

Verdi the Craftsman *

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Ex. 1 Giuseppe Verdi, *Rigoletto*, Canzone Duca.

I am not embarrassed to admit that, however much my knowledge of Italian nineteenth-century opera may have broadened and deepened over the years, what first drew me to this repertory and what continues to set my blood coursing in the theater is a series of extraordinary melodies, often over simple orchestral accompaniments. When Jonathan Miller had the Duke's famous Canzone emerge from a juke box in his *Rigoletto*, updated to New York's Little Italy during the 1950s, he gave theatrical expression to a well-understood (if sometimes resisted) fact: many Verdian tunes emerge unscathed from a hurdy gurdy, an organ grinder, or a juke box, and these tunes play a significant dramatic and musical role in Italian opera. Once heard they seem always to have existed, eternal markers of innate melodic genius. In the world these tunes inhabit and occasionally dominate, what sense does it make to talk of craftsmanship?

Both those who love this repertory and those who loathe it have constructed myths about Italian opera that continue to influence audience reaction and public discourse. When the French philosopher and musician, Jean-Jacques Rousseau,

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lauded Italian operatic style, and particularly Pergolesi's *La serva padrona*, as opposed to French operatic practice as embodied in the operas of Jean-Philippe Rameau, he painted their characteristics in broad strokes, praising Pergolesi's arias for melodic grace and unity and for the way in which the orchestra always serves in a subsidiary and supporting role to the voice. In opposition to French sophistication, melodic fragmentation, and harmonic complexity, Rousseau propounded Italian expressiveness, melodic unity, and harmonic simplicity.

Similar dichotomies dominated much nineteenth-century reaction to Italian opera in northern Europe. When Rossini's works began to circulate in France during the late 1810s and early 1820s, Henri Berton, a composer primarily active during the French Revolution, dubbed his style 'mechanical music', as opposed to the 'philosophical music' of the French school, a moniker originally applied sarcastically but adopted by Berton with pride. In Rossini he heard nothing but mechanical repetition, orchestral noise, endless, repetitive vocal roulades. Although the terms of the debate are different from those of Rousseau, for Berton was defending French music against the Italian onslaught, the conflict between musical styles remained central: 'We cannot hide the fact', he wrote, 'that at this very moment the enemy is approaching the frontier of our musical empire; let us guard against this invasion, let us defend the heritage that links us to our illustrious forebears!'

The situation was no better in Germany, and was exacerbated by the visit to Vienna of Rossini and his Neapolitan company in 1822, as well as the favor accorded them by Prince Metternich. If Rossini did indeed meet Beethoven during this Viennese season, the statements attributed to the latter are double-edged. After congratulating his visitor on *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, Beethoven is reported to have continued: 'Never try to do anything but *opera buffa*... *Opera seria*, that's not in the Italians' nature. They don't have enough musical science to deal with true drama; and how could they acquire it in Italy?' This to a composer who had written largely serious operas for the past six years, who was often dubbed 'il tedesco' (the young German) by Italian critics, and whose *opere serie* were taking Vienna by storm.

Primitive technique, no musical science, mechanical repetition, over-dependence on noise and effect: it was a harsh bill of particulars. Such accusations persisted throughout the century. Even within Italy, these

perceptions led to heated conflict between partisans of Verdi and reformers well aware of the activities of one Richard Wagner over the Alps. They included the young Arrigo Boito, who improvised a poem to celebrate the success of an 1863 opera by his friend Franco Faccio, *I profughi fiamminghi*. A phrase from Boito's verses was to reverberate in the history of Italian opera: 'Perhaps the man is already born, modest and pure, who will set art erect once more on that altar, befouled like a brothel wall.' Verdi took this as an attack on everything he had previously accomplished.

In this context it had long seemed absurd to speak of Rossini, Bellini, Donizetti, and Verdi as craftsmen, highly trained professionals, whose operas were the product not only of natural gifts, but also of careful planning, artistic control, and critical reflection. One could acknowledge that Rossini studied at the Bologna Conservatory with Padre Stanislao Mattei, but it was imperative to add that he abandoned these studies for the stage, earning opprobrium as 'disgrace of his school' from the good Padre. And who can forget that Verdi was denied admission to the Milan Conservatory: while the issue was his age, not his talent, the story has fueled images of Verdi as the unlettered peasant. Thus, when Beethoven produced multiple versions of *Leonore* and *Fidelio* or Wagner struggled with the dramaturgical problems of *The Ring of the Nibelungen*, they were seeking higher artistic truths, achieving a product that could enter the pantheon of 'great musical works'. When Rossini revised *Guillaume Tell* or Donizetti *Lucrezia Borgia*, their actions were part of a theatrical system fueled by ever-changing and contingent performances.

