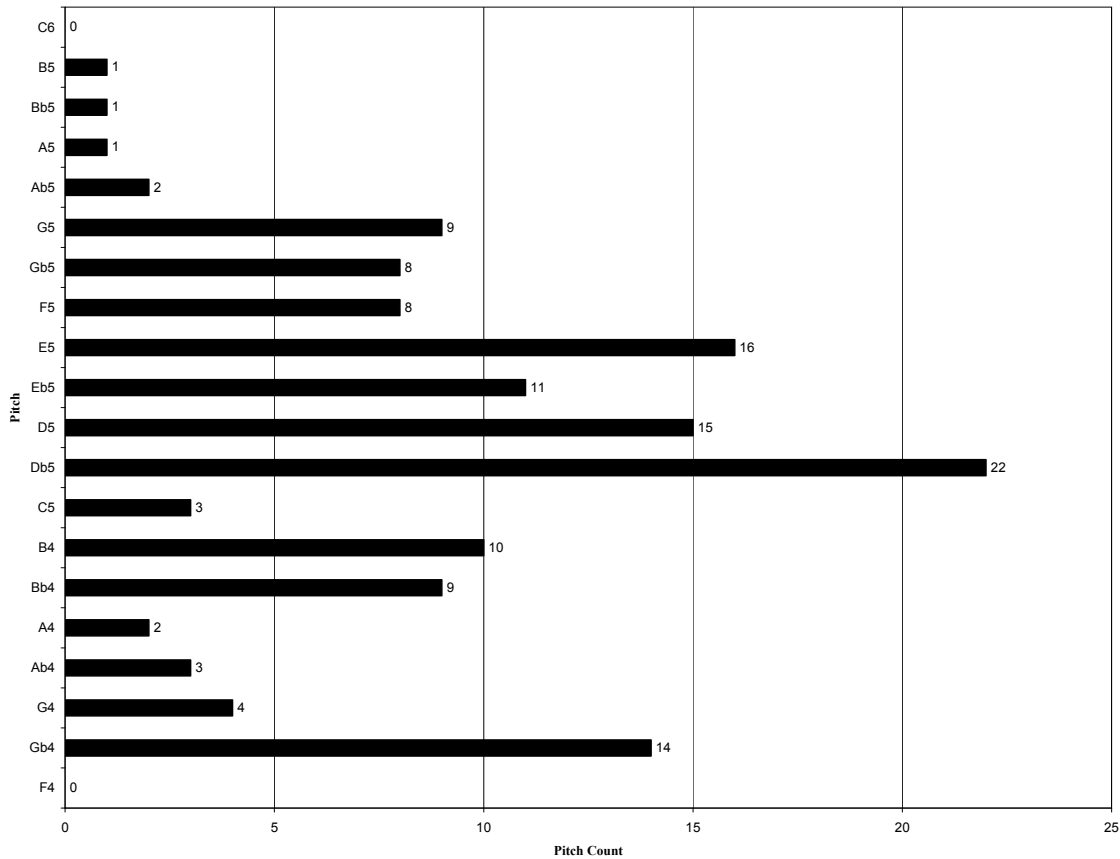


Figure 39. Leoncavallo, *Imploration éperdue*, Tessitura

In one manner, the intensity with which the music is composed suggests that the entire song is one continuous shouted utterance. However, the final and most prolific shouted utterance occurs with the pick-up to measure 65. Unsurprisingly, it coincides with the text: *Madonna mia proteggimi* (my Madonna, protect me). With an open vowel pitched on a B₅ – the highest pitch of the song – this shouted utterance is capable of producing one of the most painful pleas known to *verismo*. Lastly, the energy created with this plea is sustained until the very end. With a simplistic understanding of *verismo*, the use of shouted utterances by Leoncavallo in *Imploration éperdue* would be enough to qualify it as veristic.