Although the myths that feed this vision of nineteenth-century Italian opera continue to circulate, over the past thirty years they have been seriously challenged. Critical and analytical studies of the repertory have played an important part, as scholars described formal conventions underlying compositional choices, and charted how they changed over time. Analyses of the particularities of Italian harmony have helped us understand the historical roots of tonal procedures in Verdi's late operas. Even the construction of Bellini's 'long, long, long melodies' (as Verdi described them) is better understood. Critical studies, drawing on work in cultural theory, new historicism, and gender studies, are providing new approaches to the interpretation of Italian opera, within its own historical sphere and with regard to its reception.

Equally important has been our growing understanding of how nineteenth-century Italian operas were actually composed. Studies of compositional sketches and surviving autograph manuscripts offer direct testimony of the remarkable craftsmanship that underpins the work of Rossini, Donizetti, Bellini, and Verdi. They highlight musical matters that were demonstrably important to the composers, while also laying the groundwork for new critical editions of this repertory. Yet until recently this material was either unknown or ignored.

In a scholarly world in which Beethoven sketches had been studied since the middle of the nineteenth century, Italian opera was subject to a neglect that reflected earlier myths. Not until 1941, in celebration of the fortieth anniversary of the composer's death, did it become public knowledge that Verdi regularly made musical sketches for his operas. In that year the Verdi family allowed the composer's biographer, Carlo Gatti, to publish in facsimile the sketches for *Rigoletto*. In his introduction, Gatti repeated what he had also stated in a volume of iconography that same year: at S. Agata were preserved sketches for all Verdi operas from *Luisa Miller* in 1849 through *Falstaff* at the end of his life, in the early 1890s. Later research has established that Verdi also sketched earlier operas, although fewer of these documents survive, reflecting his more itinerant life style before 1849.

For Gatti this material was proof of Verdi's 'authentic genius' and of what it meant to be a 'geniune Italian composer'. Although there were some fragmentary sketches, most of *Rigoletto* was laid out in what we call a 'continuity draft', beginning at the first scene and proceeding until the end, with the principal vocal lines and important instrumental indications written in a continuous short score of three to four staves. While Verdi would make many changes between this draft and the opera, Gatti could reasonably assert that he had conceived the opera 'at once, in full', with 'the discourse of the characters completely contained within a melodic arch that opens, continues, and closes without interruption, well delineated, well defined.' And Gatti quoted a Verdi letter to support his judgment: 'To write well, one must write practically in a single breath, reserving for a later moment revising, filling out, and cleaning up the overall sketch; with any other system, one runs the risk of producing operas over an extended period of time, with music that is a mosaic, lacking in style and character.' The Italian scholar was quick to point out

differences with Beethoven, whose sketch books, while ‘material for sublime creations in the course of development’, were ‘broken up, incomplete, and confused’. There is something touching about this effort to show that Verdi surpassed the German master at his own game.

While scholars have studied the *Rigoletto* continuity draft, no full transcription and commentary has ever been published. Many musical ideas approach their final form, even if Verdi enters only the melodic line and a hint of the accompaniment. To understand more about the composer’s craft, however, how he conceived musical ideas and developed them into final form, we are drawn inevitably to moments where the continuity draft and completed score are significantly different. Here are two examples from the duet for Rigoletto and Gilda in the first act.

The *primo tempo* begins after Rigoletto, the court jester, returns from a party at the Duke’s palace, where he and the Duke have been cursed by Monterone, whose daughter has been seduced and abandoned by the Duke. In a dark street Rigoletto encounters Sparafucile, an assassin for hire. Then, in a powerful recitative Rigoletto compares himself to the assassin: the jester has his tongue, the assassin his sword. Still fearful of the curse, Rigoletto thrusts the idea aside and steps into his home, seeking to project a confidence he does not really feel.



Ex. 2 Giuseppe Verdi, *Rigoletto*, Duetto Gilda-Rigoletto (Atto I), *primo tempo*.

The musical idea in the sketch is of the same stripe (indeed it serves as a ‘marker’ for the final version), yet differs in numerous ways. While neither is melodically distinguished (the situation does not call for a prominent melody), both establish the blustery confidence Rigoletto is trying to project:

First phrase

Motif 1 2 3 4

Second phrase

Ex. 3 Giuseppe Verdi, *Rigoletto*, Duetto Gilda-Rigoletto (Atto I), *primo tempo*: continuity draft.

Two aspects of this draft may have led Verdi to seek a new theme. The fourfold repetition of a descending scalar motif within each phrase (there are four rhythmically similar phrases in all, of which the first two are given in the example), projects a uniformity over the entire passage. What may have disturbed Verdi even more is the internal modulation to *E minor* at the end of the second phrase, which changes the mood prematurely: Verdi will ultimately wait until Rigoletto sighs and Gilda responds 'Voi sospirate!' before introducing an *F minor* gloom into this *C major* hilarity.

In the *cantabile*, 'Deh non parlare al misero', Rigoletto speaks with love and sadness of his late wife, Gilda's mother. While most of the music in the draft is basically identical to the final version, the very opening phrase is not. Here is the music, as it appears in the continuity draft:

Oh! non par-la-re al mi-se-ro del suo per-du-to be-ne...