In conclusion, *Imploration éperdue* by Leoncavallo is undeniably veristic and represents well the presence of *verismo* in art song. Although *verismo* has been historically limited to a small selection of operas during the 1890s and into the early twentieth century, the veristic style extended to the art song compositions of the *veristi*. Having identified seven core characteristics of *verismo* from Verga's prose – and appropriately using them to evaluate the presence of *verismo* in opera – these characteristics consequently develop a framework through which *verismo* in art song may be categorically affirmed. Further, the identification of veristic elements in pre-veristic, veristic and post-veristic era art songs, as well as in art songs of pure *verismo* quality, supports the conclusion that *verismo* was not limited to literature or the opera stage. Significantly, *verismo* extended beyond these artistic mediums into the art song compositions of the *veristi*, which result was *verismo* in Italian art song.

Conclusion

The identification of the seven core characteristics of *verismo* establishes a foundational framework by which to evaluate the veristic nature of literature and music, especially art song compositions. As with any tool of assessment, the effectiveness of its employment to yield accurate and substantiated conclusions is determined by the appropriate application by its user. Consequently, the classification of veristic art song may not result merely from a check-off-the-box approach. Instead, the examiner must exercise judgment in analysis as she carefully considers the overall effect, contribution and significance of each core characteristic.

Understanding the necessity of judgment-based inspection, the honest examiner is faced with several critical questions. The first and most obvious question is, “Must all seven core characteristics of *verismo* be present in an art song for it to qualify as veristic?” This inquiry is logically followed by, “If not all seven characteristics are present, must there be a majority of the seven present?” Or, “May an art song qualify as veristic with only one of the seven characteristics employed?” In similar thought, “Of all the seven characteristics, is there one specific characteristic that trumps all others leaving the veristic classification hinging on whether or not this characteristic is observed?” In a similar and more difficult vein, “May an art song possess all seven traits and not be considered veristic?” In the absence of definitive correct answers to any of these questions, the analyst is challenged to apply reason and judgment as she derives her conclusions.

Recognizing the implications of the questions presented, an all-important eighth characteristic must be introduced into the equation. This eighth characteristic of *verismo* is the ability to recognize *verismo* when it is heard. It is an acknowledgment of the statement, “I will know it when I hear it.” In fact, conceding the validity of this assertion is at the heart of this document and its research. Specifically, the examination and presentation of the seven characteristics of *verismo* is an academic approach to qualify this statement. However, the fact remains that a critical component of reason and judgment is instinct which has been developed over time through examination of and exposure to a multitude of musical genres and forms.

With an appropriate approach to analyzing the veristic nature of art songs, the door is opened and the opportunity presented for continued research and identification of art songs belonging to the

genre of *verismo*. The research presented here was undertaken with a limited scope of only examining the art song compositions of the primary composers of veristic opera in an effort to strengthen the arguments made and the conclusions drawn. However, there are composers contemporary with Puccini, Mascagni and Leoncavallo who are worthy of examination as they also composed veristic art songs. For example, Pier Adolfo Tirindelli (1858-1937) is a prime candidate, especially his art songs *Di Te!*, *O primavera!*, *Strana* and *Amor, amor*. Two additional composers of the post-veristic era include Ottorino Respighi (1879-1936) and Pietro Cimara (1887-1967).

Additional explorative opportunities also extend from the philosophical approach employed in this research. First, as *verismo* was characterized as a reaction against romanticism, the question is presented, “What evolved as a reaction to *verismo*?” Even further, “What genre or genres of music are present today because of the veristic movement and its musical contributions?” Second, as the confines of musical *verismo* only applying to the medium of opera have been challenged, the question may be asked, “What other musical genres or forms have been needlessly restricted to select mediums that may likewise be disputed or even defied?” The capacity for intellectual and scholastic contribution continues to expand as barriers are challenged and new thought is presented. There is still much work to be undertaken in an effort to comprehend the musical genre of *verismo* and its implications in multiple mediums, especially art song. Fortunately, judgment, reason and the seven core characteristics of *verismo* offer a working framework on which to build increased intellectual awareness of *verismo* in Italian art song.

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