El-la sen-tia quel-l'an-ge-lo, pie-tà del-le mie pe-ne.

Ex. 4 Giuseppe Verdi, *Rigoletto*, Duetto Gilda-Rigoletto (Atto I), *cantabile*: continuity draft.

No matter how one imagines the accompaniment, only a very restricted tonal span is possible for this symmetrical eight-measure period, each half concluding on the tonic. It is symmetrical to the point of providing a poor accentuation of the final verse, 'PieTÀ delle mie pene'. Compare this to Verdi's final version, also an eight-measure period, with each half beginning in a similar fashion. Here, however, the harmonic pallet is far richer, with the first half moving to the dominant and with a resolution on the tonic only at the end of the second half (after a lovely intermediate cadence on *F minor*). Notice, too, how the declamation is carefully tailored to the accentuation of the text:

con espress.

Deh non par-la - re al mi - se-ro del suo per-du - to be - ne...

ppp

dim.

El - la sen - tia, quel - l'an - ge - lo, pie - tà del - le mie - pe - ne...

Ex. 5 Giuseppe Verdi, *Rigoletto*, Duetto Gilda-Rigoletto (Atto I), *cantabile*.

There are times when a rich harmonic pallet matters, and this first glimpse of the love that fills Rigoletto's misshapen body is one of them.

Before the *Rigoletto* sketches were issued in facsimile, few knew that such material existed. Italian nineteenth-century operas seemed born without a struggle, wafted by breezes toward shore on a Boticellian seashell. Would that this publication had been followed immediately by other publications and further research on the Verdi sketches, but without explanation the musical materials at S. Agata again became inaccessible. It would be almost fifty years before another generation of family members would begin to allow a few more treasures from their collection to be examined and, in some cases, published.

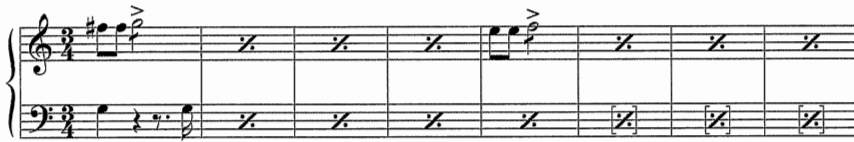
While Verdi's extensive reliance on sketches is somewhat unusual in the context of nineteenth-century Italian opera, it is less unusual than we once imagined. Scholars long assumed, for example, that Rossini did not employ independent sketches, but worked directly on pages that would eventually become his autograph manuscript. But in the past few years manuscripts with Rossini sketches have surfaced in library collections in Washington, D.C., Brussels, and Pesaro. While mostly fragmentary and pertaining to operas written after 1820 (that is, to four or five of the last nine operas in a career embracing almost forty), they suggest that more may once have existed.

The most remarkable Rossini sketches currently known, in the Fondo Piancastelli of the city library at Forlì, Italy, are for *Semiramide* of 1823, his very last opera written for Italy. Notated on eight large manuscript pages, filled with a dizzying number of entries, they cover essentially the entire, massive first-act Finale, along with many musical ideas for the Gran Scena of Arsace in the second act and a few jottings for Assur's mad scene. Many observations made about Verdi's sketches are true of these for *Semiramide*. The sketch for the final *stretta* of the Finale, for example, gives the main theme exactly as in the final version, with its text :



Ex. 6 Gioachino Rossini, *Semiramide*, Finale Primo, introductory chorus, opening melody: sketch.

The following crescendo theme for orchestra (eight measures, repeated three times) was originally sketched without vocal parts, a rather faceless design, serving as what I called a ‘marker’ in the *Rigoletto* sketches, that is, a musical idea that fulfills a structural role, but is not yet fully elaborated:



Ex. 7 Gioachino Rossini, *Semiramide*, Finale Primo, introductory chorus, crescendo: first sketch.

In this case, though, Rossini marks the passage with an asterisk and elsewhere on the page enters the definitive melodic material for the crescendo, with a treble ostinato and chromatic bass:



Ex. 8 Gioachino Rossini, *Semiramide*, Finale Primo, introductory chorus, crescendo: revised sketch.

Later he will overlay vocal ostinatos as well as this melodic line shared between the soprano and tenor:



Ex. 9 Gioachino Rossini, *Semiramide*, Finale Primo, introductory chorus, crescendo: added vocal parts.

After the crescendo, Rossini continues the sketch with a four-measure repeated phrase, also serving as a 'marker':



Ex. 10 Gioachino Rossini, *Semiramide*, Finale Primo, introductory chorus, cadential phrase after the crescendo: sketch.

Ultimately he replaces this 'marker' with an eight-measure repeated phrase, conceived vocally, the first half for chorus, the second for massed soloists. Never notated in surviving sketches, this version exists only in Rossini's autograph:

Ex. 11 Gioachino Rossini, *Semiramide*, Finale Primo, introductory chorus, cadential phrase after the crescendo.

Even these simple tunes, then, are carefully prepared, assembled, and revised. One can also make a strong case that Rossini's final choices give thematic coherence to the *stretta* that earlier sketches do not. The craft of composition is everywhere apparent alongside the genius of inspiration.

Rossini gave the pages to Gherardo Bevilacqua Aldobrandini, a writer who had previously prepared for him two librettos, *Adina* and *Edoardo e Cristina*; he also wrote verses for *Semiramide*. How many other pages once

existed for this or for other operas, casually given away or simply destroyed? The tantalizing question cannot at present be answered.

Bellini worked differently. He was apparently in the habit of preparing 'morning exercises', pages on which he drafted short melodies in endless succession, without even pausing to start a new system. While many such pages survive in the Museo Belliniano of Catania, they have yet to be studied. Here, for example, are four different melodies stemming from his labors on *I puritani*:

1)

Se non vie - ne io qui mi mo - ro,

2)

3)

4)

Ex. 12 Vincenzo Bellini, *I puritani*, Duetto Elvira-Arturo: four melodic sketches.

The second and fourth are eight-measure, symmetrically constructed phrases. The first breaks off after six measures, but it, too, is conceived symmetrically:



Ex. 13 Vincenzo Bellini, *I puritani*, Duetto Elvira-Arturo: hypothetical completion of the first sketch in Example 12.

Only the third melody is just four measures long, and I do not consider it accidental. Something about it (possibly the immediate shift to the dominant after the upbeat) caught Bellini's fancy, for the tune found a home as the principal theme of the duet for Elvira and Arturo in the last act. This theme is distinctly non-symmetrical: the opening four measures are followed by a two-measure phrase, repeated sequentially a tone higher, and then by a four-measure cadence, overlapping with its varied repetition:

Nel mi - rar - ti un so - lo j - stan - te io so - spi - ro, io so - spi - ro e mi con -

so - lo d'o - gni pian - to e d'o - gni duo - lo che pro - va - i lon - tan da

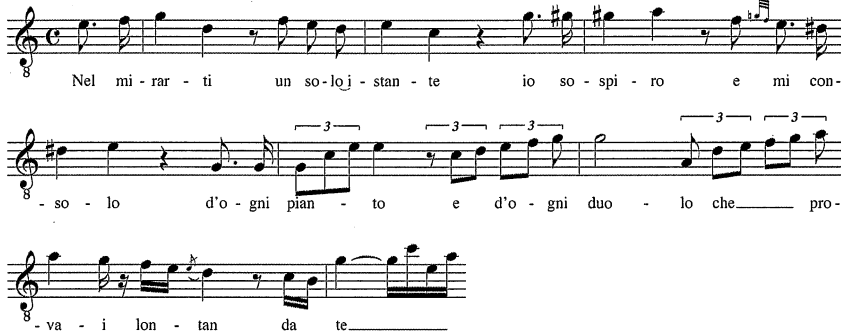
te, sì, mi con - so - lo d'o - gni pian - to che pro - va - i lon - tan da

te, sì, d'o - gni pian - to, d'o - gni pian - to e d'o - gni duo - lo che pro - vai lon - tan da te.

Ex. 14 Vincenzo Bellini, *I puritani*, Duetto Elvira-Arturo, *primo tempo*.

This is no symmetrical idea, but a Bellinian 'long' melody.

Notice, too, that the sketch leaps almost immediately to an accented high note, the highest note of the phrase. In the final version Bellini's control of the upper register is masterful. The production of this beautiful melody, in short, was anything but effortless: indeed, in Bellini's autograph it undergoes a further set of important revisions before arriving at the final version. Here is the first part, as originally entered by Bellini:



Ex. 15 Vincenzo Bellini, *I puritani*, Duetto Elvira-Arturo, *primo tempo*: earlier version in the autograph manuscript.

Then, at the end of a page of music, the tune breaks off: Bellini removed the following page when he prepared the final version of the melody. Thus, the composer's work did not stop with copying a previously-sketched idea into his autograph manuscript: he continued to craft the melody into its final form within the very pages of the manuscript that presents his completed opera. And therein lies the continuation of my story.

In Italy during the nineteenth-century the task of writing down an opera took place in stages. First the composer would lay out a 'skeleton score', notating vocal lines, instrumental bass, and important orchestral ideas. From this 'skeleton score', copyists extracted parts for singers, so that rehearsals could begin. They would then return the 'skeleton score' to the composer, who, during the rehearsal period, filled out the 'bare bones' by completing the orchestration, after which copyists prepared parts for violins, oboes, trombones, etc. A vast array of musical sources, in short, was generated for each opera.

As long as it was assumed that any Italian opera worth performing existed in a definitive edition published by Casa Ricordi of Milan, few looked beyond these scores. In 1956, however, an Australian conductor, Denis Vaughan, challenged the Ricordi hegemony, insisting that their printed scores misrepresented the intentions of Verdi and Puccini. Announcing his findings polemically, Vaughan claimed that there were 27,000 errors in the printed score of *Falstaff*. While this is not the occasion to explore the resulting shock waves, particularly in Italy, Vaughan's polemic meant that manuscripts of nineteenth-century Italian opera received significant attention for the first time. This attention grew more focused as critical editions began to be prepared, first of Rossini's *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, later of Verdi's *Don Carlos*. The establishment of complete editions for Rossini, then Verdi and Donizetti, finally Bellini, carried the process further.

It has become clear that these autograph manuscripts are often battlegrounds, scenes of intense engagement between a composer and his musical material, just as with 'Nel mirarti un solo istante' from *I puritani*. Far from being pristine, these manuscripts constantly show evidence of compositional modifications, the rethinking of significant details, and multiple versions produced under various performing conditions. As they prepared new critical editions, scholars began to understand how autograph manuscripts were constructed, allowing them to identify structural disturbances, which usually signaled changes introduced during composition, rehearsals, or even after the first performances. The earliest vocal and orchestral materials, prepared by copyists, provide evidence about versions no longer present in the autograph manuscripts, such as those reconstructed by Roberta Marvin for Verdi's *I masnadieri* or by William Holmes for *La forza del destino*.

From Verdi's sketches and autograph manuscripts, as well as from secondary sources, it is now possible to trace the compositional history of many works. Instead of an opera being represented by a single text, it has become what French textual scholarship would call a genetic text, in which the meaning of the work does not rest exclusively with the final product, but is embodied in the process through which the work was developed and the various stages in its performance history.

Currently we have access to what seem to be complete sketches and manuscript material for five Verdi operas: *Stiffelio*, *Rigoletto*, *La traviata*,

Aroldo, and *Un ballo in maschera*. To demonstrate the range of these materials, I want to examine two quite different cases:

- 1) The very earliest sketches for *La traviata*, a group of textless melodies, followed by a 'synoptic' sketch laying out the structure of the first Act, all prepared before Verdi had received a word of the libretto.
- 2) Evidence for the compositional history of *Un ballo in maschera* and the reconstruction of its completed but unperformed original version, *Una vendetta in domino* (or the related *Gustavo III*).

La traviata

The single most important publication to emerge from celebrations of the centennial of Verdi's death in 2001 was the edition, in facsimile and transcription, of the sketches for *La traviata*, prepared by Fabrizio Della Seta for the Istituto di Studi Verdiani of Parma. (The following examples from the *Traviata* sketches are derived from that publication, with a few small emendations.) While Verdi usually worked with a text, his letters often refer to his imagining the 'tinta' of an opera, its color, style, characteristic sound, before actually composing it. Does this mean he mused internally? improvised at the keyboard? set pen to paper? With *La traviata*, there is evidence that he began contemplating the melodic substance before having received the libretto, before having decided on the names of the characters. He wrote down many melodies without words, subsequently laying out the basic material of the entire first act based on his knowledge of the play and his dramaturgical vision of the succession of musical numbers.

In this manuscript there are two independent bifolios or gatherings that include sketches without words, as if Verdi were testing musical ideas. The first page of one bifolio has ideas for *Rigoletto* (including two versions of Gilda's 'Tutte le feste al tempio'). But on the second and third pages Verdi entered four textless melodies, apparently in close temporal proximity. One is identified simply as 'cabaletta' and cannot otherwise be placed:

Cabaletta

Allegro moderato

Ex. 16 Giuseppe Verdi, *La traviata*: unidentified sketch for a 'cabaletta'.

The next two melodies are well known from *La traviata*, but there are many differences between these sketches and the opera. In the first the opening is melodically akin to what we know as 'Ah fors'è lui', although the key is *E minor*, as opposed to the definitive *F minor*. Rhythmically, however, Verdi works without the constraints of Piave's *settenari*:

Sketch
Andante

Autograph

dolcissima

Ah for - se lui que - st'a - ni - ma
so - lin - ga nei tu - mul - ti, so - lin - ga nei tu - mul - ti

Ex. 17 Giuseppe Verdi, *La traviata*, Aria Violetta, *cantabile*: early sketch and autograph version of the opening.

The final section, in *major*, on the other hand, is very different in the two versions. Verdi gives his definitive version its special character by manipulating rhythmically in a remarkable fashion the pitches of the sketch. To do so, however, Verdi must repeat words in order to use Piave's *settenari* within a melody that seems originally conceived for *quinari*:

Sketch

Ah for - se lui que - st'a - ni - ma
so - lin - ga nei tu - mul - ti, so - lin - ga nei tu - mul - ti

Autograph

con espansione

A quel - l'a - mor, quel - l'a - mor ch'è pal - pi - to del - l'u - ni - ver - so, del -
 - l'u - ni - ver - so in - te - ro, mi - ste - ri - o - so, mi - ste - ri - o - so, al - te - ro,
leggero
 cro - ce, cro - ce e de - li - zia, cro - ce e de - li - zia, de - li - zia al cor.

Ex. 18 Giuseppe Verdi, *La traviata*, Aria Violetta, *cantabile*: early sketch and autograph version of the passage in major and the conclusion of the melody.

The second of these *Traviata* melodies is an early sketch for the 'Brindisi': notice particularly the absolutely symmetrical construction of the contrasting phrase, played twice, with its foreshortened second part (each semi-phrase consists of four measures plus three):

Ex. 19 Giuseppe Verdi, *La traviata*, Introduzione, Brindisi: early sketch.

Another fascicle, of three nested bifolios, has on its first five pages a similar group of nine untexted lyrical passages, all written down at more or less the same time. The other seven pages are blank. A few themes were later developed for *La traviata*; others never used. What will become Violetta's 'Sempre libera' is here notated in what for Verdi was a 'neutral' key, *C major*, rather than in a key he expected to use. As it stands in the sketch, the melody is much too high to sing. Notice, too, the very different continuation and conclusion of the melody (both modified later within the sketch).



Ex. 20 Giuseppe Verdi, *La traviata*, Aria Violetta, cabaletta: early sketch.

Verdi never uses the following melody, which seems to have been thought of as a tune appropriate for one of the party scenes. The example gives only its first phrase:

Stromentale
Allegro assai vivo

col 8

[etc.]

pp

Ex. 21 Giuseppe Verdi, *La traviata*: unused sketch for an instrumental melody.

Another sketch, identified as 'Canzone', will not appear in *La traviata*, but we will return to it later:

Canzone

Ex. 22 Giuseppe Verdi, *La traviata*: unused sketch for a 'Canzone'.

Verdi wrote these melodies *before* having a libretto in hand (not unlike Bellini's 'morning exercises'). Some would subsequently find a place in one of the most fascinating Verdi sketches currently accessible, what Fabrizio Della Seta has called a 'synoptic' sketch, in which Verdi laid out – in words and music – the shape of Act I of *La traviata*, without even knowing the names the characters would assume in Piave's libretto.¹

Two pages are involved. At the beginning, Verdi writes: 'A dinner at Margherita's house [the heroine's name in *La Dame aux Camélias* by Alexandre Dumas, *fils*]. Motives in the orchestra. The tenor's Brindisi.' Verdi again sketches the melody, in a more elaborate version, although still without words. The following example gives only the contrasting phrase, which is closer to the final version than the sketch printed as Example 19, although some foreshortening is still present, possibly an error:



Ex. 23 Giuseppe Verdi, *La traviata*, Introdutione, Brindisi: a phrase from the synoptic sketch.

It seems likely that this draft was prepared later than the sketch printed as Example 19. Verdi then continues: 'After a brief tutti, Margherita repeats the Brindisi, then everyone', at which point he indicates the reprise, including the entrance of the ensemble.

¹ That the synoptic sketch is later than these isolated sketches, not earlier as most scholars had assumed, was first suggested to me by Roger Parker in a conversation about the *Traviata* sketches. The following observations, however, are my own.

Verdi then writes: 'Margherita feels ill. All the others disperse. The Tenor alone remains, and he declares his love. She laughs and advises him to think no more of it. A Duetto, in which there will be a phrase to repeat in the Aria. Everyone returns, they say good-bye and good night and leave. Margherita is alone. 'Is it true? And if I loved him? I who have never loved. Oh love!' Andante, as follows'. Still without text, Verdi sketches her melody, as we heard it before, still in *E minor*. Only the end is significantly different between that earlier sketch and this synoptic sketch. Although the version of the synoptic sketch is still far from the final melody, it is more carefully honed than the sketch printed in Example 18:



Ex. 24 Giuseppe Verdi, *La traviata*, Aria Violetta, *cantabile*: conclusion of the melody from the synoptic sketch.

But even in this final section, Verdi knew what *kind* of music he would need. He set it down, leaving the work of molding it further to his purposes for a later moment, after he received the text. At the end of this melody, Verdi describes his heroine's thoughts in words: 'No, I cannot hope for love, I must amuse myself and drown in joy'. The music?

Cabaletta brillante


Ex. 25 Giuseppe Verdi, *La traviata*, Aria Violetta, cabaletta: the version of the synoptic sketch.

There is just a hint of the cabaletta here, but now in its correct key, *A flat major*, a key in which the music can be sung, rather than in the impossibly high *C major* of the earlier sketch. Here, too, the synoptic sketch postdates the fragments.

Verdi concludes: 'at the end of the cabaletta a voice is heard repeating a phrase of the Duettino speaking of love, "È il sol dell'anima la vita è amore". Be still love: be still, be still my heart.' I have always been delighted by these words, which have nothing to do with *La traviata*: they are the words the Duke sings to Gilda in their love duet in *Rigoletto* :



Ex. 26 Giuseppe Verdi, *Rigoletto*, Duetto Gilda-Duca, *cantabile*.

Having no words for the Duettino in *La traviata*, nor having invented music for the scene, Verdi looks back to an earlier piece similar to the music he intends to write, a verbal 'marker', so to speak.

Unlike the undifferentiated material in the pages of melodies, in this synoptic sketch Verdi made a series of particular choices, laying out the shape of the act. His activity has much in common with Bellini's sketching process, starting with a group of melodies, only some of which (worked over and tailored to a specific dramaturgical situation, character, or singer) find a place in the completed work. No other example of this procedure is known among Verdi sources, but we still have access to only a small number of documents.

Un ballo in maschera / Una vendetta in domino

While the sketches I have been discussing for *La traviata* derive from the beginning of its compositional process, the history I will now recount briefly concerns a later stage of composition for *Un ballo in maschera*.²

The history of Antonio Somma's libretto of *Un ballo in maschera* is well known: in its earliest incarnation, as *Gustavo III*, it recounted the assassination of the Swedish monarch in 1792. In the opera the assassin is the King's closest friend, Count Ankastrom, later Renato, who learns that the King and his wife are in love. For its projected Neapolitan premiere in the Winter of 1858 the opera became *Una vendetta in domino*, shifted by order of the censors to the Swedish province of Pomerania in the late seventeenth century, with the King demoted to a Duke. In January 1858 the censors, reacting to the attempted assassination of Napoleon III in Paris, made even more stringent demands. The text was recast by the theatre as *Adelia degli Adimari*, the action moved to Florence in 1385. After Verdi contemptuously refused this text, the premiere was canceled.

As negotiations opened with Rome during the spring of 1858, Verdi hoped to restore the opera to its original Swedish form, as *Gustavo III*, but Roman censors reworked it as *Il Conte di Gothemburg*. To maintain a Swedish setting and eighteenth-century date, however, they required changes that Verdi found unacceptable. Finally, in June and July, it was

² This discussion derives from work done by Ilaria Narici and myself on the compositional history of the opera during preparation of the critical edition of *Un ballo in maschera*, edited by Ms. Narici, for *The Works of Giuseppe Verdi*, of which I am general editor.

agreed that the structure of the drama could be maintained, but the action had to be removed from Europe. Verdi's opera finally set sail for late-seventeenth-century Boston, where it landed as *Un ballo in maschera* at the Teatro Apollo of Rome on 17 February 1859.

From sketches, the autograph manuscript, and correspondence with Somma, we can now reconstruct Verdi's activities. Between mid-November and early December 1857, he prepared a complete continuity draft of Act I and the opening scene of Amelia's Aria in Act II of *Gustavo III*. Only fragmentary sketches exist for the Amelia Aria and the next two numbers of the score, probably drafted during mid-December. From Christmas 1857 through the first week of January 1858, Verdi prepared a continuity draft of the Finale of Act II and all of Act III of *Una vendetta in domino*, the revised version of *Gustavo III*.

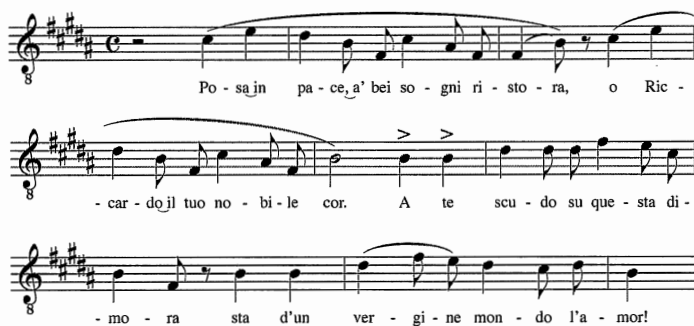
From mid-December 1857 through mid-January 1858, Verdi prepared the skeleton score of *Una vendetta in domino*. This work was completed soon after Verdi's arrival in Naples, before he became convinced that his opera would never be produced there. From March through September 1858 Verdi negotiated with Rome concerning possible sites for his opera. Only on 11 September 1858 did he acknowledge receipt of Somma's definitive libretto, *Un ballo in maschera*. Between mid-September 1858 and early January 1859, he transformed some 75% of the skeleton score of *Una vendetta in domino* into the skeleton score of *Un ballo in maschera*, making his changes directly on the manuscript. For the other 25% of the score, he substituted new pages. During this same period, he orchestrated the opera.

Through a careful comparison of all sources, we can reconstruct much of the music removed from the skeleton score of *Una vendetta in domino* to make room for the new pages for *Un ballo in maschera*. The choral theme sung at the opening of the opera, for example, was originally the following (with its Swedish verses, still in praise of King Gustavo):



Ex. 27 Giuseppe Verdi, *Gustavo III*, Introduzione: coro iniziale.

When Verdi substituted Riccardo for Gustavo and a 'verGINE mondo' (new world) for Sweden, he also modified the melody:



Ex. 28 Giuseppe Verdi, *Un ballo in maschera*, Introduzione: coro iniziale.

Some of Verdi's changes are of details, as here, but they should not be undervalued: the harmonic pacing and melodic arch of the first two verses is modified significantly in the revision.

Other changes were more thoroughgoing, none more so than in Renato's Act III Aria, the piece we know as 'Eri tu'. Within the continuity draft of *Una vendetta in domino*, Verdi originally composed a largely different melody, to a text beginning 'E sei tu'. From that draft he surely prepared a skeleton score, which no longer survives. Two phrases of the original text later became invalid. In *Una vendetta in domino*, Renato calls down revenge on 'other, nobler blood', while in the aria he refers to himself as 'your vassal'. For *Ballo* both phrases had to be modified: the

first became 'other, different blood' and the second 'your friend'. After September 1858 the composer wrote an independent draft for the new version, and the autograph manuscript of 'Eri tu' in *Ballo* has only the revised text. Here is 'E sei tu' as it appears in the continuity draft of Act III of *Una vendetta in domino*. You will recognize the opening melody: it was earlier found among sketches for *La traviata*:

E sei tu che mac-chia - vi quel-l'a-ni - ma, Pa-ra-di - so del-l'a -

- ni-ma mi - a... che m'af-fi - di e d'un trat - to e-se-cra-bi - le l'u-ni-ver -

- so av-ve-le - ni per me, per me! Tra - di-tor! che in tal gui - sa ri - mu - ne -

- rei del vas - sal - lo tuo pri - mo la fé.

O dol - cez - ze per - du - te! O me - mo - - rie d'un am - ples - so che

l'es - se - re in - di - al... Quan - d'A - me - lia si - mi - le ad un an - gel

sul mio se - no bril - la - va d'a - mor! È fi -

- ni - ta! non sie - de che l'o - dio, e la mor - te sul ve - do - vo cor, è fi -

- ni - ta! non sie-de che l'o - dio e la mor - te nel ve-do-vo cor!

O dol - cez - - ze! o me - mo - - - rie, o me -

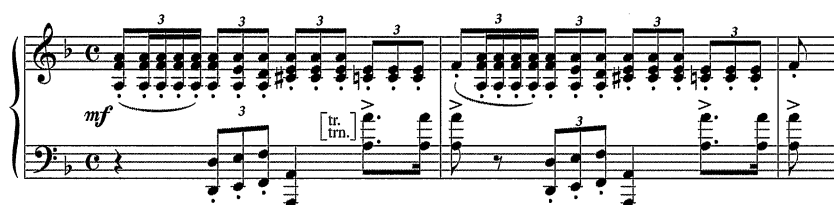
- mo - rie d'a - mor, d'a - mor, d'a - mor!

Ex. 29 Giuseppe Verdi, *Gustavo III*, Aria Ankaström, 'E sei tu': the complete version of the sketch.

Why did Verdi make this change? We cannot know for certain, nor should we fall into the trap of assuming that 'Eri tu', however familiar, is simply *better* than 'E sei tu'. Had Felice Orsini not tried to assassinate Napoleon III in January 1858, we would probably know only 'E sei tu'. Yet Verdi may well have decided that he wanted a different, more aggressive piece for *Un ballo in maschera*. He may also have grown uncertain about the regularity of the four-measure phrases in 'E sei tu', as well as the insistent anapestic rhythm in its opening period, a rhythm that works consciously and bitterly against the rhythm of the text, which would normally be declaimed:

E sei TU che machCHIAvi quell'Anima
ParaDIso dell'Anima Mia

The tension between declamation and musical meter is both expressive and disconcerting, but it is exactly what Verdi had in mind, and he emerges from it only at the end of the first period (with 'riMUnerei / Del vaSALlo tuo PRImo la FÉ'). Afterwards music and text rhythm are largely united. After having introduced this unusually dark and inward-looking effect, nine months later and in a different continent the composer opted for the more obstreperous 'Eri tu', with trumpets and trombones intoning:



Ex. 30 Giuseppe Verdi, *Un ballo in maschera*, Aria Renato, 'Eri tu': orchestral introduction.

We have come full circle. I began this paper with the admission that Verdi's extraordinary melodies first drew me to nineteenth-century Italian opera. I then asked how we could make sense of talking about craftsmanship in a world such melodies inhabit. But as I have played the sketches of Verdi, Rossini, and Bellini, as I have introduced you to the craft of their composition, you have heard how a composer takes a melodic idea and polishes it, controls its peaks and troughs, toys with its harmonic structure, forges an extraordinary melody. There are other aspects of the sketches I have not stressed: contrapuntal passages, recitative, ensembles. But it is to Verdi's melodic ideas we constantly return. Some seem to spring directly from the head of their creator (although with what ferment in pages we no longer possess or in the mind of the composer cannot be known), but most have left a more complex trail. In some cases Verdi wrote a series of melodies from which he chose those he felt appropriate for a particular dramatic situation or character; in others he invented a melody, then worried it until it met his needs. I have avoided the notion that Verdi's craftsmanship constantly made his work 'better'; it is more useful to speak about the particularities of each stage in the process, what is gained, what is lost, what is accomplished.

May our blood continue to course through our veins when we hear our favorite Verdian tunes: but let us also recognize and celebrate the brilliant craftsmanship that sets it flowing.

